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The Evaluation of Stemmatic Evidence.
Recension and Revision of <u>Niðrstigningar</u> <u>saga</u>.

1. Introduction

Textual criticism is as central in Old Norse philology as it is in classical philology. Yet it seems an undisputed observation that general problems of textual criticism have been a somewhat neglected field of study within Old Norse philology. Textual criticism is often represented as a purely idiographic branch of the arts in which creativity and intuition are of prime importance[1]. Good critics are 'born, not made', claims E. J. Kennedy, referring to A. E. Housman's polemic statement that a man who possesses common sense and the use of reason must not expect to learn from treatises or lectures on textual criticism anything that he could not, with leisure and industry, find out for himself[2]. Now, if this position is to be taken as valid, the nomothetic content of textual criticism is nil. The critic's work then becomes a matter of taste, making evaluation a question of pure subjectivity.

It can not be denied that each corpus of manuscripts poses problems that call for an individual investigation, or as stated in a commonplace of textual criticism: Each case is special. Textual criticism is truly idiographic in the sense that it establishes hypotheses of low generality, which aim at explaining the relationship within individual manuscript corpora. This does not mean that textual criticism deserves no theoretical discussion, nor that it is void of nomothetic content. In this article we intend to raise a few general theoretical problems in textual criticism, concentrating on the construction and evaluation of a stemma. Though not purporting to solve any general stemmatic problems, we should like to focus on the uncertainty and to some extent arbitrariness that faces the critic. We have chosen <u>Niðr-</u> <u>stigningar</u> <u>saga</u>, an Old Norse apocryph, as an illustrative ex- ample, which in spite of the paucity of manuscript evidence poses enough problems to warrant a closer study.

2. Manuscript evidence

Niðrstigningar saga is a translation from Latin of the
latter half of the Gospel of Nicodemus, Descensus Christi ad
Inferos. This Gospel was known to the Latin West in two versions,
commonly referred to as A and B according to Tischendorf's
edition[3]. The Old Norse version is definitely based on the A
version with some modifications in the first and last chapters
and, what is more interesting, with two interpolations added in
the middle of the text[4]. It is probably impossible to decide
exactly which Latin manuscript was the source for the Old Norse
translation. According to Tischendorf's eclectic edition the
textual variants in the Latin recension are on a comparatively
modest scale, and the textual rapport between the Latin A text
and the Old Norse text is on the whole so convincing that it
seems fair to regard the current Latin editions as close approxi-
mations to the Latin text used by the translator. The Old Norse
translation is, however, in many respects free, not only by way
of interpolations but also by way of abbreviation and, some-
times, expansion of the Latin text.

The translation can in all probability be dated to the 12th
century, but the provenience - Norwegian or Icelandic - of the
translation is far less certain and is not a matter for dis-
cussion here[5]. The four mediaeval manuscripts left to posterity
are, however, all Icelandic. Only one of the manuscripts, AM
645 qv, which we shall refer to as ms. I, carries the complete
text. It is a collection volume of Icelandic religious literature,
and Niðrstigningar saga (fol. 51v.22 - 55v.23) belongs to the
so-called younger part probably written in the early 13th
century. Of the three others, AM 623 qv (ms. II), probably
written in the 13th or even early 14th century[6], lacks the
beginning, AM 233a fol (ms. III), probably written in the 14th
century, consists of the inner column of a leaf in a collection
volume and AM 238 fol fragm. V (ms. IV), probably written in the
15th century, is a single leaf most probably from a collection

volume as well. The textual representation of the manuscripts
is shown in fig. (1) below.

There are also some younger Icelandic paper mss. which are
based on an independent translation[7]. As they have no bearing
on the mediaeval version we shall leave them out of consider-
ation.

Fig. (1): Textual representation of Niðrstigningar saga

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                                  I    II   III   IV
1.05 [Karinus oc Levcius .........│.....│......│......│
2.16 [Hic est dilectus/
       þesse er son minn .........│.....│......│......│
2.38 [til þin ...................│.....│
4.36 [-cipes vestras ............│.....│......│
5.06 oc for þangat/
       ok iamskiot].............│.....│......│......│
5.38 in terram aspexit/
       af himni a iordina]........│.....│......│
7.35 [Guþ baud Michael/
       drottin varr baud Michaele ..│.....│......│
8.35 Amen.]......................│.....│......│......│
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A solid vertical line signifies that the text is found in
the manuscript, while a dotted vertical line signifies
missing parts which, however, were probably included in
the original complete manuscript.

3. Editions

The Latin text has been edited in the 19th century both by
Thilo and Tischendorf, and most recently by Kim, none of which
editions are truly critical[8]. Ernst von Dobschütz had a critical
edition in preparation which he, however, never seems to have
completed. Tischendorf's edition is an eclectic text with a
critical apparatus based primarily on four mss.[9], while Thilo's
heavily annotated edition of the A version in some respects is
regarded as better than Tischendorf's[10]. Kim's new edition is of
the single ms. Codex Einsidlensis (10th century), commonly regarded
as the best[11]. The textual differences between these editions are
minimal in comparison to the Old Norse translation.

The Old Norse text has been edited by Carl Richard Unger, rendering each of the four manuscripts in a fairly accurate, if not diplomatic edition[12] . Two pages in the main manuscript, AM 645 qv fol. 52v + 53r, are now difficult to read, but sound conjectures can be made on the basis of the other mss., and to some extent of the Latin text. Finnur Jónsson has given a separate, diplomatic edition of AM 623 qv[13]. AM 645 qv is also available in a facsimile edition with an introduction by Anne Holtsmark[14] .

References will be given to the Latin text in Tischendorf's (1876) and Kim's (1973) editions, while references to the Old Norse text are based on Unger's edition (1877).

