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Codex Regius 2365, 4^{to} —

Purposeful Collection and Conscious Composition

Codex Regius 2365, 4^{to} is in essence a copy of a lost original, but as pointed out by Lindblad (1954), some alterations can have been made when the copy was produced. The original collection was based on several different sources and dated to the first half of the 13th century ad. Regius dates to the second half (Jónsson 1893, p. 114; Lindblad 1954, pp. 233 f., with references; Schier 1985, p. 358).

During the late 19th and early 20th century, Regius was put to use as the larger part of a collection of poems often called the Poetic Edda. This Edda was considered a corpus of Old Norse poetry more complete and representative than its dominating manuscript. Eddic poetry was seen as a specific kind of poetry most fully represented in Regius, but surviving in several other manuscripts (cf. Schier 1985, § 1, pp. 357 f.; Heusler 1937, §11, pp. 12 f.; Heusler and Ranisch 1903; Sijmons and Gering 1888 & 1901; Bugge 1867). The additions, which transformed Regius, were not felt to corrupt a medieval design. On the contrary, additions were rather uncontroversial and prolific inasmuch as they formed the basis of innumerable studies, tacitly adhering to the assumption that Old Norse poetry had actually existed in such a form that it could be collected by learned men of antiquarian disposition.

The fragmentary and considerably younger manuscript AM 748 i 4^{to} (cf. Lindblad 1954, pp. 250; Wessén 1945, p. 14), was seen as a collection similar to Regius, and the existence of the antiquarian collection was supported by the fact that Snorri knew some of the poems quoted in his Edda in written form (cf. Lindblad 1954, p. 250). The codices also sanctioned the modern formation of other collections of Old Norse poetry. From Bugge (1867, pp. xix f.) and onwards, more clearly stated in Jónsson (1893, pp. 113 f.), several scholars have taken for granted that the heroic lays known from Regius, or lays similar to these, were actually

missing from AM 748. This was seen as an indication that there was once a corpus of Old Norse poetry, which could be presented in different ways (cf. Lindblad 1954, p. 251). We can imagine the roots of Bugge's and Jónsson's suggestion by quoting Petersen (1849) who, in pursuit of a tricky mythological problem, speaks metaphorically: 'Let us then take a walk through the Eddas and try to bring to clarity that which can be clarified' (Petersen 1849: 57, p. 246, my translation). Eventually, specific ideas about a standard Edda were challenged (cf. Lindblad 1954, pp. 251 ff.), but scholars still thought that for some reason or other, i.e. for no specific reason, poems that might well have been incorporated in Regius happened not to be included. Regius was a fair or didactic collection — its antiquarian scope in principle similar to that of Snorri's Edda. As late as 1946, Wessén suggested that Snorri's instrumental influence upon the idea of forming a collection for future use was discernible in the text. In short, research led scholars to believe that they as well as medieval Icelanders could compile a corpus of Eddic poetry. The wish to form a systematic collection came to a strong expression in works such as *Die Lieder der Edda* by Sijmons and Gering (1888–1926).

'Collection', nonetheless, is a difficult concept. Much can be put together for many different reasons. Collections aiming at documentation are thus something radically different from a collection of excerpts intended to form the basis of a literary project. Those who edited the manuscript did not pay much attention to that kind of difference. They took Regius to be the poetry of a certain cultural sphere arranged by one or more learned men in order to reflect this poetry and its time depth. The minute study of the manuscript did raise questions about some of the verses being revisions, but Regius was never considered a purposeful collection untrue to antiquarian principle (cf. Lindblad 1954, pp. 247 ff.). Today, the Regius manuscript, attracts very little interest (cf. Dronke 1969 pp. xi–xiii and 1997, p. xi). On the contrary, it is the poems themselves that have formed a context for painstaking editions, summing up and developing traditions a century old (Dronke 1969 and 1997).

Regius consists of two parts: One contains poems representing general views on pagan cosmology and myth, traditionally termed 'mythological' or 'godly' poems. The other is made up of poems telling us about Volsungs and Nibelungs and their kin, usually called 'heroic' poems. On a general level, there is order in the collection (cf. Heusler 1937, § 22, pp. 20 f.), and scholars have tended to support the significance of its bisection. They have explained the lack of a clear-cut dichotomy between myth and hero as a minor deficiency and few suspected a hidden agenda

behind the collection. Its structural principle was a good and straightforward, but not strictly executed criterion of formation. Bugge's influence — based upon authority rather than argument (1867) — was paramount.

In his article 'Edda, ältere' Schier argues (1985, pp. 359 ff.) that one rational principle guided the collection of the first part, another the collection of the second one. The idea that the manuscript consists of two free-standing sections is thus still alive, but today there is no tendency to find faults with the collection (cf. Dronke 1969, pp. xi ff.). Nonetheless, the interpretation which sees Regius as consisting of two free-standing collections must be challenged since it can be argued that Regius is a purposeful collection in its own right. Far from being a learned collection of a poetry, naturally dividing itself into mythological and heroic poems, Regius can be said to demonstrate an attitude in which a dichotomy between hero and myth is relatively speaking unimportant.

