

Áns Saga Bogsveigis: an Editorial Study and a Prototype for a Digital Edition

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Abstract

This report concerns a preparatory study of a digital edition of an Icelandic manuscript reporting the saga of Án the bowbender, dated approximately to 1450-1475.¹ Scholars have attributed this saga to the subgenre of the sagas of ancient times, the *fornaldarsögur*.² The major scholarly goal that it pursued – and, I think, reached – is that to prove the usefulness of new technologies applied to old texts, so that more people can approach this literary tradition from a different perspective, somehow assisted. The edition I proposed is a diplomatic-interpretative image-based one, with a parallel transcription. The visualization software I used is EVT (Edition Visualization Technology),³ which at the time was at its 1.2 version. The choice was inevitable, since this tool offers exactly what was needed for this type of edition. In fact, it allows to transform XML-TEI files and facsimiles into diplomatic-interpretative digital editions and it was conceived for medieval manuscripts in particular. One of the most interesting EVT features is the possibility to link the lines in the image(s) to the corresponding ones in the edited texts. The idea was to offer the scholarly community the sketch of a tool that allows to perfectly relate the text of *Áns saga* to its manuscript pages, giving the chance to better investigate the text together with its copious abbreviations.

Questo report costituisce uno studio preparatorio per l'edizione digitale di un manoscritto islandese riportante la saga di Án l'arciere, datata approssimativamente al 1450-1475. Gli studiosi hanno attribuito questa saga al sottogenere delle saghe del tempo antico, le *fornaldarsögur*. Il principale obiettivo accademico che è stato perseguito – e, credo, raggiunto – è quello di

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- 1 The report presents the results of my MA thesis project, which I defended at Ca' Foscari University of Venice in 2018 under the supervision of Professors Marina Buzzoni and Massimiliano Bampi. The full work is accessible at the following link: <http://hdl.handle.net/10579/13365>. Last visited February 11, 2020
 - 2 For a taxonomy see [5].
 - 3 The software can be freely downloaded from <http://evt.labcd.unipi.it/>.

dimostrare l'utilità delle nuove tecnologie applicate a testi antichi, così che più persone possano approcciarsi a questa tradizione letteraria da una prospettiva diversa, in qualche modo assistiti. L'edizione proposta è di tipo diplomatico-interpretativo e basata sul rapporto con le immagini, con una trascrizione parallela. Il software di visualizzazione scelto per questo lavoro è EVT (Edition Visualization Technology), che allora era alla versione 1.2. La scelta fu inevitabile perché questo strumento offre esattamente ciò che serviva per questa tipologia di edizione. Infatti, permette di trasformare file XML-TEI e facsimili in edizioni digitali diplomatico-interpretative ed è stato concepito per i manoscritti medievali in particolare. Una delle funzioni più interessanti di EVT è la possibilità di collegare le singole righe delle immagini a quelle corrispondenti nei testi editati. L'idea fu quella di offrire alla comunità scientifica la bozza di uno strumento che permettesse di mettere perfettamente in relazione il testo della *Áns saga* alle pagine manoscritte corrispondenti, dando la possibilità di meglio investigare il testo assieme alle sue copiose abbreviazioni.

The manuscript and the saga tradition

The text I based my edition on belongs to codex AM 343a 4to, preserved in the Arnamagnæan Manuscript Collection at the *Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum*⁴ (Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies), in Reykjavík.⁵

AM 343a 4to was written in Iceland probably in the second half of the fifteenth century, and it arrived in the Icelandic institute in 1976. It is written on a rather dark parchment and it is 110 leaves long, plus a front flyleaf and a back one. In particular, *Áns saga* occupies folios from 81v to 87r. It is the oldest manuscript reporting this text, and the only vellum one,⁶ but studies have revealed that a much fuller tradition was probably at the disposal of the medieval writers.⁷

The most trusted and consulted edition of the saga is Carl Christian Rafn's, dated 1829. He based his edition on four witnesses, one of which is the subject of this work. With the exception of Rafn's work, "study of the *fornaldarsögur* has long been hampered by a lack of reliable editions. Recognising this, the Arnamagnæan Commission agreed in 1937 that a new edition of the complete *fornaldarsaga* corpus should be among its first priorities".⁸ However, the coming of the war interrupted the project and the majority of sagas is still waiting for a proper study. This lack of reliable editions was a great incentive for the realization of my project. An online version

4 <https://english.arnastofnun.is/>.

