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Res, Artes et Religio

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF RUDOLF SIMEK

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EDITED BY

Sabine Heidi Walther, Regina Jucknies,
Judith Meurer-Bongardt, Jens Eike Schnall

IN COLLABORATION WITH

Brigitta Jaroschek, Sarah Onkels

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Sabine Heidi Walther, Regina Jucknies, Judith Meurer-Bongardt, Jens Eike Schnall

in collaboration with

Brigitta Jaroschek, Sarah Onkels

Literature and Culture, 1

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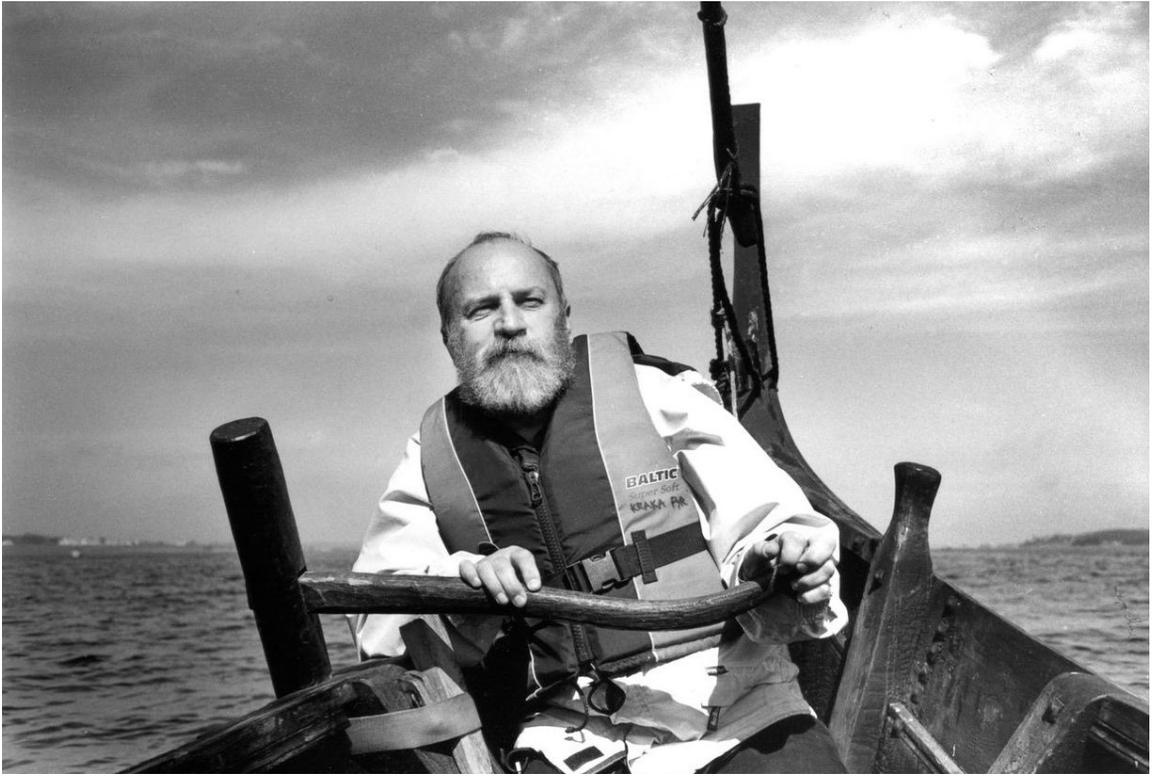
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VORWORT

VERMUTLICH STEHT IN SO ZIEM-lich jedem gebildeten Haushalt im deutschsprachigen Raum mindestens ein Buch von Rudolf Simek. Sei es eines der populären Bändchen *Die Wikinger* oder *Götter und Kulte der Germanen* oder *Die Edda*, die gut sichtbar in jedem Buchladen ausliegen, sei es ein fachwissenschaftliches Nachschlagewerk wie das *Lexikon der germanischen Mythologie* oder das *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur*, sei es eine seiner anderen zahlreichen Monographien wie *Erde und Kosmos im Mittelalter: Das Weltbild vor Kolumbus* oder *Mittelerde: Tolkien und die germanische Mythologie*. Darüber hinaus vermittelt er etwa über Fernsehdokumentarfilme kultur-

wissenschaftliche Forschung und wird regelmäßig als Experte angefragt – wohl kein anderer zeitgenössischer Skandinavist und Mediävist erreicht ein so breites Publikum wie er. Mit all diesen Aktivitäten gibt Rudolf Simek der Wissenschaft ein Gesicht. So ist es nur folgerichtig, dass er das reale Vorbild für die Figur des Professor Weisinger in der Fantasytrilogie *Mara und der Feuerbringer* (2009–2011) lieferte und auch bei der Verfilmung mitwirkte.

Rudolf Simek wurde am 21.02.1954 in Eisenstadt/Österreich geboren. Später zog seine Familie mit ihm nach Gmunden, wo er seine Matura ablegte. Gut vierzig Jahre später, nun als Professor in Bonn und im inter-

nationalen Kollegenkreis allgemein bekannt als „Rudy,“ erwies er diesem ehemaligen Heimatort seine wissenschaftliche Reverenz in Form eines Sammelbandes über den wohl bedeutendsten Sohn der Stadt, *Johannes von Gmunden: zwischen Astronomie und Astrologie*. Zunächst aber zog es ihn fort, zum Studium nach Wien. Dort nahm er zum Wintersemester 1972 ein Doppelstudium auf, das der Germanistik/Skandinavistik und Philosophie sowie der Katholischen Theologie. Besonders prägend für ihn war die nächste Station seiner Laufbahn: 1976 trat er eine Stelle als Lektor im German Department an der University of Edinburgh an. Dieser dreijährige Aufenthalt war für seine Entwicklung zum international orientierten Wissenschaftler und Skandinavisten wesentlich, insbesondere lernte er dort Hermann Pálsson kennen, seinen Mentor über viele Jahre. Zurück in Wien, wurde er 1980 mit einer Dissertation über *Die Schiffsnamen, Schiffsbezeichnungen und Schiffskennungar im Altnordischen* zum Dr. phil. promoviert und schloss 1981 auch sein Theologiestudium mit der Sponson zum Mag. theol. ab.

