

A Female Legendary from Iceland. "Kirkjubæjarbók" (AM 429 12mo) in The Arnamagnæan Collection, Copenhagen. Edited by Kirsten Wolf. Manuscripta Nordica. Early Nordic Manuscripts in Digital Facsimile. Volume 3. General Editor Peter Springborg. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2011. 147 pp. + CD-ROM. ISBN 978 87 635 3163 4.

REVIEWED BY JONAS WELLENDORF

This immensely useful scholarly edition of the late medieval Icelandic manuscript AM 429 12mo, nicknamed *Kirkjubæjarbók*, is the third publication in the series of digital facsimiles published by Museum Tusulanum Press in collaboration with The Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen. The editor, Kirsten Wolf, is one of the most prolific editors of Old Norse texts today, and she has executed the transcription with all the meticulous care one expects of a diplomatic edition. *A Female Legendary from Iceland* consists of a printed part and a digital part, which is included on a CD-ROM that accompanies the volume. The printed part consists of a 63 page-introduction and an emended diplomatic transcription of the text of the entire manuscript; the digital part contains color facsimiles of all leaves of the manuscript and various kinds of representations of the manuscript text in html format: a diplomatic text without emendations, a diplomatic text with emendations, a normalized text, a normalized text arranged in paragraphs for easier reading, and, finally, Latin source texts. The diplomatic transcription and the normalized text are also to be found in an accompanying xml file encoded according to the Menota standard. Finally, the CD-ROM also includes pdf files of the entire printed part of the publication, the easy-to-read normalized text, and the Latin source texts.

In her introduction, Wolf describes the contents of the codex, its history and provenance, its physical appearance, and the paleography and orthography of the four scribes who produced the manuscript. The parchment codex, of which 84 folios in duodecimo are preserved, dates from around 1500 and is the only surviving medieval Icelandic codex that is exclusively devoted to the lives of female saints. It is also abundantly illuminated in what Wolf describes as a "simple and naive [. . .] early High Gothic [style]" that is "characteristic of the period ca. 1300–ca. 1325 (p. 18–19)."

In the manuscript one finds Old Norse prose lives (sagas) of the saints Margaret of Antioch, Catherine of Alexandria, Cecilia, Dorothy, Agnes, Agatha, Barbara, and

the three sisters Fides, Spes, and Caritas. Most of these saints were quite popular in Iceland (and elsewhere) in the Middle Ages, and all the prose lives are, with the exception of the life of St. Dorothy, also preserved in other Old Norse manuscripts.¹ Interspersed between the prose lives are two rather long vernacular poetic legends of Cecilia and Dorothy, as well as shorter verses and prayers in Latin connected with Catherine, Cecilia, and Dorothy. A compelling argument is made that the codex once belonged to the Benedictine convent at Kirkjubær in southeastern Iceland, and the codex has therefore been dubbed *Kirkjubæjarbók*, ‘The book of Kirkjubær’, in recent times. Like other religious houses in Iceland, Kirkjubær was shut down after the Reformation, and nothing concrete is known about the whereabouts of the codex before Árni Magnússon received it from a Páll á Flókastöðum in the early 18th century—although a charming annotation and some artless scribbles suggest that the manuscript was in the possession of a child at some point. If one accepts the localization of the codex to Kirkjubær, the logical next step is to assume that the sisters of the convent penned it. However, Wolf argues that this is not the case, and she thinks it more likely that manuscript was compiled at Þykkvibær (a nearby Augustinian house) and “donated to or purchased by the convent” (p. 15) or, perhaps, by priests associated with Kirkjubær. She categorically excludes the possibility that the sisters themselves held the quill, although, she states (p. 16), the possibility that they illuminated the codex cannot be excluded. Wolf’s argument basically boils down to “the fact that there is no evidence of any medieval Icelandic manuscript having been written by women” (p. 16) and that literary activities are known to have been practised by the Augustinian canons at Þykkvibær. The rejection of the possible participation of the sisters in the scribal production of the manuscript on this basis seems to me to be too unreserved, particularly since Wolf readily acknowledges that (at least some of) the sisters were literate and able to read as well as write.

