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The Great Goddess of the north

In studies of religion and mythology the figure of a Great Goddess is frequently discussed. She is often recognized in the imperious and violent deities of Middle Eastern tradition: Anat, Ishtar-Inanna, Cybele, or Astarte.¹ Another form of the Great Goddess has also been postulated as an archetype. She is said to have existed in a pre-patriarchal society and to have embodied the prime forces of life, birth, death, and regeneration. She ruled supremely, but she was robbed of her powers by a male-dominated group of warrior gods.²

In the present study the term Great Goddess does not pertain to the reconstructed archetype but to a female godhead of great stature, as exemplified by the Mediterranean divinities. In the definition of this essay such a goddess is a many-layered creature who does not belong to the faith of simple men. She arises when smaller communities have been gathered to form a kingdom or a state, and many local deities have merged in her persona. From the close protectress of a village lad she would become the companion of a king. The entrance of foreign forces and influences from abroad would have worked their way upon the figure. Intellectuals and priests would have left their impact on her shape.

In this paper I wish to trace the presence of this kind of deity among the Germanic peoples and to explore her composition. Scholars of Germanic myth have, on the whole, paid little attention to female godheads, and a study, as the one at hand, has as yet not been undertaken.

A superficial view does not reveal the existence of a Great Goddess in the Germanic realm. Tacitus of the first century speaks of the three great, male gods Hercules, Mars, and Mercury;³ Adam of Bremen

¹ See, for instance, Helck.

² See, for instance, Gimbutas.

³ Tacitus, ch. 40.

(eleventh century) names the male gods Óðinn, Þórr, and Freyr.⁴ Yet Tacitus describes the ritual of the goddess Nerthus more fully than the ritual of other gods;⁵ a day of the week bears the name of the goddess Frigg; place names in Scandinavia testify to honor rendered to the goddess Freyja.⁶ It may be that the features of a Great Goddess are merely obscured. Closer examination indeed reveals a female deity of great stature in three main forms and in three main areas of the Germanic world: Freyja linked with areas of Sweden, Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr with the Hlaðir Jarls of Norway, and Percht-Holda with the peoples of the continental mainland.

The lands which were inhabited by the Germanic nations are by no means uniform. The plains of northern Germany stretch from a central mountainous region to the North Sea and the Baltic, and were employed for agriculture since the Neolithic. And Denmark shares the ecological and geographic conditions of her German neighbor. The southern part of the Scandinavian peninsula is fertile and the coast is favorable to seafaring. Much trade developed in harbors, such as Birka on the Mälars lake of Sweden and in the Oslo Fjord. Agriculture ceases further north while the coastal regions still offer grazing ground for flocks and herds. Yet more northerly the land becomes hostile to human habitation, and frost and cold more menacing and deadly, while the heavy woods of the northern regions provide a home for animals of many kinds. We may expect that more people entered and settled the southern, fertile areas and here the godheads would bear the imprint of many cultures.

The goddess Freyja of Eddic myth

She is the most complex of the potent female forces.⁷ She herself, her brother Freyr, and her father Njörðr belong to a sub-group of the gods: the Vanir who came to dwell with the Æsir in Ásgarðr (gyl 23). She has one (gyl 35) or two daughters (HKR I, ch. 10), both named 'jewel', whom we never meet. Her husband Óðr left her and she searches for him in many lands. Tears she sheds for her lost husband

⁴ *Magistri Adam IV*, 26.

⁵ Tacitus, ch. 44.

⁶ de Vries II, 308–11.

⁷ See also: Motz 1993 a, 93–101.

turn to gold (sk 36). Thus she is not presented as a wife or mother and she is, essentially, unmated.

She clearly is the most important of the female godheads, and she alone is the heroine of an Eddic lay — *Hyndluljóð*.⁸ She is desired more than others for her beauty; a giant mason and the giant Þrymr demand Freyja, rather than another woman, as the payment for a precious gift (gyl 42, þrym). And Snorri Sturluson calls her the noblest of the goddesses (gyl 24).

Myths

According to one account she was the mistress of Óðinn who, in this story, was a human chieftain. In this myth she beheld one day a necklace of great beauty which had been crafted by four artisans. She was so entranced by the splendid jewel that she paid the demanded price: a loving embrace for each of the four craftsmen-smiths. In this way she gained her attribute: the necklace Brisingamen. When later it was stolen from her by the crafty Loki she instigated an unceasing battle to regain her possession (sor).

In the poem *Hyndluljóð* the goddess forces the cave-dwelling Hyndla to reveal the ancestry of Óttarr, Freyja's human lover. This knowledge would help him to claim his paternal heritage, i.e., the kingship of the land. This lore is disclosed as the two, Freyja on a boar and Hyndla on a wolf, travel together on the 'road of the dead' — *valsinni*.

Goddess of Love

While Freyja is not shown as a wife or mother she is clearly drawn in her sexual encounters. She is accused by Loki of having been the 'whore' of all the Æsir and Elves who are assembled in the festive hall (ls 30). Hyndla compares her to a goat in heat:⁹

⁸ The *Hyndluljóð* — song of Hyndla — appears with other mythical poems in the so-called *Poetic Edda*. Together with the *Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson (thirteenth century) it provides one of the most important sources of Germanic myth.

⁹ hdl 47;

Rannt at Æði	ey þreyiandi
scutuz þér fleiri	und fyrirscurto
hleypr þú, eðlvina	úti á náttom,
sem með hōfrom	Heiðrún fari.

Always in heat	you ran to Óðr
and many crept	beneath your skirt.
Sister, you run	out at night
even as Heiðrún	runs after bucks.

And once she was discovered in her brother's arms (such unions were the custom in her family) (ls 32). She offered herself to each one of the artisans who made Brisingamen, and she had a human lover — Óttarr. Snorri names her the 'Goddess of Love' — *ástaguð* — and declares that she is pleased by songs of love (sk 20). Surely she is a creature of strong sexual desires.

Relation to war

She is also allied with the craft of war. Daily she rides to strife to receive half of those who were slain (gr 14); she instigated an unceasing fight to regain her jewel and her manor bears the name: *folcvangr* 'battlefield'; she rides the boar Hildisvíni 'boar of battle' (hdl 7).

Relation to kingship

She is instrumental in gaining Óttarr's kingship and she is the mistress of the chieftain Óðinn (sor). Her name Freyja marks her as a ruler and a queen.

Relation to riches

The tears she sheds for her husband turn to gold and gold may be defined in poetic diction as 'shower of Freyja's eyes' (sk 36). Her daughters' names both mean 'jewel'; and she owns a precious gem.

Character

We gain the impression of an emotional and imperious being. She wanders in bitter sorrow as she searches for her husband and she is strong and loyal to her lover Óttarr. She alone has the courage to pour ale for a threatening giant who had invaded the stronghold of the gods (sk 17). She also explodes in fury when it is suggested that she be married to the giant Pymr (pym 13). She instigates unceasing warfare to regain Brisingamen. Turning in anger against Hyndla she threatens her

with death by fire. Thus she is strong in her protectiveness and strong and fierce in her hostility.

