

# DRÁP NIFLUNGA

## (*The Slaughter of the Niflungs*)<sup>1</sup>

### Bellows' Introduction (1936)

It has been already pointed out (introductory note to *Reginmol*) that the compiler of the Eddic collection had clearly undertaken to formulate a coherent narrative of the entire Sigurth cycle, piecing together the various poems by means of prose narrative links. To some extent these links were based on traditions existing outside of the lays themselves, but in the main the material was gathered from the contents of the poems. The short prose passage entitled *Drap Niflunga*,<sup>2</sup> which in the *Codex Regius* immediately follows the *Helreith Brynhildar*, is just such a narrative link, and scarcely deserves a special heading, but as nearly all editions separate it from the preceding and following poems, I have followed their example.

With Sigurth and Brynhild both dead, the story turns to the slaying of the sons of Gjuki by Atli, Guthrun's second husband, and to a few subsequent incidents, mostly late incorporations from other narrative cycles, including the tragic death of Svanhild, daughter of Sigurth and Guthrun and wife of Jormunrek (Ermanarich), and the exploits of Hamther, son of Guthrun and her third husband, Jonak. These stories are told, or outlined, in the two Atli lays, the second and third Guthrun lays, the *Oddrunargratr*, the *Guthrunarhvot*, and the *Hamthesmol*. Had the compiler seen fit to put the Atli lays immediately after the *Helreith Brynhildar*, he would have needed only a very brief transitional note to make the course of the story clear, but as the second Guthrun lay, the next poem in the collection, is a lament following the death of Guthrun's brothers, some sort of a narrative bridge was manifestly needed.

*Drap Niflunga* is based entirely on the poems which follow it in the collection, with no use of extraneous material. The part of the story which it summarizes belongs to the semi-historical Burgundian tradition (cf. introductory note to *Gripisspo*), in many respects parallel to the familiar narrative of the *Nibelungenlied*, and, except in minor details, showing few essentially Northern additions. Sigurth is scarcely mentioned, and the outstanding episode is the slaying of Gunnar and Hogni, following their journey to Atli's home.

Thorpe (1866)	Bellows (1936)	Hollander (1962)
<p>Gunnar and Hogni then took all the gold, Fafnir's heritage. Dissension prevailed afterwards between the Giukungs and Atli. He charged them with being the cause of Brynhild's death. By way of reconciliation, it was agreed that they should give him Gudrun in marriage, to whom they administered an oblivious potion, before she would consent to espouse Atli. Atli had two sons, Erp and Eitil, but Svanhild was the daughter of Sigurd and Gudrun. King Atli invited Gunnar and Hogni to his residence, and sent to them Vingi, or Knefrod. Gudrun was aware of treachery, and sent them word in runes not to come; and to Hogni, as a token, she sent the ring Andvaranaut, in which she had tied some wolf's hair. Gunnar had sought the hand of Oddrun, Atli's sister, but did not obtain it. He then married Glaumvor, and Hogni took Kostbera to wife. Their sons were Solar, Snævar, and Giuki. When the Giukungs came to Atli, Gudrun besought his sons to intercede for their lives, but they would not. The heart of Hogni was cut out, and Gunnar was cast into a pen of serpents. He struck his harp and lulled the serpents, but an adder stung him to the liver.</p>	<p>Gunnar and Hogni then took all the gold that Fafnir had had. There was strife between the Gjukungs and Atli, for he held the Gjukungs guilty of Brynhild's death. It was agreed that they should give him Guthrun as wife, and they gave her a draught of forgetfulness<sup>3</sup> to drink before she would consent to be wedded to Atli. The sons of Atli were Erp and Eitil,<sup>4</sup> and Svanhild<sup>5</sup> was the daughter of Sigurth and Guthrun. King Atli invited Gunnar and Hogni to come to him, and sent as messenger Vingi or Knefroth.<sup>6</sup> Guthrun was aware of treachery, and sent with him a message in runes that they should not come, and as a token she sent to Hogni the ring Andvaranaut<sup>7</sup> and tied a wolf's hair in it. Gunnar had sought Oddrun,<sup>8</sup> Atli's sister, for his wife, but had her not; then he married Glaumvor,<sup>9</sup> and Hogni's wife was Kostbera; their sons were Solar and Snævar and Gjuki.<sup>10</sup> And when the Gjukungs came to Atli, then Guthrun besought her sons to plead for the lives of both the Gjukungs, but they would not do it. Hogni's heart was cut out, and Gunnar was cast into the serpent's den. He smote on the harp and put the serpents to sleep, but an adder<sup>11</sup> stung him in the liver.</p>	<p>Then Gunnar and Hogni took all the gold which Fáfínir had owned. Feud arose between the Gjúkungs and Atli, for he laid Brynhild's death at their door. To atone for it, Guthrún was to be married to him, and they gave her a drink to blot out what had gone before ere she would be wedded to Atli. She bore Atli two sons, Erp and Eitil; but Svanhild was the daughter she had by Sigurth. Atli bade to him as his guests Gunnar and Hogni, and sent to them his man hight Vingi or else Knéfræth. Guthrún had knowledge of his wives, and sent word to them by runes that they should not come, and as a token she sent to Hogni the ring Andvaranaut,<sup>12</sup> and fastened within it a wolf's hair. Gunnar had asked the hand of Oddrún, Atli's sister, but Atli said nay to that. Then wedded he<sup>13</sup> Glaumvor, but Hogni's wife was Kostbera. Their sons were hight Sólar, Snævar, and Gjúki.<sup>14</sup> But when the Gjúkungs came to Atli's court, Guthrún begged her sons to have the lives of the Gjúkungs spared,<sup>15</sup> but they would not. Hogni's heart was cut out of his breast, but Gunnar was thrown into a dungeon with serpents. He struck his harp and put the worms to sleep; but one adder bored into his liver.</p>