Die folgenden 15 Jahre (1980-1995) arbeitete Rudy als Leiter der Fachbibliothek für Germanistik an der Universität Wien, zusätzlich war er acht Jahre lang Lektor am dortigen Germanistischen Institut (1981-1989). In dieser Zeit erschloss ihm seine wissenschaftliche Neugier die Forschungsfelder, die letztlich sein fachliches Profil ausmachen sollten, und davon ist eines der ganz zentralen die mittelalterliche Fach- oder *artes*-Lite-

ratur. Für seine Habilitation wählt Rudy ein Thema, das ihn seither nicht mehr losgelassen hat – mittelalterliche kosmographische Literatur. Mit seiner breit rezipierten Studie *Altnordische Kosmographie. Studien und Quellen zu Weltbild und Weltbeschreibung in Norwegen und Island vom 12. bis zum 14. Jahrhundert* wird er im Wintersemester 1990/91 an der Universität Wien habilitiert und erhält die *Venia Legendi* für Ältere skandinavische Literatur. 1995 wird er als Ordinarius als Nachfolger von Heinrich Beck an die Universität Bonn berufen, auf die traditionsreiche Professur für ältere deutsche Literatur mit Einschluss des Nordischen. Bonn ist und bleibt für die kommenden 25 Jahre der Ort seines professoralen Wirkens. Auf dieser Position nutzt und erweitert Rudy seine vielseitigen wissenschaftlichen und kulturellen Kontakte und bereichert das Leben der Bonner Universität mit vielbesuchten Vorlesungen und Vorträgen sowie auch außerhalb der Akademie wahrgenommenen Aktionen wie der legendären Fahrt auf einem Wikingerschiff den Rhein hinauf. Unter den vielen von ihm ausgerichteten Konferenzen und Veranstaltungen war ein Höhepunkt die Ausrichtung der *12th International Saga Conference* im Jahre 2003, die er durch seine herzliche und kreative Gastfreundschaft für die vielen nationalen und internationalen Teilnehmer zu einem unvergesslichen Erlebnis machte. Ein weiterer Höhepunkt war die Ausstellung *Wikinger am Rhein* im Rheinischen Landesmuseum Bonn im Jahr darauf.

Rudys wissenschaftliche Tätigkeit führte ihn rund um den Globus. Zwischen 1978 und 1989 verbrachte er mehrmonatige Forschungsaufenthalte in Island, Dänemark und Norwegen. Es folgten ab 1990 Gastprofessuren von längerer Dauer an der Masaryk-Universität in Brno (1990-1991); an der Philosophisch-Theologischen Hochschule in Heiligenkreuz (1991-1995); als Professor II für Religionswissenschaft an der Universität in Tromsø (1999); als Research Fellow am Center for Medieval Studies an der Universität Sydney (2000-2001). Kürzere Dozenturen führten ihn nach Aarhus, Bergen, Cagliari, Catania, Dubrovnik/Zagreb, Durham, Messina, Prag, Reykjavík, Rom, Rzeszów, Seoul, Sofia, Tartu und Tokio. Viele der kürzeren Dozenturen fanden im Rahmen eines Netzwerks statt, das Rudy Simek nach Antritt seiner Professur in Bonn mit internationalen Kollegen gegründet hat und auf einem systematischen gegenseitigen ERASMUS-Lehrendenaustausch beruht (bis 2016 unter dem Thema *Early Medieval Religion in Life and Literature*, ab 2017 *Supernatural Spaces*). Dieses Netzwerk umfasste und umfasst Kollegen aus Aarhus, Cagliari, Durham, Oslo, Prag, Reykjavík, Rzeszów und Tartu und liegt Rudy besonders am Herzen, sowohl wissenschaftlich als auch menschlich. Die Produktivität dieses interdisziplinären Netzwerkes in Forschung und Lehre über so viele Jahre hinweg ist sicherlich maßgeblich Rudy als treibender Kraft zu verdanken. Ausdruck seines internationalen Renommées ist schließlich die Verleihung der Ehrendok-

torwürde der Universität Rzeszów an ihn im Jahre 2013.

Legendär in seinem Bonner Wirkungskreis ist Rudys Dynamik und sein unermüdlicher Einsatz für den sozialen Zusammenhalt der Skandinavistischen Abteilung, durch Exkursionen nach Skandinavien, die Organisation unzähliger Gastvorträge mit anschließendem Empfang und ebenso unzählige Einladungen nach Hause, wo er große und größte Gruppen von Mitarbeitern und studentischen Hilfskräften exzellent bekocht. Mehrere Generationen von Studierenden, Promovenden und Lehrenden hat er ausgebildet und wissenschaftlich wie persönlich geprägt, zu vielen hielt und hält er weiterhin Kontakt, und dies nicht zuletzt als Freund und wohlwollender Mentor.

Die Begriffe *res*, *artes* und *religio* repräsentieren gemeinsam die weiten Interessen des Geehrten und bilden den Rahmen dieser Festschrift. Die *res* stehen dabei für den Bereich der Dinge und Artefakte, mit denen sich Rudy im Rahmen der Sachaltertumskunde beschäftigt. Wer ihn kennt, denkt als erstes an sein lebenslanges Interesse an Segelschiffen, insbesondere Wikingerschiffen. Die *artes* rufen vor allem die Fächer des Quadriviums auf, insbesondere die Geographie als Teilbereich der Geometrie und die Astronomie, mit denen sich Rudy in seinen Studien zur altnordischen Kosmographie und zum mittelalterlichen Weltbild auseinandergesetzt hat. *Religio* schließlich umreißt den Bereich von Mythologie und Religion als eines von Rudys zentralen Forschungsfeldern.

