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THE POETIC EDDA

Rígsþula

The Lay of Rig

Old Norse · English – H. A. Bellows (1923)

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The god Heimdall wanders across the earth under the name Ríg and in turn lodges with three couples — with Ái and Edda (Great-Grandfather and Great-Grandmother), with Afi and Amma (Grandfather and Grandmother) and with Faðir and Móðir (Father and Mother). With each he stays three nights and shares the bed; thus he begets the forefathers of the three estates: Þræll, the thrall, from whom the race of the unfree descends; Karl, the free farmer; and Jarl, the noble, to whom Ríg himself teaches runes and his own name. Jarl's youngest son, Konr ungr (‘Young Kon’ — a play on konungr, king), surpasses all in rune-lore and becomes the first king. The poem is a mythic ordering of the estates, and at the same time it vividly depicts the clothing, food and daily life of the three classes. The only manuscript breaks off in the middle of the crow's prophecy, so the ending is lost. On the sources: the Old Norse text follows the edition of Guðni Jónsson, and the English rendering is by Henry Adams Bellows (1923) — both public domain.

	Old Norse	English – H. A. Bellows (1923)
1	Ár kváðu ganga grænar brautir öflgan ok aldinn ás kunnigan, ramman ok röskvan Ríg stíganda.	Men say there went by ways so green Of old the god, the aged and wise, Mighty and strong did Rig go striding.
2	Gekk hann meir at þat miðrar brautar; kom hann at húsi, hurð var á gætti; inn nam at ganga, eldr var á golfi; hjón sátu þar hár at arni, Ái ok Edda, aldinfalda.	Forward he went on the midmost way, He came to a dwelling, a door on its posts; In did he fare, on the floor was a fire, Two hoary ones by the hearth there sat, Ai and Edda, in olden dress.
3	Rígr kunni þeim ráð at segja; meir settisk hann miðra fletja, en á hlið hvára hjón salkynna.	Rig knew well wise words to speak, Soon in the midst of the room he sat, And on either side the others were.
4	Þá tók Edda ökkvinn hleif, þungan ok þykkvan, þrunginn sáðum; bar hon meir at þat miðra skutla, soð var í bolla, setti á bjóð; var kalfr soðinn krása beztr.	A loaf of bread did Edda bring, Heavy and thick and swollen with husks; Forth on the table she set the fare, And broth for the meal in a bowl there was. (Calf's flesh boiled was the best of the dainties.)

- 5 *Rígr kunni þeim
ráð at segja;
reis hann upp þaðan,
réðsk at sofna;
meir lagðisk hann
miðrar rekkju,
en á hlið hvára
hjón salkynna.*
- Rig knew well wise words to speak,
Thence did he rise, made ready to sleep;
Soon in the bed himself did he lay,
And on either side the others were.
- 6 *Þar var hann at þat
þrjár nætr saman,
gekk hann meir at þat
miðrar brautar;
líðu meir at þat
mánuðr nú.*
- Thus was he there for three nights long,
Then forward he went on the midmost way,
And so nine months were soon passed by.
- 7 *Jóðól Edda
jósu vatni,
hörvi svartan,
héttu þræl.*
- A son bore Edda, with water they sprinkled him,
With a cloth his hair so black they covered;
Thræll they named him.
- 8 *Hann nam at vaxa
ok vel dafna;
var þar á höndum
hrokkít skinn,
kropnir knúar,
fingr digrir,
fúlligt andlit,
lotr hrygg,
langir hælir.*
- The skin was wrinkled and rough on his hands,
Knotted his knuckles,
Thick his fingers, and ugly his face,
Twisted his back, and big his heels.
- 9 *Nam hann meir at þat
magns of kosta,
bast at binda,
byrðar gerva;
bar hann heim at þat
hrís gerstan dag.*
- He began to grow, and to gain in strength,
Soon of his might good use he made;
With bast he bound, and burdens carried,
Home bore faggots the whole day long.
- 10 *Þar kom at garði
gengilbeina,
aurr var á iljum,
armr sólbrunninn,
niðrbjúgt er nef,
nefndisk þír.*
- One came to their home, crooked her legs,
Stained were her feet, and sunburned her arms,
Flat was her nose; her name was Thir.

11 *Miðra fletja
meir settisk hon;
sat hjá henni
sonr húss;
ræddu ok rýndu,
rekkju gerðu
þræll ok þír
þrungin dægr.*

Soon in the midst of the room she sat,
By her side there sat the son of the house;
They whispered both, and the bed made ready,
Thræll and Thir, till the day was through.

