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The scribes of the *Gráskinna* manuscript of *Njáls saga*

Observations on scribal contact and social identity

The vellum manuscript GKS 2870 4to, dated to around 1300, also known as *Gráskinna*, currently in the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies in Reykjavík, is among the oldest and most important surviving manuscripts of *Njáls saga*. It was written by four scribes belonging to different scribal traditions. As such it offers a valuable opportunity to study contact between scribes representing these different scribal traditions. One orthographic feature, the denotation of the dental fricative /þ/ in non-initial position, will be used as a case study exploring scribal contact and social identity. The scribes of the *Gráskinna* manuscript belong to different orthographic conventions when it comes to denoting the dental fricative in non-initial position. It will be argued that these different orthographic conventions had social connotations at the time, and that the contrast between these different conventions highlighted by scribal contact influenced the orthographic practice of one of the four scribes.

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Abstract: The *Gráskinna* manuscript of *Njáls saga*, GKS 2870 4to, dated to around 1300, is the work of four contemporary scribes, Scribe B, who is responsible for writing the bulk of the text, and three others, Scribes A, C, and D, who wrote shorter sections. The *Gráskinna* manuscript thus offers an opportunity to study the collaboration of four seasoned scribes and compare different aspects of scribal practice. In this paper, one orthographic feature, the denotation of the dental fricative /þ/ in non-initial position, is used as a case study exploring scribal contact and social identity. The scribes differ in the denotation of the dental fricative, and it is suggested that among scribes and readers these differences may have had social and cultural connotations at the time, contrasting at once conventional against modern scribal practice and Icelandic as opposed to Norwegian scribal tradition. It is proposed that contact with Scribes C and D motivated Scribe B to alter his orthographic practice midway in his work, effectively dissociating himself with Scribes C and D and identifying instead with the exemplar from which they copied the text.

Keywords: Medieval Icelandic manuscripts, orthography, scribal practice, scribal contact, scribal identity, *Njáls saga*.

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The *Gráskinna* manuscript and its scribes

GKS 2870 4to, the *Gráskinna* manuscript of *Njáls saga*, probably received its current name *Gráskinna* ‘gray hide’ from its (originally furry but now very worn) sealskin cover. It is a small and worn volume in a limp binding, currently consisting of 121 parchment leaves, measuring approximately 120 × 150 mm, many of which are now quite dark and wrinkled with tears and holes. There are rubrics in red ink throughout (many very faded and illegible) and some initials in red ink, but no illuminations or embellishments. Out of the 121 leaves, 27 are sixteenth-century replacements of leaves that presumably had been lost or severely damaged by then. This was part of an extensive repair effort where patchwork corners with text were sewn onto individual leaves where the original text had been damaged, and faded text was touched up or copied into the margin. These younger leaves and patches are referred to as *Gráskinnuauki* or ‘*Gráskinna* supplement.’ The material aspects of the *Gráskinna* manuscript have been examined and described in detail by Emily Lethbridge (2018), and color images of the entire manuscript are available as part of the online manuscript catalog *Handrit.is*.¹ See also the descriptions by Jón Þorkelsson (1889, 697–706); Kålund (1900, 55–56); Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1953, 7–8, 58–60).

The *Gráskinna* manuscript contains only one text, *Njáls saga*, which is written in a single column throughout, typically 29–30 lines per page. Aside from the sixteenth-century additions, the *Gráskinnuauki*, which falls outside the scope of the present study, the text is written by four principal hands. The identity of these hands is unknown, as is the case with most medieval Icelandic scribes, and in the following they will be referred to as Scribes A, B, C, and D. The division of their work is shown in *Table 1*, following Emily Lethbridge (2018, 66–70).

As is evident from *Table 1*, Scribe B has written the bulk of the text, with Scribe A coming a distant second. Scribe D and, in particular, Scribe C have written only a very small part of the text. It should be kept in mind, though, that several leaves have been lost (most of which were replaced by the sixteenth-century *Gráskinnuauki*), and we do not know who wrote the now lost leaves; the extent of the original contributions by the different scribes is thus unknown. Two leaves have now been lost from the work of Scribe A, and the work of Scribe B is interrupted by two lacunae, the contributions by Scribes C and D, and two *Gráskin-*

¹ Accessible online at: <https://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/is/GKS04-2870>

Table 1. *The four scribes of Gráskinna* and their work (excluding the younger *Gráskinnuauki*).

	<i>Extent</i>	<i>Number of pages</i>	<i>Share of text (%)</i>
Scribe A	1r1–10v16 — Scribe A sections 1–2	19.5	10.4%
	10v17–58v19 — Scribe B sections 1–2		
	59r11–74v13 — Scribe B section 3		
Scribe B	76v1 to end of 87v — Scribe B section 4	164	87.2%
	90r1 to end of 94v — Scribe B sections 5–6		
	97r1 to end of 98v — Scribe B section 7		
Scribe C	58v19 (“a fund sigurðar”) to 59r11 (“fe sitt”)	1	0.5%
Scribe D	74v13 (“sinna frenda ok ellztr”) to end of 76r	3.5	1.9%

nuauki supplements; the work of Scribe B thus now consists of seven sections, as shown in *Table 5* further below. The work of Scribe B may originally have been an uninterrupted whole from 76v1, where he took over from Scribe D, to the end of *Njáls saga*, but the possibility cannot be excluded that one or more other scribes, Scribe A, C, or D or even others, contributed.

