



# THE POETIC EDDA

A Dual-Language Edition

EDWARD PETTIT





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Edward Pettit, *The Poetic Edda: A Dual-Language Edition*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0308>

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ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80064-772-5

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80064-773-2

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80064-774-9

ISBN Digital ebook (EPUB): 978-1-80064-775-6

ISBN Digital ebook (AZW3): 978-1-80064-776-3

ISBN XML: 978-1-80064-777-0

ISBN HTML: 978-1-80064-778-7

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0308

Front cover image: 'The Two Corbies' by Arthur Rackham, from *Some British Ballads* (London, [1919])

Back cover image: The god Heimdallr blowing his horn, from a seventeenth-century Icelandic manuscript (AM 738 4to, fol. 35v)

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# Frá dauða Sinfjötla

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*Frá dauða Sinfjötla* (*Sf.*) ‘About Sinfjötli’s Death’ is a purely prose passage in **R** (fol. 26v–27r). It serves as a bridge between the preceding three Helgi-poems and the following poems about Sigurðr, half-brother of Helgi Hundingsbani.

*Sf.* relates events described more fully in chapters 10 to 13 of *VS*. Similarities of wording indicate a close relationship between the two accounts.

## Synopsis

*Sf.* begins by introducing three sons of Sigmundr: Sinfjötli, Helgi and Hámundr (the first two featured in *HH. I* and *HH. II*). Sinfjötli slew the brother of his stepmother, Borghildr, over their love of the same woman. For that, Borghildr wanted Sinfjötli exiled, but she had to accept compensation from Sigmundr instead.

At her brother’s funeral feast, however, she served Sinfjötli poisoned drink three times. The first two times, Sigmundr, who was reputedly wholly immune to poison, drank it for Sinfjötli. The third time Sigmundr told his son to strain the drink through his moustache. Sinfjötli drank it and died immediately.

Sigmundr carried Sinfjötli’s body to a fjord, where an old boatman (Óðinn incognito) offered him passage. Sigmundr put the body in the boat, which was then fully laden. The old man told Sigmundr he would have to walk along the shore, and then vanished.

Sigmundr stayed in Borghildr’s kingdom in Danmørk (Denmark) for a long time, before moving to his kingdom in Frakkland (Francia). Then he married Hjördís, daughter of King Eylimi, and they had a son called Sigurðr (the hero of subsequent poems in **R**). Sigmundr died at the hands of King Hundings’ sons. Hjördís married Álfr, son of King Hjalprekr, at whose (probably Danish) court Sigurðr grew up.

Sigurðr proved to be the greatest man of all.

## Further Reading

Fleck, J., ‘Konr—Óttarr—Geirrøðr: A Knowledge Criterion for Succession to the Germanic Sacred Kingship’, *SS* 42 (1970), 39–49.

Von See, K., B. La Farge, W. Gerhold, E. Picard and K. Schulz, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, Bd. 5: *Heldenlieder* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2006).

## Frá dauða Sinfjötla

Sigmundur, Völsungs sonr, var konungr á Frakklandi. Sinfjötli var elztr hans sona, annarr Helgi, þriðji Hámundr. Borghildr, kona Sigmundar, átti bróður er hét . . . En Sinfjötli, stjúpsonr hennar, ok . . . báðu einnar konu báðir, ok fyrir þá sök drap Sinfjötli hann. En er hann kom heim, þá bað Borghildr hann fara á brot, en Sigmundur bauð henni fébætr, ok þat varð hon at þiggja. En at erfinu bar Borghildr ǫl. Hon tók eitr, mikit horn fullt, ok bar Sinfjötla. En er hann sá í hornit, skilði hann at eitr var í, ok mælti til Sigmundar: ‘Gjöróttir er drykkinn, ái.’ Sigmundur tók hornit ok drakk af. Svá er sagt at Sigmundur var harðgǫrr at hvárki mátti honum eitr granda útan né innan. En allir synir hans stóðusk eitr á hǫrund útan. Borghildr bar annat horn Sinfjötla, ok bað drekka, ok fór allt sem fyrr. Ok enn it þriðja sinn bar hon honum hornit, ok þó ámælisorð með, ef hann drykki eigi af. Hann mælti enn sem fyrr við Sigmund. Hann sagði: ‘Láttu græn sía þá, sonr!’ Sinfjötli drakk ok varð þegar dauðr.

Sigmundur bar hann langar leiðir í fangi sér ok kom at firði einum mjóvum ok lǫngum, ok var þar skip eitt lítit ok maðr einn á. Hann bauð Sigmundi far of fjörðinn. En er Sigmundur bar líkit út á skipit, þá var bátrinn hlaðinn. Karlinn mælti at Sigmundur skyldi fara fyrir innan fjörðinn. Karl hratt út skipinu ok hvarf þegar.

