

Völuspá and the Feast of Easter

It is generally agreed that *Völuspá* has been influenced by Christian ideas to some extent, but the nature of that influence has been debated. Of course it is true, as Daniel Sävborg has pointed out (2003, 131), that all the Old Norse poetry that survives comes from a time when Christianity was already to some extent influential in northern Europe. But there is a difference between the adoption of commonplace Christian expressions (such as calling Óðinn *Alföðr* ‘Father of all’, cf. Latin *Pater omnium*) or general ideas (e.g. that some beings will be resurrected after Ragnarök) on the one hand, and on the other the suggestion that specific Christian texts have been used as source material for *Völuspá*.¹ This paper will address only the latter type of influence, and will consider what criteria should be used in evaluating whether any particular claimed source is probable or not. I shall then go on to make a suggestion of my own.

The Religious Context of *Völuspá*

It is first necessary to consider whether *Völuspá* is genuinely pre-Christian or not. In polytheistic cultures, the measure of acceptance of a monotheistic religion is not whether its god is accepted, for a religious system with many gods can usually find room for a new one without any basic alteration of itself. The real measure of conversion has to be the rejection of all gods except that of the monotheistic religion. We have several examples in Germanic sources of polytheists who also worshipped Christ—men such as the East Anglian king Rædwald or the Icelandic settler Helgi inn magri (*Landnámabók* chap. S218, H184; Jakob Benediktsson 1968,

1. For example, Wolfgang Butt (1969) argues that the description of Ragnarök in the poem is directly derived from the homilies of Wulfstan and from the Old English poem *Judgment Day II*; for editions of these texts, see Bethurum 1957; Dobbie 1942; and for critical comment on this, see Lindow 1987. Another suggestion would derive the figure of the narrating *völva* in *Völuspá* from one or more Latin versions of the *Cantus Sibyllae*; for recent arguments of this kind, see Dronke 1992; Dronke 1997, 93–104; Samplonius 2001. A simpler, less detailed suggestion is that the poet may be indebted to particular passages of the Bible, and notably of Revelation—see McKinnell and Ruggerini 1994, 123–26; North 2003; and later in this paper.

250–53)—but they are not real Christians. Despite Rædwald’s temporal success and patronage of King Edwin, Bede dismisses his deeds as ignoble:

Et quidem pater eius Reduald iam dudum in Cantia sacramentis Christianae fidei inbutus est, sed frustra; nam rediens domum ab uxore sua et quibusdam peruersis doctoribus seductus est, atque a sinceritate fidei deprauatus habuit posteriora peiora prioribus, ita ut in morem antiquorum Samaritanorum et Christo seruire uideretur et diis, quibus antea seruiebat, atque in eodem fano et altare haberet ad sacrificium Christi et arulam ad uictimas daemoniorum. (Beda Venerabilis, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* 2.15; Colgrave and Mynors 1969, 188, 190)

[Indeed his father Rædwald had long before been initiated into the mysteries of the Christian faith in Kent, but in vain; for on his return home, he was seduced by his wife and by certain evil teachers and perverted from the sincerity of his faith, so that his last state was worse than his first. After the manner of the ancient Samaritans, he seemed to be serving both Christ and the gods whom he had previously served; in the same temple he had one altar for the Christian sacrifice and another small altar on which to offer victims to devils.] (Colgrave and Mynors 1969, 189, 191)

For the “real” Christian, all heathen gods must be rejected as either the personifications of natural objects or forces, as historical human beings who persuaded others to worship them, or as devils. Good examples of all three attitudes can be found in Ælfric’s *De falsis diis*, which dates from around the same time as the most probable date of *Völuspá* (Ælfric died ca. 1010). Ælfric says that the error of regarding the sun, moon, stars, or elements as gods arose after Noah’s flood (*De falsis diis* 72–98; Pope 1967–68, 2:680–81); he dismisses *Þór* and *Óðon* as distorted versions of Mars and Mercury, whom he describes as wicked human beings (104–80; 2:682–86); and a statue of Apollo which is mastered by Bishop Gregory is said to have been inhabited by a devil who pretended to be the god (572–648; 2:707–11). Ælfric is here adapting or expanding material from two of his major sources, the *De correctione rusticorum* of Martin of Braga and the *Historia ecclesiastica* of Rufinus (Pope 1967–68, 2:670–73);² but the same tradition continued after his time, and an adaptation of *De falsis diis* in Icelandic survives in *Hauksbók* (Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson 1892–96, 156–64; see Taylor 1969). Similarly, the *Old Saxon Baptismal Vow* (in an early-ninth-century manuscript from Mainz) explicitly lists *Thunaer* and *Uuoden* (Donar/Thor and Wotan/Odin) among the devils who are being renounced:

end ec forsacho allum dioboles uuercum and uuordum, Thunaer ende Uuoden ende Saxnote ende allum them unholdum, the hira genotas sint. (Schlosser 1998, 40–41; from Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Codex Palatinus latinus 577)

[And I forsake all the devil’s works and words, Thunaer and Uuoden and Saxnot, and all the fiends who are their companions.]

It should therefore be no surprise when we find Óláfr Tryggvason requiring his men, poets or not, to reject the old gods and all that they stand for. Perhaps

2. For a full text of Martin of Braga’s *De correctione rusticorum* with parallel translation into Italian, see Naldini 1991.

reluctantly, Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld proclaims his hatred for Óðinn now that he serves Christ; a couple of stanzas later he announces his enmity towards Freyr, Freyja, Njörðr, and Þórr, and that he will pray only to Christ and God (Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, B1:158–59, *lausavísur* 7, 9).³ A similar pressure is exerted by Óláfr (admittedly in a less reliable account) in the Flateyjarbók story of how he makes all his men approach the idol of Þorgerðr Hqrðabruðr to see whether any of them has any love for her, before smashing the idol to pieces and burning the fragments (Flateyjarbók, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* chap. 326; Sigurður Nordal, Finnbogi Guðmundsson, and Vilhjálmur Bjarnar 1944–45, 1:452–54). The only remaining role for Óðinn in the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason is as a sinister visitor, bent on distracting the king from Christian worship and endangering his life while he is in a state of sin (*Heimskringla*, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* chap. 64; Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, 1:312–14). In all these narratives, the king’s and/or the author’s point of view seems to be that the old gods are actually devils.

In view of this attitude, it seems understandable that the skaldic poetry attributed to poets who served Christian kings in the first half of the eleventh century includes no poems on heathen mythological subjects and few clear allusions to pre-Christian beliefs. In Sigvatr Þórðarson’s poetry there is one scornful reference to pre-Christian practice (in *Austrfararvísur* 5 [Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, B1:221], where a Swedish widow uses her Odinism and the fact that an *álfablót* is being conducted as an excuse for disgracefully refusing hospitality). He uses only one or two undeniably heathen kennings: *munvigg Dáins* ‘delightful ship of Dáinn’ (‘poetry’, *lausavísa* 29.2 [Kock 1946–49, 1:130]) and probably *Jalks briktopuðr* (‘warrior’, verse on Erlingr Skjálmgsson, line 2 [Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, B1:228]), which would normally be interpreted ‘destroyer of Jalkr’s (Óðinn’s) partition’ (of a shield), though if challenged, Sigvatr might have claimed that it meant ‘gelding’s partition-destroyer’, i.e. ‘warrior on horseback’.⁴ In Óttarr svarti’s poetry I have found no literal allusions to the gods, though there is one clearly mythological kenning (*víf Óska* ‘Óski’s [Óðinn’s] lady’ [Jqrð, ‘earth’], *Óláfsdrápa scenska* 2.4 [B1:267]). These poets clearly avoided heathen references and kennings wherever possible, except where the traditional diction could be reinterpreted in a non-heathen way.

There is a small group among the lesser-known poets of St. Óláfr who do make overt allusions to the gods, if the verses attributed to them are genuine, and

3. For a recent study of these verses which is inclined to accept them as genuine documents of a reluctant conversion, see Whaley 2003.

