

Gotland's Picture Stones

Bearers of an Enigmatic Legacy

GOTLAND'S PICTURE STONES have long evoked people's fascination, whether this has been prompted by an interest in life in Scandinavia in the first millennium or an appreciation of the beauty of the stones. The Gotlandic picture stones offer glimpses into an enigmatic world, plentifully endowed with imagery, but they also arouse our curiosity. What was the purpose and significance of the picture stones in the world of their creators, and what underlying messages nestle beneath their imagery and broader context? As a step towards elucidating some of the points at issue and gaining an insight into current research, the Runic Research Group at the Swedish National Heritage Board, in cooperation with Gotland Museum, arranged an international interdisciplinary symposium in 2011, the first symposium ever to focus exclusively on Gotland's picture stones. The articles presented in this publication are based on the lectures delivered at that symposium.

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Gotlands
Museum



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Saga Motifs on Gotland Picture Stones: The Case of Hildir Högnadóttir

THE GOTLAND PICTURE STONES have long aroused interest and admiration, not only among tourists as objects of beauty and casual curiosity, but also among scholars who have been led to speculate about what they were originally intended to signify. One of the methods used to analyze and interpret the images has been to view them in the context of Old Norse literature. In this respect, three different strands of narrative material, or legends, have been identified as possible sources for preserved texts and comparable images referring to the Völsungs and the Gjúkungar, Wayland the Smith and the story of Hildir and Héðinn. These interpretations have been applied to at least six picture stones: KLINTE HUNNINGE I¹, LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I², STENKYRKA SMISS I³, LÄRBRO TÄNGELGÅRDA I⁴, ARDRE KYRKA VIII⁵ and ALSKOG TJÄNGVIDE I⁶, which have been dated to the eighth, ninth or even tenth century according to the latest dating by Lisbeth Imer.⁷ This article will only

examine one of these legends, namely the ‘Hildir legend’ in the context of two of these stones, LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I and STENKYRKA SMISS I. An attempt will be made to place the images in a larger context than has been done before, and by doing so to strengthen the probability that they were indeed intended to refer to the original Hildir legend.

In Old Norse *dróttkvætt* poetry, and then later on in Icelandic *rímur*, we come across kennings referring to a certain Hildir, such as *él Hildar* (Hildir’s storm; battle), *hyrr Hildar* (Hildir’s flame; sword) or *hjól Hildar* (Hildir’s wheel; shield). Other variants of kennings of this type do not include Hildir’s name, but nevertheless refer to the same heroine, and hence the same legend. The oldest preserved Hildir-kennings are found in poems by Bragi Boddason (9th century), Þjóðólfr ór Hvini (c. 900), Eyvindr skáldaspillir (late 10th century), Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld (1001) and Grímr Droplaugarson (1005). These are:

Century / Date	Poem	Kenning	Meaning
9th c.	Ragnarsdrápa, st. 2.3–4	<i>hjól meyjar Høgna</i> (wheel of the maid of Høgni)	shield
9th c.	Ragnarsdrápa, st. 6.4	<i>folg-hildar munr</i> (‘Foghlildar mun’) ⁸	Héðinn
c. 900	Haustlög, st. 1.7–8	<i>hreingöru hlýri fats Hildar</i> (the brightly made cheek of the clothing of Hildir <valkyrie>)	shield
10th c.	Háleygjatal, st. 9.2–3	<i>Høgna meyjar viðr</i> (tree of maiden of Høgni)	warrior
1001	Óláfsdrápa, st. 17.2–4	<i>Týr Heðins meyjar</i> (the god of battle)	warrior
1005	Lausavísur, st. 3.6–7	<i>hildar borðs árr</i> (the shield’s man)	warrior

Table 1. The earliest Hildir-kennings.⁹

From the context of these kennings, and many others, it can be seen that they refer to Hildr Högnadóttir, who is now best known from sources such as *Ragnarsdrápa* (9th century), which contains not only kennings referring to the legend, but also the actual plot, Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* (13th century) and the legendary saga *Héðins saga ok Högna*, or *Sörla þátr*, now preserved in a manuscript from the 14th century. Many comparable kennings are to be found in more recent poetry, i.e. from the eleventh century and later.

