

Freyja and Freyr: Successors of the Sun

On the absence of the sun in Nordic saga literature

Lan Wang



Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies

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Summary

Comparing the sagas and those two Eddas, there is a significant difference that the Sun is only regarded as a physical object in sagas, while many narrations of the goddess *Sól* exist in both the Poetic Edda and the Prose Edda, though far less frequent than that of those main gods, such as Freyja, Freyr, Odin and so on. Here comes the question why the Sun is missing in Nordic saga literature, considering its vital role in the religious life in Bronze Age North. By investigating the sun worship in the Bronze Age, as well as those historical and legendary works, such as *Germania*, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, *Poetic Edda*, *Prose Edda*, and *Ynglings Saga*, and so on, I conclude that there is a strong connection among the Sun, Nerthus-Njörðr, and Freyja-Freyr.

Nerthus travels on her wagon and brings peace and good seasons to people, while Njörðr, the male counterpart of Nerthus, was worshiped as the protector of maritime. Both of these two features could have been derived from the course of the Sun through the sky during the day on the sun-chariot, and through the underworld at night, maybe on a ship, which can also be interpreted as a metaphor of the regeneration of plants and crops, and even connected with the journey from This World to the Other World.

As for Freyja and Freyr, who are probably derived from Nerthus-Njörðr, they share more similarities with the Sun, which may allow them to be identified as Nordic solar gods. For example, Freyja's wagon is pulled by cats, which are worshiped by ancient Egyptians as the representation of the Sun. At the same time, her wagon associated her with both the Sun and Nerthus. Compared with Freyja, Freyr's role as a solar god is more obvious, as he is the ruler of rains and shining of the Sun.

The similarities of functions between the Sun, and Freyja-Freyr, might indicate that the fertile functions represented by the Sun In Bronze Age, was first inherited by Nerthus in the Iron Age, and then by Freyja and Freyr in the Viking and Middle Ages, even though the Sun itself was no longer the key symbol of fertility in Viking and Medieval North.

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1. Introduction

Solar deities and solar mythologies exist throughout most cultures in early phases and had important role in early worship. In some culture such as Egypt, the solar deity Ra is the highest god. In other culture like Greece, solar gods like Apollo are at least counted among the main gods, though Helios, the traditional Sun god, is not a prominent divinity. In those cultures, there are still several extant myths about the Sun-Gods. In the Nordic mythological corpus, however, the prehistory of which we do not know much about, was probably transmitted orally before the 12th century and only then textualized and preserved in manuscripts, there are not many narrations about solar deities. In fact, it is even hard to say which one of the Nordic gods is the solar god. Considering the large amount of representations of the sun in prehistoric archaeological findings, the absence of the Sun in Nordic mythological corpus poses a research question worthy of investigation.

This phenomenon of the absence of the sun in Nordic saga literature might indicate that sun worship had diminished or even disappeared long time ago before the textualization, and that the sun was no longer important in the religious life of Viking and Medieval Norse. As Flemming Kaul put forward, the solar myth disappeared around 500 BC, while the “Æsir religion” was established around 500 AD. There were only formalized symbols left, such as wheel-crosses, rings and ships (Kaul, 1998). Anders Andrén (2014, pp.117-166) also argued that the most representations of sun worship disappeared around 500 BC, and finally, it was only contained in the medieval Icelandic literature as a natural phenomenon, though he insisted that the sun did not really disappear, instead it was placed in new ritual context. In a word, sun worship did diminish around 500 BC, and the sun was missing in Nordic saga literature as the consequence.

However, though there are no gods defined directly as solar gods in Nordic mythology, some gods do have solar representations. According to earlier studies, Thor, Odin, Baldr, and Heimdal are connected with the sun. “Odin’s eye, Balder’s countenance; Heimdal needs it for his rainbow, and still the sun itself rides as a beaming maid with her horses from morning until evening.”¹ Anderson showed the existence of the Sun in the myths of Odin, Thor, Heimdal, and Baldr. William Tyler Olcott (2004, p.91) also connected these four gods with the sun and even identified

¹ *Norse Mythology*, R. B. Anderson. The sun affects these four gods all in different ways: Odin governs the high heavens and the sun is regarded as Odin’s eye; Thor rules the clouds and conquers the frost giants; Heimdal’s realm is the rainbow; and the Balder rules the realm of light.

Thor as a Sun-God, as he ruled in the clouds and conquered the frost giants², just like Hercules, who was the enemy of the power of clouds and darkness. However, in my opinion, Freyr and Freyja are more connected with the sun, especially when we consider the symbolic meaning of the sun - fertility. Freyja and Freyr are the personified sun in the Viking and Middle Ages though they are not referred to as sun-deities directly by Nordic people.

What I want to prove in this paper is, that Freyr and Freyja are personified sun though they are not defined directly as solar deities; and that after 500 BC, they took the place of the Sun in the fertility worship. That is to say, the Sun did not really disappear after 500 BC, it was just personified as part of other deities, in particular Freyr and Freyja. In the Christian and Ptolemaic worldview there was no place for sun *gods*, the sun became with this only more or less an instrument of light created by God and as such an astronomical entity. Snorri, as the main mythographer, sharing this worldview, did thus not have much room for a sun god.

1.1 Sources

1.1.1 Rock carvings and Gotland picture stones

As the earliest evidences of sun worship, rock carvings in the Bronze Age and Gotland picture stones raised from the Migration period until the 11th century, are the most important sources for investigating the prehistoric religion of Nordic people.

In the carvings of the Bronze Age, the most important representation is a simplified ship of conventionalized form, whose keel is carved like a beam under the stem. Such ship is sometimes decorated with animal's heads and spirals, but the most common images the ships bear are the symbolic images of wheel, tree, animal and axes. Among all of these images, the wheel-symbols are the oldest found in rock carvings of the Bronze Age, which have been regarded as represented sun. (Shetelic and Falk, 1937, pp.158-159)

As for the Gotland picture stones, the first stones usually contain figures of whirling disc, which may represent the sun. However on the Viking Age stones, figures of ship and horned-women are extremely popular, which might refer to the journey to the Other world and valkyries.

1.1.2 Poetic Edda and Prose Edda

They are the most important works scholars used to investigate Old Nordic mythology. The myths contained in these two works were composed long time ago and had been transmitted orally for centuries. So we cannot say a belief is still "active" in the Viking Age and the Middle Ages, even though we find its narrations in the Poetic Edda and Prose Edda. For example, in both of these two works, we could find myths of the female deity whose name is Sun and her sun-chariot dragged by two horses, as

² Olcott used giant to represent Jötunn, but it is not accurate.

well as the myths of the death of Baldr, the God of Light. However in sagas settled in the tenth to the fifteenth centuries, there was almost no information about Baldr, or the female deity Sól. The Poetic Edda and the Prose Edda were written down in the thirteenth century, while most sagas were composed between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. This difference in content may indicate that Sun worship had been of great importance ages ago, that is why those solar myths were composed, transmitted orally and finally recorded in Poetic Edda and Prose Edda. But the Sun was no longer worshiped in Viking and Middle Ages, thus we can not find narrations of sun worship or solar gods in sagas. However, though old motif of solar myth disappeared, remains of solar myth and sun worship can be found in other myths.

Both the Poetic Edda and the Prose Edda are more memorial than improvisational, however, they are also reconstructed and reorganized more or less during its transmission. For example, there are differences between the version of *Völuspá* in the Codex Regius and the other version in Hauksbók; and the coherent and complete version of myth in the Prose Edda, which are reconstructed by Snorri Sturluson from his orally-transmitted poetic sources. (Ross, 1994, p.24)

1.1.3 Sagas

The most important one is the legendary *Ynglinga saga*, the first section of *Heimskringla*, composed by Snorri Sturluson in the 13th century. In *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri treated the Nordic gods as human kings, introduced the history of the royal house of Ynglings, and regarded Freyr as the king of Sweden. Besides *Ynglinga saga*, narrations about Freyja can also be found in several Sagas of Icelanders, such as *Egils saga*, *Njáls saga*, *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*.

1.2 Comparative method

According to Anders Andrén, the solar myth was a new religious form which was established around 1500 BC under the influence of central European, especially the eastern Mediterranean. The North and the Mediterranean had been channeled, which means the Nordic mythology was unavoidably influenced, especially from the Roman Iron Age onward. Besides the Mediterranean influence, as part of the Indo-European mythology system, the Nordic mythology is also relatively connected with the mythology of other Indo-European civilizations. As Davidson (1969, p.174) put forward, the symbol of traveling wheel of fire, which was bound up with the journey of the sun across the heaven during the day on a wagon or a chariot and beneath the sea in a ship at night, was a universal pattern among the early civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean world, as well as Ancient Egypt. Thus through comparing the myths of different civilizations, we can better comprehend the symbolic meaning of some representations such as Freyja's cats and Sif's hair; and some motifs, such as the journey of Nerthus and Freyja, and the battle between Freyr and Surtr.

1.3 Early research

1.3.1 Fertility god and goddess

The concept of “fertility deity” can be extremely complex as the term “fertility” itself has ambiguous meanings, such as the natural capability to produce offspring; and the ability of soil to sustain agricultural plant growth. The term “fertility” has been used frequently by modern scholars, however few of them gave the term a specific definition in their works.

Näsström (1995) used the concept “fertility” many times in her work about Freyja. As she introduced, Freyja had been investigated by many earlier scholars in perspective of “fertility”. According to those scholars, Freyja was a mainly a “fertility”goddess, as a protector of love, pregnancy, and childbirth; growth of plants; and fertilization of earth. However, Näsström criticized this kind argument and defined Freyja as a Great Goddess - a goddess who was not merely associated with “fertility”, but was also a female counterpart to all of Odin, Thor and Freyr. According to Näsström, Freyja was not only the protector of good year and harvest, but also the deity of death and warfare, as she was the receiver of half of the dead warriors. Obviously, in Näsström’s opinion, “fertility”, when connected with female goddess, only refers to love, pregnancy, childbirth, as well as growth and vegetation, excluding death and warfare.

Some other scholars treated “fertility” as a term with broader meanings. According to Olcott (2004), gods, either about childbirth, or growth and vegetation, or death and rebirth, or even warfare, could all be defined as fertility gods.

I agree with Olcott’s opinion towards fertility, and in my opinion, the functions of fertility gods can be classified into three groups. The first function is producing offspring, thus the fertility gods of this kind are associated with love, sex, pregnancy, childbirth, such as Isis in ancient Egyptian mythology, Aphrodite in Greek mythology, and Frigg in Germanic mythology. The second is connected with agriculture, and gods of this group are protector of growth and vegetation, such as Cybele, the Earth Mother in Greek mythology and Germanic Mother Earth Nerthus. The third is connected with death, afterlife, and even warfare occasionally. Gods of this kind are usually receivers of dead people or even rulers of the Other World, such as Osiris in Egyptian mythology and Inanna in Sumerian mythology. However, many fertility gods and goddesses have more than one function, such as Ishtar, the goddess of Akkadian, Assyrian and Babylonian mythology, and the Nordic goddess Freyja. Both of them have all of the three functions mentioned above.

About Freyja, Näsström referred to another term “Great Goddess”. According to Näsström, Freyja, just like most other Indo-European Great Goddesses, was connected with the Moon, not the sun, which is not correct in my opinion. And I will prove in this paper that, Freyja, together with her masculine counterpart Freyr, are solar deities.

1.3.2 Sun worship

As one of the most important part of ancient fertility worship, sun worship has been investigated thoroughly by earlier scholars. Some scholars concentrated on the sun worship in one certain civilization, while others did this in a comparative way, such as William Tyler Olcott and Adrian Bailey. In his work “*Sun Lore of All Ages*”, Olcott investigated variant mythological narrations of the sun of different civilizations and traced the sun worship from ancient to present days. In “*The Caves of the Sun*”, Adrian Bailey revived a long-discarded 19th-century theory that all myths, religions and folktales can be traced to the sun, which was also emphasized by Olcott.

Scholars of Nordic religion also paid great attention to the sun worship, however, mainly of the prehistoric Scandinavia. There are not much scholars investigating the sun of the Viking and Middle Ages, which might be the consequence of the reality that the sun is almost absent in Nordic mythological corpus, except the Prose Edda and the Poetic Edda. There are no gods defined directly as solar gods in Nordic mythology by ancient Nordic people, though some gods do have solar representations and are even identified as solar gods by some scholars, such as Odin, Thor, Heimdal, and Baldr. (Olcott, 2014)

1.3.3 Solar myth and solar gods

How could a god or goddess be called a solar deity? In my opinion, connections with the sun, such as the metaphor of the sun as Odin’s eye, Balder’s countenance, is totally inadequate for identifying these gods as a solar god. Or many Nordic gods can be regarded as solar gods, such as Sif who has golden hair and Skírnir whose name means “shining”.

