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## The Dating of Bragi's Poetry

ABSTRACT: Bragi Boddason is known as the earliest preserved skald in the Old Norse tradition, and from 1895 onwards, his poetry has generally been dated to *c.* 850. A reliable dating of Bragi's poetry is crucial for our understanding of the metrical transformation of common Germanic *fornyrðislag* into the uniquely Nordic *dróttkvætt*, as well as for the development of poetic diction and the dating of the first attested loanword from Old Irish into Old Norse, to mention just a few aspects. Even so, the available evidence has never been collected and evaluated in a single publication, and some of the data presented in previous scholarship are in need of further scrutiny. This article discusses the indications presented by Finnur Jónsson and Hans Kuhn in particular, and it concludes that the evidence is remarkably rich and unambiguously supports a dating to *c.* 850.

ABSTRACT: Bragi Boddason è noto come il primo skald conservato nella tradizione del norreno e, a partire dal 1895, la sua poesia è stata generalmente datata all'850 circa. Una datazione affidabile della poesia di Bragi è fondamentale per la comprensione della trasformazione metrica del comune *fornyrðislag* germanico nell'unico *dróttkvætt* nordico, così come per lo sviluppo della dizione poetica e la datazione della prima parola di prestito attestata dall'irlandese antico al norreno antico, per citare solo alcuni aspetti. Tuttavia, le prove disponibili non sono mai state raccolte e valutate in un'unica pubblicazione e alcuni dei dati presentati in studi precedenti necessitano di ulteriori verifiche. Questo articolo discute le indicazioni presentate da Finnur Jónsson e Hans Kuhn in particolare e conclude che le prove sono notevolmente ricche e supportano inequivocabilmente una datazione all'850 circa.

KEYWORDS: Bragi Boddason, skaldic poetry, dating, *dróttkvætt*, Rök runestone

PAROLE-CHIAVE: Bragi Boddason, poesia skaldica, datazione, *dróttkvætt*, pietra runica di Rök

Bragi's status as the earliest preserved skaldic poet is generally accepted, but the topic has not received a comprehensive overview of internal evidence like the one presented below. Rather, it seems that most skaldicists simply follow the *communis opinio*. In key publications, both Kari Ellen Gade and Margaret Clunies Ross hesitate to provide dates, although they both accept that Bragi is the earliest preserved poet (Gade 1995: 11; *SkP* 3: 26). The main problem for these scholars is that Bragi cannot unambiguously be connected with a ruler whose dates are known, although Clunies Ross notes that he may have served the Reginherus (Ragnarr) who led the sack of Paris in 845 (*SkP* 3: 26; Mc-Turk 1991).

Due to Bragi's pivotal status, his likely dates are important, and his murky biography calls for a focus on formal criteria. The absence of an overview of such criteria is remarkable, given that Bragi's dates played a crucial role in the debate between two of the 'founding fathers' of Old Norse philology – Sophus Bugge and Finnur Jónsson – in the 1880s and 1890s. Bugge's *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse* (1881-1891) elicited Finnur's response in two articles of 1890 and 1893, leading Bugge to produce his *Bidrag til den ældste Skjaldedigtningens Historie* (1894), to which Finnur answered with the article "De ældste skjalde og deres kvad" (1895). Bugge's central hypothesis was that ON mythology and early poetry as we know them originated in the British Isles, and if Bragi would have been active as early as the middle of the ninth century, such a profound Insular influence on him might appear unlikely (at least, both Bugge and Finnur thought so).<sup>1</sup> In the event, Bugge dated Bragi to the tenth century, thus steering clear of this potential problem. To the present-day ON philologist, Bugge's wealth of acute linguistic observations raises the question of how he could arrive at so late a date, and this seems to have baffled Finnur as well. Maintaining a remarkably amiable tone throughout, these scholars championed their opposing views, and in the end, Finnur's victory was so complete that almost no scholar has challenged his dating of Bragi for over a century.<sup>2</sup>

With so much erudition and linguistic expertise invested in the matter, one might have expected that Finnur would have thoroughly explored the formal indications of an early date. In fact, however, his observations regarding such features are underwhelming. He mentions some metrical characteristics, and these arguments are overall convincing (Finnur Jónsson 1895: 290-92). With regard to linguistic features, however, he notes only alliteration in *vr-*, the dative *Þóri* for *Þór* and the form *haufuð* for *høfuð*. He notes that

<sup>1</sup> Males (2022) is of a different opinion, arguing for an Irish provenance of the motif of the *Miðgarðs-ormr* already in the middle of the ninth century.

<sup>2</sup> A rare exception is Marold 1986, who proposes that Bragi's poetry is spurious. As we shall see, this view cannot be reconciled with indications found in his poetry.

these forms are “of limited importance” and spends less than one page on their analysis.<sup>3</sup> Instead, he devotes much energy to showing that syncopated forms in Bragi do not imply that his poetry belongs to the tenth century (Finnur Jónsson 1895: 298-313). Today, all scholars would agree on this point, but this only widens the range of possible dates. On balance, a combination of Finnur's metrical and linguistic observations suggest a date no later than around the middle of the ninth century – mainly for metrical reasons – but the evidence is somewhat slim. Furthermore, the diagnostic significance of *Þóri* is unclear, since the dative of *Þórr* does not occur in other poetry before *c.* 1200, except for one metrically ambiguous occurrence in *Þrymskviða* 9.7. In addition, Finnur's discussion of the Rök inscription is both incomplete and inadequate. For these reasons, early features in Bragi are still in need of a comprehensive analysis. Hans Kuhn has uncovered a number of additional criteria, and to these, I add one below (*valrauf*). The result is a remarkably rich body of evidence for so small a corpus, and comparison with the Rök stanza *c.* 800 and skaldic poetry from *c.* 900 onwards makes it possible to translate the relative chronology to rough absolute dates around the middle of the ninth century.

