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# SELECTED NARTÆ TALES

*Translated by Walter MAY*



## HOW XÆMYC'S SON BATRAZ AVENGED HIS FATHER'S DEATH

*Buræfærnyg* had seven sons. And every single day they went to play in the Game Square. One day they were approached from the direction of the Lower estate by a youth with a high forehead and piercing look, who was wearing a tattered grey jacket. He approached them barefoot and said: 'I would carry and fetch your arrows for you all day long, if in the evening, each of you gave me a chance to shoot an arrow'.

'That's settled', they said.

He fetched their arrows the whole day. At dusk, one of the brothers sent his arrow to the Black mountain. That made the Black mountain slip down and split into small peaks. Another one sent his arrow to the White mountain. That made the White mountain collapse and fold. Another one sent his arrow to the ravine, which turned the ravine into hills. Another one sent his arrow to the wood. The wood fell into separate groves. Another one sent his arrow to the Black sea, which caused a turbulent seastorm. *Batraz* went through the places, picked up the arrows and told the brothers:

'Now put your brocade hats in front of me!'

The brocade hats were set out as a target for him. He laid two arrows on the

bow and shot them together. The hats became riddled like leaves of burdock after heavy hail.

'Now put your brocade jackets in front of me!'

They put their brocade jackets in front of him. The jackets were also torn to pieces like clouds of mist.

'Now put your brocade shirts in front of me!'

They put their brocade shirts in front of him. *Batrax* again made a double-arrow shot. And the shirts became rags and the rags were scattered around at the speed of the arrow. The brothers rushed away and ran, in order of age, one after another. *Batrax* had one more arrow left.

'Where are you running, bitch's whelps!'

He shot the arrow at them. The arrow went between their legs and tore the pants of all the seven. They came crying to their mother and father. The father asked:

'What has happened to you? Accursed be the one who did it! Who was he?'

They answered, sobbing:

'We don't know. A youth with a high forehead and piercing look came to us from the Lower estate. All day long day he fetched our arrows for us on the condition that, in the evening, each of us gives him a chance to shoot one arrow. So, in the evening, we gave him a bow and each gave him one arrow, and this is what he has done to us.'

'What, and don't you know who he was?'

'No, we don't', they said.

*Burafærnyg* made inquiries among his neighbors and the villagers, but nobody could tell him anything. Nobody knew. Then *Burafærnyg* prepared food and drinks and invited all the Nartæ to a man for a feast. *Wryrzmæg* was invited to sit at the head of seven rows of tables. They started eating and drinking. When they had drunk enough the *Nartamongæ* cup was brought to them, and they were told:

'Whoever drinks from it, may take it along.'

The cup was brought to *Wryrzmæg*, for he was senior there. *Wryrzmæg* thought:

'If I drink it up, I'll die. If I don't – the ancestors' treasure will be taken away by somebody else.'

And in the cup had been put venomous snakes. There was a falcon which always sat on *Wryrzmæg's* shoulder, and *Wryrzmæg* told him in *Hatiag* language:

'Fly and tell our old woman:

'I have *Nartamongæ* in my hands; if I drink it, I'll die, and if I don't – the ancestors' treasure will be taken away by somebody else.'

The falcon flew off and chirped to *Satana*:

‘This is what *Wyryzmæg* says: ‘I have *Nartamongæ* in my hands; if I drink it, I’ll die, if I don’t – the ancestors’ treasure will be taken away by somebody else.’

*Satana* started crying and said:

‘Is there anybody to be sent to help him? Has he got many brothers?’

And a little boy, *Batraz*, who was busying himself with the cinders by the fire, said:

‘Why are you crying, mum?’

‘Why should I not? Woe is me, to expect anything from anyone like you. Either the *Boratae* will kill your father with a drink, or the ancestors’ treasure will be taken away by somebody else.’

Then *Batraz* spoke like this: ‘I’ll go there.’

‘It would be good, provided that you could do something. Otherwise, you would just spill your blood!’

She shook the cinder off him, wiped his nose, and *Batraz* set out. He arrived at the feast. At the doorway, he shouted and soot flaked off the ceiling in the house. Nobody came to meet him and he shouted a second time – the chain above the hearth and the ceiling girder with a food shelf started swaying. Then the seniors said:

‘Look out! Someone of our folk is calling.’

Revelry was in full swing with the young *Nartæ*, and none of them paid attention to the shout. Then *Batraz* shouted the third time – at once the chain, the ceiling girder and the food shelf under it crashed down in the house. They looked out, and it turned to be snotty *Batraz*, of all people. He was admitted to the house. On seeing *Batraz*, *Wyryzmæg* called:

‘Come here, youth, drink my cup.’

The young one ran up to him, took the cup from *Wyryzmæg*, brought it to his lips and drank it up. Whatever snake would show up, *Batraz* hit it with his sword-steel lips and it disappeared. When he drank the cup to the bottom he shook the snakes out on the table and took *Nartamongæ* with him. But when he was leaving *Buræfærnyg* said to him:

‘Hey, you, old hag’s kid! Whelp of a bitch! It was you who offended our young men recently, wasn’t it?’

‘Yes, ginger jackass, I swear on my father, it was me!’

‘You ought to have pounced upon the one who had chopped off your father’s head with his teeth. It’s nothing to offend children!’

‘I’ll first make smart with you, ginger jackass, and then I’ll deal with him.’

*Batraz* left the place and went to *Satana*. He took a large shovel, heated it in the fire, got *Satana* under him and said:

‘I’ll burn the breasts that nursed me.’

‘What for? Your mother will be your victim.’

‘Why don’t you tell me who killed my father?’

