



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

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

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Atlakviða in grœnlenszka

Atlakviða in grœnlenszka (*Akv.*) ‘The Greenlandic Lay of Atli’, on fol. 39v–41r of **R**, is the first of two consecutive poems in this manuscript concerning the death of Atli, Old Norse legend’s reflex of the fifth-century Attila the Hun; essentially the same story is told at greater length in *Atlamál in grœnlenszku* (*Am.*).

Akv. is generally thought to be among the earliest poems in the collection and, whatever the basis of its Greenlandic connection (which might simply derive from association with *Am.*), to predate the Norse settlement of Greenland in around 985.

That the poem has more than negligible links to the European continent and the ancient Germanic past is suggested by its references to, for example, the Dnieper (5), the Rhine (17, 27), to the huge and dark forest of central Europe (3, 5, 13), to the Gjúkjungar as Burgundians (or to Gunnarr, reflex of the fifth-century Burgundian King Gundaharius, as ‘friend of the Burgundians’) (18), and perhaps even to the Burgundian capital at Worms, Germany (17). Whether the poem in its present form was composed in Iceland, Greenland or Scandinavia, it is clearly not set there. Furthermore, although *Akv.*’s narrative is largely fictional, it contains some elements that reflect history. Most generally, the Burgundians and the Huns were indeed both foes and allies. More intriguingly, some aspects of *Akv.*’s account of Atli’s death suggest a distorted, elaborated folk-memory of what may well have been historical reality, as dimly as we can perceive it from the surviving sources. Thus, a contemporary account by Priscus, related in chapter 49 of the *De origine actibusque Getarum* ‘On the origin and deeds of the Goths’ (*Getica*, c. AD 551) by the sixth-century historian Jordanes, records that Attila died after a heavy drinking session on the night of his marriage to a beautiful woman called *Ildico*, having choked on blood flowing from his nose.¹ It seems possible to detect a distorted echo of this demise in Atli’s drunken consumption of his children’s bloody hearts, which were served to him by his wife.² *Ildico* could be a diminutive of Germanic **Hildaz* ‘Battle’, which may survive as the second part of *Kriemhilt*, the name of Guðrun’s counterpart as the wife of Attila in continental Germanic tradition (*Guð-* in *Guðrún* also means ‘Battle’).

1 T. Mommsen, *Jordanis: Romana et Getica*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi 5 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1882), pp. 123–24; C. C. Mierow, *The Gothic History of Jordanes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1915), p. 123.

2 Cf. also the classical story of Tereus and Procne, well known from the sixth book of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

A further indication of *Akv.*'s relative antiquity may be its metre, which includes stanzas that mix *fornyrðislag* and *málaháttir*. This feature need not (or not always) indicate composite origin or the contributions of multiple poets. It may rather reflect the differing prosodic tradition of an earlier age.

Whatever its age, and whatever vestiges of history may survive in *Akv.*, it is undoubtedly a highly effective heroic poem, even if the surviving version suffers from textual damage in some places. In contrast to the largely reflective character of preceding poems about a static, grieving Guðrún, *Akv.* is more of an action narrative. Its tense, economically told story advances to a shockingly gruesome and dramatic climax in which the burning timbers of Atli's hall collapse around the drunken king who has unwittingly eaten his own sons. Characterization is satisfyingly bold. Guðrún again features prominently, but here impresses not just in words but also in deeds both subtle and appalling, though not wholly heartless (she lets Atli's dogs and servants escape the flames); her portrayal is enriched by suggestions of the supernatural (29?, 36). Gunnarr speaks defiantly but impresses most through his apparent refusal to fight Atli; instead, he advances coolly, and unarmed, to his death in order (we infer) to embrace its inevitability and thwart his enemy's desire for treasure. Høgni, by contrast, fights valiantly and even laughs as his heart is removed—surely the ultimate expression of the defiant, martial spirit not just of the Burgundians but of the whole Germanic North. Atli remains a sinister, shadowy figure, occasionally glimpsed but largely lurking in the background.

The poem's vivid, sometimes cryptic, language also impresses. Notable, for instance, are Gunnarr's final words to his household (11), the description of the Burgundians' thunderous gallop to their doom (13), the portrayal of Atli's towering hall (14), Guðrún's prophetic words upon her brothers' arrival (16), and Gunnarr's fatalistic reply (17).

A version of *Akv.* was among the sources for chapters 35 to 40 of *VS*, although none of its stanzas are quoted. The story is also told in chapter 42 of *SnESkáld*.

Strikingly different accounts of the visit of Gunnarr and Høgni to Atli's hall, and of Atli's death, appear in the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*, the Old Norse (Norwegian) *Þiðreks saga af Bern* and the Faroese ballad *Høgna táttur* 'Høgni's Story'.

Synopsis

Prose: A brief introduction summarizes key events in the poem: Guðrún's avenging of her brothers, killing of her sons by Atli, and of Atli himself, and burning of Atli's court.

