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Ortnit, or the Failure of Patriarchy

Edward G. Fichtner

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Abstract *Ortnit*, a poem of almost 600 four-line strophes, precedes and is attached to the heroic epic Wolfdietrich A. A young king of Lombardy, Ortnit embarks on a bride-quest, wins the daughter of a Levantine sultan, but falls victim to his revenge when he is killed by dragons sent by the sultan to his palace in Garte (Garda). This article treats only one of the several versions of this story, i.e., the AW version, so called after the two Vienna manuscripts in which it has been preserved, the Ambras and the Windhagen manuscripts. In this version, a matriarchal social structure has been superimposed on the original patriarchal structure in an earlier, less detailed account found in another work, *Dietrichs Flucht*. At the beginning, Ortnit accepts his new role in the matriarchal structure, but once the bride is won, he resumes his patriarchal position as king. When one of the dragons attacks his capital, he is unable to defeat it on his own. His appeal for help to Alberich, the representative of the matriarchal structure, is rejected, and he is killed by the dragon.

Keywords Medieval German literature · Heroic epic · Dietrich-epic · Ortnit

Introduction

Among the group of so-called heroic epics in Middle High German are four in which the main character is Wolfdietrich. One of these, traditionally called "Wolfdietrich A", contains a segment which tells the story of a young king of

E. G. Fichtner (✉)
Queens College, City University of New York, Flushing, NY 11367, USA
e-mail: egfichtner@nyc.rr.com

E. G. Fichtner
45 Grace Court Apt 5D, Brooklyn, NY 11201-4171, USA

Lombardy, Ortnit, who embarks on a bride-quest and wins the hand of the maiden in question, but is ultimately destroyed by an act of revenge on the part of her father.

There is considerable variation in the content of *Ortnit*. Among the 18 manuscripts and early prints, there are at least six distinct versions which differ mainly as to the way in which the story ends. The existence of these different versions or "Fassungen" is a problem in itself, inasmuch as it makes the reconstruction of the archetype virtually impossible, which in turn precludes a critical analysis of the original as such. One solution to this quandary has been simply to accept this variation among the existing versions and to treat each version as a separate work, while acknowledging the subject matter which these versions share (Steer 1979). This is the approach taken in the present article, which concentrates on a specific version, the AW version, so called because it is preserved in manuscripts "A" and "W", the Ambras and Windhagen manuscripts. It is also the fullest version.[1] In all but one manuscript, the Windhagen manuscript, *Ortnit* is followed by one or the other continuations of *Wolfdietrich* (Amelung and Jänicke 1968b, v–viii). Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that it was conceived as a separate work and added to the Wolfdietrich epics only in the thirteenth century (de Boor 1962, p. 206; Hoffmann 1974, p. 133; Dinkelacker 1989, p. 62).

Content Summary

As to the content of the AW version, Ortnit, the king of Lombardy, is persuaded to take a wife. When his counselors cannot suggest a suitable candidate who can be found in his kingdom, Yljas, his uncle, proposes the daughter of Machorel, a sultan in the Levant, who, however, is reputed to kill all suitors for his daughter's hand. All present declare their willingness to invade Machorel's land and abduct his daughter. Because the weather at this time of the year is stormy, the expedition is postponed until the following May. In the meantime, Ortnit, against the advice of his mother (who is unnamed in the poem), undertakes a quest as a knight-errant. During this time, he meets a dwarf, Alberich, who turns out to be his father, and who gives him a suit of armor. Ortnit, having returned from this adventure, sets sail with his allies for the Levant. In a hard-fought campaign, in which he is victorious only because of Alberich's help, he takes possession of Machorel's daughter, marries her, and returns with her to Lombardy.

The royal couple go directly to Garte, where they live happily for six years, until one day a hunter brings them two large eggs, which are a gift from the young queen's father. When these eggs hatch, dragons emerge, which devastate the realm. After a long conversation between Ortnit and his wife, Ortnit goes forth to rid the country of them. In the end, he is killed by the one that is attacking his lands.

[1] The Ambras manuscript is Ser. nova 2663, the Windhagen manuscript Cod. 2779, both in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna. The edition used as the basis for this article is that of Amelung and Jänicke (1968b, III, 3–77). A detailed description of the other manuscripts and texts can be found in Heinzle (1978, pp. 308–313), Firestone (1982, 129n1), and Kofler (2001, 7ff).

Dietrichs Flucht

It has long been recognized that, in addition to the texts referred to above, there is another version of the Ortnit story consisting of about 280 lines which is embedded in the epic known as *Dietrichs Flucht* (Martin 1967, p. 55–215, ll. 2001–2279; Lienert and Beck 2003, p. 65–73, ll. 2001–2291). As this is the point of departure for this investigation, a synopsis of that text is in order.

