

## “LIQUID KNOWLEDGE” IN OLD NORSE LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Stefka G. Eriksen\*

**Abstract:** In an article from 2010, Judy Quinn argues that the metaphor of “liquid knowledge” in eddic poetry refers to the liquidity of the oral society where the eddic poetry was composed and transmitted. The aim of the present article is to expand on and nuance this interpretation based on two main factors: (1) the poetry is known to us from manuscripts produced in a highly evolved literate culture, and (2) the commonness of the metaphor linking ingestion and digestion, on the one hand, and cognitive transformation, on the other, in medieval Christian texts and rituals. This evidence suggests that the metaphor of drinking and eating knowledge has a great degree of plasticity and may refer both to the liquidity of an oral culture and to theological paradigms in medieval Christian literate culture. This has implications for our understanding of the Old Norse literary system in general and for attitudes to knowledge in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Old Norse culture.

**Keywords:** knowledge, cognition, tasting, ingestion, digestion, drinking, eating, eddic poetry, Old Norse mythology, Christian theology.

### INTRODUCTION

In her article “Liquid Knowledge: Traditional Conceptualisation of Learning in Eddic Poetry,” Judy Quinn investigates the metaphor “liquid knowledge,” as it is used in eddic texts, and argues that it refers to the liquidity of Old Norse oral culture.<sup>1</sup> The metaphor represents, according to Quinn, “the sense of knowledge as flowing from mouth to mouth and being ingested in order to be incorporated by the listeners [which] is *of course* [my emphasis] a product of a society not dependent on writing.”<sup>2</sup> She mentions that mythological sources on acquisition of knowledge are relevant not only for the discussion of oral society, but also for the orality-literacy debate, because beer is described as carrying both chanted genres and inscribed symbols.

Judy Quinn also shows that the sense of hearing is distinguished from cognitive comprehending in the eddic corpus. In many eddic poems, there is a difference between hearing, catching the meaning (*nema*), and using the information or knowledge (*njóta*). According to Quinn, this reflects the fact that the idea of eating, drinking, and digesting knowledge is common in oral tradition and that learning depends not only on remembering, but also on assimilation and being attentive.<sup>3</sup> Quinn’s analysis emphasizes the significance of hermeneutical and cognitive understanding in oral culture, and she argues that it is commonly represented through the liquid knowledge metaphor.

Acknowledging Quinn’s conclusion that the metaphor may reflect the liquidity of the oral culture where the poems were originally created, the argument will be taken one step further, by discussing the possible meanings of the metaphor in the Christian context of the preserved versions of the poems. Quinn herself comments on the manuscript transmission of the poems and discusses the implications of corrections in

\*Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research, Storgata 2, 0155 Oslo, Norway, stefka.eriksen@niku.no. I wish to thank Eric Palazzo for reading and discussing with me an early version of the article, as well as the anonymous readers at *Viator* for their constructive feedback.

<sup>1</sup> Judy Quinn, “Liquid Knowledge: Traditional Conceptualisation of Learning in Eddic Poetry,” *Along the Oral-Written Continuum: Types of Texts, Relations and their Implications*, ed. Slavica Rankovic, with Leidulf Melve and Else Mundal, *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 20 (Turnhout 2010) 183–226.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 183.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 186, 215.

the manuscripts for the editing of the text in various editions and, consequently, for the meaning of the texts.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, she is not explicit about what period and socio-cultural context her observations are relevant for (the context of origin or the context of preservation) and concludes, as mentioned, that the use of the “liquid knowledge” metaphor alludes to the liquidity of oral cultures.

In this article, we will pay closer attention to two factors that Quinn touches upon in her study, but only briefly, namely: (1) the manuscript context of the poetry, and (2) the significance and commonness of the metaphor of drinking and eating knowledge in Old Norse and medieval Christian texts (and rituals), in general. Such a scrutiny of the manuscript and thematic context of the metaphor will convey whether the metaphor of drinking (and eating) knowledge may refer both to the liquidity of an oral culture, as argued by Quinn, and to the theological thinking characteristic of medieval Christian literate culture. Finally, these discussions have implications for our understanding of the Old Norse literary system in general and the attitudes to knowledge in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Old Norse culture.

#### ON LITERARY SYSTEMS AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

First of all, a clarification of a few theoretical and methodological premises is in order. The investigation of the commonness and significance of the metaphor in the Old Norse literary system necessitates the study of a wide span of texts. For the sake of clarity of presentation, the texts to be studied may be divided into two subgroups: “pre-Christian-oral-indigenous” and “Christian-written-translated.” First, we will look at indigenous texts, such as eddic poetry, Snorri’s *Edda*, and a couple of *fornaldarsögur*. Thereafter, we will focus on Old Norse texts and translations from Latin and French, such as *The King’s Mirror*, *The Old Norse Homily Book*, *Barlaams saga*, *Tristrams saga*, and *Elíss saga*, among others.<sup>5</sup> The texts in the first group convey allegedly pre-Christian Nordic mythology and oral poetics, although these are preserved in manuscripts produced within a Christian literate environment. The texts in the second group have undoubtedly Christian content and are characterized by their writtenness and translatedness. These distinctions between the texts will not be seen as representing dichotomies, but rather as functioning along three continuums.

The first continuum concerns the thematic content of the texts: pre-Christian versus Christian content. The discussion of the possible Christian influence on the composition of eddic poetry, for example, started already at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, focusing on the link between *Völuspá* and the Greek-Latin-Christian tradition of the Sibylline Oracles.<sup>6</sup> One of Sophus Bugge’s main arguments was that Old Norse mythology was based on Christian and/or classical sources, via English and Irish contacts during the Viking Age. His point of view was much debated and contradicted already during his time.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 221, fn. 101.

<sup>5</sup> This investigation does not claim exhaustive coverage of the usage of the metaphor in the whole Old Norse literary system, but a certain textual and generic span is purposefully aimed for.

<sup>6</sup> A. Chr. Bang, *Völuspaa og de Sibyllinske Orakler*, Christiania Videnskabselskabs Forhandlinger 9 (Christiania 1879/1880). See also Sophus Bugge, *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse*. First series (Christiania 1881–1889).

Recent scholars tend to be more concerned with general influence, analogues, or models, rather than direct sources.<sup>7</sup> Joseph Harris explains that while the term “source” belongs to a literate tradition, terms like “models” and “analogues” suit the eddic corpus better, “as eddic poetry is oral in essence, its attested language is part of a great oral sea of poetic language never systematically attested in writing.”<sup>8</sup> A recent book on the poem *Völuspá*, for example, shows how the poem can both be read as instructive of pre-Christian oral tradition and be understood within the written and liturgical context of Christianity.<sup>9</sup>

The main tendencies in the studies of other Old Norse texts, such as the Icelandic family sagas<sup>10</sup> and the legendary sagas,<sup>11</sup> have followed the same main paradigm shifts as scholarship of eddic poetry, as summarized above. These genres retell events that happened in pre-Christian times, and scholars have eagerly discussed what mentality is most imprinted in them—the original pre-Christian framework of mind or the Christian structure of the writer/scribe.

Based on these developments in the discussion, a main premise for this study is that pre-Christian, traditional myths must certainly have formed part of the competence of the Christian writers, and their Christian mindset most probably influenced the writing down of pre-Christian myths. Therefore, it is most productive to keep both these entities—knowledge of Old Norse as well as of Christian mythologies and histories—in mind when discussing the literary system of the time. The degree to which the individual writer drew upon the two traditions certainly varied, but when the Christian and pre-Christian themes are placed on a continuum, the pool of knowledge and the literary system can be seen as a dynamic and coherent whole.

The second continuum is closely linked to the first and concerns the oral, as opposed to the written, character of the texts. Scholarship on orality and literacy of eddic poetry has followed the broader history of orality-literacy discussions.<sup>12</sup> The general movement of the discussion of orality has been from composition, to transmission, to delivery, to performance, and back. The pioneering work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord has influenced scholarship on the Old Norse corpus and eddic

<sup>7</sup> Karl G. Johansson, “Völuspá and the Tiburtine Sibyl, and the apocalypse in the North,” *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Völuspá and Nordic Days of Judgement*, ed. T. Gunnell and A. Lassen, *Acta Scandinavica* 2 (Turnhout 2013) 67–86.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Harris, “Traditions of eddic scholarship,” *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry. Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge 2016) 33–57, at 48.

<sup>9</sup> *The Nordic Apocalypse. Approaches to Völuspá and Nordic Days of Judgement*, eds., Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen, *Acta Scandinavica, Aberdeen Studies in the Scandinavian World* 2 (Turnhout 2013).

<sup>10</sup> For a recent review article, see Haki Antonsson, “Christian Themes,” *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (London and New York 2017) 279–291.

<sup>11</sup> See the three essay collections, edited by Annette Lassen, Agnete Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson: *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi* (Uppsala 2003); *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og virkelighet* (København 2009); *The Legendary Sagas. Origin and Development* (Reykjavík 2012).

<sup>12</sup> For a recent review, see Harris, “Traditions of eddic scholarship” (n. 8 above) 33–57. In the same volume, see also Jens Peter Schjødt, “Eddic poetry and the religion of pre-Christian Scandinavia,” 132–146, who discusses how we as scholars can get to the pre-Christian mythological core in the preserved Christian poems.

poetry,<sup>13</sup> and it has inspired discussions on composition and performance,<sup>14</sup> the performance and musical aspects of eddic poetry,<sup>15</sup> and on eddic poetry as a performative social drama.<sup>16</sup> The consecutive scholarly paradigm of the Great Divide, introduced by Walter Ong,<sup>17</sup> and points of view syncretizing oral and literary mentalities, such as those of Michael Clancy, Ruth Finnegan, and Joyce Coleman,<sup>18</sup> have also influenced Old Norse scholarship. Following the latter line of thought, it is equally significant to accept the oral origin of the poetry, as well as the writtenness of the material that is preserved.

Studies of the manuscripts elucidate various aspects of the socio-political context that produced the manuscripts. Terry Gunnell, for example, studies the manuscripts for performance clues, based on the idea that the poetry existed as drama.<sup>19</sup> In much of his work, Karl G. Johansson has sought to combine the concerns about the presumable oral existence of the poems, on the one hand, and the materiality and literate character of the manuscripts that are preserved, on the other.<sup>20</sup> Maja Bäckvall has studied the meaning and function of the Uppsala version of Snorri's Edda and discusses what a reader of the manuscript would have made of all the existing variants.<sup>21</sup>

Much more research can of course be referred to here, by scholars such as Anthony Faulkes, Guðrún Nordal, Margaret Clunies Ross, and Ursula Dronke, just to mention a few. However, this short history of scholarship suffices to elucidate that the pendulum has been swinging ever since the 1800s and that there are recent attempts to take into consideration the whole movement of the pendulum. Thus, variants of the following argument have been proposed: even though the poetry was orally conceived,

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method*, transl. Nicholas Jones, *Publications of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature 2* (Cambridge, MA 2004); Else Mundal, "Oral or scribal variation in Völuspá: A case study in Old Norse poetry," *Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing*, ed. Else Mundal and Jonas Wellendorf (Copenhagen 2008) 209–227.

<sup>14</sup> Lars Lönnroth, "Old Norse text as performance," *Scripta Islandica* 60 (2009) 49–60; Paul Acker, *Revising Oral Theory: Formulaic Composition in Old English and Old Icelandic Verse* (New York and London 1998); Scott Mellor, *Analyzing Ten Poems from the Poetic Edda: Oral Formula and Mythic Patterns* (Lewiston 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Terry Gunnell, *The Origin of Drama in Scandinavia* (Cambridge 1995); Joseph Harris, "'Ethnopalearography' and recovered performance: the problematic witnesses of 'Eddic Music,'" *Models of Performance in Oral Epic, Ballad, and Song, Western Folklore* 62.1–2, ed. Joseph Falaky Nagy (2003) 97–117.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Bauman, "Performance and honor in 13th-century Iceland," *Journal of American Folklore* 99 (1986) 131–50.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London 1982).

<sup>18</sup> Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066–1307* (Oxford 1993); Ruth Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford 1988); Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge 1996).

