

# Andrew Ramsay's and Olof Dalin's influence on the Romantic Interpretation of Old Norse Mythology

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It is well known that the interpretation of Old Norse myth in the Romantic era was to a large extent determined by the idea that the mythology of *Snorra Edda* somehow contained the same sacred symbols and the same religious philosophy as Christianity. This idea, which is anticipated in Snorri's Prologus, permeates such theoretical works as N.F.S. Grundtvig's *Nordens Mytologi* (1808 and 1832) and a large number of Romantic poems based on Norse myth and written in Denmark, Sweden, or Germany during the first half of the 19th century.

In this paper I intend to show that the Romantic interpretation of Norse myth was influenced by a work on mythology in French, *Discours sur la mythologie*, published in Paris in 1727 as an appendix to *Les Voyages de Cyrus*, a novel by a nowadays forgotten but in his own time well-known though somewhat controversial Scottish writer by the name of Andrew Ramsay.<sup>1</sup> Let

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<sup>1</sup> I have so far not been able to get hold of the original version of 1727 but have used a later French edition printed in Sweden: *La Nouvelle CYROPÉDIE ou Les Voyages de CYRUS*,

us first take a look at the author and then at his work and then, finally, see how its ideas were received and transmitted to the Swedish historian Olof Dalin and from him to other scholars and poets interested in the Norse myths of *Snorra Edda*.

Andrew Michel Ramsay, also known as “Chevalier Ramsay” or “Zoroaster”, was born in 1686 and grew up in Ayr, Scotland, as the son of a baker and studied for priesthood at the universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. After having become increasingly dissatisfied with the Protestant sectarianism prevailing in his native country, however, young Ramsay gave up the idea of priesthood and moved to London and later to Holland and France, where he settled in 1710 and stayed until his death in 1743. He started his somewhat adventurous intellectual career abroad as an ardent follower of the famous French Archbishop Fénelon, whose enlightened form of Catholicism strongly appealed to him. Most of Ramsay’s published works, including *Les Voyages de Cyrus*, are in some way or other influenced by Fénelon’s thinking. His own achievement as a prolific writer in the field of educational fiction, philosophy and theology made Ramsay well known both in France and in Britain, securing him eventually a doctorate at Oxford and a certificate of nobility in French from James Stuart, the Old Pretender. In Paris, where Ramsay lived most of his life, he made the acquaintance of many prominent writers and intellectual visitors from abroad, some of whom despised him intensely while others enthusiastically assisted him in spreading Fénelon’s and his own ideas to the enlightened reading public of Europe.<sup>2</sup>

*Les Voyages de Cyrus* is an “educational novel” of the kind introduced by Fénelon in his for 18th century readers immensely attractive but for most modern readers immensely boring piece of fiction, *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1699). The basic idea of such educational novels is to teach young people the right way to Truth and Good Customs by describing the upbringing and experience of some famous young prince, in Fénelon’s case the son of Ulysses, Telemachus, in Ramsay’s case the great Persian ruler, Cyrus, whose education had previously been described by Xenophon in his classic work *Cyropaedia* (early 4th century B.C.).<sup>3</sup> What distinguishes Ramsay’s *Les Voyages de Cyrus* from both *Les Aventures de Télémaque* and *Cyropaedia*, however, is its interest in comparative religion and mythology. The hero of the novel, Cyrus, is shown

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*Histoire Morale, Suivie d'un Discours sur la THÉOLOGIE & la MYTHOLOGIE des Anciens, par Mr. le Chevalier A.M. De Ramsay, Docteur de l'Université d'Oxford* (Calmar, 1833). I have also consulted a Swedish 18th century translation, *Anders Ramsays REGENTE LÅRDOM, Uti CYRI Fordom Persisk Prints och omsider en stor Monarchs UNGDOMS ÖFNINGAR Och RESOR, Efter Fransyska och Engelska Originalerne På Swenska UTGIFWEN Af Andreas Wilde* (Stockholm, 1749).

<sup>2</sup> On Ramsay’s biography, see G.D. Henderson, *Chevalier Ramsay* (London & Edinburgh, 1952) and Albert Cherel, *Un aventurier religieux au XVIIIe siècle, André Michel Ramsay* (Paris, 1926).