Sigmundur konungr dvalðisk lengi í Danmǫrk í ríki Borghildar, síðan er hann fekk hennar. Fór Sigmundur þá suðr í Frakkland, til þess ríkis er hann átti þar. Þá fekk hann Hjördísar, dóttur Eylima konungs. Þeira sonr var Sigurðr. Sigmundur konungr fell í orrostu fyrir Hundings sonum. En Hjördís giptisk þá Álfí, syni Hjálpreks konungs. Óx Sigurðr þar upp í barnæsku.

Sigmundur ok allir synir hans váru langt um fram alla menn aðra um afl ok vǫxt ok hug ok alla atgervi. Sigurðr var þá allra framarstr, ok hann kalla allir menn í fornfræðum um alla menn fram ok gǫfgastan herkonunga.

## About Sinfjötli's Death

Sigmundr, Völsungr's son, was king in Frakkland.<sup>1</sup> Sinfjötli was the eldest of his sons, second was Helgi,<sup>2</sup> third Hámundr.<sup>3</sup> Borghildr, Sigmundr's wife, had a brother who was called . . .<sup>4</sup> And Sinfjötli, her stepson, and . . .<sup>5</sup> they both asked to marry the one woman, and for that reason Sinfjötli slew him. And when he<sup>6</sup> came home, Borghildr asked him to go away, but Sigmundr offered her compensation, and she had to accept that. But at the funeral feast, Borghildr served ale. She took poison, a great hornful, and brought it to Sinfjötli. And when he looked in the horn, he perceived that poison was in it, and he said to Sigmundr: 'The drink is cloudy, father.'<sup>7</sup> Sigmundr took the horn and drained it. It is said that Sigmundr was so strongly made that poison could never hurt him outside or inside. But all his sons withstood poison [only] outside on their skin. Borghildr brought another horn to Sinfjötli, and asked him to drink, and everything went as before. And, again, the third time she brought him the horn, but with insulting words with it, if he did not drain it. He spoke again as before with Sigmundr. He<sup>8</sup> said: 'Let your moustache strain it then, son!' Sinfjötli drank and died at once.

Sigmundr carried him a long way in his arms and came to a fjord slender and long, and there was a little ship and a lone man in it. He offered Sigmundr passage over the fjord. But when Sigmundr brought the body out to the ship, then the boat was [fully] laden. The old man said to Sigmundr that he would have to go along the shore inside the fjord. The old man pushed the ship out and vanished at once.<sup>9</sup>

King Sigmundr stayed a long time in Danmörk<sup>10</sup> in the kingdom of Borghildr, after he married her. Then Sigmundr went south into Frakkland, to the kingdom that he owned there. Then he married Hjördís,<sup>11</sup> daughter of King Eylimi. Their son was Sigurðr.<sup>12</sup> King Sigmundr fell in battle before<sup>13</sup> Hundinr's sons. And Hjördís then gave herself in marriage to Álfr,<sup>14</sup> son of King Hjálprekr.<sup>15</sup> Sigurðr grew up there in his childhood.

Sigmundr and all his sons were far above all other men in strength and stature and courage and all accomplishments. Sigurðr was foremost of all then, and in the ancient traditions all people call him superior to all men and the noblest of army-kings.

## Textual Apparatus to *Frá dauða Sinfjötla*

*Frá dauða Sinfjötla*] This heading is rubricated but illegible in the photograph in the facsimile volume of **R**; the reading is therefore reliant on the transcription therein. Later, paper manuscripts have the title *Sinfjötla* 'Sinfjötli's End'.

*Sigmundr*] The first letter is large, inset and rubricated, but faded, in **R**

*Hámundr*] **R** *hamundir* (with a macron for *-un-*)

*er hét . . .*] **R** has a black space here

*ok . . .*] **R** has a blank space here

*innan*] **R** *iN*

*þó*] **R** *þa*

## Notes to the Translation

- 1 Francia, kingdom of the Franks.
- 2 Helgi Hundingsbani, hero of *HH. I* and *HH. II*.
- 3 'High Hand/Protection'.
- 4 The name is missing. This man is also unnamed in the account of these events in *VS 10*.
- 5 The name of Helgi's love-rival is probably missing. *VS 10* records that it was a king, Borghildr's (unnamed) brother, who vied with Sinfjötli for a beautiful woman.
- 6 Sinfjötli.
- 7 Elsewhere, *ái* means 'great-grandfather'.
- 8 Sigmundr.
- 9 The old boatman was Óðinn in disguise (cf. *Hrbl.*). Óðinn was sometimes a psychopomp for the best fallen warriors, whom he took to Valhøll. This episode may reflect a tradition about the divisive waters of death (cf. the River Styx in Greek mythology), across which Sigmundr could not be ferried while alive.
- 10 Denmark.
- 11 'Sword Lady'.
- 12 'Victory Guardian'.
- 13 I.e., at the hands of.
- 14 'Elf' or 'Noble Wolf'.
- 15 'Help-Powerful One'. *VS 12* identifies him as a Danish king.