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Review: Historical Linguistics: Haugen (2007)

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Directory

1. Brendan Wolfe, Altnordische Philologie

Message 1: Altnordische Philologie

Date: 01-Jul-2008

From: Brendan Wolfe <brendan_wolfe@yahoo.ca>

Subject: Altnordische Philologie



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Announced at <http://linguistlist.org/issues/18/18-3241.html>

EDITOR: Haugen, Odd Einar
 TRANSLATOR: Astrid van Nahl
 TITLE: Altnordische Philologie (Old Norse Philology)
 SUBTITLE: Norwegen und Island
 SERIES TITLE: de Gruyter Lexikon
 PUBLISHER: Mouton de Gruyter
 YEAR: 2007

Brendan N. Wolfe, Wolfson College, University of Oxford

SUMMARY

Altnordische Philologie is the German translation of *Handbok i norrøn filologi*, published in Norwegian in 2004. As a collection of interdependent articles which combine to cover a subject fully it is a "handbook"; "philology" is used to denote the complete set of disciplines needed to interpret the writings of a given language, including palaeography, historical linguistics, and textual criticism. The editor, Odd Einar Haugen, is Professor of Norse Philology at the University of Bergen, and the Director of the Medieval Nordic Text Archive (http://www.menota.org/index_en.page); all of the other contributors hold similar positions in different universities throughout Norway.

The introduction, by Odd Einar Haugen (pp. 13–31), sets out (p 15) the intentions of the book, including the way in which the chapters are meant to work together: Each stands alone as a presentation of its subject, in size and detail somewhere between an article and a monograph, while all use the same terminology and address the same level of readership. Haugen also offers a useful few pages (pp. 20–24; 29–30) on important resources, and how to find them, as well as discussion of what could not be included in the volume (pp. 26–28). A concisely scientific outline of the use of terms such as "Nordic", "Scandinavian" or "Viking" completes the prolegomena (pp. 24–26).

"Manuscripts and Archival Science" (pp. 33–98) by Jon Gunnar Jørgensen describes the creation, preservation history, and current location and designation of major Old Norse manuscripts. This section will be particularly useful to linguistic students of Old Norse, who often desire to get beyond the regularized forms and homogenized spellings of edited texts back to what is actually read in the sources, but are daunted by sigla such as "Holm perg 6 fol" or "AM 619^o". The rediscovery, archiving, and collecting of the manuscripts is outlined, down to the 20th-century return of some major codices from Denmark to Iceland. Of particular note is the text example on pages 94–96, where the same content is given in a strict transcription, a normalized version, and a German translation.

The aforementioned theme of the steps taken to bring the content of a manuscript to the page of an edition is resumed even more strongly in the next chapter, "Textual Criticism and Textual Philology" (pp. 99–145) by Odd Einar Haugen. It includes discussion of the process of editing a text (along with the text-critical method), "old" and "new" (since c. 1990) philology, and the burgeoning potential of digital texts. "New" philology is meant to be exemplified by an attitude to texts less concerned with reconstructing the earliest possible stage of development, and more interested in what a given manuscript can convey on its own (pp. 107–8). A guide on how to use apparatus critici (pp. 119–128) and a chart of commonly used editorial symbols make for handy reference (p118).

While Haugen's point about old and new philology is well taken, it is perhaps overstated, and some discussion of how traditional, reconstruction-oriented philology was shaped by the pursuit of the autographs of the New Testament, understood as divinely inspired, would have been welcome.

In Karin Fjellhammer Seim's "Runology" (pp. 147–222), the reading of runic inscriptions is taught, the development of the runic alphabet into its Old Norse form is delineated, and the nature of the inscriptions themselves is treated. The earliest monuments of the Old Norse (indeed of any of the Germanic languages) are found in the runic alphabet (c. AD 150–200). Most of the mainstays of runology are touched upon (for an exception see the next paragraph), including the alphabet's origin and distribution throughout Europe. Seim illustrates the nonsense that infects this field with a reference to a purported Semitic hieroglyphic inspiration for the runes (p 157). The locations and types of inscriptions are exemplified and treated.

The chapter is written soberly, avoiding the mystical excesses that bedevil much runology (in fact, more discussion of the religious uses of runes, after all from a word meaning "secret", would have been welcome). The chapter's initial theme is describing what a runologist does; while this can give the feel of "a day in the life of a rune-scholar", it is a useful way of pointing out the typical skills and risks to be expected in this field.

The other and more common alphabet in which Old Norse comes down to us, the Roman, is treated in "Palaeography" (pp. 223–274) by Odd Einar Haugen. The evolution of the alphabet is treated before a detailed discussion of important individual letters and their formation. The chapter also contains a section on abbreviations, which are pervasive in medieval documents, including in Old Norse. Numerous examples are given throughout, manuscript facsimiles with transcriptions. These illustrate the main text, and also serve to demystify the process of reading original documents.

Else Mundal, in "Eddaic and Skaldic Poetry" (pp. 275–340), discusses Eddaic and Skaldic poetry. Eddaic poetry is the verse of the anonymous Elder Edda, which recounts the doings of the Germanic gods and heroes. This chapter offers the background to the Edda, a chart of the subject, metre, and manuscript of attestation of each of the poems contained therein; metre and transmission are discussed in detail. The Skaldic section discusses who the skalds were, both in general terms and with prosopographical examples, and the nature of the poems they produced, which included homage verses, short, topical stanzas, love poems, and mockery. Transmission and metre are discussed, before a more in-depth look at dróttkvætt, the main type of strophe, beginning with eleven pages of annotated and translated examples (pp. 301–312). Heiti (poetic synonyms) and kenningar (fixed poetic metaphors, often of great allusive complexity) receive useful, diagrammed treatment, and also considered are the *quaestiones vexatae* of the artistic value and the origin of this unique style of poetics.

