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*Published in:*

Care and Conservation of manuscripts

*Publication date:*

2021

*Document version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Document license:*

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*Citation for published version (APA):*

Kapitan, K. A. (2021). Dating paper manuscripts based on watermarks: A case study of selected nineteenth-century Icelandic manuscripts. In M. Driscoll (Ed.), *Care and Conservation of manuscripts* (Vol. 17, pp. 15-26). Museum Tusulanum. Care and conservation of manuscripts, proceedings Vol. 17

# Care and conservation of manuscripts 17

Proceedings  
of the seventeenth international seminar held at  
the University of Copenhagen 11th–13th April 2018

Edited by  
M.J. Driscoll

Museum Tusulanum Press · 2021

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Proceedings of the seventeenth international seminar held at the  
University of Copenhagen 11th–13th April 2018

Typeset by Florian Grammel

Published by Museum Tusculanum Press  
Printed by Frederiksberg Bogtrykkeri A/S  
ISBN 978-87-635-4687-4  
ISSN 1602-1339

Published with financial support from  
The Arnamagnæan Commission

The articles in these Proceedings have all been subjected to peer-review.

The programme and abstracts from the 17th seminar can be viewed on  
the seminar website: [nors.ku.dk/cc/](http://nors.ku.dk/cc/)

Museum Tusculanum Press  
Rådhusvej 19  
DK-2920 Charlottenlund  
Denmark  
[www.mtp.dk](http://www.mtp.dk)

The vignette on the cover is taken from the allegorical representation of Professor Arnas Magnæus/Árni Magnússon's scholarly activities which adorned the oldest series of publications of the Arnamagnæan Commission 1773–1809.

# Dating paper manuscripts based on watermarks: A case study of selected nineteenth-century Icelandic manuscripts

by Katarzyna Anna Kapitan      Arnamagnæan Institute, Copenhagen

This article discusses the possibilities offered by basic examination of watermarks found in post-medieval Icelandic manuscripts as a tool for dating these manuscripts. Using a case study of four Icelandic manuscripts from the nineteenth century I argue that an account of watermarks should be an integral part of every description of a paper manuscript. The study focuses on Icelandic manuscripts for two reasons: firstly, the tradition of copying literary texts by hand survived far longer in Iceland than in continental Europe, providing a large amount of research material; secondly, very little research has been done on the paper used in Icelandic manuscripts in general, and even less on watermarks.<sup>1</sup>

While in Europe, with the invention of print and popularisation of printed books, hand-copying was reserved for texts which could not make it to the printing press, owing for example to censorship, in Iceland the situation was similar but somehow different. In Iceland the only printing press until the year 1772 was owned by the bishopric in Hólar, and so only texts that were considered 'worthy enough' from the perspective of the bishopric could be printed.<sup>2</sup> These, not surprisingly, comprised mainly religious texts. This print monopoly of the church influenced Icelandic book-production for centuries. The bulk of popular Icelandic literature was copied therefore by hand, well into the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Although the state of research on post-medieval manuscripts is still far from satisfactory, the growing interest in these manuscripts in recent years has led to remarkable progress in our understanding of the co-existence of printed and hand-copied books.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, catalogue records are rarely updated in keeping with the progress in modern scholarship, and the physical aspects of the manuscripts are still frequently marginalised. If the scribes did not explicitly write their names and the date of copying in colophons, the existing catalogues usually provide rather sparse information about the manuscript and only a very broad dating.<sup>5</sup> Cataloguers frequently do not have time to undertake detailed research into each manuscript and therefore have to rely on the information provided in existing printed catalogues, which may be from the nineteenth century and not surprisingly do not always meet the expectations of modern scholarly audiences. Traditional philologists are not usually interested in studying watermarks, since their primary focus is on texts. Material philologists are interested in the physical aspects of manuscripts, but at the same time there is still some reservation about looking at watermarks, perhaps because they underestimate the potential in using them as a criterion for dating a manuscript.

