

A SCRIPTORIUM IN NORTHERN ICELAND

Clárus saga (AM 657 a-b 4to) revisited

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1. Introduction

In 1966 Ólafur Halldorsson published a study of the group of manuscripts that could be connected to the monastery at Helgafell. Ólafur pointed out that it would be of great value for our knowledge to have groups of manuscripts studied as a whole, and in this connection to study the palaeographic and orthographic peculiarities that could be noted in these groups (Ólafur Halldorsson 1966).

Traditionally, however, the main interest in philological studies has focused on the texts and their relation to a now lost archetype. The textual tradition has been studied mainly with the aim to establish the best text for an edition, and the relations between different texts delivered in a compilation or collection has not often been looked upon as a primary object for study. This has sometimes resulted in editions of single texts where the text has been torn out of its context and therefore gives the wrong impression to the reader. A good example of this is the manuscript *Codex Wormianus* (AM 242 fol.) which was first edited as a whole in the *arnamagnæan* edition (1848–87), but then in later editions has appeared in single-text editions (see e.g. Braunmüller 1995).

This paper will focus on the difficult problem of authorship to the medieval Icelandic text from a manuscript perspective. The manuscript AM 657 a–b 4to, which among other texts contains the *Clárus saga*, was produced by a professional and, judging from the preserved manuscripts from his hand, highly productive scribe. The scribe and the manuscripts he has produced have often been discussed in connection to the monastery in Þingeyrar in Húnavatnssýsla. In this monastery two of the known authors/translators of the same period (1325–1375) had their residence. The two, Berg Sökkason and Arngrímr Brandsson, have both been mentioned in connection to a number of texts that are found in contemporary manuscripts associated with Þingeyrar and a group of about seven scribes (see e.g. Jakob Benediktsson 1980; Johansson 1997).

It is therefore important to elucidate the relations between the known authors/translators and the group of scribes that have been established in connection to the monastery of Þingeyrar. In this paper I will argue that the manuscript AM 657 a–b 4to was produced at this monastery at the time when Berg Sökkason and Arngrímr Brandsson had their residence there. This means that we can establish a contemporary connection between the texts and the actual preservation of them in the manuscript tradition. This must have an impact on our way of looking at texts and manuscripts from this period.

The former studies on the authorship of *Clárus saga* will be discussed in relation to the scribe that produced the copy of the text in AM 657 a–b 4to. I will show that the features put forward in Alfred Jakobsens thesis on the saga (1964) can be related to the manuscript AM 242 fol., which has never been considered Norwegian in any part. This means that the "Norwegian" features of *Clárus saga* must be seen as belonging to the environment where Bergr Sökkason, Arngrímr Brandsson and the unidentified scribes worked together.

2. The scriptorium

In my thesis on the manuscript *Codex Wormianus* I focus on the distinction between scribal and editorial factors in the manuscript to establish the different layers in the manuscript. This is important if the process of making the compilation and copying the texts into the actual manuscript is to be distinguished. The two functions of *editor* and *scribe* can hypothetically have been carried out by two different individuals. There is also a possibility that the compilation was made into another manuscript, which then was copied by the scribe. On the other hand there is also a possibility that the editor and the scribe is the same individual.

The first stage in an examination of the manuscript discusses the texts that are collected and ordered by the editor or compiler. In order to create a unity in his work he matches the texts by making interpolations and deletions and some of the texts may even have been written to fit the purpose of the compilation. This stage can be studied with traditional text criticism where intertextualities and connections are described and evaluated.

But the work of the scribe can not be rendered in the same way as the work of the editor. In order to establish the role of the scribe in the preserved manuscript I present a model, with criteria for distinguishing the scribal function on different layers in the script of the manuscript. In order to create a system in the variation of the script I use a graphonomic method. By doing this I can establish the graphemes of the manuscript at the same time as the variation is easily detected. The scribe's use of the different signs can then be studied on the palaeographic and orthographic levels in relation to a number of factors. I distinguish between variation that depends on the exemplar, on the local palaeographic and orthographic use and on the education of the scribe. The variation in the manuscript can be structured and thereby these layers can be elucidated and explained.

