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ON THE STRUCTURE,  
FORMAT, AND PRESERVATION  
OF MÖÐRUVALLABÓK

§ 1.

THE PURPOSE of this essay is to offer a new account of the genesis, history, and present physical state of the medieval Icelandic manuscript Möðruvallabók, AM 132 fol. It supplements the information given by Bjarni Einarsson in his introduction to the new Arnarnagæan edition of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, which is the most recent publication in which a text from this manuscript has been critically studied.<sup>1</sup>

Möðruvallabók (hereafter abbreviated M) came into Árni Magnússon's possession after the death in 1690 of his young patron, the historian Thomas Bartholin II. It had been transported to Denmark some years previously by Björn Magnússon *sýslumaður* from Munkaþverá in the north of Iceland.<sup>2</sup> M is a large parchment book of which 188 original leaves now remain. These leaves measure up to 34 x 24 cm, with the text written throughout in double columns. Various considerations support a dating around the middle of the fourteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Long ago Jón Helgason proposed that a *terminus ante quem* might be the death of Herra Grímur Þorsteinsson *lögmáður*, whose obit is recorded in the Icelandic annals *s.a.* 1351/52, and to whom Jón Helgason thought there might be an allusion in a note on the page immediately following the conclusion of *Njáls saga* in M. In 1939 this note read: 'lattu rita her vid Gauks sogu Trandils sonar.

1 Bjarni Einarsson (ed.), *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, vol. I: *A-redaktionen* (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2001), XXV–XXXI.

2 For the ownership of M in the seventeenth century and suggestions as to its medieval provenance see Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson, "Magnús Björnsson og Möðruvallabók," *Saga* 32 (1994): 103–51 (not utilised by Bjarni Einarsson).

3 See esp. Stefán Karlsson (ed.), *Sagas of Icelandic Bishops: Fragments of Eight Manuscripts* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1967), introduction 26–29.

mer er sagt at [herra] Grímr eigi hana' ['have *Gauks saga Trandilssonar* written here; I am told that (Lord?) Grímr owns a copy of it']. The identification with Grímr *lögmaður* is, however, at best an inspired guess by Jón Helgason and the note itself is unfortunately no longer legible.<sup>4</sup>

## § 2.

M is one of a handful of Old Icelandic manuscripts that enjoy iconic status. The facsimile published by Ejnar Munksgaard in the early 1930s is huge and heavy,<sup>5</sup> and is a book intended not so much for study as to be revered by enthusiasts for the culture of medieval Iceland. Its monumental format symbolises the fact that M even in its present defective state is our largest medieval collection of *Íslendingasögur* and *skáldasögur*, 11 sagas in all. Yet there are reasons to believe that the extant manuscript does not fully represent the intentions of those who produced it. The book is presently enclosed in two thick wooden boards to which the parchment quires have been made fast by five spinal cords; this procedure was applied by the Danish bookbinder Anker Kyster in 1928 and replicated by Birgitte Dall and Mette Jakobsen at the Arnamagnæan conservation workshop in Copenhagen in 1974. Around 1890 the quires were distributed in three bound volumes, but prior to that date they had lain loose between the boards, which according to Jón Sigurðsson and Kristian Kålund were formerly attached to each other by a strip of leather.<sup>6</sup> In Kålund's catalogue

4 Jón Helgason, "Gauks saga Trandilssonar," *Ritgerðakorn og raðustúfar* (Copenhagen: Félag íslenskra stúdenta, 1959), 102–04 [rpt. from *Heidersskrifti til Gustav Indrebø på femtiårsdagen* (Bergen: Lunde, 1939)], where the affinity of the lost \**Gauks saga* with *Njála* is pointed out. Nearly 30 years later Stefán Karlsson (*Sagas of Icelandic Bishops*, 27) was unable to verify the doubtful word 'herra', and another 15 years later Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen could see even less at this place; in *A Grammar of Möðruvallabók* (Leiden: Research School CNWS, 2000), 27–28, she seems inclined to reject Jón Helgason's reading altogether.

5 Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed.), *Möðruvallabók (Codex Möðruvallensis)* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1933).

6 In his incomplete and unpublished catalogue of the Arnamagnæan Collection Jón Sigurðsson wrote that "Codex er nu *indlagt* i tykke Spjæld med Skindryg" (AM 394 fol., f. 135r, cf. § 5 with n. 41 below, my emphasis); this calls in question the much later testimony of Jón Þorkelsson in *Njála udg. efter gamle håndskrifter*, vol. II (Copenhagen: Det Kgl. Nordiske Oldskrift-Selskab, 1889), 659, where it is stated that "Bogen er i gammel tid bleven indbunden, men nu ere de gamle membranblade løsnede fra hverandre [...]." The latter assertion is not supported by concrete evidence.

entry for M it seems to be taken for granted that this was the medieval binding.<sup>7</sup> That assumption has been challenged by Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, who points out that the boards “are actually too small for the book and do not protect the edges of the manuscript leaves at all,” and that they and the parchment leaves now inside them need not have been brought together until about the time that Björn Magnússon took the manuscript to Denmark.<sup>8</sup>

An examination of the extant material leaves no doubt that the quires of M remained unbound for a very long time.<sup>9</sup> As noted in Kålund’s catalogue and again by Jón Helgason in an excellent short presentation of the manuscript, defacement of the original writing can be regularly observed at the boundaries between quires<sup>10</sup> (the term ‘faded’ is used below as shorthand for any kind of deterioration in the quality of the original writing; such deterioration may be the result of more than one physical process, e.g. friction, or—perhaps most often—the penetration of moisture between the leaves):

Quire no.	Foliation	Remarks
*1	(—)	Beginning of <i>Njáls saga</i> lost and replaced by younger material (ff. [3]–[12]).
2	13–20	First page badly faded; last page erased and replaced by younger material (f. [20 bis]).
3	21–28	First and last pages badly faded.

