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## “HELGA Á ÞESSA LÖGBÓK”

### *A Dry Point Ownership Statement in Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Boreal 91<sup>1</sup>*

DURING A VISIT to the Bodleian Library in Oxford in December 2015 I examined MS Boreal 91, a paper manuscript from c. 1700 containing the law book *Jónsbók* and comprising 132 leaves measuring 70x120 mm; fols. 1–3 are later additions, perhaps by Eggert Ólafsson, as well as the blank fols. 108–132.<sup>2</sup> It is bound in brown embossed leather with two metal clasps; the book block is dyed blue. By 1832, Finnur Magnússon (1781–1847) had sold the manuscript to the Bodleian library;<sup>3</sup> alas, no more information on the origins or provenance of the manuscript is available.

Although fol. 83v seems to be like any other page in the manuscript, it contains a marginal ownership statement (see figure 1) that is noteworthy for two reasons. Firstly, the statement is written in dry point, i.e. with a stylus instead of with quill and ink. Secondly, the name in the ownership statement is female, and female ownership of law manuscripts is rare.

In this article, after a short description of the ownership statement, I will contextualise this finding, focusing on the occurrence of dry point writing in Iceland and Europe, as well as on female ownership of legal manuscripts.

### Ownership Statement

The ownership statement consists of two parts. The first part is incised into the outer margin of fol. 83v from top to bottom (see figures 1, 3a

- 1 Isabella Buben enhanced the images of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Boreal 91 digitally, for which I thank her.
- 2 Ólafur Halldórsson, “Íslensk handrit í Bodleian Library, Oxford” (typewritten catalogue), 100. *Jónsbók* is on fols 4r–106v; fols 2–3 contain title pages and fol. 107 contains a list of fines and some legal paragraphs.
- 3 The manuscript is listed as no. 91 in Finnur Magnússon (ed.), *Catalogus criticus et historico-literarius codicum CLIII. manuscriptorum borealium præcipue islandicæ originis, qui nun in Bibliotheca Bodleiana adservantur* (Oxford: 1832), 33.



Figure 1: Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Boreal 91, fol. 83v. © Silvia Hufnagel and Isabella Buben, with friendly permission of the Bodleian Library.

and 3b) and reads “Helgaþessa logbok” (*Helga á þessa lögbók*, Engl. Helga owns this law book). The second part is written in the lower margin on the same page (see figures 2a and 2b), with only “Sig...sd...” being clearly visible and reading, perhaps, “Sigurdsdotter”. The irregularity of the individual letters, the lack of space between several words and the unusual use of round s before tall s in “þessa” (instead of the usual tall-s-round-s-sequence) suggest that the scribe was inexperienced. The script seems to be from the nineteenth century and the inscription probably dates to the first decades of the nineteenth century, prior to the Bodleian’s acquisition of the manuscript.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, Helga—even Helga Sigurðsdóttir/Sigurðardóttir—is a common name in Iceland.<sup>5</sup> It was therefore impossible to find out who this Helga was, not least because of the unknown provenance of the manuscript.

## Dry Point Writing, Drawing and Manuscript Preparation

The first noteworthy point is that the ownership statement was written in dry point, a technique that has not been studied in Icelandic manuscripts. When a stylus is used to write with, a liquid such as ink is not applied onto a dry material surface (parchment or paper, for example) but rather, the writing surface is deformed by either incising or impressing.<sup>6</sup> The former, incising, is usually done with sharp tools such as styli with metal tips, while the latter, impressing, is done with blunt styli, for example made of ivory or wood. Dry point writing is only properly visible in favourable lighting,<sup>7</sup> especially raking light, when the script becomes legible as a negative relief.

Dry point writing implements were used for various purposes, both for writing and drawing as well as in the preparation of manuscripts. Although unknown in Icelandic manuscripts, dry point writing was common in

4 Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson corroborates my dating (e-mail communication, 26 March 2018). I thank him for help with reading and dating the ownership statement.

