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Skalds against ‘the System’

The Kennings of Þjóðolfr Arnórsson’s Harvest Metaphor

Introduction

The Icelander Þjóðolfr Arnórsson appears to have enjoyed a long-lasting reputation as one of the eleventh-century *hofuðskáld* (‘great poets’).¹ *Skáldatal* (SnE 1880–87, III: 254–62) associates him both with Magnús inn góði and with Haraldr harðráði and the kings’ sagas quote his verse extensively with regard to these two sovereigns. In addition to five fragmentary long poems for his two royal patrons, several fragments and *lausavísur* are ascribed to Þjóðolfr in medieval sources, although only a part of these attributions is now generally accepted as correct (*SkP* 2: 57–58). Especially in his quality of *hofuðskáld* and *hirðimaðr* of the poet-king Haraldr harðráði, he is a central character of various *þættir* addressing the topic

¹ For a general biography and overview of Þjóðolfr’s works, see *SkP* (2: 57–61).

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Abstract: The four *helmingar* recently edited as stanzas 27–29 of *Sextsteffa* (‘Six-Refrained [*Drápa*]’) share similarities in imagery and structure. In the past, various scholars had therefore construed them as one thematic sequence containing a running metaphor on different moments of the agricultural cycle. The present article supports this idea by addressing a number of textual difficulties which have contributed to obscuring the metaphor’s unity. By discussing the problematic readings and by addressing some well-established biases of modern kenning scholarship – such as a dogmatic avoidance of *overdetermined* kennings – the present article aims at improving our understanding of the text while, at the same time, re-evaluating some methodological premises to the interpretation of skaldic verse. When editorial guidelines become too strict, inferences predicated on the alleged regularities of the so-called ‘kenning system’ may, in fact, compromise the poem’s internal logic. Rather, an investigation of the text’s possible poetic precedents may prove helpful, shedding light on the trade-off between the skald’s innovativeness and his indebtedness to tradition.

Keywords: kenning, sentence metaphor, overdetermination, Snorra *Edda*, *Third Grammatical Treatise*, *Sextsteffa*, skaldic diction, Old Norse poetics, intertextuality.

of verse-making. These short stories, inserted in kings'-saga compilations such as *Morkinskinna* (c. 1220–75) and *Frísbók* (c. 1300), suggest that, in thirteenth-century Iceland, Þjóðolfr was regarded as a poetic authority within a 'story-telling milieu with marked literary interests' (Fidjestøl 1997 [1971]: 284; see also Males 2020: 255–63). His poetry is quoted extensively both in *Heimskringla* and *Skáldskaparmál* (below: *Skm*), where he is granted a prominent canonical status as the seventh most cited poet (Wellendorf 2017: 135–36). Although the stanzas attributed to him in *Skm* are generally held to belong to his long *drápur*, the poems from which they derive are never named (Faulkes 1998, I: xiv). This is the case also with the four *helmingar* discussed here, three of which are transmitted in *Skm* and one in Óláfr Þórðarson's *Third Grammatical Treatise* (below: *TGT*). These stanzas have here been singled out for the purpose of serving as a focal point for the evaluation of skaldic metaphor technique and its consequences for the formation of kennings. As for many other stanzas transmitted exclusively in treatises on poetics, their interest lies mainly in kennings and imagery, whereas their historical and informative content is nearly non-existent, a fact which makes the attribution to a specific poem rather difficult. Traditionally, the stanzas have been included in the fragmentary *drápa* for Haraldr harðráði, *Sextsteffa* ('Six-Refrained [Poem]', c. 1067), where they were recently edited as, respectively, stanza 27 and half-stanzas 28 and 29 (*SkP* 2: 140–45). Although the attribution to this poem must remain tentative, the protagonist of the verses is certainly Haraldr, who is mentioned by name in st. 28 and called 'king of the Hǫrðar' in st. 29.

Regardless of their original poetic context, the four *helmingar* present obvious parallels in terms of imagery and structure, which encourage treating them as a sequence, as suggested by Bjarne Fidjestøl (1982: 136–42). Fidjestøl, who regarded these as some of the finest and most artful stanzas in the entire skaldic corpus, contended that they had not been properly appreciated because of their scattered attestation (1982: 136). I will argue that a number of textual difficulties and editorial choices in the two main editions, namely Finnur Jónsson's normalized and emended edition (*Skj* B I: 345–46) and the recent *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (*SkP* 2: 143–45), have contributed to obscure the consistent design of this textual passage. The present analysis will examine first palaeographic and linguistic evidence, then matters of style and internal consistency in order to obtain a coherent reading of the stanzas. When properly restored, the four *helmingar* present an example of the skaldic technique of sustained metaphor, where kennings are actively employed to create a

consistent image. Finally, by examining possible models of Þjóðólfr's metaphor, the article will try to shed light on the skald's technique as well as on the dynamics of negotiation between conventional tropes and original creation.

1 Context of Transmission

Sexstefja 27 and 29 are transmitted both in *Skm* (Faulkes 1998, I: 60, 90, 101) and in the early seventeenth-century redaction of Snorri's treatise known as *Laufás-Edda* (Faulkes 1979, I: 269; 344; 348) where they are quoted to illustrate, respectively, kennings for gold and for birds of prey (Faulkes 1998, I: 90; Faulkes 1979, I: 269; 344). The *helmingr* edited as st. 28, by contrast, is transmitted in *TGT*, in the context of the discussion of various forms of metonymy. The *helmingr* occurs in the section of *TGT* that has a lacuna in Codex Wormianus, so it is attested only in one witness, the manuscript A (AM 748 I b 4to; Björn M. Ólsen 1884: liii, 106).

The entire st. 27 is quoted in the context of *Skm*'s illustration of gold-kennings based on the myth of Hrólfr Kraki's stratagem to escape from the host of king Aðils (Faulkes 1998, I: 59–60):

Þeir hljópu á hesta sína ok ríða ofan á Fýrisvöllu. Þá sá þeir at Aðils konungr reið eptir þeim með her sinn alvápnadan ok vill drepa þá, tók Hrólfr kraki hægri hendi gullit ofan í hornit ok sœri alt um götuna. En er Svíar sjá þat, hlaupa þeir ór sðlunum ok tók hverr slíkt er fekk, en Aðils konungr bað þá ríða ok reið sjálfr ákafliga. [...] Af þessi sök er gull kallat sáð Kraka eða Fýrisvalla.

They leapt on their horses and they ride over Fýrisvellir. When they saw that king Aðils rode after them with his fully armed host, intending to kill them, Hrólfr Kraki took with his right hand the gold from the horn and he sowed it all over the road. Now when the Svíar see this, they jump down from their saddles and each of them took as much gold as they could, but King Aðils ordered them to keep riding and he himself rode on eagerly. [...] From this fact, gold is called the seed of Kraki or of Fýrisvellir.²

² Translations from Old Norse are mine, unless otherwise stated. Concerning poetic texts, I have often based the principles of my English translation, as well as the notation of kenning's referents, on the praxis found in the new standard edition *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (*SkP*). As in *SkP* and in order to facilitate comprehension, I have included a paraphrase of the stanzas employing an unmarked, prose-like syntax.

Snorri then gives two examples of how this myth was used to build kennings for gold, the second being *Sexstefja* 27. This stanza portrays the ruler in an act similar to the one described in the myth, but he is sowing the grain (of gold) on the lands of the hawk (= forearms) of his retinue. The ultimate meaning of the verse is thus a conventional praise of the king's generosity, as he distributes precious objects to his retainers and to the skald himself.

Sexstefja, st. 27:

Qrð sær Yrsu burðar
inndrótt jøfurr sinni
bjartplógaðan bauga
brattakr vala spakra.
Eyss landreki ljósu
lastvarr Kraka barri
á hlæmyldar holdi
hauks kølfur mér sjølfum.³

Prose Order

Jøfurr sær qrð bauga Yrsu burðar bjartplógaðan brattakr vala spakra
inndrótt sinni.
Lastvarr landreki eyss ljósu barri Kraka á hauks kølfur mér sjølfum,
hlæmyldar holdi.

Translation

The lord sows with the grain of rings of the offspring of Yrsa
[HRÓLFR KRAKI > GOLD] the bright-ploughed steep field of tame
falcons [ARMS] of his retinue.
The blameless land-ruler sprinkles bright barley of Kraki [GOLD] on
my own strips of land of the hawk, warmly soil-covered with flesh
[ARM].

The two *helmingar* have a parallel structure and depict the ruler (*jøfurr*, *landreki*) as he 'sprinkles' his retinue with gold, referred to as *Yrsu burðar bauga qrð* 'the grain of rings of the offspring of Yrsa' and as *Kraka ljóst barr* 'Kraki's bright barley'. The gold-kennings' base-words are 'grain' (*qrð*) and 'barley' (*barr*), which are 'sowed' (*sá*) and 'sprinkled' (*ausa*) on the arms, referred to as 'field' (*akr*) and 'land strips' (*kølfur*). The conceptual consistency, obtained by using words belonging to the semantic sphere of farming, is enhanced by descriptive adjuncts to the kennings.

³ The editorial form of the stanza proposed here, as well as that of stanza 28 below, differs from the one found in both reference editions, namely, Finnur Jónsson's *Skj B* (I: 345–46) and *SkP* (2: 140–44). This is due to linguistic, paleographic and stylistic reasons, which will be addressed in the following section.

The arm-kenning *spakra vala brattakr* 'the steep field of tame falcons', for instance, emphasises the simile of a man's forearm as the steep (*brattr*) landing ground of trained falcons. The overlaid sowing metaphor is, in turn, reinforced by the element *bjartplógaðr* 'bright-ploughed'. Similarly, a metaphorical tension is built in the second *helmingr*, with the kenning *hauks kolfur, hlæmyldar holdi* 'the hawk's strips of land, warmly soil-covered with flesh', where the unique formation *hlæ-myldr*, literally 'warmly soiled' juxtaposes the warmth of human flesh to the coldness of the soil.⁴

Similar imagery and design can be traced in two other *helmingar* attributed to Þjóðólfr in poetic treatises and edited, respectively, as *Sexstefja*'s sts. 28 and 29 in *SkP*.

Sexstefja, st. 28 (quoted in *Skm*):

Lét hrætrana hveiti
hrynja gramr ór brynju;
vill, at vexti belli
valbygg, Haraldr, Yggjar.

