Drømte Mig En Drøm
(I Dreamed a Dream)

A 14thC. Danish Ballad (Fragment)

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Introduction

I am Sionann in Uí Fhlaithbheartaig and today I will be presenting “Drømte Mig en Drøm”, a 14th century Danish ballad and the earliest extant piece of music documented in Scandinavia. The version of “Drømte Mig en Drøm” that I will be singing, interpreted in 1945 by Erik Bertelsen & Povl Hamburger (see Appendix 2), incorporates both the words and tune of the original fragment, but adds more to the both the text and the tune. As you will see during the presentation, despite the additions to the extant song fragment, the song maintains its mode, melodic structure, and text characteristics of the original historical piece.

The Provenance of “I dreamed a dream…”

Around 1300 AD, a 202 page law book called the “Codex Runicus” was completed by an anonymous Cistercian monk probably at Herrevadskloster (Herrevad Abbey, founded in 1144AD), at Lyjunghyed, Skåne in Sweden (which was part of Denmark at the time). It was written on vellum, using a Runic alphabet and in Old Danish rather than the Latin that was the norm of the time. It is one of only 2 such texts in Scandinavia, although some historians, such as the 16th century Swedish Bishop of Uppsala, Olaus Magnus, said there were numerous such texts before the Reformation when many were destroyed. The text is now housed at the University of Copenhagen and can be viewed in its entirety online at the university’s website.

The text has 3 parts: The Scanian Law (“Skånske lov” the laws of Skania or Jutland), The Scanian Ecclesiastical Laws (“Skånske Kirklov” which were created by the Bishop of Lund in the late 12th century), and a section on the Danish Kings with a description of the Danish-Swedish borders. The first sections, pertaining to the laws were written by one scribe, while the non-legal portions were written by another anonymous scribe.

This second scribe also included something else a little strange given the nature of the rest of the text. On the bottom of the very last page, he left a short passage of a song, including the musical notes.
Drømte Mig En Drøm

notation. (see Appendix 1) This short passage is the oldest piece of secular music in Scandinavia (there are older sacred/church songs in existence). Known simply as “Drømte Mig en Drøm” (I Dreamed a Dream) there is only a fragment of the song given but it also includes a simple form of musical notation which makes it all the more unique. The passage is also well known in Denmark as the interval signal of the Danish National Radio.

Analyzing the Text

The entire text of Codex Runicus dates to about 1300AD, although Eric Moldrup in his lecture on Danish music, dates the text as early as 1230AD (though I am unsure where he has gleaned this information from).

Drømde : mik : en : drøm : i : nat : um :

silki : ok : ærlik : pæl :

Arrows indicating a "typo" on the part of the Scribe. Either this a different letter used in the word "ærlik", OR it is a different word altogether OR he simply forgot the crossbar on the rune for "L".

The original text of the fragment reads:

“Drømde mik en drøm i nat um
silki ok ærlik pæl”

In modern Danish this would be:

“Drømte mig en drøm i nat om
silki og ærlig pæl”

These few words have been open to varied interpretation for many years due to the nature of the book the passage is found in and due to differing translation or interpretation of 3 key words: “silki”, “ærlik” & “pæl”.

There is no question about the translation of the first line (“Drømde mik en drøm i nat um / I dreamed a dream this night of”), and there are several ballad texts from period which use this same trope, including the ballad of “Hagbard og Signe” (DgF 20 5; the story is known at least in the 12thC as it is mentioned by Saxo Grammaticus in his “Gesta Danorum”) in which the 2nd verse opens with:

“Hagbard drømde en drøm om nat”
(Hagbard dreamed a dream at night”)

Then there is the refrain of the ballad “Ridderen i Hjorteham” (DgF 67, one of the oldest complete ballads in Scandinavia) which has a similar phrase:

“Dromth haffuer mic on jomfrwer in nat”
(I have dreamed of young women this night).

The second part of the passage however is problematic. Given the nature of the rest of the document, a phrase related to law or legal issues would seem appropriate and many translating it to “I dreamed a dream this night of equality and honest measure” or “... of justice and fair play”. Others have argued for a more romantic meaning such as “I dreamed a dream this night of silk and fine furs” or “silk and expensive cloths” and indeed the most versions of song are built on the latter theme. The confusion stems from the translation of the Danish.

