

**Towards Further Interpretation of the Primordial Cow  
*Auðhumla***

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The purpose of this paper is to analyse some pieces of evidences concerning the primeval cow *Auðhumla* hidden in the literary tradition of Snorri's time. The analysis aims at achieving a better understanding of the principles of Snorri's approach to his material. What was his point of departure and what kind of material did he have at his disposal when creating the image of the Holy Cow? By discussion of these topics we intend to stay basically in the realm of Old Norse material, not going beyond the limits of Old Icelandic literary texts. Some parallels will be drawn, however, in order to confirm our hypothesis.

There is no lack of typological observations about the cow *Auðhumla*, made by various scholars. The 'communis opinio' is that the image of the Holy Cow is most likely related to numerous mythological figures in non-Germanic (the Indian wonder cow *Kamaduh*) and even non-Indo-European religions (like, for instance, the Egyptian *Hathor*). But observations of this kind<sup>1</sup> rather complicate the matter since they pretend to solve the problem. Moreover, they probably make the image of the cow *Auðhumla* more archaic than it is. As a matter of fact, scholars are inclined to accept Snorri's account without any idea of how the cow *Auðhumla* has come into it. Was the image of the Holy Cow created by the author of the prosaic Edda or did he borrow it from the previous mythopoetic tradition? In the present article we shall attempt to search some Old Icelandic sources, different from Edda, for the information which may refer to the cow *Auðhumla*.

The story of the primordial cow *Auðhumla* is only told in the prosaic Edda, although the name of the cow occurs once in a poetic context as

<sup>1</sup> See Schröder 1931, p. 81ff.; de Vries 1935/1937, II, pp. 389–390 (§ 318), p. 99 (§ 93); Turville-Peter 1964, p. 277; Simek 1993, p. 22; Stefán Einarsson 1965, pp. 21–26.

well.<sup>2</sup> *Auðhumla* is mentioned briefly in a *pula*—the versified list of names, which apparently served as a possible source for Snorri.<sup>3</sup>

First let us turn to the evidence of the prosaic Edda, written about 1220. In *Gylfaginning V* Snorri relates how the cow *Auðhumla*, created out of the melting primeval hoar-frost, fed the giant *Ymir* with her milk and released another new being, the progenitor of the gods, *Buri*, by licking salty rime-stones and making him free out of these:

Þá mælti Gangleri: Hvar byggði Ymir eða við hvat lifði hann? – Hárr svarar: Næst var þat, þá er hrímit draup, at þar varð af kýr sú, er Auðhumla hét, en iv. mjólkur runnu ór spennum hennar, ok fæddi hon Ymi. – Þá mælti Gangleri: Við hvat fæddisk kýrin? – Hárr segir: Hon sleikði hrímsteinana, er saltir váru, ok enn fyrsta dag, er hon sleikði steinana, kom ór steininum at kveldi mannz hár, annan dag mannz höfuð, þriðja dag var þar allr maðr; sá er nefndr Buri... ([SnE., p. 13]). “Then spoke Gangleri: Where did Ymir live, and what did he live on? The next thing, when the rime dripped, was that there came into being from it a cow called *Auðhumla*, and four rivers of milk flowed from its teats, and it fed Ymir. Then spoke Gangleri: What did the cow feed on? High said: It licked the rime-stones, which were salty. And the first day as it licked stones in the evening a man’s hair, the second day a man’s head, the third day there was a complete man there. His name was Buri...” (Faulkes 1987, p. 11).

Our knowledge of the role of *Auðhumla* in the creation myth is based entirely on this account. Ever since the pioneering work of Adolf Noreen (see Noreen 1918, pp. 169–172), we are also aware of the etymology of the name *Auðhumla*, which means “the hornless cow with lots of (milk)”, undoubtedly from ON *auðr* “riches, wealth” and *\*humala* “hornless” (related to English *hummel*, *humble*).

The interpretation suggested by A. Noreen was immediately accepted not only because of its persuasive linguistic strength but also because of new associations it provoked. Thus, since then, attention has often been drawn to the fact recorded in Tacitus’ *Germania* that Germanic tribes had hornless cattle and that in a cult procession, the chariot of the Germanic goddess *Nerthus* was dragged by cattle. Considering the place of *Nerthus* in fertility cults, connection is easily made to *Auðhumla*—even though in the case of *Nerthus* the cattle appear only as an attribute of the goddess.

