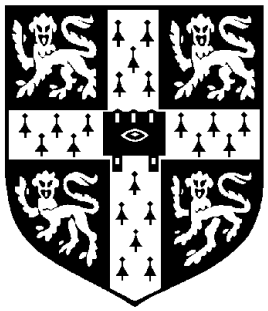
E. C. QUIGGIN MEMORIAL LECTURES 14

Odd Einar Haugen

‘So that the writing may be less and quicker, and the parchment last longer’: The orthographic reform of the Old Icelandic First Grammatical Treatise



DEPARTMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE AND CELTIC

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Edmund Crosby Quiggin (1875-1920) was the first teacher of Celtic in the University of Cambridge, as well as being a Germanist. His extraordinarily comprehensive vision of Celtic studies offered an integrated approach to the subject: his combination of philological, literary, and historical approaches paralleled those which his older contemporary, H. M. Chadwick, had already demonstrated in his studies of Anglo-Saxon England and which the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic continues to seek to emulate. The Department has wished to commemorate Dr Quiggin's contribution by establishing in his name, and with the support of his family, an annual lecture and a series of pamphlets. The focus initially was on the sources for Mediaeval Gaelic History. Since 2006 the Quiggin Memorial Lecture is on any aspect of Celtic and/or Germanic textual culture taught in the Department.

'So that the writing may be less and quicker, and the parchment last longer': The orthographic reform of the Old Icelandic First Grammatical Treatise

First published 2012 by the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, University of Cambridge, 9 West Road, Cambridge, CB3 9DP.

ISBN 978-0-9571862-4-8

ISSN 1353-5722

Set in Andron by Odd Einar Haugen

Printed by the Reprographics Centre, University of Cambridge.

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‘So that the writing may be less and quicker, and the parchment last longer’
The orthographic reform of the Icelandic First Grammatical Treatise

ODD EINAR HAUGEN
University of Bergen

The *First Grammatical Treatise* (FGT) is one of four grammatical treatises preserved in the Icelandic manuscript AM 242 fol, along with several other texts, notably the *Prose Edda* by Snorri Sturluson. This manuscript is often referred to as *Codex Wormianus* (or, in Icelandic, *Ormsbók*) after its owner in the seventeenth century, the Danish physician and antiquary Ole Worm (1588–1655). It is now in the Arnamagnæan Collection in Copenhagen.

The first two of the grammatical treatises deal with grammar in the modern sense, especially orthography, while the third and the fourth discuss rhetorical matters. In the medieval concept of *trivium*, grammar, rhetoric, and logic all belonged to *ars grammatica*, but of the four grammatical treatises in Codex Wormianus, only the first two would be referred to as grammatical today. The first treatise, which is the one to be discussed here, is deservedly the best known of the four. It is not a long text, comprising seven pages in the manuscript, or about 4,000 words. However, it is a very compact text and it is obviously the work of a gifted grammarian. It has often been claimed that this is the first text using the concept of minimal pairs in establishing the most suitable orthography of a language. This means that it predates the modern concept of minimal pairs introduced by the Prague phonologists in the 1930s. However, being written in a little known language on the periphery of Europe, it had no impact on the European grammatical tradition. It remained a unique contribution, only to be rediscovered and appreciated anew in modern times.

The FGT in Codex Wormianus is the only copy preserved of this work. The original was by all accounts written in the middle of the twelfth century.[1] Between the twelfth century original and the fourteenth century copy there are an unknown number of intermediate copies. Some readings point to there being at least one intermediate copy, but this is in all likelihood only a small part of the

[1] Einar Haugen, *First Grammatical Treatise*, 2nd ed., London: Longman, 1972, seems to favour the traditional dating to 1130–1140 (p. 78), while Hreinn Benediktsson, *The First Grammatical Treatise*, Reykjavík: Institute of Nordic Linguistics, 1972, more cautiously suggests 1125–1175 (pp. 31–33).

