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The Materiality of Medieval Texts

A comparison between *Elie de Saint-Gille* and two versions of *Elís saga*

In this paper I will focus on the material appearance of medieval texts as indicators of various aspects of the processes of production, transmission and reception. My material is comprised of three versions of one text, originating from different temporal and geographical contexts. The first version is the Old French *chanson de geste Elie de Saint-Gille* as preserved in the manuscript BnF, fr. 25516 from the second half of the 13th century; the second version is *Elís saga*, a rewriting of the Norwegian translation of an Old French version, as found in the Norwegian manuscript De la Gardie 4-7 Folio from around 1270; the third version is an Icelandic rewriting and adaptation of *Elís saga*, as it appears in the manuscript Holm Perg 6 4to from around 1400–1425. First, I will give a short presentation of the layout, content and provenance of the three manuscripts. Thereafter, I will comment on the possible implications these

The article is based on a paper given at the 22nd Arthurian Congress, Rennes, 15th – 20th of July 2008.

Eriksen, Stefka G., M.Phil., PhD student, Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies, University of Oslo. "The Materiality of Medieval Texts: A comparison between *Elie de Saint-Gille* and two versions of *Elís saga*", *ANF* 124 (2009), pp. 69–87.

Abstract: In this article, I discuss possible implications of the physical characteristics of a medieval manuscript for our understanding of the production, transmission, reception and function of the texts within the manuscript. Three versions of the same text-work from three different codicological and cultural contexts provide the empirical evidence for the discussion. The first version is the 13th century *chanson de geste Elie de Saint-Gille*, the second one is the 13th century Norwegian *Elís saga* and the third one is a 15th century Icelandic version of *Elís saga*. I argue that the three versions, having different material characteristics and being produced in different scribal milieus, may seem to have been demanded and appreciated by different types of audiences, possibly performed in different modes and therefore probably understood in different ways. Thus, variance appears as a central aspect of the production, transmission and reception of medieval texts.

Key words: New philology, materiality, *Elie de Saint-Gille*, *Elís saga*, translated *riddarsögur*, reception and function of medieval texts.

physical characteristics may have for our understanding of the production, transmission, reception and function of the three versions in their respective codicological and cultural contexts.

BnF, fr. 25516

BnF, fr. 25516 is the only medieval Old French manuscript containing the poem *Elie*. The codex contains 209 folios, about 25 x 18 cm in size, with a written area of about 19 x 14,4 cm. The text appears in two columns of 36 lines of verse in *gothica textualis*. All texts are written in the same good, legible hand and illustrated by the same artist, which makes the codex appear as a planned entity. The style of the script, decorations, marginalia and flourishes suggest that the manuscript dates from the end of the 13th century. Each new text begins on a recto, with an illumination of 10–11 lines spanning an entire column, and sometimes including details in gold (see Fig. 1). The text itself is framed by figurative drawings, which include depictions of birds, animals and people. There are also pen-flourished initials of two and three lines, alternating red and blue, which structure the texts in chapters. The initials correspond, in addition, both to a rhythmical emphasis (change in assonance) and rhetorical emphasis, such as direct speech repetitions, temporal adverbs, etc. (Oberfell 1996: 318–319; Eriksen forthcoming). The manuscript may be characterized as richly illuminated with a total of fifty illuminations. The illustration program is interesting, since the images tend to emphasize certain episodes/motives from the text, while the text focuses on others. The illustrations do not represent battle-scenes, for example, which are often described in the text, but rather focus on various perspectives of courtly life. The iconography may also be characterized as emphasizing the didactic and Christian meaning of the text and sometimes emphasizing the rhetorical topos in the text itself (Oberfell 1996, Malicote 1999). This has implications for the intended reception mode of the poem, since the text may have been understood differently by a listener who did not have visual access to the manuscript vs. a listener who had visual access to the manuscript or a private reader.

The manuscript contains four texts, some of which are sometimes identified as a *chanson de geste*, sometime as a romance. The first text is *Boeve de Haumtone*, which is inspired by an Anglo-Norman legend and dates from the beginning of the 13th century. It is a hybrid of romance and epic, retelling the story of a pre-conquest rule of Southampton, a



Fig. 1. Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 25516, f. 76r – front page of *Elie de Saint-Gille*.

Christian-Saracen conflict and a love story; the plot takes place over a large geographical area between Germany and Egypt (Busby 2002:498). The second and third texts, *Elie de Saint-Gille* and *Aiol*, form a cycle: there is a close connection between the two texts when it comes both to the subject matter and to the characters. Both texts are preserved exclusively in this Paris manuscript, and are of Picardian origin. The theme of the Christian-Saracen conflict is significant here again and, in this sense, there seems to be a thematic connection to the first text in the manuscript. The fourth chanson, *Robert le Diable*, is Picardian as well, and is dated to the end of the 12th century. It is a story of a duchess from Normandy who has difficulties in begetting children, and invokes the Devil as a last means of conceiving. The son who is born as a result has troubles because of his particular origin. The story, however, ends more as a hagiographical/didactic text, since the protagonist repents, goes on a pilgrimage to Rome, and after ten years of penitence, becomes a hermit and dies solemnly (de Winter 1985:235). The combination of the different types of texts may be seen as an example of a tendency to include different types of texts in the same manuscript (Busby 2002:403).

