As Below, So Above

Skaði, a True and Mythological “Other”

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Abstract
Though she does not appear as often as other gods in Snorra Edda, the goddess Skaði causes a stir in the academic community whenever she does. The reason for this is due to how peculiar a character she proves to be, from her demanding compensation her for the death of her father to the matter of her very name and its masculine stem, not to mention the possibility of it being linked to Scandinavia itself, as the likes of Franz Rolf Schröder and Georges Dumézil have explored. Turville-Petre has also noted how Skaði’s similarity with the god Ullr is a point of interest. Skaði exhibits so many characteristics of an “other” figure, that it is hard not to see her otherness as being at the heart of her peculiarity as a goddess and a character in the myths. Focusing on Skaði and her significance as an “other,” this thesis will delve deeper into the nature of Skaði as a figure in the mythology as well as address the possibility of Skaði being an assimilated deity, most likely due to cross-cultural interaction with the Sami, the quintessential “others” of the Norse world, with whom Skaði is still most often identified.

Keywords: Skaði, mythology, folklore, Ullr, Snorra Edda, assimilation, cross-cultural interaction, Sami, “others”

Ágrip
Enn á þótt Skaði sé ekki áberandi og önnur göð í Snorra Edda veldur hún jaflan miklum úlfafytt meðal fræðimanna í hvert skipti sem hún birtist í heimildum. Æstæða þess er hversu sérsstök persóna hún reynist vera, allt frá því að hún krefst bóta vegna dauða föður síns til þess að nafn hennar lítur út eins og karlkynsorð, svo ekki sé minnsta á að nafnið hefur verið tengt við heiti Skandinavíu í fræðum Franz Rolf Schröder og Georges Dumézil. Turville-Petre benti einnig á áhugaverð líkindi hennar með Ulli. Skaði ber svo mikil merki þess að tengjast „hinum“ að það er ógjörningur annað en að líta á það sem eitt af einkennum hennar sem guðju og persónu í goðsögunum. Með því að rýna í hlutverk Skaði sem eina af „hinum“ er í þessari ritgerð reynt að kafa dýpra í eðli hennar og stóðu í göðafraðinni um leið og þeim möguleika er velt upp að hún sé aðlagarð göðmagn, að öllum líkindum vegna menningarímskippta við Sama, sem voru „hinir“ í hugum norræna manna og sem Skaði er oftast tengd við.

Lykilorð: Skaði, göðafræði, þjóðfræði, Ullr, Snorra Edda, aðlógun, menningarímskipti, Sami, “hinir”
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As Below, So Above

Skaði: A True and Mythological “Other”

Introduction

Devotion to the study of the ancient Norse is utterly impossible without bringing in the field’s most central, most integral players: the gods. From whatever angle one may choose to approach their study of this people, this culture, the gods will inevitably factor in, as well they should, given their dominant position in Old Norse society. And over the swards of labor known to us mere mortals as the scholarly fields of the study of Norse mythology, none of the gods hold such commanding sway than the mysterious Óðinn and the mighty Þórr, both major figures among the Æsir. Freyr and Freyja, the equally famous Vanir twins, occupy a generous amount of the pages filled over the centuries as well, but there is another goddess not quite so prominently in the limelight, but lingering more on the periphery, a place to which she seems quite accustomed, given her history as a notable figure of Nordic mythology, a history seemingly best outlined by Snorri Sturluson. Indeed, whether it is in the mythology or in the modern scholarly debate, the giantess and goddess Skaði tends to remain more in the shadows and only takes center stage every now and then.

Her most notable appearance is the story arc where, as Snorri Sturluson tells us, her father—the giant Þjazi—is slain by the gods and she takes up arms to gain compensation for his death. After some socio-political finagling and a few comedic shenanigans, she gets what she sought after (and then some!)¹. Skaði also appears in Lokasenna somewhat later on. Even though her appearance in that tale is brief, it is important, nevertheless, as she is the goddess who deals Loki his punishment, an event that is also attested to sometime in the latter half of Gylfaginning². In Ynglinga saga, she is said to have borne several famous children with Óðinn, thus offering some insight into the aftermath of her leaving her first husband, Njörðr³. These are just some of the prime examples of where Skaði plays a more important role in a poem or saga. Certain other appearances of her as a character, as I will

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³ Ynglinga saga, ch. 8. In In Snorre Sturluson’s Heimskringla or the Lives of the Norse Kings, ed. Erling Monsen, trans. A.H. Smith. 1990. 6
relate in due time, are less explicit as to whether or not they show Skaði the goddess or a character merely sharing a few similarities with her. As to what befalls Skaði after her major roles in the mythology have come and gone, it appears she simply fades out, back into the shadows of the pines in the mountains where she eventually settles and makes her home. Debate still (for the most part) quietly rages on about Skaði and her significance in Norse mythology. If she is as important as some scholars seem to think, then why is she not a more obvious or well documented character in the lore? The answer, not surprising to many, lies in her origins. By this, I mean her background story as told by Snorri and the skálds, as the question of the ultimate origin of Skaði as a figure venerated across the northern world is infinitely more difficult if not utterly impossible to answer with complete assurance. Note that when I speak of Skaði’s origins, I will (unless otherwise specified) be dealing with her parentage. This is a much easier matter to trace, as Skaði was originally counted among the giants before she was numbered as one of the Ásynjur. To the gods, the giants were the peripheral figures; in other words, a giant represented the “other.” The matter I intend to explore is this matter as it pertains to Skaði. She is a major example of a giantess— that is to say, an “other”— who leaves her place on the periphery and enters into the realms of the gods, where she is eventually assimilated and becomes one of the Ásynjur as counted by Snorri. This begs the question of how is this significant, be it to her role in the lore or even to her being worshipped as a deity here on Miðgarð? How deserving of further scrutiny is this matter?

Skaði is mostly seen as a complex figure who challenges the prescribed roles, formulae, etc. for characters to follow when she is a main focus in the story being told, and this is hardly the least of her many peculiarities as a giantess/goddess. Her name alone can provide us with numerous questions despite the research done by such scholars as Schröder, Dumézil, and Turville-Petre, the latter also delving into how she could have been linked with the Norse god Ullr⁴. While such examples of her peculiarities will be often utilized, the main emphasis here, keep in mind, is on Skaði as an “other” figure, for that is what lies

at the heart of all her examples of bending or breaking what the mythology tends to outline as the “normal” or “typical” rules. It is her otherness that carves out her place in the lore and this same otherness may have come from a similar quality in this world. Perhaps her assimilation story was just that, a story told to explain the acquisition of a new goddess. The fact that she remains an “other” until she marries into the gods is also a significant matter, here, as this can also highlight the view of the “other” in Nordic society and mythology and how society and mythology can influence each other. Skaði’s significance as an “other” is further highlighted by the fact that her story is told at all. It is clear that Skaði and her stories were significant enough to be included in the corpus of lore that eventually became the *Edda*, and it should be equally clear that her otherness, the fact that she is an “other,” is one of the main factors if not the main factor that drives said significance.

To explore these matters, along with the other matters the focus of her otherness brings into the spotlight, Skaði herself must first be defined and her story will have to be analyzed in detail, as well as any other references to her in the mythology. A venture into the chronological aspect of Skaði—where she might have come from, what culture(s) might have similar figures that might be older or younger than her—would be risky, since any results gained from a trip down that path would be tenuous at best. Searching for clues into her possible origins, while it might provide some useful insights, will largely be avoided in order to steer clear of the pitfalls that can result of getting too wrapped up in the question of her geographic or cultural origins. Her geographic or cultural connections, however, and any chronology that might be associated with them can still definitely be of use to us to better define just what sort of “other” Skaði most likely represented if she can be connected to anyone outside the Norse besides the Sami. Some parallels can be found between the myth of Skaði and other myths from as far away as India, according to Ellis-Davidson⁵, but to reach that far back in the past in search of an origin for Skaði would be reaching too far and taking too great a leap in terms of speculation. Therefore, the Sami remain top contenders for the kind of “other” Skaði resembled, especially given how so many high-profile scholars in the field such as Hilda Ellis-Davidson and Thomas A. DuBois are in

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agreement that the imagery associated with Skaði can definitely link her to the Sami of northern Scandinavia⁶.

Skaði and any parallels her story might have–be they from this world or the mythological world–will have to be examined. This will bring in the question of Skaði being an assimilated deity and put it even more firmly in the spotlight due to the matter of actual events possibly being referenced in mythological stories, such as the radical notions once proposed by Bertha Phillpotts and now re-championed by Mathias Nordvig of several myths, like the duel between Þórr and Hrungrir, the very creation of the world, or the myth of the mead of poetry, being connected to volcanic activity⁷. This will also bring Snorri under closer scrutiny as the oral tradition he committed to writing and his place, role, etc. in that tradition will be further examined. Some questions there might include: how much might he have known about Skaði’s story? How might Snorri have contributed to the already broad, diverse oral tradition from which he drew so heavily? All these matters and more besides shall be addressed in the chapters to come, now that Skaði and the matter of her “other”-ness have been brought once more into the spotlight along with some highlights of what scholars past and present can offer us regarding Skaði. With all the aforementioned points and questions from this introduction in mind, let us begin.

