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quotations, quotations from Danish and Norwegian texts are sometimes influenced by Swedish. In its emphasis this book is fully aligned with the aims of *Möðruvallabók*'s compiler, of whose savage redaction Müller is somewhat uncritical. His putative cuts from the originals rate no mention until the section on *Egils saga*, where Müller defends this style of work as one which did not change the plot (p. 79). Nonetheless, it is from the older fragments of *Egils saga* that the case for Snorri's authorship has been made. Leaving this question aside, we might still wonder how much the author meant by the *kærleikar miklir* between Gunnhildr and Þórólfr, Egill's brother (ch. 37): friendship or affair? Perhaps the unshortened version could have told us. The treatment of *Víga-Glúms saga* was more drastic; and yet to read Müller on the other fragments one might never know that anything had been lost (p. 140). We might, for example, compare the text in AM 445 c, 4to (Pseudo-Vatnshyrna) with its counterpart in *Möðruvallabók*, in a scene from Chapter 7 in which Ástríðr, Glúmr's mother, shames her son into driving out her neighbour's encroaching cattle. In the fragment she makes a rousing speech of some nine lines; in *Möðruvallabók* we get a line of indirect speech followed by 'en ek hefi eigi fráleik til at reka í brott, en verkmenn at vinnu'. The plot is unchanged, as Müller would say. And yet so much else is cut out, even the verb from the second clause, that we might ask why the fourteenth-century abridger bothered to copy *Víga-Glúms saga* in the first place. 'To preserve local history' must be the answer, an antiquarian motive for the codex which Müller has now made fully plausible. A touch of regret, however, for the levelling effect of this redaction would have made hers a more literary study of the sagas in *Möðruvallabók*.

RICHARD NORTH

STURLA ÞÓRÐARSONS *HÁKONAR SAGA HÁKONARSONAR*. By ULRIKE SPRENGER. *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Germanistik und Skandinavistik* 46. Peter Lang. Frankfurt am Main, 2000. 143 pp.

Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar, Sturla Þórðarson's history of King Hákon IV of Norway (1217–64), has often enough been looked down upon as a poor relation among kings' sagas, not least because it contains stretches of narrative that are undeniably dry. The saga nevertheless has a good deal to offer those willing to read it with patient care; and in any case it demands our attention because of its subject-matter, which is the king who did more than anyone else to turn Norway into a European-style monarchy with Iceland as part of its empire. For these reasons Sprenger's concise and mostly explanatory book, which keeps literary-critical attention focused on the saga itself and clarifies its big issues while insisting on its strengths, is to be welcomed despite the reservations outlined below.

The brevity of the book is a plus in that it gets the reader quickly to the heart of a saga that can seem diffuse; but naturally it brings with it certain limitations. Perhaps I should immediately state, therefore, what lies outside the remit of the book as Sprenger conceives it. First, there is no description of the manuscripts or the versions of the saga that they contain; Sprenger registers the existence of the

different versions (p. 8), but she does not investigate the relationships between them. Secondly, no room is found for discussion of the anecdotes that give much-needed touches of colour to the narrative. Sturla has an eye for such things, but Sprenger ignores them; she goes instead for what she takes to be essential, as is right in such limited space, but by doing so she misses an aspect of Sturla's talent that helps make the saga what it is. Thirdly, although Sprenger's final chapter (pp. 126–35) is entitled 'Sturla Þórðarson', there is no summary of Sturla's life or review of his literary output as a whole; nor is *Hákonar saga* seen against the background of that output even though some attention is paid (pp. 128–34) to the small surviving fragment of Sturla's *Magnúss saga*, and short chapters are devoted to the possible relevance of *Sverris saga* (pp. 72–76) and the *Heimskringla* account of Óláfr helgi (pp. 67–71). Last, Sprenger discusses Sturla's willingness to suppress inconvenient facts (pp. 80–83) and thus to accommodate the presumed views of King Magnús, Hákon's son, who was acting as a sort of censor; but she does not consider the many places where Sturla may be suspected of irony at the expense of his royal master.

