Diplomatic edition of a medieval Icelandic manuscript*

The making of a scholarly edition

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In november 1993 my edition of the Icelandic Homily Book was published by the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi[1] after having been 'in print' for a period of 19 years. If it had not been for TEX, this period might easily have been extended indefinitely. Looking back, work on the Icelandic Homily Book can be divided into three stages: the scholarly work, the attempts at printing before TEX, and the typesetting with TEX.

1 The scholarly work

My involvement with this edition, or with Old Icelandic scholarship in general, came by almost by accident. I arrived in Iceland in 1971 with my husband, who had taken a temporary job at the University of Reykjavík, and my two small sons, and my knowledge of Icelandic at that time could easily find place in half a column of the MAPS. In order to escape the drudgery of diaper laundry I enrolled in the *Icelandic for foreigners* program at the university where I got enthralled in my second year by the secrets of paleography and Old Icelandic grammar. So when I had passed my examination, I looked around for something useful in that direction to occupy me in my third and final year in Iceland. The suggestion by Helgi Guðmundsson, associate professor of Icelandic at the University of Reykjavík, to write a doctoral thesis and to choose an edition with a thorough grammatical analysis as the topic did not strike me as a realistic option. I had majored in mathematics, so would have to go a long way before getting to a doctorate in a completely different field. However, he insisted that shortcuts could be found and that doing the edition while I had the right resources was a sensible thing. Although I did not believe him at the time, he turned out to be right. Anyway, I let myself be talked into this undertaking and after some consultations with the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar I choose the Icelandic Homily Book from the three or four manuscripts that the institute and Helgi deemed suitable and most urgent. Icelandic Homily Book is apart from some fragments the oldest extant Old Icelandic manuscript, dating from around 1200 and containing on its 102 parchment leaves (204 pages) some 60 sermons. This manuscript is by its age alone of the greatest interest for the study of the Old Icelandic language, but it is also considered to be an example of good style.

Work on the transcription started in the summer of 1973. After the first year the transcription with the critical apparatus was finished, and the introduction which was going to concentrate on orthography and morphology was well under way. Meanwhile, the staff of the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar had been keeping an eye on my work, and had offered to publish the edition in one of their series as a combined facsimile and diplomatic edition. I gladly accepted their offer, but should perhaps have been forewarned for the problems encountered afterwards when the meeting devoted to this project was nearly exclusively devoted to the choice of paper, instead of to editorial principles, deadlines to be met, special requirements and the like. So I left Iceland in 1974 with the promise that typesetting the transcription would start next week. Famous last words. During the next two years I finished writing the introduction and fulfilled the requirements of the University of Utrecht for a MA in Old Germanics. As typesetting in Iceland still had not started, I typed the introduction, pasted the needed corrections into the transcription and handed the thesis in as typescript, thinking that it well might be some more years before the book got printed, but never suspecting that it would take 17 more years, or that I would have to be my own typesetter.

2 Typesetting, the years before TEX

In 1974 all typesetting on Iceland was still done in lead. The transcription required a number of unusual characters and it turned out that not only did the typesetting firms not have these characters, they did not exist in the Monotype catalogue. So they would have to be specially cut for this edition. The various firms that were approached were understandably reluctant to invest in this, as there was no guarantee that the characters could be used for other books. These negotiations took several years as in the small Icelandic community firms could be approached only one at a time and most took their time to think the proposition over. In 1979 the news came that one firm had purchased phototypesetting machinery of the matrix variety and that they