A solar god should at least meet three criteria. First of all, he or she must have the same functions as the Sun has; then he or she must have some characteristics associated with the sun or even have possessions of represented sun; and finally, he or she must have related myths following the motifs of solar myth. Take Sól for example, she is the personification of the Sun without any doubt. However, compared with the well-known Greek solar god Apollo and the Egyptian solar god Ra, we can not find much evidences for her fertilizing function from Nordic mythological corpus, which the Sun had represented in the Bronze Age. That means Sól does not meet the first characteristic of solar gods, and that is why I do not identify her as a solar god in this paper. On the contrary, Freyr and Freyja meet all these three requirements, thus I regard them as the Nordic solar gods.

The solar myths are those myths where the sun is the central object, such as the myth of the creation of the sun or the birth of the solar deities, as well as myths of the personified sun. When it comes to the Nordic mythology, the Nordic solar myth is mainly about the movement of the sun, as there are no deities directly identified as solar deities, except the personified Sól. In this paper, I identify Freyr and Freyja as solar deities derived from the sun, however most myths about them cannot be defined as solar myth, as they are not much associated with the sun.

2. Sun worship in prehistoric Scandinavia

About the development of sun worship, there were mainly two kinds of views. According to Kaul, the solar myth disappeared around 500 BC, while the “Æsir religion” was established around 500 AD. There were only formalized symbols left, such as wheel-crosses, rings and ships (Kaul, 1998). On the contrary, Anders Andrén (2014, pp.117-166) argued that the sun did not really disappear, instead it was placed in new ritual context. He investigated carefully the solar tradition through time, and as conclusion, he argued that the importance of sun could be indicated from the Megalithic monuments, where the sunrise and sunset at midwinter and midsummer played the fundamental role. And with the influence from central European, mainly the eastern Mediterranean, a new religious tradition form was established around 1500 BC, and that is the solar myth Kaul put forward. The solar myth was sun drawn across the sky and the underworld by horse, and the ritual connected with it. Then, around 500 BC, many of solar myth’s representations disappeared, only formalized symbols were left, such as those stone pictures found in Gotland. And around 200 BC, even these sun symbols disappeared, only wheel-crosses and concentric rings as grave markers in Norway and Sweden were left. But from 200 AD to 550 AD, the solar myth was seen once more both in object and images, but was thoroughly transformed later during the sixth and seventh centuries. Finally, it was only contained in the medieval Icelandic literature, but only as a natural phenomenon.

2.1 Archaeological Evidence of Sun Worship in Prehistoric Scandinavia

Rock carvings and Gotland picture stones are the main sources for investigating the pre-literate Scandinavian religion. There is one obvious difference between Stone Age rock carvings and Bronze Age rock carvings, that is there are much more sun images in Bronze Age than in Stone Age. We cannot find much sun images in Stone Age rock carvings, the key images of Stone Age rock carvings are ships without sun on it, animals and human. In Bronze Age rock carving, the sun image is one of the key image, usually appearing as wheels, circles. The Sun figure can be alone, hold by human (fig.1 and fig.2) or set on ship (fig.3) or chariot (fig.4). Besides rock carvings, the sun could be found almost everywhere in the Bronze Age. In Kivik grave, we can find image of sun and bird-shape women on slabs inside the grave, which connected the sun with death (fig.5); the sun-like bronze shields that indicated the connection between war and the sun (fig.6 and fig.7); and the belt plate (fig.8 and fig.9). The most important archaeological find is the Trundholm sun-chariot (fig.10), as it proved the existence of the typical solar myth in Bronze Age Scandinavia, that the sun moving across the sky on the chariot dragged by horse. What we can see from the picture is the gilded side of this disc, which has been interpreted as the day-side, showing the appearance of the sun when it is drawn by the horse across the sky from east to west. On the contrary, the other side of this disk - the night-side, is not gilded, as it indicates the journey of the sun back across the sky or through the underworld

from the west to east (Kaul 1998, 2004). According to these archaeological evidences, it is obvious that sun worship was dominant in the religious life of the Bronze Age.



Fig. 1

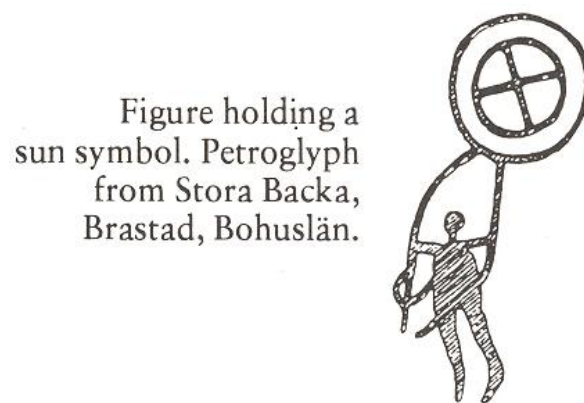


Fig. 2

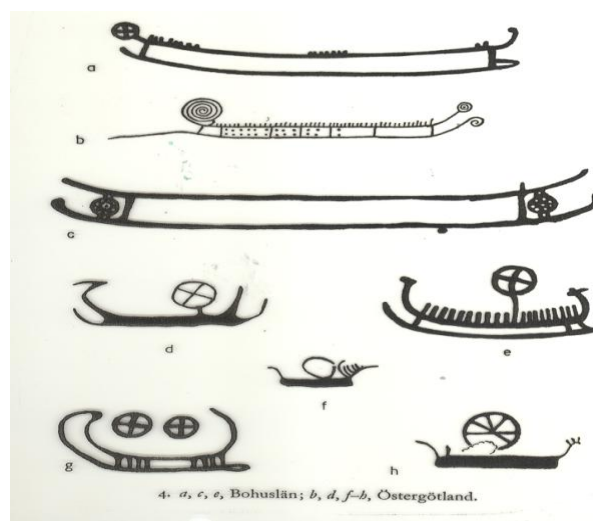


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

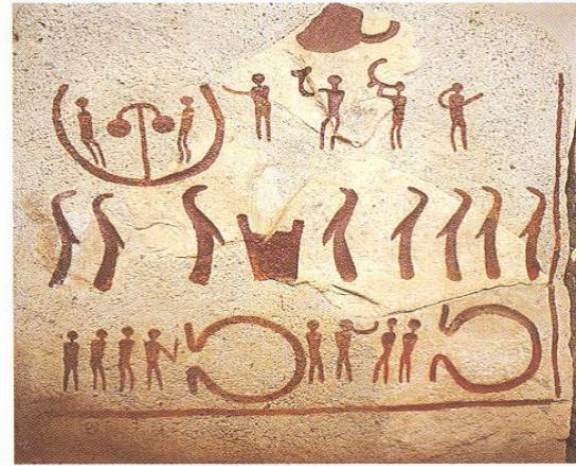
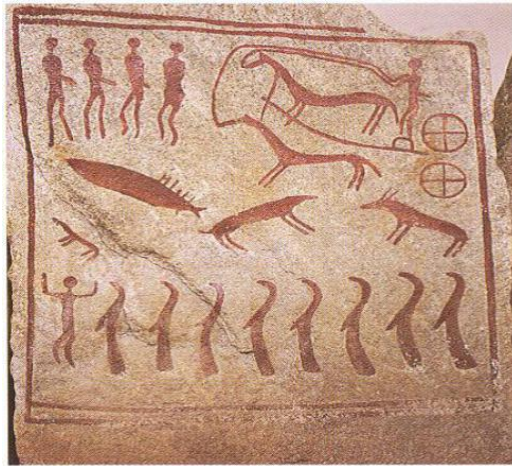


Fig. 5 1400BC



Fig. 6



Fig. 7³

³ <http://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-bronze-age/the-bronze-age-shields/>



Fig. 8

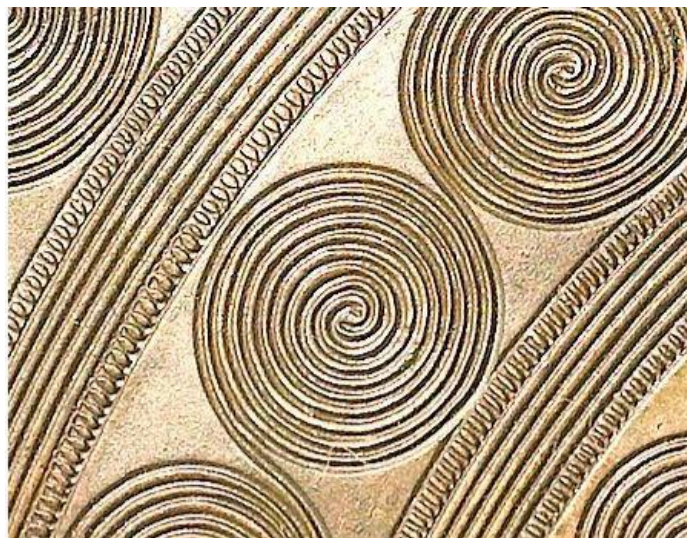


Fig. 9

Figure 8 and Figure 9: It was the largest and most perfect belt plate found from Langstrup. Together with the belt plate, he found a knife with a beautiful decorated handle and two large spiral rings, all in bronze. ⁴

⁴ <http://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-bronze-age/the-belt-plate-from-langstrup/>



Fig. 10 The Sun Chariot was made in the Early Bronze Age around 1400 BC. The elegant spiral ornamentation that graces the golden sun disc reveals its Nordic origin. The Sun Chariot illustrates the idea that the sun was drawn on its eternal journey by a divine horse. A sun image and the horse have been placed on wheels to symbolize the motion of the sun.⁵

After the Bronze Age, sun images as well as sun worship began to diminish, personified deities took the place of the Sun in fertility worship. In Iron Age, we can also find represented sun, but they usually appear together with human features. For example, on the Gundestrup Cauldron, there is an image of a woman sitting on a wagon, accompanied by two elephants, depicted like horses with trunks, two griffins and what seems to be a lion (fig.11). Compared with the solar myth recorded in Poetic Edda and Prose Edda, where the Sun travels across the heaven on a chariot dragged by two horses, the image here may indicate that goddess on wagon/chariot became the new motif of this solar myth, and the Sun became a goddess.

As for the picture stones on the island of Gotland, they are raised to commemorate the Gotland dead, since the Migration Period throughout the Viking Age until about the eleventh century when Christianity had already come. The Majority of them are purely pagan while a few later ones are influenced by Christianity, thus, “they offer a unique opportunity to learn something of ideas about the Other world and the fate of the dead, and it is possible to compare the imagery used on the stones with that of some of the earliest poetry that survives in Iceland” (Davidson, 1993, p.29). The first stones raised in the Migration Period usually contains figures of a great whirling disc as central figure accompanied by two smaller discs, which may represent the sun; while in the Viking Age, pictures of ships as well as pictures of a rider on horse welcomed by women who offers a drinking horn were extremely popular (Davidson, 1993, p.29-33; Davidson 1976, p.300). The welcoming scene may refer to either the myth of dead warriors welcomed to Valhall by valkyries, or the myth of Odin’s journey to Hel, while the picture of ship might be identified as means of transport to

⁵<http://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-bronze-age/the-sun-chariot/>

the Other world.



67 The 'travelling' goddess on the Gundestrup cauldron, surrounded by fabulous animals

Fig. 11. This silver cauldron consists of a hemispherical base, a base plate, seven outer and five inner plates richly decorated with hammered and stamped figures. Various gods and goddesses are shown on the outer panels of the Gundestrup Cauldron. Some are associated with life, fertility and beauty, others with death and destruction. The inner plates show more complicated scenes, including a possession of warriors, a bull sacrifice and a god with antlers surrounded by lions, deer and gryphons. Perhaps this god was regarded as ruler over the forces of nature and wild animals.⁶

Besides images of chariot on artifact, many real chariots/wagons from the Iron Age were found, such as the Wagons from Dejbjerg, Kraghede, Vendsyssel and Langå on Funen. These Iron Age wagons are not used for transport, instead, they are ritual wagons that accompanied a magnate to the grave or were sacrificed in a bog.

The next stage of the development of the sun deities in Scandinavian Iron Age might be the Mother Earth Nerthus, for whom a holy chariot was put in the woods on one island and sacrifice were made for her in the same place (*Germania*, 40). Finally, originated from Nerthus, Freyja and Freyr were the new sun deities in the Viking Age and Middle Ages. As Näsström said, "many scholars suggest that the couple Njorðr-Nerthus hide behind Freyr and Freyja. Nerthus became in Scandinavia the female *Njarð, represented in the place-name or Njorun, appearing in kennings. The name was forgotten in favor of Freyja" (1995, p.60). Derived from sun worship, Freyr and Freyja are personified sun though they are not defined directly as solar deities. They took the place of the Sun in the fertility worship after 500 BC. Though the importance of the sun diminished, its functions still exist in Viking and Middle Ages, however in a form - the worship of Freyja and Freyr.

⁶<http://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-early-iron-age/the-gundestrup-cauldron/the-pictures-on-the-gundestrup-cauldron/>

2.2 Functions of the Sun in Prehistoric Scandinavian

Scholars of religion often regard magic and religion as two distinct concepts representing two different attitudes. “A key characteristic of magic that is often adduced is its coercive and self-actualizing quality. Man seeks to influence his environment through actions and incantations, which are thought to have a particular effect. In religion man is dependent on the divine, whereas in the context of magic man puts himself in control. The practitioner of magic either acts independently of support from a deity or exerts influence on the deity to cause the deity to comply with his wishes.”⁷ However, magic in fact forms an integral part of religion, especially in early civilization, which means man always wants something back in return of his devotion to deities. A deity will not be worshiped unless he/she has the “function” people want. Usually, once some deities have the same function(s), they may be relative and have the same origin. The sun, Njorðr-Nerthus and Freyja-Freyr are different representatives of the same function(s).

