

**Reconstructing Rig:
The Missing Page of Rigsthula
by Timothy J. Stephany**
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Abstract:

In the Norse poem “Rigsthula” Heimdall plays the role of progenitor of mankind’s three classes under the name of Rig. In Saxo Heimdall (Humbli) is the father of Dan and Angul, the first of the line of the Danes and Angles. In Snorri Rig is used as the name of a king who was father of Danp, Danp himself (the father of Dan), but Rig was also Dygvi the father of Dag. The basic intent of the poem establishes the line of descent of the Daglins. The account of Dag in *Heimskringla* thus might be used to continue the story of Kon in “Rigsthula”. The reference to Danp and Dan, the use of the name Rig, and an equivalence between King Dag in “Ynglinga Saga” and the figure of Kon, who both understand the language of birds, attest to their similarity. Dag is considered the first of the line of the Daglins: a Swedish line from Domar that became combined with that of the Danish king Danp.

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Introduction

The final page of the manuscript containing *Rigsthula* (List of Rig) is missing, thus ending the myth just as the narrative begins. An analysis must first be undertaken to understand the main features of this myth and to assess its intent and form. In the preface to this myth there is reference to Rig, who is equated with the god Heimdall.

*People say in the old stories that one of the Aesir, who was called Heimdall, went on a journey, and as he went along the sea-shore somewhere he came to a household and he called himself Rig. This poem is about that story.*¹ (Larrington 1999: 246)

This is supported by the identification of Heimdall as the father of mankind in “Voluspa” and in Saxo in which the Danes trace their lineage back to Humbli (Heimdall).

The Danes trace their beginnings from Dan and Angul, sons of Humbli, who were not merely the founders of our race but its guides also... Tradition has it, however, that it was from Dan that our royal pedigree flowed in glorious lines of succession, like channels drawn from a spring. His sons were Humbli and Lothar, their mother Grytha, a lady whom the Teutons accorded the highest honor. (Grammaticus 1979: vol. I, 14)

Thus this somewhat uncertain line of descent is from Dan (Danp?) and Grytha (Bertha) to Humbli and Lothar, and from Humbli to Dan and Angul from whom the Danes and Angles were to have descended.

¹ Perhaps there is some connection between Heimdall here walking along the sea-shore and Odin and his brothers doing the same when they created mankind out of driftwood.

Due to Heimdall's once equivalence to the Moon, there is presented the notion that the Man on the Moon was thought to be a progenitor of mankind. Læstradius suggests that the Sami *stallo* (giants) of myth were actually raiders from Birka, Sweden who often went up into Lappland to capture slaves. Among the stories he gives about the *stallo*, this one provides the only evidence of this direct kinship with the Moon.

The *stallo* had once set up a net in order to catch beavers, made a fire in the forest close by, and taken off his clothes in order to rest. But he had tied a string to the beaver net and fastened a sleigh bell at the other end of it. That he placed beside him near the fire so that when a beaver got caught in the net and started tugging it, the bell would start ringing and wake him up. Thus the *stallo* would be able to go and catch it immediately. One Lapp had seen this and when everything had been properly set in place, he went and tugged at the rope. The *stallo* dashed to the net and found nothing. But as he came back all his clothes had been burnt because the Lapp had meanwhile hurried there and thrown them into the fire. The *stallo* was annoyed at having dashed away so heedlessly that his clothes had fallen into the fire. However, he sat down again near the fire and warmed himself until the bell rang again. Then he again dashed to the net, but the net was empty as it had been the previous time. Worst of all, the fire had gone out when he returned. Now the *stallo* began to freeze and in his agony he turned to the moon that was shining on the horizon. "Look, father, your son is freezing!" he shouted as he walked towards the moon. That did not help him, however, and he froze to death. (Læstradius 2002: 250)

Reconstruction

Other missing sections of the *Poetic Edda* can be replaced from other accounts or information: the lacunae in "Hymiskvida" can be reconstructed from the same story in Snorri, that gap earlier in "Rigsthula" can be filled-in from archaeological evidence and folk tales, and the significant

loss within the story of the Volsungs can be restored from *Saga of the Volsungs*. However, the missing final page of “Rigsthula” poses the problem of having to find an alternate version from which to base the reconstruction. Thus far nothing has yet been proffered to aid in this endeavor.