4. Earlier hypotheses on the textual history

The four Old Norse manuscripts contain enough differences to justify Unger's separate edition of each manuscript. Despite this, there are no grounds for doubting Turville-Petre's claim that all mss. are witnesses to a common original translation[15]. A conclusive argument for this point of view is the two interpolations which are found neither in the Latin text nor in cognate vernacular versions, but which are incorporated in all four Old Norse manuscripts. Ms. IV is in many respects closer to the Latin text than the three other mss., which probably make up a separate recension as opposed to that of ms. IV. Turville-Petre believes that the intermediate position of ms. IV is due to the revision of a learned scribe, which entails that mss. I-III are regarded as closer witnesses to the original translation[16]. He does not put forward any final conclusion concerning the stemmatic relationship, but his hypothesis of a revision in ms. IV means that the stemma is contaminated, i.e. that it includes at least one manuscript having two or more sources.

Magnus Már Lárusson points out that although ms. I carries the only complete text and in this respect is codex optimus, ms. II seems to keep closest to the original. This does not

necessarily entail that ms. II is older than ms. I, but in
Lárusson's opinion it is a more conservative witness to the
original than ms. I. He also believes that the text was originally
translated in the 12th century, perhaps as early as the first
half of the century[17].

The only stemma which has been established is that of Gary
L. Aho in his doctoral thesis on the Old English and Old Norse
treatments of Christ's harrowing of hell. He also regards the
four manuscripts as witnesses to a common first translation, $\underline{X}$.
Ms. IV, however, is seen as the most faithful witness to this
archetype, while mss. I-III are united in a supposed common,
now lost, redaction $\underline{X}^1$. The following stemma then emerges[18]:

Fig. (2): Aho's stemma for Niðrstigningar saga
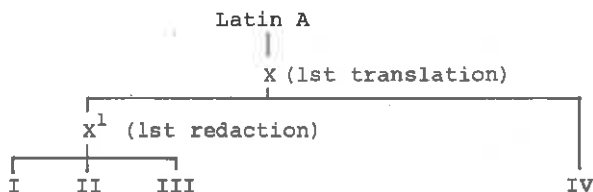
The difference between mss. I-III on the one hand and ms.
IV on the other can in principle be explained in two ways -
either by positing ms. IV as witness to the original translation
and mss. I-III as a secondary redaction (Aho) or positing mss.
I-III as witnesses to the original translation and ms. IV as a
revision using the older recension as well as the Latin text
(Turville-Petre). The reason for these alternative solutions
lies in the conflicting evidence itself. Mss. I-III are definitely
older than ms. IV, which makes Turville-Petre's assumption seem
the most probable one. Yet the closer resemblance between ms.
IV and the Latin text supports Aho's stemma, is so far as textual
variance in manuscripts tends to increase the further they are
removed from the original.

Lárusson's claim that ms. II is closer to the original than ms. I does not necessarily conflict with Aho's stemma. Even if mss. I and II are seen as sister mss., i.e. occupying the same level in the stemma, they may still differ considerably as to how faithfully they reproduce their common source. Turville-Petre's assumption, on the other hand, entails a contaminated stemma which is not compatible with Aho's uncontaminated one.

5. Constructing a stemma

When constructing a stemma, the ideal procedure is to undertake a word by word collation of all the manuscripts in question. Correspondence between mss. is, however, of less interest than deviations, particularly shared deviations. The stemmatic investigation thus concentrates on the telling mistakes and common blunders in order to rank the mss. in a final stemma. Secondly, the stemma becomes an instrument in establishing the paradosis, i.e. the archetypical text as far as it can be established on the basis of the textual witnesses. The paradosis focuses on the correspondences, the points where the manuscripts agree on the text.

In the case of Niðrstigningar saga the differences between the four manuscripts are so extensive that it is probably futile to try to establish an archetypical text. That does not mean that constructing a stemma is equally futile. The stemma gives clues as to the evaluation of deviant readings, and even if the data seem too disparate to allow for a reconstruction of a consecutive archetypical text, it is still possible to make a choice between variant readings on particular points in the text, making a somewhat fragmented paradosis.

Below are given 20 parallel readings which are chosen as examples of salient points in the recension of Niðrstigningar saga. There are, of course, many more textual variants which have bearings on the stemma, but we have made a choice which is intended to be representative, even if it seems impossible to give a statistical legitimation for the sample. We shall return

to the problem of representativeness later on, and suffice it
here to say that the sample of 20 readings is based on a word
by word collation of all four Old Norse manuscripts and the
Latin text.

Parallel readings in Niðrstigningar saga

No references are given to mss. lacking the passage in
question, while a hyphen signifies that the manuscript
does not have a parallel reading although the context is
represented. Thus example 1 shows that mss. II and III
lack this part of the text (cf. fig. 1 above), while the
Latin text simply has no parallel reading.

