1

Individuals

> Now must I, from wood to wood
> Creep with small renown;
> Who knows if I will not win
> Wide acclaim hereafter?

The verses are attributed to the future king Harald Hardrada, slinking from Norway after the defeat and death of his brother Olaf (St Olave) in 1030.[1] They are late, inauthentic, and true to the experience of all hunted nobodies who live to become rich and famous somebodies. They would do for king Alfred, hiding from the Danes in the early spring of 878, already a king but down on his luck, or for the Danish pretender, Sweyn Estrithson, running away to the woods in the 1040s in flight from the invincible king Magnus Olafsson. They epitomize the self-confidence needed by survivors in hard times; and yet this is not a good place to begin.

Two preconceptions dog the idea of individuality in the early medieval period. One is that the very idea was not invented until the twelfth, fifteenth, or eighteenth century. The other is that everyone had a place in the social world and knew what it was. There are reasons for believing both, in some circumstances; but for the time being they can be ignored, or sampled in the incisive survey of Oexle (1999), who traces the doctrine of medieval communitarianism from Novalis to Tönnies to Miegel to Minc. For there is another theory: that viking times were good for relatively unbridled individualism, whether or no the concept existed. Raiding, trading, land-taking and valour in battle were opportunities for men and women to leave the herd, and get somewhere. So Jochens claims that early Iceland was 'like the American West ... congenial to the uninhibited exercise of

1 Found in the collection of stories about kings and others called Morkinskinna (Mks) 9 verse 45.

traditional heroic qualities', and admirers of the Greenland and Vinland venturers have draped them with the mantle of Columbus, obsessive loner. Later heroic legends and poems are called in evidence: they 'reflect the would-be heroic individual in life' according to von See[2] and many others.

A weight of scholarship nevertheless insists that among 'Germanic' peoples, from start to finish, the collective ruled and shaped the individual: 'the individual acquires all his value by virtue of his belonging to the community' and 'the principle of association' ruled the lives of all but the outlaw, who was the exception that proved the rule. Genetics and culture reinforced each other through institutions already old before the first viking raid: the autonomous kin-group, or *ætt*; collective responsibility for compensation owed to injured parties outside the kin-group, or by outsiders to its members; and the heritability of almost everything material and spiritual down patrilinear descents, recited by revered keepers of tradition. The Norseman was named, trained, dressed, equipped, led, entertained and finally buried or cremated under rules prescribed to maintain social cohesion, not individual enterprise, and in daily life 'obedience to strict codes of behaviour is revealed in all records of Germanic culture'.[3] So runs the Germanist catechism, still dutifully chanted to fill a silence, as we really know very little about all this. The confident generalizations are distilled from a literature produced before this period, or after, or elsewhere.

There is some middle ground. Two developments are allowed to have loosened the hold of the tribal collective, by offering at least alternative conformities. Colonization was one; and the forming of war-bands of young warriors the other. But neither really lightened the preponderance of society over self. Settlers merely created new communities and families; team-spirit and lordship clamped the warrior even more firmly to his fellows. Christian missions may have fingered the individual, as morally unique, but up in these parts

2 von See 1981 154–93, and Jochens 1996, 200. Neil Price claims that 'an emphasis on personal identity' was 'a defining characteristic of the age' (VINAS 2000, 41).

3 Bauschatz 1982, 61; see also the Durkheimer Baetke in *Das Heilige im Germanischen* (1942), and the far more readable Vilhelm Grønbech in *The Culture of the Teutons*. On Scandinavian law as ancestral custom with religious authority see Fenger 1983, 57, representative of a deep-rooted legal-historical tradition, of diminishing momentum. Marx and Durkheim disagreed over the collective dynamic: for Marx 'the collective life-forms are holy, the private structures are alienation and unreality'; for Durkheim the collective can only be achieved by the consent or concurrence of wide-awake individuals, even if, once achieved, it becomes holy (Gustafsson 1972, 20–33). It comes to much the same thing in the viking age, which would have inherited its collectives from way back.

baptism was viewed as a collective experience, which merged converts into a christian community wholesale. Few would oppose Steensberger's claim that that creative pioneers are essential to the maintenance of the viable group, because many assume that social utility is the standard by which creativity is to be judged; that, or the endurance of the group through prudent modification or quasi-biological renewal. The loud *merde* which ensured the glory and annihilation of the Old Guard at Waterloo – one man's indignation – is not welcome in this scheme of things.[4]

To judge how thoroughly self and society were integrated in viking times, it may help to assess the force of the four commonest inhibitors or moderators of individualities in other times:

1 ancestry and kinship, which make one being in theory merely the representative of ancestors and descendants, inheritor and transmitter of status and character and appearance;
2 communal conformity: the custom of the country, how we do, did and will do things here;
3 gender;
and
4 servitude, the person as property.

How far these pressures were resisted, and how easy were solo flights for the inspired, the powerful, and the deviant, will be considered in turn, before looking through one of the exits from collectivity usually open to all individuals: suicide. Were these societies like the Roman, in which families could be proud of their self-destroyers?

Ancestry and Kin

The usual identity card of the Norse was the patronym or metronym, as in GAUT SON OF BJORN or THORGERD STEINAR'S DAUGHTER, two of many rune-stone examples, and this habit was exported to the British Isles and persists all over the world in Johnson and Jensen and Hansen. But such names were not like modern surnames, a routine identification passed down the family; Kousgaard Sørensen established that they were 'primarily a means of

4 Steensberger 1986, 175–7 expanding Wahle 1974 with the idea that individuals create culture for communities to transmit. Wenskus insisted that the *Gefolgschaft* (military retinue) was friendlier to individual development than the clan; see Bazelmans 1991 on this. For group conversions see now Cusack 1998: the full collectivist gospel.

emphasizing one's self-satisfaction by pointing to one's creditable relationship with an eminent, powerful, influential, brave, and in other ways meritorious father'.[5] People with common names (Atsur, Thorgisl, Toki) are no more likely to have patronyms than others with highly distinctive names (Sasgerth, Finulf's daughter: DR 81, Skaern 2). Those who wanted to be known as part of a wider family could in theory sport an ancestor's name with the suffix *-ing* as with the YNGVALDINGAR on the Rök stone, but examples of this datable to the viking age are extremely rare, confined to the noblest of kindreds, or the mythical, and not always to be distinguished from *-ing* groupings of a different kind: war-bands, children of one father rather than heirs of a remoter grandparent, or people who come from one place (Falstrings from Falster, Hälsings from Hälsingland).

Runic inscriptions often concern family groups, in the relationship sponsor – the dead – the living, especially in eleventh-century Sweden, but very seldom wider cousinhoods; and among the earlier stones, an individual is sometimes remembered alone. ERIK'S MONUMENT is all it says on the eighth-century Starup stone in South Jutland (DR 17); and in the following century the name HAIRULFR was enough for the Oster Løgum stone by the N–S Jutland highway (DR 15; B 354). Monoliths were rarer, less of a craze than they became after *c*. 970, and a carver or sponsor could strike a personal note, as at Gørlev on Zealand (DR 239): THIAUDVI put up a stone to UTHINKAUR, with no stated relationship, only the command MAKE GOOD USE OF THIS MEMORIAL and the words I SET THE RUNES RIGHT, in case anyone objected to the new abbreviated alphabet, and the ambiguous spelling that resulted from it. This tradition begins in Denmark *c*. 750, spreads, diversifies, becomes clamorous and stereotypical, but never quite loses the individual in the formula. Among the Danes, and on thirty Swedish stones, there were those who preferred not to wait for family piety; they put up memorials to themselves, like poet and christian Eskill Sulkason on Lolland (DR 212, Tillitse, post 1025) who:

> HAD THIS STONE RAISED TO HIMSELF: EVER WILL STAND – WHILE THIS STONE LIVES – THIS MEMORIAL – WHICH ESKILL MADE.