Chapter 1: Skaði and her Story in Detail

Introduction

In order to best understand Skaði as an “other,” she must first be defined based on what is already known about her in the sources we have and what we can clearly glean from them. This involves first looking at her name, her background, her story, and her functions as a deity. The question of whether or not it is even possible to figure out how old her story might be is one that will have to be addressed early on, as the answer will certainly have

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bearing on later parts of this work. Chances are, though, the chances of her story actually being revealed to begin in a specific point in time are quite slim, and to promise anything exact would be unrealistic, not to mention impossible. Perhaps whatever clues that can be found can still help us to a greater understanding of where Skaði’s story fits in the north and gives us at least a better idea of how it might have begun.

How Skaði’s story compares to other mythologies and where it highlights her peculiarities as a goddess will also have to be addressed. I should emphasize that the similarities between her story and the stories of other gods and goddesses from other pantheons are what will be explored in this section. The similarities and differences between Skaði herself and other gods and goddesses will come later. A closer look at her story will, of course, lead us to the question of how Snorri factors into all of this, as it’s primarily his version of her story we have to work with and for all we know, he could have attempted to draw connections to similar stories from myths and legends that were all the rage at the time he was writing his Edda and not just what Old Norse poetry he could get his hands on. Regardless of how great a grasp Snorri had on the lore, the fact remains that his is the source which has survived through the ages, and it’s the best one we have to work with regarding the myth of Skaði.

1.1: Skaði’s Name
Skaði’s name alone is one of her most peculiar features. Titchenell offers a translation of it as “injury,” while “shadow” and “harm” are some other posited interpretations of her name, which—I should be quick to point out—bears a masculine stem, making it difficult (linguistically speaking) to immediately identify her as a winter goddess. At least the first and last definitions could serve to illustrate her more vengeful side, and perhaps all three could allude to her role as a huntress. The origins of these translations can be found in the Old Norse verb (að) skáða, meaning “harm”, and the noun meaning “harm” or “injury” which is itself, skaði, while the translation “shadow” comes from the Gothic skadus and the

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Old English *sceadu*. The matter of Skaði’s name having a masculine stem could be explained by how Turville-Petre notes that the masculine names Sturla and Skúta bear feminine declensions and may have once been nicknames. If the name Skaði was originally a nickname, it might be (and has been) suggested that Skaði was simply another name for Ullr, the Norse god with whom she shares so many attributes. Given Ullr’s more noble attributes and connotations, however, such a dark nickname seems unlikely. The comparing and contrasting between Skaði and Ullr will be played out in greater detail later on, in effort to keep the focus here on defining Skaði and analyzing her story.

Another interesting point about Skaði’s name can be found in the *Völsa þáttr*, where the *vingull* is offered to a figure called Mörn. The word itself is the feminine singular form of a term for a troll-wife, and the kenning “*Marnar faðir*” has been applied to the jötunn Þjazi, the father of Skaði. If Skaði as a figure was never a male one to begin with, as her masculine-stem name suggests, this could very well explain why. Mörn and Skaði are, after all, two names that make it easier to draw a parallel between than Skaði and Ullr. That is, they are if one is looking to stay in the vein of names with darker connotations, the better to contrast with Ullr. This matter will be addressed again towards the end of this work, as the focus in this section is on Skaði’s name and its significance.

One particularly significant point about Skaði’s name is how some scholars have credited the goddess as the one who lent her name to the whole of Scandinavia, with McKinnell and Dumézil suggesting she lent her name to Scandinavia itself, and Dumézil explicitly calling her the “eponymous earth goddess” of the region. I will address the matter of her being defined as an earth goddess later, but for now, the matter of Skaði’s name having possible connections to the very region of Scandinavia takes precedence. At the outset, I thought that to call Skaði the goddess who lent her name to Scandinavia itself seemed a bit of a stretch, given the fact that while Skaði was worshipped in the further north, the lack of prominence of a Skaði-centered cult does not lend much support to this

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11 Turville-Petre, 1964. 256-257.
theory. Still, the cult of Óðinn was known to hold notable sway and Óðinn related place-names are few and far between, but that is another matter.

Skaði’s name being at the root of the word “Scandinavia,” however, does appear to be strongly hinted at in the dark connotations of her name and just how similar the name Skaði sounds compared to Scandinavia, as both Schröder and McKinnell offer the classic example of the name without the letter n, while Schröder links it to how Skaði’s name is often said by scholars to mean “shadow,” suggesting chthonic connotations in the goddess’ name. (Though Schröder does make a good point in linking the region to the darkness, something certainly hinted at in Skaði’s name, it should be kept in mind that this is one of the earlier works on Skaði, as he seems to put less stock in the “harm” translation of her name)\(^{13}\). As for where the latter half of the name of Scandinavia fits in all of this, we must also look at where that comes from to see if the name of the region could, in fact, mean “Island of Skaði,” as has been previously suggested by scholars like Franz Rolf Schröder. Schröder not only remarks on how the name of Scandinavia has so often been thought to mean something like “Island of Skaði” (or “Island of Shadow,” given Skaði’s dark and dangerous connotations as referenced again by use of the Gothic term skadus), he also points out how such a connection is hinted at in places the name of the province of Skåne and some of the older forms of its name, like Skaðin-awjō or Skānoy. The latter half of those terms match quite well with an old Germanic word for island—awī—from which we get the second half of the word Sea(n)dinavia\(^{14}\).

1.2: Skaði’s Background
Skaði is clearly a giantess when she arrives at Ásgarðr for the first time on her mission to exact compensation for the death of her father, the giant Þjazi, whom the gods have slain, as is referenced in the Skáldskaparmál of Snorra Edda. “En Skaði, dóttir Þjassa jötuns, tók hjálm og brynju og öll hervopn og fer til Ásgarðs að hefna föður sín.” /“But Skaði, daughter of giant Thiassi, took helmet and mail-coat and all weapons of war and went to

\(^{13}\) Schröder, Franz Rolf. “Skadi und die Götter Skandinaviens.” In Untersuchungen zur germanischen und vergleichenden Religionsgeschichte 2. 1941. 65-66; McKinnell, 2005. 63.

\(^{14}\) Schröder, 1941. 162-166.
Asgard to avenge her father.” How much time passes between Þjazi’s death and his daughter’s arrival is unclear, as is much of the chronology within the Old Norse myths, but this, as Lindow writes, is not as pressing a matter and is but the stuff of which further speculation can be made and on which further research can be done, for if one attempts to properly order a corpus of mythological lore, one is bound to run into all manner of problems that throw everything off.

After Skaði marries Njörðr, she is effectively elevated to the status of a “bright bride of gods” clearly distinguished from her father, a dark and devious giant. Here, her transition is clearly begun. A possible interpretation of her being made to choose a husband as part of her compensation could be that the gods hoped she might be less violent after marrying into their ranks, much like a shield-maiden might retire from battle after marriage. After Skaði and Njörðr split, she is said to move back to Þrymheim and it is mentioned how she is called “ski-lady.” “Hún heitir Öndurguð eða Öndurðís.” “She is called ski-deity or ski-lady.” She is not explicitly called a goddess or named among the Ásynjur until later in Skáldskaparmál, while Þjazi is still numbered among the giants. A point of interest here, is that one of the “troll-wives” listed is named “Morn.” This is the same name that appears in the section about Skaði’s name where the Völsa þáttr is referenced for the figure intended to bless or receive the vingull, and Ellis-Davidson agrees with the previously cited chapter from Turville-Petre that the name may have been related to Skaði herself if it wasn’t one of her bynames already. Once again, keeping in mind the wise words of John Lindow, though it may be tempting to dwell on the possible questions of whether or not Skaði was at some point also a troll-wife, if she is indeed the Morn/Mörn of Skáldskaparmál and the Völsa þáttr, her transition from one status to another must also be taken into account and the aim of this chapter is to pin down a clear definition of the

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19 Faulkes, 1995. 23-24, 95, 155, 156.
20 Ellis-Davidson, 1993. 85.
figure known as Skaði. She is never referred to elsewhere as a troll-wife or as trollish in any respect, so the focus remains on her elevation from giantess to goddess.

As if the speculation on whether or not Skaði could have been counted as a troll-wife wasn’t strange enough, it has even been argued that Skaði was a goddess all along, and never a “true” giantess, based on her conduct among the gods and her reception by the Æsir and Vanir\(^2\). This holds little to none of the proverbial water needed to stand up as a theory. Skaði’s father is explicitly named as one of the jötnar. Her mother, though, is never named, which might beg the question: what if Skaði’s mother was a goddess? But let us briefly address that matter while keeping in mind the track record of marriages between the Æsir, Ásynjur, Vanir and jötnar. Supposing that was the case, it would have certainly been notable, since there are no examples of a goddess marrying one of the giants. Since Skaði’s mother is never named, it can thus be inferred that her name was of little concern to the writer(s) of the story and that she was overshadowed by her far more notable and powerful husband, Þjazi. Therefore, my point stands that Skaði is definitely of the giants when she first enters into the lore.

Still, stories of birth and parentage aside, the question remains: should Skaði be viewed as a giantess, or as a goddess? While some have attempted to argue that she is and always was a goddess, John McKinnell, even though he muses about the possible influence of the cult of Óðinn on her assimilation into the Ásynjur, seems to swing the opposite way, as he always refers to her as a giantess or god-bride who married into the Vanir\(^2\) and John Lindow’s definition best echoes my own position, as he calls her “…a giant by birth but still regarded as one of the æsir.”\(^2\) So, returning to the question of whether Skaði should be classified as a giantess or a goddess, I would say, why not both?

