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OF ICELAND**

Scribes and Scribal Practice in Fifteenth-Century Iceland

A Study on the Evolution of Script and Language

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**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
FACULTY OF ICELANDIC AND COMPARATIVE CULTURAL STUDIES**

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates Icelandic scribal and linguistic practices during the so-called “long” fifteenth century, roughly spanning from the late fourteenth century to the early sixteenth. The period has traditionally been regarded as one of stagnation in both language and script, yet such an assessment has rarely been tested through systematic analysis. The present study re-examines this assumption by tracing selected palaeographic and orthographic developments across a corpus of fifty scribal hands drawn from manuscripts dated between c. 1375 and c. 1525.

Three palaeographic and seven linguistic features were selected on the basis of their frequency, diagnostic value, and chronological sensitivity. These include, among others, the distribution of forms of the letter “a”, of the tall “s” and of the “r” rotunda on the one hand, and on the other the fricativisation of unstressed word-final *k*, the diphthongisation of *e* before *ng* and that of *é*, the drop of intervocalic *g* before *i/j*, the *u*-epenthesis, and the orthographic representation of palatal consonants. Data were gathered through systematic random sampling of images of manuscript texts and converted into quantitative tables allowing comparison between conservative and innovative forms.

The results demonstrate that the fifteenth century was not a static period but rather one characterised by gradual and uneven change. Certain features reveal clear chronological trajectories, while others display persistent coexistence of competing forms. When the individual profiles of scribal hands are compared, no coherent clusters emerge that could correspond to geographical or institutional affiliations, suggesting a highly individualised scribal practice which challenges the notion of “scribal schools” or “scribal milieu”.

The combination of palaeographic and linguistic data thus provides a more nuanced picture of late-medieval Icelandic manuscript culture. Far from representing a period of decline, the “long” fifteenth century appears as a dynamic phase of transition, bridging the classical and early modern stages of Icelandic writing. Not least, the findings offer a basis for refining the dating of broadly-dated manuscripts and for reassessing the evolution of Icelandic orthography and script.

Ágrip

Þessi ritgerð fjallar um íslenska skriftar- og ritmálsvenju á hinni svokölluðu „löngu“ fimmtánda öld, sem nær frá því seint á fjórtánda öld og fram á upphaf þeirra sextánda. Oft er litið á þetta tímabil sem stöðnunarskeið bæði í máli og skrift, en það mat hefur sjaldan verið sannreynt með kerfisbundinni greiningu. Í þessari rannsókn er rýnt í forsendur þessa viðhorfs með því að rekja þróunarferli tiltekinna breytinga í skrift og stafsetningu fimmtíu skrifarahanda í handritum sem tímasett eru á milli u.þ.b. 1375 og u.þ.b. 1525.

Valin voru þrjú skriftarfræðileg og sjö málfræðileg atriði á grundvelli tíðni þeirra, greiningargildis og breytinga á tímabilinu sem um er að ræða. Þessi atriði eru eftirfarandi: dreifing mismunandi gerða bókstafsins „a“, hás „s“ og krók- „r“ annars vegar og hins vegar önghljóðun áherslulauss *k* í bakstöðu, tvíhljóðun *e* á undan *ng* og tvíhljóðun *é*, brottfall *g* á milli sérhljóða og *i/j*, *u*-innskot og táknun framgómmeðls *k* og *g*. Dæmum var safnað með kerfisbundnu tilviljunarúrtaki úr handritatextum á stafrænum ljósmyndum og sett fram sem meginleg gögn í töflum sem auðveldar samanburð gamalla og nýrra birtingarmynda.

Niðurstöður þessarar rannsóknar sýna að fimmtánda öldin var ekki kyrrstætt tímabil heldur einkenndist hún af stigbundnum og misjöfnum breytingum. Sum atriði sýna skýra þróun yfir tímabilið á meðan önnur sýna samhlíða tilvist ólíkra birtingarmynda eða samkeppnismynda. Þegar einstaklingsbundin gögn allra skrifarahanda eru borin saman koma engir heildstæðir hópar í ljós sem samsvarað gætu skýrum landfræðilegum eða stofnanatengdum uppruna. Hins vegar benda gögnin til mjög einstaklingsbundinna skrifararvenja sem veikir kenningar um tilvist „skrifaraskóla“ eða „skrifarasamfélag“ í hefðbundinni merkingu.

Sambland skriftarfræðilegra og málfræðilegra gagna dregur þannig upp mun nákvæmari mynd af íslenskri handritamenningu á síðmiðöldum. Fimmtánda öldin virðist síður en svo hafa verið hnignunarskeið heldur fremur umbreytingarskeið sem brúar bilið milli fyrri („klassíska“ tímabilisins) og síðari (árnyaldar) stiga íslenskrar ritunar. Ekki síst bjóða niðurstöðurnar upp á grundvöll til að beturumbæta tímasetningu lauslega tímasettra handrita og til að endurmeta þróun íslenskrar stafsetningar og skriftar.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to trace the development of selected changes in Icelandic script, together with orthographic shifts that reflect phonological developments, during the “long” fifteenth century. The scholarly contribution of such an investigation is two-fold: it enhances our understanding of the historical development of the language and tests whether these features can be used to refine the dating of texts from the period. Whereas earlier stages of Icelandic linguistic history have been the subject of sustained scholarly attention and are now comparatively well understood, the fifteenth century remains less clearly delineated. A significant number of texts are assigned only a broad fifteenth-century dating, a practice that appears to stem from limited knowledge of the linguistic and palaeographic changes of the period.

To address this lacuna, the present research examines fifty scribal hands (introduced in Chapter 4) and focuses on ten features: three in script and seven in orthography, the latter reflecting phonological change. By situating these features within their historical context, the study seeks to establish whether their distribution allows for more precise chronological placement of the manuscripts in question.

The discussion will proceed as follows: Chapter 2 reviews the history of research on the subject. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological framework. Chapter 4 introduces the corpus of scribal hands and discusses existing scholarship relating to them. Chapter 5 analyses selected changes in script, while Chapter 6 examines orthographic developments that mirror phonological change. Finally, Chapter 7 offers a comparative analysis and evaluates the broader implications of the findings.

The Late Middle Ages in Iceland (which will be called “long” fifteenth century” in this discussion) are here understood as the period running from around the last quarter of the fourteenth century to the first quarter of the sixteenth. This period extends roughly from the outbreak of the Black Death (the until the eve of the Reformation. It has received less attention in the field of Icelandic manuscript studies compared to the period which immediately preceded it.

Despite the existence of a significant number of in-depth studies of individual manuscripts, an overview of the period is lacking, resulting in poorly understood scribal and linguistic trends; consequently, the dating of the manuscripts from this period is

typically rather broad. Following the so-called “Golden Age” of saga writing (twelfth and thirteenth centuries), this period was characterised not only by more evident cultural influences coming from continental Europe, but also a decline in book production and their quality (see below), presumably affected by the historical circumstances: the coming of the Black Death (see Björn Þorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1990, 5–9) and the advancement of the Little Ice Age.

Earlier studies have already evidenced a peculiarity of late-Medieval Icelandic manuscripts in that their overall appearance changes considerably if compared to that of the previous period: they become smaller, with more densely occupied spaces, less adorned and not as lavishly decorated. Stefán Karlsson (1979a, 13) comments that Icelandic book production remained active and traditional up to the Reformation, but the refined craftsmanship characteristic of the fourteenth century had vanished. By the fifteenth century, books were produced mainly for local use rather than for a whole kingdom.¹ This notion is also reiterated by Björn Þorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir (1990, 11–12).²

In this regard, Már Jónsson (2000, 15–16) cites a study of around 300 manuscripts from the fifteenth century and compares them to Italian manuscripts from the same period, showing how the Icelandic texts occupy a higher percentage of space on the page than the Italian ones, aside from having a higher ratio of characters in each written line. He further interprets this as indicative of a specific concept of “economy of writing”.

Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (2014, 132) argues instead that the very institution which was largely responsible for book production, i.e. the Icelandic Church, did not become demonstrably poorer during this period. A number of wealthy individuals did indeed exist, so that this development in book production would be best explained as the consequence of a cultural shift, that is, a change in taste (Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2014, 132).

¹ “Íslandsk bogproduktion fortsætter på traditionel vis helt op til reformationen. Den er stor, men den elegance over håndværket som er så karakteristisk for det 14. århundredes bogproduktion er forsvundet. Nu skrev man kun til hjemmebrug og ikke længere for et helt kongerige.” Translations are mine unless otherwise specified.

² “Þá verður einnig breyting á handbragði við bókagerð; handrit frá því eftir 1400 eru smærri og einfaldari að allri gerð en handrit frá 14. öld, en hún er talin mesta blómaskeið íslenzkrar bókagerðar, því frá þeirri öld eru stærst og veglegust handrit íslenzk sem varðveitt eru.”

Not only do Icelandic manuscripts from this century differ from those created in the previous period in their form and shape, but also in content: in this period, Icelandic literature increasingly moves its focus towards continental material, such as the matters of France and of Britain, which typically results in the composition of prose texts on the deeds of knights and kings (Kalinke 2017, vii). These, in turn, had an effect on the elaboration of local material, influencing the style and themes of later, so-called *post-classical* sagas of Icelanders and perhaps inspired the composition of legendary sagas. Much of this material, starting in the fifteenth century, was also reshaped in a new form, that of the *rímur* poetry, which traces its origin to a number of continental traditions, both Latin and vernacular (Vésteinn Ólason 1976, 68–87), and this constituted a major shift from the earlier prose tradition. It was precisely in the context of the study of a number of these texts that some lavish editions of individual manuscripts from this period were produced. These include a wealth of information, as will be discussed in more detail below.

As mentioned above, there exist a considerable number of in-depth studies digging into micro-level details of individual manuscripts, such as the provenance and history, the distribution of letter-forms, intra-hand micro-variation, the occurrence of language changes and more, such as Loth (1977), Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir (2004), Mårtensson (2011), but we do not possess, as of yet, any study offering a wider scope over the late medieval period.³ In fact, Már Jónsson (2000, 13) notes how there is a wealth of detailed orthographic, palaeographic, and morphological studies of individual manuscripts, usually from a linguistic perspective and aimed at clarifying aspects of the texts and their transmission. However, a comprehensive synthesis of the insights from these studies is still lacking and much needed.

Jón Helgason (1958, 22), explains how the period spanning from the latter half of the fourteenth century to approximately the mid-sixteenth century is characterised by a general stagnation in spelling and word forms, which renders the dating of manuscripts from this era particularly uncertain.

³ See Chapter 2 for more details concerning these earlier works.

To give an example, the large codex AM 152 fol., containing a variety of texts, was initially dated to the fifteenth century (Kålund 1889–1894, 1:105–106), but later scholars have leaned toward a later date in the first quarter of the sixteenth century (Stefán Karlsson 1970a, 138, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2014) and is indicated as having been written c1500–1525 in the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*.

The development of script, language and orthography in previous centuries has been examined much more closely, and the status of language and of script in the earlier period is much better understood. The scholarship includes detailed studies such as Gustaf Lindblad (1952), Hreinn Benediktsson (1965), Ole Widding (1960), and Spehr (1929), to mention a few on script and orthography, and Lindblad (1954) on GKS 2365 4to, the *Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda*, de Leeuw van Weenen (2000) on AM 132 fol., *Möðruvallabók*, (1993, 2004) on Holm perg. 15 fol., *The Icelandic Homily Book*, (2009) on AM 519 a 4to, *Alexanders saga*, and (2018) on AM 677 4to, Mårtensson (2011) on AM 557 4to, and Kjeldsen (2013) on GKS 1009 fol., *Morkinskinna*. Consequently, we have a much firmer understanding of the development of script, language and orthography from the previous period, and the earlier manuscripts have been dated with much greater accuracy.

It is the objective of this study to narrow the gap in the level of our understanding of the language and script between the fifteenth century compared to that of the previous period. The intention is to provide an overview of script, orthography, language, and manuscripts and hopefully provide a foundation for a more extensive and in-depth study which may be improved upon by subsequent specialised studies in the realm of historical linguistics and palaeography.

Considering the lack of a comprehensive work on the subject, it appears more desirable to deliver a work that—although by necessity somewhat specialised—may offer some support to, for example, literary scholars and textual critics, rather than one which delves into the most minute intricacies of historical linguistics and palaeographic studies. These questions are of interest for a much narrower readership.

This will be done by charting and analysing the development of Icelandic script, language, and orthography during the “long” fifteenth century, that is, from the end of the fourteenth century through the beginning of the sixteenth. Selected features of

script, language, and orthography in a variety of scribal hands found in manuscript books and documents from this period will be closely analysed. Based on the resulting database, an overview of the development will be presented.

The results should prove useful for scholars of manuscript studies, insofar as a better understanding of language and script evolution may be a valuable tool for either dating and/or scribal identification, and scholars of historical linguistics, who will benefit from a clearer picture of the evolution of several language changes. Data will be gathered through systematic random sampling and conservative/innovative values for each variable contrasted.

To make such an endeavour viable for the scope of a doctoral dissertation, a selection of features must be made. This was done following two criteria: efficiency and efficacy.

- For *efficiency*, it is best to select features which show a relatively high frequency in any given text. This reduces the amount of text which needs to be read to gather a critical mass of data.
- Given that the purpose is to trace developments over a relatively long period, it is necessary for *efficacy* to select features which are known or considered to emerge/spread/become established in the script, orthography or language within the period.

As for the scope of this project, a choice had to be made: More specifically, it had to be decided whether to give priority to the number of hands or to the number of features analysed, striking the right balance between the depth and the breadth. It was decided that broadening the number of hands as much as possible and coupling this with a careful choice of the features to examine would produce more useful results, as it would make it possible to lay the foundation for a comprehensive work on the Icelandic language and script during the Late Middle Ages, as opposed to an in-depth analysis of an overly narrow selection of scribes, including a discussion of perhaps idiosyncratic elements that would have little or no bearing on the general picture.

The initial list of features was subsequently narrowed down (for further details, see Chapter 3):

- the shape of the letter “a”; more specifically the distribution of open-bow “a”, two-compartment “a” and single-compartment “a”.
- the shape of tall “s”.
- the distribution of “r” rotunda.
- the fricativisation of unstressed-word final *k*; *mik* > *mig*
- the diphthongisation of *e* before *ng*; *lengi* > *leingi*
- the *u*-epenthesis; *maðr* > *maður*
- the diphthongisation of long *é*; *fé* > *fje*
- the loss of fricative *g*; *segja* > *seija*
- the orthographic representation of palatal *g* and that of palatal *k*; “gæti” > “gjæti”, “Ketill” > “Kjetill”

Since this is a longitudinal study primarily concerned with broad trends in the diffusion of palaeographical and orthographical changes, the features selected for analysis were deliberately chosen for their relative frequency, on the assumption that this would allow for a smoother and more efficiently paced investigation. In most cases, the initial assumption has been confirmed; in others, as will be shown, obtaining sufficient quantitative data to produce robust results has proven very difficult, or even impossible.

The manuscript evidence itself is notoriously diverse. Within a single text—whether produced by one or by several hands—there coexists a sometimes-bewildering range of orthographic and palaeographic variants. This plurality renders the task of isolating diagnostic features somewhat problematic. It is rarely possible to determine whether a feature should be read as an expression of the scribe’s own dialect, the influence of his master, the norms of the institution in which he trained or was employed, the demands of a patron, the authority of the exemplar, or some combination of these factors. A single anomalous form may in principle be explained by any of these circumstances. The cumulative impression is of a cultural environment marked by substantial mobility—of people, of models, of habits of writing—whose very dynamism eroded the possibility of a stable, homogeneous scribal standard (see further Chapter 7).

In such a context, an atomistic focus on minutiae is of limited utility. What is required is a synthetic perspective that treats graphic and linguistic features not in isolation

but as an interrelated complex, whose coexistence must itself be explained. The dating of texts based on internal evidence can thus only be justified as the outcome of a synthetic reading, in which the weight of each feature is calibrated against a broader statistical pattern.

The method cannot promise absolute precision. Several of the features examined, as will be shown, generate meagre quantities of data. Nonetheless, conclusions grounded in a systematic synthesis of statistical evidence restrict the scope for subjective manipulation and compel a more focused discussion.

Once broad developmental trajectories have been established for individual features, their interplay within each scribal hand yields statistical profiles that demand careful interpretation. This is hardly a novelty: some form of statistical assessment—whether rigorously tabulated or only impressionistically intuited—has always underpinned palaeographic judgement. What distinguishes the present study is the attempt to render this assessment explicit, systematic, and therefore verifiable.

The set of features here employed is designed to provide sufficient coverage of variation across the period to establish diachronic tendencies. A full-scale study of synchronic variation, by contrast, would necessarily require a substantially larger sample of features and a correspondingly narrower corpus. The findings are presented in the form of tables and graphs in the relevant chapters, where each feature is analysed individually and in relation to the broader scribal context.

2. Research history

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the current scholarly understanding of the “long” fifteenth century when it comes to language and scribal culture, and to illustrate what relevant work has been conducted so far in this regard.

The works discussed in this chapter are largely of a general character, offering broad treatments of Icelandic manuscript culture, palaeography, orthography or phonology in the late Middle Ages. Only a few addressing specific aspects will be included as examples here: For sources that bear directly on the individual changes selected as the focus of this study—whether in script or in orthography—reference will be made in the relevant chapters (Chapters 5 and 6), where such works are considered in closer connection to the changes analysed.

Jón Helgason (1958, 13) in *Handritaspjall* suggests that, in the fifteenth century, either wealth was diminishing, or wealthy men did not concern themselves much with literature anymore, and books became smaller and simpler. In the same work, Jón (1958, 22) describes the period between the end of the fourteenth century until around the middle of the sixteenth as a period of ‘rather great stagnation’ (“allmikil kyrrstaða”) regarding both script and language. He further adds that this state of matters makes the dating of texts from the period in question more doubtful, although he sees a possible gleam of hope in the comparison between the hands of books and those of dated charters. The alleged stagnation in linguistic and palaeographic change has been accompanied by what previous scholars have interpreted as a decrease in the quality of the books produced. The stagnation meant fewer changes in Icelandic language and script, which makes dating texts based on internal evidence an unreliable process, often with results that are too broad to be useful. Many of the manuscripts in the corpus selected for this research (described in Chapter 4) were dated by Kålund (1889–1894; 1900) to the fifteenth century (c1400–1500) in his catalogues. Since then, narrower dates have however been proposed for several of them—but there are many hands still dated simply c1400–1500, around 50 according to the source list of *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (ONP).

One may be forgiven for suspecting that the uncertainty in the dating of texts from the “long” fifteenth century is more the consequence of the lesser scholarly effort

dedicated to the later Middle Ages than to intrinsic characteristics of the language and the script of the period. In fact, individual studies conducted on individual manuscripts have yielded interesting results, both refining the dating of important texts and providing a firmer foothold for the understanding of this period. On the other hand, the discrepancy between book script and documentary script appears to be decreasing during this period, and hybrid Gothic scripts make way for increasingly cursive ones, making the identification and comparison between book hands and charter hands easier.

This shift toward a convergence between documentary and book scripts, marked by the transfer of cursive features typical of documentary writing into the book hand, may reflect broader social changes associated with the growing literacy of the laity, who were presumably more familiar with cursive writing practices than with scripts characterised by a more *posato*⁴ type of *tratteggio*⁵ (Kwakkel 2015, 69).

In short, previous research has concluded that a shift in content and form in textual production can be observed in the “long” fifteenth century. At the same time, a change that may be described as a decline has been observed in the material quality of the books themselves, together with some kind of “stagnation” which would characterise script and language, making them less reliable for the dating of texts. It is precisely this latter aspect which will constitute the basis for this study.

Some of the principal characteristics of the script in the “long” fifteenth century were described in Stefán Karlsson’s (2002) general overview of Icelandic script (cf. also Björn K. Þórólfsson 1950 and Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2005). In addition, there are studies of individual manuscripts, but no comprehensive study of the period exists.

Likewise, the development of the orthography in the “long” fifteenth century has not been examined specifically. Stefán Karlsson’s (1989) general overview of the

⁴ The terms *posato* and *corsivo* are borrowed from Italian palaeographical practice. A ductus *posato* is characterised by slow, deliberate execution and clearly separated strokes, whereas a ductus *corsivo* reflects more rapid writing, with greater stroke continuity and a tendency towards simplification and ligaturing.

⁵ In traditional English palaeographical terminology, the term *ductus* refers to the sequence and direction of the strokes used in writing a letter. Since the present study distinguishes between the manner in which individual letters are executed and the overall visual character of the script, the term *ductus* will be used here to denote the latter, whereas the former will be referred to as *tratteggio*.

development of Icelandic orthography outlines some of the main characteristics of the “long” fifteenth century.

Information on the language of the “long” fifteenth century is addressed (albeit briefly) in general overviews, such as Stefán Karlsson (1989), as well as Björn K. Þórólfsson (1925). Selected individual features have also been studied, for example by Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (1994) tracing the merger of *i, í, ei* with *y, ý, ey*, or by Ari Páll Kristinsson (1987 and 1992), and, more recently, Haukur Þorgeirsson (2013) examining the development of the *u*-epenthesis; furthermore, Aðalsteinn Hákonarson (2016, 2017a, 2017b) has studied the development of *é*. In fact, information regarding specific changes in the language is to be found in articles and monographs. Furthermore, a profusion of editions or studies dedicated to individual manuscripts, hands, specific texts within a manuscript contain a multitude of both linguistic and palaeographic information, which is often impressively detailed. Any overview on the period in question, however, must be extrapolated from this corpus of research on late-Medieval texts, with a lack of any general overview.

The descriptions of individual manuscripts or parts of manuscripts are, of course, very valuable but they often vary both in the selection of the features examined, in their methodology and in the presentation of data and results. Some of these may, for example, dedicate more attention to certain features and little more than passing comments to others, while in some works the focus may be inverted. Such editions of individual manuscripts are therefore not ideally suited for making a comprehensive overview. For many editors of texts, a study of script, orthography and language was not the main focus of the study but instead secondary to an examination of the tradition and transmission of the text and the relationship of the different manuscripts. Consequently—and understandably so—the study of the script, orthography and language is often limited to observations that is difficult to place in a wider context.

Using the information provided in these studies is often difficult for several reasons: we most often have little or no information on the method which was utilised in order to acquire it. In other words, despite the minute details and the meticulous accuracy sometimes deployed in describing forms and variants of individual hands, there may not be enough information on how and from where the data was gathered. It is also

difficult to systematise data that can be presented in radically different ways depending on the scope and the objective of the edition in which it appears. Thus, it seems more appropriate for the purpose of this research to resort to this precious mine of information only insofar as it can be used to better direct our attention towards individual elements.

It may also be added that the seeming decline in book production could simply be a result of the fact that less preciously and lavishly decorated books were not as likely to be preserved, resulting in their proportionally greater loss. It is not inconceivable that this view of the fifteenth century as a period of stagnation may be the result of a prejudicial view which has elected an earlier age as the golden one, which then sets the standards by which any subsequent period is judged—usually in a negative way.

Value judgments aside, several well-documented linguistic and palaeographical changes happened in this period. What is lacking is both a firmer understanding of the progression of these changes and a general description of the state of the language as a whole. Over the course of this chapter, the features which were listed in the introduction will be discussed, particularly with reference to the pre-existing scholarly research available for each of them.

Concerning script, a number of studies detailing its development in the period in questions are available:

- *General overviews of the script in non-Icelandic sources:* The palaeographic part of the study must rely on monographies dealing with Medieval European script types, or particular features of them. Classification of European scripts and studies on their characteristics are necessary to analyse and understand Icelandic scripts, which often show interesting developments that may be explained solely with reference to general European trends. For this purpose, an abundance of textbooks for students and reference works are available in multiple languages, for example Bischoff (1986), Petrucci (1992), Cencetti (1997), Battelli (1999), Stiennon (1999) and Coulson and Babcock (2020). These are general and comprehensive descriptions of the development of Latin script(s), introducing a taxonomy which is indispensable in order to frame and approach individual script forms. Given that the late Icelandic Middle Ages are dominated by the use of

subtypes of the Gothic script, from the *Textualis* through the *Cursiva antiquior* to the *Cursiva*, including some examples of hybrid script, an invaluable reference work has been Derolez's (2003) book on the palaeography of Gothic manuscript books. The criteria for classification and the terminology largely followed his work.

- *Overview of Scandinavian scripts*: Kålund (1905 and 1907b): *Palæografisk Atlas*, Seip (1954): *Palæografi: Norge og Island*, Svensson (1974): *Nordisk paleografi*, Haugen (2013): *Handbok i norrøn filologi*.
- *General overview of Icelandic script*: Kålund (1905): *Palæografisk Atlas*, Spehr (1929): *Der ursprung der isländischen schrift und ihre weiterbildung bis zur mitte des 13. jahrhunderts*, Seip (1954): *Palæografi B: Norge og Island*, Björn K. Þórólfsson (1950): *Nokkur orð um íslenskt skrifletur* (reprinted in 2004 with colour images). Hreinn Benediktsson's (1965) *Early Icelandic Script* does not cover the "long" fifteenth century, focusing on the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Stefán Karlsson (2002, 832–840) is a very broad but dense overview on the development of the language, offering a good outline of its history, while Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (2005) similarly offers a general overview on the development of the Icelandic script through the centuries.
- *Studies focusing on specific aspects or specific texts (both manuscripts or textual traditions)*: when it comes to palaeographic descriptions of specific Icelandic manuscripts, particularly those which were used for this study, information can be extrapolated from facsimile edition series or, occasionally and with less detail, from the discussions of manuscripts used for diplomatic editions, which in some cases can also include lemmatisations and other useful indices. The *Editiones Arnemagnæanæ* offer exhaustive critical *apparati*, with abundant codicological and palaeographical information, and the diplomatic texts offer invaluable support in analysing them. The journal *Gripla* has occasionally published articles that are relevant for the present study, such the already cited work on AM 152 fol. by Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2014), while the volumes of the *Bibliotheca Arnemagnæana*, and particularly the journal *Opuscula*, present a compelling collection of articles which help navigate the original manuscripts. The online

manuscript catalogue *Handrit.is* may occasionally include details on the script (although these are usually of a general, rather than a particular nature) or the scribe(s). The quantity of material revolving around any given manuscript may also vary considerably, with some manuscripts having received little to no scholarly attention (some even lacking an entry on the online manuscript catalogue *Handrit.is*), while others benefit from voluminous secondary literature dedicated to them. The introductions to series such as *Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile* and *Manuscripta Nordica, Corpus Codicum Islandicorum, Manuscripta Islandica* and *Íslensk miðaldahandrit* are generally very detailed and accurate and offer a solid starting point. Some editions that are particularly relevant for the present discussion are Lindblad's (1963) *Bergsbók, perg Fol. Nr. 1 in the Royal Library of Stockholm*, Loth's (1964b) *Thomasskinna, Gl. Kgl. Saml. 1008 fol in the Royal Library, Copenhagen* and (1977) *Fornaldarsagas and Late Medieval Romances, AM 586 4to and AM 589 a-f 4to*, Ólafur Halldórsson's (1968) *Kollsbók: Codex Guelferbytanus 42. 7. Augusteus quarto*, Blaisdell's (1980) *The Sagas of Ywain and Tristan and other Tales, AM 489 4to*, Stefán Karlsson's (1982b) contribution in the introduction of *Helgastaðabók. Nikulás saga. Perg. 4to nr. 16 Konungsbókhöfðu í Stokkhólmi*, Holm-Olsen's (1987) *The King's Mirror, AM 243 a fol.*, Wolf's (2011) *A female legendary from Iceland, "Kirkjubæjarbók" (AM 429 12mo) in The Arnamagnæan Collection, Copenhagen*, and Mårtensson's (2011) in-depth study on AM 557 4to which has produced a finer and narrower dating of the manuscript. Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (1994) also lists a considerable number of editions of manuscripts from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries that deal with language in their introductions.

When it comes to the language itself, aside from the surveys on the history of Icelandic mentioned above, specific aspects are discussed in a profusion of articles or monographs. Some of these works, although slightly dated, are still useful and provide valuable information which can be refined with material from more recent research. Concerning the development of orthography, phonology and morphology, an early and very succinct account was published by Björn K. Þórólfsson: *Um íslenskar orðmyndir á 14. og 15. öld*

(1925), while an excellent starting point is constituted by Stefán Karlsson's "Tungan" (1989), which is also available in an English translation (*The Icelandic Language*, from 2004) and in the 2000 reprint of the original Icelandic version found in the collection *Stafrókar* (Stefán Karlsson 2000). In this article, the author traces a history of the developments from the earlier period up to the nineteenth century, providing textual examples of the changes described. Much more detailed is the historical work by Alexander Jóhannesson (1923–24), *Íslenzk tunga í fornöld*, Ragnvald Iversen's *Norrøn grammatikk* (1923 [1990]) together with Noreen's (1923) *Altnordische Grammatik*, which constitutes the single most detailed reference text for the grammar of Old Norse in the early period, but these works do not cover the later phases up to the fifteenth century. Closer to the period in question is the study *A Grammar of Möðruvallabók* by de Leeuw van Weenen (2000), Jón Helgason's *Málið á Nýja testamenti Odds Gottskálkssonar* (1929) and Bandle's *Die Sprache der Guðbrandsbiblíá* (1956). Ari Páll Kristinsson's *Stoðhljóðið u í íslensku* (1987) deals with the development of *u*-epenthesis. Concerning features which are not directly the object of this study but are relevant for an analysis of the status and development of Icelandic in the period in object, of particular interest are Kjartan G. Ottósson (1992) on the morphological and phonological development of the Icelandic middle voice, and the aforementioned study by Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (1994) on the derounding of *y, ý, ey* in which the phonological and morphological features are discussed. Another invaluable source of information is Haraldur Bernharðsson's (2016) *Icelandic: a Historical Linguistic Companion* which, although still in draft form, constitutes one of the most exhaustive collections of material on the history of the Icelandic language, complete with an invaluable bibliographical apparatus.

Concerning scribal attribution, Stefán Karlsson (1963a and 1963b) has dedicated a great deal of work to the subject in the context of his study of charters until 1450. A number of articles discuss the details of individual changes. Many of them can be found in the journal series *Íslenzk tunga*, *Íslenskt mál*, *Skírnir*, *Mímir*, in the *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, as well as in the publications from the Málvísindastofnun (Institute of Linguistics) through the University of Iceland. The research history of individual language changes, along with more specific bibliographic indications, will be traced and discussed in greater detail further below in the relevant chapters.

3. Methodology

The objective of the present research is to conduct a survey of selected features of script, orthography, and language from the “long” fifteenth century in order to extract information which would prove useful in describing their evolution in this period. Typically, the analysis will involve contrasting the occurrence of conservative and innovative instances of a given feature. Each feature will thus have two values: one conservative and one innovative, and the amount of the former will be statistically contrasted with the latter, showing the degree to which a given hand displays conservative or innovative traits. Of the various changes known to have occurred during the period, ten were selected as a manageable and methodologically viable set for the purposes of this study. Their selection was guided by three criteria:

1. They should be attested as beginning or spreading at different points within the period, with some already well advanced in the early stages and others only emerging towards the end.
2. They should exhibit an unambiguous orthographic manifestation.
3. They should occur with sufficient frequency to provide a critical mass of data.

Certain changes were excluded on these grounds. For instance, the development *vá* > *vo* was considered, but eventually not chosen: it is different in nature from the other changes as the orthographic change only manifests in words that were not affected by a change in pronunciation. In other cases, orthographic ambiguity rendered the evidence unsuitable; for example, the spelling “voru” may represent either *váru* or *vóru*, two distinct (dialectal) variants (Hreinn Benediktsson 1979, 237). Similarly, a frequent word such as *svá* is too often abbreviated to provide reliable data. The *t*-insertion *ll/rl* > *tl* and *nn/rn* > *tn* likewise appeared with insufficient frequency to be analytically productive, while the shortening of word-final consonant, such as *-rr* > *-r*, was excluded because ten other seemingly more suitable candidates had already been identified. The features chosen for the survey are listed here:

Palaeographic features

- The shape of the letter “a”. There are three types of the letter “a”: open-bow “a”, two-compartment “a” and single-compartment “a”. These appear in a chronological succession with the open-bow “a” being the oldest. This study aims to map the development. See further discussion in Chapter 5.2.
- The shape of the “tall” (or “straight”, or “long”) “s”, which can either stand on the baseline, “f”, or descend below it, “ſ”. See further discussion in Chapter 5.3.
- The use of the rotunda “r”, at first only following “o” but then gradually spreading to other environments. The aim is to chart the spread of the rotunda “r”. This is the subject of Chapter 5.4.

Linguistic features

- the fricativisation of unstressed-word final *k*; *mik* > *mig* (Chapter 6.2).
- the diphthongisation of *e* before *ng*; *lengi* > *leingi* (Chapter 6.3).
- the diphthongisation of long *é*; *fé* > *fje* (Chapter 6.4).
- the loss of fricative *g*; *segja* > *seija* (Chapter 6.5).
- the *u*-epenthesis; *maðr* > *maður* (Chapter 6.6).
- the orthographic representation of palatal *g* and *k*; “gæti” > “gjæti”; “Ketill” > “Kjetill” (Chapter 6.7).

It was decided to examine a total of 50 hands, a number which would ideally be sufficient to reveal any general trends, while at the same time making the collection of data manageable in the timeframe of this research. The volume of text assignable to a given hand was an important criterion in the selection of the scribes, given that a substantial amount of text is needed to gather a critical mass of data for a statistical study. Having to keep the research within reasonable limits, and having decided on a total of 50 hands, the choice among hands/texts of similar length was randomised to a degree, with the criteria of length and legibility as the most decisive ones. Digitised manuscripts from the online depository of *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (ONP) and the catalogue *Handrit.is* were surveyed to identify those whose hands had been already dated by previous scholarship.

It was also important that the scope of each hand within a given manuscript was clear. Furthermore, legibility was also a criterion, and the volume of text needed to be sufficient.

The data were collected through a form of systematic random sampling. For each scribal hand, tokens were extracted from leaves spaced as evenly as the manuscript allowed. The procedure is *systematic* in that clusters of tokens are taken at regular intervals—ideally spanning the opening, central, and final portions of the text—to ensure broad representation of the scribe’s output. It is *random* insofar as every legible token within those sampled sections is included, without prior knowledge of whether it reflects archaic, conservative, or innovative features.

The whole study was carried out using images of the manuscripts, either colour or black and white. These were mostly available in digital form either on the ONP website or the *Handrit.is* website. In a few cases, such as Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, digital scans of printed black and white photographs had to be produced since these had not been made available in digital form yet.

The leaves of all manuscripts were then read through on a tablet and the relevant features highlighted digitally, each with an assigned colour which facilitated their identification. The tokens were then gathered manually on paper, counted, and then transferred onto Excel sheets where they were converted into tables showing the statistical distribution of conservative and innovative features.

For this sample to be representative of the timeframe chosen, the various hands needed to be spread as evenly as possible throughout the “long” fifteenth century (c1375–1525) using the dating indicated on the ONP website. These must still be regarded as approximations. While a very few texts have been securely dated thanks to external evidence or dedicated in-depth studies, many others have been broadly assigned to either half of the fifteenth century. With all this in mind, the exact placement of each hand on a timeline will inevitably be somewhat arbitrary.

All these factors considerably restricted the range of scribal hands available for analysis, since only a very small number of manuscripts from this period can be dated securely—or even approximately—based on external evidence, that is, independently of script, orthography, or language. These are:

- [4] AM 219 fol.: c1370–1380.
- [7] AM 194 8vo: Encyclopaedic material: 1387.
- [8] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, the hand of Jón Þórðarson: c1387–1395.
- [9] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, the hand of Magnús Þórhallsson: c1387–1395.
- [36] AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to: 1479.
- [38] AM 309 4to, *Bæjarbók í Flóa*: 1498.
- [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*: c1530–1540.

For information about the circumstances behind the dating of these texts, see Chapter 4. The rest of the corpus selected is dated somewhat more roughly, with estimates based on script, orthography and language. Such estimates are typically with a margin of error of ± 25 years, and any further narrowing typically relies on factors such as scribal identification (Stefán Karlsson 1999, 139–155). Three manuscripts in the present corpus are broadly dated to the period c. 1400–1500:

- [22] AM 534 4to: c1400–1500.
- [23] AM 432 12mo: c1400–1500.
- [24] AM 430 12mo: c1400–1500.

For the purposes of this study, they have been provisionally assigned to the mid-fifteenth century and positioned accordingly within the list of scribal hands. A more detailed examination of these three texts, together with a proposal for a more precise dating based on the results of the present analysis, is provided in Chapter 7.5.

Concerning the sample size, the main goal in the selection of sample pages was to obtain a critical mass of data to use for a statistic that would yield a reliable representation of the distribution of conservative and innovative features of a given text. An effort has therefore been made to select the sample leaves for this study as systematically as possible, sampling sections at equal intervals throughout the texts. This has, however, not always been possible, for instance due to a change in scribal hands or illegibility.

The quantity of text required to obtain the necessary number of tokens varied between the features examined, and sometimes a reading of the whole manuscript would still yield an unsatisfactory quantity of data for a given feature. For example, religious

texts mentioning angels, texts with episodes taking place in England, and texts including rules, and more specifically prohibitions will oftentimes have a much higher frequency of *eng*-words, such as *engill*, *England* or *engi(m)*, as opposed to others that will not provide as many instances even in the space of an entire manuscript. In many texts, the fact that the conjunction *ok* is typically abbreviated and personal pronouns are not very frequent constitutes a challenge in the gathering of data for the status of fricativisation in the hands writing them. The drop of fricative *g* manifests itself in words between a long vowel or a diphthong and a back vowel (*lágja*, *fleygja*), between a short or a long vowel and *i* (*bogi*, *dugi*, *degi*, *daginn*) and between a short vowel and *j* (*segja*), but it is essentially only visible in the orthography when the preceding vowel is *e*, or through the inverse spelling of words with etymological *-eyja* spelled unetymologically as *-eygja*. These are rare and can be hard to find.

It was initially decided to aim for a total of 50 instances per feature as an ideal goal to provide a solid statistical base to the results. This has, however, proved impossible. Some hands do not present more than a couple of dozen instances of a given change even in the space of tens of pages. Occasionally, additional pages in the order of tens had to be studied in order to find further instances of a given change, and this has slowed down the pace of the research considerably, while proving at times an unsuccessful endeavour. Consequently, the number of tokens is sometimes less than aimed for. However, this limitation often arises from the fact that entire manuscripts are too brief to yield the desired quantity of examples, or that they contain relatively few lexical items in which the relevant change could occur. The little data yielded in these cases must be used nonetheless, with of course some caveats and precautions, but it can still be valuable once contextualised properly in relation to the rest of the data set.

At the outset of the project, the time required for its full execution could not be predicted with precision, and the work ultimately demanded a significantly greater investment than initially projected. However, once a substantial body of data had been assembled, a reduction in scope would have been neither methodologically sound nor desirable. Quantitative data collection is inherently time-intensive, and while an even more fine-grained dataset might have allowed for additional nuance in the analysis of specific features, such detail lay beyond the intentions of this study. The aim has been

to offer a broad overview of the “long” fifteenth century, charting the diffusion of palaeographic and orthographic variants in order to clarify patterns of linguistic development and contribute to the dating of the corpus.

Intra-scribal variation will not be discussed in great detail, as it does not factor into this study. Initially, it was thought that dividing the selected portions of texts into three would render any variation within the same hand apparent, but such variations may well appear across any arbitrarily selected sections, or in “waves” (possibly by external influence, such as the exemplar), thus often making such divisions seemingly ineffective. The alternative—namely, to identify potentially divergent sections and analyse them separately—would be an exceedingly detailed undertaking and falls beyond the reasonable scope of this study. Accounting for all such variables would not only expand the size of the work manifold but might also undermine its focus.

Concerning the quantitative method, Mundó (1982) was one of the early proponents of a method based on statistical inference, but he already recognised some of the limitations, particularly those involving the arbitrariness of the types of letters to be analysed and other choices which could have a skewing effect on the results. He proposed a method involving the creation of a graph offering a list of features from dated manuscripts ordered on a timeline, which can then be compared with those from undated ones, showing a more precise estimation of their possible timeframe.

The idea of using a quantitative method is thus not exactly new in palaeographic studies (Classen 2011, 1227). It has been proposed as a valuable alternative to an approach which has been at times perceived as based “on the authority of the author and the faith of the reader” (Derolez 2003, 9). One large problem which has appeared and is yet to be solved by proponents of a statistical method is that of the critical mass of data which is required for such analyses and the tediousness of the gathering process (Classen 2011, 1232).

Agati (2009, 36–40) in her succinct yet compelling discussion of the history and the issues surrounding this method, suggests that despite the undeniable shortcomings, it carries a subsidiary and complementary value for more traditional ways of approaching palaeography. It is in this spirit that this research will be carried out. Far from seeking to supplant traditional methods, this quantitative study aims rather to complement,

adjust, and—where possible—refine the conclusions established by previous research. Building on the insights of traditional palaeography, it seeks to assess the potential of quantitative approaches for advancing our understanding of this period in the history of Icelandic manuscripts. The results will be corroborated by statistical data, which will hopefully shed further light on the conclusions already reached by scholars in the past.

One thing that is important to stress is how this kind of study constitutes an endless series of leaps in the dark: the extent to which the statistical method can refine our understanding of ancient text is something that can only be verified on a case-by-case basis, as there is little way of knowing beforehand the predictability potential of any feature which goes beyond an educated guess.

4. The corpus

4.1 Introduction

The present study is based on a sample of manuscript hands from the late fourteenth century to the early sixteenth century. Some of these scribal hands are dated or datable based on evidence independent of script, orthography, and language, which offers a firmer foothold for the subsequent comparison.

The hands that were examined are listed in *Table 4.1* below, along with estimated dates from the database of the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog — Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* (ONP). Any deviation from this norm is discussed in the relevant section. A hand may have been dated more narrowly in recent studies, and the newer and narrower dating will be preferred to the broader/older ones. Some manuscripts contain the hands of multiple scribes, which are therefore referenced with a corresponding number in parentheses (1, 2, 3, etc.). For ease of reference, the scribal hands in this study have been provided with a running number presented in brackets before the shelf mark, [1], [2], [3], etc.

An effort was made to arrange the scribal hands in chronological order based on the available dating. When several entries fall within the same time range, they are listed without any deliberate order. This means that a text dated to a given period is not necessarily older than another text from the same period that appears later in the list. The three hands ([22], [23] and [24]) dated broadly to the fifteenth century, c1400–1500 have been placed in the middle between those from the second quarter/first half/middle of the century and those from the third quarter/second half of the century.

Table 4.1: The corpus of scribal hands.

No.	Shelf mark	Date
1	AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350–1375
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350–1400
3	AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360–1400
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370–1380
5	Holm perg. 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375–1400
6	Holm perg. 19 4to	c1375–1400
7	AM 194 8vo	1387
8	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón Þórðarson	c1387–1395
9	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús Þórhallsson	c1387–1395
10	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400
11	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400
14	AM 561 4to	c1400
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404–1420
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420
17	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400–1450
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450
21	AM 151 4to (1)	c1450
22	AM 534 4to	c1400–1500
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500
24	AM 430 12mo	c1400–1500
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450–1475
27	AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450–1500
28	Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450–1500
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500
35	AM 556 a 4to, <i>Eggertsbók</i>	c1475–1500
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479
37	AM 159 4to	c1480–1500
38	AM 309 4to, <i>Bæjarbók í Flóa</i>	1498
39	AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubæjarbók</i>	c1500
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500
43	AM 152 4to	c1500
44	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (1)	c1500
45	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500
46	AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500–1525
47	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500–1525
48	AM 529 4to	c1500–1550
49	AM 147 4to <i>Heynesbók</i>	c1525–1550
50	Holm perg. 3 fol., <i>Reykjahólabók</i>	c1530–1540

4.2 Manuscripts and scribal hands

This section comprises a list of the 50 hands selected for the current study, together with information about the manuscripts from which they were taken, such as dating, content, number of leaves, and, if available, bibliographical information.

[1] **AM 66 fol. *Hulda*, c1350–1375:** This manuscript is made of 142 leaves and contains a compilation of kings' sagas with *þattir*. Jonna Louis-Jensen (1968) produced a facsimile edition of the manuscript with a thorough introduction, and she also discusses it in her (1977) work *Kongesagastudier: Kompilationen Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*, which is devoted to a study of the kings' sagas compilation preserved in this manuscript and in GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna* ([17] in the present study). The two manuscripts are considered to be copied from the same exemplar. Aside from touching upon several codicological and palaeographical details, her work focuses on the textual aspects, sources, relationship to other witnesses of the textual tradition of Heimskringla, stylistic variations, and possible sources for *þattir* which are included only in this compilation. AM 66 fol. appears to be written by a single scribe, except for the two last lines on fol. 51v which are in the hand of Magnús Þórhallsson, one of the two principal scribes of GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (Louis-Jensen 1968, 14–15). Two charters, AM Fasc. III.5 and AM Fasc. III.6 penned in 1375 by the Benedictine brothers at Munkaþverá in Eyjafjörður are in a hand that bears a strong resemblance to the main hand in AM 66 fol., *Hulda*. Furthermore, these similarities are also shared by AM 238 XXV fol., AM 173 d A8 4to, and AM 646 4to. As discussed by Jonna Louis-Jensen (1968, 10–14) it is hard to tell if these are all written by the same scribe over a long period of time or by more than one closely related scribes working in the same scribal milieu. It seems thus likely AM 66 fol., *Hulda*, may have been written in Eyjafjörður, quite probably in the Benedictine monastery at Munkaþverá (Louis-Jensen 1968, 13). It seems likely that the manuscript later came into the possession of Jón Hákonarson in Víðidalstunga, and Magnús Þórhallsson had access to it and added two lines on fol. 51v while he was working on *Flateyjarbók* sometime in the period 1387–1394/95 (Louis-Jensen 1968, 14–15).

[2] **AM 230 fol., c1350–1400:** This manuscript is made of 80 leaves and contains *Barlaams saga ok Jósafats*. Four hands have been identified in the manuscript. The main

hand, hand 1, wrote most of the text and was selected for this study. Hand 2 wrote chapter headings, hand 3 wrote the last two lines of 44r, and hand 4 wrote the last seven lines of 48v (Rindal 1981, *25). A brief linguistic and palaeographic description of AM 230 fol. is in Rindal's 1981 edition of *Barlaams saga* (*25–*28).

[3] AM 351 fol., *Skálholtsbók eldri*, c1360–1400: This manuscript is made of 133 leaves, and it contains legal texts, including *Jónsbók*, *Kristinn réttr Árna byskups*, *Grágás*, and *Kristinna laga þáttr*. A facsimile edition with a thorough introduction was produced by Chr. Westergård-Nielsen (1971; cf. also the review by Stefán Karlsson 1972 and Stefán Karlsson 1979b), but now colour facsimiles are available as part of the online catalogue *Handrit.is*. Árni Magnússon referred to this manuscript as “Skálholtsbókin folio, sú eldri og betri” (the book of Skálholt in folio, the older and superior book) in contrast to [10] AM 354 fol., *Skálholtsbók yngri*, which he referred to as “Skálholtsbókin folio, sú yngri og lakari” (the book of Skálholt in folio, the younger and inferior book), both of which he had received in 1699 from Bishop Jón Vídalín of Skálholt (Kålund 1889–1894, 1:286, 288).

When the manuscript was disbound in preparation for photography, strips of parchment were found in the spine. This binding is not the earliest binding of the book, and it seems probable that the strips originated as a blank leaf that was at the end of the book itself. Examining the parchment strips, Stefán Karlsson (1992) was able to decipher the words (in normalised orthography) “Haukur Einarsson á mig, vel máttu sjá mig” (Haukur Einarsson owns me, you are free to look at me) written in a fifteenth-century hand. As the name *Haukur* was not very common until the twentieth century, Stefán identifies Haukur Einarsson as an affluent farmer who is mentioned in charters 1461 and 1462 in Southern Iceland. Moreover, Stefán points out that in the records of the Skálholt episcopal seat a mention is made in the year 1548 of a book called “Hauksnautur” (the gift of Haukur) and also of “lögbók og kölluð Hauksnautur” (a lawbook, referred to as *Hauksnautur*). It seems thus not improbable that AM 351 fol. was owned by Haukur Einarsson before he donated it to the episcopal seat in Skálholt.

Stefán Karlsson (1992) also observes that marginal entries and catchwords in the bottom margin of the final leaf of several quires as well as a few corrections to the body text are in a semi-cursive hand that resembles the hand of certain Steinmóður

Þorsteinsson found in six charters from the period 1395–1401. Steinmóður was a priest at Grenjaðarstaðir in northern Iceland and in other places, as well as a steward at the Hólar episcopal seat; he seems to have died in the Black Death pandemic 1402–1404. Even if Steinmóður Þorsteinsson's semi-cursive hand is different from the main hand in AM 351 fol., certain orthographic similarities led Stefán Karlsson to conclude that AM 351 fol. may indeed have been written by Steinmóður or under his supervision. If correct, AM 351 fol. was probably not written until around 1400.

In AM 351 fol., the main body of the text is in a single hand, but the rubrics appear to be in a younger hand, probably from the second half of the fifteenth century, that has been attributed to a certain Jón Þorláksson á Hóli who may also have illuminated the book (Stefán Karlsson 1972, 1992; Guðbjörg Kristjánsdóttir 2016, 189–193). Schulman (2010) made a diplomatic edition of the text and a facing-page English translation of the *Jónsbók* version contained in this manuscript. This codex has also been studied extensively and is particularly appreciated for its illuminations.

[4] AM 219 fol., 1370–1380: This manuscript currently consists of 21 leaves and fragments of leaves, the remains of a much larger book now found in AM 219 fol., JS fragm. 5, Lbs. fragm. 6, Þjms. fragm. 176, and SÁM 2. It contains parts of the lives of Icelandic bishops, *Jóns saga helga*, *Þorláks saga helga*, and *Guðmundar saga byskups*. According to Ólafur Halldórsson (1981, 19), the hand who wrote AM 219 fol. is the same as the one who wrote AM 350 fol., *Skarðsbók Jónsbókar*. This view is shared by Stefán Karlsson (1967, 15), who, based on the dating 1363 indicated on fol. 149r of AM 350 fol., *Skarðsbók Jónsbókar*, suggests that AM 219 fol. was most likely written a little later, between 1370 and 1380 (Stefán Karlsson 1967, 21). This is also the dating adopted in the ONP register. The entire manuscript appears to have been written by a single scribe who has been identified in several other manuscripts and manuscript fragments associated with the Augustinian monastery at Helgafell in western Iceland. A comprehensive analysis of AM 219 fol. and related manuscripts was undertaken by Stefán Karlsson (1967) and Ólafur Halldórsson (1966). AM 325 X 4to + AM 325 VIII 3a 4to (*Sverris saga*, *Boglunga saga*, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, and *Magnúss saga lagabætis*), Holm perg. 34 4to, part III (fols. 91ra–128r, *réttarbætr* and *Hirðskrá*), AM 383 IV 4to (*Þorláks saga helga*, four leaves), and AM 73 b fol., *Bæjarbók á Rauðasandi* (*Ólafs saga helga*, four leaves), are among the

manuscripts that have been attributed to this scribe. Furthermore, several other manuscripts have been identified in a hand (or hands) bearing close resemblance to the hand in AM 219 fol. This text appears thus to be the work of a seasoned scribe with quite an impressive record, apparently belonging to a scribal milieu that can be credited with significant book production.

[5] **Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók*, 1375–1400:** *Helgastaðabók*, which for a long time was in the possession of the church at Helgastaðir in Reykjadalur in northern Iceland, contains *Nikuláss saga erkibyskups* and is renowned for its beautiful illuminations (Gödel 1897–1900, 56–58). A colour facsimile of the entire manuscript appeared in the series *Íslensk miðaldahandrit* in 1982 with an introduction by Selma Jónsdóttir, Stefán Karlsson, and Sverrir Tómasson. *Helgastaðabók* consists of 62 leaves and is written by two scribes, A and B. Scribe A wrote almost the entire text while Scribe B only wrote a single leaf, 55v, and most of the chapter headings (Stefán Karlsson 1982b, 48). Stefán Karlsson (1982b) studied the script, orthography, and language of both scribes. He concluded that while the two scribes were contemporaries and collaborated on this manuscript, Scribe A may have been a young and relatively inexperienced scribe, but Scribe B gives the impression of being the older and more experienced of the two. Scribe A, Stefán (1982b, 78) continues, probably carried out his work in Eyjafjörður or Þingeyjarsýsla, while Scribe B was sent for as a rubricator and illuminator to make *Helgastaðabók* into the magnificent object it now is. Only the work of Scribe A is included in the present study.

