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THE RAVEN BANNER AND THE CHANGING RAVENS

A Viking Miracle from Carolingian Court Poetry to Saga and Arthurian Romance

BY

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On some dozens of the golden amulettes (bracteates) from 6th- and 7th-century Scandinavia which imitate the Roman imperial medallions a bird with a demonstratively curved beak, by most scholars identified with Odin's *Raven,* replaces the little winged *Victory* of the imperial Roman models[1]).

The elegant black bird with the curved beak and the yellow claws was a favourite not only with the poets but with other artists as well, more or less difficult to identify in the stylizised castings and carvings from Scandinavia and England, in the initial-miniatures in manuscripts from Northern France, or among the birds in the upper border of the Bayeux tapestry.

In Old English poetry, the "dark birds" appear traditionally in descriptions of battles, from Genesis and Exodus to the Battle of Maldon: "Then came together fierce bands of slaughter; the javelins rang aloud; the *dark bird,* dewy-feathered, sang among the spear-shafts, eager for the slain ...". "... The birds of prey, greedy for battle, dewy-feathered, dark lovers of carrion, screamed in wheeling flight over the corpses ...". "... Then clamour arose; *ravens* wheeled, the eagle greedy for carrion ..."—In "Christ and Satan"

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[1]) M. B. Mackeprang: De Nordiske Guldbrakteater. With English Summary. (Jysk Arkæologisk Selskabs Skrifter II. Universitetsforlaget i Aarhus 1952). (Thesis for the Doctorate), 36–37, 90–94. "*Victory*" plate 1, fig. 2b–6b; "*Raven*" plate 4, fig. 13; pl. 5, fig. 1, 2, 6, 11; pl. 6, fig. 19, 20, 22, 23, 27; pl. 7, fig. 1, 2, 3; pl. 8, fig. 4, 17, 18, 19, 21; pl. 12, fig. 9; pl. 13, fig. 24, 25, 27, 31; pl. 14, fig. 7, 11, 12, 21; pl. 24, fig. 3.

God's foe, once a chief of the angels, was changed, stained with guilt, and plunged with his followers into hell, "insatiate and ravening."[2])

In Snorri's Edda, from 1220/1240, the *ravens,* birds of slaughter, are sent from Odin, the one-eyed *Raven-god*; they bring to him—as they did to Apollon—news from all over the world; his maidens, the valkyrias, select the warriors to fall in the battle[3]).

In Old English and Scandinavian poetry, the birds of the battle (OE *beadu*) are quite natural birds of prey. But corresponding to the appearance of the Furies (Bellona) in old Roman poetical descriptions of extraordinarily hard and furious battles, Irish chroniclers and poets assert that in similar cases in Ireland, for instance during the battle at Clontarf 1014, a *badb* was observed over the battlefield. According to modern translators, the *badb* was some bird of prey—"a carrion crow" (Sullivan), "a scald crow" (Kuno Meyer), "a vulture" (Todd), "a raven" (Hennessy)[4]).

A poem, composed on the Orkneys about 1200 and enumerating the 51 battles fought by Ragnar Lodbrok for the benefit of the birds of prey, is called *Krákamál*; according to the late Magnus Olsen, this title might imitate some Irish "badb-scél"[5]).

In *Háttalykill,* composed about 1145 on the Orkneys, and in the verses in the Norwegian *Ragnar's saga,* ab. 1250, Ragnar Lodbrok and his sons, like other victorious Scandinavian warriors celebrated by poets, consider it their first duty to feed the voracious *raven* on innumerable battlefields—well aware that one day the unthankful dark companion will feed on their own corpses and scream with joy while sucking their blood and pecking out their eyes[6]).

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2) Transl. R. K. Gordon: Anglo-Saxon Poetry (Everyman's Library. 1926/1950) 108; 126; 363; 141–44.

3) Ed. F. Jónsson 1931, 171–72; 42–43. Ovid, Metam. II 7, 9. A. H. Krappe: Les corbeaux d'Odin. Études de Mythologie et de Folklore Germaniques (1928), 29–44.

4) Three Fragments (1860), 190.—Contributions to Irish Lexicogr. I 234.—Cogadh Gaedhil (1867), 175.—Chronicon Scotorum (1866), 123 and Revue Celtique I (1870–72), 32.

5) Maal og Minne 1935, 78–90; Anne Holtsmark, ibid. 1939, 94.

6) E. A. Kock: Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen I (1946), 241 (Háttalykill v. 9, Bjǫrn jarnsíða), and 316, 319 (Krákumál v. 2, v. 16).—Vǫlsunga saga ok Ragnars saga Loðbrókar, udg. M. Olsen (1906–08), 160 (Bjǫrn), 140, 171.—S. Egilsson: Lexicon Poeticum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis, 2. udg. v. F. Jónsson (1931), 276–77.