In terms of status and power, she clearly begins as one and ends as the other, but as a figure, her giant heritage is never quite forgotten, and McKinnell’s and Lindow’s definitions of her both give her giant heritage proper credit. Indeed, it should be stated that her heritage is not something to be forgotten, and throughout the source material, it most

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\(^2\) McKinnell, 2005. 62-64.
certainly never is. References to her father are still made even after Snorri begins naming her among the Ásynjur, and her functions as a divine figure in the mythology strongly suggest that her giant nature never quite left her and can still be seen in how she is described even as a goddess. Thus, the conclusion that Skaði can and should be defined as a giantess and goddess given her history and how that carries over through her ascending into the ranks of the Ásynjur, perhaps even in spite of her being elevated into the Ásynjur, is an important point I will maintain throughout this work.

1.3: Skaði’s Story

Skaði’s arrival in the lands of the gods and her marriage to Njörðr have already been touched on somewhat, but now it is time to delve deeper into Skaði’s story by first explaining it in detail, identifying points of interest that will be examined even further later on. As was previously mentioned, Skaði arrived at the gates of the Æsir to exact vengeance for her father’s death. Instead, she was granted compensation in the form of choosing a husband from among the gods and being entertained by Loki playing a very strange game of tug-of-war with a she-goat. The nine nights she spends with Njörðr and the nine nights he spends with her clearly serve as another testament to the mythology’s all too clear obsession over the number nine. The fact that Skaði is only allowed to choose a husband from among the gods based on their legs is echoed almost directly in the story of Hadding and how he came to be married to Ragnhild, and the result of the marriage is practically identical. The one deviation comes from how Ragnhild devised a clever way of rigging the choosing of her husband by hiding a ring in Hadding’s leg the better to make his stand out from the rest. Not only does this parallel exist between the story of Hadding and Ragnhild and the story of Skaði and Njörðr, but it is worth noting that Hadding’s longing for the sea to the point of speaking a verse about it mirrors the same yearning displayed by Njörðr. For these reasons, scholars like Schröder were quick to point out how the tale of

Hadding, coming from the works of Saxo Grammaticus, is close to the myth of Skaði in more than just a geographic sense\(^{27}\). Chances are, this means that Saxo possibly knew of the story of Skaði and Njörðr—or at least some variant of it—when he set about compiling what would become his *Gesta Danorum* in the years before Snorri’s writing of the *Edda*.

It is also worth noting here that there is a major gap in explaining Skaði’s story between *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*, since the full story of how she came to Ásgard and eventually married Njörðr—with no mention of their separation, I might add—is not told until the latter, whereas the story of their separation is all that’s recounted in the former. In order to know her full backstory—at least, as full a version as one can obtain from *Snorra Edda*—one must piece it together from two different sections. Another interesting point is that Skaði’s story is recounted both in *Haustlöng* as well as in *Snorra Edda*, but the details of her compensation are hardly as detailed in the former as they are in the latter, meaning much of the detail concerning her choosing a husband and witnessing what was likely the most bizarre tug-of-war seen in the nine worlds can, as John Lindow would have it, largely be attributed to Snorri\(^{28}\), which should raise a few eyebrows, given that Snorri might not have known much about Skaði and that if she was prominent at one point, it was long before the Conversion, hence long before his time\(^{29}\). Snorri did, after all, obtain much of his mythological knowledge from sources like the *Skjöldunga saga* and poems and stories that were passed down orally, which somehow managed to survive the two centuries that passed between the conversion of Iceland and his birth. Time and orality may not have been the only limiting factors for such sources, though. It is uncertain just how much of the mythological narrative was actually related in *Skjöldunga saga* and the skaldic poetry in which so much mythological knowledge was preserved carried said knowledge through the centuries wrapped in riddles\(^{30}\).

Returning to our in-depth look at Skaði’s tale, John Lindow’s article “Loki and Skaði” highlights a key point concerning the peculiarities of Skaði in her story. For

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\(^{27}\) Schröder, 1941. 2.


\(^{29}\) Ellis-Davidson, H.R. 1998. 10.

\(^{30}\) Turville-Petre, 1964. 24.
example, the fact that Skaði is made to laugh reflects a popular trope in certain fairy tales or folk tales where a princess or a bride-to-be must be made to laugh by her suitor. However, in Skaði’s case, her demanding the gods to find her a husband and make her laugh, with her husband-to-be, Njörðr, having nothing to do with arranging the entertainment shows her in a dual role of suitor and bride-to-be\(^{31}\). This highlight reveals another parallel between Skaði’s story and other tales, the other parallel shown being the story of Hadding as well as a key example of Skaði being the figure who turns an expected trope on its head.

Another interesting point is that, all attempts at a chronology of mythological events aside, Snorri doesn’t begin including Skaði among the Ásynjur until after she’s married Njörðr, or, more appropriately, because of her marriage to Njörðr\(^{32}\), as if to show that such an event was necessary to advance her status. If this is true, then what became of her after she split from Njörðr? Was she downgraded back to jötunn status? No mention is made of this, so are we to assume that once a giantess marries into the Æsir she’s one of their own from then on, regardless of how the marriage turns out? Once an Ásynja, always an Ásynja? Or is Skaði still technically married to Njörðr even though they are not living together anymore? If, however, her later marriage to and siring children by Óðinn is to be considered canonical, could she perhaps be viewed as having advanced even further by moving up from a Vanir god to the lord of the Æsir?

This concept of upward mobility is something that runs noticeably through the debate surrounding Skaði, led mostly by the likes of Näsström and Lindow, as referenced above. With the upward mobility theme in mind, it could perhaps be argued that Skaði’s tale is one of redemption. Such a position, however, relies on a definite dichotomy of good versus evil being in place between the Æsir and Vanir and the jötnar, which—as I will explain later on—may not have been as firmly entrenched in the Old Norse religion for as long as one might expect.

After Skaði’s arrival, her marriage into the gods, and her split from Njörðr, she more or less fades out from the mythology and is the main focus of no more major episodes. If she does appear, she is only a minor player. Yet even when she is only a

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\(^{31}\) Lindow, 1992. 132-133. 

minor character, she is hardly a wallflower in the stories where she appears. Cases in point, *Lokasenna* and *Skírnismál*, namely the version where Skaði is the one who sends Skírnir to ask Freyr what troubles him, even though it is Njörðr in some versions who is said to set the whole process in motion during the poem’s introduction. In *Lokasenna*, she not only threatens Loki when he turns his insults and accusations to her, but she places the venomous serpent over his head after his binding at the end of the tale. The only times she’s simply named and it’s left at that are when she’s included in a list (i.e.–who’s counted among what group). If she is included as a character in a story, no matter how minor her role, she still commands a good degree of importance. In *Lokasenna* especially, the ending of the story would be quite different without her being the one to place the serpent. John Lindow points out how Skaði, originally one of the jötnar, is the one who places the serpent over Loki, of giant stock himself, but does not seem to dwell on the question of why the gods had a former giantess deal Loki his punishment as much as he deals with how it is the female characters in *Lokasenna* who seem to get the last word. Could their choosing of Skaði, an “other” among them, have been deliberate? Could the gods choosing someone not originally counted among their own as the executor of Loki’s punishment possibly reflect other common occurrences in Old Norse society as seen through stories and myths?

### 1.4: Skaði’s Functions and Connections

I must admit that upon first reading Dumézil’s definition of Skaði as an earth goddess, I had my doubts. These, however, did not last long. Defining Skaði as an earth goddess seemed a stretch to me at first, given how she’s normally associated with more wintry activities, and the image of an earth goddess does not always immediately bring to mind skiing and bow-hunting amidst the pines. But then, that, if anything, showcases the misconceptions still surrounding the earth goddess figure. The terms “winter goddess” or “goddess of winter” are never explicitly used when referring to her, but the fact that she is often named as a goddess of skiing by being called “ski-lady” is more than enough to make

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such a connection\textsuperscript{35}. Even today, Skaði almost exclusively brings to mind the image of a winter goddess, more wild and operating on a more primal level, but that does not change how she is still a nature goddess, one deeply rooted in the earth, enough to the point that her marriage to a sea god winds up failing. Earth and Sea would seem like a logical pairing, since both are inevitably connected at certain points and the sea itself is a part of Earth. It has been said that Njörðr and Skaði’s marriage could be seen as an example of \textit{hieros gamos}, a sacred marriage between a certain god and an earth goddess, for the purpose of fertility\textsuperscript{36}. Earth and Sky might seem more obvious opposites at first, but given the way Skaði and Njörðr’s marriage pans out, the divide between a goddess of earth and a god of the sea, while perhaps not as readily obvious, nevertheless becomes more apparent. This slight twist on the pairing of two deities in a sacred marriage could also perhaps highlight examples of what happens when such a marriage breaks down.

Another odd thing here concerning Skaði is that she has no other typical earth goddess features, such as being concerned with the domains of fertility and/or motherhood\textsuperscript{37}, though her association with winter can, according to some, open the door to wonder if she was one of the motherly spirits honored in winter at the time of \textit{Modraniht} as recalled by Bede\textsuperscript{38}. Whether Skaði was ever regarded later on as little more than a spirit as opposed to a goddess, though, gets us into more speculation than is necessary for the time being, as what we can see for sure from the sources we have is that Skaði is a goddess and a giantess. Given the fact that Skaði is a jötunn, with the jötnar oft appearing as more earthy or primal than the heavenly deities, along with the fact that she initially marries one of the Vanir, whose functions tend to focus more on earthly matters (i.e.–fertility, fecundity), and Skaði’s functions as a goddess appear exclusively earthbound–in this case, \textit{land} bound–her being called an earth goddess by scholars does make sense.