Verse: Atli sent a messenger, Knéfrøðr, to Gunnarr's court (1–2). Knéfrøðr invited Gunnarr and Høgni to stay with Atli (3) and promised them their choice of riches (4–5). Gunnarr asked Høgni for advice, given that they already have remarkable riches (6–7). Høgni replied with the observation that their sister, Guðrún, had, in his view, sent them a warning (8). None of his court urged Gunnarr to go (9), but he

commanded that drink flow (10), and declared that wolves would rule the treasure of the Niflungar if he did not return (11).

Gunnarr and Hǫgni were escorted from home, and Hǫgni's younger son wished them well (12). They rode across mountains and Myrkviðr (13), and then saw before them Atli's fortifications and armed warriors (14). Guðrún immediately noticed their arrival, told them they had been betrayed and commanded them to leave at once (15). She added that they would have done better to have come armed for battle (16). Gunnarr replied that it was too late to assemble an army (17).

Gunnarr was then taken captive (18). Hǫgni killed eight men (19). Gunnarr then rejected an offer to buy his life—instead, he said, they must put Hǫgni's heart in his hand (20–21). Instead, they presented him the heart of Hjalli, one of Atli's slaves (22), but Gunnarr recognized it as Hjalli's from its trembling (23). Hǫgni then laughed as they cut out his own heart (24). This time, Gunnarr declared that he recognized the heart as Hǫgni's (25) and that his treasure would now never be Atli's because, with Hǫgni dead, he alone knew where it was hidden (26–27).

Wagons were brought to take Gunnarr to his death (28). Atli rode with them, and Guðrun fought back tears (29). She cursed Atli for breaking his oaths to Gunnarr (30), but the horse drawing Gunnarr's wagon continued on its way (31 [28]).³ Men placed Gunnarr in an enclosure full of snakes, where he played his harp (32 [31]). Atli rode home (33 [32]), and was greeted ambiguously by Guðrún (34 [33]). Ale was served (35 [34]), with Guðrún bringing both drink and food (36 [35]), before declaring that Atli was eating his own sons (37–38 [36–37]). At that there was loud lamentation in the hall, except for Guðrún, who wept for neither her brothers nor her sons (39 [38]). She showered the servants with rings (40 [39]). Atli had drunk himself into a stupor (41 [40]). Guðrún stabbed him in his bed before setting fire to the hall's door in revenge for her brothers, but only after freeing Atli's dogs and waking his servants (42 [41]). All those who were left inside she let burn (43 [22]).

Lastly, we learn that, henceforth, no bride will go to avenge her brothers in a mail-coat, and that Guðrún caused the death of three kings before she died (44 [33]).

Prose: A final sentence records that these events are told more fully in *Atlamál in Grænlenzku* (the next poem in **R**).

3 Bracketed stanza numbers are those of *NK* and von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*.

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Dauði Atla

Guðrún, Gjúka dóttir, hefndi bræðra sinna, svá sem frægt er orðit. Hon drap fyrst sonu Atla, en eptir drap hon Atla ok brendi hǫllina ok hirðina alla. Um þetta er sjá kviða ort.

Atlakviða in grœnlenzka

1. Atli sendi ár til Gunnars,
kunnan segg at ríða — Knéfrøðr var sá heitinn;
at gørðum kom hann Gjúka ok at Gunnars hǫllu,
bekkjum aringreyfum ok at bjóri svásfum.
2. Drukku þar dróttmegir — en dyljendr þögðu —
vín í valhǫllu — vreiði sásk þeir Húna;
kallaði þá Knéfrøðr kaldri røddu,
seggr inn suðrœni — sat hann á bekk hám:
3. ‘Atli mik hingat sendi ríða ørindi,
mar inum mélgreyfa, Myrkvið inn ókunna,
at biðja yðr, Gunnarr, at it á bekk kœmið,
með hjálmum aringreyfum, at sækja heim Atla!
4. ‘Skjöldu kneguð þar velja ok skafna aska,
hjálma gullroðna ok Húna mengi,
silfrgylt sǫðulkæði, serki valrauða,
dafar, darraða, drøsla mélgreyfa.
5. ‘Völl létz ykkur ok mundu gefa víðrar Gnitahiðar,
af geiri gjallanda ok af gyltum stǫfnum,
stórar meiðmar ok staði Danpar,
hrís þat it mæra er meðr Myrkvið kalla!’
6. Hǫfði vatt þá Gunnarr ok Høgna til sagði:
‘Hvat ræðr þú okkr, seggr inn æri, allz vit slíkt heyrum?
Gull vissa ek ekki á Gnitahiði,
þat er vit ættima annat slíkt.
7. ‘Sjau eigu vit salhús, sverða full,
hverju eru þeira hjǫlt ór gulli;
minn veit ek mar beztan, en mæki hvassastan,
boga bekksema, en brynjur ór gulli,
hjálmm ok skjöld hvítastan, kominn ór hǫll Kjárs;
einn er minn betri en sé allra Húna!’

The Death of Atli

Guðrún, Gjúki's daughter, avenged her brothers, just as has become famous. She first slew the sons of Atli, and afterwards she slew Atli and burned the hall and all the court. This poem was composed about this.

