THE TWO FRIENDS IN THE BARROW

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1. The «Tale of Asmund» and its critical classification

The *Tale of Asmund* (*TA*)[1], the medieval Nordic narrative that this paper examines, was rewritten in the 16th century by Thomas Nashe. It appeared within his pamphlet *Pierce Penilesse* (1592), a political satire parodying Langland's *visio* of *Piers Plowman* (14th century):

> [...] there is a wonderfull accident set downe in the Danish history of *Asuitus* and *Asmundus*, who being two famous friends (well knowne in those parts) vowd one to another, that which of them two out liued the other, should be buried aliue with his friende that first died. In short space *Asuitus* fell sick and yeelded to nature, *Asmundus* compelled by the oath of his friendship, tooke none but his horsse and his dog with him, and transported the dead bodie into a vast caue vnder the earth, & there determined (hauing victualed himselfe for a long time) to finish his daies in darknesse, and neuer depart from him that he loued so derelie. Thus shut up and inclosed in the bowels of the earth, it hapened *Eritus* K. of *Sweueland* to passe that waie with his armie not full two months after, who comming to the toomb of *Asuitus*, & suspecting it a place where tresure was hidden, caused his Pioners with their spades and mattockes to dig it vp: where vpon was discouered the lothsome bodie of *Asmundus*, all to besmeared with dead mens filth, & his visage most vglie and fearefull; which imbrued with congeald blood, and eaten & torn like a raw vlcer, made him so gastlie to behold, that all the beholders were afrighted. He seeing himselfe restord to light, and so manie amazed men stand about him,

[1] This title, which I have devised myself, refers to an ideal model of both the extant medieval texts. The abbreviation *TA* is intended to make the argument of this article clearer.

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> resolued their vncertain perplexity in these terms. Why stand you stonisht at my vnusual deformities? when no liuing man conuerseth with the dead, but is thus disfigured. But other causes haue effected this change in mee: for I know not what audacious spirit sent by *Gorgon* from the deep, hath not onelie most rauenously deuoured my horse & my dog, but also hath laid his hungrie pawes vpon me, and tering downe my cheekes as you see, hath likewise rent awaie one of mine eares. Hense is it that my mangled shape seems so monstrous, and my humane image obscured with gore in this wise. Yet scaped not this fell Harpie from me vnreuenged: for as he assailde me, I raught his head from his shoulders, and sheathd my sword in his bodie. [2]

Here the story is told (along with other *exempla*) by an emissary of the «Prince of Darkness» to demonstrate the behaviour of «*daimona*, or evil angels», who «hate the light, and rejoice in darkness, disquieting men maliciously in the night». Although Nashe describes his source generically as «the Danish history», this hypo(thetical)-text must have been related to Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, either in its complete original or one of its several Latin abridgements [3]. Though the earliest English translation by Oliver Elton would not be published until 1893 [4], by Nashe's day *Gesta Danorum* (*GD*), first published in Paris in 1514, had already been disseminated widely throughout the highbrow circles of Europe, mainly through its second and third editions, published in Basel and Frankfurt in 1534 and 1576 respectively.

The focal point of Nashe's account is on the ghost story, which may even have impacted the creation of the ghost in *Hamlet*, the most striking innovation by the Elizabethan playwright on the *fabula* of Amlethus in *GD* [5]. Nashe's emphasis on the ghost story certainly paved the way for the

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[2] Nashe 1592, where the devilish creature is equated with the classical *Gorgon* and *Harpie*.

[3] See Knudsen 1996. *TA* was retold in the *Compendium Saxonis* (Lib. V, cap. xvi; Gertz 1918, 279, 19 - 280, 14) and by Albert Krantz (1546), who inserts a synopsis of Saxo's tale in his *Norvagia* (Lib. I, cap. xviii, 609-610), with few meaningful modifications. The final execution of the vampire, however, is not recorded neither in the *Compendium* (whose manuscripts belong to the 14th and 15th centuries), nor by Krantz.

[4] Elton translated only the first nine books, considering the heathen past of Denmark separately and launching a successful critical approach, as, for example, in the German commentary by Paul Herrmann (*Die Heldensagen des Saxo Grammaticus*, 1922).

[5] Schwyzer 2007, 12-13. The contents page of the Northumberland Ms. Fol 10 (c. 1597, which records *Richard II* and *III*, along with some inedita by Francis Bacon, and was involved in the quarrel on the authorship of the Shakespearian plays) links Nashe's name to the unknown *Asmund and Cornelia*, though not any character bearing those names is documented in what survives of it.

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later reception of *TA*. Sir Walter Scott retold the story of the two friends in the barrow in his *Third Letter on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830), in order to prove that «when the soul left the body, its departure was occasionally supplied by a wicked demon» [6].

