



# THE POETIC EDDA

A Dual-Language Edition

EDWARD PETTIT





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# *Helgakviða Hundingsbana in fyrri*

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This poem is headed *Völsungakviða* ‘Poem of the Völsungar’ in **R**, but is now generally known as *Helgakviða Hundingsbana in fyrri* ‘The Earlier/Former Lay of Helgi Hundingsbani’ (*HH. I*). Preserved on **R** fol. 20r–22r, it is the first poem in this manuscript’s heroic group, as classified by many modern scholars. It is also the first of two works in **R** about a legendary hero called *Helgi* ‘Holy One’ who slew a certain King Hundingr, the second being now known as *Helgakviða Hundingsbana önnur* (*HH. II*) ‘The Second Lay of Helgi Hundingsbani’.<sup>1</sup> This Helgi is the half-brother of Sigurðr, greatest hero of the Völsungar, who figures prominently in subsequent poems in **R**. Somewhat awkwardly, it may seem, the two texts about Helgi Hundingsbani are separated by a third poem, now called *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* ‘The Lay of Helgi Hjörvarðsson’ (*HHv.*), about a different Helgi, who was thought to have been reborn, possibly as Helgi Hundingsbani. It may be that the two Helgis are ultimately the same figure, ‘probably variants derived from a common ritual pattern in which a Helgi “the hallowed one” mated with a goddess, probably of tribal sovereignty, and was ritually slain by a near relative’.<sup>2</sup>

*HH. I* is in *fornyrðislag*. It is distinguished stylistically by having more kennings and other poetic terms than any other Eddic poem except *Hym*. Also, as one scholar observes, its ‘language is rich in new compounds which find their closest parallels in skaldic poetry’.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, ‘[t]he spirit of the poem is that of skaldic panegyric, glorifying the victorious king’.<sup>4</sup> The poem’s language, burnished by a poet ‘of brilliant surfaces’,<sup>5</sup> and character have prompted the proposal that it was composed in the mid to late eleventh century at a royal court, possibly that of Magnús Ólafsson of Norway, though it may draw on earlier material.

The three Helgi-poems head the heroic poems of **R**, within which they form a subgroup. The association of the first and third with the subject matter of subsequent poems of the Eddic Völsung-Niflung cycle appears tangential and probably arose fairly late.

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1 The relationship between these two texts seems likely to involve both borrowing and the use of shared inherited oral tradition.

2 J. Harris, ‘Eddic Poetry as Oral Poetry: The Evidence of Parallel Passages in the Helgi Poems for Questions of Composition and Performance’, in R. J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason, ed., *Edda: A Collection of Essays* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1983), pp. 210–42 at 214.

3 Harris, ‘Eddic Poetry’, p. 226.

4 Harris, ‘Eddic Poetry’, pp. 226–27.

5 Harris, ‘Eddic Poetry’, p. 230.

*HH. I*, or a text very like it, was a source for chapters 8 to 9 of *VS*, which treat the same story, though with some differences of personal and place names. The saga's account of the central flyting between Helgi's half-brother, Sinfjötli, and Guðmundr, brother of Hǫðbroddr, in *HH. I* 34–44 (a shorter version of which appears in *HH. II* 24–29 [19–24]) helps establish which character says what. This type of verbal contest also appears in *HHv.* 12–30, is exemplified earlier in **R** by *Hrbl.* and *Ls.*, and recurs in other medieval Scandinavian texts.

Saxo Grammaticus gives a different account of Helgi's career in *GD* (2.5.2–7). Additionally, Helgi appears briefly in chapters 4 and 5 of the fourteenth-century *Nornagests þáttur* 'Story of Nornagestr'.

## Synopsis

*HH. I* begins in the distant past, with Helgi's birth to Borghildr and Sigmundr (father of the hero Sigurðr who appears in subsequent poems). Helgi's arrival is attended by auspicious signs, and his greatness is ordained by the Nornir, who arrange the threads of his destiny (1–4). One raven expresses to another its pleasure at Helgi's birth—the child who stands in armour when only a day old will slay men, giving them corpses to eat (5–6).

Sigmundr confers a leek on his son, whom the people considered a descendant of *Dagr* 'Day', a boy whom they believed would bring them fruitful years (7). Sigmundr also names his son, gives him certain places (at least some probably mythical) and a sword (8).

Helgi grows up a generous ruler (9) and, while still a teenager, slays Hundingr (10). Hundingr's sons demand compensation (11), which Helgi refuses (12). Battle ensues and Helgi kills all four brothers (14).

Radiant valkyries appear (15), and Helgi asks if they will come home with him and his men (16). One of them, later identified as Sigrún, says they have better things to do (17). She reveals that she has been promised in marriage to a king called Hǫðbroddr, whom she likens to a kitten (18). She invites Helgi to fight him (19), which Helgi agrees to do (20). He gathers his forces (21–22), and they set sail (23). The size of their naval force is emphasized (24–26), as is the clamour of their sea-voyage (27–28). Aided by Sigrún, they survive an attempt by the sea-goddess, Rán, to capsize them (29–30), and arrive offshore at their destination, to the concern of onlookers (31).

Guðmundr, Hǫðbroddr's brother, asks who the visitors are (32). A flyting ensues between him and Sinfjötli, Helgi's half-brother, in which they accuse each other of various kinds of unmanliness (33–44). Helgi says they would do better to fight than trade vain insults (45), as these opponents have shown themselves to have spirit (46).

Guðmundr sends out horse-messengers (47). They meet Hǫðbroddr outside his stronghold and inform him of Helgi's arrival. Hǫðbroddr asks why they look worried (48). They describe the multitude of Helgi's forces and declare that he will attack soon (49–50).

