HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS
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The Wilderness of Dragons

The reception of dragons in thirteenth century Iceland

Ritgerð til M.A. -prófs

Robert E. Cutrer

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Robert E. Cutrer

Kt. 180384-4569

Leiðbeinandi:Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir

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Introduction

Throughout history, the dragon has always dwelt prominently within the hierarchy of monsters. In thirteenth century Iceland, however, the dragon consists of more than the mere imagining of man; it is a creature that is imbued with centuries of history, biology, theology, and mythology synthesized into an oftentimes wholly logical and other times completely fantastical beast. By tracing the aspects of the dragon not only through its mythic past but also through historical, encyclopedic, and archaeological sources an image arises reflecting all of the forces at work in thirteenth century Iceland; additionally, analyzing the methodology and patterns within the dragon-slayings will show the influence of foreign romances and their synthesis into the cultural *motif* of the Icelandic dragon.

For the *motif* "dragon" to be comprehensible, the idea must be mutually intelligible within the audience. Kathryn Hume notes, "For supernatural beings to be effective in stories, they must be part of a tradition the audience knows and to which it is conditioned to respond."[1] The idea of the inherent value of the word is addressed by M. M. Bakhtin who writes, "It is not a neutral word of language, not as free from the aspirations and evaluations of others."[2] The mutual intelligibility of word-images in essential for the texts to be understood.[3] Joyce Tally Lionarons observes, "... we do not *not* know what a dragon is either. When the word enters actual usage it is not semantically empty...In order to understand the meaning of the word-image 'dragon' in medieval literature it is therefore necessary to reconstruct from each individual text both the internal and external questions to which the dragon is an answer."[4] The majority of scholarship on dragons, however, tends to focus either on studies of an

1 Hume, Kathryn. "From Saga to Romance: The Use of Monsters in Old Norse Literature." *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 77, No. 1, 1980. p. 15

2 Bakhtin, Mikhail M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson. University of Minnesota Press, Minn: 1984. p. 202.

3 This is reminiscent of the scene in *Through the Looking Glass* in which discussion breaks down because Humpty-Dumpty says, "When *I* use a word...it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less" Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There.* Macmillan and Co., St. Martins Street, London: 1920. p.114

4 Lionarons, Joyce Tally. *The Medieval Dragon.* Hisarlik Press, UK: 1998. p. 2

individual dragon—exemplified in the studies of Fáfnir—or in a structuralist approach to trace the dragon back to its origins. Both of these approaches are important, but the shared word-image 'dragon' must also be investigated within the epoch of contemporary literature to further elucidate the intentions and adaptations of authors. In works with a clear intention, such as *Þiðreks saga af Bern* and *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum*, analysis reveals patterns and uses that can be used to elucidate dragons within more nebulous texts, such as *Brennu-Njáls saga*.

Scholarship

A problem within the field of dragon studies is the very familiarity that today's scholars have with the idea of dragons. With the widespread popularity of the fantasy genre within many forms of media, many assume familiarity with dragons. This danger, of course, can lend itself to misinterpreting perceptions of dragons within an older time-frame, including the thirteenth century Icelandic milieu, a time noted for the influx of foreign works as well as the thriving of indigenous literature. Lionarons addresses this danger effectively arguing, "...contemporary linguistic and literary theory has taught us that it is dangerous to treat any word—even one which has a physical referent in the natural world—as if it were a transparent medium for the communication of a single, monologically determined meaning."[5] The danger is further exacerbated by a creature that exists purely in the imaginary. The word then lacks both a definite space or time, and is particularly noteworthy as each text must be analyzed independently and in conjunction with other texts. Lionarons urges, "The attentive reader's task is to discover and articulate the dialogue within which the word participates. In order to understand the meaning of the word-image 'dragon' in medieval literature it is therefore necessary to reconstruct from each individual text both the internal and external questions to which the dragon is an answer..."[6] This remains a danger to all scholars working to make meaning of what appears as a common creature for heroes to encounter.

The reductionist approach which attempts a singular definition, however, prevails in modern scholarship. Lionarons cautions, "Paradoxically, the greatest danger in attempting to reconstruct a medieval horizon of expectations for the dragon is not the creation of too many meanings, but rather reductionism: it is all too easy to limit the dragon's significance dogmatically or arbitrarily to a single,

5 Lionarons. p. 1.
6 Lionarons. p. 2.

'medieval' interpretation."[7] Reductionism has lead many scholars to isolating or ignoring works because they fail to fit the created paradigm. This approach is not a new problem in scholarship, but still must be addressed before analyzing the specific differences.

Though not the first scholar interested in the subject, Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* is one of the earliest attempts at establishing a model of dragons within the Germanic world. Jonathan Evans notes Grimm's criteria as, "dragons *breathe fire*; they *wear golden crowns*; there are special properties of the dragon's *heart and blood*; dragons are *old*; the dragon's *hoard* originates with dwarfs;...they *guard treasures*..."[8] It is already clear at this point that many dragons do not meet some, or even any, of the characteristics Grimm notes. His definition not only lacks in inclusiveness, but also intentionally ignores several dragons within the literature. It should be noted, however, that while Grimm writes about "Germanic" dragons, the bulk of his material outside of the German Sigfried cycle were Nordic texts.[9] Grimm further emphasizes the importance of the gold when he says, "No beast has more to do with gold and treasures than the *snake*...our earliest antiquity has famous legends of *snakes* and *dragons* on the gold."[10] In Grimm's model, the hoard and greed are central aspects of *draconitas*, but this interpretation poses problems as gold is wholly absent from many of the Icelandic dragon-tales; hoards rarely appear in the *riddarasögur,* and they are altogether absent from *Bjarnar saga hitdælakappa, Njáls saga, Morkinskinna, Ketils saga hængs,* and the variant of the Sigurðr story told in *Þiðreks saga af Bern*. Scholars should hesistant with universals, noting that even though in later sagas the gold motif becomes dominant, such as in *Gull-Þóris saga*, one can not say that it is an "essential" dragon trait.

Another important scholar in the history of dragon studies is J.R.R. Tolkien. In his famous

7 Lionarons. p. 4.
8 Evans, Jonathan. "As Rare as they are Dire: *Old Norse Dragons,* Beowulf, *and the* Deutchse Mythologie." *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous*. MRTS, New York, NY: 2005. p. 215.
9 Interestingly to the exclusion of *Beowulf.*
10 Grimm, Jacob. Deutsche Mythologie. 2nd ed., 2 vols. Göttingen: Dietrich: 1844. p. 817.

lecture, *Beowulf: The Monsters and the critics*, Tolkien focuses on literary excellence and thus is limiting in what he accepts as a "real dragon." He says, "In northern literature there are only *two* [dragons] that are significant...we have but the dragon of the Völsungs, Fáfnir, and Beowulf's bane."[11] Tolkien's approval of dragons seems thus even narrower than Grimm's, notably not including Ragnarr whose fame is almost as far-reaching as Sigurðr's. Tolkien's approach reacted to contemporary scholarship, but assesses the situation as a modern reader approaching the text rather than the reception of such texts by a medieval reader. The value of the word within the medieval mind must be understood in its multi-faceted nature. The current goal, however, is not to determine when dragons have been used successfully or unsuccessfully by modern literary standards, but to understand how dragons were seen and appreciated within thirteenth century Iceland.

Another important author on the broader theme of monsters in general is Kathryn Hume. She focuses initially on the function of monsters, segueing into the failures of monsters, specifically the over-abundance of supernatural in the later romances, which Hume deems of poor quality. Her paradigm is as follows:

> Whether giant or dwarf, dragon or *draugr*, the supernatural creatures function as foils for the hero, and in the sagas, the hero's confrontation with a monster follows on of four patterns: (1) The monster exists to test the protagonist and to affirm his status as professional hero. (2) The monster preys upon society, thus letting the hero put his strength to the service of others. (3) The supernatural being serves as a comic or ironic device for reducing exaggerated heroes to more human stature. (4) The monster forms part of a deliberate comment on the nature of heroism[12]

Hume notes that dragons in Icelandic literature fail to play on the societal aspects (such as *Beowulf*) creating rather stale, hackneyed monsters that serve as mere props to be killed by heroes.[13] She further places the blame on the authors stating, "The failure is one of artistic imagination, not of material."[14]

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11 Tolkien, J. R. R. "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics." *The Essays of J.R.R. Tolkien*. HarperCollins, New York, NY: 2006. p. 12.
12 Hume. p. 3
13 Hume. p. 5
14 Hume. p. 7

The failure of later romances, then, is largely the "pointlessness" of the monsters. Hume believes that few details are given for these supernatural fights, "…aside from the repeated insistence that the soft underbelly is the vulnerable spot. The dragons are usually voiceless, and the heroes are not significantly individualized by these contests."[15] The nature and status of dragons thus devolved into what Chambers deems "a wilderness of dragons," mindless creatures that exist solely to be killed by heroes. Hume notes that these later dragons are "…not much good."[16] This judgment, however, is based entirely on a modern interpretation. As Stephen Mitchell notes, "...the manner in which we categorize our world ultimately bespeaks not only how we perceive that world, but also the underlying principles on which our judgments are based."[17] Hume initially seems to agree, asserting, "...the family sagas' focus on social conflict suits modern predilections in a way that giants and dragons do not. But the Icelandic audience of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries clearly felt very differently, and we need to cultivate more understanding of the monsters and marvels they enjoyed."[18] Unfortunately, Hume faults the works, and finds them lacking. Modern scholars must remain wary of judging literature based on modern mentalities and desires.

Hume very astutely (though perhaps missing this point herself) notes, "For supernatural beings to be effective in stories, they must be part of a tradition the audience knows and to which it is conditioned to respond."[19] For this reason, Hume argues for the failure of imported motifs, which may be accurate, but the dragon, while assuming foreign influences, is a native tradition; as both the archaeological evidence and the texts show, the serpent has long held a primary significance in the North. Analysis, then, of the large corpus of dragon-literature should assist modern readers attempting to understand the breadth of the tradition towards a more like-minded appreciation of the traditions in

15 Hume. p. 8
16 Hume. p. 8
17 Mitchell, Stephen. *Heroic Sagas and Ballads.* Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY: 1991. p. 9.
18 Hume. p. 1
19 Hume. p. 15

which the dragon resides.

In addition to this issue, Hume appears unaware of the tradition of which she speaks, erroneously focusing on aspects which she deems important, noting, "...with a dragon, the hero particularly wants the creatures possessions..." and "...in many dragons strength is subordinated to the love of gold..."[20] While true for most famous saga involving a dragon, *Völsunga saga* is not the only model for a dragon-slaying tale. Many of the earliest dragon-slayings do not involve possessions at all, including the variation of Sigurðr's slaying found in *Þiðreks saga*. Additionally, Hume emphasizes the "soft underbelly" of the dragon, which is almost entirely absent from the earliest dragon-slayings other than in *Fáfnismál*. In order to approach an understanding and appreciation for the tradition of the dragon understood by the original audience, scholars must be wary of statements that may be true within today's culture (or even a larger part of medieval Europe) without validating the extant literature. While Hume very successfully establishes the functions for monsters' existance within the story, she seeks application amenable to modern tastes, and, in doing so, neglects to explain why these creatures, if "not much good" were more successful than their counterparts.

Another modern scholar who falls prey to this reductionism and isolation of other tales is Calvert Watkins, who in his book, *How to Kill a Dragon*, says, "In the Germanic world we find yet another modality of symbolic Chaos. It is the dragon's "job"...to guard treasure. That is the dragon keeps wealth from circulating."[21] Jonathan Evans follows this and Grimm's notion attributing the central aspect of greed to dragons; he adds, "Germanic culture inherited an Indo-European conception of the dragon which is unconnected with greed, gold, hoards, or treasure, there was also an alternative pre-Germanic conception of the dragon that *did* draw this essential connection."[22] Gold-hoarding as a necessary condition remains problematic because of the texts which do not involve hoards. The

20 Hume. p. 4 & 14
21 Watkins, Calvert. *How to Kill a Dragon.* Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK: 1995. p. 300.
22 Evans. p. 240-241.

popularity and perseverance of these hoard-dominated tales has made their nature pervasive, even though the motif is almost wholly absent from the sphere of romance and partially present from the mythic sphere. This cannot be, then, the central function of dragons.

Ármann Jakobsson's article, "Enter the Dragon. Legendary Saga Courage and the Birth of the Hero," disagrees with the centrality of greed, but is still reductionist instead placing a trial of fear as the central premise of dragons. This interpretation is much more tenable because even if the hero does not express fear, one can assume fear from the audience. Ármann's argumentation, however, is problematic because he only acknowledges two tales as worthy and proper. He states, "In the heroic North, dragon-slayers seem to have been in a heroic class of their own, a class with only two members (or three if we count Beowulf). These are Sigurðr Fáfnisbani and Ragnarr loðbrók."[23] His argument is that the other dragons are "of far lesser stature than those fought by Sigurðr and Ragnarr...the narrative [Gull-Þóris saga] is devoid of any sense of wonder or danger."[24] His reductionism is similar to Tolkien's, only the relevant dragons are representative, going as far as saying, "In this instance the word *dreki* may not be the best guide to the *draconitas* of Sigurðr and Ragnarr's antagonists."[25] While the stories of Sigurðr and Ragnarr are undoubtedly popular, this is no reason to dismiss the rest. Especially in the case of sagas such as *Þiðreks saga af Bern,* which influenced *Völsunga saga, Erex saga Artuskappa,* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar,* or the the sagas of the Hrafnistamen and their descendents.[26] There is reluctance to acknowledge and deal with the important place that the translated *riddarasögur* hold within the mentality of the thirteenth century Icelanders. Following the sentiments of E.V. Gordon can still be seen in viewing *riddarasögur* as, "...the turgid monotony."[27] If a an understanding of the broader perception of dragons is to be reached, it must acknowledge, if not include, all instances.

