Grottasongr
THE SONG OF GROTTI

edited by

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Preface

The present edition of Grottasongr was originally to be included in the fourth volume of *The Poetic Edda*, edited by Ursula Dronke, with the assistance of the present editor, for Oxford University Press. As work progressed on that volume, however, it became clear that a somewhat different and shorter treatment would be needed for this poem, which is not, indeed, found in the Codex Regius which forms the basis of Ursula Dronke’s edition. Hence we decided it would be better to issue the present version separately. It is with great pleasure that I am able to offer it for publication through the Viking Society, which does so much to promote scholarship devoted to medieval Scandinavia.

The present edition began as a collaborative effort between me and Ursula Dronke, and reflects many of her suggestions (in particular in the reading of the text itself), though the bulk of the editorial work was carried out by me. The edition was largely already completed before the appearance of the third volume of the edition with commentary by Klaus von See et al., *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 2000). There is, needless to say, much agreement between them, though the presentation of the material differs. I have not felt it would make a marked improvement to my own edition to repeat the many additional bibliographical references and smaller points of discussion included in the German edition, where they can readily be consulted; von See has aimed at a commendable degree of comprehensiveness in the 128 large pages devoted to the poem, but the present, rather shorter, edition seeks, in the tradition and indeed format set by Ursula Dronke in her own edition of *The Poetic Edda*, to be somewhat more selective and more focused on the presentation of the poem as a literary artefact (though historical and other aspects are not ignored). In keeping with those found in *The Poetic Edda*, the translation aspires to some small degree of poetic expression through the use of alliteration and choice of vocabulary, rather than being purely literal. Grottasongr is perhaps not among the greatest of works of the ancient North, but it is not without its own interest and attraction, and it is my hope that students and other interested readers will gain some pleasure from investigating the poem through the present edition.

I would like to thank Ursula Dronke for her friendly support (spread over many years, indeed), in particular in the editing of the poem and in bringing this edition to fruition, and Alison Finlay for furthering its publication by the Viking Society. I am also most grateful for the extensive and helpful comments made by my reader, John McKinnell, which have highlighted many points in need of elucidation. Finally, I thank the Dorothea Coke Memorial Fund for providing the necessary financial backing for the publication of this edition.

Clive Tolley
Chester, July 2007
The Norse quern, based on Norwegian, Icelandic and Shetland models.
Introduction

I. The manuscripts

Grottasongr is preserved in three manuscripts of Snorri’s Edda, in its entirety in SR and T, and the first stanza alone in C. SR (Codex Regius 2367 4°, formerly in the Royal Library, Copenhagen, now in the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, Reykjavík) is from c. 1325. It is the primary manuscript source for the present edition of Grottasongr. T (Codex Trajectinus 1374, in the University Library, Utrecht) is a sixteenth-century copy of a late-thirteenth-century original (SnE vii). It is closely related to SR, but is not a copy of it; it is likely that SR and the antecedent of T are copied from one original. This is confirmed in the text of Grottasongr found in the two manuscripts. That original was itself corrupt in various passages; problematic sections of the poem in SR are not resolved by T. The orthography of T is basically more archaic than that of SR, for example in the use of unstressed ‘o’ rather than ‘u’, or the form ‘oro’ for voru, or ‘it’ for þit: some caution is necessary, however: a form such as ‘hendor’ must be an invention of the T copyist. In two places T omits lines preserved in SR (3/1–2, 18/3), and mistakes, marked for correction, are fairly frequent. Nonetheless, in several instances T has readings preferable to those of SR (e.g. 6/5, 17/5, 18/6, 21/7). The immediate antecedent of T would probably have been more accurate than is SR, but the danger that forms in T itself stem from the sixteenth-century scribe cannot be ignored. T, though valuable, does not preserve the text in a sufficiently good state to supplant SR as the basis for the text of a modern edition. C (AM 748 II 4°, now in the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, st. 1 only) dates from c. 1400 (SnE xiii). In the one stanza cited, the text differs in two points from SR/T: C has eru for erum, and giõrvar for hafðar. The first difference may derive from a desire to avoid the complication of presenting a speech within such a short citation; it may also represent a different textual tradition, as seems to be the case with the second difference (giõrvar and hafðar may, however, derive from one (perhaps somewhat corrupt) original written form: this implies that several stages of transmission took place, presumably in the period c. 1200–1300, before the extant manuscripts were written). In both cases the SR/T reading seems slightly preferable. It seems unlikely that Snorri intended to quote the whole poem: this would be uncharacteristic, and the poem is not wholly consistent with its prose context. Therefore C may well represent Snorri’s original intention, with just the beginning of the poem cited (SnE xxii). The differences observed in this one stanza are sufficient warning that the text of the poem known to Snorri may have
differed considerably from that preserved in SR/T, where its presence is likely to be due to an early interpolator. Further discussion of the manuscripts of Snorri’s *Edda* is to be found in Faulkes’s edition of *Gylfaginning*, xxix–xxxi.

II. *The Norse quern*

At the heart of *Grottasõngr* lies the ancient Norse hand mill. The form of quern in use in medieval Scandinavia may be ascertained reasonably accurately by examining both archaeological examples, and working querns in use in Norse areas (including Norse areas of Scotland) until recently (see Eiríkr Magnússon 1910; Curwen 1937; *KLNM*, s.v. *kvern*).

The quernstones rested on a platform or crib (*liðr*) some feet off the ground, in which the flour would collect. In some querns the upper stone could be adjusted up and down to achieve the best grind with a lightening tree fixed beneath the *liðr*. In later Icelandic querns the handle rose up to a frame (a \[\text{\textit{m}}\]-shaped structure rising from the *liðr*); the *skapttré* of the poem is best understood as referring to some such device. It is clear from the poem that both the girls are involved in turning the quern; this could imply a quern with two handles, such as were sometimes to be found in parts of Scotland, but it is more likely to indicate that the quern was simply so massive that both had to turn the (one) handle together. Although specific names for the upper and lower stones do not appear to be recorded, the poem’s *snúðgasteinn* is probably the top, moving stone, while the lower stone may be indicated by *hõfgasteinn* (or variants). *Grotti* (cf. English ‘grind’) in Norn and Norwegian dialect refers specifically to the nave of the lower stone, through which the shaft supporting the upper stone passes.

III. *The sequence of ideas in the poem*

Two cycles of human life intertwine in *Grottasõngr*. The maidens, sprung from mighty giant kin, first played with rocks in the mountains – the very rocks which were to form the quernstone they were later enslaved to – before engaging in battles as valkyrie figures, and involving themselves in the highest military affairs of kings. Suddenly these mighty beings are reduced to menials, churning out riches for another without rest. Their chagrin is ripe for explosion.

Fróði is the monarch who enslaves these girls. His deceit stems from the combination of traditions the poet has employed in his depiction. On the one hand he embodies the character of Fróði the peacegiver, whose reign was marked by its long peace and prosperity, and on the other that of Fróði, originally a king of the Heathobards of the fifth century, who, in most of the Norse accounts, usurped the throne from his brother, and was subsequently overthrown by his avenging nephews (see §§IV and V). This marrying of different legends enables the poet to allude both to the riches and luxury of Fróði’s reign, and to its tyranny. His wealth is derived from a merciless exploitation of his mill-workers, not (as we should expect from the traditional king of peace) from the harmony and goodness of his rule.
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The poem presents a confrontation between these two different powers, but it also involves a collision between different sorts of wisdom. Fróði embraces the sense ‘wise’, but also harks back to a more archaic sense ‘virile, fecund’. He epitomises the conviction that a prosperous society depends on the wisdom of its rulers, and once his wisdom falters, so too does the wealth and prowess of his realm. It is upon this conceit that the structure of the poem depends. In contrast to the king, the maidens are said to have foresight, are framvisar. Fróði did not anticipate the consequences of the lack of wisdom he showed in neglecting to enquire about the nature of the maidens he obtained: he saw only strength, something to bolster his own power. The maidens, however, declare that the finding of the quernstones and their own presence there to work them was no chance, but was known to them all along. Whilst the audience may not be quite convinced by this self-assuring explanation of their capture and subjugation, the girls nonetheless put their conviction to effect, by milling out an avenger to overthrow Fróði, and overturning the wonder-mill. At this point they declare they have milled enough.

1 The poem opens with a declaration by the two protagonists of their identity, their whereabouts, and their essential nature: Fenja and Menja have come to the house of King Fróði, two girls gifted with foresight. The incongruity of their situation – máttkar meyiar at mani hafðar – strikes a foreboding note.

2–4 The girls are taken straight to the mill to start working: the king does not even mention rest before hearing the slave-women’s tune. They accordingly set to work: the sound of industry rings out, as they adjust the machine, and the king again orders them to work. The milling, accompanied by the girls’ singing, continues until Fróði’s household is asleep, and the flour begins to emerge.

5–6 Menja speaks: let them grind out wealth and blessings for Fróði, let him sleep in the lap of luxury – that may then be counted good milling. Echoing the stock descriptions of Fróði’s peace found in other sources, she arrogates its establishment to the mill’s grinding.

7 With scant thanks for this magnanimity, Fróði, far from offering them rest, tells the girls they may sleep for no longer than a cuckoo stops singing, or the time it took him to sing one song.

8–12 Menja in rejoinder undermines Fróði’s reputation for wisdom: he was not wise when he bought slave-girls without finding out about their kindred. She mentions a series of giants, and declares the girls are descended from them. Moreover, the quern Grotti would not have emerged from the earth, nor would the maidens be there to grind it, if they had not had foreknowledge of the whole matter. The maidens themselves moved the grindstones from the earth in their play, and sent them rolling to a place (presumably Denmark) where men discovered them.

13–15 The maidens then engaged in battle in Sweden, toppling and upholding kings as they chose.

16–17 With no explanation as to how it happened, the maidens were then brought in captivity and misery to Fróði’s courts, where these erstwhile warmongers were ironically reduced to turning the mill, the ‘diffuser of war’. This

1 See, for example, commentary to Skírnismál 1/5 in PE II.
perception of their ignominy is the turning point of the poem. Menja concludes by saying their hands must rest: she has milled more than her fair share.

17–20 Fenja takes over the song: they will not rest their hands, she says, before Fróði deems that enough milling is done. The irony of her statement is then revealed: it is spear-shafts that hands shall grasp – and here she taunts the sleeping Fróði: wake up, if you wish to hear our songs! An army will arise and burn down the hall in spite of the prince; she sees the fires burning already: Fróði will not keep the seat of Hleiðr. She exhorts her companion to grasp the mill-handle more firmly: they are not sickened by the gore they are grinding out.

21–3 Seeing the approaching fate, they mill all the harder, until the quern breaks to pieces.

24 The maidens conclude with a short statement to Fróði that they have milled for long enough: his fate, for them, is assured.

IV. The legendary-historical background of Fróði

For the poet of Beowulf, Froda (Old Norse Fróði) was a king of the Heathobards; in so far as he was a historical character he would have been living at some time around the late fifth century. In Norse records another Fróði is also found, a king of Denmark famed for his long reign of peace and prosperity. A glance at the Norse genealogies reveals that from these two Fróðis has proliferated a whole series of legendary Danish kings called Fróði. Fróði the peace-bringer will be considered more fully in the next section of the Introduction.

The family tree of the Danish kings which may be reconstructed from Beowulf reveals that the might of the Scyldings was based in part on marriage alliances between small peoples later forgotten in the Scandinavian record:

```
Scyld
  /
Beow
  /
Healfdene
    /
  Heorogar
  |
Heoroweard
  |
  Hroðgar = Wealhfæw (Helming)
   |
  Hroðric Hroðmund Freawaru = Ingeld Hroðulf
       |
Heorogar
  |
  Hroðgar = Freawaru = Ingeld
   |
  Halga d. = Onela (Swede)
```

The Heathobards and Danes were enemies. It seems that Froda had slain Healfdene (or Healfdene Froda); some time later Hroðgar attempted to settle the feud by marrying his daughter Freawaru to Froda’s son Ingeld. However, as the poet of Beowulf forebodes (lines 2032–69), and as Widsið says openly (lines 45–9), the Heathobards attacked Heorot, but were defeated. Upon Hroðgar’s death,

2 The manuscript’s reading of Beowulf for Beow is widely accepted as a mistaken anticipation of the protagonist’s name; I discuss the emendation to Beow in Tolley 1996, 29.
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Hroðulf must have seized the throne, slaying Hreðric and Hroðmund. Later, Heoroweard, with a still older claim to the throne, overturned Hroðulf (this much may be gleaned from the Scandinavian sources, though there Hjörvarðr’s relationship with the royal house is no longer recognised).

The Heathobards have been forgotten as a people by the time of the Norse sources; they are recalled merely in the names Hothbrodus, a Swede in Saxo, and Hôðbroddr, the enemy of Helgi in the Helgakviður. Hrólfs saga kraka preserves the closest genealogy to the Old English.³

Fróði kills his brother Hálfdan; Hróarr and Helgi take vengeance by burning Fróði in his hall. Helgi is killed by Aðils the Swede. Hróarr is killed by his nephew Hrókr. Hrólfr is killed in an attack by one Hjörvarðr, here unrelated.

The genealogy of Skjoldunga saga is given on the next page.⁴ The time of Frodo I was one of peace and prosperity (see §V); as an explanation it is stated that Christ was born at this time. Christ’s passion was marked by earthquakes and eclipses in Frodo’s realm. Frodo was burnt by a criminal named Mysingus.

The death of Frodo III was caused by a deer turning on him and transfixing him with its horns. Frodo IV killed his half-brother Alo; this fratricide is repeated in the next generation, where, after taking vengeance on Sverting for the murder of his father Frodo, Halfdanus is killed by his half-brother Ingialldus, who also takes his widow. Helgo and Roas in turn slay Ingialldus. Roas is then killed by Rærecus and his brother Frodo.

Snorri’s genealogy in Skáldskaparmál, introducing the story of Grotti, reflects that of Skjoldunga saga:

³ Hrólfs saga exists in manuscripts from the seventeenth century, based on a lost antecedent of the later sixteenth century (Hrólfs saga kraka, ed. Slay, Introduction, xii–xiv), but is believed to have assumed its extant form, itself clearly based on earlier versions of the tale, in the late fourteenth or fifteenth century; elements in the narrative are found earlier, for example in Snorri’s Edda and Ynglinga saga. See Simek and Hermann Pálsson 1987, s.v. Hrólfs saga kraka, for further references to discussions of the saga’s date and provenance.

⁴ Skjoldunga saga is from 1180–1200, but is preserved only in a sixteenth-century Latin summary, Rerum Danicarum fragmenta, by Arngrímur Jónsson. The dating is that of Bjarni Guðnason (1963, 315); he notes that Gunnlaugr Leifsson probably knew Skjoldunga saga when he wrote his saga of Óláfr Tryggvason around 1200.

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The Danish genealogies of Skjöldunga saga
The Danish genealogies of Saxo Grammaticus (selection)
**Grottasongr**

*Ynglinga saga* (probably by Snorri) also follows *Skjoldunga saga* (which is explicitly mentioned as a source); the Danish genealogy, in so far as it is given, is identical. Three Fróðis are mentioned: frið-Fróði (ch. 11), on a visit to whom the Swedish king Fjölñir drowns in a vat of mead, corresponds to Frodo I of *Skjoldunga saga*; Fróði inn mikilláti or fríðsami (ch. 25) corresponds to Frodo III of *Skjoldunga saga*; and Fróði inn frækni (ch. 26), the Frodo IV of *Skjoldunga saga*.

Snorri’s prose setting for *Grottasongr*, which is not in agreement with the content of the poem, is derived in part from *Skjoldunga saga*. Snorri identifies the Fróði of the poem as the first Fróði, of the peace, and makes no connection with the later Fróði (i.e. *Skjoldunga saga*’s Fróði IV, the original Heathobard). The poem’s information that the giant maids fought in Sweden probably prompted Snorri to imagine their acquisition as slaves as taking place on a visit by Fróði to the Swedish Fjölñir (kings associated with each other already in *Ynglingatal*). The demise of peace-Fróði is already associated in *Skjoldunga saga* with Mýsingr, though the latter is not a sea-king there; he is listed as a sea-king in *hulur*, however, and Snorri may have known both the tale of the death of peace-Fróði (Frothi III) in Saxo, where he is gored by a witch transformed into a sea-cow, and the aetiological folktale of the wonder-mill stolen by a sea-captain, which ends up in the ocean grinding salt.

Sven Aggesen (c. 1190) has the following genealogy in ch. 1 of his *Brevis historia*:

```
   Skjold
  /   \\  
Frothi Haldanus
   /   \\  
  Helghi
    /   \\  
 Rolf kraki
```