Höðbroddr summons every available man to fight with him (51–52). Immediately, the battle begins, with Helgi always in the thick of the fighting (53). Valkyries protect him (54), and Sigrún ends the poem by announcing that he has killed Höðbroddr and that he will enjoy both lands and her (55–56).

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## Helgakviða Hundingsbana in fyrri

Hér hefr upp kvæði frá Helga Hundingsbana ok bana þeira Höðbrodds.

### Völsungakviða

1. Ár var alda, þat er arar gullu,  
hnigu heilög vötn af Himinfjöllum,  
þá hafði Helga inn hugumstóra  
Borghildr borit í Brálundi.
2. Nótt varð í bœ, Nornir kvómu,  
þær er ǫðlingi aldr um skópu;  
þann báðu fylki frægstan verða  
ok buðlunga beztan þikkja.
3. Sneru þær af afli ǫrlögþáttu,  
þá er borgir braut í Brálundi;  
þær um greiddu gullin símu  
ok und mána sal miðjan festu.
4. Þær austr ok vestr enda fálu,  
þar átti lofðungr land á milli;  
brá nipt Nera á norðrvega  
einni festi — ey það hon halda.
5. Eitt var at angri Ylfinga nið,  
ok þeiri meyju er munuð foeddi:  
hrafn kvað at hrafni — sat á hám meiði —  
andvanr átu: 'Ek veit nokkut!
6. 'Stendr í brynju burr Sigmundar,  
dægrs eins gamall, nú er dagr kominn!  
Hvessir augu sem hildingar —  
sá er varga vinr — vit skulum teitir!'
7. Drótt þótti sá döglingr vera,  
kváðu með gumnum góð ár komin;  
sjálfr gekk vísi ór vígþrimu  
ungum fœra ítrlauk grami.
8. Gaf hann 'Helga' nafn, ok Hringstaði,  
Sólfjöll, Snæfjöll ok Sigarsvöllu,  
Hringstöð, Hátún ok Himinvanga,  
blóðorm búinn, brœðr Sinfjötla.

# The Earlier Lay of Helgi Hundingsbani

Here begins a poem about Helgi Hundingsbani and the death of Höðbroddr and his men.

## Lay of the Völsungar<sup>1</sup>

1. It was early in ages<sup>2</sup> when eagles screamed,<sup>3</sup>  
holy waters bowed down<sup>4</sup> from Himinfjöll,<sup>5</sup>  
when to Helgi the great-hearted  
Borghildr<sup>6</sup> had given birth in Brálundr.<sup>7</sup>
2. Night fell in the farmstead, Nornir<sup>8</sup> came,  
those who shaped a life for the princeling;  
they decreed that he would become the most famous king  
and be thought the best of Buðli's descendants.<sup>9</sup>
3. They twisted fate-strands with strength,  
when he broke strongholds in Brálundr;<sup>10</sup>  
they set in order the golden strings  
and fastened them under the middle of the moon's hall.<sup>11</sup>
4. East and west they concealed the ends,  
where the praiseworthy one<sup>12</sup> possessed lands in between;<sup>13</sup>  
Neri's kinswoman<sup>14</sup> threw onto the north-road<sup>15</sup>  
one fastening<sup>16</sup> — she decreed that it should always hold.
5. One thing caused anguish to the kinsman of the Ylfingar,<sup>17</sup>  
and to the girl who gave birth to the beloved one:  
raven spoke to raven — it sat on a high branch<sup>18</sup> —  
in anticipation of food: 'I know something!'
6. 'Sigmundr's<sup>19</sup> son stands in his mail-coat,  
one day old,<sup>20</sup> now day has come!<sup>21</sup>  
He whets his eyes as warriors do —  
that one's a friend of wolves<sup>22</sup> — we shall be cheerful!'
7. He seemed to the host<sup>23</sup> to be a descendant of Dagr,<sup>24</sup>  
they said good years<sup>25</sup> had come among men;  
the leader<sup>26</sup> himself went from battle-turmoil  
to bring a noble leek<sup>27</sup> to the young warrior.
8. He<sup>28</sup> gave him the name 'Helgi', and Hringstaðir,<sup>29</sup>  
Sólfjöll,<sup>30</sup> Snæfjöll<sup>31</sup> and Sigarsvellir,<sup>32</sup>  
Hringstöð,<sup>33</sup> Hátún<sup>34</sup> and Himinvangar,<sup>35</sup>  
[and] a decorated blood-snake,<sup>36</sup> to the brother of Sinfjötli.<sup>37</sup>

9. Þá nam at vaxa fyr vina brjósti,  
 álmr ítrborinn, ynðis ljóma;  
 hann galt ok gaf gull verðungu,  
 sparði eigi hilmir hodd blóðrekin.
10. Skammt lét vísi vígs at bíða,  
 þá er fylkir var fimmtán vetra;  
 ok hann harðan lét Hunding veginn,  
 þann er lengi réð lönnum ok þegnum.
11. Kvøddu síðan Sigmundar bur  
 auðs ok hringa Hundings synir,  
 þvíat þeir áttu jöfri at gjalda  
 fjárnám mikit ok fýður dauða.
12. Létat buðlungr bótir uppi,  
 né niðja in heldr nefgjöld fá;  
 ván kvað hann mundu veðrs ins mikla  
 grára geira ok gremi Óðins.
13. Fara hildingar hjörstefnu til,  
 þeirar er lögðu at Logafjöllum;  
 sleit Fróða frið fjánda á milli,  
 fara Viðris grey valgjörn um ey.
14. Settisk vísi, þá er vegit hafði  
 Álf ok Eyjólf, und Arasteini,  
 Hjörvarð ok Hávarð, Hundings sonu —  
 farit hafði hann allri ætt geir-Mímis.
15. Þá brá ljóma af Logafjöllum,  
 en af þeim ljómum leiptrir kvómu;  
 þá var und hjálmum á Himinvanga;  
 brynjur váru þeira blóði stoknar,  
 en af geirum geislar stóðu.
16. Frá árliga ór úlfiði  
 döglingr at því dísir suðroenar,  
 ef þær vildi heim með hildingum  
 þá nótt fara; þrymr var álma.
17. En af hesti Högna dóttir —  
 líddi randa rym — ræsi sagði:  
 'Hygg ek at vér eigim aðrar sýslur  
 en með baugbrota bjór at drekka.



