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RECYCLING AND RECONTEXTUALISATION IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN ICELANDIC PALIMPSESTS

1 Introduction

The term ‘palimpsest’ (from Ancient Greek *παλίμψηστος* ‘scraped again’) refers to a specific method of reuse of writing material, usually parchment, by which the original text of a manuscript is erased by scraping or washing it off and subsequently overwritten with a new text (Declercq 2007, 7; Bischoff 1990, 11; Lowe 1972, 480; Jakob Benediktsson 1968, 82). As a palimpsest is a manuscript which has been written on twice, it is often also called a *codex rescriptus* (Lowe 1972, 481; Jakob Benediktsson 1968, 82). This process results in a two-layered manuscript which consists of (1) the *scriptio inferior* or ‘undertext’, that is the text which has been removed and which usually cannot be read without the help of specific technical equipment, in the following referred to as ‘underlayer’, and (2) the *scriptio superior* or ‘overtext’, that is the text which has been substituted and which can easily be read, in the following referred to as ‘overlayer’ (see further Section 4.2).

In medieval and early modern Iceland, *palimpsestation* of books that had become damaged, obsolete or useless in any other way, was a common phenomenon: the Arnamagnæan Manuscript Collection alone, today divided between the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen and the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies in Reykjavík, holds at least thirty Icelandic palimpsests (Jakob Benediktsson 1968, 84). Considering the Icelandic palimpsests preserved in other collections, however, the

actual number of palimpsests among Icelandic manuscripts is probably considerably higher.¹

Despite the prominence of palimpsests in the Icelandic manuscript material, most of these palimpsests have so far received little attention in Icelandic manuscript research, with the exception of several unusual palimpsest manuscripts, which have been the subject of case studies (Springborg 1969; Westergård-Nielsen 1977; Magnús Már Lárusson 1951). However, no comparative study exists of the different types of palimpsests present in the Icelandic manuscript material and the historical context of their production. Hence, it remains unclear what function palimpsestation fulfilled in Icelandic manuscript culture and whether there are differences between the medieval and early modern periods.

In this article, I propose to distinguish between two distinctive main functions of palimpsestation: *parchment recycling* and *manuscript recontextualisation*.

In most cases, palimpsestation constitutes a form of parchment recycling: an old manuscript is dismembered so that a new manuscript may be created from its material components, which would otherwise be considered waste (Renhart 2020, 26; Ryley 2017, 9). Although manuscripts were palimpsested in both medieval and early modern Iceland, most of the palimpsests preserved in the Icelandic material date from the period following the Icelandic Reformation, which had a considerable impact on both theology and liturgy, and made the majority of the liturgical books that had been used before obsolete (Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2017, 163). Instead, there was a strong demand for new religious books in the form of handwritten manuscripts or printed books. As the purchase of paper for the purpose of book production was expensive (Hufnagel 2020, 180–83; Arna Björk Stefánsdóttir 2013, 233–34), recycling the parchment of the now obsolete Latin Catholic books to create new codices, charters and even parchment prints provided an obvious alternative. Although printing on palimpsest parchment seems to have been a specific Icelandic phenomenon, the material and textual composition of the two surviving

1 To this date, there is no complete list of Icelandic palimpsests held by Icelandic and international collections. To my knowledge, palimpsests connected to Iceland exist in the Arnarnagnæan Manuscript Collection and at the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen, the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, the National Library of Iceland, the National Archives of Iceland and the National Museum of Iceland in Reykjavík, the Royal Library of Sweden in Stockholm and the John Rylands Research Institute and Library in Manchester.

Icelandic palimpsest parchment prints has until now never been investigated (see further Section 2.3).

In other cases, palimpsestation constitutes a form of manuscript recontextualisation: rather than removing the entire content of the original manuscript, only part of it is erased and substituted with new content, while selected elements of the original manuscript are intentionally retained and recombined with the new elements. The Icelandic manuscript material provides several examples of this type of palimpsests, among them several Latin Catholic codices that were recontextualised after the Reformation, to be used in a Protestant context. A few examples of such manuscripts are mentioned by Magnús Már Lárusson (1951), Christian Westergård-Nielsen (1977), Peter Springborg (1969) and Árni Heimir Ingólfsson (2019, 68). However, the role of manuscript recontextualisation in Icelandic manuscript culture has never been investigated systematically.

In this article, I compare several typical and noteworthy examples of Icelandic palimpsest manuscripts, charters and parchment prints to investigate the respective historical contexts of their production and to reveal their function in medieval and early modern Icelandic manuscript culture. Based on the discussion of the various Icelandic palimpsests, I demonstrate the functional differences between palimpsests that are the result of parchment recycling and palimpsests that are the result of manuscript recontextualisation. Finally, I argue for the need for a redefinition of the term 'palimpsest' and suggest a new terminology and typology for the description and interpretation of Icelandic palimpsests.

2 The Palimpsest as a Product of Parchment Recycling

2.1 Manuscript Codices and Fragments

Most palimpsest manuscripts constitute a form of recycling, in the sense of conversion of waste material or debris from an obsolete older book into reusable writing material (Renhart 2020, 26; Ryley 2017, 7). This type of palimpsestation is common and includes the clear majority of the existing palimpsest manuscripts in the Icelandic material.

On a general level, palimpsestation can be compared to other forms of recycling of used parchment for other books, such as for flyleaves, paste-downs, quire guards or book wrappers (Ryley 2017, 9). It is important to note, however, that palimpsests differ from other forms of parchment

recycling: while the recycling of parchment from older books for flyleaves or book wrappers is mainly preservative, as pieces of the dismantled codex are used to preserve another book, the reuse of scraped or washed parchment as writing material is actually creative in the sense that it allows for the production of a new manuscript. Furthermore, leaves reused as flyleaves or wrappers do not need to have their textual content removed. In contrast, for a leaf to be reused as writing material, it is necessary that its former textual content has been removed beforehand (Ryley 2017, 9–10). Yet the scraped- or washed-off text can in many cases still be recovered, either because it has not been removed completely and is thus still visible to the naked eye or with the help of certain technological applications, such as multispectral analysis. In a way, palimpsestation may lead to both the destruction of a text and its preservation as an underlayer.

An Icelandic palimpsest manuscript that preserves the only manuscript witness of a specific text is AM 147 4to, also known as *Heynesbók*. This composite manuscript combines several codicological units from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Kålund 1888–1894, 1:431).² One of these codicological units, ff. 93r–111v, contains an otherwise lost redaction of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* as its underlayer. The text of the saga was written in the fifteenth century and removed in c. 1600. While the underlayer of AM 147 4to is unique, its overlayer is rather commonplace: the manuscript is a legal codex containing the law book *Jónsbók*. Icelandic manuscript collections contain several early modern manuscripts, as well as printed copies of *Jónsbók* made from palimpsested parchment from dismembered manuscripts, some of which are discussed below. This can easily be explained by the fact that *Jónsbók* was one of the most copied texts in medieval and early modern Iceland, with more than 200 parchment and paper manuscripts surviving today (Magnús Már Lárusson 1981, 613; Halldór Hermannsson 1966, 7).³

As far as the underlayer is concerned, however, most palimpsests belonging to this type in the Icelandic material contain fragments of

2 AM 147 4to on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/AM04-0147> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

3 Katelin Parsons has recently argued that there was a preference in early modern Iceland for *Jónsbók* to be written on palimpsest parchment, as it was a symbol of prestige for a family to own an old exemplar of *Jónsbók*. In contrast, the preferred medium of religious texts was paper, as these texts were more closely associated with European cultural developments and book culture.

liturgical books that have been scraped and reused as writing material (Jakob Benediktsson 1968, 84). This is not surprising, as a major share of manuscripts that existed in medieval Iceland were liturgical books. Several Icelandic church inventories preserved as *máldagar* (cartularies) mention old or unusable books as part of the church property. These might include books that had become obsolete or gone out of fashion due to changes in liturgical practices or that had been worn out by repeated use or the passage of time. Unusable liturgical books thus provided an important source of recycled manuscript parchment.