In later medieval ballads, the Danish "valravn" (OE *wæl-hræfn*), devouring the hearts and eyes not only of warriors but of children is a more complicated invention, in some cases an unhappy, spell-bound human being. In modern superstition, the raven's pecking on the window is an omen of death, for Scandinavian peasants as for Edgar Allan Poe.

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A peculiar literary theme, the miraculous change of the Viking raven was developed by clerics in Belgium and Northern France during the 9th and 10th centuries, attached to *Regnar*'s and *Sigifred*'s Danes. In 11th-century texts the theme was attached to a group of the Danes operating in the British Isles in 878, their (unnamed) leader being called "*the brother of Healfdene and Ingvar/Iwer*"—in fact, Sigifrid was Halfdan's brother (according to the Fulda annals 873). In a series of 12th and 13th-century English and Icelandic texts, the theme is connected with different earls named *Sigifred* (the father of Waltheof and opponent of Macbeth; the Orkney earl who fell in the battle of Clontarf), or to the *Brother* who was the leader of the Danes at Clontarf; other 12th-century texts from England connect the theme with Ingvar's brother *Ubbe,* famous from the St. Edmund legends, also called Habba, Hubbe, a 13th century "Huwe" being an intermediary formation, eventually influenced by the name Iwer (Ingvar). In a 13th-century Welsh manuscript, the theme is transformed into an Arthurian romance and attached to *Owein/Yvain/Iven,* Chrétien de Troyes' Chevalier au Lion (1170).

The connection of the raven-theme with the royal Danish family was attested nearly a century earlier than the first appearance of the name Lodbrok, connected with the same persons in texts from ab. 1070. A brief summary of texts from the 9th to the 13th century may sketch out the literary ramifications of this Viking legend.

1. About 850, Liège. *Panegyric on King Louis the German,* by the Irish scholar called "*Sedulius Scotus*" (II 30, verses 51–60), concerning Danish delegates for peace—according to the annals from Fulda, Xanten and St. Bertin, and the Miracles of St. Germain des Prés, such delegates were sent from *Regnar* and the Danish king after their raids to Paris and Hamburg in the summer months of 845.

In this sonorous panegyric, the metamorphosis of the raven (Ovid, Metam. II 7) is applied to the delegates; some of them were baptized, and the poet rhetorically invites others to follow the initiative of their happy comrades: by the miracle of holy baptism, their Aethiopian-coloured clothes are changed into white, and they are no longer aggressive, heathen ravens but peaceful, white, Christian doves:

51 Ecce stupent hilares *ex corvis esse columbas*
Sese gentiles, ecce stupent hilares.
53 Perfide, crede Deo, si vis albescere, *corve*;
Ne moriare miser, perfide, crede Deo:
55 Namque tui similes Christi decorantur amictu,
Non sunt, qvod fuerant, namque tui similes.
57 Exue nunc veteres maculoso schemate formas,
Aethiopum tunicas exue nunc veteres,
59 Agnus et esto nitens renovatus munere Christi,
Inter catholicos agnus et esto nitens.
(Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini III, ed. L. Traube (1896), 195.)[7]

In 878, peace was concluded by King Alfred and the Great Army. Next year a part of the army crossed to Flanders where a new Great Army was organized by the Kings Sigifrid and Godofrid. 882, at "Aschloha" below Maastricht, they were encountered by Louis the German's grandson Charles III the Stout; but they concluded a peace with his imperial army, assembled from all parts of the Carolingian empire; the two kings were baptized, Godofrid married a Carolingian princess Judith and accepted the kingdom of the Netherlands, Sigifrid received an enormous amount in gold and silver and the emperor's permission to stay in Flanders. Godofrid was murdered by treason 885, Sigifrid fell 887, and after the winter 891–92 his Great Army returned to England.

Two miracles, in 882 and in 891, attached to Sigifrid, were reported by a contemporary cleric in Bavaria (Ratisbon), writing annals during the years 882–97 in continuation of the Fulda annals:

[7] Sedulius' works were copied in Liège until the 12th century (Manitius I 315–16). A desillusioned quotation of v. 58 appears in *William of Malmesbury*'s Chronicle reporting (1125) the baptism 878 of the Viking chiefs: in spite of baptism they remained as ferocious as before, "the Aethiop did not change of his skin."

For 12 days the imperial army was encamped near the Viking ramparts at Aschloha, without the courage to venture a fatal decision. One day, July 21, a strange happening terrified the besiegers as well as the besieged. Suddenly a foggy darkness enveloped the camp, with an explosion in lightnings and a thunderstorm harder than ever witnessed by any human being and a horrible shower of hails, not plain and regular as usual hails but corny and unequal and rough and—mirabile et incredibile dictu—so big that they could not be encompassed by the thumb and the middle finger. All were stupefied by this wonderfully great and unusual spectacle; even the horses were terrified, they tore their bindings and galloped in panic inside and outside the ramparts and a great part of the besieged city crumbled down under the violence of the storm. Both parties suffered so heavy losses that a covenant was concluded. Imperial hostages were sent to the camp of the Nordmanni, and king Sigifrid who had the strongest forces came out of the camp more than six miles to the emperor. He affirmed by oath that he would never again, in the emperor's lifetime (he died 888, January 13), harrass his kingdom (Lotharingia etc.); he agreed to be christianized, asking the emperor to act as godfather, and they spent two happy days together.