The sun, which was worshiped for as long as one thousand years from the Bronze Age onward until the Iron Age, has several functions, and they could be indicated from the prehistorical archaeological finds. There are mainly five motifs of sun images: sun on ship; sun on chariot; sun held by man; and sun with bird-shape women; and finally the shields. Scholars connected the sun images with various symbolic meanings. By investigating the rock carvings, Flemming Kaul regarded the image of sun, specifically of the sun set on the ship as a representation of the movement of the sun over the sky and the underworld (Kaul, 1998). And in *Scandinavian Archaeology*, the author argued that the sun was connected with death, and linked it with the Egyptian myth, in which the dead were taken in the ship of the sun (1937, p.166). He also said that, ‘in all probability the greater number of the rock-carvings were made as shrines dedicated to public worship of the gods, especially to worship of the sun as the source of fruitfulness.’ (1937, p.163) In conclusion, the functions of the sun can be classified into two groups:

2.2.1 Growth and vegetation

The movement of the sun across the sky must have been treated as a symbol of seasonal changing and vegetation growing. The sun comes back after the darkness of the winter, brings back not only the brightness, but also the fertility of earth and vegetation. Parallels could be found in Egypt, where the sun is worshiped in unison with the serpent that represents the sacredness of the Nile, as both of them have the power to make the earth fertile. The sun as well as the serpent identify themselves with the renewal and the annual revivification of life (John Samuel Phené, 1875).

2.2.2 War and Death

As is shown in Fig.5, the slabs inside the Kivik grave contains both the image of a chariot, which can be interpreted as a sun-chariot, as its wheels might be symbols of

⁷ Spurkland. 2012. How Christian were the Norwegians in the High Middle Ages. P.198.

the sun; and the image of bird-shape women. As these stone carvings are put inside the grave, they are probably intended to help or protect the dead people, probably by the means of transporting them to the world of death. In a word, these images are connected with the death. Evidences of the connection between these images and death can also be found in later written materials.

First, the horse has a symbolic meaning in burial practice of the Vikings, as a means of transportation and communication between conceptual worlds - earth and sky; Ásgarðr, Miðgarðr and Útgarðr; and most important this world and the world of death, either *Hel* or *Valhall*, or other abstract places (Gräslund 1980; Loumand, 2004). Thus the image of sun-chariot drawn by horses is not merely a symbol of the journey of sun across the sky, but also a means of transport between the worlds of life and death.

some scholars connect the bird image with battle and war. They regard the bird image as representation of eagle, which is the symbol of power and strength in European tradition (Gräslund, 2004, pp. 127-128). Olcott (2004, p.58), however, argued that bird was a symbol of the sun, just like wheels, referring to the swift flight of the sun. In these carvings, the bird-shape images which are interpreted as women, are also connected with death since they are found in grave. Parallel of these bird-shape women connected with death, can be found from the narrations of valkyries and Freyja. Everyday, half of the people who die in war will go to Valhall - Odin's hall, led by valkyries who are described as bird-shape women; and the other half are chosen by goddess Freyja to her field Fólkvangr. Evidences of the connection between bird image and war can be found from myth of Odin. For example, Valhall has a roof thatched with shields, and with a wolf hanging in the front of its west doors and an eagle hovering above it (*Grímnismál* 8-10), and Odin can even shift shape to an eagle.

In conclusion, chariot, horse, bird and wheel are all elements of the motif of sun-chariot, and they are all connected with death. On the one hand, the bird, especially the eagle is the symbol of power and strength and it may protect the spirits of dead warriors on the one hand; on the other hand, the bird, especially the bird-shape women can guide the souls of dead people to the world of death. As for the image of chariot, it might be a representation of the course of the sun, not only the course across the sky between night and day, which represents the annual revivification of life; but also the course from life to death.

2.3 Sun on Wagon or Sun on Ship

“Sá maðr er nefndr Mundilfæri er átti tvau börn. Þau vǫru svá fǫgr ok fríð at hann kallaði annat Mána en dóttur sína Sól, ok gípti hana þeim manni er Glenr hét. En guðin reiddusk þessu ofdrambi ok tóku þau systkin ok settu upp á himin, létu Sól keyra þá hesta er drógu kerru sólarinnar þeirar er guðin höfðu skapat til at lýsa heimana af þeirri síu er flaug ór Muspellsheimi.” (Gylfaginning, chapter 11. Ed. Faulkes)

“A certain man was named Mundilfari, who had two children; they were so fair and comely that he called his son Moon, and his daughter Sun, and wedded her to the man called Glenr. But the gods were incensed at that insolence, and took the brother and sister, and set them up in the heavens; they caused Sun to drive those horses that drew the chariot of the sun, which the gods had fashioned, for the world's illumination, from that glowing stuff which flew out of Múspellheim.” (tr. Brodeur, 1916)

Scandinavian solar myth of the sun traveling across the sky can be distinguished as different motifs. First, according to the Prose Edda as quoted above, Sól, is the daughter of Mundilfæri, and she drives the sun-chariot dragged by two horses through the sky. This motif can be defined as “sun on wagon” or “sun on chariot”.

The other kind of motif in the same manner can be defined as “sun on ship”, which widely exists in Bronze Age rock carvings. Evidence of “sun on ship” could also be found from kennings. According to Snorri, the shields can be called “sun on ship” and “moon on ship”, and he provided example of such kennings: *Leyg rýðr ætt á ægi Óláfs skipa sólar* “In the sea Ólafr’s kinsman reddens the flame of the ship-sun”, and *Dagr var fríðr sá er fǫgru fleygjendr alinleygjjar í hangferil hringa hlýrtungli mér þrungu* “Fair was the day, when Scatterers of arm-fire thrust the clear moon of the cheek into my hand-clasp, the coiling track of red rings”. In the first kenning, the shield is called *Skipsól* “ship-sun”, and in the second kenning the shield is called *hlýrtungl* “moon of the ship’s cheek”. The association of the sun and ship might be derived from the Bronze Age religious tradition. Parallels of “sun on ship” can also be found in other civilizations:

“In Egypt we see on the monuments the figure of Ra, the Sun-God, in his boat sailing over the ocean of heaven. “The sun king Apollo is with the Greeks,” says Goldhizer, “the founder of navigation”. The Roman Sun-God, Janus, is also brought into connection with navigation, and the Peruvian sun deity came to them from the sea, and took his leave of them in a ship which floated down a river to the sea where it vanished.” (Olcott, 2004, p.59-60)

Now comes the question that what the difference is between “sun on wagon” and “sun on ship”. Investigating the Old Norse-Icelandic literature, it is obvious that in Nordic tradition, wagons are usually connected with females, while on the contrary ships are more connected with males⁸. For example, goddesses Freyja and Nerthus each owns a chariot, while Freyr owns the golden ship *Skíðblaðnir*. In the same manner, these two distinguished motifs of the sun might be comprehended as two aspects of the sun, one is more connected with females, and the other is more connected with males. Then around 500BC, when personified deities were created, the sun was then represented by pair of gods, one male and one female, such as Nerthus-Njörðr, and Freyja-Freyr.

However there are also opposite examples. For example, according to Snorri, Freyr rode to Baldr’s funeral on a wagon pulled by *Gullinbursti*, the dwarf-made boar;

⁸ *Skáldskaparmál*, chapter 59. “Maðr er kenndr til viðs, sem fyrr er ritat, kallaðr reynir vápna eða víga, ferða ok athafnar, skipa ok alls þess, er hann ræðr ok reynir.” ed. Faulkes.

while Freyja was the owner of *Sessrúmnir*, which refers to both her hall and a ship. Thor is also connected with wagon:

“there was no shortage of idols. Þórr sat in the middle. He was the most honored. He was huge, and completely decorated with gold and silver. This was þórr’s equipment, that he sat in a cart. It was very splendid, in front of it were harnesses two wooden goats, very well made. Both of the two - the cart and the goat - moved on wheels. The horns of the goats were slung with silver. everything was made with very great workmanship.” (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, chapter 268)

These example, in fact, are not exceptions of the argument that wagon is more connected with females, as on the one hand Freyja and Freyr might be both derived from Nerthus, and on the other hand Thor has once dressed as Freyja according to *Þrymskviða*.

3. Nerthus, the Mother Earth

As mentioned above, Nerthus can be interpreted as personified representation of the sun around the 1st century AD, functioning as a goddess of fertility.

3.1 Origin of the name

The only textual record of Nerthus is *Germania*, written by the Roman historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus around 98 AD. Tacitus usually identified the Germanic gods in an *Interpretatio Romana* (Näsström, 1995, p.48), with the exception of Nerthus. The text is as follows:

..nor is there anything noteworthy about them individually, except that they worship in common Nerthus, or Mother Earth, and conceive her as intervening in human affairs and riding in procession through the cities of men. (Germ.40, translated by Näsström)

Näsström provided a brief introduction of different theories of the origin of the name Nerthus. As introduced, there were mainly five kinds of interpretations according to de Vries's conclusion:

The name has a Celtic origin from *nerthos* "force"

The first syllable *ner-* belongs to an Indo-European stem, found in Skr. *nar-* "male power, generating power", cf. Albanian *n'er* "man", Osset. *narten*, Greek *aner* "man", etc.

Nerthus is derived from the Greek *nerteroi* "from the Underworld", referring to a chthonic goddess related to fertility.

Nerthus is derived from the same stem as Skr. *nart* "dancer", suggesting on a dancing ritual.

Two attempts have been made to derive Nerthus from the Lithuanian language: *neriti* "to drive", hinting at the ritual to drown the servants of the Goddess and from *nerseti* "to play". (Näsström, 1995, p.49)

Näsström preferred the second interpretation and argued that, in many cases a god's appellations may take a feminine form as the god's sister or wife. In the same way, considering the name's connection with "virile power", there might be a male deity as the masculine form of goddess Nerthus, just like Zeus-Dione⁹ and Hera-Heracles, and that is Njörðr. Over centuries, the goddess Nerthus changed her sex and became the male god Njörðr at last. Näsström introduced A. Kock's argument about why and how Nerthus became Njörðr. According to Kock (1896, p.289), this transformation was the consequence of linguistic change of the vowel from *-e-* to *-io-*. Following this rule, the OG **ertho* became OS *iorþ* and then ON *jorð*, and feminine Nerthus became OS

Njord and finally ON Njörðr. As the gender of Njörðr is masculine, a male deity was derived from the original female deity Nerthus. In a word, there used to be a male deity Njörðr *freyr*, “the Lord Njörðr”, as well as a female deity Njörðr *freyja* “the Lady Njörðr”. Then over centuries, only the title of the feminine form survived and became the goddess Freyja, while the masculine form split into two male gods, Freyr and Njörðr as son and father. (Näsström, 1995, p.50)

Further evidence of the connection between Nerthus and Njörðr can be found from place-names connected with the worship of Nerthus. For example, there is an island in the South of Norway named Njardar-log, which was interpreted as “Njörðr’s bath”, and this place was associated with the worship of Nerthus. (Olsen, 1905)¹⁰

3.2 Traveling deity on a wagon

Nec quicquam notabile in singulis, nisi quod in commune Nerthum, id est Terram matrem, colunt eamque intervenire rebus hominum, invehī populis arbitrantur. Est in insula Oceani castum nemus, dicatumque in eo vehiculum, veste contectum; attingere uni sacerdoti concessum. Is adesse penetrālī deam intellegit vectamque bubus feminis multa cum veneratione prosequitur. Laeti tunc dies, festa loca, quaecumque adventu hospitioque dignatur. Non bella ineunt, non arma sumunt; clausum omne ferrum; pax et quies tunc tantum nota, tunc tantum amata, donec idem sacerdos satiatam conversatione mortalium deam templo reddat. Mox vehiculum et vestes et, si credere velis, numen ipsum secreto lacu abluitur. Servi ministrant, quos statim idem lacus haurit. Arcanus hinc terror sanctaque ignorantia, quid sit illud, quod tantum perituri vident. (Germ.40. Ed. Stuart, 1916)

“There is nothing especially noteworthy about these states individually, but they are distinguished by a common worship of Nerthus, that is, Mother Earth, and believes that she intervenes in human affairs and rides through their peoples. There is a sacred grove on an island in the Ocean, in which there is a consecrated chariot, draped with cloth, where the priest alone may touch. He perceives the presence of the goddess in the innermost shrine and with great reverence escorts her in her chariot, which is drawn by female cattle. There are days of rejoicing then and the countryside celebrates the festival, wherever she designs to visit and to accept hospitality. No one goes to war, no one takes up arms, all objects of iron are locked away, then and only then do they experience peace and quiet, only then do they prize them, until the goddess has had her fill of human society and the priest brings her back to her temple. Afterwards the chariot, the cloth, and, if one may believe it, the deity herself are washed in a hidden lake. The slaves who perform this office are immediately swallowed up in the same lake. Hence arises dread of the mysterious, and piety, which keeps them ignorant of what only those about to perish may see.” (tr. A. R. Birley)

¹⁰ M. Olsen, 1995., *Det gamle norske ø-navn Njarðarlog. Skrifter utgitt av Videnskapsselekabet i Kristiania*, Kristiania. Quoted in *Freyja - the Great Goddess of the North*. Britt-Mari Näsström 1995, p.47-48.