Such 'boasting stones' were probably not pure egotism; the boasters may have wanted to be known as christians in contrast to pagan relations; examples, therefore, of not entirely collective baptism

5 Kousgaard Sørensen 1982, 12

(B. Sawyer 1991 108–9 discusses). Long before this purely commemorative custom began, sixth-century chiefs had been celebrated in runes on big stones at Stentoften, Gummarp and Istaby in Bleking, but the tallest of all, a granite needle thirteen feet (4 m) tall at Björketorp bears only a grim warning by the technician (DR 360–B 120) which runs, approximately:

> I MASTER OF THE ROW OF RUNES BURIED HERE POTENT RUNES.
> INCESSANTLY ENCUMBERED BY SORCERY…TO DEATH THROUGH MALICE IS HE WHO BREAKS IT

The aim may have been to protect the local dynasty, but the voice is one expert's.

Land was held by families, but not all moveables. The earliest continental runes name individuals on things, and from *c.* 500 come objects scratched with first persons singular: the sword or ring speaks for itself[6] or the owner speaks through the brooch, even anonymously, like EK UNWODIR (I, THE UNENRAGED) of Gårdlosa in Scania. To carve whole sentences on stone was reason for self-congratulation long after that, however social the occasion. In the mid-tenth century the colonial big-wigs on Man paid to advertise themselves on stone crosses, but it was the sculptor who got himself remembered:

> GAUT MADE IT, AND ALL IN MAN
>
> (Michael 2: Kermode 74)

like the Dane Soti, who shortly before had cut runes at Glavendrup for Ragnhildr, at Rønninge for his own brother, and at Tryggevælde for Ragnhildr again (DR 209, 202, 230); and like the four eleventh-century Swedish carvers who can be identified by the idiosyncracies of their work, as well as by their signatures: Opir, Asmund, Livsten and Balli.

Dynasties and families may have repressed individuality, then as now, but the politics of this period suggest that individual ambitions were more likely to repress dynasties; conditions for the routine distribution of wealth and power among members did not exist. Cemeteries apparently shared by one family usually contain one or more graves of exceptional interest, with exotic oriental, Frankish or Anglo-Saxon ornaments that point to the egregious. If there ever had been an egalitarian tribal community, it had broken up in the Migration Age, when the rich began leaving their women, kinsmen and

6 Compare Anglo-Saxon examples in Bredehoft, ASSAH, ix, 1996, 103–9.

animals in the old longhouse, and moving into big halls, where they could live like lords, among male dependents.[7] Rulers were exceptional in this respect. They could assert themselves at the expense of their kin, and discard them more freely in pursuit of personal gain, like their Anglo-Saxon and Frankish contemporaries: king Offa was accused of pruning his family tree to the trunk, and the Danish dynasty seems to have dwindled through internal competition in the ninth century, until extinct. Further down the scale, kin may have counted for more, and asked more of the individual: family solidarity may have been necessary for survival; but families had obvious limits as wealth-increasing and fighting units, and in this period there were alternatives.

One result of this may have been the tendency to bear nick-names: stronger among the Norse than among their neighbours at this period, as rune-stones, place-names and foreign annalists bear witness. 'Pelt-dear' (sugar-daddy?), 'loathsome', 'forest-guest' are very early examples (M 169), and some of these became Viking Age proper names: *Óspakr* (the unruly), *Skeggi* (the bearded), *Styrr* (noisy), and *Knútr* (knot) are examples, with *Stígandr* (strider) and *Sumarlíðr* (summer voyager) both beginning in the British Isles among colonists. The names parents gave were improved by the Hairy, the Stooper, the Calm, the Dwarf, the Goblin, the Speckled, the Ugly, the Neck, the Skinny, the Unwashed, the Self-Willed, the Wriggler and the Pugnacious: these were ways of telling Úlfr from Úlfr and Tóki from Tóki away from home. Praise often came by negatives, in litotes: the Un-worthless, the Un-deceitful, the Un-niggardly, the Unafraid, the Unquiet, the Undoomed; others were distinguished by lack, as in the English Danelaw with the Godless, the Foodless, the Shirtless, the Trouserless. If Ivarr, the invader of East Anglia in 869, was really called the Boneless (*Beinlauss*: possibly a later misreading of *exosus*, 'hated' as *exossis* 'boned', but not very likely, considering the rarity of *exossis*) he may have been complimented in a round about way for his furious riding. Such names tend to be stereotypical everywhere, and to acquire ironical and in-group meanings; they are not chosen by the bearers, but at least mark them out with secondhand personalities, usually uninherited, and recognizable in the wider world.[8]

7 Herschend 1993, 190–4.

8 See VACON (1993) for Fellows Jensen (398–400) and Insley (351–2) Fellows Jensen 1994, 26–7, and Whaley 1991 and 1993 for later practice in Iceland. The largest collection of such names is E.H. Lind *Norsk-isländska personbinamn från medeltiden* (Uppsala 1921) and for saga by-names, Finnur Jónsson 'Tilnavne' Aarbøger 2nd ser., 1907, 161–381.

Custom

The country can be host to many customs, and as Jens Jakob Jensen noticed in 1977, attempts to work out a common viking age system of values are undermined by the ethical discrepancy between the two main sources, Runic inscriptions and Skaldic verse. They present different social norms: what he called '*hirth*-ideals' for the court or retinue, and family values, for the homestead and the farm. In verse, the worthy man was restless, aggressive, intimidating, vindictive, spendthrift, fearless, famous overseas and seldom at home. In runic epigraphy of the later viking age, he is sometimes remembered for having died far from home in pursuit of gold and honour, but he is usually praised for his social status (as lord, *bumann*, *drengr*, *thegn*, *buandi*, *godi*) or for his association with others (*lagsman*, *skibari*, *felagi*) of similar rank, or for his good housekeeping, property and local influence, or for his qualities as a father or husband. The discrepancy is not resolved (as in Jakobsson 1992) by taking the swords and spears found in male graves as mainly symbolic of rank, rather than working weapons; the evidence for real vikings, and for powerful peace-lovers is equally good. In verse, the women are usually on-lookers, admiring the men for their fine ships, glittering array, and valour in battle; in the inscriptions they are pious or lamented widows, rich and respectable, sharing the domestic virtues of their sons and husbands; or else queens in their own right, or patronesses; or, like the men, just 'good'. Jensen's survey[9] included all Danish and Swedish inscriptions of the period 950–1100, and his conclusions may therefore be skewed in favour of Uppland values, and must be in favour of the upper classes. The individual Northman within those categories evidently lived with at least two ethical systems, between which he could move in pursuit of private ends; and those outside these categories cannot be assumed to have lived under a monolithic morality. Geography alone, the sparsity of populations, the diversity of ecologies, argues for ethical variety. Easy communication by sea brought varieties together.