Prose Order

Gramr lét hveiti hrætrana hrynja ór brynju; Haraldr vill at valbygg Yggjar belli vexti.

Translation

The king made the wheat of the corpse-crane [RAVEN > SLAIN] gush out of the byrnie; Haraldr wants the barley of Yggr's falcon [RAVEN > SLAIN] to keep increasing.

Sexstefja, st. 29 (quoted in *TGT*):

Blóðorra lætr barri
bragningr ara fagna;
Gauts berr sigð á sveita
svans qrð konungr Hqrða.

Prose Order

Bragningr lætr ara fagna barri blóðorra; konungr Hqrða berr sigð Gauts á qrð svans sveita.

Translation

The prince lets the eagle rejoice in the barley of the black grouse of blood [RAVEN > SLAIN]; the king of the Hqrðar [HARALDR]

⁴ In one sense, this word might be better translated as 'buried [in flesh]', since it is a logical counterpart to *ómyldr* 'unburied', but in the context of sowing and plowing, its connection to *mold* 'soil' (*ONP*: *mold*, *ómyldr* and **mylda*) is central (see below: paragraph 6.1).

wields the sickle of Gautr [SWORD] on the corn of the swan of blood
[RAVEN > SLAIN].

Here as well, the ruler is depicted as a farmer, but this time he is reaping rather than sowing. Many of the lexical components of the stanza are similar to the ones found in *Sexstefja* 27: we similarly have words for crops or cereals as base-words (two of the base-words are the same as in st. 27: *qrð* ‘grain’ and *barr* ‘barley’, with the addition of *hveiti* ‘wheat’ and *bygg* ‘barley’) as well as different birds as determinants. In sts. 28–29, however, the kenning patterns change: we have no longer ‘the grain of the land of the falcon’, but rather ‘the wheat of the bird of prey’, so that the crops in question are not to be understood as golden rings, but as the corpses slain by the king on the battle-field. Although the referential meaning of the stanzas is different, lexical and structural similarities are conspicuous. As in st. 27, semantic consistency is carefully pursued by means of fitting expressions, such as *at bella vexti* (lit. ‘to perform, to show increase’) referring to the growing crops, or the unique kenning pattern *Gauts sigð* ‘the sickle of Gautr’ for ‘sword’.⁵

Because of structural parallels in the four corpse-kennings and systematic variation on the same image, Björn M. Ólsen regarded the two *helmingar* edited as sts. 28 and 29 as one stanza (1884: 220–21). Taken together with st. 27, as further suggested by Fidjestøl, the sequence of sts. 27–29 would present a “running metaphor of ploughing, sowing, growth and reaping” (*SkP* 2: 111).

Sexstefja, st. 27

Qrð sær Yrsu burðar
inndrótt jöfurr sinni
bjartplógaðan bauga
brattakr vala spakra.
Eyss landreki ljósu
lastvarr Kraka barri
á hlæmyldar holdi
hauks kölfur mér sjölfum.

The lord sows with the grain of rings of the
offspring of Yrsa [HRÓLFR KRAKI >
GOLD] the bright-ploughed steep field of
tame falcons [ARMS] of his retinue.
The blameless land-ruler sprinkles bright
barley of Kraki [GOLD] on my own strips of
land of the hawk, warmly soil-covered with
flesh [ARM].

⁵ On the meaning of the weak verb *bella*, see Kock (*NN* § 2218).

Sexstefja, st. 28

Lét hrætrana hveiti	The king made the wheat of the corpse-crane
hrynja gramr ór brynju;	[RAVEN > SLAIN] gush out of the byrnie;
vill at vexti belli	Haraldr wants the barley of the falcon of
valbygg, Haraldr, Yggjar.	Yggr [RAVEN > SLAIN] to keep increasing.

Sexstefja, st. 29

Blóðorra lætr barri	The prince lets the eagle rejoice in the
bragningr ara fagna;	barley of the black grouse of blood [RAVEN
Gauts berr sigð á sveita	> SLAIN]; the king of the Hǫrðar
svans ǫrð konungr Hǫrða.	[HARALDR] wields the sickle of Gautr
	[SWORD] on the corn of the swan of blood
	[RAVEN > SLAIN].

While admitting that Fidjestøl's solution represents a "very attractive, albeit unprovable, idea", Diana Whaley expresses some doubts regarding the similarity of the two stanzas, considering "the very different subject-matter of the verses: generosity praised in the pres. tense in st. 27, [as opposed to the] rather specific warfaring images in sts. 28–29, with a pret. verb *lét* 'let' in st. 28" (*SkP* 2: 111). Whaley's concerns are sensible, although the latter argument is debatable due to the presence of the present form *vill* in the same half-stanza (st. 28, l. 3). The four *helmingar* create a consistent image – a farmer first sowing and then reaping – although with two almost diametrically opposed meanings: the ruler, respectively, distributing gold to his men and distinguishing himself on the battlefield. Even so, the contrast in tone and theme needs not to be taken as evidence of inconsistency; on the contrary, it is justified by the progressive treatment of two phases in the agricultural cycle, which are mapped onto two aspects of the ruler's greatness. The metaphor conveys an implicit play on the opposite moments of sowing *vs.* reaping – giving *vs.* taking – enhancing the juxtaposition between the, conventionally praised, positive and fierce aspects of a ruler's conduct. In so doing, the skald is praising the two traditional virtues of the military leader: generosity towards his own men and ferocity towards the enemies in battle. In my opinion, the resulting tension occurs as intentional, a poetic effect emphasized by the deliberate consistency pursued at the literal level.

Thematic explorations of this kind, to the extent that we can tell, are generally found in sequence, although the fact that most of them must be reconstructed due to fragmentary transmission may generate a risk of

circularity (e.g. *Vellekla*'s opening, *SkP* 1: 283–89). Editorial reconstructions are indeed often guided by similarity of content and based on the metaphor's logic itself. There are, however, a few exceptions that instil some confidence and invite us to adopt such metaphorical sequences as a strong indicator of textual unity. One such case is the sustained metaphor found in sts. 16–19 of Eilífr Goðrúnarson's *Pórsdrápa*, which describes the duel between Þórr and the giant Geirrðr (SkP 3: 111–17). Belonging to one of the narrative poems that received a peculiar treatment in the RTW branch of *Skm*'s transmission (Finnur Jónsson 1931: liv–lv) – being cited in long chunks associated to the prose account of their mythical subject – this sustained metaphor is likely to have been recorded in a form close to that of its original sequence.⁶ Two further examples are provided by two sets of twin *lausavísur* attributed to Eyvindr skáldaspillir which share similar content, imagery and metaphorical developments: *lausavísur* 8–9 (see below: paragraph 6.1), which are transmitted together both in *Fagrskinna* (Finnur Jónsson 1902–03: 54; *ÍF* 29: 99–100) and in *Heimskringla* (Finnur Jónsson 1893–1900, 1: 226; *ÍF* 26: 201–02), and the similarly matching *lausavísur* 13–14 (*SkP* 1: 233–34), quoted together in *Heimskringla* (Finnur Jónsson 1893–1900, 1: 253–54; *ÍF* 26: 223–34). Given the consistent employment of the sentence-metaphor technique and the unique exploration of an agricultural theme in the four *helmingar* under scrutiny, I support the idea that they should be taken as belonging to the same poetical passage, notwithstanding the possibility that more, now lost, poetic material might have belonged to the metaphor. As anticipated in the introduction, the lines present some local difficulties, which may have affected the appreciation of their structural and conceptual consistency. I shall turn now to the discussion of these textual problems and to the motivation for the alternative readings of the stanzas proposed above.

2 The Bizarre *völuspakr*

Although it does not affect the general understanding of the text, the major problem in st. 27 is represented by the puzzling form in l. 4, which is given as *völuspakra* in the two standard editions.⁷

⁶ With the exception of the *helmingr* edited as st. 17, which is transmitted in a different passage of *Skm* (Faulkes 1998, I: 16) than the rest of the Geirrðr episode (Faulkes 1998, I: 29).

⁷ The issue is discussed thoroughly by Whaley (*SkP* 2: 140–43).

Sextstefja, st. 27, ll. 1–4, as presented in *Skj B* (1: 345) and *SkP* (2: 140):

Qrð sær Yrsu burðar
inndrótt jöfurr sinni
bjartplógaðan bauga
brattakr völusakra.

The lord sows with the grain of the offspring of Yrsa [HRÓLFR KRAKI > GOLD] the bright-ploughed steep field of joint-calm rings [ARM] of his retinue.

The manuscript readings for the term(s) in question are as follows (*Skj A* I: 375; *SkP* 2: 140):

völu: 'volv' (R); 'vala' (T, W, U, 2368, 743)
spakra: 'spakra' (R, T, W, 2368, 743); 'spaka' (U)

The solution proposed by Finnur Jónsson (*Skj B* I: 345; *LP*: 629) is to select the reading of R "volv" and to build a compound adjective *völu-spakra*, where *völu* is the gen. of the f. noun *vala* 'knuckle-bone, joint'. The adj. *völu-spakr* 'joint-calm' – a *lectio difficilior* indeed! – is then connected to the genitive plural *bauga* 'of rings', producing 'of the joint-calm rings'. The remarkable adjective would describe the rings as "resting peaceably on the arm-bone" (*SkP* 2: 140). This solution is accepted by Faulkes (1998, I: 60, 188) and Whaley, who takes it, however, with some reservations as "the best solution available without recourse to emendation, but not at all certain" (*SkP* 2: 140). Whaley also observes that "the gen. pl. *spakra* [...] must qualify *bauga* 'rings', which is striking in itself since *spakr* is usually applied in skaldic poetry to human beings, especially in contexts where the theme is wisdom or native wit; 'peaceable' is another possible sense" (*SkP* 2: 140). Whaley's last remark is correct, and, in this regard, it is worth noting that the adj. *spakr* means 'quiet, tame, used to human presence' when it refers to animals, an appropriate meaning to designate domesticated, trained falcons. By contrast, according to *ONP* and *LP*, the word *spakr* is never used of inanimate objects, except, rarely, of weather phenomena.⁸ The reading *vala spakra* is thus not only semantically more plausible, but also strongly supported by being represented in most witnesses and in two stemmatic branches.⁹ In

⁸ This is arguably due to the perception of weather phenomena as semi-animate entities, as witnessed by their morpho-syntactical encoding as agents in active impersonal constructions in Old Norse.

