

ÓÐINN'S SELF-SACRIFICE—A NEW INTERPRETATION

I: The Ritual Inversion

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Hávamál 138 ff.—The Need for a New Interpretation

THE four strophes containing the narrative of Óðinn's self-sacrifice, *Hávamál* 138–141, are usually considered to be a continuous entity.¹ This basic assumption sets the stage for two main lines of interpretation:

1. The passage narrates the consecutive units of a single rite, or
2. it juxtaposes the entireties or units of similar but independent ritual entities.

Sijmons and Gering² support the former contention; Detter and Heinzel³ and Boer⁴ opt for the latter. I also favor the latter. The episode concerning Bölþor's son appears to belong to the topos of the 'genuine knowledge confrontation' (*echte Wissensbegegnung*)⁵ whereas the obligatory element of the antagonist is missing in the self-sacrifice. In his translation, Gering⁶ labels *Hávamál* 140 an interpolation: "eine Interpo-

¹ See, for example, B. Sijmons & H. Gering, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda* [Sijmons/Gering], 2 vols. Halle (Saale) 1927, 1931, I/146f. Quotations and abbreviations from the 'elder Edda', unless noted otherwise, are cited according to: *Edda*, 2 vols., ed. by G. Neckel, vol. I: Text, 4th. ed. by H. Kuhn, Heidelberg 1962.

² This can be deduced from the discussion of Bugge's theory of Christian influence; Sijmons/Gering, I/146f. The four strophes are compared to the crucifixion of Christ, certainly an integral *actus*; a parallel for *Háv.* 140 is noted as lacking. If *Háv.* 138–141 represents only a loosely connected collection of similar materials, the lack of a parallel to one feature of the crucifixion would hardly be worthy of mention.

³ F. Detter & R. Heinzel, *Sæmundar Edda* [Detter/Heinzel], 2 vols., Leipzig 1903, II/142f. under *Háv.* 136f.

⁴ R. C. Boer (ed.), *Die Edda* [*Edda*], 2 vols., Haarlem 1922, II/46ff.

⁵ For a definition of the *Wissensbegegnung* by means of a phenomenology, see: J. Fleck, *Die Wissensbegegnung in der altgermanischen Religion* (Diss.), München 1968, pp. 7ff.

⁶ H. Gering (tr.), *Die Edda*, Leipzig and Vienna (no date), p. 105 footnote.

lation, welche die Erzählung von Odins Selbstopferung störend unterbricht: sie stammt aus einem Liede, das von der Gewinnung des Dichtermets handelte." This certainly refers only to *Hávamdl* 140/4–6; the episode concerning Bölþor's son has no narrative counterpart in the mead-theft segment. It is, of course, quite possible to interpret *Hávamdl* 138–141 as a unified sequence of 'mini-rites'.⁷ The mead-episode and Óðinn's education by Bölþor's son could be steps in such a compound rite;—but the only evidence supporting this position is the *Hávamdl*-passage under investigation here.

Even the narrative unity of the two strophes *Hávamdl* 138–139 is based on a factor subject to question. In *Hávamdl* 138 Óðinn is hanging on the tree; in the next strophe he 'falls down'. Except for this 'falling', *Hávamdl* 139 contains no evidence for the supposition that Óðinn is to be thought of as hanging up to the point of his fall. If *Hávamdl* 138–141 is to be considered to narrate one complicated multipart rite at all, it can hardly be assumed that its entirety assumes Óðinn hanging from the tree. The first necessary step lies in establishing the temporal conclusion of the 'hanging-episode'. The 'falling down' of *Hávamdl* 139/6 can serve this end—but it can also be understood in a completely different way.

Before attacking that problem, we must devote our interest to another crux. In *Hávamdl* 139/4–5 Óðinn 'takes up' the runes. Here, once again, we are forced to opt for one of two possibilities:

1. The 'taking up' of the runes is meant figuratively, or
2. it is to be understood as a literal, physical act.

The second option faces us with the riddle: 'How can a man (or god) physically take up something from below if he is hanging by the neck?' Although they support the literal 'taking up', Detter and Heinzel⁸ and de Vries⁹ avoid this question. Sijmons and Gering¹⁰ admit the problem;—but attempt to solve it by inventing material for which there is no textual support:

⁷ See: J. de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte [Religionsgeschichte]*, 2 vols. Berlin 1956², 1957², I/499ff., II/75.

⁸ Detter/Heinzel, II/141.

⁹ De Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, I/499.

¹⁰ Sijmons/Gering, I/150.

namk upp rúnar 'ich nahm die runen herauf', die ihm also von unten dargereicht wurden . . .

In our almost 'ecological' day of 'Preserve the documented text at any cost!', such a simplistic conjecture is hardly worthy of discussion.

The figurative option is argued by Müllenhoff,¹¹ Boer,¹² and Genzmer.¹³ Their position recognises the problems of a literal 'taking up' of the runes and tries to solve it by free translation. Sijmons and Gering¹⁴ are completely justified in rejecting this freedom;—their own solution, however, is equally unfortunate. The question of how a hanging man can take something up from below remains open.

The easiest solution is simply to suppose that Óðinn, at the point at which he takes up the runes, is no longer hanging on the tree. This would suppose that he first completes the 'hanging-test' and then goes on to the 'fasting-test'. During this second part of the rite he would no longer be hanging and could 'take up' the runes from a standing (or sitting) position without difficulty. Then the episode with Bölþor's son, the mead-draught and Óðinn's 'growth' follow in sequence.¹⁵ But this leaves Óðinn's 'fall' to be explained.

In his article "Odin paa Træet"¹⁶ F. Ohrt subjects the *Hávamál*-passage to interpretation founded in the complex of superstitions surrounding the mandragora. Quite a few additional points could be offered to support Ohrt's conjecture;¹⁷ but in principle it remains:

¹¹ K. Müllenhoff, *Deutsche Altertumskunde*, 5 vols., Berlin 1870–1908, V/270.

¹² Boer, *Edda*, II/46.

¹³ F. Genzmer (tr.), *Edda* (= *Thule*, I–II), Darmstadt 1963², II/172.

¹⁴ Sijmons/Gering, I/150.

¹⁵ For the idea that Óðinn may no longer be hanging when he lifts up the runes, I am indebted to an oral suggestion by Prof. Aage Kabell, University of Munich.

¹⁶ F. Ohrt, "Odin paa Træet" [Odin], in *APhS* 4 (1930), pp. 273–286.

¹⁷ For example: in modern Icelandic the mandragora is called *þjóvarót* and is believed to grow under the gallows from the blood, urine or sperm of a hanged thief; see: Jón Árnason (ed.), *Íslenskar Þjóðsögur og Ævintýri*, 6 vols., Reykjavík 1955–1961², I/642f., III/456. Óðinn is known as *hangatýr*, *hangagoð* (See: Snorri Sturluson, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* [*Snorra-Edda*], ed. by Finnur Jónsson, København 1931, p. 88/12, 15), the 'mead-thief' (*Háv.* 103ff.), and is, if we accept the Óðinn/Mercurius parallel, god of thieves, etc.