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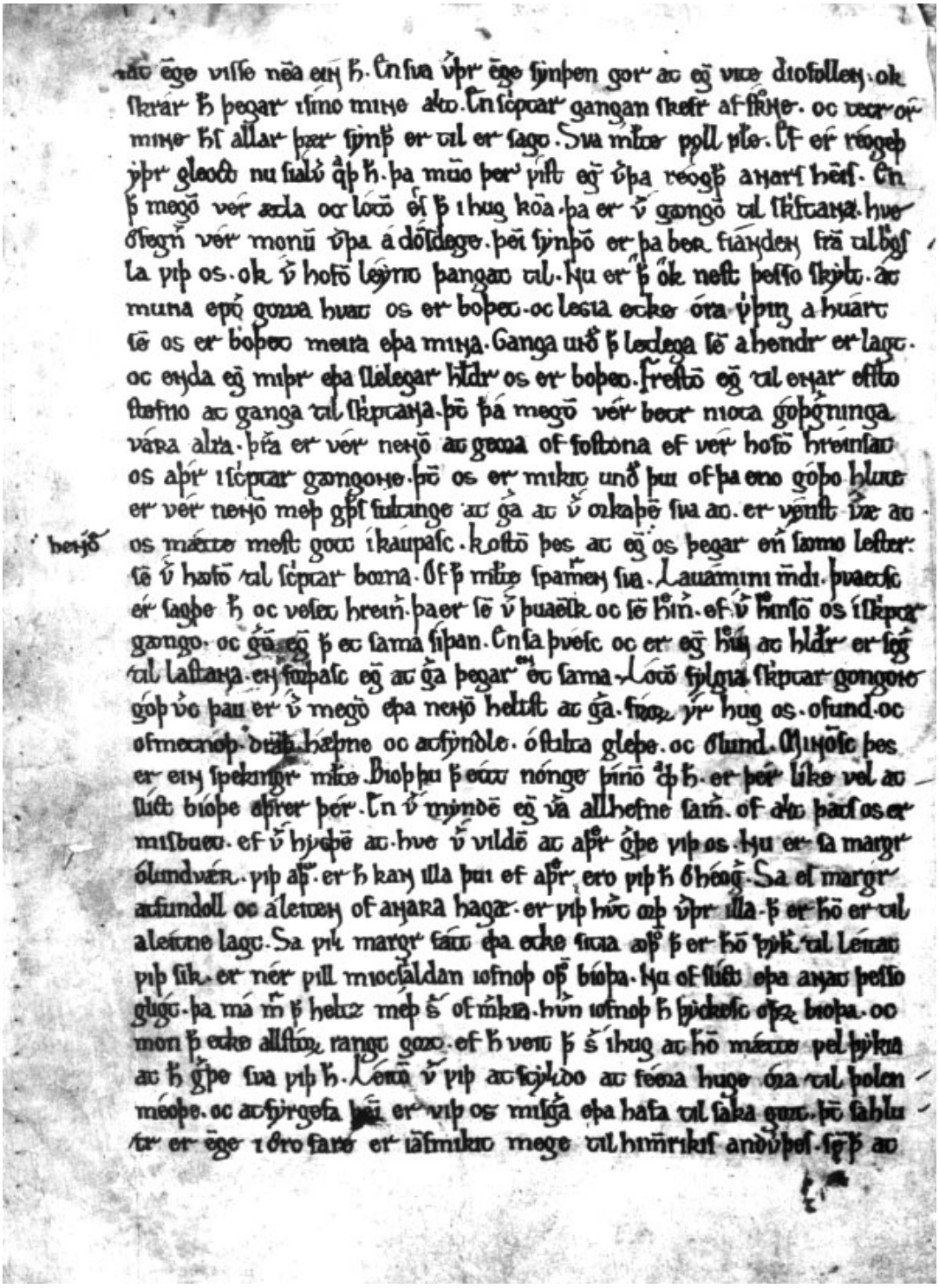
[1] This institute in Reykjavík keeps most of the existing Icelandic manuscripts and is devoted to their study and publication.



were willing to start work on the transcription. Slowly, the proofs started to come. But with them came a surprise. I had believed that proofreading would be my responsibility, but now I found that proofs of books to be published by the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar were habitually read by three independent readers, the editor of the edition, one of the senior staff members and a junior staff member, and that proofreading not meant comparing the proofs with the typescript, but with the manuscript or the photographs, thus checking not only the work of the typesetter but also that of the editor. This meant that proofreading took quite some time. For the staff of Stofnun Árna Magnússonar it was one of the many jobs they had to do besides their own research. And when we disagreed about a reading there were lengthy discussions by mail, which usually got only solved during one of my visits to Iceland. So when we finally were in agreement about the corrections to be made and sent the corrected proofs to the typesetter, it was a very unpleasant surprise when we were told that he had just got himself a new phototypesetting machine and could not convert the

