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With English summaries

UPPSALA, SWEDEN

För första gången någonsin är alla bidrag i en volym av Scripta Islandica på engelska. Det kan ses som en del av jubileumsnumrets internationella karaktär och av tidskriftens internationalisering överlag. Men internationell är inte detsamma som ickesvensk. Scripta Islandica förblir en svensk tidskrift. Svenska förblir ett vetenskapligt språk inom Islandsforskningen. Även fortsättningsvis kommer vi att publicera bidrag på svenska likaväl som på norska, danska, isländska, engelska och tyska.

Daniel Sävborg

To the letter
Philology as a core component of Old Norse studies[1]

SVANHILDUR ÓSKARSDÓTTIR

> But to shut manuscripts up in libraries abroad, where no one will ever be able to understand them, and thus keep useful sources away from capable readers forever – a practice, which out of ignorance has long been tolerated, to the great detriment of historical enquiry – is indeed not to preserve old lore but to destroy it.[2]

These are the words of Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson of Skálholt in a letter to Professor Villum Lange in Copenhagen, the librarian of King Frederik III, dated the 10th of July 1656. The letter accompanied several

[1] The following is a key-note paper given at the Fourteenth International Saga Conference in Uppsala, 10 August 2009. In preparing the paper for print I have not changed its form, except that I have added references and incorporated into the text some of the information which at the conference was conveyed through overhead slides. In the discussion following the paper, pertinent remarks were made by Hans Kuhn and Odd Einar Haugen, among others. Kuhn reminded me of the negligence we continue to show to *rímur*, and I have taken his remark on board in the revision of the lecture, while Haugen took up the question of how we can raise funds to finance editorial work. That is a central problem related to the low status editions and editorial work occupy within the academic hierarchy, a condition that needs to be challenged at every opportunity (within funding bodies, in academic committees etc.). But I would also like to stress that, in my view, working on editions is not a question of either/or. Rather, editorial work should form a part of every Old Norse specialist's training and they should subsequently reckon editing to be one of the avenues for their scholarship, not the only outlet. When involving graduate students and post-doctoral researchers in editorial projects, it is important that they be able to define, within the overall project, a sub-project they can make their own and which may result in an independent publication, enhancing their chances in the competitive job market.

[2] 'At in bibliothecas exteras codices mutos compingere, ubi a nullo unqvam intelligentur, atqve ita materiam modo non desperatam ab idoneis lectoribus æterno divortio removere, qvod hactenus magno antiqvitatum malo per imprudentiam admissum est, id vero antiqvitates non conservare sed extingvere est.' Úr bréfabókum Brynjólfs biskups Sveinssonar. Ed. Jón Helgason. 1942. Copenhagen. (Safn Fræðafélagsins um Ísland og Íslendinga 12.) P. 72. I am indebted to my colleague Margrét Eggertsdóttir for directing me to this source.

manuscripts, one of them probably Flateyjarbók, which the bishop sent to the king in response to a request for old books for the royal library. This statement follows from Brynjólfur's urging that the texts contained in the Icelandic manuscripts be published, in the original language as well as in Latin translation.

I find it easy to concur with Brynjólfur that it is the obligation of institutions which preserve important documents that are of potential interest to a wider circle of people to make these available. Since Brynjólfur was writing before the time of photographic reproduction, the medium he envisages is the printed edition. One might therefore, somewhat hastily, assume that were Brynjólfur among us today, he would consider his wishes fulfilled by the project that is under way at the two Arnamagnæan institutes and involves photographing the collection digitally and making the images available over the internet. Scrutiny of the letter reveals, however, that, in Brynjólfur's view, there was more at stake. The scenario he pictures in the quotation is of mute books stored away from their interpreters. The words on the pages will not be heard unless they find their mediator, a human mind that is able to convey their meaning to the wider world. Brynjólfur mentions Latin translations, and translations are of course an important element in the transmission of Old Norse texts. But because my time is limited here today, I shall have to leave these outside my main focus. I want, instead, to use Brynjólfur's letter as a starting point for a discussion of palaeography, textual criticism, textual commentary and the practice of editing – a discussion of *philology* in other words, where philology is seen to encompass all the fields I mentioned. (This is philology in a wide sense, a definition I have adopted from Jakob Benediktsson's article Textafræði, which formed a part of the syllabus when I began my studies at the University of Iceland in the 1980s.[3]) Let us return to Brynjólfur's letter to Lange:

> And, in fact, no one, no matter how great his learning, erudition, ingenuity or discernment, has ever been able to interpret the spirit of these sources truthfully, except those of Icelandic extraction who are well versed in these matters, having studied them thoroughly.[4]

[3] Jakob Benediktsson, 1981: Textafræði. In: Mál og túlkun. Ed. Páll Skúlason. Reykjavík. Pp. 19–37.

[4] 'Nemo etenim unqvam cujuscunqve doctrinæ, eruditionis, ingenii, judicii vir fuerit, qvi animam illis monumentis, nisi Islandus oriundo nationeqve, isqve tantum probe in his tritus versatusqve, serio bonaqve fide reddiderit.' Úr Bréfabókum Brynjólfs biskups Sveinssonar. P. 72.

We see here, more explicitly, the idea that the spirit (*anima*) of the texts can only be restored through the agency of the interpretive mind. The verb Brynjólfur uses is *reddo*, which can mean "to restore, render, interpret, translate". In Brynjólfur's view, the interpretation of these sources presupposes intimate knowledge of them acquired by thorough study, and he reckons such knowledge to be exclusive to Icelanders. It is a pleasure to be able to disagree with that last part. This conference is in itself a testament to the fact that the study of Old Norse texts would never have blossomed into the extensive and multifaceted field of enquiry that it is today, had not scholars outside my native land taken interest in the subject and brought their learning and experience to bear on the interpretation of these texts. And since we are all in this together, the matter of text editions should concern us all.

Brynjólfur did not live to see his ambitious dream of text editions fulfilled, but had he risen from his grave in the nineteenth century, he would most certainly have appreciated what he saw. And had he met the phenomenally industrious Norwegian Carl Richard Unger (1817–97), I suspect he would instantly have modified his stance on the superiority of native Icelanders as text editors.

Over a period of thirty years, from 1847–1877, Unger produced a major edition just about every year, and sometimes more than one. At the beginning of his career he also became involved in the editing of Diplomatarium Norvegicum and he went on to co-edit the first fifteen volumes, the last instalment of which came out after his death in 1897. (As if this weren't enough, he put in a lot of work for Johan Fritzner, especially when the dictionary was revised for its second edition. Fritzner died before that task was finished, so it was left to Unger to see it through press.) This output is remarkable, but what is equally remarkable (and some might say worrying) is that some of these volumes still serve as the standard editions of the works in question, as is evidenced by the fact that several of them appear in bibliographies accompanying papers in the preprints for this conference.

Unger's was a remarkable achievement – and he was a conscientious editor. But he did not have access to all the manuscript material that is now available and further research into manuscript transmission has also meant that there are reasons for revising the premises for his editions. It is perhaps instructive to note that the most substantial

Table 1. Unger's phenomenal output

1847	Fagrskinna (with P. A. Munch) Oldnorsk læsebog (with Munch) Det oldnorske sprogs eller norrönsprogets grammatik Den ældre edda (Munch with Unger)
1848	Alexanders saga Konungs skuggsjá (with Munch and R. Keyser)
1849	Ólafs saga hins helga (with Keyser)
1850	Strengleikar (with Keyser)
1851	Baarlams saga ok Jósaphats (with Keyser)
1853	Ólafs saga helga sérstaka (with Munch) Þiðreks saga
1860	Karlamagnús saga Flateyjarbók I (with Guðbrandur Vigfússon)
1862	Stjórn Flateyjarbók II (with Guðbrandur Vigfússon)
1863	Oldnordisk læsebog (new edition)
1864	Gammel norsk homiliebog
1867	Morkinskinna
1868	Flateyjarbók III (with Guðbrandur Vigfússon) Heimskringla
1869	Thomas saga erkibyskups
1871	Maríu saga Codex Frisianus
1873	Konunga sögur: sagaer om Sverre og hans efterfølgere
1874	Postola sögur
1877	Heilagra manna sögur

revision of Unger's work has been in the edition of *konungasögur*, and many of the critical editions we rely on there are the work of Finnur Jónsson, which means that they are also somewhat dated.