1. The mandragora grows under the gallows;¹⁸ Óðinn hangs on the 'gallows'.
2. When plucked, the mandragora screams;¹⁹ this scream is evidenced in our text by the word *æpandi*, which, due to later misunderstanding, was believed to apply to Óðinn rather than to the mandragora.²⁰

Ohrt cites two Old French examples:²¹ both tell how the mandragora-plucker dies on hearing the plant's scream.²² Since 'ritual death' is a standard of the rite of initiation²³ and Óðinn does not 'die' as a result of the 'hanging-test', his 'ritual death' could be caused by the mandragora. According to this theory, in *Hávamál* 139 Óðinn is no longer hanging on the tree;—he plucks the mandragora: *nam ec upp rúnar*—OHG. *alrūna* (ON. *þlrun* ?) = mandragora—hears the scream: *æpanda* (later erroneously corrected to *æpandi*) *nam*, and consequently falls down: *fell ec apter þaðan*, (ritually) dead.

This argument sounds quite convincing, despite the necessary text-conjecture. In any event, it does show how the problem of a literal 'taking up' could be solved. Nevertheless, I wish to present an even more enterprising solution, which, in order to be convincing, demands a substantial structure of supporting material.

Let us assume that, at the point at which he takes up the runes, Óðinn is still hanging on the tree. The taking-up is to be understood literally;—but no helpers, unmentioned by the text, may be invented to simplify matters. Óðinn looks downwards, sees the runes below him, reaches down and takes them up by hand. This act is unthinkable on the part of an anthropomorph hanging by the neck;—but it is quite possible if Óðinn hangs by the feet, head downward, in inverted position!

¹⁸ Ohrt, "Odin", p. 282.

¹⁹ Ohrt, "Odin", p. 282.

²⁰ Ohrt, "Odin", p. 281f.

²¹ Ohrt, "Odin", p. 283.

²² See: H. Marzell, "Alraune", in *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, 10 vols., ed. by E. Hoffmann-Krayer & H. Bächtold-Stäubli, Berlin and Leipzig 1927–1942, I/314, 318 and, as cited above, *Íslenzkar Þjóðsögur og Ævintýri*, I/642.

²³ See: de Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, I/295, I/499; M. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation [Initiation]*, tr. by W. R. Trask, New York 1965, p. xii, 30 ff. *et passim*.

The Ritual Inversion—Germanic Evidence

As bizarre as this thought may seem at first, there is actual text evidence to support it. Not only do Germanic texts speak in its favor;—it would appear that we are considering a widespread ritual concept of particular applicability to our *Hávamál*-passage. Let us begin with the Germanic evidence:

1. Adam of Bremen, III/8

*Qui et ipse non post multos dies a filio Thietmari comprehensus et per tybiam suspensus inter duos canes efflavit.*²⁴

2. Gregor of Tours, III/7

*... pueros per nervos femorum ad arbores appendentes . . .*²⁵

3. Saxo Grammaticus, V

*Furi vero traiectis ferro nervis in suspendium acto lupum collateralem affigi præcepit.*²⁶

4. Saxo Grammaticus, V

*Quosdam enim restibus in sublime pertractos more agitabilis pilæ pendula corporum impulsione vexabant.*²⁷

5. *Hrafnkels saga freysgoða*, V

Þá taka þeir Hrafnkel ok hans menn ok bundu hendr þeira á bak apr. Eptir þat brutu þeir upp útibúrit ok tóku reip ofan ór krókum, taka síðan

²⁴ Quoted according to: Adam von Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, ed. by B. Schmeidler, in *Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters XI*, Darmstadt 1961², p. 336.

²⁵ Quoted according to: Gregor von Tours, *Historiarum Libri Decem*, ed. by B. Krusch, in *Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters II-III*, 2 vols., Darmstadt 1964², I/152.

²⁶ Quoted according to: Saxo Grammaticus, *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, 2 vols., I: Text, ed. by J. Olrik & H. Ræder, København 1931, p. 137.

²⁷ *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, p. 107. In this passage it does not state explicitly that the victims were hanged in inverted position;—this must be deduced from the rest of the passage. It contains a long list of further torture methods, among which is mentioned: *alios clavis affixos laquei more suspensionis multavere ludibrio*;—the list is intended to illustrate the diversity of the methods. This second method stresses the hanging—but the first stresses the anguish suffered. If the victims of the first example were hanged by the neck, as were those in the second, swinging them back and forth would shorten their suffering rather than add to it. Not all the methods listed are lethal. Our first example appears to belong to this type and can best be explained by inverted hanging.

*knífa sína ok stinga raufar á hásinum þeira ok draga þar í reipin ok kasta þeim upp yfir ásinn ok binda þá svá átta saman.*²⁸

6. *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, VIII

*Hjörleifr konungr var uppfestr í konungs höll með skóþvengjum sínum sjálfs millum elda tveggja.*²⁹

Of course it must be stressed that none of these texts shows the ritual inversion within the framework of a clearly designated initiation. This is, however, hardly surprising—since clearly designated descriptions of Germanic initiations are somewhat more than hard to come by. In fact, our source material is extremely stingy in presenting description of any and all rites of primitive Germanic Religion. Even in cases where world-wide distribution of a structure leads us to suppose that it must also have existed in the Germania, we are forced to fine-tooth comb our texts with the subtlest philological tools to provide any actual evidence. On the other hand, whenever an older Germanic text presents us with a picture of a structure that is not understandable from the context of what we know of every day life of the period, we are more than justified in asking if a ritual factor is not hidden there. The more unusual the structure, the more justified is the question. Nowadays hanging criminals in the inverted position as either a form of corporal punishment or execution seems sadistic or barbaric to us;—but we must not forget that we are quite insensitive to the ritual aspect of the inversion. We must therefore

²⁸ Quoted according to: *Austfirðinga Sögur* (= *Íslensk Fornrit XI*), ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, Reykjavík 1950, p. 120.

²⁹ Quoted according to: *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* (= *Allnordische Sagabibliothek* 14), ed. by A. LeRoy Andrews, Halle (Saale) 1909, p. 88. Here, once again, it is not stated explicitly that Hjörleifr was hanged in inverted position. It is of course possible that the king's shoe-laces were first removed from his shoes and that he was then hanged by them. But this explanation is hardly satisfying. The well-known Germanic test/torture of being placed between fires speaks against it. Unless the fires were close enough to burn him almost immediately, as is obviously not the case here, hanging by the neck would put Hjörleifr beyond suffering long before the fires affected him. Furthermore, when the king is freed, he is ready and able to take revenge in person. We are not told exactly how long he hung, but the passage gives the impression that it was longer than would have been necessary to choke him. Since the king was not to die by hanging by the neck, but rather suffer between the fires, *með skóþvengjum sínum* is a clear indication of inverted hanging.

ask ourselves what the ritual inversion meant to those who lived in the period described in the evidence.