9. Then he began to grow in the bosom of friends,  
a noble-born elm,<sup>38</sup> in the light of bliss;  
he repaid and gave gold to his retinue,  
the ruler did not spare blood-splattered hoards.
10. The leader<sup>39</sup> waited [only] a short time for war,  
once the marshal<sup>40</sup> was fifteen winters old;  
and he had slain the hard Hundingr,<sup>41</sup>  
the one who long ruled lands and thanes.
11. From Sigmundr's boy Hundingr's sons  
then demanded riches and rings,  
because they had to requite the boar<sup>42</sup>  
for his great wealth-taking and their father's death.
12. Buðli's descendant<sup>43</sup> did not offer up remedies,<sup>44</sup>  
none the quicker did the relatives<sup>45</sup> receive kin-compensation;  
he said there would be the prospect of the great storm  
of grey spears<sup>46</sup> and the anger of Óðinn.<sup>47</sup>
13. Warriors advance to the sword-assembly,<sup>48</sup>  
that which they laid down<sup>49</sup> at Logafjöll;<sup>50</sup>  
Fróði's peace<sup>51</sup> was torn apart between enemies,  
Viðrir's corpse-eager bitches<sup>52</sup> go about the island.
14. The leader<sup>53</sup> sat himself down, when he had slain  
Álfr<sup>54</sup> and Eyjólf, <sup>55</sup> beneath Arasteinn, <sup>56</sup>  
Hjörvarðr<sup>57</sup> and Hávarðr,<sup>58</sup> the sons of Hundingr —  
he had destroyed the whole family of spear-Mímir.<sup>59</sup>
15. Then light sprang from Logafjöll,  
and from those lights came lightnings;  
then it<sup>60</sup> was under helmets on Himinvangar;<sup>61</sup>  
their mail-coats were bespattered with blood,  
and from their spears stood rays of light.
16. Dagr's descendant asked this early,  
from a wolf-lair,<sup>62</sup> of the southern women,<sup>63</sup>  
if they would go home with the warriors that night;  
there was thrumming of elm-bows.
17. And from her horse Hogni's daughter<sup>64</sup> —  
the din of shield-rims<sup>65</sup> subsided — spoke to the prince:  
'I think that we have other tasks  
than to drink beer with the ring-breaker.<sup>66</sup>

18.                   ‘Hefir minn faðir meyju sinni  
grimmum heitit Granmars syni;  
en ek hefi, Helgi, Høðbrodd kveðinn  
konung óneisan sem kattar son!
19.                   ‘Þá kœmr fylkir fára náttu,  
nema þú honum vísir valstefnu til  
eða mey nemir frá mildingi.’
20.                   ‘Uggi eigi þú Ísungs bana!  
Fyrr mun dólga dynr, nema ek dauðr sják!’
21.                   Sendi áru allvaldr þaðan,  
of lopt ok um lög, leiðar at biðja,  
iðgnógan Ógnar ljóma  
brögnum bjóða ok burum þeira.
22.                   ‘Biðið skjóttliga til skipa ganga  
ok ór Brandeyju búna verða!’  
Þaðan beið þengill, unz þiníg kvómu  
halir hundmargir ór Heðinseyju.
23.                   Ok þar af ströndum, ór Stafnsnesi,  
beit hans út skriðu ok búin gulli;  
spurði Helgi Hjörleif at því:  
‘Hefir þú kannaða koni óneisa?’
24.                   En ungr konungr öðrum sagði:  
‘Seint’, kvað, ‘at telja af Trönueyri  
langhöfðuð skip und líðöndum,  
þau er í Qrvasund útan fóru!’
25.                   ‘Tólf hundruð tryggra manna,  
þó er í Hátúnum hálfu fleira  
víglið konungs — ván erum rómu!’
26.                   Svá brá stýrir stafntjöldum af,  
at mildinga mengi vakði,  
ok döglingar dagsbrún sjá,  
ok siklingar sneru upp við tré  
vefnistingum á Varinsfirði.
27.                   Varð ára ymr ok járna glymr,  
brast rönd við rönd, reru víkingar;  
eisandi gekk und öðlingum  
lofðungs floti, löndum fjarri.



