

Lotte Hedeager. *Skygger af en anden virkelighed: Oldnordiske myter*. Samlerens Universitet. Haslev: Samleren, 1997. 138 pages.

As a reviewer with a strong interest in Old Norse myths, I was curious to read Lotte Hedeager's book on the subject, not least because, as an archaeologist by profession, she promised to shed new light on a difficult subject by bringing together archaeological, historical, and literary evidence in a new synthesis. And I certainly approve of scholarly enterprises that seek to create new knowledge by crossing disciplinary boundaries and illuminating old questions from a new or different perspective which interdisciplinarity can often bring.

I have to admit immediately that I was disappointed in this book. Perhaps it is unfair of me, as a scholar, to assess what is plainly a book written for a general Danish (and possibly wider Scandinavian) readership in something approaching the manner in which I would review a straight-down-the-line product of scholarship and research, but on the other hand, a general audience has the right to expect balanced and fair evaluation of scholarly evidence if the author presses them (as this one does) to take what she says pretty much on trust. The author states that this slim volume is a by-product of a much larger academic project, which will issue in several scholarly publications (cited on p. 134, together with a small number of reference books), where the pedantic reader can check up on the usual footnotes and so forth. But here, for the most part, we are flying blind with Hedeager as our guide to the shadows of that other reality that she refers to in her book's title.

Let me outline her aim, methodology, and main hypothesis. The book's stated aim is to try to understand the mentality of people of the European Migration Age (the fifth and sixth centuries A.D.) and discover the almost invisible traces of how they thought, what they believed in, what their political motivations were. Hedeager's approach is to combine evidence from modern archaeology, the works of classical and early

medieval historians who wrote about the Germanic peoples of the Migration Age, and modern scholarship on early medieval history, together with what she calls "den store fornordiske litteratur," which, she states, was "alle nedskrevet engang mellem 1000 og 1200" (10). On page 62 Hedeager surmises that the Elder Edda was written down in Iceland ca. 1100, "formentlig af Sæmund den Frode"! These statements (as indeed many others in this book) will come as a surprise to literary scholars, who are accustomed to date major works of Old Norse literature relevant to Norse myth, like *Snorra Edda* and our existing texts of the Elder Edda, to the thirteenth century, even though earlier, irrecoverable manifestations of the latter probably existed.

The book's main hypothesis combines evidence and arguments that have been around for some time with some new theories, as the scholarly reader will recognize. It begins with a fairly standard historical overview of the relationship between the late Roman Empire and the Germanic tribes, moving then to ask the difficult question of what caused the major migrations of Germanic peoples within, and in some cases even outside, Europe. Hedeager writes well and incisively here, though she begins to lay the foundation for her main hypothesis, that the major Germanic peoples subscribed to a common ideology, based on shared religious, social, and political concepts, and that this common ideology underpinned the legitimacy of the warrior elites who ruled them. So far, the argument is uncontroversial, indeed almost old hat, but Hedeager now begins to press the evidence in ways that become problematic.

Although Hedeager shows in her opening chapters that she is aware of the difficulties of using later written evidence, much of it authored by Christian writers, in reconstructing the "realities" of the European Migration Age, her actual use of written sources and linguistic evidence is the main weakness of this book and vitiates its hypothesis in important particulars. A significant plank in her argument is that a majority of the Germanic kingdoms, through both their historians and in their rituals, explicitly recognized (*a*) that they originated in

Scandinavia (the question of whether their concept of this geographical entity and ours coincided is somewhat fudged); (b) that their ruling houses had genealogies that claimed descent from the Norse god Óðinn; (c) and that the warrior ideology of these elites depended on a belief system in which Óðinn was the central focus of a powerful new religion whose origin coincided with the political ascendancy of the Germanic peoples in early medieval Europe; and (d), that, coincident with this political ascendancy, there occurs the ascendancy and distribution of animal interlace styles of decoration in the plastic and visual arts, which also emanated from Scandinavia. Thus the Nordic symbolic-religious world view and Nordic myths, with Óðinn as their focus, had an explicit and dominant organizing role in establishing and maintaining the political legitimacy of Germanic kingdoms in large parts of western and southern Europe. It was only when the Franks (who lacked such myths of origin and hence sought to compensate by making themselves the heirs to the Romans) consolidated their kingdom as the successor to the Western Empire and chose a legitimating symbolism based on the myths of Christianity that the ascendancy of the Nordic model was brought to an end, and the Scandinavians (who received Christianity somewhat later than most of the rest of Europe) were left high and dry for a few hundred years until they too succumbed to the irresistible rise of a Christian politico-religious ideology.

Like many hypotheses that push the evidence too far, this one has something to be said for it, but its oversimplification leaves a great many questions unanswered. Early medieval origin myths have been the subject of intense scholarly interest for decades now, and we have learned that they are complex and of diverse origin. While scholars may not be surprised at Hedeager's inclusion of the Goths, the Langobards, the Vandals, and the Eruli among the Germanic peoples whose origin myths acknowledge a Scandinavian genesis, eyebrows may be raised at the suggestion that this concept was more or less pan-European, except for the impoverished Franks. The Anglo-Saxons are mentioned several times, but no attention is paid to their actual origin myths. If it had been,

a far more complex picture of euhemerized pagan deities and eponymous northern European ancestors as well as Biblical progenitors would have emerged. And the complex relationship between learned medieval speculation about dynastic origins and the traditional inheritance of origin myths is really not tackled in this book.