The layout of Regius

There is little hope of understanding Regius if we do not take layout and headings to be intended, and see the collection as one of small poems, fragments of poems and fragmented poems with or without introductions, titles, headlines and explanatory prose interpolations. For deliberate reasons poems were broken up and autonomous pieces of prose inserted among the verses. Behind some of the prose subsections and notes there was no poetry to quote, in other cases, the compiler has in all probability refrained from including existing verse, e.g. in the case of the poem called *Lokasenna* (cf. Tab. 1; *fra egi oc godvm*). Nonetheless, there are a number of short poems, quoted in their entirety and written down under their proper names. Knowing that such poems existed, editors have felt free to label poetic sections that lack a heading in Regius (cf. Collinder 1964, pp. 196 ff. *Gripes spádom*) and also to change existing headings. The subsection, *þor þro miðgarz orm*, is thus commonly known as *Hymiskviðr*. In order to do justice to Regius, I have chosen to present each section under a transcription of the heading used in the manuscript. The exception is the first, anonymous, section which I call *Introduction* (cf. Table 1).

From a manuscript point of view, the collection is sectioned at four different levels. On the first it consists of two consecutive parts. In calligraphic terms it is the size of the initials that defines their beginning. The first part starts on page 1, line 1, with a 4-line cut-in initial and the second one appears on page 39, line 20, with a 5-line cut-in letter.

On the second level there are 18 subsections. They are introduced by an initial letter, most often a three-line cut-in initial (16 three-liners and 2 two-liners,) in combination with an encapsulated title (cf. Fig. 1a). The titles may be the name of a poem, such as *guðrunar quiþa* (8 cases), the description of an event, such as *þor ðro miðgarz orm*, (3 cases) or an extract from a poem or a tale about something, such as *fra davþa sigurðr*, (7 cases). Counting the beginning of the two main parts, Regius consists of 20 free-standing subsections.

Levels three and four represent subdivisions within the 20 main subsections. These divisions are not explicitly hierarchic nor are they applied in an obviously systematic manner. On the third level there are 16 units and they belong to 9 of the subsections of the first or second level. These units are characterised by a cut-in initial in the left marginal and, except in one case, a headline in the right marginal (Fig. 1c). The cut-in letter may cover one, two or three lines (1, 4 and 11 cases respectively). The headlines are *None* (1 case); the name of a poem, such as *hambis mal* (3 cases); the name of an event, such as *drap niflunga* (6 cases) or the name of an extract, such as *fra davþa fafnis* (6 cases).

At the bottom of the ranking, at the fourth level, there are 10 texts of different length belonging to six of the subsections at the second level. Of the 20 sections at first and second level, six lack subdivisions of either the third or fourth level. Level-four sections start either with a one-line slightly cut-in letter or an internal initial letter. The sections lack a heading in seven cases, but in three cases the word *Capitulum* is inserted before the initial letter (cf. Figs. 1d & 1e). At the very bottom of the hierarchy, each verse starts with a capital letter and so does the numerous prose interpolations and paragraphs. In short: there is a hierarchic structure in Regius, but it is not founded upon lays of different categories. It is based upon themes with digressions — a typical non-linear form of composition. *Beowulf* with its two juxtaposed parts and frequent digressions is a model of this principle of composition. In *Beowulf*, the use of the Finnsburg material is an example of an original lay, recycled — fragmented and retold — in a new tale (Herschend 1997, pp. 34 ff.). In Regius, the poems about Skirni and Loki are used in the same manner.

Layout and contents

There are 11 subsections in the first part of Regius. Six of these consist of a single section, but five include one or two sections of a lower order (cf. Tab. 1 pp. 126–28). This first part is a series of texts with an obvious pro-

A) MARGINAL INITIAL LETTER AND AN ENCAPSULATED HEADING

the text in one of the sections eventually drawing to an end

Pe first line in the new section **Its title** with four concluding words.
the continuation of the new section in prose or poetry,
which goes on an on and continues for quite a while without
coming to an end.

B) MARGINAL INITIAL LETTER AND A TRUE HEADLINE

The headline or descriptive title of a new section

Pe beginning of the new section and the continua-
tion of the new section which will carry on
and on and on

C) MARGINAL INITIAL LETTER AND A RIGHT MARGINAL HEADLINE

we come to the end of one of the section. **headline**

Pe beginning of the new section and the continua-
tion of the new section which will carry on

D) MARGINAL INITIAL LETTER ONLY

The end of st section about whatever it was about.

Pe beginning of the new section about whatever it is about and
the continuation of this new section . . .

E:1 AND 2) Internal initial letters

The end of a section. **Capitulum**. **P**e beginning of the next

The end of a section. **P**e beginning of the next section

Fig. 1. The different headings in Regius 2365.

gression from the devine to the human, from cosmology to social life, from obscure mysticism to ways of coping with a troublesome suitor, from fate to irony. Although disturbed by the lacuna, the second part of Regius is different from the first, being a collection of subsections related to the tragedy of a worldly family. The subsections consist either of small complete lays or a series of fragmented poems interpolated by prose. In this way they are similar to the subsections of the first part. The compiler structures his treatment of the two themes in two parallel ways, and from a thematic point of view we can divide the collection as a whole into four smaller sections: two in the first and two in the second part. The sections in the first part balance the ones in the second.

The first thematic section consists of *Introduction*, *hava mal* and

Table 1. An analysis of the headings the *Regius* manuscript.