The Greenlandic Lay of Atli¹

1. Atli sent an envoy to Gunnarr,
 a knowledgeable man riding — he was called Knéfrøðr;²
 he came to Gjúki's courts and to Gunnarr's hall,
 to hearth-surrounding benches and to sweet beer.

2. Men of the warrior-host drank there — but concealers³ kept quiet —
 wine in the foreign hall⁴ — they feared the wrath⁵ of the Húnar;⁶
 then Knéfrøðr called out in a cold voice,
 the southern man — he sat on a high bench:⁷

3. ‘Atli sent me riding here on an errand,
 on the bit-champing steed, [across] Myrkviðr⁸ the unknown,⁹
 to ask you,¹⁰ Gunnarr, that you both¹¹ come to his benches,
 with their hearth-surrounding¹² helms, to visit Atli at home!

4. ‘There you can choose shields and smooth-shaven ash-spears,
 gold-plated helms and a horde of Húnar,
 silver-gilt saddle-cloths, foreign-red¹³ tunics,
 lances, spears(?),¹⁴ bit-champing steeds.

5. ‘He said he would also give you both the field of wide Gnitaheiðr,
 [your choice] from yelling¹⁵ spear and from gilded stems,¹⁶
 great treasures and homesteads of the Danpr,¹⁷
 [and] that famous thicket¹⁸ which people call Myrkviðr!’

6. Then Gunnarr turned his head and said to Hogni:
‘What do you advise us both [to do], young¹⁹ man, since we hear of such?
 I know of no gold on Gnitaheiðr,
 [such] that we didn't own another such [amount].²⁰

7. ‘We two have seven hall-houses, full of swords,
 on each of them is a hilt made from gold;
 I know that my steed is the best, and my sword the sharpest,
 that my bows are bench-worthy, and my mail-coats are made from gold,
 that my helm and shield are the shiniest, come [as they are] from Kjárr's²¹ hall;
 one of mine is better than all of the Húnar's!’

8. 'Hvat hygg þú brúði bendu, þá er hon okkr baug sendi
varinn váðum heiðingja? Hygg ek at hon vörnuð byði;
hár fann ek heiðingja ríðit í hring rauðum:
ylfskr er vegr okkarr, at ríða ørindi!'
9. Niðjargi hvøttu Gunnar, né náungr annarr,
rýnendr né ráðendr, né þeir er ríkir váru;
kvaddi þá Gunnarr, sem konungr skyldi,
mærr, í mjöðranni, af móði stórum:
10. 'Ristu nú, Fjornir, láttu á flet vaða
greppa gullskálar með gumna höndum!
11. 'Úlfr mun ráða arfi Niflunga,
gamlir gránverðir, ef Gunnars missir;
birnir blakfjallir bíta þreftönnum,
gamna greystóði, ef Gunnarr né kómrat!'
12. Leiddu landrögni lýðar óneisir,
grátendr, gunnhvata, ór garði húna;
þá kvað þat inn æri erfivörðr Högna:
'Heilir farið nú ok horskir, hvars ykkur hugr teygir!'
13. Fetum létu frœknir um fjöll at þyrja
marina mélgreypu, Myrkvið inn ókunna;
hristisk öll Húnmörk, þar er harðmóðgir fóru,
ráku þeir vannstygga völlu algreana.
14. Land sá þeir Atla ok liðskjálfar djúpa —
Bikka greppa standa á borg inni há —
sal um suðrþjóðum, sleginn sessmeiðum,
bundnum røndum, bleikum skjöldum —
dafar, darraða; en þar drakk Atli
vín í valhöllu; verðir sátu úti,
at varða þeim Gunnari, ef þeir hér vitja kvæmi
með geiri gjallanda at vekja gram hildi.
15. Systir fann þeira snemst at þeir í sal kvómu,
brœðr hennar báðir — bjóri var hon lítt drukkin:
'Ráðinn ertu nú, Gunnarr — hvat muntu, ríkr, vinna
við Húna harmbrøðum? Höll gakk þú ór snemma!