We begin with the *post quem*. Metrical developments from the Rök stanza to Bragi and then to later poets have now been analysed in some detail, and I refer the reader to that study (Males 2023). In brief, it is now clear that the Rök stanza contains some embryonic features of later *dróttkvætt* – most notably internal rhyme or *hendingar* – and that Bragi belongs to a later stage of metrical development.

The assumption that Bragi postdates the Rök inscription may also be tested linguistically. The Rök inscription features retained *i* and *u* after a short, stressed syllable (*sitiR*, *garuR*, *sunu*). In Bragi, we find many words that would have retained *i* or *u* at the same stage of the language, but where the metre cannot accommodate such forms. A crucial point here is that Bragi avoided resolved lifts. Hans Kuhn has found only one resolved lift in Bragi, and this is the first lift in an A3 verse (*Ragnarsdrápa* 2.1 *nema*), meaning that it is unusually weak, not carrying alliteration (Kuhn 1977: 518). A number of the words below could have been resolved according to the rules of classical *dróttkvætt*, but apparently not in Bragi's metre, and others could not have been resolved at any attested stage of either *fornyrðislag* or *dróttkvætt*. This makes it possible to distinguish older disyllabic and younger monosyllabic forms. I thank Klaus Johan Myrvoll for collecting the following evidence:

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<sup>3</sup> In his main article on Bragi's dates, Finnur simply refers to his earlier one (Finnur Jónsson 1895: 300). In that article, he notes that early forms are few and of limited importance (Finnur Jónsson 1890: 150-51).



1. *Ragnardrápa* 2.4 *mōgr* < Proto-Norse (PN) \**maguR*. Noun, first position.
2. *Rdr* 4.6 *ǫlskakki* < PN *alu-*. Type D, second position, thus not susceptible to resolution in any stage of *fornyrðislag* or *dróttkvætt*.
3. *Rdr* 5.8 *Hergauts* < PN \**harja-* via \**hēri-* through *a*-syncope. Noun, beginning of verse (susceptible to resolution in later *dróttkvætt*, but not in Bragi).
4. *Rdr* 6.1 *mjōk* < PN \**meku*. Adverb, beginning of verse. Possibly susceptible to resolution in Bragi, but unlikely.
5. *Rdr* 6.4 and 10.4 *mun* < PN \**muni* (acc.sing.masc.). Craigie's position.
6. *Rdr* 7.4 and 12.4 *ffjōl* < PN \**felu*. Craigie's position.
7. *Rdr* 8.5 *Hristi-Sif* < PN \**Sibju* via \**Sibi* through *u*-syncope. Craigie's position.
8. *Rdr* 9.4 *men* < PN \**manja* via \**mēni* through *a*-syncope. Noun, first position.
9. *Rdr* 10.4 *hōð-glamma* < PN \**hāpu-*. Noun, first position.
10. *Rdr* 10.5 *þrym-regin* < PN \**þrumi-*. Type C3, second position, thus not susceptible to resolution in any stage of *fornyrðislag* or *dróttkvætt*.
11. *Rdr* 11.5 *herr* < PN \**harjar* via \**hēriR*. Type A, second lift. No resolution in Bragi or later.
12. *Rdr* 11.8 *mar* < PN \**mari* (dat.sing.masc.). Craigie's position.
13. *Rdr* 12.2 *salpenningi* < PN \**sali-*. Noun, beginning of verse.
14. *Þórr's fishing* 1.2 *sonr* < PN \**sunuR*. Noun, beginning of verse.
15. *ÞF* 2.1 *vaðr* < PN \**wadiR*. Noun, beginning of verse, and *hending* with *Viðris*.
16. *ÞF* 6.2 *byrsendir* PN < \**burja-* via \**byri-*. Type D, second position, thus not susceptible to resolution in any stage of *fornyrðislag* or *dróttkvætt*.
17. *Fragm.* 1.2 *glōð* PN < \**gladu*. Adjective, beginning of verse.
18. *Fragm.* 2.3 *sjōt* PN < \**setu*. Craigie's position.
19. *Fragm.* 6.1 *vin* PN < \**wini*. Craigie's position.

