

## The Ballad of Hildina (Foula)

The ballad was recorded by the Scottish clergyman George Low on his voyage to Foula in the early 1770s. Low had no knowledge of Norn whatsoever, so his "by-ear" transcript of the song is hardly phonetically precise. This prompted the Norwegian linguist Marius Hægstad to elaborate on Low's text attempting to reconstruct its Norn original. The outcome was published in Hægstad's brochure "Hildinakvadet, med utgreidung um det norske maal paa Shetland i eldre tid" (1900). Both Low's and Hægstad's versions of the ballad are included below. We also offer our translation of the song into Old Norse (translation of the stanzas 1-4 has in fact been copied with some minor changes from William Burley Lockwood's book "Languages of the British Isles past and present" (1975)). The Old Norse translation follows Hægstad's version and is mostly based on the vocabulary given in his paper with a few corrections and additions of ours. The English translation is borrowed from the [Foula Heritage website](#) (stanzas 1-12) and from the [Hildinakvadet website](#) (stanzas from 13 onwards and the notes). See also the [vocabulary to the song](#) at the latter resource and a separate chapter on the [language of the Ballad of Hildina](#).

No	George Low's version	Marius Hægstad's correction	Translation into Old Norse	Translation into English
1	Da vara Jarlin d'Orkneyar For frinda sîn spur de ro Whirdi an skildè meun Our glas buryon burtaga.	Da vara Iarlin o Orkneyar for frinda sîn spirde ro, whirdi an skildè meun or vannaro eidnar fuo – Or glasburyon burtaga.	Þat var jarlinn af [ór] Orkneyjum fyrir frænda sínum spurði ráð(a) hvort hann skyldi meyna ór vandaráði hennar fá - ór glasborginni burt taka?	It was the Earl from Orkney, And counsel of his kin sought he, Whether he should the maiden Free from her misery.
2	Or vanna ro eidnar fuo Tega du meun our glas buryon Kere friendè min yamna men Eso vrildan stiendi gede min vara to din.	“Tega du meun our glasburyon, kere friendè min, yamna meun eso vrildan stiendi, gede min vara to din.”	“Tekr þú meyna ór glasborginni kæri frændi minn jafnan meðan þessi veröldin stendr getit mun vera til þín.”	"If thou free the maid from her gleaming hall, O kinsman dear of mine, Ever while the world shall last Thy glory still shall shine."

Yom keimir cullingin  
Fro liene burt  
3 Asta Vaar hon fruen Hildina  
Hemi stu mer stien.

Yom keimir eullingin  
fro liene;  
burt asta vaar hon fruen  
Hildina,  
hemi stu-mer stien.

Heim kemr qðlingrinn  
frá leiðinni  
burt af stað var hon frúin Hildina  
heima stjúp móðir stendr.

Home came the king,  
Home from the ship's levy  
The lady Hildina she was gone,  
And only her stepmother there  
found he.

**Verse(s) missing?**

**The story ‘moves’ from the Earl  
of Orkney, to the King of  
Norway**

Whar an yaar elonden  
Ita kan sadnast wo  
4 An scal vara kundè  
Wo osta tre sin reithin ridna dar fro

“Whar an yaar e londen  
ita kan sadnast wo,  
an scal vara heindè wo osta  
tre,  
sin reithin ridna darfro”.

“Hvar hann er í londum  
þetta kann sannast á  
hann skal vera hengdr á hæsta tré(t)  
sem rötum rennr þar frá.”

"Be he in whatever land,  
This will I prove true,  
He shall be hanged from the  
highest tree  
That ever upward grew."

Kemi to Orkneyar Jarlin  
Vilda mien sante Maunis  
5 I Orknian u bian sian  
I lian far diar.

“Kemi to Orkneyar Iarlin,  
sante Maunis vilda mien,  
i Orknian u bian sian,  
i lian far di an”.

“Komi til Orkneyja jarlinn  
sankti Magnús valda mun,  
í Orkneyjum æ biðr hann síðan,  
í leiðina far þú enn”.

"If the Earl but come to Orkney,  
Saint Magnus will be his aid,  
And in Orkney ever he will  
remain—  
Haste after him with speed."

An gevè Drotnign kedn puster  
On de kin firsane furu  
6 Tworare wo eder  
Whitranè kidn.

An gevè Drotnign  
kednpuster onde kin;  
fir sane furu tworone  
wo edner whitranè kidn.