Though Walter Scott's epitome appeared more than a century after the *editio princeps* (complemented by a Latin translation) of *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* (Uppsala, 1693), which is the second medieval witness of our tale (*EseÁb*) [7], it does not reveal any influence from the Icelandic saga. Scott's version follows Saxo (who is also quoted), varying only in certain details, such as the statements that Assueit had «been slain in battle», that «The soldiers [...] rolled a huge stone to the mouth of the tomb» and that «a century had elapsed» before the barrow was infiltrated and Asmund released by Eritus (say, Saxo's Ericus *disertus*, the friend, general and minister of King Frotho III). Scott, however, adds several historical details to the «age of hills», when mound burials were enriched by deposits of luxury artefacts (jewels and weapons) and, perhaps, by the «poured [...] blood of victims» [8].

Moreover, Scott confirms Nashe's devilish interpretation («Assueit, or rather [...] the evil demon who tenanted that champion's body»). His version elaborelates on the multiple means employed to slay the undead creature (who is explicitly likened to a modern Greek or Turkish vampire) [9], gathering together the particular procedures recounted in the sagas for killing *draugar* [10]. Scott's account does not perfectly correspond to either of the two medieval sources of *TA*, but unites the monster's beheading and stabbing with a stake (Saxo) with the burning of its beheaded corpse (*EseÁb*). In a previous passage of *GD*, a wooden stake is driven through an undead creature's body (explained by Scott as «a derivation of the ancient

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6 Scott 1830.

7 *EseÁb*: Lagerholm 1927. The *Saga of Egill einhendi* (dated in the 14th century) was among the earliest Old Norse texts committed to print and translated into Latin and Swedish (Salan 1693), under Olof Rudbeck's patronage. It exists in dozens of manuscripts: the vellum AM 343 4to, fols 14r-21v (c. 1450-1475) has been favoured by the editors (*ONP* 1989, *Registre*, 234; Leslie-Jacobsen 2009, 129; *Stories for all time – bibliography – EseÁb*, http://fasnl.ku.dk/bibl/bibl.aspx?sid=eseab&view=manuscript).

8 Scott 1830.

9 Ármann Jakobsson 2011, 284; Barber 1988.

10 See Sayers 1996 and McClelland 2006. The narrative Icelandic corpus concerning *apturgaungur* and *uppvakninga* (Jón Árnason - Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1862, in compliance with the methodical precedent of Maurer 1860) has been critically reassessed by Ármann Jakobsson (2011).

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English law in case of suicide»)[11] before it is beheaded, in order to eliminate Mithothyn (the temporary usurper of Othinus's power), whose traits conform better to the pattern of Icelandic *draugr* stories: although Mithothyn has already been murdered, his barrow emits a stench and pestilence that kills people, until his unearthed corpse receives ritual treatment (*GD* Book I, chap. vii, 2).

Putting aside characteristic selfishness and ghostly «refusal to withdraw from the world», since they «tend to be people who were troublesome during their lifetime», the waking of the dead and assaults on the friend in *TA* are not easy to explain[12]. They are certainly not motivated by greed or envy (as the deeds of revenants often are). The dead figure is not a social outcast, a putrid and repulsive creature, like a *troll* (according to the current definition within Old Icelandic literature, also confirmed by the stench exuded from Mythothin's mound)[13], but a handsome and well-educated young prince. He is not woken from death by human sorcery (as occurs in another passage of *GD*)[14], but compelled by eagerness for his friend (after the sacrifice of minor earthly companions – the horse, the dog and the falcon – which followed him into the tomb). Asmund, for his part, though eventually conforming to the procedures recommended against *draugar*, is not a typical Old Norse ghostbuster, but a knightly hunter treacherously ensnared within a revenant plot.

Despite their many divergences from the usual model of this kind of narrative, critics currently count both medieval examples of *TA* – *GD* (V, xi, 1-4)[15] and the *fornaldarsaga* (*EseÁb* chaps 6-8) – among stories concerning revenants[16]. The vampire plot is listed in the Old Icelandic *Motif-Index*

[11] For the canonical recommendations on orthodox sepultures, see Février 2014; for the shift from pagan to Christian usages and the archeological evidence of deviant burials, see Lund 2013 and Gardeła 2014 respectively.

[12] Ármann Jakobsson 2011, 288; on non-corporeal European spectres (according to St Augustine's pneumatology, false images imprinted by the devil onto the human psyche), Schmitt 1998, 26 ff., and Keyworth 2007.

[13] Ármann Jakobsson 2011, 285 and *passim*. Ármann has underlined the terminological inconsistencies of medieval sources, contrasting them with the classification by 19th-century folklorists (Maurer 1860 and Jón Árnason - Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1862 ahead).

[14] *GD* I, vi, 4, along with other necromancy performed to the advantage of Hadingus (see also *GD* I, viii, 14).

[15] Olrik - Ræder 1931; Friis-Jensen 2005 (in its Oxford's reprint of 2015 with English translation by Peter Fisher): Hereafter I shall alternatively make use of both editions, quoting the former with chapter numeration (which is the conventional way of referring to Saxo's work) and the latter with page numbers.

[16] See Chadwick 1946-1947 and Davidson - Fisher 1980, 88, 128 and 131.