<sup>3</sup> See Robert Grandroute, *Le roman pédagogique de Fénelon à Rousseau I-II* (Berne, 1983), particularly its chapter on Ramsay’s *Les Voyages de Cyrus*, I, 227-300.

travelling from country to country of Early Antiquity - Persia, Greece, Egypt, Palestine, etc. - and meeting with representatives of their various religions, whose advantages and disadvantages he is then able to compare from a philosophical and religious point of view. In the end Cyrus concludes that all religions contain an element of Truth and should thus be respected, even though the religion of the Hebrews - which anticipates the great religion of the future, Christianity - should be regarded as the best available faith. By reaching this conclusion Cyrus becomes a wise and tolerant ruler of Persia.

This view of the ancient religions is further developed in Ramsay's theoretical appendix, *Discours sur la mythologie*, which is partly dependent on the ideas of Fénelon but also on a much earlier theological work, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, by the English 17th century Platonist Ralph Cudworth.<sup>4</sup> In his *Discours*, Ramsay attempts to show that even though the poets of antiquity have celebrated many different gods, the "philosophers" of all cultures have been conscious of the fact that there is really only one true god, whose essence consists of the three basic properties of Power (*puissance*), Wisdom (*intelligence*), and Love (*amour*). This trinity is, according to Ramsay, sacred in several ancient pagan religions, and Ramsay therefore suggests, although with some hesitation, that they may all, at least to some extent, anticipate Christianity.<sup>5</sup> He argues, furthermore, that most ancient religions presuppose the existence of a Divine Mediator (*Dieu mitoyen*), corresponding to Christ, who lovingly intervenes in the eternal struggle between Good and Evil: thus Mithras in Persia, Orus in Egypt and various other pagan gods should be understood as such mediators.<sup>6</sup> Such similarities between the various mythologies of the world indicate, according to Ramsay, that they are all rooted in the same original Divine Revelation, although they have not all preserved it as well as the Jews and the Christians have.

This ecumenical and tolerant view of pagan religion was considered deistic and hence unchristian by some 18th century readers, but Ramsay himself renounced such an interpretation of his work. He insisted that his intention in writing *Les Voyages de Cyrus* was to "make the atheist a deist, the deist a Christian, and the Christian a Catholic."<sup>7</sup> And it is certainly correct that his book does favor Catholic Christianity before other religions. Yet he never presents his favorite religion as one that has a monopoly on truth, and to that

<sup>4</sup> This work was published in London in 1678. Its influence on Ramsay is demonstrated by Chérel (1926) and Henderson (1952).

<sup>5</sup> "Il serait téméraire de soutenir, que les Payens ayent jamais en aucune connaissance d'une Trinité de Personnes distinctes dans l'unité indivisible de la Nature Divine; mais il est constant, que les Chaldéens & les Egyptiens croyaient que tous les attributs de la Divinité pouvaient se réduire à trois: *puissance, intelligence & amour*. [...] C'est pour cela que les anciens Philosophes regardaient le nombre de trois comme mystérieux." *Discours sur la mythologie* (1833), 8.

<sup>6</sup> *op.cit.*, 57, 64.

<sup>7</sup> "le dessein de mon ouvrage est de rendre l'athée déiste, le déiste chrétien et le chrétien catholique", quoted from Grandroute (1983), I:263.

extent his ideas fitted in very well with the secular spirit of the Enlightenment.

Ramsay's ideas had a strong influence on the Swedish poet and historian Olof Dalin (1708-63), who was one of the major Scandinavian representatives of the Enlightenment and, for a long period, the leading Swedish authority on Old Norse and Early Medieval culture. Like Ludvig Holberg in Denmark, Dalin was a witty and merciless critic of the strict Lutheran orthodoxy and the pompous nationalism that had been characteristic of Scandinavian letters in the 17th century.<sup>8</sup> He wrote satires against the clergy and against chauvinistic historians who believed that Swedish and Norse culture was older and more venerable than that of Greece or Egypt. In his own historical works, Dalin broke radically with tradition by introducing a more realistic perspective on Sweden's past and a somewhat more critical way of dealing with Old Norse sources.<sup>9</sup> When in 1739 he visited Paris, he made the personal acquaintance of Andrew Ramsay, who not only seems to have taken good care of the Swedish visitor but also inspired him to see Norse mythology in a new theological light.<sup>10</sup>