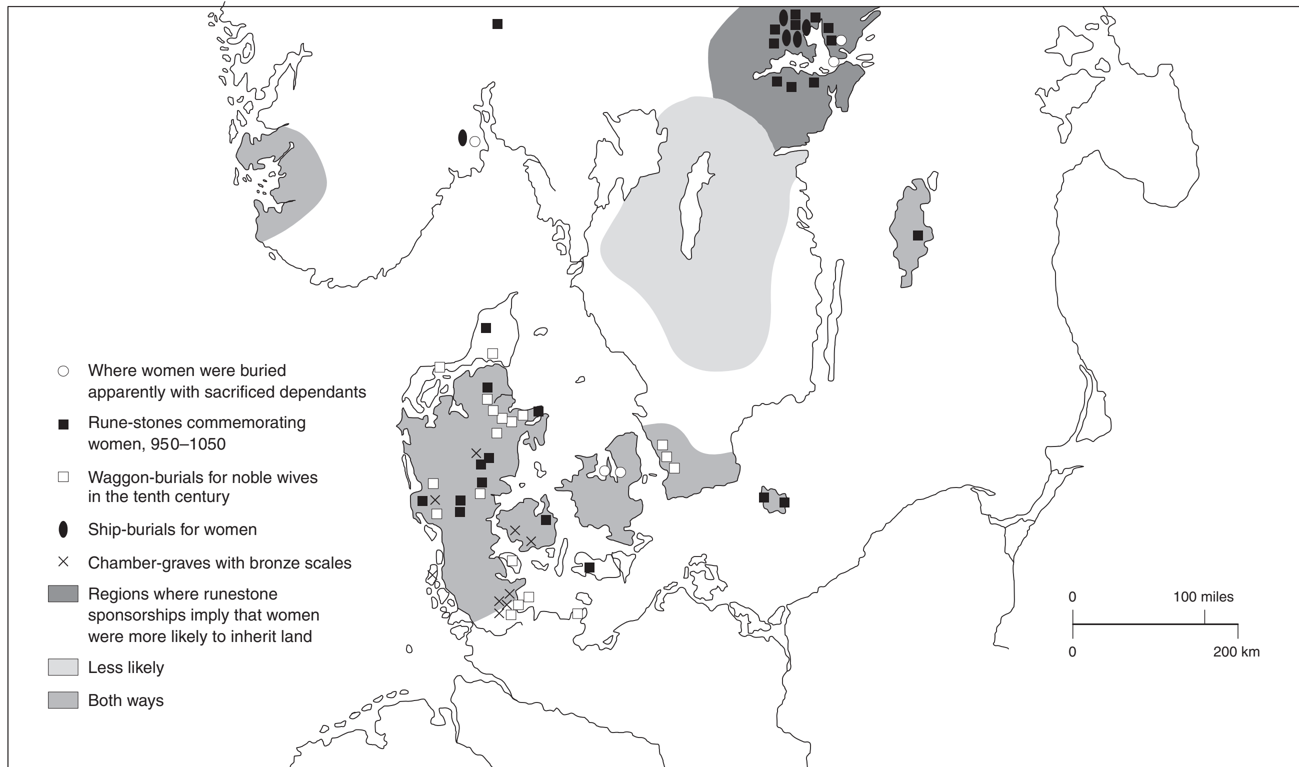
9 *De for mandigt fjernet efter guld* by Jens Jakob M. Jensen was published as a pamphlet in Copenhagen in 1977, but the farming-fighting contrast has often been noted. The concentration of runestones in Mälardal enables Herschend (1994b, 102) to trace a shift in the definition of 'good' people *c.*975–*c.*1100 from the socially-beneficial group-enhancers to the well-born landowning group-dominating individuals. But 'good' applied to categories which are not obviously one or the other; see B. Sawyer 2000, 101–11.

Gender

The condition of women in a patriarchal, heroic and warlike world is often assumed to have been submissive, semi-servile if not actually servile; so much so that some attribute the power, wisdom and sexual freedom of certain female archetypes in ON literature (Gudrun, Brynhildr, Sigrid Storrada et al.) to lingering reminiscences of pre-patriarchal days, back in the Bronze Age: memories preserved in folk tales, traduced by christians, and revived in the thirteenth century by a 'miracle' of literary creativeness. This is not only unlikely, but unnecessary. Female independence and consequence were a social fact in the viking age at the level which inspires legend: the top. Thanks to marriage, inheritance and economics, women were valuable, if freeborn, as far down the scale as freedom and property reached.[10] It can be argued that women still had to operate within the strategies of a male-dominated system, as an often overworked instrument of the family or kin-group, condemned by her sex, if she escaped exposure at birth (see p. 39–40) to the stereotyped roles of marriage-pawn (or 'peace-cow' mediating between families), inciter of male valour (nag), howler of lamentations for dead males, and jealous bitch. Such women appear in sagas and soap-operas and real life, but can hardly represent the day-to-day experience of their sisters without corroboration from contemporary sources.

However, the evidence for powerful Nordic women is good, and unsurprising to those familiar with what was going on outside Scandinavia, for the tenth has been called 'the century of women' by Pauline Stafford: she has the lady Ethelflaed of Mercia, Hrotswitha of Gandersheim, Marozia the pope-maker, the empress Theophanu and the Frankish queen Gerberga to back her. The richest Norwegian boat burial, at Oseberg, was that of a woman surrounded by goods and travelling gear and apparently accompanied by her maid, in the beautifully finished ceremonial boat now dated to 834. On Funen, among the Danes, a little later, a man called Guthfrith raised a runestone to a woman called Thiodborg (DR 188) who needed no further identification, and before that most of the fifty or so cremation graves at Valsgärde in Sweden were women's, and the highest mound,

10 Heinrichs in SMEOL (1986) 110–40 and Jochens 1996, 132–61, and 162–203 discuss the survival of female archetypes; for Gimbutas on primeval matriarchy see Gilchrist 1999, 25. Jochens derives the modern idea of the 'independent Nordic woman' from the 18th century pioneer Nordicist Mallet (EG, xlvi, 1991, 400–9) but Olaus Magnus the Swede was ahead of him (OM 5, 27–33) in the sixteenth century, and Saxo's fearsome Dane-women are the subject of a study by Mrs Sawyer: Strand 1980.



Map 1 *Women of some importance*

(After Eisenschmidt 1994, 55–6 and B. Sawyer 2000) Only 4.2 per cent of all rune-stones commemorate women alone.

crowning the whole landscape, was raised over a woman. Wall-hangings found at Oseberg and Överhogdal show women as religious leaders and owners of herds and horses.

King Gorm of Jelling and his son Harald Bluetooth both eternalized Thyrwi (Thyra) 'Denmark's Ornament' (or Improvement), and she or another Thyrwi was named as queen by the three men who made her mound (Baekke I: DR 54) and by a dependent or client (Laeborg: DR 26). Her grandson Sweyn Forkbeard's wife, fictionalized as 'Sigrid the Strong-Minded' by the Icelanders, was a player of importance in the Baltic politics of the 990s, if somewhat hard to pin down; but St Olave's widow, Astrídr was the crucial guarantor of her young son Magnus' seizure of Norway in 1034–5, and was praised as such by Sigvatr the poet. She had the treasure, and influence with her father's people in Sweden to make this bastard son of an unpopular king something more than the pawn of a discredited faction. He was not her son, but she got him elected even when his accession meant that his natural mother, Álfhildr, would be a potential rival: and the poet praised her for this.[11] By then, Norwegians had endured four or five years of female rule, when Alfífa (Aelfgifu) of Northampton stood behind the young king Sweyn, son of Canute, who also became king at the age of fifteen or thereabouts. Her regime was remembered for her harshness, as well as the bad harvests, in the twelfth century, by when the whole emergence of a Norwegian kingdom was fabulated in tales of overmighty Danish women: Gytha, Gunnhildr, Sigrid and Alfifa. Such tales show that here as elsewhere in the West and East, high birth and powerful husbands gave women power and esteem, but the evidence of the graves indicates (like the fifth- and sixth-century graves of southern Britain) that this esteem was not confined to the rulers, but went deeper than that.

Many women were buried with pairs of scales; not because they had been traders, as Stalsberg suggested (there is no evidence of any female traders), but as symbols of good housekeeping, like the keys found with many more, to look the meal or treasure chest. The magnificent lock found in one of the chests reused as coffins (for Danes?) under York minster in the tenth century was guarding more than meal, and smaller boxes occur elsewhere, in the Fyrkat graves for example. Rule of the household speaks from the Mälardal cremations: men's ashes put into pots, but women burnt with pots, for

11 See P. and B. Sawyer 'Adam and the Eve of Scandinavian History' in *Perceptions of the Past in Twelfth Century Europe*, 37–51 for the tangled tales of Sweyn's wife or wives. For Thyra, B. Sawyer 2000, 158–66. Jesch 1994 discusses these verses, and see Jesch 1990, 156–7. Álfhildr left Norway and lived as an anchoress in England, where her tale was told by William of Malmesbury (*Gesta Pontificum*, 412–15) in lurid but credible terms. He believed she was buried at Malmesbury: another individualist.

future use. As with the post-viking-age lady buried at Fläckebo in SW Västmanland, whose husband Holmgautr of Hassmyra claimed:

> WILL COME MISTRESS TO HASSMYRA
> NO BETTER THAT HOUSEHOLD TO GOVERN.