5 The collection was inscribed in the UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2009.

6 The work is extant also in more than forty paper copies, some of which derive from the *rímur* (metrical romances). A list of the witnesses can be found at <http://fasnl.ku.dk/bibl/bibl.aspx?sid=asb&view=manuscript>.

7 Cf. [6], [4].

8 [7]:3.

of the saga is edited by Jónsson and Vilhjálmsón⁹ and it is based on Rafn’s book, adapted to the modern Icelandic spelling. This edition was added to the Perseus corpus and enriched with glosses.¹⁰

There is one edition indeed related to the Old Norse Prose Dictionary that I did not take into account in 2018 when I wrote my thesis, in all probability because this specific saga still had to be implemented in the record at issue.¹¹ This one, too, is based on Rafn’s text, so I could not use it for my project because it is not based on the primary source I selected.¹²

Along with the Icelandic editions, there are also two English translations of the saga: Willard Larson’s “Aun the Bow-Bender” (1995) and Shaun F. D. Hughes’s “The Saga of Án Bow-Bender” (2005).

The selected material

The main actor of this play is, of course, codex AM 343a 4to. *Fornaldarsögur* began to be written down in the fourteenth century, and our saga belongs to the second half of the fifteenth. This means that more than one century divides the hypothetical first written version and the oldest copy we can actually read. However, it is also true that our manuscript and those that follow in the timeline also stand one century apart. Some of the later versions of this saga are not that different from the fifteenth-century one, so one might infer that the earliest manuscript could not have diverged much.¹³

Bearing in mind that a stemmatic analysis of all the witnesses still needs to appear, I chose AM 343a 4to not only because it is the support that hands down the oldest version of the saga but also because in that manuscript alone *Áns Saga* has been copied with the other sagas that report

9 The text is actually a book, but it is dated 1943 and I have not found any physical copy available. It is available online at http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/%C3%81ns_saga_bogsvægis. It is part of the online collection *Heimskringla* which contains some 5800 texts from the Old Norse literary tradition.

10 The glosses offer the grammatical description of some words, especially function words and verbs. The edition is available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:2003.02.0007>.

11 The section “Works” of the website collects all the prose texts that are cited in the entries of the dictionary. Available on the website of the University of Copenhagen at <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?r164-325>.

12 Its peculiarity is the double view: on the left, there is the digitised page of Rafn’s book; on the right, some selected words that report the grammatical category and the variant of the other witnesses selected by Rafn.

13 A different interpretation that postulates the existence of two different versions of the saga is found in [4].

the same genealogy, the *Hrafnistumannasögur*.¹⁴ This shows that some thematic connection among these tales was already detected by the medieval scribes. This manuscript seems to have borne a particular significance already when it was copied under a cultural and social point of view and therefore deserves proper consideration in the editorial process. Moreover, Buzzetti and Rebhein ([2]) emphasised the usefulness of digital text editions as being valuable and ready-to-use material for further (critical) editions. My diplomatic-interpretative edition might facilitate the project of a critical edition in the near future.