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(E 461.2: *Fight of living person with dead in the grave*) [17]. The theme of such a friendship, however, is unequalled in the Old Norse literary corpus, with *EseÁb* representing its only instance.

2. «Gesta Danorum»

While the purpose of each hero's behaviour is uncertain, both sources share a cluster of models, though they arrange them differently.

In *GD* the account of Asvithus and Asmundus occurs in the dynastic sequence (within King Frotho III's biography) in the manner of a *þáttr* [18] and reads like a digression from the main plot. Demonstrating the benefits and risks of friendship, the tale, nonetheless, echoes the tie between the main characters of Saxo's 5th book: King Frotho and his Swedish *þulr* Ericus *disertus* (who, on a deeper textual level, might be argued to mirror the contentious alliance beween the Danish throne and the Archbishopric of Lund) [19]. By implicitly comparing the effects of the king's force and the *þulr*'s cleverness, Frotho's troubled relationship with Ericus highlights the moral theme of the 5th book, which, at the factual level, describes the foundation of the legendary peaceful Danish empire (analogous to that of Augustus in ancient Rome: *GD* V, xv, 3). The action of *TA* is set during a time of Danish military and cultural expansion prompted by the two figures, when new laws were imposed upon neighbours in the Russian East and Norwegian West [20]. Three legal matters are mentioned:

1. The rules for observing funeral rites, according to which a *paterfamilias* should be buried «cum equo omnibusque sue armature insignibus» and any potential «greedy wretch» who would be brave enough to violate the grave and rob the dead's «panoply of arms [...] should not receive the

[17] Boberg 1966, 98.

[18] Ármann Jakobsson 2014.

[19] «When modern historians stress [...] the 'harmonious cooperation' between church and state during this period, they are simply victims of very successful propaganda, for which Absalon was himself responsible. He commissioned Saxo to foster the idea that church and state were a unity, Saxo did what he was asked» (Sawyer 2015, 1).

[20] The collocation of this sequence within the text was a matter of editorial controversy: the Parisian *editio princeps* places it during the Ruthenian wars of Frotho (followed by Friis-Jensen - Fisher 2015, 234); Olrik - Ræder 1931 moves it to a later chapter, during the king's expansion against Norway (V, viii, 1-3).

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benefit of a funeral» (Friis-Jensen - Fisher 2015, 325). Mound violation was indeed one of the most common – probably unintentional – ways of awakening *draugar* and a typical incident within the revenant plots [21]. Frotho's burial law differentiates the funerals of commanders or governors («centurionis [...] uel satrape»), who should be burnt on a pyre made from their own boats [22].

2. The rules for observing marriage to a woman by purchasing her, although, if a virgin had been forced into sexual intercourse, the rapist should undergo castration [23].
3. The duties concerning soldiers and how their rewards should be proportioned according to social and military rank. This amounts to a kind of *lex castrensis Frothonis*, reminiscent of that of Cnut the Great, who enacted a norm to order the retainers converging on his court hierarchically. Some of the criticism that Saxo directs at Frotho's lack of fairness («Qua lege uirtuti iniuriam afferebat, conditiones militum non animos estimans») would fit Cnut's arrangements well: «Inprimis uero sue familiaritatis adjungere decreuit, quos uel stemmatum titulus florere uel facultatum copiis exuberare didicerat» [24].

These three groups of legal statements are reflected in three anecdotes, all interpolated within the main plot – the stories of Hilda, Gestiblindus [25], and finally that of Asmund:

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[21] Canonical decrees endeavoured to keep sepultures safe from vandalisms (Février 2014, 27 f.). On their violation in sagas, see Ármann Jakobsson 2011, 289 ff. In *GD*, the crime is a narrative device apt to reveal monstrous inhabitants or supernatural forces hidden in the place of burial (as for the vortex springing from Balderus's tomb: *GD* III, iii, 8). In Scott's rewriting (1830), however, a more honourable reason than avarice was given for the conduct of mound looters: «it was reckoned a heroic action to brave the anger of departed heroes by violating their tombs».

[22] King Frotho's burial law focuses on the treatment that different social positions deserved, being only a single vessel devoted to ten sailors of lower rank, while higher persons were worthy of an entire boat each.

[23] Such an endorsement of the *Raubehe* (and of its breach through the *Entführungsehe*) will be demonstrated by the story of Hilda (*GD* V, vii, 8, and V, ix), usually equated with Snorri's *Hjaðningavíg* (*Skáldskaparmál*, chap. 50). Saxo shows some tendency towards romanticising the plot: so Hilda and Hithinus fall in love before meeting, by force of reputation («Quippe nondum invice conspectos, alterna incederat fama. At ubi mutua conspectionis copia incidit, neuter obtutum ab altero remittere poterat. Adeo pertinax amor oculos morabatur»: Friis-Jensen - Fisher 2015, 328), echoing *EseÁb*, where a similar attitude is displayed by the future revenant towards his still unknown duplicate.

