
The topic of Christof Seidler’s book is the Grimm brothers’ edition of heroic poems in the *Older Edda* from 1815, the two translations, one by each brother since they could not agree on the principle of translation, and all the unpublished materials, connected both to the published volume and to two more planned volumes that never saw the light of day.

The Grimm brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm, are now best known for their collection and editions of folktales, and they influenced many later collectors and editors of folktales in this field, such as Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe in Norway. In 2005, the Grimm brothers’ folktales were added to UNESCO’s List of World Heritage. The other field of research to which the name of the Grimm brothers has become connected for all eternity is *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, often called *der Grimm*. This impressive work consisting of 33 volumes was started by the Grimm brothers, and the first volume was published in 1854.

The Grimm brothers had, however, many interests and worked in many fields of research, as many learned men did in the early nineteenth century. Jacob Grimm was born in 1785, his brother Wilhelm in 1786. They both studied law at the University of Marburg. Their main interests were, however, Old German literature and language, in short: cultural heritage. The brothers started to collect folktales as early as 1806. The following year they started to publish articles on Old German *Minnesänger*. Jacob continued with a book on German *Mestersänger*, which is a late medieval genre that can be seen as an offshoot of the older Minnesänger. At the same time, Wilhelm wrote his first book on Old Danish heroic poems, ballads and folktales, and both books were published in 1811. Their first co-authored book was an edition of the Old High German poems *Hildebrandslied* and *Wessobrunner Gebet*, published in 1812. Later in the same year, the first volume of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* was published, and the year after the brothers started a journal, *Altdeutsche Wälder*, which covered Old German literature (the journal ceased publication after few years). In 1815, the second volume of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* appeared, and as if all this were not enough, during the year 1814 and parts of 1815 Jacob Grimm wrote his *Deutsche Grammatik*, which was published in parts as he wrote it. Later the Grimm brothers continued to publish German
legends (Sagen), and Jacob Grimm wrote on German mythology, and Wilhelm on runology.

It is in this wider context of general interest in medieval German literature and culture as well as in the context of the romantic idea of the volksgeist as the creator of a nation’s intellectual fruits that the Grimm brothers’ interest in Eddic poetry must be seen. Since all the Scandinavian speaking peoples belonged to a wider Germanic nation, Eddic poetry fell clearly within the Grimm brothers’ field of interest and could fill out and complete the picture they wanted to draw up of Old German literature and culture. The heroic Eddic poems published in the 1815 edition told the same stories as the German Niebelungenlied, and were for this reason of special interest to the Grimm brothers. It was certainly not by chance that these poems were chosen for the first volume. Seidler could profitably have placed the Grimm brothers’ Edda project more clearly in this wider context.

The present book by Christof Seidler offers a very thorough discussion of the Edda project of the Grimm brothers. He gives an exposition of the brothers’ work with the edition of the poems, whom they contacted for help and support, earlier editions they could consult, and what aids they had at their disposal. His account is supported with many quotations from the sources he has used, for example letters both from and to the brothers. Seidler has perhaps chosen to use more and longer quotations than normally found in a book like this, and one objection could perhaps be that the presentation of the sources is given more space than a critical discussion of them. The extensive use of quotations is, however, a good choice. The many quotations from sources that take us close to the Grimm brothers and their time provide us with a very good, close, and detailed picture of their work and all the problems they had to face.

The Grimm brothers’ first volume of Eddic poems with two German translations, one by each brother, was published in 1815 after many years of work. The two different translations, Jacob’s in verse, Wilhelm’s in prose, were due to the fact that the brothers could not agree on how a good translation should be carried out. The Edda project was planned as an edition in three volumes, but the remaining two volumes were never published. It has of course been a matter of discussion why this did not happen. It has even been suggested that the brothers themselves felt that they were not able to compete with other scholars in this field, which demanded competence in the Old Norse language.