Such women had a hold on the moveable goods of the family, if not the full shared ownership (*félag*) of the later laws. The runes of Sweden point to their having an inheritance right long before it was written down, and Birgit Sawyer relates it to the extent that women share in the sponsorship of memorial stones. Most of all in Uppland (23–24%), less so in Södermanland and Öland (6%), even less in Denmark and Västergötland, hardly at all in Norway, Småland and Gotland. Such inscriptions confirm the impression that wives could not inherit directly from husbands, beyond their share of goods held in common; but among the Swedes (not the Gautar) daughters and sisters inherited from fathers, and were allocated real or notional shares in the property of their own families, at least after *c*. 1000.[12] The unequal distribution of memorials, by place and date, (see map 11) must undo some of the significance of those percentages, but none of her general conclusions jars with the impression given by Anglo-Saxon wills, that whatever the legal situation was, it enabled some women to hold much more property than most men. Which is not to suggest that most women were not relatively poorer and less free than most men; only that female individuality was no more and no less limited up here than in most of Christendom.

The absence of husbands on raids, or their deaths overseas leaving minor heirs, may have contributed to this, more than any primary importance attached to the producing of children in 'frontier' societies: children could be bred from slaves, and in any case many seem to have been killed at birth. The needs to secure family property at home, and to increase wealth by going elsewhere, were better served by partnerships between sexes than by patriarchy; but whether this explains the strong Nordic women, or the women whose sons took metronyms rather than patronyms depends mainly on the interpretation of inscriptions, which are seldom unambiguous. On one of the Ardre stones on Gotland a husband commemorated his wife Rodiauth, who DIED YOUNG, LEAVING AN INFANT. Why her, of the many who met the same fate unrecorded? Because of the child, which would inherit? Inherit what, mother's property or father's? Or

12 B. Sawyer 1988, esp. 28–34, and her 'Women as Bridge-Builders' PAP (1991) 211–24. Her *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones* (Oxford 2000) discusses the evidence for women's ownership and inheritance in chs 4 and 5.

because a childless mother's property could be reclaimed by her parents? Or because he missed her?

Apart from their property-rights, Nordic women are sometimes said to have excelled others in their independence as fighters, seeresses, and poets; but only the poetesses stand up to investigation.

Where female soldiers are taken for granted, their choice of arms is not seen as a mark of individuality; but in the viking age it would have been. There are one Norwegian and two Danish examples of women buried with military accoutrements, and these need not be interpreted as amazons: there could have been a gender-reversal twist to the burial rites, of which we know nothing, a plan to offer arms for a dead husband overseas, or a plain assertion of rank regardless of sex. Conversely, there is no reason why women who fought as men should not have been buried as women;[13] there could have been dozens of temporary hell-cats who ended up as respectable housewives. Later sagas and histories told of 'shield-maidens' in days of old, and the traditions must be based on something. Clover and Clunies Ross have argued that they derive from a social fact of twelfth century Iceland, where the laws refer to a 'ring-lady' (*baugrygr*), who was the only surviving daughter of a sonless father, and so entitled to collect or pay compensation for wrong as if she were a son. This orphaned claimant's masculine role, they claim, begot the warrior-maiden of ON literature;[14] ignoring the objection that even in Iceland vindicating a claim did not necessarily mean hand-to-hand combat in full armour. Jochens is more credible, when she ascribes these stories 'to male fantasy and day-dreaming during war abroad, later recalled for entertainment', during the long winters – but for male fantasy any season will do. Women certainly accompanied the ninth-century armies in the British Isles and the Continent, and the Frankish poet Abbo of St Germain gave the Dane-women at Paris some fine contemptuous hexameters, to drive their men back into battle; but if there were actual fighting units of women, or single swords women with the men, they did not attract the attention from foreign observers they merited. The skalds show that scaring women was a routine proof of manliness, as when Valgardr á Velli celebrated king Harald Hardrada's raid on Denmark in 1045/46: Harald *sailed off the Scanian coast*, and he *scared ladies* (brides) *dear to the Danes*, while not far from Roskilde *grieving households dragged themselves*

13 See *Women who became Men* by Antonia Young (London 2000) on the Albanian women who take on men's roles and dress, possibly as substitutes for males killed or in hiding.

14 Clunies Ross 1994, 120–2, but compare the brief and balanced assessment by Præstgaard Andersen in MESCA 403–04, and her *Skjøldmøer-en kvindemyte* (Copenhagen 1982), and Jesch 1990, 105–6.

silently to the woods in flight.[15] To frighten the women was to dishonour the men; they were clearly not expected to hit back.

But they might still get the upper hand in scaring, when they became prophetic; at any rate women's primacy as seers and sorceresses, adept in the art of *seiðr*, is often asserted as an inheritance from the shrieking enthusiasts who fired the ancient Germans to do or die. *Seiðr* was described in thirteenth-century Iceland as mediation in trance between this and another world through possession by another being. By that date it was considered diabolical by the clergy, unwholesome and effeminate by the laity, and very convenient for the plots of sagas. It was practised by women, and by men, and had been perfected, along with other forms of magic, by Lapps. How necromancy was conducted in the earlier viking age has been much disputed. Snorri claimed in Ynglinga Saga (chapter 7) that in early times *seiðr* 'could discover men's fates, and things that had not yet happened, and could also bring about men's deaths or misfortunes or bad luck and deprive men of their wits or strength and give these to others':[16] a useful trick for a girl to know, but Snorri derived it from Odin, and contemporary sources refer to both male and female sorcerers, like other accounts down to the present day. Anscar found a male oracle at work in Sweden in the ninth century, and Adam of Bremen wrote of the 'arts of male magicians' in Norway in the eleventh. Jochens' theory that 'the performance of magic was originally reserved for women', and that this was reflected in the generally high status of all women in 'Germanic' societies, runs counter to this kind of evidence, and to the warlocks of the sagas and the laws. She suggests that 'nordic churchmen . . . could conceive of men only in positions of power and authority, whether good or bad' and so recognized wizards but not witches; moreover, before christianity, *seiðr* had become taboo for males because it meant surrender to another being, and was therefore a sort of spiritual unmanning.[17]

It is not clear what problem such speculation is supposed to solve. All over the world there are, and have been, male and female magi-

15 Skj IB, 360–58, from Snorri's Harald saga, chs 19–21, and from Mks 13 and 14, trans. Gade, 151.

16 trans. Clunies Ross 1994, 200. The job-description would fit the seeress of *Vǫluspá*, but that is a millenarian fiction of late date, not a guide to social reality. Sybilline prophecies circulated freely in medieval christendom, confined to no one social context.

17 Jochens 1996, 72–3, 129–36. And cf. Clunies Ross 1994, 210 and VA ch. 18, AB 4, 30. Göransson 1999 deduces the vital importance of priestesses from images in the Oseberg tapestries. Solli (1997–98) stresses the vital importance of the queer male shaman.

cians and seers. It would be surprising if things had been any different among the Norse peoples of this period, and the hints of all-powerful sybils among the ancient Germans are beside the point; there are no such hints in the sources here.[18] Indeed, if women had any kind of exclusive rights to necromancy, it is odd that so many should have been willing to renounce them in favour of christianity, the faith that did not 'allow a witch to live': career opportunities for convert women were few, until very much later, with the founding of the first nunneries in the twelfth century.

Some poetesses rejected the new order. Among them the Icelander Steinunn was remembered for her verses against the priest Thangbrand, who was shipwrecked on leaving the island *c.*985: elegantly translated by Jesch (1990, 166–7). She and two others are tantalizing proof that women could be skalds in the pagan period, but to conclude that their work fitted in to a 'female-dominated cultic environment' is to overlook the strong personal flavour of all verse in that period. The now-common assertion that *Vǫluspá* must be by a woman because the verse is attributed to a sorceress would make great girls of Virgil, Shakespeare, and Racine, who used the same device. Norse poetesses deserve to be treated as individuals, not as spokespersons. A lady called Hildr Hrólfsdóttir was alleged by Snorri to have made verses threatening a king with loss of cattle, if he outlawed a man called Hnef; the poem has been forced into a tale of how king Harald Harfagr got rid of Hrolf Ganger, an evident fiction, but the words are 'genuinely old', according to Jesch (1990, 163–4), and fiery. Jórunn 'the female poet' (*skáldmaer*) is credited with four impressively convoluted stanzas about a reconciliation between that king and one or two of his sons, negotiated by the male poet Guthormr Sindri ('the un-blind'): the context is unclear, but perhaps *c.*940, and remarkable as a tribute to 'the power of poetry' (Jesch) rather than a eulogy of the war-lord, although couched in warlike language. None of the poetesses' verses concern 'typically female preoccupations': their authors were making good in a male-dominated profession. However, the small amount of their surviving work may be due to the fact that eulogy and satire were preferred by later scribes to other genres embraced by women.[19]

18 Cf. Jochens 1996, 210, and Lecouteux 1984, 247; in prose sources female necromancy is the exception rather than the rule. Studies of later witchcraft in Iceland and Scandinavia are many, but see Mitchell 1997 on the imported element in later Nordic demonology. On viking age techniques see below, chapter 12, pp. 288–90. On Vǫluspa as finale for seeress-culture see Kress 1988.

