

An Eddic Fairy-tale of a Cursed Princess: An Edition of *Vambarljóð*

Haukur Þorgeirsson

Abstract

The Eddic fairy-tales are a group of poems of medieval origin which were collected from oral tradition in Iceland in the seventeenth century and later. These poems employ an Icelandic version of the Germanic alliterative metre and make use of Eddic formulas and style. They have fairy-tale subjects with evil stepmothers, elves, ogresses, curses and other supernatural elements. A striking trait of these poems is their emphasis on female characters and perspectives. The poem here edited is *Vambarljóð*, which tells of Signý, a resourceful princess cursed by her stepmother to appear as a cow's stomach. The poem was collected three times from oral tradition. One version (V) survives as part of a late seventeenth-century collection of ballads and other popular poems. Two other versions are fragmentary: one of them (P) was written down for Árni Magnússon (1663–1730) and the other (J) by one of Árni's successors. The most complete version, V, is also the one that has the most archaic appearance and probably best reflects the poem's medieval origins. The three versions are edited separately here. Later poems and prose narratives of the same tale type are also briefly described.

Introduction

In seventeenth-century Iceland it became fashionable to collect folk-poetry from oral tradition.¹ Most of the poems thus recorded are ballads, many of them of medieval origin and with close analogues in the Faroe Islands and mainland Scandinavia.² But along with these, the folk-poem collections also contain a few works of another genre, the Eddic fairy-tales.³ These are narrative poems with fairy-tale motifs composed in the Icelandic version of the

¹ I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers of this article for an abundance of constructive and helpful feedback. I also owe many thanks to Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir, Yelena Sesselja Helgadóttir, Vésteinn Ólason, Helgi Skúli Kjartansson and Frog. The map comprising Figure 2 was produced by Pétur Húni Björnsson.

² The standard work on Icelandic ballads is Vésteinn Ólason, *The Traditional Ballads of Iceland*, Rit, 22 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1982). During the doctoral disputation of this work, Vésteinn further reviewed the evidence that shows that many of the ballads collected from oral tradition in the seventeenth century are of medieval origin: Vésteinn Ólason, 'Fornkvæðaspjall III: Svör Vésteins Ólasonar', *Gripla*, 6 (1984), 187–201, <https://gripla.arnastofnun.is/index.php/gripla/article/view/401/387%3E>.

³ I introduce the term 'Eddic fairy-tales' here as a more legible alternative to the vague Icelandic word *sagnakvæði*.

Germanic alliterative metre. Only eight of these poems have come down to us but some exist in more than one version, including *Vambarljóð*, which is edited here.

A striking feature of the Eddic fairy-tales is their wealth of poetic formulas, many of which they share with the Eddic poems of the Codex Regius and other medieval poetry. Jón Helgason argued that the Eddic fairy-tales represent a direct continuation of the Eddic tradition.⁴ There are good reasons to believe that this is true. The popular subject matter and the oral preservation are factors which suggest a continuous tradition rather than later learned imitations.⁵ The strong emphasis which these poems have on female characters and perspectives is also unlike the typical products of the educated elite but in keeping with Eddic poems such as *Oddrúnargrátr* and the *Guðrúnarkviður*.

Vambarljóð tells the story of Signý Hringsdóttir, a princess cursed by her evil stepmother to have the shape of a stomach (*vömb*). Signý takes to being a monster with gusto and there is some charm in the ruthlessness with which she forces a prince into marrying her to undo the curse. In one stanza, Signý taunts the prince for crying on his wedding day, pointing out that many brides are sad when they enter into marriage but an unhappy groom is a novelty. The stanza appears to call attention to a certain subversion or role-reversal in the narrative and may have been salient to the audience of the poem since it is one of a small handful to be preserved in all three versions edited here.

Vambarljóð was published along with the other Eddic fairy-tales by Ólafur Davíðsson in 1898 but that edition leaves much to be desired and was not based on all surviving manuscripts.⁶ In the current edition, three versions are separately edited and translated. The V version tells a complete story while the Þ and J versions are fragmentary. These versions have enough textual overlap to be seen as the same poem but they are so different that an edition with one base text and variants would not do them justice.

There exists a fourth version (L) of *Vambarljóð* which is significantly longer than the other three. It tells the same story but shares only very few lines with any of the other versions. This longer text is not edited here but I include some analysis of it which indicates that it is of post-medieval origin — perhaps best seen as a new composition based on the old poem rather than a variant of it. The story of Signý is also preserved in two versions in *rímur* style (rhymed epic) as well as a prose fairy-tale version collected in the nineteenth century. It was a productive story for a long time.

The first collector

Students of Old Norse literature know the efforts undertaken by bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson (1605–75) to gather and transmit the medieval literature of Iceland. His most famous

For an introduction to the genre see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, 'The Tradition of Icelandic *sagnakvæði*', *RMN Newsletter*, 6 (2013), 15–20.

⁴ Jón Helgason, 'Norges og Íslands digtning', in *Litteraturhistorie B: Norge og Island*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal, Nordisk kultur, 8B (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1952), 3–179 (p. 167).

⁵ In a previous study I contrasted the Eddic fairy-tale *Gullkársljóð*, which is clearly of medieval origin, with the mythological poem *Hrafnagaldur*, which has many telltale signs of being a learned seventeenth-century composition. Haukur Þorgeirsson, 'Gullkársljóð og Hrafnagaldur: Framlag til sögu fornryðislags', *Gripla*, 21 (2010), 299–334.

⁶ *Íslenzkar þulur og þjóðkvæði*, ed. by Ólafur Davíðsson (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmentafélag, 1898), pp. 4–94. The haphazard methods used in the edition are reviewed by Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, '(Ó)Traustar heimildir: Um söfnun og útgáfu þjóðkvæða', *Skáldskaparmál*, 4 (1997), 210–26.

accomplishment is acquiring the Codex Regius of the Eddic poems, which he sent to his sovereign, Frederick III of Denmark, in 1662. Few know that around the same time, Brynjólfur's younger brother Gissur also set out to collect medieval poems, but for a different purpose and with a different method — not from old vellum but from the lips of the people.

The manuscripts which preserve most of the Eddic fairy-tales are collections of *fornkvæði*, 'poems of old'. These collections mostly contain ballads in the same simple end-rhymed poetic form as was popular in the Faroe Islands and mainland Scandinavia. For this reason, the word *fornkvæði* is sometimes translated as 'ballad' but this may cause some confusion since the Icelandic word had a wider sense. The first known collector of *fornkvæði* was Gissur Sveinsson (1604–83), a clergyman in the West Fjords. Gissur's collection survives in his own autograph copy, AM 147 8vo (G), which originally contained 71 numbered poems. The title page of the book notes that it is 'til gamans og skiemtunar ad lesa' ('to be read for enjoyment and entertainment') and the first page reiterates this with the heading 'Nøckur fornkvæde til gamans' ('Some *fornkvæði* to enjoy'). Gissur and the other seventeenth-century collectors aimed to collect enjoyable poetry and their primary objectives were not philological or historical.⁷ Some examples will give an idea of the contents of Gissur's book and the Icelandic ballad tradition.

Poem 1 is *Kvæði af Magnúsi Jónssyni*, known only from Iceland and the Faroe Islands. The titular character proposes to two women and ends up paying for that with his life. Vésteinn Ólason describes the ballad's 'clumsy' style as 'characteristic of ballads which have come late to Iceland', suggesting the sixteenth century as a possibility.⁸

Poem 2 is *Kvæði af Tófu og Suffaralín*, a medieval ballad, known from all the Nordic countries.⁹ The characters are historical — King Valdemar the Great of Denmark (1131–82), his queen Sophia ('Suffaralín') and his mistress Tove. As in poem 1, the subject is a love triangle, followed by a murder. In this case, the queen kills the mistress.

Poem 7 is *Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós*. This is the only medieval ballad which is still popularly sung in Iceland. It tells of a knight's meeting with some elf-maidens who invite him to live with them. The knight says that he would rather keep his faith in Christ. One of the elf-maidens then asks him for a parting kiss and as he obliges, she kills him with a sword. The ballad is known in all the Nordic countries and closely related ballads were recorded in Scotland and in Brittany.¹⁰

Most of the poems in Gissur's book are indeed ballads and most of those were recorded from Icelandic tradition. There are also, however, twelve poems translated directly from the Danish ballad edition of Vedel, which was first published in 1591 and reprinted several times in the seventeenth century. These twelve texts are close renderings of the Danish originals and distinct in style from the other ballads.

Along with the ballads, Gissur's book contains four Eddic fairy-tales: *Snjáskvæði* (poem 24), *Kötludraumur* (poem 25), *Þóruljóð* (poem 48) and *Kringilnefjukvæði* (poem 49). Finally, there are twelve poems near the end of the book which are neither ballads nor Eddic fairy-tales. Jón Helgason considered one of those, *Enska vísan*, to be recorded from oral tradition

⁷ There is some information on Gissur's personality and speculation on his possible motives as a collector in Vésteinn Ólason, 'Vedel á Vestfjörðum – Um Magnús Jónsson í Vigur og söfnun fornkvæða', *Jocoseria Arn-Marianiana* (Copenhagen: [no publisher], 2002). [Photocopied *Festschrift* without pagination.]

⁸ Vésteinn Ólason, *The Ballads of Iceland*, pp. 226–27.

⁹ Vésteinn Ólason, *The Ballads of Iceland*, p. 307.

¹⁰ Vésteinn Ólason, *The Ballads of Iceland*, p. 112.

while he judged the other eleven to have been composed pen in hand and transmitted through scribal tradition.¹¹ The reader might be surprised by the frequent and confident statements made by Jón Helgason on which poems did or did not undergo oral transmission but there are many tell-tale signs which distinguish preservation by memory from preservation by ink.¹²

Gissur’s book does not mention any sources, authors or informants or provide any explanation on how the work was compiled. But the chance survival of some curious pages seems to offer a little bit of insight into Gissur’s methods. Three leaves which are now a part of G (probably originally as flyleaves) contain what seem to be working documents made by Gissur while he was compiling the poems.¹³ The notes contain the first few words of each stanza of *Magna dans* and *Ásu dans* — presumably Gissur made these notes in an effort to gather up all the stanzas and place them in the right order.

When these initial notes are compared with the final versions, it turns out that there are some differences. The final versions have more stanzas and some differences in wording, even if we only have a few words of each stanza for comparison. Presumably more stanzas came to light as Gissur continued working with his informants.¹⁴

Gissur wrote the extant G in 1665. It is his own copy of a previous version of his collection, known as *X. Another seventeenth-century collection of *fornkvæði* descended from *X is known as B (Add. 11.177). It contains most of the same poems as G but with a couple of omissions and a few additions. The hand in B is that of Oddur Jónsson (1648–1711), a relative of Gissur, also raised in the West Fjords.¹⁵ While B represents only a minor expansion of Gissur’s collection, a much more extensive expansion was to come.

The great collection

Magnús Jónsson *digri* (‘the stout’) of Vigur (1637–1702) in the West Fjords was an admirer of books and literature with enough worldly means to pursue his interests extensively. Along with his secretaries, Magnús produced a substantial collection of manuscripts, some of them of great size.¹⁶ The grandest of all is a hefty folio volume of the sagas of Icelanders (AM 426 fol.) with full-page colour illustrations of three saga heroes, including Egill Skalla-Grímsson.

Among many manuscripts of poetry produced under Magnús’s auspices was a collection of 186 *fornkvæði* produced in 1699–1700. The original manuscript, *V, is now lost but the text survives in good copies. This great collection begins with Gissur’s original collection and then expands it with more poems of the same sort — ballads translated from Danish as well as ballads and other poems recorded from Icelandic tradition.

The great collection contains two Eddic fairy-tales that are not in G — *Vambarljóð* (poem 176) and *Gullkársljóð* (poem 177). Both have clearly been through oral transmission but we

¹¹ Jón Helgason, *Íslensk fornkvæði. Íslandske folkeviser*, Editiones Arnarnagæanæ, series B, 10–17, 8 vols (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963), 1 xl.

¹² Haukur Þorgeirsson, ‘*Gullkársljóð og Hrafnagaldur*’; Haukur Þorgeirsson, ‘Hávamál Resens prófessors’, *Són*, 13 (2015), 111–34.

¹³ Jón Helgason, *Kvæðabók séra Gissurar Sveinssonar AM 147, 8^{vo}* (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska fræðafélag, 1960), pp. 51–52.

¹⁴ Vésteinn Ólason, *The Ballads of Iceland*, p. 21. I have previously discussed this example in the context of the different recorded versions of *Vqluspá*: Haukur Þorgeirsson, ‘In Defence of Emendation: The Editing of *Vqluspá*’, *Saga-Book*, 44 (2020), 31–56 (pp. 34–35).

¹⁵ Jón Helgason, *Íslensk fornkvæði*, 1 xvi.

¹⁶ See the overview in Jón Helgason, *Kvæðabók úr Vigur: AM 148, 8to* (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska fræðafélag,

can be sure that *Gullkársljóð* was not collected from memory or oral performance specifically for *V. An earlier text of *Gullkársljóð* exists in a manuscript (JS 28 fol.) written ca. 1660 for bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson. The texts in 28 and *V are so similar — the same 71 strophes in the same order — that they are highly unlikely to represent two independent recordings from the sort of oral tradition that existed in seventeenth-century Iceland.

Since *Vambarljóð* and *Gullkársljóð* are adjacent in *V it seems plausible that they were obtained from the same source. We could speculate that *Vambarljóð* already existed in written form ca. 1660 like the four Eddic fairy-tales we have in Gissur Sveinsson's hand and the one that we have in a manuscript written for his brother, Brynjólfur. Some support for this is found in the L version of *Vambarljóð* which is discussed later on.

A glimpse of the informants

While the seventeenth-century collectors of *fornkvæði* left us little information on their sources, the arrival of Árni Magnússon (1663–1730) on the scene clears away some of the fog. Eager to collect almost any information on the past, Árni did not neglect the value of texts and knowledge in human memory and in some cases the *fornkvæði* written down for Árni include information on the informants.

When Árni was in Álftanes in Iceland in 1703 he had a ballad recorded, *Kvæði um sankti Hallvarð*. The informant was a woman near the age of eighty.¹⁷ Another ballad, *Eyvindar ríma*, is also noted by Árni to have been recorded from an old woman.¹⁸

Árni seems to have made a particular effort to collect the Eddic fairy-tales. What survives of his collection in AM 154 8vo includes seven texts of *Kötludraumur*, four of *Snjáskvæði*, two of *Kringilnefjukkvaði* and one each of *Bryngerðarljóð*, *Hyndluljóð* and *Vambarljóð*.¹⁹ One of the texts of *Snjáskvæði* was recorded from 'a confused old lady who had learned it from her mother'.²⁰ Árni also had a text of *Vambarljóð* (the P version) recorded from an old woman, as described below. The source of *Bryngerðarljóð* was Guðrún Hákonardóttir (1659–1745), who supplied Árni with many poems recorded from oral tradition.²¹

Judging from Árni's informants, the *fornkvæði* tradition seems to have been kept alive by women and this is corroborated by two other sources. One is *Landbúaljóð* by Eiríkur Hallsson (1614–98) which mentions 'the beautiful old *fornkvæði* of Norway which the old ladies would repeat in the dark'.²² Another source is a letter from Snæbjörn Pálsson (1677–1767) to Árni Magnússon written in 1708. Snæbjörn comments on a particular book of *fornkvæði*, probably the great collection:

1955), pp. 7–14.

