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The Skaldic Editing Project (Plenary Lecture)

Part A: Introduction

Most people here today will have heard of the skaldic editing project by now and some of you are of course among the 45 scholars who are contributing to it as editors. I am one of the five General Editors of the project, the others being Kari Gade (Indiana), Guðrún Nordal (Reykjavík), Edith Marold (Kiel) and Diana Whaley (Newcastle-upon-Tyne). We are ably assisted by Tarrin Wills, our Research Associate with special responsibility for the electronic side of the project, based in Sydney, and Valgerður Erna Þorvaldsdóttir and Kate Heslop, based in Reykjavík and Newcastle respectively. We also have the support of a distinguished board of consultants. As my time is short, I will not rehearse all the details of the project and its objectives, but merely summarise them. There are various ways in which you can acquaint yourselves with the project in greater detail: many of you will have heard an excellent paper by Kari Gade at the last saga conference in Sydney, which explained the rationale and scope of the project; there is also a special issue of the journal *skandinavistik* (32: 1, 2002) devoted to the project and you can read all about it and view the thousands of manuscript images that Tarrin Wills has assembled on the project's web site, whose address is <http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au> Tarrin will be demonstrating features of the site in a short while.

The project's main objective is to produce a new edition of the known corpus of Norse-Icelandic poetry from that supposed earliest up to that produced c. 1400, including runic inscriptions in metrical form, but excluding poetry of the so-called Elder Edda corpus and early *rímur*. This will be a critical edition based on a new assessment of the primary evidence, which is mostly in manuscript form but includes a few early printed books. It will be published in hard copy by Brepols Publishers, in Turnhout, Belgium, probably in 9 separate volumes, between 2005 and 2011, and it will also be available electronically. The electronic version (but not the printed edition) will include transcriptions of the manuscripts of each text that its editor has judged to be major.

All dimensions of the standard edition of the corpus, Finnur Jónsson's *Den norske-islandske skjaldedigtning* A and B (1912-15), and all earlier editions of individual poems or sets of verses will be up for scrutiny and re-evaluation. We expect this process to make some considerable changes to the skaldic landscape, as it were, that is, to our underlying assumptions about all sorts of things that we have been accustomed to take more or less for granted, based on the way in which the material has been presented in the standard editions. This does not mean that everything in the standard editions will be proved wrong; on the contrary, I expect most of the detailed manuscript readings and many of the interpretations advanced in *Skjaldedigtning*, the *Lexicon Poeticum* and elsewhere will stand up to scrutiny. Some accepted views, will, however, be seriously challenged, and in the time I have left I would like to speculate on what is likely to be new in the edition and where we may make an original contribution to knowledge and the understanding of skaldic poetry. I will leave aside one important innovation, which Tarrin will deal with, namely the edition's electronic format and the various opportunities that will give scholars to study and analyse the skaldic corpus.

There are several key areas in which I anticipate that new findings and reconfigurations of skaldic verse will emerge, and there may well be others that I cannot see in my crystal ball. The

first of these I will call **arrangement and attribution**. I refer here to the ways in which poetic texts have conventionally been arranged, whether as *lausavisur* or as extended poems, and upon what grounds they have been so arranged by previous editors. Included under this heading is the attribution of verses to specific poets and/or to anonymous authors and the grounds upon which they are so attributed. This topic is closely connected with another key area of reassessment, namely **the question of authenticity of verses and/or poems**; it is closely connected because decisions of earlier editors as to what was and what was not authentically the work of the person to whom it was attributed in the prose text in which the poetry was preserved has determined whether or not the poem has been included among the compositions of a specific poet or been assigned to the anonymous category. To take an apparently simple example, the first two stanzas attributed by *Egils saga* manuscripts to Egill Skallagrímsson as a three-year-old boy have been regarded by a long line of nineteenth- and twentieth-century editors as inauthentic. In *Skjaldedigting* they are to be found among the anonymous verses of the twelfth century, sub-category F. 'Uægte vers i sagaer, a. I Egilssaga', with the name Egill given in round brackets at the beginning of the stanza. Whatever one's views of the authenticity of these two stanzas, the evidence for their assignment to their current position and the implications of this treatment need to be reassessed.