Page: line	Initial	Heading	Conventional name	Rank				No of Pages
				1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	
01:01	H:3+1 marg cut-in	None	Völuspá	I				Part I Sec I
05:04	G:3, marg cut-in	Hava mal (encaps)	Hávamál	II				
11:14	M:1, marg cut-in	None	Hávamál v. 111				IV	
12:27	U:2, marg cut-in	None	Hávamál v. 138				IV	
14:09	R:3, marg cut-in	Vafþruðis mal (encaps)	Vafþrúðnis- mál	II				
15:09	S:1, internal	Capitulum (inserted)	Vafþrúðnis- mál v. 20				IV	
16:31	H:3, marg cut-in	Fra sonom. Hravðvngs konungs (encaps)	Grimnismal intro	II				Part I Sec II
17:27	H:3, marg cut-in	Grimnis m (encaps) al (in right margin)	Grimnismal poem	II				
21:05	G:1, marg cut-in	None	Grimnismal epilogue				IV	
21:10	F:2, marg cut-in	For Scirnis (headline)	Skirnismal Intro			III		
23:30	H:3, marg cut-in	Harbarz lioð (encaps)	Harbarzlioð	II				
26:26	A:3, marg cut-in	Þor ðro miðgarz orm (encaps)	Hymiskviðr	II				
29:03	E:3, marg cut-in	Fra egi oc goðvm (encaps)	Lokasenna intro	II				
29:17	S:3, marg cut-in	Loka Sena (right marginal headline)	Lokasenna poem				III	
33:06	E:1, marg cut-in	Fra loka (right marginal head- line)	Lokasenna epi- logue				III	
33:13	R:3, marg cut-in	Þryms (encaps) border case, Qviða. But qviða links to 1 st line	Þrymskviða	II				
35:04	N:3, marg cut-in	Fra volunði (encaps)	Völundrkviða intro	II				

73:05	M:3 marg cut-in	Guðrunar quiða (encaps)	Guðrunarkv II poem	II
75:24	H:1 internal	Capitulum (inserted)	Guðrunarkv II epilogue	IV
75:27	H:2 marg cut-in	Quiða G (right marginal headline)	Guðrunarkv III poem	III
76:11	H:2 marg cut-in	Fra borgnyio oc oððruno (right marginal cut-in)	Odrunas gråt intro	III
76:15	H:3 marg cut-in	None	Odrunas gråt Poem	III
78:08	G:3 marg cut-in	Dauði Atla (enclos)	Atlakv intro	II
78:12	A:3 marg cut-in	Atla quiða in grönlenzca (right marginal headline)	Atlakv poem	III
81:10	F:s marg cut-in	Atla mal in grönlenzco (right marginal headline)	Atlamal poem	III
87:13	G:2 marg cut-in	Fra guðruno (enclos)	Guðrunar-hvot Intro	II
87:21	Þ:3 marg cut-in	Guðrunar hvat (right marginal headline)	Guðrunar-hvot Poem	III
88:28	S:2 marg cut-in	Hampis mal (right marginal headline)		

vafþrúðnis mal. They are poems brought together without comments, but, nonetheless, understood as consisting of different subsections. Their scope is general. The second section starts with *fra sonom hravðvngs konungs* and ends with *alvis mal* (cf. Table 1). It is made up of a number of smaller and larger poetical fragments and fragmented poems, but ends with a single uncommented short lay which gives the impression of an epilogue.

The third thematic section starts with a single short lay, which introduces us to the second part of the manuscript and the heroic families. According to the heading this is the beginning of *queði fra helga hundings bana þeira ok h.[öðbrodds] völsunga quiða* and it fulfils the purpose of an introduction. Except for this introduction, the compiler composed the third thematic section as a number of poetic texts interpolated by prose, starting with *fra hiorvarþe oc sigrlin*. These interpolations run all the way into the lacuna. Judging from the way the first poem after the lacuna, the so-called 'Brot', comes to an end, i.e. with the prose subsection *fra*

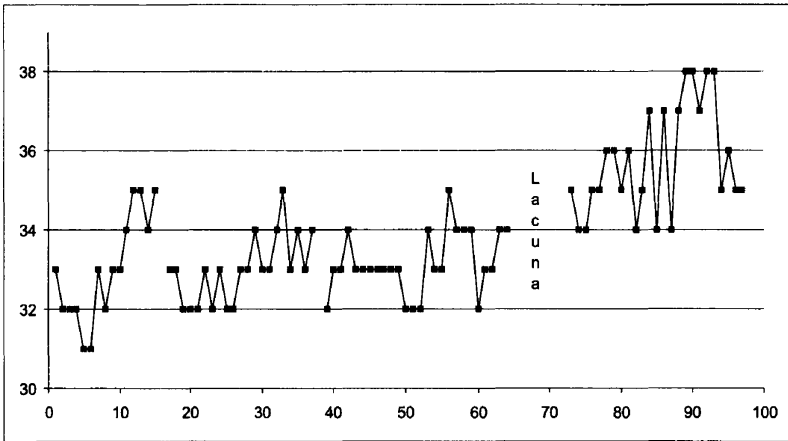


Fig. 2. Number of lines per full page in the four sections of Regius. Pages with more lines than the averages dominate in the last part of each section. Based on Wimmer and Jónsson 1891.

davþa sigurðr, it would seem that the third section ended somewhere in the lacuna. *fra davþa sigurðr* is a small intermediate text leading on to the next poem. Prose, inserted between the lays, is typical of the last section. This, the fourth section, is in other words a collection of free-standing short lays linked by explanatory notes. The interpolations, typical for the second and third section, are absent in this concluding thematic section. Apart from the bridging comments, the fourth section is built in a way similar to the first one, i.e. of free-standing lays. Furthermore, the comments show that the poems are included into the manuscript as further references (cf. *fra davþa sigurðr*).

Based on an analysis of headings and interpolated prose, the manuscript falls into two parts. Each of these consists of a general and a specific section. The two specific ones are the inner ones. They are put next to each other on each side of the divide between the first and the second part. The general ones are the outer sections and they enclose the inner ones like walnut shells their walnut kernel.