19 See Straubhaar in MESCA, 594–6, and Jesch 1993, 168–75 on the difficulty of assessing the female contribution to Eddic verse.

How far men were type-cast by gender is not easy to determine, beyond the broad hints given by their grave-goods. They were not expected to spin or weave; but as women could rule, inherit, own, compose verse, and mediate between gods and mankind, those functions were not exclusively masculine. The 'iron-age good' of which Herschend writes[20] evidently allotted the responsibility of leading, wealth-getting and fighting chiefly to men; but the Gotland picture-stones seem to show some males dressed as women, and it seems that these societies also accepted 'ritual inversion' as normal on some great occasions. There was no doubt as much gender-stereotyping then, as after the conversion; but it clearly ran along somewhat different lines.

Servitude

Servitude means loss of personality and rights in the legal sense, but need not involve the suppression of individuality. In most medieval societies, slaves either possessed a measure of economic freedom, as smallholders living near, but apart from their lords; or the prospect of gaining the lesser dependency of the freedman; or of rising within the household to responsibility for goods and animals.[21] At Hørning in North Jutland a stone was erected soon after 1000 to read: TOKI THE SMITH CUT THE STONE AFTER THURKIL GUTHMUND'S SON, WHO GAVE HIM GOLD AND FREEDOM – the boast of an ex-slave or ex-captive who could afford the noblest proof of worth. Toki the Smith inscribed another stone for Rifla and his father, at Grensten (DR 91): GOD HELP THEIR SOUL, perhaps because they too had helped him. Thorkil Gudmundsson may have emancipated Toki, as a pious deed, like the great ones of Anglo-Saxon England; perhaps the chances of liberation may have improved with the conversion of the owners, and certainly traditions grew up of much harsher slave-régimes in pagan days. Morkinskinna (chapter 37) has king Harald Hardrada reciting verses to remind a profiteering parvenu of the time when his people were thralls, wearing undyed tunics:

Do you recognize this tunic? Cow you must render
To the descendant of kings; And to the descendant of kings
A full-grown ox; Children, and all you gain, you must surrender
To king's descendant, And a pig, and a tame goose. . . .

20 *The Idea of the Good in Late Iron Age Society* (Uppsala 1998).
21 As per Watson 1980, on open and closed slave systems. On viking age slavery within Scandinavia, see Stefan Brink, forthcoming.

Words which belong to the twelfth century, when there were rich men of whom the most terrible words could be uttered: 'There is no information about his pedigree'.

Whether slavery bound the majority in viking age Scandinavia is much debated, and cannot be settled by later anecdotes (e.g. the emancipations of the great chief Erling, described in the Heimskringla *Ólafssaga*), or by reading back from law-codes contrived by such hardliners as the great jurist Andrew Sunesen, archbishop of Lund, who insisted in the Scanian code (chapter 79) that 'wheresoever the lord shall find his runaway slave, be it in the presence of the king or the archbishop, he is rightly allowed to arrest him with violent hands'. Vikings had been zealous slave traders, but they merely profited from long-established systems of slavery in the countries they invaded, or fed the great slave-markets of the Mediterranean and the Middle East; what regimes prevailed within their own lands and colonies is so unclear that they can be described both as enslavers and as emancipators.

'There is no archaeology of bondage': a dictum not much respected by archaeologists. In the Migration Age, they find a small end-room beyond the byre in the remains of Danish and Swedish long-houses, possibly slave-quarters; later on, there are 'accompanied burials' with human remains among the horses and dogs and weapons burnt or interred with the chief, as at Ile de Groix, Balladoole, Hedeby and Oseberg, where the remains are often interpreted as slave-victims, killed for company, as Ibn Fadlan witnessed in Russia.[22] Wamers even deduces 'slave warriors' from the gear of the Hedeby victims, and such men are attested in contemporary Poland and Cordova; but it seems unlikely, with what is known about the recruitment of retinues from the sons of freeholders. Place names with the element *Thrael* (the Trelleborgs are the obvious example) may be reminders of forced labour, rather than slave-gangs, and there is nothing about reconstructions of agrarian systems which either required or ruled out the use of slaves. The capture of women by raiders within Scandinavia is well attested, whether for ransom or servitude. That Valgardr who admired Hardrada's intimidation of women, gloats over what made them afraid:

> *The women were captured. Lock held girl's body. Many women were led by you. Down to the bright ships Fetters bit greedily into the flesh.*

22 Wamers 1995, 156, and Norr 1996 for the little back rooms. Tollin has found from a survey of estates in medieval Småland that from 1050 on, slavery and labour services were characteristic of large (viking-age?) older properties, and smaller farms worked by free family labour appear more recent; *Rågangår, gränshallar och ägoomraden* (English summary), Stockholm 1999. This is like many parts of medieval England.

When it comes to slave hunting and trading outside Scandinavia the sources are abundant, and have been used to good effect by Pelteret (1991 and 1995). Two accounts of what it was like to be caught, the Life of St Findan, and Warner's Satire on Moriuht are especially vivid. Findan was an unlucky pawn in Irish politics. First his sister was taken by vikings, just about the time when they were making a camp at Dublin, as a centre for their sale and blackmail dealings with the Leinstermen. Findan was sent to ransom her, and was himself captured, but the raiders were persuaded to let him go. However, his father fell foul of a local king, and was killed; the king had the son carried off a second time to be rid of him. He was shipped from Leinster to the Orkneys, sold three times en route and then escaped. He had been chained, but he was unshackled when he helped defend his captors' ship in a sea-fight.[23] The complicity of native chiefs and visiting shippers is as stark in this account, as it might be in eighteenth-century West Africa. Findan became a saint; but his fellow-countryman Moriuht escaped from slavery to become a professional poet in Normandy, where his verses earned him the uninhibited contempt of a rival, Warner of Rouen, from whose caustic denigration (of *c*.1000) a poignant picaresque emerges.

He was seized by Danes along with his wife, bound tightly in chains 'like a robber or lunatic', then sent to sea and made to row. His captors beat him; then 'stand round him, admiring the active brute, and pissing on the crown of his bald head. His penis droops, and he is led by his horn, like a goat. He suffers insults, and the part of wife is forced on him, rather than on his wife. Furred like a bear, Moriuht is stripped. You play in front of the sailors, bear, and you score.' The satire lies in the victim's sexual appetite exceeding that of his abusers; he is 'an arse-hole for all, and when penetrated by a penis groans out: Alas! what a poor one!'

They take him overland to Corbridge, the trading station next to Hadrian's Wall. They put him up for sale, under an ivy wreath, and and nuns buy him for only 3d, because of his misshapen figure. But he was expelled from the convent for seducing one sister too many, and sent to sea in an oarless boat, to be captured again by Danes and sold again in Saxony to a widow, for only one bad penny; to start a new life as a sex-machine for both sexes until his emancipation and reunion with his wife and child.[24]

The poem is a more reliable source for the author than for the subject, or butt. On the subject of slavery, or captivity, it suggests:

23 *Vita Findani* (MGH SS xv (i) 502–6).

24 Best edition with translation by C.J. McDonough, *Warner of Rouen: Moriuht, a Norman Latin Poem* (Toronto 1995). See van Houts 1999, 18–21.