In November 891 the Great Army decided to encamp for the winter at Louvain, on the banks of the Dyle. Some detachments had arrived when Charles' nephew king Arnulf of Bavaria happened to pass on the highroad, crossing the Dyle in this place. He attacked with success, and continued his journey, before the main forces of the dispersed Great Army arrived and spent the winter at Louvain.

The Bavarian annalist celebrates this victory with pious panegyrical exaggerations: Heaven decided to punish the devastations, the killing of bishops and the destruction of temples dedicated to saints. Following an impulse from Heaven, Arnulf gave the signal to attack in God's name. His men, invoking Heaven, stormed the encampment —where the Danes, with equally loud invocations according to their heathen costums, were moving their *signa horribilia*. The swords were drawn and the fight was hard, but by God's grace, victory fell to the Christians. The Danes were driven in panic into the abysses of the river (which in this place has a breadth of only three yards

and is hardly three or four feet deep, flowing on a solid bed of slates); they were drowned by hundreds of (or) thousands, with the result that the stream was blocked by corpses, and the river-bed ran dry. In this battle, the two kings Sigifrid and Godofrid were killed, and 16 *regia signa* were taken and brought to Bavaria for evidence. The king ordered litanies to be celebrated the same afternoon; he went in procession with his whole army singing thanks to God for such a victory in which only a single Christian soldier was found killed and so many thousands of the other party had perished[8]).

This Bavarian summary, with its biblical reminiscences, was repeated by German annalists and transmitted by Adam of Bremen to 12th-century Danish and Icelandic annals.

In Flanders, the pious panegyric was echoed and anticipated at St. Omer, for the benefit of local saints, before 965: It is pretended that this series of disasters had begun some months earlier when the Great Army, in the month of May 891, had stopped for one day at St. Omer (not recorded by older annals). Insulting the local saints and their altars, the (unnamed) heathen chieftains had called forth Heaven's punishment; the miracles, glorifying the saints Audomar and Bertin, concentrate upon the ominous changes of a number of vexilla and of the terrifying heathen labarum.

2. Before 965, St. Omer. *Miracles of St. Bertin.*

An assistant-priest's vision at night, lying in his humble cell at St. Omer. Appearance of St. Audomar, identified by means of his episcopal ring; execution of his military instructions. Arrival of the Great Army, passing the Aa-valley and pitching its camp below the walls of the town. One division of the army attacked the walls, the other chieftains sitting comfortably in the church of St. Bertin's Abbey just outside the town walls, discussing how to spend the evening, without reverence to the holy place and its altar. Their lengthy and circumstantial deliberations were interrupted by messengers reporting that their comrades were being defeated and their leader killed. Undisturbedly, the chieftains continued their futile occupation. Increasing irritation of the messengers, who at last burst out

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8) Annales Fuldenses, ed. Pertz, F. Kurze (1891), 108–09; 119–21.

in severe reproaches, insinuating that the chieftains did not care to take revenge for their comrades. Inflamed by such reproaches, the chieftains sprang up from their seats, swearing horribly by their gods that if they could conquer the town that evening they would kill every male person in the fortress, and they gave an order to blow the signal of a general attack. By the intermediation of the saints, God immediately punished the irreverent chieftains by a series of terrifying happenings. The colour of their *vexilla changed miraculously from pure white to pitch-black.* Their signal of attack changed miraculously into a signal of retreat, and the heathen army dispersed in panic hastening to its future destruction. The awful heathen *labarum* which had been raised on the top of a hill in order to terrify the citizens, was covered by a protecting fog and was seen to be drawn upwards in a dreadful manner and disappeared in a swarm of *doves of varied colours* descending from heaven—to the pious Christian observes this was an omen of peace (cp. 1).

Referring to the Miracula, the *Cartularium Sithiense* (II 66) has: ... The *vexilla changed into another figure*[9]).

3. 995–1020, St. Quintin. *Dudo, The First Dukes of Normandy* II 6 and 26. Concerning the baptism "in 912" of Rollo and his men, declining to settle in Flanders, but accepting the defence of Normandy.

Passing from Denmark to England, Rollo had a portending dream. He saw the most lovely mountain in France, and on its top he found a wonderful fountain in which he was cleansed from all evil. Thousands of *birds of varied colours,* swarming around the mountain, were eager to imitate his example and settled in peace and harmony, building nests of twigs from the trees. The portent was explained by a Christian: the birds signified his men (cp. 1, 2) and the fountain the baptismal font[10]).