Given how her name directly translates into such terms as “harm” or “shadow,” Skaði can, under these circumstances, definitely be viewed as a goddess of punishment, or

\textsuperscript{36} DuBois, Thomas A. \textit{Nordic Religions in the Viking Age}. 1999. 55-56.
\textsuperscript{37} Ellis-Davidson, 1998. 188-189.
\textsuperscript{38} Ellis-Davidson, Hilda. \textit{Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions}. 1988. 110-111.
perhaps vengeance, especially given how she is the one who places the snake over Loki’s face in *Lokasenna*. Having punishment as one of her domains is fitting, since it is often women who play the more pivotal roles in orchestrating vengeance and punishment in societies where feuds were all too familiar\(^{39}\).

Skaði’s connections to similar fairy tales or stories of Norse heroes has already been explored to a degree, but now her connections to the stories of other deities should also be highlighted here, since the function of a deity can be showcased, foreshadowed, or set up in their story. The story of Skaði is hardly one unique to Scandinavia, as similar tales can be found all over the world, spanning from Northern Europe as the story of Skaði and Njörðr all the way to Northern India and Bangladesh as these tales. From the Himalayas comes the story of the Nandadevi, revered as a wife of the god Shiva, and from Bangladesh comes the tale of Durga and her husband. Both of these goddesses are said to come down from the mountains to visit their former homes and are met with much celebration when the time comes for their festivals, and the Nandadevi in particular seems fond of relating how her life in the mountains is far worse than life in her home village, much like Skaði’s bemoaning the gulls’ constant noise by the sea. Both stories present the view of a goddess as a bride unenthused by her new home\(^{40}\). While this is all well and good, I would have preferred that Davidson had not only brought up but further expounded upon the matter of the matrilineal vs. patrilineal systems of allocating where a new bride should live after marriage and how less is known about what happens in cases when the husband goes to live with his wife\(^{41}\). As it is, Davidson barely touches on just how significant it is that both the god and goddess depart (at least, for a time) their known homes to live together, presenting what appears to be a kind of synergy between the two systems determining where the bride should live. While the relevant passages from *Snorra Edda* are referenced, a good compare/contrast argument that Njörðr is the one who eventually departs the mountains to go back to the place he knows best, while Skaði is the one who stays, is, for the most part,

\(^{39}\) Lindow, 1997. 160.  
\(^{40}\) Ellis-Davidson, 1998. 128-130.  
\(^{41}\) Ellis-Davidson, 1998. 129.
lacking. The parallel stories are shown, but not enough appears to be done to properly compare and contrast them with the tale of Skaði and Njörðr.

Chapter 1 Conclusions:
Now that Skaði herself has been explored and analyzed in greater detail, the following conclusions can be drawn based on what has been highlighted thus far. In terms of her background and her status in the mythology, Skaði can most certainly be defined as a giantess—an “other” figure—who was raised to the status of a goddess following her marriage to Njörðr, regardless of her later separation from him. Possible implications of Njörðr and Skaði’s divorce will be addressed later. Her functions as a goddess can be more easily understood by viewing the domains over which she presides. Meaning, of course, she can be seen as an earth goddess, as Dumézil would have it, who is associated with winter as well as skiing and hunting. There are two other final functions Skaði serves, and these in particular can be gleaned from the various ways in which her name can be translated. Whether its origins lie in a word meaning “injury” or “shadow,” both translations clearly convey a similar message: Skaði is meant to serve as a goddess of the dark and of punishment, traits quite befitting of an “other” which she appears to retain even after she marries into the gods at the end of the myth detailing her arrival to Ásgard. For the ancient Norse to bring into their mythology a goddess who represents these darker sides of nature and humanity even after joining with “the good guys” only serves to further my main argument: Skaði as a figure representative of the “other” in Norse mythology is what drives everything that is unique and peculiar about her. And now we can see that even after she rises up to join with the gods her otherness still shines through, most of all in her name and how she functions as a goddess.

Chapter 2: Skaði and the Parallels Between Myth and Reality
Introduction
The best stories, it is often said, always have some kernel of truth to them however fictitious they might ultimately turn out to be. Myth is, of course, no exception, so it would hardly be worth reviewing the myth of Skaði without taking events that may have actually
happened into consideration, as it is quite possible that the myth itself could very well have been based on or inspired by actual occurrences. Accounts of certain communities burning of an effigy likely representing Baldr after gathering mistletoe plants42 offer one example of actual events reflecting Norse mythology…or perhaps vice versa. Only brief mention of this festival was made in Csapo’s *Theories of Mythology*, but the myth I am investigating is far more likely to have been the sort that likely came on the heels of actual events and occurrences, rather than the other way around.

One of the things I found interesting at the outset of this project was how the inspiration for the origin story of Skaði as recounted in *Snorra Edda* had not really been addressed, as opposed to how other stories were delved into and explained away as mythological accounts of actual events, such as the duel between Þórr and Hrungnir being an example of how the ancient Norse might have described or explained a volcanic eruption in Iceland43. The tales placing Skaði at the root of important dynasties of jarls can be tied in with potential actual power plays by the cults holding sway in the ruling classes, suggesting Skaði’s following might have taken a few leaves out of the cult of Óðinn’s book, but this is a cultural, even political phenomenon, not a natural one. Another possible actual event that could be reflected in the myth of Skaði, particularly the matter of her assimilation into the Æsir, will be the main focus of the third and last chapter. Before exploring that possibility, however, other potential natural and socio-cultural inspirations for the myth of Skaði must first be examined, as several key points can be drawn from these, with certain metaphors in particular fitting especially well with the theme of Skaði’s otherness and the significance and implications of her otherness in this world as well as the world of the mythology.

The very definition of myth implies at least some kernel of truth in the story being related. Research by folklorist William Bascom offers this take on what constitutes a myth, defining the myths as guiding, authoritative “…prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past,” in contrast to his definitions of folktales and legends as, respectively, fictional prose

43 Phillpotts, 1920. 72.
narratives and truthful accounts in a more recent setting than myths. Along with this rather textbook definition of myth and its nature, Nordvig outlines a similar but far more eloquent take on this definition in his own words and writes that myths “are constructed on patterns made up of common cultural currency,” and thus can serve as ways to better understand the realms of the supernatural. These supplementary definitions of myths and mythology will best serve to set the stage for the arguments I intend to put forth concerning Skaði and her otherness, for since myth is so intimately bound up with reality, it is my belief that a glimpse into the culture and the mindset of the ancient Scandinavians can be found in interpreting the myth of Skaði as a mythological account of events that may have happened in the distant past. The matter of her being an other is, of course, an ideal springboard to bring us to such an interpretation since, as I’ve said before, it leads us to such questions ranging from the easy to answer “Why was she an ‘other’ figure?” to the deeper question of “Why include such a story focused so heavily on an ‘other’ figure?”

Of course, the matter of how the myth of Skaði was passed along the chain of orality is still to be reckoned with, given how oral culture is so apt to change a story in numerous ways from its first telling to when it’s finally committed to writing. While it may be that the myth of Skaði as Snorri tells it may be quite different from the numerous versions and interpretations that doubtlessly existed when he began writing his own version for the Edda, I would argue that the most important detail of the story—Skaði’s assimilation into the gods—can hardly have changed much, if at all. Such a detail serves as a major linchpin of the story and as such, had to have occupied a major part of the Old Norse Cultural Memory, and there had to have been ways of explaining cultural as well as natural phenomena before more modern schools of thought emerged to offer new ways of understanding and interpreting them. For that is what Snorri’s Edda, and mythology in a nutshell, ultimately is: a means to understand and explain phenomena unable to be explained in what we of the modern era would call accurate. All the changes brought

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45 Nordvig, Mathias. Of Fire and Water: The Old Norse Mythical Worldview in an Eco-Mythological Perspective. 2013. 15.

about by oral culture aside, the myth of Skaði still serves as an important tool for explanation of certain phenomena in nature, but especially in society, passed down through the ages in “mythological terms,” as Gísli Sigurðsson would put it47.

2.1: Skaði’s “Involvement” and Importance in Nature

Being a goddess associated so much with winter and more than a few wintry past-times such as skiing and snowshoeing, along with how she is linked with the mountains and the pine forests where she makes her home, one unfamiliar with the Edda and the corpus of Norse mythology in general might be inclined to think that the stories about Skaði would be highly nature based or inspired. And yet, there exist no such tales explaining, for example, a snowstorm as Skaði going hunting or telling of how she might be known to utilize pine needles for arrowheads or icicles as spears. If anything, her connections to wild, wintry nature might only have begun being mythologized in earnest the modern era. Still, Skaði does have some important nature-oriented elements to her tale, both of which show that hers is not to be seen as a purely culturally focused myth.

