

# HAMÐISMÁL

## (*The Ballad of Hamðir*)

### Bellows' Introduction (1936)

The *Hamthesmol*, the concluding poem in the *Codex Regius*, is on the whole the worst preserved of all the poems in the collection. The origin of the story, the relation of the *Hamthesmol* to the *Guthrunarhvot*, and of both poems to the hypothetical "old" *Hamthesmol*, are outlined in the introductory note to the *Guthrunarhvot*. The *Hamthesmol* as we have it is certainly not the "old" poem of that name; indeed it is so pronounced a patchwork that it can hardly be regarded as a coherent poem at all. Some of the stanzas are in *fornyrthislag*, some are in *malahattr*, one (stanza 29) appears to be in *ljothahattr*, and in many cases the words can be adapted to any known metrical form only by liberal emendation. That anyone should have deliberately composed such a poem seems quite incredible, and it is far more likely that some eleventh century narrator constructed a poem about the death of Hamther and Sorli by piecing together various fragments, and possibly adding a number of *malahattr* stanzas of his own.

It has been argued, and with apparently sound logic, that our extant *Hamthesmol* originated in Greenland, along with the *Atlamol*. In any case, it can hardly have been put together before the latter part of the eleventh century, although the "old" *Hamthesmol* undoubtedly long antedates this period. Many editors have attempted to pick out the parts of the extant poem which were borrowed from this older lay, but the condition of the text is such that it is by no means clear even what stanzas are in *fornyrthislag* and what in *malahattr*. Many editors, likewise, indicate gaps and omissions, but it seems doubtful whether the extant *Hamthesmol* ever had a really consecutive quality, its component fragments having apparently been strung together with little regard for continuity. The notes indicate some of the more important editorial suggestions, but make no attempt to cover all of them, and the metrical form of the translation is often based on mere guesswork as to the character of the original lines and stanzas. Despite the chaotic state of the text, however, the underlying narrative is reasonably clear, and the story can be followed with no great difficulty.

### Hollander's Introduction (1962)

"The Lay of Hamthir" enjoys the sad distinction of having been handed down in a more fragmentary condition than any other of the longer Eddic lays. A number of stanzas are certainly missing, others clearly interpolated, and still other under suspicion. And the genuine material left has needed much surgery and sympathetic treatment to make it at all intelligible. Nevertheless, enough is discernible to recognize that it brought the great Eddic cycle of heroic songs to a worthy, as well as a logical, conclusion. In its original form it must have been a masterpiece of dramatic construction, with every episode furthering the action of the poem.

As it happens, *Hamðismál* is also the one poem in the Collection which unquestionably goes back to recorded history. The Gothic historian Jordanes (sixth century A.D.) in his *Getica* reports that Hermanaricus, King of the Ostrogoths, had a woman by the name of Sunilda bound to wild horses and torn to pieces because of the treachery of her husband, and that in revenge therefor her two brothers, Sarus and Ammius, fell upon him and wounded him. Legend, we may suppose, explained the king's otherwise inexplicable, cruel deed as one done in a jealous rage; it made Sunilda his wife and invented the figure of his son Randvér, who seduced her and was hanged by the king. Connection with the Burgundian cycle of legends was effected, presumably in the North, by making Svanhild the daughter of Guthrún by Sigurth.

As pointed out above, several stanzas of "Guthrún's Lament" seem to have originally belonged to this lay and are fairly considered in this connection. As a whole, they and the following stanzas breathe a sinister power equal to the best in Eddic poetry: the unwilling brothers dashing away to their doom—snorting with rage, their wild laugh yet ringing in their ears—a doom which they seal by venting their wrath on their half brother Erp. And the scenes in Jormunrekk's hall, however fragmentary, are full of energy and passion.

The measure is, variously, *málahátt* and *fornyrðislag*, which, in itself, constitutes a sufficient reason for considering the lay as it stands a composite of two or more older, fragmentary poems. That another lay existed seems to follow from the fact that the *Völsunga saga* (Chap. 42) paraphrases only the *fornyrðislag* stanzas (quoting St. 28, ll. 1-2), and none of the *málahátt* stanzas from which, indeed, the version of the saga differs considerably.

The origin of the lay is sought, with little conclusiveness, in Norway. Both vocabulary and style point to the tenth century or earlier. The skald Bragi (early ninth century) devotes four spirited stanzas of his *Ragnarsdrápa* to the attack and slaying of Jormunrekk by Hamthir and Sorli; but it is impossible to decide which of the two poems is the earlier.

