MICHAEL SCHULTE

The Classical and Christian Impact on *Vǫlospǫ*

Toward a comparative topomorphical approach[1]

Omnia in mensura, et numero, et pondere
disposuisti. *Liber sapientiae* 11 : 21

It is a moot point in Scandinavian philology whether and to what extent
Vǫlospǫ, the initial poem of the Codex Regius, is influenced by Christian
thought and typology.[2] Almost four decades ago in a review article,
Gabriel Turville-Petre stated that "*Vǫlospá* ... is deeply coloured by
Christian symbolism." Referring to Anne Holtsmark (1964, 69–77), he
basically mentioned Christian metamorphoses of pagan gods such as
Baldr and Gefion (Turville-Petre 1963–64, 373). In the same way, Jan de
Vries (1964, 61) emphasizes the role of the innocent god Baldr in *Vǫlospǫ*
as opposed to the ancient war god Óðinn:

> Die neue Welt aber ist eine Welt Balders. Und das ist des Dichters
> ureigenster Gedanke. Aussöhnung, Friede, Gerechtigkeit, das sind die
> Merkmale, an denen man die neue Zeit, in der Balder regiert, erkennen
> wird. (de Vries 1964, 61)

Indeed, the resemblance between Baldr and Christ is striking, both being
Hoffnungsträger of a new world free from moral defilement (cf. also
Turville-Petre 1964, 114–20). As regards further conceptual contrasts,
Jan de Vries noticed the tragic tone of *ragna rǫc* in *Vǫlospǫ* which differs
markedly from that in other mythological poems such as *Vafþrúðnismál*
and *Grímnismál* (de Vries 1964, 45, 58–59). It is obvious that these

[2] In contradistinction to classical Old Norse, the spelling *Vǫlospǫ* indicates that we are
witnessing a transitional text at the turn of the millenium, clearly predating the 12th-
century merger of /ɔ:/ and /a:/ in the stressed vowel system of Old Norse (written <ǫ́> and
<á> in normalized form); cf. Schulte (2002b, 887).

observations are solely relevant to the content level without touching upon compositional structure.

While Christian reinterpretations of this kind are made very clear in *Snorra Edda*, there is much more indeterminacy with regard to *Vǫlospǫ's* state of transition between paganism and Christian thought. To elucidate this intricate problem, research has generally turned to a kind of source criticism or *Quellenkritik* of underlying mythological topics or 'mythemes', whereas formal aspects of compositional structure were widely ignored (for the term 'mytheme' see below). The present state of research is marked by Kurt Schier's article *Zur Mythologie der Snorra Edda. Einige Quellenprobleme* (1981). (For further research in this field, see literature mentioned in Schier 1981, 405). Schier's conclusion is that Snorri's mythological sources were largely imprinted with Christian concepts at the end of the 10th century:

> Die besondere Konzeption in Snorris Mythologie war schon in seinen Quellen vorgegeben: die Betonung kosmogonischer und eschatologischer Überlieferungen sowie der hohe Rang Óðins in der Hierarchie der Götter. Der Wert der Snorra Edda als religionshistorische Quelle wird durch ihre Abhängigkeit von einer bestimmten historischen Situation nicht eingeschränkt, sondern eher erhöht. Man sieht zwar die Grenzen dieses einzigartigen Werkes des Mittelalters, aber auch die Grundlagen, auf denen es ruht. (Schier 1981, 420)

The relationships between early Old Norse poetry and Medieval Christian thought need to be further explored. In the following, it will be shown that formal *topomorphical* analysis adds to our understanding of the true status of interrelations between Scandinavian and Continental European traditions in the early Middle Ages, whence the chosen focus on formal structure. As far as the Eddic lay of *Vǫlospǫ* is concerned, I am inclined to think that both classical (Pythagorean-Platonic) and Christian influences are traceable on the typological level. I opine that we are witnessing a syncretistic transitional text where pagan mythological motives or 'mythemes' are patterned on classical and Christian concepts, hence the marked accent on cosmogonic, apocalyptic and eschatological events. Henceforth, I term these mythological action particles 'mythemes'. By analogy with linguistic terminology, the role of these abstract units of action in the texture of *Vǫlospǫ* is comparable to the constitutive role of phonemes and morphemes in modern structurally-based linguistics.

The topomorphical approach

Recent scholarship in the field of Renaissance poetics resulted in a new structural approach which may be labelled the *topomorphical* point of view. Referred to the type of compounding, *topomorphics* is an exocentric compound (*bahuvrīhi*) designating a technique where the formal arrangement (*morphe*) is determined by the *topoi* or poetic themes in a work.[3] To put it differently,

> the term topomorphics and its cognates refer to the study of literary artifacts, where poets have arranged their themes (*topoi*), or textual segments devoted to particular *topoi*, according to a predetermined plan or conceptual form (*morphe*). This method may apply to individual textual segments within a work, to groups of such segments, or to the whole configuration of all constituent segments in a work. Poets often combine an overall plan with individually patterned segments ... such segments then usually holding a particular important theme or episode. (Eriksen 1984, 278)

Although the distance between Renaissance poetry and the Eddic lays must not be overlooked, there are similar patterns due to common aesthetic principles sustaining the texture and giving it form. Among the favoured arrangements of Renaissance poetry are antithesis, chiasmus, repetition, graded arrangements and last but not least composition by number, especially in terms of number symbolism. As a matter of fact, in many works of Renaissance poetry *numerology* plays such a prominent role as a compositional technique that it is appropriate to use this term with regard to literary analysis of textual structures (see ch. 1). Referred to aesthetic composition, antithesis is particularly important, since — as Tasso puts it — "the art of composing a poem resembles the plan of the universe, which is composed of contraries, as that of music is" (Cavalchini and Samuel eds 1973, 78; for classical musicology see Boethius 1872 [1521]). And Roy Eriksen comments:

> Chiasmus (recessed symmetry), antithesis, and graded arrangements are Tasso's preferred schemes of disposition; when comparing important

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[3] For *topomorphical* readings see Røstvig (1990a; 1994), especially ch. III (1994, 131–68); furthermore Eriksen (1987) and (2001). For a definition of *topos* see Curtius (1948, 77) and Crampton (1990, 694): "*Topoi*, or commonplaces are traditional ideas, images, formulae, aphorisms, and situations presented in language that is also traditional to such a degree that readers may distinguish their presence as discrete events within a work".

> episodes or events in his poem he often deploys carefully placed repeti-
> tions of rhymes and key-words to point a contrast or to draw a parallel.
> (Eriksen 1984, 279)

Without claiming any kind of genetic relationship or direct influence, such formal principles may be said to apply to Old Norse poetry as well. With regard to Eddic and Skaldic poetry, it is obvious that Scandinavian research has by no means exploited the possibilities of an adequate formal description of medieval literary works based on a *topomorphical* analysis, let alone a comparative topomorphical approach in a Continental European perspective. As a starting-point, the following three structural foci may be suitable:

(1) Internal structure: topoi and form
(2) Numerological composition: number symbolism
(3) Numerical substructure: the building in the text.

1 Internal structure: topoi and form

1.1 The overall architecture of *Vǫlospǫ́*

In Medieval thought, an aesthetically satisfying composition is achieved by well-established formal means including numerical devices. It is worth stressing that these structural principals apply not only to literary works, but to music and architecture as well; the close interrelations between them stand in need of further investigation. (For various aspects of rhetorical and mental composition cf. Carruthers 1998; for Platonic geometry in plans of medieval abbeys and cathedrals see Hiscock 2000). A key word in this context is *harmonia mundi*. The design of the universe calls for perfect symmetry mirroring the principal pattern in the mind of the creator which is diametrically opposed to chaos (Heninger 1977, 132–43). In the later Middle Ages, God is often depicted as an architect involved in creation (see illustration in Kline 2001, 11).

The topos of order and perfect balance is directly projected into the composition of *Vǫlospǫ́*, its formal structure being largely based on antitheses, correspondences and graded arrangements; hence the decided preference for symmetries by linkage between different parts. The poem's overall architecture thus depends on a highly balanced arrangement. Already Andreas Heusler perceived: "Eine Gliederung in drei Teile — Vergangenheit — Gegenwart — Zukunft: 'ich gedenke, ich sah,

ich sehe' —, symmetrisch durchgeführt, wahrt den Eindruck einer abrollenden Handlung" (Heusler 1957, 190). The perfect symmetry by
means of a tripartite structure correlates with the three aspects of Time:
Past — Present — Future or, more sophisticatedly, with the doctrine of
trinity (cf. ch. 2.3). This is further confirmed by Régis Boyer's analysis
(1983, 131): stanzas 1–30 ascend towards the central part that is "fate in its
many guises", the climax, viz. "the forces of fate", is reached in stanzas
28–31, and stanzas 32–62 constitute a descending sequence leading to rejuvenescence, exactly as in Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (cf. Eriksen
1987:112–14).

By the same token, the two refrains (1) *þá gengo regin ǫll á rǫcstóla,
ginnheilǫg goð* "Then all the ruling powers, the most holy gods, ascended
their thrones" and (2) *geyr nú Garmr mioc fyr Gnipahelli* "Now Garmr
howls loudly before Gnipahellir" stand in a complementary distribution
in marking the ascending and descending sequences, respectively.
Different types of iteration and variation are deployed to produce the
impression of an inescapable course of events (see ch. 1.2). Boyer's formal analysis displays a complex structure with systematic correspondences and antitheses, e.g. original chaos vs. regeneration, and creation
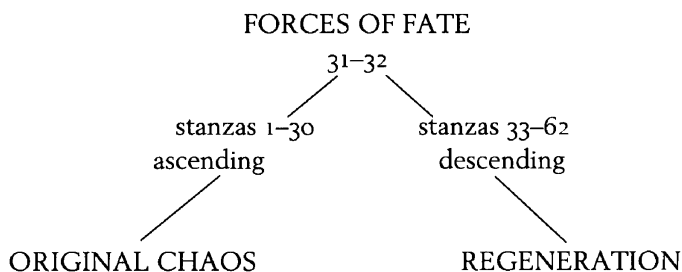vs. *ragna rǫc* (see fig. 1):

FORCES OF FATE
31–32

stanzas 1–30   stanzas 33–62
ascending   descending

ORIGINAL CHAOS   REGENERATION

Fig. 1: The architecture of Vǫlospǫ́ *according to Boyer (1983, 131)*

1.2 Evidence of classical rhetorical thought

In his *Altgermanische Dichtung*, Andreas Heusler (1957, 190) claimed
that *Vǫlospǫ́* was written by an Icelandic cleric who was fond of his pagan
traditions but whose thought was deeply embedded in humanism and
Christianity. Discussing the Christian context of *Vǫlospǫ́*, Ursula
Dronke (1997, 93) states in a similiar but more reserved fashion that
"[t]he poet of *Vǫluspá* must have lived, at some time of his life, in a com

munity where Christian thought was familiar and he had come to comprehend at least certain aspects of it well."

