

Færeyinga saga, chapter forty

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Sigmundr Brestisson, Þórir Beinisson and Einar suðreyingr took to the sea when Þrándr í Götu and his men attacked their home on Skúvoy. They swam towards Suðuroy. Einar died on the way; Þórir was drowned in the surf off the island; Sigmundr came ashore but next morning, as he lay exhausted among the seaweed, he was murdered by the local farmer, Þorgrímr, and his sons. They hid his body and the body of Þórir, who had been washed ashore. Later on, Þóra Sigmundsdóttir agrees to marry Leifr Özurarson if it can be proved that he was not responsible for her father's death and if it can be discovered how Sigmundr died. Þrándr undertakes to do this. They go to the home of Þorgrímr on Suðuroy and Þrándr accuses him and his sons of killing Sigmundr. Despite their denials, they are bound. Then comes this well-known passage:¹⁾

¹⁾ This part of the saga appears only in *Flateyjarbók*, quoted here from the edition by C. R. Unger and Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1860–68), I 556; cf. the editions by Rafn cited in the following list and *Færeyingasaga*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (1927), 59. The following names are used to stand for the translations cited: Ellis: H. R. Ellis, *The Road to Hel* (1943), 161; Grieg: *Sigmund Brestessøns saga* oversat av R. Grieg (1924), 75; Hammershaimb: *Føroyingasöga* umsett eftir V. U. Hammershaimb (2nd ed., 1919), 75; Lid: Nils Lid, *Folketru* (Nordisk Kultur XIX, 1935), 14; Meissner: R. Meissner in *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* 27 (1917), 100 note 1; Mohnike: *Færeyinga saga*. Herausgegeben von C. C.

Þrandr hafde þa latit gera ellda mykla j elldaskala ok grindr flórar lætr hann gera með flórum hornnum ok .ix. ræita rístr Þrandr alla uega út frá grindunum. en hann setst a stol mílle elldz ok grindanna. hann bídr þa nú ekki víð sig tala ok þeir gera suo. Þrandr sítr suo vinn hrið ok er stund leidd þa gengr maðr inn j elldaskalann ok var allr aluotr. þeir kenna manninn at þar var Æinarr Sudreyingr. hann gengr at elldinum ok reitir at hendr sínar ok litla hrið ok snyrr vt eftir þat. ok er stund lídr gengr maðr jnn j elldahusit. hann gengr at elde ok reitir til hendr sínar ok gengr vt síðan. þeir kenna at þar var Þórir. bratt eftir þetta gengr hinn þriddi maðr j elldaskalann. þessi var mikill maðr ok miog blóðugr. hann hafde hófudit j hende ser. þenna kenna þeir allar at þar var Sigmundur Brestisson hann nemur stadar nokkura stund a golfinu ok gengr vt síðan ok eftir þetta ríss Þrandr af stólinum ok uarpar mæðiliga ondunne ok mællti. nú megi þer sía huat þessum monnum hefir at bana ordit —

This brief description is in parts obscure and as a whole unique. It has clear affinities with divinatory and necromantic practices, particular with the *útiseti*.¹⁾ It has remoter associations with beliefs in the unquiet dead, particularly the drowned or murdered who come back to reveal the

Rafn und G. C. F. Mohnike (1833), 328; Munch: P. A. Munch, *Det norske folks historie* I 2 (1853), 592; Niedner: *Grönländer und Färinger Geschichten* übertragen von F. Niedner (Thule XIII, 1929), 332; Olsen: Magnus Olsen in *Maal og Minne* (1916), 19; Press: *The Saga of the Faroe Islanders* translated by M. A. C. Press (1934), 76; Rafn: *Færeyinga saga*. Udg. af C. C. Rafn (1832), 183–4; Rahbek: K. L. Rahbek, *Nordiske Fortællinger* II (1821), 136; Reitan: *Soga um Sigmund Bresteson* . . . ved J. Reitan (Gamal norske bokverk 5, 1908), 131; Rygh: O. Rygh in *Vore fædres liv*. Udg. af N. Rolfsen (2nd ed., 1898), 234; Schrøter: see reference under Rafn above; Strömbäck: Dag Strömbäck, *Sejd* (1935), 127; Torfæus: *Commentatio historica, de rebus gestis Færeysensium* . . . Thormodi Torfæi (1695), 108–9; de Vries: J. de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* (2nd ed., 1956–7), I 329; Winther: N. Winther, *Færøernes Oldtidshistorie* (1858–75), 349; York Powell: *The Tale of Thronð of Gate* englished by F. York Powell (1896), 54. Translations I know I have not seen are those published in Tórshavn (1904), by O. A. Øverland in *Norske historiske fortællinger* no. 3 (1895) and by A. Bugge in *Udvalgte Sagaer* (1901). Other abbreviated titles are: *Hwb.*: *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* (1927–42); *KL*: *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* (1956–).