23 Ármann Jakobsson. "Enter the Dragon. Legendary Saga Courage and the Birth of the Hero." *Making History Essays in Fornaldarsögur.* Edit. Martin Arnold and Alison Finlay. Viking society for Northern Research, London, UK: 2010. p. 37.
24 Ibid., p. 37,38.
25 Ibid., p. 38.
26 It seems unlikely to be coincidence that both dragon-slayers of *Íslendingasögur* are related to Ketill Hæng.
27 Gordon, E. V. *An Introduction to Old Norse.* Oxford University Press, Oxford: 1956. p. lv.

To achieve this broader perspective, the thirteenth century in Iceland provides an ideal time period for such an analysis because of the great number of changes happening, including Hákon's importation of courtly romances, with individuals like Snorri striving to preserve the older mythic material, and the increased literacy and learning with the importation of histories and religious material. With this limited epoch, the texts themselves are manageable in size.

Approaching a Definition

For analysis, only works in which the dragon episode can be dated to the thirteenth century or earlier with a large modicum of certainty will be used for analysis. This means that works which likely existed, but in unverifiable form, during this time-period, such as *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Völsunga saga*, *Bjarnar saga hitdælakappa,* and *Ketils saga hængs* will be omitted.[28] Works in which manuscripts exist from the thirteenth century, such as the eddic poetry within the *codex regius*, *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, *Morkinskinna, Bretasögur,* and *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum*[29] and those which are supported by dating within the text as well as source material, such as *Yngvars saga viðförla*[30]*, Margrétar saga*[31]*, Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* and *Ívens saga*[32] will be used primarily within this assessment. This provides ample sources for comparison while being manageable enough to analyze all at once.

To discuss the dragon in full would, as Elliot Smith notes, "...represent the history of the expression of mankind's aspirations and fears during the past fifty centuries and more."[33] His observation explains the necessity for a precise, narrower definition. For the sake of argumentation, a dragon, as perceived in the Nordic world, can be defined as a reptile containing traits supernatural or fantastic compared to indigenous wildlife.[34] This idea, dragon, is represented with the two Old Norse

28 When referring to specifics without plausibility, such as Ragnarr's verse.

29 *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum* exists in Hauksbók which is early fourteenth, but even if Haukr composed this piece himself, the base material as is seen in works like Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* and *Krákumál* attest to the stories existence. Ragnars saga loðbrókar, on the other hand, shows at least partial influence from romances such as *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, so should be avoided when possible for this epoch.

30 Following Pálsson and Edwards, the *Vita Yngvari* likely was composed after 1180 with the saga following within the next half century. *Vikings in Russia*. Trans. Herman Pálsson and Paul Edwards. Edinburgh University Press, 1989. p. 2-3

31 Cormack, Margaret. *The Saints in Iceland. Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400*. Société Des Bollandists, Boulevard Saint-Michel, 24: 1994. p. 122

32 Kalinke's dating is to be used here. Accepting the dating provided within the manuscripts as well as similarities shared with other contemporary versions in medieval europe. *Norse Romance.* Vol. 1 *The Tristan Legend*. edit. Marianne E. Kalinke. St Edmundsbury Press Limited, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk: 1999. p. 25-26. *Norse Romance*. Vol. 2. *The Knights of the Round Table.* edit. Marianne E. Kalinke. St Edmundsbury Press Limited, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk: 1999. p. 33-34.

33 Smith, Elliot G. *Evolution of the Dragon*. University Press Longmans, Green & Company, Manchester: 1919. p. 73

34 It is important to note not only supernatural or fantastic attributes, but specifically within the geographic range of

words *ormr* and *dreki*. It is of important note that these creatures, originally referred to in Old Norse as *ormr* or *linnormr*, began to be referred to by the term *dreki*, a borrowing from the Latin term *draco*, itself a loan-word from the Greek *δράκων*. This word is attested as early as Homer's *Iliad* and is an Aorist participle from *δέρκομαι* meaning "to see clearly" or "a flashing of the eyes."[35] The assumption and adaptation of this word into the concept of serpents has many interesting results. Evans posits that this may be why dragons are so commonly seen in a guardian/watcher role.[36] The prevalence of hoard-guarding dragons in latter Icelandic stories[37] unfortunately has clouded many scholars into the other functions of serpents/dragons in earlier stories.[38] It must be understood not only how this changed the image of serpentine monsters, but also what it was potentially replacing.[39] While some texts use one word exclusively or these words are differentiated, the words *dreki* and *ormr* are also used interchangeably with dragons themselves as evidenced in later manuscripts including the chief manuscript for *Völsunga saga*, in which Sigurðr refers to Fáfnir as *dreki* and Reginn responds using *ormr.*[40] *Þiðreks saga* provides early evidence of the terms' interchangeability, writing, "...en þat er einn ormr...Hernið konungr ríðr at drekanum."[41] It is also possible that *dreki* is used in the place of what may be just a viper in *Sólarljóð* which states, "brjóst í gǫgnum/ rendu brǫgnum þeim/ ǫflgir eitrdrekar."[42] Additionally, an older Saint's life, *Margretar saga*, refers to the "ogurligr dreki" as "hǫggormr" in the

zoological knowledge.

35 Liddell, H.G, Robert Scott, H.S. Jones. *Greek-English Lexicon 9th edition.* Oxford University Press, Oxford: 1996. p. 379. This function is apparent in the Greek with the dragons guarding the apples of the Hesperides, the golden fleece, and the cave at delphi; dragons are also hoard guardians on all four occasions in *Gesta Danorum* and in the Sigurðr/Siegfried story.

36 Evans. p. 228.

37 Especially late *fornaldarsögur and riddarasögur.*

38 Such as *Ketils saga Hængs* and *Bjarnar saga hitdælakappa*.

39 The primacy of the hoard-guardian is accepted by scholars such as Arent (Heroic pattern, p. 153) and Evans (Rare as the are Dire, p. 228-230), but this motif is entirely absent in the dragon-slayings of Ketill hængs and his descendents, Bjǫrn Hitdælakappa and Þorkell Hár, and even the story of Siguðr sveinn in *Þiðreks saga*. The Hrafnistumenna and their descendents should be considered as important in Iceland as the Sigurðr/Ragnarr descendents as so many illustrious families of Iceland come from Ketill Hængs (including Egill Skallagrimsson and Auðr Vesteinsdóttir).

40 *Völsunga saga.* Edit. Guðni Jónsson. *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*. Fyrsta Bindi. Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, Reykjavik: 1954. p. 150

41 *Þiðreks saga af Bern*. Edit. Guðni Jónsson.Síðari Hluti. Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, Reykjavik: 1954. p. 561

42 *Sólarljóð* Stanza 64, *Skaldic Database.* <http://homepages.abdn.ac.uk/wag017/db.php > 05/05/2012

following sentence.[43] It is unlikely that the *dreki* mentioned here is supposed to be reminiscent of other uses of *dreki* such as *Þiðreks saga* and *Erex saga* where the dragons are consuming entire knights in full armor.

The shared nature of these two words is evident in the continual cohabitation between regular snakes, also denoted with *ormr*, and dragons. In *Yngvars saga*, the author writes, "Nú bað Yngvarr menn við búast orminum ok leggja skipunum til annarrar hafnar um þvera ána, ok svá gera þeir. Síðan sjá þeir hræðiligan dreka fljúga þangat yfir ána."[44] The same is true of Níðhǫggr who is noted as, "En svá margir ormar eru í Hvergelmi með Níðhǫgg at engi tunga má telja."[45] While Snorri does not use the term *dreki* or *ormr* to describe Níðhǫggr, Vǫluspá recounts,

> Þar kømr inn dimmi dreki fliúgandi,
> naðr fránn, neðan frá Niðafiollom;
> berr sér í fiorðram -flýgr vǫll yfir-,
> Niðhǫggr, nái-nú mun hon søcquaz.[46]

The interconnected nature of these two words, noting their different origins, shows the malleability they comprise in transgressing the line between them. To understand what semantic values they hold then needs to begin with an analysis of the state of the serpent within Scandinavia, and more importantly, Iceland.

In addition to defining the term dragon, several of the *fornaldarsögur* follow the pattern of initiation rituals, following the work layed out by Jens Peter Schjødt, so an understanding of ritual must be defined. A ritual, as Jean La Fontaine notes, is a "purposeful activity" when humans require the involvement of dwellers of the Other World.[47] This communication, then, "...can only be established by

43 *Margretar saga.* Edit. C.R. Unger. Christiana, Trykt Hos B.M. Bentzen: 1877. p.478
44 *Yngvars saga viðförla.* Edit.Guðni Jónsson. *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*. Annað Bindi. Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, Reykjavik: 1954. p. 436.
45 Snorri Sturlusson*Edda*. Prologue and *Gylfaginning*. Edit. Anthony Faulkes. Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London: 2005. p.18
46 *Voluspá* stz. 66 *Edda.* Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern, hrsg. v. Gustav Neckel, I. Text, 5., umgearbeitete Auflage von Hans Kuhn, Heidelberg: Carl Winter 1983. All eddic poetry will be taken from this edition.
47 La Fontaine, Jean S. *Initiation. Ritual Drama and Secret Knowledge Across the World*. Harmondsworth. 1985. p 184

symbolically representing a condition, and thereby a space, in which human beings and gods can meet. This condition and this space are what constitutes the 'liminal'."[48] This liminal space, in contrast to both the world and the Other World, is the location of rituals; initiation rituals attempt a very specific goal through this liminal space.

Accepting Lauri Honko's paradigm of a tripartite ritual division into "rites of passage," "calendrical rites," and "crisis rites,"[49] one needs a clear understanding of what makes an initiation ritual (deemed a rite of passage) different. This differentiation is important especially in regards to rituals that may involve monsters; this is evidenced in the dragon episodes of *Beowulf* and *Þiðreks saga*[50] which, if containing a ritualistic origin, would be considered crisis rituals rather than initiation rituals. Schjødt notes, "Through initiation, the initiands become open to spiritual values. During the ritual they receive an answer to the great questions of life and, not only in this, they also become like gods or their ancestors and receive admission to everlasting life."[51] Initiation is, then, a transition between the world and the Other World with an intended return with new, numinous power; this return, however, is not necessary though it leads to other problems as while in-between (that is, in the liminal space) individuals are in all respects 'dead'.[52] The completion and return from this liminal state by an initiand, however, is heralded by the gaining of knowledge or rights which warrant the new, increased status granted to the individual often represented by arms and armor.[53] Understanding these definitions,

48 Schjødt, Jens Peter. *Initiation Between Two Worlds*. Trans. Victor Hansen. University Press of Southern Denmark: 2008. p. 69.

49 The necessity of clarification is important due to the less inclusive definition given by van Gennep in *Les Rites de Passage*. Honko, Lauri. "Theories concerning the Ritual Process: An Orientation.*" Science of Religion. Studies in Methodology. Proceedings of the Study Conference of the International association for the History of Religions. Held in Turku, Finaland, August 27-31. 1973*. ed. L. Honko. The Hague, New York: 1979. p. 374.

50 Speaking of Þiðrekr's dragon-slaying, not Sigurðr sveinn's, which could be an initiation ritual.

51 Schjødt., p. 32.

52 Victor Turner notes the potentials of this when he states, "A limen...is a very long threshold, a corridor almost, or a tunnel which may, indeed, become a pilgrim's road or passing from dynamics to statics, may cease to be a mere transition and become a set way of life...Those undergoing it—call them 'liminaries'-- are betwixt-and-between established states of politico-jural structure...they are in a sense 'dead' to the world." Turner, Victor. 'Variations on a Theme of Liminality.' *Secular Ritual*. Eds. S.F. Moore and B. Meyerhof. Assen, Amsterdam: 1977. p. 37.

53 La Fontaine., p. 187.

the serpentine attributes may be understood analyzing zoological, archaeological, and literary evidence.

Attributes of the Serpent

The serpent is one of the most dominant animal symbols in Scandinavian art, and this is likely due to the unique attributes that serpents embody. Most notable is the snake's amorphous shape; their ability to contort and completely change shape makes them an ideal symbol of metamorphosis. When this fluidity of shape is combined with the fact that snakes devour their prey whole,[54] the idea that they can change and incorporate others becomes more evident. Snakes garner further importance by their liminal lifestyle; they can climb trees and swim, and they dwell in underground caves or mounds making their life one of constant in-betweens.[55] To further the imagery of being a liminal creature, snakes shed their skin, hibernate, and vary in regards to being vivparous and oviparous. Additionally, the phallic shape of a snake cannot be overlooked, as their connection with copulation is present in many Indo-European myths.[56] The other key attribute of the serpent is its tongue. The serpent tongue is a symbol of wisdom or knowledge, often encompassing the forbidden.[57] It is no surprise that when Scandinavians with serpentine names are most often skalds or persuasive speakers. Hedeager notes, "It is telling that the personal name Orm (serpent), as in Gunnlaug Serpent-*tongue* and Orm Barreyiar*skjald*, is attached to the spoken word."[58] Interestingly though, serpent names do not feature, other than Óðinn, nor *jötuns*, troll-wives, or *valkyrjar*.[59] As far as the evidence can support it then, Óðinn, aside from the actual serpents, is the only individual to receive these names, and interestingly these names are the same as two snakes who dwell with Niðhǫggr.[60] This theory can also be supported

54 Compare with the dragon in *Ívens saga* whose jaws were, "váru miklir sem ofns munni" Kalinke. II. p. 72
55 Hedeager, Lotte. *Iron age myth and materiality: an archaeology of Scandinavia*. Routledge, New York: 2011. p. 85.
56 Most notably the story of Tiresias whereupon he changed gender for stopping snakes from copulation. This also lead to his eventual endowment of the prophetic gift.
57 Such as the serpent in the Garden of Eden, but also notable for bestowing prophetic powers such as with Cassandra and Helenus. For further consideration, read: *Companion to Literary Myths, Heroes and Archetypes*. Edit Pierre Brunel. Trans. Wendy Allatson, Judith Hayward, and Trista Selous. Routledge, New York: 1988. pp. 855-857.
58 Hedeager. p. 86.
59 Hedeager. p. 86.
60 Grímnismál in stanza 35 notes, "Ormar fleiri liggia undir asci Yggdrasils,/...Ofnir oc Sváfnir hygg ec at æ scyli/ meiðs

by the archaeological evidence, but first, the actual nature of snakes in Scandinavia should be discussed.