In Iceland, the key cultural and political development that made the majority of the liturgical books obsolete was the Reformation (Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2017, 163). The break with Rome had a considerable impact on both theology and liturgy. The differences between Catholic and Lutheran liturgical practices meant that most of the liturgical books that until then had been used during Office and Mass could not be used any longer and had to be replaced by new books (Loftur Guttormsson 2000, 63). Already in 1540, the New Testament was printed in Roskilde in an Icelandic translation by Oddur Gottskálfsson (c. 1495–1556), making it the oldest preserved book to be printed in Icelandic. In 1555, the second Lutheran bishop of Skálholt, Marteinn Einarsson (†1576), published an Icelandic manual, a handbook for priests containing various rites besides those for Office and Mass, as well as an Icelandic hymnal, a collection of hymns. In 1584, Guðbrandur Þorláksson (c. 1542–1627), second Lutheran bishop of Hólar, printed the whole Bible in Icelandic as well as an extensive Icelandic gradual, a collection of chants for Mass, in 1594. These books, among others, then became the cornerstone of the Icelandic Lutheran service (Loftur Guttormsson 2000, 63–77).

We do not know with certainty what happened to the Catholic liturgical books owned by the Icelandic monasteries and parish churches that were replaced by the new Lutheran service books after the Reformation. While some books may have been destroyed or thrown away, others may have simply been stored away and forgotten (Gottskálf Jensson 2021, 151; Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2017, 161). However, the surviving manuscript material shows that some Catholic liturgical books were modified to varying degrees and recontextualised for a Lutheran context (see further Section 3.1). Manuscripts that were neither destroyed nor still

used could be recycled: in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many manuscripts were dismembered, so that their parchment could be used as material for book bindings (Gottskálk Jensson 2021, 151; Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2017, 161). In other cases, the parchment of liturgical books was palimpsested and reused as writing material (Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2017, 163). According to Jakob Benediktsson (1968, 84), the majority of Icelandic palimpsest manuscripts that survive today were palimpsested in either the sixteenth or the seventeenth century.

One example of an Icelandic palimpsest that combines a pre-Reformation underlayer with a post-Reformation overlayer is Lbs fragm 29. This leaf was originally part of an antiphonary, written in c. 1100, possibly in France (Jakob Benediktsson 1959, 8).⁴ However, the manuscript was dismembered at some point in the late sixteenth century. The leaf was washed off, folded in the middle and possibly inserted into a booklet. In c. 1600, it was then reused as writing material for an Icelandic translation of Martin Luther's explanation of the Ten Commandments, which constitutes the first part of his Small Catechism (Jakob Benediktsson 1959, 8). The Small Catechism, also known in Iceland as *kver* ('booklet', 'quire'), was translated into Icelandic several times during the sixteenth century. It was first printed in 1562 in an Icelandic translation by Oddur Gottskáلكsson (Árni Daníel Júlíusson 2023, 117; Halldór Hermannsson 1916, 15–16). The scribe of Lbs fragm 29 may have intended to copy the complete *kver* but seems to never have finished the work, as the leaf preserves the last part of the eighth commandment, the complete ninth commandment, but only the caption for the tenth commandment (f. 1v).

Besides Lbs fragm 29, there are further examples of post-Reformation Icelandic manuscripts that are written on palimpsested parchment from Catholic liturgical books. One such manuscript is Holm perg 5 4to (Gödel 1897, 39–40; Gjerløw 1980, 1:80–81; Kolsrud 1912, 15r). This codex, written completely on palimpsest parchment, is a composite manuscript which was compiled in the second half of the sixteenth century. The overlayer of the manuscript includes both religious and legal material, primarily an Icelandic translation of the deuterocanonical *Book of Sirach* (*Ecclesiasticus*), as well as several sections of *Jónsbók*. All of the manuscript is written on

4 Lbs fragm 29 on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/LbsFragm-0029> (last accessed: 29 February 2024).

palimpsested parchment from a dismembered liturgical book which has been identified by Lilli Gjerløw (1980, 1:80) as a twelfth-century breviary-lectionary, written by two scribes. Holm perg 13 4to also contains several palimpsested leaves from a dismembered liturgical book. This codex is an evangeliary, containing gospels, epistles and collects, written in Icelandic in the middle of the sixteenth century (Gödel 1897, 53–54; Kolsrud 1912, 16r). In contrast, AM 38 8vo is a copy of *Jónsbók* written in 1578 that is partly written on palimpsested parchment from two different manuscripts, the first an older copy of *Jónsbók*, and the second a liturgical book with musical notation (Kålund 1888–1894, 2:351).⁵ A considerably younger example is Holm perg 12 III fol. This fragment consists of a single palimpsested leaf from a dismembered liturgical book with musical notation, either a gradual or an antiphony. The palimpsested leaf was reused in the seventeenth or eighteenth century as writing material for a manuscript containing an Icelandic translation of the first Book of Samuel. At a later point, this Icelandic manuscript was likewise dismembered and the leaf reused as a cover for another codex (Gödel 1897, 32; Kolsrud 1912, 14r).

Besides religious and legal manuscripts, palimpsest parchment from dismembered liturgical books could also be used for narrative texts: one such example is AM 357 4to, written in Iceland in c. 1600 on recycled parchment and containing *Hrólf's saga Gautrekssonar* (Kålund 1888–1894, 1:585). On several leaves, the remains of major initials and staves which were drawn in red ink are clearly visible, suggesting that the palimpsested parchment stems from a dismembered gradual or an antiphony.

An example of a liturgical manuscript that was dismembered after the Reformation, partially palimpsested, but then recycled in a different way as binding material for other books, is the fragment Þjms 625.⁶ This fragment belongs to the same dismembered manuscript, a missal from the late twelfth century, as two other fragments preserved in Icelandic collections, Þjms 174 and Lbs fragm 17 (Attinger and Ommundsen 2013, 306–7).⁷

5 AM 38 8vo on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/AM08-0038> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

6 Þjms 625 on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/Þjms-0625> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

7 Þjms 174 on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/Þjms-0174> (last accessed 29 February 2024); Lbs fragm 17 on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/LbsFragm-0017> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

While all three surviving fragments of the dismembered missal were reused as material for bookbindings, the text on the verso of Pjms 625 has been removed, suggesting that it was originally meant to be reused as writing material. This was never done, however, possibly because the erased text remains highly visible and the parchment was therefore ill-suited as writing material. Nevertheless, Pjms 625 and its sibling fragments demonstrate that the leaves of the same dismembered codex could be intended for different forms of recycling.

While these examples of palimpsest-based recycling of liturgical manuscripts date to the post-Reformation period, the Icelandic palimpsest material does suggest that the Reformation was not the only reason for the recycling of liturgical manuscripts. Several Icelandic palimpsest manuscripts that reuse parts of liturgical manuscripts were produced long before the Reformation (Jakob Benediktsson 1968, 84). The legal codex Manchester, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, Icelandic Ms 5 is a palimpsest from the middle of the fifteenth century (Benedikz 1978, 297–98). The Icelandic law book *Jónsbók* constitutes the overlayer, while the underlayer belonged to a liturgical book. Benedikz (1978, 298) suggests that the book might have been a large psalter or benedictional, written in England in c. 1300. A second example of a liturgical book which was palimpsested in the medieval period is Holm perg 36 V 4to. This fragment consists of a palimpsested bifolium from a dismembered Latin ordinal, written in the second half of the thirteenth century, which was once used as a cover for another codex. On f. 1r, the original text was erased and replaced with the first part of the Icelandic Ordo for St Jón of Hólar, written in c. 1350 (Gödel 1897, 105–6; Kolsrud 1912, 19r).

