

# Scandinavian Belief in Fate

A COMPARISON BETWEEN PRE-CHRISTIAN AND  
POST-CHRISTIAN TIMES

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In point of principle, Christianity does not give room for any belief in fate.<sup>1</sup> Astrology, horoscopes, divination, etc., are strictly rejected.<sup>2</sup> The early Christians found in the Scriptures prohibitions against soothsayers (Lev. 19, 31). They read there ironic statements like this: "Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them" (Is. 47, 13 f.), and they added themselves words like these: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8, 28) or "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2, 13).<sup>3</sup>

Christianity entered a world, where people behaved like the Roman lady of about 100 A.D.:

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<sup>1</sup> "It is wrong to introduce features of fate into the Christian image of God" (G. Borgenstierna, *Människan och ödet*, Stockholm 1949, p. 13). Or: "It is obvious that fate in any form cannot be accepted from a Christian point of view, whatever it may be called. The free God and free man cannot stand any interference from a third party, least of all from any power of fate" (p. 100).

<sup>2</sup> See Otto Riedinger, *Die Heilige Schrift im Kampf der griechischen Kirche gegen die Astrologie*, Innsbruck 1956, and H. C. Freiesleben, *Trügen die Sterne? Werden und Wesen der Astrologie*, Stuttgart 1963, pp. 53-61.

<sup>3</sup> Hj. Sundén tries to coordinate belief in God and in fate: "Both of them seem to imply that the whole somehow controls the life of all the parts" (*Gud—ödet—slumpen*, Stockholm 1947, p. 221). He seems to reach this result by interpreting the parables of Jesus as describing "a fixed order, the inexorable consequences of unmerciful, irresponsible, and unforgiving behaviour" already in this life (p. 228). Cf. the same author, "Om ödestro och gudstro", *Sjuttiotredje psalmen*, Stockholm 1956, pp. 129-142.

If she wants to  
walk to the nearest milestone she asks the stargazer's booklet  
for a suitable time, and when her eyelids are itching  
casts at once horoscope and chooses her unguent thereafter.<sup>1</sup>

But the Christian emperor Constantius II forbade astrology about 350 A.D.,<sup>2</sup> and in Dante we find those who had tried to reveal fate placed in Hell with their faces on their backs. The prophet says:

Come 'l viso mi scese in lor più basso,  
mirabilmente apparve esser travolto  
ciascun tra 'l mento e 'l principio del casso;  
ché da le reni era tornato il volto,  
ed in dietro venir li convenia,  
perchè 'l veder dinanzi era lor tolto.<sup>3</sup>

In this procession backwards are marching prognosticators from Teiresias:

perchè volle veder troppo davante,  
di retro guarda e fa retroso calle,<sup>4</sup>

to Michael Scotus (d. 1250), the physician, astrologer, and wizard of emperor Friedrich II of Hohenstaufen.<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther called astrology a "subtle jugglery" and said about it: "*Astrologia non est ars, quia nulla habet principia et demonstrationes, sed omnia ex eventu et casibus iudicat.*"<sup>6</sup> His explanation of the First commandment: "Wir sollen Gott über alle Dinge fürchten, lieben und vertrauen", excludes the existence of any power of fate.<sup>7</sup>

Astrology and belief in fate, however, forced their way into Christendom, especially through the Arabs, who had translated the works of Ptolemy

<sup>1</sup> Juvenal, Satire VI, 576-79.

<sup>2</sup> See Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Zeit Konstantins des Grossen*, Neuaufgabe, Bern 1950, p. 158.

<sup>3</sup> Inferno, Canto XX, 10-15 (Dante Alighieri, *Tutte le opere*, a cura di F. Chiappelli. Edizione del centenario, Milano 1965, p. 68).

<sup>4</sup> Stanzas 38 f. (p. 69).

<sup>5</sup> Stanzas 115-117 ("che...de le magiche frode seppe il gioco", p. 71).

<sup>6</sup> *Luthers Werke*, WA, *Tischreden* III, Weimar 1914, Nr. 2834b.

<sup>7</sup> Concerning the problem of religion and belief in fate see esp. Joachim Konrad, *Schicksal und Gott*, Gütersloh 1947, esp. pp. 195-204. Note the remark: Fate "erhebt von sich aus keinerlei Ansprüche, kultisch verehrt und angebetet zu werden, in ihrer Weisheit gepriesen, in ihrer Nützlichkeit gelobt" (p. 197).

(85-160 A.D.),<sup>1</sup> the leading Greek astronomer and astrologer, interpreted and used, e.g., by the above-mentioned Michael Scotus.<sup>2</sup> The North-Italian prince Ezzelino da Romano (d. 1259) used several astrologers, amongst them the Sarazene Paul of Bagdad.<sup>3</sup> After that belief in fate never disappeared in Christian countries, nor did it in Scandinavia in Christian times. Especially in folklore we can find it at any period: "People believed in an implacable fate. All folklore is filled up with this belief in destiny. What is to happen will happen. Nobody can escape his fate. The future lies in the hands of fate, and the time to come takes its form according to inscrutable laws."<sup>4</sup>

The pre-Christian period in Scandinavia, dominated by pagan Norse religion, and the secularized epoch of the 20th century, however, show more distinctive and more widespread beliefs in fate than does the Christian period. The present paper will make a comparison between these forms of belief.

## I. PRE-CHRISTIAN BELIEF IN FATE

### A. *Modern research*

Recent study of the old Teutonic belief in fate does not start until 1920 and then, peculiarly enough, in the realm of Anglo-Saxon research. As a matter of fact the Swede Viktor Rydberg and the Dane Vilhelm Grønbech had discussed several points connected with the topic earlier,<sup>5</sup> but Rydberg's investigations were partly silenced, partly ignored,<sup>6</sup> and Grøn-

<sup>1</sup> Ἡ μεγάλη σύνταξις, better known as Arabic *Almagest*, and Τετραβίβλος, edited by Franz Boll and E. Boer, 1940. See about this Freiesleben, *op. cit.* pp. 46-50.

<sup>2</sup> Wilhelm Gundel, *Stern Glaube, Sternreligion und Sternorakel*, Aus der Geschichte der Astrologie, Heidelberg 1959, p. 51, and Paul Bauer, *Horoskop und Talisman*. Die Mächte des heutigen Aberglaubens, Stuttgart 1963, p. 209.

<sup>3</sup> For the astrology and belief in fate in the Renaissance see Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, Atlas-Verlag, Köln, no date, pp. 367-77, and Freiesleben, *op. cit.* pp. 71-86.

<sup>4</sup> C. H. Tillhagen, *Folklig spådomskonst* Stockholm 1961, p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> V. Rydberg, *Undersökningar i Germanisk mytologi*, 1-2, 1886, 1889, *passim* (see topical index), V. Grønbech, *Vor Folkeæt i Oldtiden*, 1-4, 1909-12.

<sup>6</sup> For this, see Å. V. Ström, "Das indogermanische Erbe in der Völuspá", *Numen* 1966 (in the press).

bech's books were not translated into English and German until the thirties.<sup>1</sup> The modern literature concerning the subject in question was in fact inaugurated by a Breslau dissertation by Alfred Wolf on the words for fate in Anglo-Saxon poetry, and the treatise by Richard Jente on mythological expressions in Old English.<sup>2</sup> There attention is already drawn to three important groups of words: *wyrd*, *zescēap*—*zescēaft*, and *orlæg*, which appear in the Old Icelandic *urð*, *skop*, and *orlog*, all of them with the meaning of fate.<sup>3</sup>

In 1926 Fr. Kauffmann carried out a corresponding investigation in the East Teutonic area, which tried to show, that the expressions *giscapu*, *giscrafti*, and *urlag* were taken from the language of law, the first two meaning 'judicial decision', the third 'primal law' (Urgesetz).<sup>4</sup>

During the 1930's there appeared—with or without connection with the special belief in fate of the Hitler period<sup>5</sup>—on the average one work a year on this subject, all of them, except two, in German: M. von Kienle in 1933, A. G. von Hamel (in English), W. Baetke, and H. Naumann in 1934, M. Ninck in 1935, G. Gunnarsson in 1936, H. Schneider, H. de Boor, and E. Therman (in Swedish) in 1938, and W. Gehl in 1939.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. Grönbech, *The culture of the Teutons*, 1-3, Copenhagen 1931, *Kultur und Religion der Germanen*, I-II, Hamburg 1937-39. V. Rydberg, *Teutonic mythology*, London 1889, does not seem to have become well known.