28. Svá var at heyra, er saman kvómu,  
Kólgu systir ok kilir langir,  
sem björg eða brim brotna myndi!
29. Draga bað Helgi há segl ofarr,  
varðat hrønnum höfn þingloga,  
þá er ógurlig Ægis dóttir  
stagstjórnmörum steypa vildi.
30. En þeim sjálfum Sigrún ofan,  
fólkdjörf, um barg ok fari þeira;  
snørisk ramliga Rán ór hendi  
gjálfrdýr konungs at Gnipalundi.
31. Svát þar um aptan í Unavágum  
flaust fagrbúin fljóta knáttu;  
en þeir sjálfir frá Svarinshaugi  
með hermðar hug her kǫnnuðu.
32. Frá góðborinn Guðmundr at því:  
‘Hverr er landreki, sá er liði stýrir,  
ok hann feiknalið færir at landi?’
33. Sinfjötli kvað — slong upp við rá  
rauðum skildi, rǫnd var ór gulli;  
þar var sundvǫrðr, sá er svara kunnir  
ok við ǫðlinga orðum skipta!
34. ‘Segðu þat í aptan, er svínum gefr  
ok tíkr yðrar teygir at solli,  
at sé Ylfingar austan komnir,  
gunnar gjarnir, frá Gnipalundi!
35. ‘Þar mun Hǫðbroddr Helga finna,  
flugtrauðan gram, í flota miðjum,  
sá er opt hefir ǫrnu sadða,  
meðan þú á kvernum kystir þýjar!’
36. ‘Fátt mantu, fylkir, fornra spjalla,  
er þú ǫðlingum ósǫnnu bregðr!  
Þú hefir etnar úlfa krásir  
ok bræðr þínum at bana orðit,  
opt sár sogin með svølum munni —  
hefr í hreysi hvarleiðr skriðit!’

28.                   Thus it was to hear, when they came together,  
                          Kólga's sister<sup>88</sup> and the long keels,  
                          as if cliffs or sea would break!
29.                   Helgi had the high sail drawn higher,  
the crew did not shrink from the meeting with the waves,<sup>89</sup>  
                          when an awful daughter of Ægir<sup>90</sup>  
                          wanted to capsize the stay-bridle-horses.<sup>91</sup>
30.                   And, from above, Sigrún,<sup>92</sup> army-brave,  
                          safeguarded them and their ship;  
strongly the king's roaring-sea beast<sup>93</sup> wrenched itself  
                          from Rán<sup>94</sup> — from her hand — at Gnipalundr.<sup>95</sup>
31.                   So that there, during the evening, in Unavágar,<sup>96</sup>  
                          the attractively equipped ships floated;  
                          and they themselves<sup>97</sup> from Svarinshaugr<sup>98</sup>  
                          scrutinized the army with an anxious mind.
32.                   Well-born<sup>99</sup> Guðmundr<sup>100</sup> asked this:  
‘Who is the land-ruler, the one who steers this force  
                          and leads a fell force to land?’<sup>101</sup>
33.                   Sinfjötli spoke — he slung up by the yardarm  
                          his red shield, its rim was of gold;  
there was a sound-warrior,<sup>102</sup> the one who knew how to answer  
                          and exchange words with noblemen!
34.                   ‘Say this this evening, when you're feeding swine  
                          and enticing your bitches to their swill,  
                          that the Ylfingar have come from the east,  
                          eager for battle, from<sup>103</sup> Gnipalundr!
35.                   ‘There Hǫðbroddr will find Helgi,  
                          a flight-averse prince, in the fleet's midst,  
                          the one who has often sated eagles,<sup>104</sup>  
while you were kissing slave-girls at querns!’
36.                   ‘You remember, marshal, few ancient tales,  
                          when you fling falsehoods at noblemen!  
                          You've eaten wolves' dainties<sup>105</sup>  
                          and brought about your brother's death,<sup>106</sup>  
                          often sucked wounds with a cold mouth —  
hated everywhere, you've slithered into a heap of stones!’<sup>107</sup>



37. 'Þú vart völvu í Varinseyju,  
skollvís kona, bartu skrokk saman!  
Kvaztu engi mann eiga vilja,  
segg brynjaðan, nema Sinfjötla!
38. 'Þú vart in skœða, skass, valkyrja,  
ötul, ámátlig, at Alföður!  
Mundu einherjar allir berjask,  
svévís kona, um sakar þínar!
39. 'Níu áttu vit á nesi Ságu  
úlfa alna — ek var einn faðir þeira!'
40. 'Faðir varattu Fenrisúlfa,  
öllum ellri, svá at ek muna,  
sízt þik geldu fyrir Gnipalundi  
þursa meyjar, á Þórsnesi!
41. 'Stjúpr vartu Siggeirs, látt und stöðum heima,  
vargljóðum vanr á viðum úti!  
Kómu þér ógögn öll at hendi,  
þá er bræðr þínum brjóst raufaðir!  
Gørðir þik frægjan af firinverkum!'
42. 'Þú vart brúðr Grana á Brávelli,  
gullbitluð, vart gør til rásar!  
Hafða ek þér móðri mart skeið riðit,  
svangri und sœðli, simul, forbergis!
43. 'Sveinn þóttir þú siðlauss vera,  
þá er þú Gullnis geitr mólkaðir,  
en í annat sinn Ímðar dóttir,  
tötrughypja — vill þú tölulengri?'
44. 'Fyrr vilda ek at Frekasteini  
hrafna seðja á hræum þínum,  
en tíkr yðrar teygja at solli  
eða gefa göltum — deili gröm við þik!'
45. 'Væri ykk, Sinfjötli, sœmra myklu  
gunni at heyja ok glaða ornu  
en sé ónýtum orðum at bregðask,  
þótt hringbrotar heiptir deili!
46. 'Þikkjat mér góðir Granmars synir,  
þó dugir siklingum satt at mæla;  
þeir hafa markat á Móinsheimum  
at hug hafa hjörum at bregða.'

