

Stig Toftgaard Andersen, editor. *Die Aktualität der Saga: Festschrift für Hans Schottmann.* Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 21. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999. 266 pages.

The relevance of the Icelandic sagas to the age in which they were written is a topic of longstanding interest, and—broadly interpreted—it was the subject of a symposium held in 1997 in honor of Professor Hans Schottmann, who had recently retired from his position as director of the Institute for Nordic Philology at Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster. The printed proceedings of this symposium consist of fifteen essays bracketed by a brief biography of Professor Schottmann and a list of his publications. The present review treats the contributions in the order in which they appear in the volume.

In “Zum Wahrheitsbegriff bei Snorri Sturluson” (1–11), **Heinrich Beck** analyzes Snorri Sturluson’s notion of “truth” (*sannendi*) and finds a distinction between historical truth, which is something that can be known and that is based directly or indirectly on the accounts of witnesses, and religious truth, which is a product of faith or belief. A methodological issue underlying Beck’s approach is revealed by his quotation of chap. 54 of the *Gylfaginning*: “Gengr hann þá leið sína braut ok kemr heim í ríki sitt ok segir þau tíðindi er hann hefir sét ok heyrtr. Ok eptir honum sagði hverr maðr qðrum þessar sǫgur” [Then he went on his way and came home to his kingdom and related the events that he had seen and heard about. And each person who heard his account related these stories to others] (8). Beck reads this as a straightforward description of the ability of oral tradition to convey more or less reliably the account of a trustworthy eyewitness, but the same passage is understood by Preben Meulengracht Sørensen to be a piece of irony on Snorri’s part (152–53). In “Der *Grœnlendinga þáttur*—aktuelle oder antiquarische Geschichtsperspektive?” (13–25), **Else Ebel** uses changes in the laws governing the rights of salvage to argue that

Grœnlendinga þáttur (i.e., *Einars þáttur Sokkasonar*) must have been written in the mid-thirteenth century rather than around 1200. Further evidence of this date is adduced from the text’s classic style and its treatment of the issue of the nomination of bishops. In “Wenn ein König liebeskrank wird: Der Fall Óláfr Haraldsson” (27–51), **Anne Heinrichs** discusses the various episodes in which King Óláfr Haraldsson displays the symptoms of lovesickness as it was defined in medieval medical texts. Not surprisingly, she shows that these episodes are handled differently by clerical writers than they are by Snorri Sturluson. In “Die verleugnete Intertextualität: Adaption und Camouflage fremder Texte in der Sagaliteratur” (53–61), **Wilhelm Heizmann** raises the intriguing question of why some European texts (e.g., courtly romances) are translated into Norse with the markers of their foreign origin mostly left unchanged, whereas others (e.g., narratives from the writings of Gregory the Great) are thoroughly revised so as to seem Icelandic. Heizmann concludes that examples of imported genres did not need to be camouflaged, but that foreign material used in native genres had to be given local coloration in order to sustain the illusion of Icelandic cultural self-sufficiency. In “Höfische Unterhaltung und ideologisches Ziel: Das Beispiel der altnorwegischen *Parcevals saga*” (63–84), **Susanne Kramarz-Bein** asserts that *Parcevals saga* was produced in order to transmit courtly ideas to Norway, with the ideological goal of strengthening the monarchy. In “Valhall—Himmel—Hölle: Das Bild des Königs Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri in der nordischen Literatur des Mittelalters” (85–110), **Gert Kreutzer** surveys the depiction of the tenth-century Norwegian king Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri as it changes from the poems of his contemporaries to the fourteenth-century kings’ saga *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*. In particular, he examines the varying political and clerical interests affecting the view of Hákon’s renunciation of Christianity. In “Saga and *jartegn*: The Appeal of Mystery in Saga Texts” (111–23), **Lars Lönnroth** asserts that the uncanny aspect of the *Íslendingasögur* is what appeals most to modern readers. He likens mysterious episodes such as Hall-

gerðr's being said to have the eyes of a thief to secular signs (*jartegnir*) such as Gísli Súrsson's coin or the items that Melkorka gives her son to prove his identity to his relatives in Ireland. Intimating that things are not as they appear, these signs, messages, and omens place the events of the narrative in a mythical perspective that is never fully explained. For example, Lönnroth sees an echo of the myth of skaldic mead in the account of Egill's being tricked into drinking from a horn of liquid, which restores his will to live and results in his composition of *Sonatorrek*, which opens with a reference to that myth. In "Skotland—Bergen—Færøerne: Om den færøske ballade *Óluvu kvæði* og dens forhold til *Karlamagnús saga*" (125–34), **Jonna Louis-Jensen** investigates the source of the Faeroese ballad *Óluvu kvæði* and suggests the following sequence of events for its creation. While on a diplomatic mission to Scotland in 1286–87, the Norwegian magnate Bjarni Erlingsson found an English metrical romance and translated it or had it translated into a Norwegian metrical romance, perhaps in Bergen after 1299. In the 1300s this Norwegian verse romance served as the source of a prose version of the story (*Ólíf ok Landrés*); in the 1400s it served as the source of an Icelandic *ríma*; and at an unknown point in time it served as the source of a Norwegian or Faeroese ballad, presumably on the basis of oral tradition. In "Die *Eykyndilsvísur* des Björn Hítðælakappi" (135–48), **Edith Marold** proposes that four *lausavísur* in *Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa* are remnants of Björn's poem *Eykyndilsvísur* [Island-candle verses], whose composition is described in chap. 23 of the saga. The relevance of this topic to the theme of the symposium is found in her secondary argument that the poem *Daggeislar* [Day-beams], to which the *Eykyndilsvísur* are a response, is an adaptation of the western European genre of the dawn song (*alba*). In the thought-provoking "Modernitet og traditionalisme: Et bidrag til islændingesagaernes litteraturhistorie, med en diskussion af *Fóstbræðra sagas* alder" (149–62), **Preben Meulengracht Sørensen** counters some of the arguments for a late dating of *Fóstbræðra saga*. He notes that courtly influence goes back to the 1220s, when the first trans-