<sup>2</sup> A. Wolf, *Die Bezeichnungen für Schicksal in der angelsächsischen Dichtersprache*, Breslau 1919, R. Jente, *Die mythologischen Ausdrücke im altenglischen Wortschatz* (= Anglistische Forschungen, 56), Heidelberg 1921. Cf. already W. Jaehde, *Religion, Schicksalsglaube... und Rätsel in den englisch-schottischen Volksbaladen*, Halle 1905, and Alois Brandl, "Zur Vorgeschichte der Weird Sisters im 'Macbeth'," *Texte und Forschungen zur englischen Kulturgeschichte, Festgabe für F. Liebermann*, Halle 1921, pp. 252-270.

<sup>3</sup> See especially Wolf, *op. cit.* pp. 48, 59 f., 88, 127, and Brandl, *op. cit.* pp. 252-55.

<sup>4</sup> F. Kauffmann, "Über den Schicksalsglauben der Germanen", *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 50, 1926, pp. 361-408. Objection by W. Gehl, *Der germanische Schicksalsglaube*, Berlin 1939, who instead proposes the translation 'highest decision' (Höchste Bestimmung), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> For this question see Hj. Sundén, *Gud, ödet, slumpen*, pp. 36-44, and P. Bauer, *Horoskop und Talisman*, Stuttgart 1963, pp. 241-243.

<sup>6</sup> M. von Kienle, "Der Schicksalsbegriff im Altdeutschen", *Wörter und Sachen* 15, 1933, p. 81 ff., A. G. van Hamel, *The conception of fate in early Teutonic and Celtic religion* (= *Saga book of the Viking Society* 9), 1934, H. Naumann, *Germanischer Schicksalsglaube*, Jena 1934, G. Gunnarsson, *Nordischer Schicksalsgedanke*, München 1936, H. Schneider, "Glauben", and H. de Boor, "Dichtung", both in *Germanische*

After that time there is, as far as I know, a complete silence until 1955<sup>1</sup>, when there were two treatises in German by Mittner and Neumann.<sup>2</sup> Finally, we have to note a paper by Strömbäck in 1959.<sup>3</sup> Let us examine some of the contents of this literature about the pre-Christian Norse belief in fate.

Walter Baetke deals especially with the following two problems: fate—ethics and belief in fate—faith in gods.<sup>4</sup> He emphasizes the fact, that there is an inner connection between fate and the moral behaviour of the hero, which gives the poetry its tragic standard.<sup>5</sup> The hero has to act entirely in accordance with the decision of his fate, he has to stand in conformity with the determined model, and “that is why just the factor *we* are thinking of in moral decision is missing, namely the choice”.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary: it is fate that is to blame! Expressions like that of the Lay of the Hun-battle 29, “the Norn created bad luck” (*illr er dómr nórna*), or the famous passage in the Lay of Hildebrand, “misfortune is happening” (*wéwurt skihit*)<sup>7</sup> show that “fate is not accepted in a fatalistic way, but accused!”<sup>8</sup>

Further, Baetke opposes the traditional interpretation, that fate is superior to the gods. They are *regin*, ‘the ruling ones’,<sup>9</sup> *hopt*, ‘fetters’, or *Altertumskunde*, ed. by H. Schneider, München 1938 (new ed. 1951, pp. 222–305, 306–430), E. Therman, *Eddan och dess ödestragik*, Stockholm 1938. For Baetke, Ninck, and Gehl see p. 67 n. 4, p. 68 n. 4 and p. 69 n. 1.

<sup>1</sup> An exception is the small paper by B. J. Timmer, “Wyrd in Anglo-Saxon prose and poetry”, *Neophilologus* 26, 1944, pp. 24–33 and 213–228.

<sup>2</sup> L. Mittner, *Wurd* (*Bibliotheca Germanica* 6), Bern 1955, Ed. Neumann, *Das Schicksal in der Edda*, I (*Beiträge zur deutschen Philologie* 7), Giessen 1955.

<sup>3</sup> D. Strömbäck, “Till Ynglingatal 10 och nordisk ödestro”, *Septentrionalia et Orientalia studia Bernharðo Karlgren ... dedicata*, Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademiens Handlingar, 91, Stockholm 1959, pp. 386–92.

<sup>4</sup> W. Baetke, *Art und Glaube der Germanen*, Hamburg 1934.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> Baetke, *op. cit.* p. 68.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Hamdismál* 28 and 30.

<sup>8</sup> Baetke, *op. cit.* pp. 68 f.

<sup>9</sup> This word already appears on a stone from the 8th century at Noleby: **rūnō fāhi raginaku[n]dō**, ‘I painted god-inspired runes’ (*Sveriges Runinskrifter*, Bd. 5, “*Västergötlands runinskrifter*”, Hft 3, Uppsala 1958, pp. 92–100: Nr. 63, Fyrunga sn, Noleby). Cf. *Hdv.* 80:

*er þú at rúnum spyrr  
hinum reginkunnum*

and comments on this by Wolfgang Krause, *Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark*, Halle 1937, p. 519.

*bönd*, 'bonds'. To this group Baetke also counts "das sehr merkwürdige *mjotuðr*", a masculine word used only in the neuter sense of 'fate'.<sup>1</sup> The result is that, according to Norse opinion, "fatalism and theism coincide"<sup>2</sup>. If one of them is later in origin, it is belief in fate, which represents "paganism deprived of its real religious content and grown bloodless and cold". Óðinn as a god of fate is in any case a late poetical conception.<sup>3</sup>

Similar problems are discussed in greater detail by Martin Ninck in his large book on Óðinn and belief in fate.<sup>4</sup> In his interpretation of the notion *örlog* (cf. Swedish *örlog*, 'war'), adapted for the Hitler period, he declares, that "Krieg... ist *urlag* und damit zugleich 'Urgesetz' und 'Schicksal'"<sup>5</sup>.

Ninck's book deals more with Óðinn than with fate. The latter, he maintains, is always experienced as suffering, and he speaks of "den pathischen Zug im heldischen Erleben".<sup>6</sup> Óðinn, too, has this 'pathic' trait. "Ganz im Sinne germanischer Heldenethik, die die Ehre nur sucht, indem sie dem Spruche der Nornen gläubig sich beugt, lag die Verpflichtung auf ihm, den Lauf des Schicksals zu erfahren und nach ihm zu handeln."<sup>7</sup>

To the same period belong the books of the Bonn scholar Hans Naumann and the Finlander Erik Therman, both with particular stress on the guilt of fate. The individual as well as the whole world are guilty, owing to Destiny's determination: "Man's fulfilling his inescapable duty towards life and towards fate produces a burden of guilt, and precisely the performance of his duty constitutes the guilt that causes his destruction."<sup>8</sup> The same is true of the universe: "Upon life lies guilt from the very beginning. Such a stern religion breeds with absolute necessity the idea of the guilt of the world and 'consequently the belief in its destruction' in the hardening conflict of powers."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Baetke, *op. cit.* pp. 70 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 78.

<sup>4</sup> M. Ninck, *Wodan und germanischer Schicksalsglaube*, Jena 1935.

<sup>5</sup> Ninck, *op. cit.* p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> *Ib.* p. 198 with note 2. Similarly de Boor in: Schneider (ed.), *Germanischer Altertumskunde*, München 1938, 2. ed. 1951, p. 402. Opposition by Neuman, *op. cit.* p. 39, note 63.

<sup>7</sup> Ninck, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

<sup>8</sup> Therman, *Eddan och dess ödestragik*, p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> Therman, *op. cit.* p. 56.

The most comprehensive work on fate in the North is Walther Gehl, *Der germanische Schicksalsglaube*, Berlin 1939. In an earlier book Gehl described honour as a "Hineinwachsen ins Überpersönliche".<sup>1</sup> Now he follows the same "impersonal" line with regard to fate, in calling it "eine ungreifbare, unpersönliche Macht, die als Mass und Ordnung hinter den Dingen der Sinnenwelt steht".<sup>2</sup> Though he treats "impersonal fate", "personified fate", and "personal fate" in different chapters,<sup>3</sup> and though he maintains that "the Teutonic belief in fate was a perpetual struggle against the fatalistic and impersonal idea of fate,"<sup>4</sup> he repeats the old opinion—against Baetke—that the Teutonic gods are subject to fate,<sup>5</sup> and makes the following statement: "Schicksalsglaube ist eher 'Weltanschauung' als 'Religion'—ja er steht zu Religion im engeren Sinne überall in mehr oder weniger deutlicher Spannung."<sup>6</sup> Has, then, the Norse man no free will? The problem is discussed by Gehl at some length.<sup>7</sup> He states that the sources for the most part deal with fate as a power, over against which any resistance is meaningless, for instance: *vinnat skjoldungar skopum*, 'princes cannot resist fate' (*Helg. Hund.* II, 29).<sup>8</sup> The examples of free will are rare and late,<sup>9</sup> and in these cases it may be said: "Aus dem Willensentschluss redet das Schicksal."<sup>10</sup>

The latest monograph on the Norse problem of fate is the first part of a work by Eduard Neumann, more philosophical than strictly historical.<sup>11</sup> He divides the notions of fate into two groups: 1. the conception of "Schick-

<sup>1</sup> W. Gehl, *Ruhm und Ehre bei den Nordgermanen*, Leipzig-Berlin 1937, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Gehl, *Schicksalsglaube*, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> "Das unpersönliche Schicksal und der magische Schicksalsbegriff" (pp. 39-58), "Das personifizierte Schicksal" (p. 80-120), and "Das 'persönliche' Schicksal" (pp. 199-223).