- 8.²² 'What do you think the bride²³ meant, when she sent us both an arm-ring wrapped in the clothes of a heath-dweller?²⁴ I think she offered us a warning;
I found hair of the heath-dweller tied round²⁵ the red ring:
wolfish is our road, if we ride on this mission!'
9. No kinsmen urged Gunnarr, nor close relative either,
neither confidants nor counsellors, nor those who were powerful;
then Gunnarr spoke out, as a king should,
glorious, in the mead-hall, from great passion:
10. 'Arise now, Fjörnir,²⁶ let the warriors' golden cups flow²⁷
into the hall²⁸ in the hands of men!
- 11.²⁹ 'The wolf will rule the inheritance of the Niflungar,
old grey-guardians,³⁰ if Gunnarr goes missing;³¹
black-skinned bears³² will bite with snatching³³ teeth,
entertain the bitch-stud,³⁴ if Gunnarr doesn't come [back]!³⁵
12. Blameless³⁶ people led the land-ruler,³⁷
weeping,³⁸ [they led] the battle-whetters,³⁹ from the court of cubs;⁴⁰
then the younger inheritance-warder⁴¹ of Hǫgni said this:
'Go safely now and wisely, wherever your spirit draws you both!'
13. The bold ones let their bit-champing steeds gallop with their steps
across mountains, [across] Myrkviðr the unknown;
all Húnmǫrk⁴² shuddered, where the hard-spirited ones passed by,
[where] they drove the stick-shy ones⁴³ [across] all-green plains.
14. They saw Atli's land and army-shelves⁴⁴ of the depths⁴⁵ —
Bikki's⁴⁶ warriors standing on the high stronghold —
a hall over⁴⁷ southern peoples, surrounded by seat-trees,⁴⁸
by bound [shield]-rims, by shining shields —
[and they also saw] lances, spears(?); and there Atli drank
wine in the foreign hall,⁴⁹ warders sat⁵⁰ outside,
to ward off Gunnarr and his men, if they were to come hither seeking
with yelling spear to waken the prince with war.⁵¹
15. Their sister⁵² noticed soonest that they came into the hall,
both her brothers — she was little drunk with beer:⁵³
'You're betrayed now, Gunnarr — what, mighty one, will you do
against the Húnar's harmful schemes? Get out of the hall at once!

16. 'Betr hefðir þú, bróðir, at þú í brynju færir —
sem hjálmum aringreyfum — at sjá heim Atla;
sætir þú í sǫðlum sólheiða daga,
nái nauðfólva létir Nornir gráta,
Húna skjaldmeyjar hervi kanna,
en Atla sjálfan létir þú í ormgarð koma —
nú er sá ormgarðr ykkur um fólgin!'
17. 'Seinat er nú, systir, at samna Niflungum,
langt er at leita lýða sinnis til
of rosmufjöll Rínar, rekka óneissa!'
18. Fengu þeir Gunnar ok í fjötur settu,
vinir Borgunda, ok bundu fastla.
19. Sjau hjó Hogni sverði hvössu,
en inum átta hratt hann í eld heitan;
svá skal frækn fjándum verjask;
Hogni varði hendr Gunnars.
20. Frágu fræknan, ef fjör vildi,
Gotna þjóðann, gulli kaupa.
21. 'Hjarta skal mér Hogni í hendi liggja,
blóðugt, ór brjósti skorit baldriða
saxi slíðrbeitu, syni þjóðans!'
22. Skáru þeir hjarta Hjalla ór brjósti,
blóðugt, ok á bjóð lögðu ok báru þat fyrir Gunnar.
23. Þá kvað þat Gunnarr, gumna dróttinn:
'Hér hefi ek hjarta Hjalla ins blauða —
ólíkt hjarta Hogni ins frækna —
er mjök bifask er á bjóði liggr;
bifðisk hálfu meirr, er í brjósti lá!'
24. Hló þá Hogni, er til hjarta skáru
kvikvan kumblasmið — klökkva hann sízt hugði!
Blóðugt þat á bjóð lögðu ok báru fyrir Gunnar.
25. Mærr kvað þat Gunnarr, geir-Niflungur:
'Hér hefi ek hjarta Hogni ins frækna —
ólíkt hjarta Hjalla ins blauða —
er lítt bifask er á bjóði liggr;
bifðisk svági mjök, þá er í brjósti lá!'

16. 'You'd have done better, brother, if you'd come in a mail-coat —
likewise in hearth-surrounding helms⁵⁴ — to see Atli's home;
if you'd sat in saddles⁵⁵ through sun-bright days,⁵⁶
to make the Nornir cry over constraint-pale corpses,⁵⁷
and the Húnar's shield-maidens get to know the harrow,⁵⁸
and [if] you'd had Atli himself put in a snake-yard —
now that snake-yard is reserved for you two!
- 17.⁵⁹ 'It's late now,⁶⁰ sister, to assemble the Niflungar,
it's a long way to look for an escort of men
from the reddish-brown(?) mountains⁶¹ of the Rín,⁶²
for blameless warriors!
18. They seized Gunnarr and set him in fetters,
the friends of the Borgundar,⁶³ and bound him firmly.
19. Hǫgni hewed seven with a sharp sword,
and the eighth he shoved into the hot fire;
so must a brave man defend himself against foes;
Hǫgni defended Gunnarr's(?) hands.⁶⁴
20. They asked the brave one,⁶⁵ the king of the Gotar,⁶⁶
if he wanted to buy his life with gold.
- 21.⁶⁷ 'Hǫgni's heart must lie in my hand,
bloody, cut from the breast of the bold rider
with a sharply biting knife, from the king's son!
22. They cut Hjalli's⁶⁸ heart from his breast,
bloody, and laid it on a platter and brought it before Gunnarr.
23. Then Gunnarr said this, the lord of men:
'Here I have the heart of Hjalli the coward —
unlike the heart of Hǫgni the brave —
which trembles a lot as it lies on the platter;
it trembled half as much again, when it lay in his breast!
24. Hǫgni laughed then, when to the heart they cut
the living wound-smith⁶⁹ — least [of all] did he think to sob!
They laid it,⁷⁰ bloody, on a platter and brought it before Gunnarr.
25. Glorious Gunnarr said this, the spear-Niflungar:
'Here I have the heart of Hǫgni the brave —
unlike the heart of Hjalli the coward —
which trembles little as it lies on the platter;
it trembled not even this much, when it lay in his breast!