So, one might ask, did nothing happen in the twentieth century? And the answer would be: on the contrary, a great deal happened – but not all of it was conducive to editing projects. Before I proceed to a brief discussion of the development of twentieth-century scholarship, let's take a look at one *blómaskeið* – the 1960s, the apex of the editorial activity associated with Professor Jón Helgason in Copenhagen. Jón Helgason established the series Editiones arnamagnæanæ in the 1950s against the backdrop of the dispute between Denmark and Iceland over Icelandic manuscripts in Danish libraries. These were good times to gain financial

support for the publication of editions and the output in the first decade or so was impressive.

Table 2. Volumes published in the two series of Editiones arnamagnæanæ in the 1960s. In addition, ten volumes appeared during the decade in the two facsimile series Manuscripta Islandica and Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile.

	Series A	**Series B**
1960	Alkuin (Widding) Membrana regia deperdita (Loth) Harðar saga (Hast)	Hrólfs saga kraka (Slay) Gibbons saga (Page)
1961	Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta II (Ólafur Halldórsson)	
1962		Hemings þáttr (Fellows-Jensen) Íslenzk fornkvæði I–III (Jón Helgason) Late medieval romances I (Loth)
1963	Islandske originaldiplomer (Stefán Karlsson) Trójumanna saga (Louis-Jensen)	Life of St Gregory/Dialogues (Hreinn Benediktsson) Dunstanus saga (Fell) Íslenzk fornkvæði IV Late medieval romances II–III
1964		Late medieval romances IV
1965		Erex saga (Blaisdell) Íslenzk fornkvæði V Late medieval romances V
1967		Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar B (Hasle)
1968		History of the Cross-Tree (Overgaard) Íslenzk fornkvæði VI

As with Unger's output, there was a steady flow of editions over these years, and in some years several volumes were issued. The obvious contrast with the Unger list is that here we see several editors involved, working individually – although everyone knows that Jón Helgason, who acted as series editor, had considerable input in all these editions. The Icelandic-Danish dispute over the manuscripts not only strengthened Jón Helgason's base in Copenhagen, but in Reykjavík it led to the establishment of Handritastofnun Íslands, which later became Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi (now part of Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum). The Reykjavík institute soon established its own series of critical text editions, and it was also, like its sister institute in Copenhagen, involved in the production of facsimile editions. The two in-

stitutes have kept their series of editions going, but there is no denying that the collective output has never again reached the heights of the swinging sixties.

We are, it seems to me, in the middle of a strange paradox: the worldwide interest in Old Norse texts seems to be greater than ever before – as the record number of participants at this conference seems to bear out; this interest has spread to cover more genres than in the past; and the development in electronic text-processing is gradually opening up possibilities of transmitting these texts in new, revolutionary ways. At the same time the production of text editions seems to be grinding slowly to a halt. There are telling exceptions to this, the most obvious one being the Skaldic editing project, which I will return to later on. But the pessimistic (and by no means unrealistic) view is that we will continue to rely on Unger and Finnur Jónsson for decades to come unless we begin to see some change in the way we go about these things.

So, why were Unger and Finnur able to do what we don't seem to manage – produce editions, based directly on manuscript evidence, for students and scholars, on which other (popular) editions and translations could then be based? There are historical, ideological, and university-politics related reasons for this, many of which were discussed by some of our Swedish hosts and their guests at a symposium held in Gothenburg a decade ago under the heading "Den fornnordiska texten i filologisk och litteraturvetenskaplig belysning". In the proceedings from this symposium one encounters a lively discussion of the role of philology and textual editing in our field, a discussion I feel needs to be ongoing and in which more people need to become involved.[5] In their introduction to the proceedings,, Lars Lönnroth and Karl Gunnar Johansson lament the gulf that has evolved between what they term philology (and they use it in a narrower sense than I do, as referring predominantly to linguistically oriented textual criticism) and literary studies (*litteraturvetenskap*). This gulf is largely due to the ever- increasing specialization witnessed by the twentieth century, specialization which has had consequences which are good as well as bad.

