

## THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRANSLATIONS OF *HEIMSKRINGLA*: FROM 1844 TO 1996

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The purpose of this paper is to explore an aspect of the response to *Heimskringla* in the English-speaking world. Its focus is on the translations of the Icelandic work into the English language. Whilst obviously omitting much of the story of how *Heimskringla* has been received amongst those whose first language is English, this approach does have the benefit of concentrating on the versions of the work in which most readers of English have probably encountered the classic, and the ones which have influenced generations of English language writers from the days of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Thomas Carlyle.

Attention here will be devoted primarily to the complete translations of *Heimskringla*, of which there have been four, concentrating on the attitudes to the work revealed by the explicit statements of translators and editors and the more implicit evidence of the way their translations are presented to their book-buying and book-reading audiences. Detailed stylistic comparison of the four translations will not be attempted in this short paper, though it would certainly be an exercise revealing much about the challenges of translating medieval texts with claims to historical and to literary worth.

Unsurprisingly the bibliographies of the "Norse sagas translated into English" by Donald K. Fry and Paul Acker reveal that not all translators from *Heimskringla* have felt it appropriate to attempt the entire work.<sup>1</sup> The publishing of extracts seems to have begun as early as 1834, when William Forbes Skene published a small portion of *Ynglinga saga* under the title "Extracts from the northern sagas" in the *Transactions of the Iona Club*, and it has been continued by, amongst others, such respected scholars as the two historians Alan Orr Anderson (in his *Early sources of Scottish history A.D. 500 to 1286*) and Margaret Ashdown (in her *English and Norse documents relating to the reign of Ethelred the Unready*), and Jacqueline Simpson, whose purpose in translating parts of *Ynglinga saga* in *Beowulf and its analogues*, written with G. N. Garmonsway, is evident from the book's title.<sup>2</sup> Not all extractors have felt a need to return to the original language and produce their own version, of course: as early as 1848, four years after the publication of the first complete English *Heimskringla* by Samuel Laing, a portion of it appeared ("by the obliging permission of Mr Laing") in Thomas Wright's *Early travels in Palestine*, under the title "The saga of Sigurd the Crusader".<sup>3</sup>

When it is considered how often some sagas have been published in English guise - there appear to be nine complete versions<sup>4</sup> of *Gunnlaugs saga ormtungu* - it is perhaps surprising that few translators have presented versions of what could be regarded as complete individual sagas from the *Heimskringla* compilation. Perhaps some of the sagas have difficulty standing alone out of their context, and some have limited appeal to the reader not particularly interested in the history of Norway, but one might have expected such a highly entertaining work as *Haralds saga harðráða*, with its powerful character portrayal and the appeal to Anglo-Saxon readers of a vivid account of the Battle of Stamford Bridge, to have attracted more than two translations - a 1911 version with minimal apparatus by Eitel H. Hearn, apparently a disciple of William Morris, and the 1966 version, in the well-known Penguin style and format, by the familiar team of Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson. In her 1911 volume Hearn, who admits that she translated from "Professor Gustav Storm's Norwegian version" (itself a translation, of course), also provides the *Heimskringla* version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*,

again with minimum apparatus - a few notes, mainly from Storm. Otherwise, however, would-be readers of individual *Heimskringla* sagas in English translation must turn to one or more of the four complete versions.<sup>5</sup>

The first complete English translation of *Heimskringla*, and for long periods the only one, or the only readily available to most potential readers, was the work of Samuel Laing (1780-1868), a native of Kirkwall in the Orkney Islands. *The Heimskringla; or, Chronicle of the kings of Norway. translated from the Icelandic of Snorro Sturleson* was published in London in three volumes by Longman, Brown, Green and Longman during 1844. Laing was not trained as a philologist, and he wrote at a time when there were as yet very few grammatical or other aids for the English-speaking student of Icelandic - Guðbrandur Vigfússon's dictionary still lay about a quarter century in the future. He was, however, a keen amateur student of matters relating to Scandinavia, having lived and travelled in that part of the world and, characteristically, having become embroiled in passionate controversy about the rights and wrongs of the Union between Norway and Sweden, which in his view yoked the finest people in Europe to the most depraved and immoral. He was therefore able to make use of Scandinavian language works relating to *Heimskringla*, notably Jacob Aal's 1838-39 translation, *Snorre Sturlesons norske Kongers Sagaer*, of which his work has sometimes, probably a bit unkindly, been regarded as a translation.<sup>6</sup>