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It is often claimed that Freyja is a power of fertility.¹⁰ Yet she has no impact on the fruitfulness of women or on the fruitbearing powers of the land and of the flocks. Her strongest links are with sexuality, wealth, and war. In these aspects she has counterparts in female divinities of the ancient Middle East.

Middle eastern analogies

Ishtar-Inanna

The Sumerian Inanna and the Akkadian Ishtar have fused in the texts and cannot be truly separated. Both are strong in their sexuality. It is so vital an element in their make-up that all desire ceases when the godhead descends into the underworld:¹¹

The bull springs not upon the cow, the ass impregnates not the jenny. / In the street the man impregnates not the maiden. The man lies in his (own) chamber, / The maiden lies down on her side.

Inanna herself is consumed by longing for sexual embraces, as expressed in her love songs to Dumuzi, the husband of her youth.¹² And the list of lovers, enumerated by Gilgamesh is long. Like Freyja, the goddess is mistress of a ruler, and, like Freyja, she helps him to the throne. He will be king because he has assuaged her erotic longing, and she declares:¹³

Since by his fair hand my loins were pressed
since on my pure vulva he laid his hands . . .
the shepherdship of the land . . . I will declare
for him . . .

¹⁰ As by Turville-Petre 177; Polomé: entry Freyja; de Vries II, 307.

¹¹ ANET 108; "The Descent of Ishtar."

¹² The love poems are probably the most striking feature of Sumero-Akkadian literature. In ever varying images the poems describe the goddess' courtship; they dwell on her beauty, her sexual longing, and her fulfilment.

¹³ Klein 137.

And King Shulgi claims that he was chosen 'for the vulva of Inanna'.

Like Freyja, Inanna-Ishtar is a goddess of many jewels. These are taken from her, one at every portal, as she descends into the underworld: her rings, her crown, her necklace, hand and ankle rings, breast ornaments, as if they were elements of life.¹⁴ She is also a harlot, the hierodule of the gods. A hymn describes her going to the ale house to search for a lover:¹⁵

O, harlot you set out for the ale house . . .
to solicit for a lover . . . you my lady dress
as one of no repute . . . the beads of a harlot
you put around your neck.

She is also the patron goddess of the harlots and a girl of pleasure may be called 'daughter of Inanna'.¹⁶ Inanna's necklace bears the name: 'Come man, come'. If we note that this necklace is the sign of the harlot's calling, and if we remember that Freyja received her jewel as wages for her love we may find yet another parallel between the two divinities and another element of significance for Freyja's attribute.¹⁷

Like Freyja, Inanna-Ishtar is linked with human warfare: in a hymn of self-praise she proclaims herself a warrior:¹⁸

When I stand in the front line of battle /
I am the leader of all the lands, / . . .
when I stand in the midst of battle / I am
the heart of the battle.

Hammurabi designates her as 'Mistress of the Battlefield'.

Ishtar-Inanna is a vengeful creature; she wishes to destroy Gilgamesh who spurned her love; she sends Dumuzi to the underworld because he had not sufficiently mourned her disappearance, and she creates plagues in a country where she had been violated in her sleep.¹⁹ Yet, like Freyja, she feels deep sorrow at the loss of a beloved

¹⁴ The Akkadian version of the descent, related of Ishtar, notes: a crown, earrings, necklaces, breast ornaments, belt of birth stones, hand and ankle rings; Winter 304.

¹⁵ Jacobsen 140; BE XXXI, no 12-20.

¹⁶ Winter 342, citing Falkenstein 1964, 116.

¹⁷ Another Eddic goddess was said to have received wages for her love: Gefion obtained a bracelet for embracing a young lad, ls 22.

¹⁸ Jacobsen 137, SBH no. 56, obv. 16-38.

¹⁹ Dietz 89; entry: Inanna 6, citing Kramer 1949, 399-405.

being, as she weeps for the "sweet husband, who went away, who . . . looking for pasture was killed in the pasture."²⁰

Anat

A goddess of the younger generation is also prominent among the Canaanites, as sister of the mighty Baal and as the daughter of El and Ascherah.²¹ She is not as sexual a creature as Inanna, and her emotions center on her brother, a weather god and a force of fruitfulness. When this divinity is slain she wanders in violent sorrow through the country, gashing her forehead and her arms, and she cries in anguish: "Baal is dead."²² When she comes upon his slayer she hacks him to pieces and throws the bits across the fields. This action appears to be effective in Baal's return to life. And once, like Freyr, the brother held the sister in his arms.²³

The goddess is of overwhelming violence. She threatens her own father with assault when he does not accede to her wishes.²⁴

I shall smash him to the ground like a lamb /
I shall make his grey hair to blood . . .

When a young prince obtains a bow which she claims as her own she descends on him in fury and inadvertently takes his life.²⁵ She slaughters 'people from the shore of the sea and from the west' to wade knee-deep in their blood. In Egyptian iconography she is seen with a helmet, spear, and battle axe, as the protectress of the Pharaoh.²⁶ Ramses III speaks of Anat as his 'shield'.

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The resemblances between Freyja and her eastern goddesses are strong. All three are essentially unmated, married only temporarily, and their links with motherhood are weak. They care deeply and deeply mourn the loss of a beloved; yet they are also vengeful and

²⁰ Jacobsen 50, RA VIII (1911) 161ff.

²¹ Pope and Rölling, entry: Anat; Motz 1993 a, 103-04.

²² Gaster 194, Tablets IAB in the enumeration of Virrolleaud 1931, 1934.

²³ Lipinski 68.

²⁴ Winter 232, citing Beyerlin 200 CT 13 IV/V, 6-13.

²⁵ Gaster 294, Tablets VAB; *La légende phénicienne de Danel*; Virrolleaud 1936.

²⁶ Stele ANEP 473 in the British Museum; Pope and Rölling, entry: Anat 1.

impetuous. Theirs is a close, protective alliance with a human king. All three show vestiges of an earlier form as Mistress of Wild Beasts: Anat swoops as a bird upon the prince;²⁷ Inanna-Ishtar is often stationed on a lion, and Freyja rides a woodland beast. All three are placed within a family as members of the younger generation. Freyja's relation to her brother has a parallel in Anat's relation to her brother Baal, and Freyja's sexuality a parallel in Inanna's erotic adventures and the selling of her love. Both Freyja and Inanna are in possession of 'many names', indicating a fusion of many local deities. All three are creatures of the air: Freyja and Anat owning wings,²⁸ and Inanna as the 'Queen of Heaven'.²⁹

The many resemblances between Freyja and the eastern goddesses cannot have arisen by accident. I suggest that the Indo-European tribes had experienced the cultural impact of the Mediterranean nations, from whom they had also learned their agricultural techniques.³⁰ This heritage was brought by the tribes, such as the Germanic people, to the various places in which they settled. A Bronze Age statuette, found in Denmark, represents a naked female figure with a marked vulva, wearing a torque. She fully fits the image of the sexual goddess (statuette from Farø; Brøndsted II, ill. 225).

