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CREATING THE MEDIEVAL SAGA:  
VERSIONS, VARIABILITY AND EDITORIAL  
INTERPRETATIONS OF OLD NORSE  
SAGA LITERATURE

Edited by

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## The Words on the Page: Thoughts on Philology, Old and New

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Only a very few works from Antiquity or the Middle Ages survive in original, autograph or authorially sanctioned manuscripts. The vast majority have come down to us in copies, or copies of copies, lying at an unknown number of removes from the originals and varying in their trustworthiness, whether due to physical damage, scribal fallibility or deliberate revision. And while some works survive in unique manuscripts, most are preserved in dozens, hundreds or in some cases even thousands of copies. With very few exceptions, no two copies of the same work are ever exactly alike. There are, at the very least, always differences in punctuation (of which there is usually very little in manuscripts anyway), in spelling, reflecting both scribal caprice and changes in pronunciation, and in lexis, where new words are substituted for others no longer current. Scribes are also capable of error, miscopying words or sentences, writing them twice or leaving them out altogether. Scribes, particularly in vernacular traditions, frequently make deliberate changes too, correcting what they perceived to be errors or infelicities, shortening the text (either for stylistic reasons or to fit the amount of space available), or expanding it, either stylistically, through rhetorical elaboration, or materially, through the addition of new episodes or descriptive passages. Sometimes differences between the extant texts of a given work are so great that we are obliged to view them as representing separate versions or redactions. Occasionally these versions are so different that it is impossible to imagine how they could go back to a single original, and here it has been customary to see them as representing separate manifestations of an underlying (oral) tradition. In other cases it is necessary to speak of separate works treating similar material, rather than of separate versions of a single work.

When dealing with the transmission of classical and patristic literature, and indeed of the Bible itself, the gap between the surviving witnesses and the originals is generally very great, as is the number of witnesses: 500–600 in the case of popular Roman writers such as Terence or Juvenal, 5,000–6,000 in the case of the Greek New Testament. Scholars working with other ancient literatures with long histories of chirographic transmission, Sanskrit, for example, face similar problems, as do those working in certain vernacular traditions. In the case of Old Norse-Icelandic literature, the relative stability of the language meant that in Iceland, unlike most of the rest of Europe, medieval works were still copied and read well into modern times, even into the first decades of the twentieth century. The more popular sagas, principally romances like *Mágus saga jarls* but also some of the *Íslendingasögur* such as *Njáls saga*, and some of the eddic and sacred poems, like *Sólarljóð*, can thus be preserved in as many as sixty or seventy manuscripts, spanning up to six centuries.

To make sense of these oceans of exemplars, scholars have employed the science, or perhaps rather art, of ‘textual criticism’, generally understood as ‘the technique of restoring texts as nearly as possible to their original form’ (Kenney 1985: 614). Modern textual criticism was developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries chiefly by and for classical and biblical scholars, but began fairly quickly to be employed by scholars in other fields. As Haugen and Johansson have discussed in the previous two essays, the method most commonly employed, the ‘genealogical’ or ‘stemmatic’ method, is normally associated with the name of the German philologist Karl Lachmann (1793–1851). Lachmann himself, however, never presented a stemma,<sup>1</sup> and his method had already been anticipated by scholars such as the Germans Friedrich August Wolf (1759–1824), Carl Gottlob Zumpt (1792–1894) and Friedrich Wilhelm Ritschl (1806–76), and the Dane Johan Nicolai Madvig (1804–86).<sup>2</sup> The association of Lachmann’s name with the method may be due, in part at least, to his having

1 Although the first published *stemma codicum* is attributed to Carl Zumpt in his edition of Cicero from 1831, it was in fact preceded by that of the Swedish scholars Carl Johan Schlyter and Hans Samuel Collin in their edition of the laws of Västergötland (*Westgöta-Lagen*, the first volume of *Samling af Sweriges Gamla Lagar*), published in 1827; on Schlyter see Holm (1972) and Frederiksen (1991, 1994 and 2003).

2 See further Timpanaro (1971).

worked with such a broad range of languages and texts, including the Greek New Testament, Lucretius and the *Nibelungen Not*. As detailed in Paul Maas's book, *Textkritik*,<sup>3</sup> the method essentially involves reconstructing on the evidence of the surviving manuscripts the earliest recoverable form (or forms) of the text that lies behind them. First one must identify all the surviving witnesses, date and localise them if possible, and then establish the relationship between them through collation, where all the variant readings they contain are registered and compared. Errors and omissions made by the scribes when copying provide the most valid means of working out the relationships between the manuscripts. Witnesses which are demonstrably derived from earlier existing witnesses are without value and are therefore eliminated. The established relationship of the witnesses remaining is then usually given in the form of a family tree or *stemma codicum*. At the head, or root, of this tree is either a single surviving manuscript from which all others descend, or, more commonly, a lost copy, which can be reconstructed on the basis of the surviving witnesses. This hypothetical ancestor is called the 'archetype', and should not be, but frequently is, confused with the 'original', to which it may obviously be at some remove. Some textual critics, particularly in earlier times, choose to emend a non-authentic or corrupt archetype through conjecture, or divination (*divinatio*), as it is called, in order to get closer to the original.