It is not the hanging which attracts our attention here;—it is the inversion. Folkloristically, the first association which comes to mind is that of the 'Underworld', in which everything is reversed.³⁰ Such a concept can be read out of the following 'gestures', which can only be understood in a numinous context:

1. *Kormáks saga*, X

*Þat vǫru hólmgrongulög, . . . sá er um bjó, skyldi ganga at ljósinum, svá at sæi himin milli fóta sér ok heldi í eyrasnepla með þeim formála, . . .*³¹

2. *Vatnsdæla saga*, XXVI

*. . . hon hafði rekit fótin fram yfir hofsuð sér ok fór ofug ok rétti hofsuðit aftr milli fótanna; . . .*³²

3. *Landnámabók*, CCXXVII

*Þá var Ljót út komin ok gekk ofug; hon hafði hofsuðit millum fóta sér en klæðin á baki sér.*³³

The purpose of such actions is to 'make contact' with the underworld; abstractly, they recreate conditions which are those of the other world.³⁴ The inversion of an initiate is, similarly, identical to his ritual death, a standard factor of the initiation. But not only the death of the initiate—also his rebirth on a higher ritual level is a standard feature of the rite.³⁵ The inversion is also symbolic of this second feature. Since most children are born head-first, the concept of the fetus carried in the mother's body in inverted position is of worldwide distribution. So the inversion symbolises both death and rebirth:—an almost perfect topos to represent the initiation.

It should be clear by now that I see in the ritual inversion far more than simply a method for 'hanging' an initiate without killing him. Furthermore, we must consider the ethnologically correct supposition of

³⁰ See: de Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, I/287f.

³¹ Quoted according to: *Vatnsdæla Saga (Íslensk Fornrit VIII)*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Reykjavík 1939, p. 237.

³² Also quoted according to *Íslensk Fornrit VIII*, p. 69f.

³³ Quoted according to: *Landnámabók Íslands*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, København 1925, p. 99.

³⁴ See: de Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, I/287f.

³⁵ See: Eliade, *Initiation*, pp. xii, 16, 32, 35f., 49f., 51, 53.

Sijmons and Gering, that 'dangling' between heaven and earth has a religious significance.³⁶ This, of course, would also be present if the inversion were absent. Of more importance is Saxo's explanation for the execution of thieves: . . . *ut malitiam hominis acerbitati beluæ similitudo exæquaret pœnæ*.³⁷ At first this explanation seems simply positivistic;—but there is an element of deeper truth hidden here. Execution by hanging between animals is too striking to be meaningless and too widespread to be chance. The dogs in the passage from Adam cited above show that not only wolves were used for this purpose. The intention to insult the victim is an obvious answer;—but it is by no means the only one.

In his description of the great sacrifice at Upsala, Adam of Bremen tells us of further animals which were hanged.³⁸ Seventy-two corpses hang on the trees: nine male examples of each species. That divides out to eight species;—only humans, dogs, and horses are mentioned. In any case, the seven other species can hardly be thought of as 'harshening the punishment' of the nine human victims. It is clear that we have before us an example of an intended 'universal sacrifice'.

It is of utmost significance that Adam tells us that the sacrifice at Upsala was not limited to the *hanging* of humans and animals:

*Sacrificium itaque tale est: ex omni animante, quod masculinum est, novem capita offeruntur, quorum sanguine deos [tales] placari mos est.*³⁹

There is no doubt as to the central role which blood played in the Germanic sacrifice. De Vries writes:

Das Blut wurde auf Götterbilder, Tempelwände und die Teilnehmer am Opfer gespritzt; von den Altaren wird gesagt *roðnir stallar af blóði*.⁴⁰

Óttarr reddens the altar with fresh steer's blood for Freyja.⁴¹ Starkaðr

³⁶ Sijmons/Gering, I/147f.; also see: Eliade, *Initiation*, p. 42. It would be interesting to investigate whether or not these concepts are related to the Scandinavian practice of singing ballads while swinging on a swing; see: M. Arnberg, "Om traditionsinspelningarna och om dem som sjöng", in *Den medeltida balladen*, Stockholm 1962, pp. 32–67, in particular pp. 49f.

³⁷ *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, p. 137.

³⁸ Adam of Bremen, *ed. cit.*, p. 472.

³⁹ Adam of Bremen, *ed. cit.*, p. 472.

⁴⁰ De Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, I/418.

⁴¹ *Hdl.* 10/5–6.

carries off Álfhildr while she reddens the altar with blood at night.⁴² Any student of primitive Germanic religion can extend the list of examples at will: the sagas offer a wealth of them.⁴³ One feature of descriptions explicit in this point is highly significant: the blood was not 'used' as it flowed out of the human or animal victim.⁴⁴ Rather, it was collected in a vessel.⁴⁵ De Vries writes:

Die altnordischen Quellen erwähnen bei der Beschreibung der heidnischen Opferhandlungen auch einen Kessel (*hlautbolli*), in dem das Blut des geopfertem Tieres gesammelt wurde.⁴⁶

The Kvasir-narrative of the *Snorra-Edda*⁴⁷ offers us the symbolic representation of a sacrifice in which the blood of the victim plays the central role. Kvasir's body seems of little significance;—but the 'poet's mead' is made from his blood. To put it symbolically: Kvasir dies 'into' the ritual vessel as blood and is reborn 'out' of the same vessel as the 'poet's mead'. His entire being seems to be identical with his blood.

⁴² *Hervarar Saga ok Heiðreks Konungs* (= *STUAGNL XLVIII*), ed. by Jón Helgason, København 1924, p. 91.

⁴³ For example, *Eyrbyggja saga*, IV, etc.

⁴⁴ Although flowing blood was not used for sacrifice, it was used for prophecy: see: de Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, I/393.

⁴⁵ Strabo (VII/294) tells of a sacrifice among the Cimbri in which the blood of the victims was collected in a vessel after priestesses had slit their throats; see: F. Heiler, *Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion* [*Religion*], Stuttgart, 1961, p. 212f. De Vries considers the ritual "eigentlich mehr eine gallische Sitte" (de Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, I/408, also see: de Vries, *Kelten und Germanen*, Bern and München 1960, p. 96). In any event, we can not avoid noticing the parallel offered by this rite and the illustration found on one of the inside panels of the 'Sacrificial Vessel of Gundestrup'; for a picture, see: de Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, Plate IV, I/144. De Vries believes that also the vessel is of Celtic origin; see: de Vries, *Keltische Religion*, Stuttgart 1961, p. 47ff., 105; also see: de Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, I/150, II/91;—but this does not refute the probability that the neighboring Germanic tribes had similar, likely genetically related sacrificial rites. Furthermore, at this point two interesting passages should be mentioned: *Ynglinga saga* XI and *Saxonis Gesta Danorum* I/27; see de Vries, *Kelten und Germanen*, p. 98, for a parallel discussion. Since in both cases it is unlikely that the vessel was of sufficient proportions to allow drowning upright, the inverted position once again seems a logical conclusion.

⁴⁶ De Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, I/392.

⁴⁷ *Snorra-Edda*, p. 82.

Such a sacrifice in which the blood is important but the body insignificant can, in the case of humans or larger animals, best be performed with the victim hanging in the inverted position. This is still a standard slaughter practice today. Pigs in particular, since their blood is collected to make sausage, are 'ham-strung' by either passing a hook or cord between the tibia and fibula of the hind legs (*per tybiam*, to echo Adam's words) and then lifted to hang head downwards. Then the *arteria carotis comunis* is severed (*geiri undaðr*), so that the blood flows down into a vessel. In cultures in which blood is considered ritually non-edible the same method is used;—but there intended to drain the cadaver of blood thoroughly. Judaism offers an example: blood is not considered edible;—in order to be pure, meat must be slaughtered by *shechitah* methods including complete blood drainage.⁴⁸ The collected blood, however, may be sprinkled on the altar as a penitential act.⁴⁹ Orthodox Islam also forbids the use of blood as food⁵⁰ but knows of no corresponding blood sacrifice.⁵¹

In any event, we must consider this Germanic slaughter tradition as a contributing factor in the complex of the ritual inversion—especially in cases in which any mention of the victim's blood is made.⁵² It should not be forgotten that the ritual use of such blood was not limited to sprinkling the altars;—the Kvasir-episode proves that. Kvasir's blood is also a source of numinous knowledge (the runes), since it is identical

⁴⁸ See the following biblical passages: *Gen.* 9/4, *Lev.* 3/17, 7/26, 17/10–14; also see: *Der Babylonische Talmud*, 12 vols., tr. by L. Goldschmidt, Berlin 1964–1967², V/I *Zebahim*, V/III *Hulin*; also see: I. Klein, "Shehitah", in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 24 vols., Chicago 1965, 20/493.