According to Sven, it was Frothi that was killed by Haldanus; he is alone in presenting this reversal of the usual tradition. Sven also mentions Ingeld, but in a lower section of the royal genealogy (ch. 4):

```
  Dan the Proud
   |   
 Frothi the Old
    |   
 Frithleuer
     |   
 Frothi hin frithgothae
      |   
 Ingeld
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The genealogical elaboration and repetition reaches its climax in Saxo, who presents us with no fewer than five Frothos in the legendary part of his history. The relevant sections of Saxo’s Danish genealogy are given on the previous page. Four of these Frothos clearly developed from the original Heathobard king, and from the mythical law-giver (the position of Frotho II, about whom little is said, is unclear). Although Fróði I becomes a Danish king in Norse tradition, and he is dissociated from Ingjaldr, yet the genealogy of *Beowulf* may still be perceived through the
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later accretions and distortions. Roe is attacked and killed by Hothbrod, whom Helgi in turn slays; this is the reminiscence of the Heathobard Ingeld’s attack upon Hroðgar. Haldan kills his two brothers Roe and Skat – something with no counterpart in the Old English.

Saxo uses a source closely resembling Hrólfs saga kraka in his history of Frotho V; thus, though the names have changed (apart from Frotho’s), the story is essentially a variant of that of Frotho I (whose genealogy is closer to Hrólfs saga). Thus Frotho V kills his brother Harald, and is then burnt by Harald’s two sons.

Frotho IV with his son Ingel also clearly form a differently remembered version of the story of Fröda and Ingeld. Ingel is stirred up by the gruff warrior Starkatherus to take vengeance for his father’s death on the family of Sverting, the Saxon (a change resulting from the incorporation of the Heathobards into the Danish family).

Frotho III has the longest treatment of any Frotho in Saxo, taking up the whole of book V of the work. He is regarded as a law-giver and founder of long peace, whose reign coincided with the birth of Christ. He sets up a gold ring at a crossroads to encourage his people to be law-abiding through a fear of the punishment that would follow the theft of the ring. However, a woman incites her son to steal it. She turns herself into a sea-cow and her sons into calves. Frotho arrives in a carriage and stares in amazement at them. She sinks her horn into his flank, killing him. However, his men keep his body embalmed for three years, carrying it around the land in a carriage.

Grottasongr is composed in a tradition where Fróði is the son of Friðleifr, as (in various of his manifestations) he is in all the recorded Norse sources except Hrólfs saga (which is silent on the matter), although in earlier (pagan) tradition it is unlikely that Friðleifr was considered a father of Fróði (see below). It is likely too that the Fróði of the poem is intended to recall Fróði the fratricide of Hrólfs saga; even if st. 22 is rejected as an interpolation, it is this Fróði, rather than peace-Fróði, who is overthrown by a hostile attack such as is ground out by the giant maidens.

It would seem that two traditions stand behind the poem. On the one hand, a legendary history resembling Hrólfs saga has been used to inform the picture of the tyrannical king, against whom vengeance is eventually taken; on the other, the depiction of Fróði as the king of peace and wealth derives from a source similar to Skjoldunga saga. Both of these sources were also used by Saxo, and both may be dated to the late twelfth century (though not precisely in their extant forms). The other, later sources considered here represent further elaborations of the traditions concerning Fróði, and do not appear to have been known to the poet of Grottasongr.

V. The mythological background

Three mythological narrative elements may be identified in Grottasongr: the king, Fróði, renowned for a reign of peace and prosperity; the giantesses who bring about his downfall; and the mill, Grotti, which is the guarantor both of the king’s welfare and of his fall. Let us consider them in turn.
Grottasongr

King Fróði

The god of fertility and his peace

The time of earthly paradise under the gold-milling Fróði mirrors the early epoch of the gods recounted in Voluspá 6–8, where they forged gold in plenty, and were happy. The legendary history of Fróði is elevated to the level of myth through this allusion to the theme of a divine age of plenty.

Fróði’s golden age is described in several of the sources. Of Frodo I, son of Fríðleifur, Skjoldunga saga reports (ch. 3, ÍF 35, 5–6):

Sed et hujus tempora pax et qvies publica coronabat, ut nullus ne patris qvidem sui interfectorum laedere vel ulcisci fassibi duceret. Tum etiam vulgo a rapinis et furtis cessatum est, adeo ut in via publica, qvae per tesqva Jalgursheide ducebat, jacentem multis annis anulum aureum, cuivi obvium, nemo tollerit.

His times were crowned by peace and public quiet, so that no one arrogated to himself the right even to harm or take vengeance on his father’s slayer. At that time robbery and theft ceased to such an extent that no one took a gold ring, which lay for many years in full view of everyone beside the highway which led across the wastes of Jalgursheiðr.

Noting that Christ was born at this time, the account continues:

Furtur etiam fuisset hoc tempore incredibilis annonae in Dania proven-tus, apibus eam abundasse, agriqve perhibentur et pascua sponte floruisse, graminaqve (ut ait ille) injussa viruisse, metalla passim in Dania magna copia effossa esse; qvorum artem ipse rex Frodo probe calluerit.

It is also said that at this time there was an unbelievable produce of crops in Denmark, that bees were in abundance, the fields and meadows grew spontaneously, and the hay (he says) flourished unbidden, and that metals were mined in great quantities in various places of Denmark; in the craft of metals King Frodo himself was thoroughly versed.

The end of Frodo’s reign occurred in this manner:

Deinde post multorum annorum curriculum insveta facta ecclipsis solis cum terræ motu saxa et scopulos loco movente atqve disrumpente. Illum igitur putant fuisset annum et tempus passionis Christi. Post hæc Frodo rex (a sui temporis pace publica dictus Frode fríðgode) authore sceleris qvodam Mysingr incendio peremptus est.

Then after the course of many years there occurred an unwonted eclipse of the sun and an earthquake, in which rocks and crags were dislodged and cast down. It is believed that this occurred in the year and at the time of the passion of Christ. After this King Frodo (named Fróði fríðgodi after the public peace of his time) was destroyed by fire, a certain Mýsingr being the engineer of the crime.

Related accounts have similar observations: Upphaf allra frásagna (along with the Rymbegla collection (AM 730 4º), an eighteenth-century compilation derived from Skjoldunga saga) notes, for example (ÍF 35, 40):
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Á dógum Fróða var svá mikill fríðr, at engi vildi mann drepa, þó at sæi fyrir sér bundinn fóðurbana sinn eða bróður.

In Fróði’s day there was such great peace that no one wished to kill anyone, even if he saw the slayer of his father or brother bound up in front of him.

_Ynglinga saga_ relates (ch. 10, ÍF 26, 24):


In Freyr’s days arose the Fróði peace. There were good harvests in all lands then; the Swedes attributed this to Freyr. [ . . .] Freyr was called by another name, Yngvi. The name Yngvi was thereafter long kept in his family as a title of honour, and his family was thereafter called the Ynglingar.

Snorri’s account, closely matching the first citation from _Skjòldunga saga_ above, is given below as part of the prose introduction to the poem.

The account of the peace of Fróði’s reign is similar in Saxo (V, xv; here it is Frotho III who is the peace-Fróði); Saxo relates that Frodo abstained from war for thirty years, and turned his attention to establishing homeland security by rooting out theft and robbery. Saxo includes the story of the ring on Jålangrsheîðr (here merely designated ‘Jutland’); for Saxo, there was no lack of desire to seize it, but Frodo’s terrible authority was so great that no one dared. Saxo then notes that Christ was born at this time, bestowing a sort of peace on the whole world. Saxo is likely to have derived his account from _Skjòldunga saga_, where the linking of the peace of Augustus (stemming, in Christian understanding, from the birth of Christ at that time) with the peace of Fróði is first likely to have taken place.

The peace of Fróði is witnessed much earlier, however; already around 986 Einarr Helgason mentions in _Véleklæa_ 18 (_Skj B I_, 120) that no prince had worked such a peace as his present patron except Fróði. The ‘golden age’ is a widespread folktale motif; the peace of Fróði is the Danish variant of it. The Norse golden age differs markedly from, for example, the classical, where it is a pre-lapsarian time of plenty, unfettered by laws (see Ovid’s _Metamorphoses_, book I, 89–112). Saxo’s is by far the longest account of the reign of peace–Fróði, and is undoubtedly elaborated from a much simpler core of tradition. Central to his account, however, is that the peace is established through long war, and its maintenance requires a set of detailed laws. Bætke (1942, 39) makes the important point that peace – a condition of political and legal harmony and order where welfare flourishes – was not regarded as a natural condition, but a _donum sacrum_ that called for sacrifice.5

5 ’fríðr ist die Gesamtheit jener rechtlich-sittlichen Ordnungen, die ein friedliches und fruchtbares Zusammenleben in der politischen Gemeinschaft gewährleisten. [. . .] Darin, dass die Germanen um den Frieden opferten, spricht sich ihr Glaube aus, dass er nicht eine menschliche Institution oder eine natürliche Ordnung, sondern eine göttliche Stiftung ist, ein _donum sacrum_, das mittels des Kultes immer wieder auf die Volksgemeinschaft herabgezogen werden muss.’
Fróði is in origin a title, ‘the wise/virile’. His particular gifts are seen to be bestowed in an abundance of produce, accompanied by peace, and also in the laws he established. Both elements may be regarded as ancient. He is said to be the son of Fríðleifr; this may be a result of later genealogising trends. It is likely that fríðleifr too was originally a title. The element -leifr is common in names, and indicates ‘offspring’. The precise purport of fríðleifr perhaps cannot be determined, but it would appear to emphasise the element of inheritance: Fróði is a ‘son of peace’, who must hand on the divine gift to his heirs.

To Fríðleifr in Norse corresponds, in the Old English genealogies, Freyalfe, containing the name Frea (i.e. the Norse Freyr). Snorri, in the passage cited above, indicates that while peace reigned in Denmark under Fróði, in Sweden it was attributed to Freyr. In Skírnismál 1 Freyr is actually called inn fróði. We have here local expressions of the same mythological notion of an age of peace and plenty guaranteed by a semi-divine king. The link between Freyr and Fróði may be traced elsewhere. Snorri says that Freyr was also called by the name Ýngvi. Freyr, like Fróði, is in origin a title, and is probably not as ancient as Ýngvi, a name which is implied already in Tacitus’ name for one of the divisions of the Germani, the Ingvaeones. In Old English Ing was associated in particular with Denmark: he is a demigod who appears among the Danes in the Rune Poem, and in Beowulf the lord of the Danes is called frea Ingwina (de Vries 1956–7, §461). In Saxo book VI the father of Frotho IV is Fridlefas, who marries the Norwegian princess Frogertha; on his way to acquiring her he also has a relationship with a farm-girl Juritha. Behind this surely lies a reminiscence of the wooing of Gerðr by Freyr (told in Skírnismál), which has perhaps been split between the two girls in Saxo.

The bringing of ár ok fróðr, economic and societal well-being, is to be related to the account of Nerthus given by Tacitus in Germania ch. 40; Nerthus corresponds phonologically to Njörðr in Norse, the father of Freyr:

Contra Langobardos paucitas nobilitat; plurimis ac valentissimis nationibus cincti non per obsequium sed proeliiis et periclitando tuti sunt. Reudigni deinde et Aviones et Anglii et Varini et Eudoses et Suarines et Nuitones fluidi nubis aut silvis muniantur. nec quicquam notabile in singulis, nisi quod in commune Nerthum, id est Terram matrem, colunt camque intervenire rebus hominum, invehi populis arbitrantur. est in insula Oceani castum nemus, dicatumque in eo vehiculum, veste contectum; attingere uni sacerdoti concessum. is adesse penetrati deam intellegit vectamque bubus feminis multa cum veneratione prosequitur. laeti tunc dies, festa loca quaecumque adventu hospitoique dignatur. non bella ineunt, non arma sumunt; clausum omne fermentum; pax et quies tunc tantum nota, tunc tantum amata, donec idem sacerdos satiatam conversatione mortalium deam templo reddat. max vehiculum et vestis et, si credere velis, numen ipsum secreto lacu abluentur. servi ministrant, quos statim idem laecus haurit; arcanus hinc terror sanctaque ignorantia quid sit illud quod tantum peritiuri vident.

The Langobardi, in contrast, are famous for being so few; hemmed in by many mighty nations, they obtain safety not through servility but by running the risks of battle. Then come the Reudigni, the Aviones, the Anglii, the Varini, the Eudoses, the Saurines, and the Nuitones, defended by rivers
or woods. There is nothing noteworthy about them individually, except that collectively they worship Nerthus, or Mother Earth, and believe that she takes part in human affairs and rides among the peoples. On an island in the Ocean is a sacred grove, and in it a consecrated wagon covered with hangings; to one priest alone it is permitted so much as to touch it. He perceives when the goddess is present in her innermost recess, and with great reverence escorts her as she is drawn along by heifers. Then there are days of rejoicing, and holidays are held wherever she deigns to go and be entertained. They do not begin wars, they do not take up arms; everything iron is shut away; peace and tranquillity are only then known and only then loved, until again the priest restores to her temple the goddess, sated with the company of mortals. Then the wagon and hangings and, if you will, the goddess herself are washed clean in a hidden lake. Slaves perform this service, and the lake at once engulfs them: there is as a result a mysterious fear and a sacred ignorance about something seen only by those doomed to die.

The general reliability of Tacitus’ account has been called into question; thus, for example, North (1997, 1–25) and von See (1981, 42–72) argue that there was in reality no goddess in this Germanic cult but rather a male god, and that Tacitus was heavily influenced in his depiction by the Terra Mater celebrations in Rome. As a Roman without direct personal familiarity with the area he describes, it is likely that Tacitus’ understanding of Germanic practices was distorted in some respects, but the extent of this distortion is a matter of debate; it is impossible to engage in a detailed discussion of this topic here, but the general reliability of Tacitus’ account is defended by (among others) McKinnell (2005, 50–2), and this is the approach adopted here.

The annual peace, maintained during the divine visitation, may be seen as a ritual realisation of the formative primordial peace. The ār ok fríðr of Fróði’s reign are a mythological representation of the same primordial peace. There is clearly some geographical continuity from Tacitus’ day; although the isle in the ocean cannot be specifically identified, Tacitus’ description is precise enough to indicate that one of the Danish islands must be intended. The nearest parallel to Nerthus’ perambulation amongst her peoples occurs in the tale of Gunnarr helmingr (in Ógmundar þáttr dyttis), which is set among the Swedes. Gunnarr takes the place of the god Freyr, and makes the attendant girl pregnant – a sign of blessing, in the Swedes’ eyes. The two are carted around the country, bringing blessing wherever they come.6

There is little extant record of any ritual focused on Fróði. Saxo reports that after he died, Fróði III was carried around the country (under the pretence of being alive), which may be a reflection of an earlier perambulation of the land, such as occurred with Nerthus and Freyr.

6 It is likely that the Swedes, like the Danes, had an ancient tradition of a time of peace marked in a ritual manner. Tacitus says less about the more distant Suiones (Swedes), but his one piece of information is that all weapons there are kept in the care of a slave; he believes the Swedes, in their remote position, scarcely feared invasion, but it is more likely that a particular period of sacred peace is referred to, such as occurred later in the great gatherings at Uppsala, as reported in the eleventh century by Adam of Bremen in his ‘Descriphtio insularum aquilonis’.

13
The emergence from the lake, and return thereto after blessing the land, is to be seen as an enactment of the yearly cycle of the seasons, determined by the waxing and waning power of the sun.

The peace of Fróði is signified in the gold ring left unmolested on Jalangr-heiðr. The ring is associated with various motifs, an important one being oaths, sworn by a god on a ring. The chief association here however is surely with Draupnir, the ring which dripped clones of itself (e.g. Skírnismál 21) – an unending source of gold, just like Grotti – and therefore represents fertility. A gold ring is clearly also a symbol of the sun. Although the tale of a ring left in a public place without being touched is a commonplace motif illustrating the great peace achieved by some monarch or other (cf. the drinking bowls left by Edwin of Northumbria beside the highway, which none dared to tamper with: Bede, Ecclesiastical History II, 16), the associations of the ring with fertility suggest that it may have been an ancient emblem of Fróði.

The end of the peace-god

In Grottasongr Fróði meets his end in a hostile attack which burns him in his hall; the perpetrator is not named, but if any reliance at all can be placed on st. 22, the attack appears to be one of revenge arising out of the family affairs of the heroic Fróði, not of frið-Fróði. Skjöldunga saga, however, relates that Fróði was burnt in his hall by a criminal named Mysingus; possibly the poem once contained the same information before the interpolation of st. 22. Snorri expands the reference to Mýsingr, explaining that he was a sea-king who attacked by night, slew Fróði, and fled with booty and Grotti. Snorri has seen in his sources a connection between Mýsingr and Grotti (whether the source be Skjöldunga saga or an earlier version of Grottasongr), and knows of Mýsingr as a sea-king (as recorded in the þulur); using this information he has attributed to Mýsingr the story of how Grotti ended up in the sea churning out salt (a folk motif which may already have become attached to Grotti).

The name Mýsingr is formed from mús, ‘mouse’. In Near Eastern belief mice are deleterious vermin (Krappe 1936), and similar ideas are recorded in folk belief elsewhere; the fall of other presiders over the age of peace often took place at the hands of some beast – mice, of course, are archetypal grain-nibblers, so Mýsingr appears as a murine destroyer of Fróði, seen as a king whose wealth and fertility depends on grain (here transmuted into gold).

Frodo III, a later successor of peace-Fróði, dies in the following manner in Skjöldunga saga (ch. 7(ii), ÍF 35, 15): Hic cum cervum venatu assecutus hasta transfoderet, cervi conversi cornibus ventrem et viscera confixus occubuit, ‘After piercing with a spear a stag he had pursued in the hunt, he was transfixed in the stomach and guts by the antlers of the deer as it turned round, and died’. This is similar to the death of peace-Fróði (Frotho III) in Saxo (V, xvi); the gold ring which Frotho had set up on some crossroads as a symbol of his peace was stolen at the instigation of a woman. Frotho descended upon the woman’s home, but she turned herself into a sea-cow and her sons into calves. When Frotho climbed out of his carriage, the sea-cow thrust her tusk into his flank, killing him. This shares the motif of the emergence from the sea with the representation of Mýsingr as
Introduction

a sea-king. *Ynglinga saga* ch. 26 tells of the fall of King Egill of Sweden: he contended long with one Tunni, ‘tusk’, before being killed by the horn of a wild bull. A comparable account is found in *Beowulf*, where the Swedish king Ongenœow is killed by the brothers Eofor and Wulf, ‘boar’ and ‘wolf’; Ongenœow corresponds genealogically to the Norse Egill. As a successor to Freyr, the Swedish king was, it would seem, believed to mirror, or re-enact, the illustrious life and death of the dynasty’s founder. The death of the fertility god by the horns or teeth of wild animals is matched in Middle Eastern myths, which appear to follow a comparable (if not necessarily directly related) mythological pattern; for example, Adonis was killed by the tooth of a wild bear (de Vries 1956–7, §462).