Ramsay's influence became evident when Dalin in 1747 published the first volume of a new History of Sweden, which had been commissioned by the Swedish parliament.<sup>11</sup> In this volume Dalin devotes much space to the beliefs and customs of pagan Sweden, basing his information particularly on Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* and *Prose Edda*. The way in which Dalin presents the Norse myths, however, is clearly derived from Ramsay's *Discours*, as can be seen even in the first paragraph of the chapter about religion:

Sveriges äldste Invånares Guda-lära har gådt äfven så högt i lius och sanning som de gamle Egyptiers, Chaldéers och Persers, fast hon ej varit utprälad med så mycken wältalighet. Jag talar ej om den Poëtiska, som ej bestod af annat än dikt; ty Skalderne gjorde Gudomligheter efter behag af alt det de sågo i Naturen och den enfaldiga werlden trodde dem på orden [---] Jag menar allenast den Lära, som deras Drottare eller Philosopher förkunnade, hvilken alltid så wäl hos oss, som hos Græker och Romare, bör skiljas från den Poëtiska.<sup>12</sup>

(The mythology of Sweden's oldest inhabitants has reached as high a level of enlightenment and truth as that of the ancient Egyptians, Chaldeans and Persians, even

<sup>8</sup> For general information about Dalin's life and letters see Karl Warburg, *Olof Dalin. Hans lif och gerning* (Sthlm 1884); Martin Lamm, *Olof Dalin. En litteraturhistorisk undersökning af hans verk* (Stockholm, 1908), and *Olof von Dalin. Samhällsdebattör, historiker, språkförnyare*, utgiven av Dalinsällskapet (Varberg 1997).

<sup>9</sup> On Dalin's historiography see in particular Nils Eriksson, *Dalin-Botin-Lagerbring. Historieforskning och historieskrivning i Sverige 1747-1787* (Göteborg, 1976).

<sup>10</sup> Concerning Dalin's contact with Ramsay in Paris see Warburg (1984), 270 f. Henderson (1952) mentions Ramsay's "ready hospitality and kindly reception of visitors, and his helpful concern as he sped them on their way" (236).

<sup>11</sup> *Svea Rikes Historia ifrån des begynnelse til våra tider. Efter Hans Kongl. Maj:ts nådiga behag på Rikens Höglofliga Ständers Åstundan författad af Olof Dalin. Förste Delen, Som innehåller Hela Hedniska Tiden* (Stockholm, 1747).

<sup>12</sup> *Svea Rikes Historia* I (1747), 116-117.

though it has not been adorned with as much eloquence. I do not speak of the poetic mythology which consisted of nothing but fiction; for the poets made Deities after their own desire and the stupid world believed their words [---] I am referring only to that doctrine which was taught by their Drottar or philosophers and which should always, in our case as well as that of the Greeks and the Romans, be separated from that of the poets.)

The distinction which Dalin makes here between the mythology of poets and the mythology of philosophers is obviously derived from Ramsay's *Discours* - to which he also refers in a marginal note - and the same thing may be said about his reference to "Egyptians" and "Chaldeans" (Cf. the quotation from Ramsay in note 5). It is much less obvious what Dalin means by "Drottar eller Philosopher", since no such category of religious thinkers is known from Old Norse sources. He may be thinking, however, of learned men such as Snorri Sturluson or of noble heathens like the ones mentioned in the Prologus of the *Prose Edda* as archaic believers in some unknown "controller of the heavenly bodies" (*stjórnari himintunglanna*). At any rate it appears likely that Dalin has found a confirmation of Ramsay's theories in what Snorri says in Prologus about the original faith of the heathens and its later development into various pagan religions:

Þá vissu þeir eigi, hvar ríki hans var. En því trúðu þeir, at hann réð öllum hlutum á jörðu ok í lopti, himins ok himintunglum, sævarins ok veðranna. En til þess at heldr mætti frá segja eða í minni festa, þá gáfu þeir nöfn með sjálfum sér öllum hlutum, ok hefir þessi átrúnaðr á marga lund breytzk, svá sem þjóðarnir skiptusk ok tungunnar greindusk.<sup>13</sup>

