

**Snorra Edda.** The Edda of Snorri Sturluson (Icelandic chieftain, historian and poet, 1178/9–1241), also known as the Younger or Prose Edda, is a treatise in Old Icelandic on skaldic (medieval Scandinavian court) poetry (the mistakenly named Sæmundr’s Edda, also known as the Elder or Poetic Edda, is a collection of traditional mythological and heroic (‘Eddic’) poems). The derivation of the word ‘Edda’ from the Latin edo ‘I compose (poetry)’ by analogy with kredda ‘superstition’ from Latin credo ‘creed’ is now widely accepted.

The fourth and last part of the work, Háttatal (‘list of verse-forms’), was probably written first, soon after Snorri’s visit to Norway in 1218–20. It consists of a poem in 102 stanzas exemplifying the various metres, patterns of alliteration, rhyme, stanza and line length available to Norse poets, written in honour of the young King Hákon of Norway and his regent Earl Skúli, accompanied by a detailed commentary partly in dialogue form. The third part, Skáldskaparmál (‘the language of poetry’), was probably written next, and is an analysis also partly in dialogue form of the kennings (periphrastic terms such as ‘fire of the sea’ for gold) and heiti (poetical terms such as ‘steed’ for horse) characteristic of skaldic verse, with particular attention paid to fornøfn (substitution for proper names of kennings or heiti such as ‘ruler of the land’ or ‘prince’ for the king). These figures of speech are illustrated by over 400 quotations from over 70 earlier poets, and 36 pulur (versified lists of heiti). Skáldskaparmál also contains a number of prose narratives telling the supposed origins of kennings, including the legend of the origin the mead of poetic inspiration.

The second section, Gylfaginning (‘tricking of Gylfi’), is a contest of learning (the loser will forfeit his life) between Gylfi, a legendary king of Sweden, and

three kings of the Æsir (Norse gods), High, Equally High and Third, who give an account of the mythological background of skaldic verse, which contains so many mythological allusions. Gylfi asks the origin of giants, gods, men and dwarfs, and then goes on to hear various stories about the gods, and finally about Ragnarøkkr (the twilight of the gods), the end of the world and its renewal. Then his interlocutors are unable to answer further questions and Gylfi wins the contest. Gylfaginning is the most comprehensive surviving medieval account of Norse mythology and legend. It is based largely on Eddic and skaldic poems (some of which are extensively quoted), and possibly on oral prose stories.

Gylfaginning is preceded by a Prologue claiming that the Norse gods (the Æsir) are descendants of King Priam of Troy who migrated to Scandinavia in prehistoric times. The overall interpretation is therefore euhemeristic, though in the actual narratives the only meaning ascribed is aetiological. Snorri writes as a Christian, but without any polemic bias against his heathen ancestors, in a laconic and ironic, often humorous style.

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Snorri Sturluson, Edda, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 4 vols. (1999–2005).

Snorri Sturluson, Edda, trans. Anthony Faulkes (1987).

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