The arguments adduced against using the evidence of watermarks for dating are, first of all, that we often do not know how long a given mould was in use at the paper mill, and secondly, that we do not know how soon after the production of the paper the scribe actually used it for writing. These are perfectly valid arguments, which at the same time appear to be an excuse for the common practice of dismissing watermarks completely or marginalising them in material philological research. In this article I will argue for the importance of examining and documenting watermarks by showing what great potential they have for advancing our knowledge and understanding of the production process of manuscripts. Even though the state of research on paper used in Icelandic manuscripts is rather limited, it is still possible to find convincing arguments for the origin of the paper used in selected manuscripts thanks to existing catalogues of Dutch, Norwegian and Danish watermarks.<sup>6</sup>

The manuscripts examined in the present study have all been rather cursorily described in existing catalogues, particularly with regard to their material aspects. Two of them were broadly dated but they in fact contain rich evidence in the form of watermarks which can be used to establish a more precise dating. The other two are very precisely dated, based on the information given in colophons, and therefore the watermarks in them should be registered so this data can serve as comparative material for other studies of undated manuscripts.

## Watermarks in undated manuscripts

This section focuses on the cases where watermarks can be used as evidence for more precise dating of a manuscript. It examines two manuscripts: London, British Library, MS Add. 11109 and Reykjavík, National and University Library of Iceland, Lbs 2404 8vo. These manuscripts have been fairly broadly dated, but the watermarks present in them can help us to narrow down the dating.

The first case study focuses on MS Add. 11109. In the online catalogue of the British Library the manuscript has been dated to the eighteenth century, a dating based on the printed catalogue published in 1843.<sup>7</sup> The evidence of the watermarks present in this manuscript does not, however, confirm this dating. In one of the quires of the manuscript, specifically on leaves 49–54, there is a watermark with a countermark. The countermark contains the name of the paper mill, 'KLIPPAN', which is a Swedish paper mill in the province of Skåne.<sup>8</sup> The motif of the watermark is a beehive, which resembles to some extent the typical Honig-watermark, as presented in Churchill's catalogue, pl. 180.<sup>9</sup> The name of the paper mill and the motif of the watermark alone would not allow us to narrow down the dating of this manuscript, but fortunately one of the modifications that has been done to the beehive motif is that on the plinth in BL Add 11109 there is the date '1824'. This manuscript therefore cannot originate from the eighteenth century if the paper used in it was produced in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

There are other physical aspects of this manuscript which are omitted in the catalogue but are for a material philologist crucial in order to understand the circumstances of the manuscript's creation. There is, for example, no indication that this is a composite manuscript, made up of multiple separate codicological units, written by at least four different scribes on different paper and presumably at different points of time. The paper used in this manuscript is not homogeneous. It varies in quality and contains a number of watermarks.<sup>10</sup> The distribution of the scribal hands overlaps not only with the boundaries of the texts, but also with the boundaries of the different types of paper used for particular parts. At least four separate codicological units can therefore be identified in this manuscript.

BL Add. MS 11109 has an interesting history of production and ownership. First of all, at least some of its parts had to be written in Iceland,

as Jón Helgason suggests in his unpublished catalogue of manuscripts in British Library, that the manuscript is in an Icelandic binding.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, at least one part of the manuscript had to be written after 1824, as suggested by the dated watermark. And finally, the texts must have been copied before 1837, because the manuscript was bought by the British Museum in July of that year from Finnur Magnússon, professor of literature at the University of Copenhagen,<sup>12</sup> as the note on f. 1r indicates.<sup>13</sup> BL Add. 11109 is one of a large number of manuscripts purchased by the British Museum from him; these manuscripts are held today in the British Library with the shelfmarks Add. MSS 11061–11251.<sup>14</sup>

