

**Didaktische Absichten und Vermittlungsstrategien im altnorwegischen
“Königsspiegel” (*Konungs skuggsjá*). Palaestra 307. Göttingen:
Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000. [dissertation]**

Summary

The Old Norse *Konungs skuggsjá* of the mid thirteenth century is a knowledge-imparting text in the form of a father-son dialogue on a wide range of subjects – the conduct of a merchant at places of trade, various knowledge of nature including descriptions of the miracles and natural wonders of Ireland, Iceland and Greenland, behaviour at court, a discourse on knightly weaponry, biblical examples of fair judgement, etc. The paper on hand focuses on the goals pursued and strategies employed in this transmission of knowledge. The point of departure for the discussion is formed not by the actual contents of the knowledge conveyed, but by passages of the historic text explicitly related to its didactic goals.

The *Konungs skuggsjá* is divided relatively clearly into four sections – the prologue and one section each on the merchant, the king’s liegeman and the king himself. Particularly in the transitional passages between the sections, information on both the didactic objectives of the text as well as its overall structure is found repeatedly.

By means of frequent reference to more general concepts – customs (*siðir*), activities (*athæfi*) and the skills/arts (*íþróttir*) – as well as to the specific virtues aspired to – ›shrewdness‹ (*manvit*), ›good manners‹ (*siðgæði*) and a ›courtly bearing‹ (*hæverska*) –, all of the sections are distinctly interconnected and testify in this way to an underlying didactic concept.

›Shrewdness,‹ ›good manners‹ and ›courtly bearing‹ are defined and systematised in the section on the liegeman. Each definition lists the behaviour and abilities corresponding to the respective virtue; in each case, conspicuously concrete aspects are framed by more abstract ones. ›Shrewdness‹ is the fundamental virtue, being the prerequisite for the acquisition of both ›good manners‹ and a ›courtly bearing.‹ The latter two, frequently mentioned in the same breath, prove to be mutually interrelated but at the same time clearly differing concepts. ›Good manners‹ is the more general and refers to good overall behaviour, particularly in the sense of abstinence from the vices. In contrast, ›courtly bearing‹ refers to proper conduct at court, primarily in the area of etiquette and refined company. Thus ›good manners‹ are the prerequisite for the development of a ›courtly bearing,‹ but not vice versa. *manvit* is described as a practical intellectual virtue encompassing intelligent behaviour, and correlates roughly to the concept of the cardinal virtue *prudentia*.

The defining aspects of the three virtues refer on two levels to the remaining text: They are clearly related to other – in some cases literally identical – text passages. Thus on the one hand the definition repeatedly summarises the tenets relevant to the system of virtues and reviews the categories in which they are to be classified. On the other hand, the system consistently provides for the retrospective identification of a particular mode of behaviour as classifiable under ›good manners‹ or ›courtly bearing.‹ The distribution of the clearly appurtenant text passages is significant: Aspects of ›good manners‹ are discussed in the sections concerning both the merchant and the liegeman, aspects of ›courtly bearing,‹ however, only in the latter section.

The definition of shrewdness also corresponds in the above-described manner with other text passages. Yet the treatment of shrewdness differs from that of the other two virtues in that its aspects cannot necessarily be conveyed by the mere mention of rules of conduct or the description of a particular kind of behaviour or the respective mental attitude. At the same time, the *Konungs*

skuggsjá itself proves to demonstrate several of the abilities comprised by ›shrewdness.‹ There are, for example, three stylistically outstanding passages which correspond to eloquence, an attribute of ›shrewdness‹: the characterisation of the summer and winter winds, the description of bad times and the speech of Wisdom (personified); the rhetorical stylisation of these passages is further emphasised by commentary. Secondly, those of the defining aspects of shrewdness which are based on intellectual understanding are demonstrated as methods of discernment, i.e. logical conclusions, judgements made upon the basis of considerations of probability and the observation and systematisation of natural phenomena. These methods are linked in turn with commentaries drawing the reader's attention from the (interesting) nature-related subjects discussed in the merchant section to argumentation and methods of gaining knowledge. Here the act of rational consideration is also treated theoretically, as an illustration of glossing. Thirdly and finally, the dialogue focuses on memorisation and memory, likewise defining aspects of shrewdness. The son speaks of his desire to memorise the discussion; he continues asking questions until he understands the content precisely, then often recapitulating it in his own words.

In some cases a connection between a particular didactic strategy and source material which might have been available to the author can be conjectured, sometimes with less, sometimes with greater certainty. Those descriptions of the virtue system and of glossing which are based, for example, on the image of the tree – as a means of lending these passages expressiveness and terseness – can be seen in relation to the tree illustrations used for didactic purposes in the School of St. Victor or by Radulfus Ardens. Previous uses of imagery may also have inspired the description of the summer and winter winds: Heads with blowing mouths typically illustrated Mappae mundi and depictions of the cosmos, and had served as the fundamental pictorial element of the ›Classification of the Winds‹ in Lambert of St. Omer's *Liber floridus*.

The beginning of the *Konungs skuggsjá* was clearly modelled on sources whose didactic qualities were well-established: the *Disticha Catonis* and the *Epigrammata* of Prosper Aquitanus. With regard to didactic objectives, the *Konungs skuggsjá* exhibits a recognisably systematic structure, characterised by a rough division into the seafaring merchant's scope of experience and the scope of life at court. The first part conveys the fundamental rules of ›good manners,‹ general empirical knowledge and encyclopaedic knowledge (in the sense of the *artes liberales*), presented to some extent in forms which can be understood as a strategy for the training of shrewdness. In addition to the proportionally small but informative passage devoted to specifically commerce-related tenets, the figure of the seafarer represents above all an ideal projection surface for encyclopaedic knowledge. The framework of the first part, otherwise heterogeneous in nature, is thus formed by this figure: Only some of the subjects discussed are directly related to the needs of the navigator, but all of them fall within his scope of experience.

The second part, continuing the thread of ›good manners,‹ concentrates on ›courtly bearing‹ and the skills of knighthood, then going on to devote itself to the king, the leading figure at court, particularly in his capacity as a judge. In the discussion of the wise and fair passing of judgement, further aspects of shrewdness are elucidated.

Fictional court literature, particularly that introduced to Norway within the context of Hákon Hákonarson's efforts to advance the court culture there, transports the ideals of courtly bearing and education and may well have influenced the *Konungs skuggsjá*. Both the ideal-typical training of a figure such as Tristan and the educational programme of the *Konungs skuggsjá* adhere to a congruent underlying pattern: First the *artes liberales* (or encyclopaedic knowledge of natural phenomena) are taught, then the art of chivalry. Nevertheless, the *Konungs skuggsjá* presents this concept – in all its parts an educational programme tailored to the Norwegian elite – not as a foreign curriculum, but rather, aided by the figure of the seafarer, in the more familiar guise of learning from role models and through practical experience.