



Hymn to Freyr

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Artist's Statement

This piece was written with the intention of bridging the gap between those interested in the fields of Classical and Medieval Studies, whether they be layperson, hobbyist, or specialist in the respective disciplines. *Hymn to Freyr* was written as an outgrowth of my appreciation for the Homeric Hymns which I have developed over the past couple of years, in combination with the fact that Norse mythology is a research interest of mine; considering the theme of this issue of *Epic Threads*, I wanted to challenge myself by drawing upon the underappreciated *Hymn to Helios*, and thus, a marriage of my two interests seemed natural. Interdisciplinarity is crucial to developing a full understanding and appreciation of the past, and my hope is that I can encourage dialogue and reflection on overlaps between Norse and Ancient Greek mythologies for future scholarship.

Hymn to Freyr

And now, O Bragi¹, kinsman of the Æsir,
 Sing of Svear²-God Freyr,
 Whom rune-wise Njörun, that matronly one,
 Bore with blood-brother in the sea of wagons³.
 Njörðr bedded Njörun, his own sister⁴, who bore him lovely children⁵,
 Among whom was Beli's bane, Wane-God and World-God, and lover of women.
 As he rides in his wagon, he shines upon men and gods,
 And the battle-boar⁶ pierces the hearts of men.
 Bright rays beam dazzlingly from him,
 And a golden scalp-field⁷ covers the ear's ground⁸:
 His closest confidantes, the corpse-flame⁹ and the pitchfork of the woodland-horse¹⁰, counsel the man:
 And two stallions aid him.
 Then, when he has stopped his wagon and horses, he dreams among the spacious skies,
 Until he drives them down again through the flying-land of swans¹¹ into Rán's realm¹².
 Hail to you, Ingunar-Freyr!

¹A god of poetry in Norse mythology, modelled after the Norwegian poet Bragi Boddason who became divinised postmortem. For further details, see Ross, "Poet into Myth".

²The Svear were a North Germanic tribe who have lent their name to modern-day Sweden and the Swedish language.
³Earth.

⁴In *Lokasenna* 36, Loki accuses the god Njörðr of having slept with his own sister, who is left unnamed in the text; this story is also alluded to in *Ynglinga saga* 4. Hopkins, "Goddesses Unknown I" argues that Njörun, a poorly-attested goddess in the Norse literary record, is undoubtedly in direct etymological relation with Njörðr and the earlier Germanic goddess Nerthus (40–41); however, the goddess might have been relegated to "little more than a resource in the poetic vocabulary in the sources that have come down to us", even if "this also intersects with the account of Tacitus according to which a female counterpart of Njörðr appears to have been much more prominent more than a thousand years earlier" (42). Molin, *Ullr: A God on the Edge of Memory* also notes the existence of a goddess Njörd attested only in toponymy (12, 76). As such, I decided to take the stance that Njörun is synonymous with the sister-wife of Njörðr.

⁵Freyr and his sister Freyja (*Ynglinga saga* 4).

⁶Boar helmet, also an allusion to the importance of boars in the cult of Freyr.

⁷Scalp-field = hair; golden = blonde. Freyr having blond hair is not found in any Norse primary sources and is entirely my own creation.

⁸'The ear's ground' = the head.

⁹Sword.

¹⁰Woodland-horse = deer; pitchfork of the woodland-horse (deer) = antler. In Norse myth, Freyr kills the jötunn (a generally, but not strictly so, negative and antagonistic category of being) Beli with the antler of a stag (*Gylfaginning* 37).

¹¹Sky.

¹²The ocean.

Translation into Old Norse

En nu, Bragi, af ása-kyn,
 Syngðu¹³ af Svíagoð¹⁴ Freyr,
 Fra hvem rún-víss Njörun, þessi móðirligr kona¹⁵,
 Bar við blóðs-barmi í grœðis vagni¹⁶.
 Njörðr við systur síns Njörun sváfu, Njörun börn hann ólst,
 Af hvem var Bani Belja¹⁷, Vanaguð¹⁸ ok Veraldargoð¹⁹ ok kvennamaðr.
 Meðan ríðr hann in þeim vagni, hann skínn upp á vera ok tíva,
 Ok sá Geigrþings²⁰-jǫfurr²¹ inn hjörtun gumar hvatinn spjóta²².
 Bjartir sólargeislar ljómar af hann,
 Ok a svarðakr²³ gulls þekr grunnar hlusta²⁴:
 Trúnaðastar trúnaðarmaðar hans, valfasti²⁵ ok fork viðar-hestr, ráða manni:
 Ok hjalpa honum tveir hestar.
 þá, meðan hann hvílist með vagni ok hrossum, dreymir hann á miðli rúms roðuls²⁶,
 Unz hann drífa þeir niður aftur um flugreinr svana²⁷ at ríki Ránar.
 Heill, Ingunar-Freyr²⁸!