4. This excludes nine kennings where what was traditionally a mythological name could be interpreted as a common noun, e.g. *svortum Yggs gjóði* ‘to the black sea-eagle of the Terrifier’ (or ‘of terror’, (raven, *Nesjavísur* 9.5–7 [Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, B1:219]); *Gjallar vöndr* ‘wand of Gjöll’ (or ‘of noise, battle’, (sword, *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga* 27.3 [B1:245]). I have found six similar examples in Óttarr’s poetry, e.g. *Yggs éla linnis kennir* ‘instructor of the snake of the Terrifier’s snowstorms’ (or ‘of the snowstorms of terror’, (sword-wielding warrior, *Hqfuðlausn* 7.1–3 [B1:269]); *folk-Baldr* ‘army-Baldr’ (or ‘bold in the army’) (warrior, *Óláfsdrápa scenska* 6.1 [B1:267]). In cases like these, the poet could make use of traditional diction without admitting that he had made any reference to heathen mythology.

in at least one case this may represent a residual resistance to Christianity. There are surviving fragments of four poems attributed to Hofgarða-Refr (Kock 1946–49, 1:150–51), the son of the poetess Steinunn who according to *Kristni saga* chap. 9 composed two scornful *lausavísur* rejoicing that Þórr had wrecked the ship of the missionary Þangbrandr (Kahle 1905, 27–28; Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, and Foote 2003, 2:24). Refr's mother was therefore regarded as a determined heathen. In two of his own poems, Refr makes a deliberate parade of heathen references: one complete stanza and two half-stanzas of a poem about his fellow-poet and probable mentor Gizurr gullbrárskáld include a kenning naming a god in each half-stanza (they are Hárr [= Óðinn], Freyr, Baldr, and Gautr [= Óðinn]), as well as Óðinn's ring Draupnir. The five half-stanzas of Refr's travel-poem include references to Gymir, Sleipnir, and Rán. Gizurr gullbrárskáld himself is credited with one and a half stanzas, of which the half-stanza includes the names of the valkyries Hlökk and Sköggul and the battle-kenning *él Yggs* 'Óðinn's snowstorms' (Kock 1946–49, 1:149). Another minor poet in the same circle is Þorfinnr munnr, to whom two *lausavísur* are attributed, one of which includes the battle-kenning *Þundar hregg* 'storm of Þundr (= Óðinn)' (Kock 1946–49, 1:149; Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, 2:359).

Although they served a Christian king, there are no Christian references in what survives of the work of any of these three poets, and they may all have been covert heathens. It remains an intriguing question why St. Óláfr tolerated these heathen references; Margaret Clunies Ross has helpfully suggested to me the possibility that the most blatantly heathen of them, Refr's poem about Gizurr, may have been tolerated because its main subject is the traditional art of poetry, which Refr had learned from Gizurr.

Despite these exceptions, it remains overwhelmingly the case that the skaldic verse attributed to the first half of the eleventh century avoids referring to the heathen gods, while it abounds in references to Christ, God, and other Christian concepts. The first important court poet who makes deliberate (although sparing) use of such references while being obviously a devout Christian is Arnórr Þórðarson jarlaskáld (ca. 1012 – after 1073), to whom are attributed four more or less complete *drápur* and fragments of a fifth, as well as eleven other fragments, varying in length from a stanza to a single phrase. Arnórr's verse includes many Christian references, and three of his *drápur* (*Rognvaldsdrápa*, *Þorfinnsdrápa*, and *Haraldsdrápa*) end with Christian prayers on behalf of the patron concerned, but there are also about a dozen references to heathen mythology, all of which can be dated to between ca. 1044 and ca. 1065. A number of these are placed at or near the beginnings and ends of poems, so far as they now survive—see the warrior-kenning *Göndlar-Njörðr* 'valkyrie-Njörðr' (*Rognvaldsdrápa* 1.3), the sky-kenning *Ymis hauss* 'Ymir's skull' (*Magnússdrápa* 19.4), and *Þorfinnsdrápa* 24 (Kock 1946–49, 1:155, 160, 162–63). This may suggest that Arnórr is using them as a kind of rhetorical flourish, certainly not as an indication of belief in the pre-Christian gods. As Diana

Whaley puts it (1998, 75): “[T]he pagan-derived diction in Arnórr’s work belongs to the form of the poetry, not its content. Like the allusions to legend, it lends grandeur and variety, and reminds the skald’s audience of his and their illustrious predecessors, but its use cannot be regarded as religious in intention or effect.”

Arnórr is also responsible for what is probably the earliest reference to *Vǫluspá*, in the first half of *Þorfinnsdrápa* 24:

Björt verðr sól at svartri, sækkr fold í mar dökkvan, brestr erfiði Austra, allr glymr sær á fjöllum, áðr at Eyjum friðri (inndróttar) Þórfinni (þeim hjalpi goð geymi) gœðingr myni fœðask. (Kock 1946–49, 1:162–63)	[The bright sun will turn black, earth will sink in the dark sea, Austri’s burden will break, the whole sea thunder on the fells, before in the Isles a finer chieftain than Þorfinnr (may God help that guardian of his retinue) will be born.]
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This apparently combines echoes of *Vǫluspá* 57.1–2, 41.5, and possibly 11.3:

Sól tér sortna, sígr fold í mar svart var þá sólscin ⁵	[The sun will start to darken, the earth will sink in the sea] [The sunshine was then black]
Austri oc Vestri (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 13, 10, 3)	[Eastern and Western]

The combination of echoes from two or three different contexts in *Vǫluspá* shows that it is Arnórr who is the borrower here and makes it more difficult to maintain that the resemblance is due merely to a chance coincidence of apocalyptic phrases in the two poems.⁶ In any case, the end of the present *Miðgarðr* in stanza 57 is centrally important in *Vǫluspá*, while Arnórr is merely indulging in a rhetorical flourish. Even so, the second half of the same stanza, by calling on God to help Þorfinnr, reclaims the subject matter of the first half from the heathen Ragnarøk to the Christian Doomsday.

Þorfinnsdrápa is said to date from ca. 1065, so it seems that *Vǫluspá* almost certainly existed by then. Less certainly, the poet who composed the list of valkyrie-names in *Vǫluspá* 30.3–4 seems to have misunderstood the compound *geir-Skǫgul* ‘spear-(carrying)-Skǫgul’ in *Hákonarmál* 12.2 (Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, B1:58), since he makes Skǫgul and Geirskǫgul into two separate valkyries. This would suggest that *Vǫluspá* 30 dates from some time after ca. 962–65, the approximate date attributed to *Hákonarmál*. Unfortunately, stanza 30 is not as central to the poem as stanza 57, and it appears only in the Codex Regius, not in Hauksbók. It does not

5. So Codex Regius, but Arnórr may have known this line of *Vǫluspá* as “svort verða sólscin” [the sunshine will turn black], the reading of Hauksbók and *Snorra Edda* (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 10).

6. This is suggested by Sveinbjörn Rafnsson (1999, 410–11), whose argument that *Vǫluspá* is similar to and contemporary with *Merlínusspá* (see below, 8–9) would fall if *Vǫluspá* already existed in Arnórr’s time.

therefore prove that the whole of *Völuspá* is later than *Hákonarmál*, although this does seem likely for other reasons. For example, stanza 33.8 uses the name *Valhöll* in the specific sense ‘Óðinn’s residence’ which first appears in *Eiríksmál* 1.3 (ca. 955; Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, B1:164), rather than the earlier meaning ‘any exotic (southern) hall’, as in *Atlaqviða in grœnlenzca* 2.3, 14.11 (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 240, 242).

Sveinbjörn Rafnsson (1999) has suggested that *Völuspá* shows many similarities of detail to Gunnlaugr Leifsson’s *Merlínusspá*, the Old Norse translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Prophetiae Merlini* (which is part of his *Historia regum Britanniae*).⁷ Like *Völuspá*, Gunnlaugr’s poem is preserved in Hauksbók, and Sveinbjörn attributes both poems to about the same date (the second half of the twelfth century). He stops short of arguing that *Völuspá* derives these phrases from *Merlínusspá*, but a twelfth-century dating would of course suggest a literate Christian poet and would make the poem’s echoes of scripture unremarkable. But most of Sveinbjörn’s parallels to *Völuspá* in the text of *Merlínusspá* do not correspond to anything in the *Prophetiae Merlini*, and those that seem significant could easily have been borrowed from *Völuspá*. A good example of this appears in the opening stanza of *Merlínusspá*, where the “spár spakligar” [wise prophecies] presented by Gunnlaugr’s poem may be influenced by the “spioll spaclig oc spáganda” [wise spells and prophetic spirits] of *Völuspá* 29.3–4 (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 7), but have no counterpart in Geoffrey’s Latin. Other parallels adduced by Sveinbjörn are either commonplace or contextually quite unlike the phrases in *Völuspá* with which he compares them (Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 1999, 412). Only one of them seems more interesting; Sveinbjörn compares *Merlínusspá* II 22.7–8 with *Völuspá* 36.1–2 (Kock 1946–49, 2:18; Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 8):

Munu dreyrgar ár ór dǫlum falla. (<i>Merlínusspá</i> II 22.7–8)	Á fellr austan um eitrdala, (<i>Völuspá</i> 36.1–2)
[Bloody rivers will flow down from valleys.]	[A river flows from the east through valleys of venomous cold.]

