

# THE INTERNATIONAL SAGA SOCIETY NEWS LETTER

## Um Glám í Grettlu: Drög að íslenskri draugafræði

I Þegar reimleikar í Íslendingasögum eru athugaðir af gaumgæfni, kemur glögg í ljós að hægt er að skipta meiri háttar afturgöngum þeirra í þrjá flokka, eins og brátt verður rakið. Þau atriði sem ráða flokkun eru einkum tvenns konar: annars vegur eru ástæðurnar (ef kunnar eru) til þess að gengið er aftur og á hinn bóginn sú manngerð sem um er að ræða og hegðun drauga eftir að hann hætti að liggja kyrr í gróf sinni eða haugi. Margar afturgöngur skortir þó þau sérkenni sem hér verður miðað við, enda er oft óljóst að orði komist um þá reimleika sem valda fólki angri og sýt. Þess er skylt að minnast að í þjóðsögum frá síðari öldum fer mikið fyrir uppvakningum, en þeirra gætir ekki að fornu, jafnvel þótt reynt sé að vekja dána galdrakonu svo að hún geti galað syni sínum galdur.<sup>1</sup>

Í einstaka sögum, einkum *Grettlu* og *Eyrbyggju*, gegna afturgöngur mikilvægum hlutverkum, en hins vegar eru *Egla*, *Hrafnkels saga*, *Bandamanna saga* og raunar ýmsar aðrar sögur frjálsar af aðsókn drauga; annars staðar bregður reimleikum fyrir í hófi. Býsna mikið fer fyrir afturgöngum í fornaldarsögum og einnig bólar á þeim í hetjukviðum sem eiga rætur sínar að rekja aftur í heiðinn sið. En með því að allar sögum var voru skráðar löngu eftir að þjóðin tók kristni, verður ekki hjá því komist að leita til lærðra hugmynda þegar norræn menning hrekkur ekki til að skýra þau fyrirbæri sem eru fyrir hendi. Skal nú vinda bráðan bug að draga helstu afturgöngur í dilka eftir þeim kennimörkum sem þegar voru gefin í skyn.

1. **Haugbúar** eru að því leyti sér í flokki að þeir hírast jafnan á þeim stað þar sem þeir voru heygðir eða grafnir, og yfirleitt verða þeir engum til ama né usla, nema raskað sé við legstað þeirra og reynt að ræna þá vopnum og öðrum dýrgripum. Þó hafa haugbúar rænu á að gera vart við sig, enda hefðu engar sögur af þeim sprottið upp, ef þeir hefðu

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## Old Norse and Scandinavian at Italian Universities

As many a reader of *Saga News* already knows, the cultivation of Old Norse studies in Italy is, by virtue of a long and persistent tradition, strictly - one would say almost indissolubly - connected with the vast and variegated field of Germanic Philology. This connection has a definite *raison d'être*, of both historical and practical nature. This is, of course, not the right place for a discussion of the consequences, positive and negative, of such a long-term 'co-habitation'. It is nevertheless necessary to bear this fact well in mind if one wants to understand correctly certain peculiarities of the Italian way to approach the study of Nordic philology. Another relevant point to take into consideration here is the position occupied, within the university programmes in foreign languages and literatures, by the Scandinavian area, to which the study of Old Norse is - obviously enough, but in Italy only on a theoretical basis - most directly associated.

The teaching of Scandinavian languages and literatures at Italian universities is a rather recent acquisition: the first professorship was established in Rome in the late 1950s. Although contemplated in the constitution of most of the Arts faculties, Scandinavian languages and literatures are actually taught at only seven Italian universities (Bologna, Florence, Milan, Naples, Pisa, Rome, and Viterbo; from 1st November 1992 reportedly also in Genoa). The teaching of literature proper (which is presented, as a rule, as a global subject, embracing the whole of the Scandinavian area) is combined with one or more *lettorati* (i.e. language courses), mostly Danish and/or Swedish, less frequently Norwegian, never - or just occasionally - Icelandic. On the other hand, no teaching of Old Scandinavian is provided for, except, sometimes, as a part of Germanic Philology, as can be inferred from the above. While Scandinavian is chosen by a not negligible and steadily increasing number of students as secondary subject (besides, for example, English or German), very few of them take it as main subject. The reason for this lies principally in the fact that Scandinavian languages are not taught in any of the Italian schools; therefore, choosing them as main subject for graduation actually means for a student of foreign languages and literatures to restrict considerably his future opportunities to get a job as a school teacher.

According to the new rules (which, however, have remained essentially unchanged in this respect) recently established by the Italian Ministry of University and Scientific Research for the curricula in foreign languages and literatures, students having a given language as main subject are expected to take at least an examination "in the philology corresponding to that very language". Since the teaching of philology is organized - with very rare exceptions, if any - on the basis of the major linguistic areas (i.e. Romance, Germanic, Slavonic, etc.) and not for single languages, it follows that students of Scandinavian have no other choice than attending courses in *Germanic Philology*, i.e. the very same courses intended also for students of English, German, and Netherlandic. Philology teachers endeavour, as a rule, to set up diversified courses for students of the single languages, but this is not always easy to obtain, especially in those faculties where there is only one teacher for each of the 'major' philologies. Moreover, the philologists themselves (especially the younger ones) tend, as is quite natural, to specialize in a particular sub-branch of the larger linguistic areas; and it so happens that a very scanty minority of the Italian 'Germanic' philologists have - not least for the reason explained above - a special training in Scandinavian matters. So the circle is closed.

The repercussions of this state of things on the pedagogical level are easily predictable: very few courses specifically devoted to Old Norse topics are offered (not always and necessarily in all the places where Modern Scandinavian is taught) and even less in number are those teachers who hold Old Norse courses with a certain regularity. Fortunately, the unlimited 'freedom of teaching' which so typically characterizes the Italian university system allows that courses in Old Norse may be offered also in faculties where no teaching of Modern Scandinavian is activated; this enables those Germanic philologists who have special interest in Old Norse to give, from time to time, free play to their desire for expression and popularization, although this may not be in line with the immediate interests of their students, who would prefer to have, for example, a course in Old English or Middle High German instead.

Considerably different is the situation with regard to scholarly research, where the individual choices are totally independent from any (at least virtual) teaching bond. This means that any person engaged in university research within the Humanities may, if he or she just likes it, devote him-/herself to some investigation concerning Old Norse topics. In fact, only a half dozen Italian scholars have been regularly and prevaillingly engaged in the field of Nordic philology so far. However, it must be acknowledged - to our great satisfaction - that a more and more increasing interest is taking root all around the field, notably on the part of the younger generation of Germanic philologists and scholarly circles traditionally alien to or only marginally concerned with Nordic civilization. In this connection it may be mentioned, by way of example, that a cultural association by the name *Classiconorroena* was recently founded in Perugia on the initiative of a group of classicists and linguists with the aim of fostering the study of any possible relationship between the Classical world and Ancient Scandinavia, and that the Ph.D. course in Germanic Philology at the University of Florence (the only one of its kind in Italy up to the present) includes a curriculum in Nordic Philology, which gives postgraduate students the opportunity of a systematic specialization in this field.

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