Folios from 81v to 87r of codex AM 343a 4to were kindly digitised, on my request, by the Arnamagnæan library for the purpose of this work, not being available on the online register of historical manuscripts of the Old Norse tradition.¹⁵

The manuscript is not perfectly readable in all its parts, so for the worn sections I had to avail myself of other sources. The primary sources I opted for to analyse the manuscript are AM 345 4to and lbs 4547 8vo.¹⁶

The prototype of the edition

Excluding the most popular sagas, which have attracted much attention and on which many articles have been written, *Áns saga*¹⁷ is interesting because of its hybrid genre. In fact, it has been attributed to the *fornaldarsögur* because it fits many requirements of the category.¹⁸ Nonetheless, it shares many features with the other most famous outlaw sagas, *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* and *Harðar saga*, which belong to the *Íslendingasögur* group. Like these three, *Áns saga* reports the protagonist's ancestry and the family tie is preponderant. Moreover, these four outlaw sagas all begin with the description of “the events that lead up to the protagonist's

14 The sagas of the men of Hrafnista (a Norwegian island) are, together with *Áns saga bogsveigis*, *Ketils saga hængs*, *Gríms saga loðinkinna* and *Örvar-Odds saga*. These people are said to be descendents from the men of Hrafnista, a Norwegian island inhabited by prominent families.

15 The general description of the codex is available at <https://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/AM04-0343>. The website contains many texts from different collections: the Arnamagnæan Institution, the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, the National and University Library of Iceland, the National Library of Sweden, the Alþingi Archives and the National Museum of Iceland. Many of these are generously described and digitally-available.

16 To have the text in a more modern Icelandic form I relied on Rafn's book.

17 I offer a brief overview of the plot. *Áns saga bogsveigis* reports the life and exploits of Án son of Þórdís, who lived in Hrafnista, Norway. Clumsy, unattractive and incredibly strong, the boy is outlawed by king Ingjaldr because he killed his two brothers-in-law. He dwells then in peace with his wife and her people, until his son avenges his brother, killed by the same king that outlawed him.

18 The manuscript is quite late and Án is said to be a descendent of Hallbjörn *hálftröll* of Hrafnista, which locates the events before the colonization. For a more detailed description of the matter see [10].

outlawry, while, after the outlawry has been proclaimed, each saga consists of a series of adventures in which the hero escapes those who try to capture and kill him”.¹⁹

Given the importance of this saga, I decided to reproduce it considering the text as actually transmitted in a medieval witness. In fact, as Rafn’s edition is the only version available, the scholarly community study the saga from a non-historical work that bears no connections with the physical support that has brought the text up to our time as well as with the linguistic environment of the scribes.²⁰ I think it is a great loss, and my edition wants to be a starting point to go beyond this lack. The digital environment can highlight the relations among the different traditions thanks to a set of tools that allow the retrieval of information within the text and can favour further analysis. The following sections will provide the reader with some examples.

I opted for an image-based digital edition, since the possibility to place the digitised manuscript and the edited text(s) side by side gives more and better value to the historical dimension of the saga if compared to a printed edition. These updated methodologies allow one to consider not just the mere linguistic data, but also the physical document that preserves them, which is *de facto* a witness not only of the text itself, but also of its lively and historical-linguistic dimension.²¹

The diplomatic transcription offers a faithful representation of folios from 81v to 87r of AM 343a 4to, showing all the abbreviations and palaeographic characteristics, which usually make the interpretation slow and difficult. Of course, the rendition of the characters was my main concern. I therefore decided to offer also an interpretative text, where, thanks to the visualization software, the abbreviations can be expanded and some minor interventions take place in order to facilitate the comprehension of the heavily abbreviated medieval text. This interpretative level of representation would provide another missing piece in the edition of the saga, would make the analysis of the work more complete and the investigation of the saga wider. I addressed my work to all those scholars and users who seek an “assisted” approach to help them read the text. I also hope it might provide an example for editing other sagas, since I could not find any interactive text of this literary genre, despite its importance.

After exploring the digital edition of the Vercelli Book and all of its features,²² I decided to encode the saga in XML following the TEI-P5 guidelines,²³ which offer a standard for encoding that is strong and flexible at the same time. As a consequence, I decided to use EVT as visualization software. Following the TEI and EVT guidelines, I identified my encoding subset

19 [5]:135. A *file rouge* was detected also between this saga and the English outlaw tradition. Cf. [6].