## OUTLINE

[line numbers according to Bellows]

1-2	Poetic Introductions: the Sad Day Dawns / a Tale of Yesteryear
3-4	Guðrún's Incitement
5	Guðrún's Lament
6-8	Hamthir's Protest
9-10	Sörli's Reply
11-12	The Brothers Ride Out
13-17	Of Their Half-Brother Erp
18-19	Arrival at Jormunrek's Hall
20-25	The Attack Within the Hall
26-31	Hamthir and Sorli Slain

Thorpe (1866)	Bellows (1936)	Hollander (1962)
<p>1. In that court<sup>1</sup> arose woeful deeds, At the Alfar's doleful lament;<sup>2</sup> At early morn, men's afflictions, Troubles of various kinds; sorrows were quickened.</p> <p>2. It was not now, nor yesterday, A long time since has passed away,— Few things are more ancient, it was by much earlier— When Gudrun, Giuki's daughter, Her young sons instigated Svanhild to avenge.</p> <p>3. "She was your sister, her name Svanhild, She whom Jormunrek with horses trod to death, White and black, on the public way, With grey and way-wont Gothic steeds.</p> <p>4. "Thenceforth all is sad to you, kings of people! Ye alone survive, branches of my race.</p> <p>5. "Lonely I am become, as the asp-tree in the forest, Of kindred bereft, as the fir of branches; Of joy deprived, as is the tree of foliage, When the branch-spoiler comes in the warm day."</p> <p>6. Then spake Hamdir, the great of soul, "Little, Gudrun! didst thou care Hogni's deed to praise, When Sigurd they from sleep awaked On the bed thou satst, and the murderers laughed.</p> <p>7. "Thy bed-clothes, blue and white,</p>	<p>1.<sup>8</sup> Great the evils   once that grew, With the dawning sad   of the sorrow of elves;<sup>9</sup> In early morn   awake for men The evils that grief   to each shall bring.</p> <p>2.<sup>10</sup> Not now, nor yet   of yesterday was it, Long the time   that since hath lapsed, So that little there is   that is half as old, Since Guthrun,<sup>11</sup> daughter   of Gjuki, whetted Her sons so young   to Svanhild's vengeance.</p> <p>3. "The sister ye had   was Svanhild called, And her did Jormunrek   trample with horses, White and black   on the battle-way, Gray, road-wonted,   the steeds of the Goths.<sup>12</sup></p> <p>4.<sup>13</sup> "Little the kings   of the folk<sup>14</sup> are ye like, For now ye are living   alone of my race.</p> <p>5.<sup>15</sup> "Lonely am I   as the forest aspen, Of kindred bare   as the fir of its boughs, My joys are all lost   as the leaves of the tree When the scather of twigs<sup>16</sup>   from the warm day turns."<sup>17</sup></p> <p>6.<sup>18</sup> Then Hamther spake forth,   the high of heart: "Small praise didst thou, Guthrun,   to Hogni's deed give When they wakened thy<sup>19</sup> Sigurth   from out of his sleep, Thou didst sit on the bed   while his slayers laughed.</p> <p>7.<sup>20</sup> "Thy bed-covers white   with blood were red</p>	<p>1. [Sorrowful deeds the dayspring saw, Unwelcome dawn, the alf folk's grief;<sup>62</sup> Thus early morn the ills of men And every sorrow and sadness quickens.]</p> <p>2. 'Twas not but now, nor newly, either, But ages ago, time out of mind, [of all things older than any, this,]<sup>63</sup> When Guthrún egged on, Gjúki's daughter, Her young sons to avenge Svanhild the fair:</p> <p>3. "A sister had ye, was she Svanhild hight; Her Jormunrekk in wrath had trampled By white and black steeds, on highroad faring, By grey, war-hardened Gothic horses.</p> <p>4. "Ye alone are left of my lordly strain; But not keen are ye as those kings of yore.<sup>64</sup> (Ye are little like beloved Gunnar Or Hogni, his brother, bear-hard in mind.)<sup>65</sup></p> <p>5. "On earth I am lonely like to asp in holt,<sup>66</sup> Amidst foes unfriended like fir stripped of boughs, Of gladness bereft as the greenwood of leaves When the waster-of-twigs<sup>67</sup> on a warm day cometh."</p> <p>6. Said then Hamthir, the hardy-minded: "Not so highly thought'st thou of Hogni's deed When from sleep they waked Sigurth, thy husband— On thy bed wert seated,—but his slayers laughed.</p> <p>7. "With blood was thy bluish-white bed linen reddened—</p>