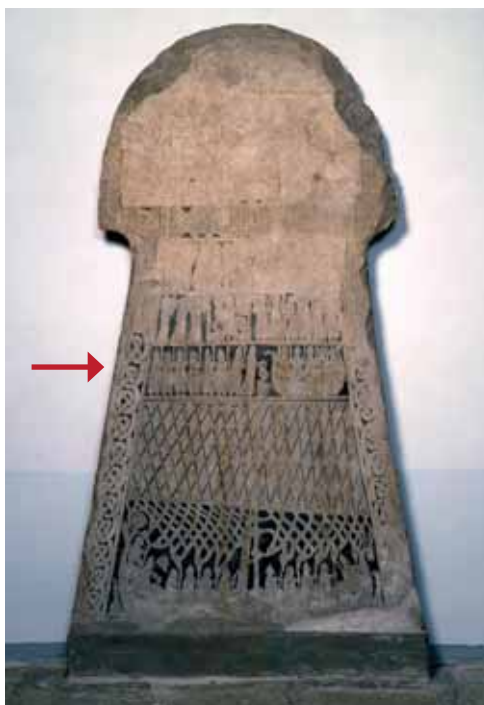
The Hildr Legend

In the most recent of the above-mentioned variants, the Icelandic *Héðins saga ok Högna*, the legend of Hildr forms part of the account of the 'Everlasting Battle' known as the *Hjaðningavíg* and how it originated, i.e. the story of Freyja's necklace, the *Brisingamen*, which includes an account of the abduction of a woman and the resulting conflict. This sequence, consisting of the abduction and the battle, is sometimes referred to simply as 'the Hildr legend'. It relates how Héðinn Hjarrandason, king of the *Hjaðningar*, abducts Hildr, the daughter of King Högni. He carries her off to his ships and they sail off to an island. Her father, Högni, pursues them and finds Héðinn with a small force on the island, and when they meet, Héðinn attempts to make peace with Högni. In Snorri's *Edda*, Hildr acts in such a way as to exacerbate their quarrel by making her father a pretended offer of peace, and the same implication is present in *Ragnarsdrápa*. Following an "unsuccessful" attempt to negotiate peace, Héðinn and Högni and their men fight the battle known as the *Hjaðningavíg*. This differs from other battles in that after the day's fighting, Hildr passes among the slain warriors and brings them back from the dead so that they can fight again the following day.¹⁰ In *Héðins saga ok Högna*, the strife between the two kings is due to curses put on them by the gods, in addition to which Hildr's role

is much less significant: she sits and watches the fight between the kings and takes no direct part in the conflict.¹¹

The Hildr shown to us in Bragi's poetry, and later by Snorri, is an evil woman, one that poses a threat to the community.¹² Her role is, primarily, that of a woman who refuses to bow to the law of a patriarchal society, and so becomes a symbol for the forces that jeopardize peace. Her violation of the prevailing order results in dissent and loss of life; she then crowns this by entering the battlefield in the role of a valkyrie and raising the slain warriors from the dead so that they can continue their battle for ever, like Óðinn's *einberjar* in Valhalla.¹³ In other words, Hildr is the personification of strife, and this is why her name is popular in kennings where poets tell of battles and conflicts; these kennings in turn must have depended for their effect on the audience's knowledge of the legend. Among the references found in poems, the identification of Hildr as the object of a quarrel between father and suitor is probably nowhere more clearly stated than in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II. Here, Sigrún stands in a similar position between her father and her lover, which gives the author of the poem the opportunity to insert a reference to Hildr as a sort of 'archetype' of women in this position: Helgi addresses Sigrún, saying 'Huggastu, Sigrún, / Hildr hefir þú oss verit; / vinnat skiöldungar sköpum'.¹⁴

As we see, Hildr is not only a woman who is caught between two opposing warrior bands as the cause of a quarrel: she actually encourages the development of the quarrel, and her role in the story is to egg her father and Héðinn on to fight each other. But why? It would seem that Hildr, like certain other famous heroines, is forced to choose between love and the will of her family, a woman who is, as it were, between the hammer and the anvil. I believe that Hildr was also between hammer and anvil in a real sense – or at least that she took shape where a hammer and chisel were used.



LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I and STENKYRKA SMISS I. The arrows point to images thought to illustrate scenes from the Hildir legend. Photo Bengt A. Lundberg, ATA, RAÄ (left) and Raymond Hejdström, GM (right).