The aftermath of the fertility god’s death is also significant. In *Ynglinga saga* Freyr dies of illness, but his death is concealed from the populace. He is buried in a mound, into which taxes are placed, and the good seasons continue. Only after this has continued for some time do the people learn that he is in fact dead; they then ascribe the continuance of good seasons to Freyr’s presence in the realm (even though dead). Saxo tells a similar story about Frotho III; after he has been killed by the sea-cow, he continues to be carried around his realm in his carriage, until the advanced state of his body’s decay obliges the officials to reveal that he is dead, whereupon he is buried in a mound. Although this carrying of the dead king about the realm must be linked to the motif of the perambulations of the divinity, in a car, found in the accounts of Nerthus and Freyr (the tale of Gunnarr helmingr), as Schier (1968, 394) points out, there appears no parallel to the carrying around of a dead king. Clearly the Swedes regarded even the dead Freyr as bestowing blessings of fertility on his realm, however; with this may be compared the account of the Norwegian king Hálfdan svarti, whose followers, according to *Heimskringla*, arranged that portions of his body should be buried in the various quarters of his realm to ensure its well-being (ÍF 26, 93). Schier argues that the death of Freyr, and indeed of Fróði, cannot be interpreted as a mythological representation of the ritual of death and rebirth, such as takes place with other fertility gods like Zamolxis, as there is no return from death in the Norse examples. He notes, however, that it may not be the return of the god as such, but his death which effects unfailing fertility; this might be supported by the occurrence of strangely ritualised deaths among many of the Ynglingar, which could be seen as re-enactments of the original fertility-generating royal sacrifice. It is also to be inferred from *Ynglingatal* that the divine gift of good seasons was inherited from the dynastic founder, and hence that founder would not be conceived of as returning personally. As Schier notes (1968, 393), a returning god of fertility would be more likely to generate an annual festival; one whose power is communicated to his descendants might be celebrated on a different time-scale, as was the case with the nine-yearly festival at Uppsala.

7 The death by sickness of Freyr in *Ynglinga saga* is out of tune with the repeated motif of untimely death caused by an animal found among fertility beings. Saxo’s account of Frotho III’s death may represent a more archaic pattern, especially given the Norse and Old English accounts of the death of Egill/Ongenœow (and analogues from elsewhere for this sort of fertility-god death). We may suspect that the most ancient evidence we have, namely *Beowulf*, preserves a hint of the most ancient layer of myth when it names Eofor as the king’s slayer. The boar was sacred to Freyr: did the god receive his life-giving death from his own sacred animal?
The giantesses

The narrative argument of the tale of Grottasongr would, in its neatest form, lead to a conclusion in which the gold-producing mill—and in its wake the king who depends upon it—is destroyed by its giantess workers overstraining themselves in an act of vengeance against a cruel and greedy tyrant. There is no need to involve Danish heroic history, with the invasion and burning of the hall: its presence in the poem has resulted from confusion between the Fróði of the mythological peace, and the Fróði of a later heroic age. This confusion may already have taken place by Eyvindr skáldaspillir’s time, however (late tenth century; see p. 25).

The role of the giantesses in the Grotti myth may parallel that of the giant maidens in Völsunga saga 8, where they appear to break in on the happy and gold-rich gods as they play with toflur (presumably in a form of chess-game): the implication is that the giantesses join in the game and, we are to assume, win, which results in the demise of the golden age for the Æsir, represented by the loss of the chequers (they turn up again in the new world in Völsunga saga 58, symbolising the new golden age), just as Fróði’s loss of Grotti marks his end. In both cases the giantesses are underestimated, and in both they achieve their aim, which from the consequences we must surmise to be to undermine the gold and good fortune, the ár ok friðr, of society. Yet in Grottasongr it is not clear that the giantesses were truly acting with fixed purpose from the beginning, even though in st. 1, 10, 13 they claim some sort of foreknowledge. What we are presented with is a ‘fall from grace’ in their social position, beginning with their playing with the huge stones like children in their own land, then becoming involved in the sordid politics and wars of men, and finally becoming enslaved to a tyrant. There is no real purpose in this curriculum vitae, and it was mere chance that they happened to be responsible for wrenching the great boulders from the mountain side, which later became the raw material of the quern. But looking back from their abject position, and contemplating the momentous events they are about to inaugurate, they impose their own fatalism upon their life story: now, it was not chance that they pulled up those rocks, but their own foreknowledge, which in due course has brought them to this plight, now seen as a deliberate self-humiliation, almost a divine kenosis, to enable them to bring about deliverance from the tyrant Fróði. Even so, it seems that they were not in a position, or indeed willing, to carry out their design without some justification from Fróði’s actions, so that they became agents of a destruction which essentially he had brought upon himself. It does not seem that the giantesses have any purpose with regard to the mill itself (such as retrieving it): for them, it had been mountain rocks, playthings which it took men to turn to use. They had no need for such a machine.

The motif of the enslavement of a superhuman being resulting in the undoing of the enslaver is also found in Völundarkviða. Völundr is álfa liði, ‘lord of elves’ (st. 11), dwelling on the very edge of human ken, and is characterised in the prose introduction to the poem as son of the king of the remote Finnar, the Sámi, who were stereotypically famed for their wily and deceitful magical

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8 See van Hamel (1934, 220–1), whose interpretation I follow, on the ‘golden age’ of the gods in Völsunga saga.
practices. Like Fenja and Menja, Völundr is forced to produce gold trinkets for the cruel King Níðuðr whilst being held captive, until he works his vengeance and escapes. Yet, despite both poems making use of a similar basic motif, they manipulate their material in quite different ways. Fróði suffers from the aloof arrogance of ignorance: it is below him to bother investigating the family history of his slave girls, and this proves his undoing once he treats them badly. Níðuðr is not ignorant of who Völundr is: rather, he is bent upon control of all around him, both people and wealth, and seeks to lessen Völundr’s power sufficiently to keep him captive – but he merely injures him physically, leaving his otherworldly magical skills intact, which enable him to make his final escape and lord it over the defeated Níðuðr as he does so, hovering in the air above. Völundarkviða is a far more sophisticated and finely wrought work of art than is Grottasongr (see the discussions of the poem in PE II), and the focus of attention is different: Grottasongr is concerned to show the dark underbelly of the ‘golden age’ of the Fróða fríðr, truly a sham which is bought at the price of inhuman cruelty towards the underclasses, a cruelty which indeed turned initial goodwill into hatred on the part of the giantesses. The author of the poem is moreover concerned with lineage: explicitly so in the case of the giantesses, whose ancestry reveals them to be other than they appear to Fróði, and also by implication in the case of Fróði himself, whose complex family history has been shown above to have been a great source of interest in medieval Scandinavia.

The mill Grotti

The folktale wonder-working mill

Folk tale type ATU 565, ‘The magic mill’, is of widespread occurrence. A Scandinavian example is found in the collection of Asbjørnsen and Moe (1886, 50). In this version, there are two brothers, one rich and one poor; the rich brother tells the poor he can have a ham if he does what he asks, but then tells him to go to the devil with the ham he throws at him; he does so, and is rewarded with a wonder-mill that grinds anything. The elder brother buys the mill, but cannot stop it; he has to pay again for his poorer sibling to take it back. A sea captain then buys the wonder-mill from the erstwhile poor brother, and bids it grind salt, but does not know how to stop it, so it sinks and is still grinding. A similar tale is told in Iceland (Jón Árnason 1863–4, II 9–13), but here the rich brother buys the mill and sails away with it, but cannot stop it milling salt after giving it the command to do so.

The story of Grotti as reported by Snorri has clearly taken elements from this folktale: Mýsingr fills the role of the sea-captain who steals the mill and cannot stop it grinding salt. The poem itself, however, does not contain the theme of the salt-mill. The mill is represented as breaking at the end of the poem (and so could not continue functioning as a salt-mill), and its breaking mirrors the

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9 A parallel example from Hanover is given by Bolte and Polívka (1913, II 439), where the tale of the wonder-mill concludes with the mill’s theft by a sea captain, who bids it grind salt, but cannot get it to stop, with the result that the ship sinks, drowning the crew and making the sea salt.
**Grottasongr**

breaking of the *Fróða friðr* and the downfall of the tyrant. The poem could not coherently end anywhere other than where the extant text concludes. Whilst the demise of the mill in the ocean may be ancient, it is reasonable to suggest that the motif of the salt-mill became attached to Grotti only at a later time, when the deeper mythological significance of the mill had been forgotten; this was obviously before the time of Snorri, but perhaps not very long before. Alternatively, if Grotti was already associated with the salt-mill folktale, then the poet has deliberately avoided mentioning it.

Grotti of the poem differs in another aspect too. The mill of the folktale is a wonder-mill: it produces ‘wealth’ (in a wide sense), like Grotti, but, unlike Grotti, it works on its own. Grotti is thus only partially a wonder-mill; it is an ordinary mill to the extent that it requires two hefty giant girls to work it. The basic motif of the mill therefore differs between the poem and the folktale.

The cosmic mill

One of the best-developed notions of cosmic churning – of the turning of the central support of the cosmos (pillar or mountain) to produce the sustaining necessities of life (as well as misfortune) – is found in Indian myth. Here, in a complex and extended series of episodes, the gods and demons contend with each other in churning the primeval milk ocean with an outlier of the world mountain, and by doing so produce many of the main cosmic entities such as the sun and moon – and also the elixir of well-being, *soma*, as well as unwelcome things like poison. Clearly there is an essential similarity with the tale of Grotti, milling out the gold which sustains the paradiselike peace of Fróði, and then an army which destroys him. Yet there is nothing overtly cosmic about Grotti’s make-up or achievements, and the tale is only lifted onto a mythological (or potentially religious) level through the implied association with a divine golden age. It would be unwise to overstate the case for seeing the tale of Grotti as a Germanic reflection of the Indian cosmic myth of the churning of the milk ocean.

Geographically and temporally closer than the Indian analogue to the tale of Grotti is the Finnish myth of the *sampo*, a myth which may indeed ultimately owe something to an Indo-Iranian origin, for the word *sampo* may be borrowed from a proto-Iranian word *stambhas*, the (world) pillar. In the case of the Finnish myth we are on firmer ground in seeing a cosmic dimension than in the Norse counterpart.

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10 The myth is recounted in the *Mahābhārata*; I have consulted O’Flaherty’s translation (1975, 274–80). She gives the passages translated as being from the *Mahābhārata* I.15.5–13; I.16.1–40; I.17.1–30; 7 lines after I.61.35; 3 lines after I.61.32; 3 lines after I.16.36; 3 lines after I.16.40; 3 lines after I.17.7.

11 I have dealt in detail with the Finnish myth of the *sampo* as an analogue of the Norse mill in Tolley 1994–5; what follows is largely a summary of this discussion.

12 The proto-Iranians are thought to have lived much further to the west and north than modern Iran at the likely time of the loan, c. 2500 BC; *sampo* is one among several loans (including, for example, *taivas*, ‘heaven’) indicating a strong religious influence from the proto-Iranians (Koivulehto 1999, 230, 232).
Introduction

The sampo is the subject of a core of traditional poems existing in a great many variants, yet it is never described in detail in these poems, nor is its precise function determined. Its general effect was to ensure the wealth – but final destruction or detriment – of the possessor. Three poems, going back, it is believed, to at least AD 800, were fused into a sequence by 1200 (Kuusi 1949, 350–2; the dates are open to debate, but are based on factors such as distribution and variance of variants, on preservation of elements of archaic pagan belief, and on comparison with other folk poems relating to more firmly datable events): the Creation of the World, the Forging of the Sampo, and the Theft of the Sampo. In outline, the contents are:

_The Creation of the World._ Väinämöinen, the primordial sage, is shot by an enemy and drifts wounded for several years at sea where he performs various acts of creation. _The Forging of the Sampo._ Finally, he is washed ashore at Pohjola, whose mistress undertakes to return him to his own people on condition that he forges her a sampo. He promises that his fellow hero the smith Ilmarinen will do this and is allowed to return home. Ilmarinen agrees to forge the sampo, in return for which he is told he will receive the daughter of the mistress of Pohjola. Thus the sampo is made and provides the inhabitants of Pohjola with great wealth (in some versions explicitly by grinding). _The Theft of the Sampo._ Jealous of this, Väinämöinen and Ilmarinen set sail for Pohjola and steal the sampo. They are pursued and a furious battle takes place at sea, during which the mistress of Pohjola transforms herself into a vaakalintu (griffon), the sampo is smashed and the pieces are lost at sea. These and some fragments that are washed ashore bring fertility to land and sea.

The song was sung at the spring sowing (Suomen kansan vanhat runot I.1, 88b): Jyrkini Iivani related that ‘when the spring sowing was done, first the sowing words were sung and then the song of the forging and theft of the sampo, and of the pursuit of the Mistress of Pohjola’. There is thus a clear implication that recounting the tale of this wealth-producing object would strengthen the crops to ensure the well-being of the community.

There have been innumerable interpretations of the word sampo, most of them implausible. The word is in derivation an adjectival formation from sampa, which originally appears to have signified ‘pillar’ (Setälä 1932, 479). Sammakko, ‘mill base’, is another derivative from sampa; it means ‘that which supports a sampa’, i.e. the support for the mill’s central axle. Drawing on the apparently parallel sense of sammakko, sampo is likely to have been interpreted as ‘something fitted with a sampa’, i.e. a mill; in origin, however, it probably meant ‘sampa object’. Harva (1943, 101–4) offers the most convincing interpretation of this: the sampo is a cult representation of the world-pillar; such representations are found widely in Siberia (Holmberg 1922–3, 9–33). The world-pillar is generally visualised as unmoving (Harva 1943, 42), and the sampo differs in this respect. However, the connection of the word sampa with mills must have

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13 Four versions of the Finnish sampo poems are given in Kuusi, Bosley and Branch 1977, nos. 12–15; see also the commentary there (526).

14 Lönnrot (1958) records a saying in which maasampa means ‘world pillar’; the derivative sammas in Võro and Estonian means ‘pillar’, but in Finnish ‘stone’.
Grottasongr

affected the concept of the world-pillar among the Finns; the Indian myth of the churning of the milk ocean demonstrates the plausibility of connecting the world-pillar with a productive milling motion. Although by the time of recorded poems the Finns had largely lost the concept of a world-pillar, a piecing together of the evidence reveals a consistent picture. Closely associated with the *sampo* is the *kirjokansi*, ‘speckled lid’; *kansi* is used for ‘sky’ in the folk poetry. Since the North Star was referred to as the ‘nail of the north’ (preserved in the Estonian *põhjanael*), it seems the lid of the sky was fixed to the world pillar at the North Star, about which it turned. This turning came to be conceived as a sort of milling action, referred to as *sammasjauho* (*sampo*/*pillar grinding). The *sampo* is naturally situated in Pohjola, because this is ‘North Land’, near the North Star. The tale of its removal by the heroes is an explanation of why the seasons now progress uneasily without the level of productiveness of the golden age: the *sampo*’s being moved from its position represents the uneven turning of the earth about its axis, observed in the progression of the seasons. The actual shattering of the *sampo* would seem to mark a complete destruction, which is inappropriate for the world-pillar (though it might apply to a cult image of the pillar), but this element of the tale is believed to have been influenced by the shattering of the egg in the myth of creation; originally the *sampo* was probably broken or set askew, but not shattered.

Grotti may show little indication of being a form of world pillar (as the *sampo* appears to be), or of carrying out its milling on a mythologically significant cosmic level, yet both motifs may be glimpsed elsewhere in Norse poems.

A cryptic hint of mythologically significant milling (but unconnected to any notion of the world pillar, as far as the evidence goes) is given in *Vafþrúðnismál*, though the text is highly obscure. The giant Vafþrúðnir says (st. 35):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Örófi vetra</th>
<th>Numberless winters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>áðr væri iðr um skópð,</td>
<td>before the world was fashioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>þá var Bergelmir borinn;</td>
<td>Bergelmir was born;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>þat ek fyrst of man,</td>
<td>the first thing I remember</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>er sá inn fróði iðtunn</td>
<td>is when that wise giant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var á lúðr um lagiðr.</td>
<td>was laid on the mill-crib.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bergelmir is the last of a threesome of primordial giants, Aurgelmir, Prúðgelmir, Bergelmir. Stanza 35 appears to span Bergelmir’s life: the laying in a mill-crib thus marks the end of the giant’s life. There have been attempts at explaining away the sense ‘mill-crib’ for *lúðr*, so that a connection with milling cannot be regarded as certain.\(^\text{15}\) However, taking *lúðr* in its literal sense of ‘mill-crib’ yields an extraordinary, but not unparalleled, motif of a giant being ground up. Any interpretation of the three giants is bound to remain tentative, particularly in view of the uncertainty of the meaning of the names. Fulk argues (1989, 317) that

\(^{15}\) Christiansen suggests (1952, 101–5) that *lúðr* could mean ‘cradle’ here, on the basis of modern Norwegian *lur* (from Old Norse *lúðr*); it would seem inept, however, to describe a baby as *fróðr*. Holtsmark (1946, 53) proposed that *lúðr* could signify ‘coffin’; since *órk* can mean both ‘coffin’ and ‘ark’, Snorri could have invented the story he gives of how Bergelmir was saved with his household in the flood by climbing aboard his *lúðr* by association between *órk* and *lúðr*.‘