According to the text above, Nerthus has a chariot drawn by female cattle, on which she travels around the villages and accepts hospitality. During the festival of Nerthus, battle, arms and all objects of iron forbidden, everyone enjoys peace and quiet.

Traveling on a chariot is the most important characteristic of Nerthus, as there are many parallels of this motif, which can help us to comprehend the function of Nerthus. Some parallels can be found in Celtic religion, such as the Gundestrup Cauldron on which there is an image of a woman sitting on a wagon, and the ritual wagon found in Dejbjerg. Both of these two objects are of Celtic origin. Parallels could also be found from later vernacular literature, such as Freyja's chariot and her journey to look for her husband Óðr.

There is another narration of the cult connected with deity on wagon in the 14th century Icelandic *Ögmundar þáttr dytts*:

“Great heathen sacrifices were held there at that time, and for a long while Frey had been the god who was worshiped most there - and so much power had been gained by Frey's statue that the devil used to speak to people out of the mouth of the idol, and a young and beautiful woman had been obtained to serve Frey. It was the faith of the local people that Frey was alive, as seemed to some extent to be the case, and they thought he would need to have a sexual relationship with his wife; along with Frey she was to have complete control over the temple settlement and all that belonged to it.” (tr. McKinnell, 1987)

And according to Snorri (*Ynglinga saga* 12), Freyr ruled as a king in Sweden after Njǫrðr, and in his days of ruling there were good seasons. The peace and good seasons even went on after his death. Thus Freyr was worshiped as god of peace and harvest, more than other gods. Nerthus, sharing similar characteristics of sitting on the wagon and traveling around, just like Freyr, is no doubt a protector of peace and harvest - a goddess of fertility. What's more, as a goddess traveling around on a wagon and bringing peace to her people and fertility to crops, Nerthus should be the personified sun of her time, representing the first function of the sun - bringing growth and vegetation.

One more feature to notion in this myth is that Nerthus' wagon is dragged by a female cattle, dislike the sun-chariot in general narrations which is usually pulled by horses. This variance can be explained by interpreting the cattle as a representation of the sun. As Olcott said:

“One of the common appellations for the sun in mythology is “the cow”, and the sun's rays are described as the cow's milk. In the Veda this is one of the most familiar conceptions. These are good examples of the part imagination has played in the development of solar mythology. Given the notion that the sun is a chariot, the rays are seen immediately to resemble steeds, and, likewise, if the sun be likened to a cow, the rays must peradventure represent milk.” (2004, p.61)

3.3 The role of the priest

One more similarity between these two text is the existence of a priest in opposite sex. In Nerthus' ritual, her male priest was the only person who can touch the chariot, and he had to perceive the presence of the goddess and escort her in her chariot, and finally bring her back to her temple. And in Freyr's festival, a young and beautiful woman, who was most possible the priestess of Freyr, would be obtained to serve Frey with a sexual relationship.

This similarity is to some extent connected with the idea that the cult of Nerthus involves both a male god and a female goddess, which is put forward by some scholars to explain why Nerthus changes both her name and her sex into Njörðr. Anne Holtsmark and Niels Lid suggested that, the earth goddess was served by a priest named Nerthus, and it was Tacitus' mistake to give the priest's name to the goddess. Other scholars like J. de Vries (de Vries II, p.165) and G. Dumézil (1973, pp.221-229) argued that Nerthus might be able to take shape in either male or female. However, neither of these two theories can really explain the Nerthus-Njörðr problem, but they provide a possible explanation of why Nerthus and Freyr have a priest/priestess of opposite gender. The priest involved in Nerthus' cult might be a representation of Njörðr, the masculine counterpart of Nerthus; while the priestess of Freyr might represent Freyja, his sister-wife and feminine counterpart. Just like Näsström's conclusion that "a male and a female deity was involved in the procession, one part was, however, represented by a priest or priestess in the ritual" (1995, p.60).

4. Sun in Nordic Mythological Corpus

Centuries after Tacitus' account of Nerthus came the time of vernacular literature. Skaldic poetry, Prose Edda and Poetic Edda, and a great number of sagas provide much more information of the Nordic mythology as well as the real religious life of Scandinavians, though they were unavoidably influenced by Mediterranean mythology and Christianity, as the majority of them were written down after the christianization.

As mentioned above, there are some accounts of the sun in Prose Edda and Poetic Edda, while the sun was almost absent in saga literature. Analyzing the recorded solar myth and comparing them with that of other civilizations, it is obvious that solar myth around the world share some common motifs, although with many variances, just as George William Cox concluded (1870):

“In the thought of these early ages the sun was the child of night or darkness, the dawn came before he was born, and died as he rose in the heavens. He strangled the serpents of the night, he went forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber, and like a giant to run his course. He had to do battle with clouds and storms, sometimes his light grew dim under their gloomy veil, and the children of men shuddered at the wrath of the hidden sun. His course might be brilliant and beneficent, or gloomy, sullen, and capricious. He might be a warrior, a friend, or a destroyer. The rays of the sun were changed into golden hair, into spears and lances, and robes of light.”

In this section, I will introduce the characteristics of the sun in Nordic mythology.

4.1 Sól as a Female Deity

Dislike the tradition of Rome and Greece, where solar deity is male, Sól is a female deity. As described in *Völuspá*, Sól is the sister of Mána, the Moon¹¹, the daughter of Mundilferi. As for the word *Sól* itself, it is a feminine noun, which might be associated more or less with the natural gender of the deity Sól.

The creation of the sun or in another word the birth of Sól is recorded in *Vafþrúðnismál* (stan. 23) as follows:

*Mundilfæri heitir,
hann er Mána faðir
ok svá Sólar it sama;
himin hverfa
þau skulu hverjan dag
öldum at ártali.*

¹¹ Stanza 5: Sól varp sunnan/ sinni mána/ hendi inni hægri/ um himin jódyr/ Sól það né vissi/ hvar hon salí átti/ stjornur það né vissu/ hvar þær staði áttu/ máni þaðan né vissi/ Hvað hann megins átti.

Similar account can be found in chapter 11 of *Gylfaginning*:

Hár segir: 'Sá maðr er nefndr Mundilfæri er átti tvau börn. Þau vǫru svá fagra ok fríð at hann kallaði annat Mána en dóttur sína Sól, ok gipti hana þeim manni er Glenr hét.' (Ed. Faulkes)

Hár answered: "A certain man was named Mundilfari, who had two children; they were so fair and comely that he called his son Moon, and his daughter Sun, and wedded her to the man called Glenr." (tr. Brodeur)

Based on these two versions, the male deity Mundilfari begat the moon *Mána*, and fathered the flaming sun *Sól*, and they two run round of heaven each day, to tell the time for men.

In Old Norse language, the word *Mundilfari* possibly means "the one moving according to particular times" (Simek, 2007, p.222), indicating that it may be associated with the movement of celestial bodies in the sky. There are different theories on the origin of this name *Mundilfari*. John Lindow (2001, p.233) stated that if the first element, *mundil-* was related to *mund*, meaning "period of time", then the name may be a kenning for the Moon, as Rudolf Simek (2007, p.222) theorizes. If their theory is correct that the male deity Mundilfari refers to the moon, then this myth can strongly support the argument that in Germanic tradition the moon is masculine, while on the contrary the the word *Sól* as well as the deity *Sól* are feminine.

What's more, after *Sól* is swallowed by the wolf Fenrir on the day of *Ragnarök*, her daughter continues her course across the heaven. As we can see, the new sun is also a female deity.

Another significant feature of this origin myth is that the moon is created or in other word the deity Mundilfari comes into being before the sun, which is contrary to general notion that the sun is created earlier. In Olcott's collection of solar creation myths, there is a parallel of this Nordic version. In Yokut Indian mythology, the chief of the animals - the coyote, went to a great lake, seized and brought back a small part of a fire from there, and made the moon out of it, and then the sun, and finally put them in the sky. Olcott explained this "incongruity" as that moon did not give sufficient light, thus it was necessary to manufacture brighter sun.(2004, p.6)

Olcott's explanation might be correct for the Indian version, but when it came to the Nordic mythology, there might be a more specific explanation. In Nordic tradition, every day begins from the night, while every year begins from winter. Hence the moon had to be created earlier in order the lighten the night, which came earlier than the day.

4.2 The motif of sun-chariot

As one of the motifs of typical solar mythology, the journey of the sun on a wagon or chariot dragged by horses is widespread in most ancient civilizations. In Scandinavia, the motif of sun-chariot mainly exists in written materials, with only several

evidences found in rock carvings and artifacts.

In *Glímismál*, two horses *Árvakr* and *Alsviðr* pull the sun and the gods set the *ísarnkol* “iron coolness” under the yokes of the sun-chariot, in order to cool them.

<i>Árvakr ok Alsviðr</i>	Arvak and Alsvith
<i>þeir skulu upp heðan</i>	up shall drag
<i>svangir sól draga;</i>	weary the weight of the sun;
<i>en und þeira bógum</i>	but an iron cool
<i>fálu blíð regin,</i>	have the kindly gods
<i>æsir, ísarnkol.</i>	of yore set under their yokes.

Glímismál, stanza 37.

tr. Brodeur

More details can be found in chapter 11 of Prose Edda, among which there are several variances compared with the narration in Poetic Edda.

‘En guðin reiddusk þessu ofdrambi ok tóku þau systkin ok settu upp á himin, létu Sól keyra þá hesta er drógu kerru sólarinnar þeirrar er guðin höfðu skapat til at lýsa heimana af þeiri síu er flaug ór Muspellsheimi. Þeir hestar heita svá: Árvakr ok Alsviðr. En undir bógum hestanna settu goðin tvá vindbelgi at kæla þá, en í sumum fræðum er þat kallat ísarnkol. Máni stýrir göngu tungls ok ræðr nýjum ok niðum. Hann tók tvau börn af jörðunni, er svá heita: Bil ok Hjúki, er þau gengu frá brunni þeim er Byrgir heitir, ok báru á oxlum sér sá er heitir Sægr, en stöngin Simul. Viðfinnr er nefndr faðir þeira. Þessi börn fylgja Mána, svá sem sjá má af jörðu.’ (*Gylfaginning*, chapter 11. ed. Faulkes)

“But the gods were incensed at that insolence, and took the brother and sister, and set them up in the heavens; they caused Sun to drive those horses that drew the chariot of the sun, which the gods had fashioned, for the world’s illumination, from that glowing stuff which flew out of Múspellheim. Those horses are called thus: Early-Wake and All-Strong; and under the shoulders of the horses the gods set two wind-bags to cool them, but in some records that is called ‘iron-coolness.’ Moon steers the course of the moon, and determines its waxing and waning. He took from the earth-two children, called Bil and Hjúki, they that went from the well called Byrgir, bearing on their shoulders the cask called Sægr, and the pole Simul. Their father is named Vidfinnr. These children follow Moon, as may be seen from the earth.” (tr. Brodeur, 1916)

Both Snorri’s Edda and Poetic Edda introduced the name of the two horses that pull the sun-chariot. In Old Norse, *Árvakr* and *Alsviðr*, literally “early awake” and “very quick” (Semik, 2007, pp.10-19), obviously refers to the journey of the sun, as the sun rises in the morning and moves swiftly. As for the possessions of the horses, Snorri described them as wind bags, while according to *Glímismál* it is *ísarnkol* “iron coolness”. No matter what their possessions are, one certain thing is that these objects are used to protect the horses from the heat of the sun. Obviously, the ancient people

are aware of the possible disasters the sun may caught, especially when we associated this myth with the shield *Svalinn* that stands in front of the sun to protect the earth from the heat.

4.3 Sun swallowed by monsters

There is another typical motif of solar myth that the sun is swallowed by a monster. According to Olcott, “the earliest sun myths are those founded on the phenomena of its rising and setting. The ancient dwellers by the seashore believed that at nightfall, when the sun disappeared in the sea, it was swallowed up by a monster. In the morning the monster disgorged its prey in the eastern sky. The story of Jonah is thought to be of solar origin, his adventure with the whale bearing a striking analogy to the daily mythical fate of the sun.” (2004, p.45)

This kind of solar myth can also be found in Nordic mythology.

