

Mercury – Wotan – Óðinn: One or Many?¹

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The aim of this paper is to discuss some aspects of the problem that we face when we are dealing with the Old Norse god Óðinn from the point of view of the History of Religions. The Óðinn figure, as we meet him in the medieval sources, mainly from Iceland, is surely a multi-faceted god and a very complex figure. Therefore, most scholars have been of the opinion that the medieval reception of Óðinn, whom we meet in the extant sources, should be viewed as the “end result”, so to speak, of a development from a much simpler state. And there is certainly no doubt that some development has taken place, since no religious or cultural phenomena (or anything else for that matter) remain the same over longer periods. Change is common for all cultural forms. The problem when we attempt to reconstruct the “history” of Óðinn is that we know, as just stated, mainly the “end result”, whereas his earlier stages are very little known to us today, mainly because of the source situation. As is well known by all scholars dealing with Old Norse religion or mythology, there has been a major dispute about the historical development of Óðinn: Is he a latecomer (perhaps no earlier than the beginning of the Germanic Iron Age) in Scandinavia or has he been there since the Indo-European migrants arrived (probably towards the beginning of the Bronze Age) – or something in between. What was his original function, and how can we imagine the process that leads to the complex picture which we get from the medieval Icelandic sources? It is not possible in a short article to address all the problems involved in any exhaustive way, so what we shall deal with here will be

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primarily discussing the relation between Óðinn and some earlier divine figures who have been seen to be cognates among other Germanic cultures, and even earlier; this will also include some of the methodological problems involved in such an enterprise. Since the problematic is of a comparative kind, i.e. comparing Óðinn with gods such as Wotan and Mercury we will be dealing to some extent with some problems involved in comparisons, such as the notions of “sameness” and “difference”.²

A Brief Outline of Contemporary Research in Connection with Óðinn

It seems as if for most scholars during the 20th century the most-often posed questions were concerned with the origin and historical development of the god, and closely tied to this issue, the question of Óðinn’s “original” function: was he originally a death god, a wind god, a warrior god, a god of fate or something else.³ The reason for this kind of question was, especially in the early part of the century, a kind of vulgar cultural evolutionism, maintaining that a phenomenon which is complex must by necessity have been much simpler in earlier stages, and therefore what we see in the medieval sources from Scandinavia as many functions must have been a single one earlier on.⁴ It is obvious that the many, sometimes apparently almost contradictory functions that we have for Óðinn, as for instance those related in the *Ynglinga saga* chapters 6 and 7, call for some kind of explanation,⁵ whether historical or structural. And until the 1950s or perhaps even the 1960s the explanatory model for most scholars was historical, sometimes supplied with structural arguments. This is the case, then, with the two most prominent names in the discussion about Óðinn during the mid-20th century, Karl Helm and Georges Dumézil, proposing respectively a late arrival to the North (early 6th century AD)⁶ and a very early one, namely with the immigration of the Indo-Europeans, i.e. sometime before 2000 BC.

In more recent times, these questions have continued to dominate the debate about Óðinn: on the one hand, there have been attempts to trace the historical roots of this god, and, on the other

hand, attempts have been made to establish what his “original” function was, before medieval Christians composed the sources which we now use for our reconstructions. It seems as if most scholars accept without further ado that the Óðinn of these sources must have originated or at least been strongly influenced from somewhere south of Scandinavia – an important view point which I will discuss later. Thus, an East Germanic origin or strong inspiration has been argued by many scholars.⁷ In recent years, however, the favourite theory has been that we should turn to the Rhine area as the place to look for most of the characteristic elements in the Óðinn figure. Two of the most interesting theories have been proposed, on the one hand, by Anders Kaliff and Olof Sundqvist who argue for a strong influence from the cult of Mithras, and, on the other hand, by Michael Enright, arguing that Óðinn (Wotan, Wodan etc.), seen as warlord, simply originated as a Germanic god along the southern part of the *limes* in the centuries around the beginning of our common era.⁸ Both Kaliff and Sundqvist and Enright maintain, and no doubt rightly so, that this area was a melting pot for cultural influences among Germani, Celts, and Romans (and individuals from many other cultures). Enright focuses on the Celtic Mercury as the primary source for Óðinn with a strong connection to warrior bands as well as kings and chieftains. Kaliff and Sundqvist, as just mentioned, on the other hand, favour a strong impact from the cult of Mithras which played a huge role among the Roman troops along the *limes*, and they argue, not least on the basis of iconographic material, that it is from this god that we should look for the warrior aspects of Óðinn. So, Enright⁹ as well as Kaliff and Sundqvist are open to the possibility that a god of the Óðinn type existed long before any connections with the Romans and Celts, or with the cult of Mithras, but that his role as a war god and ancestor of royal kin was due to such cultural influences. I partly agree with that, since it seems likely that in the Rhine area, just as in the eastern Mediterranean, around the same time (in the so-called Hellenistic Culture), there was an extremely high degree of syncretistic tendencies, so that gods that centuries earlier had been quite different, became identified; perhaps not by everybody, but by some.

