

# CHAPTER TWO

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## ASPECTS OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SCANDINAVIA DURING THE EARLY GERMANIC IRON AGE

### 2.1 TRANSITION TO THE EARLY GERMANIC IRON AGE

#### 2.1.1 CHANGING PATTERNS OF WEALTH DEPOSITION

During Scandinavia's RIA, the primary form of wealth deposition had been in burials. With the appearance of strong chieftains and their attendant warrior-bands during the ERIA there was a concurrent growth in the number of weapon graves demonstrating their occupants' places in the hierarchy. This rank-ordering of burials disappeared towards the end of the LRIA, and indeed weapon burials in general decreased during that period until only the very richest graves seem to have contained weapons. Except in northern and eastern parts of Jutland, these high-status graves stood apart from the communal cemeteries.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, the deposition of hoards became increasingly common at the opening of the EGIA. Regarding Danish hoard finds, Hedeager distinguished three different possible kinds of hoards.<sup>2</sup> Two are archaeologically indistinguishable, consisting of a mix of artefact types: these hoards may have been buried for storage or safe-keeping, but equally some may have been buried as offerings. It is even possible that these two motives might have been conflated—a hoard buried for safe-keeping in this world might have benefited its owner in the afterlife if they did not recover it before their death. It is, however, difficult to draw many further conclusions about these two possible hoard groups. The third possible hoard type contains larger hoards with remarkably consistent and distinct artefact sets (which themselves fall into various sub-categories: neck-ring hoards, arm-ring hoards, and bracteate/glass bead/brooch/finger-ring hoards). Hoards of this type are generally found in close geographical association with one another, though there are local variations in content. These hoards are most prominent around central places in south-eastern Fyn (Gudme), south-western Sjælland and Lolland (Stevns/Himlingøje, Neble), and north-eastern and central Jutland (Stentinget), and it may be that they were used in public rituals at such sites.

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<sup>1</sup>Hedeager, *Societies*, pp. 99, 134-35, 151.

<sup>2</sup>Hedeager, *Societies*, pp. 74-76.

### 2.1.2 SOCIAL CHANGE REFLECTED IN WEALTH DEPOSITION

The marked shift from the investment of wealth in ‘princely burials’ to votive offerings, if correctly identified, suggests that an important ideological change was taking place in society. It has been postulated that the élite were now sufficiently well-established that they could turn from wealth deposition which promoted their own status to wealth deposition that emphasised their relationship with the gods and ancestors as mediators on the community’s behalf.<sup>3</sup>

It may also be that the relative importance of chieftains waned during the EGIA. In this period, the Roman military had disappeared, and chieftains’ primary role may have been to serve as community leaders for the consolidated farmsteads and villages which had emerged during the preceding period. The institution of communal votive offerings might suggest a shift of focus away from the élite and towards the community at large, perhaps partially in response to the formation of new, larger, tribal confederations.

Such interpretations may also be supported by evidence concerning changing art styles during the EGIA. Burials in the RIA had most prominently featured imported Roman objects, but locally produced artefacts of Germanic style dominate the hoards of the EGIA.<sup>4</sup> Whereas the élite of the RIA demonstrated status through association with imported Roman objects, in the EGIA items offered to the gods and ancestors were being produced by the local community. The use of native, non-Roman styles on these artefacts may also be significant, perhaps suggesting a conscious effort to establish a native identity.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.2 EARLY SCANDINAVIAN TRADE & CULT-CENTRES

### 2.2.1 NEW CENTRES OF WEALTH IN THE DANISH ISLANDS

Centres from which goods were redistributed featured strongly during both the LRIA (exemplified by Stevns/Himlingøje) and the EGIA (exemplified by Gudme). As discussed in §1.5, the situation in the LRIA is far from clear, but it seems at least possible that some kind of overlordship (perhaps held by more than one person) could have exercised authority over a centre such as Stevns/Himlingøje; the prevalence of Roman prestige goods and the possible Roman interest in maintaining a client kingship in southern Scandinavia may be a factor in such an analysis. The third and fourth centuries saw considerable disruptions affecting Europe’s social and political map, however, and Roman influences on Scandinavia waned accordingly.

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<sup>3</sup>Hedeager, *Societies*, pp. 80-01.

<sup>4</sup>Hedeager, *Societies*, p. 80.

<sup>5</sup>Hines, ‘Cultural’, pp. 80-81.

Gudme, on Fyn a few miles from the coast (where another site, Lundeberg, seems to have served as its port), was attracting much of Stevns/Himlingøje's wealth by the end of the ERIA. Gudme's roots lay in the ERIA, but its growth began after upheavals in the Germanic world at the end of the second century. By the end of the third century, Gudme represented the new 'port of entry' for Roman goods into Scandinavia.<sup>6</sup> During the EGIA, Gudme flourished as a site of considerable importance. Many deposits of Roman gold and silver, some of the richest in the Germanic world, have been found in its vicinity.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, archaeologists discovered the remains of an enormous building at Gudme measuring approximately 47 metres by 9 metres.<sup>8</sup>

Lundeberg does not seem to have had buildings more complex than simple huts or booths, though there is evidence for a wide variety of craft activities and trade in Roman imports. The earliest presence dates from c. 200, as Gudme's to rise to prominence began, and use of the site seems to have intensified during the fourth century. Lundeberg has yielded some precious metal finds, though most such goods may have been destined for Gudme itself. The quantity of import trade at Lundeberg appears to have slackened in the fifth century, tailing off in the early sixth century, though limited activity persisted until the end of the seventh century.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to Stevns/Himlingøje, the Gudme complex flourished primarily during the EGIA when wealth deposition practices (§2.1.1) suggest social focus on the general community rather than on its chieftains and their associates. Though Gudme's wealth reflects the importation of Roman precious metals, the objects found in Gudme's hoards are largely of local craftsmanship—Roman gold has been reworked in Germanic styles. These differences suggest that Stevns/Himlingøje and Gudme may have differed subtly but significantly in function.

### 2.2.2 EARLY GERMANIC CULTS & CULT-CENTRES

Scholars arguing for the establishment of a strong Danish kingdom-state in the early centuries AD have naturally seized on the rich and remarkable finds from Gudme as supporting evidence; like Stevns/Himlingøje, Gudme has been interpreted as the seat of overlords who controlled the distribution of prestige-goods throughout Southern Scandinavia. Klavs Randsborg, however, has cautioned that such interpretations may be

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<sup>6</sup>Per O. Thomsen, 'Lundeberg: A Trading Centre from the 3rd-7th Century AD', in *AoMS*, pp. 133-44 (p. 133); Lund Hansen, *Römischer*, pp. 216-38.

<sup>7</sup>Todd, pp 98-99.

<sup>8</sup>P.O. Nielsen and Palle Ø. Sørensen, 'Jernalderhal udgravet i Gudme', *Nyt fra Nationalmuseet*, 59 (1993), 4-5.

<sup>9</sup>Per O. Thomsen, 'Lundeberg—an Early Port of Trade in South-East Funen', in *AoGaL*, pp. 23-29; Thomsen, 'Trading Centre', pp. 135-36; Per O. Thomsen, 'Lundeberg—en handelsplads gennem 600 år', in *Samfundsorganisation*, pp. 25-32.

anachronistic,<sup>10</sup> and moreover Ole Crumlin-Pedersen has argued that they do not fit with evidence put forward by scholars like Björn Myhre and Jørn Lønstrup, suggesting that EGIA Scandinavia may have been divided amongst various independent local chieftaincies.<sup>11</sup> An alternative interpretation views Gudme and similar sites as cult-centres to which people from all over southern Scandinavia might have brought offerings in exchange for ceremonial objects and where they could engage in more mundane trading with other pilgrims.<sup>12</sup>

The Germanic tribal confederations Tacitus and Pliny described—the Inguaeones, Herminones, and Istuaeones—are often understood as cultic leagues of some kind. Whatever kind of organisations these were, they do not seem to have survived the unrest that gripped the Germanic world at the end of the second century AD. However, traditions of one cult group Tacitus mentioned seem to have survived into the Viking Age:

Reudigni deinde et Aviones et Anglii et Varini et Eudoses et Suarines et Nuitones fluminibus aut silvis muniuntur. nec quicquam notabile in singulis, nisi quod in commune Nerthum, id est Terram matrem, colunt eamque intervenire rebus hominum, invehī populis arbitrantur. est in insula Oceani castum nemus, dicatumque in eo vehiculum, veste contextum; attingere uni sacerdoti concessum. is adesse penetrāli deam intellegit vectamque bubus feminis multa cum veneratione prosequitur. laeti tunc dies, festa loca, quaecumque adventu hospitioque dignatur. non bella ineunt, non arma sumunt; clausum omne ferrum; pax et quies tunc tantum nota, tunc tantum amata, donec idem sacerdos satiatam conversatione mortalium deam templo reddat.<sup>13</sup>

The deity-name *Nerthus* (PG \**Nerþuz*) has an exact phonological descendant in medieval ON *Njǫrðr*. There can be hardly any doubt that the two deities are linked, the fact that *Nerthus* is female and *Njǫrðr* male notwithstanding.<sup>14</sup> In *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri wrote that *Njǫrðr* married his own sister, producing Freyr and Freyja.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in *Locasenna*, Loki accuses *Njǫrðr* of fathering a child on his own sister.<sup>16</sup> Some scholars have thereby postulated that *Njǫrðr* represented the male element of a god/goddess pair, similar to that of Freyr and Freyja.<sup>17</sup> Another possibility is that as the PG *u*-stem nouns (such as \**Nerþuz*) became exclusively masculine in gender (as they had by the time of the earliest

<sup>10</sup>Klavs Randsborg, 'Gudme-Lundeborg: Interpretive Scenarios and Thoughts', in *AoGal*, pp. 209-13 (p. 209).

<sup>11</sup>Crumlin-Pedersen, 'Maritime', pp. 49-51; Lønstrup, 'Mosefund', pp. 94-95; Myhre, 'Boat houses', pp. 50, 56; Myhre, 'Chieftains', pp. 186-87. See §1.5.3.

<sup>12</sup>These two interpretations essentially form the two poles in debate of Gudme's function(s); Randsborg, 'Gudme-Lundeborg', p. 210, 212.

<sup>13</sup>*Germania*, pp. 26-27 (Chapter 40).

<sup>14</sup>There may be some Swedish place-names which used the name *Njǫrðr* in reference to a goddess rather than to a god; Elias Wessén, 'Schwedische Ortsnamen und altnordische Mythologie', *Acta Philologica Scandinavica*, 4 (1929-30), 97-115.