To consider the situation, as much as can be gleaned from the myth itself must be considered. To look at all the available information, after the descent of the three classes of mankind from Heimdall, here is what is said of the character of interest, Kon.²

But young Kin [Kon] knew runes,
life-runes and fate-runes;
and he knew how to help in childbirth,
deaden sword-blades, quiet the ocean.
He understood birds’ speech, quenched fires,
pacified and quieted men, made sorrows disappear,
had the strength and vigor of eight men.
He contended in rune-wisdom with Lord Rig,
he knew more tricks, he knew more;
then he gained and got the right
to be called Rig and to know the runes.
(Larrington 1999: 252)

It goes on, beginning the narrative story of Kon, which amount to the final stanzas of the poem:

Young Kin [Kon] rode through woods and thickets,
Shooting bird-arrows, charming down the birds.
Then a crow said—it was sitting on a branch—

² The name Kon is a root of the word king (*konungr*) (Larrington, p. 295).

‘Why, young Kin, are you charming down birds?

Rather you ought to be riding horses, conquering armies.

Dan and Danp own precious halls,

worthier territories than your clan own;

they know very well how to steer ships,

to assess a sword blade, to make red wounds.

(Larrington 1999: 252)

“Ynglinga Saga” includes the same collection of names and bears some resemblance to this poem. The first man named king of the Danes was Rig, whose son was King Danp, whose son was King Dan, and whose daughter was Drott. The closest equivalent to Kon here is Domar, who takes a Danish wife, the daughter of King Danp and brother of King Dan (the kings mentioned in “Rigsthula”). Domar and Drott then had a son named Dygvi.

Dygvi’s mother was Drott, daughter of King Danp, the son of Rig who was first called ‘king’ in the Danish tongue. His kinsmen ever after bore the name of ‘king’ as the name of highest worth. Dygvi was the first in his race to be called ‘king’, but before that they were called *drottnar*, their wives *drottningar* and the ruler’s men *drott*. But every man in the race was always called Yngvi or Ynguni and all of them together were called Ynglings. Queen Drott was sister to King Dan the Proud, from whom Denmark afterwards took its name. (Sturlason 1990: 11)

When compared to the Saxo account, King Danp (Rig) holds the same place here as Heimdall (Rig), as father of Dan. However, although the specific details of descent are different, Rig is merely the title of King and so is not uniquely determinant; even Kon “got the right to be called Rig”, although his name also appears to mean the same.

Dygvi's son King Dag the Mighty inherited the kingdom of Sweden from his father. It says of him: "He was so wise a man that he understood the song of the birds. He had a sparrow that told him many things; it often flew to other lands." (Sturlason 1987: 12) So just like Kon, Dag understood the language of birds, which suggests that the two stories are alternate versions of the descent of the Daglings. Snorri adds that it was Dag from whom the Doglings were descended (Sturlason 1987: 148), and also that the daughter of King Dag, Dageid, started the Dagling line (Sturlason 1990: 14). It is likely that the myth concerning the origin of mankind by Heimdall was later combined with the descent of kings from Rig. When this occurred then the origin of mankind and its three classes were still an act of Heimdall, but now under the name of Rig.

If the remainder of "Rigsthula" dealt with Domar, the story may have continued along the lines of *Heimskringla*:

[Domar] ruled for a long time, and there were good seasons and peace in his days. About him nothing else is told, but that he died in his bed in Upsala, was borne to the Fyrisvold, and burned there on the river bank where his standing-stone is...His son was called Dygvi, who next ruled over the land, and about him nothing more is said than that he died in his bed. (Sturlason 1990: 11)

Given the importance and build-up of Kon in "Rigsthula", there must have been more to his life than this that made him a renowned ancestor, so it seems that Kon might be better equated with Dag, who is a greater king and the one who could converse with a sparrow, equivalent to Kon's crow. In addition, it is stated that Dygvi was the first of his race to be called king (Rig), which suggests that the myth only related the descent of kings from the perspective of the Swedes. For this reason prior members of the Danish line were not addressed, as this story only concerned the

