

MEDDELANDEN FRÅN SVENSKT VISARKIV. 16

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# SCANDINAVIAN BALLAD RESEARCH TODAY

By

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SVENSKT VISARKIV . STOCKHOLM

## Scandinavian Ballad Research Today

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The ballad, together with Eddic and skaldic poetry, constitutes the most important poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages; in addition, related and later poems of these types have considerable value and interest. The ballad has therefore, since its rediscovery 200 years ago, continually acted as a fermenting agent, both in literature and in art and culture in general, not only in the Northern countries but, at times, just as much in the British Isles and Germany; it has been of decisive importance in the formation of the European view of the Northern countries. It is no wonder therefore that the study of this literature has flourished for 150 years. Even while this is being written new conclusions about the ballad are being put forward in the Northern countries and many research projects will soon be realized or completed.

By Scandinavia, *Norden*, is meant in this context the area covered by the Nordic languages: Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the Swedish-speaking coastal regions of Finland, and the important island areas of Iceland and the Faroes. Although significant contributions have been made to the study of national differences within the corpus of the ballads, the area is nevertheless so uniform in character that research which did not include material from all the countries concerned is unthinkable. Apart from a certain bias which must be attributed to the present author's nationality, the pages which follow will, consequently, include the whole of Scandinavia. An account will be given of new publications in recent years, of new collecting which has been made in the field and, finally, of research tasks of the present day.

Thus the topics for discussion are very much those of the present day and, partly, of the future. The past, the history of research, will not be discussed here. However, by way of introduction reference should be made to a well-known and valuable book, Sigurd Bernhard Hustvedt's "Ballad Books and Ballad Men" (Chicago, 1930). This book covers the history of ballad research both in the English and Scandinavian-speaking countries. Recently a continuation of one side of Hustvedt's book appeared in D. K. Wilgus' "Anglo-American



Folksong Scholarship since 1898" (New Jersey, 1959), and in 1956 the Scandinavian chapters in Hustvedt's book were covered and continued, but by no means made superfluous, by Erik Dal's "Nordisk folkeviseforskning siden 1800", with 20 pp. summary in English (Copenhagen). The few years which have elapsed since this book appeared have, however, brought an astonishing amount of new work in Scandinavian ballad research, in all three of the previously mentioned fields.

A broader background to the subject was given in Inger M. Boberg's "Folkemindeforskningens historie i Mellem- og Nordeuropa" ("Danmarks Folkeminder", No. 60; Copenhagen, 1953). Mention should also be made of two German contributions by Walter Salmen: the book "Das Erbe des ostdeutschen Volksgesanges" (Würzburg, 1956) and the important article "Die Volksliedforschung in Deutschland und Österreich seit 1955" (*Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, LVI, 1960). A supplement to Dr Boberg's chapter on Finland is to be found in K. Rob. V. Wikman's "Finlandssvensk folkminnesforskning" (*Budkavlen*, 1955). *Budkavlen*, published in Åbo, is one of the periodicals which contain articles and reviews of books on the ballad; others are *Arv*, *Danske Studier*, and *Norveg*, published in Uppsala, Copenhagen, and Oslo respectively.

Since we have mentioned both traditional and new lines in ballad research, it is a joy to be able to record that recent years have not brought any marked loss by death to Scandinavian ballad scholarship, and that new work continues to appear from distinguished scholars of an older generation like the Norwegian ethno-musicologist O. M. Sandvik, the Swedish literary historian Sverker Ek, and the all-round Swedish-Finn Otto Andersson.

Even a Dane may be permitted to say that Svend Grundtvig's edition of the older Danish ballads, "Danmarks gamle Folkeviser" (1853-1961.), provided a norm for the Northern countries and also for other countries, either directly or through Francis James Child and others, although it is still not complete in spite of the equally scholarly continuation by Axel Olrik and H. Grüner-Nielsen. Admittedly, Grundtvig's work and many aspects of his method rested on a romanticism which later generations, in the face of concrete findings and a changed viewpoint, have discarded. Nevertheless, Grundtvig's positive significance is so evident that, on a balanced view, it can never be effaced by any passing, not to mention permanent, discredit into which certain features of his work may fall. Grundtvig was also positive and tolerant in his attitude to those folk songs which stand outside the classical ballad: "skæmteviser", "efterklang", broadsheets of more recent date, etc. It was natural for him to begin by publishing the oldest and the best, but later generations have made few serious attempts



to do the other genres similar justice. Wilgus shows that Child's great work "English and Scottish Popular Ballads" has often been regarded as a canon to such an extent that it has blinkered many, and we cannot deny that "Danmarks gamle Folkeviser" may have acted in the same way. It can be mentioned in this connexion that even the word 'Folkeviser' is for many reasons unfortunate, although we shall not go into the somewhat barren disputes it has occasioned. They are outlined in L. Bødker's "Folkeviser. Et bidrag til terminologiens forbistring" in "Folkloristica, Festskrift till Dag Strömbäck" (Uppsala, 1960, identical with *Saga och sed*, 1960, 1959-60).