Some have interpreted “silki” as something of a “typo” on the part of the scribe, instead hypothesizing the word to be “slik” (in Old Norse) which is akin to “lika” and means “equal, same, alike” (in Swedish and Icelandic).6 This interpretation certainly fits the theme of the entire Codex. However, in Dano-Norwegian (which is between Old and Modern Danish), “silki” means “silk”. In modern Danish, the word is “silke”. In Swedish, the word is also “silke”, while “silkig” means “silky”. In both modern and Old Icelandic (which are closest to Old Norse and Old Norwegian), “silki” means “silk”. The Swedish medieval ballad “Pallebogsons visa” (DgF 392 also TSB 163)7 also uses a very similar phrase meaning "silk... and fine fur":

"Han kläder sig i silke, så och i ädel päll...".8
(in Swedish “ädel” means “noble, precious” and “påll” means “furs”)

Similarly, “ærlik” and “pæl” are open to differing interpretation. The older translation of the two words together has been taken to mean “honest measure”.

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6 DgF = Danmarks Gamle Folkviser, the Danish “catalogue” of medieval balladry. Each ballad is catagorised and given a number which can then be cross referenced with other catalogues in Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Finland and the Faroe Islands which have their own reference numbers.

6 Corpus iuris Sueo-Gotorum antiqui: Samling af Sweriges gamla lagar, pages 288, 294, 314, 319

7 TSB = Types of Scandinavian Medieval Ballads, the comprehensive collection of all Scandinavian balladry and cataloguing. Almost all ballads are labelled with TSB# and given descriptions of tropes used to ease cross referencing with other ballad databases/collections such as the “Sveriges Medeltida Balladår” or the “Child Ballads”

“Ærlik pæl” could be "honest measure", since päla, and the related forms “pæl” and “pel”, are old words for "measure", cognate with German “pegel”.

In Dano-Norwegian, “ærlig” (modern Danish and Norwegian “ærlig”, and modern Swedish “ärlig”) means “honest, fair, faithful, sincere”. In Old Icelandic, “ærlegr” has the same meaning. Also “ærlik” is used on the first page of the Codex Runicus to mean “honest”.

“Pæl” in Danish and Dano-Norwegian means “pale, post, pole, stake”, none of which make much sense in any context. However, the Swedish word “pål/påll” (which is pronounced the same as Danish “pæl”) means “fur/furs”, the same as Danish/Dano-Norwegian “pel/pels”. In Old Icelandic, “pell” means “a kind of costly stuff”. This interpretation is again supported by "Pallebogsons visa" use of the phrase "silk... and fine fur":

"Han kläder sig i silke, så och i ädel päll…"

When comparing the language of this runic fragment in Danish, Dano-Norwegian, Norwegian, Swedish, Icelandic, Old Icelandic, and Old Norse translations, it is easy to see where the confusion stems from and argument can be given to both sides of the debate. The modern and popular versions of the song all lean to the “romantic” rather than the less magical legal interpretations. The version I will be presenting (though of a later period) also envisions this romantic and ill-fated imagery as a young woman dreams of riches, of walking hand in hand and dancing the night away with her lover but, as each verse ends, then morning comes and the dream is done (see Appendix 2).

Analyzing the Tune Fragment

Like the text, there is also much speculation about the music of this ballad fragment. Some have presented a theory that is is actually based on a portion of the “alleluia” from "Pascha nostrum

9 http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/11665838
Drømte Mig En Drøm

Most believe it simply a “doodle” left by the anonymous scribe, either of a piece from his memory or perhaps even an original composition.

The music included in the original fragment (above) is written in an early form of notation typical of plainchant notation and other 13th & early 14th century music such as some troubadour and trouveres songs. It is written in Dorian mode on a staff of 4 lines and while it indicates the notes to be sung, called “punctum”, it does not give any indication of the value or rhythm of those notes, nor is there any indication of “measures”, leaving the piece open to a variety of interpretations, from slow ballads to joyful dance tunes. (see Appendix 3). There is what could be a “C clef” (indicating “middle C”) in the top left corner on the top line and again on the top left of the second part however this could also be a mensural symbol indicating a time signature called “tempus imperfectum, prolatio imperfectum ” in this case and indicating 4/4 time.

In the example below, we see the notes written without rhythm, or rather each note is given equal value (as interpreted by me using a program that will not allow me to delete bar lines and time signatures). This interpretation uses the theory that each of the notes indicated with a downward stem on the right side in the original is in fact a “longa” note, in which case each is of equal value.

Given the nature of other music of the time it would not be incorrect to assume this song is no different than others from that period. Music in the 13th century was often based on common rhythmic modes as well as scale modes. The rhythmic mode used most often was the “trochee”, in which there is a long beat (longa) followed by a short beat (breve). An example would be a quarter note (semiminima or crotchet) followed by an eighth note (chroma, fusa or quaver).