4. 1043, St. Omer. *"Encomium Emmae",* or, as preferred by the Danish editor *"Gesta Cnutonis Regis",* by an anonymous cleric in St. Bertin's Abbey and dedicated to Queen Emma. Concerning Ca-

[9]) Acta Sanctorum, September 5 (II 603 ff.) (extracts, ed. Holder-Egger, Mon. Germ. Hist., Scriptores 15, 515–16).—Steenstrup, Normannerne II (1878), 275–78.
[10]) Ed. J. Lair (1865) 146–47, 166.—Isidor, Etym. II 7, 61 (columbae).

nute's Danish army at Assandune 1016 ("Oscenedune", cp. Aschloha 882), the writer informs the sceptical Queen that her husband's Danes had:

"... a *banner* which gave a wonderful omen. I am well aware that this may seem incredible to the reader, but nevertheless I insert it in my veracious work because it is true: This banner was woven of the *cleanest and whitest* silk and no picture of any figure was found on it (cp. 2). In case of war, however, a *raven* (cp. 1) was always to be seen on it, as if woven into it. If the Danes were going to win the battle, the raven appeared, beak wide open, flapping its wings and restless on its feet. If they were going to be defeated, the raven did not stir at all, and its limbs hung motionless."[11]).

5. 11th century, interpolation in the *OE Chronicle* (texts B, C, D, E). Concerning the conclusion of peace between King Alfred and 29 chieftains from the Great Army in 878 in the Bath area, the baptism of King Gudrum (baptized Athelstan), and the retreat of the army (which, reorganized, crossed to Flander 879). The first sign of relief to the Christians when King Alfred was most distressed in his refuge in the woods and morasses was the victory at Cynuit (Contesbury) on the southern bank of the Severn estuary, in the beginning of 878. An (unnamed) *brother of Healfdene and Ingvar* had crossed the estuary from South Wales with 23 ships and besieged the Christians at Cynuit; at the instigation of God, the Christians, in a surprising sally, killed this chieftain and nearly 1000 warriors.

"Here was taken the *gunfani* which they called the *Raven*" (cp. 2, 4)[12]).

6. About 1105, "annalist of St. Neots" (20 miles north of London, a daughter priory of Bec). Annalistic *interpolations* from a lost Life of St. Neot and from French sources, into *Asser's Life of King Alfred.* Concerning the defeat of the heathens at Cynuit 878 and Gudrum's conclusion of peace.

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11) M. Cl. Gertz, Scriptores Minores Historiæ Danicæ II (1922), 404, transl. Kong Knuds Liv og Gerninger (1896), 38.—Isidor, Etym. XII 7, 75–78 (auspicium: corvus).

12) Plummer and Earle, Two of the Saxon Chronicles parallel I (1892), 74–77; II (1899), 93.—F. M. Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England. (2. ed. 1947), 252.—B. G. Charles, Old Norse Relations with Wales (1934).

(876) In Great Britain the duke of the Normans, Rol, had a portent. In a vision, at night, he saw *a swarm of bees* flying from his army across the Channel, descending on the boughs of the trees and beginning to suck the honey from flowers of varied colours. The portent was fulfilled when Rol accepted Normandy and, by holy baptism, was cleansed and regenerated, new-born and white ... (cp. 3).

(878) Alfred's distress. "As it is told in the Life of St. Neot", he found a refuge in the poor house (cp. 2), of one of his cowherds (var. swineherds); the herdswoman's scolding at his scorching her bread, the cabin filling with smoke. In this distress, St. Neot often appeared to the King to comfort him and to assure him that if he only remained patient and steadfast he would overcome all evils. After the victory at Cynuit, St. Neot appeared one night (cp. 2) to the King, admonishing him to ignore every terror and fear concerning the barbarians and every despair as to their multitude, and to follow St. Neot, who would go in advance of his vexilla and, with God's help, secure his victory. The victory was gained, the treaty concluded, Gudrum (var. Gythro) was baptized and his army retreated in peace ...

Copying the OE Chronicle notice (cp. 5) that the *Raven-banner* was taken by the Christians at Cynuit, the "annalist of St. Neots" adds the following information on the character of the banner (cp. 2, 4, 5):

"It is said that three sisters of *Hingwar* and *Habba,* i.e. the *daughters of Lodebroch,* had woven that banner and got it ready during one single midday's time (cp. 9b; 17). Further it is said that if they were going to win a battle in which they followed that *signum,* there was to be seen, in the centre of the *signum,* a *raven,* gaily flapping its wings. But if they were going to be defeated, the raven drooped motionless. And this always proved true."[13]).

7. 1140, Lincolnshire. *Geffrei Gaimar, Estorie des Engles,* v. 3158. Concerning the battle at Cynuit 878:

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[13]) W. H. Stevenson, Asser's Life of King Alfred, together with the Annals of St. Neots (1904), 134; 41–43, 136–38; notes, 266–67; introduction to the annals 97 f.—The Lives of St. Neot, Acta Sanctorum, July 31 (Julii tom. VII (1731), 314–29 (swineherd, 327; Gythro, Gitro—cp. Matthew of Westminster: Gytro).