[6] **Holm perg. 19 4to, c1375–1400:** This manuscript is made of 77 leaves and contains *Pétrs saga postula*, written by a main hand. Holm perg. 19 4to is accessible in a facsimile edition with a long and detailed introduction by Peter Foote (1990), discussing the script, orthography, and language, as well as other manuscripts and manuscript fragments attributed to the scribe. Holm perg. 19 4to belongs in fact to a large group of manuscripts that seem to have been written by the same hand or, at least, closely related hands. In his thorough survey of the manuscripts and the relevant scholarship, Foote (1990, 38–49) lists AM 122 b fol., *Reykjarfjarðarbók* (*Sturlunga saga*, *Árna saga byskups*, *Guðmundar saga byskups*; in part or even in its entirety in the same hand as Holm perg. 19 4to), AM 62 fol. (*Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*), AM 344 fol. (*Jónsbók*), AM 48 8vo (*Kristinn réttir Árna*

byskups), AM 651 I 4to (*Tveggja postula saga Jóns ok Jakobs*), AM 385 II 4to (*Þorláks saga helga*), AM 385 I 4to + AM 651 II 4to (*Jóns saga baptista*), AM 658 I 4to (*Pétr's saga postula*), and AM 658 II 4to (*Pétr's saga postula*). Selected features of language and orthography in Holm perg. 19 4to and four other members of this group were examined by Claire Johnstone (2010). There is, to be sure, some difference of opinion on the number of hands in AM 122 b fol., *Reykjarfjarðarbók*;⁶ Ólafur Halldórsson (1993) prepared a facsimile edition of AM 62 fol., described the script, orthography, and language in his introduction and presented an overview of the manuscripts and manuscript fragments attributed to the scribe.

Stefán Karlsson (1963a, xxxvii–xxxix, cf. Stefán Karlsson 1970a, 1983, cvii–cviii) tentatively attributed two hands found in five documents from the last quarter of the fourteenth century to Benedikt Brynjólfsson and his father, Brynjólfur Bjarnason, of Akrar (Syðri-Akrar) in Blönduhlíð in Skagafjörður. Stefán pointed out that the hand in these documents, particularly those attributed to Benedikt Brynjólfsson, bore strong resemblance to the hand in the manuscripts listed above; Foote (1990, 55–60) and Ólafur Halldórsson (1993, 21–22) concurred. Ólafur also noted that the hand of Brynjólfur Bjarnarson may perhaps be identified in the two-leaf fragment AM 162 M fol., a text that seems to have been part of the larger AM 764 4to which has ties to the Benedictine convent at Reynistaður in Skagafjörður (Ólafur Halldórsson 1963, 99–1900; 1993, 21–22). While noting certain similarities, Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (2000, 55) concluded that the hands of Brynjólfur Bjarnarson or Benedikt Brynjólfsson are not among the hands in AM 764 4to.

The family of Akrar, Brynjólfur Bjarnarson and his two sons Benedikt and Björn, were wealthy farmers and probably had the financial means required for book production on this scale. The neighbouring convent at Reynistaður should also be considered when pondering possible places of writing, especially as Brynjólfur served for a time as a steward of the convent at Reynistaður. Foote (1990, 55–60) seems to consider both Akrar and Reynistaður as a possible place of writing and concludes that Holm perg. 19

⁶ See also Stefán Karlsson (1970a) with references and also Stefán's (2000, 327–329) epilogue to the reprint of the article

4to and the other handsome volumes attributed to the same scribe are “a significant monument to the educational, literary and artistic standards of fourteenth-century Skagfirðingar”.

[7] **AM 194 8vo from 1387:** This manuscript is made of 52 leaves and contains a collection of encyclopaedic works, most of which have been edited by Kr. Kålund (1908) in vol. 1 of *Alfræði íslenzk*. AM 194 8vo is remarkable because its two scribes can be identified by name and, furthermore, one of the two provides information on the date and place of writing. The main body, 1r–36v¹⁴, 37r–48v, and 51v–52v, was written by a priest who identifies himself as Ólafur Ormsson (Kålund 1908, II). On fol. 33v, the scribe states that the manuscript was written in the year 1387 in Geirröðareyri (later Narfeyri) in Snæfellsnes in Western Iceland. On fol. 33v we read:

Enn þa er þetta var skrifat var lidith fra hingat-burdinum [Cristz] M.CCC.LXXXVII vetr.

(And when this was written 1387 years had passed from the birth of Christ).

On the same page, writing in a cipher (Kålund 1908, 54), the scribe also explains:

En Olafr prestr Orms son ritadi i litlu stufunne a Geiradar eyre [...].

(And the priest Ólafur Ormsson wrote in the small room at Geirröðareyri)

Fols 7v, 13v, 34v–36v, and 37v, were written by another scribe who can probably be identified as Brynjólfur Steinröðarson, whose name is reported in the marginalia. The hand of Ólafur Ormsson was included in the present study.

[8]–[9] **GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, 1387–1395:** GKS 1005 fol., also known as *Flateyjarbók*, is a manuscript of unusual grandeur, both in terms of its size and exquisite appearance. It consists of 202 parchment leaves + 23 additional ones, all in a large two-column layout with coloured initials, several of which are historiated. It was described by Finnur Jónsson (1927), who made a codicological and textual description of the manuscript. The book contains sagas of Norwegian kings, interspersed with numerous other sagas and *þættir*; annals and poems are also included. *Flateyjarbók* is also exceptional in that it contains information on the time of its writing, and its two main scribes are

identified by name in a preface to the manuscript written by one of them. These main hands can be identified as Jón Þórðarson and Magnús Þórhallsson. Two unknown hands have written a few lines between 108r and 111r, and there are several hands in additional leaves inserted in the fifteenth century (fols. 188–210; Louis-Jensen 1969). In the preface written by Magnús Þórhallsson on fol. 1v, he identifies himself and Jón Þórðarson as the scribes and details who wrote which part; Magnús also identifies himself as the illuminator of the entire manuscript. An overview of who wrote which section can be found in the online manuscript catalogue *Handrit.is*. In addition, Magnús states that the book is the possession of certain Jón Hákonarson in Víðidalstunga in northern Iceland, and it seems not unreasonable to assume that Magnús and Jón wrote the book for Jón Hákonarson (Ólafur Halldórsson 1987a, 196). Jón Hákonarson may also have commissioned a large manuscript containing sagas of Icelanders, the so-called *Vatnshyrna* manuscript which was destroyed in the great fire in Copenhagen in 1728 and may have been written by Magnús Þórhallsson (Stefán Karlsson 1970d). Magnús Þórhallsson's hand has also been identified in two lines on fol. 51v in [1] AM 66 fol., *Hulda*, suggesting it, too, may have been owned by Jón Hákonarson (Louis-Jensen 1968, 14–15). In *Flateyjarbók*, a passage in 4rb49–50 states:

Hann [Ólafr Hákonarson] var þa konungr er sia bok var skrifud þa var lidit fra higad burd vars herra jesu cristi .m.ccc.lxxx. ok .vij. ar.

(He [Ólafr Hákonarson] was then king when this book was written; then had passed from the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ 1387 years.)

This seems to refer to the first part of the book written by Jón Þórðarson, suggesting it may have been written in the year 1387. The last section of the original text is an annal by the hand of Magnús Þórhallsson whose last entry pertains to the year 1394. Magnús may thus have concluded his work on the manuscript late in the year 1394 or during the winter 1394–1395. If this is correct, *Flateyjarbók* was probably written in the period 1387–1395 (Ólafur Halldórsson 1987a, 207–209). Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (2018) examined the question of how long it would have taken to write *Flateyjarbók* and concluded the scribes may have written the bulk of the text in eight and a half months if they had no other tasks to attend to. Therefore, the longest texts in *Flateyjarbók* may

have been written in the year 1387 while the additional materials, particularly the annals, may have been written in the years up to 1395 when the last entry was added.

Magnús Þórhallsson's preface does not state where the manuscript was written. Víðidalstunga in north-western Iceland, the home of its commissioner, Jón Hákonarson, is one possibility. Considering the number of books needed for its production, the nearby Benedictine monastery at Þingeyrar, known for its scribal activity, is also a potential location (Rowe 2005, 11). Other less likely candidates include the Augustinian house at Helgafell in western Iceland and the Benedictine convent at Reynistaður in Skagafjörður in the North. A man by the name Jón Þórðarson was a steward in the convent in Reynistaður and appears in documents produced at Hólar. Magnús Þórhallsson seems to have been a canon at Helgafell for a period of time, and his illuminations in *Flateyjarbók* bear a striking resemblance to the illuminations in AM 226 fol., a stately manuscript containing *Stjórn*, *Rómverja saga*, *Alexanders saga*, and *Gyðinga saga*, probably produced in the monastery at Helgafell (Ólafur Halldórsson 1966, 41–45; Guðbjörg Kristjánsdóttir 1993, 26–27).

Finnur Jónsson (1930) produced a facsimile edition of the entire manuscript, but new colour facsimiles are now accessible as part of the online manuscript catalogue *Handrit.is*. A diplomatic edition (with the silent expansion of all abbreviations) in three volumes was edited by Guðbrandur Vigfússon and C.R. Unger (1860–1868) with an introduction containing a brief description of the orthography (Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger 1860–1868, 3:i–xxiv). In 1944–1945, a new four-volume edition of *Flateyjarbók* in normalised fourteenth-century orthography was produced under the auspices of Sigurður Nordal. Ólafur Halldórsson (1987b) used *Flateyjarbók* in his diplomatic edition of *Færeyinga saga*, and he includes a brief description of the orthography of the text of *Færeyinga saga* in *Flateyjarbók*, which is dispersed in many parts in the manuscript and mostly written by Jón Þórðarson (Ólafur Halldórsson 1987b, xvii–xxiv). A diplomatic edition of *Hallfreðar saga* was produced by Bjarni Einarsson (1977), using *Flateyjarbók* among other manuscripts. In his introduction, Bjarni Einarsson (1977, xxvi–xxix) briefly touches upon the orthography of the text of *Hallfreðar saga* in *Flateyjarbók* which is all copied by Jón Þórðarson. Jón Þórðarson wrote the bulk of 4v–134v but his work is interrupted by short passages in the hand of Magnús Þórhallsson on 27v and 36v. It is

thus clear that the two scribes were in a position to review each other's work. Moreover, this close collaboration suggests they met and thus had the opportunity to exchange ideas about script and orthography and book production in general. We can, however, only speculate about the nature of their relationship; we cannot know, for example, whether one was senior to the other and perhaps oversaw the work or if they worked as equal partners. In Pagani (2015), it was suggested that Magnús may have been Jón's senior, given that his orthography shows a slightly more conservative character, while his more cursive script characterised by loops and curls indicates a more confident and experienced hand. A comprehensive description of the script, orthography, and language is still much needed, but a valuable addition to the brief sketches already mentioned was produced by Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir (2004). Fellows Jensen (1962, clxxvii–clxxxii) gives an overview of the orthography of the later scribe writing the section which was added in the fifteenth century.

[10] AM 354 fol., *Skálholtsbók yngri*, c1400: This manuscript is made of 139 leaves, and it contains *Kristinn réttir Árna byskups* and *Jónsbók*. The main hand wrote fols. 2r–43r6, 43r30–43v24, and 46v20–139. The first folio was added in the seventeenth century, while between 43r and 46r there are addenda from c1400, c1410–1430, and c1500. As noted above, Árni Magnússon referred to this manuscript as “Skálholtsbókin folio, sú yngri og lakari” (the book of Skálholt in folio, the younger and inferior book), in contrast to [3] AM 351 fol. “Skálholtsbókin folio, sú eldri og betri” (the book of Skálholt in folio, the older and superior book), both of which he had received in 1699 from Bishop Jón Vídalín of Skálholt (Kålund 1889–1894, 1:286, 288).

Stefán Karlsson (1982a) explains how the manuscript includes one main hand, which was the only one analysed in this study, and is not likely to have been written over a long period of time, despite small difference between its parts. Stefán (1982a, 198, footnote 7) remarks that the script and orthography of the main scribe is much more akin to fourteenth-century script and orthography than what is traditionally seen in younger manuscripts. As an example, Stefán notes that the scribe uses the symbol “ø” for the vowel *æ* (resulting from the merger of *é* and *ø*), for which there are no incontrovertible examples after 1400. There are several short interpolations from later periods. Stefán (1982a, 199) explains the known history of this codex, and how it must have been used

as a textbook for the teaching of a young boy. AM 354 fol. is among the many manuscripts Árni Magnússon acquired from Skálholt; hence the name *Skálholtsbók*. Not all the manuscripts he acquired from Skálholt were, however, written at or for the episcopal seat, as Skálholt suffered devastating fires several times. Some of the books Árni got from Skálholt may have been brought there as replacements for books destroyed in a fire and thus originated elsewhere in Iceland (Stefán Karlsson 1967, 57–58). Stefán (1982a) has, however, adduced evidence suggesting AM 354 fol. was in Skálholt already in the fifteenth century. It is thus not unreasonable to assume it was in fact written in Skálholt around 1400.

[11] GKS 1008 fol., *Tómasskinna*, hand 1, c1400: This manuscript is made of 165 leaves and contains sagas of various genres, *Thómass saga erkibyskups*, *Ólafs saga helga*, *Þórarins þátrr Nefjúlfssonar*, *Færeyinga saga*, *Egils þátrr Síðu-Hallssonar*, *Þormóðar þátrr Kolbrúnarskálds*, and *Rauðúlfs þátrr*. It was written by three scribes. It has been published in a facsimile edition by Agnete Loth (1964b), who presents a thorough description of palaeographic and orthographic features. She identifies the three hands, writing 2r–57v, 58r–78v, and 79r–165r, respectively. Hands 1 and 2 are dated to around 1400 while hand 3 is considered to be somewhat younger, perhaps from the second half of the fifteenth century (Kålund 1900, 18; *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*). All three hands take part in writing *Thómass saga erkibyskups* which extends from 2r to 90v. None of these hands appears in charters from the period, although hand 1 is found in a fragment of *Maríu saga*, AM 240 VI fol., while hand 3 appears in AM 180 fol., a manuscript containing *Karlamagnúss saga*. In GKS 1008 fol., the text written by hand 1 consists of a little over a half of *Thómass saga erkibyskups*, and it is the hand chosen for the present study.

[12] AM 231 I fol., c1400: AM 231 I fol. consists of twelve leaves with fragments of *Barlaams saga ok Jósafats*. The leaves, which seem to have belonged to the same book, are all written by a single hand. Rindal (1981, *28–*30) gives a brief overview of some notable orthographic and linguistic characteristics.

[13] AM 225 fol., c1400: This manuscript is made of 140 leaves and contains various texts such as *Stjórn*, *Rómverja saga*, *Alexanders saga*, *Gyðinga saga*, and *Vitae patrum*. It appears to be a copy of AM 226 fol. (Unger 1862, x; Kålund 1889–1894, 1:181; Jón

Helgason 1966, xxiii–xxiv; Wolf 1995, xxx–xxxiii). Scholars disagree on the dating of AM 225 fol.: Unger (1877, 1:xxiii) dated it to around 1400 (“omtrent fra Aar 1400”), but Kålund (1889–1894, 1:181) dated it to the first part of the fifteenth century (“1ste del af 15. årh.”). Later, Jón Helgason (1966, xxiii) branded it as “a fifteenth century copy of AM 226 fol.,” Jakob Benediktsson (2004, 25) stated it was written “in the first half of the fifteenth century,” and Wolf (1995, xxx) noted that it “has been dated to around 1400 or the early fifteenth century”. Tveitane (1968, 14) referred back to Unger’s (1862, xx) view that AM 225 fol. could probably not be much than thirty or forty years younger than its exemplar [namely, AM 226 fol.] (“vel ikke kan være stort mere end 30 eller 40 Aar yngre end sin Original”). Since AM 226 fol. had been dated by Kålund (1889–1894, 1:182) to the last part of the fourteenth century (“Sidste del af 14. årh.”), Tveitane concurred with Unger and concluded that a dating to around 1400 for AM 225 fol. appears to be reasonable (“En datering til ca. 1400 for 225 synes å være rimelig”). In the manuscript source listing at *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (ONP), Unger and Tveitane’s dating to around 1400 has been preferred over Kålund’s dating to c1400–1450.

AM 225 fol. is written by several scribes. Fols. 88va–101rb, containing *Alexanders saga*, were included in this study, a text that is clearly written by the same hand throughout.

[14] **AM 561 4to, c1400:** This manuscript is made of 41 leaves and contains *Reykðæla saga*, *Gull-Þóris saga*, and *Ljósvetninga saga* (Kålund 1889–1894, 1:712–713). The manuscript is fragmented and in poor condition. Fragments of *rímur* poetry have been added in a seventeenth-century hand. The earliest part was written by a single hand. Kålund (1898) uses this text for his diplomatic edition of *Gull-Þóris saga/Þorskfirðinga saga* and discusses the orthography mostly noting its peculiarities (1898, v), such as the form “-inn” for the article used both for the masculine as expected and for the feminine sing. nominative and the neuter plural. Similarly, the form “Hallsteinn” for the accusative is encountered, together with the lack of doubling of final *-r* where it would have been etymological, such as “stor” for *stórr*, “annar” for *annarr*, etc. (these changes are discussed by Haukur Þorgeirsson 2020).

[15]–[16] AM 557 4to, 1404–1420: This manuscript is made of 48 leaves and contains twelve texts of different genres: *Valdimars saga* (1r–3r), *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* (3r–10v), *Hallfreðar saga* (11r–22v), *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* (22v–27r), *Eiríks saga rauða* (27r–35v), *Rögnvalds þáttur ok Rauðs* (35v–38r), *Dámusta saga* (38r–40v), *Hróa þáttur* (41r–42v), *Eiríks saga víðfjrla* (43r–44r), *Stúfs þáttur* (44r–45r), *Karls þáttur vesala* (45r2–48r), and *Sveinka þáttur* (48v). Strömbäck (1940) prepared a facsimile edition of AM 557 4to with an introduction, but colour facsimiles are available on *Handrit.is*. Kålund (1889–1894, 1:708) dated it very broadly to the fifteenth century. Stefán Karlsson (1963a, 11–1; 1970a, 137–138) identified the hand of AM 557 4to in six charters written in the period 1420–1449 in Eyjafjörður, Skagafjörður and Reykjadalur in northern Iceland, as well as in the manuscript fragment AM 162 C fol. He attributed it to a certain Ólafur Loptsson, a wealthy landowning farmer in Eyjafjörður and Þingeyjarsýsla who probably died around 1458–1459 (Páll Eggert Ólason 1948–1952, 2:65). Based on this identification, the dating of AM 557 4to could be narrowed down to around 1420–1450.

An in-depth study by Lasse Mårtensson (2011), focusing on micro-palaeographical details, concludes that the text must have been written in a period between 1404 and 1420 by two individuals. According to Mårtensson’s analysis, there are three discernible sections in AM 557 4to: (1) 1r–23r, (2) 23v–40v, and (3) 41r–48v), which must have been written by two scribes working together. He concludes that the third section was written by the same scribe as the first, but probably at an earlier date, since it displays innovative tendencies that are more fully developed in the first section. Mårtensson (2011, 269–274) shows this through an analysis of macro- and micro-palaeographical details. He provides his dating based on a charter dated to 24th of January 1420 (AM dipl. Isl. Fasc. VII 29), the orthography of which he analyses contrastively with that of the first hand of the manuscript. He concludes that the bulk of the text written by this hand, section 1, is closer to the charter and must have been written around the same period. Mårtensson further argues that the manuscript must have been written earlier than the charter, rather than later, because it is in the course of the writing of the manuscript that he gradually adopts the same symbol for both /ö/ and earlier /o/, a distinction never attempted in the charter, which must therefore be somewhat younger, when the new habit had been fully acquired. He considers 1404 a cautious terminus post quem, since after that year,

following two years of the Black Death epidemic, Norwegianisms are known to disappear rapidly from Icelandic scribal usage, and they are largely absent in this text (for a discussion on Norwegianism, see Stefán Karlsson 1978). Due to Lasse Martensson's convincing argument, this study will treat the two hands he identified and adopt the date he suggested.

[17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna*, c1400–1450: This manuscript is made of 91 leaves, plus four younger ones added in the sixteenth century. It contains the *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* kings' sagas compilation with *þattir*. The sixteenth-century addition to fols. 92–95 contains *Hemings þáttir Áslákssonar*. The main part, fols. 1–91, is written by one main hand. The manuscript is in a large format, and the text is arranged in two columns; the parchment, however, is thick and stiff and damage by moisture has resulted in some wrinkles which may have contributed to the late-seventeenth century name *Hrokkinskinna* 'wrinkled parchment'. Kålund (1900, 20) dated GKS 1010 fol. to the fifteenth century.

Stefán Karlsson (1963a, lvii) noted that the hand in the charter AM Fasc. VIII, 7 (no. 190) is possibly the same as the main hand in GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna*. Jonna Louis-Jensen (1977, 11–12) found no reason to doubt the identification which, moreover, is supported by an ownership note in GKS 1010 fol. The charter, written in Lögmannshlíð in Eyjafjörður in 1423, is a receipt issued on behalf of Ingibjörg Loptsdóttir to a certain Magnús Jónsson at Grund in Eyjafjörður. On 91v in GKS 1010 fol., Stefán Karlsson and Jonna Louis-Jensen (1977, 12) were able to read an ownership notice that reads, in normalised orthography: “Húsfrú Ingunn eigur bók þessa” (‘Ingunn mistress of the house owns this book’). Ingunn, according to Louis-Jensen (1977, 12), is without doubt Ingunn Arnardóttir who was married to the above-mentioned Magnús Jónsson at Grund and died after 1427. As the scribe, who wrote both the charter and GKS 1010 fol., appears to have worked for Magnús Jónsson, Jonna Louis-Jensen continues, it is reasonable to assume that Ingunn Arnardóttir was the first owner of GKS 1010 fol. Based on this, Jonna Louis-Jensen (1977, 10) dates GKS 1010 fol. to the beginning of the fifteenth century (“begyndelsen af det 15. Århundrede”), but *Ordbog over det norrøne*

prosasplog (ONP) presents the date c1400–1450 with reference to Jonna Louis-Jensen’s work and a personal communication with Stefán Karlsson in 1988.

Louis-Jensen (1977, 11) observes that the presence of more than one scribe cannot be demonstrated based on palaeographical or orthographical evidence. The variation that does occur is best explained by the use of different inks and by the likelihood that the writing was executed over an extended period.

The same scribe appears to have written AM 551 d β 4to with *Arons saga* and *Pórðar saga hreðu*, and a closely related hand or perhaps the same hand may also have written the fragment of *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* in AM 162 H fol. (Louis-Jensen 1977, 11). Gillian Fellows Jensen (1962, clxx–clxxvi) presents a treatment of the orthography of the manuscript and its relationship with younger texts.

[18] AM 489 II 4to, c1450: In its current form, AM 489 4to is a composite manuscript, consisting of parts of two different manuscripts written by two different scribes; the two parts will be referred to as AM 489 I 4to and AM 489 II 4to. A facsimile edition with a thorough introduction was produced by Foster W. Blaisdell (1980); see also Kålund (1889–1894, 1:662–663), Jónas Kristjánsson (1964, xxxix–xli), and Blaisdell (1979, l–lxxxviii). Colour images are now available on *Handrit.is*. The first part, AM 489 I 4to, which comprises fols. 1–26, was once part of AM 471 4to, which will be discussed as [27] below. The second part, AM 489 II fol., consisting of fols. 27–56, contains *Hrings saga ok Tryggva* (the conclusion of the saga), *Flóress saga ok Blankiflúr*, *Tristrams saga ok Ísþandar*, and *Ívents saga* (the conclusion lacking). AM 489 II 4to is all written by one scribe, apart from two short passages, 27v17–22 and 33v16–20, which Blaisdell (1980, 18) is inclined to believe are written by two different scribes. Blaisdell (1979, l–li; 1980, 19) points out that the main scribe of AM 489 II 4to writes a hand that is very similar to the one in an undated diploma in AM Fasc. LXIV, 17, no. 337 in Stefán Karlsson’s (1963a and b) edition. The diploma itself, which contains no date, is a letter from Kristín Guðnadóttir to her husband Jón Ásgeirsson. They were married in 1433 or 1434 and were but both dead in 1478 (Stefán Karlsson 1963, 410; Blaisdell 1980, 19). Kålund (1889–1894, 1:662) dated AM 489 4to as a whole to the fifteenth century (c1400–1500), but if the diploma, which Stefán Karlsson (1963, 410) dates to the middle of the fifteenth century, was indeed written by the same scribe, the date of AM 489 II 4to could be

narrowed down to c1450 (*Ordbog for det norrøne prosasprog*). Blaisdell (1980, 19) states the diploma may perhaps be localised in the Westfjords, possibly in the Ísafjörður district which could suggest AM 489 II 4to, too, was written in the Westfjords, where Árni Magnússon obtained it.

[19]–[20] GKS 2845 4to, c1450, hands 1 and 2: GKS 2845 4to is made of 73 leaves and contains *Bandamanna saga*, *Norna-Gests þátr*, *Orms þátr Stórolfssonar*, *Rauðúlfs þátr*, *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, *Yngvars saga víðförla*, *Eiríks saga víðförla*, and *Heiðreks saga*. A facsimile edition with an introduction was produced by Jón Helgason (1955), and colour images of the manuscript are now available as part of the online catalogue *Handrit.is*. GKS 2845 4to is written by two hands (Kålund 1900, 49–50; Jón Helgason 1955, viii): hand 1 wrote 1r–32r5 with *Bandamanna saga*, *Norna-Gests þátr*, *Orms þátr Stórolfssonar*, and *Rauðúlfs þátr*, as well as 55r–73v containing *Yngvars saga víðförla*, *Eiríks saga víðförla*, and *Heiðreks saga*. Hand 2 wrote 32r6–54v containing *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*. The orthography of hand 1 was described by Olson (1912, lix–lxxvi) and Jón Helgason (1924, i–ix; 1955, xi–xii). The orthography of hand 2 was examined by Seelow (1981, 83–106).

In *Bandamanna saga* in GKS 2845 4to, certain events are said to have taken place “norðr í Miðfirði” and “norðr þar” while *Bandamanna saga* in AM 132 fol., *Möðruvallabók* has “vestr í Miðfirði” and “vestr þar”. These words tell us that GKS 2845 4to cannot possibly originate in the north, as the Miðfjörður, which is in the north-west is indicated to be “in the North” from the perspective of the scribe. Similarly, *Möðruvallabók* must have been written in the north as the Miðfjörður region is indicated to be to the west from the perspective of the scribe. As discussed by Jón Helgason (1955, ix–x), this has been taken to indicate that GKS 2845 4to was written in the south of Iceland or the west where this reference would also have been the ordinary one. Furthermore, the fact that Þórarinn Langdælagóði is referred to as “Laxdælagóði” in GKS 2845 4to and thus associated with the Laxdælir family has prompted speculation that GKS 2845 4to may have been written in the Dalir region in west Iceland. Yet, as Jón Helgason (1955, x) points out, it is also possible that the scribe of GKS 2845 4to simply copied all of this from his exemplar. Jón Helgason (1955, x), however, calls attention to an orthographic feature found sporadically in the work of both hands in GKS 2845 4to: the

writing of “lb” and “rb” for etymological *lf* and *rf*, respectively, as in “horbizt” for *horfisk*, “huerblynt” for *hverflynt*, “orb” for *orf*, “bryñiolbur” for *Brynjólfur*, “tolb” for *tólf*, and “huerba” for *hverfa*. These spellings seem to suggest a pronunciation with a stop instead of a fricative, a dialectal feature that has been associated with the western part of Iceland and was still in evidence in the Dalir region in the early nineteenth century (Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1864, xlv; Björn K. Þórólfsson 1925, xxvi; Ásgeir Bl. Magnússon 1959, 18–19; Kristín Eik Gústafsdóttir 2007). This is a further indication that GKS 2845 4to may have been written in west Iceland.

Kålund (1900, 49) dated GKS 2845 4to to the fifteenth century (“15. årh.”) while some scholars have later suggested the beginning of the fifteenth century (Jón Helgason 1955, xi). Comparing texts in GKS 2845 4to that are thought to originate through an intermediate stage in GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, c1387–1395, namely *Norna-Gestsþáttur*, *Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar*, and *Rauðúlfs þáttur*, all written by hand 1, Jón Helgason (1955, xi–xii) concluded that the language and orthography in GKS 2845 4to is on the whole at a somewhat later stage than *Flateyjarbók*; yet, the distance between the two seems not to be particularly great, and in several instances GKS 2845 4to has older forms than *Flateyjarbók*. Jón Helgason (1955, xii) concluded:

Until Icelandic palaeography and orthography in the 15th century have been investigated more closely, it is difficult to place the manuscript within an exact span of years, but there seems to be a good deal to support the old conclusion: 2845 was probably written in the first quarter of the 15th century.

Examining the language and orthography of *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* in GKS 2845 4to, written by hand 2, Seelow (1981, 105–106) concluded that it should be dated around or after 1450 (“um oder nach 1450”). It is thus conceivable that the two scribes of GKS 2845 4to were of a different age. In the manuscript listing of *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (ONP), GKS 2845 4to is dated to c1450.

[21] **AM 151 4to, c1450:** This manuscript is made of 140 leaves, and it contains legal texts: *Jónsbók*, *Kristinréttur Árna biskups*, *lagaákvæði*, *tilskipanir*, etc. It is written by one main hand, but additional leaves are written by different hands from different periods.

Hand 2 wrote 2r; hand 3 section 130r–132r, while hand 4 wrote 133r–140r (Kålund 1889–1894, 1:434). Only the main hand was included in this study.

[22] **AM 534 4to, c1400–1500:** AM 534 4to is made of 24 leaves and contains *Mágus saga*. The text is laid out in two columns and appears to be written by a single hand. Kålund (1889–1894, 1:680) dates it to the fifteenth century and this broad dating is adopted by ONP: c1400–1500.

[23] **AM 432 12mo, 1400–1500:** This manuscript is made of 84 leaves and contains *Margrétar saga*. It is written by one single hand. Kirsten Wolf (2010, 63) lists it as representative of the version III of *Margrétar saga* in her article focusing on the version II of the same text, while Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (2014, 132) mentions it as one of the smallest Icelandic manuscripts we know of. Together with [24] AM 430 12mo, it is cited by Kirsten Wolf (2010, 62) as the version III of the saga. In the same article, she provides an edition of version II, and therefore does not discuss AM 432 12mo and 430 12mo in any detail.

[24] **AM 430 12mo, 1400–1500:** This manuscript is made of 33 leaves and contains *Margrétar saga*. It is written by a single hand. It has been given a very broad dating in the ONP database.

[25] **AM 243 a fol., 1450–1475:** AM 243 a fol. is made of 44 leaves and contains *Konungs skuggsjá*. It was written by two hands and has been published in a facsimile edition by Holm-Olsen (1987) in the *Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile* series. Árni Magnússon presumed that AM 243 a fol. was once a single manuscript together with AM 81 a fol. containing *Sverris saga*, although Holm-Olsen (1987, 11) determines the two must have started as independent manuscripts only to be combined later. Holm-Olsen (1987) concludes that the bulk must have been written by two hands, the first writing from leaf 1ra to 37va, while the second wrote the remaining shorter section up to 43vb with occasional short interpolations from five or six others. Folio 44 is blank. Holm-Olsen also suggests that the manuscript may have been written at either of the two monasteries in the Eyjafjörður area, Möðruvallaklaustur or Munkaþverárklaustur. Holm-Olsen presents a very detailed account of letter forms and their distribution. Only the first hand will be

considered here, which wrote the bulk of the text. Having found possibly related hands in documents from around 1460, Holm-Olsen (1987, 24) assigns it to the third quarter of the fifteenth century, together with AM 81 a fol. The latter may originally have belonged to the same codex as AM 243 a fol., although it was written by different hands (see Holm-Olsen 1987, 10–11).

[26] **AM 343 a 4to, c1450–1475:** AM 343 a 4to is made of 110 leaves and contains legendary sagas and romances. Kålund (1889–1894, 1:578–579) does not offer information on the number of hands. The manuscript catalogue *Handrit.is* states that the number of hands is difficult to ascertain, indicating that the shape of the letters is similar throughout, but the size and the density of the script vary somewhat. The script is larger in the beginning of the manuscript than in, for instance, fols. 89–95. It is noted in the catalogue entry that that fol. 27 may be in a different hand compared to the neighbouring leaves, while also 67v–68r seem to be somewhat different. Furthermore, fol. 35 is a seventeenth-century addition. Loth (1964a) discusses *Vilhjálmss saga sjóðs* from this manuscript, but she does not discuss either the number of hands nor matters of orthography and palaeography. Sanders (2000, 42–43) argues that it belongs to the same scribal milieu as Holm perg. 7 fol., the estate of Möðruvellir in the Eyjafjörður region in northern Iceland. He notes that occasional variations in the script in AM 343 a 4to may indicate the presence of a second hand, which may well be the same writing Holm perg. 7 fol. Sanders (2000, 54) supports this claim by citing the rare form “hliupu” as the preterit plural of *hlaupa* (instead of earlier *hljópu* and later *hlupu*), which appears in both manuscripts. In another work, Sanders (2001, xl–xli) also cites the forms “hliup”/“hliupu” and their few occurrences, suggesting that they may either be Norwegianism or are the result of dialectal variation. For reasons of caution, it was decided to exclude the leaves mentioned above (27, 35 and 67v–68r), which appear more obviously to have been written by different hands. The last leaves were also not included because the size of the script changes along with the shape of the *ok* abbreviation.

[27] **AM 471 4to + AM 489 I 4to, 1450–1500:** AM 471 4to is made of 108 leaves and once belonged to the same book as the first part, fols. 1–26, of AM 489 4to (Kålund 1889–1994, 1:654–656, 662–663; Jónas Kristjánsson 1964: xxxix–xli; Þórey Hlín Ö.

Hlynsdóttir 2020; see also discussion under [18] AM 489 II 4to above). AM 471 4to and AM 489 I 4to are written in a single hand, apart from a few younger leaves in a seventeenth-century hand. AM 471 4to contains *Pórðar saga hreðu*, *Króka-Refs saga*, *Kjalnesinga saga*, *Ketils saga hængs*, *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, *Qrvar-Odds saga*, and *Viktors saga ok Blávuss*, while AM 489 I 4to contains *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Kirjalax saga*. The final lines of *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* missing in AM 489 I 4to have been erased at the top of fol. 1r in AM 471 4to above the beginning of *Pórðar saga hreðu*, showing that these two texts were adjacent before the book was taken apart. *Kirjalax saga* may earlier have followed *Viktors saga ok Blávuss* (Jónas Kristjánsson 1964, xl–xli). Jónas Kristjánsson (1964, xxxix–xl) suggests that this large book was falling apart in the seventeenth century when it was rebound. As the book was very big and unwieldy, part of it was bound together with parts of another unrelated book to form the composite volume now known as AM 489 4to, while the remainder became what is now AM 471 4to.

The main features of the language and orthography of the scribe of AM 471 4to + AM 489 I 4to have been described by Pálmi Pálsson (1883, xi–xvi), Kålund (1917, xi–xiv), and Jónas Kristjánsson (1964, xliii–xlvi). Jónas Kristjánsson (1964, xli–xlii) discusses the frequent use of a single superscript dot to mark etymologically long vowels, for example “lèt” for *lét*, which is a curious orthographic characteristic of the scribe of AM 471 4to + AM 489 I 4to. This orthographic trait is found in a few fifteenth-century charters. Two of them, AM Fasc. XIV, 18, written 1459 in Neðri-Hjarðardalur in Dýrafjörður in the Westfjords, and AM Fasc. XXI, 24, written 1475 in Hvilft in Önundarfjörður, also in the Westfjords, bear a strong resemblance to the hand of AM 471 4to + AM 489 I 4to. Jónas (1964, xliii) accordingly concludes that AM 471 4to + AM 489 I 4to was written in the second half of the fifteenth century, very likely in the Westfjords. Furthermore, Jónas Kristjánsson (1964, xlvi–liv) observes that AM 593 a–b 4to, containing *Mírmants saga*, *Adóníass saga*, *Viktors saga ok Blávuss*, and *Sneglu-Halla þáttr*, is written in a hand that resembles both AM 471 4to + AM 489 I 4to and the two charters; moreover, he also shows the frequent use of a single superscript dot to denote etymologically long vowels. Jónas Kristjánsson (1964:xli–xlii) has also examined some charters originating from the Western and Northern regions such as AM Dipl. Isl. Fasc. XIV 18 and AM Dipl. Isl. Fasc. XXI 24 noting that they are written in a hand whose features of

script and orthography closely correspond to those observed in AM 471 4to + AM 489 I 4to and AM 593 a–b 4to. These texts were further examined by Þórey Hlín Ö. Hlynisdóttir (2020), who argued that they are likely to have been written by the same scribe.

[28] Holm perg. 1 4to, 1450–1500: This manuscript is made of 178 leaves and contains *Mariu saga* and *Mariu saga egipzku*. It is written in a very uniform single hand with unusually narrow horizontal axes. Unger (1871, xiv) maintains that it is likely written in the beginning of the fifteenth century, without commenting on the script and focusing instead on the content. Stefán Karlsson (1970b, 692) dates it to the second half of the fifteenth century.

[29]–[30] AM 586 4to, 1450–1500: AM 586 4to is made of 33 leaves and contains tales, exempla, prose romances, legendary sagas, and sagas of Icelanders. It was written by two hands, both included in this study. It is available in a facsimile edition with an introduction by Loth (1977), who in the introduction to the facsimile surveys the language, orthography, and palaeography of the two scribes. She explains that the two scribes are very similar in language and orthography and must thus have worked closely together (Loth 1977, 17); she then lists the sections written by each hand as follows: hand 1 wrote: 1r–8v22, 9r1–9; 9r12–19v; 20r12–26v; 27r12–47; 27v10–20; 28r1–13; 28r27–v17; 29r1–19; 29v1–6, 29v32–30v17; 31r–33v; while hand 2 wrote 8v22–39; 9r9–11; 20r1–12; 27r1–11; 27v1–9; 27v20–49; 28r14–26; 28v17–46, 29r20–45, 29v6–32; 30v17–45.

[31] AM 533 4to, c1450–1500: AM 533 4to consists of 103 leaves, and it contains romances such as *Mágus saga*, *Partalópa saga*, two *þættir* and *Elis saga*. Cederschiöld (1884, civ) mentions the manuscript in the introduction of *Mágus saga*, but he does not deal with the script and orthography in detail. The manuscript was written by two hands, the first writing most of the text, the second writing a few passages of a few words or lines, listed by Lise Præstgaard Andersen (1983, xxix): 49v5, 52v–53r, 79r21–23, 87v14–88r, 97r21–23, 98r5–7, and 98r15–23. Neither of the hands has been found elsewhere (Andersen 1983, xxix). Only the main hand was chosen for the present study. The two conjoined fols. 14 and 19 are a later addition, dated by Kålund (1889–1894, 1:679) to around 1500. Andersen (1983) describes the manuscript in very general terms in her edition of

Partalópa saga, focusing on codicological aspects. There is no dedicated discussion on the language or the palaeography of the two hands, but it is noted that they do not seem to appear in any other document. The suggested dating is the second half of the fifteenth century. Andersen (1983, xxix–xxx) disagrees with Kålund’s (1889–1894, 1: 679) dating of the manuscript to the beginning of the fifteenth century on account of the abbreviations for *ok* and *ek* with a superscript “c”. These are used consistently by the second hand but do not appear before c1450, as explained by Stefán Karlsson (1970c, 681). She then adds that while the main hand writes *ek* and uses a Tironian note for *ok*, it changes to abbreviations with a superscript “c” in the course of *Elis saga*. Andersen’s (1983, xxix–xxx) dating is listed by *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (ONP) and will be followed here.

[32]–[33]–[34] **AM 577 4to, c1450–1500:** AM 577 4to is made of 82 leaves and contains a collection of legendary sagas and romances: *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, *Vilhjálmss saga sjóðs*, *Bósa saga*, *Af bóndasyni nokkrum í kóngsgarði*, *Þorsteins þátr bæjarmagns*, *Vilmundar saga víðutan*, and *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*. The manuscript is written by four hands. Hand 1 wrote from 1r to 49v, 65r to 66r, 71v to 76v, hand 2 wrote from 50r to 64v, hand 3 from 66v to 71r, and hand 4 from 77r to 82v. The hands selected for the study were I, III and IV. The exclusion of Hand II does not reflect any qualitative assessment of the hand itself but follows solely from the decision to limit the dataset to fifty hands for reasons of scope and manageability. Lagerholm (1927, xlv) does not comment on the script except to say that it is quite legible, save for the first page, and quotes Rafn (1829–1830, III, viii) who simply lists in a short paragraph a number of peculiar spellings he encountered (such as “pavrði” for þorði, “tock” for tók, “egh” for ég, etc.). Springborg (1970, 67–79) published a diplomatic edition of one of the texts contained in this manuscript, *Af bóndasyni nokkrum í kóngsgarði* (written by hand II and found on 63r–54v)). In the introductory section, he describes the codex, its content and the sections written by each hand, but he does not focus on linguistic or palaeographical aspects. He identifies the place of writing in northern Iceland, based on a marginal note found on top of fol. 75v: “Sniofridur aa bok þessa” (‘Snjófríður owns this book’). If this marginal note is indeed from the fifteenth century and not later, Springborg (1970, 69) explains, it may be referring to a Snjófríður Björnsdóttir who is mentioned in three

documents from the second half of the fifteenth century and lived at Myrká in Hörgárdalur in north Iceland. If the identification is correct, he adds, the manuscript must have been written before 1481, the date of her testament, which is known to us.

[35] **AM 556 a 4to, Eggertsbók, c1475–1500:** This manuscript is made of 88 leaves and used to be part of a larger book, together with what is today AM 556 b 4to. It contains *Sigurgarðs saga frækna*, *Grettis saga*, *Grettisfærsla*, *Gísla saga Súrssonar* and *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja*. Sture Hast (1960, 15–88) provides a detailed codicological analysis of the manuscript in his edition of *Harðar saga*. He focuses greatly on identification of names in marginalia, orthography, language changes and abbreviations. The manuscript appears to be written by a single hand, and Hast (1960, 32) comments that the scribe seems to have been experienced and careful, but he explains that he has not been able to successfully identify it with any hands from manuscripts written between 1450 and 1525, or any other manuscript that Kålund (1889–1894, 1900) dated from the fifteenth century to the first half of the sixteenth. A brief letter added on the last leaf, 88v, seemingly by the owner of the book, cites a woman named Oddný. Hast tracks down one person with that name in charters from the early sixteenth century and proceeds to reconstruct the ownership story of the book. He further identifies the hand who wrote the charter AM Fasc. XXXII, 117 as that of AM 556 a b 4to. The charter was written in 1494 at Hof in Vatnsdalur in Northwest Iceland, which, if correct, would indicate northern Iceland as the place of writing (Hast 1960, 27). Hast (1960, 86) notes that the script is very uniform in style and can be considered a standard example of the average orthography used between 1450 and 1550. Furthermore, he shows how some language changes are less advanced in this text than they are in other manuscripts which are known to be older, and how these facts may be the reflection of useful dialectal differences yet to be explored (Hast 1960, 87). He then laments the fact that the knowledge on the state of the language between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is too incomplete to be confidently used as a reference to correctly assess the significance of linguistic variants.

[36] **AM 687 a 4to and AM 688 c 4to, c1479:** AM 687 a 4to and AM 688 c 4to contain church regulations. They are seemingly written by a single hand and once formed a single book (Kålund 1889–1894, 2:102, 104). The first part (AM 687 a 4to) consists of six

leaves (three bifolia), the second (AM 688 c 4to) consists of eight leaves. A third manuscript is also considered to have originally belonged with these two, AM 56 8vo, which has been excluded from this study because it consists of only seven leaves, all very defective and in poor condition. Furthermore, more than half of it (from leaf 4, where we find a translation from Alcuin's *De virtutibus et vitiis*) appears to be written in a rather different hand from the other two fragments of the text.⁷

Even if Kålund (1889–1894, 2:102) seems to imply the hand is the same throughout all three, the script in the fragments present occasional differences. Several very short sections of a couple of lines or not much more distinguish themselves from the rest, leading one to think that the fragments were written by a main hand with one or more additional hands writing short sections. These scribes, who seem to have worked together, write a very similar hand, sharing many features. The “helping” hand(s) are at times very difficult to distinguish from the main one. The signature feature setting them apart is the axes, with the vertical one being more pronounced in the main scribe, and the cursive features being occasionally less pronounced. An obvious section written by another scribe is 7v6–11 in AM 688 c 4to. The last singleton of AM 688 c 4to was probably written by yet another scribe, with the vertical axes being less rigorously parallel, and the horizontal one being more developed than in the main hand. An accompanying page with notes written by Jón Sigurðsson is to be found in the case of AM 688 c 4to, and it reports in the very first line that “brot úr þessari sömu bók með sömu hendi er 688. c. 4to. annað nr. 56. 8vo” (‘688 c 4to is a fragment from this same book with the same hand, another is 56 4to’).

Only the main hand of AM 687 a 4to and AM 688 c 4to will be included in this study. It is one of the very few hands that are dated securely thanks to a marginal note on fol. 3r, reporting the year 1479, which appears to be in the same hand of the main

⁷ The overall different appearance of the text notwithstanding, it appears to be a different hand also because of micro-paleographic details, such as the use of “g”, when the other scribe(s) use(s) “g”, the *tratteggio* (the succession and direction of the individual constituent strokes of a letter) of the ascenders of “i” and “p” with one single stroke, when the other scribes normally use two, the use of “w” word initially for *v*, etc.

text: “Anno domini M° cd° lxx° nono” (‘Year of the lord thousandth four hundredth seventieth ninth’).

[37] AM 159 4to, c1480–1500: This manuscript is made of 92 leaves and contains legal texts such as *Jónsbók* and *Kristinn réttur Árna byskups*. It is written in one single hand.

[38] AM 309 4to, *Bæjarbók í Flóa*, 1498: This manuscript is made of 48 leaves and contains excerpts from GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, and parts of *Laxdæla saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, and *Njáls saga*, which are not included in *Flateyjarbók*. It appears to have been written by a single hand. It is securely dated thanks to the following reference, found on 1ra36–39:

hann [Ólafr Hákonarson] var þa konungr er su bok uar skrifud er þessi bok uar eptir skrifud þa var lidit fra hingad bvrð uors herra iesv christi. M. CCC. LXXX. ok siau ár. enn nu erv fra hans hingadbúrd er sia bok er skrifud M. CCCC. nívtigir ok átta ár”

‘He [Ólafur Hákonarson] was then king when that book was written from which this one was copied. Then had passed from the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ M. CCC. LXXX. and seven years [1387], while now, when this book is written, have passed from the time of his incarnation M. CCCC. ninety and eight years [1498]’.

Kålund (1889–1891, xxiii–xxv) discusses the manuscript in his edition of *Laxdæla saga*, listing variants, but without spending words on the orthography or script. Ólafur Halldórsson (1968, xlv), in the introduction of the facsimile edition of Cod. Guelf. 42. 7. Aug. 4to, *Kollsbók*, shows how hand 3 wrote a note on fol. 61v indicating the owner of the book as Jón kollur Oddsson. It is reported by Scott (2003, 110*–111*) in his edition of *Eyrbyggja saga* how hand 3 of *Kollsbók* and the hand of AM 309 4to are “strikingly similar”. Scott (2003, 110*) also reports that Ólafur Halldórsson suggested in an unpublished paper in 1987 that the scribe of AM 309 4to may have been Jón kollur himself. Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (2005, 253), also maintains that Jón kollur Oddsson is the hand of AM 309 4to, *Bæjarbók í Flóa* and one of the hands of *Kollsbók*. Ah Leum Kwon (2017) found support for this assumption with a palaeographical analysis. She also suggested how the manuscript must have been copied from three separate exemplars and at

different times, citing codicological differences, such as the different vellum used. She also identified palaeographical variations that are best explained as internal developments of the scribe during the writing of the text, such as the “r” rotunda used word initially later in the text and the evolution of the shape of “y”. Scott (2003, 113–121), describes the palaeography, orthography and morphology of this text in detail, noting the two-compartment form of “a”, the almost universal use of “r” rotunda but saying nothing of the shape of “s”. He lists several spellings indicating sound changes, such as “miog” for *mjök*, “jallen” for *jarlinn* etc., and notes the absence of evidence for palatalisation. Bára Yngvadóttir (2003) compares it with AM 162 E fol., arguing that the latter served as an exemplar for the former.

[39] **AM 429 12mo, *Kirkjubæjarbók*, c1500:** AM 429 12mo is made of 168 leaves and contains lives of female saints. The number of scribal hands is four, divided as follows: hand 1 wrote 2r–13r, 15r–39v¹², 40r⁶–44v⁵, 44v⁹–59r, 60r–84v; hand 2 wrote 39v¹² to 40r⁵, from 44v⁶ to 8; hand 3 wrote 13v; hand 4 wrote 59v. The manuscript was published in a diplomatic edition by Kirsten Wolf (2011) in the series *Manuscripta Nordica*. Wolf’s (2011) introduction covers extensively matters of codicology, textuality, as well as of palaeography, orthography, and linguistic changes. The codex is likely to have been written for the nuns at Kirkjubær, but it cannot be proven that it was copied by them. It is also possible that it may have been written at the Augustinian house of Þykkvibær in Álftaver, although this is hard to ascertain. Wolf (2011, 16) suggests that the text may have been written by the canons in Þykkvibær, but the illuminations may have been the work of the nuns, who were famous for their skills in embroidery. The text is written by four hands, the first of which is included in the present study. It has been observed by Wolf (2011, 22) that the first hand changes somewhat throughout the manuscript, for example in the way geminate consonants are represented. The differences may indicate that the manuscript was written over an extended period, during which the scribe’s habits changed.

[40]–[41] **AM 624 4to, c1500:** This manuscript is made of 170 leaves and contains religious writings and *exempla*. The thorny issue of hand division for this text was mentioned initially by Kålund (1914–1916, II) and later discussed by Einar G. Pétursson

(1976) in the introduction to his edition of *Miðaldaævintýri þýdd úr ensku*. Einar does not, however, touch upon matters of linguistic change, focusing mostly on codicological and textual considerations. Their conclusions differ in some respect, but they both identify a total of seven hands. Einar G. Pétursson (1976, xv), in commenting the division previously proposed by Kålund, comments on how the division is complicated by the fact that some of these hands are very similar, adding that nothing seems to indicate that any part of the manuscript be older than others, since the change of scribe happen within the same quires (or even leaves). Cahill (1983, xxi–xxix) also identifies seven hands, listing palaeographic, orthographic and morphological aspects of two of them. He also cites previous research which suggested how what he calls hand 1 may have been that of Jón Þorvaldsson, abbot of Þingeyraklaustur between 1500 and 1514, while he admits to having failed to identify hand 2. Nikola Macháčková (2019) has proposed a somewhat different interpretation, suggesting a total of eight hands. Their portions of text are divided as follows: hand 1: 1r–7v; hand 2: 8r1–10; hand 3: 8r11–26, 70v5–117v, 157r–170v; hand 4: 8v1–27r4; hand 5: 27r5–43r8; hand 6: 43r9–45v22; hand 7 (identified as Abbot Jón Þorvaldsson): 46r–70v4, 118r–135r, 136r, 137v17, 139v14–141r, 141v14–156v; hand 8: 135v, 137v18–139v13, 141v1–141v13. According to Macháčková’s subdivision, hands 3 and 5 were chosen for this study: hand 3 wrote 8r11–26 and 8v1–27r4, 70v5–117v, 157r–170v, while hand 5 wrote 27r5–43r8 and 46r–70v4.

[42] **AM 435 12mo, c1500:** This manuscript is made of 62 leaves and contains various texts on the nature of man, holy days and festivities, moon phases, and a Christmas register. It was written by two hands, only the first of which (writing folios 1–31) was selected for the present study. The second hand wrote (32–62), but this section is largely composed by calendars and Latin material. For this reason, it was not included. The dating reported on the ONP is c1500.

[43] **AM 152 4to, c1500:** This manuscript is made of 125 leaves and contains legal texts, namely *Jónsbók* and *Kristinn réttur Árna byskups*. It was written by a single scribe.

[44]–[45] **AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver*, 1475–1525:** This manuscript is made of 40 leaves and contains a leechbook. It was written by two hands (Kålund 1907a, 6), each writing roughly half of the manuscript. Both were included in this study. The text was

published in a diplomatic edition by Kålund (1907a) and in an English translation by Waggoner (2011). It is dated by Kålund (1889–1894, 2:483) to around 1500, who also notes how it is defective both at the beginning and at the end. It has not been extensively researched, except for the already mentioned diplomatic edition by Kålund, which has in turn served as the basis for the only extant English translation (Waggoner 2011). Kålund explains that the first scribe wrote from 1r to the bottom of 24v, which is also the last leaf of the third quire, and the second from 25r until the end (for a total of two quires). Even if the two hands are quite uniform, there are some differences between the two. Kålund (1907a, 42) notes the systematic use of single-compartment “a” (“a”) by the first scribe, as opposed to that of two-compartment “a” (“a”) by the second one. He also adds that the two must obviously have copied the text from the same exemplar. The whole book contains a text which is overall rather short (Kålund’s edition consists of 29 pages, including pictures and footnotes).

