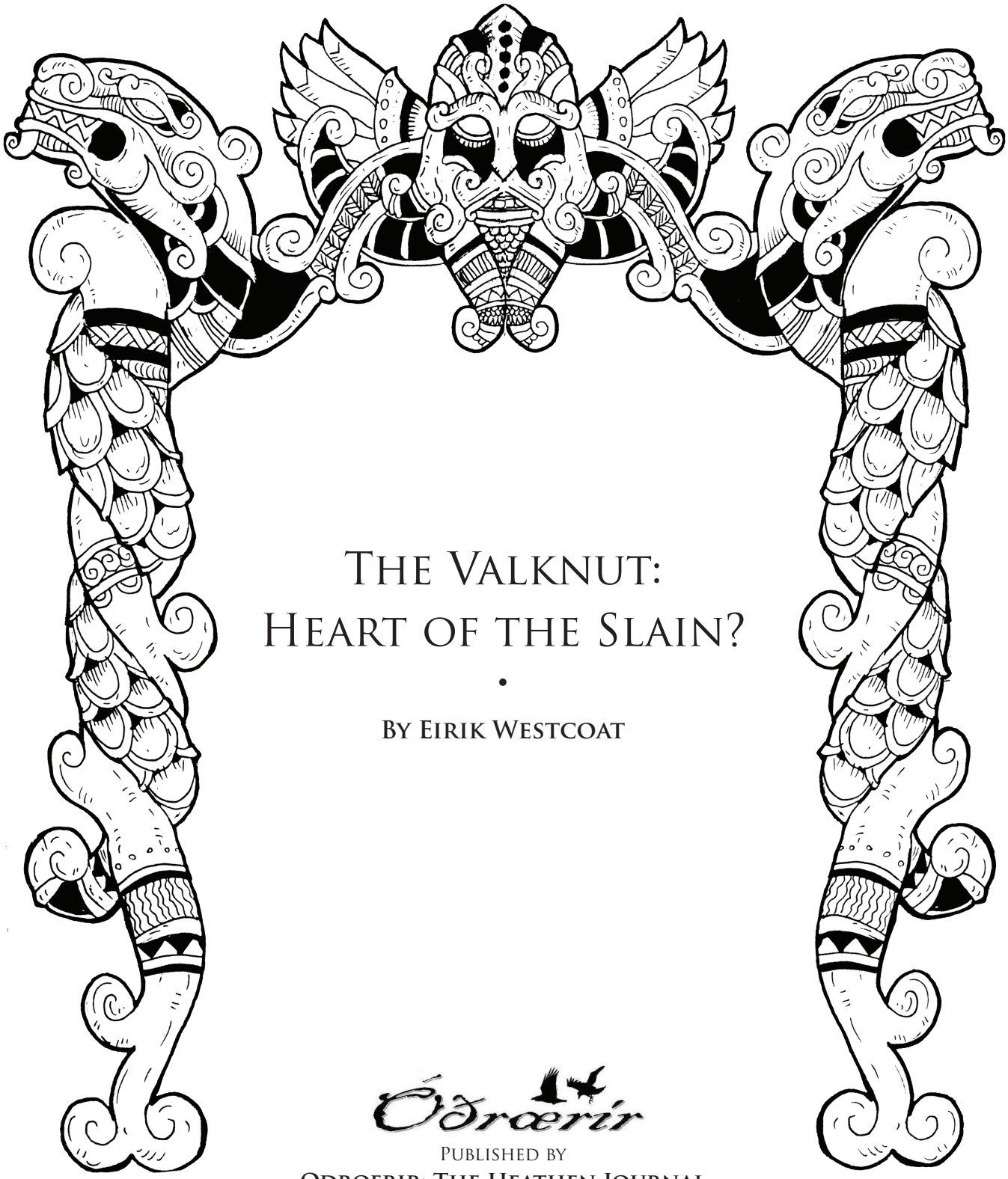

The Valknut: Heart of the Slain?

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The Valknut's most dramatic historical depiction, possibly as the heart of a slain man. From the Lärbro Stora Hammars I Stone.[1]

Abstract

This essay argues that the triple-triangle symbol commonly known as the valknut represents a heart in at least some contexts. Specifically, it is either the ideal, steady heart of the brave slain hero or that of a worthy adversary, and that the word *valknut* itself may be a *heiti* for 'heart of the slain'. Most notably, the metaphor of stone is used as an exemplar for this steadiness in the mythological figure of Hrungnir and his stone heart, while the heroic example is that of Hǫgni, whose steady heart was cut from him while still alive. To support these conclusions, this essay looks at a variety of literary, etymological, and archaeological evidence, including but not limited to *Vǫlsunga saga* for the death of Hǫgni, Snorri's *Edda* for Þórr's duel with Hrungnir, the possible sources and meanings of the word *valknut*, Gotland picture stones, and archeological finds featuring the symbol. The interpretation as a heart is compared with that of a binding symbol for the various archaeological sources and is found to be at least as viable. The possibly related symbol of interlocked drinking horns is also briefly explored as an additional depiction of a heart, but one that is connected to Kvasir and skalds instead of warriors.

Keywords: valknut, gotland, hrungnir's heart, kvasir, vǫlsunga, hǫgni, edda

1 - Ewing, 2008, p. 16

Introduction.

Although other interpretations are possible, I suggest that the interlocking triangle symbol commonly called the valknut[2] represents the ideal, brave, and steady heart of the slain warrior in at least some contexts. The symbol occurs on many archaeological finds and picture stones from the Viking Age, but there are only a few textual references to it and maybe two names for it — valknut and *Hrungnis hjarta*, and the latter provides a crucial contribution to my interpretation.[3] This essay explores the possibility by looking at the symbol across the wide spectrum of its contexts. As an essential preliminary step, I first look at some Old Norse heroic literature which connects the heart to bravery via its steadiness, to the essential qualities of one's life, and perhaps to the idea of the dead who eternally fight in Valhǫll — all in a very concrete, physical manner. Next I apply this material to the one medieval text that most likely refers to the valknut — Snorri's Hrungnir story — to explain why the symbol can be seen as the heart of the slain, and in what capacities. Then I consider the sources and etymology of the word *valknut* to see if it can plausibly mean 'heart of the slain' in some way. Following this, since the symbol occurs most famously on Gotland picture stones, I briefly look at the late *Guta saga* which may refer to the symbol. After this comes a look at several Gotland picture stones that have the symbol to see whether interpreting it as a heart is plausible or contradictory, especially as compared to the alternate view of it as a binding symbol. Then I review a few other archaeological findings with the symbol. Last I look at possibly related symbol of three interlocked drinking horns to see if a heart interpretation of it may bear on the case for the valknut as a heart.

Hǫgni's Heart and Others in Old Norse.

To establish a particular way in which hearts show bravery in Old Norse heroic literature, I first consider a contrasting pair of hearts in *Vǫlsunga saga,* those of Hjalli and Hǫgni, and the age and poetic support for this text. Then, a brief note on a dying warrior shows the emphasis on the heart in a different yet related manner. Next, the use of a heart to animate a created being in *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds* gives a possible connection to Valhǫll and the Hrungnir story. Lastly, I look at some skaldic verses that emphasize the steady heart.

In *Vǫlsunga saga*, peculiar emphasis is placed on the contrasting hearts of two different men — one cowardly, the other brave — and how their hearts reveal their bravery. The relevant text is given in chapter 39,[4] where Gunnar and Hǫgni are captured by Atli, and Atli demands that Gunnar tell him where the great gold treasure horde is hidden, the one that they got after they arranged the death of Sigurðr at the instigation of Brynhild. Gunnar refuses, saying he must first see his brother's bloody heart. Before killing Hǫgni, Atli tries to trick Gunnar by showing him instead the heart of Hjalli, the cowardly thrall who screamed loudly when threatened. Gunnar, however, sees through the ruse:

> Hjarta Hjalla má hér sjá ins blauða, ok er ólikt hjarta Hǫgna ins frœkna, því at nú skelfr mjǫk, en hálfu meir, þá er í brjósti honum lá.[5]
>
> One can see here the heart of Hjalli the coward, and it is unlike the heart of Hǫgni the valiant, because now it shakes much, but it shook by half more when it lay in

2 - Although the word is not attested before modern times, I use *valknut* in this essay as there is some possibility that it may go back further.