Even the oldest surviving Icelandic manuscript is a palimpsest: AM 732 a VII 4to consists of a single leaf (Kålund 1888–1894, 2:159; Hreinn Benediktsson 1965, 13).⁸ While the underlayer has not been identified, the high quality of the parchment makes it likely that the original manuscript was imported from another place in Europe. The overlayer is an Easter table on the recto of the leaf, written in Iceland between 1121 and 1139 (Hreinn Benediktsson 1965, 13). The verso of the leaf has not been rewritten and remains blank.

8 AM 732 a VII 4to on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/AM04-0732a-VII> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

Another famous Icelandic palimpsest manuscript is the codex GKS 2868 4to. The codex contains *Brennu-Njáls saga*, the Icelandic national epos, and was written on recycled parchment in the second half of the fourteenth century. This manuscript bears the telling sobriquet *Skafinskinna* ('scraped parchment'). It is literally a palimpsest called 'palimpsest'.

2.2 Charters

The Icelandic charter material held by the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies and the National Archives of Iceland contains several cases of charters that are made from palimpsests of liturgical books. One palimpsest-based charter which preserves most of its original Latin text is AM Dipl. Isl. fasc. LXXIII 27 (DI XIII, 192).⁹ The charter consists of a bifolium of a dismembered lectionary that was only partly palimpsested: while the Latin text has been completely removed in f. 2r–v, it remains largely intact in f. 1r–v. The overlayer of the palimpsested leaf consists of three different short texts: the first text was written in Kálfafell í Fljótshverfi in 1557. The second text was written by Jón Hakason in 1584. Remains of the third text are visible at the top of f. 2v, but these are largely unintelligible. In addition, at the bottom of the same folio, there are two drawings of a lion, drawn in red ink by the same hand (DI XIII, 192).

The underlayer of the charter AM Dipl. Isl. fasc. XVIII 22 was previously unidentified (DI V, 433).¹⁰ However, four words of the underlayer remain clearly visible above the Icelandic text of the overlayer and can be read as “*corpora mentesque sanctificet per*” (AM Dipl. Isl. fasc. XVIII 22, 1v). These words belong to the Secret of the third Sunday after the Epiphany, suggesting that the palimpsested fragment once belonged to a missal.¹¹

In contrast, in the case of the charter ÞÍ K 20/15 1579, none of the original text remains visible to the naked eye. However, traces of a mi-

9 AM Dipl. Isl. fasc. LXXIII 27 on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/AMDI-F0073-0027> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

10 AM Dipl. Isl. fasc. XVIII 22 on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/AMDI-F0018-0022> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

11 In the *Missale Nidrosiense*, printed in 1519, the Secret of the Third Sunday after the Epiphany reads as follows: “*Secreta Hec hostia, domine, quesumus, emundet nostra delicta et ad sacrificium celebrandum subditorum tibi corpora mentesque sanctificet. Per dominum.*” (*Missale Nidrosiense*, 59)

nor initial in red and green, and of notation lines in red, as well as many scratches, clearly demonstrate that the charter is written on recycled parchment from a dismembered liturgical book with musical notation, probably either a gradual or an antiphonary, whose original content was scraped off.

A fourth charter written on palimpsest parchment from a liturgical book is ÞÍ K 21/3a 1590 (Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2017, 172).¹² The charter was written by the Icelander Hallur Erlendsson in 1590 on recycled parchment. While one side of the parchment was cleaned and prepared for reuse, the Latin text on the backside of the charter was not removed. However, the writing has been damaged and today is partly hidden by two pieces of some sort of plastic material that was added in the twentieth century to stabilise the charter, which makes it difficult to read the text. However, I was able to identify the lower half of the fragment as part of the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 15:1–3), suggesting that the dismembered manuscript may have been a lectionary.

2.3 *Parchment Prints*

While palimpsests can be found in codices, booklets or charters written in Iceland, Icelandic palimpsests are not limited to handwritten artefacts: they also occur in printed books. To my knowledge, there survive a total of three exemplars of sixteenth-century Icelandic printed books from the Hólar printing press that are printed on parchment, which today are in the National Library of Iceland in Reykjavík and the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen. Of these parchment prints, at least two are printed on palimpsested parchment from dismembered Latin manuscripts. These palimpsests are artefacts that differ from other palimpsests in that they cross the medial boundaries between manuscript and print: while the underlayer consists of one or several dismembered manuscripts, the overlayer is a printed book. These mixed manuscript/print palimpsests thus constitute a specific type of written artefact.

Two of these prints are exemplars of *Lögbok Islendinga*, the first printed edition of the Icelandic law book *Jónsbók*. The first edition of *Lögbok Islendinga* was printed in Hólar in 1578. It was reprinted in 1580 and 1582. Several exemplars of these prints have survived, most of them printed on

12 ÞÍ K 21/3a 1590 on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/Thjskjs-FOO17-K21-3a> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

paper. However, two of the exemplars which were probably printed in 1580 are made of parchment (Jakob Benediktsson 1968, 84).

The first exemplar of the print is held by the National Library of Iceland (Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2017, 169; Munksgaard 1938, 112). As this exemplar has no individual shelfmark, it is henceforth referred to by its library barcode as *Lögbok Islendinga* (13630572). This exemplar is made from palimpsested parchment from recycled manuscripts written in Latin. The Latin text of the original manuscripts has not been erased completely and remains highly visible in the margins of many leaves (Munksgaard 1938, 113). In addition to the palimpsest parchment used for the print itself, there is the partly palimpsested fragment of an early-twelfth-century missal used as a flyleaf at the end of the book (Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2017, 169). A second flyleaf, which seems to have been in the front of the codex, is missing. As the remaining flyleaf has been partly palimpsested, it seems likely that the flyleaves were taken from the same dismembered codices that were recycled as writing material for the print.

The texts present in the underlayer of this *Lögbok Islendinga* (13630572) have never been studied. I was able to identify several liturgical, biblical, apocryphal and hagiographic texts, and to reconstruct some of the dismembered manuscripts. Most of the parchment leaves stem from only a small number of dismembered codices, which include different types of liturgical books, both with and without musical notation, as well as a manuscript which consisted of several books from the Old Testament and which may have been a complete Bible. The most notable text present in the underlayer, however, is the *Vita and Translatio Sancti Severini*, that is the Vita of St Severin (†403), the third Bishop of Cologne (Pangerl and Päßgen 2022). This text has not previously been attested for Iceland, either directly, in the form of a Latin manuscript, or indirectly, e.g. in the form of an Icelandic translation or a reference in historical documents. The majority of the texts identified in the underlayer seem to be written in Carolingian script (Derolez 2003, 47–55), suggesting that they may be among the oldest manuscripts preserved in Iceland.

The second parchment exemplar of *Lögbok Islendinga* is today kept in the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen, where it has the shelfmark 9,-208 8° LN bis 35 (Halldór Hermannsson 1916, 23). This exemplar is also

made from palimpsest parchment taken from several older dismembered manuscripts. These manuscripts seem to have included different types of manuscripts, including liturgical books, as texts written in different hands, major initials and staves in red ink are visible in the underlayer of the printed book. However, the identification of the actual texts is difficult, as the exemplar is in very poor condition. The parchment leaves are darkened and, in some cases, damaged. Furthermore, many leaves include paper repairs that seem to be very old and are mostly in bad condition themselves. While the texts in the underlayer are highly visible on several leaves, only a few short words or partial words can be read with the naked eye, but most of the writing is unintelligible. Nevertheless, I was able to identify parts of the Book of Psalms in the underlayer of two leaves. Based on the layout of the underlayer, the leaves are unlikely to have been part of a liturgical psalter. Instead, they seem to have formed part of a bible, and probably the same bible as was used for the other palimpsest parchment print.