Assuming the “C” at the beginning of the phrase is a C clef and not a tempo marker, the rhythm would likely be played in 6/4 or 6/8 time. Also typical of the time period, each note would correspond with one syllable of the text. In the case of runs, all of the notes would likely be sung on the same syllable as well. The tune would then look like:

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11 I have only as yet seen one reference to this and that was on a Swedish Wikipedia site about this piece. It can be seen at: http://www.amicicantantes.se/wiki/index.php?title=Dr%C3%B6mde_mig_en_dr%C3%B6m
13 http://www.pdreditions.com/MensuralNotation-1.html
14 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhythmic_mode
15 http://www.musicaragazzi.altervista.org/semiminima-e-croma.html
However, the last bars of the tune indicate falling notes, or in this case what is known as a “porrectus” indicating a 3 note “neumes” of up-down-up in the notation. In this case, it could possibly look like:

![Musical notation](image)

Further interpretations by others can be seen in Appendix 3, including one which surmises that the tune, like other ballads, would also have included a refrain/burden (omkved) and that would be a repeat of the first theme of the tune. The version I will be performing follows the 1945 interpretation of Povl Hamburger (see Appendix 2).

**The Song as I am Presenting it...**

This piece was the very first piece of Scandinavian music I learned and I presented it (albeit with far less research at the time) along with another Norwegian piece at Tir Righ Bardic Championships in 2007 (which I won).

The version of “Drømte Mig en Drøm” that I will be singing, interpreted in 1945 by Erik Bertelsen & Povl Hamburger (see Appendix 2) incorporates both the words and tune of the original fragment, but adds more to the both the text and the tune. This version contains 4 verses and continues the romantic riff that suggests a girl dreaming of silks and fine furs. It is also the most popular version of the piece in Denmark.

This version follows the structure of one type of traditional Scandinavian Ballad, where there are 4 lines per verse and each verse concluding with a repeated line, called a “burden” or “refrain” (“omkved” in Norwegian). While certainly the bulk of the song is not “period”, the composers did a terrific service to the piece by maintaining the rhythm (trochee), time signature (6/4) of typical pieces from the period and the period structure of a typical Scandinavian Ballad from the time in which the original fragment was written (Appendix 4). The score I have provided (Appendix 2) is written in E-flat Dorian mode.

As the composers of this version also chose rhythms which are period, the song could be played either as a slow ballad or a lively, skipping dance tune as many Scandinavian ballads were intended to be. I will be presenting it as a slow ballad, as I think this suits the mood of the lyrics better, however, I would be happy to demonstrate the quicker version as time allows.

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16 [http://lphrc.org/Chant/](http://lphrc.org/Chant/)
Instrumentation

I will be accompanying myself on a Lyre, as this is what I have at my disposal. While my lyre is of an earlier time period, the “hearpa” (lyre) which is mentioned in the Sagas a number of times, were popular in Scandinavia at least well into the 14th century, such as the “Kravik Lyre” (see Appendix 5). The accompaniment is my own arrangement based on appropriate but limited techniques suitable for the lyre. There are no extant descriptions of proper technique for the lyre, only depictions in paintings and manuscripts. The Norse sagas and even the Anglo-Saxon epic poem ‘Beowulf’ mention the Lyre (called “hearpe”) many times but never how it was played. Modern scholars, researchers and musicians such as Benjamin Bagby, Germund Koltveit and Michael J. King have agreed that the lyre was plucked with the fingers much like a harp, or strummed with a “plectrum” using a “block & strum” method shown in many period paintings and manuscripts.

As an Aside...

I was asked to play music at the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, B.C. during their “Viking” exhibit in summer of 2014. This song was one of the pieces I presented for the public there. It was interesting to me that when played for a couple who were visiting from Denmark, they indicated that the piece was Norwegian, though they clearly recognised it and that is was the Danish Radio call signal. Later, when playing the piece for some folks from Norway, they said it was Danish. Coupled with difficulty translating the text into English clearly, I believe composers of the whole text may have been written in slightly archaic language in order to “medievalise” it more (which was somewhat typical of later ballad collectors), or at the very least in the transitional Dano-Norwegian, which would explain the confusion my Danish and Norwegian audiences were having.