(But they did not know where his kingdom was. And so they believed that he ruled all things on earth and in the sky, of heaven and the heavenly bodies, of the sea and the weathers. But so as to be better able to give an account of this and fix it in memory, they then gave a name among themselves to everything, and this religion has changed in many ways as nations became distinct and languages branched)<sup>14</sup>

As one can see from this quotation, there are close similarities between Snorri's thinking about pagan mythology and Ramsay's, a fact which makes it easy to understand why Dalin decided to combine the two. He continues his own presentation of Old Swedish religion - in its early and "philosophical" form - as follows:

Denna [lära] hade sin upprinnelse af Noachs och Stamfädernes rena kundskap om Gud; men med tiden, antingen af vårdslöshet eller människors tilsatser, wansläktade hon liksom andra från sin första menlöshet; hon underhölls dock temmeligen deruti hos de äldste Scandianer af den urgamla och stora Sedo-lära, som kallades *Volu-Spa* eller den första *Edda* [---] Denna Lära utspäddes och bortskiämdes mycket så wäl af Odens och Asarnes som derefter af Skaldernas Dikter, så at hon blef sig grufveligen olik: dock kan

<sup>13</sup> Edda Snorra Sturlusonar, "Prologus", ch. 1. Cf. Lars Lönnroth, "The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas," *Scandinavian Studies* 41 (1969) and Margaret Clunies Ross, *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson's ars poetica and Medieval Theories of Language* (Odense 1987)

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Faulkes's translation (Everyman Classics, 1987).

ännu ganska mycket godt hämtas af det lilla, som ej blifvit förloradt (117-118).

(This [creed] was based on the pure knowledge of God possessed by Noah and the tribal ancestors; but eventually it was, like the other [creeds], corrupted from its first innocence, either because of carelessness or because of human additions to it; yet it was reasonably well kept up among the oldest Scandinavians by the ancient and great ethical doctrine called *Volu-Spa* or the first *Edda* [---] This doctrine was diluted and corrupted first by Odin and the Aesir and later by the the poetry of the skalds, so that it changed miserably: yet much good can still be derived from the small portion that did not get lost).

This description of the religious development among the early Scandinavians is in good accordance with Snorri and also with Ramsay, since both of them maintain that the original revelation was corrupted at a later stage among the pagans. According to Snorri's *Edda*, the most important corruption took place when Odin made King Gylfi and his Swedes believe that the *Æsir* were gods and should be worshipped as such. Both Snorri and Dalin see the skalds as Odin's direct followers and hence as principal transmitters of pagan myths and delusions. It should be noted, however, that Dalin does not see *Völuspá* and other mythical lays of the *Edda* as poetic creations of the skalds but as parts of an ancient philosophical *Sedo-Lära*, or ethical doctrine, in which God's divine revelation has been better preserved than in skaldic poetry. This view is further elaborated in one of Dalin's long footnotes, in which he describes the oldest *Edda* as an extremely archaic and valuable collection of religious texts from the pagan era, later in part destroyed by Christian monks but again collected and partly restored around 1114 by Sæmundr Sigfússon and then again around 1215 by Snorri Sturluson, who is credited with the noble deed of having saved the last remaining fragments of the *Edda* before it was completely lost to posterity.<sup>15</sup> Although Dalin's way of referring to the destructive activities of Christian monks is clearly influenced by the anticlerical spirit of the Enlightenment, his views about the preservation of the *Edda* are mainly derived from earlier antiquarians such as Brynjólfur Sveinsson, who regarded both *Sæmundar Edda* and *Snorra Edda* as late redactions of a much older mythological work from prehistoric times.<sup>16</sup>

Dalin then proceeds to describe the original monotheism of the early Swedes and their belief in a Trinity similar to that of Christianity:

En enda Alsmäktig Gud tilbad wår äldsta Svenska werld under namn af Oden och tillade