5 There are 26 women named Helga Sigurðardóttir in the 1816 census, see Þjóðskjalasafn Íslands, *Manntöl*, [http://manntal.is/leit/"Helga%20sigur%20ardottir"/1816/1/1816](http://manntal.is/leit/) (accessed 5 September 2018).

6 Elvira Glaser and Andreas Nievergelt, “Griffelglossen,” *Die althochdeutsche und altsächsische Glossographie: Ein Handbuch*, ed. by Rolf Bergmann and Stefanie Stricker (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), I 207–208.

7 *Ibid.*, 206.

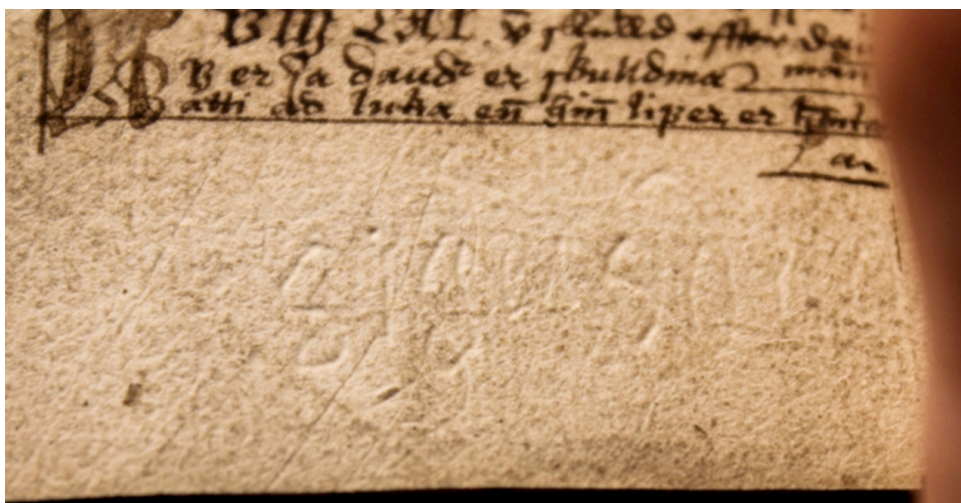


Figure 2a: Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Boreal 91, fol. 83v, lower margin. © Silvia Hufnagel and Isabella Buben, with friendly permission of the Bodleian Library.

Antiquity and in the Middle Ages. Documented dry point inscriptions have been found in Latin and in vernacular languages and include references to the main text of a given manuscript, for example, or Abc-verses and ownership statements without any connection to the manuscript's main text.<sup>8</sup> Dry point glosses (*Griffelglossen* in German) in the vernacular are perhaps the best-known group of dry point annotations. These are amongst the oldest and most important original sources for Old High German, Old English, Old Slavic and Old Irish, although their geographical distribution is not restricted to Europe – they have also been found in Chinese, Japanese and Korean manuscripts.<sup>9</sup> Of all these, the Old High German *Griffelglossen* are perhaps the best-known examples, such as those in manuscripts in the collection of St Gall in Switzerland. The oldest Old High German dry point glosses are from the area where Anglo-Saxon missionaries were active, and it is thus possible that the technique of writing with dry point came to the Old High German language area from Anglo-Saxon England, or perhaps from Ireland.<sup>10</sup> More than 160 manuscripts

8 Bernhard Bischoff, "Über Einritzungen in Handschriften des frühen Mittelalters," *Mittelalterliche Studien: Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Schriftkunde und Literaturgeschichte*, by Bernhard Bischoff. 3 vols (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1966–1981), I 88–193.