<p>Woven by cunning hands, swam in thy husband's gore. When Sigurd perished, o'er the dead thou satst, Caredst not for mirth—so Gunnar willed it.</p> <p>8. "Atli thou wouldst afflict by Erp's murder, / And by Eitil's life's destruction: that proved for thyself the worse: Therefore should every one so against others use, for life's destruction, A sharp-biting sword, that he harm not himself."</p> <p>9. Then said Sorli—he had a prudent mind— "I with my mother will not speeches exchange: Though words to each of you to me seem wanting. What, Gudrun! dost thou desire, which for tears thou canst not utter?"</p> <p>10. "For thy brothers weep, and thy dear sons, Thy nearest kin, drawn to the strife: For us both shalt thou, Gudrun! also have to weep, Who here sit fated on our steeds, far away to die."</p> <p>11. From the court they went, for conflict ready. The young men journeyed over humid fells, On Hunnish steeds, murder to avenge.</p> <p>12. Then said Erp, all at once— The noble youth was joking on his horse's back— "Ill 'tis to a timid man to point out the ways." They said the bastard<sup>3</sup> was over bold.</p> <p>13. On their way they had found the wily jester. "How will the swarthy dwarf afford us aid?"</p> <p>14. He of another mother answered: So he said aid he would to his kin afford, As one foot to the other<sup>4</sup> [Or, grown to the body, one hand the other].</p> <p>15. "What can a foot to a foot give; Or, grown to the body, one hand the other?"</p>	<p>From his wounds, and with gore   of thy husband were wet; So Sigurth was slain,   by his corpse didst thou sit, And of gladness didst think not:   'twas Gunnar's doing.</p> <p>8.<sup>21</sup> "Thou wouldst strike at Atli   by the slaying of Erp And the killing of Eitil;<sup>22</sup>   thine own grief was worse; So should each one wield   the wound-biting sword That another it slays   but smites not himself."</p> <p>9. Then did Sorli speak out,   for wise was he ever: "With my mother I never   a quarrel will make; Full little in speaking   methinks ye both lack; What askest thou, Guthrun,   that will give thee no tears?"</p> <p>23</p> <p>10. "For thy brothers dost weep,   and thy boys so sweet,<sup>24</sup> Thy kinsmen in birth   on the battlefield slain; Now, Guthrun, as well   for us both shalt thou weep, We sit doomed on our steeds,   and far hence shall we die."</p> <p>11.<sup>25</sup> Then the fame-glad one—   on the steps<sup>26</sup> she was— The slender-fingered,   spake with her son: "Ye shall danger have   if counsel ye heed not; By two heroes alone   shall two hundred of Goths Be bound or be slain   in the lofty-walled burg."</p> <p>12. From the courtyard they fared,   and fury they breathed; <sup>27</sup>The youths swiftly went   o'er the mountain wet, On their Hunnish<sup>28</sup> steeds,   death's vengeance to have.</p> <p>13.<sup>29</sup> On the way they found   the man so wise;<sup>30</sup> "What help from the weakling   brown may we have?"</p> <p>14. So answered them   their half-brother then: "So well may I   my kinsmen aid [As a flesh grown hand   another helps] As help one foot   from the other has."<sup>31</sup></p> <p>15.<sup>32</sup> "How may a foot   its fellow aid, Or a flesh-grown hand   another help?"</p> <p>16.<sup>33</sup> Then Erp spake forth,   his words were few, As haughty he sat   on his horse's back: "To the timid 'tis ill   the way to tell."</p>	<p>By skilled hands woven—in his wounds as he lay. By the side of Sigurth thou sat'st when he died, No glee thee gladdened: thus Gunnar willed it.</p> <p>8. "When thou ended Eitil's, and Erp's life too, Thou would'st harm Atli, but didst harm more thyself; So ought each one work ill on his foe With slaughterous sword that himself he harm not."<sup>68</sup></p> <p>9. Said then Sorli with seemly wisdom: "Not yet wearied are ye of words, meseemeth: With our mother I wish not idle words to bandy; Whate'er cravest, Guthrún, but will bring thee grief?"</p> <p>10. "Didst bewail thy brethren and both thy dear sons, Thy trusted kinsmen, betrayed foully: Shalt thou us, Guthrún, eke bewail now; We sit fey on our horses, and afar we shall die."<sup>69</sup></p> <p>11.<sup>70</sup> Said the highborn lady, before the heroes standing The slim-fingered one, to her sons speaking: "Are your lives at stake if ye list not to me: How could two men else ten hundred Goths Strike down and fetter in their stronghold alone?"<sup>71</sup></p> <p>12. Then rashly rode they, with wrath snorting, (Sorli and Hamthir, the sons of Guthrún,)<sup>72</sup> Forwardly fared over fells cloud-dripping, On their Hunnish horses, their harm to avenge.</p> <p>13.<sup>73</sup> On the way found they their wily brother. (<i>Hamthir said:</i>) "This brownish bastard will bring us help?"</p> <p>14. Answered them Erp, of another born: "Full quickly I come to my kinsmen's help, As one hand hastens to help the other, (Or one foot fain would its fellow help.)"<sup>74</sup></p> <p>(<i>Hamthir said:</i>)</p> <p>15. "Scace could one foot its fellow help, Or one hand hasten to help the other!"</p> <p>16. Said Erp these words as on they fared— High on horseback the hero state— "I reckon not to show the road to a craven."</p>