<sup>15</sup>*Heimskringla*, I, 13.

<sup>16</sup>*Locasenna*, in Neckel-Kuhn, pp. 96-110 (p. 103, v. 36).

<sup>17</sup>Jan de Vries suggested that a female *Nerthus* was originally paired with a male precursor of *Skaði*; de Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, II, 338.

sources mentioning Njǫrðr), the deity's sex had changed to match her/his grammatical gender.<sup>18</sup> Another possible explanation is that Tacitus simply misunderstood his information, reporting a male deity as female. It has been pointed out that Tacitus' own status as a priest would have entitled him to participate in ceremonies honouring Cybele or Magna Mater which involved the lustration of wagons and cows, and that this might have led him to change a male Nerthus into a female earth deity.<sup>19</sup>

Njǫrðr does not figure prominently in the Eddas. Perhaps his importance was waning by the end of the Viking Age; the cults of his offspring, Freyr and Freyja, may have made Njǫrðr redundant.<sup>20</sup> It is also possible that Þórr's and Óðinn's cults were edging Njǫrðr's out. Nevertheless, Njǫrðr's common occurrence in records of toasts, oaths, and appeals indicate that he was once far more important than the surviving mythological material suggests, even though he is often accompanied by Freyr in these circumstances.<sup>21</sup> Snorri Sturluson wrote that Njǫrðr (along with Freyr) was appointed a *blótgoð* by Óðinn, and that Sigurðr Hlaðajarl drank to Njǫrðr (and Freyr) *til árs ok friðar*.<sup>22</sup> *Landnámabók* records an oath, to be sworn on a ring before legal actions can proceed, which includes the phrase *hjálpi mér svá Freyr ok Njǫrðr ok hinn almátteki áss*.<sup>23</sup> Egill Skallagrímsson invoked Njǫrðr (and Freyr, and Óðinn) in a *níð*-verse against Eiríkr blóðøx.<sup>24</sup> In a different poem, Egill stated that his friend Arinbjörn was granted his wealth by Njǫrðr (and Freyr), which recalls Snorri Sturluson's statement that Njǫrðr grants prayers to him for wealth in goods and land and that he can be referred to as the *fegiafa* (or *gefianda*) *gυð*.<sup>25</sup> The idiom *auðigr sem Njǫrðr* also associates the god with wealth.<sup>26</sup> Lastly, Njǫrðr's possible title *vagna gυð* strongly recalls Nerthus's wagon-borne perambulations, described by Tacitus.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>18</sup>It has been suggested that *Heimskringla* and *Locasenna* might preserve a confused memory of a time when the deity's sex was changing from female to male; R.W. Chambers, *Widsith: A Study in Old English Heroic Legend* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1912), p. 70, n. 4.

<sup>19</sup>Eve Picard, *Germanisches Sakralkönigtum?: Quellenkritische Studien zur Germania des Tacitus und zur Altnordischen Überlieferung*, Skandinavistische Arbeiten, 12 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1991), pp. 172-83.

<sup>20</sup>See §3.2.2.

<sup>21</sup>Perhaps originally Njǫrðr stood alone in such contexts, though with the rise of Freyr's cult the two gods' functions were coupled.

<sup>22</sup>*Heimskringla*, I, 13, 168; *Snorra Edda*, p. 31; *SnEdHafn*, I, 96.

<sup>23</sup>*Landnámabók*, in *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*, ed. by Jakob Benediktsson, in *Íslenzk fornrit*, 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1968), pp. 29-397 (p. 315). Much speculation attends the phrase *hinn almátteki áss*, but what is perhaps most remarkable is the juxtaposition of such a phrase beside the names of Njǫrðr and Freyr, who are not themselves Æsir, but Vanir.

<sup>24</sup>*Skjaldedigtning*, B.I, 46-47.

<sup>25</sup>*Skjaldedigtning*, B.I, 40; *Snorra Edda*, 30, 97; *SnEdHafn*, I, 92, 260.

<sup>26</sup>*Vatnsdæla saga*, in *Vatnsdæla saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Íslenzkt fornrit*, 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1939), pp. 1-131 (p. 130).

<sup>27</sup>The R manuscript (Royal Library Copenhagen, Gks 2367, 4to) of Snorri's Edda has the form *vagnagυð*, usually emended to *Vana gυð*. The W manuscript (Arnarnagæan Institute, Copenhagen, AM 242, fol.) has *vanga*, with the *g* marked for deletion by a subscript dot in a later hand; *Snorra Edda*, p. 97 n. 6 & n. to l. 16; *SnEdHafn*, I, 260 n. 12. Freyr is also associated with wagons; *Ögmundar þáttur dytts*, in *Eyfirðinga sögur*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson, *Íslensk fornrit*, 9 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1956), pp. 99-115 (pp. 111-15). See also §3.2.2 & §3.2.3.

The activity of the Nerthus cult seems to have been focused on a particular site: a holy grove on an island. Such a situation is not unique in a Germanic context. The island of Walachern, near the mouth of the Old Rhine, seems to have been a cult site of some kind as late as the eighth century.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, there are records of an island dedicated to the god called Fosite.<sup>29</sup> It is not clear where the tribes participating in the Nerthus cult lived, but the Danish islands are a strong possibility.

The large Møllegårdsmarken cemetery, in use primarily from the first to fourth centuries AD, attests to the Gudme region's sacral nature even before the third and fourth century growth.<sup>30</sup> The name *Gudme* comes from *Guðheimr*, meaning 'place/home of the gods', and there are several other religiously-oriented place-names near Gudme.<sup>31</sup> It is worth comparing this situation to that at Helgö ('Holy Island') in Lake Mälaren, which seems to have flourished in the sixth and seventh centuries, though activity appears to have begun as early as the fourth century.<sup>32</sup> Of course, identifying the Nerthus cult site which Tacitus described (assuming his description did not conflate several similar sites) is ultimately unimportant. What is important is the evidence for a cult and its central cultic place as an inter-tribal focus in southern Scandinavia.

### 2.3 CULT-CENTRE & PING AS IDEOLOGICAL FOCI

There is no contemporary documentation to tell us whether or not a non-royal cult-centre existed at Gudme during the EGIA.<sup>33</sup> It is, however, worth considering later evidence about other Germanic centres which may have had similar functions. Iceland's Alþingi served as the central focus for a kingless society into the late thirteenth century, and seems to have involved functions of a cultic nature. The relentlessly anti-monarchist Old Saxons held a not dissimilar public assembly at Marklohe until their conquest by Charlemagne, after which the assembly was outlawed. Significantly, while aristocratic élites played important roles in both the Icelandic and Saxon assemblies, neither of these involved a king

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<sup>28</sup>Alcuin, *Vita Willibrordi Archiepiscopi Traiectensis Auctore Alcuino*, in *Willibrord Apostel der Friesen: Seine Vita nach Alkuin und Thiofrid; lateinisch-deutsch*, ed. and trans. by Hans-Joachim Reischmann (Sigmaringendorf: Glock & Lutz, 1989), pp. 43-89 (pp. 66-69, Chapter 14).

<sup>29</sup>Alcuin, *Vita Willibrordi*, pp. 60-63 (Chapter 10).

<sup>30</sup>Karsten Kjer Michaelsen, 'Iron Age Cemeteries and Settlement Structure in the Gudme-Lundeborg Area', in *AoGaL*, pp. 48-52.

<sup>31</sup>J. Kousgård Sørensen, 'Gudhem' in *Gudmeproblemer*, ed. by Henrik Thrane, *Skrifter fra Historisk Institut Odense Universitet*, 33 (Odense: Odense universitet, Historisk institut, 1985), pp. 10-17 (p. 15). There are five other surviving place-names of this type in modern Denmark, and others elsewhere in Scandinavia; John Kousgård Sørensen, 'Gudhem', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 19 (1985), 131-38.

<sup>32</sup>Eva Bergström, 'Early Iron Age', *Current Swedish Archaeology*, 3 (1995), 55-66 (p. 62); Stefan Brink, 'Cult Sites in Northern Sweden', in *ONaFRaCPN*, pp. 458-89 (pp. 479-80). See §3.1.5.

<sup>33</sup>Although Tacitus described strong leaders among Continental Germanic tribal confederations closer to the Roman *limes* (§1.2.4) and provided the strange account of the Suiones' kingship (§1.5.3), he mentioned no chieftains in connection with the Nerthus cult.

and indeed, seem explicitly to have excluded the concept of kingship.<sup>34</sup> The conservative nature of both societies lends weight to an understanding of sites like Gudme as ideological centres unconnected with an overlordship. Such sites could have provided neutral meeting grounds for competing chieftains and a distinctly non-Roman ideological focus for cult-participants.

### 2.3.1 THE ICELANDIC ALÞINGI AS CENTRE OF CULT & COMMUNITY

The *þing*, a word of uncertain etymology meaning ‘a public meeting of free adult males’, was a common feature of Scandinavian society during the Viking and Middle Ages.<sup>35</sup> *Þing* might be local meetings or regional assemblies and were the arenas in which legislative and judicial issues were worked out. They also served as communal foci. A *þing*’s name—like *Gulapþing* or *Frostapþing*—could serve to identify the community of its constituents and, by extension, the territory in which they lived.<sup>36</sup> Medieval Scandinavian *þing* (and the Old Saxon assembly at Marklohe) were part of a long tradition of representative, horizontal government stretching back to the Germanic *consilia* Tacitus described.<sup>37</sup>

Information about *þing* in mainland Scandinavia stems mostly from medieval documents written during a period in which kings had been firmly incorporated into the operation of the *þing*. Both in Norway and Sweden, would-be royal claimants needed to present themselves at regional *þing* if their kingship was to be confirmed. Iceland is notable for having formed an independent and kingless society, and it was the only medieval Scandinavian country to hold a national assembly: the Alþingi.

According to Ari Þorgilsson, a certain Úlfljótr spent time in Norway preparing laws for Iceland (*Úlfljótslög*) modelled on those of the Norwegian Gulapþing.<sup>38</sup> Upon Úlfljótr’s return to Iceland, the Alþingi was established under his direction, probably shortly before

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<sup>34</sup>It is interesting to note that in describing Dan and Angul, the legendary leaders of the early Danes, Saxo says that ‘regii tamen nominis expertes degebant, cuius usum nulla tunc temporis apud nostros consuetudinum frequentabat auctoritas’; *Gesta Danorum*, p. 10 (Book 1). This description might represent the memory of a time when southern Scandinavian society was not ruled by kings, perhaps during Gudme’s *floruit*. It is difficult to say whether a similar situation is recalled in *Ynglinga saga*, where Snorri said that ancient Scandinavian leaders were titled *dróttnar* rather than *konungar*. Bjarni Aðalbarnarson suggested that Snorri may have acquired this idea from *Ynglingatal*, where Dómaldi is described as a *dróttinn* while his successor Dyggvi is called a *konungmann*; *Heimskringla*, 1, 34 n. 1. Green, however, argued that Snorri’s distinction ‘is not to be dismissed out of hand as an etymological game’; Green, *Language*, p. 129.