This corresponds to Geoffrey’s:

Montes itaque eius ut valles aequabuntur et flumina vallium sanguine manabunt. (*Historia regum Britanniae* 7.3; Hammer 1951, 124, lines 37–38)

[for Britain’s mountains and valleys shall be levelled, and the streams in its valleys shall run with blood.] (Thorpe 1966, 171)

But in fact, the differences between *Völuspá* and *Merlínusspá* at this point are more striking than the resemblances. Geoffrey’s rivers of blood are a portent of disaster or perhaps a symbol of civil war, whereas the river Slíðr in *Völuspá* (which flows through valleys of deadly cold and has daggers and swords floating in it, neither

7. For *Merlínusspá*, see Kock 1946–49, 2:6–28; for Geoffrey of Monmouth, see the edition by Hammer (1951) and translation by Thorpe (1966).

of which is paralleled in Geoffrey or in *Merlínusspá*) appears to be an instrument of punishment of the wicked men who have to wade in it as it flows through the hall at Náströnd (*Vǫluspá* 38–39); the river Slíðr is also named in *Grímnismál* 28.6 (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 63). A dream of a raging river flowing through a hall is a portent of disaster in *Atlamál* 26 (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 251); there is a deadly underworld river swirling with weapons in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* 1.8.14 (Olrik and Ræder 1931, 30; Ellis Davidson and Fisher 1979–80, 1:31); and a deadly cold river petrifies every living thing it touches in *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* chap. 5 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44, 3:404–5). But none of these is composed of blood, and neither are any of the other perilous rivers that I have found in Old Norse myth and legend;⁸ the deadly cold river swirling with weapons seems to be a native Scandinavian idea and is clearly different from the rivers of blood in *Merlínusspá*.

Overall, the similarities noted by Sveinbjörn seem rather remote, and may reasonably be explained by the fact that both poems are prophetic and that *Merlínusspá* has been naturalized into a pre-existing tradition of vatic and occult poetry in Old Norse.⁹ It also seems unlikely that Snorri, the greatest expert of his age on the poetic tradition, would rely so heavily on *Vǫluspá* in constructing *Gylfaginning* if he knew it to be a recent composition, and equally unlikely that he would be deceived into regarding a poem that had originated within the lifetime of his parents and teachers as a genuine product of the heathen period.

It therefore seems most likely that *Vǫluspá* was composed either in the late heathen period or in the first half-century or so of Icelandic Christianity. During either of these eras, the evidence of skaldic verse makes it seem unlikely that a Christian would compose a poem on a heathen mythological subject, and even more unlikely that he would depict any of the gods as sympathetic figures. It also seems rather improbable that the poem was composed in the early Christian period by a recalcitrant heathen, since we should hardly expect, in that case, that it would borrow Christian concepts as readily as it seems to.

The poem certainly does borrow some Christian ideas, but sometimes these seem to be either misunderstood or deliberately adapted:

1. The punishment in which the wicked must wade the grievous currents of the river Slíðr in *Vǫluspá* 39 bears an obvious resemblance to Revelation 21:8 (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 9; Weber et al. 1975, 2:1903):

8. See, e.g., *Vafþrúðnismál* 16 (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 47); Snorri Sturluson, *Gylfaginning* chap. 34 (Faulkes 1982, 29); Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál* chap. 18, including Eilífr Goðrúnarson's *Þórsdrápa* (Faulkes 1998, 1:25–28); Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum* 7.11.2–3 (Olrik and Ræder 1931, 209–10; Ellis Davidson and Fisher 1979–80, 1:228–29); *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs* chaps. 23–25 (Loth 1964, 52–61).

9. Stefanie Würth (2003, 223, 227–28), Karl G. Johansson (2005, 97, 108–9), and Gísli Sigurðsson (2007, 528), the only other scholars I know of who have discussed Sveinbjörn's argument, seem also to incline towards this view.

Sá hon þar vaða þunga strauma
Menn meinsvara oc morðvarga,
Oc þannz annars glepr eyrarúno;
(*Völuspá* 39.1–6)

[She saw there, wading the grievous
currents, / lying men and murderers, /
and him who seduces another man's
mate.]

timidis autem et incredulis et exsecratis et
homicidis et fornicatoribus et veneficis et
idololatriis et omnibus mendacibus
pars illorum erit in stagno ardenti igne et
sulphure
quod est mors secunda (Rev. 21:8)

[But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the
abominable, and murderers, and whoremon-
gers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all
liars, shall have their part in the lake which
burneth with fire and brimstone: which is
the second death.]¹⁰

However, in *Völuspá* this punishment precedes Ragnarök and seems to be part of an unsuccessful attempt by the gods to deter the rising tide of wickedness in the world. In Revelation, by contrast, it is part of a symmetrical and eternal justice which comes after the Judgement.

2. The image in *Völuspá* 48.5–7 of the dwarves (who normally live in rocks and the earth) trembling outside their walls of stone is reminiscent of the terror of the powerful on Doomsday in Revelation 6:15–16 (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 12; Weber et al. 1975, 2:1888):

stynia dvergar fyr steindurom,
(*Völuspá* 48.5–6)

[the dwarves groan in front of their
stone doors]

et dicunt montibus et petris cadite super nos
et abscondite nos a facie sedentis super
thronum (Rev. 6:16)

[and (they say) to the mountains and rocks,
Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him
that sitteth on the throne]

But the dwarves apparently leave their normal dwellings for fear of being crushed when the rocks collapse, whereas the mighty in Revelation appeal in vain to the rocks to crush them rather than have to face the terror of the coming Judgement.

3. The earth rising out of the sea for a second time (*Völuspá* 59.1–4) and the hall fairer than the sun which will be inhabited by trustworthy people (*Völuspá* 64) seem almost certainly influenced by the new heaven and earth of Revelation 21:1 and the light in the heavenly city of Revelation 22:5 (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 14–15; Weber et al. 1975, 2:1903, 1905):

Sér hon upp koma qðro sinni
iorð ór ægi, iðdiagrœna;
(*Völuspá* 59.1–4)

[She sees rise up for a second time /
earth from the sea, eternally green.]

et vidi caelum novum et terram novam
primum enim caelum et prima terra abiit
et mare iam non est (Rev. 21:1)

[And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for
the first heaven and the first earth were
passed away; and there (is) no more sea.]

10. The English translations of biblical passages in this paper generally follow the Authorized Version, departures from which are marked by parentheses.

Sal sér hon standa sólo fegra,
 gulli þacþan, á Gimlé;
 þar scole dyggvar dróttir byggja
 oc um aldrdaga ynðis nióta.
 (*VǪluspá* 64)

[She sees a hall stand, fairer than the
 sun, / thatched with gold, at Gimlé; /
 there bands of trustworthy folk will
 dwell / and enjoy bliss for ever.]

et nox ultra non erit
 et non egebunt lumine lucernae neque lumine
 solis
 quoniam Dominus Deus inluminat illos
 et regnabunt in saecula saeculorum (Rev. 22:5)

[And there shall be no (more) night there; and
 they (shall) need no candle, neither light of
 the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light:
 and they shall reign for ever and ever.]

However, whereas in Revelation these things cannot happen until after the good and the wicked have been distinguished at the Judgement (Rev. 20:12), in *VǪluspá* they can precede the Second Coming (*Vsp.* 65) because the wicked have apparently all perished in Ragnarøk. This illustrates an important “theological” difference, namely that the poet of *VǪluspá* seems to have no concept that the souls of the wicked are also immortal.

Even if a Christian poet had defied the normal practice of the period by composing a poem on a heathen mythological subject, it seems unlikely that he would have misunderstood or distorted the Christian ideas he also used. On the other hand, this is exactly what we would expect of a heathen poet who had some knowledge of Christianity: he or she might either misunderstand or deliberately adapt the concepts or images that were borrowed. It therefore seems probable that the poet of *VǪluspá* was Christian-influenced but not actually Christian. But such a poet would be very unlikely to be literate in the Roman alphabet, or to have had any opportunity to learn Latin. The Christian sources available to him would be limited to those that could be received orally in a vernacular language that he could understand. Besides Old Norse, he would certainly be able to follow orally-delivered texts in Old English,¹¹ and perhaps in Old Saxon¹² and (for poets from the Hiberno-Norse area and some Orcadians, Faroese, Icelanders, and Greenlanders) also in Old Irish.