The northern form

While Freyja shares aspects with Mediterranean divinities she exhibits others that make her a creature of the North.

Goddess of Seafarers

This quality of Freyja is not usually noted. She is, however, the daughter of Njörðr, a seafaring god, who dwells in the 'place of ships', the 'harbor' — Nóatún. To him one prays for good fortune in seafaring and fishing (gyl 23). Freyja, too, was born in Nóatún, and thus she also

²⁷ As in footnote 25; Pope and Rölling, entry: Anat 5.

²⁸ Freyja has a feather garment which enables her to fly (Prym 3); Pope and Rölling, entry: Anat 6; she is shown with wings on an ivory plate from the palace of Ugarit.

²⁹ The name In-anna actually means: Queen of Heaven; Dietz, entry: Inanna-līstar, I, a; Ishtar is symbolized by a star.

³⁰ It is usually believed that the Indo-Europeans were nomadic cattleherders, as by Bruce Lincoln. It is quite clear, however, that they knew agriculture, possessing words for 'furrow', 'barley', 'grinding'; see Gramkrelidze.

is a creature of the harbor. Her habitation is Sessrúmnir and this name appears in Snorri's list of ships. The noun *rúm* has, in fact, a meaning of 'room on a ship, rowing bench', and Sessrúmnir would mean 'place of rowing benches'. Freyja's by-name Mardöll — *mar* 'ocean' — would relate her to the sea.

We know that Freyja's brother also owns a mighty boat — Skíðblaðnir — and that he too was born in 'the place of ships' (gyl 24). Thus the Vanir gods all have a linkage with travel of the sea. These deities are also rich: Freyr and his father are the 'wealth giving gods' (sk 6, 7), and all three are linked with the royal office. Thus Freyr's by-name Yngvi also has the meaning 'king'. Just these affiliations of the Vanir: wealth, seafaring, and royal rule, were noted by Tacitus as characteristic elements in the life of the Suiones, inhabitants of Sweden. These sent their swift boats across the sea, were ruled by mighty kings, and it 'was an honor to be rich' (Tacitus, ch. 44).

In the area of Uppland, Sweden, sea trading had indeed been vital since the Bronze Age and through harbors and market towns much wealth was created.³¹ Here too kings arose who were able to consolidate their powers and eventually unite the provinces of Sweden. We find indeed a massing of Vanir names in inscriptions and locations of the area of the Uppland kings; into this region the Vanir gods were placed by medieval mythographers.³² Freyja thus became the priestess of the temple of Uppsala which had been established by her brother (HKR I, chs. 4, 10). We may conclude that Freyja and her family were shaped in some measure by their stay in the domain of a rich, seafaring nation and its mighty kings.

Priestess and Witch

Freyja was made a priestess at the temple of Uppsala and she kept up the sacrificial rites (HKR I, chs. 4, 10). The saga also relates that she knew the magic skill, called *seiðr*, which she imparted to the Aesir. In *Sörla þáttur* she instigated unceasing strife by bewitching a young warrior with a potion of forgetfulness:³³

³¹ Jones 34, 78, 79; such towns were Birka on the Mälars lake and Hedeby in Denmark. In the sixth century Jordanes speaks of the Suihones as a mighty nation which sends its wares to southern markets; cited by Jones 25.

³² He is called 'God of the Swedes' in *Íslendingabók* ch. 12; personal appellations containing the name Frey- occur most numerous in runic inscriptions in the Uppland region of Sweden; Beck 92.

³³ *Sörla þáttur* — sor, ch. 7.

Heðinn was seized so forcefully by his bewilderment and lack of remembrance through the ale which he had drunk, that he could do nothing else but follow her counsel; and he did not remember that he and Högni had been joined as blood brothers.

The fight between the warring factions never ceased because the goddess raised, through her magic powers, the dead to life and to continued carnage. She also was derided by Loki as a witch — *fordæða* (Is 32).

Freyja's magic skills indeed belong with her northern environment. The *seiðr*, as described in some sagas, is a performance conducted by a gifted individual, man or woman, who attains a state of heightened emotions by various means, and in this state is able to foresee or even influence the future.³⁴ The practice resembles the magic séance of a shaman, as it is widely performed among arctic and subarctic nations.

The drink of forgetfulness — *óminnisveig* — poured by Freyja, matches the drink *óminnisveig* — poured by Grímhildr for Gúðrún which was full of 'evil and noisome' things and which induced Gúðrún to her disastrous marriage (Gudr II, 22, 23). The effectiveness of the magic potion is very visible in the Norse texts, and in its positive form it brings wisdom, inspiration, and immortality.³⁵

The poem *Hyndluljóð* portrays Freyja fully in tune with Norse beliefs. She gains wisdom from a chthonic creature, Hyndla, who dwells in a cave, as Óðinn gains knowledge from a prophetess, lying in her tomb (bd), and as he gains wisdom from a sibyl who rises through the nine realms of the underworld (vsp 2). This scenario is based on the belief which underlies the phenomenon of shamanism, that to obtain wisdom, healing, or salvation one must leave the world of men, and one must visit the chthonic and celestial spheres.³⁶ In the Eddic poem Freyja indeed engages in a journey to Valhall, Óðinn's habitation; she rides on the 'road of the dead' — *valsinni* — (hdl 6), on the 'road of the gods' — *godveg* — (hdl 5), to the 'sacred dwelling' — *vé heilag* — (hdl 1).

In the poem Freyja also functions as a priestess. She will offer a sacrifice to Þórr, ask him to be friendly towards Hyndla (hdl 4); she is accused by Hyndla of wishing to 'question' or to 'test' her (hdl 6). The

³⁴ Such a performance is described in *Eiríks saga rauða*, ch. 4 and in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 3.

³⁵ See: Motz 1993 b.

³⁶ See: Findeisen; Merkur.

verbs denoting her activities are: *blóta*, *biðia*, *freista*. All three belong to the cultic activities enumerated in the Eddic poem *Hávamál* (144): "... do you know how to test?/do you know how to pray? do you know how to render sacrifice?"³⁷ And, in the manner of a priest or priestess, Freyja praises the gifts bestowed by Óðinn on the world of men: the gift of song on the poet, arms and victory on the warrior, good sailing wind on the sailor (hdl 2, 3).

The Dog Affinity of the Goddess

The name Hyndla has the meaning 'small dog'; she and Freyja are closely related; the goddess names her 'sister' (hdl 1), and Hyndla addresses Freyja as 'relative' — *eðlvina* (hdl 46, 47). It is difficult to assess Freyja's relation to the animal. We may consider that Freyja's action in the poem resembles a shaman's journey. In such an undertaking shamans are dependent on the assistance of their helping spirits and these are often in the form of beasts. In order to gain the support of his animal familiar the shaman would imitate his behavior, the wriggling of a snake, the grunting of a bear, or the barking of a dog. It is possible that Hyndla represents Freyja's animal helper whose action is vital to the undertaking. If we accept this explanation we might find an understanding for the blasphemous ditty concerning Freyja.³⁸

I do not want a deity who barks
Freyja seems a bitch to me.