An der Redaktion dieser Festschrift waren Brigitta Jaroschek und Sarah Onkels beteiligt, an sie ergeht ein sehr herzlicher Dank. Ebenso danken wir den studentischen Hilfskräften der Abteilung für skandinavische Sprachen und Literaturen der Universität Bonn, insbesondere Lukas Orfgen und Jonas Zeit-Alt peter, die uns bei der Durchsicht der Aufsätze und der Erstellung der Publikationsliste geholfen haben. N. Kivılcım Yavuz und dem Team der Kısmet Press sei bestens gedankt für die verlegerische Betreuung des Bandes und die Korrektur der englischsprachigen Beiträge.

Lieber Rudy, mit dieser Festschrift gratulieren wir alle herzlich zum Geburtstag und wünschen auch für die Zukunft weiterhin viel Schaffenskraft und Begeisterung. Viel Freude an den Beiträgen!

Bonn und Bergen im Dezember 2020
Sabine Heidi Walther
Regina Jucknies
Judith Meurer-Bongardt
Jens Eike Schnell

GIANTS IN THE LANDSCAPE: HENNØY, SURTSHELLIR, AND THE SEMANTIC SPECTRUM OF PLACE

Matthias Egeler

Institut für Nordische Philologie, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

IN ICELAND, IT IS COMPARATIVELY easy to turn a corner—or at least a bend in a road—and come upon a place associated with giants: there is the mountain Jötunsfell, “Giant’s Mountain,” in Helgafellssveit; the “Giant’s Eyes” Jötunsaugu, which are two caves in one of the sea cliffs of the Látrabjarg promontory in Vesturbyggð; the ruins of the farm buildings of Jötunn, “Giant,” in Sveitarfélagið Ölfus; the farmstead of Jötunheimar, “Giant-Land,” in Eyjafjarðarsveit; the sea-stack Jötunn, “Giant,” that belongs to the Westman Islands; or Jötunsporshryggur, the “Ridge of the Giant-Track/Giant-Footprint,” on the small island of Suðurey in Dalabyggð

(Figure 8.1).¹ Giants, it seems, have a substantial presence in the Icelandic landscape. The present contribution will offer some thoughts on what this presence means for Norse religious history, or rather the spec-

1 *Landmælingar Íslands*, s.v. ‘Jötunsfell,’ ‘Jötunsaugu,’ ‘Jötunn,’ ‘Jötunheimar,’ ‘Jötunsporshryggur.’ The most detailed discussion of giants in Old Norse literature to date is Schulz, *Riesen*; more recently cf. Ármann Jakobsson, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly”; Ármann Jakobsson, “Where do the Giants live?”; Ármann Jakobsson, “A Contest”; Ármann Jakobsson, “Identifying the Ogre.” Cf. also two recent monographs on the related (cf. Schulz, *Riesen*, 45–46; Simek, *Trolle*, 9, 12, 20–23, 38–39, 52–53, 67–68, 76, 102, 118, 129) category of ‘trolls’ (*tröll*): Ármann Jakobsson, *The Troll Inside You*; Simek, *Trolle*, which includes a discussion of relevant toponyms on 205–16.



Figure 8.2: A cave-in in the roof of the Surtshellir lava-tube, Hallmundarhraun, western Iceland. © M. Egeler, 2014.

way, so most likely there were human witnesses. When the huge lake of lava created in this eruption cooled down, some lava tubes formed in it. One of the largest of these lava caves, which stretches over a length of just under two kilometres, has been known by the name of Surtshellir, “Surtr’s Cave,” since the 1770s at the latest (Figure 8.2).³ This

name is uniquely fitting for a cave created during a large conflagration, as Surtr is the giant who will kindle the fire that will devour the cosmos at the end of the world.⁴

The name Surtshellir as such is not attested in medieval literature; it could be very old, but it could also be quite young. The name of the island of Surtsey, “Surtr’s Island,” can serve as a warning that Icelandic mythological place-names do not have to be particularly old, as this name is attached to the youngest of the Westman Islands, which was created after an eruption that started

3 Eggert Olafsen, *Reise igiennem Island*, vol. 1, §§350–76; Eggert Olafsen, *Reise durch Island*, vol. 1, §§349–75. Later cf. Kälund, *Bidrag*, vol. 1, 338. For a modern documentation of the cave and its rich archaeology, which appears to indicate that it was used as a hideout by Viking Age outlaws, see Guðmundur Ólafsson *et al.*, *Rannsóknaskýrslur*; Guðmundur Ólafsson *et al.*, “Outlaws of Surtshellir”; Guðmundur Ólafsson *et al.*, “Surtshellir: A Fortified Outlaw Cave.” Unfortunately, there is no space here to further pursue the implications of the

archaeological record of this cave for understanding the extremely multi-layered religious history of Iceland.

4 *Völuspá*, especially st. 52 (ed. in Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*); *Gylfaginning* 4 (ed. in Faulkes, *Snorri Sturluson: Edda*).

only in 1963. Yet whatever may be the case with the name Surtshellir, it appears that the cave's mythological association with Surtr goes back at least to the thirteenth century, when the *Sturlubók*-recension of *Landnámabók* tells the following story (S208/H175):⁵

Þorvaldr holbarki [...] kom um haust eitt á Þorvarðsstaði til Smiðkels ok dvalðisk þar um hrið. Þá fór hann upp til hellisins Surts ok færði þar drápu þá, er hann hafði ort um jötuninn í hellinum. Síðan fékk hann dóttur Smiðkels.

Þorvaldr Hollow-Throat [...] came, one autumn, to Þorvarðsstaðir to Smiðkell and stayed there for a while. Then he went up to Surtr's cave and there recited the praise-poem that he had composed about the giant in the cave. Then he married Smiðkell's daughter.

Here, a certain Þorvaldr Hollow-Throat apparently decides to settle down in the area—today's Þorvaldsstaðir is located just six kilometres southwest of Surtshellir⁶—and in preparation for his move, he pays homage to Surtr in his cave. Only after he has done so does he marry into a local farming family, allowing him to stay there for good.