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aur- may be related to English ear (of corn). Vafþrúðnismál 33 tells that beneath Aurgelmir’s arm grew a girl and boy together: limb begat on limb a six-headed son. This is presumably the son Drúðgelmir, whose name is derived from þrúðr, ‘might’. Fulk argues that the six-headed son is a six-headed ear of (emmer) wheat. Bergelmir is to be interpreted as containing barr, ‘barley’ (alternating forms baraz-/bariz- in Germanic explain the vowel difference); a more common interpretation sees the name as standing for Berggelmir, Mountain roarer. Moreover, Aurgelmir is more naturally interpreted as containing aurr, fertile mud coming from water (cf. eyrr, ‘river-bank’): the poem recounts that he was formed from the coagulation of the primordial waters, Élivágar. The element -gelmir, ‘roarer’, characterises anything that roars loudly, in particular giants and torrential waters (as in Vögelmir and Hvergelmir, the source of all waters beneath the world-tree, and the related Gjöll, the underworld river). Aurgelmir appears to connect these two sorts of roaring entity in one being. Thus a motif may underlie the account of Vafþrúðnismál in which the fertile earth, aurr, emerging from water (cf. the raising of earth from ocean in Völuspá 4; see commentary in PE II), produces grain, which thrives (þrúðr), and is then ground up as barley (Bergelmir on the lúðr). The implication is that the origins of fertility lay in the primordial or underworld waters. The main objection to Fulk’s line of argument is that giants, while associated with sources of fertility, are not themselves producers of well-being (except when forced, as in Grettasongr).

The idea of being ground in a quern is implicit in Lokasenna 44, where it is said of Byggvir, a name also derived from the word for ‘barley’, at eyrom Freys mundu æ vera ok und kvernom klaka, ‘you will for ever be at Freyr’s ears and cluck under the quernstones’. There is no association with giants here, however. Clearer, but geographically remote, analogues can be found in the Middle East; in tenth-century Haran the pagans believed that fertility was secured by the god Tammuz being ground up by his master (al-Nadim 1970, 758), and in ancient Ugaritic sources Anat, on behalf of the fertility god Baal, grinds up their enemy Mot in what appears to be an act of splitting and parching grain for brewing (Wyatt 1998, 136). In England, the folksong ‘The Passion of the Corn’ may provide an analogue (and indeed possible descendant) of Byggvir in the person of John Barleycorn, ground up to provide food and drink.

Yet more difficult to interpret are some lines relating the tale of Mundilfæri in Vafþrúðnismál 23; here we are presented with an image of the turning heavens, and possibly a ‘handle’, a variant of the world pillar. We do not have any actual grinding here.

Mundilfæri heitir, He is called Mundilfæri,
hann er Mána faðir the father of Moon
ok svá Sólar it sama; and also of Sun;
himin hverfa they are to turn heaven
þau skulo hverian dag every day
oldom at ártali. for the reckoning of years for men.

16 The interpretation of Vafþrúðnismál 23 given here is based on that of Dronke, in her note to Völuspá 5/1–4 in PE II.
The meaning of the name Mundilfæri is open to interpretation, but Cleasby and Vigfusson (1957, s.v. Mundilфæri) suggest that the name’s first element is ‘akin to mёndull [mill-handle], referring to the veering round or revolution of the heavens’, so the meaning would be ‘mover of the handle’ or ‘effective with the handle’ or ‘handle device’ (see Fritzner 1886–1972, s.v. fœri, for the senses); a connection with mund, ‘time’ is also possible, especially in view of the comment in the latter part of the stanza. It is thus possible (as I argued in Tolley 1994–5) that the myth of Mundilfæri envisaged the sky being turned by means of a handle-like device, in this case to express a concept of the determining of time, the beneficent seasons (þar signifying both senses), where the ‘handle’ could be a version of the world support. The regulation of time through a turning motion in order to produce welfare (þar) – directly paralleled in Völsungaþ 6–8, where the gods meet on Íðavöllr, ‘Eddy field’ (see PE II, 118–19 for this interpretation of this admittedly obscure name), and apportion the times of day before enjoying their riches – is clearly analogous to the motif of the wealth and security milled out by Grotti, yet, in its extant form, the Grotti myth is not interested in the temporal regulation that, for the poets of Vafþrúðnismál and Völsungaþ, underlies abundance.

In Norse mythological tradition, then, we find (if the above interpretations of the meagre evidence are accepted) both the notion of the grinding of corn as a symbol of cosmic abundance, and (but distinct from the previous one) the image of the cosmos turning, or being turned with a handle (reminiscent of the Eurasian mythical world pillar), in such a way as to regulate time and the abundance of the seasons which depends upon this regulation. Grotti, however, is primarily an adaptation of the wonder-mill – the mill of folktales which grinds whatever its master bids. It assumes an aura of the cosmic, the mythic, only by allusion to motifs such as the gold-spangled reign of the King of Peace and the demiurgic giants which have taken on a cosmic significance (through association with the image of the gods’ age of plenty). By contrast, the sampo must once have formed an integral part of traditional Finnish cosmology; it shows the signs of its high origin in the sustaining pillar of the cosmos, but in the extant poems has been reduced to little more than a wonder-mill. The tales of both Grotti and sampo have been ‘tainted’ by the aetiological salt-mill motif of folklore, which lends a certain similarity between the tales, but essentially the Norse and Finnish mill legends are quite distinct;17 thus Grotti, by the time it is represented in Norse tradition, plays a part in certain distinct mythological situations not represented in Finnish myth, such as the mill’s derivation from the chthonic world of the giants, represented as antagonists of the gods or orderly society of men, and the legendary fall of the house of Fróði. The Finnish and Indian analogues are of interest chiefly in demonstrating the differences in legendary or mythological realisations of the concept of the mill that are found in different societies.

17 As I have argued previously (Tolley 1994–5), the acceptance by Finnish scholars (see for example Kuusi, Bosley and Branch 1977, 527–8) of Lid’s proposal (1949) that the tale of the sampo derives (at least in many particulars) from Norse sources does not bear close scrutiny; once we are left with little more than a vague similarity between Grotti and sampo as common-place folktale wonder-mills, there is little reason to postulate much, if any, influence between the mythologems in any essential aspects (whilst admitting the possibility that some of the more peripheral details may perhaps have constituted motifs shared between these neighbouring lands).
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Conclusion

We may now hazard some ideas about the connection between King Fróði and the mill Grotti.

The fertility gods Nerthus and Freyr both undertook perambulations among their people; Fróði was probably believed to do the same – certainly his dead body was carried around his realms after his death in what must have been a ritual act of blessing. This visitation is to be related to the cycle of the seasons, and in particular to the passage of the sun (the cart which carried Nerthus reminds us of the Trundholm waggon, with its gilded wheels and large disc, surely meant to represent the sun). The time of peace and prosperity under Fróði was no doubt a later reflection of the ritually enacted season of peace which obtained during Nerthus’ visitation, as well as being comparable to the mythical time of plenty of the primordial gods in *Voluspá* 6–8, where the whirring cycle of time and cosmos is represented by the gods’ meeting place, Íðavöllr, and to the abundance of the seasons brought about by the activity of Mundilfær, ‘turner of the handle’ of the world in *Vafþrúðnismál* 23.

We might well envisage that another image for the same turning around of the seasons would be that of the cosmic mill, whereby the firmament revolves around the North Star in the manner of a hand-quern, the seasons resulting from this milling. The Finns appear in ancient times to have conceived the structure of the cosmos in this fashion; it would well explain the connection between the mill Grotti and the fertility king Fróði if the Norse also had this image. Yet, at least in the extant records, Grotti scarcely seems to have been possessed of such a lofty mythological role; rather, it appears that a folktale of the wonder-working mill has become associated with Fróði simply because both were guarantors of wealth or fertility.

It is a remarkable characteristic of nearly all fertility beings in the Norse area that they are associated with water. The earliest record is of Nerthus, who emerges from a lake, and returns there: the waters surely mark a deathly realm from which fertility emerges, a motif found in many Middle Eastern myths. Ñjórr dwell at Nóatún, ‘ship meadow’ (*Grimnismál* 16). Úllr (Ollerus) was noted for his magical skills at sea in Saxo (III, iv.12). Íng in the Old English *Rune Poem* passed ‘over the waves’. In *Skírnismál* Freyr wooed Gerðr out of the courts of her father Gymir, the gaping ocean. Two accounts of the deaths of the various Fróðis stand out; the motif of a violent death by a wild animal is found with many fertility deities, but here the motif is specifically one of death by a wild beast from the sea; in the one case this is explicit, in that a sea-cow slays Frotho III with its tusks, in the other it is implicit, in that Fróði is said to be killed by Mýsingr, described as a sea-captain by Snorri, but whose name is linked to ‘mouse’.\(^\text{18}\)

It is therefore noteworthy that in Finnish the *sampo* ends up in the sea, and the Norse Grotti likewise sinks, though this may have been a motif avoided by the author of the poem (Snæbjörn’s verse, considered below, may, however,

\(^\text{18}\) The connection of fertility gods with the sea is a huge topic; for a discussion of some key aspects, see Dronke 1998; I touch upon further ideas (primarily as they relate to Old English) in Tolley 1996.
The sea appears to be the destination of whatever engenders fertility, be it the demigod king, or the mechanical means of its production.

The motif of the destructive giantesses is specifically Norse; it is consistent with the presentation of giantesses in *Voluspá*, wishing to deprive gods and men of the fruits of well-being.

The motif of being ground up is found in association with some fertility gods; the myth of Bergelmir possibly reflects this in Norse (but this may equally well be a faulty interpretation). It does not seem that the fertility god himself is ground up in Norse, however. Nonetheless, the association of Byggvir with Freyr indicates at least that fertility gods and milling were associated, making a deep-rooted connection between Fróði and Grotti all the more likely.

The kernel of the poem may be a very old concept: the turning of the corn-mill, and its falling and cracking off its proper pedestal, being an ancient metaphor within agricultural societies for an imagined erstwhile era of luxury and its subsequent loss, a metaphor which in certain traditions takes on a cosmic significance through its association with the turning of the heavens, and consequently the seasons, above the earth.

VI. The poetic background, and date and place of composition

The skaldic tradition

Relevant kennings for gold, in roughly chronological order (only the first three are from poems attributed to the pagan period), are:

- *Fróða mjöl*, ‘Fróði’s meal’ (Egill Skallagrímsson, *Hofðaðlausn* 17/8, Skj B I, 33);
- *Fróða þýja meldr*, ‘the grinding of Fróði’s slave-girls’ (Eyvindr Finnsson skáldaspillir, *lausavísa* 8, Skj B I, 64);
- *Fenju forverk*, ‘Fenja’s menial work’ (Bjarkamál 4/3, Skj B I, 170);
- *Fenju meldr*, ‘Fenja’s grinding’ (Dormóðr Bersason Kolbrúnarskáld, *lausavísa* 24, Skj B I, 266; Einarr Skúlason, *Óxarflokkr* 6, Skj B I, 450; Snorri Sturluson, *Háttatal* 43, Skj B II, 73);
- *Fróða sáð*, ‘Fróði’s seed’ (Einarr Skúlason, *Óxarflokkr* 3, Skj B I, 450);

Of interest (despite differences such as Fróði’s not being explicitly young or prematurely killed) is the analogue noted by Krappe 1936, 54 (cf. Krappe 1924, 332): ‘We furthermore know that a festival of general mourning was annually celebrated in Mysia, where it was connected with the name of King Kyzikos, said to have ruled over the Doliones in ancient times. Scholars are agreed in regarding him as one of those many youthful divinities doomed to a premature death: Hyakinthos, Hylas, Hippolytos, Attis, Adonis, etc., i.e. as a fertility daemon. He, too, is slain all of a sudden during a nightly invasion from the sea. Nor is this all. The most prominent feature of the annual festival commemorating Kyzikos seems to have been a grinding ritual, a ceremony where the celebrants, generally women, took a hand-mill and ground, accompanying their work with doleful dirges, the subject of which was King Kyzikos and his fatal death. It is not difficult to conjecture that such a ritual was known also in the North, as is proved by the mediaeval *cantilenae molares*, that one of the songs accompanying the rites was attached to the name of the god-king Frey-Fróði, and that it gave origin to the story of the grinding giantesses. In other words, the myth of Fróði’s death is an aetiological tale explaining why the death of the mythical king was sung by grinding women at the grinding festival held in commemoration of this death and the end of the golden age.’
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Fróða meldr, ‘Fróði’s grinding’ (Rógvaldr jarl Kolsson, lausavísa 15, Skj B I, 482);
Fróða fagbygg, ‘Fróði’s fair barley’ (Óláfs drápa Tryggvasonar 25, Skj B I, 573);
Fróða fróthyygg, ‘Fróði’s peace barley’ (Snorri Sturluson, Háttatal 43, Skj B II, 73);
Grotta glædrípt, ‘Grotti’s glad drift’ (Snorri Sturluson, Háttatal 43, Skj B II, 73);
Fenju fagrmjöll, ‘Fenja’s fair meal’ (Njáls saga, st. 24, Skj B II, 217);
Menju góð, ‘Menja’s good things’ (the Eddic Sigurðarkviða in skamma 52).

The legend of Grottasongr is thus reflected in kennings for ‘gold’ from the pagan period on; Fróði and Fenja are mentioned, but Menja only once. Grotti occurs only in one kenning, which postdates Grottasongr, apart from the verse of Snæbjörn considered below. Rarely is any narrative element found; however, Einarr Skúlason’s Öxarflokkr 6 (first half of twelfth century) reads: frák at Fróða meyjar fullgóliga mólu […] grafaðit, ‘I have heard that Fróði’s maidens ground quite joyfully the serpent’s bed [gold]’ (Skj B I, 450). This is in direct opposition to other sources, which stress the misery of the girls – unless it reflects the tradition of st. 5–6 of Grottasongr, where the girls seem glad to be grinding out wealth. The fact that the same poem contains two more kennings for gold from the Grotti legend is explained by the fact that gold is the central theme of the work.

One of our earliest sources, Eyvindr skáldaspillir, cleverly contrasts two images derived from the myth of gold as corn (I follow Davidson 1983, 205–6):

Bár um Ullr um alla
imunlauks á hauka
fjöllum Fýrisvalla
fræ Hákonar ævi;
nú hefir folkstríðir Fróða
faglýjaðra þýja
meldr i móður holdi
mellu dolgs um fölgin.

God of the battle-leek [warrior], we used to carry the corn of Fýrisvellir [gold]
on our hawks’ hills [arms] during all the life of Hákon; now an enemy of the people (i.e. Haraldr Eiríksson) has hidden the flour of the joyless bondwomen of Fróði [gold] in the flesh of the mother of the enemy of the giantess [earth].

This indicates that Fróði was regarded as oppressive towards his slave-girls, and probably was seen as an enemy of the people like King Haraldr (note the juxtaposition of folkstríðir Fróða); the indications are that Fróði’s golden age was regarded as collapsing in strife (see Davidson 1983, 206).

Snæbjörn’s verse on Grotti

The only mention of Grotti earlier than Grottasongr is in a stanza (probably not originally a lausavísa) by one Snæbjörn, whose identity is unknown; a tenth- to eleventh-century date is likely:20

They say the nine brides [waves] of the island mill-crib [ocean] turn vigorously a most army-cruel Grotti of the skerries [whirlpool], out at the rim of the earth [ocean], they who long since have ground the meal [sand] of Amlóði’s liquor [sea]. The ring-diminisher [prince] cuts with the prow of his vessel the habitation of the hillside of ships [waves].

The sea is pictured here as fiercely grinding up the land as a mill does meal. The sea is an eylúðr, island mill-crib, since it surrounds islands in the way the flat lúðr surrounds the quernstones upon it; a similar image (without the mill element) underlies jarðar skaut, ‘rim, i.e. surroundings, of land’. Sand is pictured as the meal resulting from the milling action of the sea (the kenning is explained by reference to Saxo III, vi.10, where Amlethus, feigning madness, says that the sand is farra [. . .] albicanibus maris procellis permolita, ‘meal ground fine by the hoary tempests of the sea’). ‘Grotti of the skerries’ may be another kenning for ‘ocean’, seen as the grinder-up of skerries. But the reference is surely more specific: this Grotti is hergrimmastan, ‘the most army-cruel’, because, it is to be assumed, it swallows armies on board perishing ships – or because it ground out an army to destroy Fróði, as Grottasǫngr reports. Snorri’s explanation that a whirlpool arose from the eye of the sunken Grotti is surely relevant here: Snæbjörn means specifically an ocean whirlpool by ‘Grotti of the skerries’, the skerries in question being the hidden treacherous rocks below water which cause the currents, and which were imagined as being a sunken quern. The use of the superlative may suggest that Snæbjörn has a particular whirlpool in mind, but we cannot be certain. In any case it is situated ‘out at the rim of the earth’, a phrase which, if taken merely as a kenning for ‘ocean’ becomes rather otiose: it is probably meant to bear a literal sense as well. The prince is thus pictured not merely as crossing the ocean, but as crossing distant reaches of the ocean made perilous by a mighty whirlpool.

Snæbjörn’s verse is important, for it shows that Snorri is unlikely to have invented the tale of Grotti’s demise in the ocean; Snorri has tacked this story onto his summary of Grottasǫngr, which had no use for the tale, as it reaches its conclusion with the fall of Fróði. Analogues considered above indicate that the wonder-working mill is likely from the earliest times to have been thought of as perishing in the ocean. The poet of Grottasǫngr has drawn on only part of the ancient tale for his account. Snæbjörn’s verse tends also to suggest that the motif of the mill grinding out an army against Fróði is an ancient element of the story.
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Darðarljóð

*Grottasðongr* is represented as a worksong (though it is not comparable with actual worksongs recorded from many oral traditions): it is explicitly said to accompany the work of milling. Such songs – which are primarily the preserve of women – must have been commonplace in Viking, as in other, societies, yet we have only one other poem of a comparable nature in Old Norse. *Darðarljóð* (again, really a pseudo–worksong) is cited in full in ch. 157 of *Njáls saga*. It is explained in the prose that a certain Óðruðr saw some women in a bower working at a loom, but instead of cloth, they were weaving men’s entrails, and men’s heads were the loom–weights. It is said that the vision coincided with the Battle of Clontarf in 1014. In his edition of the poem Poole shows that the verse does not warrant the interpretation given in the saga’s prose (Poole 1991, 120–5). Óðruðr is probably an invention, formed from the word *darradar* (genitive), an archaic word for ‘pennant’, that occurs in the poem. There is no indication of a bower, and it seems rather that the valkyries, the women doing the weaving, are in fact engaged in battle. The poem is relating the course of a battle, which is described using the metaphor of weaving at a loom. It uses the framework of a song accompanying weaving, but the work is in reality slaughter rather than weaving. Moreover, the poem may originally have commemorated an earlier battle, in 919, in which the Irish were decisively defeated. The structure of the poem is thus description of the battle, in terms of weaving (st. 1–3); the valkyries’ avowal of support for the ‘young king’, accompanied by a worksong refrain *vindum, vindum vef darradar*, ‘let us wind, let us wind the weaving of the pennant’ (st. 4–6); a series of prophecies resulting from the battle and the poem’s conclusion (st. 7–11). These prophecies are that death lies in store for the great king, that the dwellers of the headlands will rule the lands, that the Irish will grieve, and that news of the disaster will travel across the land. The actual end of the battle is marked in st. 8 with the statement *nú er vefr ofinn en vólr roðinn*, ‘now the fabric is woven and the field dyed red’. The poem concludes with the valkyries exclaiming ‘let us ride hence with brandished swords’, that is away from the battle described and on to others.

The author of *Njáls saga* has interpreted the whole poem as a supernatural representation of the battle, however, in which an actual task of weaving with men’s bodies determines the outcome of the fight; in some sense the valkyries are seen as both present in the battle and determining it from outside.

The outline structure of *Grottasðongr* is: arrival and setting up of the quern

