

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 *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*” (235–62), Stefanie Würth offers a closely argued reading of *Hœnsa-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to social realities, she concludes that as Icelandic society changed, the genre of the *Íslendingasögur* became out-of-date and that alternative kinds of narrative therefore became of interest.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. 572 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

the manuscript's lacunae with phrasing from other compendia. Some are known to have incorporated quires from *Morkinskinna* manuscripts at a date later than their composition, others, sections or passages of various length. In pursuing their objective of completeness and usefulness, the translators have devoted much thought and toil to textual notes, which present in lucid detail textual variants in related manuscripts and in the standard editions (*Morkinskinna: Pergamentsbog fra første halvdel af det trettende aarhundrede, indeholdende en af de ældste optegnelser af norske kongesagaer*, ed. C. R. Unger [Oslo: Bentzen, 1867]; *Morkinskinna*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, Skrifter 53 [København: J. Jørgensen & Co., 1932]). Felicitously, the notes on both the narrative and the poetry are appended rather than affixed as lengthy footnotes to the translated text. This allows linguists, textual critics, and historians an easy overview of all or any textual difficulties in individual chapters while sparing the general readership from perusing matter essential only to scholarly debate. The notes to the stanzas, fuller than those to the prose text, record not only all the manuscripts in which the verses appear but also their standard editions. The comments contain general information as well as specifics on attribution, context, textual cruxes, and emendations.

Other than the knotty matter of manuscript tradition, the translators faced a second problem: skaldic poetry interspersed in the text. Writers of Old Norse chronicles and of other sagas have traditionally treated skaldic poetry as a source for the historical accuracy and authority of their accounts. Thus, *Morkinskinna* cites copious stanzas as evidence of, or elaboration on, what the writer assumed to be the historical truth of his accounts. One editorial difficulty Gade, the translator of verse, confronted (Andersson is responsible for the narrative) was the lack of a critical edition by which to check the accuracy of the translated stanzas. She therefore included the verses in Old Norse, while the notes to the stanzas include references to readings in other manuscripts. While the collaborators provide translations of all the verses, they also provide an Old

Norse prose paraphrase for complex stanzas. For those unskilled in the reading or appreciation of skaldic verse, the Old Norse paraphrases serve a useful purpose. They disentangle the often tortuous syntax of the stanzaic text and allow insight into the formal, intellectualized diction of skalds.

The lengthy introduction—it occupies more than one-sixth of the total pages allotted to the translation and its critical apparatus—is an erudite exposition of standard, if complex, questions in saga scholarship. The detail provided in argumentation thus constitutes a reliable repository of facts on the contents of this manuscript and on historiographic epitomes and compendia in Latin or Old Norse.

As a historical work, *Morkinskinna* is situated among, and distinguished from, the historiographies that preceded and succeeded it. While it also proceeds chronologically, the imbalance in the space allotted to two of the monarchs, King Magnús Óláfsson and King Haraldr Sigurðarson, reveals the author's idiosyncratic character. Fascinated by the perils of a reign shared for some years by men of dissimilar, if strong, personalities, he allocated about sixty percent of his text to a narrative that intertwined their lives. The structure favored was episodic. This lent itself to recreating the many encounters of Icelanders with kings, to portraying sharply delineated characters, and to neglecting the activities of peaceful kings. The disinterest in peaceful reigns or kings disinclined to war is, however, also typical of saga narrative: "this . . . says much about the action-dependence of saga narrative and the limitations of that literary form" (3). In this respect, *Morkinskinna's* style is generic.

The discussion of the manuscript is as complete as one would find in an authoritative edition, including a physical description of the manuscript, its date and number of scribes, orthography, scribal corrections and marginal notes, descriptive matter on related historiographic works and their manuscripts, argumentation for the conjectured existence of earlier versions of *Morkinskinna*, their exemplars and derivatives. From the study of the verses within the context of the narrative, Gade and Andersson suggest that the manuscript's

skaldic poetry and many *þættir* “reflect the interests and knowledge of the same author, namely the author of *ÆMsk*,” the present manuscript’s archetype (57).

In saga studies, the question of interpolation looms large, for the practice of borrowing and adapting prose and verse, indulged in by writers and scribes, illuminates the interrelationship of cognate works. In this part of the introduction, discussion of the postulated existence of prose interpolations is brief (11–24), that of interpolated verse substantial (25–57). This imbalance in the length of commentary reflects, on the one hand, the lack of prior studies on the narrative and, on the other, the significance of verse for Norse historiographers.