Of course it is likely that some Christian works which now survive only in Latin were also at one time translated into or explicated in one or more of these vernacular languages, even if no translations of them survive now. However, the existence of such translations cannot be assumed for any particular text unless there is clear evidence that they may once have existed, and coincidences with *VǪluspá* cannot count as such evidence, because that leads to circular argument.

We also need to insist that any work which is held to have influenced *VǪluspá* in detail must not have been used only in contexts from which heathens were

11. On the large measure of mutual comprehensibility between Old English and Old Norse, see Townend 2002.

12. It is probable, at least, that the name *Muspell* (*VǪluspá* 51.2; Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 12) is derived from the German *mu(d)spilli* ‘Doomsday’, perhaps in its Old Saxon form. As the occurrence of this word in *VǪluspá* is the earliest surviving example of it in Old Norse, it is at least possible that the poet took it direct from a German source.

excluded. This normally included any religious service in church; and even those under instruction in the faith were excluded from the most sacred parts of the sacraments of baptism¹³ and the Eucharist. The range of occasions on which heathens were likely to be present at a Christian ceremony, and on which Christian texts might be transmitted to non-Christians, is therefore rather narrow. It follows that texts used on these occasions should be regarded as much more likely to have influenced a poet like that of *Vǫluspá* than those that were used at other times.

Baptism, the Easter Vigil, and the Creation Story

Of the few Christian occasions at which heathens might be present and the vernacular languages were likely to be used, the most obvious is baptism, but since participation in this involved renunciation of heathen gods, a recently baptised convert would be unlikely to compose a poem like *Vǫluspá* afterwards. But part of the baptism service might also be attended by catechumens, people who were, at least theoretically, under initial instruction in the faith, although there are many known examples of adults who continued in this semi-Christian state for some time (see Bedingfield 2002, 177–80).¹⁴ In later Old Norse prose texts, this process is referred to as being *primsignaðr* ‘prime-signed’. Although the word does not survive in Old Norse verse, accounts in sagas and *þættir* usually envisage it as necessary for heathens who want to have trading or other friendly relationships with Christian communities. A good example can be seen in *Egils saga* chap. 50, where King Æðelstan of Wessex asks Þórólfr and Egill to allow themselves to be prime-signed:

því at þat var þá mikill siðr, bæði með kaupmönnum ok þeim mönnum, er á mála gengu með kristnum mönnum, því at þeir menn, er prímsignaðir váru, höfðu allt samneyti við kristna menn ok svá heiðna, en höfðu þat at átrúnaði, er þeim var skapfelldast. (Sigurður Nordal 1933, 128)

[because it was then a common custom, both among merchants and men who entered the service of Christians, since people who were prime-signed had full contact with Christians and also with heathens, but held whatever faith suited them best.]

Of course this is only an early-thirteenth-century theory about why heathens who had no intention of becoming “real” Christians might agree to be prime-signed, but it is a very believable one. The earliest known record of Scandinavians becoming catechumens appears in chapter 24 of Rimbertus’s *Vita Anskarii* (referring to events of the 850s in a port in the region of Slesvig, possibly Hedeby; further see Molland 1968):

13. For the exclusion of non-Christians from the actual ritual of baptism, see *Ordo romanus* XI, sec. 72 (Andrieu 1971, 441; translated in Whitaker 1970, 201).

14. Bedingfield’s examples include King Edwin of Northumbria (who arranged for a wooden church to be built between being made a catechumen and being baptized), King Cynegils of Wessex, and St. Martin of Tours, who according to his legend was a catechumen for eight years.

Quia libenter quidem signaculum crucis recipiebant, ut catecumini fierent, quo eis ecclesiam ingredi et sacris officiis interesse liceret, baptismi tamen perceptionem differiebant, hoc sibi bonum diiudicantes, ut in fine vitae suae baptizarentur, quatinus purificati lavacro salutari, puri et immaculati vitae aeternae ianuas absque aliqua retardatione intrarent. (*Vita Anskarii* chap. 24; Waitz 1884, 53)

[For some people freely accepted the little sign of the cross, so that they might become catechumens, by which means it was allowed for them to enter the church and be present at sacred services, but they put off the acceptance of baptism, judging that it was good for them to be baptized at the end of their lives, seeing that, purified by that saving bath, pure and spotless, they would (then) enter the gates of eternal life without any delay.]

Since this implies that the catechumens concerned already had a full understanding of orthodox theological ideas about baptism, it may seem rather less credible than the more cynical explanation in *Egils saga*. However, it is also worth noticing that Rimbertus takes it for granted that heathens were not allowed to be present at church services without being prepared to become catechumens. This makes it unlikely that a heathen would experience other Christian liturgical texts, even in Latin, without previously having gone through the process of becoming a catechumen at the Easter Vigil service. For example, the suggestion that the poet might have heard the *Cantus Sibyllae* as part of the Christmas office (assuming that there was someone available to explain what its Latin text meant) would necessarily imply that he had experienced the Easter Vigil service as well.

Although a Norse-speaker at the end of the tenth century might become a catechumen anywhere in northern Europe, many must have done so in England, and surviving liturgical manuscripts from England can give us a good idea of what the experience was like. By good fortune, one of these manuscripts, the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, comes from a religious house in the English Danelaw, most likely either Peterborough or Ely, and was written before 1016 (Bedingfield 2002, 15–16; Wilson 1896, xxiv–xxvi).

Traditionally, the process of induction of catechumens was quite an extended matter. It began on the third Sunday in Lent with the first of seven “scrutinies,” in which candidates were instructed and tested in the language of their choice on the openings of the four gospels, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer, and ended on Holy Saturday with a series of exorcisms and anointing with holy oil (see, e.g., the Gelasian Sacramentary 1.26–36; Mohlberg, Eizenhöfer, and Siffrin 1968, 32–53; trans. Whitaker 1970, 166–79). However, by the time of the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, the ceremony for making catechumens had been simplified and incorporated into the service which also traditionally included most baptisms, namely the Easter Vigil service on Holy Saturday (for the tradition, see Bedingfield 2002, 175; for the full Easter Vigil service, see Wilson 1896, 90–102). It is made explicit in the Missal that the making of catechumens on Holy Saturday can be expected to include adult converts from paganism, for the prayers for use at the baptism of infants are followed by a section beginning:

ITEM AD CATICUMINUM EX PAGANO FACIENDUM

Gentilem hominem cum susceperis. in primis cateciza eum diuinis sermonibus et da ei monita quemadmodum post cognitum ueritatem uiuere debeat. (The Missal of Robert of Jumièges; Wilson 1896, 101)

[ITEM: TO MAKE A CATECHUMEN OUT OF A PAGAN. When you receive a heathen man, first catechize him with holy speeches and give him advice about how he ought to live after understanding the truth.]

The Easter Vigil service began in darkness, with the blessing and lighting of the paschal candle from the “new fire,” a small fire by the church door which in tenth-century England had already been lit on Maundy Thursday evening.¹⁵ There is then a series of readings from scripture, each followed by a prayer which relates to it. There were originally ten of these readings (see, e.g., the Gelasian Sacramentary 1.43; Mohlberg, Eizenhöfer, and Siffrin 1968, 70–72; Whitaker 1970, 184–85), but in the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, as elsewhere in the later Anglo-Saxon church, there are only four (Wilson 1896, 92–93; cf. also Regularis Concordia, Symons 1953, 47). The first is Genesis chapter 1, verses 1–19, which is repeatedly paralleled in the opening stanzas of what the *vǫlva* remembers in *Vǫluspá* (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 1–2; Weber et al. 1975, 1:4–5):

Ár var alda þat er ecci var, (SnE)	In principio (Gen. 1:1)
vara sandr né sær né svalar unnir;	
iorð fannz æva né upphiminn,	terra autem erat inanis et vacua (Gen. 1:2)
gap var ginnunga, enn gras hvergi.	
(<i>Vǫluspá</i> 3)	
[It was in ancient times, when nothing was, /	[In the beginning]
there was neither sand nor sea nor cold	
waves; / no earth existed, nor heaven above, /	[and the earth was without form, and
magic space was void, and no vegetation.]	void]
Áðr Burs synir bioðum um ypþo,	dixit vero Deus
þeir er miðgarð, mæran, scópo;	congregentur aquae quae sub caelo sunt in
(<i>Vǫluspá</i> 4.1–4)	locum unum et appareat arida
	factumque est ita (Gen. 1:9)
[Until Burr’s sons raised up the lands, /	[And God said, Let the waters under the
they who created splendid middle earth;]	heaven be gathered together unto one place,
	and let the dry land appear: and it was so.]
þá var grund gróin grœnum lauki.	et ait
(<i>Vǫluspá</i> 4.7–8)	germinet terra herbam virentem (Gen. 1:11)
[then the ground was overgrown with	[And God said, Let the earth bring forth
green leek.]	(green herbs)]

15. On the lighting of the paschal candle, see the Regularis Concordia (Symons 1953, 39), drafted in Winchester ca. 975 for the use of regular Benedictine monasteries and nunneries. It is not, however, certain that the new fire was always kept burning from Maundy Thursday until Holy Saturday, and the Missal of Robert of Jumièges refers to its flames only in passing, towards the end of the prayer of dedication of the candle (Wilson 1896, 90).