Hann gefr drottningrinn  
kinnpúst undir kinn;  
fyrir sönnu fóru tárin(i)  
á hennar hvítandi [hvít(a)ri] kinn.

The King he stood before his  
lady,  
And a box on her ear gave he,—  
And all adown her lily white  
cheeks  
The tears did flow truly.

**Verse(s) missing?**

**The story ‘jumps’ from Norway  
to Orkney**

In kimerin Jarlin  
7 U klapasse Hildina  
On de kidn quirto

In kimer in Iarlin  
u klapa se Hildina onde kidn;  
Ok klappar svá Hildinu undir kinn;

Inn kemr enn jarlinn  
Ok klappar svá Hildinu undir kinn;

The Earl he stood before Hildina,  
And a pat on her cheek gave  
he,—

	Vult doch, fiegan vara moch or fly din.	“Quirto vult doch fiegan vara moch or fy din?”	“Hvort vilt þú feigan vera mig eðr fõðr þinn?”	"O which of us two wouldst thou have lie dead, Thy father dear of me?
	Elde vilda fiegan vara Fy min u alt sin	“Elde vild-a fiegan vara fy min u alt sin ans namn u wo;	“Heldr vilda ek feigan vera fõðr minn ok allt sem hans nafn er á; Svá mun ek ok herra minn hæfi Orkneyjum lengi ráða.	"I would rather see my father doomed, And all his company, If so my own true lord and I May long rule in Orkney.
8	Ans namnu wo So minyach u ere min heve Orkneyar kingè ro.	so min yach u ere min heve Orkneyar lingè ro.		
	Nu di skall taga dor yochwo And u ria dor to strandane nir U yilsa fy minu avon	Nu di skall taga dor yoch wo and u ria dor nir to strandane u yilsa fy minu avon blit;	Nú þú skalt taka þér eyk [hest] á hõnd ok ríða þér niðr til strandarinnar og heilsa fõðr mínum afandi blítt; hann gjarna kæmi [komi?] í ykkar band.	"Now do thou take in hand thy steed, And ride thou down to the strand; And do thou greet my sire full blithely, And gladly will he clasp thy hand."
9	Blit an ear ne cumi i dora band.	an earni cumi i dora band.		
<b>Verse(s) missing</b>				
<b>The story ‘jumps’ into the conversation between the Earl and the King.</b>				
	Nu Swaran Konign So mege gak honon i muthi	No swara an Konign - so mege gak honon i muthi -	Nú svarar hann konungr - svá mikit gekk honum í móti -:	The King he now made answer— So sore displeased was he—
10	Whath ear di ho gane mier I daute buthe.	: “Whar ear di ho gave mier i daute-buthe?”	“Hvar gjarna eigar [átt] þú at gefa mér í dóttir-bætr?”	"In payment for my daughter What will thou give to me."
	Tretti merkè vath ru godle Da skall yach ger yo	“Tretti merkè vath ru godle, da skall yach ger yo	“Þrjátíu merkr við [með] rauðu gulli, Þá skal ek þér ljá	"Thirty marks of the red gold, This to thee will I give,
11	U all de vara sonna less So linge sin yach liva mo.	u allde vara sonnaless, so linge sin yach liva mo”.	ok aldrið vera sonalauss svá lengi sem ek lifa má.	And never shalt thou lack a son As long as I may live."
	Nu linge stug an konign	Nu linge stug an Konign,	Nú lengi stóð konungrinn	Now long stood the King,
12	U linge wo a swo Wordig vaar dogh mugè sonè	u linge wo an swo: “Wordig vaar dogh mugè	ok lengi á hann sá:	And long on the Earl gazed he:—

Yacha skier fare moga so minde  
yach angan u frien  
Rost wath comman mier to landa.

sonè;  
yach askier fare moga so.

“Verðigr verð þú múga sona  
ek æski fara megi svá.

"O thou art worth a host of sons;  
Thy boon is granted thee."

**Verse(s)/line(s) missing  
Now ‘Hiluge’ (the Earls rival)  
joins the conversation.**

(---Now ‘Hiluge’ (the Earls rival)  
joins the conversation.---)  
so need I not fear any enemy  
who might come to this land.

12b

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“so minde yach angan ufrien  
rost,  
wath com an mier to landa”.