Out of a scholastic perspective, it should eminently be possible to trace classical rhetorical elements in the poem. In my opinion, much of its structural arrangement and stock of rhetorical figures is directly influenced by or even derived from classical oratory (cf. the works of Beda Venerabilis). There are strong indications that the composer of *Vǫlospǫ́* was well versed in the art of rhetorics and that he had access to the scholarly and verbal tools of the *ars eloquentiae* or *ars oratoris*. In this light, *Vǫlospǫ́* provides an example of how diverse strands of different origins were energized and transformed into an inspiring coherent vision of powerful dynamics and influential force. Classical rhetorics was a suitable means to achieve this aim. Examples for the huge inventory of rhetorical figures deployed in *Vǫlospǫ́* shall be given below.

To begin with the central feature of the *antitheton* which provides the underlying construction or 'substructure' of *Vǫlospǫ́*. (For the importance of the *antitheton* in classical oratory see Lausberg 1990, §§ 787–807.) It has already been noted that the compositional technique of antithesis is central to the literary texture, as it reflects the plan of the universe in the mind of the creator. In the design of a building, 'substructure' refers to the solid base or foundation that lies under the ground to support the whole architecture. The substructure of our text is determined by Óðinn's encounter with the *vǫlva* — a vis-à-vis of protagonist and antagonist which recurs throughout the poem (cf. ch. 2.2).

Moreover, the author of *Vǫlospǫ́* establishes an inextricably entwined network of antithetical relationships, thereby applying the formal technique of *emphatic alliteration* which is well-grounded in the Old Germanic craft of verbal composition. Thus, antithetical duads are marked throughout the poem, e.g. *Heiðr — húsa* (*Vsp.* 21), and *angan — illrar brúðar* (*Vsp.* 22), where an *oxymoron* comes in (cf. Link 1985, 114–15). The *oxymoron* plays on inherent contradictions, usually reinforcing a binary opposition of two neighbouring terms that form a unit. As Lausberg (1990, § 807) puts it, "[d]as Oxymoron ist die gerafft-enge syntaktische Verbindung widersprechender Begriffe zu einer Einheit, die dadurch eine starke Widerspruchsspannung erhält".

Referring to Heiðr's incursion into the homes of men in *Vsp.* 22, it is said that she is the 'pleasure' (*angan*) of every 'wicked woman' (*illrar brúðar*) who is enraptured by her enchantments and shiny appearance — an inner contrast playing on the binary opposition between good and evil. For *angan* basically connotes positively charged sentiments but no

indecency or spoiled condition. Another striking example is provided by
the refrain of stanzas 44–49–58, where the closing line *um ragna rǫc /
rǫmm, sigtýva* conjoins the 'fatal doom' (*ragna rǫc*) and the 'victorious
gods' (*sigtýva*). Semantically, this figure creates a vehement contra-
diction in terms, for downfall and victory are incompatible: The perfect
order of the cosmos is disrupted.

Parenthesis is involved in the enumeration of the four bad Ages as
mentioned in *Vsp.* 45:7–10: *sceggǫld, scálmǫld / scildir ro klofnir //
vindǫld, vargǫld / áðr verǫld steypiz* "an axe age, a sword age — shields are
riven — a storm age, a wolf age — before the world collapses". This rhe-
torical technique produces a marked rhythm which is in tune with the
dramatic course of events leading to *ragna rǫc*. Furthermore, it applies to
Vsp. 2 where a marked contrast in terms of height is stressed through
emphatic alliteration, whence the word pair *miǫtvið — mold* in the closing
line (cf. Meissner 1939). This stanza is particularly interesting with
regard to the parenthetical connection of its final half-line *fyr mold neðan*
which is paralleled by *fyr iǫrð neðan* in *Vsp.* 43:6:

Vsp. 2	Ec man iǫtna,	ár um borna,
	þá er forðom mic	fœdda hǫfðo;
	nío man ec heima,	nío ívíði (H: ívíðior),
	miǫtvið mæran,	fyr mold neðan.

> I remember the primordial giants, who had reared me
> in Ages long past.
> I remember nine worlds, nine witches of the woodlands,
> the splendid World Tree — beneath the ground.

Other rhetorical figures which the author of *Vǫlospǫ́* seems to be partic-
ularly fond of are *hyperbaton* and *tmesis*. For a classical definition of *tme-
sis* see Lausberg (1990, § 718): "Die (nur poetische) Tmesis ist die
Trennung der beiden Bestandteile eines Kompositums durch das Da-
zwischentreten eines anderen Satzteils. In der homerischen Sprache als
ein normales Phänomen lockerer Wortkomposition üblich, ist die Tme-
sis von hier aus als metrisches Mittel in in der griechischen und lateini-
schen Poesie mechanisiert worden". In this literary mode, closely con-
nected words or elements of compounds are disconnected through the
intercalation of one or more other words or particles, e.g. *gap var
ginnunga* (*Vsp.* 3:7).

An issue of great importance to the textual structure is the classical
figure of *concatenatio* which produces the feeling of coherence and on-

going change — "eine abrollende Handlung" in Andreas Heusler's sense (1957, 190).

This kind of graded arrangement involves two different subtypes: initial repetition which is *anaphora* and end repetition which is *epiphora* (Lausberg 1990, §§ 629–632). In addition, there is a mixed type termed *complexio* (Lausberg 1990, §§ 633–34). The author of *Vǫlospǫ́* abundantly uses this rhetorical figure, especially the anaphorical subtype (cf. also Dölvers 1969). Mention must here be made of the two refrains *þá gengo regin ǫll á rǫcstóla, ginnheilǫg goð, oc um þat gættuz* "Then all the ruling powers, the most holy gods, ascended their thrones and took counsel" (*Vsp.* 6–9–23–25) and *vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?* "Do you know even more, so what?" (*Vsp.* 27–28–33–35–39–41–48–63). It may be recalled that these recurring lines stand in a complementary distribution. As regards formal composition, the first refrain pertains to the ascending sequence (*Vsp.* 1–30), opening the stanzas in question, whereas the second one constitutes a closing line. The tone in both refrains is markedly different. The first one may be regarded as "a justification, a theophany", whereas the second one is an impassioned rhetorical phrase invoking a tremendous downfall: "henceforth there will be no more creation, only destruction" (Boyer 1983, 122, 124).

To put it differently, this shifting line marks a transition from creativity via powerlessness to apprehension and fear. After being involved in the act of creation, the resources of the Æsir are bound to dwindle continuously — an evolutionary process ultimately leading to degeneration and downfall (cf. Mundal 2001). Incidentally, this is why the *Dvergaþula* (*Vsp.* 11–16) should not be regarded as a secondary interpolation, but rather as a crucial step in the process of creation: the skills of the Æsir are successively transferred to the dwarves (see also Wanner 2001, 205).

As a matter of fact, the Æsir do not match up with the divine creator or demiurge, since they are subjected to the Forces of Fate. Out of this perspective, it seems plausible that the author of *Vǫlospǫ́* regarded the Æsir merely as fullfilling their task within the divine plan. Once their mission is accomplished, they have to give up their status. Thus, *Vǫlospǫ́* operates with a highest god (Christus-figuration mentioned as *hinn ríki* in 58 *H*-manuscript) and a pantheon of demigods, viz. Æsir and Vanir. (On the interpretation of *hinn ríki* in this four-line stanza cf. Dronke 1997, 87.) This gives a clear hint that we are dealing with a patristic poem written by a clergyman.

As regards further refrains, one complete stanza in the descending

sequence centred on *ragna rǫc* (*Vsp.* 33–62) is reiterated thrice to pro-
duce an impressive effect on the audience:

Vsp. 44–49–58   Geyr (nú) Garmr miǫc   fyr Gnipahelli,
                   festr mun slitna,   enn freki renna;
                   fiǫlð veit hon frœða,   fram sé ec lengra
                   um ragna rǫc,   rǫmm, sigtýva.

                   (Now) Garmr howls loudly before Gnipahellir;
                   the fetter will break and the wolf run free.
                   She has a great store of knowledge,
                   I see farther into the future:
                   the forceful doom of the victory gods.

In a previous contribution (Schulte 2002a), I introduced the term 'nu-
merical concatenation' to designate a subtype of *concatenatio* which is
based on number (for a fuller account see ch. 3.2). It is evident that bal-
anced patterns are created by means of numbers taken to be allegorical,
and that these patterns are destined to produce either harmony or disso-
nance and tension. Vitally important in this conjunction is the recurring
half-line *unz þriár kvámo* — "until three of them came" (*Vsp.* 8–17). As
far as textual criticism is concerned, a new consensus seems to be in
sight. Sound philological method requires us to regard *þriár*, not *þrír*, in
Vsp. 17:1 (*R*- and *H*-manuscripts) as a correct and fully intended form,
deliberately chosen to suit its purpose within the lay's texture (see
Schulte 2002a, 138; furthermore Mundal 2001, 200–201 and Steinsland
2001, 252).

Numerical concatenation forms part of a network of correspond-
ences, iterations and parallel arrangements by means of number; for
more detail see ch. 3.2. In a similar textual mode, the contiguous stanzas
30 and 31 are concatenated through the figure of *gradatio*: *sá hon
valkyrior, vítt um komnar* "She saw valkyries, come from afar" (*Vsp.*
30:1–2) — *ec sá Baldri, blóðgom tivor* "I saw (the doom allotted to) Baldr,
the bloodied god" (*Vsp.* 31:1–2). This type of modified iteration (G
'variierende Wiederholung') implies only loose contact between the
repeated phrasal elements even allowing for altered inflectional forms,
whence the scenic shift between *ec* 'I' and *hon* 'she'. This figure is rhyth-
mically deployed in the descending sequence of *Vǫlospǫ́* where the evil
portents and forebodings of *ragna rǫc* are forwarded (see ch. 2.6). Again
it conveys the strong impression of inner coherence in depicting one sin-
gle poetic theme or *topos*. For the same reason, the verbal action of the

three roosters, loudly ringing in *ragna rǫc*, is repeated thrice by the Old
Norse verb *gala* 'crow' in stanzas 42–43:

Vsp. 42   Sat þar á haugi   oc sló hǫrpo
             gýgiar hirðir,   glaðr Eggþér;
             gól um hánom   í gaglviði
             fagrrauðr hani,   sá er Fialarr heitir.