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21 That songs accompanied milling is specifically mentioned in *Haraldsuna saga* ch. 18 (ÍF 28, 325), where King Sigurðr, riding in vík, hears singing so beautiful that he seeks out the house it is coming from, and there *stóð kona ein við kvern ok kvót fyrkunnar fagert, er hon mótt, ‘a woman stood by the quern and sang remarkably well as she milled*. Sigurðr sleeps with the woman, named Dóra, who then bears a son named Hákon. The richness of women’s worksongs is exemplified in the Gaelic waulking songs of the Scottish islands (themselves once Norse) preserved into the present century: see the large collection of waulking songs in Campbell and Collinson 1969–81.

22 Compare the game of *gwydddwyll* between Arthur and Owain in *The Dream of Rhonabwy* in the *Mabinogion* (slightly earlier than *Njáls saga*, which is probably late thirteenth century: *Njáls saga* lxxxiv), where it is implied that the moves in the game correspond to the developments in the battle.
Grottasõngr

(st. 1–4); the gladsome declaration, beginning with the worksong-like exhortation *mõlum* [. . .] *mõlum* (st. 5), of the riches to be milled for the king (st. 5–6); interjection of the king (st. 7); recounting of the giantesses’ life – the uncovering of the quernstones, the engagement in battle as *framvisar tvær*, ‘two foresighted women’, the arrival in misery at Fróði’s (st. 8–17); the continuing milling, with the worksong-like refrain *mõlum enn framarr* in 21–2, as a hostile army attacks Fróði, and the prophecy that he will lose his throne (st. 17–22); the collapse of the mill (st. 23); the final statement by the girls that the milling is completed (st. 24).

Some of the structural elements of *Darðararljóð* may have influenced *Grottasõngr*. The stanzas of support for Fróði (st. 5–6) match those of support for the young king by the valkyries; and as *Darðararljóð* switches to prophesying death for the mighty king (his opponent), *Grottasõngr* predicts the downfall of the king, Fróði (st. 20). The declaration that the fabric is woven, intimating that the battle is over (*Darðararljóð* 8), corresponds to the concluding statement of the giant girls that *malit hõfum* [. . .] *sem munum hætta*, ‘we have milled so that we shall stop’, from which we understand that the vengeance is assured. One of the weakest structural elements of *Grottasõngr* is the engagement in wars in Sweden by the ‘two foresighted women’ (st. 13–15); this confirms the girls’ warrior status, but not their foresight (which may even be referred to ironically), and the emphasis on the episode seems excessive. On the other hand, the engagement in battle by the foresighted valkyries forms the central theme of *Darðararljóð*. It would seem likely that the poet of *Grottasõngr* wished to appropriate some of the awe of these prophetic valkyries by incorporating an episode of slaughterous activity conducted by the ‘foresighted’ giantesses. Two phrases in the poem suggest borrowing from *Darðararljóð*. The giantesses say (st. 13/4) *i fólk stigum*, ‘we strode into battle’, just as the valkyries say *fram skulum ganga ok í fólk vaða*, ‘we must go forth and advance into battle’ (*Darðararljóð* 4/5–6); and, describing the loom, it is said that *járnvæðr yllir*, ‘the shed rod is ironclad’ (*Darðararljóð* 2/7), just as when the quern breaks to pieces it is despite the *støðr*, ‘supports’, being *úrmi varðar*, ‘ironclad’ (st. 21/7).

*Grottasõngr* differs from *Darðararljóð* in various respects. The valkyries express support for a young king and predict the downfall of his opponent, whereas the mill in *Grottasõngr* churns out both blessings and misfortunes for the same king, and Mýsingr is no more than an implied agent of the giantesses’ vengeance against Fróði. In addition, there is no question but that the giantesses are actually milling: therefore it is their action of milling which produces the avenging army to overthrow Fróði. They also seem to envisage themselves as engaged in the fighting – *eruma valnar í valdreyra*, ‘we are not squeamish in the blood of slaughter’. Thus the scene seems somewhat closer to the interpretation of the author of *Njáls saga*, a sort of simultaneous involvement in the milling which is determining the battle’s fate, and in the fatal battle as it is being determined. A greater poet might, along the lines of *Darðararljóð*, have imagined the act of mining gold and mastering the chthonic forces of the rocks in which it was found through the metaphor of the giantesses’ milling, but the aspirations of the author of *Grottasõngr* were clearly less lofty.
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The heroic-verse context

An investigation of the vocabulary of Grottasongr reveals a series of analogues in Eddic heroic verse, but very few in mythological verse. Clearly the author regarded his work as belonging among the tales of men, not gods.

Elsewhere in Eddic poetry Fróði is mentioned only in Helgakviða Hundingsbana I 13, sleit Fróða fríða frýnda á milli; fára viðris grey valgirn um ey, ‘Fróði’s peace was cut between enemies; Óðinn’s wolves go about the isle eager for slaughter’. Other vocabulary is also reflected in the Helgakviður (see commentary to 16/7, 19/3, 20/4). It is likely that vígspiõll (19/3) is borrowed from Helgakviða Hundingsbana II, where it is used more aptly. The most striking parallel is with st. 2–4 of Helgakviða Hundingsbana II, which (with the preceding prose) read:

Hamall hét sonr Hagals. Hundingr konungr sendi menn til Hagals at leita Helga. En Helgi mátti eigi forðaz annan veg en tók klæði ambótta ok gekk at mala. Peir leitoðo ok fundo eigi Helga. Pá kvað Blindr inn bólvisi:

Hamall was the name of Hagall’s son. King Hundingr sent some men to Hagall to search for Helgi. Helgi could not escape danger any other way than by putting on the attire of a servant girl and going to grind. They searched and did not find Helgi. Then Blindr the mischief-causer said:

‘Hvoss ero augo
í Hagals þýio,
era þat karls ætt
er á kvernorn stendr:
steinar rifna,
stökkr lúdr fyrrir!

Nú hefir hõrð dœmi
hildingr þegit,
er visi skal
valbygg [mala];
heldr er sæmri
hendi þeiri
meðalkafli
en mõndultré.’

Hagall svaraði ok kvað:

‘Pat er litil vá,
þótt lúðr þrumi,
er mær konungs
mõndul hrærir;
hón skævaði
skýiom efri
ok vegu þorði
sem vikingar,

‘It means little,
even though the corn-bin thunders,
as the king’s daughter
turns the handle;
she used to dart
over the clouds
and dared to battle
like the Vikings,

‘Sharp are the eyes
on Hagall’s slave-girl,
that is no working-man’s lineage
standing at the quern:
the stones are cracking,
and the corn-crib flies loose before her!

Now the prince has received
a harsh sentence:
the ruler must mill
foreign barley;
a swordhilt suits
that hand
rather better
than a mill-handle.’

Hagall answered and said:
Grottasongr

áðr hana Helgi before Helgi
hopto gørði; took her captive;
systir er hón þeira she is the sister
Sigars ok Hoğa, of Sigarr and Hogni,
þvi hefir òtul augo that’s why the servant
Ylfinga man.' of the Ylfings has sharp eyes.’

The scene may have influenced the poet of Grottasongr. Like Fenja and Menja in the poem (but without parallel elsewhere, and incidental even to the theme of the poem), according to Hagall the worker of the mill in Helgakviða Hundingsbana II is a noble woman used to engaging in battle before being captured by Helgi: and hence the quernstones are cracking and the whole apparatus shaking. This confirms the social aspect of Grottasongr: the foreign female war-captives put to menial work on the mill, and the resentment they undoubtedly felt. The shattering of Grotti – an event inconsistent with its subsequent role as a salt-mill in the ocean depths, which seems already to be a part of the folktales of Grotti by the time of Snæbjörn, but which the poet of Grottasongr has ignored – is perhaps an exaggeration of the harsh treatment Helgi gives the quern (though this may well not be the only source of this variant of the story of the mill). The word val-bygg in Helgakviða Hundingsbana II 3/4 could also imply a meaning ‘slaughter barley’, which is effectively what the giantesses grind in Grottasongr.

The name Gotþormr/Guttormr is found in the heroic poems; as the name occurs along with Knúi only in a verse of Órvar-Odds saga this must be considered a possible source (cf. also commentary to 13/8).

Other analogues are found with Atlamál (see commentary to 14, 16/8, 19/6; in st. 14 there is some possibility of influence from Atlamál), Atlakviða (see commentary to 16/7), Gripisspá (see commentary to 1/3, 15/5–6), Sigrdríðumál (see commentary to 6/7, 16/7), Guðrúnargviða I (see commentary to 8/3), Sigrudarkviða in skamna (see commentary to 16/8). Some analogues in what might be termed ‘semi-heroic’ poems are also found: Rígsþula (see commentary to 16/5–6, 23/2), Hárbardsljóð (see commentary to 16/8), Hyndluljóð (see commentary to 19/1); of these only Rígsþula 16/5–6 is significant, suggesting possible borrowing.

One likely borrowing from Grottasongr is found in Ívarr Ingimundarson (see commentary to 19/7–8), composing c. 1140, which would give a terminus ante quem for the poem’s composition.

Other literary influences and parallels

It is likely that the poet was familiar with skaldic verse (see commentary to 9, 9/7, 11/8, 14/8, 15/5), but specific influence is only reasonably demonstrable in the cases of Egill (see commentary to 7/3–4, 16/7, also st. 6) and Bjarkamál (which recounted the fall of a successor of Fróði’s, Hrólf kraki) (see commentary to 18/4–5, 19). The expression dólgs siõtul, though not in fact a kenning, may reveal a familiarity with skaldic technique (though compare similar phrases in Eddic verse: see commentary to 16/7).

It is difficult to trace influence from Skjoldunga saga in the absence of the
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Old Norse text, but it seems likely that the poet is alluding to descriptions of the golden age of Fróði that had already crystallised into a form resembling what is found in Skjöldunga saga (see commentary to st. 6, also 11).

The date and place of composition

Several factors indicate a late date for the composition of Grottasóngr in its extant form (even though, as has been shown, individual elements in the poem are likely to be of great antiquity). There is nothing of a mythological nature in the poem which challenges our understanding: indeed, there is little reflection of what must once have been a rich mythological field. Fróði is son of Friðleifr, which must be the result of genealogical speculation made after the end of paganism, and is in agreement with sources from the thirteenth century on. It seems that frið-Fróði and Heathobard Fróði are confused (perhaps deliberately) by the poet, as would scarcely have happened in the pagan period. There is an appeal to a tradition of the Fróða friðr similar to that of Skjöldunga saga, most likely a twelfth-century work. The poet shows a familiarity with heroic Eddic verse, some of it late (like Átlamál: probably twelfth century, see PE I, 111).

The vocabulary of the poem also indicates a late date. Some of it occurs chiefly in prose (see commentary to 9/7, 15/5, 19/6, 23/4); and there are three words which derive from the developed lexicon of Christianity (alsæll (5/2), meginverkum (11/6), miskunnlausar (16/3)), which point to a date not earlier than the twelfth century. If Grottasóngr is indeed quoted around 1140, a date shortly before that would be most likely for its composition.

Guðrún Nordal (2001, 310), following Bjarni Guðnason, emphasises the importance of Danish royal history in the later twelfth century in Iceland (and implies that the Danish influence in fact stretches back to much earlier in the century):

Throughout this study I have noted the eminence of Danish myths and legends in relation to skaldic poetry and during the earliest phase of the writing of royal historia. It is, I believe, no coincidence that this Danish bias is most recognizable in learned works on skaldic poetics – Snorra Edda, Háttalykill, and Skáldatal – as well as in the subject matter of poems preserved in, and in conjunction with, Snorra Edda in manuscripts (e.g., Ragnarsdrápa, Jómsvíkingadrápa, Málshátta-kvæði, and Rigspula). These texts suggest that the textual culture, and the study of skaldic poetics in particular, was subject to a decisive and unequivocal Danish influence. Why was this the case? Earlier we tentatively endorsed Bjarni Guðnason’s view that this fascination with Danish history resulted from the formative influence of Lund on the education of Icelanders in the twelfth century. Lund was the archiepiscopal seat for Iceland until the establishment of the archbishopric at Niðaróss in 1153. Six Icelandic bishops, three at Hólar and three at Skálaholt, were consecrated at Lund in the twelfth century. [. . .] These cultural links with Lund and Denmark were not broken off after the founding of Niðaróss, but were actively maintained thereafter.

23 Bjarni Guðnason suggests 1180–1200 in Danakonunga sögur lii.
Grottasongr

Nordal notes (312) the convention in European historiography of this period to set the royal genealogy within a mythic framework, a convention followed for example by William of Malmesbury (d. c. 1142) and Geoffrey of Monmouth (d. c. 1154) and taken up in the preface to Snorri’s Edda. Genealogy was a primary concern of the earliest vernacular writings in Iceland (beginning in the later eleventh century), according to the First Grammatical Treatise (fol. 84/14, p. 12).

It is surely within this period of focus upon Danish royal genealogy and its mythic background that Grottasongr as we have it was composed. The poem labours the point about the importance of genealogy; whilst the focus is upon the family history of the giantesses, this surely acts as a foil to the Danish king Fróði, whose ancestry, as has been noted, was a major source of fascination in historical works from the late twelfth century. The poem also appears, like Rígsþula, to be concerned with social order, in that Fróði suffers as a result of maltreatment of his slaves, whose real nature is belied by their menial status – noblesse oblige, and when that obligation is ignored it leads to disaster. It is not clear, however, that social concern of this sort can be used as a criterion of dating.

Given the likely date of the poem’s composition in the twelfth century, I have treated it as essentially a literary product (though the shift from orality to literacy was certainly not a black-and-white affair); hence the many parallels found in other poems are treated as allusions or borrowings, rather than reflections of oral formulas, though it is, naturally, impossible to be certain that this was always the case.

There is no evidence to suggest firmly where the poem was composed. The existence of two words in the poem, gria and vamlar (or valnar), which are not Icelandic, and the fact that cuckoos are not found in Iceland, suggests that the poem is not Icelandic. The word valnar (if we favour that reading) has a sense most appropriate to the poem in Norn. The word grotti also survived in Norn. Stories of Grotti Minnie and Grotti Finnie and their salt-quern in the Swelchie of the Pentland Firth survived on Orkney at least until 1895 (Johnston 1908–9, 297); Fenja and Menja had by then become witches, characters of local superstition used to frighten children. Manuscripts A and B (AM 748, 757) of Snorri’s Edda, in an addition to Snorri’s work, recount the following (SnE 259):

Kvern heitir Grótti, er átti Fróði konungr; hon mól hvetvetna þat er hann vildi, gull ok frið. Fenja ok Menja hétu ambáttir þær, er mólu. Þá tók Mýsingr sakonung Grótts ok lét mala hvitasalt á skip sin, þar til er þau suku á Péttlandsfirði. Þar er svelgr síðan, er sær fellr í auga Gróttu. Þa gnýr sær, er hon gnýr, ok þa varð sjóirinn saltr.

A quern is called Grotti, which King Fróði possessed; it milled whatever he wished, gold and peace. Fenja and Menja were the names of the servant girls who milled. Then Mýsingr a sea-king took Grotta and had salt ground on his

24 Cuckoos are mentioned by Egill and Snorri, however, both (travelled) Icelanders.
25 This last echo of the tale of Grottasongr appears to have died away as soon as it was recorded; Tom Muir, an Orkney folklore researcher, is clear that no further tales of Fenja and Menja have been recorded from Orkney, so effective was the opposition from the local Kirk to Norn language and traditions (personal communication).
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ships, until they sank in the Pentland Firth. There has been a whirlpool there ever since, where the sea falls into the eye of Grotta. Then the sea grates as the mill grates, and then the sea became salty.

Clearly the connection between Grotti and the Orkney whirlpool called the Swelchie is old. It is at least possible that the poem was formed with these traditions behind it, though the whirlpool motif is explicitly excluded by the poet from his work.
Grottasongr

Sonn Friðleífrs hét Fróði. Hann tók konungdóm eptir fóður sinn í þann tíð er Augustus keisari lagði frið of heim allan; þá var Kristr borinn. En fyrir því at Fróði var allra konunga ríkstr um alla danska tungu, ok kalla Norómenn þat Fróða frið. Engi maðr grandaði óðrum, þótt hann hitti fyrir sér fóðurbana eða bróðurbana lausan eða bund- ínn. Þá var ok engi þiófr eða ránsmáðr, svá at gullhringer einn lá á Ilangrsheiði lengi. Fróði konungr sötti heimboð í Sviðióð til þess konungs, er Fjólnir er nefndr. Þá keypti hann ambáttir tvær, en hétu Fenia ok Menia; þær voru mik- lar ok sterkar. Í þann tíma fannz í Danmork kverninar tveir svá miklir, at engi var svá sterkr, at dregit gæti; en sú náttúra fylgði kvernunum, at þat mólz á kverninni, sem sá maðt fyrir, er mól. Sú kvern hét Grotti. Hengið þá er sá nefndr, er Fróða konungi gaf kvernina. Fróði konungr lét leiða ambáttinnar til kverninartr ok bað þær mala gull, ok svá gerðu þær, mólu fyrst gull, ok frið ok sælu Fróða; þá gaf hann þeim eigi lengri hvíld eða svefn en gaukrinn þagði eða hlíðð máttí kvöða; þat er sagt, at þær kvæði líðð þau, er kallat er Grottasongr. Ok ár létti kvæðinu, mólu þær her at Fróða, svá at á þeirri nótt kom þar sá sækonungr, er Mýsingr hét, ok drap Fróða, tók þar herfag mikit. Þá lagðiz Fróða friðr. Mýsingr hafði með sér Grotta ok svá feniu ok Meniu ok bað þær mala salt; ok at miðri nótt spurðu þær, ef eigi leiddiz Mýsingi salt. Hann bað þær mala lengr. Þær mólu litla hríð, aðr niðr sökk skipit, ok var þar eptir sveglir í hafinu, er særinn fellr í kvernar augat; þá varð sær saltr.

The son of Friðleífr was named Fróði. He succeeded to the kingdom after his father at the time that the emperor Augustus imposed peace on the whole world; Christ was born then. As Fróði was most powerful of all kings in

The text of the poem is preserved only in manuscripts SR and T (st. 1 also in C) of Snorri’s Edda; the SR text is followed here, with variants from C and T noted. Each stanza begins with a capital in the manuscripts (unless noted otherwise in the textual notes), and in SR most helmingar are marked with ‘T’ also marks many helmingar in 8-line stanzas with a capital (not 1b, 2b, 6b, 9b, 11b (but preceded by point), 13b, 17b, 18b, 21b). In T, forms of d, ð are indistinguishable, and are transcribed here according to the sound in the context. A common source of misreadings in both manuscripts has been mimn confusion; see st. 3/1, 3/4, 4/2, 8/4, 17/5, 19/6, 21/7. The prose introduction is standardised from SnE, where textual variants may be found listed.

Conventions: IC initial capital, MC marginal capital, italics: emendation, [ ] not in manuscript, † † reading from another manuscript, †† manuscript letter omitted in emendation, ††† text transferred, ‡ superscript addition in manuscript, † end of line in manuscript, †† omission, ††† addition. Underdots (representing deletions) are scribal.
northern lands the peace was ascribed to him in all the Norse-speaking lands, and the Norsemen call it the peace of Fróði. No one harmed another, even if he chanced upon his father’s or brother’s slayer before him, free or bound. There was no thief or robber then, so a gold ring long lay upon Jalangrsheiðr. King Fróði visited a king called Fiðlnir in Sweden. He bought two slave-girls named Fenia and Menia; they were big and strong. At that time two quern-stones were found in Denmark, so big that no one could move them. It was a feature of the quernstones that they would grind out whatever the grinder told them to. This quern was called Grotti. Hengikjóptr was the name of the one who gave Fróði the quernstones. King Fróði had the slave-girls led to the quern and ordered them to grind out gold, and so they did: they ground out gold first, and peace and well-being for Fróði. He gave them no more rest or sleep than a cuckoo is silent or it takes to sing a song. It is said that they sang the lay called ‘The Song of Grotti’. And before the quern stopped they ground out an army against Fróði, so that at night there came a sea-king called Mýsingr, who slew Fróði and took great booty there. That was the end of Fróði’s Peace. Mýsingr took Grotti with him and Fenia and Menia too, and he ordered them to grind salt. At midnight they asked if Mýsingr was not tired of salt. He ordered them to carry on milling. They milled for a little while until the ship sank. There was afterwards a whirlpool in the ocean where the sea fell into the eye of the quernstone: then the sea became salt.