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<p>16. From the sheath they drew the iron blade, The falchion's edges, for Hel's delight. They their strength diminished by a third part, They their young kinsman caused to earth to sink.</p> <p>17. Their mantles then they shook, their weapons grasped; The high-born were clad in sumptuous raiment.</p> <p>18. Forward lay the ways, a woeful path they found, And their sister's son wounded on a gibbet, Wind-cold outlaw-trees,<sup>5</sup> on the town's west. Ever vibrated the ravens' whet: there to tarry was not good.</p> <p>19. Uproar was in the hall, men were with drink excited, So that the horses' tramp no one heard, Until a mindful man winded his horn.</p> <p>20. To announce they went to Jormunrek That were seen helm-decked warriors. "Take ye counsel, potent ones are come; Before mighty men ye have on a damsel trampled."</p> <p>21. Then laughed Jormunrek, with his hand stroked his beard, / Asked not for his corslet; with wine he struggled, Shook his dark locks, on his white shield looked, And in his hand swung the golden cup.</p> <p>22. "Happy should I seem, if I could see Hamdir and Sorli within my hall. I would them then with bowstrings bind, The good sons of Giuki on the gallows hang."</p> <p>23. Then said Hrodrglod, on the high steps standing; "Prince" said she to her son—for that was threatened Which ought not to happen—"shall two men alone bind Or slay ten hundred Goths in this lofty burgh?"</p> <p>24. Tumult was in the mansion, the beer-cups flew in shivers, / Men lay in blood from the Goths' breasts flowing.</p> <p>25. Then said Hamdir, the great of heart: "Jormunrek! thou didst desire our coming, Brothers of one mother, into thy burgh:<sup>6</sup> Now seest thou thy feet, seest thy hands Jormunrek! Cast into the glowing fire."</p> <p>26. Then roared forth a godlike<sup>7</sup> Mail-clad warrior, as a bear roars: "On the men hurl stones, since spears bite not,</p>	<p>A bastard they   the bold one called.</p> <p>17.<sup>34</sup> From their sheaths they drew   their shining swords, Their blades, to the giantess<sup>35</sup>   joy to give; By a third they lessened   the might that was theirs, The fighter young   to earth they felled.</p> <p>18. Their cloaks they shook,   their swords they sheathed, The high-born men   wrapped their mantles close.<sup>36</sup></p> <p>19. On their road they fared   and an ill way<sup>37</sup> found, And their sister's son<sup>38</sup>   on a tree they saw, On the wind-cold wolf-tree<sup>39</sup>   west of the hall, And cranes'-bait<sup>40</sup> crawled;   none would care to linger.</p> <p>20. In the hall was din,   the men drank deep, And the horses' hoofs   could no one hear, Till the warrior<sup>41</sup> hardy   sounded his horn.<sup>42</sup></p> <p>21. Men<sup>43</sup> came and the tale   to Jormunrek told How warriors helmed   without they beheld: "Take counsel wise,   for brave ones are come, Of mighty men   thou the sister didst murder."</p> <p>22. Then Jormunrek laughed,   his hand laid on his beard, His arms, for with wine   he was warlike, he called for;<sup>44</sup> He shook his brown locks,   on his white shield he looked, And raised high the cup   of gold in his hand.</p> <p>23.<sup>45</sup> "Happy, methinks,   were I to behold Hamther and Sorli   here in my hall; The men would I bind   with strings of bows, And Gjuki's heirs<sup>46</sup>   on the gallows hang."</p> <p>24.<sup>47</sup> In the hall was clamor,   the cups were shattered, Men stood in blood   from the breasts of the Goths,</p> <p>25.<sup>48</sup> Then did Hamther speak forth,   the haughty of heart: "Thou soughtest, Jormunrek,   us to see, Sons of one mother   seeking thy dwelling; Thou seest thy hands,   thy feet thou beholdest, Jormunrek, flung   in the fire so hot."</p> <p>26.<sup>49</sup> Then roared the king,   of the race of the gods,<sup>50</sup> Bold in his armor,   as roars a bear: "Stone ye the men   that steel will bite not,</p>	<p>A brazen bastard they called their brother.<sup>75</sup></p> <p>17. From the sheathes they drew their sharp swords forth, The gleaming wound-gashers, to gladden Hel: The twain overthrew a third of their strength When they struck down to earth young Erp, their brother.<sup>76</sup></p> <p>18. Their fur cloaks they shook and fastened their swords, In silken sarks<sup>77</sup> then themselves arrayed.