While the texts in the underlayer themselves remain for the most part unidentified, the discernible script, major initials and musical notation provide information about the dismembered manuscripts. For example, the major initials and notation lines visible on f. 245v (p. 490) and f. 246v (p. 492) suggest that these leaves belonged to an illuminated liturgical book containing music, most likely a gradual or antiphonary. Furthermore, the major 'H' initial on f. 245v (p. 490) is very similar in style and use of colour to the major initial 'E' in *Þjms 1799 1v*, a fragment of a dismembered psalter written in Iceland in the second half of the twelfth century. This psalter has been preserved in five fragments: AM 249 b fol., AM accessoria 7 Hs 108, Lbs fragm 54, Lbs fragm 56 and *Þjms 1799* (Selma Jónsdóttir 1976).¹³ Both initials consist of the main body of the letter in an unusual pale green, as well as twine and flower elements in blue, and are filled in brownish ink. While these fragments cannot belong to the same dismembered manu-

13 AM 249 b fol. on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/AM02-0249b> (last accessed 29 February 2024); AM Accessoria 7 Hs 108 on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/en/Acc-0007-d> (last accessed 29 February 2024); Lbs fragment 54 on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/LbsFragm-0054> (last accessed 29 February 2024); Lbs fragment 56 on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/LbsFragm-0056> (last accessed 29 February 2024); *Þjms 1799* on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/Þjms-1799> (last accessed 29 February 2024). This dismembered psalter may itself be written partly on palimpsested parchment: On f. 6v of AM 249 b fol., there are visible traces of text which may be the remnants of removed earlier writing.

script as they belong to different types of liturgical books with different layouts, the similarities in the initials are so striking that I believe they may have been made in the same workshop, possibly by the same book-painter.

In addition to these two exemplars of *Lögbok Islendinga*, there exists a third Icelandic parchment print. This is an exemplar of *Lifsins Vegur*, an Icelandic translation of the theological treatise *Livsens Vej* by the Danish Lutheran theologian Niels Hemmingsen, printed by Guðbrandur Þorláksson in Hólar in 1575. The parchment exemplar has the shelfmark Hielmst. 495 8to and is likewise held by the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen (Halldór Hermannsson 1916, 17). While there are no visible traces of removed texts on the parchment leaves of this exemplar, the leaves are full of heavy scrape marks. These may potentially be the result of palimpsestation.

While only these three exemplars of parchment prints from Hólar survive, it is possible that there were originally more. The reprocessing of parchment from older manuscripts as palimpsest parchment for new manuscripts is often explained by a combination of high demand for new manuscripts, a lack or scarcity of new writing material, and the ample supply of used writing material that could potentially be recycled through palimpsestation (Lowe 1972, 481–82; Declercq 2007, 20–22). All three factors seem to be present in sixteenth-century Iceland. On the one hand, there must have been considerable demand for exemplars of the new printed edition of *Jónsbók*. On the other hand, this demand could not be met by relying solely on new writing material, either parchment or paper. Paper was first introduced in Iceland in the first half of the fifteenth century, became more common in the middle of the sixteenth century and finally supplanted parchment as the main writing material for both manuscripts and documents after 1580 (Arna Björk Stefánsdóttir 2013, 227–32; Hufnagel 2020, 177). In contrast, from the very beginning, printed books were mainly made out of paper (Arna Björk Stefánsdóttir 2013, 232–33). While parchment had been produced locally for centuries, papermaking constituted a new technology. The paper used for printing at Hólar was imported at high cost from the European continent (Arna Björk Stefánsdóttir 2013, 233–34; Hufnagel 2020, 180–83).

While the supply of new paper or parchment at Hólar was limited, there was a third source of writing material that the printers could tap into:

the library of Hólar Cathedral. According to an inventory preserved in a *máldagi* from 1525 (DI IX, 299), Hólar Cathedral owned a considerable number of Latin books in the sixteenth century, none of which has been preserved. It seems very likely that the manuscripts that were dismembered and palimpsested to gain material for the parchment prints were taken from the Cathedral library. Thus, the palimpsest fragments used for the Hólar parchment prints present important evidence for the reconstruction of the lost library.

Parchment prints were a common phenomenon during the earliest period of European printing in the fifteenth century, and some of the earliest European incunables were printed on parchment. Of the famous Gutenberg Bible, printed in Mainz in the 1450s, there survive both paper and parchment copies. However, fifteenth-century European parchment prints generally make use of new parchment. There is only one known parchment print outside Iceland that is printed on palimpsest parchment: Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Library, Rb 2° 34, an exemplar of Pope Clemens V. *Constitutiones*, printed in Venice in 1476 (Schmitz 2018, 87). Although further, as-yet-undiscovered, parchment prints containing palimpsest parchment may exist, printing on palimpsest parchment seems to have been the exception rather than the rule.

2.4 Summary

The different palimpsests from medieval and early modern Iceland, dating from the twelfth to the seventeenth century, suggest that palimpsesting was a common method of recycling old parchment and gaining new material for writing or printing in Iceland from the very beginning of Icelandic book culture, and it continued to be so in early modern times. Palimpsesting of parchment was one important way that obsolete manuscripts could be recycled in medieval and early modern Iceland. Palimpsesting was motivated by an acute need for new manuscripts, a lack or shortage of new parchment that could be used as writing material, as well as an ample supply of used parchment from obsolete manuscripts. Especially after the introduction of the Reformation, obsolete manuscripts were abundant in Iceland in the form of Catholic liturgical books no longer used, which could freely be dismembered and recycled to create new manuscripts.

Manuscripts made of recycled parchment could take many shapes and forms: palimpsested parchment was used to create whole codices, as well as smaller booklets, and was even used as writing material for charters. Furthermore, palimpsested parchment was also used in sixteenth-century Iceland to create printed books. On a European scale, books printed on palimpsested parchment seem to have been at the least very uncommon, if not effectively unknown, as paper was cheaper and widely available as printing material. Parchment prints, in contrast, constituted a more exclusive ‘deluxe’ product and made use of high-quality parchment (Needham 2015, 250–51). Palimpsest parchment, which was more expensive than paper, but of considerably lower quality than new parchment, was ill-suited for both mass production of cheap books and for printing high-quality books. The Icelandic parchment prints may thus constitute a specific Icelandic phenomenon.

3 The Palimpsest as a Product of Manuscript Recontextualisation

3.1 Recontextualisation of Liturgical Books after the Reformation

A second type of palimpsest is characterised by a more complex redaction of the original manuscript. In this case, only part of the content of the original manuscript is erased, intentionally leaving selected content intact. The overlayer thus consists of the whole of the newly added content, written in place of the erased content, and the retained content. This type of palimpsest constitutes a form of manuscript reworking or recontextualisation.

This less common second type of palimpsest has not received attention in previous research. One example is the codex Thott 154 fol. (Árni Heimir Ingólfsson 2019, 68; Kålund 1900, 306–7). The original manuscript, a liturgical book, was written in England in the last quarter of the fourteenth century. The Latin text was written in two columns and lavishly decorated with illuminated and historiated initials, and extensive decorations that framed the columns. The codex came to Iceland in c. 1600, when it was substantially reworked and recontextualised. The codex was dismembered, and each leaf was cut in half twice, to get four smaller leaves. The Latin text was removed, while the illuminated initials and other decorative elements were retained. New content, both textual and musical, was inserted

into the palimpsested areas. This content stems for the most part from the Icelandic gradual printed by Guðbrandur Þorláksson in 1594 (Árni Heimir Ingólfsson 2019, 68). Thott 154 fol. differs from the examples of parchment recycling discussed above in that it preserves parts of the artefactual features of the dismembered manuscript and incorporates them into the new manuscript. While many medieval liturgical books were discarded or recycled after the Reformation, Thott 154 fol. demonstrates that others could be recontextualised by palimpsesting them and substituting the obsolete Catholic texts with relevant Lutheran content, while preserving the beautifully illuminated initials and lavish decorations of the original manuscript.