¹⁾ See Strömbäck, 126–9, and cf. Munch, Meissner and de Vries, but the account does not fit exactly in any category.

cause of their disappearance and sometimes the place where their bodies lie¹). The following notes are meant to clarify some of the elements in the description. The world of magic and popular belief is so vast that this can be no more than a tiny step, but I hope it is in the right direction.

It is unlikely that the writer and his contemporaries regarded Sigmundr, Þórir and Einar in their manifestation merely as hallucinations or even as wraiths. There is abundant evidence to show that it was generally believed that the dead who visited the living had corporeal substance. They usually appear in the shape they had at the moment of death.²)

In magic of this kind fire may serve both to attract the dead and to protect the living.³) As with many other objects and practices in the domain of folk-belief, it may have both functions at the same time, even though one is dominant. Here it seems reasonable to assume that the

1) Cf. Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1955–8), E 380, E 231; stories in Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri* (ed. Árni Böðvarsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 1954–61), I 221 ff. (dead usually return in dreams), and Eva Wigström, *Folketro och sägner* (1888–1914; *Svenska Landsmål* VIII 1, 3), nos. 630–33. Cf. *draugen* in Norway and *strandvaskaren* in Sweden. In Sogn it is »druknede og ubegravede personer . . . som blir drauger«, E. Birkeli, *Fedrekult i Norge* (Oslo Skrifter, 1938, no. 5), 179. The associations are too remote to justify Lid's reference to »ei viss form av fyreferd som skal visa seg når den mann har drukna som fyreferdet hørde til. Sumtid viser dette seg utan hovud« — Sigmundr Brestisson carries his head, after all, because he was decapitated when he was killed (*Færeyinga saga*, ch. 38; *Flateyjarbók* I 554).

2) H. Dehmer, *Primitives Erzählungsgut in den Íslendinga-Sögur* (Von deutscher Poeterey 2, 1927), 30; H.-J. Klare, 'Die Toten in der alt-nordischen Literatur', *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* 8 (1933–4), 1–56; F. Ström in *KL* III (1958), 432–4. For similar conceptions in later folk-belief cf. e.g. Jónas Jónasson, *Íslenzkir þjóðhættir* (2nd ed., 1945), 421–33; Reidar Th. Christiansen, *The Dead and the Living* (Studia Norvegica I 2, 1946), 8–11.

3) Cf. the collection of material in S. Eitrem, *Opferritus und Voropfer der Griechen und Römer* (Oslo Skrifter, 1914, no. 1), 135–6, 153 ff., 162 ff.

chief function of the big fires built up on Þránd's orders is a hilastic one. They attract the men who were wet, cold and exhausted when they died.¹⁾

Þránd's command that nothing is to be said to him is paralleled in many other descriptions of divination and spell-working. There must be no disturbance and it is especially dangerous if the name of a man is spoken at such a time.²⁾ Similarly, Þránd's weary sigh when the manifestation of the dead is over is a stock piece of description for such an occasion.³⁾ Commerce with the other world is both perilous and toilsome.