1 ‘Nú erum komnar 
til konungs húsa 
framvísar tvær, 
Fenia ok Menia.’ 
Þær ro at Fróða, 
Fríðleifs sonar, 
máttkar meyjar, 
at mani hafðar.

2 Þær at lúðri 
leiddar vóru 
ok griótz griá 
gangs of beiddu; 
hét hann hvárígrí 
hvild né ynóí, 
áðr hann heyrði 
hlóm ambátta.

1 ‘Now we have come 
to the king’s houses, 
far-sighted, both of us, 
Fenia and Menia.’ 
They are at Fróði’s, 
Fríðleif’s son, 
mighty maidens 
kept as menials.

2 To the mill-crib 
they were conducted, 
and the grit grindstones 
they goaded into motion. 
He promised to neither girl 
pause nor pleasure, 
before he heard 
the slave-women’s harmony.

1/1 Nú] large ic SR, T 1/1 erum] so SR, T, eru C 1/5 ro] eru C
1/6 Fríðleifs] fríleifs T 1/8 hafðar] gioruar C 2/3 griótz] grio T
2/3 griá] gr'í’a T
They started the screeching, shunned by silence; ‘Leggium lúðra, lettum steinum!’ Again he urged the girls to go on with the milling.

They sang and slung the swift-swirling stone, so that Fróði’s servants were mostly asleep. Then Menia spoke – the meal had started to flow:

‘Auð mõlum Fróða, mõlum alsælan, [mõlum] fióð fiár á feginsluóri! May he sit on riches, may he sleep on down, may he wake to joy – then that is milling well done!

‘Hér skyli engi õðrum granda, til bôls búa né til bana orka, né höggvalgljí hvossu sveróði, þó at bana bróður bundinn finni!’ Here must no one harm another, work for his ill-fortune or encompass his death, nor strike him any blow with biting sword, even though his brother’s murderer he should find in fetters!’
Grottasongr

7 En hann †[ekki]† kvað
orð it fyrra:
‘Sofið eigi þit me[ir] en s[yngr]at gauk’r!
edla lengr en svá liðð eitt kvedak.’

8 ‘Var[t]attu, Fróði,
fullspakr of þik,
málvinr manna,
er þú man keyptir.
Kaus[j]u at afli
ok at álittum,
en at ætterni
ekki spurðir.

9 ‘Harðr var Hrungrí
ok hans faðir –
þó var Þiazi yet Þiazi proved
þeim õflgari. more powerful than they.
Iði ok Aurnir,
okrir niðiar,
brœðr bergrísa,
þeim erum bornar.

10 ‘Kœmia Grotti
ór Griáfíall,
né sá hinn harði
hall[í]r ör iðrú,

No words he said sooner than these:
‘Sleep no more, you two,
than the cuckoo stops singing,
or longer than I chant a single charm.’

‘You were not, Fróði,
very far-sighted for yourself,
— mankind’s sweetheart —
when you bought slaves.
You picked them for strength and appearances,
but as to their ancestry you asked no question.

‘Unyielding was Hrungrí
and his father too –
yet Þiazi proved
more powerful than they.
Iði and Aurnir
are our kinsmen,
brothers of crag-giants:
we were born from their line.

‘Grotti would not have come
from the Grindstone Fell,
nor that hard
rock from out of the earth,

né mæli svá nor would a crag-giant’s girl
mær bergrisa, be doing such grinding,
ef vissi[m] vit if we two had known
vætr til k[v]ernar. nothing of the millstone.

11 ‘Vit vetr nú were playfellows,
vörum leikur mighty girls, bred
oðlgar, alnar beneath the earth.
firir iðr neðan. As maidens we took on
Stóðu[m] meyar tasks of great moment:
at meginverkum, we ourselves plucked
[höfum] siálfar the mountain-seat from its place.
setberg ór stáð.

12 ‘Veltum grióti we sent the stone rolling
of garð risa, over the realm of giants,
svá at fold firir so the ground before it
fór skiálfandi. began to quake.
Svá sløngðum vit The two of us flung so far
snúðga steini, the fast-wheeling stone,
höfga halli, the heavy rock,
at halir tôku. that humans took it.

13 ‘En vit síðan ‘And since then we two
á Svíþióðu, in Sweden,
framvisar tvær, far-sighted, both of us,
i fólk stigum. strode into battle.
Beit[t]um biðornu, We baited bears,
en brutum skiððu, and hacked shields,
gengum í gegnum marched right through
gráserkiet líð[ð]. their mail-clad host.
Grottasongr

14 ‘Steyptum stilli, ‘We toppled one prince, studdum annan. propped up another. Veittum góðum To good Gotþormr Gotþormi lið. we gave our support. Vara kyrrsseta, There was no time of truce áðr Knúi felli. till Knúi fell.

15 ‘Frám heldum því ‘We pursued that life ðau miserri, throughout those seasons, at vit at koppum so that as champions kendar vóru[m]. we both were acknowledged. Þar skorðum vit There we two carved skorpum geirum with keen spears blóð ór benium blood from wounds, ok brand ruðum. and made our blades red.

16 ‘Nú erum komnar ‘now we have come til konungs húsa to the king’s houses, miskunnlausar and without pity ok at mani hafðar. have been put as slaves. Aurð etr iliar, Mud corrodes our soles, en ofan kulði. and cold nips from above. Droðum dólg siótul – Round we heave war’s settler – daprt er at Fróða! wretched it is at Fróði’s!

17 ‘Hendr skulo hvílaz, ‘Hands shall take rest, hallr standa mun. stone will stand still. Malit hefi ek þirir mik For my part I have milled mitt of [h]leyti!’ in accord with my pledge!’ ‘[M]u[m]a hondum ‘We will not give hvíld vel gefa, our hands good rest, áðr fullmalit before the milling seems to Fróði Fróða þykki! fully done!

Grottaþongr

18 ‘Hendr skulo hœn†d†la
harðar triónor, hard staves,
þápn valdtypeg rug –
vaði þú, Fróði!
Vaki þú, Fróði,
ef þú †[vill]† hlýða
þongum okkrum
ok þongum fornun!

‘Hands shall handle
hard staves, slaughter-gory weapons –
wake up, Fróði!
Wake up, Fróði, if you want to hear
the songs we two sing
and stories of old!

19 ‘Eld sé ek brenna
firir austan borg,
vgispjöll vaka,
– þat mun viti kallaðr.
Mun herr koma
hinig af bragði
ok brenna bœ
firir buðlingi.

‘I can see fire blazing
east of the fortress,
war-news wakening,
– a warning beacon that will mean.
Soldiery will come
in sudden speed towards us
and burn the palace
in despite of the prince.

20 ‘Munat þú halda
Hleiðrar stóli,
rauðum hringum
né regingrióti.
Tøkum á misticali,
mær, skarpara –
eruma vamlar
í valdreyra.

‘You will not hold
the throne of Hleiðr,
the gold-red rings
nor the grindstone of power.
Let us grasp the mill-handle,
girl, more keenly –
we are not squeamish
in the gore of slaughter.

21 ‘Mól míns foður
mær ramliga,
þvíat hón feigð fira
fiðlmargra sá.’

‘My father’s girl
ground lustily,
for she saw the near death
of numberless men.’

18/1 hœndla] hœlða SR, holda T 18/3 hœlða] hœlða T 18/5 Vaki] tic SR
18/6 vill hlýða] so T, hlypa vill SR 19/4 mun] mœ T 19/5 Mun]
Mœ T 19/5 herr] hœr T 19/6 hinig af] hung a T 19/7 bœ]
bœ SR, bœ T 20/1 Munat þú] Muði aðr T 20/3 hringum] ringi T
20/4 -gríóti] g‘ote T 20/5 Tøkum] mc SR 20/5 misticali] mundli T
(cf. Mundilfœri, Vafprœðinnismál 23/1) 20/7 vamlar] valmar SR, with
small subscript stroke between i and m, valn” T 21/2 ramliga] rangliga T
21/3 þviat] þt SR 21/4 fiðlmargra sá] fiðl of vissi T
Stukku stórar stþjóðr frá luðri,
þárli vjarðar: ‘Möllum enn framarr!’

Off burst the massive
mainstays from the mill-crib,
girded with iron: ‘Let us grind even further!’

22 ‘Möllum enn framarr:
mon Yrsv sonr
vig[š] Hálfdana[r]
hefna [á] Fróða.
Sá mun hennar
heittinn verða
burr ok bróðir –
þáirnar varðar: girded with iron:
‘Möllum enn framarr!’

‘Let us grind even further:
Yrsv’s son will
for Hálfdan’s slaughter
take vengeance on Fróði.
He will come
to be called
her son and brother –
both of us know that.’

23 Mólu meyar,
meçins k[o]stuðu –
vóru ungur
í iótunmóði.
Skulfru skap[t]tré,
p来临lúðr ofan,
hraut hinn hofgi
hallr sundr í tvau.

The girls ground on,
gave proof of their strength –
those young ones were
in giant wrath.
The timber frames shuddered,
the mill-crib shot to the ground,
the cumbersome stone
cracked in two.

24 En bergrisa
brúðr orð um kvad:
‘Malit hofum, Fróði,
sem munum hætta.
Hafa fullstaðit
flóð at meldri.’

And the crag-giants’
consort had her say:
‘We have milled so, Fróði,
that we shall mill no more.
They have stood long enough,
these ladies, at the milling.’
Commentary

Prose  The setting for the acquisition of the giantesses, on a visit by Fróði to Fjölnir in Sweden, has probably been surmised by Snorri on the basis of the poem’s description of the girls’ feats in Sweden, along with the tradition of visits between Fróði and Fjölnir found already in Ynglingatal 1 (Skj B I, 7). The quernstones on the other hand were found in Denmark, according to Snorri. Whilst it is possible to construct a scenario in which the giantesses come from Jötunheimar via Sweden to Denmark, it is more likely that a mixing of traditions occurs here; the poem at least gives no provenance for either the girls or the stones, merely noting that the girls were responsible for the stones’ appearance. The poem also indicates that the stones rolled through the realm of giants, into the hands of men, who took them. Snorri’s account of one Hengikjóptr presenting them to Fróði is thus also inconsistent with the poem. Hengikjóptr is either a giant (cf. Hengjankjapta, a giantess in a verse of Dorbjørn disarskáld, cited by Snorri in Skáldskaparmál ch. 4: SnE 97; ed. Faulkes I, 17; trans. Faulkes 74) – which seems contextually unlikely – or a heiti (‘hanging chin’, in reference to his beard) for Öðinn (found in þulur lj 4, Skj B I, 673, as hengikeptr). An ill-fated gift presented by a disguised Öðinn would be in character, and Snorri is likely to have invented this aspect of the story. Snorri’s summary follows the poem fairly closely up to the point where vengeance is wrought on Fróði. The poem makes no mention of Mýsingr, unless in some lost section. Mýsingr does appear as the overthower of Fróði in Skjoldunga saga, however, though he is not a sea-king there. In þulur a 3 (Skj B I, 658), Mýsingr is listed as a sea-king: if this antedates Snorri, he could have used the ascription to help produce the story he gives. He would have been aided by the existence of a tradition such as is found in Saxo, that Fróði was killed by a beast from the sea (albeit a female one), which has ancient mythological parallels. The rest of the tale of Grotti, that it was taken by Mýsingr along with Fenja and Menja, and told to grind salt, ending up in the deep still grinding, is an aetiological folktale found in Norway and Iceland, and elsewhere, which has nothing to do with the poem Grottasongr: the famous mill Grotti may, however, have been associated with this tale already by Snorri’s time, especially as Snæbjörn’s verse implies a tradition in which Grotti ended up in the sea.

1  The first helmingr is spoken by the two giant maids in SR and T; in C the third person is used. Whilst the C form is perhaps more logical, it lacks the dramatic force gained by the use of direct speech here, and is probably a rationalisation on the part of Snorri (C, citing merely an excerpt, is likely to represent the form of text closest to Snorri’s original here) to accommodate the stanza to its context more readily as a straightforward quotation.
The first stanza sets out the scene and the characters. The two girls are Fenja and Menja; they are strong – hence their usefulness – but they are also gifted with foresight (in common with many giants: cf. Vafþrúðnir (Vafþrúðnismál 44)). The irony that this foresight had failed to prevent their enslavement is not considered; the focus is upon the use they will make of this foresight against Fróði, and their enslavement is regarded (perhaps disingenuously) as a deliberate act of self-humiliation to achieve their final goal. The mill, with its connotations of turning fortune, will be the means of their grinding out misfortune for the ill-treatment they receive at the king’s hands. Hence the explanation in st. 10 of how, with foreknowledge, they had arranged the discovery of the quernstones and their own enslavement (presumably the same implication lies in the repetition of framvisar tvær in st. 13: they are prescient in entering the battle in which, it may be surmised, they were caught and enslaved). Their bondage at the mill is their means of power over the king. Naturally, this may be felt by the reader as something of a justification after the event – they had milled wealth for the king happily enough to start with, after all, but it is a claim the girls themselves seem keen to defend.

Fróði is identified as son of Friðleifr. This must originally have identified him clearly as fríð-Fróði, not as the semi-historical king of the fifth century, but several of the fróðis of the Norse genealogies are sons of Friðleifr (see the family trees in the Introduction): clearly confusion between the mythical and the historical Fróðis had a long tradition. Although Snorri identified the Fróði of Grottasongr as the peace-Fróði, it is not clear that the poet intended more than the vaguest revelation of his identity by calling him son of Friðleifr.

1/3 framvisar occurs in the late Grípisspá 21/7, and in a verse of Björn Hítúlakappi (framvisar disir, Skj B I, 282, dated to 1024), and in a verse in Hjálmpérs saga ok Ólvers ch. 14.

1/4 Fenja may derive from fen, ‘deep pool’, and Menja from men, ‘necklace, jewellery’ (de Vries 1977 regards man as a more likely source, i.e. ‘slave-girl’). In the poem Menja speaks mainly of the treasures they are to grind out for Fróði. Fenja’s name would be a generic giant-name, ‘dweller in the fens, pools’, but this underwater home would confer powers of prophecy (as with Frigg: orlog Frigg hygg ek at oll viti, ‘of all fates Frigg has, I think, full knowledge’, as Lokasenna 29 says; Frigg’s home was Fensalir (Völsúpa 33/6): see PE II, commentary to Völsúpa 20/3, 33/6 and Lokasenna 21/4–6, as well as Grimmismál 7): Fenja’s chief role is to prophesy the end of Fróði. The other implication of fen is treasure: cf. the kennings fenglóð, fenlogi for ‘gold’ (Plácitusdrápa 55, Skj B I, 621; verse from Órvar-Odds saga, VII.9, Skj B II, 318). (Other possible etymologies are listed in de Vries 1977, s.v. Fenja.)

1/5 Fróði means ‘wise’, but also ‘virile, fecund’ (see PE II, commentary to Skirmismál 1/5); it is the latter sense that must have been the fore in the name of peace-Fróði, the bestower of ár ok friðr, ‘abundance and peace’, but probably the former sense was more important in the names of historical men such as the king of the Heathobards.

1/8 man, ‘slave-girl’, is here used in a collective sense.

1/8 hafðar SR, T, giorvar C. It is possible to derive both manuscript forms from one written original (‘gervar’ being more likely than ‘haðar’), but giorvar
Commentary

may be a sense replacement by the C scribe, *gera at* and *hafa at* both meaning ‘put to use’.

2/1 On the sense of *líðr*, ‘mill-crib’, see the Introduction II.

2/3 The word *griá* occurs in Old Norse only here and in 10/2. It is possible, given the defective state of the text from which our manuscripts were copied, that *griá* is a corrupt form, but what it could be derived from is not obvious. To read it as a corrupt form of *grá*, ‘grey’ – the most obvious solution – is scarcely satisfactory, as there is no obvious reason for such a common word to be corrupted twice, other than the initial *grj-* of *grjóts* preceding it; ‘grey’ is moreover a vacuous description of the rock (though this cannot wholly preclude its appearance in the poem). If we are to seek a more satisfactory interpretation, the word must clearly refer to some type of rock, perhaps one particularly suitable for quernstones (German volcanic rock was the best available, and was sometimes imported into Scandinavia; see Curwen 1937, and KLNM, *s.v. kvarn*, but the narrative of the poem implies the stones were derived from local mountains). The suggestion of *LP* is the most likely, that *griá* is accusative plural in 2/3, and genitive plural in 10/2, and is derived from a nominative *gré*; de Vries (1977, *s.v. gré*) suggests a possible etymology from a root *greu-*, ‘feinreiben’. Thus *grióts griá* would mean ‘grindstones of rock’.

2/6 *ynði* is probably meant in the more concrete sense of ‘refreshment’ rather than the usual ‘delight’ (cf. *Völuspá* 61/8, where there is a hint of ‘liquid refreshment’).

2/7 This line is problematic: whilst the general sense that Fróði told the girls to get straight on with work is clear, it is not obvious whether Fróði made his promise of rest once they had started work, or whether he made no mention of it at all. Once the noise of the mill starts, Fróði again tells the girls to work (3/5–6). St. 7 seems to indicate that he said nothing further to them until he told them they could have no rest, after which their goodwill towards him disappears. Yet st. 4–6 seem to show the girls’ good disposition towards the king, which would readily be motivated by the promise of rest mentioned in st. 2; their violent reaction after st. 7 would moreover follow all the more naturally if it was a result of Fróði breaking his word. On the whole, however, it seems most likely that no promise was made. St. 2 then demonstrates Fróði’s importunate nature: he cannot wait to get at the mill’s gold, and has no regard for his servants. That is the limit of his character; breaking of promises lies beyond this narrow scope.

2/8 *hlóm* is a word applied in particular to music (singing or instrumental); it thus looks forward to the girls’ song, but probably also encompasses the harmonic whirring of the mill. The word is also used in kennings for ‘battle’ (*LP*, *s.v. hljómr*); possibly the poet intended to hint at the violence to be milled out for Fróði.

3/1–2 These lines, unfortunately absent from T, present some problems. The seemingly nonsensical manuscript ‘þulu’ (nonetheless retained by Faulkes (ed. I, 53; trans. 108) and interpreted as ‘caused to be uttered’) must be a mistake for ‘þutu’ (cf. the *kvern hjótiandi*, ‘whirring quern’, of *Hlóðskviða* 8); the manuscript *þóð horvínar* appears to be feminine genitive singular, without any referent. It
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has been construed as referring to the quern, the thing from which silence has been banished, but this is syntactically difficult given that no noun is present to which ‘silence-banished’ would refer. The slight emendation adopted here makes the word a feminine nominative plural, in agreement with the subject of the sentence, namely the slave-girls, who, as they set to work, are ‘shunned by silence’. A further possibility would be to emend to pogon horgfinn var, ‘silence was banished’ (Kock 1923–35, §69). The word pogon refers to lack of speech, not just absence of sound: the next two lines show the girls busily telling each other what to do, and soon will follow their singing. This is the hliom referred to in 2/7. The unusual formation pogonhorgfinn may be intended to recall the expression heillum horgfinn, ‘shunned by fortune’.

3/3 leggium is to be understood as a jussive subjunctive. The manuscripts consistently use the first person plural indicative form in place of the earlier subjunctive (which was beginning to disappear already in the earliest records, and had been completely superseded by 1500; Noreen 1970, §536.2); the earlier forms would have been leggim; lettim (3/4); malim (5/1, 2, 21/8, 22/1); takim (20/5).

3/3 The mechanics of the action described here are unclear. Leggia would most naturally be taken in the sense ‘set up’, but it is clear from 2/2 that the mill is already set up. Some preparation of the corn-bin in the way of cleaning might be expected, but this would hardly be described as leggja. The mill should have been firmly fixed (for example to a wall), but perhaps some extra strengthening precautions are taken by the giantesses here. Also unusual is the use of lúdra in the plural; the mill could only have one corn-bin, though it might be seen as having two halves on either side of the stones. Lünig’s view, that the girls are proposing to stop milling (see von See et al. 2000, 880), seems unlikely given the stage of proceedings at this point in the poem.

3/4 The girls lighten the stones, that is, they adjust the upper stone by raising the lightening tree. This would no doubt reduce the þyt, ‘noise’, of 3/1 to a more acceptable level. The reading of T is a misinterpretation of minims (‘steuiû’ for ‘steinû’), but the resulting stefium, ‘refrains’, may have been connected in the mind of the T scribe with the slave–girls’ singing.

4/2 snúðga is probably a weak adjective, but it could also be taken as a compound adjective (cf. hvítaauri in Völuspá 19/4; see commentary in PE II). The snúðgasteinn would be the top stone of the quern, which whirled around over the motionless lower stone (designated possibly by the høfga halli of 12/7). For the adjective snúðigr cf. Björn krephendi, Magnússdrápa 9/4 (Skj B I, 406), where it describes a flying weapon-shaft.

4/3–4 Whilst these lines emphasise the unceasing labour of the giant maidens, working on whilst the rest of the servants slept, they also hint at a magical enchantment wrought by the whirring mill, though this is not a theme developed in the extant form of the poem. A sleep enchantment forms an important part of the myth of the sampo in Finnish (see Introduction V).

4/5 If Menja’s name derives from men, ‘necklace, treasure’, it is appropriate that she should be the one to speak of the riches they are to mill out.

4/6 meldrar: SR ‘meldr’, T ‘meldrs’ point to an antecedent ‘meldr’, corrected in T; ‘meldr’ would be badly copied from ‘meldȓȓ’ omitting the superscript abbre-
viation for -ar (more likely than the omission of ‘s’ in a supposed *meldrs).