Generally, the habitation of caves by giants and similar beings is a well-attested motif in Old Norse-Icelandic literature.⁷

5 Ed. by Jakob Benediktsson, *Landnámabók*; my translation.
6 *Landmælingar Íslands*, s.v. 'Þorvaldsstaðir.'

7 The following list of examples is not exhaustive; for more detail on this very common motif cf. Simek, *Trolle*, 28–29, 31, 38–43, 45–47, 54, 78, 99. Parallels of course are also found beyond the Norse storytelling tradition, the story of Polyphemus in the *Odyssey* (IX.105–566) being an obvious example. The latter story has in turn also in-

One example is provided by the Eddic poem *Hyndluljóð* from the thirteenth century,⁸ where Freyja visits the giantess Hyndla, who lives in a cave (st. 1). In the fourteenth-century *Grettis saga*, a cave under a waterfall is inhabited by man-eating giants that terrorise the surrounding countryside until Grettir puts an end to this horror (chs. 64–66).⁹ In the thirteenth-century *Bergþúá þáttr*, two Icelanders who during a journey are forced to spend a night in a cave are visited by a huge being; this being is probably to be understood as a giant, as it recites a poem about giants.¹⁰ In *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* from the mid-fourteenth century,¹¹ it is told that the cave of Sönghellir on Snæfellsnes was used by the half-giant Bárðr and his affiliates as a place for holding counsel (chapter 4). These examples, to which more could be added, illustrate that caves with giants are quite common in literature. Nevertheless, the *Landnámabók* anecdote about Surtshellir is exceptional in how acute a sense of a giant's presence in the local landscapes it ascribes to the real-world

influenced some Norse treatments of the motif of the 'giant in the cave' (cf. Simek, *Trolle*, 62–63; Egeler, *Avalon*, 66° Nord, 24–26). The examples quoted above, however, do not appear to be influenced by classical sources.

8 Ed. in Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*; dating: Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 201.

9 Ed. by Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga*; dating: Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 126.

10 Ed. in Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 441–50; dating: Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 37.

11 Ed. in Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 101–72; dating: Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 33.

population of the area that the story tells about. The cave of *Hynduljōð* belongs firmly to mythical topography without having a place in the physical world; *Grettis saga* seems to locate a cave under Goðafoss that is fictive, and which furthermore is cleaned of giants by Grettir; the cave of *Bergbúa þátrr* surprises the tale's human protagonists when they first encounter it, and afterwards they are never able to find it again, so by the end of the story, no cave remains in the physical world even within the narrative cosmos of the tale; and Sönghellir is described as only having been used by Bárðr in the past, but not in the storyteller's present. A very rare close parallel to the imagined presence of Surtr in Surtshellir in medieval Icelandic literature is found in *Bárðar saga's* description of the supernatural landscape of Snæfellsnes after Bárðr has left the human world and has withdrawn into the glacier (chapter 6): according to this saga, people believed that Bárðr henceforth lived in a large cave in the Snæfellsjökull glacier, and the inhabitants of the peninsula considered him to be their protective deity (*heitguð*; *bjargvætrr*) and invoked him.¹² Thus, the (part-)giant Bárðr, like Surtr, is thought of as living in a cave and is directly approached by the local population, even though his cave remains much more abstract than Surtr's, being an imaginary cave located somewhere deep within the

glacier rather than a real-world cave lying easily accessible in the local lava field.¹³

In *Bárðar saga*, the giant in the glacier is turned into a *heitguð*, “a god to whom one makes a vow,”¹⁴ and thus he essentially seems to be described as an object of religious worship. *Bárðar saga*, however, is a late and notoriously fantastic text. Nevertheless, the terminology it applies to Bárðr might point

13 There may also be a possible implied instance of a real-world presence of giants in the Snæfellsnes landscape in the archaeological record. In *Bergbúa þátrr*, the main protagonist of the tale, when entering the cave, uses a steel point to scratch the mark of a cross into the cave entrance, which appears to have the effect of (somewhat) protecting him and his companion from the apparition that haunts them during the night. This mark *might* have a counterpart in the graffiti of Sönghellir, which (in addition to a large number of initials) include many simple crosses scratched into the cave walls. One can, however, only speculate about whether these crosses were meant to protect the cave's human users specifically against giants. As a parallel to a positive (though not clearly ‘cultic’) relationship between human beings and a ‘giant’ (*bergbúi*) cf. the story of Hafr-Björn in *Landnámabók* S329/H284, who enters into a companionship (*félag*) with a *bergbúi* and as a consequence of this becomes a wealthy and powerful man. Apparently the *bergbúi* extends similar protection to Hafr-Björn, as the inhabitants of Snæfellsnes hope to receive from Bárðr according to *Bárðar saga*. Further examples of invocations of giants in the style of (or even explicitly as) deities, which closely parallel the invocation of Bárðr as the local *heitguð* of Snæfellsnes, are found in *Samsons saga fagra* and *Hervarar saga: Samsons saga fagra* chapter 21 (ed. by Wilson, *Samsons saga*; transl. by Simek, *Zwei Rittersagas*); chapter 1 of the U-redaction of *Hervarar saga* (ed. by Jón Helgason, *Heiðreks saga*, 89; ed. and transl. by Tolkien, *Saga Heiðreks konungs ins vitra*, 66; cf. Egeler, *Avalon, 66° Nord*, 109). In general on caves as cult sites cf. Bradley, *An Archaeology of Natural Places* (index s.v. ‘caves’).

14 Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *Dictionary*, s.v. ‘heitguð.’