<sup>19</sup> *The Origin of Drama in Scandinavia* (Cambridge 1995). On performance perspectives, see also Bernt Øyvind Thorvaldsen, *Svá er sagt í fornum vísindum: tekstualiseringen av de mytologiske eddadikt*, unpublished PhD thesis (University of Bergen 2007). Mats Malm, "I marginalen till eddahandskrifterna," *Den norröna renässansen: Reykholt, Norden och Europa, 1150–1300*, ed. Karl G. Johansson (Reykholt 2007) 135–155.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, "Völuspá—muntlig och skriftlig tradition: En diskussion om skärningspunkt mellan filologi och litteraturvetenskap," *Den fornordiska texten i filologisk och litteraturvetenskaplig belysning*, eds. Kristinn Jóhannesson, Karl G. Johansson, and Lars Lönnroth, *Old Norse Studies 2* (Gothenburg 2000) 64–82.

<sup>21</sup> *Skriva fel och läsa rätt? Eddiska dikter i Uppsalaeddans ur et avsändar- och mottagarperspektiv* (Uppsala 2013).

transmitted and performed, at some point in time it was written down by Christian scribes who were fluent in Christian theological thought, and it is this version of the poetry that we have preserved. With regard to the development of this discussion, Joseph Harris has emphasized the “borderlessness of actual thought”,<sup>22</sup> arguing that even though academic traditions have swung between different perspectives, these should not be seen as sharp contrasts, but as continuums of paradigms.<sup>23</sup>

The third continuum that structures the Old Norse literary system is also linked to the first two, and it concerns the degree of “translatedness,” as opposed to “indigenesness” of the texts. This is, once again, a scale and not a dichotomy. Different writing processes in the Middle Ages, such as translations from orality into writing (in other words, composing an original text), interlingual translations, adaptations, rewritings, and copies, can all be seen as hermeneutical interpretations, using and transforming existent material in the production of something new.<sup>24</sup> All new texts and translations serve the competence of the target audience and are unique indicators of what is accepted as common knowledge in the culture that produced them.<sup>25</sup> This discussion has been pursued to a greater degree for the texts in the second subgroup of the Old Norse literary system, as defined above, namely the indigenous and translated Old Norse texts. The main tendency in recent scholarship is that the translations of romances and *chansons de geste*,<sup>26</sup> as well as of Latin texts, such as *Barlaams saga*,<sup>27</sup> are seen less as a function of their sources and more as products of their target contexts. Regarding the literary system as a continuum of degrees of translatedness allows for a change of focus from traditional questions, such as whether a text or a metaphor is traditional in Nordic literature, or whether it is adapted/translated from the Christian tradition or to the Christian tradition, to focusing on the presence and the function of the text or the metaphor in a given context and discussing the implication of this presence for our understanding of the cultural context.

<sup>22</sup> Harris, “Traditions of eddic scholarship” (n. 8 above) 33.

<sup>23</sup> The orality-literacy debate has been actively pursued with regard to many other genres of Old Norse literature, which will not be central in this article. Nonetheless, for further details, I refer the reader to the following literature: *Modes of Authorship in the Middle Ages*, eds. Slavica Rancovic et al., *Papers in Medieval Studies* 22 (Toronto 2012); *Along the Oral-Written Continuum: Types of Texts, Relations and Their Implications*, eds. Slavica Rancovic et al., *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 20 (Turnhout 2010); Stefka Eriksen, *Writing and Reading in Medieval Manuscript Culture, Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe* 25 (Turnhout 2014) 22–35.

<sup>24</sup> This is a main premise, especially with regard to interlingual translations, in Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric*. See also Jan M. Ziolkowski, “Classical Influences on Medieval Latin Views of Poetic Inspiration,” *Latin Poetry and the Classical Tradition: Essays in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. Peter Godman and Oswyn Murray (Oxford 1990) 15–38. The hermeneutical nature of interlingual and intralingual Old Norse translations is discussed by Eriksen, *Writing and Reading* (n. 23 above).

<sup>25</sup> For an elaborate discussion of this premise, see Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA 1995).

<sup>26</sup> For a historical overview of how Old Norse translations have been studied in the past decades, including numerous references to important works on translations by scholars such as Marianne Kalinke and Stefanie Gropper, among others, see Stefka G. Eriksen, “Courtly Literature,” *The Routledge Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (Routledge 2014) 59–73.

<sup>27</sup> *Barlaam i nord: legenden om Barlaam och Josaphat i den nordiska medeltidslitteraturen*, eds. Maria Arvidsson and Karl G. Johansson, *Bibliotheca Nordica* 1 (Oslo 2009).

The three continuums described above are related to each other, but they are certainly not overlapping. Defining the literary system as a series of dynamic and interrelated continuums legitimizes the parallel study of a wide span of Old Norse genres, which are usually studied separately. This allows us to see texts and metaphors from new perspectives and to further our understanding of Old Norse literature and culture.

After clarifying our theoretical starting points, we can now turn back to the main focus of this article: the function of the “liquid knowledge” metaphor in the literature and culture of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Norway and Iceland. The pertinent question still is: how would the medieval readers have understood the metaphor? What associations could the metaphor have brought to mind: to traditional myths belonging to an old oral tradition, to Christian stories and metaphors introduced through the European Latinate culture, or to both? To answer these questions, we will have a look at two main parameters of the metaphor: (1) the type of liquid being consumed (mead, wine, blood, water, the liquid in various wells) and (2) the type of cognitive change the drinking of the liquid leads to (new understanding or abilities; loss of cognitive abilities; general regeneration and transformation and becoming one with eternity). These are the most significant parameters of the metaphor as they are traceable in a wide variety of Old Norse texts, and they will function as the red threads in the analysis below.<sup>28</sup>

#### “PRE-CHRISTIAN-ORAL-INDIGENOUS” TEXTS

First of all, let us see how the metaphor of liquid knowledge is used in eddic poetry and the *Prose Edda*.<sup>29</sup> The main manuscript of the *Poetic Edda* is Codex Regius (Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, GKS 2367 4to) from ca. 1270. It contains thirty-one separate poems, of which eleven have mythological content and the rest dwell on the heroic past; some of the poems are not known from other manuscripts. The manuscript was shaped by one or more compilers, or editors, who attached short prose introductions to the poems or colophons and explanations between the stanzas, to fill in the plot details and explain potential obscurities. Little is known of the provenance and reception of the manuscript up until 1643, when it is known to have been owned by Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson of Skálholt, who was an antiquarian and manuscript collector.<sup>30</sup> Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á

<sup>28</sup> I will comment briefly on the process the liquid goes through before being drunk, but just in connection with some of the examples. Other parameters that could have been looked at as well are the place of origin of the liquid, whether the liquid to be consumed is brought about by a specific figure, or whether it is consumed by a god as opposed to a human.

<sup>29</sup> For an overview of Eddic poetry, meter, content, and a more detailed bibliography, see Terry Gunnell, “Eddic Poetry,” *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford 2007) 82–100. See also *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, eds. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge 2016). On mythology in general, see *Theorizing Old Norse Myth*, eds. Stefan Brink and Lisa Collinson, *ACTA Scandinavica* 7 (Turnhout 2017); *Old Norse Mythology—Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Pernille Hermann, Stephen Mitchell, Jens Peter Schjødt, and Amber J. Rose, *Publications of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature* (Harvard 2018).

<sup>30</sup> For the history and philological peculiarities of the manuscript, see Margaret Clunies Ross, “The transmission and preservation of eddic poetry,” *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry*, ed. Larrington, Quinn, Schorn (Cambridge 2016) 12–32, at 22.

Íslandi, AM 748 I a 4to is another fragmentary manuscript, consisting of six leaves and containing some of the mythological poems. These poems exist in the Codex Regius, except for *Baldurs draumar*. The manuscript is believed to have been written slightly after the Codex Regius. A few separate poems exist in different versions in other manuscripts, such as *Völuspá* in the Icelandic manuscript Hauksbók, AM 544 4to, from the beginning of the 1300s, or a version of *Sigrdrífumál*, which is quoted in *Völsunga saga* in GKS 1824 b 4to.<sup>31</sup>

It has been suggested that the collecting of the eddic poetry in one such book as the Codex Regius was initiated at about the same time as Snorri wrote his *Prose Edda*, which was probably written around the 1220s.<sup>32</sup> He may have had access to a similar compilation or known the basic storylines, or alternative oral versions of many of the poems, but it seems that Snorri did not know all the poems found in the Codex Regius. The *Prose Edda*, or fragments of it, is preserved in seven manuscripts, six medieval and one from ca. 1600. The main manuscripts are:

- Codex Regius (GKS 2367 4to), ca. 1270.
- AM 748 I b 4to, ca. 1300–1325.
- Codex Wormianus, Copenhagen, Den Arnemagnæanske samling, AM 242 fol, ca. 1350.
- Codex Upsaliensis DG 11, Uppsala, Uppsala Universitet, DG 11, the beginning of the 1300's.
- AM 757 a 4to, ca. 1400.
- Codex Trajectinus, Utrecht, University Library Utrecht, MS No. 1374, ca. 1600, a paper copy of a lost parchment with a very similar text to Codex Regius.<sup>33</sup>

The poetic and prose Edda give us numerous examples of various types of liquids being consumed as a medium to acquire knowledge. ~~To start with, bE~~er and/or mead, ~~for example, whieh~~ may affect the cognitive abilities of the drinker either positively or negatively. The negative effect is mentioned in *Hávamál*, st. 11, where too much drinking is not recommended or considered wise:

Byrði betri berrat maðr brautu at en sé manvit mikit; vegnest verra vegra hann velli at en sé ofdrykkja ǫls.<sup>34</sup>

No better burden can a man carry on the road than a store of common sense; a worse journey-provisioning he couldn't carry over the land than to be too drunk on ale.<sup>35</sup>

Excessive drinking leads directly to loss of knowledge for men (sts. 12–13):

<sup>31</sup> For other examples see Judy Quinn, "The editing of eddic poetry," *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry*, ed. Larrington, Quinn, Schorn (Cambridge 2016) 58–71, at 59.

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of the various theories about the composition of Snorri's Edda, see Heimir Pálsson, "Reflections on the Creation of Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda," *Scripta Islandica* 68 (2017) 189–232.

<sup>33</sup> See *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar. Edda Snorronis Sturlæi*, ed. Finnur Jónsson and Jón Sigurðsson, *Havniae* 3 (Copenhagen 1880–1887). For a description of the preserved eddic poetry in *fornaldarsögur* and historic compilations, see Clunies Ross, "The transmission and preservation of eddic poetry" (n. 30 above) 28–30.

<sup>34</sup> *Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík 2014) 324.

<sup>35</sup> *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington (Oxford 1996) 15.

Era svá gott sem gott kveða ql alda sonum, þvíat færa veit er fleira drekkur síns til geðs gumli.<sup>36</sup>

It isn't as good as it's said to be, ale, for the sons of men; For the more he drinks, the less he knows about the nature of men<sup>37</sup>

Óminnishegri heitir sá er yfir qlðrum þrumir, hann stelnr geði guma<sup>38</sup>

The heron of forgetfulness hovers over the ale-drinking; he steals men's wits<sup>39</sup>

The negative cognitive effects of a toxic drink are also mentioned in the second lay of Gudrun (*Guðrúnarkviða II*), st. 21–24, when a drink is supposed to drain the memories of Sigurðr out of Guðrún's mind.<sup>40</sup>

At other times, drinking beer is described as having a positive effect on cognitive abilities. Drinking *minnisöl* is used as a metaphor for memory, as in *Hyndluljóð*, st. 45: this magic potion ensures that one will remember what one has just heard.<sup>41</sup> Traditionally beer and/or other alcoholic drinks are mentioned in Old Norse, as well as in other mythologies, as energizing and improving memory.<sup>42</sup>

Offering a guest drink can also indicate that one is favored and invited to join a group with a socially privileged status. Thus, the drinking implies mixing with a social group that brings prestige, glory, and, thus, knowledge and permanent wisdom, as in *Sigrdrífumál*, sts. 3–5.<sup>43</sup> When Óðinn asks for a welcoming drink at the giant's hall in *Vafþrúðnismál* (st. 8), he may be inviting himself to a learned debate.<sup>44</sup> In *Grímnismál*, Óðinn offers a lot to Agnar in return for a drink, namely the knowledge of the geography and sociology of the gods, and a blessing. Sometimes, the drink needs to be consecrated (*full skall signa*)<sup>45</sup> if the transmission of knowledge is to work, as in *Sigrdrífumál*, st. 8.<sup>46</sup> Thus, drinking beer seems to have a different effect depending on who is drinking: drinking and remaining levelheaded is the privilege of gods and of a few chosen princes and heroes like Óttarr and Sigurðr.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 324.

<sup>37</sup> *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 16.

<sup>38</sup> *Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 324.

<sup>39</sup> *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 16.

<sup>40</sup> *Eddukvæði II*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 357; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 199.