[24] Gertz 1918, 67.

[25] This name is related to Odin's *heiti Gestumblindi* in *Hervarar saga* (H-version, chap. 10), where a barrow conceals the sacred sword that the maid Hervǫr retrieves

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> Eodem tempore regnabat Alf in Hethmarchia, filium habens Asmundum, Biorno vero in Wik provincia, cui Asuithus filius erat. Accidit autem Asmundum parum prospere venationi intentum, dum feras aut canibus occupare aut cassibus excipere pergeret, irruente forte caligine, longius a retiariis avio fuisse calle divulsum vastaque pererrantem iuga tandem equo et vestibus destitutum fungos et tubera peredisse, ad ultimum in Biornonis regis penetralia fortuito devenisse progressu. Praeterea ipse filiusque regis, convictu paulisper habito, ad confirmandum inter se amicitiae cultum omnibus coniuravere votis, quemcumque eorum vita prolixior excepisset, mortuo contumulandum fore. Tantus enim societatis eorum atque amicitiae vigor exstabat, ut neuter, altero fatis absumpto, lucem prorogare statueret. (VIII, xi, 1)

Next Saxo recounts Frotho's covetous aggression towards Norway (in the south-eastern region of which our tale is set), introducing, to the level of the main plot, the motif of avarice («Adeo opum accessio auiditati incrementum afferre consueuit»: *GD* V, xi, 2; Friis-Jensen - Fisher 2015, 334-336), which will soon explain (on the the deeper narrative level of *TA*) how Ericus *disertus* comes to find Asuithus's mound and free Asmundus.

> Inter haec Asuithus morbo consumptus cum cane ac equo terreno mandatur antro. Cum quo Asmundus ob amicitiae iusiurandum vivus contumulari sustinuit, cibo quo vesceretur illato. Iamque Ericus cum exercitu superiora permensus Asuithi forte tumulum appetebat; cui Sueones thesauros inesse rati ligonibus perfregere collem. Itaque maioris quam credebatur altitudinis specum aperiri conspiciunt. Ad quem perlustrandum opus erat eo, qui se in illum pendulo circumligatum fune demitteret. Delectus est sorte ex promptissimis iuvenibus unus; quem cum Asmundus sporta restim sequente intromissum aspiceret, protinus, eiecto eo, corbem conscendit. Deinde superne astantibus ac moderantibus funem abstrahendi signum porrexit. Qui ingentis pecuniae spe reducto corbe, cum ignotam extracti speciem animadverterent, inusitata facie territi defunctumque redisse rati, proiecta reste, in diversa fugere. Quippe Asmundus taetro oris habitu ac veluti funebri quodam tabo obsitus videbatur. Qui fugientes revocare conatus, vociferari coepit falso eos formidare vivum. Quem videns Ericus praecipue cruentati oris eius imaginem mirabatur: in vultu siquidem profluus emicabat sanguis. Quippe Asuithus noctibus redivivus crebra colluctatione laevam illi aurem abruperat, foedumque indigestae ac crudae cicatricis spectaculum apparebat. (V, xi, 3)

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through necromancy (chaps 4-6, see Ármann Jakobsson 2011, 201, n. 39): in the *Saga of Hervǫr*, Odin plays the role Saxo assigns to Ericus (secretly replacing Gestumblindi in a duel). Notwithstanding the opacity of Saxo's report of the Hervǫr legend, all three stories chosen to exemplify Frotho's laws conclude with barrows (in *GD* V, x, 1, the mound of Gunthiouus, an otherwise unknown son of Gestiblindus, related to an equally unknown Norwegian place name).

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In *GD*, *TA* is prosimetrical, culminating in the tirade performed by the hero himself while escaping from the cave [26]. In the verse passage, Asmundus recalls his troubles [27] and the revenant's punishment («Haud impune tamen monstrifer egit; | nam ferro secui mox caput eius | perfodique nocens stipite corpus»), reflecting Asuithus's beheading and the stiking of his corpse.

Saxo's storyline proceeds succinctly, nonetheless devoting much more space to the hunting sequence, than to the encounter and the vow. After Asmundus gets lost in the mist, the scene climaxes with the naked hero divested of all aristocratic accoutrements (his horse and clothing), rooting around for mushrooms and tubers, like a wild beast [28]. Playing the role of prey, finally Asmundus falls into the trap: «ad ultimum in Biornonis regis penetralia fortuito deuenisse progressu» (*GD* V, xi, 1) [29]. Nothing more is mentioned about the protagonists themselves other than their royal status. We notice, however, that they bear two A-allitterating names, which, moreover, share the same theophoric *Bestimmungswort Ása-*.

3. «EseÁb»: meeting Árán

The former onomastic feature is confirmed by *EseÁb*, where the names allitterate again. Here, however, while the name of Ásmundr (cognate of the Latinized one in Saxo) is mantained, Asuithus becomes Árán, a quite atypical saga anthroponym. Moreover, while in Saxo's account the story (echoing contemporary conflicts) is set in Scandinavia, in *EseÁb* it takes

[26] *GD* V, xi, 4. For the verse form of this passage, see Friis-Jensen - Fisher 2015, lxxxvi. Chadwick 1946-1947, 65, connects the endurance of the barrow with the obtainment of poetic faculty.