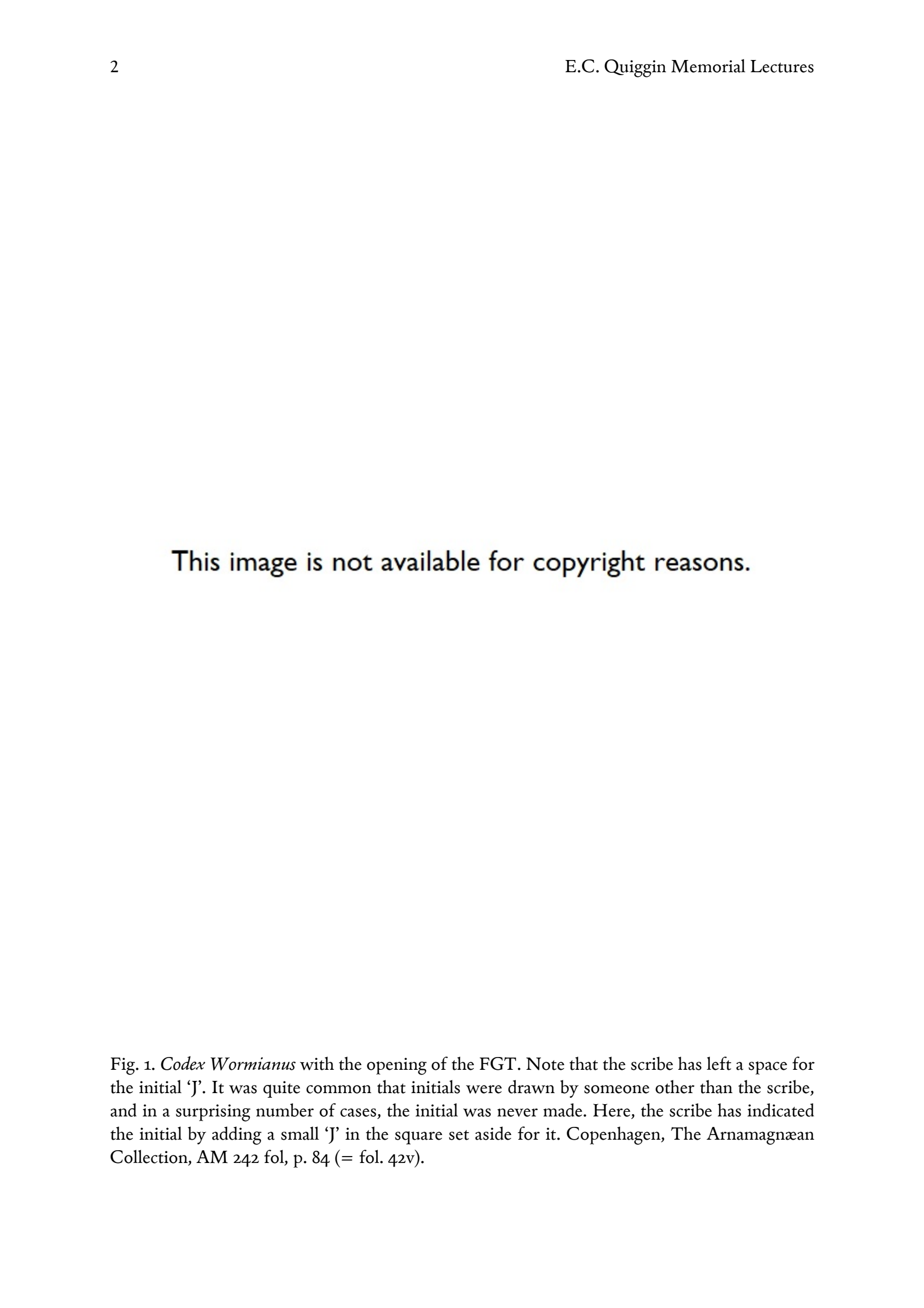

Fig. 1. *Codex Wormianus* with the opening of the FGT. Note that the scribe has left a space for the initial 'J'. It was quite common that initials were drawn by someone other than the scribe, and in a surprising number of cases, the initial was never made. Here, the scribe has indicated the initial by adding a small 'J' in the square set aside for it. Copenhagen, The Arnamagnæan Collection, AM 242 fol, p. 84 (= fol. 42v).

manuscript tradition which once existed.[2] According to common estimates, as many as 90 per cent of medieval manuscripts have been lost.[3]

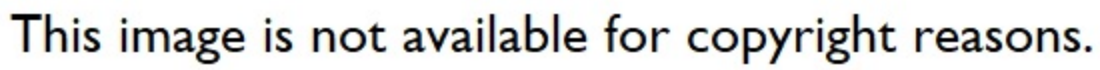

Fig. 2. Two manuscripts – one scribe. To the left is an extract from AM 227 fol (*Stjórn*), fol. 38r, and to the right an extract from AM 242 fol (*Codex Wormianus*), p. 25 (= fol. 13r). There can hardly be any doubt that these lines are the product of the same scribe, who is also known to have written several other manuscripts. Both manuscripts have been dated to around 1350. In this image, the size of the script in the two manuscripts has been scaled for easier comparison.

In other words, we know the text of the FGT in its later guise, but we do not know what it originally looked like. Even if we assume that the text was copied faithfully, some new readings must have been introduced along the way. We know that the Icelandic language changed on a number of counts over the two hundred years from the mid-twelfth to the mid-fourteenth century. Conse-

[2] See Hreinn Benediktsson, *The First Grammatical Treatise*, pp. 22–23.

[3] See e.g. John L. Cisne, 'How Science Survived: Medieval Manuscripts' "Demography" and Classic Texts' Extinction,' *Science* 307 (2005): 1305–1307, with further references.

quently, the orthography changed, too. We also know that the style of writing altered markedly in the same period.

In this article, I will try to answer two well-nigh impossible questions about the original state of the FGT. I do realise that the answers to these questions are indeed uncertain. However, there is a fascination in trying to unveil the secrets of a lost manuscript, even if the quest only covers the brief period from the mid-twelfth to the mid-fourteenth centuries. Thus my questions are as follows: (1) In what kind of script was the original committed to parchment? (2) If the FGT had been written in the orthography it recommends, what would the orthography have looked like?

The script of the original

The first question is the easiest one, which makes it a convenient starting point. There is no doubt that the appearance of the text in Codex Wormianus (W) is far from what the original must have looked like. The script of W is a fully developed Gothic script as witnessed in many Icelandic manuscripts of the time. Some of them were in fact written by the same scribe, as can be seen from Fig. 2, where the writing of AM 242 fol is compared with the Bible translation *Stjórn* in AM 227 fol.

The scribe of W wrote the manuscript in the style of his day, not trying to capture any of the older traits. To the best of my knowledge, copying the style of an exemplar was first introduced in the Old Norse manuscript tradition in the sixteenth century. A prime example is the copy made by bishop Jens Nilssøn in 1567 of the medieval manuscript *Jǫfraskinna*, now lost except for a few leaves. Jens Nilssøn's transcription is displayed in Fig. 3. Anyone familiar with medieval Nordic script will recognize the medieval traits in this writing, such as the Insular shape of ‹f› and, above all, the large number of abbreviations. This is an example of someone trying to copy a text – not only with respect to its contents, but also with respect to its palaeographical form.

My first question is primarily a palaeographical question, and in trying to answer it, one has to look at the style of contemporary Icelandic manuscripts, i.e. manuscripts that were produced in the middle of the twelfth century.[4] There is a

[4] A good overview is Hreinn Benediktsson, *Early Icelandic Script*, Reykjavík: Manuscript Institute of Iceland, 1965. This contains facsimiles and transcriptions of all important Icelandic manuscripts up to the end of the thirteenth century. A very useful supplement is

Fig. 3. The kings' saga *Jǫfraskinna* (1300–1325) in a transcription of the now mostly lost medieval exemplar. Jens Nilssøn (1538–1600) made this copy in 1567, and he obviously tried to copy his source as exactly as possible, including all abbreviation marks. Copenhagen, The Arnamagnæan Collection, AM 37 fol., fol. 150r, l. 8–14.

striking difference between the earliest Norwegian and Icelandic manuscripts in the fact that the earliest Norwegian manuscripts are written in a Carolingian minuscule with distinct Insular traits, while the earliest Icelandic manuscripts were written in a pure Carolingian script. Around 1200, the Carolingian script gave way to the style which is now commonly termed Proto-Gothic script. Subsequently, a fully developed Gothic script came into use.[5] Thus, assuming that the FGT was conceived and committed to parchment for the first time in the mid-twelfth century, we can be fairly sure that it was written in a pure Carolingian style.

The preserved Icelandic manuscript material from the twelfth century is not large. In the handbooks by Hreinn Benediktsson and Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (cf. note 4) there are five specimens which may be regarded as Carolingian, i.e. the single leaf of *Reykjaholtsmáldagi* (the first 14 lines dated to c. 1130–1150), AM 237 a fol, two leaves of homilies (c. 1150), AM 315 d fol, two

Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, *Sýnisbók,* 2nd ed., Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 2007. The *Sýnisbók* contains a wide range of facsimiles in full colour (supplemented by transcriptions) of Icelandic specimens from around 1100 to around 1900.

5 On the term *proto-gothic*, see Albert Derolez, *The Palaeography of Gothic Manuscript Books*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, ch. 3.