¹⁷ 'kona um ättræds alldur'; Jón Helgason, *Íslenzk fornkvaði*, iv 106.

¹⁸ 'uppskrifud efter gamalli konu'; Jón Helgason, *Íslenzk fornkvaði*, iv 110.

¹⁹ When Jón Ólafsson (1705–79) described AM 154 8vo in his catalogue, he recorded three texts of *Vambarljóð*, two of which have since been lost, and two of *Gullkársljóð*, both of which have been lost or misplaced; see Haukur Þorgeirsson, 'Glað eða á röngum stað?', *Bókavarda hlaðin Guðnýju Ragnarsdóttur sextugri 9. janúar 2023* (Reykjavík: Menningar- og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen, 2023), pp. 18–19. There are also indications that a text of *Kringilnefjukkvaði* written for Árni by Þórður Þórðarson has been lost; see Jón Helgason, *Íslenzk fornkvaði*, iv xlvii–xlviii. There is some further analysis of the composition of the 154 collection in Beke Stegmann, 'Árni Magnússon's Rearrangement of Paper Manuscripts' (doctoral thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2017).

²⁰ 'Skrifad efter fyrrisogn óskirrar kerlingar er það hafde numed af móður sinne', AM 154 8vo II, 1r.

²¹ Jón Helgason, *Íslenzk fornkvaði*, iv xli–xlvi.

²² 'falleg Norvegs / fornkvaði gömul, / sem kerlingar / klifuðu í húmi.'

It seems to me that the book of *fornkvæði* is not as rich in poems as I knew the hearts and minds of eighty-year-old women to be when I was a child. But most of them are buried in the ground now along with their knowledge.²³

Although Snæbjörn may have seen his childhood in a nostalgic light, there are real reasons to believe that the *fornkvæði* tradition was already in decline by the early eighteenth century. The seventeenth-century collectors were able to obtain more poems and more complete poems than their later counterparts. One constant, however, is that the known informants are predominantly women in later times as well.²⁴

The feminine leanings of the Icelandic *fornkvæði* tradition are clear not only from the gender of the known performers but also from the content of the poems themselves.²⁵ This is true both of the ballads and the Eddic fairy-tales. *Vambarljóð* certainly fits this pattern. Both the hero and the antagonist are women and the purpose of the male characters is to serve as their love interests and family members.

The story: a summary of the V version

Some of the subsequent discussion will be easier to follow for readers that know the story of *Vambarljóð* and thus it may be convenient to have a summary at hand. The V version is complete enough to be summarized as a coherent story. Insofar as they are preserved, the J and Þ versions largely agree with V but differ in some details.

King Hringr and Queen Alþrúðr have a happy marriage and a promising daughter named Signý. The queen dies and the king is distraught, going every morning to her burial mound to grieve. Signý attempts to comfort him but he cannot be consoled and sends her away. She then predicts that the king will be betrayed and walks saddened back to her bower.

A woman named Yrsa arrives at the burial mound and introduces herself to king Hringr. He suspect she is a troll-woman ('flagð') and attempts to send her away but she shakes a drop of wine onto the king's lip. He is then bewitched and under Yrsa's control and takes her as his new queen. Yrsa envies Signý for her beauty and curses her to take the shape of a stomach. Signý compels Yrsa to include some way to undo the curse. Yrsa replies that if Signý gets married to a king's son then Yrsa's curses will be undone and she will die.

Signý, now in her stomach shape, rolls into a different land, ruled by one King Ásmundr with the assistance of his mother. She finds a peasant couple near the royal estate and convinces them to take her on as an adopted daughter and a hard worker. Signý then takes to driving the goat herd of the old couple onto the king's field to have the goats graze there. King Ásmundr is away on an expedition but when he returns his men tell him that an old lady's daughter has been grazing his fields and causing damage. The king is angered by this and goes alone to attend to the issue. He meets Signý, commands her to leave and then strikes her. As he strikes Signý, Ásmundr becomes stuck to her even as she begins rolling around.

²³ 'Fornkvæða bokenn þiker mier ecke so rijk af fornkvædumm sem hiórtu og briöst attrædra kerlinga hef eg vitad nær jeg var barn, enn þær med þeim frödleik eru flestar i jórd grafnar nu.' Vésteinn Ólason, *The Traditional Ballads of Iceland*, p. 18.

²⁴ Paul Acker, 'Performing Gender in the Icelandic Ballads', *New Norse Studies: Essays on the Literature and Culture of Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. by Jeffrey Turco, *Islandica*, 58 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 2015), 301–19 (p. 303).

²⁵ Paul Acker, 'Performing Gender in the Icelandic Ballads'.

Distraught, he asks her what he should do in order to be released. Signý replies that he must propose to her and wed her as he would a princess. The king is forced to accept.

At home, Ásmundr's mother asks him why he is unhappy. He asks her in turn for poison to drink. In the next scene, Signý the stomach rolls before the throne of the king and taunts him for his sadness. In the evening, the king's mother puts Signý into bed with the king and they fall asleep together. As Signý wakes, she feels as if she is burning. She is now in human form and discovers that the king is burning her stomach form and asking her for her name. She tells him about the curse and asks him to bring her to her father. He proposes to her again and sends a messenger to her father, King Hringr. The messenger learns that Yrsa is dead and relays a message from Signý that her body should be burnt and the ashes thrown out to sea. Finally, Hringr sails to King Ásmundr's realm and asks Signý to accept Ásmundr's proposal. The tale ends happily.

The Eddic fairy-tales: love, elves and ogresses

In order to contextualize *Vambarljóð*, this section and the next briefly review the other seven Eddic fairy-tales. These poems have much in common, including themes, poetic language and in some cases even the names of the characters.

Going by the number of attestations, the most popular of the Eddic fairy-tales was *Kötludraumur*, 'Katla's dream'. It is also the only one to have a historical setting, tenth-century Iceland; the main characters are mentioned in *Landnámabók*. The title character, Katla, has a dream in which she is impregnated by an elf. She confesses this to her husband, Már, but he takes this kindly and they raise the child together. Gísli Sigurðsson takes *Kötludraumur* to deal with the social issue of extramarital pregnancy, which carried harsh penalties under Icelandic law after 1564. In his interpretation, the popularity of the poem suggests that the public had a more lenient attitude to such infractions than the law.²⁶ In a response article, Einar G. Pétursson convincingly argues that the composition of the poem must predate the Reformation. He offers various additional considerations on Icelandic attitudes to infidelity and the reality of elves.²⁷

Another fairy-tale of human-elf relations is *Gullkársljóð*. The princess Æsa falls in love with an elf named Gullkár. Her parents disapprove of the relationship but she eventually follows her lover to Álþheimar. The poem has many plot points in common with *Yonec* by Marie de France, which was translated to Norse in the thirteenth century.²⁸ I have previously pointed out similarities between *Gullkársljóð* and the Eddic poem *Völundarkviða*, both in themes and in turns of phrase.²⁹ The Eddic fairy-tale *Bryngerðarljóð* also has much in common with *Gullkársljóð*, including a love-affair opposed by parents.

²⁶ Gísli Sigurðsson, 'Kötludraumur: Flökkuminni eða þjóðfélagsumræða?', *Gripla*, 9 (1995), 189–217, <https://gripla.arnastofnun.is/index.php/gripla/article/view/353>.

²⁷ Einar G. Pétursson, 'Tvö skrif um Kötludraum', *Gripla*, 26 (2015), 185–228, <https://gripla.arnastofnun.is/index.php/gripla/article/view/139>.

²⁸ This was first pointed out by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Um íslenzkar þjóðsögur* (Reykjavík: Sjóður Margrétar Lehmann-Filhés, 1940), p. 81, and further explored by Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, 'Old French *lais* and Icelandic *sagnakvæði*', in *Francia et Germania: Studies in Strengleikar and Þiðreks saga af Bern*, ed. by Karl G. Johansson and Rune Flaten, Bibliotheca Nordica, 5 (Oslo: Novus, 2012), pp. 265–88.

²⁹ Haukur Þorgeirsson, 'Gullkársljóð og Hrafnagaldur: Framlag til sögu fornryðislags', *Gripla*, 21 (2010), 299–334.

Þóruǫljóð tells the puzzling story of a tall woman or ogress, Þóra, who comes visiting at a farm in pre-Christian Denmark during a Yule feast.³⁰ She is welcomed by the young host, Þorkell, despite the reservations of his mother. Þóra eventually rewards Þorkell by giving him a sail with some favorable properties. In a previous article, I pointed out similarities between the Þóra of the poem and the Háa-Þóra ('Tall Þóra') of an Icelandic game referred to in sources from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.³¹ From the point of view of metrics and historical linguistics, *Þóruǫljóð* is the most archaic of the Eddic fairy-tales. It is possible that it is genuinely older than the others but another possibility is that it is merely better preserved. *Þóruǫljóð* is the shortest poem, only 26 stanzas, and short poems may get through centuries of oral preservation with fewer changes than longer ones.

Kringilnefjukvæði is another short poem with a helpful ogress, Kringilnefja. She joins the household of a poor widower and his daughter, Gullinhöfða. The ogress educates her stepdaughter in needlework and helps her in a rather forceful way to marry a prince. In the end it turns out that the stepmother ogress was Gullinhöfða's aunt under a curse.

The evil stepmother poems

While *Kringilnefjukvæði* has a helpful stepmother, the more common trope of an evil stepmother cursing her stepdaughter occurs in three Eddic fairy-tales. *Snjáskvæði* combines this theme with an interest in elves and tells the story of an elven princess who is cursed to appear as a human king. As pointed out by Lee Colwill, the transformation seems to take place chiefly through the taking on of some external trappings of masculinity:

Réð ég kvenglysi að kasta mínu.
 Steyptu seggir yfir mig svalri brynju.
 Settu skreyttan hjálm á skarar fjall
 en í hendi hjaltorm búinn.³²

I cast off my female finery. The men threw a cool mailcoat over me. They placed an ornamented helmet on my hair mountain [head] and a decorated hilt-worm [sword] in my hand.

Hyndluljóð is the Eddic fairy-tale which is most similar to *Vambarljóð*. Princess Logadóttir is cursed by her stepmother to take the form of a bitch ('Hyndla'), an enchantment to be lifted only by marriage to a prince. Signý curses her stepmother in turn to take the form of a cat. Hyndla succeeds in befriending a peasant couple and takes to driving their cattle. A neighboring prince, Ásmundr, encounters Signý for a brief moment when she is in human form. He falls in love with her; they marry, and during the wedding night Signý permanently reverts to human form.

Hyndluljóð shares most of its plot points and even the names of the protagonists with *Vambarljóð*. One interesting difference is that the relationship between the princess and her suitor is never antagonistic in *Hyndluljóð*. Einar Ól. Sveinsson believed that *Hyndluljóð* was

³⁰ Anna Alexandra McCully Stewart, 'Knock, Knock. Who's There? A Translation and Study of *Þóruǫljóð*' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Iceland, 2017), pp. 8–25, <http://hdl.handle.net/1946/28720>.

³¹ Haukur Þorgeirsson, 'Þóruǫljóð og Háu-Þóruleikur', *Gripla*, 22 (2011), 211–27.

³² Lee Colwill, 'The King's Two Bodies? *Snjáskvæði* and the Performance of Gender' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Iceland, 2018), pp. 50–51 <http://hdl.handle.net/1946/29928>.

derivative of *Vambarljóð*.³³ If true, it might explain that the episode with the peasant couple is integral to the story in *Vambarljóð* but seems to serve no particular purpose in *Hyndluljóð*. On the other hand, it seems natural that a bitch would drive livestock around and it is less expected that a stomach would do so.

There is a prose narrative with significant similarities to *Vambarljóð* and *Hyndluljóð* in *Hrólfs saga kraka*. The relevant section is worth quoting in full:

Einn jöla aptan er þess gietid ad Helgi k(ongur) er kominn j reckiu og var vedur jllt vte, ad komid var vid hurðina og helldur ömätuliga. Honum kom nu j hug ad það væri ökongligt ad hann lieti það vte sem vesallt var, enn hann máð biarga þui. Fer nu og lykur vpp dyrunum. Hann sier ad þar er komid eitthvad fätækt og tötugt. Þad m(ælrir), vel hefur þu nu gjört k(ongur), og fer sijdan jnn j skiemmuna. K(ongur) m(ælrir), ber [] þig halm og biarnfelldi so þig kali ei. Þad m(ælrir), veittu mier reckiu þijna herra og vil eg hiä þier huýla, þui lýf m(itt) er j vedi. K(ongur) s(eigir), rijs mier hugur vid þier, enn ef so er sem þu s(eigir), þä ligdu hier vid stockinn, j klædum þijnum og mun mig ecki saka. Hun gjörir nu so. Kongur snijr sier fra henni. Liös brann j husinu og er stund leid, leit hann vm öxl til hennar. Þä sier hann ad þar huýlir kona so væn ad eij þikist hann adra konu frydari sied hafa. Hun var j silcki kyrtli. Hann snijr sier þä skiött ad henni med blydu. Hun m(ælrir), nu vil eg fara j burt s(eigir) hun, og hefur þu leist mig vr micklum naudum, þui þetta var mier stiuþmodur sköp, og hef eg marga konga heimsöckta, enda legdu nu ei med lytum.³⁴

One Yule evening King Helgi had gone to bed and there was bad weather outside. There came a knock at the door, a rather weak one. It occurred to him that it would not be kingly to have whatever wretch this was remain outside if he could help it. He goes and opens the door. He sees that something poor and tattered has arrived. It speaks: 'You have done well, king', and then enters the hall. The king says: 'Take some straw and bear hides so that you do not freeze.' It says: 'Grant me your bed, lord, and I want to rest with you, for my life is at stake.' The king says: 'I shudder at you but if it is as you say then lie here at the side of my bed in your clothes and that will do me no harm.' She now does that. The king turns away from her. A light was burning in the house and when some time had passed he looked over his shoulder at her. Then he sees that a woman is resting there, so beautiful that he feels he has never seen a prettier woman. She was wearing a robe of silk. He now turns to her quickly but gently. She speaks: 'Now I wish to go away', she says, 'and you have released me from great distress for this was a stepmother's curse and I have visited many kings and do not blame me for it'.

This episode has much in common with the Eddic fairy-tales. The story begins the same way as in *Þóruljóð*, with a strange woman knocking on the door during Yuletide. As in *Hyndluljóð* and *Vambarljóð*, a woman is cursed into some wretched shape by her stepmother and the curse is lifted in a prince's bed. The woman, furthermore, is an elf.

Hrólfs saga kraka was likely composed in the fourteenth century, but stepmother curses are also referred to in earlier sources. The early thirteenth-century *Sverris saga* refers to 'old stories in which it is said that the children of kings were the victims of stepmother curses'.³⁵

³³ Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Verzeichnis isländischer Märchenvarianten mit einer einleitenden Untersuchung*, FF Communications, 83 (Helsinki: Academia scientiarum fennica, 1929), p. 39.

³⁴ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ed. by Desmond Slay, Editiones Arnarnagæanæ, 1 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1960), pp. 31–32.

³⁵ 'í fornum sögum er sagt at verit hefði þä er konungabörn urðu fyrir stjúpmeðra sköpum', *Sverris saga*, ed. by Þorleifur Hauksson, Íslenzk fornrit, 30 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2007), p. 12. For an overview of

There is also a reference to stepmothers in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* by Oddr Snorrason: the saga tells of 'stepmother stories told by herdsmen, the truth of which is known by none and that always make the king out to be the least in their tales'.³⁶ *Vambarljóð* is certainly a stepmother story with humiliating roles for the kings involved. It belongs to a genre current in medieval times and, as shown in the two following sections, the preserved texts have stylistic traits characteristic of medieval poetry.