[27] *GD* V, xi, 4: «missus ab infernis spiritus Asuith | saevis alipedem dentibus edit | infandoque canem praebuit ori. | Nec contentus equi vel canis esu | mox in me rapidos transtulit ungues | discissaque gena sustulit aurem».

[28] Albert Krantz (*Norvagia*, I, xviii, 609-610), who omits the gruesome assaults of the revenant within the grave, brings forward the sacrifice of the hounds and horse, which in his version (replacing the less disturbing roots of *GD*) is to the advantage of the hungry Hasmundus lost in the wood: «Haſmundus autem errorem | in uaſtiſſimas ſolitudines conuertit. Fames illum primum in canes qui | ſequebantur: inde etiam in equu*m* dentes uertere compulit».

[29] Friis-Jensen - Fisher 2015, 334. *Penetralia*, generically used for the inner part of an abode (Blatt 1957, 594), recurs twice for the infernal cave of the wicked Geruthus/Geirrøðr (*GD* VIII, xiv, 14, and VIII, xiv, 18).

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place in the marvellous and frightening East (in Russia and its half-mythical environs, on the fluid border with the Other World) and the undead creature belongs to the exotic realm of Tartaria (*Tattaríá*) [30].

The plot is differently arranged to serve the saga narrative: Ásmundr, the «berserk murderer», is one of the titular heroes of *EseÁb*. His exploits against the revenant are narrated in a flashback of his earliest deeds as a «tale within the tale» (*EseÁb* chaps 6-7) [31], reflecting the fact that the frame narrative «is structured by a sophisticated conceit of the interaction of Other Worlds» and «contains a series of external analepses which become complex and intermingled» [32].

In *EseÁb* the hunting report is not only thorough (with some significant changes), but equal consideration is devoted to description and initial meeting of the boys, their blood brotherhood and the burial oath. In the saga, Ásmundr (portayed as a twelve-year-old youth who is extraordinarily «mikill vexti» and of matchless accomplishment «við íþróttir») loses his way on the tail of a hare («einn hera»), that confounds him, eventually plunging from a sea cliff, so that Ásmundr loses his hounds and horse. Like his Latin/Danish counterpart, he is reduced to playing the quarry, a condition which spans three days, as long as (though only in the saga) he will swear to remain enclosed in the mound [33].

Diverging in its length and mood from the elusive account of *GD* (where Asmundus, amid his *parum prospere venationi*, is suddenly plunged into the revenant's *penetralia*), the encounter in *EseÁb* represents an anagnorisis: Ásmundr gradually recognises the friend as a fated mirroring of his own self. After three days waiting in the forest,

> sá hann mann ganga á móti sér mikinn ok fríðan í skarlatskyrtli, en hárit gult sem silki. Eigi þóttist Ásmundr vænna mann sét hafa. Heilsar nú hvárr öðrum. Ásmundr spurði hann at nafni. Hann kveðst Árán heita, sonr Róðíáns konungs af Tattaríá «hefi ek verit í hernaði» – «Hversu gamall ertu?» sagði

[30] A memory of classical Tartarus, the abode of death, could also be detected, however, in this name. In Nashe's account the Devil is also, in fact, empowered as «Duke of Tartary».

[31] Egill's *einhendi* ensuing first adventure tells his fight with a troll – a kind of Viking *Polyphemus* (*EseÁb* 10).

[32] Leslie-Jacobsen 2009, 129; on narrative design in *fornaldarsögur*, see Naumann 1983.

[33] Boberg 1966, 214 (P 312.3: *Surviving blood-brother to watch three nights in grave-mound*), according to a variant in the mutual oath (that in Saxo required the friends to spend their whole life in the barrow instead). I see here some analogy with the filter-motif and its varying length in the different sources of the Tristan legend.

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> Ásmundr. «Tólf vetra», sagði Árán. «Þar munu ekki fleiri þínir líkar», sagði Ásmundr. «Engum var ek þar líkr», sagði Árán, «ok því strengda ek þess heit at koma eigi aptr, fyrr en ek hefða fundit annan minn líka at aldri ok íþróttum. Nú hefi ek frett til eins manns, er Ásmundr heitir, sonr konungs af Hálogalandi, eða kanntu nokkut at segja mér til hans, því at mér er sagt, at þar muni skammt manna á milli?». «Þann mann þekki ek gerla», sagði Ásmundr, «ok talar hann nú við þik». «Þá gengr at óskum», sagði Árán, «ok megu vit nú prófa okkra fimleika». Ásmundr kveðst þess búinn.
>
> Síðan frömdu þeir allar íþróttir, þær ungum mönnum váru tíðar í þær mundir, ok váru þeir svá jafnir, at ekki mátti á millum sjá. Síðast tóku þeir fang, ok váru harðar sviptingar með þeim, ok mátti eigi mun gera, hvárr sterkari var, ok skildu svá, at þeir váru báðir móðir.
>
> Þá talaði Árán til Ásmundar: «Ekki skulu vit vápnaskipti prófa, því at þat verðr skaði okkar beggja. Vil ek, at vit sverjumst í fóstbræðralag, at hvárr skal annars hefna ok eiga fé saman» [...] Þat fylgdi ok svardaga þeira, at hvárr, sem lengr lifði, skyldi láta verpa haug eptir annan ok láta þar í svá mikit fé sem þeim þætti sóma. Síðan skal sá, sem lengr lifir, sitja hjá inum dauða þrjár nætr í haugi ok fara síðan burt, ef hann vildi; vöktu sér síðan blóð ok létu renna saman. Heldu menn þat þá eiða.

