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The Evaluation of Stemmatic Evidence.

Recension and Revision of Niðrstigningar saga.

1. Introduction

Textual criticism is as central in Old Norse philology as it is in classical philology. Yet it seems an undisputed observation that general problems of textual criticism have been a somewhat neglected field of study within Old Norse philology. Textual criticism is often represented as a purely idiographic branch of the arts in which creativity and intuition are of prime importance¹. Good critics are 'born, not made', claims E. J. Kennedy, referring to A. E. Housman's polemic statement that a man who possesses common sense and the use of reason must not expect to learn from treatises or lectures on textual criticism anything that he could not, with leisure and industry, find out for himself². Now, if this position is to be taken as valid, the nomothetic content of textual criticism is nil. The critic's work then becomes a matter of taste, making evaluation a question of pure subjectivity.

It can not be denied that each corpus of manuscripts poses problems that call for an individual investigation, or as stated in a commonplace of textual criticism: Each case is special. Textual criticism is truly idiographic in the sense that it establishes hypotheses of low generality, which aim at explaining the relationship within individual manuscript corpora. This does not mean that textual criticism deserves no theoretical discussion, nor that it is void of nomothetic content. In this article we intend to raise a few general theoretical problems in textual criticism, concentrating on the construction and evaluation of a stemma. Though not purporting to solve any general stemmatic problems, we should like to focus on the uncertainty and to some extent arbitrariness that faces the critic. We have chosen Niðrstigningar saga, an Old Norse apocryph, as an illustrative example, which in spite of the paucity of manuscript evidence poses enough problems to warrant a closer study.

2. Manuscript evidence

Niðrstigningar saga is a translation from Latin of the latter half of the Gospel of Nicodemus, Descensus Christi ad Inferos. This Gospel was known to the Latin West in two versions, commonly referred to as A and B according to Tischendorf's edition³. The Old Norse version is definitely based on the A version with some modifications in the first and last chapters and, what is more interesting, with two interpolations added in the middle of the text⁴. It is probably impossible to decide exactly which Latin manuscript was the source for the Old Norse translation. According to Tischendorf's eclectic edition the textual variants in the Latin recension are on a comparatively modest scale, and the textual rapport between the Latin A text and the Old Norse text is on the whole so convincing that it seems fair to regard the current Latin editions as close approximations to the Latin text used by the translator. The Old Norse translation is, however, in many respects free, not only by way of interpolations but also by way of abbreviation and, sometimes, expansion of the Latin text.

The translation can in all probability be dated to the 12th century, but the provenience - Norwegian or Icelandic - of the translation is far less certain and is not a matter for discussion here⁵. The four mediaeval manuscripts left to posterity are, however, all Icelandic. Only one of the manuscripts, AM 645 qv, which we shall refer to as ms. I, carries the complete text. It is a collection volume of Icelandic religious literature, and Niðrstigningar saga (fol. 51v.22 - 55v.23) belongs to the so-called younger part probably written in the early 13th century. Of the three others, AM 623 qv (ms. II), probably written in the 13th or even early 14th century⁶, lacks the beginning, AM 233a fol (ms. III), probably written in the 14th century, consists of the inner column of a leaf in a collection volume and AM 238 fol fragm. V (ms. IV), probably written in the 15th century, is a single leaf most probably from a collection

volume as well. The textual representation of the manuscripts is shown in fig. (1) below.

There are also some younger Icelandic paper mss. which are based on an independent translation⁷. As they have no bearing on the mediaeval version we shall leave them out of consideration.

Fig. (1): Textual representation of Niðrstigningar saga

| | I | II | III | IV |
|--|---|----|-----|----|
| 1.05 [Karinus oc Levcius | — | — | — | — |
| 2.16 [Hic est dilectus/ þesse er son minn | — | — | — | — |
| 2.38 [til þin | — | — | — | — |
| 4.36 [-cipes vestras | — | — | — | — |
| 5.06 oc for þangat/ ok iamskiot]..... | — | — | — | — |
| 5.38 in terram aspexit/ af himni a iordina]..... | — | — | — | — |
| 7.35 [Guþ baud Michael/ drottin varr baud Michaela .. | — | — | — | — |
| 8.35 Amen.]..... | — | — | — | — |

A solid vertical line signifies that the text is found in the manuscript, while a dotted vertical line signifies missing parts which, however, were probably included in the original complete manuscript.

3. Editions

The Latin text has been edited in the 19th century both by Thilo and Tischendorf, and most recently by Kim, none of which editions are truly critical⁸. Ernst von Dobschütz had a critical edition in preparation which he, however, never seems to have completed. Tischendorf's edition is an eclectic text with a critical apparatus based primarily on four mss.⁹, while Thilo's heavily annotated edition of the A version in some respects is regarded as better than Tischendorf's¹⁰. Kim's new edition is of the single ms. Codex Einsidlensis (10th century), commonly regarded as the best¹¹. The textual differences between these editions are minimal in comparison to the Old Norse translation.

The Old Norse text has been edited by Carl Richard Unger, rendering each of the four manuscripts in a fairly accurate, if not diplomatic edition¹². Two pages in the main manuscript, AM 645 qv fol. 52v + 53r, are now difficult to read, but sound conjectures can be made on the basis of the other mss., and to some extent of the Latin text. Finnur Jónsson has given a separate, diplomatic edition of AM 623 qv¹³. AM 645 qv is also available in a facsimile edition with an introduction by Anne Holtsmark¹⁴.