‘May God never forgive him who has urged you on – the time has not yet come for you to avenge your father’s blood. It was celestial *Sainæg* the Prince that killed your father.’

‘Did my father leave no horse. Are there no arms?’ asked *Batraz*.

‘In the cellar his steed is breathing blue flames with his thirst for battle.’

‘And what arms are there left?’

‘They are all safe and intact, emitting blue flames with their thirst for battle.’

At sunrise, *Batraz* took the steed out and washed him. He also took out the arms, cleaned them, put them on, saddled the steed and set off. When they had left the village, the steed spoke:

‘Where are you riding me to, young man? Your father never started a journey without consulting me first.’

‘Ah, good creature of God! It’s so good that you can speak with me. Thank God! Now I don’t have to search for the road my father had taken.’

‘So, where are you going to? Where?’

*Batraz* answered him thus:

‘My father was murdered and wrath has been eating my heart out, since I haven’t avenged his blood.’

‘You are not grown up enough, young man, not clever enough. I am afraid that you might be killed yourself.’

‘There’s no point in discussing it. Just find me the one who killed my father.’

Then the steed said:

‘Listen to this piece of advice. I’ll take you to *Warypp* spring. Every morning your feudee brings his three *Ævsurg* stallions to the water. As he approaches, a strong wind will start to blow. You take a firm hold on me, lest the wind blow you away. He will come nearer and start to scold, but don’t be afraid. ‘Good morning to you, dad!’ you say to him. ‘Don’t scold little children, dad. They are not to be scolded but taught!’ ‘And whose bitch’s whelp are you? Who are you?’ he will ask you. ‘I am someone’s son as well’, you tell him. ‘I’ve come to learn from your wisdom, to understand your power.’ ‘And what do you want from me?’ he will start to ask you. ‘If I could only see some of your good deeds to study. But the main thing that brought me to you is that I don’t have a sword. Nartian blacksmiths are forging one for me, but they don’t know what particular kind to make; and your sword was praised to me, I would like to have a look at it.’ He will reply: ‘Be there as many people left in their families, as many swords like mine they would make!’ Then he will take his sword and stretch it out to you, blade-wise. I’ll get frightened and bolt you along the steppe. You turn me back, lashing me and repeating: ‘Your kin run low, it is high time that you steady up! My horse is still young, it’s fright-

ened by the glitter of your sword. I beg you, hold it out to me with the hilt', you say to him. When he turns the sword with the hilt to you, I'll start doing what I have to!

At sunrise they came to *Warypp* spring. There came such a gust of wind that *Batraz* was nearly carried away but grasped on the steed. And then *Sainæg* the Prince appeared shouting and scolding.

'Who is that? What are you doing on my land?'

'You shouldn't scold children, dad, you really shouldn't. Good morning to you! Children are to be taught and instructed.'

'What do you want? Whose bitch's whelp are you?'

'I've heard a lot of your good deeds; but the main thing is that I don't have a sword. Nartian blacksmiths are forging one for me, but I want them to make it like yours. So I've come to take a look at it, by your leave.'

'Be there as many people left in their families, as many swords like mine they would make!'

He took out his sword and handed it to *Batraz* blade-wise. The steed got frightened and bolted along the steppe. *Batraz* brought him back, lashing him and scolding:

'Your kin run low! Is it not time for you to steady up yet? You aren't always going to stay a foal, are you? Dad, my horse is still young, it's afraid of the glitter of your sword. I beg you, hand it out to me with the hilt.'

*Sainæg* the Prince gave him the sword with the hilt, and the steed did everything that it should be easier for *Batraz* to take it. The young man took the sword and said:

'How well forged this sword is!'

But there was a notch on the blade and *Batraz* asked:

'How did this notch appear on such renowned arm?'

'May he eat the bowels of a jackass! This notch was left by *Xæmyc's* tooth.'

Meanwhile, the steed was doing everything to provide the boy with a more convenient opportunity. The young man said:

'Which side does the Sun rise from in your parts?'

'The Sun? From that one...'

Hardly had *Sainæg* the Prince turned around, when *Batraz* struck him on the neck, and his head rolled to the ground. He took all the three *Ævsurg* stallions with him, cut off *Sainæg* the Prince's hand and took it with him too.

He came to *Satana*, threw the hand in front of her and said:

'Mum! My heart is relieved from its anguish. I have avenged my father's blood.'

'How can I believe you? Maybe you have just cut a hand from some shepherd, some horseherd. I'll find that out now.'

*Satana* ran along low corridors and climbed the tower. It was raining with drops of blood, tufts of hair were descending like flocks of mist – *Sainæg* the Prince's relatives were torturing themselves in grief. His hounds were running astray. *Satana* came back and told *Batraz*:

'May all my toil bring you good, the son not born by me. It's true, you have avenged the father's blood. Now go and, according to the code, take the hand to whom it belongs.'

So *Batraz* took the limb along. On the edge of the village he stuck his spear in the ground and tied his steed to it. He himself took the hand, brought it, put it on the corpse and said:

'Rejoice, your Share-of-earth. You killed my father and I avenged his death. May that not lie as sin upon me!'

The young people said:

'God has brought the murderer to us. Let's kill him!'

Then one of the old men said:

'And where is his horse? Where is it?'

'Yonder, on the edge of the village there is a spear. His horse is tied to it.'

'Go and take the spear out, and take away the horse.'

They went and tried to take the spear out, but they couldn't. They came back and told the old man:

'We can't take out the spear.'

Then the old man said to them:

'Then how are you going to kill the one whose spear you can't take out?'

They didn't dare to touch *Batraz* any more. He left the place, took out his spear, climbed upon the steed and returned home. This is how, according to custom, *Batraz* avenged his father's death.