⁹ The readings 'vala' and 'spakra' occur in W, T and in the two *Laufás-Edda* manuscripts GKS 2368 4to and AM 743 4to. R has 'volv spakra' whereas U has 'vala spaka'. The readings 'volv-' and 'spaka' look like innovative errors in R and U respectively.

fact, one might even speculate that the corruption of the reading from *vala spakra* to *vǫlu spakra* in the *Codex Regius* of Snorri's *Edda* could be explained with the fact that the scribe had encountered the name *Vǫluspá* a number of times in *Gylfaginning* before copying this passage. The familiarity with this name may have prompted the scribe's misprocessing of a difficult or unexpected phrase (*vala spakra*), producing the corrupted reading (*vǫlu spakra*).

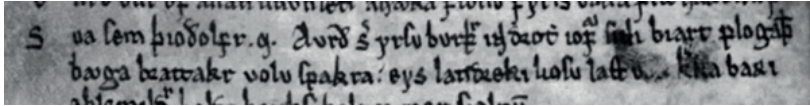


Fig. 1. GKS 2367 4to, fol. 32v, ll. 11–13.

Thus, the reading proposed above, *vala spakra* ‘of quiet / tame falcons’, is both the most straightforward linguistically and the most plausible one from a stemmatic and scribal perspective. One might also argue that yet a further indication is provided by the perfect structural and conceptual parallelism between the two arm-kennings in the stanza:

St. 27, ll. 3–4: *bjartplógaðr brattakr vala spakra* ‘bright-ploughed steep field of tame falcons’.

St. 27, ll. 7–8: *hlæmyldar holdi hauks kǫlfur* ‘land strips of the hawk, warmly-soil covered with flesh’.

However, since stylistic parameters should not be granted an excessive weight in the preliminary phase of establishing the correct reading, these considerations will for the moment play an ancillary role and the discussion of the metaphor’s design will be picked up again after the discussion of the readings in sts. 28–29.

The adoption of the reading *vala spakra* was proposed by Fidjestøl too, who, however, felt the need to suggest the emendation of the word *bauga* to the adjective *bjúgri* ‘bowing, bending’ referred to *ørð*: ‘the bending corn’, arguably a refined metaphor for golden rings (1982: 137–39). As ingenious as it is, however, the emendation of *bauga* to *bjúgri* has no manuscript support. This raises the question: why would Fidjestøl want to intervene on a text that made perfect sense? Or, alternatively, why would most editors accept the puzzling and isolated reading *vǫluspakra*? Note that the obvious proposal to retain *vala spakra* without resort to emendation, although text-critically and linguistically straightforward, is

avoided by all commentators. Whaley seems indeed to take it into serious consideration, but ultimately dismisses it:

A solution involving instead *valr* 'falcon, hawk' as the determinant of the arm-kenning is attractive, given that 'falcon's ground' is the most common pattern of arm-kenning (Meissner 1921: 141) and that one such kenning is found in the second *helmingr*; but *bauga* would be left without function, unless it joined *qrð burðar Yrsu* to mean 'gold off/in rings' (*SkP* 2: 142).

Although not explicitly stated, the reason for rejecting *vala spakra* seems to be the risk of 'overdetermination' in the gold-kenning *qrð burðar Yrsu*. In other words, if *vala spakra* is attached to *bjartplógaðr brattakr*, forming an arm-kenning (*bjartplógaðr brattakr vala spakra* 'brightly-ploughed steep field of tame falcons'), then the genitive *bauga* ('of rings') must either be left hanging or belong to the previous gold-kenning: *qrð [bauga] burðar Yrsu* 'the grain [of rings] of the offspring of Yrsa (= Hrólfr Kraki)'. Since 'the grain of Hrólfr Kraki' would suffice as a complete and canonical kenning for gold, however, the element *bauga* is considered superfluous or redundant for the correct formation of the kenning. The fact that the final editorial choice fell on *voluspakr*, notwithstanding the admitted preferability of the *vala spakra* reading, indicates that the avoidance of overdetermination has become a rather heavy constraint in the editorial praxis of skaldic scholars.

3 Overdetermination

The structural fault of overdetermination is not known to have been recognized during the Middle Ages, but it was systematically avoided by Finnur Jónsson and this has become an increasingly strict guideline among modern editors of skaldic verse. It consists in the presence of allegedly superfluous elements in the kenning-structure, specifically of two or more determinants (D) affecting the same base-word (B).

In the process of producing an extended or embedded kenning, a recursive principle is at work, by virtue of which a kenning (B+D) can itself work as the base-word of a broader kenning-pattern, with the application of another determinant to the full construction. This recursive principle is extremely productive in skaldic verse and it can result in an embedded structure, called *rekit* in *Háttatal* (Faulkes 2007: 5, 8; Gade 2017):

$$\{[(B + D1) + D2] + D3\} = \{R3 > [R2 > (R1)]\}$$

e.g. $\{[(\text{moon}^{B1} \text{ of the horse}^{D1})^{B2} \text{ of the house}^{D2}]^{B3} \text{ of the whale}^{D3}\} \dots = \{\text{SEA}^{R3} > [\text{SHIP}^{R2} > (\text{SHIELD}^{R1})]\}$

In *rekit* constructions, long chains of determinants are common. None of these determinants, however, is considered superfluous, for each of them applies to a different base-word entity, thus configuring a distinct kenning and producing a distinct referent.

By contrast, if a single base-word is provided with two or more determinant-like elements, the kenning is considered unacceptable, as it challenges the “rules of kenning-formation” (Marold 2006: 223):

$$^{**} (B + D1 + D2) = R$$

e.g. $^{**}(\text{the battle}^{D1}\text{-moon}^B \text{ of the sword}^{D2}) = \text{SHIELD}^R$

In the proposed example, both ‘battle-moon’ and ‘moon of the sword’ would make correct self-contained kennings for ‘SHIELD’. ‘Battle-moon of the sword’, by contrast, however intuitively plausible, is considered redundant and structurally faulty. Such constructions are admittedly rare, but it is also true that editors tend to discard them, making it difficult to evaluate their actual frequency throughout the productive period of skaldic composition. As will be argued below, structurally deviant kenning formations seem to occur with relative frequency in combination with semantic and metaphorical experimentation, especially when the element that appears ‘redundant’ to the stringent logic of kenning formation actually serves a different function within a broader stylistic design, as a disambiguating and / or descriptive addition.¹⁰ Indeed, ‘non-essential to the kenning logic’ is not the same as ‘(stylistically) superfluous’ and, especially in stylistically marked strategies, the two parameters should be kept apart. In such cases, overdetermination seems to have troubled the skalds far less than it troubles kenning scholarship today.

Returning to our example, the reading *vala spakra* ‘of tame falcons’ is supported by most textual witnesses and is semantically and syntactically straightforward. The only obstacle to accepting this reading seems to be the resulting overdetermination of the kenning *Yrsu burðar bauga qrð* ‘the grain of rings of the offspring of Yrsa’. Admittedly, it is not even clear whether the element *bauga* ‘of rings’ would exactly function as an extra-determinant, or if it is better taken as a sort of explanatory genitive (‘gold of/in rings’, as suggested by Whaley, *SkP* 2: 142). At this regard,

¹⁰ A typical case is the multiple instances of overdetermination occurring in the sustained metaphor of *Vellekla*’s opening (cf. Frank 1981: 159–62; Males 2020: 153–55).

it should be mentioned that the syntax of *Sexstefja* 27–29 appears to be otherwise unmarked, with elements belonging together never crossing the couplet boundary and with little ‘skaldic scrambling’ for the standards of *dróttkvætt* (Kristján Árnason 2002: 220–24). Based on its syntactical placement in the *helmingr* (ll. 3–4: *bjartplógaðan bauga | brattakr vóluspakra*), *bauga* would thus most naturally be construed with the arm-kenning *brattakr vóluspakra bjartplógaðan* [*bauga*] ‘steep field of tame falcons, bright-ploughed [of/with rings?]’. In this case, *bauga* would resonate with the element *bjart-* in *bjartplógaðan*, producing the expression ‘brightly-ploughed of/with rings’ a parallel to the expression *hlæmyldar holdi* ‘warmly soil-covered with flesh’ (where *holdi* resonates with *hlæ-*). Note the perfect syntactic parallelism of the two expressions, occurring in the same metrical positions in consecutive *helmingar*:

Sexstefja 27, ll. 1–4

Qrð sær Yrsu burðar
inndrótt jöfurr sinni
bjartplógaðan bauga
brattakr vala spakra.

Sexstefja 27, ll. 5–8

Eyss landreki ljósu
lastvarr Kraka barri
á hlæmyldar holdi
hauks kölfur mér sjölfum.

I regard this solution as the most attractive, although such an instrumental use of the genitive is syntactically problematic. This is the only reason that compels me to attach *bauga* to the previous gold kenning anyway. In any event, the phrase *vóluspakra bauga* ‘of joint-calm rings’ is decidedly odd semantically and appears to be due to a plain scribal error. I maintain that accepting a relatively structurally unusual kenning is less problematic than selecting a clearly implausible reading and, as argued in the following analysis, the design of the stanza strengthens this claim.

4 Twigs or Cranes?

Another reading which seems to have raised some problems is that of the compound occurring in positions 2–4 in the first line of st. 28:

Lét hrætrana hveiti
hrynja gramr ór brynju;
vill, at vexti belli
valbygg, Haraldr, Yggjar.

The king made the wheat of the corpse-crane [RAVEN > SLAIN] gush out of the byrnie; Haraldr wants the barley of the falcon of Yggr [RAVEN > SLAIN] to keep increasing.

Both in Finnur Jónsson's edition (*Skj* B I: 346) and in *SkP* (Whaley, *SkP* 2: 143–44), the first line of st. 28 reads: *hræteina hveiti* 'wheat of carrion-twigs'. The expression *hræteinn* is interpreted as a weapon-kenning: "kongen lader pilene (spydene) falde ned fra brynjen (?)" (*Skj* B I: 346). The same interpretation is followed in *SkP*. For both palaeographic and stylistic reasons, the present analysis chooses, by contrast, the reading *trana* – already proposed by Björn M. Ólsen (1884: 106, 220) – giving the kenning *hrætrana hveiti* 'wheat of the corpse-crane [raven > SLAIN]'. The problem is thoroughly addressed by Wood (1958), who argues in favour of Björn M. Ólsen's reading on stylistic and semantic grounds. Given the risk of circularity in using consistent imagery as an argument, however, I will first evaluate the manuscript evidence and then address stylistic considerations as auxiliary.