However, Thott 154 fol. is not the only example of a liturgical book modified and recontextualised through palimpsestation. Two Icelandic law manuscripts, NKS 1931 4to and NKS 340 8vo, are made from parchment from the same dismembered and selectively palimpsested liturgical book (Springborg 1969; Kålund 1900, 273, 302).¹⁴ These two law codices contain *Jónsbók*, written by the sixteenth-century Icelandic scribe Bjarni Jónsson. Both manuscripts are copies of the first printed edition of *Jónsbók* (see Section 2.3) and must therefore have been written after 1578 (Springborg 1969, 312–13). As is the case for Thott 154 fol., the book painting in the dismembered liturgical book was incorporated into the new manuscripts: seven illuminated initials, as well as seven puzzle initials in red, blue and violet ink were retained and reused in the new manuscripts by modifying their form and incorporating them into the Icelandic text. The first leaf of NKS 1931 4to is actually a double palimpsest: originally, the scribe wrote the beginning of *Jónsbók* both on the recto and verso of the leaf. He removed the text he had just written, turning the leaf around. On the former verso, now recto, he added a title page for the codex and on the former recto, now verso, he started writing the actual text of *Jónsbók* (Springborg 1969, 306).

Kristian Kålund (1900, 273, 302) identified the underlayer in NKS 340 8vo as a Latin ritual and the underlayer in NKS 1931 4to as a Latin missal, without identifying them as belonging to the same manuscript. In his analysis of NKS 1931 4to, Halldór Hermannsson (1966, 15) suggests the

¹⁴ NKS 1931 4to on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/NKS04-1931> (last accessed 29 February 2024); NKS 340 8vo on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/NKS08-0340> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

origin of the liturgical manuscript was fourteenth-century England. In his study of NKS 340 8vo and NKS 1931 4to, Peter Springborg (1969, 306, 326) identifies the Latin fragments underlying both manuscripts as belonging to the same dismembered liturgical book, excluding the last seven leaves (ff. 157–163) of NKS 340 8vo, which he assumes belong to a different manuscript (Springborg 1969, 308, 325).¹⁵ Furthermore, he agrees with Halldór Hermannsson in tentatively attributing the palimpsested Latin manuscript to fourteenth-century England, noting the need for further research (Springborg 1969, 326).

Another example of a palimpsest-based manuscript recontextualisation is the multilingual psalter AM 618 4to, which joins textual elements in Latin, French and Icelandic in a complex and multi-layered manuscript (Kålund 1888–1894, 2:31–32).¹⁶ The original manuscript was a bilingual psalter, written in England in the second half of the twelfth century, displaying Latin and French versions of the psalter side by side. It is a typical example of a small group of six bilingual Latin-French parallel psalters from late-twelfth-century/early-thirteenth-century England (Agrigoroaei 2018, 31–32). However, the French text was scraped off in the sixteenth century, leaving only the major initials, some minor initials and single words. In the now blank parts of the leaves, the psalms' Icelandic translation by Oddur Gottskálksson, printed as part of *Guðbrandsbiblía* in 1584, was added. The luxuriously illuminated initials and some of the minor initials at the beginning of each new verse were reused, either in their original or an adapted form. Some of the minor initials and one of the major initials were washed off and painted over with new initials, to fit the newly added Icelandic text. The intention behind the reworking of the manuscript may have been to change the beautiful but effectively useless artefact into a book that could be used by a late-sixteenth-century Icelander to read the Psalms either in Latin or Icelandic, or to use both text versions together to teach Latin.

Interestingly, a comparable recontextualisation to AM 618 4to seems to have been attempted regarding one of the manuscript's siblings: the

15 Peter Springborg does not explain why he believes these leaves belong to a different manuscript. Based on my own observations, however, the script and notation in the underlayer of ff. 157–63 differ from the script and notation in the underlayer of the remaining codex, suggesting that they do indeed stem from a different musical liturgical book.

16 AM 618 4to on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/da/AM04-0618> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

BnF Latin 768 is an analogous Latin-French parallel psalter, written in the last quarter of the twelfth century, possibly in Canterbury (Agrigoroaei 2018, 31).¹⁷ In the same way as for AM 618 4to, in the first part of the manuscript the French text on the right side was at one point carefully removed by an unknown owner (ff. 10r–58v), probably with the intention of adding the translation of the Psalms into another language in the now blank second column of the leaves. As for AM 618 4to, the illuminated initials of the French text were retained so that they could be reused and incorporated into a new text. However, the French text remains intact in the second half of the codex, and no new text has been added in the blank parts of the leaves in the first half. Instead, the illuminated initials were cut out from both the Latin text and the French text, probably so that they could be pasted into another book; either a manuscript or a printed book.¹⁸ This form of manuscript reuse was certainly a lot simpler and more versatile than palimpsesting and rewriting an entire codex. Nevertheless, the attempted modification of this manuscript corresponds to the realised reworking of AM 618 4to, showing that the two parallel psalters were approached in basically the same way. In two independent contexts, the owners of the manuscripts had similar ideas about how a codex could be recontextualised.

A fourth example of a palimpsest manuscript which retains one single major initial is AM 90 8vo, written in Iceland in c. 1600 (Kålund 1888–1894, 2:386–87).¹⁹ The entire manuscript is made from palimpsest parchment. The overlayer of the manuscript contains a calendar, as well as two Lutheran texts in Icelandic, while the underlayer consists of an unidentified Catholic liturgical book written in Latin. The retained major initial is a ‘D’ initial, which can be found in the top right corner of f. 31r. This initial is followed by an incipit written in capital letters. The retained ‘D’ initial was not incorporated into the newly added text, as the palimpsested leaf was turned 90 degrees before reusing it as writing material. The

17 BnF Latin 786 on <https://manuscripts-france-angleterre.org>: <https://manuscripts-france-angleterre.org/view3if/pl/ark:/12148/btv1b105395323> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

18 Cutting illuminated initials and miniatures out of parchment leaves has been a common practice in Europe and America since early modern times and remains so until this day (de Hamel 1996; Wieck 1996).

19 AM 90 8vo on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/en/AMo8-0090> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

initial therefore remains an arbitrary decoration without any function in the overlayer.

While the modifications of Thott 154 fol., NKS 340 8vo/NKS 1931 4to, AM 618 4to and AM 90 8vo are in many ways comparable, there are also some differences. In all four cases an obsolete text was removed and substituted with a relevant text in Icelandic. The liturgical books used to create Thott 154 fol., NKS 340 8vo, NKS 1931 4to and, presumably, AM 90 8vo were obsolete for confessional and linguistic reasons: as Catholic liturgical books written in Latin, they could not be used in a Lutheran service held in Icelandic. They were thus palimpsested to create new manuscripts belonging to different social spheres, as both religious manuscripts (Thott 154 fol. and AM 90 8vo), and law manuscripts (NKS 340 8vo and NKS 1931 4to). In contrast, the removed content of AM 618 4to was only linguistically obsolete, being written in French, while the actual content of the French text, the Psalms, was still relevant. Therefore, instead of adding an unrelated new text, exactly the same text was inserted into the manuscript, but just in another language. For this reason, AM 618 4to was not dismembered, and its original codicological structure could be preserved. The reworking of all four manuscripts can be dated to the second half of the sixteenth century. As there are no similar examples preserved in the Icelandic manuscript material dating to earlier or later time periods, this type of recontextualisation of Latin liturgical books may have been particular to the half century following the Reformation.²⁰

3.2 Modification of Manuscripts Written in Icelandic

Another example of an Icelandic palimpsest of the second type is the law codex AM 161 4to, which was written in Iceland in the middle of the sixteenth century, possibly by Grímur Skúlason of Hrúni (†1582), and contains both *Jónsbók* and other legal texts in Icelandic (Kálund 1888–1894,

²⁰ While this type of manuscript recontextualisation seems to be uncommon, it is not confined to Iceland: Prof. Dr. Hanna Wimmer (Hamburg University) is currently investigating five German palimpsest manuscripts that retain major initials and, in some cases, incorporate these initials into the newly added text, in similar ways to the Icelandic examples discussed above. Three of these German manuscripts were previously discussed by Hermann Knaus (1972). All five manuscripts were palimpsested in monastic scribal workshops in fifteenth-century Germany and seem to represent an isolated local approach to recontextualising outdated manuscripts rather than a wider common phenomenon.