<i>Óðinn kvað:</i> “ <i>Fjqlð ek fór,</i> <i>fjqlð ek freistaðak,</i> <i>fjqlð ek reynda regin;</i> <i>hvaðan kómr sól</i> <i>á inn slétta himin,</i> <i>þá er þessa hefir Fenrir farit?”</i>	Odin spake: “Much have I fared, much have I found, much have I got of the gods: whence comes the sun to the smooth sky back, when Fenrir has snatched it forth?”
<i>Vafþrúðnir kvað:</i> “ <i>Eina dóttur</i> <i>berr Álfroðull,</i> <i>áðr hana Fenrir fari;</i> <i>sú skal ríða,</i> <i>þá er regin deyja,</i> <i>móður brautir mæ.</i> ”	Vafthruthnir spake: “A daughter bright Alfrothul bears Ere Fenrir snatches her forth; Her mother's paths shall the maiden tread When the gods to death have gone.”
<i>Vafþrúðnismál</i> , stanzas 46-47	tr. Brodeur

More details can be found in chapter 12 of *Gylfaginning*:

Þá mælir Gangleri: ‘Skjótt ferr sólin, ok nær svá sem hon sé hrædd, ok eigi mundi hon þá meir hvata gongunni at hon hræddisk bana sinn.’

Þá svarar Hár: ‘Eigi er þat undarligt at hon fari ákafliga, nær gengr sá er hana sækir. Ok øngan útveg á hon nema renna undan.’ Þá mælir Gangleri: ‘Hverr er sá er henni gerir þann ómaka?’ Hár segir: ‘Þat eru tveir úlfar, ok heitir sá er eptir henni ferr Skoll. Hann hræðisk hon ok hann mun taka hana, en sá heitir Hati Hróðvitnisson er fyrir henni hleypr, ok vill hann taka tunglit, ok svá mun verða.’ (Gylfaginning, chapter 12. ed. Faulkes)

Then said Gangleri: “The sun fares swiftly, and almost as if she were afraid: she could not hasten her course any the more if she feared her destruction.”

Then Hárr made answer: “It is no marvel that she hastens furiously: close cometh he that seeks her, and she has no escape save to run away.” Then said Gangleri: “Who is he that causes her this disquiet?” Hárr replied: “It is two wolves; and he that runs after her is called Skoll; she fears him, and he shall take her. But he that leaps before her is called Hati Hródvitnisson. He is eager to seize the moon; and so it must be.” (tr. Brodeur, 1916)

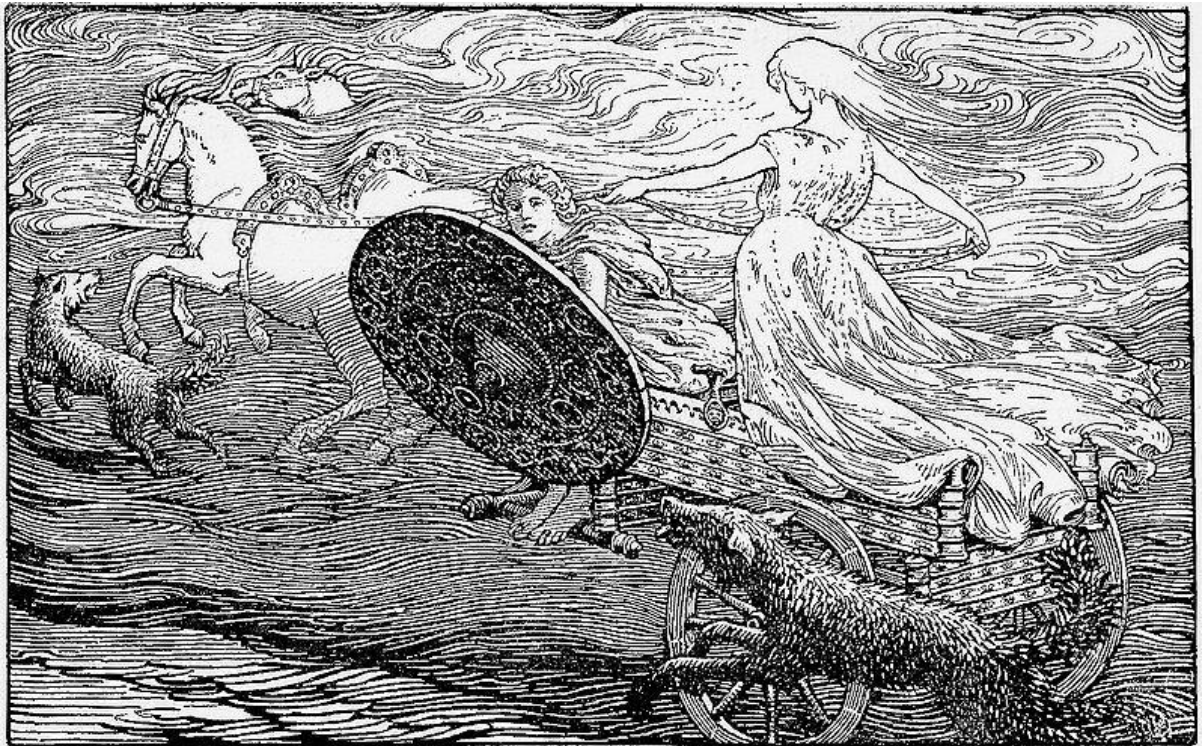


Fig. 12 *The Chariot of the Sun* by Collingwood

According to *Vafþrúðnismál*, Sól is to be swallowed by Fenrir, while according to Snorri, the wolf *Skoll* “treachery” (Orchard, 1997, p.150) chases Sól, and another wolf *Hati* “he who hates, or enemy” chases Máni (Byock, 2006, p.164). This motif of solar mythology is also connected with later myths and deities, for example, the speed of the sun, which is shown by the name of the horse *Alsvidr* “very quick”, usually associates the sun with birds, and thus the Valkyries. I will introduce this connection in later part.

4.4 Sun and the shield

*Svalinn heitir,
hann stendr sólu fyrir;
skjöldr skínanda goði;
björg ok brim
ek veit at brenna skulu
ef hann fellr í frá.*

Grímnismál, st. 38

In front of the sun
does Svalin stand,
The shield for the shining god;
Mountains and sea
would be set in flames
If it fell from before the sun.

Henry Bellows' translation

The name *Svalinn* means “cold” or “chill” and is derived from the verb *svala* which means “cool”. According to this poetry, there is a *skínanda goði* “shining god” who processed the shield *Svalinn*, and it is used to protect mountains and sea from the sun’s heat. *Svalinn* has the same function with the *Ísarnkol* (*Glímnismál*, stanza 37) and the *vindbelgi* (*Gylfaginning*, 11), as protector of the earth from the sun. Connected with the ritual shields found from the Bronze Age, and other narrations of shields as possessions of Valkyrja, the shield must be a symbol of the sun.

Skildir eru kallaðir — ok kendir við herskip — sól eða tungl eða lauf eða blik eða garðr skipsins. Skjöldr er ok kallaðr skip Ullar eða kent til fóta Hrungnis er hann stóð á skildi. Á fornum skjöldum var títt at skrifa rønd þá er baugr var kallaðr, ok er við þann baug skildir kendir. (Skáldskaparmál, chapter 61. ed. Faulkes)

Shields, periphrased in figures of warships, are called Sun, or Moon, or Leaf, or Sheen, or Garth, of the Ship; the shield is also called Ship of Ullr, or periphrased in terms of Hrungrnir’s feet, since he stood upon his shield. On ancient shields it was customary to paint a circle, which was called the ‘ring,’ and shields are called in metaphors of that ring. (tr. Brodeur, 1916)

Snorri also provided examples of the kennings of shield. A shield is called *skipsól* “ship-sun” in kenning *leyg rýðr ætt á ægi Óláfs skipa sólar* “in the sea, Ólafr’s Kinsman reddens the flame of the ship-sun”. This kenning not only shows the connection between the sun and shield, but also the connection between the sun and ship, both of which follow the motif of solar myth of the Bronze Age.

4.5 Other representations of the sun

The sun is usually represented by shield, chariot. In fact, the sun can also be represented by several other things in Nordic mythology, such as fire, gold, and hair.

Hvernig skal kenna sól? Svá at kalla hana dóttur Mundilfæra, systur Mána, kona Glens, eldr himins ok lopts. (Skáldskaparmál, chapter 93. ed. Faulkes)

“How should one periphrase the sun? By calling her Daughter of Mundilfari, Sister of the Moon, Wife of Glenr, Fire of Heaven and of the Air. (tr. Brodeur, 1916)

Hvernig skal kenna gull? Sva at kalla þat eld Ægis ok barr Glasis, haddr Sifjar, hofuðband Fullu, grátr Freyju, munntal ok rødd ok orð jotna, dropa Draupnis ok regn eða skúr Draupnis eða augna Freyju, otrgjöld, sløggjald Ásanna, sáð Fýrisvalla, haugþak Hølga, eldr allra vatna ok handar, grjót ok sker eða blik handar. (Skáldskaparmál, chapter 40. ed. Faulkes)

“How should gold be periphrased? Thus: by calling it Ægir’s Fire, and Needles of Glasir, Hair of Sif, Snood of Fulla, Freyja’s Tears, Talk and Voice and Word of Giants, Draupnir’s Drop and Rain or Shower of Draupnir, or of Freyja’s Eyes, Otter’s Ransom, Forced Payment of the Æsir, Seed of Fýris-Plain, Cairn-Roof of Hölgi, Fire of all Waters and of the Hand, Stone and Reef or Gleam of the Hand.” (tr. Brodeur, 1916).

As is introduced by Snorri, both gold and the sun are connected with fire in kennings: the sun is periphrased as “Fire of Heaven and of the Air”, while gold is periphrased as “Ægir’s Fire”. Both connected with fire, the sun should be also connected with gold.

En er goðin höfðu setzt í sæti, þá lét Ægir bera inn á hallargólf lýsigull, þat er birti ok lýsti höllina sem eldr, ok þat var þar haft fyrir ljós at hans veizlu, sem í Valhöllu váru sverðin fyrir eld. (Skáldskaparmál, chapter 41. ed. Faulkes)

When the gods had sat down in their places, straightway Ægir had bright gold brought in onto the floor of the hall, and the gold gave forth light and illumined the hall like fire: and it was used there for lights at his banquet, even as in Valhall swords were used in place of fire. (tr. Brodeur, 1916)

In this myth, Ægir used bright gold to illuminate the hall like fire, and this is the derivation of the kenning *eld Ægis*. Obviously, gold and fire, which can glow in darkness, are representations of the sun. What’s more, this myth also associates swords with sun, as they are used in Valhall for illumination.

Other kennings from chapter 40 of *Skáldskaparmál* can also prove the connection between gold and the sun. First of all, gold is called “the shining’ of Fulla”, while “shining” is in many cases connected with the sun. For example, *Alvíssmál* (stanza 16) introduces many different names of the sun, such as *Sól* “sun”, *sunna* “sunshine”, *dvergar Dvalins* “Dvalinn's deluder”, *eygló* “everglow”, *fagrahvél* “the lovely wheel”, and *alskír* “all-shining” (tr. Larrington, 1999, p.111), among which two names are related with shining, while Freyr has the servant *Skírnir*, “the shining one”. Second, the kenning *Fallsól brávallar* which means “the forehead's sun at rising” also indicates that the sun is represented by gold frequently.

There is one more evidence of the association between gold and the sun in Snorri’s Edda:

Þat var snemma í ǫndverða bygð goðanna, þá er goðin höfðu sett Miðgarð ok gert Valhöll, þá kom þar smiðr nokkvorr ok bauð at gera þeim borg á þrim misserum svá góða at trú ok ǫrugg væri fyrir bergrisum ok hrímþursum þótt þeir komi inn um Miðgarð. En hann mælir sér þat til kaups at hann skyldi eignask Freyju, ok hafa vildi hann sól og mána. (Gylfaginning, chapter 42. ed. Faulkes)

It was early in the first days of the gods' dwelling here, when the gods had established the Midgard and made Valhall; there came at that time a certain wright and offered to build them a citadel in three seasons, so good that it should be staunch and proof against the Hill-Giants and the Rime-Giants, though they should come in over Midgard. But he demanded as wages that he should have possession of Freyja, and would fain have had the sun and the moon. (tr. Brodeur, 1916)

In this text, the sun is asked for by the giant as wages for building the wall, together with Freyja and the moon. Considering gold is paraphrased as “Forced Payment of the Æsir”, gold might be a representative of the sun.

Besides fire and gold, hair is also a widespread symbol of the sun. As Olcott put forward, “the sun's rays are compared more consistently with locks of hair or hair on the face or head of the sun. The Sun-God Helios is called by the Greeks “the yellow-haired” (Olcott, 2004, p.61). In Nordic mythology, we can find myth about hair too and that is Sif's golden hair. According to *Skáldskaparmál* 43, Loki cuts off Sif's hair and is forced by Thor to have a headpiece made of gold to replace Sif's locks. Though Sif's hair is not used as a metaphor of the sun in Nordic tradition, it might be connected with the sun, as the motif of Sif losing her hair and finally getting her hair back might be a metaphor of the growth of plants, which is also represented by the sun. This myth also indicates the connection between the sun and gold, as Sif's hair is a metaphor of gold according to Snorri.

5. Freyja and Freyr as Solar Gods

Taking the place of Nerthus in fertility worship, Freyja and Freyr became the new solar deity since the Iron Age. How could a god or goddess be called a solar deity? First of all, he or she must have the same functions with the sun; then he or she must have some characteristics associated with the sun; and finally, he or she must have related myths following the motifs of solar myth. In this section, I will describe how Freyja and Freyr meet these requirements and thus could be identified as the Nordic solar deities.