1 that it was a misfortune, but worse than that: a humiliation which tainted a man for life, whether he escaped or not, in the eyes of the free-born.
2 that it was a fact of life, and a fit subject for comedy. This highly educated Latinist is convulsed with the idea that slavery is too good for the hairy Hibernian sex-maniac.
3 that transit was worse than servitude ashore. It was much better not to be at the mercy of Nordic sailors, then as now, but in Northumbria and Saxony, Moriuht's chief sorrow was separation from his family; and he managed to get the help of a dowager Norman countess in finding them.
4 Servitude never dented his self-esteem, or effaced his personality; this evidently sharpened Warner's spite, but the little victim of it was a survivor. He had gone through a bad patch, but he had won his way to a happy ending: a ticket to inflict bad verse for a good living on gullible Norman patrons, some of them the grandsons of vikings. He had the last laugh, with his latin.

Four powerful inhibitors of individuality may thus be recognized as social facts, but denied their sway over viking age men and women as conceived of by the hard-shell collectivists. Many threaded their own ways through and between the collectives, either by the sword or their wits. The collectives, and the group-consciousness they generated were not necessarily hostile to individual eccentricity, any more than the schools, monasteries and courts of Christendom. If their members lived by received wisdom and stereotyped models of behaviour, they were like us; not entirely predictable. 'Everywhere the pretence of individuality recurs', says MacNeice (*An Eclogue for Christmas*); and seldom as stridently in any age as in the work of the skalds, or Norse poets.

Poets

Poets made the stereotypes memorable. Their egotism is accepted as a sign of authenticity in the surviving texts (see pp. 308–9) and they have been described by Liberman (following Steblin-Kamensky) as 'the first medieval poets to cross the border of unconscious authorship'[25] whatever that is: evidently a mental affliction which stopped Aldhelm, Cynewulf, Gottschalk and Sedulius Scottus at Immigration. Liberman,

25 'Germanic and Scandinavian Poetry', SS, lxxi, 1998, 105, and MESCA 263. Jochens described Egil's *Sonatorrék* as 'the oldest surviving evidence of the subjectivity of a known individual in the third écriture' (1996, 15): same thing?

and many others, hold that the skalds composed their praise-poems or satires against a background of lost epic and heroic verse, from which they were escaping. They 'learned to say banalities tied to the current moment' and so 'trivialized the information which poetry had conveyed from time immemorial' (the rage of Achilles, the courage of Hector, the arrogance of Agamemnon: plot, scenery, speech) by applying these themes in a heavily contorted form to chiefs either alive or recently dead; and by intruding their own claims to respect.

> *I have killed six steel-rain announcers in all*

bragged Thormoðr Kolbrunarskald (Skj IB 264), of his victims:

> *I am only just thirty now, and I recall the destroying of men I caused their heads to be bitten.*

Egill Skalagrímsson, an Icelander like nearly all of them, was later made the hero of a saga (by Snorri himself, it seems), and became the star of this new tenth-century breed, in retrospect. The saga includes verses (whether or not by Egill) which date from that century, or relate to its events and to the mind of a poet with a distinctive diction and high self-esteem, honed by misfortune. When he praises king Eric Bloodaxe of York (died 952) as an artist in battle *heard-of east across the sea* (i.e. in Norway), he aligns Eric's victories with his own, in the verse business; for it is he who *loads praise on to the ship of thought* and *bears timber from the temple of words*. Later in life, he voiced his sorrow at the death of his sons, and evoked a range of feeling as wide of that found in the Carolingian or Irish poets. Kormákr Ǫgmundarson's adulterous thoughts on the Steingerðr he loved, and his contempt for her husband; Bjǫrn Hítdaelakappa's bitterness over his former betrothed Oddny's married sex-life; Egill's disgust at his own infirmities; show rampant self-regard among the gifted colonials, if they can be relied on as viking-age utterances in their present form.[26] This local flowering of what Lindow calls 'semantically charged word-play' won the Icelanders a hereditary claim to be court-poets off the island, and a political voice as satirists on it and off it. Personality breaks through much of it: dark, morose, Óttarr; uneasy, volatile, outspoken Sigvatr, St Olave's friend; Eyvinðr, the competitive court-vegetable; Hallfreðr, the trouble-maker; emerge from the verses, not only from prose fiction.

26 For Steingerðr's ankles (*this yearning will not die from me all my life*), see Turville Petre's trans. (1976, 47), and Faulkes' (Sn.E 70) for Ormr Steinthorisson's hope that *the beer plank's body and mine to one room be brought after death*. Beer-plank, = carrier of refreshment = woman.

Their job was to celebrate 'institutionalized violence' in stereotypical phrases for the delight of military paymasters and their retinues. Self-awareness was not the result of withdrawal from collective fury or boisterousness, but of sharing it. As the chief bends waves, winds, men, women, and peoples to his will, so the poet wrestles the whole experience into metre, and addresses the chief (at least, until the 1030s) by the second person singular: thou, like an equal. Even when he addresses women, he remembers his importance. 'When he says, *O Lady*, he really means *Notice me. Admire me, adore me, advertise me. Look lady, how good I am at being a man*', as when Thjóðolfr Arnorsson breaks off his praise of the Dano-Norwegian king Magnus (1040s) to boast of his own winnings at the battle of Helganes:

> *I bought home a Götaland shield and a mail-coat as well . . . that was my allocation . . . beautiful weapons I got (but I told the tranquil lady that before). I got a helmet there.*[27]

When the chief versifies, vanity soars. If the verses attributed to the Orkney earl Einarr are genuine, and *c.*930 in date, he bragged of his superiority not only over his enemies, but over his brothers, and defied the Rogaland king Harald himself:

> *I shall not fear that; I have hewn a cut in Harald's shield –*

the eloquent bastard claims to be as good as anyone.[28]

The poets also revealed their own feelings about the choice between the gods. In *Sonatorrek*, Egill reviewed his relations with Odin, a family friend who had betrayed him by letting his family perish: *I grew trustful, believing in him, until . . . the prince of victory broke friendship* and so no longer deserves offerings. Nevertheless, *if I reckon it better*, Odin did give him his poetic skill, and his powers of perception. He is not defied or renounced, any more than the god of Job. The troublesome Hallfreðr (*c.*1000) was also reluctant to ditch One-eye: *all our race has made poems in praise of Odin. I recall the highly-valued practise of people, my ancestors*. Hallfred's patron, Olaf Tryggvason (995–9) was baptized, and so *reluctant I turn my hatred on the first husband of Frigg* (Odin) *because I serve Christ; for*

27 Cited in Frank in PISMA, 69, and the Thjóðolfr from Skj IB, 337. See Matiushina 1998 on the aggression in the love-verses.

28 Mundal 1993 accepts these verses as authentic, but they read like the Later anti-overlord chip on the Orcadian shoulder. Whoever composed them thought it a suitable brag; Poole (1991, 161–72) argues that the verses were originally a dramatic monologue about Einarr, later attributed to him for narrative purposes.

the rule of Odin pleased the poet well.[29] As Lange put it: 'Hallfreð's christianity was called Olaf'. It went deeper with Sigvatr, poet of the next Olaf, the saint (*c*.1015–28), who spoke of his patron as his daughter's godfather:

> *O Lord, help him who my daughter home (hallowed be thy name) from heathendom made appear, and gave her the name Tofa.*

After that, the poet was 'implicitly included in the royal family by what for him was a sacred relationship'; Olaf's fall from power and death in battle made no difference, as the king became his friend in heaven, and by then Sigvatr had been on pilgrimage. Despite the inherited diction and vocabulary, saturated with heathenism, despite the special relationship with Odin, inventor of poetry and bringer of inspiration, 'the court scalds seem to have been quick to take to the new religion', according to Fidjestøl: true of the eleventh, not of the tenth century, which makes them rather slow.