There is a general agreement among scholars that the earlier part of *Gráskinna*, the work of Scribes A–D, dates to around 1300 (Jón Þorkelsson 1889, 703; Kålund 1900, 55; Finnur Jónsson 1908, xxxix–xl; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1953, 6–8). The fact that one scribe often takes over from another in the middle of the page, mid-sentence (see below), suggests they were probably contemporaneous (Lethbridge 2018, 67). The identity of the scribes is unknown, as already indicated, and so is the location or the milieu where they worked. The language (see below) and the content material, *Njáls saga*, suggests *Gráskinna* was written in Iceland, rather than, for instance, in Norway. The collaboration of four competent scribes, even if very unequal in terms of quantity, favors the assumption that *Gráskinna* was produced at a center of learning and book production, perhaps associated with one of the two cathedrals in Iceland, Hólar or Skálaholt, or a monastery. The provenance of the *Gráskinna* manuscript is, however, unknown until it came into the possession of Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson (1605–1675) of Skálaholt who sent it to Copenhagen where it was part of the Royal Library (*Gammel kongelig Samling*, GKS) until it was returned to Iceland in 1980 into the custody of the Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavík (Jón Þorkelsson 1889, 697–706; Kålund 1900, 55–56).

Scribal contact and social identity

The collaboration of two or more scribes has the potential of offering a valuable insight into the different aspects of medieval scribal practice. One such area of inquiry regards scribal contact and the interaction between scribes belonging to different scribal traditions or norms.

Handwriting is at once a cognitive skill and a motor skill. It involves both the mapping between phonemes and the graphemes (letters) representing them in alphabetic writing and the coordination of the movements of fingers, wrist, and arm producing the letter forms by a fixed sequence of strokes. For the experienced scribe, this process was largely automatic. A scribe copying a text in the vernacular, reading a written text from an exemplar, or listening to a dictation, processed the text (language) through his subconscious grammar (linguistic competence) before reproducing it in writing. For mapping the phonemes into written symbols (graphemes, letters), the experienced scribe relied on a set of stock symbols and orthographic norms that he had acquired as an apprentice scribe and had subsequently been solidified through years of application. One could think of this as the scribe's subconscious repertoire of symbols or "native" orthography. While writing, the experienced scribe retrieved the letters and their possible variant forms from long-term memory where they were stored as a "motor program" resulting from years of practice (van Galen 1991; Palmis et al. 2017). The work of the experienced scribe was thus presumably characterized by a high level of automaticity. Features of script and orthography acquired by the apprentice scribe from models used during training under the tutelage of a master scribe would have become individual traits of style ingrained after years of practice. These would then become part of his identity as a scribe compared to different scribal traditions.

Developing skills as a scribe required several types of resources. In addition to the necessary materials such as books, ink, parchment, and writing instruments, the apprentice scribe needed a tutor who could guide him through what was probably a lengthy training period, likely lasting years. Through the training, the master scribe would pass on to his student his own style of writing and his orthographic and linguistic ideals, partly through instruction and partly through the selection of model books. In thirteenth-century Iceland, the resources necessary for bookmaking were probably confined to the institutional level, the two cathedrals, the wealthiest monasteries, and perhaps a few centers of learning run by affluent chieftains. Typically, the apprentice scribe would thus have been

in the company of other scribes, both more advanced apprentices and journeymen scribes, and part of a community sharing the same stylistic, orthographic and linguistic ideals; essentially a “house style” in writing and bookmaking. The apprenticeship was thus probably not limited to the relationship between the master and the apprentice but typically involved a more complex interaction within a community of people engaged in the use and production of books, a Community of Practice (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015).

Throughout his career, the scribe was no doubt exposed to different individual orthographic and scribal styles—the work of different Communities of Practice—through scribal contact. Scribal contact can be envisaged as taking place on two levels. First, between the scribe and his exemplar and other works of other scribes, all of which may have represented different scribal traditions from different periods, contemporary or older. Second, through communication between the scribe and other contemporary scribes who represented or perhaps implicitly or explicitly advanced different scribal traditions. Individual features of these different scribal traditions were sometimes at odds with the scribe’s “native” script and orthography and that of his scribal community.

The production of a written text was not only a technical matter involving the execution of the symbols and the orthographic representation of the spoken word but also part of social practice. The choice of script and a variety of orthographic options could be influenced by social and cultural considerations, as shown by the growing body of research on the sociolinguistics of writing systems and orthographies; see, for instance, Sebba (2009, 2012). Features of script and orthography could thus, much like features of the language, become part of the scribe’s identity.

Contact between scribes belonging to different scribal traditions could prompt social categorization, to borrow from Social Identity Theory (Abrams and Hogg 2010; Islam 2014; Hogg 2016; Vinney 2019), where the scribes spotlight the differences, perhaps thinking something like: ‘This scribe’s writing, orthography, or language is different from mine (ours); he’s not one of us.’ Even if the experienced scribe was quite set in his own ways, such exposure to different scribal traditions through new books, new scribes, or a whole new scribal milieu, combined with an in-group-versus-out-group view could influence his work and bring about a change in the scribe’s practice. If the scribe viewed the out-group of scribes favorably, he might be tempted to adopt some of the characteristics of the out-group. By contrast, if he favored his own group, the scribe

might be tempted to accentuate the characteristics of his own group and thus emphasize the difference between the two groups.