Preliminary history (ll. 2001 ff.). Sigeher, a "künec von Rœmisch lant", has a son Otnît (this is the spelling in the DF [=*Dietrichs Flucht*] version) and a daughter Sigelint. The daughter marries king Sigemunt, and they move to the Niderlande. Their child is Sîvrit, who is murdered by Hagene von Tronege. After the death of Sigemunt, Otnît inherits his father's lands.

The bride-quest (ll. 2100 ff.). Otnît was an outstanding man as knight and king, but was unmarried. His retainers advised him to take a wife, and he agreed. They propose that he seek the hand of Liebgart, the daughter of Gôdîân, who lives in a "lant über mer". However, Gôdîân has the practice of killing any suitor for Liebgart. This does not deter Otnît, and he resolves to win Liebgart.

Capture of the bride (ll. 2163 ff.). Otnît invades the "lant über mer". At first, Gôdîân cannot understand why Otnît's forces are devastating his land. Finally, ambassadors inform him of Otnît's desire to have Liebgart. Enraged, he rejects the request. He fiercely defends his land, but in the end is forced to yield, and allows Otnît to marry Liebgart.

Gôdîân's revenge (ll. 2220 ff.). To avenge this deed, Gôdîân secretly sends "vier wilde würme" to Garte in Lombardy. Otnît goes out to kill them, but falls asleep. One of the dragons seizes him, drags him into its cave, where the other ones devour him. The land is in mourning. Liebgart vows to marry the man who slays the dragon. Many try, but are killed. Finally, Wolfdietrich appears. He slays the dragon and marries Liebgart.

As this synopsis shows, the plot essentially consists of two parts: a completed bride-quest followed by a scheme of revenge. In comparing the series of events above to those in AW, it is instructive to note those that the DF version does not have:

there is no mention of Otnît's mother, the queen;
there is no mention of Yljas, her brother and Ortnit's uncle;
there is no mention of Alberich, Ortnit's father;
there is no mention of the armor;
there is no mention of Otnît's knight-errantry;
there is no elaborate description of the military operations necessary to seize the daughter Liebgart;
there is no discussion between Ortnit and his wife about the need to go forth to kill the dragon;
and while Ortnit asks his wife to marry only someone who can kill the dragon, there is no mention of Wolfdietrich.

The first thesis of this article is that the DF version is an early form of the story which closely resembles an even earlier version, no longer extant, from which both

it and the AW version are derived. The existence of this version can be inferred from the fact that the names of the sultan and his daughter are Gôdiân and Liebgart in DF and in *Wolfdietrich* A and B, as well as in the version in the late fifteenth-century Piaristenhandschrift, Cvp. 15478 (Lunzer 1906). The name of the sultan is Machorel in AW, and while the name of his daughter is not given in AW, she is named Sidrat in Wolfdietrich D, which is a continuation of Ortnit (Amelung and Jänicke 1968a, 14ff.).

The elements listed above were added to this earlier source by a later redactor to form the version of *Ortnit* which we find in the Ambras and Windhagen manuscripts. As to the differences between the earlier version represented by DF and that in AW, the main additions are three in number: details taken from the events of one of the crusades; the circumstances involving Ortnit's mother and her brother Yljas; and the figure of Alberich.

The Levant in the 13th Century

It was Müllenhoff who recognized very early that the Ortnit's invasion of the Levant and the attack on Montabûr was based on Crusader activities in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, probably the unnumbered crusade of 1217, but before the attack of Frederick II in 1228–1229.[2] Müllenhoff's findings are considered to be still valid, and require no further consideration here (Hoffmann 1974, p. 137).

Matriarchy

The most important modification introduced by the unknown redactor was to superimpose a matriarchal social structure onto the earlier work, the structure of which was originally essentially patriarchal. The three characters introduced in connection with this structure are Yljas, Ortnit's mother, and Alberich.

The two social structures of patriarchy and matriarchy are based on the interaction of two kinds of groups in human society: the kinship group and the corporate group. The kinship group is derived from the relation of parent and child. Though based on human reproduction, a kinship group may in one culture include only the parents and the children of those parents; in another, it may include blood relatives with a common ancestor as remote as five generations in the past—in effect a tribe or clan. The purpose of the corporate group is also determined by the culture in which it is lodged. The corporate group, however, is defined not by kinship, but by task: the task may be participation in a religious cult, or it may be a hunting party. Essential to its identity are, first, a common purpose, and second, a leader.

In the form of family structure called patriarchy, the man controls property, including wife and children; his role also includes conduct of the affairs of state,

[2] Originally published as "Zur Geschichte der Nibelunge Not," in the Allgemeine Monatsschrift für Wissenschaft und Literatur (1854); relevant passages are cited in Amelung and Jänicke (1968b, xxv ff.).

including war. In a matriarchy, it is the woman who controls property with the help of her male relatives; the role of the man is limited to reproduction and the conduct of affairs of state, including war. In a patriarchal social structure, the kinship group ("the royal family") and the corporate group ("supervisors of affairs of state") are closely aligned, if not identical. In a matriarchal social structure, the kinship group is headed by the queen, whereas the corporate group, responsible for affairs of state, is the province of male relatives, usually the queen's brother.