20 Considering the dynamism of texts, Luiselli Fadda ([18]) argues that variants emphasize the author’s creativity, both on the text and on time. Therefore, it influences the meaning and the form of the text substantially. Variants, omissions and mistakes enrich the text with different meanings and enhance its fluidity: “il colorito linguistico scribale, specifico di ogni trascrizione, è il segno distintivo, il marker che consente l’individuazione delle varianti nella loro sincronia” ([18]:20).

21 Cf. [19].

22 <http://vbd.humnet.unipi.it/>.

23 <https://www.tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/en/html/index.html>.

of elements and attributes, selecting the essential or highly recommended elements and personally chosen markup entities according to the scope of my edition. Of course, a full identification of all the entities that I wanted to highlight preceded this phase.

Editorial choices

In this section, I present the features that I decided to analyse and, partially, those that I decided to omit for this level of the edition.

The author of the saga is unknown, as it usually happens within this genre. The writing is clear, neat and quite homogeneous, although I noted some differences that led me to believe that the text was in fact written down by two scribes. This observation has never been made before. Analysing the folios carefully, I noted that some letters differ in shape but what is more evident is the density of writing. Sometimes it is thin and sharp, in other cases it is rather bold and round. Here is an example.

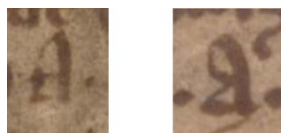


Figure 1: Examples of letters.

I also observed that the distribution of the abbreviations of the cluster *upp* supports my hypothesis, since there is coherence between one kind of abbreviation and one hand.²⁴

Some capital letters are omitted,²⁵ and a blank spot is to be found in their place.²⁶ The first letter found is then capital, so in my interpretative version I added the missing letter in capital as well within the element `<supplied>`. This element is retrieved only in the interpretative version, so the diplomatic will faithfully have just the second capital letter.

In many folios, the scribes emphasized the first capital letters of some lines, enlarging them and writing them on the left margin, not in line with the rest of the text. Unfortunately, EVT did not offer a visual representation for this case, so I opted for the element `<add>` that shows the letter in a green background. The item is then described thanks to a `<note>` that specifies what I

24 I proposed the sections written from the two hypothetical hands and the different abbreviations for this cluster – a dot above one `<p>` and a ligature of two `<p>` – are consistent with this subdivision.

25 The use of capital letters is apparently not consistent in the manuscript. Proper names are sometimes capitalized and sometimes not. The only punctuation is the middle dot, so it was up to the scribe(s) to decide whether to begin a new sentence or not. The only consistent use of them is at the beginning of each verse of the poems.

26 In modern editions, editors have assigned to the omission of letters the subdivision in chapters.

have added.²⁷ It appears as a small dot that can be clicked and a small icon opens with the information of <note>.

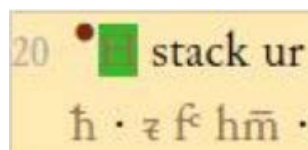


Figure 2: Visual representation of notes.

Besides capital letters, other elements appear in the margins of some folios. These are writings and drawings, whether on the left, upper or lower margin. Yet, at this stage of the work, they are not edited but only listed in a paragraph within the <physDesc>.

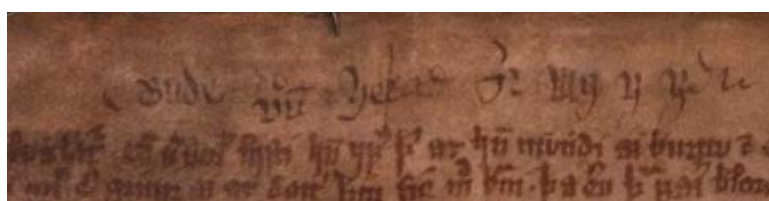


Figure 3: Writings on the upper margin of 84v.