One may, however, expect the completion of the Danish edition in the 1960s (Grüner-Nielsen's textual supplement, vol. X, has been carried on by Erik Dal and Iørn Piø; his edition of melodies, vol. XI, by Nils Schiørring and Thorkild Knudsen, and an index volume with apparatus will complete the work). The future will show what can be done for the other folk genres. Two of them have been published in editions by Grüner-Nielsen: "Danske Viser fra Adelsviser og Flyveblade 1530-1630", I-VII (1912-31), and "Danske Skæmteviser" (1927-28); in addition, the whole of the post-medieval texts and melodies have been surveyed in an indispensable reference work, Nils Schiørring's doctoral dissertation, "Det 16. og 17. århundredes verdslige danske visesang", I-II (Copenhagen, 1950).

In Norway there have for generations been difficulties in compiling a definitive edition of the ballads; the names of Jørgen Moe, Moltke Moe, Sophus Bugge, and Rikard Berge are links in a chain of unrealized hopes and plans. A considerable number of the Norwegian ballads have, however, been gathered together and worked on by Knut Liestøl; this material is available in "Norsk Folkeminnesamling", and one hopes that it will soon be issued in printed form by three of the best experts of the present day: Reidar Th. Christiansen, Svale Solheim, and Olav Bø. Messrs Solheim and Bø have just been responsible for a new edition of the best existing publication of the Norwegian ballads, Knut Liestøl's and Moltke Moe's "Folkeviser", I-II (Oslo 1958-59) ("Norsk Folkediktning, VI-VII"). Included in the same series is Olav Bø's edition of "Stev", 1957. These books are not, however, definitive enough for use in comparative studies.

In Stockholm, "Svenskt visarkiv", founded in 1951, has made valuable and practical contributions. This institution is publishing a series of separate articles "Meddelanden från Svenskt Visarkiv" and a series of publications amongst which is the very useful volume, "Om visor och låtar, Studier tillägnade Sven Salén, 7.II.1960" ("Skrifter" 2, contains U. P. Olrog's account of the work of the archives 1951-60). The director of the archives, Bengt Jonsson, has written an



unpublished commentary to the excellent existing but unannotated edition of "1500- och 1600-talens visböcker", the publication of which will perhaps make it easier for the whole of the corpus of Swedish ballads to be published eventually. The first important edition of Swedish ballads, Geijer-Afzelius' "Svenska folkvisor", appeared in a new edition 1957-60. The most important new feature of this luxury edition is Sture Bergel's annotations to the melodies in volume IV. Also during these years the life's work of a private scholar has borne definite fruit by the publication of the first volume of "Sveriges sånglekar", edited by Nils Dencker (Uppsala, 1960, 'Skrifter utg. genom Landsmåls- och folkminnesarkivet i Uppsala', Ser. B:9).

The standard edition of "Finlands svenska folkdiktning" includes "Den äldre folkvisan", edited by Otto Andersson (Helsingfors, 1934). There is hope that later ballads and dances will be published before long. From the western parts of the area there is also something new. Grundtvig-Bloch's manuscript "Corpus Carminum Færoensium, Føroya Kvæði", of which Christian Matras has published rather less than half, will from 1962 be published further by N. Djurhuus, but without the commentaries which had been promised in the sub-title. The Icelandic ballad which hitherto has had to be studied in Grundtvig-Sigurðsson's now unobtainable two small volumes, "Íslenzk fornkvæði" from 1854 to 1885, will be succeeded by a much larger edition bearing the same name, containing many new types of ballads and using many hitherto insufficiently regarded manuscripts. This work, of which the first three volumes are due to appear in 1962, is being carried out by Jón Helgason, who, as is well known, is director of the Arnarnaganae Institute in Copenhagen, the most appropriate centre of Icelandic studies. In this edition the source material will not be collected together but each manuscript will be issued separately. As a forerunner to this Jón Helgason has published the principal manuscript in facsimile: "Kvæðabók séra Gissurar Sveinssonar, AM 147, 8<sup>vo</sup>" (Copenhagen, 1960; I "Ljósprentaður texti"; II "Inngangur," Íslenzk rit síðari alda, 2nd series, vol. II).