12 *Börn ólu þau,
- þjuggu ok unðu, -
hygg ek at héti
Hreimr ok Fjósniir,
Klúrr ok Kleggi,
Kefsir, Fúlnir,
Drumbr, Digraldi,
Dröttr ok Hösvir.
Lútr ok Leggjaldi;
lögðu garða,
akra töddu,
unnu at svínum,
geita gættu,
grófu torf.*

Children they had, they lived and were happy,
Fjosniir and Klur they were called, methinks,
Hreim and Kleggi, Kefsir, Fulniir,
Drumb, Digraldi, Drott and Leggjaldi,
Lut and Hosvir; the house they cared for,
Ground they dinged, and swine they guarded,
Goats they tended, and turf they dug.

13 *Dætr váru þær
Drumba ok Kumba,
Ökkvinkalfa
ok Arinnefja,
Ysja ok Ambátt,
Eikintjasna,
Tötrughypja
ok Trönubeina.
Þaðan eru komnar
þræla ættir.*

Daughters had they, Drumba and Kumba,
Ökkvinkalfa, Arinnefla,
Ysja and Ambott, Eikintjasna,
Totrughypja and Tronubeina;
And thence has risen the race of thralls.

14 *Gekk Rígr at þat
réttar brautir,
kom hann at höllu,
hurð var á skíði,
inn nam at ganga,
eldr var á golfi,
hjón sátu þar,
heldu á sýslu.*

Forward went Rig, his road was straight,
To a hall he came, and a door there hung;
In did he fare, on the floor was a fire:
Afi and Amma owned the house.

15 *Maðr teglði þar
meið til rifjar;
var skegg skapat,
skör var fyrir enni,
skyrtu þröngva,
skokkr var á golfi.*

There sat the twain, and worked at their tasks:
The man hewed wood for the weaver's beam;
His beard was trimmed, o'er his brow a curl,
His clothes fitted close; in the corner a chest.

- 16** *Sat þar kona,
sveigði rokk,
breiddi faðm,
bjó til váðar;
sveigr var á höfði,
smokkr var á bringu,
dúkr var á halsi,
dvergar á öxlum.
Afi ok Amma
áttu hús.*
- The woman sat and the distaff wielded,
At the weaving with arms outstretched she worked;
On her head was a band, on her breast a smock;
On her shoulders a kerchief with clasps there was.
- 17** *Rígr kunni þeim
ráð at segja;
[meir settisk hann
miðra fletja,
en á hlið hvára
hjón salkynna].*
- Rig knew well wise words to speak,
Soon in the midst of the room he sat,
And on either side the others were.
- 18** *[Þá tók Amma]
...
var kalfr soðinn
krása beztr.*
- Then took Amma
...
The vessels full with the fare she set,
Calf's flesh boiled was the best of the dainties.
- 19** *[Rígr kunni þeim
ráð at segja]
reis frá borði,
réð at sofna;
meir lagðisk hann
miðrar rekkju,
en á hlið hvára
hjón salkynna.*
- Rig knew well wise words to speak,
He rose from the board, made ready to sleep;
Soon in the bed himself did he lay,
And on either side the others were.
- 20** *Þar var hann at þat
þrjár nætr saman;
liðu meir at þat
mánuðr níu.*
- Thus was he there for three nights long,
Then forward he went on the midmost way,
And so nine months were soon passed by.
- 21** *Jóðól Amma
jósu vatni,
kölluðu Karl,
kona sveip rifti,
rauðan ok rjóðan,
riðuðu augu.*
- A son bore Amma, with water they sprinkled him,
Karl they named him; in a cloth she wrapped him,
He was ruddy of face, and flashing his eyes.

