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Benedikt Gröndal
– writer and poet



Exhibition in The National and University Library
of Iceland opened 6 October 2017

Biography

Benedikt Gröndal Sveinbjarnarson was born on the 6th of October 1826 at Bessastaðir in Álftanes. Benedikt was one of ten children of Sveinbjörn Egilsson (1791–1852), the dean of Lærði skólinn (the Learned school, a junior college), and Helga Benediktsdóttir Gröndal (1800–1855).

Benedikt spent his childhood at Bessastaðir until 1835 when his family moved to Eyvindarstaðir in Álftanes. He graduated from Bessastaðaskóli (Bessastaðir college) in 1846 and later that year he sailed to Denmark where he studied natural science and literature at the University of Copenhagen.

In the year 1850 Benedikt returned home to Iceland, without a degree. For the next seven years he lived in Reykjavík working freelance, for example as a writer for the administration and the parliament as well as a part time teacher at the Lærði skólinn in the years 1852–1854.

Benedikt returned to Copenhagen in the fall of 1857. In the spring 1858 he met a Russian missionary, Dr. Etienne Djunkovskoy, and accompained him to Germany and Belgium where Benedikt stayed in a monastery for a while.

When Benedikt returned to Copenhagen he was employed by The Royal Nordic Society of Antiquaries. During his years in Copenhagen he also worked as a writer, for example, for Konráð Gíslason and Jón Sigurðsson, as well as receiving grants from time to time.

Benedikt finally finished a magister degree in nordic studies 1864.
Benedikt met Ingigerður Zoëga (1845–1881) in the year 1867. They got married in 1871 and had three daughters, Magðalena Þuríður (1873–1876), Helga (1875–1937) and Magðalena Þuríður (1879–1880).

In just over five years Benedikt lost his two young daughters and his wife. This loss was too much to bear and after this Benedikt struggled with heavy drinking and depression.

Benedikt was appointed teacher at Lærði skólinn in Reykjavík 1874 but was dismissed in 1883. He was granted a pension and then a lifelong stipend for his work on animal drawings and more.

In addition he often received payments for writing epitaphs and commemorative poems. In the years 1889-1901 Benedikt held a possision as the curator of The Museum of Natural history.

Benedikt died on August 2nd 1907.

Benedikt's manuscript preservation



Well over a hundred manuscripts in the manuscript collection are connected to Benedikt Gröndal, containing various material.

In the collection, there are manuscripts containing Benedikt's literature, including two versions of his autobiography *Dægradvöl* (e. Pastime), two fractions of *Örvar-Odds drápa* (e. The poem of Örvar-Oddur), *Þórðar saga Geirmundarsonar* (e. The saga of Þórður Geirmundarson) and *Rímur af Göngu-Hrólfi* (e. The ballad of Göngu-Hrólfur). Also to be found are his translations, for example of Homer's *The Iliad*.

Over thirty manuscripts contain scholarly writings and essays. Those are mainly manuscripts concerning nordic studies and natural science, many of them filled with illustrations. The best known manuscript is probably Benedikt's work *Dýraríki Íslands* (e. Icelandic Fauna). Those manuscripts hold a wide variety of materials, miscelanneous knowledge from a person with an inquiring mind.

A large collection of commemorative poems from the years 1850–1907 is preserved in four manuscripts. In addition to that, Benedikt's commemorative poems and epitaphs can be found in other manuscript collections.

The largest group of manuscripts connected to Benedikt contains his poetry, either written by himself or in transcripts. This group consists of about fifty manuscripts. Three autographs of Benedikt's volume of poems are preserved in the manuscript collection.

Letters to and from Benedikt are to be found in numerous collections, many of which have been published through the years.

Twelve manuscripts contain various material connected to, owned by, composed by or written by Benedikt. Those manuscripts includes for example his calendars from the years 1864–1907 and a register over The National Library's manuscripts. Benedikt's private collection has also been kept. In that there are, amongst other things, a commemorative poem about his wife, a letter written by his daughter, a grant application, a lease and a big collection of notes.

Dægradvöl



The autobiography *Dægradvöl* (e. Pastime) was written by Benedikt Gröndal, at an old age, at the end of the 19th century. In the biography, Benedikt reviews his eventful life and for example writes very openly about his contemporaries.

Two versions of *Dægradvöl* have been published. The older version in 1923 and the latter one in 1953, first amongst the collected works of Benedikt and then printed as a book in 1965 that was republished in 2014. The manuscript Lbs 1644 4to consists of twelve notebooks and is one of two autographs of *Dægradvöl* preserved at the National Library. Lbs 1644 4to is the manuscript containing the text that was published in 1953 and has been named the younger version of the story.

The manuscript was bought in the year 1912 from Benedikt's son in law, Þórður Edilonsson. Þórður and The National Librarian, Jón Jacobson, made an agreement providing that for the next 25 years the manuscript would neither be lent or read. Furthermore the agreement provided that the original autograph, that was in the custody of the family, should be kept untouched and unread for the same period of time.

Eventhough, despite the agreement, the Ársæll Árnason bookstore, was handed the manuscript for publication in 1923. That publication is generally called the elder version of the story and is based on the manuscript owned by Benedikts' heirs.

In the year 1985 Benedikt's heirs handed over to Landsbókasafn the manuscript containing Dægradvöl, written in three notebooks during the years 1887–1890. The manuscript was registered in 2013 and has the shelfmark Lbs 4520 8vo.

It seems that there can be found an even older version of the autobiography than the one published in 1923. The manuscript has similarities to that version with the exception of the chapter after 1874 that is missing from the manuscript but appears in the book 1923.

An important part in the autobiography composition are Benedikt's memorandums that he built on. The memorandums cover most of the years 1863–1907 and the last entry is written by Benedikt on the 29th of July, just a few days before he passed away. The memorandums are preserved at the National Library under the shelfmark Lbs 2101 8vo.

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