

Valhall and Helgafell

SYNCRETISTIC TRAITS OF THE OLD NORSE RELIGION

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The northern regions of the Scandinavian countries provide us with an abundance of rock-carvings dating from the early Stone Age and its hunting culture. Here fishermen and hunters of the arctic and sub-arctic regions have left, to our astonished eyes, a wealth of pictorial representations of the birds, game and fish on which they depended for their livelihood. The carvings have evolved from realistic art approaching symbolism, and with definite traits of abstract symbols which could only have been developed among a group of specialists in charge of religion and magic: Early signs, we believe, of that interesting individual in the arctic-circumpolar area—the shaman.

The pictorial material, which reveals to us the attitude of the Stone Age man towards his game and the surrounding forces, extends from its obvious northern strongholds southwards along the coast of Norway, and inland over the mountains to the southern regions. In Norway, the rock carvings from the hunting-culture meet and mix with another set of pictures approaching from the south: the rock carvings of the first farmers. This encounter of the two basic streams of culture in our pre-history might be read from rock carvings of, for example, the Oslo-fjord region.

The pictures from the advancing farming culture show to us the cup-signs, the foot-prints and the sun-symbols, all important signs for securing the presence or the good-will of the powers that were arbiters of cattle and grain for the benefit of the farmer. A multitude of men, sun-ships, volteurs and pictures of wooden ploughs provide us with an insight into important ideas and symbols of this new discovery that made men settle around their grain-fields: agriculture.

We are accustomed to interpreting this early meeting of religions in our

northern territory as a meeting between the faith, the beliefs and the magic of two essentially different societies: The northern predominantly nomadic hunters and fishermen, and the southern more settled farmers—who practiced the herding of cattle and the cultivation of grain,—the meeting of two different socio-economic systems, each having a religion rooted in and motivated by these systems.

Evidently, one of the more important features of the agricultural religion approaching from the south, was the belief in the prolonged existence of the dead in the enormous grave-mounds that were erected for the benefit of the dead and for themselves. Ancestral worship must have been one of the basic characteristics of the expanding agricultural system which was slowly penetrating northwards from Denmark and from southern Sweden.

As hunting and farming intermingled into a socio-economic structure, characteristic of our societies in later ages, the same intermingling must also have been characteristic of the religious sphere. How this really happened is not easy to discern today. The well established taboo-language used by the western Scandinavian farmer when at sea, and the “offering” of parts of the game—the “Ullins øyra”—when he hunted in the forest, are telling features of long-established practices that insured the coexistence of ancient religious attitudes.

The religion of the Viking age, the pre-Christian faith, also presents itself as a syncretism. It is quite peculiarly evident from the tradition surrounding the origin of the gods in Åsgard. The gods behind the palisade of this mythological dwelling place were of two kinds, the result of an exchange of hostages after war between the *æsir* and the *vanir*. From the flock of *vanir* came the two fertility-gods: Njörðr and Freyr to dwell in Åsgard and be accepted there on equal terms with the other gods around the “allfather”, Othin.

This quite remarkable information, concerning the syncretism of the eddic religion, is generally interpreted as a historic reminiscence of a contrast between a fertility religion, and a more aristocratic and warlike religion attached to the cult of Othin. The fertility religion then is often conceived of as old traits belonging to the indigenous population of Scandinavia, while the Othin-cult as something which was introduced by the same innovations that brought the Indo-European boat-axe people to our part of the world.

Othin, with his Valkyries and his host of fallen warriors, is decidedly much better suited to the picture of a militant group of warlike agriculturalists, than to our concepts of the state of the earlier indigenous farmers and hunters.

Our problem, as far as the religion of the Edda and the Viking Age is concerned, is not whether it is a syncretismus or not: This is quite obviously the case. But our concern is with the more complicated question as to which components this syncretistic religion is made up of.

The tradition handed down to us from the 12th century by Snorre Sturlason, that old literary master of mythology, religion and history, distinguishes between two intermingling streams. Again we are tempted to interpret these streams as being attached to two, different socio-economic systems, not opposed in principle as the hunters and the farmers of the Stone Age, but this time intruders from the south with a high degree of military organisations with horses and with new tools. But these conclusions are partly drawn from the fact that Othin-Wothan is well known, over a wider area, among Germanic tribes. To what extent traits attributed to this chief god among the æsir are constitutive to this reverend god-father, or are a result of syncretistic processes taking place on northern soil, we do not really know.

To state it bluntly, we know the result of the process that created the heathen religion which reigned in our countries at the time Christianity was introduced here, but we are highly bewildered when faced with the task of describing the syncretistic process itself, and the religions that were a part of it. This is true despite our abundant material of mythological poetry, legends and 13th century information. This too, despite our extremely favorable situation of being in possession of the exiting amount of theoforic place-names.

As far as the Othin-religion is concerned, we also have some knowledge from other Germanic tribes. In his later occurrence, he appears as the leader of "Die wilde Jagd", chasing through the sky with his unearthly followers over the forests of Germany. But the place-names in our northern countries are not abounding in witnesses in accordance with the ancient respect and popularity of this Othin. To the contrary, he is a rare guest in the theoforic place-names, and his occurrence in this material grows sparser the farther north we come. We do not have many names of the pattern indicated by

Odense and *Onsøy*. In this way the Allfather does not seem to have belonged to the kind of gods that were popular among farmers, or esteemed in such a way that he was able to impress his name on farms and place-names to a greater extent.

The basic facts about the structure of this, as we believe, more warlike and aristocratic religion, advancing north from the south, are not known to us. It is all hidden in a vapour of assumptions and conclusions arrived at from archeology, historical reminiscences and the linguistically-based theory of the origins and migrations of the Indo-Europeans: We know the syncretistic result, but not the components that went into the making of this Old Norse religion. Much would therefore be gained, if we could find methods and material that could establish or supplement our opinions—not as regards the syncretistic result, but as regards the pre-stages of the Old Norse religion. It is logical then, that it would be important to obtain a picture of that component which went into the syncretism of the later ages, that component might be regarded as *not* generally characteristic of those southern impulses. If we could advance arguments concerning features of this indigenous religious pre-stage, we would also be in a better position to isolate essential aspects of the Othin-religion.

Deeply rooted in the structure of the Othin-religion is the belief that he is the leader of the *einherjar*, the dead warriors living with him in Valhall, and training for the last battle with the Fenris-wolf and the Mithgard-serpent. The idea of life in the "here-after" is generally one of the constitutive traits of a religion, and the concept of the satisfying, warlike eternal life for the host of the dead at the abundant table of Othin, is one of the central aspects of the Old Norse faith.

Intimately connected with this concept, and supplementing it, is the picture of the dead carried away by illness or old-age, having their eternal, shadowy existence in the underworld with Lokis daughter, the blue-black Hel.

We believe this division of the fates of men in the "here-after" to be logically bound up with the warlike structure of the old society, inspiring the warriors to take suffering and death with equanimity. Another functional aspect of the conception of the existence of the dead, is the curious fact that those who died as maidens went to the courts of the fertility goddess,

Freyja. But this might have yet another basis in decidedly northern beliefs, as the unmarried maidens in western Scandinavian regions are intimately attached to the Northern Lights: The fate of the unmarried maiden is that of dancing with the Aurora Borealis: "dansa på verljaset".¹

The abode of the dead with Othin, with Freya or Hel is part of the Old Norse mythological lore, but remarkably enough, according to the tradition left to us in the Icelandic sagas, we are also made aware of the fact that in this important area, there were other beliefs: One of the emigrating chieftains from western Norway, Torolv Mostrarskjegg, from Moster in Hordaland, was an ardent adherent of Thor. When he left Norway for Iceland, he carried the poles of his "high-seat" with him. Thrown overboard, they came to the coast at what was later Thorsnes in Breidafjorden—this to indicate where the new farm should be established.

"On this peninsula there is a mountain. In this mountain Torolv had such faith, that nobody was supposed to look in that direction without having washed himself. Nothing should be killed on that mountain, neither cattle nor people, if they did not perish by themselves. He called this mountain *Helgafell*, the 'holy mountain', and he believed that he would go there when he died, and all his relations there on the peninsula."²

Seen in relation to the abode of the dead otherwise described in the sources containing the Othin-religion, this tradition concerning *Helgafell*, the "holy mountain" in the *Eyrbyggja Saga*, is of great importance. The mountain is also described as actually opening to the dead son of Torolv, when he drowns while out fishing. A herdsman, out with his sheep, was witness to it:

"The mountain opened on the northern side. He saw great fires in the mountain, and he heard great noises and the chattering over the drinking-horns. When he listened, to try to catch what they said, he overheard that Torstein Torskabit and his followers were greeted, and it was said that he should take his place in the other high-seat, facing his ancestors."³

Quite evidently, the hall in the Holy Mountain is the hall of the ancestors

who have already passed away, and the newcomer is granted the honor of being second in rank in the warm and welcoming company. And this is no shadowy existence with the blue-black Hel, nor is it a Christian place of underworld torment: It is a place where it is good for the deceased to arrive, even abundant drinking is thought to occur—but no einherjar and no Othin:

From another Icelandic saga, *Njáls saga*, we have another such tradition in which the deceased is seen passing into the mountain: "The fishermen that were at Kaldbak believed they saw Svan go into the mountain Kaldbakshorn, and there he was heartily greeted."¹ The literary aspects of *Njáls Saga* have long been recognized, but Wolf von Unwerth defended the rooting of this tradition in the local beliefs concerning Kaldbakshorn.²

Now it is evident that the belief in the mountain as a place to go after death, to join the ancestors there, is a belief that Torolv Mostrarskjegg brought with him from his old farm at Moster in western Norway. Indeed, we know of many other families of Norwegian immigrants that did the same thing: Singled out a mountain where they believed they were to stay in the "here-after".

Hreiðarr på Steinsstad elected to go into Mælifell after death, and as long as they were heathens, Selpórir and his family went into Thorismountain. This tradition is found in the main manuscripts of the *Landnáma*: the *Sturlubók* and the *Hauksbók*, and thus in sources regarded to be of great reliability.³

Even the early Christians did not escape the risk of being regarded as "mountain-believers" of this kind. In *Sturlubók* it is related that the Christian woman, Auðr, erected a cross, and said her prayers at Krosshólar. When she died, her relatives started showing reverence at this mountain. A heathen altar, *høgrgr*, was erected when they started having sacrifices there, and they believed that they would go into this mountain after death.⁴

From the more recent tradition, we know of Icelandic mountains in which the elves were believed to dwell, *heiðnaberg*, "pagan mountains".

¹ *Njála*. The ed. *Íslendinga Sögur*, chapt. 14, 28, p. 66. Kbh. 1875.

² Wolf von Unwerth: "Untersuchungen über Totenkult und Odinverehrung bei Germanen und Lappen." *Germ. Abhandl.*, Heft. 37, p. 19. Breslau 1911.

³ *Landnáma*. The ed. *Íslendinga sögur*, vol. I, p. 78. 192. Kbh. 1843.

⁴ Op. cit., chapt. 16.

¹ Own notes from N. Hordaland based on collections of beliefs 1945-47.

² *Eyrbyggja saga*, chapt. IV, 10. *Altnordisches Sagabibliothek*, Heft 6, p. 12. Halle 1897.

³ Op. cit., chapt. XI, 4. p. 27.