</p> <p>19. Still further they fared on their fateful path, Till their sister's stepson<sup>78</sup> they saw on the gallows, The wind-cold wolf-tree,<sup>79</sup> to the west of the castle, By the cranes' food<sup>80</sup> becrept—uncouth was that sight.</p> <p>20. There was glee in the hall, ale-gay the throng, And the horses' hoofbeats they heard not at all, Ere a hero stouthearted his horn did blow (The tidings to tell of the twain coming).<sup>81</sup></p> <p>21. Went then to warn the wassailing king Of the helm-clad twain on horseback seen: "Be on guard now, ye Goths, wend they grimly hither, The mighty kinsmen of the maid ye trod down."</p> <p>22. Chuckling, Jormunrek his chin-beard stroked, With wine wanton he welcomed the fray,<sup>82</sup> Shook his dark locks, at his white shield<sup>83</sup> looked, In his hand upheld the horn all golden.</p> <p>23. "Most happy were I if behold I might Hamthir and Sorli my hall within: Bind them would I with bowstrings long, The good sons of Guthrún on gallows fasten."</p> <p>24. There rose outcry in hall, alecups were shattered In the blood they lay from the breasts of Goths.<sup>84</sup></p> <p>25. Then said Hamthir the hardy-minded: "Thou didst wish, Jormunrek, that we should come; Your feet you see into the fire hurled, And both your hands<sup>85</sup> into the hot flames<sup>86</sup> thrown."</p> <p>26. Then roared the king,<sup>87</sup> akin to gods, Bold in his byrnie, as a bear would roar: "Cast stones, ye men, as steel will bite not,</p>
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<p>Nor edge of sword, nor point, the sons of Jonakr."</p> <p>27. Then said Hamdir, the great of heart: "Harm didst thou, brother! when thou that mouth didst ope. Oft from that mouth bad counsel comes."</p> <p>28. "Courage hast thou, Hamdir! if only thou hadst sense: That man lacks much who wisdom lacks.</p> <p>29. "Off would the head now be, had but Erp lived, Our brother bold in fight, whom on the way we slew, That warrior brave—me the Disir instigated— That man sacred to us, whom we resolved to slay.</p> <p>30. "I ween not that ours should be the wolves' example, That with ourselves we should contend, Like the Norns' dogs, that voracious are In the desert nurtured."</p> <p>31. "Well have we fought, on slaughtered Goths we stand, On those fallen by the sword, like eagles on a branch. Great glory we have gained, though now or to-morrow we shall die. / No one lives till eve against the Norns' decree."</p> <p>33. There fell Sorli, at the mansion's front; But Hamdir sank at the house's back.</p> <p>This is called the Old Lay of Hamdir.</p>	<p>Sword nor spear,   the sons of Jonakr."</p> <p>Sorli spake:<sup>51</sup> 27. "Ill didst win, brother,   when the bag<sup>52</sup> thou didst open, Oft from that bag   came baleful counsel; <sup>53</sup>Heart hast thou, Hamther,   if knowledge thou hadst! A man without wisdom   is lacking in much."</p> <p>Hamther spake:<sup>54</sup> 28. "His head were now off   if Erp<sup>55</sup> were living, The brother so keen   whom we killed on our road, The warrior noble,—   'twas the Norns<sup>56</sup> that drove me The hero to slay   who in fight should be holy.</p> <p>29.<sup>57</sup> "In fashion of wolves   it befits us not Amongst ourselves to strive, Like the hounds of the Norns,<sup>58</sup>   that nourished were In greed mid wastes so grim.</p> <p>30. "We have greatly fought,   o'er the Goths do we stand By our blades laid low,   like eagles on branches; Great our fame though we die   today or tomorrow; None outlives the night   when the Norns have spoken."<sup>59</sup></p> <p>31. Then Sorli beside   the gable sank, And Hamther fell   at the back of the house.<sup>60</sup></p> <p>This is called the old ballad of Hamther.<sup>61</sup></p>	<p>Nor iron swords, on the sons of Jónakr."</p> <p>(<i>Sorli said:</i>) 27. "Ill didst thou, brother, to ope that bag:<sup>88</sup> From wordy bag oft cometh baleful speech; Thou art hardy, Hamthir, but a hotspur ever: Much wanteth he who sitless is."</p> <p>(<i>Hamthir said:</i>) 28. "Off were his head if Erp lived still, Our warlike brother, on the way whom we slew, The stouthearted hero whom hateful norms Egged us to kill, who ought have been hallowed.<sup>89</sup></p> <p>29. "[Not should we, ween I, be of wolfish kind, Nor seek to slay one another Like the wolfs of the waste, wild and greedy, That howl in the hills.]<sup>90</sup></p> <p>30. "Well we have fought and felled many Goths, Stand on athelings slain like eagles on tree; Glorious we die, whether today or tomorrow: Lives till no man when the norms have spoken."</p> <p>31. There fell Sorli, slain at the gable, At the hall's hindwall stooped Hamthir then.</p> <p>This song is called "The Old Lay of Hamthir."</p>
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<sup>1</sup> See Str. 10, and Ghv. 9, and Luning, Glossary.