(1) Lat: -
    I: þar var elldr brennandi at banna manne hveriom
       at(gøngo)
   IV: eg sa elld brennanda, sa er bannade hverium sem
       einum manne ingaungo
       [Unger 2.34-35, 18.05-06]

(2) Lat: ego sum constitutus super corpus humanum
    I: ec emc til þess setr at sia um hvers mannz hug
   II: ec emc til þess settr at lita hvers manz hag
   IV: eg er skipadr yfir mannlegum likama
       [Tisch. 394.01, Kim 38.07-08, Unger 2.38-39,
       9.03, 18.10-11]

(3) Lat: ecce Satan princeps et dux mortis
    I: Satan iotunn helvitis hofðingi, er stundom er með
       .vii. høfðom en stundom með .iii., en stundom i
       dreka like þess, er omorlegr er oc ogorlegr oc
       illegre a allar lundir
   II: Satan heims hofþingi, er stundom er þar met .vii.
       havþom eþa .iii. i hreþiligo dreka liki oc omorligo
       á allar lundir
   IV: helvitis hofdingi leidtogi daudra i liking hrædilegs
       dreka ok miog auskurlegs, sa er stundum syndiz þeim
       med sio hofdum, en stundum med .iii., stundum i mannz
       liki
       [Tisch. 394.19-395.01, Kim 38.28-29, Unger 3.16-18,
       9.18-19, 18.27-29]

(4) Lat: tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem
    I: -
   II: -
   IV: hrygg er ond min allt til dauda
       [Tisch. 395.03-04, Kim 39.01, Unger 18.33]

(5)   I: þar kom fram fyrst hestr hvitr
   II: þar rann fram hestr hvitr
   IV: þa kom fram fyst hestr hvitr
       [Unger 4.20, 10.13-14, 19.34]

(6) I: hann hafði corono a høfði
    II: corono þa bar hann a hofþi
    IV: hann hafdi koronu þa æ hofdi
        [Unger 4.22, 10.15-16, 19.37]

(7) I: voro aller cledir silki hvito
    II: -
    IV: voru klæddir silke hvitu
        [Unger 4.27, 20.03]

(8) I: hann fal þa øngul
    II: oc avngull sa enn hvarsi
    IV: hann fal aungul sin
        [Unger 4.29-30, 10.22, 20.05-06]

(9) Lat: Haec audiens inferus dixit ad Satan principem
    I: þa melto helvitis buar við Satan
    II: þa melto helvitis buar við Sathan
    III: þa mæltu helvitis buar vid Sathan
    IV: ok þa er helvite heyrdi þessi ord, þa sagdi þad
        til Satans hofdingia sins
        [Tisch. 397.09-10, Kim 40.21, Unger 4.37-38,
        10.29-30, 14.25, 20.12-13]

(10) Lat: Et eiecit inferus Satan foras de sedibus suis
    I: þeir raco þa braut høfðingia sinn or helviti
    II: -
    III: þeir raku þa hofdingia sinn or helviti
    IV: ok eptir þat rak þad [helvite] Satan hofdingia
        sinn ut af sætum sinum
        [Tisch. 397.12-13, Kim 40.24, Unger 5.01, 14.27,
        20.16-17]

(11) I: en g[ec] eigi til fundar við ða
    II: en guþ egi
    III: enn eigi gud. Hann for þa eigi til fundar vid þa
    IV: en eigi sa hann þo dyrdarkongin þar komin, ok
        villdi hann þo eigi moti þeim ganga
        [Unger 5.03, 10.32-33, 14.29, 20.18-20]

(12) I: at hann þotesc liggia mundo umb heimen allan utan
    II: at hann hugþisc liggia mondo umb allan heiminn utan
    III: at hann mundi liggia i hring um allt helviti
    IV: sa er sagt, at ligi um allan heimin
        [Unger 5.04-05, 10.34-35, 14.31, 20.22]

(13) Lat: Haec autem audiens omnis multitudo sanctorum cum
        voce increpationis dixerunt ad inferum
    I: Guþs helgir, er þeir heyrþo þetta, þa melto þeir sva
    II: Helgir menn guþs heyrþo hial þeira oc melto við fiandr
    III: Guds helgir er þeir heyrdu þetta, þa mæltu þeir sva
        [Tisch. 397.16-17, Kim 40.28-29, Unger 5.18-19,
        11.07-08, 15.15]

(14) Lat: praedixi vobis
       I: ec spaða yðr þetta
      II: ec spaþa yþr þetta
     III: ek sagða þetta
          [Tisch. 397.19, Kim 40.31–41.01, Unger 5.22,
           11.11, 15.19]

(15) Lat: quoniam ego eadem per spiritum eius vaticinatus sum
       I: af þvi at ec spaða þetta af helgom anda
      II: er þar er[o me]lt fyrir helgan anda
     III: af þvi at ek spada þetta fyrir helgan anda
          [Tisch. 398.15, Kim 41.19–20, Unger 5.35,
           11.21–22, 16.01]

(16) Lat: non gustavimus mortem
       I: hofum við enn eki daet
      II: egi hofom vit en dæþa bergt
     III: ok enn hófum vid eigi æ dauda bergt
          [Tisch. 404.25–405.01, Kim 46.17–18, Unger 8.01,
           13.24, 16.14–15]

(17) Lat: latro
       I: illvirke
      II: þiofr
     III: illvirki
          [Tisch. 405.11, Kim 46.29, Unger 8.08, 13.32, 16.24]

(18) Lat: –
       I: varo sender siþan i borg Ar(i)mathia
      II: varo senir siþan i borg Joseph Arimathia
     III: voru sidan senir i borg þeiri, er heitir Aremathia
          [Unger 8.29, 14.13, 17.11]

(19) Lat: –
       I: þeir reþo up
      II: þeir lasu up
     III: þeir hafa upp lesit
          [Unger 8.31, 14.15, 17.14]

(20) Lat: –
       I: Theodosius keisere oc sendi Archadij
      II: Teodosius keisari son Archadij
     III: Theodosius keisari, hann var son Archadij
          [Unger 8.32–33, 14.17, 17.15–16]

It is clear that ms. IV represents a separate recension as
opposed to that of mss. I-III, and further that mss. I and II
are fairly close. This uncontroversial observation agrees with
the findings of Turville-Petre, Lárusson and Aho cited above.
Using this observation as an initial hypothesis, we shall

at first try to establish the stemmatic relations within recension I-III and then try to relate ms. IV to this recension by way of going from hypotheses of lower rank to a final hypothesis of higher rank.
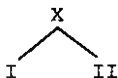
(a) The relation between mss. I and II

Neither ms. I nor II seems to be a faithful copy of the Old Norse archetype. Ms. I is closer to the Latin in 10, 15 and probably 17, where illvirke seems a more apt translation of latro than the lectio facilior þiofr. Ms. II, on the other hand, is the more conservative text in 2, where hag probably is the archetypical reading, and 16, which retains the Latin metaphorical expression. In 20, which has no parallel in the Latin text, there is still no doubt that ms. II has the original reading, while 18 is obviously corrupt in both mss.