As noted above, this *helmingr* is only attested in the manuscript A of the *TGT* (fol. 7r, ll. 3–4).

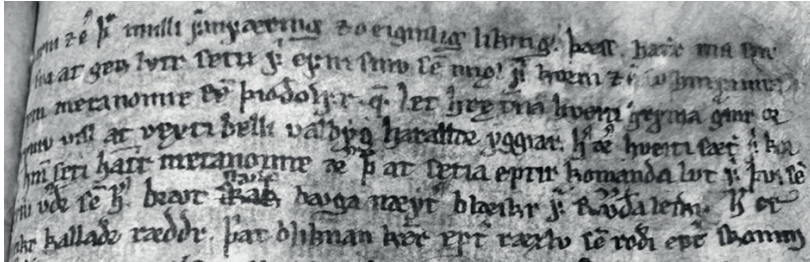


Fig. 2. AM 748 I b 4to, fol. 7r, ll. 1–7.

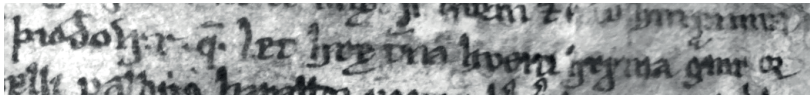


Fig. 3. AM 748 I b 4to, fol. 7r, l. 3: 'þjóðolfr kvæð: lét hræ trana hveiti hrynja gramr ór'.

The words in question occur on l. 3 of the manuscript page, where they are spelled 'hrę tna' (the spacing is probably indifferent to the interpretation, since compounds were often written as two words in Old Norse manuscripts). Above the *t* there is an abbreviation mark, the shape of which is somewhat ambiguous to interpret.

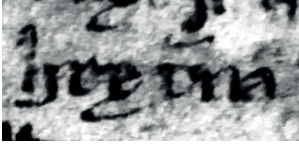


Fig. 4. AM 748 I b 4to fol.7r, l.3: 'hrę trana (?)'.

In *SkP* it is stated that "the abbreviation mark above the <t> is not the usual abbreviation for <ar> [*scil.* <ra>] but is better taken as <ei>" (*SkP* 2: 143). The segment <ra> is indeed abbreviated in a slightly different way, generally presenting the usual 'omega-like' mark in a clearly delineated shape (cf. on the same line, fig. 5 'gramr', on l. 1, fig. 6 'framfæring', and, on the previous page fol. 6v, l. 14, fig. 7 'hrausta').

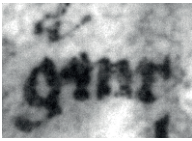


Fig. 5. AM 748 I b 4to fol.7r, l.3: 'gramr'.

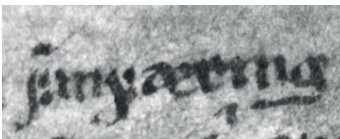


Fig. 6. AM 748 I b 4to fol.7r, l.1: 'framfæring'.

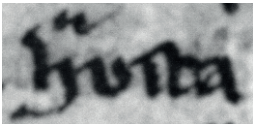


Fig. 7. AM 748 I b 4to fol. 6v, l. 14: 'hrausta'.

The stroke above the <t> in question is not as clear as in the case of *gramr* and *brausta* and is more similar to a generic abbreviation mark (cf. Fig. 3, fol. 7r, l. 3: .q̄. ‘kvað’) or to a nasal stroke than to the <ra> abbreviation. The segment <ei> proposed in the reading *teina*, however, is never abbreviated in this manuscript. Its spelling varies between *ei* and *æi*, always extended. This can be observed in the following word in the line, *hveiti* (Fig. 3), in the words ‘*blæikr*’ and ‘*leiki*’ (Fig. 2, fol. 7r, l. 6), as well as in the rest of the manuscript (cf. Fig. 8). Indeed, Old Norse orthographic praxis contemplates no abbreviations for unaccompanied vowels or diphthongs, unless these occur within conventionalized abbreviations for frequent and/or grammatical words (e.g. þeir).

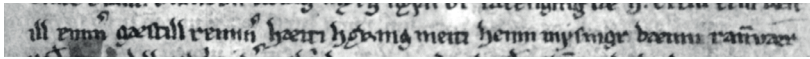


Fig. 8. AM 748 I b 4to, fol. 6v, l. 25: ‘ill eimnir gæstill reimmir hæiti hoking meiti heimi mysingr bæimi’.

Based on these observations, we may conclude that it is much more likely that the scribe reproduced a <ra> abbreviation in an inaccurate way, perhaps because of uncertainty due to the rarity of the compound, than that he suddenly switched to an otherwise unattested abbreviation practice.

The reading *brætrana* is also preferable metrically. The line in question is a Sievers’ C1-line of the ‘brestr’-type, with the first *hending* in the first dip, preceding the *studill*. A heavy third position (as in *tein-a*) in such a metrical line is highly marked, occurring in only a handful of occasions and often in dubious lines (Myrvoll 2014: 235–36). By contrast, a light third position (as in *tran-i*) is to be expected.

The preference for the reading *trana* is reinforced by stylistic considerations. The two *helmingar* edited as *Sexstefja* 28 and 29 show systematic variation on the kenning-type ‘food of the raven’:

St. 28, l. 4: *Yggjar val-bygg* ‘the barley of the falcon of Yggr [Óðinn]’ = RAVEN > SLAIN.

St. 29, l. 2: *Blód-orra barr* ‘the barley of the black-grouse of blood’ = RAVEN > SLAIN.

St. 29, ll. 3–4: *Sveita svans qrd* ‘the grain of the swan of blood’ = RAVEN > SLAIN.

Lexical variation involves both base-words and determinants: the birds (*valr*, *orri*, *svanr*) and the corn on which the birds feed (*bygg*, *barr*, *qrd*).

The reading *trani* 'crane' fits perfectly in the first series, forming the analogous kenning *hrætrana hveiti* 'the wheat of the corpse-crane'.

Notwithstanding the parallelism with the rest of the stanza, this reading is rejected in *SkP* in favour of *hræteina hveiti*. For the sake of clarity, the arguments adduced to support this reading will be quoted in full:

[1.1] *hveiti hræteina*: 'the wheat of carrion-twigs' [SPEARS]: The base-word *teinn* 'twig' quite frequently forms kennings for weapons, e.g., with determinants referring, as here, to wounds, e.g., *teinn unda* (Gísl Illugason, *lausavísa* 1), and see *LP*: *teinn*. Terms for crops, in turn, frequently form kennings for 'corpse', qualified by a beast of battle word in the genitive case. *This cannot be the meaning here, for various reasons*, and *hveiti* in the sense of showering grain may be an unparalleled variant on the pattern 'shower, rain of the corpse or wounds' referring to missiles or specifically spears (*Skj* B; Meissner 1921: 145; *LP*: *hræteinn*). If so, Haraldr is pictured either as an armour-clad fighting machine dispatching missiles, or as one shaking enemy missiles out of his armour. Björn Magnússon Ólsen and Finnur Jónsson in their editions of the *TGT* (1884 and 1927, respectively) printed *hrætrana* 'of the carrion-crane(s)' [RAVEN(S)], which together with *hveiti* could produce a kenning for 'corpse', *but this would not make sense in the stanza*, and the abbreviation mark above <t> is not the usual abbreviation for <ar> *but is better taken as <ei>* (*SkP* 2: 143–44, my emphasis).

As far as I can see, the "various reasons" why "this cannot be the meaning here" are nowhere given (*SkP* 2: 144). On the contrary, the reading *hrætrana hveiti* seems more plausible on palaeographic and metrical grounds, and, as already argued by Wood, it "gives a kenning absolutely acceptable for 'raven' and the concept *hrætrana hveiti*, whatever its meaning, is quite consistent with skaldic practice" (1958: 402). As I argue below, it is also more than consistent with the practice of the poet in this specific textual passage. The reason why the kenning "would not make sense in the stanza" (*SkP* 2: 143) is not explicitly clarified in the commentary, but seems to be related to the interpretation of the kenning's meaning when taken together with the verb *hrynja*, which indicates the action of falling or tumbling down, but which applies in particular to the flowing of liquids. This point too had been addressed by Wood:

The meaning relevant for this context is 'flow' or perhaps 'gush'. This is consistent as well with the base word of the kenning, *hveiti*. There is even a naturalistic reference right at hand. The punctured sack of grain lets the contents flow in a manner more than sufficient to suggest the flowing of liquid [...]. The suggestion of the language is not the shucking of a body

out of an armour but the exudation of blood, or, for that matter, flesh, from a well-placed cut. (Wood 1958: 403)

In other words, the meaning of this kenning in this particular context is that the king lets gush out of a pierced container (the mail-coat) the grain (blood/entrails) that is soon to become food for the ravens. Although the kenning might appear unconventional, its peculiarity needs to be considered within the context of the extended metaphor. In this regard, it is worth recalling that the reason for the inclusion of this *helmingr* in the *TGT* is the choice of what was perceived by Óláfr Þórðarson as a semantically deviating base-word, *hveiti*, as opposed to a more conventional *korn*. The commentary introducing the *helmingr* reads (Björn M. Ólssen 1884: 106):

Þessi háttur má snúask svá, at gørr hlutr settisk fyrir efni sínu, sem *mjöl* fyrir *korni*, ok er sú hin fimta grein metanomie, sem Þjóðolfr kvað:

Lét hrætrana hveiti [...]

Hér er *hveiti* sett fyrir *korni*.

This kind [*scil.* of metonymy] can be performed in such a way that a finished item is used instead of its [rough] material, such as ‘flour’ instead of ‘corn’, and this is the fifth type of metonymy, like Þjóðolfr composed:

‘He lets the wheat of the corpse-crane [...]

Here, ‘wheat’ is used instead of ‘corn’.