These liminal attributes of the serpent make it undoubtedly a powerful, symbolic creature for use in initiation rites, but this nature is further complicated by the state of serpents in northern Europe. As the majority of extant literature is from Iceland, Niels Horrebow's chapter from *The Natural History of Iceland* is an ideal place to begin; the entire chapter is as follows:

No snakes of any kind are to be met with throughout the whole Island[61]

This evidence, or lack thereof, is important to understand the lack of interaction Icelanders may have had with snakes. Heading south, however, the biodiversity only marginally grows. In both Scandinavia and Great Britain, there are only three species of snakes: the grass snake (*Natrix natrix*),the smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*), and the common adder (*Vipera berus*).[62] Of these three snakes, only the adder is venomous, and its venom is rarely fatal. Interestingly, the most common of these, the grass snake, exists on a diet entirely comprised of amphibians, so it is always near water—a trait commonly associated with dragons. The absence, however, of snakes, allows for these creatures to shift into the realm of entirely symbolic. The only experience many medieval Icelanders (those who do not travel) have may thus entirely be limited to stories and histories discussing them. This, combined with the prevalence of serpent imagery on jewelry, armor, and weapons, would maintain the importance of serpents, but allow for their word-image to continue to grow and adapt.

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qvisto má.," and stanza 54 notes, "Óðinn ec nú heiti, Yggr ec áðan hét,/...Ofnir oc Sváfnir, er ec/ hygg at orðnir sé/ allir af einom mér.." While some scholars argue that either or both of these may be interpolations, it is clear the author made the connection.

61 Horrebow, Niels. *Til forladelige efterretningen um Island*. London, 1758. p. 91.

62 With the two non-venomous snakes staying below sixty-five degrees latitude, and the adder staying below sixty-seven degrees. Boulenger, G. A. *The Snakes of Europe*. Methusen & Co, London: 1913. p. 65.

Iconography of Serpents

The importance held by serpents through iconography cannot be underestimated.[63] The animals are not only icons, but potentially represent a story in a similar fashion to Christian images.[64] Hedeager not only sees this as important, but also that, "...metaphors create new ways of conceiving the world. At the same time they both destabilise and reveal it."[65] This is further complicated because the styles represent the intentional act of forgetting and recreating a new identity. Hedeager uses this idea to assess that, "Style, then, participated in the creation and legitimation of power."[66] As the animal style continues to develop, animal style becomes more than decoration and holds a mythological meaning that is more unified than many of the myths themselves.[67] As Morphy astutely notes,

> Nordic animal ornamentation does not only incorporate animals, it *is* animals...This complex representation, far removed from naturalistic animal depiction, reveals that the styles do not attempt to mirror the animals themselves. Instead, these representations ought to be understood as representations of the animals' mentality, that is, their significance is embedded in the form of artistic expression[68]

This holds especially true of serpents as they are one of the most dominant figures in the iconography.[69] Their position, then, must be one of importance, even though they are much more sparse in the preserved literature.[70] Interestingly, in the early bracteates, serpents are present in what may be an Óðinn figure.[71] This figure is mounted and in motion, and often attended by a serpent and birds. The

63 Following Lotte Hedeager, the archaeology examined with be within 400-1200 AD, with the majority of focus on pre-Christian archaeology as they may have contributed towards initiation rites.
64 Just as the Cross is indicative of the entire passion and resurrection of Christ.
65 Hedeager. p. 15.
66 Hedeager. p. 51.
67 Hedeager. p. 61.
68 Morphy, H. "The anthropology of art." *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology.* Edit. T. Ingold. Routledge, New York: 1999. p. 659.
69 Hedeager. p. 68. Hedeager continues, "The serpent or snake holds also a special position in the animal-art; in particular Style II is organised around serpent-ornament." p. 85.
70 The reason for this is unknown, but could be associated with the taboo of serpents within Christianity; It could just as equally, however, have been a result of their lack of presence in the North that lead to their decline in involvement within stories.
71 Whether or not the figure is Óðinn is, of course, unable to be answered, but as the eddic poetry only associates snakes with Óðinn and his liminal status would add credence to this interpretation of at least an Óðinnic figure.

dichotomy between the chthonic serpent[72] and the ouranic bird of prey adds to the idea of liminality, thus making those creatures the ideal companions/symbols for initiation rituals.[73]

Serpents are not only prevalent in the bracteates and jewelry, however, but are also prominent on the arms and armor of a warrior. As previously mentioned, the acquisition of numinous power upon completion often takes the form of arms and armor in warrior initiations. The connection to this is evident in the earliest attestations of the Germanic rites.[74] This explains the prominence of the monster-fighting motif on helmets and swords; they are also in prominent positions, such as over the eye-pieces.[75] Serpents also may be more present through the stylized beaded edges on helmets. Arent notes, "The beaded edges...are reminiscent of a scaley hide, and the winglike appendages and tail would suggest a dragon-like creature. Thus it is apparent that this motif may be represented by a range of formidable beasts, real or imaginary."[76] Numerous items of war feature the serpent/dragon motif as MacCulloch observes; it, "...appeared on the bows of Norse galleys and was borne into battle as a standard by different Germanic tribes. On swords the snake was engraved..."[77] The presence, then, of these monsters may be symbols of accomplishments or reminders of the completed initiation, but helmets (specifically those with face-guards) also held their own ritualistic function.

Helmets with face-guards, such as the Sutton Hoo helmet, work not only as protective helmets, but are themselves transformative masks. Arent notes, "The donning of bear-skins or wolf-skins, tails, and masks made up part of the initiation ritual...It was not just an act of costuming; the warrior so

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72 In the Norse world, the chthonic connection is not only noted by the presence of *Niðhöggr* under the roots of Yggdrasil, but also in the underworld location Nástrǫnd. Snorri says, "Sal veit ek standa/ sólu fjarri/ Nástrǫndu á/ Norðr horfa dyrr./ Falla eitrdropar/ inn of ljóra./ Sá er undinn salr/ orma hryggjum." This could perhaps have stemmed from the large "nests" of snakes in cave when they hibernate together. Snorri p. 53.

73 Hedeager. pp. 73-75. Note also, Hedeager says, "The principals in the animal ornamentation are, in other words, found on independent figurative decorations, in which the animal characters—bird of prey, the snake and the aggressive animal —are fundamental components, with animals and humans part of the ambiguous composition." ibid., p. 79.

74 According to Tacitus (specifically the Chatti—*Germania*), Procopius (specifically the Heruli—*History of the Wars),* and Ammianus Marcellinus (the Taifali—*Rerum gestarum libri qui supersunt)* among others.

75 Arent, A. Margaret. "The Heroic Pattern: Old Germanic helmets, Beowulf, and Grettis saga." *Old Norse literature and mythology: a symposium.* Edit. Edgar C. Polomé. University of Texas Press, Austin: 1969. p. 134.

76 Arent., p. 136.

77 MacCulloch, John Arnott. *Eddic Mythology.* In *The Mythology of All Races. Volume II.* Cooper Square Publishers, inc, New York: 1964. p. 216.

attired underwent in fact the transformation..."[78] The helmets can thus be both part of the ritual and/or part of the numinous power acquired upon completion. This notion is perhaps echoed, as argued by Terry Gunnell, in *Fáfnismál* with the ægishjalmr.[79] Contained on these important pieces are often serpent/dragon motifs that can be indicative of many different themes.

In addition to indigenous artwork, the dragon also shows up in the archaeological record through the *draco* banner. Lionarons notes, "examples include the use of dragon banners and insignia by peoples as diverse as the Romans, Indians, Persians, Parthians, Scythians, and Saxons."[80] The most famous users of these were the Romans, who adopted the standard in the second century likely adopted from the Dacians or Sarmatians[81] , as evidenced by Trajan's column. That this symbol was seen as an actual creature on the battlefield is seen in the notes of Arrian of Nicodemus, note especially the attention to the hissing; he writes,

> τὰ Σκυθικὰ δὲ σημεῖά ἐστιν ἐπὶκοντῶν ἐν μήκει συμμέτρῳ δράκοντεςἀπαιωρούμενοι. Ποιοῦνται δὲξυρραπτοὶ ἐκ ῥακῶν βεβαμμένων, τάςτε κεφαλὰς καὶ τὸ σῶμα τᾶν ἔστε ἐπὶτὰς οὐρὰς εἰκασμένοι ὄφεσιν, ὡςφοβερώτατα οἷόν τε εἰκασθῆναι. Καὶτὰ σοφίσματα ταῦτα. ἀτρεμούντων μὲν τῶν ἵππων οὐδὲνπλέον ἢ ῥάκη ἄν ἴδοις πεποικιλμένα ἐςτὸ κάτω ἀποκρεμάμενα, ἐλαυνομένωνδὲ ἐμπνεόμενα ἐξογκοῦται, ὥστε ὡςμάλιστα τοῖς θηρίοις ἐπεοικέναι, καί τικαὶ ἐπισυρίζειν πρὸς τὴν ἄγαν κίνησινὑπὸ τῇ πνοῇ βιαίᾳ διερχομένῃ.[82]

These *dracones*, carried by the *draconarii*, became the standard cavalry banner, and this type of standard survived past the fall of the Roman empire; Charlemagne's troops can be seen with a draco-standard in the *Psalterium Aureum*, and Harold Godwinson's standard bearer is holding one in the famous image of the *Bayeux Tapestry* when Harold meets his end. This hissing dragon on the battlefield is a symbol of might and power throughout the medieval period. This physical representation also evolved into the heraldic image so prevalent in the Middle Ages. Jacques Legoff notes, "the standard-dragon developed a symbolism of its own, the upshot of which was to make the dragon the emblem first of a military community, then of a nation. The *draco normannicus,* or Norman

78 Arent., p. 137.
79 Gunnell, Terry. *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia.* D.S. Brewer, Cambridge: 1995. p. 354.
80 Lionarons. p. 15
81 The term used is Scythian, but the Roman usage of that word varies greatly.
82 Arriani Nicomediensis Scripta Minora. Arrian. Rudolf Hercher. Alfred Eberhard. in aedibus B. G. Teubneri. Leipzig. 1885. section XXXV.iii It reads, " The Scythian standards are snakes of equal length held up on top of spearshafts. They are made of coloured pieces of cloth sewn together, the heads and their entire body up to the tail resembling serpents, so in order that they appear thus more frightening. And when the horses are not trembling from them the multicoloured bodies can be seen hanging down, however when charging they fill with air through the wind so they are most like the beasts and even hiss when a strong wind flows through much movement."

dragon, was merely a metaphor for the people of Normandy."[83] This has lead to several scholars, such as Helen Hanna[84] and Annelise Talbot[85], who attempt to associate dragon-slayings as symbolic of large military victories of early Germanic leaders, such as Arminius and Civilis respectively. While these attempts are impossible to prove, it can not be denied that the respect and power that is carried by this symbol would be prevalent in the Scandinavian mind.

The serpent in archaeology is thus a ubiquitous image, and the paucity of actual serpents makes Hedeager's theory in regards to their iconographic power all the more convincing. Within the Scandinavian world, the serpent epitomizes the chthonic creature.[86] Additionally, the serpent's constant metamorphosis, lacking a defined shape, is most evident given how serpents frame decoration, particularly in Style II art. The recurrent presence of these creatures bespeaks their function as constant reminders of the ordering of chaos and the initiation into the warrior caste. The potency and pervasiveness of this imagery, however, begins at the mythic level and the creation of order and knowledge.

83 Legoff, Jacques. "Ecclesiastical Culture and Folklore in the Middle Ages: Saint Marcellus of Paris and the Dragon." Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. In *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*. 159-88. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980. p. 176.

84 Hanna, Helen I. "Siegfried-Arminius" *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 19 No. 4 (Oct., 1920) pp.439-485.

85 Talbot, Annelise. "Sigemund the Dragon-slayer" *Folklore*, Vol. 94 No. 2 (1983) pp. 153-162

86 Interestingly, the ouranic role is filled by different birds (usually eagle or raven) and the creature on land is the most flexible of all (whether a horse, bear, boar, or other animal).

Physiology of the Dragon

The word-image "dragon," building from the effusiveness of the serpent prevalent within the archaeological record, has many other influences. Using a system similar to Honko and Mitchell, the common attributes of the dragon will be analyzed on a scale that begins with the natural and shifts towards the fantastic. Analysis of the aspects of *draconitas* begins with the most "natural" physiological aspects, large size and venom, followed by the more supernatural flight, and finishing with the wholly fantastic fire-breathing and transformation.

To analyze these texts, key quotes from the text with be analyzed alongside Classical, Christian, and historical influences to achieve an understanding of the dragon's image's development, one that seems oftentimes to be divorced from its mythic antecedent.