Óðinn and his Historical Roots

It is common knowledge that the name of Óðinn is known from several Germanic languages. Thus, among the Anglo-Saxons he was called *Woden*, by the Longobards' *Wotan*, in Old Frankish *Wodan*, and in Old High German *Wuotan*,¹⁰ a clear indication that he was venerated among many Germanic tribes from the early Middle Ages, and probably, as we shall argue below, from at least the beginning of the common era. The proto-Germanic name would thus have been **Wōðanaz*.¹¹ It seems as if he is most often translated into the Roman god Mercury in the *interpretatio romana* by the authors of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, to which we shall return. An early Germanic piece of evidence is the so called Nordendorf fibula, found near Augsburg in Bavaria, containing the name Wodan (together with two other gods), and probably to be dated to the 6th century.¹² The root **óð-* and thus the noun *óðr* (proto-Germanic **wōþa-*), means 'excitement' or 'poetry',¹³ and as adjective 'furious'. Thus, the meaning of the name Óðinn is most likely 'ecstasy'¹⁴ which is also how it was understood by Adam of Bremen in the 11th century (4, 26), as he says "Wodan that is frenzy", and it seems to fit well with the characterization of the Scandinavian Óðinn, although etymology is not always as important as has often been believed. We also have to acknowledge that Óðinn in particular was a god who had a lot of names, all of them contributing in some way to characterize him, and all with their own etymology.

But we shall begin even further back, namely among the proto-Indo-Europeans. Georges Dumézil saw a tripartite functional structure in the various Indo-European pantheons, and Óðinn was seen here a representative of the magical aspect of the first function, Týr being a representative of the "juridical" aspect, having to do with law.¹⁵ Since these functional gods can be found all over the Indo-European area, it implies that it should be possible to find what we may term "a god of the Óðinn type" in all these pantheons. This notion "a god of the Óðinn type" is certainly rather vague, but, and this is something I shall return to, the vagueness is important in these matters because strong "either/or" solutions seldom fit the historical reality.

Dumézil often used the pre-Vedic Indian situation as a point of reference for his comparisons, and these two aspects of the first function, magic and law, are thus frequently called “the Varunic” and “the Mitraic” aspects. We shall not deal with Týr here, where we shall concentrate on Óðinn, but it is important to note that Mitra and Varuna are in many ways seen as opposites to each other: whereas Mitra is connected to light and the day, Varuna is connected to darkness and the night. Mitra is of this world, Varuna of the other; milk belongs to Mitra, soma to Varuna; Mitra is reliable, Varuna terrifying. Varuna, like many Vedic and pre-Vedic gods, is multifaceted, and has clear connections to natural phenomena, such as the moon and water; he is the protector of the world order and punishes those who do not contribute to this order (among others those who break their oaths). These are elements that we do not recognize in Óðinn, but on the other hand there certainly are such parallel elements, as, for instance, the relation to kingship, horses, and to medicine.¹⁶ Thus, if Varuna, who is also a god of magic, is of the same “type” as Óðinn, it follows logically that at least part of the Óðinn figure will have roots back in Indo-European times,¹⁷ just as is the case with the gods of the three functions, wherever they are found within the Indo-European space. The prerequisite for this, however, is that Dumézil’s Indo-European theory is at least partly right, which I think is the case.

Nevertheless, as we saw above, the idea of an Indo-European Óðinn could immediately seem to be in opposition to what many scholars dealing with the pre-Christian religion believe concerning Óðinn’s advent to the North. However, this problem is of a rather theoretical kind and has to be solved theoretically – and certainly not empirically: What part of Óðinn do we focus upon, when we talk about continuity and discontinuity from Indo-European times – or Germanic, for that matter. Influences of various kinds from other religions will always have an impact on the way religions and cultures develop; some gods may disappear, and their functions will be shared among the other gods; some gods of neighbouring cultures will be part of one’s own pantheon and be transformed in a way that makes it extremely difficult to distinguish such foreign gods from local ones, etc. For example, it seems

very likely, as was proposed by Michael Enright,¹⁸ that the particular ties between Óðinn and the war bands were heavily inspired by what went on among the Germani in the Rhine area during the two centuries around the beginning of our era. Nevertheless, there is a strong case that war bands or at least troops of warriors were connected to some god right back from Indo-European times, as suggested by Kris Kershaw.¹⁹ We thus know that the father of the warrior troops (the Maruts in mythological terms) in India is Rudra,²⁰ whereas they are usually led by Indra²¹ – but apparently not Varuna.²² Rudra, however, shows many similarities to Óðinn,²³ and particularly his engagement in war and fighting and his affiliation with illness and healing reminds us strongly of Óðinn as we shall see in a moment. So, the idea that a god with some ecstatic abilities was connected to bands of young warriors seems clearly to go back to Indo-European times. This could indicate that, in spite of the partial transformation that took place in Óðinn during the Early Roman Iron Age, he was already associated with the war bands in the pantheon of the Indo-Europeans. But it also shows that, even if there are clear similarities between Óðinn and Varuna, functions being performed by other gods have also been applied to Óðinn.²⁴ This makes it extremely complicated to decide whether Óðinn is “the same” as Varuna. In a certain sense we can, for obvious reasons, say “no”. There are huge differences between the two gods, which was also acknowledged by Dumézil, but at the same time there are also many similarities, not least in their structural positions, their “dark” roles in various myths etc. In other words, it does not really make sense to pose the question at all, if we do not qualify it. And as we shall see, this problematic is also to be seen when we ask whether the Nordic Óðinn was the same as Mercury, as Anglo-Saxon Woden, or even if Wodan by Adam of Bremen was the same as Óðinn by Snorri. In all cases we can give the answer “yes and no” – there are similarities as well as differences. I shall return to this important problematic towards the end of the paper.