The evidence that Bragi's language postdates that of the Rök inscription is thus overwhelming. Scholars sometimes assume that the Rök stanza antedates the rest of the inscription, but this is a moot point in the present context, since the unsyncoated *sunu* is not found in the stanza, and the language of the inscription as a whole thus antedates Bragi. Furthermore, the arguments suggesting that the stanza is older are weak. When Bugge and Finnur Jónsson made the case for this, they did not take the unsyncoated *sunu* into account, and their argument is thus flawed (Finnur Jónsson 1895: 302, with reference to Bugge). The carver left out the *-ð-* in *Þjóðríkr*, even though it carries a *hending*, which may suggest that he was not the poet.<sup>4</sup> Even this is a doubtful conclusion, however, since it is not obvious that carvers sought to reflect declamatory prominence in their orthography. In any event, if carver and poet were two different people, it does not follow that they were active at different times.

Theodoric is mentioned in West Germanic heroic poetry, and this might suggest that the Rök stanza is taken from a longer and possibly older poem. The case for this is relatively weak, however. The stanza says only that Theodoric once ruled, and that he now sits on his horse. This does not seem like a topic from the heroic, narrative poems, but appears like a strange mix of panegyric and riddle. As such, it seems akin to the rest of the inscription, and it may well have been composed for that purpose. The contemporary

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<sup>4</sup> On the reading of the first verse of the stanza, containing this name, see Males (2023: 125-126).



*Hildebrandslied* suggests that the topic of Theodoric was popular at this time. On balance, I think it likely that the stanza is at least roughly contemporary with the inscription and that we may take *c.* 800 as a *post quem* for the dating of Bragi's poetry.

Having established a *post quem*, we may now turn to features suggesting that Bragi is earlier than other preserved *dróttkvætt* poetry. The study mentioned above also demonstrates that *dróttkvætt* poetry not composed by Bragi, attested from *c.* 900 onwards, has proceeded further than Bragi towards the *hending* regularisation of classical *dróttkvætt*, and metrical analysis would therefore place Bragi at some distance both from *c.* 800 and *c.* 900 (Males 2023: 135-38). Specifically, Bragi poetry often lacks *hending* where one would later expect and exhibits *skothending* where one would expect *aðalhending*. No plausibly authentic poetry except for that of Torf-Einarr, active in the first half of the tenth century, is equally flexible in this regard. In addition, Bragi's use of fronted *hendingar* (e.g. *hórðum herðimýlum*) is more prominent than in any other preserved poetry. Metrically, Bragi's use of Sievers' type B and C in even verses is clearly archaic, and as Hans Kuhn notes, metrical types XB and XE are not found in Bragi's poetry, which in this regard is similar to *fornyrðislag* but unlike later *dróttkvætt* poetry (albeit XB and XE are somewhat rare and coincidence therefore cannot be ruled out).<sup>5</sup> *C.* 850 seems a reasonable estimate.

Bragi's use of expletive *of* also seems uniquely archaic. Expletive *of* is a metrical filler that often occurs in positions where a Germanic prefix had been lost. According to Hans Kuhn, expletive *of* is found in Bragi only where it would be etymologically expected, and the metre allows for its restitution in all such instances (Kuhn 1929: 69-75). Already in Þjóðólfr (*c.* 900), it is found in new contexts in 2-4 instances and may be inserted in only 19 of the 43 positions where it is historically to be expected (Kuhn 1929: 75-80). The particle thus appears to have been transformed more into a metrical filler in the intervening time.

The main weakness of Kuhn's argument is that it requires that he accept an additional syllable in the second dip of three verses (*ok bláserkjar [of] birkis; með algífris [of] lifru; þars sem lofðar [of] líta*) (Kuhn 1929: 71). Kuhn considers it "certain" that this was permissible in Bragi's day, but the only indications of this licence are Kuhn's own emendations. The basic principles regulating the syllable count were established from the beginning of the *dróttkvætt* tradition, however, and at least in the two former examples, belonging to type C, the licence in question was present neither in *fornyrðislag* nor in later *dróttkvætt*. Kuhn's metrical licence has thus probably never existed except for in his own analysis of these verses. This does not alter the fact, however, that Bragi's ratio of

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<sup>5</sup> Kuhn (1983: 277-78). Kuhn here also presents what he claims to be other archaisms relating to stress and the placement of verbs, but evaluating the diagnostic significance of these features would require an ambitious, independent study.

both transmitted and plausible expletive *ofs* is much higher and more historically correct than that of any other poet, which must presumably be explained by the fact that he is the earliest of them all.

The fact that *of* cannot be inserted in two–three instances where it would have been expected makes it unlikely that this feature was part of Bragi’s spoken language. Rather, it was retained in poetry, where it was metrically relevant and where archaic diction was common. In fact, as Kuhn notes, this seems to have been the case already some 50 years earlier or thereabouts, when the Rök inscription was carved (Kuhn 1929: 89, 91-92). The inscription features only one expletive *ofsum*, in the verse *skjaldi umb fatlaðr*.<sup>6</sup> The much longer remainder of the inscription has no examples, not even before the twice occurring participle *bornir*, *borinn* ‘born’, which may be compared to *Ynglingatal* 16.8 *of borinn væri* (all MSS and secured by metre) and *Hákonarmál* 19.2 *verðr sá gramr of borinn* (all MSS; metrically less secure, being the second verse in *ljóðahátt*). It would thus appear that the expletive particle was a poetic feature already at the time of the Rök inscription.

