

ATLAKVITHA EN GRÖNLENZKA

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THE GREENLAND LAY OF ATLI

Guthrun, Gjuki's daughter, avenged her brothers, as has become well known. She slew first Atli's sons, and thereafter she slew Atli, and burned the hall with his whole company. Concerning this was the following poem made:

1. Atli sent | of old to Gunnar A keen-witted rider, | Knefröth did men call him; To Gjuki's home came he | and to Gunnar's dwelling, With benches round the hearth, | and to the beer so sweet.
2. Then the followers, hiding | their falseness, all drank Their wine in the war-hall, | of the Huns' wrath wary; And Knefröth spake loudly, | his words were crafty, The hero from the south, | on the high bench sitting:
3. "Now Atli has sent me | his errand to ride, On my bit-champing steed | through Myrkwood the secret, To bid you, Gunnar, | to his benches to come, With helms round the hearth, | and Atli's home seek.
4. "Shields shall ye choose there, | and shafts made of ash-wood, Gold-adorned helmets, | and slaves out of Hunland, Silver-gilt saddle-cloths, | shirts of bright scarlet, With lances and spears too, | and bit-champing steeds.
5. "The field shall be given you | of wide Gnitaeith, With loud-ringing lances, | and stems gold-o'erlaid, Treasures full huge, | and the home of Danp, And the mighty forest | that Myrkwood is called."
6. His head turned Gunnar, | and to Hogni he said: "What thy counsel, young hero, | when such things we hear? No gold do I know | on Gnitaeith lying So fair that other | its equal we have not.
7. "We have seven halls, | each of swords is full, (And all of gold | is the hilt of each;) My steed is the swiftest, | my sword is sharpest, My bows adorn benches, | my byrnies are golden, My helm is the brightest | that came from Kjar's hall, (Mine own is better | than all the Huns' treasure.)"

Hogni spake:

8. "What seeks she to say, | that she sends us a ring, Woven with a wolf's hair? | methinks it gives warning; In the red ring a hair | of the heath-dweller found I, Wolf-like shall our road be | if we ride on this journey."

9. Not eager were his comrades, | nor the men of his kin, The wise nor the wary, | nor the warriors bold. But Gunnar spake forth | as befitted a king, Noble in the beer-hall, | and bitter his scorn:
10. "Stand forth now, Fjornir! | and hither on the floor The beakers all golden | shalt thou bring to the warriors.
11. "The wolves then shall rule | the wealth of the Niflungs, Wolves aged and grey-hued, | if Gunnar is lost, And black-coated bears | with rending teeth bite, And make glad the dogs, | if Gunnar returns not."
12. A following gallant | fared forth with the ruler, Yet they wept as their home | with the hero they left; And the little heir | of Hogni called loudly: "Go safe now, ye wise ones, | wherever ye will!"
13. Then let the bold heroes | their bit-champing horses On the mountains gallop, | and through Myrkwood the secret; All Hunland was shaken | where the hard-souled ones rode, On the whip-fearers fared they | through fields that were green.
14. Then they saw Atli's halls, | and his watch-towers high, On the walls so lofty | stood the warriors of Buthli; The hall of the southrons | with seats was surrounded, With targets bound | and shields full bright.
15. Mid weapons and lances | did Atli his wine In the war-hall drink, | without were his watchmen, For Gunnar they waited, | if forth he should go, With their ringing spears | they would fight with the ruler.
16. This their sister saw, | as soon as her brothers Had entered the hall,— | little ale had she drunk: "Betrayed art thou, Gunnar! | what guard hast thou, hero, 'Gainst the plots of the Huns? | from the hall flee swiftly!
17. "Brother, 'twere far better | to have come in byrnie, With thy household helmed, | to see Atli's home, And to sit in the saddle | all day 'neath the sun, (That the sword-norns might weep | for the death-pale warriors, And the Hunnish shield-maids | might shun not the sword,) And send Atli himself | to the den of the snakes; (Now the den of the snakes | for thee is destined.)"

Gunnar spake:

18. | "Too late is it, sister, | to summon the Niflungs, Long is it to come | to the throng of our comrades, The heroes gallant, | from the hills of the Rhine."

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19. Then Gunnar they seized, | and they set him in chains, The Burgundians' king, | and fast they bound him.
20. Hogni slew seven | with sword so keen, And an eighth he flung | in the fire hot; A hero should fight | with his foemen thus, As Hogni strove | in Gunnar's behalf.
21. | | The leader they asked | if his life he fain With gold would buy, | the king of the Goths.

Gunnar spake:

22. "First the heart of Hogni | shall ye lay in my hands, All bloody from the breast | of the bold one cut With keen-biting sword, | from the son of the king."