             There on a mound sat glad Eggþér, the giantess' herdsman,
             striking the harp.
             On the gallows tree crowed the bright red rooster,
             whose name is Fjalarr.

Vsp. 43   Gól um ásom   Gullinkambi,
             sá vecr hǫlða   at Heriafǫðrs;
             enn annarr gelr   fyr iǫrð neðan,
             sótrauðr hani,   at sǫlom Heliar.

             Gullinkambi crowed to the Æsir;
             he wakes the heroes of Herjafǫðr.
             Yet another one crows beneath the ground,
             a soot-red cock, in the halls of Hel.

As regards further rhetorical devices, mention must next be made of
figura etymologica which involves an inner accusative. *Vsp.* 20:9–12
relates the functions of the three Norns of Fate, one of them being *legia
lǫg* — 'determining the lots (of men)':

Vsp. 20   Þær lǫg lǫgðo,   þær líf kuro
             alda bornom,   ørlǫg seggia.

             They established laws and the fates of men
             and chose the length and way of their lives.

There are occurrences of *tautologia* in *Vǫlospǫ́* as well. For its depoy-
ment in classical rhetorics see Lausberg (1990, §502). Stanza 21:9, for
instance, makes use of an *asyndetic tautology* with a well-known parallel
in an anonymous *vísa* of the 10th century (Gering 1927, 27).[4] Here, the
tautological technique enforces upon Gullveig's untrammelled magic

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[4] The *asyndeton* refers to the omission of a conjunction, in the following case the con-
nector Old Norse *oc*. See in general Lausberg (1990, §709): "Das Asyndeton ist das

power which the Gods are unable to subdue. The adverbial phrase *opt ósialdan*, lit. "often, not seldom", marks their helplessness and inefficiency in tackling her untamed vitality:

Vsp. 21   Þat man hon fólcvíg   fyrst í heimi,
            er Gullveigo   geirom studdo
            oc í hǫll Hárs   hána brendo;
            þrysvar brendo,   þrysvar borna,
            opt, ósialdan,   þó hon enn lifir.

            She [the *vǫlva*] remembers the first war in the world,
            when they riddled Gullveig with spears and burned her
            in Hár's hall;
            — thrice burned, the thrice born one —
            often, repeatedly, and yet she is still alive.

Finally, in *Vsp.* 56:9–12 the figure of *litotes* is traceable in conjunction with the apocalyptic fight between Þórr and the Miðgarðormr. For the classical domain of this rhetorical figure see again Lausberg (1990, §§ 586–88). Although both combatants are mortally wounded in this bloody encounter, Þórr's superiority is evidenced by his making nine strides at the end of the fight. (For a numerological interpretation of this scene see ch. 2.5.) The closing half-line *niðs óqviðnom*, lit. "of derision unafraid", deploys the figure of *litotes*, indicating that Þórr's fame after death will be undisputed (Kuhn 1968, 159):

Vsp. 56   gengr fet nío   Fiǫrgyniar burr
            neppr frá naðri,   niðs óqviðnom.

            Mortally wounded, Fiǫrgyn's son, his fame being certain,
            strides nine steps away from the serpent.

Undoubtedly, there are certain figures in the poem which are specifically Nordic. Among them is the *kenning*-type which is most frequently deployed in Skaldic verse (see Stefán Einarsson 1963–64; von See 1980; Marold 1983). For an analysis of kennings in *Vǫlospǫ́* cf. Schach (1983). Other rhetorical figures such as pun or double sense may be characterized as belonging to a common stock of poetic figures in different cul-

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Gegenteil des Polysyndeton (s. § 686): es besteht also in der Weglassung der Konjunktionen. Die Wirkung ist die der pathetisch-vereindringlichenden Steigerung".

tures, paralleled for instance by the *śleṣa* in Old Indian poetics (cf. Winternitz 1920; Gerow 1977). As far as *Vǫlospǫ́* is concerned, a good example of punning is provided by the ambivalent name Heiðr in stanza 22 which plays on several strings: first it alludes to her provenance and living in the wild (ON *heiðr* = E *heath*)[5], second it relates to her enticingly shiny appearance (ON *heið-r* 'lustrous'), and third it denotes 'glory' or 'honour' (ON *heiðr*, gen. *heiðr-s*), thus setting up clear links with her double Gullveig who insinuates herself into the realm of the Æsir (*Vsp.* 21). Moreover, Heiðr appears as a *vǫlva*'s name in *Hyndlolióð* and other later sources, which ties her in with the seeress relating the poem (see McKinnell 2001, 396–97; cf. fig. 5 below).

To sum up, clear traces of classical rhetorics are in evidence. Some of them solely pertain to the poetic level, others are responsible for the rhythm and compositional dynamics of the lay, notably *antitheton*, *parenthesis* and *concatenatio*. Even if a good deal of these figures in *Vǫlospǫ́* may be derived independently from classical oratory, the poetic register of the poem as a whole indicates close typological relationships with the cultural heritage of Europe. It remains to be shown in the following paragraphs that these preliminary findings may be further confirmed by numerical and numerological analysis.

2 Numerological composition: number symbolism

To this point, we have mainly dealt with formal and rhetorical structure which characterizes *Vǫlospǫ́* as being part of a European consensus. But the 'language of containment' involves another specific constituent which is number. Numerological composition is an extension of the allegorical technique to be termed 'allegory by numbers'.[6] Verbal and numer(olog)ical structures coexist side by side underlining each other's significance. This is why number symbolism is often found in close connection with the use of symmetrical and graded structural arrangements.

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[5] Kvaran and Jónsson (1991, 286) do not suggest the equation of the proper noun Heiðr and the feminine *jō*-stem *heiðr* 'heath' (accusative *heiði*), although it is of vital importance to the lay's semantic network (see Schulte 2002a, 139–40). Note, for instance, the antonymous lexical relationship between *heiður* 'heath' and *bøur* 'pasture fenced off from it' in Faroese (see e.g. Jacobsen / Matras 1961, s.vv.).

[6] For modern studies in number symbolism see Røstvig (1990b; 1994) and Dunlop (1990); cf. also Curtius (1948, 493–504), furthermore Butler (1970a; 1970b), Hopper (1969) and Heninger (1977), chs 1 and 4. On numerological patterns in *Vǫlospǫ́* see the following sections.

By the same token, number is part of the overall composition, making up a network of correspondences, concatenations and antitheses (cf. ch. 3). It follows that numbers in a literary work are to be regarded as important types that set up links between parts of the whole to establish unifying structures (e.g. Røstvig 1990b, 514). Numerology therefore is not grounded in mysticism but in a true literary science.

Referred to the harmony of the world, the *harmonia mundi*, it has already been noted that the architecture of the universe demands perfect symmetry to mirror the underlying pattern in the mind of the creator. Hence the fundamental desire to erect a simple number-based system reflecting the order of the universe (cf. Butler 1970a, 53). Harmony is basically imposed upon the world by means of number. This applies particularly to the numerological design of the cosmos as perceived by scholars and philosophers. Though in permanent change and transition, all forces of the cosmos are in a subtle state of equilibrium, its cyclical nature correlating with the 'spherical' numbers (see especially ch. 2.3). By analogy with mathematical laws, the equal balance of the universe with its inherent cosmic correspondences and regularities is most conveniently and stringently formulated in terms of number (cf. Heninger 1977, 131). Recall the following axiom in the *Book of Wisdom* 11:21, which serves as the leading idea of the present approach: "Omnia in mensura, et numero, et pondere disposuisti" — "thou hast ordered all things in measure and number and weight".

It goes without saying that this topos of numerical order required logical consistency based upon skill and discrimination. In his *Numerorum mysteria*, the medieval encyclopaedist Pietro Bongo stated:

> Number is an original natural principle of the structure of reason; however those who have no minds, like the brutes, do not number, and so number is the principle of those who are affected by reason. (Bongo 1618, 1; quoted from Butler 1970a, 79)

Turning our attention to *Vǫlospǫ́*, there are indications of higher-scale number symbolism in the poem. It is important to note the wide range of symbolical number values which is restricted through context. Even the same number may be taken either in a positive or negative sense according to circumstances (e.g. Røstvig 1990b, 514). This applies in part to the numbers 'two', 'three', 'nine' and 'twelve' in *Vǫlospǫ́*. In what follows, the numerical focus rests on the chief numbers 'one', 'two', 'three', 'four', 'nine', 'twelve', as well as 'nihil' (cf. also Schulte 2002a). Particularly important to the texture of *Vǫlospǫ́* are 'spherical' or 'cyclic'

numbers approximating the perfection of the circle, notably 'three' and 'nine' — whereas 'four' and 'twelve' are implicit only in the formal arrangement of the poem (see chs 2.3–2.6).

It will be investigated in ch. 3, how formal numerical structure in *Vǫlospǫ́* interacts with an allegorical level of number values. This literary mode of numerical composition is most adequately described by a topomorphical approach as already outlined in the introductory chapter. For the deployment of number-based topomorphical analysis see generally Røstvig (1990a; 1994) and Eriksen (1987, 2001).

2.0 The number 'nihil'

'Nihil' is firmly established in the conceptual system of *Vǫlospǫ́*. The Old Norse term *ginnunga gap*, which reappears in *Snorra Edda*, is generally rendered into English or German as an unstructured 'yawning cleft' in the times of yore — "a 'yawning emptiness', from whose unimaginable magnitude the 'magic' of the supernatural powers would emerge" (Dronke 1997, 113). As for the basic notion of *ginnunga gap*, Hugo Gering (1927, 6) proposes "eine weite öffnung von klüften, d.h. ein ungeheurer gähnender abgrund, ein chaos", whereas Jan de Vries (1930–31) emphasizes the magical element in "der mit magischen Kräften erfüllte Urraum":[7]

> Es war in jener Urzeit nur ein leerer Urschlund da, ein *immane baratrum abyssi*, wie es ein Scholion in Adam von Bremens Kirchengeschichte (IV, 39) beschreibt und dessen Namen er als *Ghinmendegop* wiedergibt. Dieser Mitteilung dürfen wir entnehmen, daß die Vorstellung von *Ginnungagap* bei allen skandinavischen Völkern verbreitet war. (de Vries 1957, 361)

The abysmal void of chaos is part of an exposition of nothingness and non-existence in *Vǫlospǫ́*. At this initial stage of cosmic creation, the open space of *ginnunga gap* signifies the complete absence of everything:

Vsp. 3	Ár var alda,	þat er Ymir bygði,
	vara sandr né sær	né svalar unnir;
	iǫrð fannz æva	né upphiminn,
	gap var ginnunga,	enn gras hvergi.

