

# CHAPTER FIVE

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## REASSESSING THE SCYLDING-SKJÖLDUNG HISTORICAL LEGENDS

If the Scylding-Skjöldung legends need not represent a simple historical tradition, certain questions remain: What are the Scylding-Skjöldung legends? How did they come to be? Why did they come to be? A full reassessment of the Scylding-Skjöldung cycle in the space of this chapter would be impossible; any such attempt would surely require space well in excess of that given to this entire study. Without some discussion of such subjects, however, it would be inappropriate to dispense with the legends as essentially historical sources—as this study does—and difficult to consider their significance within Viking-Age Scandinavia’s ideological framework.

### 5.1 SOURCES FROM THE VIKING AGE

#### 5.1.1 THE ANGLO-SAXON SOURCES

Dating the Anglo-Saxon sources which concern the Scylding-Skjöldung cycle can be a thorny problem. Simply dating *Beowulf*’s manuscript is not without bitter controversy, but it seems fairly safe to say that most scholars currently agree that it was written sometime in the vicinity of AD 1000.<sup>1</sup> As for the date of composition, learned arguments have been advanced for dates between the seventh and eleventh centuries, though all such attempts boil down to scholarly speculation. For the purposes of this study, the fact that the poem was set in writing c. 1000 is enough to allow description of *Beowulf*’s conception of the Scylding legends as a ‘Viking-Age’ one, regardless of the original composition date. Of course, *Beowulf*’s version need not have been the only one, nor the most commonly held.

The dating of *Widsið* seems to engage less inflammatory scholarly passions than does that of *Beowulf*. If *Widsið*’s manuscript is earlier than *Beowulf*’s, it may not be much earlier, possibly of the late tenth century.<sup>2</sup> It was long thought that the poem itself, or the greater part of it, was of considerable antiquity, but this seems uncertain at best. As with *Beowulf*, it seems safest to recognise that *Widsið* need not be significantly older than its manuscript,<sup>3</sup> though all or part of it could be.

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<sup>1</sup>Agreeing generally with Ker’s dating ‘s. x/xi’; N.R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon*, supplemented edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), p. 281. See also David N. Dumville, ‘*Beowulf* Come Lately: Some Notes on the Paleography of the Nowell Codex’, *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 255 (1988), 49-63.

<sup>2</sup>‘s. x<sup>2</sup>’ in Ker, p. 153.

<sup>3</sup>Gösta Langenfeldt, ‘Studies in *Widsið*’, *Namn och bygd*, 47 (1959), 70-110 (pp. 70-75).

Figures connected with the Scylding-cycle appear in various genealogical sources concerning West-Saxon kings. Asser's *Life of Alfred* lists a *Sceldwea* amongst Alfred's ancestors, while the genealogy for Æþelwulf under the year 855 in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle lists a *Sceaf* and a *Sceldwea*.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the tenth-century *Chronicle of Aethelweard* includes a *Scef* and *Scyld* in its West-Saxon genealogy; names with identical spellings appear in *Beowulf*.<sup>5</sup> These genealogical sources may be considered products of their time, the ninth and tenth centuries, when the West-Saxon dynasty's pedigree appears to have been being extended backwards in response to contemporary ideological concerns.<sup>6</sup> Post-conquest, William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum* notes a *Sceldius*, son of *Sceaf*, amongst the West-Saxon kings' ancestors.<sup>7</sup>

### 5.1.2 THE SCANDINAVIAN SOURCES

Elements from the Skjoldung legends appear in various kinds of poetry, some of which may date to the Viking Age. The complex structure of skaldic poetry may help to prevent much post-compositional alteration, and scholars often follow Snorri Sturluson's lead in accepting as accurate many of the attributed datings for skaldic poems, though they survive only in much later medieval manuscripts.<sup>8</sup> Of course, here our understandings depend on not only which poems survived, but on which legends skalds found best-suited to kennings.

Eddic poetry is generally considered to have been more mutable than skaldic poetry, making it difficult to be sure how a given poem might have changed before it was written down in the medieval period, if it was not largely a medieval composition in the

<sup>4</sup>Asser also mentions *Seth* (son of *Noe*), possibly confused with *Sceaf*; Asser, *Asserius de rebus gestis Ælfredi*, in *Asser's Life of King Alfred: Together with the Annals of Saint Neots Erroneously Ascribed to Asser*, ed. by William Henry Stevenson with Dorothy Whitelock, supplemented edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), pp. 1-96 (p. 3). Also amongst Æþelwulf's ancestors is *Heremod*; the same name appears in *Beowulf*, and has a Scandinavian cognate, *Hermóðr*; ASC-Plummer, 1, p. 66-67; ASC-Thorpe, pp. 126-29. *Sceafa [weold] Longbeardum* according to *Widsið*, p. 150 (l. 32b); see further §5.1.3.

<sup>5</sup>*The Chronicle of Aethelweard*, ed. by A. Campbell (London: Nelson, 1962), p. 33. *Scef*, according to Æþelweard, came to the island *Scani* as a child in a boat. Something similar seems to have been understood of *Scyld Scefing* in *Beowulf*, pp. 1-2 (ll. 4-46).

<sup>6</sup>Kenneth Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 39 (1953), 287-348 (pp. 332, 339-45); Dumville, 'Kingship', p. 95. A figure from these genealogies called *Beaw* (ASC-Plummer, 1, p. 66; ASC-Thorpe, pp. 126-29) or *Beo* (*Aethelweard*, p. 33) may also have been meant to be represented in *Beowulf*'s 'Beowulf I' (*Beowulf*, pp. 1, 3, ll. 18a, 53b) who holds a similar genealogical position; see §5.1.3; Chambers, *Introduction*, p. 42. See further David N. Dumville, 'The West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List and the Chronology of Early Wessex', *Peritia: Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland*, 4 (1985), 21-66; David N. Dumville, 'The West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List: Manuscripts and Texts', *Anglia*, 104 (1986), 1-32. A convenient comparison of the relevant genealogies is in Chambers, *Introduction*, pp. 198-204.

<sup>7</sup>William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, ed. and trans. by R.A.B. Mynors with R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), p. 176.

<sup>8</sup>Jón Helgason, 'Norges og Islands digtning', in *Litteraturhistoria*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal, Nordisk Kultur, 8, 2 vols (Stockholm: Bonnier; Oslo: Aschehoug; Copenhagen: Schultz, 1943-53), B: Norge og Island, 3-179 (pp. 143-45, 151-53).

first place. No Eddic poetry deals directly with the Skjöldung cycle, though certain aspects of the so-called ‘Helgi-lays’ may be related. The extant forms of the Helgi-lays may date from the thirteenth century, though it has been thought that there may have been earlier versions drawing on ‘Danish traditions’. *Ynglingatal* is in the Eddic *kviðuháttir* metre but makes heavy use of kennings in the skaldic style and its authorship is traditionally assigned to Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, c. 900.<sup>9</sup> *Grottasöngur*, a poem in the *fornyrðislag* metre preserved in some manuscripts of Snorri’s Edda,<sup>10</sup> tells a story centred around a quern called *Grotti* and explains how Fróði’s peace ended as well as how the sea became salty through the incorporation of several motifs common to international folklore.<sup>11</sup> Parts of *Grottasöngur* may be as old as the Viking Age, though it is difficult to tell when the poem received its final shaping. Jan de Vries argued that this was not until the twelfth century in Iceland.<sup>12</sup> As for the written sources surely composed after the Viking Age, some are thought to have existed by the early thirteenth century, but others may be rather later; the surviving manuscripts are medieval or post-medieval in any case.<sup>13</sup>

In some instances, the relative familiarity of particular names associated with figures from the legends at different dates can be inferred from the appearance of those names in runic inscriptions or in relatively contemporary European written sources.

### 5.1.3 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE ANGLO-SAXON & MEDIEVAL SCANDINAVIAN LEGENDS

Vast effort has been expended over the last two centuries in attempts to identify and explain relationships between the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian Scylding-Skjöldung legends. Olrik’s *Danmarks Heltedigtning* is largely devoted to this issue, as is Chambers’ *Beowulf: An Introduction*; it would scarcely be possible to summarise even a tithe of such works here, much less the host of shorter pieces discussing aspects of the subject. In any event, despite gargantuan effort, no clear consensus on the matter truly can be said to have been reached.<sup>14</sup> That the Anglo-Saxons and medieval Scandinavians knew differing

<sup>9</sup>See §3.2.2.

<sup>10</sup>*Grottasöngur*, pp. 293-97.

<sup>11</sup>Aarne-Thompson, I, 195 (A1115.2, Why the sea is salt); II, 279-80 (D1601.20-21.1, Self-grinding mill/Stone salt-mill/Wish mill); III, III, 153, 230 and (F451.5.1.5.1, Dwarf king turns mill which produces gold; F531.5.10.2, Giant maidens grind gold, peace, soldiers, salt, etc. on large stone mill; F871, *Kalevala Sampo*).

<sup>12</sup>Jan de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, 2 vols, Grundriss der germanischen Philologie, 15-16 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1941-42), I, 95-98. A version of the story known in *Grottasöngur* was still current in nineteenth-century Orkney; Alfred W. Johnston, ‘Grotta Söngur and the Orkney and Shetland Quern’, *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 6 (1908-09), 296-304.

<sup>13</sup>See, for example, discussion in Theodore M. Anderson, ‘Kings’ Sagas’, in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: a Critical Guide*, ed. by Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, *Islandica*, 45 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 197-238.

<sup>14</sup>Another older (and briefer) effort was made in Oscar Ludvig Olson, *The Relation of Hrólfs Saga Kraka and the Bjarkarímur to Beowulf: A Contribution to the History of Saga Development in England and*

versions of the same basic legendary cycle is clear. For the purposes of this study, however, the most important consideration is whether it is possible to suppose a wholly Scandinavian origin for the Anglo-Saxon traditions. According to Chambers (speaking of Olrik's interpretation), the Anglo-Saxon and medieval Scandinavian Scylding-Skjöldung legends 'interlock, dovetail into one another and make a connected whole which, though it leaves details obscure, seems in its main outlines established beyond doubt'.<sup>15</sup> With doubt cast on the Scandinavian provenance of certain elements from the Skjöldung cycle, however, similar doubt is cast on many of the assumed relations between the Anglo-Saxon and medieval Scandinavian narratives. The main outlines may indeed interlock, but the obscuring of details makes it difficult to be sure, as Chambers was, that the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian variants indeed represent parallel branches stemming from a common origin in pre-Viking Scandinavian history.

The surviving Anglo-Saxon material concerning the Scylding-Skjöldung cycle is so cursory (and idiosyncratic) that it is probably dangerous to assume that it provides an accurate picture of the state of the legends in Viking-Age Britain. The considerably larger body of medieval Scandinavian sources demonstrates that a number of variants were current simultaneously in Scandinavia from the end of the twelfth century. It is possible that additional Anglo-Saxon variants have been lost, but perhaps it is more likely that the aristocratic Scandinavian orientation of the legends made them more popular in Anglo-Scandinavian oral environments than in literate clerical Anglo-Saxon circles (where it seems most likely that the Anglo-Saxon materials were committed to writing).<sup>16</sup> Early or late, the variants known in *Beowulf* and *Widsið* might be only tangential to a Scylding-Skjöldung legendary matrix in Viking-Age England.

