

The Aesir and the Elves

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“We have to be content with an imperfect and patchy understanding of the old religion. But this does not entitle us to assume that the religion itself was correspondingly primitive or incomplete. We must bear in mind that no extensive direct information about the pagan religion was recorded until fully two centuries after the conversion to Christianity, and the generations which had come and gone meanwhile were, or were supposed to be, hostile to these pagan heresies.”

“The most ancient poems in the *Edda* also show various signs of abridgement and alteration – some of which of course may be due to editing or error in the written stage. On the other hand, it seems an inescapable conclusion that stories told in prose must always have existed alongside stories told in verse. Many of the heroic lays are shaped in such a way that it is evident the poets assumed more knowledge of the subject-matter on the audience’s part than the poems themselves encompass: a whole legend is there as a backdrop to the verse.”

__Professor Jónas Kristjánsson, retired head of the Arni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavik, Iceland writing in “Icelandic Manuscripts: Sagas, History, and Art”; translated by Jeffrey Cosser; The Icelandic Literary Society, 1996.

The Aesir and the Elves share a special relationship. They are frequently named together in the lore:

Hávamál 159: "If in the company of men I must enumerate the gods, both Aesir and Elves. I know the distinctions of all... "

Hávamál 160: "...Strength to the Aesir, and success to Elves."

Lokasenna 2, 13, 30 " Of the Aesir and Elves seated herein..."

Völuspá 48, Þyrmskviða 7: "How is it with the Aesir and the Elves?"

Grímnismál 4: “near the Aesir and the Elves”

Sigrdrífumál 18: “They are among the Aesir; they are among the Elves”

The skalds often associate the Aesir and the Elves, yet seemingly little is known about the Elf tribe, esteemed enough by the ancient skalds to be called *tíva*, “gods” (Hávamál 159). By examining the many references in Eddaic and skaldic poems to them, we can learn much about the Elves.

PART I: The Sons of Ivaldi

In the mythic sources, we find two similar groupings of elves: the renowned artisans known as Ivaldi's Sons (*Ívaldasynir*) and the tragic artisan Völund (Wayland Smith) along with his brothers, Egil and Slagfin.

In regard to the Sons of Ivaldi, the Younger Edda contains a mythic fragment, which seeks to inform us why gold can be referred to as "Sif's hair". This is commonly recognized as the story of how Thor obtained his hammer Mjöllnir. In *Skáldskaparmál* 35, we are told that out of his love for mischief, Loki once cut off all of Sif's hair. And that when Thor learned of this, he threatened to break every bone in Loki's body, unless he proceeded to "black-elves" (*svartálfum*) and have them make hair of gold for Sif that would grow like natural hair.

First Loki visits some "dwarves" (*dverga*) called Ivaldi's Sons, who make the hair for Sif, the ship *Skidbladnir* for Frey, and the spear *Gungnir* for Odin. Afterwards, Loki wagers his head with the dwarf Brokk, that his brother Sindri (or Eitri) can not make three treasures as good as these. Although Loki tries his best to thwart their efforts, Sindri creates the boar *Gullinbursti* for Frey, the ring *Draupnir* for Odin, and the hammer *Mjöllnir* for Thor. Ultimately, the gods judge their work superior. But Loki, true to form, escapes his obligations and tricks the artists out of their prize: his head. Denied the right to cut off Loki's head, Brokk sews Loki's lips shut instead. We are not informed how the Sons of Ivaldi reacted to the judgment, because they were not present.

The authenticity of this myth is confirmed in part by a poetic reference found in *Grímnismál*, verse 43, which states:

*Ívalda synir
gengu í árdaga
Skiðblaðni at skapa,
skipa bezt,
skírum Frey,
nýtum Niarðar bur.*

Ivaldi's sons
went in days of old
to form *Skidbladnir*
the best of ships,
for bright Frey,
Njörd's benign son.

The only other poetic reference to the Sons of Ivaldi appears in the Eddaic poem *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, recently judged by the Icelandic scholar Jónas Kristjánsson to be an authentic part of the Eddaic canon. The poem relates a tale about the time Idunn was absent from Asgard.

Hrafnagaldur Óðins, verse 6, reads:

*Dvelur í dölum
dís forvitin,*

*Yggdrasils frá
aski hnigin;*

*álfa ættar
Iðunni hétu,
Ívalds ellri
ýngsta barna.*

Dwells in dales
the curious dis,

from Yggdrasil's
ash descended,
of elven kin,
Idunn by name,
Ivaldi's youngest
elder child.

