

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

afield. In an article by Stefan Olsson, which deals with place-names related to Scandinavia and the Baltic states with regard to rituals associated with hostage-taking, Ireland is linked with the Norse Viking traditions. However, despite the article being a good contribution to this important scholarly study, its title and theme seem a bit out of place in a book that focuses on religions around the Arctic. In my opinion, this subject matter might have been better to have been published in a good journal or book which focuses on cultural history in relation to linguistics and etymology, as the content regarding religion is fairly minimal.

The following chapter brings into focus both reflections on past and current comparative research concerning a myriad of mythical parallels between Sami cosmological complexes and very early Icelandic religious traditions linked with Old Norse traditions and cultural narratives. Moreover, with regard to sacred mountains and different rituals and beliefs connected with these narratives, Professor Eldar Heide from Western Norway University of Applied Sciences investigates how they coincide with each other. The approaches used in the research have been carefully considered due to the nature of ambiguous literature sources linked with both cultures from documents written by outsiders. Thus, the scholar's painstaking work results in an extensive comparative study presented in the article and through this, one is able to grasp some of the different key concepts and beliefs within both cultures, despite the ambiguity within missionary sources, and furthermore, also to comprehend in what ways religious beliefs and practices are created in connection with sacred landscapes, what purposes they have and why. And at the same time, in what ways these comprehensions have been useful for the purpose of helping to formulate a variety of questions with regard to both comparable and compatible beliefs within the Sami religion and Icelandic cosmological landscapes concerning how they have emerged. And thus, the centerpieces of the scholar's analysis in connection with sacred mountains, ancestors and traditions are related to the afterlife in connection with mythical domains, landscapes and parallels, and the spiritual beings, sorcerers and shamans associated with these.

In the contribution by Vesa Matteo Piludu, University of Helsinki, Finland, we are introduced to some of the oldest and thus, explicit, ancient mythological studies on the bear and bear ceremonialism in relation to narratives, songs, and incantations. These studies present a number of good examples of how and why identity formation is intertwined with animals and mythical beings in both Finno-Karelian and Ob-Ugrian cultures that are tied to northern identity and sacred landscapes. Overall, the study brings forth a multitude of interesting examples of how different oral and written narratives, songs and incantations are wound around both culture and history with regard to the important roles and functions myths and mythic discourses play within Arctic societies and which, as a consequence, are invaluable resources in the study of religions and cultural histories within different time periods.

In-depth, investigative research is presented in part two of the book under the heading "Indigenous Sami Religion: Research History and Source Criticism," beginning with early sources around the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries where analysis of mythical landscapes is brought into focus in connection with a recent discovery of the frame part of a Sami *noaidi* bowl drum located in Hillsá, northern Norway. The subject matter is meticulously addressed through the combined efforts of Dikka

Storm and Trude Fonneland from the Arctic University Museum of Norway in an article entitled “Indigenous Missionary Religion in the Sixth District. The Case of the Hillsá Drum.” Using multiple scholarly sources as a basis for the investigation, combined with interviews with Sami participants (family members connected with the drum), the authors assess the values, importance, and significance of the recent discovery of the frame that was found under a stone. The case study provides a refreshing and rare insight into the events linked to the discovery of the frame and, as a consequence, the fundamental importance of combining different research approaches together in order to help assess how a certain degree of understanding of drums as items of Sami cultural heritage and as sacred items might be gained. Moreover, even if what remains of the drum under investigation is deemed fragmentary it still holds immense value and can be linked by association with the plight of the drums that have been held in the custody of European museums for centuries some of which are likewise fragmentary. Therefore, when giving further consideration to this, the Hillsá drum can be contextualized as being part of the same legacy where drums had to be hidden away and therefore, has a similar history and resonance, and which today, the Sami are working to uncover and reclaim.

To continue on from this theme, a second study by Liv Helene Willumsen, who is a professor of history in the Department of Archaeology, History, the Study of Religions and Theology at The Arctic University of Norway, concerning Sami history, religion, cultural expressions and cosmology flows well into a similar research theme regarding a surviving Sami drum presented in connection with the court case and murder of Sami *noaidi* Anders Poulsen while he was held in custody on a charge of witchcraft. Having already published extensively on this same theme, the author, in a chapter titled “The Witchcraft Trial against Anders Poulsen, Vadsø 1692. Critical Perspectives,” brings a broader discussion about the impacts of the witch persecutions among both the Sami and Norwegian populations in Finnmark, a brief discussion about Poulsen and an examination of different aspects of the court case. Thus, she brings further clarification and an extension of her earlier research, delivering a deeper focus on new critical perspectives on the trial and murder of Poulsen, and also further clarification pertaining to the figures and structure of the cosmological landscape on the *noaidi*'s drum and their importance regarding the possible distortion of documented evidence between Sami pre-Christian religion and Christianity to suit the agenda of the state.