The first half of the book (pp. 9–66) is devoted to the explication of major issues associated with the portrayals of Hákon and his great adversary, Skúli, with the bulk allocated to the former and arranged around the key events of his career (pp. 9–54). Sprenger's great merit here is her power of clarification, whilst her main service is that she leaves the general reader with an awareness of Sturla's most significant political messages and of the literary strategies he uses to put them across. Her method is best seen in her account of the great debate worked up by Sturla, in which one man after another declares for Hákon as the best claimant to the kingship: she summarises the sequence of speeches, correctly foregrounding the idea that Hákon was a lawful king in accordance with the code of Óláfr helgi, and that his descent from earlier kings by an unbroken male line was of paramount importance (pp. 18–23); but she does not, of course, find space to analyse the speeches from a purely literary point of view, even though the debate constitutes a large rhetorical set-piece and is clearly meant, on one level, to be appreciated as such. The lack of abundant textual detail here does not compromise the case that Sprenger sets out to make, but elsewhere it can damage her discussion of the issues that are actually focused on: it is surely to be regretted, for example, that her treatment of Hákon as a military leader (pp. 50–53) gives no account of his actual tactics; in particular, an extensive analysis of Hákon's lack of foresight and poor grip on discipline during his final campaign, which make for uncomfortable reading in Sturla's prose account, would have been highly relevant to Sprenger's later discussion of Sturla the skald (pp. 84–94), obliged by the conventions of his art, and by King Magnús, to praise Hákon as a great warrior (p. 92).

The routine omission of details, as in the contexts just mentioned, perhaps indicates a desire to evade the problems of there being not one text but several redactions; but if so it must be noted that from time to time throughout her book, and contrary to her general tendency, Sprenger seizes on certain particulars and makes more of them than is perhaps justified. The second half of the work, which deals less with historical and more with purely literary-critical topics, such as the use of direct and indirect speech (pp. 94–103) or of the pronouns *þú* and *þér* (pp.

110–13), yields several instances of what I take to be over-interpretation. For example, in her section on Sturla's use of symbolism, she develops an almost allegorical reading of the passage in which Hákon, bearing a bloodied sword and mounted on a black horse that he has just found, pursues his enemies after defeating them in Oslo (p. 105): Sprenger relates the sword to the Old Testament image of the Day of Vengeance in Isaiah 34:6–8; further, she states that black is the colour of evil and of the devil (citing a black horse in *Piðreks saga*) but notes that since it cannot signify evil in this passage it must represent 'something terrifying'. The first problem is that the passage contains nothing that prompts the interpretation except the details that Sprenger has picked out; nor are black horses always terrifying. If the apocalyptic imagery is insisted on, however, it must surely be agreed that an audience able to recognise an allusion to Isaiah would also remember the fulfilment of the Day of Vengeance topos in Revelation 19:11–16, where Christ is portrayed, like Hákon, as a rider bearing a sword; but in this scripture the horse is white, which makes the colour of Hákon's mount even more problematical. It is therefore better, I think, to abandon the proposed interpretation and to accept that Hákon simply found a black horse and was carrying a bloodied sword because he had just participated actively in battle.

Apart from such moments of questionable commentary on details, much of the second half of the book tends, like the first, to play safe by dealing in abstractions. Hence the chapter on the 'form' of the saga (pp. 114–25), by which Sprenger really means the principles of its structuring, finds that the work is organised on three levels: first, in accordance with chronology; secondly, around the most significant events of Hákon's life; and thirdly, through the distribution of the skaldic verses. This does not take us very deep into Sturla's craft; nevertheless it is in such safe conclusions about Sturla's technique, as well as in those about his broad political messages, that the book's chief merits lie. People who have read *Hákonar saga* hurriedly and found it bemusing will have their thinking clarified and their respect for Sturla increased; those who have yet to approach the saga can be confident that this brief analysis will set them on the right lines while leaving them room for their own explorations. For this Sprenger is to be applauded.

As a final point I must note that there does not seem to be a consistent policy with regard to quotations from the saga, some of which are given in Old Norse only, some in German translation only, and some in both languages. This is a pity since giving all quotations in Old Norse and German would have added only a very few pages to the book.

DAVID ASHURST

CHAOS AND LOVE. THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ICELANDIC FAMILY SAGAS. By THOMAS BREDSORFF. Translated by JOHN TUCKER. *Museum Tusulanum Press, University of Copenhagen*. Copenhagen, 2001. 156 pp.

Chaos and Love is a translation of Thomas Bredsdorff's *Kaos og Kærlighed. En studie i islændingesagaens livsbillede*, which was published in 1971, and widely reviewed at the time (by, for example, Lars Lönnroth in *Saga-Book XVIII*:4