Here we learn Idunn is the daughter of Ivaldi. Furthermore, she is of the elven race. It is important to note that Ivaldi had two sets of children, a younger set and an older set. Idunn is the youngest of the first (i.e. the older) set. Since they have the same father, it is logical to conclude that these sets of children had different mothers. Thus Idunn is either the sister or half-sister of the famous artisans, the Sons of Ivaldi.

That they are called elves should not be considered a contradiction. In *Skáldskaparmál*, as we have seen, they are referred to both as *svartálfar* and as *dvergar*. And in this regard, we should remember that *Völuspá*'s dwarf-list contains the names of several elves: Alfr, Gandalf, Vindalf, etc. Apparently, these distinctions are not as clear-cut as we have come to believe.

The sources have nothing more to say about Ivaldi's sons. However in regard to the name Ivaldi, we find two parallel forms that may be of significance: *Ölvaldi* and *Allvaldi*.

In *Skáldskaparmál* 4, we learn that *Ölvaldi* has 3 sons: Thjazi, Idi, and Gang. . (A parallel trio of names appears in a poetic source, the Grotto-song, verse 9: Thjazi, Idi, and Aurnir.) This Thjazi, we are told, is the same being that once kidnapped Idunn along with her apples of rejuvenation. Similarly, in *Hárbardsljóð* 19, the father of the giant of whose eyes Thor made stars is called *Allvaldi*. Thus *Ölvaldi* and *Allvaldi* are variant forms of the same name. And since we find this name in at least two forms, we should consider the possibility that there are other forms as well. What these names have in common is the suffix *-valdi*. Thus, perhaps, Ivaldi also belongs to this group. But do the sources give us any indication that the sons of *Ölvaldi*-*Allvaldi* are smiths, like Ivaldi's sons are?

Following the tale of Idunn's abduction, Snorri tells a curious story about the Sons of *Ölvaldi*. He says that after their father's death, Thjazi and his brothers divided his gold among them, taking equal shares of it in their mouth. Thus gold may be referred to as the speech of these giants. As proof of this, we find two kennings for gold in the partially preserved ancient poem *Bjarkamál in fornu*, quoted in *Skáldskaparmál* 45. They are *Thjaza thingskil*, "Thjazi's testimony", and *Iðja glysmál*, "Idi's shining speech".

Examining these kennings, we have good reason to doubt the veracity of Snorri's explanation. It almost seems as if it were made up on the spot to explain the kennings for gold, *Thjaza thingskil* and *Iðja glysmál*. More and more, scholars are recognizing that

Snorri created stories such as this to explain obscure passages in the older poems. Here we find this quick explanation grafted onto the end of the story of Thjazi and Idunn. Thus it bears closer examination.

Thingskil properly refers to testimony before a court (i.e. a “Thing”). Anthony Faulkes defines it as “assembly business”, “assembly declarations” (“Skáldskaparmál: Glossary and Index of Names”). Why would gold be designated as “Thjazi’s testimony before a Thing”? Do we know of any mythic circumstance in which golden works of art, made by Thjazi, serve as testimony in a court case?

If Ölvaldi-Allvaldi’s son Thjazi, is also one of Ivaldi’s sons, then the answer is yes. In the contest of the artists described above, the Sons of Ivaldi were not present, when their works were judged before a tribunal of the gods. Their golden works of art were mute testimony of their skill as artisans. Because Ivaldi’s sons were not present to speak for themselves, their work figuratively spoke for them. If Thjazi and Idi, Ölvaldi-Allvaldi’s sons, were considered identical to Ivaldi’s sons, then the kennings *Thjaza thingskil*, Thjazi’s testimony, as well as *Iðja glysmál*, “Idi’s shining speech” find their natural explanation. That gold which was held in the mouth should be referred to as *thingskil* is improbable.

From the analysis of the names Ivaldi, Ölvaldi, and Allvaldi found in scattered fragments, shown in part above, it is becoming clearer that Idunn and Thjazi were probably regarded as half-brother and sister by the Eddaic poets. So, with this tentative conclusion, let’s examine the tale of Idunn and Thjazi.

In Skáldskaparmál 56, which uses the skaldic poem *Haustlög* as its guide, we learn that one day when Odin, Loki, and Hoenir, are out wandering (the reason for their journey is not stated), they meet the giant Thjazi, sitting in a nearby tree cloaked in eagle-guise. The gods have killed one of his herd, a *tálhreinn*, “decoy-reindeer”, and are attempting to roast it, but magic prevents the meat from cooking. Only when they agree to share their meal with Thjazi does the meat cook. However, before they can eat it, the eagle swoops down and consumes all the meat. In anger, Loki picks up a conveniently placed rod and strikes the eagle across the back. To Loki’s chagrin, the rod sticks to the eagle’s back, and to his hands. He cannot let it loose. In an instant, the eagle flies off dragging Loki over rocks and trees. When he is able, Loki pleads for mercy and the eagle agrees to release him on the condition that he lure Idunn from Asgard. Loki agrees to this condition and is set free.