Sól varp sunnan, sinni mána,
hendi inni hœgri um himinioður;
(*VǪluspá* 5.1–4)

[The sun moved from the south, the moon's
companion, / her right hand on heaven's
rim;]

nótt oc niðiom nǫfn um gáfo,
morgin héto oc miðian dag,
undorn oc aptan árom at telia.
(*VǪluspá* 6.5–10)

[to Night and her children they gave names, /
called them morning and midday, / after-
noon and evening, to count in years.]

dixit autem Deus
fiant luminaria in firmamento caeli
ut dividant diem ac noctem
et sint in signa et tempora et dies et
annos (Gen. 1:14)

[But God said, Let there be lights in the
firmament of the heaven to divide the day
from the night; and let them be for signs, and
for seasons, and for days, and years]

appellavitque lucem diem et tenebras noctem
factumque est vespere et mane dies unus
(Gen. 1:5)

[And God called the light Day, and the
darkness he called Night. And the evening
and the morning were the first day.]

Because we are all familiar with the Christian Creation story, it is easy to overlook how remarkable these stanzas are in the context of Norse heathenism. The myth of the creation of the earth from the body-parts of Ymir seems to have been well established: we find it, expressed in closely similar words, in *Vafprúðnismál* 20–21 and *Grímnismál* 40–41 (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 48, 65), and it is also alluded to by Ormr Barreyjarskáld (Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, B1:135), and in the early Christian period by Arnórr jarlaskáld (Kock 1946–49, 1:160). The *VǪluspá* poet must have known this myth, and in Codex Regius the description of the primal chaos begins with a one-line reference to it (“þar er Ymir bygði” [where Ymir lived], *VǪluspá* 3.2),¹⁶ but after that it is largely ignored in favour of the Genesis account or something derived from it.

It has been suggested that these correspondences might be mere coincidence, resulting from two independent approaches to the same religious problem, that of describing the creation.¹⁷ I find this suggestion unconvincing, because the coincidence required for it to be true is improbably large. First, all the biblical parallels to the creation story in *VǪluspá* occur in the same half-chapter of Genesis.¹⁸ Second, they appear in a similar though not identical order in both texts. Third, they contribute to a view of the creation in *VǪluspá* which is significantly different from that shared by *Vafprúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*. Finally, it is possible to pro-

16. However, since *Snorra Edda* may be an older and superior witness to the text of individual stanzas, we should perhaps prefer its version of *VǪluspá* 3, which does not mention Ymir at all.

17. This suggestion was made in a paper by Henning Kure which was delivered on July 31, 2003, at the Twelfth International Saga Conference in Bonn, but it was not included in his preprint (Kure 2003).

18. Kees Samplonius (2002) argues convincingly against the view that the creation of Ask and Embla from trees in stanzas 17–18 of *VǪluspá* reflects the Christian idea that human beings were created in the likeness of God; but in any case, the scriptural verse from which this might have been derived (Genesis 1:26) is not part of the reading in the Easter Vigil service.

pose a simple and credible way in which Genesis 1 could have influenced the poet of *Völuspá*.

The only problem with the suggestion that the poet could have heard the Christian Creation myth during an Easter Vigil service is the difficulty of knowing how much of the service was explained to catechumens in the vernacular language, but it is probable that a lot of it would have been. There had for centuries been a tradition of asking, at the beginning of sessions of scrutiny of catechumens, “In what language do they confess our Lord?” (The Gelasian Sacramentary, Scrutiny of the Creed; Mohlberg, Eizenhöfer, and Siffrin 1968, 48; trans. Whitaker 1970, 175–76). Another eleventh-century liturgical book from the Danelaw, the Red Book of Darley (now Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 422) includes a baptism service in which all the rubricated instructions to the priest are in Old English.¹⁹ If this was done for the benefit even of parish priests, it seems likely that the laity who took part in baptisms must have been given a good deal of explanation in the vernacular. The same thing would apply even more strongly to catechumens, who would have more need for such explanations than the established Christians who were the parents and godparents of infants being baptized.

It is even possible that one vernacular prayer explaining this reading actually survives, in the form of the famous *Wessobrunn Prayer* (early ninth century, Bavarian but with Old Saxon and/or Anglo-Saxon influence). This is now best known for its verse lines, some of which have close parallels in *Völuspá* 3:

Ár var alda þat er ecci var, (SnE)
vara sandr né sær né svalar unnir;
iorð fannz æva né upphiminn,
gap var ginnunga, enn gras hvergi.
(*Völuspá* 3)

[It was in ancient times, when nothing was, / there was neither sand nor sea nor cold waves; / no earth existed, nor heaven above, / magic space was void, and no vegetation.]

Dat ero ni uuas noh ufhimil,
noh paum, noh pereg ni uuas,
ni sterro nohheinig, noh sunna ni scein,
noh mano ni liuhta, noh der marþo seo.
Do dar niuuht ni uuas enteo ni uuenteo,
(*Wessobrunn Prayer* 2–6)

[There was no earth, nor heaven above, / nor tree, nor mountain existed, / not a star shone, nor did the sun, / no moon gave light, nor (was there) the glorious sea. / Nothing existed, neither end nor beginning]

However, it is also worth studying the simpler prose prayer with which the *Wessobrunn Prayer* ends:

Cot almahtico, du himil enti erda gauuorahtos enti du mannun so manac coot forgapi: forgip mir in dina ganada rehta galaupa enti cotan uuilleon, uuistóm enti spahida enti craft, tiuflun za uuidarstantanne enti arc za piuisanne enti dinan uuilleon za gauurchanne. (Schlosser 1998, 44; from MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibl. Clm 22.053)

[Almighty God, you made heaven and earth and you gave so many good things to men. By your grace, give me right belief and good will, wisdom and foresight and strength, to resist the devil and to shun evil and to do your will.]

19. This manuscript has been associated with a parish context in Derbyshire—see Bedingfield 2002, 13–14; for texts of the Old English rubrics, see Page 1978.

This is very similar to the prayer which follows the reading of Genesis 1 in the Easter Vigil service in the Missal of Robert of Jumièges:

Deus qui mirabiliter creasti hominem. et mirabilius redemisti. da nobis quesumus contra oblectamenta peccati mentis ratione resistere. ut mereamur ad gaudia aeterna peruenire. (Wilson 1896, 92)

[God, who marvellously created mankind and even more marvellously redeemed them, grant, we pray, that we may resist by mental reason the distracting pleasures of sin, so that we may deserve to reach the eternal joys.]

Both prayers have the same detailed structure: “God—you made heaven and earth/mankind—and gave good gifts/gave redemption—grant me/us—(the moral qualities needed) to resist the devil/sin—and to do your will/deserve heaven.” As the prayer in the Missal of Robert of Jumièges follows and elaborates on the Creation reading in the Easter Vigil service, it becomes likely that the same may have been true of the prose part of the *Wessobrunn Prayer*. The verse part of that prayer is generally thought to be older than the prose, but the arguments in support of this seem uncertain, and even if it is true, the verse section of the prayer could have been re-used here because of the useful function it served in explaining the biblical passage in the vernacular. If the poet of *VǪluspá* heard something of this kind at this point in the Easter Vigil service, that would explain the close phrasal echoes between *Wessobrunn Prayer* 2–6 and *VǪluspá* 3.