3 - Throughout this essay, I assume that the names *Hrungnis hjarta* and *valknut* actually do refer to the symbol. Although this is not completely certain and is probably not capable of absolute proof (either for or against), I am aware of no other viable possibilities, and as will be seen, my assumption is not exceptional.

4 - *Vǫlsunga saga,* 1965, pp. 70-71

5 - *Vǫlsunga saga,* 1965, p. 71

his breast.[6]

Then Atli cuts out Hǫgni's heart (who laughs during the process) and presents it to Gunnar, who recognizes it as genuine and says:

> Hér má sjá hjarta Hǫgna ins frœkna, ok er ólíkt hjarta Hjalla ins blauða því at nú hrœrisk lítt, en miðr meðan í brjósti honum lá.[7]
>
> One can see here the heart of Hǫgni the valiant, and it is unlike the heart of Hjalli the coward because it now stirs little, and it stirred less while it lay in his breast.

As another note to underscore the importance of hearts in that text, Gunnar dies in the snake pit when a large snake burrows into him and strikes his heart.[8] The contrasting descriptions establish that the brave heart is steady, but that the coward's heart is unsteady — furthermore, they show that this quality is revealed by the heart even after death.

Comments on the sources of *Vǫlsunga saga* are needed, since the saga is from the 13th century at the earliest and relied on many of the *Edda* poems.[9] The text we are concerned with here has its correspondences in the poems *Atlakviða,* stanzas 20-33, and *Atlamál in grœnlenzku,* stanzas 58-65.[10] Both describe the deaths of Gunnar and Hǫgni, and both make mention of Hjalli, but neither mentions a snake burrowing into Gunnar's heart (or into any other organ). In the former, the contrast between the hearts of Hǫgni and Hjalli is as explicit as in the saga, and it uses many of the same words, but for the latter the contrast is only between the bravery of the two men and it says nothing at all about the quality of their hearts. Though it is found in GKS 2365 4° dated to about 1270,[11] *Atlakviða* may potentially go back to the 9th or 10th century,[12] so the antiquity of the contrasting hearts theme is as good as could be hoped for in a text source. *Atlamál in grœnlenzku* (also in GKS 2365 4°), however, is considered a late poem not older than the 12th century.[13]

A reference in an unrelated text shows that the motif of the heart recording one's life had broader currency than for just the quality of courage. *Heimskringla* has the death scene of one Þormóðr who fought for King Óláfr.[14] An arrow has lodged itself inside of him, and he pulls it out. Before dying, he sees red and white fibers from his heart on the barbs of the arrow. Þormóðr's last words are:

> Vel hefir konungurinn alit oss. Feitt er mér enn um hjartarœtr.[15]
>
> Well has the king nourished us. Fat surrounds my heart-strings.

The context here is unlike that of the Hrungnir or Hǫgni stories, yet it demonstrates that the heart of a man records something of his life.

One tale with important parallels to the forthcoming discussion of the Hrungnir story, including the use of a heart to animate a being, may suggest Valhǫll. This is chapter 7 of Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds.[16] The

6 - Unless otherwise indicated, this and all other translations in this essay are my own.
7 - *Vǫlsunga saga,* 1965, p. 71
8 - *Vǫlsunga saga,* 1965, p. 71
9 - Byock, 1990, p. 3
10 - *Eddukvæði II,* 2014, pp. 376-79, pp. 392-94
11 - *Eddukvæði I*, 2014, p. 19
12 - *Eddukvæði II,* 2014, p. 134
13 - *Eddukvæði II,* 2014, p. 148
14 - Snorri, 2002b, pp. 391-393
15 - Snorri, 2002b, p. 393
16 - *Eyfirðinga sǫgur,* 1956, pp. 225-227

tale is found in the late 14th century manuscript *Flateyjarbók* (GKS 1005 fol.).[17] Hákon jarl, who is in Norway, seeks revenge on Þorleifr, who is in Iceland. He calls upon the sisters Þorgerðr Hǫrgabruðr and Irpa to assist him, and the result is that a tree-man is made. The tree-man is brought to life with sorcery and the heart of a freshly-killed man. He is called Þorgarðr and is equipped with clothes and an *atgeirr* for a weapon — the latter taken from the sisters' temple, suggesting some religious or symbolic importance. It is regrettable that we are not told anything about the donor of the heart since the prior analysis of this section makes it clear that the quality of a warrior is correlated with his heart. Nevertheless, it seems to have been a worthy heart, as Þorgarðr is indeed an effective warrior when he goes to Iceland and does not hesitate in giving Þorleifr a death-wound. After receiving it, Þorleifr describes Þorgarðr as *hildardjarfi*, 'battle-bold,' revealing his assessment of his mysterious opponent. (In the Hrungnir story, we will see that a similar attempt to create an effective warrior fails utterly.)

Hákon's actions have strong resonances with Óðinn. Endowing the tree-man with life parallels the story of Óðinn and company giving gifts to the trees Askr and Embla to make them human in *Vǫluspá* 17-18.[18] Hákon's provision of clothing parallels Óðinn's giving of clothes to tree-men and declaring they seem like men as a result in *Hávamál* 49.[19] Þorgarðr's weapon is another connection. Whatever precisely *atgeirr* meant, its connection to *geirr*, 'spear', would be unmistakeable, and the spear is the weapon of Óðinn *par excellence.* The result is that this brief tale shows the theme of animating a warrior with a heart had some currency. Though it is a stretch, there are possible echoes of Valhǫll here, where dead warriors live again to fight by Óðinn's will, since by means of his heart something of the man killed "lives" again as a warrior by Hákon's will.

The idea of the steady heart is supported by references in skaldic poetry. Deciphering them is helped by the list of *heiti* Snorri gives for the heart, which he presumably derives from various skaldic verses:

> Hjarta heitir negg. Þat skal svá kenna, kalla korn eða stein eða epli eða hnot eða mýl eða líkt ok kenna við brjóst eða hug. Kalla má ok hús eða jǫrð eða berg hugarins.[20]
>
> Heart is called [poetical word for heart]. It shall be referred to by calling it corn or stone or apple or nut or ball or similar and referred to with breast or thought. It can also be called house or land or rock of the thought.

Stone as a heart may emphasize steadiness in a *Þórsdrapa* verse (about Þórr's visit to Geirrøðr) by Eilífr Goðrúnarson:

> Skalfa Þórs né Þjálfa þróttar steinn við ótta.[21].
>
> Neither Þórr's nor Þjálfi's stone of valor shook with fear.

Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson directly uses *hjarta* in *Haraldsdrápa*, saying:

> Hafðit brjóst, né bifðisk bǫðsnart konungs hjarta í hjalmþrimu, hilmir hlítstyggr fyr sér lítit.[22]
>
> The prince, shunning mediocrity, had no small courage in himself, and the battle-

17 - *Eyfirðinga sǫgur,* 1956, ci
18 - *Eddukvæði I,* 2014, p. 295
19 - *Eddukvæði I,* 2014, p. 331
20 - Snorri, 1998, p. 108
21 - Snorri, 1998, p. 28
22 - *SKALD II,* 2009, p. 272

swift heart of the king did not tremble in the helmet-din.[23]

In this section, we have seen a particular importance for a symbolic meaning in which the heart reveals essential aspects of a person's life, including the contrast of whether its owner was cowardly or brave. If the dating of *Atlakviða* beyond its 13th century manuscript preservation is accurate, then that contrast may have roots in at least the 9th or 10th century but remained current through the 13th century. In that case, it would nearly bridge the gap in time between the Gotlandic picture stones (dealt with in a later section) and the writings of Snorri. Furthermore, the *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds* material shows interesting parallels to the Hrungnir story in the animation of warrior with the heart of a slain man. This heart (that is, the man's essential aspects) coming back to life as a warrior — along with the various connections to Óðinn in the tale — may suggest the idea of Valhǫll's warriors that eternally are raised from the dead. Finally, skaldic poetry sources further confirm the ideal of the steady heart.