26. ‘Thus you, Atli, shall be as far from eyes,⁷¹
 as you will be from torcs;⁷²
 all the hoard of the Niflungar is [kept] hidden
 by me alone, now Högni isn’t living!
27. ‘Doubt was always with me, as long as we two lived,
 now there’s none with me, since I alone live!
 The Rín⁷³ shall rule the discord-metal of men,⁷⁴
 the swift [Rín shall rule] the Áss⁷⁵-descended
 inheritance of the Niflungar⁷⁶—
 in surging water foreign arm-rings shall gleam,
 rather than gold shine on the hands⁷⁷ of the children of the Húnar!’
- 28.⁷⁸ ‘Bring out the wheeled wagons!⁷⁹ The captive is now in bonds!’
29. Atli the mighty rode a noisy-maned one,⁸⁰
 surrounded by discord-thorns⁸¹ — [he was] their trusted relative;
 Guðrún of the victory-gods . . . ,⁸²
 she fought back tears, destitute⁸³ in the tumultuous hall.
30. ‘May it go for you, Atli, just as you had
 often sworn oaths to Gunnarr and uttered names⁸⁴ early,⁸⁵
 by the south-slanting sun⁸⁶ and by Sigtyr’s⁸⁷ rock,
 by the horse of rest-bedding⁸⁸ and by the ring of Ullr!⁸⁹
- 31 [28].⁹⁰ And on from there the bit’s shaker⁹¹
 drew the torc-guardian, the strife-ruler,⁹² to death.
- 32 [31]. A multitude of warriors laid the living prince⁹³
 in a yard,⁹⁴ the one that was crawling
 inside with snakes; but, alone, Gunnarr,
 in hateful mood, struck a harp with his hand —
 the strings resounded; so must a brave ring-strewer⁹⁵
 guard his gold against men!
- 33 [32]. Atli made the sand-treading(?) steed visit his land,⁹⁶
 [turn] back from the murder;
 there was a clamour in the court, with steeds closely packed,
 [and] weapon-song⁹⁷ of men — they had come [back] from the heath.
- 34 [33]. Out went Guðrún then, towards Atli,
 with a gilded cup, to present the ruler’s⁹⁸ due payment:⁹⁹
 ‘You may happily accept, prince, in your hall,
 from Guðrún, young mist-gone ones!’¹⁰⁰

- 35 [34]. Umðu ǫlskálir Atla, vínhofgar,
þá er í holl saman Húnar tǫlðusk,
gumar gransíðir, gengu inn hvárir.
- 36 [35]. Skævaði þá in skírleita, veigar þeim at bera,
afkár dís, jǫfrum, ok ǫlkrásir valði,
nauðug, neffǫlum, en níð sagði Atla:
- 37 [36]. ‘Sona hefir þinna, sverða deilir,
hjortu hrædreyrug við hunang of tuggin!
Melta knáttu, móðugr, manna valbráðir,
eta at ǫlkrásum, ok í ǫndugi at senda!
- 38 [37]. ‘Kallaraðu síðan til knjá þinna
Erp né Eitil, ǫlreifa tvá!
Séraðu síðan í seti miðju
gulls miðlendr geira skepta,
manar meita né mara keyra!’
- 39 [38]. Ymr varð á bekkjum, afkár sǫngr virða,
gnýr und guðvefjum — grétu born Húna,
nema ein Guðrún, er hon æva grét
bræðr sína berharða ok buri svása,
unga, ófróða, þá er hon við Atla gat!
- 40 [39]. Gulli seri in gaglbjarta,
hringum rauðum reifði hon húskarla;
skǫp lét hon vaxa, en skíran málm vaða —
æva fljóð ekki gáði fjarghúsa!
- 41 [40]. Óvarr Atli, móðan hafði hann sik drukkit,
vápn hafði hann ekki, varnaðit hann við Guðrúnu;
opt var sá leikr betri, þá er þau lint skyldu
optarr um faðmask fyr ǫðlingum!
- 42 [41]. Hon beð broddi gaf blóð at drekka,
hendi helfússi — ok hvelpa leysti;
hratt fyr hallar dyrr — ok húskarla vakði —
brandi, brúðr, heitum; þau lét hon gjöld bræðra!