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 80. Cf. R. L. Derolez: Fate and gods are quite different things. "Vieles von dem, was ... als 'Schicksal' gilt, ist auf das Fehlen einer festgefügteten, über der Menschenwelt thronenden Göttergemeinschaft zurückzuführen" (*Götter und Mythen der Germanen*, Einsiedeln 1963, p. 215).

<sup>7</sup> Chapter VII: "Das Problem der Willensfreiheit", pp. 182-198.

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 183.

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 185.

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 205.

<sup>11</sup> Ed. Neumann, *Das Schicksal in der Edda*, I. "Der Schicksalsbegriff in der Edda" (*Beiträge zur deutschen Philologie* 7), Giessen 1955.

sals-Notwendigkeit”, with the terms *urð—verða*, *bønd* and *høpt*, and the sentence: what happens, has to happen, “Was wird, muss werden”.<sup>1</sup> Fate is what comes to pass. 2. the conception of a “Schicksals-Macht” expressed in the words *skuld—skulu*, *skop—skapa*, *leggja*, *meta* (Sigrdr. 20), and implying that a kind of superwill wants it to be in this way.<sup>2</sup> Fate is a ruling power. According to Neumann the first type belongs to a primitive people and corresponds to the gods called *vanir*, while the second type is connected with a more civilized and politically organized people and matches the *æsir*-gods.<sup>3</sup> The second form is increasingly penetrating the Norse mind, thus giving fate in the Eddic poetry its “asic” stamp.<sup>4</sup>

More recently there have been only small articles and parts of books dealing with the conception of destiny, except for one larger treatise by *Ladislaus Mittner*.<sup>5</sup> Starting from the ‘kennings’ of Norse poetic style, in which he finds a consistent pessimism,<sup>6</sup> the author proceeds to a philological analysis of the words for fate, esp. *Wurd*, from the Indoeuropean root \**uert*, Latin *vertere*, denoting a circular movement. Without mentioning the Indian *samsāra* he states, that the Teutonic conception of fate is pessimistic, most clearly expressed in *wēwurt skihit*.<sup>7</sup>

In a paper on Ynglingatal 10 and the Norse belief in fate,<sup>8</sup> Dag Strömbäck gives a careful exegesis of the stanza in question, resulting in a new translation.<sup>9</sup> He explains, that “according to Norse belief in fate each man had

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> “Der Über-Wille will, dass es so sein soll’ (*op. cit.* p. 52). On the Anglo-Saxon word *metod* see Brandl, *op. cit.* p. 254 and some reflections by Sundén, *Gud — ödet — slumpen*, pp. 55 f., 61 f.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.* pp. 54, 56 f. Cf. already Grønbech: “In the old country destiny was bound up with the luck of the clan... In the life of the viking fate asserted itself as a deity with a will of its own” (*The culture of the Teutons II*, 1931, pp. 305 f.).

<sup>4</sup> Neumann, p. 197.

<sup>5</sup> L. Mittner, *Wurd* (*Bibliotheca Germanica* 6), Bern 1955.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.* pp. 96, 104.

<sup>8</sup> D. Strömbäck, “Till Ynglingatal 10 och nordisk ödestro”, *Septentrionalia et Orientalia Studia Bernharðo Karlgren... dedicata* (see note 23). Stockholm 1959, p. 386–92.

<sup>9</sup> “I call it a miracle, / if Skjalf’s deed / seemed to Agne’s army / to be according to fate”, i.e. “Skjalf’s deed [of hanging her husband] is certainly not according to fate” (*op. cit.* p. 392).



a certain space of life, a certain measured time to live. It seems as if sometimes not only the length of life but also the place of death were determined in advance."<sup>1</sup>

### B. *Some important passages in the texts*

It is, of course, quite impossible in this paper to give a comprehensive picture of the Norse belief in destiny, or even to deal with a limited but sufficient number of texts. Our task is to make a comparison between old and modern conceptions in this area of religion or superstition. A few representative passages may be singled out in order to indicate the background of the parallels to be drawn. I marshal them in four groups according to their meaning.

#### 1. *What is to happen happens*

We find this sentence already in Beowulf:

*zæð ā wyrd swā hlo scel.*

Wyrd goes always as she must.

(Beow. 455)<sup>2</sup>

We find also both *metod* and *wyrd*:

*swā unc wyrd zeteoð,  
metod manna zehwæs.*

as fate us ordains,  
which creates man's destiny.

(Beow. 2526 f.)<sup>3</sup>

These two expressions and *zescēap* have their correspondence in Heliand:

*wurdegiscapu,  
metod gimarcod endi maht godes.*

So was his fate  
measured by the creator and God's power.

(Heliand 127 f.)<sup>4</sup>

In scaldic literature we find the sentence used by Kormákr: "fighters do not conquer destiny" (*skopum vinnat*),<sup>5</sup> and: "Angry destinies reign with their

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 391.

<sup>2</sup> Wolf, *op. cit.* pp. 34-37. Cf. Beowulf 1233: *wyrd = geosceaft*, 'creation', 'destiny', and 3030: *wyrda ne worda* 'fates and events', for which see Brandl, "Zur Vorgesichte der Weird Sisters", p. 253. Mittner, *op. cit.* p. 99, translates the last passage: "geweissagtes Missgeschick".

<sup>3</sup> Wolf, *op. cit.* p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Text and commentary in H. Ljungberg, *Tor*, Uppsala 1947, pp. 84-86.

<sup>5</sup> St. 30. Text in Kock, *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*, I, 1946, p. 46. Gehl accepts the unnecessary conjecture of F. Jónsson: *mдат* instead of *þviat* (p. 183).

own will" (*valda sköp sínu* | ... *reið at ráði*).<sup>1</sup> Nearly the same expression is found in the Edda: in *Helg. Hund.* II, 29, *Gríp.* 53, *Oddr.* 16, line 8: "if fate did not destroy" (*nema mjötuðr spilti*), *Fjölsv.* 47, and especially the following:

*Sköpum viðr manngi,  
ok skuluð þó hér kommír!*

Nobody resists fate.

You should at all events come here!<sup>2</sup>

(*Atlam.* 48)

It is explicitly said that fate dominates over chance:

*Ræðr auðna<sup>3</sup> lífi en ægi hvar maðr er  
kominn.*

Fate rules life, and not [the position]  
where one is [= chance].

(*Orkn. saga* 11)<sup>4</sup>

*Góðs höfum tírar fengit  
þótt skylím nú eða ígær deyja —  
kveld lífir maðr ekki  
eptir kvið norna.<sup>5</sup>*

We gained good honour,  
even if we should die now or to-morrow,  
a man does not live to the evening  
after the norns have spoken.

(*Hamð.* 30)

This type often occurs in the sagas, e.g. in the story of *Njál*:

Ch. 6: *þat verðr hværr at vinna, sem ætlat er.*

Everyone shall do the work that is set before him.

Ch. 13: *Ekki mun mega við gera; þat mun verða fram at koma, sem ætlat er.*

I am not able to prevent it; that will come about, which is set before us.

Ch. 128: *Ef annars verðr auðit, þá mun þat verða fram at koma, ok mun ekki mega við gera.*

If something else be ordained by fate, it will come about, and I am not able to prevent it.

Ch. 149: *Allt mun þat fram ganga um aldr manna, sem ætlat er.<sup>6</sup>*

Everything must come to pass with man's life-time, which is set before us.

<sup>1</sup> St. 40. Text in Kock, *op. cit.* p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> See Neuman, *op. cit.* pp. 43, 46, and Gehl, *op. cit.* p. 183.