Although the stemmatic method is all very neat and its logic nothing short of majestic, it has a number of shortcomings, the most significant being that it hardly ever works with real textual traditions, since it assumes, among other things, that no two scribes will ever independently make the same mistake, which they frequently do, that they will always work from a single exemplar, which they frequently do not, and that most scribes will tend to reproduce their exemplars exactly, which they almost never do, at least in the case of vernacular literature. And, indeed, criticism of the method has chiefly come from medievalists working in vernacular traditions, most notably the French scholar Joseph Bédier (1864–1938), who rejected the claims of stemmatic analysis to scientific objectivity and advocated an editorial policy which involved choosing a single 'best text' and reprodu-

3 The third edition of Maas's work was published in 1957 and translated into English the following year. It was first published as part III of Gercke and Norden (1927).

cing it conservatively, that is, with as little emendation as possible (only in cases of obvious scribal error). Something not wholly different from the genealogical method could be used to identify families of related manuscripts, but, according to Bédier, one should refrain from attempting to postulate the existence – and reconstruct the texts – of lost manuscripts (Bédier 1928). Although initially criticised by many, Bédier's 'best-text' method<sup>4</sup> has the advantage of reducing damage to the text through subjective editorial emendation (by editors, who, Bédier alleged, tended to see themselves as collaborators with the author), and presenting the reader with, if not *the* text, then at least a text which had actually existed.

### The 'New' Philology

The principal innovation in the area of editorial theory in recent years has been the so-called 'new' or 'material' philology, the call to arms for which was the publication in 1990 of a special issue of *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* edited by the Romance philologist Stephen Nichols of Johns Hopkins University.<sup>5</sup> The immediate inspiration for this 'new' philology came from Bernard Cerquiglini's polemical essay *Éloge de la variante* (1989), which marked a clear turning point in the history of medieval textual studies by arguing that instability (*variance*) is a fundamental feature of chirographically transmitted literature: variation is what the medieval text is 'about'. The following may be said to be among the key principles of 'new' or 'material' philology:

- Literary works do not exist independently of their material embodiments, and the physical form of the text is an integral part of its meaning; one needs therefore to look at 'the whole book', and the relationships between the text and such features as form and layout, illumination, rubrics and other paratextual features, and, not least, the surrounding texts.

4 Bédier's term *codex optimus* is perhaps better rendered 'best manuscript', which is what Odd Einar Haugen calls it (1995: 82 and in his essay in this volume).

5 See in particular Nichols's introductory essay (1990); other important works are Nichols (1994) and (1997).

- These physical objects come into being through a series of processes in which a (potentially large) number of people are involved; and they come into being at particular times, in particular places and for particular purposes, all of which are socially, economically and intellectually determined; these factors influence the form the text takes and are thus also part of its meaning.
- These physical objects continue to exist through time, and are disseminated and consumed in ways which are also socially, economically and intellectually determined, and of which they bear traces.

While the reaction among textual theorists to ‘new’ philology has on the whole been favourable, those involved in actual scholarly editing – not least within the field of Old Norse-Icelandic – have tended to be dismissive, though their criticisms have rarely found their way into print, being confined instead to the corridor and coffee room. The grounds for their censure of ‘new philology’ has generally either been that there is nothing ‘new’ in it, that it is even what ‘we’ have been doing all along,<sup>6</sup> or that while it might be possible as an ancillary to ‘proper’ philology, and might be better suited to some types of texts than others, ‘new’ philology cannot possibly replace traditional philology since it is patently ridiculous to claim, for example, that some arbitrary eighteenth-century manuscript, with all its errors and corruption, is every bit as good as one demonstrably nearer to the original. To this latter objection all I can say is, well, quite. No-one, to my knowledge, has ever claimed that all manuscripts of a particular work were equally ‘good’; from a new- or material-philological perspective, on the other hand, one certainly can claim that all manuscripts of a given work are equally interesting (potentially at least), not for establishing the text, separating ‘good’ readings from ‘bad’ – which is not what

6 This is essentially the argument of a recent article by Sverrir Tómasson (2002); at p. 202, for example, he says that ‘margt af því sem þar [sc. in the new philology] fram kemur á sér eldri rætur’ (‘much of what appears there [sc. in the new philology] has older roots’), and later, at p. 213, he concludes: ‘Hin svokallaða nýja textafræði hvílir á gömlu textafræðinni, án þeirra rannsókna sem lúsiðnir filólóggar hafa gert um tveggja alda skeið væri nýja textafræðin ekki til.’ (‘The so-called new philology rests on old philology; were it not for the efforts of sedulous philologists over the last two centuries the new philology would not exist.’). For a general critique of precepts underlying the ‘new philology’ see Pickens (1994).