at enge viſſe nema éiN haN. En ſva verþr enge ſynþen gor at eige vite diofollen. ok
ſkrár haN þegar iſíno miNe aLt. En ſcriptar gangan ſkefr af fkróNe. oc tecr ór
3 miNe hanſ allar þær ſynþer er til er ſagt. Sva mælte poll poſtole. Ef ér réogeþ *I Cor 11.31*
yþr gleoct nu ſiálver quaþ haN. þa muno þer víſt eige verþa réogþer anarſ heimſ. En
107 þat megom vér ætla oc lótom | ø\ſ/ſ þat i hug koma. þa er vér gængom til ſkriftana. hve
6 ôfegner vér monum verþa á dómſdege. þeim ſynþom er þa ber fiándeN fram til brigſ-
la viþ os. ok vér hofom léynt þangat til. Nu er ok þat neſt þeſſo ſkylt. at
muna epter gorva hvat os er boþet. oc legia etke óra virþing a huárt
9 ſem os er boþet meira eþa miNa. Ganga under þat letlega ſem a hendr er lagt.
oc enda eige miþr eþa ſlélegar heldr os er boþet. Freſtom eige til enar efſto
ſtefno at ganga til ſkriptana. þuiat þá megom vér betr niota góþgerninga
12 vára alra. þeirra er vér nenom at geora of foſtona ef vér hofom hréinſat
os áþr i ſcriptar gængone. þuiat os er mikit under þui of þa eno góþo hlute
er vér nenom meþ guþſ fultinge at gera at vér orkaþem ſva at. er vęnſt være at
15 os mætte meſt gott í káupaſc. Koſtom þes at eige ′hende\ os þegar ener ſæmo leſter.
′ ſem vér hæfom til ſcriptar borna. Of þat mælte ſpamaþren ſva. Lauámini mundi. Þvaetſc *Is 1.16*
ér ſagþe haN oc veſet hreiner. Þa er ſem vér þuaemſk oc ſem hreiner. ef vér hreinſom os íſkriptar
18 gængo. oc gerom eige þat et ſama ſíþan. En ſa þvéſc oc er eige hréin at heldr er ſeger
til laſtana. en forþaſc eige at gera þegar \en/ et ſama. Lótom ſylgia ſkriptar gongone
góþ verc þau er vér megom eþa nenom heltſt at gera. ſnorum ýr hug os. ofund. oc
21 ofmetnóþ. dramb. hæþne oc atfyndle. ó ſtilta gleþe. oc ôlund. Minomſc þes
er ein ſpekingr mælte. Bioþ þu þat éitt nónge þínom quaþ haN. er þér líke vel at -
ſlíct bióþe aþrer þér. En vér myndem eige vera allhefne ſamer. of aLt þatſ os er
24 miſbuet. ef vér hygþem at. hve vér vildem at aþrer gerþe viþ os. Nu er ſa margr
ólundvæR. viþ aþra. er haN kan illa þui ef aþrer ero viþ haN ô héoger. Sa eſ margr
atfundoll oc á leiten of anara hagæ. er viþ hvert orþ verþr illa. þat er honom er til
27 a léitne lagt. Sa viL margr fátt eþa etke ſitia æþrom þat er honom þyker til léitat
viþ ſik. er nér vill mioc ſ\i/aldan iofnoþ oþrom bióþa. Nu of ſlíct eþa anat þeſſo
glígt. þa má maþr þat heltz meþ sér of merkia. hvern iofnoþ haN þyckeſc oþrum bioþa. oc
30 mon þat etke allſtórum rangt gort. ef haN veit þat sér ihug at honom mætte vel þykia
at haN gerþe ſva viþ haN. Léitom vér viþ at ſcyLdo at féora huge óra til þolen-
méoþe. oc at fyrgeſa þéim er viþ os miſgera eþa haſa til ſaka gort. þuiat ſa hlu-
33 tr er enge i ôro fare er iamſmikit mege til himenrikiſ andvirþeſ. ſem þat at

2 fkróNe] ɔ: ſkróNe 7 ok þat] *T*. 10 heldr] *Add* en (*Vr*). 11 þá] < þat. 20 ſnorum] n < v, *correction indicated by an accent*. 21 ofmetnóþ] *Accent suspect, L* ofmetnoþ. 26 hagæ] æ < a. 28 nér] *Del* (*SK*). 31 féora] o < e.

material he had on punch tapes to this new machine. But he would have the thing typeset anew as soon as he could.

And so the whole circus started again: Proofreading in triplicate. There were less cases to discuss between us three, but on the other hand the work went a lot slower. I was both in the final stage of another project and taking up a new job which required a lot of reading up, and if there had ever been any feeling of urgency about the book in Iceland that had now certainly gone. So it was early 1989 when the marked proofs were returned for the second time to the typesetter. But when I arrived in Reykjavík some months later, I found that the machinery had again been replaced and that the typesetter was planning to start from scratch again. At that time I had about 10 years experience with computers and I was quite sure that conversion was possible. Moreover, I had at some stage requested and got copies from the typesetting files. Admittedly it had not been easy to decipher those, but I had copies on DOS disks of the original files and conversions of these files to ASCII where the typesetting codes had been removed. At this stage the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar was as opposed as I was myself to going through the whole troublesome procedure again as it was getting clear to us that with the methods of the institute we would always be limping behind the pace of technology.