Some of the technical structures of the manuscript itself, such as line calculation and orthography, are indicative of the four sections. If we calculate the number of lines on each sheet in sections I–IV, we detect a tendency for the number to grow, the closer we come to the end of a section, and to drop with the beginning of the following one (cf. Table 2 and Fig. 2). Between Sections III and IV, where the lacuna has disturbed the manuscript, the evidence is not completely conclusive. Nonetheless,

Table 2. Number of lines per page in the four different sections of Regius 2365.

Regius	Part One		Part Two	
	Sec I	Sec II	Sec III	Sec IV
Pages				
1	33	(3)33	(13) 32	35
2	32	33	33	34
3	32	32	33	34
4	32	32	34	35
5	31	32	33	35
6	31	33	33	36
7	33	32	33	36
8	32	33	33	35
9	33	32	33	36
10	33	32	33	34
11	34	33	33	35
12	35	33	32	37
13	35	34	32	34
14	34	33	32	37
15	35	33	34	34
16	(30) 33	34	33	37
17	325	35	33	38
18		33	35	38
19		34	34	37
20		33	34	38
21		34	34	38
22		(19) 32	32	35
23		679	33	36
24			33	35
25			34	35
26			34	23
			903	796
			Lacuna*	
			Lacuna	
			Lacuna	
			Lacuna	
			Lacuna	
			Lacuna	
			Lacuna	
			Lacuna	

*Probably six or eight pages, i.e. c. 200–270 lines, are missing in the lacuna between Sections II & IV.

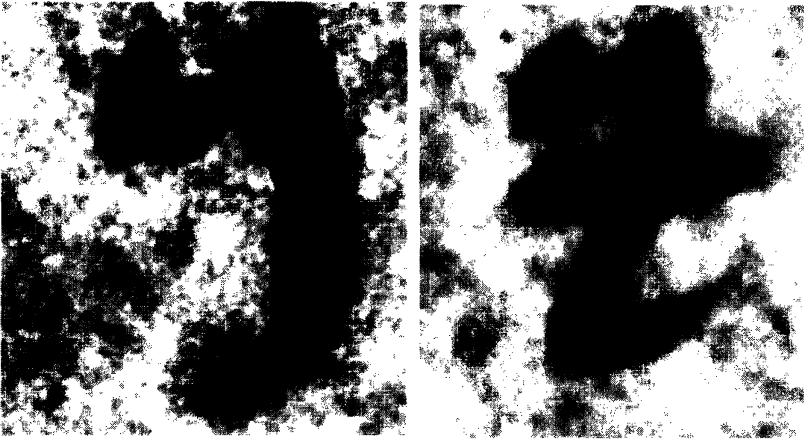


Fig. 3. The *ok* signs.

line calculation indicates that the scribe thought of the sections as a number of pages. His calculations were not precise, but still the line distribution indicates that the sections were meant to fit a specific space of vellum.

The number of lines on the pages of the last section gives us an example of the scribe's fear of wasting vellum. To begin with the pages contain 34 or 35 lines. Then the scribe raises the number to 38, but on the 22nd page of the section he realizes that he will be able to make ends meet and accordingly goes back to 35 lines per page (Fig. 2). In a similar way, he was optimistic when he started the first section, but increased the number of lines per page to make the section fit 16 pages. He made the same kind of calculations for the second section (cf. Tables 1 and 2; Fig. 2). It is therefore fair to conclude that the scribe thought of the thematic sections as units when he planned and executed his work. Probably he was guided either by the original or by his insight into its composition. We too should accept the sections as, indeed, sections.

Although Lindblad (1954) did not specifically discuss line calculation as an indication of manuscript subdivision, he conducted a great number of useful investigations to clarify the scribe's orthographic intention. From the many patterns disclosed by Lindblad, it would seem that we could carry his analysis of the use of the *ok*-signs a little further, and get a somewhat clearer picture of the relationship between prose and poetry as well as a better definition of the sections. The signs are presented in Figure 3 and I have chosen to represent them as '7' and 'z' (Figs. 4a and b).

The scribe lived in a period in which the preferred sign changed from 7 to Z. He obeyed late 13th century rules at the end of the manuscript, but his frequent use of 7 in the beginning of the manuscript, indicates that in the original, this sign was common. The scribe's unconscious attitude to the two signs also shows in a tendency to mix their characteristics (cf. Wimmer and Jónsson 1891, p. 61 ll. 8–11). As Lindblad (1954, pp. 33 ff.) suggested, 7 in the original was something the scribe intended to copy, at least when he set himself to work. The second section, ll. 0–93, bears out Lindblad's analysis since it contains 45 cases of 7 and 5 of Z. Only two of the latter are regular ones, the others are the result of the scribe forgetting himself. He intended to write 7, but Z being his usual sign, he happened to slip into this sign without completing it (cf. p. 17, ll. 23 and 24). Between lines 60 and 110 he avoids Z completely, but he relaxes a bit between lines 110 and 210 and writes 7 60 times and Z 14 times, however, relapsing into strong principles in the last 60 or so lines. In line 210 he changes his mind, and up to the lacuna, at line 320, he writes 7 and Z 45 and 39 times respectively. In the last section he has reversed his preferences and here there are five 7 and 25 Z. It follows from Lindblad's analysis that coping the *ok*-sign the scribe is less observant of his original principles in prose than in poetry. In the poetry, only c. 30% of the *ok*-signs are copied as Z, but in the prose, c. 40% of the signs are copied in this way (cf. Lindblad 1954, pp. 251 & 286). In his outset, however, the scribe is equally ardent. Therefore his esteem for the poetry seems higher than his respect for the prose. This regard can be explained as on the one hand, respect for ancient and authentic poetry and on the other, a less respectful attitude to the prose inserted by the compiler (cf. Lindblad 1954, pp. 284 ff.).

