

Alexanders saga. AM 519a 4° in The Arnamagnæan Collection, Copenhagen. Edited by Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen. Manuscripta Nordica. Early Nordic Manuscripts in Digital Facsimile. Volume 2. General Editor Peter Springborg. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2009. xxvi + 352 pp. + CD-ROM. ISBN 978 87 635 2604 3; ISSN 1601 1759.

Reviewed by Haraldur Bernharðsson

This new scholarly edition of *Alexanders saga*, the Old Norse prose translation of the Latin epic *Alexandreis* by Walter of Châtillon, is the second volume in the series Manuscripta Nordica, now published by Museum Tusulanum Press in cooperation with The Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen. It is also the latest in an already impressive series of scholarly editions, indices, concordances, and grammars of Old Icelandic manuscripts carefully prepared by Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen. Scholars and students of Old Icelandic have already benefitted enormously from her meticulous work on two manuscripts from two different periods:

(1) The Icelandic Homily Book, Holm Perg. 15 4°, from around 1200: A diplomatic transcription, color facsimiles, paleographic, orthographic, and morphological description, as well as a lemmatized word index.¹

(2) Möðruvallabók, AM 132 fol., from around 1330–1370, containing eleven sagas of Icelanders: Edition with a diplomatic transcription, a lemmatized word index (printed) and a lemmatized concordance (on microfiches),² as well as a detailed paleographic, orthographic, and morphological description.³

Now Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen has edited the manuscript AM 519a 4° in the same careful and precise manner. AM 519a 4° is a codex consisting of 37 vellum leaves (and two paper leaves from a much later period), containing *Alexanders saga*. The manuscript is dated to around 1280 and falls therefore roughly midway in between The Icelandic Homily Book (ca. 1200) and Möðruvallabók (ca. 1330–1370), with approximately 70–80 year interval between the three manuscripts. These are

¹ de Leeuw van Weenen 1993 and 2004.

² van Arkel-de Leeuw van Weenen 1987.

³ de Leeuw van Weenen 2000.

all sizable manuscripts containing a substantial amount of Old Icelandic text. As such, they are extremely valuable sources of linguistic evidence.

The structure of the edition

The edition has two major components:

(1) A printed book (paperback) in a rather large format (ca. 27 by 21 cm) containing a general introduction, a description of the codex, its orthography, and (linguistic) morphology, as well a transcription of the entire text of AM 519a 4°, a complete lemmatized word index, and a bibliography.

(2) A CD-ROM (in a jacket inside the back cover of the book) containing color facsimiles of the manuscript and its binding, the transcription on three different levels (on which see below) in HTML, along with the necessary Andron Corpus font, and a carefully formatted version of the diplomatic and normalized texts in PDF, an XML file containing the three-level transcription with a lemma (headword) and a morphological analysis assigned to every single word, a list of readings divergent from the 1925 edition of Finnur Jónsson, notes on the transcription, a list of non-initial parts of compounds, index of all lemmas in the introduction, Jón Helgason's introduction to the 1966 facsimile edition of AM 519a 4°, and the Latin text of the *Alexandreis*.

There is, in fact, a third component to this edition. The entire text with lemmatization and morphosyntactic analysis is available in the Medieval Nordic Text Archive (MENOTA) which is accessible free of charge at <http://www.menota.org/> (on which see below).

The description of the paleography, orthography, and morphology

This is an electronic edition in which the text of the manuscript has been transcribed in great detail and the transcription encoded electronically. This detailed electronic transcription allows the editor to produce a very accurate description of the paleography (in Chapter 2) and orthography (in Chapter 3), replete with exhaustive counts of various features. The reader will thus find out, for instance, that while <r> is employed 11,601 times in AM 519a 4°, there are 1,655 occurrences of <ʀ> (p. 36), or that the long /á/ is written <a> 3,185 times and <á> 440 times (p. 51). It goes without saying that (accurate) statistics of this sort would be very hard to produce without an accurate electronic transcription. In addition, every single word in the electronic transcription has been furnished with a lemma and morphosyntactic analysis, which serves as a basis for a detailed description of the morphology (in Chapter 4).