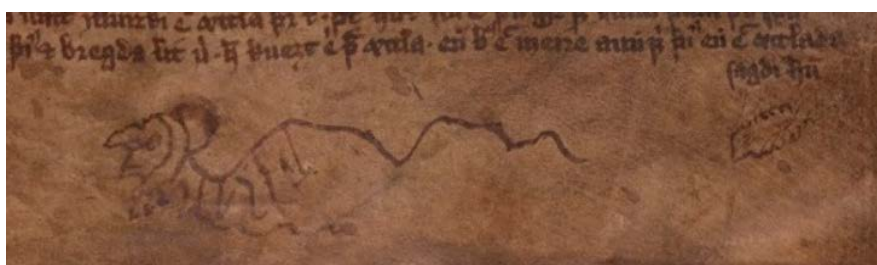


Figure 4: Drawings on the lower margin of 85r.

The element <supplied> is used also in the case of ruined vellum, which reports the reconstructed information thanks to the aforementioned further witnesses. This element appears in the interpretative level, while in the diplomatic one there is the element <damage>. In the interpretative visualization with EVT, the word will be shown in square brackets if the value of the element *reason* is “illegible”, in angle brackets if the value is “omitted”.

Some ligatures were encoded within the element <seg>, even though a deeper encoding might highlight the presence of the two different hands previously identified.

²⁷ The element <note> is in <back> after <text>. The information in <note> is retrieved in the appointed place of the text thanks to the communicating attributes within <note> and the element <ptr/>, which is found in the place where the note will have to appear.

I decided to implement the elements `<listPerson>` and `<listWit>`, since I think they are functional and crucial in this type of work. Listing all the people and all the places (see below) of the saga means having all the possible variants of a proper name and of a place linked to a standard one,²⁸ along with all of the other optional details of the entity in question, according to the desired depth of description and granularity of encoding.

As for the rendition of particular characters, for example specific glyphs, I have used the Unicode Standard²⁹ and the selection of contributors of the MUFI (Medieval Unicode Font Initiative) recommendations.³⁰

Another source I relied on is the Menota (Medieval Nordic Text Archive) handbook,³¹ which contains guidelines to represent characters, words and other meaningful units of text consistently and unambiguously in a machine-readable and platform-independent way and is based on the schema defined by the TEI.³² However, particular characters are regularized as standard Latin letter in my transcription, because they do not have distinct value (*upfia* > *upsia*).

The correspondence between a written character and its phonetic realization is not one-to-one. Different letters can stand for the same sound (e.g. `<v>` and `<u>` are used for the same word in different parts of the text, the sound /k/ after `<v>` is found both as `<k>` and `<q>`). I noticed that the irregular use of the voiced plosive `<d>` and the voiced fricative `<ð>` seems to further support the idea of the two scribes, since their distributions does not appear to be random. This observation will be subject to a deeper analysis in the future development of my project.

Finally, abbreviations. At the beginning, the elements for abbreviations and expansions I opted for were, as it might be expected, `<abbr>` and `<expan>`. However, EVT offers a better visual solution with the tags `<orig>` and `<reg>`, so I chose these. In particular, the difference between the `<abbr>` and `<expan>` forms could be seen just changing visualization from the diplomatic to the interpretative level. On the other hand, with the second option, by placing the pointer over a word, there appears a little box below it, showing the abbreviated form if we are in the interpretative edition or the expanded one if we are in the diplomatic version. Even if my choice is purely a matter of visualization, the TEI descriptions of the chosen tags perfectly fit my needs: “`<orig>` (original form) contains a reading which is marked as following the original, rather than being normalized or corrected”, “`<reg>` (regularization) contains a reading which has been regularized or normalized in some sense”.

28 As other types of linked items, an `@xml:id` is identified for each person/place/witness, and then retrieved in the text with a `@ref`.

29 The link to the 12.1 version, updated in 2019, is <http://www.unicode.org/charts/>.

30 The link to the permanent URI of version 4.0 of 2015 is <http://bora.uib.no/handle/1956/10699>.

31 In 2018, when this work was born, version 2.0 was available. Now, they have updated the handbook to version 3.0 in 2019, Available at <http://www.menota.org/handbook.xml>.

32 More than that, Menota is a network that works with medieval texts and manuscript facsimiles, with the aim to preserve and publish digital medieval texts and to develop encoding standards.