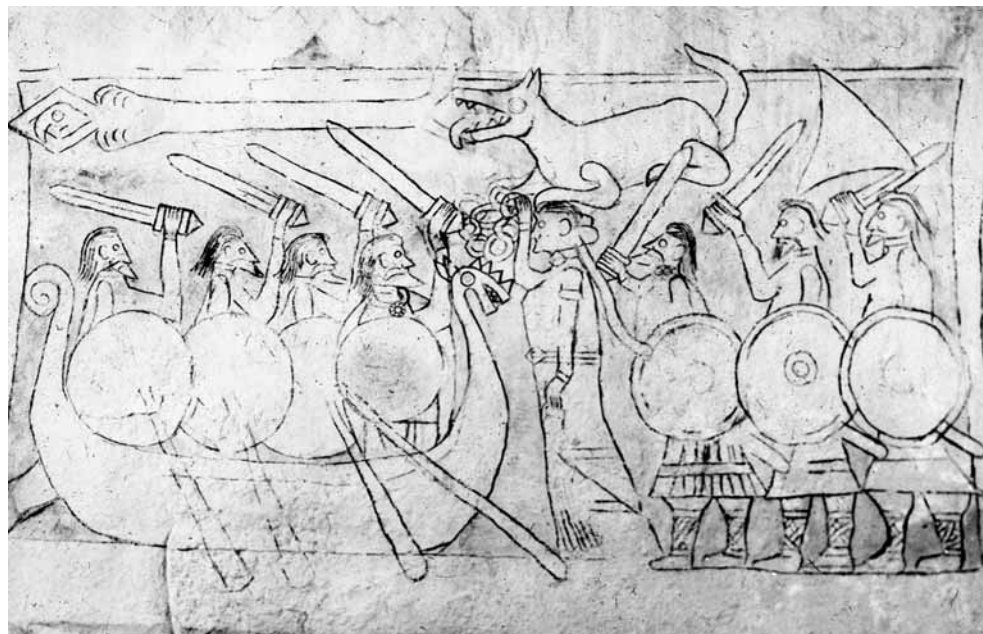
The Gotland Picture Stones

It has been argued by some that the Hildir legend may lie behind images on LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I and STENKYRKA SMISS I, which contain a picture of a woman in between two groups of armed warriors, or between an army on land and an approaching ship. Though discussion of this has been rather superficial up to now, Sune Lindqvist mentioned this possibility regarding LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I back in 1941, where he thought it possible that two panels referred to the legend, i.e. not only the scene around the ship, but also the one of a hero falling off his horse in a battle. Nevertheless, he did not think there was much to be gained from this comparison, since the written sources were both few and fragmentary.¹⁵ On the other hand, Karl Hauck, formerly a professor in Münster, went considerably further in his brief discussion of the same stone and argued that the first four panels of pictures, as well as a comparable scene on STENKYRKA SMISS

I depicted the Hildir legend.¹⁶ Later on, however, when Lindqvist examined the case more thoroughly, he reached the conclusion not only that panels 1–5 on LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I, but also the scene on STENKYRKA SMISS I, as well as various motifs on LÄRBRO TÄNGELGÅRDA I, probably depicted the Hildir legend.¹⁷ This has since been criticized by Michael Srigley, who believes that three Gotland stones, i.e. LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I, LÄRBRO TÄNGELGÅRDA I and ARDRE KYRKA VIII, depict the three major episodes of the Fall of Troy.¹⁸

Although Lindqvist and Hauck discuss 4–5 panels on LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I in their research, it is primarily the fourth scene that can be found reflected in other pictorial sources including the similar panel on STENKYRKA SMISS I. If we interpret this particular motif in relation to the preserved versions of the legend, it is probably reasonable to see it as showing Hildir turning towards her father's newly-arrived ship and making

The scene on LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I as drawn by Hauck. Courtesy of Alexandra Pesck, Zentrum für Baltische und Skandinavische Archäologie in Schleswig.



him her pretended offer of peace, with Héðinn and the Hjaðningar lined up behind her.

As a matter of interest it should be pointed out that in his interpretation of LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I, Karl Hauck made use of a drawing which he apparently transferred from the stone using latex. This drawing, which shows something that differs considerably from what other people have seen on the stone, is remarkable in giving a much more detailed picture of the Hildir scene than do the present painted outlines. Even though this drawing may not be admissible as a source, and even though it is in fact not necessary for my interpretation at all, we should nevertheless take a closer look at it, as it indisputably has a certain position in the history of these studies.

There are two points in particular that could throw light on the meaning of the picture: firstly, the woman (or Hildir) is holding rings, and secondly, a wolf hovers over Hildir and the Hjaðningar as if accompanying them

into battle. If these points are placed in context, the drawing could be interpreted as follows: The rings could easily refer to the legend as preserved in Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa* and in Snorri's *Edda*, in which Hildir, with deceitful intention, goes to her father's ships and offers him Héðinn's neck-ring or rings as a token of reconciliation, while telling him at the same time that Héðinn is ready to fight, and that he will not show Högni any mercy. The neck-rings are mentioned in stanzas 8–10, where we find:¹⁹

... þás hristi-Sif hringa / hals, en þols of fylða, /
bar til byrjar drösla / baug orlygis draugi /

Bauða sú til bleyði / bæti-Þrúðr at móti /
malma mætum hilmi / men dreyrugra benja /

and

... þróttig Heðin sóttu, / heldr an Hildar svíra /
hringa þeir of fingi

As regards the picture on STENKYRKA SMISS I, it shows a woman in front of a group of warriors on a ship and possibly holding neck-rings,²⁰ as Hildir does according to *Ragnarsdrápa* and Snorri.

Regarding the wolf on Hauck's drawing, this would fit in with the interpretation offered by some scholars that Héðinn and his men, the Hjaðningar (*cf.* Hetelingar) are *úlfrhéðnar* – warriors whose character and fighting spirit showed certain wolfish traits – which would chime in with their names. Hauck sees this as receiving further support from a comparison with one of the Scandinavian sources discussed below, the tapestry from Överhogdal in Härjedalen, where he sees Héðinn's force as represented by animals, possibly wolves.²¹ In fact there is also an animal that could be a wolf above one of the two opponents on the Oseberg cart, another of the preserved Scandinavian sources. Still further arguments can be cited for this interpretation, as in the Old English poem *Widsith*, Héðinn (Heoden) is said to be king of the Glammar (Glomman), and *glammi* is a Norse term for 'wolf'.²² Apart from this, the wolf is a common symbol for treachery, which may explain the depiction of a wolf above the figures on Hauck's drawing and the Oseberg cart.

