

¶ Stig Toftgaard Andersen (ed.), *Die Aktualität der Saga. Festschrift für Hans Schottmann*. [Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, Vol. 21] Berlin etc.: de Gruyter, 1999. Pp. 266. ISBN 3-11-016564-3.

The contributions brought together in this volume of *Ergänzungsbände* consist of papers delivered at a 1997 symposium held on the occasion of Professor Schottmann's retirement, enriched with five additional articles. In the preface, the editor accounts for the book's genesis, and presents a not wholly convincing defence of its title - a bit of a misnomer.

Since a festschrift depends on the scholarly interests of the contributors, its content is bound to be variegated. This book is no exception. Heinrich Beck comments with critical acumen on the claimed historic veracity of Snorri's accounts, as expressed in words like *sannendi* and *sannr*. Susanne Kramarz-Bein deals with courtly entertainment in Old Norwegian texts, Lars Lönnroth with "The appeal of mystery in saga texts", Jonna Louis-Jensen with the relation between *Karlamagnús saga* and the ballad *Ólúvu kvæði*. Edith Marold discusses Björn Hítðelakappi's *Eykyndilsvísur*. These examples suffice to show the great variety of topics discussed in the book. As to some of the other papers, a few words may be permitted. Else Ebel investigates the date of the *Grenlendinga þáttur* found in Flateyjarbók. As she sees it, the þáttur was composed not, as generally assumed, by about 1200 AD, but in the mid-thirteenth cen-

ture, or slightly later. The þáttur describes a conflict between, on the one hand, the relatives of some Norse merchants perished on the Greenland coast, and, on the other hand, the Greenland colonists who took the valuable ship and merchandise which the merchants left behind after having gone astray into a remote fjord. The Greenlanders, led by their bishop Arnaldr -who had taken the ship into his possession- defend the capture of the goods with a reference to well-established customary rights, whereas the merchants' relatives appeal to the king in an attempt to get back what they regard as legally theirs. According to Ebel, the story reflects a new attitude to wrecked cargo which emerged in mid-thirteenth-century Norway, when it was declared law that wrecked ships and goods did not fall to the finder any longer, but remained its owner's legal property, provided he could prove his case with witnesses and oath. If he failed to do so, the goods fell to the king, who thus gained an additional source of income. Ebel's method and conclusion are reminiscent of Björn Sigfússon's investigation of *Hansa-Dóris saga*, published some forty years ago in *Timarit Sögufélags*.

Wilhelm Heizmann draws attention to a passage in *Laxdæla saga*, where Höskuldr seeks to make Þórðr goddi's behaviour less shameful by claiming that the man whom he intended to betray -his wife's relative, Þórólfr, who had taken refuge with him- was a rascal prickly with guilt as a juniper bush (*ok svá var sökum borfinn sem brísla eini*). Heizmann points out that the expression harks back to Gregory's *Moralia in Iob*, (Iob 30, 4), where the manifold harm and discomfort caused by human greed is compared with the prickly branches of the juniper, which all derive from the same root (*avaritia*). In addition, Heizmann briefly discusses two other instances of what he calls *verleugnete Intertextualität* (disguised intertextuality): Flosi's dream in *Njála*, and the *Hróa þáttur*, where Hrói outwits his prosecutors. This last case, it will be noticed, is reminiscent of Gunnar's adventure as Hawker-Hedin (ch. 22 *Njála*). The motif, of which there may be more Old Norse variants, probably enjoyed considerable diffusion, which sets it apart from the other cases of disguised intertextuality. As a genre, the textual dependence of the *Laxdæla saga* passage discussed by Heizmann is more akin to the intertextuality pointed out by Ulrike Sprenger some ten years ago in one of

the *Opuscula* volumes (concerning st. 8 of *Sigurdarkviða in skamma*).