The *Rauen* was *Ubbe*'s banner (gumfanun, cp. 5). He was the brother of *Iware*; he was buried by the Danes in a very big mound in Devonshire, called Ubbelawe (14th and 15th century variants: Ubbeslawe, Hubbeslugh, Hubbelowe)[14]).

8. 13th-century manuscript, Lincolnshire. *The Lay of Havelok the Dane* v. 2650–99. Concerning Havelok's conquest of his wife's heritage in England, with the assistance of Ubbe and "Huwe Raven" (cp. 7):

Ubbe attacks the Earl of Cornwall; both fall; Ubbe is sorely wounded; but he is rescued by Huwe *Raven*. A thousand knights are slain. The Danes are mowed down like grass when the Earl of Cornwall attacks as sudden as lightning. The battle is stopped by Havelok, and after the taking of oaths, the Danish army retreats to settle in Lincolnshire[15]).

9. Manuscript 1375–1400, Wales. *"Rhonabwy's Dream"*.

Rhonabwy (not mentioned in other sources; "rhon": lance, spear; "abwy", cp. Habba, 6) is presented as a warrior living in Central Wales in the late 1150's (when Owen, Prince of North Wales, succeeded in uniting the Welsh against Henry II and his Norman, English and Flemish armies). During a military expedition in the border district, he and his two companions spent three nights in a poor and dirty cottage (cp. 6): The floor was slippery with cows' urine, the house was filled with smoke. The people of the house gave a cold welcome to the guests; the sullen housewoman lit a fire for them and went to cook, and brought them barley-bread. In the night, the fleas and the discomfort were a torture to Rhonabwy who could hardly sleep or rest.

During the night he had a vision.—A noble person from past centuries, contemporary of King Arthur, appeared to him, acting as his guide (cp. 2, 6).—Going down the Severn valley they witnessed the assembling of the Arthur's Great Army, and they saw King Arthur himself, and observed the ring on his finger (cp. 2).—White and black troops, presented as Norwegians and Danes from Lychlyn and

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14) Ed. Hardy & Martin (1882) I 132.—Stevenson, Asser's Life of Alfred, 263–65.
15) Ed. W. W. Skeat (1848), 75–77. (Neither Ubbe nor Huwe Raven appear in Gaimar's Havelok romance nor in the French Lai d'Aveloc).

from Denmark, passed the Severn valley in the direction of *Cevndigoll* (cp. 6: Cynuit).—Below the city of Baddon (cp. 5, 6: the Bath area), Arthur's Great Army dismounted in great commotion, unpacking the horses and pitching the tents and pavillions (cp. 2, 6). —Sitting comfortably in a chair (cp. 2), on a white carpet, King Arthur invited Owen to play at a playboard, and they began to play, and were soon absorbed by their play.—

Messengers for Owein arrive successively, with still more alarming reports (cp. 2): *Owein's ravens* were being harrassed and attacked by Arthur's men. The most notable of the ravens (cp. 1) had been killed, others wounded and molested (cp. 2) to the extent that not one of them could lift its wings one fathom from the ground.— Undisturbedly the players continue their game until Owein, observing the increasing rage of the messengers, gives this order to the messenger (cp. 2): "Go to the place where you see the battle is hardest and raise *the standard* on high, and God's will be done!"

And even as it was raised, the ravens too rose into the air in passion, rage and exultation, to let wind into their wings (cp. 4) and to throw off their weariness. And having recovered their strength and their magic powers, in rage and exultation they straightway swooped down to earth upon the men who had earlier inflicted hurt and injury and loss upon them. Of some they were carrying off the heads, of others the eyes, of others the ears, and of others the arms; and they were raising them up into the air, and there was a great commotion in the air, what with the fluttering of the exultant ravens and their croaking, and another great commotion what with the cries of the men being gashed and wounded and others being slain.

New messengers arrive, now reporting to Arthur that his best warriors had been slain. The play continued, but the players could hear a great commotion, and the shrieking of men and the croaking of ravens in their strength bearing the men into the air and rending them betwixt them and letting them fall in pieces to the ground.

Arthur bade Owein call off his ravens, but he declined the first and the second time; the third time Arthur's emotion was so intense that he crushed the golden pieces that were on the board till they were all dust (cp. 10). And Owein bade *Gwres* (cp. 6: Guthrum,

Cythro) lower his banner. And therewith it was lowered and all was peace.

Arthur's Great Army had been assembled for the battle at Baddon against *Ossa Gyllel vawr* ("Big-Knife"; cp. OE Chronicle 875: *Oscytel,* king of the Viking army); but now, 24 horsemen coming from Ossa asked a truce from King Arthur who took counsel with his counsellors and with men from Norway and Denmark, and the truce was granted (cp. 878).—Arthur's men were called to Cornwall the same evening, but Rhonabwy awoke, having slept three nights and three days[16]).