As generations follow upon one another, in a patriarchy it is the son of the male ruler who succeeds his father. In some cultures, primogeniture may obtain, in others, partible inheritance. The young prince normally takes a wife from outside the kinship group (exogamy). In a matriarchy, it is often the daughter of the queen who succeeds to her mother's position, and she will also accept a consort from outside the family group. Her male offspring are expected to find positions elsewhere, often as a consort in another matriarchal structure.[3]

In DF, the patriarchal system dominated: when Ortnit's father died, Ortnit succeeded effortlessly to his father's position ("Otnîden dem wart âne wer allez sînes vater lant" [Martin 1867, p. 88, ll. 2070f.]). In the revision of DF which resulted in the AW version, however, a matriarchal structure was superimposed on the patriarchal structure in DF. But the displacement was not complete. As a result, these two systems are in conflict. As in DF, Ortnit is described at the beginning of AW, too, in unmistakable terms as king in his country:

3 Ez wuohs in Lamparten	ein gewalteger künic rîch,
dem was bi den zîten	dehein künec gelîch
über elliu lant ze Walhen.	daz bezeichente daz,
die wîle und daz er lebte	daz er gewalticlichen saz.
4 Si muosten alle fürhten	den künec und ouch sîn her.
diu lant het er betwungen	von dem birge unz an daz mer:
den zins si im muosten bringen	die bî im sâzen dô,
die muosten alle fürhten	sîn gebot und ouch sîn drô.

However, the time comes to seek a bride. At first, his advisers are unable to identify a candidate, but finally "von den Riuzen der künic Yljas" can do so. Yljas is mentioned in Chap. 25 of *Thidreks saga* as the third, but illegitimate son of King Hertnid, though his ultimate origins are in Russia (van der Lee 1957, pp. 173–175; Haymes 1988, p. 24; Dinkelacker 1989, p. 82).

Yljas

The conflicting social structures are reflected most clearly in the person of Yljas. He is described as "nâch Ortnîden der tiweriste" (str. 11); he is also Ortnit's mother's brother. But Yljas's actions are inconsistent, as they reflect the conflict between the

[3] . This is a simplified version of the system of social relations sketched by Schneider, modified so as to be applicable to the content of *Ortnit* (1961, p. 1–29). In the description of other societies, more specific concepts such as matrilocality and matrilineality may be appropriate, but these distinctions are not applicable to the circumstances presented in *Ortnit*.

patriarchal and the matriarchal structures. No sooner has he proposed the daughter of Machorel, a sultan of a kingdom in the Levant, as a suitable bride than he has second thoughts:

17 Dô sprach der künic von Riuzen	'nu sî ez gote gekleit,
daz ich dir disiu mære	hiute hân geseit,
diu nâch dînem tôde	dir ûf erstanden sint.
ich widerriete ez gerne:	dû bist mîner swester kint.'

The first three lines are not entirely clear, but they seem to foretell Ortnit's fate: "May it be lamented to God that I have told you these things today, which will have an effect in connection with you after your death". This prediction carries the further implication that there is a preternatural level of causality that also affects the events and circumstances in the work. The last line expresses Yljas's ambivalent position with regard to the bride-quest: "I would like to advise against it: you are my sister's child". On the one hand, he owes fealty to his liege-lord Ortnit. On the other, he is the queen's brother, and as such presumably has a measure of loyalty toward her. Ortnit, in his role in the patriarchal structure as king, requires an heir, and Yljas has proposed a candidate for the position of queen. But if Ortnit's bride-quest is successful, and if the marriage produces a son, then that son would succeed to his father's position and take Ortnit's place as king—in effect, a restoration of the patriarchal structure. This would jeopardize the position of Yljas's sister, the queen and Ortnit's mother, and could eventually displace Yljas, thus undermining the controlling position of brother and sister which is the basis of the matriarchal structure.

Yljas's ambivalent position as he tries to straddle the imperatives of the two structures is further revealed in his explanation of Machorel's motives. After informing Ortnit that Machorel has the custom of displaying the heads of suitors for his daughter's hand on the battlements of his castle, Ortnit asks him for the reason for this practice. Yljas says that Machorel has resolved to do something that he ought to be ashamed of, namely, that he would like his wife to die so that he could make his daughter his wife ("'er hat im für gesetzet, des er sich solde schemen: swenn im die muoter stirbet, sô wil er die tohter nemen. er sæhe gerne tôten der frouwen muoter lîp, durch daz sîn schœne tohter wurd sîn liebez wîp'" [str. 21, 3–4; 22, 1–2]).