- 22 *Hann nam at vaxa
ok vel dafna,
öxn nam at temja,
arðr at gerva,
hús at timbra
ok hlöður smíða,
karta at gerva
ok keyra plóg.*
- He began to grow, and to gain in strength,
Oxen he ruled, and plows made ready,
Houses he built, and barns he fashioned,
Carts he made, and the plow he managed.
- 23 *Heim óku þá
hanginluklu,
geitakyrtlu,
giftu Karli;
Snör heitir sú,
settisk und rifti;
bjuggu hjón,
bauga deildu,
breiddu blæjur
ok bú gerðu.*
- Home did they bring the bride for Karl,
In goatskins clad, and keys she bore;
Snör was her name, ,neath the veil she sat;
A home they made ready, and rings exchanged,
The bed they decked, and a dwelling made.
- 24 *Börn ólu þau,
- bjuggu ok unðu, -
hét Halr ok Drengr,
Hölðr, þegn ok Smiðr,
Breiðr, Bóndi,
Bundinskeggi,
Búi ok Boddi,
Brattskeggr ok Seggr.*
- Sons they had, they lived and were happy:
Hal and Dreng, Holth, Thegn and Smith,
Breith and Bondi, Bundinskeggi,
Bui and Boddi, Brattskegg and Segg.
- 25 *Enn hétu svá
öðrum nöfnum,
Snót, Brúðr, Svanni,
Svarri, Sprakki,
Fljóð, Sprund ok Víf,
Feima, Ristill.
Þaðan eru komnar
karla ættir.*
- Daughters they had, and their names are here:
Snot, Bruth, Svanni, Svarri, Sprakki,
Fljoth, Sprund and Vif, Feima, Ristil:
And thence has risen the yeomen's race.
- 26 *Gekk Rígr þaðan
réttar brautir;
kom hann at sal,
suðr horfðu dyrr,
var hurð hnigin,
hringr var í gætti.*
- Thence went Rig, his road was straight,
A hall he saw, the doors faced south;
The portal stood wide, on the posts was a ring,
Then in he fared; the floor was strewn.
- 27 *Gekk hann inn at þat,
golf var stráat;
sátu hjón,
sáusk í augu,
Faðir ok Móðir,
fingrum at leika.*
- Within two gazed in each other's eyes,
Fathir and Mothir, and played with their fingers;

28 *Sat húsgumi
ok sneri streng,
alm of bendi,
örvar skefti;
en húskona
hugði at örmum,
strauk of rifti,
sterti ermar.*

There sat the house-lord, wound strings for the bow,
Shafts he fashioned, and bows he shaped.
The lady sat, at her arms she looked,
She smoothed the cloth, and fitted the sleeves;

29 *Keisti fald,
kinga var á bringu,
síðar slæður,
serk bláfáan;
brún bjartari,
brjóst ljósara,
hals hvítari
hreinni mjöllu.*

Gay was her cap, on her breast were clasps,
Broad was her train, of blue was her gown,
Her brows were bright, her breast was shining,
Whiter her neck than new-fallen snow.

30 *Rígr kunni þeim
ráð at segja;
meir settisk hann
miðra fletja,
en á hlið hvára
hjón salkynna.*

Rig knew well wise words to speak,
Soon in the midst of the room he sat,
And on either side the others were.

31 *Þá tók Móðir
merkðan dúk,
hvítan af hörvi,
hulði bjóð,
hon tók at þat
hleifa þunna,
hvíta af hveiti,
ok hulði dúk.*

Then Mothir brought a brodered cloth,
Of linen bright, and the board she covered;
And then she took the loaves so thin,
And laid them, white from the wheat, on the cloth.

32 *Framm setti hon
fulla skutla,
silfri varða, á bjóð,
fáin fleski
ok fugla steikða,
vín var í könnu,
varðir kálkar;
drukku ok dæmðu,
dagr var á sinnum.*

Then forth she brought the vessels full,
With silver covered, and set before them,
Meat all browned, and well-cooked birds;
In the pitcher was wine, of plate were the cups,
So drank they and talked till the day was gone.

33 *Rígr kunni þeim
ráð at segja;
reis hann at þat,
rekkju gerði.
þar var hann at þat
þrjár nætr saman;
gekk hann meir at þat
miðrar brautar;
liðu meir at þat
mánuðr níu.*

Rig knew well wise words to speak,
Soon did he rise, made ready to sleep;
So in the bed himself did he lay,
And on either side the others were.
Thus was he there for three nights long,
Then forward he went on the midmost way,
And so nine months were soon passed by.

34 *Svein ól Móðir,
silki vafði,
jósu vatni,
Jarl létu heita;
bleikt var hár,
bjartir vangar,
ötul váru augu
sem yrmlingi.*

A son had Mothir, in silk they wrapped him,
With water they sprinkled him, Jarl he was;
Blond was his hair, and bright his cheeks,
Grim as a snake's were his glowing eyes.

35 *Upp óx þar
Jarl á fletjum;
lind nam at skelfa,
leggja strengi,
alm at beygja,
örvar skefta,
flein at fleygja,
frökkur dýja,
hestum ríða,
hundum verpa,
sverðum bregða,
sund at fremja.*

To grow in the house did Jarl begin,
Shields he brandished, and bow-strings wound,
Bows he shot, and shafts he fashioned,
Arrows he loosened, and lances wielded,
Horses he rode, and hounds unleashed,
Swords he handled, and sounds he swam.