It is instructive to examine the *Gráskinna* manuscript of *Njáls saga* with this in mind. Four contemporary scribes copied this lengthy text from an earlier exemplar (or exemplars, now lost); Scribe A began the work, Scribe B then took over and did the lion's share of the work, while Scribes C and D only had cameo roles. That notwithstanding, all four appear to have been experienced scribes, and the reasons behind this division of work can only be a matter of speculation. As we shall see, these four scribes have different styles in terms of how they denote the dental fricative and thus appear to represent different scribal traditions or Communities of Practice in that regard. Yet one more scribal tradition may have been represented by the exemplar from which they copied the text. The writing of the *Gráskinna* manuscript may thus have sparked a contest between different scribal traditions on two levels: between each of the four scribes and the exemplar (or exemplars) as well as internally between the four contemporary scribes.²

A case study: denoting the dental fricative

Let us start with some background. In the history of writing in Icelandic, the dental fricative /þ/ has been denoted in different ways, as illustrated with the examples *þaðan* 'thence' and *þjóð* 'nation' in *Table 2*.³ In the earliest surviving manuscripts and manuscript fragments written in Icelandic with the Latin alphabet from the twelfth century, the letter "þ", ultimately a borrowing from runic writing, was used exclusively. By contrast, in the earliest surviving writings in Norwegian, also from the twelfth

² The term *scribal tradition*, obviously, encompasses many different aspects of writing and book production in general. The present paper is a case study examining one feature of the orthography of the four scribes of the *Gráskinna* manuscript, namely the denotation of the dental fricative. There is, of course, a host of other features awaiting comparable examination, but they remain beyond the scope of the present paper.

³ In thirteenth-century Icelandic and Norwegian, the dental fricative /þ/ had two manifestations, the voiceless [θ] and the voiced [ð]. These were allophones of the phoneme /þ/ and not contrastive; their distribution was determined by their phonological environment (Kristján Árnason 2005, 347; Kristoffersen and Torp 2016, 135). As [θ] and [ð] were not contrastive in the language, they could be denoted in writing with a single letter without any loss of information. The present study does not call for a graphem(at)-ic analysis; reference will therefore be made to the *letters* or *symbols* "þ" and "ð" (rather than graphemes or graphs).

Table 2. The denotation of the dental fricative in Icelandic orthography.

	<i>þaðan</i>	<i>þjóð</i>
12th century	“þaþan”	“þioþ”
13th century	“þaðan”	“þioð”
15th century	“þadan”	“þiod”

century, the vast majority of scribes employed two letters side by side, the “þ” and the letter “ð”, a borrowing from the Anglo-Saxon writing tradition. In the early Norwegian writing, the two symbols were used in an approximate complimentary distribution depending on the position in the word: “þ” was predominantly used in word-initial position while “ð” appeared elsewhere. In this regard, there is thus a clear difference between the earliest orthographic traditions in Iceland and Norway. Towards the end of the first quarter of the thirteenth century, “ð” began appearing in Icelandic orthography, in the same role as in Norwegian orthography, no doubt due to Norwegian influence (Seip 1954, 8–12; Hreinn Benediktsson 1965, 22–23, 43–44; Haugen 2002, 829; Stefán Karlsson 2002, 835).

The adoption of the letter “ð” by Icelandic scribes was a gradual process that took several decades, lasting into the early-fourteenth century. In Norwegian script, the letter “ð” was gradually abandoned and replaced by the letter “d”, starting towards the end of the thirteenth century. The same development occurred in Icelandic script, primarily in the course of the fourteenth century. It is tempting to assume, as is often done, that the replacement of “ð” by “d” in Icelandic script was, like its introduction in the early thirteenth century, prompted by Norwegian influence, even if the phonological reality behind the change in Icelandic is different from that in Norwegian (Seip 1954, 8–12; 1955, 158–161, 273–274; Hreinn Benediktsson 1965, 22–23, 43–44; Haugen 2002, 829; Stefán Karlsson 2002, 835; Haraldur Bernharðsson 2016, 156–161; Kristoffersen and Torp 2016, 191–193).

The letter “ð” and the Anglo-Saxon or Insular variety of “f” (the “f”) both appeared in Icelandic script towards the end of the first quarter of the thirteenth century. While the adoption of the Anglo-Saxon “f” by Icelandic scribes was swift and comprehensive (Haraldur Bernharðsson 2018), the adoption of the letter “ð” was quite different. Some Icelandic scribes practically ignored “ð” altogether, others used it to some extent, while yet others used “ð” fairly systematically alongside “þ” according

Table 3. The level of “ð” use in non-initial position by selected Icelandic scribes around 1300.

