

Forfatter: Grundtvig, N. F. S.

Titel: Udrag fra History of the Northmen, or Danes and Normans, from the Earliest Times to the Conquest of England by William of Normandy

Citation: Grundtvig, N. F. S.: "Grundtvigs værker", i Grundtvig, N. F. S.: *Grundtvigs værker*, Faculty of Arts, Aarhus University, s. 451. Onlineudgave fra Grundtvigs Værker: [https://tekster.kb.dk/catalog/gv-1831\\_494-txt-shoot-idm360/facsimile.pdf](https://tekster.kb.dk/catalog/gv-1831_494-txt-shoot-idm360/facsimile.pdf) (tilgået 29. april 2024)

Anvendt udgave: Grundtvigs værker

Ophavsret: Materialet er dedikeret til public domain. Du kan kopiere, ændre, distribuere og fremføre værket, også til kommercielle formål, uden at bede om tilladelse. Husk dog altid at kreditere ophavsmanden.

[Læs CC0-erklæringen](#)

from the Danish translator, is far advanced, and the accessibility of the work, will soon give it the place in public opinion to which it is intitled.\*

That the historic poems of the Edda, or the songs concerning the exploits and downfall of those mighty hero-races, the Volsungs, Budlungs, and the Giukungs or Nibelungs, form a highly remarkable relic of ancient Northern song, doubly alluring to the inquirer, both on account of their deviation from, and their resemblance to, the Germans' Lay of the Niebelungs, is indisputable; but they all look so like translations, and are so wanting in the completeness, clearness, and compactness, which distinguish Beowulf's "Drapa," that it would be doing the Skalds of the North a great wrong, to take this wreck of a bark stranded on Iceland, for Skibbladner (Odin's ship) itself. Mr. Wheaton has made an excellent choice in the specimen he has given of the first lay of Gudruna [p. 83] which likewise, in regard to form, belongs to the noblest, and depicts in few, but powerful and masterly strokes, the deep-toned pathos of the warrior-maid of the North; who, as it sounds in the old song, does not beat her bosom and wring her hands over the corse of the beloved hero, but is turned to stone, like Niobe, till she sees the spear-pierced eye, and then melts as snow would melt before Afric's sun, under the mere recollection of what formerly glistened beneath the vaulted arches of the heroic skull.†

The poetical merit of the songs of the Edda has, perhaps, been commonly over-estimated; but, on the other hand, a standard has been sometimes applied to them which would sink them far beneath their real value. It is certain, that at a time anterior to the colonization of Iceland, a race of Norse poets existed whose writings were natural, vivid, and popular. The few fragments that remain, and especially the elegy of Eivird Skalderspilder upon

\* Mr. Wheaton states, erroneously [p. 131] that Beowulf has been translated, or rather paraphrased, in English verse, by the late ingenious Mr. Conybeare. Mr. Conybeare, in fact, translated only a few fragments. The adventure related in Beowulf's "Drapa," is no doubt fabulous; but the historic relations, which are introduced as Episodes, deserve every attention—that relating the expedition of Fligelar to Friesland, and his fall in a conflict with the Franks and Frieslanders, is literally corroborated by history.

† Mr. Wheaton is in error when he says [p. 83] that Celenschläger has enriched his works from these songs. Grundtvig has dramatized the story in his *View of Northern Heroic Life*.\* In Germany, also, De la Motte has attempted the same thing with a part of the tale, and at least produced a poetic work which deserves to be known.†

\* *Optin af Norners og Aesers Kamp*, Klvn, 1811.

† *Sigurd der Schlangentöchter*.

Hakon, the foster-son of Athelstane, are indisputable evidence of this. Of the Edda songs, the descriptions of battle are the most remarkable passages.

There is, however, a source, which has not been referred to by Mr. Wheaton, whence very valuable relics of ancient Northern poetry may be derived. Though what is there recorded is only in the shape of translation, there can be no doubt of its authenticity, and as little of its poetical recommendations. We refer to those Latin imitations of the ancient Northern songs which are to be found in the writings of Saxo-Grammaticus. These, collected by him in the twelfth century, and immediately referred to those who might have impugned their genuineness had there been any grounds for doubt, we cannot but deem of the highest value; and of literary debts, long owing and still unpaid, we think the debt to Saxo among the strongest. In his living pages will be found a moving picture of the past, which, though sometimes verging into too fanciful a world, does notwithstanding present a striking portraiture of things that were. Here may be traced the original of that master-piece of Shakspeare, his Hamlet; and here might also be followed to their sources, what Gëhlenschläger and many inferior minds have made the topics of their songs.\* Mr. Wheaton supposes that Hamlet (Saxo's Amlet) assisted the Saxons against the Franks in the sixth century. Where Mr. Wheaton discovered any authority for this theory, we know not, unless in that wilderness of Suhm, which the author calls a "Critical History of Denmark," and of which it has been somewhat bitterly, but not altogether undeservedly said, that every thing is to be found there, but truth.

Proceeding now to the history of the North, let the reader allow his interest to be excited, and he will find how much the events of the middle ages in general, and of the British isles in particular, will receive of light from the sources to which we are now directing his attention; he will see, that in the North there was formed an historic style in the mother-tongue, so pure, so simple, and so lively, that it might serve as a pattern even now. He will discover that one kingdom at least in the North, has an eventful history thus written, with the pencil of a Walter Scott, and will feel that it has some claim upon the attention of civilized man. Now it is really the fact, that Snorro Sturleson's "Heimskringla," or history of Norway, written in the thirteenth century, is, beyond any other, a book such as here described, which, al-

\* Ewald's "Balder" and "Rolf Krage" are among the first results of the study; Gëhlenschläger's "Steerkodder" followed; and Grundtvig's translation of the whole of Saxo, is a very important contribution to the subject.