In the preface to his edition Laing states clearly what he saw as an important reason for publishing his translation. The work, he says, will acquaint the reader with the kind of people the Northmen were, "and he will see what their institutions and social spirit were at home, whether these bear any analogy to what sprung up in England afterwards, and whether to them or to the Anglo-Saxon race we are most indebted for our national character and free constitution of government" (I.iv). Laing's own "Preliminary dissertation", 210 pages long, leaves no doubt as to the right answer: what is fine in English life is basically a legacy of the Scandinavian settlers in the Viking age, when the Anglo-Saxons had become a rather servile race with no culture, and certainly no literature, worth much. Though there were other champions of the Scandinavian heritage when Laing wrote, his views were controversial from the start, attracting a prolonged refutation from an anonymous reviewer in *The Edinburgh Review*, who felt the translator's association with a region of Britain that "boasts to be a Norwegian colony" (vol. 82, 1845: 271) might have clouded his view. Rasmus B. Anderson, the editor in 1889 of the second edition of Laing's translation, retained the preliminary dissertation while observing that "The critical reader will find fault with many of Mr. Laing's bold statements", while in 1909 Laing's biographer in the *Dictionary of national biography* dismissed the dissertation as displaying "less judgment than enthusiasm".<sup>7</sup>

Laing's purpose was not entirely polemical, however. He expressed the hope "that his labour will be of good service in the fields of literature, by bringing before the English public a work of great literary merit, - one which the poet, or the reader for amusement, may place in his library, as well as the antiquary and reader of English history" (I: iv), and declared that he intended to make his translation, "like M. Jacob Aal's, not merely a work for the antiquary, but for the ordinary reader of history, - for the common man" (I: v).

Already, then, we see a translator attempting to appeal to a rather diverse audience, notably the reader of literature and the historian, whose requirements can hardly be assumed to coincide perfectly in all respects. As early as 1845 the writer giving an account of it in *The Edinburgh Review*, whilst recommending Laing's work to "all students of the early history of our country and countrymen", doubted it would appeal to the common man: "The *Heimskringla*, we fear, has too many strange names and obscure allusions, assumes too much knowledge of distant scenes, events, and manners, and, what is a greater obstacle, has too little moral or imaginative

attraction to be ever popular with the 'general gender'" (318). John Beveridge, revising Laing's work for an Everyman edition in 1915, alludes to a more practical difficulty when he states that until his own time "the expense ... placed the *Sagas of the kings of Norway* beyond the reach of most readers" (2).

Even in the second half of the twentieth century Laing continued to win admiration for the simple, direct qualities of his prose.<sup>9</sup> His renditions of the numerous skaldic verses in *Heimskringla* have enjoyed far less approval, however. The verses clearly, and understandably, presented Laing with a difficult challenge, and some of his comments betray an attitude which would be startling if it could not fairly easily be paralleled by equally unsympathetic and uncomprehending comments on skaldic poetry by translators and critics writing well after 1844: "They are not without a rude grandeur of imagery, and a truthfulness in descriptions of battles and sea-fights; and they have a simplicity which, although often flat, is often natural and impressive" (I:202).

Laing's first impulse, he tells us, was to omit the skaldic verses altogether in his translation, following the lead of the "oldest translator of Snorro's work, Peter Claussen". They are, he claims, "not essential to Snorro's prose narrative of the events to which they refer. They are not even authorities for the facts he details ...". After consultation with "a literary friend, his son, Mr. S. Laing", however, it was decided that they must be included: "However obscure, unpoetical, monotonous in the ideas, or uninteresting and flat they may be, they show the mind, spirit, and intellectual state of the age and people". Inspired by this rather anthropological motive, and making liberal use of the work of Aall and other translators, father and son produced rhyming, balled-like lines which, they claimed, conveyed the sense of the original, though not the "forms and technical beauties" (I:208-210). Their inspiration seems to have been the Danish translation by N.F.S. Grundtvig. Laing senior appears rather defensive in his discussion of the verse translations, but few would agree, unfortunately, that they enjoyed much success even in conveying the "ideas".