⁴⁹ See: H. Ringgren, *Israelitische Religion [Religion]*, Stuttgart 1963, pp. 157, 190.

⁵⁰ *Qur'ān*, 2/174, 5/4, 6/146, 16/116.

⁵¹ The 'Id sacrifice is clearly a secular slaughtering combined with a *sunnat* of *zakāt*; see: Muhammad 'Alī, *A Manual of Hadith*, Lahore, undated 2nd. un-revised ed., pp. 172ff. The well-known bloody street sight is a natural but ritually insignificant result of the slaughtering; see: R. F. Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah [Pilgrimage]*, 2 vols., New York 1964 (photocopy of the 'Memorial Edition', London 1893), II/217f., II/224.

⁵² No direct mention of Óðinn's blood is made although we know that he was wounded (*geiri undaðr*) and must have bled. I will return to this point in the second part of this article.

with the 'poet's mead'. An important fertility function will be discussed in the second part of this article.

The Ritual Inversion—Non-Germanic Evidence:

Now we must move on to the consideration of evidence from beyond the borders of the Germania. But first, a last Germanic example with widespread non-Germanic distribution should be mentioned: the death of Ymir. The creation of the universe from Ymir's body shows a remarkable set of parallels in ancient Indic and Iranian religion.⁵³ The ocean and the 'great flood' result from the spilling of Ymir's blood—and that blood flows from a neck wound;⁵⁴ so Ymir, probably the first and, therefore, proto-sacrifice,⁵⁵ was slaughtered in a manner similar to those mentioned above. H. Güntert⁵⁶ holds Ymir's slaughter to be identical with Óðinn's self-sacrifice;—but de Vries⁵⁷ is probably justified in rejecting this theory. These two mythological rites are hardly identical;—but they may very well be intentionally parallel in structure.

Perhaps of Germanic origin is the following well-known evidence for the ritual inversion:

Blarney (Blárna), a village in County Cork, Republic of Ireland, well known for its castle, lies in wooded country 5 miles N.W. of Cork. . . . Blarney Castle, built about 1446 by Cormac Laidhiv McCarthy, Lord of Muskerry, has walls 18 ft. thick. Below the battlements on the southern wall is the "Blarney Stone", reputed to confer eloquence on those who kiss it, an operation performed *only by hanging head downward*. Unknown in the early 18th. century, there is no legendary explanation of how the stone became invested with its remarkable properties. The word blarney has come to mean flattering or cajoling talk.⁵⁸

⁵³ See: *Vm.* 21, etc.; de Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, II/367ff.; Heiler, *Religion*, p. 472; G. Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans [Religionen]*, Stuttgart 1965, pp. 8ff.; S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature [Motif]*, 6 vols., Copenhagen 1955-1958², (Citations according to *Motif*-number) A614.

⁵⁴ Egill Skallagrímsson, *Sonatorrek*, 3/5-6; also see: *Lexikon poeticum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis*, 2nd. ed. by Finnur Jónsson, København 1932, p. 224.

⁵⁵ Evidence lies in his identity with the Aryan Yama/Yima, who is king of the underworld; see: de Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, II/364; J. Gonda, *Die Religionen Indiens [Indien]*, 2 vols., Stuttgart 1960, 1963, I/227f.

⁵⁶ H. Güntert, *Der arische Weltkönig und Heiland*, Halle (Saale) 1923, p. 386f.

⁵⁷ De Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, I/501 footnote.

⁵⁸ Anonymous, "Blarney", in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, ed. cit., 3/762; the italics are mine. Friends who have visited the site tell me that the construction of an access

The 'gift of the gab', which is won by kissing the Blarney Stone hanging in the inverted position, is a structural parallel to the poetic talent attained by drinking the 'poet's mead'.⁵⁰ The tradition's late first date of documentation does not rule out the possibility of great age. The construction of the new castle in the 15th. century is no *terminus ante quem non*;—the same stone can have performed the same function before it was built into the battlements of Blarney Castle.⁶⁰ The combination of the elements: ritual inversion, physical danger,⁶¹ and the acquisition of the 'gift' are a sturdy structural link shared by the Blarney Stone and Óðinn's self-sacrifice; the genetic link is supplied by the 'nordic presence' in Ireland beginning with the Viking Age.⁶²

to the stone allowing the kiss in uninverted position would cause no structural difficulties. The inversion is therefore traditional/ritual rather than a physical necessity. The visitor's legs are held by a castle attendant, but physical danger is imminent;—kissing the stone in any other manner is not supposed to grant the 'gift'. The entire tradition runs parallel to the kissing of the 'black stone' (*al-ḥajar al-aswad*) set in one of the corners of the *Ka'bat*. Kissing the stone is a *sunnat* of the pilgrimage;—the pilgrim must observe the ritual laws of the *iḥrām* (pilgrim's clothing, eating tabus, etc.) and may kiss the stone only after *ṭawāf* (ritual circumambulation of the *Ka'bat*). If, as has happened often enough in the past through excitement or intention, the pilgrim is thought to have desecrated the stone, he is almost certain to be put to death immediately;—so the element of imminent danger is present. See: Muḥammad 'Alī, *A Manual of Hadith*, pp. 232–251; Burton, *Pilgrimage*, II/164–169.

⁵⁰ *Snorra-Edda*, p. 85. Similar is the acquisition of the 'gift of the gab' by drinking/eating in the case of Ericus (*Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, ed. cit., p. 110); see: J. Fleck, *Die Wissensbegegnung in der altgermanischen Religion*, pp. 59ff. This hero will interest us in another context shortly.

⁶⁰ Another example of a stone which preserves its function when moved is the 'Stone of Scone', which plays an important role in the English coronation ceremony. The stone was used earlier in Scotland in the same function;—it is now kept under the 'coronation chair' in the Confessor's Chapel of Westminster Abbey. An evidence of its functional vitality lies in the fact that it was stolen in 1950 by Scottish nationalists, clearly in the intention of rendering any further non-Stuart coronations invalid for Scotland; see: Anonymous, "Westminster", in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, ed. cit., 23/540.

⁶¹ Parallel in the elements of physical danger and intended result is the concept of sleeping on the grave of a dead poet in order to acquire the 'gift'; see: H. R. Ellis, *The Road to Hel*, Cambridge 1942, p. 108f.