But the variation in the scribes own orthography does, however, create some problems in the analysis. Often it is impossible to make a certain decision on whether a relation between two variants for the same grapheme depend on a free variation within the scribes own system or on the exemplar. My study shows, however, that the editor of the compilation in AM 242 fol. and the scribe that copied the texts into the manuscript were most likely not identical. The scribe probably worked with a couple of different exemplars to gather the manuscript, which establishes that the compilation was done at the

same time as the manuscript, but the editorial work was done by someone that had gathered the texts and written the passages that are interpolated in different parts of the compilation. The fact that most of the texts show a quite similar pattern of variation indicates that the editor may have copied them from other manuscripts and thereby normalized the orthography to a certain extent which was found already in the scribe's exemplar(s).

The manuscript AM 242 fol. has often been discussed in connection to a group of manuscripts containing a great variety of texts central to our knowledge about medieval Icelandic literature. This group of manuscripts also presents a solid material for our study of scribal hands and the palaeography and orthography of a scriptorium (see e.g. Johansson 1997). Among these manuscripts is AM 657 a–b 4to. The connection between *codex Wormianus* and AM 657 a–b 4to has been questioned only by Alfred Jakobsen. He concluded that the two manuscripts were probably not written by the same scribe, but he still considered them to have been produced in the same scriptorium (1964:50). Recent research, however, indicates quite clearly that the two manuscripts are written by the same scribe (see e.g. Johansson 1997).

3. Clárus saga and ævintýri

The *Clárus saga* is considered to be a translation from the first part of the fourteenth century. Conclusive evidence has never been put forward concerning whether the source for the translation was in Latin or if it was an oral transition that was written down. This problem is closely scrutinized in Alfred Jakobsen's thesis on *Clárus saga* (1964:31f.). Jakobsen comes to the conclusion that the text ought to be considered a translation from Latin (1964:39).

How the saga made its way to Iceland and whether the translation was of Norwegian origin has been the subject of lively discussion in earlier research (e. g. Jakobsen 1964; Jakob Benediktsson 1980). In one of the versions of the saga the name of Jón Halldórsson, bishop of Skálholt 1323–1339, a Norwegian that had his education in Norway and France, is mentioned as the name of the translator or author. The prologue states: *Par byrjum vér upp þessa frásögn, sem sagði virðuligr herra Jón Halldórsson, ágætrar áminningar, – en hann fann hana skrifada með látínu í Frannz í þat form, er þeir kalla 'ríthmos' en vér kóllum hendingum, – ok byrjar svá* (Cederschiöld 1907:1). This leads the editor of the text, Hugo Gering, to give an account of the life of Jón Halldórsson as a background to the text (Gering 1882–83:vff.).

Jakobsen treats the Norwegianisms in the saga thoroughly. On these grounds he argues for a Norwegian origin for the translation (1964:43ff.). But an important reason for Jakobsen's point of view is, of course, the mentioning of Jón Halldórsson in the prologue (1964:10). Jakobsen's conclusion has, however, not been left unchallenged. Peter Hallberg noted that many linguistic features in the text of *Clárus saga* were common also in the so-called *ævintýri* or *exempla* that are also found in AM 657 a–b 4to and have

been attributed to the unknown author or translator α (alpha). Hallberg put forward arguments in support of the opinion that *alpha* was identical to the author and translator Bergr Sökkason (1968:183ff.).

There are two parchment manuscripts of the saga preserved to our day from the middle ages. Except for these manuscripts there are eight paper manuscripts from later centuries that contain the saga, all of them copied from the two older manuscripts (Jakobsen 1964:11f.). The parchment manuscripts are Sth. 6 4to and the manuscript treated in this paper, AM 657 a–b 4to. The former is usually dated to c. 1400 while the latter is usually dated c. 1350 (see below). Both manuscripts are copied from different exemplars which means that the younger one was not copied from AM 657 a–b 4to (e.g. Jakobsen 1964:12f.).