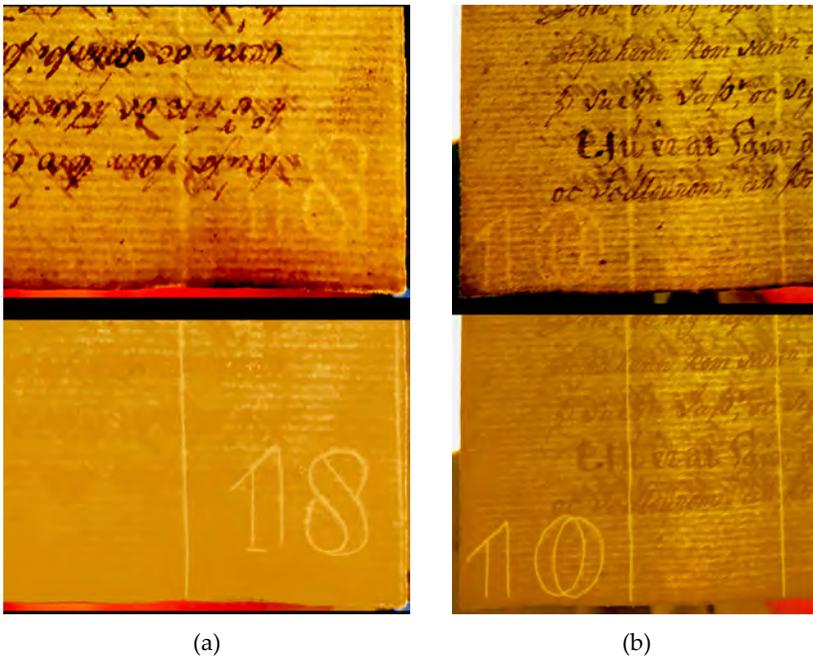
Even if we assume that the part written after 1824 is the youngest part of the manuscript, and that the manuscript was written and compiled in Iceland, the paper produced in 1824 in Skåne, Sweden, had within thirteen years made its way from Sweden to Iceland, where the texts were copied, then came to Denmark, where the manuscript was in the possession of Finnur Magnússon, and finally to England. Thanks to the material evidence, completely ignored in the catalogue, we can safely narrow down the dating of this manuscript from the broad eighteenth century to the years ca. 1800–1837, and for the part containing the dated watermark we can safely date it to the period between 1824 and 1837.

The second case is Lbs 2404 8vo. This manuscript is written in one hand throughout, identified as that of Gísli Konráðsson, a prolific Icelandic scribe of the nineteenth century. Gísli Konráðsson was born in 1787 and died in 1877, at the age of ninety.<sup>15</sup> A lifespan of ninety years is not especially helpful when we try to establish a precise dating of the manuscript. There are no dated colophons or any other notes that would give us a clue about the date of writing. In the online catalogue *Handrit.is* the manuscript is dated to 1805; the date originates from the printed catalogue, published in 1935–1937, where the date ‘ca. 1805’ is given.<sup>16</sup> This date is probably based on the age of the scribe and the assumption that he did not start copying texts before he turned eighteen, and so 1805 must therefore be seen as a *terminus post quem* for the writing of this manuscript, rather than the actual date of its writing.

Lbs 2404 8vo has a relatively regular quire structure, with four to five conjoint leaves in each quire. Even though there are overlaps of quire boundaries with text boundaries, which could divide the manuscript into four blocks (quires I–VII, quires VIII–XII, quires XIII–XIV, quires XV–XXII), there is no reason to assume that the manuscript was not

intended as a single item. Thanks to the basic examination of the watermarks in this manuscript, we can state with fairly high confidence that it could not be written ca. 1805, because the paper has a dated watermark '1810' (Figs. 1a & 1b). The watermarks with the date 1810 are attested in quires IV, V, XI, XIV and XXI, so each block contains at least one attestation of this date. We can assume therefore that the texts were copied in a similar period of time, after 1810. Thanks to the examination of the watermarks we can move the *terminus post quem* for the writing of this manuscript from 1805 to 1810.<sup>17</sup>

Fig. 1. Two parts of the '1810' watermark in Reykjavík, National and University Library of Iceland, Lbs 2404 8vo.<sup>18</sup>



## Watermarks in well-dated manuscripts

This section focuses on the potential that the registration of watermarks in dated manuscripts has for the dating of other undated manuscripts. It examines two manuscripts in Reykjavík, National and University Library

of Iceland: Lbs 1572 4to and Lbs 381 fol. Both of these are very precisely dated thanks to signed colophons, and both contain watermarks that can serve as comparative material for other undated manuscripts.