By adding as an appendix eight translated chapters from the Old Icelandic accounts of the expeditions to Vinland, Laing instituted the somewhat disreputable tradition of including this material in English translations of *Heimskringla*. Perhaps it can be said in partial extenuation that he is well aware that the chapters, found in Peringskiöld's 1697 edition, are an interpolation and "break the continuity of the narrative", and that he does print them as an appendix, in somewhat smaller type (see III:344).

In 1889 a second edition of Laing's translation, in four large and impressive volumes, appeared in London. It was limited to 310 copies for England and 210 for America, and the revision was the work of Rasmus B. Anderson, United States Minister to Denmark, described on the title page as the author of two other named works on medieval Scandinavia. The work is dedicated to William F. Vilas, U.S. Secretary of the Interior, and Anderson conveys the impression that his diplomatic posting to Copenhagen was a virtual sinecure allowing him to pursue his Scandinavian studies (I: xvii-xviii).

Anderson quotes Thomas Carlyle's statement in *The early kings of Norway* that *Heimskringla* "deserves, were it once well edited, furnished with accurate maps, chronological summaries, &c., to be reckoned among the great history books of the world" (I:vii), and he clearly saw his role as attempting to meet Carlyle's requirements. As well as providing chronological notes, maps and indexes he edited the text of the translation, moderately, in the light of what was then more recent scholarship, and considerably revised Laing's footnotes. Laing's orthography received a thorough and to modern eyes very questionable reworking at his hands: prominent

among the changes are the alteration of final "i" to "e", and the elimination of "superfluous consonants", so that "Fim" becomes "Fin" and "Olafsson" "Olafson".

Anderson retains Laing's preliminary dissertation, but with obvious misgivings. He claims that alterations to it are "confined chiefly to dates and orthography" (I:xiii), though there are a few others, including a rather terse footnote correcting the observation that accounts of slavery were as ordinary in the old North as they "would be at present in the streets of Washington" (I:121). For him the attraction of "that grand old Scandinavia" is partly at least that it "was destined to become the mother of England and the grandmother of America", and he declares: "An acquaintance with the ancient runes, with the Eddas, with the *Heimskringla*, and with all the old sagalore, should be the pride of every Englishman and American" (I:viii). The relative importance of the Anglo-Saxon and Norse legacies in the English-speaking world is not a matter he explores.

Anderson's attitude to the skaldic verses appears to have been at least as unsympathetic as Laing's, and he clearly had no high opinion of his predecessor's efforts to translate them;

They are not translations, but rather original songs or ballads in modern measures. The most that can be said for them as representatives of the *Heimskringla* verses, is that they are written on the same themes and celebrate the same events. They do not even paraphrase the thought of the original Icelandic texts. The present editor, ready to confess his own inability to reproduce the skaldic songs in suitable English translations or paraphrases, or to better Mr Laing's poetry, was at first inclined to follow the example of P.A. Munch, and omit the most of the quotations from the skalds altogether. The fact is that these verses rarely contain any additional historical matter ... the reader will lose nothing if he skips them. (I:xiii)

His eventual decision, however, was to leave them "as a monument to Mr Laing's indefatigable industry", except in a few cases where their importance of the content caused him to prefer Guðbrandur Vigfússon's version from *Corpus poeticum boreale* (I:xiv).

Anderson's interest in *Heimskringla* as an historical source, and his American allegiance, may lie behind the somewhat more prominent treatment he gives Laing's Vfnland material. In Anderson's edition it is moved to a more central position as an "Appendix to Olaf Trygvesson's saga".