The description of the codex, orthography, and morphology is very self-contained, and references to other studies or comparison with other medieval manu-

scripts are rare. In that respect, this description differs markedly from, e.g., Bandle's (1956) description of the language of the Icelandic Bible translation of 1584 (*Guðbrandsbiblíja*).⁴ When discussing individual linguistic properties of the 1584 Bible translation, Bandle typically provides some background by briefly tracking the development from Old Icelandic and points to the outcome in Modern Icelandic, usually with ample bibliographical references. As such, Bandle's (1956) work has become a cornerstone in the study of the history of the Icelandic language.

This comparison to Bandle's work, however, is largely unfair. As stated in the introduction (p. 11, cf. also p. 81) this edition of AM 519a 4° is part of a larger project, whose aim is to provide *the groundwork* for a description of the development of Old Icelandic through orthographic and morphological analysis of a number of manuscripts. The wider paleographic and linguistic context that the reader may feel is missing from the description of AM 519a 4° will thus gradually appear as more information accumulates from comparable descriptions of other medieval Icelandic manuscripts.

That said, one wonders if this self-contained approach may have been pursued too strictly. Complicated matters are sometimes treated in a rather sketchy manner, and the reader, especially the student, would welcome references to background information in the handbooks, as well as to earlier studies of individual problems, if available. Why, for instance, can “þon” in 14r32 and 23r21 be interpreted not only as *ván* ‘hope’, but also as *vón* or *von*, as stated in footnote 20 on p. 51? A reference to Hreinn Benediktsson's 1979/2002 study would give the reader access to further discussion of this issue. It seems indeed plausible that “þon” represents *vón*. It is unlikely, however, that “þon” could represent *von* in the second half of the 13th century, as the vowel undoubtedly remained long until the quantity shift several centuries later. The form “þon” is, therefore, not part of the general orthographic change of “vá” to “vo”. Similarly, in the preterite plural of the verb *vera* ‘to be’ (which, for some reason, is not mentioned in the discussion of /á/ in 3.2.4 on p. 51), orthographic “þoro” and “þoro” (and perhaps also “þ?”), beside “þaro”, are most plausibly interpreted as *vóru*, rather than *voru* that appears in the overview of the principal parts of *vera* in 4.6.5 on p. 139 (cf. also *kómu* of *koma* ‘come’ in 4.6.4).

In the condensed style of the orthographic and morphological description, too much familiarity with the linguistics of Old Icelandic is occasionally assumed of the reader. For example, in the discussion of the strong declension of the adjectives (pp. 109–110), it is stated that “The usual assimilation is found for the endings -ra, -rar

⁴ Bandle 1956.

and -ri, when attached to adjectives like *lítill*, *mikill*, *svipull*, *tígin*,” without, however, indicating the result of the assimilation.

The description of the orthography and morphology is, of course, full of examples from the Old Icelandic text of AM 519a 4°. Sometimes it would be useful to have grammatical tags or a lemma to disambiguate the examples. For instance, in the discussion of /á/ (3.2.4 on p. 51) it is not at all clear if “boðom” is the 1st person preterite plural of the verb *biðja* “ask’ or the dative (plural) of *báðir* “both’, or if “kvomo” is the 3rd person preterite plural of the verb *koma* “come’ or one of the oblique singular cases of the substantive *kváma* “arrival’. References to leaf and line in the manuscript do of course enable the reader to look these forms up in the text (or in the word index) for disambiguation (and they turn out to be from *báðir* and *kváma*, respectively). The question is, however, if the reader should be required to look them up, since these forms could easily be disambiguated in the text by way of a morphological tag or a lemma (or both).