There are, in fact, fewer certain agreements between the Anglo-Saxon and medieval Scandinavian versions than is commonly assumed. In fact, an extremely strict analysis provides only the following correspondences:

- 1) Hroðgar/Hróarr and Halga/Helgi were brothers (except in the *Chronicon Lethrense* where the positions of Ro [= Hroðgar] and Haldanus are reversed).
- 2) They were the sons of Healfdene/Hálfdan (except in the *Chronicon Lethrense*).
- 3) Hroþulf/Hrólfur was a nephew of Hroðgar/Hróarr (except in the *Chronicon Lethrense*).
- 4) These figures were members of a dynasty or tribe known as the Scyldingas/Skjöldungar (but, except in *Beowulf*, not in surviving sources earlier than Snorri Sturluson).
- 5) A character called Heorowearð/Hjorvarðr appears.

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*the Scandinavian Countries*, Publications of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study, 3.1 (Urbana, IL: Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study, 1916). A new overview of the relevant narratives and their interrelations seems long overdue.

<sup>15</sup>Chambers, *Introduction*, p. 427.

<sup>16</sup>Patrick Wormald, 'Bede, *Beowulf* and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy', in *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England: Papers in Honour of the 1300th Anniversary of the Birth of Bede, Given at Cornell University in 1973 and 1974*, ed. by Robert T. Farrell, BAR, 46 (Oxford: BAR, 1978) pp. 32-95 (pp. 52-57) Lapidge, 'Beowulf, Aldhelm, the *Liber Monstrorum* and Wessex', pp. 156-57.

It should be noted that *Widsið* substantiates only point 3:

Hroþwulf ond Hroðgar heoldon lengest  
 sibbe ætsomne suhtorfædran,  
 siþþan hy forwræcon wicinga cynn<sup>17</sup>  
 ond Ingeldes ord forbigdan,  
 forheowan æt Heorote Heaðobeardna þrym.<sup>18</sup>

This passage does not even confirm that Hroþwulf and Hroðgar were *Dene*; *Beowulf* is, in fact, the only Viking-Age source which confirms that point or points 1, 2, and 4, above.<sup>19</sup> Thus, most of the further assumed correspondences between Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian sources are based on *Beowulf*, a poetic monument of disputed origin and doubtful historical accuracy. The Anglo-Saxon sources do not even confirm that Hroþwulf was Halga's son, and certainly do not indicate he is the product of an incestuous relationship. Nor is Hroþwulf's fall—a primary feature for the medieval Scandinavian legends—foreshadowed in the Anglo-Saxon sources.<sup>20</sup>

There are several more general points worth making about the relationships (or lack thereof) between the Viking-Age Anglo-Saxon sources and the medieval Scandinavian versions of the legends; certain issues are treated in greater detail in later sections.

*Widsið*'s passage focuses on Hroþwulf and Hroðgar's strife with Ingeld and the Heaðobeardan. *Beowulf* elaborates on this theme, adding that Ingeld is the son of Froda. Certain details of this feud seem to be echoed in *Gesta Danorum*.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, in the Scandinavian legends, the character Hálfðan is often depicted in conflict with his brother Fróði; sometimes Hálfðan's brother (or half-brother) is Ingjaldr, and they are instead both Fróði's sons. Ingjaldr and Fróði are Skjöldungar in the Scandinavian sources, not

<sup>17</sup>Exactly what the poet meant—or believed he meant—by *wicingas* is unclear. See discussion and references in Chambers, *Widsith*, pp. 205 n. to l. 47, 208 n. to l. 59; Malone, *Widsith*, p. 209; Wessén, *Folkstammarna*, pp. 17-27, 38.

<sup>18</sup>*Widsið*, pp. 150-51 (ll. 45-49).

<sup>19</sup>An eleventh-century skaldic verse designates Sveinn Úlfsson as *atseti Hleiðrar* (*Skjaldedigtning*, B.I, 377), but this cannot prove Lejre was linked with the Skjöldungar as, with or without them, Lejre seems to have been an important ideological centre in the tenth century; Thietmar of Merseburg, *Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg und ihre Korveier Überarbeitung* (*Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi Chronicon*), ed. by Robert Holtzmann, MGH: SRG, Nova series, 9 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1955), pp. 23-24 (Book 1, Chapter 17); see §3.4.1 & §5.2.4. Frodo IV is said to have dwelt at *Ringsted* (in central Sjælland) in AJ, p. 341 *DsAl*, p. 17 (Chapter 9). This name may be echoed in the *Hringstaðir* held by Helgi in *HHBl*, pp. 131, 134, (v. 8, 58); Olrik, *Legends*, p. 326. Fróði is described as a king at Hleiðrar (i.e. Lejre in Denmark) in *Grottasöngur*, p. 300 (v. 20); and at Hleiðra in *Ynglinga saga*; *Heimskringla*, I, 25.

<sup>20</sup>Medieval Scandinavian sources universally agree that Hrólfr was Helgi's son (by his own daughter), and this is presumably the source of the common opinion that Hroþwulf is Halga's son in *Beowulf*. If we had only *Beowulf*, however, Hroþwulf might be the child of any of Hroðgar's siblings. Hemmingsen, arguing that Hrólfr's fall reflected that of the Erulian Rodulf, suggested that the incest motif had been added to the story to explain how a heroic king, in contrast to the normal structure of traditional narratives as identified by Propp and Dundes, had suffered defeat; Hemmingsen, pp. 128-32. Such irregular parentage is a motif commonly found in connection with legendary heroes; for example: King Arthur and Sigurðr Fáfnisbani. It is even possible that Hrólfr's incestuous origins were inspired by such models.

<sup>21</sup>*Beowulf*, pp. 76-77 (ll. 2020-2069a), *Gesta Danorum*, pp. 157-80 (Book 6).

Heaðobeardan; few traces of this latter tribe can be seen in the Scandinavian legends.<sup>22</sup> Yet though there are considerable differences between the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian accounts concerning Ingeld/Ingjaldr and Froda/Fróði, they must be related in some fashion.

*Beowulf* is also the primary source of information about the Scylding dynasty, whose name is cognate with Scandinavian *Skilfingar*. A number of the Scyldingas appear to have counterparts in Scandinavian legend, and Eadgils's fight with Onela (in *Beowulf*) broadly reflects the battle between Aðils and Áli on the ice of lake Vænir, which is mentioned in many (but not all) of the Scandinavian sources. Strangely, the Ongenþeow who stands at the head of *Beowulf*'s Scyldingas—and seems to be echoed in *Widsið*'s phrase *Sweom Ongendþeow* [*weold*], though without reference to any Scyldingas—is unknown in the Scandinavian sources, though an *Egill* sometimes appears in his place.<sup>23</sup>

In fact, a number of prominent details from the Anglo-Saxon sources are unknown in the Scandinavian sources. Several members of *Beowulf*'s Scyldingas are missing from the *Skjöldungar*, and there is no hall-name corresponding to *Heorot* (or any hall-name at all).<sup>24</sup> Many scholars have seen *Beowulf* and *Widsið* as hinting that Hroþulf will kill Hroðgar's son Hreðric to claim the kingship for himself. Kenneth Sisam challenged this view, maintaining it read too much into the texts.<sup>25</sup> His views are not universally accepted, but his criticisms seem valid.

Certain elements were developed further in Anglo-Saxon contexts than in Scandinavian ones. The name *Sceldwea* first appears in a ninth-century West Saxon genealogy which provides him with a father *Sceaf*; this pair recurs in a tenth-century West Saxon genealogy as *Scyld* and *Scef*,<sup>26</sup> and these forms are very similar to the *Scyld Scefing* found in *Beowulf*.<sup>27</sup> Based on *Beowulf*'s description of *Scyld* (and William of Malmesbury's related tale of *Scef*), *Scyld* and *Scef* have often been interpreted as vestigial figures from an agricultural myth in which a divine hero brought prosperity to men. The name *Sceaf/Scef* is linked with OE *sceaf* ('sheaf'), and the association is strengthened by

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<sup>22</sup>Restrictions on space in the study prevent the presentation of wider discussion on parallels in narratives concerning the Scyldingas and Heaðobeardan, Helgo and Hothbroddus in *Gesta Danorum*, and the Eddic Helgi-lays, but see Picard, *Sakralkönigtum?*, 131-58; Davidson-Fisher, II, 43-44 (n. 33, 35); Otto Höfler, 'Der Sakralcharakter des germanischen Königtums', in *The Sacral Kingship: Contributions to the Central Theme of the VIIIth International Congress for the History of Religions (Rome, April 1955)*, Studies in the history of religions, 4 (Leiden, Brill, 1959), pp. 664-701 (pp. 674-76); Jan de Vries, 'Die Helgilieder', *Arkiv for nordisk filologi*, 72 (1957), 123-54 (pp. 141-54); D. Hoffman, *Nordisch-Englische*, pp. 114-45; Otto Höfler, 'Das Opfer im Semnonenhain und die Edda', in *Edda, Skalden, Saga: Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Felix Genzmer*, ed. by Hermann Schneider (Heidelberg: Winter, 1952), pp. 1-67; Kemp Malone, 'Hagbard and Ingeld' in *SiHLACS*, pp. 63-81; Kemp Malone, 'Agelmund and Lamicho', in *SiHLACS*, pp. 86-107; Olrik, *Legends*, pp. 303-04; Bugge, *Home*, pp. 141-96, 271-90.

<sup>23</sup> *Widsið*, p. 150 (l. 31); *Beowulf*, pp. 89-90, 93, 110-13 (ll. 2379a-2395, 2472-89, 2922-98).

<sup>24</sup> See §5.2.4.

<sup>25</sup> *Widsið*, 150-51 (ll. 45-46); *Beowulf*, pp. 44, 38, 45 (ll. 1013-19, 1163b-68a, 1180b-87); Kenneth Sisam, *The Structure of Beowulf* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 35-39, 80-82.

<sup>26</sup> *Asserius*, p. 3; ASC-Plummer, I, p. 66-67; ASC-Thorpe, p. 126-29; *Aethelweard*, p. 33. *Scyld* appears to be a strong form of the name *Sceldwea*.

<sup>27</sup> *Beowulf*, pp. 1-2 (ll. 4-46).

reference in *Beowulf* to Scef's grandson *Beow* (*Beaw* or *Beo* in the West Saxon genealogies), as OE *beow* means 'barley', related to ON *bygg*, and is sometimes thought to be echoed in *Locasenna's* *Byggvir*.<sup>28</sup> The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle identifies Scef as a son of Noah, born on Noah's ark, and this is often thought of as an attempt to rationalise an old myth about a ship-born (or ship-borne) child with Christian learning. Certainly, it seems likely that West Saxon genealogists were keen to establish pedigrees linking their kings to prestigious Christian traditions.<sup>29</sup>

The name *Scef* has no close cognate in Old Norse (perhaps only *skauf*, 'a fox's brush'), and when borrowed from Anglo-Saxon genealogy for Snorri's Edda it was mangled to *Seskef*,<sup>30</sup> which means nothing at all. Furthermore, *Widsið* names a *Sceafa*, a weak form of *Scef*, as ruler of the Langobards.<sup>31</sup> This usage is particularly interesting given the suggested parallels between the Erulian-Langobardic struggle and fall of Hrólfr kraki in Scandinavian legend and the suggestion that Scyld Scefing *egsode Eorl[e]* ('terrified the Eruli').<sup>32</sup> Perhaps Scef and Scyld, as we know them, were learned creations of Anglo-Saxon genealogists combining information from continental sources, Germanic myth/legend, and Christian learning. In any event, it seems that Scyld was eventually adopted into Scandinavian legend as Skjöldr (absent from Viking-Age skaldic poetry, his first Scandinavian appearance is in *Brevis historia*) while Scef remained an English feature.