To follow the theme of Sami indigenous religion and investigations relating to ambiguous historical sources, Finnish scholar Konsta Kaikkonen, senior lecturer in the Study of Religions at the Department of Pedagogy, Religion, and Social Studies, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, embeds his research focus into documents compiled by missionaries and priests as a method for approaching and critically analysing, through deep investigative work, a number of perspectives and theories on early nineteenth-century literature presented in a chapter titled “Jacob Fellman’s Introduction to Saami indigenous Religion. A Source Critical Dilemma.” These different perspectives pertain to the documentation of Sami mythology by vicar Jacob Fellman and pastor Lars Levi Laestadius, who are among a number of other writers discussed in Kaikkonen’s investigative research who at the time were ministers and missionaries that published various texts about the religion of the indigenous

Sami in different languages. The task taken on by the scholar is admirable and his determination to solve complex issues relating to assimilated textual data that is fragmented clearly demonstrates the benefits of being able to speak and read in the Nordic languages when it comes to assessing and categorizing what turns out to be ambiguous data that was likewise written and published as literature sources connected with the mythology of the Sami. Kaikkonen demonstrates through different theories and approaches why this is important. Indeed, in order to better understand the past and in what ways different source materials deserve to be critically analyzed and thus, to be as thoroughly investigated as possible so that history and different perspectives might be better understood when it comes to reliability and representation of the religious practices of the Sami and in what ways research was formulated in this case, predominantly by different ministers and missionaries.

The third and final section of the book that focuses further studies of religions around the Arctic are three chapters pertaining to “Theories, Comparisons, and the Roles of Scholarship,” beginning with the scholarly work of Finnish scholar Riku Hämäläinen who is an adjunct professor of the Study of Religion at the Department of Cultures, University of Helsinki. Hämäläinen’s emphasis is initially placed on the nature of change among Native North American societies in a chapter entitled “Methods and Theories as Tools in the Study of Northern Religions. Native North American Bear Rituals and Sweat Bath Traditions as Examples.” This is with regard to rituals associated with both the powerful spiritual medicine linked with the bear and sweat bath traditions in different contexts in relation to initiation, healing practices, and taboos and customs related to both historical and contemporary beliefs and practices. The author makes a special emphasis on the benefit of using an approach from the ecology of religion and its usefulness for conducting analysis, collecting data and comparative research. In the conclusion, he also brings into focus the Finnish sauna tradition which is also known among some Native American tribes. Overall, the study presents some valuable examples of cross-cultural research from both inside and outside of different cultures through an investigation of traditions, beliefs and practices that are both contemporary and historical.

Olle Sundström is an associate professor at the Department of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies, Umeå University, Sweden. His research addresses multiple questions regarding issues relating to the classification and development of terms referring to spiritual beings associated with the Nganasan worldview and their portrayal from within multiple scholarly discourses with regard to primitive religion, with a particular emphasis on Soviet ethnographical materials. The study is approached in his chapter “‘Spirits’ and ‘Gods’ as Comparative Concepts in Soviet Studies of the Nganasan World View.” The focal points are concerned with the roles, functions, and statuses of spirits and gods as conceptualized within a variety of different approaches in relation to the theory of primitive indigenous religion from the study of animism within western discourses, and how this relates to the realms of the spirits in connection with the Nganasan cosmology and its structure. Moreover, in what ways it has been portrayed, thus outlining many of the problems associated with these terms because of concepts being mixed up, given different categorizations and even false representation due to distinctions in different viewpoints pertaining to the structure of the Nganasan worldview and its conceptualization as an analogy for

the origin of religion. In his study, Sundström also demonstrates in what ways these concepts are linked, in particular to language, group identity formation, and maintenance of traditions and beliefs within the processes of change and development in the Nganasan worldview and the different ways it has been approached and interpreted with regard to how and why some of these structural developments and classifications are problematic.

