

Advanced medieval Scandinavian language and literature

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Course description

In Michaelmas term 2011, the focus of this paper will be Old Norse poetics. In the weekly seminar we will examine the extent and mode of preservation of the corpus, the genres and sub-genres of Old Norse poetry, cultural attitudes to poetic composition and recitation (both pre-Christian and Christian), and the theorization of poetic practice. The seminar series in Lent term will focus on the prosimetric form of much Old Norse literature. A range of saga genres will be examined during the course of weekly seminars and the issue of narratorial authority will be explored in each of these. The relationship of verse to prose (and the authenticity of verse quotation) is frequently debated in the critical literature and towards the end of the seminar series we will return to the question of the origin of prosimetric form in medieval Icelandic literary compositions.

Mode of teaching

Weekly seminars on Old Norse poetics will be held during Michaelmas and Lent terms on Tuesdays at 4. Weekly readings will be set from both Old Norse texts and secondary literature and each student will present a paper during the term.

Instruction in the language will continue in six weekly classes, during which Old Norse texts will be studied in detail. The first text to be read will be *Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum* (ed. Driscoll); the text for Lent term will be *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* (ed. Turville-Petre).

Assessment

The course is examined in the Part II Tripos examinations, the question-papers for which contain compulsory seen and unseen translations and grammatical questions, and a choice of two essays chosen from typically ten literary questions. Formative feedback will be given throughout the course by in-class translation and grammar work and through seminar presentations each term.

Course outcomes

By the end of this term, students should have acquired an understanding of the nature of the corpus of extant poetic texts and the cultural attitudes to poetry expressed in traditional myths, kennings, law-codes, and by the practices of medieval manuscript compilers. They should also have a sound knowledge of the range of poetic forms in the extant corpus of Old Norse literature and the historical development of poetic theorisation from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. By the end of the course, students should also have acquired a deeper understanding of the relationship of verse to prose in Old Norse prosimetrum and have developed an ability to debate questions of poetic authenticity and narratorial authority in particular texts. They should also have a sound knowledge of the range of prosimetric forms in the extant corpus of Old Norse literature and the complex historical development of saga genres during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. Students' knowledge of the language of both poetry and prose should be extended through their own wide reading of texts in the original and detailed work in language classes.

Seminar Programme for Michaelmas Term

WEEK ONE

Introduction: the evidence of poetic traditions in pre-literate Scandinavia

A general discussion of the aims of the course and the range of texts to be examined, during which a timetable for seminar papers by students will be worked out. The nature and the extent of the corpus of written poetic texts – both *lausavísur* and extended compositions – will be considered in light of the probability that most of the verses were originally oral compositions.

Readings: Clunies Ross 2005, Harris 1983, Fidjestøl 1997, Kellogg 1991, Quinn 2000, Sigurðsson 2000, Poole 2007

WEEK TWO

The eddic/skaldic continuum

Types of poetry and contexts of preservation in saga prosimetrum and learned treatises will be considered this week in an attempt to understand the classification principles behind the opinions about poetry implied or expressed by medieval writers such as the compiler of the Codex Regius anthology and Snorri Sturluson in *The Prologue to Heimskringla*, *The Prologue to the Edda*, *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*.

Readings: Frank 1985, Harris 1985, Gade 2000, Clunies Ross 2005

WEEK THREE

The myth of the origin of poetry

Traditional attitudes to poetry and poets will be explored through an analysis of the myth of the origin of poetry (related in *Skáldskaparmál*), the range of kennings for poetry, and the kinds of verbs that serve as metaphors for composing in skaldic verse.

Readings: Meissner 1921, Kreutzer 1977, Frank 1981, Amory 1988, Clunies Ross 1994, Würth 2007, Schjødt 2008

WEEK FOUR

The poet as Odinic persona

The significance of the metaphor of poetry as imbibed and regurgitated liquid will be examined this week, in conjunction with an analysis of poets' own self-representation in verse. The implications of self-representation for the composition of eddic verse, which is almost entirely anonymous, will be explored.

Readings: Lönnroth 1971, Clover 1978, Dronke 1978, Clunies Ross 1981, De Looze 1989, Heslop 2000, Jochens 2001, Whaley 2001, Lassen 2005, Quinn 2010

WEEK FIVE

Native traditions and foreign influences

The impact of Christianity on poetic praxis included changed attitudes to traditional modes of diction, the influence of foreign verse-forms, and a changed social role for praise-poetry. This week we will survey some of these changes, looking in particular at the kennings for Christ documented by Snorri, and the overt criticism of the riddling qualities of kennings made by later Christian poets.

Readings: Clunies Ross 2005, Lange 1958, Dronke and Dronke 1977, Foote 1974 and 1984, Frank 1978, Turville-Petre 1978, Faulkes 1991, Whaley 2001

WEEK SIX

Theorising the native tradition

The aims and methods of the two native *artes metricae*, *Háttalykill* and *Háttatal*, will be discussed this week in the context of the development of the learned poetic tradition which is reflected in the writing of *The First*, *Second*, *Third* and *Fourth Grammatical Treatises*.

Readings: editions of treatises, Quinn 1994, Quinn 2007, Tranter 2000, Sigurðsson 2000, Nordal 2001, Clunies Ross 2005, Lavender 2006, Raschella 2007

WEEK SEVEN

Orality and Old Norse poetry

Taking the eddic poem *Völuspá* and the skaldic poem *Höfuðlausn* as examples, we will explore the extent of variation in the manuscript texts of Old Norse poems.

Readings: Quinn 1990, Dronke 1997, Poole 1993

WEEK EIGHT

Old Norse Poetics

Discussion of the main themes of the seminar.

Reading List

Primary sources

Skaldic Editing Project Website: skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/

*Searchable dictionary of Old Norse:

www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/collection?collection=Perseus:collection:Germanic

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Benediktsson, Hreinn, ed. *The First Grammatical Treatise* (Reykjavík, 1972)

Clunies Ross, Margaret et al. *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2007–) [vols 2 and 7 now published, on poetry from the kings' sagas and poetry on Christian subjects respectively]

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Evans, David A. H., ed. *Hávamál*, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series, Vol. VII. (London, 1986)

Faulkes, Anthony, ed. *Snorri Sturluson Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (London, 1982)

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Helgason, Jón and Anne Holtsmark, eds. *Háttalykill enn forni*, *Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana* 1 (Copenhagen, 1941)

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Neckel, Gustav and Kuhn, Hans, eds. *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, 5th ed. (Heidelberg, 1983)

Ólsen, Björn Magnus, ed. *Den tredje og fjerde grammatiske afhandling i Snorres Edda* (Copenhagen, 1884)

Raschella, Fabrizio D. ed. *The So-Called Second Grammatical Treatise*, *Filologia Germanica Testi e Studi* II (Florence, 1982)

Turville-Petre, E. O. G. *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford, 1976)

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- La Farge, Beatrice and John Tucker, eds. *Glossary to the Poetic Edda based on Hans Kuhn's Kurzes Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1992)
- Lehmann, Winfred and J. L. Dillard, eds. *The Alliterations of the Edda* (Austin, 1954)
- Meissner, Rudolf. *Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik* (Bonn, 1921)
- Other resources are available on the Skaldic Editing Project website: <http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/>

Secondary sources

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- Acker, Paul and Carolyne Larrington, eds. *The Poetic Edda. Essays on Old Norse Mythology* (New York and London, 2002)
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- [Ekphrasis round-table discussion: articles by Margaret Clunies Ross, Signe Horn Fuglesang, John Hines and Russell Poole], *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 3 (2007), 159-267
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