



THE POETIC EDDA

A Dual-Language Edition

EDWARD PETTIT



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Brot af Sigurðarkviðu

This poem in *fornyrðislag* is known to scholars as *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu* (*Br.*) ‘Fragment of a Lay of Sigurðr’ or *Sigurðarkviða in forna* ‘The Old Lay of Sigurðr’. It is acephalous in **R** (fol. 33r–v) owing to the loss of leaves which also seriously damaged *Sd.* Unfortunately, in contrast to *Sd.*, there is no means of restoring the lost stanzas of *Br.* We cannot even be sure how many stanzas it lacks, but it has been proposed that the poem is now about half its original length.

It is, however, possible to determine broadly the events leading up to the fragment’s starting point by studying other Old Norse accounts of the Nibelung story in **R**, such as *Grp.*, but especially *VS* (up to chapter 32), which is likely to reflect the content of this poem before the loss. The saga even includes a version of one stanza that recurs in *Br.* (4) and several others (quoted below) which may well have been in **R**’s ‘great lacuna’, which possibly included **Sigurðarkviða in meira* ‘The Longer Lay of Sigurðr’.

It is likely that, after exchanging marriage vows with the valkyrie Brynhildr, Sigurðr had come to the court of Gjúki, a king of the southern Rhineland, whose sons included Gunnarr, Hǫgni and Guthormr (Gothormr/Guttormr), and whose daughter was Guðrún. There Sigurðr had unwittingly drunk a magical drink given to him by Grímlidr, Gjúki’s wife, which had caused him to forget Brynhildr entirely. Having entered into blood-brotherhood with Gunnarr and Hǫgni, and having married Guðrún, Sigurðr had agreed to help Gunnarr win Brynhildr, as Gunnarr himself had been unable to cross the wall of fire surrounding her dwelling. The two men had exchanged appearances, and Sigurðr had then ridden towards the raging fire, which subsided before him:

Eldr *nam*¹ at óesask, en jǫrð at skjálfa,
ok hár logi við himni gnæfa;
fár treystisk þar fylkis rekka
eld at riða né yfir stíga.

1 Emended from *man* in *VS* 29.

Sigurðr Grana sverði keyrði,
 eldr sloknaði fyrir þölingi,
 logi allr lægðisk fyrir lofgjörnum,
 bliku reiði,² er Reginn átti.

Fire began to rage, and the earth to shake,
 and high flame to ascend to the sky;
 few of the men of a marshal dared
 ride into the fire or to surmount it.

Sigurðr spurred Grani with his sword,
 the fire went out before the prince,
 the flame all subsided before the glory-eager one,
 the riding gear glinted, which Reginn owned.

(VS 29)

The disguised Sigurðr lay beside Brynhildr for three nights, but they were separated by his sword throughout, so they never touched. They had then exchanged rings from Fáfnir's treasure in the shared understanding that they would marry, whereupon Sigurðr had left her to return to Gunnarr and the others.

Subsequently, Brynhildr and Guðrún had quarrelled in the Rhine, where Guðrún revealed the deception. Brynhildr said that she would have revenge. Unhappy with her marriage to Gunnarr, she declared to Guðrún:

‘Sigurðr vá at ormi, en þat síðan mun
 engum fyrnask, meðan öld lifir;
 en hlýri þinn hvárki þorði
 eld at ríða né yfir stíga.’

‘Sigurðr struck at the snake, and henceforth that
 will be forgotten by no one, as long as humanity lives;
 but your brother³ dared neither
 ride into the fire nor surmount it.’

(VS 30)

Afterwards, Gunnarr went to see Brynhildr, who had been made ill by the turn of events. She had harsh words for him and declared that she would cause his death and be revenged on Grímildr. Högni put her in chains to prevent her killing Gunnarr there and then, whereupon she tore down her tapestry work and lamented so loudly that she was heard from far away.

² Emended from *reið* in VS 29.

³ Gunnarr.