12 Further on this example cf. Simek, *Trolle*, 27–28.

in an interesting direction for interpreting the episode in *Landnámabók* about Surtshellir, especially if some current and classic theorising in the history of religions is taken into consideration. *Landnámabók* describes a situation where in the surroundings of Surtshellir, and at least at biographical turning points such as the choice of a marriage partner and a new home, life becomes oriented towards the figure of a giant who is both a fearful cosmic force and lives just across the low mountain ridge of Fljótstunguháls, which is the only thing that separates Þorvaldsstaðir from the Hallmundarhraun lava field and the cave. Viewed from a certain perspective, it almost seems as if the giant has turned into something quite like the ‘sacred’ as conceptualised by Rudolf Otto: a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, something terrifying that nevertheless also draws people in.¹⁵ If such a reading of this anecdote in *Landnámabók* is not entirely off the mark, then the interaction with the supernatural described here comes strikingly close to how Jürgen Mohn has recently conceptualised the relationship between religion and space.¹⁶ Mohn suggests that a central function of religion is to structure human space by means of sacred places: sacred places stand out from other space, are *different* from other space, and through this characteristic they provide

a structure for the space in which human life unfolds. In his approach, Mohn draws on Michael Foucault’s concept of the *heterotopia*, a place that is defined by being ‘different.’¹⁷ Religious space, Mohn argues, is nothing but a special case of a heterotopia (namely, a religious one): it is space that is different in a religious manner, and what is significant is that it is marked as different, not how it came to be so. When considering the *Landnámabók* account of Surtshellir, such an analytic take on sacred space and sacred places seems particularly thought-provoking. Structurally, “the giant in the cave” (*þjótunninn í hellinum*) here fills the same functional slot as religion does in Mohn’s conceptualisation: it makes the place different, creating a heterotopia, and this heterotopia constitutes a reference point for local human behaviour.

Modern western European language usage associates terms like ‘cult’ or ‘worship’ firmly with divine powers rather than powers felt to be ‘demonic,’ such as giants—and of all giants in Norse mythology the giant Surtr in particular—seem to be. Yet Þorvaldr’s poem in effect constitutes an offering: the giant, it seems, receives a sacrifice in the medium of poetry. So if there is any substantial difference between the happenings at Surtshellir and a religious cult, this difference is hard to grasp and rooted more in prior assumptions about the nature of giants than in the actual account of *Landnámabók*. This giant plays a crucial structuring role for the

15 Otto, *Das Heilige*.

16 Mohn, “Heterotopien in der Religionsgeschichte.” From a very different starting point but with comparable results cf. recently Robinson, *Connemara*, 358–59; Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*.

17 Cf. Foucault, “Von anderen Räumen (1967).”

human life that takes place around his abode and thus fulfils a function that ultimately, in a functionalist sense, is deeply religious. Thus, the events described in *Landnámabók* seem remarkably in line with the religious terminology that the much later and much more fantastic *Bárðar saga* applies to Bárðr Snæfellsáss, the “God of Snæfell.”

HENNØY: COPING WITH BOREDOM

Hennøy is a small island in Rugsund parish in Sogn og Fjordane in western Norway, located roughly 150 kilometres north of Bergen and only some seven kilometres from the famous petroglyphs found in the area of Vingen. On the southern shore of this small island (which measures only 1.8 by 0.6 kilometres), facing the mainland across the narrow Hennøysundet channel, there is a small landing-site for boats which provides shelter both in stormy and in calm conditions.¹⁸ A number of large boulders lie scattered along this shoreline. One of these, a greenish sandstone block that originally was about two metres in length, is carved with nine runic inscriptions. The longest one of them, which Aslak Liestøl considered to be the initial and main inscription on the stone,¹⁹ reads as follows (Hennøy III):²⁰

18 Barnes, *Runes*, 119; *NIyR*, p. 228; cf. the site photograph in *NIyR*, p. 227 (= Figure 8.3 in this article).

19 Aslak Liestøl in *NIyR*, no. 422, p. 230.

20 *NIyR*, no. 422. Transliteration and normalised text after *NIyR*, no. 422, p. 231, English translation adapted after McKinnell and Simek, *Runes, Magic and Religion*, 130 (P 4).

A: her lago þeir men er komo af
B: risa / lade / með lóþnu skipi af (g)ulli
C: ok þet er i þesum steini

A: Hér lágu þeir menn, er kómu af
B: Risalandi með blóðnu skipi af gulli.
C: Ok þat er í þessum steini.

A: Here lay the men who came from
B: Giant-land with a ship loaded with gold.
C: And that is inside this stone.

Klaus Düwel dates this inscription to the beginning of the thirteenth century,²¹ the same century in which the above-quoted passage from *Landnámabók* about the giant Surtr in the Hallmundarhraun lava-field is also first attested in the text’s *Sturlubók* recension. Just as the identification of a cave as the dwelling-place of a giant in *Landnámabók* has parallels in other texts of Old Norse literature, the motifs reflected in this runic inscription are also firmly rooted in wider Norse storytelling traditions. As Aslak Liestøl and Klaus Düwel have pointed out,²² *Qrvar-Odds saga* contains an episode in which Qrvar-Oddr is blown off course to Risaland, the “Land of the Giants” somewhere in the Polar Sea,²³ which parallels the inscription’s claims that its carvers have undertaken a voyage to Risaland as well. Furthermore, in one recension

21 Düwel, *Runenkunde*, 155. McKinnell and Simek, *Runes, Magic and Religion*, 130: “13th century or later?”

22 Düwel, *Runenkunde*, 155; Aslak Liestøl in *NIyR*, no. 422, pp. 232–33.

23 *Qrvar-Odds saga*, ed. by Boer, *Qrvar-Odds saga*, 39 (S-recension). On the location of Risaland and other lands of giants in Norse tradition cf. Simek, “Elusive Elysia,” 255–58, 264, 272 fig. 8, 273 fig. 9, 274 fig. 10.

of *Qrvar-Odds saga*, Oddr on one occasion receives two chests full of gold and a cauldron full of silver from a giant, which the giant then hides under a stone;²⁴ thus, the saga also provides a parallel for the motif of the giants' treasure hidden in the stone. While it is unlikely that the runic inscription refers specifically to the story of Qrvar-Oddr,²⁵ it appears to play with storytelling motifs that follow the same kind of patterns as they are found in the saga and that perhaps were rather common in contemporary oral tradition:²⁶ tales of hidden treasure and of voyages to the remote land of the giants as well as the hiding of wealth gained from giants under or in boulders. That such narrative traditions about voyages to the land of giants with the aim of gaining wealth were widespread in the northern world is also suggested by an episode in the *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* by Adam of Bremen (d. 1081).²⁷ In this episode, Adam tells of an expedition undertaken by a group of Frisian nobles to explore whether there was a landmass to be found in the Polar Sea. Sailing via the Orkneys and Iceland towards the North Pole, these Frisians reach first the chasm at the

end of the world, and then an island inhabited by cave-dwelling, treasure-hoarding cyclopes, from where they escape with limited losses and tremendous amounts of loot in the form of gold and silver (IV.40–41).²⁸ Another instance of similar motifs is found in Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* (written around 1200) in the episode treating Thorkillus's expedition to *ulterior Byarmia*, where likewise Norse adventurers sail north and attempt to plunder the treasures of an (if in this case un-dead) giant (*Gesta Danorum* VIII.14.1–18).²⁹