Creating a morphological description for a text of this sort is no easy undertaking. The problem can be illustrated through one example: Even if the text consists of 46,732 words, it contains full paradigms of only eight (simplex) substantives (p. 81–82). Consequently, there are many incomplete paradigms, and the number of forms that are ambiguous with regard to inflectional class is bound to be high. The morphological description, therefore, contains reference to many inflectional patterns to which no words could be attributed with certainty. Yet, there is no doubt that this somewhat mechanical approach will yield the most reliable results, and its value will become even more clear when it is possible to combine it with the results of comparable analyses of other manuscripts.

Occasionally, though, the description is a little too restrained. In the description of the orthographic manifestation of the suffixed article *-inn* (p. 123–24), for instance, it says that “a relationship between the quality of the preceding vowel and the spelling of the stem vowel of the suffixed article seemed to exist”, and therefore a count was made. The raw results of the count are displayed in a table (p. 124), but the reader is left to interpret the figures in the table and infer if such a relationship indeed exists. The reader is also presented with statistics on, for instance, the distribution of adjectives (p. 108) and pronouns (p. 118, 121) according to the different cases, numbers, and genders, verbs (p. 136) according to persons, number, tense, and mood (but why not the substantives?). This valuable information is presented with raw numbers only, but it would have been useful to also have the percentages. Obviously, the readers can calculate the percentages themselves, but the question arises if they should have to do that themselves.

The statistical information provided in this description of AM 519a 4°, it should be emphasized, is one of the most important assets of this edition. There is a fundamental difference between the current description of AM 519a 4° and, for instance, Bandle's description of the language of the 1584 Bible translation,⁵ and, in fact, most other linguistic descriptions of early Icelandic texts: Where Bandle most of the time describes the frequency of individual features with terms like (the German equivalents of) "frequent", "rare", "sporadic", etc., the description of AM 519a 4° contains exhaustive counts.

The transcription

This edition contains three different transcriptions of the text of *Alexanders saga* in AM 519a 4°:

(a) A facsimile text, where the text is transcribed sign by sign, retaining all the abbreviations of the original, as well as a number of paleographic traits, such as the Insular "p" and "f", and the "r" rotunda ("ʀ"). The facsimile text is intended to represent the text as it is in the manuscript.

(b) A diplomatic text where abbreviations have been expanded and the expansions identified by way of italics. Also, only a selection of the paleographic traits is retained. The diplomatic text does not follow the line and leaf division of the manuscript, as the facsimile text does. Instead the text has been divided into paragraphs that correspond to paragraphs in an English translation of the *Alexandreis*, which in turn usually match the paragraph division in the standard edition of the Latin original.

(c) A normalized text where the orthography has been normalized in accordance with the principles of the *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose (Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog, ONP)* published by The Arnamagnæan Commission in Copenhagen.

All three texts are found on the CD (all in HTML and, in addition, the diplomatic and normalized texts in a nicely formatted PDF), but only the facsimile text is printed in the book. Obviously, it would have been good to have all three printed in the book, but that would have resulted in a much larger and, above all, much more expensive volume. In selecting a single text for the book, the editor is faced with a tough choice. The reasons for choosing the facsimile text are as follows (p. 2): Firstly, the facsimile text is the basis for all the other material in the edition; not only are the other versions of the text derived from the facsimile version, but also the paleographic, orthographic, and morphological description, as well as the lemmatized index. Secondly, the facsimile version is indispensable for linguistic research. Thirdly, it is difficult to display

⁵ Bandle 1956.

the electronic form of the facsimile version in a satisfactory way. And, fourthly, the durability of the CD is strictly speaking unknown, and since the facsimile text is arguably the most valuable of the three, its longevity (as an edition) is best ensured by printing it on a high-quality paper.