One of the most problematical parts of Hedeager's argument is her implicit (and sometimes explicit) assumption that beliefs in the deities that are called Æsir in Old Norse texts of post-Migration Age and ideologies associated with them were all of Nordic origin and were transmitted from Scandinavia to the various European Germanic kingdoms. No one disputes that evidence exists in all the extant old Germanic languages and their texts for beliefs in what seems to have been a widely known pantheon. The question is: Is there compelling evidence that a version of these beliefs that underpinned the rising Germanic kingdoms of early medieval Europe originated in Migration Age Scandinavia, rather than more generally in the Germanic world? The answer to this question must surely refer to philological evidence, but this is not cited by Hedeager.

There seems to be a balance of probability, based on the range of comparative linguistic evidence available, that concepts and beliefs that underpinned the developing association of Odinic figures with a warrior elite were broadly available in early Germanic Europe. If we take the name of the god who is central to Hedeager's argument (the other deities are hardly mentioned, and that is also a problem for her hypothesis), clearly the extant forms (Old English *Woden*, Old Saxon *Woden*, Old High German *Wuotan*, Old Franconian *Wodan*, beside Old Norse *Óðinn*) relate to a common Germanic base **wōþ-* 'to be excited or inspired'. Although the phonological change in Primitive Old Norse whereby initial *w* was lost before *u/o* is generally ascribed to the period 650–800, that is, after the Migration Age, a compelling argument would have to be made for a specifically Nordic ideology associated with this deity exerting a predominant influence over most other Germanic language groups in a context where other

kinds of linguistic evidence, such as the names of the days of the week, suggest a much broader base of congruent development. If the religious beliefs of the Germanic peoples in the Migration Age and the period before their conversion to Christianity developed in Scandinavia and spread from there, we would expect to be able to detect a Norse influence in at least some of the linguistic forms of the key names and concepts in all the old Germanic languages.

Towards the end of her book (128–30), Hedeager shows some awareness of the linguistic problems her argument poses, but, ironically, she chooses a passage from the prologue to Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* to bring the matter forward. It is the section in which Snorri gives a genealogy of the Æsir from Troy, commenting that the figure that they called Woden is the one that "we call Óðinn." For Hedeager this passage is proof that "det er formentlig denne Odin, den gamle germanske Wotan og goternes gamle hovedgud Gaut, som i folkevandringstiden bliver til Odin, in den skikkelse, som han kendes fra de norrøne kilder, og samtidig gøres til konge over et folk, aserne" (128). Unfortunately, this is a castle built on sand, for, as Anthony Faulkes has shown quite unambiguously ("The Genealogies and Regnal Lists in a Manuscript in Resen's Library," in *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktsyni*, 20. júlí 1977, ed. Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson, Rit 12 [Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1977], 177–90), Snorri was not dependent here on an ancient folk memory, but rather on an Anglo-Saxon learned genealogy, in which the forms of the euhemerized deities' names were given in Old English. Not surprisingly, then, he produced their equivalent Old Icelandic forms alongside the Old English ones.

In spite of my criticisms of Hedeager's book, there are some sharp and well-founded observations here. It is a pity that at so many points the reader has to accept (or not accept) so many unfounded assertions or exaggerations based upon textual and other evidence that cannot bear the weight placed upon it.

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Marina Mundt. *Zur Adaption orientalischer Bilder in den Fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda: Materialien zu einer neuen Dimension altnordischer Belletristik*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993. 282 Seiten.

Seit mehr als zwanzig Jahren befaßt sich Marina Mundt mit der Motivgeschichte der Fornaldarsögur. In diesem Buch hat sie nun die Ergebnisse früherer Aufsätze in eine neue, systematische Behandlung des Fornaldarsaga-Corpus eingebettet und das Ganze mit einer ausführlichen methodologischen Diskussion umrahmt.

Das Kapitel "Einleitung" (9–36), eigentlich das erste von drei einleitenden Kapiteln, weist auf die wesentlichen Komponenten der Mundt'schen These hin: Archäologische und historische Untersuchungen hätten wiederholt auf den Kulturaustausch aufmerksam gemacht, der im frühen Mittelalter — also vor den Kreuzzügen — zwischen Skandinavien und dem "Osten" (Rußland, Byzanz, Vorderasien) stattgefunden habe; die Bedingungen für diesen Austausch über den "östlichen Weg" seien jedoch ab dem Ende des 11. Jahrhunderts immer ungünstiger geworden (Verslawung des Kiewer Reiches; Ende der Blütezeiten von Kiew, Byzanz, Persien, Georgien, Armenien; wachsende politische Instabilität; starke Belebung westlicher Reiserouten durch die Kreuzzüge); gerade bei den Fornaldarsögur habe man bereits verhältnismäßig viele Erzählmotive östlicher Provenienz identifiziert; trotz der späten schriftlichen Überlieferung gestehe die Forschung neuerdings zumindest dem Handlungskern einiger Fornaldarsögur durchaus ein beträchtliches Alter zu; die Entlehnung und "Adaption" einzelner Erzählmotive setze nicht unbedingt Kenntnisse der Literatursprache der jeweiligen Spenderkultur voraus, sondern könne auch durch die unmittelbare Rezeption von Werken der bildenden Kunst erfolgen.

Das zu behandelnde Corpus von dreißig Sagas wird in einem eigenen Kapitel vorgestellt (37–53). Aus gattungstheoretischen Überlegungen heraus klammert Mundt einige Texte aus, die gelegentlich zu den Forn-