- 35 [34]. Atli's ale-cups rang out, wine-heavy,
when the Húnar gathered themselves together in the hall,
men with long moustaches, [when those] from
either group went inside.¹⁰¹
- 36 [35]. Then the shining-faced one, the frightful lady,¹⁰²
hastened to bring them, the boars,¹⁰³ drinks, and chose ale-dainties,¹⁰⁴
against her will, for the pale-nosed ones,¹⁰⁵ and
spoke offensive words to Atli:¹⁰⁶
- 37 [36]. 'Distributor of swords, you have your sons'
corpse-bloody hearts chewed with honey!
You're digesting, proud one, slaughter-meats¹⁰⁷ of men,
eating them as ale-dainties, and sending them to the high-seat!¹⁰⁸
- 38 [37]. 'Never again will you call to your knee
Erpr or Eitill,¹⁰⁹ the two ale-merry ones!
You won't see henceforth in the middle of the floor
the distributors of gold¹¹⁰ attaching shafts to spears,
cutting manes or spurring steeds!'
- 39 [38]. There was uproar on the benches, an awful song of men,
a din under costly clothes¹¹¹ — the children of the Húnar¹¹²
were crying,
except for Guðrún alone, as she never cried
for her bear-hard brothers and sweet boys,
the young, unwise¹¹³ ones whom she bore to Atli!
- 40 [39]. The gosling-bright one¹¹⁴ sowed¹¹⁵ gold,
with red rings she showered the house-servants;
she let fate grow, and shining metal flow —
the woman paid no heed at all to god-houses!¹¹⁶
- 41 [40]. Atli [was] unaware — he'd drunk himself to exhaustion —¹¹⁷
he had no weapon,¹¹⁸ he wasn't on his guard against Guðrún;
often that sport was better, when they would gently
[and] more often embrace each other before noblemen!
- 42 [41]. With a sword-point she¹¹⁹ gave the bed blood to drink,¹²⁰
with a Hel-eager hand — and let the whelps loose;
the bride shoved before the hall's door — and
wakened the house-servants¹²¹ —
a hot firebrand; those [acts] she let [serve as]
retribution for her brothers!¹²²

43 [42].

Eldi gaf hon þá alla er inni váru
ok frá morði þeira Gunnars komnir váru ór Myrkheimi;
forn timbr fellu, fjarghús ruku,
bær Buðlunga, brunnu ok skjaldmeyjar
inni, aldrstamar, hnigu í eld heitan.

44 [43].

Fullrætt er um þetta; ferr engi svá síðan
brúðr í brynju bræðra at hefna;
hon hefir þriggja þjóðkonunga
banorð borit, björt, áðr sylti.

En segir glöggra í 'Atlamálum inum grænlenskum.'

Textual Apparatus to *Atlakviða in Grænlenzka*

Dauði Atla] This rubricated heading is illegible in the photograph in the facsimile volume of **R**; this reading is therefore reliant on the transcription therein

Guðrún] The first letter is large and inset but illegible in the photograph in the facsimile volume of **R**; it is therefore taken from the transcription therein

Atlakviða in grænlenzka] This rubricated heading is illegible in the photograph in the facsimile volume of **R**; this reading is therefore reliant on the (partly bracketed) transcription therein

1/1 *Atli*] The first letter is large, half-inset and rubricated, but faded, in **R**

2/4 *vreiði*] **R** *reiþi*

4/7 *darraða*] **R** *daRaþr*

8/7 *ylfskr*] **R** *ylfstr*

11/3 *gamlir*] **R** *gamlar*

13/1 *létu*] **R** *letom*

14/9 *dafar, darraða*] **R** *dafa daRaþr*

16/7 *nái*] **R** *nár*

19/8 *Gunnars*] **R** *gönars*

26/3 *þú*] **R** absent; supplied to fill out the metre

26/5 *und*] **R** *vnt*

29/5] Although there is no indication of omission in **R**, some text has evidently been lost either here or earlier in this line

30/7 *hǫlkvi*] **R** *hǫlqvi*

31/4 *dauðs*] **R** *daup*

37/6 *valbráðir*] **R** *valbrvðir*

Notes to the Translation

- 1 The identification of this poem as Greenlandic is usually considered to postdate the poem's composition and to be modelled on the title of the following poem, *Atlamál in grænlenzku*.
- 2 In *VS*, the corresponding figure is called *Vingi*.
- 3 Literally, 'concealing (ones)'; i.e., people concealing their thoughts.
- 4 Or 'hall of the slain', but whether there is an allusion to Óðinn's *Valhǫll* is uncertain; cf. st. 14.
- 5 For this line to alliterate, it requires an East Norse or preliterary West Norse form of *reiðr* (*reiði*), namely **vreiðr* (*vreiði*).
- 6 Huns. Notably, *Akv.* appears to use the term *Hún(-)* 'Hun' to describe only Attila, his people and his land; cf. note to *Sg.* 4.
- 7 A position of honour.
- 8 'Murk Wood'.
- 9 I.e., uncharted, untracked.

