

A draft abstract, not a final version for Saga Conference 2018

Arinbjarnarkviða as a version of Egils saga

ARINBJARNARKVIÐA ‘the poem on Arinbjörn’ was presumably composed by Egill Skallagrímsson in the 10th century. The poem is only preserved in a single medieval source, a vellum page in Möðruvallabók. This page is currently unreadable with the naked eye. Most of the text was recorded in a 17th century transcript that has formed the basis for printed editions of the poem, as I will demonstrate. It has recently become technically possible to re-read this text and to add some details to it. It has long been assumed that what is preserved of ARINBJARNARKVIÐA is only a small fraction from its beginning, but that most of the poem is lost. The new reading indicates that the poem is essentially preserved as a whole in what may be called a mini Egils saga or a tale of Egill and his friend Arinbjörn. This paper discusses the surprisingly refined art of story-telling demonstrated by ARINBJARNARKVIÐA. The poem is composed under a relatively light skaldic meter, *kviðuháttr* which has similarities with Eddic meters. The poem does not assume that the listener knows the storyline beforehand or the actors in the story. This would be typical for Eddic poems and seems also necessary for the *kviðuháttr* poem HÁKONARKVIÐA, the only comparable poem under the same meter. The poem is a first person narrative that never reveals the name of the speaker, yet describes his looks and feelings by letting the listener witness the poet recite another poem. The poet explains, through a rhetorical listing of his dealings with kings, a conflict that has arisen (the wrath of a king). It introduces the offended king and sets the stage for his friend Arinbjörn to appear and resolve the conflict. ARINBJARNARKVIÐA appears to be unique among preserved Old Norse poems because of its storytelling technique. I explain this by presenting details of the poem, some of which have not appeared publicly before. To highlight the uniqueness of the poem I compare it to other skaldic poems that have a storyline such as HAUSTLÖNG, MÁHLÍÐINGAVÍSUR, BERSQGLISVÍSUR and REKSTEFJA. ARINBJARNARKVIÐA may be seen as a precursor to the Íslendingasögur.