<sup>41</sup> *Eddukvæði II*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 468; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 259.

<sup>42</sup> For a general survey of the cultural historical symbolism of drinking, see E. M. Jelinek, "The Symbolism of Drinking, a Cultural-Historical Approach," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 35.5 (1977) 849–866.

<sup>43</sup> *Eddukvæði II*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 313–314; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 167.

<sup>44</sup> *Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 357; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 41.

<sup>45</sup> *Full* means ale in a horn or cup. See *Sigrdrífumál*, in *Eddukvæði II*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 315, 9. Vísa.

<sup>46</sup> *Eddukvæði II*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 315; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 168. This episode also appears in *Völsunga saga* in GKS 1824 b.4to; for a discussion, see Quinn, "Liquid Knowledge" (n. 31 above) 192.

<sup>47</sup> Quinn, "Liquid Knowledge" (n. 31 above) 197.

**Merknad [nikser1]:** Is there supposed to be a line between the source text and the translation? Check all?



The drinking of mead is also a central topos in the description of Valhalla, as all who come to Valhalla are given horns with mead (*öl*) by the Valkyries.<sup>48</sup> In this case, there is no explicit link to cognitive processes resulting from the drinking. The mead-drinking is, rather, a part of a perpetual regeneration process, to which I will return below.<sup>49</sup>

The mead of poetry is the ultimate liquid when discussing Old Norse culture, and it is mentioned in *Hávamál* and in Snorra Edda.<sup>50</sup> The origin of the mead of poetry is described by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál*. Bragi explains that the gods have a dispute with the people called Vanir, and, as a peace agreement, both groups spit into a vat. The gods keep this spittle and later make a man out of it, called Kvasir: “svá vitr, at engi spyrr hann þeira hluta, er eigi kann hann órlausn”<sup>51</sup> (he was so wise that no one could ask him a question to which he did not know the answer).<sup>52</sup> Kvasir may thus be seen as a personification of wisdom. He travels widely and teaches people, but he is killed by two dwarfs, Fjalarr and Galarr.<sup>53</sup> They pour his blood into two vats, Són (blood, reconciliation, appeasement) and Boðn (vessel), and a pot called Óðrerir (*óðr*: mind, wit, soul; song, poetry; *óðrærir*: mind-stirrer = poetry). This blood mixed with honey becomes the so-called mead of poetry—“er hverr er af drekkur verðr skáld eða fræðamaðr” (whoever drinks from it becomes a poet or a scholar).<sup>54</sup> Of Kvasir’s death, Snorri writes: “Dvergarnir sögðu Ásum at Kvasir hefði kafnat í mannviti fyrir því at engi var þar svá fróðr at spyrja kynni hann fróðleiks” (the dwarfs told the Æsir that Kvasir suffocated in intelligence because there was no one there educated enough to be able to ask him questions).<sup>55</sup> The mead is, however, called the mead of poetry, not of intelligence or wisdom; but for our purposes here, it is significant to emphasize that it is the wisdom of Kvasir, which is preserved in his blood and mixed up with sweet honey, that becomes the mead of poetry.

It so happens that the dwarfs give the mead to a giant called Suttungr; he takes it to a place called Hnitbjörg and appoints his daughter Gunnlōð to watch over it. Snorri explains the Old Norse metaphors for poetry: “Af þessu kōllum vér skáldskap Kvasis blóð eða dverga drekku eða fylli eða nakkvars konar lōg Óðreris eða Boðnar eða Sónar

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, *Grímnismál*, st. 36, *Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 375; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 57.

<sup>49</sup> Blood is also seen as having generating or regenerating qualities, such as when the dwarfs are created from Brimir’s blood (and Blain’s limbs) in *Völuspá*, st. 9 (*Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 293; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 5), or when the creation of the world is described in *Vafþrúðnismál*, st. 21 (*Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 359; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 43): the earth is made of Ymir’s flesh, the mountains from his bones, the sky from the skull and the sea from his blood. There is, however, no drinking involved in these descriptions.

<sup>50</sup> For a discussion of all the details of the myth, see E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North* (London 1964) 35–41.

<sup>51</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál. 1: Introduction, Texts and Notes*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (London 1998) 3.

<sup>52</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. and ed. Anthony Faulkes (London 1995) 62.

<sup>53</sup> Dwarfs are associated with both wisdom and blood, see John Stephens, “The Mead of Poetry,” *Neophilologus* 56.3 (1972) 259–268, at 259.

<sup>54</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes (n. 51 above) 3; Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. Faulkes (n. 52 above) 62.

<sup>55</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes (n. 51 above) 3; Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. Faulkes (n. 52 above) 62.

eða farskost dverga, fyri því at sá mjǫðr fl[ut]ti þeim fjǫrlausn ór skerinu, eða Suttunga mjǫð eða Hnitbjarga lǫgr” (That is why we call poetry Kvasir’s blood or dwarfs’ drink or the contents or some term for liquid of Óðrerir or Boðn or Son, or dwarfs’ transportation because this mead brought them deliverance from the skerry, or Suttung’s mead or the liquid of Hnitbjǫrg).<sup>56</sup>

Óðinn later comes to Suttungr and tries to stipulate a drink from Suttungr’s mead. He is refused; but Óðinn creeps into a mountain in the shape of a snake and sleeps with Gunnlǫð for three nights, and she lets him drink three draughts of the mead—first, he drank everything out of Óðrerir, then everything out of Boðn, and then everything out of Són, and thus he had all the mead. Some of this information is alluded to in *Hávamál* (st. 105–106).<sup>57</sup> Then, Óðinn changes form to an eagle and flies away. When he comes to Ásgarðr, he spits the mead out, and the Æsir who get the mead are known to be skilled at composing poetry. Some of the mead comes out from the back-end, and anyone could take as much of it as they wanted, which is called the rhymester’s share. This last part of Snorri’s account becomes a popular kenning “mud of the eagle” (= worthless poetry) and appears a couple of times in skaldic verse.<sup>58</sup>

The various stages of transformation of the mead are important here: it is through all the stages of this transformative process that the drink acquires the qualities that ultimately lead to new cognitive capacities in the drinker. The liquid becomes a symbol of knowledge (because of Kvasir), of talent and skillfulness (because of the dwarfs), and of a culturally appreciated asset (because of its value for the giants). Furthermore, since the mead was stolen by Óðinn, it also becomes imprinted with the qualities of the risk-taker.<sup>59</sup> Note that the transformative process is often, but not always, linked to the ingestion of liquids, digestion, and oral discharge, such as spitting or vomiting.<sup>60</sup> The transformative process that the liquid goes through is, thus, an important parameter of the drink’s ability to cause cognitive transformation.

Another episode that illustrates a link between ingestion, digestion, and knowledge acquisition is when Óðinn offers himself for nine nights, hanging upside down, while pierced with a spear. He takes neither food nor drink, but his sense of touch is heightened via the pain he experiences. Lacking food and drink, he “takes up the runes,” but once he takes a sip of the mead, he slowly revitalizes and receives knowledge in numerous disciplines, see *Hávamál* st. 139–141.

<sup>56</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes (n. 51 above) 4; Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. Faulkes (n. 52 above) 62.

<sup>57</sup> *Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 343; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 28.

<sup>58</sup> For a further discussion of skaldic verse, see Robert Frank, “Snorri and the Mead of Poetry,” *Speculum Norrænum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. Ursula Dronke et al. (Odense 1981) 155–171, at 168.

<sup>59</sup> Quinn, “Liquid Knowledge” (n. 31 above) 201.

<sup>60</sup> The element of spitting of the mead of poetry is compared to the episode in *Egil’s saga* when Egil vomits all over his host Ármóðr. In both literary contexts, the spitting/vomiting is related to two other elements, eye-plucking and knowledge of runes, see Stephens, “The Mead of Poetry” (n. 53 above) 264. Note that the element of vomiting is also related to eloquence and wisdom in Martianus Capella’s fifth-century *Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, where the vomit of Philology is transformed in a great variety of books, which form part of the Arts and Disciplines. For a discussion of this motif, see Sarah Kay, *Philology’s Vomit. An Essay on the Immortality and Corporeality of Texts* (Zürich 2017).

139 Við hleifi mic sældo né við hornigi; nýsta ec niðr, nam ek upp rúnar, æpandi nam, fëll ec aptr þaðan.

140 Fimbulliöð níu nam ek af inum frægja syni Bølpórs, Bestlu fōður, ok ek drykk of gat ins dýra miaðar ausinn Óðreri.

141 Þá nam ek frævask ok fróðr vera ok vaxa ok vel hafask; orð mér af orði orðz leitaði, verk mér af verki verks leitaði.<sup>61</sup>

139 No bread did they give me nor a drink from a horn,/ downwards I peered; I took up the runes, screaming I took them, then I fell back from there.

140 Nine mighty spells I learnt from the famous son/ Of Bolthor, Bestla's father/ And I got a drink of the precious mead/ Poured from Ódrerir.

141 Then I began to quicken and be wise/ and to grow and to prosper;/ one word found another word for me,/ one deed found another deed for me.<sup>62</sup>

The lack of food and drink available for ingestion, on the one hand, and the nature of the drink ingested (“dýra miaðar”), on the other, collectively mark the transformation process to a cognitive awakening and revitalization for Óðinn. It is through the ingestion of exactly that drink that this specific effect is achieved.

Another type of drink related to knowledge and cognitive processes is wine. For example, *Grímnismál*, st. 19, states that Óðinn lives on wine alone.<sup>63</sup> Snorri refers to the same information and represents Óðinn as a god who thrives on knowledge and whose main activities are intellectual ones.<sup>64</sup> The reference to wine here is noteworthy, as, from a northern perspective, wine is atypical and exotic. Wine has very specific connotations in Christian culture, to which we will come back later, but for now it suffices to note its function and knowledge-bringing qualities for Óðinn. Further, Óðinn gains knowledge not only through drinking (mead and wine), but also through all his other senses. Hearing and sight are especially important, as knowledge is continuously relayed to him by his two ravens, *Huginn* and *Muninn* (Thought and Memory) (*Grímnismál*, st. 20).<sup>65</sup> Óðinn's appropriation of knowledge appears thus as multimodal and holistic, with ingestion and digestion being just one possible way of appropriating knowledge.

In *Völuspá*, st. 28, we are told that Óðinn asks for a drink from the well of knowledge, which is situated at the roots of Yggdrasil.<sup>66</sup> The location of the well of knowledge is mentioned in the second strophe of *Völuspá*—the Mighty Measuring tree down below the Earth.<sup>67</sup> The tree is further described in st. 19:

Ask veit ek standa, heitir Yggdrasil, hár baðmr, ausinn hvíta auri; þaðan koma dōggvar þærs í dala falla, stendr æ yfir grœnn Urðarbrunni.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>61</sup> *Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 351.

<sup>62</sup> *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 34.

<sup>63</sup> *Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 371; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 54.

<sup>64</sup> For a further discussion, see Quinn, “Liquid Knowledge” (n. 31 above) 199.

<sup>65</sup> *Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 372; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 54.

<sup>66</sup> For a description of Yggdrasil, see *Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 374; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 56–57; *Grímnismál*, st. 30–35.

<sup>67</sup> *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 4.

<sup>68</sup> *Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 295.

**Merknad [nikser2]:** Delete following line?

I know that an ash-tree stands called Yggdrasil,/ a high tree, soaked with shining loam;/  
from there come the dews which fall in the valley,/ ever green, it stands over the well of  
fate.<sup>69</sup>

The three norns Urðr (Had to be/Fated), Verðandi (Coming to be/Becoming), and Skuld (Has to be/Must-be) have gained a great deal of knowledge from the lake that stands under the tree (st. 20).<sup>70</sup> The spring of fate is mentioned again in *Hávamál*, st. 111, and is described as the site where knowledge is exchanged, but not through drinking.<sup>71</sup>

Snorri also relates that under one of the three roots of the holy tree Yggdrasil lies the well of Mímir, which is the well of wisdom and intelligence.<sup>72</sup> Mímir, its owner, is full of learning because he drinks from the well with the horn Gjallarhorn.<sup>73</sup> When Óðinn asks for a drink of the well, he does not get one until he places one of his eyes as a pledge.<sup>74</sup> He thus exchanges one of his body parts that can increase his knowledge (his eye can help him increase knowledge by seeing) for wisdom directly from Mímir's well.<sup>75</sup>

As already mentioned, the ingestion and digestion of liquid or solid substances is sometimes related not to explicit cognitive processes but to regeneration: st. 45 of *Vafþrúðnismál* tells of how two humans, Líf and Lífþrasir, will have the “morgindöggar þau sér at mat hafa” (morning dew for food), and they will be the progenitors of future generations.<sup>76</sup> Even though morning dew is a liquid, it is referred to as food here, which expands the idea of ingestion a little bit. Ingestion of solids is also mentioned in *Grímnismál*, st. 26, where the hart Eikþyrnir grazes on Lærað's branches; this leads to the formation of a liquid that drips from his horn into Hvergelmir, from where all water flows.<sup>77</sup> Once again, a processual transformation of the substance that is ingested is essential for the qualities the substance has.