In his article on the Hildir scenes, Lindqvist does not cite Hauck's study, and in fact their approaches are very different. But even though both interpretations can be considered as valuable contributions, neither can be regarded as satisfactory, not least because it has been pointed out that it is rash to interpret these images as a reference to a particular legend. The motif of men standing next to a ship might be a stock motif, and we should also keep in mind that the surface of the stones is weathered, and the lines shallow.²³ In view of such cautions, interpretations of this type have generally been accepted with substantial reservations, and some people have argued that pictorial sources are, in general, too untrustworthy, because, like oral sources, they depend to a large extent on interpretation and consequently their 'meaning' can vary from one interpreter to another.²⁴ The scene in question here

has, for example, been interpreted as depicting Guðrún Gjúkadóttir, the heroine of *Völsunga saga*, taking farewell of her brothers,²⁵ and also as Helen of Troy, standing between two armies with a flaming torch, her characteristic emblem, as Michael Srigley believes.²⁶ While the Guðrún of legend is admittedly caught between her family and her husband, she does not go with her brothers to their ship, any more than other famous heroines in a similar position. On the other hand, Helen of Troy may certainly have been in a position similar to Hildir's, and in fact Sune Lindqvist pointed this out in his study, where he considered Hildir to be the Norse Helen.²⁷ But even if Srigley's hypothesis about LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I, LÄRBRO TÄNGELGÅRDA I and ARDRE KYRKA VIII showing the Fall of Troy is in itself an interesting approach, I believe that it is important to interpret the fourth panel of LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I in close relation to the comparable scene on STENKYRKA SMISS I, and then to view both pictures in a wider context of written and pictorial sources. In order to obtain a more exact idea of the process of preservation, we must take a closer look at the age of the Hildir legend, as well as its circulation. We do not know for sure whether the story of the Fall of Troy was, in fact, well known among the Nordic peoples in the 8th–10th centuries, but from the examples below, we certainly know that the Hildir legend was.

Visual Images and their Meaning

When picture stones are used as sources, it could be helpful to see them as channels of communication and to consider their role in transmission. What message did these pictures carry, and to whom? What impact did they have in their communities? Are they associated with religion, and therefore with myths, or do they tell stories of other types?²⁸ And if we believe that there are indeed underlying stories, we must ask: What stories are people likely to have known or been familiar with at the time when the pictures were made? We then have to answer this question with the help of sources of other types.

While caution is needed when interpreting images of the type under discussion here, the referents intended in these images must have been fairly commonly established, and consequently we can assume that they reflect a common pool of ideas and knowledge shared by those who initiated the artworks, those who executed them and those for whom they were intended.²⁹ Taking this into account, it is not by the fact itself unlikely that we can interpret the images, especially if we have other media available to compare them with, as this enables us to place them in a larger context.

The oldest preserved manifestations of heroic sagas in the Nordic area are far from detailed or complete. On the contrary, they are terse and compressed, and it is clear that those who told these stories assumed a certain amount of knowledge on the part of their listeners. The Eddic poems, for example, are composed in a very tightly-worded style, and various scholars have pointed out that they directly assume a greater familiarity on the part of their audience, since otherwise they would probably never have been completely understood. In other words, the poets were working in a tradition where this background knowledge was assumed. The same may be said of the kennings used by the *dróttkvætt* poets, which in many ways function as visual images. If we had no fuller accounts in another form – prose texts or poems – we would scarcely make much sense of the imagery of the kennings. Thus, the kennings, like the pictures on the picture stones, had to draw on familiar symbols that people could understand.

The nature of a visual symbol is such that a simple image only acquires meaning in the mind of the recipient, where it arouses pre-existent knowledge (where this is at hand) and elicits a response compatible with it. In order to gain a complete idea of the meaning of the symbols or their references, we therefore have to consider that which is ‘invisible’ but nevertheless constitutes an inseparable part of the imagery.³⁰ In this respect, the pictures, as such, are only allusions to the stories that lie

behind them. A horse carrying a chest on its back can, at a certain time and, of course, in a certain cultural community, represent Grani, the horse of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, carrying the gold on his back. The motif would then be sufficient to allude to the tale of the legacy of Fáfnir, with an implied reference to the story of the origin of the gold, how it came into the dragon’s keeping and finally how Sigurðr slew the dragon and loaded the gold onto Grani’s back. What is important is, first and foremost, that the interpretation should be based on arguments drawn from a knowledge of the legendary material that is relevant to the time and the place.

I believe it can be useful to lift particular motifs or fragments of narratives that correspond to a picture out of their larger contexts, and examine their preservation history from the earliest possible attested manifestation down to the time when the narrative was recorded in writing, or even later. A particular image may, in itself, represent various things: how then do these possibilities fit in with the larger process of preservation we have available for examination? Here it seems natural to assume that comparable pictorial sources of similar date may refer to the same tale, and in fact the more often we find a certain idea represented in a certain way, the more successful we will be in understanding the purpose of the reference.³¹ But the most important condition for such a comparison is that it must not be focused exclusively on particular media or genres, or bounded by regional or national identities.