If we check the break points in Figures 4a & b with their relation to the formal subsections indicated by the headings, we can sharpen our analysis (cf. Tables 1 and 3). The two first points coincide with the beginning of the sections *fra sonom hravðvngs konungs* (l. 1) and *fra egi oc godvm* (l. 60), but the third one (l. 110) is situated within the section *fra hiorvarþe oc sigrlin* and its poem. The fourth and the fifth break point mark the beginning of *fra valsungom* (l. 150) and *fra davþa sinfiotla* (l. 210) respectively. The marked drop in frequency of 7 after the lacuna (Fig. 4a, l. 330) makes it reasonable to suggest that there was a break point also in the lacuna. This means that four of the visible points concur with the beginning of a section and one does not. The invisible point may or may not have coincided with the beginning of a section. Up to line 110 and between lines 150 and 210 it would seem that the scribe writes the occa-

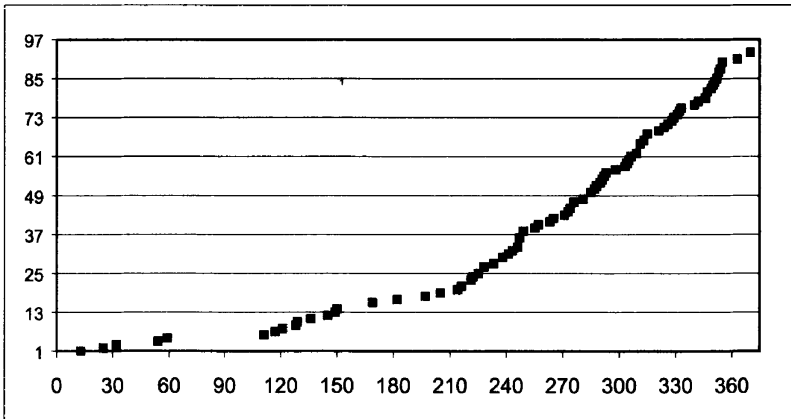
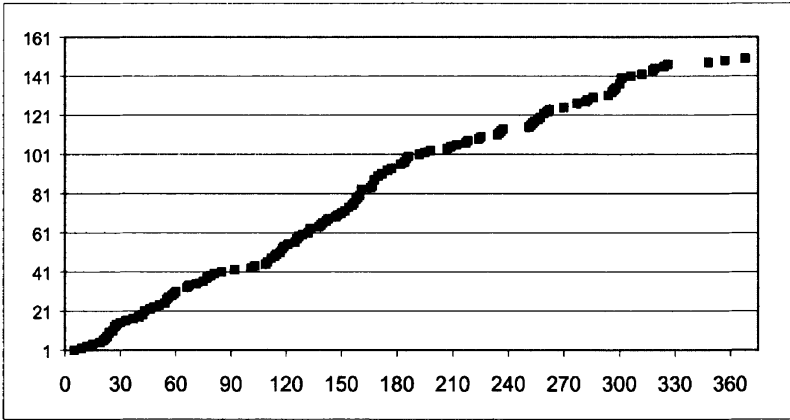


Fig. 4a and b. The use of '7' (a) and 'z' (b) as signs for the word *ok*, based on Wimmer and Jónsson 1891.

sional Z if he does not concentrate on *not* doing it. The fact that the frequent use of the sign in lines 110–150 does not correspond to a section or poem, indicates that the scribe for a while became less strict. Lines 110–150 fall within only four pages (pp. 44–47) and the scribe's setback could therefore be no more than the result of a bad afternoon. The change introduced in line 210, however, indicates that the scribe realized that he could not stop the occasional Z from sneaking into the manuscript, and accordingly, he gave up trying. In the end he decided to use only Z, but happened, nonetheless, to copy the occasional 7. Generally speaking, the scribe's propensity for obeying orthographic rules rather

Table 3. The distribution of prose lines in Regius. Based on Wimmer ok Jónsson 1891.

Start	End	No. of lines		Section	
16:31	17:27	29	29	Grímnismál, prologue	Part I
21:05	21:14	10	39	Grímnismál and För Skírnis, prologue	
21:31	22:02	03	42	För Skírnis	
23:24	23:25	01	43	För Skírnis	
23:30	23:32	03	47	Hárbarðlióð, prologue	
29:03	29:16	14	61	Fra Egir ok goðum	
29:25	29:27	03	64	Lokasenna	
30:01	30:02	01	65	Lokasenna	
32:15	32:15	01	66	Lokasenna	
32:17	32:18	01	67	Lokasenna	
33:06	33:11	06	73	Fra Loki	
35:04	35:18	15	88	Fra Völundi	
36:16	36:18	02	90	Fra Völundi ok Niðaði	
36:21	36:24	03	93	Fra Völundi ok Niðaði	
43:04	43:16	12	105	Fra Hjörvarði ok Sigrlinn	Part II
43:24	43:25	01	106	Fra Hjörvarði ok Sigrlinn	
43:28	44:07	13	119	Fra Hjörvarði ok Sigrlinn	
44:15	44:17	02	121	Fra Hjörvarði ok Sigrlinn	
44:21	44:27	06	127	Fra Hjörvarði ok Sigrlinn	
46:03	46:14	12	139	Fra Hjörvarði ok Sigrlinn	
46:23	46:26	03	141	Fra Hjörvarði ok Sigrlinn	
46:28	46:29	01	142	Fra Hjörvarði ok Sigrlinn	
47:12	47:21	10	152	Fra Hjörv. ok Sigrlin and Fra Völsungi	
47:23	47:27	03	155	Fra Völsungi	
47:31	47:31	01	156	Fra Völsungi	
48:01	48:06	05	161	Fra Völsungi	
48:23	48:32	10	171	Fra Völsungi	
49:08	49:15	08	179	Fra Völsungi	
49:16	49:22	06	185	Fra Völsungi	
49:24	49:25	01	186	Fra Völsungi	
49:31	49:31	01	187	Fra Völsungi	
50:01	50:01	01	188	Fra Völsungi	
50:13	50:17	04	192	Fra Völsungi	
51:07	51:09	02	194	Fra Völsungi	
51:11	51:13	02	196	Fra Völsungi	
51:16	51:17	01	197	Fra Völsungi	
51:20	51:20	01	198	Fra Völsungi	
51:32	52:01	03	201	Fra Völsungi	
52:07	52:10	03	204	Fra Völsungi	
52:14	53:20	38	242	Fra dauða Sinfiotla and Grípisspá	
56:30	57:11	15	257	Reginismál	
57:19	57:21	02	259	Reginismál	
57:23	57:27	04	263	Reginismál	

