

Ármann Jakobsson. 2014. *A Sense of Belonging: Morkinskinna and Icelandic Identity*, c. 1220. Translated by Fredrik Heinemann. Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark. 406 pages. ISBN: 978-87-7674-845-6.

This book may be considered part of Ármann Jakobsson's most prominent scholarship in a career that has been nothing less than prolific. The corpus of his criticism of the fabled *Morkinskinna* manuscript culminates in the English translation of his PhD dissertation. His prior book publications on this subject include his MA thesis, *Í leit að konungi* (1997), his PhD dissertation, *Staður í nýjum heimi* (2002), and a myriad of articles in English, German, Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish. The manuscript in question, GKS 1009 fol., includes material about the kings of Norway from 1030 to 1157. The manuscript, which forms a single cohesive saga, recounts not only the events of the court at this time but also didactic elements for its audience, illustrated by a wide variety of *exempla* that are ingeniously wound together.

The work is well structured into five main parts subsequently divided into chapters, with a comprehensive index of names from the saga, names of scholars, and place names found in *Morkinskinna*. The main parts are: I. Origins, II. Structure, III. Portraits of a Society, IV. Portraits of Men, and V. We Tell Ourselves Stories. The translator, Fredrik Heinemann, has done Jakobsson a great service with the nuanced way that the work uses kings' names and a variety of English clichés. The only criticism that should be laid against this is that the names often do not have their Icelandic counterparts made readily available to the reader, though the index includes both. Perhaps the work would also benefit from the place names of the original text alongside their English counterparts, so that the reader could readily move between the criticism and Jakobsson's published edition. An English edition published by Theodore Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade has existed since 2000, which can help the reader inspect differences in translation, including proper nouns. *A Sense of Belonging* extends the scholarship in *Staður í nýjum heimi*, just as each of the academic works about *Morkinskinna* extends the next one, whether in English or Icelandic, including later work by Andersson that aids the historian in making the jump from the text to the larger socio-political situations of the time.

In Part I and II, the saga's origins and structure are contemplated. Jakobsson's interpretation of the saga differs from earlier scholars in these respects whereas their attention leaned towards searching for the ur-*Morkinskinna*, which relegated the large assortment of *Íslendingaþættir* to a matter of interpolation. The episodes that involved an Icelander's foray into the Norwegian court were thought to have been added later. Jakobsson refutes this claim by saying that these episodes must be considered to understand the whole work in its own right. By using Jonna Louis-Jensen's 1977 work on the manuscript as a bridge between himself and

these earlier scholars, he makes the case for a relatively early date of inception for the manuscript, ca. 1220, arguing that the manuscript changed little from this time until the extant copy was written, ca. 1275. This plays into how he presents the structure, as he argues the removal of the *þættir* would make the saga lack key important elements in its representation not only of Icelanders but of Norwegian kings.

While Jakobsson is highly critical of earlier scholars, he is fully aware of the debt he owes to them. *A Sense of Belonging* is dedicated to his parents, but his PhD dissertation itself is devoted to Finnur Jónsson, who in the famed STUAGNL series published *Morkinskinna* in 1932. It is often against the backdrop of Jónsson's criticism that Jakobsson's own criticism in turn takes its own shape. He offers us a particularly thorough analysis of a work that he considers having been in the shadow of *Fagrskinna*, and more so *Heimskringla*, for far too long.

It is beneficial to bear in mind that this is a work that focuses on a close reading of the text and does not deeply contemplate the socio-political issues of the time in connection with the place that Icelanders felt they had in the world as exemplified by the text itself. It is rather a more personal view that we are granted an opportunity to explore. Jakobsson focuses on the art of the text and its didactic use of history to accomplish this. The work now includes scholarship up until 2012, and although it is mainly a translation of a prior piece, it has been written to include some further work that has been published since the original was printed.

In Part III: Portraits of a Society, attention is drawn to how consistently the saga makes society a central concern, especially regarding the courtly setting. In Part IV: Portraits of Men, the roles of kings and subjects are reviewed and conflicts and power struggles are commented on. Jakobsson notes that the text emphasizes moderation as proper behaviour for these characters in their respective social roles. In Part V: We Tell Ourselves Stories, the metanarrative of the Icelander developing into a poet and storyteller is explored. The episodes of the developing Icelandic courtier are said to allegorically represent the author him/herself. The role of King Hákon in developing the art of continental translation is also inspected, and the term "author" is given attention and clarification for the medieval context. Jakobsson invites us to imagine how clerics took to creating a new chivalric image. "The new ideal was the Christian and cultured courtier; the knight, who was a lion on the battlefield and a lamb in the chamber" (339).

The saga contained within *Morkinskinna* is a chronicle that ranges across a relatively broad geographical spectrum, including lands such as Russia (*Garðaríki*), Constantinople (*Miklagarðr*), Sicily (*Sikiley*), Spain (*Spánn*) and Ibiza (*Íviza*), and others between these countries and Norway. Moreover, it deals with the place of the Icelander and the Norwegian royal court within that world. Jakobsson duly considers and explores the world in which these people lived, both within their domestic and international contexts. He also considers the time in which these

people lived and the early reception of the piece. The feudal and courtly societies of Western Europe had arrived in not only Norway but also Iceland by the early 13th century. Not only does he consider the chivalric literature that influenced Iceland and Norway, he places Iceland as a contemporaneous adopter, along with Norway, of a new ideal propagated by clerics at the behest of Hákon Hákonarson and later his offspring. As such, this piece is more than a great work of literary criticism; it can also enjoy a home within the collections of any scholar who works within the cultural context of the Old Nordic societies of the 11th to 13th centuries and beyond, whether they consider themselves cultural anthropologists, historians, philologists, or belong to any other discipline including those who simply have an interest in how Icelanders viewed their place in the world during the 13th century.

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