Translators and commentators have not all agreed over the interpretation of the sentence: *ok grindr fiorar lætr hann gera med fiorum hornnum ok .ix. ræita ristr Þrandr alla uega vt fra grindunum.*

Although we cannot tell exactly what form of *grind* the writer had in mind, we may safely assume that it was a rectangular frame of wood with enough bars or rails to produce a lattice-work effect, a hurdle of some kind. (Closely woven wickerwork is not likely to have been found in Iceland.) The *grind* was a portable barrier, chiefly used for fencing. Slung from a post in some way, it made a gate, and it is this sense of the word that is now commonest in Norway. Put together in a square or other shape, *grindr* made a pen or fold for animals. Although the use

¹⁾ Cf. the description of the return to Fróðá of the drowned Þórðr oddr and his companions in *Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 54 (Íslenzk fornrit IV (1935), 148–9).

²⁾ Cf. e. g. K. Nyrop, 'Navnets Magt', *Mindre Afhandlinger udg. af Det philologisk-historiske Samfund* (1887), 118–209; W. H. Vogt, *Vatnsdæla Saga* (Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek 16, 1921), 8 notes to 3–4, 35 note to 3; I. Reichborn-Kjennerud, *Vår gamle trolldomsmedisin* (Oslo Skrifter, 1927, no. 6), 134, 137–44; Dehmer, *op. cit.*, 96. Sjødraugen in Rogaland dislikes noise (Birkeli, *op. cit.*, 179); dragging for a drowned man on the Swedish coast must be done in the strictest silence (L. Hagberg, *När döden gästar* (1937), 593).

³⁾ See especially Strömbäck, 182–6.

of this kind of *færikvíar* (in which a section may be called (*færi*)*kvíagrind*) is in Iceland not said to go back beyond the eighteenth century, references in early literature show that Icelanders were familiar with *grindr* used in this way in Norway.¹⁾ Translators have generally tried to make clear the nature of the construction of the *grind*: *clathri* (Torfæus), *Tral-, Sprinkelværker* (Rabbek, Rafn, Winther), *Gitterwerke, Holzgitter* (Mohnike, Niedner, de Vries), *lattices* (York Powell), *hurdles*(?) (Ellis).

It has also generally been accepted that the four pieces of fencing were set up in a square. (That the *grindr* were laid flat in a square may be conceivable but is contrary to nature.) The phrase *með fjórum hornum* (*skautum*), with four corners, is well attested in the description of things with a square or rectangular shape.²⁾ Cf. *ferhyrindr*, *four-cornered, viereckig*. Some people believe that the square of lattices surrounds the fire,³⁾ but there is nothing in the text to compel this conclusion. On the contrary, given the hilastic function of the fire and the fact that Þrándr sat on

1) According to Magnús Hákonarson's *Landslög* (VII 30), a satisfactory gate (*grind*) on a public road should have »rimar i ok okar tveir fyrir endum ok krossband a«; a *rimagarðr* is built in the same way but without the *krossband* (*ibid.* VII 29); see *Norges gamle Love* II 122, V 249 s. v. *grind*, 523 s. v. *rim*. For a lot of general information on types of fencing see *KL* I (1956), 420, VI (1961), 279–92, IX (1964), 554–6. That portable *grindr* were used for pens in Sweden is shown by the famous passage in *Äldre Västgötalagen* (*Rettlösabalken* V 5): »Þættæ aru vkvæpins orþ kono. Iak sa at þu reet a quiggrindu lösharæþ —«. Pens made of *grindr* are illustrated in H. Stigum, 'Grindgang og grindhus', *By og bygd* 6 (1948–9), 4, 7; Jónas Jónasson, *op. cit.*, 174; Johannes Skar, *Gamalt or Sætesdal* (samla utg., 1961–3), II 342. Cf. *Egils saga*, ch. 57 (Íslenzk fornrit II (1933), 167): »vöku vér . . . yfir fé váru, er byrgt er í grindum«, and other references in Cleasby-Vigfússon, *Icelandic-English Dictionary* (1874), and J. Fritzner, *Ordbog over det gamle norske Sprog* (1883–96), s. v. *grind*.

2) Cf. Fritzner, *Ordbog*, s. v. *skaut*.

3) Meissner, Press, Rabbek, Rygh, Torfæus, York Powell (cf. his introduction, xxxviii); Olsen and Lid by inference.

a stool *milli elldz ok grindanna* (plural), it would seem impossible to maintain that the fire was within the *grindr*.