When Ortnit hears this, he immediately declares that God should not permit this, and that he will never rest until she becomes his consort ("'daz sol im got verbieten' sprach der künec Ortnît. 'ich geruowe nimmer, unz si mir nâhen lît'" [str. 22,3–4]) Yljas then gives an equivocal response: "Since you have set your mind on it, it will be a day of judgment for many a Lombard, but I will help you as best I can" ("'sit du dîn gemüete dar an gewendet hâs, vil manegem Lamparten wirt diu reise ein suontac, iedoch wil ich dir helfen sô ich aller beste mac'" [str. 23, 2–4]).

It is fair to ask whether Yljas's accusation is true. Since Machorel's daughter later makes every effort to save her father's life, either he has no such intentions, or if he does, she has no knowledge of them. Furthermore, she consents to marry Ortnit only on the condition that her father's life be spared (str. 413). Whatever his motive,

it was Yljas's representation of Machorel's intention that provoked Ortnit's precipitous reaction, though Yljas implies that it is Ortnit's own decision.

The ambiguous relationship of uncle and nephew here also comes out in another passage in which the leaders of the expedition have to be appointed. Ortnit in effect makes Yljas his second in command:

54 'Œheim unde hêrre'	sprach der künec Yljas,
'sint du von starkem guote	die grôzen kraft hâs
und ouch sô rîche wirde,	nu kius dir einen man,
der dir gerâten kunne:	an wen wilt du dich lân?'
55 Dô sprach der Lamparte	'ich bin dîner swester kint.
sît daz die fürsten alle	in unserm gwalte sint,
ich wil dich ze vater kiesen:	du bist der vater mîn.
die liute und ouch mich selben	enphilhe ich ûf die triuwe dîn.'

The terms with which Yljas addresses Ortnit—"œheim unde hêrre"—refer explicitly to his double role, i.e., as kinsman and as liege-lord. Ortnit and his uncle already share in the exercise of state authority ("sît daz die fürsten alle in unserm gwalte sint").[4] But Ortnit now abdicates his position as liege-lord in basing his decision to appoint Yljas as his chief advisor, not on his role as king, but on his kinship with his uncle ("ich bin dîner swester kint"). The last two lines also underscore both Yljas's new leadership role as a surrogate father in a patriarchal structure as well as his role as Ortnit's uncle in the matriarchal social structure. What Ortnit is saying here is: "I am selecting you to play the advisory role which a father in a patriarchal structure normally plays. I and my supporters will rely on you as a trusted advisor." As brother of the matriarch, Yljas ought to assume the traditional role in a matriarchal structure of the benevolent uncle and mentor of his nephew. But in fact, Ortnit has conferred upon him the place of Ortnit's own biological father, which in turn reduces Ortnit's role to that of the dependent son.

These shifting roles also lie behind one of the most important passages in the text: the thirteen strophes which open the second adventure (pp. 12ff.). The fact that they are not in proper order is one indication that this is the point at which the matriarchy component was inserted into the original version of *Ortnit*. The first three strophes (73–75) follow upon the preparations for the bride-quest in the previous section. They describe Ortnit's dream and his desire to engage in knight-errantry, though at this point he has no idea where this will take him. In the second sequence of strophes, Ortnit's mother gives him the ring which will ultimately lead him to the person of Alberich. The strophes in question, rearranged so as to reflect these considerations, are below:[5]

73 Dô sprach der Lamparte	'mir ist ein troum bekant.
vil lieber kameræ re,	nu brinc mir mîn sturmgewant.'

[4] The relationship between the mother's brother and the sister's son is normally expressed as *oeheim* 'uncle' and *neve* 'nephew'. However, the use of *oeheim* in both senses occurs in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Jones 1990, p. 155).

[5] A similar rearrangement of this group of strophes was proposed by Jänicke (Amelung and Jänicke 1968a, p. 243).

dô sprach mit klagenden worten daz minniclîche wîp
'sun, du geruowest nimmer, dune verliesest dînen lîp.'

(Ortnit's dream, coming as it does so suddenly, is an act of self-assertion and a reaction to his subordination to Yljas. Because he calls for his armor, his mother knows what he has in mind, and tries to dissuade him from it.)

74 Do sprach der Lamparte 'frowe unde muoter mîn,
ein man mac ouch nimmer ân ungelücke sîn.
dem ich mich bevilhe, der muoz mich bewarn.
ich hân geruowet lange, ich wil aber irre varn.

(He accuses himself here and in the next strophe of the sin of "verligen", of failing to live up to the duties of a knight.)

75 'Ich hân nâch âventiure nu lange niht geriten.
muoter unde frouwe, du solt mir guotes biten.
wan ich dich nie erzurnde: des ich geloubic bin,
und werest du mir die reise, sô wil ich doch dâ hin.'