Alexandra Pesch discusses the many aspects and problems connected with the Oseberg ship-burial, discovered a century ago in Vestfold. The grave, which was robbed of weaponry and treasure already in the Viking Age Period, contained the remains of two women. The archaeologist A.W. Brøgger connected the find with queen Ása, mentioned in Old Norse literature as Haraldr Fairhair's grandmother, and suggested that the first element of modern *Oseberg* contained the queen's name. Pesch questions the validity of this identification. She argues that the Old Norse sources neither picture the queen with sympathy, nor mention any shipburial in connection with her. These arguments don't seem weighty. Of greater interest is her observation that an analysis of the two skeletons suggests that the buried women were blood-relatives, which seems at variance with the *Heimskringla* report of Ása's abduction by the Vestfold king. Pesch concludes her survey of scholarly attitudes by saying that "Bei allen Zweifeln an Königin Ása gilt eines jedenfalls heute noch immer und überall als sicher: Die Zugehörigkeit der Bestatteten zum Königsgeschlecht der Ynglinge ..." The statement has a rhetoric tone that I find difficult to agree to. Articulating your opponents' view in such absolute terms makes it too easy to cast doubt upon its tenability. The alleged link still seems a fair possibility, though I would not dream of taking the connection any step further. After denying the link with the Vestfold royal dynasty, Pesch attributes the grave to a *völva*, the Scandinavian prophetess of the pre-Conversion period. To sustain her claim, Pesch puts forward the following arguments: 1) the artefacts unearthed in the find were not made to be used properly, which implies that they served a religious purpose, 2) the occurrence of symbols indicating a connection with the otherworld (such as the *valknutr*), 3) the Oseberg tapestry shows a religious procession, and 4) the place-name *Oseberg* occurs in a cluster of other sacral names, which indicates the presence of a regional sanctuary of some importance. Pesch etymologizes the name's first element as a genitivus pluralis: 'of the *Æsir*'. 5) the wand found in the grave belonged to a *völva*. Apart from the last argument, which is mere assumption, these arguments provide no evidence in favour of the idea that the Oseberg grave is that of a

dead priestess or völvu. A thesis of this kind is of course difficult to prove (or disprove for that matter), but even if we, for the sake of argument, momentarily assume that Pesch is right, we don't get a picture that is more in line with the data than the conventional interpretation. Pesch claims that the buried women were relatives. Are we to assume, then, that both of them were völvus, and that divination was hereditary in the North? There is more to it. Pesch argues at length that the burial site was a religious center. Perhaps, but the fact remains that we hear nothing of any völvu being engaged in the cult of the Vanir, even though there obviously was an overlap of domain and function. These remarks suffice to show that Pesch's reconstruction rests on shaky grounds. Her paper contains valuable observations, but I don't think her conclusion is tenable.

Gert Kreuzer surveys the picture of king Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri in the medieval North. The survey makes clear that all sources, both heathen and Christian, acknowledge the benefits of the king's rule. Harald Fairhair may have subjugated the land, but when he died the country was still no more than a collection of regional kingdoms divided between his unruly sons. It was left to his successors to pacify the country and to give laws to it. Given the circumstances, Hákon seems to have done well. Kreuzer, however, is concerned, not so much with king Hákon as a giver of law and peace, as with the way Hákon's abortive role as a missionary is reflected in our sources. The early skalds praise his beneficiary rule, and they don't comment on his religious attitude. It would be wrong to call this silence deliberate. Viking Age religion was eclectic, and a switch of religious attitude hardly aroused much interest, provided it did not interfere with common interest. Later historiographers show more concern with Hákon's lapse, but even then there was no outright condemnation of the figure. They regret the course of events, but stress the odds he was up against. There is much emphasis on his attempts to introduce Christianity, and we are left with the impression of a great king who regrettably failed to convert the country. Kreuzer explains this relatively mild picture by assuming influence of a positive native tradition (echoed in *Hákonarmál*). I don't know. It is true – or so it appears – that the people remembered the king favourably,

