Jeff S. Love  
Kingship in the Riddles of Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks

This paper examines the use of riddles and ambiguous language within the narrative context of Hervarar saga. King Heiðrekr's choice to use riddles in lieu of proper legal procedure earns him a contest of wits against Óðinn, which quickly leads to the king's disgrace and death. The king's enigmas subvert the medieval Scandinavian justice system and represent the zenith of Heiðrekr's poor judgments. Several other (sometimes intentionally) unethical actions perpetrated by Heiðrekr supplement the riddles to demonstrate the qualities of a bad king. This reading allows for additional literary depth and adds a moral facet to the saga.

Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough  
Power and Powerlessness on the Shores of Greenland

The representation of Greenland and its physical landscape is unique in the sagas, and stands in sharp contrast to the role of the topography of other regions elsewhere in the literary corpus. Powerless in the face of vast glaciers, impenetrable mountains and thick sheets of ice, Greenlandic society is portrayed as beset by famine, plague, eerie supernatural activities and death, all of which seem to emanate from the landscape. These trends can be seen even before they establish themselves on the land itself, and a turbulent sea journey is one of the literary hallmarks of a story set in the country. This paper will focus on the point at which the protagonists of the various sagas near the Greenlandic coastline, highlighting the difficulties that they face in attempting to land on the shore itself and their defencelessness in the face of the hostile landscape. In order to appreciate fully the unique powerlessness of travellers to Greenland, I will briefly compare it with the arrival of the landnámsmenn in Iceland and the role of Icelandic topography in their settlement. The narrative moment, so important in the Icelandic settlement stories, is contrasted with the parallel phase in the plots of sagas involving Greenland, with the powerlessness of Greenlandic settlers in the face of a hostile landscape being replaced by a relatively straightforward entry into a land that can be harnessed and controlled. The paper will conclude with a brief analysis of the possible explanations for the
differences in the nature of the arrival of the Norse settlers to the shores of Greenland and Iceland.

Thorir Jónsson Hraundal
The power of ritual among Ibn Fadlan's Rus

In 921 an Arab envoy named Ibn Fadlan made a journey from Baghdad to the King of the Volga Bulghars. Among his tasks was to instruct the King and his subjects on the laws and correct practice of Islam. During his stay he encountered a group of people whom he calls ar-Rusiyyah or ar-Rus.

A central place in Ibn Fadlan's account of this people is a description of a funeral, apparently that of a chieftain or a highly regarded person of their community, accompanied by the ritual killing of a slave-girl. The nature and affiliation of this ceremony to a particular culture has been debated, as have been in fact most other issues relating to the Rus' question. One widely held view has been that it was essentially or exclusively a Viking funeral.

In this presentation I will argue that instead of carrying out analysis along the lines of comparative religion studies we should look at this ceremony from a different viewpoint and examine what role it played for Rus society with regard to the particular cultural and geopolitical environment in which they found themselves. I will centre my discussion on the treatment of the slave-girl, for example the apparent elevation of her social status and try to suggest an alternative reading of Ibn Fadlan's account of this part of the ritual.

Brittany Schorn
Óðinn Giveth and Óðinn Taketh Away: Wisdom as the Currency of Power in Eddic Poetry

Óðinn is often portrayed in Old Norse literature as greatly interested in human kings, very willing to interfere in their affairs and sometimes capricious in granting and rescinding favour. This tendency provides the impetus for some eddic wisdom trials, in which royal human characters feature as the objects of his tests. In Grímnismál, Hervarar Gátur, Reginsmál, and possibly the Loddfáfnismál portion of Hávamál, Óðinn displays his own wisdom and tests that of others with the apparent motivation of elevating princes to power or bringing about the downfall of kings. In each case the survival and advancement of the human character depends on his ability to identify the situation and his interlocutor correctly. This paper will consider the relationship between these scenes in order to account for the recurrence of this convention. Although wisdom is revealed, its potential usefulness is called into question as only those men who prove themselves discerning in their encounters with Óðinn can successfully convert it into temporal power.
Erin Goeres
The role of the powerless king in Ynglingatal

The genealogical poem Ynglingatal is unusual in the corpus of skaldic praise poetry: its focus is not on the deeds of a heroic ruler, but on the deaths of his ancestors. Establishing the ancient pedigree of a Norwegian earl's family, the poet does not praise the earl's almost mythical Swedish ancestors for their own deeds, but merely for their existence. The ancient kings are shown to be powerless participants in the history recorded by Ynglingatal as the poet focuses instead on the active role played by the various causes of death, many of which are supernatural. However, when the poet describes the ruler's immediate Norwegian predecessors, commemoration, rather than death, becomes the focus of the poem and the king's followers become the subjects of each verse. The kings are still portrayed as the powerless puppets of history, but each kingly death becomes an important catalyst prompting the king's followers -- warrior and poet alike -- to play an active and powerful role in their ruler's commemoration, and thus in the preservation of the Yngling dynasty and its history.