4/6 komit: the manuscripts read ‘kömi’ (SR), ‘comi’ (T), i.e. komin, which would mean ‘Menja had come to the milling’. But she must be included in the þær of 3/1: she has been fully involved in the milling process already. The small emendation adopted here changes the sense, so that the poet is saying the milling had reached the point where the flour starts to emerge from between the quernstones (meldr outside Grottasongr appears always to mean ‘result of the milling process, flour’, but here a sense ‘milling process’ is implied; see von See et al. 2000, 883). This prompts Menja to speak of the riches they are to mill out in place of the expected wheat-flour.

5/1 Although mõlum is probably jussive, standing for an earlier malim, it could be indicative: Menja could be simply pointing out the nature of the meldr as it emerges from the mill.

5/2 mõlum alsælan is a difficult construction. Alsælan must be an accusative masculine adjective (cf. parallel compounds such as matsæll, ‘fortunate in respect to food’, a nickname in Bandamanna saga ch. 10), agreeing with an understood Fróða, ‘let us grind Fróði happy in all things’, but mala is not elsewhere recorded with an adjective used as an object in this way. Snorri, in his prose rendering, substitutes the noun sælu. There does not appear to be any abstract noun from which alsælan could be derived or corrupted, however; Snorri has merely simplified. Alsæll appears to be used primarily in Christian religious contexts: alsælan hug occurs in Heilagra anda visur 11/4 (Skj B II, 178), and the word is also used in the Stockholm Homily Book 29/31 (SG).

5/4 feginslúðri: for the use of a genitive adjective as the first element in a compound cf. Skírnismál 26/1: tamsvendi (and commentary in PE II).

5/5–8 It is possible that this helmingr is based on actual charms (von See et al. 2000, 886): cf. the phrase sem á dúni søfr dóttir Atla, ‘where Atli’s daughter sleeps on down’, in the inscription from Årdal kirke, Sogn (Olsen 1941–60, IV, 126–36).

6 This stanza seems to be a deliberate reflection of the traditional description of the Fróða friðr; this well-known time of peace and prosperity, described in the Introduction V, ‘King Fróði’, is thus attributed to the working of the mill (such a clear, or exclusive, connection was not made elsewhere). The poet makes no allusion, however, to the tale of the gold ring remaining undisturbed for many years beside the highway on Jalandsheiðr. It is likely that the poet has made use of Skjöldunga saga or a closely related source in this deliberately allusive stanza – though the lateness of the Latin recension of Skjöldunga saga admits the remote possibility that it may itself have been influenced by Grottasongr.

The phrases used have an air of legal terminology, but exact parallels cannot in fact be found. Sitt bjó til betra occurs in a verse of Ámundi Árnason (thirteenth century) describing a ruler, a true friend of the law and righteousness (Skj B II, 59), where the sense appears to be ‘prepared himself for a better [home]’ in a religious sense. The use of búa in an absolute sense, ‘prepare’, ‘work’, without a reflexive (‘prepare oneself’) or a direct object is unusual, but cf. Rígsþula 16/4: bjó til váðar, ‘prepared to make cloth’; the construction is presumably intended to
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parallel til bana orka of the next line. Búumk til vígs, ‘I am ready for battle’, occurs in Egill’s lausavísa 29 (Skj B I, 49). The nearest parallel to orka til bana seems to be orka til þarfú in lausavísa 43 of Egill (Skj B I, 52), meaning effectively ‘help’. 6/5 Compare Grípisspá 15/5–6: þú munt hóggva hvoosso sverði, ‘you will strike with sharp sword’.

6/7 bana bróður: the brother’s killer is an ancient mythical motif (see Lokasenna 17/6 and commentary in PE II), here placed in a heroic context and given legal rather than mythological import (cf. the bróður bani of Sigrdrífumál 35).

7 It is possible that some lines are missing at the beginning of the stanza, though the continuity of sense in the extant text can be defended: the slave-girls’ effusion on Fróði’s behalf is met with the cold indifference of his command to take no rest.

7/1–2 Compare Oddrúnargrátr 8, svá at hón ekki kvad orð í fyrra, ‘for she had spoken no word before’. Here and at 18/6 the metrically better T text is preferred to the text of SR (kvad ekki, hlýða vill). However, given the lack of metrical regularity elsewhere in the poem (e.g. 15/1–2), the T reading does not necessarily represent the poet’s intention.

7/3–4 The manuscripts read sofði eigi þit né of sal gaukar, which makes little sense. Clearly a corrupt text lies behind both T and SR. Apart from the grammatical problems it may also be noted that cuckoos do not frequent halls (SG). The emendation is based on Snorri’s prose account; he says þá gaf hann þeim eigi lengri hvíld eða svefn en gaukrinn þagði eða lióð mátti kveda, ‘he gave them no more rest or sleep than a cuckoo is silent or it takes to sing a song’. The phrase syngrat gaukr occurs in Egill’s lausavísa 27 (Skj B I, 48) – ‘the cuckoo does not sing’ when the hound is circling below it; both poetic contexts appear to allude to the cuckoo as an archetypal incessant chatterer (other associations of the cuckoo in ancient Norse and Old English sources, either with magic, as in some runic bracteates (see McKinnell, Simek and Düwel 2004, 72–3), or as a bird of ill-omen (e.g. the Old English Seafarer 53), seem irrelevant). Egill’s is the only other use of gaukr recorded in verse in LP; that the poet of Grottasongr has borrowed from Egill is indicated moreover by the occurrence in the same stanza of Egill’s word sjôtul, the only other occurrence of which is in Grottasongr 16/7. (Egill’s verse reads: þar nautk enn sem optarr arnstalls sjôtul-bjarnar, ‘there I benefited again, as often, from the settle of an eagle’s pedestal bjôrn’; the pedestal that eagles settle on is a rock, equivalent to arinn, ‘hearth-stone’: hence Arinbjorn, Egill’s comrade.) It appears that various scribal misreadings of letters and abbreviations have taken place to produce the text of these lines as found in the manuscripts; at least one, misreading of ‘t’ as ‘l’, occurs elsewhere (cf. 3/1 þutu). Another possibility would be to allow the manuscript reading to stand, and assume some lines have dropped out, so that the statement would have been to the effect ‘Sleep no [more than x’s do not sing] nor the cuckoos about the hall’, but Snorri’s summary does not reveal anything these lines could have contained.

7/6 The sort of ljóð implied here is the short charm of the sort listed in Hávamál 146–63, suitable for any eventuality; particularly swift must have been the ljóð against a speeding weapon (Hávamál 150).

48
Commentary

8/1 The form ‘varattv’ in SR is probably a slip. Noreen (1970, §534.2.d) cites the loss of -t in the second person singular preterite when þú follows immediately; here however a negative -a- intervenes. Since the negative a was archaic by the time of the manuscript, varattu could possibly represent an erroneously reconstructed form. Note that the form kvaðattu occurs in Oddrúnargrátr 12/5.

8/2 fullspakr: the link between wisdom and prescience emerges clearly in Völuspá 29/3: spaklig (see commentary ad loc.). Fróði is ‘the wise’ (a multarum rerum scientia sic dictus, ‘so called from his knowledge of many matters’, as Skjoldunga saga puts it), but he lacked foresight for himself, unlike the giant maidens (or so they claim).

8/3 málvinr: lit. ‘a friend in speech’. The word is used with deep irony: Fróði was far from friendly in his speech to the girls. The word is elsewhere used in the sense of ‘sweetheart’ (Guðrúnarkviða 20, Krákumál 20): the ‘people’s sweetheart’ refers to Fróði’s popularity as bestower of peace and well-being. Menja uses the title with biting sarcasm.

9 Five mighty giants, four of them named, are mentioned to impress upon Fróði that he has taken on more than he bargained for in buying the girls. Hrungnir’s father appears to be an invention of the poet of Grottasongr; he is nowhere else mentioned.

The story of Hrungnir, ‘Noisy’ (de Vries 1977, s.v.), is recounted in Skáldskaparmál ch. 17 (SnE 100–4; ed. Faulkes I, 20–2; trans. Faulkes 77–9), based on Haustlǫng 14–19 (Skj B I, 17–18); he is also mentioned in Hárbardsljóð 15, Lokasenna 61, 63, Hymiskviða 16, Sigdrífumál 15, Ragnarsdrápa 17 (Skj B I, 4), Kormakr’s lasavísa 14 (Skj B I, 73), and Háttatal 30 (Skj B II, 69). In a contest with Þórr, Hrungnir defended himself by placing his shield beneath him, believing the god would attack from below; he cast a whetstone at Þórr, who shattered it in mid-air, but received a splinter of it in his forehead; the god crushed the stone head of Hrungnir.

Þjazi (meaning obscure, but probably originally related to ‘father’ words: de Vries 1977, s.v.) was the father of Skaði, wife of Njórr (Skáldskaparmál ch. G56: SnE 30; ed. Faulkes I, 1–3; trans. Faulkes 59–61); Þjazi abducted Iðunn from Ásgardr by assuming the form of an eagle; Loki retrieved Iðunn, and Þjazi pursued; when he reached Ásgardr, the Æsir set fire to his feathers and slew him. His daughter marched off to Ásgardr in panoply of war to seek vengeance, but was placated by the promise of one of the gods as husband, the condition being she had to choose him by his feet alone (Skáldskaparmál ch. G56: SnE 80–1; ed. Faulkes I, 2; trans Faulkes 61). Þjazi is also mentioned in Haustlǫng 1 (Skj B I, 14), Kormakr’s Sigurdardrápa 6/4 (Skj B I, 69), Grímnismál 11, Hárbardsljóð 19, Lokasenna 50, 51, and Hyndluljóð 30.

Íóti, ‘Industrious’ (de Vries 1977, s.v.), was brother of Þjazi (Skáldskaparmál ch. G56: SnE 81; ed. Faulkes I, 3; trans. Faulkes 61); when their father died, his sons divided their inheritance by each taking a mouthful of gold. The name also occurs in Bjarkamál 5 (Skj B I, 171), Pórsdrápa 2 (Skj B I, 139), Fríðbjófs rimur I, 21/3 (Rímnaðsafn I, 414), in two anonymous verses (Skj B I, 601, 604), and in þulur (Skj B I, 658 st. 1/4).
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Aurnir (probably ‘Muddy’: *aur*—is a common element in giant names; cf. Aurboda, Aurgelmir, Aurgrimmir) occurs as a giant name in *Þulur* (*Skj* B I, 659 b 4); in Sturla Þórðarson’s *Hákonarkviða* 19 (1263–4, *Skj* B II, 122); and in a verse from *Bergþúaþáttu* 9 (*Skj* B II, 228). It also occurs in a context at least comparable with *Grottasøngr*, in the third of three *vísur* found in Hemings þáttur (from Hauksbók) sung by a troll-woman flying through the air on a wolf, carrying a trough of blood and limbs and prophesying defeat for Haraldr harðráði as he lies off the coast at Scarborough (*Skj* B I, 400; recent edition and discussion in Poole 1991, 16–17). The troll-woman is called *brúðr Aurnis jóða*, ‘bride of the children of Aurnir’. Nothing is known of the history of Aurnir.

9/7  bergrisa: the word is not found elsewhere in Eddic poetry; it is used in a tenth-century verse (*Skj* B I, 172 st. 7), in *Buslubœn* 8 (*Skj* B II, 352; *Bósa saga* ch. 5), and also in *Gylfaginning* ch. 15, 21, 27 (*SnE* 23, 29, 33; ed. Faulkes 18, 23, 25; trans. Faulkes 18, 22, 25).

9/7–8  Cf. *Oddrúnargrátr* 11: *sem við brœðrom tveim of borin værim*, ‘as if we were born of two brothers’.

9/8  The alliteration falls on the second stressed syllable.

10/1  *Grotti* is the ‘grinder’; *grotti* survives in Norn and Faeroese as a designation for the nave in the lower quernstone, and in Norwegian for the block in the nave; in Danish dialect the verb *grotte* means ‘grind up fine’ (see de Vries 1977 on the etymology).

10/2  See commentary to 2/3.

10/7–8  SG retain the manuscript reading *ef vissi vitt (T *vit*) vætr til hennar*, taking this to mean ‘if sorcery did not belong to her’. However, the mention of magic here appears inappropriate: it is not a theme developed in the poem, and even if it were, the statement by the girl that she would not be working the mill if she—or it—were not in possession of magic powers would be pointless in the context. Moreover, the word rendered ‘magic’— *vitt* or variants—is found exceedingly rarely, occurring with any certainty only in a couple of passages in the Norwegian laws and probably in the archaic *Ynglingatal* 6 (see Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, s.v. *vitt*, for citations), where it most likely refers not to mere ‘magic’, but to a particular (and now unidentifiable) object used in conjury. Rather, the stanza in fact must relate to, and justify, the girls’ attribute of foreknowledge: they are stating that they knew about the situation they now find themselves in long before it actually took place; therefore they allowed it to happen, with the result that they now command control over the mill, with which they will work a punishment for Fróði (as noted, this may be more their *post factum* explanation for their plight). The emendations adopted here are fairly minor: final -*m* is regularly dropped before a labial in the manuscripts (cf. *stóðum*, next stanza; see Noreen 1970, §531.3), double and single consonants alternate often without regard to phonology (and *tt* here is represented merely by a dotted t); the change of *hennar* to *kvernar* is more major. *Hennar* makes no sense, as it cannot meaningfully be related to any antecedent; it is also suspect semantically as a weak word coming at the climax of the forcefully stated stanza. *Kvernar* is the most apposite word to fit the context from which *hennar* could be corrupted.
Commentary

11 Eiríkr Magnússon suggests the image of stones being hurled by giantesses may be related to the account of Rymbegla: 'It was one year, when Fróði was old, that mighty wild thunderings and lightnings came; then the sun disappeared from the sky and the earth shook so that the mountains quivered from their place and crags came out of the earth and all forecasts went awry'. This is based on Skjöldunga saga, of which the Latin summary here reads (ch. 3, IF 35, 6): Deinde post multorum annorum curriculum insveta facta ecclipsis solis cum terræ motu saxa et scopulos loco movente atqve disrumpente. Illum igitur putant fuisse annum et tempus passionis Christi, ‘Then after the course of many years there occurred an unwonted eclipse of the sun and an earthquake, in which rocks and crags were dislodged and cast down. It is believed that this occurred in the year and at the time of the passion of Christ’. It is difficult to say if the motif of the age of peace and wealth ending in natural cataclysms is older than this Christian version, but it may well be. The difficulty with associating the emergence of the millstones with such events is that this would scarcely allow enough time for the construction of the mill and acquisition of the slave-girls to work it: the cataclysms mark the end of Fróði’s reign, not merely an event within it. The poem does not present the casting up of the stones as an apocalyptic event, and the collapse of the mill cannot be equated with such natural events as Skjöldunga saga describes. On the whole, therefore, it is difficult to see any particular connection with Skjöldunga saga at this point.

11/1 The use of vér (plural) in place of the dual vit may be a scribal slip.
11/4 firir iõrð nédan characterises the giantesses as chthonic or underworld beings: the phrase is used in Lokasenna 23, Völuspá 42 and Alvíssmál 3, all relating to giants, dwarfs or the dead.
11/6 meginverkum is otherwise found only in Heilagra anda visur (Skj B II, 178). Von See et al. (2000, 909) suggest it is borrowed from Old English mægen-weorc, and cite the Paris Psalter, Psalm 91/4.
11/7 SR has ‘færþ’; the T reading ‘hauſ’ probably represents a misinterpretation of ‘hoſ’, i.e. hófom, ‘lifted’; this may well be the original reading, which SR has replaced with the semantic equivalent færðum; SG quote some parallels (an Uppland runic inscription, and Þjalar Jóns saga) where fiera steinn (bjõrg) ör stáð is used of moving stones. This is the only place in the poem where æ is represented by the up-to-date ‘æ’ in SR (except once in the commonplace word bœ); the T reading is preferred as being marginally more likely to be earlier.
11/8 setberg: a saddle-backed mountain, suitable for seating giants (SG); the word occurs in topographical names in Norway and Iceland (Fritzner 1886–1972, s.v.; Kålund 1908–18, I 428, II 390), as well as Norse-colonised areas of England (Watts 2004, s.v. Sadberge, Sedbergh), where such mountains may have been associated with gods as well as giants (see Ælfric, De falsis diis 138, in Pope 1969, 684): this would lend a more aggressive tone to the statement, with the giantesses appearing in a traditional role as antagonists of the gods. The word occurs twice in kennings: setbergs bond, ‘gods of the mountain’, i.e. giants, in Eilífr Guðrúnarson (Skj B I, 144) (though Weber 1970 questions this interpretation), and linna setberg, ‘mountain seat of serpents’, i.e. gold, in
Grottasóngr

Eyjólfr dáðaskáld’s Bandadrápa 3 (Skj B I, 191). In Gylfaginning ch. 47 (SnE 59; ed. Faulkes 43; trans. Faulkes 45 as ‘table mountain’) the giant Skrýmir thrusts a setberg in front of him to defend himself against Þórr; possibly the poet of Grottasóngr is alluding to the lost Eddic lay that Snorri almost certainly used as a source (see Brennecke 1981).

12/5–6 The same words are used to describe the dislodging of the stones from the earth as are used in st. 4 for the action of turning the quern made from these rocks. The snúðgi steinn and the hõfgi hallr (or snúðgasteinn and hõfgahallr) may designate the two stones used to make the quern, as Snorri seems to have understood (fannz í Danmõrk kvernsteinar tveir, ‘two quernstones were found in Denmark’); see commentary to 4/2.

13–14 The exploits of the giant girls in Sweden must relate in some way to Fróði. It was presumably through defeat in a Swedish war that the girls fell into Fróði’s hands as captives. Snorri appears to have connected this with fróð-Fróði, who is said to have purchased the girls while visiting Þjólnir of Sweden. However, in Skjóldunga saga it is Froðo IV, son of Fréðileifus, and father of Ingiálldus (and thus in origin the Heathobard king), who has the greatest connection with Sweden. Frodo’s half-brother Alo, a pirate, was adopted as king of Sweden, upon which Frodo decided to assassinate him in case he should come seeking his patrimony in Denmark. This task was entrusted to Starcardus, who slew the king in his bath. Frodo then defeated the Swedish king Iorundus and took his daughter. Iorundus murdered Frodo as he was making a night sacrifice. Further exploits of this Fróði are recounted in Ynglinga saga ch. 26; he attacks and lays waste Sweden after King Ottarr has refused to pay tribute; Ottarr in turn attacks Denmark while Fróði is absent. It is more likely that the poet of Grottasóngr wished to evoke these Swedish wars to accommodate the giantesses into an accepted ‘historical’ tradition, rather than the weaker links between fróð-Fróði and Sweden. However, the two leaders mentioned, Gotþormr and Knúi, are not found associated with any Fróði elsewhere. Gotþormr is a name known from the Sigurðr poems as a brother of Gunnarr, Hoðni, and Guðrún (Grípisspá 50, Bro 4, Sigurðarkviða in skamma 20, 22, Guðrúnarkviða II 7, Hyndluljóð 27). The name Knúi is found in a list of heroic names in Órvar-Odds saga, where Guttmórn also occurs (Skj B II, 316 IV 3, 5).

There appears little justification for the giantesses’ engagement in the wars mentioned in terms of the structure of the poem. The poet may be intending to imitate Darradarljóð, where the engagement in war by the weaving valkyries as they proclaim the outcome of the battle is essential. There is also some similarity to the part played by Þorgerðr hõlgabrúðr and her sister Irpa in Hákon jarl’s battle with the Jómsvíkingar (in Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, ch. 154–5, in Flateyjarbók I, 210–11). The Grottasóngr poet may have wished to appropriate some of the terror of these beings for his giantesses.

13/4 í fólk stigum: cf. í fólk ganga, lausavísa 2 of Óláfr inn helgi (Skj B I, 210) and í fólk vada of Darradarljóð 4 (all meaning ‘to engage in war’).

13/5 beittum biõrn: it is difficult to decide between the nearly homophonous T and SR forms beittum/beiddum biõrn, both with the general meaning ‘we hunted bears’, but beita, ‘make bite, bait’, better emphasises the heroic risks.
Commentary

the girls undertake (cf. Olkofra þáttr ch. 1, ÍF 11, 86, where Olkofri, having got into trouble for accidentally burning down a group of chieftains’ woodlands, is refused help by his former patrons, who declare at þeir mundu eigi þeim birni beitas, ‘that they would not bait that bear’, i.e. bring trouble upon themselves).

The image of warriors as bears being overpowered as an example of heroic feats is found in Helgakviða Hundingsbana II 8/5: er ek bíorno tók í Bragalundi, ‘when I took bears in Bragalundr’, which may have influenced Grottasongr. Bjorn, ‘bear’, used in the sense of ‘warrior’ seems to occur only in riddling or enigmatic contexts (thus in the example just cited, Helgi is attempting to be evasive, being uncertain who he is talking to; for other examples see von See et al. 2000, 913–14), but the riddling context appears to be lost on the poet of Grottasongr. Bugge suggests an emendation (adopted by SG) to sneiddum brynjur; it is based on Vikarsbálkr 11/7–8 (Skj B II, 346): brynjur sníddum ok brutum skjóldu, ‘we sliced byrnies and shattered shields’, which might then be viewed as a likely borrowing from Grottasongr. The word-order brynjur sneiddum would be metricaly preferable, as in Vikarsbálkr. However, the emendation appears too far removed from the forms of SR and T to be adopted here.