Lárusson's claim that ms. II is on the whole closer to the archetype than ms. I does not seem warranted. A comparison of the two mss. yielded 30 readings (of which only a few are given here) where it was possible to arrive at a conclusive evaluation, showing that ms. I seemed to be the most conservative in 17 cases, ms. II in 13. It thus seems reasonable to conclude that both mss. are free transcripts and that neither of them has priority in relation to the archetype.

Ms. II has not been the source for ms. I, as is shown by 7, 10 and 15, nor has ms. I been used as the source for ms. II, as is shown by 11 and 16. The only conclusion then that fits in with the evidence, is that mss. I and II are sister mss., copied from a common source X, as set up in the provisional stemma below.

Fig. (3): Provisional stemma for mss. I and II

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        X
      /   \
    I       II
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It should be noted that even if ms. II is considerably younger
than ms. I (cfr. note 6 above), they may still occupy the same
level in a stemma, which intends to state genetic, not chrono-
logical relations.

(b) The relation between ms. class X and ms. III

In some respects ms. III is close to ms. I, as in 10, 13,
15 and 17, while in other cases it is closer to ms. II, as in
16 and 20. In other respects ms. III has a reading of its own,
as in 12 (which seems an inferior reading in the context), 14
and 18, where both mss. I and II are corrupt.

Examples 10, 11, 15 and 17 appear to argue against ms. II
as the immediate source for ms. III. The evidence against ms. I
being the source is less strong, but 11 indicates that ms. III
has a source other than ms. I (and ms. II). In this passage mss.
III and IV probably are closest to the archetype, while both
mss. I and II have abbreviated readings.

A provisional stemma then may posit mss. I-III as sister mss.
dominated by a common source X, as there is no evidence for any
hierarchy between the mss. so far, and the general rule of mini-
mizing theoretical constructs (which we shall return to in ch. 6)
counters the postulating of any additional sources.