[46]–[47] AM 152 fol., 1500–1525: This manuscript comprises 201 leaves and contains a miscellany of sagas, including family and legendary sagas and romances. It also contains a fragment of an earlier Latin homily. Two main hands have been identified. The first hand, rather uniform and clearly identifiable, wrote fols. 1r to 51v. The scribe’s name appears at the top of fol. 46v, where we read: “Þessa saugu hefur skrifath broder Bjarnar Þorleifssonar” (“This saga was written by the brother of Björn Þorleifsson”). Björn Þorleifsson was the sponsor of [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók* (see below), and, indeed, may also have been the commissioner of AM 152 fol., according to Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2014, 92), who also speculates that the two manuscripts may originate in the same *scriptorium*. Björn’s half-brother, the hand of the first section of this manuscript, was called Þorsteinn Þorleifsson. Both brothers belonged to the same wealthy family, who owned GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* for some generations.

Kålund (1889–1894, 2:105) cites Jón Sigurðsson stating that AM 152 fol. was written by 2–3 hands. The issue of scribal identification has been further touched upon by Stefán Karlsson (1970a, 138) and Mariane Overgaard (1968, cvii–cviii), who claims that this topic was supposed to be discussed in detail in an edition of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* that never saw the light of day. Kjartan G. Ottósson (1992, 193) also assumes the presence of two hands. Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (1994, 71) reports that Stefán Karlsson

communicated to him *viva voce* that the first hand should be attributed to Þorsteinn Björnsson, who wrote fols. 1r–51v, on the basis of its identification with nine charters written in his own hand. Stefán further identified a second hand in three charters drafted at Hólar; these documents share the name of a priest, Jón Þorgilsson, fols. 52r–200v, about whom little additional information is known. More recently, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2014, 90), together with Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, whom she consulted, agrees with the conclusions of Stefán Karlsson (1970a, 138) that the book must be the work of two scribes. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir accepted the conclusion for which the first scribe would be Þorsteinn Þorleifsson, and the second would be Jón Þorgilsson, administrator of the episcopal see of Hólar and priest at Melstaður.

The variation in the script of Jón Þorgilsson has, however, called for further scrutiny. A study of the text has led to the conclusion that Jón wrote his part over an extended period. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2014, 90–91) suggests that he may have copied the text at different points in his life. Uniformity must have been particularly difficult to achieve given the size of the work. Changes intervene naturally over time, and the scribe must have been copying from different exemplars, while perhaps consciously trying to utilise archaic features in a bid to confer the book a more solemn character. Particularly, between fol. 52 and 87 the script becomes less uniform in character. In this part, some sections have larger letters than others, some being more carefully executed with individual lines drawn separately, frequently lifting the pen (more *posato*) in character (for example with “ð” and “þ” lacking a loop on the ascender, and the angularity becoming pronounced). On 88v, where we find the beginning of *Þórðar saga hreðu*, the script becomes uniformly more conservative, angular, with shorter ascenders and descenders, and the few cursive features, such as additional airlines, loops or extended descenders are reduced to a minimum. There is a stark contrast with the section written by Björn Þorleifsson’s half-brother, Þorsteinn, whose profusion of cursive elements appears almost whimsical. Both hands have been included in this study.

[48] **AM 529 4to, c1500–1550:** This manuscript is made of 62 Leaves and contains *Gibbons saga*, *Nítíða saga*, *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* and *Konráðs saga keisarasonar*. It is written by a single hand. Page (1960, xvi–xvii) describes the codex in its material aspects but does not comment on language and orthography.

[49] AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók*, 1525–1550: This manuscript is made of 133 leaves and contains various texts such as *Jónsbók*, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, legal documents, *Búalög*, and *Kristinn réttur Árna byskups*. Three scribal hands can be identified: hand 1 has written 1r–13v, 21r–85v, 89r–92v, and 112r–133v; hand 2 has written: 14r–20v and 92v–110v; and hand 3 has written 86r–88v and is dated to the seventeenth century. Only the first hand was taken into consideration for this study. Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (1994, 98) reports how the manuscript is dated to the first part of the sixteenth century and mentions how Stefán Karlsson told him *viva voce* that he suspected this text to originate in the north, as he found the same hand in a charter written in Hólar in 1526.

[50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjabólabók*, 1530–1550: This manuscript is made of 168 leaves and is a compilation of saint's lives and legends, partly a translation of the Low German *Dat Passionael*, partly based on the *Legenda aurea*, and further sources (for a study on the texts and their sources see Kalinke 1996). A diplomatic edition has appeared in two volumes, edited by Agnete Loth (1969–1970); the commissioner is identified as Björn Þorleifsson. The whole text was written by a single scribe, either Björn Þorleifsson or someone working for him (Loth 1969, ix). The same hand is to be found in a number of fragments and charters (Loth 1969–1970, xxi–xxix), though it is not clear whether it belongs to Björn himself or someone else. Björn lived in the period between 1471–1474 (see Loth 1969–1970, xxx) and 1548–1554. A conscious archaising effort can be detected, particularly as far as the palaeography is concerned. However, when it comes to language changes as reflected by orthographic ones, this manuscript truly reveals its younger age. It is therefore a good candidate when it comes to showing how the data provided by a text can be conflicting.

5. Selected changes in the script

5.1 Introduction

An internal classification of Icelandic script in the fifteenth century has so far not been undertaken, aside from general comments on the penetration of “cursive” character of the book script in this period. Seip (1954, 138), for example, observes: ‘The cursive script, which was first used in charters, influenced book script [in Iceland] as it did in Norway, giving it a new character.’⁸ It was noted by Björn K. Þórólfsson (2004, 22) that a fully-fledged cursive script did not become prevalent in Iceland until the Reformation, perhaps because of increased isolation due to the plague.

A look at charters from Stefán Karlsson’s *Íslandske originaldiplomer indtil 1450* (1963b) immediately shows the co-existence of several markedly different types of cursive script, which a dedicated study may reveal to possibly belong to different schools or scriptoria, perhaps influenced by different continental models. Such a study, however, is beyond the scope of this research.

This classification is potentially interesting, but this, along with the co-existence of various styles of documentary script at any given time, will not be valuable in dating the manuscripts, which is the primary goal of this study. Thus, we shall concentrate more on individual palaeographic features in the hope that they will yield more fruitful results.

For the present discussion (as mentioned in Chapter 2) it has been chosen to follow the distinction used by Italian scholars, such as Cencetti (1967, 52) and Petrucci (1989, 21–22), between the *ductus*, which is interpreted as the way the script as a whole is laid on the page (that is, rapidly and or cursively—*corsivo*—or slowly and more artfully—*posato*) and the *tratteggio*, which is the way a single letter is constructed by means of individual strokes and the direction in which they are executed. Though in English usage the word *ductus* is also used to indicate the sequence of strokes making up an individual letter, making such distinctions comes in handy when one is working with forms of

⁸ “Kursivskriften, som först ble brukt i diplomer, virket som i Norge også på bokskriften så den fikk en ny karakter.”

hybrid script, in which an overall *ductus posato* may coexist with some individual letter forms that are more typical of cursive scripts.

In what follows, the shape of three letters in the fifteenth-century corpus of manuscripts will be examined: the letter “a”, the tall “s” (“f”) and the round “r” (or *rotunda* “r”).

5.2 The shape of the letter “a”

The first palaeographic feature which will be taken into consideration for this enquiry is the shape of the letter “a”. In the corpus, three main variants can be distinguished which in what follows will be referred to as (1) the open-bow “a” or “a₁”, (2) the two-compartment “a” or “a₂”, and (3) the single-compartment “a” or “a₃”. Representative examples of these three variants are shown in *Figures 5.1–5.3*.⁹



Figure 5.1: Open-bow “a” (“a₁”).



Figure 5.2: Two-compartment
“a” (“a₂”).



Figure 5.3: Single-compartment
“a” (“a₃”).

The terminology in the scholarly literature concerning these letterforms is somewhat fluctuating and potentially confusing. The open-bow “a” (“a₁”), which is sometimes also called “a” with a bowl and a neck, consists of a vertical (although often quite left-leaning) stroke and a bowl which is roughly half as tall as the vertical stroke with the top of the vertical stroke slanting leftward but not touching the bowl below, as shown in *Figure 5.1*. The two-compartment “a” (“a₂”), which is also called the two-storey “a” or box “a” in its squarer variety, represents a later variant of “a” in which the top of the vertical stroke continues downward, usually as a hairline, and joins the bowl, forming two closed compartments, as illustrated in *Figure 5.2*. The single-compartment “a” (“a₃”), sometimes called one-storey “a”, has a bowl which is as tall as the vertical stroke. The letter thus

⁹ Figures providing examples of palaeographic letterforms in this chapter were drawn by myself.

consists of two main strokes that are joined at the top without a neck, as can be seen in *Figure 5.3*.

The different shapes of the letter “a” have a rather complex history. The letterforms discussed in this chapter came into use and spread at different times in Icelandic script, and they had already been in use in different scribal traditions in Europe. Therefore, a chronology of the spread and use of the different types of “a” in Icelandic script does not reflect the genesis of these letter types in general but testifies to a change in style. To give an example, some forms of the single-compartment “a”, which was the latest of the three in Icelandic script, are derived from the open cursive minuscule type of Roman script (Battelli 1999, 90–91; Derolez 2003, 48). It can be found already, with a different *tratteggio*, in pre-Carolingian scripts, such as the insular script of the British Isles (Battelli 1999, 168), though that is not the source of its adoption in Icelandic scripts. In the Icelandic context, however, the three variants of the letter “a” studied in this chapter appear in a chronological succession in the history of the script; the open-bow “a” is the earliest one, followed by the two-compartment “a”, and the single-compartment “a” is the latest of the three.

After the political collapse of the Roman Empire in the West, there followed a period of scribal differentiation that mirrored somewhat the linguistic fragmentation of vulgar Latin into the various Romance languages. This trend was somewhat halted—during the reign of Charlemagne—by the influence and spread of the Carolingian minuscule script, seemingly developed initially in the abbey of Corbie, north of Paris. This script became predominant in the West and has been defined as ‘a graphic expression of the universalist Romano-Christian culture of the Holy Roman Empire and therefore deserves the name of Carolingian minuscule’ (Cencetti 1997, 152).¹⁰

The open-bow “a” or “a₁”, cf. *Figure 5.1*, has its origin in the uncial script, and this letterform supplanted several others which had been in use in pre-Carolingian times, as those (often one-storey, either open or closed) could be misread as sequences of “cc”, “ct” or even “u” (Derolez 2003, 49). This is the standard form of “a” in the Carolingian script,

¹⁰ “espressione grafica della cultura romano-cristiana universalistica del Sacro romano impero, e non demerita perciò il nome di minuscola carolina” (Cencetti 1997, 166).

and subsequently of the Gothic script, which is an evolution and stylisation of the Carolingian, albeit without a clear turning; Cencetti (1997, 166) calls it *unità scrittoria carolino-gotica* ‘Carolingian-Gothic scribal unity’. With the transition from Carolingian to Gothic Textualis, the back of this letter, originally somewhat diagonal, became increasingly vertical.

The two-compartment “a” or “a₂”, cf. *Figure 5.2*, is a later development which began in the thirteenth century when the neck extended to the left bending down until it connected with the bowl (Derolez 2003, 84). Gradually, the loop so formed was lengthened until it eventually touched the lower bow, thus producing two closed compartments. This became the most common letter form in Northern Textualis in the thirteenth century. A variant of this form, called box “a”, consists of two vertical lines connected at the top and bottom, and divided in the middle by a horizontal stroke. It can be observed in some Icelandic hands such as Magnús Þórhallsson’s, the second scribe of GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (1387–1395), as will be discussed below. The distinction between these two forms is often unclear (Derolez 2003, 84), but their distribution in European manuscripts seems to have, at least in some cases, adhered to a set of rules which have been described by Oeser (1971) and summarised by Derolez (2003, 85–87). Whether these rules were observed by any Icelandic scribe, though beyond the scope of this research, may be an interesting subject to study as it may be useful in both scribal identification and the identification of scribal schools.

The single-compartment “a” or “a₃”, cf. *Figure 5.3*, is considered a defining element of the later cursive script, the *Cursiva recentior* in the system devised by Derolez (2003, 130, 142). It is the result of a simplified *tratteggio*, requiring only two strokes or even one. It appeared already in earlier scripts, such as the Anglo-Saxon minuscule or the Semitextualis from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Occasionally, though, it is impossible to decide from its shape whether the scribe had in mind a single-compartment “a” or an open-bow “a” whose upper section is so underdeveloped to be almost undiscernible (Derolez 2003, 118).

The story of these letterforms in Icelandic, as can be traced in several volumes on the topic of palaeography in Nordic manuscripts, can be summarised with the following points:

Seip (1954, 14) writes that the symbol for “a” in the oldest Norwegian manuscripts is not the insular “a” without a neck, but rather the Carolingian “a” which was used in Anglo-Norman script in the twelfth century.¹¹ He also notes that, in the oldest Icelandic manuscripts, “a” is of the Anglo-Norman type with a “neck”, although the neck is often shorter than in the older Norwegian scripts and represents surely an older form. Seip notes (1954, 48) that the “a” without a neck appears occasionally in the earlier Icelandic manuscripts. In his chapter on the Icelandic script after 1300, he (1954, 138) explains further that, earlier in the fourteenth century, the open-bow “a” is the most common letterform in many Icelandic manuscripts, similarly to what can be observed in Norwegian ones, while in others the two-compartment “a” dominates. In the second half of the fourteenth century, he further remarks that two-compartment “a” became almost universal, supplanting the open-bow “a” altogether by the end of the fourteenth century, while the top compartment began to disappear at the end of the fifteenth.

Hreinn Benediktsson (1965, 45) states that the “a” used in the earliest Icelandic writing was the Carolingian “a” — “with the vertical rising above the bowl and forming a bow to the left”; it was not, he observes, the insular “a” without the neck which is similar to a modern cursive “a”. Hreinn Benediktsson (1965) further notes that the height of the neck varied somewhat and could even be reduced to the point of almost disappearing. The letter became more angular in the second half of the thirteenth century, and gradually the bow was extended down to join the bowl, resulting in two closed compartments, the so-called two-compartment “a”. This change, Hreinn observes, did not affect the ligature “æ”.

In charters from the thirteenth century through to around 1450, published by Stefán Karlsson in his 1963 *Íslandske originaldiplomer indtil 1450*, the single-compartment “a” can be found in the documentary script as early as 1302 in a letter written by an Icelandic scribe in Norway and about Norwegian matters. It does not, however, appear in most of the documents included in Stefán’s edition where the two-compartment “a” is more frequent. This edition, it should be remembered, only covers the period up to

¹¹ “[t]egnet for a er i de elste no. håndskrifter ikke insulær a uten hals, men karolingisk a som ble brukt i anglonormannisk skrift i 12. årh.”

1450, therefore leaving out the second half of the century. Stefán Karlsson (2002, 836) states that the Carolingian open-bow “a” predominated in the thirteenth century, but the two-compartment “a” appeared sporadically in the second half of the century and prevailed in the fourteenth century. The single-compartment “a”, Stefán declares, started appearing first in charters before the middle of the fourteenth century. Spehr (1929, 116), who is mostly concerned with the earlier period, notes that the two-compartment “a” is the prevalent form in the fifteenth century.

Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (2005, 260) affirms that the open-bow (or open-necked) “a” is the dominant form in Icelandic thirteenth-century script while the relative size of the bow and the neck differ considerably. In the second half of the century, the two compartment “a” entered the scene and became the dominant form in fourteenth-century script. The single-compartment “a”, Guðvarður argues, appeared in the fourteenth century, first in documents already before the middle of the fourteenth century, later to enter semi-cursive book script where it was used to some extent.

There seems thus to be a general consensus in the scholarly literature that the open-bow “a”, inherited from the Carolingian minuscule and adapted to the esthetical canon of Textualis script, gradually evolved into the two-compartment “a”. It could even reach a more angular shape, referred to as box “a” (Derolez 2006, 84), which, with its two vertical strokes, may perhaps have been perceived as more fitted to the rigid succession of vertical strokes typical of the Textualis. This letter form, as already mentioned, can be seen clearly in Icelandic script in GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, particularly in the work of the second scribe, Magnús Þórhallsson (see below). It is, however, somewhat laborious in its *tratteggio* and was therefore not the preferred type in documentary scripts where the single-compartment “a” was preferred, probably because it could be traced with two simple and swift strokes. Over the fifteenth century, the book script apparently began to converge with the documentary script. The single-compartment “a” naturally gained currency as part of this process until it ultimately supplanted the other types of “a”.

In this study, the shape of the letter “a” in the corpus of fifty scribal hands from the “long” fifteenth century was examined, categorizing each token into one of the three main types, (1) open-bow “a”, (2) two-compartment “a”, and (3) single-compartment “a”.

A sample of around 150 tokens (see *Table 5.1*) was gathered from the work of each of the fifty scribes in three separate sets, one at the beginning of the work, a second set in the middle, and a third set towards the end. An overview of the findings is presented in *Table 5.1* where, for reasons of space, the three variants are referred to as “a₁”, “a₂”, and “a₃”, respectively. In gathering the data, capitals, initials and other enlarged letters were ignored as their execution is somewhat different due to their often decorative nature, and they were often consciously traced with a distinctive shape. Thus, a capital open-bow “a” in a text which uses exclusively the one-compartment “a” is not to be taken as an example of palaeographic oscillation.

In *Table 5.1*, the highest value for each scribal hand has been highlighted to increase readability; 100% value with yellow and, in the case of a mixed usage, the highest value is shown in blue. Based on these data, some main generalizations can be made:

- Most of the scribes examined have *one type* of “a”; deviations, going down to 99%, 98% or 96%, seem insignificant.
- 34 out of 50 hands examined, that is 68% of the corpus, have the two-compartment “a₂” as the sole “a” type.
- The open-bow “a₁” predominates in only four hands in the corpus. Only one out of 50 has the open-bow “a₁” as their sole “a” type: [2] AM 230 fol. (100%). This letterform also has a strong presence in [38] AM 309 4to (87%) and [5] Holm perg. 16, *Helgastaðabók* (59%).
- Five or six scribes out of 50 can be considered innovative as they show the “new” single-compartment “a₃” as their sole “a” type: [13] AM 225 fol. (100%), [25] AM 243 a fol. (100%), [29] AM 586 4to, scribe 1 (100%), [31] AM 533 4to, scribe 1, and [44] AM 434 a 12mo (100%). In addition, [22] AM 534 4to should probably also be included, having 97% single-compartment “a₃”.

Table 5.1: The distribution of three different variants of the letter “a”.

No.	Shelf mark	Date	<i>n</i>	“a ₁ ”	“a ₂ ”	“a ₃ ”
1	AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350–1375	150	0%	100%	0%
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350–1400	150	100%	0%	0%
3	AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360–1400	150	0%	100%	0%
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370–1380	150	0%	100%	0%
5	Holm perg. 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375–1400	100	59%	41%	0%
6	Holm perg. 19 4to	c1375–1400	150	0%	100%	0%
7	AM 194 8vo	1387	150	0%	100%	0%
8	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387–1395	150	13%	87%	0%
9	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387–1395	150	0%	100%	0%
10	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400	300	0%	50%	50%
11	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400	150	0%	100%	0%
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400	150	13%	87%	0%
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400	150	0%	0%	100%
14	AM 561 4to	c1400	150	0%	100%	0%
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404–1420	150	0%	100%	0%
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420	150	0%	100%	0%
17	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400–1450	150	0%	100%	0%
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	150	96%	4%	0%
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	150	0%	100%	0%
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	150	0%	100%	0%
21	AM 151 4to (1)	c1450	150	0%	100%	0%
22	AM 534 4to	c1400–1500	150	2%	1%	97%
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	150	0%	100%	0%
24	AM 430 12mo	c1400–1500	150	0%	100%	0%
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475	150	0%	0%	100%
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450–1475	150	0%	100%	0%
27	AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450–1500	300	7%	93%	0%
28	Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500	150	0%	100%	0%
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	150	0%	0%	100%
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450–1500	150	2%	3%	95%
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	150	0%	0%	100%
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500	150	0%	100%	0%
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	150	0%	100%	0%
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	150	0%	100%	0%
35	AM 556 a 4to, <i>Eggertsbók</i>	c1475–1500	150	0%	100%	0%
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	300	15%	4%	81%
37	AM 159 4to	c1480–1500	150	0%	100%	0%
38	AM 309 4to, <i>Bæjarbók i Flóa</i>	1498	150	87%	13%	0%
39	AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubæjarbók</i>	c1500	150	0%	100%	0%
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	150	0%	100%	0%
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	150	0%	100%	0%
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500	150	0%	100%	0%
43	AM 152 4to	c1500	150	0%	100%	0%
44	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (1)	c1500	150	0%	0%	100%
45	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500	150	1%	99%	0%
46	AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500–1525	150	0%	100%	0%
47	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500–1525	150	0%	100%	0%
48	AM 529 4to	c1500–1550	150	0%	100%	0%
49	AM 147 4to <i>Heynesbók</i>	c1525–1550	150	0%	100%	0%
50	Holm perg. 3 fol., <i>Reykjabólabók</i>	c1530–1540	150	0%	100%	0%

Nine hands show more than one variant:

- [18] AM 489 II 4to has 96% open-bow “a₁”, together with 4% of two-compartment “a₂”.
- [5] Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók*, scribe A, who has 59% open-bow “a₁” and 41% two-compartment “a₂”. The distribution appears to be random.
- [8] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, scribe 1, Jón Þórðarson, with 87% two-compartment “a₂” and 13% open-bow “a₁”. The older open-bow form appears occasionally without any apparent logic and may perhaps be attributed to the influence of an earlier exemplar. His colleague and collaborator on GKS 1005 fol., Magnús Þórhallsson, by contrast, uses the younger two-compartment “a₂” consistently throughout the parts sampled.
- [10] AM 354 fol., *Skálholtsbók yngri*, has an equal split in the sample between two-compartment and single-compartment “a₃”. The distribution appears to be random.
- [12] AM 231 I fol. has 13% open-bow “a₁” and 87% two-compartment “a₂”. The distribution appears to be random.
- [38] AM 309 4to, *Bæjarbók úr Flóa*, has 87% open-bow “a₁” and 13% two-compartment “a₂”. The distribution appears to be random.

Only three scribes seem to use three types to some extent. All three can be characterised as innovative scribes, using the new single-compartment “a” most of the time, while the other types only appear sporadically and can probably be attributed to the influence of an earlier exemplar:

- [36] AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to has 15% open-bow “a₁”, 4% two-compartment “a₂”, but the new single-compartment “a₃” is his principal type, occurring 82% of the time in the sections sampled.
- [22] AM 534 4to features mainly the new single-compartment “a₃”, 97%, but at the same time there are sporadic occurrences of the open-bow “a₁”, 2%, and the two-compartment “a₂”, 1%.

- [30] AM 586 4to, scribe 2, uses primarily the new single-compartment “a₃” or 95% of the time in the parts sampled, but there are also 2% open-bow “a₁” and 3% two-compartment “a₂”.

The open-bow “a”, which *a priori* could be regarded as a relic feature in this period, is found in several hands but predominates only in four hands out of fifty. These are in the first half of the period, save for [38] AM 309 4to, *Bæjarbók í Flóa* (1498) which could represent the tail-end of the use of the open-bow “a”. On the other end of the spectrum are the more innovative scribes using almost exclusively the “newer” one-compartment “a”. These are not only in the second half of the period under examination but instead they are distributed through the stretch of the corpus.

It is clear that the two-compartment “a” is predominant throughout the period examined. This raises questions. It seems, then, that the shape of the letter “a” is quite individualistic. Why, for instance, do four of the scribes, [2] AM 230 fol. (100%), [18] AM 489 II 4to (96%), [38] AM 309 4to (87%), and [5] Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók* (59%), prefer the open-bow variety? Could this be attributed to influence from old(er) exemplars? Two of the manuscripts, [2] AM 230 fol. and [5] Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók*, are dated to the end of the fourteenth century and may have been among the last regular practitioners of this script. [18] AM 489 II 4to, on the other hand is dated to the middle of the fifteenth century and is thus more of an outlier, and [38] AM 309 4to, dated 1498, stands even more out from his contemporaries with 87% open-bow “a”. Similarly, what justifies the choice of the (few) scribes preferring the single-compartment “a”? Are these scribes more accustomed to documents? Are these hands related in any way? Or are they simply less conservative than the others, following a general cursive tendency in book script?

While these questions may never be satisfactorily answered, the data collected here suggests that the two-compartment “a” appears to be the preferred letter form in the period studied, while the other two appear as clear exceptions.

Interestingly, Jón Þórðarson [8], the first scribe of GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, appears more formal and conservative than his colleague Magnús Þórhallsson [9], writing the old open-bow “a” 13% of the time. His use of the open-bow “a” appears evenly

throughout the samples without any identifiable conditioning environment. Magnús, by contrast, used exclusively the two-compartment “a” of the “box” type.

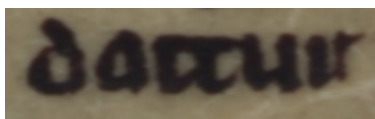


Figure 5.4: “dottur” in GKS 1005 fol. *Flateyjarbók*, Jón Þórðarson.

[38] AM 309 4to, *Bæjarbók í Flóa*, despite being written towards the end of the fifteenth century (1498), has 87% open-bow “a”. Parts of AM 309 4to have been shown to be a direct copy of GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, which was in the possession of Jón kollur Oddsson, the presumed scribe of AM 309 4to (see discussion in Chapter 4 for further details on his identification). The scribe of AM 309 4to thus had access to the then one-hundred-years-old *Flateyjarbók* and could have been influenced by its script and formatting. In fact, the scribe of AM 309 4to goes to some length to imitate *Flateyjarbók*, particularly in the style of the initials (Kwon 2017, 45–50). In the case of the shape of “a” in particular there cannot have been any significant influence from the old *Flateyjarbók* because the old open-bow “a” preferred by the scribe of AM 309 4to only appears sporadically in the script of Jón Þórðarson (13%) and not at all in the script of Magnús Þórhallsson.

The resilience of open-bow “a” in later texts is interesting. Its *tratteggio* is uneconomical if compared to that of the single-compartment version, and this is at odds with the general tendency towards “cursivisation” which we find throughout this century, for example in the spread of a new type of “s”. As shall be seen in Chapter 5.3 below, the younger, cursive, form of tall “s”, descending below the baseline, was very swiftly adopted in the early fifteenth century. The shape of “a” does not follow this trend. One possible explanation is that this form of “a” with an open bow was considered a good compromise between the need for formality and that for efficiency. Another possible explanation is that with a more rigid and composite ductus, with a marked parallelism of the axes, the single compartment “a” can often look too similar to an “o”, for instance the “o” seen in Figure 5.4.

In the hand of [36] AM 687 a 4to + AM 688c 4to, a discernible pattern for the distribution of the different shapes of “a” was not found, despite the fact that this scribe

uses all three forms of it. These can appear in all position (that is word-initially, internally and finally), therefore lacking a discernible distribution which could indicate whether younger letterforms imposed themselves first in particular environments. This does not seem to be the case, and the change from one letterform to the other seems arbitrary. The *tratteggio* of the “a₁” in this hand is very similar to that of Jón *kollur* Oddsson in AM 309 4to, but the variation level is high throughout the text. The predominant type is in fact the “a₃” found in 82% of the sampled text. It looks as if this manuscript, AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to, was written down discontinuously, and the scribe seems to have changed his mind on several occasions when it comes to aesthetic choices. The script is larger and with less loops and bows on 1r, but it shrinks drastically on the second half of 2v. The parallelism of the vertical strokes remains marked throughout, but the distribution of cursive features seems to vary whimsically, almost as if the scribe could not make his mind up on what degree of formality his text should have, although the preference for a more documentary-influenced text appears obvious by the frequency of the cursive elements such as the loops and the single-compartment “a”. This is, of course, a late-fifteenth-century text.

It is quite evident that even the younger manuscripts, almost all from [39] to [50], with only a couple of exceptions found in AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* and AM 152 4to (where “a₃” is used), are characterised by a rigorous use of the two-compartment “a₂”, and in this respect, a consideration should be made: it is not impossible that the different shapes of “a” may have been in use in different palaeographic schools or milieus, rather than being simply two variants existing side by side and divided (at least initially) by a line of formality. Unlike the case of the round “r”, which will be analysed in Chapter 5.4, the distribution of the different forms of “a” is quite rigid, and only a few scribes make use of more than one type in the same text. The difference in training may explain the sharp contrast between the two scribes of [44]–[45] AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver*, rather than a more “formal” intent in the second scribe. In fact, the intended purpose of the book must have been equally clear to both scribes, and from a strictly mechanical point of view it would have been simpler for the second scribe to follow the first in using single compartment “a”, unless he had been trained to use the two-compartment “a”.

A similar explanation could be also provided concerning [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*. In this case, however, other factors may have come into play, and it seems important to consider the social and family background of the commissioner of *Reykjahólabók*. Björn Þorleifsson was a prominent figure of his time belonging to the *Skarð-verjar* family from west Iceland, who owned the magnificent GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (Louis-Jensen 1969, 235–246). It is conceivable that the example provided by such a splendid manuscript book, coupled with an intention to convey prestige and solemnity through his personal library, may have had an impact on the overall appearance of Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*. The two-compartment “a”, which predominates in the script in GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, may have been perceived as more formal and/or elegant than the later single-compartment “a”, which may have been associated with documentary script. It is unclear to what extent the old open-bow “a” would have been considered, as it was probably rarely seen at that time.

Two hands from the corpus examined, namely [44] AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* hand 1, or that of [42] AM 435 12mo, present an orthographic peculiarity which combines these two palaeographic variants. To denote the etymologically long vowel *á* and distinguish it orthographically from its etymological short counterpart *a*, the scribe uses a ligature consisting of two instances of the letter “a”, namely “aa”, to denote *á*. Interestingly, though, they use two different variants of the letter “a” in these sequences. The former uses the combination of a single-compartment “a” and a two-compartment “a” while the latter does it in the reverse order, two-compartment “a” followed by a single-compartment “a”. The first element of the ligature corresponds to the preferred symbol for “a” by either scribe. The scribe of [44] AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* hand 1, prefers the single-compartment “a” and uses this as the first element of the ligature, while the scribe of [42] AM 435 12mo uses the two-compartment “a”, which also constitutes the first part of the ligature he uses to denote *á*.

It is rather noticeable how many scribes display a great coherence in their choice of this letter form; that is, most of them make a choice and stick to it. This is thus different to what we see in the distribution of the round “r”, discussed in Chapter 5.4 below, where it is rather common that either form of “r” be used after any letter. The oscillation between forms in most scribes is minimal: only [10] AM 354 fol., *Skálholtsbók yngri*, and

[5] Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók*, show an oscillation of 50/50% and 59/41%, respectively, while all the others have a very clearly dominant form and rare or very rare deviations.

The co-existence of different forms in the minority of texts that exhibit it can be explained in two different ways:

- A degree of influence from the exemplar, conflicting with the scribe's practice.
- An intra-scribal variation deriving from multiple sources (education, unconscious habits, changing personal taste, later influence from other people's handwriting, conscious choices conflicting with one's own automatic/unconscious practice etc.).

This analysis shows that the shape of “a” is not a useful criterion to date texts from the “long” fifteenth century. The data collected in this study does not apparently indicate that the single-compartment “a” became increasingly dominant in book script in the course of the fifteenth century, particularly given how the latest manuscripts in this corpus and nine out of the last ten show almost invariably a preference for a two compartment “a”, but it does make some sporadic appearances. Thus, it can be said that the dominant script as it emerges from the corpus studied, is a hybrid script. As mentioned, it is precisely the single-compartment “a” to constitute the most important defining element of the later cursive script, that is, the *Cursiva recentior* in the system devised by Derolez (2003, 130, 142), and the rare occurrence of this letter form in the “long” fifteenth century indicated that the transition to a fully cursive script as the one seen in charter was far from being completed even by the end of the period studied.

5.3 *The shape of the tall “s”*

The shape of the “tall” (also known as the “straight” or “long”) “s” (“f”) is the subject of this chapter. Even before the emergence of what is now known as Gothic script, a binary system had developed for the use of “s” (Derolez 2003, 92): half-uncial straight “f” was most commonly used word-initially and medially while uncial round “s” was used word-finally. In Lieftinck's classification system, as refined by Derolez (2003, 125), a defining feature of a cursive script is the presence of descenders in the letter “f” and “s”. This is

only partly applicable to Icelandic script, since the insular variety of “f”, namely “f̃” or “ƿ”, had been the only type used in the vernacular, while the Caroline “f” was confined to foreign words and texts in Latin from the early thirteenth century onwards (Stefán Karlsson 2002, 836). The tall “s” variant descending below the base line gradually gained ground at the expense of the tall “s” standing on the line over the course of the period examined. The objective of this chapter is to trace this development in fifteenth-century manuscripts and provide an overview of the change. The macro-palaeographic varieties that will be examined are thus (1) the tall “s” standing on the base line, “f̃”, or “s₁”, as illustrated in *Figure 5.5*, and (2) the tall “s” with a descender, “f̃”, or “s₂”, shown in *Figure 5.6*.



Figure 5.5: Tall “s” standing on the line.



Figure 5.6: Tall “s” extending below the line

These two forms were used in a chronological succession, as the tall “s” was originally typically above the base line, sometimes with a foot. Over time it began extending below the base line, often with a left curve below the base line. The spread in the use of the tall “s” descending below the baseline (the younger form) can be explained with the fact that interrupting the stroke precisely at the baseline, and perhaps even adding a foot to it, requires more effort than letting the pen slip somewhat further below the line before eventually lifting it. The development may have also followed a change in taste which was increasingly favouring the introduction of cursive elements in the Gothic script, including loops and curls added for aesthetic reasons.

Seip (1954, 18, 54) states that in the earliest Norwegian and Icelandic scripts in the twelfth century to around 1225, the tall “s” typically stands on the line (the earlier type) although sporadic instances of it descending below the line can be found (the younger type). From around 1225 to around 1300, Seip (1954, 74, 94) continues, the earlier type predominates alongside occasional instances of the younger type. According to Seip (1954, 120, 140), the earlier type was predominant in both Norwegian and Icelandic book

script throughout the fourteenth century, while the younger type slowly gained ground, spreading from documentary script. Around 1400, he states, the younger type prevailed in both Norwegian and Icelandic book script. Spehr (1929, 70-73) does not address this but focusses on describing the different uses of the tall “s” and of the round “s”, the latter being favoured in abbreviations for reasons of space.

Hreinn Benediktsson (1965, 49) notes that in the earliest Icelandic script in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there are two main variants of “s”, one being the round “s”, the other being the tall “s” (which he calls long “s”). The first is only used sporadically; the latter is by far the most common. He notes that there exist two variants of the tall “s”, one which stands on the baseline and a younger one which extends below it, but he does not make any statements regarding the frequency of each of the two variants.

Stefán Karlsson (2002, 837) states that the tall “s” was used almost exclusively down to 1300, after which the round “s”, initially largely confined to abbreviations, became used in word-initial or word-final position, while the tall “s” remained dominant (cf. also Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2005, 259). From around the middle of the thirteenth century, Stefán adds, the tall “s” extended below the line in some hands and became predominant in the fourteenth century, except for very formal script.

Some micro-palaeographic variants, including loops, thicker ascenders, or other comparable details, may be useful in the identification of hands that appear quite similar, but these features could not be included in the present study. For this research, the fifty scribal hands from the “long” fifteenth century were examined with the aim of gauging the use of the two macro-types of tall “s”, the older type standing on the baseline, “s₁”, and the younger type “s₂”. A total of 150 tokens were gathered in the work of each of the fifty scribes, divided into three equally large sets, one from the beginning of the scribe’s work, another from the middle, and the third from the last part of his work. An overview of the findings is presented in *Table 5.2*. In the table, the highest value for each scribe has been highlighted; 100% value is yellow and the highest value below 100% is blue. Occasionally, it can be problematic to decide whether a tall “s” is standing on the baseline or descending under it as the descender can be very short, but an effort was made to objectively classify all tokens.

Table 5.2: The distribution of two different variants of the tall “s”.

No.	Shelf mark	Date	<i>n</i>	“s ₁ ”	“s ₂ ”
1	AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350–1375	150	0%	100%
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350–1400	150	100%	0%
3	AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360–1400	150	100%	0%
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370–1380	150	100%	0%
5	Holm perg. 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375–1400	150	100%	0%
6	Holm perg. 19 4to	c1375–1400	150	100%	0%
7	AM 194 8vo	1387	150	0%	100%
8	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387–1395	150	100%	0%
9	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387–1395	150	100%	0%
10	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400	150	100%	0%
11	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400	150	100%	0%
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400	150	100%	0%
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400	150	0%	100%
14	AM 561 4to	c1400	150	33%	67%
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404–1420	148	0%	100%
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420	150	0%	100%
17	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokinskinna</i>	c1400–1450	150	0%	100%
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	150	0%	100%
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	150	0%	100%
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	150	32%	68%
21	AM 151 4to (1)	c1450	150	85%	15%
22	AM 534 4to	c1400–1500	212	47%	53%
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	150	100%	0%
24	AM 430 12mo	c1400–1500	150	0%	100%
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475	150	0%	100%
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450–1475	150	0%	100%
27	AM 471 4to + AM 489 I 4to	c1450–1500	150	0%	100%
28	Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500	150	94%	6%
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	150	0%	100%
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450–1500	150	0%	100%
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	150	0%	100%
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500	150	0%	100%
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	150	0%	100%
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	150	0%	100%
35	AM 556 a 4to, <i>Eggertsbók</i>	c1475–1500	150	0%	100%
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	300	0%	100%
37	AM 159 4to	c1480–1500	150	0%	100%
38	AM 309 4to, <i>Bæjarbók í Flóa</i>	1498	150	0%	100%
39	AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubæjarbók</i>	c1500	150	0%	100%
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	150	0%	100%
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	150	0%	100%
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500	150	0%	100%
43	AM 152 4to	c1500	150	59%	41%
44	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (1)	c1500	150	0%	100%
45	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500	150	0%	100%
46	AM 152 fol. (1)	c1500–1525	150	0%	100%
47	AM 152 fol. (2)	c1500–1525	150	33%	67%
48	AM 529 4to	c1500–1550	150	0%	100%
49	AM 147 4to, <i>Heynesbók</i>	c1525–1550	150	0%	100%
50	Holm perg. 3 fol., <i>Reykjabólubók</i>	c1530–1540	150	100%	0%

As can be seen in *Table 5.2*, there is a relatively clear break around 1400 in this corpus: the tall “s” descending below the line, the “s₂”, becomes predominant and replaces the earlier variety of tall “s”, the “s₁” with relatively few exceptions. The tall “s” standing on the baseline seems, in other words, to give way rather rapidly to the younger form descending below the base line with relatively few scribes showing a mixed practice. A possible explanation for the success of the tall “s” extending below the line may be attributed to the fact that in a swifter and more cursive writing, it can be executed more rapidly than the “s” standing on the line (which, without a medial stroke protruding to the left, is easily confused with “l”).

The only scribe remaining fully committed to the old “s” (“s₁”) after 1400 is [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, from c1530–1540 with 100% “s₁” in the sections sampled, while [28] Holm perg. 1 4to, from c1450–1500, has a strong preference for it with 94% “s₁”, as well as [21] AM 151 4to (1), from c1450 with 85% “s₁”. [23] AM 432 12mo, instead, while retaining “s₁”, is dated broadly to the fifteenth century, and it may well belong earlier in the period than in its position in the list suggests.

In addition to these, only five other scribes in the corpus use both “s₁” and “s₂”. One shows a preference for the older “s₁”, namely [43] AM 152 4to, from c1500 (59% “s₁”). The remaining four scribes all lean more towards the younger “s₂”: [14] AM 561 4to, from c1400 (33% “s₁”), [20] GKS 2845 4to (2), from c1450 (32% “s₁”), [22] AM 534 4to, from c1400–1500 (47% “s₁”), and [47] AM 152 fol. (2), from c1500–1525 (33% “s₁”). In this corpus of fifty scribes, only seven have a mixed practice when it comes to the use of the tall “s”; the remaining 43 scribes use only one type of tall “s” in the sections sampled.

Looking at the earliest part of the corpus, [1] AM 66 fol., *Hulda*, from c1350–1375, and [7] AM 194 8vo, from 1387, are innovative compared to their peers at the end of the fourteenth century, both using only the younger “s₂” extending below the line. The scribe of AM 66 fol., *Hulda*, also uses other cursive features, such as loops and curls on the ascenders of letters such as “k” and “h”, and on nasal bars, while the overall script is quite pronouncedly angular Gothic and displays the “a₂” (two-compartment type), classified as *hybrida*. AM 194 8vo is a shorter text with an unassuming appearance, and its script is quite crammed on the pages, giving the impression of having been written swiftly. This suggests that there may be at least a couple of reasons behind the choice of

a particular letterform: on the one hand, personal taste, and, on the other hand, swift-ness; same result but different motivations. One may wonder if the scribes of AM 66 fol., *Hulda*, and AM 194 8vo, were perhaps accustomed to documentary script and therefore ahead of the curve in the book script. Interestingly, though, these two scribes were not particularly innovative in their choice of the form of the letter “a”, both using only the two-compartment “a” (“a₂”), as discussed in Chapter 5.2 above.

In this corpus, the turning point when the younger “s₂” takes over comes around 1400, starting with [13] AM 225 fol., which is indeed dated to around 1400. After this date, the tall “s” overwhelmingly has a descender which means that, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, its presence can be considered a good indicator of a date of writing after 1400.

In some hands, it can be difficult to distinguish between the two types. In [26] AM 151 4to, the difference between the tall “s” standing on the baseline and descending below it is almost negligible. There are very few instances where the “s” unequivocally extends below the baseline; typically, it is quite debatable whether it was meant to stand on it or to descend below it. The overall appearance of the script does, however, not strike as particularly archaising, and some loops and curls typical of hybrid or cursive script can be observed. Some examples from fol. 5r and 5v are shown in *Figures 5.7* and *5.8*.

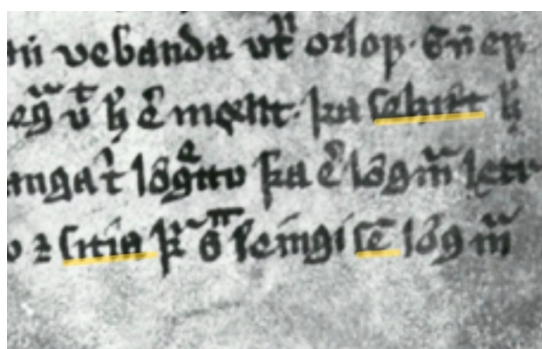


Figure 5.7: [21] AM 151 4to: tall “s” standing on the baseline, fol. 5v.

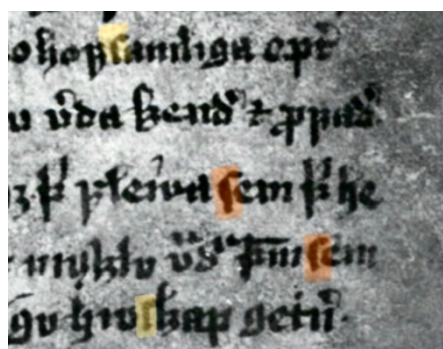


Figure 5.8: [21] AM 151 4to: tall “s” descending below the line, fol. 5r.

Conversely, there is one hand, [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók* that shows no instance of the younger form. It is likely that this outlier in the later period is the consequence of either an archaising effort or the result of an effort to confer the text a more solemn and formal character, at least in this respect. It is also possible that both factors

have played a role: [21] AM 151 4to (1) is also somewhat conservative in character when it comes to the shape of “a” and the distribution of “r” rotunda, as it shall be shown in Chapter 5.4.

[50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, dated to c1530–1540, stands out in its consistent use of the old “s₁” at this late date. The character of this text was intended to be imposing and elegant, as can be inferred from the *mise-en-page* in two columns, and one wonders whether this conservative use of “s” is also a reflection of such aesthetic choice. This may explain the choice of the tall “s” standing on the baseline. In general, there appears to be a kind of archaising effort at play in the script of Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, and the shape of “s” is one of the manifestations of it. The other scribes that show a preference for the older letterform are [28] Holm perg. 1 4to, from c1450–1500 with 94% “s₁”, [21] AM 151 4to (1), from c1450 with 85% “s₁”, and [43] AM 152 4to, from c1500 with 59% “s₁”.

The scribe [28] Holm perg. 1 4to, from c1450–1500, with 94% “s₁” and 6% “s₂” used the two variants in essentially a complementary distribution. The tall “s” descending below the baseline was used before “k”, while its counterpart standing on the baseline was used elsewhere. Moreover, the tall “s” appearing before “k” is not as tall as it is elsewhere, as shown with some examples in *Figure 5.9* from fol. 100rb. This distribution, which appears unique to this hand in the corpus examined, was generally maintained throughout the sampling obtained. A possible interpretation would be that the scribe wanted to facilitate the reading by avoiding a fusion between the tall “s” and the ascender of the “k”, which may have looked too similar, at least at first glance, to the fusion between tall “s” and “t”, but it is also possible that it may have been a purely aesthetic choice.

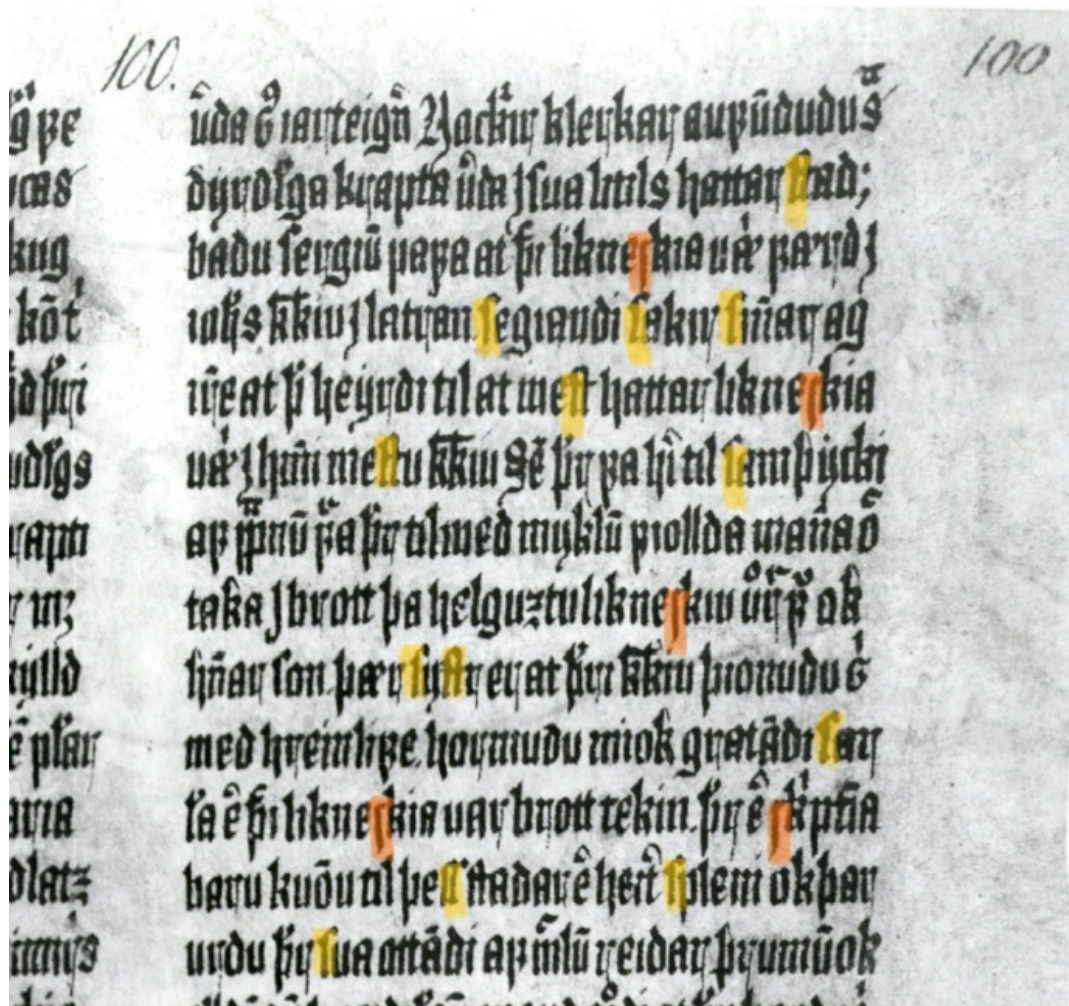


Figure 5.9: [28] Holm perg. 1 4to, from c1450–1500, fol. 100rb.

In the hand [43] AM 152 4to, from c1500, with 59% “s₁” and 41% “s₂”, the difference between tall “s” standing on or descending below the baseline is, as it was the case for [20] GKS 2845 4to (2), very slight and does not appear to have any identifiable distribution. This scribe could be more of a witness to how, at least when he wrote this text, he did not feel a particular urge to define this letterform in a clear way and may have settled (consciously or not) for some kind of compromise by making the two competing variants more alike. Compare the two instances from folio 42v shown in Figures 5.10 and 5.11.

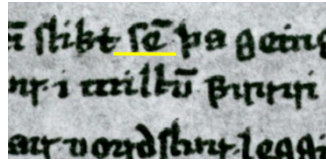


Figure 5.10: [43] AM 152 4to, from c1500;
“sem” fol. 53v1.

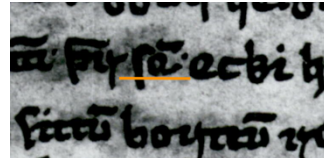


Figure 5.11: [43] AM 152 4to, from c1500;
“sem” fol. 120r5.

Aside from these outliers, a few hands presented an alternated use of the two letter forms. Those showing an oscillation between tall “s” standing on the baseline and tall “s” descending below the baseline are the following:

The scribe of [14] AM 561 4to, from c1400, is among those who have mixed practice, 33% “s₁” and 67% “s₂”. The script is quite uniform throughout, but around page 21r, around the middle of the text (which consists of 41 folios), it starts shifting, with few exceptions, from a tall “s” descending below the baseline to one standing on the baseline. This is quite remarkable in light of the fact that it cannot be explained with the fact that two texts written at separate times may have been collated together. In fact, the change happens in the middle of *Þorskrfirðinga saga*, right around the middle of the page, and with no evident change in pen, ink or style; then, it is rather the earlier part of the text that shows the younger form, while the latter part shows the more conservative one, which is then retained throughout the text.

It is difficult to envisage possible explanations other than either a change in personal taste or some kind of external pressure, perhaps motivated by the preference of the surrounding community of practice, whereby the scribe, who had been trained in a community where the tall “s” descending below the baseline was the preferred choice, had found himself in an environment in which the other form was the preferred one. The hand is rather conservative in its overall appearance for a fifteenth-century manuscript, and the scribe (or someone directing the scribe) may have decided that the older form was appropriate.

A change in the exemplar seems a less likely explanation, given how the shift between letterforms happens in the middle of a text, but it could also be that either part was copied from a defective exemplar that forced the scribe to resort to a different one

in order to finish his work. This is of course highly speculative. Figure 5.12 shows folio 21r, where the change seems to quite abruptly take place.