“ð” less than 10%	“ð” more than 99%
AM 291 4to, c1275–1300, <i>Jómsvíkinga saga</i> (main hand)	AM 240 XIV fol., c1300, <i>Marín saga</i>
AM 325 VIII 4 b 4to, c1275–1300, <i>Sverris saga</i> and <i>Boglunga saga</i>	AM 655 XI 4to, c1300, Homily
AM 325 I 4to, c1300, <i>Orkneyinga saga</i>	AM 75 a fol. Bæjarbók í Borgarfirði, c1300, <i>Óláfs saga helga</i>
AM 325 XI 2 g 4to, c1300, <i>Óláfs saga helga</i>	Holm perg 18 1 4to, hand A, c1300, <i>Heiðarvíga saga</i>

to the same principle as their Norwegian counterparts. Rather than being only a generational difference where the use of “þ” was phased out step by step by successive generations of scribes, this appears to reflect different parallel scribal traditions within Iceland, perhaps with differing degrees of Norwegian influence. Examples of scribal hands representing these two concurrent scribal traditions in Iceland are shown in *Table 3*.⁴

The denotation of the dental fricative, a frequent sound in Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian, was a conspicuous attribute of any written text. Much in the same way as the current use of “þ” and “ð” are a prominent characteristic of the literary form of Modern Icelandic, standing out to those who are not accustomed to the symbols; or the letters “å” and “ø” which are by many viewed as characteristic of the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish literary languages, “ä”, “ö”, “ü”, and “ß” of German and so forth (Spitzmüller 2012). It seems thus not unreasonable to assume that there was some awareness of the different orthographic varieties in the literary community in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries both in Iceland and in Norway. In Norway, where “ð” was more or less universal in non-initial position, Icelandic books with their extensive use of “þ” probably stood out. Norwegian scribes and readers may have been able to identify them as Icelandic, and the extensive use of “þ” in non-initial position may have been “an Icelandic mark” in manuscript production. High level of “þ” use may also have been a known characteristic within the Icelandic scribal community, not only in contrast to books produced in Norway where

⁴ The data presented in *Table 3* were obtained by the same kind of sampling as used for the work of the scribes of the *Gráskinna* manuscript described below. The data are thus comparable.

“ð” predominated in non-initial position, but also as a distinguishing feature between two parallel scribal traditions or Communities of Practice in Iceland, one using “þ” extensively and another using “ð”, as shown with representative Icelandic scribal hands in *Table 3*. Scribes may have identified with one of these two traditions, as “þ” scribes or “ð” scribes. The denotation of the dental fricative may thus have been an attribute of their social identity as scribes, a social marker.

Considering the fact that the use of “þ” in non-initial position has a long history in Icelandic scribal tradition, going back to the twelfth century at least, while the use of “ð” in non-initial position was a Norwegian orthographic practice that ultimately gained foothold in Icelandic scribal practice, it seems within reason to assume that among Icelandic scribes and readers of books in the second half of the thirteenth century, use of “þ” in non-initial position may have been regarded as conventional or even old-fashioned while the use of “ð” was considered more current or modern. At the same time, the use of “þ” may have been associated with Icelandic scribal practice while the use of “ð” was a token of Norwegian book production or, in the case of an Icelandic scribe, an indication of (close) ties to Norway or Norwegian scribal practice. For scribes and readers of books, the use of “þ” vs. “ð” in non-initial position may thus have served as a social marker.

The four scribes of Gráskinna

The four scribes of the *Gráskinna* manuscript denoted the dental fricative in different ways, as already observed by Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1953, 7–8). For the present study, the denotation of the dental fricative by the four *Gráskinna* scribes was examined. Examples of the spelling of the dental fricative in non-initial position were registered (instances such as *bíða*, *ráða*; *beið*, *réð*), thus excluding instances of the dental fricative in word-initial position where the spelling “þ” is universal (for instance, *þekking*, *þing*; also compounds such as *óþekkt*, *alþing*), as well as instances where the fricative may have become a stop by sound change (as in the clusters *lð*, *nð*, *mð* in, for instance, *hulði*, *vandi*, *samði*; also, *skelfði*, *hengði*, *kembði*). Inverse spellings with “t” for etymological fricative were also ignored (for instance, 2nd plur. pres. *takið* spelled “takit”). Examples were gathered by reading sections at more or less regular intervals (roughly every fifth leaf for Scribe B, but more extensively for the short contributions by the other scribes) throughout the work of the four scribes A–D (the younger *Gráskinnuauki* supplement was not part of the study)

Table 4. The denotation of the dental fricative in non-initial position by the scribes of *Gráskinna*.

	<i>n</i>	“þ”	“ð”	“d”
Scribe A	379	0%	100%	0%
Scribe B	1,721	35.3%	63.9%	0.8%
Scribe C	30	0%	0%	100%
Scribe D	202	0%	100%	0%

using black-and-white images kindly provided by the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies. Many of the leaves are currently in poor condition, dark and damaged, but only clear and unambiguous examples were included in the data set. This resulted in a total of 2,332 tokens from the work of Scribes A–D, gathered on 61 pages, with an average of around 38 tokens per page. The two principal values are “þ” and “ð” but there was also a very small number of “d”.

An overview of the denotation of the dental fricative in non-initial position by Scribes A–D is shown in *Table 4*. Scribes A and D consistently use “ð” for the fricative in non-initial position (and “þ” in initial position). Scribe B uses “ð” more than half of the time (63.9%) alongside “þ” and, very rarely, “d”. Scribe D, by contrast, never uses “þ” or “ð” in non-initial position, only “d” (inevitably, the size of the data sets differs considerably).

With regard to this particular feature, the *Gráskinna* manuscript is thus the outcome of the collaboration of scribes seemingly belonging to three distinct scribal traditions or Communities of Practice. Scribe B uses a combination of “þ” and “ð” (with very rare occurrences of “d”), as do many Icelandic thirteenth-century scribes, still partly retaining the early-Icelandic practice of using “þ” in non-initial position while at the same time having partly adopted “ð” through Norwegian influence. Scribes A and D, by contrast, have fully adopted “ð” at the expense of “þ” in non-initial position; they have thus to a further extent embraced Norwegian scribal tradition than their colleague Scribe B. Scribe B could thus be characterized as a “þ” scribe, even if his overall use of “þ” is nowhere nearly as extensive as that of the “þ” scribes in *Table 3*, while Scribes A and D are fully in step with the “ð” scribes in *Table 3*.