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[7] Already Guðmundur Andrésson in his *Lexicon Islandicum* (1999[1683], 56) glosses *gynnunga gap* as: "Abyssus, gap etiam hiatus Oris vel Terrae, Ostium Fluminis & c."

In the beginning of time, Ymir was alive.
There were neither sands, nor sea, nor cool waves.
The earth didn't exist, nor did the upper sky,
— there was a vast void — but grass nowhere.

Although this cosmic conception is generally deemed autochthonous Nordic, there are cogent reasons to challenge this view. I strongly suspect this term to be designed by analogy with European medieval thought. It may be noted in passing that this issue not only touches upon the composition of *Vǫlospǫ́* but upon Norse mythology as a whole. In classical cosmogony, 'nihil' or 'nothingness' is the base that God uses for the *creatio ex nihilo* (Heninger 1977, 16, 26). The primeval state of non-existence is directly linked to the notion of chaos as the exact opposite of cosmos. This central idea of European medieval thought found its expression in several cosmographical diagrams. An early French humanist such as Charles de Bouelles depicted *deus de nichilo creans universa* (see illustration in Heninger 1977, 16). *Vǫlospǫ́*, stanza 5, reflects this state of unstructured chaos by the disorder of the sun, moon and stars who have not yet found their stations.

In a famous passage of his *Timaeus* (28C), Plato renders the antonym of 'nihil' as το πᾶν, which is translated into Latin as *omnes* and into English as 'the All' (cf. ch. 2.1). Given these equations and antitheses, it is far from daring to suggest that the Norse conception of *ginnunga gap* relies heavily on Continental traditions of cosmogony. From the beginnings of philosophical speculation, there was a fundamental dispute on the issue of pre-existent matter with two competing solutions (Heninger 1977, 26–27). First, there was the widely held view that God created the world out of nothing (as seen for instance in *Genesis* with its common ex *nihilo*-interpretation). Second, many philosophers who pondered on the origin of origins assumed that pre-existing substance was merely shaped and patterned by God according to a predetermined plan (the view of Plato's *Timaeus*). In a personal interpretation, the author of *Vǫlospǫ́* ingeniously conjoined these two incompatible strands by intercalating a 'mytheme': the ancient Ymir myth, or myth of creation. For detail see Turville-Petre (1964, 275–78). This interlude offers a unique solution to the problem of origin, conflating both pagan Nordic and classical European thought. The androgynous giant Ymir who dwells in the vast void of *ginnunga gap* embodies the primary matter and, consequently, has merely to be patted into new shape by the Æsir:

Þeir [Bors synir; M.S.] tokv Ymi ok flvttv imitt Ginvnga gap ok gerþv af honvm iorþina, af bloþe hans sæiN ok votnin. Iorþin var gor af holdinv, en biorgin af beinvnvm, griot ok vrþir gerþv þeir af tavnvm ok ioxlvm ok af þeim beinvm, er brotin voro. (Finnur Jónsson 1931, 14–15)

"They took Ymir and transported him to the middle of Ginnungagap, and out of him made the earth, out of his blood the sea and the lakes. The earth was made of the flesh and the rocks of the bones, stone and scree they made out of the teeth and molars and of the bones that had been broken." (Faulkes 1987, 12)

This antithetical relationship between *ginnunga gap* and Ymir prefigures the fundamental opposition between 'nihil' and 'one', or 'nothingness' and 'all' in the structured world. The Nordic creation myth as depicted in *Vǫlospǫ* appears as an ingenious syncretistic rendering of pagan lore inspired by continental European traditions referring to the *creatio ex nihilo*. In any case, influences from cosmological ideas centred on Pythagorean-Platonic and biblical traditions are beyond doubt.

2.1 The number 'one'

'One' is a firm pole or centre on the plane, signifying both 'unity' and 'substance', viz. the primary matter of the universe. It may represent the 'monad' and stand for creation. Our poem invokes several mighty symbols of oneness. Among them is the androgynous giant Ymir dwelling in the abyss of *ginnunga gap* as well as the World Tree and the golden gameboards (*gullnar tǫflor*), but last but not least the *vǫlva* or seeress relating her vision to Óðinn: "The *vǫlva* herself, the most impressive figure in the whole poem, however, emerges alone" (Jochens 1990, 272). Referred to the basic network of relationships, the fundamental opposition is between the vast void of *ginnunga gap* and the structured world, whence the antithetical duad of 'nihil' versus 'one' (cf. Heninger 1977, 26). With regard to this archetypal pattern of classical cosmography, S. K. Heninger remarks:

The concept of cosmos assumed a beneficent deity, the divine monad of the Pythagorean school. This Holy One began the creation with an archetypal idea to which he gave physical extension into a time-space continuum, thereby producing the universe as we perceive it. Because the creating deity is beneficent, his creation is good and beautiful. Because he worked from a rational plan, it is orderly, with the endless variety of the world carefully organized into a systematic arrangement.

> Each item has its proper place, and is related both to the whole and to every other item — hence *universe*. The word, in fact, comes from L. *unus+versus*, and means literally "that which rolls around as one". The heavens continually circle in their course and carry all with them in a regulated movement. (Heninger 1977, 7)

While the primeval abyss signifies 'chaos', the creation of the universe is equal to 'perfection', whence the equation Κόσμος = πᾶν = *omnes* = 'all' = 'universe' = 'perfection' and even 'Christ', since English poets equated πᾶν and God the Son (Heninger 1977, 26). God is the simple unity, the all-embracing circle with center everywhere and circumference nowhere. *Vǫlospǫ́* invokes this symbolism in connection with the world ash Yggdrasill which is the tree of cosmic unity and order (for detail see Steinsland 1979). Since it is the axis of the structured universe, the World Tree embodies harmony and oneness *in nuce*. Moreover, as evidenced by its Old Norse designation *miǫtuðr* in *Vsp.* 46, Yggdrasill is etymologically in line with OE *meotod* 'fate, god' and OS *metod* 'measurer, regulator, fate' (de Vries 1962, 390). In this sense, Yggdrasill is the 'dispenser of fate' bearing the destiny of the whole world — a notion that Meissner (1939, 218) translates as "schicksalhaftes Geschehen" or "Verhängnis". (For a fuller account see de Vries 1956, 267–68 and Dronke 1997, 57, 144–45.)

Since the ash tree is affected by the decline of vital powers, the whole world is bound to decay and wither. This conveys a fatalistic attitude towards the course of events. Linguistically, the competing term *mjǫtviðr* which appears in *Vsp.* 2 is central here, for it refers to measurement (G 'Maßbaum'; Kuhn 1968, 142). More than half a century ago, Rudolf Meissner commented on this *hapax* word:

> *mjǫtviðr*, nur hier vorkommend, kann nichts anderes sein, als der Baum, der das Lebensmaß der Welt bestimmt; stirbt der Baum, so vergeht auch die Welt, und ein sinnreicher Mythus schildert, wie der Baum von feindlichen Wesen am Wipfel, den Zweigen und seinen Wurzeln dauernd angegriffen wird (*Grm.* 32–35), wodurch auch die Welt dem Untergang geweiht ist. Das bevorstehende Ende verkündet der Baum durch sein Erbeben und das Rauschen seiner Zweige (*Vsp.* 47). (Meissner 1939, 218)

But the world ash is also capable of rejuvenation. After *ragna rǫc*, it will flourish again as in olden times. This interpretation invokes the cyclic nature of the world in conjunction with 'spherical' numbers: hence

'three' and 'nine' provide a direct clue to the the numerical design of *Vǫlospǫ́* (cf. chs 2.3 and 2.5). It has already been mentioned that the lay unfolds a rather complex network of correspondences and antitheses centred on Yggdrasill, e.g. the antithetical relationship with its negative counterpart, the mistletoe which is a perilous weapon (Turville-Petre 1964, 116).

The 'monad' as a key image of the Deity is associated with truth, light, and the cosmic 'mens', and there are interesting — though probably independent — Nordic parallels (cf. in principal Butler 1970a, 83). One of them is Óðinn's feature of one-eyedness. *Vǫlospǫ́*, stanza 28, relates that Óðinn in times long past left his eye as a pledge in Mímir's well (*Mímis brunnr*), and Jan de Vries comments:

> Der Sinn scheint nicht schwer zu finden, wenn wir nur Rücksicht nehmen auf die Eigenart des Riesen Mimir, der die Quelle besitzt (s. § 176); er gilt als ein Wesen, das tief verborgene Weisheit künden kann. Odin bekommt durch das Opfer seines einen Auges die Möglichkeit zu einer tieferen Schau; ... statt eines körperlichen Auges wird ihm ein geistiges zuteil. (de Vries 1957, 82)

This symbolical network can still be further extended by taking *Heim-dallarhljóð* into consideration. Like Mímir's eye, it is hidden beneath the world ash. Consequently, the Norse god Heimdal(l)r who is responsible for this designation is located at the *axis mundi* as a guardian of the world. Summing up different strands of evidence, Jan de Vries remarks that the variants *Heimdallr* and *Heimdalr* refer to the World Tree or the vault of heaven, respectively. As might be suspected, the main argument rests on numerology:

> Die neun Mütter des Gottes [mentioned in *Heimdallargaldr*; M.S.] symbolisieren die neun Welträume, deren Achse dieser Weltbaum bildet. Der Gott ist mit dem Widder verbunden, weil gerade dieses Tier der Himmelssäule als Opfer dargebracht wurde (z.B. dem lappischen Gott Waralden Olmay). (de Vries 1957, 240)

As with Óðinn's eye at Mímir's source, visionary insight is invoked by Heimdallr's *hljóð*. It may be noted, however, that the term *Heim-dallarhljóð* defies a sound semantic interpretation. Yet again, its location as the centre of the cosmos provides a clue:

> Obgleich das Wort *hljóð* niemals „Horn" bedeutet, hat man es immer gerne mit dem Gjallarhorn, das *Vsp* 46 erwähnt wird, verbunden. So

entstand die Vorstellung des Götterwächters, der im Anfang des Welt-
unterganges in sein Horn stößt, eine Vorstellung, die wieder kräftig an
christliche Anschauungen gemahnt. ... Als Mittelpunkt des Kosmos
heißt er [Heimdallr; M.S.] deshalb auch *heimskr*, das hier wohl durch
den Dichter absichtlich verwendet wurde, damit ein Doppelsinn hin-
eingelegt werden konnte. (de Vries 1957, 241–42)

To sum up, Yggdrasill and related mythological concepts in *Vǫlospǫ́*
make up symbols of oneness and unity, alluding to balance and centricity
— the equilibrium of the cosmos in its many guises. The prosperity of
the world and the mental gift of vision are bound up with it.

