

Towards Standards in Digital Editions of Old Norse Prose: A Case Study

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Introduction

This on-going Ph.D. research project seeks to contribute to furthering adoption of digital critical editions as a standard in Old Norse philology. The goal of the project is a systematic review and analysis of available tools and technologies that editors of Old Norse texts can use. To this end, I am building an example edition of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* based on a limited sample of manuscripts (around 5-8). The creation process of this digital edition, starting at collecting and storing manuscript images and ending at building the visual presentation, will serve to evaluate the used tools and technologies on categories of ease-of-use, sustainability and reusability, as well as their ability to improve the ability of the edition to reflect current theories of editions more effectively. The project follows a Neo-Lachmannian approach to textual criticism, following modern developments of the genealogical method for the reconstruction of the transmission of a text through the extant and presumed manuscript material, especially those made by Froger in the 1960's.

The Saga

Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar is an Icelandic saga likely written some time in the early 15th c. and is today classified as a *Legendary saga*, referring to sagas that deal with the fictional legendary history before the settlement of Iceland. The saga exists today in 47 manuscripts, the majority of which were created during the 17th and 18th c. The oldest manuscripts are likely written in the latter half of the 15th c., but my analysis so far has indicated that at least one older, non-preserved layer of manuscripts is likely to have existed. Due to its high variance in manuscript material regarding scripts, physical conditions, and age, the saga is well suited to test out different tools, especially HTR/OCR. The last critical edition of the saga is C.C. Rafn's 1829 rendition as part of his *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* corpus edition, which has critical deficiencies. The digital critical edition created during the course of this project will thus serve as a valuable contribution to continuing research on the text.

Theoretical background

The approach chosen for this project is highly influenced by Peter Robinson's writing on building a theory of digital editions separate from printed editions, as well as Robinson's and Bo-A. Wendt's thinking on the conceptual complexity of the different levels of abstraction of a single text in the context of textual criticism. I am interested in the ways in which editions can communicate the conceptual relation between the *work* and the individual *documents* above and beyond what is possible within the spatial limitations of a printed book. I will evaluate current technical capabilities to help guide the user of the edition towards a more abstracted and reflected reception of the edition text, through allowing them to interact and display information in a layered hierarchy.

Tools and Technologies

My goal is to use each individual step of edition creation to test out several different tools to evaluate them. As testing every single available tool is not feasible, I will be selecting based on features, ease-of-access, available documentation, and scope of the ecosystem. Free-and-Open-Source solutions will be preferred where possible, in accordance with the principles of Open Science. Currently, I plan on testing (among others): CollateX, MenotaG, MenotaBlitz, Corpusele (MENOTA), Loghi, Kraken, Transkribus, TEI publisher. All digital encoding will be done in the Menota sub-specification of the TEI 5 standard.

References

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