

Grottasongr

The Song of the Mill

From *Norse Poems*

Translated by W.H. Auden and P. B. Taylor

1. Now are come to the palace the foreknowing pair,
Fenja and Menja;
They are at Frode's, the son of Fridleif, mighty maidens
Held as helots.
2. Forth to the mill bench were they brought
To set the grey stone in motion;
He gave them no rest nor peace,
Attentive to the creak of the mill.
3. Their song was a howl,
Shattering silence;
"Lower the bin and lighten the stones!"
Yet he would have them grind more.
4. They sang as they swung and spun the stone
While most of the men were sleeping;
Then sang Menja, her turn at the mill,
The hardminded maid with thunderous voice:
5. Goods we grind Frode, milling out fortune,
Full fare of riches on the mill of delights;
He shall sit upon gold; he shall sleep upon down,
And wake with a will, then is it well ground.
6. Here shall none harm another, nor harbor malice,
Nor bring to bane,
Nor cut with sharp sword, even should he find
His brother's bane bound!
7. The hands stopped, resting; the quern was quiet;
Then called the king his ancient plaint:
Sleep no more than the cock is silent, rest no more
Than the words I speak!
8. Frode, you were not wholly wise, oh, friend of man,
When you bought these thralls;
You chose us for strength and bearing,
Not heeding of what race we are born.
9. Hard was Rungner, hard his father;
Tjasse was greater than both;
Ide and Orner, sires of our race, brothers of mountain giants,
These are our forebears.
10. Grotte had never risen from the grey mountain
Earth's hard bedrock,
Nor would be grinding the mountain-maid,
Did anyone know her kind.
11. Nine winters lasted our playing-time,
Beneath the earth matured our power;
Great works performed we constantly;
We moved the very mountains.
12. From giants' fields we tore out boulders;
So the earth trembled, subsided, and quaked;
We rolled from thence the singing stone,
The heavy slab, for men to take.
13. In the land of Svitjod, foresighted,
We two joined the people;
Hunted bears, broke shields,
Marched through the ranks of grey.
14. We destroyed one prince, supported another,
The good Gothorm we helped with his horde;
No peace there was till we conquered Knue
There we were stopped and captured.
15. Such was our progress in former times,
Well known were we among warriors;

- Then we cut heroes with sharpened spears,
Wounded and reddened with fire.
16. "Now we are come to the house of the king,
In thralldom, with mercy from none;
Grit tears our feet, frost freezes our forms as we turn the peace
mill.
It is dreary at Frode's.
17. Hands shall rest; the stone shall stop;
I have milled my whole life's aim.
Yet the hand may not stay until Frode feels
All has been fully milled.
18. The hands shall hold handles hard, bloodstained weapons.
Wake up, Frode! Wake up, Frode,
If you would hear our songs and our sayings of long ago.
19. Fire I see burning east of the fort;
Call up the couriers, call for the beacons!
A warrior horde shall o'errun this place
And burn the Budlung's (King's) dwelling.
20. You shall not retain the throne of Leidre,
Your redgold rings, or your quern of riches;
Grasp the shaft more firmly, sister!
We are not warmed by the blood of the whale!
21. Surely my father's maid mightily milled,
For she saw many men go to their death;
The mill's great props, though cased in iron,
Burst asunder - yet more we milled.
22. "Yet still more we milled! May Yrsa's son,
Scion of Halfdan, avenge him on Frode;
He may be held her son, and also her brother.
We both know this."
23. The maids they milled with might and main,
Young they were, in giant-wrath;
The rafters quivered, the boom was lowered,
With deafening din the boulder burst.
24. So collapsed the former world.
Chanted the mountain-giant's bride:
"We have ground for you, Frode, as we were forced.
At the quern the women remained till the end!"

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