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THE *STUDIER* OF BUGGE: A WORK TO REDISCOVER

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It may be seen surprising to draw attention to a text written more than 100 years ago - the *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse* of Bugge. I hope to be able to clarify the reasons why this work, though in many ways dated, deserves a re-examination and, i would say, a re-evaluation. Also it is appropriate, on the occasion of the publication of *Classiconorroena*, to pay our respects to a distinguished Norwegian scholar, who in many ways can be considered an authentic pioneer of the studies which our Association hopes to develop.

Firstly a few notes on the author. Elsens Sophus Bugge is well known for his studies in Nordic Philology (for example his important edition of *Edda* and of Runic Inscriptions). Georg Stephen had in fact already in 1883 signalled the importance of Bugge's work. Bugge also contributed work on Italic languages and Classical literature, on Plaute, on Greek and Latin etymology, on the Etruscan and Osco-Umbrian languages. The most important of his essays are the *Studier*, which were published in Oslo between 1881 and 1889, and were almost immediatly translated into German by Oscar Brenner, *Studien über die Entstehung der nordischen Götter- und Heldensagen*, München [1881-1882-] 1889; a second series of the *Studier* (*Helge-digtene i den Ældre Edda*, Oslo 1896) were translated into English in 1899 (London) by W.H.Schofield.

Bugge's studies on Scandinavian mythology are located in that historical tradition which has been superceded by the structural approach in our century,

particularly by the work of Georges Dumézil (cf. *Les dieux des Germains*). What characterizes Bugge's approach in his studies on the history of religions, was the attention given to the presence of classical and christian culture in nordic myths and in Norse literature. The *Studier* attempt to verify this working-hypothesis specifically in relation to two recurrent themes of nordic mythology, the saga of Baldr and the episode of the hanging of Odin from the tree of Yggdrasill (in the second series of the *Studier* the saga of Helgi is examined). Also the numerous fragmentary digressions of the *Studier* offer a wealth of insights and intuitions into the re-working of classical-christian themes and models in the whole of Norse literature, beyond the two myths cited.

The historical method of Bugge is even clearer in the importance he gives, in his research, to christian sources. Bugge starts from the hypothesis that the classical-christian motifs and themes in nordic myths were passed on by Anglo-Saxon and Irish monks, and that consequently it was the Anglo-Irish christian culture which came in contact with the Norse world. This assumption led him to emphasize the homology between old- and newtestament characters and events, and nordic myths. In the cases examined: between the figure of Christ betrayed in texts such as the Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus and that of Baldr in the Icelandic sources (*Völuspá*; *Vegtamskviła*; Snorri); between the event of the crucifixion of Christ in the same Gospel and that of Odin, in which Yggdrasill corresponds to the tree of the Christian cross; also between the so-called *Vindicta Salvatoris* and the myth of Odin and Geirradr and Agnarr, and others. For these comparisons concerning the macronarrative, Bugge's work is indisputably dated in the light of Dumézil's analysis. For the figure of Baldr, for example, today it is necessary to bear in mind the relation between the Norse sagas and the *Mahábhárata*, already proposed by Dumézil and by Wikander earlier still. For Yggdrasill the hypothesis developed by Bugge had already been discarded by such scholars as Grimm and Munch. This is also true for the consideration of the religious symbols that characterize the tree in the whole Germanic tradition, beyond the myth taken in consideration by Bugge. Similarly unconvincing is his attempt to prove his thesis (in relation to Grimm) on the basis of traditions as the *arbor maxima* which would have characterized, for Adam of Bremen (*Gesta Hamm.eccl.pont.* 4,26), the temple of Upsala (more analogous, in my opinion, to the *Irminsul* of the Saxons of which Rudolf of Fulda writes in the *Translatio s.Alexandri* about the middle of the ninth century). Also, for example, in the examination of animal figures, Bugge's considerations were not able to take into account the symbolic meanings which have been elucidated by Frazer particulary. Yet even in these cases there are very interesting ideas, especially where Bugge manages to combine linguistic comparison and knowledge of classical and medieval tradition. Concerning for example the zodiacal denominations, Bugge points out the survival in the nordic area of the *Duodecim caeli signa* (work first published by Angelo Mai in 1830), where Latin and Greek names of the signs were indicated. It is very probable that the re-utilisation of this nomenclature in the Norse mythical tradition, to which Bugge refers, presupposes the mediation of the glossaries (the relevance of which in the Norse culture has only recently been realized).