On Elliðaey, in Breidarfjord, it is stated that the bishop cosecrated one of the two mountains for gathering eggs and catching birds. Only one of them, because bishop Guðmundur intended the other one for the guardian spirits and the elves, *hann ætlaði hann landvættum eða álfum til íbúðar*. Other places are also called *heiðnaberg*, "and it is certainly not trolls living there, but elves".¹ But these again are other beliefs related to the general concepts of the host of "unseen" beings or hidden ones.

The constitutive elements of the tradition concerning the "holy mountains" are that it is a place that opens to the dead, that fires inside give an impression of expectancy and a hearty welcome. Similar traditions are also found on the Scandinavian mainland, at Voss, the inland region of Hordaland in western Norway:

On the western side of the great lake where Vossevangen is located, at Hornve farm, there is a mountain-precipice called *Rysseberget*. Both by name and by tradition, this is one of the numerous places in this area where they led up the old horses, and let them kill themselves by falling down from the precipice. The killing of horses was "forbidden" to respectable people, and this was the way they solved the dangerous task of putting to death an animal, which was both dear to the farmer, and, at the same time, an old sacrificial animal given to the heathen gods, and for centuries forbidden for Christians to eat.²

Rysseberget was thought to be an unearthly place. In the local tradition it is believed to be a place where lights are seen foreboding deaths in the districts: "It is a nasty, haunted place. Fires have been seen burning inside the mountain" ... "Now somebody is dying again, last night a light was showing in Ryssaberje."³

I do not intend to go into detail here about the tradition concerning the precipices used for killing old horses. Far more mysterious is the Old Norse tradition which states that, in heathen times they also used to kill people in this way: "The heathens sacrificed evil men, and threw them down

from mountains or precipices." This statement comes from "The Saga of the Bishops", and in "The Saga of the Icelanders" it is said that something similar took place at the time of Harald Gråfell: "they used to kill the aged and the feeble by throwing them down from precipices".¹

We consider this to be an almost incredible disregard for the aged and disabled. But, if we are to believe what is told in later and fictitious sagas, they had quite another attitude to these things, at least during some periods in antiquity. In a tradition which is said to be a description of practices from Götaland in Sweden, it is told: "The children sent their father and mother down from the *Æternisstapa*, 'the family-precipice', and they went, happy and in good spirit, to Othin."² ... Also, traditions from more recent times in Norway deal with the practice of hurling people down from mountains.³

The historic value of these traditions is dubious. We might compare them with the more recent Scandinavian stories told about the large "hammers" which were kept in the churches in some places: They were supposed to be "family-hammers", to be used for ending the lives of old people with ritual killings when they lived too long. In reality, those hammers were kept in the churches for use in the restoration of the wooden constructions of the church, and they had nothing whatsoever to do with the treatment of the old people in the past. The entire tradition seems to have been created in accordance with the belief in more recent times, of the ruthless ways of bygone ages.⁴

But as we have seen: The idea of the Holy Mountain receiving the dead, must have been part of the beliefs of both the emigrants that settled in Iceland, and of the people in the districts in Norway from where these settlers came. We find the same beliefs concerning the dead in the mountain, in Iceland, and in inland regions of Hordaland, Voss, in Western Norway.

These are not the only areas in Scandinavia bearing witness to such beliefs. But to find them again playing an important part in the folk-tradition, we must go to the far north—to the religion of the nomadic Lapps. Magister Johan Randulf, has written a description of the superstitions of the Lapps

¹ J. Árnason: *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri*, I, p. 143 ff. Lpz. 1862.

² As regards the taboo that comprised the killing of horses see Nils Lid: "Norske Slakteskikker." *Skr. utg. av Videnskapsselskabet i Kra.*, II. 1923. Hist. filos. kl.

³ Notes after Torstein Røte, Voss. The last expression he quoted after an old woman.

¹ Biskupa sögur, vol. I, ed. 1858, p. 23. *Íslendinga sögur*, vol. I, ed. 1843, p. 323.

² Gautreks saga. Fornaldarsögur norðrlanda, vol. III, p. 10, Reykjavík 1889.

³ Nils Lid, op. cit., p. 189.

⁴ J. Götling in "Folkminnesstudier tillägnade H. Celander," p. 69, Gbg 1926.

as far as the Holy Mountain is concerned. The description is given in the "Nærøy-manuscript" dating from 1723: "Their attitude is as follows: (1) The dead bodies shall not arise from the dead, and the resurrection of the dead shall never take place. (2) As soon as they are dead, their souls will immediately move to that *Saivo* or holy mountain, whose master or owner, also called *Saivo*, has been their guardian angel, *Angelus tutelarís*, as has been related before. (3) There they are made into gods, having the power for some time, to keep death away from their friends and relatives. These in turn present them with sacrifices, reindeer or horses—with which they might drive around for pleasure from one *Saivo* to another, but mostly for use in their own *Saivo* and their pleasure there, altogether called the realm of the dead."¹

The animal sacrificed at such places is intended for the use of the dead in the mountain. This is a very interesting piece of information, in view of the fact that we find the ritual killing of the horses at Voss, taking place from the precipice which also shows a light for the dead from the neighbouring farms. This might be a pure coincidence, but it suggests a greater and more logical coherence in the beliefs and practices centered around such mountains. And despite the scarcity of the material available at present, the logic of the system is also an argument carrying relative weight.

The god living in such a mountain, the *Saivo*, belongs to the Lapp family. He might serve generation after generation, and if he is not called upon, he will still come by himself to offer his services: "For so many years I have served your father on land and water, while he lived. When he died, I escorted his soul to the pleasure it now has, and because at his death he commanded me to serve you, I have now come to offer you the same service."² When a Lapp shaman, the *noaide*, worked himself into a trance to cure someone who was taken ill, the Lapps always believed that his soul went into these holy mountains for help and information.³

The name *saivo*, for this kind of mountain, has been connected with the Pre-Nordic word for "sea" or "lake" (compare Goth. *saiws*). This then must

¹ J. K. Qvigstad: "Kildeskifter til den Lappiske Mytologi. I." *Det kgl. No. Vid. selsk. skr.*, p. 49, 1903.

² Op. cit., p. 49.

³ Knud Leem: *Beskrivelse over Finmarkens Lapper*, p. 477 f. Kbh. 1767.

be a result of Lappic borrowings from the neighbouring Germanic languages at a very early stage in the history of our languages.¹ Not everything concerning this borrowing is clear: The Lapp *saivo* is a mountain, and it is not easy to understand this change of meaning. In the second place: The Lapp form would have been a correct borrowing from the gen. pl. of the Pre-Nordic language, but the fixation of a gen. pl. in such a process is not easy to understand straight away.

Newer research has brought forth evidence to the effect that a change from *saivo*, meaning "lake", to the meaning of "mountain" is possible and even probable. To the east, in Lappland we have an area with *saivo*-lakes, believed to have "dobble bottoms"! Such lakes were said to have a hole through which the spirit inhabiting it could pass.² The idea of the *saivo* must have come to the Lapps from areas in which the abode was thought to be a lake, changing then in the Northern and Western areas into the idea that the mountain was the place of habitation.

S. Kildal mentions several such mountains regarded by the Lapps to be holy: *Leiron Saivo*, *Biarchon Saivo* and *Harchild Saivo*. "The reason for the maintained holiness of these mountains is the fact that Sathan has made them believe that in each such mountain there resides a holy angel or an under-god. He has the power to protect them and help them in every undertaking. Of such mountain angels, a Lapp then selects one or two, as he likes—at times he also makes three or four his *Angelus vel Angeli tutelares*. He calls upon them with his customary singing (*joiking*), when he is about to undertake something, especially when he wants to beat his shamandrum (*runebomme*) or in other ways is going to consult Sathan."³

If we return to the districts in western Norway, from which the conceptions of the Icelandic *Helgafell* were transplanted, we will find that even this custom (the naming of mountains as "holy") is well known, although the reason for the name might to-day seem obscure to us. The Voss-area, where we found the tradition that the mountain could open to the dead and show

¹ *Nordisk Kultur*, vol. 26, p. 144.

² Askö Vilks: "Das Verhalten der Finnen in 'Heiligen' (*pyhä*) Situationen." *FFC*, 164, p. 166. Helsinki 1956.

³ J. K. Qvigstad: "Kildeskifter til den lappiske Mythologi. I." *Det kgl. No. vidsk. selsk. skr.*, p. 43 f. 1903.

us lights from within, has just such a holy mountain, *Helgaberg*, situated close to the central church-site: Vinje, at Vossestrand (Fig. 1). The ON *vin* f. does not belong to the living vocabulary of Nordic historical times, apart from the *vinjartoddi* (a kind of tax), and in place-names. The word is also found in Goth. *winja* f. "pasture", "meadow".¹

The name indicates that the farm-site is of an early date, and in former times the church and church-yard were situated even closer to *Helgaberg* Mountain than at present. The site was higher up on the slopes, towards the farm called Finne.

In Helgaberg Mountain, there is a cave called *Jakops-kyrkja*, "The church of Jacob". "Here they performed the services in the old days, at a time when they were not allowed to ..." "There was a deacon belonging to the hidden people (*huldreklokkar*), who used to stay there. He sang so loud that he was heard as far down as Fuglleikane, and that is quite a distance. They put down angels, iron nails and wooden chisels on which they had written their names. At the foot of Helgaberg there is another place called *Koshelleren*. This has been a place where they sang Mass, and they used to carry food to be offered up there."²

It is evident that these places having sacred names are, in turn, interpreted as having received their names at a time when Catholicism was forced to recede before the Evangelic-Lutheran faith. The interpretations here are late etymologies, and secondary to the names themselves, of primary importance is the concept of "holyness".

Helgafell, on Iceland was believed by the immigrants belonging to the Mostrarskjegg-family, to be so sacred that nothing should be hunted or killed on that mountain, neither animals, nor people. Nobody should look at it, unwashed ... These are rather strict rules imposed by the holiness of the place, a taboo covering the region of the holy mountain.

We have traces of similar intricate rules imposed upon those who had to deal with the Helgaberg at Vossestrand: On the slope below the mountain there is a path called *Kvinnestien*, "the women's-path". The reservation

of a special path for the women is very uncommon according to Western Norwegian name-giving customs and practices, and it is even more so, when, on the same slope, there is still another path: *Bustien*, "the cattle-path". The ground between the two paths is called *Ryssebakhamrane*, and *ryssa* f. is the term by which the women at Voss are advised to name the mares.¹

The Kvinnestien must have been so named because this was a special way for the women to go when approaching and passing the area where the Helgaberg and the Jakopskyrkja were. The path might have been preferred for the women, because it led them somewhat more out of sight from places that were not supposed to be looked upon or trespassed upon by women.

The fact that, among the set of rules covering the behaviour shown towards the holy mountains, we also should find a taboo against women is very interesting and shows great consistency with the religious attitudes among Lapps and Finns when dealing with such holy regions. It is well known that the Lapps regard women as having a special and dangerous influence on the saivo-mountains. Intimate pieces of clothing left behind, might do great harm.

Knut Leem has supplied interesting information from the 18th century concerning this attitude to the holy mountains among the Lapps: "All the so-called *Passe Varek*, or holy mountains, were held in great esteem by the Lapps, which might be seen from the following: They visited their sacrificial places in their holyday-clothes, and fell down upon their knees before their heathen gods." Such a mountain, he relates, is so holy that nobody would live near it, sleep close to it, speak loudly, shoot anything there, or wear blue clothes. The women did not look at the mountain when they passed there, they hid their faces. A man had to take care that he did not go there in women's clothing. Even to wear shoes that had been impregnated with bark-extract in the same kettle as women's shoes was dangerous.²

Such a place was dangerous for a woman to pass even at a great distance. Had she passed on one side of the holy place, then she had to return on the

¹ Sigm. Feist: *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der gothischen Sprache*. Halle 1922.