But, to conclude on Óðinn’s Indo-European background, we can state that, at least at a structural level, it makes sense to accept that “a god (or maybe more appropriate ‘gods’) of the Óðinn type” existed more or less continuously from Indo-European times down to the Viking Age in Scandinavia.²⁵

Moving forward into the Roman era we have almost no Germanic names for any of the gods, although the weekday names which probably found their way into the Germanic area during the 3rd century AD indicate that, at that time at least, equivalents to Týr, Óðinn, Þórr and Frigg were major gods in a pan-Germanic pantheon. According to most of the authors of that period the Germanic peoples venerated Mercury, Mars, Hercules, Venus, and others with Roman names. Most scholars agree that Mercury, of whom Tacitus says (*Germania* Ch. 9): “of the gods they venerate Mercury most, and they see it as a sacred obligation to sacrifice human victims for him at certain days”, “is” Óðinn, although it has been rejected by some.²⁶ The acceptance of this identification, which probably owes much to the Celtic Mercurius is based primarily on three arguments: 1) he is the most venerated (at least among the nobility), and he is receiving human victims,²⁷ exactly like Óðinn in the medieval sources; 2) In the Germanic weekday names *Mercurii dies* is translated into Wednesday, the day of Woden, with cognates to be found in other Germanic languages, and particular in the Scandinavian languages, too;²⁸ and 3) among later authors, writing in Latin, there is a clear tendency to identify Mercury with Óðinn, although at times he is also identified with other gods such as Mars,²⁹ to which we shall return in a moment. The identification between the two gods can, as we have just argued, never be a one-to-one relationship: Wodan was not the same as Mercury, but from a Roman perspective, and probably also from that of the Germani acquainted with Roman and Celtic culture, this identification would in most cases be the most sensible way of translating – not the name – but the semantics of Wodan/Óðinn. Thus we meet the identification again by Paulus Diaconus in his history of the Longobards (*Historia Longobardum* 1.9) and in other sources in Latin, such as the *Vita Columbani* I. 27 from the 7th century.³⁰

We cannot be certain what the exact reason was for the identification, but it is remarkable that these writers chose to identify the allegedly most powerful god of the Germani (and also the Celts) with a relatively minor god among the Romans. This indicates that it was not just a routine, which could have been the case if they had chosen to identify with Jupiter – our mightiest god is the

same as their mightiest god. There must have been some special reason. We may notice that there is a partial similarity between the attributes of the two gods: they both carry a staff and wear a large hat, and they are both “wanderers” moving from place to place. The identification, however, was probably based on much more than these minor parallels. Both Óðinn and Mercury had knowledge of things that were unknown to ordinary people, both were connected to eloquence, and both were connected to the dead: Mercury as a psychopompos and Óðinn as the lord of the dead in *Valhöll*. And there are further similarities.³¹ All in all it seems quite understandable that, if the Germanic peoples in antiquity had a god, who corresponded more or less to the Óðinn of the North, then Mercury would be the natural choice among the Roman gods to identify with. This is not to say, however, that the statement by Tacitus and the identification in general cannot be seen as partly due to influences from the Celts, as has been proposed by both Enright,³² as we saw, and also Rübekel³³ and Timpe³⁴ and many others. There is no doubt that the Celtic Mercurius was not exactly the same as the Roman god due to a process which would be parallel to that of the “Germanic Mercurius” in his relation to both Roman and Celtic versions: the development would involve a complex relation between differences and similarities; therefore, we can state that the mutual identification of gods of the different cultures in the Rhine area around the birth of Christ cannot be reduced to the simple question of whether Mercury “was” Óðinn.³⁵

Turning for a moment away from the *interpretatio romana*, it can be mentioned that in the 6th century Jordanes write in his *Getica* (14, 79) that the ancestor of the Amali of the Ostrogoths was *Gapt*, probably to be identified with *Gautr*, a byname for Óðinn, mentioned among other places in *Grímnismál* 54, and thus a further indication of a cult of Óðinn among the southern Germanic peoples. This idea that Óðinn was the progenitor of royal houses or whole tribes is also known from Anglo-Saxon genealogies.³⁶ Wodan (*Uuodan*) is also mentioned in the second Merseburg charm as a sort of healer of a horse. We know this charm from a 10th century manuscript, but it is likely to be much older. In this connection we should also mention the English *Nine*