While many descriptions of dragons exist, the most pervasive aspect of *draconitas* is that of its larger than normal size. The dragons of *Þiðreks saga* are described as, "...digr ok langr..." and "...mikill linnormr;"[87] *Yngvars saga víðförla* makes special note saying, "Þar sáu þeir dreka þann, at slíkan höfðu eigi fyrir sét fyrir vaxtar sakir..."[88] and *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum* emphasizes the growth as well, noting, "En þessi ormr varð svá mikill um síðir, at han lá íkring um skemmuna ok beit í sporð sér."[89] For the medieval authors, the dragon's size is undoubtedly important.

While there are no real serpents of enormous size in the North, resources that Northerners had access to mention them. Pliny, for instance, writes, "...sed maximos India bellantesque cum his perpetua discordia dracones tantae magnitudinis et ipsos ut circumplexu facili ambiant nexuque nodi praestringant."[90] He also writes, "nota est in Punicis bellis ad flumen Bagradam a Regulo imperatore

87 *Þiðreks saga af Bern.* pp. 235, 561
88 *Yngvars saga víðförla*. p.442.
89 *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum*. p. 289
90 Pliny. *Naturalis Historia*. Book VIII Edit. T.E. Page. Loeb Classical Library, MA: 1940. p. 25-27 "...but the largest and

ballistis tormentisque ut oppidum aliquod expugnata serpens cxx pedum longitudinis."[91] This information, transmitted through the middle ages through works such as Isidore of Seville's *etymologiae* transfer the enormous size to the dragon, in Pliny a separate creature from these large pythons, stating, "draco maior cunctorum serpentium, sive omnium animantium super terram."[92]

The other natural, but conflated, attribute of serpents is that of their venom.[93] Undoubtedly the most terrifying aspect of the serpent, their venom is an essential trait to their existence. Consider Nástrǫnd which is described as,

> Sal sá hon standa sólo fiarri
> Nástrǫndo á, norðr horfa dyrr;
> fello eitrdropar inn um lióra,
> sá er undinn salr orma hryggiom[94]

Úlfr Uggason also writes about the miðgarðsormr and the power of his poison, saying,

> En stirðþinull starði
> storðar leggs fyrir borði
> fróns á fólka reyni
> fránleitr ok blés eitri.[95]

The power and prevalence of venom within the mythic material is undeniable. The chief slayers of the heroic sagas also fight venomous dragons. Fáfnir describes himself saying, "Eitri ec fnæsta..."[96], and the dragon that Ragnarr must fight responds to his presence by, "reistist hann upp ok blés eitri móti honum."[97]. Within the romances, however, the venom, when present, seems of a different type. It is noted in conjunction with fire, denoting a burning or acidic quality to the venom. *Ívens saga* describes

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warring [snakes are produced by] India, with ongoing strife the dragons have such great size that they easily coil around, encircling and binding [the elephant] they tie them with a binding knot.

91 Pliny. p. 28. "It is known in the Punic wars near the Bagrada river that Regulus, the military commander with his large stone-throwing siege weapon assaulted a serpent 120 feet in length just as [he would] some town.

92 Isidore of Seville. *Etymologiae*. Edit. W. M. Lindsay. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1911. XII.iv.4 "the dragon, larger [than] all of the serpents, or of all living beings upon the earth.

93 It should be noted that snakes have venom, not poison; but this would be anachronistic to apply to the medieval understanding of serpents.

94 *Völuspá.* Stanza 38

95 Snorri Sturlusson. p. 86, 87.

96 *Fáfnismál*. Stanza 18.

97 *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum.* p. 290

the dragon as, “er helt um hala hans ok brendinann af eitrinu ok eldi er hann blés á hann.”[98] *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* follows the same description noting the the dragon, “...sem kom skríðandi...ok blés alla vega frá sér eitri ok eldi...”[99] The romances, noted for their increasing fantastic attributes, have increased the potency of the poison, but the deadliness is not without validation.

While snakes having venom would undoubtedly been common knowledge, the act of spraying poison, as described, is only marginally present in the *naja* genus of serpents. There is, however, written evidence of this within the Classical corpus. Pliny, speaking of the basilisk, writes, “sibilo omnis fugat serpentes...necat frutices non contactos modo verum et adflatos, exurit herbas, rumpit saxa. aliis vis malo est.”[100] Isidore's *etymologiae* adds, “nam et hominem vel si aspiciat interimit. siquidem et eiusaspectu nulla avis volans inlaesa transit, set quam procul sit eius ore conbusta devoratur... sibilus idem est qui et regulus. sibilo enim occidit, antequam mordeat vel exurat.”[101] This deadliness is revealed through men who fail to take the right precautions, such as Ragnarr and Sigurðr; *Yngvars saga* says, “Hann reistist á sporðinn ok lét sem þá maðr blístrar...ok fellu síðan dauðir niðr.”[102] *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* continues its description, noting, “...svá at hvatvetna knivkt, sem fyrir honum varð, drap han ok sleit af eldi.”[103] This amplification of the destruction “burning” nature of the serpents' venom follows the information presented in the bestiaries, but is also being conflated due to the lack of serpent variety in the north.[104] The “burning” effect of serpent's poison is also attested to in Gregory

98 *Ívens saga.* p. 72

99 *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar.* p.98

100 Pliny. p. 56-58. “with a hiss it sets to flight all serpents, nor does it more forward [its] body with many coils as the other [snakes] do, but advancing tall and erect in the middle. It kills shrubs not only through contact but also through breath, it burns up grass, it breaks up rocks. Its strength is very bad to others.”

101 Isidore of Seville. XII.iv.6,9. “For if it sees a person it kills [him], accordingly no flying bird in its sight crosses uninjured, but far away it may be, it is set ablaze by his mouth and devoured...the Sibilus is the same as the little king[basilisk] for he kills with a hiss.”

102 *Yngvars saga viðförla.* p. 442.

103 *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar.* p. 98.

104 The authors only seem to inflate the cytotoxic aspects of venom (the venom method of the *vipera* family) which causes a localized burning that increases over duration rather than the neurotoxic effects of many of the African and Indian snakes that Pliny seems aware of (for instance, the *naja* genus of serpents have largely neurotoxic venom which are much faster and more deadly.

who writes, “ Regulus namque non morsu perimit, sed flatu consumit. Sæpe quoque aerem flatu afficit, et quidquid vel positum longe contigerit sola narium inspiratione tabefacit.”[105]

This conflation continues with the combination of the venomous basilisk-type serpents and the flying draco-type serpents. The evidence indicates that at one point, these two types of dragon were separate entities (whether the words were ever as exclusive is irrelevant). Following this linguistic distinction tradition, Vǫluspá has two great dragons, the miðgarðsormr, already noted for his deicidal venom, and Niðhǫggr, a flying dragon. Vǫluspá writes,

> þar kömr inn dimmi dreki fliúgandi,
> naðr fránn, neðan frá Niðafiollom;
> berr sér í fiorðrom - flýgr vǫll yfir -
> Niðhǫggr, nái -nú mun hon söcquaz.[106]

Additionally, *Þiðreks saga af Bern* has only flying, non-venomous dragons. They are described as, “...einn mikinn flugdreka. Hann varbæði langr ok digr. Hann hefir fótleggi digra ok klær bæði hvassar ok langar,”[107] “einn ormr. Sá er digr ok langr. Hann hefir mikit gin ok sterkliga fætr,”[108] and “flýgr inn illi dreki. Sá er meiri ok hr´ðiligri en allir aðrir.”[109] This same type of dragon, borrowed from *Þiðreks saga*, is present in *Erex saga.*

There is only one flying snake that is attested to in Pliny, who writes, “iaculum ex arborum ramis vibrari, nec pedibus tantum pavendas serpentes sed ut missile volare tormento.”[110] This snake, however, perhaps based upon the chrysopolea, is small enough to hang from tree branches, and definitely not large enough to swallow a whole human. The flying attribute of this snake seems to be conflated with the *draco* which Isidore describes as, “ Draco maior cunctorum serpentium, sive

105Gregorius I Magnus. *Moralium Libri Sive Expositio in Librum Beati Job. Pars II.* Clarendon Press, Oxford: 1915. XXXIII.xxxvii.62 “For a basilisk does not destroy with its bite, but consumes with its breath. It often also infects the air with its breath, and withers with the mere blast of its nostrils whatever it has touched, even when placed at a distance.”

106*Völuspá*. Stz. 66.

107*Þiðreks saga af Bern*. p. 156

108*Þiðreks saga af Bern.* p. 561

109*Þiðreks saga af Bern*. p.478

110Pliny. VIII.xxxv.85. “That the javelin [snake] hurls itself from the branches of trees, and that serpents are not only formidable to the feet but fly like a missile from a catapult.

omnium animantium super terram...Qui saepe ab speluncis abstractus fertur in aerem, concitaturque propter eum aer... Innoxius autem est a venenis."[111] The dragon, as presented in Isidore is a large flightless constrictor without venom (following Pliny), but the conflation seems to be the result of Gregory the Great and his *Moralium Libri Sive Exposition In Librum Beati Job*. Gregory, discussing Leviathan, notes,

> Quia vero Leviathan iste alias non solum serpens, sed etiam regulus dicitur, pro eo quod immundis spiritibus, vel reprobis hominibus principatur, sicut Isaias ait: De radice colubri egredietur regulus (Isai. Siv,29), inspiciendum nobis summopere est qualiter regulus perimat, ut, ex operatione reguli, hujus nobis malitia apertius innotescat.[112]

The conflation of these two serpents is seen in later bestiaries, such as Hugh of Fouilloy shows when he writes,

> The scripture teaches us that the greatest of the serpents is the dragon and that it deals death by its poisonous breath and by the blow of its tail. This creature is lifted by the strength of its venom into the air as if it were flying, and the air is set in motion by it[113]

The conflation of these two distinct serpents is clear, following Biblical exegesis of important writers such as Gregory the Great. This may explain why a work with clearly religious overtones, such as *Yngvars saga viðförla*, shows an awareness and conflation of all of these deadly serpents into single serpents. The dragon, Jakulus "...kom yfir skip þat, sem prestar tveir stýrðu, þá spjó hann svá eitri, at bæði týndust skip ok menn."[114]

One of the best known attributes linked with dragons is that of breathing or emitting fire. This attribute falls into the fantastic category as there is no written bestiary from which an author may assume it as a normal animal aspect. Additionally, the act of fire-breathing seems to originate from foreign sources, both histories and romances. The earliest evidence we have of this idea is seen in

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111 Isidore of Seville. XII.iv.4-5

112 Gregorius I Magnus. XXXIII.xxxvii.62 "But because this Leviathan is called in another place not merely a serpent, but also a basilisk, because he rules over unclean spirits, or reprobate men, as Isaiah says, Out of the serpent's root shall come forth a basilisk, [Is. 14, 29] must attentively observe how a basilisk destroys, that by the doings of the basilisk, his malice may be more plainly made known to us."

113 Hugh of Fouilloy. Ms. Sloane 278 – Druce Translation. <Bestiary.ca> 05/05/2012

114 *Yngvars saga viðförla*. p. 436

Merlinspá which records, “Geriz sokn mikil snaka íj gapa grimlega grvndar bellti havggvaz hoeknir havðrs gyrðingar blasaz eitri a ok blám elldi. ”[115] This form may be a largely British influence with the British evidence for fire-breathing dragons being older and more prevalent.[116] The other two sources, the romances *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* and *Ívens saga*, both treat the fire as a very dangerous obstacle that must be dealth with, unlike wings which take no part in the fights of early saga. *Tristrams saga* notes, “...ok hvern dag vandiz at koma í borgina ok gerði mikinn mannskaða, at hann drap all þá er hann mátti ná, með eldi þeim, erhann skaut ór sér.”[117] Íven, in a scene reminiscent of Beowulf's encounter, “...brá þá sverði sínu ok hulði sik skildinum at eihi skyldi eldrinn gera honum mein. En ormrinn blés ór kjöptum sínum er svá váru miklir sem ofns munni.”[118] Additionally, fire-breathing is present in the Saint's life genre; *Margretar saga* says, “Lios gerdiz i mykvastofunni af elldi þeim, er for or munni hans ok nausum.”[119] It should be noted, however, that none of the dragons who are noted for breathing fire fly.[120] It is interesting that in these early tales, it is only within the foreign locations that dragons have the fantastic ability to breath fire, and this may support the theory that the “indigenous” dragons are remnants of the mythic more than anything else, focusing on the chthonic attributes.

The last, and most unrealistic, element that dragons can embody is the metamorphosis from a human. This transformation is reminiscent of the mask-donning transformation rituals and likely has roots in ritual practices. In literature, however, the change into a dragon is always perceived as a negative. Only reprehensible characters transform, and in their otherness they seek to destroy society either by withholding goods (such as gold) or destroying order (by using witchcraft). In

115“Merlinspá.” *Hauksbók.* Kobenhavn. Thieles Bogtrykkeri: 1892-96. p. 278

116Consider the omens of fire-dragons in Northumbria before the Viking invasion of Lindisfarne and the dragon of *Beowulf* among other examples.

117 *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar.* p. 96.

118 *Ívens saga*. p. 72.

119 *Margretar saga.* p. 478

120It should be noted that this connection is likely later, even though it seems to be early in British history (at least 8th century). It is possible that the connection is made sooner than the manuscripts attest if *Ketils saga hængs* is as early as some scholars wish to date it, or if, as the evidence suggests, the author of *Völsunga saga*, was envisioning a flying dragon.

fornaldarsögur, The malicious and greedy transform exlclusively to hoard gold; *riddarasögur,* on the other hand, use the fantastic element of witchcraft to temporarily change the user.