There is some divergence of opinion as to the precise interpretation of the word *reit*. Etymologically it is connected with *ríta* (**writan*), English *write*, etc., and its first meaning would be incised mark, scratched line. Some people have consequently translated *reitar* here merely as furrows or lines (Schrøter *Rajnar*, Olsen *streker*, Meissner *Linien*, Lid *strik*, Strömbäck *streck*, de Vries *Striche*).¹⁾ Other people, however, have been suitably impressed by the fact that the word *reit* in Icelandic never appears to imply an independent line but always a marked-off space, an area.²⁾ Thus we find *loculi distincti* (Torfæus), *indcirklede Pladser* (Rafn), *Plätze* (Mohnike), *saakaldte Rejter eller Afsatser* (Munch), *Pladser, Rejter eller Afsatser* (Winther), *ruder* (Rygh), *squares* (York Powell), *rutur* (Reitan), *rútar* (Hammershaimb), *ruter* (Grieg), *Felder* (Niedner), *spaces* (Press), *enclosures* (Ellis).

There seems, in fact, no doubt but that the word *reit* early came to mean a line which joins itself to form a

1) Rahbek differs entirely; he has *Runer*.

2) Only Norwegian seems to have *reit*, f., in the sense of line, furrow, although cognate words in other Germanic languages have the same sense (see A. Torp, *Nynorsk etymologisk ordbok* (1919), s. v.). But *reit*, m., means »en liden Ager, et opspadet Jordstykke . . . en Rude, eller Strimmel af opkastet Jord i en Myr« (I. Aasen, *Norsk ordbog* (1918), s. v.); and Swedish *vreter*, *vret* has a similar sense of patch of ground. Fritzner, *Ordbog*, s. v., begins his gloss with »Rids, Fure« but although this sense must be etymologically correct, none of the examples of the word's usage quoted by him demands this meaning. Other dictionaries give no such gloss as line or furrow at all, thus e. g. Björn Halldórsson, *Lexicon Islandico-Latino-Danicum* (1814), »area, pulvinus, porculum«, etc.; Cleasby-Vigfússon: »a square, a space marked out«, etc.; Sigfús Blöndal, *Íslenzk-dönsk orðabók* (1920–24): »afstukket Plads, afgrænset Stykke Jord«, etc.; Árni Böðvarsson, *Íslenzk orðabók* (1963): »afmarkað svæði«, etc. On the whole question of the word's etymology and sense see especially N. Lindqvist, *Bjärke-Säby ortsnamn* (1926), 104 ff.

perimeter, and was then used only in this specialised sense to mean both the perimeter line and the space it encloses.¹⁾ Possibly this development was by way of a general sense of boundary indicated by a furrow or incised line. The nine *reitar* drawn by Þrándr must thus have been concentric squares scratched in the earth floor around the square made by the *grindr*. There is no harm in translating *reitar* as lines as long as this design is made clear, as it is by Meissner, for example, who writes: »Das Gehege wird mit neun Linien umzogen«. It is harder to see exactly how other translators have visualised their *loculi distincti, ind-cirklede Pladser, squares, ruter* and so forth,²⁾ but one form of translation seems positively misleading in its ambiguity, and dangerously so because of the eminence of the authors. This is Magnus Olsen's version: »og 9 streker rister Trond ut i alle retninger«; cf. Lid, »han riste 9 strik ut i alle leider«, Strömback, »han ristar nio streck åt alla håll ut från grindarna«,³⁾ de Vries, »von da aus werden neun Striche (in den Boden) geritzt«. These do not suggest enclosed spaces at all, and may even give the impression that the lines drawn were not parallel to the sides of the *grindr* but at right-angles to them. This ambiguity arises largely from the translation of *alla uega vt* as »out in all directions«, when in fact it must simply mean »on all sides«,

1) One can compare *kyklos*, *circulus*, and other words for circle, which mean both the circumference line and the whole figure; cf. Eitrem, *op. cit.*, 57. Cf. too the semantic spread of such a word as *bólkr* (*balkr*).

2) Translators have of course not been very sure themselves. York Powell, xxxviii, asks, »Are they [the squares] nine 'houses' surrounding in a ring the lattices and fire, or are they nine concentric squares one within the other?« Miss Ellis, 162, speaks of »the strange figure drawn on the floor ... too obscure for us to know exactly what the figure could have been like«.