⁶² The city of Cork (Chorcarghe) was founded by Scandinavians;—for centuries it remained an independent nordic city-state ruling over its immediate hinterland

The *Mahābhārata* provides us with three passages, describing two separate examples of the ritual inversion:

1. *Mahābhārata*, I/13; repeated in I/45

Jaratkāru sees a vision showing his ancestors hanging head downwards by a rope over an abyss;—they are emaciated due to hunger, and a rat is seen gnawing on the rope. Jaratkāru, the last of his clan, is compared to the rope.⁶³ By means of this vision, Jaratkāru's ancestors convince him to provide for the continued existence of their blood line.⁶⁴

2. *Mahābhārata*, I/30

The bird Garuḍa, the mead-thief of the parallel Indic tradition,⁶⁵ breaks a branch off a giant banyan tree. The act is unintentional;—he notices that holy men are hanging head downwards from the branch, performing an act of penance.⁶⁶ Garuḍa saves the ascetics.⁶⁷

In the second example, we are not faced with a parable but with the description of a ritual act;—unfortunately, the purpose of the penance is not documented. In any event, it falls into the category of *tapas*, for which Penzer considers the following rigors typical:

. . . fasting for great lengths of time; lying surrounded by fires, with the burning sun overhead; hanging upside down from a tree or remaining standing on the head for long periods; . . .⁶⁸

(Blarney lies only five miles from Cork!) ; see: S. H. Shearman, "Cork", in *Encyclo-pædia Britannica*, ed. cit., 6/500.

⁶³ A similar parable (a white and a black mouse gnaw on the life-sustaining roots) utilizing hanging but without inversion appears in Burzōē's introduction to the Persian collection preserved best in 'Abd-'ullāh 'ibn Muqaffa' 's *Kitāb Kalīla wa Dimna*; see: G. Widengren, *Iranische Geisteswelt*, Baden-Baden 1961, pp. 94f., 106; Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Le livre de Kalīla et Dimna*, tr. by A. Miquel, Paris 1957, p. 47.

⁶⁴ See: *The Mahabharata*, 12 vols., tr. by Pratap Chandra Roy, Calcutta, 2nd. undated ed., I/60f., I/107.

⁶⁵ *The Mahabharata*, ed. cit., pp. 87ff.

⁶⁶ But also see: Somadeva, *Kathā Sarit Sāgara* [Somadeva], 10 vols., tr. by C. H. Tawney, ed. by N. M. Penzer, London 1924–1928, I/144, who has the holy men sitting under the tree.

⁶⁷ *The Mahabharata*, ed. cit., I/82.

⁶⁸ Somadeva, I/79; for a discussion of *tapas* between fires (parallel to the *Grm.*, the *Hálfs saga* passage cited above, etc.) see: H. Oldenberg, *Die Religion des Veda* [*Veda*], Stuttgart and Berlin 1923³⁻⁴, pp. 401ff.; also see Thompson, *Motif Q522.6* (Thompson includes the Tawney/Penzer edition of Somadeva in his bibliography of materials covered (I/13), but the examples of inverted hanging cited above appear neither under *Motif Q522* nor *J162*.)

In a tale contained in Somadeva's *Kathā Sarit Sāgara*⁶⁹ Devadatta is able to elicit help from the god Śiva by performing similar penances. To begin with, Devadatta gains 'a perfect knowledge of the sciences'; then he wins the daughter of King Suśarman, Śrī, by craft.⁷⁰ Devadatta does not become king himself—but Suśarman assigns the throne to Mahīdhara, Devadatta's son by Śrī. This provides us with our first concrete documentation of the formula: *tapas* → *numinous knowledge* → *throne*.

The formula is present even more explicitly in a further tale in

⁶⁹ Somadeva, I/78–85.

⁷⁰ Here once again attention must be called to the figure of Ericus in Saxo;—also he wins his bride, Gunwara, from her brother, Frotho, by craft; see: *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, ed. cit., pp. 117f. Later Ericus wins Sweden and neighboring territories for Frotho;—in return, Frotho establishes Ericus as king of that area, but retains tribute rights:

Quippe Suetliam, Wermiam atque insulas Solis opera sua Frothonis adiectas imperio nuntiabat. Quem mox Frotho devictarum ab eo gentium regem constituit ac præterea Helsingiam ei cum utraque Lappia, Finniam quoque et Estiam annuo stipendiorum iure contribuit. Nemo ante ipsum Suetlicorum regum Erici nomine censebatur, . . . (ed. cit., p. 135)

Ericus dies after Frotho, and his throne passes on to his son, Haldanus. No further mention of tribute is made, but when Haldanus has difficulty defending his kingdom, he seeks help from Frotho's son, Fridlevus:

Eodem tempore Ericus, qui Suetlicæ præfecturam gerebat, morbo exanimatus est. Cuius filius Haldanus paterna procuratione junctus, cum duodecim fratrum Norvagiæ oriundorum crebris congressibus tereretur, nec oppressioni vindicta suppeteret, spe capessendæ opis Fridlevi tunc Rusciæ consistentis copiam profugio petivit. (ed. cit., p. 143)

Although the wording here once again suggests a dependent throne, it is nevertheless clear that Ericus established a ruling dynasty, partially based on his success in the field no doubt—but essentially due to his abilities characterised in the nickname *disertus*. It must be noted that Ericus received this 'gift' by eating the portion of the food colored by the venom of the white snake:

Suspexit præterea tres colubras superne tenui reste depensas, ex quarum ore proflua tabes guttatim humorem epulo ministrabat. Duæ quippe colore picæ erant, tertia squamis albida videbatur, reliquis modico eminentius pensa. Hæc nexum in cauda gestabat, cum ceteræ immisso ventri junculo tenerentur. (ed. cit., p. 110)

In the light of the evidence presented in this article, I read this last line to mean that the white snake hung in inverted position, whereas the other two did not. Therefore, since—despite many pattern divergencies—the elements of inverted hanging, the poetic gift, marriage to a princess by craft, and subsequent rule are present, I believe that Ericus must be accorded a position in the cast of our topos.

Somadeva's collection.⁷¹ In a previous life King Ajara performed *tapas*;—he speaks:

*. . . you saw there a skeleton on a banyan-tree; know that that is my former body. I hung there in old time by my feet and in that way performed asceticism, until I dried up my body and abandoned it. . . . So it is owing to the might of that asceticism, my friend, that recollection of my former birth and knowledge and empire have been bestowed on me.*⁷²

In the Indic world of rebirth and reward or punishment according to *karma*, the death and rebirth of Ajara are identical with an initiation. The future king must suffer and 'die' in order to be reborn into a higher ritual order. His recollection of his past life, in itself a sign of divine grace, provides a continuity between previous and present lives. As a 'reborn one' Ajara receives numinous knowledge and, consequently, the throne.

We must concern ourselves with one further text from Somadeva, as he too provides us with a version of the famous complex known, in reference to its frame tale, as the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*.⁷³ Trivikramasena is an *avatar* (hypostasis) of the god Śiva;—due to his 'knowledge-confrontation' with the *vetāla*, in his next rebirth he becomes emperor of the Vidyādhara.⁷⁴ But here we have a new twist: it is the *vetāla* and not the hero, Trivikramasena, who hangs from the tree. And it is the evil magician Kṣāntiśīla, who wanted to make use of Trivikramasena's ability to withstand the *vetāla*'s test and consequently become emperor of the Vidyādhara, who dies. Nevertheless, the standard elements of the topos are all present. It should however be stressed that nowhere in the many repetitions of the frame tale does Somadeva tell us that the *vetāla* hangs in inverted position. This motif must be supplied from comparison with other versions of the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*:

1. Tamil Version

The Brāhman instantly assumed the form of a Vetāla, and was transported

⁷¹ Somadeva, III/243–249.