Hildir outside Scandinavia

If we look at the preservation of the Hildir legend in a larger context, it is clear that it enjoyed considerable popularity in the Middle Ages, and though most of the extant sources are Norse, the legend was known among the Germanic peoples at least as early as the seventh century. This can be seen from the following table, where the material has been broken down on the basis of the characters, marking them Hi (Hildir), Hé (Héðinn), Hö (Högni) and Hj (Hjarrandi, Héðinn’s poet):

Century	Poem	Language	Hi	Hé	Hö	Hj
7th	Widsith	Old English		x	x	
9th–10th	Deor	Old English	x	x	x	x
12th	Das Alexanderlied	German	x		x	
13th	Kudrun	German	x	x	x	x

Other related material:

<i>Beowulf</i>	Old English
<i>Branwen verch Llŷr</i>	Welsh
<i>Marvels of the East 42</i>	Old English (Lat.)
<i>Immram Brain</i>	Old Irish
<i>Annot and Johon</i>	Old English
<i>Dukus Horant</i>	German
<i>König Rother</i>	German
<i>Wartburgkrieg</i>	German

Table 2. The Hildir legend in Old English and German poetry.

While the corpus of preserved material includes mentions of the protagonists in two Old English poems, *Widsith* and *Deor*, some scholars believe the core of the Hildir legend could be from as early as about 400, with accretions building up at later dates.³² Some of them have even argued that the legend may have originated in the Baltic area, since according to *Widsith*, Högni (Hagena) is the king of the Rygir, or Hólmrygir, while Wate (Wada) – one of Hetels companions – is the chief of Helsingjar. This view can even be further strengthened by the testimony of Saxo, as discussed below, where the fighting actually takes place at Hiddensee, near Rügen, which is situated in the Baltic Sea.³³ Subsequently, the picture stones LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I and STENKYRKA SMISS I are positioned somewhere near where the legend might have originated.

Even though the two Old English poems *Widsith* and *Deor* are relatively early, it may be seen from a few more recent sources that the legendary material was known in the British Isles in later centuries too. While the point inviting comparison between the Hildir legend and *Beowulf* consists primarily of the motif of a woman standing between two opposed parties, her family and her husband, the similarities are much more conclusive in two later stories. These are *Branwen verch Llŷr* (*Branwen Daughter of Llŷr*), preserved in the Welsh collection *The Mabinogion* from the second half of the 12th century, and a tale written in Latin, which is preserved in manuscripts from the eleventh and twelfth centuries and published as section 42 of the tale collection *Marvels of the East*, where the constantly fighting opponents are brothers. In both of these stories, in addition to the family relationships and feuding motifs, the fighting men are healed or brought back from the dead so they can continue their struggle forever.³⁴ There are also certain similarities between the Hildir legend and the Irish tale *Immram Brain* (*Bran's journey to the land of the women*),³⁵ and Hildir and her underlying legend are mentioned in the Middle English poem *Annot and Johon* from the 13th century, indicating that the content of the story was known to the intended audience of the poem.³⁶ Finally, one of the main characteristics of the legend, the motif of the resuscitating hag, is common in Gaelic tales.³⁷



Usually, it has not been claimed that the Hildir legend is attested in pictorial sources outside Scandinavia. I think, however, that we should not ignore two Anglo-Scandinavian hogback stone carvings in England which are dated to about 1000, or the eleventh century, and include pictures showing a figure between bands of warriors; admittedly only one of these pictures, from Lowther in Westmorland, Cumbria (Lowther 4A), has the figure standing between an army and warriors on a ship, which certainly resembles the standardized images of Hildir that we have from Scandinavia,³⁸ not only on LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I and STENKYRKA SMISS I, but also on other comparable scenes, as listed below.

While the other hogback, from Gosforth in Cumbria (Gosforth 4A), does not exhibit such clear similarity to the motif from the Hildir legend, it appears to be related to the image on Lowther 4,³⁹ and it seems natural to include the two Cumbrian grave monuments in the overall picture we are trying to establish in the present discussion.

We shall now turn to the German sources. As can be seen from the above table, the Hildir legend is told in the Middle High German *Kudrun*, an epic poem from the early thirteenth century, and other related sources. Although *Kudrun* is a very long poem, the relevant mate-

A drawing of Lowther 4. Collingwood 1927, p. 171.

rial for comparison with the Norse material is in fact a simple bridal quest theme: Hagen (*cf.* Högni) is in the habit of killing Hilde's suitors, but Hetel (*cf.* Héðinn) tricks him by sending men to fetch her, among them his court poet Horant (who corresponds to Hjarrandi). Horant manages to enchant Hilde with his music, and afterwards he takes her away to meet Héðinn, who is waiting for them. Hagen, however, chases the fugitives and fights with Héðinn, until Hilde finally manages to reconcile her father and suitor.

The legend of Hilde and Hetel is quoted in the Middle High German poem *Das Alexanderlied* (*Strassburger Alexander*) by Lamprecht the Priest (*der Pfaffe*) from the mid-twelfth century. Comparable material is also found in the Middle High German *Dukus Horant*, which is preserved in a fragment from the fourteenth century, and a resemblance is also found in the poem *König Rother*, along with other German bridal quest romances; German scholars have long held different opinions on the relationship between these poems.⁴⁰ Finally, there is the Middle High German collection *Wartburgkrieg* from the thirteenth century, where Hilde and Horant are mentioned.⁴¹

Century	Region		Hi	Hé	Hö	Hj
8th–10th	Gotland	Lärbro Stora Hammars I	x	x	x	
9th–10th	Gotland	Stenkyrka Smiss I	x	x	x	
9th	Norway	Oseberg	x	x	x	
9th	Norway	Rolvsøy tapestry	x	x	x	
9th–11th	Norway/Sweden	Överhogdal tapestry	x	x	x	

Tab. 3. Depictions of Hildir in Scandinavian art.