The nature of the semantic opposition between *hveiti* and *korn* remains somewhat elusive, but Óláfr Þórðarson’s commentary and especially his paraphrase of *hveiti* with *mjöl* (‘flour’) reveal that the base-word of the kenning indicated some form of processed cereal and it was probably chosen in order to fit with the verb *hrynja* (‘to flow’), resulting in the creation of the kind of image suggested by Wood. As Óláfr’s commentary shows, semantic peculiarities in kennings did not escape the notice of medieval scholars, and, as Wood rightly pointed out,

[...] *the context of the kenning and its use in that context are a more primary consideration than its formal structure and meaning.* That is, the presence of a base-word other than the formally customary one meaning ‘liquid’ is less significant than the fact that the combination of *hveiti* and *trani* exists. And now the verb, meaning as it does ‘to flow’, determines perforce the ultimate significance of the kenning. (Wood 1958: 404, my emphasis)

This is yet another way to say that the regularities we infer about the kenning-system should not become more real than real kennings. As already suggested, imagery can exact its toll on the way in which kennings

are formed, leading to structural and lexical innovations. In the case at hand, the choice of consistent imagery exerted pressure on the poet to expand the conventional metaphorical frame.

This becomes obvious in a kenning such as *Gauts sigð* 'the sickle of Gautr [Óðinn] [SWORD]'. This original coinage is both motivated by and inserted into the broader design of the harvest metaphor. Similarly, the 'pouring grain' falling from the pierced mail-coat (*ór brynju*), on which the *brætrani* is about to feed, is an artful detail in Þjóðólfr's depiction and represents an innovative twist on a conventional image, that of birds of prey feeding on corpses. Stanzas 28 and 29 elaborate consistently on the image of cereals and birds, enhancing the metaphor with a touch of realism, drawing on the flock of birds that invariably followed the farmer during the sowing and the harvesting.

A closer look at the combination of the kennings in this stanza reveals how central the metaphor is to its composition and interpretation. Throughout the stanza, it is not only the conventional meaning 'corpses, slain warriors' that is referred to as 'crops of the raven', but also the soldiers who will soon be falling on the battlefield. As suggested by Wood, in st. 28, what is gushing out of the mail-coat is technically not yet a corpse, but the entrails of a man who will *become* food for the ravens. Similarly, in st. 29, the warriors who are about to fall under the sword of the ruler ('Gautr's sickle') are already called the corn of the raven – which is what they will become, strictly speaking, only after the 'sickle' has reaped them. The harvest metaphor has gained the upper hand on conventional kenning referentiality, inducing a sort of *hysteron proteron* effect and guiding the interpretative logic of the stanza.

Coming back to our point of departure, one final remark needs to be made about the two full stanzas of *Sexstefja* 27–29. Concerning st. 27, Whaley observes:

The two *helmingar* of this colourful and witty stanza are parallel in many ways, as explained by Kock (*NN* § 2267) and Fidjestøl (1982: 137–38) [...]. Whether the parallels can be assumed to be so exact as to determine the solution to the textual crux in l. 4 (*völuspakra*), as argued by Fidjestøl, is an interesting problem (*SkP* 2: 141).

The problem is interesting indeed and, as argued above, whereas the textual parallels alone may not suffice to resolve the 'crux', linguistic plausibility and manuscript evidence definitely should. After having established the readings *vala spakra* ('of tame falcons') in stanza 27 and *brætrani* ('of the corpse-crane') in stanza 28, considerations about the

systemic structural parallels may be extended to include stanzas 28–29. The kennings of stanza 27–29 consistently retain names for various cereals as base-words and names for various birds as determinants. In st. 27, the falcons (*valr* and *haukr*) are determinants of arm-kennings and the cereals are base-words of gold-kennings:

St. 27, ll. 1–2: [*Yrsu burðar bauga*] *grð* ‘the grain [of rings of the offspring of Yrsa]’.

St. 27, l. 4: *vala spakra brattakr* ‘the steep field of tame falcons’.

St. 27, l. 6: [*Kraka*] *barr* ‘the barley [of Kraki]’.

St. 27, ll. 7–8: *hauks kolfur* ‘the hawk’s land-strips’.

In stanzas 28–29, by contrast, the two elements are combined in one kenning-pattern, where the ‘cereal’ serves to indicate the food of the birds of prey:

St. 28, l. 4: [*Yggjar*] *val-bygg* ‘the barley of the falcon [of Yggr]’.

St. 29, l. 1: [*Blóð-*] *orra barr* ‘the barley of the black-grouse [of blood]’.

St. 29, ll. 3–4: [*Sveita*] *svans grð* ‘the grain of the swan [of blood]’.

The contrast in tone between the two stanzas could not be stronger. The well-trained hawks graciously landing on the bejewelled forearms of Haraldr’s retainers evoke images of peace and prosperity: lavishly adorned noblemen engaging in falconry. These are the same retainers, however, who will follow their king in the gruesome harvest of men described in sts. 28–29. The proposed re-evaluation of some readings in light of the manuscript evidence allows us to acknowledge the rigorous consistency of Þjóðolfr’s metaphorical technique.

5 Convention and Innovation: Þjóðolfr’s Metaphor and its Possible Models

So far, the analysis has focused on a set of mostly philological criteria relatively easy to test. The aim of the remaining part of the article is to address the trade-off between individual originality and indebtedness to tradition in Þjóðolfr’s creation. In order to do so, it will be expedient to analyse his technique, his lexical choice and the overarching imagery and motifs of his sustained metaphor, with an eye to similar elements in the work of earlier poets. This operation will inevitably involve a higher degree of speculation, both because our access to the poetic tradition

known to Þjóðolfr is certainly partial, and because the assessment of literary similarity remains, to a certain extent, an arbitrary operation. Nonetheless, in order to isolate plausible instances of poetic influence, I will select as diagnostic only features, or clusters of features, that show a marked distribution within the extant corpus. The occurrence of one or more items such as, for instance, a relatively rare kenning-pattern and/or mythological allusion, the employment of a specific metaphorical overlay, and the resort to otherwise rare words or metrical forms will be regarded as indices of plausible textual interaction. As the following section will illustrate, Þjóðolfr's idea, however ingenious, appears to be based on the imitation and re-casting of previous individual realizations of skaldic tropes.

5.1 Precedents to Stanza 27: Sowing Gold

Sexstefja 27 occurs in the section of *Skm* telling the story of Hrólfr Kraki at Fýrisvellir. The first of the two poetic examples provided by Snorri comes from a stanza by Eyvindr skáldaspillir (*lausavísa* 8, ll. 1–4):

Borum, Ullr, of alla,
ímunlauks, á hauka
fjöllum Fýrisvalla
fræ Hókunar ævi.

Prose Order

Borum fræ Fýrisvalla á fjöllum hauka of alla ævi Hókunar, Ullr ímunlauks.

Translation

We bore the seed of Fýrisvellir [GOLD] on the mountains of hawks [HANDS] during the whole of Hákon's lifetime, Ullr of the battle-leek [GOD > SWORD > WARRIOR].¹¹

As long as king Hákon góði (d. 961) was alive, his poets always wore the 'seed of Fýrisvellir' (golden objects, jewels) on their 'mountains of the hawks' (forearms). In *Skm*, Eyvindr's *helmingr* is immediately followed by the quotation of *Sexstefja* 27, with which it shares both theme and imagery:

¹¹ Ed. and transl. R. Poole (*SkP* 1: 226).

Sexstefja, st. 27:

Qrð sær Yrsu burðar
inndrótt jöfurr sinni
bjartplógaðan bauga
brattakr vala spakra.
Eyss landreki ljósu
lastvarr Kraka barri
á hlæmyldar holdi
hauks kölfur mér sjölfum.

The lord sows with the grain of rings of the offspring of Yrsa [HRÓLFR KRAKI > GOLD] the bright-ploughed steep field of tame falcons [ARMS] of his retinue.

The blameless land-ruler sprinkles bright barley of Kraki [GOLD] on my own strips of land of the hawk, warmly soil-covered with flesh [ARM].

Notwithstanding the relevance accorded to the Hrólfr Kraki narrative in *Skm*, in the extant skaldic corpus the kennings referring to this myth are only four, according to Meissner's catalogue (1921: 228). Three of them are the ones examined here and quoted in *Skm*, belonging to Eyvindr skáldaspillir's *lausavísa* 8 and to *Sexstefja* st. 27. The fourth occurs in a stanza attributed to the skald Grani, who, like Þjóðólfr, composed for Haraldr harðráði (*Poem about Haraldr harðráði*, st. 1, l. 2; *SkP* 2: 296). This makes the reference to the Hrólfr Kraki myth shared by Eyvindr's *lausavísa* and *Sexstefja* 27 fairly marked. In addition to this one, the two texts share other analogies: in both the theme is the generosity of a king toward his retinue, generally, and toward the skald, specifically, who is speaking in first person (collectively in Eyvindr's stanza: *bórum* 'we bore'; first collectively and then in the first person in Þjóðólfr's one). Moreover, both stanzas use the kenning-pattern 'land of the hawk' for 'arm'. Compared to Eyvindr's *helmingr*, however, Þjóðólfr's stanza combines the two kenning-types ('seed of Kraki' + 'land of the hawk') by means of verb harmonization (*sá* 'sow'), thus pushing the implicit analogy with the myth of Hrólfr Kraki further and explicitly comparing the ruler to a sower: the kenning-types are similar, but word choice in *Sexstefja* shows a greater emphasis on the intent to lexically support the image of the 'sowing king'.¹² As illustrated above (paragraph 2), this is obtained by

¹² A similar sentence metaphor based on the same elements, but different kenning patterns, is found in a *helmingr* by Eilífr Godrúnarson quoted in *Skm* and edited in *Þórsdrápa* (st. 23, *SkP* 3: 124): *Verðið ér, alls orða | oss grœr of kon mærar | á sefreinu Sónar | sáð, vingjöfum ráða* "You must establish friendly gifts, as the seeds of words of Són [POETRY] about the descendant of the land [Qrð > ÞÓRR] grow for us on the land-strip

means of matching kenning-patterns variously extended with descriptive adjuncts and the operation is repeated in both *helmingar*.

The half stanza by Eyvindr skáldaspillir on the gold of Fýrisvellir belonged to a larger series of variations on the theme of gold and of the generosity of Eyvindr's late patron, Hákon góði, found in a couple of *lausavísur* that combine frequent mythological references to artistic employment of metaphors and kennings. The two stanzas, which are transmitted together in historiographical sources, have been edited as *lausavísur* 8 and 9 (*SkP* 1: 226–28, ed. and transl. by Russell Poole). It is now expedient to consider them in their entirety:

Eyvindr skáldaspillir, *lausavísa* 8:

Borum, Ullr, of alla,
ímunlauks, á hauka
fjollum Fýrisvalla
fræ Hókunar ævi.
Nú hefr folkstriðir Fróða
fáglýjaðra þýja
meldr í móður holdi
mellu dolgs of folginn.

