A
Scandinavian History
Settlement of Iceland - Landnámabók

Bibliography

Landnámabók, in Íslendingabók - Landnámabók, ed. by Jakob Benediktsson, Íslenzk fornrit, 1 (Reykjavík, Híð íslenzka fornritafélag, 1986), pp. 29-397 [UL/NF4 752:1.c.3]

The Book of Settlements: Landnámabók, trans. by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies, 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1972) [UL/NF6 599:01.c.5.1]

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Benediktsson, Jakób, ‘Some Problems in the History of the Settlement of Iceland’, in The Vikings: Proceedings of the Symposium of the Faculty of Arts of Uppsala University - June 6-9, 1977, ed. by Thorsten Andersson and others (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1978), pp. 161-65 [UL/NF6 911:01.c.44.8]


or

Discuss how Landnámabók can be described in relation to historical investigation. You may use some or all of the texts below as starting points for your essay.

1. 'I think it right to assume that most people [in thirteenth-century Iceland] were relatively well informed about their forebears, and that there was a high level of social stability in most areas; changes were primarily linked to politics and religion. It is much more difficult to argue that a group of authors in the thirteenth century agreed to invent a glorious past for the Icelanders living in the period roughly covering the years 870-1030 and decided amongst themselves how society, culture, religion and a number of important individuals and their genealogical tables were to be described'.


2. 'It is not a new idea to reject the historicity of medieval Icelandic sources. The book-prose school has stressed the literary nature of the Sagas of Icelanders, seeing them as the creative efforts of individual artists than the result of centuries of oral tradition. ... However, it must also be accepted that this material is not entirely without basis in earlier tradition. Individual names, anecdotes, and events may well have been brought unaltered through generations of storytellers, representing genuine data of a sort. The problem lies in the fact that it would be next to impossible to differentiate historical information (e.g. a primary settler called Þórðr did really existed) from spurious or distorted evidence (e.g. Þórðr did not exist, but some of the deeds attributed to him were real events carried out by another person). Historical evidence of this type is of little use in scholarly enquiry as it cannot be identified with any certainty. Traditional stories may have been plentiful in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and used as raw material in saga composition. Nevertheless, the overall view of the landnám and Icelandic society in these early sources was clearly a scholarly construct'.


3. 'While a text revealing a thirteenth-century view of the past may, and probably can, tell us something about the writer's own time, it must also tell us something about that past itself'.