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18 See Michael J. King’s website for more information on Lyre (and many other ancient instrument) playing methods. www.michaeljking.com - or visit Benjamin Bagby’s site for a wealth of information on Lyres and playing them. www.bagbybeowulf.com/background/texts.html
Appendix 1: Codex Runicus
The last page of the “Codex Runicus” containing the fragment of “Drømte Mig En Drøm” at the bottom of the page.
**Appendix 2: Lyrics and Translation**

Lyrics & English translation and score of the 1945 version of the song; lyrics written by Erik Bertelsen & music interpretation (below) by Povl Hamburger.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dano-Norwegian</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drømte Mig En Drøm</strong></td>
<td>I Dreamt a Dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drømte mig en drøm i nat om silke og ærlig pæl</strong>, Bar en dragt så let og glat i solfadets strålevæld -nu vågner den klare morgen</td>
<td>I dreamt a dream this night of silk and fine furs. Wore a dress so light and smooth in the sunset's radiance. -now the clear morning is waking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Til de unges flok jeg gik, jeg droges mod sang og dans. Trøstigt mødte jeg hans blik og lagde min hånd i hans -nu vågner den klare morgen</td>
<td>To the young crowd I went, I was drawn to song and dance Fearlessly, I met his eyes and put my hand in his -now the clear morning is waking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alle de andre på os så, de smilede og de lo. Snart gik dansen helt i stå, der dansede kun vi to -nu vågner den klare morgen</td>
<td>All the others watched us, they smiled and they laughed Soon the dance completely stopped, only us two were left dancing. -now the clear morning is waking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drømte mig en drøm i nat om silke og ærlig pæl. Fjernt han hilste med sin hat og grå gik min drøm på hæld -nu vågner den klare morgen</strong></td>
<td>I dreamt a dream this night of silk and fine furs From far away he waved his hat And grey went my dream of happiness. -now the clear morning is waking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Sionann in Ui Fhlaithbheartaig
Appendix 3: Other Interpretations of the Score in the “Codex Runicus”

Further Interpretations from Angul Hammerich in "Das Volksliedfragment im Codex Runicus", Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft, 1921

I. Umschreibung der Melodie im zweiteiligen Rhythmus:

II. Umschreibung der Melodie im "modalen" Rhythmus:
This interpretation theorises that the "omkvæd" would be simply be a repeat of the first theme, which is similar to other period ballads of time and region.

Interpretation from Angul Hammerich in "Das Volksliedfragment im Codex Runicus", Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft, 1921
Appendix 4: Scandinavian Ballad Text and Tune Structure

Like all songs called “ballads”, they were often considered dance tunes and it is likely that the Scandinavian types were as well, at least in part. Some ballad tunes lend themselves to lively dancing, or more stately or somber dances, while others have less emphasis on rhythm and are more free-flowing and melismatic, allowing freedom of personal expression.

Within the Scandinavian ballad genre, there are 6 types of ballads in the “Types of Scandinavian Medieval Ballads (TSB): Heroic, Legendary, Historic, Bawdy, Supernatural, Chivalric. All songs called ballads fall into one of those categories, though some are more difficult to identify and so are sometimes seemingly miscategorised for lack of a better fit.

Text Forms and Structure ¹⁹

The Scandinavian ballad has a basic structure which is both similar and different from the ballad structures of other European Balladry. Scandinavian ballads are recognisable from the basic form of the stanza. These are sometimes hard to determine by aural identification only. Seeing the ballad in writing makes identifying Scandinavian ballads much easier.

There are 2 distinct forms of ballad stanzas (in the Scandinavian types): 2 lined and 4 lined. Both types will almost always contain a “burden” (refrain, or repeated line... called “omkved” in Norwegian). Sometimes this falls in the middle [internal] of the stanza after the first line (called “mellomstev”), sometimes at the end of each stanza (called “etterstev”). In the 4 line stanza, the burden will come at the end, after the 4th line, although a few may also contain a “mellomstev” as well.

Sometimes the burden consists of phrases related to the song, sometimes they are completely unrelated, and sometimes completely nonsensical. Often, the burden was meant for everyone to sing along with, while the “skald” sings the rest of the verses. The Faroese ballads typically have a very long burden for this reason as in the Faroe Islands, they still dance to these ballads.

The first form of ballad may contain 2 long lines (often broken into four lines), or short stanzas written in 2 lines. Each stanza line will have a concluding rhyme. The long line stanza (broken into 4) will only rhyme in the 2nd and 4th lines, however Scandinavian ballads often utilise internal rhymes and vowel harmony or assonance instead of strict end rhyme. I have also seen ballads that do not seem to rhyme at all.