The first manuscript, Lbs 1572 4to, is written in one hand throughout, that of the prolific Icelandic scribe Þorsteinn Gíslason (1776–1838).<sup>19</sup> Lbs 1572 4to contains a number of dated colophons that allow us to date this manuscript with high certainty to the period from 4 June 1815, written on f. 39v, to 14 May 1827, written on f. 145v. Even though the contents of the manuscript have most likely been rearranged, as the texts do not appear in chronological order, the majority of the texts preserved in this manuscript have dated colophons, allowing us to trace the production process of the manuscript.

Moreover, there are various watermarks in Lbs 1572 4to, some of which can be fairly well dated. One of them is the watermark with the text 'Roeskilde' (Fig. 2), which appears on ff. 73+76 and 72+77 in quire XI. This watermark can be found in Nordstrand's catalogue of Danish watermarks, pl. 100.<sup>20</sup> It originates from the Maglekilde paper mill in Roskilde, where it was used from approximately 1811 onwards. Another watermark that can be found in Lbs 1572 4to contains the name 'Maglekilde', which appears on ff. 127+130 in quire XIX (Fig. 3). This watermark also appears in Nordstrand's catalogue of Danish watermarks, pl. 97.<sup>21</sup> It originates from the same paper mill as the previous watermark, Maglekilde in Roskilde, and was also in use after 1811.

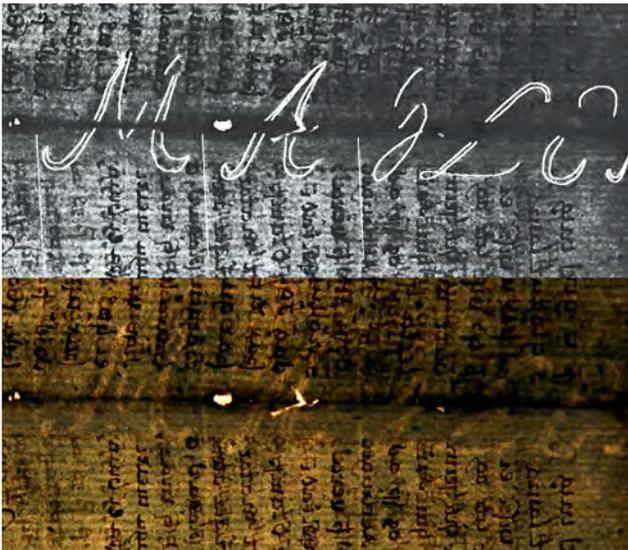
If we compare the dates given in the colophons with the dating of the watermarks as provided in the catalogues, we can come to some very interesting conclusions. Quire XI is made of paper originating from the period after 1811, while the colophon following the text written on these leaves indicates that this text was finished on 15 July 1816 (f. 77v). If the dating of the watermark from Roskilde in Nordstrand's catalogue is correct, it means that the paper produced in Denmark after the year 1811 was being used in Northern Iceland in 1816, meaning that fewer than five years had passed from the earliest possible date of production to the moment of utilisation of this paper.

A similar case can be found in the other manuscript, Lbs 381 fol. The main bulk of this manuscript is written in one hand, that of Tómas Tómasson (1756–1811), a district administrative from Stóra-Ásgeirsá in Northern Iceland.<sup>22</sup> Tómas Tómasson is fairly consistent in providing colophons that include the dates of writing of the texts to which they are

Fig. 2. The watermark 'Roeskilde' in Reykjavik, National and University Library of Iceland, Lbs 1572 4to.



Fig. 3. The watermark 'Maglekilde' in Reykjavik, National and University Library of Iceland, Lbs 1572 4to.



attached. The dated colophons clearly show that the texts preserved in this manuscript were not copied in chronological order or that the contents of this manuscript were rearranged. The three first sagas are followed by a colophon with the date 1790, while other texts are followed by colophons with the dates 1801, 1803 and 1805. The latest colophon is dated to 6 May 1805. Thus we are in the fortunate position of knowing both the identity of the scribe and the time of writing. This allows us to compare the dating of the watermarks found in this manuscript with the time of writing of the various texts.