⁷² Somadeva, III/248; for a basic discussion of *tapas* and its efficacy (among other goals) "Offenbarung geheimer Weisheit zu erlangen", to comprehend the "Prozeß der dichterischen Inspiration", "Macht zu erlangen", etc., see: Gonda, *Indien*, I/183ff.

⁷³ Somadeva, VI/165–VII/125.

⁷⁴ Somadeva, VII/123f.

*into the midst of a wilderness, where he remained suspended, head downwards, on a Muruca tree.*⁷⁵

2. Hindi / Marāṭhī Version

*It happened that he one day went out into the jungle and saw—what?—a devotee suspended head-downwards from a tree, . . .*⁷⁶

These examples document the ritually inverted hanging for India. The element of fasting is implicit in the concept of *tapas*;—on the other hand, the element of the blood-sacrifice is missing. As I intend to show later, blood played an extremely small role in Indic ritual. A new factor is the formula illustrating the path to the throne by way of the initiation and the resulting acquisition of numinous knowledge.⁷⁷

A last Indic tale⁷⁸ provides a degenerate form of the topos: a necessary text bridge to similar European material. A prince is sent out on a quest for a certain piece of jewelry;—he is structurally an initiate. As one of the many complications he experiences on his quest, he is hanged in inverted position on a fig tree.⁷⁹ In a contamination typical of later Indic material, this trial is ascribed to the workings of *karma*. In a previous life the prince ordered one of his servants to walk bare-foot through a patch of thorns. The servant refused—and was punished by being hanged on a fig tree in inverted position.⁸⁰ The parallel punishment of the prince sounds fishy: hanging in inverted position has remained a well-known form of *tapas* up to the present day;—a punishment, which

⁷⁵ Somadeva, VI/232.

⁷⁶ Somadeva, VI/234; for repetitions, see: VI/234, VI/236, VI/239.

⁷⁷ For a discussion of evidence supporting the formula in the Germanic area see: J. Fleck, "Konr—Óttarr—Geirroðr: A Knowledge Criterion for Succession to the Germanic Sacred Kingship", in *Scandinavian Studies* 42 (1970), pp. 39–49.

⁷⁸ "Dharmatschandras Auszug aus der Geschichte von Malajasundari" in *Indische Märchen*, ed. and tr. by J. Hertel, Düsseldorf and Köln 1962, pp. 187–273.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 238, 242. The ritual significance of the fig tree in India is discussed in the same volume, p. 8; due to its "Treue", it is "immer saftreich, immer voll Milchsafte"—an attribute which will take on further importance in the second half of this article.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 267:

Bindet ihn doch mit den Füßen an dem Feigenbaum, dass sie die Erde nicht berühren und er unter den Dornen nicht zu leiden habe.

The position must be inverted: firstly, due to the inversion in the parallel punishment, and secondly, since this is the most logical reading of the passage.

puts the victim into a ritual position used to gain power, is self-contradictory. It seems certain that this tale misunderstood the implication of the ritually inverted hanging of the prince, later to succeed to the throne, and felt obligated to supply a rational explanation for this important episode in the story.

A similar degeneration of the topos is evidenced in a Hungarian tale.⁸¹ The hero is tested by the leader of a gang of robbers: his task is to steal the horse and gold of a rich merchant. In order to trick the merchant, the initiate (the test obviously is an initiation into the robber band) hangs himself several times on the merchant's path:

*. . . und hängte sich wieder an einem Baum auf. Er baumelte mit den Füßen oben und mit dem Kopfe unten.*⁸²

At first, the merchant rides by him. But the next time, the merchant decides to rest at a pool of water under the tree and descends from his horse. While resting, he is struck by the thought that he could go back and check if the man he saw hanging previously were still hanging there where he saw him.⁸³ Of course, the merchant leaves his horse and gold behind, the hero 'unhangs' himself and makes off with the booty, thus passing the test.⁸⁴ The tale, which started off as *Type 552*⁸⁵ is then contaminated with *Type 950*, but not without first making a short sortie into *Type 676*. The episode in question seems best at home in *Type 1525* (in particular *1525d*); the bridge to *Types 950* and *676* is, of course, the thief they share in common. Our motif, *K341.3: Thief distracts attention by apparently hanging (stabbing) himself*, is typical for *Type 1525d*—but without inversion. The hero is a prince, who wins a princess by craft. He uses the inverted hanging in his initiation to thieftom and

⁸¹ "Der Schwager von Rabe, Bär und Fisch", in *Ungarische Volksmärchen, neue Folge*, tr. by E. Róna-Sklarek, Leipzig 1909, pp. 167–186.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 181:

Er dachte bei sich, er wollte zurückgehen und nachsehen, ob jener Mensch noch dort sei, den er vorhin hatte hängen sehen.

This peculiar remark must illustrate the merchant's surprise over the similarity of the two 'hanged' men.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁸⁵ Tale 'types' are cited according to: S. Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale* [*Type*] (= *FFC* 184), Helsinki 1961²; 'motifs' according to Thompson's *Motif-Index*, see: footnote 53 above.

continues in this new profession until he wins the princess and thereby doubles his realm. The dependence on the structure of the second Soma-deva tale (King Ajara) is quite obvious and this explains the functionality of the inverted hanging here.

A further example of the formula can be found in a Breton tale.⁸⁶ This one clearly belongs to *Type 671*;—except that the hero does not become king or emperor, but pope. Christic also does not learn the 'language of the animals' as most heroes of this *Type* do.⁸⁷ As a boy he is diligent in school, but his knowledge hardly surpasses the bounds of the normal.⁸⁸ In this *Type* the hero is supposed to be killed;—but the servant is a 'compassionate executioner':⁸⁹

*Der Diener tötete das Kind nicht, sondern band es mit einer Schnur an einen Baumzweig, die Füße nach oben und den Kopf nach unten.*⁹⁰

It is only after this point in the narrative that Christic shows his supernatural knowledge;—it seems, judging from the examples already cited, that these new powers are the result of his inverted hanging. *Type 671* demands that the hero be selected for his throne as the result of a 'sign';⁹¹—this obviates the episode we would expect: Christic proves his right to the throne by a display of his supernatural knowledge. Nevertheless, this variant of *Type 671* must belong to our complex;—how else can one explain the inverted hanging?

To move on to Arabic tradition; as strange as it may seem, a *hadith* ascribed to 'Ā'īshah in aṭ-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr*⁹² combines the elements of the ritually inverted hanging and the acquisition of numinous knowledge:

⁸⁶ "Die Geschichte von Christic, der Papst in Rom wurde", in *Bretonische Märchen*, ed. and tr. by R. Soupault, Düsseldorf and Köln 1959, pp. 122–132.

⁸⁷ *Motif D217*; also compare *Types 517* and *Type 673*, which brings us back to Saxo's Ericus.

⁸⁸ A certain supernatural protection is evident in the use of *Motif N811*; rarely used in *Types 671* or *517*;—the supernatural godfather is a blind motif.

⁸⁹ *Motif K512ff.*; compare: *Motifs S10, H105.2*.