It is true, of course, that the facsimile version reflects the original very accurately, but it could even be argued that its accuracy, with all the special symbols and abbreviations of the original, reduces its readability to the point where it ceases to be practical as the only printed text. Considering the fact that the edition includes color images of the manuscript, the primary value of the facsimile text is perhaps in its electronic form where the various paleographic and orthographic details can be subjected to electronic search. The diplomatic text, on the other hand, with its expansions and many fewer special symbols, could be seen as combining adequate accuracy (or, perhaps, acceptable level of editorial intervention) and readability. In the end, however, this may be a futile discussion, as the readers can themselves print out the diplomatic and normalized text, nicely formatted in the PDF files contained on the accompanying CD.

As already indicated, the principal role of the facsimile text is to represent, as faithfully as possible, the text *as it is* in the manuscript. The diplomatic text (and, of course, the normalized text), by contrast, involves more editorial intervention. In light of that, the reader might ask why the facsimile edition includes, without any notification, changes made by the scribe himself (pp. 13 and 43–44): Transposition instructions are carried out, as well as the correction of individual letters, expunged characters are left out, and dittographs are removed. It can be very hard to determine with certainty if transposition signs or deletion instructions by subpunctuation or overstrike are in fact the work of the scribe; instead of reflecting the will of the scribe, such alterations could be the work of someone else (a contemporary or someone from a later period). Moreover, the uncorrected forms can potentially be of value. One wonders, therefore, if it would not have been in keeping with the general aim of the facsimile text to print these exactly as in the manuscript and carry out the transpositions and corrections in the diplomatic (and, of course, normalized) text. Interlinear and marginal insertions by the scribe are printed in-line with insertion marks (‘...’ and ‘...’, respectively). This is a practice that is firmly rooted in the Old Norse editorial tradition. Yet, it seems a little out of place in a facsimile edition with this high level of accuracy and typographic sophistication, where not only line and leaf divisions of the manuscript are retained, but also every abbreviation and a variety of paleographic traits. Would it not have been more fitting in the facsimile text to print the interlinear insertions as in the manuscript? And perhaps also the marginal insertions in the margins?

The normalized text is based on the principles applied to the lemmas in the *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* (*Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*, ONP) (p. 18, cf. also pp. 2–3). The foundation for this normalization is the Icelandic language as it appears in sources from (or is reconstructable for) the period around 1200 or shortly thereafter. Consequently, the normalization applied to the text of AM 519a 4° reflects a stage of the language that is approximately 70 to 80 years older than the manuscript. There is an advantage as well as a disadvantage to this approach.

The advantage is the creation of a version of the text that conforms (at least partly) to a reasonably (but by no means wholly) fixed linguistic standard found in most grammars, dictionaries and other handbooks, as well as in a number of widely used text editions, perhaps most notably the *Íslensk fornrit* series published by Hið íslenska fornritafélag in Iceland. This is highly beneficial to students, in particular those who are in the early stages of learning Old Icelandic and have become accustomed to this orthography in their textbook and the handbooks.

The disadvantage is that implementing this normalization forces the editor to archaize the language of the text in several respects. This includes resurrecting the distinction of the short vowels *ø* and *ɔ*, as well as the distinction of the long *é* and *ø*, which in the language of the scribe of AM 519a 4° had merged into *ö* and *æ*, respectively. It also calls for the middle voice ending *-sk*, which had been replaced by orthographic “z”, in all likelihood representing *-st*, as well as the distinction of *t* and *ð* in unstressed word-final position, which was disappearing in the language of the scribe who wrote AM 519a 4°.

Strictly speaking, the normalization of *orthography* should apply to orthography only. That is, the exclusive aim of the normalization should be, in theory at least, to remove (normalize) purely orthographic variation—such as “ck”, “kk”, “cc”, “kc”, “k”, “k̄”, or “c̄” for phonemic *kk*, or “ø”, “ɔ”, “o”, “a”, “au”, “av”, or “ö” for phonemic *ö*—that does not (to our best knowledge) reflect phonemic variation. Needless to say, it can be very difficult to adhere to this strict definition of normalized orthography. The reinstatement of lost phonemic distinctions or of earlier inflectional endings, however, goes far beyond the domain of orthography; it is, in effect, the normalization of *the language* itself.