<sup>35</sup>Generally, on the subject of *þing*, see Kjell Å. Modéer and others, ‘Ting’, *KLNM*, xviii (1974), col. 334-66. The term is well attested in NG and WG, though the Gothic cognate *þeihs* meant ‘fixed or appointed time’, suggesting that the terms in NG and WG might have originally held the sense ‘time of assembly’; see *OED*, xvii, 941 (*sv* ‘thing’).

<sup>36</sup>The term *lög* could be used in a similar fashion; *Þrendalög* is an example of such usage, referring to a people (and thus the regions in which they lived) governed by a particular custom of laws. *Lög* could also be appended to *þing*-names, as in *Gulapþingslög*. Interestingly, this kind of geographical use of names with *-lög* was adapted for the English term *Danelaw*; prior to the nineteenth century this term referred only to actual laws, and not a region; *OED*, iv, 240, (*sv* ‘Dane-law’).

<sup>37</sup>*Germania*, pp. 9-11 (Chapter 11-13).

<sup>38</sup>*Íslendingabók*, pp. 6-9, 11-13.

930. The Alþingi contained a legislative body (*lögretta*) and also judicial bodies—the *fjórðungsdómar* (dealing with lawsuits from the different *fjórðungar* into which Iceland was administratively divided) and, later, the *fimtardómur* (a kind of supreme court of appeals, which primarily handled issues not resolved in a *fjórðungsdómur*). The officers presiding at these institutions, as well as at local *þing* and in other official functions, were called *goðar*; a *goði*'s officership was termed a *goðorð*. There seem to have been thirty-six or thirty-nine *goðorð* when the Alþingi was established.<sup>39</sup>

The word *goði* is almost always translated into English as ‘chieftain’, yet its etymology suggests the original meaning was ‘priest’, as for Gothic *gudja*; these terms are related to ModE ‘god’.<sup>40</sup> Three rune-stones on Fyn seem to use *goði* in the compounds **nurakuþi** (on two stones) and **sauluakuþa** (dative singular, on one stone),<sup>41</sup> but the term is otherwise found only in Icelandic sources (though *Landnámabók* tells us that one early settler, Þórhaddr inn gamli, had been a *hofgoði* in Norway).<sup>42</sup> Almost certainly, the term *goði* originally designated a person with a religious function, but it is unclear how the Icelandic sense developed stronger connotations of political authority. Early *goðar* seem to have been responsible for overseeing religious affairs in their *goðorð*, and we are told they conducted sacrifices and maintained temples.<sup>43</sup> It is thought that Icelandic *goðar* derived their secular power from their religious authority.<sup>44</sup> Such a process may have been more possible for Icelandic *goðar* than mainland Scandinavian *goðar*, as there was no established hereditary nobility in Iceland (though many Icelandic *goðar* claimed descent from Scandinavian nobility). After Iceland’s Christianization, it would have been impossible for *goðar* to maintain their heathen religious roles, and perhaps their secular functions appear additionally emphasised by the fact that all our Icelandic textual sources are Christian-era.<sup>45</sup> Many post-conversion *goðar* had themselves ordained as Christian priests, probably in order to maintain their combination of sacral and secular authority. In response to the

<sup>39</sup>Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, trans. by Haraldur Bessason (Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 55 [a translation of Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga* (Reykjavík: Almenna Bókafélagið, 1956)]. Generally on *goðar* and their functions, see Lúðvík Ingvarson, *Goðorð og Goðorðsmenn*, 3 vols (Oddi: Egilsstöðum, 1986).

<sup>40</sup>*Landnámabók*, p. 307. An exact Icelandic cognate of Gothic *gudja* would be *\*gyði*. Such a form is not attested, although a feminine version of this form is, Icelandic *gyðja* (generally translated ‘priestess’; it can also mean ‘goddess’); Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 208 (*sv* ‘goði’).

<sup>41</sup>*DR*, I, 223-25 (225), 226-28 (228), 248-53 (252) (DR 190; DR 192; DR 209). An older form is **gudija**, found on the Nordhuglo stone in Hordaland, Norway, c. AD 400/425; Krause-Jankuhn, p. 146 (no. 65).

<sup>42</sup>It is possible that the word *goði* is preserved in some OSw placenames, such as *Gudhaby* and *Lyþgubawi* (the latter possibly including a title which OIce would have rendered *\*ljóðgoði* or *\*ljýðgoði*, perhaps analogous to *ljóðbiskup* or *ljýðbiskup*); K.F. Söderwall and others, *Ordbok öfver svenska medeltids-språket*, Samlingar utgifna af Svenska fornskrift-sällskapet, 3 vols (Lund: Berling, 1884-1973) I, 432 (*sv* ‘gupi?’), 771 (*sv* ‘liuþgupi’).

<sup>43</sup>Archaeological evidence of such temples is hard to come by, and regular dwelling halls may have served as temples, leaving them effectively indistinguishable from other structures in the archaeological record

<sup>44</sup>Jón Jóhannesson, *Commonwealth*, p. 53.

<sup>45</sup>Jón Jóhannesson, *Commonwealth*, pp. 165-66. Conversely, if there were *goðar* in mainland Scandinavia, and their function was entirely religious, then they would have disappeared as a class after the conversion to Christianity while chieftains, as political leaders without religious authority, would have continued their roles within the new religious climate.



archbishop of Trondheim's efforts to separate church and state power in Iceland during the late twelfth century, such *goðar* sometimes devolved religious duties to priests who operated under their auspices.<sup>46</sup>

Although modern scholars are accustomed to thinking about the Alþingi primarily in secular terms, its cultic functions are undeniable and appear prominently in the *alþingishelgun* performed by the *allsjerjargoði* at the Alþingi's opening. Such practices go back to the time of Tacitus, who describes Germanic assemblies being initiated by priests.<sup>47</sup> The cultic associations of *þing* also can be detected in the term *véþond* for the cords surrounding the legislative bodies of Norwegian *þing*, as well as from descriptions in *Guta saga* of sacrificial feasts at *þing*.<sup>48</sup> Such cultic functions are echoed in Scandinavian mythological sources. *Völuspá* describes the Æsir meeting *á þingi*,<sup>49</sup> and in Snorri's Edda, it is said that the gods' chief centre or holy place is beneath the world tree where they hold their *dómr* (or *dómstaðr*) each day. Snorri cited *Grímnismál*'s description of Þórr travelling daily to judgement beneath the world tree.<sup>50</sup> These passages imply links between *þing* sites and religious activity, and the association with the world tree may be significant. Outside mythology, trees, pillars, or groves are strongly associated with Germanic cult sites: Nerthus's island grove,<sup>51</sup> the Uppsala temple tree described by Adam of Bremen,<sup>52</sup> the Old Saxons' 'oak of Jupiter' at Geismar,<sup>53</sup> and the pre-Christian Old Saxons' Irminsul ('mighty pillar', though described alternatively as shrine or idol by the Franks) at Eresburg.<sup>54</sup>

Besides its legal and religious functions, the Alþingi also functioned as an annual fair. *Goðar* were required to attend the Alþingi,<sup>55</sup> but people from all walks of Icelandic life appeared there: merchants, craftsmen, entertainers, vagrants. Business might be transacted, marriages arranged, and the Alþingi was the best chance for folk to hear news from other regions. In short, the Alþingi was the legal, social, and ideological centre of Icelandic society. Mainland Scandinavian *þing* must have fulfilled similar roles. Snorri Sturluson described the Uppsalaping in terms which emphasise its continuing function as a

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<sup>46</sup>Magnús Stefánsson, 'Kyrkjuvald eflist', in *Saga Íslands: Samin að tilhlutan þjóðhátíðarnefndar 1974*, ed. by Sigurður Línadal, (Reykjavík: Sögufélagið, 1974-), II, 55-146 (pp. 86-91).

<sup>47</sup>*Germania*, pp. 9-10 (Chapter II).

<sup>48</sup>*Guta saga*, in *Guta lag och Guta saga: jämte ordbok*, ed. by Hugo Pipping, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 33 (Copenhagen: Møllers, 1905-07), pp. 62-69 (pp. 63-64).

<sup>49</sup>*Völuspá*, in Neckel-Kuhn, pp. 1-16 (p. 12, v. 48).

<sup>50</sup>*Snorra Edda*, pp. 22-23; *SnEdHafn*, I, 68-72; *Grímnismál*, in Neckel-Kuhn, pp. 57-68 (p. 63, v. 29).

<sup>51</sup>*Germania*, pp.26-27 (Chapter 40).

<sup>52</sup>Adam of Bremen, p. 260 (Book 4, Chapter 27).

<sup>53</sup>Willibald, *Vita s. Bonifacii archiepiscopi*, in *Scriptores rerum Sangallensium: Annales, chronica et historiae aevi Carolini*, ed. by Georgicus Henricus Pertz, MGH: Scriptores (in folio), 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1829), pp. 331-53 (pp. 343-44, Chapter 6).

<sup>54</sup>(R)RFA, pp. 32-35 (sa 772).

<sup>55</sup>But see §3.1.3.

social and economic event of considerable magnitude even after being stripped of its pre-Christian religious functions:<sup>56</sup>

Í Svíþjóðu var þat forn landsiðr, meðan heiðni var þar, at höfuðblót skyldi vera at Uppsolum at góí. Skyldi þá blóta til friðar ok sigrs konungi sínum, ok skyldu menn þangat sækja um allt Svíaveldi. Skyldi þar þá ok vera þing allra Svía. Þar var ok þá markaðr ok kaupstefna ok stóð viku. En er kristni var í Svíþjóð, þá helzk þar þó lögþing ok markaðr. En nú síðan er kristni var alsíða í Svíþjóð, en konungar afræckðusk at sitja at Uppsolum, þá var færðr markaðrinn ok hafðr kyndilmessu. Hefir þat haldizk all stund síðan, ok er nú hafðr eigi meiri en stendr þrjá daga. Er þar þing Svía, ok sækja þeir þar til um allt land.<sup>57</sup>

The cultic and communal functions exemplified in the Icelandic Alþingi and Swedish Uppsalathing might also have been present in a communal cult-centre at Gudme.