- 7 *Katalog over den Arnemagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, udg. af kommissionen for det Arnemagnæanske legat [ved Kr. Kålund], vol. I (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1889), 94: “Det opr(indelige) bind er to svære træplader med læderryg.”
- 8 Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, “The care of the manuscripts in the Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland,” *Care and conservation of manuscripts* [1], eds. Gillian Fellows-Jensen and Peter Springborg (Copenhagen: Royal Library, 1995), 63.
- 9 The following remarks are based on the facsimile mentioned in n. 5 and on observations made by previous students. When this article was drafted, M was on display at the Culture House (Þjóðmenningarhúsið) in Reykjavík and therefore not accessible for direct inspection. A diplomatic edition and linguistic commentary were published by the Dutch scholar Andrea (van Arkel-) de Leeuw van Weenen, *Möðruvallabók AM 132 fol.* (Leiden: Brill, 1987) and *A Grammar of Möðruvallabók* (Leiden: Research School CNWS, 2000); the second chapter of the *Grammar* contains a very thorough description of the manuscript. Here I have adopted van Weenen’s quire numbering for convenience of reference.
- 10 *Katalog over den Arnemagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, vol. I; Jón Helgason, *Handritaspijall* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1958), 59.

- 4        29 + 31–37 First leaf badly faded on the recto and outer column cut away; younger replacement inserted as f. 30; last leaf somewhat worn at edges.
- 5        38–45        First and eighth pages partly faded.
- 6        46–53
- 7        54–61        *Njáls saga* ends after only eight lines of outer column on penultimate page, rest of that column blank; all of last page originally blank, but a drawing added later illustrating Egill Skallagrímsson's duel with Ljótr the berserk; Jón Helgason reported in 1939 that he could read not only the caption to this drawing, but also—at the bottom of the page—the above-quoted instruction that (the lost) \**Gauks saga Trandilssonar* should be inserted here.<sup>11</sup>
- 8        62–69        All of first page originally blank, but here too a drawing added later; *Egils saga* begins at top left-hand corner of second page with an initial seven lines high; inner column of second page faded toward margin; last page now largely obliterated.<sup>12</sup>
- 9        70–77        Front page, esp. top of outer column, badly faded.<sup>13</sup>
- 10       78–83        Outermost bifolium (ff. \*77, \*83 *bis*) lost; van Weenen remarks on a special bookmark at the outer edge of f. 78,<sup>14</sup> the purpose of which must have been to indicate the first lacuna.
- 11       84–91        First two leaves worn at outer margin; last page, esp. inner column, faded.
- 12       92–99        First and (to a lesser extent) second page faded; penultimate page very seriously faded, *Egils saga* ends here at bottom right-hand corner; *Arinbjarnarkviða* added by a later hand, but now obliterated, on originally blank back page of quire.<sup>15</sup>
- 13       100–07       First and penultimate pages somewhat faded; *Finn-*

11 See above, § 1 with n. 4.

12 Bjarni Einarsson, *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, vol. I, XXX–XXXI.

13 *Ibid.*, XXXVIII–XXXIX.

14 Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen, *A Grammar of Möðruvallabók*, 18–19.

15 Bjarni Einarsson, *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, vol. I, XXXIX.

- boga saga* begins at top left-hand corner of first page with an initial seven lines high.
- 14 108–15 First page slightly faded; *Bandamanna saga* begins at top right-hand corner of thirteenth page with an initial six lines high.
- 15 116–23 *Kormáks saga* begins in middle of inner column on tenth page with an initial five lines high; last page slightly faded.
- 16 124–31 *Viga-Glúms saga* begins toward top of outer column on eleventh page with an initial 13 lines high.
- 17 132–39 First and last pages slightly faded.
- 18 140–47 *Droplaugarsona saga* begins near bottom of outer column on fourth page with an initial four lines high; last page somewhat faded at top; *Qlkofra þáttur* begins near top of outer column on this page with an initial five lines high.
- 19 148–55 First page somewhat faded at top; *Hallfreðar saga* begins near bottom of outer column on fourth page with an initial five lines high.
- 20 156–63 First page quite badly faded; *Laxdæla saga* begins here near top of outer column with an initial four lines high; second page somewhat faded; third leaf faded on both recto and verso, sheared at top; seventh page faded at top.
- 21 164–71 Front page faded at top; last page somewhat faded.
- 22 172–79 First and last pages somewhat faded.
- 23 180–87
- 24 188–95
- 25 196–201 First page slightly faded; *Fóstbræðra saga* begins near top of outer column on fifth page with an initial six lines high; middle bifolium (ff. \*198–99 *bis*) lost; last page very badly faded (*Fóstbræðra saga* breaks off here incomplete).

