

*The Brothers Grimm and the Making of German Nationalism*, by Jakob Norberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; pp. vii + 257. £75.00).

*Grimm Ripples: The Legacy of the Grimms' Deutsche Sagen in Northern Europe*, ed. Terry Gunnell (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2022; pp. xvii + 591. €160.00).

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Nationalism in Germany, according to David Blackbourn, 'was a cause of the educated middle class, who defined (even created) the idea of a German nation with their grammars, dictionaries and collection of folk tales' (p. 6). Yet the most influential examples of these genres were authored by just two members of the *Bürgertum*, Jacob Grimm (1785-1863) and his brother Wilhelm (1786-1859). Jakob Norberg sets out in this lucid, pithy study, to determine what their actual contribution was to the making of German nationalism. Of course, the Grimms would have denied that they were creating the nation. The nation existed because the people or 'Volk' existed: time, environment, tradition and, above all, language had made them one. The brothers' role as philologists was to advise statesmen on the nation's character, and its extent.

In some ways the Grimms were unlikely state-builders. They were hostile to any type of imposed uniformity; standardisation was a form of despotism which they associated with the Napoleonic Empire. They were dubious even about compulsory education because it was an agent of deracination. 'Every individuality must be held sacred' wrote Jacob in 1811, even the 'smallest and most despised dialect' (p. 12). Despite their own activities in the area, they were ideologically opposed to lexicographers and grammarians with their 'abstractly deduced, feeble and falsely conceptualized rules', as Jacob put it in his *Grammatik* (1819). Yet they saw themselves as civil servants responsible to the rulers by whom they were employed (successively the King of Westphalia, the Elector of Hesse, the kings of Hanover and Prussia). Their role was to act as a 'mediator between the king, on the one hand, and the linguistically and culturally defined people, on the other' (p. 8). With melancholy pragmatism they accepted the need for some top-down centralisation and homogeneity, if in return the state took on the duty of protecting the larger particularity embodied in the nation.

Their ideal was the 'philologist king', an archetype Norberg erects in opposition to the 'philosopher kings' of the Enlightenment with their appeals to universal reason (p. 2). The philologist king needed to share and cherish the particularities of the people. This imagined bond avoided the tricky problem of defining whether sovereignty lay with the people or the monarch. The Grimms were nationalists but, despite their occasional appearance as poster-boys for liberal and democratic forces, they were not committed radicals. They were drawn into some political disputes, for instance when they refused to withdraw their oath to the Hanoverian constitution in 1837. But they were reluctant to engage into speculative

discussions about ideal political forms, preferring the empirical science of linguistic data collection. In what Norberg considers a typical example of the poverty of nationalist philosophy, they were less concerned with the internal functions of the nation-state than with defining its boundaries.

How then were the elements of the Fatherland to be brought together? Through love: 'For Grimm, the nation was a community of love, and philological research devoted to the national community was a labor of love' (p. 126). They were, after all, products of the Romantic age. They used metaphors based on sibling bonds to describe both the internal relationships within a nation, and of one nation to another. They disapproved of foreign rule, including Prussian authority over Polish provinces. One unnecessary impediment, though, to brotherhood, was nobility, and while Norberg mentions their antipathy (p. 121), he possibly underestimates the consistency of this element of their political vision. The philologist king's advisers were to be members of the educated middle classes, not the aristocratic elite. Their career trajectories, in fact, owed much to Napoleon's disdain for the particularities, including the hierarchies, of the German states, and his commitment to 'careers open to talent'. They found the Elector an even less receptive employer than Jérôme Bonaparte. Norberg also argues that the comparative method, on which their scholarship was built, 'implied an international dimension above nationhood' which Jacob admitted that, both historically and even in own experience with the opportunities it created to travel to Paris and meet leading linguists, had taken the form of empire (p. 179).

The limits of brotherhood would also be tested by conflict at the boundaries of nations. Both brothers had strong scholarly connections to Denmark and the Nordic world, but this did not stop Jacob taking a hard line on the Schleswig-Holstein question, urging the King of Prussia to support the German-speakers of the provinces, with violence if necessary. Norberg concentrates on the period just before and during the First Schleswig War (1848-51), which was also the period when Jacob was most visible on the national scene, as chairman of the Association of Germanists who met in 1846, and then as a prominent (if not very active) member of the Frankfurt Parliament in 1848-9. It was this crisis, rather than the social conflicts of the period, that forced him to clarify his thinking about 'what is a nation', but for that reason his writings about the Dano-German borderland some of the difficulties with his linguistically determined concept of the nation. Norberg also points out that Frederick William IV did not attach much significance to Jacob's advice. Bourgeois shall speak unto bourgeois rather than to monarchs.

One of the Grimms' works that Norberg barely mentions is the *Deutsche Sagen* (1816-1818), but Terry Gunnell's argument in *Grimm Ripples* is that, in the first half of the nineteenth century, their 'Sagen' (legends) were more influential than their 'Märchen' (folktales). Before the Grimms, the terms 'folktale' and 'legend' were often used interchangeably, as Joep Leerssen explains in his contribution. As late as 1815, when he distributed his 'Circular Letter Concerning the Collection of Folk Poesy' at the Vienna Congress, Jacob used the word 'Sagen' to cover both

'children's tales' as well as '*local legends* which are told and known for their explanation of certain localities... and all monuments of remote antiquity' (p. 57). However, in their publications, the brothers drew a sharp line between the two genres of folk literature: 'The fairy tale is more poetic, the legend is more historical... The legend... adheres always to that which we are conscious of and know well, such as a locale or a name that has been secured through history' (p. 37). (In practice the distinction blurs, and some of the same stories turn up in both collections.) The first volume of *Deutsche Sagen* concerned supernatural creatures such as dwarves, giants, ghosts and a handful of saints – never the brothers' favourite protagonists; the second featured narratives of kings and nobles, arranged in roughly chronological order. Despite the local quality of legends, this was the first of the brothers' major works to be explicitly labelled 'German'. And as their arrangement had no geographical or dialectal subdivisions, so the collection appeared to represent the inherited beliefs, narratives and history of the entire German nation, very broadly defined. This 'purely German fare' (p. 3) tied national geography to national history, and made the common people the authority on both. Although more than eighty per cent of their narratives derived from existing written texts (p. 57), the very word 'Sagen' — that which is said — gave credit to popular report.