As shown by the parallels that Old Norse literature provides both for the inscription from Hennøy and for the lore locally connected with Surtshellir, the stories of both these places were part of the same Norse culture of storytelling. Their *Sitz im Leben*,³⁰ however, could hardly be more different. While Surtshellir is connected with a biographical turning point and (one may guess) with at least some existential fear of a destructive force of cosmic scale, the little haven of Hennøy is a place connected with being becalmed or being land-bound by a storm. Thus, Hennøy first and foremost is

24 *Qrvar-Odds saga*, ed. by Boer, *Qrvar-Odds saga*, 124 (A-recension). The saga locates this episode on the Vargeyjar, perhaps present-day Vardø in Finnmark in northern Norway: Aslak Liestøl in *NIyR*, no. 422, p. 232; Düwel, *Runenkunde*, 155.

25 As already noted by Aslak Liestøl in *NIyR*, no. 422, pp. 232–33.

26 On the inscription as a reflex of an oral tradition cf. Mundal, "Kva kan vi vite?," 704–06.

27 Ed. by Schmeidler, *Adam von Bremen*; dating: Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 112.

28 Cf. Egeler, *Avalon*, 66° Nord, 23–26.

29 Ed. and transl. by Friis-Jensen and Fisher, *Saxo Grammaticus: Gesta Danorum*; cf. Egeler, *Avalon*, 66° Nord, 20–22, 26; Simek, "Elusive Elysia," 251, 256–58, 264, 266–67, 272 fig. 8, 273 fig. 9, 274 fig. 10.

30 The term *Sitz im Leben*, coined by the biblical scholar Hermann Gunkel, designates the original place of a type of literature in social life; on the term and its history see Bartsch, "Sitz im Leben."

associated with waiting and boredom:³¹ until the storm has blown itself out (or, inversely, a sailing wind has formed), the sailors waiting on Hennøy can do nothing but kill time. Our inscription fits this context on several levels. It is a maritime story in the maritime context of a landing-site. It is beautifully self-aggrandising, in the best tradition of a proper seaman's yarn, and even gives a logical explanation for why there is no material evidence for the sailors' adventures (as the treasure that could testify to their truth is hidden inside the stone). And, most importantly, it is entertaining: it is a way of coping with a land-bound sailor's boredom.

The self-aggrandisement implied by this inscription is particularly worth highlighting for the breadth of associations it evokes. The inscription claims that its land-bound carver(s) were seamen of such prowess that not even the journey to the land of the giants held terrors for them. By implication, this puts these men on the same level of maritime heroism as Qrvar-Oddr, Saxo's navigator Thorkillus, and Adam of Bremen's Frisian noblemen, all of whom exemplify the considerable prestige that seems to have been attached to heroic long-distance voyages. This is made particularly clear by *Qrvar-Odds saga*. After Qrvar-Oddr has travelled to Bjarmaland, it becomes a leitmotif of the saga that Oddr, after he has introduced himself, is asked: "Are you the Oddr who has travelled to Bjarmaland?" This happens half a dozen

times with only minor variations, underlining the prestige attached to such northbound travel.³² The motif of the northbound heroic journey of exploration was well established by the eleventh century at the latest. In Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* the motif is, in addition to the Frisian nobles already mentioned, connected also with the Norwegian *princeps* Haraldus, probably Haraldr *harðráði* (d. 1066). Adam reports that Haraldr undertook an expedition into the Polar Sea and only made a narrow escape from the chasm at the end of the world (Book IV.39).³³ Even earlier, in 1025, the Persian scholar Bīrūnī mentions a journey undertaken by a "Warangian" in which this man pushed so far north that he reached the land of the midnight sun.³⁴ What the carver(s) of the Hennøy inscription ascribe to themselves—a voyage to the miracle-ridden lands of the farthest north—is thus a very traditional and long-established topos of Norse storytelling that reinforces the heroism and glory of great heroes and noblemen of the highest rank—and which on Hennøy is harnessed by probably much humbler men.³⁵

32 Boer, *Qrvar-Odds saga*, 52/53 (M- and S-text), 62/63 (M and S), 84/85 (M and S), 89/90 (S and M), 125 (S), 130 (A), 168 (M), cf. 128 (A). Cf. Egeler, *Avalon*, 66° Nord, 89.

33 Cf. Egeler, *Avalon*, 66° Nord, 22–23.

34 Zeki Validi, "Die Nordvölker bei Bīrūnī," 39–40; Egeler, *Avalon*, 66° Nord, 23.

35 It should at least be mentioned in passing that hidden treasure is the object of runic inscriptions on other sites as well; for inscriptions about treasure and treasure-hunting in Maeshowe, Orkney, see Barnes, *The*

31 Cf. Aslak Liestøl in *NlYR*, p. 239.

These rich heroic associations may be one aspect of the inscription that connects to its perhaps most important feature: its value as a weapon to stave off the boredom of waiting for the right wind. It draws on the grand rhetoric of maritime heroic adventure—and if (as it is likely, though strictly speaking we do not know) it was carved in a considerably more banal context by sailors waiting to continue on a much more trivial voyage, then this alone would have contributed to making this inscription rather funny and thus an entertaining thing to execute.³⁶ Another aspect that seems to mark the inscription as a kind of joke is its reference to the land of the giants: the reference to such non-real beings as giants might have contributed to underlining the absurdity of the claim made by the inscription.

An obvious counter-argument against this line of reasoning would be that our sailors might well have believed in the real existence of giants and a transmarine land of giants. In the specific context of the Hennøy

landing-site, however, another runic inscription found on the same stone strongly suggests that at least in that place, giants were indeed viewed as something unreal. This inscription reads (Hennøy VI):³⁷

ræist ramr iotun rūn(ā)r

Reist rammr jötunn rúnar.

