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Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia (Toronto Old Norse-Icelandic Series (TONIS))

Kevin Wanner

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Why would Snorri Sturluson (c. 1179-1241), the most powerful and rapacious Icelander of his generation, dedicate so much time and effort to producing the Edda, a text that is widely recognized as the most significant medieval source for pre-Christian Norse myth and poetics? Kevin J. Wanner brings us a new account of the interests that motivated the production of this text, and resolves the mystery of its genesis by demonstrating the intersection of Snorri's political and cultural concerns and practices.

The author argues that the Edda is best understood not as an antiquarian labour of cultural conservation, but as a present-centered effort to preserve skaldic poetry's capacity for conversion into material and symbolic benefits in exchanges between elite Icelanders and the Norwegian court. Employing Pierre Bourdieu's economic theory of practice, Wanner shows how modern sociological theory can be used to illuminate the cultural practices of the European Middle Ages. In doing so, he provides the most detailed analysis to date of how the Edda relates to Snorri's biography, while shedding light on the arenas of social interaction and competition that he negotiated.

A fascinating look at the intersections of political interest and cultural production, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda* is a detailed portrait of both an important man and the society of his times.

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