The protagonists and themes of the last three texts may be interpreted as literary parallels to historical figures and events as described by authors like Orderic Vitalis and Wace. Elie, for example, has been seen as a literary rendering of Hélias, the last count of Maine and a great ancestor of the house of Flanders (Malicote 2006:103). He was the great-grandfather of Count Philippe and King Henry II, and is known to have won the battle of Tinchebray together with Henry I, which resulted in the unification of England and the Duchy of Normandy. The battle is also the final event of Wace's *Roman de Rue*. In this battle, one of Hélias' enemies was Robert de Vellême, "Robert le diable", which may be seen as another parallel between literary and historical figures. Seen from this perspective, the poem is about an important ancestor of the House of Flanders who manages to unite two important dynasties. The poem may also be interpreted as a comment on the ancestry of Henry II, emphasizing the importance of the connection between England and Normandy and possibly propagating the new socio-political ethics of peaceful and judicious Christian rule (Malicote 2006:105). The link to the English context may also be a possible link to the precise transmission route of the poem from France to Norway.

Based on the style of the illuminations, the manuscript may be said to originate from the northeast of France. It may be situated as part of the group of manuscripts produced either in the diocese of Thérouanne or

that of Arras, by a commissioner related to the House of Flanders. The style of the illustrations brings to mind the workshop of the Master of the Grail and, to some extent, the workshop of an Artesian version of *Lancelot* from 1274 (de Winter 1985:235).

The northeast, corresponding more or less to the medieval Duchy of Flanders, encompassed some of the greatest cultural centers of medieval France, like Amiens, Arras, Lille and Tournai. The area was also politically prominent in the Middle Ages, since it functioned as a separate kingdom, with strong aristocracy, such as the counts of Flanders, the Houses of Boulogne, Artois, Brabant and Hainaut. The area was also a commercial center based initially on wool trade, and later on finance and banking (Busby 2002:513). The extensive book production tradition in the 13th and 14th centuries may also be related to the great ecclesiastical institutions of the region. The close relationship between authors, aristocratic audience and patrons is characteristic of the texts produced here, and there are comparatively many authors known from the area. Almost all central texts and genres exist from important manuscripts from the northeast, like Chrétien's romances and several of the *chanson de geste* cycles. Some texts are preserved only in a single north-eastern manuscript, as is the case with *Elie de Saint-Gille* and *Aiol* and *Robert le Diable*. Approximately 50 % of all surviving Old French manuscripts were copied in the area, which represents a vast proportion compared to the relatively small geographical area (Busby 2002:535).

The manuscript is also recorded as a part of the collection of Marguerite de Flandre, but many of her books were inherited either from her father Louis de Male (died 1384) or his mother (died 1382) (de Winter 1985). And despite the lateness of this ownership, compared to the date of origin of the manuscript, it is plausible that the manuscript was also originally read in similar aristocratic circles.

Hákon Hákonarson, brother Robert and Old Norse translations

The Anglo-Norman *Elie de Saint Gille* was translated to Old Norse after the commission of Hákon Hákonarson, king of Norway between 1217–1263, at least according to the epilogue of one of the versions of the Old Norse text. The king is mentioned as a commissioner in four more translations of Old French romances: *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, *Ívens saga*,

Strengleikar and *Möttuls saga*. Most of these texts and dedications appear, however, in manuscripts written much later than the original translations. In the case of *Elís saga* and *Strengleikar*, which appear in a manuscript written a couple of decades later than the original translations, there may be little reason to doubt the dedications. In the case of *Tristrams saga*, however, which appears in a 17th century Icelandic paper manuscript, the dedications to King Hákon may very well have been added by the 17th century scribe for a specific reason fitting the 17th century temporal and geographical context. The uncertainty around the historical validity of the dedications does not render them uninteresting, but rather emphasizes the necessity to interpret and discuss their significance from other points of view, such as, for example, the function of dedications in general, or links to a historical past.

One more name appears in connection with two of these texts, that of Robert, first as a brother translating *Tristrams saga*, and then as an abbot translating *Elís saga*. Not much more is known of him, besides the fact that he was obviously involved in a monastic community and that he may have been of Anglo-Norman origin, as the name Robert is not Scandinavian. The Anglo-Norman provenance of the Cistercian monasteries at Hovedøya, near Oslo, and Lyse, near Bergen, has been suggested in this connection. These were both founded as daughter-monasteries of the English Fountains Abbey in 1146 (Tveitane 1972:32). Robert may have been working at one of those places, translating or copying European romances.