36 *Kom þar ór runni
Rígr gangandi,
Rígr gangandi,
rúnar kendi;
sitt gaf heiti,
son kveðsk eiga;
þann bað hann eignask
óðalvöllu,
óðalvöllu,
aldnar byggðir.*

Straight from the grove came striding Rig,
Rig came striding, and runes he taught him;
By his name he called him, as son he claimed him,
And bade him hold his heritage wide,
His heritage wide, the ancient homes.

37 *Reið hann meir þaðan
myrkvan við,
hélug fjöll,
unz at höllu kom;
skaft nam at dýja,
skelfði lind,
hesti hleypði
ok hjörvi brá;
víg nam at vekja,
völl nam at rjóða,
val nam at fella,
vá til landa.*

Forward he rode through the forest dark,
O'er the frosty crags, till a hall he found.
His spear he shook, his shield he brandished,
His horse he spurred, with his sword he hewed;
Wars he raised, and reddened the field,
Warriors slew he, and land he won.

38 *Réð hann einn at þat
átján búum,
auð nam skipta,
öllum veita
meiðmar ok mösma,
mara svangrifja,
hringum hreytti,
hjó sundr baug.*

Eighteen halls ere long did he hold,
Wealth did he get, and gave to all,
Stones and jewels and slim-flanked steeds,
Rings he offered, and arm-rings shared.

39 *Óku ærir
úrgar brautir,
kómu at höllu,
þar er Hersir bjó;
mey átti hann
mjófingraða,
hvíta ok horska,
hétu Erna.*

His messengers went by the ways so wet,
And came to the hall where Hersir dwelt;
His daughter was fair and slender-fingered,
Erna the wise the maiden was.

40 *Báðu hennar
ok heim óku,
giftu Jarli,
gekk hon und líni;
saman bjuggu þau
ok sér unðu,
ættir jóku
ok aldrs nutu.*

Her hand they sought, and home they brought her,
Wedded to Jarl the veil she wore;
Together they dwelt, their joy was great,
Children they had, and happy they lived.

41 *Burr var inn ellsti,
en Barn annat,
Jóð ok Aðal,
Arfi, Mögr,
Niðr ok Niðjungr,
- námu leika, -
Sonr ok Sveinn,
- sund ok tafl, -
Kundr hét enn,
Konr var inn yngsti.*

Bur was the eldest, and Barn the next,
Joth and Athal, Arfi, Mog,
Nith and Svein, soon they began-
Sun and Nithjung- to play and swim;
Kund was one, and the youngest Kon.

42 Upp óxu þar
Jarli bornir,
hesta tōmðu,
hlífar bendu,
skeyti skófu,
skelfðu aska.

Soon grew up the sons of Jarl,
Beasts they tamed, and bucklers rounded,
Shafts they fashioned, and spears they shook.

43 En Konr ungr
kunni rúnar,
ævinrúnar
ok aldrúnar;
meir kunni hann
mönnum bjarga,
eggjar deyfa,
ægi lægja.

But Kon the Young learned runes to use,
Runes everlasting, the runes of life;
Soon could he well the warriors shield,
Dull the swordblade, and still the seas.

44 Klök nam fugla,
kyrra elda,
sefa of svefja,
sorgir lægja,
afl ok eljun
átta manna.

Bird-chatter learned he, flames could he lessen,
Minds could quiet, and sorrows calm;
The might and strength of twice four men.

45 Hann við Ríg jarl
rúnar deildi,
brögðum beitti
ok betr kunni;
þá öðlaðisk
ok þá eiga gat
Rígr at heita,
rúnar kunna.

With Ríg-Jarl soon the runes he shared,
More crafty he was, and greater his wisdom;
The right he sought, and soon he won it,
Rig to be called, and runes to know.

46 Reið Konr ungr
kjörr ok skóga,
kolfi fleygði,
kyrrði fugla.

Young Kon rode forth through forest and grove,
Shafts let loose, and birds he lured;

47 Þá kvað þat kráka,
sat kvisti ein:
„Hvat skaltu, Konr ungr,
kyrra fugla?
Heldr mætti ér
hestum ríða,
[hjörvi bregða]
ok her fella.

There spake a crow on a bough that sat:
„Why lurest thou, Kon, the birds to come?
„Twere better forth on thy steed to fare,
and the host to slay.

48 *Á Danr ok Danpr
dýrar hallir,
æðra óðal
en ér hafið;
þeir kunnu vel
kjóli at ríða,
egg at kenna,
undir rjúfa.*

,The halls of Dan and Danp are noble,
Greater their wealth than thou hast gained;
Good are they at guiding the keel,
Trying of weapons, and giving of wounds.'

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