The Warrior Goddess

In her warlike aspect Freyja blends with the Valkyries, the battlemaids of northern myth.³⁹ Like these she rides to strife to receive the bodies of dead heroes (or to choose who is to be slain). In *Sörla þátrr* (sor) Freyja bears the Valkyrie's name: Göndul. Freyja's steed, a boar, in turn belongs with Norse symbolism of warfare: a helmet may be designated as *hildigöltr*, *valgöltr*, *hildisvín* 'boar of battle' and it may be crested by a boar.

³⁷ For a full discussion of the verb *freista*, see: Ruggnerini 159–62; for a discussion of *senda*, see: Liberman.

³⁸ Hjalti Skeggjason, skj I, 131.

³⁹ Motz 1993 a, 73–4.

The Eddic Goddess

The *Hyndluljóð* exhibits a pattern which also appears in other Eddic poems.⁴⁰ A frame is set; much information is brought forth, in monologue or dialogue, and occupies the bulk of the composition; then the frame closes. The frame has been compared to a stage on which a performance is enacted; the bulk of poem thus would contain the vestiges of a play, of probably a ritual nature.⁴¹ A close look, however, reveals that no clearly dramatic action is unfolded on the 'stage'. What we find instead is a pronouncement: a prophecy (*Baldrs Draumar*), a curse (*För Scírmis*), a disclosure of wisdom (*Vafbrúðnismál*, *Grimnismál*), information on esoteric speech (*Alvissmál*). The action, the clash of forces and its resolution, is accomplished within the frame.⁴² The pronouncement is of magical or religious significance, and we may wonder why it is enveloped and enclosed.

It may be observed that in the poems cited a ruling god meets a member of a different race: a sibyl, a giantess, a human king, a giant, a dwarf, and the god always subjugates his opponent. The frame thus affirms the power of the dwellers of *Ásgarðr*. In the *Hyndluljóð* Freyja forces her 'sister in the cave' to disclose knowledge which she does not wish to give and to travel on a journey on which she does not wish to go. In the end Hyndla explodes in anger, possibly because she understands that she has been used against her will (hdl 46, 47).

The scenario of *Hyndluljóð* is also met in the poem *Baldrs Draumar*. Óðinn seeks and wakes a dead sibyl and questions her against her will about events fated for his son. She answers, but in the end, like Hyndla, she turns in wrath against the deity.⁴³ The frame poems cited appear to have complex functions; they convey or preserve numinous lore and they affirm the superior powers of the ruling gods. The god achieves his victory through speech, through certain poetic formulae, hence through his power over the spoken word. Þórr thus declares in the poem *Alvissmál*: "With many words I have ensnared you (alv 35)." We may interpret the poems as expressions of an Eddic theology: the quest to establish the

⁴⁰ Beck 7–27.

⁴¹ As by Phillpotts.

⁴² Motz 1996 (forthcoming).

⁴³ It is usually believed that the wrath of the prophetess arises on her recognition of the god, as by Fleck: but in the *Hyndluljóð* there is no sudden recognition.

legitimacy of the ruling divinities.⁴⁴ Through the *Hyndluljóð* Freyja has become a missionary of this faith.

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We have encountered the following components of the goddess Freyja: a divinity of sexuality and war, such had arisen in the Middle East, is also a deity of seafaring kings, a creature steeped deeply in the magical and ritual practices of the North, who shares the warlike nature of the northern battlemaids, and a promoter of Eddic theology.

Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr — the northern goddess

Þorgerðr does not belong to the family of Eddic gods. One sentence only is devoted to her in Snorri's Edda. He states that she was the daughter of King Hölg after whom Hálogaland is named and that she as well as her father received sacrifice in their honor (sk 44). Thus we know that she belongs to the northern part of Norway and that she was worshipped as a divinity. References in sagas show her close alliance with the Hlaðir Jarls who held sway over the northern areas or Norway.⁴⁴

Her temple stands in a clearing of the forest; it is surrounded by a wooden fence and richly decorated with gold and silver carvings. The image of the goddess, in turn, is adorned in a costly manner. Into this sanctuary Jarl Hákon leads his friend, Sigurðr Brestason, before the latter sets out on a dangerous journey. Through gifts the Jarl shows his devotion to the goddess and advises his friend to do the same. If she is kindly inclined she will allow it that a ring is taken from her finger. And, indeed, the lady is, eventually, gracious to Sigurðr.⁴⁵

In a bitter moment of his life, when the Jarl must face his enemy in battle (at Hjörungavágr) the Jarl prostrates himself before his *fulltrúa* — his fully faithful — friend and implores her for her help. She is not moved by his promise of gold and silver, nor by his promise of the

⁴⁴ During the ninth century the Jarls of Hlaðe rose to prominence from their base in Hálogaland, and extended their rule southwards. They attained virtual sovereignty over northern Norway during the reign of Harald hárfagri and Hakon góði. After 974 A.D. Jarl Hákon executed full sovereignty over almost all of Norway. He was the last of the pagan rulers and a staunch upholder of pagan faith until he was defeated by Óláfr Tryggvason and killed by his own thrall. Davidson.

⁴⁵ Flat I, 144–45; *Færeyinga þáttur* ch. 23.

lives of many men, but she yields to his entreaties when he offers her the life of his young son, aged seven. As the battle starts the sky darkens, lightning flashes, thunder sounds, and Þorgerðr and her sister are apparent in the midst of carnage. It seems, as if an arrow issued from every finger and every arrow took a man.⁴⁶

Then I heard the storm of Hölgabrúðr / raging grimly
from the North / rained hail unto men's shields, / here sky
stones battered the fierce eyed warriors / to cause
bitter death.

In another episode the Jarl turns to the goddess when he wishes to avenge a slight. Through her magic powers she endows a piece of wood with life, equips the man with a spear and sends him on his journey. And indeed he kills the offender and thus avenges the insult to the Jarl.⁴⁷

The worship of Þorgerðr was also brought to Iceland. Here also a sanctuary was erected for her in a clearing, and here she was honored together with Þórr in his carriage and her sister Irpa. This temple was later burned by an angry settler.⁴⁸

Þorgerðr's importance to pagan faith is affirmed by the fury of Óláfr Tryggvason, the Christian king who defeated Jarl Hakon. He set fire to her temple and her image and dispersed her treasure in his missionary zeal.⁴⁹

Since the divine stature of Þorgerðr is assured by her sanctuaries, her acceptance of sacrifices, her powerful help, and the wrath of the Church, and since she was not a goddess of the Eddic pantheon, we must assume that Eddic myth does not encompass all there is to north-Germanic religion. The study of Þorgerðr thus would allow us a glimpse into beliefs which are ignored in the poems and prose of Eddic myth and show us the godhead of a different faith.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *Jomsvikinga saga*, ch. 34. The poem is by Bjarni Kolbeinsson, skj II, 7, 32. The battle of Hjörungavágr was between Jarl Hákon and Danish and Wendish troops. Legendary tradition transformed these forces into the 'Jomsvikings', supposedly a group of professional warriors.