Gunnarr went again to see her, as did Hǫgni, but she would speak to neither. Then Guðrún urged Sigurðr to visit her and pacify her with gold. Brynhildr, however, was outraged at his visit. During their difficult conversation Brynhildr expressed regret that she could not redden a sword in Sigurðr's blood, and he, having remembered his love for her, declared that he would like to marry her and leave Guðrún. But Brynhildr was implacable: '*Eigi vil ek þik ... ok engan annarra*' 'I don't want you ... and no other [either]'. Whereupon, *svá segir í Sigurðarkviðu* 'as it says in *Sigurðarkviða* [the Lay of Sigurðr]':

Út gekk Sigurðr andspjalli frá,
hollvinr lofða, ok hnipaði,
svá at ganga nam gunnarfúsum
sundr of síður serkr járnofinn.

Out went Sigurðr from their conversation,
the gracious friend of praiseworthy ones, and hung his head,
so that, for the battle-eager one,⁴ the iron-woven shirt
began to [split] apart at the sides.⁵

(VS 31)

Gunnarr went to see Brynhildr twice more, but she said she would reject him utterly unless he killed Sigurðr and his son. She also falsely told him that Sigurðr had taken her virginity. Gunnarr then discussed the matter with Hǫgni, which is probably the point at which *Br.* begins.

Br. is the first surviving member of a number of poems in **R** concerned with the death of Sigurðr. As they stand, these poems are generally supposed to have been composed in the twelfth or early thirteenth centuries, possibly in the following order, which does not match their sequence in **R**:⁶

1. *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu*
2. *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*
3. **Sigurðarkviða in meira* (a hypothetical work believed by some scholars to have been in **R**'s great lacuna)
4. *Guðrúnarkviða ǫnnur*

4 The translation 'battle [*gunnarr*]-eager one' for *gunnarfúss* fails to capture the word's full semantic freight, which includes retrospective allusion both to Sigurðr's initially professed keenness that Brynhildr should be happy with *Gunnarr* and to his willingness to masquerade as Gunnarr. Cf. *Br.* 8 [9] *gunnar fúsa* describing Gjúki's sons.

5 Cf. Sigurðr's earlier cutting of the sleeping Brynhildr from her mail-coat.

6 See J. McKinnell, 'Female Reactions to the Death of Sigurðr', in his *Essays on Eddic Poetry*, ed. D. Kick and J. D. Shafer (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2014), pp. 249–67 at 250–51, <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442669260-012>

5. *Guðrúnarkviða in fyrsta*

6. *Helreið Brynhildar*

In these poems, female voices, especially those of Guðrún and Brynhildr, come to the fore in grief, insult, accusation, self-justification, incitement to vengeance and prophecy.

Important variant accounts of the dealings of figures corresponding to Sigurðr, Gunnarr, Høgni, Brynhildr and Guðrún appear in the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*, the Old Norse (Norwegian) *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, and the Faroese ballad *Brynhildar táttur* 'Brynhild's Story'.

Synopsis

Verse: What remains of *Br.* probably starts with Høgni asking Gunnarr why he wants to kill Sigurðr (1). Gunnarr replies that Sigurðr has tricked him (he presumably believes, mistakenly, that Sigurðr had taken Brynhildr's virginity) (2). Høgni asserts that Brynhildr has incited Gunnarr because she begrudges Guðrún her marriage to Sigurðr (3).

We then hear that Gothormr was fed noxious food, evidently to fortify him for the daunting task of killing Sigurðr (4).

Guðrún then asks where Sigurðr is (5). Høgni replies that they have hacked him to pieces (6). Brynhildr congratulates Høgni, as she thinks it would have been unfitting for Sigurðr to rule Gjúki's inheritance, and laughs loudly (7–9). Guðrún declares that their malice will be avenged (10).

A single stanza (possibly misplaced) then records that Sigurðr had died south of the Rhine, and that a raven foretold that Atli would kill both Gunnarr and Høgni (11). Gunnarr reflects anxiously on the raven's words, and those of an eagle (unreported), when riding home (13).

Next Brynhildr expresses her internal conflict about Sigurðr's killing (14), at which all those present fall silent (15). She describes a dream which bodes ill for Gunnarr and his fellow oath-breakers (16), points out that Gunnarr has forgotten his blood-brotherhood with Sigurðr (17), and reveals that Sigurðr had not betrayed Gunnarr with her (18), but rather placed a sword between them when they slept side-by-side (19).