A strong giant carved (these) runes.

The claim that this inscription was carved by a giant is so blatantly absurd that, considering its *Sitz im Leben* as a graffito carved by bored waiting sailors, it can hardly be interpreted as anything but a joke, which is exactly the interpretation proposed by John McKinnell, Rudolf Simek, and Klaus Düwel.³⁸ If we can assume that thematically related inscriptions carved into the same stone can reveal something about each other, then this also strengthens the interpretation

Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe, 33–35, 38, 76, 93, 95, 172–74, 192–93, 195–96.

36 A comprehensive study of humour in Old Norse and Old Icelandic literature and culture has not yet been undertaken. On some aspects of the topic cf. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, “Gender, Humor, and Power”; Liberman, “Germanic Laughter”; North, “*goð geypja*: The Limits of Humour”; Wolf, “Laughter in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature.” A classic contribution in a broader medieval context is Fromm, “Komik und Humor.” For theoretical considerations on joking about supernatural matters see North, “*goð geypja*: The Limits of Humour,” 386; Smith, *Map is not Territory*, 309; Smith, *Relating Religion*, 111–12.

37 *NIyR*, no. 425. Transliteration and normalised text after *NIyR*, no. 425 (p. 235), English translation after McKinnell and Simek, *Runes, Magic and Religion*, 131, P 5. Aslak Liestøl (*NIyR*, no. 425) notes that while the inscription makes sense as it stands, damage to the stone nevertheless makes it possible that it could originally have been longer.

38 McKinnell and Simek, *Runes, Magic and Religion*, 131, P 5. Similarly cf. also Barnes, *The Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe*, 38. While *jötunn* could in theory have been used to refer to a particularly big man (cf. *ONP*, s.v. ‘jötunn’) in the same way in which apparently *þurs* has been used as the nickname of Þórðr þurs in *Landnámabók* H49/S61, the term’s primary referent is the supernatural being, just as the term is used in the Surtshellir-episode in *Landnámabók* (cf. the phrase *jötunninn í hellinum*, see above). So even if a very large man referring to himself as a ‘giant’ carved this inscription, the phrasing would still have been purposefully ambiguous and playful.

of the Risaland-inscription as essentially being a joke, if a richly multi-layered one.

Aslak Liestøl has taken an alternative approach: he also considered the possibility that the two inscriptions about giants might have referred to a local folktale.³⁹ However, that there was an established folktale about a treasure hidden in the stone that now carries the inscriptions is unlikely due to the topography of the site. Boulders to which folktales are attached typically stand out visually from their surroundings, usually in a very prominent manner; good examples are the “Dwarfstone” on the Seyðisfjörður fjord in eastern Iceland or Irish boulders like “Columba’s Boulder” *Mulán Cholm Cille* on the coast of Aran in Galway Bay.⁴⁰ In contrast, the inscribed boulder of Hennøy does not noticeably stand out among the boulders that line the shore of the landing-site. In fact, it is completely dwarfed by a much more prominent boulder located just a few metres to the east of it (Figure 8.3). Also, geologically the green sandstone of the inscribed block is not unusual but is simply the typical stone of the area.⁴¹ So this stone stands out neither through its size or location nor through its geology, which makes it a most atypical stone for a folktale to be attached to. Therefore, considering the landscape context of the inscribed boulder in its lo-

cal micro-topography, an interpretation of the giant inscriptions as references to established local folklore seems highly unlikely, and certainly much less likely than an interpretation as a practical joke. On the island of Hennøy, giants in the landscape appear to be used to imbue some light-heartedness into a place, which, as a place of waiting for better weather conditions, otherwise would have been characterised first and foremost by boredom.

This, I would argue, is the most likely intention of the original carvers of these inscriptions: to inscribe lightheartedness into the land. There is, however, a postscript that remarkably muddies the picture: somebody later split the boulder into which these inscriptions had been carved.⁴² Did somebody take the story of the hidden treasure seriously later on? This may well be. One of the great threats to the preservation of ancient rock sculpture in Asia Minor are local beliefs that consider such rock sculpture to mark rock faces behind which treasure can be found, which every now and again leads to the destruction of images even though it is clear that they are carved into the living rock of a cliff. A recent example of this kind of treasure digging can be seen at the Adamkayalar carvings in Cilicia. So it is very much conceivable that somebody might have approached the inscribed rock of Hennøy with similar naiveté. Yet ultimately we do not know. To be becalmed on Hennøy

39 *NIyR*, no. 422, p. 233; no. 425, p. 236; no. 425, pp. 239–40.

40 Cf. Egeler, “Icelandic Folklore, Landscape Theory, and Levity”; Egeler, *Atlantic Outlooks on Being at Home*, 62–63 fig. 1, 117 fig. 10.

41 *NIyR*, p. 230.

42 McKinnell and Simek, *Runes, Magic and Religion*, 131 (P 4); Düwel, *Runenkunde*, 155.



Figure 8.3: The landing-site on Hennøy. At the time when the photograph was taken in the mid-twentieth century, one of the halves of the inscribed stone supported a corner of a little turf-shed; the other half is located a few metres to the right of the shed, where the person is standing. Note how little the inscribed boulder stands out from its surroundings. The much larger and much more prominent boulder to the right of the boat would have been a much more typical stone for a folktale to be associated with, if there had been more to the inscription than a practical joke. Photograph by Aslak Liestøl, © Kulturhistorisk museum, Universitetet i Oslo; also published in *NTyR*, p. 227.

after a while might well have been unbearably boring, so to split the inscribed treasure-boulder might just as well have been a way of dawdling away the time by turning the written joke into a practical one, killing time by killing a boulder, so to speak, which might have been somebody's idea of fun. As practical jokes go, this might not even have been a bad one and it certainly would have been remarkably multi-layered.