A difference in the story in *Kudrun*, as compared with the Norse material, is that Hetel does not directly abduct Hilde. Instead, she follows Hetel's court poet, Horant, more or less 'voluntarily': he 'charms' her away with him. Hilde's role is also rather different from that of Hildir in the Norse sources in that she tries to bring about a reconciliation instead of inciting to violence. Her caring nature is then further demonstrated after the battle, when she asks Wate to heal the wounded, as the fighting between Hetel and Hagen does not end with their death, as in the Nordic variants.

As can be seen from the above, the character of the protagonist Hildir/Hilde is portrayed in highly contradictory ways: on the one hand she is the destroyer of the peace, as in the accounts by Bragi and Snorri, and on the other hand she plays a conciliatory role, as in the German *Kudrun*. The positive aspect of the heroine has given rise to speculation as to whether the German Hilde underwent a change by taking on some Christian characteristics, or whether the development was in the opposite direction: *Kudrun* could indicate that the heroine of the legend was originally a conciliator, but underwent change among the Nordic peoples under the influence of the Hjaðningavíg, which must then have been added to the Hildir legend at a later stage.⁴² Scholars who have compared the variants of the Hildir legend usually regard the Norse material as being the more original,

since it is clear from the ancient kennings for war and battle that Hildir was not regarded as a conciliatory figure in the ninth or tenth century – and in fact always had the role of instigating strife in the Norse manifestations of the legend.⁴³ However, we must not forget that both Hilde and Hildir share the attribute of being uncomfortable with the consequences of war; while the former simply wishes that wounded men should be healed, the latter goes further by changing their fates and bringing them back from the dead.

Hildir in Scandinavian Sources

There is much to suggest that the Hildir legend lies behind five pictorial sources from Scandinavia: the two Gotland stones discussed earlier, the carving on the Oseberg cart, the tapestry from Rolvsøy (Nedre Haugen) in Norway and the tapestry from Överhogdal in Härjedalen, which is now in Sweden but used to belong to Norway.⁴⁴ All these sources are old, i.e. from the 8th/9th to the 10th/11th centuries.⁴⁵

All the images, except the one on the Oseberg cart, depict the scene of a woman standing between a ship and a group of men. It is therefore quite understandable that the image on the Oseberg cart has been interpreted with a great caution, and in fact it has been suggested that it might indicate that 'a woman interfering in a battle scene may have been a stock motif';⁴⁶ it is, how-

The carving on the Oseberg cart. Courtesy of Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, Norway. Photo by Ove Holst.



ever, highly interesting. As has already been mentioned, the scene depicts the figure of an animal, possibly a wolf, above one of two opponents who are fighting next to a woman, who even seems to be trying to stop the fighting or reconcile the two men, just like Hilde in *Kudrun*. The ‘wolf’ could correspond to Hauck’s tracing of LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I⁴⁷ and indicate that the man beneath could be Héðinn.

Perhaps none of the Scandinavian sources, as listed in the table, have indisputable evidential value, considered separately and in isolation, but taken collectively they can be seen as lending each other support. What gives this interpretation further support is the fact that this material is also preserved in Norse poetry and other written sources, as can be seen from table 4.⁴⁸

Apart from the *dróttkvætt* poems as mentioned at the beginning, we find the story – the Hildir legend itself – preserved in the poems *Ragnarsdrápa* by Bragi Boddason and *Háttalykill* by Hallr Þórarinnsson and Rögnvaldr jarl, the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus, the Skáldskaparmál section of Snorri’s *Edda* and the Icelandic *Héðins saga ok Högna* (*Sörla þáttur*). All these sources reveal a different evolution of certain material elements in the legend. Héðinn may also appear in the *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, which mentions a Norwegian Héðinn *mjóí*. If this is the same person, then it is likely that he was also named in the lost poem *Brávallakvæði*, which was among the sources used in the *Sögubrot* and the *Gesta Danorum*.⁴⁹ Héðinn is also mentioned in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* and along with Hildir in

Century/ Date		Hi	Hé	Hö	Hj
9th c.	Ragnarsdrápa	x	x	x	(x)
c. 900	Haustlög	x			
10th c.	Háleygjatal	(x)		x	
1001	Óláfsdrápa		x		
1005	Lausavísur	x			
11th c.?	*Brávallakvæði		(x)		
11th c. >	Various scaldic verses	x	x	x	
10th c.–12th c.	Helgakviða Hundingsbana II	x			
1140–1150	Háttalykill	x	x	x	x
c. 1200	Gesta Danorum	x	x	x	
13th c.	Snorra-Edda	x	x	x	
13th c.	Sögubrot af fornkonungum		x		
13th c.	Kongetallet	x	x		
13th c.–14th c.	Héðins saga ok Högna (Sörla þátr)	x	x	x	(x)
14th c.	Göngu-Hrólfs saga		x		(x)
14th c	Bósa saga ok Herraúðs				(x)

Table 4. The subject matter of the Hildir legend in Old Norse written sources.

the thirteenth-century *Kongetallet* from Skåne, in addition to which elements in the legend are reminiscent of the Eddic poems *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* I and II, as already mentioned.⁵⁰ Finally, the memory of the court poet Hjarrandi lingers on in *Bósa saga ok Herraúðs*, in which the *Hjarranda(h)ljóð* is played.