References will be given to the Latin text in Tischendorf's (1876) and Kim's (1973) editions, while references to the Old Norse text are based on Unger's edition (1877).

4. Earlier hypotheses on the textual history

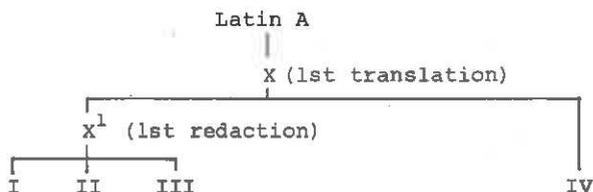
The four Old Norse manuscripts contain enough differences to justify Unger's separate edition of each manuscript. Despite this, there are no grounds for doubting Turville-Petre's claim that all mss. are witnesses to a common original translation¹⁵. A conclusive argument for this point of view is the two interpolations which are found neither in the Latin text nor in cognate vernacular versions, but which are incorporated in all four Old Norse manuscripts. Ms. IV is in many respects closer to the Latin text than the three other mss., which probably make up a separate recension as opposed to that of ms. IV. Turville-Petre believes that the intermediate position of ms. IV is due to the revision of a learned scribe, which entails that mss. I-III are regarded as closer witnesses to the original translation¹⁶. He does not put forward any final conclusion concerning the stemmatic relationship, but his hypothesis of a revision in ms. IV means that the stemma is contaminated, i.e. that it includes at least one manuscript having two or more sources.

Magnus Mår Lárusson points out that although ms. I carries the only complete text and in this respect is codex optimus, ms. II seems to keep closest to the original. This does not

necessarily entail that ms. II is older than ms. I, but in Lárusson's opinion it is a more conservative witness to the original than ms. I. He also believes that the text was originally translated in the 12th century, perhaps as early as the first half of the century¹⁷.

The only stemma which has been established is that of Gary L. Aho in his doctoral thesis on the Old English and Old Norse treatments of Christ's harrowing of hell. He also regards the four manuscripts as witnesses to a common first translation, X. Ms. IV, however, is seen as the most faithful witness to this archetype, while mss. I-III are united in a supposed common, now lost, redaction X¹. The following stemma then emerges¹⁸:

Fig. (2): Aho's stemma for Niðrstigningar saga



The difference between mss. I-III on the one hand and ms. IV on the other can in principle be explained in two ways - either by positing ms. IV as witness to the original translation and mss. I-III as a secondary redaction (Aho) or positing mss. I-III as witnesses to the original translation and ms. IV as a revision using the older recension as well as the Latin text (Turville-Petre). The reason for these alternative solutions lies in the conflicting evidence itself. Mss. I-III are definitely older than ms. IV, which makes Turville-Petre's assumption seem the most probable one. Yet the closer resemblance between ms. IV and the Latin text supports Aho's stemma, in so far as textual variance in manuscripts tends to increase the further they are removed from the original.

Lárusson's claim that ms. II is closer to the original than ms. I does not necessarily conflict with Aho's stemma. Even if mss. I and II are seen as sister mss., i.e. occupying the same level in the stemma, they may still differ considerably as to how faithfully they reproduce their common source. Turville-Petre's assumption, on the other hand, entails a contaminated stemma which is not compatible with Aho's uncontaminated one.

5. Constructing a stemma

When constructing a stemma, the ideal procedure is to undertake a word by word collation of all the manuscripts in question. Correspondence between mss. is, however, of less interest than deviations, particularly shared deviations. The stemmatic investigation thus concentrates on the telling mistakes and common blunders in order to rank the mss. in a final stemma. Secondly, the stemma becomes an instrument in establishing the paradosis, i.e. the archetypal text as far as it can be established on the basis of the textual witnesses. The paradosis focuses on the correspondences, the points where the manuscripts agree on the text.

In the case of Niðrstigningar saga the differences between the four manuscripts are so extensive that it is probably futile to try to establish an archetypal text. That does not mean that constructing a stemma is equally futile. The stemma gives clues as to the evaluation of deviant readings, and even if the data seem too disparate to allow for a reconstruction of a consecutive archetypal text, it is still possible to make a choice between variant readings on particular points in the text, making a somewhat fragmented paradosis.

Below are given 20 parallel readings which are chosen as examples of salient points in the recension of Niðrstigningar saga. There are, of course, many more textual variants which have bearings on the stemma, but we have made a choice which is intended to be representative, even if it seems impossible to give a statistical legitimation for the sample. We shall return

to the problem of representativeness later on, and suffice it here to say that the sample of 20 readings is based on a word by word collation of all four Old Norse manuscripts and the Latin text.

Parallel readings in Niðrstigningar saga

No references are given to mss. lacking the passage in question, while a hyphen signifies that the manuscript does not have a parallel reading although the context is represented. Thus example 1 shows that mss. II and III lack this part of the text (cf. fig. 1 above), while the Latin text simply has no parallel reading.