1:441–42; Halldór Hermannsson 1966, 17–18).²¹ A later ownership note identifies the Danish official Hendrik Kragh and his half-brother Poul Stigesen Hvide (Páll Stígsson) as owners of the manuscript: “Thenne Bog hører Migh Hennrick Kragh Tiill *med* Rette och tend erfued iegh epter minn gode Broder Pouell Stiifsenn aar 1566 tend gaff hand migh wdii fiin testament” (AM 161 4to, f. 1v).

The first section of the codex (ff. 1r–16r) contains a collection of minor law provisions. This section was heavily modified in two separate instances, resulting in several examples of palimpsestation:

The text of the first leaves of the manuscript (ff. 1r–6r) was removed and substituted with a table of contents in Danish for the Icelandic *Jónsbók* text (ff. 2r–6r). The scribe, who apparently knew both Icelandic and Danish, seems to have considered *Jónsbók* to be the most important part of the codex and the content of the first pages of lesser importance.

A further case of palimpsestation can be found on ff. 10r–10v. On f. 10r, the majority of the text was washed off and a new version of the same text was then added. On 10v, the original text was washed off, presumably by the same scribe, but no new text was added. The same scribe who wrote the new text on f. 10r, also added further law provisions to the collection in ff. 15r–16r.

A very different case is AM 556 a 4to (Kristian Kålund 1888–1894, 1:720).²² This codex mainly contains *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*. One of the texts it originally included is the satirical poem *Grettisfærsla* on ff. 52r–53r. However, this poem was later removed, initially without adding any new text in its place. Only later were the blank parts of the leaves used to write down minor textual additions by later owners of the manuscript. The reason for the removal of *Grettisfærsla* is probably the sexual content and obscene language of the poem (Heslop 2006, 69). Ironically, the remaining traces of the text were further damaged by an attempt to recover the text with the use of a detergent in the nineteenth century.²³

21 AM 161 4to on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/AM02-02491> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

22 AM 556 a 4to on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/AM04-0556a> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

23 AM 556 a 4to and *Grettisfærsla* are the object of an ongoing project by Kate Heslop and Beeke Stegmann which aims to restore the lost text of the poem with the help of spectral imaging, making it the first attempt of this kind for an Icelandic palimpsest. For information on the project, see <https://bit.ly/4gK89Ey> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

A comparable case is AM 586 4to, also known as *Arnarbælisbók* (Kristian Kålund 1888–1894, I 747–48).²⁴ This codex contains a collection of *Íslendingasögur*, *fornaldarsögur*, *riddarasögur* and *ævintýri*, among them the legendary saga *Bósa saga og Herraudís* on ff. 12v–19r. Like *Grettisfærsla*, *Bósa saga og Herraudís* contains some obscene sexual language regarding the encounter of the titular protagonist Bósi with several farmers' daughters. The most explicit sections on ff. 15r, 16v and 17v–18r were removed by a later owner of the manuscript, creating three lacunas in the text.

Although the changes made to these manuscripts vary in extent and nature, they all represent a similar manuscript reuse practice. In contrast to the various forms of parchment recycling whereby a manuscript is considered to be waste and is dismembered to reprocess its materials into clean writing material, the examples discussed partly and selectively preserve the artefactual and textual structure of the original manuscript, as far as they are deemed to be valuable or useful, and recombine them with newly added textual or non-textual elements. Thus, there is continuity between the original manuscript and the reworked manuscript, and, in certain cases, they are essentially the same artefact.

3.3 *Palimpsests in Forged Charters*

While all the examples of manuscript recontextualisation discussed above are codices or fragments of dismembered codices, manuscript recontextualisation could also be employed to create other kinds of documents. One important subgroup of such documents is forgeries of medieval charters in which (part of) the text of the original document is substituted with new text, but certain elements, such as the original seal, signature or parts of the text, are retained to suggest an authenticity and integrity of the newly created document (Hødnebo 1968, 82; Huitfeldt-Kaas 1896, 90–91). Rather than merely recycling old parchment from dismembered manuscripts (see Section 2.2), a forger used the palimpsest of an older charter to create a more convincing forgery.

Charter forgery is a common phenomenon. In his study of the Icelandic charters dated to before 1450, Stefán Karlsson (1963, xxvii–xxxvi) identifies ten charters that he considers to be forgeries written at a later

²⁴ AM 586 4to on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/AM04-0586> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

time. Four of these forgeries are palimpsests of older charters that retain the original seals but replace the writing. Two of them are forged by the same scribe: AM Dipl. Isl. fasc. IV 20 and AM Dipl. Isl. fasc. VI 8 (DI III, 375; DI III, 560; Stefán Karlsson 1963, 96–97 (no. 82), 151–52 (no. 120)). The forged charters are dated internally to 1390 and 1401, respectively. They concern the farm Alviðra in Dýrafjörður, which was the object of ownership disputes in the sixteenth century. In the course of these disputes, the forger seems to have created the forgeries to strengthen his legal position (Stefán Karlsson 1963, xxviii–xxix). To prove the authenticity of the forged charters, the forger retained the seals of the original charters: AM Dipl. Isl. fasc. IV 20 contained four seals, three of which have been preserved until today, whereas AM Dipl. Isl. fasc. VI 8 contained three seals, none of which has been preserved.

AM Dipl. Isl. fasc. VI 21 is also a palimpsest-based charter forgery (DI III, 590; Stefán Karlsson 1963, 164–65 (no. 131)).²⁵ The text of the original charter was removed in c. 1600 and substituted with a new text dated to 1406. The forged charter pretends to have been written by Jón Broddason, the episcopal official of the bishop of Hólar. It seems unlikely, however, that this Jón Broddason was even alive in 1406. In authentic charters, he is first mentioned in 1448, and in the function of *officialis* only in 1474 (Stefán Karlsson 1963, 165). Furthermore, this priest seems to be the same Jón Broddason who was abbot of Munkaþverá from 1489 to c. 1495 (Jón Guðnason 1976, 538). Of the three seals of the original charter, none has survived.

In a similar way, AM Dipl. Isl. fasc. VII 13 is a forged charter written on a palimpsested older charter (DI IV, 318; Stefán Karlsson 1963, xxxiii–xxxv, 207–208 (no. 161)). While the charter contains six holes for seals, none of these seals has been preserved. Although the charter is dated to 1417, it must actually have been written in the late sixteenth century, as the same scribe wrote another charter dated to 1590 (Stefán Karlsson 1963, xxxiv). This scribe is also responsible for AM Dipl. Isl. fasc. LII 18, a palimpsest-based forgery pretending to have been written in 1554 (DI XII, 471; Stefán Karlsson 1963, xxxiv). The Icelandic charter material dated to

25 AM Dipl. Isl. fasc. VI 21 on handrit.is: <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/AMDI-F0006-0021> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

after 1450 has not been systematically studied with regard to palimpsest-based forgeries (Jakob Benediktsson 1968, 84).

These examples may only be the tip of the iceberg: although several forged medieval charters survive, it is not difficult to imagine that there might have been considerably more such palimpsest-based charter forgeries in circulation in early modern Iceland. However, charters that can be recognised as forgeries are less likely to be preserved than authentic charters. Palimpsest-based charters might thus have been an even more common phenomenon than is evident from the surviving Icelandic charter material.

3.4 Summary

The different palimpsests from early modern Iceland, dating back to the sixteenth to eighteenth century, suggest that in the early modern period palimpsestation was a common method of recontextualising obsolete manuscripts and adapting them to changing social and cultural contexts. The Icelandic manuscript material contains several examples of palimpsest manuscripts in which selected textual, artistic or material elements of the original manuscript are intentionally retained and recombined with new textual, artistic or material elements. This form of palimpsestation needs to be differentiated from the recycling of waste parchment from dismembered manuscripts.