## 5.2 SOME ISSUES CONCERNING THE LEGENDS' EARLY EVOLUTION

### 5.2.1 THE DYNASTIC TITLES

*Widsið* does not mention the names *Scyldingas* (or *Scylfingas*) even when discussing Hroþwulf and Hroðgar. *Beowulf* provides the earliest surviving record of these terms' use in a dynastic sense.<sup>33</sup> It is commonly assumed that *Beowulf's* Scylding dynasty reflects old

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<sup>28</sup>Beow and Byggvir may be echoed in the Finnish *Pekko*; de Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, II, 204-06; Chambers, *Introduction*, pp. 68-88; Olrik, *Legends*, pp. 381-445; Olrik, *Heltedigtning*, I, 226-48; II, 249-65; *Aethelweard*, p. 33; ASC-Plummer, I, p. 66; ASC-Thorpe, p. 126-29; *Beowulf*, pp. 1, 3 (ll. 18a, 53b); *Locasenna*, p. 105 (v. 43-46). Dumézil, however, has argued that *Pekko* is the diminutive form of *Pietari* ('Peter'); Dumézil, *Myth to Fiction*, pp. 132-33.

<sup>29</sup>Thomas D. Hill, 'Scyld Scefing and the "Stirps Regia": Pagan Myth and Christian Kingship in *Beowulf*', in *Magister Regis: Studies in Honor of Robert Earl Kaske*, ed by Arthur Groos with Emerson Brown, Jr. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986, pp. 37-47; Thomas D. Hill, 'The Myth of the Ark-Born Son of Noe and the West-Saxon Royal Genealogical Tables', *Harvard Theological Review*, 80 (1987), 379-83; Craig R. Davis, *Beowulf and the Demise of Germanic Legend in England* (London: Garland, 1996), pp. 58-63. See also Lapidge, 'Beowulf, Aldhelm, the Liber Monstrorum and Wessex', pp. 184-88.

<sup>30</sup>In the Codex Regius manuscript, presumably from an Old English source reading *se Scef*. Codex Upsaliensis has *Sefsmeg* (*Snorra Edda*, p. 4) while Codex Wormianus has *Cespheth*; *SnEdHafn*, I, p. 24.

<sup>31</sup>*Widsið*, p. 150 (l. 32b).

<sup>32</sup>See §4.1.3.

<sup>33</sup>*Beowulf* is remarkable in associating these names not only with the ruling Danish and Swedish dynasties, but also with the tribal groups *Dene* and *Sweon* ruled by those dynasties.

Scandinavian traditions, but if so, there is no surviving Viking-Age Scandinavian evidence of a Skjöldung dynasty. If Sæmundr Sigfússon composed a tally of Skjöldungar comparable to Ari's tally of Ynglingar, that suggests an understanding of the Skjöldungar as a legendary dynasty, comparable to *Beowulf's* Scyldingas, among Icelanders by the early twelfth century.<sup>34</sup> However, roughly contemporaneous use of the term in Denmark by Sven Aggesen and Saxo Grammaticus suggests that a dynastic understanding may not have been widespread at that time. Sven Aggesen, speaking of the legendary Skiold, says: 'A quo primum modibus Hislandensibus skioldunger sunt reges nuncupati'.<sup>35</sup> Saxo Grammaticus wrote of Skyoldus: 'tantaque indolis eius experimenta fuere, ut ab ipso ceteri Danorum reges communi quodam vocabulo skioldungi nuncuparentur'.<sup>36</sup> It is not clear that Sven or Saxo understood the term *skjöldungr* as anything more than a *heiti* for 'king' which referred especially to Danish kings—a kind of honorific—despite their (erroneous) derivation of the term from the legendary Skjöldr's name. Roughly contemporaneous is the *Chronicon Lethrense*, the earliest substantial Scandinavian narrative source for figures commonly identified as Skjöldungar. It does not mention any 'Skiold' nor does it use the term 'Skioldunger'. The earliest sure dynastic use of *skjöldungr* in a Scandinavian context comes from Snorri's thirteenth-century Edda.<sup>37</sup>

It is commonly recognised that the legendary Skjöldr is a back-formation from the term *skjöldungr*, a standard skaldic *heiti* for 'king, leader', much in the way Sven and Saxo demonstrated.<sup>38</sup> Erik Björkman suggested *skjöldungr* derived from an early LG word \**skalda* (MLG *schalde*),<sup>39</sup> apparently a kind of punt used on the Continent's North Sea coasts, and that \**skalding* (meaning 'boatman') became a label for Scandinavian sailors. Much more likely is that *skjöldungr* meant 'person associated with a shield'.<sup>40</sup> The meaning 'shield-bearer' is often put forward, though a meaning connected with the Germanic custom of raising a leader on a shield—best known from the Merovingian examples—might not be impossible.

Frank has noted that skaldic poetry of the early eleventh century uses *skjöldungr* largely as a 'king' *heiti*, describing the kings Knútr inn ríki, Óláfr helgi, and Magnús góði.

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<sup>34</sup>*Íslendingbók*, pp. 27-28. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson suggested that Ari modelled his tally of the Ynglingar on a similar tally of the Skjöldungar; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Sagnaritun*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>35</sup>*Brevis historia*, pp. 96-97 (Chapter 1). Editors commonly capitalize the variants of the term *skjöldungar* as used by Sven and Saxo in accordance with the common understanding of the term's dynastic use. I have modified the quotations from their published versions slightly to avoid drawing possibly unwarranted attention to a dynastic interpretation of the term's use.

<sup>36</sup>*Gesta Danorum*, p. II (Book 1).

<sup>37</sup>'Þaðan er sv ætt ko[min, er] Skioldvngar heita; þat erv Danakonvngar'; *Snorra Edda*, pp. 6, 135; *SnEdHafn*, I, 26, 374.

<sup>38</sup>Given the difficulty of dating *Beowulf*, it is impossible to say whether or not figures such as Sceldwea, in the tenth-century Anglo-Saxon genealogical sources, are older or younger than the composition of the poem. Skjöldr did not figure strongly, or necessarily appear at all, in the medieval Scandinavian narratives. The evidence does not rule out the possibility that Sceldwea/Scyld/Skjöldr may have been largely an Anglo-Scandinavian hybrid creation; see §5.1.1 and §5.1.3.

<sup>39</sup>Erik Björkman, 'Two Derivations', *Saga Book of the Viking Club*, 7 (1912), 132-40.

<sup>40</sup>*ANEW*, p. 496-97 (sv 'skjöldr' & 'skjöldungr').

She suggested a connection between these kings' exploits in England and the use of *skjöldungr* to describe them.<sup>41</sup> The Icelandic skald Óttarr svarti seems to have used the term in a slightly wider sense when he described Óláfr helgi as a *skjöldunga þopti* and as holding the *þjóðskjöldunga góðra ... veldi*.<sup>42</sup> In these instances, *skjöldungar* (plural) seems to refer to Óláfr's retinue, or perhaps intends to describe Óláfr figuratively as 'in the company of kings'. Use of *skjöldungar* to describe a sub-ethnic collective may be indicated in the mid-tenth-century *Historia de sancto Cuthberto*, where the 'Danes' (a term which need not mean anything more specific than 'Scandinavians') are referred to as *Scaldingi*.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, Olrik noted the legendary hero Helgi and his retinue were collectively termed *ylfingar*.<sup>44</sup> Frank's arguments attempted to assess whether the appearance of similar topics and usages both in skaldic verse and *Beowulf* suggested a Viking-Age compositional date for the latter. These proposals are somewhat problematic, but it may be significant that a dynastic use of *skjöldungr* is absent from extant Viking-Age Scandinavian material.<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, there is scant evidence for Scandinavian use of any terms in the *-ing/-ung-* suffix to imply genealogical descent—as is known from Frankish, Anglo-Saxon, and Gothic contexts—before the twelfth century.<sup>46</sup> The most common use of the *-ing/-ung-* suffix in ON is within words denoting people from a particular place or kind of place, i.e. *Íslendingar*, *útlendingar*.<sup>47</sup> Snorri listed a number of skaldic *heiti* for 'leader' employing the *-ing/-ung-* suffix, and explained them as dynastic titles modelled on a founder figure's personal name.<sup>48</sup> As with Skjöldr, many of the founder figures may be late back-formations of some kind.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Roberta Frank, 'Skaldic', pp. 126-27. The line *veþrs skioldunga valldi* appears in a verse attributed to Gísli Súrsson (tenth century). Before the twelfth century, however, *o* and *a* rhymed fully; the metrical requirement for a half-rhyme here means the verse is most likely late; *Skjaldedigtning*, A.I, 104; B.I, 98-99.

<sup>42</sup> *Skjaldedigtning*, B.I, 270, 272. The element *þjóð-*, in *þjóðskjöldungar*, might be translated 'national', but 'great, excellent' is in some ways more plausible; the word *þjóðkonungr* would normally be translated 'great king'. Óttarr used *ynglingr* as a 'king' *heiti* in reference to Óláfr in the same stanza as he uses *skjöldunga þopti*. Notably, the *Beowulf* poet describes Hroþulf and Hroðgar as *þeodscyldingas*, a very similar term to *þjóðskjöldungar*; *Beowulf*, p. 38 (l. 1019a); Frank 'Skaldic', pp. 126-27.

<sup>43</sup> *Historia de sancto Cuthberto*, in *Symeonis monachi opera omnia*, ed. by Thomas Arnold, Rolls Series, 75, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1882-1885), 1 (1882), 196-214 (pp. 200, 202); Frank, 'Skaldic', p. 127, n. 15 & 17; Björkman, 'Two', pp. 132-40. W.H. Stevenson considered *Scaldingi* a corruption of *skjöldungar*, though he assumed the legendary dynasty was historical; Stevenson, *Asser's Life*, p. 218 n. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Olrik, *Legends*, p. 439; *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, p. 135 (v. 34).

<sup>45</sup> The first certain Scandinavian use of an *-ing/-ung-* term in a genealogical sense is post-Viking, introducing Ari Þorgilsson's Yngling genealogy: 'Þessi eru nofn langfeðga Ynglinga'; *Íslendingabók*, p. 27.

<sup>46</sup> The early-ninth-century Rök stone in Östergötland preserves two names on this pattern: **marika** (*Mæringa*, genitive plural), and **igoldga** (*Ingoldinga*, genitive plural). The Rök inscription seems to betray familiarity with material from continental contexts, however. It is difficult to know whether possible use of the *-ing/-ung-* suffix to imply genealogical descent in these words is an isolated borrowing or not; Bugge, *Runenstein*, p. 127; *SR*, II, 130 (ÖG 136); Otto von Friesen, *Rökstenen: Runstenen vid Röks kyrka, Lysings härad, Östergötland* (Stockholm: Bagge, 1920), pp. 47-48; *Deor*, p. 178 (v. 18-19); Elias Wessén, *Runstenen vid Röks kyrka* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1958), pp. 44-45.