- (1) Lat: -
 I: þar var elldr brennandi at banna manne hveriom at(gøngo)
 IV: eg sa elld brennanda, sa er bannade hverium sem einum manne ingaungo
 [Unger 2.34-35, 18.05-06]
- (2) Lat: ego sum constitutus super corpus humanum
 I: ec emc til þess setr at sia um hvers mannz hug
 II: ec emc til þess settr at lita hvers manz hag
 IV: eg er skipadr yfir mannlegum likama
 [Tisch. 394.01, Kim 38.07-08, Unger 2.38-39, 9.03, 18.10-11]
- (3) Lat: ecce Satan princeps et dux mortis
 I: Satan iotunn helvitis hofðingi, er stundom er með .vii. hofðom en stundom með .iii., en stundom i dreka like þess, er omorlegr er oc ogorlegr oc illegre a allar lundir
 II: Satan heims hofþingi, er stundom er þar með .vii. hofðom eða .iii. i hrepiligo dreka liki oc omorligo á allar lundir
 IV: helvitis hofþingi leiddogi dauðra i liking hræðilegs dreka ok miog auskurlegs, sa er stundum syndiz þeim með sio hofðum, en stundum með .iii., stundum i mannz liki
 [Tisch. 394.19-395.01, Kim 38.28-29, Unger 3.16-18, 9.18-19, 18.27-29]
- (4) Lat: tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem
 I: -
 II: -
 IV: hrygg er ond min allt til dauða
 [Tisch. 395.03-04, Kim 39.01, Unger 18.33]
- (5) I: þar kom fram fyrst hestr hvitr
 II: þar rann fram hestr hvitr
 IV: þa kom fram fyst hestr hvitr
 [Unger 4.20, 10.13-14, 19.34]

- (6) I: hann hafði corono a hofði
 II: corono þa bar hann a hofði
 IV: hann hafði koronu þa æ hofði
 [Unger 4.22, 10.15-16, 19.37]
- (7) I: voro allar cledir silki hvito
 II: -
 IV: voru klæddir silke hvitu
 [Unger 4.27, 20.03]
- (8) I: hann fal þa øngul
 II: oc øngull sa enn hvarsi
 IV: hann fal aungul sin
 [Unger 4.29-30, 10.22, 20.05-06]
- (9) Lat: Haec audiens inferus dixit ad Satan principem
 I: þa melto helvitis buar við Satan
 II: þa melto helvitis buar við Sathan
 III: þa mæltu helvitis buar við Sathan
 IV: ok þa er helvite heyrdi þessi ord, þa sagði það til Satans hofðingia sins
 [Tisch. 397.09-10, Kim 40.21, Unger 4.37-38, 10.29-30, 14.25, 20.12-13]
- (10) Lat: Et eiecit inferus Satan foras de sedibus suis
 I: þeir ræco þa braut hofðingia sinn or helviti
 II: -
 III: þeir ræcu þa hofðingia sinn or helviti
 IV: ok eptir það rak það [helvite] Satan hofðingia sinn ut af sætum sinum
 [Tisch. 397.12-13, Kim 40.24, Unger 5.01, 14.27, 20.16-17]
- (11) I: en g[ec] eigi til fundar við ða
 II: en guþ egi
 III: enn eigi gud. Hann for þa eigi til fundar við þa
 IV: en eigi sa hann þo dyrdarkongin þar komin, ok villdi hann þo eigi moti þeim ganga
 [Unger 5.03, 10.32-33, 14.29, 20.18-20]
- (12) I: at hann þotesc liggia mundo umb heimen allan utan
 II: at hann hugþisc liggia mondo umb allan heiminn utan
 III: at hann mundi liggia i hring um allit helviti
 IV: sa er sagt, at ligi um allan heiminn
 [Unger 5.04-05, 10.34-35, 14.31, 20.22]
- (13) Lat: Haec autem audiens omnis multitudo sanctorum cum voce increpationis dixerunt ad inferum
 I: Guþs helgir, er þeir heyrþo þetta, þa melto þeir sva
 II: Helgir menn guþs heyrþo hial þeira oc melto við fiandr
 III: Guðs helgir er þeir heyrdu þetta, þa mæltu þeir sva
 [Tisch. 397.16-17, Kim 40.28-29, Unger 5.18-19, 11.07-08, 15.15]

- (14) Lat: praedixi vobis
 I: ec spaða yðr þetta
 II: ec spaða ypr þetta
 III: ek sagða þetta
 [Tisch. 397.19, Kim 40.31-41.01, Unger 5.22,
 11.11, 15.19]
- (15) Lat: quoniam ego eadem per spiritum eius vaticinatus sum
 I: af því at ec spaða þetta af helgom anda
 II: er þar er[ó me]lt fyrir helgan anda
 III: af því at ek spaða þetta fyrir helgan anda
 [Tisch. 398.15, Kim 41.19-20, Unger 5.35,
 11.21-22, 16.01]
- (16) Lat: non gustavimus mortem
 I: hofum við enn eki daet
 II: egi hofom vit en dæpa bergt
 III: ok enn hófum við eigi æ dauda bergt
 [Tisch. 404.25-405.01, Kim 46.17-18, Unger 8.01,
 13.24, 16.14-15]
- (17) Lat: latro
 I: illvirke
 II: þiofr
 III: illvirki
 [Tisch. 405.11, Kim 46.29, Unger 8.08, 13.32, 16.24]
- (18) Lat: -
 I: varo sender síþan i borg Ar(i)mathia
 II: varo senir síþan i borg Joseph Arimathia
 III: voru sidan senir i borg þeiri, er heitir Aremathia
 [Unger 8.29, 14.13, 17.11]
- (19) Lat: -
 I: þeir reþo up
 II: þeir lasu up
 III: þeir hafa upp lesit
 [Unger 8.31, 14.15, 17.14]
- (20) Lat: -
 I: Theodosius keisere oc sendi Archadij
 II: Teodosius keisari son Archadij
 III: Theodosius keisari, hann var son Archadij
 [Unger 8.32-33, 14.17, 17.15-16]

It is clear that ms. IV represents a separate recension as opposed to that of mss. I-III, and further that mss. I and II are fairly close. This uncontroversial observation agrees with the findings of Turville-Petre, Lárusson and Aho cited above. Using this observation as an initial hypothesis, we shall

at first try to establish the stemmatic relations within recension I-III and then try to relate ms. IV to this recension by way of going from hypotheses of lower rank to a final hypothesis of higher rank.