Poetic formulas

It is immediately apparent that *Vambarljóð* uses a great amount of traditional poetic language, formulas, kennings and poetic words. We can take the first stanza of the Þ version as an example:

Þ-1. Fardu heim hedan heillin góða
hafðu þóck fyrir þína gaungu
mey veit ek óngva ne mans konu
sem bölstöfunum bregde mínum.

Go home from here, dearest. Thank you for your visit. I know no maiden nor man's wife
who might alter my baleful staves.

The formula in short lines 5–6, *mey né manns konu*, also occurs in the Eddic poems *Hávamál*, *Lokasenna* and *Sigrdrífumál*. The last two short lines are also highly reminiscent of *Sigrdrífumál*, which has *bölstöfum* in strophe 30 and *bregða blundstöfum* in strophe 2.³⁷ Short lines 2–3 have a parallel in *Kötludraumur* 18, 'Hún þakkaði mér / mína gaungu'.³⁸ Short lines 1–2 have a parallel in *Vambarljóð* V-29, even though the context there is quite different. In sum, every part of this strophe is built out of poetic words and phrases that occur elsewhere.

In previous work I identified and listed a number of poetic formulas occurring in *Vambarljóð*. I defined 'poetic formula' as 'a combination of words found at least twice in texts using a poetic register but not elsewhere'.³⁹ Under this definition I came up with forty-seven poetic formulas, of which twenty-seven were shared with other Eddic fairy-tales and seventeen with the poems of the Codex Regius. A smaller number were shared with other poems in *fornyrðislag*, with skaldic poetry or with *rímur* cycles.

stepmother curses and other *álög* see Jonathan Y. H. Hui, Caitlin Ellis, James McIntosh and Katherine Marie Olley, 'Ála flekks saga: A Snow White Variant from Late Medieval Iceland', *Leeds Studies in English*, new series 49 (2018), 45–64.

³⁶ 'stjúpmæðra sögur, er hjarðarsveinar segja, er engi veit hvárt satt er, er jafnan láta konunginn minnstan í sínum frásögnum', *Færeyinga saga, Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar eptir Odd munk Snorrason*, ed. by Ólafur Halldórsson, Íslensk fornrit, 25 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2006). Stepmother tales can be classified as involving either a 'wicked stepmother' or a 'lustful stepmother'; for an overview of the latter see Ralph O'Connor, "'Stepmother Sagas": An Irish Analogue for *Hjálmþérs saga ok Ölvérs*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 72 (2000), 1–48.

³⁷ *Eddukvæði*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, Íslensk fornrit, 36 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014).

³⁸ Ólafur Davíðsson, *Þulur og þjóðkvæði*, p. 6.

³⁹ Haukur Þorgeirsson, 'Poetic Formulas in Late Medieval Icelandic Folk Poetry: The Case of *Vambarljóð*', *Approaching Methodology – RMN Newsletter*, 4 (2012), 181–96 (p. 184). I have found it convenient to stick with this definition here but many other approaches could be as valid. For much more detailed methodological discussion see Frog, 'On the Case of *Vambarljóð* I: Comments on Formulaicity in the *sagnakvæði*', *RMN Newsletter*, 5 (2012), 22–38; Frog, 'On the Case of *Vambarljóð* II: Register and Mode from Skaldic Verse to *sagnakvæði*', *RMN Newsletter*, 5 (2012), 49–61; Haukur Þorgeirsson, 'How Can You Tell Who's Talking? –

Dating *Vambarljóð*

In previous work on Eddic fairy-tales I have pointed out some linguistic and metrical traits that are indicative of medieval origin. In the following, I look at these features in the three texts of *Vambarljóð* edited here (V, Þ, J) and also in the long version (L) as printed by Ólafur Davíðsson.

The medieval features in question are instances of alliteration between *j* and vowels⁴⁰ as well as alliteration between *sl* or *sn* and *s*.⁴¹ The A2k metrical type is a further archaic trait.⁴² It was a staple of medieval alliterative poetry but after the Reformation it appears mostly to occur by accident. Finally, I count instances where the *Vambarljóð* texts share a poetic formula with the poems of the Codex Regius.⁴³ The results are shown in Table 1.

The table indicates that the L text has essentially no identifiable medieval traits. The V text, however, has the most medieval appearance. As it turns out, there is a difference between the first and the second half of the V text in this respect, as shown in table 2. The first half has significantly more medieval traits.

An alternative way to proceed is to look at late or post-medieval traits and again I have selected four. One is the presence of the suffixed article, which is mostly avoided in medieval *fornyrðislag* poetry. All four *Vambarljóð* texts have a number of instances.⁴⁴ A less common late trait is to begin a sentence with a preposition, which is a violation of Kuhn's second law and abnormal in medieval *fornyrðislag*.⁴⁵ Another syntactic trait which is late in this context is to place the verb further than the second position into an unbound sentence.⁴⁶ Finally, I have counted the number of verses where a svarabhakti vowel is needed for the number of syllables to rise to the normal minimum of four.⁴⁷ This phenomenon entered Icelandic poetry in the fourteenth century and meant that previously monosyllabic words like *hendr* could occur as disyllabic *hendur*.⁴⁸

Transitions between Direct Speech and Narration in *Vambarljóð*, *RMN Newsletter*, 6 (2013), 20–25 (p. 22), https://www2.helsinki.fi/sites/default/files/atoms/files/rmn_06_2013.pdf.

⁴⁰ Haukur Þorgeirsson, 'Gullkársljóð og Hrafnagaldur', p. 308. The instances in *Vambarljóð* are found in V: 11.1–2, 17.7–8; J: 13.3–4, *3.1–2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 309. The instances are in V: 30.5–6; Þ: 14.5–6; L: 66.5–6.

⁴² *Ibid.* pp. 309–310. V: 1.7, 2.6, 10.6, 13.8, 21.6, 24.6, 26.7, 28.4, 31.8, 37.8, 53.2, 57.4, 59.8; J: 1.7, 3.6, 9.4, 10.8, 11.2, 11.8, *5.4, *6.8; Þ: 7.3, 11.7, 13.4, 21.8; L: 44.8.

⁴³ I include the seventeen formulas identified in previous work (M3, M8, M9, M10, M11, M12, T17, T18, T20, T21, T23, T24, T26, K1, K2, K3, K10) and two additional formulas. Those are *gumna stjóri*, found in *Grípisspá* 1.6 and *Vambarljóð* J 29.2, and *hvarf í skemmu*, which occurs in *Vambarljóð* V 9.4, Þ 2.4, as well as in *Guðrúnarhvöt* 7.2 *hvarf til skemmu*. Note that even under my relatively lax definition of a formula I cannot find any instances of Eddic formulas in the L version.

⁴⁴ It seems unnecessary to list every instance but those in V are in strophes 3, 21, 22, 37, 45, 46, 47 (3), 52, 54, 58 and 62.

⁴⁵ There are sentences beginning with prepositions in strophes J 31; L 2, 4, 14, 21, 24, 27, 31, 34, 47, 51 (2), 74.

⁴⁶ I refer to this principle as K4 following the enumeration in Bjarne Fidjestøl, *The Dating of Eddic Poetry: A Historical Survey and Methodological Investigation*, Bibliotheca Arnarnagana, 41 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1999), p. 297. See also Hans Kuhn, 'Zur Wortstellung und -betonung im Altgermanischen', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* (PBB), 57 (1933), 1–109; Haukur Þorgeirsson, 'Þórljóð og Háu-Þóruleikur', pp. 218–19. List of K4 violations V: 11, 20, 43; J: 33, *3; L: 2, 4, 5, 8, 14, 15, 21, 23, 26, 30, 34, 47, 51, 52, 60, 66, 69, 70, 72, 74.

⁴⁷ V: 5.4, 10.1, 11.8, 32.2, 33.3, 42.6, 51.5, 61.1; Þ: 19.5, 22.7; J: 17.8, 21.5, 30.6. In a previous article I used a more sophisticated approach to measure the prevalence of the svarabhakti vowel in a poem: Haukur Þorgeirsson, 'Gullkársljóð og Hrafnagaldur', pp. 311–13. But the simple approach used here makes it easier to aggregate data.

⁴⁸ Haukur Þorgeirsson, *Hljóðkerfi og bragkerfi* (doctoral thesis, University of Iceland, 2013), p. 365.

Table 1: Medieval traits in the four versions of *Vambarljóð*

	Eddic formulas	A2k verses	S-alliteration	J-alliteration	Total	Strophes	Total per 100 strophes
V version	17	13	1	2	33	62	53
J version	7	8	0	2	17	39.75	43
p version	2	4	1	0	7	27	26
L version	0	1	1	0	2	80	3

Table 2: Medieval traits in the first and second half of the V text of *Vambarljóð*

	Eddic formulas	A2k verses	S-alliteration	J-alliteration	Total	Strophes	Total per 100 strophes
V (1–31)	12	9	1	2	24	31	77
V (32–62)	6	4	0	0	10	31	32

Table 3: Late traits in the four texts of *Vambarljóð*

	Eddic formulas	A2k verses	S-alliteration	J-alliteration	Total	Strophes	Total per 100 strophes
V (1–31)	12	9	1	2	24	31	77
V (32–62)	6	4	0	0	10	31	32

Table 4: Late traits in the first and second half of the V text of *Vambarljóð*

	Eddic formulas	A2k verses	S-alliteration	J-alliteration	Total	Strophes	Total per 100 strophes
V (1–31)	12	9	1	2	24	31	77
V (32–62)	6	4	0	0	10	31	32

Again the L version has by far the latest appearance while V has the earliest. And again it is true that there is a striking difference between the first and second half of the V text, as shown in table 4.

It is tempting to conclude that V has a more archaic appearance than J and Þ because it is better preserved and thus closer to the medieval text that these three versions are derived from. Perhaps it is also true that the first half of V is better preserved than the second half: this would be a natural enough state of affairs for a text preserved in human memory.

While linguistic and stylistic traits show that *Vambarljóð* must have existed already in medieval times it is difficult to further narrow down the time of origin. Ideally we would like to make comparisons with poetry in *fornyrðislag* but there is little after the thirteenth century which can be precisely dated. The most plausible candidate for a comparison is *Skaufalabálkur*, which there are good reasons to date to the mid-fifteenth century.⁴⁹ The linguistic dating traits of that text are similar to the V, Þ and J versions of *Vambarljóð*. On the other hand, *Skaufalabálkur* has no identifiable Eddic formulas. The poetic language of *Vambarljóð* and the other Eddic fairy-tales gives us some reason to think these poems may have earlier origins. I would not like to rule out composition in the thirteenth century or even earlier in which case most or all of the late traits would have accumulated during the oral transmission. Further studies on this corpus as a whole may shed more light on the question.

The V version of *Vambarljóð*

A version of *Vambarljóð* was preserved in the manuscript *V, a large collection of ballads and other popular poems written for the magnate Magnús Jónsson at Vigur in 1699–1700. This book is now lost but two copies of it survive. One is V¹ (NKS 1141 fol.), made in Copenhagen in the eighteenth century. The other is V² (JS 405 4to), made in Iceland in 1819.⁵⁰ These are both good and faithful copies with minimal editorial interventions and relatively few mistakes. *Vambarljóð* in particular is also preserved in two other manuscripts derived from *V. One is T (Thott 489 8vo, eighteenth century) which is chiefly derived from *V but with some stanzas and readings from the J version as well as some intentional editing. Finally there is I (JS 80 8vo, ca. 1800), which is clearly derived from *V but with a significant amount of editing.⁵¹

This edition uses V¹ as its base text but in cases where the combined evidence of V², T and I indicates that *V had another reading I have emended the base text accordingly. The resulting edition should closely resemble the text of the lost manuscript *V. The apparatus gives every variant reading from V² but does not include the many isolated readings from T or I in order not to overload the apparatus with secondary variants. Jón Sigurðsson (1811–79) made a copy of V¹ in JS 406 4to. He suggests some reasonable conjectures which I have cited in the apparatus.

Some texts preserved in *V are also preserved in older manuscripts related through a scribal tradition. In those cases it is sometimes apparent that the editors of *V tried to improve on the text from a metrical point of view.⁵² A case in point is *Þóruljóð*, which was found in *V

⁴⁹ Haukur Þorgeirsson, 'Gleðiskáldið – Hvað fleira orti höfundur Skíða rímu?', *Skírnir*, 196 (2022), 53–85.

⁵⁰ Jón Helgason, *Kvæðabók séra Gissurar Sveinssonar*, pp. 39–43.

⁵¹ Cpr. Jón Helgason, *Íslensk fornkvæði*, v xxi–xxiii.

⁵² Jón Helgason, *Kvæðabók séra Gissurar Sveinssonar*, pp. 45–46.

but also in the manuscripts G (AM 147 8vo) and B (Add. 11.177). The relationship between these manuscripts was investigated by Jón Helgason and is shown by the stemma in figure 1.⁵³

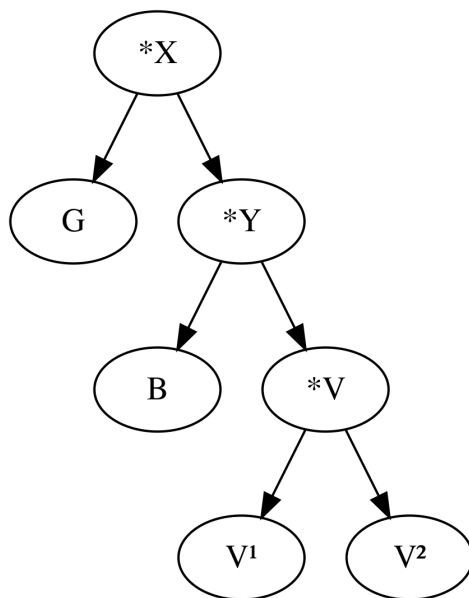


Figure 1. Jón Helgason’s stemma of several Icelandic folk poetry collections

The text of the final stanza of *Þóruhjód* is as follows in G:

Þu munt sigla framm j romu
vera fremstur j før allra manna
skal þig alldreí hamingjuna skortta
ä medann su hin **bjartta byrvod** þoler.⁵⁴

The first three verse pairs of this stanza have a structural defect — the verse pairs are not linked by alliteration. The text in B is nearly identical and no better in terms of alliteration so the exemplar of *V must have had the stanza in this form as well. However, the editor of the *V text (presumably Magnús Ketilsson, the scribe of the manuscript) took it upon himself to remedy these alliterative problems. The text in V¹ is as follows (V² differs only in orthography):

Þú munt **sigla seggr** í rómu
og vera **fremstr í för flestra** manna
hal skal alldri **hamingju** korta
á medan sú hin **bjartta byrvod** þolir.⁵⁵

⁵³ Jón Helgason, *Kvæðabók séra Gissurar Sveinssonar*, p. 47.

⁵⁴ AM 147 8vo, 76r. Alliteration in bold.

⁵⁵ NKS 1141 fol., p. 247. Alliteration in bold.

The insertion of some handy words has brought the alliteration into order for all three verse pairs. The meaning of the strophe is minimally affected. The editor of the V text does not seem to compose new stanzas or radically alter the sense of the text.