Sometime later, Loki lies to Idunn, telling her that he has discovered apples comparable to hers outside Asgard. When they go to investigate, Thjazi promptly abducts Idunn. Apparently many years pass, as the gods grow old, without her apples to restore their youth.. When they are quite aged, they compel Loki to return Idunn to them. Using Freyja’s falcon-guise, he enters Thjazi’s gard, changes Idunn into a nut and takes flight with her. Clad in eagle-guise, Thjazi follows and is burnt on Asgard’s wall. Sometime thereafter, Thjazi’s daughter Skadi comes to Asgard demanding wergild for her father’s death. The gods appease her by allowing her to choose a husband from their number.

In this story we find Idunn, Ivaldi's daughter, closely associated with Thjazi, Ölvaldi-Allvaldi's son. This cannot be coincidence. Since the Younger Edda does not inform us of any consequences following the judgment on the artists, we have assumed there were none. But now, when we recognize Ölvaldi-Allvaldi's son Thjazi as one of the Sons of Ivaldi, these two mythic fragments come together like broken shards of a shattered urn, and these two seemingly independent mythic fragments reveal scenes of a larger picture:

1) The Sons of Ivaldi (Thjazi, Idi, and Gang-Aurnir) have been deeply insulted by the judgment on their work, which they had given freely to the gods.

2) Odin, Hoenir, and Loki visit their realm, perhaps to appease them. Since the Sons of Ivaldi were not present at the judgment, the gods must travel to their home. Before they arrive, they are met and intercepted by Thjazi. Loki in particular, as the instigator of the contest of the artists, is the target of Thjazi's wrath. Thjazi treats him badly dragging him over trees and rocks.

3) Thjazi wants Idunn, his sister and her golden apples, most probably a product of his magic forge, away from the gods. With this in mind, we should note the plentiful magic implements in this tale: the feather-cloak, the adhesive rod, the decoy-reindeer, and the oven that will not cook. These may be regarded as products of the Ivaldi sons' art.

That the heathen skalds regarded Ivaldi's sons as identical to Ölvaldi-Allvaldi's sons, should now be apparent. But before we regard it as conclusive, let us ask: Is this corroborated by any other source?

For the sake of simplicity, I will cite just one. In Lokasenna 17, Loki insults Idunn by saying:

*Þegi þú, Iðunn
þik kveð eg allra kvenna
vergjarnasta vera,
sízt arma þína
lagðir úturþvegna
um þinn bróðurbana.*

“Shut up, Idunn!
of all women I declare you
to be the most fond of men,
since you laid your arms,
carefully washed,
around your brother's bane”

Here Loki accuses Idunn of embracing her brother's killer. The identity of Idunn's brother has long befuddled the scholars, whose theories range from the mundane to the fanciful. John Lindow simply says that “the identity of her brother and the killer remain unknown.” (“Handbook of Norse Mythology”) while, Ursula Dronke in her “Poetic Edda Volume II” (pg. 359), remarks:

“Loki is upbraiding Iðunn for a mythological situation in which she found herself. As goddess of the constantly renewed spring of life, Iðunn belongs to the same mythologem as the Vanir. They took as consort their brother or sister. If this marital custom applied to Iðunn, the husband who was killed in the seasonal contest for possession of her would be her brother, and the winner of her, her “*bróðurbani*” (brother’s bane). . . . The situation Loki castigates here in relation to Iðunn cannot be relevant to Bragi. He has just been mocked for martial cowardice; he cannot now be seen as the May-Queen winning champion.”

Why Dronke identifies Idunn with the “May Queen” is uncertain, and moreover unnecessary, since a far simpler answer lies close at hand.

Idunn’s lover is not named, but Loki adds that she washed her arms white, a detail only she and her lover would know. We should consider that he makes similar accusations against Sif and Skadi in the same poem. He says directly that he was their lover. (Lokasenna 52, and 54). To Sif, he says:

*einn ek veit,
svá at ek víta þikkjumk,
hór ok af Hlorriða,
ok var þat sá inn lævísi Loki*

“but one I know,
and, I think, know him well,
was whoring and on Hlorridi (Thor),
and that is the wily Loki.”