Bearing this in mind, the kingship of Hákon Hákonarson may function as the background context for the Old Norse translation. King Hákon has been accredited with great political and cultural achievements during his reign. With the pronouncement of Hákon as king in 1217, and the assassination of his rival Skuli, an almost hundred-year civil war was ended. During his kingship, the Norwegian domain gradually grew and at its greatest in 1265, it included Iceland, Greenland, The Faroe Islands, Shetland, the Orkneys, the Hebrides and The Isle of Man. A new Law of Succession was advanced (1260), and the earlier provincial laws were extensively revised, leading to the development of legislation on a national scale (Helle 2003b: 380). During this state-building process, the concept of the royal office was also altered – kingship by the grace of God replaced the focal position of the king as a person. By a renewed royal ceremony of unction and coronation, which was first introduced in Norway in 1163–64, the king was placed above all others, as a representative of God on earth and as a holder of a divine office (Helle 2003a: 347).

Culturally, besides commissioning literary translations, the king was responsible for new architectural enterprises, such as the Hákon's Hall in Bergen, built in 1261 for the king's son's wedding. He is known to have exchanged letters with the kings of Sweden and Denmark; he was a great friend of the emperor Fredrick II, son of the German emperor Fredrick Barbarossa (HsH: chapter 191, 243, 275), and sent falcons as a present to the sultan of Tunisia (HsH: chapter 313). The marriages of his children also reveal royal relations with various European countries, since the King's daughter was married to a Castilian prince (HsH: chapter 271), and his son, Magnus, to the Danish princess (HsH: chapter 312–313). King Hákon thus appears to have been a monarch with great political and cultural ambitions of elevating his kingship to the level of the great feudal continental monarchies.

De la Gardie 4-7 Folio

The oldest manuscript in which *Elís saga* appears is De la Gardie 4-7 Folio, which has been dated to a couple of decades after the actual translation, and which is quite contemporary to the historical and cultural context described above. The manuscript consists of two fragments, which are more or less the same size of approximately 31 x 23 cm; the vellum is very similar, and the script and language suggest that the two fragments have been written at more or less the same time and place (southwest Norway, in or south of Bergen). The text in the whole manuscript is written in two columns (see fig. 2a and b). Unlike the French version, where *Elie* is a poem in verse, all the texts here are in prose. The only difference between the two fragments is that the first one, containing a fragment of *Óláfs saga Tryggvassonar* is written in much finer and smaller script than the rest, making space for 47 lines per page, contra 39–44 lines per page for the rest. In addition, the condition of the first fragment is comparatively better than the main part of the manuscript. All texts have colored initials – red, green or blue – but these are not completed towards the beginning of the manuscript (see fig. 2a), which may indicate that the illuminator may have worked backwards from the end towards the beginning of manuscript (Tveitane 1972:15–16). It should also be said that there may have been a few illustrations in the manuscript, but these have been torn or carefully cut out, possibly because of inappropriate subject matter.