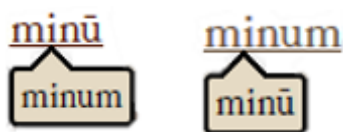


Figure 5: Abbreviations.

The digital saga

So far, the digital edition prototype offers the possibility to explore one folio (84r) of the manuscript only. Yet, all the folios are encoded at both the diplomatic and interpretative level.

<facsimile> was used to create the link between the image(s) and the text. As stated in the guidelines of EVT, it requires a <surface> for each image and here the editor can also choose to insert the coordinates of each line of the manuscript to enable the linking function that permits to easily connect the respective lines of the facsimile to the edited text.

<text> contains those elements and attributes that interface with the corresponding ones in <surface>, enabling the text-image and line-zone linking. This element is crucial and is one of the most innovative features of this work, since it facilitates the consultation of the text, thus avoiding the loss of time derived from the line search when working simultaneously on the facsimile and one of the edited texts.

The result is a two-page presentation of the different texts. As already mentioned, the visualization options are three: facsimile and diplomatic edition, facsimile and interpretative edition or diplomatic and interpretative editions. Above the left frame, there are the buttons “Image-Text” and “MS Desc”. The first one enables the function to link the single lines of the facsimile to the corresponding ones in the edited text. The other button, quite intuitively, reports the information gathered in <teiHeader> (location, contents and physical description).

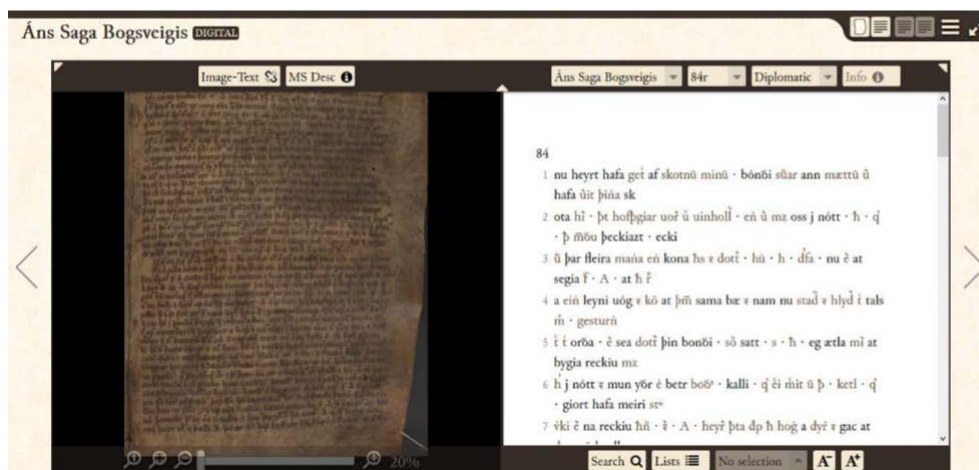


Figure 6: Digital edition of *Áns Saga Bogsveigis*.

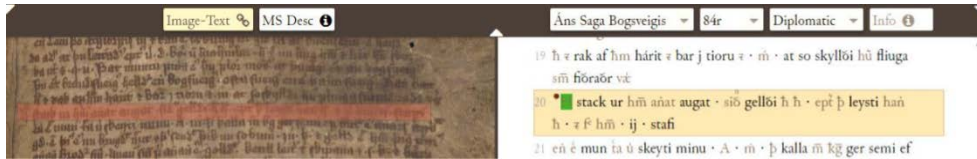


Figure 7: Digital edition of Áns Saga Bogsveigis.

Other information regarding the project can be found in the section in the upper right corner denoted by the hamburger button. On its left, there are the two buttons that allow the folio-text or text-text visualization. On its right, the full screen option.

The facsimile can, of course, be zoomed in.³³ EVT offers other different options for the facsimile. For example, the hotspot function allows to isolate specific areas of the manuscript that can be accompanied by a textual note. More easily, from the configuration file the editor can enable the magnifying lenses and thumbnails.