We are not told elsewhere that Loki ever seduced Sif or Idunn. But from the available sources, it’s clear that he certainly has had the opportunity. He once got close enough to Sif to cut off all her hair (a sign of adultery in old Germanic culture; Tacitus, *Germania* 19), and, when he stole into Thjazi’s abode and changed Idunn into a nut, he presumably was alone with her. Whether his accusations are true or not, Loki can claim to have been these goddesses’ lover with impunity. Only he and they know what happened when they were alone. Thus he is free to say what he would like. Therefore, in all probability, when Loki says that Idunn embraced her brother’s murderer, he means that she embraced him. This interpretation is consistent with the thrust of his other boasts. The detail of her arm-washing, adds weight to this conclusion. Since Idunn is the daughter of Ivaldi, it stands to reason that Loki murdered one of the famous artisans, the Sons of Ivaldi

In Lokasenna, Loki admits to only two murders. To Frigg, he admits that he is the reason that “Baldur is no longer seen riding to halls,” (Lokasenna 28) and to Skadi, he admits being “the foremost when your father was slain” (Lokasenna 51). Skadi’s father is well-known to have been the giant Thjazi. Other sources confirm that Loki brought about the death of Thjazi, Allvaldi-Ölvaldi’s son, by luring him in hot pursuit to Asgard, where he would ultimately die in a fire raging around Asgard’s wall. We have no indication whatsoever that Baldur was Idunn’s brother, thus we are left with Thjazi, providing further circumstantial evidence that Thjazi is Idunn’s brother, whom Loki, her supposed lover, helped murder.

Still there is room to doubt. One may ask, how can Idunn and Thjazi be siblings, if Idunn is an elf and Thjazi is said to be the kin of giants?

Haustlǫng provides a clue. In verse 13, Thjazi is referred to as “the son of Greip’s wooer”. Greip is the name of a giantess. Thus Thjazi is the son of a giantess. Thjazi’s father, Ivaldi, was her wooer. Going back to Hrafnagaldur Óðins 6, recall that Ivaldi had two sets of children, a younger set and an older set. Idunn is the youngest of the older set. The younger set therefore seems to have been produced by Ivaldi’s union with a giantess. Thus the Sons of Ivaldi are half-giant and half-elf, while Idunn and her full-blooded siblings are pure elf.

That the gods held Thjazi in high esteem is made clear by the fact that either Thor or Odin made stars of his eyes. (Skáldskaparmál 56, Hárbarðsljóð 19). Thor also bestows a similar honor on his friend Aurvandil (Skáldskaparmál 17), whom he rescued from the Elivagor on his return from Jotunheim. When he discovers that Aurvandil’s toe was exposed and became frostbitten, Thor broke it off and threw it into the heavens, where it became a new star. Thor honors Thjazi in a similar manner. That Thjazi’s daughter Skadi is allowed to choose a husband from among the Aesir as just compensation for her father’s death, also points in this direction. Thjazi’s death represents a special case. If not, we should expect a steady stream of giantesses appearing at Asgard’s gate demanding such compensation.

By what all has been stated above, it is evident that for a time, the Sons of Ivaldi were the friends of the gods, and then for a time they were their enemies. This interpretation sheds light on the events of Hrafnagaldur Óðins. Which tells us that while Idunn was absent from Asgard (when she fell out of Yggdrasil, as an apple falls from a tree), she joined their cause:

*Sjá sigtívar
syrgja naumu
Viggjar at véum,
vargsbelg seldo;
let í færast,
lyndi breytti,
lek at lævísi,
litom skipti.*

The divinities see
Nauma (Idunn) grieving
In the wolf’s home
Given a wolf’s skin
She clad herself therein,
Changed disposition,
Delighted in guile,
Shifted her shape.

Since we know only one myth, regarding a time when Idunn was absent from Asgard, the poem no doubt describes the time Idunn spent with her half-brother Thjazi,— a time when she joined his plan of revenge against the gods. The duties of her blood-obligation demand that she do so. Considered in isolation, this poem has been thought obscure, but no longer if we consider it within the context of the corpus of poetic and prose sources, which reveal the relationship between Idunn and the Sons of Ivaldi.

In this light, let’s take a closer look at Hrafnagaldur Óðins:

The poem begins with a catalog of mythic beings, presumably the observations of one of Odin's ravens as it flies through the worlds:

<i>Alföður orkar</i>	Allfather works,
<i>álfar skilja,</i>	Elves understand
<i>vanir vitu</i>	Vanir know
<i>vísa nornir</i>	Norns reveal, <i>etc.</i>

Interestingly, the verb associated with the elves here, *skilja*, “understand” literally means “to separate (one thing from another)”. Other meanings include “to divorce, to cut off, to sever”. If we interpret the poem as the story of the elves severing their friendly relations with Asgard, both meanings are relevant.