37. 'You were a seeress on Varinsey,<sup>108</sup>  
a deceit-wise woman, you drew together lies!  
You said you wanted to possess no man,  
[no] mail-coated fighter, except Sinfjötli!
38. 'You were the wounding one, a witch, a valkyrie,  
awful, immensely mighty, at Alfaðir's!<sup>109</sup>  
The unique champions would all fight each other,  
headstrong woman, for your sake!<sup>110</sup>
39. 'Nine wolves we two had begotten on Sága's ness<sup>111</sup> —  
I alone was their father!'
40. 'You weren't the father of Fenrir's wolves,<sup>112</sup>  
older than all, as I recall,  
because giants' maidens gelded you  
before Gnipalundr, on Þórsnes!<sup>113</sup>
41. 'You were Siggeir's stepson,<sup>114</sup> you were at home lying under haystacks,<sup>115</sup>  
accustomed to wolf-songs<sup>116</sup> out in the woods!  
Every sort of disaster came upon you,  
when you pierced your brother's breast!<sup>117</sup>  
You made yourself famous from dreadful deeds!'
42. 'You were Grani's bride<sup>118</sup> on Brávöllr,<sup>119</sup>  
gold-bridled, you were made for galloping!  
I had ridden you, giantess(?),<sup>120</sup> to exhaustion on many roads,  
scrawny beneath a saddle, downhill!
43. 'You appeared to be an indecent youth,  
when you milked Gullnir's goats,<sup>121</sup>  
and on another occasion [you were] Imðr's daughter,<sup>122</sup>  
one with a tattered dress — do you want a longer list?'<sup>123</sup>
44. 'I would sooner sate ravens  
on your corpses<sup>124</sup> at Frekasteinn,<sup>125</sup>  
than entice your bitches to their swill  
or feed gelded boars<sup>126</sup> — may fiends deal with you!'
- 45.<sup>127</sup> 'It would be more fitting by far, Sinfjötli, for you two  
to engage in war and to gladden eagles  
than it is to cast useless words at each other,  
even if the ring-breakers deal in hatreds!<sup>128</sup>
46. 'Granmarr's sons don't seem good to me,  
yet it befits princes to speak truly;  
they have made it clear at Móinsheimar<sup>129</sup>  
that they have the spirit to wield swords.'<sup>130</sup>

47.                    Peir af ríki renna létu  
Svipuð ok Sveggjuð, Sólheima til,  
dala dögðotta, dökkvar hlíðir;  
skalf Mistar marr, hvars megir fóru.
48.                    Mœttu þeir tiggja í túnhliði,  
sögðu stríðliga stilli kvómu;  
úti stóð Høðbroddr, hjálmi faldinn,  
hugði hann jóreið ættar sinnar:  
'Hví er hermðar litr á Hniflungum?'
49.                    'Snúask hér at sandi snœfgir kjólar,  
rakka hirtir ok rár langar,  
skildir margir, skafnar árar,  
göfugt lið gylfa, glaðir Ylfingar.
50.                    'Ganga fimmtán fólk upp á land,  
þó er í Sogn út sjau þúsundir;  
liggja hér í grindum fyr Gnipalundi  
brimdýr blásvört ok búin gulli.  
Þar er miklu mest mengi þeira —  
muna nú Helgi hjarþing dvala!
51.                    'Renni raukn bitluð til reginþinga,  
en Sporvitnir at Sparinsheiði,  
Mélnir ok Mýlnir til Myrkviðar!  
Látið engi mann eptir sitja,  
þeira er benlogum bregða kunni!
52.                    'Þjóði þér Høgna ok Hrings sonum,  
Atla ok Yngva, Qlf inum gamla;  
þeir ru gjarnir gunni at heyja —  
látum Vølsunga viðrnám fá!
53.                    Svipr einn var þat, er saman kvómu  
fölvir oddar at Frekasteini;  
ey var Helgi, Hundings bani,  
fyrstr í fólki, þar er firar þorðusk,  
æstr á ímu, alltrauðr flugar —  
sá hafði hilmir hart móðakarn!
54.                    Kómu þar ór himni hjálmvittr ofan —  
óx geira gnýr — þær er grami hlífðu;  
þá kvað þat Sigrún — sárvittr flugu,  
át hálu skær af Hugins barri:

47. They<sup>131</sup> made run from the realm  
Svipuðr and Sveggjuðr,<sup>132</sup> to Sólheimar,<sup>133</sup>  
[through] dewy dales, [over] dark hillsides;  
Mist's sea<sup>134</sup> shook, wherever the young men went.
48. They met the prince<sup>135</sup> at the courtyard-gate,  
said severely that a king had come;<sup>136</sup>  
outside stood Hǫðbroddr, encased in a helmet,  
he considered the horse-ride of his kin:  
'Why is there a look of anxiety on the Hniflungar?'<sup>137</sup>
- 49.<sup>138</sup> 'Swift longships head to the sand<sup>139</sup> here,  
harts of mast-rings<sup>140</sup> and long yardarms,  
many shields, shaven oars,<sup>141</sup>  
the noble host of a sea-king, happy Ylfingar.
50. 'Fifteen companies go ashore,  
yet there are seven thousand out in Sogn;<sup>142</sup>  
there lie here within the gates<sup>143</sup> before Gnipalundr  
blue-black sea-beasts<sup>144</sup> and [they're] adorned with gold.  
There is their greatest multitude by far —  
Helgi won't delay the sword-meeting now!'
- 51.<sup>145</sup> 'May bridled horses run to mighty assemblies,  
and Sporvitnir<sup>146</sup> to Sparinsheiðr,<sup>147</sup>  
Mélnir<sup>148</sup> and Mýlnir<sup>149</sup> to Myrkviðr!<sup>150</sup>  
Let no man linger behind,  
of those who know how to wield wound-flames!<sup>151</sup>
52. 'Summon Hǫgni<sup>152</sup> and Hringr's<sup>153</sup> sons,  
Atli and Yngvi, Álfr the Old;  
they're eager to engage in war —  
let's give the Vǫlsungar some resistance!'
53. It was in only a blink of an eye that  
pale weapon-points came together at Frekasteinn;  
Helgi, slayer of Hundingr, was always  
first in the army,<sup>154</sup> where men fought each other,  
keen on fighting, wholly averse to flight —  
that king had a hard mood-acorn!<sup>155</sup>
54. There came from the sky helmet-creatures,<sup>156</sup> from above —  
the clamour of spears<sup>157</sup> grew — they who protected the prince,<sup>158</sup>  
then Sigrún said this — wound-creatures<sup>159</sup> flew,  
the horse of the troll-woman ate from Huginn's barley.<sup>160</sup>