9 Ibid., 228 and 205.

10 Ibid., 204 and 223.



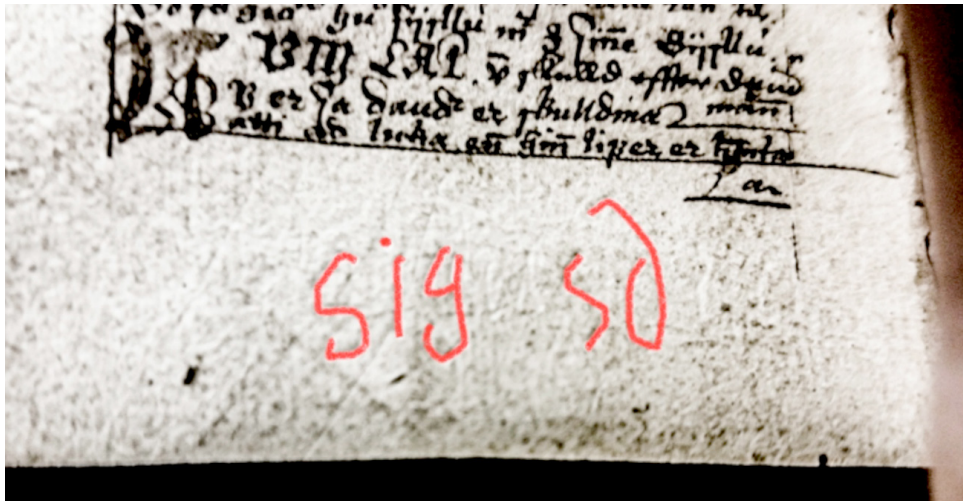


Figure 2b: Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Boreal 91, fol. 83v, lower margin with traced inscription. © Silvia Hufnagel and Isabella Buben, with friendly permission of the Bodleian Library.

with Old High German dry point glosses are known.<sup>11</sup> These manuscripts were produced in all regions of the Old High German language area. The bulk of the manuscripts was produced in the eighth and ninth centuries, and younger dry point glosses tend to be in Latin, not in the vernacular.<sup>12</sup> The manuscripts can contain any number of glosses, from very few to over 1,000.<sup>13</sup> Their function varies, too: some dry point glosses were individual, spontaneous notes on single words, some were used as a means of drafting text until the scribe was able to write the glosses with quill and ink, yet others were clearly intended to be read by users of the manuscripts.<sup>14</sup> A small number of *Griffelglossen* were written in cipher. On p. 163 of Abbey Library St Gall, MS Nr. 219, we find some dry point glosses in the so-called bfk-cipher, where vowels were supplanted with the consonant following the vowel in the alphabet.<sup>15</sup> Since these cryptographic *Griffelglossen*

11 *Althochdeutsche Glossen Wiki*, <http://de.althochdeutscheglossen.wikia.com/wiki/Griffelglossenhandschriften> (accessed 26 March 2018). Bernhard Bischoff was the first who analysed them systematically, see his “Nachträge zu den althochdeutschen Glossen,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 52 (1928): 153–168.

12 Glaser and Nievergelt, “Griffelglossen,” 221–223.

13 *Ibid.*, 222–223.

14 *Ibid.*, 224–225.

15 Andreas Nievergelt, “Griffelglossen zur Pastoralregel,” *SchriftRäume: Dimensionen von Schrift zwischen Mittelalter und Moderne*, ed. by Christian Kiening and Martina Stercken.

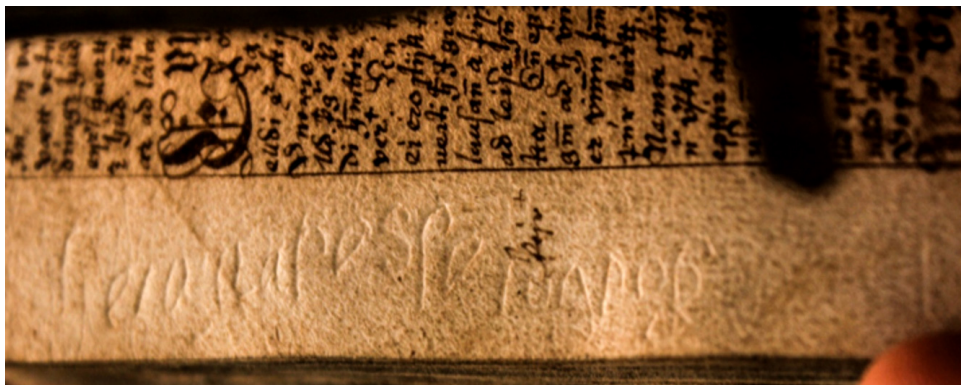


Figure 3a: Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Boreal 91, fol. 83v, outer margin. © Silvia Hufnagel and Isabella Buben, with friendly permission of the Bodleian Library.