<sup>2</sup> A. Holtsmark is certainly mistaken, when she writes in her “Studier i Snorres mytologi” (1964, p. 28) that the cow *Auðhumla* is named in the poetic Edda (“Kua Auðhumla er nevnt i Grímnismál, men myten om henne må Snorre ha kjent på annen måte”).

<sup>3</sup> ...ok auðhumbla // hon es elzt kúa (Skj./I B: 669) “...and auðhumbla // oldest of cows”. E.O.G. Turville-Peter expressed his doubts elsewhere, whether this *pula* is old enough for Snorri to have known it (1965, p. 374).

There are also some traces of the cow-worship in the Old Icelandic literary tradition. The *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* tells us about the legendary Swedish king *Eysteinn* who used to venerate a cow called *Síbilja*:<sup>4</sup>

Hann var blótmaðr mikill, ok at Uppsölum váru blót svá mikil í þann tíma, at hvergi hafa verit meiri á Norðrlöndum. Þeir höfðu átrúnað mikinn á einni kú, ok kölluðu þeir hana Síbilju. Hún var svá mjök blótin, at menn máttu eigi standast lát hennar. Ok því var konungr vanr, þá er hers var ván, at þessi kýr in sama var fyrir fylkingum, ok svá mikill djöfuls krafr fylgdi henni, at óvinir hans urðu svá ærir, þegar þeir heyrðu til hennar, at þeir bördust sjálfir ok gáðu sín eigi, ok fyrir þá sök var óherskatt á Svíþjóð, at menn treystust eigi við slíkt ofrefli at etja (Ragn., p. 242, ch. IX). “He was a great worshipper of the gods and in those days there were more sacrifices made in Uppsala than any place else in the Northlands. The folk there had great faith in a certain cow which they called *Sibilia*; she had been so much worshipped with sacrifices that men could not endure the noise she made. Therefore, when an army of foes was expected, the king was wont to have this cow go before the host, and so great was the devil’s power attending her that his enemies grew mad when they heard her, and fought one another, taking no care of themselves. For this reason Sweden was unharmed by war, since men had not the heart to be matched against so mighty a power” (Schlauch 1930, p. 219).

G. Turville-Peter, mentioning this story on a different occasion (1964, p. 256), rightly writes that “no one, not even their authors, would believe that such stories were true, but yet they cannot be made of nothing”. However, there is another account of a particular interest which does not seem to have drawn the attention of scholars as yet. In his *Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason* Snorri relates the story about king *Ögvaldr* who in ancient times used to sacrifice to a cow (*blét kú eina*), drink her milk and take her wherever he went (Hkr./I, pp. 377–378, ch. LIXV). When the cow died (after the death of *Ögvaldr*), she was placed in a howe, close to that of the king.

According to the saga this story was told to Olaf Tryggvason by a night-visitor, when the king was resting at *Ögvaldsness* after the long journey. When king Óláfr fell asleep, the guest, who turned out to be no other than Odin, went to the king’s cooks and gave them two pieces of beef (*nautssíða*) to be prepared for the master. In the morning the king found out about the gift of the night-visitor and realized that it was Odin, “who the heathens used to believe in for a long time”. So he ordered to throw out the boiled meat and broth.

<sup>4</sup> The name *Sibilia* has nothing to do with the name of the Greek prophetess *Sybille* as one could assume. Concerning the etymology and meaning of the name *Sibilia* (related to the verb *belja* “to bellow”) see Lidén 1928, pp. 361–364.

For better understanding of this episode it is essential to know that, according to this source, Óláfr Tryggvason came to *Ögvaldsness* at the end of Lent, just one or two days before Easter (see: ch. LXIII). Likewise, Snorri makes it clear that there was an Easter feast to be presided by him. It should be remembered that Óláfr Tryggvason was the first Norwegian king to introduce the Christian rite. In such a context the gift of beef meat is clearly to be regarded as Odin's trick to defile the sacred Christian Lent meal. From other sagas we are well informed about the importance of horseflesh, which was customarily consumed during pagan feasts in Scandinavia (see, for example, the description of a pagan banquet in Snorri's life of Hákon the Good (Hkr./I, pp. 191–193, ch. XVII), where the Christian king is forced to taste a piece of horseflesh). In the episode under discussion the beef obviously replaces the ritual horseflesh, which suggests an opportunity to associate this story with the worship of the cow.

