

## Who was **hulmkir**?

### Double apposition in the Ramsund inscription

#### The inscription

The rock at Ramsund, in Södermanland, Sweden, is one of the best known of all runic rocks because of its clear and attractive representation of scenes from the story of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, the legendary Norse dragon-slayer. The dragon being killed by Sigurðr forms a band containing a runic inscription which reads (Brate and Wessén 1924–36, 71–3):

**siripr : kiarþi : bur : þosi : muþir : alriks : tutir : urms : fur · salu : hulmkirs : faþur : sukrupar buata · sis ·**

The runes are clear and well-cut, and there is no doubt about the transcription. The only doubt concerns how the inscription should be translated. The identity of the commissioner of the monument is clear enough: a woman called *Sigriðr*, mother of *Alrikr* and daughter of *Ormr*, commissioned a bridge<sup>1</sup> and recorded this act in the illustrated inscription on an earthbound rock at its eastern end. But for the benefit of whose soul did *Sigriðr* undertake this doubtless expensive project? His name was *Holmgæirr* and he was the father of someone called *Sygrðr*. The phrase **faþur sukrupar** follows on and must be in apposition to **hulmkirs**: both are in the genitive, dependent on the phrase **fur salu**. Then follows a further phrase also in the genitive, **buata sis**, “her husband”. There are two possible explanations for this genitive case:

- (1) The phrase is parallel to **faþur sukrupar** and also in apposition to **hulmkirs**. This would make *Holmgæirr* the husband of *Sigriðr*.
- (2) The phrase is dependent on the noun preceding it (the name **sukrupar**). This would mean that *Sygrðr* was *Sigriðr*’s husband and *Holmgæirr* was her father-in-law.

Both of these explanations have received support in print, the latter more authoritatively in that it was propounded by the runologists responsible for the official corpus of Swedish runic inscriptions (Brate and Wessén 1924–36,

<sup>1</sup> Unlike most other “bridges” referred to in Swedish runic inscriptions, this was not a causeway, but a wooden bridge 75 metres long over the inlet in Mälaren known as Ramsundet (Lindqvist 1914–15).

71–3; Wessén and Jansson 1949–51, 28–39; see also Ruprecht 1958, 113–24 and Åhlén 1986, 4), but the former just as frequently (Lindqvist 1914–15, 218; von Friesen 1933, 190; Ohlmarks 1978, 91; Sawyer 1988, 38–9).

## Interpretations of the Ramsund inscription

Since the relationship between *Sigriðr* and *Holmgæirr* cannot be determined by studying this inscription alone, it has been usual to compare it with related inscriptions from Kjula and Bro, of which the memorial formulas are as follows:

Sö 106 Kjula (Brate and Wessén 1924–36, 77–9):

**alrikr × raisti × stain × sun × siripar × at × sin faður × sbiut ×**

U 617 Bro kyrka (Wessén and Jansson 1949–51, 28–39):

**kinluk × hulmkis × tutir × systir × sukrupar × auk × þaira × kaus × aun × lit × keara × bru × þesi × auk × raisa × stain × þina × eftir × asur × bunta · sin × sun × hakunar × iarls ×**

Although there are only two possible interpretations of the Ramsund inscription, that *Sigriðr* was married to *Holmgæirr* or that she was married to *Sygrðr*, comparison with these other two inscriptions suggests further possibilities as to the number of times they were each married and which marriages produced which children. Four of these possible family trees, as suggested by scholars who have considered the question, are shown in Appendix I (p. 132–3, below) and a brief review of their reasons for positing these relationships follows.

Lindqvist's article of 1914–15 publishes both the results of his archaeological investigations of the Ramsund area, establishing the site of the bridge mentioned in the inscription, and his interpretation of the inscription (in conjunction with a number of others in the area). Lindqvist takes *Holmgæirr* to have been *Sigriðr*'s husband, but gives no reason for this. Indeed, he scarcely seems aware of the ambiguity, except to mention in a footnote (p. 218) that “another interpretation” has been proposed by two other scholars. Lindqvist's explanation is followed by von Friesen in his brief notice of the Ramsund inscription, although he does take note of Brate's differing interpretation (1933, 190, and n. 35, p. 247). Von Friesen also concludes that the stone from Kjula can be dated to the 1020's and that from Ramsund slightly later.