Another archaic feature that is generally seen as unique to Bragi is the form *haufuð* for later *høfuð* ‘head’.<sup>7</sup> The final verse of Bragi’s *Gefjun* stanza reads *valrauf fjögur haufuð* [war booty, four heads]. The last word is of great interest. In Germanic languages, the word for ‘head’ is found both with a monophthong (e.g., ON *høfuð*; cf. Lat. *caput*) and a diphthong (e.g., German *Haupt*, with a historical diphthong, Gothic *haubiþ*, etc.). The fifth position is always long in *dróttkvætt*, meaning that the *aðalhending auf*: *auf* must be intended as such. Bragi thereby gives us the clearest trace of this variant form in North Germanic. It is also likely found in *Ragnarsdrápa* 4.8 *laufi fátt at haufði*, whereas Fragment 3 is ambiguous: *sundrkljúfr níu høfða/haufða*. Interestingly, however, Bragi also has an unambiguous example of the short form: *Ragnarsdrápa* 3.6 *Randvés høfuðniðja*. This is an A2k verse, meaning that the form must be *høfuð*-. Heavy dips, which would here have made the form *haufuðniðja* possible, are never found in Bragi (Kuhn 1983: 104; Myrvoll 2014: 248). It is possible that Bragi used the long form as simplex and the short one in compounds.

Be that as it may, the crucial fact for dating is that no other skald unambiguously uses the long form, even though the skaldic corpus has well over a hundred occurrences distributed over the productive period. Scholars generally take this to indicate that the form was lost not long after Bragi’s day, but there are a few plausible occurrences in Ed-

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the verb *fatla* ‘gird’ is found only once in the later corpus, in the structurally identical verse *fjotri fatlaðr* ‘girded by a fetter’ in *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu* 16.7. There would have been room for *of* in the metre, and a comparison with Rök suggests that this may earlier have been the case. The combined ratio of V2-violations and expletive *of* suggests that *Brot* belongs to the earliest Eddic poems (Haukur Þorgeirsson 2012: 264-65).

<sup>7</sup> Finnur Jónsson (1931: s.v); Finnur Jónsson (1890: 150-51).

dic poetry, one of which may suggest that the form was known by some poets down to c. 1000. Exploring these calls for metrical sensitivity, since it would appear that each poet had slightly different metrical preferences. It is therefore necessary to evaluate whether the short or the long form is consistent with the poet's practice, and not only with the general rules of *fornyrðislag*. In this context, Hugo Gering's *Vollständiges Wörterbuch zu den Liedern Edda* (1903) deserves mention for its identification of forms required by metre, since Gering was somewhat merciless in his application of Sieversian metrics to the text. Gering's *Wörterbuch* therefore constitutes a maximalist yet methodologically sound collection of archaic forms that may be required by metre, providing a good starting point for an evaluation of potentially relevant data. I mark alliterations in bold.

*Hamðismál* 28.1 reads 'Af væri nú haufuð/høfuð'. Here the long form would be most natural, but *Hamðismál* features short penultimate syllables in comparable circumstances (i.e. A/A3, excluding A2k) in 1.1; 2.8; 10.7; 16.1; 22.6; 30.1. The case for *haufuð* in *Hamðismál* is thus not altogether compelling. It is somewhat stronger in *Völundarkviða*. *Völundarkviða* 31.5 reads 'kell mik í haufuð/høfuð' (type A) and 34.5 'sneið ek af haufuð/høfuð' (type A3; also 24.1). To be sure, *Völundarkviða* contains three verses with short penultima – 18.8 'æ fjarri borinn', 18.10 'til smiðju borinn' and 37.6 'at þik af hesti taki'. Unlike the two previous verses, however, these three are most easily analysed as type B with resolution on the second lift, which is plausible in light of *Völundarkviða*'s flexible and archaic metre. By all appearances, then, this poet did not allow for short lifts except where these are conventionally found, which speaks decisively in favour of *haufuð*. This chimes well with the common opinion that *Völundarkviða* is one of the earliest Eddic poems.

*Hymiskviða* 34.5 'hóf sér á høfuð upp' seems to require the form *haufuð* (type B). Otherwise, one would have to posit resolution on the second lift 'hóf sér á høfuð upp' (type A), and the *Hymiskviða* poet has extremely regular metre.<sup>8</sup> A resolved second lift is therefore highly unexpected. This is therefore probably the strongest case for *haufuð* outside Bragi. What is surprising about this is that many scholars consider *Hymiskviða* to be young, from the twelfth or even thirteenth century. The arguments for this are not compelling, however, and beside *haufuð*, another plausible archaism is disyllabic *Þóarr/Þonarr* for later *Þórr*, in addition to the poem's unusually clear preference for hiatus

<sup>8</sup> Thus, for instance, he has no five-position verses or catalexis that cannot be accounted for by hiatus or variants. An apparent exception is found in 34.1, but 34.1-2 appear to have seen some metrical corruption: 'Faðir Móða | fekk á þremi'. At face value, 'Faðir Móða' seems like a D-, but this does not appear to conform to the practice of the poet, and 'fekk á þremi' is also irregular, featuring a short lift after a light word. 'Faðir Móða fekk' would be an acceptable D4/E, so it is possible that the corruption is really restricted to 34.2. On these and other metrical characteristics of the *Hymiskviða* poet, see Haukur Þorgeirsson (2023).

forms (Fidjestøl 1999: 253; Haukur Þorgeirsson 2023). It is unlikely that a mythological poem like *Hymiskviða* would have been composed in the eleventh century, when mythological references experienced a considerable slump (Males 2020: 39-94). Other features make it unlikely that *Hymiskviða* belongs among the earliest Eddic poems (e.g. regular structure, suggesting regularisation also in contemporary *dróttkvætt*; linguistic criteria) (Haukur Þorgeirsson 2012: 264-65). A plausible date may therefore be in or around the second half of the tenth century.