The other three readings in the Easter Vigil have not influenced the *VǪluspá* poet;²⁰ but the ceremony of lighting the new fire and the paschal candle may have provided a link with the already-existing *Surtarlogi* ‘Surtr’s fire’ of the heathen Ragnarøk (for which see also *Vafþrúðnismál* 50–51 [Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 54–55]). The main symbolism of the new fire and the candle lit from it is that of resurrection to new life, but in the Anglo-Saxon liturgies it also has a more aggressive side. Just before the point at which catechumens who were not being baptized were required to leave,²¹ the Missal of Robert of Jumièges has a prayer (also found in the Gelasian Sacramentary) which begins:

Nec te latet satanas imminere poenas imminere tibi tormenta. imminere tibi diem iudicii. diem supplicii. diem qui uenturus est uelut clibanus ardens. in quo tibi atque uniuersis angelis tuis aeternus ueniet interitus. (Wilson 1896, 96–97)

[Be not deceived, Satan: punishment threatens thee, torment threatens thee, the day of judgement threatens thee, the day of punishment, the day which shall come as a burning furnace, when everlasting destruction shall come upon thee and all thine angels.] (Whitaker 1970, 183; see Mohlberg, Eizenhöfer, and Siffrin 1968, 67)

A similar balance between fire as destroyer of evil and as symbol or nourisher of

20. They are Exodus 14:24–15:1, the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea; Isaiah, chapter 4, a prophecy of Mount Zion; and Isaiah 54:17–55:2, the invitation to come and eat and drink without money (Wilson 1896, 92–93; Symons 1953, 47).

21. For this provision, see the Gelasian Sacramentary (Mohlberg, Eizenhöfer, and Siffrin 1968, 68; trans. Whitaker 1970, 183); *Ordo romanus* XI, sec. 88 (Andrieu 1971, 444; trans. Whitaker 1970, 202–3).

new life can also be seen in the imagery of *Völuspá* 57.5–8:

geisar eimi við aldrnara,
leicr hár hiti við himin síálfan.
(Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 14)

[fire rages opposite fire (‘nourisher of life’), / lofty heat plays against heaven itself]

Interestingly, the features of the Easter Vigil service which are echoed in *Völuspá* all appear at the beginning and end of the service as it would have been experienced by a catechumen—just where we might expect images to remain most vividly in the memory of an illiterate poet.

Echoes of Doomsday: The Easter Sunday Sermon

When we turn from the poem’s account of the beginning of the world to that of Ragnarøk and the rebirth of the new world after it, we are again met by a mass of specific echoes of the Bible, but this time they are not all drawn from a single chapter of scripture. Passages that are heavily used include the so-called Little Apocalypse in Mark 13:7–27 (or less probably the similar passage in Luke 21:10–27), Revelation 21:1–11, and perhaps Revelation 6:14–16, but there are also echoes of Revelation chapters 8, 19, 20, and 22 (see appendix, 23–25). Nor do they appear in *Völuspá* in any sequential order corresponding to that of the scriptural passages. This suggests that the poet has been influenced by them indirectly, through a single source that combined a number of biblical echoes drawn from different passages of scripture and placed them in an order of its own.

Anyone who became a catechumen at the Easter Vigil service would also, almost as a matter of course, attend the open part of the mass on Easter Sunday, and this would always include a sermon in the vernacular language. Today, we normally expect an Easter Sunday sermon to be based on the story of the Resurrection, and in particular on the announcement of it to the three Maries by the angels in the empty tomb. This is also prominent in the Anglo-Saxon liturgy, as in the famous *Quem quaeritis* dramatic trope in the Regularis Concordia,²² but in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries there was also an alternative, for it was believed that the Second Coming would also be on Easter Sunday.²³

In Blickling Homily 7, the Easter Sunday homily in a late-tenth-century southern English collection, there are two main sections, the first concerned with the Harrowing of Hell, the second giving graphic details of the signs which will occur on each of the seven days immediately preceding the Day of Judgement. This man-

22. Symons 1953, 49–50; Bevington 1975, 27–28; for the development of this trope in the western church as a whole, see Young 1933, 1:201–38.

23. “þæt nænigne tweogean ne þearf þæt seo wyrd on þas ondweardan tíð geweorþan sceal, þæt se ilc[a] Scyppend gesittan wile on his domsetle” [so that there is no need for any doubt that the Last Judgement will happen at this present season, when the Creator in person will sit on his judgement-seat] (Blickling Homily 7; Morris 1967, 83).

uscript (or perhaps its immediate source) was copied in the year 971, as we learn from another reference to the imminent end of the world in Homily 11, for Ascension Day.²⁴ Blickling Homily 7 cannot itself have been an influence on *Vǫluspá*, for the source material for its latter half comes mainly from the apocryphal Apocalypse of Thomas rather than from the canonical scriptures, but it does show that eschatological homilies were sometimes used as sermons on Easter Sunday. This provides an obvious means through which the many echoes of particular passages of Mark and Revelation could have reached an illiterate pagan who had no knowledge of Latin.

It seems unlikely that the particular Easter sermon heard by the *Vǫluspá* poet now survives, but it would not be difficult to reconstruct some of its probable contents. If my theory of a pagan poet with a good memory and the experience of a catechumen is correct, we should expect the sermon he heard to include *all* the quotations from scripture relating to Doomsday and the rebirth of a new heaven and a new earth that are echoed in *Vǫluspá*. I have not yet found a homily that does this, but Anglo-Saxon and other early homilists often borrow whole sections from other works of the same kind, and it is not hard to find homilies which contain major parts of what the *Vǫluspá* poet might have heard.

A good example can be found in Vercelli Homily 2, from another late-tenth-century Old English collection; in its longer version this is headed *De die iudicii* [On the Day of Judgement] (Scragg 1992, 48–69).²⁵ Although it is not specified for any particular day, it would be appropriate to read it on the day on which the Judgement was expected to take place, especially in a society where many seem to have believed that the end of the world was imminent.²⁶ One particular passage in this homily is particularly rich in phrases which are echoed in the stanzas of *Vǫluspá* about the punishment of the wicked and the coming of Ragnarǫk. In the quotation below, these are placed in italics:

Vercelli Homily 2, A 39–51

On þam dæge us bið æteowed
se opena heofon 7 engla þrym
7 eallwihтна hryre 7 eorþan forwyrht,
treowleasra gewinn 7 tungla gefeall,
þunorrada cyrm 7 se þystra storm,
7 þæra liga blæstm

Phrases in *Vǫluspá*

en himinn klofnar (52.8)
troða halir helveg (52.7), sígr fold í mar (57.2)
hverfa af himni / heiðar stiornor (57.3–4)
svart var þá sólscin / of sumor eptir (41.5–6)
geisar eimi (57.5)

24. “Þonne sceal þes middangeard endian & þisse is þonne se mæsta dæl agangen, efne nigon hund wintra & lxxi. on þys gear.” [Then this world must come to an end, and the major part of this (age) has now passed, that is 971 winters in this year.] (Blickling Homily 11; Morris 1967, 117, 119).

25. The Vercelli manuscript preserves the shorter version of this homily, while versions of the longer one survive in four different manuscripts. These are all slightly different from each other in content, and brief extracts of it are also found interpolated into two other homilies (see Scragg 1992, 48–51).

26. Despite a learned insistence, following St. Augustine, that the time of the world’s end was impossible to predict, missionaries and preachers to the laity seem to have made increasing use of this belief as the thousand years since Christ’s Incarnation or Resurrection approached—see Kick 2006.