In 1924, Brate published the fascicle of *Södermanlands runinskrifter* containing the inscriptions from Ramsund and Kjula. His reasons for preferring *Sygrðr* as *Sigriðr*'s husband are explained in somewhat more detail (Brate and Wessén 1924–36, 71–3). He argues that the name *Holmgæirr* and the

phrase “her husband” are too far apart to belong together and he points out that it is usual for an explanation of the relationship of the deceased to the commissioner of the monument to come before any other information about him or her. Having chosen this interpretation, he goes on to point out, in a somewhat circular argument, that “if *Holmgæirr* is *Sigríðr*’s father-in-law, it is natural for her to express his relationship to her with the phrase ‘father of her husband *Sygrøðr*’”.

The third inscription in this group, that from Bro in Uppland, was published in 1949 by Elias Wessén (Wessén and Jansson 1949–51, 28–39), who attempts to clear up the family relationships in all three inscriptions. He is the first scholar to give proper emphasis to the real ambiguity in the Ramsund inscription, but goes on to find, with Brate, that it is “probable” that it was *Sygrøðr* that *Sigríðr* was married to, since he finds it “difficult to understand” why *Sigríðr* should mention that her husband was the father of a man not her son.<sup>2</sup> He also simplifies the problem by suggesting that *Spiut* was simply a nickname for *Sygrøðr*, so that *Alrikr*’s father is the same person as *Holmgæirr*’s son. On the relative dates of the inscriptions, which might affect our judgement of the relationships between the persons mentioned in them, Wessén will commit himself no more than to conclude that all three inscriptions are roughly contemporary.

Ruprecht (1958, 113–24), in his “Ekskurs” on the Mälardalen stones, accepts that *Holmgæirr* was *Sigríðr*’s father-in-law, but not that *Sygrøðr* and *Spiut* were the same man. Having done this, he develops the argument with geographical and historical reasoning, to the extent that he feels able to tabulate (p. 123) the “mutmaßiges Alter der Personen”.

In her popular article of 1986, Åhlén also rejects (p. 4) the identification of *Sygrøðr* with *Spiut*, preferring to assume that *Sigríðr* was married twice, but otherwise follows Wessén’s line. Sawyer (1988, 38–9), on the other hand, returns to the Lindqvistian interpretation (but making *Sygrøðr* the son of *Holmgæirr* and *Sigríðr*) without discussing the ambiguity.

What all of these interpretations have in common is that they are based on assumptions and impressions, and on what each scholar considered to have been “likely”. Only Brate attempted a reasoned explanation in which he compared the wording of the Ramsund inscription with that in other inscriptions. He may not have gone far enough, however, and it may be that a closer look at the wording of these other inscriptions can help us to determine the relationships involved.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, the inscription does not actually say that *Sygrøðr* was not her son as well as *Holmgæirr*’s, this is merely Wessén’s assumption.

## Double apposition in runic inscriptions

The majority of inscriptions on Swedish rune stones regularly contain three elements: (1) the name(s) of the person(s) commissioning the monument, (2) the name(s) of the person(s) being commemorated, and (3) an explanation of the relationship(s) between the commissioner(s) and the commemorated. These three elements can be expanded or varied in different ways (Thompson 1975, 11–21).

If there is only one commissioner and one person being commemorated, the formula is usually straightforward, as in Sö 137 Aspa (Brate and Wessén 1924–36, 102–4, 399–400):

**pura : raisþi : stin : þansi at : ubi : buanta : sin :**

Where more people are involved, the memorial formula remains straightforward if the deceased is in the same relationship to both (or all) commissioners, as in Sö 2 Axala (Brate and Wessén 1924–36, 1–2):

**sloþi rahnfrjþ þaun · litu · hakua · stain · iftir · ihulbiarn · sun · sin ·**

If the commissioners are in different relationships to the deceased, it is most common to express these in parallel but separate clauses, e.g. Sö 242 Stav (Brate and Wessén 1924–36, 213):

**+ auþa + raisti + stain : at : haralt · buata · sin : auk · fastlauk · at + faþur sin**

In all of these cases, additional information could be provided after the mention of the deceased. This was sometimes merely an added adjective extolling the deceased (e.g. **faþur sin nytan**), or it could be an additional clause describing his life or death, as in Sö 9 Lifsinge (Brate and Wessén 1924–36, 5–6):