The setting of the episode is conspicuously lavish. The *skarlatskyrtill* seems to be a sophisticated adaptation (suggesting any of the «Red Knights» in the Arthurian cycle)[34] of the colour sometimes worn by Old Icelandic dwellers of Hel[35]. Árán looks tall and fair, and his hair is as golden as silk. The details of the youths' education evoke multiple hints of a learned milieu (either from the Icelandic homeland or abroad): the induction to manhood at the age of twelve (which matches the life of Jesus, the medieval Alexander and Qrvar-Oddr) and the *íþróttir*, conceived as a normative set of accomplishments to be mastered. The desire for his own replica (in age, talent and in uniqueness among comrades) only in force of reputation, is a recurrant motif in bridal-quest narratives (as the previous example of Hilda and Hitinus in *GD* demonstrates)[36].

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[34] For the occurrences of *skarlat*, a borrowing from Old French, and its compounds, see *ONP* 1989.

[35] In *Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts* («a kind of thematic introduction to the account of the conversion of Iceland», added to *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* in the Flateyjarbók: Rowe 2004, 459), two groups of red and blue-clad people fight inside an infernal abode, where Þorsteinn, while dreaming, has been summoned by the alluring mound-dweller dressed in red. After defeating the blue army, Þorsteinn receives the treasures concealed within the burial and is advised by the mound dweller to accept the new faith. The red-earred hunting dogs of the Other World are discussed below.

[36] See *GD* V, vii, 8 (n. 23 above).

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The *íþróttir*, which, in prose, seem to have been written down first in AM 477, 4to (1200-1225 c., Gregor the Great's *Dialogues*), referring to the sly seduction of the fiend [37], received mythical consecration in *Bragaræður*, where the term refers to Odin's magic and its transmission to humans. Among *fornaldarsǫgur*, it appears in *Vǫlsunga saga* (Nks 1824b, 4to, c. 1400-1425), in the list of Sigurd's accomplishments under Reginn's tutorship. Later it entered the conventional portrait of saga heroes (mainly in the biographies of skalds), indicating physical as well as intellectual skills (mainly poetry). The catalogue of *íþróttir*, that in *Vǫlsunga saga* encompasses *tǫfl*, *rúnur* and *tungur* (chap. 31), is more exhaustive in the *lausavísur* of two skalds of royal status, Haraldr *harðráði* (11th century) and Rǫgnvaldr Kali Kolsson, jarl of Orkney (12th century) [38], who counted eight and nine *íþróttir* respectively [39].

In *EseÁb*, the reference is probably only to physical feats, and the first duel between Ásmundr and Árán consists of «allar íþróttir, þær ungum mönnum váru tíðar í þær mundir», a fixed albeit indefinable repertoire. The encounter closes with a truce, since the single combat turns out to be impossible to settle, and, as often happens in romances, the duellers opt for a commitment of brotherhood (enacted by a blood ritual, according to *fornaldarsaga* cases). The saga confirms that Árán dies of illness (as accounted by Saxo) and introduces some traits evocative of Old Icelandic *draugar* (he is buried while sitting on his royal stool and wearing his full panoply) [40]. Noticeably in the funeral scene Ásmundr bestows on his friend the abundant equipment for the aristocratic hunt: «hest hans með söðli ok beizli, merki ok öll herklæði, hauk ok hund».

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[37] In the same hagiographic milieu, the word appeared for the *artes liberales* (either meant singularly or collectively), firstly in *Clemens saga*: for all quotations, see *ONP* 1989, s.v. *íþróttir*.

[38] Haraldr fell at Stamford Bridge (1066), Rǫgnvaldr in 1159.

[39] Board games (*tǫflur*); runes (*rúnur*), books (*bók*), craftsmanship (*smíðir*), skis (*skíð*); shooting (*skýta*), rowing (*rœka*), harp-playing (*harpsláttr*) and poems (*bragþættir*): Haraldr's and Rǫgnvaldr's lists differ in that books are mentioned only by the latter.