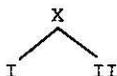
(a) The relation between mss. I and II

Neither ms. I nor II seems to be a faithful copy of the Old Norse archetype. Ms. I is closer to the Latin in 10, 15 and probably 17, where illvirke seems a more apt translation of latro than the lectio facilior piofr. Ms. II, on the other hand, is the more conservative text in 2, where hag probably is the archetypal reading, and 16, which retains the Latin metaphorical expression. In 20, which has no parallel in the Latin text, there is still no doubt that ms. II has the original reading, while 18 is obviously corrupt in both mss.

Lárusson's claim that ms. II is on the whole closer to the archetype than ms. I does not seem warranted. A comparison of the two mss. yielded 30 readings (of which only a few are given here) where it was possible to arrive at a conclusive evaluation, showing that ms. I seemed to be the most conservative in 17 cases, ms. II in 13. It thus seems reasonable to conclude that both mss. are free transcripts and that neither of them has priority in relation to the archetype.

Ms. II has not been the source for ms. I, as is shown by 7, 10 and 15, nor has ms. I been used as the source for ms. II, as is shown by 11 and 16. The only conclusion then that fits in with the evidence, is that mss. I and II are sister mss., copied from a common source X, as set up in the provisional stemma below.

Fig. (3): Provisional stemma for mss. I and II



It should be noted that even if ms. II is considerably younger than ms. I (cfr. note 6 above), they may still occupy the same level in a stemma, which intends to state genetic, not chronological relations.

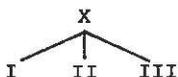
(b) The relation between ms. class X and ms. III

In some respects ms. III is close to ms. I, as in 10, 13, 15 and 17, while in other cases it is closer to ms. II, as in 16 and 20. In other respects ms. III has a reading of its own, as in 12 (which seems an inferior reading in the context), 14 and 18, where both mss. I and II are corrupt.

Examples 10, 11, 15 and 17 appear to argue against ms. II as the immediate source for ms. III. The evidence against ms. I being the source is less strong, but 11 indicates that ms. III has a source other than ms. I (and ms. II). In this passage mss. III and IV probably are closest to the archetype, while both mss. I and II have abbreviated readings.

A provisional stemma then may posit mss. I-III as sister mss. dominated by a common source X, as there is no evidence for any hierarchy between the mss. so far, and the general rule of minimizing theoretical constructs (which we shall return to in ch. 6) counters the postulating of any additional sources.

Fig. (4): Provisional stemma for mss. I-III



(c) The relation between ms. class X and ms. IV

As pointed out above, it is clear that ms. IV represents a separate recension as opposed to the recensions of mss. I-III. In most cases ms. IV reflects the Latin text more accurately than the other three mss.: 2, 4, 9 and 10 are only a few of the examples. On the other hand, the two recensions are not

completely independent, as all four mss. incorporate the two interpolations on the expulsion of Satan, to which there is no parallel in the Latin text (cf. 5, 6, 7, 8, 11 and 12 above).

In Aho's stemma ms. IV is seen as the more conservative text reflecting a first translation, while mss. I-III represent a secondary redaction (fig. 2 above). Turville-Petre, on the other hand, sees ms. IV as a revision by a learned scribe, who had the Latin text as well as a manuscript in the recension of mss. I-III in front of him. This implies a contamination in the stemma, but as Maas concludes rather pessimistically in his *Textkritik*, against contaminations there are no remedies¹⁹. Our problem, then, is not only to handle a contamination, but to decide whether the recension is contaminated (Turville-Petre) or not (Aho).

It is possible to give a consistent argumentation in favour of Aho's solution. When mss. I-III agree on a reading as opposed to ms. IV, the variant reading will be ascribed to the postulated first redaction. When one or two mss. of recension I-III disagree on a reading, the reading common to ms. IV and the other ms(s) is seen as archetypal, while the deviant reading is explained as a spontaneous innovation. Thus 4 is explained as abbreviation in the first redaction, 5-8 as innovations or abbreviations in ms. II, 9 as deviation in the first redaction, 10 as spontaneous abbreviation in ms. II and 11 as corrupt and independent readings in mss. I and II. Finally, 12 poses a problem, but according to Aho's stemma mss. I and II may be assumed to have the archetypal reading, slightly altered in ms. IV, while ms. III carries an innovation, and not a very good one at that. Thus Aho's stemma is fully consistent with our sample of parallel readings.

The same evidence can be used to support Turville-Petre's point of view, i.e. explaining the variant readings in ms. IV as influenced by two sources, the Latin text and the recension I-III. Thus 2 is explained as a corrected reading in ms. IV based on the Latin text, 3 as a transfer from recension I-III, 4 as a correction based on the Latin text, 5-8 as transfers from ms. I or a ms. close to it, 9-10 as corrections based on the Latin text, 11 as a

transfer from ms. III or a ms. close to it, and finally 12 as a transfer from mss. I and II or a ms. close to them. This solution entails some sort of hierarchy among mss. I-III, a point which will be further discussed below. Suffice it here to conclude that Turville-Petre's contamination hypothesis is equally consistent with our sample of parallel readings.