² Knut Bjørgeas, Vossestrand. The sacrificing of food for various purposes is well known from these districts: for preventing precipices from falling down (Bjørge), or to the wild riders on Christmasnight (Fenno).

¹ Nils Lid: "Norske slakteskikker." *Skr. utg. av vid. sel. i Kra.*, II, p. 189. 1923. Hist. filos. kl.

² Knud Leem: *Beskrivelse over Finmarkens Lapper*, p. 443 f. Kbh. 1767.

same side, even if it meant a walk of several kilometers more.¹ Isak Olsen relates from Loppa and Hasvik, in Northern Norway, that *Andotten*, a mountain at Sørøy, is so holy that women have to cover themselves when they pass by. The same is the case with *Stalla passe* at Sørværet. Other places are so holy that women must not land there, and not show their faces: For example at *Zieuia* (Silden), *Lappe-passe* (Loppa) and *Kalbe-passe* (Kalven).²

Among the northern and eastern neighbours of the Scandinavian peninsula, the taboo on holy places that forced the women to use special roads, or take special precautions, is amply demonstrated in connection with the Finnish *pyhä* places. From the parish of Iitti, in the neighbourhood of the village Lyöttilä the following customs were reported in 1880's:

"On the property of Marlebäck estate there is a height called Hiidenvuori on the banks of the river Kymi. It is one of the highest mountains in Iitti, with a splendid view." The name of the place originates from the *Hiisi*, the devil which of old has been living in that mountain. The inhabitant of the mountain is very irritable and shows ill will especially to women. He does not want to permit the women travelling along the Kymi river to pass by. Men, on the other hand, could do this unhampered. For this reason, the women had to leave the boat shortly before they came to the devil's dwellingplace, and then walk the rest of the way to church. The place where they went ashore has thus been named *Naisten lahti*. "The inlet of the women."³

The practice of having special paths and passageways for women travelling in *pyhä* places, like lakes, streams and mountains, has been treated in an interesting study by Asko Vilkkuna. He also points to such conceptions not only among the Finns and the western Lapps, but also among the Koltalapps and the eastern Woguls. The taboo on women covering such places could even be extended, at times, to the berries, the game and the fish that originated in such places.⁴

¹ Pehr Högström: *Beskrifning öfver de til Sveriges Krona lydande Lapmarker*, p. 194. Sthm 1747.

² J. K. Qvigstad: "Lappische Opfersteine und Heilige Berge in Norwegen." *Kra. Etnogr. Mus. skr.*, Band I, p. 342.

³ Johan Knaapila. In a manuscript from parish Iitti at NM.

⁴ Asko Vilkkuna: Das Verhalten der Finnen in "Heiligen" (*pyhä*) Situationen.

Among northern and eastern peoples, these concepts seems to be amply demonstrated right down to our time, and it is in relation to these concepts that the taboo concerning Helgaberg at Voss, and Helgafell on Iceland, should be regarded.

At Vossestrand, the neighbouring farm to Vinje under Helgaberg, where the church is situated, is called *Draugsvoll*. The first part of the word is the ON *draugr* m., "dead man, ghost"; the ending *vollr* m., meaning "meadow". As an explanation of the name, we might think of the place as being haunted, or also postulate a nick-name: "*draugi*".¹

Draugsvoll is the site of a large number of pre-historic grave-mounds, one of the largest collections of its kind in Hordaland. It is of the greatest importance that this site, close to Helgaberg, was chosen as a burial place of this size. The reason for this must be the mountain itself, and the beliefs attached to it. We have previously been aware of the conception of the mountain in this area as opening to the deceased.

Another such collective burial place, with a large number of prehistoric grave-mounds, is to be found in Hardanger in the Sør fjord area, at Ullensvang. Situated at Opedal farm, the burial place is called *Alvavoll*. ON *alfr* m. "Elfen, hidden ones, 'Totengeister'". Close to this meadow is a large prominent stone: *Ullabersteinen* (Fig. 2). This stone must be named after the mountain above it, which was then called: **Ullarberg*.² In recent times this stone has been a central gathering place in connection with processions, the dressing of "midsummer-brides" and the like.

As on Draugsvoll, the grave-mounds at Alvavoll are gathered close to the mountain, a mountain indicated by the name of the stone to be of special importance, as it contains the name of the ON god *Ullr*. Magnus Olsen has pointed out the fact that *Ullensvangr* and **Ullarberg* must have received their names from the related names *Ullr* and *Ullinn*. The name *Ullinn* must eventually have become obsolete, and the more familiar *Ullr* retained. The same development took place at Naustdal in Førde, where *Ullinsland* was changed to **Ullarland*.³ Some of the mounds at Alvavoll have been excavated by archeologists. One of the grave-mounds: Kongshaugen, has been dated

¹ Magnus Olsen in *NG*, XI, p. 562.

² *Grundriss d. Germ. Philologie*, 12, pp. 286, 289. Berlin and Leipzig 1935.

³ See Magnus Olsen in *NG* (Norske Gaardnavne), II, p. 454.

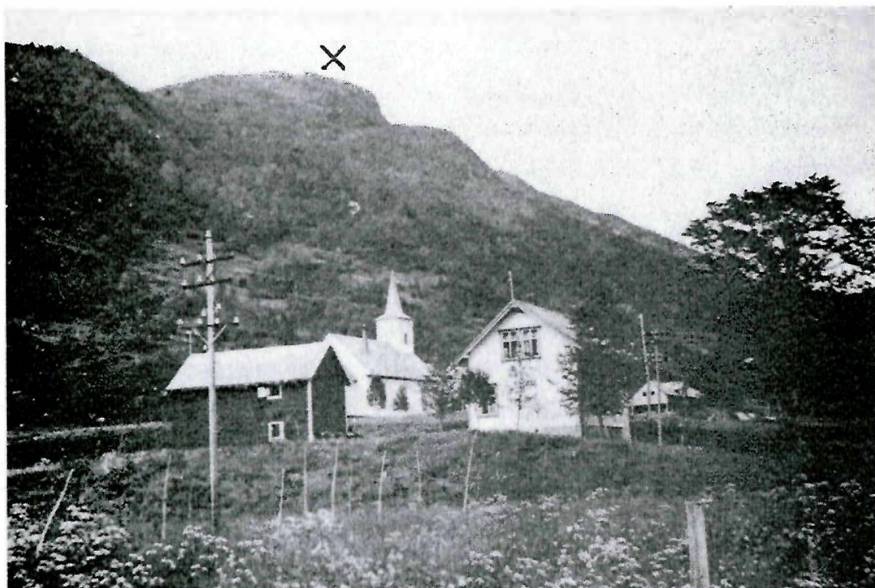


Fig. 1. The Helgaberg, "The holy mountain", at Vinje, Vossestrand. The church is situated at Draugsvoll.

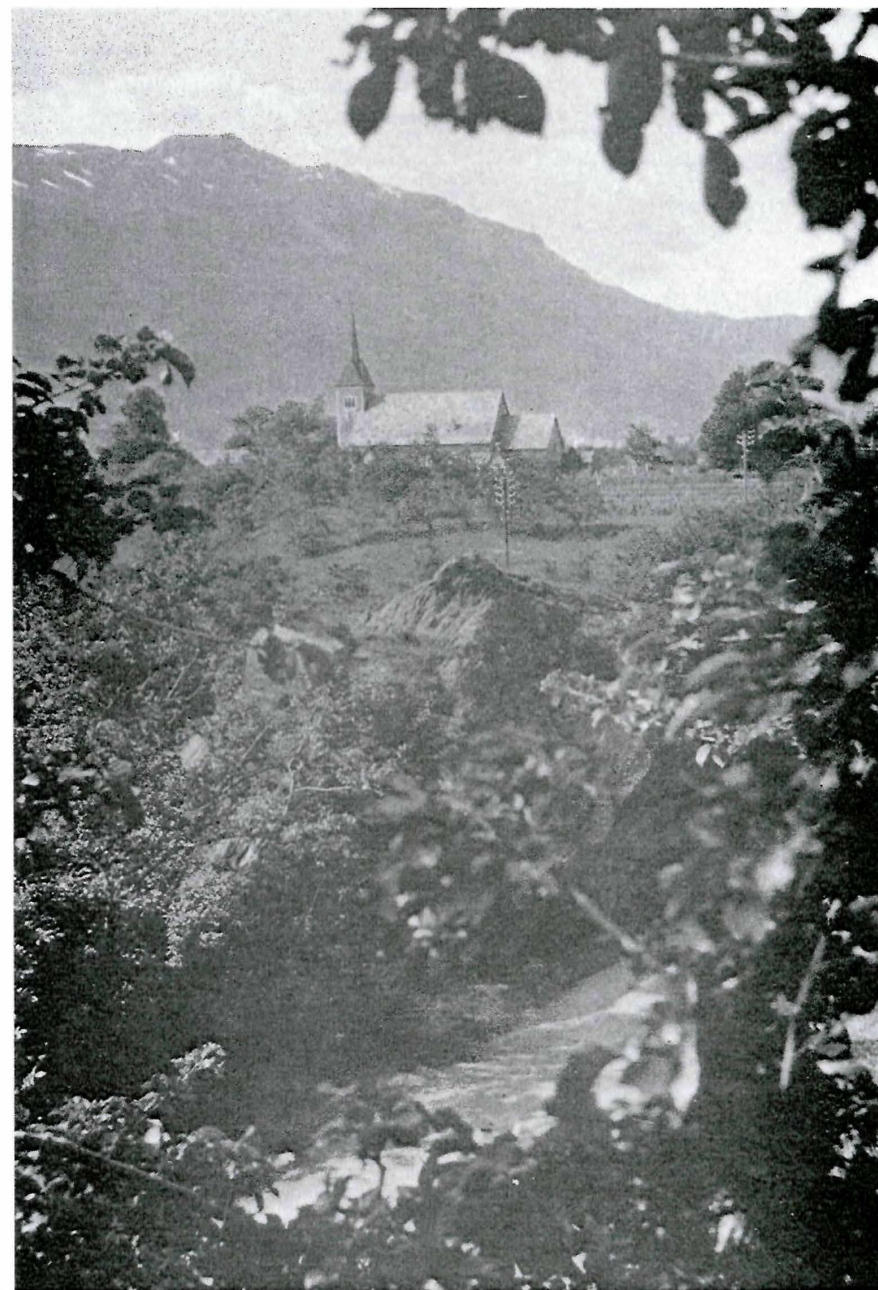


Fig. 2 (right). Ullabergsteinen and Ullensvang church. Higher up to the right is Allevoll where "The Opedalsstone" was found with the famous runic inscription.