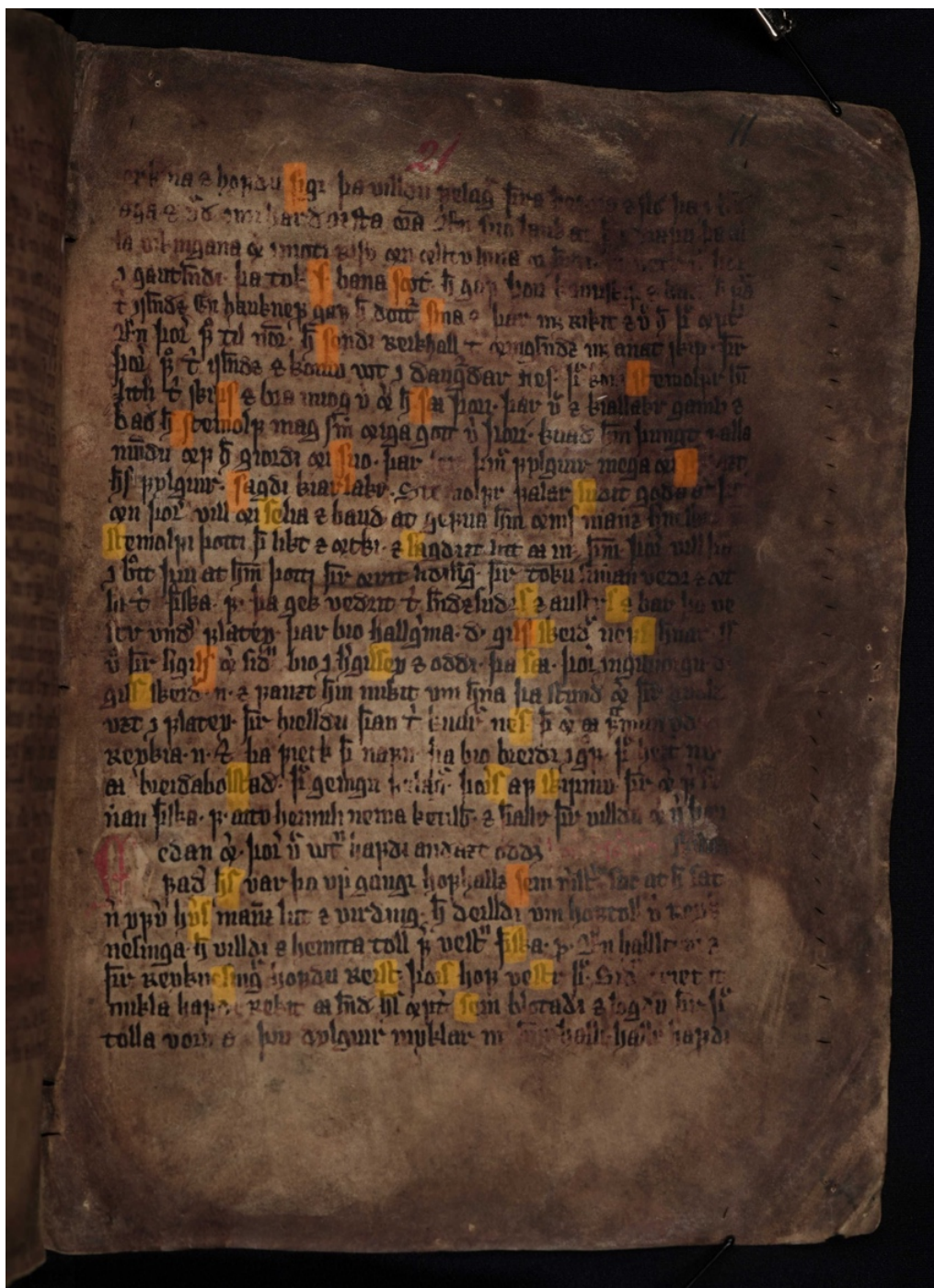


Figure 5.12: [14] AM 561 4to, from c1400, fol. 21r.

In [20] GKS 2845 4to (2), from c1450, the sampling yielded 32% “s₁” and 68% “s₂.” This scribe used the two variants interchangeably, before any vowel or consonant and without an obvious conditioning environment, but admittedly the difference between

the two forms is often rather slight, as seen in *Figure 5.13* from fol. 54r. The other hand analysed from this manuscript, [19] GKS 2845 4to (1), is completely consistent in the use of the younger form. It is, however, difficult to infer much from the differences between these two, as this is a manuscript with a very complex history, where multiple factors must inevitably concur in the individual differences between scribes, but in such a manner that it becomes difficult to reconstruct the genesis and motivation of these variations.

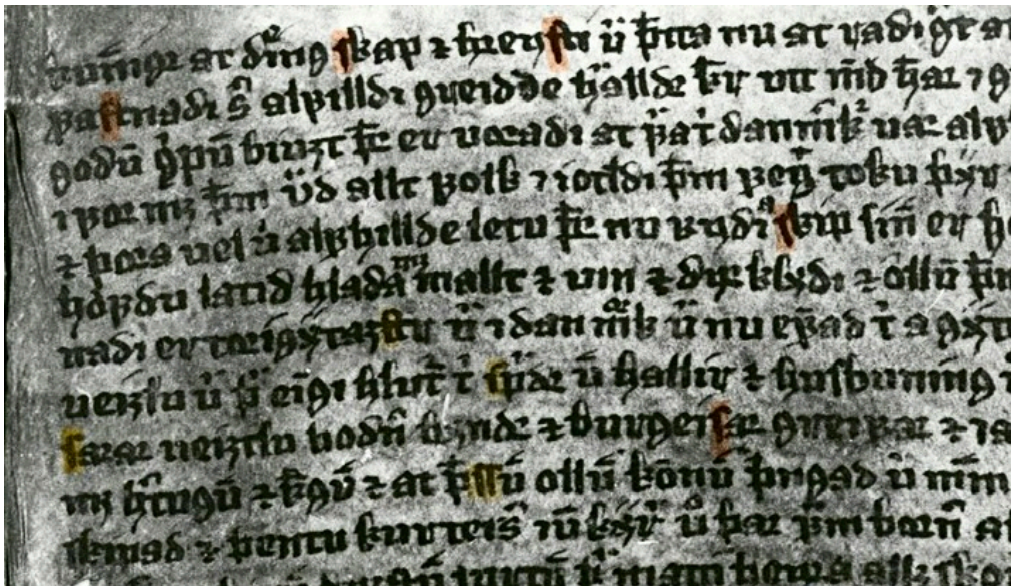


Figure 5.13: [20] GKS 2845 4to (2), from c1450, fol. 54r.

The scribe [22] AM 534 4to, from c1400–1500, with 47% “s₁” and 53% “s₂”, does not distinguish very clearly between the two letterforms, as shown in *Figure 5.14*, and both have a random distribution throughout the sample studied.

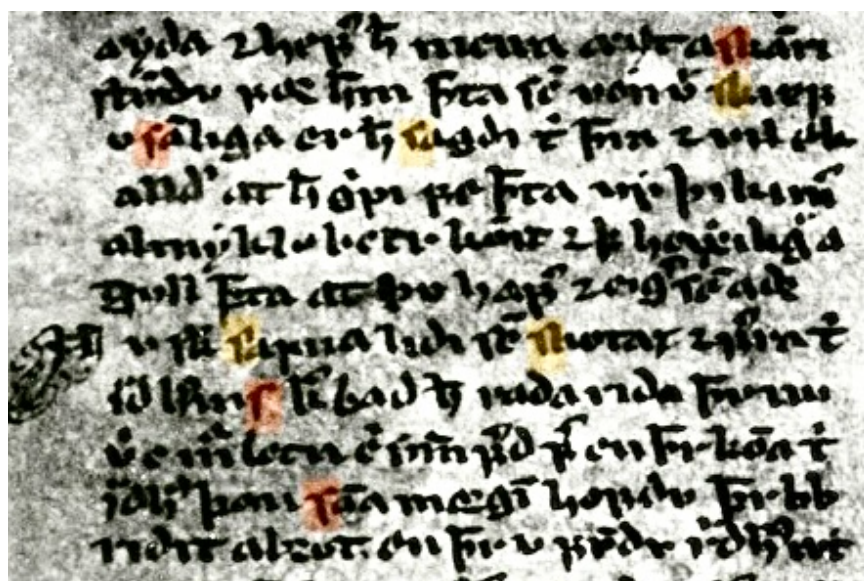


Figure 5.14: [22] AM 534 4to, from c1400–1500, fol. 5r.

In [47] AM 152 fol. (2), from c1500–1525, with 33% “s₁” and 67% “s₂”, the descenders are somewhat reduced, but clearly identifiable. The tall “s” standing on the baseline appears usually, but not exclusively, when it is connected to other letters, and it is clearly distinguished from its younger counterpart by the fact that it has a foot. As the work advances, around fol. 87, the scribe changes to the older form of tall “s” standing on the baseline, which he uses throughout. It is plausible that the reason behind this shift is the same behind the use of tall “s” standing on the baseline in Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*: the willingness to include archaising elements for aesthetic reasons. The other scribe of this manuscript, on the other hand, features a tall “s” descending below the baseline in quite a pronounced way, in keeping with the generally cursive character of his script. An example of the two forms in the work of the second scribe can be found on folio 82rb, where the younger variant with a descender is still dominant, but the older form already appears occasionally, before taking over a few folios ahead. See the samples in Figure 5.15 from fol. 82rb.

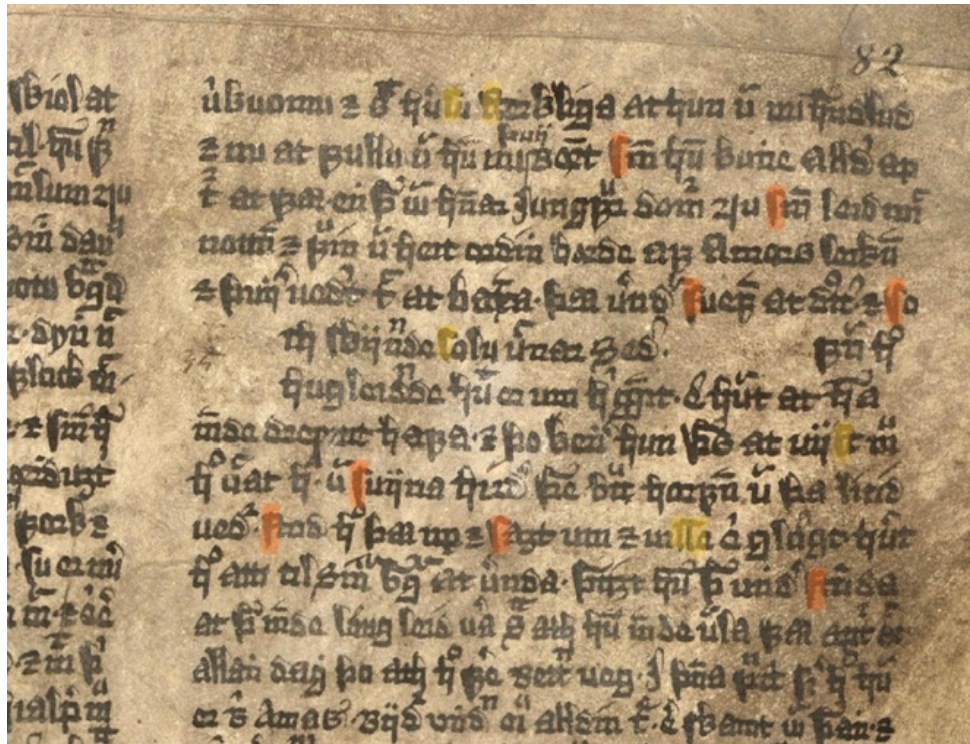


Figure 5.15: [47] AM 152 fol. (2), from c1500–1525, fol. 82rb.

From this analysis, it can be said that the overlap between the older letterform and younger is somewhat negligible, and it typically manifests itself in context in which the palaeographical differentiation of the two through their *tratteggio* is not particularly pronounced. The fact that the younger form with a descender spreads quite rapidly around the beginning of the fifteenth century makes it a good reference point to establish a *terminus post quem*, except for those cases in which the hand is obviously younger in other linguistic and palaeographic details. In such cases, the older form must be interpreted as an influence from older exemplars or, perhaps, a stylistic choice. Occasional archaisms or conservative features may have been chosen (more or less consciously) to follow the model of earlier thirteenth and fourteenth-century texts.

Interestingly, the scribes who were conservative in their choice of the letter “a”, discussed in Chapter 5.2, are not at all conservative in their choice of tall “s”. [2] AM 230 fol. (100% “a₁”), [5] Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók* (59% “a₁”), [18] AM 489 II 4to (96% “a₁”), and [38] AM 309 4to (87% “a₁”) all use the younger “s₂”. Yet [13] AM 225 fol., who was among the innovative “a” scribes (100% “a₃”), is also among the innovative “s” scribes (100% “s₂”). The other innovative “a” scribes, [25] AM 243 a fol., [29] AM 586 4to, [31] AM 533 4to, and [44] AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* (1), consistently use the

younger “s₂”, but [22] AM 534 4to who had 97% “a₃” has a slightly mixed use of “s”. It is thus clear that the scribes were not consistent in their choice of old vs. new features current in the script at the time.

5.4 The use of the “r” rotunda

The purpose of this section is to analyse the distribution of two different forms of the letter “r”, one of which will be referred to as the straight “r” and the other “ʀ”, which is usually called “r” *rotunda* (or round “r”), in order to map the spread of the latter form at the expense of the former. In the earliest Icelandic manuscripts, as will be explained in this discussion, the scribes made a much more restricted use of the “r” rotunda than later generations of scribes did, and by the sixteenth century, it had become the main or even sole form of “r”. The two letterforms can be seen in *Figures 5.16* and *5.17*, and in *5.18* the “r” rotunda is seen as part of the “or” sequence where its use is thought to have begun.



Figure 5.16: The straight “r”.



Figure 5.17: The “r” rotunda.



Figure 5.18: The “or” ligature.

While the straight “r”, which evolved from the roman cursive, was the main type inherited in the *Textualis script* from the Carolingian minuscule, it is generally accepted that the form of the letter “r” referred to as the “r” rotunda (“ʀ”) originated in the uncial script in the ligature of “o” and “r”. As the two letters were joined in a fusion, the capital “R” lost the vertical stroke, its function instead provided by the curved side of the “o”.

As Derolez (2003, 53) explains, fusions were already common in late Roman book-scripts, as means to compress the writing, particularly at the end of a line. The “r” rotunda was widely used in the *orum* abbreviation in the Caroline script, essentially an “r” rotunda with an extended tail and a more or less perpendicular cross stroke. From the extensive use of the *orum* abbreviation, scribes later inferred that it simply represented a variant form of “r” to be used after “o” (Derolez 2003, 63). As a purely calligraphic variant, it never carried any phonological distinction.

Wilhelm Meyer (1897, 6), at the end of the nineteenth century, formulated a set of “rules” describing the Textualis script, one of which says that the “r” rotunda is used after round letters, such as “b”, “d”, “o” and “p”, also noting that it may be occasionally appear after letters such as “h”, “y”, “v” and “w”, particularly if their right stroke was somewhat rounded. He hypothesises that this use must have been initiated by a single ‘clever mind’ (*findiger Köpfe*) either in Italy or in France, as it is in manuscripts from those regions that such usage is most systematically observed (Meyer 1897, 13). He is quite careful in describing a situation in which this ideal rule was by no means universal but maintains that scribes of this period must have known it and decided to either follow or ignore it (Meyer 1897, 27) In his reconstruction, the “oz” ligature served as a prompt to extend the “r” rotunda to other round letters first, and then to other vowels and then consonants. By the fifteenth century, the straight “r” persisted (at least in Italian manuscripts) only word-initially and after a few consonants, such as “c”, “g” or “t”. With the spread of the humanistic script, the “r” rotunda began to disappear.

Meyer’s description has percolated into the pool of knowledge of all subsequent generations of palaeographers, and a simplified version of it is to be found in most treatments of the Textualis script. Bischoff (1986, 130) states that “r” rotunda after “o” became the norm in Gothic/Textualis script from the twelfth century. Cencetti (1997, 187) presents it as the shape of “r” after a letter which is convex towards the right, such as “o”, “b”, “g”, uncial “ð” (with a slanted ascender) and “p”. Battelli (1999, 180) indicates that the combination of “o” and “r” rotunda was one of the rare ligatures derived from the uncial script to be used in the Caroline script and indicates the “r” rotunda as the typical form of the letter “r” after “b”, “ð”, “g” and “p” in the Gothic script (Battelli 1999, 208). This ligature penetrated the Gothic/Textualis script possibly also because of its compactness, as the Gothic/Textualis script is generally much more compressed laterally than the Caroline and because “oz” takes up less space than “or”.

At some point, this usage must have been interpreted as some kind of convention for which the “r” rotunda was no longer a part of a ligature, but rather an allographic variant of the grapheme “r” which was supposed to be used after “o”. Its use was then expanded in Western scripts at the beginning of the thirteenth century (Bischoff 1986, 130), and the “r” rotunda began appearing after other round letterforms, such as “b” or

“p”. This was presumably a way of maintaining a balanced harmony in the ductus, for which a straight letter would be followed by a straight “r” while a round letter, such as the “o” itself or “b” and “p” would be followed by an “r” rotunda (Bischoff 1986, 130). Concerning the emergence and spread of this peculiar variant of the letter “r”, Derolez (2003, 62–63) explains that:

r is a letter with various forms in Pregothic. [...] The constant use of the **or**-ligature, especially in the **orum**-abbreviation, gave birth to the notion that it represented **o** followed by a variant form of **r** [...] In Pregothic script and its Gothic successors the normal, Carolingian form and the so-called ‘round’ **r** would be used together, the latter being written after **o**. The hand of the odd scribe betrays some hesitation in using Carolingian and round **r** interchangeably after **o**, but the consistent use of the two forms of **r** became a rule from the middle of the twelfth century onwards.

The simpler *tratteggio* of the “r” rotunda may have also been a contributing factor in its ultimate spread in western scripts. It can be executed without lifting the pen from the page, unlike its straight counterpart. Thus, it is better suited for a script that is showing an increased tendency towards fluidity, as it is the case in the scripts that we encounter in fifteenth-century Iceland.

While Kålund does not discuss the use or distribution of the “r” rotunda in his two volumes of *Palæografisk Atlas* (Kålund 1905, 1907b), Spehr (1929, 124–126) relates the derivation of the “r” rotunda from the fusion of “o” and small capital “r” in the uncial script. Spehr (1929, 124–126) maintains that the combination of “o” and the “r” rotunda had become common in Icelandic script by 1200 and spread further at the expense of the straight “r” to other round letters such as “b”, “ð” (with a slanted ascender), and “p” in the thirteenth century. He adds that after 1250, it became a rule to use the “r” rotunda after “o”, “ð” (with a slanted ascender) and “ð” in Icelandic script, while in the beginning of the fourteenth century it is also used after letters with a round component like “þ”, “b” and “g”. Over the course of the same century, Spehr (1929) continues, it spread further, appearing following “p” and, in the second half of the fourteenth century, also after

“y” and “v”. After 1400, the use of straight and “r” rotunda becomes irregular until the “r” rotunda completely ousts the straight “r” after the middle of the fifteenth century.

Seip (1954, 140–141), explains how the “r” rotunda was increasingly used in Icelandic script after 1350, often also after non-round letters, while it gained ground in the fifteenth century. The same is also true for Norwegian script (1954, 119–120), about which he says that the “r” rotunda is used also after non-round letters in the fifteenth century but also “a”, “v” and “y”. Seip (1954, 119–120, cf. 108) also cites hand d of NKS 1642 4to, Codex Tunsbergensis, from around 1320 which writes the “r” rotunda not only after “o”, “œ”, “b”, “p”, “ð”, and “ð̊”, but also after “a”, insular “f”, “g”, “h”, “p”, “y”, “D” and “T”. He concludes by saying that in Norwegian script, the use of the “r” rotunda increasingly expands in the fifteenth century.

Hreinn Benediktsson (1965, 47–48) writes that the “r” rotunda shows an increasing occurrence in Icelandic script during the thirteenth century, being used regularly after “o”, while in the fourteenth century it spreads to round letters other than “o”. It spread first to the position after “ð” (with a slanted ascender) and “ð̊”, where it quickly became regular; it also appeared early following “p” but does not become established in that position. He notes how it is least frequent after “p” and “b”, possibly because of the low frequency of *pr* and *br* clusters in the language. Hreinn then adds that this letterform gained further ground in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, occurring after “a” and other non-round letters, and ultimately in word-initial position.

Stefán Karlsson (2002, 837) reports how the “r” rotunda was used after “o” and related letters, such as “ø” and “q”, in the earliest Icelandic script and became almost a standard choice after those letters throughout the thirteenth century. Around the middle of the century, it began to appear after “ð” (with a slanted ascender) and “ð̊”, occurring less regularly also after “p”, “g”, “p”, and “b”, becoming increasingly common around the middle of the fourteenth century, to be later extended to the position after “a”, “y”, “v” and “h”. During the fifteenth century, Stefán continues, it was used indiscriminately after any letter but was rarely seen word-initially before the sixteenth century.

Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (2005, 259) also explains that the “r” rotunda is almost always found following “o” in the earliest Icelandic manuscripts, and in the middle of thirteenth century it appears also after “ð” and “ð̊”, where it quickly became a rule,

while it was also used irregularly after “þ”, “g”, “p”, and “b”. In the fourteenth century it is also found after “a”, “y”, “v” and “h”, while it could follow any letter in the fifteenth century but does not appear word-initially until the sixteenth.

All these scholars agree that there has been a gradual progression from the use of “r” rotunda after “o” (and related letters such as “ø” and “ø”) in the earliest script to the position after other round letters in the thirteenth century, to the position after non-round letters starting in the fourteenth century and progressing significantly in the fifteenth, after which the “r” rotunda also entered the word-initial position.

In the present study, the use of the “r” rotunda by fifty scribal hands during the “long” fifteenth century was examined. The general picture emerging from this study is that of a development from a limited use of the “r” rotunda at the end of the fourteenth century to a transitional phase where the use varies from one scribe to the next, to the establishment of the “r” rotunda as the main or even sole form of “r”. Even if two (almost) contemporary scribes, or scribes working on the same book in a space of a few years at the most, may show a different use of the two letter forms, the general trend emerging from the study is that of a gradual expansion in the use of the “r” rotunda.

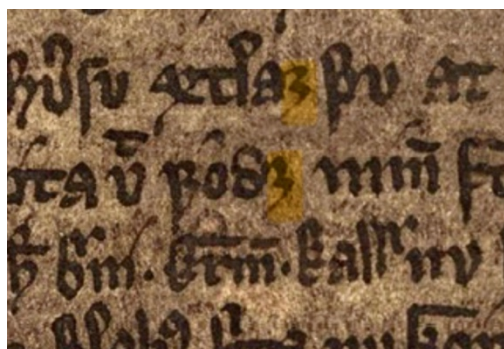


Figure 5.19: [15] AM 557 4to (1), 3r11–12:
“ætla2” and “föð2”.

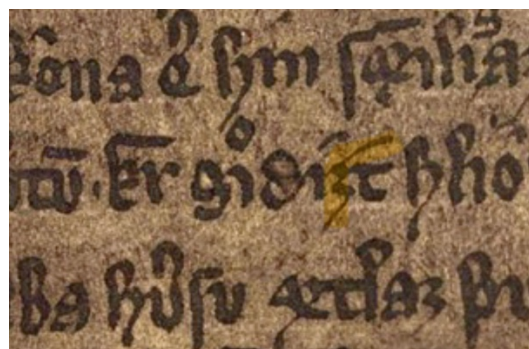


Figure 5.20: [15] AM 557 4to (1), 3r10:
“giordizt”.

It is clear, however, that in Icelandic script the “r” rotunda did not spread in a strict and systematic way from the position following “o” to other round letters and then onwards to non-round letters. The picture emerging from the present study is more complex. As

we shall see, some round letters, the “þ” in particular, were often followed by a straight “r”, also in hands which already used the “r” rotunda after non-round letters.

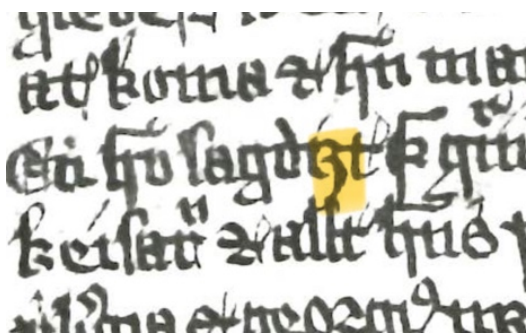


Figure 5.21: [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, 152rb35: “fagðízt”.

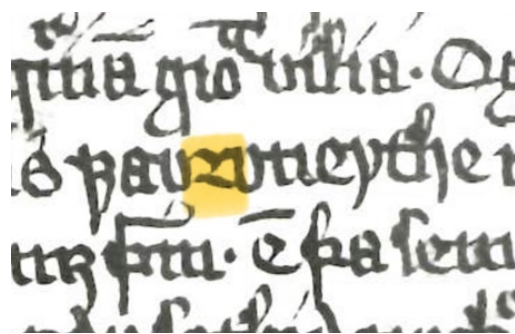


Figure 5.22: [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, 152rb36: “favrvneythe”.

The scribal hands in the corpus reveal some variation in the shape of the “r” rotunda. In some hands, it has a curved descender extending below the line. A few of these same hands give the letter “z” a very similar descender, making the two letters practically identical. This similarity of the two letters appears, for instance, in [25] AM 243 a fol. To counter this, the scribe [15] AM 557 4to (1) adds a diagonal stroke above the “z” which thus distinguishes it from the “r” rotunda, as can be seen in *Figures 5.19* and *5.20*. The “r” rotunda appears in “ætla^z” (*ætla^r*) and “fôð^z” (*fôð^r*) while an instance of the “z” is found in “giorðízt” (*gørðisk*). In the youngest manuscript in the corpus, [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, the “r” rotunda and the “z” are distinguished essentially by the “z” having a descender, as is shown in *Figures 5.21* and *5.22*, “fagðízt” (*sagðisk*) and “favrvneythe” (*fvrneyti*). Examination of the variation in the form of the “r” rotunda is, however, beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the two letters (“r” rotunda and “z”) are typically different enough to avoid any confusion, and most hands make a clear distinction.

Table 5.3 shows the different environments in which the “r” rotunda is used by each of the fifty scribal hands. On the X axis, the different letters are listed following which the “r” rotunda occurs, twenty different environments, ending on the right-hand side with word-initial position (indicated with #). The frequency of the “r” rotunda as opposed to the straight “r” is indicated with the following symbols:

✓ = the “r” rotunda is used 100% of the instances in the sample.

+ = the “r” rotunda is used 50–99% of the instances in the sample.

– = the “r” rotunda is used 1–49% of the instances in the sample.

x = “r” rotunda is never used in the sample

Ø = no instances of either “r” or “r” rotunda following this letter were found in the sample.

To further increase readability, the three categories of the use of the “r” rotunda, marked ✓, + and –, are highlighted in *Table 5.3* with three shades of the colour green. As can be seen in *Figure 5.23*, there is a steady expansion in the use of the “r” rotunda in terms of domains in which it is used, that is, the letters after which it appears. There is a decidedly more extensive use of the “r” rotunda in the second half of the century than in the first. If we split the corpus into two halves, the difference manifests more obviously. In the first half, scribes 1–25, the average number of domains is 7.92, while in the second half, scribes 26–50, the average number of domains is 12.64. There is, of course, considerable variation within each half, but the overall picture is clear. The “r” rotunda gradually gains ground throughout the fifteenth century.

Figure 5.23 shows, for each hand, the number of environments (out of a possible twenty) in which “r” rotunda was observed.

Looking at both *Table 5.3* and *Figure 5.23*, a steady expansion in the use of the “r” rotunda through the period examined can be observed. The younger letterform appears to be spreading steadily at the expense of the older one, but there are details that make this spread far from linear. As can be seen, the notion that the “r” rotunda was first used chiefly after round letters and then spread to non-round letters does not accurately describe the development that emerged in this study. As we shall see, already the earliest hands do not always use the “r” rotunda after round letters but may occasionally (or always) use it after non-round ones.

Table 5.3: The use of the “r” rotunda by preceding letter.

			o	ð	b	þ	g	y	u	a	h	f	e	k	æ	l	i	t	p	m	n	#	✓	+	-	x	Ø	Σ
1	AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350–1375	+	+	+	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	ø	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	0	3	0	16	1	20
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350–1400	✓	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1	0	1	18	0	20
3	AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360–1400	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-	x	x	x	ø	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	ø	4	0	2	12	2	20
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370–1380	✓	✓	✓	+	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	ø	ø	3	1	0	14	2	20
5	Holm perg. 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375–1400	✓	x	✓	✓	+	✓	✓	x	-	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	ø	x	x	x	5	1	2	11	1	20
6	Holm perg. 19 4to	c1375–1400	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	x	x	x	x	x	ø	x	x	x	x	ø	x	x	6	0	1	11	2	20
7	AM 194 8vo	1387	✓	+	✓	+	+	-	-	-	ø	-	-	-	x	x	x	-	✓	x	x	x	3	3	7	6	1	20
8	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387–1395	+	+	✓	x	x	-	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	2	2	2	14	0	20
9	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387–1395	✓	+	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	3	1	0	16	0	20
10	AM 354 fol. <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1397–1410	+	+	+	-	-	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	ø	x	x	x	0	3	3	13	1	20
11	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> , hand 1	c1400	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	ø	x	x	X	6	0	1	12	1	20
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400	✓	+	✓	+	-	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	✓	x	x	x	4	2	2	12	0	20
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	-	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	ø	x	x	ø	4	0	2	12	2	20
14	AM 561 4to	c1400	x	✓	✓	-	✓	+	-	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	4	1	2	13	0	20
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404–1420	+	-	✓	✓	x	x	-	-	ø	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	ø	-	x	x	2	1	8	7	2	20
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420	+	-	+	-	x	-	x	-	ø	-	x	-	-	ø	-	x	ø	x	x	x	0	2	8	7	3	20
17	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400–1450	+	+	+	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	ø	x	-	x	0	3	1	15	1	20
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	✓	✓	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	ø	x	x	3	0	0	16	1	20
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	✓	+	x	-	+	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	ø	x	x	x	1	2	3	13	1	20
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	✓	+	-	+	+	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1	3	4	12	0	20
21	AM 151 4to (1)	c1450	✓	✓	✓	+	+	✓	-	x	✓	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5	2	2	11	0	20
22	AM 534 4to	c1400–1500	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	+	x	+	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	✓	ø	x	ø	6	2	2	8	2	20
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	+	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	+	-	x	x	ø	✓	x	1	4	10	4	1	20
24	AM 430 12mo	c1400–1500	✓	+	-	+	+	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	x	-	x	ø	✓	-	ø	2	5	9	2	2	20
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	✓	+	+	+	+	✓	+	✓	ø	✓	✓	✓	6	12	1	0	1	20
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450–1475	+	✓	✓	+	✓	✓	+	+	✓	-	x	+	+	+	-	ø	ø	ø	ø	x	5	7	2	2	4	20
27	AM 471 4to + AM 489 I 4to	c1450–1500	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	+	✓	✓	✓	ø	18	1	0	0	1	20
28	Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	ø	x	x	0	0	3	16	1	20
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	ø	x	x	x	ø	x	x	0	0	1	17	2	20
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450–1500	+	-	x	✓	+	-	x	-	x	x	-	x	x	-	x	x	ø	x	x	x	1	2	5	11	1	20

31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	✓	+	✓	✓	✓	x	-	x	+	-	-	-	x	x	x	x	∅	∅	x	x	4	2	4	8	2	20
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500	+	✓	-	-	+	+	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	∅	x	x	∅	∅	x	x	1	3	5	8	3	20
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	+	+	+	+	+	✓	-	+	+	✓	-	✓	-	+	-	x	✓	✓	∅	x	5	8	4	2	1	20
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	+	+	-	x	+	x	-	x	∅	x	x	∅	x	x	x	x	x	∅	x	x	0	3	2	12	3	20
35	AM 556 a 4to	c1475–1500	+	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	+	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	+	✓	✓	+	✓	✓	∅	13	4	2	0	1	20
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	✓	x	✓	+	+	∅	+	+	✓	-	-	+	+	+	x	-	∅	∅	x	∅	3	7	3	3	4	20
37	AM 159 4to	c1480–1500	✓	✓	✓	+	✓	✓	+	+	✓	x	-	x	x	x	-	x	x	∅	x	x	6	3	2	8	1	20
38	AM 309 4to, <i>Bæjarbók í Flóa</i>	1498	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	+	+	+	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	+	+	∅	∅	✓	+	10	6	0	2	2	20
39	AM 429 12mo	c1500	✓	+	+	✓	+	✓	x	x	∅	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	4	3	0	12	1	20
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	+	+	✓	-	✓	✓	+	+	+	+	✓	-	✓	∅	-	-	x	✓	∅	x	6	6	4	2	2	20
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	✓	+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	+	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	x	-	∅	∅	∅	x	x	10	2	2	3	3	20
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	+	✓	✓	+	✓	-	+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	15	3	1	1	0	20
43	AM 152 4to	c1500	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	∅	x	x	∅	∅	x	x	0	0	1	16	3	20
44	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> , hand 1	c1500	✓	✓	✓	+	✓	✓	✓	+	✓	✓	+	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	∅	✓	✓	x	14	3	0	2	1	20
45	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> , hand 2	c1500	✓	+	✓	+	✓	+	+	+	✓	✓	+	✓	+	✓	+	+	+	✓	✓	x	9	10	0	1	0	20
46	AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500–1525	✓	+	✓	+	+	✓	+	✓	+	+	+	✓	+	-	x	x	✓	∅	∅	x	6	8	1	3	2	20
47	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500–1550	✓	✓	✓	✓	+	✓	+	✓	✓	✓	+	✓	-	✓	+	+	x	+	✓	x	11	6	1	2	0	20
48	AM 529 4to	c1500–1550	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	∅	∅	∅	✓	17	0	0	0	3	20
49	AM 147 4to	c1525–1550	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	∅	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	∅	∅	+	16	1	0	0	3	20
50	Holm perg. 3 fol., <i>Reykjabólabók</i>	c1530–1540	+	+	x	x	+	-	+	-	x	-	+	x	x	-	x	x	∅	✓	✓	x	2	5	4	8	1	20

	o	ð	b	þ	g	y	u	a	h	f	e	k	æ	l	i	t	p	m	n	#
✓ = “r” rotunda is used 100% of the instances	30	20	30	17	19	19	8	6	13	10	7	12	7	8	5	6	9	10	10	2
+ = “r” rotunda 50% of times up to 99%)	16	21	7	14	17	4	11	12	7	3	7	3	5	6	4	4	2	1	0	2
- = “r” rotunda is 49% of the times down to 1%	1	5	5	9	2	11	12	10	7	12	9	7	9	4	9	4	1	1	2	0
x = “r” rotunda is never used	3	4	8	10	12	15	19	22	17	24	27	27	27	27	32	34	17	20	31	38
∅ = neither “r” or “r” rotunda following this letter	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	6	1	0	1	2	5	0	2	21	18	7	8
Σ	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50

Combined: ✓ and +	46	41	37	31	36	23	19	18	20	13	14	15	12	14	9	10	11	11	10	4
Combined: ✓ and + and -	47	46	42	40	38	34	31	28	27	25	23	22	21	18	18	14	12	12	12	4

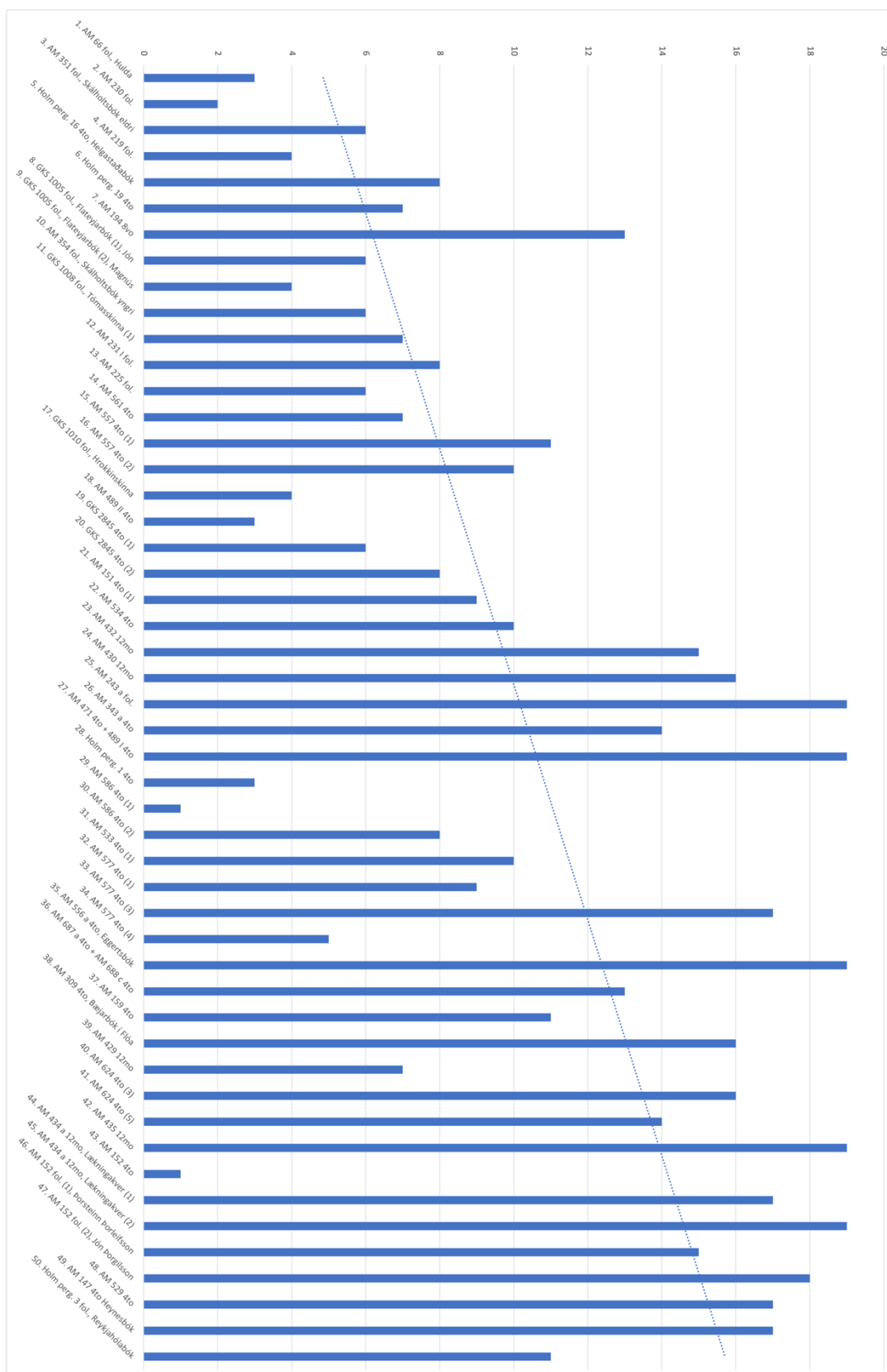


Figure 5.23: The use of the “r” rotunda by domain.

At the start of the period under examination there is a slight preference for a combination of certain (but definitely not all) round letters + “r” rotunda. However, the variability between hands is too great to assume the presence of some kind of scribal convention giving preference to such a combination in the period examined. The scribe of [1] AM 66 fol., *Hulda* uses the “r” rotunda fairly consistently following “o” and “ð” (98.1% and 98.3%, respectively); and frequently following “b” (57.1%), but never after “þ” (which of course was not present in the Latin models). The scribe of [2] AM 230 fol., meanwhile, always uses it consistently after “o”, sometimes following “ð” (17.2%) but never after “b” or “þ”. Conversely, the scribe of [3] AM 351 fol., *Skálholtsbók eldri*, always shows an “r” rotunda after “o”, “ð”, “b”, and “g”, and occasionally after “þ” (14.3%) and “y” (6.7%), while the scribe of [4] AM 219 fol. always shows an “r” rotunda after “o”, “ð”, and “b”, and occasionally after “þ”, but never after “g” or “y”. The rounded shape of the preceding letter would thus appear not to be the determining factor in the distribution of “r” rotunda among the earliest scribes in the present corpus.

Interestingly three scribes in the corpus never use the “r” rotunda following “o” in the text sampled, the very letter that was originally used in combination with the “r” rotunda. These are [14] AM 561 4to from c1400, [28] Holm perg. 1 4to from c1450–1500, and [43] AM 152 4to from c1500. The latter two scribes seem to try to avoid the “r” rotunda altogether. In addition, the scribe of [29] AM 586 4to (1) from c1450–1500 used the “r” rotunda following “o” only 8.7% of the time in the text sample, the only occurrence of “r” rotunda in his writing. One is left to wonder whether this could be read as a manifestation of an archaising effort gone too far. In other words, some kind of overgeneralisation or hypercorrection.

As mentioned, the “r” rotunda originally arose as a positional variant immediately following “o” and then spread to other round symbols, “ð” with a slanted ascender, “ð”, “b”, “þ” and “p”. Interestingly, the use of the rotunda “r” following “þ”—as round a letterform as it gets—is much less consistent than following “ð” or “b”. Among the scribal hands examined, there are ten that never use the rotunda “r” immediately following “þ”:

- [1] AM 66 fol., *Hulda*, c1350–1375.
- [2] AM 230 fol., c1350–1400.
- [8] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (1), Jón Þórðarson, c1387–1395.

- [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna*, c1400–1450.
- [18] AM 489 II 4to, c1450.
- [28] Holm perg. 1 4to, c1450–1500.
- [29] AM 586 4to (1), c1450–1500.
- [34] AM 577 4to (4), c1450–1500.
- [43] AM 152 4to, c1500.
- [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, c1530–1540.

A total of 17 hands use “r” rotunda after “þ” 100% of the time, which is 34% or roughly a third of the corpus, and 14 hands use the “r” rotunda after “þ” more than 50% of the time. Nine scribes use it in 49% of the cases or less, and of these nine, six use it very sparingly, or less than 15% of the time:

- [3] AM 351 fol., *Skálholtsbók eldri*, c1360–1400: 14.3%.
- [10] AM 354 fol. *Skálholtsbók yngri*, c1400: 9.1%.
- [14] AM 561 4to, c1400: 1.9%.
- [16] AM 557 4to (2), c1404–1420: 3.2%.
- [19] GKS 2845 4to (1), c1450: 31.3%.
- [22] AM 534 4to, c1400–1500: 21.4%.
- [23] AM 432 12mo, c1400–1500: 18.2%.
- [32] AM 577 4to (1), c1450–1500: 5.3%.
- [40] AM 624 4to (3), c1500: 10.5%.

One possible explanation may be that this rule (or, better, “practice”), was not understood so much as a convention demanding the use of the “r” rotunda after *round* letters, but rather after *certain* letters, although what these letters may have been seems to be highly dependent on individual variations that are hard to explain.

The letter “þ” was not part of the original Latin alphabet and thus there were no models for its use in Latin books. Icelandic scribes may therefore have had different opinions on how to best represent the cluster *þr*. While some must have been under the influence of combinations such as “oʀ”, “ðʀ”, “bʀ”, and “pʀ”, others may have felt that the use of the “r” rotunda should be limited to those round letters which were found in Latin

texts. It is noteworthy that “p” is occasionally followed by straight “r” in hands where the “r” rotunda is otherwise used more in other environments, including non-round ones, such as [40] AM 624 4to (3), both scribes [44] and [45] of AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver*, and [46] Þorsteinn Þorleifsson, hand (1) of AM 152 fol.

The fact that so many hands, 23 out of 50, display an oscillation between straight “r” and “r” rotunda after “p”, much more so than after “b” (12 out of 50), to give an example, seems to point to the fact that there was not a universal understanding of how to distribute these letter forms. This is not at all surprising: scribes were not exclusively trained reading twelfth-century Latin manuscripts (nor Icelandic, for that matter). They inherited (and copied from) manuscripts from different periods and different schools, which likely showed inconsistencies in the distribution of these two letterforms—a distribution that was also, for all practical purposes, meaningless. This can also be illustrated by the oscillation which can be observed among contemporary scribes working on the same text: the two main hands of [8]–[9] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* display the opposite tendency, with Jón Þórðarson only using straight “r” after “p”, while Magnús Þórhallsson invariably uses the “r” rotunda. The three hands out of four chosen from [32]–[34] AM 577 4to are all slightly different in this regard: a minority of “r” rotunda after “p” (5.3%), a majority (93.8%), and no “r” rotunda after “p”, respectively.

It is particularly interesting how the position immediately after “p” and “p” remains behind, especially since it has usually been assumed that the spread beyond “o” and related letters started with letters with a round component, such as “b” and “p”. The latter shows something particularly striking: 12 scribes use “r” rotunda to some extent following “p” while 17 out of 50 scribes never use it in this position. To be sure, the sequence *pr* is not very common in the language, and in 21 of the works examined it was never encountered. As noted by Haraldur Bernharðsson (2021, 97–98), the use of “r” rotunda after “p” in one instance in Hand B in GKS 1812 4to, dated to the mid-thirteenth century, is a rare occurrence and may be among the earliest ones; similarly, the high frequency of “r” rotunda after “p” in the same scribe represents an exception from the general tendency of his time.

In addition to the position after “o”, the “r” rotunda is most extensively used following the letters “ð”, “b”, “p”, “g”, and “y”. Notably, some non-round letters tend to be

accompanied by “r” rotunda more often than others. Among the earliest of these are “g”. The letter “g” is particularly interesting as it is usually highly variable in shape. Two main types can be distinguished: the straight-backed “g” with a straight vertical stroke on the right-hand side extending below the base line, and the so-called 8-shaped “g” which typically consists of a circle or an oval (essentially “o”) on the base line and a descender joining the middle of the circle or oval at the base line. In the hands examined in this study, most of the scribes predominantly used the straight-backed “g”, including [1] AM 66 fol., [3] AM 351 fol., [5] Holm perg. 16 4to, [6] Holm perg. 19 4to, [14] AM 561 4to, [21] AM 151 4to (1) and [37] AM 159 4to. [8] Jón Þórðarson in GKS 1005 fol. shows some oscillation between the two types, but he never uses “r” rotunda after either of them. The observations made here suggest that the round version of this letter, the 8-shaped “g” is not more likely to be followed by the “r” rotunda than the straight-backed “g”. The 8-shaped form is indeed quite rare, and the straight-backed “g” is the predominant form encountered in the corpus.

After “g”, the letter “y” seems to be the next environment to increasingly show an “r” rotunda early in the period examined. Of the hands dated to before or around 1400, number [1]–[14] in the list, eight use the “r” rotunda to some extent after “g”, while nine use the “r” rotunda after “y”. The difference is only in [8] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (1), Jón Þórðarson, who, unlike [9] Magnús Þórhallsson, uses it following “y”.

All in all, there are 38 hands using the rotunda “r” to some degree following “g” and 34 hands using it to some extent following “y”. In [36] AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to, from 1479, no instances of the environment after “y” occurred in the sample, but he uses rotunda following “g”. Five hands use the rotunda “r” following “g” but not “y”:

- [18] AM 489 II 4to, c1450.
- [19] GKS 2845 4to (1), c1450.
- [31] AM 533 4to (1), c1450–1500.
- [34] AM 577 4to (4), c1450–1500.
- [38] AM 309 4to, *Bæjarbók í Flóa*, 1498.

By contrast, only two hands use the rotunda “r” following “y” but not “g”:

- [8] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (1), Jón Þórðarson, c1387–1395
- [16] AM 557 4to (2), c1404–1420

Finally, it can be observed that ten hands use the rotunda “r” after neither “y” nor “g”:

- [1] AM 66 fol., *Hulda*, c1350–1375.
- [2] AM 230 fol., c1350–1400.
- [4] AM 219 fol., c1370–1380.
- [9] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (2), Magnús Þórhallsson, c1387–1395.
- [13] AM 225 fol., c1400.
- [15] AM 557 4to (1), c1404–1420.
- [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna*, c1400–1450.
- [28] Holm perg. 1 4to, c1450–1500.
- [29] AM 586 4to (1), c1450–1500.
- [43] AM 152 4to, c1500.

There seems thus to be a correlation between the use of “r” rotunda immediately following “g” and “y”. A scribe using “r” rotunda following “y” very likely also uses it following “g”. Chronologically, after these two, the letters “h” and “u” also increasingly appear to be followed by “r” rotunda. These are not round letters, and this contrasts with the lesser frequency of occurrence of “r” rotunda after “b” and “þ”, which are indeed round.

The letter “a”, together with the previously discussed “g” and “y”, seems to sporadically trigger some use of the “r” rotunda early on, which becomes the norm in the later manuscripts which were studied. This does not seem to be related to the palaeographic forms after which it appears; that is, the shape does not seem to play a significant role. In [39] AM 429 12mo, *Kirkjubæjarbók* from c1500, [18] AM 489 II 4to from c1450, and [11] GKS 1008 fol., *Tómasskinna*, hand 1, from c1400, for example, the rotunda “r” appears after the straight-backed “g” (“g”), as it does in [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, where the “g” has a very straight back and yet is normally followed by “r” rotunda.

The word-initial position should also be mentioned. Four scribes show it at least to some extent: [38] AM 309 4to, from 1498, [48] AM 529 4to and [49] AM 147 4to, both assumed to be from the first decades of the sixteenth century. It is therefore not surprising to see that they have extended their use of the “r” rotunda to word-initial position. Somewhat surprising, by contrast, is to see word-initial “r” rotunda in [25] AM 243 a fol., *Konungs skuggsjá*, dated to around 1450–1475.

As was observed in Chapter 5.2, the change in the “s” types began in earnest with [13] AM 255 fol., from c1400, apparently around the same time as the “r” rotunda began to spread to other letterforms, even though there is no such clear turning point for the “r” rotunda. These two separate developments may, however, be interpreted as two expressions of the same general tendency towards a more cursive book script. For the expansion of the “r” rotunda, [7] AM 194 8vo, from 1387, is on the forefront, using the “r” rotunda in thirteen different domains, including the position following “p”. This scribe was among the scribes leading in the adoption of “s₂”, as discussed in Chapter 5.3. Also [15] AM 557 4to (1) and [16] AM 557 4to (2), both dated to c1404–1420, are quite advanced in their use of the “r” rotunda with eleven and twelve domains, respectively.

The picture that emerges from this study is that of the coexistence of two competing forms, the straight “r”, more common earlier in the period, and an “r” rotunda, becoming more common through the period studied, whose distribution is subject to a high degree of variability depending on the hand studied. This kind of inter-scribal variation hardly fits within the notion of a scribal school or a community of practice (or even, more generally, scribal convention) and seems to testify to a general uncertainty on how to treat and distribute the two letterforms, with every hand adopting a very individual solution.

Despite this, the data gathered through the period examined indicates a constant expansion of domain for the younger “r” rotunda. Possibly for reasons of economy, the tendency throughout the period is thus that to abandon the older straight “r” and generalise the once more limited use of the “r” rotunda. Why the tendency has been that of expanding the domain of the once less frequently used “r” rotunda at the expense of the older letterform (rather than eliminating the less used younger form) is probably best

explained with the fact that the rotunda has a simpler *tratteggio* that fits well in a script that is becoming increasingly cursive.

Aside from this general picture, a number of hands showed interesting aspects that is worth noting:

- Interestingly, the scribe of [1] AM 66 fol., *Hulda*, is conservative when it comes to the “r” rotunda while he was very innovative with the tall “s”, as discussed in Chapter 5.3.
- The scribe of [7] AM 194 8vo, from 1387, who is quite advanced in his use of the “r” rotunda, as already indicated, was also innovative with the tall “s”. Neither of these two was particularly innovative in their choice of “a”, but not very conservative either, both using “a₂” exclusively.
- [18] AM 489 II 4to, c1450, who was quite conservative in his choice of “a” with 96% “a₁” (open-bow “a”) but not at all conservative regarding the tall “s”, appeared conservative in his use of the “r” rotunda, only using it following “o”, “ð”, and “g”.
- [21] AM 151 4to (1) was conservative in his choice of “s”, but he was not particularly conservative in his use of the “r” rotunda.
- [25] AM 243 a fol., *Konungs skuggsjá*, dated to around 1450–1475, has documented use of the “r” rotunda in nineteen domains out of twenty; only the position following “p” is missing as *pr* did not occur in the text sampled. Notably, this extensive use of the “r” rotunda includes consistent use in word-initial position, thus being the first scribe in this corpus to use it in word-initial position at all. The text of *Konungs skuggsjá* is of Norwegian provenance, even if this manuscript is Icelandic, but judging from the information provided by Seip (1954, 119), the extensive use of the “r” rotunda is not something that can be attributed to the influence of a Norwegian exemplar. It contrasts so starkly with the supposed tendency of using the “r” rotunda mostly after round letters and not as frequently after straight ones, that it is hard to imagine an explanation beyond a very peculiar scribal preference.

- [27] AM 471 4to + AM 489 I 4to, from c1450–1500, shows a consistent use of “r” rotunda except after “t”, where it is used less than 100%, but no instances of word-initial position occurred in the text sampled. This scribe thus uses the round “r” in nineteen domains out of twenty, like [25] AM 243 a fol., *Konungs skuggsjá*, dated to around 1450–1475, which is, in fact, all the domains that were encountered in the samples from these scribes. Even if the number of domains is the same, the scribe of AM 471 4to + AM 489 I 4to uses the rotunda “r” more consistently than the scribe of AM 243 a fol. The scribe of AM 471 4to + AM 489 I 4to generally writes in a rather cursive hand with several connections, fusions and loops resulting from a swift *ductus*. It is thus conceivable that this text may have been written late in the second half of the fifteenth century, but the linguistic data collected in this study and presented in the following chapters exclude an even later dating.
- [28] Holm perg. 1 4to from c1450–1500 is of particular interest. This scribe does not use the rotunda “r” following any of the round letters “o”, “ð”, “b” or “þ”, but instead he sometimes (less than half of the time) uses it immediately following “u” (7.1%), “a” (1.8%), and “æ” (6.7%), none of which are round. This scribe was conservative in his choice of “s”, and he is also very conservative when it comes to the “r” rotunda, something he shares with [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, c1530–1540 (see below). Yet, his decision to avoid the rotunda “r” immediately following “o”, at least, and perhaps “ð” and “b”, could be interpreted as archaising effort resulting in overgeneralisation.
- [29] AM 586 4to (1) from c1450–1500, is conspicuously conservative for a scribe active in the second half of the fifteenth century as he makes use of the “r” rotunda after “o” only, and even in this position, his use of the “r” rotunda is very sparse, only 8.7%. While [38] AM 309 4to, *Bæjarbók í Flóa*, attributed to Jón kollur Oddsson, written in 1498, is very conservative in writing “a₁” 87% of the time, the scribe was not conservative in his choice of tall “s”, and here, too, with the “r” rotunda he is not at all conservative.