<sup>47</sup> On the *-ing/-ung-* suffix, see further Green, *Language*, pp. 130-33.

<sup>48</sup> These included: *hildingr*, *dauðlingr*, *aðlingr*, *bragningr*, *bvðlungr*, *siklingr*, *skioldungr*, *lofþungr*, *volsungr*, *ynglingr*, and *skilfingr*; *Snorra Edda*, p. 181-85; *SnEdHafn*, I, 516-28.

<sup>49</sup> On the forms *Yngvi* and *ynglingr*, see §3.2.2.

Snorri derived the heiti *skilfingr* from a legendary *Skelfir*, a back-formed figure about whom there is little more to say.<sup>50</sup> Of the Scandinavian Skilfingar dynasty, Snorri says only that they came ‘from Eastern lands’. *Skilfingar* is cognate with the name of *Beowulf*’s Scylfingas, the Swedish dynasty paralleled in Scandinavian sources by the Ynglingar. Assumptions about *Beowulf*’s historicity stand behind the common equation of the Scylfingas, Ynglingar, and Skilfingar. As noted in §4.2.1, such a name-shift is rather difficult to explain and likewise the lack of scholarly comment on it.<sup>51</sup> Only three figures with broadly similar names are found in connection with both *Beowulf*’s Scylfingas and the Scandinavian Ynglingar: Ohthere/Óttarr, Eadgils/Aðils and Onela/Áli (and Áli is not himself an Ynglingr). The term *skilfinga nið* is used once in *Ynglingatal* to describe Egill, father of Óttarr, whose son was Aðils.<sup>52</sup> Here *skilfingar* simply may have meant ‘leaders’; as with *skjöldungr*, there is no clear dynastic use of *skilfingr* from the Viking Age other than *Beowulf*’s Scylfingas.

Some of the ‘king’ *heiti*, however, were certainly dynastic titles, but borrowed from originally non-Scandinavian legends. *Völsungr*, *buðlungr*, and *niflungr* are derived from well-attested legendary dynasties in the *Völsung* cycle—the families of Sigurðr, Atli, and Gunnarr—and are ultimately of continental origin.<sup>53</sup> If the Frankish or Anglo-Saxon dynastic use of *-ing/-ung-* suffixed words influenced similar usage in Scandinavia, it would be difficult to date.

Though it seems most likely that *skjöldungr* was not originally a dynastic appellation, efforts to assess the early use of such terms are hampered by the limitations of the surviving evidence. Any conclusions must be tentative, but the evidence which does survive is not incompatible with an interpretation in which the term *sköldungr*, denoting ‘leader’ (and perhaps by extension ‘leader’s retinue’) acquired a dynastic sense during a process of the legendary narratives’ evolution in an Anglo-Scandinavian context. Although *Beowulf*’s use of *Scyldingas* suggests that a dynastic meaning for such terms may have been current in Scandinavian contexts at some point during the Viking Age, the evidence of Sven Aggesen and Saxo Grammaticus suggests *skjöldungr* may not have been automatically understood in a dynastic sense throughout twelfth-century Scandinavia. At

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<sup>50</sup>Snorri also gives *skilvingr* as *heiti* for Óðinn and ‘sword’, probably meaning ‘shaker’; *Snorra Edda*, pp. 28, 201; *SnEdHafn*, 1, 86, 566; Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 546 (*sv* ‘skillfingr’). There is evidence for a place-name *Skialf* in Uppland for which an association with the Ynglingar has been suggested; Elgqvist, *Skälv*, pp. 68–74. *Ynglingatal* mentions a *Skjálfr*, who according to Snorri strangled her husband Agni, who had slain her father, Frosti, a Sámi leader; *Skjaldedigtning*, B.1, 9; *Heimskringla*, 1, 37–38; Erik Björkman, ‘Skalf och Skilfing’, *Namn och Bygd*, 7 (1919), 163–81; Kari Ellen Gade, ‘Skalf’, *Arkiv for nordisk filologi*, 100 (1985), 59–71. *Skjálfr* is also listed as one of Freyja’s names; *SnEdHafn*, 1, 557; Picard, *Sakralkönigtum?*, pp. 192–219. The histories and relations of these various name-forms appear complex.

<sup>51</sup>For example, Grundtvig merely noted the existence of the apparent Scylfingas-Ynglingar correspondence with little further comment; Grundtvig, ‘Bjovulfs’, p. 283, n. Most recently, Krag argued that information about the Swedish dynasty was synthesized by Ari Þorgilsson, who himself attached the name *Ynglingar* to it, based on his understanding of their descent from Yngvi. Krag considered *Skilfingar* the original name, accepting *Beowulf*’s authority; Krag, pp. 33, 165–66, 210–11, 218–19. But see §3.2.2.

<sup>52</sup>*Skjaldedigtning*, B.1, 10.

<sup>53</sup>See §2.5.4.

the very least, it may be rash to assume that terms like *skjöldungr*, *yinglingr*, or *skilfingr* were borne as dynastic appellations by Scandinavian rulers of the GIA.

### 5.2.2 BJARKI & BJARKAMÁL

*Bjarkamál* is the name commonly given to the long Latin poem concerning the fall of Rولو in *Gesta Danorum*, taking the form of a dialogue between the heroes Biarco and Hialto.<sup>54</sup> Saxo claimed to have adapted his poem from a vernacular original, and certain short verses preserved in Icelandic sources (see below) have often been considered fragments of this original poem, commonly referred to as *\*Bjarkamál in fornu* (or *Húskarlahvøt*).<sup>55</sup> Axel Olrik attempted to reconstruct the ‘original’ *Bjarkamál* but, while Olrik’s Danish version was a remarkable creative achievement, his results must be considered highly speculative at best. More recently, Karsten Friis-Jensen has suggested that Saxo himself was largely responsible for the bulk of his *Bjarkamál*’s content.<sup>56</sup> If there was a long *\*Bjarkamál in fornu* in the Viking Age,<sup>57</sup> Saxo’s *Bjarkamál* should not be considered a reliable guide to its nature.

Several fragments attributed to *\*Bjarkamál in fornu* are preserved in Icelandic sources (and conveniently collected in *Skjaldedigtning*). The most relevant, from *Heimskringla*, read:

Dagr ’s upp kominn,    dynja hana fjaðrar,  
mál’s vílmögum    at vinna erfiði;  
vaki ok æ vaki    vina hofuð,  
allir enir œztu    Aðils of sinnar.

Hár enn harðgreipi,    Hrólfur skjótandi,  
ættumgóðir menn,    þeirs ekki flœja;  
vekka yðr at víni,    né at vífs rúnum,  
heldr vek ek yðr at hørðum    Hildar leiki.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup>*Gesta Danorum*, pp. 53-63 (Book 2).

<sup>55</sup>*Heimskringla*, II, 361-62. A performance of *Bjarkamál in fornu* before the Battle of Stiklastaðir is also mentioned in *Olafs saga hins helga*, p. 182; and *Fóstbræðra saga*, in *Vestfirðinga sögur*, ed. by Björn K. Þórolfsson og Guðni Jónsson, Íslensk fornrit, 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1943), pp. 119-276 (p. 261).

<sup>56</sup>Friis-Jensen pointed especially to the influence of Gautier de Châtillon’s *Alexandreis* and Virgil (particularly the *Nyctomachia* in Book 2 of the *Aeneid*) on Saxo’s *Bjarkamál*; Friis-Jensen, *Latin Poet*, pp. 15-16, 64-101. See also Friis-Jensen, *Saxo og Vergil*, pp. 88-91.

<sup>57</sup>The surviving *\*Bjarkamál* fragments may themselves be largely post-Viking creations; Klaus von See, ‘*Húskarlahvøt*: Nochmals zum Alter der *Bjarkamál*’, in *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. by Ursula Dronke and others (Odense: Odense University Press, 1981), pp. 421-31 [repr. in Klaus von See, *Edda, Saga, Skaldendichtung: Aufsätze zur skandinavischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, Skandinavistische Arbeiten, 6 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1981), pp. 272-82.]

<sup>58</sup>*Skjaldedigtning*, B.I, 170-71; *Heimskringla*, II, 361-62. Another possibly relevant fragment is ‘Hniginn er j hadd jardar/Hrólfur hinn störlati’ which comes from an early-modern version of Snorri’s *Edda*; *Two*

In theme at least, these verses are similar to the opening of Saxo's *Bjarkamál*, seemingly exhorting warriors to rouse themselves and prepare for battle. It is odd, however, that warriors who presumably should belong to Hrólfr kraki appear to be referred to as 'companions of Aðils'. This quirk is commonly explained with reference to a version of the story in which Hrólfr had sent his warriors to assist Aðils in the Swedish king's battle with Áli. This tale may first have been written in *Skjöldunga saga*, whence Snorri acquired it and repeated it in his Edda and in *Ynglinga saga*, and whence it also came to *Bjarkarímur*. It does not appear in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, nor in the early Danish sources.<sup>59</sup> Olrik rejected the authenticity of this story as a West Scandinavian addition to the Skjöldung cycle, along with the battle between Áli and Aðils itself.<sup>60</sup> In order to explain the apparent description of *\*Bjarkamál in fornu's* warriors as companions of Aðils, Olrik suggested that the phrase *aðils of sinnar* might be interpreted 'companions of a noble' (postulating an ON *\*aðill* on the model of OE *æðele*) or that an older version of the poem might have used an ODa term *aðalsinnar* ('excellent companions').<sup>61</sup> It might be, however, as plausible to view the *Bjarkamál* fragments in *Óláfs saga helga* as unconnected with legends of Hrólfr kraki. Hrólfr skjótandi, who appears in the *Óláfs saga helga* fragment, can hardly be identified with Hrólfr kraki, though his appearance in an originally separate Bjarki-tale might have encouraged its linking with legends of Hrólfr kraki.<sup>62</sup> The extant fragments of *\*Bjarkamál in fornu* mention no characters from the later Skjöldung cycle, not even the presumed speaker Bjarki. Bjarki—variously known as Bøðvarr-Bjarki, Bøðvarr, or Bodvarus in the medieval Scandinavian sources—might easily have had a separate early existence.

Narratives concerning Bjarki, whose name is likely to be a short form of *Björn* or a name in *-björn*, largely take the form of wonder-tales concerning his status as the son of a bear (in Bjarki's case, an ensorcelled prince named Björn) and a human woman. This motif appears to have been a popular one in Scandinavian, as well as wider European, traditions.<sup>63</sup> An allied tale appears in *Gesta Danorum*, where Sveinn Úlfsson's paternal grand-father Thrugillus Sprakeleg is said to have been the son of a bear and a girl it

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*Versions of Snorra Edda from the 17th Century*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes, Rit (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi), 13, 2 vols (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977-79), 1: *Edda Magnúsar Ólafssonar (Laufás Edda)* (1977), p. 265, 272. The passage might refer to Hrólfr kraki himself, but also might have been composed quite late. Moreover, it is difficult to know what to make of the other *Bjarkamál* fragments included in *Skjaldedigtning* (not quoted here) from Snorri's *Edda*; *Snorra Edda*, p. 143; *SnEdHafn*, 1, 400-02. They do not discuss Skjöldungar or Ynglingar, alluding mostly to the Völsung cycle and—perhaps barring two late, uncertain lines—have no obvious relation to Saxo's *Bjarkamál*. These verses could, in short, be from almost anywhere and their late recording in Snorri's *Edda* does not allow more to be said with any confidence.

