

Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, eds. 2017. *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*. Routledge. 376 pages. ISBN: 9780367133658.

In the past half a century, the field of medieval Scandinavian studies has experienced a considerable shift in focus, characterized by a growing attention to the sagas' significance in Icelandic culture and an interest in how the sagas conceptualize the past that many of them describe. *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas* represents this change in scholarly interest and its chapters discuss a wide variety of approaches that have recently been productive in saga studies. While the *Research Companion* frequently touches on earlier scholarship, its declared aim is to outline more recent discourses and debates, and hence showcase the multiplicity of approaches that have informed—and transformed—research on these texts. Overall, the contributions engage with saga writing as a social phenomenon, and this allows the *Research Companion* to discuss the end products (i.e., the individual sagas) in light of their geneses, transmissions, and receptions. The combination of research summaries and short analyses of particular texts or groups of texts allows the authors to touch on numerous issues that are of interest to those researching collective or cultural memory: the medieval and post-medieval reception of the sagas; the sagas' role in Icelandic identity formation and their formative and normative value; and the relationship between the sagas and Icelandic (memory) culture.

Although the *Research Companion's* introduction acknowledges that most saga genres exhibit an interest in the representation of the past, collective and cultural memory are not well represented in terms of direct mentions within the volume. None of the 27 thematic chapters is explicitly concerned with collective or cultural memory, effectively denying one of the most productive research paradigms of the past decade its place in the discussion. Furthermore, a look at the index reveals that a mere seven out of 353 numbered pages explicitly reference cultural memory, while collective memory is not listed in the index. Forgetting, which has long been viewed as a relational concept to and even an integral part of memory, is not discussed at all. From a quantitative viewpoint, the value of the *Research Companion* for collective and cultural memory studies may therefore be questioned.

However, as every medievalist knows, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and issues relating to collective and cultural memory are in fact raised in many chapters. The chapters written by Pernille Hermann (“Literacy”) and Ralph O’Connor (“History and Fiction”) are of particular interest, as they include both cultural memory and recent progress in cultural memory studies in their analyses. Hermann, for example, discusses the dynamic relationship between writing and personal memory in the production of written texts, but also devotes

a whole section to “Writing and Memory” and another to “Literacy and Cultural Memory.” However, these sub-chapters remain at the overview level and can only briefly touch on the role of the sagas within cultural memory: these include developing tradition(s), generating a relationship with the past, establishing a written culture, and the formation of identity. Nonetheless, Hermann successfully links this to the interpretation, invention, and innovation of the tradition and hence reminds readers of the dynamic and multifaceted roles texts can assume over the centuries. As such, her contribution highlights the period of the sagas’ reception as much as their origins, and in referencing key areas of debate in cultural memory studies proves a useful introduction for those with an interest in the role of literacy in memory culture.

O’Connor stresses the impact of the paradigm shift towards studying the conceptualizations and communications of the past and utilizes recent research on cultural memory in his own chapter. In particular, he highlights the need to investigate the influence(s) of a shared knowledge about the past on collective identity. As a whole, his chapter tackles the difficult question of how (and to what degree) saga authors combined historical and imaginative material, and how sagas may be related to medieval and modern ideas of historiography through a study of their cultural function and audience reception. This productively shifts the focus of enquiry towards the reception (history) of the texts, and their relation to other media. Both articles present a succinct but useful summary of key issues in collective/cultural memory studies and their bibliographies present appropriate material for further reading.

Other articles, such as those on “Genre” (Massimiliano Bampi), “Dating and Origins” (Chris Callow), “Narratives and Documents” (Patricia Pires Boulhosa), “Travel” (Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough), and “Worldview” (Sirpa Aalto) also touch on issues of collective memory, for example in relation to the worldview of the saga authors (and their audiences) and the relationship between sagas and other (written) media. Furthermore, Jan Alexander van Nahl’s chapter on “Digital Norse” points to the success of the “Icelandic Saga Map” and the related “Inscribing Environmental Memory in the Icelandic Sagas” projects in communicating the mnemonic value of the Icelandic landscape to both academic and non-academic audiences. These discussions, although generally short, provide helpful coordinates for those starting out in collective/cultural memory research, and also showcase the importance of a conceptually nuanced and critically attuned engagement with theoretical discourses.

While the *Research Companion* is of much use to those interested in the wider culture of saga composition and reception, it is regrettable that a topic that has generated so much research in the past decade is not afforded a more prominent position. In terms of outlining the grounds on which cultural memory studies research bases its readings, however, the companion covers the full spectrum of analysis, from the micro-level of individual texts to the macro-level of medieval

Icelandic culture. That it does not simply focus on the end product—the sagas—but on the larger cultural context from which they emerged (and which they so decisively shaped) enables those interested in collective/cultural memory to gain a deeper understanding of the sources. This is particularly valuable for those new to cultural/collective memory studies or to colleagues from other fields who are keen to gain an overview of key topics and debates. That some chapters (for example that by Lena Rohrbach on “Drama and Performativity” and Julia Zernack’s discussion of “Artistic Reception”) discuss sources that span into the modern period allows readers to appreciate the temporal depth of the sagas’ reception and transmission. As cultural/collective memory cannot be studied in a vacuum but must be viewed as part of the culture at large, the *Research Companion* presents a valuable framework despite its lack of direct focus on memory.

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