5.1 Origins of Freyr and Freyja

5.1.1 Relation with Nerthus-Njörðr

Freyja and Freyr, literally meaning “Lady” and “Lord”, are regarded as epithet of an unattested deity originally (Grundy, 1998, pp.55–56), most possibly of Nerthus-Njörðr (Näsström, 1995). Just like I have introduced in the third section, according to Kock (1896, p.289), there used to be a male deity Njörðr *freyr*, “the Lord Njörðr”, as well as a female deity Njörðr *freyja* “the Lady Njörðr”. Then over centuries, only the title of the feminine form survived and became the goddess Freyja, while the masculine form split into two male gods, Freyr and Njörðr as son and father. “The couple Njörðr-Nerthus hide behind the vague parallels of Freyr and Freyja. Nerthus became in Scandinavia the female *Njarð, represented in the place-name of Njörun, appearing in kennings. The name was forgotten in favor of Freyja.” (Näsström, 1995, p.60)

Besides the linguistic connection introduced above, the argument that Freyja-Freyr are derived from Nerthus-Njörðr can also be supported by other evidences. Such as their connection with the chariot, their similar function of bringing peace and harvest, and so on. Freyr and Njörðr have another similarity that both of them are connected with ship and maritime. According to Snorri, *Njörðr í Nóatúnum gat síðan tvau börn* (*Gylfaginning*, 24), Njörðr’ abode *Nóatún* means “the place of ships, the harbour” (Näsström, 1995, p.68), and he rules the wind and calms the sea (*Gylfaginning*, 22), while Freyr has the ship *Skíðbladnir*. In fact, referred as *eigandi Sessrúmnis* (*Skáldskaparmál*, chapter 28) “the possessor of Sessrúmnir”, Freyja is also connected with ship and maritime more or less. Besides Freyja, Freyr and Njörðr in Nordic mythology, the Egyptian sun-god Ra also has a boat which carries him across the ocean of heaven, while the Greek sun-god Apollo is the founder of navigation (Goldhizer, 1877). Obviously, solar mythology is usually connected with navigation, as the course of the sun resembles the course of a ship.

5.1.2 Relationship between Freyja and Freyr

In Nordic mythology, Freyja and Freyr are twin brother and sister; however, in some

records they are described as wife and husband, just like their father Njörðr who married his own sister when he was still among the Vanir gods.

According to Näsström, “the Vanir’s nature is erotic and they are representatives of voluptuousness and sensual pleasure. Sexual lust should not, however, be regarded as an aspect of the incestuous relationship” (1995, p.66). As for the explanation of the existence of myths and epics containing incestuous theme, some scholars (S. Wikander, 1941) believed that it was a survival from a primeval in the history of mankind, practiced in certain groups, as in the cases of Old Iran. Others, such as G. Widengren (1969) believed that the incest motif reflects one quality of the androgynous high god, created from his own body and apprehended as a sister or as daughter, who becomes the sexual partner in the ongoing creation. Näsström (1995, p.67) agreed with the second explanation when analyzing the *Vanir*, such as Nerthus and Njörðr, as well as Freyja and Freyr. Though Njörðr’s wife-sister is not Nerthus, but the narration of his marriage with his sister might support the argument that Njörðr is derived from Nerthus, as the masculine form of her. The relationship between Hadingus, a paraphrase of Njörðr (Dumézil, 1973), and Hartþgrepa was also apprehended as incestuous behavior, according to Dumézil. As for the ending, both Njörðr and Hadingus married a new wife princess.

5.2 Characteristics shared by Freyja and Freyr

Njörðr í Nóatúnum gat síðan tvau börn. Hét sonr Freyr en dóttir Freyja. Þau váru fagr álitum ok máttug. Freyr er hinn ágætasti af Ásum. Hann ræðr fyrir regni ok skini sólar ok þar með ávexti jarðar, ok á hann er gott at heita til árs ok friðar. Hann ræðr ok fésælu manna. En Freyja er ágætust af Ásynjum. Hon á þann bæ á himni er Fólkvangar heita, ok hvar sem hon ríðr til vígs þá á hon hálfan val, en hálfan Óðinn, svá sem hér segir:

*Fólkvangr heitir,
en þar Freyja ræðr
sessu kostum í sal.
Hálfan val
hon kýss á hverjan dag,
en hálfan Óðinn á.*

Salr hennar Sessrúmnir, hann er mikill ok fagr. En er hon ferr, þá ekr hon kottum tveim ok sitr í reið. Hon er nákvæmust mǫnnum til á at heita, ok af hennar nafni er þat tignarnafn er ríkiskonur eru kallaðar “fróvur”. Henni líkaði vel mansǫngr. Á hana er gott at heita til ásta.’ (Gylfaginning, chapter 24. ed. Faulkes)

“Njörðr in Nóatún begot afterward two children the son was called Freyr, and the daughter Freyja; they were fair of face and mighty. Freyr is the most

renowned of the Æsir; he rules over the rain and the shining of the sun, and therewithal the fruit of the earth; and it is good to call on him for fruitful seasons and peace. He governs also the prosperity of men. But Freyja is the most renowned of the goddesses; she has in heaven the dwelling called Fólkvangr, and wheresoever she rides to the strife, she has one-half of the kill, and Odin half, as is here said:

Fólkvangr it is called,
where Freyja rules
degrees of seats in the hall;
Half the kill
she keepeth each day,
and half Odin hath.

Her hall Sessrúmnir is great and fair. When she goes forth, she drives her cats and sits in a chariot; she is most conformable to man's prayers, and from her name comes the name of honor, Frú, by which noblewomen are called. Songs of love are well-pleasing to her; it is good to call on her for furtherance in love." (tr. Brodeur, 1916).

Above is the introduction of Freyja and Freyr in Snorri's Edda. In Snorri's narration, Freyr is more connected with good season and harvest, while Freyja is more identified as a love goddess, and the receiver of death. However, in fact, both Freyja and Freyr are responsible for vegetation and harvest, as well as love and marriage.

5.2.1 Protector of love and marriage

Evidences of Freyr's function of protecting marriage can be found mainly from two sources. First is the *Skirnismál*, according to which Freyr gives his sword away in order to marry Gerðr, and as the consequence is killed by the fire demon Surtr in the day of Ragnarök without his magic sword. As Näsström (1995, p.69) argued, this myth indicated that Freyr "makes love rather than war". Another evidence is found from Adam of Bremen's work:

"in this temple, entirely decked out in gold, the people worship the statues of three gods in such wise that the mightiest of them, Thor, occupies a throne in the middle of the chamber; Wotan and Frikko have places on either side. The significance of these gods is as follows: Thor, they say, presides over the air, which governs the thunder and lighting, the winds and rains, fair weather and crops. The other, Wotan - that is, the Furious - carries on war and imparts to man strength against his enemies. The third is Frikko, who bestows peace and pleasure on mortals." (*History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, chapter 26, tr. Tschan, 2002)

"for all their gods there are appointed priests to offer sacrifices for the people. If plague and famine threaten, a libation is poured to the idol Thor, if war, to

Wotan; if marriages are to be celebrated, to Friikko.” (*History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, chapter 26, tr. Tschan, 2002)

According to Adam, sacrifices would be made for Freyr if marriages were to be celebrated. Obviously, Freyr can be identified as a god of marriage and love, just like Freyja.

5.2.2 Protector of vegetation

On the other hand, Freyja is also a goddess of good seasons and harvest as Freyr is. For example, In *Völuspá*, a woman named Gullveig came to the Æsir from the Vanir, and was burnt by the Æsir for three times, however each time she was reborn. This woman is interpreted as Freyja by many scholars, such as Turville-Peter and Näsström. Her ability of surviving from the fire and rebirth might be a metaphor of the regeneration of vegetation, thus Freyja is the goddess of growth and harvest.

What's more, Freyja also has a boar *Hildisvíni* while Freyr owns the boar *Gullinbursti*, whose mane can glow in the dark like the shining sun.

Óðr fór í braut langar leiðir, en Freyja grætr eptir, en tár hennar er gull rautt.
(*Gylfaginning*, chapter 35. ed. Faulkes)

Óðr went away on long journeys, and Freyja weeps for him, and her tears are red gold. (tr. Brodeur, 1916).

Óðr, interpreted as “the frenzied one” by Orchard (1997, p.121), might be a representation of the wild nature, while is contrary of the characteristic of Freyja. Thus Freyja's marriage with Óðr is a typical Nordic marriage of fertility gods as metaphor of seasonal changes. Parallels can be found from marriage of Njǫrðr and Skaði. Njǫrðr is a fertility god without any doubt while Skaði, connected with “harm” (Davidson, 1993, p.62), “darkness” (Dumézil, 1973, p.35), the underworld (McKinnell, 2005, p.63), and winter (Byock, 1990, p.111), is a Jötunn, who is always associated with the wild nature. According to Snorri (*Gylfaginning*, chapter 23), after Njǫrðr and Skaði got married, Skaði wanted to live in mountains in Þrymheimr because she could not sleep because of the screeching of the birds; while Njǫrðr preferred to living in his home Nóatún near the sea, as he can not tolerate the howling of the wolves. Finally, then made an agreement that they would stay in mountains for nine nights, and spent three nights in Nóatún, referring to the seasonal changes.

Parallels of such motif can also be found from Greek mythology and Egyptian mythology. Hades, the ruler of the underworld, abducts Persephone, the goddess of vegetation, to the underworld, where she lives three seasons a year, while spends the last season on earth. This myth represents the growth of plants in spring and the withdrawn after harvest. The other parallel of Freyja's journey searching for her husband Óðr is the myth Egyptian of solar god Osiris and her sister-wife Isis. After Osiris was fooled into a coffin by his brother and threw into Nile, Isis had been looking for him until she found his corpse. She used a spell and brought him back to

life, however, Osiris died again after Isis got pregnant. Osiris' death and resurrection is regarded as representation of the regeneration of vegetation, and he is also the god of death and afterlife, just like Freyja.

In conclusion, like Osiris and Persephone, Freyja is goddess of the regeneration of vegetation.

5.2.3 Ruler of wealth

In Nordic mythology, both Freyja and Freyr are identified as gods of wealth, especially gold and golden possessions.

5.2.3.1 Freyja and gold

Hvernig skal kenna gull? Sva at kalla þat eld Ægis ok barr Glasis, haddr Sifjar, hofuðband Fullu, grátr Freyju, munntal ok rødd ok orð jøtna, dropa Draupnis ok regn eða skúr Draupnis eða augna Freyju, otrgjöld, sløggjald Ásanna, sáð Fýrisvalla, haugþak Hølga, eldr allra vatna ok handar, grjót ok sker eða blik handar. (Skáldskaparmál, chapter 40. ed. Faulkes)

“How should gold be periphrased? Thus: by calling it Ægir's Fire, and Needles of Glasir, Hair of Sif, Snood of Fulla, Freyja's Tears, Talk and Voice and Word of Giants, Draupnir's Drop and Rain or Shower of Draupnir, or of Freyja's Eyes, Otter's Ransom, Forced Payment of the Æsir, Seed of Fýris-Plain, Cairn-Roof of Hölgi, Fire of all Waters and of the Hand, Stone and Reef or Gleam of the Hand.” (tr. Brodeur, 1916).

As is written above, gold is periphrased as *grátr Freyju* and *augna Freyju*, which is derived from the myth of Freyja and her husband Óðr. According to Snorri, *Óðr fór í braut langar leiðir, en Freyja grætr eftir, en tár hennar er gull rautt*. “Óðr went away on long journeys, and Freyja weeps for him, and her tears are red gold.” (tr. Brodeur, 1916). Obviously, Freyja is connected with gold, or in other words, she is the goddess of gold.

Freyja er tignust með Frigg. Hon giftist þeim manni, er Óðr heitir. Dóttir þeirra heitir Hnoss. Hún er svo fögur að af hennar nafni eru hnossir kallaðar það er fagurt er og gersemlegt. Óður fór í braut langar leiðir, en Freyja grætur eftir, en tár hennar er gull rautt. (Gylfaginning, chapter 35. ed. Faulkes)

Freyja is most gently born (together with Frigg): she is wedded to the man named Óðr. Their daughter is Hnoss: she is so fair, that those things which are fair and precious are called hnossir. Óðr went away on long journeys, and Freyja weeps for him, and her tears are red gold. (tr. Brodeur, 1916).

Another evidence of Freyja's connection with gold is her daughters. She has two daughters, *Hnoss* “treasure” and *Gersemi* also “treasure” (Orchard, 1997, p.54), both of whom are so lovely that whatever is beautiful and valuable is called treasure from her name.

Besides the connections mentioned above, Freyja is the owner precious golden object, which relates her with gold and wealth.