<i>7 graniendra gesceaft 7 þæra gasta gefeoht</i>	Gnýr allr iqtunheimr (48.3) sceggöld, scálmöld / scildir ro klofnir (45.7–8)
<i>7 sio grimme gesyðð 7 þa godcundan miht</i>	Þá kœmr inn ríki (65.1)
<i>7 se hata scur 7 hellwarena dream</i>	gýgiar hirðir, / glaðr Eggþér (42.3–4)
<i>7 þara bymena sang 7 se brada bryne</i>	hátt blæss Heimdallr, / horn er á lopti (46.5–6)
<i>7 se bitera dæg 7 þara sawla gedal</i>	
<i>7 se deaðberenda draca 7 diofla forwyrð</i>	dreki...berr sér í fioðrum...Niðhoggr náí (66.2,5,7) en gífr rata (52.6)
<i>7 se nearwa seap 7 se swearta deap</i>	
<i>7 se byrnenda grund 7 se blodiga stream</i>	Sá hon þar vaða / þunga strauma (39.1–2)
<i>7 mycel fionda fyrhto 7 se fyrena ren</i>	fello eitrdropar (38.5)
<i>7 hæðenra granung 7 hira heriga fyll,</i>	Þá kœmr Hlínar / harmr annarr fram (53.1–2) þá mun Friggjar / falla angan (53.7–8)
<i>heofonwarena mengo 7 hiora hlafordes miht,</i>	þar scoló dyggvar / dróttir byggia (64.5–6)
<i>7 þæt mycle gemot 7 sio reðe rod</i>	
<i>7 se rihta dom 7 þara feonda gestal</i>	
<i>7 þa blacan ondwlitan 7 bifendan word</i>	hræðaz allir / á helvegom (47.5–6)
<i>7 þara folca wop ond se scamienda here</i>	
<i>7 sio forglendrede hell 7 þara wyrma gryre.</i> (Scragg 1992, 56, 58)	sá er undinn salr / orma hryggiom (38.7–8) (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 9–15)
<i>[On that day we shall be shown</i> <i>the open heaven and glory of angels</i> <i>and all creatures' fall and earth's</i> <i>destruction,</i> <i>the faithless ones' struggle and fall of stars,</i> <i>noise of thunder and the storm of darkness,</i> <i>and the blaze of fires</i> <i>and groans of created things, and the</i> <i>fighting of souls</i> <i>and the grim sight and the divine power</i> <i>and the hot shower and the joy of the hosts</i> <i>of hell</i> <i>and the sound of trumpets and the broad fire</i> <i>and the bitter day and the separation of souls</i> <i>and the death-bearing dragon and devils'</i> <i>destruction</i> <i>and the narrow pit and the black death</i> <i>and the burning earth and the bloody</i> <i>stream</i> <i>and great fear of devils and the fiery rain</i> <i>and groaning of the heathen and fall of their</i> <i>armies,</i> <i>the multitude of heaven's hosts and their</i> <i>Lord's might,</i> <i>and the great conflict and the cruel cross</i> <i>and the righteous judgement and</i> <i>accusations of devils</i>	 [and heaven will split] (52.8) [men will tread the road to death] (52.7) [earth will sink in the sea] (57.2) [the bright stars will leave the sky] (57.3–4) [sunshine was black the summer after] (41.5–6) [fire rages] (57.5) [all Giant-world makes a noise] (48.3) [axe-age, sword-age, shields are split] (45.7–8) [Then the mighty one will come] (65.1) [ogress's herdsman, cheerful Eggþér] (42.3–4) [loud blows Heimdallr, the horn is aloft] (46.5–6) [the dragon Niðhoggr bears corpses in his feathers] (66.2,5,7) [and ogresses stumble] (52.6) [There she saw, wading the grievous streams] (39.1–2) [venomous drops fell] (38.5) [Then comes on Hlín's second grief] (53.1–2) [then Frigg's delight will fall] (53.7–8) [there bands of trusty men will dwell] (64.5–6)

and *the pale faces* and *trembling words* [all will be afraid on the roads to Hel] (47.5–6)
 and peoples' weeping and the shamed ones'
 army
 and the glowing hell and *horror of the*
serpents.] [That hall is woven from snakes' backs] (38.7–8)

Here it is not only the phrases that are often similar, but also the form (since the sermon is largely in alliterating rhythmic prose) and the atmosphere of headlong panic and chaos. A number of other sentences in the same homily also suggest parallels with individual stanzas in the same sections of *VǪluspá*, and also in those about the reborn world. The punishment of the wicked in *VǪluspá* 39 singles out oath-breakers, murderers, and seducers of other men's wives; Vercelli Homily 2 visualizes the sinful soul living in hell:

in morþre 7 on mane, in susle 7 on sare, on wean 7 on wurmum, betweox deadum 7 dioflum, 7 on bryne 7 on biternesse 7 on fulnesse 7 on eallum þam wítum þe dioflu gearwedon fram þære frymþe (A 64–67; Scragg 1992, 60)

[in murder and in crime, in torment and in sorrow, in woe and among worms, among the dead and devils, and in burning and in bitterness and in foulness and in all the punishments which devils have prepared since the Creation]

The simpler version of the homily then adds an extended warning against pride (A 91–103; Scragg 1992, 62), but the longer one replaces this with warnings against verbal deceit (N 110–29) and sexual sin, especially seduction (N 130–49; Scragg 1992, 63, 65)—the same as the other two sins singled out in *VǪluspá* 39.

The sounding of Heimdallr's horn Gjǫll in *VǪluspá* 46 comes to mind when we read: "In þam dæge beoð blawende þa byman of .iiii. sceattum þyses middan-geardes, 7 þonne ealle arisað" [In that day the trumpets will sound from the four corners of this earth, and then all (the dead) will arise] (A 12–13; Scragg 1992, 54). The departure of the heavenly bodies from the sky in *VǪluspá* 57.1–4 is recalled by: "7 on þam dæge gewit sunnan leoht 7 monan leoht 7 þa leoht ealra tungla" [and on that day the light of the sun and the light of the moon and the light of all stars will depart] (A 6–7; Scragg 1992, 52, 54). Towards the end of the homily Christians are urged "sien we snotre 7 soðfæste" [let us be wise and true to our word] (A 108; Scragg 1992, 64), and are promised a land "þær bið ece leoht 7 blis 7 ece wuldor 7 ece gefea mid urum dryhtne" [where there is eternal light and happiness and eternal glory and eternal joy with our Lord] (A 115–16; Scragg 1992, 64). This resembles the *VǪluspá* poet's vision of Gimlé (*Vsp.* 64),²⁷ the hall brighter than the sun where bands of trustworthy people will enjoy bliss for ever. And much earlier in the homily, the Second Coming is mentioned in words that resemble those of *VǪluspá* 65: "On þam dæge siteð ure dryhten in his þam myclan mægenþrymme" [On that day our Lord will be seated in that great majesty of his] (A 14–15; Scragg 1992, 54).

27. Richard North suggests that *Gimlé* in *VǪluspá* 64 contains the Old English name-elements *gimm* 'jewel' and *leah* 'clearing', which would parallel the Heavenly City of Revelation 21:10–11, whose light is like that from a precious stone (North 2003, 408–9).

None of the surviving versions of Vercelli Homily 2 can plausibly be suggested as the actual Easter sermon that might have been heard by the poet of *Völuspá*, because these sections of the poem also contain biblical echoes that are not found in any version of the homily. These include the strife between brothers in *Völuspá* 45 (cf. Mark 13:7); Loki bursting free in *Völuspá* 47 (cf. Rev. 20:7); the gathering of the forces of chaos for battle in *Völuspá* 51 (cf. Rev. 19:19); and the second rising of the earth from the sea in *Völuspá* 59 (cf. Rev. 21:1; see above, 10). Another possible echo is the image of the old woman giving birth to Fenrir's children in the Iron Wood (*Völuspá* 40), which recalls the whore of Babylon in the wilderness, who is the mother of abominations (Rev. 17:3–5). She is sitting on a beast and is drunk on the blood of the saints (Rev. 17:6–7), and this may suggest a parallel with *Völuspá* 41.1–4:

Fylliz fiorvi feigra manna,
 rýðr ragna siot rauðom dreyra;
 (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 9)

Although this is generally taken to refer to Fenrir and translated “He fills himself with the life of doomed people, reddens the sky (lit. ‘dwellings of the gods’) with red blood,” there is no initial pronoun, and the subject of *Fylliz* might be either Fenrir or the old woman. Equally, its sense could be “he/she becomes drunk (*fullr*) on the blood of doomed people.” Another uncertain parallel may be drawn between the dwarves groaning outside their stone doors in *Völuspá* 48 and the mighty begging the mountains and rocks to fall on them in Rev. 6:15–16 (see above, 10). But there is no evidence that the source sermon was in Old English—it might equally well have been in Norse or Old Saxon. Simonetta Battista (2003, 31) has shown how difficult it can be to distinguish exact sources in conservative and orthodox religious genres where many texts are related to each other and most have not survived.

However, the comparison with Blickling Homily 7 and Vercelli Homily 2 shows that the *Völuspá* poet could have derived all the poem's echoes of the Christian Doomsday, the punishment of the wicked, and the reborn heaven and earth from a single eschatological sermon delivered on Easter Sunday. Similarly, the Easter Vigil service suggests an obvious means whereby the poet might have been influenced by the first chapter of Genesis.