The *melodies* to the various national ballads have been given varying attention. The Danish melodies in the Danish and Faroese tradition and the Swedish and Swedish-Finnish melodies have usually interested the editors of the respective texts, but in Norway conclusions have been reached without much co-operation between the two disciplines, whilst the Faroese and Icelandic editions of the texts are based on ancient manuscripts without melodies.

The scholarly editions which have appeared in Scandinavia, and which, of course, must be the first aim of research, only serve, however, indirectly the reader who requires an easily available selection of the ballad treasure of his country, and for whom the scholarly editions are inaccessible for one or more



reasons. This type of reader is found not only among private lovers of literature but also among scholars and students of some of the fields which are neighbours to ballad research. However, if one does not do what Helen Child Sargent and G. L. Kittredge, as an ideal example, did for Child in their one-volume edition, what ought one to do?

The many possibilities for answering this question are, especially, typified in Denmark, where the boundary between scholarly and popular editions has been clearest and where editors of popular editions have therefore been placed in a much freer position than if they had had to publish original material together with what was already known. It is more instructive than edifying to compare the different treatment of some of the same ballads. The following redactions typify these differences: Svend Grundtvig's (1867, 1882)—broad in the spirit of the production theory (Ger. *Produktionstheorie*); Axel Olrik's (1899, 1909) and Ernst von der Recke's (1927-29)—selective, from the period of the reception theory (Ger. *Rezeptionstheorie*); Sofus Larsen's (no edition but many monographs)—strongly constructive, on the fringe of philological conjectural criticism.

On the other hand, H. Grüner-Nielsen (1925-27) and—partly—Ernst Frandsen (1937) gave the unedited text in their popular editions without any attempt at pedagogical, aesthetic or historical constructions or reconstructions, except for the most necessary minor amendments. This is a method which gives protection against criticism from scholars. But there remains a doubt: does it really help the reader? How often wouldn't a stroke of the pen have given him some real help! Yet whilst a bold editor can no doubt give a more readable and polished text, he is usually debarred from initiating the reader into the historical background and context of the subject, and he may therefore easily give a wrong impression or, at least, make the reader feel uncertain. The situation is a precarious one, but not to be avoided, since it is continually necessary to do something to take the ballad outside the circle of the specialists. Restored texts are at the moment, and it is typical of the time, discredited. Both supporters and opponents of this method can find support for their views in a sentence taken from a Danish work on another subject, Eric Jacobsen's "Translation—A Traditional Craft" (Copenhagen, 1958): "Literalness has always been the refuge of the unlearned, as well as the stronghold of the scrupulous"; but it must be admitted that the conservative principle adopted by Grüner-Nielsen will be used in the 1962 one-volume selection of "Danske Viser", edited by Erik Dal (who, by the way, unlike the previously mentioned editors, will include *Skæmt* and *Efterklang* besides the classical ballad).

In carrying out field-work, scholars have, no doubt, to some extent had a



tendency to apply Kittredge's well-known words, "The making of ballads is a closed account." The Dane Evald Tang Kristensen (1843-1929) was a collector of international standing, and the material he collected dominates the supplements to "Danmarks gamle Folkeviser" and influences the whole character of the "Dansk Folkemindesamling". But after his death there was a tendency to regard genuine tradition as defunct, also because Denmark is a small flat country with easy communications and a country where everybody goes to school. It was different in Norway and Sweden, where distance and difficult country gave rise to scattered and isolated habitation. Thus, especially in Norway, collections of melodies were continually made, bringing in a rich harvest, and in this way songs of many kinds were saved.