form a part of the oldest glosses, they seem to be proof that styli were the most important writing instruments of the early Old High German glossators.<sup>16</sup> Even more remarkable, and even rarer, are Old High German dry point glosses in runic alphabets. Andreas Nievergelt found four instances of such runic *Griffelglossen*;<sup>17</sup> they are perhaps best understood as an expression of the glossator's erudition, as a form of display script, or even as an experiment testing whether runes were a useful writing mode for glossaries.<sup>18</sup>

Although occurrences of dry point writing are today mostly found in manuscripts, styli were often used to write short notes or letters in dry point writing on wax tablets from Antiquity up until the Middle Ages.<sup>19</sup> Styli were, in fact, “the primary instrument of writing” in the Middle Ages:

Medienwandel – Medienwechsel – Medienwissen 4 (Zurich: Chronos, 2008) 160–161. Such ciphers were found in Old Norse-Icelandic manuscripts, too, see Finnur Jónsson, “Lønskrift og lejlighedsoptegninger fra et par islandske håndskrifter,” *Småstykker 1–16* (Copenhagen: Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 1884–1891), 185–187.

<sup>16</sup> Andreas Nievergelt, *Althochdeutsch in Runenschrift: Geheimschriftliche volkssprachliche Griffelglossen*. Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur, Beiheft 11 (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 2009), 191–192.

<sup>17</sup> In addition to these glosses, there are six instances of dry point runic inscriptions, *ibid.*, 30–73.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>19</sup> Bernhard Bischoff, *Paläographie des römischen Altertums und des abendländischen Mittelalters*, 4th ed. Grundlagen der Germanistik 24 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2009), 28–30.

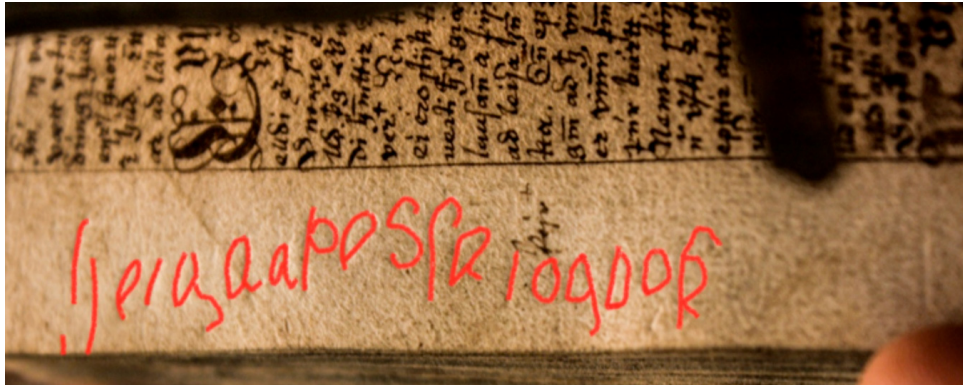


Figure 3b: Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Boreal 91, fol. 83v, outer margin with traced inscription. © Silvia Hufnagel and Isabella Buben, with friendly permission of the Bodleian Library.

drafts of textual works were commonly written on wax tablets, which made it easy to change single words or phrases; scribes then copied the final version of these drafts onto parchment.<sup>20</sup> As far as medieval Iceland is concerned, we find several references to writing on wax tablets in the *Biskupasögur* and in *Sturlunga saga*. Bishop Laurentius wrote instructions to his scribe on wax tablets.<sup>21</sup> The cause of death of Priest Ingimundur and his six followers was explained in runes on wax.<sup>22</sup> Sturla Þórðarson