55. 'Unharmed,<sup>161</sup> prince, you shall profit from men,  
descendant of Yngvi,<sup>162</sup> and enjoy life,  
since you have felled the flight-averse boar,<sup>163</sup>  
the one who caused the death of a frightful one!<sup>164</sup>
56. 'And for you, Buðli's descendant, are most befitting  
both red rings and the mighty maiden!<sup>165</sup>  
Unharmed, Buðli's descendant, you shall enjoy both  
Hǫgni's daughter and Hringstaðir,  
victory and lands — then the battle is concluded!'

## Textual Apparatus to *Helgakviða Hundingsbana in fyrri*

*Helgakviða Hundingsbana in fyrri*] This title is not in **R** but supplied from later, paper manuscripts

The introductory line of prose is rubricated but illegible in the photograph in the facsimile volume of **R**; this edition therefore draws on the transcription therein and prior editions

*ok bana þeira Hǫðbrodds*] **R** apparently reads *þeira h.*

*Vǫlsungakviða*] Illegible in the photograph in the facsimile volume of **R**; this edition therefore relies on the transcription therein, in which *ga qviþa* is bracketed

1/1 *Ár*] The *Á* is a large, red, decorative initial in **R**, which clearly marks the start of a major new section

5/3 *ok*] **R** *er*

7/4 *góð*] Missing in **R**, which has a blank space

8/3 *Sólffjöll*] **R** *sól fjoll*

9/8 *blóðrekin*] Or *blóðrekinn*

10/4 *fimmtán*] **R** *xv.*

11/3 *ok*] **R** absent

15/9 *geirum*] **R** *geiror*

22/6 *þinig*] **R** *þing*

23/1 *ströndum*] **R** *ströndom*

31/1 *Soát*] **R** *Sat*

31/4 *fljóta*] **R** *flita*

35/3 *flugtrauðan*] **R** *flaug traupan*

46/8 *hjúrum*] **R** *hioriom*

47/8 *hvars*] **R** *hvar*

52/5 *þeir ru*] **R** *þeiro*

54/6 *flugu*] **R** *fluga*

54/7 *hálu*] **R** *haulþa*

## Notes to the Translation

- 1 This poem appears distinct from, but related to, 'the ancient *Vǫlsungakviða*' cited in *HH. II*. The *Vǫlsungar* are descendants of *Vǫlsungr*, a king of *Húnaland* 'Hunland', according to *VS 2*.
- 2 The same phrase appears in *Vsp. 3*.
- 3 Cf. *HHv. 6*.
- 4 I.e., 'poured', but it might be intimated that the falling waters humbly acknowledged the new-born *Helgi*'s destined status.

- 5 'Heaven/Sky Falls', possibly a mythological term for 'clouds', perhaps especially cumulonimbus, in which case thunder and lightning may be implicitly present. It was traditional for new-borns to be sprinkled with water, and here *Helgi* 'Holy One' is consecrated by holy water.
- 6 'Stronghold Battle', first wife of Sigmundr.
- 7 ON *lundr* means 'grove', but the meaning of *Brá* is uncertain (perhaps 'bright', so 'Bright Grove').
- 8 Supernatural females who determined the fates of humans; cf. *Vsp.* 20.
- 9 Buðli was a legendary king. 'Descendant of Buðli' is a term for 'prince.'
- 10 A somewhat puzzling line, perhaps suggestive of a violent birth, amid associated warfare, from the womb of *Borghildr* 'Stronghold Battle'; cf. the last line of st. 1. Or perhaps *þá er borgir braut* is an impersonal expression meaning 'when strongholds broke' (literally 'when it broke strongholds').
- 11 The 'moon's hall' is the night sky. In this stanza and the next, the Nornir should be understood as twisting or 'plying' three strands of Helgi's fate, respectively fastened at one end to the east, west and north, and all attached at the other end to the middle of the sky, in order to form a single, stronger thread of destiny which hangs down from the suspended midpoint.
- 12 Helgi.
- 13 Cf. *Rm.* 14.
- 14 One of the Nornir. *Neri* is obscure, but possibly relates to *Nþrr* 'Narrow (One)', the father of *Nótt* 'Night' in *Vm.* 25, *Alv.* 29.
- 15 I.e., to the north.
- 16 One of the strands of Helgi's destiny.
- 17 Sigmundr, the *Ylfingar* 'Wolfings' (OE *Wylfingas*) being his dynasty. The cause of the anguish suffered by Helgi's parents is probably his extraordinarily youthful preparedness for battle, which suggests he may die much sooner than he would otherwise.
- 18 Alternatively, 'it sat in a high tree' or 'it sat on a high gallows'.
- 19 'Victory Hand/Protection'.
- 20 Cf. *Vsp.* 32, *BDr.* 11.
- 21 This line might intimate that Helgi is a reincarnation of *Dagr*, a mythical-sounding figure who may have personified the 'day'; see the next stanza.
- 22 The idea is that Helgi will kill men, whose bodies will be eaten by wolves and ravens. Cf. *HH. I* 16.
- 23 I.e., the host of warriors, or people in general.
- 24 'Day'. The etymology of *ðoglingr* 'descendant of Dagr(?)' is disputed, but here the word may suggest the daylight that will contribute to a fruitful year (cf. *HH. I* 26). An alternative, generalized translation, 'prince', seems bland in the context. For Helgi's killing by a man called Dagr who wields Óðinn's spear, see *HH. II* 29 pr. Sigurðr is called *ðoglingr* in *Gðr. I* 14.
- 25 I.e., years in which there would be a fruitful harvest.
- 26 Sigmundr.