Along with other saga translations Anderson's revision of Laing's text was reissued in 1906 in the somewhat disreputable "Norræna" series, notorious for its cavalier "recycling" for its own illustrative purposes of pictures which originally depicted quite different personages and events.<sup>9</sup> Of rather more importance was what described itself as "the first popular issue of the *Heimskringla* in the English tongue", a new edition of Laing's text by the Reverend John Beveridge, prepared for the inexpensive Everyman's Library.<sup>10</sup> Beveridge published his edition in two volumes, the first of which is undated except for a reference towards the end of the foreword to the fact that "Last year, 1914, Norway celebrated the centenary of her independence" - curiously, this did not stop Everyman listing 1914<sup>11</sup> as the date of their original edition. The first volume contained only what are described as "The Olaf Sagas" (Laing's versions of *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* and *Ólafs saga helga*), their treatment in this manner being justified on the grounds that they are "so much longer than the others, so closely associated, and of such special interest to British readers" (2). The publication of the remaining sagas in one additional volume, made possible by the elimination of Laing's preliminary dissertation, was promised in the 1915 foreword but did not in fact occur until 1930.

Like Anderson, Beveridge in 1915 quotes Carlyle's comment on the need for a properly edited version of *Heimskringla*, and he continues:

Carlyle's requirements have now been met. The Icelandic text has been carefully revised by Professor Finnur Jonsson, and in 1899 Dr Gustav Storm gave to the world an inimitable translation of the revised original into Norse, furnished with such notes, comments, and other data as make the book of supreme value and interest to all who seek an acquaintance with the history of those lands which helped in great measure to make Great Britain the nation she is today. (2)

Beveridge's own debt to this Scandinavian scholarship is a bit unclear: he speaks of having revised Laing carefully, and of having supplied "ample notes" and an index, and he thanks Gustav Storm for his help, as well as a Norwegian librarian who supplied the books necessary to bring the edition "thoroughly up to date" (2-3). But it remains essentially Laing's text we encounter.

For Beveridge *Heimskringla* is primarily of interest to the historian, and it is history of particular interest to British readers. Beveridge was conscious of more modern links across the North Sea as well as those in the Viking Age: in 1915 he noted that "a British princess shares with her worthy husband the honours of the Norwegian throne" (3). In 1930 he was even more effusive, and saw yet another reason for studying *Heimskringla* as an historical source, the light it sheds on the English achievement in helping to bring Christianity to the North:

In this year of grace (1930) the Norwegians will observe with fitting ceremonial the nine hundredth anniversary of the death of Olaf King and Saint. The ancient cathedral at Trondhjem, which had suffered from the ravages of calamity and age and has been undergoing restoration for seventy years, will then be completed and reopened in the presence of representatives from all parts of the country, and from other lands as well, including our own. In connection with such an event it is not unfitting that this edition of the *Sagas of the Norse kings*, the first truly popular English edition, should be issued now. For, as we have seen, the sagas tell us not only of the Norsemen's early visits to England, but also of the worthy part our ancestors played in the winning of Norway and Iceland from paganism to Christianity. And it is also seemly that the Everyman's Library edition of the sagas should be inscribed to Norway's beloved sovereign, who is bound by many ties to the British royal family ... (xxviii)

The Everyman edition of 1915-30 was itself to experience an extensive reworking, with new editorial apparatus, nearly half a century after Beveridge published his first volume. In 1961 Peter Foote brought out a new edition of *Heimskringla Part two: Sagas of the Norse kings*, and this was followed in 1964 by Jacqueline Simpson's edition of *Part one: The Olaf sagas*.

The dustjacket to Foote's edition describes *Heimskringla* as "of first importance both as an historical source and as an outstanding example of the characteristic virtues of classical Icelandic saga-literature" and stresses the links between the British Isles and Scandinavia. The content of the volumes, however, is a somewhat unwieldy encounter between a text more than a century old, reprinted here from the earlier Everyman plates, and conscientious 1960s editorial scholarship. There are corrections to the text in the footnotes (as well as to the limited extent in the body of the work), but there is also in each part a set of three appendices relating to the translated text: "Corrections to the translated text", "Interpolations in the translated text", and "Omissions in the translated text". It is difficult to believe that many readers have ever consulted the 1960s Everyman volumes in the way that seems to be intended, looking in about five different places to determine the "correct" reading in translation of a particular passage. The volumes appear a compromise between scholarly

integrity and the commercial realities of pre-computerised publishing, rather than an attempt to provide accessible texts to readers with limited or no knowledge of Icelandic.