<sup>3</sup> The word *auðna* in 21 cases means 'fate', in 12 'luck' (Gehl, *op. cit.* p. 69).

<sup>4</sup> *Orkneyinga saga*, ed. S. Nordal (SUGNL 40), København 1913-16, p. 20. A. B. Taylor translates: "not his own comings and goings" (*Orkneyinga saga*. A new translation, Edinburgh 1938, p. 148.)

<sup>5</sup> The text of the manuscript (Cod. Reg.) is metrically too long, and F. Jónsson proposes to shorten it (*De gamle Eddadigte*, København 1932, pp. 342 and 359). The meaning will be the same.

<sup>6</sup> *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. E. Ól. Sveinsson, Reykjavík 1954, pp. 20, 42, 327, and 427.

## 2. Each man has his own fate

There is at least one passage in Beowulf:

Wyrð oft nered unfæzne eorl,                      Wyrð often saves un doomed man,  
(Beow. 573)<sup>1</sup>

that is to say, a man who from the beginning is made to have success. *Vǫluspá* describes to us, how this personal destiny is given to men. The creator gods, *Óðinn* and *Hœnir*, found the first men, *Askr* and *Embla*, *ørlogslausa*, 'without a destiny' (st. 17). But the three Norns (whose names, *Urðr*, *Verðandi*, and *Skuld*, are all connected with fate,) came, and

þær lög lögðu,                                      they created law,  
þær líf kuru                                        they chose life[-models]  
alda þǫrnum                                        and told destinies  
ørlog seggja.<sup>2</sup>                                      to the children of men.  
(*Vsp.* 20)

The result appears in another Eddic lay:

Oll eru mein of metin.                              All harm is measured.  
(*Sgdr.* 20)

Destiny is thought of as so personal, that one person can be the fate of another:

Urðr ǫðlinga                                        The fate or princes  
hefir þú æ verit,                                    have you always been,  
rekr þik alda hver[r]                              each wave of a bad destiny  
illrar skepnu.                                        is driving you.  
(*Guðr.-kv.* I, 24)

The fate, 'luck', of one person can compete with that of another, as is especially shown by a story in the *Flateyjarbók*. A merchant called *Hrói* was an *úgiptumaðr*, 'unlucky man', and was unsuccessful in business. The Danish king *Sveinn Fork-beard* entered into partnership with him, and the following conversation developed:

<sup>1</sup> Wolf, *op. cit.* p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Snorra Edda* 14, where *Allfǫðr* creates rulers at *doema... ørlog manna*, and 15, where the Norns have the duty to *koma til hvers manns er borinn er, at skapa aldr* and to *ráða ørlogum manna*. They create these destinies *geysi-újafnt*, 'specially for each person'. The scald *Hallfrøðr* speaks of *forhaldin sköp norna*, 'the time-honoured doom of the Norns' (*Visur*, st. 10, Kock, *op. cit.* p. 86).

*Hrói: Vænti ek, at þá megí meira  
gipta yður ok hamingja en úgæfa mín.*

Hrói: I expect that your good luck  
and fortune will be stronger than my  
ill-luck.

*Konungur: þar skal á hætta, hvárt  
meira megí, konunglig gípt eða úgæfa  
hans.*

The king: There shall be ventured  
upon whether [my] royal luck or his  
ill-luck is the stronger.

(*Styrbj. þátrr Sviakappa*, in *Ólafs saga helga*, ch. 62)<sup>1</sup>

### 3. *One had better not know his fate, except through divination*

The main passage is the following:

*Orlog sín  
viti engi fyrir:  
þeim er sorgalausast sefi.*

His fate ahead  
one ought not to know:  
for him sleep is most carefree.

(*Háv.* 56: 4–6)<sup>2</sup>

Such a carefree situation, through lacking knowledge of one's destiny, is pictured in the following scene in *Beowulf*:

...there was a choice banquet,  
and the men drank wine. They knew not Weird,  
the Fate that was grim, as it had befallen  
many an earl...

...one of the beer-servants,  
eager and fated (*fús ond fæge*), went to his bed.

(*Beow.* 1232–35, 1240 f.)<sup>3</sup>

There are, however, two ways of finding out one's coming destiny without any risk: the special Norse divination, called *seiðr*, and the sacrifice, with the name of *blót*. A famous female soothsayer had used a woman, named *Guðriðr*, as her assistant at the *seið*, and she thanked *Guðrið* warmly, adding:

*þín forlog eru mér nu öll glöggsæ.*

Now I see your future destinies quite  
clearly.

(*Eriks saga rauða*, ch. 3)<sup>4</sup>

There seems to be no danger in this sort of looking into the future, and *Guðriðr* is as successful as the *seiðr* promised.

<sup>1</sup> *Flateyjarbók*, ed. S. Nordal, *Annað bindi*, Akraness 1945, p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> For this see Gehl, *op. cit.* p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> Translation by Ernest J. B. Kirtlan, *The Story of Beowulf*, London [1914]. On the quoted passage see Mittner, *op. cit.* p. 102.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from Dag Strömbäck, *Sejd*, Lund 1935, pp. 51 and 54.

The other method is the *blót*.<sup>1</sup> It is told about the first settler on Iceland:

*þenna vetr fekk Ingólfr at blóti miklu,*      This winter Ingolf made a big sac-  
*ok leitaði sér heilla<sup>2</sup> um forlög sín.*      rifice and sought augury for his fate.  
(*Landnámabók, Sturlubók, ch. 7*)

About another settler there is the following comment:

*þorsteinn Rauðnefr... blótaði forsinn...*      Thorstein Rednib sacrificed to the  
*hann var ok framsýnn mjök.*      waterfall... he was also very fore-seeing.  
(*Landn. Sturl. ch. 355*)

A special sacrificial instrument, the *hlautteinn*, which had some connection with the old Indoeuropean bundles *barsman*, *barhis*, *strena*, and εἰρεσιώνη, has also served as a divining rod.<sup>3</sup> The expression *fella blótspánn*, 'cast divining rods', shows the method, by which the Norsemen investigated their destinies at *blót*-time. We find it in a least one Scaldic poem:

|                                            |                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Flótta gekk til fréttar</i>             | The felling Niord [= the victor]                          |
| <i>fellí-Njörðr á velli.</i>               | went to ordeal in the field.                              |
| <i>Draugr gat dolga Sögu</i>               | The spirit of Saga's enemies [= the warrior]              |
| <i>dagrðð Hedins váða...</i>               | received augury of Hedin's peril [= success in battle]... |
| <i>Týr vildi sá týna</i>                   | The Tyr of the <i>hlauttein</i> [= the sacrificer]        |
| <i>teinhlautar fjör Gauta.<sup>4</sup></i> | was to destroy the lives of the Gauts.                    |

### C. Some philological remarks

The Norse word *mjotuðr*, Anglo-Saxon *meotod*, is mostly translated 'that which is measured', 'that which is allotted'.<sup>5</sup> Professor Dumézil, however,

<sup>1</sup> See Åke V. Ström, "The king-god and his connection with sacrifice in old Norse religion", *La regalità sacra, Suppl. to Numen* IV, Leiden 1959, esp. pp. 713-15.

<sup>2</sup> About the neutral *heill*, meaning 'omen', 'augury', see Baetke, *Das Heilige im Germanischen*, Tübingen 1942, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> See Ström, *op. cit.* pp. 705-07, and the same author, "Die Hauptriten des wikingerzeitlichen Nordischen Opfers", *Festschr. Baetke*, Leipzig 1966, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> *Einars Skálaglams Vellekla*, st. 30, Kock, *op. cit.* p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> So F. Jónsson, *Lexicum Poeticum*, København 1913-16, p. 408, F. Ström, *Nordisk hedendom*, Göteborg 1961, p. 141. Cf. Grønbech, *The culture*, p. 326: *Mjotuðr* is a ritual expression for luck... bound up with the sacrifice", and Sundén, *op. cit.* p. 55.

in an article on a rather different subject,<sup>1</sup> writes the following note apropos the Latin word *modus*, Oscian *med-diss*: "Cf. les valeurs de la racine en irlandais (*midiur*, 'je juge', *com-midethar*, 'il gouverne'); en vieux-scandinave (*mjǫtuðr*, 'juge, chef'), en grec (μέδων, Λαο-μέδων)."<sup>2</sup> Consequently, we ought to take the male gender of *mjǫtuðr* seriously and translate: 'the measurer', i.e. 'the dispenser of fate'; thus there is nothing 'merkwürdig' about the word at all.<sup>3</sup>