- [43] AM 152 4to from c1500 is also very conservative for his time, using the rotunda “r” only in one position. Oddly, this is not the position immediately following “o” but rather following the round “ð”, and even there, it is scarce, only 20%. The script does not have a particularly formal general character. Its *ductus* looks fast-paced, though lacking decorative elements typical of cursive or hybrid scripts. Most letters touch and blend into one another, something which appears at odds with the fact that this scribe not only prefers the straight “r”, more complex in its *tratteggio* than the rotunda, but he or she also adds a decorative hairline departing from the junction between the vertical stroke and the horizontal one. Postulating that this must be an influence from a very old exemplar still does not account for the fact that the “r” rotunda is not even used after the traditional “o”, “b”, but only after “ð”, etc. Since this represents a unique case within the group of hands analysed, it is difficult to advance the hypothesis that it belonged to a particular scribal school. The only plausible explanation would seem to be that the choice reflects an individual preference, motivated either by personal taste or by some other intention now lost to us. This scribe, [43] AM 152 4to, uses 59% tall “s” standing on the baseline, and is one of few scribes that exhibits a mixed practice.
- [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, from c1530–1540, is also quite conservative in some respects and appears to be an outlier in light of the trends shown by earlier texts. While the scribe uses the rotunda “r” extensively and after a variety of letters, namely “g”, “y”, “u”, “a”, the two-compartment Insular “f”, “e”, “l”, “m”, and “n”, he never uses it immediately following the round letters and “b” and “p”. GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* was in the possession of Björn Þorleifsson, the owner of Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, at the time of writing of *Reykjahólabók* (Louis-Jensen 1969, 235–246; Rowe 2005, 13). It seems possible that the scribe of *Reykjahólabók* was influenced by the script found in the more-than-a-century-old *Flateyjarbók*. After all, we find in *Reykjahólabók* extensive use of the tall “s” standing on the baseline, quite a conservative feature for this time, as well as a two-compartment

“a”, which was certainly not innovative at the time. It seems plausible that the scribes of [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, and [48]–[49] AM 152 fol., who also show some similar archaising tendencies, were to some extent imitating an earlier script for reasons of aesthetic and formality. Yet, their use of the “r” rotunda is not exactly in line with what can be observed in the work of the two scribes of *Flateyjarbók*.

Even if some of these scribes have been attracted to early models in writing and book production, it was probably hard for them to be uniformly conservative in the script, as there are so many variables at play. A scribe drawn to earlier books and script probably cannot keep up with all of them; instead, the attention is focused on selected features. Another possibility that should not be excluded is that some scribes may not have cared about maintaining a more conservative character but could not help themselves in doing so when they were copying from older exemplar. The extent to which we are dealing with a conscious choice or with external influences is hard to ascertain, when neither of the letterforms represents a clear exception which can be explained as an occasional slip generated by older models.

As mentioned above, the use of the “r” rotunda is quite individualistic; many of the scribes are independent in their application of this letter. As it appears from this study, Icelandic scribes seem to increasingly disregard the traditional conditioning environment for the “r” rotunda. The spread of the “r” rotunda does not seem to follow a clear trajectory, as is often assumed, first appearing after round letters and then spreading to the position after non-round letters. In fact, “þ” is often followed by the straight “r”, even in scribal hands that otherwise use the “r” rotunda extensively. It may be possible that some kind of regular distribution was attempted by some scribes, particularly in those cases where the percentages are close to 100%, but most of the scribes failed to either follow or establish any significant rule, as can be inferred from the pronounced individual variation among scribes. The distinction evolved thus into more of a free distribution where the straight “r” and the “r” rotunda were used interchangeably, and this may be an indication of a conflict between personal practice and influence from older exemplars.

It is likely that the “r” rotunda eventually supplanted the straight “r” merely for reasons of practicality, as its *tratteggio* is simpler and faster. This characteristic may have

made it be perceived at first as a “lesser” variant, more appropriate for less formal texts. In fact, a sort of resurgence of the straight “r” can be found the later part of the period examined in texts that are rather formal in nature, such as [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*. The straight “r” persists word-initially up to the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth, possibly because the openness of the round “r” on the left side appeared odd in an initial position. Another explanation could be that the appearance of “r” rotunda only word-internally or word-finally made it more natural to extend its domain first and foremost to word-internal and word-final positions before it eventually spread to the word-initial one. In other words, the use of the rotunda “r” evolved from being a variant conditioned by the environment to being an all-purpose symbol used without any regard to the environment. The distribution of these two graphs may thus be understood as free variation, rather than a complementary distribution.

In conclusion, it must be reiterated that the distribution of “r” rotunda was never really conditioned by a clearly demarcated rule, commanding its use after round letters, and certainly not in the period studied here. After all, the earliest hands of the corpus examined already show an oscillation between the two letterforms that puts the very notion of the existence of any “rule” dictating the distribution of the “r” rotunda into question: if it ever existed, it was not paid much heed. But it seems more likely that Icelandic scribes finding themselves with two alternative letterforms simply did not know exactly what to do with them. They may have tried to make the distribution more systematic in some cases, but there does not seem to be a significant overlapping among different hands. This puts into doubt that the usage may have been regulated in any way in different scribal schools or scribal milieus. If that was ever the case, whatever scribal practice may have been taught or used in any given environment must be hidden behind the many variables at play: local practice, individual practice acquired in another area or milieu, influence from early exemplars, influence from documentary script, etc.

Thus, the “r” rotunda must have gained ground by virtue of its simpler *tratteggio* which suited the increasingly more cursive aesthetics and character of the script much better. Furthermore, the “r” rotunda lends itself to be written in a continuous script much more than the straight “r”, and the tendency of the script in the following centuries will indeed be that of evolving towards a continuous script, as can be seen in the later cursive

(*síðléttiskrift*) of the seventeenth century. Eventually, once the younger letterform, the “r” rotunda had spread more and its use more established, it would have been more economical to drop the earlier and more complex form altogether.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the distribution between conservative and innovative versions of three letters, namely “a”, tall “s”, and “r” were studied. The study focused on the evolution of three specific letterforms: “a”, “s”, and “r” rotunda. Each of these developed at different rates and under different conditions, suggesting that the process of script evolution was neither linear nor uniform:

1. The letter “a” exhibited the highest level of conservatism, with most scribes retaining the two-compartment form throughout the examined period. The lack of widespread adoption of the one-compartment form suggests that this feature was either not subject to the same pressures for change as “s” and “r” or that it carried a stylistic or functional significance that promoted stability. Because of this, its value is limited for the purpose of narrowing the dating of texts from the “long” fifteenth century.
2. The letter “s” demonstrated a markedly different trajectory, undergoing a relatively rapid transition towards the tall “s” extending below the baseline. The turning point for this shift appears to have occurred around the year 1400, after which the new form became dominant. Only a few exceptions were found, most notably the youngest manuscript of our database, [50] Holm perg. 3 fol. *Reykjahólabók*, which appears to have retained the older form as part of a deliberate archaising effort.
3. The letter “r” rotunda followed a more gradual but steady pattern of adoption. The evidence suggests that its spread was independent of the shift in “s”, meaning that these two innovations were not necessarily linked. The “r” rotunda appears with increasing frequency after 1450, suggesting that its adoption was part of a long-term trend rather than an abrupt change.

To conclude this analysis, we shall offer an overview of the hands that were studied in *Table 5.4*. The table indicates for what of the three features studied each scribe shows a preference for the more innovative form of each letter, to establish whether there is some kind of correlation or distribution between innovative or conservative forms across letterforms, and therefore whether such a thing as a general conservative or innovative tendency within an individual scribe can be said to exist.

The table should be interpreted as follows: the more conservative palaeographic variant in the case of “a” and tall “s” will be indicated with the same percentages as in the chapter above. Whenever the percentage equals or exceeds 50%, the cell will be coloured. In the case of “r” rotunda “+” indicates that the scribe uses this letterform in at least 10 out of 20 possible environments.

On a general level, we can observe some slight chronological shifts:

- Before 1400: conservative forms dominate, with the only significant innovation being the increasing use of the tall “s” extending below the baseline.
- 1400–1450: “r” rotunda gradually spreads, while tall “s” descending below the baseline solidifies as the dominant form.
- After 1450: a clear acceleration in the adoption of “r” rotunda. The number of scribes using at least one innovative feature increases.

On a more specific level, *Table 5.4* shows that only four scribes are mostly innovative:

- [26] AM 343 a 4to.
- [31] AM 533 4to.
- [36] AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to [44].
- [44] AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* (1).

Table 5.4: Distribution of innovative features.

No.	Shelf mark	Date	“a ₃ ”	“s ₂ ”	“r”
1	AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350–1375	0%	100%	
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350–1400	0%	0%	
3	AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360–1400	0%	0%	
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370–1380	0%	0%	
5	Holm perg. 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375–1400	0%	0%	
6	Holm perg. 19 4to	c1375–1400	0%	0%	
7	AM 194 8vo	1387	0%	100%	+
8	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387–1395	0%	0%	
9	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387–1395	0%	0%	
10	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400	50%	0%	
11	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400	0%	0%	
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400	0%	0%	
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400	100%	100%	
14	AM 561 4to	c1400	0%	67%	
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404–1420	0%	100%	
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420	0%	100%	
17	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400–1450	0%	100%	
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	0%	100%	
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	0%	100%	
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	0%	68%	
21	AM 151 4to (1)	c1450	0%	15%	+
22	AM 534 4to	c1400–1500	97%	53%	
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	0%	0%	+
24	AM 430 12mo	c1400–1500	0%	100%	
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475	100%	100%	
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450–1475	0%	100%	+
27	AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450–1500	0%	100%	+
28	Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500	0%	6%	
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	100%	100%	
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450–1500	95%	100%	
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	100%	100%	+
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500	0%	100%	
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	0%	100%	+
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	0%	100%	
35	AM 556 a 4to, <i>Eggertsbók</i>	c1475–1500	0%	100%	+
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	82%	100%	+
37	AM 159 4to	c1480–1500	0%	100%	+
38	AM 309 4to, <i>Bæjarbók í Flóa</i>	1498	0%	100%	+
39	AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubæjarbók</i>	c1500	0%	100%	
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	0%	100%	+
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	0%	100%	+
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500	0%	100%	+
43	AM 152 4to	c1500	0%	41%	
44	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (1)	c1500	100%	100%	+
45	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500	0%	100%	+
46	AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500–1525	0%	100%	+
47	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500–1525	0%	67%	+
48	AM 529 4to	c1500–1550	0%	100%	+
49	AM 147 4to <i>Heynesbók</i>	c1525–1550	0%	100%	+
50	Holm perg. 3 fol., <i>Reykjahólabók</i>	c1530–1540	0%	0%	+

On the other hand, 10 scribes are consistently conservative: [2], [3], [4], [5], [6], [8], [9], [11], [12] and [43]. All the others show a combination of innovative and conservative choices to various degrees.

- [43] AM 152 4to is more conservative in all the features examined, and this can be explained with the fact that it is a law book that may have called for a closer adherence to earlier models, something that may have had an influence also in the palaeography.

Scribes that presumably worked closely together may show interesting differences:

- [33] AM 577 4to is innovative in that he uses “r” rotunda more than 50% of the time, while his two colleagues [32] and [34] do not.
- [44] and [45], writing AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver*, both show an innovative character in the use of tall “s” and “r” rotunda, but [44] also makes use of a single-compartment “a”, something that his colleague does not.

As mentioned above, in the case of the “r” rotunda we see gradual spreading but when it comes to the tall “s” extending below the line there appears to be a turning point around 1400, with only few exceptions being detected. The most notable exception is [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, which can be explained with a conscious archaising intent. A more conservative shape of “a” is preferred by most of the scribes studied throughout the period examined. Starting with [26] AM 243 a 4to, the first text to be dated more securely after 1450, there is a more noticeable increase in the spread of “r” rotunda, which accompanies the already established tall “s” extending below the baseline.

One of the most striking conclusions from this study is that there does not appear to be a strong correlation between the adoption of one innovative letterform and another. That is, a scribe who embraced the tall “s” descending below the baseline did not necessarily adopt the “r” rotunda, and vice versa. This finding challenges the notion of a general “innovative” or “conservative” scribe and suggests that individual scribes made letterform choices based on a complex set of factors, perhaps including training, function, readability, and personal preference.

While broader chronological trends are observable—such as the increasing use of tall “s” descending below the baseline around 1400 and the rapid spread of “r” rotunda after 1450—these trends were not universally adopted in a predictable manner. Instead, scribes alternated between conservative and innovative features in ways that were often independent and seemingly unrelated.

In conclusion, the study highlights the nuanced and non-linear nature of script evolution in this corpus of late-medieval manuscripts. Rather than a clear-cut shift from old to new, the data suggests a landscape in which scribal choices were influenced by multiple, overlapping forces, leading to a patchwork of conservatism and innovation that varied from scribe to scribe and manuscript to manuscript.

6. Selected linguistic changes

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a selection of changes that emerge in the orthography and may reflect underlying phonological developments in the language will be analysed. The changes are introduced, then the data gathered will be presented and the picture emerging discussed, while the list of individual hands with short comments and referenced examples will be provided at the end of each section.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the data was gathered through a systematic randomised sampling, with the aim of providing a balanced picture of the hands studied. Leaves were selected, whenever possible, at regular intervals, and the data was divided into conservative and innovative forms. It must be borne in mind that a collection of a significant amount of data was not always possible: some texts simply do not contain enough lexical items potentially showing the relevant language changes. In such cases, results should be taken with some caution, of course. The tables below show the proportion between older and younger forms, together with the total of tokens collected, while the charts show the spread of the innovative forms.

6.2 Fricativisation of unstressed word-final *k*

Function words ending in *k* that bore little stress began showing signs of fricativisation starting in the thirteenth century (Björn K. Þórólfsson 1925, xxxii). The voiceless velar stop *k* in unstressed word-final position began turning into a fricative, perhaps [x] before a pause or a word starting with a voiceless consonant and [ɣ] before a word starting with a vowel or a voiced consonant. This happened in the 1st person pronoun nom. sing. *ek* ‘I’, acc. sing. *mik* ‘me’, the 2nd person pronoun acc. sing. *þik* ‘you’, the reflexive pronoun acc. sing. *sik* ‘oneself’, the conjunction/adverb *ok* ‘and’/‘also’, and the adverb *mjök* ‘much’. As these are all function words, they carried limited stress and were therefore affected by the fricativisation. The lexical content words were not affected. The change in pronunciation manifests itself in a direct orthographic change where spellings with “c” or “k” start giving way to spellings in “g”. Thus the pronoun *ek* starts appearing as “eg” in the written record instead of the earlier “ec” or “ek”; similarly, *mik*, *þik*, *sik*, the conjunction/adverb *ok*, and the adverb *mjök* surface with “g” instead of “c” or “k”. Inverse

spellings are rarely if ever found. This change is mentioned in passing in a variety of handbooks and linguistic descriptions, but it really has not been studied systematically. Works covering it are mostly general handbooks and linguistic descriptions, including Noreen (1923, 183); Björn K. Þórólfsson (1925, 32); Kristján Árnason (2005, 361–362), and Haraldur Bernharðsson (2016, 185–186).

As anticipated, lexical words such as the substantives *ok*, *lok*, *þak*, or verbal forms like *tók*, *lék*, *rak* of *taka*, *leika*, *reka*, respectively, were unaffected by the change. The function words with former final *k* only very rarely contrasted with any words which already ended in *g*, meaning that this change did not cause any merger (if we exclude that of *sik* > *sig* with *sig* n. ‘subsidence’, a word which is not very frequently encountered anyway, and inverse spelling of this one were at any rate not found in the course of this study). Even if the earliest orthographic signs indicating pronunciation with a fricative date back to the thirteenth century, the earlier spelling with “c” or (mostly) “k” is quite persistent. In the present study, the aim is to shed a light on the development of the orthographic representation in fifteenth-century hands. It is, of course, difficult to tell to what extent the variant spellings with “c”/“k” and “g” reflect actual variation in pronunciation and what is merely archaic spelling practice, perhaps intensified by the copying of early exemplars.

Both “c” and “k” typically represent a stop. Yet, by the fifteenth century, the velar/palatal stop is normally represented by “k” whereas “c” belongs mostly to an earlier orthographic tradition that in fact stretches back to the twelfth century and first part of the thirteenth. In fifteenth-century hands, “c” could possibly have been carried over from an old exemplar. Another holdover from an earlier period is the abbreviation with a superscript “c” (often used above the “e” to abbreviate the pronoun *ek*) in hands that otherwise do not use “c” (apart from “ck”); a fixed abbreviation even after spelling indicating a fricative became common.

Table 6.1 presents an overview of the results of the examination of fifty hands from the late fourteenth century into the beginning of the sixteenth century. The table shows the size of the sample (number of tokens) from each scribal hand (*n*) and the distribution between the two values (in percentages), namely, the spellings “c” and “k”, typically representing a stop, and the spelling “g” representing a fricative. Data was, as already

mentioned and explained in Chapter 3, gathered with systematic random sampling selected wherever possible at regular intervals. Cells are coloured in yellow when the percentage is 100%, while they are blue whenever the percentage exceeds 50%, to help visualise the distribution. *Figure 6.1* represents the data in a graph with a trendline.

As can be observed in *Table 6.1* and *Figure 6.1*, there is a trend towards a spread of the “g” spellings during the period examined. Starting sometime after the middle of the fifteenth century, there is a sudden appearance of numerous spikes in the graph in *Figure 6.1*, and these become more numerous towards the end of the period. These, however, are accompanied by a large number of hands that keep, partly or largely, a conservative character. It is instructive to compare the first half and the second half of the corpus (further division could be more questionable as many of the dates are so fluid).

In the first half of the corpus, scribes 1–25, the average ratio of “c”/“k” spellings is around 83% while in the second half, scribes 26–50, it is around 44%, quite a marked difference. Likewise, in the first half of the corpus, there are only two scribes that use the “c”/“k” spellings less than 50%:

- [20] GKS 2845 4to (2), c1450: 22.8%
- [23] AM 432 12mo, c1400–1500: 10.1%

In the second half of the corpus, by contrast, 13 out of 25 scribes use the “c”/“k” spellings less than 50%. Furthermore, in the first half, nine scribes use the “c”/“k” spellings consistently, 100%, and three more use it 95% of the time or more but not quite 100%; all in all, twelve scribes are in the 95–100% range. In the second half, only one scribe uses the older spelling 100% of the time and only two 95–99%; that is, only three scribes in the 95–100% range compared to twelve in the first half. Again, a fairly strong contrast.

Table 6.1: The fricativisation of unstressed, word-final *k*.

No.	Shelf mark	Date	<i>n</i>	“c”/“k”	“g”
1	AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350–1375	208	100%	0%
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350–1400	143	100%	0%
3	AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360–1400	24	100%	0%
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370–1380	223	100%	0%
5	Holm perg. 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375–1400	109	85.3%	14.7%
6	Holm perg. 19 4to	c1375–1400	84	54.8%	45.2%
7	AM 194 8vo	1387	14	92.9%	7.1%
8	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387–1395	215	63.7%	36.3%
9	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387–1395	100	100%	0%
10	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400	57	84.2%	15.8%
11	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400	80	100%	0%
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400	327	99.7%	0.3%
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400	186	100%	0%
14	AM 561 4to	c1400	42	83.3%	16.7%
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404–1420	103	96.1%	3.9%
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420	55	100%	0%
17	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400–1450	130	88.5%	11.5%
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	79	73.4%	26.6%
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	67	70.1%	29.9%
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	57	22.8%	77.2%
21	AM 151 4to (1)	c1450	13	100%	0%
22	AM 534 4to	c1400–1500	108	86.1%	13.9%
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	160	10.6%	89.4%
24	AM 430 12mo	c1400–1500	173	76.3%	23.7%
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475	168	98.8%	1.2%
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450–1475	65	63.1%	36.9%
27	AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450–1500	82	1.2%	98.8%
28	Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500	297	99.7%	0.3%
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	68	0%	100%
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450–1500	43	0%	100%
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	101	100%	0%
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500	42	2.4%	97.6%
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	36	52.8%	47.2%
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	25	28%	72%
35	AM 556 a 4to, <i>Eggertsbók</i>	c1475–1500	410	96.6%	3.4%
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	38	21.1%	78.9%
37	AM 159 4to	c1480–1500	29	79.3%	20.7%
38	AM 309 4to, <i>Bæjarbók í Flóa</i>	1498	52	5.8%	94.2%
39	AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubæjarbók</i>	c1500	115	86.1%	13.9%
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	2	50%	50%
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	52	1.9%	98.1%
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500	20	85%	15%
43	AM 152 4to	c1500	9	77.8%	22.2%
44	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (1)	c1500	13	69.2%	30.8%
45	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500	11	45.5%	54.5%
46	AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500–1525	124	0%	100%
47	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500–1525	21	38.1%	61.9%
48	AM 529 4to	c1500–1550	25	83.3%	16.7%
49	AM 147 4to <i>Heynesbók</i>	c1525–1550	22	40.9%	59.1%
50	Holm perg. 3 fol., <i>Reykjahólabók</i>	c1530–1540	67	0%	100%

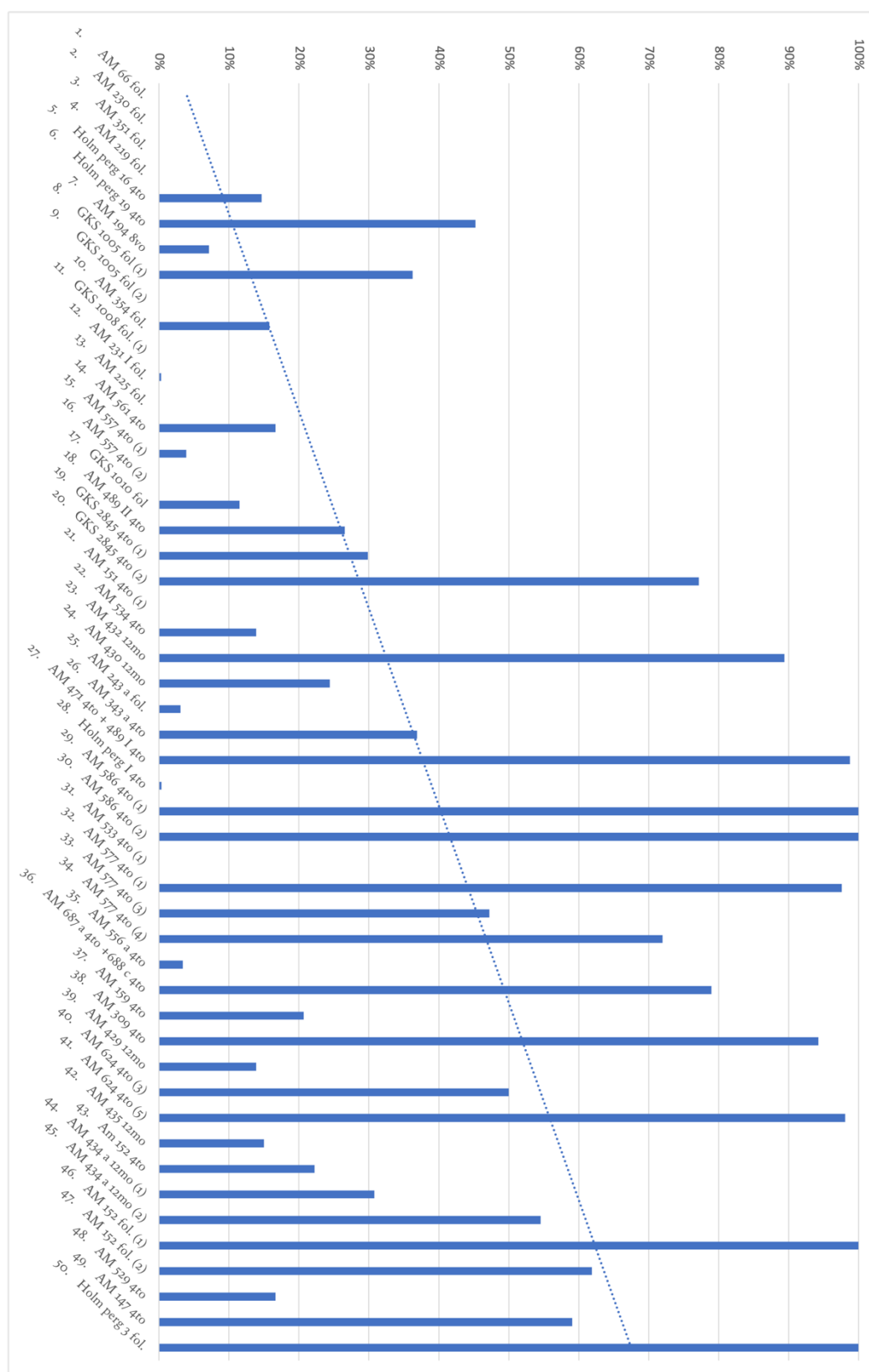


Figure 6.1: Fricativisation of word-final *k*.

The earliest hands showing a mixed practice, thus introducing the innovative “g” spellings along with the conservative “c”/“k” spelling, are listed here, along with the percentage of younger forms (“g”) collected in the sample:

- [5] Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók* (1), c1375–1400: 14.7%.
- [6] Holm perg. 19 4to, c1375–1400: 45.2%.
- [7] AM 194 8vo, 1387: 7.1%.
- [8] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (1), c1387–1395: 36.3%.

Of these, [5] Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók* was probably written in the Northeast (Stefán Karlsson 1982b, 78), [6] Holm perg. 19 4to in the Skagafjörður area (Stefán Karlsson 1963, xxxvii), while [8] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* in the north-western region (Rowe 2005, 11). It is, however, difficult to draw any conclusion on the localisation of this change in any particular area, as the mobility of the scribes may significantly affect its appearance in texts written far away from their place of origin. However, this information may indicate that the change was somewhat more spread in the North than elsewhere around the beginning of the fifteenth century, though these manuscripts cannot be contrasted with others localised in different parts of the country.

The first hand to show a more marked preference for the younger form is [20] GKS 2845 4to (2), c1450, with 77.2% fricative spellings, a manuscript presumed to be written in the West of Iceland (Jón Helgason 1955, ix–xii; and in fact Jón Helgason thought it may have been written in the first quarter of the fifteenth century), while the first hands using the younger orthography 100% of the time are [29] and [30] AM 586 4to (1)–(2), dated to the second half of the same century. The place of writing of AM 586 4to has not been determined. Árni Magnússon reports to have obtained this book from the farmer Bjarni Bjarnason in Arnarbæli on Fellsströnd, in the West of Iceland (Loth 1977, 17). Of course, the two manuscripts *presumed* to originate from the same region can hardly be any evidence on the point of dispersal of this change, but it would nonetheless be worth investigating.

There are some conspicuous outliers in the second half of the corpus, showing a marked preference for the conservative variant, despite a relatively younger dating. The percentages show the ratio of innovative forms:

- [28] Holm perg. 1 4to, c1450–1500, *Mariu saga* and *Mariu saga egipzku*: 0.3%.
- [31] AM 533 4to, c1450–1500, containing romances: 0%.
- [35] AM 556 a 4to, *Eggertsbók*, c1475–1500, containing family sagas: 3.4%.
- [37] AM 159 4to, c1480–1500, containing legal texts: 20.7%.
- [39] AM 429 12mo, *Kirkjubæjarbók*, c1500, containing female saints' lives: 13.9%.
- [42] AM 435 12mo, c1500, containing a miscellany: 15%.
- [43] AM 152 4to, c1500, containing legal texts: 22.2%.
- [44] AM 434 a 12mo, *Lakningakver* (1), c1500: 30.8%.
- [48] AM 529 4to, c1500–1550, containing chivalric sagas: 16.7%.

The type of texts written by these hands are quite varied, though most of them appear to be sagas, which is also true for the more innovative scribes. The following observations can be made: [28] Holm perg. 1 4to and [31] AM 533 4to (1) have not been localised. [35] AM 556 a 4to, *Eggertsbók* has been connected to northern Iceland (Hast 1960, 27), while [39] AM 429 12mo, *Kirkjubæjarbók*, if we accept that it was likely written at *Þykkvabæjarklaustur* in Álftaver (Wolf 2011, 15–16), originated in the Southeast. This is hardly a solid ground from which to draw assumptions, but if some of the earliest texts in the corpus showing the fricativisation ([5] Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók*, [6] Holm perg. 19 4to, and [8] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*) did indeed originate in the north-west of Iceland, it should not be surprising that parts of the south-east would not be affected by this change as rapidly as areas closer to the centre of this innovation. Concerning [48] AM 529 4to, and [24] AM 430 12mo, given how little is known about their provenance, it is hard to make any inferences. It should be added that a later hand showing a markedly innovative character is also located to the western region: [46] Þorsteinn Þorleifsson writing AM 152 fol. (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2014, 90). His colleague writing the latter part of the text, [47] Jón Þorgilsson, uses the younger orthography 61.9% of the time, but was known to be active in the bishopric of Hólar in the North (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2014, 90). Again, this may indicate a core area of innovation in the West, and a spread which may have initially affected some pockets in the North, leaving others unaffected.

Observing the general trend through the period, it may be thus assumed that the change, if we exclude any earlier sporadic appearance in the orthography, gains considerable ground around 1450. After that, many hands show considerable spikes, and one [31], does not show any sign of innovation. It is also important to notice that only four hands have “g” 100% of the time ([29] and [30], writing AM 586 4to, [46] AM 152 fol. (1) Þorsteinn Þorleifsson, and [50] Holm perg. 3 fol.), while ten hands have 100% “c”/“k” and the others show a mixed practice. The change cannot thus be said to appear definitively established even at the end of the period studied.

We can find interesting and varied results when comparing hands that (may have) worked side by side: [8] Jón and [9] Magnús, writing GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* show respectively 36.3% and 0% of “g”, which shows the extent of possible variation between contemporaries working on the same project. The scribes [15] and [16], writing AM 557 4to, are somewhat more like each other, and the first one uses very sporadically (3.9%) “g”, while his colleague never does so. Both [29] and [30] writing AM 586 4to show a preference for “g” in 100% of the instances. A significant difference is found between [46] Þorsteinn Þorleifsson and [47] Jón Þorgilsson, writing AM 152 fol., with the former using the younger form in 100% of the cases and the latter in 61.9%. As mentioned, the former came from the West of Iceland, while the latter was active in the bishopric of Hólar in the North (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2014, 90). What may lie behind similarities of differences between scribes working together is perhaps impossible to ascertain, as it may be either dialectal, generational, or merely a reflection of different scribal conventions in place in different writing centres.

Regarding the advancement of the change in the individual lexical items, it must be said that the orthographic evidence collected seems to suggest that there was some lexical difference in its spread: on the one hand the fricativisation appears orthographically in the adverb *mjök* far more often than in the other words, followed by the objective forms of the personal pronouns *þik* and *mik* and eventually the reflexive *sik*. On the other hand, the pronoun *ek* is typically least affected. This agrees with the findings of Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen (2000, 78, 81 and 195) in her study of AM 132 fol., *Möðruvallabók* from 1330–1370. This can be illustrated, looking at the earlier examples, by the scribes of GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, [8] and [9], who are somewhat divergent: while the text

written by [9] Magnús, as already mentioned, shows no examples of the change, his colleague [8] Jón shows frequent fricativisation (more than a third of the sample, 36.3%) in the accusative forms *mik*, *þik*, *sik* and in the adverb *mjök*, but spells *ek* consistently with “k” (or “c”). This is quite typical, and hands displaying a mix of conservative and innovative features usually retain “ek” more frequently than any other item. An interesting exception to this tendency was found in [18] AM 489 4to II, where the conservative spelling “miok” was encountered along with numerous examples of younger “þig” and “sig”.

It remains an open question, of course, to what extent this orthographic variation between lexical items reflects variation in pronunciation. The personal pronoun *ek* remains spelt as such (with “k” or “c”) even in manuscripts that show fricativisation almost everywhere else. Thus, the question is bound to arise whether this conservative spelling reflects a phonological reality, indicating that the phenomenon spread gradually and did not affect all the function words equally in its initial phases, or if it was merely a spelling convention with no phonological reason backing it up. In other words, there are two possible explanations for the seemingly uneven distribution of the change in certain words as opposed to others:

(1) The change in pronunciation may have been lexicalised to some extent, affecting some lexical items sooner than others. Lexical diffusion, contrasting with the neogrammarian notion by which a change would occur in all cases in which it is applicable, is the hypothesis by which change would appear in specific lexical items and then spread across different words. It is not implausible that this spelling pattern reflects actual pronunciation to a certain degree. It is possible this change first gained ground in *mjök*, although this will likely never be proven.

(2) Through orthographic convention, some words may have retained earlier spelling longer than others. For example, the abbreviation “ē” for *ek* became established in the scribal practice after the *k* began appearing as fricativised elsewhere, as shown very clearly in Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, where *ek* is consistently spelled “eg” but abbreviated as “ē”.

Haraldur Bernharðsson (2016, 186) shows how some of the earliest examples of fricativisation for *ek* can be found in the thirteenth century in the clitic form of the pronoun, particularly in intervocalic environments, which very often facilitate

fricativisation—normally after an initial stage of voicing, in case of voiceless consonants. Considering how the phenomenon is very circumscribed in a very small class of words, it seems difficult to believe it may have hit all the pronouns with *ek* lagging somewhat behind, only to be affected later. It seems thus reasonable to assume that *ek* followed the trend of the other function words on a similar timeframe, but somehow the spelling choice for this word in particular remained more markedly conservative, perhaps with the frequency of the forms impacting the development of the spelling. The following section is a survey on individual hands intended to provide some examples of the instances encountered (instances of “*ē*” are ambiguous, as they ostensibly denote a stop consonant but occur in contexts where fricativisation was already well underway or fully established. They will therefore not be included in the quantitative counts, although their occurrence will be noted where relevant):

[1] **AM 66 fol., *Hulda*:** a total of 208 tokens were registered, including all the relevant words, the pronominal forms *ek*, *mik*, *þik*, *sik*, the conjunction *ok* and the adverb *mjök*. All the forms appeared in a spelling representing a stop.

[2] **AM 230 fol.:** examples of all the applicable items were found. Invariably represented with a stop. Only the conjunction *ok* was occasionally spelt with a “*c*”.

[4] **AM 219 fol.:** examples of all the applicable items were found. Invariably represented with a stop.

[5] **Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók*:** examples of all the applicable items were found. While the orthographic representation of a stop prevailed, instances of spelling indicating a fricative were found, such as “*miogh*” 5r29, “*migh*” 10r25, “*sigh*” 15r19. Considering the age of the manuscript, this “*gh*” orthography can be considered a Norwegianism, as this was the common spelling for the fricative allophone of *g* in Norwegian scribal practice.

[6] **Holm perg. 19 4to:** examples of all the applicable items were found, except for the conjunction *ok*, which was abbreviated with the symbol “*z*”. All the items were both present with a spelling indicating a stop or a fricative, except for *ek*, which

only appeared with a spelling indicating a stop. The fricative was represented by “g” only and no instances of “gh” were found.

[7] AM 194 8vo: only fourteen examples were found. These were limited to iterations of *ek*, *mik*, *ok*, and *sik*, one instance of the adverb was found in “miog” 2r23, showing fricativisation.

[8] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (1), Jón Þórðarson: in the hand of Jón Þórðarson, examples of all the applicable items were found. Fricativisation is widespread: “miog”, “mig”, “þig”, and “sig” are the norm throughout with very few exceptions, as in “mik” 5rb25, 55rb32 and 115ra32. However, the first-person pronoun *ek* is consistently showing a stop, together with *ok*, whenever it is not represented by a Tironian note, so that these two items deviate from the rest of data set.

[9] GKS 1005 fol. *Flateyjarbók* (2), Magnús Þórhallsson: in the hand of Magnús Þórhallsson, examples of all the applicable items were found. Indications of fricativisation never appear in his spelling. Given the massive volume of this text, there is reason to suspect that the spelling indicating a stop, from which Magnús never deviates, was not merely a conservative orthographic convention, but either a dialectal feature or perhaps a consequence of older age compared to his contemporary colleague Jón (and perhaps both), though this is hard to ascertain.

[10] AM 354 fol., *Skálholtsbók yngri*: examples of all the applicable items were found, except for the accusative pronoun *mik*. This is a legal text that does not offer many examples of personal pronouns. The conjunction *ok* is always spelt with “k”. The pronoun *ek* and the adverb *mjök* were found only once each and with a spelling indicating a stop. The spelling indicating a fricative, found in 9 instances, is almost exclusively confined to the pronoun *sik*, which was once found with the Norwegian spelling “sigh” in 90r28 but is otherwise spelt “sig” throughout except for an instance where it appears as “sik” 30r14. One instance of “þig” was found at 30r5.

[12] AM 231 1 fol.: examples of all the applicable items were found. Invariably represented with a stop, except for one exception: “miogh” 8rb32.

- [14] **AM 561 4to**: examples of all the applicable items except *þik* were found: *ek* was always spelt “æk”, “ok” was typically abbreviated or rarely spelt “ok”. The only items showing fricativisation were “sig”, as in 12r14, 19v12, 20r17 and “miog” as in 13r4, 21r8, 28r3, 29r10.
- [15] **AM 557 4to (1)**: examples of all the applicable items were found. The only four examples found where fricativisation was present were “eg”, in 21r17 and 21r19, and “miog” 21r7 and 18r26. As they appear concentrated towards the end of the portion of text written by this hand, it could be the case that the scribe may have given up preserving an older spelling which no longer corresponded to his speech habit.
- [17] **GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna***: examples of all the applicable items were found. From the very beginning and scattered throughout the texts, instances of fricativisation can be found, with *mjök* being the most frequent item: “miog” 15ra11, 15rb29, 15ra38-15rb1 65rb22, 90vb1, “míogh” 15ra11, 15rb6, 29ra1, 30ra19 “mígh” 15rb35, “þig” 2rb27, “þigh” 2rb31, “sig” 45ra18, 81rb7, 90va1, 90vb31. The pronoun *ek* and the conjunction *ok* are spelt in a way indicating a stop except in “egh” 30rb22.
- [18] **AM 489 II 4to**: examples of all the applicable items were found, except for *ok*, which is abbreviated with the symbol “z”. From the very beginning of this hand’s section and scattered throughout the texts, instances of fricativisation can be found alongside instances showing the spelling indicating a stop: “sig” 27r25, 28r5, 28v21, “þig” 32v18, 32v24, “miog” 32v31; the pronoun *ek* always has a spelling indicating a stop.
- [19] **GKS 2845 4to (1)**: examples of all the applicable items were found. From the very beginning and scattered throughout the texts, instances of fricativisation can be found: “eg” 2r15, 12r11, 24r4, 28r3, “sig” 16r8, “miog” 30r8. The first-person pronoun *ek* represented most items in which a “g” spelling was found (11 out of 20). This is exceptional, as *ek* is often one of the last words showing fricativisation in the orthography.

[20] **GKS 2845 4to (2)**: examples of all the applicable items were found. This is the first scribe showing a majority of spellings indicating a fricative at 77.2%. From the very beginning and scattered throughout the texts, instances of fricativisation can be found: “eg” 42r1, “þig” 44r2, 44r3, “sig” 52r1; “miok” was only found with the older spelling, as in 43r23. This is particularly interesting, because *mjök* is usually among the first words to appear with “g”. The pronoun *mik* was abbreviated twice with a superscript “c” and these two occurrences were not counted, since they could not be interpreted as representing a plosive: the superscript “c” became a fixed abbreviation as it fit nicely above other characters, whilst “k” and “g” were not as well suited for superscript position. Such superscript “c” is also often found in hands where the spelling with “g” is virtually universal, such as in AM 152 fol., from the start of the sixteenth century. Just as it was the case with the first hand of this manuscript, the scribe of GKS 2845 4to (2) spelt the first-person pronoun *ek* with “g” in the majority of the instances found. This is exceptional, as *ek* is often one of the last words showing fricativisation in the orthography.

[21] **AM 151 4to (1)**: very few instances were found, as it is usually the case with legal texts, which normally do not show extensive use of personal pronouns: items were limited to *ok*, *sik*, *ek*, *mjök*, all with a spelling indicating a stop.

[22] **AM 534 4to**: instances of fricativisation can be seen already on the first folio, with “miog” appearing three times 1ra19, 1rb19, 1rb21. On folio 2 there appear already a few pronouns none of which shows fricativisation. Sporadic examples of the change appear later, as in “sig” 8ra28 and “þig” 8rb31, but they are also found alongside other items with a spelling indicating a stop (“þik” in 16ra10, but “þig” in 16ra22). The pronoun *ek* was not found with a spelling indicating a fricative.

[23] **AM 432 12mo**: examples of all the applicable items were found, overwhelmingly showing fricativisation. The few scattered exceptions included “ek” 83r1, 83r5, 83r10, “ok” 13v1. All of these were normally spelt with a “g”, although a “gh” was also found twice: “egh” 48v10 and 59r6. Instances such as “þ” 79r1, were not counted.

- [24] **AM 430 12mo**: examples of all the applicable items were found, except for the conjunction *ok*, which was abbreviated with the symbol “z”. Fricative and spelling indicating a stop alternate quite randomly throughout the text: “sik” 3r1 but “sigh” 15v2, “mik” 30r4, “egh” 5r14 (together with two “ek” in 5r13 and 5r16), in 7r5 and 75r16 (still with “ek” and even “pik” in the same folio “nu bid egh pik” 7r5), “miok” 2v4 but “miog” 16r15, 30r11.
- [25] **AM 243 a fol.**: examples of all the applicable items were found. Invariably represented with a stop except for two cases in which the adverb *mjök* “miog” 1ra12 and 15rb7.
- [26] **AM 343 a 4to**: examples of all the applicable items were found except for *mik*. From the very beginning and scattered throughout the texts, instances of fricativisation can be found: “sig” 83r5, “miog” 93r4, “eg” 43r4, “og” 13r8. One instance of *pik* abbreviated with a superscript “c”, was found: 43r14, but it was not included in the tally; elsewhere it was written “pik”.
- [27] **AM 471 4to + 489 1 4to**: examples of all the applicable items were found, all showing a spelling indicating a fricative except for a single “ok” in AM 489 a 4to, 3r15.
- [28] **Holm perg. 1 4to**: examples of all the applicable items were found, all showing a spelling indicating a stop except for a single instance of “sig” 20ra22.
- [30] **AM 586 4to (2)**: examples of all the applicable items were found, except for the adverb *mjök*, all showing a spelling indicating a fricative.
- [31] **AM 533 4to (1)**: examples of all the applicable items were found, except for the pronoun *pik*, all showing a spelling indicating a stop. It should be noted that on 53r, a different hand has written lines 1–14, before the main hand one took over again. This auxiliary hand writes both “miog” 53r8 and “mig” 53r10. As this is a different hand, these examples were not included in the tally, but it is still interesting to note this fact.
- [32] **AM 577 4to (1)**: no instances of *mik* and *pik* were found, but all the other items showed fricativisation, except for a single instance of “ek” 25v3.

- [33] AM 577 4to (3): a few examples of all the applicable items were found, except for the pronoun *mik*. The pronoun *ek* was often written “eg”, 66r2, 66r3, 66r6, 67v1, 67v3, 68v16, etc., but most frequently “ek”. The conjunction *ok* was written in full once in 67r8 and with a spelling indicating a stop.
- [34] AM 577 4to (4): a few examples of all the applicable items were found, except for the pronoun *mik*. Only the pronoun *ek* and the conjunction “ok” 79v5 displayed a spelling indicating a stop.
- [35] AM 556 a 4to, *Eggertsbók*: no instances of *mik* and *þik* were found. The remaining instances were overwhelmingly represented with a spelling indicating a stop as in “sik” 20r24, with few exceptions, mostly in the word “og” 1r15, 20r3, 25r24, 30r12, 41r12, 45r35, 50r37, 60r37, 65r20, 70r24, 70r30 and “miog” 85r26.
- [36] AM 687 a 4to + 688 c 4to: in 687 a, no instances of *mik* were found, all the items showed fricativisation except for “miok” 4v20 and “ok” 7r1. In 688 c, no instances of *mik* were found. Most of the instances found showed fricativisation. Of those which did not, only five cases of the conjunction “ok”, see for example 15r24, and one of “miok” at 3r17 were found.
- [37] AM 159 4to: no instances of *mik* and *mjök* were found. The spelling indicating a stop was prevalent: “sik” 12v7, “ok” 13r4, “ek” 24r13. Six exceptions were “þig” 42v26, 83v7, “sig” 4r16, 12r12, 12v9, 72v9.
- [38] AM 309 4to, *Bæjarbók í Flóa*: examples of all the applicable items were found. The overwhelming majority of them showed fricativisation, or 94.2%. The only exceptions found were “ek” 16ra11, 20rb35, and “ok” 24rb5.
- [39] AM 429 12mo, *Kirkjubæjarbók*: examples of all the applicable items were found. The overwhelming majority of them with a spelling indicating a stop. Exceptions included all but one applicable item: the three pronouns “þig” 11r14, 51r15 and “mig” 7r10, 17r6, “sig” 21r3, 21r10, 51r11, and the adverb “míog” 45r5, 75r7. The pronoun *ek* was never found fricativised. This is in line with the tendency to retain a conservative spelling for the pronoun *ek*.

- [40] AM 624 4to (3): only two instances were found: “ek” 82r11 and “pig” 82r16.
- [41] AM 624 4to (5): no instances of *mik* and *pik* were found. All the items collected indicate fricativisation. The only possible exception was the pronoun *sik* which was once found with a superscript “c” in 38r19. This is, of course, ambiguous and not tallied since this abbreviation was used consistently by scribes as a fossilised form.
- [42] AM 435 12mo: no instances of *mik* and *sik* were found, the others were all found with a spelling indicating a stop, with three exceptions: “miog” 10v4, 12r3, and 12r10.
- [43] AM 152 4to: only nine tokens were found, two of which showed fricativisation: “miog” 70r17 and “sig” 85r7.
- [44] AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* (1): only thirteen tokens were found, nine of which had a spelling indicating a stop, such as “ek” 6rb18, 6va7, “ok” 7ra5, 7va11, 15vb2, while fricativisation could be found in “pig” 6va7 and “míog” 14ra10, 15va13, 22ra3. Instances with a superscript “c” were not counted, as in 6ra1 or 20ra15, where *pik* is abbreviated in this way, or 6ra13, where *ek* is abbreviated with a superscript “c”. It must be noted that the same abbreviation is often used with “t” to represent the form *tek*.
- [45] AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* (2): only eleven tokens were found, of *ok*, *mik*, *sik* and *mjök*. The first was invariably written with a spelling indicating a stop, while the pronouns *mik*, *sik* and the adverb *mjök* showed fricativisation: “ok” 25ra17, 25va19, 31vb16, 32ra11, 34rb12, “míg” 36vb3, 36vb5, “sig” 35ra5, and “míog”, 34rb16 34rb19, and 40ra5.
- [46] AM 152 fol. (1), *Þorsteinn Þorleifsson*: examples of all the applicable items were found for a total of 124 tokens, invariably represented with a fricative.
- [47] AM 152 fol. (2), *Jón Þorgilsson*: in this smaller sample, of only 21 tokens, the fricative is consistently represented by “gh”. The first-person pronoun *ek* is occasionally abbreviated with a superscript “c”, but these instances were not counted as

they are ambiguous. The pronoun was occasionally spelt “ec” in full, as in 162ra15, 162rb9, 162rb30 172ra4, 172rb6, and 172rb39, and occasionally “eg”, as in 92ra25, 102rb31, and 142ra28. The instances of spellings indicating a stop were almost always of the pronoun *ek*, except for one instance of “ok” in 152ra1.

[48] **AM 529 4to**: examples of all the applicable items were found, but only twelve tokens in total. When written in full, they show a spelling indicating a fricative, except for *ok*. All the pronouns were occasionally abbreviated with a superscript “c”, as in “ē” 5v21, “m^c” 30r19, “p^c” 35r3, and “s^c” 60r17. Such instances were not included in the tally, as they are ambiguous. The superscript “c” is also used to abbreviate *ekki*, “ēi”, leaving little doubt that the scribe had a stop in mind at least in this case. However, since the scribe mostly used a spelling representing a fricative, when not abbreviating, these items were not counted; the value of abbreviation symbols may differ depending on the context.

[49] **AM 147 4to**, *Heynesbók*: only 22 tokens could be found in the sample examined, nine of which showed a conservative spelling: “ok” 7v18, 69r5; otherwise, the spelling indicating a fricative was found: “sig” 43r22, 43r25, 79r12, “og” 109r19, 111r14, “miog” 1v1, 127r4.

[50] **Holm perg. 3 fol.**, *Reykjahólabók*: examples of all the applicable items were found in a sample of 67 tokens. Invariably represented with a fricative. The spelling alternated between “g”, as in “sig” 2ra40, and “gh”, as in “sigh” 2ra42, but the former was the more common by far.

To summarise the findings of this section, from around the middle of the period studied there is an increase in the appearance of the younger form, the spelling suggesting a fricative pronunciation. After that these appear to spread more steadily with some hands showing a marked preference for it, while the majority typically show a mixed practice. There is a clear general trend towards a spread of the younger form. It is an open question whether it may have originated in the West of the country and then reached some pockets in the North and then elsewhere. Scribes presumably working side by side can either show significant similarity or differences in their practice, and it is hard to establish

whether any similarity would reflect a common provenance, or whether the differences should be attributed to their dialect or to learned conventions. The change does not appear with equal frequency in all the applicable cases: the word *mjök* is the one which most consistently shows the spelling indicating a fricative, followed by accusative forms of the pronouns, *mik*, *þik*, *sik*, the conjunction *ok* and eventually by the nominative form *ek*.

6.3 The diphthongisation of *e* before *ng* (*nk*)

The diphthongisation of short *e* to *ei* [ei] immediately before *ng* (or *nk*) in words such as *lengi* adv. ‘long’, *drengr* m. ‘boy’, *gengi* of *ganga* ‘walk’, *fengi* of *fá* ‘get’, etc., appearing in the orthography chiefly through the spelling “ei” instead of the earlier “e”, is part of a series of changes affecting short vowels before *ng/nk*. Björn K. Þórólfsson (1925, xii–xiii) explains how the short vowel *e* appears to start changing into a diphthong before *ng* clusters (and *nk* in loanwords) around 1300 but starts spreading only in the second half of that century. By the time in which the *Guðbrandsbiblía* was printed in 1584, the diphthongal spelling had become universal (Bandle 1956, 46). This change also affected the short vowels *a* and *ö* around the same time, which evolved into the diphthongs *á* [au] and *au* [œy] (though the contemporary standard orthography does not indicate this change). However, *u* and *i*, did not change quality but surface as *u* [u] and *i* [i] in today’s Icelandic, though the spelling is “u” and “i”, respectively, before “ng”. In contrast to the diphthongisation of *e*, these latter changes do not have a clear orthographic manifestation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and will not be considered.

There have been two competing explanations for this development. Some scholars, such as Jóhannes L.L. Jóhannsson (1924, 19), maintain that this change must have progressed through two stages: first one in which the etymologically short vowels were lengthened before *ng*, then a subsequent stage in which these newly arisen long vowels became diphthongs. These diphthongs and vowels would have subsequently become short with the new phonotactical rules which emerged after the Quantity Shift took place. Stefán Karlsson (1967, 50) initially agreed with this interpretation in his introduction to the seventh volume of *Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile*, where he cites one instance in which the scribe of AM 221 fol. (c1275–1300) writes “géngr”, which would imply a vowel lengthening in *gengr*. However, Stefán Karlsson (1981, 279–280) changed

his mind later, calling the evidence cited a weak argument (“veik rök”), and instead maintained that the change must have manifested itself immediately in the form of a diphthongisation, describing this interpretation as much more probable (“mun sennilegri”). This view is also espoused by Helge Sandøy (1997–1998, 46–83) and Kristján Árnason (2005, 392), who adds that there is no orthographic evidence suggesting a long vowel *é* before *ng* in manuscripts. If that it had been the case, this lengthened vowel would have merged with the earlier long *é* and followed the development of *é* in becoming the rising diphthong [ie] and ultimately the sequence [jɛ] which is found in Modern Icelandic.

Before this change took place, the language had a contrast between /e/ and /ei/ as in the minimal pairs *ben* : *bein* or *men* : *mein*. Thus, the phonemes /e/ and /ei/ had different orthographic representation with “e” and “ei”. However, as result of the diphthongisation, the former /e/ merged with /ei/ before /ng/ and it was therefore inevitable that the scribes would select the spelling “ei” for the vowel in *leingi*, just as they would in *bein* and *mein*. Of course, they were also influenced by an orthographic tradition showing “e” before “ng” in the earlier manuscripts which they were copying, and this must have slowed down the orthographic change.