In one respect Jacqueline Simpson revised more thoroughly than Peter Foote: she rewrote many of the verses ("though in such a way as to preserve the style of Laing's couplets" - xxxv), believing that this was "often essential if Snorri's handling of these primary sources was to be appreciated". By the 1960s, of course, a more sympathetic attitude to skaldic verse was widespread. This won her a measure of praise for Assar Janzén, reviewing of her work for *Scandinavian Studies*: "This is a welcome change, but it seems that the editor, who obviously is a fine poet and is able to create translations in Laing's style that are at least in remote agreement with the contents of the original, could have rendered a more substantial revision of Laing's poetry" (Janzén 254). Janzén was less enthusiastic about the appearance of Vinland material in Simpson's edition, sandwiched between the two Olaf sagas. One notes, however, that the inclusion is mentioned prominently on the dustjacket of the work: presumably someone in the publisher's office saw this survival of earlier editorial shortcomings as a selling point rather than a drawback!

In 1996 Laing's text obtained yet another lease on life, in a form which would have seemed improbable even a short time before. It appeared on the Internet (at <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/Heimskringla/>) as part of "The Online Medieval & Classical Library", which describes itself as "an archive being assembled as a service to the Internet. The purpose is to provide a free and easy way for the average computer user to access some of the most important literary works of Classical and Medieval civilisation". The text used as the basis for this edition was the *Norræna* one, a somewhat dubious choice, not least because it omits *Ynglinga saga*, which however Diane Brendan added in May 1996 to the original electronic edition, dated April 1996, "edited, proofed and prepared by Douglas B. Killings". The apparatus accompanying the Laing text here could hardly be much more minimal. It is an intriguing and rather pleasant thought that individuals using the technology of the 1990s to "surf" the Internet might have an interest in Old Icelandic literature awakened by a one hundred and fifty year old translation of a thirteenth century text, but one must wonder if it particularly likely.

The second of the four distinct translations of the entire *Heimskringla* into English was the work of William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon, whose immensely fruitful partnership has provided probably the most famous corpus of English translations from the Old Icelandic, and certainly the most discussed and most controversial. Their version of *Heimskringla*, (*The stories of the kings of Norway, called the "Round world"*)<sup>12</sup> though begun in the 1870s, was the last of their translations to achieve publication in their lifetimes. It was apparently revised in the 1890s (probably not very extensively) and began to appear in 1893, the first part constituting volume three of *The Saga Library*, a celebrated six volume collaboration between the two translators and the noted bookman and publisher Bernard Quaritch. (Volumes one and two of the Library, containing some of their *Islendingasögur* translations, had appeared in 1891 and 1892 respectively.) Volumes two and three of *Heimskringla* (four and five of the Library) appeared promptly in 1894 and 1895. The three very handsome volumes provided the complete text of the translation, but very limited assistance for the reader, apart from explanations of the kennings of the verses at the back of each volume. A one paragraph "Translator's note" at the front of the 1893 volume explained:

As this work is to be published in four volumes, we think it best to keep the general body of Notes for the last; only printing in each volume an explanation of the metaphors contained in the staves of verse which occur in it. But the map of Norway with the names of the Saga period is given in this first portion of *Heimskringla* for the convenience of the reader.

A note at the beginning of volume three of *Heimskringla* announced that the final volume would contain "the life of the author; an account of his sources; notes on each saga; genealogies; series of kings and other rulers; indexes of things, places, persons, nicknames" and added, with what in retrospect seems sad irony, the promise that "No time will be lost in bringing this somewhat laborious work to a speedy conclusion" (a form of words which may suggest diminishing enthusiasm for the task).

In fact it was to be ten years before the final volume of *Heimskringla* and of the Saga Library would appear, after the death of William Morris in 1896 and of Bernard Quaritch in 1899. Eiríkr Magnússon, who completed the work alone, acknowledged himself "not ... personally free from all blame" for the delay but stated that it was mainly due to factors beyond his control (1905: vii). His final volume, over five hundred pages long, provided more or less what had been promised in 1895, with the significant exception of the notes on each saga.