Thomas Birkett

The idea that the runic script was an operative system, used to manipulate people and events, is a longstanding and insidious one. Whilst the mythic and heroic material of the Edda usually forms the basis of such conceptions, the saga treatment of the script is often cited as direct evidence for the historical application of runes as powerful magic devices. This paper will reassess the evidence first presented by Finnur Jónsson, highlighting both the literary expediency of representing the script as supernaturally powerful, and also the curiously marginal and tangential role the runes seem to play in these situations. The vast majority of runic episodes configure the power of the script along quite different lines, any influence that the runes effect being a result of the inherent power of writing to inform, memorialize, incriminate and ultimately, to exclude. I will argue that taken as a whole this is the conception of the runes that the saga material promotes.

Håkon Haugland
From power to powerlessness - the case of the shoemakers guild in Bergen

In my paper I will try to investigate the power-relations between guilds and state in the Nordic countries in the period between year 1330 and year 1600. The subject will be discussed through a case study, that of the power-relations between the shoemakers guild in Bergen, and the state, in this case meaning both the Norwegian and later Danish-norwegian kingdom, and the Hanse League. The members of the shoemakers’ guild were citizens of hanseatic towns, but lived in Bergen. Hence, both the king of Norway and the Hanse claimed the power to control the guild through their representatives in the city, the captain of the king’s castle and the guild of
the hanseatic merchants. The paper will argue that during the period, the ability to exercise this power effectively upon the guild went back and forth between the kingdom and the Hanse league. It will also argue that the shoemakers guild went from having power to a state of powerlessness during the same period, meaning that they went from being able to make demands and get privileges from the states in question, to being in a position where they by no means were able to make demands and were being forced to obey on the terms given them by the state.

Robert Avis
The political power of skaldic composition in Einars þáttur Skúlasonar

The skald – the court poet – was arguably Iceland’s most important export to Norway in the early middle ages. These Icelanders enjoyed an unusual position of proximity to the king whilst nevertheless remaining ‘other’, moving between the hierarchy of the Norwegian court and the ever-shifting power dynamics of the Icelandic ‘Freestate’. Whilst much of their poetry was composed to praise or memorialise, some reveal a playful engagement with the power of verse in ritualised games and challenges within the context of the royal court.

Einars þáttur Skúlasonar (Einarr Skúlason’s tale) is a short series of three linked anecdotes concerning the relationship between the eponymous skald and two Norwegian kings, found embedded within Morkinskinna, a collection of sagas of kings. This paper will examine this short text closely, first by seeking to understand the shifting power dynamics between artist and patron within the circumscribed word-games the kings initiate to test their poet, and then to see how these games are mutated and subverted by the Icelander. When placed within a context of trans-ethnic dialogue between Norway and Iceland, they come to incarnate, within the sanitised boundaries of a game, the complex relationship between the pseudo-colony of Iceland and the Norwegian imperial centre, informing a peculiarly Icelandic narrative of the construction of a literary identity.

Stephanie Fishwick
Strategies of Power: The Relationship between Individuals and the Land in the Sturlubók redaction of Landnámabók

This paper will explore the relationship of Sturlubók, the oldest surviving redaction of Landnámabók to its late thirteenth century context. Climate changes and the creation of new classes of tenants created social pressures in Icelandic society as new groups of people competed for a diminishing amount of land. I will build on arguments that the Sturlubók Landnámabók legitimises the land holdings of a small number of powerful families and explore
the strategies used within the text to depict a strong relationship between the original settlers and the land. These include named sites, genealogies, and the creation of sacred space.

Vicky Cribb
Deferred Revelation in Íslendinga saga – or The Power of the Narrator

Earlier scholars tended to dismiss the contemporary sagas as ‘raw and barely digested material’ (Jón Jóhannesson), more in thrall to their sources than to the demands of literary composition. This view has been contradicted by later champions of their artistic value, such as Úlfar Bragason. I intend to examine two examples of the retrospective disclosure of information in Íslendinga saga to suggest that far from being powerless in the face of his source material, the narrator is playing with his audience, manipulating the way we interpret events in a manner that has implications for our ideas about medieval reception.

Debbie Potts
Poetic power, interpretive impotence: the conceptual world of poetry-kennings.