⁹⁰ *Bretonische Märchen*, ed. cit., p. 125. This time the inversion is mentioned—but not the hanging. But his being tied onto a branch (*Baumzweig*) and not the trunk (*Baumstamm*) in inverted position leaves little doubt but that he was hanging.

⁹¹ *Motif H41.3*; the 'candle test'.

⁹² Re: *Qur'ān*, 2/96; the Commentary of aṭ-Ṭabarī (ca. A.D. 838–923) is considered extremely dependable;—we may assume that he granted this tradition credibility and recorded it faithfully.

*And lo, there were two men, hung up by their feet, and they said, "What has brought you?" I said, "I would learn magic".*⁹³

The transmission of so unorthodox a story in so orthodox a work can only be the result of the tradition being connected with a figure of 'Ā'īśah's importance.

Several sources attest to a variant of our topos in which, instead of being hanged in inverted position, the initiate is suspended in a sack. The tale *Die Rübe*⁹⁴ from the collection of the Grimm brothers can serve as a paradigmatic example. It consists of two sections; the first, *Type 1689A*, is of no interest to us here. The second part is based centrally on *Motif K842*, also used in the *Unibos*-tale (*Type 1535*). In *Die Rübe* we have a clear-cut example of the new variant: hanging in a sack to gain wisdom:

*. . . ich sitze hier oben im Sack der Weisheit; in kurzer Zeit habe ich grosse Dinge gelernt, dagegen sind alle Schulen ein Wind, um ein Weniges, so werde ich ausgelernt haben, herabsteigen und weiser seyn als alle Menschen.*⁹⁵

This variant is documented for southern Germany circa 1200 A.D.⁹⁶ by the Latin *Rapularius*.⁹⁷ It is true that no actual wisdom is gained in this variant;—but the idea of hanging in a sack for that purpose is in itself so bizarre that it must hold our attention. A combination comparing the sack-variant with *Hávamál* 138 goes as far back as the Grimms.⁹⁸ Bolte and Polívka⁹⁹ add further arguments and R. Pipping¹⁰⁰ suggests an

⁹³ See: Somadeva, VI/65.

⁹⁴ *Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm [KHM.]*, ed. by F. Panzer, Wiesbaden (undated), pp. 509–511.

⁹⁵ *KHM.*, p. 511.

⁹⁶ See: K. Langosch, "Rapularius", in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, 5 vols., ed. by K. Langosch, vol. V: *Nachträge*, Berlin 1955, columns 927–931, in particular, column 929.

⁹⁷ *Rapularius*, in *Waltharius—Ruodlieb—Märchenepen [Waltharius]*, ed. and tr. by K. Langosch, Basel and Stuttgart: 1956², lines 325–440.

⁹⁸ *KHM.*, notes to "Die Rübe", p. 554.

⁹⁹ J. Bolte & G. Polívka, *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, 5 vols., Hildesheim 1963², III/192f.; also see: *Motif J162*

¹⁰⁰ R. Pipping, "Oden i galgen" in *Studier i nordisk filologi* 18/2 (1927), pp. 1–13.

interesting parallel in *Hávamdl* 134.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, true to my argument, I must call attention to the fact that hanging in a sack in no way excludes the inversion;—once the critical eye is trained to recognise this feature, otherwise ornamentative factors gain significance:

Also liess der Schüler ihn herunter, band den Sack auf und befreite ihn, dann rief er selber: "Nun zieh' mich recht geschwind hinauf", und wollt' geradestehend in den Sack einschreiten. "Halt!" sagte der andere, "so geht's nicht an", packte ihn beim Kopf, steckte ihn rücklings in den Sack, schnürte zu und zog den Jünger der Weisheit am Strick baumwärts und schwengelte ihn in der Luft: . . .¹⁰²

The words *beim Kopf* and *rücklings* in contrast with *geradestehend* attest to the inversion stated explicitly in a Scottish tale of the same *Type*:

. . . er packte den Schäfer bei den Schenkeln und steckte ihn kopfüber in das Fass.¹⁰³

The parallel passage of the *Rapularius* contains a similar feature:

Deponensque caput hominis talosque supinans . . .¹⁰⁴

This inversion calls the position of the *ŷætus in utero* back to mind;—thereby also explaining the symbolism of the sack. The entire complex is, once again, an example of knowledge gained within the framework of an initiation leading to a rebirth. Before leaving the sack-variant, I would like to cross-reference with a degenerate sub-variant contained in the Mongolian *Siddhi-Kür* collection and in the Tibetan *Stories of the dead Ngo.rub.čan*, both direct descendents of the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*. In their shared tradition, the hero must transport the corpse in a special sack,¹⁰⁵—and since the corpse is a source of wisdom, we have “wisdom in a sack” once again.

¹⁰¹ The passage reads:

*opt er gott, þat er gamlir qveða;
opt ór scorpom belg scillin orð koma,
þeim er hangir með hdm
oc scollir með scrdm
oc vðfir með vilmggom.*

¹⁰² *KHM*, p. 511.

¹⁰³ “Die drei Witwen”, in *Schottische Volksmärchen*, collected and ed. by H. Aitken & R. Michaelis-Jena, tr. by U. Clemen, Düsseldorf and Köln 1965, p. 322. The variants: Knowledge/Wealth and Sack/Barrel are structurally identical.

¹⁰⁴ *Rapularius*, line 421 (*Waltharius*, p. 330).

¹⁰⁵ Somadeva, VI/245–247; *Märchen aus Tibet*, ed. and tr. by H. Hoffmann,

Although the motif of ritually inverted hanging performs a function in the unified corpus of evidence cited above, it also appears as a free unit in extremely varied complexes. In some cases, the complete independence of the complex from our formula is obvious;—in others, a possible genetic relationship may have become obscured by contrafunctional motif displacement (*Zweckentfremdung des Motivs*).

A practical/mechanical use of the motif is offered by Stith Thompson in a variant of *Type 507C*: the princess is hanged in inverted position in order to force the snakes, which have possessed her, to escape by her mouth.¹⁰⁰ A difficult inverted hanging to categorise appears in the *Rāmāyaṇa*:¹⁰⁷ Triśaṅku reaches the heavens, but is cast out again head downwards. Viśvamitra assigns Triśaṅku a place in the heavens—but in inverted position. Exactly what is intended (perhaps an ætiological explanation?) is hardly clear.¹⁰⁸ Another example from the *Rāmāyaṇa*¹⁰⁹ is equally difficult: in a dream Bharata sees his father, hanging in the inverted position and smeared with filth. No further details are offered, but in this passage we may well be dealing with a case parallel to that of Jaratkāru, discussed above. Dante's concept of the cosmos explains the inversion of Lucifer¹¹⁰ quite well, but we must consider the possibility that the concept of general inversion in the underworld (as well as that of "derogatory inversion") was a contributing factor. I have no idea

Düsseldorf and Köln 1965, p. 53f. Also of interest is a Mongolian *Vetālapañcaviṅśatī*-variant, *Mongolische Volksmärchen*, ed. and tr. by W. Heissig, Düsseldorf and Köln 1963, pp. 25–30, in which the *vetāla* is replaced by a magic bird (possible influence of the *Tuti-Nameh*?). Here, where the sack would serve a functional purpose, it is missing.

