

Prophetic Ragnarssons: Strange Births and Childhoods in Indo-European Mythology

The strange births of Ivar the “Boneless” and Sigurd “Snake-in-the-eye” to Aslaug and Ragnar from the *Saga of Ragnar Lothbrok* exemplify prophetic and deformed births of mythological figures throughout the ancient and medieval worlds. Both sons are cursed from birth, but also blessed. Aslaug’s affinity for prophesy and level-headed wisdom combined with Ragnar’s strength of arms and quickness of wit produce two children who both have deformities but also prove to be formidable warriors and leaders in the saga (Crawford, 2017). Both sons share their parents’ formidable powers of the mind and body. Ivar, though lacking the use of his “boneless” legs, proves to be both an able military commander and bowman, while Sigurd at the age of three has the wisdom to assess complex situations as well as the prophetic powers of his mother. From Ragnar and Aslaug’s first meeting, themes of prophesy and predilection pervade the saga narrative. By comparing these two heroes with other mythological tales of deformity and abnormal childhood, such as the Greek god Hephaestus, the handicapped Argonaut Palaimonios, and the Irish hero Cian, I will show how the corresponding connections of many ancient and medieval myths apply to the bond between birth, deformity, and wisdom of both the magical and mundane kinds. By investigating this specific episode from the Norse sagas, the attitude of ancient Scandinavians toward children of unusual talents becomes illuminated, as well as the multitude of similarities across Indo-European mythology.

Bibliography

Crawford, Jackson. *The Saga of the Volsungs: With the Saga of Ragnar Lothbrok*. Hackett Publishing, 2017.