So disks were sent to Iceland and in due time new proofs arrived. But after the initial joy that conversion to the new machine turned out to be possible, a closer look brought great disappointment. The font used looked decidedly irregular and the kerning of the high s (ſ) was absolutely ugly, but worse, lots of errors had crept in. A systematic study of the errors I found on the first few pages brought me to the conclusion, which was later affirmed, that a conversion program had been written, but that when this was found not to produce the correct result, rather than correcting and rerunning the program the output file had been corrected, and that not very systematically. From this level of competence to judge I decided that the safest way would be to get my hands on their files and to repair those by comparison with mine. As this required only a physical conversion to DOS disks it seemed not to tall an order. However, this could not be done in Iceland, but had to be handled in Denmark, and after some phoning and explaining 2 disks arrived, which were not too difficult to decipher. As soon as I had corrected a couple of pages I returned a disk, and waited with some optimism for a corrected proof. No such thing, but a panicky fax that the disk could not be read. Some weeks of multilateral discussion followed between the institute and the typesetter in Reykjavík, the technical staff of the manufacturer of the typesetting machine in Denmark, and myself in Leiden. This discussion was not made any easier by the lack of a common language. In the end it became clear that the lack of expertise on the Icelandic end combined with the distances involved made it highly unlikely that the problem would ever be solved.

At that time I had some experience with TEX, enough at least to be confident that the job could be done, and luckily not enough to foresee all the problems involved. So I wrote a letter to Iceland enumerating the possibilities open to us, from starting from scratch with typesetting for the third time via various methods involving conversion to doing it myself with TEX, stating the adhering disadvantages and advantages and the fact that in my opinion some methods were so impractical and relied so much on factors without our influence that I was not willing to cooperate in them. Probably the members of the staff of the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar were then about as fed up with the whole thing as I was, so they agreed that I should have a go with TEX.

3 Typesetting, the years with TEX

As the book had to appear in a series and was planned as a combined facsimile and diplomatic edition with photographs and transcription on facing pages both page breaks and line breaks were decided by the manuscript, not by the software. The large paper size required a 12 point font. It came therefore as an unpleasant surprise that the cm fonts which I wanted to use were significantly wider than the fonts used previously and, more to the point, that the resulting lines did not fit the given page width. After much hesitation I decided to decrease the width of the characters about 10%.

The paperweight too was not unproblematic. Some manuscript pages had far more lines than others and there was a critical apparatus too that had to be accommodated as a whole at the foot of the page. If I choose a page height that would fit all pages, the majority would look ugly. So after some experiments I choose a page length that fitted most pages with the apparatus at the bottom of the page. The overlong pages had a special page height and the apparatus directly following the text.

The next problem were the special characters that had caused us problems right from the beginning: ſ aꝛ ǫ aꝏ to name a few. Some were easily made like the high s which just required removing the bar from f, and of course the introduction of quite a few new ligatures. Others required more METAFONT skills, like aꝛ or ⅁.

The transcription has small capitals within words otherwise consisting of romans. Normally small caps are larger than the corresponding romans. This made the page look very jumpy, so I scaled down the small caps. This was not completely successful. I feel that a small cap that has to fit within a word should be parameterized in a different way, but for that task I lacked the time.

The transcription also has italics and romans mixed within words. I had thought that the italic correction would take care of that problem, but it did not. So I had to figure out experimentally the amount of kerning needed for each pair of roman-italic and italic-roman that occurred. Again, this can certainly be improved upon by someone with a designer's eye. I can only say that this kerning is a great improvement upon the results without the kerning. The TEX files for the transcription pages were produced by program from the original ASCII files, so the program could insert explicit kernings as well. However, the introduction still only existed as a typescript and contained thousands of quoted words from the transcription. I was not looking forward to typing in that amount of explicit kernings, so I decided to solve the kerning problem by combining romans and italics in a single font and take care of the kernings in the ligature tables. The small caps and the italic small caps which occurred within the transcription were placed in this same font, and a lot of macro's defined. As mostly only one or two consecutive italic characters occur, this made typing not to strenuous.

Apart from the adaptation to the width of the characters the cm part of this combined font had undergone only one change: ø. The height of this character is the height not of the o, but of the diagonal stroke. This results in the accent over ø standing higher than that over o: ǿ ó. By reducing the height of the ø to the height of o the accents come at the same height: ǿ ó.