The Icelandic palimpsest manuscripts discussed above demonstrate various applications of palimpsestation for the purpose of manuscript recontextualisation. Among the Icelandic palimpsests which are the result of manuscript recontextualisation, there are several cases of Latin Catholic codices that were reworked after the Reformation to be used in a Protestant context by adding an Icelandic text (Springborg 1969; Westergård-Nielsen 1977; Magnús Már Lárusson 1951). These palimpsests are characterised by preserving initials from the original manuscript and either using them as decorations or reusing them as initials for the new Icelandic text. Besides substituting texts with new texts, certain Icelandic manuscripts could be palimpsested and recontextualised to censor objectionable content by removing the relevant passages without inserting new text in the now blank spaces. Another typical application of manuscript

recontextualisation is the creation of forgeries of medieval charters that preserve the plicas and seals of the original charter.

4 Towards a Comprehensive Definition

4.1 *The Definition*

While the traditional definition and terminology of palimpsest research are well-suited to describing most palimpsest manuscripts, several palimpsest in the Icelandic material challenge the traditional understanding of palimpsestation and therefore require a broader definition and more specific terminology.

The usual modern understanding of a typical palimpsest is a manuscript in which the original text, the *undertext* or *scriptio inferior*, has been erased and ‘overwritten’ with a new handwritten text, the *overtext* or *scriptio superior* (Lowe 1972, 481–83; Declercq 2007, 11–12).

However, while the clear majority of Icelandic palimpsests are pure manuscript codices or charters, the corpus of Icelandic early printed books contains two unique parchment prints, made from palimpsest parchment from dismembered liturgical codices, that combine handwritten undertexts and printed overtexts (see Section 2.3). While manuscripts and printed books are often studied by different subdisciplines, either manuscript studies or book history, the existence of these mixed manuscript-print palimpsests blurs the boundaries between these disciplines and requires a more flexible and open definition of the term ‘palimpsest’.

Rather than restricting the term to pure manuscripts, palimpsestation may best be understood as a method of reusing writing material (parchment, paper, papyrus or other) in which the original (textual) content is erased so that it may be substituted (by writing or printing) with new (textual) content. The result of this process is a complex, two-layered written artefact (manuscript codex, charter, printed codex or other): the actual palimpsest.

4.2 *The Terminology for the Description of Palimpsests*

Most descriptions of palimpsests are based on the basic dichotomy between the undertext and the overtext, i.e. the old text that has been erased and the new text written in its stead (Lowe 1972, 481–83; Declercq 2007,

11–12). For the description of many palimpsests, however, this dichotomy is insufficient.

On the one hand, it refers solely to the textual content of the manuscript but ignores the different non-textual elements that may be present in a manuscript and that need to be considered in a holistic, material-philological analysis of a palimpsest. This includes artistic, musical and other functional elements, such as minor and major initials, miniatures, different forms of musical notation and, on a more abstract level, the general layout and *mise-en-page* of the manuscript. In extreme cases, the *scriptio inferior* or *scriptio superior* may not include any text at all, but solely non-textual elements.

Rather than focusing on the various erased and substituted texts present in the palimpsest, I therefore suggest focusing on the different layers that make up the entirety of the written artefact. These two layers of the palimpsest may be referred to as the ‘underlayer’, encompassing the various textual, artistic and material elements that have been removed; and the ‘overlayer’, encompassing the various textual, artistic and material elements that have been substituted for them. The terms *scriptio inferior* and *scriptio superior* may then be used to refer exclusively to the textual elements contained in them.

On the other hand, many palimpsests include a third group of elements, namely those elements of the original manuscript that have not been erased, but intentionally retained. The elements may be artistic, textual or material. In Section 3.1, I discussed several examples of palimpsests which purposefully retain certain artistic elements, i.e. the initials, miniatures and other decorations, of liturgical books, while substituting the original liturgical texts with new texts. Furthermore, in Section 3.2, I discussed examples of manuscripts that retain part of their original text(s), while erasing other texts or text passages, or substituting them with new texts. Finally, in Section 3.3, I have provided examples of forged charters that purposefully retain certain material elements, i.e. the seals, of authentic charters.

These retained elements cannot simply be assigned to either the underlayer or the overlayer as they are essentially part of both. At a descriptive level, however, it is helpful to distinguish them from the underlayer and the overlayer and to consider them as a separate component of the palimpsest, which may be referred to as the *retained elements*. The retained elements connect the underlayer and overlayer of a palimpsest manuscript.

The presence or absence of retained elements is essential for the interpretation of a palimpsest as being the result of parchment recycling or manuscript recontextualisation (see Section 2.3).

4.3 A Typology of Palimpsests

Although there is wide variation in manuscripts that are or contain palimpsests, each of the Icelandic palimpsests discussed above seems to be the result of either parchment recycling or manuscript recontextualisation. I therefore argue that recycling and recontextualisation may be understood to represent two distinctive main types of palimpsests.

The first main type, which is what researchers usually mean by ‘palimpsest’, consists of the reuse of the material, usually parchment, to produce a new manuscript. In this case, there is generally no relation between the content of the old manuscript and of the new manuscript, and they constitute two separate artefacts. This corresponds to the classical idea of a palimpsest as the product of recycling (Renhart 2020, 26). A palimpsest created by recycling consists of underlayer and overlayer text but has no deliberately retained elements (see Section 2).

In the second main type, the manuscript is modified to a lesser or greater extent by removing some of the original elements and substituting them with new elements, while retaining other parts of the original manuscript. Usually, there is some textual, functional or thematic connection between the newly added elements and the intentionally retained elements of the original manuscript(s), which are now joined in the same manuscript. Rather than the mere recycling of material, this type of palimpsestation constitutes a form of recontextualisation, in which part of a codex is taken out of its original context and set into another context (see Section 3).

To distinguish between recycling and recontextualisation of palimpsest manuscripts, it is thus necessary to focus more closely on the interplay between the different elements: both the underlayer and the overlayer, as well as the retained elements.

4.4 Summary

While all known Icelandic palimpsests are made from parchment and the majority of them are manuscript codices or charters, a smaller number of Icelandic parchment prints that are palimpsests exist. To adequately

describe the potential varieties of palimpsests encountered in the Icelandic material, I therefore suggest the following extended general definition:

- (1) A palimpsest is a specific type of multi-layered written artefact in which the original textual and/or non-textual content is partly or completely removed so that new textual and/or non-textual content can be inserted. The two layers present in the palimpsest are the underlayer and the overlayer.
- (2) There are two main types of palimpsest. The first subtype constitutes the recycling of the material of an older written artefact to create a new written artefact. This type of palimpsest consists of an underlayer and an overlayer, with the overlayer consisting purely of newly added elements.
- (3) The second subtype of palimpsest constitutes the recontextualisation of an older written artefact. This type of palimpsest consists of an underlayer and an overlayer, with the overlayer consisting of both retained elements and newly added elements.
- (4) The whole of the removed textual and/or non-textual content constitutes the underlayer. The undertext (*scriptio inferior*) exclusively constitutes textual elements that are part of the underlayer.
- (5) The whole of the newly added textual and/or non-textual content and the preserved textual and/or non-textual content constitute the overlayer. The overtext (*scriptio superior*) exclusively constitutes textual elements that are part of the overlayer.
- (6) A palimpsest may contain retained elements, that is textual and/or non-textual elements of the original written artefact that have been retained intentionally and are incorporated into the new written artefact.

5 Conclusion

In medieval and early modern Iceland, palimpsestation fulfilled two major functions: parchment recycling and manuscript recontextualisation. While the former corresponds to the classical idea of palimpsests, consisting of an underlayer and an overlayer, the latter differs from this traditional understanding as it includes certain retained elements in addition to the underlayer and overlayer. While the functional difference between parchment

recycling and manuscript recontextualisation has largely been overlooked in previous scholarship, approaching palimpsest manuscripts as the result of either parchment recycling or manuscript recontextualisation might provide new insights into the understanding of single manuscripts, as well as a wider manuscript culture.