Fig. 4. *Reykjaholtsmáldagi* containing a list of the possessions of the Reykjaholt church. A single leaf of 36 lines written over a period of time from the first half of the twelfth century to c. 1300. Reykjavík, Þjóðskjalasafni Íslands. The first 14 lines (displayed here) have been dated to 1130–1150 (Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, *Sýnisbók*, 2nd ed., 2007, p. 12).

leaves of the law *Grágás* (c. 1150–1175), AM 674 a 4°, *Elucidarius*, 33 leaves (1150–1200) and AM 673 b 4°, *Plácitúsdrápa*, 5 leaves (c. 1200).[6] After having reconsidered the earliest Icelandic material, Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson believes that only three of these are truly Carolingian, viz. *Reykjaholtsmáldagi* (the first 14 lines), AM 237 a fol and AM 674 a 4°.[7]

[6] These manuscripts are all kept in Reykjavík, The Arnamagnæan Collection.

[7] As for Norwegian manuscripts, he is of the opinion that only one Norwegian specimen is to be regarded as fully Carolingian, viz. GKS 1347 4°, fol. 62v. This is a single page listing properties belonging to the Munkeliv monastery in Bergen, which has been written on the last leaf of a Gospel manuscript in Latin. His views are developed in the article, 'Carolingian and Proto-Gothic Script in Norway and Iceland,' in the forthcoming *Studies in Memory of Lilli Gjerløw*, edited by Espen Karlsen.

Reykjaholtsmáldagi is commonly regarded as the oldest preserved Icelandic manuscript leaf. As can be seen from the facsimile in Fig. 4, it is an open script with a fair amount of space between the individual letters and between the lines. It differs from early Norwegian script in that it has ‹þ› in all positions of the word (instead of ‹þ› and ‹ð›), and, in addition, it does not contain the Insular letter forms of ‹f›, ‹v› and ‹r›. Note that in the known Icelandic specimens from the twelfth century there is considerable variation in the format of the books, the width of the column and the size of the letters. While *Elucidarius* in AM 674 a 4° is a rather small codex with comparatively large letters, *Reykjaholtsmáldagi* has smaller letters and approximately double the column width of *Elucidarius*.

The first 14 lines of *Reykjaholtsmáldagi*, recently dated to c. 1130–1150, is contemporaneous with or possibly somewhat earlier than the FGT.[8] As mentioned in note 1 above, the FGT has been dated to 1125–1175 or, more narrowly, to 1130–1140. The script in these lines is thus the prime candidate for a palaeographical reconstruction of the original FGT. After I had tried to reconstruct the orthography (the procedure for this will be discussed below), the calligrapher Bas Vlam was given the task of actually reproducing the script.[9] Bas Vlam has done similar work over the last few years; the first was a reconstruction of the lost half of a Norwegian chirograph, a letter from Aga, Ullensvang in Hardanger, 26 May 1293.[10] The next was a reproduction of the script in the Old Norwegian homily book (c. 1200 or somewhat later).[11] The present reproduction is his first venture into Icelandic script.

As can be seen from Fig. 5, the reconstruction is very close to the exemplar. For this to be possible, the calligrapher has to estimate the angle between the letters and the base line, and the width of the pen nib. Furthermore, he has to deconstruct the script of the exemplar into its constituent strokes; it is not only a question of trying to copy the finished letter, but of building it with the right number of strokes in the right sequence.[12] When looking at the two specimens in Fig. 5, one has to conclude that they look as if they have been written by the same scribe – although the latter one is, as one would expect, the more regular.

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8 See Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, *Sýnisbók*, p. 12.

9 His work can be accessed at http://www.kalligraf.no/.

10 Bergen, University Library, Diplomsamlingen. The reconstruction is reproduced in colour in the chapter 'Diplomer, lover og jordebøker' by Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, in *Handbok i norrøn filologi*, ed. Odd Einar Haugen, Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2012.

11 Copenhagen, The Arnamagnæan Collection, AM 619 4°. See the article by Bas Vlam and his reproduction in *Vår eldste bok*, eds. Odd Einar Haugen and Åslaug Ommundsen, Oslo: Novus, 2010, pp. 101–113.

12 This procedure is explained and illustrated in his article in *Vår eldste bok*.

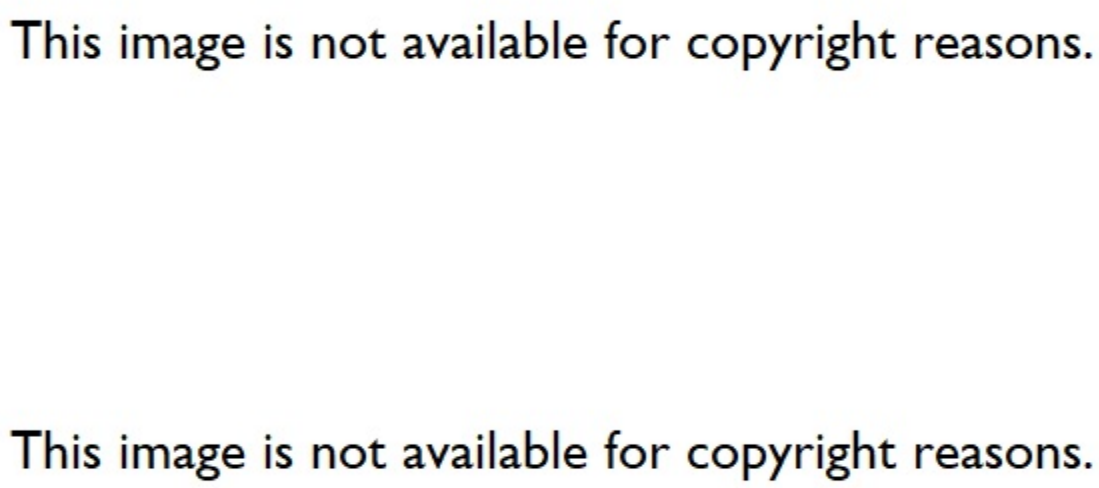

Fig. 5. Two scribes, almost 900 years apart. The first six lines of *Reykjaholtsmáldagi* (c. 1130–1150), and six lines of the reconstructed script of the *First Grammatical Treatise* by Bas Vlam (2011), based on the script of the *Reykjaholtsmáldagi*.

Deciding on the style of the script is only the first step in the reconstruction of the text; it is by no means an unexpected conclusion that the FGT was most probably written in a Carolingian style. The script must also be applied to a specific orthography; in other words: form requires content.

What did the orthography look like?

In this article, I am working from the hypothesis that the FGT was originally written in its own recommended orthography. In the concluding remarks of this article, I will briefly discuss whether this is a reasonable hypothesis, but let us for the sake of argument accept it as a point of departure. It is only to be expected that this will lead to a text looking quite different from the one in W. Of W, one can safely refer to the old adage that you should do as I say, not as I do.