⁴⁷ Flat I, 213; Óláfs s. *Tryggvasonar*, ch. 173.

⁴⁸ *Harðar s. ok Hólmverja*, ch. 19; her sanctuary in Norway also was destroyed by an angry man, according to *Njáls s.* ch. 88.

⁴⁹ Óláfs s. *helga*, ch. 112; HKR.

⁵⁰ The figure of Þorgerðr has been discussed by Norah Chadwick. She believes that the Jarl had relations with two women, one human, Þora (who was in fact his mistress) and one superhuman: Þorgerðr, for such was the pattern of archaic faith. Gro Steins-

While Þorgerðr is not a member of the family of the gods she clearly is a member of the family of giants. Her name is listed by Snorri in his enumeration of giantesses;⁵¹ *Ketils saga hængs* relates that she hastens to attend a meeting of the trolls — *trollaþing* — where the mightiest of the trolls will meet (the terms for trolls — *troll* — and giants — *jötnar* — interchange in the texts).⁵² Sometimes she also bears the designation: Hörgatroll.⁵³ A giantess may be incorporated into the household of the gods through marriage, as were Skaði and Gerðr; Þorgerðr was not assimilated in this way.

Neglected, as she is, by Eddic myth we only know her in a cultic aspect, i.e., in her relationship with men. We do not know of her dealings with other gods or her adventures. In the sagas, conversely, we frequently encounter giantesses, outside of a cultic context and embedded in story matter, who are vividly described. It is possible that myths of the goddess-giantess Þorgerðr were retained in a literary setting concerning other members of her family; these too might have had a place in faith, and a location might bear the name of a troll-woman.⁵⁴ We shall now try to ascertain if any of Þorgerðr's qualities may be affirmed and more fully shown through her sisters in the sagas.

Habitation

Like Þorgerðr, giantesses of the sagas are usually related to a specific dwelling place and usually, like Þorgerðr's, it lies in the North. Some giantesses are stationed in the very lands of the Hlaðir Jarls: Gandriðr, Friðr, Flaumgerðr in Dofrafjall (Trondelag) and Gúðrún, Þordís, Eimyrja, Eisa, Glöð in Hálogaland. Yet more giantesses have their homes in the northern regions: Brana, Hrimgerðr, Sleggja in the Polar

land finds a different context: according to this the king or god must marry a giantess in order to create a royal line. To her Þorgerðr and Helgi are the original ancestors of the Hlaðir Jarls, later supplanted by Óðinn and Skaði; Steinsland 220–225. Gustav Ström believes that Þorgerðr was a goddess rather than a giantess. Since she was a figure of the North she was fused with trolls and giants in later time because these live traditionally in the North. He deduces her importance from the many places in which she is remembered, i.e., skaldic poems by Tindr Hallkelsson, Þorkell Gíslason, Bjarni Kjölbainsson, the Norwegian ballad of Aasmund Frægðagævar, the Icelandic tale of Flagða-æva hölda.

⁵¹ *Edda Snorra: Pulur, trollkvinna heiti.*

⁵² *Ketils s. hængs*, ch. 3.

⁵³ The name *Hörga-troll* is given to her in *Jomsvikinga s.* and in *Ketils s. hængs*; she is named Torgerd Hukebrud in a later ballad, cited by Steinsland 222.

⁵⁴ Such as Hítardalr in Iceland, home of Hít; *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, ch. 13; for giantesses as part of faith, Motz 1984 b; 1993 a, 60–87.

lands, Gnípa, Geit, Syrpa, Glámdís, Hergerðr in Greenland, Töglðr, Geirriðr, Griðr on the shores of the White Sea, Hrafnhildr, and Hildigunnr in Finmark. Few giantesses dwell in the South, and the Arctic Ocean received the name: Trolle-botn 'sea of the trolls';⁵⁵ here: Þorgerðr finds her residence according to a later ballad.⁵⁶

Names

The name Gerðr recurs among the appellation of the spirits. We find Gerðr, Ámgerðr, Flaumgerðr, Hergerðr, Hrímgrerðr, Ímgrerðr, Margerðr, Skjaldgerðr, Skrámgrerðr, Ungerðr.⁵⁷ The name Lathgertna is cited by Saxo Grammaticus in his book on Danish history: and this name may be rendered as 'Gerðr of the Hlaðir'.⁵⁸ The name Gerðr may be traced to an IE root *gherd- with a basic meaning of 'to enclose', as apparent in the ON noun *garðr* 'enclosure' and Norwegian *gierde* 'fence'. On the basis of this root the name may be interpreted as 'the one enclosed' or as 'encloser, i.e., protector'.⁵⁹ Þorgerðr's name strongly affirms her closeness to the saga spirits.

The Weather

Þorgerðr's storm rages from the North and hailstones fall from heaven when she aids her human friend in battle. Powers over the elements, especially the elements of storm and cold, are also held by others of her race: a troll-woman sends her friends good sailing wind (*Sturlaugss s. starfsama*); snow begins to fall when Grímr is approached by giant-women (*Gríms s. loðinkinna*); Illugi experiences an intensity of cold as he meets a giantess (*Illuga s. Gríðarfóstra*); a river is whipped by hail and lashed by tempests sent by giant-women (Þd 5, 8). A giantess may herself bear the name of an element of wintertime, such as Mjöll, Drífa, and Fönn, all meaning 'snow', and thus be identified with a phenomenon of winter.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Motz 1987 a, 472, fn 18.

⁵⁶ Steinsland 222.

⁵⁷ Motz 1981 a, for a systematic listing of giantesses' names.

⁵⁸ Saxo, Book IX, as cited by Chadwick 414.

⁵⁹ In 1909 Olsen suggested the meaning 'fenced in field, fertile earth' as interpretation of the name. He sees the giantess Gerðr as the personification of the fertile earth. Yet the meaning of 'fertility' cannot be detected in the noun or in any of its congeners. Motz 1981 b, 124–26.

⁶⁰ These women are the daughters of King Snær 'Snow'.