Herbs Charm, recorded in the same century, mentioning Woden, as a healer of snake poisoning and the so called Ribe skull fragment,³⁷ where he is mentioned in connection with some kind of pain. Another noteworthy characteristic is that we are told by, for instance, Jordanes (*Getica* 5, 41) about the Goths and Procopius (*De bello Gothico* 6. 15) about the people in Thule, both writing in the 6th Century, that these peoples sacrificed war prisoners to the war god. In this case, however the war gods are called respectively Mars and Ares, which indicate that the identifications were far from static, but it is hard to think of any Germanic god, apart from Óðinn or “a god of the Óðinn type”, to be venerated with human sacrifices in connection with war,³⁸ so once again we probably see that the *interpretatio romana* was in no way consequent: the associations of the antique and medieval writers were more likely connected to functions and characteristics than to names of the various Germanic gods.³⁹ And, as stated already by Tacitus and later authors, Mercury was in particular the recipient of human sacrifices, strongly reminiscent of myths and rituals connected to the Scandinavian Óðinn.⁴⁰ The picture we get from these sources is thus a god who is connected to human sacrifices, who has a clear relation to royalty (and thus may be seen as a kind of “main god”), and to war and who has some magical abilities.

Even if many scholars have cast doubt on most of these individual sources, taken together, they strongly indicate that Óðinn, although not exactly the same as the god that we know from the Nordic sources, has roots reaching far back in time, probably as early as the Indo-European era (at least 3000 BC). During this long period various kinds of major and minor changes inevitably must have taken place due to changing circumstances of all kinds. And particularly during the first half of the first millennium AD, huge changes took place among the Germanic peoples, first in the Rhine area, but soon also in other Germanic areas. The Rhine area was a melting pot with Roman soldiers from various parts of the empire taking part in various cults,⁴¹ as well as Celts and Germani from various parts of their respective homelands being part of the Roman army. Thus, many possible direct and indirect influences were at stake, with strong variations from place to

place, from one social stratum to another and from one individual to another according to the relation with different groups of Romans and Celts, soldiers and priests, magistrates and chieftains, etc. that this individual would have. When this is acknowledged, it hardly seems to be worth the effort to attempt to trace the historical development of the semantics of a certain god from the very heterogeneous source material. In my opinion it is in any case doomed to fail, since most of the scholars who have discussed whether Wodan existed among the south Germanic peoples in the guise of Mercury, or if Óðinn existed in the North before a certain time have not even made the effort to define which Óðinn they are talking about. The Germanic gods (not only Óðinn) as well as the gods of other peoples from the Roman Iron Age, we can be pretty sure were all influenced to some degree by ideas about other gods. And some of these ideas would eventually reach Scandinavia; in the case of Óðinn, it was probably among warriors and in the higher social strata, whereas nothing suggests that he was ever a god of importance for the daily life of common people.

This is perhaps also reflected in the place-name material. There are rather few of these connected to Óðinn, either in Scandinavia or among the other Germanic peoples in comparison to some of the other gods. This has been taken to indicate that the cult of Wotan-Óðinn was not very widespread, and has even been used as an argument against the identification of Mercurius-Óðinn. However, we have to take into consideration the character of the place-name material. Although it is far from certain how various places got their names, it is probable that most names were not given by kings and chieftains, but by the people living in the area. The complexity concerning name giving, nevertheless, is overwhelming,⁴² and the argument should not be stretched too far. But if Óðinn, as suggested, was not a god of the common people, then we should expect his appearance in place-names to be quite modest.

Conclusion

My main point here has been that, when we compare various gods in order to decide whether they are “the same” or not, it

is important that we are explicit about what we are comparing. As mentioned earlier, it is obvious that Óðinn is not the same as Varuna in the sense that everything we know about Óðinn from all the available sources could also be found in Varuna, or vice versa. Now, one way to explain these differences could be, at least theoretically, that once, back in Indo-European times, there was a conception about such a god; and during the following millennia different branches of Indo-Europeans developed different variations, no doubt often influenced by encounters with other cultures. The last part of this is clearly true, but the idea that an original “Varuna-type” ever existed is probably not true, since the natural question then would be: was this god not influenced by any other gods? And, from a logical point of view we have to admit that he must have been so. And furthermore, is it likely that, even back in the pre-migration time of the Indo-Europeans, all held the same conception about a certain god? Again, the answer must be a definite “no”. We know from all historical religions that religious notions differed, even within rather small areas; and even from one individual to another there would be minor differences in their religious outlook, and especially so when we speak about religions with no theological élite, telling people how this or that figure should be viewed. This means that there was never one single mythological figure like a proto-Varuna or a proto-Óðinn who were seen in exactly the same way by all individuals. Religious conceptions, like everything else, change all the time, sometimes rapidly and sometimes slowly, but they do change. And the same line of reasoning can be attributed to Mercury, whether we talk about the Roman god or the Celtic one, and to the Germanic *Wōðanaz: None of them would be exact equivalents to the Scandinavian Óðinn. But as noted above, the same problem applies, let us say, to the Óðinn of Snorri and the Wotan of Adam, and perhaps even, for instance, to the Óðinn of *Hárbarðslióð* and the Óðinn of *Hávamál*. The god(s) in these sources were different in regard to some characteristics, but similar when it comes to others, of course dependent of distances in time and space. Therefore, let us repeat, it is as correct to say that Óðinn and Mercury were different gods as it is to say that they were one god. The discussion among some scholars of an older