[40] «A sitting corpse indicates that the dead might return, and thus it is important to put the deads in a horizontal position when they are dealt with» (Árman Jakobsson 2011, 296); on archeological interpretation of Viking-Age «deviant burials» (Gardeła 2014): Scandinavian burial customs are affected by strong chronological and local variation in both inhumation and cremation, so that «it is difficult to introduce the term 'atypical/deviant burial' when talking about Viking-Age funerary practices» (Gardeła 2014, 64). According to canonical convention, however, double burials are not allowed except as dispensation for the sisters of saints.

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4. The hunted hunter and the vampiresque friend

What makes *AT* unique is that in both its medieval witnesses the *draugr* story (the hard but victorious duel againts a revenant, who requires particular procedures to be eventually killed) is paired with two other unrelated narrative sequences, that apparently conflict with it (though sharing a common moral theme of sovereignty and its legitimacy) [41]:

1. That of the hunter who, following the tracks of a wild animal (mostly a deer, but occasionally a hare, as in *EseÁb*) [42], falls prey to the snares of the Other World.
2. That of a true, eternal friendship between two fair, noble and skilled young warriors of equal age (whose loyalty promises to extend beyond the death).

The intermingling of the oath of spending a fixed period in the abode of a strange hunter (which will finally be revealed as the realm of death), with the theme of two friends' similitude and interchangeability (along with the elsewhere unattested name Árán) have been seen as evidence of influence from Celtic material, because corresponding motifs and the omophonous name *Arawn* recur in the Welsh story of *Pwyll* [43]. While hunting, Pwyll, prince of Dyfed, captures the stag that some red-earred dogs were chasing and injures their master Arawn. As reparation, he is forced to

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41 McKenna 1980; Winst 2009, chaps II.2. and III.

42 «Eitt sinn, er þeir váru á skóg riðnir, fann Ásmundr einn hera. Hann sleppti hundum sínum til hans. Herinn hljóp undan, ok gátu hundarnir ekki farit hann. Ásmundr gaf ekki fyrr upp en hestrinn fell af mæði. Hljóp hann þá ok elti dýrit með hundunum. Lauk svá, at herinn steypti sér ofan fyrir sjóvarhamra» (*EseÁb* 6). The same animal appears in similar circumstances within an early hagiographic Icelandic narrative, in the *Martinus saga byskups* (in AM 645, 4to, 1225-1250), «Hundar helto (!) hera a viðom velle, oc var heranom at comet, at hann mondi tekinn verþa» (see *ONP* 1989, s.v. *heri*): here the plot merges the hunt of the hare (according to *EseÁb*) and the wrangle with a wild hunter about prey (according to the *Tale of Pwyll*). The same anecdote is examined in Donà 2003, within the *Acta s. Marculphi* (108-109, nn. 71-73), where it pertains to a monastic foundation myth.

43 Chadwick 1946-1947. The so-called *Mabinogion* (a compilation of tales) is witnessed in two Welsh manuscripts, the «White Book of Rhydderch» (*Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*: Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 4, written down around 1375-1425), and the «Red Book of Hergest» (*Llyfr Coch Hergest*: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Jesus College 111, between 1382 and 1400). In the former codex, the hands of more scribes have been identified, probably working in Strata Florida Abbey (in the county of Ceredigion, Wales, founded in 1164), which would have been under the strict control of the Norman aristocracy. A recent reassessment of the dating is conjectured in Breeze 2013.

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change places with Arawn, in both situation and experience, for one year and one day (eventually freeing his kingdom from a dreadful usurper)[44].

The interference of the scholarly foreign story of *Amicus et Amelius* is detectable in an uncertain folkloric substrate in the Welsh tale (to which we owe proper names, location and the hunting situation). Amicus and Amelius (or *Ami* and *Amile/Amis* and *Amiloun*, according respectively to Old French and Middle English spellings) also exchange roles on the battle field and in the nuptial bed as well, accepting the punishment of leprosy and a gruesome cleansing blood sacrifice, for each other's benefit[45]. The tale of Pwyll, therefore, represents a modification of the overall European story of an unrivalled warrior friendship, whose narrative structure is semantically circumscribed by the theme of amicable unity (recognizable even if the protagonists' names are varied according to varying contextual needs)[46]. The archetypal Amicus and Amelius (who, I suggest, partially influenced both the *TA* and the Celtic tale of Pwyll, but in opposite directions) not only bear names similarly derived from the verbal root *amare* but are born on the same day and share the same appearance promising eternal fraternity upon meeting one another. In the mainstream version, the pledge is eventually fulfilled, through changes of identity, ordeal, illness and even an abominable human sacrifice to heal the friend by pouring on his leprous skin the guiltless blood of his own children, with a final miracle and edifying happy ending[47].