Prose: A concluding passage records the existence of different traditions about Sigurðr's death, with some maintaining that he was killed in bed, some in a forest, and one poem that he died at an assembly.

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Brot af Sigurðarkviðu

1.

‘....
Hvat hefir Sigurðr til saka unnit,
er þú fræknan vill fjörvi næma?’
2.

‘Mér hefir Sigurðr selda eiða,
eiða selda, alla logna —
þá vélti hann mik, er hann vera skyldi
allra eiða einn fulltrúi!’
3.

‘Þik hefir Brynhildr þöl at gerva,
heiptar hvattan harm at vinna;
fyrman hon Guðrúnu góðra ráða,
en síðan þér sín at njóta!’
4.

Sumir úlf sviðu, sumir orm sniðu,
sumir Gothormi af gera deildu,
áðr þeir mætti, meins um lystir,
á horskum hal hendr um leggja.
- 5 [6].

Úti stóð Guðrún, Gjúka dóttir,
ok hon þat orða alls fyrst um kvað:
‘Hvar er nú Sigurðr, seggja dróttinn,
er frændr mínir fyrri ríða?’
- 6 [7].

Einn því Hogni andsvör veitti:
‘Sundr hofum Sigurð sverði hogginn;
gnapir æ grár jór yfir gram dauðum.’
- 7 [8].

Þá kvað þat Brynhildr, Buðla dóttir:
‘Vel skuluð njóta vápna ok landa!
Einn myndi Sigurðr öllu ráða,
ef hann lengr litlu lífi heldi!’
- 8 [9].

‘Væria þat scemt at hann svá réði
Gjúka arfi ok Gota mengi,
er hann fimm sonu at fólkraði,
gunnar fúsa, getna hafði!’
- 9 [10].

Hló þá Brynhildr — þær allr dunði —
einu sinni af öllum hug:
‘Vel skuluð njóta landa ok þegna,
er þér fræknan gram falla létuð!’

- 10 [11]. Þá kvað þat Guðrún, Gjúka dóttir:
 ‘Mjök mælir þú miklar firnar!
 Gramir hafi Gunnar, gøtvað Sigurðar!
 Heiptgjarns hugar hefnt skal verða!’
- 11 [5]. Soltinn varð Sigurðr sunnan Rínar;
 hrafn at meiði hátt kallaði:
 ‘Ykkur mun Atli eggjar rjóða!
 Munu vígská of viðá eiðar!’
12. Fram var kvelda, fjöld var drukkit,
 þá var hvívetna vilmál talit;
 sofnuðu allir er í sæing kvómu;
 einn vakði Gunnarr ǫllum lengr.
13. Fót nam at hrœra, fjöld nam at spjalla;
 hitt hergløtuðr hygga téði:
 hvat þeir í bōðvi báðir sōgðu,
 hrafn ey ok ǫrn, er þeir heim riðu.
14. Vaknaði Brynhildr, Buðla dóttir,
 dís Skjöldunga, fyr dag litlu:
 ‘Hvetið mik eða letið mik — harmr er unninn! —
 sorg at segja eða svá láta!’
15. Þōgðu allir við því orði —
 fār kunni þeim fljóða látum —
 er hon grátandi gørðisk at segja
 þat er hlæjandi hǫlða beiddi.
16. ‘Hugða ek mér, Gunnarr, grimt í svefni,
 svalt allt í sal, ættak sæing kalda;
 en þú, gramr, riðir glaums andvani,
 fjōtri fatlaðr í fjánda lið;
 svá mun ǫll yður, ætt Niflunga,
 afli gengin — eruð eiðrofa!’
17. ‘Mantattu, Gunnarr, til gōrva þat,
 er þit blóði í spor báðir renduð!
 Nú hefir þú honum þat allt illu launat,
 er hann fremstan sik finna vildi.
18. ‘Þá reyndi þat, er riðit hafði
 móðigr á vit mín at biðja,
 hvé hergløtuðr hafði fyrri
 eiðum haldit við inn unga gram!’