All these myths are also reflected in various kennings in skaldic poetry. For example, there are many kennings for beer/mead/ale, most of them referring to

<sup>69</sup> *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 6.

<sup>70</sup> *Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 295; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 6.

<sup>71</sup> *Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 344; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 29.

<sup>72</sup> The explicit account of the roots of Yggdrasil brings to mind the description of the tree on which Óðinn hanged himself in sacrifice to acquire knowledge: no one knows where its roots are. The tree is therefore generally accepted to be Yggdrasil; see Quinn, “Liquid Knowledge” (n. 31 above) 211. Whether this is an intentional mode to relate to, but also to distinguish the two trees, is an interesting question, as the whole episode of Óðinn's hanging provides other parallels, and differences, to Christ's crucifixion (Óðinn gains knowledge; Christ is free of sin and frees mankind from sin; both are gods).

<sup>73</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. Faulkes (n. 52 above) 17.

<sup>74</sup> *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 7.

<sup>75</sup> Note that Heimdallr, the watchman of the gods, makes a similar exchange: he gives away his ear for Mímir's wisdom. See *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 265. This episode does not involve drinking or ingestion, but it is relevant for the discussion of the significance of all the senses for the appropriation of knowledge.

<sup>76</sup> *Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 364; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 47.

<sup>77</sup> *Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 373; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 55.

yeast/flour, horn, or cup. Mead is interestingly once called “heilsu máls” (the cure of speech), while wine on one occasion is called “galli strúgs” (the destruction of dignity).<sup>78</sup> There are many kennings for poetry referring to liquids: “liði Hoars” (the drink of Hoarr); “hverlegi farms galga” (the cauldron-liquid of the burden of the gallows; the burden of the gallows = Óðinn); “kerlaug drauga” (the cup-liquid of the undead); “réttan drykk Reginn” (a correct drink of Regin), etc.<sup>79</sup> In some kennings, mead and knowledge are linked together, as, for example, in “fæða spilli” (plunderer of knowledge).<sup>80</sup> These few examples, as far from exhaustive as they may be, show that the mythology, unsurprisingly, is represented also in this poetic genre and that a further discussion of the topic would benefit from a closer study of the skaldic poetry, even though this is beyond the aim of this article.<sup>81</sup>

The metaphor “liquid knowledge” also appears in Old Norse legendary sagas. In *Völsunga saga*,<sup>82</sup> after Sigurðr kills the dragon Fáfnir, Reginn drinks the dragon’s blood (no specific consequences are mentioned) and asks Sigurðr to roast the dragon’s heart for him. While preparing it, Sigurðr tastes the juice of the heart to check if it is done, and this makes him able to understand the speech of birds. In this way, he hears that Reginn is planning to kill him, and Sigurðr can plan his own move. It is noteworthy that the causal link between tasting the blood and acquisition of knowledge is operational only in the case of Sigurðr, and not Reginn.<sup>83</sup>

Even though, in this episode, it is the tasting of the blood from the heart that leads to new cognitive super-powers, the eddic poem *Hyndluljóð* (st. 41) includes another example, where the eating of a half-cooked heart by Loki leads to his being impregnated and giving birth to all the ogresses on earth. This episode does not link ingestion and cognition directly, but the heart is called *hugstein konu* (the thought-stone of a woman),<sup>84</sup> which suggests that the heart is especially related to cognition and thought.

After this episode, Sigurðr meets Brynhildr, and he asks her to teach him mighty things. She answers:

<sup>78</sup> See “Kennings for drink” at <http://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/m.php?p=kenning&i=148> [last visited 20 September 2018].

<sup>79</sup> See “Kennings for poetry” at <http://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/m.php?p=kenning&i=145> [last visited 20 September 2018].

<sup>80</sup> Stephens, “The Mead of Poetry” (n. 53 above) 260.

<sup>81</sup> Some such studies exist already. For example, Jens Eike Schnall, “Nahrung, Erinnerung, Dichtung oder vom zu-sich-nehmen, bei-sich-behalten und von-sich-geben: Zum Raub des Skaldenmets und mittelalterlicher Körpermetaphorik,” *Poetik und Gedächtnis: Festschrift für Heiko Uecker zum 65. Geburtstag* (Sonderdruck 2004) 249–277.

<sup>82</sup> *Völsunga saga* was written down in the period 1200–1270 and includes many of the traditional eddic poems. Its main manuscript is the Icelandic codex Copenhagen, Det kongelige biblioteket, NKS 1824 b 4to, fols. 1r–51r, dated to ca. 1400–1425. See *Völsunga saga ok Ragnars Saga Lodbrokar*, ed. Magnus Olsen (Copenhagen 1906–1908).

<sup>83</sup> “Völsunga saga,” *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson: [http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Völsunga\\_saga](http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Völsunga_saga) [last visited 20 September 2018]. *The Saga of the Völsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer*, trans. Jesse L. Byock (London 1999) 66. On the treatment of this episode in the prose between st. 31 and 32 in *Fáfnismal*, see Quinn, “Liquid Knowledge” (n. 31 above) 202.

<sup>84</sup> *Eddukvæði I*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (n. 34 above) 467; *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Larrington (n. 35 above) 258.

Þér munuð betr kunna, en með þökkum vil ek kenna ydr, ef þat er nokkut, er vér kunnum, þat er yðr mætti líka, í rúnum eða öðrum hlutum, er liggja til hvers hlutar, ok drekkum bæði saman, ok gefi goðin okkr góðan dag, at þér verði nyt ok frægð at mínum vitrleik ok þú munir eptir, þat er vit ræðum.<sup>85</sup>

You know them better than I. But gladly will I teach you, if there is anything I know that will please you about runes or other matters that concern all things. Let us drink together and may the gods grant us a fair day, that you may gain profit and renown from my wisdom, and that you will later remember what we speak of.<sup>86</sup>

They start drinking, and she recites a poem:

Biór færík þer, brynþings apaldr, magni blandinn ok megingtíri; fullr er ljóða ok líknstafa, góðra galdra ok gamanrúna.<sup>87</sup>

Beer I give you/ battlefield's ruler/ with strength blended/ and with much glory/ it is full of charmed verse/ and runes of healing,/ of seemly spells/ and of pleasing speech.<sup>88</sup>

The poem continues, and she mentions victory runes to secure wisdom, speech runes, ale runes, aid runes, branch runes, mind runes (if you would be wiser than all men), and so on. The poem refers to the spilling of the mead of poetry. The mead is, however, here not associated only with poetry, but also with wisdom and various types of abstract knowledge. A variation of the list of the types of knowledge that can be attained with the drinking of mead appears also in *Sigrdrífumál*, st. 5–13, as mentioned above. Various types of knowledge are also listed in *Hávamál*, as when Óðinn drinks a sip of the *dýra miðar*. Note that this is not necessarily the same kind of mead as the mead of poetry.<sup>89</sup> The link between mead and a vast range of various types of knowledge reminds us of a lore that perceives of mead as a generally potent force, with the link to poetry being just one of various assets.<sup>90</sup>

Later, Sigurðr is given the ale of forgetfulness, which makes him forget Brynhildr and leads to his marriage with Guðrún, as already prophesied by her dreams.<sup>91</sup> In this case, liquidity is again connected to the cognitive capacity of the character, even though the link is negative, as was the case in some of the eddic poems.

In another legendary saga, *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*,<sup>92</sup> the drinking of liquids is linked to information and knowledge, but, this time, the type of drink is not specified.

<sup>85</sup> “Völsunga saga,” ed. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson: [http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Völsunga\\_saga](http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Völsunga_saga) [last visited 20 September 2018] (n. 83 above) ch. XX.

<sup>86</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs*, trans. Byock (n. 83 above) 67.

<sup>87</sup> “Völsunga saga,” ed. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson: [http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Völsunga\\_saga](http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Völsunga_saga) [last visited 20 September 2018] (n. 83 above) ch. XX.

<sup>88</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs*, trans. Byock (n. 83 above) 68.

<sup>89</sup> The link between these texts—*Snorra Edda* and *Sigrdrífumál* and other eddic poems—with regard to the nature of the mead that is being ingested, is discussed by Stephens, “The Mead of Poetry” (n. 53 above).

<sup>90</sup> Stephens, “The Mead of Poetry” (n. 53 above) 261.

<sup>91</sup> “Völsunga saga,” ed. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson: [http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Völsunga\\_saga](http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Völsunga_saga) [last visited 20 September 2018] (n. 83 above) ch. XXVIII. *The Saga of the Volsungs*, trans. Byock (n. 83 above) 78.

<sup>92</sup> *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* is dated to the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries. It is preserved in several medieval Icelandic manuscripts: Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, Holm Perg 7 4to (1300s); Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, Holm Perg 18 4to (1300s); Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, AM 152 fol (1400s). The shorter and older redaction is edited by Ferdinand Detter, *Zwei Fornaldarsögur (Hrólfs saga*

King Hrólfr is given a drinking horn with the very special quality that if someone drinks from it, it rings out so loudly that the sound can be heard a French mile away if the horn has some important news to tell. However, no one can get a single draught from it if he does not drink properly.<sup>93</sup> The horn is brought out on one occasion, when King Hrólfr has been away from his kingdom for one year. His queen gives it to Þórir Iron-Shield, who has been in charge of the kingdom while the king has been away. Þórir drinks up, and, when the horn is almost empty, it gives a loud noise, “sem þá var jafnan vant, er eptir komu mikil tíðindi eða ella voru þau umliðin; var þetta fyrir stórum orrostum ok lífláti göfugra manna”<sup>94</sup> (as it usually did before or after events of great importance such as major battles or the deaths of great men.)<sup>95</sup> The news the horn relates is confirmed by the dreams of the queen, namely that the king might be in a situation where he needs support.<sup>96</sup> This is, of course, crucial for the further development of the story. Dreams predicting the future are commonly used as literary narrative devices in sagas, as hints to what is about to happen, but, in this case, this essential piece of information is also perceived not only through a dream, but also through the use of the horn. This suggests that drinking properly from this particular horn puts one in an especially perceptive state of acquiring knowledge that is inaccessible otherwise. Here, it is not the substance that is ingested that is in focus, but the ingesting process and the object that is used in the process.

To summarize, the texts referred to so far were seen, for the sake of structure, as part of the subgroup of “pre-Christian-oral-indigenous” literature. They were, however, all preserved in manuscripts written by Christian scribes in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Iceland. The various manuscript versions were thus a part of the three continuums of the literary system. These texts contained many examples where the consumption of liquids, as well as some solids, is related to various cognitive processes. The liquid in question is sometimes mead, ale, wine, the liquid from various wells, morning dew, or blood. The ingested substance sometimes remains unspecified, and it is the object from which one drinks, and not the drinking itself, that is the meaningful element. The transformation processes that the liquid goes through is sometimes significant for the liquid’s capacity to impact cognitive abilities. The ingestion of these substances sometimes leads to a general increase in intellectual and creative abilities, access to all kinds of knowledge, and the gaining of new cognitive abilities. At other times drinking leads to the loss of memory and knowledge. At still other times, drinking leads to becoming one with eternity. Ingestion, digestion, and oral dispersion thus appear as important methods for acquiring and spreading knowledge in these Old Norse texts. In the following, we will investigate whether this

*Gautrekssonar* and *Ásmundarsaga Kappabana*): nach *Cod. Holm. 7 4to* (Halle a.S. 1891) 1–78. The longer redaction “Saga af Hrólfi konungi Gautrekssyni,” ed. Carl Christian Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur Norðrlanda eptir gömlum handritum*, 3 vols. (Copenhagen 1829–1830) 3: 57–190, and in *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, ed., Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík 1954) 61–157. The long version is *Hrólfr Gautreksson: A Viking Romance*, trans. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (Toronto 1972).

<sup>93</sup> *Hrólfr Gautreksson*, trans. Hermann Pálsson and Edwards (n. 92 above) 101.

<sup>94</sup> “Saga af Hrólfi konungi Gautrekssyni,” ed. Rafn 3(n. 92 above) 164.