A third scribal tradition is represented by Scribe C, who in his small contribution uses neither “þ” nor “ð” but only “d” in non-initial position.

Unlike Scribes A, B, and D, the practice by Scribe C is not characteristic for Icelandic scribes around 1300 or in the beginning of the fourteenth century. At this time, most Icelandic scribes followed a practice resembling Scribe B with partial use of “ð” or Scribes A and D with near-full use of “ð” in non-initial position, while some still used “þ” even more extensively than Scribe B. In Norwegian script, “ð” was gradually replaced by “d”, starting at the end of the thirteenth century, first in charters, later in books. It was used in different varieties of script in the first half of the fourteenth century, but yielded steadily to “d”, especially in scribal hands affiliated to the Oslo chancery where “ð” had become rare as early as 1320 (Seip 1954, 71, 117). In Icelandic script, by contrast, “ð” was used fairly extensively by most scribal hands until the second half of the fourteenth century. Scribe C may thus have had stronger ties to Norwegian scribal practice than his fellow scribes A, B, and D. The possibility that he was in fact Norwegian cannot be excluded, but admittedly the data afforded by the short text written by Scribe C is too limited to allow a firm conclusion in that regard.⁵

Had these different scribes representing these three scribal traditions been found in three separate manuscripts, it would have been tempting to assign separate dates to the three based on the successive stages in the replacement of “þ” in non-initial position first by “ð” and then by “d”. According to this criterion Scribe B would be presumed the oldest, then Scribes A and D, and Scribe C the youngest. The scribes may, of course, have belonged to different generations, but their collaboration shows that they were contemporaries and, moreover, that these three different scribal traditions or Communities of Practice were concurrent, intersecting in the writing of the *Gráskinna* manuscript around 1300.

While Scribes A, C, and D are steady in the denotation of the dental fricative throughout their work, Scribe B, who is responsible for the largest part of the text, shows quite remarkable variation in his work.

⁵ Scribes A, B, and D do not make an orthographic distinction between the long vowels *é* and *ó*, indicating that in their language the rounded vowel *ó* had been unrounded (although the work by Scribes A and, in particular, B shows residual spellings of this distinction). This is a change that happened in Icelandic, starting, it seems, shortly before the middle of the thirteenth century (Jón Þorkelsson 1887, 28–32; Kålund 1905, vi–vii; Hreinn Benediktsson 1959, 295–297); by contrast, it did not take place in Norwegian. Consequently, it seems fairly certain that Scribes A, B, and D were Icelandic, rather than Norwegian. The text written by Scribe C is, however, short and contains too few examples for this criterion to be applicable.

Table 5. Sections of work in the Gráskinna manuscript.

<i>Extent</i>	<i>Scribe</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>“ð” use</i>
1r1 to end of 6v	Scribe A section 1 [lacuna; two leaves missing]		
7r to 10v16	Scribe A section 2		
10v17 to end of 11v	Scribe B section 1 [lacuna; one leaf missing]	69	97.1%
12r1–58v19	Scribe B section 2	692	92.1%
58v19–59r11	Scribe C		
59r11–74v13	Scribe B section 3	367	62.9%
74v13 to end of 76r	Scribe D		
76v1 to end of 87v	Scribe B section 4	223	4.9%
88r1 to end of 89v	<i>Gráskinnuauki</i>		
90r1 to end of 92v	Scribe B section 5 [lacuna; one leaf missing]	101	19.8%
93r1 to end of 94v	Scribe B section 6	165	46.7%
95r1 to end of 96v	<i>Gráskinnuauki</i>		
97r1 to end of 98v	Scribe B section 7	104	54.8%
99r1 to end of 120v	<i>Gráskinnuauki</i>		

Variation in the work of Scribe B

Scribe A is responsible for the first ten leaves (and perhaps also the two leaves missing between the current fols. 6 and 7). The by far largest stretch of text is written by Scribe B, 87.2% of the surviving leaves, as shown in *Table 1* above. The work of Scribe B was interrupted by Scribe C writing roughly one page and Scribe D who wrote roughly three and half pages, as illustrated in *Table 5*. As indicated above, sampling from Scribe B’s work shows an average use of “ð” in non-initial position at 63.9% alongside “þ” and, very rarely, “d” (at 0.8%). Interestingly, his use of “ð” changes substantially in the course of his work. The ratio by sections is shown in *Table 5*, and an overview by pages sampled is illustrated in *Figure 1*.