According to *Gesta Danorum*, the Hildir legend takes place in Jutland and nearby places such as Hidensee (Hidensø), and the Orkney Islands, and the plot is partially different from the Icelandic variants. It is interesting that Saxo emphasizes the love element, describing the love that awakens between Hilda and Hithinus (who is Norwegian, cf. Héðinn).⁵¹

The most notable difference regarding the actual plot is probably that Hithinus does not abduct Hilda,

as in other variants of the legend, yet is accused by Hoeginus (cf. Högni) of seducing her. Both kings die in the ensuing conflict, but Hilda, who misses her lover so much, desperately begins to chant magic charms over the dead during the nights, so that they rise and fight again. Although it is never stated explicitly, Hilda's reaction could indicate her wish that the battle had turned out differently – and that she might be able to overrule fate by means of magic. In her grief she resembles Sigrún in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II, who wishes that the dead were alive, Hilde in *Kudrun*, who asks Wate to heal the wounded, and the sister of the two brothers in *Marvels of the East*, who weeps over the unceasing strife between her brothers, whom she must continually heal of their wounds.

Century/Date	
7th c.	Widsith
8th–10th c.	Lärbro Stora Hammars I and Stenkyrka Smiss I
9th c.	Ragnarsdrápa, Oseberg carving and Rolvsöy tapestry
9th–10th c.	Hauströng and Deor
9th–11th c.	Överhogdal tapestry
10th c.	Háleygjatal
11th c.?	Various verses, Óláfsdrápa, Lausavísur, Helgakviða Hundingsbana II, Brávallakvæði and two Cumbrian stone monuments
12th c.–c. 1200	Háttalykill, Gesta Danorum and Das Alexanderlied
13th c.	Snorra-Edda, Sögubrot af fornkonungum, Kongetallet and Kudrun
13th–14th c.	Héðins saga ok Högna
14th c.	Göngu-Hrólfs saga and Bósa saga ok Herrauðs

Table 5. The preservation of the Hildir legend.

If we give due accord to the role of these women as not only representing the cause of strife between their suitor/husband and their family, but also as the persons who grieve over those who die in the ensuing conflict, we perhaps gain a new perspective on Hildir as she is presented in the older sources. The Hildir who brings the dead back to life through her magic, as in Snorri's and Saxo's accounts could, in other words, be emblematic of women's reaction against the destructive powers of warlike societies, expressed here in their grief and their wish that those who have died could be brought back to life; that everything could be as it was before. At the same time, however, the legend shows us how powerless women really were, because according to what it says, it does not matter how often they heal the wounds or how deeply they wish to be able to bring the dead back to life: conflict continues, and whether they like it or not, they cannot escape from being – because of their good qualities or the value they represent in the form of their dowries – the cause of strife between men.

Apart from the Överhogdal tapestry, the visual images of the Hildir legend are connected with funeral practices of some kind, either as memorial stones or gravestones or objects from burial mounds. Consequently, it is per-

haps natural to ask why it could have been thought appropriate to commemorate the dead by referring to Hildir, the woman who encourages war. If, on the other hand, we view these artefacts in the light of the interpretation offered here, references to the Hildir legend in this context can be seen as highly relevant, since Hildir may stand for the woman who has lost loved ones; who wishes for power over death; who lives on and mourns.

Conclusion

As mentioned at the outset of this article, the interpretation of visual images has often been regarded as untrustworthy and arbitrary. However, the interpretation offered here shows that the images under discussion fit a story which was popular at the time when they were made – and this is the important point. If we consider the principal manifestations of the legend in relation to each other, but without listing every instance of *dróttkvætt* kennings which are based on it, the pattern of preservation, as seen in table 5, emerges.

As seen from the table, all these different manifestations – poems, written saga texts and archaeological remains – influence our understanding of the preservation process. Not only do they show that the material was

known among the Anglo-Saxons in the seventh century and the people of Scandinavia a couple of centuries later; they also show that it had been disseminated over a considerable area and was popular. In other words, we can assume that Norsemen of the ninth century would have been familiar with the story of Hildir and Héðinn; if this were not the case then the kennings used by the poets of that age would probably have failed to work, and the same applies to images in which artists depicted a woman between two groups of warriors. The preservation process therefore must support the interpretation that the fourth scene on LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I and the comparable panel on STENKYRKA SMISS I contain references to the Hildir legend, and furthermore that this scene alone would have been sufficient to allude to the underlying story.⁵²