The De la Gardie 4-7 is the oldest Norwegian collection of courtly

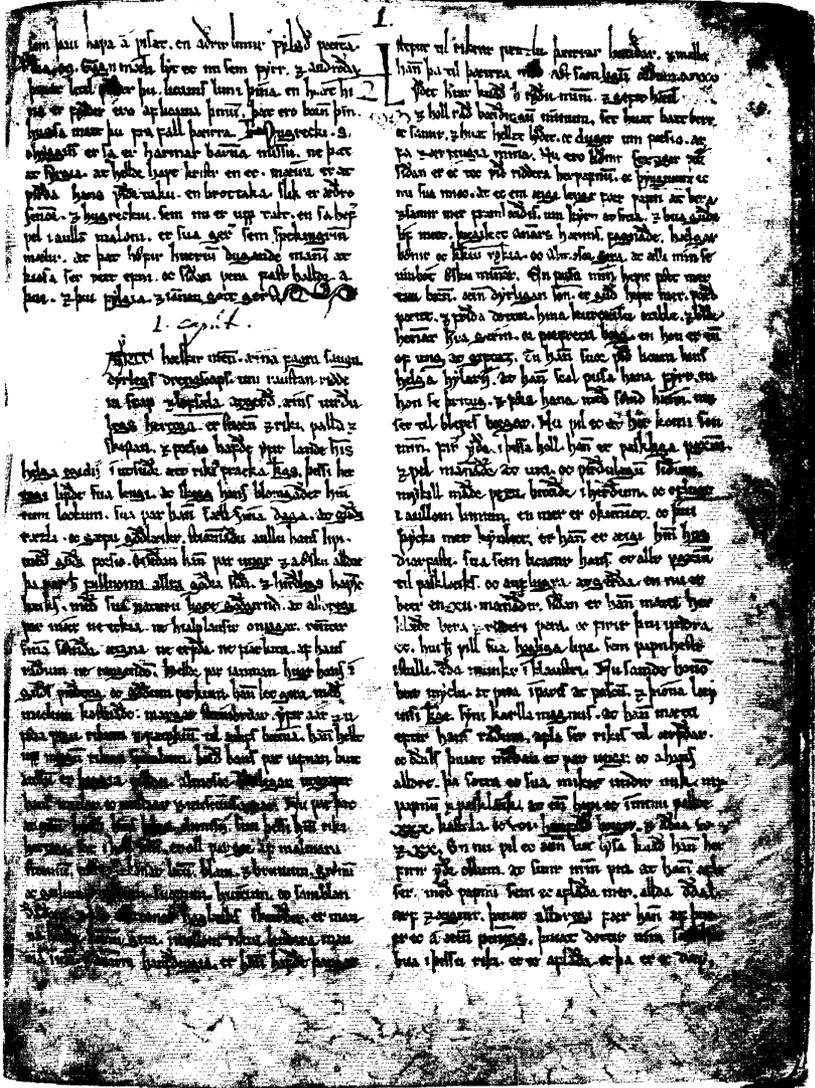


Fig. 2 a. Uppsala University Library, De la Gardie 4-7, f. 6r – front page of *Elis saga*.

literature. In addition to the fragment of *Óláfs saga Tryggvassonar*, “a vernacular version of a lost Latin work by the Icelandic monk, Oddr Snorrason” (I’veitane 1972:9), it also contains *Elis saga*, *Strengleikar*, *Pamphilis*, and a dialogue between *Courage* and *Fear*, from which only 13 lines survive. All these texts are defective to varying degrees.

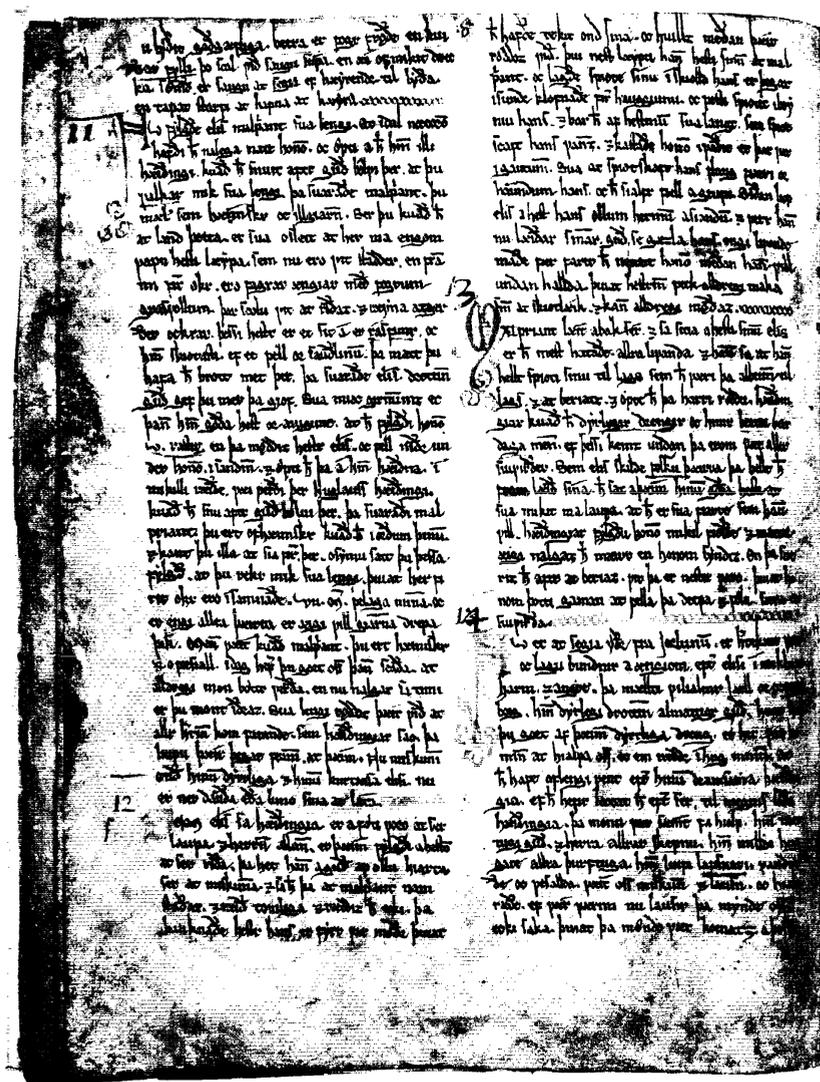


Fig. 2 b. Uppsala University Library, De la Gardie 4-7, f. 9v.

All five texts are translations from Latin or Old French, and place the manuscript in relation to the Latin, classical and Old French vernacular literary tradition. In addition, the Latin or Old French originals seem to have been rather popular texts in their respective contexts. The Latin *Pamphilus de amore* dates from the end of the 12th century and was prob-

ably composed in England or northern France. The thirteen lines from the dialogue between *Courage* and *Fear* were translated from *Moralium dogma philosophorum*, a collection on moral philosophy by the French author Guillaume de Conches (c. 1080–1154), who, himself, built on the pseudo-Senecan *De remediis fortuitorum* (Tveitane 1972:28). *Moralium Dogma* was a very popular work in the whole of Western Europe up to the Reformation. A copy of the translated text, or part of it, is also found in Hauksbók, an Icelandic manuscript from the 14th century. *Strengleikar* is a collection of short stories, including some of the *lais* of Marie de France as well as others without known French originals.