**× barkuiþr × auk × þu : helka × raistu × stain × þansi : at · ulf : sun · sint · han  
× entaþis + miþ : ikuari +**

Most relevant to the present discussion, however, are those instances in which the additional information is expressed in a second appositive phrase following the one which explains the relationship of the deceased to the commissioner(s). Often the second apposition specifies the social or moral standing of the deceased, as in Vg 152 Eggvena (Jungner and Svårdström 1940–70, 283–4):

**kunuar : resþi : stin : þani : eftir : kana : bunta : sin : þegn harþa kuþan**

Otherwise it usually contains an expression of relationship. Most often, this provides us with information about the relationship of the deceased to some further person who is not named among the commissioners of the monument, as in Sö 227 Sundby (Brate and Wessén 1924–36, 201–2):

× **rota** × **lit** × **hakua** × **mirki** × **pisa** × **iftir** × **kairfast** × **boröpur** × **sin** × **mag**  
 × **aubiarnar** ×

This was commissioned by the dead man's sister, but his brother(?)*-in-law* is also mentioned. In this instance, the second appositive phrase agrees in its case ending with the first and both are thus in apposition to the name of the deceased. This is a fairly common pattern in Swedish runic inscriptions and a list of all instances<sup>3</sup> is given in Appendix II (p. 133–6, below), grouped according to the relationships expressed by the two (or occasionally more) appositive phrases.

The examples listed conform to the pattern outlined above. Both appositive phrases refer to the deceased and agree in their case with his or her name. The first appositive phrase (which may occasionally precede the name it is in apposition to, see Wessén 1965, III, 100) almost invariably consists of a noun of relationship with the reflexive possessive *sin* or *sina*, pointing back to the commissioner(s) of the monument. The second appositive phrase provides further information about the relationship of the deceased to some other person.

Superficially, the Ramsund inscription appears to conform to this pattern. We have the name of the deceased, *Holmgæirr*, followed by two appositive phrases, both in the genitive and therefore agreeing with the case of his name, and presumably both giving information about his family relationships. However, the usual order of the appositive phrases is reversed, with the one defining a relationship to a third person coming before the one containing a reflexive possessive and indicating his relationship to the commissioner. If this simple transposition of the usual order could be accepted as a possible variation (and it is unique), Ramsund would fit in perfectly with a large number of other inscriptions and we could argue with confidence that *Sigriðr*'s husband was in fact *Holmgæirr*. It should also be noted that the largest group of inscriptions listed in Appendix II is that in which the deceased is identified first as a father and then as a husband. These inscriptions are, of course, all commissioned by a child or children of the deceased, with his wife mentioned as a kind of afterthought. Obviously, Ramsund, if it was commissioned by the wife of the dead man, does not fit into this pattern. But if we ignore the commissioners and concentrate on the appositional phrases about the deceased, the basic construction **eftir** --- **fapur** --- **buanta** --- is identical. It may be that a very common memorial formula

<sup>3</sup> To compile this list I have checked all volumes of *Sveriges runinskrifter* except the first, and notices of new finds regularly published in the journal *Fornvännen*. The examples represent all instances I found among inscriptions which were complete enough to enable it to be determined whether or not they had two appositive phrases following the name of the deceased, and what those phrases were.

influenced the wording of the Ramsund inscription<sup>4</sup> and led to the transposition of the two phrases.<sup>5</sup>

In his study of Old (West) Norse syntax, Nygaard (1906, § 74, n. 2) noted that prose texts prefer simple appositions, while double appositions such as we have been considering occur mainly in poetry (or in the highly rhetorical prose of the *lærd stíl*). One example he gives from the opening of *Helgaqviða Higrvarðzsonar* (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 140) is very like our runic examples, with the name of a person in an oblique case followed by two appositions:

“Sáttu Sigrlinn, Sváfnis dóttur,  
meyna fegrsto í munarheimi?”

A few other examples can be found in Eddic poetry, e.g. *Vǫlospá* 31 and *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu* 14 (but in the latter the name and the appositions are in the nominative). It may be noted that inscriptions with double apposition after the name of the deceased are relatively common in Södermanland (over a quarter of those listed in Appendix II), which is also the province with the most inscriptions in poetic form.

## Conclusion

The ambiguity of the Ramsund inscription can best be resolved by comparing its syntax and structure with those of the memorial formulas in other eleventh-century Swedish runic inscriptions. This comparison has shown that double appositions are fairly common in such inscriptions and that, when they occur, both appositions invariably refer to the same person. The kind of embedded apposition that has been suggested for the Ramsund inscription (giving “for the soul of *Holmgæirr*, father of her husband *Sygrøðr*”) is without parallel. It is much more likely that the Ramsund inscription also contains a double apposition referring to the same person and should therefore be translated as follows:

*Sigríðr*, mother of *Alrikr*, daughter of *Ormr*, made this bridge for the soul of *Holmgæirr*, her husband, father of *Sygrøðr*.