- 10 I.e., 'you and Hǫgni'; *yðr* should perhaps be emended to *yk(k)r* 'you two'.
- 11 Gunnarr and Hǫgni.
- 12 This phrase, which also appears in st. 16, has sometimes been deemed problematical. But perhaps helmets were arranged around the hearth when not being worn, or we may imagine helmeted men sitting around a fire.
- 13 Or 'slaughter-red', i.e., blood-red.
- 14 Or perhaps 'pennons'.
- 15 The notion of the 'yelling' spear, also found in Old English poetry, presumably relates to a sound produced as the weapon flew through the air.
- 16 Prows.
- 17 The Dnieper.
- 18 An understatement for 'forest'.
- 19 Literally, 'younger'.
- 20 The attribution of the second half of this stanza, and all of the next, to Gunnarr, rather than Hǫgni, is insecure but supported by the paraphrase in *VS* 35.
- 21 Probably, in origin, Latin *Caesar*, a title applied to the emperors of Rome and Constantinople.
- 22 The attribution of this entire stanza to Hǫgni is insecure but supported by the paraphrase in *VS* 35.
- 23 Guðrún.
- 24 I.e., in wolf-hair.
- 25 Literally, 'in'.
- 26 One of Gunnarr's servants. He performs the same function of cupbearer in *VS* 37.
- 27 Literally, 'wade'.
- 28 Literally, the platform running along the walls, where the benches were situated.
- 29 This stanza, or a variant thereof, is presumably the basis for the following words spoken by Gunnarr in *VS* 37: '*nú mun inn gamli úlfrinn komask at gullinu ef vér deyjum, ok svá björninn mun eigi spara at bíta sínum vígtǫnnum*' "'now will the old wolf get at the gold, if we die, and thus the bear will not spare to bite with its canine teeth'".
- 30 Wolf-packs.
- 31 I.e., 'is killed'. Gunnarr, who refers to himself in the third person, is perhaps indicating that, if he dies at the hands of Atli and his men, he will take the location of his gold with him to the grave, so that only the wolves of the wilderness may have it.
- 32 Brown bears are sometimes almost black.
- 33 Or 'wrangling'.
- 34 Gunnarr imputes a bestial cowardice and effeminacy to his foes.
- 35 In the second half of this stanza, Gunnarr possibly imagines himself and Hǫgni as bears cornered by dogs, and that the pair of them will give the dogs a good fight before succumbing. If so, 'bitch-stud' is probably a sexually derogatory term for Atli's men.
- 36 In contrast to the treachery that Gunnarr and Hǫgni will face, but probably also 'valiant' because free from the shame of cowardice.
- 37 Gunnarr.
- 38 This refers to the people, not Gunnarr.
- 39 Warriors, here Gunnarr and Hǫgni.

- 40 I.e., their young children; cf. *Vkv.* 24. Alternatively, *Húna* ‘of the Húnar’, though the sense is then somewhat problematic; cf. note to *Sg.* 4.
- 41 Heir.
- 42 ‘Hun-Mark’.
- 43 Horses, creatures shy of the riding stick.
- 44 Possibly ramparts, turrets or battlements.
- 45 Perhaps deep ditches immediately outside the stronghold. Alternatively, perhaps emend *djúpa* to *djúpar* and translate ‘deep (army-shelves)’, or to *Dúnár* ‘(army-shelves) of the Danube’.
- 46 Elsewhere, *Bikki* ‘Bitch’ or ‘(Son of) a Bitch’ is the name of a wicked counsellor of *Jǫrmunrekk*. Perhaps *Bikka* ‘Bikki’s’ is a mistake for *Buðla* ‘Buðli’s’.
- 47 Or, less likely, ‘around’, ‘enclosing’.
- 48 Benches outside the hall.
- 49 Perhaps also ‘hall of the slain’, given the events that unfold; cf. *st.* 2.
- 50 I.e., were positioned—they need not have been sitting.
- 51 I.e., to wage war on Atli. With Atli’s impressive stronghold, compare that of Iarmericus (ON *Jǫrmunrekk*) in *GD* 8.10.7, 8.10.13.
- 52 Guðrún.
- 53 I.e., she was sober, having not participated in merry-making.
- 54 Either an allusion to the helmets of Gunnarr and his men or a poetic pl. that may be translated as sg. Cf. *Akv.* 3.
- 55 Alternatively, a poetic pl. that can be translated as sg.
- 56 I.e., Gunnarr (and his men) should have fought on horseback throughout the day.
- 57 The ‘constraint’ is death.
- 58 I.e., as slaves.
- 59 The speaker of this stanza is presumably Gunnarr.
- 60 I.e., too late now.
- 61 Alternatively, *rosmuffjoll* might derive from *Wormazfeld* ‘plains of Worms’ and mean ‘hills/mountains of Worms’. Formerly the capital of the kingdom of the Burgundians, Worms is on the west bank of the Rhine.
- 62 The Rhine.
- 63 Burgundians, of whom Gunnarr is the leader. By calling the Húnar ‘friends of the Burgundians’ at the very moment of betrayal, the poet may use irony to emphasize their treachery. Alternatively, emend nom. pl. *vinir* ‘friends’ to acc. sg. *vin* ‘friend’, the ‘friend of the Burgundians’ then being Gunnarr.
- 64 I.e., ‘Hǫgni defended Gunnarr’, but *Gunnars* should perhaps be emended *sínar*, to yield the sense ‘Hǫgni defended his (own) hands (i.e., himself)’.
- 65 Gunnarr.
- 66 Goths, or humans in general.
- 67 Gunnarr replies.
- 68 One of Atli’s slaves. His name might mean ‘Noisy One’ (he screams in *VS*) or ‘One of the Wooden Shelf’.
- 69 Or ‘grave-smith’. Either way, this term for ‘warrior’ (here Hǫgni) is used somewhat ironically in the context.