Four different hands have worked on the manuscript – Hand A on *Óláfs saga*, Hand B on *Pamphilis*, the dialogue, and *Elís saga*, Hand C on the beginning of *Strengleikar* and Hand D, which has finished *Strengleikar*. Hand B, C and D follow each other very closely, continuing in the same column as the previous. The language and script of the four hands are very similar, and have even been confused. However, the four hands may be characterized as representing different scribal systems or schools, used at the same time and place (Tveitane 1972:17). Further, the different texts may have been influenced from the language of the original copies. These varieties make “DG 4-7 one of the most varied Norse manuscripts now in existence” (Tveitane 1972:18). Hand B for example makes use of some Icelandicisms, which indicates either that the copy the scribe was working from was Icelandic, or that the scribe himself was Icelandic, schooled in the southwestern dialect. The differences between the two *Strengleikar*-hands may also be interpreted to indicate that either the first was a younger man than the second, or that the first was trained in a more modern school than the second (Tveitane 1972:23).

The different hands have been dated separately, to about 1270 or a bit earlier (Tveitane 1972:20). When it comes to the more precise whereabouts of the scriptorium where these scribes worked, there are two main suggestions, neither of which is certain, however. The manuscript may have originated at Lyse Abbey, where Robert may have been abbot; or it may have been written in the Royal Chancellery in Bergen. In either case, southwest Norway is likely both the manuscript’s place of origin and also where the earliest known owner of the manuscript, or parts of the manuscript, lived (Tveitane 1972:26).

A great deal is known about the owners of the DG manuscript from the end of the 13th century onwards, which is relevant for the discussion on its use and function, and the meaning of the texts in the different contexts. What is more interesting here, however, is the manuscript’s use and

function in its original context. Due to the condition of the back and front leaves of the two constituting manuscripts, Mattias Tveitane (1972: 11) claims that “it appears likely that the first two leaves (the *Óláfs saga* fragment) occupied the same position in the medieval binding as they do now”. He does not situate this medieval binding more precisely in time than as preceding the binding done by one of the manuscript’s owners Stephanus Johannis Stephanius (1599–1650). It is, thus, uncertain whether the two parts of the manuscript were bound together at the end of the 13th century.

The oldest known owner of the *Óláfs saga* fragment, at least, is Snara (or Snare) Aslaksson, one of the leading men under King Hákon V Magnusson (1299–1319). He is mentioned in letters dating back to c. 1296, and these elucidate his gradual social rise in the hierarchy from a man with no title, to a *herra*, to a member of the council of state and a baron (cited from Tveitane 1972: 13–14). There is a possibility that he lived in southwest Norway, in one of the Agder counties or in Rogaland. Tveitane (1972: 14), however, doubts that Snara owned the whole DG collection, even though he does not have any specific arguments for or against. Still, it is possible that the manuscript was owned and read by members of the top aristocratic circles in Norway.

Holm Perg 6 4to

Elís saga is preserved in several late medieval Icelandic manuscripts, and one of these, Holm Perg 6 4to, will function as a basis for comparison to BnF, fr. 25516 and DG 4-7. The manuscript is a collection of romances, consisting of 137 leaves of rather good quality and in good condition. It seems that approximately 39–40 leaves have been lost. The manuscript is built up of 19 gatherings. The size of the leaves is about 23,5 x 16,5 cm, but leaves towards the end are smaller, probably due to later trimming. Several leaves are somewhat irregular in form, or are narrower than the rest; the situation of the script on these pages, however, may be interpreted to indicate that this was the original form of the leaves and not a later deflection (Slay 1972: 11). Despite other minor variations, “the gatherings were originally almost uniform” (Slay 1972: 11).

Unlike the BnF, fr. 25516 and the DG 4-7 manuscripts, the text in this manuscript is written in a single column of prose, and the number of lines per page is the same in most of the gatherings in the manuscript, varying in range between 29 and 33, from gathering to gathering. Most of