The kind of examples to look for in this case are words such as *engi*, *fengi*, *fengu(m)*, *lengi*, *England*, *engill*, which may be found spelt “ei” instead of “e” as in “eingi” or “eīgi”, “feingi”, “leingi”, “eīgld”, “eingill”, etc. The spelling change thus reveals a change in the pronunciation. Two marginal types that are somewhat difficult to interpret are forms such as:

- a) “giengu”, etc.
 1. [33] AM 577 4to (3).
- b) “fiengu”, etc.
 1. [4] AM 219 fol.
 2. [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna*.
 3. [33] AM 577 4to (3).
 4. [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*.

A discussion on the development of these forms, why they are difficult to interpret, how they are treated and tallied in the present study will be presented below. *Table 6.2* and *Figure 6.2* illustrate the distribution of spellings indicating a monophthong and a

diphthong in the hands analysed. Rates of 100% are marked yellow, those between 51 and 99% are in blue.

The data gathered from the scribal hands analysed show a slow trend throughout the period under examination. Seventeen scribes in total show the younger form 100% of the time and, interestingly, the first of them to do so is also the oldest hand in the corpus, [1] AM 66 fol., *Hulda*, c1350–1375. The change appears to be well established and frequently represented in the orthography already in the earliest part of the period under examination. The earliest hands until around 1400 show greater differences among themselves than those dated to later than 1400, all displaying the innovation, though to varying degrees. Given how predominant the younger form is, it may be the case that at least those scribes showing a mixed practice must have been influenced by the old scribal convention, rather than, for example, a mixed pronunciation, although this may have been a possibility in some cases. In other words, this change is much more advanced than the fricativisation of word-final *k* examined in Chapter 6.2, and the difference between the two halves is much smaller in this case.

In the first half of the corpus, scribes 1–25, the average “eing” spelling is around 72%, but in the second half, scribes 26–50, it is around 86%. Comparable numbers for the fricativisation of *k* are (using the innovative feature): around 17% in the first half and 56% in the second half. In the change *eng* > *eing*, 19 scribes out of 25 in the first half of the corpus use “eing” more than 50% of the time, of which seven use it 100%. In the second half, 23 scribes out of 25 write “eing” more than 50% of the time, of which ten use it 100%. The change is thus quite advanced already at the beginning of the period examined, and further progress is slow.

Table 6.2: The diphthongisation of *e* before “ng”.

No.	Shelf mark	Date	<i>n</i>	“eng”	“eing”
1	AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350–1375	29	0%	100%
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350–1400	26	50%	50%
3	AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360–1400	52	3.8%	96.2%
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370–1380	55	100%	0%
5	Holm perg. 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375–1400	20	0%	100%
6	Holm perg. 19 4to	c1375–1400	27	33.3%	66.7%
7	AM 194 8vo	1387	22	31.8%	68.2%
8	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387–1395	69	7.1%	92.9%
9	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387–1395	91	60.4%	39.6%
10	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400	62	77.4%	22.6%
11	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400	46	0%	100%
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400	17	100%	0%
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400	53	100%	0%
14	AM 561 4to	c1400	43	0%	100%
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404–1420	40	5%	95%
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420	37	18.9%	81.1%
17	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400–1450	59	0%	100%
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	37	0%	100%
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	17	11.8%	88.2%
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	22	0%	100%
21	AM 151 4to (1)	c1450	37	5.4%	94.6%
22	AM 534 4to	c1400–1500	27	66.7%	33.3%
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	19	5.3%	94.7%
24	AM 430 12mo	c1400–1500	19	0%	100%
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475	44	2.3%	97.7%
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450–1475	31	29%	71%
27	AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450–1500	50	18%	82%
28	Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500	24	0%	100%
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	18	0%	100%
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450–1500	10	0%	100%
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	36	2.8%	97.2%
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500	18	5.6%	94.4%
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	11	27.3%	72.7%
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	15	6.7%	93.3%
35	AM 556 a 4to, <i>Eggertsbók</i>	c1475–1500	33	9.9%	90.1%
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	69	0%	100%
37	AM 159 4to	c1480–1500	59	67.8%	32.2%
38	AM 309 4to, <i>Bæjarbók í Flóa</i>	1498	39	35.9%	64.1%
39	AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubæjarbók</i>	c1500	37	21.6%	78.4%
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	19	0%	100%
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	20	20%	80%
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500	16	0%	100%
43	AM 152 4to	c1500	58	0%	100%
44	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (1)	c1500	10	0%	100%
45	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500	17	11.8%	88.2%
46	AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500–1525	52	0%	100%
47	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500–1525	50	60%	40%
48	AM 529 4to	c1500–1550	11	18.2%	81.8%
49	AM 147 4to <i>Heynesbók</i>	c1525–1550	33	0%	100%
50	Holm perg. 3 fol., <i>Reykjahólabók</i>	c1530–1540	60	1.7%	98.3%

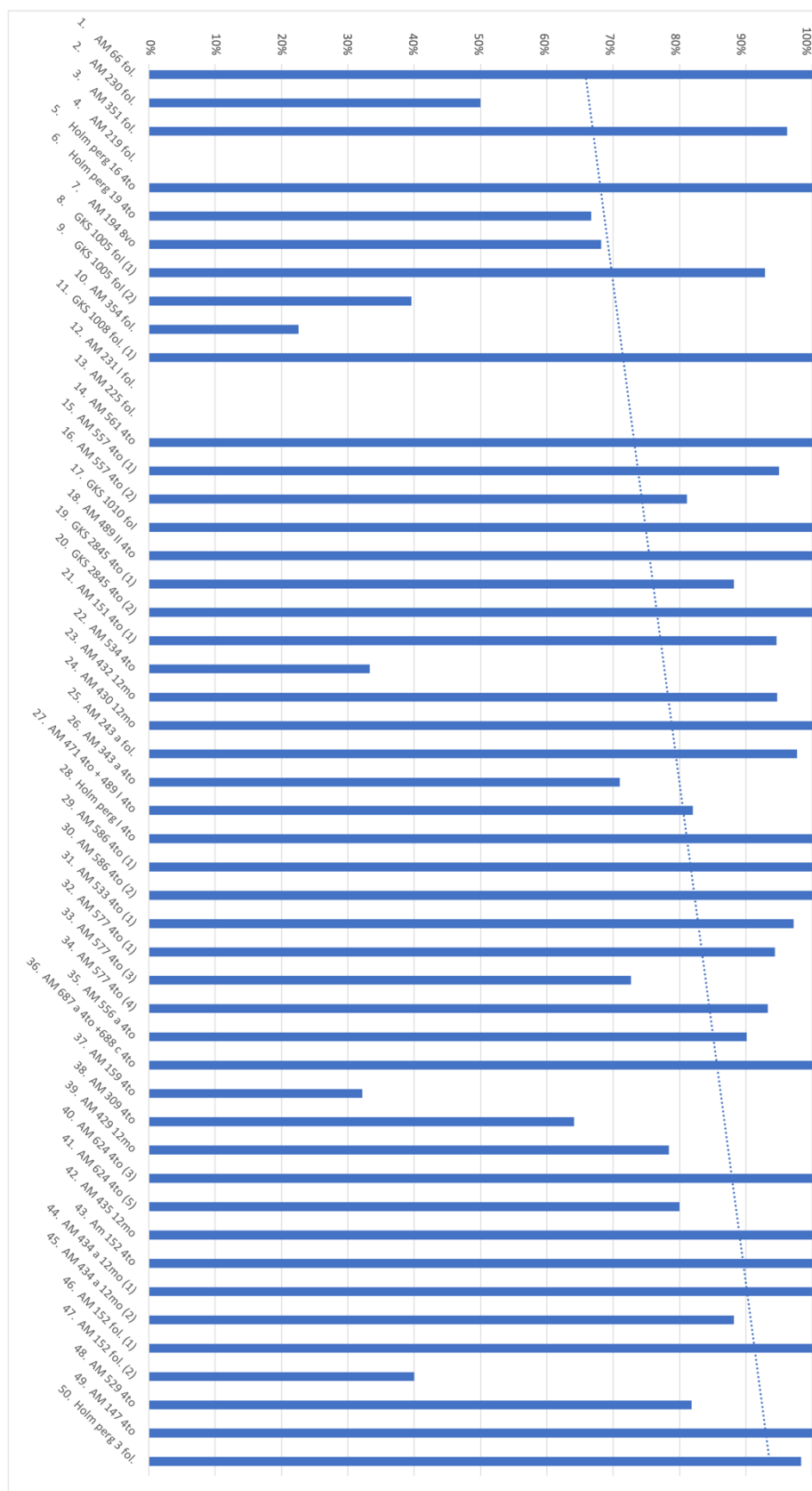


Figure 6.2: The diphthongisation of *e* before *ng*.

More specifically, there are thus eight scribes all in all that use “eing” less than 50% of the time, two of which are in the second half. The following are the hands showing a preference for the older form (the percentage of younger forms is indicated next to the shelf marks):

- [4] AM 219 fol.: 0%.
- [9] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (2), Magnús Þórhallsson: 39.6%.
- [10] AM 354 fol., *Skálholtsbók yngri*: 22.6%.
- [12] AM 231 I fol.: 0%.
- [13] AM 225 fol.: 0%.
- [22] AM 534 4to: 33.3%.
- [37] AM 159 4to: 32.2%.
- [47] AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson: 40%.

If we exclude the hands dated to c1400 and earlier, only three hands show a preference for the older form: [22] AM 534 4to (33.3%), which is dated to the whole fifteenth century, [37] AM 159 4to, from c1480–1500, (32.2%) and [47] AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson (40%), dated to the first quarter of the sixteenth century. The preference for the older form in these hands corresponds with that found in the fricativisation of unstressed, word-final *k*, as discussed in Chapter 6.2 above, showing a conservative character in both cases. In hands [4], [9], [10], [12] and [13] this is perhaps less surprising, given that they are dated early in the period under examination. More interesting is the conservatism of [37] AM 159 4to, c1480–1500, and [47] AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson, c1500–1525, is rather conservative in this respect, compared to other hands from around the same time. In this case too, textual genre does not seem to have any impact on scribal choices, given that these manuscripts contain sagas and religious and legal texts.

As Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen (2000, 64) shows, the scribe of AM 132 fol., *Möðruvallabók*, from c1330–1370 is not consistent in the notation of *eng*. Interestingly, the younger form seems to be on the rise as the work of the scribe progressed. Furthermore, the level of “eing” spellings varies from one saga to the next, as well as in different words, with the pronoun *engi* always spelt with “eng”, something which was not encountered in the present research. Since *Möðruvallabók* is probably somewhat older than the

oldest hands in this corpus, this would indicate that the change was progressing already around the middle of the fourteenth century and, according to the data gathered in this research, became widespread around the beginning of the fifteenth century.

There are no indications in the written record suggesting certain lexical items were more susceptible or resistant to this change than others. Two potential exceptions will be discussed below. Hands showing the change are equally likely to show it or not show it in any of the words where it is applicable, although forms of the verbs *ganga* and *fá* do seem to occasionally stand out and not show an orthography indicating diphthong.

One of the possible exceptions is found in items in which the vowel *e* is preceded by a plosive that was also palatalised by the front *e*. There is a possibility that a notation of the palatal pronunciation of *g* with “gi” in forms such as *gengu*, *gengið*, etc. may have delayed or blocked the orthographic manifestation of diphthongisation (“eing”), as forms such as *gengu*, *gengið*, etc. often appear without orthographic manifestation of a diphthongisation in texts where diphthongisation is otherwise widespread. This can be seen in, for instance, [16] AM 557 4to (2) (c1404–1420), [20] GKS 2845 4to (2) (c1450), [21] AM 151 4to (1) (c1450), [27] AM 471 4to + AM 489 I 4to (c1450–1500), [35] AM 556 a 4to, *Eggertsbók* (c1475–1500). Yet earlier hands already show “eing” spellings in such forms: [3] AM 351 fol., *Skálholtsbók eldri* (c1360–1400), [5] Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helga-staðabók* (c1375–1400), [7] AM 194 8vo (1387), and [9] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (2) (c1387–1395).

An example may illustrate the complexity involved in interpreting certain orthographic forms. The forms “giengr” 66v4 and “giengur” 67v2 in [33] AM 577 4to (c1450–1500) are not straightforward to explain. These spellings are ambiguous, since “gi” may either reflect palatalisation of *g* or indicate an alternative development of *e*. The same scribe writes “fiengu” 68r9 for *fengu*, the preterite plural of *fá*, which suggests that “ie” could, in principle, represent a dialectal outcome of short *e* before *ng*. However, this interpretation is ultimately unconvincing.

In this hand, the most prevalent spelling for etymological *eng* is “eing” (see examples in the list below). In addition, the scribe writes the adverb *gegnt* as “giegnt” 67v2. While this spelling includes “ie”, it should not be interpreted as evidence for diphthongisation in this environment: although the vowel in *gegnt* is synchronically realised as /ei/, the

cluster *egn* is not one in which the historical development from short *e* to *ei* would be expected to operate. It therefore represents a separate development and the *i* is therefore more plausibly understood as an orthographic device reflecting palatal articulation rather than a phonological diphthong.

It would thus seem more likely that “gie-” represents a palatal stop plus *e*, rather than a sequence of *g* plus a rising diphthong *ie* or *je* (see Chapter 6.7 for a discussion on palatalisation). Again, some further data makes this hypothesis not completely satisfactory: as will be shown in Chapter 6.7, this scribe does not mark the palatalization of *g* before the vowel *e* in any other case. These examples are, therefore, isolated and not conclusive. A third possibility is likelier: as will be discussed in Chapter 6.4, this hand does show quite vigorous orthographic signs of the diphthongisation of etymological long *é*. Strong verbs of class 7.3 adopted [je], probably analogically, in the preterit singular. It is possible that [je] was transferred analogically from the preterit singular to other forms of the verb, such as the preterit plural and even the present. For instance, the form “fiengu” (from *fá*) is almost certainly analogical to the singular “fieck”. The form “giengr”, if not simply reflecting the palatalisation of the stop, could also be the result of an analogical process. In the modern language, the form has both palatalization and *eing*. However, forms with the spelling “giei” were not encountered anywhere, and one wonders whether this is to do with the fact that such spelling would have been too alien. Regardless of its nature, forms like “giengr” and “fiengu” are obviously not included in the tally for diphthongisation of *e* before *ng*. The vowel preceding the cluster *ng* is indicated by “e” and thus they rather belong in the “eng” column.

Ambiguous forms of the verb *fá*, for instance “fiengu” 68r9 for *fengu*, pret. plur. of *fá*, encountered in [33] AM 577 4to (3) which has been just discussed, have been recorded elsewhere; for example, “fiengíz” 27rb33, “fiengi” 29ra19, 65ra3, “fiengu” 65ra8 (alongside a majority of instances with “ei”, including “feingi” 7r14) in [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkin-skinna* and “fiengut” 22ra45, “fiengi” 52rb10, “fiengu” 232ra29, 232rb24 (but “feingit” 52ra17) in [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*. These are somewhat more complicated and debatable than those of *ganga* just discussed. The most convincing explanation is that the root vowel in these preterit plural forms was most likely influenced by that of the preterit singular, *fékk*, which in turn had been affected by the analogical pressure of class

7.4 verbs such as *ráðaða*–*réð*, *láta*–*lét*, etc. The preterit singular *fekk* with the short vowel *e* was replaced by *fékk* with the long vowel *é* or the diphthong [ie] on the analogy of the preterit singular forms *réð*, *lét*, etc. (*fekk* → *fékk*). The long vowel *é* or the diphthong [ie] in *fékk* may then have been extended analogically from the preterit singular stem to the preterit plural: *fengu* → *féngu*. The *e* in *fengu* might have already become *ei* before *ng* by then, although some individual scribes still allowed themselves to write “ie”. It is possible that scribes occasionally confused “ie” and “ei” before “ng”. At any rate, such analogical plural stems did not become widespread and eventually disappeared.

One may wonder whether the underlying force behind this (dialectal?) difference between forms such as “feingu” vs. “fiengu” could be explained with a different outcome of the diphthongising process, rather than by the intervention of analogical forces. After all, Kristján Árnason (2005, 392) admits that the development from *e* to *ei* before *ng* may well have been much more complicated than this linear description may seem to suggest, and the situation in contemporary Icelandic may be the simplification of a greater fluctuation in earlier stages. He cites examples from earlier commentators in which the pronunciation of the sequence V + *ng* was indicated as having a different quality in some parts of the country, for instance in the *Réttritaþók* by Eggert Ólafsson, completed in 1762 but never published. In it, the author indicates both a monophthongal pronunciation in parts of the Westfjords and a diphthongal one in others and in part of the North, which differed in quality from that which could be found the rest of the country, and which is referred to as the “æng” pronunciation. One may thus wonder whether this “ie” in forms such as “fiengu” could not just be simply a different dialectal outcome of the diphthongisation, perhaps one that was largely lexicalised. This hypothesis deserves some discussion.

Aside from the cases in which the “ie” spelling is most likely a representation of palatalisation (for example in forms of the verb *ganga*, “giengr”, “giengu”, “gieck”, and the like), this spelling seems to be confined to forms of the verb *fá*, (“fiengu”, etc.). It is thus hardly conclusive evidence for a parallel dialectal development of the short monophthong, but it is nonetheless not impossible that the *ng* cluster may have caused a different kind of diphthongisation of the short monophthong in some areas. It would be hard to explain in different terms the reason why a phonological change which affected all the

eng clusters in the language should have only spared a few items from a single verbal paradigm, and one which is prone to analogical pressure from other more frequent verbal patterns.

In the light of these considerations, the more likely explanation is that the preterit plural and the past participle of *fá* may have been under the analogical influence of the preterit singular, which in [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna* surfaces as “fieck” as in 81ra5, 81ra18, 81ra25, itself the result of analogical extension from preterit forms of strong class 7.4 verbs such as *ráða* and *láta* and the 7.1 verb *heita*. This change in the preterit plural did not gain much ground in the language and was supplanted by the diphthong *ei* regularised before *ng*. Thus, forms with “ieng” (such as “fiengu”) will not be considered in this tally.

Interesting observations can be made while looking at scribes working (presumably) together. For example, the two scribes of [8]–[9] GKS 1005 fol. *Flateyjarbók* and the three scribes of [32]–[34] AM 577 4to show quite a marked difference. Jón Þórðarson, the first hand of GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* shows a 92.2% of “eing” spellings, while his colleague Magnús Þórhallsson uses this spelling only 39.6% of the time. This is a pattern that can be seen in other instances (see the other sections of this chapter) with Magnús being overall more conservative in his orthography than his colleague Jón. The three hands of AM 577 4to write “eing” 94.4%, 72.7% and 93.3%, respectively. The same variation was encountered also for other features studied (see the other sections of this chapter).

The two scribes of [46]–[47] AM 152 fol., Þorsteinn Þorleifsson and Jón Þorgilsson, show a significant variation, as they did in the fricativisation of unstressed word-final *k* discussed in Chapter 6.2 above, with Jón Þorgilsson displaying a more archaic character: Þorsteinn shows 100% “eing” while Jón is at 40%. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2014, 90–91) reports that Jón Þorgilsson was *ráðsmaðr* (steward) in the diocese Hólar and priest at Melstaður in the first decades of the sixteenth century. She further comments that it is not clear how he came to work on this manuscript, but it is not unlikely that the different geographical provenance of the two (as already explained in Chapter 4 and 6.2, Þorsteinn belonged to a family that lived in the West, while Jón was

associated with the see of Hólar) may have played a considerable role in the differences between them.

The two scribes of [15]–[16] AM 557 4to, though showing a small difference, have a similar preference for the diphthongal spelling “eing”, 95% and 81.1%, respectively. As already discussed in Chapter 4., Stefán Karlsson concluded these two hands may have been one and the same, but Lasse Mårtensson (2011) suggested the AM 557 4to was the work of two scribes. Orthographic similarities of this kind may perhaps be attributed to a common background of the two scribes, such as belonging to a certain dialectal area, having lived in the same place, having been trained in the same scribal milieu or, more simply, having copied from the same exemplars.

Below is a discussion of the individual scribes:

- [1] **AM 66 fol., *Hulda*:** all 29 relevant examples found had diphthongal spellings. These included “leingr” 25r8, “dreingiliga” 40r9, “leíngi” 40r17, “eingvm” 50r12, “þeingill” 70r17, “einglandi” 80r8, “feingv” 90r8.
- [2] **AM 230 fol.:** an even number of instances with and without the diphthongisation were found, 13 each. The diphthongisation was mostly present in the pronoun *engi*, although some instances of “engi” were found: 45r14, 65v22, and “englum” 75r29 (but “eingla” 20r34 and “eingill” 35r15) sometimes in close proximity with items showing the diphthongisation. The only other two items showing the change were “dræing” 35r5 and “dreingiliga” 35r23.
- [3] **AM 351 fol. *Skálholtsbók eldri*:** examples of items from different grammatical categories were found and the “eing” spellings predominate with 92.6% in the sample: “arfgeínggr” 22rb18, “leinge” 22ra30, “eingu” 42ra12, “ftreínggr” 62rb10, “feí|ngít” 72rb9–10. Only two instances of monophthongal spelling were found, near one another, “fengit” 102rb13 and “enga” 102rb24.
- [4] **AM 219 fol.:** examples of items from different grammatical categories were found, all with a monophthongal spelling. The example “fiengu” 9rb12 from *fá* was not counted as it is ambiguous.

- [5] **Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók***: examples of items from different grammatical categories were found, all with a diphthongal orthography, including “éingil” 10v18, “geingr” 25v4, “leingi” 30v8, “éinga” 45v16, and “feingna” 55r22.
- [6] **Holm perg. 19 4to**: examples of items from different grammatical categories were found. Instances with monophthongal spelling were found until around 35r, after which the scribe shifts to diphthongal spellings which he uses until the end of the manuscript in all the leaves studied. This is interesting as the manuscript contains a single text, *Pétrs saga postula*, and the hand is very uniform throughout with the *ductus* being rather *posato*, suggesting a thoughtful and slow pace of writing. This latter characteristic may hide the fact the scribe could have taken a relatively long pause between the two sections.
- [7] **AM 194 8vo**: examples of items from different grammatical categories were found, with 68.2% showing diphthongal spellings, including “éingla” 2r4, “leingra” 2r22, “eingu” 4r19, “geingín” 8r4. Items not showing the change include “gengr” 10r23, “englar” 12r2, “gengr” 13v9.
- [8] **GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (1), Jón Þórðarson**: examples of items from different grammatical categories were found, 92.9% showing the diphthongisation, which could either be spelt “ei” or “æi”. The forms showing the change were interspersed with older monophthongal ones. Examples include “leinge” 55b6, “fengi” 10rb38 right after “leingía” 10rb20 and “fengu” 105rb43, 105rb50. The form “henge” (3rd pers. sing. pret. subjunctive of *hanga*) was encountered in 5rb8.
- [9] **GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (2), Magnús Þórhallsson**: examples of items from different grammatical categories were found in the parts written by Magnús. Only 39.6% of them did show the diphthongisation, much less than in the parts written by Jón Þórðarson. The forms showing the change were interspersed among older monophthongal ones and included “englum” 2ra12, but “dreingr” 2ra18, “éinga” 135rb17 but “fenguz” 135rb42–43, “teingfl” 142rb15 but “geingit” 142rb21, “england” 213ra2, but “leingi” 213ra6.

- [10] AM 354 fol., *Skálholtsbók yngri*: examples of items from different grammatical categories were found, overwhelmingly with a monophthongal spelling, 77.4%. The distribution was very sharply divided. The hand consistently uses a diphthongal spelling until around fol. 30, but then monophthongal spellings take over until the end of the manuscript. Later resurgence of archaising spellings is more difficult to explain than the spread of innovative ones. This can perhaps be attributed to influence from older exemplar or pressure from a commissioner or superior instructing the scribe to use an older spelling convention.
- [15] AM 557 4to (1): most instances found, 95%, presented a diphthongal spelling. Only two exceptions were found: “fengu” 5v5, 11r5.
- [16] AM 557 4to (2): most instances found, 81.1%, presented a diphthongal spelling. The exceptions were “fenger” 34v22, “fengu” 32v35, 33r3, 32v35, “Gengu” 31v2, 35r1 “fengu” 36r26.
- [18] AM 489 II 4to: examples of items from different grammatical categories were found, always with an innovative diphthongal spelling except in the foreign personal name *Engres*, as in “engref” 41r4, 41r12, 41r19, 41r29. This foreign name was not tallied as there is no way of knowing how it was treated in the language at that time, especially since speakers of Icelandic probably knew this name only from its written form, and it is unlikely to have enjoyed a wide circulation.
- [19] GKS 2845 4to (1): only 18 items were found, in two cases showing an older monophthongal spelling: “gengit” 4r1, “fenga” (from *fá*) 6r8.
- [21] AM 151 4to (1): 94.6% of the 37 examples found presented a diphthongal spelling. There were but two exceptions: “engi” (pronoun) 11r5 and “gengr” 130v5.
- [22] AM 534 4to: only 27 instances were found, 66.7% of which had a monophthongal spelling.
- [23] AM 432 12mo: only 19 examples were found, all of them showing a diphthongal spelling, except for “engu” 27r10.

- [25] AM 243 a fol.: 44 examples from different grammatical categories were found, always with an innovative diphthongal spelling except in one case: “gengi” 1ra16.
- [26] AM 343 a 4to: 31 relevant examples were found, 71% of which had a diphthongal spelling. The exceptional monophthongal spellings are dispersed throughout the text: “fengnir” 3r4, “fengu” 3v9, “lengur” 4v2, “gengu” 5r26, 5r35, “fengit” 6r9, “fengi” 7r17, “gengr” 8r17, “engi” 10v5.
- [27] AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to: instances from different grammatical categories were found. This hand shows a strong preference for the diphthongal spelling in both manuscripts with a frequency of 82% in the sample, but the monophthongal spelling pops up occasionally. In AM 471 4to: “fenngum” 5r12; in AM 489 I 4to: “gengu” 5r26, 5v8, 9r25, 88v11, 89r5, “genge” 8v22, “fengu” 17r20, 17v13.
- [31] AM 533 4to (1): instances from different grammatical categories were found. The diphthongal pronunciation was almost universal, except in one case: “engi” (pronoun) 10r7.
- [32] AM 577 4to (1): only 18 instances were found, all indicating a diphthongal pronunciation, except for “engum” 35r5.
- [33] AM 577 4to (3): instances from different grammatical categories were found; the diphthongal spelling was more frequent. Exceptions included “gengr” 69v3, but “geingu” 66v25–26. The forms “giengr” 66v4 and “giengur” 67v2 are of somewhat complex interpretation, as discussed above. They could represent a palatalisation of the *g*, an analogical [ie], as explained above, or a different outcome of the diphthongisation of *e* before *ng*, since the scribe does indeed write “fiengu” 68r9. However, the most prevalent spelling he uses before *ng* is “ei”, which further reinforces the idea that “ie” in forms of the verb *fá* was more likely a result of an analogical process, rather than of diphthongisation.
- [34] AM 577 4to (4): only fifteen instances were found, all showing a diphthongal spelling except one, “gengu” 78v3.

- [35] **AM 556 a 4to**: 34 instances were found, mostly showing a diphthongal spelling. Exceptions were: “gengu” 50r19, “hengia” 60r32, “fengi*t*” 75r26.
- [36] **AM 687 a 4to + 688 c 4to**: instances from different grammatical categories were found. Diphthongal spellings are used consistently in all 69 instances observed.
- [37] **AM 159 4to**: instances from different grammatical categories were found, almost a third of which showing a diphthongal pronunciation. The distribution of the diphthongal spellings was not confined to specific portions of texts, but was apparently random, as in: “eingi” 3r2, “eingu” 12v16, “feingi” 13r29, “eingi” 13v10, “feingna” 21r14, “leingi” 43r27. All the items could also be found with a monophthongal spelling.
- [38] **AM 309 4to, *Bæjarbók í Flóa***: instances from different grammatical categories were found, showing diphthongal spelling 64.1% of the time. Monophthongal spellings were not concentrated in particular sections and could be found randomly; examples included: “fengu” 12rb37, “enngi” 16ra30, “fengi*t*” 20ra17, “lengr” 28rb34, “englandi” 30rb38.
- [39] **AM 429 12mo, *Kirkjubæjarbók***: 37 instances from different grammatical categories were found, mostly showing a diphthongal pronunciation. Exceptions included: “sam|tengiaz” 7r10–11, “geng” 6r12, 9v10, “gengr” 25r2, “gengu” 5v13, 20r1, “fengi*t*” 16r12, “tengiaz” 4r11.
- [40] **AM 624 4to (3)**: only nineteen instances were found, all showing a diphthongal spelling.
- [41] **AM 624 4to (5)**: only twenty instances were found, mostly showing a diphthongal spelling (80%). Exceptions were: “fenngum” 83r10, 81r15, fenngar” 79r6, “fengi” 59r20.
- [44] **AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* (1)**: only seventeen instances were found, all showing a diphthongal spelling.

- [45] AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* (2): only ten instances were found, mostly showing a diphthongal spelling. Exceptions were “engu” 37ra20, 37rb4.
- [47] AM 152 fol. (2): 50 instances were found, 40% of which have diphthongal spelling, which were scattered unevenly and in close proximity with monophthongal ones. Examples included: “dreíngía” 62ra2 but “lennge” 62ra13, “éingi” 72ra3, but “fengit” 72r9, 72r24, “einngínn” 102rb27, but “ennginn” 102rb8.
- [48] AM 529 4to: only eleven instances were found, nine of which had diphthongal spelling. Exceptions were “engri” 10r7 and “fengi” 30r18.
- [50] Holm perg.3 fol., *Reykjabólabók*: numerous instances were found, all showing a diphthongal spelling, except for “fengu” 27ra26.

From the observations made in this chapter, the diphthongal pronunciation (and, consequently, its orthographic representation) had become quite widespread before the period under study. After 1400, virtually all scribes show a preference for the younger form, with only three exceptions, though with a mixed practice and never favouring the older form totally. Indeed, some pockets of monophthongal pronunciation before *ng/nk* still exist in some areas of the Westfjords, although monophthongal pronunciation of *e* in this position is very rare (Kristján Árnason 2005, 391–395). The extent to which the medieval scribes under study may have had a monophthongal pronunciation while using diphthongal spellings under a “majority pressure”, or with a speaker using a diphthongal pronunciation but writing monophthongally because of scribal tradition, cannot be ascertained. To assess the extent to which this variation may be attributed to underlying dialectal differences, it would be necessary to undertake a comprehensive investigation into scribal hands and, potentially, scribal traditions. Although dialectal variation is an interesting subject, it lies beyond the scope of the present study. The primary aim here is to trace the emergence of orthographic indications of the change and their subsequent diffusion, rather than to examine the phonetic character of the change in pronunciation.

Considering the results and the analysis, the change from *eng* to *eing* was already well advanced at the beginning of the “long” fifteenth century, yet sporadic occurrences

of the conservative spelling, sometimes even in considerable numbers, can still be observed towards the end of the period.

6.4 The diphthongisation of the long *é*

The orthographic manifestation of diphthongisation of long *é* in words such as *mér* ‘me’ (dat.), *þér* ‘you’ (dat.), *sér* of *sjá* ‘see’, *lét* of *láta* ‘let’ appears sporadically in some written sources already in the first half of the thirteenth century but it slowly begins spreading in the course of the fourteenth (Björn K. Þórólfsson 1925, xiii–xiv; Jóhannes L.L. Jóhannsson 1924, 13), as revealed by a change in the orthography whereby “e” (“é”, “ee”) was replaced by “ei” and later “ie”. By the time of the printing of the *Guðbrandsbiblía* (1584), etymological *é* was generally spelt “ie” (Bandle 1956, 48). Aðalsteinn Hákonarson (2016, 83–123) has argued that the diphthongisation can in fact be traced back to around 1200, starting with a development into a falling diphthong, that is, *é* to *ei*.

Initially, the outcome of this development seems to have been two-fold, possibly determined by dialectal differences, with etymological *é* surfacing either as [jɛ:] (written “ie”) or [ei:]/[ɛi:] (written “ei”). Hreinn Benediktsson (1959, 298) states that *ei* seems more common in the earlier stages, particularly in the fourteenth century, following the tendency of other long vowels (particularly *á*, *ó* and *æ*) to develop a second element, yielding thus the following diphthongs: *au*, *ou*, *ei* and *ai*. However, the outcome *ei* was likely reversed to avoid a merger with the etymological diphthong *ei*, and later fully supplanted by the sequence [jɛ:], as testified by the spreading of the spelling “ie”, which happened over the fifteenth century (Stefán Karlsson 2000, 54).

In this chapter, the orthographic manifestation of the diphthongisation of the long *é* will be examined. This phonological change is not only revealed by the spelling “ie” gradually replacing the earlier spelling “e” but also by a change in the use of certain abbreviations. The pronouns *mér* and *þér* could be abbreviated with the first consonant plus the symbol for *er*, that is, some form of “*ǣ*”, without any needs to indicate the different quantity of the vowel, which was rarely if at all indicated: “*mǣ*” and “*þǣ*”, but also “*vǣ*” for *vera* and “*þǣ*” for *bera*. In other words, the abbreviation could represent both *er* and *ér*. In the period under study, we begin to encounter spellings such as “*mǣ*” and “*þǣ*”: the diphthongisation prompted scribes to note the new element arisen from the change.

The details of this development are not fully understood. As an example, it can be mentioned that in Faroese, the old /é/ and /æ/ merged with different dialectal outcomes. Most commonly, the result was (after the Quantity Shift) [ɛaː]/[a] (long/short) which is also the outcome of /a/; thus, *far* and *fær* are pronounced identically: [fɛaːɹ], while *fer* is pronounced [feːɹ]. However, in the Suðuroy dialect, the outcome of the merger /é/+ /æ/ resulted in [eː]/[ɛ] which is also the outcome of /e/; thus, *fær* and *fer* are pronounced identically [feːɹ] while *far* is pronounced [fɛaːɹ] (Kristján Árnason 2011, 80; Höskuldur Thráinsson et al. 2012, 346–347). In both cases, a merger is involved, clearly indicating that a certain instability had arisen in the vowel system of Old Norse—specifically among the front and open vowels.

In the case of Icelandic, it is not clear whether the long vowel *é*, which must have been a long, front-mid [eː], developed into a diphthong, such as [ɛɛː], further opening into [ɪɛː], and eventually evolving into the sequence [jɛː], which is the phonetic value in Modern Icelandic, though now the length is conditioned by syllabic structure. Jóhannes L.L. Jóhannsson (1924, 13) argues that the monophthong must have become a diphthong at first, developing later into the sequence [jɛː]. Agreeing with Hreinn Benediktsson (1969, 298), cited above, Kristján Árnason (2005, 332–333) also believes that *é* may have evolved first into a diphthong and eventually into a sequence of *j* and *e* rather than the *ei* diphthong which is occasionally encountered in manuscripts. However, even if the orientation or leaning of the diphthongisation may have varied somewhat in the beginning, resulting in either [ei] or [ie] (as suggested by early spellings), ultimately [ie] prevailed. As a second step, the diphthong [ie] then developed into a sequence of [j] and [ɛ], likely to avoid a merger of minimal pairs such as *mér* : *meir*. Aðalsteinn Hákonarson (2017a, 51–58), maintains instead that *é* must have developed into a sequence of a *j* + vowel rather than a diphthong, citing examples from poetry and compares the diphthong with the development of other similar sequences in the language, noting that spellings with “i”, such as “ie”, would be more consistent with a sequence of *j* + long *e* than with a rising diphthong and that poetic evidence points to the direction of original long *é* rhyming with original short *e* starting in the fourteenth century.

If this is indeed the case, as Aðalsteinn Hákonarson argues (2017a, 37–38), then the diphthongisation would be at best only one phase of this change, given how the result

is not ultimately a diphthong, but rather a sequence of a semi-consonantal *j* and a vowel *e*. Aðalsteinn (2017a, 55–61) shows evidence that this is likely the case drawing evidence from poetry and from within the phonological system of Icelandic itself, but the matter will not be discussed further in this context, as the exact nature of this change is of secondary importance in the present study. The older terminology of “diphthongisation” and “diphthong” will therefore be retained for simplicity.

Similarly, in a small class of Icelandic words, the sequence *je* (spelt “é” in the modern spelling) evolved from a short monophthong immediately following *h*, including *heðan* > *hjeðan* ‘from here’, but also *herað* > *hjerað* ‘county’, *heri* > *hjeri* ‘hare’, *Heðinn* > *Hjeðinn*, a personal name; also the pronoun *ek* > *jeg* ‘I’ with *e* in word-initial position (also displaying fricativisation of the unstressed word-final *k*), and possibly *helt* > *hjelt*, a class 7.3 verb, whose development may however been influenced by analogy to class 7.4 verbs, as will be discussed now.

Through a different (and most likely analogical) process, short *e* in the root of the preterit singular of a subset of class 7 strong verbs also became a diphthong or [jɛ]: *fekk* → *fék*, from *fá* ‘obtain’; *helt* → *hél* from *halda* ‘hold’; *fell* → *fél* from *falla* ‘fall’) of which it is difficult to trace the development. Specifically, it is not clear whether this short *e* was first lengthened and then “diphthongised” along with the etymologically long *é*, or whether it was fractured to [jɛ], to then merge with the diphthongised etymologically-long counterpart. It may indeed be possible that the short *e* fractured rather than diphthongised, a fracturing of short vowels into such a sequence can be observed cross-linguistically. For example, in the evolution from Latin into Romance, we see that some stressed short monophthongs in Latin have evolved in sequences (sometimes called “rising diphthongs”) rather than pure diphthongs, which is usually named *dittongazione spontanea* (spontaneous diphthongation): Lat. *pēde* ‘foot’ (ablative of *pēs*) > It. *pie* Fr. *pie*; *tēnēs* ‘you hold’ > It. *tien*; Lat. *hērba* ‘grass’ > Sp. *hier*; but also Lat. *lōcus* > It. *luo* ‘place’, Lat. *nōvus* > It. *nuov* ‘new’ etc. The condition for this development is that the vowel had to be stressed and in an open syllable. Save for the verbal forms from class 7 verbs and the pronoun *ek*, the Icelandic words listed all satisfy these same conditions, a fact which constitutes an interesting parallel. Regardless of the phonological history of these changes, and in the light of this consideration, we are clearly dealing with

independent developments which resulted in the same diphthong r sequence [jɛ(:)], thus producing a merger.

In this perspective, the development of both long *é* and etymologically short *e* into *jé* [jɛ(:)] are two separate developments resulting in the same sequence, while in the case of the class 7.3 verbs it may be analogical to verbs of classes 7.1 and 7.4. Since it is hard to determine convincingly whether the outcome [jɛ(:)] in words with an etymologically short vowel would result from a different change from that affecting etymological *é*, only words with etymological *é* have been included in the tally. Examples of the sequence originating from the short, rather than the long monophthong (such as “hiedan” or “fieck”) are already to be found aplenty in [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna*.

The data collected does not seem to indicate clearly which development is more likely to have taken place: either a direct fracturing or through an initial stage of lengthening followed by a diphthongisation, but a brief comment on this will be included in the discussion below. It must be noted that the modern development of words which had an etymologically short monophthong (such as *heðan*, *fekk* and *hellit*) appears quite early in the corpus of this study.

Very rarely, a spelling “ee” has been found for etymological *é*, in hands [4] AM 219 fol., [12] AM 231 I fol., and [13] AM 225 fol., and one is left to wonder whether this could be an attempt to represent a sequence of two *e*’s with different heights, as they would have been if the sequence [jɛ] had evolved first through a diphthongal phase. Of course, double letters were used elsewhere to denote long vowels, particularly with “aa” instead of “á”, but “aa” too was used to denote the diphthong [au] once it had evolved from the long monophthong *á*, as can be seen both in the New Testament translation of Oddur Gottskálksson from 1540 and in the Bible translation of bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson from 1584. For now, this doubt is not likely to be dispelled, but it remains an interesting matter to ponder, and some comments will be made on this in the following discussion.

Table 6.3 and *Figure 6.3* show the distribution of the orthographic representation of etymological long *é*; on the one hand, monophthongal spellings such as “e”, “é” and (very rarely) “ee”; on the other hand, the diphthongal spelling “ie”, “íe”. Rates of 100% are shown in yellow, while 51–99% rates are highlighted in blue.

The trend emerging in *Table 6.3* and in *Figure 6.3* is that of a slow but steady spread of the diphthongal spelling. It is sporadic until the early fifteenth century, after which it begins spreading. Only eight scribes are consistent in choosing one spelling, and they all demonstrate a preference for the older form. No single scribe uses 100% of diphthongal spellings. All the other hands show a mixed practice in various degrees but with a general tendency to increase the preference for the younger form. The change seems to gain ground at a relatively steady pace starting around 1400, but the older form is not quickly supplanted; ultimately, a coexistence of both is to be found in most scribes until the end of the period studied. This parallels to some extent the data shown by Haukur Þorgeirsson (2021, 30) in his quantitative study on the earlier *rímur* poetry.

The hands showing an exclusive preference for the monophthongal spelling are, with few exceptions, dated to the first half of the period examined:

- [2] AM 230 fol., c1350–1400.
- [3] AM 351 fol., *Skálholtsbók eldri*, c1360–1400.
- [9] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (2), c1387–1395, Magnús.
- [10] AM 354 fol., *Skálholtsbók yngri*, c1400.
- [12] AM 231 I fol., c1400.
- [15] AM 557 4to (1), c1404–1420.
- [22] AM 534 4to, c1400–1500.
- [29] AM 586 4to (1), c1450–1500.

Table 6.3: The diphthongisation of long *é*.

No.	Shelf mark	Date	<i>n</i>	<i>é</i>	<i>je</i>
1	AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350–1375	110	75.5%	24.5%
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350–1400	90	100%	0%
3	AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360–1400	100	100%	0%
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370–1380	113	36.3%	63.7%
5	Holm perg. 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375–1400	45	93.3%	6.7%
6	Holm perg. 19 4to	c1375–1400	116	99.1%	0.9%
7	AM 194 8vo	1387	62	98.4%	1.6%
8	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387–1395	228	99.6%	0.4%
9	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387–1395	89	100%	0%
10	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400	136	100%	0%
11	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400	59	71.2%	28.8%
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400	94	100%	0%
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400	98	96.9%	3.1%
14	AM 561 4to	c1400	57	47.4%	52.6%
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404–1420	83	100%	0%
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420	59	86.4%	13.6%
17	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400–1450	82	32.9%	67.1%
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	98	77.6%	22.4%
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	67	58.2%	41.8%
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	41	85.4%	14.6%
21	AM 151 4to	c1450	66	98.5%	1.5%
22	AM 534 4to	c1400–1500	77	100%	0%
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	111	7.2%	92.8%
24	AM 430 12mo	c1450–1500	106	14.2%	85.8%
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475	104	58.7%	41.3%
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450–1475	94	17%	83%
27	AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450–1500	118	33.9%	66.1%
28	Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500	111	30.6%	69.4%
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	27	100%	0%
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450–1500	32	28.1%	71.9%
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	135	65.9%	34.1%
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500	41	90.2%	9.8%
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	42	16.7%	83.3%
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	36	19.4%	80.6%
35	AM 556 a 4to, <i>Eggertsbók</i>	c1475–1500	92	79.3%	20.7%
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	145	64.1%	35.9%
37	AM 159 4to	c1480–1500	124	95.2%	4.8%
38	AM 309 4to, <i>Bæjarbók í Flóa</i>	1498	116	37.1%	62.9%
39	AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubæjarbók</i>	c1500	93	97.8%	2.2%
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	22	50%	50%
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	48	22.9%	77.1%
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500	45	46.7%	53.3%
43	AM 152 4to	c1500	85	44.7%	55.3%
44	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (1)	c1500	44	47.7%	52.3%
45	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500	16	56.3%	43.8%
46	AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500–1525	108	13.9%	86.1%
47	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500–1525	168	25.6%	74.4%
48	AM 529 4to	c1500–1550	60	3.3%	96.7%
49	AM 147 4to <i>Heynesbók</i>	c1525–1550	93	71%	29%
50	Holm perg. 3 fol., <i>Reykjahólabók</i>	c1530–1540	199	3.5%	96.5%

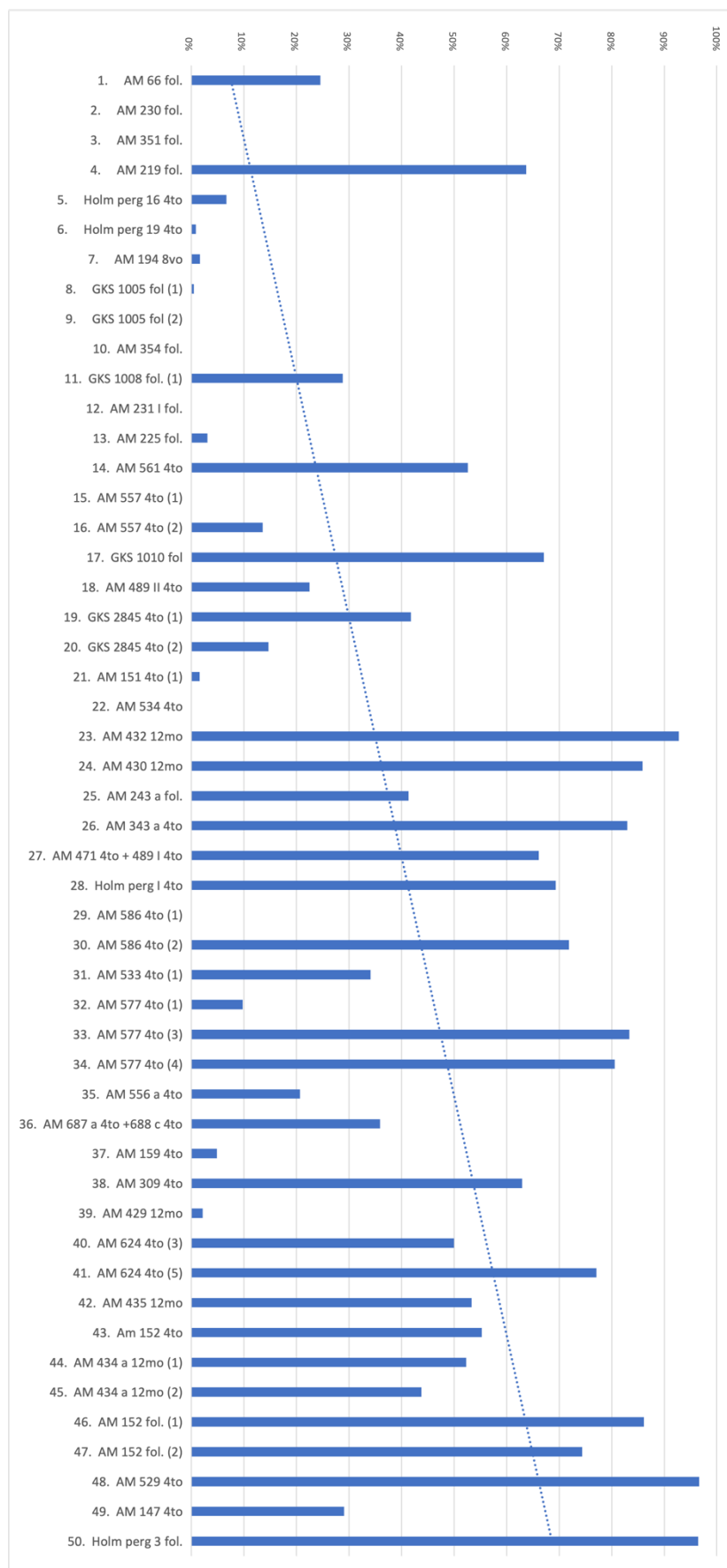


Figure 6.3: The diphthongisation of long é.

All but one, [29] AM 586 4to (1), c1450–1500, are in the first half of the corpus, among scribes 1–25. In addition, there are seven scribes that have monophthongal spellings in the range 95–99%:

- [6] Holm perg. 19 4to, c1375–1400: 99.1%.
- [7] AM 194 8vo, 1387: 98.4%.
- [8] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (1), Jón, c1387–1395: 99.6%.
- [13] AM 225 fol., c1400: 96.9%.
- [21] AM 151 4to, c1450: 98.5%.
- [37] AM 159 4to, c1480–1500: 95.2%.
- [39] AM 429 12mo, *Kirkjubæjarbók*, c1500: 97.8%

Five of these are in the first half of the corpus. The remaining three, along with [29] AM 586 4to, c1450–1500, stand out for their preference for the monophthongal spellings among scribes 26–50 in the second half of the corpus. There is a clear difference between these two groups. In the first one, scribes 1–25, the average of the innovative diphthongal spellings is around 26%. In the second one, scribes 26–50, the average is around 50%. Interestingly, though, none of the scribes has 100% diphthongal spellings. While there are fifteen scribes with more than 95% monophthongal spellings, there are only two scribes with more than 95% diphthongal spellings:

- [48] AM 529 4to, c1500–1550: 96.7%.
- [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, c1530–1540: 96.3%.

This is quite different from the orthographic manifestation of the diphthongisation *eng* > *eing* discussed in Chapter 6.3 where seventeen scribes had 100% diphthongal spellings.

It is interesting to note that while [9] Magnús Þórhallsson, writing GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, never showed the change, his colleague Jón Þórðarson, hand [8] did show one very rare instance of the change (0.4%). While the available evidence allows us to identify the two scribes as contemporaries, it does not exclude the possibility that they worked in close collaboration, at least for a period. Yet some slight differences between the two regularly emerge. A difference can also be found in [15] AM 557 4to (1), and his colleague [16] AM 557 4to (2): the former never shows the change, but the latter displays

it 13.6% of the time. It is curious that [15] was slightly more innovative in the fricativisation of word-final *k* and *eng* > *eing* (3.9% and 95% of innovative spellings respectively) than [16] (0% and 81.1% of innovative spellings respectively); this contrasts with the more conservative character of [15] in the *é* > *je* change. If we look at the provenance of these texts, [9] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* was likely written in the North West (in the vicinity of the residence of his commissioner Jón Hákonarson from Viðidalstunga), [10] AM 354 fol., *Skálholtsbók yngri* was possibly written in Skálholt (Stefán Karlsson 1982a, 197–200), [15] AM 557 4to (1) was likely from some area in the North (Springborg 1970, 69), while the others have not been localised. This data could indicate that pockets of the older pronunciation may have existed both north and south, but it is also possible that these scribes were simply more conservative in their orthography each for their own reasons. Furthermore, the origin of the scribes remains unknown.

The hands showing a (slight) preference for the innovative form in the earlier part of the period studied are the following:

- [4] AM 219 fol. (c1370–1380): 63.7%.
- [14] AM 561 4to (c1400): 52.6%.
- [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna* (c1400–1450): 67.1%.

Conversely, [4] AM 219 fol. (63.7% of innovative spellings) has been traditionally associated with the monastery of Helgafell in the West (Stefán Karlsson 1960). [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna*, (67.1%) was likely written in the North (Jonna Louis-Jensen 1977, 12) while [14] AM 561 4to (52.6%) has not been localised. [4] AM 219 fol. is markedly conservative both in the fricativisation of *k* (with 0% innovative spellings) and diphthongisation of *e* before *ng* (with only 1.8% innovative spellings). [14] AM 561 4to appears conservative in the former change (with only 16.7% innovative spellings) but very innovative in the latter (with 100% innovative spellings). [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna* was slightly innovative when it came to the fricativisation (with 11.5% innovative spellings), and consistently innovative (100% innovative spellings) when it came to diphthongisation of *e* before *ng*.

In the second half of the corpus, some hands still show a preference for the older form (with $\geq 75\%$ monophthongal spellings), and they are:

- [26] AM 151 4to, c1450: 98.5%.
- [32] AM 577 4to (1), c1450–1500: 90.2% (very different from the other two scribes analysed in the same manuscript, 3 and 5).
- [35] AM 556 a 4to, *Eggertsbók*, c1475–1500: 79.3%.
- [37] AM 159 4to, c1480–1500: 95.2%.
- [39] AM 429 12mo, *Kirkjubæjarbók*, c1500: 97.8%.

Hand [49] AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók* (c1525–1550) was rather close with 71% conservative monophthongal spellings, though it showed a more innovative character in the previous two sections (59.1% of innovative fricative “g” spellings and 100% of “eing” spellings). [32] AM 577 4to (1) was instead consistently conservative in those two, and in that he is very different from the other two scribes, preferring the younger form only 20.7% of the times, against 81.4% of hand [32] and 70.7% of hand [33]; [35] AM 556 a 4to, *Eggertsbók*, was rather conservative in the fricativisation (3.4% of innovative spellings), but decisively innovative in the *eng* > *eing* change (90.1%); [37] AM 159 4to was consistently conservative relative to other hands from the same period (20.7% and 32.2% of innovative spellings for the previous two changes); and [39] AM 429 12mo, *Kirkjubæjarbók* was instead more conservative in the fricativisation of *k* (13.9%) and less innovative than hands dated to the same period when it came to the *eng* > *eing* change (78.4%).