<sup>20</sup> Roger Chartier, *Inscription and Erasure: Literature and Written Culture from the Eleventh to the Eighteenth Century*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 1–5. After its introduction to Europe, paper was first used for administration, e.g. for drafts and letters. See, for example, Erik Kwakkel, “A New Type of Book for a New Type of Reader: The Emergence of Paper in Vernacular Book Production,” *The Library*, 7<sup>th</sup> series, 4 (2003): 237, for case studies of Duisburg and Heidelberg; see Heike Hawicks, “Situativer Pergament- und Papiergebrauch im späten Mittelalter: Eine Fallstudie anhand der Bestände des Stadtarchivs Duisburg und des Universitätsarchivs Heidelberg,” *Papier im mittelalterlichen Europa*, ed. by Carla Meyer, Sandra Schulz and Bernhard Schneidmüller, *Materiale Textkulturen* 7 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 213–246; for Iceland, see Arna Björk Stefánsdóttir, “Um upptöku pappírs á Íslandi á sextánda og sautjándu öld,” *Sagnir* 30 (2013): 226–236. This means that, with regard to drafts, paper did not immediately supplant parchment, but that it first supplanted wax tablets.

<sup>21</sup> *Laurentius saga biskups*, ed. by Árni Björnsson, Rit 3 (Reykjavík: Handritastofnun Íslands, 1969), 101.

<sup>22</sup> *Guðmundar sögur biskups I: Ævi Guðmundar biskups; Guðmundar saga A*, ed. by Stefán Karlsson. Editiones Arnarnæðanæ, Series B 6 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1983), 68.

used wax tablets, and Þorgils skarði sent a letter written on wax tablets.<sup>23</sup> Some wax tablets and styli have been found in Iceland, too.<sup>24</sup> In 1969 a single wax tablet, though without wax in it, was found at Stóruborg undir Eyjafjöllum: it was made of oak, measures 11x7.3x0.5 cm and is probably one half of a diptych, the second half being lost. In 1971 a lead stylus, presumably from no later than c. 1400, was found at the same place: the stylus measures 12x6x0.4–3.4 cm and has “blý” (lead) carved in runes at the thicker end.<sup>25</sup> In 1987 an item made of lead and five well-preserved wax tablets in a leather container were found on Viðey in the ruins of a hall that was most likely part of the Augustinian monastery.<sup>26</sup> The lead item measures 6x0.5–2.5 cm and has a hooked end; it was perhaps used to write on the wax tablets.<sup>27</sup> The tablets are made of wood and measure c. 8.5x5.5x0.2 cm; there is wax on both sides of all five of them, and on four of them we can still decipher some text.<sup>28</sup> There is a Marian metrical psalm from the fifteenth century in Dutch, including musical notation; a Latin text; and a probable draft of a letter in Icelandic that is dated to c. 1450–1600.<sup>29</sup> It seems plausible that these wax tablets came to Iceland in the wake of the Dutch Carthusian monk Gozewijn Comhaer, Bishop of Skálholt in 1435–1446, who was in Iceland in 1437–1440 and again in 1442–1444.<sup>30</sup> In 1988 another wax tablet was found on Viðey, though this time in the ruins of a pantry; there are traces of wax on the tablet, but alas, no letters or words can be deciphered.<sup>31</sup>

23 *Sturlunga saga: Efter membranen Króksfjarðarbók; udfyldt efter Reykjarfjarðarbók*, ed. by Kristian Kålund. 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Nordiske Oldskrift-Selskab, 1906–1911), II 328 and 143.

24 Several styli and wax tablets, including the five found on Viðey described below, are included in the database *Sarpur*, <http://sarpur.is/Default.aspx> (accessed 24 March 2018).

25 Þórður Tómasson, “Þrír þættir: Vaxspjald og vaxstíll frá Stóruborg,” *Árbók Hins íslenska fornleifafélags* 79 (1982): 105–107.

26 Margrét Hallgrímsdóttir, “Rannsóknir í Viðey: Vaxspjöld frá 15. öld finnast við uppgröft rústa Viðeyjarklausturs,” *Árbók Hins íslenska fornleifafélags* 87 (1990): 102–103.