Much more complex issues are involved here too. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century editors, often basing themselves on the flimsiest evidence (or no evidence), confidently assigned groups of verses to specific long poems by specific poets and 'created' thereby apparently coherent titled poems, whereas the manuscript evidence points to something much more fragmentary. The assignment to these creations of particular titles, which often have no medieval authority, further entrenches them in the reader's mind as whole works, whether or not they have survived as wholes. An initial and excellent attempt to reassess the evidence concerning poetry transmitted in kings' sagas was made by Bjarne Fidjestøl in *Det norrøne fyrstedigtet* (1982), but I am confident that the work of our editors will unravel more of the literary creations of Finnur Jónsson and other earlier editors. There will probably be fewer extended poems in our new edition, but those that survive our tests will be far more securely attributed and the criteria for regarding them as long poems will be clearly stated. Several scholars (e.g. Poole 1985 and 1991, Marold 1999) have argued in the last two decades that some poetry that is presented as *lausavisur* in sagas was probably originally part of long poems; such claims will be rigorously tested for the new edition.

Another area where conventional assumptions need to be re-examined is that of **dating and the chronological sequence of poetic material**. To give another example from the *Egils saga* corpus, which I have been working on recently, I find that Finnur Jónsson's dating and therefore sometimes his sequencing of Egill's long poems requires revision. Finnur dates Egill's first long poem, *Ádalsteinsdrápa*, to c. 926, and his second, *Hofuðlausn*, to 936. These dates can be fairly confidently renegotiated on the basis of our improved knowledge of Anglo-Scandinavian history. It is very unlikely that *Ádalsteinsdrápa* was as early as 926, barely two years into Æðelstan's reign and before he had consolidated his power over British and Norse rulers in Northern England and Scotland. His first northern campaign to subjugate them took place in 927 (*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* s.a. 926D), his second in 937. If the battle at Vinheifir can be equated with Brunanburh, it is likely that *Ádalsteinsdrápa* was composed between 937, the date of the battle, and 939, the year of Æðelstan's death, for the *drápa* addresses him directly as a living ruler. Although *Egils saga* assumes unhistorically that Æðelstan was still alive when Egill visited King Eiríkr blóðøx's court at York, this was not actually the case; Eiríkr's rule at York, according to *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, took place between the years c. 948-52 and he

was dead by c. 954. If historical circumstances are to guide us, then the date of *Hofuðlausn* should be placed c. 950. I expect that better contextual evidence of various kinds will allow our edition to improve on at least some of the underlying assumptions of Finnur Jónsson and other earlier editors.

One area of **contextual and background improvement** that I would like to single out as a likely major strength of the new edition concerns the corpus of skaldic material that deals with overtly Christian subject-matter, in the form of the celebration of the deity, doctrinal matters, the Virgin Mary and local and foreign saints. I am confident that the group of editors working on the Christian material, many of whom have specialist knowledge of its intellectual and doctrinal background, will reveal the importance and interest of this sub-field of skaldic verse, which has been somewhat neglected up to now. Indeed, in more general terms, the provision of explicit contextual and background information of all kinds in our introductions and notes to the poetry should make it so much more meaningful to skaldic scholars, students and scholars from other fields, such as history, archaeology and the history of religion and myth, than the current editions, which are bare of notes and information that allows the reader access to the intellectual world of this poetry. Another major help to many readers will be the English translations of the verses and the explication of kennings and *heiti*, most of which were not fully deconstructed in Finnur Jónsson's Danish translations.

