CHAPTER 13

The Arenas for Royal Funeral Feasts and Inauguration Rituals

As noticed in the introduction to this book, some traditions in Old Norse sources refer to the funeral feast, often called erfi (n) ‘funeral feast, heir, inheritance’ (cf. ON arfr m, arfi m, erfa vb). During this type of feasts ritual drinking was often performed. It seems as if these feasts took place in all three investigation areas. In the Old Norse prose texts there are also some traditions referring to performative rituals executed at such feasts, which seem to have been more exclusive for kings and earls in Sveitjód, Norway and Denmark. One of them is the royal funeral feast. In Ynglinga saga Snorri describes such ceremonies in general terms. These rituals also included an inauguration of the new king. Since these performative rituals took place in a hall, close to the high-seat, they are also relevant in this study, as they can clearly be conceived as a ritual strategy for gaining authority and legitimacy. Closely related to these rituals is the royal custom of sitting on a (grave) mound (sitja á haugi) mentioned in the Norse sources.

13.1 King Ónundr’s Funeral Feast

In Ynglinga saga 36 Snorri tells the story of King Ingjaldr and the funeral feast he gave for his father King Ónundr at Uppsala:

King Ingjaldr had a great banquet prepared at Uppsala for the purpose of honouring King Ónundr, his father, with a funeral feast (erfi). He had

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2 This is a revised version of the chapter “The ruler’s funeral feast (erfi)” in my dissertation, Sundqvist 2002.
made ready a hall in no wise smaller or less stately than [the hall] *Uppsalr*, which he called the Hall of Seven Kings (*sjau konunga sal*). In it were erected seven high-seats. King Ingjaldr sent messengers through all of Svetjud, inviting kings, earls, and other prominent men. To this funeral feast (*erfí*) came King Algautr, Ingjaldr’s father-in-law, and king Yngvarr of *Fjaðryndaland*, and his two sons, Agnarr and Álfr. Also King Sporsnjallr of *Næríki* and King Sigverkr of *Áttundaland*. Only King Granmarr of *Suðrmannaland* did not come. There, the six kings were assigned seats in the new hall. One high-seat that King Ingjaldr had had erected remained empty. All the host that had come there were given seats in the new hall. But for his bodyguard and all his people King Ingjaldr had made room in the [old hall called] *Uppsalr*. It was custom at that time, when a funeral feast was prepared to honour a [departed] king or earl, that the one who prepared the feast and was to be inducted into the inheritance, was to sit on the step before the high-seat (*á skǫrinni fyrir hásetinu*) until the beaker (*full*) called the *bragafull* was brought in; and then he was to stand up to receive it and make a vow (*strengja heit*), then quaff the beaker, whereupon he was to be inducted in the high-seat (*í háseti*) which his father had occupied. Then he had come into the [rightful] inheritance to succeed him. So was done here; and when the beaker was brought in, King Ingjaldr stood up, seized a large drinking horn (*dýrshorni*), and made the vow that he would increase his dominion to double its size in every direction, or else die. Then he emptied the beaker. Now when everyone was drunk, King Ingjaldr told Fólkviðr and Hulviðr, the sons of Svipdag, to arm themselves and their men when evening approached, as was planned. They went out to the new hall and put it to the torch; the hall blazed up, and the six kings and all their followers were burned [inside]. Those that tried to come out were quickly cut down. Thereupon King Ingjaldr took possession of all realms these kings had ruled, and levied tribute on them.³