

Andreas Schmidt, Daniela Hahn (eds.)

Unwanted

Neglected Approaches, Characters, and Texts
in Old Norse-Icelandic Saga Studies



Münchener Nordistische Studien

herausgegeben von

Wilhelm Heizmann und Joachim Schiedermaier

Band 50

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Preface

This volume is the result of »Unwanted ... by Literature and Scholarship. A Workshop on the Fringes of Saga Literature«, which was held in Munich on the 8th and 9th of December 2018, following and connecting to *Bad Boys and Wicked Women*, our first gathering in 2015.

Again, we want to thank our teacher Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Heizmann. All this could not have been possible without his continuing support, guidance, and confidence in us and our ideas and work. Thank you so much for all your trust and enthusiasm, we could never have felt more at home and encouraged! While you gave us the »nudge through the door«, we are also thankful to our faithful companions on the roads to these two adventures and beyond, Marion Poilvez, Yoav Tirosh, and Florian Deichl. Who could have wished for any better fellowship!

Once more, we are deeply grateful to the Institute for Nordic Philology (LMU) for all their support, especially to Johanna Schreiber, who helped us a second time with all of the organisation. We're very lucky to have someone on our side who knows how to fight the multi-headed serpent of travel expense accounting! We're equally thankful to the Institute and the utzverlag for accepting our volume into this series.

We owe special thanks to the helping hands of Sophie Heier and Johann Levin during the workshop and Sophia Hermann and Hilkea Blomeyer during the editing of this volume. We are much indebted to Alex Wilson and again Johann for their diligent proofreading, smart suggestions, and patience in the help with our English.

Finally, we thank all contributors for their patience and for not only writing and re-writing their own chapters, but also reviewing the contributions of the others. This volume is dedicated to all of you for never losing faith in this project. The world may have changed since we met in Munich in 2018 or 2015, but we are still proud and thankful to be part of this unique group of scholars and friends!

Andreas Schmidt & Daniela Hahn

Unwanted: An Introduction

#IchbinHanna, »I am Hanna«. Under this hashtag, in the summer of 2021, an uproar amongst ›young‹ members of academia could be heard on German Twitter, connected to a video that had been published by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. This promotional film portrayed the so-called »Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz«, a law that forbids academic staff from being employed on temporary contracts for longer than twelve years in total, as a necessary measure to ensure flexibility and innovation in universities. Unlike »Hanna«, the fictional protagonist of the short film, most doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers using the hashtag were unable to appreciate the alleged benefits of this system.¹ Instead, they wrote thousands of short narratives describing their harsh working conditions: contrary to its supposed purpose, the law resulted in universities being reluctant to grant permanent contracts beneath the level of professorship to anyone, instead opting to contract varying personnel for short periods – in quick succession, if necessary. Young academics must therefore often occupy position after position on fixed-term contracts, which results in turn in permanent social and perspective instability as to where and on what research – if indeed at all – one might be able to work during the next year or academic term. The discussion focused around the hashtag therefore served to highlight how, contrary to the Federal Ministry's claims, insecurity, precarious employment, and poor working conditions had developed in academic environments, resulting in pervasive anxiety amongst early-career researchers and a feeling of their being unwanted by politics, universities, and even society as a whole.

Of course, the academic system as it has developed in Germany is symptomatic of a much more widespread problem, with circumstances not much different elsewhere in the world. While short-term contracts and the

¹In addition to #IchbinHanna, a second hashtag was developed to foreground the perspectives of People of Colour, coined by linguist Reyhan Şahin [<https://twitter.com/LadyBitchRay1/status/1403238905051332609>; 29/10/2021]: #IchbinReyhan (»I am Reyhan«), see also Djahangard 2021, for example.

rapid change of working places seem to be a universal feature of contemporary academia, the fields of humanities and arts in particular are notoriously endangered, with many so-called ›small disciplines‹ often facing threats of closure. In fact, some of the few German departments of Scandinavian and Old Norse Studies have recently been forced to downsize, not least because of financial restrictions following the recent pandemic.² Despite engagement with the Scandinavian Middle Ages being abundantly popular in contemporary culture,³ as a scholar of Old Norse literature it is not unusual to have to defend oneself from questions about the value of one's research. As a member of an arts faculty, it is therefore easy to feel ›unwanted‹, both within the university as an institutional body and in light of the apparent political disinterest in the work that one does one's best to produce. It is heartening to see, however, that the above mentioned hashtag and related debate have since managed to cross the boundaries of academic social media to generate nationwide interest in the problems discussed here.⁴

While it is not the aim of the present volume to engage politically in this discussion, its coming into being and its editing process testify to the issues raised there. When we convened the workshop that resulted in this collection of essays, our entire group was in high spirits: we were gathering for a second time, convening as a follow-up to the workshop *Bad Boys and Wicked Women* (2015), which first brought us together as a group and which resulted in the publication of a collection of essays the following

² An online-petition started in April 2021 resulted in an assurance that the Scandinavian departments in Tübingen and Göttingen would remain open, albeit with loss of staff and positions, see *Schützen Sie die Skandinavistik vor Streichungen* [<https://www.openpetition.de/petition/online/schuetzen-sie-die-skandinavistik-vor-streichungen>; 29/10/2021].

³ This is testified by the numerous television adaptations, such as *Vikings* (History Television, 2013–2020), and films, such as the Thor franchise within the Marvel Cinematic Universe, alongside medieval markets, heavy metal music, and diverse novels and comics, that make use of historical Scandinavian material or are influenced by Old Norse literature and mythology. On this topic, see, e.g., *NORDEUROPAforum 2020*.

⁴ Numerous articles in news portals, incorporating both mainstream media and independent outlets, have been published on matters raised under the hashtag; see, for example, *#IchBinHanna – Machen Zeitverträge die Wissenschaft in Deutschland kaputt?* [<https://www.swr.de/swr2/wissen/ichbinhanna-kritik-an-zeitvertraegen-in-der-forschung-100.html>]; 29/10/2021]; Barbutev 2021. A comprehensive website about the campaign and its media reception is run under *#IchBinHanna* [<https://ichbinhanna.wordpress.com>]; 29/10/2021].

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