Hrungnir's Heart and the Valknut

Armed with the importance of hearts in Old Norse sources, I turn to the one Old Norse source that most explicitly seems to mention the shape called the *valknut*, and show how it reveals the symbol as representing the heart of the slain. It is the story of Þórr's duel with Hrungnir from Snorri's *Edda* (extant in GKS 2367 4° from the first half of the 14th century, among others[24]), in which Þjálfi and Mǫkkurkálfi serve as seconds. I start by comparing the hearts of the etins in the duel to those of Hǫgni and Hjalli from *Vǫlsunga saga*. Then the end of the duel is considered for what it means for Hrungnir's heart. Next some comments on the duel by Dumezil support seeing it as the heart of a worthy opponent. Then, since this is Snorri's story, I consider what his sources may have been, and whether they show if he invented the detail of the hearts. Finally, with the combined Hrungnir and Hǫgni material laid out, the full implications of the valknut as the heart of the slain may be summarized.

I start with Mǫkkurkálfi, whose heart and bravery are described by Snorri as follows:

> Þá gerðu jǫtnar mann á Grjótúnagǫrðum af leiri ok var hann níu rasta hár en þriggja breiðr undir hǫnd, en ekki fengu þeir hjarta svá mikit at honum sómði fyrr en þeir tóku ór meri nokkvorri, ok varð honum þat eigi stǫðugt þá er Þórr kom.… Á aðra hlið honum stóð leirjǫtunninn, er nefndr er Mǫkkurkálfi, ok var hann allhræddr. Svá er sagt at hann meig er hann sá Þór.[25]
>
> Then the etins made a man at Grjótúnagarðar from clay and was he nine leagues high and three broad under the arms, but they did not get a heart as mighty as befitted him until they took one from a certain mare, and it became unsteady in him when Þórr came.… On the other side of [Hrungnir] stood the clay-etin, who is named Mǫkkurkálfi, and he was extremely frightened. It is said he made water when he saw Þórr.

It is clear that Mǫkkurkálfi is a coward, and that his heart quivers as a reflection of his cowardice, just like that of Hjalli. The mare's heart did not make for an effective warrior, unlike whatever heart Jarl Hákon obtained for Þorgarðr.

23 - *SKALD II*, 2009, p. 272 (D. Whaley, Trans.)
24 - Snorri, 2005, p. xxviii
25 - Snorri, 1998, p. 21

Snorri describes Hrungnir and his heart as follows:

> Hrungnir átti hjarta þat er frægt er, af hǫrðum steini ok tindótt með þrim hornum svá sem síðan er gert var ristubragð þat er Hrungnis hjarta heitir.[26]
>
> Hrungnir had that heart which is renowned, made of hard stone and spiked with three corners just as afterwards which was made that carved-figure which is called Hrungnir's Heart.

This sounds very much like the *valknut*, as Simek has noted.[27] It is difficult to imagine what other symbol this could be (although a possibility will be dealt with later), and yet it is no less difficult to imagine why Snorri has suddenly mentioned it here. A significant word in Snorri's description of Hrungnir's heart is *ristubragð*, 'carved-figure'. This suggests that it may have been known from stone carvings, hence a possible connection to Gotland picture stones. Hrungnir's bravery is not directly commented on, but it is easily inferred that he is a paragon of it. He challenged Þórr to a duel, the only one to ever do so, and even though he was drunk at the time, he does not back out of it — he is also said to be the strongest of the *jǫtnar*.[28] Since Hrungnir's heart is made of hard stone (cf. Snorri's list of *heiti* above), it is an exemplar of steadiness in contrast to the unsteady heart of Mǫkkurkálfi, and it is likely that this steadiness was the reason for its renown — simply having a heart made of stone *per se* would not be cause for memorializing it. Hrungnir and his stone heart correspond to Hǫgni and his steady heart, even though the contexts are quite different. Lastly, I would speculate that this story could be a source for the use of stone as a *heiti* for heart as Hrungnir seems to be the only being in the mythology whose heart is literally stone — and that I would not expect to find the heart of a coward identified with stone in the skaldic corpus, except perhaps as mockery.

The end of this story is important for what happens to the heart. Upon the conclusion of the duel with the death of Hrungnir, the renowned *Hrungnis hjarta* quite literally becomes a 'heart of the slain' and thus suitable as a symbol for the same — hence a following section that attempts to connect that meaning to the word *valknut*. Though we are not told what happened to the heart, least of all whether Þórr ate it, we are tempted to think of other stories where a being is defeated and the heart is consumed, conferring on the eater some essential qualities of the heart's former owner, such as Sigurðr eating some of Fáfnir's heart, but keeping a portion of it.[29] Nevertheless, concluding that Þórr possesses it in some way seems reasonable, as knowledge of the heart's peculiar shape implies that it has been removed from its owner's body.

Dumezil makes interesting connections with this story that will be relevant here. He first considers whether this may be a higher-level initiation for Þórr as a warrior[30] since Snorri says this is the first time he fights in a formal duel[31]. He also suggests that the piece of the hone that remains in Þórr's head is thus the mark of his initiation.[32] Next he says that the three corners of Hrungnir's heart make him akin to creatures from other Indo-European mythologies that are connected with the number three and are defeated by a great hero, such as Hercules defeating Gēryon and Mac Cecht defeating the triple-hearted Meche.[33] Schjødt, however, concludes that the story as it stands is not directly an initiation myth or ritual — he sees

26 - Snorri, 1998, p. 21
27 - Simek, 1993, p. 163
28 - Snorri, 1998, p. 21
29 - *Vǫlsunga saga,* 1965, p. 34
30 - Dumezil, 1973, p. 70
31 - Snorri, 1998, p. 21
32 - Dumezil, 1973, p. 70
33 - Dumezil, 1973, pp. 70-71

significant problems in that for each possible initiand here — although it cannot be ruled out that it may have elements originating in those.[34] Generally agreeing with Schjødt, but assuming initiatory connections of some kind whatever their precise nature, I would here see *Hrungnis hjarta* as the possible mark of initiation, representing the steady heart of the worthy enemy defeated, which is now possessed by the victor — as a sign revealing that his own heart was proven steady — thus linking him to the great hero who defeats a monster connected with triplicity. After all, Þórr, by all indications, already had a perfectly steady heart, so his victory must be a consequence of that instead of a cause. Regarding the measure of the enemy, we need only recall that Þórr's victory over Hrungnir is thought to be quite significant, undoubtedly for the worth of the opponent, and the contrast with Mǫkkurkálfi, who perished "við lítinn orðstír" ("with little glory"), makes this clear — there is no indication that Þjálfi has gained any renown from this battle.[35]

Snorri's narrative is from the 13th century, so his sources must be considered. Schjødt notes that "scholars agree in this instance that this an old myth, although certain features have been considered to be relatively late poetic additions."[36] The antiquity of the heart emphasis is most important for my purposes here. Snorri cites stanzas from *Haustl*ǫng by Þjóðólfr hvinverski to support the story.[37] However, there is no mention of hearts, nor even any mention of Þjálfi or Mǫkkurkálfi in those stanzas, so we are left wondering why Snorri should want to emphasize the hearts. Schjødt notes that:

> Snorri's version includes a number of 'peculiar' features that cannot have been placed there with a view to increasing the myth's epic value but which, on the contrary, confuse the reader and therefore can be seen as features that were present in the tradition that Snorri knew, which existed alongside *Haustl*ǫng.[38]

The emphasis on the strange shape of *Hrungnis hjarta* is surely among those peculiar features. Turville-Petre also agrees that Snorri had other sources besides *Haustl*ǫng.[39] At this point, it is a fair question whether Snorri's emphasis on hearts in the Hrungnir story was inspired by the *Atlakviða* text about Hǫgni and Hjalli. That remains possible, but Snorri does not show that he knows the *Atlakviða* text and the contexts are quite different. Snorri gives a brief version of the deaths of Gunnar and Hǫgni,[40] mentioning that Hǫgni's heart was cut out while he was still alive — but it is clearly the version from *Atlamál in grœnlenzku* and Snorri makes no mention of Hjalli, let alone any contrast of their hearts. Most oddly opposed to *Vǫlsunga saga*, he says that the snake instead struck Gunnar's liver! Thus, it seems likely that he got the emphasis on hearts for the Hrungnir story from somewhere other than *Atlakviða*, which also at least indicates a wider spread for the motif than if he had gotten it from *Atlakviða*.

Putting the Hǫgni and Hrungnir material together leads to the complete interpretation of the valknut as the heart of the slain. The contrasting hearts of Hǫgni/Hjalli and Hrungnir/Mǫkkurkálfi show clear parallels in which the steady heart of the brave man is the ideal. It is then no great leap to suggest that a heart of stone is the steadiest of all and would thus become a symbol of that ideal. Since Hǫgni is a hero and Hrungnir is a foe, I consider that it can thus be either the heart of the valiant hero and/or that of the worthy enemy he defeats. Whichever meaning it started with, it seems likely that the other would have soon followed. Hrungnir's death thus makes the valknut a literal heart of the slain. Furthermore, the symbol could be a mark of initiation or distinction, and it would be used to identify the hero, the enemy he defeats, or to

34 - Schjødt, 2008, p. 241
35 - Snorri, 1998, p. 22
36 - Schjødt, 2008, p. 233
37 - Snorri, 1998, pp. 22-24
38 - Schjødt, 2008, p. 234
39 - Turville-Petre, 1975, p. 77
40 - Snorri, 1998, pp. 48-49

remind the hero of the ideal. The remaining sections will look at word origins, other texts, and archeological material to see how viable this interpretation is.

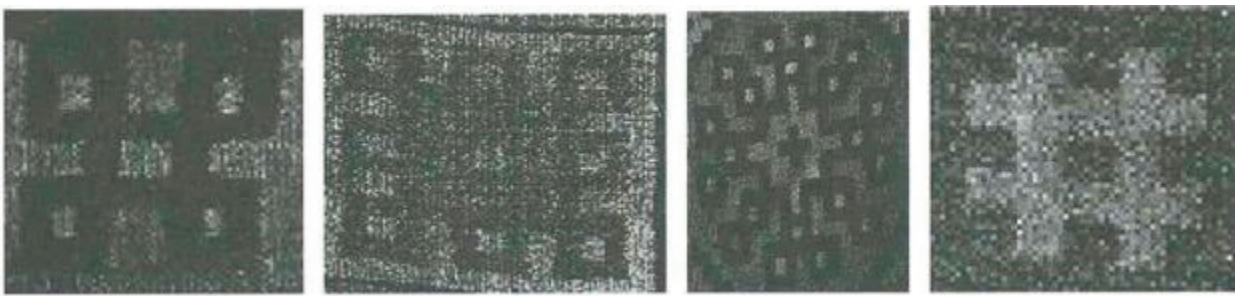
The Word Valknut: Sources and Etymology.

Having established the particulars of my view of the valknut as the heart of the slain, I turn to the sources and etymology of the word. The sources for the word are late, referring to rope knots and knitting patterns, and seem to have nothing to do with the ancient symbol under consideration. However, I suggest a way for the heart to bridge this gap. Then I consider the etymology of *valknut*, followed by whether this could refer to a heart through a *heiti*, with or without a folk etymology association, and thus mean 'heart of the slain.'

I use *valknut* in this essay instead of Old Norse ***valknútr*[41] since there are no known Old Norse attestations of the word, as Hellers observed by searching the word list of the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar.[42] Nevertheless, the word does not seem to be a brand-new creation of recent times. Hellers finds the following dictionary citations that treat the word as the kind of knot that one ties in a rope:[43]

> *Valknut* (and *Valknude*): 'kunstig Knude paa en Svøbe.'[44] ('artificial knot on a whip.')
>
> *valknut*: 'dubbelknut i form av ett S.'[45] ('double knot in the form of an S.')

There is no suggestion that these knots have anything in common with the three-fold shape under consideration here. Next Hellers notes that *valknut* was used to refer to a folk art pattern on tapestries and carpets of the 18th and 19th centuries, and shows some variants of the design.[46] However, the examples given are all four-fold patterns, not the three-fold shape under consideration.



Valknut Knitting Patterns[47]

The origin of using the word *valknut* to describe the three-fold symbol is unclear, and seems to be a leap of faith. Hellers notes that Kostveit seems to assume that the term *valknut* originally referred to the three-fold symbol, but later became attached to the four-fold symbol.[48] Hellers says that this cannot be verified at this time and that the discrepancy between the three-fold symbol and the four-fold symbol of folk art is

41 - Here and elsewhere (especially in the appendix), I follow the standard practice of preceding unattested or reconstructed forms with an asterisk.
42 - Hellers, 2012, p. 46
43 - Hellers, 2012, pp. 46-47
44 - Aasen, 1873, p. 894
45 - Hellquist, 1922, p. 1084
46 - Hellers, 2012, pp. 47-48
47 - Hellers, 2012, p. 48
48 - Hellers, 2012, p. 49 citing Kostveit, 1998, pp. 91-93

rather large.[49] Thus we are left with no solution to the question of whether *valknut* was first applied to the three-fold symbol and then later to the four-fold symbol, or if instead it was first applied to the four-fold symbol and then (perhaps very recently) assumed to be the name of the three-fold symbol — or perhaps variably applied to both.

It is here that the interpretation of the valknut as a heart may be useful, as it could bridge this discrepancy. The heart is a four-fold organ, having four chambers and four valves, and it thus has a better correspondence to four-fold symbols as representations. If the three-fold symbol was originally referring to a heart, the association would have a natural instability due to the discrepancy. The subsequent reinterpretation of the word as applying to a four-fold symbol might sooner or later become appealing, especially if the original reasons for using a three-fold symbol became forgotten.

Whatever the usage of the word, it is possible that it goes back quite some distance in time, making its etymology worth considering. Hellers notes that **valknútr* has been analyzed etymologically, and that the latter part, *knútr*, is accepted as meaning 'knot'.[50] There are no problems in this, as the symbol, whether three-fold or four-fold, is objectively a knot. Looking at various scholarship, he notes four possible meanings for the *val-* portion: 'slain', as in *valkyrja*, 'chooser of the slain'; 'welsh' as in *valir*, 'the Welsh'; as from the god-name Váli, the avenger of *Baldr*; or as from *vǫlva*, referring to a seeress or her magic in some fashion.[51] I would note the following other possibilities: *val*, 'choice'; *valr*, 'hawk' (which itself may go back to *valr*, 'slain' by identifying it as a carrion-bird); *vala*, 'knuckle-bone'; and *valr*, 'round, oval' related to *vǫlr*, 'a round stick'.[52] At this point, we may wonder if this is wild goose chase over a word that could mean simply 'round knot'. Nevertheless, Hellers concludes that the term **valknútr* is still a mystery, though it most likely means 'knot of the slain (on the battlefield)' and that this fits many aspects attributed to the symbol.[53] However, it is not immediately obvious why the Old Norse should have a knot of the slain.