(9.b.) In the Welsh manuscript "Rhonabwy's Dream"—Arthurian adaptation of Viking elements from the Miracula of St. Bertin (2) and of St. Neot (6), and eventually from Ireland (cp. 11)—is placed as an introduction to the tale of *Owein and the Lady of the Fountain/Chrétien de Troyes' Yvain, Chevalier du Lion* (composed ab. 1170 when the author entered the service of the count of Flanders). This coordination is not quite accidental, Owein being the hero of both tales. Without entering into too many details, it might be worth mentioning that in the latter tale, the famous central parts, which are repeated several times by the author, are composed of other Viking episodes mentioned in this survey of the Raven theme:

A young hero on his quest rode up a valley and arrived at a mound where he met the hideous, one-eyed master of dragons and all sorts of wild and flying beasts; this ugly man was not smaller than two men of this world; his predictions proved true, and the hero followed his directions (cp. 13, and Odin the one-eyed). Climbing a slope he came to its summit where he found a valley and in the middle of the valley a tree with green branches, and under the tree a fountain and a marble slab; at his sprinkling the marble with water from the fountain, a miracle happened (cp. 3):

A peal of thunder came, so great that he fancied that heaven and earth were quaking. The peal was followed by a shower so cold and

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16) The Mabinogion, translated with an introduction by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (Everyman's Library 1949, reprinted 1957), 137–52, 281 (Ossa).—The Mabinogion, translated by Lady Charlotte Guest, with notes by Alfred Nutt (1902, reprinted 1904), 147–63.

hard that he thought that neither man nor beast of those the shower overtook would escape with his life. For never a hailstone of it would stop for skin nor flesh, till bone checked it. He turned his horse's crupper to face the shower and set his shield over the horse's head and mane and over his own head, and in this wise he bore the shower. And as his life was at the point of departing his body, the shower came to an end. And when he looked at the tree there was not one leaf on it (cp. the annals from Fulda/Ratisbon a. 882): the miracle of the thunderstorm; the immense hailstones terrifying men and horses and causing damage; the baptism).

And then the weather cleared and the birds, alighting on the tree, began to sing delightfully (cp. 3).

A knight coming along the valley, complaining of the destructions caused by the hero in his dominions, encountered the intruder, and in the first instance with success. But the quest was repeated by Owein who succeeded in vanquishing the knight and took over his widow and the defense of the dominion (cp. 882).

A scene where the hero delivers the restlessly weaving, noble ladies from their devilish oppressor (cp. 6, 17) is described by Chrétien with fresh impressions from the Flemish and French factories of his own days.

10. 13th century, Denmark and Norway. *Saxo* (before 1219): *Gesta Danorum*, and (about 1250) *Ragnars Saga Lodbrókar.*

Concerning Lodbrok's sons, returning from Luna in Italy (cp. Guillaume de Jumièges).

They were short of food and had no occasion to fight because every town had been evacuated by the inhabitants. One morning *Biorn Jarnsíða* said: "Every morning the vigorous bird of the battlefields is flying over the towns, apparently almost dying of hunger; if it would fly south to the sands, it could get blood enough from the men we killed there." (Saga chap. 15).

Arrived at home, the brothers were sitting one day in the hall. Two of them were occupied at a playboard (cp. 9, 11). Messengers from England arrived to report that their father had been killed. Listening intently to the report of the messengers, the brothers, concealing their emotion, continued their occupations (cp. 2, 9). The

emotion was only betrayed by involuntary reactions, one of the players crushing a piece from the playboard so hard that blood sprang out from under his nails (cp. 9). When the messengers left, the brothers began their deliberations concerning the revenge. Ivar was not eager to start a battle (cp. 2, 9), but he was scolded by his brothers who insinuated that he did not care to take revenge (cp. 2). (Saga chap. 16; Saxo)[17].

11. Manuscripts 1166 ff., Ireland. *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*—The War of the Irish with the Foreigners. The latter half of this chronicle is a report of the battle at Clontarf 1014, the notes of older annals being supplemented with tales told by the Irish and Scandinavians settled at Dublin. The composition, of extraordinary stylistic quality, presents a arrangement of epic decorations and details similar to Rhonabwy's Dream.

Introductory playboard scene (ed. Todd p. 145, cp. 9, 10).—Arrival of messengers complaining of antagonists harassing the young noblemen (p. 149, cp. 2, 9).—Arrival of valiant warriors, assembling to aid the Dublin-Scandinavians: Danes from all parts of Western Europe, commanded by Earl *Brotor* from Northumbria (York), an outlaw leader of the fleet; warriors from the Orkneys and other islands, commanded by Earl *Siucrad,* son of Lotar; British and French princes and a chieftain from Lochlann; their arrows and spears were poisoned with the blood of dragons and toads and water-snakes of hell (pp. 151–59).—"And it will be one of the wonders of the day of judgment to relate the description of the tremendous onset. And there arose a wild, impetuous, precipitate, furious, *dark,* frightful, voracious, merciless, combative, contentious *badb,* screaming and fluttering over their heads (cp. 4, 9). And there arose also the satyrs, and the idiots, and the maniacs of the valleys, and the witches (cp. 17), and the goblins, and the ancient birds, and the destroying demons of the air and of the firmament (cp. 9b), and the feeble demoniac phantom host; and they were screaming and comparing the valour and combat of both parties" (p. 175).—The collision of the Danes and the Irish was like the Day of Judgment, a