Skills in warfare

In the battle of Hjörungavágr Þorgerðr herself stands in the midst of bloodshed. Her sisters in the sagas are indeed skilled and gifted fighters: they wield such arms as a sword — *skálm* — (*Sörla s. sterka*), a pike — *atgeirr* — (*Sturlaug's s. starfsama*), a spiked club — *gaddakylfa* — (*Illuga s. Tagldarbana*), a knife — *sax* — (*Hálfðanar s. Brönufóstra*).⁶¹ The battle against a troll-woman is sometimes fiercer and more difficult than the battle against a giant, as in the case of Mána (*Sörla s. sterka*) or Sleggja (*Hálfðanar s. Brönufóstra*). And battle-axes are equated with troll-women — *öxar kalla menn tröllkvinna heitum* (sk 48). A giantess' name, such as Gunnlöð — *gunnr* 'battle', or Hrafnhildr — *hildr* 'battle', point to the warlike nature of the spirits.⁶²

Alliances and magic powers

The second part of Þorgerðr's name — *brúðr* — has the meaning 'bride', and it marks her as a young woman and as an erotic being though we find her in no overtly erotic relationship in the texts.⁶³ In the sagas a giantess is frequently related in sexual union to a human hero, and she may bear the hero's child. Such is the fate of Friðr who dallies with Búi (*Kjalnesinga s.*) and of Hildigunnr who is embraced by Örvar-Oddr (*Örvar-Odds s.*). Snorri cites Þorgerðr together with her father; and this too, a father-daughter pair emerges in tales about the family of giants.⁶⁴ We thus meet Dofri and his daughter Friðr (*Kjalnesinga s.*) or Brúni and his daughter Hrafnhildr (*Ketils s. hængs*). As Þorgerðr employs her magic powers to endow a piece of wood with life, so a giantess may employ her magic powers to restore a mortally wounded man to health (*Þorsteins s. Geirneffufóstra*), or to protect him through her gifts (*Hálfðanar s. Brönufóstra*).⁶⁵

⁶¹ Motz 1987, 469, fn 58; Motz 1984 a, 93–95.

⁶² Motz 1981 a, 500–01.

⁶³ Only one poem may show a reference to erotic dealings between the Jarl and the giantess. Tindr Hallkelsson skj I, 136 states, describing the Jarl's station in battle: 'It is not as if Gerðr made a bed for you in her arms'.

⁶⁴ Motz 1984 a, 86–7.

⁶⁵ 1984 a, 90–91.

Protectress of human hero

Strongly marked in the life pattern of a giantess is her protective alliance with a human hero whom she may guide through life. He usually meets her in the travels of his youth in great distance from his home. Sometimes she tests his strength through her physical assault, and when she is defeated and she has been granted mercy she becomes his loyal friend. Sometimes she finds him in agony or close to death and she heals his wounds. A troll-woman, riding on a wolf, offered Heðinn her help in combat as he was passing through a forest (HHj, prose). She may become his mistress or support him only as a friend. When he leaves her dwelling she may bestow on him rich parting gifts. Thus Mána offered Sörli armor which could not be out by weapons and a sword which could pierce steel and stone. Brana built a boat for Hálfðan, the father of her child, which was always followed by a favorable wind.⁶⁶

Sometimes the alliance is sealed with a formal promise as between Ásmundr and Hergerðr; she declared: "Spare my life and I will be your friend."⁶⁷ Thus she saved Ásmundr from drowning when his ship was broken in a storm (*Ásmundar s. Atlasonar*). A man's name sometimes indicates that he has gained the guidance and protection of a giantess, as did Þorsteinn Geirnefjufóstri. In alliances of this kind we find the most striking of the analogies to the life pattern of Þorgerðr and her loyalty to her human friend.

* * *

Þorgerðr might share yet more aspects with her sisters of the tales. Like these she might have the ability to transform herself into a beast. Like these she might be connected with the flocks and herds of pastoral existence. These features are, however, not presented; she might have, like Freyja and Ishtar, lost many of her animal alliances.⁶⁸

We have found that the elements which make up the persona of Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr possess a counterpart in the giantesses of the tales. These are presented in a story context, but they must have been

⁶⁶ Motz 1993 a, 60–4.

⁶⁷ *Ásmundar saga Atlasonar*, ch. 4.

⁶⁸ Forað of *Ketils saga hængs* may change into a whale; *Skinnhúfa* and *Vargeisa turm* into vultures (*Hjalmþérs saga ok Ólvi*); Motz 1984 a, 96–97; *Arinnefja* is the mistress of a flock of goats: *Egils saga einhenda*; Motz 1987 fn 53.

modeled on the daimons of the landscape which were revered by the local population.⁶⁹ When the communities were united to form a kingdom, governed by a single ruler, one spirit rose to national stature. She no longer lived in a mountain or a mountain cave but in a temple built by men. That her sanctuary was stationed in a forest may be a testimony to her origin in the wilderness. Much gold and silver was rendered to the deity and she herself was represented through a man-made form. We do not know that sacrifice was given to the woodland spirits, but it is clear that Þorgerðr received as offering besides gold and treasure also the lives of men.

The North of Norway was less open to foreign influences than the southern parts of Scandinavia. Here we may expect to meet a more archaic, more northern, kind of religion. We have been able to ascertain one element of such a faith: a Great Goddess who arose out of the local spirits of the North, deeply embedded in the northern landscape, a fierce fighter, a recipient of human sacrifice, and the loyal protectress of a king.

The continental Goddess

The goddess Nerthus, described by Tacitus, was revered by seven tribes. Thus already in the first century of our era we meet a divinity which has transcended the boundaries of local worship. Church documents of the Middle Ages vigorously protest against the belief in a deity who is often equated with Diana: "*Diana quæ vulgariter dicitur fraw Percht.*"⁷⁰ We have no written documents, besides the protests of the Church, to tell us about this mighty creature. But she has been so well remembered through folktradition in the provinces of the Germanic world that we gain a clear and vivid image.⁷¹ The knowledge comes to us from many regions and she is known by many names. It may be argued that this finding points to the existence of many local spirits; yet the persona behind the names is so unified and the characteristics so clearly marked that they seem to have arisen in one mighty being, and the Church speaks consistently of the honor rendered to

⁶⁹ Such spirits have recently been designated as Owners and guardians of Nature; Hultkrantz 1961; Motz 1984 b.

⁷⁰ As stated in a fifteenth century Bavarian sermon, cited by Waschnitius 64.

⁷¹ I base myself on the systematic and extensive collection by Victor Waschnitius=Wasch. See also Motz 1984 c.

one goddess. Our information must come from many quarters because we have no unifying mythology.

A multitude of names is recorded; 34 names are listed for North Germany alone in the collection of North German tales by Kuhn and Schwartz.⁷² In Switzerland we find such names as Stregele and Frau Selden; Frau Perchta rules the Alpine regions and Frau Holle prevails in Central Germany.⁷³ The goddess, a spirit of the woodland, closely interacts with the human population through her visits. In her yearly rounds she inspects the order of the household and these take place, most usually, in the winter season. Thus the Christian feast day of Epiphany is the 'Night of Perchta' — *Perchtennacht* — in Styria;⁷⁴ in the twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany Frau Holle roams the countryside near Weimar,⁷⁵ Perht comes to Tiers in the Tyrol in advent time and in the night before Epiphany.⁷⁶

The Lady is awaited in great fear and hope, for she may set the fate and fortune of the household for the entire year. Offerings are prepared for her arrival: eggs and dumplings placed on the roof tops of houses in Tyrolia and the *Gstampanudeln* 'Gstampa dumplings' baked for her in Wälschnoven.⁷⁷ Sometimes a dish is eaten in her honor, such as the *Bachlkoch*, a porridge, covered with a layer of honey of which all, master as well as servants, must partake.⁷⁸ The Church declares:⁷⁹

They are sinners who leave food for Perchta
in the *Perchtennacht*.