The next chapter, "Saga Literature" (pp. 341–390) is also by Else Mundal. This is a quick-moving chapter, which because of the magnitude of the subject matter can only highlight interesting topics and make important first distinctions. Sagas are divided into a number of genres (including knightly, bishops' and family stories), all flowing out of the original kingly and heroic tales. Discussion of the overarching genre begins only on page 381, and attempts to define style and composition, as well as treat the dispute about whether sagas originated as spoken or written accounts. As everywhere in this book, a well-chosen selection of examples is scattered throughout.

In "Syntactic Development" (pp. 391–431) by Marit Nielsen, the principal syntactic developments from Proto-Norse to Modern Norwegian are treated, with the focus upon the nature of the subject. While early Norse allows subjects to be omitted or oblique (i.e. set in cases other than the nominative), Modern Norwegian does not. Similarly, the verb may take the first position in Old Norse, but is barred from doing so except in questions in Modern Norwegian. In keeping with the wide intended audience of the book, this chapter is written without an excess of syntax idiom, and carefully explains the terms and processes it does employ. The examples include the earliest attested Germanic inscriptions, as well as later Norse texts, and are often glossed in Norwegian as well as German, to make clear the diachronic changes.

"Person- and Place-names" (pp. 433–482), by Inge Særheim, discusses names, an important feature of Old Norse literature. In common with other early Germanic

literatures, the concern for memorializing individuals leads to relatively minor characters in most stories being carefully named. On top of this, the settler experience that informs many of the Icelandic sagas involved the naming of new places. This chapter elucidates the principles and practice (e.g. baptism) of name-giving, and lists (pp. 440–441) common formants of proper names. A tour is taken through Norway, explaining place-names along the way, and attention is paid to Old Norse names in Iceland, the Orkneys and even North America (e.g. Markland for Labrador, from Old Norse *mork*, 'forest'). Theories of pre-Indo-European toponyms persisting in Europe are rightly dismissed (p 458), while the possibility of Early Indo-European hydronyms is properly considered (p 459).

Jan Ragnar Hagland in "Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian" (pp. 483–525), sets out to differentiate Icelandic from Norwegian in Old Norse, to provide a basic description of each dialect, and to illustrate with examples the differences between attested and normalized texts. Many Old Norse sources tell Norwegian stories in Icelandic manuscripts. Furthermore, much of what passes for Old Norse is in fact Old West Norse (which also includes the Atlantic isles and Britain): Other dialects are known in Sweden and Denmark. Diachronic change within the medieval period is given some space, but the bulk of the chapter is devoted to synchronic phonological statements. The only development earlier than Old Norse that is mentioned is Verner's Law.

The pages of "Middle Norwegian" (pp. 527–580), by Endre Mørck, are filled with charts: of phonemes, of inflectional paradigms, of pronouns. It is a classic language description, offering also a brief historical situation of Middle Norwegian, and alluding to influence from Danish, Swedish and German sources. Syntax is also well represented.

Since no grammar or dictionary of Middle Norwegian has been published to the reviewer's knowledge, this is a useful service. Middle Norwegian has historically often been treated as an unstable and short interlude between Old Norse and Modern Norwegian, but this can be true only if one pretends that Norwegian had ceased to exist during the Danish pre-eminence, only to be reborn in the 19th century. While a chapter such as this is necessarily dependent upon writings, it is worth bearing in mind that its contents must also be the approximation of hundreds of years of Norwegian speech.

EVALUATION

This book is to be recommended to those looking for a general introduction to the field of Old Norse studies, as well as to students of particular aspects of that field who would like to know what others in closely related disciplines do. It is clearly and concisely presented, does not espouse theories outlandish or otherwise inappropriate for beginners, and never strays far from the original sources, which are, after all, the point. The one discipline that is omitted is Comparative Historical Linguistics, by which I mean the study that shows the development of Proto-Germanic into Old Norse (and perhaps, at the most basic level, Proto-Indo-European into Proto Germanic), a discipline that has been vital to the development of the field overall, and which implicitly informs many of the chapters. Such minor criticism notwithstanding, one may hope that an English translation will appear in due course, to give the book an even wider readership.

Some of the changes between editions are worth noting: All proper names, which had been unfortunately modernized, are restored to their Old Norse forms, by which they are likely to be known to English (and German) speakers. This means that Audun frá Vestfjordane returns to Auðunn inn vestfirzki (i.e. Auðun from the West-Fjords). This change means that the "Namneformer" section of the Norwegian edition is no longer necessary. The German edition also makes use throughout of 'Andron', a new, single, unified font system for all of the alphabets required (including runes), an improvement over the 15 used in the original. Sadly, the map of the Nordic world printed on the inside cover of the Norwegian edition is nowhere to be found in the German.

The bibliography has been significantly expanded. Not only have many titles published since the Norwegian edition been included, but items more useful to a non-Norwegian audience, such as Zoega's "Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic" have been added. Furthermore, there has been major expansion of the German section on web-pages, which is also helpfully categorized. This is particularly valuable in a subject such as this, in which the internet is more and more important for editions of source texts, comparison of research, and general interaction between distant scholars.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Brendan N. Wolfe is a D.Phil. candidate in the Faculty of Theology at Wolfson College of the University of Oxford. His thesis is on Christianity of the Late Antique Germanic peoples, notably the Arianism of the Goths and the Gothic New Testament. He holds an M.Phil. in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology from Oxford, and a B. A. in Classics, Modern Languages, and Great Books from Brock University.

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