Andersson is careful, as is his wont, in the discussion of Morkinskinna’s incorporation of narrative matter from extant and lost sources, *Ágrip af Nóreg’s konunga sögum*, *þættir*, *Hryggjarstykk, *Hákonar saga Ívarssonar*, *Orkneyinga saga*, only some of which the author of Morkinskinna refers to explicitly. At times, however, this endeavor is fraught with uncertainty, as it relies heavily on a critic’s sense of structural logic and on a perception of narrative consistencies. Thus, at least one posited interpolation is tenuous (12), for the argument rests on a retelling considered to be infelicitous. I am referring to *Ágrip* chap. 38, Morkinskinna chap. 8, King Haraldr’s disguise as a messenger to King Magnús’s advisor Úlfr stallari. Andersson accepts Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson’s thesis that this interpolation is placed out of context. Yet another interpretation is possible. Morkinskinna’s chap. 7 had ended on a positive note. Magnús had reached an ethical decision, to forego the conquest of England. King Haraldr’s reconnoitering, a discrete inquiry into Magnús’s possible reaction to his prospective claim to half the kingdom, hence serves to reaffirm Magnús’s ethical constraint on the reach of his power, in this case, his inherent willingness to assume the risk of sharing the kingdom with his uncle. That the brief recitation of Haraldr’s foreign adventures follows rather than precedes the encounter is likewise sound rather than incongruous. In a summary occupying five chapters of about twenty pages (130–51, chaps. 9–13), the narration foreshadows the

difficulties Magnús was to face in his dealings with his intelligent, if devious, and wise but venturesome coregent-to-be.

The discussion of the number and type of verses original to Morkinskinna is exemplary in its methodology and in the caution with which the editors sift the evidence for interpolations. The procedure consists of several steps. The basic units investigated are the individual kings’ sagas, so that the number of verses, the poems from which many were quoted, and the *þættir* with stanzas can be easily ascertained. The data from each unit is compared with that found in *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna* as well as with that in other related manuscripts. This establishes which stanzas were retained and which omitted, permitting occasional insight into the reasons for the retention or omission. The comparison will be of considerable interest to literary scholars as it lifts the veil on the editorial policies of both Snorri, in his composition of *Heimskringla*, and the author of *Fagrskinna*.

The matter of retention or elimination rested, for the most part, on the historiographical principles that Snorri and the author of *Fagrskinna* applied to the weighing of evidence transmitted over a span of one hundred and fifty years. They included informative stanzas but frequently excluded verse that was nonspecific. They omitted the ornamental verse in the *þættir* and avoided citing as historical verification any stanza that was cast in *fornyrðislag*, a meter intimately associated with oral tradition. Still, some decisions are obscure. For unknown reasons, the author of *Fagrskinna* was less liberal in the citation of verse after the beginning of *Magnúss saga berfætts*.

The author of Morkinskinna, however, delighted in the poetic imagery of skaldic verse, quoting verses for the beauty of their phrasing rather than for their value as a means of verification. These were often descriptions of fierce battles or of ships in perilous seas. He even introduced verses to an extract taken from *Hryggjarstykk, that, in its original written form, had contained none. Foremost, he loved verse, not solely for its own sake, but also for the narrative possibilities it afforded him. His knowledge of skaldic poems allowed him to fabricate

or structure narrative sections, establish the sequence of events, summarize an account, or provide it with a conclusion. Skaldic verse also furnished some of the few chronological details of a history that failed to situate events within the framework of years. The days, however, to which stanzas linked deeds or happenings turn up in the narrative, as do a few dates probably derived from annals. But above all, the stanzas reveal his passion for, and understanding of, an intellectually and metrically demanding poetic tradition.

In saga studies, it is traditional to record and to discuss named informants and to seek putative authors, in this case to sketch a provisional profile of Morkin-skinna's anonymous writer. It is obvious from the names cited that the author drew on an oral tradition that spanned the period he chronicled. Some were prominent, such as King Haraldr Sigurðarson, who appears to have assiduously promoted his reputation in literary form. Others belong to well-known families in Iceland as well as in Norway and testify to the cultivation of historical knowledge in anecdotal form. About some, little is known except for the sources of their knowledge, informants who elicited information from family members whose ancestors were entangled in bloody political struggles. The type of information conveyed is also varied. Some is connected to objects still in the possession of contemporaries (62). An unusual feat of intelligence and technological expertise is tied as a noteworthy event to Haraldr Sigurðarson (63). A bishop remembered in a scene from his youth the ire of a Norwegian king when censured by a bishop for his divorce (61). While this is not commented upon, it constitutes an analogue to controversial ecclesiastical efforts to reform conjugal life in Iceland during the author's life. This matter might well be a springboard from which to investigate more broadly the cultural background that spawned the remembrance of this type of knowledge, a field left largely unexplored in a tome remarkable for its scope.