‘new’ philology seeks to do – but rather for what they can tell us about the processes of literary production, dissemination and reception to which they are witnesses.<sup>7</sup> Nor am I aware that anyone has ever claimed that with the advent of ‘new’ philology there can no longer be any justification for practising ‘old’ philology. Most linguists would nowadays doubtless prefer to discuss the meaning of a word in terms of the way it is used by the actual speakers of the language in question, or a sub-group thereof, rather than by reference to its etymology – that is, from a synchronic rather than a diachronic perspective – but I am not aware that anyone has seriously suggested that historical linguistics may no longer be practised.

To the former of these accusations, that there is nothing new in the ‘new’ philology, it can only be said that, like any other movement, trend or school, the ‘new’ philology did not spring fully formed *ex nihilo*. One of its more obvious antecedents is Paul Zumthor’s *Essai du poétique médiévale* from 1972, which introduced the concept of *mouvance*, the ‘mobilité essentielle du texte médiéval’ (Zumthor 1972: 171, ‘the essential mobility of the medieval text’), without which Cerquiglini’s ideas would have been unthinkable. Another is to be found in developments within Anglo-American bibliography in the 1970s and early 1980s. These developments culminated, for some, in D.F. McKenzie’s 1985 Panizzi lectures, published the following year as *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, which argued that since any history of the book must take into account ‘the social, economic and political motivations of publishing, the reasons why texts were written and read as they were, why they were rewritten and redesigned, or allowed to die’, it is ‘more useful’ to describe bibliography as ‘the study of the sociology of texts’; ‘sociology’ because it deals with ‘the human motives and interactions which texts involve at every stage of their production, transmission and consumption’ (McKenzie 1986: 5–7). Others might point to Jerome McGann’s *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* from 1983, which also proposed a sociological, rather than an intentionalist, approach, arguing that literary works ‘are fundamentally

7 Hans Walter Gabler (2005: 907b), points out that ‘Through the rekindled interest of the medievalists in a ‘material philology’, it has been brought to fresh attention, for instance, that it is often the exemplars disqualified under stemmatological premises as derivative, textually unreliable, and corrupt that, in the high variability of their texts, hold immediate information about the cultural life and afterlife of works.’



social rather than personal or psychological products' (McGann 1983: 43–4).<sup>8</sup> Nor should we underestimate the influence of French (and French-inspired) work in *histoire du livre*,<sup>9</sup> work in the German-speaking world on the history of transmission, *Überlieferungsgeschichte*,<sup>10</sup> and the extensive work in orality and literacy on both sides of the Atlantic in the late 1970s and 1980s<sup>11</sup> – in fact pretty much everything that went on in literary and cultural studies from the late 1960s onwards, subsumed under the general heading 'post-structuralism', which, among other things, de-emphasised the importance of the author, focusing instead on the inevitably collaborative nature of literary production, dissemination and reception and the cultural, historical and ideological forces at work in these processes.

It is necessary, before trying to assess how new the new philology is, to distinguish between three basic concepts: the 'work', the 'text' and the 'artefact'.<sup>12</sup> To take a simple example: *Hamlet* is a 'work'. The New Swan Shakespeare Advanced Series edition of *Hamlet* by Bernard Lott, M. A. Ph. D., published by Longman in 1968, is, or presents, a 'text'. My copy of Lott's edition, bought from Blackwell's in Oxford in 1979 and containing my copious annotations, is an 'artefact'.<sup>13</sup>

The 'work', being an abstraction, is perhaps hardest to pin down. By 'Hamlet, the work' I mean simply the sum of all the Hamlets that have

- 8 Although coming out of similar intellectual traditions, McGann and McKenzie appear to have operated largely independently of each other (cf. Greetham 1999: 407). McGann first posited his idea of 'bibliographical codes' in a review of McKenzie's book (McGann 1988, subsequently developed in McGann 1991), and says in a recent article that he sees his own work 'as a critical pursuit of McKenzie's ideas' (McGann 2005: 226).
- 9 The seminal work here is Febvre and Martin (1958).
- 10 See, for example, Ruh (1985).
- 11 For example works like Ong (1982) and Goody (1987), to name only two.
- 12 I am not the first to make these distinctions, and other names are possible for the concepts; these are simply the ones I prefer. My chief inspiration is Shillingsburg (1996: 41–51) although Shillingsburg uses the term 'document' for what I prefer to call 'artefact'.
- 13 While the distance between work, text and artefact is obviously not always so great as in the case of *Hamlet* – where, for example, a poem has been jotted down on the back of an envelope and then forgotten, so that there is only a single text, preserved in or on a single artefact, of that particular work – the distinction between the three is nevertheless real enough.