¹⁹ Wright, Sheila Louise. “Scandinavian Ballads 101”, 2012 - The rest of this section is summarised from my lecture notes from a class I taught on “Scandinavian Ballads 101” at the An Tir Performing Arts Grand Ithra in 2012.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drømte Mig En Drøm</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### 2 Line, single burden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Norwegian)</th>
<th>(Swedish)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grisilla ho sat i gullveven så fin.</td>
<td>Två systrar gingo neder till strand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sò kom hennar moer sjov gangandes inn.</td>
<td>Att hemta der vatten på snöhvitan sand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A, ja...</em></td>
<td><em>Du ädela ros: Du ädela rosens blomma</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Faeroese)</th>
<th>(Norwegian)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Í Noreg býr ein menskur mann,</td>
<td>Noregs menn, dansið væl í stillum; stillið tykkum allar, riddarar, Noregs men, dansið væl í stillum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ólavur Trygvason eitur hann.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2 Line, internal & final burden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Icelandic)</th>
<th>(Norwegian)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systir talar vid systir göð</td>
<td>Heiemo kvad, det song i li.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>i landenu so vida</em></td>
<td><em>Vakna dikko ødelege drengje</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gangum vid útá sjáfar flód</td>
<td>Det høyrde nykkjen, på havet skrid,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>vel má herinn af Danmörk út rída.</em></td>
<td><em>For de hev sove tidi for lengje.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2 lines, broken into 4 Lines, single burden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Norwegian)</th>
<th>(Norwegian)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Han rende bratt og han rennde flatt og skia dei mone fljote.</td>
<td>Høyre do Rikar Århus høtt eg no seie deg, kvi gjenge do i skogjen så alleine?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sò vart han vare de bergje blått, all kola dei mone roke.</td>
<td>Hørr æ din høkur, å hørr æ din hund?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>De va Hermod den Unge han konne på skio renne.</em></td>
<td>Hørr æ alle dine små drengjir?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Der gjei eit ørn i Bøyarlunden så lengje.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4 Line, internal & final burden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Norwegian)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Søstrenen tele te Søstrenen sin,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Diben dal falder ind.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nu vil vi gå te skjødestrand, og vaske vore ben så hvite</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Så vi kan bli to søster så lige</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Strengen var af rode guld stilles mitt hele liv.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Melody, Text and Rhythm

As for melodies, there is very little known about how they were sung, especially those of the Middle Ages. Few scholars documented the melodies, but we know that they were meant to be sung. Those who did document had difficulty when faced with performers who had themselves never seen notation or heard a well-tuned instrument. Often their concept of melody is much different than what we think of today. Collectors were also faced with ornamentation, tonality and rhythm unlike anything they’d seen or heard before. Often that meant they’d simplify the melody and rhythm, thus much of the original is lost. This is typical in many surviving folk tunes, for example, the same phenomena is observed in Sephardic music, which has a similar history in terms of tune preservation of songs performed in a melismatic style. It was only when audio recording became available that some of those melodies were preserved in their entirety, including the Nordic use of quarter tones and other types of scales.

These types of songs Ballads have a very loose connection between text and rhythm and melody. They were freer and less regimented, i.e. melismatic. Because of this, text from one song could be used with another melody, thus melody varies more than the text. It was only after [extensive] collection began [in the 1500] that text and melody were more firmly married.

Strangely, unlike modern music, whether of melody was melancholy or jovial had nothing to do with the text of the piece. Some lively tunes may be sung over very sad or dramatic text, while melancholy tunes may be sung over songs of great happiness.
Appendix 5: Lyres in Scandinavia

The Lyre was a common instrument in Scandinavia and is mentioned in the Sagas a number of times as the “hearpa” which is the Nordic name for a Lyre. It is unknown when the Lyre was first introduced to the Nordic regions, however there is a depiction of a lyre on a gravestone from the 6th century in Lärbro Källested, Gotland (see below, left). Several Lyre bridges have been found in Sweden dating to the Viking Age and there are many carved items such as doorways into churches at Austad and Hylestad, (see below, right - this one shows Gunnar in the snake pit playing the Lyre with his feet) dating to the 1200s as well as a painted church wall in Aal, Jutland and Rolda, Hordaland also from the 1200s. It is known that Lyres were still being used later as well as evidenced stone sculptures at Tornheim Cathedral (1325-1350) and by the “Kravik Lyre” found in Kravik, Numedal which is dated to 14th Century. (see below, centre)20

Bowed Lyres, such as the Finnish “Jouhikko” date to after the Viking age, such as the 13th century ones found at Novgorod, but they are still popular in some regions today.

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