However, there is some even more significant Icelandic material which seems to be related to the image of the cow *Auðhumla*. In *Sneglu-Halla þátr* there is a description of a fight between two Icelandic poets at the court of king *Haraldr harðráði*. One of the poets, *Þjóðólfr Arnórsson*, tells the king about *Kolluvísur*, the verses about cows, which *Sneglu-Halli*, the other skald, had composed at home in Iceland. *Halli* gets his own back by telling the king about the *Sóptrogs-* (or *Sóðtrogs*) *visur*, that *Þjóðólfr* had made about carrying out ash-pails from the farmhouse, which had been his particular job together with other youngsters. The king wanted to hear these poems, but, when he did, he could neither find the two poems, nor their subject-matter, worth listening.

Ok er kemr jólaaptann, gengr Halli fyrir konungr ok kveðr hann. Konungr tók vel máli Halla. Þá mælti Halli: "Herra, kvæði hefi ek ort of yðr; ek vilda, at þér hlýddið". Konungr mælti: "Hefir þú nökkt kvæð fyrir ort?" Hann svarar: "Ekki, herra". Konungr mælti: "Þat mun þá sumra manna mál, at þú takisk mikit í fang fyrsta sinni, slík skáld sem of mik hafa ort, eða hvat sýnisk þér ráð, Þjóðólfr?" Hann svarar: "Ekki kann ek þér ráða ráðin, herra", segir hann, "hitt mun nær fara, at ek kunna ráða Halla heilræði". Konungr segir: "Hver ró þau?" Þjóðólfr svarar: "At hann ljúgi eigi at yðr". Konungr mælti: "Hvat lýgr hann?" "Þát þá, herra, at hann hafi ekki kvæði ort, en ek ætla hann ort hafa". "Hvert er þat?" segir konungr. Þjóðólfr svarar: "Þat heita Kolluvísur, er hann orti of kýr ut á Íslandi, er hann gætti". Þá mælti konungr: "Er þatt satt, Halli, er hann segir?" "Satt er þat, herra", svarar Halli. Konungr mælti: "Hví sagðir þú þat, at þú hefðir ekki kvæði ort fyrr en of mik?" "Því, herra," svarar Halli, "at ek vænti, at mönnum muni lítil kvæðismynd á því þykkja, ef þat kvæmi á lopt". "Kveð þat fyrst þá", segir konungr. Halli svarar: "Skemmta mun þá fleira skulu, herra". "Hverju þá?" segir

konungr. "Kveða skal Þjóðólfr Sóptrogsvisur," en hann orti ut á Íslandi". Konungr segir: "Hvernig er þat kvæði?" Halli svarar: "Þjóðólfr hafði þat verk, er hann var heima, at hann bar út ösku með öðru ungmenni, ok þótti til enkis annars færr<sup>6</sup> ok varð þó at at hyggja, at eigi væri eldr, svá at mein yrði at". "Er þat satt, Þjóðólfr?" segir konungr. "Satt er þat, herra", svarar Þjóðólfr. Konungr mælti: "Hví hafðir þú svá óvirðiligt verk?" "Þat bar til, herra", svarar hann, "at vér várum mörg börnin, ok tók ek undir með þeim of verkit, ok flýttak þeim svá til leika".<sup>7</sup> "Heyra vil ek hvártveggja kvæðit", sagði konungr. Svá var nú gört, at þeir kveða kvæðinn, ok er lokit var, þá mælti konungr: "Hvartveggja er kvæðit ófengiligt ok munu ok lítil verit hafa yrkisefnin, ok þat er þó enn fengminna, Þjóðólfr, er þú ortir"<sup>8</sup> (Snegl. H., p. 275–278).

Our knowledge about these poems is completely exhausted by the two titles mentioned in the *þátr*. The story-teller does not quote any single line from those verses and there is moreover no reason to believe that the poems ever actually existed. However, the narrator does retell the contents of the verses in his own words and describes in details the circumstances causing the composition of each poem. This information (together with the titles of the poems) seems to be quite sufficient to conclude that the discussed episode is in some way connected with the story of the primeval cow *Auðhumla*.