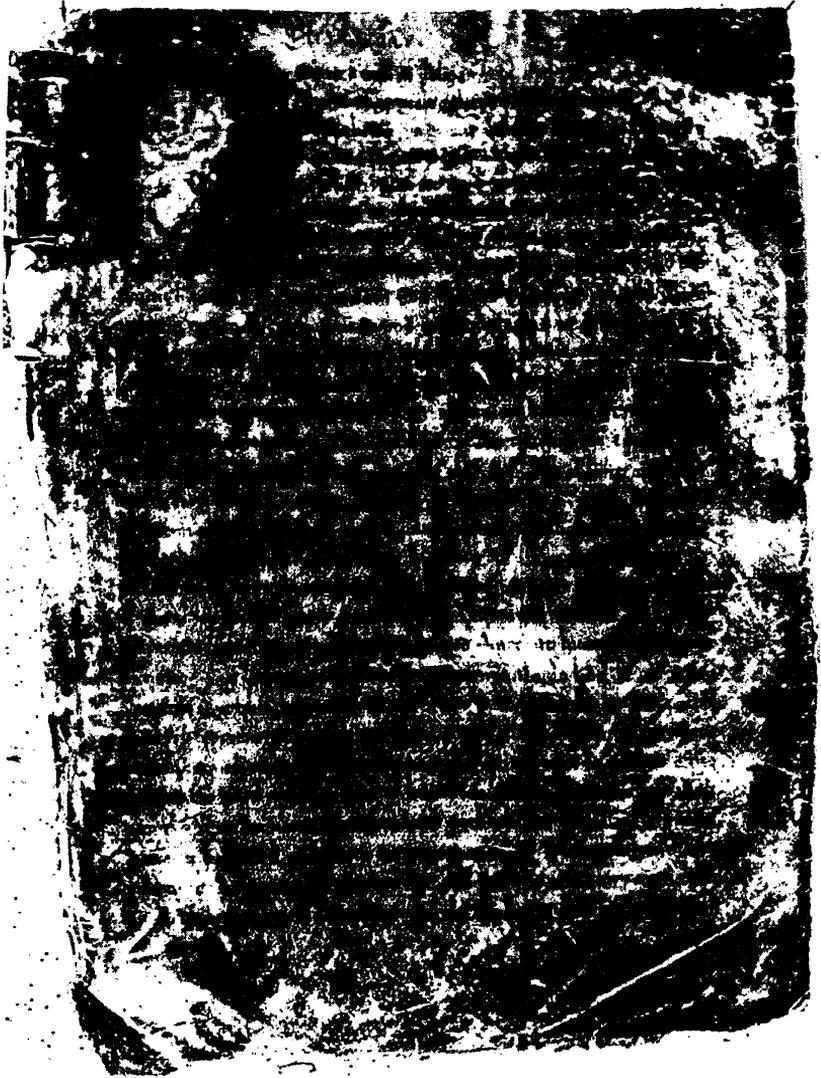


Fig. 3. Royal Library, Sweden, Holm Perg 6 4to, f. 86r – front page of *Elís saga*. Photo from Nordisk Forskningsinstitut, København.

the texts begin on a new page and with a decorated initial, which varies in size, depending on the space available, sometimes containing animal drawings, or floral decorations; see fig. 3 for the front page of *Elís saga*. Five different colors and ink are used in the initials – red, dark red-brown,

turquoise, yellow and light brown – sometimes one at a time, sometimes in combination. Chapters begin with smaller initials, making use of the same colors as the saga initials, but being more poorly drawn, probably by another hand. Most of the sagas have a title in red, and each chapter seems to have been intended to have a heading in red as well, sometimes signified by the word *capitulum*, or an abbreviation of it (Slay 1972: 13). In addition, the manuscript contains gathering catchwords – the first few words of one gathering is written at the right bottom of the last page of the previous gathering. It is plausible that such catchwords existed throughout the manuscript, even though some of them are lost because of missing leaves and trimming. The existence of these catchwords may indicate that the manuscript was intended as an entity from the beginning. The manuscript also begins and ends with a blank page, which may have been included in order to prevent damaging of the initial and final textual passages (Slay 1972: 14).

Almost the entire manuscript is written by Hand A, with the exception of *Elís saga*, which is started by Hand A and finished by Hand B. The transition between the two hands is very gradual, since the second scribe seems to have initially tried to imitate the handwriting of the first scribe. The end of *Elís saga* seems thus to have been written later, on leaves left blank by the first scribe. Scribe A may have known that *Elís saga* has a continuation, unavailable in the copy he was rewriting, for which he left some blank leaves. Bearing in mind that the poem *Elie* functions as a kind of prologue for *Aiol* in the French manuscript, such a scenario of scribal hands sets some expectations for possible similarities between the continuation and *Aiol*. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The presence of the continuation thus makes the three versions of the text rather different, each having different narrative structure and ending.

In addition, scribe A seems to have worked in three stages: first, writing the main body of text, possibly leaving space for *Valvens þáttr* at the end of *Parceval saga*, which he was aware of but did not have available at this stage; thereafter, he wrote in *Valvens þáttr*, filling out the last gathering of *Parceval saga* and inserting a new gathering, smaller than the rest of the gatherings and possibly adjusted to fit the length of *Valvens þáttr*; finally, adding further sagas at the end of the manuscript, from which we have extant only *Möttuls saga* and *Clárus saga* (Slay 1972: 20). The three stages were written more or less at the same time, since the manuscript is dated to the beginning of the 15th century based on paleographical evidence.