¹³For usage of the imperative, see Faarlund, *The Syntax of Old Norse*, 228.

¹⁴Lit. ‘god of the Swedes’; from *Viðbætur við Olafs sögu hins helga* 11.

¹⁵Lit. ‘that motherly woman’; the use of a demonstrative pronoun *sjá* ‘this, that (thing)’ was relatively straightforward, although the word *matronly* posed some translation problems. I decided to calque *matronly* as *móðirligr* by analogy with English *motherly* and thus retain a distinctly Germanic terminological base for this composition.

¹⁶Anon (TGT) 27III.

¹⁷*Skáldskaparmál* 72.

¹⁸*Skáldskaparmál* 14.

¹⁹*Ynglinga saga* 13.

²⁰Hfr ErfÓl 9I.

²¹This is a pun; in Old Norse, *jǫfurr* primarily means ‘prince’ although it descends from Proto-Germanic **eburaz* ‘boar’ (Kroonen, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic*, 114), thus emphasising the rulership of Freyr while also connecting him to his boar Gullinbasti and to Germanic boar-helmets. For further details on Germanic boar helmets and the role of boars in Germanic culture and mythology, see Kovárová, *The Swine in Old Nordic Religion and Worldview*, 38–39, 56–58, 66, 118–19, 154, 171, 173–77, 179–84, 185–89, 203–8. On boar-shaped pots from around the Elbe and Lower Saxony, see Kovárová, *The Swine in Old Nordic Religion and Worldview*, 167–68.

²²Lit. ‘pierces with a spear’.

²³SnSt Lv 7III.

²⁴ÚlfrU Húsdr 6III.

²⁵Gísl Magnkv 16II.

²⁶Adapted from expression *rume roderas* ‘spacious, roomy heavens/sky’, found in the Old English poem *Maxims I* 132–33 (“Woden worhte weos, wuldor alwalda, | rume roderas...”). This takes the genitive in combination with *á miðli*.

²⁷Gamlkan Has 44VII.

²⁸*Lokasenna* 43.

Commentary

Hymn to Freyr is a work of fiction drawing upon the Homeric tradition by building upon the Homeric Hymn to Helios (HH 31) [ed. Evelyn-White], owing in no small part to the fact that the translation in question is in the public domain and therefore readily accessible to a lay audience. Although often attributed to Homer in the past, the Homeric Hymns themselves are of varying authorship and often (albeit with some uncertainty) thought to postdate Homer and Hesiod,²⁹ and Faulkner (2011) even suggests the Hymn to Helios itself might be dated to the 5th century BCE.³⁰ The guiding principle for my transformation and subsequent translation into Old Norse was to retain its core themes and descriptors, and develop equivalencies with Norse mythology. As such, I originally considered centring the poem around the obscure Norse god Ullr, closely associated with the Sun and sky in scholarship.³¹ Both Freyr and Ullr are associated with the ‘solar barque’ concept in scholarship,³² and Ullr might have originally been connected to the horses Árvakr and Alsviðr,³³ but by the time of attested Norse myth, Freyr, who is also identified as a solar deity within modern scholarship,³⁴ is much more obviously associated with the horse-cult,³⁵ justifying his equivocation with Helios in this instance. Both Helios and Freyr are explicitly identified as the byproducts of incestuous divine relations (in this case, brother-sister pairs) in their respective canons: Helios is described as the child of the Hyperion and Euryphaessa in HH 31, and Freyr and Freyja are the children of Njörðr and his unnamed sister-wife (*Lokasenna* 36; *Ynglinga saga* 4), thus providing a point of considerable comparative interest and strengthening the identification of Helios and Freyr with one-another in my composition.