(He supports his request by pointing out that he has never given her cause to be angry with him—the verb "erzürnen" will appear in his conversation with Alberich later on. But he adds that he intends to go on this adventure, regardless of her wishes in the matter.)

76 Dô sprach diu frouwe in zühten 'du bist mîn liebez kint,
sît alle mîne mâge an dich gedigen sint
und ouch an mînen bruoder, dînen œheim Yljas,
den künic von wilden Riuzen, der dir ie getriuwe was.'

(Störmer-Caysa sees this passage as evidence for an incestuous relationship between mother and son (1999, p. 291). It is true that there is a close relationship between Ortnit and his mother, but the statement "du bist mîn liebez kint" seems rather only to express normal maternal affection and to strengthen her argument by assuring him that she is motivated only by her concern for her son's safety. In this regard, she also emphasizes the concern of Ortnit's uncle Yljas, the uncle–nephew relationship being one of the main features of the matriarchal social structure (Farnsworth 1913, p. 198).

70 Mit zühten sprach sîn muoter, daz minneclîche wîp
'du wilt in grôze sorge bringen dînen lîp.
du soldest billîche haben dîner friunde rât.
ez ergêt vil selten ebene, swas man âne rât begât.'

(She urges him to consult with his associates. This would, of course, encroach on Ortnit's prerogative to determine his own course of action, as consultation involves shared decision-making and hence potentially a dilution of authority.)

71 'Muoter unde frouwe' sprach der künec Ortnît,
'du solt mir niht weren den willen noch den strît.

swaz du mir gebiutest, frouwe, daz geschiht:
hiet aber ich tûsent muoter, durch die belibe ich niht.'

(Ortnit acknowledges his mother's authority, but will not submit to it.)

72 'Ich sulz niht widerrâten' sprach diu künigin
'vater unde hêrre, man unde kindelîn,
sît dichs sô sêre lustet, sô wil ich dirz niht wern.
nu müeze dir gelücke und sælde got dar beschern.'

(Ortnit's mother, sensing his determination, withdraws her objections. She addresses him, using the four nouns in str. 72,2 to describe the various roles which Ortnit will play: (1) a father, at least potentially, in light of the bride-quest in preparation; (2) his role as liege-lord; (3) man = liege-man; (4) a child. It is noteworthy that they are polarities: "vater" vs. "kindelîn" and "hêrre" vs. "man". The Frankfurt manuscript (Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek, MS. Carm. 2) omits the third term; it reads: "vatter vnd herre vnd och sun min" (Kofler 2001, p. 63).)

77 'Bringt mir mîne ringe' sô sprach der helt balt,
'ich muoz nâch âventiure rîten in den walt.
mir ist mîn muot sô ringe, mir gelinget lîhte wol.
der biderbe an allen dingen sîn heil versuochen sol.'

(This is Ortnit's final word on the subject.)

78 Dô sprach sîn liebiu muoter 'du wilt in sorgen leben,
und suochest âventiure. ich wil dir mîn stiure geben.
daz du mir immer mêre muost deste holder sîn,
swenn du von mir rîtest, sô gibe ich dir daz vingerlîn.'

(At this point, his mother abandons all resistance, and the conversation shifts from the mother's concern about the dangers of knight-errantry to the encounter with Alberich which is to follow. Now she agrees to help him. She gives him the ring so that he may remain all the more well-disposed toward her. The word "holt" and its nominal counterpart "hulde" normally express a feudal obligation, and do not have an erotic association here.)

80 Alsô der Lamparte daz vingerlîn ersach,
er schouwetz flîziclîchen, er lachete unde sprach
'nu weste ich harte gerne, vil liebiu muoter mîn,
wâ von sô liep dir wære ditz kleine vingerlîn?'

81 'Daz vingerlîn ist rîche, und dunct dich nihtes wert.
du suochest âventiure: sît des dîn herze hert,
wil du in die wilde rîten, sô lâz es von dir niht.
du vindest âventiure, von dem steine daz geschiht.

82 Du solt mir daz gelouben, ditz selber vingerlîn,
daz du daz niht engæbest, ob diu rîche wæren dîn.
das golt hât nutzes kleine, der stein ist aber sô starc:
ez frumt dir an disem jâre über fünfzic tûsent marc.'

(As to the order of strophes, the promise never to give the ring away makes no sense until his mother imposes this stipulation on him.)

79 ‘Muoter unde frouwe, ich swer dir einen eit,
daz ich ez niemen gibe, ist es dir anders leit.’
‘sun unde hêrre, nu habe dir daz golt:
und gîst duz aber iemen, ich wird dir nimmer holt.’