Dagling line from King Dag, an offshoot of the Yngling (Swedish) line through King Dygvi (Rig). As this appears to be the more likely line of descent, there may have been a slightly different sequence of events in “Rigsthula”, which suggests that Kon combines elements of Dag with Domar. Although the specific points of difference cannot be determined, the account of Dag continues in *Heimskringla*:

Dag was the name of King Dygvi’s son, who had the kingdom after his father; he was so wise a man that he understood the song of the birds. He had a sparrow which told him many tidings; it often flew to other lands. It happened once that the sparrow flew to Reidgotland, to a town which was called Vörva; it swooped down to a bonder’s field and fed there. The bonder came up, took up a stone and slew the sparrow dead. King Dag became uneasy in his mind because the sparrow did not come home, went to the sacrifice of atonement to ask about it and received the answer that his sparrow was killed in Vörva. He afterwards ordered out a great army and went to Gotland; but when he came to Vörva he went up with his army and harried there; the folk fled far and wide from him. When it was near evening Dag led his army back to the ships after he had killed or taken many men. But when they crossed the river near a place called Skiotansvad or Vapnavad, a workman leaped forth from the wood to the river bank and cast a hayfork into the host of men, and it fell on the king’s head. He straightway fell from his steed and died. (Sturlason 1990: 12).

Although the direction of the story here takes a turn away from Dan and Danp³, and the specific presentation of the material is beyond recovery, this narrative can be directly converted into verse form to better fit better the style of “Rigsthula”:

Soon Kon became King Dag the Mighty

Ruling over that area now called Sweden

³ This is where the link with Domar becomes relevant, for his marriage to Drott implies a foray into Denmark wherein he takes King Danp’s daughter as his wife. The link is awkward but relevant.

*Then his crow flew into Reidgotland
Until it decided to alight near Vörva
Coming down on a farmer's field it fed
That bonder saw the crow and took a stone
He threw it and slew him with deadly aim
Dag was uneasy and thought of ill fortune
Giving an atonement sacrifice he asked
In reply it came the crow was killed in Vörva
So at once he assembled a large army
Went down from Sweden into Götland
An encampment was made near that town
People spread word and fled far from fear
In his attack he killed and took many captives
Then in the evening returned to his ships
When crossing the river near Vapnavad
One of the thralls came out of the wood
With pitchfork in hand, swiftly he threw
That fork broke through the king's skull
He fell down from his steed and died there
King Dag the Mighty had a daughter Dageid
From her comes the line of the Daglins*

The specific form of the reconstruction from “Ynglinga Saga” can be varied or embellished, but the basic intent is to represent at least the missing content, which until this time has never been attempted. There is, of course, no guarantee that this is the correct reconstruction, since knowledge of the missing page is not extant.

Conclusion

Heimdall plays the role in “Rigsthula” of the progenitor of mankind’s three classes under the name of Rig. Here he gives rise to the character of Kon. In Saxo Heimdall (Humbli) is the father of Dan and Angul, the first of the line of the Danes and Angles. In Snorri Rig is used as the name of a king who was father of Danp, who was father of Dan. These three differ but are essentially equivalent, except that the story of the descent of the classes of mankind might have at one time been entirely disassociated from the descent of Dan and Danp. In this case Kon is encouraged to invade the kingdom of Dan and Danp, which puts Heimdall in a different position in the line of descent. However, the basic intent of the poem appears to establish the line of descent of the Daglings specifically, which arose from a Swedish incursion into Danish lands. Either Dag or his daughter Dageid is considered the first of the line of the Daglings (Doglings).

In the effort to account for lacunae in the *Poetic Edda* the first stage is to identify what exists from alternate sources or information. Doing so permits a reconstruction to prevent the annoyance of ellipses and absences when reading. Although attempts at reconstruction can be done of other missing lines through the existence of an alternative form from which to work, the poem “Rigsthula” has never had something from which a reconstruction could be attempted. However, a continuation is suggested in “Ynglinga Saga”, that forms part of Snorri’s *Heimskringla*. The reference to both Danp and Dan in both, as well as the name Rig, first draws attention to the passages, but there also exists a passing equivalence between King Dag the Mighty in “Ynglinga Saga” and the figure of Kon in the poem, particularly that he is to have

understood the language of birds and was a great king. These give some weight to the validity of a reconstruction along these lines.

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