<sup>2</sup> "The Alfar's Lament" is the early dawn, and is in apposition to "early morn," in the following line. The swart Alfar are meant, who were turned to stone if they did not flee from the light of day. This is the best interpretation I can offer of this obscure strophe.

<sup>3</sup> In this and the four following strophes the person alluded to is their half-brother Erp, of whose story nothing more is known. He, it appears, had preceded or outridden the others.

<sup>4</sup> Malmesbury relates a similar story of King Æthelstan and his cupbearer.

<sup>5</sup> Lit. wolf-trees; a fugitive criminal being called *vargr*, wolf.

<sup>6</sup> According to the Skalda it would appear that they cut off his hands and feet while he was asleep. Erp, had they not murdered him, was to have cut off his head.

<sup>7</sup> Odin, as in the battle of Bravalla.

<sup>8</sup> This stanza looks like a later interpolation from a totally unrelated source.

<sup>9</sup> Sorrow of elves: the sun; cf. *Alvissmol*, 16 and note.

<sup>10</sup> Some editors regard lines 1-2 as interpolated, while others question line 3.

<sup>11</sup> Guthrun, etc.: regarding the marriage of Jonak and Guthrun (daughter of Gjuki, sister of Gunnar and Hogni, and widow first of Sigurth and then of Atli), and the sons of this marriage, Hamther and Sorli (but not Erp), cf. *Guthrunarhvot*, introductory prose and note.

<sup>12</sup> Svanhild and Jormunrek: regarding the manner in which Jormunrek (Ermanarich) married Svanhild, daughter of Sigurth and Guthrun, and afterwards had her trodden to death by horses, cf. *Guthrunarhvot*, introductory note. Lines 3-4 are identical with lines 5-6 of *Guthrunarhvot*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> These two lines may be all that is left of a four-line stanza. The manuscript and many editions combine them with stanza 5, while a few place them after stanza 5 as a separate stanza, reversing the order of the two lines.

<sup>14</sup> Kings of the folk: Guthrun's brothers, Gunnar and Hogni, slain by Atli.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. note on stanza 4; the manuscript does not indicate line 1 as beginning a stanza.

<sup>16</sup> Scatter of twigs: poetic circumlocution for the wind (cf. *Skaldskaparmal*, chapter 27), though some editors think the phrase here means the sun.

<sup>17</sup> Some editors assume a more or less extensive gap between stanzas 5 and 6.

<sup>18</sup> Lines 1-3 are nearly identical with lines 1-3 of *Guthrunarhvot*, 4. On the death of Sigurth cf. *Sigurtharkvitha en skamma*, 21-24, and *Brot*, concluding prose.

<sup>19</sup> The word *thy* in line 3 is omitted in the original.