The first grammarian takes as his starting point the Latin alphabet as he knew it. He does not suggest changing any of its letters, but he argues in favour of a somewhat different selection of letters, and suggests additions among the vowels as well as among the consonants. With regards to the vowels, Ancient

Nordic had the five vowels /i/, /e/, /a/, /o/ and /u/, as had Latin. As a consequence of syncopation and *i*- and *u*-mutation, four new vowels were added to this inventory, as shown in Fig. 6. Representing the vowels appropriately is in many ways the first grammarian's primary concern.

	front		back	
	unrounded	rounded	unrounded	rounded
close	i	(y)		u
mid	e	(ø)		o
open	(ę)		a	(ǫ)

Fig. 6. The vowel system of Old Icelandic in the twelfth century. The four new vowels appear in circles. They are the result of *i*- and *u*-mutation.

The main points in the recommended orthography of the FGT are the following:

1. There should be one and only one letter for each sound in the language.

This is perhaps the most important principle of the FGT, although it is not formulated as explicitly as here. The fact that the orthography of the FGT is supposed to be in a 1 : 1 correspondence with the underlying phonological system has led to its being used as the Archimedean point in the analysis of Icelandic (and, in general, Old Norse) phonology.[13] Most linguists seem to believe that it offers a 'perfect fit', i.e. that a text written in the recommended orthography of the FGT would be a near-orthophonic text. I add 'near' since there are a few exceptions to this rule, namely that he allows ‹x› for the sequence /ks/, which is redundant. Also, his use of a special character for /ng/, namely the strange-looking ‹ɋ› of Codex Wormianus, is questionable, and raises doubts about an unequivocal phoneme–grapheme correspondence. Finally, it has been pointed out that short nasal vowels were not really in opposition to short oral vowels, since the nasality of short vowels, e.g. in words like *land* and *menn*, were

[13] A recent example is the chapter on Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian language, 'Gammalislandsk og gammalnorsk språk', by Jan Ragnar Hagland in *Handbok i norrøn filologi*, Bergen, 2012.

derivable from the nasal context. Even so, among the orthophonic orthographies of the world, past and present, the one recommended by the first grammarian surely ranks high on the list.

2. There are short and long vowels in the language, and they should be distinguished by an acute accent (*stryk*).

The analysis of vowel quantity is correct, and the recommendation of using accents is appropriate, although not wholly original. Diacritical marks were sporadically used to indicate length in Latin manuscripts, either an apex or an acute, but it is not clear to what extent diacritical marks were used in the writings known to the first grammarian. Although usage was not consistent, accents were employed to indicate long vowels in some thirteenth-century Icelandic manuscripts, e.g. AM 645 4° (part 1, ca. 1220; part 2, c. 1225–1250). Accents were used sporadically in Old Norwegian manuscripts, too, such as the Old Norwegian homily book, AM 619 4° (c. 1200 or shortly after). It is not clear whether this usage can be attributed to the FGT. In other respects, it looks as if Icelandic script was influenced from Norway, not the other way round. For example, the early Icelandic practice of using ‹þ› in all positions (correct from a phonemic point of view) was replaced be the Norwegian practice of using ‹þ› initially and ‹ð› in other positions (a subphonemic variation).

3. There are oral and nasal vowels in the language, and the nasal vowels should be marked by a superscript dot.

This is perhaps the most remarkable analysis and recommendation in the treatise. There are no traces of this practice in Icelandic or Norwegian orthography. The superscript dot was used in somewhat younger Icelandic manuscripts, but mostly over consonants to indicate length. It seems likely that Norwegian and, hence, Icelandic had nasal vowels for several centuries after the period of syncopation 500–700 AD. In this period, short vowels were syncopated unless they were nasal; thus Ancient Nordic **landa* n. ‘land’ was syncopated to Old Norse *land*, while in an infinitive like **takan* ‘take’, the final *n* was dropped, but it left the preceding short *a* with a nasal timbre, and this vowel was in fact not syncopated, cf. Old Norse *taka*. In other words, there must have been a distinction between oral and nasal vowels at the time, which is also borne out by runic orthography. After the loss of initial /j/ in the syncopation period, e.g. /ja:ra/ > /a:r/, Old Norse *ár* n. ‘year’, the old **j** rune, ᛃ, with an added stave, ᚼ, was

shifted to represent the oral /a/ (it was later changed into ᚾ), while the old oral **a** rune, ᚨ, was taken into use for the nasal /ã/, somewhat later in other forms, e.g. ᚾ.[14] We cannot be sure about the nasality of other vowels, and there are no traces of a further distinction in runic script. However, it should be added that the runic orthography in the Viking Age was highly restricted. There were only four runes, **i** ᛁ, **u** ᚢ, **ą** ᚾ and **a** ᚾ, and they represented a total of nine vowels, which in addition were distinguished by length and nasality. In other words, the lack of runes for nasal vowels – apart from **ą** ᚾ vs. **a** ᚾ – cannot count as an argument against the existence of nasality in the other vowels. From the Norwegian runic inscriptions it seems that Norwegian lost nasality in the eleventh century, while the FGT leads us to believe that Icelandic kept nasality somewhat longer. If we assume that nasality was lost in Icelandic in the twelfth century, it is no longer surprising that there is no trace of it in later orthography. It seems that the FGT caught a linguistic phenomenon just as it was disappearing.

	front		back	
	unrounded	rounded	unrounded	rounded
close	ɪ í i ï	y ý ẏ ÿ		u ú u̇ ü
mid	e é ė ë	ø ǿ ø̇ ø̈		o ó ȯ ö
open	ę ę́ ę̇ ę̈		a á ȧ ä	ǫ ǫ́ ǫ̇ ǫ̈

Fig. 7. The vowel system of the FGT. Each vowel can be short and oral (no diacritics), long and oral (acute accent), short and nasal (superscript dot) or long and nasal (acute accent and superscript dot).

Fig. 7 shows the Icelandic vowel system at the time of the FGT with its nine vowels. Following the distinction between oral and nasal, and short and long,

[14] One should have expected the opposite to happen, but the reason seems to be that the initial sound in the traditional rune name were regarded as defining for the sound represented by the rune (the acrophonic principle). For this reason, the old **a** rune in */ansuʀ/, Old Norse *áss* n. 'heathen god', was the best candidate for the nasal /ã/ since it was in fact nasalised in the rune name, */an-/. In */ja:ra/ there was no nasality, and when the initial /j/ was dropped, cf. Old Norse *ár* n., the **j** rune was no longer a good candidate for /j/ (which in fact became represented by the rune for /i/), but it came to be used for the initial sound of the new rune name, */a-/, i.e. the oral /a/.

vowels, the FGT concluded with no less than (9 × 2 × 2) = 36 distinctions. In this figure, the vowels are displayed with the two diacritical marks suggested by the first grammarian, the acute accent for length and the dot for nasality.