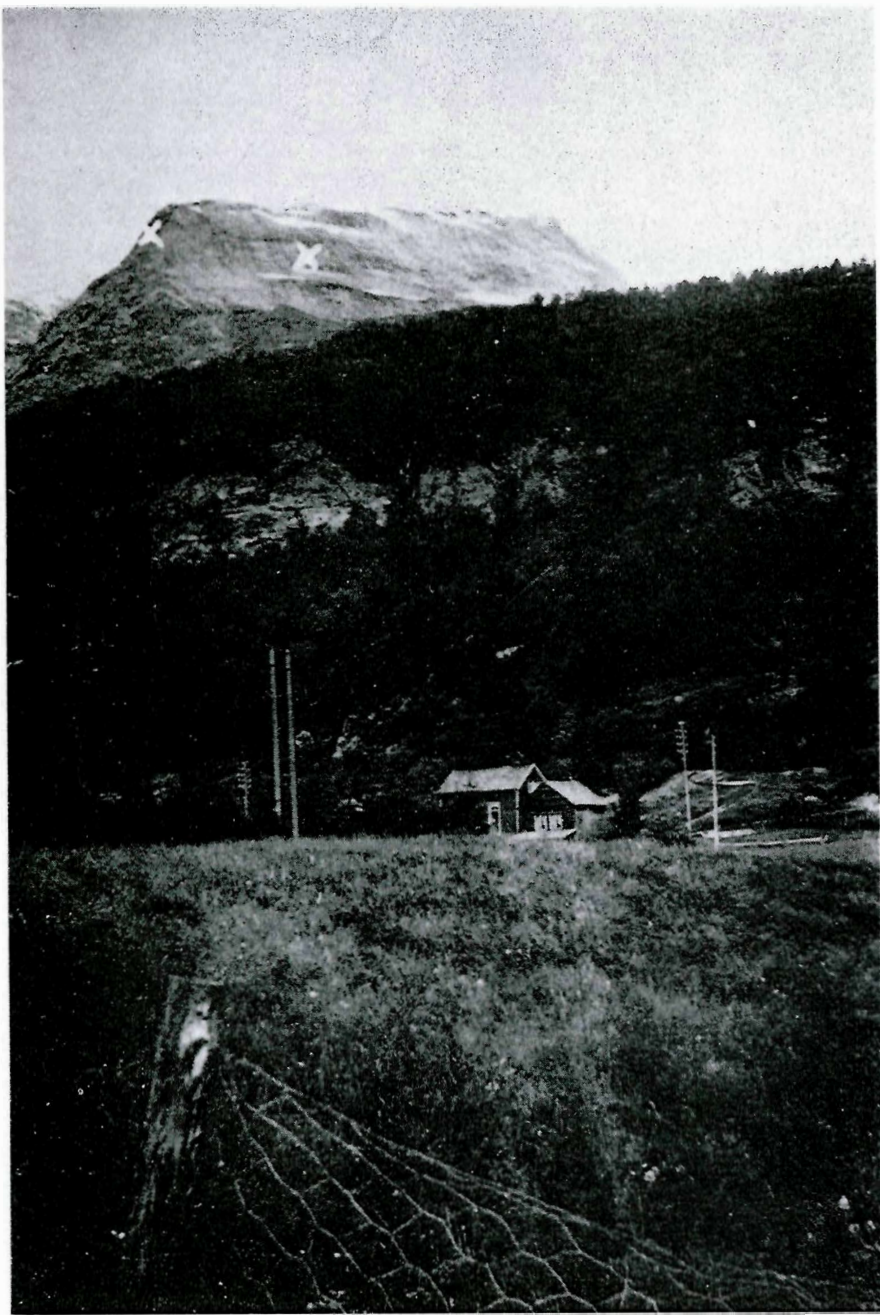


Fig. 3. Lönehorgi with Helgatörne (crosses), "The holy shelves", Voss.

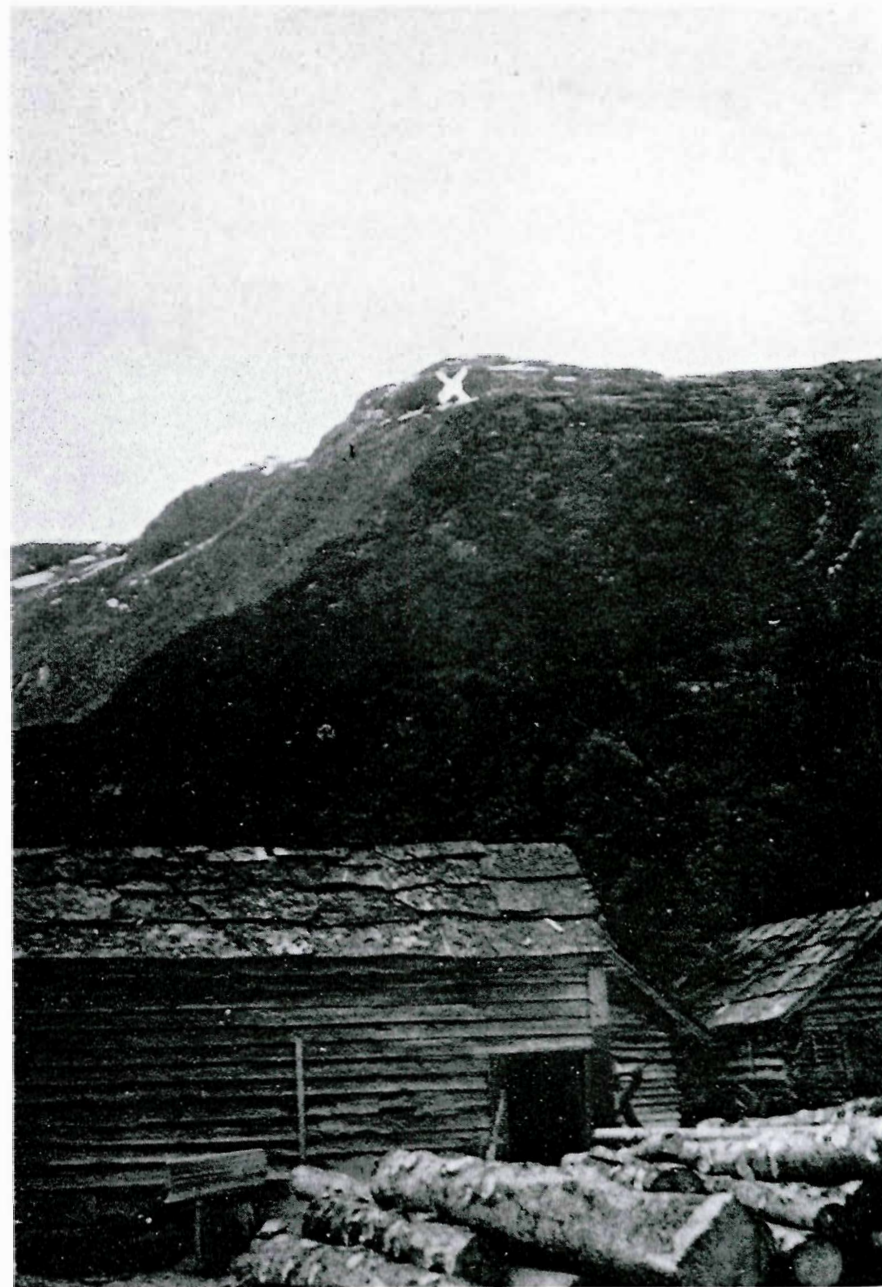


Fig. 4. Jåstadnuten with Tussaskora, "The plateau of hob-goblin", Ullensvang.

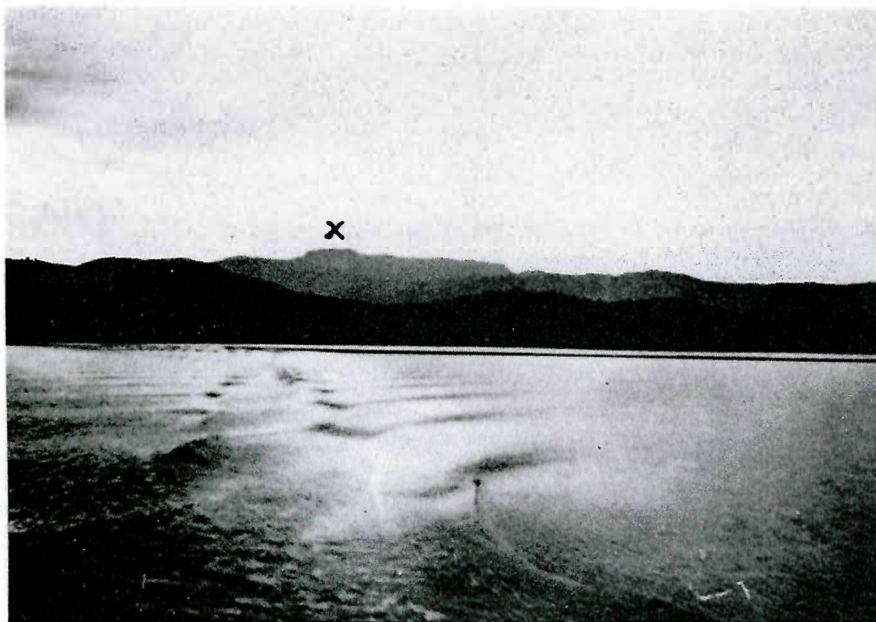


Fig. 5. Ådneburen. When at sea the mountain had to be mentioned by its taboo-names: Østergnadd or Handverkskista. ("Eastern peak" or "Tool-chest").

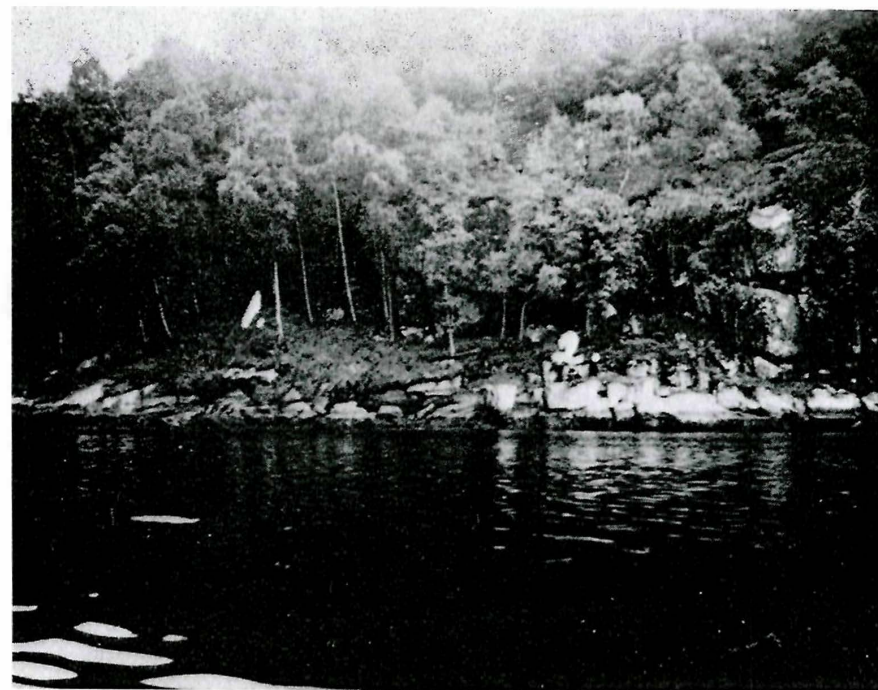


Fig. 7. Details of the spot marked 5 on Fig. 6. Helgatona (1) with the cave called Kyrkja (2).

