

Jeffrey Scott Love, *The Reception of “Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks” from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Münchener Nordistische Studien 14), Munich: Utz 2013, ISBN 9783831642250, 338 pp.

When I was an undergraduate, one of my lecturers noted the success of a colleague’s recent book before wondering, uncharitably, “will anyone still be reading it in ten years’ time?” The silver lining of this review appearing so eye-wateringly late is that I can at least say with confidence that people will still be reading *The Reception of “Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks”* in 2024, and beyond.

The Reception of “Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks” concerns one of the most distinctive of the *fornaldarsögur* (Old Icelandic stories set in pre-Conversion Continental Europe), which is of particular interest *inter alia* for its overlaps with other medieval heroic literature, its renowned anti-heroine Hervör Angantýsdóttir, its exceptional repository of Old Norse riddles, and its influence on Romantic writers from Thomas Percy through to J.R.R. Tolkien. By examining how the saga was transmitted through the Middle Ages to 1700, that is through the peak period of Nordic humanist saga-scholarship, Love provides us with a range of valuable insights into the early reception of this important work. Chapters one and two survey and examine the manuscripts of the saga from Love’s chosen period; chapter 3 maps manuscript variation concerning numerous episodes in the saga; chapter 4 offers a focused investigation of variation concerning the riddles; chapter 5 examines the saga’s seventeenth-century reception; and chapter 6 offers some brief conclusions.

One reason why it took me so long to produce this review was that one does not want to say negative things about research as obviously painstaking as Love’s, yet I did not find this book very clear as to its overall argumentative trajectory and contribution to the wider field. In this respect it perhaps reflects its origin as a PhD thesis (University of Cambridge, 2012), from which, as the preface explains, the book is little changed. It is common enough for PhD students to struggle to articulate the significance of their work; one suspects that firmer editorial direction as Love adapted the study for book publication would have been valuable. Thus I have come to the point where I feel I can offer a useful evaluation of this book because I have found myself in recent years using *The Reception of “Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks”* as a repository of information rather than as an articulation of a thesis, with the attention to detail that this process demands. My further comments on the work accordingly focus on the two areas of Love’s research into which my research has given me the greatest insights, as proxies for its value elsewhere: riddles and stemmatics.

The thoroughness of Love’s secondary reading on the *Hervarar saga* riddles is particularly apparent in his citation (p. 194) of an edition of eight Old Norse verse riddles published by Ólafur Halldórsson in 1970: almost no scholar of the *Hervarar saga* riddles seems to have noticed this publication (the exception of which I am aware being Sverrir Tómasson 1984). That Love did notice it is very much to his credit, though he did not himself develop comparisons between the riddles edited by Ólafur and those of *Hervarar saga*, which feels characteristic of the lack of an overarching argument as to what was going on in the transmission of the riddles that Love traces.

But there is no question that on points of detail, Love offers a rich array of stimulating material: anyone working on a particular riddle will want to check what he has to say, and this is without doubt true of every other part of the book.

Love's general outline of the pre-1700 manuscript contexts and relationships is a useful guide to the material. Love also provides the first stemma of over forty manuscripts dating from before 1700, which is a considerable service not only to people researching the transmission of *Hervarar saga* specifically, but also to scholars interested in intellectual-historical questions about who was copying whose manuscripts in early modern Scandinavia (pp. 324–327). We are just about at the point where enough extensive or comprehensive stemmas have been constructed for enough *fornaldarsögur* and romance-sagas that we can start to draw interesting conclusions about how scribes went about anthologising texts, and Love's research constitutes an important brick in this wall. On the other hand, even in 2013 the open-data movement was gaining enough momentum that we could have hoped to see researchers publishing the data on which their stemmas were based, and Love asks us to take his stemma almost entirely on trust. The care of Love's research is obvious throughout his study, and that in itself vouches for the usefulness of his stemma as being good enough for scholars to be going on with—but his work will eventually need to be replicated and possibly corrected.

Love's precise scope—tightly restricted to manuscripts of *Hervarar saga* dating down to 1700—is altogether understandable from the point of view of a PhD project: as he demonstrates, these manuscripts alone give plenty of material for analysis. And yet, as again is often the way with doctoral research, the scope set by a research project is not necessarily conducive to facilitating the argument of a subsequent book. For example, there is no doubt that *Hervarar saga* influenced the lost saga on which the fifteenth-century *Ormars rímur* is based. There is some very worthwhile cultural analysis awaiting the scholar who probes the rewriting of *Hervarar saga*'s Hervör as the altogether more conventional male hero Ormar (a task admittedly now made easier by Haukur Þorgeirsson 2013: 279–343 and Kapitan & Lavender 2022). One can quite understand that Love felt that he had enough to do without opening that particular can of worms, but some reference to how *Ormars rímur* fits in to the early modern reception of *Hervarar saga*—of which it is an important pre-1700 example—would have been useful. Likewise, pages 206–207 seem to miss the fact that one of the three medieval recensions of *Hervarar saga*—H, found in the earliest manuscript, Hauksbók, but clearly a conflation of two earlier recensions—reorders the riddles by the formulae used in their opening lines. This reordering seems typical of the encyclopaedic mindset of Haukur Erlendsson, redactor of the Hauksbók version of the saga, and an example of the kinds of details which Love might have spun into a stronger narrative about intellectual trends in the transmission of *Hervarar saga*. Love's omission of this detail seems to reflect a reluctance to take a view on the stemmatic relationship of our witnesses to the earliest stages of *Hervarar saga*'s development, R (Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, MS 2845), U (Uppsala, University Library, R 715) and H (Hauksbók: Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, AM 544).

In retrospect, *The Reception of "Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks"* stands in the vanguard of a wave of new-philological work on the scholarly culture of later medieval and early modern Iceland and continental Scandinavia, characterised by a corpus of

PhD theses and derived books from the same decade as Love's (Lansing 2011; Hufnagel 2012; Love 2013; McDonald Werronen 2016; Kapitan 2018; Lavender 2020), and by the Stories for All Time project (at <https://fasnl.net/>), which produced the first comprehensive bibliography of *fornaldarsögur* and their manuscripts (in which Love was also involved). *The Reception of "Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks"* is an enormously careful and, within its chosen scope and especially for the seventeenth century, thorough exploration, providing a truly rich repository of information for future researchers needing to plumb the depths of different aspects of the saga itself or late medieval and early modern Scandinavian humanism.

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