More than one deduction can be made from this survey. In the first place, wear and tear is particularly noticeable at some quire boundaries where a new text begins: see quires 13 (*Finnboga saga*), 18–19 (*Ölkofra þáttr*), 20 (*Laxdæla saga*). This must mean that leaves normally protected by lying underneath one another in a pile of loose quires were exposed to dirt and damp when a text was lifted out of the pile to be read. In the second place, *Njáls saga* and *Egils saga* were not destined from the beginning to belong with each other, or with the remaining quires. As already observed by Jón Helgason, the vacant space at the end of quire 7 (nearly three whole columns), followed by the notice about \**Gauks saga* at the bottom of the last page, implies that the scribe—or, more accurately in the context, the scribe and those directing his work—envisaged a separate codex containing *Njáls saga* and its proposed sequel. A fresh start was then to be made with *Egils saga*:

Hann [skrifari Möðruvallabókar] virðist þá hafa gert ráð fyrir að Njála og Gauks saga yrði *codex* út af fyrir sig [...]; fyrir því byrjar hann næsta kver (þar sem Egla hefst) þannig að ljóst er að hann hefur ætlazt til að þar yrði upphaf annars *codicis*.<sup>16</sup>

What is not commented on here is that *Egils saga* occupies five whole quires, with the very first and very last pages deliberately left unused; the intention must have been that the blank pages should protect the text inside, and the priority assigned to this arrangement appears from the fact that the scribe has abbreviated the end of the saga in order to finish on the penultimate page.<sup>17</sup> That *Egils saga* led a temporary existence independent of the material that now precedes and follows it would also seem to be implied by the fact that wear and tear, and even loss of leaves, is observable at quire boundaries within the limits of the ongoing text.

16 Jón Helgason, “Gauks saga Trandilssonar,” 103 (‘He [the writer of M] seems in other words to have reckoned with *Njála* and *Gauks saga* making up a codex of their own [...]; therefore he starts the next quire, where *Egla* commences, in such a way that it is obvious he intended this to be the beginning of a new codex’). A similar interpretation is proposed by Jonna Louis-Jensen with respect to the blank page that begins a new quire with *Breta sögur* in AM 573 4to; it is maybe not a coincidence that part of this manuscript was written by the main scribe of M. Cf. Jonna Louis-Jensen (ed.), *Trójumanna saga* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963), XXXII.

17 Cf. Bjarni Einarsson (and the present writer) in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, vol. I, XXII with n. 6.

Jón Helgason reduced the number of sagas in the M codex proper by one (*Njála*); he could in fact have reduced it by two (not just *Njála*, but also *Egla*). He did not speculate about what might have been lost prior to the extant quires of *Njála* or after the extant quires of *Fóstbræðra saga*. Calculations by Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson suggest on the one hand that the beginning of *Njála* would not have filled the whole of the lost quire \*1, and on the other hand that the end of *Fóstbræðra saga* would have filled more than one, but less than two, quires after the mutilated quire 25. Other material may well have preceded *Njála* in the separate codex that was to have continued with \**Gauks saga*, and have followed *Fóstbræðra saga* after its conclusion somewhere in quire \*27.<sup>18</sup>

With *Finnboga saga*, which begins with a prominent initial at the top left-hand corner of the first page of a new quire, an unbroken sequence of texts also begins.<sup>19</sup> These texts are now nine in number and may formerly have been more, and probably occupied some 120 leaves (quires 13 ff.). They were clearly meant to have constituted a separate codex and the first five of them are ordered in geographical sequence clockwise around Iceland, reminiscent of the arrangement of the original recension of *Landnámabók*. An additional saga may have been lost prior to quire 13, otherwise the first page of that quire would probably have been left blank in the same way as is observable at the beginning of *Egils saga*. If the geographical order of the codex is not coincidental (and that it is in fact intentional forms part of the philological *communis opinio* about M),<sup>20</sup> the possibly missing saga might have been, to name just one candidate, *Gull-Þóris saga*. None of the material was apparently bound at the time of writing; instead the loose quires of the codex now represented by quires 13 ff. were bundled together behind those containing *Njála* and *Egla*, and so they remained until modern times.

18 See Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson, “Magnús Björnsson og Möðruvallabók,” 110, 113; neither Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson nor Jón Helgason consider the theoretical possibility (which I also discount) that *Njáls saga* was originally meant to have occupied a place at the end, not the beginning, of the codex.

19 Cf. Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson, “Magnús Björnsson og Möðruvallabók,” 108: “Stærstu stafirnir eru í upphafi *Egils sögu* og *Finnboga sögu*, eins og þar væri að byrja ný bók eða bókarhluti.”

20 See e.g. Stefán Karlsson, “Möðruvallabók,” *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, eds. Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf (New York and London: Garland, 1993), 426–27.