I consider now whether *valknut* could refer to a heart through a *heiti*. *Valknut* could mean 'heart of the slain' if *knútr* were a *heiti* for *hjarta* in skaldic poetry. After all, the intertwining large vessels emerging from the heart would naturally suggest the image of a knot. Direct evidence for this, however, is lacking. Although *knútr* occurs in roughly thirty instances of skaldic poetry (according to a search of the *Skaldic Project* website), it is not used as a *heiti* for heart in any of them.[54] It is most often used as a masculine proper name, as in Knútr konungr, and we may wonder if the potential confusion with the name would have deterred kenning usage. Other words with meanings relating to 'knot' (such as *knútóttr*, *knýta*, *knýttr*, *knǫttr*, *knykill*, *atrenna*, *hnykill*, *rúmsnara*, *rœxn*, and þrymill) were not found in any context to support that idea that *knútr* could be a *heiti* for *hjarta*. The *Skaldic Project* website, however, says of their dictionary search that "This material is incomplete and is for reference only," so perhaps an example may yet be found.[55] Similar searches on the also-incomplete *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* yielded similarly negative results.[56]

Another route for connecting *valknut* to *hjarta* would involve a folk etymology. Snorri gives a list of *heiti* and kennings for *hjarta*, which does not include *knútr*, but does include *hnot*, 'nut'.[57] This suggests that a hypothetical compound **valhnot*, literally 'nut of the slain', would be a *heiti* for 'heart of the slain'.

49 - Hellers, 2012, p. 49
50 - Hellers, 2012, p. 49
51 - Hellers, 2012, p. 49-50
52 - Cleasby & Guðbrand, 1874, p. 674-676
53 - Hellers, 2012, p. 183
54 - *Skaldic Project*, 2015
55 - *Skaldic Project*, 2015
56 - *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, 2015
57 - Snorri, 1998, p. 108

The word is perhaps close enough to **valknútr* to suggest a connection similar to how Snorri connects Æsir to Asia in his *Prologue*[58] or Auðunn to Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga*.[59] A significant complication with this is that *valhnot*, using a different *val-* root and thus meaning 'welsh nut', is in fact the attested Old Norse word for 'walnut'.[60] Such an overlap with the 'walnut' word would seem likely to deter a connection to *valknut*.

In this section, we have seen that the word *valknut* itself emerged from the mists of time in uses that are distant from a likely etymological meaning of 'knot of the slain'. Its use to name rope knots confirms that we should see it as a knot, but its use for four-fold knitting patterns makes connecting it to a three-fold symbol problematic. It was here, however, that the interpretation as a heart offered a possible bridge. The natural appearance of the heart as the center of a knot of vessels gives the best opportunity for a *heiti* connection to make 'heart of the slain', although skaldic poetry support is lacking. Folk etymology adds only a meager possibility. Further possible evidence for the knot-as-heart connection will be explored later, however, in the context of the interlocked drinking-horn symbol.

The Valknut in a Gotland Text.

Since the valknut occurs most dramatically on the Gotland picture stones, it is worth seeing if *Guta saga* (generally dated to roughly 1220-1275, but from an early to middle 14th century manuscript[61]) tells us anything. Although there is no connection to the heart in it, there is a possible connection to binding and snakes. Also, there is mention of human sacrifice, with which one of the Gotlandic picture stones is often connected.

Before *Guta saga*, Ellis Davidson's comment about the *valknut* should be noted:

> For instance, beside the figure of Odin on his horse shown on several memorial stones there is a kind of knot depicted, called the *valknut*, related to the triskele. This is thought to symbolize the power of the god to bind and unbind, mentioned in poems and elsewhere.[62]

An interesting connection to this idea of binding is found in the poetic-seeming speech of Hafþi that is quoted early in *Guta saga*:

> Alt ir baugum bundit. Boland al þitta varþa, ok faum þria syni aiga…. Guti al Gutland aiga, Graipr al annar haita, ok Gunfiaun þriþi.[63]
>
> Everything in rings is bound. Inhabited this land shall be; we shall beget sons three…. Guti shall Gotland claim, Graipr the second by name and Gunfiaun the third.[64]

We are not told how many of these binding rings are meant here, but the tendency of the saga in chapter one can be our guide.[65] Huitastierna dreams of three snakes coiled together in her womb. The number of

58 - Snorri, 2005, p. 6
59 - Snorri, 2002a, p. 20
60 - Cleasby & Guðbrand, 1874, p. 675
61 - *Guta saga,* 1999, pp. lii-liii, p. xlix
62 - Ellis Davidson, 1964, p. 147
63 - *Guta saga,* 1999, p. 2
64 - *Guta saga*, 1999, p. 3 (C. Peel, Trans.)
65 - *Guta saga,* 1999, pp. 2-5

sons is three, and they divide Gotland into three. When the land becomes overcrowded, one out of every three people is then sent away. From the use of the number three in the verse and its immediate context, it would be safe to conclude that the number of binding rings may also be three, and the valknut is an obvious candidate for representing this. Peel may be referring to the valknut (or possibly the arm rings that some figures are holding up on stones such as Lärbro Tängelgårda I) when she says:

> The rings (*baugum*) of the verse echo the coiling of the snakes, as well as the rings that appear frequently on picture-stones. *Alt* could refer to the future of Gotland as a whole, or simply to 'everything', and the binding in rings could be a reference to the interconnection of various events, or to the idea that the future of Gotland is to be determined by the coiling of the snakes (Hafþi's and Huitastierna's sons).[66]

Chapter 1 also tells us that human sacrifice was practiced on Gotland, but the the text does not give us any way to connect it to the valknut.[67] Finally, I found no references to hearts, triangles, or knots in the text.

Putting it together, it seems that *Guta saga* would make a better case for a binding interpretation of the valknut. Absent here is any connection to hearts. However, we also have the possible peculiar connection of the symbol to a triad of snakes. It is here that an odd detail about the triple-hearted Meche should be mentioned: he had an adder living in each of those hearts.[68] Whatever the likelihood of a borrowing here, the striking commonalities between Meche and his adders and hearts, Huitastierna's womb and snake-embryos, and the triplicity of *Hrungnis hjarta* lead to the possibility that identifying the triangles of the valknut with serpents is somehow part of the heart symbolism. However, whether binding or not, there are not other triads of snakes in Old Norse that I am aware of that could make sense of this, although there is a single famous snake which binds everything — the Miðgarðsormr which encompasses the whole of Miðgarðr.[69]

The Valknut on Gotland Picture Stones.

This section will look at the occurrences of the valknut on Gotland picture stones to test whether the interpretation as a heart is viable. These stones are especially useful, as they provide the closest thing to a narrative context for the symbol outside of the scant textual references. Since the stones are part of a recognizable tradition, some context for them is first laid out which connects them to burial practices in general, but sometimes Valhǫll specifically, and in this latter case they may be connected to the Hrungnir story. Then a selection of individual stones is examined — Lärbro Stora Hammars I (giving this one the most attention), Buttle Änge V, Lärbro Tängelgårda I, Stenkyrka Lillbjärs I, and Stenkyrka Smiss I — to see whether the valknut might represent a heart on them.