BETWEEN EXTREMES: THE SEMANTIC SPECTRUM OF MYTHOLOGICAL PLACES

The implications of places like Surtshellir and Hennøy for the history of religions could be developed in many different directions. One such direction could be their relevance for memory theory. Jan Assmann in his work on religion and cultural memory argues that in non-literate societies, the most important situation for the perpetuation and

institutionalisation of cultural narratives are celebrations (*Feste*) and religious rites.⁴³ Ancient Scandinavia and Iceland were certainly not illiterate societies, but they were societies with a limited use of writing. Hence it may be of some theoretical interest that in the examples discussed above, what stood in the centre of the engagement with ‘memory’ were very specific places rather than specific times (celebrations, rituals) or a (place-less) written tradition. Surtshellir has its greatest relevance not as a narrative abstracted from its *Sitz im Leben* in a farming community in a concrete geographical location, but its main importance lies in being a local phenomenon that fundamentally characterises a specific place. Similarly, the engagement with giants on the island of Hennøy makes sense, and has an effect, only in its specific place context. Assmann himself is aware of the importance of place for cultural memory and, while putting his focus elsewhere, notes landscapes as being one of the “storage media” (*Speicherungsmedien*) of this memory.⁴⁴ Other approaches put even more emphasis on the fundamental importance of places for the preservation and continuation of cultural meanings, such as W. J. T. Mitchell when he emphasises that “landscape” is a “physical and multisensory medium [...] in which cultural meanings and values are encoded.”⁴⁵

Yet neither the concept of (‘cultural’) memory nor questions of mediality seem to

be quite what places like Surtshellir and Hennøy can teach us most about, though both could offer valuable perspectives for further analysis. In the context of the spatial turn, it has become widely established to look at places as bearers of meaning, irrespective of whether the analysis one is attempting is a literary,⁴⁶ a historical,⁴⁷ or an ethnographic one;⁴⁸ Mitchell’s conceptualisation of landscape as a medium of cultural meaning, as quoted above, is a good example for this broad trend. If one looks at Surtshellir and Hennøy with this perspective, it is remarkable to see how different the ‘meaning’ of two places can be that belong to the same cultural area (Norse), draw on the same imagery (giants), and in a way—if one looks at the dates of the actual texts—even stem from the same time (the thirteenth century). In the case of Surtshellir, the ‘meaning’ of this place is located on a virtually cosmic plane, relating the place to the mythology of the end of the world, and it pulls the life of the local population into its cosmological field of gravity so strongly that structurally it appears to become a religious place as described by Jürgen Mohn.⁴⁹ It becomes a place that provides ‘orientation’ in the sense that it is inte-

46 In the context of general theorising cf. for instance Westphal, *Geocriticism*, or Cresswell, *Place*. In Old Norse contexts see e.g. Hermann, “Founding Narratives”; Barraclough, “Naming the Landscape”; Lethbridge, “The Icelandic Sagas and Saga Landscapes.”

47 E.g., Brink, “Mythologizing Landscape.”

48 E.g., Basso, *Wisdom sits in Places*.

49 Mohn, “Heterotopien in der Religionsgeschichte” (see above, 125–26).

43 Assmann, *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis*, 129.

44 Assmann, *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis*, 131–32.

45 Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape,” 14.

grated into how people structure their lives, and a place where some people at least seem to have faced and conquered existential fears. On the island of Hennøy, in contrast, nothing more existential is conquered than the boredom of being becalmed, and the coastal landscape is turned into a ‘medium’ carrying a runic joke or two. Both places are ‘giants’ places’ in the sense that in both places, using the media of toponymy, storytelling, and graffiti, giants are evoked; yet while both places are associated with giants, the effect achieved by this association could hardly be more different.

I would suggest that the value of comparing Surtshellir and Hennøy lies exactly in this point. These two places mark two extremes of meaning: deep, cosmic fear and inconsequential fun. Here, mythical terror meets light humour. These two places, and the extremes they stand for, illustrate the two ends of the spectrum of what can be the ‘meaning’ of places in the Norse culture of the Middle Ages. To recall how different such meanings can be might constitute a salutary reminder of how difficult it is to grasp the ‘meaning’ of places. At the beginning of this essay, I mentioned a number of places, which through their names are connected with giants: the mountain Jötunfell, the Jötunsaugu caves, the farm ruins of Jötunn, the farmstead of Jötunheimar, the sea-stack Jötunn, and the island ridge Jötunspors-hryggur. Juxtaposing Surtshellir and Hennøy starkly reminds us of how little we can say about the ‘meaning’ of these places just on

the basis of their names: their meaning may have been anywhere on the scale from existential to humoristic. Furthermore, Hennøy illustrates that not only are we unable to say much about these giant-named places in a synchronic perspective, but also the diachronic development of their ‘meaning’ may have oscillated greatly. The giants of Hennøy almost certainly started off as a motif of pure fun; yet (unless this was a truly multi-layered practical joke) that somebody split the boulder suggests that at some point, the tongue-in-cheek claim of a giant’s treasure inside the stone became serious enough for somebody to check. Hennøy was not fixed on the ‘fun’ end of the scale that covered the spectrum from deepest seriousness to jocular lightness, but it moved around on this scale, being one thing for one protagonist and a different thing for another. Places, like texts, have a considerable ‘*mouvance*,’ or inherent instability.⁵⁰ This also pertains to places of the supernatural, directly affecting the way we can approach them analytically. The stuff of religious history, and perhaps especially of the engagement with supernatural forces that do not have a clearly institutionalised cult, is fluidity. Meaning is made, remade, and taken in the most surprising directions—and this is not so much a methodological problem as a central part of the richness of the religious history of the North Atlantic.

50 On the term cf. Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, 45–49.

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Res, artes et religio is a collection of thirty-nine essays in honour of Rudolf Simek, professor at the Department of German, Comparative Literature and Culture at the University of Bonn. The terms *res*, *artes* and *religio* describe the wide-ranging interests of Rudolf Simek, which centre around but are by no means limited to the area of Viking Age and medieval Scandinavia. The chapters gathered here, written by his friends, colleagues and students, match these interests and show the influence of his work in the fields of mythology, religious studies, runology, saga studies, archaeology and more.

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