How and why this burst of poetic individuality lit up the butchers, buggers and braggarts is unknown. The switch from the celebrating of dead heroes, as in the verses on the Rök stone, *c*.800, to boosting the living can be connected with increased competitiveness among rulers in the more intense and far-reaching raids of the 830s onwards, or with the more contemporary tastes of the retinues which served them. All that survives is a selection of what was preserved orally in Iceland; whether what survives represents the court entertainment of the whole viking age is doubtful. The incentive to egotism is also there in the competitive word-play of the derision (*senna*) and comparison (*mannjafnadr*): found in Eddic poetry and sagas as literary conventions, but have often been traced by speculation to the firesides of viking chiefs,[30] when the drengs had drunk, or to the meetings of champions at play time. The *Maldon* poet made the raiders of 991 exchange mockery with the English across the water, and one of the first Danes to make an impression on westerners, king Godofred, was given a vaunt or taunt by Charlemagne's biographer, Einhard: 'he was so puffed up with vain hope that he promised himself power over the whole of Germany... he was boasting that he would arrive at Aachen, where the king was holding his court'. The loud mouths of the Danes were notorious; it was easy for the Franks to claim that they had killed another king Godofred at a parley near Cleves in 885

29 Trans. Turville Petre 1976, 72; and see Fidjestøl on the *erfidrápa* on Olaf, in VIRE (1993) 111–12: (ibid., 114–15 on Sigvat's verses below.

30 Ellis Davidson 1983 for retrospective recreation of flyting; but these were not technical terms, just words for quarreling and comparing.

because 'he had infuriated them by abuse and scornful words'.[31] The links between this verbal aggressiveness and skaldic verse are tenuous, but not invisible. At any rate, the Franks and Anglo-Saxons had found other forms for their self-assertion, in latin and christian culture.

But what of those who moved outside the collectives, rather than rising to fame within them? Or were moved out, by collective decisions?

The Mad

The most famous lunatics of the viking age are the *berserkir* (probably 'bear-skin dressers'), thought in later times to have formed units of shock-troops in war, and bands of desperadoes in peace. They were a real enough nuisance in twelfth-century Iceland to be mentioned in the laws as men prone to periodic frenzies, for which they were outlawed, along with those who failed to restrain them.[32] In sagas they appear as fighters of sociopathic habit, often solitary, malign, uncanny and gruesome; but what relationship this recognizable, and fairly universal type, bore to the realities of viking times is not known. Airy fantasies have arisen, of Migration Age bear-cult brotherhoods reflected in Sutton Hoo helmet-plates, Torslunda ornaments, names in *bjorn*, mumming masks, epic stereotypes, and any remotely ursine antiquity; but the only reference to viking age *berserkir* which might be contemporary is in the dubious *Haraldskvæði* about Harald Hárfagr (*c*.930?), as a description of one of the warrior bands in his retinue (see pp. 54–5). If there were raving psychopaths in fur suits, or naked, among the Nordic raiders into Western Europe, it is strange that the annalists and preachers failed to notice them. On the other hand, their exciting afterlife, in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century imagination, deserves a full study on its own.[33]

Effeminacy and Homosexuality

Effeminacy and homosexuality appear in the maledictions appended to some rune-stones; as present in sagas and laws of the later period

31 *Vita Karoli* ch. 14, and for the killing of Godofrid, the Annals of Fulda (trans. Reuter, 97).

32 *Grágas* ch. 7 (trans. Foote, 39); the penalty was 1/2lb silver and 3 yrs exile.

33 Simek 1993, *berserkir* summarizes the warrior-cult theory, which is developed in all directions by H. Blaney in *The Berserkers* (Colorado 1972) and in MESCA 37–38, with useful bibliography, and see Breen 1997 and 1999.

they have been studied by Meulengracht Sørensen in a work translated by Joan Turville Petre as *The Unmanly Man* (Odense 1983); from which it appears that in Iceland, as elsewhere, unmanliness was seen as disgraceful, and was epitomized by the man who passively accepted anal penetration. If the Moriuht poem is anything to go by (see p. 26) this fate could be expected by the less valuable captives, which may account for the contempt earned by those who sought it voluntarily.

> RÆTA BE WHOMSOEVER DAMAGES THIS STONE OR DRAGS IT AWAY TO COMMEMORATE ANOTHER

is written on the huge Glavendrup memorial (DR 209): but whether this refers to the scorn roused by the *raeti* (passive sodomite), or to the fear of being sodomized involuntarily is not clear.[34] The place of the unmanly in everyday life is not shown by these formulae, or by the later sagas and laws. After all, these men were sailors, who spent time together, so that manly-man homosexuality, between consenting adults may have been as common as at other periods; not in the least remarkable, and so not remarked upon in sources. It has been asserted that in viking times, the warrior reserved his love for other males, and was therefore disinclined to express love for women in verse, hence the heterosexual deficit in Skaldic poems; a chain of reasoning weakened still further by the notion that the later romantic verse (*mannsöngr*) of the Icelanders developed from songs directed at female slaves to humiliate their owners, not to express genuine passion.[35] This is all speculative. Whatever bond there was between males can only be inferred from later or earlier analogies, such as the feeling which in historic times reigned between the Finnish headman (*noita*) and his corps of pure young men sent out to reconnoitre forest with a view to sanctifying the place suitable for burn-beating. As for the unmanly, whether sodomized or not, the seriousness of the accusation would have rallied other males of the family to their defence in law; the accuser might well be found guilty of defamation (*nið*) and made to pay (see pp. 284–5).

34 In one Olaf Tryggvason anecdote, buggery is treated as the sort of mishap that occurs at sea; and Perkins (1999, 199–200) finds in the sealore of Agdanes, the cape at the mouth of Trondheim fjord, traces of a sex-inversion rite to appease the local land-spirit.

35 Jochens in FROSA (1992) and Jesch 1991, 157 on this. *Mannsǫngvar* are usually post-Reformation ballads; see Matiushina 1998, and Tvengsberg 1995, 144 on the Finnish boy scouts. Solli has proposed Odin as a sort of cosmic queer, but given the nature of the evidence, it is hard to disentangle he-men in frocks, nancy-boys, and ritual perverts. See her 'Odin — the queer?' UOÅ 1997–8, 7–42.

Outlaws

It is often said that outlawry was the fullest possible separation of the living individual from the community among all the northern peoples, especially in the pre-christian period. The Nordic evidence is all later than this period. The saga of Grettir the Outlaw, the laws of the Icelanders and the Danish military law concocted by Sweyn Aggeson in the 1180s[36] relate to other times and places. However, where wrong can only be righted by agreement between interested groups of responsible males, it follows that the irresponsible wrong-doer can expect to be killed out of hand by someone, or excluded from the protection of a group: his family, or kin, in this case. So it was in Iceland down to the 1280s, when the king of Norway became the vindicator of public peace; until then, an unamended wrong led to the perpetrators being outcast as 'wolf', 'wilderness man', 'forest man'. If he stayed on the island he had to avoid settlements, live with beasts and be hunted like them: a civil death, from the collectivist viewpoint. In practice, exclusion meant different things, depending on who had been offended, rather than on the obduracy of the offender, on whether the offender's family backed him or the other families, on whether it was worth offending them even if he were outlawed; and if anyone tried hunting the outlaw, they had better outnumber or outfight him. As described in sagas, outlawry was really a way of identifying losers in a competitive society, rather than an irreversible doom on the anti-social. Outlaws were debarred from the courts, but could be recruited by chiefs as hit-men, casual labour, and low-grade clients (*flugumenn*); they could emigrate to Norway or Greenland and start again. This was the situation in one peculiar commonwealth of legalistic freemen at one period of its history; conditions were and had been different everywhere else, and what prevailed in viking-age countries can only be inferred.[37] Three relevant clues emerge:

1 Among both Danes and Swedes, the infliction of capital punishment and penal servitude is well attested: for rapists, robbers, slanderers and adulterers, according to Adam of Bremen (4, 21).

36 The workman-like specification of outlawries in e.g. *Baugatal* or ring-payment section of *Grágas* (trans. Foote 1983, 85) can be compared with the fanciful reconstructions of Danish custom in Saxo book 10 and Aggesen: *The Works* trans. E. Christiansen (London 1992) 42–3, 45.

37 Amory 1992 summarizes the way outlaws lived in Iceland, and see Gade in MESCA 116 for later variations elsewhere. Breisch (1994, ch. 4) argued that outlawry in Iceland degenerated from serious expulsion to a mere degradation.

Outlawry was evidently not the ultimate threat of an offended collective in those parts.

