



The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia

Terry Gunnell

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This book takes a new approach to the question of whether some form of drama existed in early Scandinavia. Dr Gunnell examines the dialogic poems of the Poetic Edda, preserved in manuscripts from the late thirteenth century, from the viewpoints of both performer and audience. He argues that in order to be fully understood by the audience, the poems must have been presented in some dramatic fashion, and not merely chanted. He substantiates his claims by exploring characteristics found only in the manuscripts of these dialogic poems and in contemporary manuscripts of dramatic works from England and Northern France, suggesting that even in the thirteenth century, the dialogic poems must have been regarded as dramatic works. The examination is accompanied by the most complete review to date of the evidence for some kind of ritual drama having existed in pagan Scandinavia, looking at archaeological evidence for the use of masks and costumes, information contained in the sagas, and contemporary historical accounts. TERRY GUNNELL teaches English at Hamrahlid College, Iceland.

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