Prose Order

Borum fræ Fýrisvalla á fjollum hauka of alla ævi Hókunar, Ullr ímunlauks. Nú hefr folkstriðir of folginn melldr fáglýjaðra þýja Fróða í holdi móður mellu.

Translation

We bore the seed of Fýrisvellir [GOLD] on the mountains of hawks [HANDS] during the whole of Hákon's lifetime, Ullr [god] of the battle-leek [SWORD > WARRIOR]. Now the afflicter of the people [Haraldr] has hidden the flour of the little-satisfied bondswomen of Fróði [Fenja and Menja > GOLD] in the flesh of the mother of the enemy of the giantess [ÞÓRR > JQRÐ = EARTH].

Eyvindr skáldaspillir, *lausavísa* 9:

Fullu skein á fjollum
fallsól bráa vallar
Ullar kjóls of allan
aldr Hókunar sköldum.
Nú's alfrøðull elfar
jötna dolgs of folginn

of thought [BREAST]". Notice that the most straightforward interpretation of the *helmingr*, the one proposed above, involves an overdetermined kenning: *Sónar orða sáð* 'the seeds of words of Són' (cf. Frank 1981: 163; Males 2020: 149; Patria 2021: 118, 131–32).

– rǫð eru rammrar þjóðar
rík – í móður líki.

Prose Order

Fallsól vallar bráa Fullu skein á fjöllum kjóls Ullar sköldum of allan aldr
Hökonar.

Nús alfróðull elfar of folginn í líki móður dolgs jǫtna; rǫð rammrar þjóðar
eru rík.

The setting sun of the plain of the brows of Fulla [GOLD] shone on the mountains of the ship of Ullr [SHIELD > ARMS/HANDS] of skalds throughout Hákon's whole lifetime. Now the sun of the river [GOLD] is hidden in the body of the mother of the enemy of the giants [PÓRR > JǪRÐ = EARTH]; the resolutions of the mighty people are powerful.

The two *lausavísur* combine several oblique references to figures and details of the mythical world, such as the golden head-band worn by the goddess Fulla, the notion that the god Ullr used a shield as a ship, and, beside the already mentioned story of Hrólfr Kraki, the one about king Fróði's gold-grinding mill Grótti. Finally, both stanzas show a parallel closing, where the gold, which once shone on the skald's arms, is now hidden in the ground. This image is twice realized by combining personification and linguistic association, so that the soil (*jǫrð*) is depicted as the body of the goddess Jǫrð, Þórr's mother. Beside the similarities already discussed concerning the Hrólfr Kraki kennings, another detail of *Sexstefja* 27 may betray a degree of indebtedness to Eyvindr's *lausavísa*.

á hlæmyldar holdi
hauks kǫlfur mér sjǫlfum.

[...] on my own strips of land of the hawk, warmly soil-covered with flesh [ARM].

The expression *á hlæmyldar holdi* 'warmly soil-covered with flesh' is reminiscent of Eyvindr's couplet (*lv.* 8, ll. 7–8):

meldr í móður holdi
mellu dolgs of folginn.

has hidden the flour [...] in the flesh of the mother of the enemy of the giantess [PÓRR > JǪRÐ = EARTH].

The two texts share the same conceptual play involving the words *hold* 'flesh' and *fela*/**mylda* 'to conceal, to hide underground, to bury'. In Eyvindr's *lausavísur* the metaphorical transfer between soil and flesh is prompted by the personification of the earth as Jǫrð, whereas in Þjóðolfr's metaphor it is harmonized with the sowing-theme derived from Hrólfr

Kraki's myth. Although the similarity may seem less obvious than in the previous cases, the markedness of the mapping (human flesh : soil) becomes significant when considered beside the other, more conspicuous, parallels between *Sexstefja* 27 and Eyvindr's stanza. Tenth-century skalds tended to insert pointed and specific mythological allusions in their metaphorical experimentations, whereas Þjóðólfr's technique appears to be more image-driven, his intention being to consistently extend the agricultural metaphor. The same difference in approach will emerge again in the next paragraph, with regard to poetry by Egill Skallagrímsson. For the time being, suffice it to say that, judging from the multiple similarities, Eyvindr's gold-themed *lausavísur*, with their typically tenth-century mixture of mythological references and rich imagery, are likely to have served as a model for Þjóðólfr's exercise in sustained metaphors.¹³

5.2 Precedents to Stanzas 28–29: Grain and Birds

Among the terms occurring as bird-determinants in the examined stanzas, some are usual skaldic words (*valr*, *svanr*, *ari*), others are rather rare (*trani*, only attested twice before this occurrence) or even *hapax* in the skaldic corpus, such as *orri* 'black grouse'. The same can be said of the base-words: terms for cereals as base-words in the kenning-type 'food of the [scavenger beast]' are attested sparsely in the earlier corpus, and I will treat previous occurrences below. This situation is typical of skaldic synonymic repertoires, which, moving along an axis of semantic proximity, tend to expand from more 'conventional' (e.g. *svanr* 'swan') or unspecific lexical items (e.g. *verðr* 'meal') to unusual (e.g. *orri* 'black-grouse') or contextually specific lexical solutions (e.g. *hveiti* and *barr* in the harvest metaphor under scrutiny). Such lexical innovations are often, although not always, predicated on peculiar poetic creations based on the kenning's imagery. At the same time, the dynamics of synonymic variation represented one of the aspects of the 'skaldic game', as unexpected words, while lending a new twist to worn-out tropes, may have required an extra effort of the listener / interpreter to be correctly associated to the conventional kenning pattern. In the examined stanzas, the relatively plain syntax and rigorous structural parallelism might have balanced out the lexical and conceptual complexity, aiding the listeners' comprehension.

¹³ A similar emphasis on sentence metaphor and mythological reference emerges in *Sexstefja* stanza 3 (*SkP* 2: 114), with semantic play on marital imagery as a metaphor for the conquest of land (the 'Jörð-topos'). In that case as well, Þjóðólfr appears to have modelled his metaphor on poems of tenth-century skalds (*Patria* 2021: 185–86).

Indeed, although the kenning-type ‘food of the [scavenger beast]’ is well attested and much modified by previous poets, the combination [cereals] + [birds (of prey)] looks like an original invention, never found in the attested corpus before Þjóðólfr’s stanzas nor afterwards. Its systematic occurrence – four times in these *helmingar* – must be related to the design of stanzas 28–29 recognized by Björn M. Ólsen, and to the encompassing harvest metaphor indicated by Fidjestøl. As mentioned, the word *trani* is relatively unusual in the early skaldic corpus, as it is attested only a couple of times before Þjóðólfr’s use of it in *Sexstefja*.¹⁴ Its first attested appearance is in Egill Skállagrímsson’s *Höfuðlausn* (c. 950).¹⁵

Höfuðlausn, st. 11:

Flugu hjaldrs tranar
of hræs lanar;
órut blóðs vanar
benmós granar;
þá er oddbreki
– sleit und Freki –
gnúði hrafni
á höfuðstafni.

The cranes of battle [RAVENS] flew over heaps of corpses; the lips of the wound-seagull [RAVEN] were not devoid of blood, when the breaking wave of spear-points [BLOOD] – Freki [WOLF] tore up wounds – roared upon the head’s ship-stem of the raven [BEAK].

In this stanza, the skald indulges in experimental variations on the image of different beasts of prey feeding on the bodies of the slain. The worn-out topos becomes occasion of a typically skaldic stylistic exercise: the migrating birds are depicted in the semi-realistic act of flying *of [hræs] lanar* ‘over heaps [of corpses]’, impressively describing the gruesome landscape overflowed by these ‘cranes’. The ravens and wolves feeding on the corpses are described through litotes, metonymy and personification (the ‘lips’

¹⁴ Beside the occurrence in Egill’s *Höfuðlausn* st. 11, l. 1, the word *trani* is attested in Óttarr svarti’s *Knútsdrápa* (c. 1030) st. 10, l. 3: *fekk blóðtrani bráðir* [RAVEN > CORPSES]. It appears later in *Háttalykill* (c. 1140) st. 13, l. 4: *rómu trani* [EAGLE].

¹⁵ The dating and authenticity of *Höfuðlausn* has been topic of much debate (Jón Helgason 1969: 174–75; Hoffman 1973; Bjarni Einarsson 1975: 195–207). The strongest evidence against a date earlier than the twelfth century, based on an inaccurate rhyme *ø* : *ø*, seems ultimately inconclusive (see the discussion and further references in Jónas Kristjánsson 2006: 12–14). The rhyme *fjöl* : *mjöl*, as evidence for a date previous to the early-eleventh century was presented by Kuhn (1969 [1937]: 476). See further discussion in Males (2020: 16–17). The second half of st. 11 is one of the four illustrative quotations of *Höfuðlausn* attributed to Egill in *Skm*.

of the wound-seagull were not devoid of blood; Freki tore up wounds). Finally, a sentence metaphor playing on naval imagery occurs in the last couplet of the stanza. Here, the *hapax* compound *høfuðstafn* ('ship-stem of the head') is properly a kenning for the raven's beak. The semantic ambiguity of this element is enhanced by the fact that the rostrum on the prow of a ship, often animal-shaped, is also called *høfuð* (lit. 'head'). Thus, the compound is the pivot of a sentence metaphor that equates blood to a breaking wave (*breki*) and the beak of the raven to the beak-shaped ship-stem. Notice the harmonization of the verbal phrase *gnýja á* 'to roar, to resonate against'. Notwithstanding the repeated and stereotypical theme, somewhat aggravated by the *runhent* rhythm, this stanza of *Høfuðlausn* is an exercise in rhetorical dexterity.