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- <sup>20</sup> Lines 1-2 are nearly identical with lines 4-5 of *Guthrunarhvot*, 4. The manuscript, followed by many editions, indicates line 3 and not line 1 as beginning a stanza.
- <sup>21</sup> The whole of stanza 8 is in doubtful shape, and many emendations have been suggested. Some editors regard this stanza as interpolated.
- <sup>22</sup> Erp and Eitil: regarding Guthrun's slaying of her sons by Atli, cf. *Atlamol*, 72-75. The Erp here referred to is not to be confused with the Erp, son of Jonak, who appears in stanza 13.
- <sup>23</sup> Some editors assign this speech to Hamther.
- <sup>24</sup> Brothers: Gunnar and Hogni. Boys: Erp and Eitil.
- <sup>25</sup> In the manuscript this stanza follows stanza 21, and some editors take the word here rendered "fame-glad one" (*hroyrgoy*) to be a proper name (Jormunrek's mother or his concubine). The *Volsungasaga*, however, indicates that Guthrun at this point "had so fashioned their war-gear that iron would not bite into it, and she bade them to have nought to do with stones or other heavy things, and told them that it would be ill for them if they did not do as she said." The substance of this counsel may well have been conveyed in a passage lost after line 3, though the manuscript indicates no gap. It is by being stoned that Hamther and Sorli are killed (stanza 26). On the other hand, the second part of line 3 may possibly mean "if silent ye are not," in which case the advice relates to Hamther's speech to Jormunrek and Sorli's reproach to him thereupon (stanzas 25 and 27). Line 3 is thoroughly obscure. Some editors make a separate stanza of lines 3-5, while others question line 5.
- <sup>26</sup> Steps: the word in the original is doubtful.
- <sup>27</sup> Many editors assume the loss of a line after line 1. In several editions lines 2-3 are placed after line 2 of stanza 18.
- <sup>28</sup> Hunnish: the word meant little more than "German"; cf. *Guthrunarhvot*, 3 and note.
- <sup>29</sup> In the manuscript these two lines follow stanza 16; some editors insert them in place of lines 2-3 of stanza 11. The manuscript indicates no gap. Some editors assign line 2 to Hamther, and some to Sorli.
- <sup>30</sup> The man so wise: Erp, here represented as a son of Jonak but not of Guthrun, and hence a half-brother of Hamther and Sorli. There is nothing further to indicate whether or not he was born out of wedlock, as intimated in stanza 16.
- <sup>31</sup> The stanza is obviously defective. Many editors add Erp's name in line 1, and insert between lines 2 and 3 a line based on stanza 15 and the *Volsungasaga* paraphrase as given in brackets. In the *Volsungasaga*, after Erp's death, Hamther stumbles and saves himself from falling with his hand, whereupon he says: "Erp spake truly; I had fallen had I not braced myself with my hand." Soon thereafter Sorli has a like experience, one foot slipping but the other saving him from a fall. "Then they said that they had done ill to Erp, their brother."
- <sup>32</sup> Many editions attach these two lines to stanza 14, while a few assume the loss of two lines.
- <sup>33</sup> In the manuscript this stanza stands between stanzas 12 and 13. Some editors make line 4 a part of Erp's speech.
- <sup>34</sup> The manuscript does not indicate line 1 as beginning a stanza.
- <sup>35</sup> The giantess: presumably the reference is to Hel, goddess of the dead, but the phrase is doubtful.
- <sup>36</sup> In the manuscript these two lines are followed by stanza 19 with no indication of a break. Some editions insert here lines 2-3 of stanza 12, while others assume the loss of two or more lines.
- <sup>37</sup> Ill way: very likely the road leading through the gate of Jormunrek's town at which Svanhild was trampled to death.
- <sup>38</sup> Sister's son: many editors change the text to read "stepson," for the reference is certainly to Randver, son of Jormunrek, hanged by his father on Bikki's advice (cf. *Guthrunarhvot*, introductory note).
- <sup>39</sup> Wolf-tree: the gallows, the wolf being symbolical of outlaws.
- <sup>40</sup> Cranes'-bait: presumably either snakes or worms, but the passage is doubtful.
- <sup>41</sup> The warrior: presumably a warder or watchman, but the reference may be to Hamther himself.
- <sup>42</sup> Many editors assume the loss of a line after line 3.
- <sup>43</sup> The word here rendered *men* (line 1) is missing in the original, involving a metrical error, and various words have been suggested.
- <sup>44</sup> Line 2 in the original is thoroughly obscure; some editors directly reverse the meaning here indicated by giving the line a negative force, while others completely alter the phrase rendered "his arms he called for" into one meaning "he stroked his cheeks."
- <sup>45</sup> In the manuscript this stanza is followed by stanza 11, and such editors as have retained this arrangement have had to resort to varied and complex explanations to account for it.
- <sup>46</sup> Gjuki's heirs: the original has "the well-born of Gjuki," and some editors have changed the proper name to Guthrun, but the phrase apparently refers to Hamther and Sorli as Gjuki's grandsons.
- <sup>47</sup> Editors have made various efforts to reconstruct a four line stanza out of these two lines, in some cases with the help of lines borrowed from the puzzling stanza 11 (cf. note on stanza 23). Line 2 in the original is doubtful.
- <sup>48</sup> Some editors mark line 1 as an interpolation. The manuscript marks line 4 as beginning a new stanza. As in the story told by Jordanes, Hamther and Sorli succeed in wounding Jormunrek (here they cut off his hands and feet), but do not kill him.
- <sup>49</sup> The manuscript marks line 3, and not line 1, as beginning a stanza.
- <sup>50</sup> Of the race of the gods: the reference here is apparently to Jormunrek, but in the *Volsungasaga* the advice to kill Hamther and Sorli with stones, since iron will not wound them (cf. note on stanza 11), Comes from Othin, who enters the hall as an old man with one eye.
- <sup>51</sup> In the manuscript this stanza is introduced by the same line as stanza 25: "Then did Hamther speak forth, the haughty of heart," but the speaker in this case must be Sorli and not Hamther. Some editors, however, give lines 1-2 to Hamther and lines 3-4 to Sorli.
- <sup>52</sup> Bag: i.e., Hamther's mouth; cf. note on stanza 11.
- <sup>53</sup> The manuscript indicates line 3 as beginning a new stanza.
- <sup>54</sup> Most editors regard stanzas 28-30 as a speech by Hamther, but the manuscript does not indicate the speaker, and some editors assign one or two of the stanzas to Sorli. Lines 1-2 are quoted in the *Volsungasaga*. The manuscript does not indicate line 1 as beginning a stanza. Lines 3-4 may be a later interpolation.
- <sup>55</sup> Erp: Hamther means that while the two brothers had succeeded only in wounding Jormunrek, Erp, if he had been with them, would have killed him.
- <sup>56</sup> Norns: the fates; the word used in the original means the goddesses of ill fortune.
- <sup>57</sup> This is almost certainly an interpolated *ljothahattr* stanza, though some editors have tried to expand it into the *fornyrthislag* form.
- <sup>58</sup> Hounds of the Norns: wolves.
- <sup>59</sup> Some editors assume a gap after this stanza.
- <sup>60</sup> Apparently a fragment of a stanza from the "old" *Hamthesmol* to which the annotator's concluding prose note refers. Some editors assume the loss of two lines after line 2.
- <sup>61</sup> Regarding the "old" *Hamthesmol*, cf. *Guthrunarhvot*, introductory note.
- <sup>62</sup> However, dawn is the grief only of the swart alfs—the dwarfs—and of the giants whom it transforms into stone. Indeed, the sun is called "fair wheel" by the alfs (*Alvíssmál*, St.16). The whole stanza is generally regarded as spurious.
- <sup>63</sup> This absurd line must be interpolated.