2.2 The number 'two'

'Two' represents two opposite poles on a straight line. It is first of all
the number of imperfection, symbolizing 'evil' and 'discord' in many
contexts (Butler 1970a, 73). Since plurality is regarded as the root of evil
in medieval thought, 'two' is deteriorated in relation to the unity or
trinity (Hopper 1969, 165). In consequence, duality and division are
natural expressions of the 'law of polarization'. In a topomorphical
perspective, antithesis is an issue of great importance to the texture of
Vǫlospǫ́. For the *antitheton* as a classical rhetorical figure see ch. 1.2. The
antithetical network of the lay involves duality of different kinds, viz.
good — evil, order — chaos, one — nihil, creation — destruction, re-
juvenation — decay, but last but not least the constellation protagonist
— antagonist. Apart from the antonymous relationships just mentioned
in chs 2.0–2.1, the basic constellation occurs as the antithetical duad
Óðinn — *vǫlva:*

> Outside and alone our sibyl meets *inn aldni*, Óðinn. Face to [face; M.S.]
> with the chief god she withstands his fierce look as he tries to gain from
> her knowledge about the future (str. 28). ... Her next statement *alt veit
> ek*, Óðinn (I know everything, Óðinn), including where he has hidden
> his eye, is indicative of the self-assurance and superiority that is veiled in
> her rhetorical questions. (Jochens 1990, 272–73)

Obviously, this initial scheme is of great importance to the substructure
of *Vǫlospǫ́*, as it is constantly played on throughout the text. Lending
the poem its vital force, this tension is maintained until the end of the
soliloquy when the *vǫlva* finally sinks away: *nú mun hon søcqvaz* (*Vsp.*
66:8). Since these systematic interrelations have been treated else-

where, I do not dwell on them here (see Jochens 1990 and Schulte 2002a). Owing to various self-projections, the seeress is mirrored in different shady personalities who severely trouble and intimidate the Æsir, viz. the enchantress Gullveig-Heiðr (*Vsp.* 21–22) and the three recurring giant maidens: *þriár þursa meyiar* (*Vsp.* 8–17). With time, the resources of the Æsir seem to be strongly counterbalanced by diametrically opposed forces, hence the vivid impression of anxiety (cf. Mundal 2001).

As regards configurational structure, Gullveig and Heiðr in stanzas 21–22 may be regarded as a duplication: "Heiðr is Gullveig reborn" (Turville-Petre 1964, 158; critically however McKinnell 2001). It has already been noted that these two names are intertwined in several ways. By the same token, the three gods Óðinn, Hœnir and Lóðurr who animate the lifeless tree-trunks Ascr and Embla in *Vsp.* 17 turn out to be a triplication of the supreme god Óðinn *in optima forma* (see ch. 2.3). Again, this trinity is counteracted by effective self-emanations of the *vǫlva*, viz. the three giantesses or *þursa meyiar*. What matters in this conjunction is the numerical design of *Vǫlospǫ́* with its deployment of repetitive structural patterns. These compositional aspects of numerical substructure will be further explored in ch. 3.2.

Antagonism results in fierce battle and hostile encounters. Thus, dualism is first of all reflected in on-going warfare. The involvement of the Æsir in two different conflicts renders the case as an inescapable course of events: *their* destiny has chosen *them* (see fig. 2). Obviously, the gods suffer from ambivalence, facing a severe lack of cohesion and integrity. As I have argued elsewhere (Schulte 2002a, 139), this lack of integrity is partly based on the fact that gods such as Óðinn and Þórr have giant blood in their veins. Their inner dissolution becomes the dissolution of men, as the fate alloted to the gods is bound up with the fate of men, never allowing them to escape their destiny. Like human beings then the gods are part of the divine creation and hence part of the eternal return. For this reason, there is no principal difference between the two classes of beings. The inner schism of the gods is signalled by their double conflict (fig. 2):
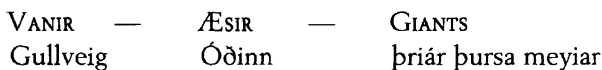
Vanir	—	Æsir	—	Giants
Gullveig		Óðinn		þriár þursa meyiar

Fig. 2: Antagonism: the double conflict of the Æsir

It is known from other sources that this conflict involves conspiracy, treason and treachery on behalf of the Æsir where the god Loki plays a prominent role (see e.g. Schach 1983, 94–95). *Vǫlospǫ́* lays stress both on the violent measure of the Æsir and their deceitfulness through fourfold reiteration of their oath-breaking:

Vsp. 26   Þórr einn þar vá,   þrunginn móði,
            hann sialdan sitr,   er hann slíct um fregn;
            á genguz eiðar,   orð oc sœri,
            mál ǫll meginlig,   er á meðal fóro.

        There, Þórr was the only one who slew, swollen with rage
        he seldom sits idle, when he learns such things;
        oaths were broken, pledges and promises,
        all solemn vows that had been exchanged.

Another antithetical duad aims at the war god Óðinn and the innocent Baldr — both being representatives of two opposite World Ages, viz. a passing and a coming one. The old paradigm is represented by Óðinn and Þórr both having a clear connection with war (cf. Kroesen 2001, 104–105). As for number symbolism, the way of the world is embodied by the cyclic number 'nine'; hence *nío heima* 'nine worlds', which will be further explored in ch. 2.5.

The composer of *Vǫlospǫ́* perceived dualism and ambivalence as direct causes for the disruption of cosmic order and the ruin of the world. On the rhetorical level, this is eminently shown by the poets fondness for the *oxymoron* (see ch. 1.2). Again, this gives a clear hint of a scholastic setting. A hidden message on the semantic level may then be that ambivalence ruins life. In the typological system of the poem, gold, for instance, is charged with positive and negative values. While its original connotations are highly positive (as evidenced by the golden game-boards of the gods), there are inverse allusions to greed and intoxication, especially where the enticing Gullveig enters the scene (*Vsp.* 21). Originally, gold alludes to a state of ultimate perfection and balance, viz. 'eternal life' (for semantics see Schulte 2002a, 137, 140). Thus, the golden game-boards (*gullnar tǫflor*) add to the impression of original harmony reflecting the design of the cosmos in the mind of the creator: The highest class of beings, the gods are at their ease and celebrate life. Cyclicity, therefore, is invoked when the golden game-boards of olden times are finally retrieved in the new World Age (*Vsp.* 8 and 61).

On the other hand, 'two' may also allude to a state of harmony and

reconciliation, when duads are reunited just as day and night at the crack of dawn. Most importantly, the fact that Hǫðr and Baldr live peacefully together after *ragna rǫc* bears witness that discord and quarrel are finally made up (*Vsp.* 62). There is a new spirit of innocence and peace in this prophetic stanza:

Vsp. 62   Muno ósánir   acrar vaxa,
              bǫls mun allz batna,   Baldr mun koma;
              búa þeir Hǫðr oc Baldr Hroptz sigtóptir,
              vé valtíva —   vitoð er enn, eða hvat?

              Unsown fields will bear grain and all grief will be assuaged,
              Baldr will return;
              Baldr and Hǫðr will inhabit the ruins of Hroptr's victory hall
              (ɔ: valhall),
              the sanctuary of the gods. — Do you know even more, so what?

Here, duality is suspended by the notion of peace and reconciliation. In a similar vein, the first human couple, Ascr and Embla, who directly correspond to Adam and Eve in the Scriptures, represent the prosperous mankind (*Vsp.* 17). As a matter of fact, this 'mytheme' is of further interest, since it turns out to be configured by the author of *Vǫlospǫ́* himself. Stressing its uniqueness, Gro Steinsland (2001, 262) argues that "Ask og Embla er relatert både til verdenstreet Yggdrasill og til Bibelens Adam og Eva". She concludes that the anthropogony myth of *Vǫlospǫ́* is an analogical rendering of the composer patterned on the Bible. Once this working hypothesis is accepted, it is tempting to argue that several other groupings within the lay are scholarly inventions with strongly altered pagan traditions or none at all behind them (cf. ch. 3).

2.3 The number 'three'

'Three' is a circular number closely related to 'one' in conveying the notion of balance, completion and unity (cf. ch. 2.1). It is equally close to the number 'nine' which is its square and intensification: *thrice three* (see ch. 2.5). This is one of the most reverenced and sacred numbers both in heathen and Christian belief finding its highest Christian expression in the Trinitas. Everything is organized hierarchically in triple arrangements (Butler 1970a, 74). Moreover, 'three' is the earthly symbol of ultimate perfection and reconciliation which overcomes dualism (e.g. Hopper 1969, 138).

In his chapter on the number 'three', the late sixteenth-century ency-clopaedist Pietro Bongo — building on Patristic and Medieval sources — related that the Pythagoreans called it *Iustitia* or 'Justice' because it shows how the central unit (the mean) keeps the other two in place, thus minimizing the tendency to defect and excess (cf. Røstvig 1994, 159). In Bongo's view, all odd numbers have such a centre or mean within themselves as their unifying nexus so that they may be envisaged as a perfect circle, and, because the middle in this way mediates between the extremes, the number 'three' represents the beginning of all order. Out of this perspective, Plato remarks that "it is impossible that two things alone should be conjoined without a third" (Timaeus, 31 B–C).

From a scholastic perspective, the topos of order then explains why 'three' (along with its square 'nine') is *Vǫlospǫ́*'s favourite number. On the whole, different tripartite configurations are in evidence. To begin with a commonplace in medieval literature and art, viz. the enumeration of sun, moon and stars which recurs so frequently in texts of the Middle Ages (Heninger 1977, 9–10). *Vǫlospǫ́* attaches importance to the disorder of the cosmos at the early stages of creation:

Vsp. 5   Sól varp sunnan,   sinni mána,
          hendi inni hœgri   um himiniǫður;
          sól þat né vissi,   hvar hon sali átti,
          stiǫrnor þat né visso, hvar þær staði átto,
          máni þat né vissi,   hvat hann megins átti.

