

# The Eddic Tradition

# Two Eddas

## The Prose Edda

- ▶ *Snorra Edda*
- ▶ *Edda* is the author's title
- ▶ Snorri Sturluson, c. 1220

A manual of poetic form and circumlocutions, based on ON mythological material mostly from known eddic poetry.

## The Poetic Edda

- ▶ Elder Edda; *Sæmundar Edda*
- ▶ *Edda* is the scholars' title
- ▶ Group of poems composed at various times

Poetry on ON mythological and heroic material. The full canon is only contained in, and therefore defined by, Codex Regius; a few additional poems are drawn from other MSS.

# The Poetic Edda

## The Mythological Poems

Cover creation, apocalypse, and the deeds of the Æsir

Themes:

- ▶ Creation and apocalypse
- ▶ Racial tensions
- ▶ Wisdom exchanges

## The Heroic Poems

Deal with the Völsungar/  
Nibelungen material and a few  
other legendary characters

Themes:

- ▶ Legend
- ▶ Honour and vengeance
- ▶ Wisdom exchanges

# The Prose Edda

## 0. *Prologue*

- ▶ Introduces the material from a euhemeristic perspective.

## 1. *Gylfaginning*

- ▶ Brings together mythological narratives in a wisdom exchange format. Sources: mythological eddic poetry.

## 2. *Skáldskaparmál*

- ▶ Lists off what things are called in poetry and why, recounting a great deal of mythological narratives; takes the form of a wisdom exchange. Sources: skaldic poetry.

## 3. *Háttatal*

- ▶ Lists off metrical forms with reference to illustrative poetry by Snorri's own hand. Initially takes the form of a dialogue, then trails off into instruction and enumeration. Sources: skaldic poetry.

# *Kenningar*

- ▶ A base word: *horse*
- ▶ A determiner: *of the sea*
- ▶ The determiner explains the context within which to reinterpret the base word → *ship*

## Afterlives

- ▶ No evidence that the Prose Edda was especially widely read in the Middle Ages.
- ▶ It drew attention in s. XVII as a supposed repository of pre-Christian religion.
- ▶ At any rate there is system to the kennings used in skaldic poetry.

## Bibliography

- Faulkes, Anthony, trans. *Snorri Sturluson: Edda*. Everyman's Classics. London: Dent, 1987.
- , ed. *Snorri Sturluson: Edda*. 4 vols. London: Viking Society for Northern Research / University College London, 1988–99.
- Larrington, Carolyne, trans. *The Poetic Edda*. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Meissner, Rudolf. *Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*. Rheinische Beiträge und Hilfsbücher zur germanischen Philologie und Volkskunde 1. Bonn and Leipzig: Schroeder, 1921.
- Orchard, Andy, trans. *The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore*. London: Penguin, 2011.
- See, Klaus von, et al., eds. *Kommentar zu den Liedern der "Edda."* 7 vols. Heidelberg: Winter, 1997.