Another likely candidate is found in *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 23.3 ‘hendr ok haufuð | hné á annan veg’. In *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*, I count four instances of a short syllable in comparable circumstances (4.5; 12.1; 27.2; 37.3).<sup>9</sup> *Hamðismál* has five instances, but *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* is more than twice as long, with 567 verses against 216 (excluding *Hamðismál*’s stanza 29 in *ljóðaháttr*). The case for the long form in *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* thus seems fairly strong. Like *Hymiskviða*, *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* displays a curious ratio of expletive *of* versus V2-breaks, V2-breaks being relatively low (= potentially young), expletive *of* non-suspiciously high (= potentially old). Importantly, however, *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* has four occurrences of expletive *of* before nouns, strongly suggesting a date before c. 1000 (Kuhn 1929: 34).<sup>10</sup> Here, too, in or around the second half of the tenth century seems a plausible date (like in the case of *Hymiskviða*, scholarly arguments for a late date are not compelling and will be dealt with in a coming publication). It would thus appear that the form *haufuð* may have existed as a marker of archaic poetic discourse until this time. If so, the form still strengthens the overall impression that Bragi’s poetry is early, but it does not in itself indicate that he stands at the beginning of the tradition.

Other likely occurrences of the long form listed by Gering are found in *ljóðaháttr*, and more cautious scholars would hesitate to trust this metrical evidence. Still, the poems in question – *Lokasenna*, *Reginismál* and *Skírnismál* – contain nothing to suggest that they are late, and *Lokasenna* has alliteration in *vr-*, which is an early feature (Haukur Þorgeirsson 2017a).

The Eddic evidence is thus compatible with the long form *haufuð* being early, but perhaps living on until c. 1000. One poem causes problems, however, if one accepts an emendation found in all modern editions. *Guðrúnarkviða* III 5.8 reads *á hqfuðniðjum*, which is a regular type C2, but editors have deleted *á*, giving an A-verse and thus an

<sup>9</sup> 1.1 and 6.5 have ‘Sigurð(r)’, the first syllable of which was always long until c. 1100 (*Sigurðr* < \**Sigvǫrðr*). Later both long and short are used (Sievers 1889: 135-41). In Sievers’ skaldic list, only Þjóðólfr’s *lv.* 5 ‘Sigurðr eggjaði sleggiu’ is purportedly of an earlier date, but there is reason to suspect that Þjóðólfr’s following stanza in the same *þáttr* was composed for the *þáttr*, and this is then likely to be the case with the preceding one as well (Sievers 1889: 135; Males 2020: 255-59).

<sup>10</sup> Kuhn assumes that *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* has borrowed all four occurrences from earlier poems, but since the feature is rare overall, this is an unlikely scenario.

expected long first lift: *haufuðniðjum*. This is surprising, since several features suggest that *Guðrúnarkviða* III is young. The poem is irrelevant to the storyline of the Niflung material and its main analogues are found in German tradition (von See *et al.* 1997-2019, 6: 782-83). More importantly, it centres on a trial by ordeal, and it seems likely that this practice entered the Nordic tradition with conversion to Christianity.<sup>11</sup> The assumption is corroborated by stanza 6:

Sentu at Saxa  
 sunnmanna gram;  
 hann kann at helga  
 hver vellanda.

[Send for Saxi, lord of the Southerners. He knows how to bless a boiling cauldron.]

This is clearly a Christian trial by ordeal, which chimes well with a formal feature in verse 5.2 ‘með þrjá tugu’. The older form *þrjá* cannot be restored here, since Sievers’ Type C2 (C with resolution on the first lift) does not allow for a short second lift (*tug-*). The poet appears to abide by this rule: I count 13 type C, whereof two C2 (2.6 ‘und þaki svæfið’; 7.4 ‘í ketil tæki’), and short second lifts are found only after unresolved first ones. Admittedly, the manuscript here reads ‘xxx.’ rather than \*‘þrjá tugu’, but the structure would be identical with other possible forms of the numeral (e.g. \*‘þrjá tigu’).<sup>12</sup> This suggests a date after *c.* 1150. What, then, of the seemingly archaic *haufuðniðjum*?

First, it must be stressed that the form is based on an emendation, albeit a reasonable one. When the only late occurrence is the product of editorial conjecture, its diagnostic significance must be open to serious doubt. Still, in order to exhaust the list of potential scenarios, it may be useful to evaluate whether the long form is indeed a necessary corollary of the emendation.