## § 3.

The assertion that M comprises the remains of two or three parchment codices and not one requires some additional justification in view of the fact that the handwriting, layout (including rubrication), and size of the leaves is more or less uniform throughout. Here it should be borne in mind that both the main scribe and the second scribe who filled in some of the strophes in *Egils saga* are known from several other manuscripts (see § 4 below). These scribes were certainly professional clerks. It has been widely assumed that they worked for rich patrons in a scriptorium attached to some centre of literary activity, and the presence of M in the north of Iceland in the seventeenth century tempts one to think of the Austin house at Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur,<sup>21</sup> though other locations are of course entirely possible. Medieval books did not necessarily remain in the neighbourhood where they were written; as remarked by Ólafur Halldórsson, they were sometimes inherited within a family, but sometimes given away to others and sometimes bought and sold.<sup>22</sup> It is therefore not a matter of indifference that the various parts of M appear to have been stacked in loose quires. The labour and expense invested in their production implies that they were intended to be disposed of for profit, and if that had actually happened they would eventually have been placed in a binding. Instead they must have been left in storage in one and the same place. That place is most likely to have been the workshop where they were written.

Commercial book production undoubtedly played a part in the medieval Icelandic economy. Though this has long been recognised as regards books written for the Norwegian market,<sup>23</sup> I am not aware that much thought has been given to domestic supply and demand. It has been tacitly assumed that behind all luxury books of the period lurks a buyer who had commissioned the work in advance. Perhaps the various parts of M had

21 Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson, “Magnús Björnsson og Möðruvallabók,” 117–19; Stefán Karlsson, *Sagas of Icelandic Bishops*, 29.

22 Ólafur Halldórsson, “Úr sögu skinnbóka,” *Grettisfærsla* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1990), 68 [originally published 1963]: “Mjög oft hafa bækur gengið að erfðum, en stundum gengu þær líka kaupum og sölum, og dæmi eru þess að eigendur handrita hafa gefið þau vandalausum.”

23 See esp. Stefán Karlsson, “Íslensk bogeksport til Norge i middelalderen,” *Staflrókar* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 2000), 188–205 [originally published 1979].



indeed been commissioned, but the sponsors—not for the first time in the history of the wealthier classes—failed to pay up.<sup>24</sup> However, it must also be seriously considered that the work was carried out as a speculative venture, that is to say in the hope of finding buyers who never materialised. The careful arrangement of *Egils saga* as an independent codicological entity, with protective blank pages front and back, might even suggest that single sagas were sometimes copied in the expectation that a prospective buyer might wish to specify what other texts he required; this is in fact the situation we see before our eyes at the end of *Njáls saga*, where directions are given for \**Gauks saga* to be added.

#### § 4.

Stefán Karlsson compiled a list of nine or ten other (fragments of) manuscripts attributable to the main scribe of M and to the second scribe who supplied missing strophes in *Egils saga*.<sup>25</sup> The texts represent several genres:

*Legal matter* (3)

Scribe 1: AM 173 c 4to

Scribe 2: KB (R) GKS 3268 4to; KB (R) GKS 3270 4to

*Devotional matter* (3)

Scribe 1: AM 220 I fol. + RLH Lbs. fragm. 5; AM 240 V fol.;

AM 642 a I 4to

(Note in addition the fragment of *Stjórn* in AM 229 II fol., possibly but not certainly the work of Scribe 1)

24 For the dramatic outcome of a probable debt-collection attempt on the part of a professional manuscript illuminator in the year 1335, see Jonna Louis-Jensen, “Fra skríptoriet i Vatnsfjörður i Eiríkr Sveinbjarnarson's tid,” *Con Amore* (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2006), 321–36 [also in Else Mundal (ed.), *Reykholt som makt- og lærdomscenter i den islandske og nordiske kontekst* (Reykholt: Snorrastofa, 2006)].

25 Stefán Karlsson, *Sagas of Icelandic Bishops* (as n. 3 above). In a previous article I have put forward the idea that the second scribe supervised the copying of *Egla*. This does not necessarily mean that he was also the person who gave instructions to add \**Gauks saga*, nor indeed can it be taken for granted that the main scribe of M was the recipient of those instructions. Cf. Michael Chesnutt, “Tekstkritiske bemærkninger til C-redaktionen af *Egils saga*,” *Opuscula* XII, ed. Britta Olrik Frederiksen (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2005), 241 n. 8.