The most rousing celebration of the year, the *Perchtenlauf*, is performed in her honor in the towns and villages of Salzburg and Tyrolia.⁸⁰ In this custom the young men of the communities appear in the role of the 'handsome' (*schöne*) or the 'hideous' (*schiache*); Perchten, and the 'hideous' are by far more visible. Cloaked in fur, wearing frightening masks, carrying bells and whips, they race in

⁷² Kuhn and Schwartz 413–18.

⁷³ We thus also find a Frau Rupfa, a Stregele, a Chunkle, etc.

⁷⁴ Wasch. 19.

⁷⁵ Wasch. 106.

⁷⁶ Wasch. 133.

⁷⁷ Wasch. 43.

⁷⁸ Wasch. 57.

⁷⁹ Wasch. 64, quoting: *der gewissen spiegel*, a fourteenth century manuscript.

⁸⁰ Wasch. 37; Wasch. 57.

frenzy through the fields and towns, amidst the deafening noise of their instruments, and leap wildly, for it is believed that as high as their leaps will grow the produce of the earth. The divinity herself may lead a procession. The Church condemns those who join a 'crowd of demons' to follow *fraw Percht* in her sacred night;⁸¹ in the seventeenth century Rhineland still speaks of the 'menads' in the train of *Werra* of the *Voigtland*.⁸²

The Lady greatly concerns herself with women's duties, and especially, with the task of spinning. In Tyrolia the girls must finish with their set amount of work before Christmas or else their distaff will be destroyed.⁸³ In Salzburg the flax is tied around the arm of the neglectful spinner and then burned off with a flame.⁸⁴ In Thuringia wool or flax is placed on the distaff at Christmas time when *Frau Holle* starts her rounds and it must be worked off by Epiphany when she returns. A jingle states:⁸⁵

For every thread (left behind) / a bad year
shall be had.

While diligence is demanded by the Lady there are also times when all labor must cease. In *Zwettl* of Lower Austria all spinning must rest between Christmas and Epiphany,⁸⁶ in *Naussau* *Frau Holle* is honored in this way on the last day before Christmas, the *Frauholleabend* 'Dame Holle's Eve'.⁸⁷ When a woman near *Halle* twists her thread during the twelve days of Christmas her distaff will be fouled by *Frau Harre*.⁸⁸

The Lady also supervises other labors of the household. On Christmas Eve *Perchta* inspects the cleanliness of Styrian homes. If she finds that dirt has been swept into the corners she opens up the stomachs of the servant girls, fills them with the rubbish, and sews them back together. For this reason she always carries scissors, thread, and a broom.⁸⁹ But near *Hasloch* on the *Main* *Frau Holle*

⁸¹ Wasch. 83-84; quoting Burchardt of Worms.

⁸² Wasch. 103, citing Tomas Reinesius: *Werra cum comitatu sua*.

⁸³ Wasch. 33.

⁸⁴ Wasch. 56.

⁸⁵ Wasch. 105.

⁸⁶ Wasch. 53; here the *Spinnweibl* will come to twist the flax.

⁸⁷ Wasch. 93.

⁸⁸ Wasch. 109.

⁸⁹ Wasch. 20.

helps tired girls with their loads and shows compassion to the old and weak.⁹⁰

The department of children also matters to the deity. In Göttingen Frau Holle rewards the well-behaved with presents on Christmas Eve,⁹¹ but she may also take those who do not please her to her forest dwelling, as in Heidermoos of Upper Austria.⁹² In some areas Frau Perchta is surrounded by a swarm of children, those who cannot enter hell or heaven because they were too young, when they died, to be received in the Christian faith.⁹³ Milk is set out in some households for Frau Perchta and her throng — the *Perschtmilch*. The milk is thirstily consumed and what is left is fed to cattle to give it health.⁹⁴ The explanation of the theme must be a Christian interpretation of the role of the pagan goddess as a nurturer of children.⁹⁵

The goddess may also assume the leadership of the Wild Hunt, a ghostly throng which rides in fury through the sky, especially during the nights of wintertime, and which explodes with deafening clamor of barking dogs, squealing pigs, or squeaking fiddles. There is also evidence that the phenomenon was enacted in folktradition. Thus a man was convicted at a witch's trial (1630) for having followed Frau Holle's retinue into her mountain on New Year's Eve.⁹⁶ A woman was exiled from the town of Bern for having ridden with Frau Selden.⁹⁷ A fifteenth century Bavarian manuscript declares:⁹⁸

... many believe that in the sacred nights between
the day of the birth of Christ and the night of
Epiphany women come to their houses whose leader
is the Lady Perchta.

The Codex of Augsburg, also of the fifteenth century, remarks:⁹⁹

⁹⁰ Wasch. 81–88; in this area the goddess (Frau Holle) is more fully developed than in other places; she rides on a white horse, takes baths in a pond, sings in the moonlight; 81–83.

⁹¹ Wasch. 111.

⁹² Wasch. 54.

⁹³ As in Styria; Wasch. 18.

⁹⁴ Wasch. 48.

⁹⁵ The role of a nurturer of children who is not their biological mother is well marked in Greek myth. The function may be performed by an important goddess, such as Hera or Artemis; she then receives the by-name: *kourotrophos*. Price.

⁹⁶ Wasch. 86–87; this took place in Hesse.

⁹⁷ Beitzl, entry: *Wilde Jagd*.

⁹⁸ Wasch. 62; manuscript of Tegernsee of 1448.

⁹⁹ Wasch. 64.

... Diana, who is commonly known as *fraw Percht*, is in the habit of wandering at night with her army.

It seems that women were highly noticeable among the devotees of the goddess.

While the deity is not encountered in all the areas of Germanic settlement she appears in a large number of provinces from the northern shores to Italy and Switzerland. No other godhead is so well remembered or so vividly and consistently described. It is clear that a powerful female divinity had been worshipped among the Germanic nations of the Continent.

It also appears that the goddess left her mark on iconography. A female figure appears among amulets ascribed to the time of tribal migrations (about 400–600 A.D.). The artifacts are small, coin-shaped, and made of gold; they were discovered in large numbers, especially in Denmark and North and North-west Germany.¹⁰⁰ They bear images which are apparently of magical or religious significance. Five of these 'bracteates' show the picture of a woman (IK 2; 350b: unknown site in south-west Germany; 389b: Welschingen, Kr. Konstanz, Baden-Württemberg; 311b: Oberwerschen, Kr. Hohenmölsen, Bezirk Halle; 259b: Grossfahner, Kr. Erfurt, Bezirk Erfurt; IK 3; 391b: Gudme, south-east Fyn). She is uniformly presented and we cannot doubt that we meet in her a single being though the finds themselves derive from widely separated regions.¹⁰¹

She is shown full face and wears a crown; she seems seated on throne which sometimes merges into her skirt. On one amulet her hands are empty; on others she holds staff-shaped instruments, some of them ending in a cross; they appear to be symbols of royal power. The image of an imperial woman is also drawn into a horse ornament from Eschwege in Thuringia. She too wears a crown, is frontally presented, flanked by heraldic animals, and she too carries a staff-like object which is probably a scepter (horse ornament; Eschwege, Kr. Werra-Meissen; Hauck, *ill.* 17).