John Beveridge in 1915 dismissed the Morris-Eiríkr Magnússon translation as "for a special class" (1), and while the idea might not have pleased William Morris very much, it is difficult not to believe that the most likely private purchasers of the half leather bound, gilt-edged volumes were comfortably well-off bibliophiles. The absence of the proposed notes on the individual sagas, and a mode of verse translation which enthusiastically preserved the Norse kennings in remarkably opaque English, made the work even more demanding than some of the other sagas in Morris's distinctive style. Whilst not everyone would agree with the judgment of the poet and critic Kenneth Rexroth, he probably came close to an important truth when he described the work as a "terrible waste - I doubt if Morris' wonderful Saga Library was ever readable by anybody - and there the great sagas are, locked up in that ridiculous language".<sup>13</sup> While other saga translations by Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon have been republished, sometimes several times, their version of *Heimskringla* has never again appeared in print - not even in May Morris's twenty-four volume edition of her father's *Collected works*. Possibly Morris's style, while tolerable and even pleasing in a work primarily of literary interest, is less acceptable when there is (or appears to be) a strong historical dimension.<sup>14</sup>

Ironically, some of the most enthusiastic words written in praise of this version of *Heimskringla* were penned by Erling Monsen, who had misgivings about the treatment of personal names but described the translation as "a magnificent literary work ... a book that should appeal to all British lovers of the sagas" (xix). Monsen was in fact writing in his introduction to the third complete English translation (and the first in one volume), *Heimskringla, or the lives of the Norse kings* "by Snorre Sturlason, edited with notes by Erling Monsen and translated into English with the assistance of A.H. Smith", published in Cambridge, England by Heffer in 1932. One might reasonably suspect that much of the actual translation was done by Smith, whom Monsen thanks "for having undertaken the spade work of making the first draft of the translation" (xxxii). Smith, a Yorkshireman, was apparently responsible for the appearance of a modest number of archaic and dialect words in what is generally a clear modern translation. It must be added, however, that some doubt has arisen as to the language from which the two scholars were working. In a 1934 book review Lee M. Hollander accused the translators of presenting "a direct translation (without acknowledgement!) of the modern Norwegian of Gustav Storm's household edition",<sup>15</sup> the declared source of many of the book's illustrations. Reviewing in the *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* (11, 1928-36) Bruce Dickens dismissed this charge as "quite unjustified" (105), suggesting that it arose from an unfortunate decision to use modern Norwegian forms of names in the English translation; but clearly not everyone has been convinced: Donald Fry in his 1980 bibliography of translations lists Storm's work as Monsen and Smith's source.

A possible reason why Monsen felt able to extend the kind of praise he offered to Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon's translation is that he saw his own work as serving a primarily historical purpose, particularly relevant to England. He suggests, in fact, a rather specific, almost tendentious aim:

It was the study of various English chronicles that caused this translation of *Heimskringla* to be undertaken. By collating the chroniclers with Snorre it has often been possible to solve problems which have hitherto been obscure, and although we do not profess to have solved them in their entirety we believe that we have shown the right way for further research: work in this uncertain and difficult part of English and Scandinavian-history ... comparisons have been pointed out in the numerous footnotes ... but because certain events do not apparently at once agree with the chronicles, it is no use to get impatient. (xxx)

In keeping with his belief that Snorri's work is "essentially historical" Monsen preferred to term each individual part of the translation (except *Ynglinga saga*) a "history" rather than a "saga" (xxii).

Monsen translated the skaldic verses, but unlike William Morris as reported by Eiríkr Magnússon<sup>16</sup> he had little enthusiasm for the task: "Instead of leaving out the scalds' poems an endeavour has been made to translate them into English, and although it may be looked upon as a most difficult, if not hopeless task, it seemed preferable to translate them in order to give the reader some idea of their contents; but to appreciate them fully they must be read in Old Norse" (xxx). Also unlike Morris and Eiríkr he translated the *Vínland* chapters, including them in the body of the translation and suggesting that despite their stylistic differences they might have been inserted in *Heimskringla* by Snorri or his scribes (xviii).