<sup>95</sup> *Hrólfr Gautreksson*, trans. Hermann Pálsson and Edwards (n. 92 above) 123.

<sup>96</sup> *Hrólfr Gautreksson*, trans. Hermann Pálsson and Edwards (n. 92 above) 124.

was the case in the other structurally-defined subgroup of the literary system, namely “Christian-written-translated” texts.

#### “CHRISTIAN-WRITTEN-TRANSLATED” TEXTS

This literary subsystem will be represented by a couple of indigenous texts that built heavily on European Christian genres, such as the *Old Norse Homily Book* and *The King’s Mirror*; a translation from Latin,<sup>97</sup> namely, *Barlaams saga*; and two translations of Old French texts: *Tristrams saga* (based on Thomas’s romance about Tristan and Isolde) and *Elíss saga ok Rósamundu* (based on the *chanson de geste Elye de Saint Gille*). The metaphor “liquid knowledge” will be approached through the same variables as above, i.e., the type of liquid or substance ingested, and the type of cognitive change that occurs in the one who swallows.

The motif of ingestible knowledge appears in the *Old Norse Homily Book*,<sup>98</sup> as the text tells of the nourishing qualities of knowledge. One of the homilies, the Stave Church Homily, emphasizes the analogical link between the body and the soul, and it invites every man to take as good care of his soul as his body through the right nourishment:

Oc sva sem vér fõðum ós itarlegre fõzlo umm hætiðir. sva scolum vér fõða ond vara hotiðlegre fõzlo. þat er orð guðs. því at os’ómt er at licamr fõðesc ok cleðesc itarlega. en hinn iðre maðr se uprvör ok missi sinnar fõzlo.<sup>99</sup>

And in the same way as we give ourselves more exclusive foods during the holidays, we should also nourish our soul with more festive nutrition, that is with God’s words. Because it is not right that the body is fed and dressed with much care, if the soul is neglected and starved for its spiritual nourishment.<sup>100</sup>

The passage focuses on the nourishment of the soul and juxtaposes it with care for the body. Drinking as such, however, is not mentioned. In the same homily, the church is compared to the body of each and every person, and their inner qualities and virtues; physical nourishment is again made analogous to spiritual transformation:

oc sva sem vér tæcum í kirkiu himnesca fõzlo þat er corpus domini. sva scolum ver væita þorfendum licamlega fõzlo.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>97</sup> I will look at both primary and secondary translations, as defined by Rita Copeland in *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge 1995). A “secondary translation” is a text that alludes to other authoritative texts, but that claims its own primacy and agency, without referring to its sources. Some Old Norse texts are mixtures of primary and secondary translations, as for example *The King’s Mirror* and *The Old Norse Homily Book*, as they allude strongly to Christian Latin literature, in terms of genre and style, and, in addition, include sections that are direct translations of Latin sources.

<sup>98</sup> *The Old Norse Homily Book* is the name of the Norwegian manuscript Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske samling, AM 619 4to, dated to ca. 1220. Contrary to what the title of the manuscript suggests, the manuscript includes various texts, in addition to Old Norse homilies; for an overview of the homilies and the other texts, see Odd Einar Haugen and Åslaug Ommundsen, “Nye blick på Homilieboka,” *Vår eldste bok. Skrift, miljø og bilebruk i den norske homilieboka*, ed. Odd Einar Haugen and Åslaug Ommundsen, *Bibliotheca Nordica* 3 (Oslo 2010) 9–34.

<sup>99</sup> *Gamal Norsk Homiliebok*, ed. Gustav Indrebø (Oslo 1931) 99.

<sup>100</sup> My translation.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*



and in the same way as we take our heavenly food in Church, which is *corpus domini*, we should give food for the body to those who need it.<sup>102</sup>

Once again, the focus is on nourishment in general, and not specifically on drinking, and on how this process is analogous to the spiritual nourishment one gets through participating in the Mass. The reference to *corpus domini* makes the Eucharistic overtones in the passage explicit and shows the relevance of the liturgical ritual, which includes the drinking and eating of the body of the Lord (see below), as a ritual that gives insight and enhances knowledge.

The metaphor of drinking knowledge also appears in the pedagogical text *The King's Mirror*,<sup>103</sup> which may have been inspired by the European genre of *speculum regale*. Sections of the text suggest that the physiological appropriation of knowledge and wisdom—through drinking—may be a first stage of cognitive understanding. Wisdom appears as a personified figure, and, in her monologue, she promotes God as the source of all knowledge—because He wishes man to take a profitable interest in the wealth of knowledge that he draws from the divine treasures. God together with Wisdom created the whole world. Wisdom recounts her journey:

Hugga ec harmannda, gef ec moðum hvíll, skenki ck þyrstannda, fæðe ec hungrannda. Sæll er sa er dræccr af mínu borðkeri því at minn dryccr hævir uprotlegan sætleik...Sæll er sa er gengr til mins snæðings, því at min fœzla þæfiar bætr hværium hirm; hunange sætare er minn dryccr ok skirri hværiu vini; at mínu borðe ma hœyra þiotannde / strængleica með sætum ok fagrum tona þar er kvæðskapr oc fahœyrðer songar þar er skemtan oc glæðe oc flærðlaus fagnaðr on alla sorgh...iminu hærbærgi eru siau havvðstolpar þær er saman tængia allt hvalf með goðri þæckio oc sialft golf mæðr oþrotligum grundvolum oc ræmma þræcliga alla væggi mæð stærku afli. Ihværium stolpa þessarra ma finna siau havvð velir allz kyns haghleics...Hvar fær sa sec er flyia vil mec. annde Guðs fyllir alla heimskringlu oc rannzakar skilning oc skyring hværrar raddar.<sup>104</sup>

I give rest to the weary, drink to the thirsty and food to the hungry. Happy is he who drinks from my cup, for my beverage has an unfailing sweetness...Happy is he who goes to my table for my meat has a more pleasing savour than the sweetest perfume; my drink is sweeter than honey and clearer than any wine; tuneful music is heard at my table in sweet and beautiful melody; there are songs and poems such as rarely are heard, merriment and gladness unmixed with grief...my house has seven great pillars, standing on immovable foundations and fortifying the walls. In each pillar is one if the seven liberal arts of study...where can he hide who seeks to escape from me? The spirit of God fills the entire home-circle and searches out the meaning and the interpretation of all knowledge.<sup>105</sup>

Wisdom, or knowledge, can thus be appropriated through drinking, as well as eating, for the thirsty and hungry. The ingestion of knowledge is pleasurable, knowledge is sweet, and the process is even accompanied by sound. The appropriation of knowledge

<sup>102</sup> My translation.

<sup>103</sup> It was composed between 1240 and 1263, and the main manuscript in which it is preserved is the Norwegian codex Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske samling, AM 243 ba fol, written during the second half of the thirteenth century. For a detailed presentation of the main manuscript, see Ludvig Holm-Olsen, "Innledning," *Konungs Skuggsjá* (Oslo 1983) xi–xii. For a discussion of the other manuscripts containing the text, see Didrik A. Seip and Ludvig Holm-Olsen, "De norske håndskriftene av *Kongespeilet*," *Konungs Skuggsjá, Speculum Regale: De norske manuskriptene i facsimile* (Oslo 1947) 5–17.

<sup>104</sup> *Konungs Skuggsjá*, ed. Ludvig Holm-Olsen, *Gammelnorske tekster 1* (Oslo 1983) 99–100.

<sup>105</sup> *The King's Mirror*, trans. Laurence Marcellus Larson (New York 1917) 302–303.

thus depends on all the senses and leads to inner pleasure and happiness. The focus on the importance of all the senses for achieving knowledge was also emphasized in connection with Óðinn's intellectual awakening and existence.

Ingestion of substances with Eucharistic overtones is also treated in the so-called separate (or independent) saga of St. Óláfr, written by the priest Styrmir Kárason the Wise, which is largely lost, but fragments appear in the Icelandic manuscript *Flateyjarbók* from the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>106</sup> The episode tells of the youth of the skald Sighvatr Þórðarson and how he attains his ability and talent as a poet. He is invited to go ice-fishing by a Norwegian man, named Þorkell. Sighvatr catches a fish, which is cooked by the Norwegian man, and Sighvatr is invited thereafter to eat the fish:

þa mælti hann við Sighuat at hann skyldi fyst eta hofudit af fiskunum kuad þar vera vit huers kuikendis i folgit. Sighuatr at þa hofudit ok sidan allann fiskinn ok þegar eftir kuad hann visu þessa...<sup>107</sup>

Then he told Sighvatr that he should eat the fish's head; he said that in it was hidden the source of wisdom of each living being. Sighvatr then ate the head and after that all the rest of the fish, and immediately afterwards he spoke the verse...<sup>108</sup>

Margaret Clunies Ross argues that the “the myth is a plastic one, capable of both traditional interpretation in terms of the myth of the poetic mead and Óðinn's gift to human skalds and of interpretation in a fully Christian context of divine inspiration.”<sup>109</sup> By “plastic,” Clunies Ross means traditional episodes in Old Norse literature, which could have Christian resonance and usage.<sup>110</sup> She argues that the episode is parallel to other myths of ingestions of special power, like the ingestion of other substances associated with a watery environment or a heart, as in myth about Sigurðr. The head and the heart seem to symbolize a concentration of intellectual and spiritual powers that are transferred through ingestion, as was mentioned above.<sup>111</sup> A parallel to this episode may be found in Irish stories about the hero Fionn Mac Cumhail, where eating fish, more specifically salmon, is associated with wisdom and poetry.<sup>112</sup> The cooking of the fish may symbolize a transfer from natural and wild to

<sup>106</sup> The motif is also found in other versions of the saga, but it is missing from, for example, Snorri's account of St. Óláfr in *Heimskringla*. The textual history of the saga is complicated. For an overview of all the manuscripts in which the saga is preserved, see “Óláfs saga Helga,” in *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog, Registre* (Copenhagen 1989) 348–352.

<sup>107</sup> *Saga Óláfs konungs hins helga. Den store saga om Olav den hellige, eftir pergamenthåndskrift i Kungliga Bibliotek i Stockholm nr. 2 4to med varianter fra andre håndskrifter*, ed. Oscar Albert Johnsen and Jón Helgason, 2 vols. (Oslo 1941) 2: 689–690.

<sup>108</sup> My translation.

<sup>109</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, “From Iceland to Norway: Essential Rites of Passage for an Early Icelandic Skald,” *alvissmál* 9 (1999) 55–72, at 58. See also Hallvard Lie, “Sagnet om Hvorledes Sigvat ble Skald,” *Maal og Minne* (1946) 66–74.

<sup>110</sup> Clunies Ross, “From Iceland to Norway” (n. 109 above) 62.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* 65.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* 65–66 enumerates other possible parallels. One is the ingestion of the fish (first the head and then the rest), which may be found in the fifth dream of King Sverrir in chapter 41 of his saga, where he is eating a man. The idea of “eating one's enemy” in this dream has been related to ingurgitating as a metaphor for domination and assimilation in exegetical thinking of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see Torfi H. Tulinius, “Présentation de *La Saga de Sverrir*,” *La Saga de Sverrir, Roi de Norvège* (Paris 2010) 17–39, at

cultivated and intellectual, and the transformative process, thus, has significance on its own once again. From a Christian perspective, the fish is a symbol for Christ himself, as a sufferer for human sins (the cooked fish symbolizing the suffering Christ), as well as in the form of the Eucharist.<sup>113</sup> The myth could thus preserve the traditional concept of ingesting knowledge and, at the same time, be meaningful and acceptable to a Christian audience.

The metaphor linking ingestion and knowledge acquisition also appears in another form in *Barlaams saga*,<sup>114</sup> in one of the didactic fables that Barlaam tells the king's son Josaphat: a man is running away from a unicorn towards an abyss, and, as he falls over the precipice, he grabs hold of a tree or a bush growing on the edge. At the foot of the tree, the man sees two mice, one black and one white, which are about to gnaw through the tree's roots; at the bottom of the abyss, there is a ferocious dragon waiting for the man to fall down. However, the tree is full of honey drops, and, when the man sees all the honey, he forgets his anxieties and everything else that worries him. The fable is full of symbolism: the man represents every man; the unicorn is death; the tree the man holds onto is life; the smooth honey is life's passing joys and pleasures; the dragon at the bottom of the abyss is the devil; and the two mice represent day, night, and the eternity of time.<sup>115</sup> The saga narrator goes on to tell us that the honey represents the ephemeral joys of life that with their sweetness tempt us to forget the important matters in life. The ingestion of sweet honey is here related to cognitive distraction from the truths of life.