An interesting relationship is claimed by Stefán Karlsson (1967) between the two hands of Holm Perg 6 4to and two of the hands in Bergsbók (Holm Perg fol. Nr. 1). He claims that Hand A in Holm Perg 6 4to is identical with Hand A in Bergsbók, who wrote a major part of *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*, four short passages in *Ólafs saga Helga* and the chapter headings throughout the manuscript. Hand B of Holm Perg 6 corresponds to another of the 6 hands in Bergsbók, responsible for a part of *Geisli*. Further, Stefán Karlsson claims that the two manuscripts were contemporary, and establishes a possible order of work of Hand A, based again on paleographical evidence, by characterizing the work on the two manuscripts as interwoven and simultaneous. As mentioned above, Hand A wrote most of Holm Perg 6. This scribe's role in the writing of Bergsbók may seem to have been central as well; not in the sense that he wrote the greatest quantity of text, which he did not, but in the sense of being a kind of supervisor for the scribal process, based on the position and nature of his shares (cited from Slay 1972:20–21). Lindblad (1963) and Stefán Karlsson have even suggested that this scribe was a priest named Guthormr, who is mentioned on folio 113r of Bergsbók. If he was controlling the scribal process of both manuscripts, it may seem that “scribe A intended them for himself” (Slay 1972:22). It may, however, also be that the monk was a supervisor of the scribal process, which was commissioned by and intended for an unknown person.

As mentioned, parts of the Holm Perg 6 4to manuscript are lost, and there are only twelve texts still extant, out of originally more. These are *Amícus saga ok Amilíus*, *Beveris saga*, *Ívents saga*, *Parcevals saga*, *Valvens þáttr*, *Mírmants saga*, *Flóvents saga*, *Elís saga ok Rósamundu*, *Konráðs saga*, *Þjalar Jóns saga*, *Möttuls saga* and *Clárus saga*. This is a combination of translated *riddarasögur* and indigenous Icelandic romances (*Mírmants saga*, *Konráðs saga*, *Jóns saga*). The genre of the source texts for the translations is not always easy to define, ranging between *chanson de geste*, romances and hagiographical/religious texts. The genre of the Old Norse texts themselves is also sometimes difficult to define, as in the case of *Jóns saga*, for example, which shares features from the *riddarasögur* and the *fornaldarsögur*. It is also debatable whether some of the texts are translations or original texts. Earlier scholars of *Mírmants saga*, for example, assumed that the saga was a translation rather than an original text, with a Latin or French original. But there is no concrete evidence for this – it borrows and adapts themes and motifs (Driscoll 1993:414). *Flóvents saga* is problematic as well – it is probably not a translation (despite the insertion of an Old French proverb in one of the

manuscripts), but rather an adaptation of a lost *chanson de geste*, done during king Hákon's reign. There is no connection, besides the name, to the *Chanson de Floovant* (Zitzelsberger 1993:201). *Clárus saga* also has an interesting background history. According to the introduction of the Holm Perg 6 4to – version, the story is a translation from a Latin text found in France, by Jón Halldórsson. Jón is said to have brought back exempla from France which he told orally and which were later written down. It is written in a learned style, with some absolute constructions and Latinisms, which may derive from the lost Latin original (Cook 1993:356). Because of the good representation of motives from various literary genres, the texts in this manuscript embody many traditional literary motives – betrayals, battles, frustrated romances, rescuing of heathen princesses by Christian knights, conversion and marriage; bridal quests, revenge, and gaining of power.

The history of the manuscript is even more scanty and uncertain than that of DG 4-7, especially regarding the primary reception context in the 15th century. There are a couple of traces to the owners of the manuscripts in the 17th century, but these are not certain either. When it comes to the whereabouts of the manuscript in the 15th century, not much can be said. Some verses are suggested to have been written in the manuscript in the 15th century, on its last folio, which was originally left blank. Based on the paleography of the verses, it may be suggested that the man who wrote them had learned to write in the northern part of Iceland (Slay 1972:22). It is, however, impossible to say, whether the manuscript itself was written in the north.

Implications

What might these specific characteristics of the manuscripts illustrate of the production, transmission and reception of the various versions of the text?

First of all, it appears that one and the same text could be produced by different production teams in the Middle Ages. I use the term *production team* since there were many people involved with the production of a text in the Middle Ages, not just an author. So, in the case of the French manuscript, the production of *Elie de Saint-Gille*, would have needed an author who wrote the original poem, scribes who copied the text, including the one who wrote in our manuscript, illuminator, binder, gold and silversmiths, etc. The commissioner may be included in the production

team as well, since it was the economical situation, taste and interest of the commissioner that often determined what the layout of a manuscript would be in medieval France.

Most of these may be indirectly related to DG 4-7 as well, even though those directly involved with the production of the manuscript were probably the scribes at the monastery or royal chancellery, and a possible commissioner/compiler for the whole manuscript. Others indirectly involved in the production team may have been King Hákon as a commissioner of the original translations of *Strengleikar* and *Elis saga*, the translator(s), other people involved in the translating process (jongleurs or scribes), etc.

All these indirect participants are also relevant for Holm Perg 6 4to, but their role becomes much more distant, vague and a matter of conjecture. The production team of the manuscripts possibly consisted of the priest Guthorm and the other scribe who wrote, and a possible commissioner/compiler.