In the earliest sagas, there are only three recorded instances of humans transforming themselves into dragons. In *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, Queen Ostasia, a *seiðkona*, "Svá miki gerði hún seiddi til sín margs konar dýr, kóna ok björnu ok flugdreka stóra...Hún sjálf var ok sem einn flugdreki."[121] This transformation, no doubt, would fall into the category of poor literary use, and indeed there is a "wilderness of dragons" in this scene. Unlike the dragons that pose threats for heroes, this swarm of dragons seems just as effective as the lions and bears, and her transformation is thus not as impressively received. Additionally, her performance of *seiðr* creates an element of the fantastic; she is a witch who summons legions of beasts to fight. The other two transformations, however, are handled with greater care. *Yngvars saga viðförla*, with it's religious connotations, hints at the transformation and what it could mean when it writes, "En drekar átu hræ konungs ok dætra hans, ensumir menn ætla, at þau sé at drekum orðin."[122] The dragon scene here shows a connection to eating corpses, akin to Niðhǫggr, and the potential outcome of hoarding wealth, like Fáfnir. The author seems unwilling to firmly state what happens, but the incorporation of the men's beliefs is important, the dragon's origin is told as a myth. The most well known of draconic transformations is that of Fáfnir, who, placing the *ægishjálmr* on his head, **"...**fór upp á Gnitaheiði ok gerði sér þar ból ok brásk í orms líki ok lagðisk á gullit."[123] Similar to *Yngvars saga* both of these transformations are permanent and connected to greed.

It is interesting that with the three instances of transformation, there are three different approaches. *Þiðreks saga* shows the transformation being used aggressively, as an implement of war. *Yngvars saga* shows the transformation in a neutral perspective; it happens merely because that is what happens to those who die with greed in mind. Fáfnir chooses to transform specifically for the purpose

121*Þiðreks saga af Bern.* p. 477
122*Yngvars saga viðförla*. p. 443.
123Snorri. p. 46

of protecting his hoard.

These physical attributes of dragons are not only varied, but perceived differently. The author's intention in whether reception of the dragon is revealed in the means and method that dragons have these traits as well. Whether it is the conflation of naturally occurring attributes such as size and poison or the unbelievable attributes such as human transformation, their use follows intention of mythic or fantastic.

Psychology of the Dragon

In addition to the physiological aspects of dragons, their behavior, that is their psychology, should also be analyzed for prevalent traits and uses. As previously noted, Ármann Jakobsson astutely writes, "...fear is exactly what is to be expected in this situation...the symbolism of the dragon in the dragon-slaying myth...represent, even embody, terror..."[124] There is no more universal behavior trait to dragons than that they are invokers of fear. *Fáfnismál* most notably states,

> Ægishiálm bar ec um alda sonom,
> metan ec um meniom lág;
> einn rammari hugðomc ǫllum vera,
> fannca ec marga mǫgo.[125]

While this explicit embodiment is not present in other sagas, it is almost always present. *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum* writes, "Fólkit óttaðist mjök, ok vissu, at hann mundi mikinn skaða gera, svá mikill ok ólmr sem hann var þá orðinn."[126] Similarly, *Tristrams saga* writes, "sjá þeir því næst, at fólkit undan flýði ofan at sjónum at hjálpaz af hryggleik ok hræðslu eins ógnarligs dreka."[127] In *Margretar saga*, the dragon is so terrifying that is writes, "Þa vard Margreta sva rędd, at hon fell til iardar."[128] *Yngvars saga* and *Þiðreks saga* mention dragons as "hræðiligr"[129], and *Þiðreks saga* also uses "ógurligt".[130] People are to be afraid of dragons, and the courage merely to face a dragon is heroic.

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects is the perceived danger from dragons' tails outside of the romances. Not just their ability to constrict with them, but the actual strength of the tail in beating. This is seen most clearly in Haraldr Harðraði's fight with the dragon in Byzantium. He says, "Úlfr er sterkastr, hann skal fara á sporðinn, því at þar er aflit ormanna."[131] This sentiment is reflect in

124Ármann. p. 43.
125*Fáfnismál*. st. 16
126 *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum.* p. 289
127*Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar.* p. 96.
128*Margretar saga.* p. 478
129*Yngvars saga viðförla*. p. 436 *Þiðreks saga af Bern.* p. 478
130*Þiðreks saga af Bern*. p. 156
131*Morkinskinna.* Edit. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson. Íslenzk Fornrit. XXIII Ízlenzka Fornritafélag,

Isidore, who writes, “Vim autem non in dentibus, sed in cauda habet, et verbere potius quam rictu nocet.”[132] Isidore is likely following Gregory who first notes this following the verse from Job, describing Leviathan, which states, “He makes his tail stiff like a cedar.”[133] Gregory exigetes this passage saying, “Prima quidem serpentis suggestio mollis ac tenera est, et facile vitutis pede conterenda, sed si hæc invalescere negligligenter admittitur, eique ad cor aditus licenter præbetur, tanta se citute exaggerat, ut captam mentem deprimens, usque ad intolerabile robur excrescat.”[134] This notion may also be related to the growth of the serpent and gold within *Ragnars saga loðbrókar.*

Perhaps the most commonly associated psychological attribute of dragons is their insistence on hoarding gold. Several scholars, including Grimm, Arent, and Evans speak of it as the fundamental aspect of the Germanic dragon. Of the earliest dragon-tales in Iceland, however, the hoard is only present in three stories. *Yngvars saga viðförla* mentions it, stating, “þar sáu þeir dreka þann...ok mikit gull liggja undir honum.”[135], The gold-hoard may have been present in Ragnar´s cycle as *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* states, “lítinn lyngorm...lét hann í sitt eski ok bar undir hann gull....ok gullit vex undir honum jafnt sem ormrinn sjálfr.”[136] The oldest preserved version of the story, *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum*, makes no mention of gold, however, when discussing the dragon. In Sigurðr's story, gold, specifically a ring within the hoard, is central to the entire plot in the eddic material. This key plot element, however, is wholly missing in the *riddarasögur* version presented in *Þiðreks saga.*[137] The line of demarcation is clear between *fornaldarsögur* and other literary genres. There are, however, ample sources for this motif. It will later be revealed the dominance of this motif within Indo-European myth, specifically the Greeks which the root word is closely associated with. Outside of the mythic cycles, however, there is

Reykjavík, 2011. p. 110.

132Isidore of Seville. *Etymologiae*. XII.iv.4.

133Job 40:17 (ESV)

134Gregorius I Magnus. XXXII.xix.33 **“**The first suggestion of the serpent is soft indeed, and tender, and easily to be crushed by the foot of virtue. But if it is carelessly allowed to gain strength and access is freely allowed it to the heart, it increases itself with such great power, as to weigh down the enslaved mind, and to increase to intolerable strength.”

135*Yngvars saga viðförla.* p. 442.

136*Ragnars saga loðbrókar.* p. 226.

137It should be noted that the hoard is not present Þiðreks saga, but is later referenced when he is killed.

other evidence which may be part of establishing the idea. Perhaps one of the oldest references that seems strongly connected to this idea. If the notion of gold-hoarding is one of the more archaic elements, it can be traced to the mythic origins of dragons.

The Dragon in Myth

Following Schjødt's theory, the dragon as integral to initiation and crisis rituals is readily apparent. In wealth-giving societies, the dragon can be seen as an unwelcome destroyer of a society that requires wealth mobility. Watkins notes,

> The Chaos which the dragon symbolizes may take up many manifestations in the different traditions...In the Germanic world...It is the dragon's "job", as Professor William Alfred has put it, to guard treasure. That is, the dragon keeps wealth from circulating: the ultimate evil in society in which gift-exchange and the lavish bestowal of riches institutionalize precisely that circulation."[138]

Understanding initiation rituals, one can then move towards understanding the long history of serpents and dragons within the realm of Indo-European belief. Jan De Vries notes, in his book *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend*, that the heroic pattern is often applicable to gods and their feats may be seen as initiation rituals. The dragon-slaying motif of Indo-European gods is seen Marduk's slaying of Tiamat, Ra's slaying of Apep, and Apollo's slaying of Python among others. De Vries incitefully notes, "The monsters slain by these gods are the powers of chaos, which must be destroyed so that the cosmos can be created."[139] Monsters, then, are part of the Other; they are the chaos to the order that is society. De Vries continues, "The explains why, in the initiation ritual, the dragon or some such monster plays an important part. The creature is a symbol of chaos; he who is going to be initiated must pass through this creature to be born a new man."[140] De Vries also notes that as representations of Chaos, these beasts are oftentimes dismembered and ordered to create the world[141], or, as the earth is envisioned often as rising out of water, the monster lays in the water "outside" of the ordered world.[142] The ordering of chaos, however, is not only the realm of gods, but also the heroes.

Fighting a dragon is one of the more common tasks of a hero; some of the more prominent Indo-european heroes are: the Persians Rustum, Gushtasp, Artachsir, and Bahram Gor, the Greeks

138Watkins. p. 300
139De Vries, Jan. *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend*. Trans. B.J. Timmer. Oxford University Press, London: 1959. p. 222.
140De Vries. p. 222.
141Consider the *jötunn* Ymir; though he is not a figure of chaos as presented in the texts that have been transmitted.
142Consider the *miðgarsormr* who is reminiscent of Tiamat and Apep in this regard.

Perseus, Heracles, Cadmus, Bellerophon, Jason, and Perseus, the Germans Sigfried/Sifrit, Heimir, and Wolfdietrich. These stories, of the stories that are still preserved, follow Schjødt's pattern of an initiation ritual, and often end with rewards typically associated with manhood.[143] An excellent case study of this can be seen in the story of Cadmus.[144] Apollodorius writes,

> Guarding the spring was a serpent (some say it was Ares' offspring), and it destroyed most of those who had been sent out. Cadmos became angry and killed the serpent...he sowed the dragon's teeth like seeds...there grew up from the earth armed men...After his service Athena arranged for him to have the kingdom, and Zeus gave him as wife Harmonia...All the gods left heaven and celebrated the marriage feast in the Cadmeia with much singing.[145]

This myth adheres to van Gennep's model – having skipped the initial phase for brevity's sake—and additionally meets all of Schjødt's criteria. Cadmus, by defeating the serpent, ceases to wander—his liminal state—and founds a city, family, and dynasty while being reconciled with the gods themselves. The pattern is similar with Heracles—though he has twelve labors (two of which contain serpents) to achieve the same result—and the other Greek heroes. The reward for this initiation rite is unanimously a kingdom, or a seat in Olympus for Heracles, and a wife—objects indicative of manhood, especially within royalty. The goal of these rites is thus clear, but the question is then raised as to why serpents and dragons are so symbolically apt.

The only surviving myth involving a great serpent which may have an initiation ritual background is Þórr and the *miðgarðsormr.* This scene is not normally considered an initiation ritual, likely because Þórr does not accomplish what he sets out to do and thus has no numinous acquisition at the end of the trial. It should be noted, however, that Gangleri says, “Allmikit flrekvirki vann fiórr í flessi ferð.”[146] Additionally, the only missing element is the acquisition of numinous power, all other

143This includes often includes a woman, a kingdom, or arms and/or armor.

144This story is chosen specifically because of its popularity in the Greek, Roman, and Medieval world. The Roman version is undoubtedly influencing at least Saxo Grammaticus and the author of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar.*

145Apollodorus. “Library*”. Anthology of Classical Myth: Primary Sources in Translation*. Edit and trans. Stephen M. Trzaskoma, R. Scott Smith, and Stephen Brunet. Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis: 2004. sections 3.4.1-3.7.7 p.47.

146 *Edda* p. 45.

criteria are met. The similarities of this myth with the previously mentioned Indo-european myths against the chaotic serpent are equally relevant here. The potential interpretation of this as an initiation ritual is further strengthened by its strong similarities to Ketill hængs' encounter with a dragon in *Ketils saga hængs.* The very fact that the literature is all post-Christian, however, has left scholars with a paucity of material; one would expect the serpent, and its pervasive iconography, to be maintained within the realm of the heroic or the realm of the wholly fantastic where it is not in opposition to Christianity.

A Draconic Initiation

Understanding Bakhtin's notion of chronotopes and applying it to dragon-slaying episodes will, among other things, reveal a workable paradigm for all of the various "types" of dragons. It is not necessary that dragons themselves always fall within the realm of supernatural depending on the situation. As Mitchell notes, "The relationship of the supernatural (perceived as real) to notions of the fabulous and fantastic (thought to be unreal) is critical...one possibly fruitful approach of the mythical-heroic sagas was what I termed the 'factual-fabulous' axis."[147] This approach allows and anticipates dragons being handled differently dependent upon the situation, and accounts for the influence of the translated romance on other genres. Lionarons concurs adding, "...medieval texts dealing with dragons do not present a monologic repetition of a single dragon motif so much as they depict a progression of individual, intertextually related dragons, a series of particular historical expressions of a varying notion of *draconitas*."[148] To further understand how these texts interact, scene analysis, the semantic interaction between the hero and the dragon, and the motivation and reward, will be analyzed to approach a unified understanding of the perception of dragons. Early *fornaldarsögur* typically follow the patterns of initiation, and thus will be analyzed first.