Edison's phonograph was brought into use in Scandinavia soon after 1900, but here as elsewhere conditions were improved radically by the invention of the tape-recorder and by co-operation between broadcasting authorities and research workers. In this Sweden and Norway took the lead, but also in Denmark possibilities were seen. It is worth mentioning that an expedition to the Faroes with participants from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden was undertaken at the beginning of 1959, that is in the severest and therefore the most "songful" time of the year in those parts. The expedition returned with no less than eighty hours of recordings of all kinds. This was, however, qualitatively rather than quantitatively surprising, for, as everybody knows, the medieval ring dance with ballad song is still living in that isolated place. It was felt to be much more surprising that a group of young music-folklorists connected with "Dansk Folkemindesamling" have in recent years found folk songs in the most widely different parts of Denmark. In Jutland, where pietist and primitive-orthodox congregations have for centuries preserved a character of their own within the Danish State Church, there were found ancient church melodies in "omsungne" forms (German *Umsingen*—for *Zersingen* is almost a rude word in modern ethno-musicology). A volume of folk songs to the hymns of Pietism's greatest hymnologist, which both from the scholarly and artistic points of view is first rate, has been harmonized and published by Karl Clausen: "Folkelig Brorson-sang" (Copenhagen, 1961; "Folke- og Skolemusik", Særhefte). A Norwegian standard work was commenced recently by O. M. Sandvik: "Norwegian Religious Folk Tunes, I: Melodies sung to the texts of Thomas Kingo and his contemporaries" (Oslo, 1960). This subject will seem to some ballad scholars somewhat remote, but wrongly so, since from the point of view of methodology it cannot be separated from the study of ballad melodies. Also among the lowest strata of the population of Copenhagen has been found a considerable repertoire of songs very far removed from the usually known song material and also from



commercialized "hits". These songs contain ancient elements, some of them of the internationally known "skæmteviser" types. Thorkild Knudsen and Anders Enevig have written on this subject in *Folkeminder*, 6 (Copenhagen, 1960).

Another aspect of the popular songs of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been studied by Iørn Piø, who has researched into the publications and methods of the publishers of the broadsheets ("Skillingsviser") of the time. One such publisher died in 1958 (see Piø in *Folkeminder*, 6). He had sold thousands of *different* songs, many written by himself, but many of them systematically collected (bought!) from people who could remember the genuine tradition. Only a few of them were old, but all of them catered for the taste and needs of the uneducated section of the population in their sentimentality and sensationalism.

It is thus clear that not only the collection but also the creation of Scandinavian folk song (certainly *Volkslieder*, but not, of course, ballads) is far from being a closed account. When, for example, it was discovered that informants knew two songs about a crime which was committed in 1939, songs they had only heard and never read, and when it was possible to show that these songs contained contaminations and variations, it is difficult to say that the definition "folk song" lacks validity, however disputed it might be. Some scholars are, no doubt, not very interested in such products, especially now that the element of sensation has disappeared from the unexpected fact that people sing. This does not, however, deter the folklorists, who have interesting and legitimate research tasks in this field, and who have enriched the study of the subject by a much-needed and welcome extension of our horizon both from the sociological and other points of view. However, one must not push qualitative criteria aside, for trash, however endearing, remains, of course, trash.

In the other Scandinavian countries there has been a similar intensifying of collecting activity, partly because commercial gramophone records containing folk song and instrumental music have been published by the Norwegian and the Swedish State Radio. Sveriges Radio has extended its activities to the Lapp populations of northern Sweden and the Swedish populations of Finland; for the last-mentioned see Alfild Forslin's "Sveriges Radios magnetofoninspelningar av svensk folkmusik i Finland 1957" (*Budkavlen*, 1958, pp. 74-111). Matts Arnberg is the driving force in this work (see his contribution to "Om visor och låtar"), while Rolf Myklebust is the specialist of Norsk Rikskringkasting.

In small countries there are at any one time only a few research workers, if any, who are available for each scholarly discipline. This means that one or



two scholars can easily set their stamp on the research of their time, and points of view other than theirs tend to disappear into the background. Thus a new period will bring with it a new spirit, new scholars and new specialist interests. This is clearly the case in ballad research and not only in connexion with popular editions. At the moment folkloristic interests are the dominating ones in Scandinavia. Grundtvig and Bugge, Moe and Olrik were also, of course, folklorists, and they had an open view as to the importance of field collecting, but they nourished, nevertheless, the lively interest of their age for the root of the tree of tradition, not only for its youngest branches. Wilgus ends, on the other hand, his account of the history of ballad research with some pages on "the functional approach". The essential thing, and that which especially ought to be the subject of modern study, is for him the life of the ballad as it is infiltrated with the life of the informants and the life of their communities. As already mentioned, similar interests prevail here, which is something new and valuable. The folk-song milieu of today and yesterday and the fly-sheet sociology of changing periods will come up for investigation; those who wrote, printed, sold and made use of all sorts of songs were themselves people and media of communication. As a result of this the classical inferior rating of variants which, either probably or certainly, can be traced back to a printed copy is usually discarded. This dependence is something which follows as a matter of course, and the process and its results, the variants, is a field of study. The matter is not judged either in the spirit of the theory of production or of reception (and it can be noted here that the "communalistic" theory which was the reception theory's opposite pole can scarcely be traced in Scandinavian research).