My studies in comparative mythology provided the impetus for producing this composition, especially regarding the various connections between gods such as Apollo and Helios, on one hand, and analogous myths and figures among groups to the north of the Ancient Greeks, on the other. One particularly pertinent example is visible in the poetry of Minnervna, who describes Helios journeying in a cup during the nighttime; as argued by Panchenko (2012), this specific motif is a reflex of Bronze Age religious iconography depicting the daily journey of the Sun and its need to change vehicles during the nighttime by hiding within a cauldron or cup-shaped vessel,³⁶ as visible in the Kesselwagen ‘kettle, cauldron-wagon’ motif. Since this motif is highly specific in its form and widespread in Bronze Age artwork from the Carpathian Basin, Central Europe, the Alps, and Scandinavia, it is thus natural to set a god like Helios in direct relation to these ‘northerly’ religious concepts which have clearly shaped his development, as discernible in ancient sources.

It should also be noted that the Sun itself seems to take an ambivalent shape within Ancient Greek and Old Norse sources, owing to the various localised and supraregional traditions which have influenced

²⁹Faulkner, *The Homeric Hymns*, 1, 7–9, 175–81.

³⁰Faulkner, *The Homeric Hymns*, 16.

³¹For further discussion, see Molin, *Ullr: A God on the Edge of Memory*.

³²Cf. Andrén, *Tracing Old Norse Cosmology*, 155–56; Molin, *Ullr: A God on the Edge of Memory*, 102, 105, 112, 126–30, 142.

³³Molin, *Ullr: A God on the Edge of Memory*, 127: “Bearing in mind the well-established knowledge of an ancient Bronze Age tradition, of the horses dragging the sun across the sky, reflected, for example, in the Trundholm chariot, it is easy to imagine that Sigrdrífumál str. 15’s ‘shield’, namely, the sun itself (which stands before the ‘shining god’), is being dragged by the two horses, Árvakr and Alsviðr. Indeed, Grímnismál str. 37 seems to confirm, that the shield, is the sun itself. Considering the earlier noted evidence, and the age of the famous Trundholm chariot, who else could the ‘shining god’ with the shield be, than Ullr, ‘the radiant one’, who is regularly connected with shields? Strophe 38 speaks explicitly about the interesting relation between the shield and the sun, before which the ‘shining god’ stands once again. One might imagine the sun god as wielding the sun itself as a shield, thus the explicit mention of the shield standing before the shining god, as the shield stood before the warrior.”

³⁴Cf. Andrén, *Tracing Old Norse Cosmology*, 157. For discussion on *Beowulf* from the perspective of the cult of (Yngvi)-Freyr (Old English Ing), including his involvement in the solar cult, see Pettit, *The Waning Sword*. On Freyr and his putative descendants taking on the archetype of the ‘Summer King’, see McKinnell, *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend*, 62–80. Consider also *Gylfaginning* 24, where Freyr is described as possessing rulership over sunshine.

³⁵For discussion on the horse and its connection to the cult of Freyr and aristocracy, see Sundqvist, *Freyr’s Offspring*, 229–40.

³⁶Panchenko, “Scandinavian Background of Greek Mythic Cosmography,” 12, 14–16.

its depiction. Among the Ancient Greeks, the diurnal movement of the Sun could be interpreted with a mythological lens as a solar god journeying by boat into the ocean, itself envisioned as circling the Earth, as part of a tradition that personified and anthropomorphised the movement of the Sun.³⁷ During the daytime, Helios rides a chariot driven by horses, as described in HH 31, showing that the concept of Helios' boat/cup-shaped vessel was not in conflict with usage of his chariot in the daytime. Likewise, the Sun could be variously conceptualised in Norse mythical material as a golden disc or flame, but elsewhere might be personified as a goddess named Sól with a husband named Glenr, with the occasional inclusion of details such as the Sun and Moon being chased by wolves and/or protected by a defender named Svöl 'cooler; one who cools'.³⁸ For the sake of this composition, I focused on the 'solar chariot' concept shared between Ancient Greek and Norse mythology; indeed, in Norse myth, the horses Árvakr and Alsviðr are described as pulling the chariot of the Sun daily (*Grímnismál* 37; *Gylfaginning* 11), and the Trundholm sun chariot of the Nordic Bronze Age, dated c. 1400 BCE,³⁹ depicts the sun being pulled by a horse, just as a rock carving from Askum in Bohuslän (Sweden) depicts a pair of solar horses facing one-another,⁴⁰ attesting to the antiquity of this motif. Freyr being identified with Helios thus seemed quite natural in the context of this traditional and shared solar wagon/chariot imagery, and by having the wagon rest at sea, I also alluded to Nerthus' attestation in Tac. Ger. 40, where, with incredulity on the part of Tacitus, the goddess is described as travelling in a sacred wagon that is afterwards sacrificed in a lake with slaves ("servi").

