



The Retrospective Methods Network

RMN

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RMN Newsletter is a medium of contact and communication for members of the Retrospective Methods Network (RMN). The RMN is an open network which can include anyone who wishes to share in its focus. It is united by an interest in the problems, approaches, strategies and limitations related to considering some aspect of culture in one period through evidence from another, later period. Such comparisons range from investigating historical relationships to the utility of analogical parallels, and from comparisons across centuries to developing working models for the more immediate traditions behind limited sources. *RMN Newsletter* sets out to provide a venue and emergent discourse space in which individual scholars can discuss and engage in vital cross-disciplinary dialogue, present reports and announcements of their own current activities, and where information about events, projects and institutions is made available.

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discussion that stimulated exchange and collaboration which has continued beyond that significant AFS meeting.

Notes

1. AFS website “2013 Annual Meeting Theme Statement: Cultural Sustainability”, available at: <http://www.afsnet.org/?2013AMTheme>.

Projects, Networks and Resources

Translating the Medieval Icelandic Romance-Sagas

Alaric Hall, University of Leeds

This note is to advertise ongoing work on a series of free-access translations of medieval Icelandic romance-sagas, and to promote the collaborative and free-access model of research and publishing which my collaborators and I have been using.

Icelandic romance-sagas, currently thought to have flourished particularly in the 14th century, arose in direct response to medieval French and Latin romances transmitted to Iceland via Norway. They have received relatively little attention, largely because the National-Romantic historiography which we still, to a large extent, inhabit has seen them as foreign – both to Iceland and to the Germanic-speaking cultures which Iceland is taken to represent – and of poor literary quality. But, as with so-called ‘popular romance’ of medieval Europe generally, researchers are increasingly seeing the value of Icelandic romance-sagas both as literary texts and as historical sources. They comprise a body of literature in many ways outward-looking, international, and scholarly, demonstrating the intellectual vigour of Iceland under Norwegian rule, with its Europeanising outlook. Yet they also represent the first appearance in the Nordic literary tradition of a range of narratives and motifs that must have been well rooted in the region: they include, for example, the first attestations of what Oddr Snorrason dismissed in the twelfth century as:

stjúpmæðrasögur er hjarðarsveinar segja, er engi veit hvert satt er, er jafnan láta

konunginn minnztan í sínum frásögnum.
(normalised from Finnur Jónsson 1932: 2.)

stepmother-stories which shepherd-boys tell, whose truth no-one knows, and which always give the king the smallest role in his own saga.

Some attest to similarities between the narrative traditions of medieval Iceland, Ireland and Wales which are much less apparent in other sources. Finally, these romances underpinned a long tradition of further composition of sagas, and recomposition as *rímur*, which themselves deserve further study. Thus romance-sagas are an important resource for understanding oral literature and early-historic traditions in the medieval North. (For further discussion and references see Hall et al. 2010; Hall, Richardson & Haukur Þorgeirsson 2014.)

Along with various colleagues and friends (particularly Sheryl McDonald Werronen, Haukur Þorgeirsson, Steven Richardson, and Gary Harrup), I have been working to bring more medieval Icelandic romances to a wider audience, primarily through collaborative translations into English; but also by providing these with facing normalised editions; by digitising existing editions and translations; and by undertaking research on Icelandic romances’ manuscript transmission. Most Icelandic romance sagas were edited by Agnete Loth (1962–1965), in editions which were never intended to be definitive but which I have so far found to be impressive in their judgement; with the help of Gillian

Fellows-Jensen, Loth provided extensive English paraphrases for each of these. Loth's work, therefore, is invaluable, but complete translations of these romances are important for making them accessible to less specialist audiences. Our work also, of course, builds particularly on the foundational bibliographical work of Marianne E. Kalinke and P.M. Mitchell (1985) and the recent English translations by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (1985) and Ralph O'Connor (2002). It stands alongside the recent major translations of romance-sagas and *fornaldarsögur* into German (Glauser, Kreutzer and Wäckerlin 1998) and Finnish (Helga Hilmisdóttir, Kirsi Kanerva, & Sari Päivärinne 2013). My own work, based at the University of Leeds (though always indebted to the Arnamagnæan institutes in Reykjavík and Copenhagen), itself stands in a tradition of previous Leeds editions and/or translations of romance-sagas: *Bragða-Ölvis saga* (Hooper 1932, edition only), *Nikulás saga leikara* (Wick 1996), *Nítíða saga fræga* (McDonald 2009) – all now available free-access – along with *Kirjalax saga* (Divjak 2009) and *Úlfs saga Uggasonar* (Wawn 2010, translation only).

My work so far has led to completed facing-page editions and translations of *Sigurðar saga fóts* (Hall et al. 2010) and *Sigurgarðs saga frækna* (Hall, Richardson & Haukur Þorgeirsson 2014). The translation of *Sigurðar saga fóts* was undertaken in collaboration with my undergraduate Old Norse students of 2008–2009. While publications with twenty-two named authors are not common in humanities publishing (and I haven't found the energy to undertake a similar project every year!), I can recommend this process as a way to give students a sense of purpose in learning Old Norse; as a way to emphasise their role, even at undergraduate level, as researchers; and as an external motivation to complete the tedious process of finishing off a translation and getting it through the press!

Meanwhile, the University of Leeds Old Norse Reading Group is producing a translation of *Jarlmanns saga og Hermanns*. At the time of writing, a complete draft translation on Google Docs can be found via

<http://www.alarichall.org.uk/jarlmannssaga>. It needs quite a lot of work before it is finished, but we are making our draft work public both in the hope that it will even at this stage be useful to some researchers, and that people consulting the draft will leave us helpful comments. (In due course, this URL will be redirected to the final publication.) Likely future targets over the next few years include *Dínus saga drambláta*, *Bærings saga fagra*, and *Sigurðar saga turnara*. If anyone is interested in being involved, with these or other sagas, feel free to email me: alaric@cantab.net. In due course, my collaborators and I will probably collect up these translations as a book; either the book itself will be a free-access publication or we will publish the translations individually as free-access articles before republishing them in book form.

My work on the manuscript transmission of the romance-sagas has so far appeared as Hall and Parsons 2013, which focuses on *Konráðs saga keisarasonar*, but I have made working papers available on *Sigurgarðs saga frækna* and (with Sheryl McDonald Werronen) *Nikulás saga leikara* at http://www.alarichall.org.uk/sigurgards_saga_stemma_article/ and http://www.alarichall.org.uk/nikulas_saga_stemma_article/, respectively. Work on these is proceeding incrementally; again, the URLs given here will be updated eventually to point to final publications. Meanwhile, Sheryl McDonald has published similar work on *Nítíða saga* (2012; 2013).

Finally, a plea: the UK inter-library loan service has found no copies of the translation of *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* by Otto Zitzelsberger (1980): if anyone can send me a scan, I would be very grateful!

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