A similar figure is *Narfi* (*Nǫrfi*, *Nǫrr*),<sup>4</sup> the father of Night (*nótt*). Rydberg derives the name from *njǫrva*, 'to bind with narrow bonds', and translates 'he who binds narrowly'; he proceeds to show that *Narfi* is the same as *Mímr* (*Mímir*) in *Vsp.* 28 and 46, *Sigrdr.* 14.<sup>5</sup> Detter has pointed out that *Mímr* is not to be derived from Latin *memor*, Greek *μυμνήσκειν*, but ought to be connected with Anglo-Saxon *māmrian*, 'to brood', Dutch *mijmeren*, 'to dream', and Norwegian *meima*, 'to measure', from the old root \**mer*.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, we can combine *Mímr* with *meotod-mjǫtuðr*. The word *mímameiðr* (*Fjolsv.* 20) is not 'Mímir's tree', which would suppose a third form of the name, *Mími*, but 'the tree of measurement'.<sup>7</sup>

Gehl, with some hesitation, accepts Detter's identification of *Mímr* with *mjǫtuðr* and with *Mitothyne* in Saxo,<sup>8</sup> the last name being a latinized form of the same word as *mjǫtuðr*.<sup>9</sup> If *Mímr* is also the god of fate or a god of fate,

<sup>1</sup> G. Dumézil, "Ordre, phantasie, changement dans les pensées archaïques de l'Inde et de Rome", *Revue des études latines* 32, 1954 (Paris 1955), p. 139-162.

<sup>2</sup> Dumézil, *op. cit.* p. 151, note 4.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the quotation from Baetke, above p. 68.—The new translation in Geir T. Zoëga, *A concise dictionary of Old Icelandic*, Oxford 1952, s.v., Åke V. Ström, in: Ringgren-Ström, *Religionerna i historia och nutid*, 3rd ed., Stockholm 1964, p. 379, and, before Dumézil, in Ljungberg, *op. cit.* p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> *Snorra Edda Gylf.* 10, *Vafþr.* 25.

<sup>5</sup> Rydberg, *op. cit.* 1, pp. 459-63.

<sup>6</sup> Ferd. Detter, "Zur Ynglingasaga", *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* XVIII, 1894, pp. 72-105.—The Norse word *meta*, too, has in various Indo-European languages the meaning of 'measure' as well as of 'meditate' (de Vries, *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Leiden 1956, p. 385).

<sup>7</sup> Detter, *op. cit.* p. 75, note 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Saxonic Gesta Danorum*, ed. J. Olrik-H. Raeder, Hauniae 1931, I: 7: 2 (p. 25).

<sup>9</sup> "Mimir könnte eine Nebenform für die vermutlich alte Schicksalsgöttheit *Metod* sein, eine Annahme, die durch Saxos Bericht über Mitothyne wesentlich gestützt wird" (Gehl, *Der germanische Schicksalsglaube* p. 113, n. 253, cf. p. 22, n. 17). For Mitothyne = *mjǫtuðr* see ib. p. 106.—Dumézil, in connection with his conception of the Mitothyne episode in Saxo as a duplicate of the story of the fight be-

we need not affirm the existence of two wells under the root of Yggdrasill, the well of *Urðr* (*Urðarbrunnr*, *Vsp.* 19, *Háv.* 111) being then the same as the well of *Mímir* (*Mímisbrunnr*, *Vsp.* 28).<sup>1</sup>

The combination of *Mímir* and *mjǫtuðr* is supported by the following passages, in one of which *Yggdrasill* (in *Vsp.* 2 called *mjǫtviðr!*) is connected with *mjǫtuðr* (and *Mímir!*),<sup>2</sup> and in the other *Mímameiðr* is also combined with *mjǫtuðr*:

*Leika Míms synir,*  
*en mjǫtuðr kyndis...*  
*mælir Óðinn*  
*við Míms höfuð;*  
*skelfr Yggdrasils*  
*askr standandi.*

The sons of Mímr play,  
and fate is kindled...  
Óðinn talks  
to Mímr's head;  
the ask Yggdrasill  
trembles, as it stands.

(*Vsp.* 46 f.).

*Mímameiðr hann heitir,*  
*en þat manngi veit*  
*af hverjum rótum renn...*  
*sá er hann með mönnum mjǫtuðr.*

His name is Mímameiðr,  
and nobody knows  
from what root it rises...  
he is such a dispenser of fate for men.

(*Fjolsv.* 20, 22).

Leaving the Norse conception of fate we only want to add that the old Scandinavians did not make any strong distinction between theism and fatalism, nor between the personal and the impersonal in the concept of fate.<sup>3</sup> Norse culture, being impersonalistic in its nature, lacked our clear-cut notion of personality,<sup>4</sup> and consequently no sharp distinction, like

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tween the *æsir* and the *vanir* (Le saga de Hadingus, Paris 1953, pp. 100-113), offers a rather different interpretation: Mithothyn = Mithothyn (the first edition of Saxo, Paris 1514, and the second, Basel 1534, by Dumézil called "l'édition princeps", have: Mithotyn) = *mjǫð-Óðinn*, 'the Óðinn of mead' or 'the mead of Óðinn' (ib. p. 111, n. 3).

<sup>1</sup> "Es berührt eigenartig, dass unter dem Weltbaum zwei Brunnen liegen sollen, in deren einem die Nornen wohnen, während der andere die Gabe der Wahrsagung verleiht. Man möchte annehmen, dass es sich hier ursprünglich um einen Brunnen gehandelt hat" (Gehl, *op. cit.* p. 113).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Yggdrasill* in connection with *urðr* and *ørlog* in *Vsp.* 19 f.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the oscillation between personal and impersonal in the case of *ἄτη, τύχη*, etc. See above C. M. Edsman, pp. 24 f.

<sup>4</sup> For this see Åke V. Ström, *Vetekornet*, Studier över individ och kollektiv, Uppsala 1944, pp. 37-45 (English summary p. 432).

our's, was made between personal powers and impersonal fate.<sup>1</sup> So *mjótuðr* is sometimes a person (*Oddr.-gr.* 16, *Sig.sk.* 71), sometimes a tree (*Fjolsv.* 22), a sword (*Snorra Edda Skaldsk.* 1: 8) or an impersonal power (*Vsp.* 46). In a similar way the old word *urðr*, fem. or (seldom) masc., oscillates between person (Weird sister) and power,<sup>2</sup> but it can also be used of a real, living person: *Urðr ǫðlinga hefir þú æ verit* (above p. 73).

## II. POST-CHRISTIAN BELIEF IN FATE

### A. *The situation.*

In comparison with the folkloristic concept of fate in Christian times the secularized man of the 20th century shows more and richer forms of fatalistic belief. Oswald Spengler represents in his doctrine of culture, as set forth in his work *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1919), an entirely pagan idea of destiny.<sup>3</sup> Theophil Spoerri gives the following description of the new way of thinking in our century: "Die Vorsehung wird zum Schicksal, die klare Offenbarung zum zweideutigen Orakel, das gläubige Gebet zur magischen Beschwörung."<sup>4</sup> *Kismet*,<sup>5</sup> an international vogue-word, served in the thirties as an expression for the belief in fate.<sup>6</sup> Trends in modern psychology have appeared to give scientific sanction to certain ideas of fate: "What we call fate is the totality of those psychological mechanisms, against which we feel ourselves powerless."<sup>7</sup> In popular thought, inheri-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. H. Schneider: "Was ist aber 'Schicksal' anderes als der Begriff eines formlosen 'Mächtigen', das sich unseren Berechnungen und Einflüssen entzieht; sei es ein noch oder ein wieder Formloses? Im einen Fall ist das Göttliche noch nicht menschlich gefasst, im anderen hat es enttäuscht, wird deshalb aus der Menschengestalt wieder entlassen und kehrt zur alten Rätselhaftigkeit zurück" ("Glauben", *Germanische Altertumskunde*, p. 257).

<sup>2</sup> See Mittner, *Wurd*, p. 87 f. with note 173.

<sup>3</sup> See Theophil Spoerri, *Die Götter des Abendlandes*, 3rd ed. 1932, p. 132.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> The Turkish form of Arabic *qismah*, "the share or portion, attributed by God to man" (H. Ringgren, *Studies in Arabian fatalism* (= *Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift* 1955: 2), pp. 106 and 156. Cf. Konrad, *op. cit.* p. 198.

<sup>6</sup> Spoerri, *op. cit.* p. 39 f.