The sun, from the south, the moon's companion,
with her right hand cast her rays across the horizont of the sky;
the sun did not know where her dwelling was,
the stars did not know where there stations were;
the moon did not know yet what power he had.

Another tripartite structure is made up by the three spheres of the world, viz. Miðgarðr, Hel, and the mansion of the gods (*Hárs hǫll*) — all of them being united by the World Tree (see ch. 2.1). As designated by the Old Norse verb *gala*, a rooster will loudly ring in *ragna rǫc* in each of these three worlds (*Vsp.* 42–43). Referred to the three Times or Ages, Past — Present — Future, the Present may be viewed as an interim stage between the two World Ages ruled by Óðinn and Baldr respectively (see ch. 2.4). This transitional age is characterized by on-going warfare as the result of fateful deceitfulness.

Regarding configurational structure, the author of *Vǫlospǫ́* seems to be fond of hierarchical arrangements in triads which points at him being a scholastic. Among the high-powered trinities of the poem are the three gods Óðinn, Hœnir and Lóðurr who are responsible for the animation of man. Ascr and Embla are still feeble (*litt megandi*) and fateless (*ørloglausa*), before being patted by the resourceful gods:

Vsp. 18	Ǫnd þau né átto,	óð þau né hǫfðo,
	lá né læti,	né lito góða;
	ǫnd gaf Óðinn	óð gaf Hœnir,
	lá gaf Lóðurr	oc lito góða.

They had neither breath nor reason, hair nor speech, nor fair countenance.
Óðinn gave breath, Hœnir gave reason, Lóðurr gave hair and fair countenance.

Based on convincing evidence, Gro Steinsland (2001) interprets this trinity as different hypostases of the supreme god Óðinn which means a triplication ("ulike hypostaser av Odin"; Steinsland 2001, 251, cf. also 259–60 with further arguments). This assumption ties in with the present analysis perfectly (cf. ch. 3.2). First of all it is sustained by the fact that the divine triad of *Vsp.* 18:5–7 is not found elsewhere. We are certainly reminded of the triad Hár — Jafnhár — Þriði in Snorri's *Edda* alluding to the Trinitas. Turning our attention to Hœnir, it has long been noted that this god is a shadowy figure in the Norse pantheon "of whom next to nothing can be known" (Turville-Petre 1964, 132; cf. de Vries 1957, 268–72). Some fifty years ago, Anne Holtsmark concluded that this figure is merely an attendant of the highest god Óðinn:

> Jeg konkluderer: Høne er en emanasjon av Odin, opptrer som dennes felle og arvtager; han hører til en bestemt side av dødskulten hvor haner har vært ofret, kanskje også vært brukt som orakelfugler. Han kan være representert av en »fillemann«, en utkledd dukke, men ved kultspillene har han opptrådt lys levende, en mann »i haneham«, som forrettet haneoffer eller bare var Odinsprestens assistent. (Holtsmark 1950, 53)

In a replay mode, Hœnir shows up again after *ragna rǫc*, when Óðinn has come to death in the final fight of the Æsir (see ch. 2.4). In the new World Age, therefore, Hœnir takes over one of Óðinn's typical functions as a dieu magicien: *kiósa hlautvið*, lit. 'choosing the wood for the

lots (of men)', or G *Losholz kiesen* — which means determining the destiny of men (*Vsp.* 63):

> Hønes funksjon etter Ragnarǫk 'å velge hlautved' må være nettopp denne prestens handling. Og denne rollen må Odin, le dieu magicien, ha hatt før; Høne er Odins arvtager. (Holtsmark 1950, 47)

On the whole, there can be little doubt that the focus of the poem — at least in the ascending sequence until *ragna rǫc* (*Vsp.* 1–30) — rests on the mighty god Óðinn, whose powers are organized hierarchically in triads. In a patristic setting this arrangement is clearly reminiscent of the Deity or Trinitas (cf. Butler 1970a, 74). But as noted before, the divine Powers are counterbalanced by the three giantesses — *þriár þursa meyiar* — who seem to be impressive self-emanations of the *vǫlva* or handmaidens conjured up by herself (for structural analysis see ch. 3.2). Consequently, the mighty god Óðinn is not equal to the demiurge, since God would certainly not be subjected to the Forces of Fate nor entangled in *ragna rǫc*.

Last but not least, there are the three Norns of Fate: Urðr, Verðandi and Sculd (*Vsp.* 20). These are often related to the three chronological stages of Past — Present — Future. Following the analysis of Paul Bauschatz (1982), Jenny Jochens takes this triad "to symbolize events that have taken place, that are in the process of happening, and that of necessity must occur" (Jochens 1990, 272; cf. also Dronke 1997, 128). In all probability, this configuration is indigenous Nordic but classical prototypes are in evidence as well. Two of the Norns may be later additions to form one of the powerful triads within *Vǫlospǫ́*. As Jan de Vries remarks,

> die unbestimmte Vielheit hat sich zu einer plastischen Dreiheit verdichtet. Die drei Nornen stehen mit den drei Moiren oder den drei Parzen auf einer Linie, und es besteht gar keine Veranlassung, hier wieder an eine Entlehnung zu denken. Aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach kreuzen sich zwei grundverschiedene Vorstellungen. Die eine kannte eine ursprünglich namenlose und gestaltenlose, aber später persönlich gedachte Schicksalsmacht (Urðr); die andere bezog sich auf weibliche Wesen, die bei der Geburt hilfreich waren und das Los der Kinder prophezeiten; sie waren von unbegrenzter Zahl, aber traten gerne in der Dreizahl auf. (de Vries 1956, 272–73)

To conclude, several tripartite configurations as evident in *Vǫlospǫ́* must

have permeated into Norse mythology well before the time of the poem (around 1000 A.D.).[8] By his inventive nature, however, the author of *Vǫlospǫ́* had a marked tendency to create new configurations by means of triads. They were modelled on different prototypes to suit a particular function within the lay's overall plan, whence again the strong suspicion of a poem inspired by patristic thought (cf. Heusler 1957, 190).

2.4 The number 'four'

In essence, 'fourness' relates to the Pythagorean tetragon, or more generally speaking to the square and the double square, which means the 'architectura ad quadratum' (on the underlying Platonic metaphysics of medieval geometry see Hiscock 2000). But the number 'four' also invokes the different complexions and ages of man, the seasons, the cardinal winds and the elements (for diagrams see Heninger 1977, 99–110). As a matter of fact, this basic numerical argument affects cosmic structure within a wider scope:

> Harmony is imposed on the world by means of the number 4, as we may see in the 4 elements, the 4 qualities, the 4 seasons, the 4 kinds of creatures (...), the 4 motions (ascent, descent, progression, and turning round). ... Because 4 creates the number 10 (through addition of the four first numbers), the universe is also organized in terms of this number, which denotes a return to Unity. (Røstvig 1994, 51)

In Medieval thought 'four' is the smallest number that can provide an extended body or tetrahedron, as opposed to a point, a line, or a plane surface (triangle). In this sense, it exhausts the possibilities of spatial extension (Heninger 1978, 99). In Platonic cosmogony, there are four elements which make up the physical world. Therefore, four delimits the world's substance. Everything in the mundane or sublunary region — without exception — consists of earth, water, air, and fire.

In *Vǫlospǫ́*, 'fourness' as such bears allegorical meaning at least twice, although the number remains unexpressed in both these cases. The first occurrence is more of an enumeration. *Vǫlospǫ́* 45, lists four bad Ages of discord and discomposure, viz. *sceggǫld, scálmǫld, vindǫld, vargǫld* (for semantics see Gering 1927, 59–60). The four items are patterned accord-

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[8] By consensus, *Vǫlospǫ́* is dated around 1000 A.D.; see e.g. Ström (1967, 167–68) and Jónas Kristjánsson (1990, 217). Although Andreas Heusler (1957, 191) argued for a definitely later date of the poem (middle of the 11th c.), there are few scholars today who share this conviction.

ing to the ratio 2:2 by means of parenthesis and alliteration (for these rhetorical devices see ch. 1.2):

Vsp. 45   Brœðr muno beriaz   oc at bǫnom verðaz,
               muno systrungar   syfiom spilla;
               hart er í heimi,   hórdómr mikill,
               sceggǫld, scálmǫld,   scildir ro klofnir,
               vindǫld, vargǫld,   áðr verǫld steypiz;
               mun engi maðr   ǫðrom þyrma.

               Brothers will smite and slay each other,
               and sisters' sons betray their kinsmen.
               There is evil on earth and great whoredom;
               an axe age, a sword age — shields are riven —
               a storm age, a wolf age, before the world collapses.
               No man will show mercy to another.

Second, when *ragna rǫc* approaches, the Æsir fight four major fights which are clearly interlinked (*Vsp.* 53–56). These hostile encounters consist of four antithetical duads, viz. (1) Óðinn–Fenrisúlfr, (2) Freyr–Surtr, (3) Viðarr–Fenrisúlfr, (4) Þórr–Miðgarðormr (see fig. 3):
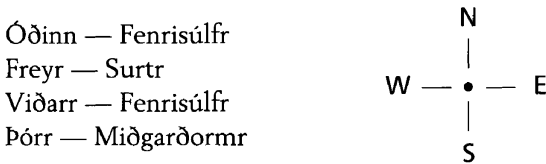
Óðinn — Fenrisúlfr   N
Freyr — Surtr |
Viðarr — Fenrisúlfr   W — • — E
Þórr — Miðgarðormr |
                                      S

Fig. 3: The fourfold fight of the Æsir in relation to the cardinal points

Here the allusion to the four directions and cardinal points is obvious, since "[t]he 'fourness' of earth became another almost universal commonplace as a result of this simple recognition of the cardinal points" (Hopper 1969, 8–9). This yields the archetypical pattern of the macrocosm. Classically-based conceptions may sufficiently account for this fourness, which however is firmly established in Norse mythology as well (cf. Hopper 1969, 204).

This number symbolism points at the fight of the Æsir being relentless and unsparing. It means a total, inexorable war. In view of these numerological associations, the notion of an eternal return to unity is evident (Ciklamini 1963). Thus, alluding to the four seasons, the fourness of fights and bad Ages in *Vǫlospǫ́* is the point of departure for a cyclic

renewal of the world in permanent change. It has already been stressed that the ancient war god Óðinn will be relieved of his command by the innocent Baldr, who embodies the peaceful qualities of the new Age.

