

Baldr's Love and Death in the Light of Indo-European Studies: Old Norse *Nanna Nepsdóttir* 'Maiden Sky-Daughter' and *Hǫðr* 'Darkness'

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Old Norse (ON) *Nanna Neps-dóttir* ('Neps-daughter') and *Hǫðr* are the names of two Norse deities, the lover and the killer, respectively, of Baldr, a god who is "so bright that light shines from him" (*Gylfaginning* 22: *bjartr svá at lýsir af honum*) and the protagonist of mythical narratives about his love for Nanna and killing by *Hǫðr* (e.g. *Gylfaginning* 49; Saxo *Gesta Danorum* 3.1–4).

Nanna is clearly identical to the ON appellative *nanna* 'maiden, woman' (Lieberman 2004:25; 47), whereas her father's name (gen. sg. *Neps*) is etymologically unclear (de Vries 1962, s.v.). *Hǫðr* is currently analysed as a derivative of the ON feminine *hǫð* 'battle' (PIE **kó/á/Htu-* 'hostility' : Hittite *kattu-* 'id.', Old Irish *cath* 'battle'); these semantics, however, find no support in myth.

The aim of this paper is to make the case for ON *Nanna Nepsdóttir* and *Hǫðr* as reflexes of Proto-Indo-European (PIE) designations for the 'dawn(-goddess)' and 'darkness', respectively, on both formal and mythological grounds.

As will be argued, *Neps*^o is the regular outcome of **Nefrs*^o (cf. Noreen 1923:180; 214–5), the gen. sg. of the ON reflex of Proto-Germanic (PGmc) **neb-iz-* and PIE **néb^h-es-* 'sky, cloud' (Hittite *nepiš-* 'sky', Vedic *nábhas-* 'humidity, cloud, sky', Greek *νέφος* 'cloud'). Accordingly, the theonym *Nanna* and the patronymic *Neps-dóttir* mean 'Maiden' and 'Sky's Daughter', respectively, closely matching the epithets of the Vedic dawn-goddess *kanā-* 'maiden' (also *yuvatī-*, *yóṣā-*, *yóṣañā-* 'id.') and *Divó duhitár-* 'Sky's daughter' (both occurring e.g. in *Rigveda* 10.61.5), as well as those of other reflexes of the PIE dawn-goddess (for an overview, cf. West 2007:186) such as Greek *Διὸς θυγάτηρ* 'Zeus's daughter' (e.g. Aphrodite) and Lithuanian *diėvo duktė/dukrytė* 'Diėvas's daughter' (the sun-goddess).

ON *Hǫðr* may be traced back to PGmc **hap-u-* and PIE *(s)*kót-u-/két-u-* ON *Hǫðr* may be traced back to PGmc **hap-u-* and PIE *(s)*kót-u-/két-u-* 'concealment (abstract), shadow/darkness (concrete)', an acrostatic *-u-* stem of PIE *(s)*ket-* 'conceal' (Vedic *cátant-* 'concealing himself', *cātáya^{te}* 'make (someone) hide', Greek *σκότος* 'shadow, darkness'; cf. *LIV*²:357 "k^(u)et- 'entweichen'; *EWAia*, s.v. *CAT*), among whose direct and indirect reflexes are Vedic (*māṁś*)^o *cat-ú-* 'the time of the hiding (of the moon)', Gothic *skadus*, Old English *sceadu* 'shadow', and Old Irish *scáth* 'covering, protection, shadow'.

Finally, the onomastics, phraseology and narrative elements of the myth of the light-god Baldr's love for Nanna (a reflex of the PIE dawn-goddess) and killing by *Hǫðr* (*(s)*kót-u-* 'darkness') will be shown to closely match those of a Vedic myth whose plot has been reconstructed by Stephanie W. Jamison (1991:133–303), in which the sun-god's desire for the dawn-goddess leads to his wounding *támasā* 'with darkness' (*Rigveda* 5.40.5b) by the demon Svarbhānu.

References

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