The title of the first poem—*Kolluvísur*—might be translated as "Verses of *Kolla* the Cow", as it has been done on different occasions by various scholars.<sup>9</sup> In this case the word *Kolla* is apparently treated as the name of a certain cow with no special meaning; correspondingly, the word remains usually untranslated.

However, the name *Kolla* has a very transparent meaning—it indicates a hornless animal, be it a hornless deer, sheep or cow (compare ad-

<sup>5</sup> *Sóðtrogsvisur*

<sup>6</sup> ok þótti þá til einkis annars færr fyrir vitsmuna sakar

<sup>7</sup> "Því, herra", segir Þjóðólfr, "at ek vilda flýta oss til leika, enn ekki váru verk á mik laginn". "Þat olli því", segir Halli, "at þú þóttir eigi hafa verkmanns vit". "Ekki skuluð þit við talask", segir konungr, "en heyra viljum vér kvæðinn bæði"

<sup>8</sup> "Lítil er kvæðit hvártveggja, enda munu lítil hafa verit yrkisefnin, ok er þat þó enn minna, er þú hefir ort, Þjóðólfr".

<sup>9</sup> We know about the existence of another scaldic poem, bearing exactly the same title: there is a story in *Bjarnar saga Hítalækappa* (Bjarn., p. 46, ch. XX) mentioning the insulting verses *Kolluvísur*, composed by Þórðr Kolbeinsson about Björn. It seems interesting that the saga-writer (almost like the author of *Sneglu-Halla þátr*) avoids from quoting these verses, probably because of their offensive character (according to the saga, a man was killed by Björn only for the reason of reciting the *Kolluvísur*). Although the composing and reciting of an insulting verse (*niðr*) was prohibited by law in Mediaeval Iceland, there should still be a more plausible explanation of not-quoting these verses in the saga-text.

jective *kollóttir* "without horns, polled"). As a matter of fact, a feminine common noun *kolla* means nothing else but "a hornless cow" and is also found in a scaldic verse composed by Þórðr Kolbeinsson (...und saur-gom hala kollo... "...under the filthy tail of a [hornless] cow...").<sup>10</sup> Thus, there are some reasons to associate the title of the poem in *Sneglu-Halla þáttir* with the image of *Auðhumla*, since the latter name itself contains an unambiguous indication of the absence of horns as well.<sup>11</sup>

The second poem, referred to in the same *þáttir*, presents a more complicated matter. As it has been pointed out before, we are told about the *Sóptrogsvísur* (or *Sóðtrogsvísur*), made in Iceland by Þjóðólfr Arnórsson. *Sóptrogsvísur* evidently means "Verses of the Rubbish trough", but there is also another version of this title including the element *soð* "water, in which fish or meat has been cooked, broth".

At first sight, all of this has nothing to do with the story about the mythological cow *Auðhumla*. But whatever version of the title is referred to it seems significant for our discourse that the subject of the poem bears on the activity of Þjóðólfr in a certain Icelandic farmhouse. According to the *þáttir* he had been responsible for carrying out the ashes with other youngsters (...hann bar út ösku með öðru ungmenni). It is difficult to answer the question as to what kind of sanitary purpose this activity might have served? None the less, it is essential, as we hope to show, that Þjóðólfr had been busy precisely with this kind of "dirty job": carrying

<sup>10</sup> The word *kolla* is presented in an occasional verse of Þórðr made up after his main rival, Björn, had picked up from the floor of the byre a new-born calf. Ursula Dronke, who discussed this episode in her article (1981, p. 71), suggested that Þórðr represents Björn in his mocking verse as the father of the calf. She also made the observation that the *Kolluvísur* mentioned in the *Bjarnar* saga were presumably "an elaboration" of that mockery. This information could be particularly useful for our further investigation.

<sup>11</sup> Compare also the Icelandic folktale of *Búkolla* whose connection with *Auðhumla* was pointed for the first time by Stefán Einarsson in his article "Parallels in Norse and Indian Mythology" (1965, pp. 25–26). *Búkolla* is the miraculous cow that, according to the fairy tale, is kept by trolls in a cave. She rescues herself by creating a great river from the hair of her tail, that can only be crossed by the flying bird. To counter this the trolls bring their father's big bull and this bull drains the river. Then she creates a big fire which no one can pass through nor put out until the big bull quenches it by urinating the whole river on it. In the third test she creates a mountain that no one can pass over but the flying bird. This time the trolls bring the big auger of their father, trying to drill a hole in a mountain (Stefán Einarsson emphasizes that this reminds very much of Snorri's Edda passage where Óðinn / Bolverk gets the scaldic mead by boring a hole in the mountain). But the trolls got stuck in the hole and *Búkolla* was freed from the monsters. It should be added that in his comparison Stefán Einarsson does not mention the evident interchange of the names *Búkolla* and *Auðhumla*. Some interesting material concerning the image of the Wonder Cow in Scandinavian folklore is given in Nordisk Kultur (1935, pp. 147–148).