27 *Ibid.*, 122. Four polished stones were also found on Viðey which were perhaps used to smooth the wax in the tablets before a new text could be written, *ibid.*, 122.

28 *Ibid.*, 104. The thickness of the tablets is given as 1.5 cm on p. 104, but this must refer to the total height of the stacked tablets.

29 *Ibid.*, 110–117.

30 *Ibid.*, 117–121.

31 *Ibid.*, 105–106.



Besides written inscriptions, dry point drawings occur in European manuscripts, too, though less frequently than dry point writing. Some parchment manuscripts contain human and animal heads drawn in dry point, for example, as well as geometric ornaments.<sup>32</sup> On rare occasions we also find dry point preparatory drawings in illuminated manuscripts. Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert 1<sup>er</sup>, MS 9968–72 (c. 925–950, Trier) contains a dry point draft of an illustration on fol. 91v.<sup>33</sup> Vienna, Austrian National Library, Cod. 4869 (c. 1390/1400, Bohemia) has, on fol. 1v, an unfinished pen drawing of Paulus sitting at a lectern; the draft of the drawing was done in dry point and parts of it were later traced with ink.<sup>34</sup> In Icelandic manuscripts I found dry point drawings, too. In AM 426 fol., a paper manuscript from 1670–82,<sup>35</sup> the drawing of Grettir the Strong on fol. 79v was clearly first outlined in dry point, and the impressed contours on the back of the drawing can still be seen on fol. 79r.

In addition to writing and drawing, styli were used for preparing manuscripts prior to the text being written, for example to mark the text area and to draw lines for writing.<sup>36</sup> From the earliest times onwards, a stylus was pressed onto the parchment to draw the lines, but from the twelfth century onwards we also find lines drawn with lead, and from the thirteenth century onwards, ink is used too.<sup>37</sup> In Icelandic parchment manuscripts dry point ruling was the most common form of ruling in the thirteenth century, and after a dip in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,

32 Falko Klaes, *Mittelalterliche Glossen und Texte aus Trier: Studien zur volkssprachlichen Trierer Überlieferung von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 11. Jahrhunderts im lateinischen Kontext*. Germanistische Bibliothek 60 (Heidelberg: Winter, 2017), 578.

33 Ibid., 578.

34 Ulrike Jenni and Maria Theisen, *Mitteleuropäische Schulen III (ca. 1350–1400): Böhmen, Mähren, Schlesien, Ungarn*, vol. XII Textband of *Die illuminierten Handschriften und Inkunabeln der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek*, ed. by Gerhard Schmidt. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Denkschriften CCCXV (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004), 122–123. I thank Maria Theisen for drawing my attention to this manuscript.

35 Kristian Kålund (ed.), *Katalog over Den arnamagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1889–1894), I 317–318. <http://baekur.is/is/bok/000215004/Katalog-over-den> (accessed 7 September 2018).

36 Leslie Webber Jones, “Pricking Manuscripts: The Instruments and their Significance,” *Speculum* 21 (1946): 389–403. Jones uses analyses of pricking as evidence for determining the date and provenance of manuscripts.

37 Karl Löffler and Wolfgang Milde, *Einführung in die Handschriftenkunde*, Bibliothek des Buchwesens 11 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1997), 73.

again in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>38</sup> This preference for dry point ruling increases in later centuries. Of the roughly one third to half of the extant Icelandic parchment and paper manuscripts that I analysed, one third of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century parchment and palimpsest manuscripts are dry point ruled, and more than half of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century paper manuscripts have dry point ruling. It thus seems that dry point ruling became the most frequently used method of ruling post-medieval paper manuscripts in Iceland, thereby confirming that dry point methods of manuscript preparation were well known.

