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Religio. 2023, vol. 31, iss. 1, pp. [167]-168

ISSN 1210-3640 (print); ISSN 2336-4475 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/Rel2023-1-13>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.78397>

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Access Date: 18. 02. 2024

Version: 20230713

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“Old Norse Culture and Religion” Conference in Prague

VENDULA HOJKOVÁ

At the end of September 2022, Charles University welcomed the tenth student conference “Old Norse Culture and Religion”, organized in cooperation with the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität of Munich. This regular event, started by Wilhelm Heizmann and Jiří Starý in 2013, is aimed at Master’s and Doctorate students and gives them the opportunity to present their own research. The theme of this year’s conference was “Friend, Foe, Frændi. Rivalry and Amity in Old Norse Culture”, which was divided into four sub-themes according to the topics presented.

The topics of “Relatives, Sworn-Relatives and Friends” and “Competitors, Rivals and Enemies” were presented during the first day of the conference, 28 September 2022. The second day of the conference was dedicated to the topics of “Friendship, Enmity and Gender” and “Old Norse Friendship and Enmity in the Later Reception”.

The conference was opened by Jiří Starý. The first topic of the day, “Relatives, Sworn-Relatives and Friends”, was presented by four speakers. Andrea Eder (University of Munich) explored the concept of friendship and sworn brotherhood in the *Gísla* saga from a linguistic perspective. She analysed the ritual of sworn brotherhood in the aforementioned saga and the consequences of its failure. Debora Neudorf (University of Munich) continued with the linguistic theme, examining the origins of the present-day English word ‘fellow’ and its evolution from the Old English word ‘feolaga’ and Old Norse ‘félagi’. In his contribution, Sebastian Schindlbeck (University of Munich) examined the social bonds between the dead and the living, while also exploring the ritualisation of death and interactions with the malevolent dead. The topic was concluded by Jiří Chytrý (Charles University), who analysed the ancient Germanic ideas of vertical friendship (i.e., the lord-retainer relationship) in Anglo-Saxon culture and its reformulation in the Christian poem *Genesis B*.

The conference’s second topic “Competitors, Rivals and Enemies” was presented by four more speakers. The topic was opened by Tomáš Stude-



Religio: Revue pro religionistiku 31/1, 2023, 167-168.

<https://doi.org/10.5817/Rel2023-1-13>

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novský (Charles University), who delved into the Legend of Hjaðningavíg – the Old Norse legend of an everlasting fight – and its evolution throughout the ages, mainly the evolution of Hildir, the cause of the fight, and the role of gods in the legend. The character of Hildir was then further analysed by Simon Hauke (University of Munich), who explored the influences of the Old High German Kudrun epic on the story of Hildir and the variations of female friendship appearing in the Germanic epic. Sarah Braunnmüller (University of Munich) discussed the content of the skaldic verses in the Bjarnar saga Hítöelakappa and analysed the insults and petty behaviour which accompany the conflict between the saga's male main characters. The final speaker on the first day was Barbora Nováková (Charles University). Her work examined the role of dragons in Old Norse literature, highlighting the dragons' role as either the protector against the beast or the beast itself.

The second day of the conference comprised presentations from five speakers. The first was given by Valentýna Lidická (Charles University), who compared male and female revenge and the activity and passivity of the avenging party, which in turn influences the result of the vengeful action. The following paper by Johannes Kains (University of Munich) focused on female enmity in Njáls saga and how the social system itself fuelled the enmity between the two heroines of the saga. The topic was concluded by Vendula Hojková (Charles University), who explored sources of female conflict in the different versions of the Niflung legends, focusing on elements of guilt and shame cultures and their influence on the conflict.

The last section of the conference, presented by Barbora Hlavatá (Charles University), was devoted to later receptions and adaptations of the Old Norse concepts of friendship and enmity. She analysed the adaptations of Old Norse matters during the Victorian era and their rise in popularity, concentrating on Haggard's Eric Brighteyes. The concluding presentation was given by Veronika de Abreu (Charles University) and concentrated on the portrayal of conflict in Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung, using both leitmotifs and the gradation of the music in order to enhance the Old Norse enmity presented on the stage.

Overall, the conference looked at the theme of friendship and enmity from many different angles, bringing both new knowledge and opening up avenues for further research. It also provided an opportunity not only for the contributors to present their research, but also to network within their field of study. Last but not least, the conference highlighted the importance of international cooperation in the field of Old Norse studies, both for advanced students and for their tutors.¹

1 The conference was supported by the grant SVV 2022, n. 260 554, realized at the Charles University, Faculty of Arts.