4. There are short and long consonants in the language, and the long consonants should be rendered by small capitals.

This is another remarkable recommendation in the FGT and it is a wholly original one. A similar practice is to the best of my knowledge not known from other vernacular orthographies in Europe. This practice was also taken up to some extent in later Icelandic orthography, especially for the consonants ‹ɴ›, ‹ʀ› and ‹ɢ›. Small capitals as such were not the invention of the FGT, but in other orthographies, e.g. in Norwegian writing, they were only used ornamentally.[15]

	labial		dental		alveolar		palatal – velar	
	unvoiced	voiced	unvoiced	voiced	unvoiced	voiced	unvoiced	voiced
plosive	p ᴘ	b ʙ			t ᴛ	d ᴅ	c ᴋ	g ɢ
fricative	f ꜰ		þ		ſ s		h	
nasal	m ᴍ		n ɴ				ŋ	
lateral			l ʟ					
trill			r ʀ					

Fig. 8. The consonant system of the FGT. Long consonants are represented by small capitals. Three consonants, ‹þ›, ‹h› and ‹ŋ› were always short and have no corresponding capital form. Note that /k/ is represented by ‹c› and /s/ by the tall form ‹ſ›. The table is simplied with respect to /g/, since the short variant represented by ‹g› could be both plosive and fricative, while the long variant represented by ‹ɢ› could only be plosive. The table is also simplified with respect to /h/; it may be regarded as an unvoiced vowel, but with respect to distribution it should be analysed as a consonant, especially in clusters like ‹hl-›, ‹hn-› and ‹hr-› (the /h/ was dropped in Norwegian, but retained in Icelandic).

[15] An example of this can be found in a Norwegian charter from 1225, cf. the facsimile in Didrik Arup Seip, *Palæografi, B: Norge og Island*, Oslo 1954, p. 31, Fig. 7, l. 5, where we find the oblique form of *Maria* spelt ‹Maʀiu›. Here, /r/ can not possibly be long.

The standard option was to render long consonants by geminates, i.e. by doubling, such as ‹aptann›, ‹herra› and ‹liggja›. This is in fact the modern Scandinavian way of doing it. It could be argued that capitals were an uneconomical way of dealing with consonantal length. Why did the grammarian not recommend a single diacritical mark for length, the acute accent? In other words, why spell /si:n/ as ‹sín›, but /sin:/ as ‹siɴ› rather than as ‹siń›? In modern parlance, we might counter that this would leave too little redundancy in the orthography, and that a degree of redundancy is needed in any channel of communication. Also, the first grammarian might add that either solution would be equal with regards to syntagmatic length; it is as space-saving to write ‹siɴ› as it is to write ‹siń›. Thus, his major concern to save parchment was not invalidated.

Fig. 8 displays the consonant system of the FGT. Here, short consonants are displayed with their usual Latin form, while the long consonants are displayed with small capitals. This is the one recommendation where the first grammarian really lives up to his dictum of making the script become quicker and shorter.

5. The semivowel /j/ should be rendered with ‹i› (but ‹e› in rising diphtongs), and /v/ with ‹u›.

The FGT does not make any distinction between the vowel /i/ and the corresponding semivowel /j/, nor between the vowel /u/ and the semivowel /v/. Today, we would say that this is phonemically correct, since the distinction between the vowel and semivowel is one of syllabicity, and it makes for a more economical system to use the same character for both. The syllabic and asyllabic sounds did not contrast in Old Icelandic, for example /i/ was only allowed in the nucleus of the syllable, while /j/ was only allowed in the margin.

The reasoning behind the rising diphthong is not very clear, and will not be discussed here. Suffice it to say that the FGT advocates the usage of ‹e› in these diphthongs, so that *járn* n. 'iron' should be spelt ‹eárn› and *jór* m. 'horse', presumably, ‹eór›.

6. The letters of the language should be designed so that their shape reflects their sound.

While the previous five points are uncontroversial, I would like to add a sixth point, namely the first grammarian's analysis of the vowel symbols. From a modern point of view, the shape of a character in a script is arbitrary; the historical development of the **A** from the head of an ox does not seem relevant to

the usage of this letter. The orthography of most languages seems to converge in using this letter for an open vowel, and that is it. The first grammarian was apparently of a different opinion. His background is the traditional threefold distinction of a letter into its *name* (nomen), its *shape* (figura) and its *sound* (vox). He accepted the five vowels ‹a›, ‹e›, ‹i›, ‹o›, ‹u› of the Latin alphabet, and incidentally of Ancient Nordic, as a natural basis. His aim was not to make a new alphabet, but rather to add to it in a consistent manner. Now, after the rather stable period of Ancient Nordic c. 200–500 AD, the processes of syncopation and mutation led to the phonemisation of four new vowels in the language, denoted in Old Norse orthography as ‹y›, ‹ø›, ‹æ›, ‹ǫ›. The first grammarian obviously wanted these characters to be well motivated as far as their shape was concerned, and his arguments are surprisingly to the point. As shown in Fig. 6, the graphic traits of the proposed characters testify to their phonic status.[16] His arguments is as follows:

> ‹y› has the stem of the ‹i› and the branch of the ‹u›. Right! As Fig. 6 shows, these are all high vowels, and ‹y› is rounded like ‹u› and fronted like ‹i›.
>
> ‹ø› has the circle of the ‹o› and the cross-bar of the ‹e›. Right! These are all medium-high vowels, and ‹ø› is rounded like ‹o› and fronted like ‹e›.
>
> ‹ę› has the shape of the ‹e› and the loop of the ‹a›. Right! These are all non-high vowels, and if we accept that the hook can be seen as a representation of the ‹a›, ‹ę› indeed has the shape of both. Alternatively, one can regard the hook as a diacritical mark indicating a lower position of the vowel, and while ‹e› is a medium-high front vowel, ‹ę› is a low front vowel. Note that while many of the early Old Icelandic manuscripts agree in using the letter form ‹ę›, standard Old Norse orthography has the ligature ‹æ› for this vowel.
>
> ‹ǫ› has the circle of the ‹o› and the loop of the ‹a›. Right! These are all back, non-high vowels, and ‹ǫ› has elements of ‹o› as well as ‹a›. In many early Old Icelandic (and Norwegian) manuscripts, a ligature of ‹a› and ‹o›, namely ‹ǫ›, was used for this sound. Once again, the hook can be regarded as a

[16] The Korean *hangul* script has a similar basis in the phonic level, since characters in this script reflect the actual pronunciation of the sounds. The *hangul* script was made from scratch in the mid-fifteenth century under the reign of emperor Sejong the Great (1397–1450 AD), and today it is the dominant script in Korea, although *hanja* characters are also used as supplements. However, not even a Thor Heyerdahl would suggest that there was any connection between the orthographical recommendations in FGT and *hangul*!

diacritical mark for a lower position of the vowel, and ‹ǫ› is indeed a low vowel as opposed to the medium-high ‹o›.