- 10 [11]. Then Guðrún, Gjúki's daughter, said this:
 'You utter very great atrocities!
 May fiends²⁰ have Gunnarr, Sigurðr's gravedigger!
 The avidly hateful thought shall be avenged!'
- 11 [5]. Sigurðr had died south of the Rín;²¹
 a raven on a tree²² called out loudly:
 'Atli²³ will redden edges²⁴ in you both!²⁵
 Oaths will overthrow the warlike ones!'
12. The evening was far advanced, much had been drunk,
 pleasing words had been uttered to²⁶ everyone then:²⁷
 all slept when they went to bed;
 Gunnarr alone lay awake longer than all [the others].
13. His foot began to twitch, he began to mutter a great deal,²⁸
 the army-destroyer²⁹ started to think about this:
 what those in the tree(?) both said,
 the raven, repeatedly, and the eagle, when they rode home.³⁰
14. Brynhildr awoke, Buðli's daughter,
 the lady of the Skjöldungar, a little before day:
 'Urge me on or hold me back — the harm is done —
 a sorrow to speak of or now to let be!³¹
15. All fell silent at that speech —
 few understand the ways³² of women —
 when she, weeping, prepared herself to speak of
 that which she, laughing, had demanded of men.
16. 'I thought, Gunnarr, of grim things in a dream:
 all was chilly in the hall, I had a cold bed;
 and you, prince, were riding, bereft of joy,
 fettered by a fetter in the company of foes;
 so all of you, the family of Niflungar,³³ will be
 separated from³⁴ strength — you are oath-breakers!
17. 'You don't recall it too clearly, Gunnarr,
 when you both³⁵ let your blood flow into a footprint!³⁶
 Now you've repaid him all that with evil,
 since he wanted to find himself foremost.³⁷
18. 'It was revealed then, when the brave one³⁸
 had ridden to see me to request [my hand],
 how the army-destroyer³⁹ had earlier
 kept his oaths to the young prince!⁴⁰

19. ‘Benvond of lét, brugðinn gulli,
margdýrr konungr á meðal okkar;
eldi váru eggjar útan gǫrvar,
en eitrdropum innan fáðar!’

Frá dauða Sigurðar

Hér er sagt í þessi kviðu frá dauða Sigurðar, ok víkr hér svá til, sem þeir dræpi hann úti. En sumir segja svá, at þeir dræpi hann inni í rekkju sinni sofanda. En þýðverskir menn segja svá, at þeir dræpi hann úti í skógi. Ok svá segir í ‘Guðrúnarkviðu inni fornu,’ at Sigurðr ok Gjúka synir hefði til þings riðit, þá er hann var drepinn. En þat segja allir einnig, at þeir sviku hann í tryggð ok vógu at honum liggjanda ok óbúnum.

19. ‘The very worthy king⁴¹ let a wound-wand,⁴²
 braided with gold, be between us;⁴³
its edges were forged with fire on the outside,
and dyed with venom-drops on the inside!’⁴⁴

About Sigurðr’s Death⁴⁵

It is said here in this poem about the death of Sigurðr, and here it points to [the belief] that they slew him outside. But some say thus, that they slew him inside in his bed as he was sleeping.⁴⁶ And German people say thus, that they slew him outside in a forest.⁴⁷ And it says thus in *Guðrúnarkviða in forna* [‘The Old Lay of Guðrún’],⁴⁸ that Sigurðr and Gjúki’s sons had ridden to an assembly, when he was slain. But all say this with one voice, that they broke faith with him and attacked him as he was lying down and unprepared.

Textual Apparatus to *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu*

Brot af Sigurðarkviðu] This title is not in **R**; it is supplied editorially

1/3 *Hvat hefir Sigurðr til*] **R** absent; this is a conjectural, but traditional, emendation

2/5 *véliti*] **R** *velt* (with e caudata)

Fra dauða Sigurðar] This rubricated but faded heading is illegible in the photograph in the facsimile volume of **R**; this reading is therefore reliant on the transcription therein

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

riðit] **R** *riþiN* (i.e., *riþinn*)