3) The word *nio* is absent in Professor Strömback's printed text, but the author has kindly inserted it in my copy.

»around«. That the phrase is synonymous with *umhverfis* here can be seen from the variant readings in a passage often quoted in connection with this text from the saga. This is the story about St Barbatus found among the legends of the Blessed Virgin in Icelandic collections of her miracles. The saint accuses Romaldus of conjuring up the devil and describes his practice. The oldest text, AM 655 4to II, from the early thirteenth century, has: *oc bredder þar niþr bloþga navts hvþ oc settisc þar niþr oc gorþer nio reta alla vega fra vt meþ sverþi þino*. Compare these younger texts: *ok rístr umhverfis á iörðunni hía þér með blóðrefli sverðs þíns níu reita* (AM 234 and 232 fol., fourteenth century); *giorir þu med blodrefli þess sverdz, er þu ert gydr, niu reita umhuerfis hudina* (Stock. perg. 4:0 nr 1, fifteenth century); *ok reist umhuerfis aa iordinni hia þier .ix. reita med blodrefli suerdsins* (AM 635 4to, c. 1700 from a fourteenth-century original).¹⁾

The references in other Icelandic writings are in full agreement with the sense of *reitr* as an enclosing line and an enclosed space and with the use of such to confer magic protection. Most often, as is also the case with the usual »magic circle«, it is the living person who is protected within the limits of the *reitr*, but sometimes it is the beings from the other world who are safely trapped within them.²⁾

1) Konráð Gíslason, *Um frum-parta íslenzkrar túngu* (1846), lxxix-xx; C. R. Unger, *Mariu saga* (1871), xxxiii-iv, 147-8, 730, 737.

2) Apart from the passages in *Færeyinga saga* and *Mariu saga*, the best known instances are the *reitar* that surround the place where the judges sit (*Grágás* udg. af Vilhjálmur Finsen (1852), I 72) and those around the cloak on which the duel was fought according to the rules given in *Kormáks saga*, ch. 10 (*Íslenzk fornrit VIII* (1939), 237); cf. also Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur* (1954-61), I 166-7, 254, and I 56-7, II 18-19, where *reitur* and *hringur* appear to have the same significance. On the power of such *reitar* see G. Holmgren, 'Ting och ring', *Rig* 12 (1929), 19-36, and on magic circles and the like see the material in S. Eitrem, *op. cit.*, 6 ff.; H. Feilberg, *Ordbog over jyske almuesmål* (1886-1914), s. v. *kreds*; *Hwb.* III 524.

The magic significance of the number nine is too well known to need particular comment.¹⁾

If the *reitar* around the *grindr* have a magic=apotropaic effect, they are either protecting the *grindr*, which then have some special function of their own, or they are reinforcing a similar power in the *grindr* themselves. Since the ordinary function of *grindr* is to form a barrier, the latter explanation seems the more likely. It may be supported by a certain amount of analogical evidence drawn from a brief survey of the use of *grind*-like barriers to separate the dead and the living.

Tacitus's description of the manner of execution of certain types of criminal among some Germanic tribes is well known (*Germania*, 12, 1): *ignavos et imbelles et corpore infames caeno ac palude, iniecta insuper crate, mergunt*. The »hurdle« had the practical aim of preventing the return of the corpse to the surface of the swamp, as it will often do otherwise,²⁾ but this is tantamount to preventing the dead from walking again.³⁾ Tacitus's description is borne out by various finds of bog-burials. The practice continued through the middle ages and Gjessing particularly has emphasised the continuity of the tradition both in the custom itself and in the attempts made to fix the dead in some way.⁴⁾ Ström has

1) See e.g. K. Weinhold, *Die mystische Neunzahl bei den Deutschen* (Abh. der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, 1897, No. 2); J. Hoops, *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* (1911–19), III 312–4; A. Teilgård Laugesen, *Syv-Ni-Tolv* (Studier fra Sprog- og Oldtidsforskning no. 237, 1959).