Fig. (4): Provisional stemma for mss. I-III

```
              X
            / | \
          I   II  III
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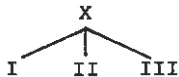
(c) The relation between ms. class X and ms. IV

As pointed out above, it is clear that ms. IV represents a
separate recension as opposed to the recensions of mss. I-III.
In most cases ms. IV reflects the Latin text more accurately
than the other three mss.: 2, 4, 9 and 10 are only a few of
the examples. On the other hand, the two recensions are not

completely independent, as all four mss. incorporate the two
interpolations on the expulsion of Satan, to which there is no
parallel in the Latin text (cf. 5, 6, 7, 8, 11 and 12 above).

In Aho's stemma ms. IV is seen as the more conservative text
reflecting a first translation, while mss. I-III represent a
secondary redaction (fig. 2 above). Turville-Petre, on the other
hand, sees ms. IV as a revision by a learned scribe, who had
the Latin text as well as a manuscript in the recension of mss.
I-III in front of him. This implies a contamination in the stemma,
but as Maas concludes rather pessimistically in his Textkritik,
against contaminations there are no remedies[19]. Our problem,
then, is not only to handle a contamination, but to decide whether
the recension is contaminated (Turville-Petre) or not (Aho).

It is possible to give a consistent argumentation in favour
of Aho's solution. When mss. I-III agree on a reading as opposed
to ms. IV, the variant reading will be ascribed to the postulated
first redaction. When one or two mss. of recension I-III disagree
on a reading, the reading common to ms. IV and the other ms(s).
is seen as archetypical, while the deviant reading is explained
as a spontaneous innovation. Thus 4 is explained as abbreviation
in the first redaction, 5-8 as innovations or abbreviations in
ms. II, 9 as deviation in the first redaction, 10 as spontaneous
abbreviation in ms. II and 11 as corrupt and independent readings
in mss. I and II. Finally, 12 poses a problem, but according to
Aho's stemma mss. I and II may be assumed to have the archetypical
reading, slightly altered in ms. IV, while ms. III carries an
innovation, and not a very good one at that. Thus Aho's stemma
is fully consistent with our sample of parallel readings.

The same evidence can be used to support Turville-Petre's point
of view, i.e. explaining the variant readings in ms. IV as in-
fluenced by two sources, the Latin text and the recension I-III.
Thus 2 is explained as a corrected reading in ms. IV based on the
Latin text, 3 as a transfer from recension I-III, 4 as a correction
based on the Latin text, 5-8 as transfers from ms. I or a ms. close
to it, 9-10 as corrections based on the Latin text, 11 as a

transfer from ms. III or a ms. close to it, and finally 12 as
a transfer from mss. I and II or a ms. close to them. This
solution entails some sort of hierarchy among mss. I-III, a
point which will be further discussed below. Suffice it here
to conclude that Turville-Petre's contamination hypothesis is
equally consistent with our sample of parallel readings.

At this point it looks as if we have reached an aporia in
the sense that no intrinsic textual arguments can lead up to a
decisive conclusion. In such a situation the critic has to
resort to other criteria, i.e. extra-textual ones, in order to
make a qualified choice. A peculiar aspect of recension I-III
is that the original triad of Christ – Satan – Inferus in the
Latin text is reduced to a simple dualism between Christ and
Satan, while Inferus is transposed to a host of devils and im-
pious inhabitants of hell. Ms. IV keeps to the original structure,
translating the personified Inferus with the neuter actant hel-
vite (anaphorically referred to as 'þat'), as shown in 9 and 10.
Either mss. I-III or ms. IV must be explained as some sort of
revision in this respect, but other things being equal it is more
likely that a revision tries to correct the text, as in ms. IV,
not the other way round, as in mss. I-III.

The archaic language of the related mss. I and II shows by
simple extrapolation that their common source, X, belongs to the
12th century, perhaps as early as the first half of the century[20].
As the first half of the 12th century by common consent is thought
to be the beginning of Old Norse literature of some importance,
this leaves little margin for a supposed redaction intercalated
between mss. I-III and the first translation, as is supposed in
Aho's stemma. It is further a puzzle that the oldest textual
witness to the archetype is the 15th century ms. IV, while the
13th century ms. I, reflecting a 12th century hyparchetype, is to
be explained as a textual witness to a secondary redaction. If,
then, ms. IV is seen as a reflection of an original and closer
translation of the Latin text, it is even more puzzling why it

should include the specific Old Norse interpolations, which fit far more easily in with the freer rendering of mss. I-III.

These extra-textual arguments seem strong enough to warrant Turville-Petre's solution, but here, as in most stemmatic discussions, there is no conclusive proof of any solution.

Granted that ms. IV is a revision, the next problem then is to decide the genetic relationship between ms. IV and recension I-III. As pointed out above, the contamination hypothesis entails a hierarchy among these mss.

Ms. IV comes closest to ms. I in most instances, especially in the interpolations, as shown in 5, 6, 7 and 8 (and an additional number of examples not included in the present sample). In example 10 it follows mss. I and III, and in 11 ms. III. Ms. II seems to be furthest removed from ms. IV, but the phrase 'i hreþiligo dreka liki'/'i liking hrædilegs dreka' in 3 points to some connection between mss. II and IV. None of the three mss. can be posited as an immediate source for ms. IV, even if ms. I is a close candidate. Example 11 shows that neither ms. I nor II has been the immediate source for ms. IV, and example 12 rules out ms. III. The source for ms. IV must then be a ms. situated on a higher node in the stemma.

Now, two solutions are possible. This higher node ms. may be identified with $\underline{X}$, as in stemma (a) below[21]. According to this stemma the significant closeness between mss. I and IV as opposed to mss. II and III is a matter of coincidence. The scribes of mss. I and IV may both have stuck fairly close to $\underline{X}$, while the scribes of mss. II and III may have been more innovative in their work.

Fig. (5): Stemma (a) for Niðrstigningar saga
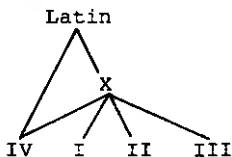
The evidence also admits of another stemma, **viz. (b)**, where
mss. I and IV are seen as sister mss. dominated by Y, which in
turn is dominated by X. This solution is based on a higher degree
of abstraction than stemma (a) as it introduces a new construct,
Y. Stemma (b) articulates more clearly the textual relation
between mss. I and IV. The significant higher degree of corre-
spondence between those two mss. as opposed to mss. II and III,
is shown in establishing Y as a denominator for mss. I and IV.