<sup>7</sup> Poul Bjerre, *Korset och livsbägaren*, Den efterkristna människans tro och krav, Stockholm 1927, p. 100. For a commentary see Åke V. Ström, *Vetekornet*, pp. 71-76. The quoted passage, as well as the subtitle, disappeared in the 2nd edition of Bjerre's book, Stockholm 1940.



tance and environment determine the destiny of man,<sup>1</sup> and nearly all the leading psychologists have a behaviouristic background (Tolman, Hull, Skinner, Murray, Cattell, Lewin etc.; exception: Allport).<sup>2</sup> In a recent pamphlet the present situation is described thus: "Man läßt die Arme schlaff am Leibe herunterfallen und beugt sich schweren Herzens, aber stumm wie ein Tier, unter das Joch, das dieses grauenvolle Schicksal durch Vererbung und Umwelt, durch Charakterveranlagung und Lebensmitgift einem aufgebürdet hat."<sup>3</sup> Astrology is as much in vogue as in the Renaissance.<sup>4</sup>

The revival of the fatalism is intimately bound up with modern superstition and its consequences.<sup>5</sup> Our world is shrinking, distances have grown shorter, and foreign cultures have come nearer. Accordingly, purely pagan belief in stars and fate is able to infect Europe, now as during the Renaissance. The great solar eclipse on the 5th of February 1962, caused by the conjunction of the sun, the moon and the earth, Jupiter, Saturn, Venus, Mars, and Mercury in the constellation of Capricorn,<sup>6</sup> created alarm in nearly the whole world. The Prime minister of Burma U Nu sacrificed personally during a whole week, Indian astrologists predicted the destruction of the world,<sup>7</sup> and Lorcher Astrologischer Kalender in Germany announced, that "diese totale Verfinsternung ganz gewaltige Katastrophen, Umwälzungen, Kriege oder aber auch Veränderungen der Erdoberfläche verursachen wird".<sup>8</sup>

A woman expert, Evangeline Adams, holds the opinion, that nations, too, have their horoscopes, and that the United States of America, as being born on the 4th of July 1776 at 3: 03 a.m., has a horoscope, which shows the

<sup>1</sup> "Ingen videnskapsmann vilde vel våge å sette formelen så nakent op: arv + miljø = skjebne. Men allikevel er dette faktisk den formelen som mange mennesker tenker efter nu for tiden." (E. Berggrav, *Legeme og sjel*, Oslo 1933, p. 68.)

<sup>2</sup> See Calvin S. Hall-Gardner Lindzey, *Theories of personality*, New York 1957, pp. 157-419, K. B. Madsen, *Moderne psykologiske teorier*, 2 ed., Copenhagen 1965, pp. 17-117, esp. p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Dannenbaum, *Schicksal oder Schuld*, Velbert (Rheinl.) o. J. [1964], p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Gundel, *op. cit.* pp. 148-164, Freiesleben, *op. cit.* pp. 89-105.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Bauer, *Horoskop und Talisman*, pp. 11-22, Kurt E. Koch, *Der Aberglaube*, Öhringen o. J. [1965].

<sup>6</sup> The astronomer Freiesleben has Aquarius instead of Capricorn (*op. cit.* p. 100).

<sup>7</sup> Svenska Dagbladet 1 febr. 1962.

<sup>8</sup> Bauer, *op. cit.* p. 250.

country's great cultural importance etc.<sup>1</sup> According to Patrice Bousset there is one astrologist to 120 Parisians, but only one doctor to 514, and one clergyman to 5000. The French people pay ten times as much to fortune-tellers as the state does to scientific research.<sup>2</sup>

How do matters stand in Sweden? In 1930 no Swedish magazine published horoscopes, in 1940 and 1950 four of them<sup>3</sup> contained articles on the stars, and in 1963 there were horoscopes in 13 magazines, besides daily newspapers.<sup>4</sup> Books on astrology and soothsaying are more and more often translated into Swedish.<sup>5</sup>

### B. *Two Swedish investigations*

In the spring of 1963 a small investigation concerning chance, fate, and horoscopes was carried out in Stockholm.<sup>6</sup> The material consists of 250 oral interviews with people selected by chance. Unaware of this research, the present writer in the spring of 1964 made a somewhat larger investigation of the same subject in a suburb of Stockholm (Handen). A questionnaire with 16 questions was answered by 440 young people, i.e. all the pupils of 14-16 years of age in Handen's public school. They wrote anonymously and did not know the author of the questions and the receiver of the answers, but only the scientific purpose of the inquiry, which was conducted during school-hours by a student of professor Husén's. Here is a translation of the questionnaire developed by myself and my wife, who also worked up the answers statistically.\* The number of answers are inserted.

<sup>1</sup> Dagens Nyheter, ed. B, 31 Dec. 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Expressen 20 Dec. 1964.

<sup>3</sup> Hemmets Veckotidning, Vårt Hem, Veckorevyn and Allas Veckotidning.

<sup>4</sup> Berndt Gustafsson, *Religionssociologi*, Stockholm 1965, p. 44, *Gud i storstad*. Undersökningar utförda vid Religionssociologiska Institutet i Stockholm, Stockholm 1963, p. 144 f. Cf. about similar investigations in Germany Freiesleben, *op. cit.* pp. 103-105, and in USA Svenska Dagbladet 25 April 1966.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Eleanor Kirk, *Planeternas inflytande på människans liv*, Stockholm 1926, *Nostradamus profetior*. Världens öden 1555-2797 ... tolkade av Åke Ohlmarks, 1960, and *Konsten att spå i kort*. Sepharials klassiska handbok i översättning av Åke Ohlmarks, Stockholm 1960.

<sup>6</sup> *Gud i storstad*, 1963, p. 138-146.

\* I here want to express my gratitude to the Provost, fil.lic. Olle Flodby, and to my wife, fil. kand. Siv Ström.

Questions concerning modern belief in fate.

Section I: "Que sera, sera, Whatever will be, will be."

|                                                                                                    |                    |                 |                 |           |       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|-------|
| 1. Do you think, that on the whole what happens is settled in advance?                             |                    |                 |                 |           |       |
| yes                                                                                                | no                 | do not know     | no answer       |           |       |
| 55 (12.5 percent)                                                                                  | 314 (71 percent)   | 69 (16 percent) | 2 (0.5 percent) |           |       |
| 2. How, above all, is that which happens settled?                                                  |                    |                 |                 |           |       |
| by fate                                                                                            | by fate and chance | by chance       | by God          | no answer |       |
| 131 (30) <sup>1</sup>                                                                              | 6 (1)              | 246 (56)        | 46 (10.5)       | 11 (2.5)  |       |
| 3. Which influence has inheritance and environment of a person on what happens to him?             |                    |                 |                 |           |       |
| total                                                                                              | great              | only little     | no answer       |           |       |
| 26 (6)                                                                                             | 272 (62)           | 136 (31)        | 6 (1)           |           |       |
| 4. Is it possible for a person to influence that which is to happen to him?                        |                    |                 |                 |           |       |
| yes                                                                                                | no                 | a bit           | no answer       |           |       |
| 174 (39)                                                                                           | 112 (25)           | 152 (35)        | 2 (1)           |           |       |
| 5. Can you increase your luck by                                                                   |                    |                 |                 |           |       |
| a) living better and more up-rightly?                                                              |                    |                 |                 |           |       |
| yes                                                                                                | no                 | a bit           | no answer       |           |       |
| 204 (46)                                                                                           | 141 (32)           | 88 (20)         | 7 (2)           |           |       |
| b) making special arrangements?                                                                    |                    |                 |                 |           |       |
| yes                                                                                                |                    |                 |                 |           |       |
| have a mascot                                                                                      |                    |                 |                 |           |       |
| pray                                                                                               | something else     | no              | do not know     | no answer |       |
| 116 (26)                                                                                           | 98 (22)            | 11 (2.5)        | 290 (48)        | 6 (1.5)   | 0 (0) |
| c) avoid certain things, for example use the number 13, walking under a ladder, breaking a mirror? |                    |                 |                 |           |       |
| yes                                                                                                | possibly           | no              | do not know)    | no answer |       |
| 25 (6)                                                                                             | 13 (3)             | 389 (88)        | 1 (-)           | 12 (3)    |       |

Section II: "It is written in the stars."<sup>2</sup>

|                                                                                                                     |           |             |           |  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|--|
| 6. Do you read the newspapers' horoscopes and predictions, based on the position of the stars, your birthdate etc.? |           |             |           |  |
| often                                                                                                               | sometimes | never       | no answer |  |
| 146 (33)                                                                                                            | 256 (58)  | 37 (9)      | 1 (-)     |  |
| 7. Do you believe in a connection between such things (stars, date of birth, etc.) and the progress of a person?    |           |             |           |  |
| yes                                                                                                                 | no        | do not know | no answer |  |
| 35 (8)                                                                                                              | 304 (69)  | 99 (22.5)   | 2 (0.5)   |  |
| 8. Do you believe in other methods to find out one's destiny?                                                       |           |             |           |  |
| yes                                                                                                                 | no        | possibly    | no answer |  |
| 48 (11)                                                                                                             | 344 (78)  | 35 (8)      | 13 (3)    |  |

<sup>1</sup> The figures in parentheses mean percentages.