Turning to the word forms in the data set, the diphthongal spellings are probably most commonly found in the dative of the singular pronouns, *mér*, *þér*, *sér*, and the nominative second person plural pronoun *þér* (also used to address single individuals for courtesy). There are rare exceptions, such as [4] AM 219 fol. and [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkin-skinna*, where the pronouns do usually not have a diphthongal spelling, but other words do.

Concerning the parallel development which saw etymologically short *e* develop eventually into *je* in a subset of words, some comments should be made. Scribe [12] writing AM 231 I fol. from c1400, who never shows any diphthongal spellings “ie” or “ie” for the long vowel *é*, occasionally uses “ee” or “ée” for both the etymologically long *é* as in *fé* “fee”, *þér* “þéér” and *hégóma* “héégoma” (see the list below for line reference within the text) and the etymologically short vowel of *helt* (from *halda*), which he writes “heellt” at least

twice (see examples in the list below), indicating that he identified the sound resulting from the evolution of both etymologically short *e* in “heelt” and of long *é* elsewhere as phonologically corresponding. This kind of spelling is rare in the corpus studied (aside from this hand, it was found for etymological *é* only in [4] AM 19 fol. and [13] AM 225 fol.), and it is difficult to ascertain whether we are dealing with a spelling reflecting a phonological aspect, or simply an older/rarer scribal convention deriving from the exemplar(s) and used to indicate a long vowel. This scribe also writes *á* as “aa”, but this may have already represented a diphthong at this point (Hreinn Benediktsson 1959, 298), so it cannot be ruled out that a spelling “ee” may represent some kind of diphthong too.

If this were the case, such spellings would seemingly indicate that the short *e* in words such as *helt* or *fekk* first lengthened, rather than fractured to *je* as has been suggested above. Furthermore, a spelling “ee” may also indicate that the etymologically long *é* became first a diphthong, rather than fracturing directly into *je*, depending on how that digraph is interpreted.

This would in fact be the case if such “ee” spellings were intended to represent two front vowels of a slightly different height (perhaps a higher [e] or [ɪ], followed by a lower [ɛ], which is the value of the second half surfacing in Modern Icelandic). After all, the scribe would have had no way to differentiate the two in the spelling with the letters provided by the Latin alphabet, unless the quality of the second element had been similar to that of *æ*, which must have originally been a front low-mid vowel [ɛ:], before it developed into the modern [ai(:)]. It must be borne in mind that the *ei* diphthong was spelt “æi” under Norwegian influence in several hands from the fourteenth century (the first element, in Norwegian, may have been lower than in Icelandic, as it is still the case today). The use of “æ” to represent the second element of the newly arisen diphthong or sequence should thus have been a possibility. Since this is not the case, and “eæ” or “iæ” spellings for older *é* have never been encountered, at least three explanations are available:

1. The diphthong was something like [eɛ], but *æ* had already started to develop into the modern *ai*, and thus the “æ” was no longer a suitable candidate to represent [ɛ], and thus the spelling “ee” was chosen instead.
2. The phonetic quality of this diphthong may have been higher: [ɪe] rather than [eɛ]. The notation of unstressed *i*—which was modified in response to the

change in quality of stressed *i*, lowering from [i] to [ɪ] beginning in the early thirteenth century (Kristján Árnason 2005, 329)—is most often written as “e” by this scribe ([12] AM 231 I fol.), as is also common among other scribes. For example, the scribe writes *sagde* for sagði, *bonde* for bóndi, and *skorte* for skorti.

3. The etymologically short *e* in *fekk* and similar forms had fractured into *je* and the etymologically long *é* had also developed (either directly or through a diphthongal phase) into *je* in the language of [12] AM 231 I fol. He then chose to use a conservative spelling (perhaps influenced by older books) for many of the cases in which his language had *je*, extending it also to the diphthong/sequence that generated from etymologically short *e*. In this case, the spellings “heelt” would be a hypercorrection: the scribe may have mistaken it to be the correct etymological spelling, not being aware that in *helt*, which he pronounced *hjelt* the vowel was etymologically short.

However, none of these hypotheses can be proven convincingly with the data available, and behind this “ee” orthography there may well be a long *é*. Regardless, the questions are bound to remain as to what extent we are dealing with orthographic practices and to what extent they reflect the pronunciation. And what pronunciation do they reflect? Describing the spread of an orthographic change is not the same as describing the phonological change behind it, as the two may move at very different paces. From the evidence collected here, the change appears manifest more frequently in pronouns, with few exceptions: pronouns are extremely common in most types of texts, and usually high frequency acts as a protective factor against the spread of orthographic innovations, as repetition favours the learning of these forms. On the other hand, once a sound change has begun taking place, it also tends to spread first in high-frequency words, so one is left to wonder what really lies behind any etymological spelling. Besides, other very frequent items such as *fé*, were found showing a monophthong in contexts where the personal pronouns were almost invariably showing a diphthong. The following list provides examples of the tokens collected for each hand.

- [1] **AM 66 fol., *Hulda***: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The diphthongisation is prominent on the first folio studied, where only the pronoun “mer” 5r20 does not show diphthongisation, alongside “hiet” 5r1, 5r6, “riettarbotvm” 5r7, and “liet” 5r21. Aside from strong verbs of class 7, as “líet” 5r19 from *láta* and “hiet” 5r1 from *heita* or “rieð” 55r18 from *ráða*, the other forms in which the diphthongisation was found included the participle “fieð” 15r5, the substantives “flíettv” 70r3, and “fie” 85r4. Surprisingly, no signs of diphthongisation were found for the personal pronouns.
- [2] **AM 230 fol., *Skálholtsbók eldri***: instances from different grammatical categories were found. No orthographic signs of the diphthongization were present.
- [3] **AM 351 fol.**: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The diphthongisation is absent.
- [4] **AM 219 fol.**: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The diphthongisation (63.7%) was almost twice as frequent as the retention of the monophthong (36.3%), which was occasionally spelt “ee” as in “féé” 6rb29, “féed” 6vb20, “séé” subjunctive of *vera*, 13ra38. The diphthongisation is mostly found in the preterit of class 7 verbs (excluding class 7.3 and 7.5), more rarely in substantives or adjectives, such as “logríettu” 8va18 and “riett” 12vb15, but never in the pronouns *mér*, *pér*, *sér*.
- [5] **Holm perg.16 4to, *Helgastaðabók***: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The monophthong was the norm with only three exceptions: “hietu” 60r1, *pier* 10r21, and “mier” 10r22.
- [6] **Holm perg. 19 4to**: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The monophthong was the norm with only one exception: “pjer” 39v4.
- [7] **AM 194 8vo**: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The monophthong was the norm with only one exception: “liet” 30v9.

- [8] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (1), Jón Þórðarson: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The monophthong was the norm with only one exception found in the text sampled: “liettu” 45ra15.
- [9] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (2), Magnús Þórhallsson: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The diphthongisation is absent.
- [10] AM 354 fol., *Skálholtsbók yngri*: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The diphthongisation is absent.
- [11] GKS 1008 fol., *Tómasskinna* (1): instances from different grammatical categories were found. The monophthong was vastly more prominent, 71.2%. Diphthongal spellings could be found in the preterit of the class 7 strong verb *heita*: “hiet” 5r5, but also on other words such as “sír” 5v16 from the verb *sjá*, “fie” 10v9 from *vera*, “riettur” (adjective) 14r9, “fie” 15v16. The diphthongisation took the form “ei” in the substantive “reítt” (from *réttr*) 20r13 and 20r18, but these instances were not included in the tally as they seemingly do not represent the *je* diphthong.
- [12] AM 231 I fol.: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The diphthongisation is absent. The scribe often marks the long vowel with “ee” as in “fee” 3va1 or with “ée” as in “péér” 3vb28 or “héégoma” 4vb14 (but “hegomi” in 3ra19), “feelaga” 9ra4, “ueelar” 9ra14, “leeku” 9ra34. This orthography is also used for an etymologically short *e*, as in “heellt” (from *halda*) 3va32, 4rb16.
- [13] AM 225 fol.: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The monophthong was the norm (96.9%) with only three exceptions: “liet” 97va, “lietvm” 100rb10 and “liekv” from *leika* 97ra10. The scribe very rarely marks the long vowel with “ee” as in “feed” 89rb29.
- [14] AM 561 4to: an essentially even quantity of monophthongal (47.4%) and diphthongal (52.6%) spellings were found. Examples include: “ser” (pronoun) 3r11 alongside “fier” (pronoun) and “riett” 3r13, “fe” 22r4 alongside “liet” 22r20. The diphthongal spelling is also used for etymological short *e*, as in “fiell” 10r15 of *falla*.

- [15] **AM 557 4to (1)**: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The diphthongisation is absent.
- [16] **AM 557 4to (2)**: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The monophthongal spelling was the norm (86.4%). Exceptions were limited to the pronoun *þér*: “þier” 30r6, 30r10, 30r32 and “þier” 30r8, 30r34, 32r27.
- [17] **GKS 1010 fol. *Hrokkinskinna***: 67.1% of the tokens collected have a diphthongal spelling. The pronominal forms typically have monophthongal spelling: “mer” 15r23, 15r25 (x2), “þer” 15rb13, 15rb17, but also in other items, such as “fed” from *sjá* 15rb17, and “fé” 45ra17, alongside “friett” (substantive) 45rb12 and “riettur” (adjective) 45rb16. The etymological short *e* is also occasionally found with a diphthongal spelling: “hiedan” 45rb6, “fieck” 45rb23.
- [18] **AM 489 II 4to**: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The monophthong was more frequent. The distribution of monophthongal/diphthongal spellings was frequently in *sér* (pronoun) throughout the manuscript, but not in the verb “fe” from *sjá* 32v13, 36v23 or “fe” from *vera* 41v25, with the occasional exceptions, such as “fíe” from *sjá* 50r20 and “fíed” 50r17. Other items were invariably with monophthongal spellings.
- [19] **GKS 2845 4to (1)**: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The monophthong spellings were slightly more frequent, 58.2%, than the diphthongal spellings. The diphthongal spellings were overwhelmingly found in the pronoun *þér*, though monophthongal spellings could still be encountered, as in “þer” 14v19. Other pronouns could show diphthongisation too: “mier” 14r17 and 28r4, shortly before “mer” 28r2, then “sier” 18r9, and the verb “fiem” 24r26 from *vera*, preceded by the pronoun “uer” not showing the diphthongisation.
- [20] **GKS 2845 4to (2)**: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The monophthong was predominant, 85.4%, with a few exceptions. The diphthongisation was only found in the pronoun *sér*, as in “fíer” 33v10, “sier” 34r24, “Sier” 35v22, and *þér* 34r4. The scribe seems to show a preference for a monophthongal spelling, as he abandons the diphthongal one in the second half of the same text.

One is left to wonder whether this is due to influence from an exemplar or a deliberate change in scribal practice.

[21] AM 151 4to (1): instances from different grammatical categories were found. The monophthongal spelling was predominant (98.5%) with only one exception: “*pier*” 10v8.

[22] AM 534 4to: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The diphthongisation is absent.

[23] AM 432 12mo: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The diphthongisation was widespread (92.8%) in all lexical items and no distribution of monophthongal or diphthongal spelling could be found between different items. The rare exceptions showing a monophthongal spelling were interspersed throughout the text: “*margreta*” 19r10 (this name is a borrowing, but, given the modern Icelandic pronunciation, it must have entered the language before the diphthongisation took place, as it has been affected by it, with the modern form being *Margrét*), “*fe*” 77v1 from *vera*, “*fneruzt*” 68r7 from *snúa* (originally with a short vowel), “*kne*” 39r8.

[24] AM 430 12mo: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The diphthong was predominant (85.8%), with a few exceptions: *né* was never diphthongised, “*liet*” 2r7 was found alongside “*letu*” 2r3, 25r6 and “*let*” 13r8, 29r14. With only few exceptions, such as “*fie*” 8v15, 8v1516, “*Sie*” 22r15 from *sjá*, the diphthongisation was primarily found in the pronouns; see for example “*kne*” 15v9 and “*rettvifa*” 18r16, with a monophthongal spelling.

[25] AM 243 a fol.: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The monophthong was slightly more frequent, 58.7%. The distribution of monophthongal/diphthongal spellings was uneven. For example, on fol. 1 we already find “*mier*” 1ra19, 1ra24, 1ra30, alongside “*fer*” (pronoun) 1ra16, and “*fet*” 1ra18 from *sjá*. The substantive “*fie*” 5ra3 and the adverb “*hier*” 5rb3 were together with “*ne*” 5ra26, and “*fe*” 5rb9 from *vera*. On 30v, we find “*pier*” 30va2 and “*per*” 30va7.

- [26] **AM 343 a 4to.**: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The diphthongal spelling was predominant (83%), with exceptions such as “red” 3r5, “ried” 6r19, “ne” 3r21, “se” (from *sjá*) 5r25, but “sier” (pronoun) 4v10, “fte” from *stíga* 3r20, “ver” 10v21, 93r13, “rettastefnu” 53r3. It is worth noting that this scribe also writes “fiell” from “falla” in 3r28, originating from a short monophthong.
- [27] **AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to**: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The diphthong was predominant (69.4%), with exceptions that were not limited to specific items: in AM 471 4to: “fe” 1v3, “ver” 76v3, 77r13, 77r14, “fe” from *vera* 77r6, “mer” 46v6, “let” 46v10, “flettur” 46v15. In AM 489 I 4to: “Red” 1v21, “fe” 4r11, 4v18, 16v4, “fenu” 4v2, “fed” (from *sjá*) 8v4, “ver” 12r11, 12r13, 12v1, 13r11, 16v2, 16v3, 16v5, 16v10, 16v12, 16v17, 22r5, 22r23 (x2), the etymological *é*, usually written “e” was sometimes written with a dot above, as in “fè” 1r1, “flètt” 31v21, “lèt” 44v1 “lèttir” 76v3, but this was occasionally the case even in forms indicating the sequence *j + é*: “fiè” 76v1.
- [28] **Holm per. 1 4to**: instances from different grammatical categories were found. The diphthong was the norm, with exceptions that were not limited to specific items: “her” 5ra28, but “hier” 3orb11, “fer” 5rb15 (pronoun), but “fier” 15r9, “fehirdar” 10ra4, but “fielagfkapr” 35ra15, “rettrar” 10rb19, “let” from *láta* 15ra18.
- [29] **AM 586 4to (2)**: only 27 instances were found. The monophthong was universal.
- [30] **AM 586 4to (2)**: only 32 instances were found. The diphthong was more frequent. The pronoun *mér* was most often but not invariably monophthongal, as in “mer” 20r8, 29v9/10/12/13, but “mier” 28v20, “ser” 28r25, “let” 29v15, “fe” 30v44 but “fie” 30v41.
- [31] **AM 533 4to (1)**: 34.1% instances of diphthongisation were found throughout the sample examined, most often next to monophthongal ones: “hier” 10r4, but “her” 10r8, “pier” 10r10/11/13/14/16 but “per” 10r18, “fier” 5r1/4/5/8/9. Lexical words, verbs and function words other than the pronouns were much less likely to be found showing a diphthong than pronouns: “ne” 40r4, 80r5 “fe” 23r21, 45r12,

85r20, “let” 45r21, 90r20 “fe” (from *sjá*) 60r5, “fte” (from *stíga*) 70r5, “slettann” (from *sléttr*) 8r13, “fed” 13r15/16, “red” (from *ráða*) 33r8.

[32] AM 577 4to (1): only four instances of diphthongisation were found: “hiet” 5v3, “þier” 31v9/19 “fier” 40r7.

[33] AM 577 4to (3): most instances found showed a diphthongisation, the exceptions were “fe” (from *vera*) 66r2, “fe” 66r 15, “fér” (from *sjá*) 66r17, “þer” 66r25, 67v16, “letu” 67v15 and “let” 68r6.

[34] AM 577 4to (4): a little over three quarters of the instances found display a diphthong. These were mostly the preterit forms of class 7 verbs: “het” 77r3, 81r23, 82v17, “let” 78r6, 80r17/15, “reð” 82v16; but also “fretter” (from *frétta*) 80v3, “her” 80v7, “fe” 80v24, “ne” 82r16. The pronouns appear to be mostly affected by the change.

[35] AM 556 a 4to, *Eggertsbók*: less than a third of the instances found showed the diphthongisation. These included: “fie” 5r28, 19 “fier” (pronoun) 10r1/20, 50r2/6/15/21, “fier” (from *sjá*) 45r2, “hier” 10r33, 50r11/36. On fol. 15, the orthography “ee” was found, were *fēð* was spelt “feeth” 15r7/8/14/18/25/33.

[36] AM 687 a 4to + 688 c 4to: in the first text, this hand shows diphthongisation in slightly less than half of the instances found, while the proportion is of two-fifths showing diphthongisation for the second text. The diphthongisation, in both texts, mostly affects the pronouns *þér*, *sér*, *vér*, (only one instance of *mér* was found, in 7v28, not showing the diphthongisation) and the adverb *hér*.

[37] AM 159 4to: the diphthongisation was extremely rare, and only very few instances of it were found: “hier” 23v8, 31v22, 42v24 “sier” (pronoun) 31v18, “þier” 41v19/20. The words *fé* and *réttr* (and inflected forms of them) accounted for most instances found and never showed a diphthongisation.

[38] AM 309 4to, *Bæjarbók í Flóa*: the diphthongisation appears in a majority of instances, and it mostly surfaces in the pronouns and the adverb *hér*, as well as

occasionally in other items such as “riett” 20rb24, “fie” (from *vera*) 28ra30, 36rb18, and “fier” 36ra43, “liet” 30ra20, “hiet” 38ra15.

[39] AM 429 12mo, *Kirkjubæjarbók*: of the relatively large data set gathered, only two items showed diphthongisation, both of which personal pronouns: “mier” 30r1, “fier” 7r7.

[40] AM 624 4to (3): very little data was found, but the diphthongisation only surfaced in the pronoun *þér* (other pronouns were not found) except for on one occasion in which “fier” (from *vera*) 73r19 was found, while all other items did not show it: “fe” 72r10, “flett” 82r18, “ser” (from *sjá*) 82r18, “rett” 102r2, “petur” 104r20, and “fe” (from *vera*) 72r11, 74r15, 99r11/19, 93r3.

[41] AM 624 4to (5): the diphthongisation mostly surfaces in the pronouns and in the adverb *hér*, but occasionally also in the preterit of class 7 strong verbs, such as “Liet” 29r17, 38r12, “hiet” 38r7. Items such as “ne” 30r15, 34r10, 35r20, “eta” 38r4, “rettuifi” 39r4, “fe” 36r8, 37r17, 41r17 did only show a monophthong.

[42] AM 435 12mo: a little over a half of the instances found showed diphthongisation, and the distribution was not confined to certain grammatical categories, and the same items would either show the change or not somewhat randomly: “riett” 10v5, “rietter” 2v9, but “rettlatan” 9v7, “rettrar” 7r17, “fe” (from *vera*) 3v1, 8r15, but “fie” 2v4, 9r17, 9v11, “fier” (pronoun) 1r14 but “ser”, also at 1r14. Other items showed just a monophthong: “tre” 2v2, “fe” 28r17, “petur” 27v5,

[43] AM 152 4to: most instances found showed a diphthong. Of all pronouns, only “fier” was found, in 10r24, 15r5, 25r17, 30v4/22, 90r14, and the vast majority of items showing a diphthong were forms of the adjective *réttur*, or compounds including the stem *rétt-*, such as in 5r12, 10r10, 15r3/7/12, 30v6/7/9/18, 40r3 60r4, 65r8 etc., and the adverb “hier” 55r19. This may indicate that the spelling, if not the pronunciation itself, may have been lexicalised. In fact, the word *fé*, also rather frequent, was never diphthongised, such as in 45r19/22/24, 55r7, 60r5, just as “ne” 50r11, 60r16, and also “fe” (from *vera*) 10r18, 30r11, 105r10.

- [44] **AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* (1):** the diphthongisation emerges mostly in the pronouns, of which *mér*, *þér* and *sér* were represented, invariably diphthongised: “mjer” 1ra17/b2, 4vb7, 6rb2, “þjer” 1rb11, 4rb4/12, 5ra1/10/18/b1, 5va1 (x2), 5vb8/10, “sjer” 7rb16, the verb “fier” (from *sjá*) 7va3, also appeared with a diphthong; however, a monophthong was found in other items such as “fe” 2ra8, 13vb15, “ne” 3va11, 4rb17, 11vb6, “eta” (which originally had a short vowel) 4ra10, 13ra4, 18rb10, 19rb9, 22rb2, “et” 14ra4, 23ra1, “fe” (from *vera*) 6rb2, 21ra17.
- [45] **AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* (2):** the data found in the entire section of the text was very scant. The diphthongisation was present on the pronouns “fier” 27rb1, 29rb12, also spelt “sjer” 36ra21, and “þjer” 38va4, but also on “nie” 34b19, “fie” (from *vera*) 37va13, and “fier” (from *sjá*) 38va8.
- [46] **AM 152 fol. (1):** most instances found showed a diphthong. The rare exceptions were “felage” 1ra12, (but “fielagi” in 2va30), “felogum” 11rb35, “fe” 2ra32, (but “fie” in 22vb10), “tre” 42va32/b38 and “tred” 42va33/b12/39. These are best explained as very rare cases of influence from the exemplar.
- [47] **AM 152 fol. (2):** the diphthongisation was the norm. Monophthongal forms were, however, scattered in different grammatical categories, including the pronouns: “ver” 62ra1, 152ra11 but “uier” 152ra39, 182va14, “ser” 142ra23 but “sier” 82ra1, 142rb26, “þer” 92ra5/7 but “þier” 62vb9, 72rb7, 82ra31, then “mier” 62ra14/20/21/28.
- [48] **AM 529 4to:** most instances found showed diphthongisation, including the pronouns, the adverb “hier” 15v5, “fie” from *vera*, 15v5, the preterit of class 7 verbs such as “hiet” 30r3/5, 40r14/17, and “liet” 35r2, 45r14, “nie” 50r10, “fied” 50r22, but “fe” 45r19, and “her” 35r21,
- [49] **AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók*:** this scribe oscillates considerably between monophthongs and diphthongs throughout the text, mostly favouring the former. The pronouns were generally diphthongised: “fier” 24r18, 23r25, 35r4, 40r25, 75r13/14/22, 85r20, 115r3/4, 120r5, 125r24, (though it was spelt “fer” in 40r10), “þier” 1r12/14/15 and “uier” 130r11, “Wier” 8r4/16/18, as the adverb “hier” 45r18, 120r23. Other items

showed mostly a monophthong: “rette” 24r1, “rettir” 7r21, “logrettu” 5r1/10/17, 6r8/15, 7v8, “rettinde” 7v16 (but “riettum” 9r16 and “ríettu” 9r18), “fe” (from *vera*) 7v24 (but “fie” in 12Or7), “fe”, which is arguably the most frequent word in which the change is applicable and which appeared many times even on the same page, 6r21, 27r6, 3Or1/3/5/6/8/9/13/20/22/27/29, “ne” 6r21, but also “etur” (from *eta*, with an etymologically short *e*) 13Or18/19/20/21 and “eta” 13Or3/20.

[50] **Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahlólabók*:** the diphthongisation was the norm across grammatical categories and lexical items. Pronouns and applicable verbal forms virtually all show just diphthongised forms, and adverbs such as “híer” 12rb11/12, 162va5 “níe” 27ra21, 142ra37. The pronoun *ég*, with an etymological short vowel, was also found showing a diphthong: “Jeg” 27rb4. The very rare exceptions are best explained as occasional slips influenced by earlier exemplars, “retteliga” 37ra6, “rettur” 37ra12 “rettazt” 37ra16 “rett” 37ra24, “frettu” 115ra16.

To summarise the findings of this chapter, the so-called “diphthongisation” of etymological long *é* had already entered the orthographic repertoire by the earliest part of the period under examination. Its distribution, however, was uneven: some scribal hands employed the innovative form with notable frequency, while in others it remained only sporadically attested. At this stage, the conservative monophthongal spelling still predominated. From shortly after 1400 onwards, the new form began to spread in a gradual yet consistent manner. Over the course of the fifteenth century, virtually all scribes exhibit a mixed practice in which both variants co-occur, though the diphthongal spelling becomes progressively more dominant as time advances. This trajectory suggests that, while the innovation was initially adopted in a somewhat selective or idiosyncratic fashion, it gradually acquired the status of an emerging orthographic norm.

6.5 *The evolution of intervocalic fricative g before i/j*

Throughout the history of Icelandic, a sound that may have been a palatal fricative [j], inherited from Proto-Norse, underwent a change when it occurred after a vowel and before a front vowel *i* or the semivowel *j*. This change led to diphthongisation of the preceding vowel and, at the same time, to the sound merging with *j*. The fricative *g* before

j or a front vowel *i*, as in *segja* ‘to say’, *bogi* ‘bow’, *dugi* ‘suffices’ (of *duga*), *daginn* ‘the day’ (of *dagr*), was palatalised at an early stage, probably already in Proto-Norse, and was presumably [j] in the earliest Old Icelandic. Starting probably in the early thirteenth century, the palatal fricative [j] in this position began changing into the semivowel [j]. This change is typically apparent in the orthography through the insertion of “i” between *gi/gj* and a preceding *e* (as in “seigia” for *segja*), or through inverse spelling adding an unetymological *g* (as in “deygia” for *deyja*). Jón Axel Harðarson (2007) has thoroughly analysed this development (see below for a more detailed description of his results) and described the environments in which it took place as follows:

1. between a long vowel or a diphthong and a back vowel (*a* and *u*): *lágja*, *fleygja*
2. between a short or long vowel (diphthong) and the vowel *i*: *bogi*, *dugi*, *degi*, *daginn*
3. between a short vowel and [j]: *segja*

Jón Axel Harðarson (2007, 87) concluded that the change [j] > [j] must have begun around or shortly after 1200, probably first gaining ground in the environment in (1) already in the thirteenth century. In (2) and (3), by contrast, the change did not advance significantly until the second half of the fourteenth century.

The evolution from [j] to [j] in the environment between a short or a long vowel and *i/j* only has an orthographic manifestation after the short vowel *e*, for example “deigi” for *degi*. The reason we only find orthographic evidence of this change when the preceding vowel is *e* and not, for example when it is *ó*, like in *skógi*, or *a* as in *lagi*, is possibly because the diphthong *ei*, was already present in Icelandic and had an established orthographic representation, while the other resulting diphthongs were only ever found in this position, after the fricative turned into a semi-vowel *j*. Therefore, the fact that *ei* was already spelled “ei” (or “ey”) elsewhere, must have encouraged the extension of the same spelling in the position before *gj*. This development has been described in various ways, and there have been at least two main conflicting interpretations concerning how exactly the sounds involved were affected (cf. Jón Axel Harðarson 2007, 67–78).

Björn K. Þórólfsson (1925, xxv) assumed that this *g* must have been a velar fricative [ɣ]) in all positions, even before both the semivowel [j] (as in *fleygja*) and front vowels such as [i] (as in *fleygi*). According to this view, the change involved this velar fricative

merging with *j*—though he does not elaborate on the exact process leading to this change, perhaps assuming that the velar fricative turned directly into the semivowel [j]. The earlier scholarship is somewhat unclear on this. This interpretation was however refuted by Jón Helgason (1927, 93) who believed that the original fricative had “dropped” (though, as Kristján Árnason [2000, 20] explained, this change is best described as an assimilation of the fricative to the following palatal glide, rather than a drop). Hreinn Benediktsson (1969, 24–25) suggested instead that vowels would have lengthened or diphthongised before the sequence *gj*, and that later the fricative would have been dropped. Stefán Karlsson (2000, 32) essentially agreed with this interpretation.

Jón Axel Harðarson (2007, 78) describes what is possibly a more economical explanation, though he does not find it convincing: even before a front vowel, Old Icelandic *g* may have been realised as a velar fricative [ɣ], only to change into a palatal fricative [j] during the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries and this preceded either the evolution of fricative *g* into *j* or the lengthening or diphthongisation of the preceding short vowel. Kristján Árnason (2000, 19–20 and, more succinctly, 2005, 359) explains how, in the oldest poetry, the sound indicated by the digraph “*gj*” rhymes with that indicated by “*g*” (this may suggest a similar quality, though he also admits it is possible that the *g* in *gj* may have been palatal and not velar). It is in the thirteenth century that the sound represented by “*gj*” begins to rhyme with “*j*”.

Jón Helgason (1927, 91–93) had taken for granted that this rhyme had an underlying phonological merger starting already in the thirteenth century, with sporadic instances of inverse spellings including an unetymological “*g*”, such as “*orcnaýgiar*” for *Orkneyjar*, and rhymes including *geiga* : *sýjur*, and resulting, later in the fourteenth century in rhyming pairs such as *beygja* : *meyjar*. These rhymes are an indication that some kind of merger had taken place between the fricative realisation of the phoneme *g* and *j*. Kristján Árnason (2005, 359), however, considers the time discrepancy between the earlier thirteenth century and the later fourteenth century rhymes as too large, preferring thus to explain the earlier manifestations as the result of the establishment of an equivalence class for [j] in which [ɣ] and [j], would have been an acceptable rhyme set.

Whatever the nature of this change, its outcome has not been identical in the whole country, with a dialectal variant surviving to this day. In fact, a monophthongal

pronunciation of vowels preceding “gj” is to be found as a dialectal variant at least in some parts of the Southeast (Björn Guðfinnsson 1964, 136–137; Bandle 1997, 17), and it is called monophthongal pronunciation of the Skaftafell region in contemporary Icelandic dialectology: *skaftfellskur einhljóðaframburður* (cf. Indriði Gíslason and Höskuldur Þráinsson 1993, 174–177; Kristján Árnason 2005, 387–390). The phonetic realisation of words such as *hagi*, *sigi*, *bogi* and *dugi* is thus [ha:ji], [si:ji], [pɔ:ji] [ty:ji] instead of the standard [haiji], [sijji], [pɔiji] [tyiji] in this dialectal area.¹²

On this dialectal variation, Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (1983) proposes two possible reconstructions for these changes: on the one hand the palatalisation of *g* affected the whole country, with a lengthening of the vowel intervening dialectally after the quantity shift. On the other hand, the parts of the country displaying a long monophthong may have preserved a velar fricative [ɣ], when the rest of the country had [j], until the period in which the Quantity Shift began to operate. This shift would have then forced the lengthening of the short monophthongs, which would have then been followed by the assimilation of the fricative to the following *i*. Jón Axel Harðarson (2007) suggests a different interpretation: he considers [j] to have existed since Proto-Norse times, and to have acquired phonemic status in Old Icelandic, where it can distinguish minimal pairs such as *leigja* : *leiga* and *vígja* : *víga* (where “gj” stands for [j]). Starting in the thirteenth century, the [j] began to merge with the approximant [j]. He shows this to have happened in three separate situations (2007, 82–86):

- a) *in the thirteenth century*: after a long vowel or diphthong and before a back vowel (*a* or *u*); we find spellings such as “hvsfrægja” for *húsfreyja* and “gyiar” for *gýgjar*, inverse spellings indicating that the palatal fricative [j] in words such as *fleygja* and *gýgjar* had become the semivowel [j].

¹² It should be noted that in the language of some speakers from the Skaftárhreppur county, a slightly palatalised fricative *g* in intervocalic position before *i* was anecdotally observed in the course of this research: [pɔ:ji], [ty:ji] etc. This is most likely the result of paradigmatic levelling aiming to flatten the alternation of different roots: *bogi* would thus have the same root as the oblique *boga* without the alternation between the semivowel in the nominative root and the velar fricative in the other cases. An opposite tendency has been sometimes observed anecdotally in children from other areas [Jon Axel Harðarson, *viva voce*], extending the nominative root with the semivowel to the other cases, thus producing [pɔija] for *boga*.

- b) *starting in the thirteenth century*: between a short vowel and [j]; such as in *segja*, which we can find in the spelling “seigia” reflecting a pronunciation which must have been something like [sej.ja] and has thus not changed any further in the pronunciation.
- c) *in the fifteenth century*: between a short or long vowels and [ɪ]; we see this change in words such as “eigill” for *Egill*, or “fvr veigit” for *fyrvegit* the root of which contains the vowel *e*, which we find spelt as “ei”, but likely affected other root vowels in the same time frame, despite it not being indicated in the orthography. This shows how the former fricative became an approximant and entered the nucleus of the preceding syllable.

As Jón Axel Harðarson explains (2007, 89), during the sixteenth century, following the quantity shift, which made vowel length in Icelandic dependent on syllabic structure, rather than phonemic, and reflecting the length inherited from earlier stages of the language. Further changes happened to the inherited short vowels in words such as *hagi*, *vegi* and *bogi*: in these, the sequence Vj (< Vg+j/i) had to be restructured, as the first syllable, which bears the stress, is open and ends in a short vowel, but the new rules in play after the quantity shift dictate that a stressed vowel in an open syllable must always be long. The adjustment could be done either by lengthening the *j* (*hagi*: [ha.jɪ] > [haj.jɪ]), so that the short *a* would no longer be in an open syllable, or by lengthening the vowel, keeping the syllable open (*hagi*: [ha.jɪ] > [ha:.jɪ]).

Most speakers of Icelandic would adopt the former solution, but speakers in the South-East would prefer the latter. In those areas where the *j* was lengthened, its first mora became re-interpreted as the second part of a diphthong which started with the preceding short vowel: [hajɪ] > [hajjɪ] > [hai.jɪ]. Thus, the monophthongal pronunciation of the Skaftafell area would not be the relic of an older pronunciation, but rather a different development sharing the same age as the more common one.

For this research the relevant and interesting features to observe will be those showing the change from a palatal fricative [j] to a semivowel [j] in manifestation of this change between the short vowel *e* and *i* or *j*. In other words, the spellings “eg” and “eig” will be contrasted. Further examples of this include spellings such as “seigia” and “seigir”, for *segja* and *segir*, “deigi” for *degi*, or inverse spellings such “egi” for *eigi*, the third person

singular present subjunctive of *eiga* “to own” etc. Conversely, we can also find spellings such as the “gh” for the fricative, which we find very frequently, for example, in GKS 1010 fol. *Hrokkinskinna*, a spelling for the fricative which is interpreted as a Norwegianism: in Norwegian spelling practice, “gh” appears to mark the fricative, while the stop is represented by “g” (see Stefán Karlsson 2000, 53). When this convention occurs in Icelandic manuscripts—particularly during a period when Norwegian influence was already in decline—it may indicate the retention of the fricative. For example, the form “laghi” for *lagi* in GKS 1010 fol. *Hrokkinskinna* 29rb may point to a fricative pronunciation. Although this distinction was applied only inconsistently in Iceland, Norwegian scribes regularly differentiated between the fricative and the stop in their orthography. Sporadic instances of this scribal habit can still be found much later (in Holm perg.3 fol., *Reykjahólabók* the spelling “gh” is very common for the fricative: “figh”, “þigh”, “miogh”).

Exceptionally rare examples of the change from a palatal fricative [j] to a semivowel [j] in rhymes and spellings, as mentioned, can be found already in thirteenth century, although it becomes widespread in the fifteenth, and virtually universal by the sixteenth (Björn K. Þórólfsson 1925, xxxiii). Thus, such change represents a suitable candidate for the purpose of this research. Applicable items include *degi*, *segja* and its conjugated forms, *megin*, *þegja* and its conjugated forms, *dreginn* from *draga*, *megi* from *má*, *vegi*(nn) from *vegr*, and others. There can also be found instances of inverse spelling by which an unetymological “g” is added between a vowel and *j*, as in “meygjar” for *meyjar* “eygjar” for *eyjar* “deygja” for *deyja* etc.

Table 6.4 shows a distinct trend of spreading for this feature between the second half of the fifteenth century, and the beginning of the sixteenth.

Table 6.4: The evolution of intervocalic fricative *g* before *i/j*.

No.	Shelf mark	Date	<i>n</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>j</i>
1	AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350–1375	32	100%	0%
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350–1400	21	95.2%	4.8%
3	AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360–1400	44	100%	0%
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370–1380	40	100%	0%
5	Holm perg. 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375–1400	25	100%	0%
6	Holm perg. 19 4to	c1375–1400	30	100%	0%
7	AM 194 8vo	1387	27	100%	0%
8	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387–1395	86	100%	0%
9	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387–1395	37	100%	0%
10	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400	53	100%	0%
11	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400	32	100%	0%
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400	31	100%	0%
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400	40	100%	0%
14	AM 561 4to	c1400	52	100%	0%
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404–1420	26	96.2%	3.8%
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420	30	100%	0%
17	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400–1450	26	100%	0%
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	26	100%	0%
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	24	66.7%	33.3%
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	13	92.3%	7.7%
21	AM 151 4to (1)	c1450	9	100%	0%
22	AM 534 4to	c1400–1500	24	100%	0%
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	16	87.5%	12.5%
24	AM 430 12mo	c1400–1500	20	85%	15%
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475	25	100%	0%
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450–1475	12	83.3%	16.7%
27	AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450–1500	66	57.6%	42.4%
28	Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500	63	58.7%	41.3%
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	18	100%	0%
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450–1500	3	66.7%	33.3%
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	29	89.7%	10.3%
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500	19	89.5%	10.5%
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	16	93.8%	6.3%
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	18	100%	0%
35	AM 556 a 4to, <i>Eggertsbók</i>	c1475–1500	44	88.6%	11.4%
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	44	100%	0%
37	AM 159 4to	c1480–1500	22	100%	0%
38	AM 309 4to, <i>Bæjarbók í Flóa</i>	1498	43	44.2%	55.8%
39	AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubæjarbók</i>	c1500	31	80.6%	19.4%
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	38	0%	100%
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	43	100%	0%
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500	33	97%	3%
43	AM 152 4to	c1500	30	20%	80%
44	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (1)	c1500	19	94.7%	5.3%
45	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500	16	62.5%	37.5%
46	AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500–1525	44	9.1%	90.9%
47	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500–1525	31	100%	0%
48	AM 529 4to	c1500–1550	13	7.7%	92.3%
49	AM 147 4to <i>Heynesbók</i>	c1525–1550	16	75%	25%
50	Holm perg. 3 fol., <i>Reykjahólabók</i>	c1530–1540	48	22.9%	77.1%

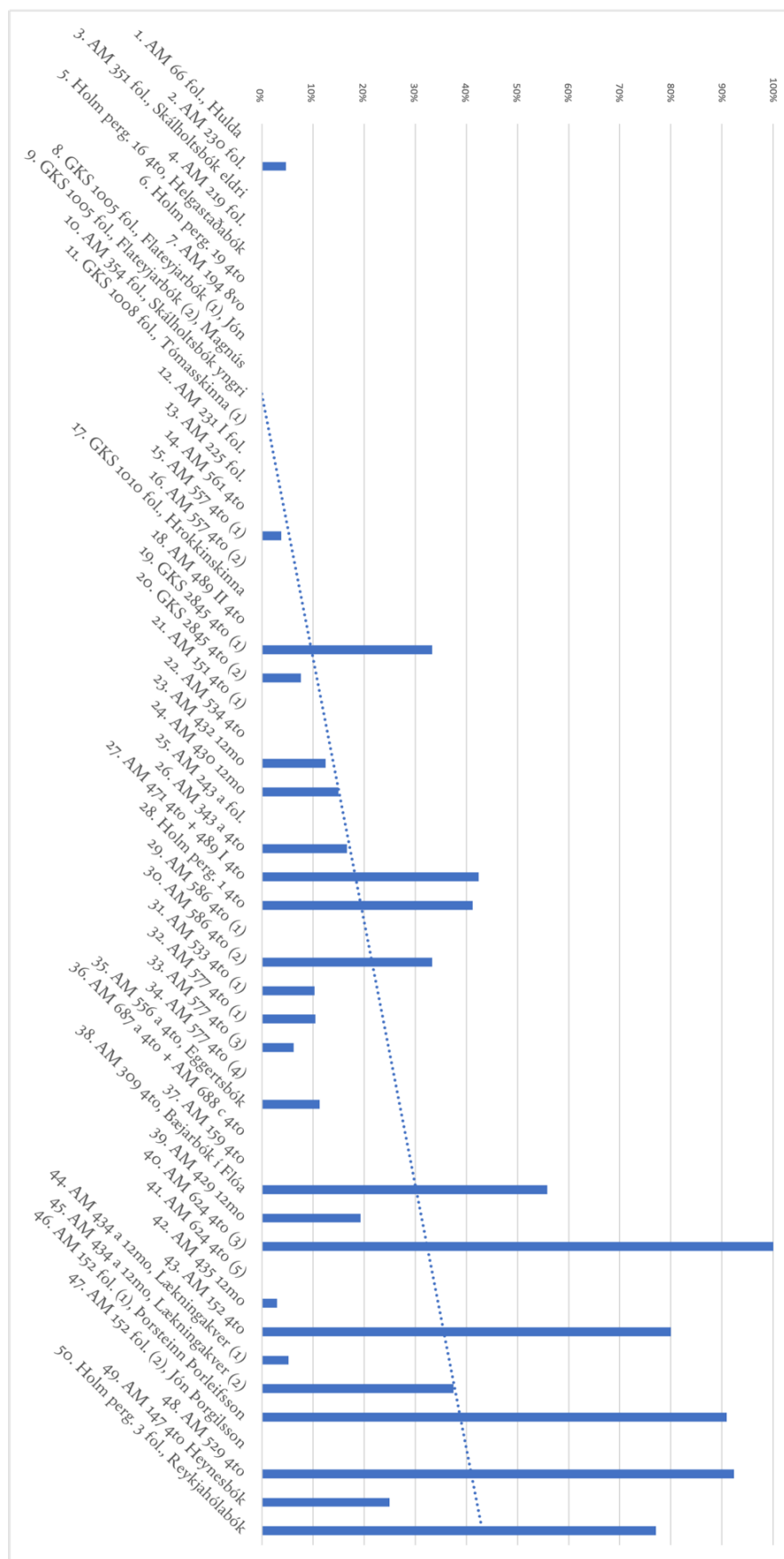


Figure 6.4: The evolution of intervocalic fricative g before i/j.

From the data in *Table 6.4* we can make the following observations: [2] AM 230 fol. (c1350–1400) is the first hand showing a couple of instances of the change in the spelling, though one of them is ambiguous (see the list of examples below). If we exclude this one, the next to show the change, though only in one instance, is [15] AM 557 4to (1), with the personal name “eígill” for *Egill*. After that, the change begins appearing sporadically, in a very few items, only to become more established towards the end of the fifteenth century, starting with [38] AM 309 4to, *Bæjarbók í Flóa*, the first showing a slight preference for the younger form. The other hands using the younger orthography in the majority of instances are the following:

- [38] AM 309 4to, *Bæjarbók í Flóa* (1498): 55.8%.
- [40] AM 624 4to (3) (c1500): 100%.
- [43] AM 152 4to (c1500): 80%.
- [45] AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* (2) (c1500): 37.5%.
- [46] AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson (c1500–1525): 90.9%.
- [48] AM 529 4to (c1500–1550): 92.3%.
- [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók* (c1530–1540): 77.1%.

[40] AM 624 4to (3) is the first and only one to show the younger form 100% of the times, and it is a hand that has so far shown an innovative character in all but one of the features analysed. The other hands in this list all have a rather more innovative character with very few exceptions. [48] AM 529 4to was more conservative in the representation of the diphthongisation of long *é*, while [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, for instance, has shown a conservative preference when it came to the form of the letters “a” and “s” and the representation of the *u*-epenthesis (see Chapter 6.6), but it otherwise has a more pronouncedly innovative character when it comes to the representation of sound changes.

An interesting observation should be made concerning [39] AM 429 12mo, *Kirkjubæjarbók* (c1500), which showed the younger form 19.4% of the times: if indeed this work, a female legendary, was written at the convent of Kirkjubær or at the nearby Þykkvibær, the scribe may have come from elsewhere, given how both places are in the

dialectal area where the older monophthongal vowel did not evolve into a diphthong. But it is also possible that the text was copied elsewhere.

Very generally, from the data in *Table 6.4* it can be observed that hands displaying the younger form of this change tend to be innovative in most of the other aspects as well. Given how late the spread of this change seems to have its onset, at least compared to the changes seen so far, it is not surprising that it should make an appearance in younger hands that present a more innovative character. The following list is meant to illustrate some examples of the tokens collected which displayed the change:

- [2] AM 230 fol.: the items found did not show instances of the change in question except for “egi” 45v19, which is an inverse spelling of the negative adverb *eigi* and “eigip-taland” 15v27—though this is a foreign word and not reliable as evidence, especially in light of the fact that in the modern language it is pronounced with a stop and was thus not counted. If this spelling is not some kind of mistake, which it may well be, it would seemingly indicate that the *g* was not a stop.
- [15] AM 557 4to (1): only one instance of the change was found: “eígill” for *Egill* on 3v3.
- [19] GKS 2845 4to (1): a few instances of the change were found, such as “feigia” 14r17, 24r8/11/20, 26r8, “feiger” 28r7, “þeigia” 22r8, and the inverse spelling “orkn eygia” for *Orkneyja* 12r22.
- [20] GKS 2845 4to (2): only one example of the change was found, in “eígill” 38r24.
- [23] AM 432 12mo: two instances were found in “þeigi” 56v5, “deígi” 67v7.
- [24] AM 430 12mo: two instances of “deíge” for *degi* 7v14, 27v11, “þeige” 21r15.
- [27] AM 471 4to: the innovative spellings appear in the usual tokens, particularly forms of the verbs *segja* and *þegja* “þeigia” 123r16, “seiger” 123r17, 153r9, 182v23.
- [28] Holm perg. 1 4to: examples were mostly limited to the dative singular of *dagr* “deigi” 10ra 8, 10ra11 (x2), 10ra13, 10ra14, and forms of the verb *segja*: “feigir” 10rb11 and 50rb24, 50rb27.

- [30] AM 586 4to (2): only three instances were found in this hand. One of them showed the change: “feigir” 29v10.
- [31] AM 533 4to (1): “feigin” 50r9, 70r20.
- [33] AM 577 4to (3): “feiginn” 66r6.
- [35] AM 556 a 4to: “þeigi” 1r2, “feigia” 30r32, 50r1, 65r33 “feiginn” 50r32.
- [38] AM 309 4to, *Bæjarbók í Flóa*: 25 instances of the change were found, such as “deígi” 10rb9, “feigia” was the most prominent spelling of this verb, although it could be found sporadically without a diphthong, 12ra40, b43, b53, 16rb16, 36, 52, and on several other pages, 20ra11, “feigin” 34rb21.
- [39] AM 429 12mo, *Kirkjubæjarbók*: most instances found did not show the change, but it occasionally appeared, as in “þeigi þu” 9v14. Interestingly, the change was evident also through inverse spellings: “hlęgia”, the intransitive verb *hlęja*, in 38r11 and “hlęgi” in 4v5. We also find “deygía” in 21v4–5, for the verb *deyja* and “deyger” 6r1 for its second person singular present subjunctive active, *deyr*, “meygium” for *meyjum*, dative plural of *mær* in 5v11, “meygiar” 18r11, in place of *meyjar* the genitive singular of the same word.
- [40] AM 624 4to (3): this hand only shows instances of evolution of the fricative. They are quite numerous, but only present on three lexical items, which therefore appear very frequently: “deigi” for *degi*, “feigir” for *segir*, and “meigin” (adverb).
- [42] AM 435 12mo: only one item found, “eigínlanda” 3v10.
- [43] AM 152 4to: the only items showing the change of intervocalic *g* were *segir* and *degi*; however, being particularly frequent, they constituted the majority.
- [44] AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* (1): only one instance showing the change was found, “feigir” 3va13.
- [45] AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* (2): the change was found, though in a minority of the few instances collected: “þueigit” 31va19, “feigir” 35rb17.

[46] AM 152 fol. (1): the change was present in the vast majority of instances collected, “deíge” 12rb21, “seíger” 12ra37, 12va38, “þeigit” 12vb17 “seígia” 22ra18, “meíginn” 22rb15, etc.

[48] AM 529 4to: only one instance of lack of the change was found “aunduegi” 10r2.

[49] AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók*: a few instances of the change were found on the word “feigir” 5r13, “feigia” 6r4, and “deíge” 8r15.

[50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjabólabók*: the change was found on around three quarters of instances gathered, particularly on items such as forms of the verb *segja* and the dative singular *degi*: “feigir” 2rb34/40/44, 12rb10, 27ra11, 86va43/b43/45/46, 71vb31/44, 96vb11, 141va5, “feigiande” 52rb11, “deíge” 96vb7, “deígí” 162va39 (x2).

This analysis shows that the change appears only sporadically, and never in abundance in any hand, until the end of the fifteenth century. Around that time, its spread is rather noticeable, with a sharp contrast between hands either showing it ever so slightly or very frequently.

6.6 The *u*-epenthesis

The *u*-epenthesis (*stoðhljóð* in Icelandic, “supporting sound”) is a feature with a long and somewhat complex history. It consists of the emergence of a rounded *svarabhakti* vowel (represented in the orthography as “u”) before an *r* in substantives, adjectives and verbs, in which said *r* was immediately preceded or followed by a consonant other than *r*: *armr* > *armur*, *langr* > *langur*, *tekr* > *tekur*, *fegrð* > *fegurð* etc.

The change was discussed early by Konráð Gíslason (1846) in *Um frum-parta íslenzkrar túngu í fornöld* and Jón Þorkelsson (1863) in his study *Um r og ur í niðrlagi orða og orðstofna í íslenzku*, where he presents a survey of the change with copious references to manuscripts and poetry. Björn K. Þórólfsson (1925, xxiv), referencing Jón Þorkelsson (1863), stated that the *u*-epenthesis began towards the end of the thirteenth century. According to Björn, orthographic “ur” did not become as common as “r” until the fifteenth century, but at that point, Björn maintained, the new pronunciation with *u* was without doubt much more common than the older pronunciation.

Jón Helgason (1926, 55) discussed the emergence of *u*-epenthesis and associated changes in spelling, arguing that the distinction scribes made between words with the old and the new *-ur* endings seems to imply the presence of a distinctive trait that he defines as “the musical accent.” Although the new vowel had developed, words such as *móður* ‘tired’ and *móður* ‘mother’ (acc. sg.) were still differentiated in pronunciation, the former carrying the first accent (“accent 1”) and the latter the second accent (“accent 2”). Poets maintained this distinction between the two word-types in verse up until the Reformation. Kjartan G. Ottósson (1986, 188) succinctly lists cues on the presence of this pitch accent in Icelandic which, he maintains may have survived regionally in Iceland all the way to the seventeenth or even eighteenth century.

In this regard, Myrvoll and Skomedal (2010) traced some poetic evidence from the *Third Grammatical Treatise* that seems to support the theory of the presence of a tonal accent in Old Icelandic. However, Kristján Árnason and Haukur Þorgeirsson (2017) argued instead that Old Norse or Old Icelandic probably did not have systematic or lexicalised tonal accents like those found in later Scandinavian languages. However, utterances could display subtle distinctions arising from the interaction between word-level phonology and intonation/distinctions that might, over time, have become lexicalised. They link this to a final falling contour at the end of stems that were originally monosyllabic but later became disyllabic or had a suffixed definite article.

This falling contour, which would correspond to what became the *stød* in Danish and accent 1 in Swedish/Norwegian likely originated as an intonational feature, used variably depending on phrasal stress, but the development of new disyllables (including those arising from the spread of the *u*-epenthesis) made its integration into the word’s phonological structure possible. In other Scandinavian varieties, the retention of such a low boundary tone may have led to the later emergence of the tonal accent contrast. Sólveig Hilmarsdóttir and Haukur Þorgeirsson (2025) have shown that the author of the *Third Grammatical Treatise* was consciously applying classical knowledge to make sense of differences in accent in minimal pairs distinguished by pitch contour.

According to Stefán Karlsson (1989, 11), the first signs of *u*-epenthesis date to around 1300, but the change, he says, seems to have been complete throughout the country in the first half of the fifteenth century. Stefán, like Björn before him, thus seems to

assume the absence of *u*-epenthesis in the orthographic record in later sources can be explained as orthographic archaism.

Ari Páll Kristinsson, in his unpublished thesis from 1987, presents an in-depth study of the emergence and spread of the *svarabhakti* vowel in the orthography, analysing a corpus of texts from ca. 1275 to ca. 1525, providing a phonological analysis of the phenomenon. He concludes that the epenthesis of *u* must have started in specific phonological environments before it was gradually extended to other environments. According to Ari Páll (1987), *r* and *ur* alternated in the pronunciation from the end of the thirteenth century all the way to the sixteenth century, thus rejecting the assumption that the absence of *u*-epenthesis in the written record from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries can be explained as nothing more than orthographic archaism.

