

MARIANNE E. KALINKE (ed.)

The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus' Realms. Arthurian Literature of the Middle Ages V.

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This book traces, in nine out of its ten chapters, the literary reception of the *matière de Bretagne* in medieval and medieval-to-modern Scandinavia; the tenth chapter (by Susana Torres Prieto) deals with Czech and Belarusian treatments of the Tristan story dating respectively from the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. The medieval reception in Scandinavia begins in c.1200 in Iceland, with *Merlínusspá*, Gunnlaugr Leifsson's translation into verse of the prose *Prophetiae Merlini*, and with *Breta sögur*, a prose translation, possibly also by Gunnlaugr, of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniæ*, itself a prose narrative of which the *Prophetiae* form part (treated in ch. 3, by Stefanie Gropper). The reception continues in Norway at the court of King Hákon Hákonarson (r. 1217-63), with prose translations of metrical romances and *lais* in French and Anglo-Norman: Brother Robert's *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* (an important source for its fragmentarily preserved original, Thomas de Bretagne's *Tristan*) (see ch. 4, by Geraldine Barnes); the anonymous *Strengleikar*, a translation of twenty-one *lais* (eleven of them attributable to Marie de France), and *Möttuls saga*, a translation of the *Lai du cort mantel* (ch. 5, by Carolyne Larrington); anonymous translations of Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain (Ívens saga)*, *Erec et Enide (Erex saga)* and *Perceval (Parcevals saga)* (ch. 6, by Claudia Bornholdt); and finally, with a departure from West Norse to East Norse, the anonymous Old Swedish translation, this time into verse, of Chrétien's *Yvain (Hærra Ivan)*, commissioned at the Norwegian court of Hákon Magnússon (r. 1299-1319) by his German wife Eufemia, and forming with two other translated romances the threesome known as *Eufemiavisor* (ch. 7, by William Layher).

These five chapters (3-7) are preceded by an Introduction and two chapters by the editor, Marianne Kalinke, first setting the scene in

general terms and then, in ch. 2, emphasising that, with the exception of the *Strengleikar*, preserved in the Norwegian manuscript *De la Gardie* 4-7 (c.1270), the West Norse translations are preserved in relatively late Icelandic manuscripts, raising the question of how far in their preserved form they reflect the work of the original translators and/or adaptation by Icelandic copyists. This chapter includes an account of the ‘courtly style’, the alliterative and rhythmical prose characteristic of many of the translations. Kalinke also contributes a chapter (8) on Arthurian echoes in the indigenous Icelandic sagas (see further below).

In the ‘medieval-to-modern’ category belong *Skikkju rímur*, a metrical reworking of *Möttuls saga* from the fourteenth or fifteenth century (see pp. 16, 90) discussed by Larrington in ch. 5, and the items treated by M.J. Driscoll in ch. 9, which include Icelandic, Danish and Faroese ballads of Tristan, an Icelandic folktale of Tristan, and the Danish chapbook *Tistrand og Indiana*, published in 1775, which gave rise in Iceland to prose translations and metrical versions, the latter including *Rímur af Tístrani og Indiönu* by the poet Sigurður Breiðfjörð (1798-1846).

There is very little to criticise here. Ch. 4, on the Tristan legend, could profitably have given a straight summary of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* (rather than concentrating specifically on its references to King Arthur), so that the marked differences between it and the fourteenth-century Icelandic *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, also treated in ch. 4 and arguably a burlesque response to *Tristrams saga*, could be fully appreciated; this would also have assisted comparison (and contrast) of *Tristrams saga* with the Danish *Tistrand og Indiana* and the Belarussian *Tryščan*, summarised in chs 9 and 10 respectively. Fuller accounts than are given of *fornyrðislag*, the alliterative metre of *Merlínusspá*, and of *knittelvers*, the rhyming metre of the *Eufemiavisor*, and also of *rímur* (though see pp. 16, 79) would have been helpful; and given Gropper’s view (p. 58) that the Latin exemplar of *Breta sögur* was related to the one used by Wace in his *Roman de Brut* (cf. also p. 25), a work mentioned in passing several times in the book, a succinct account of this ‘French translation’ (see pp. 25, 42) in relation to its original would have been welcome. In general, though, this volume is a fine contribution to the series to which it belongs, providing within its

Northern compass (to quote the words of the General Editor, Ad Putter, p. ix) 'a comprehensive and reliable survey of Arthurian writings in all their cultural and generic variety'.

As this book first appeared six years ago, it is worth mentioning that it has received deservedly favourable reviews from Shaun F.D. Hughes (in *Arthuriana*, 22.1 (2012), 136-42), from Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (in *The medieval review*, 7 December, 2012), and from David Elton Gay (in *Fabula* 54 (2013), 339-41). Hughes makes a number of additions to its bibliographies (of which each chapter has one; there is also a General Bibliography, pp. 209-11), and I would offer two further additions here. The book's one mention of *Hrólfs saga kraka* (on p. 9) seems to call for a reference to Foster W. Blaisdell's separately paginated paper 'The figure of the king: Arthur vs. Hrólfr', published only, as far as I know, in the typewritten Summaries and Papers of the Fourth International Saga Conference held in Munich 30 July-4 August, 1979, but readily accessible on the internet. My second addition, which I make more diffidently, is to an article of my own, first published in Icelandic under the title 'Hetjan sem vingull' in the short-lived Icelandic journal *Skáldskaparmál* 4 (1997), 40-49 (alongside an article by Marianne Kalinke!) and now published in updated and revised form in English, with the title 'Wavering heroes in the Icelandic sagas', in *Ollam: studies in Gaelic and related traditions in honor of Tomás Ó Cathasaigh*, ed. by Matthieu Boyd (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Madison 2016), 79-93. In this article I argue against Bjarni Einarsson's view (in his *Skáldasögur*, Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs, Reykjavík 1961), touched on by Kalinke on p. 151, that the story of Tristan influenced four of the Icelandic *skáldasögur* 'sagas of poets'. I argue that the story of Sigurðr Völsungr, reflected in *Völsunga saga* and the poetic and prose Eddas, is in fact more likely to have influenced the sagas in question, but I acknowledge the case for the influence of the Tristan story on three of them, namely *Kormáks saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, and *Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa* (the fourth is *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*). Of these Kalinke mentions only the first two. A reference to the 1997 version of the article might reasonably have found a place, I submit, in Kalinke's discussion (in ch. 8), of Arthurian echoes in the sagas.