58:01	58:03	02	265	Reginsmál
58:07	58:11	04	269	Reginsmál
58:18	58:24	06	275	Reginsmál
58:26	58:28	02	277	Reginsmál
59:01	59:01	01	278	Reginsmál
59:14	59:15	01	279	Fafnismál
59:17	59:24	07	286	Fafnismál
60:31	61:01	02	288	Fafnismál
61:09	61:10	01	289	Fafnismál
61:20	61:25	05	294	Fafnismál
62:07	62:09	02	296	Fafnismál
62:19	62:33	15	311	Fafnismál and Sigdrífumál
63:04	63:05	01	312	Sigdrífumál
63:09	63:18	07	319	Sigdrífumál
Lacuna				
66:02	66:13	11	330	Fra dauþa Sigurðar and Guðrunarkv I
67:30	68:01	05	335	Guðrunarkv I
71:30	71:34	04	339	Sigurðarkv iii
72:25	73:06	16	355	Sigurðarkv iii Guðrunarkv ii
75:24	75:26	03	358	Guðrunarkv iii
76:12	76:14	03	361	Oddrúnargrátr
78:08	78:11	03	364	Oddrúnargrátr
81:08	81:09	01	365	Atlakviða
87:12	87:20	08	373	Atlamál
90:23	90:23	01	374	Hamðismál

than copying strictly causes him to change, but he structures his change with an eye to the formal sections of the manuscript.

The general need for *ok* is relatively constant, forming a fairly straight line in Figure 5, but some characteristics are worth commenting on. The first section, for one, is not represented here since it contains no prose. The divide between the second and the third section, i.e. between the first and second part of the manuscript, is located in an area where there is little need for the word. The plateau around the divide in line 93, a plateau signifying the scattered use of the word, reflects a situation in which there are only a few explaining facts to be related and thus no need to make up series of conjunct explanatory phenomena. The character of the distribution is congruent with the decision to end and begin the first and second part with a free-standing lay (*alvis mal* and the first of the *queþi fra helga hundings bana*).

It seems typical for a section interpolated with prose that it begins with a low frequency of the word. Then the need grows, but towards the end there is again less to explain and the frequency drops. The lacuna

between Sections III and IV makes a clear cut into the third section, but seems to have spared most of the fourth. Although some of Section IV is no doubt lost, it is still obvious that it was constructed in the same way as the second one: a hesitant start, and an increase followed by a drop in frequency. The third section was probably built in the same way, although today the end is lost.

The analysis of headlines, prose and *ok*-signs defines a framework: two main parts, each divided into two thematic sections. The two central sections are interpolated with prose and encapsulated by the two other ones in which prose, if there is any, does not interfere with the poetry. Indirectly, the use of *ok* indicates the explicatory function of the prose. The framework helps the interpretation of Regius which, due to the framework, must now be understood as a composition rather than a collection.

Conscious Composition

Some authors think that their private letters, collected and composed with the occasional emendation and a minimum of tact, make up an autobiographical novel. In *Han och hon*, Strindberg, tactlessly depicting his relation with Siri von Essen, is the incarnation of the pathologically interesting example (cf. Landquist 1919, pp. 232 ff.; Crawford 1993, pp. 136 f.). Our compiler, albeit with a seemingly less egocentric point of departure, probably felt that a composition of poetry and tales could make up a literary work. Strindberg, forced by his editor, whose daughter Jenny Bonnier copied the letters with some small changes, eventually dropped his letter novel and wrote most of *Le plaidoyer d'un fou* — (A Madman's Defense), based on the material. In our case, we may venture to say that *Völsunga saga*, beyond defending its element of utter madness, is a saga in part based on material from Sections III and IV. Let us suppose, therefore, that Jenny Bonnier's copy of the arranged letters *Han och hon*, and the scribe's copy of the arranged poetry 'Regius' have the same relation to the literary project inasmuch as they are collected, emended and composed texts.

Strindberg's decision, or the fact that perhaps only *Völsunga saga* is based on Regius, must not prevent us from interpreting both *Han och Hon* and Regius as they stand. Indeed, it is tempting to bundle everything into a wide interpretation of women as a male problem backed up by myth in the 1870s and onwards. Confident that this has already been done, I confine myself to a more commonplace interpretation of Regius.