In research into melodies new methods are also being used. Bertrand Harris Bronson's monumental edition, "The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads" (volume I, Princeton, 1959; volume II in the press) is based on analyses made from punched cards in IBM computers. In Sweden and Denmark researchers are still satisfied with more modest manually-operated punched-card systems, but, nevertheless, hope for important results from this method (see Bengt Holbek in *Arv*, XVI, 1960). The problems of cataloguing melodies will not be gone into here; this has gradually become a separate discipline with its own literature, and the same applies to the phono-photographic recording of melodies, in which field an important contribution has been made in the Norwegian Karl Dahlback's book "New Methods in Vocal Folk Music Research" (Oslo, 1958). It should be noted, however, that two articles by Thorkild Knudsen give an insight into some of the present problems, and that the second of them is the first example of the typological treatment which will end "Danmarks gamle Folkeviser", XI: "Præmodal og pseudogregoriansk



struktur i danske folkevisemelodier" (*Dansk musiktidsskrift*, 1957, pp. 63-68, cf. the following numbers) and "Model, type og variant" (*ibid.*, 1961, pp. 79-92; both numbers contain also articles on related topics). In addition reference should be made to Jaap Kunst: "Ethno-musicology" (3rd ed., The Hague, 1959) with "Supplement" (1960) (a reference book and bibliography) and to current articles and reviews in the yearly *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*; for Norway see Øystein Gauksstad: "Norsk folkemusikk: Ein bibliografi" (a supplement to "Norsk musikkgranskning, 1947-50", Oslo, 1951).

The folkloristic interests and plans of the present day will, as will be understood, contribute to abolishing the distinctions between the different genres of folk song; they will not always be published and studied separately, but will be found and described in their own free milieu. This underlines the importance of the archives, in that no one editor can cope with the growth of the material. In Sweden the folklore archives are, for historical reasons, decentralized—a further reason for welcoming the "Svenskt Visarkiv". In Norway "Norsk Folkemindesamling" has for fifty years been the central, though not the only, folklore archive, and in Denmark "Dansk Folkemindesamling" has a similar position, though with a certain overlapping with the new "Nordisk Institut for Folkedigtning", which, however, will only concern itself with those groups of ballads which have importance for the prose genres, i.e. *sagn*, *eventyr*, etc. (see the reports of these institutions in *Arv*, XIV, 1958; about Sweden see also Bengt R. Jonsson: "Volklied" in: "Schwedische Volkskunde, Festschrift für Sigfrid Svensson", Lund, 1961, pp. 491-509).

However, there remain many important investigations in the historically minded tradition of research. The Finnish school and the monographs in its tradition have certainly reached a critical stage in most people's view; nevertheless, it cannot be doubted that monographs on individual ballads and groups of ballads can be of the greatest importance—one can certainly call Holger Olof Nygard's "The Ballad of Heer Halewijn" (Helsinki, 1958, *FFCommunications*, 169) a model of this type. The introductions and notes which the reader will be able to find in the future large-scale editions of Norwegian and Swedish ballads will contribute in a decisive way to our general knowledge.

While lengthy monographs are for the most part the work of non-Scandinavians, it is in Scandinavia that the most important genre-critical works have appeared. The important works by E. v.d. Recke, K. Liestøl and Sv. Ek, in which they give an account of which groups of ballads, in particular, had their root in each of the Scandinavian countries, are already several decades old. A small monograph of the same type is Gun Widmark: "Folkvisan Hagbard och Signe", in *Arv*, XV, 1959 (1960). Ernst Frandsen's monograph "Folkevisen"



(Copenhagen, 1935) received an important supplement in the posthumous article "Middelalderlig Lyrik" in *Danske Studier* (1954), pp. 75-108. In these works he tries to find traces of a ballad chronology by, among other things, showing how the lyrics (apparently without any past history, but nevertheless clearly German influenced) which in Swedish and Danish manuscripts from noble hands of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are found side by side with the ballad ("Danske Viser, 1530-1630", "Visböcker"), seem, in fact, gradually to have influenced its style and emotional attitudes already in the Middle Ages. At the same time Frandsen settled accounts with the attractive old "stevstammeteori" (cf. Erik Dal, "Nordisk folkeviseforskning", p. 446). His work was also of great service, since it dealt with the whole foreign prehistory of the ballad genre—a somewhat neglected field in our cautious era, because the sources are so catastrophically defective.