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<sup>64</sup> A difficult line.

<sup>65</sup> Supplied after Grundtvig's suggestion from the similar third stanza of *Guðrúnarhvøpt*.

<sup>66</sup> Of evergreen trees (?). Compare with *Hávamál*, St.50.

<sup>67</sup> Kenning for "fire." Compare with *Vǫluspá*, St.51.

<sup>68</sup> It is precisely Guthrún's tragic fate that she may not ever heed this counsel. See *Guðrúnarkviða II*, St.10.

<sup>69</sup> Stanzas 6-8 of *Guðrúnarhvøpt* most likely contain material originally from *Hamðismál*.

<sup>70</sup> This stanza is transposed here, following Grundtvig and Bugge, from its position in the original after St.23. Its text is badly mutilated, and the translation hence largely conjectural.

<sup>71</sup> As they can now, in their charmed armor: the *Vǫlsunga saga*, Ch.42, tells how Guthrún gave her sons armor impenetrable to iron, but bade them "not to damage it by stones and other large matter" as else it were their death.

<sup>72</sup> Supplied after Grundtvig's suggestion.

<sup>73</sup> The order of Sts. 13-16 is changed, following Grundtvig and Bugge.

<sup>74</sup> Supplied by Gering.

<sup>75</sup> Their half brother Erp, the "Brownish One."

<sup>76</sup> *Vǫlsunga saga*, Ch.42, continues: "Then they went on their way, and but a little while after, Hamthir slipped and put his hand out and said: 'Erp may have said sooth—I would have fallen if my hand had not steadied me.' Soon after, Sorli stumbled, but put forth his foot and thus steadied himself. He said: 'I would have fallen now if both my feet had not steadied me.' Then both said that they had done ill by their brother."

<sup>77</sup> They have arrived in the confines of Jormunrekk's castle and now change their garments, arraying themselves in the magic (silken) armor.

<sup>78</sup> Randver: he is called thus in Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, which also tells this story. Here the original has "sister's son," which is quite in keeping with the Old Norse way of thinking: he is Svanhild's stepson as the son of her husband.

<sup>79</sup> Kenning for "gallows." "Wolf" was the designation of outlaws who had been proscribed and who were hanged wherever seized.

<sup>80</sup> Kenning for "serpent." Doubtful.

<sup>81</sup> Supplied after Grundtvig's suggestion.

<sup>82</sup> Conjectural.

<sup>83</sup> Here, probably, not the white shield of peace (*Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, St.33, note) but a shield made of the white wood of the linden tree.

<sup>84</sup> In Stanza 4 of the skald Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa* (ninth century) Jormunrekk is described as falling prone into the ale on the floor with which is mixed his own blood.

<sup>85</sup> According to the account of *Skáldskaparmál*, Ch.39, Guthrún advised them to attack Jormunrekk at night in his bed: "was Sorli and Hamthir to hew off his hands and feet, but Erp his head." They follow her advice, but Erp is lacking at the critical moment to perform his share.

<sup>86</sup> The (ever blazing) hearth fire in the middle of the hall. See *Rígsþula*, St.2, note, and *Atlakviða*, St.1, note. The two last lines translated after Neckel's conjectural restoration.

<sup>87</sup> In the *Vǫlsunga saga*, Ch.42, it is Óthin who gives the counsel to stone the brothers.

<sup>88</sup> Thy mouth (Compare with *Hávamál*, St.134). Is a stanza lacking here in which Hamthir had taunted the king with their invulnerability to iron?

<sup>89</sup> As their half brother and thus being of their own kin, he ought to have been inviolable.

<sup>90</sup> This stanza is *ljóðahátttr* and with adhortative content is generally supposed to be an interpolation.