Has the text of *Vambarljóð* in the V manuscripts been edited in a way similar to that of *Þóruljóð*? Perhaps. In some cases where we have comparative material in J or Þ we might suspect similar editing. Here is one example:

J-4.5-6 mei skalltu verða i **vambarlike**
 V-19.5-6 víf skalltu hafa **vambarlíki**

It is possible that the editor of the V text inserted the synonym *víf* for *mey* to get alliteration between the verse pair. If it was a conjecture it might be a successful one — the original text may have had *víf*.

The objective of the V collectors was to compile a book of enjoyable poetry — ‘til gamans, skemtunar og Dægra-styttingar’ as the title page proclaimed.⁵⁶ A little polishing of the text is in accordance with that objective. But any such editing of *Vambarljóð* must have been carried out opportunistically rather than systematically since the V text has a number of verse pairs with unsatisfactory alliteration. Indeed, the first verse pairs in stanzas 30, 31, 50 and 54 in V have no alliteration at all.

The Þ version

The Þ version of *Vambarljóð* was recorded from oral tradition for Árni Magnússon. The informant was Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir (b. 1636, d. after 1703) and on the basis of her name I refer to this text as the Þ version. Þorbjörg’s first known residence is Stapar in Vatnsnes but her family later relocated to Snæfellsnes where she lived first at Arnarstapi and then at Hellnar.⁵⁷ These locations are at some distance to Vigur and Eyri, where the V and J versions were recorded.

Þorbjörg was the mother of Guðmundur Bergþórsson, a prolific poet. An eighteenth-century biography of Guðmundur briefly mentions his mother. She seems to have had a warm relationship with her son and to have enjoyed his poetry. An illness at the age of four left Guðmundur largely paralyzed but his left hand was hale and he could use it not only to write but also to crawl at surprising speed while dressed in leather pants.⁵⁸ This must have been an unusual sight and one wonders if Guðmundur heard *Vambarljóð* from his mother and if he felt any kinship with Signý, the cursed princess who rolled around instead of walking.

When Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík (1705–79) made the first catalogue of the Arnamagnæan manuscript collection (AM 477 fol.) three versions of *Vambarljóð* were preserved under the shelfmark AM 154 8vo. Two of these texts must have been lost since only one version of *Vambarljóð* remains in 154 — the L version. The L text was copied from 154 to NKS 1894 4to by Markús Magnússon (1748–1825). Following this, Markús copied out another version, the Þ text, which was presumably also taken from 154. The page preceding the poem itself

⁵⁶ Jón Helgason, *Kvæðabók séra Gissurar Sveinssonar*, p. 39.

⁵⁷ Páll Eggert Ólason, *Íslenzkar æviskrár frá landnámstímum til ársloka 1940*, 6 vols (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1948–76), II 127; Guðmundur Bergþórsson, *Olgeirs rímur danska*, ed. by Björn K. Þórólfsson and Finnur Sigmundsson, 2 vols (Reykjavík: Landsbókasafn Íslands, 1947), I xiii–xiv.

⁵⁸ ‘alltíð var hann í skinnbuxum þegar hann fór nokkuð sjálfur og skreið á endanum og dró sig áfram með annari hendinni og skreið út á aðra hliðina og var ólíkindalega fljótur að skriða svoleiðis áfram’, *Olgeirs rímur danska*, ed. by Björn K. Þórólfsson and Finnur Sigmundsson, I xv.

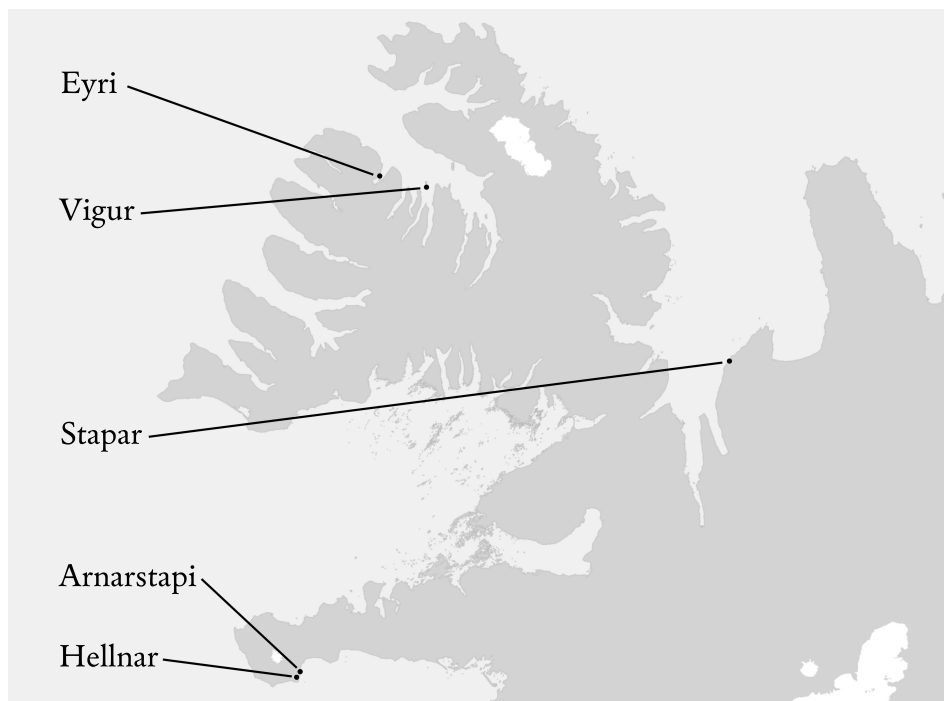


Figure 2: Locations in Iceland relevant to the recording of *Vambarljóð*; V was recorded at Vigur, J probably at Eyri. Stapar, Hellnar and Arnarstapi are locations where Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir, the source of P, is known to have lived.

has this piece of information: ‘Scriba ad A. Magnæum: Ad eg síne ydr þó nockurn lit, er þetta fragment Vambarlióða sem afgömul kelling móder Gudmundar Bergþórssonar kunne’ (‘Written to Árne Magnússon: In order to make some effort on your behalf, here is a fragment of *Vambarljóð* as a very old woman knew it, the mother of Guðmundur Bergþórsson’). This must be taken from a letter written to Árne Magnússon which is not otherwise preserved. Presumably, Árne had written to one of his friends in Iceland, requesting *Vambarljóð* and perhaps other texts or information as well. The apologetic wording (‘þó nockurn lit’) indicates that the correspondent was only partially able to fulfill Árne’s requests. He or she is well aware that the *Vambarljóð* text is incomplete, a ‘fragment’, and presumably Þorbjörg thought so as well. A brief prose introduction corresponds to the opening stanzas of the other versions.

While the collectors of the seventeenth century were searching for complete poems with entertainment value, it is characteristic of Árne’s philological interests also to have collected any available scraps, no matter how imperfect. While we do not have the letters he wrote seeking *Vambarljóð* we can guess at their contents from enquiries that have survived. Especially interesting is a letter written by Árne to Ólafur Einarsson on December 10, 1707:

Kona hefur heited Ragnhildur Þorvardz dotter su er kunne Modars rimur, tvær ad visu, dötter Ragnhilldar skal heita Vigdis Þorlaks dötter, og vera j vist ä Þyckva bæjar klaustre. Væri nu svo ad þessi Vigdis lifdi, og j ódru lage kynne sagdar Modars rimur, þa vil eg ydur umbeded hafa, ad läta epter henne uppskrifa nefndar rimur, eda svo mikid sem hun ur þeim kann. En kunni hun eckj samfleytt j rimunum, þä bid eg ad epter henne mætte uppteiknast skilmerkelifa efned ur þeim, og þar jafnframt þau einstöku erenden er hun kann ur rimunum hier edur þar.⁵⁹

A woman named Ragnhildur Þorvarðsdóttir knew *Móðars rímur*, two in number. Ragnhildur's daughter is thought to be named Vigdís Þorlákisdóttir and to be a part of the household at Þykkvabæjarklaustur. In the case that this Vigdís is alive and, secondly, does know these aforementioned *Móðars rímur*, I would like to ask you to have the aforementioned *rímur* recorded from her, or as much as she knows of them. But if she does not know the *rímur* contiguously then I would ask that the storyline from them should be carefully recorded as well as the individual stanzas she knows from here or there in the *rímur*.

As it happened, Vigdís did know *Móðars rímur* from beginning to end and they have come down to us only by virtue of being recorded from her knowledge. But it is worth considering Árni's comment on the eventuality that the informant might not know the whole text but might know parts of it and be able to summarize the storyline. Whoever recorded the P version of *Vambarljóð* might have received similar instructions and the brief prose introduction to the poem might be an attempt to honour them. The Codex Regius of the Eddic poems also has prose introductions to some of its poems as well as prose connecting stanzas or groups of stanzas within poems. In some cases the explanation might be, as in the case of the P text, that parts of the poems had been forgotten.

In addition to NKS 1894 4to, there is another manuscript which may or may not have some textual value. This is JS 430 4to, which was in the possession of Hallgrímur Scheving (1781–1861). There is a copy here of the P text but I have been unable to determine whether it is copied from NKS 1894 4to or directly from the lost text in AM 154 8vo. In any case, it is clearly a less accurate copy than 1894, with many conjectural emendations. In the edition here, I have selectively cited variants from 430 when they seemed plausible and not obviously the result of conscious editing. There are copies of the 430 text in JS 581 4to and Lbs 202 8vo.

The J version

The J text has been preserved in a rather curious way on two individual leaves of paper that are now in different collections but must have originally belonged together. One is in the Icelandic National Library under the shelfmark JS 406 4to, a collection of material from Jón Sigurðsson (1811–79). The leaf has two texts written in a hand dating to ca. 1700 or the early eighteenth-century. One text is *Vambarljóð* while the other is *Þornaldarþula*, a bizarre folk poem of the *þula* type.⁶⁰ The leaf gives no indication to the provenance of the texts. The abbreviation 'def.' between some strophes in *Vambarljóð* correctly indicates that the text is defective — some strophes have been forgotten.

⁵⁹ Cited from a page at the back of AM 135 8vo.

⁶⁰ See Yelena Sesselja Helgadóttir, *Íslenskar þulur síðari alda* (doctoral thesis, University of Iceland, 2020), pp 386–89 and *passim*.

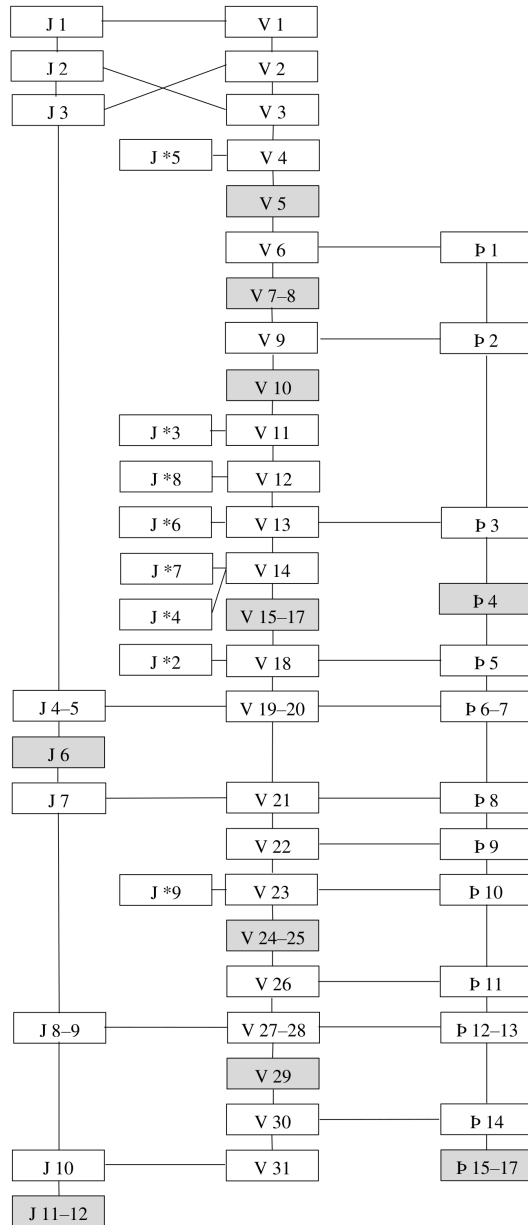


Figure 3: Corresponding strophes in the first half of *Vambarljóð*; shaded strophes are unique.

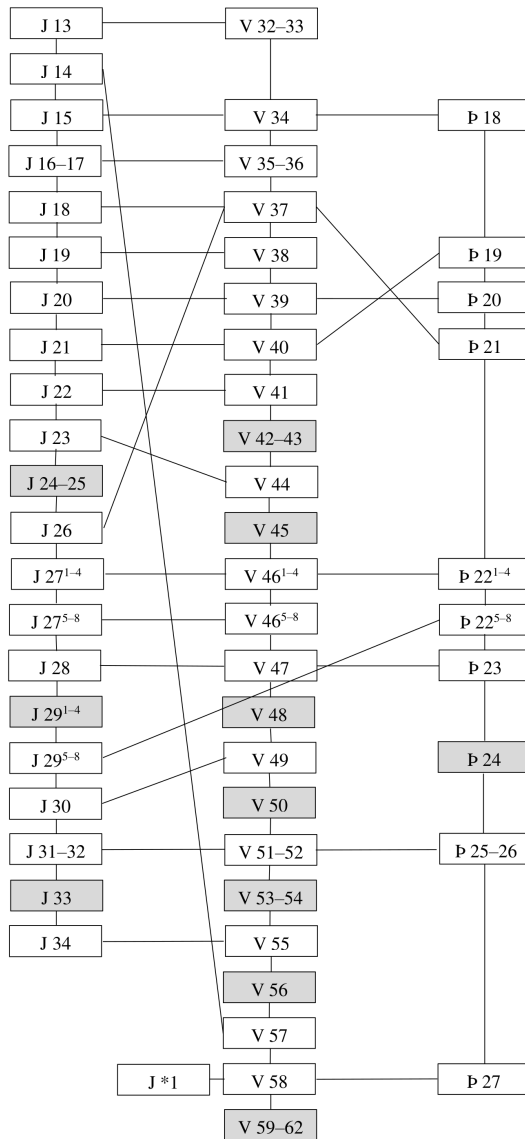


Figure 4: Corresponding strophes in the second half of *Vambarljóð*; shaded strophes are unique.

The other source of the J text is a single leaf at the back of Thott 489 8vo which I refer to here as J*. Kaalund's catalogue indicates that the leaf was used as a cover for 489 at that time but at some point it must have been inserted and glued into the manuscript.⁶¹ This leaf is originally an envelope for a letter addressed to Jón Sigurðsson (1702–57), provost (*prófastur*) at Eyri by Skutulsfjörður. The envelope was reused for some notes and texts, including *Kötludraumur* and some nine strophes or half-strophes of *Vambarljóð*.

Several facts make it clear that J and J* belong together. They are written in the same hand and both use the abbreviation 'def.' to indicate missing material. Furthermore, there is no overlap in the strophes recorded in each of them. It seems apparent that J was written first and represents someone's attempt to get through *Vambarljóð* from beginning to end with the strophes in a coherent order while realizing that some were missing. Then J* constitutes a partially successful effort to recover some of the missing material from memory. The strophes in J* are not in the order of the narrative but presumably in the order in which they came to mind. It is interesting that the name *Yrsa* occurs nowhere in the original J recording but it occurs in each of the first strophes of the J* text. Presumably the name came to mind and with it some disjoint text fragments containing it.