On two points we are left in the dark. One is capitalisation. Manuscripts at the time used majuscules as well as minuscules, although not always in a manner which is consistent with modern usage. However, would the first grammarian think that the distinction between minuscules and majuscules is actually a superfluous one? That was indeed the case for the German tradition of *kleinschreibung*, i.e. using only minuscules (lower-case letters), as advocated by e.g. the grammarian Jakob Grimm, and made into a programme by the Bauhaus movement. For this reconstruction, we will assume that the FGT would stick to *kleinschreibung*, and thus simply do away with a distinction of minor value.[17]

The other point is punctuation. From other medieval traditions, we know of elaborate systems of punctuation, using such marks as *mid point*, *punctus elevatus*, *punctus flexus*, etc.[18] However, the great majority of Old Norse manuscripts use only a single punctuation mark, the dot. The most likely hypothesis is that the FGT would find this mark sufficient, too.

Trying to reconstruct the orthography

The time has come for a reconstruction of the orthography. The three opening lines of the FGT will be used as a test case (see the facsimile in Fig. 1 for comparison). The source is by necessity the text in W, the only preserved witness. This has been rendered in diplomatic style, following the edition by Hreinn Benediktsson (Reykjavík 1972, p. 206). In his edition, abbreviations are expanded silently, but the rules for expansion have been given at the outset (p. 205).

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[17] Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (personal communication) points out, however, that the first grammarian may have wanted to use capitals at the beginning of sections, cf. p. 88, l. 21–22 in the manuscript (quoted from Hreinn Benediktsson's edition, Reykjavík 1972, pp. 234–235, see also Einar Haugen's edition, London 1972, pp. 24–27): '... allra helldz er ek rít[ca] þa hofvð ſtafí ſtæʀi enn aðra í rítí er æigi ſtanda í verſ vpphafí ...' (... in particular since I [do not] write those capitals any larger than other (letters) in the text that do not come at the beginning of a period ...). Note that Einar Haugen translates *vers* as 'chapter' rather than 'period'. Also note that the addition of the negating particle *-ca* in *rít*[*ca*] is an emendation of the text, originally introduced by Rasmus Rask. It was accepted by both Einar Haugen and Hreinn Benediktsson in their editions.

[18] The standard work in this respect is Malcolm B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992.

Diplomatic transcription

[J] fleſtvm londvm ſetia menn a bækr annat tveggia þann froðleik er þar innan landz | hefir giorz ęða þann annan er minniſamligaztr þikkir þo at annarſ ſtaða[r hafi] helldr | giorz ęða lǫg ſín ſetia menn a bækr hverr þioð a ſína tvngv

The first step is to normalise this text according to standard Old Norse orthography, thus ironing out variation in the orthography of W. The process of normalisation is well known and documented, although it should be pointed out that there is some variation within the Old Norse standard.[19] Normalising to standard orthography requires, among other things, indicating vowel length by accents and consonant length by gemination, introducing the older distinction between ‹œ› and ‹æ› and between ‹ø› and ‹ǫ›, using the vowels ‹i›, ‹a› and ‹u› in unstressed position, and using ‹þ› in initial position and ‹ð› in medial and final position. This is how Einar Haugen did it in his edition and translation of the work (London 1972, pp. 12–13):

Standard Old Icelandic orthography

Í flestum lǫndum setja menn á bœkr annat tveggja þann fróðleik, er þar innanlands hefir gǫrzk, eða þann annan, er minnisamligstr þykkir, þó at annars sta[ðar hafi h]eldr gǫrzk, eða lǫg sín setja menn á bœkr, hver þjóð á sína tungu.

(In most countries men put into books either the great events that have come to pass within their country, or whatever seems most memorable that has occurred abroad, or men put their laws into books, each people in its own language.)

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[19] For many, the orthography of the series *Íslenzk fornrit* (Reykjavík 1933–) is a point of reference. It is based on the language of the early thirteenth century and thus makes a distinction between /ø:/ and /æ:/ in the shape of ‹œ› vs. ‹æ›, and between /ø/ and /ɔ/ in the shape of ‹ø› vs. ‹ǫ›. Some grammars and dictionaries use a slightly different notation. For example, *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (Copenhagen 1989–) renders the first opposition as ‹ǿ› vs. ‹ǽ›. In the digital edition of the Eddic poems, Haraldur Bernharðsson has normalised the text according to the norm of the manuscript, GKS 2365 4° (c. 1270), which leads to a slightly younger orthography, in which /ø:/ and /æ:/ have been merged in ‹æ›, and likewise /ø/ and /ɔ/ in ‹ö›. A specimen of *Vǫluspá* in GKS 2365 4° (traditionally referred to as *Codex Regius*) is now available in the Menota text archive, http://www.menota.org. Here, the text has been rendered on three levels: a facsimile level, a diplomatic level and a normalised level (the latter according to the manuscript).

The next step is, in comparison, a step into the unknown, i.e. into the complete FGT orthography.[20] Verner Dahlerup and Finnur Jónsson in their edition of the first and second grammatical treatises made a similar reconstruction,[21] but I have taken this venture a step further with respect to the notation of nasality and also provided a calligraphic version of the result. The opening of the FGT would then look like this:

FGT ORTHOGRAPHY

í flęſtom lǫ̇ndom ſętıa mę̇ɴ á bǿcr. ȧɴat tuęɢıa þȧɴ fróþleic eſ þar ınanlȧndſ hęfer gǫrþſc. ęþa þȧɴ ȧɴan eſ mınеſamlegſtr þyкer. þó at ȧɴarſ ſta[þar hafe h]ęldr gǫrþſc ęþa lǫg ſĭ́n ſętıa mę̇ɴ á bǿcr. huęr þeóþ á ſĭ́na tuŋo.