### 2.3.2 THE OLD SAXON ASSEMBLY AS CENTRE OF CULT & COMMUNITY

It is often assumed that the Icelandic Alþingi was a unique, innovative development in medieval government.<sup>58</sup> While the Alþingi was doubtless unique in detail, it nevertheless seems broadly similar to the Old Saxon Assembly at Marklohe. There is very little information about this latter institution, in comparison to the Icelandic Alþingi, and it is described best in the *Vita Lebuini antiqua*:

Regem antiqui Saxones non habebant, sed per pagos satrapas constitutos; morisque erat, ut semel in anno generale consilium agerent in media Saxoniam iuxta fluvium Wisuram ad locum qui dicitur Marklo. Solebant ibi omnes in unum satrapae convenire, ex pagis quoque singulis duodecim electi nobiles totidemque liberi totidemque lati. Renovabant ibi leges, praecipuas causas adiudicabant et, quid per annum essent acturi sive in bello sive in pace, communi consilio statuebant. [...] Igitur advenerat dies statuti consilii, advenerunt satrapae, assunt et alii, quos adesse oportebat. Tunc in unum conglobati fecerunt iuxta ritum in primis supplicationem ad deos, postulantes tuitionem

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<sup>56</sup>Birgit and Peter Sawyer characterized the Uppsalathing—known in OSw sources as the *disaping*—as the only pre-Christian Scandinavian assembly that was not ‘converted’ by association with Christian festivals. It continued to be held throughout the medieval period. After the conversion Uppsala seems to have maintained a religious role as a Christian cult-centre, becoming an archbishopric in 1164 and continuing as such (though moved slightly from Gamla Uppsala to modern Uppsala) to this day; Birgit and Peter Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation, circa 800-1500*, The Nordic Series, 17 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 109, 149; Sawyer, *Making*, p. 18; John Granlund, ‘Disting’, in *KLNM*, III (1958), col. III-115.

<sup>57</sup>*Heimskringla*, II, 109 (Chapter 77).

<sup>58</sup>For example, Jesse L. Byock, *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas, and Power*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) pp. 51-52, 70-71.

deorum patriae suae, et ut possent in ipso conventu statuere sibi utilia et quae forent placita omnibus diis. Deinde disposito grandi orbe concionari coeperunt.<sup>59</sup>

At the Assembly, the missionary Lebuin informs the Saxons that God commands them to convert, foretelling that although they have not previously had a king, they will be conquered by one—Charlemagne, of course—if they do not heed God’s mandate. The Saxons receive these admonitions poorly. They attack Lebuin, but he is whisked to safety by a miracle.

Though it purports to describe events of the seventh century, the *Vita Lebuini antiqua* was clearly written in the ninth. Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* would surely have been known to Lebuin’s biographer, but although Bede touched on the Old Saxons and their kinglessness, he provided a briefer description which lends weight to the *Vita Lebuini antiqua*’s authority as an independent source:

Non enim habent regem idem Antiqui Saxones, sed satrapas plurimos suae genti praepositos, qui ingruente belli articulo mittunt aequaliter sortes, et quemcumque sors ostenderit, hunc tempore belli ducem omnes sequuntur, huic obtemperant; peracto autem bello, rursus aequalis potentiae omnes fiunt satrapae.<sup>60</sup>

The absence of kings is explicitly noted in both accounts, and Reuter has suggested the system’s primary purpose was to prevent a kingly office’s emergence.<sup>61</sup>

The *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, issued by Charlemagne in the early 780s (well before the Saxon Wars were concluded), reads in its final provision: ‘Interdiximus ut omnes Saxones generalites conventus publicos nec faciant ... et hoc a sacerdotibus consideretur, ne aliter faciat’.<sup>62</sup> The *Capitulatio* moreover prescribes particularly harsh penalties for offences against the king (and his representatives) or Christianity—the Marklohe assembly probably entailed both. Like the Icelandic Alþingi, the Old Saxon Assembly was a clear descendant of the *consilia* Tacitus described, having both governmental and religious functions. While the Icelanders chose to adopt Christianity and subsequently adapted their governmental structure to the new religious system, the Franks Christianized the Saxons by the sword, and no element of the former system could be tolerated. These dire measures deemed necessary by the Franks underline the Old Saxon Assembly’s ideological significance. Like the later Scandinavian þing, the Old Saxon Assembly helped to reaffirm the community’s

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<sup>59</sup>*Vita Lebuini antiqua*, ed. by Oswald Holder-Egger and Adolfus Hofmeister, in *Supplementa*, MGH: Scriptores (in Folio), 30, 2 vols (Leipzig: Hierseman, 1896-1934), II: *Supplementa tomorum I-XV*, ed. by Adolfus Hofmeister and others (1934), 789-95 (pp. 793-94) (Chapters 4 & 6).

<sup>60</sup>*HE*, pp. 299-300 (Book v, Chapter 10).

<sup>61</sup>Reuter, *Germany*, pp. 66-7.

<sup>62</sup>*Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, ed. by A. Boretius, in *Capitularia regum Francorum*, ed. by A. Boretius and Viktor Krause, MGH: Leges: Capitularia regum Francorum, 2 vols (Hannover: Hahn, 1883-97), I (1883), 68-70 (p. 70).

unity by reinforcing identification with the assembly—in other words, the assembly itself served as an ideological focus for the community.

## 2.4 FACTORS AFFECTING GERMANIC CULT-CENTRES' ESTABLISHMENT

### 2.4.1 THE SITUATION IN EGIA SCANDINAVIA

If there had been an overlordship in southern Scandinavia during the LRIA which had been in some way dependent on Roman support (§1.5.4), the withdrawal of that support for whatever reason likewise might have spelled the end of the overlordship. David Braund wrote, 'It is an anthropological cliché that the worth of a ruler may be conceived in terms of natural fertility', and noted Ammianus Marcellinus' account of how a Burgundian king (*hendinos*) would be deposed upon crop failures.<sup>63</sup> If Scandinavians were inclined similarly to rid themselves of rulers with the misfortune to preside in inauspicious times, slackening support from Rome in the face of unresolved (or unsatisfactorily resolved) social and agro-climatic pressures could have provided just the excuse they needed to rid themselves of not just a particular overlord but the very office of overlord. Because our knowledge of southern Scandinavia's social organisation during the LRIA remains uncertain, we must not construct a picture of the EGIA's social organisation dependent on a particular understanding of that preceding period. Yet there are good, independent reasons to postulate the emergence of a communal cult-centre as the ideological focus for all of southern Scandinavia during the EGIA.

Regardless of whether or not there had previously been a client king in the region, the archaeological record, as discussed above, suggests considerable changes in both the nature and function of materials being imported into Scandinavia at the opening of the EGIA and perhaps a renewed focus on the community as a whole. Existing cult-centres would have been well-poised to increase their statures in such an environment. If there were communal functions which took place at the Nerthus cult-centre, Tacitus did not describe them. Indeed, the Nerthus cult as described by Tacitus appears to have been one in which the sacred was brought out into the wider community, as Nerthus' chariot travelled among the tribes, as opposed to one in which members of the community gathered for rituals at a sacred centre.<sup>64</sup> A combination of the *consilium*'s and cult-centre's functions, however, would have made an unquestionably powerful social focus. In fact, the dual religious and legal functions of the Icelandic Alþingi and Old Saxon Assembly indicate that combinations of this kind indeed took place at some point—moreover, the prominence of Njǫrðr (and his son Freyr) in Icelandic legal oaths suggest a combination of the *consilium*

<sup>63</sup>David Braund, 'Ideology', pp. 14, 18-19; Ammianus Marcellinus, *Ammiani Marcellini rerum gestarum libri qui supersunt*, ed. by Victor Gardthausen, Bib. Teub., 2 vols (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1967), II, 154 (Book 28, Chapter 5.14). See §2.4.4.

<sup>64</sup>A similar approach may have existed in the later cult of Freyr; see §3.2.2.

with Nerthus's cult itself. As northern Europe's climate was getting colder and wetter in the LRIA and GIA,<sup>65</sup> a fertility cult such as Nerthus's could have been powerfully attractive as climatological pressures made agricultural fertility an issue of great import.

#### 2.4.2 THE ICELANDIC ALÞINGI'S RELATIVE UNIQUENESS

Some have suggested that societies developing from an isolated fragment of a parent society may, through looking inward, develop new and remarkable features that could not have developed in the original, mainstream parent society; this theory has been used to explain the medieval Icelandic Commonwealth's apparently unique development. Icelandic society, it has been argued, developed its particular forms in an environment where law had a greater influence than kinship or traditional community structures.<sup>66</sup> Yet we may question whether this was so. After all, many prominent early Icelandic settlers seem to have shared kinship.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, Scandinavian kingship was developing towards its medieval forms at the same time that the Icelanders were establishing their Alþingi; the Icelanders themselves cherished the belief that they formed their society as a reaction to the tyranny of the Norwegian king Harald hárfagri. In some senses, the Icelandic Commonwealth was no more a new society than were other Scandinavian societies—though the other Scandinavian societies were more strongly influenced by the continental models which underlie our opinions about what is mainstream.

Other arguments suggest that Icelandic society's development was strongly influenced by an environment which dictated a thinly settled land of nucleated farms and estates. This environment in itself does not seem reason enough to cause the establishment of a kingless society, but the mix of immigrants from various different regions of Scandinavia—each with its own laws and customs—may well have spurred the establishment of a single set of Icelandic laws and customs as a convenience. It may be significant that the Icelanders referred their society as *vár lög*.<sup>68</sup> Iceland was starting not so much from a blank slate, as is sometimes suggested, as a slate scribbled on by many hands. As with the Icelandic Alþingi, an EGIA cult-centre might have served to unify disparate micro-cultures from all around southern (and coastal) Scandinavia.

Yet in the end, most attempts to explain Iceland's kingless society start with the assumption of its uniqueness, and therefore require unique circumstances with which to

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<sup>65</sup>Hedeager, *Societies*, pp. 206–09.

<sup>66</sup>Richard S. Tomasson, *Iceland: The First New Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), p.4; Louis Hartz, *The Founding of New Societies* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1984), pp. 4, 6. It must be said that attempts to separate the influences of law and kinship on Icelandic society seem to be making a somewhat unreal distinction; as elsewhere in Scandinavia, issues of law and kinship seem to have been intricately interwoven in Iceland.

<sup>67</sup>Jón Jóhannesson, *Commonwealth*, p. 38.