and it is also conceivable that this positive picture gained something from the fact that his successors to the throne were mainly concerned with enriching themselves at the cost of the people, but I have some doubts that this popular picture prevented later historiography from criticizing the king more severely. After all, his namesake jarl Hákon, who also lapsed, is depicted in terms that make him seem the devil's accomplice, even though his rule, too, is described as mostly beneficiary. I cannot see better than that the different treatment of these two apostate rulers of Norway in later historiography has something to do with the fact that king Hákon was a son of Harald Fairhair, the progenitor of the dynasty that brought forth the missionary kings Ólafr Tryggvason and Ólafr inn helgi. To harm the dynasty's reputation was undesirable. So, instead of stressing his lapse, they turned him into an antitypus of the two Ólafrs, making him a missionary king who failed only because the time of the country's conversion had not yet come.

Highly readable is also Alois Wolf's "Vergangenheitsbilder einiger 'Problemsagas' der Literatur Altislands" which contains many a fine observation of the way in which the saga-authors treat their pagan past. At the end of his paper, Wolf touches on the question why Njáll throws his silk-cloak on the pile of money collected to reach an agreement with Flosi. Why should the otherwise wise and prudent Njáll make this gesture – a faux passe as it turns out – which makes the settlement collapse? According to Wolf, the garment reminded Flosi of Höskuldr's bloodstained cloak, which Hildigunnr had presented to him to make him commit himself to revenge. Wolf's suggestion may prove fruitful in solving a question which so far has remained unanswered. It can only be part of the answer, though. Wolf's solution may account for Flosi's hesitation to accept the money, it leaves unexplained why Njáll remains silent when Flosi inquires who had presented the garment. The question does not stand isolated: why, one might ask, does Njáll instruct his sons to go inside the house at Bergþórshváll, a fatal advice which leads to him and his sons being burned alive.

Anne Heinrichs deals with the themes *amor hereos* and courtly love. Central to her investigation is the case of the love-sick king Ólafr inn helgi, pictured as a womanizer in the articuli preserved in Flateyjarbók.

According to Anne Heinrichs these addenda predate the Ólafs sagas written by Snorri, who apparently had no use for them in his description of the king and later Saint. Heinrichs competently discusses the value of the various textual variants, some of which virtually exclude each other. Particularly enjoyable I found her discussion of an amusing episode found in *Flateyjarbók*. It is told here how king Ólafr imprisons the skald Óttarr. The reason for this was that according to rumours Óttarr, while staying with the Swedish king, had composed a poem of love (*mansöngs drápa*) on the king's daughter, Ástríðr, whom king Ólafr's later married. When king Ólafr hears about this, he believes his honour to be at stake, and has the poet locked up. Óttarr is visited in prison by his nephew, Sighvatr, a renowned skald. Since they assume that the king will make Óttarr recite the composition, the two rework the poem, substituting all words which might suggest a liaison of some kind between Óttarr and Ástríðr. The plan works out as anticipated. Seated in front of the king and the queen – who is told to be present – Óttarr recites the poem in its altered form, of which the king takes no offence. Óttarr now produces a poem of praise on the king, who rewards him a golden ring. The queen, however, follows suit and also gives him a golden ring. When the embarrassed king wants to know her motives for doing so, she answers: You cannot blame me, my Lord, for rewarding a poet who sings my praise, since I am only following your example. The suggestion is clearly that the queen, by doing what she does, outwits her husband, and rewards the skald for saving her honour.

Other papers, finally, are by Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (“Modernitet og traditionalisme. Et bidrag til islændingesagaernes litteraturhistorie med en diskussion of *Fóstbræðra sagas alder*”), Vésteinn Ólason (“Gísli Súrsson - a flawless or flawed hero?”), Anna-Leena Siikala (“Das Reich *Pohjola* der kalevalischen Dichtung im Licht der Sagas”) and Stefanie Würth (“Parodistische Transgression in der *Hænsa-Þóris saga*”).

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