Our good man Unger, whose editorial production was no doubt close-

[5] Cf. Den fornnordiska texten i filologisk och litteraturvetenskaplig belysning. Studier och diskussionsinlägg redigerade av Kristinn Jóhannesson, Karl G. Johansson och Lars Lönnroth. 2000. Göteborg. (Gothenburg Old Norse Studies 2.)

ly linked to his teaching of Old Norse, was professor not only of Germanic philology but also of Romance philology, and would give lectures on, for instance, Shakespeare and Cervantes as well as on Old Norse language and literature.[6] The large scope of his learning is typical of the nineteenth century – the great age of comparative studies of many kinds, not least in folklore and linguistics; and the nineteenth century was of course also the age of the stemma. Thanks to Karl Lachmann, his predecessors, contemporaries and successors, the methodology of textual criticism was refined and the seeds for the controversy between a positivist approach and the hermeneutic view of editing were sown.[7] On the practical side, this meant that demands for methodological accuracy of textual editions became more stringent and in Old Norse studies that development culminated in the Helgasonian school. Jón Helgason insisted that editors should survey all existing manuscripts of a given text – even young paper manuscripts – in order to establish the history of the transmission and justify the choice of a main text. This insistence can be seen, as M. J. Driscoll has pointed out, as a reaction to the shortcomings of Finnur Jónsson's editions, where younger manuscripts were often discounted as a matter of course.[8] The Arnamagnæan editions were thus a step forward in that they were based on a more solid methodological ground. Arnamagnæan oral tradition has it that Jón Helgason's chief concern was to get the texts themselves printed according to his standards, and that he cared less about the contents and quality of the introductions that accompanied them. Many of the volumes in the B-series of Editiones originated as student projects – mostly *magister* projects by Jón Helgason's students and MA or PhD projects by students from Britain – and the introductions could therefore take on variant forms although some treatment of the manuscript transmission was a *sine qua non*.

What I find quite striking when viewing the entire list of Arnamag-

[6] Cf. Heyerdal, Gerd Høst, 1975: Unger, Carl Richard. In: Norsk biografisk leksikon 17. Ed. J. Jansen and Ø. Anker. Oslo. Pp. 391–96.

[7] The literature on editorial theory is extensive and there is no room here for a lengthy list of references, but for an overview of some of the issues involved see G. Thomas Tanselle, 1995: The Varieties of Scholarly Editing (In: Scholarly Editing. A Guide to Research. Ed. D.C. Greetham. New York. Pp. 9–29), and Greetham's own treatment in his Textual Scholarship. An Introduction. 1992. New York.

[8] M.J. Driscoll [forthcoming]: The words on the page: Thoughts on philology, old and new. In: Creating the medieval saga: Versions, variability, and editorial interpretations of Old Norse saga literature. Ed. J. Quinn and E. Lethbridge. Odense.

næan editions (till the present day) is that most of the editors who cut their teeth working on a text for Editiones B seem not to have bitten into any Old Norse text since – many of them became university teachers in the field but did not produce any further editions. Could it be that they had had enough? Was one of the reasons that topics that appealed to them and they wanted to address had been banished from the 'standard edition'? I am sure there was never any formal decree stipulating what could or could not be included in an Arnamagnæan introduction but the tendency was definitely towards linguistic minutiae and away from any literary pronouncement. It is possible to pick up one of these volumes and search in vain for any information about the literary origins and characteristics of the text in question. One thinks of poor old Brynjólfur again and his ambition to have the *spirit* of the texts restored. The editions became increasingly specialized and geared more towards the needs of scholars interested in the history of the language. That, however, was not enough to draw in new generations of linguists. They had been moving away from an historical approach to language since Saussurian linguistics gained ground and, as Henrik Williams pointed out in his paper at the Gothenburg symposium, those interested in the Scandinavian languages tend nowadays to be linguists first, *nordister* second.[9]