At this point, she gives him the mysterious ring which, as she knows and as Ortnit does not yet know, will take him to where he will find his father, Alberich. The ring is thus a symbol of the transfer of control from the mother to the hitherto absent father. In a matriarchy, the father is either absent or plays a limited role. When the son comes of age, however, it is necessary to transfer the responsibility for the further education of the son to his father. This includes instruction in warfare and providing the equipment for this activity.

Alberich

Ortnit encounters Alberich sleeping on the ground. Although he is as small as a child, he is very strong. After a violent struggle, Alberich offers to give Ortnit a fine suit of armor. He then asks to examine the ring. When Ortnit gives it to him, Alberich disappears. After an exchange, he returns the ring to Ortnit under the condition that Ortnit will not be angry (“erzürnen”) with his mother if he tells him something. He then reveals to Ortnit that his parents were unable to have a child, and that he, Alberich, is his father. He gives Ortnit the suit of armor, which fits as though it were designed for him. The sword already has his name on its blade—again an indication of the preternatural agenda. He also says that he will come to Ortnit’s aid whenever he needs him.[6] Ortnit rides away, but is disappointed that he can find no one to fight with. He decides to return to Garte and, concealing his identity, to challenge the watchmen on duty there. He does so, eventually revealing who he is, and is reconciled with his mother, who confirms Alberich’s account of his parentage (str. 213–214).

The figure of Alberich is not intrinsic, either to the story of Ortnit or to the motif of matriarchy into which it has been inserted. Alberich himself is a composite figure. Originally he appears as a contestant for one of the early Merovingian kingships which preceded the consolidation of the Frankish kingdom under Clovis/Chlodovech. He is described in, among other places, a chronicle of one Hugo of Toul, which has been lost, but which has been preserved in part in the sixteenth-century history of Hainault by the Belgian chronicler Jacques Guyse. Engaged in constant warfare with his relative or brother Meroveus, Alberich showed himself to be so clever in evading

[6] The notion that Alberich is an incubus-figure, i.e., a sexually driven demon, as Gottzmann (1987, p. 171) and Schmid-Cadalbert (1985, p. 208) have suggested, is an inference from this single act, and is otherwise inconsistent with Alberich’s nature. As to the attributes of an incubus, cf. Rühle (1932, vol. 4, col. 695).

all of the traps set for him by Meroveus and his followers that they attributed magic powers to him (Guyse 1826–1838, VII, 336). At some point in his development, Alberich assumes many of the characteristics of the Germanic smith. The common element was probably the possession of esoteric knowledge. Of the various features associated with the smith are, first of all, his size—Alberich has the physique of a child. Second, like most dwarfs, he is at home in the earth and in mountain caves: the word "steinwant" appears in many places in association with him. Third, he is skilled in metal-working, in this case, in the manufacture of fine suits of armor. There is an allusion to the smith's craft when Alberich retreats into the mountain to bring out Ortnit's armor: "da truoc er von der esse daz wunneclîche werc" (str. 176,2). The "esse" here is the furnace used by the smith in the smelting of metal. The source for this feature is once again *Thidreks saga*: in Chap. 167, Mimir gives Sigurd (=Sîvrit) the helmet, shield, and byrnie that he made for Hertnid in Holmgard (=Ortnit in Garte) (Haymes 1988, p. 107).

The motif of the substitute father recalls a similar episode in *Thidreks saga*: Chap. 169 tells of a king named Aldrian who ruled over Niflungaland. He was a powerful man and his wife was the daughter of a powerful king. It happened one time, when she was drunk with wine and when the king was not at home in his kingdom, that she fell asleep in a garden outdoors and there came a man and he lay with her. When she awakened she thought she recognized King Aldrian, but before she was completely awake, the man disappeared. When some time had passed, the queen was pregnant. Before she gave birth, it happened that she was standing alone and the same man came to her and told her what had happened the first time they had met. He told that she was pregnant and that the child was his.

He said that he was an elf. "If that child should grow up, tell him about his paternity, but keep it secret from everyone else. It will be a boy, as I can already tell, and he will be a great man. He will often be in great danger and whenever he stands in such danger and cannot save himself, he should call on his father, and I will be there when I am needed." The elf then disappeared like a shadow (Haymes 1988, p. 110).

Sources

The matriarchal structure superimposed on the earlier version of Ortnit in DF has been populated with three figures, all from sources which have passed into *Thidreks saga*: Yljas, the queen, and Alberich. This raises the further question as to where the matriarchal structure comes from into which they have been placed. To begin with, there is evidence for this feature in the earliest known phases of Germanic society in an often-quoted passage from Tacitus, in which the relation between the sister's son and her brother is balanced by that between father and son, much as in *Ortnit*:

Tacitus, Germania, 20: "Sororum filiis idem apud avunculum, qui apud patrem, honor.Quidam sanctiorem arctioremque hunc nexum sanguinis arbitrantur, et in accipiendis obsidibus magis exigunt, tamquam ii et animum firmius et domum latius teneant. Heredes tamen successoresque sui cuique liberi; et nullum testamentum." (Much 1959, p. 206).