The man holding onto the tree, thus, represents the antithesis of Christ on the Cross: eating the fruit or indulging in its sweet honey is the opposite of seeking knowledge of God and eternal life. This fable summarizes the moral of the whole of *Barlaams saga*, which, at its core, is about the transitory nature of the sweetness of physical and worldly things and the eternity of their bitterness.<sup>116</sup> While in *The King's Mirror*, the sweetness of wisdom was to be drunk and eaten by the thirsty and the hungry, in *Barlaams saga*, the sweetness of the honey is to be resisted as it leads to the loss of knowledge about God and eternity. This double meaning and possible effects of the ingested sweet substance recalls the opposite effects that could be caused by drinking

31–32; Philippe Buc, *L'Ambiguïté du Livre: Prince, Pouvoir, et Peuple dans les Commentaires de la Bible au Moyen Age* (Paris 1994).

<sup>113</sup> See Bo Almqvist, "The Fish of Life and the Salmon of Life: Some Marginal Contributions to Irish-Icelandic Conceptions of Life and Soul," *Viking Ale: Studies on Folklore Contacts between the Northern and the Western Worlds; Presented to the Author on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Éilís Ní Dhuibhne-Almqvist and Séamas Ó Catháin (Aberystwyth 1991) 141–154; Hallvard Lie, "Sagnet om Hvorledes Sigvat ble Skald," *Maal og Minne* (1946) 66–74, at 67.

<sup>114</sup> The Old Norse translation of the Barlaam legend is dated to the beginning of the thirteenth century and was allegedly commissioned by King Hákon Hákonarsonar "the young" (1232–1257). Its main manuscript is the Icelandic codex Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, Holm Perg 6 fol., c.1400. For a more detailed review, see *Barlaams ok Josaphats saga: Manuscript No. 6 in the Royal Library, Stockholm and the Norwegian Fragments*, ed. Magnus Rindal, *Corpus Codicum Norvegicorum Medii Aevi, Quarto Series 6* (Oslo 1980).

<sup>115</sup> This motif, with variations, is represented visually in medieval art as well; see Kristin B. Aavitsland, "Fra tekst til bilde: Ikonografisk transformasjon av enhjørningfabelen fra Barlaam-legenden i nordeuropeisk middelalder," *Barlaam i nord: Legenden om Barlaam och Josaphat i den nordiska medeltidslitteraturen*, ed. Karl G. Johansson and Maria Arvidsson, *Biblioteka Nordica 1* (Oslo 2009) 131–152.

<sup>116</sup> "de nærværende Tings Sødhed er timelig og deres Bitterhed evig." See *Barlaam og Josaphat: En religiøs roman*, ed. H. E. Knick (Christiania 1852) 17.

mead/ale in the eddic literature—the same substance could sometimes enhance the memory, while, other times, it could jeopardize its function.

The link between ingestion of liquids and cognitive transformation also appears in *Tristrams saga*, which includes the story of the famous love potion drunk by Tristan and Isolde.<sup>117</sup> In the Old Norse version, the potion is described as a “leyniligan drykk inniliga af margs konar blómstrum, grösom ok listugum velum” (secret potion [made of] many kinds of flowers, herbs, and magical things) and that it “gerði svá ástfenginn, at engi lifandi maðr, sá er af drakk, má við haldaz at unna þeiri konu, sem af drakk með honum, á meðan hann lifði” (made people fall so madly in love that no man alive who drank of it could resist loving his whole life long the woman who drank of it with him).<sup>118</sup> When Tristram and Isolde drink the potion, they are condemned to “harmfullt líf ok meinlæti ok langa hugsótt með líkams girnd ok tilfýsiligum hætti” (a life of sorrow and trouble and anxiety caused by carnal desire and constant longing).<sup>119</sup> Drinking the potion thus leads to the worldly sorrows and troubles that the medieval reader was warned against, for example, in *Barlaams saga*. The drinking of the potion distracts a person from the search for essential knowledge, by carnal desires and longing. Despite this negative link between the drink and worldly lusts and desires, the story as a whole tells of a strong spiritual link between the two who have shared the drink. As is well known, at the end of the saga, the two lovers die, and they are buried on separate sides of a church. It also happens that “eik eða lundr” (an oak or other large tree) grows from each of the graves, and the branches of the trees meet and intertwine above the gable of the church.<sup>120</sup> The growth of the two trees that unite their branches above the church may be seen as a symbolic unification of the two souls after their deaths. Even though they were tormented by carnal desire and longing, the drinking of the love potion also led to their finding eternal love in each other. Together with the symbolism of God’s house, the magic drink may thus be allegorically interpreted to be a means to knowledge of eternal, true love and inner peace.

A final example may be given from *Elíss saga*.<sup>121</sup> When Elís is wounded by his Saracen enemies, Rosamunda makes an herbal potion that helps him recover and heals his dreadful wounds:

<sup>117</sup> *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* is the translation of the lost work about Tristan, by the French poet Thomas of Britain. According to its prologue, it was translated in Norway in 1226, under the commission of King Hákon Hákonarssonar. The oldest version of the text is preserved in Copenhagen, Den Arnemagnæanske samling, AM 543 4to, dated to the seventeenth century. For a presentation of later versions of the story and a review of recent scholarship, see Geraldine Barnes, “The Tristan Legend,” *The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus’ Realms*, ed. Marianne E. Kalinke (Cardiff 2011) 61–76.

<sup>118</sup> “Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar,” ed. and trans. Peter Jorgensen, *Norse Romances, Volume I: The Tristan Legend*, ed. Marianne E. Kalinke (Cambridge 1999) 23–226, at 118–119.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* 120–121.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* 223.

<sup>121</sup> *Elíss saga* is the Old Norse translation of the Old French *chanson de geste Elye de Saint-Gille*. Like *Ívens saga* and *Tristrams saga*, the translation of the saga was commissioned by King Hákon Hákonarsson during the thirteenth century. The oldest extant version is from the Norwegian manuscript Uppsala, Uppsala Universitet, De la Gardie 4–7 fol, see ‘*Elis saga*,’ ‘*Stregleikar*,’ and *Other Texts: Uppsala University Library Delagardieska Samlingen Nos. 4–7 Folio and AM 666 b Quart*, ed. Mattias Tveitane, *Corpus Codicum Norvegicorum Medii Aevi* 4 (Oslo 1972). For a discussion of the other manuscript versions of the saga, see *Elis saga ok Rosamundu, mit Einleitung, deutscher Übersetzung und Anmerkungen zum ersten Mal*, ed. Eugen Kölbing (Heilbronn 1881). This example is discussed more extensively in Stefka G. Eriksen,

Siðan toc mærin or mioð dreckiu sinni. III. gros sua kroftog. at allregi scapaðe guð þat kuikuende. ne mann er abergði þæima grosum. sua at þau niðr kæmi um halsinn i briostið. at æigi væri þegar sua hæill sem fiskr ivatni. Nu stappaði su hin kurtæisa mæri siolfum sinum hondom grosin & gaf elisi siðan at drecka. hinum vasca & hinum rausta riddera. Sem hann hafði dryckit. & ibriost honom kom dryckrinn. þa kennde hann sec þegar hæilan. & kallaði hann þa á galopin & mælli. þetta er paradisi & himnesk dyrd. & vit erom ikomnir alldre bæiðomz ec heðan at fara. ef ec hevi slict ynde iamnan.<sup>122</sup>

Thereafter the maiden took out of her wooden chalice four herbs, which were so powerful that God has never created a living creature, nor a man, who would not have become as healthy as a fish in the water, when those herbs were swallowed down the throat and into the chest. Now the maiden crushed the herbs with her hands and gave them then to Elís, the brave and bold knight, to drink. When he had drunk, and the drink got to his chest, he felt healthy straight away, and he called to Galopin and said: This is Paradise and Heavenly Glory and when we have come here, I would never want to leave, if it was as delightful.<sup>123</sup>

The drinking of the healing potion prepared by Rosamunda not only helps Elís to feel physically better, but also helps him transform spiritually, as he sees Paradise and Heavenly Glory. The expression “hæill sem fiskr ivatni” strengthens the link between the drinking of the herbs and the spiritual transformation, as the fish is a symbol of Christ, the ultimate symbol of regeneration.

In the Old French version of the text, the reference to Christ and His symbolic powers is even stronger (l.1446):

A ses mains qu'ele ot blanches, en a traite .ii. hebes/ Que Dieus ot so uses pies, li glorieus chelestre/ Quant en crois le leverent, la pute gent averse./ En .i. anap de madre les souda la puchele./ Onques Dieus ne fist home, se le col en traverse./ Que ne soit ausi sains con li pisson sort ere./ Ele en dona Elye, .i. chevalier honesties./ Li ber en a beü, por l'amor la puchele./ Tous fu sains et garis; Galopin en apele:/ "Chaiens est paradis et la gloire chelestre!/ Je n'en quic mais issir, se tout jors i puis estre!"

With her white hands she took out two herbs/ That God had under His feet, the celestial glorious King, / When the evil enemy raised Him on the cross!/ In a wooden chalice she dissolved them./ Never was man made, that if this potion went down his throat./ He would not become as healthy as a fish in the sea./ she gave some to Elye, the honorable knight./ The youth drank some of it, for love of the lady./ He was completely cured and well. He called Galopin:/ "This place is paradise and heavenly glory!/ I don't think I'd ever leave if I could always stay here!"<sup>124</sup>

In the Old French poem, when Elye is wounded, Rosamunda saves his life with two herbs that have grown by Christ's cross. The ointment is here directly connected to the supreme Christian symbol of revival, resurrection, and the ultimate reanimation. This reference to the Cross is gone in the Old Norse version, where the maiden takes out

"Translating Christian Symbolism into Old Norse Mythology in Thirteenth-century Norway," *Medieval Translator: Translation and Authority—Authorities in Translation*, ed. Pieter de Leemans and Michele Goyens (Turnhout 2016) 303–314.

<sup>122</sup> *Elis saga ok Rosamundu*, ed. Kölbing (n. 121 above) 75–76.

<sup>123</sup> My translation.

<sup>124</sup> *Elye of Saint-Gilles: A Chanson de geste*, ed. and trans. A. Richard Hartmann and Sandra C. Malicote (New York 2011) 94–95.

the herbs from a wooden chalice (*mioðdrekkja*).<sup>125</sup> Even though this word does not demand further interpretation, its use, with its associative reference to *mioð*, allows for one extra associative excursion. Word-games by means of association were not uncommon in the Middle Ages, and, even though only through association, the reference to the mead is very interesting in this context. While the healing herbal drink in the Old French poem is related to the ultimate Christian symbol of regeneration, eternal wisdom, and knowledge, the Cross, in the Old Norse saga, the herbal potion is linked, through an associative word-play, to the mead. As we have seen, the drinking of the mead of poetry was also used as a metaphor for regeneration (in Valhall for example) and intellectual transformation in various mythological texts, and thus may function as a fitting and adequate translation of the metaphor for ultimate knowledge, the Cross. Such a translation strategy may be explained by an attempt at a cultural appropriation on the part of the translator, the addition of an extra cultural reference that would have been understood by the Norse audience. This may have also been motivated by the fact that Rosamunda was, after all, not Christian at that point in time in the poem, and a heathen, and not Christian, origin of the special qualities of her potion may have seemed better to the Old Norse translator. Such a strategy is reminiscent of the *interpretationes Norrænae*, when names of Old Norse gods were used when the Roman pantheon was translated in Old Norse translations of Latin texts.<sup>126</sup> In any case, even if unintended semantically, the choice of word certainly opens for one extra layer of possible interpretations of the translation.

Old Norse translations also include warnings against excessive drinking because of the negative effect alcohol has on the mental abilities of men, such as those in *Grímmismál* (st. 51, 52, 53) and *Hávamál*. In *Ívens saga*, the Old Norse translation of Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*,<sup>127</sup> Kæi addresses Íven, making fun of what he is saying and suggesting that it is exaggerated and foolish: “Nú megum vér heyra, Íven, at þú ert vel mettr. Þú hefir fleiri orð en fullr pottr víns” (Now we can hear, Íven, that you have had your fill. You have more words than a full pitcher has wine).<sup>128</sup> In this case, the proverb means that Íven has gotten carried away in his words and promised rather too much, when he has declared that he will avenge Kalebrant's disgrace. Once again, a quick comparison with the French original is interesting, as it says: “Plus a paroles an plain pot/ De vin, qu'an i mui de cervoise./ L'en dit, que chaz saous s'anvoise.”<sup>129</sup> (There are more words in a pitcher full of wine than in a hogshead of beer. They say

<sup>125</sup> For a thorough discussion of the meaning of the word and its use in other Old Norse texts, see Eriksen, “Translating Christian Symbolism” (n. 121 above).