Notes to the Translation

- 1 The following question is probably addressed by Högni to Gunnarr, whom Brynhildr has incited to kill Sigurðr.
- 2 Gunnarr speaks this stanza, having apparently been misled by Brynhildr that Sigurðr took her virginity when he slept beside her in Gunnarr's guise.
- 3 Brynhildr.
- 4 A variant of this stanza appears in *VS* 32: *Sumir viðfiska tóku, sumir vitnishræ skífðu, / sumir Guttormi gáfu gera hold / við mungáti ok marga hluti / aðra í tyfrum* 'Some took wood-fish [i.e., snakes], some sliced wolf-carcass(es), some gave Guttormr greedy one's [i.e., wolf's] flesh with beer and many other things in magic potions'.
- 5 Probably a wolf.
- 6 *Gothormr* 'Goth Snake' (also known as *Guthormr* 'God/Good/Battle Snake' and *Guttormr*), brother of Högni and Gunnarr, was to eat these to fortify himself. It is he who kills Sigurðr.
- 7 Literally, 'desirous of harm'.
- 8 Sigurðr.
- 9 Stanza numbers in brackets are those of *NK*, which considers one of this poem's stanzas misplaced in **R**.
- 10 Cf. *Brk.* 2, 3, 9, 12, *Od.* 3.
- 11 Evidently, Sigurðr had always ridden at the front.
- 12 Grani, Sigurðr's horse.
- 13 Goths, or humans in general.
- 14 Probably Gjúki.
- 15 Other Eddic poems and *VS* mention only three sons of Gjúki: Gunnarr, Högni and Guthormr/Gothormr/ Guttormr (but note *Hdl.* 27 and cf. *Gðr.* I 24). However, the existence of two more, Gernoz and Giselher, might be inferred from *Þiðreks saga* and the *Nibelungenlied*.
- 16 Or 'people'.
- 17 Cf. *Sg.* 30.
- 18 The Old Norse line lacks alliteration, which might, however, be supplied by changing *vel* 'well' to *lengi* 'long', or *landa* 'lands' to *vápna* 'weapons' (cf. *Br.* 7[8]).

- 19 Probably a taunt made in the firm belief that they will not.
- 20 Literally, 'fierce ones'.
- 21 The Rhine.
- 22 Or branch, or gallows.
- 23 Atli (Attila), king of the Huns, is Brynhildr's brother and Guðrún's future husband.
- 24 Of weapons.
- 25 Gunnarr and Högni.
- 26 Or 'by'.
- 27 Or 'in every way'. It appears that *hv-* (in *hvívetna*) alliterates with *v-* (in *vilmál*) in the Old Norse line.
- 28 Or simply, 'His foot twitched, he muttered much'.
- 29 Gunnarr.
- 30 An eagle, like the raven, had presumably prophesied the demise of Sigurðr's killers as they rode by.
- 31 Alternatively perhaps 'or to die thus [from unexpressed grief?}'. The meaning of this line is disputed.
- 32 Literally, gestures, manners.
- 33 ON *Niflungar* presumably corresponds to Middle High German *Nibelunge* in the *Nibelungenlied*, but the etymology is uncertain.
- 34 I.e., deprived of.
- 35 Gunnarr and Sigurðr.
- 36 Or 'track', 'trail'. The reference is to part of a supposed rite of blood-brotherhood, one described in chapter 6 of the thirteenth-century *Gísla saga Súrssonar* 'Saga of Gísli Súrsson' and chapter 2 of the thirteenth-century *Fóstbræðra saga* 'Saga of the Sworn Brothers'. It is said to have also involved the participants passing under one or more strips of raised turf which remained in contact with the ground at either end.
- 37 I.e., he wanted either to be able to consider himself the foremost of men, or to put himself in the front in order to win the most glory in battle.
- 38 Sigurðr.
- 39 Sigurðr.
- 40 Gunnarr.
- 41 Sigurðr.
- 42 Sword.
- 43 Sigurðr and Brynhildr, when they slept beside each other.
- 44 Possibly a reference to acid etching.
- 45 A passage similar to the following prose conclusion appears in chapter 9 of *Norna-Gests þátr*.
- 46 As in *Sg.* 21–25, *Ghv.* 4 and 17, *Hm.* 6–7, *VS* 32 and *SnESkáld* (I, 41, p. 48).
- 47 As in *Þiðreks saga* (chapters 346–47), which reflects German tradition, and *Nibelungenlied* (Adventures 15–16).
- 48 Possibly *Gðr. II* (see st. 4 thereof).

