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Egils Saga (Icelandic Edition)



Synopsis

Note: This is the original text of Egils Saga in the Icelandic Language. Egils saga (About this sound listen (help·info)) is an epic Icelandic saga. The oldest transcript (a fragment) dates back to 1240 AD. The saga is centered on the life of Egill Skallagrímsson, an Icelandic farmer, viking and skald. It is generally referred to as "Egla" by Icelandic scholars. The saga covers a long period of time, starting in Norway around 850 AD, with the life of Egill's grandfather Álf, called Kveldulf ("Evening Wolf") and his two sons, Álf and Egill's father Skalla-Grímur. Kveldulf is described as bigger and stronger than anyone else, gaining much land and property from viking raids. He was a very wise man, a shaman (a shape-shifter) in battles and a shy recluse in the evenings. Extreme personal traits like these are seen in his son Skalla-Grímur and his grandson Egill as well. After Álf's death, due to his broken allegiance to King Haraldr (although not Álf's fault), Skalla-Grímur and his father Kveldulf flee Norway to settle in Iceland. Skalla-Grímur settles in peace as a farmer and blacksmith at Borg, where his sons Egill and Álf (named after his uncle) grow up. The story continues with the childhood of Egill, which foreshadows his future rebelliousness. His family's peace is again lost as the social order is threatened by Egill's dangerous attitude. He stirs up trouble with his first murder with an axe at the age of seven. The story goes on to tell the tales of Egill's voyages to Scandinavia and England and his personal vendetta against King Eric Bloodaxe. There are also vivid descriptions of his other fights and friendships, his relationship with his family (highlighted by his jealousy, as well as fondness for his older brother Álf), his old age, and the fate of his own son Órsteinn (who was baptized once Roman Catholicism came to Iceland) and his children who had many children of their own. The saga ends around the year 1000 AD and spans many generations. The saga follows Egill through the various stages of his life, most of which are surrounded by battle and Egill virtually narrates his own life story with his frequent segments of poetry. Before Egill died he allegedly concealed his silver treasure near Mosfellsbáir, giving birth to the legend of silfur Egils ("Egill's Silver"). The character of Egill is highly ambiguous. His multi-faceted nature reflects the ambivalent qualities of his family, a family of men who are either ugly or astoundingly handsome; a family with a history of "shapeshifters" who become suddenly mad, violent and cruel, though they may at other times be deliberate and wise; a family which neither submits to the will of kings, nor stands in open rebellion. His character is also reflected in the storytelling conventions of the text, a highly ambivalent tale populated by characters with similar or identical names, living out various permutations of very similar stories. The two handsome Álfs die heroic deaths, while their brothers Skallagrímur and Egill both die in old age after spitefully burying their wealth in the

wilderness. The descendants of Kveldǫlfr find themselves involved in two complicated inheritance feuds, at one time rejecting the claims of illegitimate children of a second marriage, and at another time claiming land on behalf of another illegitimate child born to similar circumstances. As a work of literature, Egils saga is generally considered to be amongst the best of the Icelandic sagas, along with Njáls saga and Laxdǫla saga.

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