On the literary front there were also developments that changed the circumstances for textual editing and in fact changed the whole definition of what constitutes a text. New criticism arrived with its reaction against the biographical approach to literary studies. The sixties and the seventies came with structuralism, oral-formulaic theory, anthropological approaches and an inclination to read the texts as evidence of the society that produced them.[10] University syllabuses changed drastically in the 1970s as the content of degree programmes was redefined. Old languages did not do well out of that shake-up. The scholars who represented fresh ideas or new approaches and who were most likely to inspire new generations of students did not do philology. Philologists withdrew into their shell and their defence sometimes took the form of shrouding their activities in mystery, giving the impression that dealing with manuscripts was only for the hardiest of souls – or possibly only for curmudgeons. Philology had developed a serious image-problem, as Odd Einar

[9] Williams, Henrik, 2000: Framtidens fornnordiska filologi: etymologisk exempelsamling eller litteraturteoretisk lekstuga? In: Den fornnordiska texten, pp. 5–16; 6.
[10] This is admirably summarized by Lönnroth and Johansson in their introduction, cf. Den fornnordiska texten, pp. 1–4.

Haugen noted very succinctly in his Gothenburg paper: Philology was seen as elitist and monumental, obsessed with narrow detail and archetypes.[11] In short: it was out of date and out of touch. *Boring*.

At this point one has to pinch one's arm – are we not talking about incredibly important texts preserved in old manuscripts, each different from the other, each with its fascinating history? How could it have come to this? Show a moderately curious person a manuscript and he or she is invariably smitten, drawn towards its peculiarity, its message, the miracle of its existence. Verily I say unto you: Those medievalists who deny themselves the opportunity to work with manuscripts are losing out on one of the greatest pleasures they can have with their clothes on.

I confess that I borrowed this last sentence from Nigel Slater, the English cookery writer (although he was obviously not talking about manuscripts and medievalists).[12] And there are, I believe, some further parallels between cooking and textual editing in modern times. We all need editions as we all need nourishing food. But who is going to do the cooking? For the best part of the twentieth century, everyday cooking was done by housewives, whose job was invisible in society and not valued. Nowadays, cooking is largely thought of as a pleasant and creative, albeit necessary, activity – a sociable thing, the source of pride for individuals, males and females alike. We need a similar seismic shift of attitudes towards the editing of Old Norse texts. For even though the entire scholarly community is dependant on editions, it is difficult to get them done. People are reluctant to give up the time and energy to produce them, which is understandable since there is comparatively little remuneration on offer – there are few brownie points to be had for an edition (if you count the hours spent on it) compared with an article or a monograph. And is it not also conceivable that we, as a scholarly community, almost look down on editorial work – in our hearts we don't believe it is real scholarship and therefore worthy of our efforts. But, if we are not to subsist on a diet of Unger and Finnur, with a few more recent editions thrown in, we need to change the way we think, and the way we behave. There will of course always be those who can't cook or won't cook. And that's fine, as long as the majority of us manage to discover the pleasure

[11] Haugen, Odd Einar, 2000: Fem argument mot filologien. In: Den fornnordiska texten, pp. 17–26.
[12] Slater, Nigel, 2000: Appetite. London. P. 10.

involved in preparing a long-neglected text for consumption. And there is no shortage of texts in need of attention – we can mention whole genres: *postola sögur* (among which are some of the oldest preserved texts in Old Norse), *rímur* (a vast corpus of which only a fraction has been published), *fornaldarsögur* (mostly extant in inadequate nineteenth-century editions). And we can mention individual works, some of them from the core of the traditional canon: Heimskringla, Vápnfirðinga saga, Reykdæla saga, Laxdæla saga, Grettis saga. Yes, even Brennu-Njáls saga.

These are only examples: the list could go on. I do not want to suggest that all of these texts have been utterly neglected; a monograph on the manuscript tradition of Heimskringla was published recently[13] and there are significant stirrings on the *fornaldarsögur* front.[14] We are, however, still dependent on old editions of these texts. It happens too often that research into the manuscript transmission of texts does not translate into an edition for us to use. My heart sinks every time I hear of a thesis that is an excellent first step towards opening up a neglected text, but is destined to languish in a drawer for time immemorial while the author turns to other tasks. Why does this happen so frequently? One keyword here is *individualism*.

