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Grotta Savngr, an eddic lay of pagan times

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Grotta Sabngr,

AN EDDIC LAY OF PAGAN TIMES.

THIS wild and extraordinary romance of early Pagan times in the North has hitherto been little, if at all, known in this country. In 1794, it was printed at Copenhagen, with translations in Latin and Danish; but it was never published, and is in few hands. Two copies of it in Icelandic were brought to Edinburgh, in MS., last year, by Mr F. Magnusen, from Island, and are now here, along with all the other unpublished Eddic remains; of which advantage should have been taken in the course of this work, had not my part of it been nearly printed off two years ago, before I had access to them.

It is not very easy to conjecture why this very curious piece should have been rejected, or rather so long neglected, by Sandvig, and the Arna-Magnean editors of the Edda of Sæmund. It is found in all the MS. copies of that collection, except the parchment one in the king's library at Copenhagen; and has this peculiarity in its favour, that it is the only one of all the Sæmund lays which is found entire in the Edda of Snorro; a proof, if not of its superior antiquity, at least of the esteem in which it was held by Snorro. Had it no other merit, however, its having survived so many changes of religion, manners, language, and government, during eleven centuries, surely entitles it to some notice. The prose translation here given, is intended merely to make the original more intelligible. The tale is thus introduced in the Edda:

* Not that published by Resenius, but Oluf Orm's copy, a transcript of which is now in this country.

Formali til Grotta Sabngs,

PREFACE TO THE QUERN-SONG.

“GOLD is called (by the poets) the meal of Frothi ; the origin of which is found in this story. Odin had a son called Skiöldr, (from whom the Skiöldvngar are descended) who settled and reigned in the land which is now called Danmaurk, but was then called Gotland. Skiöldr had a son named Frithleif, who reigned after him. Frithleif's son was called Frothi, and succeeded him on the throne. At the time that the Emperor Augustus made peace over the whole world, Christ was born. But as Frothi was the most powerful of all the monarchs of the North, that peace, wherever the Danish language was spoken, was imputed to him ; and the North-men called it Frothi's peace.

“At this time no man hurt another, even if he found the murderer of his father or brother, loose or bound.* Theft and robbery were then unknown, insomuch that a gold ring (*armlet*)² lay for a long time untouched in Jalangursheath.

“Frothi chanced to go on a friendly visit to a certain king in Sweden, named Fiölnir ; and there purchased two female slaves, called Fenia and Menia, equally distinguished for their stature and strength. In those days there were found in Danmaurk two Quernstones of such a size, that no one was able to move them ; and these mill-stones were endued with such virtue, that the Quern in grinding produced what-

* The point of honour, which obliged every North-man in those days, as an indispensable duty of piety, to revenge the death of a relative, makes a striking feature in the Danish ballads, as it does in the manners of many nations at this day.

² These rings were often of great weight and value. See Note on *Rigs-mal*.

ever the grinder wished for. The quern was called *Grotti*;* he who presented this quern to Frothi was called *Hengikiöptr* (*hanging chops*.) The king caused these slaves to be brought to the quern, and ordered them to grind gold, peace, and prosperity for Frothi, allowing them no longer rest or sleep than while the cuckow was silent,² or a verse could be recited. Then they are said to have sung the lay which is called *GROTTA-SAVNGR*; and before they ended their song, to have ground a hostile army against Frothi, insomuch, that a certain sea-king, (*pirate*) called *Mysingr*, arriving the same night, slew Frothi, taking great spoil, and so ended Frothi's Peace. *Mysingr* took with him the Quern *Grotti*, with *Fenia* and *Menia*, and ordered them to grind salt. About midnight they asked *Mysingr* whether he had salt enough? On his ordering them to go on grinding, they went on a little longer, till the ship sunk under the weight of the salt. A whirlpool was produced where the waves are sucked up by the mill-eye, and the waters of the sea have been salt ever since!"

Such is the Eddic prose account of this extraordinary adventure. Had the learned Bishop of Drontheim, *Eric Pontoppidan*, been acquainted with it, it might have helped him wonderfully in accounting for the *MÖL-STROM* off the coast of Norway, which has puzzled and terrified so many men as well as monsters.³

* I take this to be an old Gothic name for a mill of any kind, perhaps from the *grey stone* used for mill-stones; hence the *Gaëlic grattan*, meal ground on a *mullin-grattan*, or hand-mill; the *Scottish, groats*; *Eng. grits*; *Germ. grout*; *Dan. grytte*, to grind; and the *Swedish, gröt*, in *Scottish, crowdy*.