13/8 gráserkiait: the warriors are ‘grey-shirted’ with iron mail-shirts; cf. hringserkjat lít, ‘ring-shirted army’, in Merlinusspa II, 46 (Skj B II, 33); í gráum serkjum, ‘in grey shirts’, in Órvar-Odds saga (Skj B II, 311, III 3/3).

13/8 SR ‘lit’ is a result of hypercorrection of final -ð to a (supposed) earlier -t.

14 An interference in politics is found also in Atlamál 96–9, where Guðrún and her brothers go roving, killing a king and freeing outlaws. This is similar in that a woman is involved in these Viking activities, and in the contrast which both poems draw between the former life of freedom and the present one of drudgery (Guðrún is married to Atli). Moreover, in both instances the female activists bring about vengeance on their masters.

14/7 kyrseta: this word occurs in Óttarr svarti’s Knútsdrápa 3 (Skj B I, 273) from 1024, but is otherwise a prose word.

14/8 felli: the subjunctive implies purpose: the giant girls are actively engaged in toppling knúi. The construction áðr . . . felli is fairly common, however: it occurs in Gísl Illugason’s Erfikvæði (c. 1104) 13/8 (áðr Hugi felli: Skj B I, 412), and frequently in Krákumál (twelfth century) (st. 5, 6, 7, 10, 20: Skj B I, 650 ff.). De Vries (1964–7, §129) regards Gísl’s phrase as borrowed from Grottasongr, but the expression is too short to draw any firm conclusion.

15/3 kõppum: either from kapp, ‘brave deed’, or from kappi, ‘champion’; cf. kendir at þegnum, ‘recognised as subordinates’ (Óttarr svarti, Hofiðlausn 19, c. 1023, Skj B I, 272).

15/5 skorðum . . . geirum: skora (of which skorðum is a syncopated preterite), frequent in prose, is found only here in Eddic poetry. Compare Sighvatr’s Erfi-drápa 6/3 (Skj B I, 240, c. 1040): hvössum hundmorgum [. . .] lét grundar vórðr med vopnum skórða vikingum skor, ‘with sharp weapons the guardian of the land had the heads sheared from a good many Vikings’ (though note the varia lectio form skerða, ‘diminish’, here; skorðum too could be read as skorðum, the preterite of skerða). The related skera commonly occurs in heroic verse of wounds, in
particular with reference to the cutting out of Hógni’s heart (Oddúnagrátr 28/5–6, Atlakviða 22, 24, Atlamál 59, Guðrúnarhvót 17).

15/8 brand ruðum: rjóða brand is a fairly frequent expression in skaldic verse (Skj B I, 133, 218, 338, 380).

16–17 St. 16 represents the lowest point in the expression of the giantesses’ fortunes: in the cold drudgery of slavery these mighty warrior women are forced to turn a mill to produce peace. Menja appears ready to give up milling, but in the next stanza her companion urges her on to grind out not peace but an army of vengeance to overthrow Fróði. A combination of traditions seems to be the poet’s purpose here: the peace of frið-Fróði is about to end in the violent overthrow of the murderous Fróði the erstwhile Heathobard.

16/3 miskunnlausar: this word does not appear elsewhere in verse. Miskunn is found only in late religious verse; the earliest is probably Harmsól from the twelfth century (st. 4, 46, Skj B I, 549, 560; for further references see LP, s.v.). A double meaning may be intended in the present context: the obvious sense is ‘(treated) without pity’, but the usual prose sense is ‘having no pity (on others)’ (see von See et al. 2000, 922–3, for examples). The implication is that the giantesses will also behave without pity in their subsequent treatment of Fróði.

16/5–6 aurr etr iliar, en ofan kulði: cf. Rígsþula 10/3: aurr var á ilium, ‘soil was on the soles of her feet’, describing Þír, ‘Thrall-woman’ (see commentary in PE II).

16/7 dólgs siõtul: dól, ‘enmity, strife’, occurs in the most ancient skaldic verse (see LP for references); in Eddic poetry it occurs in Helgakviða Hundingsbana I 20 (dólya dynr, ‘din of battle’), and, as in Grottasongr, in kennings: dólgrõgnir, ‘sovereign of enmity’ (warrior) (Atlakviða 31); dólgsopor, ‘battle trace’ (wound) (Helgakviða Hundingsbana II 42); dólgrîðr, ‘battle tree’ (warrior) (Sigrdrífumál 29). Siõtull occurs elsewhere only in a lausavísa of Egill (see commentary to 7/3–4), where it means ‘seat’ (cf. English settle); an interpretation of dólgs siõtul as ‘seat of enmity’ would appear feasible, but instances of ‘seat’ words being used in the sense of ‘source’ seem hard to adduce in Old Norse. Whilst lexical influence from Egill’s verse is likely, semantically siõtul is better linked here with the derived verb sjõtlandsk, ‘subside, settle’, hence siõtul is ‘that which settles’. Following the pattern of the heroic and skaldic verse known to him, the poet has formed a striking designation for the mill as a disperser of strife.

16/8 daprt er at Fróða: cf. Hárðardljoð 4/3: dopr ero þin himkynni, ‘dismal are your home affairs’ (Óðinn taunting Þórr). In Eddic poetry the word is found also in Atlamál 59/7 (dag dapran, ‘dismal day’), Sigurðarkviða in skamma 54/5 (daprar miniar, ‘dismal memories’). In all these instances the word is associated with death (respectively a dead mother, the servant’s own forthcoming death, a dead husband).

17/4 of hleyti: the manuscript form ‘leití’ represents a common spelling of hleyti in the sense ‘share’ (Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, s.v. hleyti II). Of either means ‘over, beyond’, hence ‘beyond my share’, or it is the (chiefly poetic) enclitic particle, of little semantic weight; in noun phrases the word order adjective + of + noun, as here, is typical (see Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, s.v. of enclitic particle II); the meaning then would be ‘for my part I have milled my share’.
Commentary

17/5  The change of mood, from Menja’s statement that she has milled enough and will stop, to one of defiant refusal to rest the hands before the milling has reached completion, indicates the probability of a change of speaker to Fenja, although there is no indication of this in the manuscripts. The T reading, with the giantesses as subject, is preferable to that of SR with the unclear singular subject (in the subjunctive); there has clearly been confusion of minims in the manuscript tradition.

17/8  The use of the subjunctive þykki emphasises the irony: when Fróði’s overthrow has been ground out, he will certainly feel enough milling has been performed.

18  Whereas Menja had prophesied riches for Fróði and had finally resigned herself merely to cease milling, Fenja proposes to change the milling to one of hostility, and she prophesies the overthrow of Fróði. He had fallen asleep earlier, dreaming of riches, but is now taunted by Fenja to awake, if he wishes to hear the song they are now singing. The sogum fornorn may, as SG argue, refer to the histories the girls have related in St. 9 and following, but the expression carries more weight if it is taken to mean the tales of the feuds and wars Fróði was involved in (such as are alluded to in Beowulf when it recounts the history of Froda and Ingeld), ancient to the audience of the poem, though still to happen from the perspective of the characters in the poem; cf. sogom fornorn, ‘old tales’ (Oddrúnargrátr 1/2); fornom stofom, ‘old lore’ (Vafþrúðnmál 1/5); fornar rúnar, ‘old runes’ (Völuspá 57/8); forn spíll fíra, ‘old news of men [i.e. of the world]’ (Völuspá 1/7); fornra spíallia, ‘old news’ (Helgakvitha Hundingsbana I 36/2).

18/1  Henderson, an emendation of Gudbrand Vigfusson, appears the best solution for this clearly corrupted passage. The SR reading ‘hólða’ (‘of freemen’) makes at best strained sense (‘hands of men shall [become] hard staves’), and presupposes the ellipsis of an infinitive ‘be’ or ‘become’. The T reading ‘holda’ might readily be taken as standing simply for halda (instances of ‘ó’ for ‘a’ are listed for example in Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, s.v. fáldr), but, as von See et al. (2000, 933–4) point out, halda in the sense of ‘grip’ requires a dative. Suspicions are aroused too by the fact that this is the only place where ‘õ’ occurs in the text of the poem in SR, suggesting innovation by the scribe (such as a misreading of ‘o’ as ‘õ’ and ‘correction’ to ‘õ’).

18/2  trjónor: the usual meaning is ‘snouts’ (trjónu trolls, ‘snout troll’, is found in Haustlóng 17 (Skj B I, 18) as a designation of Þórr’s hammer). However, von See et al. (2000, 935–6, following SG’s earlier suggestion) point out the likely existence of another meaning, ‘shaft’, found (arguably) in Eiríks saga rauða and Sturlunga. A meaning ‘shaft’ and thus ‘spear’ is clearly called for in Grottasongr.

18/4–5  The repeated call to awaken, used here as a device to link helmingar together (cf. 21/8, 22/1), is reminiscent of Bjarkamál 1–2 (Skj B I, 171), where a call to awaken as day breaks is made several times: but the call is explicitly to war, not to old stories, as in Grottasongr. It seems likely that Grottasongr’s allusion to the older poem underlines the nature of these old songs as ones of war in which Fróði is overthrown.

18/6  The word-order of T is followed as being metrically preferable; even so, the fall of the alliteration on the modal verb vill betrays weak poetic technique.
**Grottrasóngr**

It is possible that the text was corrupted at some point (in which case SR ef þú hlýða vill could be correct).


19  The stanza bears a strong resemblance, presumably coincidental, to the Old English *Finnsburh Fragment* lines 3 ff.: Ne ōís ne dagād eastan, ne her draca ne fleogō, ne her disse healle hornas ne byrnād, ac her forþ berād [...] nu arisād wædaēda [...] ac onmæcngiæad nu, wetand mine, habbað cœwre linda, ‘This is not the day dawning from the east, nor is any dragon flying here, nor are the eaves of this hall burning here, but [an army] here brings [weapons] [...] now deeds of woe arise [...] but awake now, my warriors, hold your shields’. To this may be added the opening of *Bjarkamål*, marking the beginning of battle: *Dagr’s upp kominn*, ‘Day has arisen’. Behind the ‘fire to the east’ of *Grottrasóngr* (surely pointing to the dawning day), and the disavowal of the fiery light at Finnsburh being the new day, lies the suspicion that a fiery sky marked the onset of battle: cf. the vigroði, ‘battle reddening’, of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 19. Also to be compared with the scene in *Grottrasóngr* is that described by Saxo (VII, i.7), where Fróðo V is attacked and burned in his hall at night, with the implication that he may have been asleep (inferred from his punishment of those that woke him, mentioned previously).

19/1  Cf. Hyndluljóð 49/1: *Hyr sék breonna*, ‘I see a fire burning’.


19/4  *vit*: SG take the mention of beacons as evidence for the poem’s composition in Norway under Hákon góði (935–61), who made use of warning beacons (*Hákonar saga góða* ch. 22, IF 26, 176–7); however, as SG point out, beacons were also used later in Orkney (see *Orkneyinga saga* ch. 69–71). This places the use of such warning beacons in the mid-twelfth century, in both a time and place more likely for the composition of the poem.

19/6  *af bragði*: the expression is common in prose, but occurs sporadically in (fairly late) verse: *Atlamál* 2/7, a *vísa* of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (*Skj* B ii, 258), and *Krákumál* 25 (*Skj* B I, 655).

19/7  The burning of Fróði in his hall forms the dramatic climax to the revenge taken by the sons of his murdered brother in *Hrólfssaga kraka*; however, in *Skjoldunga saga* peace-Fróði too is burnt in his hall, by Mýsingr. The poet again has not focused on an event which can be used to distinguish one Fróði from the other.

19/7–8  Neckel (1908, 428) compares the mid-twelfth century Ivarr Ingimundarson’s *Sigurðarbolkr* 24/7–8 (*Skj* B I, 471): *brunnu byggðir fyr buðlungi*, ‘the habitations burnt despite the prince’; this is likely to be borrowed from *Grottrasóngr* (see de Vries 1964–7, §129).

19/8  *búdlungi*: a term for ‘prince’ derived from Buðl, father of Atli, found, in Eddic poetry, only in heroic poems; it is also used in *Ynglingatal* 32, 34 (*Skj* B I, 13), by Snorri in *Háttatal* 14, 74 (*Skj* B II, 64, 81), and in kennings in skaldic verse (see *LP*, s.v. *búdlungr*).

20/2  Hleiðr was regarded as the ancient seat of the Danish kings; it is identified with the modern hamlet of Lejre, near Roskilde. There may have been
some historical basis in this tradition as far as the Danish kings of the fifth to sixth centuries are concerned (including Hrólfr kraki), but Fróði, as a Heathobarb originally, would not have lived there. By the time of all the Scandinavian records, Hleiðr is regarded as the seat of all the Fróðis, including peace-Fróði, so little can be concluded from its mention in the poem at this point.

20/3 The T reading *raudom ringom* is possibly original. Initial *h*—before a consonant is also lacking in T’s ‘lyða’ and ‘leiti’. Whilst this would be consistent with a non-Icelandic origin, Icelandic skalds would also have been open to using alliteratively felicitous dialectal variants (the same phrase occurs elsewhere in heroic verse, but often requires *h*—, e.g. at *Prymskviða* 29).

20/4 *regingríöti*: *rein* normally refers to ‘the powers’, i.e. the gods, but a basic sense of ‘mighty’ is more likely here: cf. the *reginþing*, ‘mighty assembly’, i.e. battle, of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 51. Compare also *reginfjalli*, ‘mighty, wild mountain’, of *Heiðreks gátur* 10 (Skj B II, 242). Possibly a sense of fatality may have adhered to the word *regin*, which is related to Gothic *ragin*, ‘judgement’, but if he inherited the word *regingríöti* with this connotation the poet of *Grottasongr* seems not to have been aware of it.

20/4 *mõndli*: on the ‘handle’ as a cosmological entity, see the section on ‘The cosmic mill’ in Introduction V.

20/7 *vamlar*: SR reads ‘valmar’, where the short line beneath ‘lm’ indicates that some sort of correction is required; it does not appear to indicate deletion, but may indicate transposition (a similar sign is found elsewhere); possibly the scribe wrote ‘val’ in anticipation of *valdreyra*. The word *vamall* does not occur in modern Icelandic, but is well recorded elsewhere in Scandinavian languages (e.g. Danish *vammel*, ‘sickly’). Another possibility is to follow the T reading ‘valnar’; this word too is not found in modern Icelandic, but is well recorded in all other Scandinavian tongues. Particularly apposite is the sense in Norn: *valin*, *valen*, ‘benumbed with cold, of limbs, esp. the hands; fumbling, lacking handiness in doing a piece of work’ (on this suggestion, see Svar Sigmundsson 1975). Two orthographic developments are thus possible: *a*. an original ‘valnar’ was miswritten by the SR scribe as ‘valmar’ and then corrected with a small line between *l* and *m*: the only distraction to cause this miswriting would seem to be the ‘ma’ in the preceding *eruma*; or *b*. an original ‘vamlar’ was miswritten in the antecedent of SR and T (which shows clear signs of being a defective text by the time of the writing of SR and T) as ‘valmar’, under the influence of the several *val*— compounds in the text, in particular of the following *í valdreyra*; this form was copied by the scribe of SR, who marked it as dubious and probably intended a transposition of *l* and *m* by his mark, whereas the scribe of T or his antecedent corrected the form to ‘valnar’. This implies that the word *valinn* was still understood in Icelandic in the seventeenth century – unless the T scribe was simply interpreting the word as the past participle of *velja*, ‘chosen’ (for bloodshed, *í valdreyra*) (which would, however, make nonsense of the girls’ account of their marching into the fray in many wars, assuming that *eruma* was correctly read as ‘we are not’).

20/7 *valdreyra* is a highly unusual word, occurring in verse elsewhere only in *Haraldskviða* 13 (Skj B I, 24); the only other comparable compound appears to be *valblöð* (Guðrúnarhvöt 4, *Krúkumál* 2 (Skj B I, 649)).
The reason for the shift to the past tense and to the third person is unclear; the speech appears to be blending with the narrative of lines 5 to 7.

21/1–2 *mins foður mar:* for this periphrasis for ‘I’ cf. *mins foður sveinn,* ‘my father’s boy’ (Þórarinn svarti, Skj B I, 107), Sigurðr [. . .] mun [. . .] moðr foður kallaðr, ‘Sigurðr will be called son of his father’ (Ragnars saga lodbrókar, Skj B II, 253).

21/7 *iáðni varðar:* cf. Darradarljóð 2/7: *járnvarðr yllir,* ‘the shed rod is iron-clad’. In the meaningless SR reading *‘iarnar fiarþar’* the –ar of *iarnar* anticipates that of *fiarþar,* ‘fi’ is doubtless a misreading of an original ‘p’, the use of which indicates an early manuscript.

22 This stanza is at best corrupt, and probably an interpolation (for a full discussion, see von see et al. 2000, 952–8). The son of Yrsa, called both son and brother, is Hrólfr kraki: Helgi married his own daughter Yrsa unaware of their relationship (*Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 6; a similar history is related in *Skjöldunga saga* ch. 11 and Saxo book II). The manuscripts read, in lines 3–4, *víð hálfdana hefna Fróða;* this would mean, on the most natural reading, that Hrólfr was taking vengeance for Fróði against (though *víð* is rarer than *á* in this sense) or alongside the ‘half-Danes’. Clearly the vengeance must be taken against Fróði, for which we would expect *á Fróða* (as here emended: the plain dative is, however, possible; see Fritzner 1886–1972 on the various constructions with *hefna*). Half-Danes are nowhere else mentioned in Germanic literature, other than in the Old English *Finnsburh Fragment* (and the associated Episode in *Beowulf* 1069), and the use of the word even there is not clear: Tolkien (1982, 37–45) argues it was rather a ‘surname’ than a tribal name. The only possible sense in the present context would be ‘sons of Hálfdan’ (the brother whom Fróði murdered in *Hrólfs saga kraka*). This would indicate that Hrólfr was acting in concert with his father and uncle to take vengeance on Fróði – something with no analogue anywhere in Old Norse literature. Here, the emendation adopted by SG is followed, changing *víð* to *vígs.* The form ‘halfdana’ would have arisen after a scribe had wrongly written *víð,* which requires an accusative form, most easily derived from ‘halfdanar’ by dropping the final *-r* (even though this changes the sense). However, problems remain: there is no parallel to Hrólfr taking vengeance for his grandfather (an unlikely event in itself); the proposal of SG, that Hrólfr is here regarded as son, not grandson, of Hálfdan is also unparallelled and unlikely. In addition, the second *helmingr* presents us with a very weakly expressed irrelevance scarcely credible as the pinnacle of a curse of vengeance. Moreover, alliteration is weak throughout the stanza: *mon* (2) should be unstressed; in 3 *Hálfdanar vígs* would be better (and *víð hálfdana* would again be weak); in 5–6 both *hennar* and *heitinn* are hardly suitable to bear the stress; 8 would be improved as *báðar vitum þat.* As Eiríkr Magnússon points out, the time-frame of the stanza is also out of kilter with the rest of the poem: in 19 the speaker already sees the warning beacon heralding war, yet 22 proclaims a piece of knowledge presumably unknown as yet to the world, that Hrólfr *will* be called both son and brother (and *will* seek vengeance). Such an array of weaknesses in this stanza suggest it is a badly constructed interpolation, based perhaps on a marginal surmise by a previous scribe. Snorri did not know this stanza, or ignored it if he
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did, for his tale of Grotti identifies the Fróði as frið-Fróði, not the later brother of Hálfdan; indeed, the poet nowhere else makes such a clear identification, preferring rather to shroud Fróði’s identity in a deliberate ambiguity to produce an interplay of characteristics associated, in tradition, with separate characters.


23/4  í iõtumóði: in eddic poetry found elsewhere only in Völuspá 47/4 (of the world-serpent Þormungandr). It is also found in prose, of giants and trolls.

23/5–8  The skapttré is probably a framework above the mill for attaching and steadying the handle (the skapt). SG’s argument against this, on the ground that tré is plural, does not carry much weight: the use of the plural derives from the fact that the apparatus had several parts to it. The manuscript form ‘skap’ can scarcely be accepted; no sensible meaning for skap can be adduced that has any parallels. The lúðr would be roughly at waist height; as the great lower stone (hinn hofgi hallr) fell, it split in two (SG take this to refer here to the upper stone: elsewhere the reference of hofgi hallr is to the lower stone; the poet is emphasising that even the mighty unmoving base-stone of the quern is shattered).

24/4  The line is suspect: the use of sem (‘as’) appears to be without sense, and the alliterative stress on munum is unsatisfactory. It is likely that some lines have been lost before 4.

24/5  fullstaðit: this has great ironic value: the girls have stood long enough to accomplish the full circle of fate encompassed by the poem – long enough to fulfil any engagement they have made, long enough to bore and tire them, long enough to grind out all the good and ill that adhered to the name of Fróði.
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