2) M. Ebert, *Reallexikon der Vorgeschichte* VIII (1927), 287. Cf. Livy's description of the novel form of execution (*Ab urbe condita* 1. 51, 9): »— deiectus ad caput aquae Ferentinae crate superne iniecta saxisque congestis mergeretur«. The other references in Roman sources (*Ab urbe condita* 4. 50, 4, and Plautus, *Poenulus* 5. 2, 65) seem to presuppose crushing to death under hurdles.

3) Cf. W. Reeb, *Tacitus Germania* (1930), 95, who speaks of the corpses »zum Teil mit Flechtwerk bedeckt, das eine Wiederkehr des Toten als Gespenst verhindern sollte«.

4) G. Gjessing, 'Skjoldehamndrakten', *Viking* II (1938), especially 30–37.

concluded that the prophylactic intention was predominant in the use of the hurdle or related forms of wickerwork,¹⁾ comparable to the later common practice of driving a stake through the body.²⁾

Various other burial practices are designed to dissuade or prevent the dead from returning from the grave. Sometimes the intention is clearly to put a barrier of more or less complexity in the way of the dead. Thus the corpse may be shrouded in a net or a piece of net may be included in the grave-goods. If there is particular fear of the malevolent propensity of the dead, the grave may be planted with or surrounded by thorn-bushes of some kind.³⁾ In Silesia in the early eighteenth century the graves of women who died in childbirth were surrounded by »Gegitter«, lattice-work fencing, to ensure that they stayed quiet. Various other kinds of barrier are known, some spread net-like over the graves, some built like walls around them.⁴⁾ Not dissimilar practices may spring from necrophilic motives but they seem rare in comparison with cases where the necrophobic element predominates.⁵⁾

1) F. Ström, *On the sacral origin of the Germanic death penalties* (1942), 188. Ström, 187, refers to a custom which forbade the use of nails in a suicide's coffin: the boards were fastened together with withes. His source for the practice in north Sweden is L. Hagberg, *När döden gästar* (1937), 501, but it was also known in west Norway, cf. Halldor O. Opedal, *Makter og menneske. Folkeminne ifrå Hardanger* II (Norsk folkeminnelag nr. 32, 1934), 208. This may be too remote to be relevant, but it would be odd if the knotted withes were reckoned more of an obstacle than nails of iron and the custom might contain a reminiscence of early methods of fixing the dead.

2) See e. g. A. Sandklef, 'Om den nedpålade döde i sägen och fynd', *Folkminnen och folktankar* 24 (1937), 72-87.

3) *Hwb.* I 986-7, III 1095; H. Rosén, *Livets högtider* (Nordisk Kultur XX, N. D.), 95.

4) *Hwb.* I 985-7, 989.

5) The *grindr* which King Sverrir had put around the grave of Magnús Erlingsson in Christchurch, Bergen, were apparently counted a contribution to his honourable entombment, see *Sverris saga*, ch. 97

It may be noted in this connection that the word *grind* figures in the names of the barriers which enclosed the worlds of the dead in early Norse belief.¹⁾ The barrier was conceived in the form of a gate with bars or a grating of some kind. Valhöll is barred by *Valgrind* (*Grímnismál* 22). The gates of Hel's domain are the *helgrindr*; and *helgrind* in the singular is used of the opening of Angantý's burial mound.²⁾ Particularly distinctive is the cliché *fyrir nágrindr neðan* (*Skírnismál* 35, *Lokasenna* 63, *Fjölsvinnsmál* 26), with its suggestion of the dead in an underworld with grating-like barriers above them.

In popular belief a gate on a road may remain an effective barrier against the dead,³⁾ and gates may also be regarded as particularly dangerous places.⁴⁾ It is difficult to dissociate this from the general idea of the fence as a

(ed. G. Indrebø (1920), 104), although it is amusing to speculate on other possible motives. The practice sometimes followed of placing the bier, often merely a plank, on top of the uncoffined corpse (*KL V* (1960), 438) was probably necrophilic in intention. The custom in *Sætesdal* of surrounding the bier with stones whenever it was put down to allow the bearers a rest (Johannes Skard, *Gamalt or Sætesdal* (1961–3), II 112) has been interpreted, perhaps unnecessarily, as designed to protect the dead man, see Birkeli, *op. cit.*, 34. According to the story, Egill thought it important to carry his father Skalla-Grímr to his grave without stopping anywhere (*í hriðinni*), *Egils saga*, ch. 58 (*Íslenzk fornrit II* (1933), 175), and this was fear of, not for, the dead.