2 Being 'outside law' is a relative condition when law can mean local custom, a chief's will or power, a district, or agreement in a specific case (see pp. 256–7). The outlaw differed from the man escaping from a powerful magnate, or kin-group, or from the litigant slow in meeting obligations but not a full defaulter, only by degree. The Anglo-Saxons borrowed the term from the Danes as a convenient way of describing the banned freeman under a system heavily dependent on accountability imposed by royal decree; no such accountability emerged in Scandinavia for centuries, and it may be that full public proscription developed equally late.[38]

3 Until then, the gravity of outlawry can only have reflected the authority of the outlawing bodies; rather restricted geographically, until the development of the five big Norwegian legal jurisdictions (eleventh century?), even if dreadful in the suspension of land-right within the district.

The outlaw cannot have been the least fortunate of outcasts in regions of widespread mobility, where fugitives from hunger, war, slavery and sacrifice padded through the forests.

Suicide

Suicide is not always a matter of individual choice, and no doubt the troop of Norsemen who killed themselves in 925 to avoid being killed by Frankish pursuers[39] included some who died reluctantly; but most would have preferred to avoid the fate of the vikings hanged at Winchester thirty years earlier, after surrendering to king Alfred. A group suicide also appears in the *Landnamabók* legend (chapter 8) of the Irish slaves of the founding colonists, who murdered their master, fled to the Westmanna islands, and were surprised by an avenging posse: 'they jumped over a cliff that has been called after them ever since'. Warrior codes usually condone voluntary self-killing, and the Anglo–Saxon annalist who noted that an apparently

38 As in Denmark, where it is difficult to trace before the royal decree of 1200 against obdurate homicides.

39 Flodoard, *Annales*, 925 (PL cxxxv, 435c); deemed a case of 'black-and-white honour' by Alexander Murray in *Suicide in the Middle Ages* i (Oxford 1998), 62. Flodoard suggests that it was not dishonour or defeat they feared, but massacre.

Nordic 'king Sigeferth killed himself' in 964, also reveals that 'his body is buried at Wimborne', the burial place of king Alfred's elder brother; rather than being staked or burnt or tossed into a bog?[40] Later traditions are not unanimous on suicide. When the Norwegian cleric who wrote *Ágrip c.*1180, tells how the great ruler Hákon jarl had made his slave Kark cut his throat for him, while he was hiding from his enemies in a pigsty, he explained the deed with another tale of how one of Hakon's ancestors had renounced kingship so that he would be entitled to hang himself as a plain earl: which he did.[41] But if kings were not meant to kill themselves, legends of how king Jormunrek did so, and how kingly Odin tricked king Dómaldi into hanging himself need some explaining; preferably not by Germanist theory. The supposed pan-Germanic tradition of self-slaughter, (embracing the suttee of widows and daughters, and the anticipation of fate by the old and useless, and fallen heroes and retainers loyal to slain lords) is unsupported by any reliable evidence of what actually happened in this period and is usually padded out with fiction or anachronistic references to ancient Germans,[42] or later folklore. There is no shortage of that. At Nimwegen in 1679 Sir William Temple was assured by a count Oxenstierna that in Sweden there was a rocky bay called Odin's Hall, where, in former times 'men who were sick of Diseases they esteemed mortal or incurable, or else grown invalid with Age...and fear to die meanly and basely in their Beds, they usually caused themselves to be brought to the nearest Part of these Rocks, and from there threw themselves down into the Sea'.[43] The retainer loyal unto death has sometimes been detected in the 'accompanied burials' of great chiefs, and Ibn Fadlan certainly reported that the 'better men' in the retinue of the Rus kagan were ready to sacrifice themselves for him; but he did not say how, or when. Battle would seem to be the obvious place, as recorded on the Hedeby stones:

> KING SWEYN FIXED THIS STONE AFTER SKARTHI HIS RETAINER WHO...MET DEATH AT HITHABU (DR 3).

40 King Sigeferth had come to Eadred and Edgar's courts with some Welsh rulers; nothing more is known.

41 Trans. Driscoll, 24–7.

42 So Engfield 1972.

43 An example followed by Temple's own son John (William III's secretary at war) off London Bridge ten years later. That actually happened; Odin's Hall, and the myth of Odin's hanging himself and claiming suicide victims belong to imaginary worlds, of unverifiable relevance to viking days.

Agents and Patients

Historians reward the best efforts of the eccentrics and the egoists with a place in the line-up.[44] Only the palaeopathologists get down to irreducible singularity, as in the case of the 'majesty of buried Denmark'. Bones from Jelling church, now supposed to be king Gorm's (*c*.958), reveal a big-headed, heavy-browed fellow, with 'anomalous dentition', but sound limbs; about 5 foot 8 inches (172 cm) tall, and probably under fifty when he died, despite his later nickname, The Old. The bones of his son Harald and his grandson Sweyn lie so far unmolested, at Roskilde or Lund, and what is left of Canute may lie under the chancel of Winchester cathedral, or in a green box above it; but Canute's sister and her son Sweyn II (1046–75) were dug up at Roskilde and reconstructed by F.C. Hansen in 1914. Estrith (baptized Margaret) was one of the strong ladies who outlived their husbands and promoted their sons: Adam of Bremen says she was married twice, once to a Norman duke, once to 'duke Wolf', and Ulf Jarl drifted into saga and church legend as the hardly innocent victim of Canute's early morning vindictiveness. His widow, some fifty years later, had her grandfather's buck teeth, a lop-sided face, jutting jaw and crooked back that robbed her of $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches; a badly-mended fracture of the upper left arm gave her months of pain. Her tall son ($6\frac{1}{2}$ foot, when the average was below 5 foot 8 inches) bore the marks of his adventures as a self-made king: three broken ribs, an awkward twist to the back, head skewed to the right, reminders of hard fighting. With his big flat head, receding forehead, beetle brow, long nose and slight overbite, he looked majestic if he stood still, but walked knock-kneed and flat-footed – 'not so pronounced that he got a nickname thereby';[45] but in the Harald sagas of Heimskringla and Morkinskinna a rough-tongued farmer's wife calls him 'both lame and cowardly'. Like his mother's, his brain capacity was above the modern average (by over a gill: 150 cm^3) and Adam of Bremen, who knew him, found him an intelligent and persuasive talker. His affability, lechery and wit were written about by Icelanders over a century after his death, and the dynasty kept his memory green in Denmark. He was christened Magnus, tried to conquer Norway and

44 There are some, like Erik Ringmar, who attribute even major political events to the fulfilment of the individual's self-imagined identity. But the case he offers, of Gustavus Adolphus, is that of complementary and fairly stereotypical identities driving king and people to war: see *Identity, Interest and Action* (Cambridge 1996).
45 Hansen 1914, 19: a slim outsize folio illustrated with drawings of the remains and reconstructions of the faces.

England, and failed; but he and his mother were generally good friends to the clergy, and he left behind him seven episcopal sees which became the foundation-stones of a post-viking-age kingdom.

For those two, words and even biographies can be fitted to the bones with some confidence; for the rest, it is mostly speculation.[46] As with a Dane who died about fifty or less years before Sweyn, in the new royal town of Lund, where his bones were found in 1990. Not all of them, because this man had been laid on his back with his hands and feet tied to posts, so that they could be severed more neatly with cuts from above. Nevertheless, it took two blows to take off the left hand above the wrist, and two to slice through the right shin. It is not clear whether he was already dead, or died as a result of this treatment. The hands and feet were not present in the grave, and a similar burial nearby lacked the skull, although the lopped limbs were thrown in. The excavator concluded that they had been dishonourably executed, and buried below dung-heaps for some offence against the king: this was 'an early manifestation of royal supremacy at a time when the state was not fully established.'[47] A pat conclusion, since the poets congratulated kings for mutilating plain thieves and vikings; so it is possible to link these deaths to the birth of the Danish state, one way or another, if you must. Whatever they did, they deserve better than to be merged with collective consciousnesses and group mentalities congenial to the ant, the bee, and the cultural historian.

46 Arup's 'Kong Svend 2's biografi' Scandia 1931 was the first true source-critical essay on this ruler; now, more and more is being deduced from more and more VA skeletons. Sellevold, Lund Hansen, and Balslev Jørgensen 1984 was a useful survey. Most of the medieval history of Greenland is from skeletons; see Lynnerup in VINAS, 285–93.

47 Carelli 1993–4 offers a careful analysis in English.