- 70 Høgni's heart.
- 71 I.e., the eyes of people. This is presumably a prophecy of Atli's death.
- 72 A synecdoche for all the treasure of the Niflungar.
- 73 The Rhine, where Gunnarr has sunk his treasure. Cf. Sg. 16.
- 74 I.e., the treasure over which men quarrel.
- 75 I.e., (heathen) god.
- 76 Alternatively, '... the inheritance of the Niflungar of Áss/divine-descent'.
- 77 Or 'arms'.
- 78 This stanza may be spoken by Atli or one of his men.
- 79 Perhaps more than one wagon was required to transport not just Gunnarr, but also the bodies of Hjalli and Høgni. Alternatively, this might be a poetic pl. that can be translated as sg.
- 80 A (proper noun for a?) horse whose mane perhaps had attachments which made a noise as they moved.
- 81 Probably Atli's companions or their swords.
- 82 Although there is no indication in the manuscript, some text has evidently been lost either here or earlier in this line.
- 83 Presumably of joy or hope.
- 84 Presumably holy names invoked to secure oaths.
- 85 I.e., long ago.
- 86 Probably the morning sun.
- 87 'Victory God', an alias of Óðinn.
- 88 What this kenning denotes is unclear. Perhaps the 'rest-bed (ding)' is the earth of the grave, in which case its horse might be Sleipnir, Óðinn's steed, on which dead warriors may have been thought to ride to the afterlife in Valhöll. A more mundane possibility, however, is that it denotes a wooden bedstead, perhaps one with carved horse-heads on its posts.
- 89 'Glorious One', a god, possibly a manifestation of the glorious aspect of Óðinn. Cf. *Háv.* 110.
- 90 Brackets enclose the stanza numbers of *NK*, which makes these lines the second part of st. 28.
- 91 Horse.
- 92 Gunnarr.
- 93 Gunnarr.
- 94 I.e., an enclosure.
- 95 I.e., lord, one who dispenses wealth (rings). The term appears ironic in this context.
- 96 The first half-line appears metrically short in the Old Norse.
- 97 The ringing of metal weapons.
- 98 Either Atli's or Gunnarr's. *Røgnir* is also an alias of Óðinn.
- 99 Or 'reward' or 'compensation'.
- 100 Supposedly young animals which have been killed and can now be eaten, their spirits having gone to *Niflhel* 'Dark/Mist Hel'. But a much darker significance to Guðrún's words will soon become apparent with regard to Guðrun's children, who were possibly *Niflungar*.

- 101 The identity of the two groups is unclear, but one might comprise the men who have just returned from putting Gunnarr in the snake-yard, and the other those who had stayed behind at court. Alternatively, emend *hvárir* to *hvátir* and translate 'keen/bold ones went inside'.
- 102 This description may identify Guðrún with one of the sinister supernatural *dísir* 'ladies' who attended conflicts and controlled men's fates. The first line of this stanza lacks alliteration; perhaps *veigar* 'drinks' is a mistaken substitution for *skálar* 'bowls', 'cups'.
- 103 Warriors, men.
- 104 Tidbits for the men to eat with their ale.
- 105 This description may suggest both drunkenness and imminent death; cf. *Alv.* 2.
- 106 Or 'told Atli of his shame'. *Níð* represents an extremely potent accusation in Old Norse literature. There is perhaps a pun on *niðr* 'kinsman'.
- 107 Pieces of slaughtered meat.
- 108 The privileged position at the centre of the bench opposite Atli.
- 109 Atli's sons.
- 110 Erpr and Eitill.
- 111 The distraught Huns perhaps cover their heads with their cloaks.
- 112 I.e., all the Huns, not literally just their children.
- 113 I.e., inexperienced.
- 114 I.e., white as a gosling; here a description of Guðrún. The term suggests a radiant exultancy.
- 115 I.e., strewed, distributed.
- 116 I.e., she did not hold back in distributing treasures from temples dedicated to the (living) gods.
- 117 Literally, 'had drunk himself weary'. This line lacks alliteration, which probably indicates textual corruption.
- 118 Or 'weapons'.
- 119 Guðrún.
- 120 An ironic phrase — Guðrún is still serving drinks.
- 121 Presumably so that they might escape.
- 122 This line's second half shows unusual alliteration; perhaps emend to *gjöld broeðra* to *bræðra gjöld*, which yields the same sense.
- 123 'Murk Home/World', a unique mythological-sounding name suggestive of the darkness of Myrkviðr and Hel.
- 124 Temples.
- 125 'Descendants of Buðli'.
- 126 I.e., having their lives cut short.
- 127 Guðrún is not actually described as wearing a mail-coat in *Akv.*
- 128 One of these kings is obviously Atli, but the identity of the others is unclear.
- 129 I.e., she brought about their deaths.
- 130 I.e., this tale is told.