The three versions of the text seem to have been read or listened to by three different types of audience groups. In the first case, the link between the Duchy of Flanders and the manuscript may indicate that the poem *Elie* was read or listened to by aristocrats with considerable cultural competence, political power and religious aspirations. Based on the illustrations, often depicting a teaching scene, the poem has also been claimed to have functioned as a tool of teaching the noble court in matters of ethics and secular governance (Malicote 2006: 110). The poem may also seem to be intended to comment upon and correct earlier vernacular narratives, and to exemplify how *chansons de geste* should be constructed. It is also known that the book belonged to Margaret of Flanders, which defines even more closely the type of audience that appreciated *Elie*, not only at the time of the production of the manuscript, but for a while afterwards as well. Many manuscripts containing cyclical *chansons de geste* were also produced in the northeast at that time. Many of the texts and the illustrations in these manuscripts emphasize the Christian-pagan conflict, which was also the theme in several of the texts in BnF, fr. 25516, and may thus literally relate the House of Flanders and important events in the Holy Land.

When it comes to the type of audience of *Elís saga*, if judged from the materiality of DG 4-7, it may have been either monastic, as for example, monks at the monastery, where the text was translated and copied, or lay aristocratic, as for example, members of the court or individuals like Snara Aslaksson. Thus, it seems that the intended audiences of both ver-

sions of the text possibly belonged to the top social class of the respective societies, and were, in this sense, similar. Yet, it should be remembered that there were great differences, in terms of members and cultural competence, between the top social class in northeast France and in Norway in the second half of the 13th century. This accentuates the necessity of proper contextualizing of the texts and the manuscripts within their respective text-cultures.

The audience of *Elís saga*, if judged from the materiality of Holm Perg 6 4to may seem to be a different matter. The dedication to king Hákon is gone, and both the physical and metaphorical distance between the royal court and a monk in northern Iceland is considerable. More specifically, the audience may once again have been monks at a monastery, as for example, Guthorm, or a lay commissioner, including his whole family and farm guests.

As a very general conclusion, it may be said that the three versions seem to be intended for a wider audience, albeit one of decreasing social stature, during their journey from one textual culture to another. The three respective groups of audiences may, however, have been at the top of the social ladder in their respective cultures.

The layout of the manuscripts may also be interpreted to indicate a certain intended mode of reception. Despite the difference in size, all the three manuscripts were small enough to have been carried around and read or listen to on different occasions. Titles, headings, ornate initial capitals, and use of different colors may have assisted a prelector in a public reading séance, making it easier for him to find a certain saga or chapter, or providing him with guidance as to where to take pauses of various lengths. It may, however, also be said that the availability of such features may also be interpreted to indicate intention for private reading and study of the texts – one would be able to navigate the contents of the book based on the titles, headings and chapter titles and, without reading everything, find the passage of greatest interest. Thus, again, it may seem that one and the same book and text may have been used in different modes at different times. The three manuscripts share some common features – they all use colors and have ornate initials. However, the differences are more considerable than their similarities. The French manuscript is much more lavish and distinguishes itself with its numerous illustrations, rubrics and titles, structuring and subdividing the text on more levels, than the initials in the other two manuscripts. It should be remembered, however, that in Holm Perg 6 4to, and also in DG 4-7 to some degree, space was left also for titles and chapter names. All in all,

the layout of the three manuscripts is indeed different, and may be interpreted to indicate that a reader of the text in the three different manuscripts would have experienced the text differently, both in terms of the extra meaning dimension provided by the meta-texts, but also in terms of the meaning defined by different patterns of structuring and division by capitals, initials and titles.

The last issue I wish to comment on is the subject matter of the three versions, seen from the perspective of the type of the other texts in the three manuscripts. Although an oversimplification, the following main subjects appear in the three versions. In the French manuscript, the main subject of the poem may be claimed to be the Christian-Saracen conflict or the troubles during the founding of a new Christian kingdom. This main theme may be well explained if the commissioners were the House of Flanders, since it comments on major events from the history of the dynasty. In the Norwegian manuscript, there seems to be some focus on love relationships and moral struggles in *Elís saga* and *Strengleikar*, *Pamphilis* and the dialogue. "Service to the king" as a moral, political and physiologically complex duty may also be seen as a possible meta-theme in *Óláfs saga* and *Elís saga*. *Strengleikar* may also be related to the king in terms of the royal dedication in the prologue. Some of the texts may have served as didactic and moral models for the audience. Such themes may very well be explained if the manuscript was written in the Royal Chancellery. It is difficult to unite the texts from the Icelandic manuscript under one grand theme, as they are so diverse, but the thematic conjunction in the stories is different from that in the Paris or the Norwegian manuscript. One topic, among others, that seems to be emphasized is Christian faith and religion, which may be related to the assumed monastic provenance and audience. In any case, the three manuscripts may easily be regarded as having functioned in different modes because of their different materiality.

The main aim of this article was to illustrate that versions of one and the same text could be produced in very different types of scribal milieus, could be demanded and appreciated by very different types of audiences, possibly performed in different modes and therefore probably understood in different ways. Thus, variance appears as a central aspect of the production, transmission and reception of medieval texts.

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