out the ashes from the farm. Thus, we intend to demonstrate that the combination of various subjects briefly touched in the *þáttir* (the reference to a hornless cow together with mentioning of ashes) is connected in quite a special way with the topic of *Auðhumla* and can therefore be considered a dim allusion to the story of the primeval cow.

In order to make this connection clear we must turn to another story which is presented in *Eyrbyggjasaga*. The saga tells us about a long quarrell between a very wicked man whose name was Thórólf Clubfoot (Þórólfr bægifótr) and his son Arnkell. When Thórólfr died, sitting upright in his high seat, his body was so heavy that it had to be laid on a sledge drawn by oxen. Before that the households of Thórólfr had broken the wall of the house and dragged him through the gap.<sup>12</sup>

Thórólfr was buried by Arnkell under huge stones (incidentally the oxen which had dragged the body were bewitched and went mad), but he was not lying quiet in his grave and started instead to visit his old home, plundering the neighbours and giving them a lot of trouble. Then his son Arnkell resolved that the Thórólfr's grave must be opened in order to re-bury him.

The body was found uncorrupt and so heavy that the strongest oxen could hardly drag it. So the corpse was buried a second time on the headland above the sea. But Thórólfr continued to cause trouble and inflict damage. This was the reason why the neighbours (Thórólfr's son Arnkell was already dead at that time) decided to reopen the grave. Thórólfr was still uncorrupt, but, as it says in the saga, he looked like a troll, black as *Hel* and fat as an ox (*blár sem hel ok digr sem naut*) (Eb., p. 222, ch. XLIII). The neighbours dragged the corpse to the seashore, kindled a fire and burned it up.

<sup>12</sup> It is usually considered that this universal custom was performed in the hope that the dead would not find his way home through the door of the house (cf. Matthias Þórðarson 1928, pp. 95–112; Turville-Peter 1964, p. 270). However, it may reflect the ancient (prechristian) funeral custom which was later considered to be necessary in case of the death of the sorcerer. Thus, according to the primary Russian chronicle (*The Tale of Bygone Years*) when prince Wladimir, the baptizer of Russia, died in 1015, his corpse was carried not through the door, but through a specially made hole in the wall of his house. It might be essential that Wladimir was a Varangian, that is Scandinavian by origin. The same custom is reflected in "Igor's Tale", the oldest Russian epic, where prince Svjatoslav, foreseeing his death, says: "And the beams of my gold-roofed palace were already without girding" (Zenkovsky 1963, p. 149). Thus Svjatoslav, upon seeing the roof without the essential beam in his dream, recognizes an evil omen threatening him, symbolizing his imminent death. Also in Russia this custom was later preserved in the case of a sorcerer's death (see references in Čiževska 1966, p. 192–193).

However, during the ritual of killing Thóroíf the second time by burning him up a mishap occurred. The ashes which were supposed to be thrown in the sea to prevent the return of the dead<sup>13</sup> were partly dispersed by the sharp wind. The consequence of this blunder is of such importance for our topic that it deserves to be recounted in detail.

The story about Thóroíf Clubfoot is actually not completed by the events described above. Thus, we are informed that after a while a lean, shaky cow went down to the beach where Thóroíf's corpse had been burned. She licked the stones onto which the ashes had drifted, and was soon in calf. The calf became a dapple-grey bull, named *Glæsir*, of abnormal size and strength. Long before he was full grown he had gored his master to death, and then made off to sink in a marsh, and since then was never seen again.<sup>14</sup>

In order to argue the resemblance between this story and that of the cow *Auðhumla* it should be emphasized that the bull *Glæsir* was apparently conceived when his mother licked up Thóroíf's ashes:

Kýrin gekk opt ofan í fjöruna, þar sem bálit hafði verit, ok sleikði steinana, þar sem askan hafði fokit (Eb., p. 223, ch. LXIII).