This brings me to another major area in which I am sure the edition will break new ground and rework old ground. I refer to the **preparation and interpretation of the texts themselves**. Although Finnur Jónsson's knowledge of the manuscripts and his assembling of variant readings was outstanding, there are improvements to be made, especially where facsimiles and new editions of manuscripts, that have been made since his time, can present us with better or additional readings. (Of course there are instances where the manuscripts are no longer as legible as they once were for various reasons, probably including Finnur's infamous 'water treatment'.) Two very important areas in which evidence requires reassessment are those of **emendation** (where, why, how and by whom) and the **interpretation of skaldic diction and word order, including the thorough reassessment of kennings**. As most people are aware, Finnur's interpretations of these things fed into his second edition (1931) of the *Lexicon Poeticum* of Sveinbjörn Egilsson (1860). The premises upon which he interpreted and classified the kennings and other word combinations of the skaldic texts must be reassessed. Of course, many scholars have already done this, the most systematic of whom was Ernst Albin Kock, but it needs to be done again and it will be in the process of preparing this new edition. Reverting briefly to the matter of emendation, I have myself found it quite shocking to discover the true extent and nature of the emendations upon which many of Finnur's (and other editors') interpretations depend. These textual alterations include deletion of manuscript material far beyond the requirements of normalisation, which often distorts both metre and sense, as well as the more common addition of material not in any manuscript. Unlike the practice in other fields of scholarly editing, editors of Old Norse texts seem not to have adopted the habit of italicising or otherwise noting the emendations they make. I do not know why this has happened, and would be interested to learn if anyone here does. Whatever the reason, it has the effect of concealing what is an editor's conjecture and is not present in any manuscript. The new edition will use italics to make the location and extent of emendations obvious to the reader and notes to signal processes not dependent on acknowledged textual variation.

Part B: The Skaldic Database

The skaldic website and database originally started as a way of communicating information about

the project to editors and interested scholars [home page]. This included material from the *Editors' Manual*, a list of contributors and their allocations, and other resources such as the font used for the project. The database grew mainly from the list of editors and their allocations, that is, it was primarily an administrative tool to establish what contributors were allocated, what was unallocated, and which of the coordinating editors had responsibility. Given that there are forty-five editors contributing to the project, the administration and organisation of the project are ongoing issues.

The database has expanded from this fairly narrow administrative function to a much broader role in managing the corpus and contributors. We have also aimed to incorporate at least some of the resources which editors need to produce their editions, that is, information about the manuscripts, prose texts and secondary material related to the verse in the corpus.

Given that most of these resources are also useful for the final edition, we aim to have the edition in a form which can be linked to the data gathered for the database. Ultimately, this will be in both printed and electronic forms, with the latter allowing interactive referencing of other data, such as images and transcriptions of manuscripts. We also aim to create the edition in such a way that various types of reference material can be created, such as lexicographic data and an index of kennings.

History

The data in the database has come from a number of sources. Initially, the corpus was divided by the co-ordinating editors on the basis of Finnur Jónsson's *Skjaldedigtning* (*Skj*), and the contents of the corpus allocated to the various editors. This provided a rudimentary database of skalds, poems, prose works and verses. To this was added some basic information about the manuscripts in which the poetic material is found.

Fortunately, Jón Helgason had embarked on a similar project in the 1950s and oversaw the creation of a card index of the locations of the verses in the corpus at the Arnarnagæan Institute in Copenhagen. Using *Skj* as their basis, various research assistants compiled page and line references to the locations of most of the verses in the corpus in both manuscripts and editions. In 2001, I entered all the manuscript information into a database, some thirteen thousand references. This is by no means the entirety of instances of verses in manuscripts, but it has been an extremely useful basis. Since then, further manuscript references, mainly collected by Valgerður Erna Þorvaldsdóttir, Edith Marold and myself have been entered into the database.

Using this information about the manuscript locations of verses, we have been in the process of collecting digital images of the relevant manuscript pages. This has been done by scanning photographs of some manuscripts and gathering and commissioning digital photographs of others. There are now almost ten thousand pages for which we have digital images in some form.

The *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* has generously supplied us with the data collected for their *Registre* volume (Degnbol, Jacobsen et. al. 1989), containing detailed information about the locations of prose works in medieval and modern manuscripts. This has been incorporated into the skaldic database. While this information does not aim to cover verse material, it does so incidentally by covering the prose works in which most of the verse is found.

Also of great use has been material from a site created by Eysteinn Björnsson in Iceland, which presents most of the material from *Skj* B (that is, Finnur Jónsson's normalised text). With Eysteinn's permission, this has also been incorporated into the database so that we now have the text of most of the corpus as edited by Finnur. This will of course eventually be superseded by the text of the new edition.

Other information that also has been incorporated is some bibliographic material. Assistants to Edith Marold are currently working on compiling a full skaldic bibliography which will also be added to the database.