<sup>126</sup> See Annette Lassen, *Odin på kristent pergament—en teksthistorisk studie* (Copenhagen 2011) 96–109.

<sup>127</sup> *Ívens saga* was most probably translated during the second half of the thirteenth century, commissioned by King Hákon Hákonarssonar (r. 1217–1263). The main manuscript containing *Ívens saga* is the Icelandic codex Holm Perg 6 4to, c. 1400. For a description of the manuscript and a facsimile edition, see *Romances: Perg. 4:0 nr. 6 in the Royal Library, Stockholm*, ed. Desmond Slay, *Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile* 10 (Copenhagen 1972). For a discussion of the other manuscripts containing the text and a critical edition, see *Ívens saga*, ed. Foster W. Blaisdell, *Editiones Arnarnaganae, Series B* 18 (Copenhagen 1979).

<sup>128</sup> *Ívens saga*, in *Norse Romances, Volume II: The Knights of the Round Table*, ed. and trans. Marianne E. Kalinke (Cambridge 1999) 33–102, at 44–45.

<sup>129</sup> <https://archive.org/details/RomansChevalierHollandSchulze, II 590-592> [last visited 20 September 2018].

the drunken cat makes merry.)<sup>130</sup> Note that the reference to beer is omitted in the Old Norse version, where the negative influence of alcohol is explained only by referring to wine. This could be due to the fact that beer was a more common substance in the north that people were more familiar with, and possibly because of the drink's special significance in relation to wisdom in traditional Old Norse culture.

Chapter 14 in *Elíss saga ok Rósamundu* also includes a passage on how listening and comprehending may be impeded by the consumption of alcohol:

Nu lyðit goðgæfliga. betra er fogr fröðe en kuiðar fylli. þo scal við saugu súpa. en æf ofmikil drecka s/oe/mð. er saugu at segia ef hæyrenðr til lyða. en tapat starfi at hafna at hæyra.<sup>131</sup>

Now listen carefully! Fair wisdom is better than a full stomach; one may drink when stories are told, but not too much; it is honorable to tell stories if people listen, but it is a wasted effort if nobody listens.<sup>132</sup>

The short chapter warns against excessive consumption of substances and compares intellectual and bodily nourishment. The former is recommended if one of these is to take priority, and the passage brings to mind the invitations in, say, the *Old Norse Homily book*, that people should think of their spiritual nourishment as much as their physical nourishment. Once again, comparison to the original Old French text is interesting, as this very passage does not exist in French and seems to have been composed by the Old Norse translator. The Old Norse translation thus seems to have been concerned especially with warning local readers and listeners to heed both to their bodies and minds, and not to jeopardize the latter by excess intake of foods and alcoholic substances.

To sum up, this subgroup of texts consisted of either primary or secondary translation of various European genres, such as pedagogical texts, romances, and *chansons de geste*. These texts were preserved in manuscripts contemporary with the ones that included the eddic texts, and the numerous examples of the “liquid knowledge” metaphor revealed both some similarities and differences in the use of the metaphor in the two subgroups. Compared to the eddic texts, where we heard of beer/ale, wine, blood, water, etc., these texts do not always state what type of liquid is being drunk (water is sometimes mentioned). Furthermore, drinking is not the only oral ingestion process that is related to knowledge; there is also eating, tasting, and taking in nourishment. The oral consumption of knowledge is sometimes expanded to refer to a general nourishment process that leads to intellectual transformation. The transformative process that the liquid goes through in order to have knowledge-enhancing qualities is important in many of the texts in both subgroups. This sometimes includes oral dispersion, through spit or vomit, or allusions to taking the Eucharist. Finally, the cognitive processes to which the oral ingestion leads could differ: in the eddic literature, the results included new cognitive abilities, access to knowledge in general, regeneration, and becoming one with eternity. In the Old Norse

<sup>130</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, “The Knight of the Lion (Yvain),” *Chrétien de Troyes: Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler (London 2004) 295–380, at 302.

<sup>131</sup> *Elíss saga ok Rósamundu*, ed. Kölbing (n. 121 above) 33.

<sup>132</sup> My translation.

literature with a Christian content, not surprisingly, drinking (and eating) trigger emotional and spiritual processes that ultimately lead to unification with God and eternity. In both literary subgroups, the drinking of alcohol is sometimes warned against as it may result in loss of memory and weakened cognitive abilities and social honor, and many of the examples in the Christian texts recommend balanced care of the body, the mind, and the soul.

In order to fully understand the cultural connotations of these complex references to drinking and eating knowledge, we need to turn to the meaning of these references in medieval Christian culture in general. This was the cultural background for the scribes/writers/translators of both subgroups in the Old Norse literary system, defined by the three continuums: pre-Christian–Christian; oral–written; indigenous–translated.

#### THE DIGESTION METAPHOR IN LATIN CHRISTENDOM

The Old Norse sources reveal that not only drinking (knowledge), but also the consumption of solids, the process of digestion, as well as the sense of taste and tasting, may be related to cognitive processes and transformations. These are all likewise related and inseparable from each other in European Christian thought and ritual, which was the main cognitive framework of the writers and scribes of all the Old Norse sources mentioned above.

The main ritual that links ingestion and cognitive and spiritual transformation in Latin Christendom is the Eucharist ceremony, which involved the elevation of the Sacred Sacrament, followed by the consumption of wine and bread, symbolizing Christ's blood and body.<sup>133</sup> The rite was instituted by Christ himself during the Last Supper, when he gave bread and wine to his disciples, referring to them respectively as "my body" and "my blood" (1 Cor 10.16). Christina Risch argues that, because of his messianic self-understanding, Jesus used wine intentionally as a messianic symbol, and she interprets wine as a symbol of the blood of the Messiah at the Lord's Supper.<sup>134</sup> Eric Palazzo links the symbolic significance of wine in the medieval liturgy to the role wine and vinery plays in biblical tradition as "la plantation de Dieu."<sup>135</sup> Even though the Eucharist ritual has always been related to complex theological discussions, it is not controversial to take for granted that during the liturgy and during the ritual of the Eucharist, through the eating of the bread and the drinking of the wine, ~~the~~ people were believed to become the blood and body of Christ, cognitively, physically, and spiritually. In this context, it is relevant to recall how Óðinn was specifically said to thrive on wine, which was otherwise a foreign drink in the Norse context.

<sup>133</sup> On the theological discussions about the nature of the Eucharist in the Middle Ages, see Caroline Bynum, *Metamorphoses and Identity* (New York 2001) 104–105, 144–150. Gary Macy, "Theology of the Eucharist in the High Middle Ages," ed. Ian Christopher Levy, Gary Macy, and Kristen van Ausdal, *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages* (Leiden 2012) 365–398.

<sup>134</sup> Christina Risch, "The Wine-Symbolism in the Old Testament and Jewish Tradition and its Relevance for the Interpretation of the Lord's Supper," *Feasts and Festivals*, ed. Christopher Tuckett (Leuven 2009) 87–96.

<sup>135</sup> Eric Palazzo, "Les fonctions pratiques et symboliques du vin," *Olie e vino nell'alto medioevo*, Spoleto 20–26 aprile 2006, *Atti delle settimane LIV*, t. II (Spoleto 2006) 1211–1247, at 1214.



Further, in Latin Christian writings, ingestion and digestion is explicitly used as a metaphor for understanding, conceiving, and internalizing the meaning of an authoritative text. In her book, *The Book of Memory*, Mary Carruthers gives many examples of the use of this metaphor. Hugh of St. Victor writes about reading the Scripture, “whose ideas like so many sweetest fruits, we pick as we read and chew as we consider them.”<sup>136</sup> In 1359, Petrarch writes that he has internalized the writing of Virgil, Horace, and Cicero, among others: “I ate in the morning what I would digest in the evening; I swallowed as a boy what I would ruminate upon as an older man. I have thoroughly absorbed these writings, implanting them not only in my memory but in my marrow...”<sup>137</sup> Carruthers relates this to a discussion about plagiarism in the Middle Ages, but the metaphoric blend of ingestion/digestion and cognitive transformation is clear. Her examples show that becoming “familiar” with something, i.e., learning and understanding something, meant making it a part of one’s own experience: “reading is to be digested, to be ruminated, like a cow chewing her cud, or like a bee making honey from the nectar of flowers.”<sup>138</sup>

Carruthers shows that also digestion was a central aspect of the learning and understanding process; the stomach and all its physiological processes were understood as a metaphor for memory. In a text ascribed to Jerome, *Regula monarchum*, the author writes about the stomach rumblings, belching, and flatulence that accompanied the prayer. This is explained by the fact that belching and farting are necessary for the processing of the food one takes in.<sup>139</sup> This bodily treatment of the ingested substance recalls the oral dispersion that was necessary for the making of the mead of poetry in the myths. The idea that knowledge production is a process that needs ingestion and bodily treatment that may involve dispersion of some sort is at work in both cultural spheres.

Taste and tasting were important in the Old Norse texts. Rachel Fulton shows how taste was considered essential for achieving knowledge of God in the Middle Ages.<sup>140</sup> While one can see and hear things without being in physical contact with what is to be perceived, taste implies taking something in your mouth and absorbing it in the cells of the tongue. She describes how taste is and was inseparable from the cognitive and bodily experience of learning—it is through taste that we learn what is nourishing and what makes us sick, physically and spiritually. Christian texts abound in references to the importance of tasting and the sweetness of God: “Praise the Lord for He is good [*bonus*]; sing to his name because it is sweet [*suavis*]”;<sup>141</sup> “blessed the mouth that tastes, O God, my love, the words of your consolation, sweeter than honey and the

<sup>136</sup> *Didascalion*, ed. Charles H. Buttmer (Washington 1939) 103, ll. 26–27. Cited in English from Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge 1990) 165.

<sup>137</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* 219. Francesco Petrarca, *Le Familiari*, ed. V. Rossi and U. Bosco, 4 vol. (Florence 1933–1942) XXII, p. 2. *Letters of Familiar Matters*, trans. Aldo Bernardo, 3 vol. (Baltimore 1975–1985) 213.

<sup>138</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* (n. 137 above) 164.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* 166.

<sup>140</sup> “‘Taste and see that the Lord is sweet’ (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West,” *The Journal of Religion* 86.2 (2006) 169–204.

<sup>141</sup> Ps. 134:3

honeycomb”;<sup>142</sup> or William of St. Thierry’s “O good Father, sweet brother (*dulcis frater*), sweet Lord (*suavis Dominus*), you are everything that is good and sweet (*bonus ... et dulcis et suavis*).”<sup>143</sup> Fulton reads intellectual and spiritual sophistication in this focus on sweetness and taste and explains that the underlying meaning of such passages is that “with the Incarnation, Christ himself became not only good or friendly or pleasant but food, that is something that we might taste: bread sent from heaven ... [giving] life to the world.”<sup>144</sup> Christ was not only the bread, but also the vine, and the Old Testament is full of such cereal and vine images of Christ. Sometimes the taste of liquids and solids was used to signify the spiritual nourishment appropriate for people of different degrees of religious maturity: the teachings for those who were less skilled were compared to milk, while the more mature could take in solids.<sup>145</sup> The thirst for milk for all is, however, encouraged by Peter, as the thirst for God.<sup>146</sup>

Further, taste can be used to discover what is deceptively sweet and poisonous, as was also the case in the Barlaam legend. Taste was essential, in addition to sight, as without taste, one could not distinguish between foods that nourish and foods that kill. Further, it is said “Taste and see that the Lord is sweet,” because it is through physical experience and anointment that one can appropriate the wisdom of God, in addition to seeing.<sup>147</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux argues how our spiritual (and thus cognitive) condition was destroyed when our taste was infected by “the old serpent’s poison.” But, with wisdom, the palate of the heart is cleansed and healed, and “it tastes wisdom itself.”<sup>148</sup> So for Bernard, tasting is healing, cleaning, and experiencing; it is the repairing of the infected and rebalancing back to goodness and sweetness. The sweetness of God is not just a metaphor, it is an invitation to taste, to experience, and “to risk being changed,” by incorporating substances that may either nourish and heal us or poison us and make us sick. But, we must taste, in order to know!<sup>149</sup>

Today we say: “you are what you eat”; medieval thought reckoned “you eat what you are.” Christ ate human food—bread, milk, wine, fish, honeycomb, and myrrh—and offered the leftovers of himself to humanity in the same form and substances; humans have to taste the sweetness and bitterness of Christ’s leftovers to experience and incarnate him.<sup>150</sup> By the ingestion and digestion, we not only experience God, we become like God.