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-----  
“so myndi ek engan ófrænda hræðast  
at kom hann mér til landa.

13 Nu swara Hiluge  
Hera geve honon scam  
Taga di gild firre Hildina  
Sin yach skall liga dor fram.

Nu swara Hiluge  
- hera geve honon scam -:  
“Taga di gild firre Hildina  
sin yach skall lega dor fram:

Ni svarar Hiluge  
- herra gef honum skömm -:  
“Tekr þú gjald fyrir Hildina  
sem ek skal leggja þér fram:

Now Hiluge answers ‘Sir, thou  
shouldst inflict injury on him’  
Now thee canst accept a fitting  
dowry  
for Hildina, that I shall bring  
forth:

14

Estin whaar u feur fetign  
Agonga kadn i sluge  
Feur fetign sin gonga  
Kadn i pluge.

Estin whaar u feur-fetign  
a gonga kadn i sluge, -  
estin whaar u feur-fetign  
sin gonga kadn i pluge.

Hestinn hvern ok fjórfœtinginn  
eð ganga kann í slóða, -  
hestinn hvern ok fjórfœtinginn  
sem ganga kann í plógi.

Every horse and ‘four-footed’  
that can follow a path,  
every horse and ‘four-footed’  
that can pull a plough’.

15

Nu stienderin Jarlin.  
U linge wo an wo  
Dese mo eke Orknear  
So linge san yach lava mo.

Nu stiender in Jarlin  
u linge wo an swo:  
“Dese mo eki Orknear,  
so linge san yach lava mo”.

Nú stendr hann jarlinn  
ok lengi á hann sá:  
“Þess má ekki Orkneyjar,  
so lengi sem ek lifa má”.

Now the Earl he stood for a  
long time, and gazed at him,  
‘This can Orkney not be equal to  
as long as I may live’.

**The Earl addressing Lady  
Hildina**

16	<p>Nu eke tegaran san Sot Koningn fyrir din U alt yach an Hilhugin Widn ugare din arar.</p>	<p>“Nu eke tegar an san sot, Koningn fyrir din; u alt yach an Hilhugin u garedin arar widn.”</p>	<p>“Nú ekki tekr hann sanna [sådan?] sátt konungrinn fyrir þín [þig]; og allt ek hann Hilhugin á gerðinni annarri vinn.</p>	<p>‘Now he’s not willing to make a deal with me, the King your father; and instead I think that Hilhugin by another decision will win.</p>
17	<p>Nu swarar an frauna Hildina U dem san idne i fro Di slo dor a bardagana Dar comme ov sin mo.</p>	<p>Nu swarar an frauna Hildina u dern san idne i fro: “Di slo dor a bardagana, Dar comme ov sin mo!”</p>	<p>Nú svarar hon frúin Hildina ór dur(un)um sínum inni í frá: “Þú slær þér á bardaganum [-ana?], Þar komi af sem má!”</p>	<p>Now the Lady Hildina answers from inside the house; ‘Someone will die if you fight, that will happen for sure’.</p> <p><b>Verse(s) missing?</b> <b>The scene switches to the ‘duelling ground’</b></p>
18	<p>Nu Jarlin an genger I vadlin fram U kadnar sina mien Geven skeger i Orkneyan.</p>	<p>Nu Iarlin an genger i vadlin fram u kadnar sina mien, gever skeger i Orkneyan ----- -----</p>	<p>Nú jarlinn hann gengr í vøllinn fram ok kallar sína menn, gæfir skeggjar í Orkneyjum ----- ---</p>	<p>Now the Earl steps forward onto the duelling ground and adresses his men: ‘brave islanders of Orkney ----- -----</p>
19	<p>Han u cummin In u vod lerdin Fronde fans lever Vel burne mun.</p>	<p>“Han u cummin in u vodler din; frinde hans lever velburne mien.”</p>	<p>“Hann er kominn inn á vøll þinn frændi hans hleypir velborna menn [velbornum mönnum]</p>	<p>He has come onto the duelling ground; his friend follows the men of royal lineage’.</p>
20	<p>Nu fruna Hildina On genger i vadlin fram Fy di yera da ov man dum Dora di spidlaikì mire man.</p>	<p>Nu fruna Hildina on genger i vadlin fram: “Fy di yera da ov mandum dora, di spidla ikì mire man”.</p>	<p>Nú frúin Hildina Hon gengr í vøllinn fram: “Faðir þú gerir þá af manndóm ykkar, þú spillir ekki meira mann[i].</p>	<p>Now the lady Hildina, she steps forward onto the duelling ground, ‘father thou overdost thy manhood don’t let a brave man die’.</p>
21	<p>Nu sware an Hiluge Crego gevan a scam</p>	<p>Nu sware an Hiluge - erego gev ana scam -:</p>	<p>Nú svarar hann Hiluge - herra guð gefr honum skømm -:</p>	<p>But Hiluge he answers: ‘May God inflict injury on him’</p>