The occurrence of the base-word *trani* (l. 1) in a raven-kenning is particularly interesting for our analysis given its occurrence in a constellation with the word *bræ* (l. 2), as in *Sexstefja*'s compound, and in a stanza where great attention is devoted to birds-of-prey imagery. It is plausible that the placement itself of these elements triggered the creative re-elaboration: the imitator (in this case Þjóðólfr) would have seen an opportunity – or it might have occurred to him unconsciously – to use these words in a new way than the one already attested. The probability that this stanza of Egill's end-rhyming poem might have been among Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's models is strengthened by the fact that Þjóðólfr is one of the earliest known imitators of the kind of *runhent* metre used in *Høfuðlausn*.¹⁶

Egill also has the first and only other preserved occurrence of the word *orð* in poetry, as a kenning base-word in the expression *arnar kjapta orð* 'the grain of the eagle's jaws'.¹⁷ With this kenning, he creates an image of grain falling from a bird's beak, in the poetry-kenning of the only extant stanza of *Berudrápa*:

¹⁶ Þjóðólfr Arnórsson uses *fornyrðislag*-based *runhent* in four stanzas transmitted in *Heimskringla* and in *Snorra Edda*, usually attributed to a poem for Haraldr harðráði and dated to the mid-eleventh century (*SkP* 2: 103–07). Shortly before him, in the early-eleventh century, two other skalds are credited with having composed poems in end-rhyming metre, namely: Gunnlaugr ormstunga and Björn Hítöðlakappi. A few stanzas of each poem are transmitted in the sagas about the two skalds, although, given the source-critically challenging context of transmission of the two works, their authenticity appears less reliable than that of Þjóðólfr's stanzas.

¹⁷ The word is attested only in Egill's *Berudrápa* and twice in the two stanzas of *Sexstefja* under examination (*LP*: 663, *orð*). The noun *orð* (f.) is a derivative form of the stem **ar-* 'to plough', cf. ON weak verb *erja* 'to plough', *arðr* (m.) 'plough' (*AEW*: 104, 688). According to *ONP*, the lexeme is otherwise attested only in Norwegian juridical sources, with the primary meaning 'crop, harvest' and a secondary meaning '(one year's) harvest, (a field's) annuity'.

Heyri fúrs¹⁸ á forsa
 fallhadds vinar stalla,
 hyggi, þegn, til þagnar
 þinn lýðr, konungs mína;
 opt skal arnar kjapta
 orð góð of trøð Hqrða,
 hrafnstýrandi hræra
 hregna, mín of fregnask.

May the king's thane listen to my waterfalls of the longhaired friend of the fire of sacrifice altars [ÓÐINN > [mead of] POETRY] – may your people mind their silence; often shall my good grain of the eagle's jaws be heard in the land of the Hqrðar, steerer of the Hrafn [HORSE] ...¹⁹

In this instance, the 'grain' or 'seed' falling from the eagle's beak is interpreted as a pointed reference to the episode of the theft of the mead of poetry, and in particular to the detail of Óðinn, in an eagle's shape, vomiting the mead, a theme alluded to in the first *helmingr* as well, where poetry is described as 'Óðinn's waterfalls'. This detail is of some interest for our discussion since the image of the pouring grain found in *Sextstefja*'s stanzas (as argued by Wood and suggested in the discussion above) may find here yet another precedent in Egill's poetry. Notice that both in *Berudrápa* l. 5 and in *Sextstefja* 29, l. 4, the rare word *orð* occurs in *aðalhending* with the Norwegian ethnonym *Hqrðar*.

In the eleventh century, some decades before the composition of *Sextstefja*, Þórðr Kolbeinsson and his son Arnórr jarlaskáld used the words *hveiti* ('wheat') and *barr* ('barley') as base-words in kennings for 'corpse', but they combined them with 'wolf' as determinant. The instance by Þórðr Kolbeinsson is found in his *Eiríksdrápa* (c. 1020), st. 17:

Óð, en ærnu náði
 íms sveit Freka hveiti,
 – Gera qlðra naut gylðir –
 Gjalpar stóð í blóði.

¹⁸ I here adopt Björn M. Ólsen's suggestion to take the manuscript reading *feyrs* as a misspelling for *fýrs* / *fúrs*, gen. of *fúrr* 'fire', resulting in the kenning *stalla fúrs fallhaddr vinr* 'longhaired friend of the fire of sacrifice altars' (1903: 209–10).

¹⁹ The kenning *brafnstýrandi hræra hregna* is partly unexplained. The element *hræra hregna* is probably the corrupted determinant of a ship-kenning, whose base-word is *Hrafn*, a *heiti* for 'horse'. The dedicatee of the *drápa* is thus referred to as a ship-ruler, lit. 'ship-steerer' (cf. *branna Hrafna vqrðr* 'guardian of the Hrafnar [horses] of the waves', *Vellekla* st. 9 [*SkP* 1: 293]; *stqrðvar Hrafna stefnir* 'steerer of the Hrafnar of the harbour', Hallfreðr's *Hákonardrápa* st. 8 [*SkP* 3: 224]).

Prose Order

Stóð Gjalpar óð í blóði, en sveit íms náði ærnu hveiti Freka; gylðir naut
qlðra Gera.

Translation

Gjǫlp’s studs [GIANTESS > WOLVES] waded in blood, and the company of the dusky one [WOLF > WOLVES] gained plentiful wheat of Freki [WOLF > CORPSES]; the wolf enjoyed the ales of Geri [WOLF > BLOOD].²⁰

This *helmingr* is crowded with wolves, indicated through various poetic terms (*gylðir*, *ímr* ‘the gray/dusky one’), names (*Geri* and *Freki*) and kennings (*Gjalpar stóð*). The ‘studs of the giantess’ are described as they waded the flood of blood shed on the battlefield in order to get their share of ‘wheat’ and ‘ale’. Notice the emphasis on hyperbolic imagery and metaphor technique already observed in the *Höfuðlausn*’s stanza above. The wolf roaming the battlefield is compared to a horse wading a stream (of blood): *óð [...]* *Gjalpar stóð í blóði*. According to skaldic practice, the hyperbole exploits the kenning-type’s imagery: whereas in *Höfuðlausn* the blood was a wave breaking on the ‘beak’ of the raven, here it is a stream that the giantess’ mount has to wade across. Moreover, by using terms referring specifically to human food items (‘wheat’ and ‘ale’), Þórðr is seeking a paradoxical effect, developing the image of the battlefield as a wolf’s banquet.²¹ This stanza shares with *Sexstefja* 28–29 both the lexical item *hveiti* and the consistent focus on one type of animal, in this case wolves, for metaphorical effect.²²

Þórðr Kolbeinsson’s son, Arnórr jarlaskáld, similarly picks up the themes of ‘the wolf’s barley’ and of ‘the giantess’s mount’ and, in a similar fashion, he deforms conventional warfare tropes into an almost absurd hyperbole. This is found in st. 11 of the *erfidrápa* for Magnús inn góði († 1047):

Svá hlóð siklingr hývan
snarr af ulfa barri

²⁰ Ed. and transl. (with slight variations) J. Carroll (*SkP* 1: 513).

²¹ A diachronic survey of this kenning-type shows that this kind of lexical innovation is unattested before the eleventh century (Meissner 1921: 202–04). Previously attested base-words for ‘food of the scavenger’ had been more general: *verðr* ‘meal’ (Egill *Hfl* 10/8; *Eskál lv.* 2a/2; *Tindr Hákr* 4/3–4); *virði* ‘meal’ (*Tindr Hákr* 3/3–4); *tugga* ‘bite’ (*GSúrs lv.* 30/4); *tafn* ‘offer’ (*Eskál Vell* 35/4); *beita* ‘bait’ (*Hókr Eirfl* 7/6).

²² Another *helmingr* usually attributed to *Sexstefja* shows similarities with this stanza, namely st. 31 (*SkP* 2: 146–47; Faulkes 1998, I: 87), in which the wolf Geri is offered plentiful hospitality (*gisting* lit. ‘lodging’); the *helmingr* further explores metaphorical effects by describing the ruler as he entices the wolf out of the woods, suggesting a hunting simile.

(hrósa'k hugfulls vísa)
 hrækøst (fira ævi),
 at áleggjar Yggjar
 allnøttföruull máttit,
 – öld lá vítt – þótt vildi,
 vífs marr yfir klífa.

Prose Order

Snarr siklingr hlóð svá hōvan hrækøst af ulfa barri – hrósa'k ævi hugfulls vísa fira – at allnøttföruull marr vífs Yggjar áleggjar máttit yfir klífa, þótt vildi – öld lá vítt.

Translation

So high a corpse-heap of wolves' barley [CORPSES] did the swift prince pile up – I praise the life of the brave chieftain of men – that the ever-night-roving steed of the wife of the river-limb's Yggr [ROCKS-ÓÐINN > GIANT > GIANTESS > WOLF] could not climb over it, though he wanted to – men were strewn widely.²³

Once again, the enormity of the bloodshed is expressed in paradoxical terms: as with the river of blood of Þórðr Kolbeinsson's stanza, here the pile of corpses becomes itself a physical obstacle for the scavenger beasts. Arnórr has thus modified the image used by his father, turning the river into a mountain; the wolf-kenning, although conforming to the same kenning-pattern, [the horse of the giantess], is significantly expanded: *áleggjar Yggjar vífs marr allnøttföruull* lit. 'the ever-night-roving steed of the wife of the Yggr (Óðinn) of the river-limb', where 'the Óðinn of rocky landscapes' is a kenning for giant.

Of greater interest for our analysis of *Sexstefja*'s precedents is the other agent in the *helmingr*, namely, the warrior who creates the 'pile'. The ruler (*siklingr*) is depicted in the act of heaping up (*hlaða*) a pile (*køst*) of [wolves'] barley (*ulfa barr*), in another grim farming-themed simile playing on the fate awaiting the corpses of the slain. We can observe here yet another instance of 'overdetermination', which, as mentioned above, seems to be relatively common in stanzas with a metaphorical emphasis. In fact, the kenning *hrækøst af ulfa barri* ('corpse-mound of wolves' barley'), which is harmonized with the verb *hlaða* 'to heap up, to pile up', has, strictly speaking, an extra determinant (*hræ-* 'corpse-'), considering that *af ulfa barri* – a self-contained kenning meaning 'corpses' – would suffice to define the nature of the mound (*køst*). As argued above, the necessity to lexically underpin the metaphor's farming imagery

²³ Ed. and transl. (with slight variations) D. Whaley (*SkP* 2: 220–21).