The normalization of the language is a difficult task. Two problems in particular deserve a mention. Firstly, when imposing a linguistic norm from a different period, the danger of anachronism is ever-present. This can be illustrated with an example. In AM 519a 4°, the demonstrative pronoun *sjá* ‘this’ has in the dat. sing. fem. not only the form *þessi*, which occurs twenty times, but also the younger form *þessar(r)i*, appearing four times (p. 122). The younger form, *þessar(r)i*, does not, however, appear in the ear-

liest Icelandic manuscripts (cf. Larsson 1891). The question is bound to arise, therefore, as to whether the normalization of the text towards the period around 1200 does not call for the replacement of the younger form *þessar(r)i* with the more archaic *þessi*.

The indefinite pronoun *nokkurr* ‘some, any’ is particularly troublesome in this regard. It appears to have undergone a series of changes in the course of the 13th century,⁶ and these changes are evident in AM 519a 4°; consequently, its form in AM 519a 4° is not compatible with the language around 1200 or shortly thereafter. Resolving this anomaly, however, is by no means easy, as the phonological and morphological shape of this pronoun in Old Icelandic around 1200 is complicated and partly obscure. This remarkably thorny problem illustrates the danger inherent in archaizing the language of a medieval text.

Secondly, there is the question of how strictly the normalization should be applied and to what extent variant forms should be allowed to appear. The singular present indicative of the verb *koma* ‘come’ existed with either the round vowel \emptyset (later \ddot{o}) or the unround e in Old Icelandic, e.g., 3rd sing. *kømr* or *kemr*. The latter variant, with e , is predominant in AM 519a 4°, but the form with the round vowel appears once, “kø̄r” 35v24. This has been normalized as “kemr”, but one wonders if this variation should not have been allowed to appear in the normalized text, especially since the form with the round vowel is more congruous with the language around 1200. Similarly, the variants *örendi* (*ørendi*) vs. *erendi* ‘errand, message’, *váru* vs. *vóru* ‘were’ (pret. plur. of *vera* ‘be’), *kvómu* vs. *kómu* ‘came’ (pret. plur. of *koma* ‘come’), and *ván* vs. *vón* ‘hope’ have all been normalized at the expense of the latter variant. By contrast, *snø̄ri* (*snø̄ri*) and *sneri* ‘turned’ (pret. plur. of *snúa* ‘turn’) have not been normalized.

In the 3rd singular present indicative of the middle voice, the ending is normalized as “zk”, e.g., “gerizk” from *gera* ‘make’, presumably under the influence of Noreen’s grammar. Noreen assumed that the dental of the earlier 3rd sing. pres. ind. ending **-iþ* (cf. Gothic *bairiþ* ‘carries’), which had been replaced by the 2nd sing. ending **-iR* in the active, actually surfaced in the orthographic “z(k)” the middle voice.⁷ As pointed out by Kjartan G. Ottósson, however, this assumption is unfounded.⁸ An examination of the earliest Icelandic manuscripts reveals no reliable indications of the survival of the 3rd sing. ind. dental ending, either in the active or in the middle. Except in instances where there is a stem-final dental, a normalization of the 3rd singular present indicative of the middle voice with “sk” is, therefore, preferable to “zk”.

⁶ Cf. Hreinn Benediktsson 1961–62/2002 and de Leeuw van Weenen 2003.

⁷ Noreen 1923: 356 (§530, Anm. 2) and 369 (§544.1).

⁸ Kjartan G. Ottósson 1981.