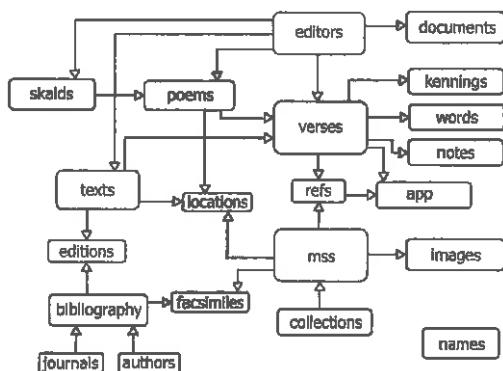
All this can be used to generate a great number of useful resources concerning the poetry. For example, the *Skj B* text is used to generate a list of all word forms used in the corpus, which can be browsed and is linked to the verses. The text is also searchable, making it simple to find a verse or a word or series of words in the corpus.

Material is continually being added. We now have a format for entering the edited material into the database, and I have inserted the sample verses from the editors manual. Editors can also add transcriptions to the database, which also provides a convenient way of comparing them. Rob Fulk, Peter Jorgensen, Jonathan Grove, Kate Heslop, Valgerður and I have all been adding transcriptions to the database, so that now there are some 1400 manuscript versions of individual verses in the database.

Issues

The main problem in producing such an edition electronically is the complexity of the data involved. While the corpus can be conceived of simply as a collection of stanzas and verses, the verses may be organised in various ways, for example, they may be attributed more or less confidently to a particular skald or poem. The verses are found mostly within prose works, sometimes multiple prose works for a single verse; and the verses may be found in a number of mss. It is also useful to maintain information about the locations of whole prose works and poems containing skaldic verse in the manuscripts. From an administrative point of view, various parts of the corpus are the responsibility of particular editors. Apart from (obviously) the verses in the corpus, an editor may also be responsible for an introduction to a poem or prose work, or for the biography of skald. Sometimes two editors will have responsibility for the same verse, poem or introduction.

A slightly simplified version of the data relationships in the database is as follows:



The boxes represent data tables: 'poems' are the poems and groupings of verses in the database, including introductory matter; 'texts' are the prose works, also including introductions where

relevant; 'refs' are the references and transcriptions of verses in manuscripts; 'app' contains the variant apparatus; 'kennings' and 'words' are the indices generated from the text in the database. Almost all these types of data can be referred to also in the discursive parts of the edition, such as in the notes to the verses, and in introductory and biographical material.

There are other complexities which I will not enumerate here. These are exacerbated by the size of the corpus. There are over 5000 stanzas or verses in the corpus, belonging to over 500 poems or groupings of verses (such as *lausavisur*), and mostly found in almost 100 prose works. There are at least 600 manuscripts being used for the edition, with probably the same number again in the database containing skaldic verse, but which are (probably) not primary witnesses. It becomes very complicated for these data to be combined, such as in locating and transcribing verses in manuscripts.

Demonstration

- Following the organisation of *Skj*, poems and other groups of verses can be browsed by skald [skalds > Bragi > *Rdr*].
- Alternatively, one can browse a list of these poems and groupings to find a stanza [poems > *Rdr* > verse 1]. Other information is also linked to the verses, such as a list of ms references, images of them [> C image d], and transcriptions of them where available [> all transcriptions].
- This information can also be browsed via the information about a ms [*Rdr* verse 1 > AM 748 I b 4to > list pages and images > fol. 17r > *Rdr* verse 1].
- Prose works can also be browsed (texts). At the moment, the database retains most of the two systems of categorisation used in *Skj*, that is, according to skald or anonymous group, or according to the prose work in the case of verses categorised as 'uægte'. The latter group will have verses listed under the view for the text [> *Frið*]. In some cases, both systems are maintained by a list of cross-references [> *Knytl* > verses in order].
- The list of editors can also be browsed and provides contact and allocation details for each editor [editors > editor].
- The list of word forms generated from the *Skj* B text can also be browsed alphabetically [word forms > a] and individual word forms are linked to the verses in which they are found [> 'aðal' > *Hsv* 71]. There is also an index of first lines which can be browsed in the same way [first lines > a > 'Á engum hlut'].
- The *Skj* B text can also be searched [search > 'engum hlut'] and the results listed in order of relevance.

Solutions

The database as implemented solves a number of the administrative problems involved with having a large number of people working on an expanding data set.