	Gayer an Jarlin frinde Din an u fadlin in.	“Yayer an Iarlin frinde din an u fadlin in”.	“Þegar hann jarlinn frændi þinn hann er fallinn enn.	‘then the Earl your friend will surely be dead. Now the Earl received a deadly cut, no one there could heal him Hilunge threw his head into Hildina's lap; thus added to her grief.
22	Nu fac an Jarlin dahuge Dar min de an engine gro An east ans huge ei Fong ednar u vaxhedne more neo.	Nu fac an Iarlin dahuge - dar minde an engin gro -. An cast ans huge ei fong ednar, u vaks hedne mere meo.	Nú fekk hann jarlinn dauðahøggit - þar myndi hann engan græða -. Hann kastaði hans höfði í fang hennar, ok óx henni meiri móðr.	<b>Verse(s) missing?</b> <b>The Earl is now dead. Hiluge talks to the King:</b>
23	Di lava mir gugna Yift bal yagh fur o lande Gipt mir nu fruan Hildina Vath godle u fasta bande.	“Di lava mir yugna, yift bal yagh fur o landi; gipt mir nu fruan Hildina vath godle u fasta bande.”	“Þú lofar mér gagna [eigna, unga?], ef baldr ek fór af [ór] landi; gipt mér nú frúna Hildina við [með] gulli ok fõstu bandi”.	You promised me marriage if I boldly voyaged from our land Now let me marry Hildina, with golden dowry and solid pact. <b>The King to Hiluge:</b>
24	Nu bill on heve da yals Guadnè borè u da kadn Sina kloyn a bera do skall Fon fruna Hildina verka wo sino chelsina villya.	“Nu billon heve day alty uadn è borè, u da kadn sina kloyna bera; do skall hon fruna Hildina verka wo sino chelsina villya”.	“Nú biðlund hefir þú alt til barns er borit, ok þá kann sín klæðin(i) bera; þá skal hon frúin Hildina verka á sínu sjalfs síns vilja.	‘Now you will suffer long, until a child is born, and wearing its own clothes; then the Lady Hildina will act upon her own will’.
25	Hildina liger wo chaldona U o dukrar u grothè Min du buga till bridlevsin Bonlother u duka dogha.	Hildina liger wo chaldona uo dukrar u grothè; min du buga til bridlevsin, hon lothir u duka dogha.	Hildina liggr á tjaldinu auga dökkvar ór gráti; meðan þú býr til brúðhlaupsins, hón lætr í drykkju dóa.	<b>The scene switches to the preparations for Hiluge’s and Hildina’s wedding. Then Hildina gets her revenge.</b> Hildina is lying on the blanket her eyes all wet with tears; while they’re preparing the