<sup>15</sup> "Med den gamla förlorade *Edda* war det så fatt: Wid Christendomens början war hon af Munkarne mäst utrotad, när den witre Isländaren Sæmund Sigfusson, kallad den *Frode* eller *Wise*, sammanhämtade alt hvad som kunde igenfinnas wid pass A. 1114. och blef hans samling en *Skatt af hela menniskliga Wisheten*, säger Brynolfus Svenon. Episc. Scalholt. in Epist. ad Stephanium. Men denna Skatt blef äfwen förlorad af samma orsak som förr, tilö dess den kloke Isländaren Snorre Sturleson räddade hvad han kunde och utgaf åtminstone en skugga deraf, i det han hopskref *Edda* och *Scalda* wid pass A. 1215" Dalin (1747), 118, note f.

<sup>16</sup> See Margaret Clunies Ross & Lars Lönnroth, "The Norse Muse: Report from an International Research Project", *alvissmál* 9 (1999), 10.

honom sådana namn och egenskaper, at de hos oss må upväcka förundran: Han kallades *Altings Fader* och *Begynnare*, den *Alrahögste*, den *Evige* [---] Liksom de gamle Chaldéer och Egyptier begripit alla Guds egenskaper under *Makt*, *Kärlek* och *Wishet*, hvarföre ock Tre-talet varit i så stor wördnad hos de äldste Philosopher; så hafva äfven de gamle Svenske inneslutit Gudomligheten under tre på Kungelige throner sittande personer, *Har*, *Jafn-Har* och *Tridi*, det är, den *Store*, den *Lika-Store* och den *Tredie*, hvarmed de förstådt samma Gudomeliga egenskaper *Makt*, *Kärlek* och *Wishet* (119-123)

(Our oldest Swedish community worshipped one almighty God under the name of Odin and gave him such names and attributed to him such properties that they should make us amazed: He was called *Father of All* and *Beginner*, the *Highest of All*, the *Eternal* [---] In the same manner as the old Chaldeans and Egyptians understood all God's properties as functions of *Power*, *Love*, and *Wisdom*, thus making the number three greatly venerated among the oldest philosophers, so the old Swedes subsumed under the Godhead three persons sitting on royal thrones, *Hárr*, *Jafn-Hárr*, and *Priði*, i.e., the Great, the Just-as-Great and the Third, by which they referred to those same Divine properties *Power*, *Love* and *Wisdom*).

The trinity of *Hárr*, *Jafn-Hárr*, and *Priði*, which confronts King Gylfi in *Gylfaginning*, is thus interpreted according to Ramsay's theory. Further on, however, Dalin explains that Odin represents Power, Thor Love and Frigga Wisdom (140). The various *heiti* for Odin listed by Snorri in *Gylfaginning* are interpreted as referring to the properties of the Allmighty God of Christianity.

Thor is characterized as the "middle god" (*Medel-Gud*) of the Scandinavians just as Orus, according to Ramsay, is the middle god of the Egyptians, Mithras of the Persians, Adonis of the Syrians, etc. The Norse Thunderer is described by Dalin as a "son or designated hero of the Allmighty, the one mentioned by all ancient poets as the one who should come to the world in order to reconcile Good and Evil, strike down everything that is harmful and raise the downtrodden."<sup>17</sup> Thor is thus, in spite of his tough exterior and brutal treatment of the giants, an example of Ramsay's Christ-like *Dieu mitoyen*. It is his task to bring back the innocent and happy Golden Age (*Gylldende Álder*) which preceded the Fall. He reigns in "Bil-Skermer" (i.e., Old Norse *Bilskirnir*), which Dalin interprets as meaning "Protector of Innocence" and "Shield of the Unhappy" (132). His enemy is the Midgard Serpent, who according to Dalin is the symbol of Sin, finally defeated at Ragnarök or Judgment Day (134-135).

Frigga is, correspondingly, said to be originally related to various other similar pagan goddesses such as Pallas of Greece and Isis of Egypt (135), but she is also claimed to be the same as "Urania or the Queen of Heaven", She is also said to be worshipped under the name of Astarte or Astarot - names which in Dalin's opinion are related to Old Norse *Ástar-godð* or "god of love" (138). She is, furthermore, described as the equivalent of the Finnish Jumala and the

<sup>17</sup> "Son eller utskickad Hiälte af den Alrahögste, som alle gamle Poëter omtala, hwilken skulle komma i werlden att förlika det Goda och det Onda, nederslå alt skadeligt och uprätta alt förfallit", Dalin (1747), 124-125.