generation, therefore, seems to me to be based on false prerequisites, as if it could be determined as an either-or. So, when we discuss whether Mercury “was” Óðinn, it is necessary to be clear about what we are actually talking about: is it the whole spectrum of attributes and mythic roles that we mean, for if so the answer is “no”, but to take this view point to its extreme, we can hardly speak about the “same” god, in the world view of even two individuals. And that, of course, would hardly make any sense; so less will have to do. We could, for instance, focus on etymology: is it the same name we meet; or we can focus on the attributes: one-eyedness, a spear, a certain dress, or so on. From my point of view it would, however, make much more sense to focus on what I have earlier called “the semantic centre” of the god in question.⁴³ This notion, I suggest, we may use to describe those ideas about a certain god which could be expressed in the discourse about this god, and not least those ideas that cannot be attributed to this figure.⁴⁴ From that perspective, because we do not have many pre-medieval sources, so we cannot be certain – it may very well make sense to speak about a semantic centre with considerable similarity, concerning Mercury, Wotan, and Óðinn.

So, to summarize my view of the historical roots of Óðinn, I find it very plausible that part of the semantics that we find surrounding the god, as described in the medieval sources of the North, can be traced back to an Indo-European god of the Varuna type, especially when it comes to the “dark” aspects. I also find it probable that at the same time there existed one or several gods who were connected to bands of young warriors and who were somewhat connected to royalty and leadership. Around the beginning of our era along the *limes*, not least due to strong Roman and Celtic influences (but not only so) and foreign gods such as Mithras and various versions of Mercury, a god, much closer to “the Óðinn type” took shape who eventually also transformed the Wodan of the North from a god of magic and war and connected to death, and to the chieftains into Óðinn who kept many of these characteristics and added others. Are these gods identical, then? *No*; are they historically related? *Yes*. So, the answer to the question asked in the title of this article: “one or many?” must be “both one and many”.⁴⁵

Óðinn or Wotan is thus not a latecomer, either in the southern Germanic area, or in the North, but he, like all other gods, was certainly part of a permanent transformation process.

Notes

1. Parts of this paper in a slightly revised version will be part of an extensive chapter on Óðinn in the work *Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Histories and Structures*, edited by Anders Andrén, John Lindow, and Jens Peter Schjødt, planned to be published in 2018.

2. I have been dealing with comparison in a number of articles, i.e. Schjødt 2012; 2013; and 2017a and 2017b. Here I have argued that comparisons of various kinds are necessary in order to make sense of the Pre-Christian religion of the North.

3. A good survey of the scholarship concerning Óðinn up till the beginning of the 20th century can be found in Lassen 2011; and for more recent research in Dillmann 1979. The question of “original” function will only be briefly touched upon in this paper.

4. The idea that “many” earlier on was “one” (functions or gods) can be seen by many researchers during the 20th century, perhaps most clearly by the Swedish historian of religion Folke Ström, who, among other ideas, suggested that Óðinn and Loki were originally one single figure (Ström 1956). It is quite possible that such developments may have taken place, just as it is possible that the opposite, i.e. that several gods have turned into one, can be imagined. A functional area of one god may have been distributed among several gods earlier on. Such processes are definitely not impossible, but they are very difficult to trace, and it is very hard to decide where to stop. For instance: if Óðinn and Loki were “originally” (when?) one and the same, what went on before, then? Could it be that even more “originally” they were two or even more? We do not know, and it is hard to imagine that we ever will.

5. A possibility is that Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga* is actually modelled on some contemporary “shaman” or sorcerer, as has been suggested by John Lindow (2003). This is certainly not unlikely, but it could well be argued that even so, it is not a coincidence that all these attributes

are connected to Óðinn, and not to any other god, and thus that this “sorcery” aspect was already at hand in the conception of the pagan Óðinn.

6. Helm 1946:71.

7. See, for instance, references by Hultgård 2007:776; and Kaliff & Sundqvist 2004:14–16. Lotte Hedeager (2011) argues that, although Óðinn is seen as a pan-Germanic god, the Huns and their famous king, Attila, played a decisive role in the formation of the late pagan Óðinn, enumerating many common traits between the king and the god (2011:221–222). Therefore, her theory can be seen as a variant of the “eastern” hypothesis.

8. Enright, however, seems to accept some “proto-type” for Wodan, as he writes (1996:218): “Dumézilians routinely associated this wisdom/warfare complex with the first function of sovereignty, just as they associate Celtic Lug and Germanic Wodan with Indic Varuna. In a certain ultimate senses, they may be correct”.

