

Oft er gott, þat er gamlir kveða
Introduction to Medieval Icelandic Literature
March 4th – 8th 2019



This class is designed as an introduction to Old Norse-Icelandic literature and aims at providing an overview over origin, contents, and development of its most prominent genres – Eddic poetry, the Prose Edda, Skaldic poetry and the Sagas of Early Icelanders:

1. Famous mythological poems from the Poetic Edda like *Völuspá*, telling the story of the creation of the world, the Nordic gods (*æsir*), and its coming end will be addressed as well as heroic Eddic lays recounting the deeds and fate of mortal heroes similar to the story of the Nibelungs. Another important source for the study of both Nordic mythology and Skaldic poetry is the co-called Prose Edda written by the Icelandic scholar, lawspeaker and historian Snorri Sturluson around 1220.
2. Skaldic poems were descriptive and subjective with strictly syllabic metres and their language was ornamented with stylistic devices such as *heiti* and *kenningar*. Students will get an introduction to the most popular verse form *dróttkvætt* (“court metre”) and to popular subjects of the known skalds like praise of kings, love, flyting and lament.
3. The Sagas of Early Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*) are prose narratives, which recount the events that took place mostly in Iceland during the so-called Saga Age (*söguöld*, from 870/930–1030). *Íslendingasögur* focus among other things on genealogical and family history and reflect the struggles for power that arose within the early generations of Icelandic settlers. However, the sagas were not written before the 13th and 14th centuries. Finally, more recent scholarly approaches to *Íslendingasögur* will be covered exploring the sagas’ material culture and presenting a new reading of famous *Brennu-Njáls saga* (“The story of Burnt Njáll”).

Recommended Reading:

1. *Völuspá*. (“The Seeress’s Prophecy”). In: The Poetic Edda. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Carolyne Larrington. Revised Edition. Oxford 2014, 3–12. (Or any other suitable translation of *Völuspá*).
2. Snorri Sturluson: *Gylfaginning*. In: Snorri Sturluson. Edda. Translated and Edited by Anthony Faulkes. London et al. 1995, 7–59. (Or any other translation of *Gylfaginning*).
3. Úlfr Uggason: *Húsdrápa* (“Eulogy on the House”). => See attached translation by Richard North.
4. Excerpts (your choice) from *Brennu-Njáls saga*. *Njáls saga*. Translated with Introduction and Notes by Robert Cook. London et al. 2001. (Or any other suitable translation).
5. Article on *Brennu-Njáls saga*: Anita Sauckel: “*Brennu-Njáls saga*. A thirteenth century Icelandic trickster (discourse)?” => See attachment.