Using the database framework, it is relatively easy to organise the verses in different ways, such as according to their manuscript context (as in the listing of verses on a ms page), prose context [*Eg* > orderings], according to the *Skj* arrangement [Sigv *Bsv*, *Skj* info], or simply by the arrangement chosen for the new edition. As we have seen, it is also straightforward to add and link other types of data to supplement the main data, such as images of mss.

The project is too large for the system to rely on any one person to update all the data, so I have developed web interfaces for entering, modifying and (if necessary) deleting any of the data in the database. For example, transcriptions can be entered by selecting the '(edit)' link next to ms references for a verse [*Rdr* 1 in C > edit]. A strict referencing framework is produced by

automatically linking the different data types [> change mss].

I am starting to develop interfaces for entering the data for the actual edited verses of the corpus. It is not expected that all editors will enter their material this way, but this interface is provided to eventually ease the process of entering the edition information. For example, there is an interface for entering and reordering the verse text to produce the prose word order [*Rðr* 1 > edit > add text]. The prose order is consequently linked electronically to the verse order. This is still in its early stages. Notes and textual apparatus entries can also be added with links to the manuscripts and text [*Rðr* 1 > edit > add note; > add apparatus entry]. The textual apparatus is an example where in many cases it will be simpler to enter the material in this way than for editors to type out a list of mss for every textual variant.

Relevant editors can make all these changes, that is, editors can change ms references and transcriptions where they have responsibility for the relevant verse; likewise with material for the edition such as the textual apparatus. An administrator of the database (such as myself) can change the allocations for editors as well as the data any editor has responsibility for.

The main problem with project-specific solutions such as these is that they will not be compatible with other electronic editing formats. The preferred format for producing editions of Norse-Icelandic material is the XML implementation of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI), and more specifically the guidelines developed by the Medieval Nordic Text Archive (MENOTA).

Our solution has been to implement TEI at more specific levels within the edition, such as in the encoding of the edited text, for example, the word, line and line group elements of TEI are used to mark up the stanzas in the corpus. Introductory material in the database also uses the elements from the referencing systems of TEI as well as elements to mark up various features of the text.

Where TEI could not be adapted so well in the database format, I have been careful to ensure that the interim format used can be converted to TEI. For example, while the transcriptions – including representing features such as expansions and damage – are made in the ReykholtTimes font, the mark-up using the font is compatible with the equivalent concepts in TEI.

TEI gives a much richer set of tools for representing features of the text than the more restrictive format we are currently using. This means, however, that while much material will have to be omitted in the interim, it will be comparatively easy to transfer the more restricted database format into the more detailed TEI format. Eventually, all the material in the database – in TEI and in other forms – will be able to be combined automatically into the TEI/XML format to produce an exchangeable document.

Because many editors will be submitting their material in word-processor format, it has been necessary to incorporate the framework of TEI and the constraints of the interim database format into the guidelines for editors. For example, in order to analyse kennings electronically, it is useful to have them marked as such in the text. Editors are asked to place brackets around the logical boundaries of the kenning, e.g., from *Hallfredar saga* verse 18 (*Editors' Manual*, 67):

Prose order: 'at {lýsibrekku {leggjar íss}}'

Translation: 'onto {the bright slope of {arm's ice}} [SILVER > WOMAN]'

This can then be converted automatically to XML code, and then used to generate an index of kennings and kenning referents which can be browsed and searched.

In its present state, all the reference data and edited material can be entered into the database in a way that can be automatically linked. This can then be used to generate interactive

presentations of the text where a reader can have access to all the information related to the edition of a particular verse [*Rdr* 1 > edited]. This includes the textual apparatus for the verse, linked to the with images and/or transcriptions; the critical apparatus with links to any references to bibliographic or indexed material, or any other type of data in the database (texts, poems, skalds, etc.); editions of the verse linked to full bibliographical information; and other information which may optionally be entered, such as material from *Skj*.

The database hopefully is and will continue to be a useful resource not only for those working on and administering the project, but also to others in the field. It will also provide a useful way of presenting the poetry itself, as well as generating lexicographic reference material and reference material on skaldic diction which will be linked to the corpus itself and related resources.

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Internet resources

- Skaldic web site: <http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au>
- Skaldic database: <http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/bin/skaldic.cgi>
- Medieval Nordic Text Archive (MENOTA): <http://www.menota.org>
- Text Encoding Initiative: <http://www.tei-c.org>