*Matter belonging broadly to the category of legendary history (2)*

Scribe 1: AM 325 XI 2 b 4to; AM 573 4to

*Annalistic matter (1)*

Scribe 2: AM 420 a 4to

This number of examples is sufficiently large for the prevailing quarto format to be considered significant. When the distribution of formats by genre is reviewed in Old Norwegian and Icelandic manuscripts before the middle of the fourteenth century, it becomes evident that the double-column layout ordinarily requiring a broadish leaf (20 cm or more) was reserved for material addressed to the learned if not powerful, and the powerful if not learned, members of society. The earliest Icelandic example I know is the homily book AM 237 a fol. from about 1150.<sup>26</sup> Upwards of a century later we find legal texts from Iceland such as KB (R) GKS 1157 fol. and AM 334 fol. (*Grágás* etc.), as well as didactic and courtly texts from Norway: SKB isl. Perg. fol. nr 6 (*Barlaams saga*) and UUB DG: 4–7 fol. + AM 666 b 4to (*Elís saga*, *Strengleikar* etc.). DG: 4–7 also contains part of a Norwegian manuscript of Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, and is more or less coeval with RLH Lbs. fragm. 82 (olim SKB isl. Perg. fol. nr. 9 I), the famous Icelandic fragment of *Heimskringla* carried to Sweden in the seventeenth century by Jón Eggertsson. By the early fourteenth century the double-column format had become popular in Iceland for historical literature, e.g. AM 39 fol. (*konungasögur*), but not for *Íslendingasögur*, *riddarasögur*, or *fornaldarsögur*. The luxury codex of *Njáls saga* known as *Kálfalækjarbók*, AM 133 fol., is almost as big as M, but has single columns. So does the more or less contemporary though admittedly more compact anthology of romantic and legendary fiction in SKB isl. Perg. 4:o nr 7 + AM 580 4to (also including the beginning of *Egils saga*, and thereby passing an unconscious comment on the compiler's perception of narrative genre).<sup>27</sup>

26 For the dating see Hreinn Benediktsson, *Early Icelandic Script* (Reykjavík: Handritastofnun Íslands/Manuscript Institute of Iceland, 1965), iii.

27 This manuscript and its text of *Egla* are discussed in detail in Michael Chesnutt (ed.), "Stockholm Perg. 4:o nr. 7, bl. 57r–58v," *Opuscula* XII: 209–27.

Manuscripts of *Egils saga* from the first century or so after the compilation of the transmitted archetype are in fact all written in single columns. The oldest by far, AM 162 A fol. fragm.  $\vartheta$  from ca. 1250, is almost oblong in shape (ca. 25 x 14.5 cm), perhaps designed for ease of transport in a saddle-bag or in the pocket of a gown. The next oldest, AM 162 A fol. fragm.  $\zeta$ , from the last quarter of the thirteenth century, is smaller but of less unusual proportions (ca. 18.5 x 13 cm). The obvious predilection of early scribes for such handy, unpretentious formats when copying this type of literature can be easily explained: the texts were written to be read aloud, and there was no point in expending precious time and materials on a book that only the reciter could see. (It should be recalled that these books are not liturgical lectionaries, richly decorated as they often were to underline the importance of the epistle and gospel recited by the sacred ministers at Mass.) Here the manuscripts indeed tell us something about the functional diversity of Old Norse-Icelandic literature. Homilies and saints' lives were generally meant for consultation and pious display in the religious institutions of Norway and Iceland; lawbooks and historical texts were meant for similar use—and surely with no less an element of ostentation—in the homes of prominent families in both countries; the translated romances were meant, at least in the first instance, for the diversion of the newly-refined men and women of the Norwegian court. *Íslendingasögur*, on the other hand, were directed not to the eyes of the privileged few, but to the ears of society at large. If the evidence of Möðruvallahók and Kálfalækjarbók is anything to go by, the copying of such sagas as luxury artefacts was a fourteenth-century innovation. It points to a growing ambition on the part of Iceland's feudal overlords to appropriate the traditional history embedded in these texts.

It may be noted that only three of the fragments listed by Stefán Karlsson—apart from the doubtfully attributed remnant of a manuscript of *Stjórn*—are written in double columns, viz. AM 325 XI (*Ólafs saga helga*), AM 420 a (the first six leaves only; *Skálholtsannáll hinn forni*), and GKS 3270 (*Kristinréttir* etc.). None of them resembles M in applying the double-column format to the transcription of *Íslendingasögur*.

## § 5.

The history of M over the centuries is one of cumulative physical deterioration. The outermost bifolium of quire 10 still existed in Iceland in the second quarter of the seventeenth century, for at that time the whole text of *Egils saga*, including the portions contained on these two leaves, was copied directly from M into a now lost manuscript of which numerous derivatives are known; in Bjarni Einarsson's critical work on *Egils saga* the designation \*M<sup>1</sup> is used for this lost copy.<sup>28</sup> Not quite the same good fortune has attended the transmission of *Fóstbræðra saga*: while the middle bifolium of quire 25 and probably the whole of quire \*26 were still present when that saga was copied in Denmark by Árni Magnússon and his collaborator Ásgeir Jónsson, the remainder of the text had—as Árni Magnússon remarks on a slip at the front of the copy, AM 566 b 4to—already gone missing.<sup>29</sup> On this point the condition of M had remained more or less unchanged since *Fóstbræðra saga* was copied from it, presumably in the north of Iceland, into the lost source of our oldest extant paper manuscript of the saga, SKB isl. Papp. 4:0 nr 4.<sup>30</sup> Papp. 4 was written by Þorleifur Jónsson í Grafarkoti, an employee of Bishop Þorlákur Skúlason of Hólar,<sup>31</sup> at about the same time as the \*M<sup>1</sup>-transcript of *Egla*.