Advantages of using styli or other dry point implements include their economy and practicality. Preparing ink and quills was a laborious task requiring various raw materials, some of which were seasonal, and advance planning.<sup>39</sup> Using styli and wax tablets was much simpler, even though it may have been difficult and expensive to acquire them. But once owned, they could be re-used without difficulty and without much wear and tear. Furthermore, they were more portable than quill and ink (usually kept in a lectern) and thus on hand all the time.<sup>40</sup>

## Female Manuscript Ownership

The second noteworthy aspect with regard to the inscription of MS Boreal 91 has implications for male/female literacy in Iceland and for the provenance of Icelandic legal manuscripts. By the early nineteenth century between one quarter and one third of Icelandic men could write. The ratio was higher among wealthy men but low among women: only one in ten women was, in fact, able to write during the time Helga impressed her note into MS Boreal 91.<sup>41</sup> This makes Helga's marginal notes rather un-

38 Már Jónsson, "Fyrstu línur á blaðsíðum skinnhandrita," *Gripla* 13 (2002): 226–227.

39 I thank Svanhildur María Gunnarsdóttir for explaining the production method in detail. A short description of producing ink and quill can be found in, e.g., Soffía Guðný Guðmundsdóttir and Laufey Guðnadóttir, "Book Production in the Middle Ages," 66 *Manuscripts from the Arnarnagæan Collection*, ed. by Matthew James Driscoll and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2015), 215–218. More information, including references, can be found in Christine Jakobi-Mirwald, *Buchmalerei: Terminologie der Kunstgeschichte*, 4th ed. (Berlin: Reimer, 2015), 110–120.

40 Glaser and Nievergelt, "Griffelglossen," 205.

41 Loftur Guttormsson, "Læsi," *Munnmenntir og bókmennning*, ed. by Frosti F. Jóhannsson. Íslensk þjóðmenning 6 (Reykjavík: Bókautgáfan Þjóðsaga, 1989), 139–140. It is possible, though, that someone else wrote the ownership statement for Helga.

usual. Reading ability was ubiquitous at that time though,<sup>42</sup> and there is evidence that many manuscripts were owned by women. In general, women played an important role in manuscript production and transmission in medieval and post-medieval times.<sup>43</sup> The oldest extant Icelandic manuscripts known to have been owned by women date from the second half of the fourteenth century; until the seventeenth century, female owners were often from wealthy and influential families, but from the seventeenth century onwards we also find women with more modest socio-economic backgrounds as manuscript owners.<sup>44</sup> The manuscripts owned by women were often religious or saga manuscripts (notably *Margrétar saga* manuscripts<sup>45</sup>) and, from the seventeenth century onwards, poetry manuscripts and miscellanies or handbooks.<sup>46</sup> Metrical psalm manuscripts, too, were frequently written for women, most of whom were from wealthy and powerful families.<sup>47</sup>

Although women used legal manuscripts to teach their children to read,<sup>48</sup> female ownership of law manuscripts seems to have been rather rare. C. 170 Icelandic manuscripts and manuscript fragments dated to the fifteenth century survive, of which approximately 15 percent contain law texts; of the c. 2,000 manuscripts that were written between c. 1500 and c. 1700, one quarter contain law texts.<sup>49</sup> Despite the large numbers

42 Ibid., 135.

43 Susanne Miriam Arthur, “The Importance of Marital and Maternal Ties in the Distribution of Icelandic Manuscripts from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century,” *Gripla* 23 (2012): 201–233.

44 Guðrún Ingólfssdóttir, *Á hverju liggja ekki vorar göfugu kellingar: Bókmenning íslenskra kvenna frá miðöldum fram á 18. öld*. Sýnisbók íslenskrar alþýðumenningar 20 (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2016).

45 Ásdís Egilsdóttir, “Handrit handa konum,” *Góssið hans Árna: Minningar heimsins í íslenskum handritum*, ed. by Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, 2014), 51–61.

46 Guðrún Ingólfssdóttir, *Á hverju liggja ekki vorar göfugu kellingar*.

47 Margrét Eggertsdóttir, “Script and Print in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Iceland,” *Mirrors of Virtue: Manuscript and Print in Late Pre-Modern Iceland*, ed. by Margrét Eggertsdóttir and Matthew James Driscoll (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2017), 132–137.