I assume that the writer of J and J* was provost Jón Sigurðsson, principally because no one else would be likely to reuse as scrap paper an envelope addressed to him. I have loosely compared the handwriting in J and J* to some of the many preserved manuscripts written by Jón and there seem to be enough similarities for the theory to hold. There is, however, substantial variation in Jón's handwriting depending on what sort of text he is writing and in what sort of context — doubtless there are also chronological developments. A detailed study of his oeuvre would be required to firmly confirm that J and J* were written by him.⁶²

Jón Sigurðsson grew up with Jón Ólafsson, who became Árni Magnússon's assistant and a prolific scholar. Both Jón Sigurðsson and Jón Ólafsson came to Copenhagen as students in 1726. Jón Sigurðsson graduated in 1729 and then returned to Iceland. He became a pastor at Eyri in 1730 and a provost in 1732. In 1741 he returned to Copenhagen to work as a scholar.⁶³ Since J* is originally an envelope addressed to Jón as provost it must be from a letter written between 1732 and 1741. It seems likely that the piece of paper was reused for notes on poetry shortly after being received, presumably while Jón was still at Eyri in Iceland — a short distance from Vigur where the great collection (*V) was created. Most likely, Jón then brought J* (and J) with him to Copenhagen in 1741. While Jón was a student in Copenhagen in 1726–29 he had got to know Árni Magnússon and this may have inspired him to write down *Vambarljóð* and *Pornaldarþula* at a later date in Iceland. Most likely this was from some unknown informant though it is not inconceivable that he was writing from his own memory.

The J text was used by the compiler of Thott 489 8vo (perhaps Jón Sigurðsson) to make a neatly written and edited version of *Vambarljóð*. The original intention seems to have been

⁶¹ 'Som omslag er anvendt et brevomslag', Kristian Kaalund, *Katalog over de oldnorsk-islandske håndskrifter i Det store kongelige bibliotek og i Universitetsbiblioteket* (Copenhagen: Kommissionen for Det arnamagnæanske legat, 1900), p. 365.

⁶² In an unpublished introduction to an edition of *Pornaldarþula*, Jón Samsonarson also reaches the tentative conclusion that J* was written by Jón Sigurðsson. I am grateful to Yelena Sesselja Helgadóttir for drawing my attention to Jón's notes – I had altogether overlooked J* until then. Its existence was also clearly unknown to Jón Helgason when he prepared his notes on *Vambarljóð*.

⁶³ Jón Helgason, *Jón Ólafsson frá Grunnavík*, Safn fræðafjelagsins um Ísland og Íslendinga, 5 (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska fræðafjelag, 1926).

to produce a text based on J and J* but after writing out the first three stanzas from J, the compiler must have discovered that it was difficult to construct a complete narrative out of the J text. He then started anew, this time with the V text as the base. Many readings from J and J* are, however, introduced along with some stanzas which are only found in J. The result is that Thott 489 8vo (T) contains a new composite text type, longer than the source versions. Ólafur Davíðsson's edition of *Vambarljóð* uses T as one of its sources and includes the strophes which T had sourced from J.

Jón Þorkelsson indicates that there is a text of the J type in JS 398 4to but I have been unable to find any trace of *Vambarljóð* in 398.⁶⁴ Possibly, Jón had confused JS 398 4to with JS 406 4to, possibly there was a text in 398 that has now been lost, or possibly the leaf in question was at some point moved from 398 to 406.

Among Jón Helgason's documents preserved in Copenhagen is a transcript of JS 406 4to. I have cited some readings from this transcript as JH in the apparatus.

A comparison of V, J and Þ

The three versions printed here have many corresponding strophes but each of them also has some material not shared by the others. A slightly simplified visualization of the relationship between the strophes of each version can be seen in figures 3 and 4. The overall picture is consistent with the idea that all three versions are derived from an oral archetype that was similar in scope to the V text. It seems especially telling that there is very little material common to J and Þ and lacking in V — chiefly the second half of J 29 / Þ 22.

I have compared the 16 stanzas that are, in whole or in part, shared by V, J and Þ. There is no clear pattern of common errors though it is tempting to think that J 32.4 *til ats buenn* is the original wording. The humorous point that the stomach is not being roasted for eating seems fitting while the vague wording in V and Þ might be a common error.

Many of the strophes found only in one preserved version may have been a part of the archetype while some may be new compositions to replace forgotten or half-forgotten lines. A third possibility is that some strophes might have migrated from other poems. This might be true for J 6, which has a close analogue in *Hyndluljóð* 46⁶⁵ and which there is no trace of in V and Þ even though the surrounding stanzas are common to all of V, J and Þ. Another possible migrant is the sequence J 11.5–12.8, which mentions *hafskrímsl* 'sea monster' and the 'vatni ausa' ceremony, both of which are otherwise absent from the text. To be sure, it is not impossible to make some sense of this — a wandering stomach might look like some sort of marine creature. But it also seems possible that these lines come from a lost fairy-tale where a girl is cursed to appear as a sea monster.

I do think it would be possible to reconstruct a text moderately closer to the original composition — or to the oral archetype — by using the V text as a basis and then adding to it and correcting it in a few places based on the testimony of J and Þ. I have not done so here to avoid adding further complexity to what is already a lengthy treatment but it would be a worthwhile avenue for further study.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Jón Þorkelsson, *Om digtningen på Island i det 15. og 16. århundrede* (Copenhagen: Høst, 1888), p. 208.

⁶⁵ Ólafur Davíðsson, *Pulur og hjóðkvæði*, p. 69.

⁶⁶ Leonard Neidorf justly criticizes 'the intellectual paralysis that the philosophy of textual conservatism has inflicted upon the field'. At the same time, his study shows that thousands of words of analysis may be required to convincingly establish one reading as anterior to another: Leonard Neidorf, 'The Ruthwell Cross Inscription and

Textual difficulties

There are two textual difficulties in *Vambarljóð* which I have not been able to resolve. The first is an obscure noun phrase which appears in three versions, all incomprehensible, in the three texts of the poem:

ef eg skal eiga ýr við grímu
þau hafa fádæmin flestu vm ollað. (V-45, 5–8)

If I shall have *ýr við grímu* it is mostly caused by abnormal events.

og so til blíðrar brullaupid bua
þo hann ætle þig arfa grimu. (J-7, 5–8)

and celebrate the wedding with the sweet one though he think you *arfa grimu*.

so til blíðrar brullaup drecka
sem hann ætte Ilfa grímu. (Ð-8, 5-8)

and celebrate a wedding with the sweet one as if he had *Ilfa grímu*.

The context in the Ð text could imply that the phrase refers to something positive but the context in the J version calls for a negative sense and the V version also seems to suggest as much. The word *gríma* can mean 'night' or 'mask' but the word also occurs as a troll-woman's name. The form *arfa* could be accusative of *arfi* ('heir') so *arfa grímu* could formally mean 'heir of the night'. While this sounds promising in English as a vague reference to an awful creature, I am not aware of any parallels in Old Norse. According to the Prose Edda, the mythological being Nótt ('Night') has three offspring, Auðr ('Wealth'), Jörð ('Earth') and Dagr ('Day'), but this does not seem to lead anywhere. The word *ýr* would typically mean 'yew' or 'bow' but neither sense seems to fit here. What *Ilfa* might be is no less obscure; *ylfa* is a rare word for she-wolf but this does not seem to help. It appears likely that *ýr við*, *arfa* and *Ilfa* are three corruptions of some lost word that had become incomprehensible to the transmitters of the poem.

These difficult verses have a further parallel in Egill Skallagrímsson's *Sonatorrek*, which is only preserved in seventeenth-century copies:

maka eg upp í aröar grimu
rínis rejð rjette hallda⁶⁷

I cannot uphold the *rínis* wagon *í aröar grimu*, *rjette*.

This, too, is very obscure and almost certainly corrupt. Even allowing for some conjectural emendations, there is no convincing interpretation of *iaröar grimu*. I have no solution and will offer none.

The second textual problem occurs when the stomach is roasted:

nú mun elldzlitnum öllum linna
ef hilmi segir hvað þitt er heiti. (V-52.5–8)

All the colour of fire will end if you tell the prince what your name is.

hier mun öllum elldslitrum linna
enn siklinge segdu hvað þu heiter. (J-32.5–8)

⁶⁷ *The Dream of the Rood* line 58', *Studia Neophilologica*, 93 (2021), 333–40 (pp. 337–38).
AM 453 4to, 82r.

Now all the *elldslitrum* will come to an end. Tell the prince your name.

While *elds-litr* ('the colour of fire') is a normal enough word it is surprising in this context. The word in the J version seems to be *eld-slittr*, a hapax legomenon seemingly meaning 'the shreds of fire', no less surprising in the context. There is a parallel to this half-strophe in *Kringilnefjukvæði*:

Nú mun álögum öllum linna,
en eg heiti Hildifríður.⁶⁸

Now all the enchantment will come to an end and my name is Hildifríður.

The word *álögum* fits very well here semantically and we might consider if *elldzlitnum/elldslitrum* could have a similar meaning. There is a possible parallel in the word *elúist*, which occurs at the beginning of *Guta saga* and seems to mean 'bewitched'.⁶⁹ The word has been related to Old English *ælwihtra*, 'strange creatures' and English *eldritch* with the first element, *æl-* or *el-*, meaning 'foreign, strange; from elsewhere'.⁷⁰ On the other hand, *ælwihtra* has been related to the Eddic word *alvittr*, with initial *a* rather than *e*,⁷¹ though Sophus Bugge suggested a reconstructed **elvittr*.⁷² Conceivably, Old Norse had **el-litr* or **els-litr* for 'enchanted form', which was then eventually reinterpreted as *elldslitr*.

The later texts

There are four texts which tell the tale of Signý Hringsdóttir which I have not edited here. First there is the L version of *Vambarljóð*, which is preserved in AM 154 8vo (early eighteenth century) and in Lbs 985 4to (mid-eighteenth century). Both manuscripts are defective: 154 ends with stanza 80 while 154 ends with stanza 123.⁷³ Ólafur Davíðsson was unaware of 985 but he printed the text of 154 in his edition, which I use in the following citations.

The first three stanzas of the text provide an introduction in which the authorial voice says that in his or her youth they learned much from old books ('á fornum bókkum') and that they found this adventure ('ævintýri') in an old collection ('í einni fornri syrpu'). There is nothing implausible about this and perhaps the author did read a version of *Vambarljóð* in an old book, perhaps a *fornkvæði* collection from the 1660s that has not come down to us. The author may have remembered the storyline but little from the poem itself and thus arrived at the solution of composing a new poem.

The story of the L version is close to that of V, Þ and J but it has various additional details — for example Alprúður is said to be from Hungary while Yrsa claims to be from Hálogaland. The text itself is very different from the older versions but a few stanzas have some recognizable verbal similarity. The closest similarity is in stanza 54, which has 'sem úr nýdreppu / nauti væri', a phrase which is also found verbatim in V 27, J 8 and Þ 12. There is a similar case in strophe 42:

⁶⁸ Ólafur Davíðsson, *Pulur og hjóðkvæði*, p. 43.

⁶⁹ *Guta saga*, ed. by Christine Peel (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1999), p. 2.

⁷⁰ Alaric Hall, 'The Etymology and Meanings of *Eldritch*', *Scottish Language*, 26 (2007), 16–22.

⁷¹ See for example Ottar Grønvik, 'Runebrakteater fra folkevandringstida med lesbare og tydbare urnordiske ord', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 120 (2005), 5–22 (p. 12).

⁷² Sophus Bugge, 'Sprøglige oplysninger om ord i gamle nordiske love', *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Filologi*, 3 (1877–78), 258–75.

⁷³ The difference between 154 and 985 is substantial. Further study will be needed to determine whether extensive

Þig æði ormar stinga,
grös og steingur, grund og skógar,
nema þú leggir mér líkn með nokkra,
svo eg ósköpum úr megi komast.⁷⁴

You will be maddened, snakes will sting you, grass and rods, ground and forest, if you do not grant me some mercy along with this so that I can escape the enchantment.

Short lines 5–6 here have a closely corresponding text in stanzas V 20, J 5 and Þ 7. These two shared quarter strophes seem to suggest that the author of the L version had at some point read or heard a version of the older poem.

According to *Rithöfundatal* by Hallgrímur Jónsson (1780–1836), a *rímur* cycle on the subject of *Vambarljóð* was composed by the poet Sigmundur Helgason (1657–1723). No such text has come down to us.⁷⁵ However, two *rímur* cycles on the subject are preserved from the eighteenth century.

The manuscript ÍB 895 8vo, written in 1792, preserves *Rímur af Signýju Hringisdóttur* by one Þórður Pálsson who is otherwise unknown. The text has some relationship with the L version of *Vambarljóð* — Alþrúður is said to be from Hungary.⁷⁶ The text is also partially preserved in Lbs 2324 4to.

In 1781, the poet Helgi Bjarnason (ca. 1730–84) composed another cycle also called *Rímur af Signýju Hringisdóttur*. This is preserved in two manuscripts, Lbs 985 4to and JS 579 4to. Here, too, Alþrúður is said to be from Hungary.

Finally, a prose fairy-tale, *Sagan af Signýju Vömb*, was recorded from Guðrún Ólafsdóttir (ca. 1791–1862) in 1856.⁷⁷ This version also shares some details with the L version of the poem — such as a curse turning Yrsa into a cat.

Some other Icelandic fairy-tales also feature princesses cursed by their stepmothers into the form of a stomach and in each case the curse is lifted by sleeping with a prince. One such tale is *Hildur góða stjúpa og veltandi vömb* which was recorded from the prolific storyteller Guðríður Eyjólfsdóttir (1811–78).⁷⁸ Another is *Gorvömb*, which was first recorded by Þorvarður Ólafsson (1828–72)⁷⁹ who did not specify an informant. Another *Gorvömb* tale with similar content was recorded on tape from Katrín Valdimarsdóttir (1898–1984) in December 1971 or January 1972. Katrín was unsure whether she had learned the story from Járnbrá Einarsdóttir (1871–1961) or from Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir (1833–1913), Katrín's grandmother.⁸⁰

When Einar Ól. Sveinsson published his classification of Icelandic folk tale types he did not find a suitable pre-existing type for *Vambarljóð* and related tales so he added the tale type 404*. He mentions that he had himself heard the story long before from the old woman

editing or re-oralization is at play.

⁷⁴ Ólafur Davíðsson, *Pulur og þjóðkvæði*, p. 60. The corresponding text in Lbs 985 4to is 'Þig skulu armar arir stýnga, gras og steingur, grund og skógar, nema þú leggir mier líkner nockrar, so ad eg ósköpum, ur meige komast'.

⁷⁵ Ólafur Davíðsson, *Pulur og þjóðkvæði*, p. 64; Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, Rit Rímnafélagsins, 11, 2 vols (Reykjavík: Rímnafélagið, 1966), II 122–23.

⁷⁶ ÍB 895 8vo, 84r.

⁷⁷ Manuscript: Lbs 528 4to, 101r–102v. Printed in Jón Árnason, *Íslenskar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, rev. edn by Árni Böðvarsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 6 vols (Reykjavík: Þjóðsaga, 1954–1961), IV 495–97, VI 102.

⁷⁸ *Íslenskar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, IV 590–94.

⁷⁹ *Íslenskar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, II 360–64.

⁸⁰ Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir, *Sagan upp á hvern mann: átta íslenskir sagnamenn og ævintýrin þeirra*, Rit, 82 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 2011), pp. 96–100, 280–85.