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<sup>1</sup> That is, the Gjúkungs, as possessors of the Niflung hoard. This awkwardly written piece (separated by most editors from the following poem) was no doubt meant by the Collector to form a transition to the Atli lays. It has no independent value whatever, its statements being, on the face of them, derived from the following lays, especially from *Atlamál*.

<sup>2</sup> Niflungs: regarding the mistaken application of this name to the sons of Gjuki, who were Burgundians, cf. *Brot*, 17 and note.

<sup>3</sup> Draught of forgetfulness: according to the *Volsungasaga* Grimhild, Guthrun's mother, administered this, just as she did the similar draught which made Sigurth forget Brynhild.

<sup>4</sup> Erp and Eitil: Guthrun kills her two sons by Atli as part of her revenge; the annotator here explains her act further by saying that Guthrun asked her sons to intercede with their father in favor of Guthrun's brothers, but that they refused, a detail which he appears to have invented, as it is found nowhere else.

<sup>5</sup> Svanhild: cf. *Sigurtharkvitha en skamma*, 54 and note.

<sup>6</sup> Vingí or Knefroth: *Atlakvitha* (stanza 1) calls the messenger Knefroth; *Atlamol* (stanza 4) speaks of two messengers, but names only one of them, Vingí. The annotator has here tried, unsuccessfully, to combine the two accounts.

<sup>7</sup> Andvaranaut: regarding the origin of Andvari's ring cf. *Reginismol*, prose after stanzas 4 and 5 and notes; Sigurth gave the ring to Guthrun. Here again the annotator is combining two stories; in *Atlakvitha* (stanza 8) Guthrun sends a ring (not Andvaranaut) with a wolf's hair; in *Atlamol* (stanza 4) she sends a message written in runes. The messenger obscures these runes, and Kostbera, Hogni's wife, who attempts to decipher them, is not clear as to their meaning, though she suspects danger.

<sup>8</sup> Oddrun: cf. *Sigurtharkvitha en skamma*, 57 and note.

<sup>9</sup> Glaumvor: almost nothing is told of Gunnar's second wife, though she appears frequently in the *Atlamol*.

<sup>10</sup> Kostbera (or Bera), Hogni's wife, is known only as skilled in runes. Her brother was Orkning. The sons of Hogni and Kostbera, according to the *Atlamol* (stanza 28), were Solar and Snaevor; the third son, Gjuki, named after his grandfather, seems to be an invention of the annotator's.

<sup>11</sup> Adder: according to *Oddrunargratr* (stanza 30) Atli's mother assumed this form in order to complete her son's vengeance.

<sup>12</sup> See *Reginismál*, Prose after St.4. The *Volsunga saga*, Ch.28, relates that Sigurth deprived Brynhild of it on the bridal night and give it to Guthrún.

<sup>13</sup> Gunnar.

<sup>14</sup> In *Atlamál*, St.28, only the first two are mentioned as Hogni's sons.

<sup>15</sup> This statement is at variance with all other tradition. It looks as though a motive was sought to justify Guthrún's murder of her (infant!) children (*AtlakviðaI*, St.36, and *Atlamál*, St.73).