Nonetheless, this is not ultimately a Christian poem. Its basic situation—an encounter between Óðinn and the *völva*—uses and adapts a story-pattern that was probably already present in Norse heathenism, since we find an allusion to it in *Ynglingatal* 3 (Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, B1:7). Even if we accept every possible scriptural, liturgical, and homiletic parallel, only about twenty of the poem's sixty-six stanzas show Christian influence, and those that do are not always understood in a Christian way. However, it seems clear that there are some specific scriptural echoes in the poem, and the experience of a catechumen over the twenty-four hours of the celebration of Easter provides one of the few clear routes by which these could have come about.

Appendix: *VǪluspá* and the Apocalyptic Scriptures²⁸

39. Sá hon þar vaða þunga strau­
menn meinsvara oc morðvarga,
oc þannz annars glepr eyrarúno;
(*VǪluspá* 39.1–6)

[She saw there, wading the grievous cur­
rents, / lying men and murderers, / and the
man who seduces another man's mate]

40. Austr sat in aldna í Iárnviði
oc fœddi þar Fenris kindir;
(*VǪluspá* 40.1–4)

[In the east sat the old woman in Iron
Wood / and gave birth there to Fenrir's
children.]

41. Fylliz fiorvi feigra manna,
rýðr ragna siot rauðom dreyra;
(*VǪluspá* 41.1–4)

[She (?) gets drunk on the life-blood of
doomed people, / reddens the gods' homes
with red blood]

45. Brœðr muno beriaz oc at þonom
verðaz,
muno systrungar sífiom spilla;
hart er í heimi, hórdómr mikill,
sceggǫld, scálmǫld, scildir ro klofnir,
vindǫld, vargǫld, áðr verold steypiz;
(*VǪluspá* 45.1–10)

[Brothers will fight and slay each other, /
kinsfolk will break the bonds of kinship; /
it's harsh in the world, much wickedness, /
an axe-age, a sword-age, shields are split, /
a wind-age, a wolf-age, before the world
falls]

timidis autem et incredulis et execratis et
homicidis et fornicatoribus et veneficis et
idololatrīs et omnibus mendacibus
pars illorum erit in stagno ardenti igne et
sulphure
quod est mors secunda. (Rev. 21:8)

[But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the
abominable, and murderers, and whoremon­
gers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars,
shall have their part in the lake which burneth
with fire and brimstone: which is the second
death.]

et in fronte eius nomen scriptum mysterium
Babylon magna mater fornicationum et
abominationum terrae (Rev. 17:5)

[And upon her forehead was a name written,
MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER
OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE
EARTH.]

et vidi mulierem ebriam de sanguine sancto­
rum et de sanguine martyrum Iesu
(Rev. 17:6)

[And I saw the woman drunken with the
blood of the saints, and with the blood of the
martyrs of Jesus]

tradet autem frater fratrem in mortem et pater
filium
et consurgent filii in parentes et morte
adficiēt eos (Mark 13:12)
cum audieritis autem bella et opiniones
bellorum ne timueritis
oportet enim fieri sed nondum finis
(Mark 13:7)

[Now the brother shall betray the brother to
death, and the father the son; and children
shall rise up against their parents, and shall
cause them to be put to death.]

[And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours
of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things
must needs be; but the end shall not be yet.]

28. Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 9–15; Weber et al. 1975, 2:1597–98, 1889, 1898, 1902–5.

46. Leica Míms synir enn miotuðr kyndiz
at ino gamla Giallarhorni;
hátt blæss Heimdallr, horn er á lopti,
(*Völuspá* 46.1–6)

[Mímr's sons are active and the tree of fate catches fire / at the sound of the ancient horn Gjöll; / Heimdallr blows loudly, the horn is aloft]

47. ymr iþ aldna tré, enn iotunn losnar;
hræðaz allir á helvegom,
áðr Surtar þann sefi of gleypir.
(*Völuspá* 47.3–8)

[The ancient tree groans and the giant (Loki) breaks free; / all are afraid on the roads to Hel / before Surtr's kinsman (fire) swallows it (the tree).]

48. gnýr allr iqtunheimr, æsir ro á þingi;
stynia dvergar fyr steindurom,
(*Völuspá* 48.3–6)

[All giant-world resounds, the gods are in council; / the dwarves groan in front of their stone doors]

51. fara fífls megir með freca allir,
þeim er bróðir Býleiptz í for.
(*Völuspá* 51.5–8)

[all the forces of the monster travel with the wolf, / Býleiptr's brother (Loki) is in company with them]

52. griótbjörg gnata, enn gífr rata,
troða halir helveg, enn himinn klofnar.
(*Völuspá* 52.5–8)

[rocky cliffs clash, and hags are about, / men tread the road to Hel, and heaven splits]

57. Sól tér sortna, sígr fold í mar,
hverfa af himni heiðar stiorror;
(*Völuspá* 57.1–4)

[The sun grows dark, earth sinks in the sea, / the bright stars depart from heaven.]

et primus tuba cecinit
et facta est grando et ignis mixta in sanguine
et missum est in terram
et tertia pars terrae combusta est
et tertia pars arborum combusta est (Rev. 8:7)

[The first (trumpet) sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: (and the third part of the earth was burnt up,) and the third part of the trees was burnt up]

et cum consummati fuerint mille anni
solvetur Satanas de carcere suo
et exhibit et seducet gentes quae sunt super
quattuor angulos terrae (Rev. 20:7)

[And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth]

et dicunt montibus et petris cadite super nos
et abscondite nos a facie sedentis super
thronum (Rev. 6:16)

[and (they say) to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne]

et vidi bestiam et reges terrae et exercitus
eorum congregatos ad faciendum proelium
cum illo qui sedebat in equo et cum exercitu
eius (Rev. 19:19)

[And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.]

et caelum recessit sicut liber involutus
et omnis mons et insulae de locis suis motae
sunt (Rev. 6:14)

[And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.]

Sed in illis diebus post tribulationem illam
sol contenebrabitur
et luna non dabit splendorem suum
et erunt stellae caeli decedentes
(Mark 13:24–25)

[But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not

59. Sér hon upp koma qðro sinni
iorð ór ægi, iðdiagrœna;
(*Vǫluspá* 59.1–4)

[She sees rise up for a second time /
earth from the sea, eternally green.]

62. Muno ósánir acrar vaxa,
bqls mun allz batna, Baldr mun koma;
búa þeir Hqðr oc Baldr Hroptz sigtóptir,
vel, valtívar— vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?
(*Vǫluspá* 62)

[Fields will grow unsown, / every ill will
be put right, Baldr will come; / Hqðr and
Baldr will inhabit Hroptz's (Óðinn's)
victorious dwellings, / happily, those
gods of the slain—do you know enough
yet, or what?]

64. Sal sér hon standa sólo fegra,
gulli þacpan, á Gimlé;
þar scola dyggvar dróttir byggia
oc um aldrdaga ynðis nióta.
(*Vǫluspá* 64)

[She sees a hall stand, fairer than the sun, /
thatched with gold, at Gimlé; / there bands
of trustworthy folk will dwell / and enjoy
bliss for ever.]

65. Þá kœmr inn ríki at regindómi,
qflugr, ofan, sá er qllo ræðr.
(*Vǫluspá* 65; Hauksbók only)

[Then comes the mighty one to divine
power, / strong, from above, he who rules
all.]

give her light, And the stars of heaven shall
fall]

et vidi caelum novum et terram novam
primum enim caelum et prima terra abiit
et mare iam non est (Rev. 21:1)

[And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for
the first heaven and the first earth were passed
away; and there was no more sea.]

et ipse Deus cum eis erit eorum Deus
et absterget Deus omnem lacrimam ab oculis
eorum
et mors ultra non erit neque luctus neque
clamor neque dolor erit ultra
quae prima abierunt (Rev. 21:3–4)

[and God himself shall be with them, and be
their God. And God shall wipe away all tears
from their eyes; and there shall be no more
death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall
there be any more pain: for the former things
are passed away.]

et ostendit mihi civitatem sanctam
Hierusalem
descendentem de caelo a Deo
habentem claritatem Dei
lumen eius simile lapidi pretioso tamquam
lapidi iaspidis sicut crystallum
(Rev. 21:10–11)

[and shewed me that great city, the holy
Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,
Having the glory of God: and her light was like
unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper
stone, clear as crystal;]

et non egebunt lumine lucernae neque lumine
solis
quoniam Dominus Deus inluminat illos
et regnabunt in saecula saeculorum (Rev. 22:5)

[and they (shall) need no candle, neither light
of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light:
and they shall reign for ever and ever.]

Et tunc videbunt Filium hominis venientem
in nubibus cum virtute multa et gloria
(Mark 13:26)

[And then shall they see the Son of man
coming in the clouds with great power and
glory.]

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