Gotland's picture stones show connections to memorial practices, Valhǫll, and the Hrungnir story. Nylén reckons that the Gotland picture stones were all probably memorial stones, whether near a burial or elsewhere.[70] Andrén considers at least some of them to be doorways to other worlds.[71] Whether they can specifically go to Valhǫll would be most important here. Many of the picture stones have a horse (whether with four or eight legs), rider, and a woman with a drinking horn, and Andrén says of this motif (on the

66 - *Guta saga,* 1999, p. 21
67 - *Guta saga,* 1999, p. 3
68 - "Bodleian Dinnshenchas", 1892, p. 483
69 - Snorri, 2005, p. 27
70 - Nylén & Lamm, 1988, pp. 9-10
71 - Andrén, 1993, p. 51

single-scene stones) that “For good reasons it has long been argued that the pictures represent Valhalla, with a dead warrior, or Odin himself, being welcomed by a valkyrie”.[72] Ney, however, offers a different perspective, considering whether the image may be Sigurðr greeted by Sigrdrífa, or more generally the lady of a hall greeting a warrior[73] — but these parallel Valhǫll also. Regarding the eight-legged horse pictures, Turville-Petre says of these: “This may well be an image of Óðinn riding Sleipnir, but it is no less likely that the eight legs were intended to give an impression of the horse’s speed”.[74] If it is speed that is shown, there is connection to the Hrungnir story, which may equally well apply to stones that only show four-legged horses. That story starts with Óðinn racing Hrungnir on horseback, and Hrungnir goes so fast that he ends up in Valhǫll before he knows it and is offered a drink, and later it is even said that Freyja is bringing him drink.[75] This parallel thus supports interpreting such a scene as depicting a warrior who has been lead by Óðinn to Valhǫll and is greeted with a drink by a woman, perhaps one of the valkyries if it is too much to think that it is Freyja herself. The warrior, when not drinking, would then enjoy battle with his comrades and be whole again afterwards in time for dinner. We have exactly that in the Hrungnir story when he fights Þórr after much drinking, although Hrungnir does not get to live again afterwards. Although Hrungnir himself may not be depicted on the stones, I consider that the many parallels make it more likely that other elements of the story are sometimes depicted on the stones — hence the valknut as a heart, just as Snorri told us.

Lärbro Stora Hammars I in Northern Gotland is probably the most dramatic occurrence of the valknut, and it may well represent a heart despite the proliferation of interpretations. The stone is dated to the 8th century.[76] The valknut occurs on panel four, counting from the bottom. Ewing considers this a picture of human sacrifice and says “the triple triangle or *valknut* is a symbol of the god Odin.”[77] This would presumably imply that the sacrifice depicted on the stone is to Óðinn, and that is reasonable, since we have many attributes of Óðinn in this panel, such as a hanged man, a spear, and some birds which could be eagles or ravens. Nylén also considers this a depiction of human sacrifice, but instead of mentioning the valknut directly, he merely implies it is a religious symbol.[78] Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir connects the stone with the Hildr legend of the everlasting battle, focusing specifically on panel three (counting from the bottom) of the stone.[79] She does not attempt to analyze whether panel four would also be a part of the Hildr legend or not — the possibility of the scenes referring to different stories would certainly complicate matters. Srigley considers it rather to depict an episode from the Fall of Troy.[80] The interpretation supporting my view is Andrén’s, who connects the scene with the valknut with the death of Gunnar and Hǫgni in *Vǫlsunga saga*, and the rest of the stone to the same saga.[81] Though Hellers is dismissive of it,[82] Andrén suggests that the valknut in the scene may be Hǫgni’s extracted heart.[83] If that is so, it becomes quite likely that the valknut — Hrungnir’s stone heart — has been used as an exemplar of steadiness here. If it is some other story depicted, I find it possible that the man standing on the right of the valknut is holding it up or gesturing to it to show the person to the left of it. It may then be the victim’s heart, even if it is not Hǫgni’s.

72 - Andrén, 1993, p. 41
73 - Ney, 2012, p. 80
74 - Turville-Petre, 1975, p. 57
75 - Snorri, 1998, p. 20
76 - Nylén & Lamm, 1988, p. 63
77 - Ewing, 2008, p. 16
78 - Nylén & Lamm, 1988, p. 62
79 - Aðalheiður, 2012, pp. 59-71
80 - Srigley, 1989, p. 182
81 - Andrén, 1993, pp. 41-42
82 - Hellers, 2012, p. 119
83 - Andrén, 1989, p. 302

Lärbro Stora Hammars I[84]

Buttle Änge V[85]

Buttle Änge V shows a warrior with a sword facing off against what might be a monster, with the valknut above the monster, and a possible valknut above the warrior. This stone is dated to the 6th through 8th centuries by Lindqvist.[86] Though the sword prevents us from seeing the man as Þórr, the scene calls to mind the battle with Hrungnir and his association with the valknut. In this case, the valknuts may represent the valiant hearts of the combatants, identifying both as worthy. The initiatory interpretation that Dumezil gave to the Hrungnir story also comes to mind here

Lärbro Tängelgårda I, from the eighth century,[87] has has two valknuts and an oddly-shaped triangle placed under a man on horseback, and all these may be hearts. Andrén considers this stone to have early depictions of Sigurðr and Grani from *Vǫlsunga saga*,[88] and he specifically suggests that the three symbols represent Sigurðr's triumphs over King Lyngvi, Fáfnir, and Reginn, with Sigurðr's eating of Fáfnir's heart as justification for connecting the valknut to a heart here.[89] He comes across as reaching in his context, but in this case, I would bridge the gap by suggesting that the valknuts are used as the hearts of Lyngvi and Fáfnir to identify them both as worthy opponents as per Hrungnir, whereas the oddly-shaped triangle — maybe a deformed valknut — identifies Regin as perhaps less worthy. Andrén also considers that this stone is linked Lärbrö Stora Hammars I by both depicting the death of Sigurðr in another panel on each.[90] The close spatial, temporal, and thematic connections of the two stones make it such that if the valknut is a heart on one of them, it could well be a heart on the other.

84 - Hellers, 2012, p. 230
85 - Hellers, 2012, p. 234
86 - Hellers, 2012, p. 90
87 - Nylén & Lamm, 1988, p. 67
88 - Andrén, 1993, pp. 41-42
89 - Andrén, 1989, p. 302
90 - Andrén, 1993, pp. 41-42

Lärbro Tängelgårda I[91]

Stenkyrka Lillbjärs I[92]

Stenkyrka Lillbjärs I has an ordinary horse and rider (with sword and shield), with possibly a woman to the left greeting him, and once again the valknut is underneath the horse. This stone, dated to the eighth century,[93] is much less elaborate, and barely anything else is discernible. Since there is only one valknut, it is conceivable this could represent the heart of the rider, but it could also be the heart of a defeated enemy. Either way, it can be a mark of the worth of the rider for entering Valhǫll, and its appearance on this stone and similar such stones would suggest that we should indeed connect the symbol to Valhǫll.

Stenkyrka Smiss I has the valknut above some warriors on a ship. It is dated to the 8th century by Lindqvist.[94] Here the symbol could show the steady hearts of the men as they sail to wherever they are going. However, in this stone, like all the others considered in this section, it is difficult to see the symbol as binding anything.

91 - Hellers, 2012, p. 231
92 - Hellers, 2012, p. 232
93 - Nylén & Lamm, 1988, p. 101
94 - Hellers, 2012, p. 92

Stenkyrka Smiss I[95]

To conclude this section, it would seem that interpreting the valknut as a brave steady heart on these stones is indeed a possibility that does not contradict, but can rather enhance the interpretations of the scenes depicted. Whether it commemorates a worthy opponent or a champion, the image is entirely in keeping with the welcome of a warrior to Valhǫll (when it occurs on stones that have such imagery), where Óðinn prefers the valiant heart of a Hǫgni and has no use for the unsteady heart of a Hjalli. It is thus a way to link another aspect of the Hrungnir story to the stones, even if the characters in the duel itself are not on the stones. On the other hand, it would seem difficult to apply the notion of the valknut as a binding symbol to any of these stones, for what would it be binding? Most of all, however, we have one stone that could plausibly show it directly as an extracted heart instead of alluding to one.