These women clearly represent ruling powers; yet no mighty queen has come forward in the Germanic provinces of Europe. The amulets,

¹⁰⁰ These artifacts have been systematically reproduced, arranged, discussed, and interpreted by Karl Hauck, Morton Axboe, and Klaus Düwel = IK.

¹⁰¹ Two of the bracteates belong to central Germany found near towns of Erfurt and Halle of the former GDR; one bracteate appeared in Fyn, another near the Swiss border and one in an unknown place of south-west Germany.

moreover, as apotropaic objects, would portray the superhuman forces. Karl Hauck assumes that the bracteates picture Óðinn's wife, the goddess Frigg.¹⁰² Yet no traces of a Frigg sanctuary were discovered in the regions. Three of the images (IK 2:259b, IK 3:391b and Eschwege, see above) were discovered in the very heartland of the Lady's traditions. The creature of Welschingen near Switzerland is obviously the same as that of Gudme in Fyn. We may assume that we meet here the Great Goddess of this discussion who appears throughout the provinces of the Germanic nations. The amulets testify mainly to her imperial position; stars and horseshoe-shaped objects, probably crescents, recur among the images and these would point to a celestial aspect, as it is also held by Freyja and Inanna.

* * *

We may assume that a powerful female divinity had developed in some areas of the Germanic world; she was a creature of the wilderness and also a visitor to human houses. This goddess was taken along by the tribes who moved onwards to conquer and to settle in new lands, and thus her cult was widely spread. We know, for instance, that the Nerthus worshipping Anglii and Varini settled in Central Germany and were later known as Thuringi.¹⁰³ The Thuringians indeed exhibit great devotion to the goddess. It is only natural that the deity brought by immigrating tribes blended with the local spirits of the woodland. Thus she married the 'wild man' — 'l'om salvadegh' — in the southern parts of Tyrolia,¹⁰⁴ and she became Wechtra-Baba in Slovenian regions.¹⁰⁵ With the triumph of the Church she lost her status in official, national religion and she sank back into the sphere of local belief in which, in very archaic time, she had originated.

Unlike her northern sisters the continental goddess shows no affinities with battles and her contact with the women's world is

¹⁰² Michael Enright thinks that the Lady represents a weaving goddess; he interprets a staff-like object in the hand of the Oberwerschen bracteate as a spindle, and the crosses at the end of some of the staves as yarnwinders. He speaks of distaff, spindle and flax as symbols of a weaving being; these entities, however, belong to the craft of spinning.

¹⁰³ As noted by Tacitus, *Germania*, ch. 40; a sixth century law code designates them as Thuringians: *lex Angorum et Werinorum quid est Thuringiorum*. Cited by the Tacitius edition of Jankuhn-Much, 445-46; see also: Motz 1992.

¹⁰⁴ Wasch. 44.

¹⁰⁵ Wasch. 27.

marked. These phenomena may be explained by the fact that she was remembered mainly in farmers' households and not at the courts of conquering kings. Similar affiliations were noted with the Latvian goddess of fate, Laima, whose memory was kept alive through centuries of christian dominance, by the rural population.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, Percht-Holda developed or retained elements apparent in a spirit of a pastoral environment. Her followers, the Perchten, are masked as goats; their leaping imitates the leaps of goats; the Lady herself is sometimes seen in the shape of this beast.¹⁰⁷ She also retained the features of a creature of the wilderness, so that the Schnabelpercht possesses the beak of a bird of prey, remembered in her 'iron nose',¹⁰⁸ and Frau Harke of the Havelland leads her ferine beasts to their cave.¹⁰⁹

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Let us state in conclusion that it was possible to reconstruct and probe the nature of a Great Germanic Goddess through three main sources: Freyja through Old Norse myth; Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr through Old Norse tales, and Percht-Holda through German folktradition.

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¹⁰⁶ Biezais.

¹⁰⁷ A similar figure appears in Crete, also in a pastoral environment; the Mountain Mother Rhea dwells on Mt. Aigeon 'goat mountain'; the name Kitzbühel of Perchta celebrations also means 'goat hill'; the Kouretes are urged to leap high so that the crops will grow.

¹⁰⁸ The fifteenth century Tyrolean poet Thomas Vintler speaks of 'Precht with the iron nose'; Wasch. 35.

¹⁰⁹ Höttges 156.

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Texts

- Ásmundar s. Atlasonar; Bárðar s. Snæfellsáss; Eiriks s. rauða; Harðar s. ok*
Hölmverja; Illuga s. Tagldarbana; Kjalnesinga s.; Njáls s.; Þorsteins s.
Geirnefjufóstra; Ketils s. hængs; Sturlaugs s. starfsama; all in: *Íslendinga*
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Gríms s. loðinkinna; Halfdánar s. Brönufóstra; Hjálmpérs s. ok Ölvis; Hrólfs s.
kraka; Hversu Noregr byggðist; Illuga s. Gridarfóstra; Ketils s. hængs; Stur-
laugs s. starfsama; Sörla s. sterka; Örvar-Odds s.; all in: *Fornaldar Sögur*
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Ólavs s. Tryggvasonar. In: Flat.

Abbreviations

- ANEP — *The Ancient Near Eastern Texts in Pictures*. 1954. J. B. Pritchard, ed.
 Princeton.
 ANET — *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. 1969. J. B. Pritchard, ed. Princeton.
 bd — *Baldur's Draumar*. In: *Edda. Die Lieder*.
 BE — *The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania*. 1896. Series
 A. Cuneiform Texts. Philadelphia.
 Flat — *Flateyjarbók*. 1860–68. Kristiania.
 Guðr II — *Guðrúnarkviða önnur*. In: *Edda. Die Lieder*.
 gyl — *Gylfaginning*. In: *Edda Snorra*.
 hdl — *Hyndluljóð*. In: *Edda. Die Lieder*.
 HHJ — *Helgaqvíða Hjorvarðzsonar*. In: *Edda. Die Lieder*.
 HKR — *Heimskringla Snorra Sturlusonar*. 1946. Páll Eggert Ólason, ed. Reyk-
 javík.
 IK — Hauck et al. eds.
 ls — *Locasenna*. In: *Edda. Die Lieder*.
 RA — *Revue d'assyriologie orientale*.

- SBH — G. H. Reisner. 1896. *Sumerisch-babylonische Hymnen und Thontafeln griechischer Zeit*. Berlin.
- sk — *Skáldskaparmál*. In: *Edda Snorra*.
- skj — *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*. 1912–15. Finnur Jónsson, ed. Copenhagen.
- sor — *Sörla þattr*. In: *Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda*. 1959. Guðni Jónsson, ed. Reykjavík.
- vsp — *Völuspá*. In: *Edda. Die Lieder*.
- þd — *Þórsdrápa*, skj B I, 139–44.
- þrym — *Þrymskviða*. In: *Edda. Die Lieder*.