The search option and the list of personal names help the user in the analysis of the text. Names appear in many graphic variations and, thanks to the implementation of a list, it is possible to group them under a standard form and have all the variants displayed.

³³ For example, this tool can facilitate the detection of the two hands.

```
<TEI xmlns="http://www.tei-c.org/ns/1.0">
  <teiHeader>
    ...
    <person xml:id="Ketill">
      <persName>
        <forename>Ketill</forename>
        <state><p>King's retainer</p></state>
      </persName>
    </person>
    ...
  </teiHeader>

  <facsimile xml:id="AM_fac">
    ...
  </facsimile>

  <text xml:id="AM" n="Áns Saga Bogsveigis">
    ...
    <persName
      ref="#Ketill"><choice><orig>ketl</orig><reg>ketill</reg></choice></pers
      Name>
    ...
    <persName ref="#Ketill">katli</persName>
    ...
  </text>
  ...
</TEI>
```

Figure 8: Encoding.

Conclusion and future developments

So far, I have tried to describe the methodology applied to my project and the results obtained. However, this digital edition is just a prototype of what a work of this kind might be.

My aim is to implement this edition with EVT 1.3, which was released in December 2019. One of the most interesting new features is the different visualization of critical and comment notes.³⁴ Adding the *n* attribute to <note> and alphabetical values for critical notes and numerical values for comments, you will see them on a dark red and blue background respectively.

³⁴ Cf. [3].

There is also a greater flexibility in the handling of list filters. The editor can decide which groups and/or single elements to show and hide.

One last remark is the implementation of the VisColl software,³⁵ which is now supported. This tool aims at building models of the physical collation of manuscripts, and then visualizing them in various ways.

In the future, the whole saga will be available online and more features will be developed and perfected. The level of interpretation will be more thorough and the analysis of the selected pages of AM 343a 4to will be deeper.

One of the most interesting implications of digitally representing the whole saga will be the implementation of the lists. The text, as is customary in the *foraldarsögur* and *Íslendingasögur*, is rich in people names and genealogies, as well as place names, which will find their place in future encoding in the <listPlace> element. Ambitious as it might seem, I think it would prove extremely interesting in a hypothetical edition inclusive of the other three *Hrafnistumannasögur*. In fact, it might be a useful tool to simplify and investigate the connection among these people and places³⁶ and the cohesion of the edited texts would be even more emphasized.

The work on the orthography will be more meticulous. As expected, in the manuscript we find characters like <ð>, <f>, <g>, and <δ>. So far, I have not given the precise character representation; all letters follow a standard modern font and this is another aspect that will change.

The interpretative level is now a mere expansion of the abbreviations, without any further intervention. My idea is to give a slightly more reinterpreted version, with a normalization of the capital letters and a proposal for punctuation, and further attention will be given to the expanded forms.³⁷

Last but not least, I will turn to the elements that have received less attention so far, for example drawings.

With this project, I hope to have given my contribution to a field that is still growing and needs to show its potential in the editing of Old Norse texts. It is important to prove the usefulness of the integration between the Humanities and this relatively new digital environment, whose functionalities might not be fully understood or accepted yet by the whole scholarly community.³⁸

35 Available at <https://github.com/KislakCenter/VisColl>.

36 An interesting article about the relations among these characters is [17].

37 In fact, it is not as immediate as it might seem, since “[a]lthough it is often presented as a fairly straightforward matter, the expansion of abbreviations involves a good deal of interpretation, not to say guesswork, on the part of the editor.” ([8]:32).

38 Some scholars have observed that the majority of the existing digital editions do not exploit the full potential offered by these tools, merely offering visual and hypertextual solutions that are secondary and that do not prove the efficiency of these new technologies. Cf. [16], [21], [1]. On the other hand,

This edition can also be exploited for didactic purposes: given its intuitive nature, fledgling students now have a (rare) resource at their disposal to approach this field. To the best of my knowledge, there are, in fact, no other digital editions of Old Norse texts to present as examples for University courses.

This edition is needed, then, for a series of reasons that I hope to have convincingly argued in this report.

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