ever been, printed, staged, filmed or otherwise manifested.<sup>14</sup> Those of the intentionalist school, on the other hand, would argue that ‘Hamlet, the work’ is whatever Shakespeare originally intended *Hamlet* to be, ‘what Shakespeare wrote’. Yet in the case of Shakespeare, and many, many other writers, it is frequently impossible to establish what the author’s original intention might have been, or indeed whether the author had a single original intention. *King Lear*, for example, famously exists in two quite distinct versions, both apparently equally ‘authentic’. And what of works for which there is no author, or where the notion of authorship is highly problematic, for example those originally oral in nature: what did ‘Homer’ intend the *Odyssey* to be?

The ‘text’ may be defined as a series of words in a particular order, which seems straightforward enough. It is, however, very much a coin with two distinct sides. W.W. Greg famously divided the text into ‘substantives’, which ‘affect the author’s meaning or the essence of his expression’, on the one hand, and ‘accidentals’, mainly presentational features such as spelling, punctuation, word division *et cetera*, on the other (1950–1: 21). The ‘accidentals’, the words on the page (or screen) in front of us, we might refer to as the ‘real text’, and the other, the ‘substantives’, as the ‘ideal text’, its gaze fixed firmly upwards, toward the ‘work’.

The ‘artefact’ would seem to be the least problematic of the three, as any text-bearing object is, by its nature, unique. This is self-evidently true of manuscripts, slightly less self-evidently so of early printed books (since no two copies are ever exactly the same). But in the age of mass reproduction is it really possible to claim that every copy of a text is a unique artefact? Anyone who has, for example, read a book previously annotated, even slightly, by another reader (or even by oneself at some remove), or encountered a copy of a book in an unlikely place (*Hamlet* in an airport kiosk) will, I think, agree that it certainly can be. And what of electronic texts? Are bits on disks and pixels on screens not as ‘material’

14 Zumthor defined the ‘oeuvre’ as ‘l’unité complexe [...] que constitue la collectivité des versions en manifestant la matérialité; la synthèse des signes employés par les “auteurs” successifs (chanteurs, récitants, copistes) et de la littéralité des textes’ (1972: 73, ‘the complex unity constituted by the collectivity of its material versions; the synthesis of the signs employed by the successive “authors” (singers, reciters, copyists) and of the literality of the texts’).

as ink on paper? Is a digital document really ‘the same’ when accessed on two different computers?

The focus of traditional textual criticism has always been the ‘work’, of which one can, through the rigorous interrogation of the extant witnesses, be afforded a glimpse. In so far as traditional textual criticism recognises artefacts at all, it has tended to despise them. The ‘best-text’ edition presents just that, a ‘text’, a series of words in a particular order, without trying to say too much about the ‘work’ – although there is obviously some value inherent in the word ‘best’, and some significance in the fact that ‘text’ is in the singular. But the interest has been firmly on the ‘substantives’, the upper side of the textual coin, rather than the ‘accidentals’. In ‘new’ philology, however, the focus is entirely on the lower, the artefactual, side, on the interplay between the text and the text-bearing artefact, the way in which the ‘bibliographic codes’ affect – are part of – the text’s meaning, just as much as its lexical content. And it is here, in this shift in orientation, that the ‘new’ in the ‘new’ philology is to be found.

### Jón Helgason and the ‘Arnarnagnæan School’

In his recent article ‘Er nýja textafræðin ný?’, Sverrir Tómasson says ‘saga norrænnar textafræði er því miður enn ósögð’ (2002: 200, ‘the history of Old Norse textual criticism sadly remains untold’). It is not my intention here, any more than it was his there, to write that history. I should, however, like at least to look at the history of Old Norse textual criticism in the light of the suggestion that what ‘we’, which I take to mean scholars working in the Arnarnagnæan tradition, have been doing all along is essentially ‘new’ philology, a suggestion which, in view of the distinction between work, text and artefact just presented, is something of an overstatement at best.