In roughly the first two-thirds of his work, from 10v to 60v, Scribe B uses “ð” quite extensively in non-initial position, with percentages on pages sampled ranging from 79% to 100% with an average of 93%. That is much more “ð” use than the “þ” scribes in *Table 3* above, but still not quite as much as the “ð” scribes. In this part, instances of exceptional

“þ” in non-initial position consist predominantly of the adverb *síðan* ‘since, after that’ abbreviated with a “þ” with a horizontal bar crossing the ascender (“fþ”) as well as the occasional *neðan* ‘from below’, *meðan* ‘meanwhile’, and *hofðingi* ‘chieftain’ abbreviated with a crossed “þ”. This orthographic practice is quite common among Icelandic scribes in this period who otherwise use “ð” extensively. These can be regarded as stock abbreviations.⁶

On fol. 65, the use of “ð” in non-initial position starts to decline as Scribe B begins to write “þ” in its place without any detectable rule or pattern. The use of “ð” declines steadily until fol. 74 where Scribe D takes over and remains very low after Scribe B returns (his section 4), 4.9%, on 76v1 to end of 87v. In what follows, the use of “ð” increases somewhat with notable spikes on fol. 93 and page 98r. This last part of *Gráskinna* is fragmentary as several leaves have been lost, many of which have been replaced by the much younger *Gráskinnuauki* supplement. Was the use of “ð” on an upward trajectory again? This can, of course, be nothing more than a matter of speculation, and it is, moreover, impossible to know how much of the text now lost was actually written by Scribe B; other scribes may have contributed. This relatively sudden drop in the use of “ð” by Scribe B calls for an explanation.

Scribal contact on two levels and social identity

It is not obvious what could have prompted Scribe B to alter his orthographic practice, adopting “þ” instead of “ð” in non-initial position, relatively swiftly, in a span of a few leaves. Several different scenarios may be considered. Conceivably, such a change of practice could occur if there was an extended hiatus in the scribe’s work on the manuscript, perhaps even several years. During this interim period, his orthographic practice changed before he resumed writing the *Gráskinna* manuscript. Such an extended hiatus would no doubt have resulted in a sharp break in the text, signaled by several features of both the script and the orthography as well as a change in the color of the ink. This is, however, not the case. Instead of there being a clear break in the scribe’s use of “ð”, it gradually declines over a span of few leaves, which is hard to reconcile with an extended hiatus in his work.

⁶ Sporadic occurrences of these same words written out in full with “þ” by Scribe B and other extensive “ð” users were probably based off of the abbreviated forms.

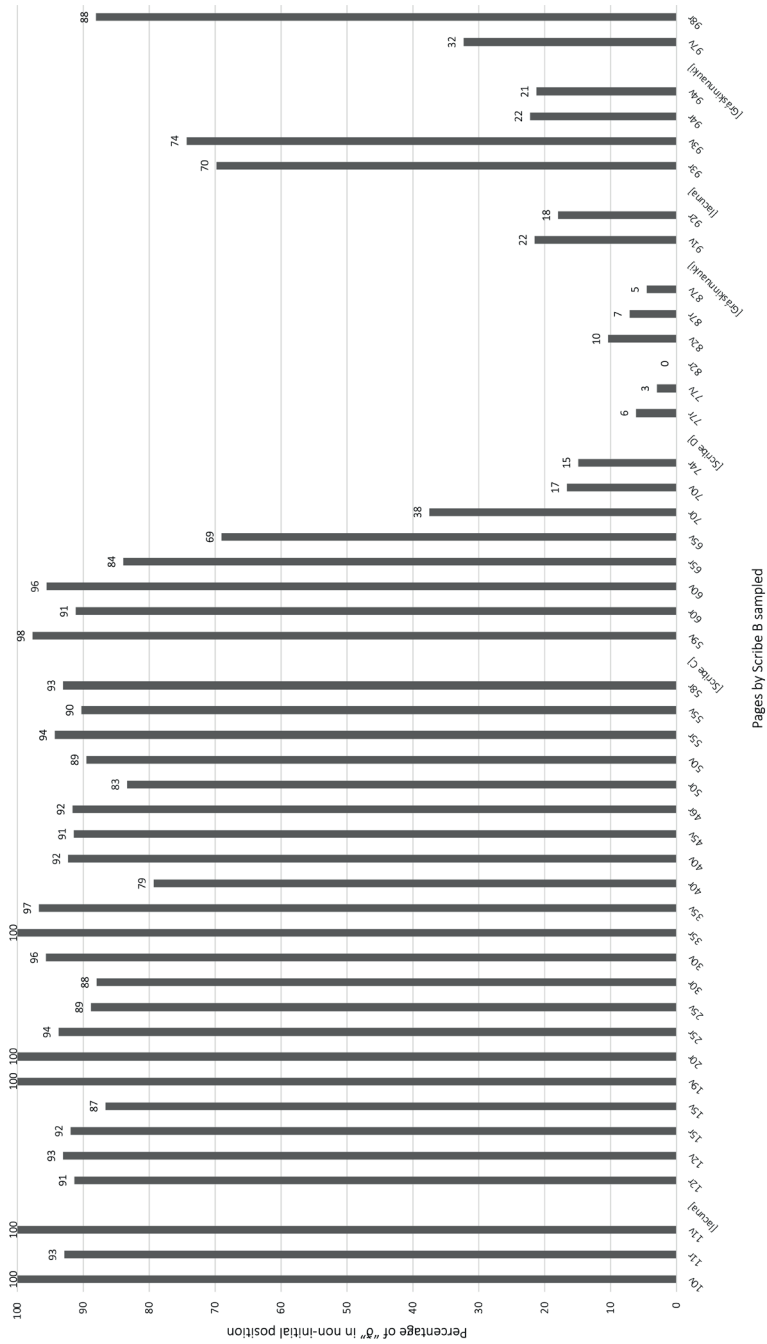


Figure 1. Scribe B's use of "ð" in non-initial position on the pages sampled.