It is usually difficult to identify saga authors. By its very nature, oral literature is generally anonymous. The questions posed attempt only to narrow the gap of our ignorance. They normally yield narrow

answers, although some illuminate authorial beliefs and experiences by an analysis of the events described and the ethos conveyed. Which sentiments, for instance, does the author express repeatedly in the words and actions of the protagonists and actors in his history? Where in Iceland might we localize him? The many *þættir*, accounts that relate adventures or depict interactions of Icelanders with Norwegian kings, bespeak his interest in the personal and political relationship of Icelanders with the Norwegian court. To him, Icelanders were thanes as were the Norwegians who served their kings. Yet there was a difference caused and actuated by the geographic separation that fostered Icelandic independence and a deep-seated sense of equality that often went hand in hand with loyal service. Loyal service to the last king featured in the compendium, Ingi Haraldsson (d. 1161), anchors the search for the region that might have nurtured its author, a writer interested not only in historical events but also in commercial enterprise. Scholars have also noted his tendency to cast a religious interpretation on royal decisions that illustrated restraint on either the reach of power or its unbridled exercise. It is this profile, in a section written with verve and authority, that permits the positing of authorship and of the origin of the manuscript in a scriptorium in northern Iceland (67–71). Suggested as author is Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson, a remarkable chieftain in the Eyjafjörður district, known also for his unswerving loyalty to King Ingi. Upon hearing of Ingi's death, he swore that he would never serve any other king. Likewise, he persuaded his brother Ari to join only factions loyal to Ingi's memory and to follow only those candidates with claims to Ingi's succession. His was also a family with strong religious convictions, interest in trade and in literature, and close ties to a nearby monastery, Munkaþverá. Two family sagas that mention Þorvarðr, *Ljósvetninga saga* and *Reykdaela saga*, may have been written in Munkaþverá, suggesting an active scriptorium in the monastery.

The lengthy preface and compendious notes, the careful sifting of evidence on questions for which authoritative and definite answers are often elusive, enable

scholars and students to revert to the monograph for balanced opinions and copious details on the composition and influence of Morkinskinna. Literary scholars will welcome the concordance of episodes described also in *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*. The bibliography is useful, although restricted in its citations of works on ecclesiastical matters. The two indexes, one covering the introduction and explanatory notes, the other keyed to Morkinskinna itself, mirror Andersson and Gade's concern to provide ease of reference, a collegial gesture toward their readership. Still, the major accomplishment is the vivid translation of the manuscript itself, a work too long neglected in modern times. Obviously, the work's significance was recognized immediately in medieval Iceland. Within the brief time span of perhaps five years, the authors of *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*, major historians, incorporated much of its phrasing. This adaptation and sifting of Morkinskinna's text for the years 1035–1157 testifies to the deep effect that the narration of the manuscript's author exercised on their thinking, both positively and negatively, about the nature and presentation of history.

Marlene Ciklamini

Ulrike Sprenger. *Sturla Þórðarsons "Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar"*. Texte und Untersuchungen zur Germanistik und Skandinavistik 46. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000. 143 sider.

For første gang er der nu skrevet en monografi over sagaen om Håkon Håkonsson. Forfatteren er den schweiziske litteraturforsker Ulrike Sprenger, som har en betydelig forskning bag sig inden for især den oldgermanske litteratur. *Hákonarsaga* er en biografisk beretning om kong Håkon og omfatter tiden 1203–1264. Den er skrevet af den islandske historiker Sturla Þórðarson under dennes ophold ved det norske hof. Mindre end et år efter kongens død er Sturla gået i gang med pen og pergament i den kongelige skrivestue. Her har han kunnet gøre brug af et varieret kancellimateriale samt mundtlige meddelelser fra både norske og islandske fortællere. Sagaens samtidige affattelse har givet den en særlig høj kildeværdi. Den tidsalder, som *Hákonarsaga* omhandler, er en storhedstid i norsk historie; for Island derimod knytter der sig bitter vemod hertil på grund af republikkens undergang og drabet på landets mangeårige lovsigemand Snorri Sturluson på foranledning af kong Håkon. *Hákonarsaga* forlener de to lande med modsatrettet nostalgi. Det indebærer en fordel, at en bog om denne saga udarbejdes af en forsker uden personligt tilhørsforhold til noget af de to lande.

Den litterære analyse, som Sprenger giver sin læser, er på sine steder nyskabende; dette gælder ikke mindst når hun anvender en litterær metodik på sagaens fremstilling. For recensenten som historiker af den socio-politologiske skole er det ikke blot spændende, men også velgørende at bevidne, at en af ens gamle "ikoner" — *Hákonarsaga* — nu får en behandling af en litterat af fag. Sturlas selvbeherskelse over for stoffet kan ikke skjule, at der her står følelser på højkant. Dramaet, som ulmer under den fortælle tekniske saglighed, blev opfanget af Henrik Ibsen da han gjorde sagaens første to tredjedele til tema for sit berømte skuespil *Kongsemnerne*. I sin fordeling af lys og skygge mellem hovedpersonerne — kong