<sup>142</sup> Gertrude of Helfta, *Exercitia spiritualia*, in *Gertrude D’Helfta, Oeuvres spirituelles*, ed. Jacques Hourlier and Albert Schmitt, vol. 1, *Les exercices*, Sources chrétiennes 127 (Paris 1967) 194, bk. 5: lines 481–482; cited from Fulton “Taste and see that the Lord is sweet” (n. 140 above) 178.

<sup>143</sup> *Meditation VI: Anima gaudium beatorum, ac coelum, id est Deu, et arcam testament, id est humanitate Christi, contemplator*, ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 180 (Paris 1855) col. 226; *The Works of William of St. Thierry*, vol. 1, *On Contemplating God; Prayer; Meditations*, trans. Sister Penelope, *Cistercian Fathers Series* 3 (Kalamazoo 1977) 132; cited from Fulton “Taste and see that the Lord is sweet” (n. 140 above) 179.

<sup>144</sup> Fulton, “Taste and see that the Lord is sweet” (n. 140 above) 182.

<sup>145</sup> Heb. 5:13.

<sup>146</sup> 1 Pet.2:2–3, Vulgate, Fulton, “Taste and see that the Lord is sweet” (n. 140 above) 184.

<sup>147</sup> Fulton, “Taste and see that the Lord is sweet” (n. 140 above) 192.

<sup>148</sup> Bernard, *Sermons de cantica canticorum*, sermon 85, par. 8, cited from Fulton, “Taste and see that the Lord is sweet” (n. 140 above) 193.

<sup>149</sup> Fulton, “Taste and see that the Lord is sweet” (n. 140 above) 200.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.* 200.

These examples illustrate that tasting, ingesting, and digesting liquids and foods were understood as essential for evaluating what was nourishing and good, not only physically but also morally and spiritually in Christian medieval culture. Drinking, eating, tasting, and digesting were metaphors for learning, understanding, and thus knowing. This was the cultural context and the standard Christian pattern of thinking for the Old Norse writers and translators, who wrote all the Old Norse texts discussed above. ~~The texts were seen as belonging to a literary system organized in three continuums, which legitimized their juxtaposition and comparison.~~

#### THE NATURE OF THE OLD NORSE LITERARY SYSTEM

So, how could this metaphor, which is realized with the above-mentioned variations in the two literary subgroups, have been understood in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Old Norse culture—as one metaphor with variations or as two different metaphors? And what does this imply about the nature of the Old Norse literary system?

When discussing similar questions earlier, scholars have argued that the link between pre-Christian mythology and Christian theology could have been either ironic<sup>151</sup> or analogous.<sup>152</sup> The whole of *Gylfaginning* has indeed been seen as “an elaborate selection and structuring of different mythological accounts, most likely expressed in the framework of a fundamental theological discourse in the early thirteenth century.”<sup>153</sup> The different realizations of the “liquid knowledge” metaphor may be due to the complexity of the literary and cultural system. John Stephens discusses the link between the mead of poetry myth and a universal motif such as “the water of life,” without explicitly linking the meaning of the metaphor in a pre-Christian context to its meaning in the Christian cultural context. He argues that the archetype metaphor “is in itself never invented but [its] application can be. That is, though the broad outline of the myth is durable, it undergoes modification during the passage of time; it decays and no longer communicates the original externalization of an inner event; it is then rediscovered, refelt, rethought, and transformed; and finally the “new” myth thus created undergoes the whole process again.”<sup>154</sup> Based on such a theoretical conceptualization of how a metaphor may remain the same and still change function, and on the fact that analogy and contrasting were known medieval rhetorical strategies, it is reasonable to argue that the variations in the representation of the liquid knowledge metaphor were meaningful in one and the same cultural context. Judy

<sup>151</sup> Anne Holtmark has proposed that lexical terms from medieval theology used by Snorri in the Prose Edda, should be understood as irony, based on cognitive association of contrasting elements, see Anne Holtmark, *Studier i Snorres Mytologi* (Oslo 1964).

<sup>152</sup> For a discussion, and further references, on Snorri’s authorship of the Prose Edda, see Jan Alexander van Nahl, “The Skilled Narrator: Myth and Scholarship in the Prose Edda,” *Scripta Islandica* 66 (2015) 123–142, at 124–125. For various examples of analogy between Norse mythology and Christian theology in the Prose Edda, see Heinrich Beck, “Die Uppsala-Edda und Snorri Sturlusons Konstruktion einer skandinavischen Vorzeit,” *Scripta Islandica* 58 (2007) 5–32 (final scene in *Gylfaginning*, when the human *Æsir* declares the same identity as the divine *Æsir* and the biblical *ego et pater unum sumus* (I and the Father are one) John 10:30); Johansson “*Völuspá* and the Tiburtine Sibyl” (n. 7 above) 2013 (*Ragnarök* and the biblical Apocalypse); Anatoly Liberman, “Mistaken identity and optical illusion in Old Icelandic literature,” *Word heath. Wordheide. Ordheidi. Essays on Germanic Literature and Usage*, ed. A. Liberman (Rome 1994) 165–175 (vision and *sjónhverfing*).

<sup>153</sup> Van Nahl, “The Skilled Narrator” (n. 152 above) 136.

<sup>154</sup> Stephens, “The Mead of Poetry” (n. 53 above) 264.

Quinn related the metaphor of “drinking in” knowledge to the instability and liquidity of oral culture. When the “writtenness” and the Christian context of the poems, and other literary genres, are taken into consideration, as has been done in this article, it becomes clear that the “liquid knowledge” metaphor alludes not only to traditional pre-Christian conceptions of knowledge, but also to Christian theological discussions. The “liquid knowledge” metaphor seems to be imbued with the quality of “plasticity,”<sup>155</sup> since it appears as a meaningful motif within the whole literary system. As pointed out at the beginning of the article, the main question is not where the “liquid knowledge” metaphor came from and what it originally meant, or whether it refers to pre-Christian or to Christian mentalities, but rather how it was understood in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Norse contexts. The analysis has shown that the metaphor was meaningful within the whole literary system, although it possibly brought various associations to mind depending on the reception context and the audience. The important variables in the metaphor were the same—the nature of the ingested substance mattered and brought about cognitive transformations of various types. This supports the placement of the texts along three continuums and not juxtaposing one subgroup with the other. The variety of meanings of these important variables further emphasizes the flexibility of the literary system based on continuums, rather than on rigid language, origin, or genre-divides. All in all, this study of the metaphor of liquid knowledge confirms that one of the defining features of the Old Norse literary system is that it feeds simultaneously into the memory of a past oral and partly pagan culture and into the contemporary culture of Christian Europe.

#### ATTITUDES TO KNOWLEDGE IN OLD NORSE SOCIETY

The examples given above indicate thus that the idea that knowledge could be drunk, ingested, and digested was widespread in Old Norse culture in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This is a valuable conclusion when discussing what ideas people had regarding knowledge and how it could be achieved.

Medieval epistemological discussions encompass numerous definitions of what knowledge is, such as factual knowledge; logic, memory, and cognition; ethics; or faith in God. These discussions reveal that there are various modes of acquiring knowledge, for example, intellectually, emotionally, or through the senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste).<sup>156</sup> Scholars have also discussed the various categories of knowledge represented in Old Norse literature, such as grammar and liberal arts,<sup>157</sup>

<sup>155</sup> The term is used by Clunies Ross, “From Iceland to Norway” (n. 109 above).

<sup>156</sup> For an overview of the main arguments of various medieval theologians, see *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Robert Pasnau, vol. 1, part 4: Soul and Knowledge (Cambridge 2010) 293–384.

<sup>157</sup> The texts in question are the so-called Old Norse grammatical treatises, which are concerned with the nature and structure of the Old Norse language, and, thus, the native literary and mythological tradition. See, for example, Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Toronto 2001); Margaret Clunies Ross, *History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge 2005). See also Fabrizio D. Raschella, “Old Icelandic Grammatical Literature: The Last Two Decades of Research (1983–2005),” *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World. Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills, *Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe* 17 (Turnhout 2007) 341–373.

encyclopedic knowledge,<sup>158</sup> science,<sup>159</sup> politics, and theology;<sup>160</sup> and whether knowledge acquisition was an emotional,<sup>161</sup> intellectual,<sup>162</sup> or sensory/physical process in Old Norse culture.<sup>163</sup> The physiological appropriation of knowledge through drinking and eating has hitherto been addressed in a few studies only.<sup>164</sup> Despite the differences in the characteristics of the “liquid knowledge” metaphor in the various texts, this article reveals that acquiring knowledge through ingestion and digestion was a valid epistemological concept in Old Norse culture. The numerous examples indicate that the modes of acquisition of knowledge were a significant concern: in addition to acquiring knowledge rationally, emotionally, or physically, physiological ingestion and digestion of knowledge was a meaningful knowledge-enhancing strategy in Old Norse culture.

<sup>158</sup> See, for example, Sverrir Jakobsson, *Við og veröldin: heimsmynd Islendinga 1100–1400* (Reykjavík 2005); Sverrir Jakobsson, “Hauksbók and the Construction of an Icelandic World View,” *Saga Book, Viking Society for Northern Research* 31 (2007) 22–38.

<sup>159</sup> For a general discussion of science as learning, see *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, eds. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills, *Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe* 17 (Turnhout 2007); *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Stefka G. Eriksen, *Disputatio* 28 (Turnhout 2016). There are many discussions on the contextualization and transmission of pre-Christian mythology and cosmology in the writings of Christian authors; see, for example, Heather O’Donoghue, *From Asgard to Valhalla: The Remarkable History of the Norse Myths* (London 2007).

<sup>160</sup> Sverre Bagge, *The Political Thought of The King’s Mirror* (Odense 1987); Gunnar Harðarson, *Littérature et spiritualité en Scandinavie médiévale: la traduction norroise du De arria animae de Hugues de Saint-Victor* (Paris 1995).

<sup>161</sup> Emotionality is a much-debated topic in Old Norse studies, but not always in relation to knowledge. See, for example, Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Emotion in Old Norse Literature: Translations, Voices, Contexts* (Woodbridge 2017); *Emotions in Medieval Arthurian Literature: Body, Mind, Voice*, eds. Frank Brandsma, Carolyne Larrington, and Corinne J. Saunders (Woodbridge 2015); *Arthur of the North: Histories, Emotions, and Imaginations*, eds. Björn Bandlien, Stefka G. Eriksen, and Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Scandinavian Studies* 87.1 (2015); *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland: Essays in Honour of Marianne Kalinke*, eds. Kirsten Wolf, Johanna Denzin, and Marianne E. Kalinke (Ithaca 2008). See also Stefka G. Eriksen, “Emotional Religiosity and Religious Happiness in Old Norse Literature and Culture,” *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* (2018) 53–83.

<sup>162</sup> Knowledge-enhancing processes, such as rationality, self-reflection, and inner rumination, have also been discussed. See Stefka G. Eriksen, “Pedagogy and Attitudes towards Knowledge in The King’s Mirror,” *Viator* 45.3 (2014) 143–168; Eriksen, “Emotional Religiosity” (n. 161 above); Stefka G. Eriksen, “The Role and Identity of the Warrior: Self-Reflection and Awareness in Old Norse Literary and Social Spaces,” *Representation of the Warrior*, ed. Jan Erik Rekdal and Charlie Doherty (Dublin 2016) 399–432.

<sup>163</sup> The link between the physical and the spiritual and intellectual, as well as the importance of sensory perception for the acquisition of knowledge are discussed increasingly in Old Norse scholarship. See, for example, M.A. Jacobs, “‘Undir ilmöndum laufum ok nýsprungnum blómstrum’: Sensual Pleasure in Old Norse Arthurian Romance,” *Scandinavian Studies* 87.1 (2015) 107–128. On sight, see Annette Lassen, *Øjet og Blindheten i Norrøn litteratur og mytologi* (Copenhagen 2003). The link between body and soul is discussed by Stefka G. Eriksen, “Body and Soul in Old Norse Culture,” *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Stefka G. Eriksen, *Disputatio* 28 (Turnhout 2016) 393–428.

<sup>164</sup> Quinn, “Liquid Knowledge” (n. 31 above), Clunies Ross, “From Iceland to Norway” (n. 140 above).