Steinunn Runólfsdóttir⁸¹ in Vestur-Skaftafellssýsla — adding yet another female storyteller known to have had the story as a part of her repertoire. Einar adds that he had forgotten most of the story but did remember the stomach saying at the wedding that she had often seen a weeping bride but never a weeping groom.⁸²

The first recording of *Vambarljóð* which we can definitely establish took place in 1699–1700 and the poem then written down shows every sign of medieval origin. The story caught the attention of multiple poets and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there were still old ladies who could tell tales of resourceful princesses who were cursed to appear as a stomach. Anyone who wants to delve deeper into this tale has plenty of material to work with.

About this edition

The objective of this edition is to present the V, J and Þ versions of *Vambarljóð* faithfully and separately. In the case of the V text, the fact that we have four independent manuscripts allows us to reconstruct their lost written archetype *V with some precision. In the cases of J and Þ we are mostly dependent on single sources. I have resorted to conjectural emendation in a few places where the preserved text appears untranslatable and corrupt and a plausible restoration suggests itself. A further few conjectures for which a reasonable case could be made are suggested in the apparatus.

The text is diplomatic and follows the punctuation and capitalization of the manuscripts though I have intervened to begin each strophe with a capital letter and end it with a full stop. As it happens, the spelling of V¹ is rather close to that of normalized Old Norse or modern Icelandic and the spelling in Þ is also helpful in marking vowel distinction. The spelling of J is typical for a manuscript written in the eighteenth century.

The translation aims for a relatively literal style, similar to that used in the *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*. When the different versions have identical wording I have aimed to use identical translations and when the versions have the same meaning but differ slightly in the choice or order of words I have tried to vary the translations a little as well.

Manuscripts used

V¹ = NKS 1141 fol., 18th century (basis of V edition)

V² = JS 405 4to, written in 1819

T = Thott 489 8vo, 18th century

T* = the first version of the poem in T, only three strophes

I = JS 80 8vo, ca. 1800

J = JS 406 4to, 1732–41

J* = Thott 489 8vo, single leaf at end, 1732–41

JH = Jón Helgason's transcript of J

Þ = NKS 1894 4to, late 18th century (basis of Þ edition)

⁸¹ Presumably Steinunn Mýrdalína Runólfsdóttir, born in 1836.

⁸² 'Häufig habe ich eine traurige Braut gesehen, aber noch niemals einen weinenden Bräutigam', Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Verzeichnis Isländischer Märchenvarianten*, pp. 38–39. The tale type is listed in Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*, FF Communications, 184 (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1961), p. 134. Since the type has not been found outside Iceland it is discontinued in Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography. Based on the system of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson*, FF Communications 284–86, 3 vols (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004).

154 = AM 154 V 8vo, ca. 1700

430 = JS 430 4to, early 19th century

985 = Lbs 985 4to, mid-18th century

1894 = NKS 1894 4to, late 18th century

Manuscripts known with certainty to have existed

*V = a lost book of *fornkvæði* written in Vigur in 1699–1700

*P̄ = pages lost from AM 154 8vo after P̄ was made, ca. 1700

More hypothetical manuscripts

*L = the original manuscript of the L version

*forn syrpa = the claimed source of the L version, presumably dating to the second half of the 17th century; this, or a related manuscript, may have also served as the exemplar of *V

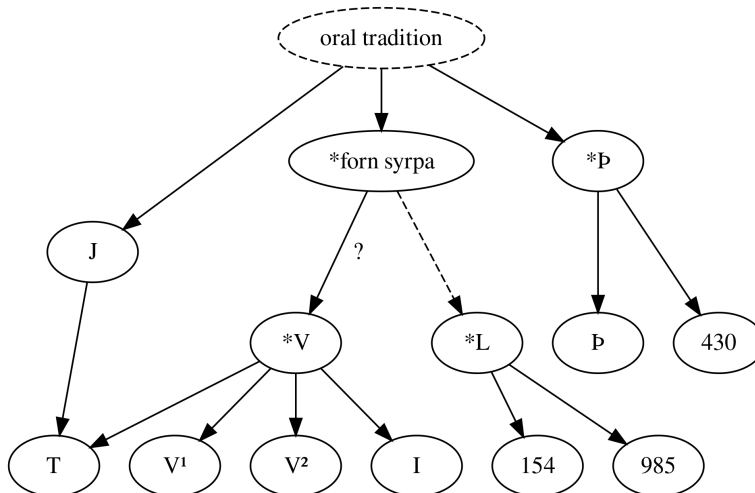


Figure 5: A possible stemma of the manuscripts of *Vambarljóð*.

176. Qvæðe / kallað / Vambar líóð (V version)**V-1 (J-1)**

Sat *gullaudigur gylve að lande
 sá er hǫldar hríng kǫlluðu
 konu átte hann sier kynstórrar ættar
 kappsamr konungr kiærn að flestu.

A leader, wealthy in gold, held the land, the one whom men called Hringr. He had a wife of a noble family — that vigorous king, wise in most things.

Title: 176 Vambarlíóð, V² 1.1 gullaudigur: *so* V², gullaudugur TI, gullauðgr V¹ 1.7
 konungr: kongur V², gramr I

V-2 (J-3)

Ól sier dǫglingr dóttir eina
 þá er Signýiu *seggir nefna
 hafðe hvors slags hannyrð numið
 vng auðarlín átta vetra.

The monarch had one daughter, whom men call Signý. She had learned every sort of needlework — that young Lín of wealth [woman] — by the age of eight.

2.4 seggir: *so* V²TI, segir V¹ 2.6 hannyrð: handyrd V²

V-3 (J-2)

Svo var ágætleg æfin hióna
 að hvort þeirra ǫðru heiðrs leitaðe
 enn er kongs konu kvöldu verkir
 hýr varð hlaðsól að hylíast molldu.

The life of the married couple was so excellent that each of them sought honour for the other. But after the king's wife was tormented by pain the gentle headband-sun [woman] needed to be covered with earth.

V-4 (J-*5)

Geck á háfan haug alþrúðar
 morgin serhvorn mætr landreke
 enn fyrir hilmi á margan veg
 tignarmenn hans telia fóru.

Every morning the esteemed land-ruler walked upon the high mound of Alþrúðr. But the nobles came to plead with their king in many ways.

4.5 hilmi: mildíng, Jón Sigurðsson's conjecture

V-5

Fagrvoxin geck við fōðr að mæla
og vm háls gramí *hendur lagðe
skunda til skemmu skatna drottinn
mier er tíðt við þig tafl að efla.

The shapely one went to speak with her father and she laid her hands around the neck of the king: 'Hurry to the bower, lord of men! I would like to play *tafl* with you.'

5.4 hendur: *so* V²TI, hōndur V¹ 5.8 tafl: chess or another board game

V-6 (P-1)

Hōrva heim aftr *hilmers dóttur
og haf þú þōck fyrir þína gaungu
mey veit eg ongva ne manns konu
er *bōls stōfum *bregdi mínvm

'Go back home, princess, and thank you for your visit. I know no maiden nor man's wife who might alter my baleful staves.'

6.2 hilmers: *so* V²T, hilmer I, hilmis V¹ 6.4 bōls: *so* V², bōls V¹, bōl TI 6.8 bregdi: *so* V²TI, bregða V¹

V-7

Hier sit eg hiá þier og siá þyckunst
að muner siklingr fyrir svikum verða
giōrir þú bōl mikið barni þínu
*þó má skiōlldungr ei við skōpum vinna.

'I sit here by you and I seem to see that you, lord, will be afflicted by deceit. You will do much evil to your child but the ruler cannot contend against fate.'

7.7 þó: *so* V²TI, þá V¹

V-8

Geck vng meya aftr til skemmu
var *ei lofðungs mærllett vm dryckiu
þó hún salkonur sumar gledde
með gulle rauðu og gersemum.

The young maiden walked back to the bower. The princess did not find it easy to partake in drinking though she gladdened some of her hall women with red gold and treasures.

8.3 ei: *so* V²TI, eigi V¹

V-9 (P-2)

Kom þar að haugie kona gangande
þegar *hilmers mæð hvarf í skemmu
kvadde hún oðling með orðum blíðum
sit þú hilmir heill með huga glöðum.

A woman came walking to the mound when the princess returned to the bower. She greeted the king with sweet words: 'Sit in good health, lord, with a happy mind.'

9.3 hilmers: *so* V²TI, hilmis V¹ 9.8 með: *i* V²

V-10

Leyfðr konungr leit ecki við
þó sá hann líóma á loft bera
seg þú en þýða þitt nafn grame
má eg *ei við þig mæla fleira.

The praised king did not turn his head yet he saw a beam of light in the sky: 'Tell, kind one, your name to the king. I can speak no more to you.'

10.7 ei: *so* V²TI, eigi V¹

V-11 (J-*3)

Ýrsa eg heite og er jofurs dóttir
hef eg margt numið er menn *ei vita
spurt hef eg alllitt hylmir heilan
og mun eg brádt á því bætur vinna.

'My name is Yrsa and I am a ruler's daughter. I have learned many things that people do not know. I have heard that the king is not well at all and I will soon remedy that.'

11.1 Ýrsa: *Irsa* V²T (here and elsewhere) 11.4 ei: *so* V²I, eigi V¹ 11.7 mun: *mon* V² 11.7 brádt á: bráðla V²

V-12 (J-*8)

Far heim til hallar hellst mið er framorðið
þar muntu góða gisting fanga
það er flagða hátr að fara mið síð
nú tel eg sólu setta vandlega.

'Go home to the hall, it is getting very late. You will get good lodging there. It is the way of troll-women to go about very late. Now I reckon the sun has set completely.'

V-13 (J-*6, Þ-3)

Hryste hún sínar handagiörver
 að hraut víndrope á vör gramí
 fýsti nú millding meira að drecka
 þá gaf hún honvm horn fullt miðar.

She shook her gloves so that a drop of wine fell onto the king's lip. Now the monarch desired to drink more — then she gave him a horn full of mead.

V-14 (J-*7, J-*4)

Drack af kalke kóngr víðrisinn
 að til Alþrúðar eckert munde
 setst niðr hiá mier og seg tíðinde
 þvíað margt við þig mæla eg villde.

The renowned king drank from the goblet so that he did not remember Alþrúðr at all. 'Sit down by me and tell me news for I would like to say many things to you.'

14.2 víðrisinn: hapax legomenon, probably a corruption of 'vígrisinn', cpr. *gramr vígrisinn* in *Grípisspá*

V-15

*Ei vil eg sikling sitia í hiá þier
 skal eg til hallar heim fyrir aftan
 þá tók hilmer í hönd vífi
 og til borgar heim brátt skunduðu.

'I do not want to sit with you, lord. I must go home to the hall before evening.'
 Then the prince took the hand of the woman and they hurried to the castle.

15.1 Ei: *so* V²T, Eigi V¹ 15.1–2 Ei vil ec hiá þer Sikling sitia V², Sist vil eg hiá þier sitia konungur I

V-16

Gack í qndvegi æðra að sitia
 eig svo við mig át og dryckiu
 qngvum skal það ýta hlýðast
 *af hofðe þer hár að blása.

'Come sit in the nobler high-seat and have food and drink with me. No-one will be suffered to blow a hair off your head.'

16.6 hlýðast: hlida TI 16.7 af: I, á V¹V²T; the phrase *blása hár af hofði* occurs in multiple Old Norse prose texts and always with the preposition *af*, while *á* appears meaningless

V-17

Allz ǫngvum var hún Ýrsa í þocka
þó kvaðst ræsir einn ráða vilia
lögðust síðan í sæng eina
óbrúðarleg mey og jöfr síálfr.

Ýrsa was to no-one's taste, yet the king said that he alone would decide. Then that unbridely maiden and the ruler himself lay down into one bed.

V-18 (J-*2, Þ-5)

Frá eg hún Signý með salkonum
veðrbliðan dag geck epli að velia
og er hún var vti ein á skógie
þá kom hún Ýrsa þar að gangande.

I heard that Signý went one fine day with her hall women to pick apples. And as she was alone out in the woods then Ýrsa came walking.

18.3 geck: *om.* V²

V-19 (J-4, Þ-6)

Ángr er mier að því meira enn mikið
að þú fegre ert fljóðe hveriu
víf skalltu hafa vambar líki
og úr kvöl þeirre komast alldregi.

'It bothers me more than much that you are fairer than every girl. Woman, you shall have the shape of a stomach and never escape that misery.'

V-20 (J-5, Þ-7)

Vlfar þig skulu og ǫll skógar dýr
kallt griót og steinar kvika slíta
vtan leggir mier líkn nockra með
vm dapurlega æfe mína.

'Wolves and all forest beasts, the cold rocks and the stones shall shred you alive unless you also grant me some mercy for my sad life.'

V-21 (J-7, Þ-8)

Það skal til líknar língrundin þier
ef að þig konungsson kaupir mundi
og villde til blíðrar brúðkaup giðra
enn ætla þig þó óvætte vera.

'It will be a mercy for you, linen-ground [woman], if a king's son buys you with a bride price and wants to wed the sweet one and yet thinks you a monster.

21.4 kaupir: kaupa V² (and J)

V-22 (P-9)

Ef svo ólíklega verða mætte
skal bráðr bane bíta Ýrsu
enn Hríngi *kongi harminum brugðið
að honvm verðe *ei neitt að ángre.

In that unlikely case, sudden death shall befall Yrsa and king Hringr be released from sorrow so that nothing will grieve him.'

22.2 orðit gæti, Jón Sigurðsson's conjecture 22.5 kongi *so* V²TI, konungi V¹ 22.7 ei: *so* V²TI, eigi V¹

V-23 (P-10, J-*9)

Vallt síðarla vqmb til heiðar
enn Ýrsa geck heim að hollu
sagðe hún hilmi hvarf Signyiar
enn hann kvaðst í því allz enkis sakna.

The stomach rolled late to the heath and Yrsa walked home to the hall. She told the king that Signý had disappeared but he said that was no loss to him.

V-24

Kom þar af mörku mæz aðrennande
sem líúfr konungr lqndum stýrðe
ýtum þótte hann Ásmundr vera
í fornum sið frægr snemmindis.

The maiden came sliding from the wilderness into lands ruled by a beloved king. Ásmundr was considered famous at a young age during the days of the old religion.

V-25

Móðr átte hann sier með landreka
sú var veigaþoll vitr og hyggín
hún stýrðe lqndum og lýði víða
þegar lofðúngar í leiðangri vóru.

The land-ruler had a mother. That fir-tree of beverages [woman] was wise and intelligent. She ruled widely over the lands and the people if the princes were on an expedition.

V-26 (P-11)

Karl hefr búið nærre *kongs velldi
 sá er auðæfi átte lítil
 hann var genginn vm grænar follder
 geitur heim reka og gamlar kýr.

A man who had little wealth lived near the king's estate. He had walked over green ground to drive home goats and old cows.

26.2 kongs: so V²TI, konungs V¹

V-27 (J-8, P-12)

Vomb sá hann liggja vndir viðar runni
 sem úr nýdrepu nauti være
 stude að framán fæti sínvm
 þá reð mæð við hann margt að ræða.

He saw a stomach lying under a shrub in the woods — as if from a freshly killed bull. He touched it in the front with his foot. Then the maiden came to speak many things to him.

V-28 (J-9, P-13)

Hlíf mæð hýr faðer og hygg að eg mune
 minne móður miog þorf vera
 eg kann að birla og búa að gulle
 enn ómagie ecki þickiunst.