One of the main reasons, I believe, for the bankruptcy (if that is not too strong a word) of the Arnamagnæan approach to editing is the fact that projects have been the responsibility of individuals. The ever-increasing demands that every stone be turned have blown the edition of even the shortest of texts into a gigantic task that requires years of solitary confinement to complete. No sane person wants to spend her life like that. And why should she? Modern editorial projects should be defined as group projects. Not only will this save editors from depression and loneliness, but it will increase the likelihood of the projects making it past the goalposts, of editions actually materializing, and – last but not least – it is the only way out of the prison of specialization. By bringing together the efforts of a group of people and pooling resources, we can have our cake and eat it – we can fulfill the modern criteria for accuracy

[13] Jørgensen, Jon Gunnar, 2007: The lost vellum Kringla. Copenhagen. (Bibliotheca arnamagnæana 45.)

[14] Cf. for instance recent conferences in Uppsala (2001), Copenhagen (2005) and Reykjavík (2009) and the resulting publications (Fornaldarsagornar struktur och ideologi, Uppsala 2003, and Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og virkelighed, Copenhagen 2009, both volumes ed. Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney).

and transparency in the presentation of the manuscript evidence, but we can also unite the world of nineteenth-century philologists and the interests of the many branches of twentieth-century scholarship. This is because every member of the group will wear the cloak of the philologist as well as being a linguist, or a historian, a literary historian, or art historian. The collective work on the text will inform the studies of the individuals, and their various expertise will bring valuable insights and interpretations which will be fed into the commentary on the texts.

Is this an illusion? You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I think the new edition of Skaldic poetry that is underway is an important step in this new direction (http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au). This brings together scholars from all corners of the world to tackle collectively the considerable task of replacing Finnur Jónsson's edition. It has rescued several PhD theses from oblivion. And it is also a significant milestone because it combines a printed edition with electronic resources. The Skaldic edition teaches us an important lesson on what can be achieved if people work together, but it is still only a halfway house in the sense that the contributing editors work mostly, I believe, individually. The corpus has been divided between them and each editor tackles his or her bit. This is a fully valid mode to proceed but I would like to advocate here a model that goes a step further and presupposes several people working together on the same text (or rather texts of the same work). Such an approach is being experimented with at the institution that is the International Summer School in Manuscript Studies.[15] The summer school began as a suggestion made by Herbert Wäckerlin of Zürich university to two of our colleagues, Matthew Driscoll and Stefanie Gropper. He suggested there was a need for a course introducing graduate students in Old Norse to palaeography and manuscript studies in general. Driscoll and Gropper responded by saying 'Let's do it', got me onboard, and we held the first summer school in Copenhagen in 2004. We had no idea what to expect, but to cut a long story short, the enthusiasm and engagement of our students has cemented my belief that there is hardly a person in our field who does not enjoy working with manuscripts. The students keep coming back for more, which has led to the formation of groups that tackle the edition of a single work with the assistance of a senior scholar or two.

[15] It is run by the two Arnamagnæan institutes in collaboration with the National and University Library in Iceland and the universities of Zürich, Tübingen and Cambridge.

The first such group, initially made up of eight young scholars[16] from Britain, Germany and Switzerland, has been working on an edition of Margrétar saga III. I have been their assistant together with Michael Chesnutt and Jonna Louis-Jensen, and working with these hardworking young people has been encouraging and very illuminating in the best sense of the word. We have had a lot of fun, a fair amount of disagreement and our share of the frustrations and epiphanies that go with the territory.