A facsimile edition of Monsen and Smith's was issued in 1990 by Constable in London and Dover in New York. More interesting, however, was the appearance of an abridged edition in Oslo in 1967.<sup>17</sup> This was very obviously directed at native English speakers, with a clear effort in the abridgement process to increase the attractiveness of the work to the general reader. Thus most of the skaldic verses disappeared, and an effort was made to cut down on the large number of names of people and places mentioned (and to substitute English or Icelandic forms when dealing with those countries and their people). It was also decided to dispense with the final portions of the work, it being explained that about 1130

Norway enters a period of civil war. The civil wars are mainly a Norwegian concern and Snorri's account of them is not marked by the same literary skill as are the earlier Sagas. For this reason our selection concludes with Sigurd The (sic) Crusader's death in 1130, although Snorri's account continues to the year 1177. (5)

Viking age links with the British Isles were acknowledged, leading to the conclusion that "outside Scandinavia, Snorri's sagas are of particular interest to Anglo-Saxons" (6). Perhaps with a potential American market in mind the *Vínland* material was preserved unabridged in an appendix and the work bore the title *From the sagas of the Norse king by Snorri Sturluson. With an appendix: The Norse voyages to Vinland about 1000 A.D.* In his introduction, however, Gudmund Sandvik faced directly the question "Is *Heimskringla* a reliable historical work?" and he answered himself:

*Heimskringla* is a saga, and that means that it is in the first place a work of art, literature, within a historical framework. In this connection the artist and historian Sigrid Undset, who wrote *Kristin Lavransdatter*, springs to mind. (12)

The scholarly integrity here is obvious, but the publishers, one suspects, felt a need to appeal both to historically minded readers and those seeking English versions of what the dustjacket to a 1979 reissue in the Shetland Islands described as "the classics of Norwegian saga literature"!



In 1964, thirty years after his dismissive review of MONSEN and SMITH'S volume, the American scholar Lee M. Hollander published his own one volume of *Heimskringla* (employing more or less the same Norwegian illustrations whose use he had questioned in 1934). By the time *Heimskringla: History of the kings of Norway* appeared Hollander had behind him a long and distinguished career during which he had been involved in several major translation projects from the Old Icelandic, either by himself or in collaborations with other scholars where his own particular contribution was the translation of the skaldic verses. Professor Hollander had a particular reputation as a student of skaldic verse and as a translator who enjoyed considerable success in rendering it into English which maintained a remarkable number of the stylistic features of the originals.

Hollander allowed his translated text to stand alone more than any of his English language predecessors in *Heimskringla* translation. His notes are relatively brief, as is the introduction, which is largely devoted to Snorri's life and work. There is some comment on previous editions of the Icelandic text, and on translations into languages other than English, but only one brief passing reference to the three earlier English language works

It [his translation] differs from previous translations into English, and from all others, for that matter, in endeavouring to adhere closely both to the form and content of the copious skaldic stanzas. I have laid down my views on how best to render skaldic verse in the Introduction to *The Skalds* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1945), and also in *Scandinavian Studies*, XVIII (1945), 233-240. Readers interested in the nature of skaldic art ... will find a brief orientation in the former publication. (xxv)

In the following paragraph "[r]eviewers are urged to take note of what I consider the proper diction to be employed in the rendering of Old Norse poetry (discussed in *Scandinavian Studies*, V (1920, 197-201)". This, and the provision next to each stanza in the text of its number in the relevant Íslenzk fornrit edition of the Icelandic text, suggest (besides the somewhat magisterial approach of one who had earned the respect of his profession) a particular awareness of readers within the academic world and within reach of good libraries. As perhaps also with the rather demanding presentations of Laing by Foote and Simpson, which appeared at much the same time, one is inclined to suspect that the real, if unstated audience, is students and fellow scholars.

Hollander's subtitle describes *Heimskringla* as a "history", but his introduction is concerned with Snorri as historian rather than with his work as history, and history is not a significant concern of his notes. The dustjacket to the 1964 edition is more willing to claim historical worth for the work, and it hints at a continuing role played by the work in modern Scandinavian life, describing it as "a history still read fondly in the schools and homes of the North - a household book in the best sense of that term - one, moreover, which in its turn has influenced the thinking and the literary style of Scandinavia in modern times". Professor Hollander's work continues to be readily available: a "second paperback printing", unaltered from the 1964 edition, appeared in 1995.