Fig. (6): Stemma (b) for Niðrstigningar saga
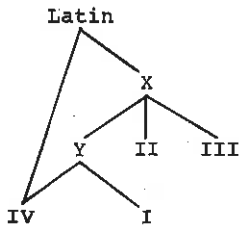
Both stemmata have the same power of explanation in the
sense that the set of registered textual variants (1-20) are
compatible with both models. The variant readings in 11 suffice
to illustrate this point. Here the original reading is probably
close to ms. III or the somewhat paraphrastic wording in ms. IV,
while mss. I and II clearly give corrupt readings. According to
stemma (a) mss. III and IV are independent witnesses to the
original reading in X, while both mss. I and II are independent
corruptions. According to stemma (b) X still carries the original
reading, which is transferred to Y and then to ms. IV, while its
sister ms. I is corrupted. The readings in mss. II and III bear
the same relation to X as in stemma (a).

This means that if (a) gives a consistent explanation of the
textual relationship, the same applies to (b). How, then, can
one choose between the two? Stemma (a) makes do with one con-
struct less, X, as opposed to X and Y in (b). On the other hand

stemma (b) articulates the comparatively close relation between mss. I and IV, which appears to be a mere coincidence in (a). Thus the configuration of (b) is a better representation of the degree of textual distance in recension $\underline{X}$ than the equipollent stemma (a). On this basis, we will choose (b) as the stemmatic model which seems to give a consistent explanation of the genetic relationship between the four texts and which at the same time gives the best representation of textual affinity. It should be noted that this is not a matter of strict proof, but of constructing the best possible hypothesis of the textual history.

6. Drawing some general conclusions

Since the Swedish philologist Carl Johan Schlyter constructed what is thought to be the first stemma in his edition of Vestgötalagen (1827)[22], this biologically inspired model has become a commonplace in textual criticism (fig. 7). Even if the model itself has the dignity of high age, construction of stemmata is by no means finally described. The consensus on the model does not entail consensus on the rules for its construction. Hard and fast rules simply do not exist: Each stemma reflects an investigation into a manuscript corpus which raises a host of particular problems.

In spite of the dominantly idiographic character of stemmatic work, it is still possible to make some general observations. In this final chapter we shall try to point out some of these aspects, based on the preceding discussion, but hopefully with a wider application.

The need for a terminology has strangely enough arisen in this well-tilled field. We shall borrow some terms from the phrase structure component of generative grammar, whose syntactic tree model turns out as a useful analogy [23]. An initial ms. thus refers to the archetype, a terminal ms. to the ms. at the end of each branch in the stemma, and node to the dividing point of the branches. A node is said to dominate its lower nodes, on which

daughter mss. are situated. Mss. on the same level are referred
to as sister mss., i.e. mss. dominated by the same, immediately
preceding node, which in its turn is referred to as a mother
ms. (German Vorlage).

(a) Abstraction in the model

Schlyter's stemma lends itself
to a fairly concrete interpre-
tation. The vertical axis states
an absolute chronology, in which
each ms. is placed at its time
of composition - even the ones no
longer extant (set out as empty
nodes). The essence of the model,
then as now, is of course to ex-
pose the genetic relations between
the mss., in Schlyter's words
cognatio codicum.

In a modern stemma the verti-
cal axis only intends to give a
relative chronology. Sister mss.
may differ considerably in time
of writing, and mss. on the same
level but on different branches
even more so. The distance from
the initial to the terminal ms.

Fig. (7): Schlyter's stemma

is not a measure of chronological span, but of textual affiliation.
In linguistic terms the stemma is a model of the hypotaxis in the
recension of the mss., stating domination along the vertical and
diffusion along the horizontal axis.

The higher degree of abstraction implies that the intermediate,
empty nodes in the stemma no longer should be conceived of as lost
mss. The empty nodes in Schlyter's stemma and the X and Y in our
preceding stemma (b) are simple denominators: They show domination
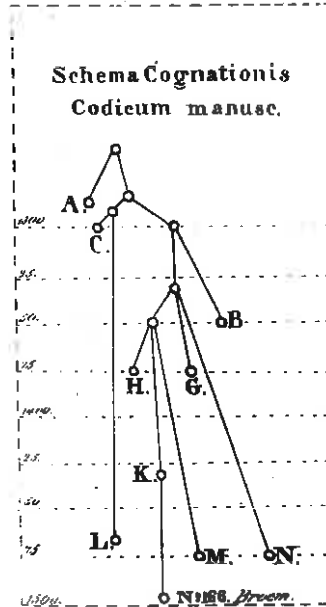
over lower nodes in the sense that they group together mss. of
common descent. Deciding the exact number of lost intermediate
mss. is in any case impossible, because the extant mss. will
always be an unknown fraction of the total, once existing ms.
corpus. A stemma is thus the critic's representation of the
relationship between the initial and terminal mss., and is not
aimed at giving information concerning the number of mss. lying
between the two. This shows the need for Occam's razor when
constructing a stemma: Plurality is not to be assumed without
necessity, i.e. the number of stemmatic denominators should be
minimized, though without infringing on the consistency of the
stemma.

In stemma (b) above a possible objection is that the younger
ms. II appears to be closer to the initial ms. than the older
ms. I, as there is an additional node dominating this ms. A
manuscript may, however, have as its immediate source a very
much older ms., which either has been chosen by chance (there
being no other ms. available) or which has been chosen for the
very reason that it is an older ms., carrying the stamp of
authority. This is probably the case with ms. II, which in our
view is clearly younger than ms. I[24], although it seems to have
been copied from a ms. close to the initial ms. The age of the
manuscript is no definitive criterion for stemmatic rank.

In an abstract interpretation of the stemma, the position of
ms. I as opposed to ms. II states that ms. I is dominated by $\underline{Y}$,
then by $\underline{X}$, which in its turn dominates ms. II. This means that
mss. I and IV are more closely related than mss. I and II in
spite of ms. IV being contaminated, while both mss. I and II
must have a common source. The stemma is thus a representation
of a hypothesis of textual relatedness, and does not purport to
decide the exact number and character of the manuscript sources
for mss. I-IV.

(b) Representativeness

The basic openness of a text (which some literary critics
stress to the point of absurdity) means that there is apparently
no limit to the number of relations that can be established
between any two manuscripts. The material for establishing
stemmatic relations is in principle any differences in the text,
i.e. any variants. A variant is a relational term, which is defined
as deviation from the textual norm in a chosen manuscript. As the
number of variants even in the shortest text can be overwhelming,
the critic's task is to make a representative sample of variants,
deciding at which points in the text the stemmatic relation is
to be established.

Random sampling, e.g. picking out every 10th line in the manu-