The choice of Margrétar saga III was largely fortuitous: my eyes fell upon it because it was an unedited text, but it had the advantage that its transmission had been studied by Peter Rasmussen back in the seventies.[17] We could therefore retrace Rasmussen's steps and, when satisfied that we were standing on a sound basis, produce our own edition of the text. None of the students who formed the group had any particular interest in saints' lives. They soon, however, became immersed in their task, and found that the manuscripts and their text held a lot of interesting aspects. Some of the manuscripts have drawings in the margins. The language of the translation is rich – the group had, for instance, the satisfaction of discovering a word which had not been recorded by the Dictionary of Old Norse Prose, and seeing it added to the database. All the extant manuscripts are incomplete, so choosing a main text has not been a straightforward case. And there has been much healthy discussion on what form the edition should take – resulting in a decision to produce a printed edition with critical apparatus as well as depositing the marked-up text of two of the main sources in the MENOTA electronic archive. When I asked some members of the group to comment on the experience, they mentioned that working on a text that was not on their everyday menu had been surprisingly enjoyable and made them more aware of the many dimensions of Old Norse culture. They all agreed that studying the manuscript sources gives them the satisfaction of getting to the core of the text; it means peeling away intermediaries and forces them to confront the material directly, to interpret it for themselves. And (and this may surprise you): finding out that a lot of the work is mundane is reassuring, de-mystifying. It also alerts students to the limits of editions. One of them said, 'I tend to seek perfection and it is good for me to see

[16] They are Astrid Erismann, Sarah Gaffuri, Simone Horst, Helen Imhoff, Vera Johanterwage, Emily Lethbridge, Jonjo Roberts and Ludger Zeevaert.

[17] Rasmussen, Peter, 1977: Tekstforholdene i Margrétar saga. Specialeafhandling til magisterkonferens i nordisk filologi ved Københavns Universitet. [Unpublished dissertation.]

that it is impossible to achieve perfection in this kind of work.' So, contrary to the claims of detractors that philology narrows the mind, the experience of our summerschoolers, generally, I think, is that it broadens their horizons.

And the main thing is: anyone can do it. The only prerequisite is a knowledge of the language – a skill that is necessary anyway for any person who intends to become seriously involved in Old Norse studies. The flip-side of that coin is that one's knowledge of the language is greatly enhanced by grappling with editing texts. So it works both ways and gradually one becomes more adept. However, the basic responsibility for language acquisition lies with all your universities. It is vital to preserve the teaching of Old Norse/Icelandic language in as many places as possible. And when students have progressed beyond the initial stage, it is desirable that editing projects be accepted as part of their degrees.

But if we, as a community, embrace the idea that anyone can do philology, and anyone can – and should – produce editions, it follows that we must become more tolerant of different types of editions. There are many ways to edit texts and the contents and the extent of the accompanying luggage, commentary et cetera can vary greatly.

And then there is cyberspace. The development in the electronic processing of texts and the creation of the worldwide web has transformed the possibilities for disseminating manuscripts and the material they contain. Our views on what we do and our methods are necessarily influenced, limited or conditioned by the tools at our disposal. Technological innovations invite us to re-examine our attitude to our work and the material we work with.[18] As matters now stand, one might describe the status as regards electronic editing of Old Norse manuscripts something like this: a vast new building is arising in front of us, its layout very different from what we are accustomed to. A few of our number have entered the hallway but the majority are still standing outside wondering whether to put their best foot forward and cross the threshold. I think we ought to be very grateful to those colleagues of ours who have led the way into the new era, for instance by taking part in the development of international standards for marking-up texts – I refer here primarily to the Text Encoding Initiative – and by working assiduously towards es-

[18] For a concise discussion of the potentials (and pitfalls) of electronic editing see Peter L. Shillingsburg, 2006: From Gutenberg to Google. Electronic Representations of Literary Texts. Cambridge.