The evidence that monstrous serpents were originally connected with initiation rights is made clear through the prominence of youth in dragon-slaying. Ármann Jakobsson, speaking of two of the most popular slayers (Sigurðr and Ragnarr), notes, "One thing the dragon-slayers of *Vǫlsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga* do have in common is that both heroes are youths".[149] From a narrative standpoint this is problematic because it often places the most climactic event near the beginning of the story[150]. This

147 Mitchell, Stephen, A. "The Supernatural and the *fornaldarsögur:* The Case of *Ketils saga Hængs." Fornaldarsagaerne. Myter og virkelighed. Studier I de oldislandske fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda.* eds. Agneta Ney, Ármann Jakonsson, Annete Lassen. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag: 2008. p. 282

148 Lionarons. p. 4.

149 Ármann Jakobsson. p. 41. Sigurðr is nine in *Þiðreks saga*, Ragnarr is fifteen, Ketill hæng is eleven, and Bjǫrn Hitdælakappa is eighteen. The slayers in *Gesta Danorum*, Regner, Frotho, Fridlevus, and Alf also all are in their teens it seems.

150 Compare this to the dragon of *Beowulf* which, from a modern literary viewpoint, is more successful as the climax of the

may additionally add support to the theory of serpent/dragon-slaying having strong bonds with initiation which, by its very nature, requires a place near the beginning of the story. Another key factor that Ármann notes is the necessity of fear (or absence of it in the case of some heroes).[151] Additionally, that which is acquired is not always physical wealth. Though two of the most famous dragon-slayers, Sigurðr fáfnisbani and Ragnarr loðbrókar, do attain gold and women, the numinous acquisition is more important from the slaying of a monstrous serpent; evidenced by change of their name. These names are part of who they are and indicative of the permanent change that has taken place within their lives. Due to the transformative nature of these heroes dragon-slayings, as well as the early attestations of these heroes, they shall be each investigated.

Ragnarr loðbrókar holds to the initiation pattern in all variants of his story. Ragnarr's place in the saga begins with him being young and untested creating instability in the land by, "...margir konungar á ríkin ok lögðu undir. En því at hann var ungr maðrok þeim sýndist hann lítt fallinn til ráðagerðar eða landstjórnar..."[152] In order for Ragnarr to be seen as worthy, he needs to be initiated into the world of rulers, and that requires wealth and a wife. To accomplish this feat, he equips himself with the items necessary to kill the dragon; his outfit reminiscent of the wolf-cloaked man on the Torslunda plate, who is also carring a sword and a spear. *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum* notes, "þá fór hann í rögguð klæði, brækr ok kápu, ok ermar á ok höttr. Þau kl´ði váru þæfð með sand ok tjörnu, ok tók í hönd sér eitt mikit spjót, en var gyrðr sverði..."[153] Ragnarr then, "gekk svá einn frá sínum mönnum ok til býjar jarlsins ok skemmu Þóru."[154] In some variants, it is also specified early in the morning[155] that he encounters the dragon. The theme of fear is firmly established when the author notes, "Þessi tíðendi

story.

151 Ármann Jakobsson. p. 42-45. This is most obvious in *Völsunga saga* where Fáfnir is the bearer of the ægishjálmr.

152 *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum*. p. 289.

153 *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum*. p. 290.

154 *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum*. p. 290.

155 This is done early enough that everyone is still sleeping, so this may be similar to the darkness with which Ketill hæng encounters a dragon.

spyrjast víða of land, en þó treystist engi til at ráða fyrir þessum mikla ormi."[156] Ragnarr, however, is undaunted; he, "...kemr í skíðgarðinn, þar sem ormrinn var, leggr hann til hans með spjóti sínu..."[157] Ragnarr approaches without fear and engages the dragon. The dragon's most dangerous attribute, his poison, is ineffective on Ragnarr because of his *loðbrókar.*[158] When confirming his deed to the one witness, Þora, he, also speaking through litote, recites the following verse,

> Hætt hefik leyfðu lífi,
> litfögr kona, vetra
> vák at foldar fiski
> fimmtán gamall, mínu;
> hafa skalk, böl nema bíti,
> bráðrakinn mér dauða,
> heiðar lax til hjarta
> hringlegin, vel, smýgr-a[159]

This verse is particularly interesting because of the kennings used for the dragon. The connection with fish is reminiscent of Ketill's dragon near the water, as well as the mythical dragons of the primordial seas. Additionally, the coils (*hringlegin)* are mentioned, returning to the notion of chaos that seems inherent in serpents and dragons of the Nordic world.

As a direct result of Ragnarr's victory, he gains the hand of Þora and the wealth guarded by the dragon. Of a more enduring nature, however, is that he is referred to as loðbrókar, and this title is transferred to his sons.[160] Ragnarr, heir to the throne, upon succeeding this initiation into manhood receives the indicators of nobility, enormous wealth and a woman of acceptable pedigree.[161] This story

156 *Ragnars saga loðbrókar.* p. 227.
157 *Ragnars saga loðbrókar.* p. 228.
158 In the *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum*, Ragnarr´s shield, similar to Cadmus', protects him, but the emphasis still remains on his unique outfit.
159 *Ragnars saga loðbrókar.* p. 228.
160 It is important to note that he is not given this nickname in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar, Þáttr af Ragnars sonum,* nor *Norna-Gests þáttr.* It is even possible that this nickname is not related to the slaying of the dragon, but Ragnarr still acquires numinous power in the completion; additionally, in his verse, he refers to himself for the first time as famous, further indicating the transformation that occurred.
161 It is also of important note that his dragon-slaying may be the reason why he is worthy of marrying Áslaug, the only child of Sigurðr and Brynhildr. The merging of these two dragon-slaying families has not been overlooked, and seems

of initiation is even more important because of the kings duty to establish and maintain order. It is in this story that Jonathan Evans view of dragons seems most appropriate; he states, "We may state this more clearly: the Germanic dragon myth's primary function may be partly about the preservation of cosmic or social order...but in its most focused and most popular form...it is about the socially and personally destructive effects of greed."[162] While his definition may be too narrow (or only relevant in the German rather than Scandinavian world), it is easy to see the theme of greed and kingship apparent with Ragnarr's dragon-slaying.

The other story to be discussed is that of Sigurðr fáfnisbani, undoubtedly the most popular dragon-slaying myth in Scandinavia.[163] Because of the myriad sources and versions of this tale, the oldest preserved, the eddic material, will be focused upon.[164] Sigurðr's initiation begins when he is being raised in a foreign kingdom being fostered by a dwarven smith. Reginsmál states, "Þá var kominn Reginn til Hiálprecs, sonr Hreiðmars. Hann var hveriom manni hagari, oc dvergr of vǫxt; hann var vitr, grimmr oc fiolkunnigr. Reginn veitti Sigurði fóstr oc kenzlo ok elscaði hann mioc."[165] Sigurðr is then given the tool he needs to complete his initiation; Reginsmál writes, "Reginn gerði Sigurði sverð, er Gramr hét. Þat var svá hvast, at hann brá því ofan í Rín oc lét reca ullarlagð fyrir straumi, oc tóc í sundr lagðinn sem vatniþ. Því sverði klauf Sigurðr í sundr steðia Regins."[166] Reginn offers Sigurðr

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the likely reason that Ragnarr and Áslaug's children seem themselves serpentine.

162 Evans. p. 239.

163 While claims such as this are difficult to make, the presence of Sigurðr in literature, rune stones, and even on churches indicates the persistent nature of this character, even though he himself is not Scandinavian.

164 Evans notes, "...the problem of the origins of the *Nibelungenlied* and the interrelations between the ON and OHG versions of the legend [are] "the North European equivalent of the Homeric question"...requiring careful untangling of complex textual relations among the *Poetic Edda,* the *Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson, *Völsunga saga, Þiðreks saga,* and, in Middle High German, *Das Lied vom Hürnen Seyfrit* and the *Nibelungelied* itself." p. 231, 232. This is obviously out of the scope of the paper, so Scandinavian prose shall be focused on. Additionally, as the author of *Völsunga saga* is consciously using some of the Eddic poetry, it will be covered via proxy. It must also be noted that Sigurðr has many functions that may be part of initiation, such as his horse from Óðinn and the transference of Wisdom from Fáfnir to Sigurðr; the scope and size of this paper, however, will not allow expansion. Schjødt notes eighteen episodes in the initiation sequence, but this seems excessive given the combinatory nature of the *Völsunga saga* author interpolating directly from *Þiðreks saga* as well as conjoining what appear to be divergent traditions in the Eddic poetry. p. 287-289.

165 *Reginsmál* I.2-5. The fact that a dwarven smith is his foster-father adds to the chthonic elements present in the tale. Smiths are the shapers and orderers of earth.

166*Reginsmál* XIV.8-11

fame and immense wealth to slay the dragon.[167]

The theme of fear is ever-present due to the fact that, “Fáfnir lá á Gnitaheiði oc var í orms líki; hann ægishiálm, er ǫll qviqvindi hrodduz við.”[168] As the dragon approaches, Sigurðr overcomes fear as *Völsunga saga* states, “eigi hræddist Sigurðr né óttast við þann gný.”[169] This important feature shows the initiand's overcoming of fear and becoming a true warrior.[170] The dragon then enters his death-throes before a dialogue between the two begins; this scene itself, accepting Terry Gunnell's theory, this scene has “all the traits of a formal initiation ceremony.”[171] Sigurðr rides to receive his reward and finds, “bolis hans oc fann þat opit, oc hurðir af iárni oc gætti; af iárni vóro oc allir timbrstoccar í húsino, enn grafit í iorð niðr. Þar fann Sigurðr stórmikit gull oc fyldi þar tvær kistor. Þar tóc hann ægishiálm oc gullbrynio oc sverðit Hrotta oc marga dýrgripi”[172] Sigurðr also gains fearlessness from eating the heart of Fáfnir and “hiartblóð Fáfnis kom á tungo hánom, oc scilði hann fuglsrǫdd.”[173]; it is interesting that the numinous power gained by the defeat of the chthonic dragon is ouranic knowledge. Sigurðr then proceeds to kill the other chthonic figure, Reginn, and goes to receive his final reward, a suitable wife.[174] In a similar fashion to Ragnarr, Sigurðr receives rewards expected of a king, wealth and a wife, but Sigurðr's initiation also yielded numinous knowledge, from Fáfnir, birds, and a valkyrie, this itself puts Sigurðr in a liminal space between the heroic world and the mythic world.[175] Sigurðr, assuming the mantle of fáfnisbani, has become a radically different person than the boy who went to

167 Notably in *Þiðreks saga* the foster-father smith (Mimir) instead sends Sigurðr out into the woods to be eaten by the dragon because he is a nuisance. Either way, though, the boy is sent alone.

168*Reginsmál* XIV.6-7

169 *Völsunga saga.* p. 151.

170 Though in *Völsunga saga*, Sigurðr has already proven his battle worth by avenging his father's death. This revenge, is not present, however, in *Þiðreks saga* where Sigurðr's slaying is his first heroic act.

171 Gunnell, Terry. p. 355-356. Given the conjoining by the author, it is entirely possible for this episode to stand alone; the dragon itself makes an ideal subject for a call and response performance because of the act of overcoming this chthonic creature of chaos by ordering the world itself.

172*Fáfnismál* XCIV.6-10. Notice the further chthonic connotations present with the Iron everywhere.

173*Fáfnismál*. XXXI.9

174 The story itself then becomes increasingly complicated, but this is after Sigurðr has been initiated into the heroic world and when, in some variants, he engages in the courtly world.

175 Given the divine lineage of Sigurðr, this is not unexpected, but it does raise questions as to the exact status that Sigurðr may have held in pre-Christian times.

slay the dragon.

These dragon-slayers are excellent examples of the initiatory nature that often can accompany dragon-slaying. They follow van Gennep's model and fulfill Schjødt's criteria, and the clear pattern that they follow is that of an initiation rite. These figures, pre-Christian, see a clear transformation from boys to warriors and rulers. The dragon is the key to their transformation as it embodies chaos and fear which must be conquered in the world of the warrior and especially in the world of a king. The change of their name, which rather than a name is an identity, shows their irreversible change in status.

A Dragon's Function in Romance

Under the reign of King Hákon Hákonarson, there was a great deal of translation of continental texts into the Old Norse language. The romances brought not only new stories and characters, but also a unique approach to heroics and monsters. The translating of romances proved very popular including the texts of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar, Ívens saga, Erex saga Artuskappa,* and *Þiðreks saga af Bern* which all include episodes between the titular knights and dragons.[176] In this world, the heroes are without fear, which is perhaps why they were not counted among Ármann's slayers; Katheryn Hume notes that these dragon adventures, rather than being the focus of the story, merely exist to further glorify or exalt the hero.[177] These figures all find themselves in the Otherworld, typically by riding through the woods or mountains, and they are not liminal visitors, but are indeed part of that world. Bakhtin says,

> In this world the hero is 'at home' (although he is not in his homeland); he is every bit as miraculous as his world. His lineage is miraculous, as are the conditions of his birth, his childhood and youth, his physique, and so forth. He is flesh of the flesh and bone of the bone of this miraculous world, its best representative.[178]

The dragons, rather than being the primordial battle against fear and chaos, are just further evidence that these heroes are just better than a typical person.[179] This romance mentality is perhaps best captured in the Middle English poem *Gawain and the Green Knight*, where is says,

> So mony meruayl bi mount þer þe mon fyndez,
> Hit were to tore for to telle of þe tenþe dole.

176 *Þiðreks saga af Bern* additionally includes a variation of the story of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani which does not properly fit into the romance tradition seeming to be following a tradition similar to or connected with *Das Lied com Hürnen Seyfrid.* See Andersson *The Legend of Brynhild* p. 233ff.

177 Hume. p. 3.

178 Bahktin, Mikhail M. *The Dialogic Imagination.* Edited by Michael Holquist. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. University of Texas Press, Austin, TX: 1981. p. 152.

179 The clearest notion of this is presented in the prologue to *Þiðreks saga af Bern* following the medieval convention of giants and descendents of the antediluvian nephilim.