It can be seen from spaces left blank in the extant derivatives of \*M<sup>1</sup> (especially clearly in AM 455 4to, written in 1660 by the Rev. Helgi Grímsson of Húsafell) that larger or smaller segments of M ff. 69v–70r

28 See Jón Helgason, “Athuganir um nokkur handrit Egils sögu,” *Nordæla: Afmáliskveðja til Sigurðar Nordals 14. september 1956* (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1956), 110–48 [English translation by Michael Chesnutt in *Opuscula* XII: 3–47], here esp. § 13; Bjarni Einarsson, “Um Eglutexta Möðruvallabók í 17du aldar eftirritum,” *Gripla* VIII (1994): 7–53, and *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, XLIII–LVIII; Michael Chesnutt, “Reconstruction from Transcripts: The Case of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* in *Möðruvallabók*, an Icelandic Codex of the Fourteenth Century,” *Care and Conservation of Manuscripts* 7, eds. Gillian Fellows-Jensen and Peter Springborg (Copenhagen: Tusculanum, 2003), 17–26.

29 Árni Magnússon writes ‘vantar nærri halfa aptan vid’; quoted by Kálund, *Katalog over den Arnemagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, vol. I, 720, no. 1413. AM 566 b is assigned to Ásgeir Jónsson's (first) period of residence in Copenhagen 1686–1688 (see n. 37 below).

30 It should be noted that Björn K. Þórólfsson in his edition of *Fóstbræðra saga* (Copenhagen: Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 1925–27), XVI, reckons with more than one intermediary between M and Papp. 4.

31 See most recently Peter Foote (ed.), *Jóns saga Hólabýskups ens helga* (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2003), 207\*–12\*.

were already illegible when the scribe of \*M<sup>1</sup> was at work,<sup>32</sup> and further deterioration had evidently occurred by the time that Eyjólfur Björnsson copied *Egla* directly from M under the auspices of Árni Magnússon in Copenhagen.<sup>33</sup> Much more recently, the writing at the bottom of f. 61v seems gradually to have faded away over the period of 40 years separating the attempts by Jón Helgason and Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen to decipher it.<sup>34</sup> A similar process is observable over the centuries rather than decades that elapsed between the pioneering efforts of Árni Magnússon to recover the text of *Arinbjarnarkviða* on f. 99v and the renewed examinations of that page by Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Finnur Jónsson in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1860 Guðbrandur Vigfússon could read not a few whole words and some isolated letters from the lower half of col. 99vb; Finnur Jónsson's transcript in his edition of 1886–88 ends about halfway down that column.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, the last three lines reported by Finnur Jónsson are more complete than they are in Guðbrandur Vigfússon's transcript. In this case the younger scholar's success was probably due not so much to his having moistened the parchment with distilled water—a practice for which he is nowadays ritually vilified by conservationists—as to his having collated these three lines with the text given by Guðmundur Magnússon († 1798) in his edition of *Egils saga* published posthumously by the Arnamagnæan Commission in 1809. Here the lines in question are supplied from a copy of *Arinbjarnarkviða* lent to the editor by Bishop Hannes Finnsson of Skálholt, now ff. 17–18 in a volume of *varia* preserved as RLH ÍB 169 4to.<sup>36</sup> The copy of the poem is in a hand

32 Bjarni Einarsson, *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* vol. I, xxx–xxxI, xxxiv, xxxviii.

33 Jón Helgason, “Bemærkninger til håndskriftet AM 460 4to,” *Opuscula* XII: 48–49. Eyjólfur Björnsson was in Copenhagen between 1687 and 1689.

34 Cf. § 2, remarks on quire 7 with n. 11.

35 Bjarni Einarsson, *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, xxxix–xlii with n. 21, and text (Tillæg I) 190. In Guðbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell (eds.), *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1883), 271, the writing on f. 99v is characterised as “the washed-out ghostly marking on the bleak greasy page.” The touch of pathos in this description can probably be laid at the door of York Powell.

36 *Egils-saga, sive Egilli Skallagrímii vita* (Copenhagen: [Det Arnamagnæanske Legat], 1809), 682–84; cf. 607 footnote, where ÍB 169 is described as an “old exemplar” (*vetusto Exemplare*) and its fragment of the poem as “somewhat fuller” (*aliquanto plenius*) than the copy by Ásgeir Jónsson. My knowledge of Guðmundur Magnússon's debt to 169 derives from an investigation made by Bjarni Einarsson in connection with *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, vol. I, but not included in the introduction to that volume [it is now published in this issue of

that I would judge to be from the first half of the eighteenth century, and the title explicitly states that it is from M: ‘Drapa Eigils Skallagrimssonar er hann orte um Arenbiorn hersir. Ex Membrana Magnæj’ (f. 17r1–2).

The text of *Arinbjarnarkviða* in ÍB 169 is closely related to that in AM 146 fol., a copy of *Egils saga* written by Ásgeir Jónsson after he had left Denmark to work for the historian Torfæus. We have Árni Magnússon’s word for it that the poem in AM 146 was borrowed from a transcript he had sent to Torfæus. Had the latter contained the last three lines that Finnur Jónsson was able to read on f. 99v in M, and that are also transmitted in ÍB 169, we should expect Ásgeir Jónsson to have included them, but he did not. Two explanations seem possible: (a) these lines had not been read under Árni Magnússon’s auspices, and ÍB 169 is an independent copy of the original in M—perhaps revising Ásgeir’s text in AM 146, in which case it must postdate the transfer of Torfæus’s manuscripts to Denmark after his death in 1719; (b) they had indeed been read, but Árni found the text doubtful and suppressed it in the copy he sent to Norway—in which case ÍB 169 may be a sister text of AM 146 or even, if early enough, its source. A more thorough treatment of this problem is clearly needed.