<sup>59</sup>Saxo wrote 'Ab Athislo lacesiti Rolvonis ultionem armis exegit eumque victum bello prostravit' in Book Two, but later described Athisl drinking himself to death while celebrating Roluo's downfall in Book Three; *Gesta Danorum*, pp. 51, 67; Davidson-Fisher, p. 55. This is not Saxo's only internal contradiction.

<sup>60</sup>Olrik, *Legends*, pp. 348-53.

<sup>61</sup>Olrik, *Legends*, 196-97.

<sup>62</sup>Hemmingsen, pp. 45-46.

<sup>63</sup>Olrik, *Legends*, 370-75. Though Olrik considered the 'bear's son' aspects late additions to legends of a historical Bjarki.

abducted in the woods.<sup>64</sup> The motif also seems to have been known in late- and post-Anglo-Saxon England, particularly in Scandinavian contexts. The *Gesta Herewardi*, a legendary account of the post-Conquest English folk-hero Hereward the Wake, tells how Hereward slew a great bear, the offspring of a famous Norwegian bear—equipped, according to ‘Danish fables’, with human hands, feet, intelligence, understanding of speech, and skill in battle—which had fathered the Norwegian king Biernus on a girl it had encountered in the woods.<sup>65</sup> These examples are very close to descriptions of Bjarki’s origins in *Hrólfs saga kraka* and *Bjarkarímur*. Olrik identified similar elements at work in the story of Sivard, an eleventh-century Danish earl of Northumberland, whose father was said to have been Beorn Beresun, the son of a bear and a human woman (compare Bjarki’s human mother, Bera).<sup>66</sup>

Bjarki’s bear-like qualities have led some scholars to identify him with Beowulf.<sup>67</sup> The links are fairly tenuous, but it is nevertheless remarkable that both Bjarki and Beowulf, in their respective narratives, mediate between the concerns of the Danish and Swedish dynasties. It might not be impossible that the character of Beowulf is in some way a literary reflection of the oral combination in Viking-Age England of tales concerning Bjarki, the Swedish dynasty, and Hroþulf/Hrólfr kraki. Olrik noted that the name *Boduwar Berki* seems to appear, alongside numerous other names of Scandinavian origin, in a twelfth-century list of benefactors of the church of Durham.<sup>68</sup> The occurrence of this name suggests that tales of Bjarki were popular in Anglo-Scandinavian England, and perhaps remained so into the time when the Skjöldung cycle was being first committed to writing in Scandinavia.<sup>69</sup> The Bjarki found in medieval Scandinavian sources may represent an amalgamation of several legendary strands.

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<sup>64</sup>*Gesta Danorum*, pp. 287–88 (Book 10, Chapter 15).

<sup>65</sup>*Gesta Herewardi*, in Geffroi Gaimar, *Lestorie des Engles solum la translacion Maistre Geffrei Gaimar*, ed. by Thomas Duffus Hardy and Charles Trice Martin, Rolls Series, 91, 2 vols (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1888–89), 1, 339–404 (p. 343).

<sup>66</sup>Axel Olrik, ‘Sivard Digri of Northumberland: A Viking Saga of the Danes in England’, *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 6 (1910), 212–37 (pp. 212–13, 218–20, 233–34).

<sup>67</sup>Resemblances between Beowulf and Bjarki were perhaps first noted by Gísli Brynjúlfsson, ‘Oldengelsk’, p. 130. Beowulf’s status as a ‘bear’s son’ was famously discussed by Friedrich Panzer, *Studien zur germanischen Sagen Geschichte*, 2 vols (Munich: Beck, 1910–12), 1: *Beowulf*, 16–29, 254–75. There is considerable debate on these subjects, but see also Olrik, *Legends*, pp. 247–51; *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. and commentary by Fr. Klaeber, 3rd edn (Boston: Heath, 1950), pp. xxi–xiv; Chambers, *Introduction*, pp. 54–61; Orchard, pp. 147–48; Fjalldal, pp. 88–95.

<sup>68</sup>Olrik, *Legends*, pp. 256–57; *Liber Vitae ecclesiae Dunelmensis: nec non obituaria duo ejusdem ecclesiae*, ed. by Joseph Stevenson, The Publications of the Surtees Society, 13 (London: Nichols, 1841), p. 78.

<sup>69</sup>Hroþulf himself may appear as *Rudolphus* in a post-Conquest list of popular English heroes (in British Library, Cotton MSS, Vespasian D IV, fol. 139b); see references in Chambers, *Introduction*, p. 252 n. 2; Chambers, *Widsith*, p. 254.

### 5.2.3 HROPULF & HRÓLFR

Apparent references to Hrólfr kraki in Viking-Age kennings are primarily concerned with his sowing treasures behind him to slow his pursuers, a motif later known in connection with his escape from Aðils across the Fýrisvellir. Snorri related this story, and explained that because of it gold may be called ‘Kraki’s seed’, and he quoted examples from poems attributed to Eyvindr skáldaspillir and Þjóðólfr Arnórsson: Eyvindr called gold *Fýrisvalla fræ*, while Þjóðólfr called it *qrð Yrsu burðar* and *ljósu Kraka barri*.<sup>70</sup> Eyvindr’s kenning only relates gold to the Fýrisvellir, but *Ynglinga saga* mentions several battles there besides Hrólfr’s, including one involving a king Huggleikr perhaps connected to the Hygelac of *Beowulf*.<sup>71</sup> Þjóðólfr’s kennings are more informative as, though they do not mention Fýrisvellir, they seem to know Hrólfr kraki as Yrsa’s son. These kennings strongly suggest that elements known from medieval narratives of Hrólfr kraki were already operative by the tenth or eleventh century.

It has been noted that the story referenced by these kennings conforms closely to a wonder-tale type found also in Waltharius’s escape from Attila,<sup>72</sup> and that objects dropped to inhibit pursuit feature in several international folktale motifs.<sup>73</sup> Such issues complicate an assessment of the legend’s development considerably, as such a wonder-tale of Hrólfr could have had a Viking-Age existence entirely separate from whatever other elements of the legends then existed. The story is absent from the Anglo-Saxon sources.

### 5.2.4 HEOROT & LEJRE

Of Lukman’s many proposed connections between classical sources and the Scylding-Skjöldung cycle, one of the most intriguing concerns Hroðgar’s hall, named in *Widsið* and *Beowulf* as *Heorot* or *Heort*. This name is usually interpreted as meaning ‘hart, stag’. This is certainly the simple translation of OE *heorot*, though there is little in *Beowulf* to explain such an interpretation. Sarrazin speculated, unconvincingly, about hart-cults and ‘hart-halls’.<sup>74</sup> Hroðgar’s Heor(o)t is unique among royal halls of Germanic legend in that it is named.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>70</sup>*Skjaldedigtning*, B.1, 64, 345. In the same verse Eyvindr also referenced Fróði and his *fríðr*. See also Meissner, p. 228.

<sup>71</sup>*Heimskringla*, I, 43, 45, 57. More historically, it was also on the Fýrisvellir that Styrbjörn sterki was defeated by Eiríkr sigrsæli, probably in the 980s. Finnur Jónsson, however, dates Eyvindr’s poem somewhat earlier, to c. 965; *Skjaldedigtning*, B.1, 64.

<sup>72</sup>Lukman, *Skjoldunge*, pp. 72-87.

<sup>73</sup>See §4.1.3.

<sup>74</sup>G. Sarrazin, ‘Die Hirsch-Halle’, *Anglia*, 19 (1897), 368-92.

<sup>75</sup>Only the halls of the gods, as described in the Eddas, have names, and these names may be late-heathen or post-conversion innovations; Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. by Angela Hall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993), p. 263 (*sv* ‘Residences of the Gods’) [a revised translation of Rudolf Simek, *Lexikon der germanischen Mythologie* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1984)].

Olrik was clearly troubled that Lejre lacked archaeological evidence of Hrólfr's royal centre and went to some effort finding an explanation.<sup>76</sup> Recently, the picture has changed with the discovery of large halls from the eighth and the tenth centuries at Lejre.<sup>77</sup> Clearly there was an ideological centre of some kind there at those times, and this finding gives added credence to Thietmar of Merseburg's early-eleventh-century description of a cult assembly at Lejre, which Olrik had concluded was more fabulous than historical.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps significantly, a name corresponding to Lejre does not appear in *Beowulf* or *Widsið*, nor do medieval Scandinavian sources have any name for the Skjöldung hall they place at Lejre.

Lukman suggested a link between Hroðgar's Heor(o)t and a stronghold held by the Hunnish leader Roas which Priscus named *Καρσώ*.<sup>79</sup> This may have been the same place Jordanes described as *Herta*,<sup>80</sup> and which was known to the Romans as *Carsium*,<sup>81</sup> likely to be identified with the modern Romanian town spelled alternately Hârşova or Hîrşova. What this name originally meant is difficult to say. Lukman suggested a link with Turkish *hirz* ('stronghold, asylum').<sup>82</sup> The name might also be cognate with early Turkic *karşi*: ('[royal] palace', possibly a loan-word from the synonymous Tocharian B *kerccīye*).<sup>83</sup>

The connections between *Καρσώ* and *Herta* depend more on geography than narrative, and, although a Gothic-Latin *Herta* could have been interpreted as an OE *Heort*, Lukman's proposed link between *Καρσώ* and Heorot depends primarily on the association of Roas and Hroðgar. Nevertheless, that Hroðgar's hall has a name, and a name very similar to that which belonged to Roas's headquarters, is quite remarkable even if it seems coincidental. Any suggestions must remain contentious, yet it could be that the Heor(o)t of *Beowulf* and *Widsið* reflects Anglo-Saxon awareness of large halls at Lejre—of either the seventh or tenth century—but that these were given a name drawing on information about strongholds in Dacia (perhaps influenced by its occasional confusion with Denmark). The *Chronicon Lethrense* agrees broadly with *Beowulf*, ascribing an enrichment of Lejre to Roas as *Beowulf* ascribed the building of Heor(o)t to Hroðgar.<sup>84</sup> If the name *Heor(o)t* was a

<sup>76</sup>Olrik, *Legends*, 324-47.

<sup>77</sup>Tom Christensen, 'Sagntidens', pp. 5-10; Axboe, 'Danish', p. 229; S.W. Anderson, 'Lejre', pp. 103-26; Tom Christensen, 'Lejre', pp. 172-73; S.W. Andersen, 'Vikingerne', p. 22.

<sup>78</sup>Thietmar, pp. 23-24 (Book I, Chapter 17).

<sup>79</sup>Priscus, p. 226; Lukman, *Skjoldunge*, p. 103-04, 115; Hemmingsen, p. 40-41.

<sup>80</sup>*Getica*, p. 135 (Chapter 58).

<sup>81</sup>Jan Burian, 'Carsium', in *Der neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*, ed. by Hubert Cancik und Helmuth Schneider (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996-), II (1997), col. 997.

<sup>82</sup>James William Redhouse, *A Turkish and English Lexicon: Shewing in English the Significations of the Turkish Terms* (Constantinople: Boyajian, 1890), pp. 775-76 (*sv* 'hirz').