The Valknut on Other Artifacts.

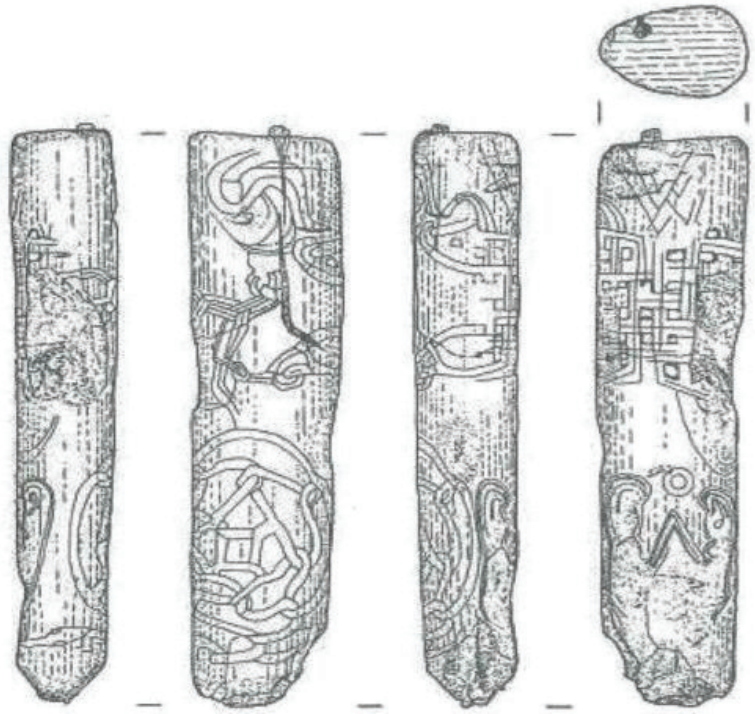
In this section I consider the occurrence of the valknut on other artifacts and whether it can represent the steady heart there also. Here I will briefly look at a bedpost from the Oseberg ship burial, a knife-handle from Hedeby, a ring from Peterborough, a bracteate, and a fibula. The interpretation of the valknut as a binding symbol will be the main alternative.

A bedpost from the Oseberg ship burial has the valknut on it.[96] The burial is dated to 834, and of the

95 - Hellers, 2012, p. 236
96 - Hellers, 2012, p. 76

two women buried there, one may have been a priestess.[97] It would be more difficult to see this valknut as connected to a warrior-heart ethos in the burial of women. The valknut as a symbol that one of the women was involved in magics of binding and loosening would make more sense here.

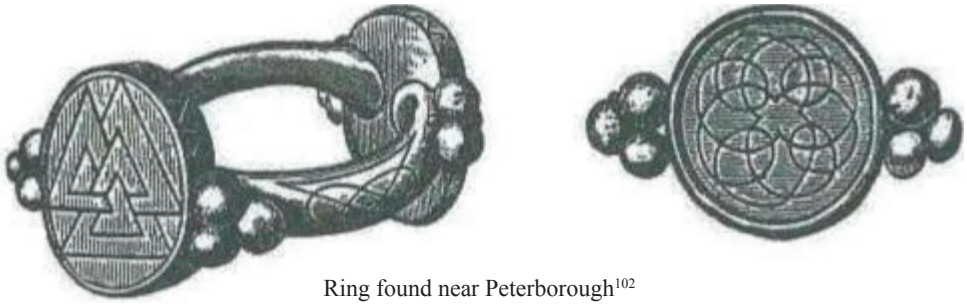
One of the Oseberg Bedposts[98]



Knife Handle from Hedeby[99]

A knife-handle from Hedeby in the mid-to-late Viking Age also has the symbol.[100] Carried as a weapon, it could remind the owner to have a steady heart. Alternatively, it could reflect the knife's ability to unbind the life force of a being by killing it.

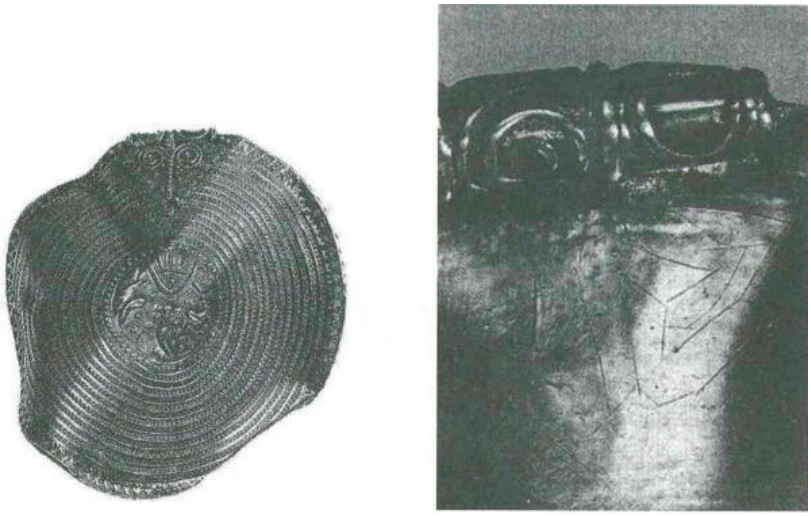
A ring found near Peterborough, Cambridgeshire in England, is from Anglo-Saxon times, perhaps the seventh century.[101] The reminder to a steady heart is certainly a possibility here, even more so than for the knife handle. If it were for binding, it is not clear what would be bound, except that it might show similar affiliation with binding magics as in the Oseberg bedpost. If it is to bind fear so that the warrior could be effective in battle, then we have reached a point where the two interpretations merge.



Ring found near Peterborough[102]

97 - Nordeide, 2011, pp. 7-8
98 - Hellers, 2012, p. 253
99 - Hellers, 2012, p. 258
100 - Hellers, 2012, pp. 79-80
101 - Hellers 2012, p. 84
102 - Hellers, 2012, p. 85

A late bracteate from Nygårds, Västerhejde in Gotland has a valknut scratched, not stamped, on the back, and this is dated to the 10th century.[103] Here the valknut could be thought to bind magic to the bracteate or it could give the ability to bind and loosen to the wearer. Whether worn by a man or woman it could also be one for imparting a steady heart to the wearer. Deciding between the interpretations would seem difficult.



Late Bracteate from Nygårds[104]

A fibula from Kaupang, Norway, dated to 850-900, has the symbol.[105] Depending upon whether it was worn by a man or a woman, we would potentially have the same interpretations as the preceding objects. However, the idea of binding is more appropriate on an object that itself is used to bind, even if it is only a cloak or other garment.

Fibula from Kaupang[106]

In this look at other objects bearing the valknut, it was seen that interpretations relating to binding may better explain some of them. Nevertheless, the interpretation of the valknut as the steady heart is just as viable for others. In addition, the geographic distribution of them shows that knowledge of the valknut indeed spread beyond the shores of Gotland before the time of Snorri.

103 - Hellers, 2012, p. 83
104 - Hellers, 2012. p. 83
105 - Hellers, 2012, p. 84
106 - Hellers, 2012, p. 84

The Valknut and the Interlocked Drinking Horns.