As depicted in *Vǫlospǫ́* 3, Óðinn's advent in the times of yore marked the end of the abysmal chaos and the beginning of time-structuring (as part of a balanced and harmonic universe). But in the time-bound universe, the end inevitably approaches. It is tempting to infer that the four-fold fight of the Æsir in *Vsp.* 53–56 signifies a paradigmatic shift at the brink of a new Age (cf. ch. 2.5). Óðinn's time is finally over. We may ask: Does the death of the supreme god of the Norse pantheon signal a major cultural-religious transition on the eve of christianity?

2.5 The number 'nine'

'Nine' plays a prominent role in Norse mythology, being a mystic and holy number to an even higher degree than 'three'. It is the heathen counterpart of the Christian 'seven', which is a 'cyclic' or 'spherical' number, too (cf. ch. 2.7). It is particularly associated with fertility, cult and magic. The particular relation to the human gestation is obvious in *Rígsþula* 20 and 33: *Lið o meir at þat mánuðr nío* — "nine months passed after that". Due to the notion of 'cyclic unity', it is significant for the rhythmic course of time (de Vries 1956, 421). In all probability, its importance rests on the old chronology which was based on the lunar year and week. Several traces may be found in Old Germanic (Dumézil 1947, 231–38). Owing to its cyclicity, this number exhausts the possibilities for variety in the particular system and thereby achieves the perfection of a 'unified infinite' (for cyclic cosmographical diagrams see Heninger 1977, 110–13). The nine planets moving in their orbits represent the eternal cosmic cycle.

In terms of measurement, 'nine' is adored as a sacred integer and has a firm base in Old Germanic number lore. Still there may be said to be some obscurity which envelops the origin and meaning of the papan 'nine' (Hopper 1969, 209). In general, it conveys the notion of completion or even infinity. As the square of 'three', it is a perfect and powerful number raised to its higher potency. Referred to classical number symbolism, Christopher Butler remarks,

> [t]he number nine is a kind of locus of perfection — as the square of the
> divine triad, as the number of the muses, and as 'tending towards ten'
> (Hugh's 'modum porrectionis') (Butler 1970a, 35)

In *Vǫlospǫ́*, the number 'nine' is deployed to form a network of concatenations and antitheses, thereby interacting with the number 'three' (cf. ch. 3). In the beginning of her soliloquy, the *vǫlva* invokes the whole universe along with her own ancestresses, when she remembers *nío heima* 'nine worlds' and *nío ívíðíor* 'nine witches of the woodlands'. As regards the *R*-variant *íviði*, Stefán Karlsson (1979, 227–28) has convincingly shown that this *hapax* word is based on an erroneous reading that should be dismissed in favour of *ívíðíor* (cf. also Einar G. Pétursson 1984, 274–75). As for compounding, *ívíðíor* is to be regarded as a *bahuvrīhi* formation with prepositional adverb *í-* as its first element and *víðr* as its second member, semantically 'those female beings related to the wood(lands)' (cf. also de Vries 1962, 288 and Dronke 1997, 109–10).

It is important to note that these *nío heima* do not only refer to the underworld, but to the upperworld as well (cf. Meissner 1939, 221; Ranke 1941, 52).[9] These nine worlds are echoed in *Vsp.* 56 in connection with the fourfold fight of the Æsir. In a structural perspective, the recurrent number 'nine' is of vital importance to the 'language of containment':

Vsp. 56	þá kømr inn mœri	mǫgr Hlóðyniar,
	gengr Óðins sonr	við úlf vega;
	drepr hann af móði	miðgarðz véor,
	muno halir allir	heimstǫð ryðia;
	gengr fet nío	Fiǫrgyniar burr
	neppr frá naðri,	níðs óqvíðnom.

Then the glorious son of Hlóðyn comes, Óðinn's son goes to fight the serpent.
Miðgarðr's protector slays him in wrath. All men will perish from the earth.
Mortally wounded, Fjǫrgyn's son, of derision unafraid, strides nine paces away from the serpent.

Following Jan de Vries (1967, 143), Þórr's nine steps after slaying the Miðgarðormr in *Vsp.* 56 signal his superiority. At the same time, they allude to the nine worlds mentioned in *Vsp.* 2. Thus, the end of the poem is tied up with its beginning, and we are certainly reminded of the lay's highly symmetrical structure again (cf. ch. 1.1). This provides an example of numerical concatenation, as illustrated in figure 4:

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[9] For an intertextual parallel see *Vm.* 43:5–6 *nío kom ec heima / fyr Niflhel neðan.*

> *Vsp.* 2:5–6   <u>Nío</u> man ec heima, <u>nío</u> ívi𝀥ior
>
> |
>
> *Vsp.* 56:9   Þórr gengr fet <u>nío</u>

Fig. 4: Numerical concatenation by means of the number 'nine'

Moreover, Jan de Vries ponders on the relation between Þórr's nine steps after fighting the serpent and the *sapta padāni* in Old Indian tradition — the seven paces "mit denen Buddha die sieben kosmischen Welten durchschreitet" (see de Vries 1957, 143; with further typological parallels). Given the allusion to the nine worlds, the scene does not only mark the end of the Æsir's reign, but also the dawn of a new Age — a World Age ruled by the peaceful god Baldr who is going to replace the war gods Ó𝀥inn and Þórr. Even the hierarchical triad Ó𝀥inn, Hœnir and Ló𝀥urr is gone — Ó𝀥inn's attendant Hœnir will partly take over his master's function as a *dieu magicien* (cf. ch. 2.3).

To sum up, Pythagorean and Platonic number lore views 'nine' as a 'spherical' number, which is highly reverenced and sacred. In essence, it means 'perfection' and 'completion' with regard to the sublunar world. But since 'nine' runs short of the decade, it is all-but-perfect and all-but-complete in relation to ten — an image of the physical world as opposed to the supralunar one. For the high status of the number 'ten' in classical number symbolism cannot be overrated (cf. Butler 1970b, 4). As a corollary, the nine worlds (*nío heima*) of the Norse cosmos allude to a state of mundane completion on the one hand, but a lack of celestial perfection and harmony on the other. Therefore they are bound to collapse in the cyclic course of events. This line of reasoning invokes the notion of an eternal return. It is directly corroborated by the World Tree being dubbed *miǫtvi𝀥r* in *Vsp.* 2, a term referring to measurement (cf. ch. 2.1). In view of these results, Þórr's nine steps (*fet nío*) at the end of the fight relate directly to the passing World Age ruled by the war god Ó𝀥inn and his clan. They are an integral part of the poem's eschatology.

2.6 The number 'twelve'

'Twelve' is a 'cyclic' or 'spherical' number closely related to the bases 'three' and 'four' (cf. chs 2.3–2.4). Since 'twelve' is of no vital importance to the textual weave of *Vǫlospǫ́*, it may only be dealt with in passing. In brief, this number alludes to the cyclic course of the year with its twelve months or to the dozen. More specifically in a Christian setting, 'twelve' prefigures the 'twelve apostles', or conversely 'the twelve forces of evil'

in Gnostics (cf. Hopper 1969, 54, 129–31). As for *Vǫlospǫ́*, the opinion has been voiced by Wolfgang Lange (1955, 338–39) that the poem mentions twelve 'evil portents and forebodings' of *ragna rǫc* (*Vsp.* 50–52) and, correspondingly, twelve 'fortunate circumstances' after *ragna rǫc* (*Vsp.* 59–66). The twelve evil portents mentioned by Lange (1955) are:

> *Vsp.* 50:1 Hrymr ecr austan, *Vsp.* 50:3–5 snýz iǫrmungandr í iǫtunmóði, ormr knýr unnir, *Vsp.* 50:6–7 enn ari hlaccar, slítr nái neffǫlr, *Vsp.* 50:8 Naglfar losnar, *Vsp.* 51:1 Kióll ferr austan, *Vsp.* 51:5 fara fífls megir, *Vsp.* 51:7–8 þeim er bróðir Býleiptz í fǫr, *Vsp.* 52:1 Surtr ferr sunnan, *Vsp.* 52:5 griótbiǫrg gnata, *Vsp.* 52:6 enn gífr rata, *Vsp.* 52:7 troða halir helveg, *Vsp.* 52:8 enn himinn klofnar.

The twelve auspicious signs may be listed as follows:

> *Vsp.* 59:3–4 iǫrð ór ægi, iðiagrœna, *Vsp.* 60:1 finnaz æsir, *Vsp.* 61:3 gullnar tǫflor, *Vsp.* 62:1–2 Muno ósánir acrar vaxa, *Vsp.* 62:4 Baldr mun koma, *Vsp.* 63:1–2 Þá kná Hœnir hlautvið kiósa, *Vsp.* 63:3–4 oc byrir byggia bræðra tveggia, *Vsp.* 64:4 Gimlé, *Vsp.* 65:1 Þá kømr inn ríki, *Vsp.* 66:8 nú mun hon søcqvaz.

It should be noted, however, that 'twelve' does not permeate the sub-structure of the poem as do the numbers 'two', 'three' and 'nine' (cf. ch. 3.2). As a matter of fact, to draw a numerological conclusion would exceed the evidence and there is no firm base for further typological considerations in a comparative European perspective. In any case, the auspicious signs culminate in the *vǫlva* sinking down — she takes with her all evil spirits whom she has just conjured up in her own vision (cf. fig. 5 below).

2.7 The Pagan 'nine' and the Christian 'seven'

It is worth noting that *Vǫlospǫ́* abides by the pagan 'nine', whereas its Christian counterpart 'seven' is completely absent. Apart from its function as 'supreme cyclic entity', the number 'nine' is related to the huge heathen sacrifices held at Uppsala (ON *Uppsalir*), Lejre (ON *Hleðra*), Trondheim (ON *Þrándheimr*) and other places. These pagan fertility cults with their nine-years rhythm were particularly important as heathen resistance to conversion, hence the central status of the number 'nine' in the syncretistic transitional phase of the late 10th and 11th century. Jan de Vries (1957, 422) lays stress on these cults reinforcing hea-

then reaction to Christianity. In this connection, 'nine' symbolizes the sacred community. Those who did not participate in the sacrifice were excluded from the holy circle and received the pejorative status of a *niðingr*: "Die Weigerung, am Opfer teilzunehmen, bedeutet ja, daß ein solcher Mensch sich außerhalb der heiligen Gemeinschaft stellt, daß er also zu einem *niðingr* wird" (de Vries 1956, 420–21).