'A sister's sons are considered to be related to her brothers as nearly as to their own father. Some tribes even esteem the former tie to be the closer and more sacred of the two, and they tend to require it in exacting hostages, as appealing more strongly to the feelings and giving a wider hold upon the family. Nevertheless a man's own children are his heirs and successors, and there is no power of bequest' (Aron 1920, p. 5).

The reason for importance of the mother's brother lay in the uncertain circumstances of the time. Men at this time were mainly warriors, and the mortality rate in this occupation was relatively high. What this meant was that a woman frequently found herself solely responsible for minor children, and if she remarried, for children of more than one husband. In the absence of her husband, her brother was often the only male family member to whom she could turn for protection (Dargun 1883, p. 59).

While this custom is found elsewhere in medieval German literature, the main influence on *Ortnit* probably comes from France (Schneider 1913, p. 276, 302; Bell 1922, p. 90, 105, 114). In the literature of that country in the Middle Ages, there is a highly developed repertoire of motifs accompanying the relationships of uncle and nephew, on the one hand, and father and son, on the other. The tendency in the Old French chansons de geste is to minimize the intimacy between father and son, while exalting that between uncle and nephew; in the latter case the closest solidarity is almost the invariable rule, while for the most part the attitude of the father, when the poet goes into the subject at all, is one of severity and injustice, breeding dissension and disruption of the family relations. An extreme example is Guillaume d'Orange in the cycle of chansons de geste in which he is a central character: he has no sons of his own, but has great affection for his nephews Bertrand, Guielin, and Vivien (Ferrante 1974, p. 41). In *Ortnit*, this contrast is particularly apparent in the tone of disapproval on Alberich's part when Ortnit encounters him on his way to confront the dragons.

The Dragons

Upon Ortnit's return to Garte after the first encounter with Alberich, the expedition to capture Machorel's daughter gets under way. The invasion is ultimately successful, and Machorel's daughter is brought back to Italy. The girl is baptized, the marriage is consummated, and the couple settle in Garte, where they rule as king and queen of the land. His mother is still alive, but is mentioned only after Ortnit has died. Yljas does not appear at all. Six years later, a hunter approaches Machorel, and suggests that he send gifts to Ortnit in Lombardy, which will include two large eggs. When these hatch, dragons will emerge which will devastate the land and ultimately kill Ortnit. While there were two eggs, there is only one dragon that is menacing Garte (str. 521,1). This account is similar to the one in Chap. 417 of *Thidreks saga* (Haymes 1988, p. 253).

The saga (Chap. 417) tells how King Hertnid [=Ortnit!] of Bergara [=Bergamo, near Garda], a great warrior, was such a powerful man that he did not want any kind of companions when he went to hunt animals. He had heard that there was a dragon

lying in a certain forest. It had killed many men and generated a great deal of fear. Hertnid wished to ride alone into the forest and either gain fame or be killed. He rode through the forest a day and a night, and the next day he heard something alive in the woods. When he rode out, a fiend came toward him which challenged him to a great battle. It was a giant serpent, long and stout. It had a great maw and strong legs. King Hertnid rode at the dragon more out of bravery and honor than out of wisdom because this dragon was so strong. As soon as they came together, the dragon took him in its claws and carried him to a deep valley where there was a mountain with a large cave. The dragon had there three young. It cast the king dead before them. They devoured his flesh, but the dragon rooted out the armor from its den.

It was widely told that King Hertnid had ridden out and had not returned. The robbers who lived all around Hunland heard about this. They gathered a large army of robbers so that there were three thousand of them and they went to King Hertnid's castle and wanted to steal money since the kingdom there was kingless. In the following chapter, 418, King Thidrek (=[Wolf-]dietrich!) appears and defeats the dragon.[7] While the postulated Low German texts linking these two accounts are no longer extant, the similarity between the account in DF and that in *Thidreks saga* suffices to demonstrate their common origin.