script, is no feasible way. What the critic is looking for is not
a statistical average, but the telling mistakes, the instances
of common deviation, etc. The only safe method of choosing variants
relevant for constructing a stemma is to collate the manuscripts
line by line. Richard Bentley's famous dictum that reason and the
facts outweigh a hundred manuscripts goes for evaluating variants
as well. A single variant may decide a stemmatic dilemma, while a
hundred other readings may be ambiguous or uninteresting. Making
a representative sample then is not a mathematical operation, but
a test of the critic's qualified opinion. It is rather a question
of making a conclusive sample, i.e. sorting out the variants that
have bearing on the stemma one way or another.

Though allowing for subjectivity, this is not an opening towards
irrationality. Tradition in textual criticism has established an
inventory of variational types, epitomized in the central rules
of lectio difficilior potior (the more difficult reading is to
be preferred) and utrum in alterum abiturum erat? (which reading
would be more likely to have given rise to the other?)[25] . They
are guiding-lines for the critic's sampling and evaluation, but
they still leave considerable room for qualified interpretation.

In our somewhat abbreviated discussion of the stemma for Niðr-
stigningar saga we based the argumentation wholly on a sample of

20 parallel readings. The sample is supposedly qualified, but
only one among other conceivable samples, which implies that
other conclusions are equally possible. This underlines the
provisional character of the stemma, as it is open for falsi-
fication on two levels: It may be shown to be wrongly constructed
on the basis of the critic's sample alone, or on the basis of
counter-examples not included in the sample. Still, different
samples may lead to the same conclusions. Evaluation of variants
is not a matter of counting, but of weighing them according to
stemmatic rank. Making a representative choice of variants means
to sort out variants that are relevant for the establishing of a
priority among the manuscripts. As such a sample and its evaluation
is never finally made, the stemma is in Popperian terms properly
defined as the best, as yet not falsified hypothesis of the
inter-textual relationship [26].

(c) Explanatory power

In the preceding discussion a stemma has several times been
said to explain a textual relationship. The concept of explanation
usually entails generalization in the sense that a phenomenon is
referred to a law or to some observation of regularity. 'Explaining
a textual relationship' may simply mean to relate a manuscript to
other mss. in a stemmatic hypothesis, based on a generalization
of their common features.

Explanations differ as to how powerful they are. Claiming that
all four mss. of Niðrstigningar saga are dominated by a common
initial ms. is a fairly weak explanation of the inter-textual
relationship. The explanation is probably correct, but rather
uncontroversial as it rules out few other possibilities. A strong
explanation, on the other hand, is characterized by its power to
exclude possibilities. The final stemma (b), for example, is a
more powerful explanation than the stemmatic observation above,
because it rules out Aho's uncontaminated stemma among the
possible stemmatic relations, in fact any uncontaminated stemma
whatsoever.

As strong explanations exclude more possibilities than weak
ones, it follows that they are more easily falsified as well.
Counter evidence for stemma (b) is easier to come by than counter
evidence for the uncontroversial hypothesis of a common initial
ms. Weak explanations, on the other hand, carry a certain immunity
against falsification, which means that they are false under
comparatively fewer conditions than stronger ones. In stemmatic
work explanations in this sense are often fairly immune. The dis-
cussion of stemmata (a) and (b) is an instructive example of this
partial immunity. On the basis of the existing evidence, both
stemmata seem able to 'explain' the textual relationship. Despite
this apparent equilibrium, we tried to show that stemma (b) is a
'better' explanation than (a). The question then arises if a set
of manuscripts allows for any number of stemmata, or in other words
if the art of explaining is the art of introducing denominators
according to need, answering counter arguments by constructing
new levels in the stemma.

    There are (at least) two ways of reducing stemmatic immunity,
and thereby increasing the empirical content of the stemma.

    The first rule is Occam's razor, as pointed out above (p. 18):
The number of denominators must not exceed the minimum which is
required to give a consistent statement of the inter-textual
relationship. The consequence of this rule, however, is that there
can be no one-to-one correspondence between the number of lost
mss. and the denominators of the remaining manuscripts. If the
real stemma for the remaining mss. $\underline{f}$, $\underline{g}$, $\underline{h}$, $\underline{i}$, $\underline{j}$, $\underline{k}$ and $\underline{l}$ was
fig. 8 (mss. $\underline{a}$-$\underline{e}$ being lost), the critic would, depending on the
degree of textual variance, probably construct stemma 9. This
stemma uses only the minimum of denominators in order to group
the mss. in two main recensions, $\underline{B}$ and $\underline{C}$. Ms. $\underline{h}$ is immediately
dominated by the initial ms. $\underline{A}$, as there is no reason to inter-
calate a lost ms. between them (though $\underline{c}$ in fact was intermediate).
The readings of $\underline{A}$ are only indirectly accesible via $\underline{B}$ and $\underline{C}$, which
makes it very difficult indeed to argue for an intermediate ms.
between $\underline{A}$ and $\underline{h}$ on the basis of the sister denominators $\underline{B}$ and $\underline{C}$.

Fig. (8)   A complete stemma of mss. a-l
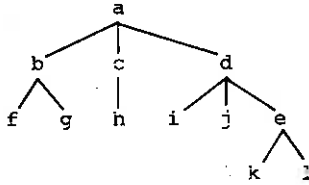
Fig. (9): A stemma constructed on the basis of mss. f-l
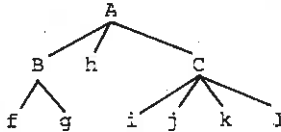
Similarly, as ms. e is lost, mss. k and l are most likely to be
raised to the level of mss. i and j.

This rule underlines the need for caution in interpreting the
stemma. A stemma is not primarily a historical reconstruction
of a manuscript corpus. It is rather a minimal model for stating
the hypotaxis between manuscripts which are weighted and ranked
according to their critical value.

The second rule is the necessity of what we may term textuali-
zation, i.e. the manifestation of stemmatic relations in the text
itself. Exact copies are the exception in mediaeval corpora, and
particularly in Old Norse literature, where a linguistic norm
was never established. There is no way of telling the difference
between two printed books only on the basis of the text. Manu-
scripts, on the other hand, reveal their fallible character in
many ways. Textualization means that the source has left traces
in the manuscript as testimony to the textual history. Even if
only one manuscript remains, it is very often possible to make

some judgement as to its stemmatic standing on the basis of