At the time when *Vǫlospǫ́* was composed, paganism and Christian faith must already have coexisted side by side. Turning to a younger visionary poem such as *Sólarlióð*, a Christian counterpart of *Vǫlospǫ́* (datable to 1250), we meet a different stage of Nordic-Christian syncretism. As Frederic Amory (1990, 252) puts it,

> this mid-thirteenth century poem ... through its imagery of heaven and hell runs an eclectic Icelandic *interpretatio christiana* which freely adapts the myths of the Eddas and the kennings of the skalds to the visions of a Christian seer, and thus synthesizes them ... 'at the conceptual level', which is to say, 'not at a level of fundamental significance for Christian orthodoxy'. (Amory 1990, 252)

As for numerology in *Sólarlióð*, we find the sovereignty of the numbers 'seven' and 'twelve' (cf. Fidjestøl 1979, 26). Not only are the heathen gods reinterpreted to connote evil, but the holy number 'nine' has undergone pejoration almost toward a voodoo. (For the 'nine sins' in medieval typology see Butler 1970a, 35 and Røstvig 1990b, 514.) Thus Fredrik Paasche comments on *Sólarlióð* 79:

> Navnet Njord er nok til at vise, at dette er onde væsener. Njords datter er Freyja, Njords ni døtre forstaar jeg som ni „freyjur", ni kvinder onde som Freyja. De kan personificere de store synder (*hǫfuðlestir, hǫfuðsyndir*). Deres vanlige tal er syv, men ofte opgives otte eller ni. Syv er Sólarlióðs hellige tal, ni dets ulykkestal (ni nætter paa sykeleiet). (Paasche 1914, 160)

This change of symbolic value is definitely not traceable in *Vǫlospǫ́* — 'nine' being one of its sacred and central numbers. Moreover, 'nine' in *Vǫlospǫ́* is part of an allegorical network in terms of higher-scale number symbolism, where *nío ivíðior* take on a prefigurative function with regard to *þriár þursa meyiar* intimidating the Æsir (*Vsp.* 8–17; see ch. 3.2 along with fig. 5). Although the overall issue of Norse-Christian syncretism remains highly controversial, it seems safe to state that our poem represents an early Old Nordic transitional text with an amalgamation of

Christian and heathen elements where modern structures were partly imposed on old mythological lore — the number 'nine' being part of it.

3 The architectural base of numerical composition

3.1 Numerical substructure: The building in the text

Apart from formal and rhetorical structure, one specific constituent is numerical substructure. The significance of 'substructure' has already been emphasized in the introductory chapter. What is here referred to as numerical substructure aims at an adequate description of the underlying architectural base of *Vǫlospǫ́* that supports its building by means of number. Arguably, numerical substructure links the two aspects of formal structure and numerological composition, i.e. number symbolism. It is part of the overall texture of the lay forming a network of correspondences, concatenations and antitheses based on the deployment of number (cf. ch. 1.1).[10] Obviously, a medieval audience would have been more sensitive to this textual weave with its links and knots than any modern reader or listener; hence our need to raise structural awareness by analytical means.

As already noted in ch. 2, numbers function as important types setting up links between parts of the whole work to establish unifying structures. On the whole, verbal and numerical structures coexist side by side underlining each other's significance. Furthermore, formal numerical structure interacts with an allegorical level of symbolic number value; this numerical interface will be explored in ch. 3.2.

3.2 Numerical concatenation

Numerical concatenation is a particular case of *concatenatio*, as discussed in ch. 1.2. It is a means of producing textual coherence and tension, thereby employing the symbolic value of number. In *Vǫlospǫ́*, the basic arrangement of antithetical relationships — especially involving Óðinn and the *vǫlva* — rests on number. This literary mode of iteration and parallelism is central in producing the poem's compositional dynamics.

As surmised in ch. 2, there are strong indications that the author of

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[10] As for the Scandinavian runic inscriptions, mention must be made of Heinz Klingenberg's numerical approach in his work *Runenschrift — Schriftdenken — Runeninschriften* (1973), which however met with severe criticism.

Vǫlospǫ invented or patterned certain configurations according to a pre-determined plan. A striking example is provided by the anthropogony myth centred on Ascr and Embla which turns out to be the author's analogical construction based on the Bible (see ch. 2.2). Once this working hypothesis is followed, it is tempting to infer that several other configurations within the lay are reshaped or patterned on numerical configurations with strongly modified or no underlying pagan traditions. To begin with the three Æsir Óðinn, Hœnir and Lóðurr which have already been discussed in ch. 2.3. It may be noted that this group meets with a direct counterpart connoting 'evil', viz. the three giant maidens — *þriár þursa meyiar* (*Vsp.* 8 and 17). As I have argued elsewhere, these giantesses turn out to be the effective self-projections or emanations of the *vǫlva* (Schulte 2002a, 146–47). In a numerical perspective, we are facing two diametrically opposed groups which are interlinked by the numbers 'three' and 'nine'. This yields the following recurrent pattern based on numerical concatenation (see fig. 5):
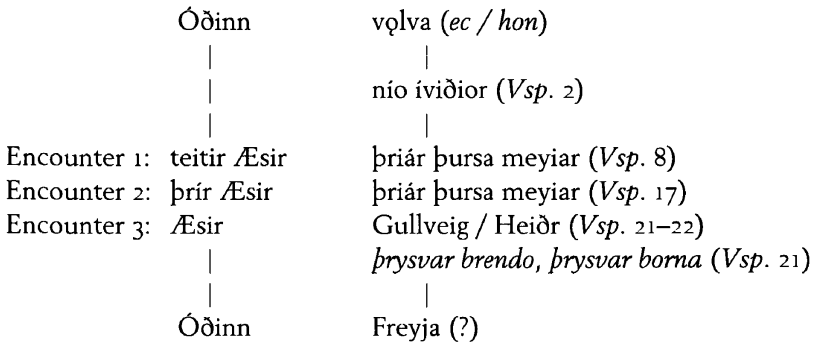
	Óðinn	vǫlva (*ec / hon*)
		nío íviðior (*Vsp.* 2)
Encounter 1:	teitir Æsir	þriár þursa meyiar (*Vsp.* 8)
Encounter 2:	þrír Æsir	þriár þursa meyiar (*Vsp.* 17)
Encounter 3:	Æsir	Gullveig / Heiðr (*Vsp.* 21–22)
		þrysvar brendo, þrysvar borna (*Vsp.* 21)
	Óðinn	Freyja (?)

Fig. 5: *The substructure of Vǫlospǫ*

The antithetical duad Óðinn — *vǫlva* is repeatedly projected into the poem's substructure, thus reinforcing the basic opposition. This numerical configuration makes up the substructure of the poem with all other textual segments and devices being subordinate. The relationship between Óðinn and the *vǫlva* is characterized by a forceful and dynamic competition (cf. Jochens 1990, 272 and Schulte 2002a, 146–47).

4 Conclusion

In this analysis, the focus rested on structure and substructure — the interface of different strands. Two different types of evidence can now be conjoined: content and structure. Formal structure includes both numerical and rhetorical structure. The investigation of literary composition supports the claims based on the content level. *Vǫlospǫ́* is a high-toned poem with an elaborately contrived structure. Following recent research on Renaissance literature (e.g. Røstvig 1994 and Eriksen 2001), the poem's layout is clearly topomorphical. Not only do numerical configurations produce the compositional dynamics of the lay, they also convey basic semantic meaning resulting in a new wholistic approach (cf. Schulte 2002a).

Rhetorical structures in *Vǫlospǫ́* involve a huge register of classical figures, thus hinting at a scholarly (scribal) origin. The allegorical use of numbers in *Vǫlospǫ́* has to be characterized as syncretistic, meaning that Nordic-pagan traditions interact with other typological patterns (notably Classical and Biblical ones). The confrontation of pagan myths with Christianity gave way to personal interpretations which resulted in a unique mythological syncretism. In this regard, *Vǫlospǫ́* may stand as a test case. Patristic structures are particularly evident in conjunction with the number 'three'. Suffice it to mention its relation to the divine Trinitas. Old Norse *nío*, on the other hand, functions as a direct counterpart to the Christian 'seven', thus representing similar functions in each typological system. Apart from the non-occurrence of the Christian 'seven' in *Vǫlospǫ́*, it has been noted by several scholars that the Christian notions of expiation and foregiveness are completely absent in the poem. 'Evil' has not yet turned into 'sin'. Ascr and Embla face another world than Adam and Eve who God punished by making them leave the Garden of Eden. Gro Steinsland (2001) duly stresses this point with regard to *Vsp.* 8:

> Her [in *Vǫlospǫ́*; M.S.] var det et „fall" av kosmiske dimensjoner, et brudd på en gullaldertilstand, en ide som gjenfinnes i hele den indoeuropeiske mytologien. Men syndefallsmotivet som er grunnleggende knyttet til skapelsesmytologien i Genesis, glimrer helt med sitt fravær i den norrøne kilden. (Steinsland 2001, 257)

Summing up, it seems reasonable to argue that we are witnessing an early Old Norse transitional text where pagan strands of mythological lore are arranged and restructured according to Classical and Christian

typology. Comparative evidence sheds light on *Vǫlospǫ́* as being part of a general European mainstream in the Middle Ages, later rehearsed for instance in Pietro Bongo's Renaissance encyclopaedia *De numerorum mysteria* (1585). In its references to rhetorical and numerical structure, *Vǫlospǫ́* turns out to be a patristic poem written by a scribe who was fond of his Norse traditions. But the author felt free to play on the old themes as his literary plan demanded; as a result we get the innovated triad of the Æsir as opposed to the three giant maidens and the *imago dei*-motive of Ascr and Embla pitted against their prototypes Adam and Eve (cf. Steinsland 2001). In this context it is rather unimportant whether or not stanza 58 (*H*-version) with its allusion to Christ should be regarded as a secondary interpolation. To conclude, *Vǫlospǫ́* is even more of an aesthetic and innovative blend than commonly acknowledged — neither a stringent *interpretatio norrœna* nor an *interpretatio christiana* — but an elaborately crafted text of cultural transition.

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NK = Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, eds 1983. *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius*. 5th ed.

OE = Old English.

ON = Old Norse (including Old Icelandic).

OS = Old Saxon.

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