More than one episode and motif of the Amicus and Amelius story enjoyed widespread influence (think, for example, of the separating sword in Sigurd and Tristan legend). The most striking difference in the partial Welsh derivative of Pwyll is that the ominous encounter with the friend is set within a hunting scene, which, nevertheless, holds the clue to *TA*. The latter, on the contrary, shares the premise of the Amicus and Amelius story (the characters' similarity and mutual love), even if in Saxo's rendition it remains implicit (being alluded to in the book's narrative frame and in the relationship between Frotho and Ericus). *TA* replaces the pledge in the hypotext with the revenant plot, disabling, at once, the moral meaning

[44] Hanson - Smith 1983; Fife 1992; Remley - Smith - Paul 2007; Rodway 2007.

[45] The earliest Middle Latin verse realisation was that by Radulfus Tortarius (in verse), at the end of the 11th century; later in Scandinavia the prose version in Vincent de Beauvais's *Speculum historiale* (xxiii, 162-166, 169) was particularly influential (Hemming 1996; Ford 2002; Winst 2009).

[46] Winst 2009, 5 and n. 21.

[47] The story received one of its earliest realisations with the hagiographic *Vita Sanctorum Amici et Amelii carissimorum* (Northern Italy, 1st half of the 12th century).

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of both sources: the underground trial does not prove royal legitimacy (as in the Pwyll and other «Melusinian» tales), nor fulfill the obligations of perfect friendship (as in *Amicus et Amelius*).

Trying to reconstruct the directions of influence and set them in plausible chronological sequence is a difficult undertaking. Saxo, the earliest Scandinavian source, shortens the story overlooking the most characteristic features of Amicus and Amelius (apart from offering a correspondence in the principles of name giving). His derivatives, however, reactivate them and the *Compendium* emphasises the boys' mutual love (*Hij duo filji […] se mutuo dilexerunt*) [48]. Regarding proper names, a derivation from *Pwyll* to the *EseÁb* can not be ascertained: while personal names within Celtic narratives do usually matter, Arawn is inexplicable (*EseÁb*, nonetheless, characterises the revenant as an exotic creature, prince of Tattaríá and son of King Róðíáns, employing unusual names). In the time span separating Saxo's work from the rendition of the Icelandic *fornaldarsaga*, the legend of Amicus and Amelius had been translated probably in Norway, for the benefit of the courtly audience (*Amícus saga ok Amilíus*, in all likelihood from the Latin prose version in Vincent de Beauvais's *Speculum historiale*, c. 1250) [49].

Though the correlations examined above might seem easy to recognize, with the *Amicus et Amelius* corpus on the one side and the extraordinarily widespread motif of the «hunted hunter», on the other, the reasons for them are almost inexplicable. The hunted hunter and his quarry developed fairy-like traits in the European Middle Ages and this motif was often the impulse of a foundation myth or a dynastic legend (as for Melusine and the Lusignan family) [50], while in *AT* the male relationship is unfertile and instead of begetting a royal bloodline it culminates in the eradication of a royal *draugr*. The original trick from which the friendship story in *TA* descends (the fairy-tale model of the «hunted hunter», which most frequently refers to erotic relationships) leads inescapably to the disloyal fulfillment of the friends' oath (as it is usual in Melusinian plots, which follow the remote classical fable of Amor and Psyche). The identification of the reliable *félagar* (whose names are coupled in Saxo by similar principles of those connecting *Amicus* and *Amelius*) with either hunter and beast, or the human and the vampire fighting in the barrow, highlights the incongruity of *TA*. It will remain unanswered for now why the revenant plot was

[48] Gertz 1918, 280, 12-13.

[49] For the sake of brevity, I refer here only to the recent bibliographic repertory in Wolf 2013, 27-29.

[50] Thiébaux 1974; Harf-Lancner 1984; Donà 2003.

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joined with the hagiographic legend of a male passionate friendship (which deserves the particular attention of Queer Studies) and with the fairy-like motifs elsewhere used to legitimate kingship [51].

The presence of this contradictory plot (reporting the elective affinities between a young warrior and the *draugr* he is going to kill) in *EseÁb* is, in my opinion, more easily explicable than in *GD*. The saga (structured as a frame tale collection) gathers the extraordinary adventures of its protagonists and has a central episode (inserted between the oath and its fulfillment within the mound) in which the oath produces the usually expected outcomes of a *fóstbræðralag* and the youths journey together to earn wealth from their alliance, as traditionally Vikings did.

Saxo, instead, chooses this story as an exemplum equivocally mirroring Frotho's law, which Ericus, Frotho's comrade and counsellor, is going to infringe: The author's hostility towards foreign courtly fashion is well-known through Starcatherus's biography (6th and 7th book) and critically asserted [52]. Here, however, Saxo («an important witness to the Latin vocabulary of courtesy and to the contemporary reception of the phenomenon») [53] displays an ambiguous attitude towards either his own «oath-taking» society [54], or the courtly deceptive specimen of *amicitia perfecta*, both represented on the backdrop of the episode shared by *GD* and *EseÁb* [55].

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[51] Damsholt 2013.
[52] Jaeger 1985, 176-194.
[53] Jaeger 1985, 289, n. 18.
[54] Hermanson 2013.
[55] See also, Ford 2002; Oschema 2005 and Simonkay 2015.

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