lations of French texts were made, so that *Fóstbræðra saga* could be dated to around 1230. The digressions, if they were interpolations, could have been added at any point during the textual transmission of the saga. He contends that the Flateyjarbók version of *Fóstbræðra saga* is an early textual production that shows the Icelandic learned milieu's clear understanding of its new literariness, in that the ethical commentary in the prologue demonstrates the author's "modern" distance towards oral tradition. Shortly thereafter, Meulengracht Sørensen asserts, "traditionalism"—in the form of a written imitation of oral rhetoric—became the dominant style of the *Íslendingasögur* and "modernism" disappeared. In "Gísli Súrsson—a Flawless or Flawed Hero?" (163–75), **Vésteinn Ólason** presents a reading of *Gísli saga* that indicates that the author of the saga was not critical of Gísli but instead genuinely admired him and the heroic values he embodied. This view could only be possible, Vésteinn Ólason argues, if these values were still part of thirteenth-century Icelandic society, making *Gísli saga* a sympathetic effort to investigate their meaning and limits in concrete dramatic situations. In "Die Oseberg-*'Saga'* in ihrer Vielschichtigkeit" (177–99), **Alexandra Pesch** reviews the interpretations of the Oseberg ship burial first in the light of the kings' sagas' account of Norwegian history, and then on the basis of archaeological and place-name evidence. The former indicates that the burial is that of a pagan seeress or priestess rather than that of a queen, and the latter suggests that Oseberg (if from *Æsirberg*) may have been a center for worshipping a collection of gods rather than a single deity such as Freyr. The silence of the sagas regarding a heathen cult center or sacral landscape in this part of Norway reminds us that when it comes to early Scandinavian history, the sagas are far from preserving a full account of events. In "Das Reich Pohjola der kalevalischen Dichtung im Licht der Sagas" (201–14), **Anna-Leena Siikala** compares the northern realm of Pohjola in the Finnish *Kalevala* to the descriptions of the far north found in Old Norse literature. The many similarities make it likely that this region on the edge of the

known world served a common mythical function in both cultures. In the illuminating “Über die Vergangenheitsbilder einiger ‘Problemsagas’ und die Stellung dieser Sagas in der Literatur Altislands” (215–33), **Alois Wolf** proposes that some *Íslendingasögur* consciously depict the settlement period as the heroic age of Icelandic history, whereas other sagas view the settlement period typologically (i.e., as being the pagan forerunner of the Christian period). After commenting on the tendency towards heroicization in *Egils saga*, *Gísla saga*, and *Grettis saga*, he examines the nature and operation of ill fortune in *Njáls saga*, which he argues shows the interaction between the first, heroicizing view of the settlement period and the later, typological view of it. In “Parodistische Transgression in der *Hænsa-Þóris saga*” (235–62), **Stefanie Würth** offers a closely argued reading of *Hænsa-Þóris saga* as a parody of the *Íslendingasögur*; that is, she asserts that the saga uses literary traditions and conventions as a source of humor, rather than aspects of real life, as a satire would. In the process, several issues arise that are important for the current debate regarding the fictionality of the sagas, such as the audience’s historical knowledge and the author’s use of historical figures rather than invented ones. Acknowledging that a literary response to literature is ultimately a literary response to social realities, she concludes that as Icelandic society changed, the genre of the *Íslendingasögur* became out-of-date and that alternative kinds of narrative therefore became of interest.

As can be seen from the brief summaries here, this volume provides a number of interesting and solidly researched essays. The eminent contributors have done a more-than-respectable job of honoring their colleague. Although the question of the contemporaneity of the sagas is far from exhausted, *Die Aktualität der Saga* advances our understanding of the issues, sometimes in unexpected ways.

Elizabeth Ashman Rowe

Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, translators and editors. *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157)*. Islandica 51. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000. 570 pages.

When thinking of medieval historiography, it is Snorri’s *Heimskringla* that leaps to the mind of a readership versed in medieval history and literature, for the clarity and vividness of its narrative crowds out awareness of, and interest in, earlier epitomes or near-contemporaneous chronicles, relegating their study to scholars. We owe, therefore, considerable debt and gratitude to Andersson and Gade for their expert, absorbing translation of *Morkinskinna* (Gks 1009 fol., ca. 1275, archetype composed ca. 1220), the earliest vernacular chronicle of Norwegian kings reigning from 1030 to 1157. To date, it represents the sole translation of a manuscript that has long provided much pleasure, although its inherent unreliability as a historical source has elicited a measure of disparagement. Nevertheless, *Morkinskinna* has served as an exemplar. It invited the study of transmission, the incorporation and adaptation of historiographical matter and phrasing in later compendia, including *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*.

Still, *Morkinskinna* was considered of such little merit to the general readership of medieval sources, even to students of Old Norse, that it has never been edited as a normalized text. The translation of this monumental work in the prestigious Islandica series should revise this erroneous notion. Despite the history of its neglect, *Morkinskinna* mirrors the culture of a sophisticated, literate society with an abiding love for history and the dynamics of power.

An ambitious and magisterial undertaking as well as a labor of love—it surely is this also—the volume addresses a wide public: scholars, students, and an educated readership. All are served by the careful examination of questions relating to the *Morkinskinna* manuscript. In accordance with common practice, the translators fill