<sup>68</sup>Jón Jóhannesson, *Commonwealth*, p. 40. See §3.4.5.

explain its formation. The existence of the Saxon Assembly however, shows that whatever unique aspects Iceland's society might have had, kinglessness and the use of a communal assembly as an ideological focus were not among them. Given the scanty evidence for conditions in the EGIA there is a danger of circular argumentation, but it is possible that the Icelandic Alþingi was intended as a deliberately archaic re-creation of a communal cultic assembly.

#### 2.4.3 ORIGINS OF THE OLD SAXON ASSEMBLY & THE ICELANDIC ALÞINGI

Saxony was not a harsh, remote land newly settled by recent immigrants, so if such conditions were an influence on the Icelandic Alþingi's establishment, the Old Saxon Assembly was clearly formed without them. However, the amalgamation of various older tribal formations into a new Saxon tribal league, which spent most of its recorded history expanding, may have produced a need for a common legal and ideological focus. Such a situation would not be dissimilar to that which Iceland may have faced (§2.4.2). Whether the Saxon expansion was primarily the result of military conquest or a more peaceful process of 'cumulative Saxonity' (or both) is uncertain, but there is no indication that the Saxons had ever been politically united under an overlord. Had they been, that office had disappeared without trace by the seventh century, replaced with the Assembly at Marklohe. Saxon chieftains may have found a general assembly a more tolerable means of unification than a single overlord. The Old Saxon Assembly's power to appoint a temporary war-leader recalls Tacitus' distinction between Germanic *reges* ('ex nobilitate ... sumunt') and *duces* ('ex virtute sumunt').<sup>69</sup> It may be that there was never sufficient military pressure on the Saxons for a temporary war-leader to transform himself into a permanent king, though Widukind, the Saxon leader in the wars with Charlemagne, may have had such aspirations (§3.1.3).<sup>70</sup> Such a move would recall the actions of Arminius and Maroboduus (§1.2.4).

More is known about the establishment of the Alþingi than of the Old Saxon Assembly, though the exact motivations for and the circumstances of the Alþingi's establishment are not entirely clear. Ari Þorgilsson wrote that Grímr geitskǫr (foster-brother of that Úlfjótr who prepared the *Úlfjótsslög*) 'kannaði Ísland allt at ráði hans [Úlfjóts] áðr alþingi væri átt', and also that before the establishment of the Alþingi at Þingvöllr there was a *þing* established at Kjalarnes by Þorsteinn Ingólfsson (son of Ingólfr Arnarson, Iceland's 'first settler').<sup>71</sup> According to *Landnámabók*, the successors to

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<sup>69</sup>*Germania*, p. 6 (Chapter 7).

<sup>70</sup>Ian N. Wood, 'Pagan Religion and Superstition East of the Rhine from the Fifth to the Ninth Century', in *After Empire*, pp. 253-79 (p. 263).

<sup>71</sup>*Íslendingabók*, pp. 6-9. Ari's strange passage about the murder of the thrall Kolr on land later set aside as *allsherjarfé* as common land for use during the Alþingi is difficult to interpret, but may dimly recall a sacrifice associated with the Alþingi's establishment.

Porsteinn's chieftainship continued to perform the ritual *alþingishelgun*,<sup>72</sup> suggesting that the Kjalarnes *þing* functioned as the Alþingi's immediate antecedent. Jón Jóhannesson suggested that Porsteinn Ingólfsson wished to establish a unifying assembly for Iceland and that Grímr's exploration was intended to select a site more suitable than Kjalarnes.<sup>73</sup> The need to unite populations of disparate origin and the lack of any severe external military threat may have characterised both the Icelandic and Old Saxon societies and may have influenced the establishments of their respective communal assemblies.

#### 2.4.4 ORIGINS OF AN EGIA SCANDINAVIAN CULT-CENTRE?

Though this study argues that Gudme's primary function was that of community cult-centre, the possibility that some kind of kingly office was associated with the site should not be ruled out. Charlotte Fabech suggested a compromise position of sorts, in which Gudme's status as a sacrosanct site and sacred refuge depended on the protection of a powerful individual wielding considerable politico-military strength.<sup>74</sup> It could be argued that such an arrangement was unnecessary for the Icelandic Alþingi, but Iceland was rarely threatened by pitched battles until the *Sturlungaöld* in the thirteenth century. In contrast, war-booty sacrifices from the fourth and fifth centuries show that a number of battles were fought in Scandinavia during this period.<sup>75</sup> Concentrations of such offerings along the shores of Lille Bælt, in Skåne, and on Bornholm might hint at the boundary zones of a power block centred on the Danish islands. Gudme's role in the redistribution of goods suggests that it functioned as the centre of activity for a much wider area than politico-military influence wielded from it may have reached. Perhaps some kind of local leader did maintain power on Fyn (and perhaps Sjælland), deriving considerable status from his custodianship of the cult-centre which attracted people from a much larger region. Perhaps such a leader even played some ceremonial role in the cult centre's function,<sup>76</sup> as did the

<sup>72</sup>*Landnámabók*, p. 145.

<sup>73</sup>Jón Jóhannesson, *Commonwealth*, pp. 35-39.

<sup>74</sup>Charlotte Fabech, 'Reading Society from the Cultural Landscape: South Scandinavia between Sacral and Political Power', in *AoGal*, pp. 169-83 (pp. 176-77).

<sup>75</sup>The character of the finds indicates that these battles were conducted largely by Scandinavians against Scandinavians, and though it is not always clear whether these deposits represent the war-booty taken in a single battle—some sites were certainly used more than once—the numbers of weapons recovered from individual Iron Age war-booty deposits are usually sufficient to equip several hundred men. For comparison, it has been suggested that although chieftains in Sturlung Iceland could command armies of up to 1200-1400 men, fatal casualties sustained in battle were comparatively light, perhaps c. 350 Icelanders all told during the *Sturlungaöld*; Charlotte Fabech, 'Booty Sacrifices in Scandinavia—A History of Warfare and ideology', in *RRiS*, pp. 135-38; Charlotte Fabech, 'Booty Sacrifices in Southern Scandinavia: A Reassessment', in *Sacred and Profane: Proceedings of a Conference on Archaeology, Ritual and Religion, Oxford 1989*, ed. by P. Garwood and others, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology: Monograph, 32 (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1991), pp. 88-99; Axboe, 'Danish Kings', pp. 224-25; Helgi Þorláksson, 'Sturlung Age', in *MSE*, pp. 615-16.

<sup>76</sup>The *Vita Anskarii* seems to suggest that in ninth-century Sweden, the king's presence was necessary for an assembly to take place; Rimbart, *Vita Anskarii*, in *Vita Anskarii auctore Rimbarto, Accedit Vita Rimbarti*, ed. by G. Waitz, MGH: SRG in usum scholarum separatim editi, 55 (Hannover: Hahn, 1884),

Icelandic Alþingi's *allsþerjargóði*. Such situations would fit a general pattern suggested by Germanic assembly institutions known from historical sources.<sup>77</sup> What such a leader's office would have represented is uncertain, though we may consider the case of Karlli af Ezwæri/Karl Sónason in twelfth-century Västergötland whom different sources variously describe as *laghmaðþær*, jarl, and king.<sup>78</sup> Another suggestive model might be found among the Burgundians, who appear to have had two kinds of 'kings' working in tandem: the *hendinos*, who were responsible for the fortunes of the tribe, and the *sinistus*, who functioned as a kind of high priest.<sup>79</sup>

The conditions which prevailed in Saxony and Iceland—populations of diverse but related origin and no serious military threat—may have prevailed also in Southern Scandinavia during the EGIA. Though the Roman Empire might have been considered a potential military threat by southern Scandinavians in the first centuries AD, it could hardly have represented one by the late fourth century. The third and fourth centuries had seen the Romans busy coping with various internal problems, and the appearance of the Huns, driving the Goths before them, at the end of the fourth century led to the disintegration of the Western Empire (administratively split from the Eastern Empire during Diocletian's reign, AD 285-305) in the course of the fifth century.<sup>80</sup> Spoils (and salaries) acquired by Germanic mercenaries in conflicts of this period may have contributed to Scandinavia's impressive wealth. It may also be that the ongoing Roman crisis led to a slackened interest in Roman prestige goods among Scandinavians and contributed to the dominance of items of native style and manufacture which gives the EGIA its name.

A powerful Frankish polity was only just emerging at the time of Clovis c. 500, and there are no indications that it posed much of a concern to Scandinavians until the sixth century, when there were Scandinavian raids on Francia, such as that of

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pp. 13-79 (pp. 39-44, 57-59; Chapters 19, 27). The reliability of the Vita Anskarii's information about Scandinavian customs is, however, often questionable; Ian Wood, 'Christians and Pagans in Ninth-Century Scandinavia', in *CoS*, pp. 36-67.

<sup>77</sup>These possibilities raise the difficult issue of so-called 'sacral kingship', which is not discussed here partially because there seems to be little agreement on what 'sacral kingship' means (or meant), but moreover because one questions how likely it was that early Germanic leaders were not inherently sacral at some level, given that the distinction between the sacral and the profane—the supernatural and the natural—seems a concept that belongs rather more to our society than theirs. But see further Rory McTurk, 'Scandinavian Sacral Kingship Revisited', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 24 (1994), 19-32; Rory McTurk, 'Kingship', in *MSE*, pp. 351-52; Eve Picard, *Germanisches Sakralkönigtum?: Quellenkritische Studien zur Germania des Tacitus und zur Altnordischen Überlieferung*, Skandinavistische Arbeiten, 12 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1991); John Stanley Martin, 'Some Aspects of Snorri Sturluson's View of Kingship', *Parergon*, 15 (1976), 43-54; Rory McTurk, 'Sacral Kingship in Ancient Scandinavia: A Review of Some Recent Writings', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 19 (1975-76), 139-69; Folke Ström, 'Kung Domalde i Svitjod och "kungalyckan"', *Saga och sed* (1967), 52-66; Walter Baetke, *Yngvi und die Ynglinger: Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung über das nordische 'Sakralkönigtum'*, Sitzungsberichte der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig: Philologisch-historische Klasse, 109.3 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964).

<sup>78</sup>Sawyer, *Making*, pp. 26, 29; *Incerti auctoris variae adnotationes*, p. 296.

<sup>79</sup>Wolfram, *Roman*, p. 17; Ammianus Marcellinus, II, 154 (Book 28, Chapter 5.14).