The lemmatized index

The book also contains a lemmatized index of all the words in AM 519a 4°. The entire text is arranged under head words (lemmas) so that one can find a complete list of all the occurrences of any given word in the text, analyzed and arranged morphosyntactically. The lemmatization and morphosyntactic analysis is, to judge from the sections looked at, very reliable, and constitutes, along with the orthographic and morphological description, a tremendously useful tool for linguistic research.

The CD

As indicated earlier, the accompanying CD contains a wealth of additional material that cannot, for reasons of space, be discussed at any length here. The three levels of the transcription in HTML format are provided with links to color images of the manuscript, and the normalized text also has links to the Latin text. In addition, all three texts are equipped with mouse-over pop-up windows that contain the version of the word targeted at the two other levels of transcription, the lemma, the morphosyntactic analysis, as well as a reference to leaf and line in the manuscript. By simply hovering with the cursor over a word, the user will thus in the blink of an eye learn which word class the word belongs to and its dictionary form (lemma), the gender, number and case for nominals, person, number, tense, mood for verbs, and so on. This feature thus affords the edition a particular pedagogical value, as the normalized text with the pop-up windows is ideally suited for the teaching of Old Icelandic.

The color images of the manuscript, also contained on the CD, are clear and easy to use. Also of great value is the XML file, containing the three levels of transcription along with the lemmatized index. The XML file is not only the foundation of this particular edition, but also a vehicle for further research on AM 519a 4°. It can, for instance, be used as a base for further mark-up of paleographic or linguistic properties.

The book and the CD complement each other well and constitute a very well-stocked edition and a tool for research. There is one element, though, that the user, at least the linguistically oriented researcher, might feel the need for on the CD, and that is the opportunity to conduct an electronic search of the text (although a computer-savvy reader could use the XML file to this end). This fault, however, turns out not to be a real one, as there is, as already mentioned, a third component to this edition: The electronic version in The Medieval Nordic Text Archive.

The Medieval Nordic Text Archive

The Medieval Nordic Text Archive, or MENOTA, is a collaborative network of 17

research institutions and libraries in Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden working with medieval Nordic manuscripts. Its aim is to preserve and publish (Nordic) texts in digital form and to adapt and develop encoding standards necessary for this work. In addition to the book-*cum*-CD edition of AM 519a 4^o, the complete text with the three levels of transcription and the lemmatized index has also been published in the MENOTA archive at <http://www.menota.org/>. In addition to browsing the text, this enables the user to conduct electronic search and create an electronic keyword-in-context concordance.

Miscellaneous

The countless examples from the Old Icelandic text that are to be found in the description of the paleography, orthography, and morphology are not identified specifically or distinguished typographically from the rest of the text. Even if this rarely if ever causes any real confusion, it is at odds with the general practice in published linguistic scholarship. The usual application of italic typeface for distinguishing words as words (or foreign words) would probably be impractical for a work of this sort due to the high number of special characters and abbreviation marks. Enclosing individual letters and words in quotation marks could, however, be an option.

References to other scholarly works sometimes are a little too imprecise. For instance, it would be useful to have references to specific pages, e.g., “Hreinn Benediktsson (1961–62)” on p. 128, and occasionally the author-date method is not followed, e.g., “as Jón Helgason suggests” on p. 59 or “According to Noreen” on p. 102.

The layout is generally fine, although one could quibble with details like a “widowed” end of paragraph on top of pp. 14 and 18. A list of two items on p. 41 also lacks indentation or some other feature distinguishing it from the main text.

Concluding remarks

Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen has long been at the forefront in the electronic editing of Old Icelandic texts. In her publications, she has combined the elegance of a nicely printed edition with the enormous fact-finding capabilities of an electronic edition, that have enabled her to produce not only word indices and concordances, but also paleographic, orthographic, and morphological descriptions with unparalleled detail and accuracy. This new edition is no exception in that respect. The imperfections touched upon above detract only marginally from the overall value of the work. Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen is to be congratulated on this new edition of *Alexanders saga* in AM 519a 4^o which will become indispensable for any linguistic research on Old Icelandic.

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