

log,’ and another meaning of the word is said to be ‘cow muzzle’ (p. 53). I am unclear as to which meaning is the most likely one in this case, and how this meaning might be justified. Nor does the relationship between the names *Kornö* and *Bygget* (pp. 176 f.) seem to be fully clarified, and further investigation is required here. When it comes to the possible *vin*-name *Skådene* (pp. 122 f.), it could also have been made clearer whether or not the name is to be considered a transfer name.

The volume concludes with a number of well-crafted indexes of place-names, first names, bynames, soldier and boatman names, as well as of lexemes and cultural- historical circumstances. The latter index, in particular, is commendable.

The current volume is a valuable addition to this series of place-name surveys. Parts that provide particularly stimulating reading are those where the authors have allowed themselves to discuss and question handed-down “truths,” i.e., interpretations that have automatically been passed on from one place-name publication to the next, and the concrete manner in which these issues are discussed is commendable. In addition, illuminating photographs supporting the interpretations—some of which are mentioned above—are found in several places in the volume, and these, too, deserve praise.

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Jan Rüdiger, *All the King’s Women. Polygyny and Politics in Europe, 900–1250* (The Northern world 88), Leiden: Brill 2020, ISBN 9789004349513, 452 pp.

This book is an English translation of Jan Rüdiger’s “Habilitation,” published in 2015. English-speaking readers will have to put up with an original form of *Der König und seine Frauen*, which has not been revised or updated. This is a profound study that examines the fitness of the concept of marriage for the socio-political strategies of high medieval elites. Rüdiger argues that “full marriage” (the *matrimonium iustum/legitimum*) was just one form of couple relationship that existed alongside many other forms of liaisons between men and women. He is careful to avoid the term *concubinage* because it is so closely associated with its juridical and Augustinian meaning, i.e., a reprehensible relationship, as opposed to marriage, which was considered a commendable union. With the notion of polygyny, Rüdiger develops a functional concept that is in many ways better suited to analyze various aspects of medieval sociopolitical practices. He argues that “polygyny is not a form of marriage, but marriage can be a form of relationship within general polygyny.” The main objective, therefore, is to examine the meanings and uses of polygyny in elite political culture, focusing on narrative sources from twelfth and thirteenth centuries Northern Europe. These findings are thereafter compared with explicit and presumed polygynous practices in the Anglo-Norman sphere, France, and the Iberian Peninsula.

In the first chapter, the *generative aspect* of polygyny is discussed using case studies from Norse-Icelandic sources and Latin texts from Denmark. Reproductive strategies, especially in Royal families, are analyzed, focusing on legitimacy and to whom material and immaterial resources could be transferred. Both the Norwegian and the Danish realm are characterized by open systems of competition for control of resources. Polygyny was a common strategy to produce as many sons as possible. Rüdiger claims that the progenitor Harald Fairhair acted as a model in Norway (and Iceland) for the polygynous king with many sons. Paternal blood was what mattered to claim kingship in Norway well into the beginning of the thirteenth century. Polygyny is not condemned in the Norse-Icelandic narrative. According to Rüdiger, it was quite the opposite. He notes, for example, that royal polygyny seemed to be a prerequisite for good rule according to Snorri Sturluson. The Saga society espoused a meritocratic principle based on ability to act, and therefore it did not matter if a pretender to the throne had a low-born mother.

The argumentation in this chapter is altogether convincing. However, when it comes to Denmark, Rüdiger could have unfolded the discussion of meritocratic ideology. For example, the Latin term *strenuitas* [‘energetic, strenuous’] plays a prominent role in the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus. This term pretty much resembles the basic content of the Norse-Icelandic ideal. Just as Saxo depicts the strategies of the Danish rulers through a Roman filter, Snorri portrays the Norwegian kings through the lens of an Icelandic chieftain. King Harald Fairhair becomes the model because polygyny prepared the ground for cooptative kinship, which meant that Icelandic leaders could claim royal descent. This is addressed in the next chapter, which deals with the strategies of the Icelandic chieftain Jon Loptson. However, Rüdiger does not elaborate on the source-critical question of the extent to which the Icelandic model might have had an influence on the portrayal of sociopolitical conditions in Norway. In contemporary Europe, the distinction between the royal/imperial family and the aristocracy was more noticeable. Snorri (and to some extent the aristocrat Saxo) had no interest in promulgating this demarcation for obvious reasons.

Rüdiger claims that the absence of commentary on polygynous paternity in Norse sources is “not a barbarian ignorance, but a cultural decision.” He refers to the Danish chroniclers Sven Aggesen and Saxo Grammaticus as “dissenting voices” because, like Adam of Bremen, they speak of legitimate and illegitimate royal sons. For them, this question was particularly relevant when it came to the legitimacy of the Valdemarian branch of the royal family. Rüdiger does not discuss the Swedish royal house, which is probably due to the lack of sources. However, the Scandinavian royal families were closely intertwined. Norse and Danish sources contain a great deal of information about Swedish sociopolitical strategies as well. Rüdiger claims that the Swedish monarchy was “completely dispensed with genealogical consistency until the thirteenth century.” This is clearly a misinterpretation. A closer look at the strategies in Swedish “Game of Thrones” shows that maternal inheritance was the key to power in Sweden. From a gendered perspective that focuses on how Swedish pretenders relied on connections with female descendants of the Stenkil family, a pattern of “genealogical consistency” can be discerned.