Scholarly editions of Old Norse texts began to appear under the auspices of the Arnarnagnæan Commission in 1773 with the publication of *Kristni saga*, but by ‘the Arnarnagnæan tradition’ I mean in particular the publications in the two series inaugurated by Jón Helgason (1899–1986), professor of Old Norse at the University of Copenhagen from 1929 to 1969. Jón, who was secretary of the Arnarnagnæan Commission from 1927 and

a full member from 1936, began in 1941 a series of scholarly monographs under the title *Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana* and a new series of critical editions of Old Norse texts, *Editiones Arnamagnæanæ*, ten years later (although the first volume of *Byskupasögur*, published in 1938 and containing Jón's edition of *Hungrvaka*, is to all intents and purposes to be regarded as part of the series). Although Jón was himself responsible for only a handful of these editions (the second volume of *Byskupasögur*, published in 1978, and the eight volumes of *Íslenzk fornkvæði*, published between 1962 and 1981), he was involved, directly or indirectly, in all of them – even from beyond the grave: the most recent volume of *Editiones* to appear, *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* III, edited by Michael Chesnutt (2006), is, as stated on the title page, 'efter forarbejder af Jón Helgason' ('based on preliminary work by Jón Helgason'). Jón's influence is also manifest in the series of editions and monographs published from 1972 onwards by the Arnamagnæan Institute in Reykjavík, most of the original members of staff of which had studied in Copenhagen under Jón. Members of the older generation of Old Norse textual scholars in other countries have also generally spent lengthy periods under Jón's tutelage as well, while the younger generation has in turn been tutored largely by them. So while Jón himself, having been that sort of person, would doubtless have been quick to deny it, there is therefore a discernible 'Helgasonian school' which has dominated Old Norse textual-critical practice from the middle of the twentieth century onwards.<sup>15</sup>

It is a school without a manifesto, however, in that Jón Helgason never produced any kind of guidelines to editorial practice or engaged in any theoretical or methodological discussion of its precepts. In a conference paper from 1985 Helle Jensen, who edited *Eiríks saga víðförla* for *Editiones*

15 Cf. Jakob Benediktsson: 'Med sine udgaver fra 1930erne og senere skabte han en helt ny standard for udgivelsen af norrøne tekster som siden er blevet et mønster for andre udgivere på dette område.' (1980: 208, 'With his editions from the 1930s and later he set a whole new standard for the editing of Old Norse texts, which has since become a model for other editors in this area.'). See also Jonna Louis-Jensen: 'hans udgiverpraksis har dannet skole, således at den bl. a. følges i alle tekstkritiske udgaver, der udsendes af de to arnamagnæanske institutter i København og Reykjavík' (1986: 28, 'his editorial practice has established a school, one which is followed in, among others, all the textual-critical editions published by the two Arnamagnæan institutes in Reykjavík and Copenhagen').

Arnarnagnæanæ, describes with some humour how she had been introduced – or rather not – to textual-critical practice by Jón Helgason, who told her all she had to do was ‘bare lige se på alle håndskrifterne og finde ud af, hvordan de var skrevet af efter hinanden’ (Jensen 1985: 500, ‘just have a look at all the manuscripts and find out how they were copied from each other’). Following Jón’s advice and looking at other Arnarnagnæan editions, she said, she was able to deduce the methods employed, and it was not until much later that it occurred to her that theoretical discussion of the precepts of textual criticism must exist.<sup>16</sup> Four years later she returned to this theme in an excellent article in *Forskningsprofiler*: ‘For det er en ejendommelighed ved nordisk filologi i almindelighed og norrøn filologi i særdeleshed, at der har været meget lidt explicit teoretiseringen omkring disse emner’ (Jensen 1989: 211, ‘For it is a curious fact that in connection with Nordic philology in general and Old Norse philology in particular there has been very little explicit theorising of these matters’).

One assumes this reluctance to theorise about editorial practice was because Jón, who had, or professed to have, an antipathy to most things, regarded it as something self-evident, common sense, simply what one did with texts. One can, as Helle Jensen did, read ‘what one did with texts’ out of Jón’s own editorial work and out of the editions published under his auspices. From Jón himself the only thing approaching a statement of principles, apart from a few remarks in the book *Handritaspjall* (1958, especially 106–10) was a paper entitled ‘Om udgivelser af islandske tekster’ (‘On the editing of Icelandic texts’) given at a seminar, *Synspunkter på tekstudgivelse*, held in 1979, when Jón received an honorary doctorate from the University of Copenhagen. The full text of this has unfortunately – though perhaps not surprisingly – never been published, but there is a

16 The introduction to textual criticism received by the present writer when a graduate student in Reykjavík was equally brief, consisting in fact of only two words: *sameiginlegar villur* (‘shared errors’).

summary in English in the Arnamagnæan *Bulletin* for 1977–9 (14–5).<sup>17</sup> The central part of this summary is as follows:

The essential foundation for all close study of a text is a critical edition. One can demand of an edition that it presents, as far as is possible, an investigation of the whole manuscript tradition. The numerous young copies of older works must be examined because there is always the possibility that they derive from sources other than the surviving medieval texts. The result of such an examination is often that the younger copies prove to have no independent value, but this must nonetheless be demonstrated. The editor's aim must be to present as concisely as possible everything that the manuscripts themselves can tell us about a particular work's oldest form (that is to say, the oldest form we can establish[,]) which is not necessarily the original mould), while also giving an account of the work's history through the centuries.