Immediately afterwards, a dire scene unfolds. The Aesir suspect that “evil wights” have confounded the weather with runes, Urd is appointed to protect Mimir's well from the cold; the sun, here represented by her horse Alsvidr, begins to fail; and the “ruin of men” is feared.

<i>Stendur æva</i>	Earth and Sun
<i>strind né röðull</i>	cannot stand firm,
<i>lofti með lævi</i>	malignant winds (corrupted air)
<i>linnir ei straumi</i>	do not cease

The cause of these maladies is identified in verse 10:

<i>Galdur gólu</i>	They chanted galdur
<i>göndum riðu</i>	rode on wolves
<i>Rögnir og Reginn</i>	Rögnir and Reginn
<i>að ranni heimis</i>	against the world's house
<i>hlustar Óðinn</i>	Odin listened
<i>Hliðskjálfu í</i>	in Hliðskjálf.

Here the culprits are designated as Rögnir and Reginn, terms usually reserved for the gods themselves. This is reminiscent of terms used for the elves, which include *tíva*, gods (Hávamál 159). That the gods are not meant here however is made clear. Odin listens in Hliðskjálf, his observation tower in Valhalla, as the beings, called “evil wights” in verse 2, sing magic songs “against the world's house.” Clearly these are enemies of Midgard, the “house” built by the gods from Ymir's remains (cp. Völuspá's *salar* and *húsi*, 2 & 17). They “ride on wolves”, a common attribute of sorcerers and giantesses. Since we find Idunn in wolf-form (verse 8), we may also infer a sexual connotation here. Their songs have a devastating effect on the weather. While this occurs, Idunn, “the youngest of Ivaldi's elder children”, “dwells in dales”. There she is wrapped in wolf-skin and changes her disposition “delighting in guile”.

Several elements of this poem hark back to the mythic story of Idunn and Thjazi found in *Haustlög*. First Idunn is called *forvitin*, a word meaning both curious and prescient. The meaning “curious” may refer to the story told by Snorri of how Loki lured Idunn from Asgard. He said that outside of Asgard, she would find some apples worth having, and told her to bring hers for comparison. Certainly she was curious enough to follow him.

Both names Rögnir and Regin are also found associated with Thjazi. In *Haustlög* 4, Thjazi is designated as *ving-Rögnir vagna*, “the Rögnir of the wing-cars”, and in verse 12 as *leikblaðs reginn fjaðrar*, “the Regin of the feather’s swinging leaf-blade (i.e. wing). Both of these designations probably refer to the fact that he is cloaked in eagle-guise, but may also allude to his creation of additional bird-guises, such as Frigg and Freyja’s falcon-guises, and the dresses of the swan-maidens found in *Völundarkviða*. As an artist friendly to the gods, his art would seem like the natural origin of such items. Ironically then, Loki lures Thjazi to his death using one of these guises against him, Freyja’s falcon form. As in *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, the names Rögnir and Reginn are associated with a dangerous enemy of the gods. In *Haustlög* 6, the poet refers to Thjazi as *dolg ballastan vallar*, “earth’s mightiest foe”, a designation which corresponds well with the “evil wights” of *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, who confound the weather with runes.

Taken together, what underlies these mythic fragments appears to be a larger tale regarding the elves, Ivaldi’s sons, and how Loki turned their friendship and generosity into enmity for the gods. Thus we find a group of brothers, who are smiths, filled with thoughts of revenge, and who now hate the gods and seek to destroy their creation. A similar situation occurs in *Völundarkviða*, the tale of perhaps the most famous artist in all Germanic lore: *Völund* (Wayland Smith). Traces of his myth can be found in personal names recorded as far back as the seventh century in Germany, as carved scenes on an eighth century whalebone chest, and as references in several Anglo-Saxon poetic sources including *Beowulf* that can be dated prior to 900AD, as well as in recorded place-names. In Scandinavia, a reference to Thjazi as *grjót-Niðað* in *Haustlög*, composed in the 10th century, demonstrates that its poet Þjólfur of Hvin knew some form of the legend.

First it should be noted that *Völundarkviða*’s position in *Codex Regius* has always been questioned by the scholars. It was firmly included by the scribe within the mythological lays. However, since the poem does not seem to refer to any known story of the gods, scholars have long wondered why this seemingly heroic poem was placed so. An examination may reveal the answer.