(heaping up a pile of barley) is likely to play a role in such additions to the kenning structure. Þórðr Kolbeinsson and Arnórr jarlaskáld's stanzas contain the first attestations of the base-words *bveiti* and *barr* in kennings for 'slain'. In the first case, the 'wheat' is the solid counterpart to the 'ale' offered to the wolves; in the second, the fierce warrior has piled up the 'wolf's barley' just like a diligent farmer would have done. Only a few years after, *Sexstefja*'s sustained metaphor takes such explorations to the next level. Whereas depicting the slain as 'the wolf's barley' plays on a paradoxical simile, the stanzas in *Sexstefja* pursue a realistic image: after all, common birds are more likely to feed on barley and grain than wolves are. Similarly, whereas Egill's depiction of the mead-of-poetry as 'the grain of the eagle's jaws' was a subtle hint to a mythical detail, in Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's image the shower of grain is retained for its purely realistic value, side-by-side with the image of the sickle and that of the flocking birds ready to feast on the fallen corn.

6 Are These the *Stef* of *Sexstefja*?

At this point, one final question should be addressed concerning the relationship between the *helmingar* examined above and the one edited as stanza 30 in *SkP*. In a section of *Skm* about the use of various birds in kennings, *helmingar* 29 and 30 are cited as one complete stanza in the redactions R, T and U, and this arrangement is retained by Finnur Jónsson (*Skj* B I: 346) and Faulkes (1998, I: 90):²⁴

Blóðorra lætr barri	<i>Sexstefja</i> , st. 29 (<i>SkP</i> 2: 144–45)
bragningr ara fagna;	
Gauts berr sigð á sveita	
svans qrð konungr Hqrða.	

The prince lets the eagle rejoice in the barley of the black grouse of blood [RAVEN > SLAIN]; the king of the Hqrðar [Haraldr] wields the sickle of Gautr [SWORD] on the corn of the swan of blood [RAVEN > SLAIN].

Geirs oddum lætr greddir	<i>Sexstefja</i> , st. 30 (<i>SkP</i> 2: 145–46)
grunn hvert stika sunnar	

²⁴ The two *helmingar* are introduced by the words: *Alla aðra fugal karlkenda má kenna við blóð eða hræ ok er þat þá nafn qrn eða hrafn, sem Þjóðólfr kvað* "All the other birds with a name in the masculine must be determined by means of 'blood' or 'corpse' and then that becomes a term for 'eagle' or 'raven', as Þjóðólfr composed" (Faulkes 1998, I: 90).

hirð, þat's hann skal varða,
hrægamms ara sævar.

Prose Order

Greddir hrægamms sævar ara lætr hirð stika sunnar oddum geirs hvert
grunn, þats hann skal varða.

Translation

The feeder of the corpse-vulture of the sea of the eagle [BLOOD > RAVEN > WARRIOR] has his retinue barricade with spear points, further south, every shallow [lit. 'each shallow'] that he has to defend.²⁵

In A, the two *helmingar* are separated, however, by the words *svá quað hann enn* 'he further recited thus' (14r, ll. 15–16), as well as in C, where the words *ok enn* 'and further' have been added, written above the line, between the end of st. 29 and the beginning of st. 30 (7r, l. 10). The matter is not easy to solve. C has been argued to often retain the closest text to the archetype, whereas A belongs before U in the same branch (Haukur Þorgeirsson 2017: 65–69). On the other hand, considering that an independent innovation in two branches seems implausible, the full stanza structure shown by R, T and U appears to have the strongest claim and, in the cases of A and C, we might be dealing with 'corrections' on the scribes' part (the case being especially strong for the addition in C). The two scribes might independently have thought that there should be an 'ok enn' between two *helmingar*, as is the general norm in *Skm*, where quotation of half-stanzas for exemplification is the standard practice. Nonetheless, it should be noted that, although the two *helmingar* have a strong affinity when it comes to the illustration of the use of birds in kennings for battle, which is the reason for which both are quoted in *Skm*, the harvest imagery and metaphor development present in sts. 28–29 is absent in st. 30, which appears to be concerned with the more practical activity of staking shallows as a coastal defence (*SkP* 2: 145).²⁶ Given the tight thematic connection between stanzas 28 and 29, it is not impossible that the scribes of A and C corrected based on knowledge of the tradition as well. As observed by Whaley, A is also the only source to preserve st. 28, in its text of the *TGT* (*SkP* 2: 111). Finally, the c. 150 years of oral

²⁵ Ed. and transl. D. Whaley (*SkP* 2: 145–46).

²⁶ Incidentally, the kenning *hrægamms ara sævar* 'of the corpse-vulture of the sea of the eagle' happens to be overdetermined, as highlighted in the reference edition: "The construction assumed here is overloaded (so also Finnur Jónsson in *Skj* B, marking *hrægamms ara* as unexplained): *-gamms sævar ara* 'of the vulture of the sea of the eagle' [BLOOD > RAVEN] is an adequate determinant, leaving *hræ-* 'corpse, carrion' as unnecessary" (*SkP* 2: 145).

transmission between Þjóðólfr and Snorri remains a factor to take into account for fluctuation in the sequence of the stanzas, as well as in the ordering of half-stanzas into stanzas.

On the basis of the abbreviating praxis of the scribe of the U ms. of Snorri's *Edda*, Mårtensson and Heimir Pálsson argued interestingly that the *helmingr* edited as st. 30 may have been one of the refrains of *Sexstefja*, since it appears to have occurred as a recurring – hence abbreviated – portion of text in a now lost antigraph used by the U scribe (2008: 149–52). This different abbreviational treatment concerns only stanza 30 however, and might be a further indication that, regardless of the fact whether stanza 30 actually was part of the *stef* of the poem or not, it did not belong together with stanza 29.

The question of the unidentified or lost six *stef* alluded to by the title of the poem is undoubtedly an intriguing one. The very general tone of the praise of the king and the rhetorical dexterity shown in the realization of the harvest metaphor would suggest the four *helmingar* examined above as obvious candidates. Stanzas 27 and 29, however, were not abbreviated like stanza 30 in the U redaction of *Skm* and the very attribution of the harvest metaphor to *Sexstefja* is ultimately impossible to establish. The problem of *Sexstefja*'s *stef* will thus not be solved here.

Conclusions

The harvest-metaphor stanzas and their likely poetic antecedents suggest that we should be wary of forcing the 'regularities' of a perceived system onto the most artful instances of skaldic poetry. Besides, when supported by other criteria, such as linguistic, metrical or palaeographic ones, the internal logic and meaning of the verse should be granted some relevance in the interpretative process. As Wood put it, "the context of the kenning and its use in that context are a more primary consideration than its formal structure and meaning" (1958: 404), and the regularities we infer about the kenning-system should not become more real than real kennings.

Moreover, the relative frequency of apparent structural anomalies – such as overdetermination – in kennings occurring within sentence metaphors suggests that stylistic strategies based on imagery may affect the structural make-up of kennings. In fact, considering that a lexically sustained simile is their primary goal, such constructions may affect both the lexical *and* the structural realization of 'conventional' kenning-pat-

terns, becoming a driving force of innovation within the shared poetic acrolect. Besides, given the inherent intertextual and imitative nature of the skaldic art, the notion of conventionality itself has to be taken with a grain of salt, for the conventionalization of skaldic motifs, images or even expressions is a gradual process, of which it is possible to trace, to some extent, the intermediate steps.

In this respect, the retained metaphor examined above is an ingenious combination and harmonization of previously attested topoi and rhetorical strategies. For what concerns the gold-sowing imagery of stanza 27, the clearest precedent is represented by Eyvindr skáldaspillir's *lausavísa* 8, which is, in turn, part of a series of variations and sentence metaphors involving gold imagery. The second unit, formed by stanzas 28 and 29, joins in a productive tradition of stylistic experimentation on the theme of the battlefield as the banquet of ravens and wolves, but taking the old metaphor to a new level of realism. Some lexical parallels seem to suggest a dependency on Egill Skallagrímsson's poetry, as well as on a number of later explorations of the same theme by eleventh-century skalds such as Þórðr Kolbeinsson and Arnórr jarlaskáld. This analysis aimed at showing that skalds would target marked uses of traditional kennings in the verse of earlier poets as the starting point for emulation and creative variation. Not least, tracing such influences is informative of the canonical status of the source-texts in the context of their earliest poetic reception.

The harvest metaphor is not an isolated instance of metaphorical explorations and mythological referencing in Þjóðolfr Arnórsson's extant production, although it might be the most elaborate one. These refined stanzas bear witness to eleventh-century skalds' reception of previous verse and creative negotiation of new expressive strategies. Such experimentalism may explain the interest of thirteenth-century grammarians and saga-writers in a poet like Þjóðolfr, at a time when the rhetorical properties of the native poetic tradition as well as its tropes were being analysed, described and performed systematically.²⁷ Crucially, it was through the influence exerted on later poets and by virtue of the canonical status accorded to him in prescriptive and descriptive works, that Þjóðolfr's verse, as that of the other skalds quoted in *Skm*, contributed to shape our expectations about the 'kenning-system' as we know it today.

²⁷ Suffice it to mention the employment of sentence metaphor in *Háttatal* (Faulkes 2007: 6–7) and in the spurious stanzas attributed to Óláfr Haraldsson and to Þjóðolfr Arnórsson himself (Males 2020: 74, 255–59).

Manuscripts

- A = AM 748 I b 4to. Snorra-Edda, Þriðja málfræðiritgerðin and Íslendingadrápa. Iceland, (1300–25), parchment. Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum.
- R = GKS 2367 4to. *Codex Regius* of Snorra Edda: Snorra Edda, Jónsvíkingadrápa and Málsháttakvæði. Iceland (1300–50), parchment. Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum.
- T = Traj 1374x. *Codex Trajectinus*. Snorra Edda. Iceland (c. 1595), paper. Universiteitsbibliotheek, Rijksuniversiteit te Utrecht.
- U = DG 11. *Codex Upsaliensis*. Snorra Edda with additions (Skáldatal, Genealogies, Grammatical Treatises). Iceland (1300–25), parchment. Uppsala universitetsbibliotek, Delagardieska samlingen.
- W = AM 242 fol. *Codex Wormianus*, *Ormsbók Snorra Eddu*. Snorra Edda with additions (the four Grammatical Treatises). Iceland (1340–70), parchment and paper. København, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling.
- 2368 = GKS 2368 4to. *Laufás-Edda*. Iceland (1600–1700), paper. Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum.
- 743 = AM 743 4to. *Laufás-Edda*, Iceland (1623–70), paper. Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum.

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