Jón appears to have decided what it was one did with texts fairly early on. Among the papers in the Commission's archives there is a 'Plan til en ny udgave af Fornaldarsögur Nordrlanda' from 1939 (Driscoll 2009). This plan was unfortunately never realised owing to the outbreak of the war, but the proposal, which although unsigned may be assumed chiefly to have been Jón Helgason's work, includes the following:

Hele Haandskriftsmaterialet undersøges. Den oprindeligste Tekst søges fastslaaet. Hvis en Saga foreligger i flere forskellige Redaktioner, aftrykkes de hver for sig. Hvor der foreligger mindre Afvigelser mellem Haandskrifter, som har

17 Several of the articles in the book *Tekstkritisk teori og praksis* (Fidjestøl et al. 1988) attempt to provide some methodological background, in particular those by Jensen, Ólafur Halldórsson and Stefán Karlsson. Jonna Louis-Jensen gave a paper at a seminar in 1999 in honour of Stefán Karlsson (who had been awarded an honorary doctorate by Copenhagen University) on 'Jón Helgason og den københavnske udgivertradition'; like Jón Helgason's contribution from 1979, this too has never appeared in print, but an English summary can be found on p. 16 of the *Bulletin* for 1998–9. See also Louis-Jensen (1986: 28).

tekstkritisk Betydning, optages de i et Variantapparat. I Indledningen skal Overleverings-historien saavidt muligt udredes, ogsaa med Benyttelse af Afskrifter, som ikke har tekst-kritisk Værd.<sup>18</sup>

In an article from 1950 on a planned new edition of the corpus of skaldic poetry, Jón states that ‘Der er en række krav, der er saa velkendte, at der næppe er grund til at opholde sig ved dem’ (1950a: 130, ‘there are a number of requirements which are so well known that there is hardly reason to dwell on them’). He does mention one specifically, however: ‘redegørelser for haandskrifternes forhold til hverandre’ (‘an explication of the manuscripts’ relationship to each other’), which was, he adds, ‘et emne som overhovedet ikke blev berørt i den gamle udgave’ (‘a matter which was not at all touched upon in the old edition’). ‘Den gamle udgave’ is *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning* (1912–5) by Finnur Jónsson (1858–1934), professor of Old Norse Philology at the University of Copenhagen from 1898 (*ekstraordinær*; he became an ‘ordinary’ professor in 1911) to 1928. In fact, Jón Helgason’s textual-critical programme could be seen in many ways as a reaction to that of his predecessor. Finnur was without doubt one of the most prolific text editors of all time, producing over a fifty-year period editions of a huge number of works, often more than one. Without him, many of these works would have remained (and in some case would still remain) unavailable to the scholarly community, so we can only be grateful for his industry, but there are very few of his editions, in particular the later ones, that could not have been better. What Jón objected to in particular was Finnur’s tendency to dismiss younger manuscripts, often without having actually examined them, as ‘uden nogen som helst selvstændig verdi’ (Finnur Jónsson 1886–8: xxix, ‘entirely without independent value’), manuscripts which subsequent scholars, not infrequently Jón himself, have occasionally found to be very valuable indeed

18 ‘All the extant manuscripts will be investigated and the most original text identified. If a saga exists in more than one redaction these will be printed separately. Where there are minor variations between manuscripts with textual-critical value these will be included in an apparatus. In the introduction the history of [the text’s] transmission will be clarified as far as possible, also including copies which have no textual-critical value.’

(Jón Helgason 1934a: 150).<sup>19</sup> Jón's insistence that the entire manuscript tradition be investigated was simply a way of ensuring that one did not overlook manuscripts with textual-critical value, as Finnur had done. This does not make him a new philologist *avant la lettre*. As he made clear in the passage cited above, the job of the editor should be to investigate the manuscripts in order to see what they 'can tell us about a particular work's oldest form', not what they can tell us about themselves.<sup>20</sup>

Desmond Slay's edition of *Hrólfs saga kraka* from 1960 can be taken as a typical example of an Arnarnagnæan edition.<sup>21</sup> Of the thirty-eight manuscripts of the saga known to him at the time, Slay eliminates all but twelve as 'without authority for establishing the text of the saga' (1960b: 4).