The prime manuscript for this paper sets out with the text of *Michaels saga hefudengils*, a text that has been attributed to Bergr Sökkason (e.g. Hallberg 1968:128ff.). At the end of the saga the author refers to himself with the words: *Biðr ek liúllatliga, er þessa ræðu samsetti, at þeir guðhræddir menn, er þenna bækling hafu með höndum, minnizst sælu broður Sokka sonar α hatidardegi Mikhaelis meðr nokkurri bæn eða olmusu* (Unger 1877:713). This seems to have been accepted by the scholars who have studied this text (e.g. Hallberg 1968:128; Stefán Karlsson 1973:237). It is interesting to observe, however, that the reference to Bergr in this instance is made in the first person, so that it actually is the author who asks the reader to pray for him. In the copy of the saga to be found in the manuscript AM 657 c 4to the scribe has left out the name and instead written *minnar* (mine) (Unger 1877:713). Unger states in his description of the manuscript AM 657 a–b 4to that: "Det fuldstændige Haandskrift af Sagaen 657 a qv. og det paa foregaaende Side omtalte AM 657 c qv., hvor kun dens slutning er bevaret, kunne næppe være meget yngre end Forfatterens Dødsaar" (1877:xv)¹. The difference between the wording in these two manuscripts can, however, depend on the fact that AM 657 a–b 4to was copied in close connection to Bergr, while the other manuscript was copied some time later or in an environment where the name of Bergr Sökkason was not as important. The wording of the sentence could of course also indicate that Bergr himself wrote the actual manuscript. It is not, however, the aim of this paper to argue such a point.

The text that follows *Michaels saga* in AM 657 a–b 4to is named *Jartegnir Maríu drotningar* (Kálund 1894:69). Jakobsen has in connection to this been able to read a previously unreadable page (91v in the manuscript AM 764 b 4to, see below) that contains a legend regarding Mary (1960:267ff.).

Another text attributed to Bergr Sökkason by Hallberg is found in AM 657 a–b 4to, the so-called *Drauma-Jóns saga* (1968:187f.), that is here preserved in an incomplete version (Kálund 1894:69).

¹ The complete manuscript of the saga, AM 657 a 4to, and the manuscript mentioned on the previous page, AM 657 c 4to, where only its ending is preserved, could hardly be older than the year of the death of the author. [my translation]

The manuscript contains, besides the abovementioned texts, a collection of *ævintýri*. In his edition of the *ævintýri*, Gering divided the texts into groups that he then attributed to different anonymous authors. A large number of the texts included in AM 657 a–b 4to were attributed to the author *alpha* (Gering 1882–83:xxvff.; see also Jakobsen 1964:24).

Peter Hallberg points out that the *Clárus saga* is probably the work of Bergur Sökkason. In his further discussion he also states that the *ævintýri* attributed to *alpha* has all the features of Bergur in common with *Clárus saga* (1968:179ff.). He therefore claims to have shown it to be probable that Bergur Sökkason was the author/translator of these texts and identical to *alpha* (1968:182). Stefán Karlsson treats this issue thoroughly. He concludes that the features used by Gering to characterize *alpha* are the same features that he himself attributes to Arngrímur Brandsson, a contemporary to Bergur Sökkason, who has been acknowledged the authorship of one of the versions of *Guðmundar saga biskups* and *Thómas saga* (1973:235). From the fact that the *Jóns þáttur biskups Halldórssonar* was written after the bishop's death (1339), and judging from the common features of the texts written by the author *alpha*, it is reasonable to think that Jón Halldórsson is not identical with the author. Therefore, Stefán Karlsson considers it quite plausible that the author *alpha* is identical to Arngrímur Brandsson (1973:236). It is interesting, in this connection, to read Stefán Karlsson's comment to the studies of Peter Hallberg:

I am inclined to think that Peter Hallberg has demonstrated some common characteristics of two or more authors working at the same time, in the first half of the fourteenth century, and at least partially in the same environment, the Benedictine monasteries in northern Iceland. (Stefán Karlsson 1973:237f.)

Jakob Benediktsson has commented upon the discussion concerning the manuscript *Codex Wormianus* and the scribe that has written that manuscript. He noted that this scribe has produced all of the texts discussed above (1980:11, n. 6). I will return to this discussion below, where I intend to put these texts in relation to the manuscript AM 657 a–b 4to and the scribes that have produced it. There are some connections between the known manuscripts in the large group that I have sketched above and the authors discussed by Hallberg and Stefán Karlsson, which I wish to elucidate further.