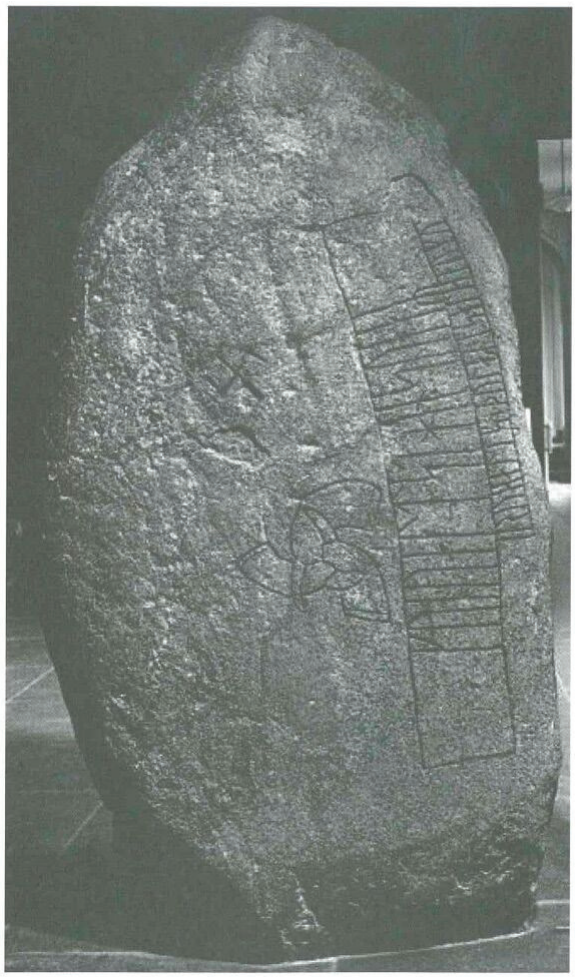
There is a symbol of three interlocked drinking horns that is sometimes linked to the valknut or *Hrungnis hjarta*. Simek says of these drinking horns that:

> This last symbol, which could also fit Snorri's description, is also found on the rune stone from [Snoldelev]. It is possibly only a stylistic variant of the symbol formed from three triangles. Perhaps consideration ought to be given to whether the three horns known as Hrungnir's heart are not actually totally different from the *valknuter*.[107]

However, there is nothing in Snorri's description that implies horns, and since Snorri surely knew what drinking horns looked like, we might have expected him to say something about the symbol if he had known it. Nevertheless, connecting both symbols to hearts suggests an interpretation with more functionality than that of mere stylistic variation, and it bears on the knot-as-heart *heiti* possibility mentioned earlier. I first discuss the appearance of the symbol on the Snoldelev rune stone from Ramsø, Denmark, suggesting that the heart-interpretation makes more sense if it is not a warrior's heart. Then I look at whether any poetic evidence supports this interpretation. Next I look at the Gotland picture stone Stenkyrka Lillbjärs III, which features both this symbol and the valknut and suggest an interpretation of it. Last I consider some implications.

The Snoldelev rune stone from Ramsø, Denmark is dated to the ninth century.[108] The interlocked drinking horns are accompanied by a runic inscription which reports that the person commemorated was a þulr.[109] Although not certain, þulr may be a title of some kind referring to a skald or cultic speaker and is connected to the poetic lists called þulur.[110] Whatever a þulr is, he is connected to Óðinn through the likely reference to Óðinn as a *fimbul*þulr in *Hámavál* 80 and 142.[111] Furthermore, the three drinking horns call to mind Snorri's story of the poetic mead made from the blood of Kvasir and the three containers it is kept it.[112] I suggest these drinking horns may also be a stylized depiction of a heart. Of course, in this context of poetic connections, interpreting it as *Hrungnis hjarta* would be absurd. Instead, the heart of Kvasir or a skald would be more likely. There is no mention of hearts in Snorri's mead story, but the heart as the source of blood is a natural image, and if the symbol is a stylized heart, then the drinking horn openings would correspond to the large vessels that pour blood out of the heart. Thus the poetry of skalds or wisdom of a þulr would be envisioned as being poured forth from his heart like blood.

107 - Simek, 1993, p. 163
108 - Simek, 1993, p. 331
109 - Simek, 1993, p. 331
110 - Simek, 1993, pp. 331-332
111 - *Eddukvæði I,* 2014, p. 338, p. 351
112 - Snorri, 1998, pp. 3-4



Snoldelev Runestone[113]

If there is any likelihood of this interpretation being valid, we would expect the skalds to use kennings that describe their poetry as being like blood or something that comes out of the heart. We do have the kenning *Kvasis dreyri*, 'Kvasir's blood' in the poetry of Einarr skálaglamm,[114] but that is part of the material that Snorri is accused of liberally expanding into the mead myth.[115] However, *dreyri* is blood, and Kvasir, though he makes for a great image, is not essential to the interpretation. I did not find any direct references to poetry as from the heart, but at least one kenning reference exists, using thought-land for heart or breast, by Refr:

> Grjótaldar ték gildi geðreinar Þorsteini.[116]
>
> I offer Thorstein feast [the mead] of rock-men's [giants'] thought-land [breast].[117]

Now something may be said of the Gotland picture stone Stenkyrka Lillbjärs III, dated to the 8th century.[118] It has a horse and rider with both a valknut and the interlocked drinking-horns above him, along

113 - Hellers, 2012, p. 243
114 - Snorri, 1998, p. 12
115 - Frank, 1981, pp. 155-170
116 - Snorri, 1998, p. 12
117 - Snorri, 1987, p. 70 (A. Faulkes, Trans.)
118 - Nylén & Lamm, 1988, p. 65

with a woman bearing a drink. Like Stenkyrka Lillbjärs I, deciding for the valknut between the heart of the rider and that of a worthy opponent is difficult. Here, since it is over the rider, I prefer to see it as the heart of the rider, and thus the drinking horns as also the heart of the rider, identifying the man as both warrior and skald.

Stenkyrka Lillbjärs III[119]

By adding consideration of the drinking-horn symbol, we may have two hearts, one for warriors, the other for skalds, both with strong connections to Óðinn, suggesting some broader cultic importance for the heart than just that of the warrior-centered one connected with Hrungnir. In any case, since the drinking-horn symbol is more amenable to being seen as a literal heart and it is also objectively a knot as well, it would suggest that other knots, such as the valknut, might also be seen as hearts by analogy, even if more direct *heiti* and kenning evidence is absent.

Conclusions.

Old Norse sources, potentially ranging from the 9th to 13th centuries clearly demonstrate the ideal of the steady heart of the brave warrior, sometimes by markedly contrasting it with the unsteady heart of the coward. These support interpreting Hrungnir's Heart as an exemplar of that ideal, since it is made of stone,

119 - Hellers, 2012, p. 232

which is an paragon of steadiness. The steadiness of Hrungnir's heart also suggests that it is a reflection of the glory to be gained by defeating a brave-hearted enemy as opposed to a coward like Mǫkkurkálfi. The deaths of Hrungnir and Hǫgni make each of their hearts literally a heart of the slain, suggesting the application of the concept to both hero and foe. Though poetic kenning evidence for it has not yet been found, connecting the word *valknut*, literally 'knot of the slain', to the meaning 'heart of the slain' remains plausible on the basis of the natural appearance of the heart as the center of a knot of vessels. A look at *Guta saga*, however, shows that its possible reference to the symbol is most likely connected to binding and possibly snakes, and could only connect to the heart in an obscure manner. A selection of Gotland picture stones, however, could plausibly use the valknut as a heart reference, whether as the heart of a defeated enemy or the heart of the hero, and the valknut-as-heart would reinforce the accepted connections to Valhǫll of many stones via the Hrungnir story. Furthermore, the most famous of the stones may even be showing Hǫgni's extracted heart as a valknut to emphasize its steadiness. Other archeological objects, however, represent a mixed bag and may plausibly refer either to the heart or to binding. Lastly, the interlocked drinking horns, rather than being the steady heart of the hero or of Hrungnir, might better be seen as the skald's heart pouring out words in a connection to Kvasir, and that a knot could represent a heart is further suggested by the graphical correspondence of this knot to the large vessels emerging from the heart. I conclude that interpreting the valknut as the ideal heart of the slain is indeed plausible for some contexts, although the evidence cannot support giving that meaning predominance over other plausible interpretations for the time period considered.

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