In the mythical frame-dialogue of Skáldskaparmál, Bragi relates the story of the mead of poetry as an explanation for the kinds of poetry-kennning formulae cultivated by the hófuðskáld, the classical skalds of viking tradition. The addressee Ægir at one point responds with the observation: Myrkt þykki mér þat mælt at kalla skáldskap með þessum heitum (‘That seems to me an obscure way of speaking, to call poetry by these names’). The modern reader might sympathise with Ægir’s position, given not only the often complex cognitive processes involved in the operation of kenning figures, but also the authority Snorri’s poetological work holds over the interpretive frameworks of modern scholarship, an authority which has resulted in the rather idiosyncratic emendation of certain manuscript readings. Over thirty years ago, Roberta Frank put forward a more sceptical view of Snorri’s grand narrative, suggesting that Snorri’s preference for interpretations which yield mythological names as determinants can obscure the basic metaphors which underlie a particular poet’s kenning formation.1 Her conclusion gestures towards a more recent trend in kenning analysis, which focuses on the conceptual metaphors latent within kenning formulae.

-------------------

In this paper, I will explore the possibility of some further frames of association in some poetry kenning constructions (and their verse contexts) which are not acknowledged by Snorri's kenning system. Such an analysis requires a reassessment of the manuscript evidence which, as mentioned, is occasionally subject to drastic emendation, perpetuated by the domineering research tools of modern skaldic scholarship which follow Snorrian codes. Alongside this, I will also consider the inclusivity of Carol Clover's claim that skalds never employ irony in the service of poetic self-doubt, even though irony appears to be an intrinsic aspect of the general skaldic aesthetic. It is certainly the case that the prevalent image of poetic utterance fostered by classical skaldic verse is that of an intoxicating liquid, surging forth from the poet's mouth over the drótt, but there are also examples where the poet likens his habitual love-versification to the domestic action of scrubbing clothing at a well, or equates poetic performance with the bailing of stagnant water from a ship. Through this study, I hope to demonstrate that, despite our apparent interpretive impotence at the hands of skaldic complexity and scholarly idiosyncrasy, skaldic self-reflexive language manifests a rewarding richness of tone and metaphor that we may access through a reconsideration of the sources with a flexible approach to past preconceptions and current methodologies.

Inka Moilanen
Royal Saints: Power and Powerlessness of Religious Rhetoric

Rhetorical tools can be seen as one, but far from the only one, aspect in creating religious authority. My starting point is to study the role of literary discourse in the consolidation of political power and evaluate the concept of sacred in connection with authority, partly participating in defining the concept and its meaning at the turn of the first millennium. In this paper I concentrate in examining the forms and frameworks of this discourse in two of Ælfric of Eynsham's royal saints' lives, St Oswald and St Edmund. I will deal with tools of repetition, similitude, and antithesis, and view their possible power (and powerlessness) in connection with contemporary power relations, rhetorical tradition, and the culture of translation. The purpose of this analysis and my overall aim is to find out how the literary formulae were used and what their impetus was in their own context.

---

2Carol J. Clover, 'Skaldic Sensibility,' ANF 93-4 (1978-9): 80. Of course, creative humility is very much a feature of the twelfth- to fourteenth-century christian drápur, but they are not examined in Clover’s study. Nor are they in this paper, primarily due to considerations of time, but also because the later christian skalds tend to employ synonyms for poetry rather than kennings.
Marjolein Stern  
Representations of power in Viking-Age runestone decoration

Having commemorative inscriptions and decorations carved in stones at strategic locations in the landscape, as was done with varying frequency throughout Viking-Age Scandinavia, was in itself an expression of power, since the runestones functioned as status symbols. At the same time it could be a claim to power, with regard to the possible function of runestones as public declarations of inheritance rights. This paper will explore how the use of figural images on runestones, generally interpreted as expressions of Christian ideology and/or pre-Christian values and beliefs, relates to this aim of emanating power through the monument.

Aliki-Anastasia Arkomani  
Wisdom vs power: The representation of the physician and the king in the Old Icelandic version of the pseudo-Hippocratic Capsula Eburnea

In this paper I will examine the preface of the Old Icelandic version of Capsula Eburnea and attempt to account for its deviation from the Latin and other European vernacular versions of the Middle Ages. I will argue that a close examination of the lexis and style of the Icelandic text in its earliest preserved form in AM 194 8vo can reveal the objective behind the reworking of the story, which is to redefine the roles and virtues ascribed to the king and the physician. The study of textual additions, omissions and alterations reveals a less than flattering portrayal of the king, whose virtues of intellect and influence have been usurped by the physician and who, despite being the embodiment of secular power, is powerless to disseminate the wisdom he accidentally stumbles upon.

Emily Osbourne  
What Can the Subsidised Skald Praise? - Taking another Glance at Bragi's and Þjóðólfr's Shields and Stef

The performance of skaldic verse was based on exchange relations in which poetry and praise was traded for economic compensation. Sagas largely depict roving skalds as possessing the autonomy to cash their poetic cheques where and when they desire. Yet in the early shield-poems the politics of exchange seems to have operated in a different direction, in which an initial gift required the composition of compensatory verse. When the skald is not the initiator of the exchange, does his verse evidence a remunerative sensibility based on its subsidiary role?