<sup>83</sup>Gerard Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), p. 664 (*sv* 'karşi:'); Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Bern; München: Francke, 1959), pp. 584-85 (*sv* 'kert-, kerət-, krät-').

<sup>84</sup>The *Chronicon Lethrense* also ascribes the foundation to Roskilde to Ro, explaining the name as 'Ro's Spring'; *Chronicon Lethrense*, p. 46; *Beowulf*, pp. 3-4 (ll. 64-85). Olrik, however, noted that the earliest mention of Roskilde is in an eleventh-century skaldic verse as *Hróiskilda*, suggesting derivation from a name \**Hróirr* rather than *Hróarr*; Olrik, *Legends*, p. 295. Similar attested forms like *Hrói* would

learned Anglo-Saxon borrowing, however, it would have seemed inauthentic to Danes, if they heard it, and probably would have been rejected, perhaps explaining the absence of any similar name in the Scandinavian legends. Memory of a historical hall and cult centre at Lejre might have continued in Scandinavia, however, and Sven Aggesen noted Lejre's former importance even though in his time it lay 'scarcely inhabited among quite the meanest of villages'.<sup>85</sup>

### 5.3 ENVIRONMENT FOR THE LEGENDS' DEVELOPMENT

#### 5.3.1 POST-CONVERSION LEARNED CORRECTIONS TO OLD LEGENDS

It is a perennial concern among field folklorists that versions of a narrative which they have collected from Region A, after being published and made generally accessible, will influence formerly indigenous versions of the same basic narrative as told in Region B. Such a process would create a possibility that the folklorist could subsequently collect versions of the narrative from Region B which they themselves would have unwittingly caused to be 'unnaturally' influenced by the published versions from Region A.<sup>86</sup>

Likewise, it is possible that learned corrections to the Skjöldung legends might have spread throughout literate Scandinavian circles, leaving us unable to distinguish between what belonged, respectively, to the 'original' legends and to the 'corrected' legends, owing to the simple truth that our surviving sources are all written ones dating from a period after the introduction of Christian learning to Scandinavia. The very fact that sources like the *Chronicon Lethrense* were the earliest written works suggests that their composers, rather than entirely synthesising new legends themselves, might have been using the fruits of Christian learning to 'correct' versions of historical legends they already knew.

We can be sure that in some cases this very process did take place. The association of Friðfróði with the period surrounding the birth of Christ must be such an example.<sup>87</sup> This association is made in *Upphaf allra frásagna* (itself perhaps derived from *Skjöldunga saga*),<sup>88</sup> Snorri's *Edda*,<sup>89</sup> *Gesta Danorum*,<sup>90</sup> Arngrímur Jónsson's epitome of *Skjöldunga*

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correspond with forms such as *Roe*, though the relationship of such forms with *Hróarr* is unclear; *NIDN*, 1, col. 585-86, 1293; II, 472 (*sv* 'Hrói').

<sup>85</sup>*Brevis historia*, p. 97; *Works of Sven Aggesen*, pp. 49, 106 n. 13.

<sup>86</sup>Cautionary tales of such instances circulate among contemporary folklorists virtually as modern academic legends in their own right. Doubtless some folklorist will eventually collect them and publish an analysis, thereby continuing the process.

<sup>87</sup>See §5.2.3.

<sup>88</sup>*Upphaf allra frásagna*, in *Danakonunga sögur*, ed. by Bjarni Guðnason, Íslenzk fornrit, 35 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1982), pp. 39-40.

<sup>89</sup>*Snorra Edda*, p. 135; *SnEdHafn*, 1, 374.

<sup>90</sup>*Gesta Danorum*, pp. 141-42 (Book Five).

*saga*,<sup>91</sup> and an Icelandic chronological note from 1137.<sup>92</sup> This last may hint that Sæmundr prestr (inn fróði) was the originator of the idea; if the note's self-dating is accepted, then it was written a mere four years after Sæmundr's death. It should be noted that Sæmundr had studied in *Frakkland* ('Frank-land', perhaps designating the Rhine valley rather than France proper) during the late eleventh century where he would have had every opportunity to encounter the mainstream scholarship of Christian Europe.<sup>93</sup> As noted previously, Sæmundr is also credited with drawing up a tally of Skjöldung rulers.<sup>94</sup>

We can be sure that an association between Friðfróði (whatever this figure's origins) and the birth of Christ is a learned, post-conversion 'correction' to whatever native Scandinavian concepts of pre-history may have existed earlier.<sup>95</sup> Whether or not this idea originated with Sæmundr, it had become a commonplace within learned Scandinavian scholarship by the late-twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries, the period in which *Skjöldunga saga*, *Gesta Danorum*, and Snorri's *Edda* seem to have been composed.<sup>96</sup> From this example it is also clear that modifications to Scandinavian legendary history based on non-native sources were taking place before the composition of the Danish legendary chronicles.

Such modifications would have become more likely as learned, literary sources from Christian Europe became more widely available in Denmark—and Iceland—from the twelfth century onwards.<sup>97</sup> Their impact is clearly visible in the 'learned pre-history' of Snorri's works, where the explanation of Scandinavia's early history draws on a blend of Anglo-Saxon, classical, and biblical traditions which is synthesised with knowledge of Scandinavian myth and legend.<sup>98</sup> Similar elements had already appeared in Ari Þorgilsson's

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<sup>91</sup>AJ, 1, 335; *DsAl*, pp. 5-6 (Chapter 3).

<sup>92</sup>The relevant portion of the Icelandic chronological note reads: '[A]ugustus keisare Fridadi ad fyrer setning Gudz um allann heim þá er christur var borinn. Enn vier hyggium ad i þann tid væri Fridfróði konungur á Danm(ork)u Enn Fiølnar i Svíþjóðu sem Sæmundar prestur ætladi'; Stefán Karlsson, 'Fróðleiksgreinar', pp. 332-36, 341-47.

<sup>93</sup>I am grateful to Peter Foote for clarification on Sæmundr and *Frakkland*, on which see Peter Foote, 'Aachen, Lund, Hólar', in Peter Foote, *Aurvandilstá: Norse Studies*, ed. by Michael Barnes, Hans Bekker-Nielsen, and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, Viking Collection, 2 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1984), pp. 100-20 (pp. 114-18, 120); Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Sagnaritun*, p. 8; Halldór Hermannsson, *Sæmund*, pp. 33-35.

<sup>94</sup>See discussion at the beginning of Chapter 4 in this study and Halldór Hermannsson, *Sæmund*, p. 41; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Sagnaritun*, pp. 12-16. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson also suggested that *Skjöldunga saga* was originally composed by an author connected with the Oddaverjar. There are various medieval Icelandic genealogies concerning the Skjöldungar; see 'Skrá um Ættartölu', pp. 501-06; *Flateyjarbók*, 1, 22-29.

<sup>95</sup>In *Brevis Historia*, *Grottasöngur*, and *Vellekla*, Fróði is associated only with peace and prosperity, and not with the birth of Christ or reign of Augustus; Skovgaard-Petersen, 'Saxo, Historian', p. 64-65.

<sup>96</sup>Interestingly, in *Heimskringla* Snorri draws a link not between the the reign of Friðfróði and the birth of Christ—as he did in his *Edda*—but does link the reigns of Friðfróði and Freyr (in Sweden); *Heimskringla*, 1 (1941), 25 (Chapter 11); *Snorra Edda*, p. 135; *SnEdHafn*, 1, 374.

<sup>97</sup>On external currents in eleventh- and twelfth-century Icelandic scholarship, see G. Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953), pp. 70-212, and de Vries, *Literaturgeschichte*, 1, 322-59; Peter Foote, 'Observations', pp. 72-77. On Scandinavianization of wonder-tales, see Halldór Hermannsson, *Sæmund*, pp. 45-47, 51-52.

<sup>98</sup>See generally Andreas Heusler, *Die gelehrte Urgeschichte im altisländischen Schrifttum*, *Abhandlungen der Königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften Philos.-hist. Klasse*, 1908.3 (Berlin: Reimer,

*Íslendingabók*, where Njorðr, at the head of the Yngling dynasty, was called *Tyrkjakonungr*, which in medieval parlance implies a Trojan origin.<sup>99</sup> Saxo Grammaticus seems to have utilised a wide range of classical, biblical, and contemporary European models in order to place Danish history on a pan-European footing.<sup>100</sup> As noted in §5.1.1 and §5.2.3, the history of the development of royal genealogies in Anglo-Saxon England shows that an interest in the same kind of synthesis must have been at work there; medieval Scandinavian royal genealogies may have been composed with similar goals.<sup>101</sup> *Widsið* collected Germanic legend together with classical and biblical learning, and *Beowulf* may have been similarly influenced.

The Skjöldung legends may well contain historical elements, and their picture of violent aristocratic competition may fit broadly what is known of the LGIA (§3.3.4). Nevertheless, it is clear that their narratives should by no means be treated as historical documents or as keys to pre-Viking Scandinavian history. The search for a ‘historical Hrólfr kraki’ can be no more conclusive than similar attempts with figures such as Robin Hood or King Arthur.<sup>102</sup>

### 5.3.2 LATER MEDIEVAL LEARNED CORRECTIONS TO OLD LEGENDS

It is clear that Scandinavian interest in ‘correcting’ older legends continued into the later medieval period. The Swedish *Vetus chronicon Sueciæ prosaicum* (or *Prosaiska krönikan*) was completed in the mid-fifteenth century,<sup>103</sup> and claims to have been compiled from various *gambla foreldrna Krönokar* concerning the history of the people who were originally called *gethe*, later *götha* or *gotha*, and finally *swenske*; it clearly equates the Getae, Götar, Goths, and Swedes much as Leake discussed.<sup>104</sup> It also includes a list of Swedish kings which seems closely related to those appearing in the *Historia Norvegiae*, but makes some noteworthy ‘corrections’ of its own:

Domaldrs son heth attila han vart konung j Swericæ och wan danmark oc tysktland och thogh skath aff dænom sidan k: haldan hans frende var dræpin i danmark och fik them sidhan en Rakke till konungh och epthr rakke k: sætte han dænom læes jätte dreng till konungh han heth k. snyo

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1908). Also Anthony Faulkes, ‘Descent from the Gods’, *Medieval Scandinavia*, 2 (1978-79), 92-125 (pp. 110-24).

<sup>99</sup>*Íslendingabók*, p. 27.

<sup>100</sup>Skovgaard-Petersen, ‘Saxo, Historian’, 70-71, 74-77.

<sup>101</sup>Faulkes, ‘Descent’, pp. 95-106.

<sup>102</sup>Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*, the extremely popular and influential if not overly accurate history of the British Isles, was written c. 1136, several decades before the earliest surviving written sources on the Skjöldung cycle. It was probably known to Saxo; Lukman, ‘Galfred’, pp. 593-607.

<sup>103</sup>*Vetus chronicon Sueciæ prosaicum*, in *Scriptores rerum Svecicarum ex schedis praecipue nordinianis, collectos dispositos ac emendatos*, ed. by Ericus Michael Fant and others, 3 vols (Uppsala: Zeipel et Palmblad; Palmblad; Berling, 1818-76), 1.1, ed. by Ericus Michael Fant (Zeipel et Palmblad, 1818), pp. 239-51.