In quire XV, consisting of three conjoint leaves, there are two marks, one on f. 123 and the other on f. 124. On f. 123 there is the Royal Cypher of Christian VII, King of Denmark in the years 1766–1808 (Fig. 4). On the following leaf there is a countermark with the name of the paper mill, Ørholm (Fig. 5). These marks can be associated with the Ørholm paper mill, north of Copenhagen, which operated in the years 1793–1921. A very similar pair of marks is presented in Nordstrand's catalogue, pl. 43, where it is dated to the years 1805–1832.<sup>23</sup> Various combinations of watermarks with the Royal Cypher CR VII were used at the Ørholm paper mill between 1805 and 1832, but none before or after that period. Therefore, we can safely assume that the watermark in Lbs 381 fol. also originates from that period.<sup>24</sup>

If we compare the dating of the watermark found in quire XV of the manuscript with the date attested in the colophon following the text written in this quire we have an interesting result. The dating of the watermark is 1805–1832, while the colophon on f. 124v states that the text was copied on 6 May 1805. So, this particular sheet of paper was used in the same year it was produced, having apparently made its way from Denmark to Northern Iceland in fewer than five months.

The examples from the manuscripts discussed here show that the time between the production of paper in Denmark to its utilisation in Iceland can vary significantly, from five months to five years. There is a high possibility, however, that when other undated Icelandic manuscripts are made of paper with the same watermarks, the time of their production would be similar and they could be more precisely dated. Therefore, registration of watermarks should be prioritised when describing precisely dated manuscripts to create a comparative dataset for dating of other manuscripts.

Fig. 4. The watermark with the Royal Cypher of Christian VII in Reykjavik, National and University Library of Iceland, Lbs 381 fol.

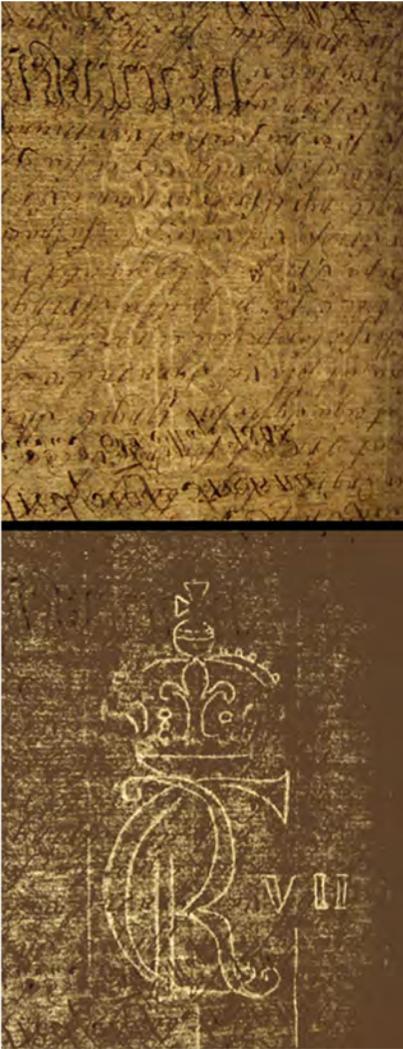
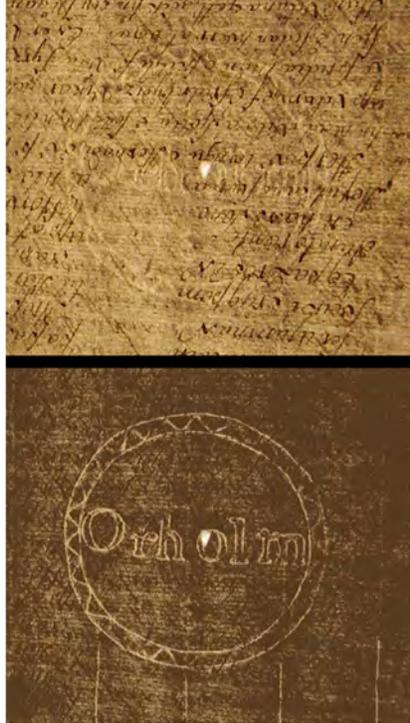


Fig. 5. The watermark with the name Ørholm in in Reykjavik, National and University Library of Iceland, Lbs 381 fol.