In the story of Skaði and Njörðr’s marriage, we can see how Skaði not only highlights a connection to the diametric opposites of land and sea, but how she connects with and plays into the Old Norse worldview itself. Granted, the term “worldview” is problematic, as Nordvig is quick to point out how often it gets thrown around in the field of Old Norse scholarship. Different backgrounds tend to yield different definitions for and uses of the term. Though Nordvig himself notes his reservations on how the scholars he deems are closer than most to presenting a concise definition of the Old Norse worldview, I am inclined here to say that the theme of opposition hinted at is still one of great importance. While it does, for the most part, leave out the natural world in favor of the gods, the giants, and the spirits and their dealings, it also shows us the establishment of a “binary opposition” between the inner and outer worlds as well as one between the sea and the land48. This is a theme which factors especially well into the focus on Skaði as an “other” figure. If Skaði’s connection to nature is not the main focus of what her myth

47 Gísli Sigurðsson, 2014. 188.
means to explain, it at least lies—like her otherness—at the heart of some of the key conflicts presented in her story. Skáði comes from the lands of the giants, the outer world, and manages to secure herself a place in the inner circles of the gods. While the opposition between the inner and outer realms might be resolved, the opposition on the more natural level, however, is not. This is evident because the marriage to Njörðr that establishes Skáði as one of the Æsir’s own quickly dissolves due to the established Earth-Sea opposition.

Another part of Skáði’s story we can say is at least close to being connected to natural phenomena is really more of an astral legend than an earthbound one. This, of course, is the placing of Þjazi’s eyes by Óðinn (or Þórr, in some tales) in the night sky as two stars. “Svo er sagt að Óðinn gerði það til yfirbóta við hana að hann tók augu Þjassu og kastaði upp á himin og gerði af stjörnur tvær.”/“It is said that Odin, as compensation for her, did this: he took Thiassi’s eyes and threw them up into the sky and out of them made two stars”49.” Keeping in mind the view of Snorra Edda as a means to explain and understand various phenomena as best one could without modern knowledge, this part of the myth of Skáði could be seen as a synthesis of such a view with the practice of creating a Norse version of how to best explain two particularly bright stars, in this case, equating them with Þjazi’s eyes and thereby linking them in a way to Skáði.

Granted, Skáði is an earth goddess, not a sky goddess, but I would argue that once the Æsir place her father’s eyes in the sky, she gains a connection to the sky, however small it may be. As Gísli Sigurðsson wrote, the sky plays such an integral role in mythologies the world over that connections to the heavens cannot be glossed over50. Indeed, stories concerning what could be explained through the use of earthly examples could also be told with the heavens as the setting, the tableau, if you will; the place where the gods and their supernatural allies and enemies were constantly on the move or, in the case of Þjazi, left fixed for friend and foe alike to see. In other words, not an ongoing conflict played out for mortals perchance to view, but the result of a conflict long since resolved51. To the Sami, the folk with which Skáði and her father are so often equated by modern scholars, the sky is

50 Gísli Sigurðsson, 2014. 196.
also seen as the place where the supernatural dramas are constantly being played out until the end of the world, where the gods carry on in their affairs, their battles, their business, and “Sami culture heroes remain at the margins, practicing their ancient ways and biding their time”\(^{52}\).” This one passage by DuBois, while it is quite a new take on Scandinavian and Sami astral lore, nonetheless gives us another valuable insight into Skaði as a true and mythological “other” and also provides us with a fitting segue into the next section. We have seen where the myth of Skaði can and does fit into the natural world, incorporating both the earth and the sky, but to suggest a link between Skaði and Sami culture heroes lingering on the periphery opens the door to where and how the myth of Skaði fits into the Old Norse culture as an “other” and what purpose it serves therein.

2.2: Skaði’s “Involvement” and Importance in Society and Culture

Real world events that might have inspired the myth of Skaði cannot be limited to just natural phenomena. In fact, if they are really limited to anything, they would be to social and cultural (this includes political and religious) events, owing to the general lack of natural phenomena explicitly attributed to Skaði since myth, as something so closely tied to religion, is something which, like religion itself, plays as much a social role as one centered around explaining nature. As the last section shows, Skaði’s myth can and does include connections to the natural world. Thus, it is not entirely limited to cultural phenomena, although the nature-centered stories about her are still quite heavily overshadowed by the primarily societal-themed stories. The maintenance of social cohesion that ultimately results from the myth of Skaði reveals another reason why it should be treated as important, since such cohesion maintains the society of the gods, thus providing human society with a mythological aid to ensure its own survival\(^{53}\). An example of her as a figure said to exert influence over Scandinavian society, even if not in a major role, can be seen in how she is said to have borne children with Óðinn, one of whom being Sæming, the great ancestor of the Hlaðir jarls as was told in Háleygjatal circa 985\(^{54}\) and quoted in Ynglinga saga\(^{55}\).

\(^{53}\) Nordvig, 2013. 13.
\(^{54}\) Turville-Petre, 1964. 56.
At first, casting Skaði, a former giantess, as the mother of a dynasty seems an odd move from a storyteller’s perspective. Óðinn being the father, of course, could be construed as an effort by the cult of Óðinn to legitimize the jarls’ power as coming from the god of the ruling class, and this links quite well with the concept of ideological history. This concept is one that originally came from Jacques Le Goff, who succinctly sums up ideological history in the three points on which it focuses. These points deal with origin myths that lead to what Le Goff calls a “collective mythical identity,” the histories of famous family lines and dynasties, and magically charged technical knowledge meant to be handed down. Skaði being named as the mother of Sæming does not pass on much in terms of technical knowledge, but it primarily serves the first two points by having her featured in an origin story which brings in her and Óðinn as the deities who cemented the status of a certain famous line—in this case, the Hlaðir jarls—by siring their earliest ancestors.

But why name Skaði as the mother of Sæming as opposed to another goddess? I would not call it at all far fetched to suggest that the marriages between Æsir and Vanir, Æsir and jötnar, etc. served a cultural as well as a literary purpose. Óðinn, one of the most popular gods of the Æsir, is so closely connected to Vanic gods and goddesses, for example. He learns magic and seíðr from Freyja in the myths and his likeness is often found alongside that of Freyr the fertility god, something which suggests that the cults of the Æsir and Vanir may have, putting it plain and simple, played off each other, resulting in moments of synchronicity. Wedding gods and goddesses from the Æsir and Vanir, even including a few of the jötnar not quite so predisposed to ill could have been just as much a bolstering of relations between social groups in the real world as in the supernatural world. It is because of this we can infer that one very sound way to interpret the myth of Skaði is to view it as a story that arose as a result of ongoing and increasing interaction between cults and cultures, rather than the story that began such intermingling, synchronicity, and syncretism. Perhaps the underlying theme was cooperation, or perhaps

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it was legitimizing one group’s superiority. But then again, it is just as easy to infer that the reasoning behind the telling of the myth of Skaði and the other tales where she plays an important role, such as in Lokasenna or Háleygjatal, varied with time depending on the social climate of the day, so cooperation and legitimacy both likely served as the message behind the myth at some point or another.

Myths of great importance, as Csapo writes, are known to involve greater ceremony and revolve around more “taboos,” regardless of whether they are being enforced or broken in the myth in question. It is definitely safe to say that there are taboos being broken left and right in the myth of Skaði’s arrival at Ásgardr. Sometimes, as with Loki’s testicular tug-of-war, these taboos are only “broken” for comedic effect (as much for the audience as for Skaði, I’d say), but the most important break with the norm is Skaði herself, as I outlined in the previous chapter. Following Csapo’s logic, the myth of Skaði cannot have been just a mere one-off, funny story about the time everything went topsy-turvy when a giantess arrived at Ásgardr, demanded payback from the gods, and actually got her way. No, the myth of Skaði has far more import than that. Refer back, if you will, to my previous point of synchronicity between the cults of the Æsir and Vanir and Skaði’s reported influence on the eventual dynasty of the Hlaðir jarls. Had a union between Óðinn and Skaði been recognized before the composition of Háleygjatal, perhaps for reasons of encouraging unity between the Norse and their neighbors? If one had been recognized, we cannot be sure, as we only have sources from the 13th century to go on, all relevant in their own context, of course. It is logical, therefore, to reason that the sources could very well have reflected on prior notable instances of cross-cultural interaction between the Norse and their neighbors. To better address this matter, we must look at the neighbors in question.

Viewing Skaði as an “other” figure cannot be done right without looking into the quintessential “others” to the ancient Norse, the Sami. Skaði and her father are so often compared to Sami figures or said to be representatives of the Sami in Norse mythology by scholars that the suggested tie-in points between her and the Sami cannot be overlooked. One of the most recent scholarly works concerning Skaði and her otherness by Thomas A. Csapo, 2005. 9.
DuBois states her being originally a giantess comes from her Sami connections in this world, as the giants were—in a sense—the neighbors of the gods the same way the Sami were a neighboring “other” group to the Norse. The possibility of Skaôi’s myth being a thinly veiled metaphor concerning cross-cultural relations between the Norse and the Sami, given the Sami connotations attached to Skaôi and Þjazi, is a very strong one indeed. The Norse and the Sami and even the Finns share many similarities in their culture and religion. One important linguistic note to keep in mind here is that the Norse referred to the Sami as finnar. Since I will be using examples from the Finnish people (largely based in folklore and magic) as well as examples from the Sami to highlight the importance of Skaôi as an “other” figure in Norse mythology, I will not be relying too heavily on the Old Norse terms finn or finnar to avoid confusion between the Finns and the Sami. An important factor to consider concerning Sami society is their relationship to their Nordic neighbors. While conflict did sometimes occur between the two cultures, it was more of a rarity than between the Sami and the Finns, as will be glimpsed later on in this section. Trade and exchange was common between the Norse and the Sami, especially where their cultures met and blended, and they were known to exchange not only material commodities, but arrange marriages between their people as well. With this in mind, the myth of Skaôi entering into a marriage with Njôrð finds an even stronger tie to common real world events, and her connection with the Sami becomes stronger than ever.