Ephesian Diana, who in the New Testament (Acts 19:26) is said to be worshipped “in Asia and the whole world” (139 f).

Quoting *Völuspá* and *Snorra-Edda*, Dalin also tries to show that the early Swedes originally believed in the immortality of the soul and an afterlife in either Heaven or Hell (151-154). But this knowledge of the eternal truth is maintained to have been corrupted, in much the same way as in Palestine, when the original monotheism was replaced in the North by the polytheism encouraged by skalds and pagan priests (157 f). The main responsibility for this deterioration Dalin attributes to the immigrant from Asia who called himself Odin, even though his real name was Sigge Fridulfson (100 f). Through the deceptions and poetic art of this man the old religion of Sweden is supposed to have been transformed almost beyond recognition, even though it continued to preserve some fragments of the original truth (11 f, 157 f).

Such is then, in broad outline, Dalin’s view of Old Norse mythology - a view that seemed modern and reasonable enough in its time, even though it does not very well fit the facts as we now know them. Dalin had presented his and Ramsay’s opinions in an attractive way that was easy to understand, and they were soon echoed by other scholars as well as by laymen. The first volume of *Svea Rikes Historia* was translated into German and evidently read by quite a few people outside Sweden.<sup>18</sup> The most influential of his immediate followers was probably Paul-Henri Mallet, the Swiss intellectual who for a while was a professor at the University of Copenhagen and later became the international prophet of the “Nordic Renaissance” in Europe.<sup>19</sup> In the preface of his *Introduction à l’histoire de Dannemarc* (1755) Mallet enthusiastically praises Dalin’s *Svea Rikes Historia*, which he has read in Swedish, especially its chapters on the religion, laws and customs of the early Swedes.<sup>20</sup> And it is indeed obvious that Mallet was influenced by Dalin’s and Ramsay’s method of dealing with the pagan myths. Like them he stresses the importance of separating the religion of philosophers from the mythology of poets. Like them he maintains that the earliest pagans were monotheists who believed in a divine trinity. Like Dalin he presents the god Thor as a mediating, Christ-like figure, “une divinité mitoyenne, un médiateur entre dieu et les hommes,” with close parallels in Asian and Near-Eastern mythologies.

From Mallet and Dalin these thoughts were passed on to people like Thomas Percy in England and Johann Gottfried Herder in Germany,<sup>21</sup> and

<sup>18</sup> *Geschichte des Reiches Schweden* I (Greifswald 1756). Cf. Wahrburg (1884), 360.

<sup>19</sup> See in particular Anton Blanck, *Den nordiska renässansen i 1700-talets litteratur* (Stockholm 1911); Margaret Clunies Ross & Lars Lönnroth, “The Norse Muse: Report from an International Research Project”, *alvissmál* 9 (1999).

<sup>20</sup> *Introduction à l’histoire de Dannemarc, ou l’on traite de la religion, des loix, des moeurs et des usages des anciens Danois* (Copenhague, 1755), 10.

<sup>21</sup> On the reception history see in particular Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse in Britain, 1750-1820* (Hesperides, Letterature e culture occidentali, vol. 9, Trieste, 1998); François-Xavier



further on to early Romantic poets in Scandinavia and Germany, who eagerly accepted the idea that Old Norse mythology is not just a barbaric superstition but essentially a Scandinavian or Germanic variety of a universal religion ultimately based on divine revelation and hence a sublime reflection of Absolute Truth. This made it possible for the poets to use the Norse myths as symbols of Christian and Romantic metaphysics, and this was in fact what many of them did.