9. Although Enright has made a very good case for “the warlord” Wodan, originating at that time, it seems as if he is basing much too much of this argument on *argumenta ex silentio*. For instance, even if there is no positive evidence that the Cimbri worshipped Wodan before they left their Scandinavian homeland (1996:238), as was proposed by Jan de Vries (1956–57, II:30), we have to ask the simple question: what evidence could we in any possible way hope for? Such arguments are simply of no value in this case, and the question whether or not Wodan, as a god connected to war, existed before the Roman and Celtic influences were at stake, must therefore be based on another line of reasoning.

10. de Vries 1962:416.

11. For various forms of the name, such as *Godan* in *Origo gentis Longobardorum* and Paul the Deacons *Historia Longobardorum*, see Hultgård 2007:759–760.

12. Discussion of the inscription can be seen in McKinnell & Simek 2004:48–49.

13. de Vries 1962:416.

14. Cf. The runic inscription from the so called Gårdlösa fibula from the pre-Viking Age, according to Krause (1966:35–36) as early as around 200 AD, saying *ek unwod*, probably meaning ‘I the not frantic...’ (Moltke 1976:99–100).

15. Dumézil 1973:26–48.

16. Gonda 1960:73–82.

17. For interesting ideas about both etymology and function of these gods, we can also refer to Jackson 2012:57–59.

18. Enright 1996:218–240.

19. Kershaw 2000:211–221.

20. Gonda 1960:87.

21. In some texts (e.g. *Rigveda* 2.33), however, Rudra apparently takes over many characteristics that we usually see in Indra. The whole distribution of functions among the gods in India is in general rather unsystematic, and there is a great deal of overlap in the functional areas of the various gods.

22. It is not possible to trace the development of the retinue, or the *comitatus* in any detail back from the Indo-European times, but there is no doubt, however, that it must have changed substantially from the times when a chieftain would have had a small band of men, perhaps twelve as could be indicated in some of the Icelandic fornaldar sagas, to a large number of warriors, surrounding the kings in later times because of completely different social situations.

23. Cf. Samson 2011:186–187; Gonda 1960:89.

24. Turville-Petre (1964:41) is no doubt right when he writes that: “Perhaps we should rather doubt the stability of the tripartite system”, although it seems to be an understatement of the actual situation. Rather we should say, that, even if, at a rather abstract structural level, as Dumézil has shown in numerous publications, there are clear parallels among the various Indo-European traditions, there is at the same time also room for tremendous variations and transformations.

25. It could be relevant here to ask whether Óðinn can be traced in the Rock carvings of the Scandinavian Bronze Age. But as is often

the case the answer is almost impossible to give. We do have carvings depicting a figure with a spear, which is one of the main attributes of Óðinn. On the other hand, a spear was probably a rather common weapon in the Bronze Age, so that the motif could be either a great warrior, or perhaps a god. But a god of the Óðinn type? It seems as if more attributes would be needed, if such an interpretation is not to be seen as completely arbitrary. For a discussion of that sort of problems we can refer to Schjødt 1986.

26. E.g. Helm 1946:8. Helm argues that this sentence by Tacitus is a convention that can be seen from Herodotus to Caesar, and that it is pure form, whereas it has no real content. Helm certainly has shown that it is *possible* that the sentence by Tacitus is not reliable. On the other hand, however, it is a question of whether his proposition is the most likely one. What if a god of “the Óðinn type” was at stake among the Indo-European peoples that Herodotus as well as Caesar wrote about? What if the Hermes of Herodotus (V, 7) who was venerated by the kings of the Thrachians (as Óðinn was venerated by the kings of Scandinavia) actually was a god of the Óðinn type, and if Cesar’s Celtic Mercurius was a god resembling Lug? Then they were both similar to Óðinn and therefore reminded the respective authors of Hermes/Mercury? (for a critical evaluation of the equation between Lug and Mercury, see Maier 1996, and Egeler (2013) casts doubt on the parallels between Lug and Óðinn). How would these authors of antiquity be able to convince the source critics of our time that this was actually the case? They would probably not stand a chance.

27. Maier 1994:231.

28. For the question of the week day names we can refer to Strutynski 1975; and for a critical evaluation of the traditional dating of the acceptance of the theophoric week among the Germanic peoples, Shaw 2007, who proposes a much later dating, namely in the 7th and 8th centuries (Shaw 2007:387).

29. Lassen 2011:90; cf. Ármann Jakobsson 2009.

30. For many other instances of texts mentioning Mercury and various cognates of Wodan from the southern part of the Germanic area, we can refer to de Vries 1956–1957, II:27–42.

31. See for instance Kaliff & Sundqvist 2004:62–63 and Liberman 2016:33–35.

32. Enright 1996:217–218.

33. Rubekeil 2002.

34. Timpe 1992:456–457.

35. Bernhard Maier is no doubt right when he argues that, when it comes to *interpretatio romana* in general, the particular reason for the various identifications would have been similarity in certain aspects which are not necessarily transparent (Maier 1994:180).

