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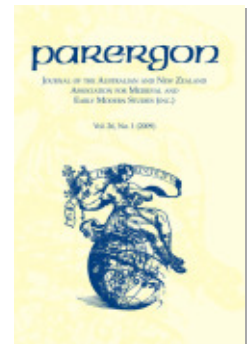
*Reflections on Old Norse Myths* (review)

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**Hermann**, Pernille, Jens-Peter **Schjødt**, and Rasmus Tranem **Kristensen**, eds, *Reflections on Old Norse Myths* (Studies in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia 1), Turnhout, Brepols, 2007; hardback; pp. xiv, 176; 3 b/w figures; R.R.P. €50.00; ISBN 9782503526140.

This slim volume is the first in what promises to be an exciting, high-quality new series from Brepols publishers: Studies in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia. *Reflections on Old Norse Myths* stems from a symposium convened at the University of Aarhus in 2005, and comprises reworked versions of papers given there, together with supplementary articles by each of the three editors. As suggested by the title, the volume is broad in scope, and is consciously multi-disciplinary, aiming to gather together perspectives on Old Norse myths and mythology from various fields of study to allow an overview of current directions and developments in the area.

Jens-Peter Schjødt opens the volume with a critical, interdisciplinary review of recent research in the field (including pre-Christian Scandinavian religion in general), focussing on major (i.e. book-length) studies. Valuable in itself for those less familiar with the scholarship – indeed invaluable, as it includes a significant number of non-English-language publications and, like each of the subsequent essays, a sizeable current bibliography – the article also provides a useful orientation for the chapters to come, each of which takes a more specific focus.

Pernille Hermann revisits the staple Old Norse text *Íslendingabók*, drawing attention to its necessary subjectivity and showing, with reference to the *Papar* that the text claims to have been the first inhabitants of Iceland, how it conforms to patterns of medieval Christian thought on signs and their significance. John McKinnell considers the problem that, with a few exceptions, extant mythological writings were recorded in Christian contexts, and wonders why pre-Christian survivals were handled with more vigour, detail and literary sophistication in Iceland than in other Germanic contexts. Ultimately, he suggests, mythological poems afforded secular Icelanders the flexibility and freedom to ‘experiment with human problems’ (p. 50) in a way that Scripture could not.

Rory McTurk’s article posits the existence of a fertility goddess Lopkona, traditions about whom, he suggests, became intertwined with various historical figures and memories of whom may be preserved behind the protagonists of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, Ragnarr and his wife Áslaug. Applying Jan de

Vries' model of the heroic biographical pattern, McTurk speculates that the saga may reflect female as well as male initiation practices, but cautions that influence from Greek romance may provide another explanation for the phenomena he observes. Stephen A. Mitchell discusses Nordic aphrodisiac and anaphrodisiac charm magic, and reconsiders *Skírnismál* in this context, highlighting the importance of speech acts and performance.

Judy Quinn then looks at Snorri Sturluson's use of the valkyrie motif in his *Edda*, particularly in *Háttatal*, where the *valmeyjar* ('maidens of the slain') 'gather in numbers' (p. 97). Quinn's close reading sheds light not only on this relatively neglected part of the *Edda*, but also on the martial culture of thirteenth-century Iceland, where it seems that despite the incompatibility with Christian theology of the notion of an afterlife in Valhöll, the poetic concept of the valkyrie had an important role in glorifying battle and promoting the comfort of death.

Next, Catharina Raudvere examines themes and motifs in *Völsunga saga*, arguing that the *fornaldarsögur* ('sagas of ancient times') need not be dismissed as sources for the study of the history of religions, since their exploration of ideological concepts and values can be analysed as an alternative mode of religious expression to literal statements of belief.

This is followed by Jens Peter Schjødt's second contribution to the volume, a reading of Ibn Fadlan's account of a Rus funeral alongside what can be pieced together about pagan Scandinavian rites from Old Norse sources and Saxo's story of Hadingus. Using Van Gennep's (1909) model of rites of passage as a framework, Schjødt argues that structural and semantic parallels between the accounts demonstrate that the pagan rituals of the Rus and the Scandinavians were aligned, implying that Ibn Fadlan's account should be taken seriously as a model for the reconstruction of pagan Nordic rites.

Finally, Rasmus Trandum Kristensen's essay is a structural analysis of kinship in Old Norse mythological texts dealing with the creation and ending of the world, which draws attention to the structural parallels between Óðinn and Fenrir and suggests that this makes them natural adversaries at Ragnarök. Trandum Kristensen proposes that the boundary-testing relationships in Norse myth explained and justified the rules of Icelandic kinship systems.

Each of the papers found here is thought-provoking in its own right, but the volume is particularly welcome as a collection which covers a range of methodological approaches and a diversity of primary sources, both drawing

to the fore little-studied material and bringing new insights to more familiar texts. It thus makes both a valuable introduction to work on Old Norse mythology for the relative newcomer, and a stimulating addition to the field for the more experienced.

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**Hiatt**, Alfred, *Terra Incognita: Mapping the Antipodes before 1600*, London, British Library Publishing, 2008; cloth, pp. xii, 298; 47 b/w illustrations, 8 colour plates; ISBN 9780712349314.

In recent years there has been a burgeoning of publications focussed on medieval map-making. Books by Evelyn Edson, Catherine Delano-Smith and Roger J. P. Kain and Naomi Reed Klein, amongst others, have done much to open up this material to a broader range of readership, beyond those interested in the history of cartography. Art historians, literary scholars and those involved in the history of science have begun exploring this material in a more nuanced way. The British Library has published some of the most interesting of these texts, including both this work and Hiatt's previous book, *The Making of Medieval Forgeries*, that included a discussion of John Hardyng's maps of Scotland.

Medieval diagrammatic representations of the world, the *mappae mundi*, have been one important strand in recent research. Such maps are less a geographically precise measure of the world and more a symbolic one. In this book, Hiatt focuses less on these visual representations, although these continue to constitute a significant element in his discussion. Instead he examines these works within the wider context of scientific, philosophical and theological thought from the Classical to the Early Modern periods.

Having first encountered the weirdly speculative maps of *terra australis* in primary school, it is fascinating to read Hiatt's tracing of the idea of the antipodes from the classical period. As he points out, the concept of the 'antipodes' is a product of classical Greek geometry. The term means literally 'with feet against', referring to the people who live opposite to the known world. It was not originally limited to a north-south dichotomy, encompassing east-west as well. Given that maps were often 'orientated', with the east at the top, this is not so surprising.