With only 80 verses, the poem provides a limited sample of the poet’s metrical practices, but 8.4 ‘svása bræðr’ is clearly catalectic, and 7.1 ‘sjau hundruð manna’ is too heavy. The poet apparently displays a degree of flexibility, and it is therefore possible that we should not read *haufuðniðjum* as a type A, but rather *høfuðniðjum* as type D- with resolution on the first lift (provided that the poet’s verse even had this form). A

<sup>11</sup> Bartlett (1986: 21); but cf. von See *et al.* (1997-2019, 6: 780-81). *Guðrúnarkviða* III describes what appears to have been the earliest form of trial by ordeal in both Frankish and Irish tradition: trial by cauldron (Bartlett 1986: 4-12).

<sup>12</sup> Due to the Roman numerals in the S manuscript, Bjarne Fidjestøl treats this occurrence as inconclusive, but this seems overly cautious (Fidjestøl 1999: 257). The number is confirmed by the following “þrigiatego” (for grammatical correct “þrigiatega”), and the accusative is required when referring to a leader bringing his men (“Hér kom Þjóðrekr | með þrjá tugu”). In addition, the ending of “þrigiatego” suggests influence from a preceding accusative.



fairly strong indication to this effect is that no other plausible attestation of the long form, even in *ljóðahátttr*, is a compound, and Bragi appears to have made a distinction between the long simplex and the short compounded form.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, he uses the very same word, *hofuðniðjar*, in the short form, and it is difficult to believe that the poet of *Guðrúnarkviða* III would have used a more archaic form than Bragi. I would therefore suggest that despite appearances, *Guðrúnarkviða* III does not contain the long form.

In short, all plausible attestations of the long form seem to date to before *c.* 1000, and the apparent exception in *Guðrúnarkviða* III is most likely illusory. *Hofuð* being a common word, the material is rich, and the long form thus seems to be a strong indication of an early date.

The evidence provided by the verse *valrauf fjögur haufuð* does not end here. The word *valrauf* is interesting in several ways. In later ON, as well as Old Swedish, it is attested in the form *valrof*, with short *o* (*ONP*: *s.v.*; Schlyter 1877: *s.v.*). *Rauf* f. and *rof* n. are two different words in ON, but neither of these otherwise means ‘booty, spoils’, as required in Bragi’s stanza. *Rauf* means ‘hole, cleft, tatters [i.e. cloth with rifts]’, whereas *rof* similarly means ‘hole’ (though not ‘cleft’), but also ‘breach [of contract, law, agreement, etc.]; end [where something breaks off]’. The spelling *valrof* in the main manuscript of the *Gulapingslög* unambiguously shows that the legal term ends in the short neuter *-rof* (“ef maðr gerer valrof”; DonVar 137 4to [*Codex Rantzovianus*] 86r 14, *c.* 1250-1300).

As the second element in compounds, *-rauf* is rare while *-rof* is common, referring to things that end or are broken off. *Eiðrof* means ‘breach of a promise’, *friðrof* ‘breach of an armistice’, *nætrrof* ‘end of night, morning’, etc. *-rauf* is used only to designate a cleft or opening. Thus, we find *Bakrauf* as the name of a giantess, meaning ‘back-cleft’, referring to her behind. In a theological context, we find *hljóðraufar* ‘sound-crevices’ to refer to the cataracts through which one abyss calls to another, and *himinraufar* ‘openings in the sky’ for the same (Clunies Ross and Wellendorf (eds.) 2014: 38-40, 130, 132).

As we see here, the meaning ‘booty, spoils’ is not attested in *rauf* or *rof* or in compounds of these, except for *valrauf* and *valrof*. In the verbs *raufa* and *reyfa*, and especially the latter, the meaning ‘rob’ is attested in prose texts that are either religious, translated, late or showing Danish influence, whereas in more traditional contexts, both verbs mean ‘perforate, split’ and the like (*ONP*: *s.vv.*). The meaning ‘rob’ was apparently imported from German.

<sup>13</sup> In addition to the occurrences discussed above, *Bjarkamál* 1.6 *vina hofuð* might deserve mention, but the stanza is irregular in verse 4 and 5, and it is therefore doubtful that *haufuð* should be restored (which would in any event give a D-, not the regular four positions) (*SkP* 3: 497). Svartr á Hofstöðum, *Skaufhala bálkr* 37.7 “mier yfir hofuð” (var. “yfir hofuð mier”) is not diagnostic, since the poem contains many unresolved short lifts (*SkP* 8: 981). This poem dates to the late fourteenth century (*SkP* 8: 951-54).



*Valrauf* is found not only in Bragi, but also on the Rök runestone *c.* 800, where morphology and syntax clearly show that it is feminine, and the meaning is 'booty'. When this word was transmitted to the later legal language, the meaning 'booty' was apparently felt to be more consistent with *-rof*, implying some kind of 'breaking' of the dead on the battlefield, than with *-rauf* 'hole, cleft [anus], tatters'. This is clearly a secondary development, however, since *valrauf* is attested as *wælrēaf* in OE (*ēa* < Germanic *au*) and *walaraupa* in Old High German, both meaning 'spoils from the slain' (Bosworth-Toller: *s.v.*; Lloyd *et al.* 1988-2021: *s.v. roub*).