At this point it looks as if we have reached an aporia in the sense that no intrinsic textual arguments can lead up to a decisive conclusion. In such a situation the critic has to resort to other criteria, i.e. extra-textual ones, in order to make a qualified choice. A peculiar aspect of recension I-III is that the original triad of Christ - Satan - Inferus in the Latin text is reduced to a simple dualism between Christ and Satan, while Inferus is transposed to a host of devils and impious inhabitants of hell. Ms. IV keeps to the original structure, translating the personified Inferus with the neuter actant helvite (anaphorically referred to as 'pat'), as shown in 9 and 10. Either mss. I-III or ms. IV must be explained as some sort of revision in this respect, but other things being equal it is more likely that a revision tries to correct the text, as in ms. IV, not the other way round, as in mss. I-III.

The archaic language of the related mss. I and II shows by simple extrapolation that their common source, X, belongs to the 12th century, perhaps as early as the first half of the century²⁰. As the first half of the 12th century by common consent is thought to be the beginning of Old Norse literature of some importance, this leaves little margin for a supposed redaction intercalated between mss. I-III and the first translation, as is supposed in Aho's stemma. It is further a puzzle that the oldest textual witness to the archetype is the 15th century ms. IV, while the 13th century ms. I, reflecting a 12th century hyparchetype, is to be explained as a textual witness to a secondary redaction. If, then, ms. IV is seen as a reflection of an original and closer translation of the Latin text, it is even more puzzling why it

should include the specific Old Norse interpolations, which fit far more easily in with the freer rendering of mss. I-III.

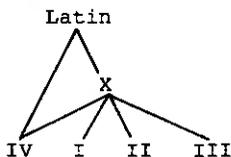
These extra-textual arguments seem strong enough to warrant Turville-Petre's solution, but here, as in most stemmatic discussions, there is no conclusive proof of any solution.

Granted that ms. IV is a revision, the next problem then is to decide the genetic relationship between ms. IV and recension I-III. As pointed out above, the contamination hypothesis entails a hierarchy among these mss.

Ms. IV comes closest to ms. I in most instances, especially in the interpolations, as shown in 5, 6, 7 and 8 (and an additional number of examples not included in the present sample). In example 10 it follows mss. I and III, and in 11 ms. III. Ms. II seems to be furthest removed from ms. IV, but the phrase 'i hreþiligo dreka liki'/'i liking hrædilegs dreka' in 3 points to some connection between mss. II and IV. None of the three mss. can be posited as an immediate source for ms. IV, even if ms. I is a close candidate. Example 11 shows that neither ms. I nor II has been the immediate source for ms. IV, and example 12 rules out ms. III. The source for ms. IV must then be a ms. situated on a higher node in the stemma.

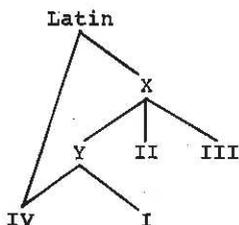
Now, two solutions are possible. This higher node ms. may be identified with X, as in stemma (a) below²¹. According to this stemma the significant closeness between mss. I and IV as opposed to mss. II and III is a matter of coincidence. The scribes of mss. I and IV may both have stuck fairly close to X, while the scribes of mss. II and III may have been more innovative in their work.

Fig. (5): Stemma (a) for Niðrstigningar saga



The evidence also admits of another stemma, viz. (b), where mss. I and IV are seen as sister mss. dominated by Y, which in turn is dominated by X. This solution is based on a higher degree of abstraction than stemma (a) as it introduces a new construct, Y. Stemma (b) articulates more clearly the textual relation between mss. I and IV. The significant higher degree of correspondence between those two mss. as opposed to mss. II and III, is shown in establishing Y as a denominator for mss. I and IV.

Fig. (6): Stemma (b) for Niðrstigningar saga



Both stemmata have the same power of explanation in the sense that the set of registered textual variants (1-20) are compatible with both models. The variant readings in 11 suffice to illustrate this point. Here the original reading is probably close to ms. III or the somewhat paraphrastic wording in ms. IV, while mss. I and II clearly give corrupt readings. According to stemma (a) mss. III and IV are independent witnesses to the original reading in X, while both mss. I and II are independent corruptions. According to stemma (b) X still carries the original reading, which is transferred to Y and then to ms. IV, while its sister ms. I is corrupted. The readings in mss. II and III bear the same relation to X as in stemma (a).

This means that if (a) gives a consistent explanation of the textual relationship, the same applies to (b). How, then, can one choose between the two? Stemma (a) makes do with one construct less, X, as opposed to X and Y in (b). On the other hand

stemma (b) articulates the comparatively close relation between mss. I and IV, which appears to be a mere coincidence in (a). Thus the configuration of (b) is a better representation of the degree of textual distance in recension X than the equipollent stemma (a). On this basis, we will choose (b) as the stemmatic model which seems to give a consistent explanation of the genetic relationship between the four texts and which at the same time gives the best representation of textual affinity. It should be noted that this is not a matter of strict proof, but of constructing the best possible hypothesis of the textual history.

6. Drawing some general conclusions

Since the Swedish philologist Carl Johan Schlyter constructed what is thought to be the first stemma in his edition of Vestgötalagen (1827)²², this biologically inspired model has become a commonplace in textual criticism (fig. 7). Even if the model itself has the dignity of high age, construction of stemmata is by no means finally described. The consensus on the model does not entail consensus on the rules for its construction. Hard and fast rules simply do not exist: Each stemma reflects an investigation into a manuscript corpus which raises a host of particular problems.