- 27 Leek or garlic was deemed to have magically protective properties. There is a possibility, however, that 'leek' is here a metaphor for the sword of the next stanza.
- 28 Sigmundr.
- 29 'Ring Steads' is a place-name, like the next six proper nouns in this stanza. It might be modern-day Ringsted on the Danish island of Zealand.
- 30 'Sun Fells'.
- 31 'Snow Fells'.
- 32 'Sigarr's Plains'; cf. Sigersted, Zealand. In *HH. II 4*, Sigarr is the name of a brother of Hogni, father of Sigrún.
- 33 'Ring Harbour'.
- 34 'High Home-Meadow(s)'.
- 35 'Heaven Fields'.
- 36 I.e., sword.
- 37 I.e., to Helgi. Sinfjötli, Helgi's half-brother, was Sigmundr's son by his sister, Signý, according to *VS 7*. His name is interpretable as 'Sinew-Fettered One', but its first element may originally have been *Sindr-* 'Cinder-/Ash-'. In Old English he is called simply *Fitela* 'Spotted One(?)'.
- 38 Old Norse poetry often likens men to trees.
- 39 Helgi.
- 40 Helgi again.
- 41 A king whose name means 'Descendant of a Hound'. Several kings of this name appear in *GD. VS 9* briefly describes this battle.
- 42 When not denoting an actual boar, *jǫfurr* is, as here, a common metaphor for 'warrior' or 'prince', here Helgi.
- 43 Helgi. The term *buðlungr*, literally 'Buðli's descendant', often signifies merely 'prince'.
- 44 I.e., pay compensation.
- 45 The sons of Hundingr.
- 46 A metaphor for 'battle', in which spears 'rain' from the sky.
- 47 The war-god Óðinn's iconic weapon is the spear.
- 48 Battlefield.
- 49 I.e., appointed.
- 50 'Mountains of Flame(s)'.
- 51 Fróði was a legendary king whose peaceful reign became proverbial.
- 52 *Viðrir* is an alias of Óðinn, which might identify him as a god of the weather (*veðr*); his bitches are wolves.
- 53 Helgi.
- 54 Possibly 'Noble Wolf' or 'Elf'.
- 55 Possibly 'Luck(y) Wolf'.
- 56 'Eagle's (or Eagles') Stone'.
- 57 'Sword Warder'.
- 58 'High Warder'.

- 59 Mímir is a mythical figure, possibly a giant, with whom Hundingr and his family are here associated.
- 60 The light, ostensibly at least. However, there might be some textual corruption, including the loss of a preceding line.
- 61 This line refers to radiant, armoured valkyries.
- 62 Or ‘wolf-wood’. Either way, this is an obscure reference. Perhaps Helgi, like Sigmundr and Sinfjötli in *VS* 8, had spent time as a wolf; cf. *HH*. I 6.
- 63 More specifically, supernatural women — here valkyries.
- 64 A valkyrie, later called Sigrún. Her father, Høgni, is distinct from Høgni, brother of Gunnarr and Guðrún, who appears in subsequent poems of the *Poetic Edda*.
- 65 A kenning for ‘battle’; ‘shield-rims’ can be a synecdoche for ‘shields’.
- 66 I.e., leader. The breaking of rings enabled lords to distribute wealth to their followers.
- 67 ‘Moustached Famous One’ or ‘Bewhiskered Horse’, whose son is Høðbroddr.
- 68 Or ‘blameless/innocent as a kitten’.
- 69 I.e., unless Helgi challenges him to battle.
- 70 Possibly an ironic designation, if it is not merely formulaic.
- 71 Høðbroddr. Ísungr is obscure.
- 72 Helgi.
- 73 If Ógn, possibly ‘Terror’, is the name of a river, its ‘light’ is gold.
- 74 ‘Ship-Beak Isle’, a common name.
- 75 ‘Heðinn’s Island’, now the Baltic island of Hiddensee.
- 76 ‘Prow’s Ness’.
- 77 ‘Sword Leaving’, one of Helgi’s men. In *VS* 9 he is called *Leifr* ‘Leaving’, ‘Inheritance’.
- 78 Or ‘to another man’.
- 79 ‘Crane Sandbank’.
- 80 A reference to ships with long prows, perhaps elongated dragon-heads.
- 81 ‘Arrows’ Sound’, perhaps now Stralsund in northern Germany. *VS* 9 has *ór Nørvasundum* ‘from the Straits of Gibraltar’, rather outlandishly.
- 82 Literally, ‘more by half’.
- 83 The din of battle. This stanza is perhaps spoken by the captain mentioned in the next stanza.
- 84 The sun rising over the horizon.
- 85 Sails.
- 86 ‘Varinn’s Fjord’, possibly the estuary at Warnemünde, Mecklenburg, Germany.
- 87 Iron weapons and armour.
- 88 A kenning for ‘wave’. Kólga is one of the daughters of the sea-giant Ægir, who personify waves; her name may be related to *kala* ‘to become cold’.
- 89 I.e., when the waves crashed into the ship.
- 90 A wave.
- 91 Ships, imagined as horses with stays (mast-supported ropes) for bridles.