'Spare me, kind father! And consider that I will be very useful to my mother. I can fill cups and decorate with gold. I am no freeloader.

V-29

Haf þig heim apr heilla góðe
 enn eg mun geyma geita þinna
 eg skal hvorn dag hiarðar gæta
 enn þið sæl megið sitia heima.

Go back home, dearest, and I will keep your goats. I will watch over the herd every day while you two sit happily at home.'

29.3 mun: mon V²

V-30 (P-14)

Karl skundaðe til húss þaðan
 fann nú kerlingu káta sína
 sagði hann henne slíkt er hann visse
 enn hún kvað ser *ei vndralaust vera.

The man hurried to the house from there and found his cheerful old lady. He told her what he knew and she said that this seemed wondrous.

30.7 ei: *so* V²TI, eigi V¹

V-31 (J-10)

Mær rak jafnan hiqrð kerlingar
 það er ólogieð í akur konungs
 beitte hún þar henne hvorn dag *at qðrum
 og giqrðe fylki fiártión mikið.

The maiden constantly drove the old lady's herd — this is no lie — to the king's field. She had it graze there one day after another and did costly damage to the ruler.

31.6 at: *so* V²TI, af V¹

V-32 (J-13)

Heim kom að hausti horskr stillir
 með allmyklu ýta mengi
 heitt var munngát á móti gram
 enn qlkonur qðling fognuðu.

In the fall the wise king came home with a great host of men. Beer was prepared for the monarch and the ale-women celebrated the prince.

V-33 (J-13)

Frettu að frægan hvorsu farið hefði
 enn *lofdúngr let vel yfir
 spurðe á móte margs fróðlega
 eða er hier nockuð nýtt í frettum.

The famous one was asked about his journey and the prince declared it successful. He asked intelligently in return: 'Or is there anything new to report here?'

33.3 lofdúngur: *so* V²T, lofdánger V¹

V-34 (J-15, P-18)

Illt er vndrum eftir að fretta
og þó er enn verra að vita af sínum
beitt hefr alla akra þína
mær kerlingar og er slíkt mein mikið.

‘It is bad to enquire about wonders and yet it is worse still to know them from sight. An old lady’s maiden has been grazing all your fields and causes much harm.’

V-35 (J-16)

Menn þickist þier mikilla burða
og oflátar ongum minne
enn hafið þó ecki allt úr garðe
kerlingar jóð og keyrt með höggum.

‘You consider yourselves able men and you are second to none in showing off. Yet you have not chased an old lady’s child from the estate and driven her away with blows.’

V-36 (J-17)

Reiðr geck þaðan recka drottinn
og bað þá alla eftir að sitia
vallt að honvm vomb óþvegin
vertu hilmir heill með huga glöðum.

Angry did the lord of men walk from there and he asked all of them to remain behind. The unwashed stomach rolled up to him: ‘Be well, lord, with a happy mind.’

36.8 glöðum: góðum V²

V-37 (J-18, J-26, P-21)

Hvor leyfði þer *líótvaxinn mær
að beita alla akra mína
far heðan aftr heillinn góðe
eg mun í kvöld heim helldr síð koma.

‘Who allowed you, ugly-shaped maiden, to graze all my fields?’ — ‘Go back from here, dearest, I will come home rather late tonight.’

37.2 líótvaxinn: *so* V²TI, líttvaxin V¹ 37.6 góðe: the masculine form of the adjective indicates that the king is addressed

V-38 (J-19)

Þá reð að reiðast recca drottinn
 og laust hana hende sinne
 mátte *ei leysa lófa frá kvistum
 svo var buðlúngr við brögð kominn.

Then the lord of men became angry and struck her with his hand. He could not release his palm from the branches. Thus the prince was tricked.

38.5 ei: so V²TI, eigi V¹

V-39 (J-20, Þ-20)

Vallt óþvegin vomb til nauta
 þar varð ǫðlingr eptir að darka
 seig þú sámlituð siklingi það
 hvað eg skal til vinna að við skilium.

The unwashed stomach rolled to the bulls and the king had to trudge behind.
 'Tell the prince, dark one, what I should do to separate us.'

V-40 (J-21, Þ-19)

Hier skalltu alla æfe þína
 buðlúngr við mig bundin vera
 engi maðr skal að því giðra
 fyrr enn við afgömul ǫndumst bæðe.

'You will be bound to me all your life, lord, and no-one can do anything about it until the both of us die in ripe old age —

V-41 (J-22)

Vtan þú biðier mín bauga deilir
 og eftir mier egir að ganga
 svo skalltu brúðkaup búa vandlega
 sem þú *kóngsdóttur kaupa munder.

— unless you propose to me, divider of rings [man], and seek me. You shall prepare the wedding as carefully as if you were marrying a princess.'

41.7 kóngsdóttur V²T, kongs dóttir I, konungsdóttir V¹

V-42

Gramr kvað ecki úr góðu að ráða
 þó kaus vísir vomb að eiga
 hellt heim þaðan horskr stillir
 var *ei lofdungi lett vm dryckiu.

The prince said that there was no good choice and yet the ruler decided to marry the stomach. The wise king went home from there. The monarch did not find it easy to take part in drinking.

42.7 ei: *so* V²TI, eigi V¹

V-43

Að spurðe en hvíta *hilmers móðer
hvað til ógleði jöfri være
hann í hlióðe henne sagðe
gef mier íborið eitur að drecka.

The white mother of the king asked what was giving the prince displeasure. He told her quietly: 'Bring me blended poison to drink.'

43.2 hilmers V²T, hilmer I, hylmis V¹ 43.6 sagðe: allt sagdi V²

V-44 (J-23)

Hvað er svo ólíklegt orðið vm *hilmer
að þú villt fylkir fiörvi týna
síá munu reckar ráð betra til
enn þennan kost þigg eg eigi.

'What unlikely thing has happened to the king that you, lord, want to lose your life? Some better counsel will be found. I will not accept this option.'

44.2 hilmer: *so* V², hilme T, þig V¹ 44.4 fiörvi: fióri V²I

V-45

Illt er vndrum eptir að fretta
þó er enn verra vita *á sýnum
ef eg skal eiga ýr við grímu
þau hafa fádæmin flestu vm ollað.

'It is bad to enquire about wonders, yet it is worse still to know them from sight. If I shall have *ýr við grímu* it is mostly caused by abnormal events.'

45.4 á *so* V²TI, að V¹ 45.6 ýr: the word is underlined in V¹ but probably not by the original scribe, yr V²TI 45.6 ýr við grímu: obscure, see commentary on textual difficulties

V-46 (J-27, P-22)

Velltist vm vrðer vqmb óþvegin
og fyrir hasæte hylmirs sínvm
ser hún hvar húkir *heria stiller
mátte hún *ei allra orðanna bindast.

The unwashed stomach rolled over rocky land and by the throne of her king she sees where the lord of armies is cowering. She could not refrain from speaking.

46.6 heria: *so* T, hermanna I, herians V¹V², Herjann is a common poetic synonym for Óðinn but it gives no sense here; the form in T is almost certainly an emendation, but it is a sensible one, cpr. *herja stilli* in *Guðrúnarkviða III* 46.7 ei: *so* V²TI, eigi V¹

V-47 (J-28, Þ-23)

Margar hef eg vitað meyiarnar daprar
þegar flióðin voru fóstnuð manni
hitt vissa eg *aldrei á æfe minne
að brúðguminn byggist við gráta.

'I have known many maidens to be sad when the girls were engaged to a man.
But never in my life have I known the groom about to cry.

47.5 aldrei: *so* V²T, alldri V¹I

V-48

Hier máttu bragning síá brúðe þína
vertu glaðr af því gumna drottinn
stýrðu vel lǫndum og *lidi víða
þer skal eg hilmir hníga að armi.

Here, prince, you can see your bride! Be happy for it, lord of men. Rule well
and widely the lands and the hosts. I will sink into your arms, lord.'

48.6 lidi: *so* V²TI, lýðe V¹

V-49 (J-30)

Þá tók drottning við dýrre snót
vertu flióð komið með fǫgnuðe
lagðe hún meyiú í miðia sæng
og sveypaðe að vtan silki dúki.

Then the queen received the precious lady: 'Be happily welcomed here, girl!' She
laid the maiden into the middle of the bed and wrapped her with a silken cloth.

49.8 dúki: dúka V²

V-50

Hún breidde síðan skickiu eina
svinn seimabil yfir sæng þeirra
hafið nú náðer og niótist vel
enn hiá lofðungi hún lagt sofnaðe.

Then she spread a cloak — that wise Bil of gold [woman] — over their bed. ‘Go to sleep and enjoy each other!’ And she fell asleep beside the prince.

50.2 skickiu: blæu, Jón Sigurðsson’s conjecture, cpr. *Oddrúnargrátr* 25 þa er breiddo við / bleio eina 50.8 lagt: the sense of this word here is unclear, conceivably it has to do with the relative position of the sleepers as ‘fyrir ofan’ does in J-30

V-51 (J-31, P-25)

Þá reð að vakna vísers dóttir
svo að buðlungs mær brenna þóttist
hvor velldr svo heitum elldi
verðr mier all lítt ángurs á mille.

Then the princess awakened and felt as if she were burning. ‘Who causes such a hot fire? Little time passes from one of my troubles to the next.’

V-52 (J-32, P-26)

Vomb hef eg steikta vísirs dóttir
þó mun enn eigi alldeilis búið
nú mun elldzlitnum qlum linna
ef hilmi segir hvað þitt er heiti.

‘I have roasted the stomach, princess. Yet things are not quite over. All the colour of fire will end if you tell the prince what your name is.’

52.5 elldzlitnum: this word is unexpected here, see section on textual difficulties

V-53

Öll hafa þesse álog verið
stillis arfue af stiúpmóður *skópt
ef þú fylgder mier fður að finna
þá hefðe lofðung leyst vel af hende.

‘This entire curse, prince, was wrought by my stepmother. If you were to take me to my father you would have done well.’

53.4 skópt: *so* V²T, sköpuð V¹, þinne I

V-54

Fyrr skal eg bióða gull rauðt við þier
og þig mær við mundi kaupa
skal nú veitzlan sú verða að ǫngvu
sem hún móðer mín mest vandaðe.

‘I would sooner offer red gold for you and purchase you, maiden, with a bride price. Now the feast that my mother carefully prepared will come to nought.’

V-55 (J-34)

Hann sende síðan sinn riddara
 sem að mannvite mestu stýrðe
 jafnan fór drengr dag sem nóttu
 vns til hallar kom Hríngs að kvellde.

Then he sent his knight of greatest wisdom. The warrior travelled steadily through day and night until he reached the hall of Hringr one evening.

V-56

Var vel tekið við kóngs þegni
 og frett giörla að tíðendum
 spurðe á móti margs fróðlega
 eða er hier nockuð nýtt í frettum.

The king's man was well received and asked closely for tidings. Sagely, he asked many things in return: 'Or is there anything new to report?'

56.8 frettum: lande T

V-57 (J-14)

Þau eru her *ordin nýiust tíðendi
 að bráðdauð varð buðlungs kona
 enn hitt er annað ecki minna
 að fylkirs dóttir finnst alldregi.

'The last thing to happen is that the king's wife died suddenly. And another thing, of no less import, is that the king's daughter is nowhere to be found.'

57.1 ordin: so V²T, vorðin V¹, i landi I

V-58 (P-27, J-*1)

Satt vil eg segja sialfum konungi
 að Signý sitr í sal vorum
 bað hún á báli að brenna hana Ýrsu
 og á æginn út ǫsku kasta.

'I will tell the truth to the king himself. Signý is sitting in our hall. She asked for Ýrsa to be burnt on a pyre and the ash thrown out to sea.'

58.2 konungi: kongi V², jøfre T, tiggia I

V-59

Það skulu aðrer ýtar þjóna
 enn eg mun skunda til skipa ofan
 mig skulu skeiður skreyttar fram bera
 enn lýðer aðrer landveg fare.

‘Other men will tend to this but I will hurry down to the ships. The splendid warships will carry me forth and other people will go by land.’

59.2 ýtar: Ita V²

V-60

Dreif drengia lið á dreka *gilldan
 og siglde gramr að góðu veðre
 feck hraðbyri hóllda drottinn
 vnz til hallar kom Ásmundz að kveldi.

A host of warriors rushed onto the golden dragon ship and the king sailed in good weather. The lord of men had favorable wind until he arrived at Ásmundr’s hall one evening.

60.2 gilldan: so V²T, gilldum I, gylltan V¹ 60.2 gilldan: this spelling could represent either *gylldr* ‘golden’ or *gildr* ‘broad’ but the first is more likely in light of the V¹ form and the many literary references to golden-headed dragon ships

V-61

Bað blíðugr bauga þiliu
 að hún Ásmunde ecki neytte
 gengu síðan í sal konur
 sá var flióða skare skrautlegast búinn.

The gentle man asked the plank of rings [woman] not to refuse Ásmundr. Then the women walked into the hall. That host of ladies was splendidly dressed.

V-62

Biuggu síðan báðer jofrar
 bar hvor þeirra brióst fyrir oðrum
 svo man vm síðir sagan lyktast
 að vm allan alldr með vnað lifðu.

Then both the princes lived on, each of them cared for the other. So, at last, the story comes to an end. They lived in bliss for all their life.

Vambar Liod (J version)**J-1 (V-1)**

Sat gunnþorer godur a lande
þann er holldar hring kolludu
konu atte hann sier var kiæn ad afle
kappsamur konungur af kine godu.

A good leader, brave in battle, held the land. Hringr was his name. He had a wife, that vigorous king, she was wise in power, of a noble kin.

Title supplied from T, J has none. 1.1 gunnþorer: hapax legomenon which I take to be a nominalization of *gunnþorinn*, 'battle-brave'

J-2 (V-3)

Þaug unntu sier allt hid besta
hugde hiona hvort odru vel
þar til kona konungs var kuldu verke
þa var hun hladsol hulenn molldu.

They enjoyed themselves in the best way — each of them thought well of the other — until the king's wife was *kuldu verke*. Then the headband-sun [woman] was covered with earth.

2.6: obscure but cpr. V-3

J-3 (V-2)

Atte doglingur sier dotter eina
þa er segger Signyu nefna
hun hafde hveria handnird numed
ung audarbil atta vetra.

The monarch had one daughter who was called Signý. She had learned every type of needlework — that young Bil of wealth [woman] — by the age of eight.

J-4 (V-19, P-6)

Angur er mier ad þvi meir enn miked
ad þu fegre ert fiode hveriu
mei skalltu verda i vambarlike
og ur kvol þeirre komast alldreige.

'It bothers me more than much that you are fairer than every girl. Maiden, you shall have the shape of a stomach and never get out of that misery.'

J indicates that material is missing after stanza 3 with 'def. a'. 4.3 fegre ert: There is some illegible attempt at correction here in J.

J-5 (V-20, Þ-7)

Þig skulu ulfar og oll grei
 kallder griotsteinar kvika slita
 nema þu legger líkn nockra mier
 um dapurlega æfena mina.

‘Wolves and all bitches and the cold rocks shall shred you alive unless you grant me some mercy for this sad life of mine.’

J-6

Latum við hverugt halldast þetta
 sem eg mæri við þig mællte af folsku
 þetta mun hvertveggja halldast verða
 þó með meinum minn alldurenn sie.

‘Let neither of us hold to these things which, out of foolishness, I spoke to you, maiden.’ — ‘Both things will hold, though my life be one of sorrows.’