Four scribes were at work, but the majority of the text is penned by Hand I. In her description of paleography and orthography, Wolf naturally focuses on this hand. Interestingly, a rather large number of scribal errors is found in the text written by Hand I—the examples given (p. 22) in particular demonstrate transposition of individual letters, but many other types of errors can be found as well. The editor suggests that lack of training, or dyslexia, might have given rise to these slips of the pen. The orthographical and paleographical descriptions, as often in such editions, take the

¹ Wolf has earlier published editions of some of these texts in other formats and partly from other manuscript sources. See *Heilagra Meyjar Sögur* (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 2003), *The Old Norse-Icelandic legend of Saint Barbara* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2000), *The Icelandic Legend of Saint Dorothy* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1997), and a number of articles.

form of a listing of particular features and examples of them. We are told, for example, that the vertical stroke of a <v> does not normally extend beyond the cross-bar (p. 14), that superscript <o> stands for *or*, *ro*, *uo*, *oku*, and *esso* (p. 24), that both the strong and the weak form of the noun *likamr/likami* 'body' are in evidence (p. 30), and that the dative of *holl* 'hall' is written both with and without the inflectional ending *-u* (p. 30). But little information is given about the possible significance of these individual features. Summing up this section, Wolf writes: "The orthographic analysis reveals features characteristic of thirteenth- and especially fourteenth- and fifteenth-century, Icelandic, but clearly the orthography has been somewhat streamlined and is suggestive of a ca. 1500 dating of the codex (p. 31)." However, readers are expected to know which features point in which direction because they are not told and references to secondary literature on the significance of various features are not given.

The longest section of the introduction, "The Texts", deals with the relationship between the preserved Old Norse texts of the various lives and their Latin sources. Through comparison with the Latin texts that have been identified as sources, Wolf shows that, in a number of cases, *Kirkjubæjarbók* contains better readings of particular passages than parallel texts. Conversely, examples are also given that show other texts to contain better readings than *Kirkjubæjarbók*. The relevant source texts are identified by reference to their number in *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina*, and footnotes point to the relevant editions of the Latin texts.

In the printed diplomatic transcription, abbreviations and suspensions have been expanded and marked with italics or parentheses respectively. The text is rendered with a fairly standard set of graphs which means that graphs such as <s> is printed instead of <ſ> and <v> instead of r-rotunda etc. This makes the text easier to read (and to quote). Wolf has also done readers a great service by actually emending scribal errors; this is not a matter of course in diplomatic editions, where many editors are less invasive. The apparatus at the foot of the page in these cases gives the original readings of the manuscript, and many of them are strange indeed. The emendation of the reading *ollat* (supine of the verb *valda* 'cause') to *ollit* at 64v l. 12–13 might be a bit rash, and *aur* at 41v l. 10 would have merited emendation to *aurum*, dat. pl. of *eyrir* 'money'. Readers wishing to work their way through the unemended text can consult the accompanying CD-ROM. The CD-ROM also contains text normalized according to a standard that resembles that of the majority of the volumes of the Íslenzk fornrit-series, i.e. the state of the language before the merger of /ø/ and /ɔ/. The poetic legends are normalized according to a later state of the language where /æ:/ and /ø:/ have merged.

The CD-ROM is easy to navigate, and the user is advised to copy the files to his or her hard drive for better performance—this will also be necessary for the growing

number of people who no longer possess a CD-ROM drive. A few of the facsimiles are quite dark, probably resembling the original in this respect, but they are easy to access. One of the advantages of the digital format is that users can make adjustments to the files themselves. Considering the many different ways of viewing and accessing the text that are provided by the combined digital and printed edition, one almost feels unappreciative in asking for yet others. Working with the digital part, I nevertheless often had occasion to wish that it was possible to see different views of the text at the same time. When the cursor is placed over a given word, a small box pops up that shows how the word is represented at other levels of coding, and one always has the possibility of opening more windows. It would nevertheless have been convenient to have a synchronized view where one could, e.g., see the facsimile and a text simultaneously, or a text and its Latin source text at the same time. Direct links to the illuminated leaves in the html file would also have been convenient.

The genre of the facsimile introduction imposes certain strictures on editors, and such introductions often tend towards the descriptive. As a consequence, not much is said about the actual contents of the texts, their genre, or the cult of these saints in late medieval Iceland in themes that Wolf is eminently qualified to treat. This means that some questions that might occur to readers are left unanswered. In my case these included among others: what is the relation between the old-fashioned style of the illuminations (ca. 1300–1325) and the dating of the manuscript to ca. 1500? What kind of connection, if any, is there between the hypothesis that the codex was given to or purchased by the convent and the ill-trained, supposedly, dyslexic scribe? What connection is there between the size of the book (it is a duodecimo) and the editor's suggestion that it was used for communal reading at Kirkjubær (p. 51)?

All in all, this is a welcome, useful, and carefully executed addition to the series of digital facsimiles. I also register that the interest in the literary and textual cultures of late medieval Iceland is growing these years, and the volume will surely find many interested readers.²

² I only spotted a few misprints. Potentially confusing is the note 60 (p. 54) that reads "BHL 5308" instead of "BHL 5303." In the Latin legend of St. Margaret on the CD-ROM, I noted the following: *habetat* for *habebat*, *natriae* for *nutrita*, *castoriumque* for *castioremque*, and *indeficientum* for *indeficientem*. In the normalised text of the *Ceciliu saga* I noted *djöflar* for *djöfla* (32v l. 7), *drita* for *drita* (32v l. 16).

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