The limits of Bugge's approach are further illustrated by the cases in which he is not able to give a reasonable "historical" explanation for specific thematic or narrative convergences, for example in the case of the parable of Barlaam and Josaphat (of Indian origins), of which Ernst Kuhn had already demonstrated the relation with the version of the myth referred in the *Grimnismál*.

It is significant that Bugge, when comparing the Islandic version of the myth of Baldr with that given by Saxo in the third Book of the *Gesta Danorum*, was obliged to postulate a closer rendering of the Saxo's version to the original myth (that had not yet

been influenced by christian themes) than is easily credible.
In the case of Saxo Bugge shows rightly the presence of classical influences, in particular for the murder of Baldr by Hotherus, which echoes the murder of Achilles by Paris. Bugge shows as sources of the Homeric myth Dares the Phrygian, Dictys the Cretan, the Vatican *Mythographi* and the Virgilian commentaries, to which should certainly be added Ovid (which is echoed in some interesting aspects also by Benoît de Sainte-More in the *Roman de Troie*, as Bugge showed). Even if the whole question of the medieval survival of the Trojan myth deserves a systematic re-examination, beyond the cases cited, the example given shows the importance that Bugge's analysis has for the study of Saxo, particulary in the contemporary approach, as is revealed in the studies of Karsten Friis-Jensen and in the contributions to the Congress of Bevagna in 1990.
In conclusion, what remains valid of Bugge, is his working-hypothesis, that is the verification of the permeability of the Norse saga to the culture of medieval Latin world. And Bugge insisted on the fact that the texts in consideration are never older than the VII and VIII centuries. Compared to the time of Bugge, we possess today more precise information on the diffusion of culture in medieval Europe and we also have a greater knowledge and more sophisticated research techniques. Bugge's project has not advanced correspondingly (for several reasons, connected particulary to the academic compartmentalisation). This is why it may still be useful, nevertheless, to take the *Studier* as a starting-point.

I VICHINGHI A PARIGI

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La mostra, che si è aperta a Parigi al Grand Palais il 2 aprile 1992, come 22ª esposizione del Consiglio d'Europa, sotto l'alto patronato dei capi di Stato di tutte le nazioni della Scandinavia oltre che della Francia, e con un comitato organizzatore costituito analogamente da un ampio staff di studiosi di tali paesi, si presenta con un titolo assai significativo: "Les Vikings...Les Scandinaves et l'Europe 800-1200". Per questo e per altri motivi non si tratta in realtà della "solita" mostra sui Vichinghi, e non appare certo prevalente, da parte dei curatori, l'intento di rivendicare al medioevo scandinavo - proprio nell'anno di Colombo - il vanto del primo sbarco al di là dell'Atlantico, secondo una chiave di lettura spesso fornita dalla stampa italiana. In tale senso potrebbe essere intesa una precedente iniziativa congiunta dell'Islanda e della Norvegia di far salpare una nave, ricostruita secondo i canoni vichinghi, dalla costa norvegese per raggiungere dapprima Reykjavík (alla metà di giugno 1991), con successiva tappa in Groenlandia verso la destinazione finale dell'America del Nord. La presentazione dei Vichinghi a Parigi si muove, invece, lungo linee molto più sottili e di assai più vasto respiro.
Dall'allestimento di penetrante intelligenza e di eccezionale efficacia emerge ben presto che si è voluto offrire un quadro completo del mondo scandinavo medievale. Il visitatore si muove tra documenti - collocati sia in spazi aperti sia in vetrine - che lo introducono in una cultura materiale non fine a se stessa ma apprezzata come mezzo di comprensione della complessa e variegata vita dell'epoca: dalla banalità degli oggetti del vivere quotidiano all'interesse per il commercio e la guerra, e quindi per i viaggi che entrambe queste attività sempre accompagnano. Le spinte ideali sono costantemente sottolineate - quasi in una visuale parallela che accompagna e sostanzia il dato materiale e storico - e