

Andreas Nordberg: *Formordisk religionsforskning mellan teori och empiri: kulturen av anfäder, solen och vegetationsandar i idéhistorisk belysning*. Uppsala: Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademien för svensk folkkultur 2013. 426 sider. ISBN 978-91-8740-302-6.

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### **The Origins of Scandinavian Manism, Animism and Solar Theories**

The book in question is, as the exhaustive title suggests, a survey of a rather limited field, namely animistic, manistic and solar theories, within the study of the history of ancient Scandinavian religion. However, these theoretical insights have been rather significant for Swedish research, as becomes obvious in the discussion. The book also offers a thorough survey of the European discussion of these theories during the 19th century, which thus serves as a basis for the treatment of the Scandinavian research from the perspective of the history of ideas and as a mirror for inspecting scholarly discussions within it. The author treats the topic in a thoughtfully comprehensive and detailed manner, but nevertheless succeeds in creating a narrative out of it. This narrative begins in pre-19th century theories and culminates in the present situation and the current outlook for Swedish studies in the history of religion.

The book is divided into four parts. The first and second parts discuss European 19th century research on mythology and rituals, while the third and fourth parts discuss how these theories have been received and implemented in the study of Scandinavian history of religion. In the first half of the book, the author sketches two quite distinct schools of thought: British and German. Even though quite different in methodology, these schools approached the same questions concerning the original form of religion and the history of its development towards the present (Puhvel 1987: 12), and despite the methodological dichotomy, the author shows how these schools were intermingled in various ways, especially towards the end of the 19th century (chapter 5).

The first part focuses on predominantly British anthropological research on myths and rituals, which was based on evolutionary principles. With its focus on cultural evolution and universal regularities in the development of religion, this research was related to the synchronic approaches of anthropology and ethnology through its doctrine of cultural stages of development. The author focuses on the most famous researchers in this field, namely Herbert Spencer and Edward Tylor, who first introduced the doctrines that are today called, respectively, manism (the belief that ancestors have influence on people's lives) and animism (the belief that natural objects and phenomena have a will of their own – and have influence on people's lives), as well as James Frazer, whose book *The Golden Bough* argues for fertility rites being the key to ancient belief. The second part discusses mostly German philologically oriented research which was especially interested in the origins of Indo-European myths. This research tradition sprang from comparative linguistics and evolved towards simplifying explanations of myths as different mythical allegories of natural phenomena. Especially Max Müller's solar mythology, which highlights worship of the Sun within the origins of Indo-European religion, is given careful study in this book. Besides Müller, also Wilhelm Mannhardt receives attention as he successfully brought comparative anthropology into the study of the history of religion and was influential on, for example, James Frazer's work and, especially, on later Swedish research history.

The second half of the book focuses on the history of Scandinavian and especially Swedish scholarship of Old Scandinavian mythology, remaining mostly within the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This discussion is based on the one hand upon the European research tradition and its influences, and on the other hand upon the scholarly discussion within Scandinavia. The Scandinavian discussion is observed so attentively, carefully and with such enthusiasm that occasionally it feels as if one was witnessing gossip in academic cafeterias. Indeed, the thorough survey of European research tradition in the first half of the book is redeemed in the second, although the author trusts the reader to have read it thoughtfully, because references to concepts and individual researchers are often passed by with only cursory remarks.

The author begins by describing the rise of the theory of the solar myth as the origin of religion in Scandinavia and its abandonment in philologically oriented research while it remained acceptable in the ar-

archaeological study of religion. Next, the author describes how manistic and animistic theories were applied to the study of the Old Scandinavian religion at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the methods of comparative anthropology and ethnology, following the path paved by Wilhelm Mannhardt, later began to emerge. The discussion ends in a treatment of the history of Swedish research in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Animistic theories were popular, but scholarly attention turned away from the history of religion and was increasingly directed towards a synchronic approach due to the polemic and influential contribution of Carl von Sydow. From beyond the scope of the book under discussion, it may be noted here that in Finland the origins of different religious phenomena were scrutinized through comparative paradigms already by Matthias Castrén, whose principal work (1853) represents also early ideas of animism and manism. This line of study was continued by researchers such as Kaarle Krohn and especially by Uno Harva (Holmberg) within the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast to the situation in Sweden, the diachronic approach to folk religion has been preserved in Finnish research up to the present time. Nevertheless, according to the author, the development in Sweden has created a good basis for the study of the history of religion in the future.

The book discusses quite a narrow topic but is nevertheless wide-ranging in its treatment of the topic. Although the survey of the scientific paradigms prevailing in 19<sup>th</sup> century European myth scholarship is thorough, this survey can be considered exhaustive only in terms of representing paradigms that provided models for parallel theories in Scandinavia. For instance, European structuralistic and psychoanalytic research remains largely uncovered. The treatment of the theories under discussion is thorough, which inevitably leads to a certain level of incoherence (compare similar difficulties in de Vries 1967 and Burton and Richardson 1972), but the author carries the reader steadily towards the second half of the book. However, as the structure of the book is like two separate pillars supporting a roof that is reached last, the importance of disposition grows large. The structure of the book, loosely following a chronological order in three different settings, is illustrative of the development of ideas, but the book's usability would have benefited from a cross-reference system and from thorough indexes.

At present, philological, linguistic, archaeological, folkloristic and other approaches to the ancient Scandinavian religions are being com-

bined and juxtaposed in different ways (see e.g. Andrén et al. 2006, Raudvere and Schjødt 2012), and the need to understand the underlying postulates and paradigms that accompany these individual disciplines is increasing. This book provides a thorough investigation into discussions on the worship of ancestors (manism), spirits of nature (animism) or natural phenomena (such as the worship of the Sun) in the study of the history of religion in ancient Scandinavia and provides a survey of the ideological basis and theoretical premises for this discussion. The author's discussions on the relevance of the concepts in question for understanding and describing the old Scandinavian belief systems and their usage in present-day research are brief, and they almost disappear within the scholarly survey. However, it is, in fact, these very passages that demonstrate the relevance of this book.

## Literature

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