In Sections 2 and 3, I demonstrated how this is manifest in Icelandic palimpsests. The Icelandic manuscript material provides many examples of both parchment recycling and manuscript recontextualisation in the form of different palimpsest manuscripts, which include manuscript codices, charters and parchment prints. While several of the examples of parchment recycling date to the medieval period, including the presumably oldest manuscript, which is known for certain to have been written in Iceland, most of the Icelandic palimpsests that are the result of parchment recycling post-date the period following the Icelandic Reformation. Although palimpsestation seems to have been a common approach to recycling parchment from older manuscripts from the beginning of Icelandic manuscript culture, the Reformation brought a marked increase in palimpsestation for the purpose of parchment recycling. In contrast, the Icelandic manuscript material does not provide any examples of manuscript recontextualisation dating to the medieval period, suggesting that palimpsestation may not have been employed to recontextualise manuscripts before the Icelandic Reformation. Confronted with an immense need for new, Lutheran books, palimpsestation provided a way to either create a new book out of the waste material from an obsolete book or to actualise an obsolete book and make it useful again. In addition to a general increase in palimpsestation, the Reformation coincided with a change in how palimpsestation was employed in Icelandic manuscript culture.

Based on the Icelandic material, I have argued that the traditional definition of the term 'palimpsest' does not suffice to adequately describe the various types of medieval and early modern palimpsests. I therefore suggest a more comprehensive definition of the term as a multi-layered written artefact that encompasses manuscript codices, charters and prints. Furthermore, I have argued that the traditional terminology used for the description of palimpsests, focusing on the dichotomy between *scriptio inferior* or undertext and *scriptio superior* or overtext, is insufficient to describe both palimpsests that are the result of parchment recycling and

palimpsests that are the result of manuscript modification. To include not only text but also any form of written or artistic content, such as layout, initials, drawings and other illuminations, as well as musical annotation, I have introduced the terms ‘underlayer’ and ‘overlayer’. In addition, I have suggested adding the new term ‘retained elements’ for those elements of an original manuscript that are not removed but intentionally retained and incorporated into the new manuscript. This expanded terminology allows for the description of more complex written artefacts by taking into consideration the underlayer, overlayer and retained elements that may be present in a palimpsest manuscript. The interpretation of a palimpsest as a form of parchment recycling or manuscript recontextualisation depends on the interplay between these elements.

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SUMMARY

Recycling and Recontextualisation in Medieval and Early Modern Icelandic Palimpsests

Keywords: charters, manuscripts, palimpsestation, parchment prints, recontextualisation, recycling

In medieval and early modern Iceland, palimpsestation, that is the removal and substitution of the original writing through new writing, of books that had become damaged, obsolete or in any other way useless, was a common phenomenon.

In most cases, an obsolete manuscript was dismembered so that a new manuscript may be created from its material components which would otherwise be considered waste. While parchment recycling was common in Iceland both in the medieval and early modern period, it was most productive in the century following the introduction of the Icelandic Reformation when palimpsested parchment from Latin Catholic books was frequently used for religious and legal manuscripts as a cheaper and more readily available alternative to paper. In addition, the Icelandic material includes two parchment prints of *Jónsbók* which are printed on palimpsest parchment. While palimpsestation was common all over Europe in medieval and early modern times, printing on palimpsest parchment seems to have been an exclusively Icelandic phenomenon.

In other cases, an obsolete manuscript was recontextualised by substituting certain elements of the original manuscript while retaining other elements. After the Icelandic Reformation, Catholic liturgical manuscripts such as AM 618 4to, NKS 1931/NKS 340 8vo and AM 90 8vo were palimpsested to adapt them to a Protestant context. In an analogue way, manuscripts written in Icelandic could be modified by substituting old for new content (AM 161 4to) or by removing undesirable texts or text passages (AM 556 a 4to and AM 586 4to). Moreover, palimpsestation was used in several cases to create forgeries of medieval charters. As the Icelandic manuscript material does not provide any example of manuscript recontextualisation dating to the medieval period, this form of palimpsestation may have been an early modern phenomenon.

To better describe these different types of Icelandic palimpsests, I propose redefining the term 'palimpsest' as multi-layered written artefact consisting of an 'underlayer' of partly or completely removed original textual and non-textual content and an 'overlayer' of newly-added textual or non-textual content. Furthermore, I propose the term 'retained elements' for those elements of an original manuscript that are not removed but intentionally retained and incorporated into the new manuscript as a separate component of palimpsests

in addition to the ‘underlayer’ and the ‘overlayer’. Based on this definition, I propose to distinguish parchment recycling and manuscript recontextualisation as two main types of palimpsests.

ÁGRIP

Endurvinnsla og endurnýting í íslenskum uppskafningum frá miðöldum og á árnýöld

Efnisorð: fornbréf, handrit, uppskafningar, prentuð skinnhandrit, endurnýting, endurvinnsla

Á Íslandi á miðöldum og einnig á árnýöld voru uppskafningar algengt fyrirbæri, en svo nefnast handrit þar sem upphaflegt letur hefur verið fjarlægt, skafið upp, og nýtt letur sett í staðinn. Þetta eru handrit sem höfðu skemmst, verið eyðilögð eða á annan hátt orðið gagnslaus. Í flestum tilfellum var handrit sem talið var ónýtt tekið í sundur svo að hægt væri að búa til nýtt úr efni þess sem annars hefði verið litið á sem rusl eða úrgang. Endurnýting bókfells eða skinns var algeng á Íslandi bæði á miðöldum og síðari öldum en náði þó sögulegu hámarki á öldinni eftir siðbreytingu (siðaskipti) þegar uppskafin skinnhandrit sem áður höfðu geymt latneskar bækur úr kaþólsku voru notuð til að skrifa upp trúarlegt og lagalegt efni enda var það ódýrari og aðgengilegri kostur en pappír. Auk þess eru á Íslandi varðveitt tvö skinnhandrit sem hafa að geyma *Jónsbók* prentaða á uppskafning úr skinni. Alls staðar annars staðar í Evrópu var algengt að nota uppskafin handrit, bæði á miðöldum og á árnýöld, en prentun á uppskafninga virðist hins vegar vera séríslenskt fyrirbæri. Í öðrum tilfellum fékk ónýtt eða gagnslaust handrit nýtt hlutverk og nýtt samhengi þegar ákveðnum atriðum í upphaflega handritinu var skipt út með nýjum en öðrum haldið. Eftir siðaskiptin á Íslandi urðu kaþólskar messubækur, eins og AM 618 4to, NKS 1931/NKS 340 8vo og AM 90 8vo, að uppskafningum til þess að hægt væri að nýta þær og laga að nýjum sið. Á svipaðan hátt var hægt að nýta handrit skrifuð á íslensku með því að setja nýtt innihald í stað þess gamla (AM 161 4to) eða með því að fjarlægja óaskilega texta eða efnisgreinar (AM 556 a 4to og AM 586 4to). Þar að auki eru dæmi um að uppskafningar hafi verið búnir til í þeim tilgangi að falska forn skjöl. Þar sem engin íslensk handrit af því tagi frá miðöldum hafa varðveist, verður að gera ráð fyrir að sú tegund af uppskafningum hafi orðið til á árnýöld. Til að lýsa betur mismunandi gerðum af íslenskum uppskafningum legg ég til að hugtakið uppskafningur verði endurskilgreint sem marglaga ritaður gripur sem hefur bæði *neðra lag* þar sem áður var frumtexti sem annaðhvort hefur verið fjarlægður algjörlega, eða

innihald án texta, og *efra lag* með texta sem síðar var bætt við, eða innihald án texta. Enn fremur legg ég til að hugtakið „varðveittir þættir“ verði notað um þá þætti í upprunalegu handriti sem ekki voru fjarlægðir en viljandi haldið og felldir inn í nýja handritið sem sérstakur hluti af uppskafningum til viðbótar við áður nefnt neðra og efra lag. Með þessari skilgreiningu legg ég til að greint verði á milli endurvinnslu bókfells og endurnýtingar texta í handriti og þetta tvennt skilgreint sem tvær megingerðir uppskafninga.

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