The Sami were also known to closely interact with the Norse when it came to the practice of various magics such as seiôr, as can be seen by looking at Gunnhildr of Haralds saga ins Hárfagra or Þuriôr Sundafyllir from the Landnámabók, both of whom learned magic from the Sami, called the “Finns” in the former example. If there is something we might speculate on given this bit of information about the Sami and magic, it might be on how this might present a reason to have Skaôi linked with Ôðinn, owing to his association

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61 Zachrisson, 2008. 33-34.
with seiðr in both scholarship and the source material and Skaði’s associations with the Sami by scholars.

The Norse and the Sami also share similarities in their lore, particularly their astral lore, although the similarities there may not be so readily apparent\(^{63}\). The fact that the Norse seem to have assimilated so many Sami-like figures into their astral lore may be hinting at a colonization from without. If the Norse were indeed appropriating Sami deities and astral figures, this would appear to play into Snorri’s view of the Norse as being originally outsiders to the Scandinavian region, being led there by Óðinn and his sons from Asia and Troy. I should like to note here, that I only say it would appear to lend Snorri’s euhemeristic view some support, as I do not think it ultimately does. Assimilation of Sami deities by the Norse does not have to automatically equal the Norse being a colonizing people who arrived from outside the region, as Snorri would have it.

To support this point, we must look to Finland, specifically to examples of the Finnish Väinämöinen being at odds with several Sami figures, even escaping an attempt on his life by a Sami in one story. DuBois believes this to be evidence of what he calls “internal colonization” and the archaeological record is on his side, telling of the expansion of the Kiukainen culture from around 1200 BCE onwards, pushing the Sami further and further north as the agricultural Balto-Finns increased their territory\(^{64}\). Therefore, if such interaction stories exist in Finnish and Sami lore, the door is open to infer that the Norse were likely on a similar path of expansion, rather than suddenly appearing from out of Asia as Snorri would have told it. Even with the matter of the Norse expanding their territory in mind, we should not think of their interactions with the Sami as suddenly beginning and then increasing, but rather as something continuous, something ongoing. Any increase in cross-cultural interaction took place between the Norse and the Sami would have to have been the result of population growth. To further support the Norse-Sami interactions being an ongoing process, we have the legal records from the eleventh and twelfth centuries in post-Conversion Norway (Borgarthings Kristenrett and Eidsivathinglag), both of which contain measures forbidding interaction with Sami magicians or healers, thus revealing that

\(^{63}\) DuBois, 2014. 218.
\(^{64}\) DuBois, 2014. 218-219.
the Norse were quite familiar with the Sami and their magical practices and had been for many long years\textsuperscript{65}.

With the astral lore connections between the Finns, the Sami, and the Norse, the point can even be made that the natural and cultural sides of the mythology surrounding Skaði could be linked in some ways, as the sky serves as such an important canvas for heavenly and worldly events in the natural sphere as well as the social and the cultural. As DuBois himself put it in one of his most recent articles on the subject, “The sky is not a foreign or remote world but rather a telling reflection of the conflicts and characteristics of the earth below”\textsuperscript{66}.” Skaði’s link with the sky through Þjazi’s eyes brings in a cultural connection strong enough to be mythologized in the sky, further establishing and bolstering her link to the Sami. If the Finns managed to work stories of expansion-related conflict with the Sami into their lore, I see little to no reason to believe the Norse could not have done the same, thus lending more support to the view of the myth of Skaði’s arrival at Ásgarðr as an example of what happens when two cultures meet and clash. Since this view so strongly corresponds to my argument that Skaði’s assimilation may, in fact, have parallels to actual socio-cultural events, the metaphor concerning real and mythological neighbors shall be a theme to which I shall adhere more closely than others in examining the myths of Skaði and the significance of the goddess herself.

With modern scholars labeling Skaði as a nature and earth goddess, we can see that such a definition may suggest Sami connections as well, especially since her unique character may have originated in Scandinavia proper. Hunting would have been much easier there than in Iceland, and what functions Skaði served in Scandinavia, the land spirits were credited with by the Icelanders. As for Skaði’s possible beginnings, she may have been seen as what Ellis-Davidson names a “Ruler of the Wild” figure, the likes of which would have been venerated by the Sami of northern Norway\textsuperscript{67}. Given Skaði’s Sami connections and what Davidson mentioned about the land spirits of Iceland, this is an opportune point to refer back to my previous caveat about making any specific statements

\textsuperscript{65} DuBois, 1999. 129.
\textsuperscript{66} DuBois, 2014. 219-220.
\textsuperscript{67} Ellis-Davidson, 1998. 23-24.
on the origins of Skaði outside the mythological narrative. While I did say that it would be unrealistic to point to any exact time periods as giving rise to Skaði as a goddess with a story all her own, I think it can be deemed safe to say that, regardless of when her story began, her story is of Scandinavian origin. That is to say, even if her story is but an equivalent of a more common myth, mainland Scandinavia is where the version centered around the goddess we know as Skaði almost certainly arose, since Iceland had less need or use for a goddess of her sort.

While this next point does not deal so much with the myths or tales of Skaði, it is no less important, as it may offer some added insight into the character of Skaði as an “other” figure while looking at the Finns, more “others” on the periphery of the world according to the Norse. In the Finnish *Kalevala*, as noted by Ellis-Davidson, we can see that these “others” have a Skaði-like figure of their own: the hunting goddess, Mielikki. Called upon for success in hunting, but not connected to much else outside the forest, Mielikki does not seem to have much in common with Skaði at first, but one important point Davidson notes is the seeming duality of Mielikki, that she can appear beautiful or terrifying, implying she has a much darker side to her. This potential link to the often dark and mysterious Skaði warrants a closer look at the Finns and any possible significance they have in this matter.

Skaði and her characteristic otherness could possibly have ties to the folklore and superstitions of the Karelia region of Finland, an argument that can be made through looking at the Karelian beliefs in magical forces almost equivalent to those in which the Finns’ Nordic neighbors also believed. The spiritual energies in question here, are the Finnish versions of *meginn* and *nåttüra*, known as *väki* and *luonto*, forces that could be summoned by people and existed within nature. Evidence of belief in *väki* and *luonto* is easily documented, as it persisted for so long after the Finns were converted since the Church was far less involved in the Karelian region than they were further south in Finland and the remoteness of Karelia allowed for the folk practices involving *väki* and *luonto* to continue. The most interesting of these pertinent to this research is the belief surrounding the female *väki*, which was said to be both helpful and harmful and was regarded with a special kind of caution and reverence as it was a force representing—big surprise—that which

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68 Ellis-Davidson, 1998. 24-25.
was outside the bounds of “normal,” able to heal and protect family members or infect and cause fear.

The “conventional wisdom” held that women had little to no control over väki and were largely unable to summon luonto, suggesting one who could do so could be counted as an “other,” yet the amount of female healers with this power flies in the face of this claim. Where the female väki and female manipulators of väki best fit in this argument, however, is how they were seen as masculine in some ways for having such abilities and were regarded as more peripheral figures in this regard, although the female healers’ masculinity was said to exist more in the physical, and not the linguistic sense69. Even though Skaõi is not associated with magic or shamanism, the geographic closeness of this practice involving peculiar females with masculine characteristics as figures representing the “other” ought not to be ignored. While it may be tempting to suggest the Karelian folk magic as a possible parallel for Skaõi’s peculiarity, going in that deep to search for such roots would quickly find us in over our heads, something that ought to be avoided. With these matters having been addressed, we must now take a look at the problems with several of the points made in this chapter before moving on to the argument that Skaõi was an assimilated deity.

2.3: Problems to Consider

Despite numerous examples of events in the real world giving rise to myths that relate to or tie directly into the myth of Skaõi, there are still some issues with this theory. One is the lack of nature-related material. Obviously, Skaõi being defined by modern scholars a winter goddess, one might think she’d have stories related to winter associated with her. But apart from being linked in the mythology to hunting, skiing, and snowshoeing—all common winter activities—the majority of her stories show her in a social or a cultural context. Her connections to the natural world are glossed over. Now, this does not mean we shouldn’t view Skaõi as an earth goddess figure or a wilderness deity, but it is

somewhat problematic to have such a figure of primal nature featured in the mythology only to largely disregard her nature-based elements in favor of how she breaks the established norms and challenges the divine social conventions. In fact, the most in-depth look we get at how deeply connected she is to nature, especially the harsher side of nature, comes from her marriage to Njörðr, where she proves to be so land-based and Njörðr so very much the opposite that the marriage results in their separation. The case could be made that Skaði’s colder and more wintry side never shone through as much as it could have in the Norse myths until Hans Christian Andersen wrote and published his fairy tale *The Snow Queen* as Stange likens the mighty hunting goddess to the icy-hearted fairy tale antagonist. 70 Little can be found to support a theory that Andersen based his Snow Queen on Skaði or drew inspiration for the character from her, though, as their personalities are almost–dare I say it–polar opposites the way Stange would have it.