In spite of the dominantly idiographic character of stemmatic work, it is still possible to make some general observations. In this final chapter we shall try to point out some of these aspects, based on the preceding discussion, but hopefully with a wider application.

The need for a terminology has strangely enough arisen in this well-tilled field. We shall borrow some terms from the phrase structure component of generative grammar, whose syntactic tree model turns out as a useful analogy²³. An initial ms. thus refers to the archetype, a terminal ms. to the ms. at the end of each branch in the stemma, and node to the dividing point of the branches. A node is said to dominate its lower nodes, on which

daughter mss., are situated. Mss. on the same level are referred to as sister mss., i.e. mss. dominated by the same, immediately preceding node, which in its turn is referred to as a mother ms. (German Vorlage).

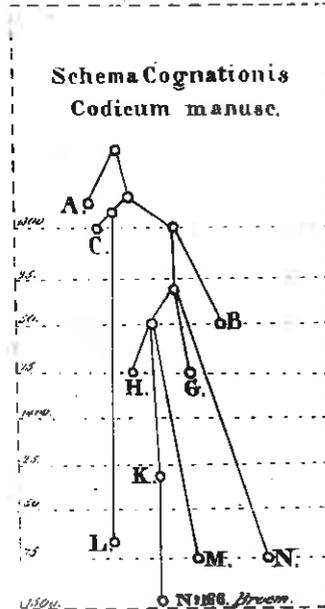
(a) Abstraction in the model

Schlyter's stemma lends itself to a fairly concrete interpretation. The vertical axis states an absolute chronology, in which each ms. is placed at its time of composition - even the ones no longer extant (set out as empty nodes). The essence of the model, then as now, is of course to expose the genetic relations between the mss., in Schlyter's words cognatio codicum.

In a modern stemma the vertical axis only intends to give a relative chronology. Sister mss. may differ considerably in time of writing, and mss. on the same level but on different branches even more so. The distance from the initial to the terminal ms. is not a measure of chronological span, but of textual affiliation. In linguistic terms the stemma is a model of the hypotaxis in the recension of the mss., stating domination along the vertical and diffusion along the horizontal axis.

The higher degree of abstraction implies that the intermediate, empty nodes in the stemma no longer should be conceived of as lost mss. The empty nodes in Schlyter's stemma and the X and Y in our preceding stemma (b) are simple denominators: They show domination

Fig. (7): Schlyter's stemma



over lower nodes in the sense that they group together mss. of common descent. Deciding the exact number of lost intermediate mss. is in any case impossible, because the extant mss. will always be an unknown fraction of the total, once existing ms. corpus. A stemma is thus the critic's representation of the relationship between the initial and terminal mss., and is not aimed at giving information concerning the number of mss. lying between the two. This shows the need for Occam's razor when constructing a stemma: Plurality is not to be assumed without necessity, i.e. the number of stemmatic denominators should be minimized, though without infringing on the consistency of the stemma.

In stemma (b) above a possible objection is that the younger ms. II appears to be closer to the initial ms. than the older ms. I, as there is an additional node dominating this ms. A manuscript may, however, have as its immediate source a very much older ms., which either has been chosen by chance (there being no other ms. available) or which has been chosen for the very reason that it is an older ms., carrying the stamp of authority. This is probably the case with ms. II, which in our view is clearly younger than ms. I²⁴, although it seems to have been copied from a ms. close to the initial ms. The age of the manuscript is no definitive criterion for stemmatic rank.

In an abstract interpretation of the stemma, the position of ms. I as opposed to ms. II states that ms. I is dominated by Y, then by X, which in its turn dominates ms. II. This means that mss. I and IV are more closely related than mss. I and II in spite of ms. IV being contaminated, while both mss. I and II must have a common source. The stemma is thus a representation of a hypothesis of textual relatedness, and does not purport to decide the exact number and character of the manuscript sources for mss. I-IV.

(b) Representativeness

The basic openness of a text (which some literary critics stress to the point of absurdity) means that there is apparently no limit to the number of relations that can be established between any two manuscripts. The material for establishing stemmatic relations is in principle any differences in the text, i.e. any variants. A variant is a relational term, which is defined as deviation from the textual norm in a chosen manuscript. As the number of variants even in the shortest text can be overwhelming, the critic's task is to make a representative sample of variants, deciding at which points in the text the stemmatic relation is to be established.

Random sampling, e.g. picking out every 10th line in the manuscript, is no feasible way. What the critic is looking for is not a statistical average, but the telling mistakes, the instances of common deviation, etc. The only safe method of choosing variants relevant for constructing a stemma is to collate the manuscripts line by line. Richard Bentley's famous dictum that reason and the facts outweigh a hundred manuscripts goes for evaluating variants as well. A single variant may decide a stemmatic dilemma, while a hundred other readings may be ambiguous or uninteresting. Making a representative sample then is not a mathematical operation, but a test of the critic's qualified opinion. It is rather a question of making a conclusive sample, i.e. sorting out the variants that have bearing on the stemma one way or another.

Though allowing for subjectivity, this is not an opening towards irrationality. Tradition in textual criticism has established an inventory of variational types, epitomized in the central rules of lectio difficilior potior (the more difficult reading is to be preferred) and utrum in alterum abiturum erat? (which reading would be more likely to have given rise to the other?)²⁵. They are guiding-lines for the critic's sampling and evaluation, but they still leave considerable room for qualified interpretation.