¹⁾ Cf. J. de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* (1956–7), II 376.

²⁾ Finnur Jónsson, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* (1931), 11, 66; *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning* (1912–15), A II 246.

³⁾ »En gengångare hade ju svårt att komma genom en grind —« (L. Hagberg, *op. cit.*, 630). It has been suggested that the gate-like patterns made with spruce branches as part of the widespread custom of dressing up the road and ground outside houses at the time of a funeral were intended to represent real gates that would hinder the return of the dead (see C. W. von Sydow, 'Några begravningsbruk', *Folkminnen och folktankar* 6 (1919), 8–9; Hagberg, *op. cit.*, 302).

⁴⁾ »Jo, kors da, sa gamlingen; det er nock inte trygt ved grin'ane om kvelden eller ved nattetid, nei; det har jeg da baade hørt og set —« (Kr. Bugge, *Folkeminne optegnelser* (Norsk folkeminnelag nr. 31, 1934), 61).

boundary line and thus in itself belonging neither to one side nor to the other, a sort of no-man's land, comparable to the threshold, the line of the eaves of a house, the ridge between two valleys, places with a kind of magic potential of their own conferred by their very neutrality.¹⁾ Fences and gates are places where supernatural forces are likely to be encountered (it is on a piece of fencing that the witch rides, cf. the *Västgötalag* passage, note 1 p. 88, and the Norse word *túnriða*, German *zûnrite*),²⁾ and where figures from other worlds are likely to congregate. On the basis of such notions it might be argued that the purpose of Þránd's *grindr* in the midst of the *reiðar* was not protective but hilastic: if the dead are likely to linger by fences, let us put up fences to attract them.³⁾ But it would be

1) On the supernatural significance of the boundary see e. g. H. F. Feilberg, *Sjæletro* (1914), 158–64; *Hwb.* IX 991–4.

2) See E. Noreen, 'Om ordet häxa', *Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift* (1924, no. 8), 53–61; *Hwb.* IX 994–5; Å. Holmbäck och E. Wessén, *Svenska Landskapslagar V* (1946), 125–6.

3) Olsen somehow equates the inanimate *grindr* with the *völva*'s living circle of women whose song attracts (and holds?) spirits. This is hard to see. I know one other context in which wattles figure as part of a practice designed to evoke spirits. O'Rahilly describes an ancient Irish practice from the account by Keating (c. 1570–1644) thus: »Upon wattles of mountain-ash they spread, raw side uppermost, the hides of bulls that had been offered in sacrifice, 'and in this way they had recourse to their *geasa* to evoke the demons, for the purpose of winning knowledge from them, even as the *tog-harmach* (evoker of spirits) does in the circle today'« (T. F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (1946), 324). The wattles were called *cliatha fis*, »wattles of wisdom«, a phrase which occurs fairly often (*ibid.*, 324 notes 2–3). In other contexts the hide is not mentioned but, as O'Rahilly concludes, Keating's account clearly suggests that the procedure was some form of *incubatio*, a divinatory rite well known among Greeks, Romans and Celts, and referred to in Icelandic and Faroese sources (cf. the story of St Barbatus, p. 00 above; Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur* (1954–61), I 422–4, 684; V. U. Hammershaimb, *Færøsk anthologi* (1891), I 342–3; Meissner, 102–5, where the references show that sitting on the hide was sufficient for the divinatory purpose,

difficult to reconcile this with the description as a whole, where the pieces of fencing are mounted in a square, the dead men do not appear within or by the fencing, and the fire, whose hilastic function can hardly be doubted, is dissociated from the *grindr*.