Sumwhyle wyth wormes he werrex, and with wolues als,
Sumwhyle wyth wodwos, þat woned in þe knarrez[180]

It is sufficient to note for Gawain that he fought fantastic beasts the entire way to his destination, and so they are passed over. This building of credibility may be lacking in narrative development that scholars seem so desirous of, but the effect of dragons must not be ignored; the heroes prove their might, so even if the draconic encounters are not satisfying as a conflict, they achieve their purpose.

The heroes can clearly be seen in this chronotope of romance as they are always traveling to places for *aventure. Ívens saga* begins the section saying, "Herra Íven ríðr nú þar til er hann kom í einn djúpan dal ok þykkan skóg."[181] *Erex saga* begins the section with, "<F>rá Erex er þat at segja at hann ríðr lengi um skóggin ok hans unnasta."[182] Similarly Þiðreks encounters begin with, "Nú er þeir koma af skóginum,"[183] and, "Þiðrekr konugr ríðr jafnan at veiða dýr, ok nú hefir hann riðit langt á merkr með hauka sína ok hunda."[184][185] In these scenes, the heroes "happen upon" *aventure* something that presents the heroes in a more favorable Christian light than the *fornaldarsögur* heroes.[186] A similar pattern can be seen in *Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa* where the setting is in a similar location for *aventure*, when , "Þar varð sá atburðr, er Bjǫrn fylgði konungi ok sigldi með liði sínu fyrir sunnan sjó"[187][188] These heroes are in the 'wilderness' where the fantastic happens, but *aventure* is part of their journey rather than a destination as the dragons tend to be in *fornaldarsögur.*

180 *Gawain and the Green Knight*. Edit J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon. 2nd edition. Norman Davis. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK: 1967. ln. 718-721 "The man finds so many marvels there in hills,/ It would be too difficult to tell a tenth/ Sometimes he battles with dragons, and with wolves also,/ sometimes with woodwoses that dwelt in caves"
181 *Ívens saga.* p. 73.
182 *Erex saga.* p. 247.
183 *Þiðreks Saga af Bern.* p. 156.
184 *Þiðreks Saga af Bern.* p. 562
185 Because I am in agreement with Lionarons, Andersson, Evans, and other scholars in regards to the Sigurðr sveinn segment of *Þiðreks saga,* I will place that segment in with the *fornaldarsögur* which is supported not only linguistically, but also thematically.
186 Even Tristram, who gains a more monetary reward, heads to the mountains, "Sem Tristram varði minnst." the idea of 'happening upon' *aventure* remains the dominant form.
187 *Bjarnar saga hítdælakappa*. Íslenzk Fornrit Vol. III. Edit. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson. Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, Reykjavík: 1938. p.124
188 It seems plausible that Þorkell Hákur in Njáls saga would be perceived in a similar situation not only because of the familial connection, but also because of his sailing east for adventure beign the basis for his interaction.

Semantically, the dragon-fights are markedly different as well. In the *fornaldarsögur,* the heroes go to the dragons' dwellings and attack them. Sigurðr goes to Gnita-heath and attacks Fáfnir as he goes to drink, Ragnarr goes to the serpent guarding the maiden, potentially while it is sleeping[189], and Yngvarr goes to the mound while the dragon is being delayed from drink by salt. In the *riddarasögur,* the formula is inverted. The surprise of the hero in romance is continually noted; *Tristrams saga* says, "Sem Tristram varði minnst, þá heyði hann ópit ok hljóp þegar á hest sinn," *Ívens saga* notes, "Hann heyrði hörmuligt óp ok læti. Hann stefndi þegar þangat," and *Erex saga* follows saying, "Ok einn dag heyra þau ógurlig læti. Því næst sá þau hvar einn flugdreki."[190] The heroes are happened upon by dragons; perhaps because it is unchivalrous for a knight to hide in a pit or attack a sleeping foe, even a dragon. The implications are clear, however. Dragons are generally the actors and initiators of conflict in *riddarasögur* whereas the protagonists are the actors and initiators in *fornaldarsögur.*[191]

Additionally, the *riddarasögur* present a non-magical, and thus non-pagan, fight against one of the greatest monsters. If "gold and glory" are at the root of Indo-European dragon-slaying, then dragon-slaying is in conflict with Christian ideology. Kathryn Hume elaborates saying, "What had been a potent sublayer in the better *fornaldarsögur*...could not, as time went on, be handled in detail without undermining the adventures themselves, for in a Christian context the goals of the heroes might have to be condemned."[192] The *riddarasögur* provided an opportunity and chronotope to keep the monstrous that the audience so enjoyed, without the conflicting moral message. Hans Robert Jauss, speaking on the Matter of Britain, says, " The wonderful in the Arthurian novel stands in direct opposition to the wonderful in Christian legend: in the former, an event in the real world is not a sign of a transcendent,

189 Given the fact that it is early morning, the guards are noted as sleeping, and the dragon doesn't seem to react until the second spear strike.

190 *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar.* p.98, *Ívens saga* p.72. *Erex saga* p. 246

191 Being wary of reductionism, it should be noted that Tristram is made aware of the dragon and prepares to fight him, but is still caught "unawares" early in the morning. This difference, however, can potentially reveal how the audience is supposed to react to the encounter in general. Compare Gull-Þorir, and actor, and Bjǫrn hitdælakappa, a reactor in Íslendingasögur.

192 Hume. p. 24.

higher reality. Indeed, whatever happens in the *aventure* unfolds according to the principle underlying the fairy tale."[193] This shift into the realm of the fantastic rather than the supernatural may explain the ever-changing physiology of the dragons in thirteenth century texts.

In the *fornaldarsögur* and eddic material, the dragons are serpentine in nature. Their definitive attributes are their coiling and poison. Fáfnir is described in *Völsunga saga* as, "ormrinn skreið...Hann fnýsti eitri alla leið fyrir sik fram."[194][195] The dragon Ragnarr kills is described saying, "þessi ormr varð svá mikill um síðir, at hann lá í kring um skemmuna ok beit í sporð sér...at þar var kominn ókunnr maðr, þá reistist hann upp ok blés eitri móti honum."[196] These attributes are nothing more than a supernatural inflation of normal snake attributes; dragons, then, in *fornaldarsögur* are distinctly supernatural which can be problematic within the Christian mentality.[197]

Following Jauss's theory, the *riddarasögur* need to find themselves more distinctly out of the realm of the supernatural and into the realm of the fairy tale. These dragons exhibit more fantastic characteristics. The dragon in *Ívens saga*, "helt um hala hans ok brendi hann af eitrinu ok eldi er hann blés á hann."[198] In *Erex saga*, Erex sees, "einn flugdreki flýgr ok hefir einn mann í sér alvápnaðan."[199] *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, contains perhaps the most fantastic dragon with Tristram seeing, "drekann, sem kom skríðandi, ok bar hátt hans höfuð, ok skaut út augunum ok tungunni ok blés alla vega frá sér eitri ok eldi, svá at hvatvetna kvikt, sem fyrir honum varð, drap hann ok sleit af eldi."[200] A clear shift

193 Jauss, Hans Robert. *Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding.* Edited and translated Michael Hays. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN: 1989. p. 8.
194 *Völsunga Saga.* p. 151.
195 There are other traits being attributed to Fáfnir in *Völsunga saga* that are not in the eddic poetry. Due to the nature of *conjointure* present in the text as wella s the inclusion of at least a French lai and a section of *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, it seems more probable that the author is adding in these traits. For further information, see conference paper, "Wilderness of Dragons" by Robert Cutrer: Háskóli Íslands Student Conference, 2012.
196 *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum*. p. 290.
197It should be noted that human transformation is of course wholly fantastic, but as noted earlier can fall in the supernatural category based upon ritual background.
198 *Ívens saga.* p. 72.
199 *Erex saga.* p. 246.
200 *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar.* p. 99.

along Mitchell's factual-fabulous scale has occurred in the presentation of the dragons. Interestingly, this shift seems to be why critics today find those dragons less enjoyable. Tolkien very astutely notes in regards to *Beowulf*, "Beowulf's dragon, if one wishes really to criticize, is not to be blamed for being a dragon, but rather for not being dragon enough, plain pure fairy-story dragon."[201] Not only does the image and the function of the dragon shift, but also the purpose for slaying the dragon.

The popularity of this conflict is obvious, and this may explain the shift seen in dragons from the *fornaldarsögur* which can not identify with Christian virtues, like *Völsunga saga* where Sigurðr's motivations is, "mikinn frama"[202] and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* where Ragnarr, "verðr hann af þessu verki harðla mjök frægr of öll Norðrlönd."[203] These stories, within the mythic chronotope, feature heroes who are transformed and gain fame, wealth, and power which they sought going to encounter the dragons.

The heroes in the *fornaldarsögur* have typically completed a *rite of passage*, returned from the liminal, and gained new numinous knowledge. They are markedly different characters after the slayings.[204] This is perhaps why so many scholars do not want to place the dragons following the pattern of *riddarasögur* into analysis because of this distinct lack of transformation. The knights may receive, fame, fortune, or even a bride, but their character does not change. Dragons in this chronotope cease their initiatory, mythic nature and become another tool to further validate the already impressive reputation of the character. This change is perhaps necessary if dragons are not to be at odds with Christianity. *Þiðreks saga* makes this clear in how markedly different Sigurðr sveinn's dragon-fight is in comparison to Þiðrekr's two fights. Lionarons notes, "Sigurðr sveinn, like Sífrit, demonstrates unquestionably 'dragonish' behavior in his actions towards other apprentices, towards Mimir, and even

201 Tolkien. p. 17.
202 *Völsunga Saga.* p. 150.
203 *Ragnars saga loðbrókar.* p. 230.
204 La Fontaine. p. 187.

toward Reginn himself."[205] He is a character who does not really fit the mold of Þiðrekr's knights. This is made even more clear in the scene following his slaying when he, "...ferr þá leið, sem honum er vísat, til borgar Brynhildar. Ok er hann kemr þar til borgarhliðs, er þar fyrir járnhurð, ok engi maðr er nú þar honum upp at lúka. Nú hrindr hann þeiri hurðu svá hart, at í sundr ganga járnslárnar, er hurðin var lukt með...Ok nú bregðr Sigurðr sínu sverði, ok eigi léttir hann fyrr en hann hefir drepit þessa þjónustumenn alla."[206] Sigurðr is an outsider; he breaks in and begins killing knights before being welcomed. For his "siege," he acquires his horse, Grani. On the other hand, Þiðrekr, a much more chivalrous knight, receives his horse, who is described as equally strong and untameable as Grani, by finding it after slaying his second dragon. The clear difference in their characters as actors and reactors is again laid out. These chronotopic differences inform the audience in regards of what to expect, and the chronotopes present in riddarasögur seems to become more dominant as the culture shifts away from the mythic realm.

In addition to the location and the initiator of the conflict, the capital gained should also be analyzed. As has been noted already, the heroes of *fornaldarsögur* seem primarily to be seeking "gold and glory" and that is precisely what Sigurðr and Ragnarr receive. Not only do they gain numinous power, they gain power that can solidify and create stability. The chronotope that these figures exist within is a culture where rewarding one's followers is the key to social stability, and thus their acquisition of wealth and power makes them stable figures to create order.[207] This theme is of course present in the mythic realm, consider Heracles' immortality after completing his twelve labors, Theseus' kingdom after he defeats the minotaur, or the defeat of Apep by Ra.

In the *Riddarasögur,* the rewards also help create order, but in a different way following the

205 Lionarons. p. 105.
206 *Þiðreks saga*. p. 238.
207 This is achieved with Ragnarr and his sons, and for a time with Sigurðr. Their final falls are potentially inevitable because of the mythic doubling that occurs between them and the dragons they slay.

structure of feudalism that chivalry revolves around. In *Þiðreks saga af Bern* and *Erex saga*, the knights encounter a dragon swallowing another chivalrous knight; they succeed in saving the knights and are both rewarded with vassalage. In a world where power is no longer dependent upon the transfer of wealth but vassals, the effect is similar, but it avoids the Christian vice of *cupiditas*. The second dragon-fight in *Þiðreks saga af Bern* and the dragon-fight in *Ívens saga* have a similar function in that the heroes rescue a lion from danger. Þiðrekr gets carried off by the dragon and enters a different type of episode by entering into the dragon's lair itself rather than the forest *aventure*, but Íven gains a new companion in the lion who faithfully serves him. This lion acts as a symbol for the power, nobility, and majesty that Íven encapsulates as one of Arthur's greatest knights. These rewards make perfect sense within the world of chivalry, but one wonders how that idea translates into the Icelandic non-feudal mentality. The result can potentially be seen in Bjǫrn's reward of, "mikit fé og langskip gott"[208] Bjǫrn is rewarded with wealth, but is also a form of 'privateer' vassal in that he raids outside of Cnut's kingdom and winters with the king. If there is a unifying aspect of dragons, rather than greed or fear, it seems that their destruction, through one form or another, creates stability.[209]

In the thirteenth century milieu then, dragons have many different functions depending on their chronotopic use. The introduction of the fantastic *riddarasögur* introduces not only new characteristics into the image that is evoked by the words *dreki* and *ormr* with fantastic elements such as fire-breathing and flight, but also the semantic function in viewing the dragon in the acting or reacting role within the story. The flexibility and blending of the mythic and the romance chronotopes leads to inclusion and adaptation within other genres such as *Íslendingasögur* and *Konungasögur* where dragons can fall in unique locations along the factual-fabulous scale. It is important to note, however, that these texts are

208 *Bjarnar saga hitdœlakappa*. p. 124

209 To avoid reductionism, it should be noted that this is not always the case. Sigurðr sveinn uses his invulnerability to bully others rather than establish societal peace. He is only "peaceful" when he is controlled by another lord rather than working under his own impetus. Additionally, Haraldr Harðráði saved himself, but this only served to further show the saintly power of St. Ólafr.

part of a literary milieu of both chronotopes being used experimentally. To understand the audience's perception then, one can not isolate one at the expense of others. Not only is each dragon unique to its text, but also the presence of so many genres means that the dominant image, if one can even make such a claim, of a dragon must be more inclusive than the “true” or “great” dragons because the textual culture indicates a success and adaptation of both the supernatural-mythic chronotope and the fantastic-romance chronotope. With the clear distinction in dragons made between the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*, application of the same traits can reveal how the dragons of other genres are intended to be perceived.