The manuscript AM 657 a–b 4to is dated to the second half of the fourteenth century (Kålund 1894, 68f.). Gering has put forward a rather earlier date and suggests the first half of the fourteenth century (1882–83, xi). The manuscript today consists of 100 leaves since another ten leaves from the manuscript AM 764 b 4to were attached to it by Kålund (1894:69). These ten leaves are placed at the end of the manuscript and paginated 91–100.

The provenance of the manuscript has been discussed by several scholars. There are, however, no clear indications as to where it was produced. Árni Magnússon got the main part of the manuscript from Páll Vídalín, who got it from Halldóra Erlendsdóttir in Bólstaðarhlíð in Húnavatnssýsla in northern Iceland. Some of the leaves, however, had

come to Árni from "ymsum stöðum", among them a couple from a student at the cathedral school at Hólar (Kálund 1894:70; Jakob Benediktsson 1980:11).

As mentioned above, the manuscript includes a version of *Michaels saga*, which may indicate that it had been in Bólstaðarhlíð since the middle ages. The church in Bólstaðarhlíð was dedicated to Michael, which leads Árni Magnússon to state: "Mun fyrrum hafa vered kirkiubok þar: því þar er Michaels kirkia" (Kálund 1909:13).

Alfred Jakobsen argues from the suggested authorship of the *Clárus saga* and some of the *ævintýri* when he wanted to place the origin of the manuscript at the church in Skálholt. He also argues that the manuscript AM 227 fol. which was written in parts by one of the scribes in AM 657 a–b 4to, was found at Skálholt and therefore indicates that the whole group of manuscripts was produced in this place (1964:53f.).

Jakob Benediktsson does not accept this argumentation. He notes that the connection with Jón Halldórsson is in no way confirmed and that it can not support a provenance at Skálholt. Neither can the fact that AM 227 fol. was found at Skálholt support a provenance in this place, Jakob Benediktsson claims, considering the devastating fires that destroyed the church in Skálholt several times – the last one, before Árni found the manuscript, was in 1630 – and that would have left few manuscripts. There is therefore much that indicates that the manuscript came to Skálholt after this year (Jakob Benediktsson 1980:11). Jakob Benediktsson puts forward arguments for placing the manuscripts origin in the north of Iceland. He mentions the fact that so many of the manuscripts connected to the same scribe indicates an origin in the north (1980:11f.).

Kálund established four hands in the manuscript (Kálund 1894, 68f.). The dominating scribe is considered to be identical to the scribe in AM 242 fol. (Jakob Benediktsson 1980; Johansson 1997). The scribe has been assigned the number IV in the figure below. The orthography of the manuscript was first treated by Hugo Gering in his edition of the *ævintýri* (1882–83, xff.). In his study Jakobsen deals with the palaeography and orthography of the scribe (1964, 45ff.). I will return to this treatment in my discussion below.

It is difficult to establish the division between different texts in the manuscript. The division between the scribes has also been difficult to establish from earlier research. Below I have divided the manuscript into its different leaves and gatherings, and related them to the respective scribe. The division between texts has been described in *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (ONP 1989:44; 419ff.). The saga is found on fols. 83r–90v.

The composition of the gatherings is not certain. Árni Magnússon collected the parts from different places, and even during the last century new leaves have been added to the codex. The four hands that can be established can therefore not be definitely connected to the same scriptorium. The only certain connection is between the two scribes I and II, who have copied text within the same gathering. The impression of the manuscript's composition, however, makes it plausible to think that the codex was originally produced as a unit consisting of a collection of *exempla* and written in the same environment.

Scribe	Leaves	Gathering	Manuscript
I	1-7	1	AM 657a 4to
I	8-15	2	"
I	16-17 ^v 5	3	"
II	17 ^v 6-22	3	"
IV	23-28	4	AM 657b 4to
III	29-34	5	"
III	35-40	6	"
III	41-44	7	"
III	45-52	8	"
III	53-59	9	AM 657a 4to
III	60-64	10	"
III	65-68	11	AM 657b 4to
III	69-74	12	"
IV	75-82	13	"
IV	83-90	14	"
III	98-100		AM 764b 4to
IV	91-97		"

4. The authorship of *Clárus saga* and the group of manuscripts

Alfred Jakobsen argues from previous research that there is a lot of linguistic evidence in the saga text that indicates a Norwegian rather than Icelandic translation (1964:43). Among the evidence initially put forward by Jakobsen is the word-forms that are considered Norwegian rather than Icelandic as well as single words or phrases (1964:43). Jakobsen admits, however, that this evidence is far too sparse to make a Norwegian provenance for the saga plausible. He therefore continues to present a thorough investigation into the language of the saga (1964:43ff.).