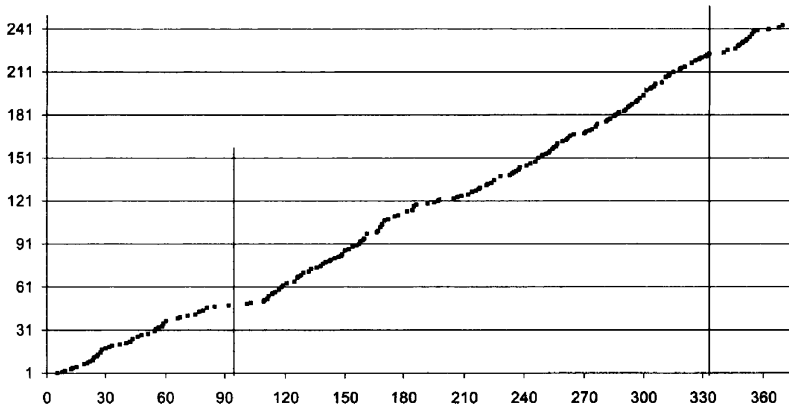


Fig. 5. The use of the word *ok* as reflected by the use in the prose of Regius of the signs 7 and z. The diagram shows the cumulative distribution of the word.

A Basic Interpretation

Regius is a reflexive composition — the first part reflected in the second one. Most of the editing work has been put into the second section of the first part and the first section of the second one. These two sections are juxtaposed and should be read as complementary. They develop the same theme from two different aspects. The outer sections, I and IV, are made up of poems more loosely related to the subject.

The composition is binary, and the first part, as well as the second, are complete compositions. The parts too are binary, but the first sections in each part are incomplete compositions. We cannot let the section come to an end with *vafþrúðnis mal* without asking ourselves what point there is in this mixture of earnest and ironic, cryptic and plain wisdom that signifies Section I. Likewise, the tragedy of the *Volsungs* demands an answer to the question: 'What happened afterwards?' For a basic interpretation however, Sections II and III are the essential ones.

The second section consists of 8 parts: (1) *fra sonom hravðvngs konungs*, (2) *grimnis mal*, (3) *harbarz lioð*, (4) *þor ðro miðgarz orm*, (5) *fra egi oc goðvm*, (6) *þryms quíða* (7) *fra volunði* and (8) *alvis mal*. The well known poems *Skirmismál* and *Lokasenna* are apparently not there. They have disappeared into *grimnis mal* and *fra egi oc goðvm* making up the last parts of these subsections. Probably they are ranked as subsections because the compiler was unwilling to present extracts of larger poems as poems or sections in their own right. Their treatment is suggestive,

and what remains of the poems is probably as significant as what is left out. In the composition they are both meant to be dialogues and express a sense of nearness. This is especially true of *för Skirmis* in which the actual description in poetic form of the *för*, i.e. the 'journey', has been cut away to lay bare the dialogues reflecting passion, falling in love, being in love and wooing — with a detour to sexual abuse. Likewise, in *fra egi oc goðvm* we get a summary of verses leading up to the actual quarrel, termed *loka sena*.

In the first poem we have lost most of *Skirmi* and the journey; in the second one we have lost a social setting in which gods and giants, some twenty middle-aged, partly frustrated, and by blood and marriage related gentry, meet in one of the local halls. The host and fifteen or so of his guests, attended by four servants, have come together to talk, eat and drink. They get reasonably drunk, but the situation goes out of hand mostly due to Loki's frustration with their middle-aged fake decency and hall-life front. In his abuse he points out that everybody knows how they used to fool around and how they probably still sneak out now and then.

Loki is a Grendel character, criticising hall society and seeking destruction rather than power, but in this part of the section the compiler is not interested in the sociology of hall society or in Grendels; instead he focuses on the relationship between men and women, not least the sexual aspects.

Generally speaking, however, the whole thematic section is staged in the hall-governed society, and its topic is the conflicts of this society on an individual level. Seen principally from a male point of view, the section is a model from mythic or remote times of a rural society with dominating farms and arranged marriages. There is travelling in this landscape between halls, and deeds to be performed by men. Eventually, women as a male problem become more acute and we hear of the emancipated woman whom nobody should expect to sit decently in her father's hall, waiting for a suitor. The concluding lay, *alvis mal*, selects the humorous conflict between a girl's father and the suitor to symbolise one of the roots of the social and personal tensions building up around the marriage institution. Humour, irony, gods, myth, distance and deviance are all there to give the section a didactic touch and to produce a 'Verfremdung' effect, promoting the understanding of a social play. There is a point in the fact that it is hard to identify with the persons involved. It makes us laugh and criticise at the same time, structuring our insights into social life.

Section II is a thematic background for Section III. Its contents reflect a

narrative complex in which we find both positive myth and inversion of tales as well as the far-reaching transformation of an original myth about married life.

The compiler's method consists of cutting up and putting together everything (theme and digressions) in front of our eyes without taking chronology and context into account. The result may at first look like the regular joints of a carcass arranged to give the impression that all essential pieces are there. But vital parts are missing. The most obvious type of missing poems are lays like *Rigsþula* in which the relation between men and women as well as rural social life is depicted as natural, good and orderly. The fact that Venantius Fortunatus' poems to Sigebert and Brunhild reflect the same kind of happy Germanic order, based upon the same kind of positive myth about blessed marriage and positive hall life, makes it likely that the compiler has chosen to suppress an ideal of normality (cf. Herschend 1998, pp. 94 ff.). There could well have been good social and artistic reasons for doing so — Venantius' poems and *Rigsþula* are rather dull — and the historical poems in the third section underpin a critical attitude to any positive view upon the relationships within the upper or heroic classes between men and women. *Rigsþula* simply does not fit in. Such a lack of fit is natural only if pagan normality is out of the question, i.e. if one's literary project focuses upon the personal tragedy of the victims of a power struggle rather than on the good individual (cf. Herschend 1998, pp. 149 ff.).