When the condition in the land around Garte becomes desperate, Ortnit realizes that he has no alternative: he must slay the dragon. He engages in a long colloquy with his wife, which, with its mutual recriminations and reconciliations (str. 527ff.) is poignant even for the modern reader: for example, he tells his wife in a passing moment of anger that he wishes he had never seen her, whereupon the poet comments that he heard her heart break in her body ("'Nu müeze ez got erbarmen daz ich dich ie gesach.' ir herze hôrte er krachen, dazz in ir lîbe brach" [str. 541,12]). He considers the possibilities which lie before him (str. 524ff.). He is concerned about his wife: while Ortnit is alive, she is the queen, the counterpart to him as king—a patriarchal role. If he dies, her position will be untenable, as she no longer has any kinsmen to whom she can turn ("vlius ich dich alters einen, sô hân ich nieman mêr. alle mîne mâge liez ich, hêr, durch dich" [str. 530,2–3])—a remnant of the matriarchal structure. Moreover, after Ortnit's death, the Lombards would urge her to take a husband who would conduct the affairs of state ("si wolden si des twingen daz si næme einen man, dâ von beruochet wæren ir liute und ouch ir lant, an dem daz künicrîche wære wol bewant" [str. 587,4–588,2])—also a responsibility of a queen in a matriarchal social structure. Now, however, before Ortnit departs, they agree that she should marry only the man who could destroy the dragons. That champion would, of course, be Wolfdietrich, the hero of the subsequent epic.

Up to this point, Ortnit has had no further contact with Alberich, but has exercised his patriarchal authority independently as king. When he goes forth to confront the dragon, he fails to take the ring which would summon Alberich. He then realizes the daunting challenge he faces in confronting the dragon, and knows

[7] This description of the content has been paraphrased slightly from the translation by Haymes (1988, pp. 253–254).

that he will need Alberich's help. He returns to get the ring, in so doing resuming his former role in the matriarchal social structure as nephew of his uncle Yljas, but more importantly as the protected son of his father Alberich. When he has the ring, he sets out again. He encounters Alberich again under the linden tree, but Alberich is angry because Ortnit did not consult him before undertaking this task ("Wil du mit im [the dragon] vechten, das tuost ân mînen rât" [str, 557,1]). But Ortnit had already come to the conclusion the dragon had to be destroyed ("ich muoz uns von im [the dragon] lœsen" [str. 523,4]), and he tells Alberich that he has already resolved to do so ("ich hân michs an genomen" [str. 557,3]). He has acted on his own initiative—patriarchally—as king. Alberich distances himself from Ortnit and his fate, saying that he will soon find out what God has in store for him ("du wirst sîn wol inne was dir got hât dâ beschert" [str. 558,4]). But he does offer the consolation that Ortnit can succeed in slaying the dragon, provided he does not fall asleep. Though Alberich is concerned, the words exchanged at Ortnit's departure are cold and unemotional:

560,3 [Alberich:] 'got müeze dich gesegenen.	gip mir mîn vingerlîn.
gesent dich got her widere,	sô ist ez aver dîn.'
561 Im warf der Lamparte	das vingerl ûf das gras.
Alberîches herze	von der reise betrüebet was.
er sprach: 'zuo solhen dingen	hœrt michel arbeit.'
'got gesegen dich' sprach der grôze;	von dem kleinen er dô reit.

When Ortnit's mother first gave the ring to Alberich, she stipulated (str. 79,3–4) that, if he should ever give it to another, she would no longer be "holt" or well inclined toward him, i.e., it is not only a symbol of her affection for her son, but also of his inclusion in the matriarchal social structure, and by virtue of its power he can call upon his father Alberich for his help whenever it is needed ("'du solt mich nu niht mîden, als du bedurfest mîn: du maht mich nimmer vliesen, hast du daz vingerlîn'" [str. 189,3–4]). Thus, when Alberich asks Ortnit for the ring, it is a sign that he believes that Ortnit has withdrawn from the matriarchal social structure, and has assumed the independent patriarchal responsibility of ridding his land of the dragon. If he succeeds, Alberich holds out the possibility that the relationship can be restored. Ortnit, in effect, dismisses the offer. And he is ultimately killed by the dragon.

Conclusion

It remains only to offer a justification for the title of this article: the failure of patriarchy. As noted above, the original version of the Ortnit epic in *Dietrichs Flucht* was a straightforward bride-quest followed by a somewhat unusual means of revenge—the dragons—culminating in the death of Otnît. The redactor of the version in AW added new characters—Yljas, his sister, and Alberich—and placed them in a matriarchal social structure. This implantation was not carried through consistently, as the ambivalent actions of Yljas show. When Ortnit succeeded in

asserting his independence by winning the bride-quest and assuming the position of king of Lombardy, he removed himself from the matriarchal social structure and the support it offered, and resumed his patriarchal authority. Confronted by the menace to his kingdom from the dragon, he found himself unable to fully meet the responsibilities of a king to protect his land and people, and when for this purpose he sought the help of the matriarchal social structure in the form of Alberich's powers, he was rebuffed. In revising the earlier version, the redactor of AW reinterpreted Ortnit's death so as to result, not simply from Gôdîân's revenge for the abduction of his daughter as in DF, but rather from Ortnit's rejection by the matriarchal social structure in the person of Alberich, which in turn made it impossible for him to carry out his role in a patriarchal social structure as king. It is in this sense that Ortnit's demise is the result of the failure of patriarchy.

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