Another problem with Skaði as a figure thought to be involved in mortal affairs, this time concerning the story of her and Óðinn siring the line of the Hlaðir jarls, comes from how Eyvindr skáldaspillir’s version of *Háleygjatal* deviates from the Óðinn connection, as he later names Freyr as the god from whom the great leaders are descended, not Óðinn, when speaking in particular of Hákon Grjótarðsson 71. This problem of whether Óðinn or Freyr was the father of the dynasty can perhaps be attributed to orality, but it still leaves Skaði, as a central figure in the origin story of the jarls of Hlaðir, in a much more precarious position. While such unions might not be as frowned upon by the Vanir as among the Æsir (or us mere mortals, for that matter) if Eyvindr skáldaspillir meant that Freyr was the god from whom the Hlaðir jarls were descended, then it seems unlikely that Freyr would have sired them with his stepmother, or former stepmother if Skaði had already separated from Njörðr at this point. Perhaps the cult of the Vanir was stronger in the land of the Hlaðir jarls once and perhaps the ruling class’ progenitor god changed as the cults of different gods rose to power. Whatever the reason, though, the fact still remains that saying Skaði was a goddess from whom mortals once claimed descent largely rests on

how widely accepted the tales were of her bearing children by Óðinn, a far more likely god for her to be paired with than Freyr. This, however, is just an interpretation, as the sources are how they are. For now, it is better to work with what we already have rather than spend too much ink and energy in questioning the sources.

Chapter 2 Conclusions
In retrospect, having viewed several different examples of how the development of the myth of Skaði may have been influenced by real world events, there is one glaring gap we can note from the beginning, and that is the fact that her story seems to have a far greater basis in socio-cultural rather than natural occurrences. Even the astral lore associated with her must be called upon to strengthen the ties her story has to the natural world. The fact that the myth of an earth-oriented giantess turned goddess of winter serves more of a purpose as a cultural tale than a mythological explanation for wintry phenomena appears perplexing on the face of it. If I would attribute this to anything specific, however, I would attribute it to the issue that lies at the heart of this research: the importance of Skaði as an “other.” Since her connection to the Sami is so widely known thanks to the work of past and present scholars and appears to be largely accepted, it may be the case that because of her “other”-ness, the Norse did not go into nearly as much detail with Skaði as they did with their other deities, leaving the finer points of her story, her very character unwritten throughout the ages until modern scholars and writers began to expound upon what parts of her story the ancients neglected to relate. More may be to come on that in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Was the Myth of Skaði Based on an Actual Assimilation?
Introduction
Skaði has already been defined as giantess turned earth goddess associated with winter, skiing, darkness, and punishment. Elements of her story have been shown to appear in the real world in both natural and socio-cultural contexts, hinting at the possibility that the myth of Skaði arriving at Ásgarðr could have arisen from actual political or socio-cultural happenings. This leads us to the final major question of this work: to what extent does Skaði’s assimilation story parallel an actual deity assimilation? Since much of the evidence
presented last chapter finds in favor of myths arising from actual occurrences in nature and society, I offer the answer that the myth of Skaði and her ascending into the Ásynjur is a story that could have been inspired by actual events. To be clear, I am not aiming to single out one particular event and claim that gave rise to the myth of Skaði. When I say, “actual events,” I mean ongoing socio-cultural occurrences, events that were common enough to warrant an example of them as told through myth. A main point in favor of this will involve revisiting Skaði’s Sami connections, as the Sami are the most likely candidates from whom Skaði was assimilated into the Norse pantheon. Also, the mythical implications of her similarities to the Norse god Óðinn, perhaps as a political move by his cult in the regions where interaction between the Norse and the Sami was more prevalent. This more religio-political assimilation may be supported further by returning to Skaði’s connections with Óðinn, showing the ways in which a goddess like Skaði could have complemented him, provided she wasn’t introduced to replace or compete with him. Of course, problems with this argument will arise and they will be addressed, but it is an aim of mine here to make it known that the claim of Skaði’s assimilation story in the corpus of lore serving as a mythologized rendition of an actual assimilation is a legitimate one.

3.1: Reasons for Assimilation

As was addressed in the last chapter, the myth of Skaði coming to the gates of the Æsir to exact compensation for her father may very well have been based on Norse interactions with the Sami as they moved further north in Scandinavia, encountering more of the Sami people as they went. There is also the chance that Skaði could have been assimilated from the Finns to become a Norse Mielikki, given that particular goddess’ similarities to Skaði. However, since more than several places bearing the name of Skaði and other related gods are firmly within the bounds of Norse and Sami territory, upon which I soon shall elaborate, the Sami will remain at center stage as the people from whom Skaði was most likely assimilated. The idea of the Norse assimilating a Sami deity into their own pantheon for religious purposes or as a character in their mythology for storytelling purposes is all

72 Ellis-Davidson, 1998. 24-25.
well and good, but one must wonder why they felt it necessary to do so if they already had a skiing deity of their own? Case in point: Ullr. Before we delve deeper into this matter, I should just like to point out now that, given how Ullr’s functions as a deity hint at potential Sami connections also, the focus is on Skaði and why she specifically was assimilated. Ullr will still be mentioned from time to time, as some of the similarities he shares with Skaði make this unavoidable. Even should the question arise of whether or not Skaði and Ullr were assimilated together, the brunt of our focus must still remain on Skaði, as Ullr has none of the explicit connections to the “other” the way she does, as will be made clear in good time.

While it has become increasingly clear that the myth of Skaði’s arrival at Ásgardr was likely based on interactions between the Norse and the Sami, Skaði as a cultic figure still has yet to be explored to a greater extent. She herself refers to the shrines and temples dedicated to her in Lokasenna, saying that for Loki “…frá mínun vëum og vöngum skulu þér æ köld ráð come.73” “…from my holy groves and hallowed shrines will cold counsel ever come for thee,” so it would only be logical to investigate how reflective of the Old Norse and/or Sami religion such a passage may have been. Upon doing so, we can find that it is not that difficult to discover that Skaði was quite likely indeed to have been worshipped as a figure of cultic focus in the pre-Christian times, as a cult of Skaði may have been in place in Hålogaland of northern Norway, further strengthening possible Sami ties and origins for the goddess.74

Several theophoric place names beginning with the prefixes Ska- and/or Skada-, which are likely referring to Skaði, give even more credence to her cult following as they lend themselves to such names as Skedevi, Skea, and Skedvi75, also Skaðavé and Skaðalundr76. The cult of Skaði may have also been operating in conjunction with or as a part of an Ullr cult, particularly in Sweden.77 Ullr himself appears in place names mostly in

74 Ellis Davidson, 1993. 61-62.
76 Turville-Petre, 1964. 165.
77 Lindow, 2001. 269.
eastern Sweden and sometimes in Norway—though usually as Ullinn in those cases—proving he is also a rather popular deity in terms of theophoric place names. Sites like *Ullevi*, *Ulleråker*, and *Ullerål* can attest to this, along with the more land-connected *Ullarbolstaðr*\(^78\). If Skaði or her cult were connected with an Ullr cult, then this connection begs the question: why assimilate Skaði or connect her cult with Ullr’s at all? Surely assimilating neighboring deities would imply a seeking for religious homogeneity, a practice seemingly more befitting Christianity than the Old Norse religion? With this question, though, comes the imperative to bear in mind that Christianity operates on what has been deemed a “vertical” model in assimilating and/or appropriating various traditions, a method which neglects figures on the horizontal axis, such as the trolls, elves, and land spirits, and thus allows said figures to survive in lore as was (and still is, to an extent) the case in Iceland and other countries following the Conversion\(^79\).

While this is all well and good, we must remember that the ultimate goal here is to focus on how this fits with Skaði as an “other” figure and how it is significant regarding this point. If Skaði was a figure who came into the Old Norse myths, especially if she was originally a Sami figure, then this point brings up another possibility as to why she might have been assimilated for religious reasons as well as for reason of cultural appropriation. Skaði and Ullr are both associated with skiing, and this is referenced explicitly in *Snorra Edda*, where Skaði is called Öndurdís and Ullr, Öndurás and both are also quite clearly associated with archery and hunting\(^80\). Referring back to how Skaði’s name bears a masculine stem, one might wonder if she and Ullr may have been two versions of the same deity worshipped by the people of Hálogaland. Which name was given to the god(dess) by the Norse or Sami inhabitants, though, remains to be seen, and the differences between Skaði and Ullr are still strong enough to offset their similarities, making it less likely that they were one and the same.

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While Ullr and Skaði may not have always been viewed as ski deities, Ullr, perhaps, could still be the elder of the two, as evidence suggesting a cult associated with him—or, at least, a figure bearing his name—dates back to as early as AD 300. This is referenced by the inscription on the Thorsbjærg chape “(o)wlþpuþewaR,” which can be translated as “servant of Ullr.” The name of Ullr is far more commonly associated with light and brilliance, as it is thought to stem from the Gothic wulþus, and such connotations indicate he might have been a celestial instead of an earth deity. It is with these points in mind that the contrast between him and Skaði becomes particularly strong. Ullr as a sky god of brilliance, Skaði as an earth goddess of shadow and punishment. The fact that both are winter deities associated with winter activities could indicate that Skaði was or went on to fill the role of either a darker goddess in a regional sub-pantheon based in the far north and focused on winter and hunting or that of the darker half of a pair of twin winter deities, whether as the sister or wife (if not both) of Ullr. Though this rendition would make it unlikely that Ullr and Skaði were perhaps viewed as siblings, the fact that Ullr is named as bór’s stepson would further strengthen the argument for Ullr and Skaði being a pair of opposites, one being born to the gods, the other to the giants. The concept of twin god worship is something which dates back all the way to proto-Indo-European times and it has been hinted that the worship of twin deities did make it all the way to Scandinavia.