tablishing the Medieval Nordic Text Archive MENOTA (http://www.menota.org/). A lot of effort has gone into grappling with theoretical issues and solving technical problems, and there now exist fairly user-friendly tools and methods to mark up the text of whatever manuscript that takes one's fancy and display it on the internet. It is now relatively uncomplicated to produce on-line what Odd Einar Haugen terms monotypic editions,[19] i.e. editions of a single manuscript, and they are starting to build up in the MENOTA archive. A focus on single manuscripts has become more common lately, due to the shift in manuscript studies associated with New or Material Philology. Such studies and editions are definitely to be welcomed but there will also be demand for editions that embrace the entire corpus of a given text and give the reader some advice as to how to approach it. We are, it seems to me, still some way away from more complicated electronic editions, those where the various manuscript sources of a given text are linked together, giving the user a map of the manuscript transmission; where the user is able to explore all variant readings in order to choose any of the manuscripts as his/her main text; to compare two or more texts side by side; to access extensive commentary and consult an annotated bibliography. The vision for an edition of the *fornaldarsögur* which Matthew Driscoll outlined in his paper at this conference is one scenario of this kind and, as Driscoll mentions, the technology already exists.[20] There are, however, not many such projects that have yet been carried out in the field of medieval studies – the one best known to me is the Canterbury Tales project that Peter Robinson in Birmingham and his associates have been working on (http://www.canterburytalesproject.org/). I am certain that we will manage to launch ambitious projects like that in the future. But such an undertaking is not merely a question of acquiring the technical skills and building the right software. Producing editions will still be, in essence, practising philology. Granted, its practitioners need to acquire skills to fit the medium (learning to mark-up etc.), but the most important thing is that they have the desire to bring the text to a wider audience and

[19] Haugen, Odd Einar, 2003: The spirit of Lachmann, the spirit of Bédier: Old Norse textual editing in the electronic age. Paper read at the annual meeting of The Viking Society, University College London, 8 November 2002. Electronic version, 20 January 2003 (http://www.ub.uib.no/elpub/2003/a/522001/haugen.pdf). P. 16. Accessed 23 October 2009.

[20] Driscoll, Matthew J., 2009: Editing the Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda. In: Á austrvega. Saga and East Scandinavia. Preprint papers of The 14th International Saga Conference Uppsala 9th–15th August 2009. Vol. 1. Gävle. Pp. 207–212.

that they feel they have something to say about the text and the manuscripts that contain it. Electronic editions must **not** become yet another area of specialization, where we have on the one side a small band of experts who know all about how to produce them – in theory – and on the other hand a handful of ageing philologists who are supposed to be the practitioners but haven't a clue how to orientate themselves in the unfamiliar building. Theory and practice must go hand in hand. And practical considerations must be given attention. If editorial projects are to be realistic, a balance must be struck between possibility and feasibility. There is hardly a limit to the detail one can get into when editing and commentating a text. This holds true for printed editions, and in the electronic world the possibilities have multiplied. You can tag yourself to death. Let's not lose the will to live.

We are understandably excited by the revolution of electronic media. As of yet, though, the printed book is still alive. I see nothing intrinsically wrong with continuing to produce editions on paper, alongside any electronic development. (One might say it's a little bit like the co-existence of runes alongside the innovation that was the roman alphabet.) What we must not do is sit around scared to start any new project because we fear that when we have finished it, our methods or the technology will be out of date, or that something better will have come along, rendering our edition obsolete. Editions only become truly obsolete when new editors manage to improve the philological **content** on all counts, that is to provide a more accurate reading of the manuscripts, to explain their relationship better, to provide a better historical context, a closer analysis of the language, and a superior or more extensive commentary on the literary aspects of the text. As Finnur Jónsson's editions superseded some of Unger's work, the Skaldic project is superseding some of Finnur's. And so it must continue.

Every person in this auditorium knows the meaning of the word philology. It means love of words. So let's do it – let's fall in love.

Summary

This article reviews the position of text editions in the field of Old Norse studies and argues the need for a revival. As it is, scholars often have to rely on the work of nineteenth-century editors, and although the Arnamagnæan institutes in Reykjavík and Copenhagen have ventured to carry on the ambitious projects begun in

the heyday of the cultural-political strife over the Icelandic manuscripts, they have not managed to keep up the impressive output of the 1960s. Meanwhile, both the theory and the practice of textual editing have undergone significant changes. There are different views on what constitutes a text; manuscripts are scrutinized in new ways; the printed book is no longer the only – not even the preferred – medium for editions; and last, but not least, the concept of collaboration has acquired a whole new significance in the age of the internet. These issues have consequences for the ways in which editions of Old Norse texts are to be produced. The author argues that editorial work should not be seen as an area of specialization within Old Norse studies, but rather that scholars and students should generally see it as one of their tasks to participate in the editing of texts.