The circumstances, and the motives, of the English language translators of *Heimskringla* have clearly been diverse. One translator, Hollander, apparently undertook the huge task alone, two sets of two man teams produced versions, and Samuel Laing worked largely alone but enlisted his son's aid for the verses. For Laing and for MONSEN and SMITH, *Heimskringla* was the only translation of early Icelandic literature they published, whereas William Morris, Eiríkr Magnússon and William Morris all came to the task as experienced translators. The motives of the translators, and those who edited their work, have sometimes been a little idiosyncratic, but a concern for *Heimskringla* as history and *Heimskringla* as literature have clearly been important elements. Perhaps in a hundred and fifty years the literary element has tended to grow in importance and the historical element to diminish, but the tendency is not

sharply defined, particularly if one takes account of such elements of presentation as dustjacket "blurbs". No doubt the hard fact of publishing life, that publishers of necessity want, generally above all else, to sell as many copies as possible to as many different kinds of potential purchaser as possible, has in the past limited any tendency towards academic purism, and will in the future help ensure that academic reviews of translations continue to find imperfections to deplore!

<sup>1</sup> Donald K. Fry, *Norse sagas translated into English* (New York: AMS, 1980); Paul Acker, "Norse sagas translated into English: a supplement," *Scandinavian Studies* 65 (1993): 66-102.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Orr Anderson was published in two volumes by Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1922; Ashdown by Cambridge University Press in 1930; and Garmonsway and Simpson in 1968 by Dent in London and Dutton in New York.

<sup>3</sup> Reprinted New York: KTAV, 1968. See p. xxx.

<sup>4</sup> See Fry and Acker. See also E. Paul Durrenberger and Dorothy Durrenberger, *The saga of Gunnlaugur Snake's Tongue, with an essay on the structure and translation of the saga* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Ethel H. Hearn, trans., *The sagas of Olaf Tryggvason and of Harald the Tyrant* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1911). See especially p. 215; Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson, trans., *King Harald's saga: Harald Hardradi of Norway* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966). The version of *Haralds saga gráfeldar* by George Webbe Dasent said by Fry (p. 47) to appear under the title "Queen Gunnhilda" in volume 2, pp. 377-396 of Dasent's 1861 translation of *Brennu-Njáls saga* does not in fact exist. "Queen Gunnhilda" is an essay by Dasent on the queen. See his *The story of Burnt Njal* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas).

<sup>6</sup> See Halldór Hermannsson, *Bibliography of the sagas of the kings of Norway and related sagas and tales*, *Islandica* 3 (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 1910), p. 25; Fry 50.

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, ed., *The Heimskringla or sagas of the Norse kings*, 2nd ed. (London: John C. Nimmo, 1889), p. xiii; J. M. Rigg in *DNB*, vol. 11 (1909), p. 405.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Foote, ed., *Heimskringla. Part two. Sagas of the Norse kings*, trans. Samuel Laing (London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1961), p. xxx; Assar Janzén, review of Simpson's revision of Laing and Hollander's translation in *Scandinavian Studies* 38 (1966):254.

<sup>9</sup> *The Heimskringla, a history of the Norse kings* (London: Norræna Society). See Halldór Hermannsson, *op. cit.*, 26; also his comments in his *Bibliography of the Icelandic sagas and minor tales*, *Islandica* 1 (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 1908), p. 83.

<sup>10</sup> *Heimskringla. The Olaf sagas* (London: Dent; New York: Dutton [1915]), see p. 2; *Heimskringla. The Norse king sagas* (London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1930).

<sup>11</sup> In Jacqueline Simpson's 1964 edition (London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1964).

<sup>12</sup> Changed to "Round of the world" in the final volume of 1905.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Einar Haugen, "On translation from the Scandinavian," in *Old Norse literature and mythology: a symposium*, ed. Edgar A. Polomé (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> At least one reprint publisher "tested the water" in regard to a facsimile reissue of the Saga Library in the late 1960s.

<sup>15</sup> *Germanic Review* 9:210

<sup>16</sup> See volume 4, 1905, of their edition, pp. ix-x.

<sup>17</sup> Dreyers Forlag. Reissued 1979 by Thule Press, Sandwick, Shetland.