Notes

1. GM C9286.
2. SHM 29974:1.
3. GM 3428.
4. SHM 4171.
5. SHM 11118:8.
6. SHM 4171.
7. Imer 2004, p. 105, c.f. Imer's article in the present volume.
8. The interpretation is disputed. The usual form foglhildr ('Fogel-hildur mun') is generally seen as representing Svanhildur, the wife of king Jörmunrekr, while Örn Sævar Thorleifsson argues that the correct form of the word is folghildr, referring to Hildir, as Svanhildr, who is "fölgín" in Jörmunrek's house, is going to cause a strife within the family, and was therefore compared to Hildir (see Örn Sævar Thorleifsson 2000, pp. 207–209).
9. Skjaldedigtning B.1 1912: 1–2, 14, 61, 154 and 184. English translations: Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages, <<http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/db.php>>
10. Snorri Sturluson 1931, pp. 154–155 and *Skjaldedigtning* B.1 1912, pp. 1–3.
11. Sörla þattr 1829, pp. 404–405.
12. Cf. Ragnarsdrápa, st. 11.3–4, where Hildir is said to be 'fjórða fordæða' (evil-doer among women).
13. Cf. Örn Sævar Thorleifsson 2000, pp. 62–63.
14. 'Take comfort, Sigrún; you have been a Hildir to us; kings are not more powerful than their fate'; *Eddadigte* 1971, p. 36.
15. Lindqvist 1941–1942, I pp. 105–106, table 27, fig. 81 and II pp. 83–87.
16. Hauck 1957, pp. 367–369 and fig. 13. Lindqvist recognized that STENKYRKA SMISS I has a motif comparable to that of LÄRBRO STORA HAMMARS I, scene 4, but did not draw any conclusions from this.
17. Lindqvist 1968, pp. 18–27.
18. Srigley 1989, p. 182.
19. '... when the ring(-sword) shaking Sif [Hild], filled with malice, brought a neck-ring on to the wind's horse [ship] to the battle-trunk [warrior]. This bloody-wound-curing Thrud did not offer the worthy prince the neck-ring to give him an excuse for cowardice in the meeting of metals. ... when indefatigable edge-din powers [warriors] attacked Héðinn instead of accepting Hild's neck-rings'; Skjaldedigtning B.1 1912, pp. 2–3 and Snorri Sturluson 1987, p. 123.
20. Cf. Lindqvist 1941–1942, II p. 128 and 1968 pp. 24–25.
21. Hauck 1957, p. 368.
22. Stefán Einarsson 1936, p. 174; Malone 1964, pp. 40–41.
23. Fuglesang 2007, pp. 194–197 and 214.
24. E.g. Bradley 2010, p. 20.
25. Staecker 2006, p. 365.
26. Srigley 1989, p. 174.
27. Lindqvist 1968, p. 27, cf. Srigley 1989, pp. 167–168.
28. Bradley 2010, p. 21.
29. Cf. Bradley 2010, p. 20.
30. Cf. Bradley 2010, pp. 21–22.
31. Bradley 2010, p. 21.
32. Wisniewski 1969, p. 14.
33. E.g. Malone 1964, pp. 40–42; Lindqvist 1968, p. 27.
34. The Mabinogion 2000, p. 24; Malone 1964, pp. 38–40 and 44. For more Irish and Scottish legends about women who bring soldiers back from the dead, see Nordland 1973, pp. 95–96.
35. Örn Sævar Thorleifsson 2000, pp. 117–121.
36. Brown 1932, p. 138 and pp. 227–228.
37. Bo Almqvist believes "that the Hildir story is an example of a Gaelic motif which spread to Scandinavia via Orkney", see Almqvist 1978–81, pp. 91–94.
38. Cf. Hadley 2006, p. 215; Collingwood 1927, pp. 171–172, fig. 210.
39. Collingwood 1927, pp. 172–173, fig. 211; cf. Kopár: forthcoming.
40. Panzer 1901, pp. 184–185; Wisniewski 1969, pp. 14–18.
41. Gillespie 1973, p. 73.
42. Cf., e.g., von See 1971, p. 35 and p. 59.
43. E.g. Fuglesang 2007, pp. 202–203.
44. Hauck 1957, pp. 368–369, fig. 13, 14 and 15; cf. Helmbrecht 2011, pp. 92–98.
45. In addition, Lindqvist suggested that some motifs on LÄRBRO TÄNGELGÅRDA I represented the Hildir legend, as mentioned above.
46. Fuglesang 2007, pp. 194–197.
47. Hauck 1957, p. 368 and fig. 13.
48. In cases of uncertainty, the x marking is shown in parentheses, as in the first example, where Hjarrandi is not actually mentioned as a character, but the kenning *hurðir Hjarranda* (st. 11), meaning shield, indicates that Hjarrandi was nevertheless known to the poet.
49. Olrik 1894, pp. 191–192.
50. Panzer 1901, pp. 169–172 and 179–181; Malone 1964, p. 39.
51. Saxo Grammaticus 2005, I 338–341 [Lib. 5.8.3–5.9].
52. The English translation was made by Jeffrey Cosser. I would like to thank Hlaðvarpinn, a cultural fund for Icelandic women, for contributing a grant for this project.

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