<sup>4</sup> There are in fact no examples that I have found of an inscription commissioned by a wife in which the dead man is identified, first as her husband, then as someone’s father. If the extant material accurately reflects practice, there was thus no established pattern into which the Ramsund inscription could fit neatly.

<sup>5</sup> It could be argued that *Sigríðr* intended the memorial for *Sygrøðr* as much as for her husband – his importance would be indicated not only by his mention directly after his father but also by the pictures of his legendary namesake.

The family tree we get from this conclusion is reproduced in Appendix III/A (p. 136, below).

It is undeniable that whoever formulated the Ramsund inscription did so rather clumsily, or so it seems to us. In fact, there is a neat symmetry in the inscription which must have been intended and probably caused the confusion: both *Sigriðr* and *Holmgæirr* are first characterised as someone's parent before we get further information about their family relationships. To achieve this pleasing symmetry, the usual order of appositional phrases about the deceased had to be reversed.

Also supporting the proposed solution that *Holmgæirr* was *Sigriðr*'s husband is the fact that we do not have any other inscriptions commissioned by a woman for her father-in-law, while we do have nearly 60 inscriptions commissioned solely by a woman for her husband (sometimes including other commemokees), about 75 in which a woman is joint commissioner along with other members of her family for her husband (and sometimes others) and over 20 commissioned by other family members in which the dead man's wife is mentioned.<sup>6</sup> Most inscriptions are in memory of very close relatives and we rarely have inscriptions for relatives by marriage apart from spouses, although it should be noted that there are two inscriptions in which a man commemorates his mother-in-law (on his own in U 897 and together with his wife in U 914) and four or five in which men are involved in monuments to their fathers-in-law (U 774, U 1051, U 1110 and possibly U 590 where they are the main commissioners, and U 846, where their wives are the main commissioners). Of course even a single example of a type of commemoration is enough evidence to show that it was possible. There are isolated instances of relationships such as niece/uncle (Ög 81, although this inscription is quite problematic) and granddaughter/maternal grandfather (U 472, a straightforward inscription), but both of these involve blood relatives.

Finally, if like Wessén we find multiple marriages a complication and would like to simplify *Sigriðr*'s emotional history, it might be worth considering whether *Spiut* (whose name means "spear") was not in fact a nickname for *Holmgæirr* (the second element of whose name also means "spear"), being the only husband of *Sigriðr* and giving the family tree reproduced in Appendix III/B (p. 136, below). This would mean that the memorial stones from Kjula and Bro were commissioned by *Sigriðr*'s son *Alrikr* and daughter *Ginnlaug*. The similarities in style and construction of the three inscriptions would then be a result of the two children consciously imitating the memorial commissioned by their mother for their father.

<sup>6</sup> These figures are based on my own calculations, but not dissimilar ones can be deduced from Sawyer 1988.

## Acknowledgements

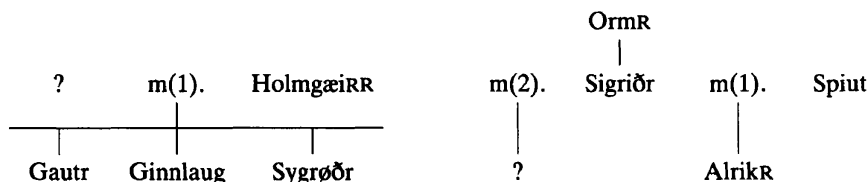
Thanks are due to Michael Barnes, Bridget Morris and Henrik Williams for their friendly and constructive suggestions about many points of detail in this article. However, I alone remain responsible for the final version.