[17] Vǫlsunga Saga ok Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar, udg. M. Olsen (1906–08), 160–63.—Saxonis Gesta Danorum, ed. J. Olrik & H. Ræder (1931), 262–63.

sparkling shower of flaming stars from the firmament passing over the surface of the earth, roaring eruptions of fires from the clouds, roaring from the turbulent oceans and roaring storms from North and South, East and West, as if all four elements of Nature were in decomposition in order to annihilate the continents (p. 179, cp. 882; 9b).—The horrible sound of the crashing skulls and bones (cp. 9) was echoed and multiplied by the neighbouring woods and cliffs (181).—The warriors sought in vain to protect their eyes and cheeks against the heavy showers of fire sparking from the burnies at the heavy blows of the swords ... A sharp April wind carried a rain of blood and gore over our heads and faces and clothes; above our heads, our spears were entangled and fastened by locks of hair carried by the wind (183, cp. 12).—Neither pointed nor any other kind of edged weapon could harm the victorious Earl Siucraid, and there was a strength that yielded not, and a thickness that became not thin at his furious attack (cp. 15) ... but when his helmet was smashed the valiant hero was decapitated at last, by two heavy blows of a sword (195).—Old King Brian was inactive in the fighting; during the battle he was in his tent; the carpet was arranged under him (cp. 9), and he read his psalter, attended only by one servant. Undisturbed he continued his praying, at intervals receiving still more alarming reports (cp. 2, 9). His main concern was with the Irish standard "the men of Erinn shall be well while that standard remains standing, because their courage and valour shall remain in them all, as long as they can see that standard". At last the standard fell: "The honour and valour of Erinn fell when that standard fell; and Erinn has fallen now" (197–201). Brodar and a couple of blue, stark-naked people enter the tent and they kill the pious king Brian (203)[18].

12. About 1280, Iceland. *Niál's Saga.* Concerning the battle at Clontarf (1014).

Brothir (cp. 5) had once been a Christian priest but he had re-

[18]) Chron. Scotorum, ed. W. Hennessy (1866), 251; Annals of Loch Cé, ed. W. Hennessy (1871), 5; Cogadh Gaedhel, ed. J. H. Todd (1867), 145–203.—A. J. Goedheer: Irish and Norse Traditions about the Battle of Clontarf (1938).—John Ryan: The Battle of Clontarf (1938).

jected God and worshipped heathen spirits. Before the battle his fleet had crossed the Irish sea between Mǫn (Man, or Mona, i.e. Anglesey) and Dublin. One night he and his men heard an immense noise, boiling blood was raining (cp. 11), and many of them were burnt by it. Next night a similar noise was heard, and they were attacked by swords and axes and spears from above, killing one man from every ship. The third night the noise was heard again and the men were attacked by *ravens* with iron beaks and claws, the men defending themselves with shields and swords during the whole night (cp. 9); and again one man on every ship was killed. Frightened by the strange happenings Brothir sought the advice of his fellow-chieftain who admired King Brian and who was a very wise man although he was no Christian. He explained: "The raining blood is a portent of battle, and the attacking *ravens* signify the devils you are worshipping. Be sure that they will draw you to the pains of Hell!" (cp. 14)[19].

13. Before 1180, Crowland, Huntingdonshire. *William Ramsay*, abbot of Crowland (died 1180), *Lives of Waltheof and his father Sivard Digri (the Stout)*, the Earl of Northumberland. Concerning the arrival of Sivard to England, the author (who also composed a panegyric on St. Neot, cp. 6), relates that Sivard, leaving Denmark, passed via the Orkneys before he arrived at the Northumbrian coast, which was harrassed by a dragon.

Sivard left his men at the ships and went in search of the dragon's den. On the top of the hill he found an old man (cp. 9b) and asked him where to find the dragon. "Sivard, you will not find any dragon! Return to your men instead and continue southwards to the Thames, enter the service of King Edward and he will soon give you land!" "Surely my men will not believe in what you say!" Then the old man, who, mysteriously, had adressed the young foreigner by his proper name, drew forth a banner from his bosom and gave it to Sivard as a proof to the men, and he called the banner *Raven land eye*,—by William explained as: *corvus terrae terror* (cp. 882, 2, 4ff.). A few weeks later Sivard obtained Huntingdonshire, and after-

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[19] Ed. F. Jónsson (1908), 406–08.

wards Northumberland (cp. 882, 9b). 1054 he defeated *Macbeth* in Scotland. At his own death, 1055, "Raven land eye" was deposed in St. Mary's church in York, where he was buried[20]).