- 19 Interestingly, Finnur Jónsson's textual-critical programme seems to have been a reaction to that of his predecessor: Konráð Gíslason. As he expressed it in his autobiography: 'Við útgáfur af sögum hef jeg fylgt þeirri reglu að fylgja sem næst einu og þá því elsta og besta, en aðeins leiðrjetta það eftir öðrum handritum, þar sem þau voru til; en að blanda saman textunum og búa til úr þeim aðaltexta, hef jeg álitid alveg rángt. En það gerði Konráð í Njáluútgáfu sinni. Hann tók þessa setningu úr einu handriti og aðra úr hinu, og þóttist þar með geta fengið frumtextann. En þetta er hinn mesti mis-skilningur; með hans aðferð kom fram texti, sem aldrei hefur til verið.' (Finnur Jónsson 1936: 171, 'In editing sagas I have as a rule generally followed one [sc. manuscript], the oldest and best, and only emended it [sc. the text] following other manuscripts where [or: in so far as] they existed, but to mix texts together and make from them a main text I have always considered to be quite wrong. But this is what Konráð did in his edition of *Njála*. He took this sentence from one manuscript and that [sentence] from another and thought that in this way he could get the original, but this is a great misunderstanding; with his method a text was produced which had never [previously] existed'). Konráð's *aðferð* was basically taking readings freely from a number of manuscripts, principally *Möðruvallabók* and some of the older fragments, but also isolated readings from much younger manuscripts, chiefly on the basis of his feeling for Icelandic prose style, with no real account taken of the relationship between the manuscripts. There is a story, doubtless apocryphal, that Konráð lay on a sofa wearing a Turkish fez and smoking a long pipe while his amanuensis read him out the variants, Konráð then choosing the one he thought sounded best.
- 20 Jón Helgason was certainly not unaware of, or uninterested in, the non-textual aspects of books, as evidenced by his various facsimile editions: *Corpus codicum Islandicorum VI* (1934b), *XV* (1942a) and *XIX* (1950b), *Manuscripta Islandica I–VII* (1954–66) and *Early Icelandic manuscripts in facsimile* (1958–); he also edited two volumes, *IV* (1936) and *VI* (1942b), in the series *Monumenta typographica Islandica*.
- 21 Slay's edition (1960a) was published as vol. 1 of *Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ, Series B*, while the accompanying investigation of the manuscript tradition was presented in a separate volume in *Bibliotheca Arnarnagnæana* (Slay 1960b).



These twelve were not all of equal value, however, and so he was able to confine his attention to five ‘for practical purposes in textual reconstruction’. ‘Almost any one of these’, he says, ‘could be used as the basis for an edition’, but he chose AM 285 4to, while acknowledging that there was ‘no decisive reason’ for doing so. There is very little emendation of the text, apart from obvious mistakes in spelling and grammar and where the text as it stands makes no apparent sense. At the foot of the page there are full variant readings from the other primary manuscripts. By comparing these variants to the main text, Slay says in the introduction, ‘it is possible to make out the common original of all the manuscripts with considerable certainty’ (Slay 1960a: x–i). This is, in other words, essentially a ‘best-text’ edition, the best text having been arrived at through the application of the stemmatic method – the best of both worlds, as it were, in which the editor assembles all the evidence necessary to reconstruct the archetype but without actually doing so. As Odd Einar Haugen has pointed out, the Arnamagnæan edition is thus in some ways a curious hybrid, one in which ‘the spirit of Lachmann reigns in the recension, the spirit of Bédier in the text constitution’ (Haugen 2002: 10; cf. Haugen 1994 and his essay in this volume).

Although the textual basis for Arnamagnæan-type editions varies somewhat – from single unique manuscripts, representing a particular kings’ saga compilation, for example, to ‘best texts’, generally with but occasionally without variant apparatus, to multiple texts, either presented in parallel (that is, two or more texts per page) or sequentially (one after the other or in separate volumes) – all are essentially of this same basic type. Despite the insistence on an investigation of the entire manuscript tradition, the underlying assumption remains the same: that what the editor is trying to do is to separate readings which are likely to be original from those which are not, ‘good’ readings from ‘bad’. ‘Secondary’ manuscripts, that is, those demonstrably derived from others still extant, or manuscripts containing demonstrably ‘corrupt’ texts, are still dismissed as ‘without value’. And even though the texts presented are based on single manuscripts, little or no attention is paid to the physical artefacts themselves or the processes through which they have come into being. The focus is still on ‘the text’ in an abstract sense, and the search essentially still is one for origins.

So while the majority of Old Norse-Icelandic text editions produced in the last seventy-five years or so have arguably focused more on the ‘text’ than the ‘work’, none, so far as I can see, with the exception of Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir’s *Úlfhams saga* (2001),<sup>22</sup> has taken the artefacts themselves, the social, economic and intellectual factors of their production, dissemination and reception, sufficiently into account to be called ‘new philological’.