Völundarkviða relates the tale of three brothers, *Völund*, *Egil*, and *Slagfin* sons of a Finnish king, who live in a land referred to as the *Wolfdales*.

After a time, they are joined by three swan-maidens: *Alvit* (also called *Hervör*), *Ölrun*, and *Svanhvít* (also called *Hladguð*). But after eight winters, the swan-maidens are overcome with longing, and in the ninth they leave. *Egil* and *Slagfinn* pursue them, leaving *Völund* alone in the *Wolfdales*. In time he is captured by *Nidhad* and his men,

hamstrung, and imprisoned on an island. Völund forges treasures for Nidhad, but his thirst for revenge is not assuaged. He secretly kills two of Nidhad's sons, and makes goblets of their skulls for the king to drink from, jewels of their eyes, and brooches of their teeth for the queen. He plies Nidhad's daughter with strong drink and then rapes her. He secretly fashions a bird-guise, which he uses to escape, and before flying off, reveals his acts of revenge to Nidhad, after making him vow he will do his daughter and the child she carries no harm.

Several points of contact connect Völundarkviða with the mythic fragments mentioned above.

Foremost, Völund is called “elf-prince” and “master of elves” (*álfa ljóði, vísi álfa*, verses 11, 14 and 32), like Ivaldi's children, who are referred to as *álfa ættar*, of the race of elves (Hrafnagaldur Óðins 6.) Like them, Völund forges magic implements. In Völundarkviða, he makes a sword to which he applies all his cunning, and in a land where there is no gold, he produces 700 rings. Since only one of these rings interests Nidhad, we might suspect Völund has forged a ring like Draupnir, which replicates itself periodically. In captivity, he turns the eyes of Mimir's young sons into jewels, and later devises a winged-guise to make his escape. After noting “significant resemblances” between the elves of the Eddaic poems and the Ribhus of Sanskrit Rigveda, which both derive from a common Indo-European root, Ursula Dronke writes:

“I would suggest that the titles of Völundr, *álfa ljóði, vísi álfa*, relate to an old tradition in which *álfar* were subtle smiths before the popularity of the dwarfs as underground metal workers made the elves' title forgotten.”

The name of Völund's home in exile, the Wolfdales, alludes to Idunn's home once she has “fallen out of” Yggdrassil, as described in Hrafnagaldur Óðins 6. There Idunn is said to “dwell in dales”, when she dons “wolf-skin”. The brothers are also said to “ride wolves”. The poet all but says “Wolf-dales.”

The three brothers are presented as skiers and hunters, traits associated in our mythology most closely with Thjazi's daughter Skadi and Sif's son, Ull. In Haustlöng 7, Skadi is referred to as *öndurgoðs*, the ski-goddess. In Völundarkviða, Völund hunts bear on skis, and when the swan-maidens depart, Egil and Slagfinn set off on skis after them. That they are called sons of a Finnish king in the prose introduction, also points in this direction. Finns are well-known as skiers and sorcerers from the sagas and law-codes of Iceland and Scandinavia. Similarly, Haustlöng 3 calls the meat the Aesir catch near Thjazi's home a *tál-hreinn*, a decoy reindeer, an animal herded by the Finns even in modern times. In geographic terms, the Finns lay between the Scandinavians and the Arctic Ocean beyond which the giants were thought to dwell, east and north of Scandinavia. In mytho-historic terms, the elves and Finns were therefore equated.

In regard to the traditions concerning Völund's parentage, we should also take into account Thidrek's Saga, an Old Icelandic prose account of the broader Völund legend based on German poetic sources. There the smith Velent (Völund), is depicted as

half-giant, the son of a giant and a mermaid. His father is named Vati (perhaps a contraction of -Valdi?). Thus we have the same ‘confusion’ surrounding Völund’s birth as we have surrounding Thjazi’s. He seemingly is an elf and a giant at the same time. The physical proximity of lands of the mythic giants and elves likely fueled the imagination in regard to such relationships between the two tribes.

Like Thjazi, whose father was said to be rich in gold, Völund laments in verse 15: “I remember that we owned a greater treasure when we were a whole family in our home,” he then refers to the swan-maidens as his kin, although the exact relationship is unclear. From *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, we learn that at least one of his female companions is his half-sister Idunn.

In *Haustlög* 9, we find Thjazi designated as *grjót-Niðuð*, “Nidhad of the stones.” Scholars have long considered this an unmistakable reference to the Völund myth. Most recently, Ursula Dronke observes: “The source for his kenning can only have been the legend of Völundr” (*Poetic Edda II*, page 272). Similar kennings for giants in other poems include *berg-Þórr*, and *grjót-Moði*. Here Thjazi is designated as “Nidhad of the stones”, Nidhad being the famous foe of Völund.