<sup>104</sup>*Vetus chronicon*, 1.1, 240; Leake, pp. 22-23, 101.

værre konungh finghe dænir a aldrih man finder i manghom androm krönikiom aff mange stora gerninghæ som thenne samma attila k: giorde i thytzland walland och flere landh attila doo i wpsale gantz gamall

Diguer attilæ son doo i wpsale hans son dagr varth sidhan konungh.<sup>105</sup>

Based on *Historia Norvegiae*, Diguer would be expected to follow Domaldr—to complicate matters *Vetus chronicon* has an *Adhel*, *Oktar*'s son, in the expected place for *Athisl*.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, there is a medieval Swedish version of the *Chronicon Lethrense* which seems to have served as an appendix for the *Vetus chronicon* and was probably translated from a Latin original.<sup>107</sup> It provides the name *Attilia* in place of the *Chronicon Lethrense*'s *Athisl*. The *Vetus chronicon* and its appendix both include the stories about Attila/Attilia's appointments of Rakke and Snyo as Danish kings, a role which certainly belongs to the *Chronicon Lethrense*'s *Athisl*.<sup>108</sup> Thus, the *Vetus chronicon*'s compiler can only somehow have conflated the figure of Aðils/*Athisl* with the name and deeds of Attila the Hun.<sup>109</sup>

### 5.3.3 GERMANIC LEGEND IN FRANCIA & ANGLO SAXON ENGLAND

Traditionally, modern scholarship has considered Germanic heroic poetry to have been preserved in orally transmitted songs composed shortly after the events thought to stand behind them; such songs might have been passed relatively freely from one Germanic tribe to another (linguistic barriers of varying strengths notwithstanding), contributing to a common body of Germanic legend. Such a view is in many ways an outgrowth of the pan-Germanic school and found vigorous exposition in the works of Heusler.<sup>110</sup> As Frank has pointed out, however, all the information concerning Germanic 'oral literature' in classical and late antique sources indicates nothing more than that 'eulogistic poetry was widely known and practised' amongst the Germanic-speaking peoples.<sup>111</sup> Frank went on to argue

<sup>105</sup> *Vetus chronicon*, I.I, 243.

<sup>106</sup> *Historia Norvegiae*, pp. 98-101; *Vetus chronicon*, I.I, 243. Compare the *Vetus chronicon*'s *Oktar* (= *Óttarr* of *Ynglingatal*) with Jordanes's Hunnish *Octar*, whom Lukman suggested stood behind *Óttarr*/*Ohthere*. The author of the *Vetus chronicon* certainly used Jordanes as a source (naming him *Arđan*); *Vetus chronicon*, I.I, 240.

<sup>107</sup> *Vetus chronicon*, I.I, 247-50. Lukman first noted this late Swedish version of the *Chronicon Lethrense*, which is discussed further by Toldberg; Lukman, *Skjoldunge*, pp. 12, 39, 172-73 n. 3 to p. 12; Helge Toldberg, 'Stammer Lejrekroniken fra Jakob Erlandsøns: Valdemarernes eller Knud den stores tid?', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 79 (1964) 195-240 (p. 204-08); Hemmingsen, pp. 394-409. Snyo (*Snio* in *Gesta Danorum*, pp. 235-38) is often equated with *Snær*, a figure found in some unusual origin-legends in *Hversu Nóregr byggðisk*, in *Flateyjarbók*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal and others, 4 vols (Akranes: Flateyjarútgáfan, 1944-45), I (1944), 22-25; and *Orkneyinga saga*, in *Orkneyinga saga*, ed. by Finnbogi Guðmundsson, Íslensk fornrit, 34 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1965), pp. 1-300 (p. 3). Hemmingsen, however, suggested a link between Snyo and the Byzantine emperor Zeno; Hemmingsen, pp. 390-94, 449-53.

<sup>108</sup> *Vetus chronicon*, I.I, 243, 248-50; *Chronicon Lethrense*, pp. 48-51.

<sup>109</sup> Ironically, Fant cautioned that one should not confuse the *Vetus chronicon*'s *Attilia* with Attila the Hun; *Vetus chronicon*, I.I, 248 n. 1.

<sup>110</sup> See, for example, Heusler, *Lied und Epos*.

<sup>111</sup> Frank, 'Legend', pp. 90-91.

that it is anachronistic to assign an awareness of the concept 'Germanic' to the early Anglo-Saxons before perhaps at least 800. Growth of interest in information about the wider 'Germanic' world in Anglo-Saxon England, she suggested, may have been linked to developments in Carolingian France where the establishment of Charlemagne's 'multi-cultural empire', in which Germanic-speaking groups had a strong presence, led to renewed interest in the legends of these various peoples, even the legends of peoples who had almost ceased to exist, such as the Goths.<sup>112</sup>

The statement of Charlemagne's biographer, Einhard, that the Frankish emperor commissioned the collection of *barbara et antiquissima carmina* concerning *veterum regum actus et bella* and also initiated a Frankish grammar, is well known.<sup>113</sup> Charlemagne also had a statue of Theodoric the Great moved from what had been the Ostrogothic king's seat in Ravenna to his own capital at Aachen. Such acts imply Charlemagne's personal interest in such matters. While Charlemagne did pursue an aggressive policy of conquest and Christianization against his neighbours, it should be noted that most of the 'old kings' who provided models for the heroes of Germanic legend would have been Christian themselves (if probably of Arian persuasion). There would be no dichotomy in enjoying tales of the Christian Goths' deeds whilst doing one's best to eradicate the heathen Saxons. During the early 790s, whilst engaged in the Saxon Wars, Charlemagne also conducted extensive campaigns against the pagan Avars. A nomadic steppe people who had established an empire in Pannonia around 560, the Avars were regarded as akin to the Huns, and this identification may have contributed to a renewed interest in the exploits of 'old kings' against the Huns.<sup>114</sup>

It is worth re-emphasising that 'Germanic legend' in this sense earns its label 'Germanic' more through accident than design. Such macro-ethnic classifications were not necessarily recognised by the peoples whom modern scholarship labels 'Germanic'. Most earlier authors preferred to consider East Germanic peoples like the Goths and Vandals as 'Scythians', despite Tacitus' description of the Gotones and Vandilii as 'Germanic'.<sup>115</sup> Conversely, despite the possibilities for cultural influence from the Goths whom they absorbed, by modern standards the Huns would not be considered Germanic. Yet within Germanic legend the Huns are portrayed no differently from the tribes identified by modern scholarship as 'Germanic', and in many contexts it is a figure modelled on the

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<sup>112</sup>Frank, 'Legend', pp. 90-94, 104. Michael Hunter has argued that the Anglo-Saxons view of the past was one 'in which many traditions were variously confused' and that to perceive a conscious preference among the Anglo-Saxons for appeal to either the Germanic or Roman past is anachronistic (though he noted that Offa might have appealed to Germanic antiquity as a source of legitimisation in response to Charlemagne's Roman pretensions); Michael Hunter, 'Germanic and Roman Antiquity and the Sense of the Past in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3 (1974), 29-50 (pp.48-49).

<sup>113</sup>Einhard, p. 33 (Chapter 29). See further Friedrich von der Leyen, *Das Heldenliedebuch Karls des Grossen: Bestand, Gehalt, Wirkung* (Munich: Beck, 1954).

<sup>114</sup>Pritsak, p. 37.

<sup>115</sup>Wolfram, *Roman*, p. 5.

historical Attila who emerges as an ideal ‘Germanic’ king.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, the Anglo-Saxons not uncommonly handled classical and biblical material within a framework provided by native poetic forms. If most of the material in the Germanic legendary corpus concerns events among Germanic-speaking peoples, that may be because there simply happened to be a large number of Germanic-speaking peoples in Europe, and not because of any special Germanic cultural continuum.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that it was probably easier for cultural artefacts to move between peoples who spoke similar languages; the runic system, for example, seems to have spread fairly widely through the Germanic-speaking world—eventually—and there is little evidence that the runic system had much impact outside that cultural sphere. Likewise, barring active ignorance, it would have been difficult for a learned or well-travelled person in Carolingian Europe to have failed to notice the basic relationship between the various Germanic dialects and languages. Paulus Diaconus (writing c. 790) seems to have understood the Langobards, Bavarians, and Saxons as essentially sharing a common language.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, a roughly contemporaneous Carolingian text groups the speech of the Franks, Langobards, and English together under the heading *theodisca lingua*. This grouping might simply distinguish vernacular speech from Latin, without further qualifications, though a mid-ninth century Frankish text uses the term *gens teudisca* more clearly to refer collectively to all Germanic-speaking peoples.<sup>118</sup> This term reflects a markedly different situation from that which had existed only a century or so before. In keeping with the traditions of classical ethnography, Isidore had made no connection between the Goths and Franks, while Fredegar’s Frankish history saw Theodoric the Great as more Macedonian than Goth, and the early-ninth-century *Liber historiae Francorum* provided the Franks themselves with a classically inspired Trojan pedigree. In contrast, Frechulf of Lisieux (c. 830) provided the Franks with a Scandinavian ancestry, presumably using as a model that of the Goths in Jordanes’s *Getica*.<sup>119</sup> The emergence of a seemingly ‘pan-Germanic’ perspective under the Carolingians could itself owe something to classical Roman influence on Frankish thought, since the ethnographic classification of peoples as ‘Germanic’ is itself a concept Roman in origin.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup>In some senses, Attila was a ‘Germanic’ king, as (besides being best known by a Germanic name) he exercised lordship over various Gothic groups; see Heather, *Goths*, pp. 109–29.

<sup>117</sup>*Historia Langobardorum*, p. 81 (Book 1, Chapter 27).

<sup>118</sup>These and other references to apparently ‘pan-Germanic’ usages from this period are collected in *Der Volksname Deutsch*, ed. by Hans Eggers, *Wege der Forschung*, 156 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970), pp. 406–07.

<sup>119</sup>See discussion and references in Frank, ‘Legend’, pp. 93–94; Frechulf of Lisieux, *Freculphi episcopi Lexoviensis chronicon tomi duo*, in *Gregorii IV, Sergii II, pontificum Romanorum, Jonaem Freculphi, Frotharii, Aurelianensis, Lexoviensis et Tullensis episcoporum, Opera Omnia*, ed. by J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiæ cursus completus: Series Secunda*, 106 (Paris: Migne, 1851), col. 915–1258 (col. 967). Frechulf here used the term *theotisc* almost in the sense of ‘Germanic’.