² Even in the north of Scotland, about Midsummer, when the weather is fine, as it generally is at that time, there is so little darkness during the night, that the morning and evening twilights almost melt into each other: the cuckow calls through the whole night, and the lark and thrush are silent but a very short space.

³ This is not meant as a sneer at that venerable prelate, whose life, as well as his learning, were an ornament to his country, and to the age in which he lived.

GROTTA-SAVNGR;

THE

QUERN SONG.

Fenia and Menia.

Nv erom komnar
til konvngs hvsu
framvisar tvær
fenia oc menia.
thær ro at frótha
frithleifs sonar
mátkar meyiar
at mani hafthar.

Thær at lvthri
leiddar varo
oc griótz gria
gángs of beiddo.
het hann hvarigri
hvild ne yndi
áthr han heyrthi
hlióm ambátta.

Thær thyt thvlo
thavgn horvinnar,

“ Now are we come
to the king's house,
two fore-seers,
Fenia and Menia.”
These were at Frotha's [house,]
Frithleif's son,
(mighty maidens)
held as thralls.

They to the Quern [eye]
were led,
and the grey millstone
were bid set a-going.
He promised to neither
rest nor relief,
ere he heard
the maidens' lay.

They made to rumble,
ceasing silence,

leggiom lvthvr
 lettom steinom.
 bath hann enn meyiar
 at thær mala sklydo

with their arms, the Quern's
 light stones.
 He bade again the maidens,
 that they should grind.

Svngo oc slvngo
 svthga steini
 sva at frótha man
 fest sofnathi.
 thá qvath that menia
 var til meldz komin.

They sang, and whirled
 the grumbling stone,
 so that Frothi's folk
 mostly slept.
 Then thus sang Menia,
 who had come to the grinding:

Avth mölom frótha
 mölom alsælann
 fiöld fiár
 á fegins lvthri

Menia.

" Let us grind riches to Frothi!
 Let us grind him happy
 in plenty of substance,
 on our gladdening Quern.

Siti hann á avthi
 sofi hann á dvni
 vaki hann at vilia
 thá er vel malit.
 her skyli engi
 avthrom granda
 til bavl's bva
 ne til bana orka
 ne höggva thví
 hvasso sverthi
 thó at bana bróthvr
 bvndinn finni.

" Let him brood over treasures!
 Let him sleep on down!
 Let him wake to his will!
 There is well ground!
 Here shall no one
 hurt another,
 to plot mischief,
 or to work bane (*death*),
 nor strike therefore
 with sharp sword,
 though his brother's murderer
 bound he found.'

En han qvath ecki
 orth it fyrri.
 sofit ei thit
 ne of sal gavkar

Both.

" But he spake no
 word before this:
 ' Sleep not ye,
 nor the cuckows without,

etha lengvr enn sva longer than while
lióth eitt qvethac. I sing one strain."

Fenia.

Varrattv fróthi "Thou wast not, Frothi,
fvllspakr of thic sufficiently provident,
málvinr manna [tho'] persuasively eloquent,
er thu man keyptir. when thou boughtest slaves.
kavss thu at afli Thou boughtest for strength,
oc at álitom and for outward looks;
en at æterni but of their ancestry
eckí spvrthir. didst nothing ask."

Genia.

Harthr var harvngnir "Hardy was Hrungnir
oc hans fathir. and his father;
thó var thiassi yet was Thiassi
theim avfigari. stouter than they.
ithi oc avrnir Ithi and Arnir
okrir nitbiar our relations,
bræthvr berggrisa mountain ettin's brethren,—
theim erom bornar. of them are we born."

Fenia.

Komia grotti "The Quern had not come
or gría fialli from the grey fell,
ne sá hinn harthi nor thus the hard
hallr or iörtho. stone from the earth,
ne moli sva nor thus had ground
mær berggrisa the mountain-ettin maiden,
ef vissi ótt if her race known
vætv til hennar. had not been to her."

Genia.

Vær vetor nío "We nine winters,
vorom leikor playful wierd-women,

avflgar alnar
for iorth nethan.
stótho meyar
at meginverkom
ferthóm siálfar
setberg or stath.

were reared to strength,
under the earth.
We maidens stood
to our great work ;
we ourselves moved
the set mountain from its place.

Velltom grióti
of garth risa
sva at fold fyrir
för skiálfandi.
sva slavnngdom vith
snvthga steini
hafga halli
at halir tóco.