One can easily see that precisely the same act caused the origin of the divine ancestor, *Buri*, who was licked out of the salty rime-stones by the primeval cow:

hon [Auðhumla] sleikði hrímsteinana, er saltir váru, ok enn fyrsta dag, er hon sleikði steinana, kom ór steininum at kveldi mannz hár, annan dag mannz höfuð, þriðja dag var þar allr maðr; sá er nefndr Buri... (SnE., p. 13).

The similarity between the two episodes under consideration seems evident; basically both authors are talking about the same topic, they are

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Laxd., p. 69, ch. XXIV; see also Boberg 1966, p. 97, E431.9, Ashes of dead thrown on water; cf. E431.13.

<sup>14</sup> There cannot be a slightest doubt that Thóroíf himself was in some way involved in the origin of the supernatural bull *Glæsir*. As a matter of fact we find in the saga another alternative explanation of *Glæsir*'s appearance as well. The saga-writer tells that some people have seen the sharky cow pasturing together with an unknown dapple-grey bull (Þat er sumra manna sögn, at þá eyjamenn [...] sæi þeir kúna upp í hlíðinni ok naut annat apalgrátt at lit, en þess átti engi maðr ván) (Eb., p. 223, ch. LXIII). From the context of the saga it is quite clear that this bull was no other than Thóroíf. The author of the saga had previously given some hints that Thóroíf would reappear precisely in the form of a bull by describing his corpse as "digr sem naut" (as fat as an ox) (Mc Cresh 1978, pp. 274–275) or by mentioning seven bulls involved in the quarrel between Thóroíf and his son Arnkell (Eb., p. 112, ch. XXX). Moreover, it should be added that a sledge with the corpse of Thóroíf was each time drawn to the grave by oxen.

telling almost the same story. On the other hand, there are significant distinctions in some details. Thus, the substance which was licked by the cow *Auðhumla* apparently differs from the one which was licked up by the nameless cow in *Eyrbyggjasaga*. This striking difference between the salty rime and the ashes representing two various kinds of creative substance deserves a special comment: as a matter of fact, it turns out to be a supportive argument for our proposal, concerning the identity of the stories quoted above.

First of all, we shall focus our attention on the word *hrím* which is used by Snorri as a term for the primeval creative substance. In Snorri's account of the creation of the universe *hrím* plays an extremely important role being, without exaggeration, one of the very first elements life was formed from. For our discussion it seems to be of particular significance that the word *hrím* has actually two very specific meanings.

One of them, according to all translations and dictionaries, is "rime", "hoar-frost" or sometimes "ice". It is in this sense that Snorri uses the word *hrím*, when he describes the very beginning of the world:

Ár þær er kallaðar eru Élivágar, þá er þær váru svá langt komnar frá uppspretunni at eitrvíkja sú er þar fylgði harðnaði svá sem sindr þat er renn ór eldinum, þá varð þat íss, ok þá er sá íss gaf staðar ok rann eigi, þá héldi yfir þannig úr þat er af stóð eitrinu ok fraus at hrími, ok jók hrímit hvert yfir annat allt í Ginnungagap (SnE., p. 12). "These rivers, which are called Elivagar, when they had got so far from their source that the poisonous flow that accompanied them began to go hard like the clinker that comes from a furnace, it turned to ice; and when this ice came to a halt and stopped flowing, the vapour that was rising from the poison froze on the top in the same direction and turned to rime, and this rime increased layer upon layer right across Ginnungagap" (Faulkes 1987, p. 10).

But there is another meaning of the word *hrím*, which Snorri was definitely aware of, namely "the soot", that is the black powder in smoke, or left by smoke on surfaces.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> There is a certain number of compounds and mythological names, including the element *hrím*, meaning "black soot" (Lex. Poet., p. 284); cf. *hrímaldi* "a lazy lout who lies on the hearth black with soot" (Cleasby / Vigfusson 1957, p. 285–286), "der Russ geschluckt hat" (Jóhannesson 1956, p. 266) or *ketillhrím* "copper's soot" (the mythological copper itself has a name *Eldhrímnir*, cf. *eld* "fire"). But to us the most interesting case is probably the one of Kormák's saga (Korm., pp. 216–217, ch. IV). Here we find a Kormák's *lausavísa* about a miserable person, called Narví, whom the scald calls in the verse *frenju-fæðir* "feeder of the cows", i.e. cowherd (since *frenja* means 'cow' in poetry) and *hrímugr hlúki* "grubby, sooty duffer" (*hlúki* is certainly a term of abuse with a quite obscure meaning). It is not difficult to see that we are dealing once more with the similar conjunction of topics as in Sneglu-Halla þátr, where the cow was mentioned in the same place with ashes.