<sup>80</sup>On Rome's history during this period, see Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Europe 300-1000*, Macmillan History of Europe (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1991), pp. 1-93; A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*, 3 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964); *Imperial Crisis and Recovery: A.D. 193-324*, ed. by S.A. Cook and others, *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939);



Ch(l)ochilaicus, and when king Theudobert I, Ch(l)ochilaicus's defeater, claimed dominion over peoples called Eucii (Jutes?) and Norsavi, who were perhaps Scandinavians.<sup>81</sup> Likewise, the growth of kingship in Anglo-Saxon England, perhaps partially spurred by the Frankish threat, does not seem to have taken place until the later sixth and early seventh centuries.<sup>82</sup> The Old Saxons provided a buffer zone against any real Frankish threat to southern Scandinavia, and besides the mysterious Ch(l)ochilaicus there is little solid evidence for Scandinavian kings until c. 700.<sup>83</sup> The first Scandinavian king whose strength is readily appraised was the early-ninth-century Danish Godefrid;<sup>84</sup> Haraldr hárfagri followed in Norway during the latter part of that century.

The establishment of a judicial and legislative centre linked with a pre-existing cult would have been an effective force for the ideological unification of southern Scandinavia without necessitating an overlord. It is even possible that, as the Icelandic Alþingi was prefigured by the Kjalarnes þing, an initial southern Scandinavian assembly could have been established at one existing centre (such as at Stevns/Himlingøje) and then moved to another more central location, as Gudme might have been. Other southern Scandinavian 'central places' might also have been cult-centres, perhaps even functioning as regional complements to a primary cult-centre at Gudme, much as Icelandic regional þing were subordinate to the Alþingi.

## 2.5 HORIZONS OF GERMANIC & SCANDINAVIAN HISTORICAL LEGEND

### 2.5.1 EARLY GERMANIC LEGENDS?

It would be unusual if the early Germanic peoples did not tell stories of their gods and heroes. Tacitus wrote that the Germanic peoples' understanding of their past was informed by *carminibus antiquis*; presumably the myth of Tuisto and his sons which Tacitus described originated in such material. Tacitus also mentioned Germanic songs of 'Hercules' (presumably the *interpretatio Romana* for some Germanic figure) whom the Germanic peoples considered the greatest of heroes.<sup>85</sup> Such poverty of information, however, does not allow much comparison with other material from Germanic tradition.

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<sup>81</sup>HF, p. 99 (Book 3, Chapter 3); *Epistolae Austrasicae*, ed. by W. Gundlach, in *Epistolae Merovingici et Karolini aevi*, ed. by Wilhelm Gundlach, Ernestus Dümmler, and Karl Hampe, MGH: Epistolae, 3-7, 5 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892-1928), 1, ed. by Wilhelm Gundlach and Ernestus Dümmler (1892), 110-53 (pp. 132-33, Letter 20). Venantius Fortunatus seems to have claimed that the Danes and Jutes were subordinate to Chilperic I; Venantius Fortunatus, *Ad Chilpericum regem quando synodus Brinnaco habita est*, in *Venanti Honorii Clementiani Fortunati presbyteri Italici*, ed. by Fridericus Leo and B. Krusch, MGH: AA, 4, 2 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881-85), 1, *Opera poetica* (1881), 201-05 (p. 203, ll. 73-76). See §3.1.4.

<sup>82</sup>Carver, *Kings?*, pp. 104-05.

<sup>83</sup>See §1.5.3.

<sup>84</sup>See §3.4.2.

<sup>85</sup>*Germania*, pp. 2-3. (Chapters 2, 3). Tacitus' knowledge of such material was almost certainly not first hand and might have come from a variety of sources. J.G.C. Anderson suggested that Tacitus may have

Tacitus also mentioned Germanic songs about the Cheruscan leader Arminius.<sup>86</sup> As Tacitus wrote several decades after Arminius' death, when the Cherusci's status had decreased substantially, narratives of Arminius must have been a well-established part of Germanic popular tradition. It has, therefore, been a vexation to more recent scholars that no clear trace of Arminius remains in Germanic myth or legend. Some scholars, perhaps most notably Otto Höfler, have attempted to identify Arminius with the medieval Germanic hero *par excellence*, Sigurðr-Siegfried.<sup>87</sup> Höfler's arguments rested chiefly on a suggested link between \**χerut-* ('hart', the Germanic root probably lying behind the name *Cherusci*), some hart/hind motifs in Sigurðr-Siegfried cycle, and also the element *Segi-* (ON *Sig-*) which appears in the names of several of Arminius' close relatives. Ultimately, however, these correspondences remain unconvincing.

The earliest relatively datable figure of Germanic legend is Ermanaric, a mid-fourth-century ruler of the Gothic Greuthungi believed to have died c. 375.<sup>88</sup> Reliable historical information about Ermanaric is well-concealed behind the legends which seem to have grown up around him very quickly. Versions of his story, or references to him, appear in the works of the near-contemporary Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus,<sup>89</sup> the sixth-century *Getica*,<sup>90</sup> later Anglo-Saxon poetry (*Widsið*, *Deor*, *Beowulf*),<sup>91</sup> and medieval German chronicles.<sup>92</sup> Eventually Ermanaric was worked into the various narratives comprising the Scandinavian *Völsung* cycle, starting with one of the earliest surviving Old Norse poems, *Ragnarsdrápa*.<sup>93</sup> The *Völsung* cycle appears to be a complex assemblage of stories, and attempts to wring historical matter from it are confounded by its use of characters who appear out of chronological sequence with their historical antecedents—not that there were necessarily any real connections between their historical antecedents to begin with.<sup>94</sup> Such are the characteristics of historical legend.

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ultimately derived these descriptions from the now lost histories of Posidonius and then fashioned his presentation on Herodotus' description of Scythian origin legends; *Germania*-Anderson, ix-lxiv, (pp. xxi-xxii, xxx).

<sup>86</sup>*Annales*, p. 92 (Book 88, Chapter 2).

<sup>87</sup>Otto Höfler, *Siegfried, Arminius und die Symbolik: mit einem historischen Anhang über die Varusschlacht* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1961); A. Beneke, *Siegfried ist Armin!* (Dortmund: Ruhfus, 1911); Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell, 'Sigfred-Arminius', in *Grimm Centenary. Sigfred-Arminius, and Other Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1886), pp. 5-21.

<sup>88</sup>An excellent general survey of the Ermanaric legends is that of Caroline Brady, *The Legends of Ermanaric* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1943).

<sup>89</sup>Ammianus Marcellinus, II, 237-38 (Book 31, Chapter 3.1).

<sup>90</sup>*Getica*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>91</sup>*Widsið*, pp. 149, 150, 152, 153 (ll. 8, 18, 88, III); *Deor*, in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by George Philip Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 3 (London: Routledge; New York: Columbia, 1936), pp. 178-79 (ll. 21-27); *Beowulf*, p. 45 (l. 1201a).

<sup>92</sup>*Chronicon Wirziburgense*, in *Chronica et annales aevi Salici*, ed. by Georgicus Heinrichus Pertz, MGH: Scriptores (in folio), 6 (Hannover: Hahn, 1844), pp. 17-32 (p. 23).

<sup>93</sup>Bragi enn gamli Boddason, *Ragnarsdrápa*, in *Skjaldedigtning*, B.I, 1-4.

<sup>94</sup>Historical antecedents for Sigurðr-Siegfried have been sought by many, and an overview of these efforts is included in *The Saga of the Völsungs*, ed. and trans. by R.G. Finch, Nelson Icelandic Texts (London: Nelson, 1965), pp. xxxii-xxxvi; E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), pp. 198-205.

### 2.5.2 GOTHs & HUNS

Despite Ermanaric's perennial popularity in Germanic legend, he does not appear in one of the oldest—if not the oldest—surviving artefacts of Germanic legend: the poem *Hlōðsquiða*, around which the end of *Hervarar saga* is built.<sup>95</sup> This absence is all the more surprising given the Goths' central role in this poem, which tells of a colossal battle between Goths and Huns. Christopher Tolkien suggested that the poem's narrative origins might depend on traditions concerning the earliest clashes of the Goths and the Huns before the collapse of Ermanaric's fabled kingdom.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, in *Hlōðsquiða* the Goths defeat the Huns.

Some variant of this tale may have been known to the composer of *Widsið*, which on line 116 mentions:

Heaþoric ond Sifecan,    Hliþe ond Incgenþeow.<sup>97</sup>

This is followed on lines 119-122 by:

Wulfhere sohte ic ond Wyrmhære;    ful oft þær wig ne alæg,  
þonne Hræda here    heardum sweordum  
ymb Wistlawudu    wergan sceoldon  
ealdne eþelstol    Ætlan leodum.<sup>98</sup>

The Old English names *Heaþoric*, *Sifeca*, *Hliþe*, *Incgenþeow*, and *Wyrmhære* bear a striking resemblance to the Old Norse names *Heiðrekr*, *Sifka*, *Hlōðr*, *Angantýr*, and *Ormarr* found in *Hervarar saga*. The linguistic correspondences are not all exact but the similarities are highly suggestive.

It is, however, surprising to see *Widsið* describing conflict between the Goths and Huns taking place *ymb Wistlawudu*.<sup>99</sup> Tacitus and Pliny knew of Goths—Gotones or Gutones—who seem to have lived near the lower Wisła.<sup>100</sup> These early Goths were perhaps connected with the Wielbark cultural assemblage, which formed in the mid-first century AD and slowly spread into the northern Ukraine by the decades around 200. During

<sup>95</sup>*Hervarar saga*, pp. 45-58.

<sup>96</sup>Christopher Tolkien, 'The Battle of the Goths and the Huns', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 14 (1953-57) 141-63 (p. 141); *Hervarar saga*, pp. xxi-xxviii.

<sup>97</sup>*Widsið*, p. 153.

<sup>98</sup>*Widsið*, p. 153. OE *Hrædas* (or possibly *Hræde*) means 'Goths'; compare OE *Hreðgotas*, as well as ON *Reiðgotaland* and runic Swedish **hraiþmarar**; Chambers, *Widsith*, pp. 252-53. The phrase *Ætlan leodum* need not refer to people led by Attila, but could, as it seems to do here, simply mean 'Huns'; C. Tolkien, 'Battle', p. 154.

<sup>99</sup>*Widsið*'s location of the Goths *ymb Wistlawudu* recalls the forest *Mirkviðr* which lay between the Goths and Huns in *Hlōðsquiða*.