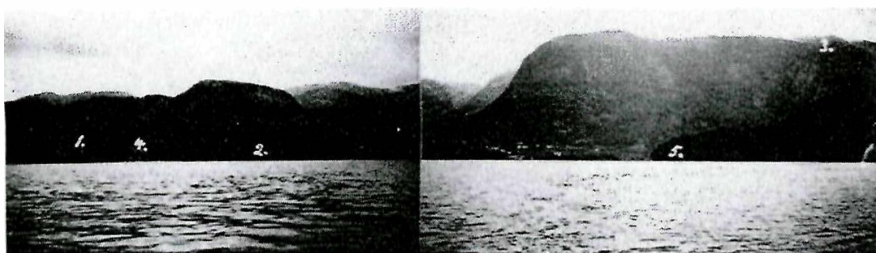


Fig. 6. On each side of the bay, when approaching the area of the Ådneburen there is a Helga-name indicating the relation to important forces. (1) Ådnekvamme, (2) Ådnasteinen, (3) Ådneburen, (4) Helgaleet, (5) Helgatona.

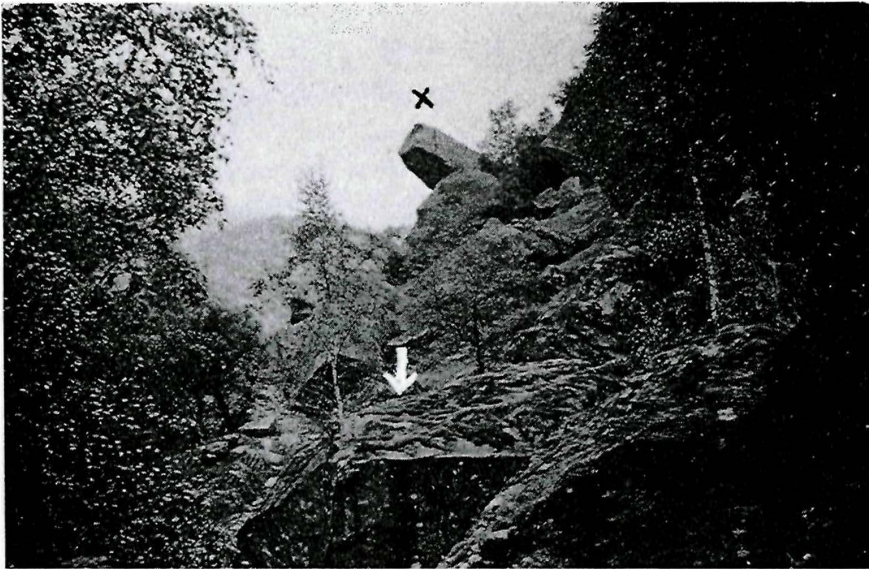


Fig. 8. Gygrasteinen at the farm Gjöstein, Vossestrand, The arrow indicates one of the few rock-carvings at Voss.

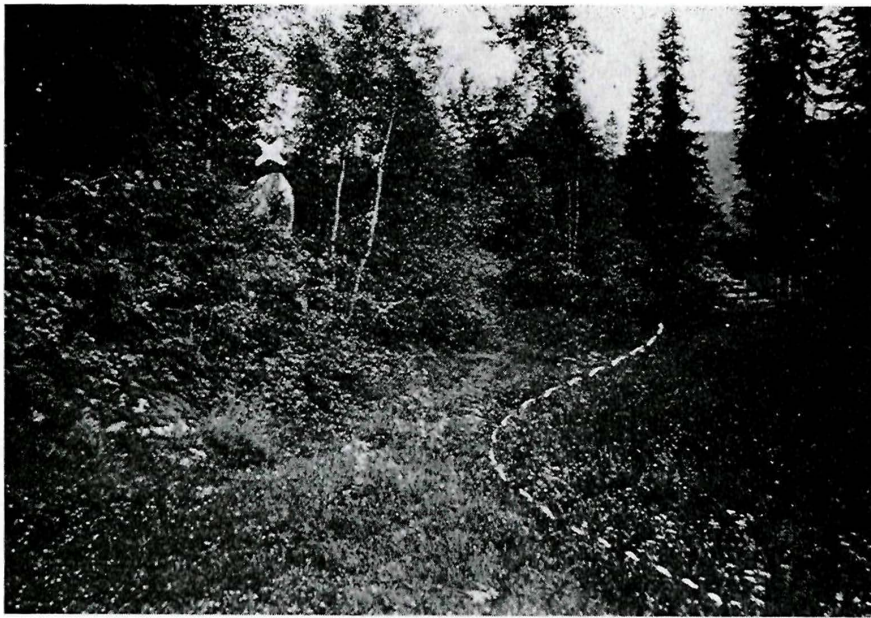


Fig. 9. Gullsteinen at Skjervet, Voss. The old road past the stone is indicated by the dotted line.

The interpretation as the personal name of a woman seems less probable, as we do not know of a name to compare it with. But the word might be a feminine -ing derivation of the ON *berg* n. meaning: "She that belongs to (or comes from) the mountain."¹

Birgingu is then a dat. f. sg., and if, in other respects, we keep to Marstrander's suggested reading: "For she that comes from (or lives in) the mountain, the brother made these runes. My beloved sister spare me (be gracious to me)!"

The belief that the dead dwelled in the mountain (**Ullarberg*) behind Alvavoll must have been part of the faith around 600 A.D. This belief has been so strong that the brother made the runes over his sister, and placed the stone at the boundary between life and death to prevent her from returning to the abode of the living—where she could now only be a baleful ghost. The conception is so far the same, when, in later ages in the same parishes they lifted the coffin over the churchyard hedge to prevent the dead from haunting. Nonetheless, they *saw* her return that very way, with the rope from which she had hanged herself under her arm.²

Like some other western Norwegian runic inscriptions, this too was turned towards the "other world" where the deceased lived their lives—on the "wrong" side of real existence. They had come "under the turf", and only on that side could you communicate with them.

The combination of archeology and place-names, in connection with investigations into the location of prehistoric burial-places in western Norway, seems promising. No doubt it would bring forth more evidence that could be drawn into the picture of the religious beliefs attached to the holy mountains. But the methods to be used in recording local place-names and traditions are very time-consuming, and must necessarily be followed up by visits on the spot to locate the actual sites of the places involved.

But instead of dealing with the concepts centering around the ancient and more important collective burial sites, other methods might be used for obtaining an insight into these concepts of the early ages. Composite

¹ Cf. ON *bergbúi* m. for male inhabitants of the mountains.

² H. O. Opedal: *Makter og Menneske*, II, p. 210. Cf. Louise Hagberg: *När Döden Gästas*, p. 361, Sthm 1937, where it is told about "the tree of the dead". "Here by this tree she had to turn to go back to the abode of the dead."

place-names beginning with *Helga-* could be drawn more extensively into consideration, to find their frequency and probable origin. In Hordaland such names are very numerous.

In a mountain behind Ekse farm, in Eksingedalen, there is a cave called *Helgahelleren*. According to the people at Ekse, no traditions are attached to this name. A shelf on the side of the mountain along Mollandsvatnet, in Masfjorden, is called *Helgatona*. It is told that a woman called *Helga* fell into the lake and was drowned there. *Helgatona* at Breimyr, Masfjorden, is situated close to the sea where the boats rowed past. A large cave called *Kyrkja*, "the church" is to be found there (cf. Fig. 7).

At Etne, there is a mountain slope, with rock-carvings, called *Helgaberg*.¹ A stone that looks like a skerry, in the sea between Ve and Tysnes farms at Tysnesøy, is called *Helgasteinen*. Even this place is said to be named after a woman.²

High up on the dominating *Lønehorgi*, one of the highest peaks in the row of mountains surrounding the Voss-area, are *Helgatorne* f. pl. *Helgatona* f. sg. (Fig. 3). There are several green shelves up under the grey precipices, where snow might even be seen in the shadowy places far into the summer. "An old servant on the farm told me that it was named after a woman, called Helga Aordalen" (ON *ár* gen. sg. f. "river").

This "River-valley" is a lonely place in the high mountains. Nobody has ever lived there, except for the short stay in summer at the dairyfarm. "Yes," they would say when something unusual happened, "that must be Helga at Aordal." This was said when a pile of wood had fallen down in the forest, or when tools or the like had disappeared. "Did you see Helga at Aordal?", they would joke, when someone had been up on *Lønehorgi*. — They smiled a bit, when talking about her. (Brynjuv Løne, Voss.)

When it is repeatedly stated that a woman's name, *Helga*, is the origin of such place-names, it corresponds well with the same development concerning *Helgafell* on Iceland. Today it is often told that even this mountain is named after a person. On the other hand, the sacredness of *Helgafell* is still revealed in the local lore that if you walk upon this mountain backwards, you might get three wishes fulfilled. (Ole Tveit, Framnes.)

¹ NG XI., p. 71.

² NG XI., p. 170; and Johannes Heggland, Våge.

The *Helgatorne*, underneath the mighty peak of *Lønehorgi*, are almost inaccessible. The situation of these holy shelves might be compared to another peculiar name of a similar inaccessible place: *Tussaskora* on *Jåstadnuten* mountain in Ullensvang (Fig. 4). There is no tradition connected with this place. But at Tveranger in Sulen, Sogn og Fjordane, there is a *Tussaskora*, a grasscovered shelf, about a meter over the tidal mark across the bay opposite the boat-houses. Here *tussen*, the hob-goblin lived. "My grandfather found his boat floating under the *Tussaskora*, when he had been up in the boathouse a while: 'So you were at it again, you scoundrel!' my grandfather would say. He believed the hob-goblin had unfastened the boat." (Anders Tveranger, Sulen.)

On the slope down towards *Lønevatnet*, there is a place in *Lønehorga* called: *Nonpresten*, "the Mid-day priest". This protruding part of the mountain was used by the parishers for calculating time, according to the shadow it threw. But the interesting part of the name is the sacred "Priest". Yet another peculiar name is to be found up on the barren plateau of the mountain, 1185 m over the sea: *Vivangane*. The first part of the word might be a *vé* adj. "holy", or *viðr* adj. "wide", but the second part is the ON *vangr* m. "meadow, green flat piece of land".¹ A strange name to be given to a barren place, where snow and glaciers often remain all summer.

But, as Magnus Olsen has shown, ON *vangr* also has another meaning: "A centrally located, religious center dating most often, from heathen times."² It is in this very function that we find *Vangen* used as the central meeting place and the church-site at Voss. At Jernes, there is a flat meadow called *Helgavangen*, which is said to have been a kind of gathering-place in former times. (Guri Himle, Voss.)

ON *vangr* m. in farm-names, is most often used alone. But of the three place-names, acknowledged to be composites, which carry the names of heathen gods, two are found in the western fjord-areas: *Ullensvang*, Hardanger, with *Ullinn*. *Gudvangen*, Aurland, Sogn og Fjordane, with *goð* n.

¹ A possible parallel to this name could be the farm-name: *Vevang* Kornstad in Romsdalen. NG XIII, p. 339.

² Magnus Olsen: "Hedenske Kultminder i Norske Stedsnavne. I." *Skr. utg. av Vid. selsk. i Kra.*, II, bind 2, p. 140. 1914. Hist. filosof. kl.

"pagan god".¹ Bishop Ulfila used the corresponding Goth. *wagg* m. for "Paradise", when translating the New Testament.