For this reconstruction, I have established fourteen rules:[22]

1. A long consonant is rendered by a small capital, e.g. ‹tveggja› > ‹tveɢja›
2. The dental fricative /þ/ is rendered as ‹þ› in all positions, e.g. ‹þjóð› > ‹þjóþ›
3. The short consonants /k/ and /s/ are rendered by ‹c› and ‹ſ›, e.g. ‹bœkr› > ‹bœcr›, ‹setja› > ‹ſetja›
4. The cluster of the consonants /n/ and /g/ is rendered by ‹ŋ›, e.g. ‹tungu› > ‹tuŋu›
5. The cluster of a dental consonant, i.e. /þ/, /d/ or /t/, and /s/ is not rendered by ‹z›, but by its separate components, e.g. ‹gǫrzk› > ‹gǫrþſc›
6. A short, oral vowel has no diacritical mark, not even ‹i›, e.g. ‹hefir› > ‹hefır›
7. A short, nasal vowel is indicated by a superscript dot unless it is unstressed, e.g. ‹lǫndom› > ‹lǫ̇ndom›
8. A long, oral vowel is indicated by an acute accent, e.g. ‹bœcr› > ‹bǿcr›
9. A long, nasal vowel is indicated by the combination of a superscript dot and an acute accent, e.g. ‹sína > ‹sĭ́na›

[20] This requires a font with the necessary characters. I have used Andron Corpus, developed by Andreas Stötzner in Leipzig, cf. http://www.signographie.de.

[21] See their edition, *Den første og anden grammatiske afhandling i Snorres Edda*, København 1886, pp. 19–49.

[22] Note that in the examples, I have only made the change specified in each rule; thus ‹tveggja› > ‹tveɢja› is the result of rule (1), while ‹tveɢja› > ‹tueɢıa› is the result of rule (10). The cumulative effect of the rules is that some words change shape radically, e.g. ‹tveggja› > ‹tuęɢıa›.

huat þá ſcal at hafa. cuaþ ec. huat þá nėma ſў̈na hȯnom ſuá ſcý̈r dø̈me þę̇ira gręina. eſ hȧn ſcılr ø̇ŋuar áþr ueſa. at þá þʏkeſc hȧn of ſę̇in uerþa tıl at mǽla ſıalfr á mót ſér. oc uerþa fʏre at bragþe. èn þę̇ır eſ ę̇la mẏnde fífla hȧn oc cale. ſė̀m uǽre ſpacara. ef þę̇gþe. nú ero hér þau dø̈me eſ bráþa fȧŋſ fùndoſc þę̇ır. èn ſíþan nǫkoro leóſlegar tıl málſ førþ oc ſcılniŋar. ú bé ube. ſę̇cr ſę̇kr. hǫ́ dó hǫdo. áfarar afarar. þagat þacat. ǫl ǫl. fràme fràme. uina uina. crapa crapa. huę̇r huę̇r. fúſ fús. ſceót ſceót. **ú** bé. þat ero tuau nǫfn tuę̇cıa bóc ſtafa. èn ube þat eſ ę̇inſ màNſ ę̇ıt nafn. ſę̇cr eſ ſcógar maþr. èn ſę̇kr eſ ílát. hǫ́ dó þá eſ hǫlga trol dó. èn hę̇yrþe tıl hǫdo þá eſ þór bar hueren. [...] bętra eſ huę̇rıom fyr þagat. èn ànar hafe þacat. ę̇ıgı ero ǫl ǫl at ę̇ino. mę̇ire þʏker ſtý́re màn ſ́ínſ fràme. èn þes eſ þılıornar byguer fràme. ſá eſ meſtr guþſ uina. eſ meſt uil tıl uina. uaþa opt tıl cırcıo crapa. þó at þar fáe lę̇ıþ crapa. huę̇r cȯna oc huę̇r carl maþr ſcyldo þeſ fúſ. ſė̀m guþ eſ fús. þá mùno þau tıl góþra uerca ſceót. oc hafa guþſ hyle ſceót. **n**ú ùm þàn màn. eſ ríta uil eþa nėma at uáro mále rıtet. ànat tuę̇cıa helgar þý́þiŋar eþa lǫg eþa át uíſe eþa ſuá huę̇rege eſ maþr uil ſcỳn ſàmlega nyt ſę̇me á bóc nėma eþa cę̇na. ę̇nda ſé hȧn ſuá lítel látr í fróþ lę̇ıx áſtene at hȧn uıle nėma lítla ſcỳn ſę̇me hę̇ldr èn ø̇ŋua. þá eſ á meþal uerþr inar mę̇ire. þá leſe hȧn þeta cápítúlom uàndlega. oc bǿte ſė̀m í mǫrgom ſtǫþom mùn þurfa. oc mete uıþ lę̇ıtne mı̋na èn uárcỳne ócø̆nſco. hafe ſtaf róf þeta eſ hér eſ áþr rıtet. ùnz hȧn fǽr þat. eſ hȯnom lícar bętr.

a á à ă ǫ ǫ́ ǫ̇ ǫ̋ e é è ë ę ę́ ę̇ ę̋ ı í i ĭ o ó ȯ ő ø ǿ ø̇ ø̋ u ú ù ŭ y ý ẏ ÿ
b b c k d d f f g g ŋ h l l m m n n p p r r ſ s t t x þ – ʻ

Text 1. The final part of the FGT in the reconstruction of its own recommended orthography, made according to the rules established in this article. Note that the explanation of 'áfarar afarar' is lacking in the manuscript. It is an open question whether this goes back to the original or it was lost during transmission

10. The semivowels /j/ and /v/ are rendered by ‹i› and ‹u›, e.g. ‹tvegja› > ‹tuegıa›, ‹hver› > ‹huer›
11. The rising diphthongs /ja:/, /jo:/ and /ju:/ are rendered by ‹eá›, ‹eó› and ‹eú›, e.g. ‹þjóð› > ‹þeóþ›
12. The vowels /æ/ and /æ:/ are rendered by ‹ę› and ‹ę́›, e.g. ‹huer› > ‹huę̇r› (where ‹e› reflects /æ/, the *i*-mutation of /a/) and ‹mæla› > ‹mę́la› (not in this text)

Finally, I have added two phonologically-based rules:

What should one do, I said – except to show him such clear examples of the distinctions he did not notice before that he will hurry and take back his own words, so that he may get ahead of those who otherwise would mock him and say he would have been wiser to have kept his mouth shut. Here are the examples that could be found in a hurry, which will then be arranged in sentences for clarity's sake: *ú bé, ube*; *secr, sekr*; *hǫ́ dó, hǫdo*; *áfarar, afarar*; *þagat, þaɢat*; *ǫl, ǫl*; *frame, frame*; *uina, uina*; *crapa, crapa*; *huer, hueR*; *fús, fús*; *sceót, sceót*. *Ú bé* are the names of two letters (u b), but *Ubbi* (ube) is a man's name. A forest-dweller is *outlawed* (secr), but a *sack* (sekr) is a bag. A *tall woman died* (hǫ́ dó) when Hǫlgatroll died; but you could hear the *handle* (hǫdo) when Thor carried the kettle. [...] It is better for every man to have been *silent* (þagat), rather than let another have *silenced* (þaɢat) him. Not *all* (ǫl) *beers* (ǫl) are alike. The skipper's *fame* (frame) is held to be greater than his who bunks on the *forward* (frame) deck. He is the greatest of God's *friends* (uina) who will *work* (uina) the hardest for Him. People often wade to church through *wet snow* (crapa), even though it makes a *difficult* (crapa) path. *Every* (huer) woman and *every* (hueR) man should be *desirous* (fús) of that of which God is *desirous* (fús). Then they will be *quick* (sceót) to do good deeds and *quickly* (sceót) gain the grace of God. Now any man who wishes to write or to learn that which is written in our language, whether it be sacred writings or laws or genealogies or whatever useful knowledge a man would learn or teach from books if he is humble enough in his love of learning so that he will rather gain a little insight than none, until there is a chance for more – then let him read this treatise with care, and improve it, as it no doubt needs in many places, let him value my efforts and excuse my ignorance, and let him use the alphabet which has already been written here, until he gets one that he likes better:

a ȧ ǫ ǫ̇ e ė ⟨ ę ę̇ ⟩ ı i o ȯ ø ø̇ u u̇ y ẏ b ʙ c ᴋ d ᴅ f ꜰ g ɢ ɡ h l ʟ m ᴍ n ɴ p ᴘ r ʀ s s t ᴛ x þ – ʻ

Text 2. The translation by Einar Haugen of the section which corresponds to the facing page, from his edition of the FGT, pp. 31–33. The pair ⟨ ę ę̇ ⟩ was evidently left out by mistake.

13. The unstressed vowels are rendered by ‹e›, ‹a› and ‹o›, not by ‹ı›, ‹a› and ‹u›, e.g. ‹hafi› > ‹hafe› and ‹tungu› > ‹tuŋo›
14. According to Verner's law, the relative particle ‹er› is rendered as ‹eſ›, and the verb ‹vera› as ‹ueſa›.

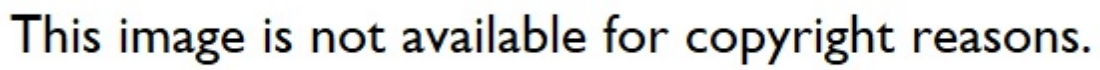

Fig. 9. The last page of the *First Grammatical Treatise* in the orthography reconstructed in this article and penned by Bas Vlam (2011), based on the script of the first 14 lines of *Reykjaholtsmáldagi* (c. 1130–1150). This section is identical to the one in texts 1 and 2 on the preceding pages. Note that the small capital ‹ᴋ› was rendered in a *kappa*-like form in later Icelandic script, ‹ĸ›, but the standard Carolingian shape has been chosen here.

The recommended alphabet at the very end of the FGT is a particular challenge, since it is not in the orthography of Codex Wormianus, nor is it a likely version of an alphabet in the original. The explanation may be that the original

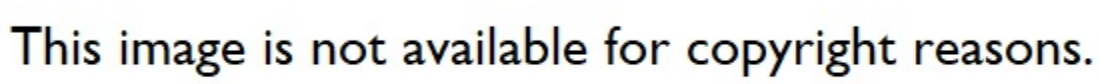

Fig. 10. The last page of the *First Grammatical Treatise* as preserved in AM 242 fol, p. 90 (= fol. 45v), l. 12–32. The reconstruction in Fig. 9 on the facing page begins with ‘huað’ in the middle of the first line. Note the difference in style and orthography – and in the rendering of the recommended alphabet in the last couple of lines.

simply did not conclude with any alphabet, but when the text was copied by later scribes who understood that the language had changed, someone along the line of copying may have tried to spell out what the alphabet would have looked like.

Concluding thoughts

Even if there is some variation in the few preserved specimens of early Icelandic Carolingian script, the reconstruction presented in this article, based on the script in *Reykjaholtsmáldagi*, has chosen what is probably the earliest specimen as its model. *Reykjaholtsmáldagi* is contemporaneous with or possibly somewhat

earlier than the presumed original of the FGT. As mentioned above, there is only a handful of Icelandic specimens which can unequivocally be said to be in Carolingian style, perhaps no more than three specimens, and of these only one full-length manuscript, AM 674 a 4°.

The reconstruction in this article has been carried out without abbreviations as it seems that the early manuscripts used abbreviations somewhat sparingly, and especially *Reykjaholtsmáldagi*. If abbreviations, e.g. occasional nasal strokes, had been introduced in the reconstruction, the overall look would not have been much different. It should also be added that the original manuscript of the FGT probably would have been written in a single column, as is the case with other early Icelandic manuscripts (except for AM 237 a fol, which was written in two columns). One might also surmise that it would have been written in a rather simple style, with little or no usage of initials and *litterae notabiliores*. These traits seem to have been introduced somewhat later, perhaps around 1200. So, for what it is worth, the palaeographical reconstruction presented here may give a fair indication of what the original might have looked like.

The orthography is another matter. What did surprise me when trying to follow all the recommendations of the FGT was how different the orthography turned out to be. There is a considerable distance from it to the standard normalised orthography of Old Icelandic (and Old Norwegian), even if this is based on the language of the early thirteenth century. There is also considerable distance from it to any of the actual manuscripts of the time, as they can be accessed in collections such as the aforementioned *Early Icelandic Script* by Hreinn Benediktsson (1965) and *Sýnisbók íslenskrar skriftar* by Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (2007). Even if the majority of manuscripts of this period have been lost, it seems likely that even for scribes of the time, the orthography presented here would have looked strange and possibly difficult to follow. For this reason, one might think that the first grammarian would have chosen a less deviant orthography when presenting his recommendations.

We cannot know exactly what this orthography would have looked like, since there is some variation in the preserved specimens, and there would surely have been more variation in the now lost manuscripts. However, since the fourteen first lines of *Reykjaholtsmáldagi* have the distinction of being contemporaneous with or possibly antedating the FGT, they are our best guide to the prevalent orthography at the time of the FGT. To the extent that they can provide conclusive answers, we see that they make no distinction between short and long vowels, they make no indication of nasal vowels, and long consonants are only occasionally rendered by gemination, never by small capitals. So if we assume

that the first grammarian would have chosen a less deviant orthography, the one in *Reykjaholtsmáldagi* might be the best on offer. However, the initial fourteen lines of *Reykjaholtsmáldagi* leave too many questions unanswered. So perhaps the final answer to my second question is that we really cannot know, but that our best guess is that the first grammarian would have been hesitant to follow his own recommendations if he were to have put them into practice.

I would like to thank Judy Quinn and her colleagues at the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic for the invitation to give the E.C. Quiggin Memorial Lecture in 2011 and for their hospitality when I was in Cambridge. I would also like to thank Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson at Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum in Reykjavík for a number of pertinent and helpful comments to this article.

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