<sup>100</sup>*Germania*, pp. 29 (Chapter 44); C. Plinius Secundus, 1, 346-47 (Book 4, Chapter 99-100).

the third and fourth centuries, however, the Wielbark culture seems to have lost its cohesion, though it has strong connections with a newer assemblage then forming north of the Black Sea, identified as the Černjachov culture. As with the Wielbark culture, there seems to be a strong correlation (if not equation) between the Gothic peoples and Černjachov culture.<sup>101</sup> Thus, if *Widsið* preserves a memory that Gothic peoples lived in the Wisła valley, this must be a very old memory indeed, as there is little evidence for Goths in the Wisła valley after the Marcomannic Wars in the late second century. In such a case, *Widsið* could only have confused this memory with the later struggles between the Goths and Huns, as the Huns did not encounter the Goths until the fourth century AD, when some of the Gothic peoples were located just north of the Black Sea.

Linguistic fossils suggest that *Hlǫðsquiða* has a very long oral tradition behind it. It has been noted that *Harvaðafjöll* ('the Carpathians') derives, by regular sound changes, from an original form *\*karpat-*, through an early Germanic *\*χarfap-*.<sup>102</sup> Something similar may be at work in the name *Danparstaðir* (in the phrases *á Danparstoðum* and *á stoðum Danpar*).<sup>103</sup> The name *Danpr* is used of a legendary figure mentioned in *Ynglinga saga*, *Rígsþula*, and Arngrímur Jónsson's epitome of *Skjöldunga saga*,<sup>104</sup> but is also linked to the river Dnieper, which appears in *Getica* as *Danaper*. Probably the hero took his name from a misunderstanding of what the river's name signified.<sup>105</sup> The river Dnieper is more commonly named *Nepr* in ON, appearing so in a twelfth-century *þula* of river names, *Kristnisaga*, and *Heimslýsning*.<sup>106</sup> This form seems to point back to an East Slavic *\*Dněpr* (before loss of medial *-b-*).<sup>107</sup> Rather than a learned borrowing from Greek (or from Jordanes), ON *Danpr* more likely represents the syncopated descendant of an original form similar to Jordanes's *Danaper*; if so, it must have entered Scandinavian dialects no later than the seventh century.<sup>108</sup>

In contrast, it is difficult to know whence *Widsið*'s composer derived his information. Some of *Widsið*'s names and its identification of Goths as 'Hrædas' could have been borrowed from Scandinavian sources (in the Viking Age or earlier), while the

<sup>101</sup>Peter Heather, *The Goths, The Peoples of Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 11-25.

<sup>102</sup>C. Tolkien, 'Battle', p. 142.

<sup>103</sup>*Hervarar saga*, pp. 46, 49; *Hlǫðsquiða*, pp. 304 (v. 9)

<sup>104</sup>*Heimskringla*, 1, 34; *Rígsþula*, in Neckel-Kuhn, pp. 280-87 (p. 287, v. 48); AJ, p. 336; *DsAl*, p. 9.

<sup>105</sup>Arngrímur associated *Danpr* with *Danpsted*; AJ, pp. 336-37; *DsAl*, p. 9. Tolkien also suggested that *staðir* pointed back to a Gothic *stap*, used by Wulfila to mean 'bank/shore'; C. Tolkien, 'Battle', pp. 142-43, 156-58.

<sup>106</sup>*Skjaldedigtning*, B.1, 667 (v. 4); *Kristnisaga*, in *Hauksbók*, pp. 126-49 (p. 144); *Heimslýsning ok helgifræði*, in *Hauksbók*, pp. 150-77 (p. 150).

<sup>107</sup>Bohdan Strumiński, *Linguistic Interrelations in Early Rus': Northmen, Finns, and East Slavs (Ninth to Eleventh Centuries)*, Collana di filologia e letteratura slave, nuova serie, 2 (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1996), pp. 162-63, 211-12.

<sup>108</sup>Einar Haugen, *The Scandinavian Languages: An Introduction to Their History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 142, 150-60.

location of the Goths *ymb Wistlawudu* could have been separately acquired from classical ethnographic sources locating the Gotones near the Vistula.<sup>109</sup> Thus it is uncertain whether *Widsið*'s association of the 'Hrædas' with the Wisła represents ancient folk-tradition or learned knowledge.

### 2.5.3 TRACES OF ROME & CAESAR

Very little in the surviving Germanic legends predates the EGIA, but perhaps most surprising of all is the virtual absence of any reference to Rome in surviving Germanic legendary material. Presumably the songs of Arminius described by Tacitus did not fail to mention Arminius' chief foes. The massive Roman presence in the Germano-Scandinavian archaeological record demonstrates that contacts with Rome were of supreme importance to Germanic culture in the early centuries AD. Yet even surviving legends concerning the Goths dwell primarily on their conflicts with the Huns and never mention Rome, which is remarkable considering Rome's importance in Gothic history—not least in such Gothic triumphs as slaying a Romano-Byzantine emperor along with most of his army at Hadrianople in 378, and the sack of Rome itself in 410.

After Ermanaric, the most famous of all Goths must be Theodoric the Great, who seized control of Italy in 493. His legendary reflex appears in *Hildebrandslied*, in *Deor* and probably *Widsið*, the Waltharius legends, as well as the Sigurðr-Siegfried cycle; he is probably the **þiaurikr** mentioned on the Rök rune-stone in Östergötland, Sweden from c. 800.<sup>110</sup> It may even be significant that Theodoric is mentioned on a stone from Götaland, as the Götär are often thought to have been associated with the Goths; in any event, there is some evidence for contacts between the Goths and the Götär into the sixth century.<sup>111</sup> Theodoric's familiar eke-name relates to the city of Verona (thus *Dietrich von Bern*/*Þiðrekr af Bern*) where his armies defeated Odoacar—not Ravenna, whence his Italian realm was administered. The legendary Theodoric never has any Italo-Roman associations, however, and 'Bern' is presented without any Roman context.

<sup>109</sup>Wulfstan names the Wisła as the *Wisle*; *The Old English Orosius*, ed. by Janet Bately, Early English Text Society: Supplementary Series, 6 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 16. The form *Vistla* is used in C. Plinius Secundus, 1, 346-47 (Book 4, Chapter 99-100). Jordanes uses *Vistula* (*Getica*, pp. 58, 62, 63) or *Viscla* (pp. 63-82).

<sup>110</sup>*Hildebrandslied*, in *Die kleineren althochdeutschen Sprachdenkmäler*, ed. by Elias von Steinmeyer, *Kleinere althochdeutsche Denkmäler* (Berlin, Weidmann, 1916), pp. 1-15 (p. 3, ll. 19-26); *Waldere*, in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. by Elliott van Kirk Dobbie, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 6 (London: Routledge; New York: Columbia, 1942), pp. 4-6 (p. 5, l. 11.4b); *Waltharius*, ed. by Karl Strecker, in *Nachträge zu den Poetae Aevi Carolini*, ed. by Karl Strecker with Otto Schumann, MGH: Poetae Latini medii aevi, 6.1 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1951), pp. 1-85; *Widsið*, p. 219; *Deor*, in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by George Philip Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 3 (London: Routledge; New York: Columbia, 1936), pp. 178-79 (p. 178, v. 18a); Chambers, *Widsith*, pp. 40-41; Sophus Bugge, *Der Runenstein von Rök in Östergötland, Schweden* (Stockholm: Hæggström, 1910), p. 127. For an alternative view, see Kemp Malone, 'The Theodoric of the Rök inscription', in *SiHLaCS*, pp. 116-23.

<sup>111</sup>Birgit Arhenius, 'Connections between Scandinavia and the East Roman Empire in the Migration Period', in *From the Baltic to the Black Sea: Studies in Medieval Archaeology*, ed. by David Austin and Leslie Alcock (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 118-37 (pp. 119, 134); Heather, *Goths*, p. 27.

*Widsið* places various figures from classical and biblical history in the same context as Germanic heroes, though most of these come from learned sources. *Casere* ('Caesar') is mentioned twice: in line 20, and in line 76 as the ruler of *Creacas* ('Greeks'). The form *Cāsere* may be early, as it seems to show the regular transformation of WG *ai* (from Latin *ae*) to OE *ā*, and its original ending replaced by a more familiar OE *-ere* suffix.<sup>112</sup> That Caesar should be described as ruling the Greeks is not surprising; the Byzantine emperor was the only 'Caesar' for most of the Anglo-Saxon period. The form *Crēacas* (dative *Crēacum* in the poem) is strange—*Crēcas* would be more regular—but may be similarly early.<sup>113</sup> It shows the substitution of Germanic *k* for Greek  $\gamma$  or Latin *g*, reflecting the lack of a back voiced stop in Germanic (except in  $\eta$  or Gothic *gg*).<sup>114</sup> If this form had been a later literary borrowing, a form closer to Latin *Graeci* might have been expected. The eastern orientation of OE *Casere* suggests that information on him is unlikely to predate Diocletian, more likely to post-date Constantine I, and perhaps even more likely to post-date the end of the Western Empire in 476. 'Caesar' also appears in an eighth-century East Anglian royal pedigree as *Caser*, son of Woden.<sup>115</sup> This form could also be early, though the compositional date and juxtaposition with Woden complicate an understanding of its origin. None of the OE forms of 'Caesar' were necessarily borrowed before the Germanic *adventus*, though they may well have been borrowed before the conversion to Christianity.

There also seems to be a trace of Caesar in ON, preserved in the name of *Kiarr* or *Kjarr*, usually a king of the *Valir*, itself a term meaning essentially 'foreigners' and generally applied to Celtic- or Romance-speakers;<sup>116</sup> Snorri, mysteriously, describes *Kiarr* as *af Auðlinga ætt*.<sup>117</sup> *Kiarr/Kjarr* is generally recognised to stem from Latin *Caesar*, though how this word arrived in NG is unclear. It may have come directly from Latin-speakers or from other early NwG dialects, but early Scandinavian links with Gothic regions suggest it also could have come from Greek  $\kappa\alpha\iota\sigma\alpha\rho$ , perhaps through Gothic *kaisar*. The diphthong in the first syllable would have been monophthongized early: *\*kēsar* > *Kiarr* > *Kjarr* (ON *járn*, alongside *ísarn*, probably had a similar development from PG *\*īsarnam*).<sup>118</sup> The only other potential hint of early Roman contacts may survive in the ON element *Rúm-* (alongside *Róm-*) in terms like *Rúmverjar*, and *Rúmveg* (and *Rúm* itself); the form with *-ú-* could

<sup>112</sup>A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, corrected edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), pp. 203, 206.

<sup>113</sup>See Kemp Malone, *Widsið*, *Anglistica*, 13 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1962), p. 135; Chambers, *Widsið*, pp. 166, 192 n. to l. 20.

<sup>114</sup>Campbell, *Grammar*, p. 199.