In *Völundarkviða*, special attention is paid to Völund’s eyes. First he is called “weather-eyed”, *veðeygr* (verse 10). Later when Völund is captured in Nidhad’s snare, his eyes are said to “glisten” when he sees his sword in Nidhad’s belt, and his ring on the arm of Nidhad’s daughter (verse 17). In light of *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* description of Rögnir and Regin raising malignant winds with *galdur* chants, the term “weather-eyed” finds significance. Certainly as a conjurer of foul weather, Rögnir kept his eyes on the weather. And since we know that Thjazi’s eyes were changed into stars, that Völund’s eyes are referred to as “glittering” most likely alludes to this well-known mythic feature.

Although Völund exacts terrible revenge by the end of the poem, killing two of Nidhad’s sons and raping his daughter, when Völund flies away, he boasts that he has now avenged all of his injuries except one (verse 28). What this unavenged injury is however remains a mystery. Scholars such as Ursula Dronke, who discusses this verse at length, find it problematic enough to emend Völund’s words to say “Now I have avenged my injuries-- not one, but all of the envious snares.” Other translators have not been so liberal, but the problem remains: What affront is there left for Völund to avenge? If we accept Völund as the name of a Son of Ivaldi, whose works are judged inferior to that of Brokk and Sindri, the answer is clear. His reputation as a master smith remains tarnished. To learn how that grave insult is avenged, long after Völund’s death, we need only follow the fate of the sword taken from him by Nidhad, something beyond the scope of this article.

Yet, even though Völund and his brothers can be identified as the Sons of Ivaldi, the identity of the swan-maidens remains elusive. Again, a comparison of the poetic fragments yields fruit.

In both Völundarkviða and Hrafnagaldur Óðins, the women who reside with the artisans in exile are unhappy. Völundarkviða says they “ached with longing”, while Hrafnagaldur Óðins informs us that “Nauma (Idunn) was grieving”, before she donned wolf-guise.

Verse 7 of Hrafnagaldur Óðins elaborates on this theme:

<i>Eirði illa</i>	Ill she endured
<i>ofankomu,</i>	the fall from above
<i>hárbaðms undir</i>	under the hoar-tree’s (Yggdrasil’s)
<i>haldin meiði;</i>	trunk confined,
<i>kunni síst</i>	disliked staying
<i>að kundar Nörva</i>	at Nörvi’s daughters
<i>vön að værri</i>	used to better abodes
<i>vistum heima</i>	back home.

Why would Idunn and her siblings, be discontent in the company of their brothers? To answer this, we must examine the nature of swan-maidens.

Swans are creatures accustomed to warmth and light. In the mythology, they are associated with Urd’s well. Snorri informs us that all swans originate from a pair in Urd’s well (Gylfaginning 16). In Völundarkviða 1, they are referred to as “southern maids” (*drósir suðrænar*); whereas in a loose verse by the skald Eilífr Gudrunarson preserved in Skáldskaparmál 52, we find Urd’s well located in the south: “south at Urd’s well”, *sunnr at Urðrbrunni*. In Völundarkviða, the swan-maidens weave and when they fly off, it is to “fulfill fate”, *örlög drýja*. (verses 1 & 3). Both images refer back to the Norns who weave the threads of fate on the loom of the sky.

In Hrafnagaldur Óðins and Völundarkviða, the women are clearly out of their element. The Woldfdales, according to the Anglo-Saxon poem Doer’s lament are “winter-cold”. To arrive there, the swan-maidens must fly “from the south” (i.e. toward the North), through the Myrkwood (Dark-wood). Hrafnagaldur Óðins 7 states that when Idunn dwelt in “dales” wrapped in wolf-skin, that she was “at Nörvi’s daughter’s”. Nörvi’s daughter, according the Younger Edda is Night. Völundarkviða also depicts the brothers skiing and hunting by night in this terrain, and when Nidhad and his men arrive, moonlight glistens on their shields. To live in this land, Idunn must doff her swan-guise, and don wolf-skin. Swan-maidens have no place there.

The poem Hrafnagaldur Óðins cleverly juxtaposes these two images: the warm well of Urd in the south, and the cold isolation of the Woldfdales in the north. Urd herself is designated as “the bearer of Gjöll’s Sunna” *Gjallar Sunnu gátt*, a kenning simply meaning, woman. Gjöll’s Sunna refers to the “fire of a river”, i.e. gold. A gold-bearer is a woman. The river here is an underworld river, Gjöll, and the term for fire is an alternate name for the Sun, indicating warmth and light. A similar idea is contained in the verse that appoints Urd to guard the more northerly Oðrerir (Mimir’s well), once the malignant

winds start to blow from the north. Idunn and her sisters long to return to their native home in the south, and in time this longing causes them to leave their brothers.

