

Magnús Pétursson: Isländisch. Eine Übersicht über die moderne isländische Sprache mit einem kurzen Abriss der Geschichte und Literatur Islands. Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag. 1978. Pp. xii, 220 + map.

Before the book under review, Magnús Pétursson (=MP) had published his doctoral dissertation about the articulatory phonetics of Icelandic (1974, in French), a book on general and Icelandic phonetics, and another on general and Icelandic phonology (1976, 1978, both in Icelandic) in addition to a number of papers connected with phonetics and phonology. MP has now to be commended for having tackled a broader subject: Isländisch is an attempt at presenting an overall view of Iceland and Icelandic, especially the latter, to the German-reading public.

The book is divided into five chapters (each ending with a select bibliography in which the works recommended for reading are marked with a cross; a complete more-than-300-item bibliography is to be found at the end of the book) and an appendix (by Heinrich Heeger) on Icelandic cartography. Enclosed is a fairly large multicoloured map of Iceland.

The first two chapters of the book are non-linguistic: they discuss Iceland and its inhabitants. The basic geographical data about the island are given; its landscape, climate, flora and fauna are briefly described. There follows a short political history of Iceland, beginning with the landnáma (874-930) and independence (930-1262), continuing with the Norwegian (1262-1380) and Danish (1380-1918) domination, and ending with the eras of the personal union with Denmark (1918-1944) and of the new independent republic (1944-). Also mentioned is the discovery of Greenland and North America by Icelanders in the tenth century, as well as emigration from the island in more recent times.

The remaining pages (32-211), the bulk of the book, treat Icelandic, except that the third chapter contains, in addition to the discussion of the early Norwegian settlers' language, some encyclopaedic information about Icelandic literature.

Chapter Four describes Standard Modern Icelandic (with some allusion to the dialects in the pronunciation section). The presentation is partly contrastive, in that the emphasis is in several places on the characteristics of Icelandic unlikely to be familiar to the German reader, e.g. on the peculiar syntax of the definite article. Phonetics, morphology, syntax, and lexicology are dealt with. There is also an informative section on personal names. Morphology is the most complicated (and the best investigated) part of Icelandic grammar, and has consequently received most attention in the book (pp.76-131). However, at least phonetics, phonology, and syntax would have deserved comparably extensive treatment. True enough, syntax has so far been lamentably neglected in Icelandic studies, so that MP had a less than desirable foundation to build upon; much of what he does describe is typical Icelandic constructions, and these will receive due attention from the interested readership (pp.130-140, cf. also pp.106-110 and 116-119).

It is unfortunate that phonetics (the pronunciation) is limited to pp. 54-75, for MP, a specialist in Icelandic phonetics and phonology, would have been eminently suited to present an extensive and reliable picture as well as the latest results in these fields. An expansion of the phonetics and phonology (and, as far as possible, of syntax; some syntactic work seems to be forthcoming at the time of this writing) is advised for the future editions of Isländisch.

The information offered in Chapters 1-4 is useful, important, and it is good to have it gathered in one place. However, it draws on the existing literature, and a German-reading person could retrieve much of it from German encyclopaedias and from Kress 1963. By contrast, Chapter Five

(pp.157-188), a forschungsbericht covering the period between 1923 (the publication year of Noreen, to whose bibliography MP refers the reader for information on older work) and about 1976, is completely new: there is no other such survey of Icelandic written in German, and none of equal scope and up-to-dateness written in any other language. The chapter is divided into thematic sections, in which much of the work referred to is accompanied by terse allusions to its contents and/or by evaluation. The latter (rarely negative) is of course subjective: another author would probably judge differently, at least in some cases; in the present era of specialisation one scholar cannot be expected to be equally competent in all the fields. (Actually it would be the wisest, given the ramified state of Icelandic linguistics, if such bibliographies raisonnées were composed by suitably balanced author collectives; but the only relatively recent opportunity of this kind - the publication in Reykjavík of Þattir um íslensk mál eftir nokkra íslenska málfræðinga in 1964 - has been missed. MP's in the next best course of action.) Estimating the importance of the publications by the quantity of remarks attached to them in Isländisch, one gets the impression that MP has a bias towards the work of non-Icelandic authors. The impression may be erroneous, and is possibly due to the fact that the contributions to Icelandic studies of Russian-writing scholars (those contributions are collected in toto for the first time - this being yet another service rendered by MP) have been allotted relatively much comment, in an effort to break the language barrier. In any case, this reviewer wishes to state his conviction that nobody has furthered Icelandic studies more than Icelanders - MP himself being an illustrative example. Another case in point, the wealth of bibliographical references to the work of Icelandic scholars would be more forceful if the philology were not drastically underrepresented in the book. (Thus only three publications by Jón Helgason are mentioned.) For instance, text editions contain in their apparatus much material directly or indirectly relevant to the history of the language and to its grammar. A proper selection of the philologica ought to have been included in Chapter Five, possibly in a special section.

Errors and omissions worth pointing out are, (1) a is pronounced as [öi] in laut (p.54; correct a to au), and (2) in Chapter Five I miss Finnur Jónsson 1908, Jakob Jóh. Smári 1920 (mentioned in another chapter, on p. 155), and Höskuldur Thráinsson 1975. Future editions of the book can and must be improved, both in scope and in such detail as just adduced.

## References

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