Seidler has succeeded in showing that the answer to the question of why the second and third volume of the Grimm brothers’ Eddic poems never saw the light of day is a complex one. It is true that the Grimm
brothers got some very negative criticism from other German scholars during their work with the Eddic poems (see Seidler for example pp. 134–155), but these scholars were also in competition with the Grimm brothers, and were perhaps not completely objective. The Grimm brothers had problems finding a publisher for their book on the Eddic poems, this process took many years, and in the meantime one of their competitors, Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen, published his edition of Eddic poems in 1812. Three years after the Grimm brothers had published their edition of Eddic poems, the Arnamagnæanske Kommission in Copenhagen finally published their second volume of the poems (the first volume had been published in 1787, and the third and last appeared in 1828). In the same year (1818), Rasmus Kristian Rask and Arvid August Afzelius published their edition of Eddic poems in Stockholm, and a few editions of separate poems had also appeared. The Grimm brothers had certainly planned to fill a gap when they first started to work on their Edda project, but von der Hagen managed to get his book out first, and after the two editions of Eddic poems in 1818, the market was flooded. In addition, it turned out that there was next to no money to be made on publishing Eddic poetry, and the Grimm brothers had to take financial considerations in account. Jacob Grimm got his professorship as late as in 1830, Wilhelm five years later. The Grimm brothers may have been disappointed with the lack of interest in their Edda project, and as can be seen from several of Seidler’s quotations, they realized that they had some problems with the Old Norse language (see for instance Seidler p. 279), but the reasons for not completing their Edda project were to be found in a series of unfortunate circumstances.

While the Grimm brothers received many critical comments on their edition of Edda poems during their work, the reception was mainly positive after the publication in 1815 (see Seidler pp. 273–278). Seidler finally discusses the impact of the Grimm brothers’ Edda research on later scholars and editions of Eddic poems. It is of course not easy to measure impact, and it is especially not easy to measure the Grimm brothers’ impact on later research on Eddic poetry, since they published only parts of the material. In connection with the discussion of impact on later scholarship, Seidler gives a survey of important editions in the time after 1815. There is more focus on German editions than on editions from other areas, which is fair enough, but there is reason to suspect that the author is not quite as familiar with editions from countries outside Germany as he is with those in German. One reason to suspect this can be found on p. 296, where we can read that Sophus Bugge’s edition from 1867 was normalized (which it was not), and to support this piece of information
there is a reference to Bugge’s own edition, but unfortunately to an empty page. All the same, Seidler is able to point out many instances where later scholars have followed the Grimm brothers’ edition, for example concerning emendations, order of stanzas, and interpretations.

Seidler has succeeded in taking us back in time to the life and work of the Grimm brothers and their contemporaries. The many long and interesting quotations give the readers an illusion of being there looking over the brothers’ shoulder, secretly reading the letters they wrote or received. At times the book is exciting, at least more exciting than scholarly literature normally is.

The book is of course of interest for scholars working with Eddic poetry, or with Old Norse philology in general. It should also be of great interest for scholars working on the history of research. It is worthwhile using a few minutes now and then to reflect on the easy access we have to sources and what aids we have at our disposal compared with scholars like the Grimm brothers who had to wait for months, if not years, for a copy of a manuscript sent from Copenhagen. Scholars interested in the theory of translation will also find titbits in this book. The brothers’ quarrel over how Eddic poetry should be translated is still of interest.

It is to hope that this book on the Edda project of the Grimm brothers will lead to a renewed interest in these impressive scholars who belonged to the generations that laid the foundation for modern scholarship. The production of the brothers is really impressive. Jacob Grimm published some 500 titles, Wilhelm Grimm, whose health was not strong, “only” about 225. Around 20 were co-authored publications (Seidler pp. 255–256).

Seidler’s book contains a rather detailed table of contents which is helpful for the readers when navigating through the book trying to find the discussion of a specific issue. There is also a useful index of names.

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