Frandsen's conclusions have been supported by the most gifted Scandinavian ballad scholar of the younger generation, the Swede Karl-Ivar Hildeman, whose first work dealt with the Swedish historical ballads of the fifteenth century (often preserved especially in Denmark) and other poems. Hildeman also documented, not in any national-romantic spirit, that these were often deliberately produced items in the well-developed propaganda of the time. In Hildeman's published work many old problems are cleared up and many new points of view expressed; see his dissertation "Politiska visor från Sveriges senmedeltid" (Stockholm, 1950); "Ballad och vislyrik" (*Ny illustrerad svensk litteraturhistoria*, I, Stockholm, 1955); "Medeltid på vers" (Stockholm, 1958; "Skrifter utg. av Svenskt Visarkiv", 1); "Danmarks gamle Folkeviser," X, part 5 (Copenhagen, 1958), with commentaries to the younger historical ballads, theoretical basis, pp. 394 ff.

Whilst these scholars have investigated especially the contacts between the ballad and the lyric, the relationship between the ballad and "Den danske Rimkrønike" is being investigated by Helge Toldberg (*Danske Studier*, 1959, with references), and his full-scale edition of the "Rimkrønike" will bring further details of this ("Den danske Rimkrønike", I-III; texts, Copenhagen, 1958-61; commentaries being prepared).

More specialized philological studies of the language of the ballad are remarkably few. The ballad falls between two stools by being created before and written down after the dividing line between the Middle Ages and modern times. The Danish philologist Kr. Hald is carrying further the few already existing specialist works which are mentioned in "Nordisk folkeviseforskning", p. 346; the subject is treated in Peter Skautrup's "Det danske sprogs historie", II (Copenhagen, 1947, pp. 73-80).



All the standard Danish literary histories have naturally devoted a chapter of appropriate length to the ballad, and as has already been mentioned Ernst Frandsen was also a literary historian. Non-specialists with a literary or aesthetic point of departure have, however, only to a regrettably small extent given the ballad consideration, presumably because they were frightened by the fundamental and not exactly clear disputes of the specialists. A rare exception to this is the chapter "Folkeviser og forlovelser" in a collection of essays, "Digtere og dæmoner: Fortolkninger og vurderinger" (Copenhagen, 1959) by the young Danish critic Villy Sørensen, who both from the literary and philosophical points of view was well equipped for the task. Sørensen throws new light, especially, on the varying interpretations which are found in the "trylleviser" of the important changes and transitions in human life. Another writer outside the narrow circle of ballad scholars is Mogens Brøndsted, whose approach, too, is based not only on literary scholarship but on philosophy as well; in his comprehensive book, "Digting og Skæbne: En Studie i æstetisk Determination" (Copenhagen 1958), he subjects also pre-literary and medieval forms, including the ballad, to an analysis which deserves to be known to those interested in the ballad.

The chief problem of Scandinavian ballad research as a whole may be said to be the late date at which the Icelandic tradition "íslensk fornkvæði" was handed down and the early dating which is usually given to it. When, how, and by which route these ballads came to Iceland is uncertain, but it is important, because it is a problem which crops up in the most diverse connexions, in the history of motifs, metrically and chronologically—casuistically and fundamentally. Jón Helgason's new edition of the whole material, including direct translations from Vedel's printed Danish ballad edition of 1591 (which must give an idea as to how the Icelandic ballad idiom varies from the Danish), must, to an essential degree, be able to help an attempt at a general solution of the problem. The scholar who is foolhardy enough to make the attempt must be an expert both in ballad research and in west Nordic philology in order to be able to evaluate in an unprejudiced and competent manner the autochthonous Icelandic genres which have influenced and have been influenced by imported ballads.

In traditional ballad research as elsewhere in medieval studies one is on uncertain ground, because one must not only reckon with lost variants but also with lost groups and whole genres. It is undeniable that these gaps have tempted scholars to somewhat overimaginative use of extrapolation and combination—this is by no means unknown in other diachronic branches of scholarship—and this has called forth the just and valuable corrections of the folklorists. It goes,



however, without saying—and it is typical of the time that it nevertheless has to be said—that textual and musical ballad and other folk-song research offers solid, important and legitimate research tasks for the scholar, not only into the process of tradition and the conditions for it and its late results, but also into the pre-conditions and the earliest history of the genres concerned.

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