In our somewhat abbreviated discussion of the stemma for Niðr-stigningar saga we based the argumentation wholly on a sample of

20 parallel readings. The sample is supposedly qualified, but only one among other conceivable samples, which implies that other conclusions are equally possible. This underlines the provisional character of the stemma, as it is open for falsification on two levels: It may be shown to be wrongly constructed on the basis of the critic's sample alone, or on the basis of counter-examples not included in the sample. Still, different samples may lead to the same conclusions. Evaluation of variants is not a matter of counting, but of weighing them according to stemmatic rank. Making a representative choice of variants means to sort out variants that are relevant for the establishing of a priority among the manuscripts. As such a sample and its evaluation is never finally made, the stemma is in Popperian terms properly defined as the best, as yet not falsified hypothesis of the inter-textual relationship²⁶.

(c) Explanatory power

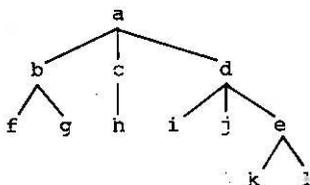
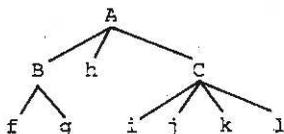
In the preceding discussion a stemma has several times been said to explain a textual relationship. The concept of explanation usually entails generalization in the sense that a phenomenon is referred to a law or to some observation of regularity. 'Explaining a textual relationship' may simply mean to relate a manuscript to other mss. in a stemmatic hypothesis, based on a generalization of their common features.

Explanations differ as to how powerful they are. Claiming that all four mss. of Niðrstigningar saga are dominated by a common initial ms. is a fairly weak explanation of the inter-textual relationship. The explanation is probably correct, but rather uncontroversial as it rules out few other possibilities. A strong explanation, on the other hand, is characterized by its power to exclude possibilities. The final stemma (b), for example, is a more powerful explanation than the stemmatic observation above, because it rules out Aho's uncontaminated stemma among the possible stemmatic relations, in fact any uncontaminated stemma whatsoever.

As strong explanations exclude more possibilities than weak ones, it follows that they are more easily falsified as well. Counter evidence for stemma (b) is easier to come by than counter evidence for the uncontroversial hypothesis of a common initial ms. Weak explanations, on the other hand, carry a certain immunity against falsification, which means that they are false under comparatively fewer conditions than stronger ones. In stemmatic work explanations in this sense are often fairly immune. The discussion of stemmata (a) and (b) is an instructive example of this partial immunity. On the basis of the existing evidence, both stemmata seem able to 'explain' the textual relationship. Despite this apparent equilibrium, we tried to show that stemma (b) is a 'better' explanation than (a). The question then arises if a set of manuscripts allows for any number of stemmata, or in other words if the art of explaining is the art of introducing denominators according to need, answering counter arguments by constructing new levels in the stemma.

There are (at least) two ways of reducing stemmatic immunity, and thereby increasing the empirical content of the stemma.

The first rule is Occam's razor, as pointed out above (p. 18): The number of denominators must not exceed the minimum which is required to give a consistent statement of the inter-textual relationship. The consequence of this rule, however, is that there can be no one-to-one correspondence between the number of lost mss. and the denominators of the remaining manuscripts. If the real stemma for the remaining mss. f, g, h, i, j, k and l was fig. 8 (mss. a-e being lost), the critic would, depending on the degree of textual variance, probably construct stemma 9. This stemma uses only the minimum of denominators in order to group the mss. in two main recensions, B and C. Ms. h is immediately dominated by the initial ms. A, as there is no reason to intercalate a lost ms. between them (though c in fact was intermediate). The readings of A are only indirectly accessible via B and C, which makes it very difficult indeed to argue for an intermediate ms. between A and h on the basis of the sister denominators B and C.

Fig. (8) A complete stemma of mss. a-lFig. (9): A stemma constructed on the basis of mss. f-l

Similarly, as ms. e is lost, mss. k and l are most likely to be raised to the level of mss. i and j.

This rule underlines the need for caution in interpreting the stemma. A stemma is not primarily a historical reconstruction of a manuscript corpus. It is rather a minimal model for stating the hypotaxis between manuscripts which are weighted and ranked according to their critical value.

The second rule is the necessity of what we may term textualization, i.e. the manifestation of stemmatic relations in the text itself. Exact copies are the exception in mediaeval corpora, and particularly in Old Norse literature, where a linguistic norm was never established. There is no way of telling the difference between two printed books only on the basis of the text. Manuscripts, on the other hand, reveal their fallible character in many ways. Textualization means that the source has left traces in the manuscript as testimony to the textual history. Even if only one manuscript remains, it is very often possible to make

some judgement as to its stemmatic standing on the basis of textual corruptions etc. Textualization is the empirical manifestation of lost manuscripts, which are only visible par-derrrière, through traces in the remaining mss.

The concept of textualization is trivial, and only points out the need for textual evidence of stemmatic history, e.g. saut du même au même, haplography, dittography, simple omission, intelligent restitution etc. Setting up formal limitations for stemmatic work can probably never become more than generalities bordering on trivialities.

The art of constructing a stemma for a literary work, then, may be described as an extrapolation from the fraction of remaining manuscripts towards the initial manuscript, founded on textualization in the manuscripts and restricted by the rule of minimizing theoretical constructs.