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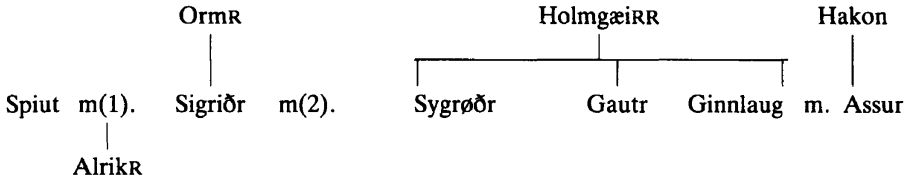
## Appendix I

*Lindqvist 1914–15:*

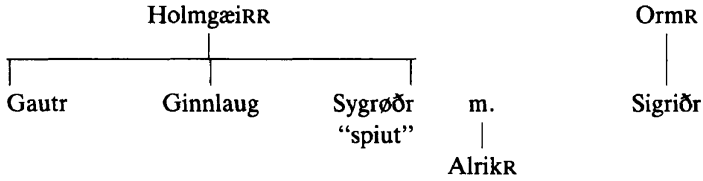




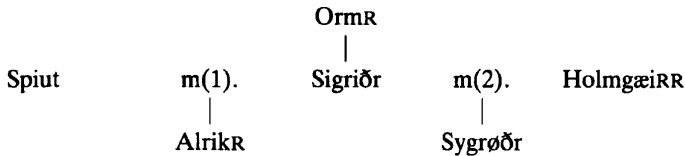
*Brate 1924, Ruprecht 1958, Åhlén 1986:*



*Wessén 1949:*



*Sawyer 1988:*



## Appendix II

In this list, the name of the person commemorated and the double apposition on this name are *italicized*. Normally, only that portion of each inscription which contains the memorial formula is cited.

### Sources:

*Sveriges runinskrifter* (1900–). Kungl. vitterhets historie och antikvitets akademien, Stockholm.

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*Sö*: III. *Södermanlands runinskrifter*. Eds. Erik Brate and Elias Wessén. 1924–36.  
*Sm*: IV. *Smålands runinskrifter*. Ed. Ragnar Kinander. 1935–61.  
*Vg*: V. *Västergötlands runinskrifter*. Eds. Hugo Jungner and Elisabeth Svärdström. 1940–71.  
*U*: VI–IX. *Upplands runinskrifter*. Eds. Elias Wessén and Sven B.F. Jansson. 1940–58.  
*G*: XI–XII. *Gotlands runinskrifter*. Eds. Sven B.F. Jansson, Elias Wessén and Elisabeth Svärdström. 1962–78.

- Vs: XIII. *Västmanlands runinskrifter*. Ed. Sven B.F. Jansson. 1964.  
 Nä: XIV. *Närkes runinskrifter. Värmlands runinskrifter*. Ed. Sven B.F. Jansson. 1975–78.  
 F 81: Helmer Gustavson (1986), “Runfynd 1984”. *Fornvännen* 81, pp. 84–9.

*brother/brother-in-law*

Sö 227 rota lit hakua mirki þisa iftíR *kairfast boroþur sin mag aubiarnaR*

*brother/heir*

U 354 kulauh auk hulma litu arisa stain þinsa afti *suin bruþur sin uafra arfua*

*brother/son*

- Ög 32 sin uk þurburn uk satar þR ritu stin þina iftr *þurkl brþr sin sun sistm*  
 Ög 66 ikiualtr ristþi stin þisi eftíR *stufialt bruþur sin* suain halkuþan *sun sbialbuþa*  
 Sö 290 þuríR auk suaen litu raisa stain at *uinut baurþur sen sun hlku*  
 Sö 360 þurstin reisti stin þisi iffir *bruuR sin þurbn sun ru-ts*  
 U 200 finuiþr risti stin þina iftíR *bruþur sin þurþr þialfa sun* kuþ halbi at hns auk  
 kus muþ íR hn k rþi bru at *bruþur sin auk osa muþir þira*  
 U 968 stoþi auk sihtiarfr þorker litu rista stin at *aistulf broþur sin sun þorkerþa*  
 U 974 inkulfr uk yntr litu raisa sta-n iftíR *inkialt broþur sin uk sun kunulfs*

*son/brother*

- Sö 3 kefluk auk kyla þau litu raisa stain þisa at *styfialt sun sin broþur iluka*  
 Sö 179 tula lit raisa stain þinsat *sun sin haralt bruþur inkuars*  
 Vs 13 fulkuíþr raisti staina þasi ala at *sun sin hiþin bruþur anutár*

*uncle/son*

Sö 296 oskautrR raisti stain þinsi aftíR *airnfast mu . . . uþur sin sun kuþiks* uk aftíR  
 ulafu kunu sina

*grandfather/father*

F 81 . . . asmu-tr . . . ris-- runaR eftíR *stein faþurs faþur sin auk faþur siba ok*  
*geirbiarnaR aok ulfs*