The presence of the two opposite significances of the term under consideration could most likely be explained etymologically, since *hrím* goes back to IE \**qrei*, meaning nothing else but “to touch”. So the initial, etymological meaning of the word *hrím* might be probably reconstructed as a “(self-forming) deposit”. In any case, it is necessary to emphasize that the term *hrím* designates the effect of the two processes, which can be regarded as opposite: indeed, it can be associated both with burning and with freezing.<sup>16</sup>

There cannot be the slightest doubt that Snorri was aware of the double meaning of the word *hrím*: in fact, he was basing on it his mythological thinking. The story of creation of the world, told by Snorri, contains the description of life arising out of formless chaos. According to Snorri, in the beginning there were two regions: *Muspell* in the south, blazing hot, full of brightness and fire; and *Niflheimr*, a dark world of snow, mist and ice in the north. Between them stretched the great emptiness of *Ginnungagap*. As the heat and cold met in the midst of the expanse, a living creature appeared in the melting rime, called *Ymir*. The melting rime also took the shape of a cow *Auðhumla*, who fed with her

<sup>16</sup> Taking this into account we can better understand the semantic structure of one vague kenning from the poetic Edda, viz. *umdögg arins* or “hearth-dew” (= soot). It should be noted that the kenning occurs only once in the poetic Edda, namely among the ingredients of a magical drink, offered to Guðrun by Grimhild (Gðr II. 23. 5). Some commentators of this fragment found difficulty in grasping the general idea of the poetic expression. Thus H. Gering, who understood the kenning correctly as a designation of soot, wrote in his “Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda” (1931/II, p. 304): “Die Kenning ist allerdingens seltsam, da der schwarze trockene Ruß und der glänzende feuchte Tau zwei recht disparate Dinge sind” (see also Saemundar Edda 1903/II, p. 501; Neckel/Kuhn 1968; Reichborn-Kjennerud 1924, pp. 126–127). Indeed the kenning *umdögg arins* “hearth-dew” (= soot) seems to be quite an unusual one, but if we bear in mind the double meaning of the word *hrím*, the word, which is presumably implied in this riddle, it becomes clear, in what manner this idiom was actually constructed. Moreover, this kenning seems to be unusual only in the context of Elder or Poetic Edda: indeed, as a scaldic expression for “soot” it would rather represent a traditional way of creating an enigmatic periphrasis. The implication of the kenning (*hrím* = soot) probably stimulated the idea to make use of a different meaning of the word (*hrím* = rime) and to substitute it by its synonym (*um)dögg* “dew”, which might be considered as ordinary *heiti* in this case. As a matter of fact Snorri provides us with some examples of this kind in *Skáldskaparmál* (The language of poetry), the second part of his Prosaic Edda, devoted to the analysis of poetic diction: cf. “Poetry is also called the dwarfs’ vessel or *lid*. *Lid* is a word for ale and *lid* is a word for ships. This is the origin of the expression whereby poetry is now as a result called dwarfs’ ship... (Faulkes, 1987, p. 72). On the other hand, because of the two opposite meanings involved in the formation of the periphrasis under discussion, the kenning *umdögg arins* is also comparable with such scaldic expressions, where “earth” is called “sea of the animals” and vice versa “sea” is named “land of the ships”.

milk the giant *Ymir* and got her own nourishment from the salty blocks, evidently covered with rime/soot, that she licked into the shape of a man *Buri*.

Thus, according to Snorri’s mythological order, life was formed from the meeting of heat and cold (cf. von See 1988, p. 52–55); needless to say that the word *hrím* fits this idea in the best possible way because of its opposed meanings discussed above. In such a context *hrím* serves, generally speaking, as a supporting corroboration or linguistic embodiment of Snorri’s cosmogonic theory.