## Conclusion

The four case studies presented here illustrate the possibilities afforded by a basic analysis of watermarks in Icelandic manuscripts for expanding our knowledge and understanding of these artefacts. The first two studies showed that the watermarks can help us to date manuscripts more precisely, or at least serve as an argument to confirm or reject a dating previously proposed in the literature. The second two case studies argued in favour of the suggestion that a comparative analysis of watermarks can be one of the criteria applied to date other manuscripts which have not been yet catalogued or where dating is uncertain.

In all the major Scandinavian repositories there are Icelandic manuscripts that are dated very broadly to whole centuries, such as for example Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, Rask 111 (18th cent.); Reykjavík, National and University Library of Iceland, Lbs 4156 8vo (19th cent.); and Reykjavík Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, AM 246 8vo (18th cent.). There is a significant possibility that if the watermarks present in these manuscripts were examined, we would be able to date them more precisely. The analysis of watermarks should therefore be part of any material philological study of paper manuscripts. Watermarks should be examined, described and documented and the information about them should be included in online catalogues to increase the amount of data necessary for the comparative analysis of watermarks.

## Notes

1. There is no systematic study of watermarks in Icelandic manuscripts but there is a growing interest in this area demonstrated in recent studies of Icelandic manuscripts, for example in: Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, *The lost vellum Kringla*, trans. Siân Grønlie, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana XLV (Copenhagen, 2007); Beeke Stegmann, 'Árni Magnússon's rearrangement of paper manuscripts' (PhD thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2016); Katarzyna Anna Kapitan, 'Studies in the transmission history of *Hrómundar saga Greipssonar*' (PhD thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2018); Katarzyna Anna Kapitan & Beeke Stegmann, 'Writing, correcting and annotating AM 601 b 4to: Material and multispectral analysis', *Opuscula* 17 (2019), pp. 111–31. A research project, 'Paper trails: A material history of 16th and 17th century Icelandic books from paper production to library collection' (2018–2021), recently initiated at the University of Iceland by Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, in collaboration with Silvia Hufnagel and Regina Jucknies, examines water-