It seems the poet who composed *Völundarkviða* set out to tell an episode from the lives of the Sons of Ivaldi, about the time when they were the enemies of the gods, and dwelt with their sisters in the Wolfdales, beyond the scepter of the gods'. Without this context, the poem has lost its significance for us, and we incorrectly ascribe it a place among the heroic poems. But when we recognize *Völund* and his brothers as the famous Sons of Ivaldi, we understand why the scribe of the *Codex Regius* placed this poem squarely among the mythological poems of the *Elder Edda*. It has its proper place there. This is not an isolated heroic tale, as current wisdom holds, but a central timber of a greater story arc, which explains the consequences of the judgment on the artists, wrought by the cunning *Loki*. We need only bring together the scattered fragments to see the image more clearly.

No one piece of evidence is the lynchpin that holds the entire argument together. Rather we have a confluence of ideas that all point in the same direction. We must remember that we are dealing with fragmentary sources, many of which make poetic allusions to events obscure to us, but undoubtedly well known to a heathen audience in oral story form, as the quotes by Dr. Kristjánsson which precede this investigation suggest.

As shown above, the source documents demonstrate a remarkable consistency of ideas throughout. They are more homogeneous than is popularly recognized. Without doubt, the old skalds had a clear vision of the characters that they were portraying. It is the ornament of their art, the use of complex kennings and wordplay that make it difficult for us, and the scholars who examine these poems to understand. The poet need not have stated things clearly, nor was he expected to, because he spoke of tales his audience knew well. There is every reason to believe that these myths existed in oral narrative forms, independent from any poetic treatments. The popularity of the *Völund* myth is well attested to in ancient times. It is we who have forgotten the details.

Thus, without the weight of argument and evidence to cloud our perception, I will present a probable timeline of mythic events that underlie the poetic fragments spoken of here:

- The Sons of Ivaldi are friends and allies of the gods, giving them treasures freely.
- Loki instigates a contest of the artists, in which the works of the elves, Ivaldi's Sons and of the dwarves, Brokk and Sindri, are compared with one another.
- At the behest of Loki, the gods compare the works made by the Sons of Ivaldi to the works of Sindri. The gods prefer Sindri's masterpiece, the hammer Mjöllnir, and by default the works of the Sons of Ivaldi are deemed inferior.
- Fearing the reaction of Ivaldi's sons, Odin, Hoenir, and Loki travel to the home of these elves, perhaps to appease them.
- Thjazi, one of Ivaldi's sons and the group's primary artist, thwarts the gods' best effort at peace and strong-arms Loki into luring Idunn, his half-sister way from Asgard with her treasure, the apples of rejuvenation that keep the gods young. She is gone for some time.
- The Sons of Ivaldi go into exile in the furthest reaches of Niflheim, in the far north of the underworld where the gods have no sway. Idunn and her sisters, the swan-maidens, join them and their cause.
- While in the Wolfdales, Thjazi-Völund creates a sword, to which he applies all his skill and cunning. The weapon is designed to destroy Asgard and its inhabitants. (It is the same sword Surt eventually uses to set the world aflame.) In addition to this, he and his brothers chant magic songs, which send out devastating storms toward Midgard. Odin is powerless to stop them.
- In time, the swan-maidens leave and Thjazi-Völund is captured by a friend of the gods (Here called Nidhad, and perhaps Mimir himself). His sword, most dangerous to the gods, is taken from him and kept by Mimir.(by "the satyr Mimingus" in Saxo's History and under "Mimir's Tree" in Fjölsvinnsmál. Idunn and her sisters most likely return to Thjazi's mountain-home, Thyrnheim, where Idunn bears Thjazi's daughter Skadi.
- Thjazi-Völund escapes Nidhad-Mimir's underworld prison, and returns to Thyrnheim to be with Idunn and Skadi.
- After many years, the gods grow old and force Loki to regain Idunn and her apples. Under threat of injury, Loki steals into Thjazi's abode and kidnaps Idunn. He entices Thjazi to follow.
- Thjazi recklessly pursues Loki and is burnt and killed on Asgard's walls.
- To honor their former friend, the gods turn Thjazi's eyes into stars and intermarry with the elf clan: Thor weds Sif, Bragi weds Idunn, and Skadi marries Njord.
- The mythic epic continues with the saga surrounding the fate of Völund's sword.