One might also consider the role of the exemplar or exemplars. Did Scribe B change exemplars on fol. 65? *Njáls saga* is a lengthy text and copying it in its entirety is no small undertaking; it would have required a long period of time. It is conceivable that Scribe B had to return a borrowed exemplar before the work was completed which in turn compelled him to borrow another manuscript of *Njáls saga* to be able to conclude the work. Such a change of exemplars appears to have taken place during the writing of another manuscript of *Njáls saga*, GKS 2868 4to, *Skafniskinna*, from c1350–1400 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1952, 125–127). There is, however, nothing to suggest such a change of exemplars took place during the writing of the *Gráskinna* manuscript.⁷

Yet, the role of the exemplar must be considered. There are at least two opposing views on how a gradual change in a scribe's practice within a single work could be attributed to the influence of an exemplar. On the one hand, greater adherence to the exemplar could be expected at the outset of the work. As the scribe was starting his copying task, he paid close attention to his exemplar and reproduced features of script and orthography that were not part of his "native" script and orthography. As the work wore on, his reliance on the exemplar decreased, and his "native" script and orthography gradually took control. On the other hand, one could envision a scribe using his "native" script and orthography right from the outset of the copying work but then as he got better acquainted with unfamiliar features of the script and orthography in the exemplar, he gradually started reproducing them in his copy (Lindblad 1954, ix–x; van Arkel 1979, 35–36). Under the assumption that Scribe B copied from a single exemplar throughout, neither of these two viewpoints seem to apply as the scribe was roughly two-thirds into his work when his orthographic practice changed.

As an alternative, one might, however, entertain the supposition that *the exemplar* was written by two scribes with different orthographic practice and the change manifest in the work of Scribe B reflects this shift of hands in the exemplar. The small contribution to the *Gráskinna* manuscript written by Scribe C, 58v19–59r11, is about a page. He took the pen from Scribe B mid-sentence in line 19 and wrote ten lines, finishing fol.

⁷ Admittedly, the comparative material is limited. In his study of the manuscript transmission of *Njáls saga*, Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1952, 1953, 1954) divided the manuscripts into three main branches, X, Y, and Z. The text of the *Gráskinna* manuscript belongs to the Z class in his analysis, and the text of the Z class is found in *Gráskinna* alone after Chapter 66.17 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1953, 105); comparative material within the Z class is thus lacking. In spite of that, there are no indications of a change of exemplars.

58v, before moving on to fol. 59r where he wrote the first eleven lines. Scribe B picked up the pen again mid-sentence in line 11 on fol. 59r and continued his work. Scribe C thus wrote a total of twenty lines and five words in addition. In general, it is not uncommon to see a shift of hands mid-sentence in the middle of a page where there is ostensibly no logical break in the work. This could indicate that in medieval book production, the copying work was structured around the exemplar, not the copy. The contribution to *Gráskinna* by Scribe C may thus have been some clearly identifiable unit in the exemplar, such as a page or even a column.

It seems thus reasonable to assume that both Scribe C and Scribe B were copying the same exemplar. In the short passage he wrote, Scribe C consistently denoted the dental fricative with “d” in non-initial position, as already indicated. Interestingly, he also wrote the placename *Bergþórshváll*, a tripartite compound consisting of the compound man’s name *Berg-þórr* and the masculine noun *hváll* ‘hillock’, as “bergdorf hualf” (genitive) 59r9. This name is typically spelled with “þ” (in word-initial position in *Þórr*), and it seems within reason to expect it was also spelled with “þ” in the exemplar from which *Gráskinna* was copied.⁸ The form “bergdorf hualf” could thus be the result of somewhat mechanical replacement of “þ” in the exemplar with “d”, suggesting the exemplar had extensive use of “þ” for the dental fricative in non-initial position. If correct, this means that Scribes B and C applied their “native” orthography when copying from an exemplar with extensive use of “þ” before Scribe B changed his practice on fol. 65. This change can, therefore, not plausibly be ascribed to an abrupt increase in the use of “þ” in the exemplar. Furthermore, this suggests that the exemplar from which the *Njáls saga* text of the *Gráskinna* manuscript was copied belonged to the “þ” tradition rather than the “ð” tradition. If we accept the supposition that *Njáls saga* was written around or perhaps shortly before 1280 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, lxxxiv), the exemplar cannot have been much younger than the archetype.

If the change in Scribe B’s orthographic practice cannot be attributed to a change of exemplars or a shift of hands within a single exemplar, other potential sources of influence need to be considered. Interestingly, Scribe B changed his orthographic practice during the leaves he wrote

⁸ The placename *Bergþórshváll* (and other compounds with a non-initial member with word-initial þ) can be found with “ð” or “d” instead of “þ” in later manuscripts, from the second half of the fourteenth century and later, when the use of the letter “ð” was declining or it had been replaced by “d”. By contrast, the spelling with “d” around 1300 is unexpected.

between the sections written by Scribes C and D. Scribe C used only “d” to denote the dental fricative in non-initial position while Scribe D operated exclusively with “ð”. In the absence of any indications to the contrary, it seems reasonable to assume that all three copied from the same exemplar, and, the exemplar, it seems, had extensive use of “þ” in non-initial position.