*Arinbjarnarkviða* is not the only case in which Árni Magnússon may have refrained, as other students certainly did, from transmitting text in M that was in fact capable of being deciphered. It was mentioned earlier that *Fóstbræðra saga* must have continued through 1–2 quires after the mutilated quire 25, but the paper manuscripts of the M-text of this saga do not all end at the same place. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Jónas Kristjánsson<sup>37</sup> provide the following data:

*Gripla*, 7–17]. See however Bjarni Einarsson (as previous note) for what he showed to be the text of *Arinbjarnarkviða* from 169 as interpolated into *Egla* in the saga anthology AM Accessoria 28, written in Iceland in the second half of the eighteenth century. — Other items gathered together in 169 include a transcript of *Sonatorrek* from about 1700 (f. 16), ‘Þáttur af Aununde Tre-fót’ mainly in the hand of Árni Magnússon’s maternal grandfather, the Rev. Ketill Jörundsson (ff. 50[51]–58r), and a scientific treatise by the Rev. Guðmundur Jónsson († 1836; ff. 85–96). Printed catalogue description in Páll Eggert Ólason, *Skrá um handritasöfn Landsbókasafnsins*, vol. II (Reykjavík: Landsbókasafn Íslands, 1927), pp. 770–71, no. 6324.

37 Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Fóstbræðra saga*, introduction; Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um Fóstbræðrasögu* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1972), here 16–18 and (for the dating of Ásgeir Jónsson’s copies) 25.

Manuscript	Scribe(s), date	Ends at (page/line in Björn K. Þórólfsson's edition)
SKB isl. Papp. 4:o nr 4	Þorleifur Jónsson, ? <i>ante</i> 1640	145/13
KB Thott 1768 4to	Ásgeir Jónsson, 1687	145/6
BL Add. 5317	Oddur Jónsson, undated	145/4
AM 566 b 4to	Árni Magnússon (ff. 1–8), continued by Ásgeir Jónsson, ? 1686/87	142/18
KB NKS 1149 fol. (and secondary copy in BL Add. 11,126)	Oddur Jónsson, 1768	137/17

The Rev. Oddur Jónsson († 1814) studied theology in Copenhagen from 1757 to 1759 and remained in Denmark for another 15 years before returning to Iceland to be ordained.<sup>38</sup> His direct transcript of *Fóstbræðra saga* in Add. 5317 reaches approximately the same place as Ásgeir Jónsson's in Thott 1768, some half dozen lines earlier in Björn K. Þórólfsson's edition than the end of Þorleifur Jónsson's M-derived text in Papp. 4. His second direct transcript, NKS 1149, ends some 80 lines earlier in the edition, while AM 566 b, written with the active participation of Árni Magnússon, ends some 40 lines earlier. Though the estimation of column and page lengths in lost manuscripts is not an exact science, a column of M can be taken to equal between 40 and 50 lines in the edition. The figures accordingly suggest that a page in M—most likely the unprotected back page of quire \*26—existed in a poor state of preservation in Oddur Jónsson's time, and that the second column was in an even poorer state than the first (compare, for example, the damage to f. 91v at the end of quire 11). With sufficient effort both Oddur (in Add. 5317) and Ásgeir (in Thott 1768) could nevertheless decipher all of the first and most of the second column. Neither of them, however, could make out the extra lines preserved indirectly by Þorleifur Jónsson. These lines were doubtless located at the bottom right-hand corner of the page. Ásgeir, when completing AM 566 b for Árni Magnússon, refrained from attempting the second column; Oddur, when writing NKS 1149, omitted the whole page.<sup>39</sup> There is no way of knowing

38 See Páll Eggert Ólason, *Íslenzkar aviskrár frá Landnámstímum til ársloka 1940*, vol. IV (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1951), 15.

39 Cf. Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Fóstbræðra saga*, XIV–XV.



whether the two men's fuller texts were due to intensified scrutiny of the exemplar, or whether their shorter texts were due to impatience, lack of time, or (in Ásgeir's case) the restraint imposed by a critical employer.<sup>40</sup>

As noted earlier, the middle bifolium of quire 25 in M (ff. \*198–99 *bis*) was extant in Árni Magnússon's lifetime. It was still extant nearly 40 years after his death, as appears from the fact that there is no sign in either Add. 5317 or NKS 1149 of a lacuna in *Fóstbræðra saga* at this point. Jón Sigurðsson, describing M in his incomplete catalogue of the Arnamagnæan Collection, testified that by the 1840s these two leaves had been mislaid together with the quire following f. 201.<sup>41</sup> Since readings from these portions of M are quoted in the *editio princeps* of *Fóstbræðra saga* published in Copenhagen by Gunnlaugur Oddsson in 1822, Jón Sigurðsson concluded that the losses in question had occurred after that date. The validity of this inference is, however, compromised by Björn K. Þórólfsson's identification of NKS 1149 and AM 566 b as the immediate sources of Gunnlaugur Oddsson's variant apparatus.<sup>42</sup> At all events, the disappearance of leaves at the end of Möðruvallabók as recently as the last quarter of the eighteenth or the first half of the nineteenth century supports the view that this manuscript did not assume the character of a single bound volume until bookbinder Anker Kyster imposed that character on it after World War I.