Although legends, unlike tales, were told as true (or at least believable), the Grimms were not naïve about the actual historical value of these stories; as they assembled hundreds of examples, it became clear that the same stories were told about disparate locations and personages, both within Germany and beyond. It was not just Frederick Barbarossa who slept under a mountain until his services were once more required, so did Arthur, Charlemagne, Ogier the Dane... But for the Grimms, in true romantic fashion, there was more than one kind of truth. Legends might, for example, preserve fragments of pre-Christian mythology, and so folk legends about the mid-winter spirit Mother Holle had something to tell the scholar about the pagan deity Holda (p. 54). Or so Jacob would argue in his *Deutsches Mythologie* (1835).

As Holger Ehrhardt reveals in his chapter, the *Sagen* were not well received in Germany. The editor of the Berlin journal *Freimütige* described the first volume as an 'immense cartload of useless rubble' (p. 61). The brothers were sufficiently discouraged not to attempt the promised third volume, nor re-edit the collection in their lifetime. However, their example inspired a young Danish librarian to assemble a collection of legends, published in four volumes between 1817 and 1823 (and then in a revised edition in 1843). Although the Grimms were not themselves great field collectors, they gave the impression that it was in the countryside that the treasures of oral culture were to be found, and Thiele followed this advice. Tim Tangherlini maps out Thiele's collecting trips, which he combined with pleasure and romance on visits to gentry acquaintances. Thomas Keightley, an Irishman in London, read out parts of both the Grimms' and Thiele's collection to his fellow countryman Thomas Crofton Croker, who was inspired to publish his own collection of

*Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* (1825-8). But unlike his predecessors Croker set his legends within a storytelling context, introducing narrators and the landscapes that inspired them. His legends read like short stories, and this same approach was then imitated by the Norwegian naturalist Peter Christen Asbjørnsen, who published his *Norske Huldre-Eventyr og Folkesagn* in 1845. Asbjørnsen, together with his fellow student Jørgen Moe, had already assembled a collection of folktales akin to the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, which would be translated into English under the title *Popular Tales from the Norse* by George Dasent. Dasent, a former secretary at the British Embassy in Sweden, was a great friend of the Scottish geologist John Francis Campbell, and advised him about collecting folklore, which resulted in Campbell's four volumes of *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* (1860-62)...

And so the ripples spread from country to country across the North Sea and Baltic, with only Finland seemingly immune from the influence of the *Deutsche Sagen*, according to Pertti Anttonen's chapter. But the flow also passed in the other direction, for all these characters were also in contact with the Grimms. Wilhelm reviewed Thiele's collection, and Jacob translated the first volume of Croker's *Fairy Legends* into German. Jacob was a regular correspondent of Asbjørnsen's, and he met with Dasent in Stockholm in 1844. (His good relations with many Scandinavian linguists, librarians and folklorists somehow survived his belligerence during the First Schleswig War.) Although these figures were often engaged in a conscious project of national cultural (re-)constitution, they were simultaneously part of a republic of letters, emulating and learning from analogous projects in other parts of Europe.

Thus, while each chapter deals with one country, and usually just one or two collectors, the same characters recur. For example, we first meet the legal scholar Konrad Maurer in Munich, where Jacob Grimm was a friend of his father, then as a correspondent of Asbjørnsen's, and finally as a field collector of legends in Iceland. The world these collectors inhabited was markedly homosocial, no women folklorists appear in this volume. There are several relations that resemble the sibling bond between the Grimm brothers – Asbjørnsen and Moe, the Swede Gunnar Olof Hylltén-Cavallius and the Englishman George Stephens (one of the few within this republic of letters to fall out with the Grimms)... Scientists as much as men of letters (Asbjørnsen translated Darwin into Norwegian) their tramping holidays combined nature fieldwork with folklore collecting.

The significance of the Grimms' example in the Baltic-Nordic-Celtic area is clearly demonstrated in this volume, though several of the authors also argue that there were other, indigenous influences at work. The particular importance of the *Deutsche Sagen* is less firmly established: for many of these folklore pioneers it was the totality of the Grimms' oeuvre – the *Grammatik*, the *Mythologie*, the *Märchen* as well as the *Sagen* – that inspired them. The wider significance of legends in the shaping of national culture is indicated but not explored. As Gunnell points out, these are precisely the kind of stories that end up in schoolbooks as patriotic *exemplae*: think of Alfred and the cakes, the Bruce and the

spider, William Tell and the apple... Leerssen also highlights their role in tourist literature, simultaneously the most ephemeral and omnipresent of genres. Legends would make their way from folklore collections into high art - there is a direct line between Asbjørnsen and Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* for example - and into popular culture - Croker himself used one of his fairy legends to write a pantomime. Elsewhere Gunnell has explored the role of legends in the making of national theatres in Iceland and Ireland. But there were many other ways in which writers, artists and cultural entrepreneurs used legends to effectively fuse ethnos, topography and history. The significance of the legend genre in the history of entangled nationalisms requires a whole future volume.