- 92 'Victory Rune', a valkyrie.
- 93 Ship.
- 94 'Plunder', wife of the sea-giant Ægir. She was thought to drown people at sea.
- 95 Perhaps 'Overhanging Grove'.
- 96 'Contentment Bays'.
- 97 Apparently Helgi's foes.
- 98 'Svarinn's (Burial-)Mound'; possibly one of the hills near Schwerin, Mecklenberg, Germany.
- 99 I.e., of noble birth. Alternatively, *goðborinn* 'god-born'.
- 100 'God/Battle Hand/Protection', Hǫðbroddr's brother.
- 101 Guðmundr's words are quoted, with variation, in *HH. II* 18 pr.
- 102 I.e., guardian of a sound. This refers to Sinfjǫtli, who acted as watchman.
- 103 Or 'at/to', if the emendation *at* is adopted.
- 104 I.e., who has often killed men, whose corpses became food for eagles.
- 105 Corpses.
- 106 See also *HH. I* 41. *VS* 8 describes how Sinfjǫtli and Sigmundr became werewolves, and how the former slew his young half-brothers. The present accusation is of a single fratricide, however.
- 107 Presumably a cairn. In this line and the previous one, Guðmundr likens Sinfjǫtli to a snake.
- 108 'Varinn's Island'. Cf. *Ls.* 24.
- 109 I.e., *Valhǫll* 'Hall of the Slain', the dwelling of Óðinn, whose alias *Alfaðir* is usually interpreted as 'All Father'.
- 110 The 'unique champions' are fallen warriors whom Óðinn selects to join him in the afterlife in Valhǫll, in preparation for the battles of Ragnarok.
- 111 Sága is a goddess. *VS* 8 has *á Láganesi* 'on Láganess'.
- 112 Fenrir is the apocalyptic wolf of Norse mythology.
- 113 'Þórr's Ness'. *VS* 8 has *á Þrasnesi* 'on Þrasness'.
- 114 King Siggeir was Signý's husband.
- 115 Cf. *VS* 8, which describes how Siggeir buried Sinfjǫtli and Sigmundr alive, but how they escaped thanks to Signý, who, before the mound was complete, threw down to them straw in which she had concealed food and Sigmundr's marvellous sword.
- 116 I.e., wolves' howling. Sinfjǫtli and Sigmundr spent time in the woods as werewolves, according to *VS* 8.
- 117 Cf. *HH. I* 36.
- 118 Grani was the stallion of Sigurðr, the hero of subsequent poems in the *Poetic Edda*.
- 119 Perhaps a reference to the eighth-century Battle of Brávellir, for which see especially the eighth book of *GD*.
- 120 Or perhaps 'witch', 'wolf' or 'cow'.
- 121 In *VS* 9 Sinfjǫtli declares that Hǫðbroddr's brother Granmarr (who corresponds to Guðmundr in the present poem) was *geitasvenn Gǫlnis jǫtuns* 'goatherd of the giant Gǫlnir'.
- 122 *Imðr* is the name of a giantess.

- 123 Or 'do you want a longer talk?'
- 124 I.e., the corpses of Sinfjötli and his men.
- 125 'Freki's Stone'. *Freki* is both a poetic term for 'wolf' and the name of one of Óðinn's wolves.
- 126 Here actual boars.
- 127 This stanza is spoken by Helgi, as is the following one.
- 128 Cf. *HH. II* 28.
- 129 'Moor-Creature's Homes', a moor-creature probably being a snake or a horse. Cf. *Móinsey*, now the Danish island of Møen.
- 130 Cf. *HH. II* 29.
- 131 Guðmundr and his men.
- 132 'Fast-Moving One' and 'One With a Rolling Gait', the names of two horses.
- 133 'Sun Homes'.
- 134 Or 'horse'. *Mist* 'Mist' is a valkyrie-name; her 'sea' or 'horse' is presumably either the air or the earth.
- 135 Hǫðbroddr.
- 136 Or perhaps 'They spoke severely to the king (Hǫðbroddr) of the coming (of Helgi)'.
- 137 A family name, originally at least, for members of the Burgundian royalty; a variant of *Niflungar* 'Nibelungs'.
- 138 This stanza is probably spoken by Guðmundr, as is the next.
- 139 I.e., the shore.
- 140 A kenning for 'ships'.
- 141 Oars smoothed by shaving.
- 142 Sogn fjord in Norway. *VS* 9 has *Sþk*.
- 143 Perhaps a reference to palisades, stake-fences forming a harbour. *VS* 9 has *fyrir Grindum* 'off Grindir', a supposed place-name.
- 144 Ships. Their colour suggests deadly purpose.
- 145 This stanza is spoken by Hǫðbroddr, as is the next.
- 146 'Spur Wolf' or 'Track Wolf', a horse.
- 147 'Sparinn's Heath'.
- 148 'One with a Mouth-Bit', a horse.
- 149 Perhaps 'One with a Halter' or 'Muzzled One', another horse.
- 150 'Murk Wood'.
- 151 Swords.
- 152 Sigrún's father.
- 153 'Ring', possibly Sigurðr Hringr, victor at the Battle of Brávellir.
- 154 Or 'battle'.
- 155 Heart.
- 156 Valkyries.
- 157 A kenning for 'battle'.
- 158 Helgi.

- 159 Valkyries.
- 160 'Horse of the troll-woman/giantess' is a kenning for 'wolf' (cf. *Hdl.* 5). Huginn is one of Óðinn's ravens. A raven's 'barley' (i.e., food) is the flesh of dead warriors. In other words, 'the wolf ate corpses'.
- 161 Literally, 'hale', 'whole'.
- 162 This name often describes the god Freyr, especially in the title *Yngvi-Freyr*, but was also given to humans.
- 163 Presumably Hǫðbroddr.
- 164 An obscure reference.
- 165 Sigrún refers to herself in the third person. *VS* 9 records that Helgi and Sigrún married, as does *HH. II.*