40 In the above exposition I follow Jónas Kristjánsson (as n. 37) in assuming that both of Ásgeir Jónsson's and the first two of Oddur Jónsson's M-texts of *Fóstbræðra saga* were first-hand transcripts of AM 132 fol. Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Fóstbræðra saga*, XVI, did not believe that this applied to Thott 1768. Jónas Kristjánsson's counter-argument concerning Ásgeir's use of a peculiar script ('membranagtig frakturskrift') when copying parchment codices carries a good deal of weight, but is not decisive; cf. Agnete Loth, "Om nogle af Ásgeir Jónssons håndskrifter," *Opuscula I* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1960), 207–12, and Hubert Seelow, "Ásgeir Jónsson und seine 'membranartige' Frakturschrift," *Sjöttu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. júlí 1977*, síðari hluti (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977), 658–64.

41 Fair copy of catalogue in AM 394 fol., ff. 133v–134r; cf. Jón Sigurðsson, "Den arnamagnæanske Commission," *Antiquarisk Tidsskrift 1846–1848* (1849): 104–06.

42 Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Fóstbræðra saga*, XL. Gunnlaugur Oddsson was an Arnamagnæan stipendiary in Copenhagen from 1816 to 1827.



## LIBRARY SIGLA

- AM = The Arnamagnæan Collection, Copenhagen and Reykjavík  
 BL = British Library, London  
 KB = Royal Library, Copenhagen  
 KB (R) = The Arnamagnæan Institute, Reykjavík (olim Royal Library, Copenhagen)  
 RLH = National and University Library, Reykjavík  
 SKB = Royal Library, Stockholm  
 UUB = University Library (Carolina rediviva), Uppsala

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| AM 146 fol.                | AM 460 4to       |
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| AM 162 A fol. <i>theta</i> | AM 642 a I 4to   |
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### SUMMARY

'On the Structure, Format, and Preservation of Möðruvallabók'

**Keywords:** Codicology, medieval Icelandic book market, post-medieval copyists, Saga of Egill Skallagrímsson, Saga of the Sworn Brothers

The aim of this essay is to explain the physical make-up of the fourteenth-century saga codex Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol.). *Njáls saga* at the beginning of the extant book was intended, as already argued by Jón Helgason, to have preceded a copy of the lost *\*Gauks saga Trandilssonar* in a separate codicological entity. *Egils saga*, now immediately following, was likewise designed to stand alone, and the first item signalling the commencement of an unbroken series of texts is *Fimboga saga*, prior to which another saga may have been lost. The extant AM 132 fol. represents a pile of loose, unbound groups of quires formerly kept in a bookshop with a view to being sold in combinations determined by potential buyers. The large double-column format represents a mid-fourteenth-century innovation in the production of manuscripts of *Íslendingasögur*, which previously had been copied in smaller formats with a view to being read aloud; it is suggested that pretentious and expensive copies of this literary genre reflect the ambition of the burgeoning fourteenth-century Icelandic aristocracy to appropriate traditional history. The cumulative physical deterioration of Möðruvallabók over the centuries is discussed with special reference to the text of *Egils saga* and *Fóstbræðra saga*.

### EFNISÁGRIP

Markmið þessar greinar er að skýra uppbyggingu fjórtándu aldar handritsins Möðruvallabókar (AM 132 fol.). Jón Helgason færði rök fyrir því að upphafssaga núverandi gerðar bókarinnar, *Njála*, hafi átt að koma á undan hinni glötuðu *\*Gauks*

sögu *Trandilssonar* og að þær hafi átt að standa saman sem sérstakt handrit. *Egils saga*, sem kemur strax á eftir, hafi sömuleiðis átt að geta verið sérstök. *Fimboga saga* sé hins vegar fyrsta sagan í samfelldu sagnasafni handritsins og að á undan henni hafi glatast einhver önnur saga.

Möðruvallabók geymir nú safn áður ótengdra og óbundinna kverahópa sem hafa verið geymdir í skrifarastofunni með það í huga að hugsanlegir kaupendur gætu pantað þær sögur sem þeir vildu hafa saman í bók. Uppsetning textans í tveimur dálkum er nýjung sem kom upp um miðja fjórtánda öld í handritum Íslendingasagna sem höfðu áður verið ritaðar á minni leturflöt með upplestur í huga. Sú hugmynd er sett fram að þessi metnaðarfulla uppsetning Íslendingasagna sé til vitnis um vaxandi styrk höfðingja sem hafi viljað einoka hina hefðbundnu sögu. Þá er farið nokkrum orðum um það hvernig handritið hefur hrörnað á síðari öldum með sérstöku tilliti til texta *Egils sögu* og *Fóstbræðra sögu*.

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