36. Cf. North 1997:111–131.

37. Cf. McKinnell & Simek 2004:180.

38. From the week day names it is indicated that Týr is equivalent to Mars, but we do not know which aspects of Mars is in focus here. There is nothing to suggest (except from *Snorra Edda*) that Týr was seen as mainly a war god. It is not possible to deal with this highly interesting problematic in any detail here.

39. A great example of this lack of consequences in the identification, although within the Celtic realm, is the so-called Berner Scholia where almost any Roman god can be identified with almost any Celtic god.

40. Cf. *Orkneyinga saga* Ch. 8, see also below.

41. Therefore, it is also a priori likely that Óðinn of the Viking Age was to some extent influenced by the cult of Mithras – and influences the other way round are just as likely – as has been convincingly proposed by Kaliff and Sundqvist (2004), taking both textual, iconographic, and archaeological material into consideration.

42. Cf. Vikstrand 2001:45–54.

43. I have dealt with this notion particularly in Schjødt 2013.

44. Schjødt 2013.

45. The answer proposed here thus has clear references to the brilliant 1994 book by John McKinnell, *Both One and Many*, which, however, does not have Óðinn as a primary focus.

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Response

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The old and much-debated problem tackled in Jens Peter Schjødt's paper concerns the origins and development of the god rendered as *Óðinn* by the writers and poets of Medieval and Viking Age Scandinavia. Covering a near half millennium stretching from the earliest recorded Skaldic poetry to Snorri Sturluson's mythographic adaptation of the Old Norse poetic heritage by the first half of the 13th century, the Scandinavian evidence gives a comparatively rich testimony to what most scholars regard as, in Schjødt's own wording, as the "end result" of a god whose functions and features must have gone through significant changes, through time as well as space, from the Roman Iron Age onwards. While there is little doubt that this god – whether Proto-Germanic (PGmc) **Wōðanaz*, **Wōðinaz* or **Wōðunaz* (the form taken by Stefan Schaffner to reflect the most archaic stage) – was being worshiped by most Germanic tribes during the Migration Period, opinions diverge as to the deeper past of the cult. Did it spread late from a more restricted geographical area to the rest of the Germanic speaking world under the influence of Gallo-Roman cults, or was the god rather an original member of the Germanic pantheon with ties back to the Indo-European migrations of the Bronze Age? The answer provided by Schjødt in the concluding sentence of the paper seems altogether satisfying to me, namely that "Óðinn or Wotan is thus not a latecomer, neither in the southern Germanic area, nor in the North, but he, like all other gods, was certainly part of a permanent transformation process."

Since the ancient sources remain far too meagre to allow us to reconstruct the no doubt complex processes through which the gods of the Celts and Germani merged and changed shape as a result of Roman influences, we should avoid the *argumentum e silentio* that a god, whose perfectly transparent name is well-attested in the ancient dialects (excluding only Gothic), was *not* indigenous to all of the Germanic tribes before their first

encounters with the Roman-Hellenistic world. The unwillingness to accept the god’s early provenance lies in the failure to appreciate the “permanent transformation process” that all cultural artefacts are expected to undergo in a changing socio-economic environment, and especially so with regard to religion in the absence of canon and scripture. Whether gods are to be considered new or old also depends on how we chose to distinguish innovation from tradition: is the latter always endemic to the former, or should the “new” only be treated as such in the absence of a pre-existing model – the introduction, for instance, of an entirely new cult, like emperor Elagabalus’ installation of the Syrian god *Ilāh hag-Gabal* as the new chief deity of the Roman pantheon?

Even when one turns to the much richer documentation of the cult of Mercurius, with whom Wotan/Woden was frequently identified by Roman writers and the colonists of Roman Gaul and Germania from the first century AD onwards, uncertainty still prevails as to whether this god was a direct borrowing from Greek religion (Hermes) – because he is said to have been worshiped “according to Greek rites” (*Graeco ritu*) – or, at least, a comparatively late member of the Roman pantheon without a common Italic origin (BNP, s.v. *Mercurius*). This is just to exemplify how tricky it is to disentangle such matters, even where processes of cultic migration and innovation can be reconstructed in greater detail.

Schjødt makes a moderately positive assessment of George Dumézil’s treatment of Óðinn as a manifestation of the dark, magico-religious so-called “Varuṇic” aspect of the first function (as opposed to the light, judicial so-called “Mithraic” aspect). A comparison between Óðinn and Varuṇa in the style of Dumézil implies a systematic treatment of functional (or semantic) correlations, whereas the linguistic dimension is typically disregarded. Suggestive as such an approach may be, a linguistic touch to the operation would in fact – at least in this particular case – substantiate the comparison. I can think of at least three such instances:

1. If Óðinn is the *áss* (Proto-Germanic **ansuz*) par excellence – the chief of the *æsir* as it were –, Varuṇa is the chief representative of the group of divinities referred to as Asuras (or

Ādityas [i.e. descendants of the goddess Aditi]) in the Vedic hymns. He is frequently referred to as *ásura*- ‘lord’. The same title (possibly reflecting a Proto-Indo-European [PIE] noun **h₂ṛ̥su[ro]-*) is also seen in the name of Zarathustra’s god of preference, Ahura Mazda (‘the Wise Lord’).¹