<sup>115</sup>David N. Dumville, 'The Anglian Collection of Royal Genealogies and Regnal Lists', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 5 (1976), 23-50 (pp. 33, 40 n. 2).

<sup>116</sup>*Vǫlundarquiða*, in Neckel-Kuhn, pp. 116-23 (pp. 116, 119 v. 15); *Atlaquiða in grænlenzca*, in Neckel-Kuhn, 240-63 (p. 241 v. 7); *Flateyjarbók*, 1, 26; *Hervarar saga*, p. 46. A recent article on this topic which, unfortunately, I have not yet been able to access is Marina Mundt, 'ór hǫll Kjárs', in *Helsing til Lars Vassenden på 70-årsdagen*, ed. by Johan Myking, Helge Sandøy and Ivar Utne (Bergen: Nordisk institutt, 1994), pp. 117-21.

<sup>117</sup>*Snorra Edda*, p. 183; *SnEHafn*, 1, 522.

<sup>118</sup>*ANEW*, p. 312 (sv 'Kjarr'). A perhaps less likely alternative is borrowing from Old Irish *cíar* ('brown'); Ásgeirr Blöndal Magnússon, p. 458 (sv 'Kíarr').

have been borrowed into Germanic during the early centuries AD.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, these dim echoes only emphasise the fact that there is virtually no trace of Rome in any surviving Germanic literary context until after the conversions to Christianity.

#### 2.5.4 DISCONTINUITY IN GERMANIC LEGEND & RELIGION

Traces of early Scandinavian legend concerning Scandinavia itself are extremely scarce; most of the early legends are external to Scandinavia. The shadowy *Kíarr/Kjár* suggests something Roman, now lost. *Hlǫðsquiða* relates to possibly pre-fifth-century Goths and seems likely to have reached Scandinavia before the sound-changes into NG took place. The *Vǫlsung-Niflung* cycle has historical horizons in fifth-century Burgundy and may have first gained a wider audience when the Franks conquered the Burgundians in the sixth century, but it is uncertain when it arrived in Scandinavia.<sup>120</sup> Roberta Frank has noted that there is no actual evidence—in skaldic poetry or artwork—demonstrating that the *Vǫlsung* cycle was known in Scandinavian contexts before the late tenth century,<sup>121</sup> though this lack does not rule out the possibility that the legends were known in Scandinavia at an earlier date, as it seems likely that Scandinavians were aware of Frankish trends during the Migration Age (§3.1.5). If the form *Kíarr* which appears in the *Vǫlsung*-cycle poem *Atlaquiða in grænlensca* is a genuine fossil belonging to that narrative, and not a late insertion, that would suggest an early date for knowledge of the *Vǫlsung* cycle in Scandinavia.<sup>122</sup> Associated with pre-Viking Scandinavia itself is the legendary *Skjöldung* cycle, though this material presents special problems of its own (§4 & §5).

Traditions are often assumed to evolve at a relatively slow and steady rate, but while traditions are doubtless undergoing constant slow evolution, in practice it seems that particular periods of political upheaval and social reorganisation see the evolution of traditions greatly accelerated. In the Germanic world successive periods of social change seem to have progressively erased previous traditions while simultaneously encouraging the acquisition or generation of new bodies of legend. The discontinuity in Germanic legend indicated by the dearth of Roman remembrances and the more general paucity of legendary material predating the mid/late fourth century AD may reflect such processes. This pattern may be not least true for Scandinavia, where the beginning of the GIA saw the introduction of native styles which were to supplant Mediterranean styles,<sup>123</sup> and the

<sup>119</sup>Compare Gothic *Rūma*, from Greek *Ῥώμη* or Latin *Rōma*.

<sup>120</sup>*The Poetic Edda*, ed. and commentary by Ursula Dronke (Oxford: Clarendon: 1969-), 1: *The Heroic Poems*, 29-38.

<sup>121</sup>Roberta Frank 'Skaldic Verse and the Date of *Beowulf*', in *DoB*, pp. 123-40, pp. 130-31.

<sup>122</sup>*Atlaquiða in grænlensca*, p. 241 (v. 7).

<sup>123</sup>The bracteates and Salin's Style I both seem to have originated as particularly Scandinavian innovations, developing relatively rapidly away from the classical iconography and motifs which they creatively reinterpreted within a Germanic context. Both are thought to have served as a medium for the Germanic élite to express their status; Mårit Gaimster, *Vendel Period Bracteates on Gotland: On the*

spread of the runic system,<sup>124</sup> as well as major changes in practices of ritual deposition.<sup>125</sup> In GIA Scandinavia, the growth of new tribal confederations, and perhaps the reorientation of society towards a communal cult-centre,<sup>126</sup> could have seen the disappearance of traditions associated with previous institutions which had become obsolete. Such processes may have been repeated during periods of social change in the LGIA (§3) and again in the Viking Age (§4 & §5). Something similar seems to have taken place in England following the Norman Conquest, where a stock of native narratives and performance styles was, eventually, replaced by new models. Similar changes again affected medieval Scandinavia itself, i.e. the replacement of Eddic-style poetry by ballad forms.

It seems likely that such processes would have been reflected not only by changes in the legendary corpus but also in the mythological corpus and more generally in religious beliefs and practices. This effect may be best expressed in the Viking-Age conversion to Christianity, when social and political realignments saw the replacement of those aspects of heathen religion which most conflicted with the requirements of medieval Christianity—those of ‘public’ cult practices—while elements at the level of ‘private superstition’ for which Christianity did not have replacements lingered on in ‘folk belief’.<sup>127</sup> But similar processes surely operated in earlier pre-Christian contexts. Although there is little information about Germanic religion of the Roman period, it is remarkable how well the Nerthus cult seems to be reflected in information, approximately a millennium younger, concerning Njorðr and the Vanir. Although clearly waning within late heathenism, Nerthus/Njorðr’s cult is perhaps better represented than the cults of deities such as Týr or Ullr, for whom place-name evidence implies a far larger role in earlier times

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*Significance of Germanic Art*, Acta Archaeologica Lundensia: Series in 8°, 27 (Lund: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1998), p. 216; Märit Gaimster, ‘The Scandinavian Gold Bracteates’, in *RRiS*, pp. 218-21; Kent Andersson, ‘Nordic Gold Jewellery Production in the First Centuries A.D.’, in *RRiS*, pp. 185-87; Hedeager, *Societies*, p. 156; Karl Hauck, ‘Fünens besondere Anteil an den Bildinhalten der völkerwanderungszeitliche Brakteaten (Zur Ikonologie der Goldbrakteaten XLIX)’, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 26 (1992), 106-48; Morten Axboe, ‘Guld og Guder i folkevandringstiden: Brakteaterne some kilde til politisk/religøse forhold, in *Samfundsorganisation*, pp. 187-202; Eliza Fønnesbech-Sandberg, ‘Guldets funktion i ældre germansk jernalder’, in *Samfundsorganisation*, pp. 233-44; Anders Andréén, ‘Guld och makt—en tolkning av de skandinaviska guldbrakteaternas funktion’, in *Samfundsorganisation*, pp. 245-56; Morten Axboe and others, *Die Goldbrakteaten der Völkerwanderungszeit: Ikonographischer Katalog*, Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften, 24 (Munich: Fink, 1985-); Mogens B. Mackeprang, *De nordiske guldbrakteater: brakteatstudiets historie, brakteattypernes udvikling, geografiske fordeling, kronologi, motiver og praegningsteknik*, Jysk arkæologisk selskabs skrifter; 2 (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlaget 1952), pp. 20-21; Bernhard Salin, *Die altgermanische Thierornamentik: typologische Studie über germanische Metallgegenstände aus dem IV. bis IX. Jahrhundert, nebst einer Studie über irische Ornamentik*, trans. by J. Mestorf, 2nd edn (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1904) pp. 214-45. Both the bracteates and Style I also may have served to express Scandinavian cultural affiliation, but restrictions on the length of this study preclude discussion of these issues.

<sup>124</sup>Glancing at any catalogue of runic finds (i.e. Krause-Jankuhn) and their approximate dates reveals that most runic finds older than c. 400 are from southern Scandinavia, after which finds are spread more widely (but not universally) through the Germanic world. As with the bracteates and Style I, it is possible that use or display of runes demonstrated cultural affiliation with the Scandinavian world, but space restrictions on this study prevent the presentation of this matter.

<sup>125</sup>See §2.1.1.

<sup>126</sup>See §2.4.

<sup>127</sup>An analogous process seems to have taken place during the Reformation, as practices associated with medieval Catholicism lingered at the popular level long after public ritual had been replaced in Protestant countries.



than medieval literature suggests.<sup>128</sup> Changes in the religious environment, reflecting social changes, are probably responsible for these shifts. Likewise, though stemming from ancient roots and probably being widely established in the Germanic world by the fourth century, Óðinn's cult seems to have become increasingly important in late Scandinavian heathenism and may reflect growth in the status of the élite from the LGIA. Some Óðinn place names in Denmark (i.e. Odense: ON *Óðinsvé*, sometimes construed as *Óðinsey*) may have been connected to royal sites, strengthening an understanding of Óðinn as a god particularly connected with the heathen aristocracy and perhaps particularly with kingship.<sup>129</sup> The early stages of this growth may be reflected first in the EGIA bracteates which Hauck linked with Óðinn's cult.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup>Kristian Hald, *Vore Stednavne*, 2nd edn (Copenhagen: Gad, 1965), p. 250-53; Further on Óðinn placenames in Scandinavia, see de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, II, 50-54 & Karte 1.

<sup>129</sup>Kristian Hald, 'The Cult of Odin in Danish Place-Names'. in *Early English and Norse Studies Presented to Hugh Smith in Honour of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. by Arthur Brown and Peter Foote (London: Methuen, 1963), pp. 99-109 (pp. 108-09).

<sup>130</sup>Hauck has numerous publications on this topic, but see, for example, Karl Hauck, 'Zwanzig Jahre Brakteatensforschung in Münster/Westfalen (Zur Ikonologie der Goldbrakteaten XL)', in *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 22 (1988), 17-52; Karl Hauck, 'Zur Ikonologie der Goldbrakteaten, IV: Metemorphosen Odins nach dem Wissen von Snorri und von Amulettmeistern der Völkerwanderungszeit' in *Festschrift für Siegfried Gutenbrunner: zum 65. Geburtstag am 26. Mai 1971 überreicht von seinen Freunden und Kollegen*, ed. by Oskar Bandle, Heinz Klingenberg, and Friedrich Maurer (Heidelberg: Winter, 1972), pp. 47-70; and further in bibliographies in volumes of Axboe and others, *Goldbrakteaten*.