<p>26 Nu Hildina on askar feyrin Sien di gava mier livè Ou skinka vin Ou guida vin.</p>	<p>Nu Hildina on askar feyrin sien: “Di gava mier live ou skinka vin, ou guida vin”.</p>	<p>Nú Hildina hon aksar [æskir, Eng. asks] föðrinn sinn: “Þú gefr mér leyfi at skenkja vín, at gjóta vín”.</p>	<p>wedding she pours poison into the drinks. Now Hildina she asks her father: “Wilt thou permit me to pour the wine, and serve it for the guests?”</p>
<p>27 Duska skinka vin, u guida vin Tinka dogh eke wo Jarlin an gougha here din.</p>	<p>“Du ska skinka vin u guida vin; tinka dogh eke wo Jarlin, an gougha here din.”</p>	<p>“Þú skalt skenkja vín at gjóta vín; þenkja þó ekki á jarlinn, þann góða herra þinn”</p>	<p>‘You may pour the wine and serve the wine; don’t think any more of the Earl, the dear late husband of yours.</p>
<p>28 Watha skilde tinka Wo Jarlin gouga herè min Hien minde yagh inga forlskona Bera fare kera fyrin min.</p>	<p>“Wath a skilde tinka wo Jarlin an gouga herè min, hien mindi yagh inga forlskona bera fare kera fyrin min”.</p>	<p>“Þó at ek skyldi þenkja á jarlinn þann góða herra minn, héðan myndi ek enga fárskönnu bera fyrir kæra föðrinn minn”.</p>	<p>Why should I think of the Earl the dear late husband of mine? and sure I will not present any poisoned drink, to serve for my father’.</p>
<p>29 Da gerde on fruna Hildina On bar se mien ot On soverin fest, Fysin u quarsin sat.</p>	<p>Da gerde on fruna Hildina, on bar se mien ot; on sover in fest fysin, fysin u quar sin sat.</p>	<p>Það gerði hún frúin Hildina, hón bar svá mjöðinn út; hón syfjar inn fast föðr sinn föðr sinn eð hvar sem sat.</p>	<p>Then the lady Hildina, she served the drinks for the men; she sent to sleep her father, and all the guests that were present.</p>
<p>30 Da gerde un fruna Hildina On bard im ur Hadlin burt sien on laghdè Gloug I osta jatha port.</p>	<p>Da gerde un fruna Hildina, on bar dim ur hadlin burt; sien on laghdè gloug í otsta jath a port.</p>	<p>Það gerði hún frúin Hildina, hún bar þeim [þá] ór höllinni burt; síðan hún lagði glóð í ýzta gataport.</p>	<p>Then the Lady Hildina, she dragged her father and his friends, out of the hall; then she lit a fire, in the main entrance.</p>
<p>31 Nu iki visti an Hiluge Ike ov till do Eldin var commin i lut U stor u silkè sark ans smo.</p>	<p>Nu iki visti an Hiluge ike ov till do eldin var commin i lutustor u silkisark ans smo.</p>	<p>Nú ekki vissi hann Hiluge ekki af til þá eldrinn var kominn í lophúsdyr eð silkiserkr hans smár.</p>	<p>Now Hiluge he didn’t wake up, not until too late; when the fire had covered the entrance, and his silk shift had caught fire as well.</p>

<p>32 Nu leveren fram Hiluge du kereda Fraun Hildina du Gevemir live u gre</p>	<p>Nu lever en fram Hiluge ----- - “Du keresta fraun Hildina, du geve mir live u gre”.</p>	<p>Nú hlaupr hann fram Hiluge ----- “Þú kærasta frúin Hildina, Þú gefr mér lífit ok grið”.</p>	<p>Then Hiluge he jumped up and cried out to Hildina “My dearest Lady Hildina, please let me live and give me quarter”.</p>
<p>33 So mege u gouga gre Skall dogh swo Skall lathì min heran I bardagana fwo.</p>	<p>“So mege u gouga gre skall dogh swo, sin shall lathì min heran i bardagana fwo.</p>	<p>“Sá mikít það góða grið skalt þú sjá sem sjalfr lézt þú minn herrann í bardaganum fá.</p>	<p>‘Thus much good life and quarter you shall receive, as you yourself let my late husbond have, on the duelling ground.</p>
<p>34 Du tuchtada lide undocht yach Swo et sa ans bugin bleo Dogh casta ans huge I mit fung u vexemir mise meo.</p>	<p>Du tuchta da lide undocht yach swo etsa ans bugin bleo; dogh casta ans huge i mit fung, u vexe mir mîre meo”.</p>	<p>Þér þótti það lítit en þótt ek sá einnug hans búkinn blæða; þú kastaðir hans höfði í mitt fang, ok vex [óx] mér meiri móðr.”</p>	<p>You thought little of it, even though I saw also his body bleeding; you threw his head into my lap, and added to my grief’.</p>
<p>35 Nu tachtè on heve fwelsko Ans bo vad mild u stien Dogh skall aidè misè Koningnsens Vadna vilda mien.</p>	<p>Nu tachtè on heve fwelsko ans bo vad mild u stien. “Dogh skall aldè mirè Koningnsens vadne vilda mien”.</p>	<p>Nú þakt hún hefir fòlska hans bæði með mold og steini. “Þú skalt aldrið meira konungsins barni valda mein[i]”.</p>	<p>Now she has covered his falseness both with earth and stone. ‘You will do the King’s children, no harm ever again’.</p>