The final chapter in the third section of the book delves further into the realms of Siberian shamanism. Russian scholar Liudmila Nikanorova, who is a researcher in the Department of Study of Religions at the University of Bergen, Norway, examines in her scholarly work “The Role of Academia in Finding, Claiming, and Authorizing Sakha Religions.” The central focus of her research illustrates very well a common problem in the study of indigenous peoples and their religious practices, and what happens when these practices are interpreted, translated, categorized and presented through the lens of a particular dominant culture and, in this case, predominantly Russian discourses, as well as European involvement. The author describes rather well how the development of power relations and authority are evident within different discourses and are thus, problematic when it comes to why the indigenous Sakha religion has been misrepresented.

In addition to this, she brings into focus different descriptions of a multitude of problems with regard to in what ways outsiders are given a certain kind of feigned authority in the manner in which religion and related practices are portrayed in relation to the use of terminology and language for a multitude of purposes (colonialism).

Reflecting on where this originates from, Nikanorova later on in the study also presents an informative section on the widespread persecution and eradication of shamans throughout Siberia by Soviet authorities. I would say that this very important discussion highlights very well state policies that have also been a common practice throughout Fennoscandia, but much earlier, and ties in very well with other chapters in the book where similar policies have been in operation, albeit on a much smaller scale. To balance the research, Nikanorova includes the research of Sakha scholars and describes how important their contributions have been in helping to reclaim Sakha religions through their research and fieldwork in different ways from within the culture and the efforts that have been made in order to make this possible.

The collective research contained in the book *Religions Around the Arctic*, edited by Håkan Rydving and Konsta Kaikkonen, brings forth yet another important compilation of scholarly works that make a major contribution to the study of religions around the Arctic and sub-Arctic environments. This is in relation to comparative research and contrasting landscapes into ancient rituals, new contributions, and developments from within the study of Sami pre-Christian indigenous religion from different perspectives, and then two elaborate chapters about bear ceremonialism, myths, songs, and oral narratives from Finno-Karelian, Ob-Ugrian, and North American cultures and traditions. The book concludes with two chapters on cosmology and shamanism in Siberian indigenous religions in the regions of Nganasan and Sakha communities. The merits of the book are the systematic reviews of earlier data and the ways the wealth of new research is compiled and presented. The book can be recommended to anyone who engages in the study of the aforementioned cultures and themes, as the materials in many ways go beyond what is already known about each

individual subject matter and bring forth new insights into, and understanding of, each of the particular topics and their study.

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Andreas Schmidt & Daniela Hahn (eds.), *Unwanted. Neglected Approaches, Characters, and Texts in Old Norse-Icelandic Saga Studies*, München: Utzverlag 2021, ISBN 9783831649426, 312 pp.

The concept of “the unwanted” central to this book appears rather similar to the concept of “the other.” And many of the articles in the book do treat aspects of saga literature close to the latter concept. It is therefore not surprising that the editors in their introduction discuss the understanding of “the other” at some length. There are still, however, aspects of the unwanted, as it is treated in the individual chapters of the book, that to me appear to belong outside of the category of the unwanted as it is presented in the introduction, and in some instances perhaps it could have been made clearer what this concept encompasses.

The book is the result of a workshop for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers held in Munich in 2018 as a follow-up to the workshop *Bad Boys and Wicked Women* organised by the same researchers in 2015. The papers from both workshops have been edited by Andreas Schmidt and Daniela Hahn, and published in the same series, *Münchner Nordistische Studien*. The present book consists of nine contributions and the already mentioned introduction by the two editors. All the contributions adhere to some degree to the concept of “the unwanted,” but the rather wide definition opens up for diverse aspects. The overall impression of the book can therefore be said to be that of a rather loose construction. This said, the individual chapters of the book are all engaging and present interesting approaches to saga literature and the research in this literature.

The group of sagas gathered under the sub-category of *skáldasögur* (sagas of poets) are studied in the inaugural article by Alexander J. Wilson. He starts by stating that

[t]he protagonists of the *skáldasögur* as “unwanted” figures in the sense that their continued insistence on the primacy of their own desires, at least in their native Iceland, is shown to lead to long-lasting hostilities with their neighbours (p. 28)

This illustrates at once the problem with a wide definition of what is meant by “the unwanted.” Does this concept bring anything new into the discussion of the role of these poet marauders occurring in the *skáldasögur*, a role that has been discussed at some length in the scholarly tradition? Wilson treats examples from a number of the