The crucial point in the present context is that *-rauf* in the meaning 'booty', attested both in Norway and Eastern Sweden in the ninth century, was later found to be so alien that the term *valrauf* was changed to *valrof*. This change, too, is attested in both Norway and Eastern Sweden (*Östgötalagen*). The geographical spread of occurrences shows that the change of semantics was not regional but chronological, and the switch from *-rauf* to *-rof* indicates a complete loss of any sense of the 'booty' dimension of *-rauf*. The spread and completeness of the loss suggest that it happened relatively early.

This is supported by the fact that the concept of 'booty, plunder, theft, etc.' is common in skaldic poetry, partly due to its martial content and partly to the centrality of Óðinn's theft of the mead of poetry, but that outside Bragi, (*-*)*rauf* is never used to denote the concept. Rather, words such as *rón*, *fundr*, *fengr*, *þýfi*, *herfang*, etc. are used. By contrast, OE, where *wælrēaf* is found in several sources, has many attestations of (*-*)*rēaf* in the meaning 'booty, plunder', both as a simplex and a compound (e.g. *hererēaf* 'war-booty'). Had (*-*)*rauf* retained its old meaning, the skaldic drive towards variation and the centrality of the concept would likely have served to promote its use. Several factors thus combine to suggest that the meaning 'booty, spoils' was lost not long after Bragi's time, and that Bragi thus belongs among the earliest skaldic poets.

Moving on to other items, two archaic forms can be identified based on Craigie's law, and one of these is unique to Bragi. Craigie's law states that the fourth position of a *dróttkvætt* verse cannot be filled by a long, but only a short, monosyllabic noun or adjective if the third position is weak. This is valid also if the word is the last element of a compound. Poets generally adhered strictly to this principle before *c.* 1200: out of *c.* 1.400 monosyllables fulfilling the requirements in *dróttkvætt* poetry of this period, Craigie's law is broken in four instances, all in *lausavísur*, whereas the natural distribution of the language would result in roughly 1.000 breaks (Kuhn 1937: 56-58; Myrvoll 2014: 267-78). In addition, another 16 violations may be discounted on linguistic or other grounds. One of these is Bragi's *Ragnarr ok fjǫlð sagna*, where *fjǫlð* contains a long syllable (*SkP* 3: 38, 46). From a comparative perspective, we would not expect an *-ð* in this word (cf. German *viel*, Gothic *filu*, etc.), and in Egill's *Höfuðlausn*, we find the end-rhyme *fjǫl – fjǫl – mǫl – mjǫl* (Wolfenbüttel

has retained the older *ffjql*, whereas the quotation of the last couplet in R and T of Snorri's *Edda* has *ffjqlð* (*Skj* A I: 38-39). The form *ffjql* seems to have been in use until the early eleventh century and can thus be restored in Bragi's verse (Kuhn 1937: 56).

While the presence of *ffjql* in Bragi's poetry supports its antiquity, it does not set him apart from other early poets. The verse *sonr aldafǫðrs vildi*, as manuscripts and editions would have it, is another matter (*SkP* 3: 47). Here, *-fǫðrs* is clearly long: a nominative *-r* or genitive *-s* does not give syllabic length (so *hugr*, for instance, would count as short), but *-ðr-* in the stem does, and any 'analogical' shortness is ruled out when followed by a genitive *-s*. Craigie's law therefore indicates that to Bragi, the *r* in *-fǫðrs* did not belong to the stem, but that we should here read *\*aldafaðs*. This is a strong argument, since the very few exceptions to Craigie's law are found only in *lausavísur*. This verse is found in the first of the Þórr stanzas, which probably belonged to *Ragnarsdrápa* – in any event, it is certainly not a *lausavísa*.<sup>14</sup>

As Kuhn has noted, the restored form matches perfectly Gothic *-faps* 'leader, lord', which is similarly used as the second element in compounds: *hunda-faps* 'hundred-leader' (centurion), *brūð-faps* 'bride-lord' (groom), *swnagoga-faps* 'head of a synagogue' (Kuhn 1937: 56-57). This is the well-known root *\*pot-* 'power', found in both Latin (e.g. *potestas* 'power') and Greek (πόσις 'husband'). Presumably, the form known to Bragi was *\*faðr*, gen. *\*faðs*. It was subsequently assimilated to *faðir* 'father' in three ways: the root vowel received the /q/ of the oblique cases of *faðir*, the *-r* was attached to the root, and the meaning changed to 'father'. The first indication of influence from *faðir* is found in *Völuspá*, with the genitive *sigfǫður*. It should be noted, however, that the compound is still more consistent with the old meaning: the 'lord', rather than the 'father', of victory.

There is further contextual support for Kuhn's hypothesis. For one thing, Óðinn is never described as the father of mankind, except in relation to the reinterpreted *-fǫðr/-faðir* (Snorri uses the more archaic form *-fǫðr* but interprets it as 'father').<sup>15</sup> If this was

<sup>14</sup> Unlike the editors of *SkP* but like Finnur Jónsson before them, I assume that the stanzas about Þórr's fishing expedition belong to *Ragnardrápa*, because of the connection to Þórr signalled by the names *Sif* and *Þrúðr* in *Ragnarsdrápa* and because of the verb *sent* (conveyed) in the first Þórr stanza, suggesting a setting comparable to that of *Ragnarsdrápa* (*SkP* 3: 39-41, 47).

