

Ancient Germanic Heroic Legend

DRAFT PENSUM MAY 2014

Course code: NOFI 210, 250, 300, 302, 303, 304.

Lecturer: Helen F. Leslie, helen.leslie@lle.uib.no

Course Theme

The pan-Germanic medieval heroic legends are our most significant source of shared narratives of early medieval northern Europe, both for its history and its eminent figures. Seldom, however, are the legends examined with this shared heritage in mind. This course explores how heroes of the Germanic far past are remembered in cognate sources and how their stories were manifest in the related vernacular communities of the medieval north in different ways. As story begat story, autobiography, reportage, biography and speculation about great heroes was spun into ever denser webs, in prose and poetic narratives first in oral tradition and later in written form, and in pictures stones carved with scenes from their lives. Although these interrelated Germanic heroic legends have received much scholarly attention in terms of each national literature (Icelandic, English, Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, Faroese and German), from an overall perspective they are researched and taught piecemeal without an understanding of cognate synchronic and diachronic traditions in the medieval north as a whole.

This course will juxtapose extensive pieces of the wider medieval Germanic heroic tradition, as it explores how the heroic and legendary material in the well-known Old Icelandic traditional alliterative poems and legendary-heroic sagas is handled across Germanic vernacular narratives.

By the end of this course, the students will:

- Have read and analysed a number of Old Norse texts pertaining to heroic legend in the original, and a number of Old English, Latin and Old High German texts in English or Norwegian translation.
- Appreciate the complexity of heroic legend and be able to analyse the legends and texts surrounding the key heroic figures.
- Understand how Old Norse legend relates to wider European traditions.
- Appreciate the transmission and basic manuscript traditions of the texts.

Primary Sources - *This list is subject to change.*

^ indicates that we will be discussing the sources in class and they are thus on your reading list, but they do not form part of the *pensum* as such.

Much of the material will be made available to you in PDF form on Mi side.

Old Norse Sources	Old English, Latin, OHG Sources (in translation)
Whole sagas: <i>Völsunga saga</i> <i>Hervarar saga</i> <i>Gautreks saga</i> <i>Hrólfs saga kraka</i>	Whole texts: <i>Nibelungenlied</i> <i>Beowulf</i> <i>Widsith</i> <i>Skjöldunga saga</i>
Short texts: <i>Sögubrot</i> <i>Norna-Gests þátrr</i>	Short excerpts from: <i>Gesta Danorum</i> <i>Chronicon Lethrense</i> and <i>Annales Lundenses</i> [^] <i>Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus</i> [^] <i>Annales Ryenses</i> [^]
Eddic Poems: <i>Helgakviða Hundingsbana I</i> <i>Helgakviða Hundingsbana II</i> <i>Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar</i> <i>Bjarkarímur</i>	
Short excerpts from sagas: <i>Þiðrekssaga</i> [^] <i>Ynglinga saga</i> [^] <i>Örvar-Odds saga</i> <i>Grottasöngur</i> [^] <i>Skáldskaparmál</i>	
Other: Runestones depicting Sigurðr	