Today Section III, i.e. the first section of the second part of the manuscript, consists of only three subsections before the lacuna sets in: *queþi fra helga hvndings bana*, *fra hiorvarþe oc sigrlin* and *fra valsungom*. In Section III, we find ourselves in essence dealing with the same theme as in Section II. In the third section, however, there is less distance between the events and the reader. We come closer to women and conflict; closer to fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, husbands, sons- and brothers-in-law, i.e. closer to real-life tragedy and fate.

Male fantasy is still in focus, now and then channelled into flattering tales about female sexual emancipation or deviant tendencies such as necrophily with a beloved hero and husband. The hero's sense of being accompanied in traumatic situations by someone who loves him, when in fact heroes or men are not, adds to the reader's identification with the leading figures. By and large the ironic distance has disappeared and traumatic tragedy entered the manuscript. Sympathy and compassion lie with the male heroes, who are victims, while women are more incomprehensible, fanatic and deviant.

The second part and Section III is introduced by a single poem, stressing the main subject, and concluded with a series of poems, Section IV, related to the historical setting in which Section III is set.

Conclusion

When Preben Meulengracht Sørensen discussed the Saga of Haakon the Good (1991, pp. 235 ff.), he concluded that Snorri did not seek to give a correct antiquarian account of the king. Factuality was not Snorri's point. On the contrary, his purpose was to understand, in his day and age, what happened in the past. We can say that he wrote in order to *understand* rather than to *explain* (cf. v. Wright 1971). In this situation there was no need to turn facts upside down and nothing, factually speaking, right or wrong — his method was choice and his aim interpretation. As an example of Snorri's method it can be shown that Snorri's understanding was partly different from that of Kormak Ögmundersson, who commented upon Sigurd's feast in a 10th century stanza quoted by Snorri. This difference between Kormak and Snorri is a difference in emphasis of interpretation only, and the fact that Snorri did not comment upon the second half of Kormak's stanza, does not mean that he opposed its meaning. He just thought that his own point of view was more essential than Kormak's. Obviously Snorri felt no need to suppress Kormak's comment on the feast, and there was no point in suppressing it, inasmuch as Snorri was not trying to prove anything (cf. Herschend 1997, pp. 86 f.).

In a similar perspective we ought also to see the original and Regius. That is, as a wish in the 13th century to understand a historical situation, rooted in Merovingian times, reflected in an out-dated mythological understanding of the relation between men and women, and in the political setting around aristocratic or royal matchmaking and marriage. The story about Volsungs and Co. is no doubt an interesting model in the Icelandic power struggle in the 13th century AD (Sigurðsson 1999, pp. 71 ff.). But it is also obvious from the composition of the manuscript that the compiler wishes to mirror his story in a complex and pagan cultural setting different from his own Christian one. That is why he collects a number of poems relating to the problematic relationship between men and women, but also the reason why he supplies his composition with an overcoat of poems — i.e. cosmological poems, and historical lays about his leading figures — with a general relation to his themes. He does this, not to prove himself correct: On the contrary, he does is

because these poems and tales existed and could be chosen. A Christian, indirectly commenting upon the past, the compiler has a tendency at first to ridicule a non-Christian mythological and moral complex. Later he depicts the power struggle of an unspecified late pagan society as catastrophe. Christian attitudes to a heathen past come to the fore in Regius and remind us of the early Christian Germanic attitude, e.g. in *Beowulf*. *Beowulf* too is a binary tale about the shortcomings of a heathen past.

Some editors stress the foresight of the compiler in his choice of lays and verses (cf. Dronke 1969, pp. xi). Others have found faults (cf. Bugge 1867, p. xxv, Heusler 1937, § 22, pp. 20 f.). But the prevailing feeling we get from reading Regius is nevertheless one of alienation from the depth and tragedy of the subject. The compiler has disguised his personal attitude by means of his method and has put together a work in which the air of collection makes the reader lose sight of the earnestness of the predicament. Today the complementary relationship between Sections II and III does not help us to understand, and as a work of art Regius does not disclose an original artist. For all we know, the compiler may have been a young man of modest heroic disposition, in love with a girl of modest emancipation, incapable of breaking up her arranged engagement to the oaf of the neighbouring farm — a couple, that is, less radical than August and Siri. Obviously he could also have been a moral writer who, in a state of civil war, tried to stigmatise some of the ideals lurking behind the power struggle of his own society and at the same time defend his old-fashioned, Christian, and kingless Icelandic, attitude (cf. Meulengracht Sørensen 1991, p. 235).

With the tyranny of old norms and tragedy at hand, and good literary expression still within reach in stanzas as often as not perfected by oral tradition and time, it is easy also for the banal to find profound expressions of sentiments which are at best commonplace. This lack of depth or feeling of alienation is so strong that from the rediscovery of the manuscript in the 17th century and onwards, the literary qualities of Regius were considered negligible. Literarily speaking they are, source critically speaking, they are not. Regius is a purposeful composition rather than a fair collection. As a composition it is harmless, but as a collection it distorts our view on late pagan mentality. It draws a line of demarcation between an Icelandic 13th century attitude, in itself most interesting, and what would seem to be a much more commonly shared Northwest European attitude to aristocratic life during the Late Iron Age. It is worth pointing out that a better understanding of Late Iron

Age mentality resides within a normality that lies behind the distorted reflections in Codex Regius 2365, 4^{to}.

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