In an early review of Mallet's Danish history, published in *Königsberger Gelehrten und Politischen Zeitungen* on the 12th of August 1765, Johann Gottfried Herder not only praises Mallet and, incidentally, "der vortreflichen Schwedischen Reichsgeschichte des Olof Dalins" for having presented Old Norse mythology and culture so well to modern readers, but he also anticipates the later poetic development when he writes the following about the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson and its possibilities as a treasure chest for modern poets:

Es kann dies Buch eine Rüstkammer eines neuen Deutschen Genies seyn, das sich auf den Flügeln der Celtischen Einbildungskraft in neue Wolken erhebt und Gedichte schafft, die uns immer angemessener wären, als die Mythologie der Römer. Vielleicht fängt sich eine neue Poetische Periode unter uns an, da die Edda, der Fingal und die Arabische Chrestomathie des Herrn Prof. Michaelis den Weg dazu öffnen.<sup>22</sup>

(This book could be a treasure chest for a new German genius rising on the wings of Celtic imagination to new skies, creating poems that would suit us better than the mythology of the Romans. Perhaps a new era of poetry will begin, when the Edda, the [Songs of] Fingal, and the Arabic anthology of Professor Michaelis will open the road to it)

It should be noted here that Herder at this early stage in his career follows Mallet in making no distinction between "Celtic" and "Germanic" culture; to him they are one and the same. Furthermore, Herder evidently regards the Old Norse Edda, the Scottish "Fingal" or "Songs of Ossian," and the Arabic texts collected by one of his German colleagues, Professor Michaelis, as variants of the same universal patterns which could - and should - inspire the imagination of poets in the days to come. The thinking is here reminiscent of Ramsay's *Discours*, even though Ramsay is not mentioned and perhaps not even known by Herder.

In later years Herder returned to the idea of using Old Norse myth in modern poetry, most particularly in the dialogue called "Iduna, oder der Apfel der Verjüngerung" (Iduna, or the Apples of Rejuvenation), which he published in Schiller's journal *Die Horen* in 1796. From Herder such thoughts passed on

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Dillmann, "Frankrig og den nordiske fortid - de første etaper af genopdagelsen", in *The Waking of Angantyr: The Scandinavian Past in European Culture*, ed. E. Roesdahl & P. Meulengracht Sørensen (Aarhus 1996), 13-26; Thomas Krömmelbein, "Mallet in Deutschland: Zur Wirkungsgeschichte der nordischen Poesie und Mythologie", *Aus dem Antiquariat*, 1995.12 (Beilage zum *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel* no 103-4, 28 December 1995), A449-56;

<sup>22</sup> Herder, *Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan, vol. 1 (Berlin 1877), 74-75.

to Scandinavian poets such as Oehlenschläger and Grundtvig in Denmark, or Geijer and Atterbom in Sweden. The most consistent application of these thoughts can be found in Atterbom's large allegorical poem *Skaldar-mal* (1811), in which the Old Norse myths are given a philosophical interpretation which is obviously borrowed in part from Olof Dalin's *Svea Rikes Historia*.<sup>23</sup> Thus in his own commentary to the poem, Atterbom explains that his poem is based on "the original Nordic doctrines about God's trinity as Allfather (unity, the center and ring of Eternity), Middle God (Reason, Light, Λογος) and World Soul (Nature, Matter, Object)."<sup>24</sup> Although several of the philosophical concepts in this quotation are not exactly those of Dalin and Ramsay but more reminiscent of contemporary German philosophers such as Schelling, there is hardly any doubt that the whole theoretical construction has its ultimate roots in Ramsay's *Discours*.

So we may indeed ask ourselves if the Romantic poets would have used the Old Norse myths at all as vehicles for their religious and philosophical imagination, unless a certain Swedish poet by the name of Olof Dalin during his visit to Paris in 1739 had happened to meet a somewhat obscure Scottish emigré commonly known as Chevalier Ramsay and been inspired by this meeting to read *Les Voyages de Cyrus*. It seems likely, at any rate, that the study of Old Norse mythology would have taken a somewhat different course.

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Lars Lönnroth, "Atterbom och den fornnordiska mytologin", *Kritik och teater. En vänbok till Bertil Nolin* (Göteborg 1992).

<sup>24</sup> "de ursprungliga Nordiska lärorna om Guds trefaldighet såsom Allfader (enhet, Evighetens medelpunkt och ring), Medelgud (Förstånd, Ljus, Λογος) och Verldssjäl (Natur, Materia, Objekt)", *Phosphoros* jan-feb 1811, 8. The quotation is further commented by Lönnroth (1992), 14.