Dragons Throughout the Genres

Considering the major distinctions between *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*, now the less definatory works shall be investigated for similarities between the two genres, keeping in mind Michtell's factual-fabulous scale. The three works in question are the Saint's life, *Margretar saga*, the History, *Morkinskinna*, and the part-*fornaldarsögur,* part-saint's life, part-voyage tale, *Yngvars saga viðförla.*

Interestingly, all three of these works hold the scene in a fashion similar to *fornaldarsögur*, that is, in a chthonic cave. *Margretar saga* states, "þa kom or hyrningu einni myrkvastofunnar ogurligr dreki."[210] Similarly, *Morkinskinna* writes, "Þar var fyrir einn mikill eitrormr ok svaf þá við bekk einn er flaut í hellinum."[211] *Yngvars saga*, on the other hand, interestingly combines both aspects. Sveinn and his men, "fara þeir ok koma í skóg einn mikinn, er stóð við drekabælit, ok fálust þar."[212] This "coming upon" in the woods is indicative of the romance genre, but the dragon which only Yngvarr encounters is located at the *uppspretta* and that the dragon resides on gold buried with a king on a ness, reminiscent of Fáfnir.[213] There is a very interesting dichotomy being established between Yngvarr and his son, Sveinn that will further be evidenced with the actor and the rewards.

In regards to fighting the dragon, the men of heroic legend are more likely to act upon the dragon. For instance, Yngvarr actively seeks and acts upon a dragon. Upon discovering the dragon, Yngvarr told his to men, "at þeir sæðisalti eftir götunni ok draga þangat risafótinn, ok kveðst þat ætla..."[214] While Yngvarr does not kill the dragon[215] he steals the gold of the dragon while the dragon is

210*Margretar saga*. p. 478.
211*Morkinskinna.* p.110.
212*Yngvars saga viðförla*. p. 454
213*Yngvars saga viðförla.* p. 442-443
214*Yngvars saga viðförla*. p. 442.
215Which is likely to preserve dragon-slaying for his son, as Yngvarr just managed to kill giants and set two islands on fire by shooting consecrated arrows into tubes, essentially the same method Sveinn uses to kill Jakulus. This theory is supported in Galina Glazyrina's paper "Dragon Motifs in Yngvars saga víðfǫrla." in: The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature. Sagas and the British Isles. Preprint Papers of The 13th International Saga Conference. Durham and York, 6th-12th August, 2006. ed. by John McKinnell, David Ashurst and Donata Kick (Durham, 2006) I, 288-293

"skríða til vatns," the same word-phrase used in *Fáfnismál*.[216] It is evident that Yngvarr is acting as a character to be found in *fornaldarsögur.*

Similarly, Sveinn Yngvarsson hides in wait for the dragon until his men disturb Jakulus. However, Sveinn waits for the dragon to approach his ship before attacking it. The saga writes, "En er Sveinn sá, at Jacúlus færðist á loft ok hann stefndi á skip þeira ok flaug með gapanda munni, skýtr Sveinn örinni með eldinum vígða í munn orminum, ok rann svá til hjartans, at á einni svipstundu fell hann dauðr niðr."[217] Interestingly, while Sveinn's men approach the dragon in his sleep, Sveinn does not engage the dragon until the dragon acts upon him, and he does so "stóð við eiki eina mikla" reminding the reader of the presence in the woods.[218] In a situation similar to his father, Sveinn acts more like a chivalrous hero even though his method of fighting is the same.

In the fashion of *fornaldarsögur* heroes*,* Haraldr harðráði*,* though being placed within the dragon's lair against his will, acts upon the sleeping dragon. Halldórr alerts the reader to this when he says, "...því at ormr mun skamma [stund sofa, ok ófúss em ek at hann vakni...]" to which Haraldr, "mælti... at þeir myndi skipask til at gǫngu við orminn."[219] Haraldr then prepares himself for combat in a fashion similar to Ragnarr loðbrókar and Cadmus by using an animal skin when, "hann tók af sér gráfeld ok snaraði um hǫnd sér ok hafði kefli í framanverðri hendinni ok knífinn í annarri."[220] He also fights the dragon in a similar heroic fashion to Cadmus who Ovid describes as, "Tegumen derepta leoni/ pellis erat..."[221] which then, "cedit Agenores paulum spolioque leonis/ sustinet incursus instantiaque ora retardat..."[222] Haraldr may be viewed as even more heroic as he is forced to accomplish

216*Yngvars saga viðförla*. p. 442. *Fáfnismál* strope 0, verse 3-4.
217*Yngvars saga viðförla.* p. 455
218*Yngvars saga viðförla.* p. 454
219*Morkinskinna.* p. 110
220*Morkinskinna.* p. 110
221Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Edit. Frank Justus Miller. Loeb Classical Library, MA: 1961. III.52-53 "a covering torn from a lion"
222Ovid. III. 81-82. "Agenor's son yields little and the plunder of the lion puts off the attack and delays the mouth's approach..."

this feat with only his *gráfeldr* and *tygilknífr,*[223] and no one could question the bravery of attacking a sleeping dragon when only armed with such meager weapons.

Finally, *Margretar saga* is the most characteristically "un-heroic" beginning with her falling to the ground in fear. She is so passive that, "tok drekinn enum efra kiaptinum yfir hvirfil henni, en tungunni tok hann under tænar, ok svalg hana sidan."[224] She is even inactive in defeating the dragon, such that, "En þa er hon kom gegnt hiartanu drekans, sprack hann i .ii. hluti."[225] This interaction with the dragon is reminiscent of Daniel's defeat of the dragon of Babylon which reads, "tulit ergo Danihel picem et adipem et pilos et coxit pariter fecitque massas et dedit in os draconi et disruptus est draco et dixit ecce quae colebatis"[226] The Biblical precedent for the dragon being torn asunder by God is there, and Margret's weapon being only her faith also helps her attain the correct "reward".[227] Margret uniquely deals with the dragon not by acting, as in *fornaldarsögur*, or reacting, as in *riddarasögur*, but by passively doing nothing, firmly removing any glory from her.

The rewards gained by these characters are also important in how the audience is expected to interpret and understand their actions. The most straight-forward of these heroes, Yngvarr, does not gain numinous power; unlike Sigurðr Fáfnisbani and Ragnarr loðbrókar*,* the dragon encounter is merely one of Yngvarr's encounters. What he does gain tangibly, however, is the same as Sigurðr and Ragnarr. It says, "Síðan hjuggu þeir af staupinu með bolöxum, ok var þat óf fjár, er þeir fengu þar...Sneru þeir á burt með mikit fé ok fálu þat."[228] Yngvarr receives the very straight-forward reward of wealth. This scene, set in a distant supernatural location follows what would be expected by the audience in a *fornaldarsögur.*

223*Morkinskinna.* p. 110
224*Margretar saga*. p. 478
225*Margretar saga*. p. 478
226Daniel 14:26 from the Vulgate. It reads, "Then Daniel took pitch, and fat, and hair, and boiled them together: and he made lumps, and put them into the dragon's mouth, and the dragon burst asunder. And he said: Behold him whom you worship "
227Other versions of the story involve her holding a cross which causes the dragon to burst into two, but the important aspect is that Margret defeats the dragon through no action on her part.
228*Yngvars saga viðförla*. p. 442.

Sveinn, on the other hand, concludes the family's interaction with Jakulus, a serpent firmly rooted in the classical tradition[229] in a manner similar to the Saint's lives, and his reward is similar. Sveinn receives no numinous reward, but he gains fame for killing the dragon while the glory goes to God. The saga writes, "En er þeir Sveinn sáu þat, þá lofuði þeir guð með fagnaði... Eftir þenna atburð bað Sveinn, at þeir hvötuðu í burt frá daun ok fýlu, er af varð."[230] There is no dwelling on the victory nor recovery of the mound of gold in which the serpents laid. The only glory to be gained is from slaying a dragon which his famous father had not. Similar to heroes of *riddarasögur*, this dragon exists to further prove the hero's mettle. This dragon, however, has the added value of being a foe faced by two generations.[231]

Morkinskinna yields similar rewards for Haraldr harðráði. Haraldr defeats the serpent, "með hamingju ok trausti Ólafs konungs ok hvatleik Haralds ok tjónaði liðsmanna hans þá sœfisk ormr, ok fá þeir hlaðit honum."[232] This defeat does not even save him from the dungeon, rather he is saved by an *ekkja* who came because, "Ólafr konungr vill leysa yðr."[233] Similar to Sveinn, the glory goes to God and Haraldr gains fame for killing a dragon; this reward situates nicely between that of a hero of a *riddarasögur* and a Saint's life.[234] Both Sveinn and Haraldr find themselves as dragon-slayers within the good graces of the Church.

The last of these characters, St. Margaret, can hardly be said to be a dragon-slayer. Her "reward" for God slaying the dragon further showing the powers of God. The maiden's purity bests Rufonem and Belzebub and submission of devils is merely another miracle to show her benevolence before martyrdom. As expected from a Saint's life, the fame and honor is dedicated wholly to God.

229In comparison to the other dragon that Yngvarr encounters whose movement is described as "skriða" and is poisonous. Jakulus acts just as the *iaculus* of Pliny and Isidore behaves.
230*Yngvars saga viðförla.* p. 455.
231Even though Yngvarr did not even attempt to fight Jakulus.
232*Morkinskinna.* p. 111
233*Morkinskinna.* p. 111
234This is further increased by the presence of Saint Ólafr

Conclusion

Analysis of these other genres reveals the fluidity of expectations of the thirteenth century audience and how the authors engaged and used these chronotopes. Understanding of this not only helps analysis and understanding within the texts that have a great deal of exposition, it also assists in interpreting sagas in which there is only room for assumption. An excellent case-study of this is the mention of Þorkell hákur's slaying of a *flugdreki* in *Brennu-Njáls saga.*[235] No elaboration is given, but it seems likely the the audience would envision a dragon similar to Jakulus[236] or one of the dragons encountered in *Þiðreks saga ag Bern*.[237] Given the voyage nature of Þorkell's encounter, the word used, and only the glory of the kill, readers can fill in the story with their knowledge and expectations.

Compiling the stories of dragon-slayers with creation and initiatory myths, and archaeological iconography, it becomes evident the crucial role that the serpent and dragon play within the Scandinavian context. The creatures, in the mythic realm, are representative of the earth, even when flying they emerge from caves; dragons and serpents embody this chthonic nature, which must be subdued to create order. Their affiliation with water can be traced back to several early creation myths where they symbolize the unknown and uncontrolled, that which is feared. The macro-cosmic setting of the world by slaying a dragon is then relived and reproduced on the micro-cosmic scale in the heroic slaying of the monster or in the act of war itself, symbolizing the protection and ordering of society. Serpents, with their ever-changing coils represent what must be tamed for the world to be ordered. The idea of creating order and shaping the world itself finds agreement in Christianity, so these images persist.[238] The serpentine image, seen originally as the embodiment of earth, slowly incorporates the

235*Brennu-Njal´s Saga.* Íslenzk Fornrit. Vol. XIII. Edit. Einer Ól. Sveinsson. Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, Reykjavík: 1954. p.303

236Especially given the similarity of the voyages and the nature of voyage tales.

237Depending on the dating of *Ketils saga* hængs and *Bjarnar saga hitdælakappa*, there could be a relationship bewteen these figures. It can not be coincedence that Ketill´s family has produced three dragon-slayers include Bjǫrn hitdælakappa

238 Or in the case of Sigurðr evolve into a Christian image.

Christian notion of evil; this may explain why the early bracteates do not necessarily indicate any negative aspect of the serpents, they are merely chthonic, but with the spread and acceptance of Christianity, serpents and dragons may have been perceived more and more as evil. Dragons, which needed to be slain, would not have any problems continuing to exist in this paradigm, and that may be why they not only remained, but became more and more popular. The mythic rituals of initiation that begot these tales become lost echoes, and, just like the serpent shedding its skin, leave nothing but the moult left behind.

From initiation, inspiration grew including scholarly training found in bestiaries, archaeological evidence, and historical precedent; with all of these factors and modern literary tastes, it is easy for a reductionist approach, but all of the evidence indicates not only a wide and varied pedigree but also an understanding and use followed by authors. This allowed dragons to exist in the liminal state of natural, supernatural, and fantastic in the same time period based upon how they appeared and acted. Understanding the chronotopic use allowed for dragons to be natural serpents, in *Morkinskinna* and fly in *Yngvars saga viðförla* and *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, supernatural chthonic dragons of transformation, in *Fáfnismál*, *Yngvars saga viðförla,* and *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum*, and a devil, in *Margretar saga*. The versitility and inherent fear that this monster evokes makes it a quintessential foe, often to the point of overuse, but the diversity of uses was understood and appreciated by the audience of the time, which is evidenced not only by the popularity within stories but simply because, like *miðgarsormr* encompassing all, there is not a genre of literature in Old Norse that does not have dragons.

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