Horg f. is a common name for mountains in this mid-western region of Norway. In the massif where *Lønehorgi* is located, we have *Svarthorgi* to the north, while a peak to the south of *Nonpresten* is called: *Longahorgi*. Aasen notes the meaning of *horg* f.: "Mountain peak or top, mostly as a term for some great mountains, Voss."² Ross has recorded this word in Hardanger, Setesdal and Voss. Such mountains often have steep sides and flat tops, he says. Etne, in S. Hordaland, has the pl. *horjer*. "A naked, flat mountain with many steep peaks." In Hardanger there is the saying: "to run over hill and horg". Setesdal: "to travel hill and horg".³

In Swedish, the word *harg* (*horj*) m. means "area filled with naturally assembled stones" (Östergötland, Småland). "Heap of stones laid together as a direction for sailors" (Gotland). In some places a form of the word *horge* (*horje*) m. means: "a thickly grown cluster of young forest, a gathering of something".⁴ In the last sense, we also have NN *horg* f. "throng, flock, gathering, especially of animals, but also of people" (I. Aasen, op. cit.). Icelandic has *hörgur* m. "hillock, little mound".⁵

These later forms are derived from ON *horgr* m. and OS *hargher* m. The ON *horgr* m. has had the meaning "heap of stones, gathering of stones". Furthermore, there must also have been a meaning: "Holy place intended or used for cult of heathen gods."⁶ We must keep in mind a more or less primitive construction of stone, intended for religious purposes of some kind.⁷ This is seen from the religious intent of the word from related northern languages.

In OHG there is a corresponding word, *harug*, *haruc*, *haruh*, translated with "holy grove, temple or altar of stone, earth or turf". Ags *hearg*, *hearh* can, in addition, also mean "heathen god". All these forms may be derived

¹ Magnus Olsen: „Hedenske Kultminder i Norske Stedsnavne. I." *Skr. utg. av Vid. Selsk. i Kra.*, II, bind 2, p. 132. 1914. Hist. filos. kl. Magnus Olsen, NG, XI, p. 454, and same NG, XII, p. 121.

² I. Aasen: *Norsk Ordbog*. Chra. 1900.

³ H. Ross: *Norsk Ordbog*. Chra. 1895.

⁴ J. E. Rietz: *Ordbok öfver svenske allmoge-språket*. Lund 1887.

⁵ S. Blöndal: *Islandsk- dansk Ordbog*. Reykjavik 1920-24.

⁶ J. Fritzner: *Gammelnorsk Ordbog*. Chra. 1886-1896.

⁷ Magnus Olsen: *Hedenske Kultminder*, I, p. 293 f.

from an ancient word **haruga*, meaning something built and constructed of loose stones,* probably some kind of altar of stone.¹

As far as the sacred implication of the ON *horgr* is concerned, it is revealing to find this word as a term used for mountains. In this region in Voss, and in surrounding districts, it is especially numerous. It was in this area that we found that the mountains had retained traces of their special holiness as abodes for the dead, and that even a taboo against women persisted. The term used to designate a holy mountain was a composite beginning with *Helga-*, in addition to the sacred name *horgr*. *Lønehorgi* also had two high shelves in the mountain-side called: *Helgatorne*. Plains up in the mountain plateau were called *Vivangane*.

According to this, it seems highly probable that the *horg* in connection with this mountain *Lønehorgi*, is not apt to tell us something about a mountain of a special height or shape, but about the beliefs of the inhabitants of this region.

Ingvar Nielsen once maintained that a number of stones piled up on *Horgen* mountain at Veøy in Lofoten, *Alteret*, were the *horgr* that had given the place its name.² The only horg mentioned in the Icelandic saga, is one built and sacrificed to at Krossholar, a mountain where they believed people went after death.³

Nonetheless the *horgr* must have been known in connection with religious practices in many places in Iceland: We do have a *Hörgsdalr* in Myvatnssveit, mentioned in 1318 as a summer dairy-farm under Helgastaða church.⁴ Bjørn M. Ólsen made excavations on the site, and was then searching for a house which he meant was called *horgr*.⁵ With our greater knowledge, in later times of the development of Icelandic houses, the house he excavated seems to have been a very ordinary one. At Siða in Vestr-Skaptafellssysla there is also a farm *Hörgsdalr*, neighbouring-farm to *Hörgsland*.⁶

The other large group of Horg-mountains at Voss is situated in the mountain massif to the east, between Borddalen and Granvinfjord, and south

¹ Op. cit., p. 298.

² *Norsk Historisk Tidsskrift 4 række*, 5, p. 1.

³ *Landnáma*, chapt. 18.

⁴ *Árbók hins íslenska fornleifafjelags*, p. 1 ff. 1903.

⁵ Op. cit.

⁶ Magnus Olsen: *Hedenske Kultminder*, I, p. 287.

of the valley that leads over Skjervet to Granvin. Within a radius of approximately 5 kilometers we find 6 such mountains ending in *-horg*. This region was of great importance to the people of the Voss-district, because for centuries it was their only convenient passageway to the Hardangerfjord and to the sea.

It is almost impossible for people today to realize how isolated the Voss area was, in former times, from the rest of the country. The first road that connected the parishes with Hardanger went through the pass at Skjerven: "In winter they go down that same mountain by a path or passage called Skjerven. There is no passage for horses, unless they are lowered down by ropes. The road passes through the steep mountain side, so narrow, so steep, slippery and dangerous that if one lost ones footing there was nothing else to expect but to fall through the air down the precipice, later to be collected in thousands of pieces."¹

Even in the 1940's I have talked to old people who, each autumn during the early years of their marriage went over the mountains to Hardangerfjord to fetch their loads of salt, which they carried home to Voss on their backs. It was Bergen-Voss railway line, which in 1883 put a definite end to this previous isolation.

The usual route for the districts around Vangsvatnet at Voss, in former times, was to go up Borddalen, and across the plains with the Horg-mountains down to Granvin, or to go to Folkedal, further down along the western side of Hardangerfjord, over Krosset and Helgastøl, or over the farms at Rong, down to Lussand even further down on the western side of the fjord. The route over Folkedal must have been popular, as it is this passageway that has given the name *folk* n., "people", to the valley where the travellers from across the mountains again encountered farms and people. "In the autumn they went by *Salttjørn* at Hjellestølen, with a bushel of rye and a bushel of salt." (Lars Himle, Voss.)

All the highest mountains in this important massif, through which the people at Voss had to carry their yearly supplies of salt and other necessities, have names with a sacred context: *Grønahorgi*, *Veskrethorgi*, *Skåndalshorgi* (*Vossahorgi* in Hardanger), *Nesheimshorgi*, *Steinsæterhorgi*, *Håsethorgi*. Apart

from the first mountain, the "green", all the other mountains are named after neighbouring dairy-farms or settlements.

The most important road to the sea for the Voss district went past these Horg-mountains, and a series of Helga-names are to be found along the route, bearing witness to the attitudes and feelings of the travellers through this area: *Helgaset* was the important nightly restingplace for everyone who wanted to go to Granvin or Folkedal. Here the travellers had to rest and get food and shelter if necessary. "There were 14 different summer-dairy farms there. The people from Folkedal always took this route over the mountains. In olden times they also went past there on the way to Granvin." (Lars Himle, Voss.)

Along this route there is another summer-dairy farm further down towards Folkedal: *Helgastøl*. The name *Helgaset* recurs on the slopes down towards Dale and Istad under Håsethorgi.¹ A farm, often called Liahelgeset is now there. This was originally a part of Lid farm. Where the road over the mountains leaves Borddalen on the Voss-side, there is a farm called *Helland*, in BK written *Hælghalande*, and in 1386 a *Hellgalande*.²

On this road to the Hardangerfjord, there is an ancient mountain market place: *Krosset*, several kilometers from Horgaset and Skåndalshorgi. This is a gathering place for people from many parishes, and almost every summer an open-air sermon is held there. "St. Olav once made a cross there." (Knut Haug, Voss.) In all probability, the name is derived from the crossing of the tracks over the mountain here. But the importance of the mountain passage is duly reflected in the annual sermons held there. Such meeting places in the mountains are well known, for example, at Hallingskeid and at the St. Thomas chapel on Fillefjell.

The Horg-names in western Norway indicate a tendency towards clusters geographically. This, in itself, is interesting, as it might signify whole areas which have been considered sacred, and which, in former times, were dealt with more cautiously. But it should also be possible to trace such attitudes to other place-names in the vicinity of these sites.

¹ On the old mountain trail from Voss to Vossestrand there is yet another *Helgaset* at Langedalen. This place is said to have been a farm in former times, which took part in the transport of the post. (Knut Bjørgaas. Notes in manuscript from 1918 kindly put at the disposal of the author, p. 48.)

² NG, XI, p. 553.

¹ A description from 1714. *Vossebygdene*, XV, p. 49 f. 1925.

If we are to consider connections between names given from the same background of beliefs and attitudes, we must not seek them too widely separated. But as we are here dealing with mountains and massifs we must of necessity take into consideration greater distances than if we are studying related farm-names. All the names chosen here for consideration are to be found within a radius of five kilometers. Most of them are even closer to each other. All the place-names used in this study have been taken from ordinary maps.¹ (See pp. 96-97.)

Within a circle of 5 kilometers, drawn around each Horg-mountain, names are sought which might reveal something of the attitudes once shown towards these mountains. Especially numerous are names beginning with *Sol*-, "sun". Most of these names are the names of mountains, but some are names of farms derived from the names of mountains. Out of the eight *Solberg* farms, taken by V. Kiil as proof of an ancient suncult,² four are found to be in the vicinity of Horg-mountains: *Solbjørg* in Bergsdalen in the vicinity of *Jonshorgi*, *Hærnesborgi* and *Gråhorgvatnet*,³ *Solbjør* in Samnanger at *Hausdalshorgi* and *Horjehalsen*,⁴ *Solbjørgo* in Ulvik at *Horgi S*,⁵ *Solberg* in Norheimsund at *Solhellenuten* and *Solheimenuten* in the vicinity of *Fossdalshorgi*.⁶ In addition to these farm-names, we also have *Solbjørgsvatnet* in Kvinnherad⁷ named after the *Solbjørg* (fjell) mentioned by Kiil, and also called *Helvedeshorgje*.⁸ In this last group, we also find the mountains *Storehorgi* and *Ljosavasshorgi*.⁹ Here we have an example of a mountain called both *Solbjørg* and *-horg*. — In the massif where we find *Lonehorgi*, we also find a mountain called *Solberget*.¹⁰ A similar name, *Solåsen*, is found at *Yddalshorgi*, *Jensahorgi*, *Horgevatn* and *Horgi* in Strandebarm.

¹ The maps used for this study are: Gradteigskart: Lærdal D31 vest, Aurland C32 aust, Bergen B33 vest, Bergsdalen B33 aust, Ulvik C33 aust, Voss C33 vest, Vossestr. C32 vest, Hardangerjøkulen D33 vest, Strandebarm B34 aust, Fana B34 vest, Stord B35 vest, Vikedal B36 aust, Haugesund B36 vest, Ombo B37 aust, Skånevik B35 aust.

² *Maal og Minne*, p. 126. 1936.

³ B33 aust.

⁴ B33 vest.

⁵ C33 aust. *S* short for "summer dairy farm".

⁶ B33 aust.

⁷ B34 aust.

⁸ *Maal og Minne*, p. 142. 1936.

⁹ B34 aust. ¹⁰ C32 vest.

Not all the *Sol*-names in these groups must have their origins in sacred attitudes. The *Sollia S* and *Sollikampen* at *Horjolo*, Voss, are situated on sunny slopes facing east.¹ More difficult to understand is the *Soløyefeti* (1146 m) at *Svolnos*, in the group centered around *Grytehorgi* at the Hardangerjøkulen.² Without older forms of the name, nothing definite can be said as to its meaning.