<sup>120</sup>Reuter, who downplayed the use of terms suggestive of an early ‘pan-Germanic’ consciousness, suggests that terms like *theotisc* were uncommon in vernacular usage, the earliest direct example being from c. 1000, Reuter, *Germany*, p. 52. Whatever ‘pan-Germanic’ consciousness may have existed in the

It is difficult to say whether the Anglo-Saxons themselves may have come to perceive themselves as belonging to a wider 'Germanic' cultural sphere. Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* in some senses projects an idea of unity among the Germanic-speaking peoples of Britain, though Bede was writing from a clerical perspective, and it might have been easier, in a politically fragmented society, for a churchman than a king to hold such a view. Even so, it might be that the eighth-century English did have some perception of a common identity, rooted in their shared language. Patrick Wormald has stressed the importance of the church itself in providing a sense of cultural unity in England from at least the eighth century, and on archaeological grounds John Hines has argued that 'the conditions for the emergence of a conscious common English identity' existed as early as the sixth century. English cultural unification, Hines suggested, would have almost necessarily preceded the political unification which took place during the tenth century in the wake of the Viking invasions.<sup>121</sup> As for the Germanic world beyond Britain, as early as the eighth century English churchmen could advocate missions to the Old Saxons based on a sense of shared origins. Bede writes of this common English-Old Saxon heritage as a factor inspiring missionary work, and Boniface claimed that the Old Saxons themselves characterised their relationship with the English in the phrase, 'De uno sanguine et de uno osse sumus'.<sup>122</sup>

In any event, this apparent interest in Germanic legend amongst the Carolingians may well have been transmitted to the Anglo-Saxons, as Anglo-Saxon clerics and scholars were deeply involved in the 'Carolingian renaissance'.<sup>123</sup> Alcuin's irate reference to clerical enjoyment of tales of Hinioldus dates from this period, after all.<sup>124</sup> Alcuin may not have been interested in old legends, but many of his contemporaries in the English church clearly were. It seems likely that a variety of relevant texts—*Getica*, *Historia Langobardorum*, even Tacitus' *Germania* were known to the ninth-century Franks and could have been accessible to the Anglo-Saxons.<sup>125</sup> Copies of *Historia Langobardorum* are known to have existed in Anglo-Saxon England,<sup>126</sup> and Alcuin himself wrote to his Frankish colleague Angilbertus requesting a copy of Jordanes's histories.<sup>127</sup> Although there

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Carolingian period probably had the greatest importance among the élite and the intelligentsia, whose conceptions may have stemmed from Roman models.

<sup>121</sup>Patrick Wormald, 'Bede, Bretwaldas and the Origins of Gens Anglorum', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. by Patrick Wormald with Donald Bullough and Roger Collins (Blackwell: Oxford, 1983), pp. 99-129 (p. 125); Hines, 'Cultural', p. 83-84.

<sup>122</sup>*HE*, p. 296 (Book 5, Chapter 9); *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, ed. Michael Tangl, MGH: Epistolae selectae, 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1916), pp. 74-75 (Letter 46).

<sup>123</sup>Dronke suggested the Weland story may have reached England in this way in the eighth century, at which time the evidence of Gotland picture stones suggests it was also known in a Scandinavian context. The narrative itself seems to have a continental provenance, possibly ultimately Gothic; *Poetic Edda*, Dronke, II, 269-72, 280.

<sup>124</sup>Alcuin, *Alcuini Epistolae*, p. 183 (Letter 124).

<sup>125</sup>Frank, 'Legend', pp. 93, 104. See §4.2.3.

<sup>126</sup>Gneuss, p. 32.

<sup>127</sup>Alcuin, *Alcuini Epistolae*, p. 365 (Letter 221); J.D.A. Ogilvy, *Books known to the English, 597-1066*, Publications (Mediaeval Academy of America), 76 (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1967), p. 185.

is in fact no direct evidence demonstrating that *Getica* was known widely in Britain, certain parallels between *Getica*'s Amal genealogy and *Widsið* may strengthen the possibility that it was. If Heather was correct in his suggestion that there was no historical Gothic king Ostrogotha and that this figure was Jordanes's invention, it seems likely that *Widsið*'s Eastgota could not have sprung from oral traditions, but rather betrays a familiarity with material drawn from *Getica*.<sup>128</sup> A mixed oral-literary environment might be envisioned for the transmission of such material.

#### 5.3.4 LEARNED INFLUENCE ON PRE-LITERATE SCANDINAVIAN HISTORICAL LEGEND?

Even a fairly sceptical, if brief, analysis suggests that elements of the Skjöldung cycle did enjoy some popularity in the Viking Age. It is not clear what shape these legends then took, if they had any cohesion as a cycle at that time, but they may have stemmed from diverse sources. They seem to have undergone considerable development during the period from the eighth to the eleventh century. Such a view is broadly similar to that accepted by Olrik, and itself has important implications for understanding Viking-Age Scandinavian ideology. However, the possibility that non-Scandinavian sources could have affected surviving versions of the Skjöldung cycle has not been entirely ruled out, and such a possibility offers further insights into the resolution of ideological contrasts which marked Scandinavia's entry into the European cultural mainstream during the Viking Age.

It is clear that medieval Scandinavian authors were eager to align conceptions of Scandinavian history with the classical and biblical traditions endorsed by the remainder of Christian Europe. Might their pre-literate, even pre-Christian, predecessors have had similar interests? It might be argued that heathen Scandinavians would not have valued ties to such traditions, particularly those associated with Roman Christianity. Such an argument is weakened, however, by the evident willingness of Scandinavian culture to adopt and adapt external cultural artefacts, both tangible and (in all likelihood) intangible, from the earliest periods. The Viking Age must have been a period particularly marked by such processes, resulting as it did in the emergence of the Scandinavian nations as Christian kingdoms on the European model. It is scarcely conceivable that such events could transpire without first a period of experimentation and some degree of acceptance for mainstream European cultural artefacts and ideology (§5.5.5).

While the *Völsung* cycle acknowledges its continental origins, however Scandinavianized it became (§5.5.6), the Skjöldung cycle gives the appearance of being

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<sup>128</sup>I am grateful to Peter Heather, who also affirmed that there is strong evidence indicating *Getica* was well-known on the continent from Charlemagne's time, for the substance of this argument; Peter Heather, 'Getica', e-mail to Carl Edlund Anderson [Online], Available e-mail: ceazo@cus.cam.ac.uk (19 March 1999); Peter J. Heather, 'Cassiodorus and the Rise of the Amals: Genealogy and the Goths under Hun Domination', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 79 (1989), 103-28 (pp. 106, 108 n. 18, 110, 127-28); *Getica*, pp. 76-78, 81, 83; *Widsið*, pp. 152-53 (ll. 109-14). Wolfram, however, accepted Ostrogotha as historical; Wolfram, *Goths*, p. 24.

wholly native. It was Olrik's contention that the Skjöldung legends had an autochthonous origin in events of pre-Viking Denmark, that the versions reflected in *Beowulf* and *Widsið* represented an early and short-lived off-shoot, and that Viking-Age Scandinavian communities in the British Isles played a significant role in the legends' development, especially in developing the strands which Olrik classified as characteristically West Scandinavian.<sup>129</sup> His analysis was founded on the fact that the surviving documents all centre the Skjöldung legends on Denmark. Since Olrik's time, however, it has been made clear that it was at least possible for information concerning Dacia to become attributed to Denmark; the *Chronicon Lethrense* explicitly equates the two names, and its legend of Danish migration from Sweden probably owes its origin ultimately to Jordanes, through intermediaries like Dudo or William of Jumièges, if not directly.<sup>130</sup> This misidentification depends on access to traditions stemming from classical and medieval ethnography; hence Hemmingsen's identification of twelfth-century Denmark as an ideal environment for the Dacia-Dania confusion to influence the growth of historical legend. As noted, however, while processes such as those Hemmingsen suggested may have been at work in twelfth-century Denmark, his analysis does not account for evidence pertaining to the historical legends' development in contemporary Iceland, let alone in the Anglo-Scandinavian world of previous centuries.

Certainly it was possible for Christian scholars in Viking-Age Francia and England to make the Dacia-Dania identification, even if it was not a universal. Since the Dacia-Dania confusion is a manifestly literate phenomenon, it might be argued that it could not have affected the views of illiterate, heathen Scandinavians of the Viking Age or earlier. However, the strong evidence provided by the extant mythological poetry suggests that presumably illiterate Scandinavians had the kind of access to information concerning Christian religion which would otherwise normally be attributed to literacy (§3.4.6). There is no reason to suppose that Scandinavians in the late heathen period could not acquire such information orally from clergy or laymen well-versed in such matters. Moreover, it should probably be assumed that the Scandinavians first became familiar with legendary material such as the Völsung cycle, whether they did so in the tenth century or much earlier, in an oral environment. Frank pointed out:

People with a professional interest in the past—historians, scholar-clerics, kings and vernacular poets—tend to talk to each other. A degree of literacy at some level is all that is needed to ensure a measure of influence for the written word.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Olrik, *Legends*, 484-507.

<sup>130</sup>See §4.2.3.

<sup>131</sup>Frank, 'Legend', pp. 93-94.

The evidence suggests that pre-conversion, illiterate, Scandinavians did take an interest in foreign cultural elements, which could be reinterpreted within a Scandinavian context.<sup>132</sup> Conversely, the incorporation of apparently Scandinavian elements within material such as the West Saxon regnal lists, *Widsið*, and *Beowulf* suggests that Christian scholars were acquiring and making use of Scandinavian traditions. It is, therefore, possible that Scandinavians exchanging information about the past with Christian scholars might have acquired information in narrative form concerning Dacia, yet have been under the impression (as may have been those providing the information) that it concerned Denmark.<sup>133</sup> It must be stressed that there seems no way to determine whether such a process actually took place, but to assume that it did not is as dangerous as stating that it did.

Olrik was surely correct in suggesting that the extant Skjöldung legends had evolved considerably in the course of the Viking Age. It is possible that the significance he placed on Britain's role in the development of the cycle could be broadened. Rather than early narrative dead-ends, the versions of the legends in *Widsið* and *Beowulf* might be viewed equally well as tangential branches from a rich legendary matrix in Scandinavian Britain. Indeed, it seems possible that Britain itself might be viewed as in some senses the cycle's 'home' since, much as Bugge suggested, it was there that learned continental traditions might have interacted most easily with oral Scandinavian traditions.<sup>134</sup> It may not be possible to prove whether or not apparent parallels between elements of the Skjöldung legends and of Dacian, Gothic, or Langobardic materials are the results of such a process. Nevertheless, that heathen Scandinavians with an interest in the past, with an interest in foreign cultural elements, and with an interest in setting their past within a wider European context with which they were becoming familiar could have acquired these external historical legendary elements in such a way remains a plausible possibility.

This possibility is important for our understanding of the Skjöldung cycle's significance, even while a further investigation of the issues remains wanting. Such an understanding underscores the dangers accompanying the use of historical legends as sources for Scandinavian pre-history. It also provides a new approach for exploring changes in Scandinavian ideology during the Viking Age. The Skjöldung cycle may indeed be, in certain senses, an early 'national myth', even as nineteenth-century Romanticists identified it. Yet rather than a simple derivation from an imaginary, pre-Viking past, the cycle's Viking-Age development may have reflected the interests of Scandinavians coming to terms not so much with the existence of a wider, more cosmopolitan world and its radically different ideology—for it is clear that Scandinavia was never unaware of these

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<sup>132</sup>Consider the gold bracteates, and development of Style I. This study's space restrictions prevent discussion of these issues, but see §2.5.4.

<sup>133</sup>Moreover, the fact that works like *Getica* and *Historia Langobardorum* traced the descent of their respective peoples from Scandinavia may have reinforced a tendency to assign information related to those works to a Scandinavian past.

<sup>134</sup>Another possible location for such activity would be Normandy, though it is seldom considered, perhaps partly because little Scandinavian influence is detected in later Norman literature. Normandy's possible role as a point of contact between heathen Scandinavian culture and Christian European culture deserves further consideration, but space restrictions preclude it.

elements—but rather their merger with that world and the final resolution of many ideological contrasts which had previously distinguished Scandinavia from Europe.