

# “THE DELUDING OF GYLFI” ILLUSTRATION AND SNORRI’S FRAMING STORY

## Snorri Sturlason (1179 - 1241)



Haukur Stefánsson’s portrait of Snorri (1933)

Lesbók Morgunblaðsins. Arfleið Snorra [Snorri’s Legacy] April 20, 1996. <https://timarit.is/page/3311583> Accessed January 17, 2024.

The Icelandic politician, poet, and scholar, Snorri Sturlason was a Christian who nonetheless believed that it was important to preserve the cultural knowledge of Norse mythology.

Snorri explicitly stated that the *Prose Edda* is a book on poetics and that it is to be strictly regarded as a ‘scholarly inquiry and entertainment’ (Faulkes 1987 64), whose primary function was to provide young poets with a wide vocabulary of traditional terms and the ability to understand what had been expressed obscurely, i.e., poetic metaphors.

Snorri warned that “Christian people must not believe in the heathen gods, nor in the truth of this account in any other way than that in which it is presented at the beginning of this book” (Faulkes 1987 64 – 65).

## The Deluding of Gylfi

Snorri’s framing narrative for The Deluding of Gylfi section of *The Prose Edda* consists of a wisdom contest between the Swedish King Gylfi—disguised as Gangleri—and Óðinn. Gylfi wants to know whether Óðinn and his followers were simply exceptional men or whether they were empowered by the gods that they worshiped.

When Gylfi comes into the presence of Óðinn, he believes that he is standing before three regal figures seated on high seats hierarchically arranged so that they tower above him. The answers to the questions in the wisdom contest all require knowledge of Norse mythology. When the contest ends abruptly, Gylfi finds himself standing alone “out on open ground.” He goes back to his kingdom “and from his account these stories passed from person to person” (Faulkes 1987 57). As time passed, Gylfi and his people came to believe that Óðinn and his followers actually were gods.



The Deluding of Gylfi DG 11 f. 26v (c. 1325)



Jón Guðmundsson. Marsh 114 - f. 23v (1648)

## The Iconic Illustration of “The Deluding of Gylfi”

The fourteenth-century Icelandic manuscript designated DG 11, also known as *Uppsalaþók* and *Codex Uppsaliensis*, is a significant historical document because it is the key source for understanding Old Norse mythology and poetry. DG 11 is also important because it contains an illustration of “The Deluding of Gylfi” (f. 26v).

DG 11 was sent to Denmark in 1639. Before its departure, a copy was made that became part of Thomas Marshall’s collection and was sent to England in 1690. The is known as Marsh. 114.

‘The Deluding of Gylfi’ scene on f.23v in Marsh. 11 is not an exact copy of the original illustration. The illustrator portrayed the three seated figures as bearded kings and explicitly identified them within the illustration as “þrenning Óðins” (a trinity of Óðinns).

“Deluding of Gylfi” illustrations are ubiquitous in the early print books of antiquarian scholars such as Thomas Bartholin and Olaus Rudbeck.

## The Victorian Retellings and “The Deluding of Gylfi” Illustration

The retellings of Old Norse mythology for children began with *The Heroes of Asgard and the Giants of Jötunheim, Or, The Week and Its Story* by Annie and Eliza Keary (1857).

*The Heroes of Asgard* inspired many other retellings with various myths and scenes from the narratives illustrating them. Hamilton Wright Mabie included “The Deluding of Gylfi” in *Norse Stories Retold from the Eddas* (1902) and describes the three figures of Óðinn sitting high above Gylfi. However, George Hand Wright choose to illustrate the scene with only one figure of Óðinn in order to indicate that Gylfi was indeed deluded (20).



George Hand Wright. (Mabie. 1902 20)

### Would you know more?

The Deluding of Gylfi illustration was frequently reproduced with visual revisions in hand-copied manuscripts and early print books. Scan the QR codes to see many more...



Bartholin, Thomas. *Antiquitatum danicarum...* (1689)



Jakob Sigurðsson Nks 1867 4to f. 111v (1760)



The Deluding of Gylfi, framing story in the *Prose Edda*



Deluding of Gylfi illustrations in MyNDIR



“Individuality and Iconography” Saga Conference 2009