All in all, it seems most likely that the dead were thought to be summoned by Þránd's psychic exertion (whatever form it was believed to take), coupled with the big fires, and that the intention of the *reitar* and *grindr* was apotropaic, in accordance with their use in other contexts.¹⁾ The one who would seem to need protection is Þrándr, but after taking his elaborate precautions, he calmly sits on a chair between the fire and the *grindr*. This may give him cover back and front but one feels that he ought to be inside the *grindr* all the same.

Two possible explanations of this discrepancy suggest themselves. It may be implied that by making his square of fencing and drawing the nine perimeter lines around it, Þrándr has created an effective apotropaic symbol which

so that there is no need to assume, as O'Rahilly does, that the seer wrapped himself in the skin, although this is also known). In this rite it appears to be the hide of the (sacrificial) animal which confers divine potency, enabling the seer to share the secrets of other worlds; its protective function is probably secondary. The purpose of the wattles on the other hand is obscure. The fact that they were made of the sacred rowan (cf. J. de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* (1956-7), I 282-3 with references) suggests that their function was apotropaic, and it may be that they made some sort of platform, similar to the *seiðhjallr*, whose function was to isolate »den sejðande från störande inflytelser och erbjuda en trygg plats under den extas, som åtföljde sejden« (Strömbäck, 118). It is perhaps worth pointing out the similarity of construction between the typical *grind* and the typical *hjallr*, both made of frames with bars and interstices; on the possible connection of *hjallr* with *hjalmr* and an original sense »Geflecht«, see J. de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (1961), 230.

¹⁾ A protective function for the *grindr* is naturally assumed by those who think the fire and Þrándr were inside them, implicitly by Meissner, for example, and explicitly by York Powell, xxxviii.

will protect himself and all the other witnesses of the manifestation of the dead men. Considering the vast scope of homoeopathic magic, this does not seem an excessively remote possibility. A parallel might be seen in the belief that to fix a dead-walker it was sufficient »att slá ned en påle på ett ställe var som helst«, examples of which are quoted by Sandklef.¹⁾ This idea would not be far from de Vries's tentative suggestion as to the significance of the procedure described in the saga: »das deutet vielleicht auf einen magischen Kreis, in den die Seelen von Sigmundr Brestisson und seinen Gefährten gebannt werden sollten.«²⁾ Given the situation, however, it may seem preferable to think that the centre of the *grindr* and *reitar* represents the world of the living, thoroughly protected from the dead who come from outside.

A second possible explanation is that the author of the description was himself not clear about the function of the *grindr* and *reitar*, even though he understood that they were appropriate in a necromantic context.³⁾ If they do constitute a »blind« motive in this way, we may at any rate be reasonably sure that the author did not invent them. This would add in some degree to our faith in the authenticity of the *grindr*, whether this paper has done anything to clarify their function or not.

¹⁾ It is interesting to note that in one example quoted by Sandklef (*op. cit.*, 79–80) the fixing of the dead in this way was done by planting a thorn-bush at the place haunted by the dead man, and that in another example it was done by driving in nine stakes around the place where a revenant was »manet ned«.

²⁾ Cf. also Lid: »Og den færøske fyregjerdi står nær til parallele fyregjerder i svartebokstrolldomen der djevelen skal manast i ein ring dei har drege upp.«

³⁾ That the author did not know much about »heathendom« is suggested by his quite implausible description of the temple of Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr in ch. 23 of the saga (*Flateyjarbók* I 144–5).

ÚRTAK

Greinin hefur nakrar viðmerkingar til frágreiðingina í 40. kapitli í Føroyinga Sögu um, á hvønn hátt Tróndur í Gøtu varð varur við, hvussu Sigmundur Brestissonur og menn hansara lótu lív. Líkt er til, at hildið hefur verið, at hinir deyðu menninir hava verið drignir av hinum stóru eldunum og av Tróndar sálarstreiging (hvussu hon annars hefur verið fatað), meðan girðingin úr *grindum*, sum hann setti upp og kringsetti við níggju sammiðjaðum rútum (*reitum*, *ristum* í gólvið), vóru fyribýrgjandi myndaratgerðir.

Tann móguleikin, at nýtslan av grindum og rútum er ein »duld« ætlan, eigur eisini at verða havdur í huga, men eisini um so er, hefur pettið sín týdning fyri tjóðminnafrøðingin.