- marks in Icelandic manuscripts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For more information see the project's webpage: [papertrailsiceland.wixsite.com/papertrails](http://papertrailsiceland.wixsite.com/papertrails) (last accessed 23/05/2019).
2. Halldór Hermannsson, *Icelandic books of the sixteenth century (1534–1600)*, Islandica IX (Ithaca, NY, 1916).
  3. Matthew James Driscoll, 'Pleasure and pastime: The manuscripts of Guðbrandur Sturlaugsson á Hvitadal', *Mirrors of virtue: Manuscripts and print in late pre-modern Iceland*, ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir & Matthew James Driscoll, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana XLIX (Copenhagen, 2017), pp. 225–76.
  4. Davíð Ólafsson, 'Post-medieval manuscript culture and the historiography of texts', *Mirrors of virtue: Manuscripts and print in late pre-modern Iceland*, ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir & Matthew James Driscoll, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana XLIX (Copenhagen, 2017), pp. 1–30.
  5. In the present study I focus on the manuscripts held in the British Library, London, and the National and University Library of Iceland, Reykjavík; therefore I refer only to their online catalogues, *Handrit.is* ([handrit.is](http://handrit.is)), which relies heavily on Kristian Kálund, *Katalog over den Arnemagnæanske Håndskriftsamling I–II* (Copenhagen, 1889–1894), and Páll Eggert Ólason, *Skrá um handritasöfn landsbókasafnsins I–III* (Reykjavík, 1918–1937), and the British Library online catalogue ([searcharchives.bl.uk](http://searcharchives.bl.uk)), which relies equally heavily on printed catalogues such as Frederic Madden, *List of additions to the manuscripts in the British Museum in the years MDCCCXXXVI–MDCCCXL* (London, 1843).
  6. Henk Voorn, *Paper mills of Denmark and Norway and their watermarks* (Hilversum, 1959); Henk Voorn, *De papiermolens in de provincie Noord-Holland* (Haarlem, 1960); Haakon Mathiad Fiskaa & Ove K. Nordstrand, *Paper and watermarks in Norway and Denmark* (Amsterdam, 1978); William Algernon Churchill, *Watermarks in paper, in Holland, England, France, etc., in the XVII and XVIII centuries and their interconnection* (Amsterdam, 1935).
  7. British Library online catalogue, [searcharchives.bl.uk/IAMS\\_VU2:IAMS032-002108866](http://searcharchives.bl.uk/IAMS_VU2:IAMS032-002108866), last accessed 6/10/2018, merely reproduces information from Frederic Madden, *List*, p. 32.
  8. Gustaf Clemensson, *Klippans pappersbruk med Lessebo och Böksholm till hundraårsminnet av Sveriges första pappersmaskin* (Uppsala, 1932).
  9. Churchill, *Watermarks*, p. clvi.
  10. Kapitan, 'Studies', pp. 132–33.
  11. Jón Helgason, *Catalogue of the Icelandic manuscripts in the British Library*, Unpublished draft held at the Arnemagnæan Institute in Copenhagen (Copenhagen, n. d.).
  12. C. F. Bricka, ed., *Dansk biografisk Lexikon, tillige omfattende Norge for Tidsrummet 1537–1814* (Copenhagen, 1887–1905), XI, pp. 57–63.
  13. The note reads 'Purchased of [?] Professor | Finn Magnussen | July 1837.' (f. 1r). The British Library did not allow me to use my own images in this publication, therefore no images of BL Add. MS 11109 are included in this article.
  14. Pamela Porter, 'Preserving the past: England, Iceland and the movement of manuscripts', *Care and conservation of manuscripts* 9 (Copenhagen, 2006), pp. 173–90.
  15. Páll Eggert Ólason, *Íslenzkar æviskrár frá landnámstímum til ársloka 1940 I–V* (Reykjavík, 1948–1952), II, p. 66.
  16. The information in the online catalogue *Handrit.is* ([handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/Lbs08-2404](http://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/Lbs08-2404)), last accessed

6/10/2018) is based on Páll Eggert Ólason, *Skrá*, III, p. 339.

17. Even though the watermark with the date 1810 is registered in the online catalogue *handrit.is*, the dating to 1805 which originates from the printed catalogue is presented in the online catalogue.
18. All images in this article were taken and edited by the author.
19. Páll Eggert Ólason, *Íslenzkar æviskrár*, V, p. 203.
20. Fiskaa & Nordstrand, *Paper*, p. 408.
21. Fiskaa & Nordstrand, *Paper*, p. 407.
22. Páll Eggert Ólason, *Íslenzkar æviskrár*, V, p. 18.
23. Fiskaa & Nordstrand, *Paper*, p. 391.
24. Some caution must be exercised when working with catalogues of watermarks, as the dating presented in them might not always be exactly precise.

There are known cases where watermarks appear in manuscripts that are earlier than the dating presented in the catalogues, for example the occurrence of the 'Ø & N' watermark in Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, Acc. 61, which can be dated to the period before 1818, while a very similar watermark appears in Fiskaa and Nordstrand's catalogue pl. 61 and is associated with the period between 1832 and 1837; for more detailed discussion see Katarzyna Anna Kapitan, 'Material-philological and textual studies of a Danish collection of Old Norse sagas in Acc. 61', *From text to artefact: Material-philological studies in honour of Anne Mette Hansen*, ed. Katarzyna Anna Kapitan, Beeke Stegmann & Seán Vrieland (Leeds, 2019), pp. 39–46.