¹⁰⁰ S. Thompson, *The Folktale*, New York 1967 (reprint of the 2nd. ed.), p. 52, but unfortunately without a source citation.

¹⁰⁷ *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, 3 vols., tr. by Hari Prasad Shastri, London 1962², 1957, 1959, I/120f.

¹⁰⁸ Triśaṅku becomes the constellation of the 'Southern Cross'; see: M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Oxford 1956 (reprint of the ed. of 1899'), p. 460. I have not been able to establish which source is primary. If the idea of the inversion arose from the appearance of the constellation, we have a simple ætiological legend;—if, on the other hand, the myth was primary, the significance of the inversion remains open to question.

¹⁰⁹ *Rāmāyaṇa*, ed. cit., I/331.

¹¹⁰ *Divina Commedia: Inferno*, 34/88–126.

how to fit in the execution of twelve persons who, according to Herodotus,¹¹¹ were buried alive in inverted position:

Τότε μὲν ταῦτα ἐξεργάσατο, ἐτέρωθι δὲ Περσέων ὁμοίους τοῖσι πρώτοισι δωδεκα ἐπ' οὐδεμιῆ αἰτίῃ ἀξιοχρέω ἐλὼν ζῶοντας ἐπὶ κεφαλὴν κατώρυξε.

The number of victims and the inversion give this execution a unique character and I agree with Widengren¹¹² that a ritual element is present—but can not suggest anything more explicit.

We can introduce the category of 'derogatory inversion' with the familiar inverted hanging of the corpses of Benito Mussolini and Clara Petacci in Milano after their being shot in Dongo.¹¹³ I would like to add the following typical examples:

1. In a Chinese tale,¹¹⁴ people are hanged on hooks in inverted position in hell, who sold merchandise with false weight during their lives.

2. In an Arabic tale,¹¹⁵ the following execution is ordered:

. . . *Gharib called for his brother Ajib and commanded to hang him. So Sahim brought hooks of iron and driving them into the tendons of Ajib's heels, hung him over the gate; and Gharib bade them shoot him; so they riddled him with arrows, till he was like unto a porcupine.*

3. In 'Ināyatu-'llāh's *Bahār-i Daniš*,¹¹⁶ the motif is used as follows:

Here an adulterous wife has been discovered by her husband, but when asleep she suspends him head downwards from a tree and proceeds to carry on an orgy with her lover in full view of the unfortunate husband.¹¹⁷

But by far the most ticklish example of inverted hanging is that of the legendary inverted crucifixion of the apostle Peter. This begs the question of the crucifixion of Jesus and his own paralleling of this event

¹¹¹ Cited according to: Herodotus, *Historien*, ed. by J. Feix, München 1963, p. 392.

¹¹² See: Widengren, *Religionen*, p. 130f.

¹¹³ See: M. W. Salvadori & D. M. Smith, "Mussolini, Benito", in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, ed. cit., 15/1101.

¹¹⁴ *Chinesische Märchen*, tr. by R. Wilhelm, Düsseldorf and Köln 1958, p. 119.

¹¹⁵ *'Alf Laylah wa Laylah—The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, 16 vols., tr. by R. F. Burton, private printing (no place, no date), VII/66.

¹¹⁶ J. Scott, *Bahar-Danush; or, Garden of Knowledge. An Oriental Romance translated from the Persic of Einaiut Oollah*, 3 vols., Shrewsbury 1799, I/78ff. (not accessible to me).

¹¹⁷ Somadeva, VII/214.

with the slaughter of the *Pesaḥ*-lamb¹¹⁸—a problem of scope which far exceeds that of this investigation.

Inversion and Initiation—Zimmer's Theory

The complex of ritually inverted hanging and the initiation can be developed a step further by considering Heinrich Zimmer's interpretation of the 'picture-series' known as the "major arcana" of the *tarot* card deck.¹¹⁹ According to his theory, the twenty-one cards of this numbered sequence represent the stages on an initiation.¹²⁰ The twelfth card is entitled *le pendu*;—it shows a man hanging by one foot from a gallows, head downward.¹²¹ The thirteenth card, *la mort*, shows death as a skeleton, wielding a scythe. Zimmer thinks these two cards represent two separate and distinct 'deaths', which form a part of the initiation: the thirteenth card represents physical death, but the twelfth the 'death' of

¹¹⁸ On the one hand, the Petrus-Legend is old and well documented; on the other, the story sounds rather improbable. It seems hardly likely that Rome would have granted the wish of a leader of a band of religious revolutionaries causing considerable trouble at the time in regards to an exceptional form of execution, which would make him stand out among his supporters. Furthermore, if Peter succeeded in having himself crucified in inverted position as the legend would have it because he did not consider himself worthy to share Jesus' form of execution, we would expect to hear that the entire Christian community followed suit—but inverted crucifixion is limited to Peter. Once the bonds of traditional thinking have been relaxed, it would be easy to accept Jesus' crucifixion in the inverted position. The communion contains the symbolic drinking of blood (forbidden in Judaism), supported by the comparison with the *pesaḥ*-lamb and the wounding on the cross. Crucifixion between thieves is a parallel to the motif of 'social death' to be discussed in the next paragraph. Martyr-death, resurrection from the cave-grave (vulva symbol), and coronation as King of Heaven all fit the complex. It must not be forgotten that the actual mechanics of crucifixion were quite different from what most religious pictures would have us believe. The upright post was firmly anchored in the ground; the victim was attached to the cross-bar and then hauled up onto the upright post—a process which could with ease have been accomplished in inverted position. This thought, I am afraid, is so bizarre that it will hardly find many supporters.

¹¹⁹ H. Zimmer, *The King and the Corpse*, ed. by J. Campbell, New York 1960, pp. 177ff. If Zimmer had only looked beyond the classical versions of the *Velāla-pañcaviṃśati*, he would have noted the inverted hanging and certainly seen a parallel to the *pendu* of the *tarot*-deck.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 178ff.

¹²¹ For an illustration see: Zimmer, *op. cit.*, opposite p. 167.

“social disgrace on the social gallows”.¹²² My understanding of the significance of these two cards, accepting the theory that the “major arcana” does symbolise an initiation, must differ from Zimmer’s in the light of the material presented above. Inverted hanging is not in itself lethal;—but the standard form of the initiation does demand a ritual death. If this death in the *Hávamál*-passage under discussion is represented by the line: *fell ec aþr þaðan*—as I believe it does—then death follows the inverted hanging there just as it does in the *tarot*’s “major arcana”.

Recapitulation

Up to this point, I have presented evidence for the theory that in his self-sacrifice in the *Hávamál* Óðinn hung in inverted position. I have accepted the well-known theory that this self-sacrifice represented an initiation, but have drawn attention to the ‘lifting up’ of the runes as a symbolization of Óðinn’s acquisition of numinous knowledge. Furthermore, I have presented material supporting the formula that the acquisition of such knowledge within the framework of an initiation may lead to the throne—in the case of a god, obviously a ‘ritual kingship’.

In the second half of this article, I intend to illustrate a further highly significant feature of Óðinn’s self-sacrifice, namely: the overwhelming sexual symbolism involved. After discussing the cosmic import of this feature, I will attempt to show how and why the entire ritual complex led to Óðinn’s supreme position in the Germanic pantheon.

(To be continued in *SS*, Summer, 1971.)

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 179.