### Everything But the Smell: Toward a More Artefactual Philology

Although the publication of the special edition of *Speculum* in 1990 constituted, as was said, a ‘call to arms’, the battle for the new philology has never really been fought – nor has it needed to be, as the ideas put forward in it were very much ‘in the air’, and few would now question the notion that ‘the text’ cannot be divorced from the physical form of its presentation. For the most part, however, we continue to edit texts as though it could. What ought the new- or material-philologically-inclined editor to do? To start with, an editor ought to consider producing editions of demonstrably ‘corrupt’, yet sociologically and historically interesting, texts, including younger reworkings of older material and works hitherto dismissed as ‘spurious’. There should also be a greater emphasis on the editing of whole manuscripts, including compilations, miscellanies and anthologies, despite their perceived lack of aesthetic order, rather than of individual works taken out of context. First and foremost, however, he or she must demonstrate an awareness of the manuscript as a cultural artefact which – among other things – serves as a vehicle for a text. The most obvious way to do this is by striving to retain as many features of the original, and introduce as little interpretation, as possible, thus allowing the reader to appreciate the interplay between form and meaning. I am not talking here about what E. Talbot Donaldson referred to as the editor’s ‘wish for

22 See the discussion in Glauser et al. (2002: 243–99). Other editions which have been identified, incorrectly in my view, as (proto-)new-philological include the Rit Árnastofnunar edition of *Elucidarius* (Firchow and Grimstad 1989), according to Wolf (1993: 339), and the Svart á hvítu editions of *Íslendingasögur* (Bragi Halldórsson and Bergljót Kristjánsdóttir 1985–6) and *Sturlunga* (Bergljót Kristjánsdóttir et al. 1988), according to Sverrir Tómasson (2002: 202, note 5).

non-existence' (Donaldson 1970: 105).<sup>23</sup> To such 'level-zero' transcriptions various levels of interpretation can, and indeed must, be added if an edition is going to be of any use to the reader. But it should always be clear what is actually written in the source, as distinct from however the editor has decided this is to be interpreted; wherever one is, one must always be able to get back to 'level zero'. Fortunately, there is now a means of doing precisely this: electronic texts using XML mark-up.<sup>24</sup>

Children learning mathematics at school are required to 'show their workings'; they should not, in other words, simply produce a (correct) result but also show the process by which this result was arrived at. Showing one's workings seems to me to be something one should also be required to do as an editor. It should be made clear any time there is any form of interpretation. And by interpretation I mean not just corrections or emendations to the text, but also relatively straightforward things such as the expansion of abbreviations. One chooses spellings and letter-forms used in expansions on the basis of the normal practice of the scribe in question, but one cannot ever be absolutely certain that that is what the scribe would have written if he had chosen to write the word out in full. And surely it is significant that the scribe did not choose to write out the word in full: the (in our eyes) extensive use of abbreviations is so fundamental a part of the process of manuscript writing and reading that I wonder whether we should be expanding them at all.

In the 1990s, when textual scholars became aware of the possibilities of producing electronic text editions, it was thought that such editions would replace traditional paper-based editions, even as CDs were then replacing vinyl, DVDs video and so on.<sup>25</sup> Some were even so bold as to pronounce the imminent death of the printed book. Not only has this not happened, it seems the book has never been as viable a medium as it is today. As far as

23 Greetham (1994: 296) cites Donaldson as referring to this as the 'editorial death-wish'; while more poetic than 'wish for non-existence', this is unfortunately not what Donaldson actually says.

24 I refer here in particular to the work of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI); see [www.tei-c.org](http://www.tei-c.org).

25 The literature on electronic scholarly editing is extensive. Shillingsburg (1996) is particularly to be recommended, as is Shillingsburg (2006). Several recent articles by Peter Robinson deal in particular with what has, and what has not, been achieved in this area; see in particular Robinson (2004) and Robinson (2005).

scholarly editions are concerned, the failure of the electronic edition ever really to take off is due to a large extent, I have come to believe, to the inability of textual scholars to see, and embrace, the real potential of digital media, as doing so would inevitably involve relinquishing the more-or-less total control textual scholars have tended to want to maintain over the way in which 'their' texts are presented. The majority of the electronic texts produced in the last decade and a half have thus been static and read-only, essentially trying to reproduce the printed text on the screen. At the same time we have seen the rise of the interactive web, not least the phenomenon of the wiki and social networking services such as MySpace and Facebook – what has collectively been termed 'Web 2.0'. So rather than mere electronic versions of printed texts what we ought possibly to be thinking of are interactive text archives, where the user determines to a much greater extent the nature and scope of the content and how that content is presented. I hasten to add that I am not suggesting that we relax our scholarly rigour or compromise our philological principles, only that we recognise that people may want to use our texts in ways other than those we ourselves have envisaged. Zumthor, Cerquiglini and the 'new' philologists have all argued that textual instability (*variance*, *mouvance*, 'unfixedness') is so fundamental a feature of chirographically transmitted texts that rather than trying to bring order to this chaos we should celebrate it. Here, finally, we have a means of doing so.

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