textual corruptions etc. Textualization is the empirical mani-
festation of lost manuscripts, which are only visible par-derrière,
through traces in the remaining mss.

The concept of textualization is trivial, and only points out
the need for textual evidence of stemmatic history, e.g. saut du
même au même, haplography, dittography, simple omission, intelli-
gent restitution etc. Setting up formal limitations for stemmatic
work can probably never become more than generalities bordering
on trivialities.

The art of constructing a stemma for a literary work, then,
may be described as an extrapolation from the fraction of re-
maining manuscripts towards the initial manuscript, founded on
textualization in the manuscripts and restricted by the rule of
minimizing theoretical constructs.

(d) The quest for a stemma

Constructing a stemma serves a double purpose. For the textual
critic it is a model that sums up his investigations into the
manuscripts, with the aim of ranking them according to their
critical value. The stemmatic work then makes a basis for an
edition or a re-evaluation of a former edition, either by estab-
lishing which manuscript is to be preferred or how variant readings
are to be evaluated. In this sense a stemmatic discussion is a
necessary prolegomena for an edition, whether it is possible to
arrive at a conclusive stemma or not. The exception is the literary
work that is only left to posterity in a single manuscript, but
even here, as pointed out above, is it possible to pass some
judgement as to its relative stemmatic standing.

For the user of a critical edition the stemma is an essential
instrument in evaluating the variants. If no priority among the
mss. is established, the evaluation of the variants becomes
accidental and the text less clearly defined. The stemma can,
admittedly, give no final conclusions in the evaluation of variants,
but it is to be read as the critic's qualified advice to the

reader. In this sense the stemma is a model for making explicit an often complicated discussion of manuscriptual evidence.

Establishing a stemma can be tiresome work and, at times, inconclusive. The practical use of the stemma for the readers of an edition may also seem marginal, and for some readers the stemma and its accompanying critical apparatus are uinteresting. Is the stemmatic work worth the trouble, then, or are the returns too few?

It is probably a common judgement in textual criticism that an edition ought to approximate the archetype unless secondary manuscripts have independent literary or linguistic value. As historiography traditionally has tried to go back to the beginnings, textual critics have tried to restore and occasionally improve readings in fragmented and corrupted manuscripts. This quest for a textual archetype has certainly lead some critics to unwise conjectures and emendations. The need for a stemma, however, is not primarily for the stating of a historical reconstruction. The point of constructing a stemma is to furnish the reader with relevant information on the manuscripts presented in a practical format, stating the premises for the critic's own judgements.

Here we may return to the position referred to in the intro-duction, viz. that textual criticism is an art rather than a science (Wissenschaft). A pivotal criterion in all scientific research – even in the Humanities – is that the results are made open for inspection, that the premises for the conclusion are stated, not just the conclusion itself. Thus the rhetorical virtue of perspicuitas is applicable to the humble genre of stemmatic discussion as well. Even if a conclusion in the form of a stemma seems meagre, it is still of theoretical importance to present whatever conclusions that can be drawn from the textual evidence. Only in this way can other critics evaluate the findings.

* * *

The stemma, then, is an instrument in a restorative approxi-
mation to a literary work, which presents itself through the
historical process of transcription by occasionally scrupulous
and occasionally careless scribes. At the end of the line is the
critic, faced with the challenging and often hopeless task of
retracing the literary work as it was once written by an anonymous
author or translator.

NOTES

1) The reference is to Wilhelm Windelband's distinction between
   on the one hand idiographic science (Wissenschaft), dealing
   with the individual aspect, and on the other hand nomothetic
   science, dealing with general statements (laws).

2) Kennedy 1974:190B.

3) Tischendorf [1]1853, [2]1876.

4) The A version was definitely the one most used in Western
   Europe, cf. Turville-Petre 1953:127 or Aho 1966:10,19.
   For a comprehensive introduction to the study of the inter-
   polations, cf. Marchand 1975. The text of the Old Norse
   interpolations is found in Unger 1877:2:4.18-33,5.01-12, and
   an English translation in Marchand 1975:328-329.

5) Cf. Mogk 1904:890, Seip 1954:81,135 and Bekker-Nielsen
   1967:309 as opposed to Lárusson 1955:166. There is no room
   for taking up this discussion here, but some of Seip's
   examples of Norwegian influence will probably be treated
   with greater caution today. Perhaps the best conclusion is
   to look upon Niðrstigningar saga as a part of the common
   Norwegian-Icelandic literature, leaving the question of
   nationality aside.

6) The date is disputed. Benediktsson 1965:xxxvii believes
   that it is probably written 'about or not long after the
   middle of the 13th century'. The ms. has, however, some
   disturbing innovations (svarabhakti vowel and itacism) and,
   integrated in the running text, there is a second, pre-
   dominantly gothic hand on fol. 21r.26-30, which on paleo-
   graphic grounds points to the 14th century.

7) Cf. Bekker-Nielsen 1967:309.

8) Thilo 1832 (A text only), Tischendorf [1]1853, [2]1876 (A and
   B text) and Kim 1973 (A text).

9) Tischendorf 1876:LXXVI.

10) Cf. Kim 1973:8.

11) Cf. Dobschütz 1899:253*-254*.

12) Unger 1877:2:1-20.

13) Jónsson 1927:1-9.

14) Holtsmark 1938.

15) Turville-Petre 1953:127.

16) Loc. cit.

17) Lárusson 1955:159-160.

18) Aho 1966:156.

19) Maas 1960:30.

20) Lárusson 1955:160.

21) For the sake of simplicity X is identified with the arche-
type. The original translation and the manuscripts left to
posterity are so close in time, and the manuscript corpus
so small that positing a separate archetype (as Maas does
in his Textkritik) seems unnecessary in this context.

22) Cf. Holm 1972. Discussions of genetic relations between
manuscripts are of course older than Schlyter, but the
coining of the stemmatic model for textual criticism is
- to our knowledge - his merit.

23) Introductions to phrase structure grammar are legio, cf.
e.g. R. Huddleston: An Introduction to English Trans-
formational Grammar, London 1976, ch. 3, or a linguistic
dictionary, e.g. R. R. K. Hartmann & F. C. Stork: Dictionary
of Language and Linguistics, London 1972.

24) Cf. note (6) above.

25) Cf. further Birt 1913:124-163 for a catalogue of types of
variation.

26) Cf. Popper 1972 for general terminology.

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