We whirled the Quern
at the giant's house,
so that the earth
therewith quaked.
So swung we
the whirling stone,
the heavy rock,
that the subterraneans heard it."

En vith sithan
à svithiótho
framvisar tvær
í fólk stígom
bræddom biórno
en brvtom skióltho
gengom í gegnom
gráserkiat lith.

Jfenia.

" But we since then,
in Sweden,
two fore-seers,
have fought.
We have fed bears,
and cleft shields ;
encountered
grey-shirted (*mailed*) men.

Steyptom stilli
stvdðom annann
veittom góthom
gyttormi lith.
vara kyrrseta
áthvr knví fellí.

We've cast down one prince ;
stayed up another.
We gave the good (*brave*)
Guttormi help.
Unstably we sat
Till the heroes fell.

Fram heldom thví
thav misseri
at vith at kavppom

Forward held we
these six months [so]
that we in conflicts

kendar voro. were known.
 thar skortho vith There scored we
 skavrpom geirom with sharp spears
 blóth or beniom blood from wounds,
 oc brand rvthom. and reddened brands.

Nv erom komnar Now are we come
 til konvngs hvsa to the King's house,
 miskvnnlavsar unpitied,
 oc at mani hafthar. and held as thralls.

avrr etr iliar The earth bites our feet beneath,
 en ofan kvldi and the cold above;
 drögum dólgs siötvi we drive an enemy's Quern;
 dapvrt er at frótha. sad is it at Frothi's [house]!

Hendor skvlo hvilaz Hands shall rest;
 hallr standa mvn the stone must stand;
 malit hefi ec fyri mik, I've ground for my part
 mit ofleiti. with diligence."

Qenia.

nv mvna havndom " Now must not to hands
 hvild vel gefa rest well be given,
 áthvr fvlmalit till enough ground
 frótha thycki. Frothi thinks.

Hendor skvlo havlda Hands of men shall
 harthra triónor harden (*temper*) swords,
 vapn valdreyrvg. blood-dropping weapons."

Jenia.

vaki thv fróthi. " Awake thou, Frothi!
 vaki thv fróthi Awake thou, Frothi!
 ef thv hlytha vill If thou wilt listen to
 3 K

savngom ockrom
oc savgom fornóm.

our song,
and prophetic sayings.

Eld se ec brenna
fyrir avstan borg.
vígspjavll vaka
that mǫn viti kallathr.
mǫn herr koma
hinnig at bragthi
oc brenna bæ
fyri bǫthlvngi.

I see fire burn
east of the town ;
the war heralds wake ;
it must be called the beacon.
An army must come
hither forthwith,
and burn the town
for the prince.

Mvnnatv halda
hleithrar stóli
ravthom hríngom
ne regingríóti.
tavkom á mavndli
mæskarpara.
eroma vafnar
í valdreyra.

Thou must no more hold
the throne of state,
nor red rings,
nor stone (*royal*) edifice.
Let us drive the Quern,
maiden, more sharply !
We shall not be armed
in the bloody fray."

Mól míns favthvr
mærarmlíga
thvíat hon feigth þra
fiölmargra sá.
stykke stórar
stethor frá lvthri
iárnar fiarthar.
mölom enn framarr.

Qenia.

" My father's daughter
ground more furiously,
because the near deaths she
of many men saw.
Wide sprung the large
prop (from the quern-eye)
of iron to a distance.—
Yet let us grind on !"

Mölom enn framarr
mon yrsu sonr
nith hálfðana
hefna frótha.

fenia.

" Yet let us grind on !
Yrsu's son must
with the Kalfðani
revenge Forthi.

sa mǫn hennar
heitinn verða
burr og bróðir.
vitom báðar það.

So must he of his [mother]
be called
son and brother :—
we both know that."

Both.

Mólo meyar
megins kostotho
voro vngar í
iötvmóthi.
skvlfu skaptre
skavtz lvthr ofan
hravt hinn hafgi
hallr svndvr í tvav.

The maidens ground,
and bestowed their strength.
The young women were in
ettin mood.
The spindle flew wide ;
the hopper fell off ;
burst the heavy
nether millstone in two !

En berggrisa
brvthvr orth vm qvath.
malit havfom fróthi
senn mǫnom hættu.
hafa fvlstathit
flióth at meldri.

But the mountain giantess
woman these words said :
" We have ground, Forthi !
Now must we finish.
Full long stood
we maidens at the grinding."