Gull er kallat í kenningum eldr handar eða liðs eða leggjar, því at þat er rautt, en silfr snær eða svell eða héra, því at þat er hvítt. Með sama hætti skal ok kenna gull eða silfr til sjóðs eða diguls eða lauðar, en hvárttveggja silfr ok gull má vera grjót handar eða hálsgjörð nökkurs þess manns, er títt var at hafa men. Men ok hringar eru bæði silfr ok gull, ef eigi er annan veg greint. (Skáldskaparmál, chapter 46. ed. Faulkes)

Gold is metaphorically termed Fire of the Hand, or of the Limb, or of the Leg, because it is red; but silver is called Snow, or Ice, or Hoar-Frost, because it is white. In like manner, gold or silver may be periphrased in metaphors of purse, or crucible, or lather, and both silver and gold may be called Hand-Stone, or Necklace, of any man who was wont to have a necklace. Necklaces and rings are both silver and gold, if no other distinction is raised. (tr. Brodeur, 1916).

First of all, she is the owner of the necklace, which is can be interpreted as a metaphor of gold. As for the name *Brisingamen*, The etymology of the first element is uncertain. It has been derived from Old Norse *brísingr*, a poetic term for "fire" or "amber", making *Brisingamen* "gleaming torc", "sunny torc", or the like. Second, Freyja has an extremely strong desire for gold as she sleeps with three dwarfs in order to get the necklace *Brisingamen*. And in *Völuspá*, Gullveig, who is identified as Freyja herself, was burnt by the Æsir for three times, and each time she was reborn. Her name Gullveig, literally "thirst for gold" thus indicates the connection between Freyja and gold.

5.2.3.2 Freyr and gold

Svá at kalla hann son Njarðar, bróður Freyju ok enn Vana guð ok Vana nið ok Vanr ok árguð ok fégjafa. (Skáldskaparmál, chapter 15. ed. Faulkes)

Thus: by calling him Son of Njördr, Brother of Freyja, and also God of Vanir, and Kinsman of the Vanir, and Wane, and God of the Fertile Season, and God of Wealth-Gifts. (tr. Brodeur, 1916)

According to Snorri, Freyr was not only the god of fertile season, but also the god of wealth and gifts. In fact, compared with Freyja, Freyr possesses more precious object, such as his ship *Skíðbladnir*, his boar *Gullinbursti* "Gold Mane or Golden Bristles", and his magical sword. And just as I have introduced in last chapter, sword is also a representation of the sun.

5.3 Freyja as a Solar Goddess

Freyja, also known as: Gefjon, Gefn, Gondul (possible), Horn, Mardal, Mardoll (“Shining One over the Sea”), Menglad, Menglod, Moertholl, Sessrymnir, Syr, Vanadis. (Coulter and Yurner, 2012, p.181)

Having the epithet *Mardöll*, “Shining One over the Sea”, Freyja must be a goddess associated with something shining, most possibly the sun, and at the same time Freyr rules over the rain and the shining of the sun. Besides her epithets, she also has many other solar represented characteristics, which I will introduce in this part to support my argument that Freyja is the Nordic solar goddess.

Svá at kalla dóttur Njarðar, systur Freys, konu Óðs, móður Hnossar, eigandi valfalls ok Sessrúmnis ok fressa, Brisingamens, Vana goð, Vana dís, it grátfagra goð, ástaguð. - Svá má kenna allar ásynjur at nefna annarrar nafni ok kenna við eign eða verk sín eða ættir. (Skáldskaparmál, chapter 28, ed. Guðni Jónsson)

Thus: by calling her Daughter of Njördr, Sister of Freyr, Wife of Ódr, Mother of Hnoss, Possessor of the Slain, of Sessrúmnir, of the Gib-Cats, and of Brisinga-men; Goddess of the Vanir, Lady of the Vanir, Goddess Beautiful in Tears, Goddess of Love. All the goddesses may be paraphrased thus: by calling them by the name of another, and naming them in terms of their possessions or their works or their kindred. (tr. Brodeur, 1916)

Above are the main characteristics of Freyja according to Snorri, her roles as *móður Hnossar*, *fressa*, *Brisingamens*, *it grátfagra goð* and *ástaguð* indicate her connection with wealth and gold, and thus with the sun; her role as *eigandi fressa* directly associates her with the sun; while her role as *eigandi valfalls* identifies her as a goddess of death.

5.3.1 Freyja, the goddess of death

The kneeling *eigandi valfalls* “the possessor of slain”, referring to the myth of Freyja recorded in both Prose Edda and sagas:

Hon á þann bæ á himni er Fólkvangar heita, ok hvar sem hon ríðr til vígs þá á hon hálfan val, en hálfan Óðinn, svá sem hér segir:

*Fólkvangr heitir,
en þar Freyja ræðr
sessa kostum í sal.
Hálfan val
hon kýss á hverjan dag,
en hálfan Óðinn á.*

Salr hennar Sessrúmnir, hann er mikill ok fagr... (Gylfaginning, chapter 24. ed. Faulkes)

According to Snorri, Freyja has hall *Sessrúmnir* at *Fólkvangr*. Everyday she received half of the dead warrior while the other half belongs to Odin. *Sessrúmnir*, interpreted as “filled with many seats” (Näsström, 1999, p.61), refers to both the hall of Freyja (*Gylfaginning* 24) and ship she owns (*Skáldskaparmál* 20, 75). As for the field ruled by Freyja, *Fólkvangr* is translated as “field of the host” (Orchard, 1997, p.45), “people-field” and “army-field” (Lindow, 2001, p.118), regarded as the dwelling of the half of dead warriors. As the owner of *Sessrúmnir* and the ruler of *Fólkvangr*, Freyja is identified as the goddess of battle and death. Functioning as the goddess of death in the Viking and Middle Ages, Freyja is the personified sun, for the sun is the protector of the dead people in the prehistoric Scandinavia.

On the other hand, just as Siegfried Andres Dobat commented, as the chooser of half the fallen warriors for her death realm, Freyja emerged as the mythological role model for the Valkyrie (Dobat, 2006, p.186), which literally means “the one who chooses the slain” (Näsström, 1999, p.61). Considering the equivalence of Freyja and Valkyries, we can conclude that Freyja is connected with the sun if we can find the connection between the sun and Valkyries.

Below is a picture of three Valkyries, Hildr, Þrúðr and Hlökk (fig.13). This picture accurately shows the most important features of Valkyries. First of all, they are female deity; second, they have wings; and finally they are usually described as women holding drinking horn. There are two more features not shown here that Valkyrie usually appears riding on a horse with a shield in hand. These features indicate the strong connection between the Valkyries and the sun.

As I have introduced in earlier part, shield was widely used in cult in the Bronze Age, possibly as the symbol of the sun. Parallels can also be found in Nordic mythological corpus, such as the shield *Svalinn* standing before the sun; and the *álfröðull* “elf-disc”, which refers to either the deity *Sól* or her sun-chariot.



Fig. 13 The valkyries Hildr, Þrúðr and Hlökk bearing ale in Valhalla (1895) by Lorenz Frølich

Another sun represented feature of the Valkyries is their wings and their horses.

Swift steeds were associated with the sun in Classical, Indian, Persian, and Hebrew mythologies, and in the Hebrew worship in Canaan, horses were dedicated to the sun, as indeed they were in Greece at a later date. This idea of the swift flight of the sun is further carried out by attributing wings to the sun, or dawn, and on the Egyptian and Assyrian monuments we find the winged solar disk inscribed. (Olcott, 2004, p.58)

Obviously, both the wings and the horses are intended to raise the speed of the Valkyries. These two features are also connected with the myth of Sól's speed contest with wolves, both of which indicate the course of the sun in the sky. And as equivalence of the Valkyries, Freyja can thus be regarded as the sun-goddess.

5.3.3 Freyja and cat

What is different from the solar myth is that Freyja's chariot is dragged by two male cats instead of horse. However, just like Nerthus's wagon is dragged by a female cattle, which is a symbol of the sun, the cats of Freyja are also symbolized sun. Parallels can be found from Egyptian religion, where the cats are worshiped as represented sun. As Olcott (2004, pp.60, 294) introduced, the ancient Egyptians called the sun "the Cat", as "the pupil of the cat's eye grows larger with the advance of day" as the sun does. "The Egyptians imagined that a great cat stood behind the sun which was the pupil of the cat's eye." In Egypt, the female cats are emblematic of the solar goddess Bast or Bubastis, while the male cat symbolized the great Sun-God Ra.

5.4 Freyr as a Solar God

5.4.1 Freyr and the sun

Connections between the sun and Freyr could be found from many materials. First of all is the written material. According to *Skírnismál* and *Gylfaginning*, the servant of Freyr is called *Skírnir* "the Shining One, the Bright One", associating Freyr and the sun. Another servant of Freyr is named *Beyla* (*Lokasenna*, stanzas 55-56), whose name is related to "cow" "bean" or "bee" (Lindow, 2001, p.78), is also associated with the sunshine. And according to Snorri (*Gylfaginning* 24), *Freyr er hinn ágætasti af ásum. Hann ræður fyrir regni og skini sólar, og þar með ávexti jarðar, og á hann er gott að heita til árs og friðar*'. As the ruler of the rains and the "shining sun", Freyr can be identified as the solar god without any doubt. Finally, one of Freyr's possessions, the boar *Gullinbursti*, "Gold Mane or Golden Bristles", with its golden mane glowing in the dark, also referring to the sun.

En Frey gaf hann göltinn ok sagði, at hann mátti renna loft ok lög nótt ok dag meira en hvern hestr ok aldri varð svá myrkt af nótt eða í myrkheimum, at eigi væri ærit ljós, þar er hann fór; svá lýsti af burstinni. (Skáldskaparmál, chapter 43. ed. Faulkes)

To Freyr he gave the boar, saying that it could run through air and water better than any horse, and it could never become so dark with night or gloom of the Murky Regions that there should not be sufficient light where he went, such was the glow from its mane and bristles. (tr. Brodeur, 1916)

Thus as the owner of this sun-like shining boar, Freyr shall be the solar god.

Son Þorsteins var Þorkell máni lögsögumaður, er einn heiðinna manna hefir best verið siðaður, að því er menn viti dæmi til. Hann lét sig bera í sólargeisla í banasótt sinni og fal sig á hendi þeim guði, er sólina hafði skapað; hafði hann og lifað svo hreinliga sem þeir kristnir menn, er best eru siðaðir. (Landnámabók, chapter 9)

It should be Freyr that was called the god who created the sun and according to this text it seems that the sun is no longer the central object of fertility worship, but rather a created thing of Freyr, who is the personified sun.

Another possession of Freyr also supports the argument that Freyr is the personified sun, that is the finest ship *Skiðblaðnir*. As is introduced in Snorri's Edda, It has the ability to be folded up into one's pocket when not needed, and to fly in air. Investigating Stone Age and Bronze Age rock carvings, and the Gotland picture stones, the image of ship as well as the image of sun on ship are the most important and widespread motifs. They are connected with not only the journey of the sun through the sky and underworld, but also the maritime of the Viking Age, and also the transition from life to death. As the possessor of the ship, Freyr can be identified as the sun-god.

The third connection between the sun and Freyr is the *álfar*. In *Grímnismál* (stanza 5), Freyr was given the *Álfheimr* as the tooth-gift, which indicates that Freyr is the ruler of the *álfar*. As the same time, the deity Sól and the sun-chariot are both periphrased as *álfröðull*, which can be translated as "elf-beam" (Orchard, 1997, p.153), "elf-disc" (Faulkes, 1995, p.133), and "elf-glory, elf-heaven" (Machan, 1988, p.105).

Besides as the ruler of *álfar*, Freyr is also connected with the *álfar* in many other ways, in perspective of fertility.

Sighvatr kvað, "Gakkattu inn, kvað ekkja, / armi drengs, en lengra. / Hræðumk ek við Óðins, / erum heiðnir vér, reiði. / Rýgr kvazk inni eiga... / álfablót..." (Heimskringla, chapter 41)

"Hóll einn er heðan skammt í brott, er álfar búa í. Graðung þann, er Kormákur drap, skaltu fá og rjóða blóð graðungsins á hólinn útan, en gera álfum veizlu af slátrinu, ok mun þér batna." (Kormáks saga, chapter 22)

"Var hann fljótliga í lagiðr hjá sínum mönnum með miklu fé, ok eftir þat haugrinn aftr byrgðr. Þá tók ok at létta manndauðnum. Síðan gerði óáran mikit ok hallæri. Var þá þat ráð tekit, at þeir blótuðu Ólaf konung til árs sér ok kölluðu hann Geirstaðaálf." (Þáttur Ólafs Geirstaðaálfs, Flateyjarbók).

Freyr tók sótt, en er att honum leið sóttinu, leituðu menn sér ráðs ok létu fá menn til hans koma, en bjöggu haug mikinn ok létu dyrr á ok þrjá glugga. En er Freyr var dauðr, báru þeir hann leynilega í hauginn ok sögðu Svíum, at hann lifði, ok varðveittu hann þar þrjá vetr. En skatt öllum helltu þeir í hauginn, í einn glugg gullinu, en í annan silfinu, í inn þriðja eirpenningum. Þá helsk ár ok friðr. (Ynglinga saga, chapter 10)

According to these narratives, we could find many parallels between Freyr and *álfar*; that both Freyr and *álfar* are objects of cult; their sacrifices are held at the same time, both at the beginning of winter; and the sacrifices are made to both of them for the good seasons and harvest of the next year.