As part of my efforts to build upon the Hymn to Helios, I identified the importance of incorporating kennings into my text, a common feature of the broader Germanic poetical tradition. Kennings are compounds referring to a concept or thing using descriptors which can vary quite a bit in complexity. For example, one might readily interpret *flugreinr svana* 'the flying-land of swans' as a kenning for 'sky', whereas *grunnar hlusta* 'the ear's ground' might require more effort to be recognised as a kenning for 'head'. Further, *ríki Ránar* 'Rán's realm' plays on the fact that Rán is a sea-goddess, knowledge of which is necessary to understand that this kenning refers to the ocean. I incorporated kennings used in Norse poetry of the Middle Ages for the sake of authenticity, listed here in order of appearance: *Svíagoð* (based on "ok Frey Suia god" in *Viðbætir við Olafs sögu hins helga* 11), *græðis vagni* (Anon (TGT) 27III), *Bani Belja* (*Skáldskaparmál* 72), *Vanaguð* (*Skáldskaparmál* 14), *Veraldargoð* (*Ynglinga saga* 13), *svarðakr* (SnSt Lv 7III), *grunnar hlusta* (*ÚlfrU Húsdr* 6III), *valfasti* (*Gísl Magnkv* 16II), and *flugreinr svana* (*Gamlkan Has* 44VII). For the sake of emphasising unique qualities associated with Freyr, I took great effort to devise some kennings of my own, including: *blóðs-barmi* 'blood-brother', *Geigrþings*⁴¹-*jöfurr* 'battle-boar (lit. 'boar of battle')' (playing on *jöfurr* and its semantic shift from 'boar' to 'prince'⁴²), *fork viðar-hestr* '(pitch)fork of the forest-horse', and *ríki Ránar* 'Rán's realm'. To demonstrate the rich vocabulary of the Old Norse language, I also made sure to use several synonyms for the same concept in the Old Norse translation; in particular, I employed *ása*, *goð/guð*, and *tíva* (all denote 'god, deity, divine being'), on one hand, and *manni*, *gumar*, and *vera* (all denote 'man, human being'), on the other, for poetical effect.

The most difficult aspect of this composition by far was the translation into Old Norse, especially with making sure certain prepositions and declined nouns agreed with one-another; while I have experience with reading Old Norse in my academic research, I have not had the pleasure of producing anything in Old Norse until now. Fortunately, Faarlund (2004) was rather helpful in this regard, and it is thanks to this book that I was able to make sure that, e.g., *vera ok tíva* 'men and gods' was declined in the accusative plural to agree with preposition *upp á* 'upon', since this expresses a movement towards something⁴³ (in this case, toward men and gods). It was also thanks to this invaluable resource that I was able to, e.g.,

³⁷Bilić, "North vs. South," 60–61.

³⁸DuBois, "The Mythic Sun," 194–98.

³⁹"The Sun Chariot," Nationalmuseet i København, accessed 14 April 2026, <https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-bronze-age/the-sun-chariot/>; Pettit, *The Waning Sword*, 298.

⁴⁰Andrén, *Tracing Old Norse Cosmology*, 137.

⁴¹Lit. 'injury-Thing (a legal assembly)', thus denoting a dangerous or injurious meeting, i.e., a battle. Note that this kenning is already established within Norse poetry (cf. *Hfr ErfÓl* 9I), although its combination with *jöfurr* is my own creation.

⁴²Kovárová, *The Swine in Old Nordic Religion and Worldview*, 115, 118–19.

⁴³Faarlund, *The Syntax of Old Norse*, 111.

decline *rúms rǫðuls* in genitive to agree with the preposition *á miðli* ‘between’⁴⁴ (in this case, meaning ‘among’; compare Icelandic *meðal* ‘among, amongst’⁴⁵). However, there might still be grammatical and/or terminological quirks present in this composition that I am currently unaware of, for which I apologise and hope that my efforts make up for any potential imprecisions or faults in the text itself.

⁴⁴Faarlund, *The Syntax of Old Norse*, 116.

⁴⁵Cf. Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, xxviii.

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