(d) The quest for a stemma

Constructing a stemma serves a double purpose. For the textual critic it is a model that sums up his investigations into the manuscripts, with the aim of ranking them according to their critical value. The stemmatic work then makes a basis for an edition or a re-evaluation of a former edition, either by establishing which manuscript is to be preferred or how variant readings are to be evaluated. In this sense a stemmatic discussion is a necessary prolegomena for an edition, whether it is possible to arrive at a conclusive stemma or not. The exception is the literary work that is only left to posterity in a single manuscript, but even here, as pointed out above, is it possible to pass some judgement as to its relative stemmatic standing.

For the user of a critical edition the stemma is an essential instrument in evaluating the variants. If no priority among the mss. is established, the evaluation of the variants becomes accidental and the text less clearly defined. The stemma can, admittedly, give no final conclusions in the evaluation of variants, but it is to be read as the critic's qualified advice to the

reader. In this sense the stemma is a model for making explicit an often complicated discussion of manuscriptal evidence.

Establishing a stemma can be tiresome work and, at times, inconclusive. The practical use of the stemma for the readers of an edition may also seem marginal, and for some readers the stemma and its accompanying critical apparatus are uninteresting. Is the stemmatic work worth the trouble, then, or are the returns too few?

It is probably a common judgement in textual criticism that an edition ought to approximate the archetype unless secondary manuscripts have independent literary or linguistic value. As historiography traditionally has tried to go back to the beginnings, textual critics have tried to restore and occasionally improve readings in fragmented and corrupted manuscripts. This quest for a textual archetype has certainly lead some critics to unwise conjectures and emendations. The need for a stemma, however, is not primarily for the stating of a historical reconstruction. The point of constructing a stemma is to furnish the reader with relevant information on the manuscripts presented in a practical format, stating the premises for the critic's own judgements.

Here we may return to the position referred to in the introduction, viz. that textual criticism is an art rather than a science (*Wissenschaft*). A pivotal criterion in all scientific research - even in the Humanities - is that the results are made open for inspection, that the premises for the conclusion are stated, not just the conclusion itself. Thus the rhetorical virtue of perspicuitas is applicable to the humble genre of stemmatic discussion as well. Even if a conclusion in the form of a stemma seems meagre, it is still of theoretical importance to present whatever conclusions that can be drawn from the textual evidence. Only in this way can other critics evaluate the findings.

* * *

The stemma, then, is an instrument in a restorative approximation to a literary work, which presents itself through the historical process of transcription by occasionally scrupulous and occasionally careless scribes. At the end of the line is the critic, faced with the challenging and often hopeless task of retracing the literary work as it was once written by an anonymous author or translator.

NOTES

- 1) The reference is to Wilhelm Windelband's distinction between on the one hand idiographic science (Wissenschaft), dealing with the individual aspect, and on the other hand nomothetic science, dealing with general statements (laws).
- 2) Kennedy 1974:190B.
- 3) Tischendorf ¹1853, ²1876.
- 4) The A version was definitely the one most used in Western Europe, cf. Turville-Petre 1953:127 or Aho 1966:10,19. For a comprehensive introduction to the study of the interpolations, cf. Marchand 1975. The text of the Old Norse interpolations is found in Unger 1877:2:4.18-33,5.01-12, and an English translation in Marchand 1975:328-329.
- 5) Cf. Mogk 1904:890, Seip 1954:81,135 and Bekker-Nielsen 1967:309 as opposed to Lárusson 1955:166. There is no room for taking up this discussion here, but some of Seip's examples of Norwegian influence will probably be treated with greater caution today. Perhaps the best conclusion is to look upon Niðrstigningar saga as a part of the common Norwegian-Icelandic literature, leaving the question of nationality aside.
- 6) The date is disputed. Benediktsson 1965:xxxvii believes that it is probably written 'about or not long after the middle of the 13th century'. The ms. has, however, some disturbing innovations (svarabhakti vowel and itacism) and, integrated in the running text, there is a second, predominantly gothic hand on fol. 21r.26-30, which on paleographic grounds points to the 14th century.
- 7) Cf. Bekker-Nielsen 1967:309.
- 8) Thilo 1832 (A text only), Tischendorf ¹1853, ²1876 (A and B text) and Kim 1973 (A text).

- 9) Tischendorf 1876:LXXVI.
- 10) Cf. Kim 1973:8.
- 11) Cf. Dobschütz 1899:253*-254*.
- 12) Unger 1877:2:1-20.
- 13) Jónsson 1927:1-9.
- 14) Holtsmark 1938.
- 15) Turville-Petre 1953:127.
- 16) Loc. cit.
- 17) Lárusson 1955:159-160.
- 18) Aho 1966:156.
- 19) Maas 1960:30.
- 20) Lárusson 1955:160.
- 21) For the sake of simplicity X is identified with the archetype. The original translation and the manuscripts left to posterity are so close in time, and the manuscript corpus so small that positing a separate archetype (as Maas does in his Textkritik) seems unnecessary in this context.
- 22) Cf. Holm 1972. Discussions of genetic relations between manuscripts are of course older than Schlyter, but the coining of the stemmatic model for textual criticism is - to our knowledge - his merit.
- 23) Introductions to phrase structure grammar are legio, cf. e.g. R. Huddleston: An Introduction to English Transformational Grammar, London 1976, ch. 3, or a linguistic dictionary, e.g. R. R. K. Hartmann & F. C. Stork: Dictionary of Language and Linguistics, London 1972.
- 24) Cf. note (6) above.
- 25) Cf. further Birt 1913:124-163 for a catalogue of types of variation.
- 26) Cf. Popper 1972 for general terminology.

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