14. 1220–40, Iceland. *Snorri, Heimskringla, Saga of Harald Hardraði,* chapters 22, 85, 88, 93. Concerning the battle at Stanford Bridge (1066).

King *Harald*'s most precious treasure was the sign *Landøyðan* (cp. 12); it was said that victory was always gained by the man before whom it was borne (cp. 15, 16, 17), and Harald asserted that from the first time it came into his possession this had always come true. The Danish King Sven Estridsen would not believe it until he had witnessed it three times (ch. 22).

When Harald's fleet started for England (1066), one of his men had a vision: On the stem of every ship in the fleet he saw a bird, all of them were eagles and *ravens*; a huge witch (cp. 11) standing on an island quoth: "The King, going westward, will meet with many skeletons, to my benefit, the raven will find enough to eat on the ships" (ch. 80, cp. 12).

Approaching York, Harald, preceeded by the *Landeyðan,* gained a victory over *Waltheof Earl* (ch. 85, cp. 12). At Stanford Bridge the *Landeyðan* was carried by one Frirekr (ch. 88); when King Harald had been killed with an arrow, the last and hardest fight was fought around the *Landeyðan,* at last carried by Eystein Orri who fell, and this part of the battle was called the Orra-hríð (ch. 93). Eystein and the Orkney earls had been left on Harald's ships with his young sons (ch. 91; Orkneyinga saga chap. 34)[21]).

15. 1200, Iceland. *Orkneyinga Saga* chap. 11–12. Concerning the battle of Clontarf (1014) where Sigifrid (Sigurd, Sivard), the earl of the Orkneys, fell, as reported by Irish annals.

This *Sigurd Digri* (the Stout, cp. 882, 13) was the son of Earl

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[20]) Ed. Langebek, Scriptores Rerum Danicarum III (1772), 288f.—A. Olrik: Sivard den Digre. Arkiv f. nord. fil. 19 (1903), 199–223; (transl. H. G. Leach) Saga Book of the Viking Club 6 (1910), 212–37—with the observation that the mysterious old man is presented by William in the same manner as *Odin* by the authors of the fornaldarsagas, e.g. the *Sigurd*-story in the Vǫlsunga saga.

[21]) Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla—Nóregs Konunga Sǫgur, udg. F. Jónsson (1911), 459, 503, 505–08.

Lodvi and Edna, the daughter of King Kjarval of Ireland (Cearbhall). She was well versed in sorcery. The day before a dangerous battle she gave him a banner and said: "Take this sign, I have made it for you (cp. 6). It will bring victory to the man it preceeds (cp. 11, 14, 17), but death to the man who carries it" (cp. 14, 16). The sign was ingeniously made in the shape of a *raven*. When the wind was blowing into it, the raven was seen to rise in flight (cp. 4, 6, 9). In the battle against the Scotch earl, three successive bearers of the sign were killed, but Sigurd gained the victory. At Clontarf, on Holy Friday 1014, Sigurd had to carry the *Raven-sign* himself and he fell.

16. 1280, Iceland. *Niál's Saga* chap. 157. Concerning the battle of Clontarf.

Sigurd's standardbearer fell, and at Sigurd's request, another took the sign, and was killed in hard battle. At Sigurd's request, Thorstein was about to take the sign, but Ámund hvíti said: "Do not carry the sign, Thorstein, everybody carrying it has been killed." Then said the Earl: "Hrafn (*Raven*) the Red, will you take the sign!" But he declined: "Carry your devil yourself!" (cp. 12). The earl remarked: "It becomes a beggar to bear his bundle" (cp. 11). He unfastened the sign from the stake and put it under his clothes. After a little while, Ámund hvíti was killed, and the earl was pierced by a lance.

17. 1280, Iceland. *Darraðarljóð*—The Lay of the Spears, Niál's saga chap. 157. Reporting one of the wonders connected with the battle.

On Holy Friday, during the battle at Clontarf, twelve women, only observed by the man called Darrað (the spear-man, i.e. Odin) assembled in a little house as far away as in Caithness (in Scotland), and similarly in the Faeroes. They set up a loom and began to weave (cp. 4, 6, 9b, 15). Their yarn and thread were intestines of men, tightened by means of skulls instead of ordinary stones; their loom-beam and shuttle were swords and arrows. As they worked, they quoth: We are weaving the massacre by means of arrows, spears and swords. The tissue is drawn on a background of storm and showers of blood (cp. 882, 9b, 10), the threads in this tissue of

spears are intestines fastened to skulls. We proceed in our weaving the battle in order to assure the victory of our friends, and to spread fear among their enemies. We are weaving the spear-tissue and we decide who is going to fall. The strength of the king will persist as long as he is preceeded by the *sacred ensign* of the valiant men. Finishing their work, they tore the tissue from the loom and each one of the women (valkyrias) kept her part of the tissue, left the house, mounted their horses and disappeared, six riding northwards and the other six southwards.