In this connection Jakobsen discusses the group of manuscripts attributed to the scribe that had copied *Clárus saga* in AM 657 a-b 4to and the relation between the scribe and the authorship (1964:44ff.). He also treated the possibility that the scribe had been to Norway but dismissed this thought on the grounds that there are errors in the rendering of Norwegian place-names in the fragment of *Egils saga* (AM 162 A fol. β) that is attributed to the scribe (1964:54). Jakobsen concluded, however, that we have to expect some Norwegian influences on the language of the scribe (1964:54f.). Jakobsen shows that most of the Norwegianisms in *Clárus saga* can be explained as belonging to scribal orthography, i.e. they belong to the transition of the text from exemplar to copy (Jakobsen 1964:55ff.; 114). The scribe that produced the copy of the saga in AM 657 a-b 4to is characterized as "norvagerende" (1964:114). Still Jakobsen concluded by

stating that the saga was translated by a Norwegian, and that he could probably be identified as the bishop of Skálholt, Jón Halldórsson (1964:116).

Stefán Karlsson discusses the Norwegianisms in Icelandic manuscripts from a methodological perspective in two successive articles (1978; 1979). He wishes to use the term *norvagisme* in the sense that: "en norvagisme er et udtryk eller en skrivemåde, der er bedre kendt i norsk end i samtidige islandske håndskrifter"¹ (Stefán Karlsson 1978:88). He concentrates on the kind of Norwegianisms that can be found on the scribal level of the preserved manuscripts and concludes that these are – especially in the fourteenth century – mainly explained as depending on the dominance from Norway on the copying of texts (1978:97f.).

In his next article, Stefán Karlsson discusses the Icelandic export of manuscripts to Norway in the middle ages and the influence of this trade on the language and script in the manuscripts. He demonstrates that a large number of manuscripts has been transported from Iceland to Norway, which indicates that this trade was important and therefore had an effect upon the Icelandic scribes (1979). Stefán Karlsson concludes that Icelandic scribes often normalized the texts they copied under influence from Norwegian palaeography and orthography (1979:13).

Among the manuscripts and fragments listed by Stefán Karlsson as being produced on Iceland and exported to Norway, two fragments can be found that belong to the group of manuscripts that are discussed in this paper: NRA 60 A, a fragment of a *Stjórn* manuscript and NRA 62, a fragment of *Karlamagnús saga*. This indicates of course that the scriptorium where these manuscripts were written also produced manuscripts for export to Norway.

It is therefore important that the manuscript AM 657 a–b 4to is taken into a new consideration in connection with the question of the authorship of *Clárus saga*. We must consider the attributions made by Peter Hallberg and Stefán Karlsson of the saga and *ævintýri* respectively to Berg Sökkason and Arngrímur Brandsson in relation to the indications of a large scriptorium with an export of manuscripts to Norway. Hallberg's detailed studies of authorial peculiarities that could be connected to a single author – or according to Stefán Karlsson to an environment with a number of authors – gives strong evidence that these authors have worked with translating and collecting texts in connection to the scriptorium sketched out in my above mentioned thesis. If the criteria used by Hallberg are considered in relation to the criteria presented for the scribes connected to the scriptorium, the language of this environment can be elucidated from different angles. Hereby we can get a more detailed image of a scribal and editorial environment in a monastery scriptorium around the middle of the fourteenth century. Many observations in the above presentation point to this environment as the origin of the saga as well as the manuscript. The connection to Jón Halldórsson by Jakobsen should therefore be rejected.

¹ a *norvagisme* is an expression or a written form that is better known in Norwegian than in contemporary Icelandic manuscripts. [my translation]

The Norwegianisms in the saga text can then be seen as part of the local tradition of producing texts and manuscripts on all linguistic levels.

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