The following chapters, dealing with northern Europe, discuss habitual, agonistic, expressive, and performative aspects of polygyny. In the habitual section, Rüdiger

explores the question of whether polygyny can serve to enhance status. His case study of the Icelandic chieftain Jon Loptsson shows that *Nóreg's konungatal* served the purpose of proclaiming that the Oddverjar were descended from Harald Fairhair's *frilla* Gyða, which made them jarl worthy. Furthermore, Rüdiger has doubts about the binary model of previous research, which distinguishes formal marriages on the one hand and loose forms of all kinds on the other (*uxor contra concubina*). The distinction between marriage and non-marriage, he argues, is a sweeping assumption. Rüdiger's observations are for the most part compelling, although his counterarguments are also somewhat "sweeping," since he has chosen not to analyze the legal sources. He reasons that most previous studies of polygyny have focused on the legal material. While this is true, this decision does not preclude him from having some form of dialogue with these previous studies based on laws. This would have enabled him to better position his own study on narrative sources, and his counterarguments might have been on safer ground.

The chapter on the agonistic aspect deals with the ubiquitous rivalry of men over women. Here, the focus is on the Old Norse literary rhetorical convention *mannajafnað*, i.e., the comparison of men. This section is somewhat loosely connected to the main theme of the volume, and it is therefore challenging to see what the problem and conclusions really are and how they relate to the main purpose. Overall, the book would have benefited greatly from more frequent use of discussions of partial results. The chapters on the expressive aspect and the performative aspect are closely related. Here, polygyny is analyzed from the perspective of social semantics. Rüdiger's interesting study of the "bigamists" King Cnut the Great and King Harald Hardrada of Norway is a well-chosen example of how polygyny was used as a social sign system that was more flexible and adaptable to different situations compared to monogamously structured systems. For example, Cnut the Great had another wife, Ælgifu of Northampton, in addition to Queen Emma of Normandy. Through this triad, the king forged ties of loyalty on both sides of the English Channel, and at the same time these alliances functioned as "statements" directed at a wide circle of northern and western European rulers. Harald Hardrada's ties with Þóra Þorbergsdóttir of Trøndelag and Elizabeth of Novgorod served the same purpose. Using J.L. Austin's speech act theory, Rüdiger addresses the performative aspects of polygyny. This is illustrated by a case study of Hákon Hlaðjarl, in which the author attempts to show how the acquisition of land, as depicted in the Norse skaldic poems, went hand in hand with the acquisition of women. Through symbolic appropriation, Rüdiger argues, women could "not only signify the land, but also be the land." This is a thought-provoking interpretation that is most likely applicable to other types of sources and to other historical periods.

In the final chapters, Rüdiger compares his findings on polygyny in the North with sociopolitical strategies in western and southern Europe. In particular, he succeeds in drawing significant parallels between the Anglo-Norman region and Scandinavia, such as how Henry I of England employed polygynous strategies to strengthen his position. However, Rüdiger also notes some important differences, such as the fact that none of Henry's "bastard sons" laid claim to the throne. The comparative discussion of France, Occitania and the Iberian Peninsula ends with a rather vague conclusion. He finds some examples that suggest that polygynous practices like those in northern

Europe also existed in areas such as Catalonia and Andalusia, but here it is probably more appropriate to use the term *concubinage* rather than polygyny. Rüdiger does not elaborate on why European elites abandoned polygyny as a sociopolitical strategy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. But his suggestion that the increasing formalization of medieval society led, among other things, to a more effective application of law and order seems plausible.

The book *All the King's Women* is an important contribution to a better understanding of the sociopolitical strategies of the high medieval European elites. Rüdiger is not the first to show that polygyny was an important political tool, but he presents a nuanced view of a range of relationships between men and women that will likely make scholars hesitant to take the static model of wife and concubine for granted. The study draws on a large body of different narrative sources, and it is refreshing that he does not refrain from combining Old Norse sources with Latin texts, as Scandinavian historians are wont to do.

Still, there are some weaknesses as well. One is that it is difficult to discern what the central theses are, and this may explain why his concluding discussion remains elusive. Another is the lack of dialog with previous research. Rüdiger explains that the study is not about concubinage, but “first about ‘political culture,’ that is, about the groups that are now called ‘elites.’” Nevertheless, much research has been done in recent decades on the political culture of medieval elites. Many of these studies focus on sociopolitical relationships such as friendship, kinship, fosterage, patronage, and gift-exchange. Rüdiger only partially situates his study of polygyny within this larger framework of social and symbolic resources. This is a pity, as it would have contributed to a deeper understanding of the ways in which members of the elite navigated between different sociopolitical strategies to consolidate and maximize their power.

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Håkan Rydving & Konsta Kaikkonen eds., *Religions around the Arctic. Source Criticism and Comparisons* (Stockholm studies in comparative religion 44), Stockholm: Stockholm University Press 2022, ISBN 9789176351833, 277 pp.

As a scholar of religion, I can say how the timing of this publication is important, as many indigenous societies are reviving their spiritual traditions and practices. The subject matters treated of in the book are overall historiographically related to different themes related to indigenous religions located around the Arctic, from Iceland to Siberia. At the beginning of the first three chapters of the book, under the heading “Localised Practices and Religions,” there are even correspondences from further