Looking back at the cultural references highlighted in the second chapter to showcase how the myths of Skaði might have parallels in actual instances of cross-cultural interaction between the Norse and the Sami, we must revisit the points made therein, this time to put them to use in the argument for Skaði being assimilated from the Sami, whichever side of the argument they may lead us to come down on. The main example to remember here is the mention of the cult of Óðinn and Skaði’s connection to Óðinn according to Háleygjatal, as some scholars have approached this matter as something that

81 Turville-Petre, 1964. 184.
could indicate not just a religious and cultic focused assimilation, but a political one as well. Claiming descent from the gods, according to Grundy, can easily tie in with the Old Norse belief in luck being something a person could inherit from their ancestors, meaning, naturally, that those who could trace their lineage back to a god or multiple deities had a greater store of personal fortune from which they could draw, and of course, the Hlaðir jarls would have exploited this belief to bolster their power. Grundy notes that the jarls of Hlaðir—the line of which is the oldest to name Óðinn as a progenitor—like Sigurðr Hákonarson and Hákon Sigurðsson, who was said to be the niðr (that is, the son) of Óðinn and Skaði, are quite powerful and quite successful on the battlefield and in matters of state, whether they were political or religious matters. That is to say, Grundy points out no obvious problems arising from having Óðinn sire a line of jarls with a (former) giantess. Since the gods and the giants are so often seen as enemies, the lack of problems arising from a giantess being involved in the creation of the Hlaðir dynasty seems to fly in the face of the gods being the opposite and opposed to the giants from the “Other World.”

McKinnell, who notes this dichotomy in Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend, is nonetheless guilty of making the assumption that such a divide between the gods and giants as one between forces of good and evil, life and death, vying for supremacy was always present. While it is generally the case that the gods view the giants as the “others” in their worldview, the interpretation of this divide as one of “good vs. evil” may not have always existed. After all, Óðinn and Þórr, the mightiest of the Æsir, can claim giant heritage, and nobody seems to harbor any qualms about this fact. Nor does anybody decry the gods taking giantesses as wives or mistresses as fraternizing with the enemy. Also, since Skaði’s ascension to the Ásynjur raises no eyebrows in the mythology about where her allegiance still ultimately lies, it would appear that the good vs. evil dichotomy between the gods and the giants did not become such an ironclad staple of Old Norse religion and mythology until later, if Turville-Petre’s reasoning holds true, despite the problem of chronology this brings back. Putting the matter of chronology aside, however we can still

86 McKinnell, 2005. 4.
87 Turville-Petre, 1964. 144.
conclude from this that assimilating members of the “other” side was a practice common enough among the gods in the mythology and among the humans in this world to be accepted. The ease with which cultures could intermingle is an important point in favor of Skaði being a goddess assimilated by the Norse in the real world and how it translated into the tale of Skaði the giantess being assimilated by the gods in the mythology.

3.2: Problems to Consider

Of course, it is also likely that Ullr was assimilated from the Sami as well, but the linguistic origin of the most likely translation of his name, as was previously noted, seems to suggest otherwise. By that logic, however, it could also be speculated that Skaði was, herself, a deity of Nordic origin. Since no names for similar figures among the Sami deities can be found, the question of where these deities ultimately originated is still up in the air, which is just where said question will remain, owing to how impossible it is to pin down with complete accuracy anything pertaining to origins regarding Skaði and her stories. The forever unclear matter of origin, however, remains roughly the only persistent problem that dogs the argument set forth in the previous section. Given the evidence from this chapter and the previous chapter, it can still be said that Skaði appears to now even more strongly fit the bill of an assimilated goddess or even a god, if she perhaps underwent a change in sex similar the Nerthus-Njörðr shift.

Another problem to address is the fact that following Skaði’s split from Njörðr, nothing more is said of her as a giantess or as a goddess. Whether she remains aligned with the Vanir or the Æsir is not specified, so this could leave the door open for speculation that her assimilation might have been brief, a point which ties in rather well to the nature and the culture-based sides of the myths about Skaði but can also be used here, as it connects the doomed marriage of Skaði and Njörðr to the conflict between hunter-gatherer and agricultural societies as well as to the brief change in seasons typical of the far northern climes, where spring only lingers to warm the tundra for a short while before departing and the dead cold of winter returns. These interpretations of the myth of Skaði and Njörðr

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seem to imply some inherent incompatibility between the gods and the giants and may be suggesting that Skaði not only left Njörðr, but the gods as well to fall back into the realms of the “others” and continue on as a being of darkness and destruction. Though it is never confirmed that Skaði abandoned her alliance with the gods, it must still be noted that whether or not she remains allied with the Æsir, she has, by leaving Njörðr to live in her father’s old dwelling, faded to some extent back into the realm of the “other.” She has moved back to the periphery, and the fact that she stays there means much remains unsaid concerning how her story arc truly resolves. While it seems unlikely that Skaði’s return to the side of the giants would simply be left uncommented on, since little more is said of what happens to Skaði after leaving Njörðr aside from her siring children with Óðinn, this point may continue to linger on the periphery of research concerning Skaði. In a stranger line of thought, if the myth was being used by those harboring ill will towards the Sami, the meaning of her separation from Njörðr could then be interpreted as an implicit opinion against cross-cultural unity between the Norse and the Sami, that the gods and the beings of this world could never really coexist with the “others” outside their realms. Such outlandish views as these, however, have thankfully yet to be given enough credence to be expressed in great detail in the realms of serious scholarship. Aside from the problem of being unable to pin down precisely where Skaði and the myths surrounding her might have come from and the fact that her story simply ends and little more is told of her character outside of Ynglingatal and the Edda, the points against Skaði being a deity who was assimilated, even if she was only assimilated briefly, are few and far between.

Chapter 3 Conclusions
By now, it should be clear that one of the greatest findings investigating the significance of Skaði representing the “other” in Norse mythology can lead us to is the idea that she was an assimilated deity, one most likely gained from the Sami. The possibility does exist that she was assimilated from a different group like the Finns, but the Sami connections highlighted by scholars lead to the Sami being a more viable option. The primarily cult-focused reasons in this chapter and the tie-in points from the previous chapters outline how this is quite likely to be the case given her symbolic connections to the Sami in appearance and
demeanor, her natural and cultural as well as cultic similarities to the Sami, and the appearance of an underlying theme of cross-cultural interaction with the Sami along with the theme of Skaði being an “other” figure. Even her connections with Ullr suggest she might have been assimilated to be the representative of the “other” alongside him, given the stark contrasts between these two ski deities. Given how Skaði and her various myths tie in to relevant cultural and political happenings from Scandinavia, especially between the Norse and the Sami, these reasons can also be utilized to support the theory of Skaði as a deity assimilated into Norse mythology. With that in mind, we must also hearken back to the fact that Skaði remains an “other” even after her assimilation, albeit perhaps to a lesser extent once she’s aligned with the Norse and their gods. That she remains so and even reconnects in some ways with the “other” she was at the beginning merely links even this to the point I made at the very beginning: Skaði’s being an “other” is something at the heart of everything peculiar and mysterious about her. In this case, her reclaiming some of that otherness is what leaves the door open for such speculation regarding the resolution of her story.

**Conclusion**

Though Skaði still remains shrouded in mystery, there is hope for the academic community to better understand her and her myths yet, as we now have several valuable bits of knowledge with which to shine a scholarly light onto this shadowy goddess of the North. The fact that she represents an “other” figure in Norse mythology is something we can easily identify from the start, and the fact that she comes from the realms outside but retains her connection to the wild and the “other” in her even after being brought into the inner circles of Ásgarðr is something we can find by just looking at the myth of her arriving in the realms of the Æsir and obtaining compensation for the death of her father. The peculiarity of her character as a giantess turned goddess both in the mythology and as the subject of real world cult worship and ancient belief is a matter I say can be attributed to her being a figure of the “other” in Norse mythology.

Skaði’s otherness can easily be understood as a literary trope regarding the mythology, but considering how myth and reality are so intimately connected, Skaði’s
being an “other” figure takes on a whole new light when we consider her connections to nature, surprisingly less focused on than her connections to culture, along with how her otherness plays a role in those aspects as well. The similarities she shares with the Sami, “other” figures in and of themselves who existed alongside and intermingled with the Norse, brings to mind that Skaði’s otherness may come from real world connections and is just as likely to suggest that the myth concerning her arrival at Ásgard and marriage to Njörðr could very well have been based in actual occurrences of cross-cultural intermarriage and assimilation, a Sami deity being appropriated by the Norse and then being mythologized as the tale of Skaði. Such a mythologized account of actual events makes a good deal of sense as an interpretation of the myth of Skaði as it is still able to take into account and be inclusive of all the other interpretations concerning this part of the mythology with no need to discredit or replace most of them. Speculation will continue to exist on just what purpose the character of Skaði serves in the corpus of Norse mythology. Scholars will continue to wonder where she as a goddess worshipped in the real world might have come from, despite the futility of being able to dig so deep. Even what might have happened to her in the stories after she faded into the background to–to borrow a phrase–do her own thing will still be scrutinized, as the question of what ultimately became of her character after her tale ended is one still yet unanswered, thus leaving her story arc unresolved in several ways. But the answers to these matters, I think, are among those that Skaði will continue to hide with her, cloaked in the snowy shadows of obscurity.
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