The transition in the text from Scribe B to Scribe D and back to Scribe B is as seamless as the one between Scribe B and Scribe C described above. Scribe D took over from Scribe B mid-sentence in line 13 on fol. 74v and wrote down to the bottom of the recto side of fol. 76; Scribe B then continued at the top of the verso side of fol. 76, and, again, the transition occurs mid-sentence. In none of these shifts of hands is there any detectable change in the color of the ink. The much earlier shift when Scribe B took over from Scribe A on fol. 10v even occurs in the middle of a word; Scribe A wrote to the end of line 16 where he stopped in the middle of a word and Scribe B picked up the pen and continued at the beginning of line 17 by finishing the word started by Scribe A. Here there is, however, an unmistakable change in the color of the ink. This could suggest that some time elapsed between the work of Scribes A and B, although that should not be considered a forgone conclusion.

Considering (a) the brevity of the passages written by Scribes C and D, (b) the seamless transitions from one scribe to another (mid-sentence without a change in ink color), and (c) the relatively short interval between the contributions by Scribes C and Scribe D, it seems within reason to suppose that there was actual contact between the three scribes. Whether Scribe A was also part of this company is somewhat less certain. It appears thus justifiable to assume that during the production of the *Gráskinna* manuscript there was scribal contact on to levels, not only between each scribe and the exemplar but also contact between the scribes themselves, at least Scribes B, C, and D. If this analysis is correct, the question arises as to whether the different denotation of the dental fricative—on both levels—caught their attention and became a matter of discussion or even debate.

In the thirteenth-century scribal community in Iceland, the denotation of the dental fricative in non-initial position may have been a social marker, as already indicated; whether a scribe denoted it with “þ” or “ð” may effectively have been an expression of identity. Contact between, on the one hand, Scribes B, C, and D and, on the other hand, each scribe and the exemplar, may have triggered social categorization based on how the dental fricative was denoted; each of the three scribes used his own orthography in this regard, and the exemplar probably represented one

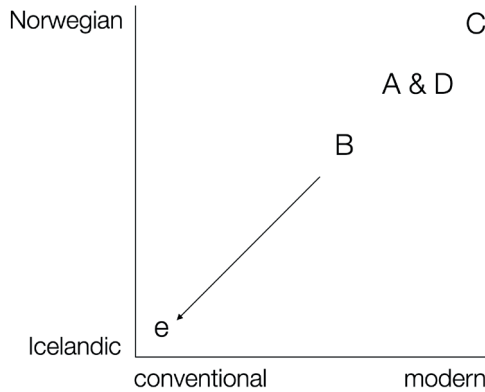


Figure 2. Four scribes, A, B, C, and D, and their exemplar (e) and the social attributes of three scribal traditions.

more scribal tradition. The social attributes of these different scribal tradition characterized by spellings with “þ”, “ð” or “d” in non-initial position could perhaps be plotted on two intersecting scales, as illustrated in *Figure 2*. On the one hand, the use of “þ” as conventional (or perhaps old-fashioned) opposed to the more modern (or perhaps fashionable) use of “ð” and (later) “d”. On the other hand, the use of “þ” as “an Icelandic mark,” characteristic of Icelandic scribal practice, in contrast to “ð” and, in particular, “d” as more in line with Norwegian scribal practice.

The interaction between the scribes can, of course, only be a matter of speculation. The identity of the scribes is unknown and so is their social status relative to one another. Scribe B is the main scribe of the *Gráskinna* manuscript; he may have had some authority over the project. It is hard to tell, however, if he was in a more general position of authority in relation to the other scribes; it may have been the other way around. It seems unlikely that there was a teacher-student relationship between them, since the three represent different scribal traditions in terms of how they denoted the dental fricative in non-initial position. Instead, it seems more likely there was an outsider element involved; Scribe C and D were perhaps new to the scribal milieu where Scribe B operated or vice versa.

The contact between Scribes B, C, and D and the scribes and the exemplar may have prompted Scribe B to shift his denotation of the dental fricative away from Scribes C and D and towards the exemplar. The denotation of the dental fricative may have been a social marker, and this may have been due to social categorization. From the point of view

of Scribe B, Scribe D and, in particular, Scribe C belonged to a different scribal tradition; they constituted an out-group. Scribe B may have identified more with the scribal tradition represented by the exemplar, and in an effort to dissociate himself from Scribes C and D he altered his orthography to match that of the exemplar.

Conclusion

The *Gráskinna* manuscript of *Njáls saga* affords us a valuable insight into medieval Icelandic scribal practice. The four scribes belonged to three different concurrent scribal traditions or Communities of Practice in terms of how they denoted the dental fricative /þ/ in non-initial position; the exemplar from which they copied represented yet another scribal tradition. It was suggested that these different scribal traditions had social and cultural connotations at the time, and that they could be plotted on two intersecting scales with “þ” at one end considered at once conventional and Icelandic and “ð” and “d” on the opposite end regarded as both modern and Norwegian. Scribes A and D employing “ð”, and in particular Scribe C using “d”, would thus have been considered modern and Norwegian in character, while Scribe B was more conventional and Icelandic. It was also argued that during the writing of the *Gráskinna* manuscript, there was scribal contact on two levels, between the scribes and their exemplar, as well as between the scribes themselves, at least Scribes B, C, and D. In reaction to contact with Scribes C and D, it was suggested, Scribe B altered his orthographic practice, leaning more towards the use of “þ” instead of “ð” in non-initial position, thus dissociating himself with Scribes C and D and identifying instead with the exemplar.

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