The semantics of the word *hrím* makes the connection between the two stories even closer than it appeared to be in the beginning of our discussion. Indeed, the episode from *Eyrbyggjasaga* cannot be regarded henceforth exclusively as a dim reminiscence from Snorra Edda’s account of the cow *Auðhumla*: both stories display quite evident signs of resemblance in the minutest details and the allusion, we are dealing here with, is by no means obscure.

Moreover, we are not entirely sure that the prosaic Edda should necessarily be treated as a source for the saga-episode; it is to be kept in mind that Snorri may have deliberately incorporated various pieces of evidence of several sources into his mythological representations, combining various details and frequently turning them to his own advantage. As a matter of fact, there are some clear indications that the story of the cow *Auðhumla* is most probably based on different source materials as well.

One could easily notice that Snorri virtually mentions two substances licked by the primeval cow, viz. rime/soot and salt: hon [Auðhumla] sleikði hrímsteinana, er saltir váru. The motif of conception by licking the salt is confirmed by many typological parallels. In particular, we find it in “Table-talk” of Plutarch, who, discussing the divine nature of salt, tells about the mice on a ship that are able to multiply without mating, but merely by licking the salt (Eitrem 1915, pp. 329–331).

To the best of our knowledge, there are no evident traces of this motif in Scandinavian mythology (the possible exception could be the story about the primeval cow).<sup>17</sup> However, we assume that Snorri was in some

<sup>17</sup> Cf. the motif of licking salt by a dragon evidenced in “Yngvarssaga viðförla”. This story might have been influenced in some way by the story of Auðhumla, although it is essential to realize that the salt does not appear here as a creative substance:

Þeir lendy þar skamt jfra ok gengu aller a land upp ok kuomu þar at, sem drekin uar uanur at skrida til uasz. [Su gata] uar hardla breid. Þa bad Ynguar, at þeir sædi salti epter gautunni ok draga þangat risafotinn, ok kuezti

way familiar with various tales, representing the salt as a creative substance. In other words, two different creative substances in Snorri's account probably originate from two different sources and the need to combine these two in the Edda seems typical of the author.

There is no lack of typological parallels concerning the motif of licking the soot (or ashes) either. We find this topic, for example, in some Serbian and West-Bulgarian tales, where the princess becomes pregnant after tasting with the tip of her tongue the powder made from cremated skull (Mechanismy kultury 1990, p. 146). It should be mentioned that in Russian (and East-Slavonic) folktales the hag, *Baba-Jaga*, is often depicted with unnatural, hypertrophied features of femininity (enormous breasts)<sup>18</sup> lying on the oven and gathering the soot by her tongue (Smirnov 1917, p. 150).

Nevertheless the comparative analysis of various topics does not help to understand completely Snorri's point of departure in creating the image of *Auðhumla*; we can only establish the fact that his account is obviously related to a folklore background. The same appears to be true concerning the episode from *Eyrbyggjasaga*: this story is also clearly marked by the presence of the universal folklore motif.

Taking this into consideration it seems more plausible not to explain the similarity between the two stories by their mutual relations, supposing instead a common folklore source for both of them. Up to now the discussion of the origin of the cow *Auðhumla* has been restricted to the comparative mythological approach. The purpose of this article was to demonstrate the relevance of the local Scandinavian tradition to the study of Snorri's mentality.

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þat ættla, at þar mundi drekin at duellazt um hrid. Þeir voru hlíodlater ok leitudu sier hælis. En er su tid uar komin, at drekin uar uanur at skrida til uasz, ok er hann kom a gotuna, sa hann at sallt uar a gotummi fyrir honum, ok toc hann at sleikia; ok er hann kom þar, sem risafoturinn la, sualg hann hann þegar. "They approached land not far from the dragon and came ashore, walking till they reached the track it used when it crawled down to the water. The path was broad and Yngvar told his men to sprinkle salt all over it, then drag up the giant's leg for he thought that might make the dragon stay around for a while. After that they kept quiet and looked about for cover. Soon the time came for the dragon to crawl as usual to the water and as it came along the track it saw the salt and began licking it. When it got to the giant's leg it swallowed it down in one gulp." (Vikings in Russia 1989, p. 56.) (YS., pp. 21–22).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the mentioning of *Auðhumla*'s udder as a sign of fertility by Snorri: "...en iv. mjólkur runnu ór spennum hennar..." "...and four rivers of milk flowed from its teats..."

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