<sup>15</sup> "Ok fyrir því má hann heita Alfǫðr at hann er faðir allra goðanna ok manna ok alls þess er af honum ok hans krapti var fullgert" [And therefore he may be called Alfǫðr that he is the father of all the gods and men and all that which was completed by him and his power] (Faulkes 2005: 13). Interestingly, Snorri appears to have thought of *alfǫður*, gen. sing. of *alfaðir*, as gen. sing. of *alfǫðr* when he writes "svá sem segir Arnórr jarlaskáld at Óðinn heiti alfǫðr" [as Arnórr jarlaskáld says, that Óðinn is called *alfǫðr*]. After this follows a quotation with the genitive *alfǫður*, where the metre requires the forms to have three syllables, and the *u* is present in all manuscripts except U, which has "alfavþrs". In light of the quotation, B has apparently "corrected" *alfǫðr* in the preceding prose to *alfaðir*. Apart from *alfavþrs* in U and *alfaðir* in B, there are no significant variants, and the stemmatic spread of occurrences suggests that Snorri's text had *alfǫðr* in the prose and *alfǫður* in the stanza (Finnur Jónsson 1931: 88; on the stemma, see Haukur Þorgeirsson 2017b).

a central function of Óðinn's, it is somewhat curious that we find no traces of it. More importantly, the fact that the element *-fǫðr/-faðir* is consistently interchangeable with *-týr* 'god' in poetic language supports the meaning 'lord'. Thus, we find *her-fǫðr/herja-fǫðr-her-týr* 'army-ruler/army-god', *sig-fǫðr/sig-faðir-sig-týr* 'victory-ruler/victory', *val-faðir/valfǫðr-valtýr* 'ruler of the fallen/god of the fallen' (Falk 1924: s.vv.). These expressions all concern war, where Óðinn was clearly more of a ruler than a father. Only Bragi's *aldafaðr* portrays Óðinn as a ruler of mankind rather than battle and warriors, but the distinction may be moot, since Bragi addressed a warrior elite. In general, plausibly pagan sources often connect the concept of 'god' with a domain over which that god rules, not with a domain over which he is a father. In short, metrics, cognates and poetic conventions all speak in favour of the original meaning 'lord'.

Through a close analysis of the word *aldafaðr* in Bragi's verse, we thus see that the interpretation 'father' is secondary and that a host of proposed etymologies is false.<sup>16</sup> This also suggests that the reading *aldafǫðs* in R may not be a mistake, but rather a trace of a metrically correct form in the archetype, in other manuscripts adapted to conform to the contemporary understanding of the scribes.<sup>17</sup>

Although not unique to Bragi, alliteration in *vr-* also deserves mention. In West Norse, the word-initial sequence *vr-* became *r-* around the turn of the millennium. This change affected alliteration, since before c. 1000, words like *vreiðr* 'angry' and *vrangr* 'wrong' could alliterate with words beginning in *v-*, but after that time, they only alliterate with words beginning in *r-*. It has been suggested that later poets could archaize in this regard, but this claim does not stand up to scrutiny: even late poets who placed a premium on early features never alliterate old *vr-* words with *v-*, and scribes generally did not understand the phenomenon – only in one instance is it likely that the archetype of Snorri's *Edda* contained a *vr-* spelling, and the *Poetic Edda* never does (Haukur Þorgeirsson 2017a). This feature may thus be taken as a strong dating criterion in both skaldic and Eddic poetry. Within the skaldic corpus, it is found in Bragi, Þjóðolfr, Egill and Eilífr Goðrúnarson (Haukur Þorgeirsson 2017a: 42).

The relevant couplet in *Ragnarsdrápa* reads:

Vildit vrongum ofra  
vágs byrsendir/hyrsendir ægi

[The wind-sender/fire-sender of the sea [GIANT/MAN] did not want to raise up the twisted terrifier [Miðgarðsormr]] (*SkP* 3: 52)<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> For an overview of these, see Strandberg (2008).

<sup>17</sup> See *SkP* 3: 47-48 and 732-33, although the editors do not mention Craigie's law and choose the form *Aldafǫðs* in Bragi's stanza.

<sup>18</sup> The editors opt for the variant *byr-*, but *hvr-* has a strong stemmatic claim and

Here, *rǫngum* would result in the lack of one alliterating stave, something that never occurs in Bragi's poetry nor in any uncorrupt *dróttkvætt* poetry. The reader may also note the lack of *hending* in the odd verse and the *skothending* for normal *aðalhending* in the even one, as discussed above.

In sum, the forms *ffjól* and *haufuð*, as well as alliteration in *vr-*, place Bragi among the poets active before *c.* 1000. Metrical patterns and the historical correctness of expletive *of* are uniquely archaic, and Bragi has the only occurrence of historically correct *-faðs*. The form and meaning of *valrauf*, otherwise only attested on the Rök runestone (*c.* 800), also suggests a very early date. This is a remarkably rich set of evidence for such a small body of text: some 24 *dróttkvætt* stanzas or half-stanzas. We must thus assume that Bragi was significantly earlier than any other preserved poet, and the date *c.* 850 seems likely: roughly half a century before Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, but distinctively later than the Rök stanza.

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cannot be rejected out of hand.

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