If we continue along these lines, which presupposes a suncult attached to mountains,—as advocated by Kiil and others,—or at least a feeling that places within the area should be given "good" or flattering names, we end up with the result that in the vicinity of 33 % of the Horg-groups, enough *Sol*-names are to be found which could indicate such attitudes. Even if some of the *Sol*-names might be due to other, and more practical namegiving practices—i.e. sunny places in a mountainous region—the percentage is still high. We have only considered the names on the maps where Horg-terms are only to be found on larger mountains, as far as *Sol*-names are concerned, we must believe them to be more numerous on smaller and less dominating sites not registered on the maps. If we could get hold of all names of this kind actually occurring, the percentage might be even higher.

If we now look at the table on p. 96 f. we will discover that in two of the groups having *Sol*-names, the word *Kjerring*-, "woman",³ also appears as a mountain-name. In all, 7 of the 27 Horg-groups (that is to say, 25.9 % of the Horg-groups), have names on *-kjerring*, or *-kone*, "wife". In addition to these groups we find only the mountain *Trollkona* in Evanger, and the *Kjerring* on the map over Ulvik.⁴ Thus we must also regard such feminine names with suspicion, and take into consideration the fact that even behind such names, there might be hidden some ancient beliefs or traditions. We know that as far as names at sea and along the coast are concerned, such terms indicate places to be regarded as dangerous or potent.⁵

From the map, it is only possible to find the Helga-names in the area around *Veskrehorgi* and *Grønahorgi* at Voss. Most of the Helga-names

¹ C33 vest. Concerning *Horjolo* see O. Rygh: *Norske Elvenavne*. Chra. 1904.

² D33 vest.

³ *Solbjørg* in the Bergsdalen and *Solbjørgo* at Ulvik.

⁴ B33 aust and C33 aust.

⁵ Per Hovda: "Kjerring i stadnamn frå sjøen." *Maal og Minne*, p. 37 ff. 1941. Svale Solheim: *Nemningsfordomar ved fiske*, pp. 149, 156. Oslo 1940.

which we have dealt with earlier are only names of places of minor importance and therefore known only locally.

As we have seen, *Helland*, the farm in Borddalen at Voss, was situated on the outskirts of an area, which owing to the many Horg-mountains, appears to be of sacred importance. The same might be said of *Helgeland* farm at *Myrkdalen*, Vossestrand. The distance from *Helgaberg* at Vinje to *Svoleffjellet*¹ in the same massif is not great. The *Helland* farm in Haus, at the foot of *Gullfjellet-Hausdalshorgi*, might also have been named according to concepts attached to the mountain-area.²

In the Horg-groups, names with *Gull-* ("Gold-") occur relatively often. There are 5 such groups of *Gull*-names. This means that 18.5 % of the Horg-groups contain such names, generally regarded on a level with names beginning with *Smør-*, "Butter-", as "flattering" terms for places regarded with awe or veneration for some reason or other.³ *Gull-* is found both in composite farm-names: *Gullbrå* in Eksingedalen,⁴ names of summer dairy-farms: *Gulset* at Voss,⁵ names of lakes: *Gullvatni*, *Gultringstjørni*, Voss,⁶ and place-names in the mountains: *Gulringsdalen*, Voss,⁷ *Gullfjellet*, *Gullfjellshalsen*, *Gullkleivane* og *Gullvellene*.⁸ (In connection with *Gull-* see Fig. 9.)

The names found on the maps show less of a correlation between the Horg-names and names ending in *-prest* "-priest" and *-kyrkje* "-church". Only 11 % of the Horg-groups have *Prest*-names and only 3.7 % have *Kyrkje*-names. Outside the Horg-groups, such names are still relatively common. But some of these names must have their origins in the ownership by churches or priests of pastures or summer dairy-farms. Furthermore, the renaming of such places must have taken place in Christian times, if they were believed to be potent or sacred in any way. This, in itself, is less likely to take place in areas where Christianity was already well established.

As we do not generally have the ancient spellings of place-names of forests

¹ Meaning a mountain with a *svalr* m. "entrance".

² Cf. NG, X, p. 399. Magnus Olsen points here to the farm **Helgaberg* that must have received its name from the mountain *Helgabergsvarden*, Avaldsnes.

³ Cf. *Nordisk Kultur*, Folketru, p. 59; and Qvigstad, op. cit., pp. 331, 352.

⁴ C32 vest.

⁵ C33 vest.

⁶ C36 aust and C33 vest.

⁷ C33 vest.

⁸ B33 vest.

and mountains, it is difficult to say anything definite concerning names beginning with *Vid-*, *Ved-*, *Vi-*, *Ve-* and with *God-* and *Gud-*. The closest we might come is to regard such names as possibly having a sacred origin. With several names having such a possible origin in the same horg-group, they might carry some weight as additional proof.

A very heterogenous group of mountain-names are the personifying names. — Names like *Troll-*, *Gyger-*, *Mann-*, *ŷutul-*, indicate that the shape of the place, or the place itself, is attached to some kind of supernatural being. Especially interesting, and very obscure, are names starting on *Grim-*, *Gjø-* and *Adne-*, which might contain reminiscences of mythical persons and supernatural beings. In places like Voss such mythical beings are still remembered in the local lore, like *Grebbe Hangur* (a male named after the Hangur-mountain) and *Gjervor Møn* (a female in the legends attached to the *Gjervor-tona* at Møn). (In connection with *Gjō-* see Fig. 8.)

Grim, ON *Grímr* m., seems to be a name that occurs with unusual frequency in western Norwegian local place-names, as also in Icelandic place-names.¹ According to my material it is only found once in the non-composite form: *Grim*, the mountain above the farm *Grimo* at Ullensvang. A *Grims-haug* is found at the old overland hauling-place for boats at Haraldseid in Skjold, Rogland. This is significant as we also have other natural short-cuts called *Grimseid*.²

The *Grímr* in this case seems to be something more than an ordinary personal name. The ON *Grímr* m. might indicate some characteristic trait or act connected with the place: "One that wears a mask" (*gríma* f.) or "covers his face".

The name *Adne* occurs in connection with one of the highest mountains in N. Hordaland, *Adneburen*, Masfjorden. The real name of the mountain is regarded as a taboo-word by people at sea: "The mountain is either called *Østerngadd*", "The eastern peak", or *Handverkskista*, "The tool-chest".³

The top of the mountain is rather like a chest, when seen from the sea. The second part of the name must mean "house", ON *búr* n., but in this

¹ Bjarni Einarsson: "Vættatrú ok nokkur íslensk örnefni." *Árbók hins íslenska fornleifafélags*, p. 111 f. 1967.

² See NG, XI, pp. 242, 230. Odd Nordland: "Handelsveg og hovdingemakt i segn og sog." *Haugesunds Museums årsskrift*, p. 12 ff. 1948.

³ Th. Frølich: *Masfjorden*, p. 45. Bergen 1919.

instant it is surprisingly a masculine noun. The profile of the top bears a strong resemblance to the profile of the western "black house" found in the Shetlands (Fig. 5 and 6.)

It adds to the perspective of this explanation, when we are aware of the fact that also Icelandic mountain-names beginning with *Bur-* are covered by a taboo as regards the name mentioned by sailors at sea: "If they are mentioned by name, the *bur*-whale will appear and attack the boat."¹ The taboo concerning the *Bur*-mountains might here be traced back to western Scandinavian common conceptions that prevailed at the time of the settling of Iceland.

The bay with its many surrounding farms near the *Ådneburen* have other names connected with this *Ådne*: *Ådnekvame*, a farm, and *Ådnasteinen*, a large stone in the vicinity of this farm (see Fig. 6). We do not know how this *Ådne* was regarded. But the children who passed through the valley behind the mountain threw stones towards the mountain slope, calling as they did: "Ådne, are you at home? Take care of yourself! Now you will get a knock on your head!"

Approaching the area where the large *Ådneburen* dominated the terrain, one passed on either side of the bay places by their names designated as sacred: *Helgaleet*, "The holy porch", on the left bank, and *Helgatona*, "The holy shelf" on the right bank. In this last place there was also *Kyrkja*, a "Church" (Fig. 7). These names seem to have been given by people approaching the area: From now on the relation to the mountain was important, religious feelings appeared to dominate their actions and attitudes. The feelings towards these natural formations might perhaps best be described by quoting Clifford Geertz: "For what else do we mean by saying that a particular mood of awe is religious and not secular except that it springs from entertaining a conception of all-pervading vitality like mana and not from a visit to the Grand Canyon."²

I have dwelt at great length on the characteristics of the beliefs of the inner districts of Hordaland centering around the holy mountains. These beliefs

are surprisingly similar to conceptions found among our neighbours to the north and to the east. If we now turn to the farm-names in Hordaland, indicating *hóf*-places ("temples" of heathen times), or composed of names from the pagan ON mythology, we discover a pattern of considerable importance: The inner districts with which we have dealt, totally lack farm-names indicating a knowledge of the Othin-mythology, as revealed by the songs of the Edda and the works of Snorre in the 13th century (See map).

The inner parishes that are void of the theoforic place-names include: Haus, Bruvik and the rest of Osterøy, Modalen, Eksingedalen, Voss, Vossestrand, Granvin, Kinsarvik, Ulvik and Eidfjord. In the Sogne-area this also applies to the whole of Aurland. Voss is the centre of this area, and together these parishes make up an extensive mid-western ethno-religious area.

The farm-name *Hófland* is relatively common in Vestlandet. It seems to signify that the farm, or the adjoining territory had a *hóf*, a pagan temple for more private use.¹ Hordaland has eight Hovland-farms, more or less well-established from the medieval forms of the names in writing. None of these farms is to be found in this inner area of Hordaland. Hordaland has 20 farms with names that are supposed to be theoforic, none of these farms is to be found in the inner area. It is quite a remarkable and singular phenomenon that such a large area should lack names of this kind indicating a knowledge of the ON mythology and religion. The fact has been noticed by philologists and ethnologists, but so far no real explanation has been offered.

The settlements in these inner parishes are undoubtedly old. Voss has a few scattered finds from the Bronze Age, something which is to be expected from an inland district. But the finds from the Iron Age and the Migratory Period are numerous and rich, indicating a permanent and well-established settlement.² The many *vin* farms around the Vangsvatnet are evidence of settlements at least dating back to the centuries around the beginning of our era.³ The farm-names ending in *-heimr*, *-land* and *staðir* in these parishes bear witness to the later periods of expansion, the tilling of new fields and

¹ Own notes from my stay in Iceland, 1954.

² Clifford Geertz: "Religion as a Cultural System." *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (ed. by Michael Banton), p. 12. ASA Monographs, 3. N.Y. 1966.

¹ Magnus Olsen: *Ættegård og Helligdom*, p. 234. Oslo 1926.

² Per Fett: Arkeologisk kart over Vossebygdene. At Historisk Museum, Universitetet i Bergen.

³ Magnus Olsen: *Ættegård og Helligdom*, p. 197. Oslo 1926.

the establishment of new farms. But none of these farm-names tells us about the organization, the religion and the mythology which we regard as significant to the ON period.