23. | They cut out the heart | from the breast of Hjalli, On a platter they bore it, | and brought it to Gunnar.
24. Then Gunnar spake forth, | the lord of the folk: “Here have I the heart | of Hjalli the craven, Unlike to the heart | of Hogni the valiant, For it trembles still | as it stands on the platter; Twice more did it tremble | in the breast of the man.”
25. Then Hogni laughed | when they cut out the heart Of the living helm-hammerer; | tears he had not. | On a platter they bore it, | and brought it to Gunnar.
26. Then Gunnar spake forth, | the spear of the Niflungs: “Here have I the heart | of Hogni the valiant, Unlike to the heart | of Hjalli the craven, Little it trembles | as it lies on the platter, Still less did it tremble | when it lay in his breast.
27. “So distant, Atli, | from all men’s eyes, Shalt thou be as thou | from the gold.
.. | |
28. “To no one save me | is the secret known Of the Niflungs’ hoard, | now Hogni is dead; Of old there were two, | while we twain were alive, Now is none but I, | for I only am living.
29. “The swift Rhine shall hold | the strife-gold of heroes, That once was the gods’, | the wealth of the Niflungs, In the depths of the waters | the death-rings shall glitter, And not shine on the hands | of the Hunnish men.”

Atli spake:

30. “Ye shall bring the wagon, | for now is he bound.”

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31. On the long-maned Glaum | rode Atli the great, About him were warriors | But Guthrun, akin | to the gods of slaughter, Yielded not to her tears | in the hall of tumult.

Guthrun spake:

32. “It shall go with thee, Atli, | as with Gunnar thou heldest The oaths oft-times sworn, | and of old made firm, By the sun in the south, | by Sigtyr’s mountain, By the horse of the rest-bed, | and the ring of Ull.”
33. Then the champer of bits | drew the chieftain great, The gold-guarder, down | to the place of death. |
34. By the warriors’ host | was the living hero Cast in the den | where crawling about Within were serpents, | but soon did Gunnar With his hand in wrath on | the harp-strings smite; The strings resounded,— | so shall a hero, A ring-breaker, gold | from his enemies guard.
35. Then Atli rode | on his earth-treading steed, Seeking his home, | from the slaughter-place; There was clatter of hoofs | of the steeds in the court, And the clashing of arms | as they came from the field.
36. Out then came Guthrun | to meeting with Atli, With a golden beaker | as gift to the monarch: “Thou mayst eat now, chieftain, | within thy dwelling, Blithely with Guthrun | young beasts fresh slaughtered.”
37. The wine-heavy ale-cups | of Atli resounded, When there in the hall | the Hunnish youths clamored, And the warriors bearded, | the brave ones, entered.
38. Then in came the shining one, | | and drink she bore them; Unwilling and bitter | brought she food to the warrior, Till in scorn to the white-faced | Atli did she

Speak:

39. "Thou giver of swords, | of thy sons the hearts All heavy with blood | in honey thou hast eaten; Thou shalt stomach, thou hero, | the flesh of the slain, To eat at thy feast, | and to send to thy followers.
40. "Thou shalt never call | to thy knees again Erp or Eitil, | when merry with ale; Thou shalt never see | in their seats again The sharers of gold | their lances shaping, (Clipping the manes | or minding their steeds.)"
41. There was clamor on the benches, | and the cry of men, The clashing of weapons, | and weeping of the Huns, Save for Guthrun only, | she wept not ever For her bear-fierce brothers, | or the boys so dear, So young and so unhappy, | whom with Atli she had.
42. Gold did she scatter, | the swan-white one, And rings of red gold | to the followers gave she; The fate she let grow, | and the shining wealth go, Nor spared she the treasure | of the temple itself.
43. Unwise then was Atli, | he had drunk to wildness, No weapon did he have, | and of Guthrun bewared not; Oft their play was better | when both in gladness Each other embraced | among princes all.
44. With her sword she gave blood | for the bed to drink, With her death-dealing hand, | and the hounds she loosed, The thralls she awakened, | and a firebrand threw In the door of the hall; | so vengeance she had.
45. To the flames she gave all | who yet were within, And from Myrkheim had come | from the murder of Gunnar; The timbers old fell, | the temple was in flames, The dwelling of the Buthlungs, | and the shield-maids burned, They were slain in the house, | in the hot flames they sank.
46. Now the tale is all told, | nor in later time Will a woman in byrnie | avenge so her brothers; The fair one to three | of the kings of the folk Brought the doom of death | ere herself she died.

Still more is told in the Greenland ballad of Atli.

Revision #1

Created 2025-10-17 13:02:33 UTC by Ekospirit

Updated 2025-10-17 13:02:33 UTC by Ekospirit