2. Óðinn and Varuṇa are both conveyers of poetic skills linked to the etymologically compatible nouns *bragr* (‘poetic craft’ [*Digtekunst* in Fritzner’s terms]) and *bráhman* (‘sacred utterance’ or [in Monier-Williams terms] ‘pious outpouring of the heart’) (from a PIE noun **b^hreg^h-*). If the two gods really did develop from a common source, this figure would have been especially linked to the area of poetry and ritual professionalism – a circumstance still reflected in the cases of Varuṇa and Ahura Mazda.
3. A pre-Proto-Germanic realization of the PGmc name **Wōðunaz* would (before the Germanic sound shifts) have sounded something like **Wātunos* (or perhaps **Wātūnos*, with a long *ū* reflecting the so-called *Hoffmannsches Possessivsuffix* [typically expressing lordly qualities, the ‘lord of x’ {as in *Portūnus*, the ‘lord of the *portus*’}], from an earlier PIE form **Wātuh₃nos*). Somewhere and sometime during the long period of gradually dissolving Indo-European tribal networks,² perhaps even after the development of Proto-Indo-Iranian, a god worshipped by some groups as **Waruna* and as **Wātunos* by others, could very well have developed out of some common source, in which case one or other would have acquired a consonant epithet replacing an earlier one, perhaps as the result of taboo deformation.³ A comparable case is seen in the likewise non-etymological consonance between the reconstructed name of the North-West Indo-European god **Perk^wuh₃nos* (e.g. Old Norse *Fjörgýnn* and Lithuanian *Perkūnas*) [‘lord of the oak’]) and the reconstructed name of his eastern cousin **Pergenjo* (as seen in the name of the Vedic storm-god Parjanya) (possibly from an extension of the root **per* ‘to strike’). The latter was a god who, just like Old Norse *Þórr* (a close associate of the relatively bleak divine pair

Fjörgyn and Fjörgynn) and Perkūnas, ‘thundered’ (PIE **(s)tenh₂-*), confronted a serpentine monster and wielded a thunderbolt.⁴ While the reconstructed epithets are merely vaguely consonant, the divinities so labelled apparently had other attributes in common, some of which can also be grasped linguistically. Divine names are not typical items of everyday communication, but may also be expected to reflect the embellishments of poetic creativity and ritual artifice.

Notes

1. If the initial element *A(n)su-* (PGmc. **ansuz* [‘god’]) in the Ancient Scandinavian (Runic) name *Asugastiz* (= *A[n]sugastiz*) is cognate with Old Avestan (OAv.) *ahura-/Vedic* (Ved.) *ásura-* (< PIE **h₂nsu[ro]-*) (cf. Hittite *hassu-* [‘king’]), as hesitatingly acknowledged by Manfred Mayrhofer (“nicht primär auszuschließen”) in his *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen* (EWAia), the second element (*-gastiz* [PIE < **g^bosti-* {‘guest, stranger’}]) would be functionally compatible with Proto-Indo-Iranian (PII) **átHti-* (> OAv. *asti-/Ved. átithi-*). This means that the recurrent Mitanni-Aryan onomastic element *-atti*, if it really does reflect **átHti-* (> OAv. *asti-*) in the name *Ašuratti*, could belong to the same onomastic tradition (cf. Pinault 1998:454 [with reference to a series of studies on the topic by Mayrhofer {e.g. Mayrhofer 1960:137 ff.}]). The name would thus reflect either a late Proto-Indo-European proper noun **H₂nsu(ro)g^bosti* realized as Proto-Indo-Iranian **AsurātHti*, or a pre-Proto-Germanic calque of the Proto-Indo-Iranian name.

2. An intermediary (Meso-Indo-European) period of relative comprehensibility between different Indo-European branches (or dialect clusters) – including those of Italo-Celtic, pre-Proto-Germanic, Balto-Slavic, Indo-Iranian, Proto-Greek and Proto-Tocharian – may have reached well into the 2nd millennium BC. Compare, for example, the 1) initial members of the Eburonic royal name *Catuvolcus* with the Ancient Scandinavian (Runic) name *Haþuwulfz* (500–700 AD), and 2) that of the Greek name *Kle(w)óxenos* with Ancient Scandinavian *Hlewagastiz*. Both would have been virtually transparent to speakers

of Celtic, Greek and pre-Proto-Germanic in the early 1st millennium BC: **Katu-* and **Klewo-* respectively.

3. Interaction between speakers of pre-Proto-Germanic and speakers of Iranian dialects, somewhere in the Pontic-Caspian region, must still have taken place during the 1st millennium BC, as attested by the word *hemp* (PGmc **hanapa-* > **kánnabis*), a borrowing from some Iranian dialect (possibly Scythian [cf. Herodotus 4.74]) clearly pre-dating the so-called First Germanic Sound Shift (or Grimm's Law).

4. A historical example of the same basic tendency would be that of Italian *Madonna* replacing the proper noun *Maria* (Ma-CVC-a/ Ma-CV-a) in vernacular piety.

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