<sup>2</sup> The Swedish translation of the song hit "C'est écrit dans le ciel" is more 'astrological' than the French original text and runs: "Det har stjärnorna sagt".

|                                                                    |                       |          |           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------|-----------|
| 9. Do you know someone, who, in earnest, has had his fortune told? |                       |          |           |
| yourself                                                           | someone whom you know | nobody   | no answer |
| 8 (2)                                                              | 92 (21)               | 336 (76) | 4 (1)     |

Section III: "*Pride will have a fall.*"

|                                                                                                                                                        |                      |                       |             |        |                                 |                      |         |        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------|---------------------------------|----------------------|---------|--------|
| 10. Do you think that bragging involves bad luck?                                                                                                      |                      |                       |             |        |                                 |                      |         |        |
| yes                                                                                                                                                    | no                   | sometimes             | no answer   |        |                                 |                      |         |        |
| 72 (16)                                                                                                                                                | 132 (30)             | 232 (53)              | 4 (1)       |        |                                 |                      |         |        |
| 11. Do you think that bad luck more easily hits a person who talks about his luck (e.g. a person gets ill who says: I have not been ill for 10 years)? |                      |                       |             |        |                                 |                      |         |        |
| yes                                                                                                                                                    | no                   | sometimes             | no answer   |        |                                 |                      |         |        |
| 25 (6)                                                                                                                                                 | 322 (73)             | 90 (20)               | 3 (1)       |        |                                 |                      |         |        |
| 12. Have some people good luck, others bad luck?                                                                                                       |                      |                       |             |        |                                 |                      |         |        |
| yes                                                                                                                                                    | no                   | do not know           | no answer   |        |                                 |                      |         |        |
| 279 (63.5)                                                                                                                                             | 63 (14)              | 95 (22)               | 3 (0.5)     |        |                                 |                      |         |        |
| 13. What is the cause of this difference?                                                                                                              |                      |                       |             |        |                                 |                      |         |        |
| their character                                                                                                                                        | character and chance | chance                | inborn luck |        |                                 |                      |         |        |
| 58 (13)                                                                                                                                                | 4 (1)                | 234 (53)              | 73 (16.5)   |        |                                 |                      |         |        |
| 14. Each section above is headed by a quotation. Are they true?                                                                                        |                      |                       |             |        |                                 |                      |         |        |
| all of them                                                                                                                                            | none                 | only quotation number |             |        | do not know and obscure answers | no answer            |         |        |
| 75 (17)                                                                                                                                                | 123 (28)             | I                     | II          | III    | I + II                          | I + III <sup>1</sup> | 92 (21) | 24 (5) |
|                                                                                                                                                        |                      | 55 (12.5)             | 9 (2)       | 38 (9) | 2 (0.5)                         | 22 (5)               |         |        |

Accordingly voting quotation

I (Que sera...) true: 154 (35)

II (It is written...) true 86 (19.5)

III (Pride will...) true 135 (30.5)

The most interesting figures are probably the following:

56 percent believe in chance, 30 percent in fate as determiner of destiny (question 2),

35 percent believe that what is to happen happens (question 14, cf. question 1),

26 percent believe in mascots (question 5 b),

33 percent read horoscopes frequently, 58 percent sometimes, together 91 percent (question 6),

16 percent or possibly 69 percent believe in the danger of *hubris* (question 10), 6 or 26 percent believe in *nemesis* (question 11),

<sup>1</sup> Answers II + III are not represented.

19.5 percent hold the song hit "It is written in the stars" to be true (question 14).

Only 11, or possibly 19, percent believe in soothsaying and auguries (question 8), but no less than 63.5 percent think, that some people are born to luck, others to bad luck (question 12).

It is interesting to compare these results with those of the Stockholm investigation of 1963.

The figures about chance and fate are not quite comparable. In Stockholm people were asked about the origin of *accidents*,<sup>1</sup> in Handen about the background of *all that happens* (question 2), but perhaps young people in the latter case think primarily of accidents.

Here are the figures in percent:

|                |          | chance | fate | negligence | God  | do not know     |
|----------------|----------|--------|------|------------|------|-----------------|
| Stockholm 1963 | men      | 38     | 21   | 43         | —    | 14 <sup>2</sup> |
|                | women    | 31     | 37   | 21         | —    | 25              |
|                | together | 30     | 25   | 28         | —    | 17              |
| Handen 1964    | boys     | 64     | 21   | —          |      |                 |
|                | girls    | 48     | 38.5 | —          |      |                 |
|                | together | 56.5   | 30.5 | —          | 10.5 | 2.5             |

In both cases the main result is the same: male individuals believe more in chance, females in fate. The percentage of believers in fate is only insignificantly higher in Handen than in Stockholm, but concerning chance it is nearly twice as high—certainly depending upon the lower age.

People in Stockholm were asked about the determination of the hour and the manner of death,<sup>3</sup> which can be compared with our question 1 about predestination:

|                | yes  | no | do not know |
|----------------|------|----|-------------|
| Stockholm 1963 | 36   | 45 | 19          |
| Handen 1964    | 12.5 | 71 | 16.5        |

<sup>1</sup> *Gud i storstad*, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> The totals of these figures are more than 100 percent, because the investigator has used the unusual method of counting two answers by one person as two! Cf. our treatment of the answers to our questions 13 and 14 above.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 140.

In both places the negative answers predominate, but the lower age in the Handen material gives more negative answers.

Are some people luckier than others (question 12, Handen), respectively, are born with more good luck (Stockholm<sup>1</sup>)?

|                |              | yes  | no | do not know |
|----------------|--------------|------|----|-------------|
| Stockholm 1963 | 18-29 years  | 27   | 62 | 11          |
|                | 60 and above | 56   | 37 | 7           |
|                | total        | 40   | 48 | 12          |
| Handen 1964    | 14-16 years  | 63.5 | 14 | 22.5        |

Here we find a great difference. More young people in the suburb believe in inborn luck than do even people of 60 or more years of age in town.

Every third person in Stockholm and every second under 30 years of age confesses having a mascot.<sup>2</sup> There are many more people who believe that mascots give better luck (question 5 b) than those who believe in luck through avoidance (question 5 c). The comparison runs as follows:

|                |               | yes | no | do not know |
|----------------|---------------|-----|----|-------------|
| Stockholm 1963 | over 60 years | 4   | 92 | 4           |
|                | 30-60 years   | 6   | 84 | 10          |
|                | 18-29 years   | 12  | 73 | 15          |
| Handen 1964    | 14-16 years   | 26  | 48 | 1.5         |

The percentages of those using horoscopes in Stockholm<sup>3</sup> and Handen (question 6) are as follows:

|                |       | often | sometimes | never |
|----------------|-------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Stockholm 1963 | men   | 6     | 34        | 60    |
|                | women | 12    | 46        | 39    |
| Handen 1964    | boys  | 7     | 77        | 15    |
|                | girls | 58    | 39        | 2     |

The females and the younger persons read much more horoscopes than males and older persons. The believers in them are grouped this way:

|                | yes | no | do not know |
|----------------|-----|----|-------------|
| Stockholm 1963 | 9   | 74 | 17          |
| Handen 1964    | 8   | 69 | 23          |

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 143 f.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 145.

### III. COMPARISON BETWEEN PRE-CHRISTIAN AND POST-CHRISTIAN BELIEF IN FATE

To characterize the difference between the two forms of fatalism before and after Christianity, we will make use of the phenomenological pattern, drawn up by C. J. Bleeker<sup>1</sup> and applied by Helmer Ringgren in his introductory lecture.<sup>2</sup> According to this pattern there are five methods of grasping and interpreting what happens. I Scandinavia these apply as follows.

#### A. *Types of fatalism*

##### 1. *The wheel of Fortuna is turning arbitrarily*

This type is not met with in pre-Christian times, because fate is bound up, measured, and ruled, as the words tell us (*bønd, metod, regin*). Fate has a coherent plan.