*father/son*

- Sm 85 ku-m-R auk þir bruþr ristu s . . . nsi eftíR *martin sin faþur sun hurstins*  
 Sm 101 kuntkel sati sten þansi eftíR *kunar faþur sin sun hrufa*  
 U 229 halfntan auk tubi litu risa stin at *huta faþur sin sun þorbiarn*

- U 922 ikimuntr uk þorþr iarł uk uikibiarn litu risa stain at *ikifast faður sin* sturn maþr sum for til girka hut *sun ionha* uk at igulbiarn
- U 1146 raþulfr auk funtin auk anuntra bruþr ritu stain þinsa abtir *kara faður sin* in mal sbaka *sun uks* i suanobu

*father/brother*

- U 410 sturbiarn lit raisa stai . . . ftir *sikstain faður* ---- *broþur hulmst* . . . ns

*father/husband*

- Ög 194 tan auk ---- ristu stin þina iftir *kruk faður sin bunta þuru*
- Sö 31 hrualtr auk ulef raistu stain þina at *þuri faður* kuþan *bunta altrifaR*
- Sö 306 . . . rn auk fasti raistu stain at *kilbeaurN faður sin buata þor kiarþi*
- Sö 328 þurulfr auk untrlahu þau raistu stina þasi auk bru kiarþu -t *kuþui faður sin buanta asu*
- U 35 aþisl auk ays- auk ---fr þair litu raisa stain þinsa at *uikisl faður sin boanta irfriþaR*
- U 43 ofaigr ok sikmar ok fraibiarn þir raistu at *iarut faþr sin bota gunum*
- U 647 kil auk lit risa stn at *sikterf faður sin boanta hulmfriþir*
- U 829 furkuntr auk kuanr þnir litu hakua stain þinsa at *anut faður sin boanta auþfriþaR*
- U 873 þikfastr lit raisa stain þinsa at *hulmkair faður sin* koþan kuþ hielbi sal hans *boanta ikuR*
- Nä 28 suen let rita stin eftir *faður sin kunuat* . . . *tahrulauhar*
- Nä 32 ulfr auk anuntr titu reisa stein eftir *hu*----. . . ----*ur sin boana kunuR*

*father/husband/brother*

- Sö 8 kyla auk raknþruþr þaR raistu stain at *uraip faður sin buna auluafaR bruþur biarnaR*

*father/other*

- Sm 76 tufa risti stin þina eftir *ura faður sin stalara hkunaR iarls*

*husband/son*

- U 617 kinluk hulmkis tutir systir sukrupaR auk þaira kaus aun lit keara bru þesi auk raisa stain þina eftir *asur bunta sin sun hakunaR iarls*
- U 744 kiþa lit raisa stain at *þorterf boanta sin sun kuþuaukaR*

*husband/brother*

- Vg 171 þura kiarþi kuml þesi eftir *tusta bunta sin herluks bruþur*

*wife/sister*

Vg 79 katil karþi stan þinsi aftr *katu kunu sina sustur þurils*

*wife/daughter*

G 111 siba raisti stain eftir *roþiauf kunu sina totur roþkais* i anikum

*mother/daughter*

U 112 rahnuatr lit rista runar efr *fastui moþur sina onems totR*

*stepdaughter/daughter*

U 312 kunar sun farulfs lit kiara mirki fr sial *iufurfast stiubu sin totur hulmtis*

*miscellaneous with 'and'*

Sö 292 uihmar let rai— saen þina at *iaruta mah auk felha sin auk buþur ka . . . a*

Sö 297 omuþa auk muþa litu lakia stain þino at *sirif bunta sin auk bruþur sikstains auk hulmstains*

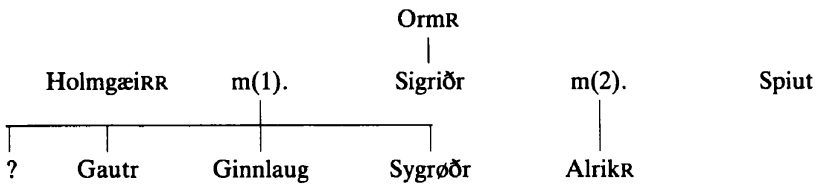
*miscellaneous non-reflexive*

U 79 ernfastr iuk stain at *bersu botba uikerþar sun þorkerþar*

U 1139 huskarl auk tiuri faþrkar tuair rastu stain þinaftir *triurkair bruþur huskarlsa auk sun tiura*

## Appendix III

A:



B:

