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“The Symmetrical Battle” Extended: Old Norse Fránn and Other Symmetry in Norse-Germanic Dragon Lore

Julian A. Emole
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, emoleja@uwec.edu

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Cover Page Footnote

The title of this work was inspired by Daniel Ogden's book, "Drakōn: Dragon Myth & Serpent Cult in the Greek & Roman Worlds," and specifically his chapter titled 'The Symmetrical Battle'. His work serves as the foundation for the following outline of the Graeco-Roman dragon and was the inspiration for my own work on the Norse-Germanic dragon. This paper is a condensed version of a much longer unpublished work, which itself is the product of three years worth of ongoing research. I am indebted to Professor Erica Benson, who answered many of my questions regarding Norse and English literature; Professors Joshua Brown and Johannes Strohschänk for their help with the medieval German sources; and, most of all, Professor Matt Waters, whose constant guidance and praise has been pivotal in my continued enjoyment and success in academia.

"The Symmetrical Battle" Extended: Old Norse *Fránn* and Other Symmetry in Norse-Germanic Dragon Lore

Julian Emole

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Abstract

Previous endeavors to identify a common origin of the dragon-slayer myth (and its many derivatives) in the Indo-European language family have produced mixed results, due in part to the ubiquity of dragon lore. Calvert Watkins's (1995) ambitious project to reconstruct a poetic formula with PIE **g^{w}hen-* ('to smite, slay') has garnered both praise and criticism (see, e.g., Daniel Ogden, 2013). Christine Rauer (2000) has demonstrated that *Beowulf* was influenced by the Latin hagiographic tradition but finds that "the imagery which seems to be so typical for the hagiographical genre is extremely rare" in the secular Scandinavian material (82). However, not much has been said about the Norse-Germanic dragon's relationship to the dragons of classical antiquity. To determine whether the Norse-Germanic dragon was demonstrably influenced by the Graeco-Roman dragon, this project focuses on the pattern to portray symmetry between serpent and adversary in the Graeco-Roman literature and identifies analogous examples in the Norse-Germanic extant literature. Although such a discovery further complicates Watkins's project, it aids in clarifying the origin of certain features of the dragon lore in at least one of the Indo-European language branches.

Keywords: Dragon, Classics, Norse, Germanic, Indo-European, Mythology.

INTRODUCTION

Dragons are a widespread motif in myth, and their ubiquitous nature therefore makes it exceedingly difficult to establish any connection between distinct mythologies or traditions with certainty. Given the multitude of dragons in both Graeco-Roman and Norse-Germanic literature, this project focuses on symmetry between serpent and adversary in Graeco-Roman literature and identifies analogous examples in the Norse-Germanic extant literature. These symmetries can be found on many levels throughout the works analyzed and arise from the descriptions of dragons and serpents; heroes and gods; and the weapons (swords, lightening, fire, and poisons) that they have at their disposal. Through these symmetries we can connect these distinct traditions through their treatment of dragons and the dragonesque and argue that medieval writers analogized features of the ancient Graeco-Roman dragon into their own mythology.

Despite the difficulties faced by scholars, many have attempted to identify the origins of the dragon lore found in the various Indo-European cultures, some of which have compared distinct mythologies in order to demonstrate, what we may call, either vertical influence, i.e., an Indo-European inheritance as evident in a lexical analysis of the Indo-European daughter languages (Watkins 1995), or horizontal influence, i.e., influence on one tradition's dragon-slayer narratives via an adjacent culture, including both Indo-European and non-Indo-European cultures as the source (Fontenrose 1974). Most Indo-European scholars are in agreement with Watkins's proposal, providing the full formulaic expression ***(h₁e)gʷhént h₁ógʷhim*** ('he killed the serpent') with lexical substitutions in Greek, Hittite, and Germanic.[1] However, other scholars are skeptical of Watkins's hypothesis: what is missing, and would perhaps be the most convincing evidence in

[1] Mallory and Adams (1997), 579. See esp. the entire section titled 'Three-Headed Monster' (578-81). The formula is informed by OInd *áhann áhim* ('he killed the serpent', attested in *Rigveda* 1. 32. 1, etc.) and Av *janat ažīm* ('[who] killed the serpent', attested in *Avesta*, *Yasna* 9.8, etc.).

favor of Watkins's argument, is a set of cognate lexical items that make up this formula and pervade the key Indo-European daughter languages.[2]

In addition, it is well established that the Greek *drakōntes* are at least partially indebted to the dragons of the ancient Near East. Typhon is most securely demonstrated, being influenced by the Canaanite-Ugaritic Baal-Sapon against Yam and Litan and the Hittite Tarhunna against Illuyanka and Teshub against Hedammu, while others are less certain.[3] Nonetheless, it is erroneous to assume that the Greeks did not have a set of myths which were entirely their own, but it seems to be equally as fallible to assume that Typhon would be the only Greek *drakōn* to be analogized with dragon-like monsters of adjacent cultures. Cross-cultural influence, after all, does not occur in a vacuum.

We may also briefly note Gunkel's (1895) *Chaoskampf* (literally 'struggle against chaos') hypothesis, which suggests that the battle between the supposed "culture hero" deity and the chaos monster, most often in the form of a serpent, is a ubiquitous feature in not only Indo-European culture but also certain cultures of the ancient Near East.[4] As for previous work on the Germanic dragon, Rauer (2000) has firmly established Latin hagiographical influence on Germanic texts such as *Beowulf* but finds no convincing evidence in her examination of secular Scandinavian material, saying, "the imagery which seems to be so typical for the hagiographical genre is

[2] Ogden (2013) is skeptical of the vagueness and plasticity of this formula, especially since the only term for which there are cognate words in the daughter languages is arguably 'SLAY', and he is even surprised by West's endorsement of the "lax attitude to lexical substitutions" in Watkins's work. See Ogden (2013), 21; and West (2007), 78-9.

[3] Fontenrose (1974), 145; Ogden (2013), 10-15, 75; and Watkins (1995), 448-459.

[4] See Gunkel's original work titled *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Enzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen. 1 und Ap. Jon 12*. An English translation can be found in Gunkel (2006). Gunkel's work has been debated and criticized since its original publication in 1895. For a contemporary reassessment of his work, see Scurlock and Beal (2013).

extremely rare" (82).[5] The dragon slain by the hero in *Beowulf* is therefore excluded from this examination.

The sources included in this examination cover a large span of time, ranging from the earliest of antiquity to the beginning of the Early Modern Period. Ancient Norse myths and legends survived through oral transmission, and, as a result, we have few written records of these myths before the twelfth century, shortly after writing was introduced in Iceland. Fortunately, there exist stone reliefs of some of these myths, which predate the literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and some myths are also mentioned in other Germanic texts.[6] Changes between the oral histories and written texts were inevitable, and we know little about them. In contrast, we know much more about the ancient cultures which had a productive writing system at their disposal, such as the Greeks and Romans.

The Norse-Icelandic literature is divided into two groups, 'eddic' and 'skaldic'.[7] The main divergence between these groups of poetry is content: whereas the anonymous eddic literature details Norse cosmology and the adventures of gods and heroes, the authors of the skaldic literature, who are known to us, wrote about contemporary history. The poetry of the latter is generally of a laudatory nature, either praising chieftains or commemorating warriors and battles. Although the subject of skaldic poetry was not pagan myths and legends, there are many allusions to the old religion, and therefore the skaldic literature will be useful throughout the course of the present examination. The skalds, as *we* call them (from ON *skald*, 'poet'), adhered to a much stricter meter, counting and measuring down to the syllable, which contrasts the more loosely

[5] See also Sorrell (1994), 57-87; and Ogden (2013), 21.
[6] The vast majority of the surviving Scandinavian texts were written in Iceland during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, long after paganism had been abandoned for Christianity (999-1000 AD). There is therefore little doubt that the authors of these texts were Christian, which is also evident in the widespread Christian imagery and symbolism that we find interwoven among the pagan myths.
[7] This distinction is problematic, but it is a distinction to which scholars continue to adhere, and it will serve our purposes here. For more on the types of medieval Scandinavian literature, see Turville-Petre (1975).

written poetry associated with the eddic corpus. It was the skalds who further developed the art of the kenning and brought Norse-Icelandic poetry to new heights.[8]

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that this research attempts neither to take on as wide of a scope as Watkins nor to establish any type of vertical (Indo-European) influence. Moreover, this research does not claim that the Norse-Germanic dragon is entirely indebted to its classical counterparts, nor does it seek to discredit Waktins's proposal. Indeed, the dragons of northern Europe are undoubtably genuine to that group, whether they were original inventions within their respective traditions or, at their very core, were inherited from the Indo-European mother religion. The evidence laid out below suggests that the Norse-Germanic dragon inherited features of the *drakōntes* from classical Greece and Rome by the time their myths were recorded during the Middle Ages.

THE GRAECO-ROMAN *DRAKŌNTES*

[8] The Norse and Old English texts often employ a poetic technique known as the kenning, which is a form of figurative periphrasis or circumlocution used in place of a single word. The meaning of a kenning is not always transparent, oftentimes depending on knowledge of other myths, and thus the identification of its referent can be difficult for the inexperienced reader. Indeed, we may echo Turville-Petre (1975) in saying that kennings "may present a myth in miniature," which is especially the case in skaldic poetry (16). Kennings are often conventional, but that does not exclude them from containing vivid descriptions or being highly ornate—they can be rather long and even contain other kennings within themselves. We may contrast the periphrasis of the kenning with the heiti, which is a single word that is considered to be synonymous with the referent. To better highlight the distinction between these two literary techniques, consider the following example from *Merlínusspá II* 35:

> The grey dogs' scabbards [SWORD] growl;
> The piercing wolf of the neck-strap [SWORD] bites the army.
> The cruel one <sword> breaks men's halls of the pericardium [BREAST];
> The wound-flame [SWORD] topples the settlements of brains [HEADS];
> The strongholds of brains [HEADS] are smashed to pieces.

A word enclosed in brackets signifies a kenning, whereas a word enclosed in angled brackets signifies a heiti. Note also the difference in upper and lower case letters, respectively. Using 'the strongholds of brains' (*borgir heila*) as a transparent example, being in this case a periphrasis for 'heads', we see the poetic utility of the kenning. The substantive adjective 'the cruel one' (*garmr*) is the heiti in this example. Note that, in the original text, it is a single word which is substituted for, and considered synonymous with, the referent 'sword'. Garmr is a mythical dog in eddic poetry, and this reference forms a metaphorical congruence with the dog and wolf kennings in the previous lines. Trans. from Poole (2017), 165.

It is perhaps best to start by saying that the forms of symmetry in the dragon-slayer myths and serpent lore of the Graeco-Roman mythology outlined here are non-exhaustive.[9] The focus centers around those forms of symmetry which are present in, or similar to, the Norse-Germanic tradition. Many singular examples in both the Graeco-Roman and Norse-Germanic texts where no clear symmetry is present have been excluded from the present examination. Furthermore, although through great effort this research attempts to offer a thorough overview of the Norse-Germanic dragon, it is by no means claimed that the treatment of either tradition herein is all-encompassing or complete. It is possible that unintentional oversights or exclusions have been made, due in part to the sheer volume and richness of the literature from both traditions. Such is the nature of the field.

According to Ogden (2013), the Greeks and Romans believed that "the best way to a fight a *drakōn* was to resemble one oneself, or to be aligned with other *drakontes*" (215). We see this idea replicated countless times and in many contexts in Graeco-Roman literature. For example, several classical authors talk of the Ophiogeneis ('Snake-born') who, as the name implies, were humans descended from serpents. The exact origins of the race differ by author: one claims that the founder of the race was a snake who was transformed into a human hero, while another suggests that the goddess Artemis slept with a divine snake and gave birth to the first generation.[10] In either case, the males were said to have the paradoxical ability to cure snake bites. Ogden (2013) provides his answer to the dilemma:

[9] For a rich, though perhaps still non-exhaustive, account of the symmetry in dragon-slayer myths from the Graeco-Roman tradition, see Ogden (2013), 215-246; and (2007), 79-86.
[10] Strabo *Geography* 13.1.14; Aelian *Varia Historia* 12.39.

> It is a curiosity that the Ophiogeneis should be antithetical to snakes and yet born of them. But the paradox can be resolved if we bear in mind the ideal symmetricality to which ancient *drakōn*-fights tend […]: it stands to reason, therefore, that those best equipped to fight serpents should be those that partake of their nature. (212)

The Ophiogeneis example above is but one instance of symmetry portrayed in contexts other than combat, which happens to be the most common place to find symmetry between dragon and adversary. It is no wonder then why Athena uses the aegis, the shield emblazoned with the Gorgon head which itself has the ability to turn those who look upon it into stone, to petrify the giant Palleneus's snake legs and simultaneously kills his upper humanoid body with a sword.[11] As Ogden (2013) aptly puts it, "[t]he humanoid can fight the humanoid, but the anguiform ['snake-form'] is best fought by the anguiform" (215).

Ogden (2013) further notes that symmetry exists "both within individual narratives and at the broader level of lore and culture" with the Graeco-Roman dragon (215). The primary and central symmetrical motif in the myths is, both literally and metaphorically, fire against fire, i.e., a pattern of the dragon and its opponent to share characteristics, making their encounters and fights strikingly reciprocal. Above all, it is the weaponry used by dragon and adversary where this symmetry is most prevalent. However, it is important to note that Ogden uses the term 'weaponry' broadly, ranging from obvious examples (e.g., fire breathing) to those which are less salient (e.g., fiery eyes).

The *drakōntes* of Greek and Roman mythology often shoot fire from their eyes, which Ogden (2013) claims stems from "a wider complex of thought about the perils of the *drakōn*'s

[11] Claudian 52. 104-13.

gaze" (222). This dreadful gaze includes not only the fiery eyes of the dragon but also the Gorgons' ability to turn their victims to stone by simply looking into their eyes. In fact, the ancients "considered that a terrible look was integral to the creature's nature," basing their reading on the dragon's real world analogue (Ogden, 2013, 237). We see this idea replicated in the word *drakōn* itself: it is undoubtably related to *dérkomai* ('to see').[12] A dragon is literally 'one who sees', and therefore its eyes will be an important and recurrent feature in both the Graeco-Roman and Norse-Germanic myths.

According to Dionysius of Samos, the sea-monster Scylla is said to have fiery eyes (*pyroeideis*).[13] Interestingly, we find a rare description of Cerberus flashing fire from his eyes from Euphorion, and Ogden (2013) says that "it resembles lightning, the fire, that is, that flashes forth from Etna" (223).[14] Typhon's fiery eyes are mentioned by several authors.[15] Hesiod tells us that

[12] *δράκων* < *δρακεῖν*, aorist active infinitive of *δέρκομαι* by means of metathesis.
[13] Dionysus of Samos *FGrH* 15 F12.
[14] Euphorion F51 Powell = 71 Lightfoot. The three-headed hellhound is considered a *drakōn* by Ogden, due to his serpentine parentage (Echidna and, depending on the text, Typhon). He is also depicted as either having a tail made of snakes or serpents protruding from his body. We may compare the Fenrisúlfr. On the Gosforth Cross, a large Scandinavian stone dated c. 900 AD, the god Viðarr is shown tearing the Fenrisúlfr's jaws apart during their battle at Ragnarǫk. What is significant about this carving is the wolf's mouth, which displays a forked tongue. The interpretation of this cross is a topic of considerable debate. On the one side, it is believed that this stone is representative of Northern mythology alone, specifically the events of the world's creation and destruction as detailed in the *Vǫluspá*. On the other, it is interpreted as expressing purely Christian themes. A third view claims it is a synthesis of both, which is perhaps most likely correct. Although Cerberus is never depicted in Graeco-Roman art with a forked tongue, this feature is suggestive of the serpent. It is perhaps of little wonder why both the serpent and canine assume a negative role in the Graeco-Roman and Norse-Germanic mythos: much like the snake, the wolf "would be the primary dangerous wild carnivores with whom the Eurasian Indo-European-speaking peoples had to deal, and this beast will be important as an animal enemy, partner, and also image or symbol" (Mallory and Adams, 1997, 647).
[15] Zeus's battle with the infamous Typhon is, as Ogden (2013) puts it, the most celebrated *drakōn* fight in the Graeco-Roman literature, or at least it is the most popular in the surviving texts (69). The battle is highly cosmological, the outcome of which determines who will have supremacy over the cosmos. As we will see below, this struggle over cosmic order appears to be a recurring theme in Indo-European dragon-slayer narratives, the identification of which has lead to some of the hypotheses outlined above. The Typhon myth specifically is a smaller episode in the larger 'Succession Myth' or 'Kingship in Heaven Theme', wherein a series of father-son successions end with Zeus defeating Typhon and thus securing his place as king of the gods. This final episode does not appear to be an original part of the myth; rather, it is believed to be a later addition influenced by the dragon-slayer myths of the ancient Near East. Typhon is said to be the offspring of either the Earth and Tartarus, as revenge for the Titans' or Giants' defeat at the hands of the Olympians, or Hera alone, as a response to Zeus's parthenogenetic begetting of Athena. The cosmic battle ensues, leading up to Typhon stealing Zeus's sinews, which severely

'fire sparkled from his eyes under the eyebrows, and from all of his heads fire burned as he glared'.[16] Apollodorus offers a similar description of Typhon, saying that 'fire flashed from his eyes'.[17] Nonnus also mentions Typhon's 'flashing eyebrows' (*charopēsin ophrysi*).[18] Aeschylus says that Typhon's eyes flash lightning instead of fire (note that Zeus's characteristic weapon has become Typhon's).[19] In the Hesiod and Apollodorus examples above, we see the use of Greek *dérkomai*, which is fitting given the etymology above. In fact, *dérkomai* and its derivatives are not an uncommon occurrence in the literature: Bacchylides's Nemean dragon is described using *xanthoderkēs* ('fiery-eyed').[20]

Intriguingly, there are two examples of humans first likened to the serpent and then described having fiery eyes, both of which occur in the works of Euripides. In *Ion*, Creusa is described as a 'viper' (*échidnan*) who has a 'glare of flames' (*pyròs drákont*'), and Orestes is referred to as a 'viper darting venomous lighting-flashes from his eyes'.[21] We find similar examples of humans being likened to the serpent in the Norse-Germanic, though these instances display more readily the symmetry between serpent and adversary.

weakens the god. Zeus recovers his sinews when Pan (with Hermes's help) either steals them or tricks Typhon into coming out of the cave in which they were kept with either music (and Cadmus) or an invitation to a feast. With his sinews returned, Zeus is able to defeat Typhon, after which the hundred-headed, multiform monster is cast into Tartarus and imprisoned beneath Mount Etna in Sicily.

The "Kingship in Heaven Theme" is thought to stem from ancient Mesopotamia, possibly being diffused as far as Scandinavia. For a discussion of this myth in both Indo-European and ancient Near Eastern mythologies, see Littleton (1970); and also Dongen (2011).

[16] Hesiod *Theogony* 827-828: *θεσπεσίῃς κεφαλῇσιν ὑπ' ὀφρύσι πῦρ ἀμάρυσσεν: πασέων δ' ἐκ κεφαλέων πῦρ καίετο δερκομένοιο*.

[17] Apollodorus *Bibliotheka* I. vi. 3: *πῦρ δὲ ἐδέρκετο τοῖς ὄμμασι*.

[18] Nonnus *Dionysiaca* I. 507: *χαροπῇσιν ὀφρύσι.*

[19] Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* 358: *ἐξ ὀμμάτων δ' ἤστραπτε γοργωπὸν σέλας*.

[20] Bacchylides 9. 13. Ogden (2013) notes that *ξανθοδερκής* is often times rendered 'fiery-eyed' despite its literally meaning of 'golden-eyed' (223).

[21] Euripides *Ion* 1262-5; *Orestes* 479-81: *ὁ μητροφόντης ὅδε πρὸ δωμάτων δράκων στίλβει νοσώδεις ἀστραπάς*.

Fire is not exclusive to eyes of the Graeco-Roman *drakōntes*. The emanations from their mouths are both fiery and venomous, and the venom itself is considered fiery.[22] Ogden (2013) claims that the fieriness "is founded in a metaphorical reading of the effects of their venom: it is this that burns" (220). Nicander often notes that the bite of a real-world snake is fiery,[23] and he even goes so far as to say that the Libyan dipsad inflames the hearts of those it bites, resulting in the victim drinking water until his stomach bursts.[24] The name 'dipsad' means 'thirst-inducing':[25] Lucan tells us how Aulus is devoured from within by a consuming fire, tries to drink the entire sea, and finally drinks his own blood in a final, fatal attempt to sate his unquenchable thirst, all of which was caused by a dipsad bite;[26] in *The Dipsads*, Lucian explicitly defines the snake's bite as fiery, saying that 'it burns and corrupts and sets alight, and people scream out as if lying on a pyre'.[27]

Not only does the *drakōn* emit a burning poison from its mouth but also a breath of pure fire. Aeschylus tells us that Typhon, after his burial, will spout 'rivers of fire' (*ekragēsontaí potamoì pyròs*) and 'boil up with bile of hot missiles and a fire-breathing storm'.[28] In another text by the same author, the shields of Hippomedon and Hyperbius, who square off in battle against one another, are adorned with Typhon and Zeus, respectively. Hippomedon's shield is said to have 'fire-breathing Typhon' (*pyrpnoon Typhōn*) who is 'spitting out of his fire-breathing mouth a dark, thick smoke, the darting sister of fire', while Hyperbius's shield bears Zeus.[29] Apollodorus says

[22] This association between fire and venom was apparently more widely known in the ancient Near East, esp. to the Egyptians and Israelites.
[23] Nicander *Theriaca* 245 (*πυρπολέουσα*) and 364 (*πυρπολέοντα*).
[24] Nicander *Theriaca* 334-58 (*ἐμφλέγεται*, 338).
[25] Greek *διψᾰ́ς* ('venomous snake'), from *δίψα* ('thirst').
[26] Lucan 9. 734-60; *ignis edax* at 742.
[27] Lucian *Dipsads* 4: *ἐκκαίει τε γὰρ καὶ σήπει καὶ πίμπρασθαι ποιεῖ, καὶ βοῶσιν ὥσπερ οἱ ἐν πυρᾷ κείμενοι*.
[28] Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* 369-73: *ἐξαναζέσει χόλον θερμοῖς ἁπλάτου βέλεσι πυρπνόου ζάλης*.
[29] Aeschylus *Seven* 511 and 493-4: *ἱέντα πύρπνοον διὰ στόμα λιγνὺν μέλαιναν, αἰόλην πυρὸς κάσιν*. Trans. by Smyth (1926).

that Typhon spews 'a great jet of fire from his mouth'.[30] Ovid similarly says that Typhon 'spouts forth ashes and vomits flames from his mouth',[31] and both he and Philostratus have him breathing out fire beneath Mount Etna.[32] Pindar claims that the fires of both Etna and Vesuvius, 'the purest streams of unapproachable fire' (*aplátou pyròs hagnótatai pagaí*), are from Typhon.[33]

Paralleling the previous comparisons, an analysis of the weaponry used by god and hero in the Graeco-Roman texts reveal reciprocity as they are identical to those deployed by the *drakōn* (i.e., poison, fire, and lightning). We will begin by discussing Zeus's characteristic weapon, the thunderbolt. Fittingly, Zeus's thunderbolt was known for its ability to scorch and burn.[34] Hesiod's description of the fieriness of Zeus's thunderbolt is strikingly explicit:

> The heat that they [Zeus and Typhon] both generated took hold of the dark blue sea, the heat of the thunder and the lightning, and of the fire from the monster, and of the burning winds and the burning thunderbolt. The entire earth boiled, and so did the fire and the sea … When Zeus had raised high his might and taken up his weapons, thunder, lightning and the flashing thunderbolt, he struck him, leaping from Olympus. And he burned all the heads of the terrible monster on all sides.[35]

Continuing with the explicit symmetry established by Hesiod, Aeschyleus says that Zeus wields a 'fire-breathing' (*ekpneōn phloga*) thunderbolt and burns Typhon to an ember (note that, just as Typhon's eyes flash lightning in this text, which effectively gives Typhon Zeus's weapon,

[30] Apollod. 1.6.3: *πολλὴν δὲ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος πυρὸς ἐξέβρασσε ζάλην*.
[31] Ovid *Metamorphoses* 5. 352-353: *eiectat flammamque ferox vomit ore Typhoeus*.
[32] Ovid *Fasti* 4. 491-4; Philostratus *Imagines* 2. 17. 5.
[33] Pindar *Pythians* 1. 21-2. The entire description ranges from about 1. 20-26.
[34] Cf. Indra's weapon, which also has the ability to burn (*Rigveda* 7.104.4f). The three-pronged iconography of Zeus's thunderbolt stems from the ancient Near East. See West (2007), 253.
[35] Hesiod *Theogony* 844-7, 853-6. Trans. from Ogden (2013), 218.

Zeus's weapon has now taken on a characteristic feature of Typhon).[36] Similarly, Apollodorus says that Zeus 'threw thunderbolts on Typhon'.[37] Recalling the discussion of Hippomedon's shield above, which bears the fire- and smoke-breathing Typhon, Hyperbius's shield has 'firm father Zeus, a burning missile in his hand'.[38] Xanthus of Lydia ascribes the burning of the volcanic Lydian Catacaumene to Zeus's thunderbolts.[39] Similarly, both Apollodorus and Hyginus tell us that the aftermath of Zeus's thunderbolts can be seen in Etna's eruptions.[40] Typhon was also said to be burned by Zeus's thunderbolts. Plato references Typhon being burnt up by Zeus.[41] His 'vomiting of a sacred flame from the breast', according Valerius Flaccus, was caused by Zeus's thunderbolts, though Ogden (2013) notes that Typhon's own fire "may be ironically saluted" as well (219).[42]

Just as Zeus fights fire with fire, man also deploys fire in order to defeat the Graeco-Roman *drakōntes*. Heracles utilizes fire against the Hydra, though the implementation of this fire varies depending on the author. Diodorus tells us that Heracles has Iolaus cauterize the severed Hydra necks, lest they grow back two-fold.[43] Euripides briefly mentions how Heracles 'burned the many-headed, murderous water-dog of Lernea to ashes'.[44] Apollodorus has Heracles shooting fiery arrows at the Hydra while Iolaus set fire to a nearby forest.[45] We may also briefly note that man (or god) can deploy venom and manufactured poisons against the *drakōn*. Apollonius has Heracles

[36] Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* 353-74.
[37] Apollodurs *Bibliotheca* 1. 6. 3: *βάλλων κεραυνοῖς ἐπ' ὄρος ἐδίωξε Τυφῶνα.*
[38] Aeschylus *Seven* 509-13: *Ὑπερβίῳ δὲ Ζεὺς πατὴρ ἐπ' ἀσπίδος σταδαῖος ἧσται, διὰ χερὸς βέλος φλέγων*. Trans. from Ogden (2013), 219.
[39] Xanthus of Sardis *FGrH* 765 F4a and b.
[40] Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 1. 6. 3: *ἐξ οὗ μέχρι δεῦρό φασιν ἀπὸ τῶν βληθέντων κεραυνῶν γίνεσθαι πυρὸς ἀναφυσήματα*; Hyginus *Fabulae* 152.
[41] Plato *Phaedrus* 230a. The verb here is *ἐπιτεθυμμένον* ('to be burnt up').
[42] Valerius Flaccus *Argonautica* 2. 25: *sacras revomentem pectore flammas*.
[43] Diodorus 4. 11. 5-6.
[44] Euripides *Heracles* 419-21: *μυριόκρανον πολύφονον κύνα Λέρνας ὕδραν ἐξεπύρωσεν*.
[45] Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 2. 5. 2. There may be two different reasons for Iolaus setting fire to the forest. On the one hand, Iolaus burned the forest in order to drive the Hydra into it. On the other, Iolaus started the fire in order to have a source from which he would cauterize the Hydra's necks after the heads were severed. See Ogden (2013), 224.

use arrows dipped in the Hydra's own venom in order to kill it,[46] and Apollo shoots Python with poisoned arrows.[47]

OLD NORSE *FRÁNN*

ON *fránn*, meaning 'gleaming, flashing (of serpents or weapons)', is a particularly interesting adjective in the scope of Norse-Icelandic dragon lore precisely because of its definition: the word is characteristically associated with both serpents and weapons (Zoëga, 2004, 161).[48] The semantic connection between serpent and weapon is thought to stem from a shared effect: both are said to shimmer while in motion.[49] The semantic details aside, the Scandinavian poets used this word in a way which portrays symmetry between serpent and adversary, so much so as to suggest something more than mere coincidence.

I know of no alternatives used by writers to describe the Scandinavian serpents as such. However, we do find a few alternatives for the 'gleaming sword' in the texts. In *Sigurðarkviða hin skamma* 4, *mæki málfán* is used, bearing the same meaning as *fránn mækir* ('gleaming sword'), and in stanza 22 we also have Sigurðr's sword described as 'bright steel' (*kynbirt járn*). The alternative *mæki málfáan* appears to be common, occurring also in *Skírnismál* 23 and 25. The Faroese text *Sigurðar saga þǫgla* says that Sigurðr's sword was 'adorned with gold and gleaming gems' (*gulle skreytt og skijnande gimsteinum*).[50] Alongside *fránn*, ON *hvessa* ('sharp, keen') is commonly used for the eyes (cf. Eng. 'keen-eyed' and even Grk. *glaukopis*, 'bright-eyed', which

[46] Apollonius *Argonautica* 4. 1396-407.
[47] *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 3. 357. For a discussion of herbs and even human saliva used against the *drakōn*, see Ogden (2013), 233-234.
[48] Flom (1926) offers several different translations of this word, given the specific context in which it occurs. We also see 'piercing' and 'fiery' as viable translations.
[49] For a thorough philological analysis of the semantic development of *fránn*, see Flom (1926).
[50] *Sigurðar saga þǫgla* 16.

is an epithet for Athena), particularly when describing those of Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr, which is appropriate given that this adjective also often occurs with words for 'sword' (and sometimes the serpent itself). Although these examples are divergences from the use of *fránn*, they still demonstrate the pattern of the shining weapon and eyes.

We can perhaps better demonstrate the tendency to use ON *fránn* for the serpent, weapons, and eyes by identifying the small number of tokens which relate to none of these terms. These occur in only the skaldic texts, and of these there are approximately eight.[51] *Magnússdrápa* 18 describes a 'bright banner' (*frôn merki*), and *Sexstefja* 12 a 'splendid troop' (*frôn sveit*). *Jómsvíkingadrápa* 25 refers to Búi as 'keen-tempered' (*fránlyndr*). *Plácitusdrápa* 9 has a kenning for the river, 'the shining ski of Vôn' (*fránskíðs Vánar*). There are even a small number of tokens which describe other animals. *Plácitusdrápa* 22 again has an interesting description of a lion, 'the fierce animal of the land' (*it frána dýr fróns*), and *Erfikvæði* 19 a raven, 'gleaming Huginn' (*fránn Huginn*). There are also two instances where the wolf is qualified by *fránn*, though these specific tokens will be discussed later.

Fránn is a common word in the *Fáfnismál*, occurring five times.[52] Three of these occurrences relate to the serpent: both stanza 19 and 26 refer to Fáfnir as the 'the shinning serpent' (*inn fráni ormr*).[53] Perhaps of special interest is stanza 32, which refers to Fáfnir's heart, after it is ripped out by Sigurðr, as 'the shining life-muscle' (*fjǫrsega fránan*). We may understand the

[51] I found forty-seven instances of *fránn* in total, many of which have been excluded from the present examination. For serpents, see *Vǫluspá* 65, *Grípisspá* 11, *Hymiskviða* 24, *Skírnismál* 27, *Plácitusdrápa* 50, *Merlínusspá I* 17, Þjóðólfr Arnórsson 1, and *Lausavísur* 10; for swords, see *Erfikvæði* 17, *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* 71, *Þorfinnsdrápa* 9, *Haraldsdrápa* 1, *Eiríksflokkr* 4, and *Geisli* 29.

[52] Fáfnir is probably the most widely known dragon in Norse mythology. He and Sigurðr's battle is mentioned in many Norse-Germanic texts and may even go as far back as *Beowulf* (c. 725 AD), suggesting that the story belongs to an old and long-unattested tradition. See *Beowulf* 884-914: the hero's name is Sigemunde, the name which is ascribed to Sigurðr's father in the continental Scandinavian texts. This mention, at least, if the author does indeed mean Sigurðr's father and not Sigurðr himself, still suggests that the story reaches far into the past.

[53] Bellows (1936) translates *orm inn frána* in the *Grípisspá* as 'the fiery dragon'.

meaning if we consider *fránn*'s semantic history: the heart glistens as fat on meat. Compare *Rígsþula* 31, *fáin fleski* ('hams shining with their fat').[54] The glistening serpent is matched by the glistening of the sword. In *Fáfnismál* 1, Sigurðr's sword, as he 'reddens' it upon Fáfnir, is described as a 'bright blade' (*inn frána mæki*).[55] We may also note that the hero's sword is later described as sharp (*hvassi hjǫrr*) in *Fáfnismal* 6.

The *Fáfnismál* is of particular interest because it contains the glistening of the serpent with the glistening weapon of the adversary, yet we find another instance of a blade glistening with an immediate reference to the serpent. In the *Vǫlundarkviða*, king Níðuðr cuts the sinews of the master-craftsman Vǫlundr and imprisons him so that he will forge 'all kinds of treasures for the king'.[56] Níðuðr greedily takes both Vǫlundr's sword and his wife's ring, and 'the sword shines on Níðuðr's belt' (*skínn Níðaði sverð á linda*).[57] In stanza 18, Vǫlundr says that 'gleaming sword is ever borne far from me' (*sá er mér fránn mækir æ fjarri borinn*). There is, in fact, symmetry in the *Vǫlundarkviða* even though this is not a dragon-slayer story. In the preceding stanza, Vǫlundr's eyes, when he looks upon the sword and ring which were stolen from him, are said to be like 'those of a shining serpent' (*ámun eru augu ormi þeim inum frána*). Interestingly, Vǫlundr mysteriously 'rose into the air' in order to escape his imprisonment.[58]

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[54] Flom (1926) makes this connection at 315.

[55] Flom (1926) translates ON *mækir* as 'mace', whereas Zoëga renders this word as 'a kind of *sword*' (305, italics from original). We know that Sigurðr wields a sword, Gram, which has been reforged by Regin. However, *mækir* is of interest because it is the only word (not kenning) denoting a weapon which occurs in conjunction with *fránn*, which perhaps lends itself to Flom's argument that these words together create a collocation. We find a *similar* pattern with *ormr* ('serpent', note the exception in the *Vǫluspá* and *Húdrápa* where *naðr*—'adder, snake'—is used) but not with the many words for 'eye'.

[56] This story belongs to the widespread tales in Germanic mythology about Wayland the Smith (OE *Wēland*, ON *Vǫlundr* or *Velentr*, OFris *Wela(n)du*, Grm *Wieland der Schmied*, OHG *Wiolant*, OF *Galans*). He is credited with being the maker of Sigurðr's sword Gram in the *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* and Beowulf's armor in *Beowulf*.

[57] *Vǫlundarkviða* 18.

[58] *Vǫlundarkviða* 29: *Völundr hófsk at lofti*. The means by which Vǫlundr takes flight is different depending on the source. The visual representation on the English Franks Casket shows either Vǫlundr or his brother crafting wings from birds' feathers, which also occurs in the *Þiðreks saga af Bern*. Regardless, the fact that Vǫlundr flies in order to escape is reminiscent of the dragon's flight, especially considering how the Old English poem *Deor*, line 1, says

The last occurrence of *fránn* in the *Fáfnismál* refers to Sigurðr's eyes. Fáfnir describes him as a 'bright-eyed youth' (*inn fráneygi sveinn*) in stanza 5. Perhaps of particular significance is the manner in which both Sigurðr and Fáfnir are described using *fránn*: Fáfnir refers to his young slayer as the 'bright-eyed youth', and Sigurðr echoes this in turn by calling Fáfnir 'the shinning serpent' in stanza 19. These forms of address reveal another form of reciprocity when considering how both hero and serpent are the ones who identify the flashing characteristics of their opponent.

Sigurðr's flashing eyes are a common occurrence in poetry. Elsewhere in the Elder Edda, in *Guðrúnarkviða I* 14, there is a reference to Sigurðr's 'sparkling eyes' (*fránar sjónir*). We may also note *Völsunga saga* 30, which details Sigurðr's death: Gutthorm is unable to kill the hero twice out of fear of his 'bright eyes' (*augu Sigurðar váru svá snör*).[59] Indeed, the flashing eyes are most often ascribed to Sigurðr, whose snake-like eyes are even said to have killed the dragon Fáfnir:

> The boy will be called Sigurðr; he will engage in battles, will be very like his mother and called his father's son. He will come to be known as the chief scion of Óðinn's dynasty; there is a snake in the eyes of him [Sigurðr Fáfnisbani] who caused another [snake, Fáfnir] to die.[60]

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that 'Welund knew misery among snakes' (*Welund him be wurman* | *wræces cunnade*). The interpretation of this line is disputed since the writing in the extant MS is unclear. See, for e.g., Osborn (2019).

[59] *Völusunga saga* 30: "Gutthorm came in to Sigurd along toward morning, while he was resting in his bed, and when Sigurd looked at him, Gutthorm dared not make any attack on him, and so he turned away and went out again. And so he came and went a second time. Sigurd's eyes were so bright and keen that few ventured to look in them. But the third time Gutthorm went in, and found Sigurd asleep. Gutthorm raised his sword and laid it into Sigurd, so that the sword-point went into the bolster under him." Trans. from Anderson (1982), 114.

[60] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* 8. Trans. from McTurk (2017), 639:

Sigurðr mun sveinn of heitinn;	*sá mun Óðins ættar*
sá mun orrostur heyja,	*yfirbátr vera heitinn*;
mjǫk líkr vera móður	*þeim er ormr í auga,*
ok mǫgr fǫður kallaðr.	*er annan lætr svelta.*

This stanza presumably explains the epithet of Ragnarr's son, *Sigurðr ormr-í-auga* ('Sigurd Snake-in-eye'), as being a result of inheriting the piercing gaze from his maternal grandfather Sigurðr Fáfnisbani ('Sigurd Fáfnir's-bane', i.e., the mythical Sigurðr described above).[61] Previous interpretations of the 'Snake-in-eye' motif include: it is the result of the eye condition nystagmus;[62] it refers to the myth where Óðinn crawls through an eyelike opening in the form of a snake in order to acquire the mead of poetry;[63] it reflects the tradition where images of snakes were placed over the eyeholes of masks which in turn were placed over helmets (this archaeologically-attested practice occurred predominately in Sweden and is dated to the Vendel period, c. 550-800);[64] and it reflects the warrior's association with Óðinn as the god of war (cf. the use of the adjective *ormfránn*, 'glittering as a snake', which is used to describe the eyes of kings and warriors, and how some of Óðinn's epithets—*Sváfnir*, *Ófnir*, *Grímr*—are used as heitis for 'snake').[65] While any of these interpretations may be true, I here argue that the 'Snake-in-eye' motif further reflects the symmetry between serpent and adversary in the Norse-Germanic literature, being informed by the symmetry found in the Graeco-Roman tradition.

[61] This reference to the eyes is recurrent in the *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*. In stanza 9, the non-mythical Sigurðr's eyes are called 'a glittering brow-stone' (*fránan brúnstein*). The following stanza also mentions 'the bright snakes placed in the brow-stones' (*brúna tauma bráðhalls lagða í brúnsteinum*) and also 'the snake in the eyes' (*hrings myrkviða í hvarmantúni*). Stanza 20 of the same poem says that other men do not have eyes like Sigurðr's: 'There is no snake in our eyes, nor glittering serpents' (*Ormr er oss eigi í augum né fránir snákar*).

[62] Nystagmus, ultimately from Greek *νυσταγμός* 'nodding, drowsiness', is characterized by rapid, involuntary movement of the eyes. See Reichborn-Kjennerud (1922), 26.

[63] This myth is recorded in Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* 6. See also McTurk, (1991), 358-9; and (2006), 685.

[64] See Marold (1998), 7-29.

[65] See Lassen (2003), 39-42. All of this information appears in McTurk (2017), 640. I here closely paraphrase what McTurk has written there. *Ormfránn* ('piercing eyes'), of course, is a compound of *ormr* and *fránn* and invariably creates a collocation with ON *augu* 'eyes'. Flom (1926) speculates that the compound "might early have been coined for the meaning 'many-colored like the serpent,' or 'shining like the serpent'," though this meaning does not align with those of skaldic texts in which it occurs. Rather, it should be rendered as it is above and perhaps with the sense 'serpent-sharp eyes' (319). Harris (2017) states that this epithet is "often applied to the terrifying glances of powerful rulers," which echoes McTurk's (2017) assessment above (521-2). *Jómsvíkingadrápa* 32 tells of 'the snake-flashing eyes of men' (*ormfrán augu ýtum*), and *Hjálmþés saga ok Ǫlvis* 29 (*ormfrán augu*). We may also compare King Óláfr Haraldsson's 'snake-bright eyes' (*ormfrôn augu*) in *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga* 13. *Knútsdrápa* 7 describes Knútr as 'the handsome, bright-eyed descendant of the ruler of the Danes' (*fríðr, fráneygr niðr fylkis Dana*). Trans. by Jesch (2012).

Þórr's fishing expedition is perhaps also of interest.[66] The most interesting part of the myth is the confrontation between god and monster, which readily expresses multiple forms of symmetry, especially with the eyes of Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr.[67] *Húsdrápa* 4 says that Þórr's eyes ('the inner forehead-moon', *innmáni ennis*) shoot 'rays of terror' (*skaut ægisgeislum*), and the Miðgarðsormr stares back with 'flashing eyes' (*fránleitr*). Here we find that the serpent itself is not flashing but rather its eyes: a flash that is an answer to the rays which come forth from those of the god. We may also note that the Miðgarðsormr is given the kenning 'glittering adder of the fishing-line' in *Húsdrápa* 6 (*vaðs af fránum naðri*). The other versions of this myth do not contain *fránn*, but they contain symmetry with the eyes nonetheless. Bragi and Eysteinn offer a similar account: in the former the serpent 'stares from below in anger' (*harðgeðr neðan starði*), while the latter says that Þórr glares at the Miðgarðsormr with 'piercing eyes' (*hvassligum augum*).[68] This latter description also occurs in Snorri's rendition (*hvessti augun*), while the Miðgarðsormr 'in turn stared up toward him from below'.[69]

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[66] The general form of Þórr's fishing expedition is as follows: Þórr and the giant Hymir take a boat out to sea, and Þórr, having received an ox head from the giant, casts his line, using the head as bait. The god hooks the serpent on his fishing line and pulls it up to the gunwale. Depending on the source, the Miðgarðsormr is either freed by Hymir, who cuts Þórr's fishing line, or Þórr strikes the serpent on the head with his hammer. The serpent then sinks back into the sea. Out of the three skaldic poems, Bragi's work is perhaps the only one to mention the ox head. The *Hymiskviða* and Snorri's *Gylfaginning* (48) name it explicitly, and so too is the ox head present in several stone reliefs which depict the scene. Commenting on the ox head's absence in the skaldic versions, Sørensen (2002) suggests that "we must assume that it was taken for granted, when the boat, the fishing line and the fight between Þórr and the serpent are all mentioned. These other features were sufficient to make the myth recognizable" (127). Sørensen also suggests that "without [the ox head] the World Serpent would not have swallowed the hook" (126).

[67] The Miðgarðsormr (Jǫrmungandr, the 'Midgard-serpent') is one of the children of Loki and the giantess Angrboða, the other two being the Fenrisúlfr (Fenrir, the 'Fenris-wolf') and Hel. According to Snorri, Loki's children were prophesied to be a great threat to the gods, and so, in order to prevent the prophecy, the gods convened a council. The Fenrisúlfr was chained with an unbreakable fetter in, presumably, Ásgarðr ('enclosure of the Æsir', i.e., the home of the gods; *Gylfaginning* 34 says that 'the wolf the Æsir brought up at home', *úlfinn fæddu æsir heima*), and Hel was cast into Niflheim, which then became the abode of those who die an unheroic death. The Miðgarðsormr was tossed into the encircling ocean by Oðinn where it grew so large that it encircled the entire world. Evans (2005) notes that the Miðgarðsormr is "deeply embedded in cosmology" and is part of "the narrative of primordial struggle between the dragon and its divine opponent, the outcome of which is decisive for the achievement or maintenance of cosmic order," further suggesting that the cosmic significance in the aforementioned dragon-slayer stories has become far less overt, if even discernible (217-8). See also Turville-Petre (1975), 279.

[68] *Ragnarsdrápa* 17 and Eysteinn 2.

[69] *Gylfaginning* 48: *Þórr hvessti augun á orminn, en ormrinn starði neðan í mót.*

We may also compare *Þrymrskviða* 27, which details Þórr's retrieval of his stolen hammer from the giants: fire is said to burn forth (*augum eldr of brenna*) from the god's 'piercing eyes' (*ǫndótt augu*). *Húsdrapa* 4 (see above) is also worthy of note: Þórr is described as 'awful' or 'fiery', using the same adjective (*ǫndótts*). It is not a wonder then that the god was known for his fiery temper. The *Ketils saga hængs* says that Ketil slew a dragon whose 'fire angrily burned out of its eyes and mouth' (*eldur þótti honum brenna úr augum hans og gini*).[70] The *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* says that the dragon slain by Tristram 'bore its high head and shot out its eyes and tongue and blew fire and poison all around'.[71]

We may also note that 'flames will burn from its [the Fenrisúlfr's] eyes and nostrils' (*eldar brenna ór augum hans ok nǫsum*).[72] Compare Euphorion's unique description of Cerberus flashing fire from his eyes above. A reference to a wolf occurs in *Bersǫglisvísur* 2, wherein *fránn* is used to describe the wolf's eyes: 'the son of the king gave many a slain warrior to the grey, keen-eyed wolf by means of swords' (*sonr konungs gaf grônum fráneygjum vargi margan val sverðum*).[73] Another reference to a wolf is found in *Merlínusspá II* 35, containing an interesting kenning for the sword:

> The grey dogs scabbards [SWORD] growl;
> The piercing wolf of the neck-strap [SWORD] bites the army.

[70] *Ketils saga hængs* ch. 1.
[71] *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* 36: *bar hátt hans höfuð, og skaut út augunum og tungunni og blés alla vega frá sér eitri og eldi*. Trans. from Evans (1984), 400.
[72] *Gylfaginning* 51. Cf. perhaps the folklore legend of a ghost, supposedly a former Countess of Eberstein, who inhabits the Schwarzwald in Germany. She is accompanied by a pack of black hounds who breathe fire from their nostrils. This specter is apparently a counterpart to the Wild Huntsman. See Howey (2002), 55.
[73] Trans. from Gade (2009), 14-15. This seems to reference the wolf being known as a 'carrion-beast', i.e., the son of king Óláfr Haraldsson gave the wolf corpses to feed on after he put those men to the sword. Gade notes that "Most earlier eds adopt the Flat variant *fráneggjum* 'keen-edged' (*hap. leg.*) which is taken with *sverðum* 'swords' (l. 8). This is also possible but would appear to be a *lectio facilior*" (15).

The cruel one <sword> breaks men's halls of the pericardium [BREAST];
The wound-flame [SWORD] topples the settlements of brains [HEADS];
The strongholds of brains [HEADS] are smashed to pieces.[74]

Interpreting *fránn*'s referent here can be difficult, especially since it is used in a kenning, i.e., it is not clear whether *fránn* modifies the noun *freki* ('wolf') or the whole kenning 'wolf of the neck-strap' (*freki halsgerðar*). There are therefore two possible interpretations:

(1)	[*fránn*	*freki*]	*halsgerðar*
	piercing, ADJ-NOM SG	wolf, N-NOM SG	neck-strap, N-GEN SG
	'The piercing wolf of the neck-strap' [SWORD]		

(2)	*fránn*	[*freki*	*halsgerðar*]
	gleaming, ADJ-NOM SG	wolf, N-NOM SG	neck-strap, N-GEN SG
	Gleaming 'wolf of the neck-strap' [gleaming SWORD]		

I here take a broad approach by assuming that *fránn* refers to both the wolf (i.e., *piercing* wolf) and the entire kenning (i.e., *gleaming* sword). There is therefore not only another instance of the sword gleaming but also the wolf. We may also note the heiti: Garmr is a mythic dog in eddic poetry, and Poole (2017) notes that it "may also be reminiscent of the name of the hero

[74] Trans. from Poole (2017), 165:

'Grenja gránir	*grammar slíðra;*
bítr fránn freki	*ferð halsgerðar;*
Rýfr gramr guma	*gollorhallir;*
bregðr benlogi	*byggðum hjarna;*
err brother mjǫk	*borgir heila.*

Sigurd's sword," which gleams as he pierces Fáfnir in the *Fáfnismál* (166). We have a similar sword kenning in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 11, 'the gleaming fish of the shield' (*frán hvítingr rítar*). The fish is oftentimes used in snake kennings (cf. *Lausavísur* 10 *fránǫluns*, 'the flashing fish'), so here we have both a gleaming snake and a gleaming sword.

OTHER SYMMETRY

Beyond the use of *fránn* in the Scandinavian texts, there are other examples of symmetry in the Norse-Germanic literature which are reminiscent of the symmetry in the Graeco-Roman corpus. First, we will analyze how the confrontation between god and serpent in Þórr's Fishing Expedition portrays even more forms of symmetry; how this symmetry is further exemplified in the poem *Þórsðrápa*; the use of poison, fire, and lightning by serpent and adversary; and finally Sigurðr Fáfnisbani's serpentine characteristics, which he acquired from a dragon, juxtaposed by his other human adversaries' serpentine characteristics.

Besides the symmetry between the eyes of Þórr and the serpent, this scene in Þórr's Fishing Expedition depicts symmetry in, what Sørensen (2002) prefers to call, its vertical dimension (128). This is perhaps evident in the exchange of glares between god and serpent, especially in Bragi's account, which says that the Miðgarðsormr stares from below (*neðan*). In stone reliefs of the myth, namely the Hørdum and Altuna stones, which were most likely erected in the 11th century, Þórr's feet are shown bursting through the boat's bottom, while Þórr pulls upward on his fishing-line. These details are present in Snorri's account as well:

> The Midgard Serpent snapped at the ox-head, and the hook caught in its jaw; but when the Serpent was aware of this, it dashed away so fiercely that both Thor's fists crashed against the gunwale. Then Thor was angered, and took upon him his divine strength, braced his

> feet so strongly that he plunged through the ship with both feet, and dashed his feet against the bottom; then he drew the Serpent up to the gunwale. And it may be said that no one has seen very fearful sights who might not see that: how Thor flashed fiery glances at the Serpent, and the Serpent in turn stared up toward him from below and blew venom.[75]

The *Hymiskviða* relates a similar series of events. Þórr baits his hook with the ox head, and the Miðgarðsormr gapes and swallows the bait. Þórr pulls the Miðgarðsormr up to the boat, but, instead of the giant Hymir cutting the fishing line, Þórr strikes the serpent on the head with his hammer. It then sinks back into the ocean.[76] Sørensen provides his assessment of the scene:

> We have here a representation of the universal opposition between the powers of the cosmos and the powers of chaos […], but this battle is distinctive in that the god is placed on the sea, outside his natural element, and in the strong emphasis on the situation's vertical dimension: Þórr seeks to haul the serpent *up* from *its* element, while it on the contrary pulls *downwards* and tries to overturn the fragile vessel. It is a picture of dramatic balance. (Sørensen, 2002, 128; italics are from the original)

The symmetry (or, as Sørensen, 2002, calls it, "dramatic balance") created through the situation's vertical dimension is quite striking and recalls the fight between Zeus and Typhon,

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[75] *Gylfaginning* 48. Trans. from Bellows (1936): *Miðgarðsormr gein yfir uxahöfuðit, en öngullinn vá í góminn orminum. En er ormrinn kenndi þess, brá hann við svá hart, at báðir hnefar Þórs skullu út at borðinu. Þá varð Þórr reiðr ok færðist í ásmegin, spyrnði við fast, svá at hann hljóp báðum fótum gegnum skipit ok spyrnði við grunni, dró þá orminn upp at borði. En þat má segja, at engi hefir sá sét allógurligar sjónir, er eigi mátti þat sjá, er Þórr hvessti augun á orminn, en ormrinn starði neðan í mót ok blés eitrinu.*

Note ON *hvessti augun* 'keen eyes', which also occurs in Eysteinn 2 (*hvassligum augum*). I am not sure why Bellows (1936) translates this as 'fiery' (cf. note 50 above).

[76] See *Hymiskviða* 22-25.

which was "a mirror-battle between the two most terrifying varieties of elemental fire: the fire of lightning, which shoots *from heaven to earth*, and the fire of the volcano, which shoots *from earth to heaven*" (Ogden, 2013, 218; italics mine). Again, we see an emphasis on the vertical dimension of opposing powers in a dragon fight.

We may also compare Þórr's Fishing Expedition to the skaldic poem *Þórsdrápa* by Eilífr Goðrúnarson. The latter appears to create a metaphorical congruence between Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr, which further exemplifies the symmetry in the renditions of Þórr's Fishing Expedition. The *Þórsdrápa* contains a striking description of one of Þórr's encounters with the giants, of whom he is their greatest enemy, and from whom the Miðgarðsormr and the Fenrisúlfr are descended. Here we are told that the giant Geirrǫðr, who has "invited" Þórr to play a game, throws a lump of molten iron at Þórr, who then catches it with his iron gloves. What is interesting about this scene is not the series of events per se, but rather how they are described, particularly Þórr's hand:

> An uncommon lesson (nor did the lair-men of the fjord-apple Møre
> Put their ale-mirth aside) did Earth's progeny [ÞÓRR] learn:
> The elm-cord's fear-twanger, kin-branch of Southerly, [GEIRRǪÐR] knocked
> A forge-heated lump from his tongs into the open mouth of Óðinn's sorrow-thief
> [ÞÓRR].[77]

[77] *Þórsdrápa* 15:

> *Fátíða nam frœði (fjarðeplis) kon Jarðar*
> *(Mœrar legs ne mýgðu menn ǫlteiti) kenna:*
> *álmtaugar laust ægir angrþjóf sega tangar*
> *Óðins afli soðnum áttruðr í gin Suðra.*

The 'open mouth of Óðinn's sorrow-thief' is Þórr's mouth, and the ON noun used for the mouth here is *gin*. Interestingly, this word denotes the mouth of a beast specifically and is used for the Miðgarðsormr and the Fenrisúlfr elsewhere (cf. *Völuspá* 55, *Hymiskviða* 22, and *Gyflaginning* 51).[78] The following stanza is even more interesting:

> The oppressor of the kinfolk of evening-faring women [ÞÓRR] yawned with his arm's mouth [HAND] over the heavy red lump of tong-seaweed [MOLTEN IRON].[79]

The 'yawning' of Þórr's hand is quite striking, especially since the same verb (*gein*) is used to describe how the Miðgarðsormr 'yawns' over the ox-head bait in the *Gylfaginning*.[80] This event during Þórr's fishing expedition, as described in the *Gylfaginning*, is reminiscent of Þórr's encounter with Geirrǫðr in the *Þórsðrápa*. What is more, the kenning used to describe the molten

[78] See, for e.g., Zoëga (2004), 165.

[79] *Þórsðrápa* 16. The first two lines of this stanza are missing:
þrøngvir gein við þrungum þangs rauðbita tangar
kveldrunninna kvinna kunnleggs alinmunni,

[80] ON *gein* is perhaps of special interest. It derives from PIE **ĝhē(i)-*, an Indo-European root which also includes Grk. χάσμα and Lt. *hiatus*. Nonnus, a Greek poet who wrote the *Dionysiaca* (c. 6th century), uses χάσμα to describe the 'gaping jaws' of Typhon (1.222-223, 2.286-287, 2.44-45, and 2.610) and the gaping crevice into which Typhon is thrown after his defeat (2.241-243). Cf. the Homeric expression νῦν μοι χάνοι εὐρεῖα χθών, 'Now the wide earth gapes for me', which occurs twice in the *Iliad*. West claims the idea is "related to the concept of the earth itself gaping open to swallow someone up so that he is never seen again." Note that the 'lurking lairs hollowed out in a grinning chasm for the snaky heads,' and from then on Typhon is never seen again. Note also the paralleled use of χθόνα ("earth") and χάσμα and χάνοι, the latter two of which are derived from the same PIE root. Furthermore, West notes that "the Ugaritic Baal epic Death (Mot) is personified as a being who swallows people into his mighty throat, and in the Old Testament there are references to the earth 'opening its mouth' to swallow people up so that they go down to Sheol." From West (1997), 288.

We may also compare the gaping (Lt. *hiatus*) openings to the underworld in the works of Ovid and Virgil (*Metamorphoses* 7.409-413 and *Aeneid* 6.237-242, respectively). The Norse analogues have received more attention in other contexts, particularly relating to the Christianization of northern Europe, which is supported by depictions of the entrance to the Christian Hell as the gaping jaws of a beast in Anglo-Saxon art and is aptly named the 'Hellmouth'. Schapiro speculates that this motif has its origins in Norse paganism, specifically from the battle between the Fenrisúlfr and Viðarr. According to Hofmann, Cerberus, too, came to be associated with the Mouth of Hell by the early Middle Ages. See Schapiro (1942), 211, footnote 66; and Hofmann (2008), 147.

ON texts which have gaping (*gein*, *gapa*) serpents or wolves: *Gylfaginning* 34 and 51, *Vǫluspá* 55, *Hymiskviða* 22, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* 34, *Merlínusspá II* 16, *Geisli* 29, *Sigurgarðs saga frækna* 5, and *Krákumál* 19. 39-107.

iron ('the heavy red lump of tong-seaweed') in the second stanza is even more interesting in light of this comparison: whereas the Miðgarðsormr yawns over something that is land-based (ox-head), Þórr's hand yawns over something that is described in terms of the aquatic (seaweed), both of which are characteristically out of their own element (see Sørensen, ibid., above). Þórr is on a boat in the ocean during his fishing expedition and is on land when he catches the molten iron.

Symmetry involving fire is undoubtably far more present, or perhaps more explicit, in the Graeco-Roman texts. In fact, authors such as Müllenhoff have "observed that the association of dragons with flying and fire-spitting would appear to be absent form the Germanic tradition."[81] Alternatively, the Norse-Germanic dragons are often noted for their ability to spit poison. Yet, just as the poison of the Graeco-Roman *drākontes* is affiliated with fire, one can make similar observations in the Norse, though perhaps to a less considerable extent. Fire imagery associated with weapons is also a more salient feature in classical literature; nonetheless, below we will analyze instances where not only the adversary uses fire to fight a dragon but also poison.

The *Gull-Þóris saga* describes a dragon which 'snored fire from its mouth … with great poison' after it was put to sleep by lightning.[82] The two serpents in the *Merlínusspá I* 'blow venom and blue fire on each other' (*blásak eitri ok blǫm eldi*).[83] The *Bærings saga* 31 says that Bæringr fights the dragon Skadevalldr which 'spouted red fire and spewed poison' (*þviat ravðr logi ravt*

[81] Müllenhoff *apud* Rauer (2000), 86, footnote 55. The dragon in *Beowulf* is an obvious exception: *Đā se gæst ongan | glēdum spīwan*, "Then the demon [i.e., dragon] began to vomit with fire" (line 2312, etc.). See also Rauer (2000), 33 and 63.

[82] §4: *En jafnskjótt sem eldingin kom yfir drekana þá sofna þeir allir … og hraut eldur af munni þeim með miklu eitri*, 'But as soon as the lightning passed over the dragons, they all fell asleep … and [one of the dragons] snored fire from its mouth at them with great poison'.

[83] *Merlínusspá I* 16. Poole notes that "the reference is probably to the blue flame emitted on combustion of sulphur. In a fragment of Barth extant in the mid-C13th Norwegian ms. AM 237 b fol (Loth 1969, 233), the phrase *blár loge* 'blue flame' is used to translate Lat. *flamma sulphurea* 'sulphurous flame' (cf. ONP: blár 3; Loth 1969, 221)." From Poole (2017), 59. Cf. also Statius *Thebais* 5. 508 where he gives the Serpent of Nemea blue fire which comes from its eyes.

or mvnni honvm, ok spin hans eitri).[84] As stated above, the dragon in the *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* 'blew fire and poison all around' (*blés alla vega frá sér eitri og eldi*).[85] Interestingly, the dragon in *Vilhjáms* only 'spewed fire form its nose and mouth' (*gaus elldr ur navsum hans og munni*). *Ectors saga* 10 has a dragon 'snorting out poison and blackening both the earth and the forest' (*ogurligur frysanndi eitri suo iordinn og skogurinn sortnadi*).[86] We may wonder whether the blackening of the earth and forest is from the poison (i.e., killing vegetation) or an implicit scorching.

Neither Þórr's nor Sigurðr's weapons are often explicitly described as fiery. However, there are a small number of texts which give Sigurðr a weapon that is fiery or venomous. The *Þiðriks saga af Bern*, an Old Norse text based on lost Germanic material, says Sigurðr beats the dragon (*linnormr*), who in this tale is named Regin (a Fáfnir reflex), to death with a tree lit on fire by his charcoal burner.[87] Taking the aforementioned connection between the venom and the fire of the dragon into account, an implicit symmetry emerges: Sigurðr beats a fire-dragon with a fiery beam. The *Lied vom hürnen Seyfrid* closely aligns with the *Þiðriks saga af Bern*, but, after killing the initial dragon, Sigurðr comes upon a valley full of dragons and other reptilian creatures. He decides to cut down trees and set them on fire with the charcoal burner, effectively killing all of the monsters.[88] Similarly, a unique dragon-slaying story has Sveinn kill the dragon Jaculus by shooting a fiery arrow into his mouth (i.e, the place from which a dragon emits fire and poison).[89]

[84] Trans. from Evans (1984), 244. The "dragon" in this story is a shape-shifter. During the majority of the fight, the dragon, named Skadevalldr, takes the form of a man, which suggests a more explicit symmetry (i.e., man against man).
[85] *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* 36. Trans. from Evans (1984), 400.
[86] Trans. from Evans (1984), 257.
[87] *Þiðriks saga af Bern* 163-7.
[88] *Lied vom hürnen Seyfrid* 1-11.
[89] *Yngvars saga viðförla* 11.

In the *Brot af Sigurðarkviða*, Sigurðr says: 'The glorious king laid between us a sword adorned with gold; with fire were the edges wrought without, with venom-drops within'.[90] The *Sigurðar saga þǫgla* also gives Sigurðr a sword whose 'one edge was poisoned while the other was not' (*audrum megin eggiar var eitrud enn audrum meginn eigi*) and its sheath was 'painted with birds, beasts, and dragons' (*oll penntud dyrum fuglum go drekum*).[91] This description occurs right before Sigurðr slays a dragon that 'spews poison spectacularly in all directions' (*blasa eitre med miklum vnndrum j allar aettir*).[92] We may draw particular attention to the fact that Sigurðr fights a poison-spewing dragon with a poison-edged sword which itself features a dragon of its own.

Considering how Zeus's thunderbolts were celebrated in the context of their ability to burn, we may find a similar connection with Þórr's hammer, Mjǫllnir. This word is thought to derive from PIE **meldh-* ('lightning'), a late PIE word which also yields ON *mjuln* ('fire').[93] That Þórr's weapon was associated with lightning is of little doubt: the god's name, after all, means 'thunder'. West (2007) rightly asserts that there is no explicit scorching or burning by Þórr's hammer, but we

[90] Stanza 19, trans. from Flom (1926), 315: *Benvǫnd of lét brugðinn gulli margdyrr konungr á meðal okkar; eldi vóru eggjar útan gǫrvar en eitrdropum innan fáðar*. Davidson (1998) discusses this description and others like it in Germanic literature, arguing that these descriptions refer to the use of acids in the etching process of sword forging and finds it unlikely that they reference poisoned weapons (131-2). This suggestion does not appear to hold up in the following *Sigurðar saga þǫgl* sword reference, which has an explicit poisoning (*eitrud*), compared to the poison drops (*eitrdropum*) in the *Brot af Sigurðarkviða*. However, Davidson does note that the association between weapons and poison is a result of "the continual association in poetry between swords and serpents. There is satisfaction to be gained from the image of a gleaming, silvery sword darting like a snake to leave its deadly imprint on the victim, while the serpentine patterns which formed the hall-mark of a good blade in early times strengthen this connexion [sic]" (132). Thus, even if the *Brot af Sigurðarkviða* passage makes no reference to a poisoned sword, it still furthers the metaphorical congruence between serpents and swords in Norse-Germanic literature.

[91] *Sigurðar saga þǫgla* 16.

[92] *Sigurðar saga þǫgla* 16.

[93] I here appeal to the knowledge of Indo-European scholars. See Mallory and Adams (1997), 353. PIE **meldh* also yields Welsh *mellt*, Old Prussian *mealde*, Latvian *milna*, Old Church Slavic *mlŭnii*, and Russian *molnija*, all of which mean 'lightning'. Turville-Petre (1964) suggests such etymological speculation has not been fruitful and further says that Icelandic *mala* ('to grind') and *mølva* ('to crush') have also been suggested sources (81). The former derives from PIE **melh₂-* ('grind'), which also includes ON *mjǫl* ('meal'). See Mallory and Adams (1997), 247. I am not sure of the etymology of the latter. West (2007) actually groups the words descended from **meldh-* and **melh₂-* together, along with other words meaning 'hammer', and provides the semantic steps crush > crushing instrument > thunderbolt > lightning (243-4).

know many of the PIE words for 'lightning' derive from words for 'fire' (253). ON *elding*, which is found in the *Gull-Þóris saga* passage cited above, is also worth noting: the word is undoubtably related to ON *eldr* ('fire').[94] Thus it follows that lightning and fire have been connected not only linguistically but conceptually for some time, and we may wonder whether the Scandinavian poets had this idea in mind.

There was also a popular and long-attested belief throughout Europe and Asia, and even in parts of Africa, that certain stones of particular type and shape had magical properties.[95] These stones, called thunderstones, were thought to have fallen from the sky, having been made from thunderbolts, and to have the ability to protect one's house from being struck by lightning. In reality, these stones were prehistoric tools which were long buried beneath the earth, hence the belief that they were shot down from the sky and ended up being embedded deep within the ground. Thunderstones were popular among the Vikings and, because of their supposed origin, came to be associated with Þórr. This affiliation with the thunder god appears to be reflected in the properties the Vikings sought after when choosing thunderstones: their shape had to be similar to an axe (e.g., ground stone or flint), and they had to have "flaming" properties (e.g., flint and quartz).[96] That the stones which were associated with Þórr required flaming properties is significant: it lends itself to the idea that the thunder god was associated with fire or, at the very least, that Mjǫllnir had flaming properties.

Besides Sigurðr's well-known encounter with Fáfnir, we find imagery associated with his other adversaries—namely Guthrun, Gunnar, and Brynhild—which is also worthy of note. This imagery likens these human adversaries to the serpent, which in turn brings them into the thematic

[94] Zoëga (2004), 111. See also Buck (1949), 57.
[95] For the widespread belief in, and practice of keeping, these types of stones, see West (2007), 252, 255, and 343; and Johanson (2009).
[96] See Thäte and Hemdorff (2009).

fold of reciprocity. When Guthrun has Sigurðr killed by Gotthorm, she feeds the latter snakes and the flesh of beasts (i.e., the flesh of wolves), both of which were thought to induce ferocity.[97] That killing Sigurðr, who has bathed in the blood of a dragon, requires the ingestion of snakes and wolves by his slayer suggests a need for quasi-serpentine characteristics in order to defeat a man who has received powers from a dragon himself.

In the *Völusunga saga* episode, we find another curious detail involving Sigurðr's death. The kenning used for the sword with which Gotthorm kills Sigurðr is 'blood-serpent' (*bloðrefill*). Anderson (1982) renders this as 'sword-point' being that a snake's head is its only dangerous part, and, since Sigurðr is mortally wounded via stabbing, this translation is sufficient for our purposes here (151). It is not uncommon for sword kennings to be related to the serpent—their long and thin bodies, coupled with their aforementioned deadliness, make them an ideal point of comparison—but they are not the only objects used in kennings for the sword.[98] The point being, out of all of the options which denote the sword, the choice is one of serpents. All things considered, Gotthorm is put in a state of frenzy by the consumption of serpents and wolf's flesh and using a sword that

[97] See *Brot af Sigurðarkviða* 4 and esp. Bellows's (1936) notes:

They cooked a wolf, they cut up a snake,
They gave to Gotthorm the greedy one's flesh,
Before the men, to murder minded,
Laid their hands on the hero bold.

We may also compare *Völusunga saga* 30, which quotes a somewhat different version of this stanza: "They took a snake and some wolf's flesh and had them boiled together and given Gutthorm to eat, as the skald has said:

Some wood-fish they took, some wolf-flesh they cut;
Some they gave to Gutthorm, some flesh from Gera,
To go with beer and parts of many things
To wreak the magic spell…

"And with this food he became so violent and covetous and subject to the persuasion of Grimhild [Brynhild, Krimhild in the German texts] that he promised to do that deed, and they promised him great honor in return." From Anderson (1982), 114.

[98] See Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* 64: "Cutting weapons, swords or axes, are called fires of blood or wounds. Swords are called Odin's fires, and people call a spear by names of trollwives and refer to them in terms of blood or wounds or forest or oak. And thrusting weapons it is fine to refer to as snakes or fish." This last sentence seems to confirm Anderson's translation. Trans. from Faulkes (2012), 179.

is described as a serpent, and all of this is against a man who bathed in the blood of a dragon, gaining special abilities after he slew it.

Sigurðr's other non-serpent adversaries are worthy of note. We have an interesting depiction of Gunnar in *Guðrúnarhvöt* 17:

The sorest it was	when Sigurðr mine
On his couch, of victory	robbed, they killed;
And grimmest of all	when to Gunnar's heart
There crept the bright-hued	crawling snakes.
And keenest of all	when they cut the heart
From the living breast	of the king so brave.[99]

As stated above, we have *fránir ormar* for 'glistening serpents'. The meaning of this metaphor is perhaps of little doubt: when Gunnar decided to have Sigurðr killed at the behest of his wife, Brynhild, it was then that the serpents 'crept into his heart'. We may also note that the keenest (*hvassastr*) serpents were those who 'cut the heart of the king'. Similarly, in *Guðrúnarkviða I* 27, we have Brynhild, who was instrumental in bringing about Sigurðr's demise, likened to the serpent:

[99] Trans. from Bellows (1936):
En sá sárastr, er þeir Sigurð minn,
sigri rœntan, í sœing vágu,
en sá grimmastr, er þeir Gunnari
fránir ormar til fjörs skriðu,
en sá hvassastr, er til hjarta
konung óblauðan kvikvan skáru.
Cf. *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* 1: 'I shall courageously suffer death, however suddenly realized for me it may be; the coiled serpent will not creep to my heart, unless a misfortune befalls me' (*vá ek at foldar fiski heiðar lax til hjarta fimtán gamall—mínu. hringlegnum vel smjúga*). From McTurk (2017), 626.

By the pillars she stood, and gathered her strength,
From the eyes of Brynhild, Buthli's daughter,
Fire there burned, and venom she breathed,
When the wounds she saw on Sigurðr then.[100]

Here Brynhild is actually given features of the dragon rather than simply having serpents in her heart as Gunnar does. The differences aside, both of these descriptions liken the two who were responsible for Sigurðr's death to serpents. In summation, Gotthorm is only able to kill Sigurðr by ingesting snakes and wolves, delivering the death blow with a sword described as a serpent; and the two people who orchestrated Sigurðr's death, Gunnar and Brynhild, are said either to have glistening serpents in their heart or are explicitly described as having serpentine characteristics (i.e., fiery eyes and venomous breath). These features are due recourse against a hero who slew a dragon single-handedly and acquired dragon-hard skin.

Conclusion

In short, the overwhelming number of corresponding elements and the depth of symmetry between the imagery of dragons and their slayers suggests a common source for these features. The evidence does not point to a common Indo-European inheritance, however, but rather one culture imitating another. The medieval Norse-Germanic texts contain many examples of the symmetry which were so widespread in the writings of classical antiquity, suggesting that

[100] Trans. from Bellows (1936):
Stóð hon und stoð, strengði hon efli;
brann Brynhildi Buðla dóttur
eldr ór augum, eitri fnæsti,
er hon sár of leit á Sigurði.

medieval writers attempted to analogize elements of the Norse-Germanic dragon with its classical counterparts. Fire, which is commonly found in the eyes and mouths of the Graeco-Roman *drakōntes*, is wielded by god and hero in order to slay their dragon enemies. Similarly, the characteristic gleaming of the Norse serpent is extended to the sword and eyes of its adversary, and we even find a few examples of the dragon's flaming eyes and emanations and the hero's fiery weapon. The Graeco-Roman and Norse-Germanic heroes are also described using poisoned weapons to defeat their venomous foes. Symmetry is even created in the spatial dimension of dragon fights in both traditions.

As mentioned above, many examples of symmetry were excluded from the present examination. What would make this research more complete is a thorough treatment of the entire classical and medieval corpora. Moreover, exploring other Indo-European and non-Indo-European traditions would be fruitful for identifying more examples of emulation and the ultimate source of the symmetry motif. Ogden (2013) explores this briefly at the close of his chapter on the symmetrical battle, focusing specifically on the Indian tradition of the divine cobras known as the Nagas. In this section, he also notes that the "complex set of motifs of symmetricality [… are] found in several of the Near-Eastern and Indo-European dragon-fight narratives," though his treatment of the serpent lore of other cultures is introductory and therefore non-exhaustive (244-5). Expanding the notion of the symmetry motif to include elements outside of the weaponry deployed by dragon and adversary, which is done in more detail by Ogden (see, for example, the Ophiogeneis example above), would provide even more possibilities for further research.

Finally, it is important to reiterate the difficulties faced in this field of scholarship, especially when they involve dragons and the dragonesque. The ubiquity of dragon myth creates unique challenges for scholars as they attempt to sort out the origins of, and influences on, any

given culture’s dragon lore. Being that the mythological dragon is both widespread and of great antiquity, cross-cultural borrowings and insular innovations were not simply possible but inevitable. The ultimate goal of such scholarship is not necessarily to identify the proto-myth from which all of the Indo-European dragon-slayer myths derive; rather, identifying the source of a specific motif or feature, whether in one tradition or an entire set of cultures, can be considered a victory. Each discovery ultimately brings us closer to understanding the complex mythological structure that reflects humanity’s universal ways of interpreting and understanding the reality that surrounds them.

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