On the other hand this type is predominant in modern time: belief in chance prevails over belief in fate, and inheritance and environment are considered to have great, though not exclusive, significance (question 3).

##### 2. *Fate has something to do with birth*

This type has two subdivisions: a) Some (female) personages of fate (good or bad) stand at the cradle of the child with gifts, b) The constellation of stars in the moment of a child's birth is significant for its future life.

Type 2a is current in pre-Christian religion. The Norns create the destinies of each man. But *time* has no great importance in Norse religion,<sup>3</sup> and there is no astrology to be found. Possibly there is a small astrological embryo in an Eddic lay, according to which in the birth-night of the child the Norns come and twist its thread of fate<sup>4</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> C. J. Bleeker, *The sacred bridge*, Leiden 1963, pp. 114-116.

<sup>2</sup> Helmer Ringgren, "The problem of fatalism", above, pp. 13-15.

<sup>3</sup> I cannot agree with Folke Ström in connecting *urðr* with time (*Nordisk heden-dom*, Göteborg 1961, pp. 143 f.).

<sup>4</sup> *Helg. Hund.* I, 2 f.—In spite of his own opinion, that the Teutonic goddesses of fate were originally not spinners but weavers, Mittner writes: "Von derselben Wurzel [\**uert*, see above, p. 70] stammt auch mhd. *wirtel* 'Spinnwirtel'; das schien den Schluss zu berechtigen, die Wurd sei eine den Parzen ähnliche Schicksalsspinnerin gewesen" (*Wurd*, p. 90).

|                           |                                |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>ok und mána sal</i>    | Under the hall of the moon     |
| <i>miðjan festu.</i>      | they fixed the middle /of it/. |
| <i>þær austr ok vestr</i> | In east and west               |
| <i>enda fálu.</i>         | they hid the ends.             |

(*Helg. Hund.* I, 3 f.).

This cosmic scene is, as far as I know, the only trace of astrology in the Norse texts.<sup>1</sup>

Among modern youth we find at least great interest in and sensitiveness for "what is written in the stars", that is, type 2b. No instances of type 2a are found.

### 3. *There is an inscrutable world-order (ṛta in India, tao in China)*

The order in the world is reliable and causes optimism. This type is difficult to discover in the North. Surely there is a definite plan, which is carried into effect without human effort, but there is no principle like *ṛta*, *θεῖμος* etc. and no optimism. In modern fatalism the type is completely lacking.

### 4. *Man is doomed to an inescapable destiny*

The knowledge of this causes a pessimistic view of life. On the whole, I think Professor Bleeker is right in finding this type in Greek tragedy and in Norse heroic literature.<sup>2</sup> All expressions in part I:B:1 of the present paper point in this direction.

However, a slight reservation may not be out of place. Man's achievement plays a certain rôle, in spite of all. We meet a sort of *semipelagianism*, similar to the one found in Greece.<sup>3</sup> In the *Vatnsdøla saga*, for instance, it is admittedly said as a general rule: "It is not possible to 'break upon'

<sup>1</sup> The most interesting *urðar-máni*, 'weird-moon', in *Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 52, is seen on the wall, not in the sky. — In the 14th century the first instances of astrology appear in the North through continental influences (See Anne Holtsmark, "Horoskop", *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid*, VI, Malmö 1961, col. 674 f.). We find quite the contrary amongst the Celts: the Druids *multa de sideribus atque eorum motu . . . disputant* (Cæsar, *De bello Gallico* VI: 14: 6).

<sup>2</sup> Bleeker, *op. cit.*, pp. 115 f.

<sup>3</sup> Edsman, above, p. 33 f.



(fight against) fate" (*brjótask við forlogumum*, ch. 9).<sup>1</sup> But in an unguarded moment it is said that Ingimundr went to Iceland "more as a result of fate than of [his own] desire" (*meirr af forlogum... en fýsi*, ch. 11),<sup>2</sup> and in ch. 29 (perhaps the best example): Gróa finds it difficult to stand against the luck of the sons of Ingimundr, but she causes a landslide to come upon them with the words: "Be it, as it was prepared [by fate]" (*Fari nú hvat sem búit er*).<sup>3</sup>

Modern faith, too, is an exponent of type 4. A third of the investigated youth consider the song "Que sera sera" to be true. But the determination is now placed in inheritance and environment. A mechanistic, biological view of life is behind this new fatalism.

### 5. *The omnipotent God determines man's destiny*

This type, of course, is not to be found in the two bodies of material before us.

## B. *Types of man's action*

As to the question of man's attitude towards destiny, we have to discuss briefly Professor Maass' pattern<sup>4</sup> and its application to the Norse material.

The first type, called the *primitive* interpretation, "sums up", according to Ringgren, "too much under one heading".<sup>5</sup> That is really so; we must e.g. distinguish between two ways of escaping fate: by sacrifices and by man's own will. Norse men held the position, that they could alter their destinies by *blót* (p. 75), and they gave some room for human will and desire in the realm of shaping the fate (p. 86).—The position of modern fatalism is shown by the answers to question 4: it is possible to influence one's destiny a good deal (p. 81).

The *heroic* view is, in Ringgren's opinion, "more or less identical with Bleeker, No. 4",<sup>6</sup> which we have discussed at some length. It is an inter-

<sup>1</sup> *Vatnsdælasaga*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, København 1934, p. 27, l. 9. Cf. ch. 13 (p. 33, l. 11 f.). See H. Neuberger, *Der Aberglauben in den Islendinga Sögur*. Thesis Jena, Riga 1926, p. 10, and Åke V. Ström, *Vetekornet*, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> *Vatnsdælasaga*, p. 31, l. 22 f.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* p. 83, l. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Above, pp. 16 f.

<sup>5</sup> Above, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Above, p. 17.

esting feature, that no stubborn Promethean attitude is expressive of the Norse mind.<sup>1</sup> The famous Swedish poet Tegnér's pastiche in "Fritiof's Saga" has no historical or psychological authenticity:

Hur glad, hur trotsig, hur förhoppningsfull!  
Han sätter spetsen av sitt goda svärd  
på Nornans bröst och säger: du skall vika.<sup>2</sup>

Every trace of belief in hubris or nemesis is lacking in the Norse sources.<sup>3</sup> In the modern material it shines dimly through (16, resp. 6 percent). But 30,5 percent hold the opinion that pride will have a fall.

The last two types of professor Maass': destiny can be *denied* or fully *accepted*, are not found out in our material. There is no attitude like the Arabic *ṣabr* in pre- or post-Christian thought in Scandinavia.

Comparative religion finds an amazing multitude of remnants from pre-Christian religion, still alive in the Northern countries. The celebration of Christmas and Easter bears the impress of pagan customs and food<sup>4</sup>, most of the weekdays are named for the Norse gods, and a trace of the goddess *Vár* is left behind in the wedding ritual of the Church of Sweden.<sup>5</sup> But the modern belief in fate is decidedly not a 'survival' of ancient religion but the spontaneous creation of a secularized culture.

<sup>1</sup> Baetke, *Art und Glaube*, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> Esaias Tegnér, *Samlade skrifter*. Nationalupplaga, vol. 1, Stockholm 1923, pp. 152 f.

<sup>3</sup> Gehl, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> See Åke V. Ström, "Germanerna", in: Ringgren-Ström, *Religionerna*, pp. 377f.

<sup>5</sup> Helge Ljungberg, »Vårdtecken». En liturgisk-etymologisk undersökning till 1529 års handbok, *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* 36, 1936, pp. 281-298.

*Proof Addition to pp. 66 f.* More literature from the 1930's: W. Mohr, *Schicksalsglauben und Heldentum* (= *Die Welt der Germanen* 3), Leipzig 1935, H. Buttgerit, „Die Schicksalsauffassung der Germanen”, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Bildung* 15, 1939, pp. 197 ff., W. Wirth, *Der Schicksalsglaube in den Isländersagas* (= *Veröffentlichungen des Orientalischen Seminars der Universität Tübingen* 11, Veröffentlichungen des Arischen Seminars 1), Stuttgart 1940. — Literature after 1955: J. de Vries, "Gott, Mensch und Schicksal bei den Germanen", *Der neue Bund* 7, 1958, M. C. van den Toorn, „Über die Ethik in den Fornaldarsagas", *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* 26, 1964, pp. 19-66 (fate in pp. 55-57). F. P. Pickering, "Notes on fate and fortune", *Medieval German studies*. Presented to Frederick Norman, London 1965, pp. 1-15.