48 Guðrún Ingólfssdóttir, *Á hverju liggja ekki vorar göfugu kellingar*, 87–117 and 139–140.

49 Based on my own statistics and Silvia Hufnagel, “Projektbericht ‘Alt und neu’: Isländische Handschriften, Bücher und die Gesellschaft des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts,” *Quelle und Deutung III: Beiträge der Tagung Quelle und Deutung III am 25. November 2015*, ed. by Balázs Sára. EC-Beiträge zur Erforschung deutschsprachiger Handschriften des Mittelalters und

of extant law manuscripts, Guðrún Ingólfssdóttir has found only 30 legal manuscripts out of 255 dating from the medieval period until 1730 that were, at some point, owned, or thought to have been owned, by women.<sup>50</sup> No female names are found in Icelandic legal manuscripts before the late Middle Ages.<sup>51</sup> The earliest known occurrence of a woman owning a law manuscript seems to be Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir's (c. 1385–1431) inheritance of AM 350 fol. (Skarðsbók manuscript of *Jónsbók*) from her father, the son of the manuscript's patron; Þorbjörg subsequently passed AM 350 fol. on to her own daughter, Kristín Guðnadóttir (c. 1410 until after 1490).<sup>52</sup> Another late medieval example is AM 132 4to, which was written around 1450 in the environment of Möðruvellir farm in Eyjafjörður and was owned by Margrét Vigfúsdóttir (1406–1486), the manuscript's likely patron and an important member of one of the most powerful and wealthy families of her time.<sup>53</sup> An increase in female ownership of legal manuscripts is detectable only in the second half of the seventeenth century, and is still very low compared to female ownership of literary and religious manuscripts.<sup>54</sup> The fact that a woman, Helga, who could write, owned MS Boreal 91 is therefore noteworthy.

## Concluding remarks

Finding dry point writing is most certainly challenging because raking light is needed for the incised inscriptions to become visible, but most

der Frühen Neuzeit, Reihe 1: Konferenzbeiträge und Studien 3 (Budapest: Eötvös-József-Collegium, 2016), 152 and 155.

50 See the short manuscript descriptions in Guðrún Ingólfssdóttir, *Á hverju liggja ekki vorar göfugu kellingar*, 305–336. We might expect to add a few additional manuscripts, such as AM 132 4to.

51 Lena Rohrbach, e-mail communication 21 March 2018.

52 Ólafur Halldórsson, "Skarðsbók – Uppruni og ferill," *Skarðsbók: Codex Scardensis; AM 350 fol.*, with a foreword by Jónas Kristjánsson, Ólafur Halldórsson and Sigurður Línal, Íslensk miðaldahandrit 1 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1981), 33.

53 Hans Jacob Orning, "The Truth of Tales: *Fornaldarsögur* as Sources of Contemporary History," *Legendary Legacy: Transmission and Reception of the Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, ed. by Matthew Driscoll, Silvia Hufnagel, Philip Lavender and Beeke Stegmann, The Viking Collection 24 (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2018), 94–99.

54 This observation is based on my analysis of the manuscript descriptions provided by Guðrún Ingólfssdóttir in *Á hverju liggja ekki vorar göfugu kellingar*, 305–336. Guðrún gives birth and/or death dates for the female owners of 30 legal manuscripts, as noted above.



manuscript reading rooms have diffuse lighting from above. A special lamp with raking light was specifically developed for working with dry point glosses,<sup>55</sup> and even the torch of a mobile phone, if allowed by conservators, can yield success. Since my findings in MS Boreal 91 I have found some dry point script on fol. 1r in AM 194 a fol., a *fornaldarsaga* manuscript from 1677, and a dry point drawing on fol. 59v in Thott 2101 4to, a legal parchment manuscript from c. 1500. A thorough study of Icelandic manuscripts with raking light would be worthwhile and would probably reveal more dry point texts. Amongst these might be more female ownership statements, such as Helga Sigurðardóttir’s in MS Boreal 91, which would help to highlight the importance of women in Icelandic manuscript culture and history.

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AM 350 fol.

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 210.

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