The equality of Freyr and *álfar* can be explained by their origin. Both Freyr and *álfar* are originated in Sweden. According to Snorri, “Frey took the kingdom after Njord, and was called drot by the Swedes, and they paid taxes to him. He was, like his father, fortunate in friends and in good seasons.” (*Ynglinga saga* 12, tr. Laing) *Álfar* also originated from Sweden, near Bohuslan. There are place-names of *alvhem* and around those places are place-names such as *fornborg*, which indicates that the *álfablót* is held in this place. The symbolic meaning of the sun as the representation of fertility is succeeded by the Vanir especially Freyr, and *álfar*. That is why the word *álfar* were used to mean the Vanir in many cases, for example, the words *ása ok álfa* appears many times in Eddic Poetry (*Lokasenna*, sts.2, 13, 30; *Hávamál*, st.159), referring to the *Æsir* and the Vanir. With the personalizing process the deity of fertility, there might not be clear distinctions between *álfar* and Vanir, so they are used as exchangeable terms. But with the development of the religion, the differences between *álfar* and Vanir became clearer over time. Another development is the narratives of different Vanir gods became more detailed. In earlier time, the Vanir may be simply regarded as a race of gods which was of fertility. It should be in later time when Freyr, Njörðr and Freyja were worshiped independently as god of fertility. That’s why so many gods are connected with fertility.

5.4.2 the battle between Freyr and Surtr

Freyr is fated to fight with the fire demon Surtr in the day of Ragnarök. The myth of the final confrontation between Freyr and Surtr has several features, indicating Freyr’s role here as the solar god.

Freyr’s death seems to have been doomed already before Ragnarök, as he gave his magical sword away in order to marry Gerðr.

*Mar ek þér þann gef,
er þik um myrkvan berr
vísan vafrloga,
ok þat sverð,
er sjálft mun vegask
ef sá er horskr,
er hefr.*

Skírnismál 9, GJ's edition

My steed I lend thee
to lift thee o'er the weird
ring of flickering flame,
the sword also
which swings itself,
if wise be he who wields it.

tr. Hollander

As narrated in this stanza, Freyr not only gives his sword away, but also his steed, which can lift people over the weird ring of flickering flame. Obviously, this steed can protect its possessor from “the ring of fire”, the represented sun. This steed equals the responsibility of *Árvakr ok Alsviðr*, who drag the sun-chariot as fast as possible to escape from the wolf. And considering its ability of protecting its owner from the fire, it is parallel with the shield *Svalinn* in perspective of function. As for the sword, which can swing itself, is also a necessary object for Freyr to survive the Ragnarök. Losing both of these two objects, there is no possibility for Freyr to win the battle.

<i>Surtr fer sunnan</i>	Surtr moves from the south
<i>með sviga lævi,</i>	with the scathe of branches:
<i>skínn af sverði</i>	there shines from his sword
<i>sól valtíva.</i>	the sun of Gods of the Slain.
<i>Grjótbjörg gnata,</i>	Stone peaks clash,
<i>en gífr rata,</i>	and troll wives take to the road.
<i>troða halir helveg,</i>	Warriors tread the path from Hel,
<i>en himinn klofnar.</i>	and heaven breaks apart.
<i>Þá kómr Hlínar</i>	Then is fulfilled Hlín's
<i>harmr annarr fram,</i>	second sorrow,
<i>er Óðinn ferr</i>	when Óðinn goes
<i>við úlf vega,</i>	to fight with the wolf,
<i>en bani Belja</i>	and Beli's slayer,
<i>bjartr at Surti,</i>	bright, against Surtr.
<i>þá mun Friggjar</i>	Then shall Frigg's
<i>falla angan</i>	sweet friend fall.
(<i>Völuspá</i> 51–52, EB's edition)	Dronke's translation

Above is the narration of Freyr's battle with Surtr in *Völuspá*. At Ragnarök, Surtr came from the south with fire, and killed Freyr with his sword. Dislike Dronke who translated *skínn af sverði sól valtíva* as “there shines from his sword the sun of Gods of the Slain”, Sigurður Nordal preferred to translate it as “the sun shine from the sword of the gods”, and thus identified Surtr's sword as the one Freyr lost. This argument is quite possible as the fire demon and Freyr might be two sides of the sun. As the sword can be interpreted as a symbol of the sun, Freyr and Surtr's identity as two sides of the sun can be more strongly proved.

... a belief, common to many of the Indian tribes, that originally the sun was much nearer to the earth than now, and his scorching heat greatly oppressed mankind. Strangely enough, although it can be nothing but a coincidence, the nebular hypothesis of modern science predicates that the solar system resulted from the gradual contraction of a nebula. This implies that the planet earth and the sun were once in comparatively close proximity. (Olcott, 2004, pp.5-6)

In fact, in myths from different civilizations, there is one common motif of solar myth that the world has once been nearly destroyed by the heat of the sun. Olcott provided an evidence of such myth of Indians:

When the earth was dry and the animals came down, it was still dark, so they got the sun and set it in a track to go every day across the island from east to west just overhead. It was too hot this way, and the Red Crawfish had his shell scorched a bright red so that his meat was spoiled, and the Cherokee do not eat it. The conjurers then put the sun another handbreadth higher in the air, but it was still too hot. They raised it another time, and another until it was seven handbreadths high, and just under the sky arch, then it was right and they left it so. Every day the sun goes along under this arch and returns at night on the upper side to the starting place. (Olcott, 2004, pp.5-6)

As is described in the text above, the sun was too close to the earth long time ago, and things on earth are spoiled. And then the sun was put higher in air.

Similar myths can also be found from Greek mythology. Phaeton, the son of Apollo, insisted on driving the Sun-Chariot of his father. However, Phaeton was frightened by the giant serpent and thus completely dropped the reins, and as the consequence, the unchecked horses galloped downwards, pulling the sun-chariot closer and closer to the Earth. "Rivers began to dry up, cities and forest caught fire because of the great heat.... As the chariot crossed the continent of Africa it was so close that it set on fire the great Sahara forest. That wooded region of northern Africa was reduced to ashes and burning sands." (*Phaeton and the Chariot of the Sun*. James Parks and Sally Corbett)

Considering the dual character of the sun - fertilizing the earth and destroying the earth, there might be two deities each representing one of the two characters of the sun. And in my opinion, Surtr represents the destruction caused by the sun, while Freyr represents the positive aspect of the sun. Thus the battle between Freyr and Surtr can be interpreted as a battle between the good sun and the evil sun.

Evidence to support my argument can be found in Egyptian mythology. In Egypt, the serpent is worshiped together with the sun as a representation of fertility. And just like the sun, the serpent also has a dual character. The Egyptian god Apophis, who usually appears as a giant serpent, is the greatest enemy of the Egyptian Sun-God Ra. Obviously, Apophis represents the bad side, while Ra is the good side.

Coming back to the battle of Surtr and Freyr, Surtr, literally "black" (Orchard, 1997, p.154), is obviously contrary to Freyr, the ruler of the shining sun. As the same time, described as Jötunn coming with fire, he is of great possibility the personification of the destroying sun. And as the enemy of Surtr, Freyr must be the personification of the fertile sun.

6. Conclusion

As I have put forward at the beginning of this paper, a god should at least have three characteristics to be defined as a solar god: First, the god must have the same religious functions as the Sun represents; second, he god must have some characteristics associated with the Sun, such as possessions representing the Sun; and finally, the god must have related myths following the motifs of solar myth. Thus in order to investigate whether Nerthus-Njörðr, Freyr-Freyja can be identified as solar gods, I have to make a thorough comparison of the sun and these four gods, in perspectives of characteristics and functions.

In the second chapter, I investigated archaeological evidences of sun worship in pre-historic North, and tried to discover the features and functions of the sun in Bronze Age sun worship.

The most primary form of sun image is a single circle or disk, usually hold by human figures. Such images indicates the existence of sun worship in the Bronze Age. Another form of symbolic sun, which has a more complex structure, is the wheel image. The spokes inside the wheel might refer to the rays of the sun. The wheel, carved as represented sun, shows the swiftness of the sun and thus connects the sun with bird and horse. Then comes the most important solar representations, the sun-chariot and the sun-ship, which represent the movement of the sun across the sky and the underworld, and even the journey from This world to the Other world. What's more, the co-existence of the sun-chariot and the sun-ship possibly presaged the androgynous character of later solar gods, Nerthus-Njörðr, and Freyja-Freyr.

As for the functions of the sun in Bronze Age, they can be classified into two kind. The first function of the sun is prompting the growth of plants and crops, and the second one is transiting people from life to death.

In the third chapter, I investigated narrations about Nerthus and Njörðr, and compared them with the sun at the same time. According to earlier studies, Njörðr is derived from Nerthus as the masculine form of her. What's more Nerthus has a wagon which can be interpreted as sun-chariot, while Njörðr is the god of maritime, which connects him with the sun-ship. In a word, with this androgynous character and connections with the journey of the sun, Nerthus and Njörðr might be the personified representations of the sun, functioning as protector of harvest and peace.

Nerthus-Njörðr and Freyja-Freyr have many similar features which can indicate the strong connection between them. First of all, Nerthus, Freyja and Freyr are all connected with chariot, while Njörðr, Freyja and Freyr are all connected with ship. Second, Njörðr married his sister when he was still among Vanir, while Freyja is also recorded as Freyr's sister-wife, however both of them married a new wife. Third, Njörðr's marriage with Skaði and Freyr's marriage with Gerðr are typical marriage of fertility gods with Jötnar, which might be a metaphor of the seasonal change.

In the forth chapter, I investigated the narrations of the sun in Nordic mythological

corpus, and discovered that, the sun in written materials has some similar representations as the sun had in Bronze Age, such as disc, wheel, ring, shield, bird, and chariot; and also has some new representations, such as fire, hair and gold. As for the solar myths recorded, they can be divided into three motifs: the journey of the sun, the sun swallowed by monster, and the creation of the sun. However, there are neither narrations of sun worship nor records of the sun's religious functions.

Then in the fifth chapter, I compared the narrations of Freyr and Freyja, with that of the sun in the forth chapter:

First, Freyja and Freyr are derived from Nerthus-Njörðr, and all of these four gods are originally derived from the sun. The co-existence of “sun on wagon” and “sun on ship” might have presaged the androgynous character of later solar gods, such as Nerthus-Njörðr, and Freyja-Freyr. That might be the explanation of why Nerthus changed both her name and gender to Njörðr and why Njörðr, Freyja and Freyr all have myths containing incestuous theme.

Second, comparing the ritual functions of Freyja and Freyr in the Viking and Middle Ages, and the ritual functions of the Sun in the Bronze Age, it might be concluded that Freyja and Freyr inherited the religious responsibilities of the Sun, and were the personified Sun - the solar gods in the Viking and Middle Ages. Because these two gods and the Sun have similar ritual functions in perspective of fertility, as the protectors of vegetation and growth, death, and the last love and marriage. Freyja, as goddess of gold, which is a symbol of the sun, she might be interpreted as ruler of the sun. Then, as the ruler of Fólkvangr and chooser of the slain, she is connected with Valkyries, who are connected with the sun as bird-shape women. Her cats, her chariot and her ship can all associate her with the sun. As for Freyr, as the ruler of the shining of the sun according to Snorri, his mythological role as a solar god might be more obvious than Freyja's. He is the owner of the *Álfheimr*, which connects him with the Sun, as *álfröðull* is the metaphor for both the goddess Sól and the sun-chariot. His boar *Gullinbursti*, whose mane can glow in the dark like the shining sun may also identify him as the ruler of the shining sun, while his ship *Skíðbládnir* connected him with both the Sun and Njörðr in perspective of maritime. Even his battle with Surtr might be interpreted as a battle between the fertilizing sun and the destroying sun. With all these connections above, it might be possible to argue that Freyr and Freyja might be the personified solar gods in Nordic mythology. The fertile functions represented by the Sun In Bronze Age, was inherited by Nerthus first, and then by Freyja and Freyr, even though the Sun itself was no longer the key symbol of fertility in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia as it had been before.

Further investigation

In this paper, I mainly investigated the solar characteristics of Freyja and Freyr, and tried to identify them as solar gods. However, considering the importance of the Sun in the Bronze Age and the abundance of the functions the Sun represented, it is strange

that Freyr and Freyja, who are derived from the Sun, are not identified as solar gods, especially when they are in fact worshiped widely. The reasons for this phenomenon might be the influence of the Christian and Ptolemaic world view, in which the sun was regarded as merely an instrument of light created by God¹² and as such an astronomical entity. Snorri, as well as other saga writers, influenced by this world view, did thus not have much room for a sun god.

¹² "Hvernig skal Krist kenna? Svá at kalla hann skapara himins ok jarðar, engla ok sólar, stýranda heimsins ok himinríkis ok engla, konung himna ok sólar ok engla ok Jórsala ok Jórdánar ok Griklands, ráðandi postola ok heilagra manna." (Skáldskaparmál, chapter 43. ed. Faulkes). Christ is phrased as the fashioner of the Sun.

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