This stanza is also in *Hyndluljóð*, where the context is clearer. A curse is followed by a countercurse and then an offer to cancel both curses. The offer is rejected. This motif is found in tales in Iceland, Ireland and Scotland, see Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Um íslenzkar þjóðsögur*, pp. 246–47.

J-7 (V-21, Þ-8)

Það skal til líknar líufbundenn mæri
 að þig kongson kaupa munde
 og so til blidrari brullaupid bua
 þó hann ætli þig arfa grimu.

‘It will be a mercy for you, sweetly bound maiden, if a king’s son were to buy you and celebrate the wedding with the sweet one, though he think you *arfa grimu*.’

7.2 The hapax *líufbundin* might have developed from *línbundin* ‘linen-bound’, an adjective applied to women in two skaldic stanzas. 7.8: see section on textual difficulties

J-8 (V-27, Þ-12)

Vallt um heidar vomb oþveigenn
 sem ur nydreþnu naute være.

The stomach, unwashed as if from a freshly killed bull, rolled through the heaths.

J indicates that material is missing after stanza 7 with ‘def B’. 8.1 heidar: ‘nar’ added above the line to correct to ‘heidarnar’

J-9 (V-28, P-13)

Hlifdu mier fader ad eg hugda munde
 minne modur margþorf vera
 eg skal geima geita þinna
 enn þid sæl skulud sitia heima.

'Spare me, father, since I think I would be useful in many ways to my mother. I will keep your goats and you two shall sit happily at home.'

9. J indicates that material is missing after stanza 8 with 'def'.

J-10 (V-31)

Mær rak hvorn dag hird kiellingar
 enn það var olofad i akra konungs
 beitte hun sidann hvern af odrum
 giorde hun fylker fiarspioll mikel.

Every day the maiden drove the old lady's retinue — though it was not allowed — to the king's fields. She had them graze one after the other. She did costly harm to the ruler.

10.2 hird: either a humorous way to refer to the goats or an error for 'hiord'

J-11

Geingu heiman hirdmen konungs
 og badu oþockann undann ad snauta
 vissum vier ei ad þu varst vatne ausen
 vier hugdum þig hafskrimsl mikid.

The king's retainers went forth and asked the disgusting one to clear off. 'We did not know that you were sprinkled with water. We thought you a great sea monster.'

11–12: Here I follow T in the order of the verses. The order in J is 11.5–8, 12.5–6, 11.1–4, 12.1–4, 12.7–8 with some ambiguous symbols which may be intended to indicate another order. 11.6 vatne ausen: pagan baptism

J-12

Þid erud dælsker og dulberer
 þid ætled mier ongvu ad rada
 þeir voru hyggnares en hvor ydar
 sem mig villdu vatninu ausa.

'You are foolish and deluded. You expect me to have no say! Those who would have me sprinkled with water were more intelligent than any of you.'

J-13 (V-32, V-33)

Heim kom um hausted heria stiller
 med allmiked jarla meinge
 spurde a mote allfrodlega
 er hier nockud nytt i lande.

In the fall the lord of armies came home with a great host of jarls. He asked sagely in return: 'Is there anything new in the land?'

13.2 heria: 'ns' added above the line to correct to 'herians' 13.6: 'all' corrected to 'marg' above the line

J-14 (V-57)

Þaug eru tidendenn mest ad fretta
 ad braddaud vard budlungs kvinna
 og þo er annad ecke minna
 ad kongsens mær siest alldreige.

'The most important news is that the monarch's wife died suddenly. And there is another thing, no less weighty. The king's daughter is nowhere to be seen.'

J-15 (V-34, P-18)

Jllt er undrum epter ad fretta
 þo er enn verra ad vita til sinna
 beitt hefur alla akrana þina
 mær kellingar þad er mein miked.

'It is bad to enquire about wonders. Yet it is worse still to know for sure. An old lady's maiden has been grazing all your fields and causing much harm.'

15.4 sinna: I take this to represent *sýnna*

J-16 (V-35)

Menn þykjast hier meire burdar
 og *oflatar ecke minne
 ad þeir skyllde ecke hart ur garde
 kellingar jod keira med höggum.

'My men think they are capable and there is no lack of showing off. But they have not driven an old lady's child firmly from the estate and chased her with blows!'

16.3 oflatar: conjectural emendation, hoflatar J

J-17 (V-36)

Gekkt reidur þaðan *heria stiller
 það ita alla eptir að sitja
 vallað að honum vomb óþveigenn
 sittu hilmir heill með hird gláður.

Angry, the lord of armies walked from there and asked the men to remain behind.
 The unwashed stomach rolled up to him: 'Be well, lord, happy with your retinue.'

17.2 heria: conjectural emendation, herians J

J-18 (V-37, Þ-21)

Hvor leifde þeir liotvaxen mæri
 að beita alla akrana mína
 skridtu á burtu heim hiedann
 og síðann þú síast alldreige.

'Who allowed you, ugly-shaped maiden, to graze over all my fields? Slither back home and never be seen again!'

J-19 (V-38)

Þá gjörde að reidast *heria stiller
 og listu að *henne hende sinne
 gat eige leist lofan frá kviste
 þá var buðlungsson í brogð komenn.

Then the lord of armies became angry and struck at her with his hand. He could not release his palm from the branch. Thus the son of the prince was tricked.

19.2 heria: conjectural emendation, herians J 19.3 henne: henne henne J

J-20 (V-39, Þ-20)

Vallað óþveigenn vomb til nauta
 þar varð odlingur eptir að snauta
 segðu samlituð síklinge það
 hvað til skal vinna so eg laus verðe.

The unwashed stomach rolled to the bulls and the king had to lumber behind.
 'Tell, dark-coloured one, to the prince what I should do to be free.'

J-21 (V-40, Þ-19)

Hier skaltu buðlungur bunden vera
 við mig alla æfena þína
 eingenn maður skal að því gjöra
 fyrir enn við afgömul ondustum bæðe.

‘You will be bound to me, lord, for all your life and no-one can do anything about it until the both of us die in ripe old age —

J-22 (V-41)

Nema þu bidier min baugadeiler
og epter því eige eg ad ganga
so skalltu brullauped bua vandlega
sem þu kongsdotter kaup muner.

— except if you propose to me, divider of rings [man], and I accept the offer. You shall prepare the wedding as carefully as if you were marrying a princess.’

22.5–6: There is some hard-to-make-out attempt to correct these lines in J, perhaps to ‘so skalltu budlungur brullauped vanda’ (JH). 22.8 muner: corrected to ‘munder’ in J

J-23 (V-44)

Hvad er illt orded ungum filker
ad lofdungsson vill life tina
sia munu rekar rad betra til
mun eg þenna kost kiosa ecke.

‘What evil thing has happened to the young prince that the king’s son wants to lose his life? Some better counsel will be found. I do not accept this choice.’

J indicates that material is missing after stanza 22 with ‘d.’ and some space.

J-24

Ok i vagne veltiolddudum
kiæn kinge bil karl ad finna
sia vil eg dotter dulssens skeggia
og syne minum sidann gipta.

The clever Bil of magic [woman] travelled in a nicely covered wagon to find the old man. ‘I wish to see the daughter of the denizen of deceit and then marry her to my son.’

J-25

Vallt ad vagne vomb oþveigenn
hier mattu snot sia sonar konu efne
þike þier ecke eg alvæn vera
þo epter því eige hann ad ganga.

The unwashed stomach rolled to the wagon: ‘Here, lady, you can see your daughter-in-law-to-be. You do not think me altogether pretty. Yet he is to accept this.’

25.4 efne: ‘þina’(?) added above the line

J-26 (V-37, Þ-21)

Villtu víf með mier a vagn fara
 og oduglega aka til byggða
 heim fardu hiedann heillenn goda
 eg mun sidar um kvöld koma.

'Would you, woman, go with me on the wagon and drive swiftly to the settlements?' — 'Go back home, dearest, I will arrive later tonight.'

J-27 (V-46, Þ-22)

Vallt um hurder vomb þþveigenn
 og i hasæte til hilma sinna
 sier hun hvar hann hædst situr heria stiller
 ei matte hun allra ordanna bindast.

The unwashed stomach rolled through the doors and onto the high seat to her princes. She sees where he sits, highest, the lord of armies. She could not restrain all her words.

27.4 a puzzling verse; using plural forms of 'hilmir' is unusual 27.5 situr: 'sit' with a curl under it, JH transcribes this as 'situr'

J-28 (V-47, Þ-23)

Margar hefe eg sied meýarnar daprar
 þo flíodenn være fostnud manne
 hitt sa eg alldrei a æfe minne
 ad brudgumen byggest til ad grata.

'I have seen many maidens sad though they were engaged to a man. But never in my life have I seen the groom about to cry.'

28.1 sied: 'vitad' added above the line 28.3 þo: 'þegar' added above the line 28.3 være: 'hafa vered' added above the line 28.7 JH reads a crossed-out 'rner' above the line 28.8 byggest: JH reads 'hann bideð' above the line

J-29 (Þ-22)

Hvar er þad gulleð sem gumnastíorenn
 blídur landrekenn gaf brudenne sinne
 hefde mier alldrei i hug komed
 hringur sa milldingur meýunne atladur.

'Where is the gold which the lord of men, the gentle land-ruler, gave to his bride?' — 'That ring, prince, intended for the maiden, would never have entered my mind.'

J-30 (V-49)

Þá tok drottning vid dyrre snot
 og sveipade hana í silkeduke
 lagde hana sidann í sæng nidur
 fyrir ofann lofdung hun laust sofnade.

Then the queen received the precious lady and wrapped her in a silken cloth.
 After that she laid her down onto the bed. She fell lightly asleep to the wall side
 of the prince.

30.5 vertical lines around 'sidann' in J, unclear why

J-31 (V-51, Þ-25)

Vid það vaknade visers dotter
 að hun þottest helldur heitt kenna
 hver velldur heitum hiriar ellde
 verdur mier sialldan angurs a mille.

Then the princess woke up feeling rather hot. 'Who is causing a hot, flaming fire?
 There is seldom a long time between my troubles.'

31.5–6 corrected to 'hver velldur mier so heitum elldi', 'hiriar' is crossed out but seems
 reasonably clear

J-32 (V-52, Þ-26)

Vomb hefe eg steikta visers dotter
 þo ecke sie hun til ats buenn
 hier mun ollum elldslitrum linna
 enn siklinge segdu hvad þu heiter.

'I have roasted a stomach, princess, but not for eating. Now all the *elldslitrum*
 will come to an end. Tell the prince your name.'

32.6: see section on textual difficulties 32.7 siklinge: corrected from 'siglinge'

J-33

Þier a eg milldingur miked að þacka
 og mætre jofur modur þinne
 þid hafed mig ur anaud þeiged
 segger mig Signyu nefna.

'I have much to thank you for, lord, and your esteemed mother. You two have
 rescued me from distress. I am called Signý.'

J-34 (V-55)

Sende hann sinn þa frægsta riddara
þann er mestu mannvite stirde
bæde for dogling daga sem nætur
og til hallar kom Hrings ad kvellde.

Then he sent his most famous knight of greatest wisdom. The prince travelled both day and night and reached the hall of Hringr one evening.

J indicates that material is missing after stanza 33 with 'def'.

J-*1 (V-58, P-27)

Þaug eru tidenden best ad fretta
ad Signy situr i solum vorum
bad hun a bale ad brenna hana Jssu
og a ægenn ut oskunne ad kasta.

'The best news is that Signý is sitting in our halls. She asked for Yrsa to be burnt on a pyre and the ash thrown out on the sea.'

*1. The beginning of the additional material on the other leaf; 'def A' is written to the left of the first two long lines.

J-*2 (V-18, P-5)

Þa var hun ute ein a skogie
þar kom hun Jssa ad gangande.

She was alone out in the woods when Yrsa approached her.

Between *2 and *3 the word 'def' is written.

J-*3 (V-11)

Jssa eg heite Jofurs er eg dotter
margt hefe eg numed i mannvite
frett hefe eg odling all lit heilann
mun eg skiott a því bæturnar vinna.

'My name is Yrsa — I am a ruler's daughter. Much wisdom have I learned. I have been told that the king is not at all well and I will quickly remedy that.'

*3.7 skiott: corrected to 'bratt' above the line

J-*4 (V-14)

Settu þig nidur hia mier og segdu tidende
þvi eg margt vid þig mæla villde.

‘Sit down by my side and tell me news since I would like to say many things to you.’

J-*5 (V-4)

Gieck a haänn haug alþrudar
mirgenn hvern medlands drekenn.

Each morning the dragon of Meðland walked upon the high mound of Alþrúðr.

*5.4 medlands: This is a hapax, perhaps to be thought of as a toponym (cpr. *Meðalland*). Presumably the verse is a corruption of something like V4.4 ‘mætr landreke’. *5: The strophe is preceded by ‘def B’. *5.4 drekenn: The first three letters are unclear.

J-*6 (V-13, P-3)

Hriste hun sinar handa gerfur
þa hraut vindrope a vor grame
fyste fylker meira ad drecka
þa gaf hun honum horn fullt miadar.

She shook her gloves and then a drop of wine fell onto the king’s lip. Now the ruler desired to drink more — then she gave him a horn full of mead.

J-*7 (V-14)

Drack af kalke kongur vidrisenn
so til alþrudar hann ecke munde.

The renowned king drank from the goblet so that he did not remember Alþrúðr.

J-*8 (V-12)

Þad er flagda sidur ad fara miog seint
nu true eg solu setta vandlega.

‘It is the custom of troll-women to go about very late. Now I believe the sun has set completely.’

J-*9 (V-23, Þ-10)

Enn hun Jssa geck aptur til bæar.
Sagde hun konge hvarf Signyar.
hann kvadst i því einkis sakna.

And Yrsa went back to the settlement. She told the king that Signý had disappeared. He said that was no loss to him.

*9: The arrival of internal punctuation seems to be a reaction to less space on the page at this point, preventing the long lines from being written out as a whole.

Fragment Vambarlióða (Þ version)**Prose introduction**

Hríngur het Kongur oc Signi dóttir hans. hann sirde jafnan epter Drottningu ok sat á leide hennar ok villde dóttir hans koma hönum þadan:

A king was named Hringr and Signý was his daughter. He grieved constantly for his queen and sat on her grave. His daughter wanted to bring him from there.

Þ-1 (V-6)

Fardu heim hedan heillin góða
hafðu þöck fyrer þína gaungu
mey veit ek öngva ne mans konu
sem bölstöfunum bregde mínum.

‘Go home from here, dearest. Thank you for your visit. I know no maiden nor man’s wife who might alter my baleful staves.’

1.7 sem: þeim 430

Þ-2 (V-9)

Kom þar ad haugi kona gágangande
þegar hilmirs mær hvarf í skemmu
kvadde hún Óðlín med ordum blídum
sittu heill Kóngr med hyrd glóðu.

A woman came walking to the mound when the princess returned to the bower. She greeted the king with sweet words: ‘Sit in good health, king, with the happy court.’

Þ-3 (V-13, J-*6)

Hún bad hilmer af harmi láta
ecke skyllde hann audgrund optar syrgia
hriste hún sína handa gerfu
þá hraut hagl á varer tiggia.

She asked the prince to desist from sorrow — he should grieve no more over the ground of wealth [woman]. She shook her glove and a hailstone was flung onto the ruler’s lips.

3.2 láta: at láta 430 3.6 gerfu: gyrfu 430