Instead of the *Hóf* of the other parishes in Hordaland, we here find a common gathering-place called *vangr*: *Vossevangen*, *Oppheimsvangen*, *Ullensvang* and *Vangen* in Ulvik and Aurland. This name is not to be found in the other districts of Hordaland, but appears often in the districts of Oppland and Trøndelag.¹ In spite of its context of "meeting place", "religious gathering-place", the *vangr* does not show evidence of any house or temple for sacrifices or worship. It is more like the *akr* m. which might also be pinned down as a place where rites have been performed, but where buildings for this purpose do not seem to have been necessary. Another such term for a place of worship is *vé* n. "holy place". We might also add names on *Frétt*- indicating connection with prophecies of some kind.²

The religious difference between the inner and outer areas in Hordaland stands out clearly in the farm-names ending in *-land*, which go back to the elder period of the Migratory Age. According to the archeologists, the inland-parishes like Voss had their real period of settlement during the Migratory Period.³

The *-land*-farms in the outer districts are often composites of names from ON mythology, names like *Pórsland* (6), *Frøyjaland* (1) and *Njarðarland* (1). Many of the *-land*-farms are also combined with the word *Hóf*-, indicating a house for cult-purposes on the farm. Not a single name of this kind is to be found in the inner area of Hordaland.

Nonetheless we still find *-land*-farms in the inner area, their names indicating sacred content: These farms are characterized by the word *Helga*-, and are called *Helgaland*. Such farm-names are also found in the outer area of Hordaland, with 5 reliable and 2 less reliable *Helgaland* farms. A similar distribution should also have been expected in connection with *Hófland*, but neither this nor any other *Hóf*- farm is to be found in the inner area. This reveals a rather typical kind of organization, as far as the re-

ligious cult is concerned. We have no traces of houses or temples for this purpose in the inner Hordland-area.

What is then behind this? A large mid-western area, a central place of emigrants and cultural and religious impulses towards the new settlements in Iceland and the western Islands, but still without any trace of that religion which we believe to be common property of the ON pagan era? Large and rich, but relatively isolated parishes without any trace of the Othin-religion and the organization of such a cult, but with distinct evidence in tradition and place-names of religious beliefs and attitudes more appropriate to Torolv Mostrarskjegg than to Dale-Gudbrand.

Part of the solution of these self-contradictions must lie in the background of the religion and the beliefs that attached the term *heilagr* to the *-land*-farms which were established from 400 to 800 A.D. These beliefs seem to have been part of the religion of the inland area in such a way as to exclude the naming of the farms after the gods of Valhall that were respected elsewhere. This must imply that the dominating religious attitudes of the inland area in Hordaland were different from those in the coastal- and central fjord-areas.

Not that these beliefs were unknown in the outer districts, but in the inland area they seem to have been the dominating ones. We have already understood the reason for places in the inland area being singled out by the initial *Helga*-, but the interesting fact is that the term occurs in place-names ending in *-land*.

Now the *-land*-farms were areas that, by tilling and settling, were elevated from ordinary forest or pasture land to the rank of farms. This former stage of the *-land*-farms is indicated by the terms used to designate such farms: The farm is known as a piece of ground taken more or less from the wilderness and put under cultivation. The reason for the term: *Helga*- must be that, for some reason or other, the farm is considered to be sacred in its position or its dependency on powers generally attached to caves, mounds, mountains or terrains of special importance. In some way or other, the farm had a special dependency on these powers.

At the same time, the name *Helga*- indicates the kind of powers the inhabitants of the farm thought were of prime importance to their existence and their activity. While the people in the outer districts of Hordaland could

¹ NG, XI, pp. 75, 173, 318.

² *Fréttheimr*, two farms in Sogn, composite with ON *frétt* f.

³ The same is the case with western parishes like Jølster and Breim.

Map (Gradteigs- kart)	Names containing		Kone Kjerring	Prest	Kyrkje	Helga	Ve	Gud	Gull Smør	Persons	Sval
	Horg	Sol									
Vossestr. C. 32. vest.	Löna-, Svarta-, Langa-horgi	Sol- berget	*	Nonpresten. Preststöl	*		Vidvang-, ane		Smörtun- nefj.	Gygra- bruni	Svola- helleren
Voss. C. 33. vest.	Horjolo	Sollii Sr. Solli- kamben	*	*	*	*	*	*	Gullrings- dalen	*	*
Bergsdalen B. 33. aust.	Fossdals- horgi	Solhellen ^t Solheimen ^t	*	Prestafj.	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Ulvik. C. 33. aust.	Horgi S ^r	Solbjörgo Solhovden Solsævatn	Kjerringfj.	*	*	*	*	*	*	Kongsb. ^g	*
Strandebarm B. 34. aust.	Horgi Yddals-, Vesle-, Jensahorgi	Solaasen	*	*	Dom- kyrkja	*	Vedalen	*	*	Ådnev ⁿ	*
Strandebarm B. 34. aust.	Storehorgi Ljosavass- horg	Solbjörge- fjell	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Strandebarm B. 34. aust.	Midthorgi	*	Kjerringafj.	*	*	*	*	*	*	Gjöna- kvitingen	*
Fana. B. 34. vest.	Storehorgi	*	Graut- kjerringi	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Bergsdalen B. 33. aust.	Gråhorgi	*	Kjerringafj. Kjerringa- dalen	*	*	*	*	*	*	Trollskard -n ^t	*
Skånevik B. 35. aust.	Rana-, Brandvik-, Sandvats- horgi	*	Konefj.	*	*	*	*	Guddalen	*	*	*
Ulvik C. 33. aust.	Horgi	*	*	Prestafet S ^r	*	*	Vedal Vedalss ^r Vedölo	*	*	*	*
Voss. C. 33. vest.	Steinsæter- horgi	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

Voss. C. 33. vest.	Gröna-, Vestre-, Skåndals-, Nesheims- horgi Horgaset	*	*	*		Helgastöl. Lihel- gaset.	*		Gulset.	*	*
Vikedal B. 36. aust.	Horganuten	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Gull- vatni	Trollabotn ^t . Trollabotn.	*
Voss C. 33. vest.	Gråhorgene	*	*	*	*	*	*	Goddalssv ⁿ Goddal S ^r	*	*	*
Bergen B. 33. vest.	Hausdals- horgi Horjehalsen	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Gullfj. Gullfj.- halsen. Gull- vellene	Runda- mannen Mannaleit- nipa	*
Strandebarm B. 34. aust.	Sandvike- horgi	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Skånevik B. 35. aust.	Geitavats-, Svartavats- horgi	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Englefj. Mannen.	*
Voss. C. 33. vest.	Torfinns-, Hjorta-horgi Horgav ⁿ	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Strandebarm B. 34. aust.	Gråhorgi.	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Gygre- stolen	*
Hardanger- jökulen D. 33. vest.	Grytehorgja	Solöyefeti.	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Svolnos Svolnosv ⁿ .	*
Vossestr. C. 32. vest.	Horgi	*	Kjerringanosi	*	*	*	*	*	Gullbrå (gn.)	*	*
Voss. C. 33. vest.	Tjernahorgi	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Bergsdalen B. 33. aust.	Jonshorgi Hærnes- horgi Gråhorgav ⁿ	Solbjörg (gn.)	Kjerringafj.	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Lærdal. D. 31. vest.	Horgi Horganosi	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Hardanger- jökulen D. 33. vest.	Helvetes- horgi Horge (gn.)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

also name their farms after the gods known from the poems and the myths, the Helga-terms were the only terms acceptable in the more remote inland districts of the Horg-mountains.

The difference between the inner and the outer areas in Hordaland, as evidenced by the Land-names, must be the fact that in the Land-period (400–800 A.D.) there was a virtual difference in religion and cults in these areas. The new personal gods of the Valhall-mythology did not attain the rank and the popularity among the people of the mountainous and more isolated inland districts. In these areas people went on believing in the forces and powers attached to the mountains and the sacred abodes of the supernatural beings.

In outer parishes, the Land-farms could be named after the gods of Valhall. But where the owner kept to the old faith and beliefs, or built on a place regarded as sacred, he could call his farm *Heilagr*.¹ The use of two different religious systems for the naming of the farms of the period, in the outer Hordaland-area, is an obvious result of the syncretism of the Land-period.

To the outer districts the cult organized around the Valhall-mythology must have meant a stronger social organization, with temples for the services and with a more marked responsibility and leadership, as natural when houses or buildings for special cult purposes should be established and maintained. The inner area seems to have shown great resistance to the new impact of the gods of Valhall. In the more remote valleys and fjords the old cult still maintained its position throughout the entire Land-period.

The cult, centering around the belief in the mountain abode of the dead, and the sacred places of pastures and forests, was too deeply rooted in the social responsibility towards family and ancestors. In the forests and mountains, or on the farm, they were caught up with the taboo-rules imposed upon everybody, and kept up by overt actions controlled by relatives and neighbours.

The possibility for the cult of mountains to survive changes in religion, depends amongst other things on the syncretistic possibilities offered by new religions. An illustrating example of such syncretism is shown by the im-

¹ Cf. Dag Strömbäck: "At helga land." Festskr. tillägn. A. Hågerström. Upps. 1928.

portant mountain cult of Japan in its mixture with Buddhism to form the cult of the Shugendō.¹

The western Norwegian districts without theoforic farm-names thus provide us with a most valuable possibility of peeping through the consistent layer of ON mythology and religion to the Scandinavian pre-stages of this otherwise so compact system. The picture we in this way get displayed to us is what we might have suspected: A connection with the *saivo*-cult of the Lapps, and with the *pyhä*-concepts of the Finnish people.

The traits in the old religion of inner Hordaland area are consistent with religions to the north and to the east, with old traits in the arctic and sub-arctic faith of hunters and settlers. And the reason for the double abode of the dead in the ON sources: *Valhall* and *Helgafell* is obviously the fact that the ON sources present us with a syncretistic mixture of beliefs pertaining to two religions: An ancient religion with connections towards north, and a newer religion introduced from the south, and advancing upon the old system in the Hordaland area, but never gaining a significant foothold in the inner area of this part of Scandinavia.

¹ Ichiro Hori: "Mountains and their Importance for the Idea of the other World in Japanese Folk Religion". *History of Religions*. Vol. VI, No. 1, Aug. 1966, pp. 1–23, Copyright 1966 Univ. of Chicago.

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JONNERSKA INSTITUTET
SCRIPTA 3

Syncretism

*Based on Papers read at the Symposium on
Cultural Contact, Meeting of religions, Syncretism held at
Åbo on the 8th-10th of September, 1966*

Edited by

SVEN S. HARTMAN

ALMQVIST & WIKSELL

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The Problems of Syncretism

By HELMER RINGGREN

The term syncretism is often used without a clear and unambiguous definition. Now, definition is often a difficult enterprise, and especially so in the area of religious research. Neither etymology, nor a historical analysis of the use of the term appears to be particularly illuminating. The etymology is doubtful, the historical use of the word includes that of the reformation age with reference to mediating formulations of protestant doctrine. One might even ask if exact definitions are always useful in the study of religion. After all, terms are labels which we put on phenomena; they are necessary and useful as long as they serve the purpose of clarity and exactitude. But in a case like this (or in the case of, e.g., Gnosticism) it is questionable that the phenomenon under discussion is so homogeneous that it is capable of exact definition.

Roughly speaking, in actual language the term *syncretism* is used to denote any mixture of two or more religions, as for instance, in Hellenistic syncretism, where elements from several religions are merged and influence each other mutually. It might also be used to refer to cases when elements from one religion are accepted into another without basically changing the character of the receiving religion (because of the relatively small quantity of adopted elements).

It may be that this definition is too broad to be scientifically useful and that it would be preferable to start from the empirical fact of encounter of religions and to examine the various types, conditions, and results of such encounter.

That which happens when two religions meet is obviously different from case to case. It is possible for two "organized" religions to exist side by side for centuries without any exchange taking place. But otherwise, we are obviously moving along a continuum, the one pole of which is the repression of one of the two religions, the other a complete fusion of them. From