Ari Páll Kristinsson (1987) argues for a phonological development drawing on arguments pertaining the syllabic structure of Old and Modern Icelandic. He concludes that the change must have happened in two steps. The first step was the development of a syllabic *r* in certain phonological environments: first before *r* between consonants (words like *fegrð*), then before *r* and between *p*, *t*, *k* and a word boundary (words like *kópr*, *betr*, *lekr*) and later in other environments (*fagr*, *armr*, etc.). Haukur Þorgeirsson (2013, 145–151) challenges this view attributing the alternation observed to palaeographic factors. According to Ari Páll (1987), the second step in the change was the development of a fully-fledged vowel + *r* from a syllabic *r*. The syllabic pronunciation of *r* possibly coexisted for some time alongside *ur* before the latter took over. Similar conclusions are presented in a later article in which Ari Páll (1992) makes again the case for the development of a syllabic *r* offering some relief in pronunciation of complex consonantal clusters such as those already mentioned, which would then have optionally evolved into the sequence of *u* and *r* to become the norm later. In other words, a syllabic pronunciation of *r* and a *ur* sequence would have co-existed, conditioned by the phonological environment, for some time in the language, until the syllabic pronunciation was eventually supplanted by the sixteenth century. This interpretation will be important in the present discussion. With regards to English, Kim (2005, 283) writes:

Syllabic consonants in Present-day English appear in unstressed syllables where their preceding vowels are normally lost (e.g., *sudden* ['sʌdn̩]). When the preceding

vowel remains undeleted, the alternative phonetic form [əC] surfaces instead (e.g., *sudden* ['sʌdən]).

We may thus imagine a similar situation for thirteenth–fifteenth century Icelandic, in which an *r* phoneme with a syllabic function, and probably considerable articulatory intensity would have favoured the emergence of a vowel to make its utterance easier. This vowel may have co-existed with the original syllabic sonorant for quite a while. In this regard, the interpretation of Ari Páll Kristinsson (1987) would thus be the most convincing one.

The long retention of etymological spellings, together with the proliferation of inverse spellings, may therefore be explained by the presence of a suprasegmental feature such as a tonal accent, as discussed. However, this development may also have been favoured by sociolinguistic factors. A syllabic pronunciation may initially have been perceived as a more elegant or “proper” realisation, influenced by spellings attested in earlier texts. This, in turn, may have encouraged the retention of etymological spellings with a syllabic consonant and subsequently triggered the spread of unetymological *-r* forms. In other words, monophthongal spellings and syllabic pronunciation may have mutually reinforced each other, at least for a time. One example comes to mind: word-initial *h* in English words borrowed from Latin is normally silent, but it has been restored in some cases—such as British English *herb* [hɜːb]—under the influence of spelling as it was likely perceived more correct. The likelihood that a syllabic pronunciation in Icelandic might, for a time, have existed in some circles as a supposedly more “correct” realisation of words spelled with etymological *-ur* endings is admittedly difficult to infer and is perhaps low, but it is nonetheless an interesting hypothesis to consider.

Cross-linguistically, we may notice how, for example, syllabic consonants in English dialects may be realised as a sequence of *schwa* + sonorant.¹³ Ari Páll Kristinsson (1987, 10–12) already makes comparisons of epenthetic vowels in languages as diverse as Norwegian, English, Latin and Irish where various solutions are adopted to resolve clusters of consonants—particularly plosives—and sonorants.

¹³ The literature on the treatment of sonorants in English is rather vast. For a discussion of the matter, cf. Mora Bonilla 2003.

Regardless, the result of this change was that in nouns with stem-final *r*, the *u*-epenthesis created an intra-paradigmatic alternation of monosyllabic vs. disyllabic stems, as in, for instance, masc. nom.-acc. sing. *akr* ‘field’ becoming *akur* while dat. sing. *akri* and nom. plur. *akrar* and other forms where the *r* was followed by a vowel remained unaffected. In adjectives with stem-final *r*, a similar alternation arose, as in masc. nom. sing. *fagr* > *fagur* ‘fair’ vs. masc. acc. sing. *fagran*. Gradually, this alternation in adjectives with stem-final *r* was extended on the analogy of disyllabic adjectives like *göfugr* ‘noble’, resulting in the creation of a disyllabic stem in feminine dat. sing. and gen. sing. as well as the gen. plur. of all three genders before an ending starting with a consonant, *-ri*, *-rar*, and *-ra*: fem. dat. sing. *fagri* → *fagurri*, fem. gen. sing. *fagrar* → *fagurrar*, and gen. plur. of all genders *fagra* → *fagurra* (see Haraldur Bernharðsson 2016, 188–192).

The presence of the epenthetic vowel is very often revealed through inverse spellings; in other words, lexical items which present an etymological *ur*, are spelled with a simple “r” as the emergence of the epenthesis obscured the earlier opposition between *r* and *ur*. Such inverse spellings can be found most frequently in, for instance, kinship words where etymological *faður*, *móður*, *bróður* and *systur* (acc., dat. and gen. sing. of *faðir*, *móðir*, *bróðir* and *systir*, respectively), are spelled with “r” instead of “or”, “ur”, or “vr”. They may further be encountered in the nominative of the pronoun *nokkur*, spelled with “r”, in the feminine nominative singular and neuter nominative and accusative plural forms of the possessive pronouns *okkarr*, *ykkarr* and *yðvarr* where the forms *okkur*, *ykkur*, and *yður* appear as “okkr”, “ykk” and “yðr”, respectively. However, Haukur Þorgeirsson (2013, 189–193) argued that this may have actually been a temporary change, at least in the language of some speakers, affecting these possessive pronouns: they were modelled from, or confused with, the genitive of the personal pronouns with *-r* before the *-ur* pronunciation became universal. Lastly, the nom. and acc. pl. of weak feminine substantives could be mentioned, as etymological *sögur* can occasionally be found as “sogr” or *messur* as “messr”.

Care must be exercised when looking for examples of inverse spelling, as some inflected forms of disyllabic stems such as *nökkurr* did not lose the *u* regularly in Old Icelandic but started showing signs of *u*-syncope during this period, thus slowly adopting the syncope rule of disyllabic stems seen in adjectives such as *gamall* with, for instance,

fem. acc. sing. *nökkura* becoming *nökkra* (for a thorough discussion on this matter, see de Leeuw van Weenen 2003 and Luxner 2011). It can be difficult to tell apart cases of inverse spelling due to hypercorrection from those of actual *u*-syncope (Luxner 2011, 74–78); consequently, these ambiguous instances have not been considered for the tally. Moreover, the dative singular of *faðir* could exist in two versions, *faður*, for which a form lacking orthographic representation of *u* would be an inverse spelling, and *feðr*, akin to the nominative plural, where the lack of *u* is in fact etymological (cf. Noreen 1923, 286). Furthermore, *okkr* and *ykkur*, the accusative and dative dual of the pronouns *vit* and (*þ*)*it*, as well as *yðr*, the dative plural of (*þ*)*ér*, had *-r*, while the feminine nominative singular and neuter nominative and accusative plural of the possessive pronouns *ykkarr*, *okkarr*, and *yðvarr* had *ur*: *okkur*, *ykkur* and *yður*. An overview of items in which the *ur* was etymologically present is provided already by Jón Þorkelsson (1863, 5–10).

Given its high frequency as a case marker, both in masculine and feminine declension patterns, the combination of *u* and *r* was well suited for abbreviation. A special symbol already existed for *ur* in the Latin manuscript tradition in the form of a superscript “r” rotunda (“^ʀ”; cf. Cappelli 2011, xxiv). The frequent use of this abbreviation is very useful in identifying unetymological spellings: since a superscript “r” rotunda is normally intended as a *ur* abbreviation, it occasionally appears word-internally and finally for etymological *ur*, as in, for example, “siġd” for *Sigurð*, “broð” for *bróður* and “dočč” for *dóttur*. At the same time, certain scribes often abbreviate etymological *r* with the superscript “r” rotunda thus suggesting phonological *ur* resulting from *u*-epenthesis. Within this study, superscript “r” rotunda was thus treated as having the phonological value *ur*.

It complicates the matter that “r” rotunda on the base line is used partly as an alternative of the straight “r”. Due to the spreading of “r” rotunda on the base line at the expense of the straight “r” in the period under study, one may wonder whether for some scribes the “r” rotunda on the base line was not simply a palaeographic variant of the straight “r” but perhaps had the phonological value *ur* and was thus essentially an abbreviation equivalent to the superscript “r” rotunda. In that case, examples such as “tek₂” and “tek²” on the same page could in equal measure be taken as indicative of *u*-epenthesis. However, such an interpretation would only be viable if the “r” rotunda on the base line

only appeared in environments where *u*-epenthesis could have applied, which is not the case.

While the nature of these orthographies is difficult to ascertain, there may sometimes be other clues in a given text indicating the presence of the *u*-epenthesis, either in the form of unetymological spellings, or the use of “²” for an etymological *ur*, as in the already cited example “²sigd” for *Sigurð*. In this regard, Bandle (1956, 156) explains that “²” standing on the line is often used in the printed 1584 Bible translation *Guðbrandsbiblíja* to indicate etymological *ur*, providing examples such as “Brod²” for *bróður* and “kon²” for *konur*. Furthermore, he also notes the presence of instances such as “fell²”, “nid²trodet”, “apt²”, “sund²” and “alld²”, which may indicate that this symbol was treated as having a specific underlying phonological value, as opposed to a merely palaeographic one. In other words, it was perhaps not treated as a mere palaeographic variant of “*r*” (both in words like “apt²” and “sund²”, with etymological *r* and words like “brod²” and “kon²” with etymological *ur*), but as a kind of abbreviation for *ur*, betraying the presence of *u*-epenthesis even in words such as “apt²” and “sund²”. Given the widespread presence of spellings indicating the prominence of this change by the time of printing of the Bible, it is hard to make the case for which spellings such as “apt²”, “sund²” or “alld²” would indicate some lingering etymological pronunciation without *u*. If anything, such spellings may simply be a result of the desire to retain archaic conventions in the face of the spread of unetymological *ur*; not least attesting an increasing difficulty on the part of scribes and authors alike to retain etymological spellings in the face of linguistic change.

At any rate, though such spellings are far from being unambiguous, they will be treated as etymological in this study; the object of the present research cannot be that of reconstructing the phonological reality of a given scribe’s language. That would be far from possible: for all we know, a scribe that is quite precise in the use of phonological spellings may have used pronunciation that was far removed from the earlier stages of the language. For the scope of this study, the goal is to trace the spread of the unetymological spelling without any expectation that this would reflect the phonological reality of the language at the time of writing, in the same way as modern Icelandic spelling conventions are quite detached from the actual pronunciation of today.

The symbol $\sim$, on the other hand, is a more reliable indicator of the presence of *u*-epenthesis, given that, aside from being another *ur*-abbreviation in the Latin tradition (Cappelli 2011, xxiv), it stands unequivocally for *ur* also in the Icelandic tradition (Haraldur Bernharðsson 2016, 77, Haugen 2013, 237). In this study, it has thus been taken as indicative of *u*-epenthesis in words such as “he $\tilde{f}$ ” *hefur* which are very frequent, for example, in Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*. To sum up, the orthographic forms have been interpreted as follows:

- the abbreviation $\sim$ = *ur*
- superscript “r” rotunda = *ur*

The data has been divided into two categories:

- (1) Etymological spellings (“*etym.*” in Table 6.5 below): orthographic forms consistent with the origin of the word form; etymological *r* and *ur* are clearly distinguished:
 - “r” and “2” on the line = *r*
 - “ur”, “vr”, “or” and the *ur* abbreviations $\sim$ and superscript “r” rotunda = *ur*
- (2) Unetymological spellings (“*unetym.*” in Table 6.5 below): orthographic forms inconsistent with the origin of the word form; the orthographic distinction between etymological *ur* and *r* is lost. The unetymological spellings are of two kinds:
 - Direct evidence (“updated” spellings): etymological *r* represented with orthographic “ur”, “vr”, “or” or an *ur* abbreviation, that is the symbol $\sim$ or superscript “r” rotunda.
 - Indirect evidence (inverse spellings): etymological *ur* represented with orthographic “r”.

Table 6.5 presents an overview of the results of the examination of fifty scribal hands from the late fourteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth century. The figures show first the size of the sample for each hand (*n*) and then the division in percentages. The data was, as explained in Chapter 3, gathered with systematic random sampling and selected wherever possible at regular intervals. To help visualise the distribution, cells are

coloured in yellow when the percentage is 100%, but otherwise they are blue whenever the percentage exceeds 50%. *Figure 6.5* offers a further visualisation of the results.

Table 6.5: The *u*-epenthesis.

No.	Shelf mark	Date	<i>n</i>	<i>etym.</i>	<i>unetym.</i>
1	AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350–1375	170	100%	0%
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350–1400	73	98.6%	1.4%
3	AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360–1400	185	100%	0%
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370–1380	158	100%	0%
5	Holm perg. 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375–1400	144	98.6%	1.4%
6	Holm perg. 19 4to	c1375–1400	106	90.6%	9.4%
7	AM 194 8vo	1387	177	100%	0%
8	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387–1395	393	99.2%	0.8%
9	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387–1395	174	99.9%	0.1%
10	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400	468	99.4%	0.6%
11	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400	241	66.4%	33.6%
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400	133	95.5%	4.5%
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400	328	99.4%	0.6%
14	AM 561 4to	c1400	240	95.8%	4.2%
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404–1420	125	84.8%	15.2%
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420	105	93.3%	6.7%
17	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400–1450	100	91%	9%
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	120	86.7%	13.3%
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	165	60.6%	39.4%
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	92	64.1%	35.9%
21	AM 151 4to (1)	c1450	186	92.5%	7.5%
22	AM 534 4to	c1400–1500	182	95%	5%
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	82	54.9%	45.1%
24	AM 430 12mo	c1400–1500	115	22.6%	77.4%
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475	221	84.2%	15.8%
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450–1475	211	48.8%	51.2%
27	AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450–1500	184	90.2%	9.8%
28	Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500	211	60.2%	39.8%
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	93	97.8%	2.2%
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450–1500	77	51.9%	48.1%
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	211	10.4%	89.6%
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500	183	60.7%	39.3%
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	111	61.3%	38.7%
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	133	46.6%	53.4%
35	AM 556 a 4to, <i>Eggertsbók</i>	c1475–1500	151	17.2%	82.8%
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	83	83.1%	16.9%
37	AM 159 4to	c1480–1500	368	53%	47%
38	AM 309 4to, <i>Bæjarbók í Flóa</i>	1498	114	84.2%	15.8%
39	AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubæjarbók</i>	c1500	80	87.5%	12.5%
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	225	34.2%	65.8%
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	91	58.2%	41.8%
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500	233	35.6%	64.4%
43	AM 152 4to	c1500	212	7.1%	92.9%
44	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (1)	c1500	79	17.7%	82.3%
45	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500	96	30.2%	69.8%
46	AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500–1525	235	55.3%	44.7%
47	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500–1525	258	45.3%	54.7%
48	AM 529 4to	c1500–1550	117	13.7%	86.3%
49	AM 147 4to, <i>Heynesbók</i>	c1525–1550	189	3.7%	96.3%
50	Holm perg. 3 fol., <i>Reykjahólabók</i>	c1530–1540	204	59.8%	40.2%

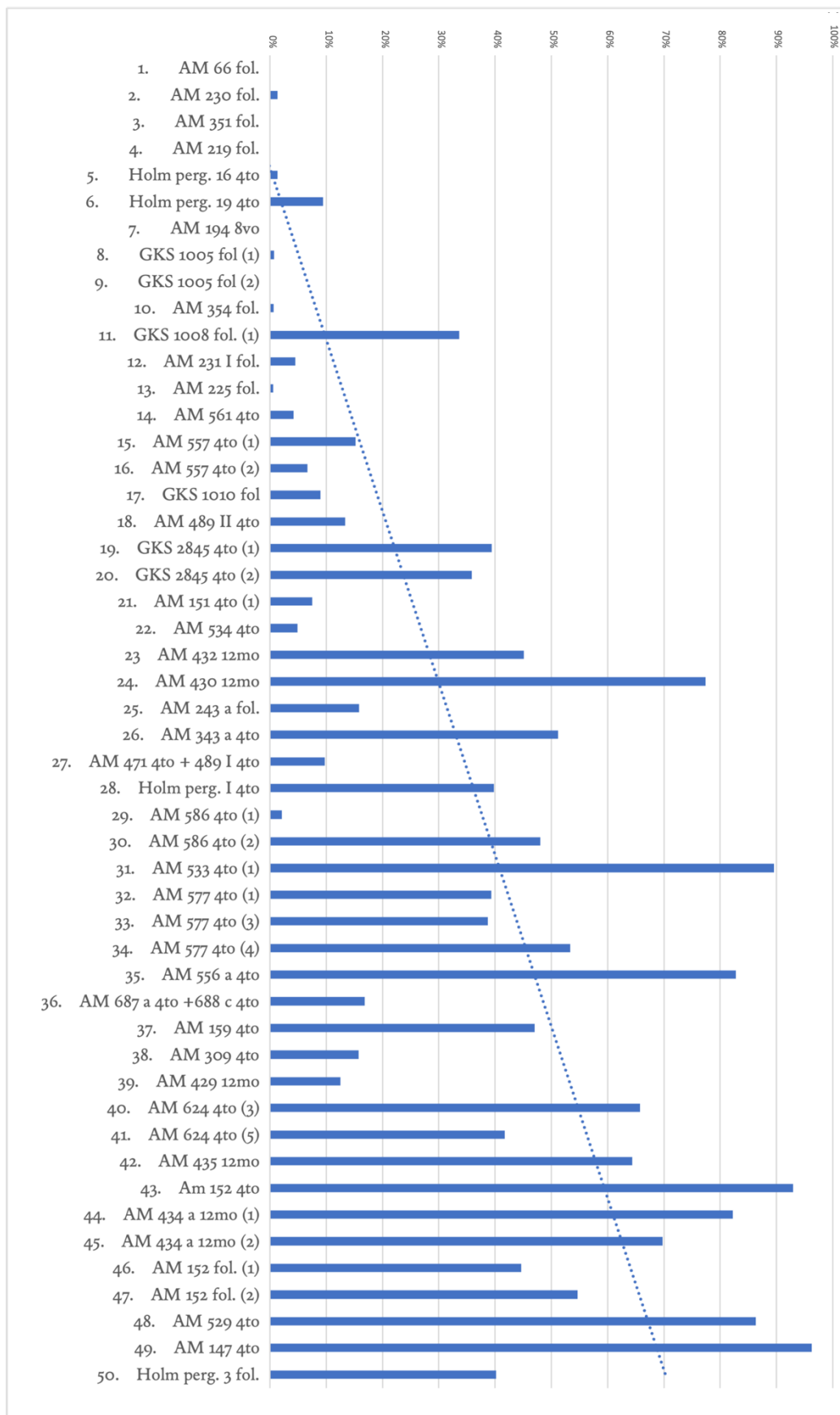


Figure 6.5: The *u*-epenthesis.

The picture emerging from the data shows a very gradual and steady increase of the unetymological spellings, which can be visualised clearly in *Figure 6.5*, with a more decisive turn towards their spread starting around 1450. In the first half of the corpus, hands 1–25, the average percentage of unetymological spellings is 13%, while in the second half, hands 26–50, it has risen to 51.4%. Only four hands fully distinguished etymological *r* and *ur* in the orthography in the sections sampled, and they are all dated to the end of the fourteenth century:

- [1] AM 66 fol., *Hulda*, c1350–1375
- [3] AM 351 fol., *Skálholtsbók eldri*, c1360–1400
- [4] AM 219 fol., c1370–1380
- [7] AM 194 8vo, 1387

All the other scribes show a mixed practice, indicating that the phenomenon may have been well underway, though nothing certain can be said about the distribution throughout the country, as only a fraction of the corpus can be localised.

In the present study, the collection of data was geared towards identifying the presence or absence of etymological versus unetymological spellings across manuscripts, rather than recording every single token. The data was therefore noted in a way that captured overall distributional tendencies (etymological vs unetymological forms), but not in a way that would allow for an easy subdivision of the items and calculation of percentages between the various unetymological subtypes. While a comprehensive token-by-token quantification would necessitate a different sampling design and a substantially more elaborate dataset, extending beyond the methodological scope set for this thesis, it is still possible to notice that, in the earlier hands, the instances of *u*-epenthesis manifest themselves primarily through inverse spellings, “r” for etymological *ur*. This is not surprising, as etymological forms with *ur* are comparatively rarer than those which had only *r*. It is therefore to be expected—when *r* and *ur* merged as result of the *u*-epenthesis— that there was a tendency on the scribes’ part to generalise the more frequent “r” spellings, extending them also to words in which such orthography was unetymological. Since such convention contrasted with the phonological reality of the language, the number of “ur” spellings started to rise later in the period under examination. This direct

manifestation of *u*-epenthesis gains ground and the inverse spellings retreat or disappear altogether. The spellings “ur” and “vr” or a corresponding abbreviation become the norm, and spellings with “r” become essentially relics.

Three hands stand out among those dated to the first half of the fifteenth century by showing more unetymological spellings than their contemporaries:

- [11] GKS 1008 fol., *Tómasskinna* (1), c1400 with 33.6% unetymological spellings. This scribe also shows a tendency to represent the diphthongisation of *é* much more than other scribes from the same period (see Chapter 6.4) and invariably showed the diphthongisation of *e* before *ng* (see Chapter 6.3), although he was also conservative in that he never displayed fricativisation of unstressed word-final *k* (see Chapter 6.2). Apart from this last feature, there is some consistency so far in the innovative character of this hand.
- [19] GKS 2845 4to (1), c1450: 39.4%. This scribe was quite conservative in all other changes, except for the diphthongisation of *e* before *eng*, which, however, seems to have spread earlier than others.
- [20] GKS 2845 4to (2), c1450: 35.9%. This scribe was significantly more innovative than his colleague in the fricativisation of *k* and in diphthongisation of *e* before *ng*, but somewhat less conservative in the diphthongisation of *é*. These two scribes have so far shown a quite pronounced variation between them, but they are more alike in this case.

The scribes where unetymological spellings rise above 50% are all dated to the second half of the fifteenth century or to the first half of the sixteenth century, and this is thus the period in which the change gains significant ground:

- [24] AM 430 12mo, c1450–1500: 77.4%
- [26] AM 243 a 4to, c1450–1475: 51.2%
- [31] AM 533 4to (1), c1450–1500: 89.6%
- [34] AM 577 4to (4), c1450–1500: 53.4%
- [35] AM 556 a 4to, *Eggertsbók*, c1475–1500: 82.8%
- [40] AM 624 4to (3), c1500: 65.8%

- [42] AM 435 12mo, c1500: 64.4%
- [43] AM 152 4to, c1500: 92.9%
- [44] AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* (1), c1500: 82.3%
- [45] AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* (2), c1500: 69.8%
- [47] AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson, c1500–1550: 54.7%
- [48] AM 529 4to, c1500–1550: 86.3%
- [49] AM 147 4to *Heynesbók*, c1525–1550: 96.3%

Of these hands, only two exceed 90% unetymological spellings, although [31] AM 533 4to (1) comes close with 89.6%:

- [43] AM 152 4to, c1500: 92.9%. This scribe had a noticeable preference for *k* over *g* in unstressed word-final position, always preferred “eing”, and had a slight preference for *je*. If we consider that “eing” becomes spread at an earlier date and is thus not surprising here, this is the change most frequently represented by this scribe among those so far analysed.
- [49] AM 147 4to *Heynesbók*, c1525–1550: 96.3%. This scribe had a slight preference for fricative *g*, only wrote “eing”, but did not often represent the diphthongisation of *é*. When it comes to the *u*-epenthesis, he thus shows a more innovative character than he has shown so far.

In the very last part of the corpus, there are still some hands that show a somewhat conservative character compared to the others:

- [41] AM 624 4to (5), c1500: 41.8% unetymological spellings. This scribe showed a preference for younger forms in all the changes seen so far, but somewhat less than other hands from around the same period, except for the fricativisation of *k*. His colleague, hand [40], has significantly less preference for the “g” spelling for unstressed word-final *k* and showed a more innovative in character in all other features.
- [46] AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson c1500–1525: 44.7% unetymological spellings. His colleague Jón Þorgilsson [47] AM 152 fol. (2), however, is not very

far off with 54.7%. This is interesting because [46] appears significantly more innovative than [47] in always choosing “g” for etymological unstressed word-final *k*, always writing “eing”, while being somewhat less innovative in the diphthongisation of *é*. We therefore have two instances in which the first scribe is more innovative, and two where the more innovative is his colleague.

- [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, c1530–1540: 40.2% unetymological spellings. This is somewhat surprising, given how innovative this hand turned out to be in other features. One wonders whether this has to do with a conscious archaising effort

The following scribes are very conservative despite belonging in the second half of the period (second half of the corpus) with frequency below 10% unetymological spellings:

- [27] AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to, c1450–1500: 9.8%. This is quite peculiar as the script itself is innovative, with a more pronounced cursive character, frequent ligatures, hairlines and loops, showing the contradictory evidence that may coexist within the same hand.
- [29] AM 586 4to (1), c1450–1500: 2.2% An interesting contrast can be seen between this scribe and his colleague [30] AM 586 4to (2), with the latter at 48.1%. For contrast, the two scribes of GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, show a relatively little difference, 0.8% and 0.1%.

In the following list, unetymological spellings have been included; they are either inverse spellings (not including an etymological *u*) or “updated” spellings (including unetymological *u*). The tokens in the list below are representative and only meant to give an idea of the kind of items that were found. They were chosen more or less randomly throughout any given text, but some care was taken in finding (where applicable) examples from the various grammatical categories in which the changes appeared (whether they be substantives, verbs, adverbs or adjectives). They are categorised as either a), representing indirect evidence, or b), representing direct evidence.

Where applicable, inverse spellings will be grouped separately from “updated” spellings, i.e., those reflecting a vowel epenthesis, either through its proper spelling, or

its inclusion in a *ur* abbreviation (such as the superscript “r” rotunda). In the following tokens, when *ur* was represented by an abbreviation, it will be reported in *italics*, otherwise it will be spelled out (whether it is “ur” or “vr”).

[2] **AM 230 fol.**: only one unetymological spelling was found (1.4%).

a) No examples.

b) “viturlæk” 10r20, where the *u*-epenthesis is spelled out with an unambiguous “ur”.

[5] **Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók***: two unetymological spellings were found (1.4%), one inverse spelling and one with direct manifestation of *u*-epenthesis:

a) “fōdr” 50r10 for *fǫður*

b) “fegurd” 45r19.

[6] **Holm perg. 19 4to**: a few unetymological spelling were found, 9.4%, particularly in the form of inverse spellings. This shows the tendency to overgeneralize “r”—which is not surprising given that etymological *r* is much more common than etymological *ur*:

a) “modr” 25r19, “modr kvidi” 14v22, “fōdr” 25r19, 29v16, “fōdr broðir” 50r15, “fōdr leifd” 29v16, “fōdr brōdr” 35r12, “ydr” (*yðvarr*, acc. neut. pl.) 14v4.

[8] **GKS 1005 fol. (1) *Flateyjarbók*, Jón Þórðarson**: very few instances of inverse spelling appeared, amounting to 0.8%.

a) “mōdr” 10ra5, 10ra5b3, “fōdr” 10rb18.

[9] **GKS 1005 fol. (2) *Flateyjarbók*, Magnús Þórhallsson**: only one unetymological spelling was found.

a) “fōdr” 177rb7.

[10] **AM 354 fol., *Skálholtsbók yngri***: rather than through inverse spellings, the change was revealed by three instances (0.6%) in which the orthography betrayed the presence of the *u*-epenthesis, indicated in full in one case and by a superscript *ur* abbreviation (rotunda) in the other two.

b) “arfur” 80r16, “vetur” 110r2, “merkur” 125r20.

[11] **GKS 1008 fol., *Tómasskinna* (1)**: the change was revealed in many instances, 33.6%, both through inverse spellings and the spelling of unetymological *u*, which is

represented by the superscript “r” rotunda. The scribe never writes the “u”, however. Some representative examples of unetymological spellings:

a) “módr” 5r8, “fódr” 5r18.

b) “kemur” 5r29, 10r8, 10r18, 25r18, “konungurinn” 10r3, “liotur” 15r8, “betur” 15r13, “gefur” 15r13, “fitur” 15r8, “flytur” 15r18, “lætur” (from *láta*) 20r11, “tekur” 30r16, “manadagurinn” 25r10, “vetur” 30r7, 30r10 (x2), “aufturs” 30r27, “nætur” 30r26, “hatur” 45r13, “fialfur” 50r1.

[12] AM 231 I fol.: very few unetymological spellings were found, 4.5%, both inverse and with unetymological *u*, though the former were more frequent.

a) “fodr” 1ra17, 1rb30, 5rb2, “modr” 1ra35, “konr” 12ra21.

b) “fegurstu” 4va4.

[13] AM 225 fol.: only two unetymological spellings were found, 0.6%, both with “u”:

b) “fagurt” 9orb55, “betur” 96rb6.

[14] AM 561 4to: unetymological spellings are very few, only 4.2%, and confined to ten items. The epenthesis of *u* is revealed exclusively through the superscript “r” rotunda.

b) “aptur” 2v15, 4v5, 5r19, 12r15 (x2), 12v13, 13r21, 23r20, 29r16, “hattur” (*háttur*) 29r26.

[15] AM 557 4to (1): unetymological spellings are 15.2%, both inverse spellings and spellings with superscript “r” rotunda.

a) “fódr” 3r12, “nockr” 46r23, “faudr” 6r7, 6r12, 6r14, 46v9, 46v16, “módr” 1r24, 46v11.

b) “fagurliga” 1r7, “aptur” 3r1, 3r13, 21r8, “hvitur” 3r29, “fagurt” 4v9, “ykkur” (*þit*, accusative) 4v7, “Gunnlaugur” 4v22, “vetur” 46v10, 46v16.

[16] AM 557 4to (2): unetymological spellings are 6.7%.

a) “fiftr” (for *systur*) 27r4, 27r20, “bródr” 27r29, “kónr” (for *konur*) 35r4, “Modr” 35r38, “faugr” (for *sogur*) 38r38.

b) “vekur” 32r33.

[17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna*: unetymological spellings are 9%.

a) “nockr” 2ra8, “faudr” 2ra31, 60ra12, “dottr” 2rb34.

b) “fagdur” 2ra28, “vlfur” 45r32, “kostur” 45rb19, “yckur” 45rb4, 45rb6.

[18] AM 489 II 4to: unetymological forms are a small minority, only 13.3%, but they are nonetheless widespread and present across different grammatical categories.

a) “dottr” 27v15, “konr” 27v30, “fodr” 39r23, “modr” 39v23.

b) “nídur” 27v10, “lætur” 32r4, 36v25, “fagur” 32r18, “fitur” 32r19, “rennur” 32r21, “fetur” 36r27, “helldur” 41v7, “hoggur” 41v11, “aftur” 50r23, “fagurt” 50v9, “ridur” 54v26.

[19] GKS 2845 4to (1): 39.4% of the instances found showed an unetymological spelling (one of which was inverse), and they can be found across different grammatical categories. Some representative examples:

a) “fodr” 24r25.

b) “glumur” 2r5, “filfur” 2r4, “veturna” 4r3, “betur” 4r9, “gefur” 14r4, “hringurin” 14r5, “kemur” 14r8, “litur” (verb *lita*) 16r22, 30r26, “heriulfur” 20r1, “fyftur” 20r2, “meftur” 20r4, “fterkztur” 20r7, “fitur” 22r1, “grimur” 24r2, “ormur” 24r5, “fialfur” 26r2, “auftur” 26r4, “ormurin” 26r4, “vetur” 26r9, “dagur” 26r12, “[R]audulfur” 28r13, “malmur” 30r7, “voxtur” 30r14, “fegurd” 30r14, “vegur” 30r19, “fætur” 30r28.

[20] GKS 2845 4to (2): 35.9% of the instances collected showed an unetymological spelling. Direct spellings seem to be gaining ground. Some representative examples:

a) “yðr” (*yðvarr*, neuter, acc. pl.) 41v23, “fðdr” 42r13.

b) “híorleifur” 33v3, “kemur” 34r11, “dregur” 34r13, “eírekur” 49v9, “bryniölfur” 50311, “aptur” 51v14, 51v16, 52r1, “hesturin” 41v4, 51v26, “brestur” (verb) 52r17, “domurin” 52r17, “fæturna” 53v1, “hlutur” 54r8, “fegurd” 54r21, “nætur” 54r23.

[21] AM 151 4to (1): the unetymological spellings were only 7.5%.

a) “ydr” (*yðvarr*, fem. nom. sing.) 4v7, “modr” 13r2, “fðdr” 13r2, “fystr” 25v6, “faudr” 28v12, 35v15, “brodr” 35v15 (x3).

b) “dętur” 28v8, 28v12, “aptur” 28v18, “tuítugur” 35v5, 35v8.

[22] AM 534 4to: the unetymological spellings were only 4.4%.

a) “fædr” 4rab12, 5rb36, 22rb16, “fodr” 2va29, “fædr bana” 4ra23, “nokr” 8vb15, 12rb11.

b) “vetur” 21rb2, “kemvr” 12vb25.

[23] AM 432 12mo: 45.1% the instances collected showed unetymological spellings. Some representative examples:

- a) “modr” 10v7, 32v5, 40r3, 49v10, “fodr” 11r3, 32v10, 40r4, 53r3, “konr” 11v8.
- b) “lætur” 5v2, “tekur” 5v7, “rikur” 6v9, “petur” 7v6, “helldur” 16v2, “fanur” 32v7, “aptur” 36r10, “gylltur” 44r4, “brodr” 48v8, 50r2, “figur” 49v1, “adur” 58v1, “ungur” 73v8, “brædur” 77r2, “yður” (*þú*, accusative) 77v5, “dagur” 82v7.

[24] AM 430 12mo: with a rate of 77.4% unetymological tokens, this is the first scribe in the corpus that has more than half of the examples indicating the presence of the change. This hand is thus innovative compared to his contemporaries in this corpus. Word forms like nom.-acc. plur. *konur*, etc., with etymological *ur* were consistently spelled with “ur”; no inverse spellings were found in the sampled text. So far, the *u*-epenthesis has manifested itself partly in inverse spellings. In some, it has appeared exclusively through inverse spellings. This is not surprising, as etymological forms with *r* are much more numerous than forms with etymological *ur*. This scribe indicates the *u*-epenthesis fairly regularly and the exceptions are etymological “r” spellings, not inverse spellings. Some representative examples:

- b) “Lauardur” 7r8, “fialfur” 8r5, “diarfur” 12v6, “fætur” 13v16, 19r4, 26v6, “nídur” 14r14, “uollur” 16r2, “banadur” 17r11, “vngur” 18r10, “fingur” 19r7, “kriftur” 19r9, 25v7, “fundur” 21r11, “vínvr” 22r2, “verdvr” 22r3, “kemur” 23r1, “lætur” 23r11, “elldvr” 23r13, “elldur” 24v2, “fagur” 26r7, “hendur” 26v5, “elldurín” 24r13, 27r14, “helldvr” 29r3. Etymological spellings were mostly present in word forms which had etymological *ur*, but there were also a few examples of etymological *r* spelled with “r”, such as “nídr” 1v7, “liðr” 2r2, “konungr” 15v15, “audliðr” 16v2, and “hyðr” 24r6.

[25] AM 243 a fol.: unetymological orthographies are a small minority, 15.8%, but they are nonetheless widespread and present across different grammatical categories.

- a) “ydr” (poss. *yðvarr*, acc. plur.) 1vb22, “dæmífogr” 10ra14, “nokkr” 30va5.
- b) “aptur” 1r2a3, “helldur” 1ra25, 1vb38, “vitur” 1ra29, “hæfiligur” 1vb17, “fonur” 1vb39, “fialfur” 1vb39, “vesturl” 5ra6, “avoxtur” 5ra25, “gefur” 5ra25, “dætur” 10ra31, “blomftur” 30va23, “fialfur” 30rb25, “ormurínn” 30vb34, “nætur” 35ra7, “fagur” 35ra15, “nídur” 35rb14, “kvedfkapur” 35rb34.

[26] **AM 343 a 4to**: A little more than half of the instances gathered, 51.2%, showed an unetymological spelling. Again, the composition of the unetymological spellings is changing: the direct spellings are gaining ground. Some representative examples:

a) “faudr” 10v18, “fodr” 13r3.

b) “nafnbætur” 3r9, “nafnbætur” 3r16, “aptur” 3r27, 3v25, 3v32, “guftur” 3r27, “tenurnar” 3r28, “allfterkur” 3v5, “drauttur” 3v1, “drauttur” 3v8, “knautturín” 3v9, “filfurs” 4v14, “lengur” 4v2, “kemur” 4v4, 8r12, 8r20, 8r35, “grimur” 4v12, 4v18, “fætur” 4v32, “jlmur” 4v32, “getur” 8r15, 8v4 (x2), “fætur” 8v1, “ftendur” 8v24, “helldur” 43r9.

[27] **AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to**: unetymological spellings were only 9.8%. Some examples from AM 471 4to:

a) “brodr” 2r25, “modr” 16v6, “ðnmr” 77r20, “fiðgr” 91v4.

b) “aptur” 47r18, “fridur” 44v7.

And some from AM 489 I 4to:

a) “fðdr” 8v8, 18r18, “modr” 8v8, “nockr” 12v2, 20r10, 20v12, 22r27, 24v20.

b) “kemur” 16v18, “vetur” 24v16.

[28] **Holm perg. 1 4to**: unetymological spellings were numerous, 39.8%, and mostly direct. Some representative examples:

a) “modr” 20rb2, 20rb24, 30ra18, 30rb3, “nockr” 40ra1, “brodr” 40rb14, “faudr” 40rb19.

b) “líkamur” 15ra1, 15ra9, “aptur” 15ra10, “tekur” 15rb1, “myskunnfamur” 20ra25, “hræddur” 20rb13, “heimurinn” 20rb16, “kemur” 30ra30, “gefur” 30rb10, “mann-domurinn” 35ra5, “fialfur” 35rb9, “beztur” 35rb12, “drepur” 40rb11.

[29] **AM 586 4to (1)**: only two instances of unetymological spelling were found, 2.2%, both inverse. This is thus a rather conservative scribe.

a) “nockr” 1r14, “modr” (of *móðir*) 6r39.

[30] **AM 586 4to (2)**: unetymological spelling were only slightly less than half of the total, 48.1%. Some representative examples:

a) “nockr” 30v29.

b) “fætur” 9r8, “vafkætur” 20r1, “kemur” 20r4, 30v34, “wlfur” 20r5, 20r7, “fialfur” 20r11, “ligur” (*liggr*, from *liggja*) 28r26, “hyggur” 28v22, “helldur” 29r22, 29v8, “fagur” 29v15, “ormur” 29v17, 29v18, 29v19, “betur” 30v28.

[31] AM 533 4to (1): unetymological spellings were the majority, 89.6%. The direct manifestation of *u*-epenthesis is of two types: (1) superscript rotunda “r” and (2) the abbreviation symbol ~. Some representative examples:

b) “eikurnar” 10r21, “adur” 73r18, “hyggur” 5r7, “aptur” 5r11, “vetur” 5r14, “kemur” 5r22, “fodur” (*fóðr*) 10r15, “konungurin” 40r1, all these are abbreviated with a superscript “r” rotunda. Instances such as “figurdur” 28r3, 33r16, with superscript “r” rotunda in both *ur* sequences, confirm that the scribe intended the value of this superscript mark to be that of *ur*. There are also instances making use of a different *ur* abbreviation were found: “að~” = “adur” 50r11, “be~” = “betur” 50r13. Since the etymological spellings are so few, it is interesting to list some examples to show what kind of tokens they may be. Aside from the kinship terms, there are also a few verbs, pronouns and adjectives, most likely written under the influence of an earlier exemplar: “gengr” 5r1, 5r4, “modur” 28r13, 33r8, “brodur” 33r14, 45r18, “konungr”, “ydr” (*þú*, acc. pl.) 10r7, “huggodr” 15r2, “nokkur” 15r5, 15r13, “milur” 40r20, “liðr” 45r8, “fódur” 8r6, 33r4, 45r17, 50r8, 63r3, 80r2, “fyftur” 73r9, 75r1, “dottur” 95r12.

[32] AM 577 4to (1): etymological spellings were still the majority, but unetymological spellings were numerous, 39.3%, showing evidence of the change both directly and indirectly. Some representative examples:

a) “fodr” 5v24 (acc. sing. of *faðir*).

b) “kemur” 1r22, 20r12, 35r18, 35r19, “danzleikur” 1r23, “fæturna” 1v18, “tekur” 5r14, 20r21, “fterkur” 5r22, 35r20, “getur” 5r23, “veturinn” 5r24, “konungur” 35r21, “hestur” 35r21.

[33] AM 577 4to (3): etymological spellings were still the majority, but unetymological spellings were numerous at 38.7%, mostly “updated”. This hand shows fewer unetymological spellings later in the text (after 68r). Examples of unetymological spellings include:

a) “fodr” 67v24 (acc. sing. of *faðir*).

b) “dvergurinn” 66r10, “ferkur” 66r10, “fvartur” 66r16, “felur” (second pers. sing. pres. ind. from *fela*) 66r17, “kemur” 66v3, “betur” 66v7, “gefur” 66v8.

[34] AM 577 4to (4): unetymological spellings were the majority, 53.4%. Some representative examples:

a) “fodr” 80r18.

b) “liftugur” 77r3, “lætur” 77v2, “gefur” 77v5, “bidur” 77v5, “filfur” 77v6, “godur” 79r5, “fiallfur” 80r11.

[35] AM 556 a 4to, *Eggertsbók*: unetymological spellings were the majority, or 82.8% of the instances found. Etymological ones were mostly found in word forms which had an etymological *ur*, with rare exceptions such as “ftygr” 20r2. A trend can be observed by which the higher the number of unetymological spellings, the fewer inverse spellings. At some point, “ur” becomes the regular spelling, instead of generalising the “r” spelling. The *ur* was almost universally denoted with a superscript “r” rotunda. Examples of unetymological spellings in this hand are as follows (inverse spellings were not found):

b) “hendur” 5r2, “adur” 5r8, “figmundur” 5r9, “myrkur” 25r5, “ueturinn” 30r1, “fullur”, 40r3.

[36] AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to: the distribution of etymological and unetymological variants in both texts was roughly the same for this hand, and unetymological spellings were the minority, only 16.9%.

In AM 687 a 4to, examples of unetymological spellings are:

a) “fodr” 2r24, “modr” 4v34, “nockr” 5v10, 5v14.

b) “Vilialmur” 3r12, “prestur” 3r6, “tekur” 3r8.

In AM 688 c 4to, examples of unetymological spellings are:

a) “modr” 3r14.

b) “vigdur” 1r13, “tekur” 1v20, “leingur” 1v12, “nidur” 2r2, “fyngur” 2r17, “prestur” 2r31, 3r17, “fiallfur” 2v2, “nidur” 3r2, “adur” 3r16, hlytur 3r26, “aftur” 4r17, “songur” 6v24, “lofadur” 6v24.

[37] AM 159 4to: the distribution of etymological and unetymological variants was similar, 53% and 47%, respectively, with the same words showing or not showing the

u alternatively, even in the space of a few lines or pages. Unetymological spellings were spread across lexical categories. Examples included:

a) “modr” 21v13.

b) “fkytur” 2v9, “fitur” 2v15, “mefstur” 3r27, “rettur” 12v24, “kemur” 13r17, “tekur” 21v16, 21v20, “fonur” 21v19.

[38] **AM 309 4to**: unetymological spellings were only 15.8% but scattered throughout the text. This manuscript contains excerpts from GKS 1005 fol. *Flateyjarbók*, from the end of the fourteenth century, together with other sagas such as *Laxdæla saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Njáls saga*, also copied from earlier manuscripts. It must be, however, borne in mind that the other manuscripts too are copies of earlier manuscripts. In principle, this is not different from the rest, apart from the fact that one of the exemplars (GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*) is known and another one has been possibly identified for the excerpts from *Laxdæla saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga* (AM 162 E fol.), and the extent to which we can hypothesise an influence from older texts is difficult to estimate. Examples included:

a) “fodr”, 12ra11, “faudr” (acc. sing of *faðir*) 24rb48, “modr” 28rb30, “konr” (nom. plur. of *kona*) 34rb18, “brekkur” 38ra14, “fogur” 38ra36.

b) “Olafur” 16rb3, “fkygustur” 30rb29, “ueturinn” 62ra24, “harmur” 38ra15, “madr” 38ra16, “fuartur” 38ra24.

[39] **AM 429 12mo**, *Kirkjubæjarbók*: unetymological spellings were 12.5%, all “updated”. Some representative examples:

b) “aptur” 3r12, “odaudlegur” 7v2, 7v9, “fegurd” 8r1, 17r3, “fialfur” 19r4, “eilifur” 21v8, “fostur” 34r1, “dagur” 36r6, “bredur” 38r3.

[40] **AM 624 4to (3)**: unetymological spellings are 65.8%. They are all “updated”, rather than inverse spellings. Some representative examples:

b) “fialfur” 73r2, “godur” 73r14, “uerdur” 73r17, “domendur” 73r21, “dagur” 104r7, “finur” 98r6, “vetur” 104r9, “vidur” 104r11, “kemur” 104r14, “nætur” 104r15.

[41] **AM 624 4to (5)**: unetymological spellings are 41.8%, only “updated” spellings; no inverse spellings were found in the text sampled. Some representative examples:

b) “giftur” 39r19, “fetur” 40r11, “gefur” 40r17, “aptur” 41r7, 42r19, “heilagur” 42r4, “fagdur” 42r21.

[42] **AM 435 12mo**: unetymological spellings are 64.4%. No inverse spellings were encountered. Some representative examples:

b) “*fæturna*” 4v5, “*fíngur*” 12r1, “*ágiætaztur*” 15r3, “*ftendur*” 15v2, “*helldur*” 18v7, “*filfur*” 22r1, “*aftur*” 22r4, “*fialfiur*” 25r3, “*kemur*” 27r2, 27r6, 27r7, 27r9, 27r12, 27r13, 27r14, 27v8, “*nætur*” 27v5, “*þritógur*” 28r1, “*manudurinn*” 28r7, “*Tekur*” 28r16.

[43] **AM 152 4to**: unetymological spellings are the absolute majority, 92.9%, and the etymological ones are limited to words which had etymological *u*. Inverse spellings are absent. Interestingly, the ending is not normally abbreviated, and the *ur* sequence is spelt in full, with rare exceptions in which it is abbreviated with a superscript “*r*” rotunda (indicated by expanding it in italics). Some representative examples:

b) “*fkilur*” 5r1, “*uegur*” 5r8, “*tekur*” 30r1, “*glæpur*” 30r12, “*hendur*” 50r4, “*aptur*” 70r11, “*fluttur*” 75r13, “*dreckur*” 85r7, “*fialfur*” 85r8, “*hlytur*” 85r21, “*ftaddur*” 90r12, “*geingur*” 90r6.

[44] **AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* (1)**: unetymological spellings are the vast majority, 82.3%, but no inverse spellings were found. Some representative examples:

b) “*adur*” 2ra6, “*rætur*” 2rb14, “*dreckur*” 2rb19, “*etur*” 2va5, “*aptur*” 3v5, “*bækur*” 7rb8, “*fiukur*” 7v67, “*langur*” 9va5, “*ormur*” 10vb17.

[45] **AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver* (2)**: unetymological spellings are the vast majority, 69.8%. Inverse spellings were not found. Some representative examples:

b) “*tekur*” 30ra13, “*filfur*” 30ra15, “*verdur*” 30rb19, “*adur*” 30va9, “*Madur*” 30vb17, “*langur*” 31vb9, “*brytur*” 32va8, “*betur*” 34rb8, “*lætur*” 34rb9.

[46] **AM 152 fol. (1), *Þorsteinn Þorleifsson***: unetymological spellings are 44.75%, found across grammatical categories and include:

a) “*fodr*” 1ra5, “*modr*” 1ra7, “*nauckr*” 2rb18, “*fogr*” 11rb29, “*Brodr*” 22ra7.

b) “*þrandur*” 2ra13, “*vitraztur*” 2rb13, “*nefndur*” 11ra2324, “*gladur*” 12va29, “*líjdur*” 21ra6, “*Glamur*” 21rb5, “*GRimur*” 31ra3, “*vestur*” 32rb1, “*vngur*” 41ra32 “*uedur*” 42ra2.

[47] **AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson:** there is a more pronounced ratio of unetymological spellings (54.7%), all in the form of “updated” spellings; no inverse spellings were found in the text sampled. Some representative examples:

b) “adur” 62ra9, “Reidur” 62ra12, “yður” (*þú* acc. pl.) 62rb14, “fæddur” 62rb16, “nytur” 72ra6, “dvergur” 72ra8, “auftur” 72rb11, “uerdur” 82ra17, “ormur” 92ra29, “uetur” 92ra30, “kemur” 92ra30, “figrijdur” 92rb26, “flygur” 102ra11, “fundur” 112ra2, “hardur” 112ra2, “þorgrimur” 122rb3.

[48] **AM 529 4to:** unetymological spellings are the absolute majority, 86.3%, and the etymological ones are limited to words which had etymological *u*. No inverse spellings were found. Some representative examples:

b) “leikur” 5r4, “kemur” 5r14, “fitur” 10r2, “ftendur” 10r3, “aptur” 10r9, “gengur” 15r5, “konungur” 45r6, 45r16, “kemur” 55r12, “nockur” 60r3, “reykur” 60r4, “litur” 60r5, “hefur” 60r11.

[49] **AM 147 4to, Heynesbók:** the “ur” spelling is universal and unetymological spellings are the absolute majority, 96.3%; the etymological ones are limited to words which had etymological *u*. Some representative examples:

b) “fonur” 1r2, “logbækur” 1r9, “fidur” 2v2, “helldur” 6r5, “kiemur” 6r7, “hendur” 22r1, “madur” 23r2, “hefur” 23r10, 24r1, “vegur” 23r13, “edur” 23r17, “margur” 23r19, “godur” 23r19, “frændur” 23r25, “dætur” 27r7.

[50] **Holm perg. 3 fol., Reykjabólabók:** unetymological spellings are 40.2%. Some inverse spellings can be found again, showing how the scribe has a conservative preference in this case. Some representative examples:

a) “modr” 2rb28, “faudr” 52ra11.

b) “aftur” 2rb13, 232rb4 “fellur” 12ra2, “thekur” 12ra2, “kemur” 12rb6, “hleypur” 27rb40, “bidur” 52ra2, “hefur” 192rb1, 96rb3, “yckur” (dative) 141ra7, 141rb5, “fathækur” 162ra13.

The earliest instances appear mostly as inverse spelling of words which had etymological *u*, such as *móður*, *bróður* or *systur*, and this tells us that the epenthetic vowel must have been present in the language, or else scribes would have not confused etymological *r* with *ur*. The fact that inverse spellings are more common in the earlier phase is no doubt a consequence of the fact that words lacking etymological *u* are vastly more numerous than

those showing one, and the analogical force operated by the former was much more effective in influencing the latter instead of the other way around but could also betray a social attitude towards this innovation which strongly preferred the earlier orthography.

There is a clear difference between the first half of the corpus: scribes 1–25 with an average of 13% unetymological spellings, and the second half, scribes 26–50 with an average of 51.4%. In the first half, unetymological spellings are often in the form of inverse spellings, but the proportion of inverse spellings steadily declines as direct spellings with “ur” gain ground.

Given that whenever the change appears outside of the limited set of words with etymological *ur*, which can be represented by an inverse spelling, it is detected in a great variety of words, with no evident distribution, it seems reasonable to suggest that there must have been some kind of oscillation in the pronunciation of the consonant clusters where the *u*-epenthesis was applicable. This must have been the case for a rather long time, considering how early the change appears and before it becomes widespread. Furthermore, given that the epenthesis was not a change that caused any restructuring of the phonological system, it may have not immediately made the updating of the orthography a pressing problem.

This interpretation appears to lend support to the view proposed by Ari Páll Kristinsson (1992), who argued that a syllabic *r* and a *ur* sequence must have coexisted for a time before the latter ultimately prevailed, with the *u*-epenthesis originally conditioned by the phonological environment. His data (1987, 105–106) indicate that during the “long” fifteenth century, the etymological *r* was variably written as either “r” or “ur,” though the simpler form “r” was slightly more frequent, whereas “ur” tended to occur following plosives or between consonants. This pattern may suggest that the tendency to insert “u” in the contexts identified by Ari Páll was more widespread precisely because such clusters were consistently pronounced with an additional *u*, making it unlikely for scribes to conceive of an earlier pronunciation with a syllabic *r* and given the articulatory difficulty of those sequences.

Nevertheless, the almost ubiquitous occurrence of sporadic inverse spellings or “ur” orthographies in words that do not conform to these phonological conditions lends greater plausibility to Haukur Þorgeirsson’s (2013) conclusion that the manuscript

evidence offers little indication that the emergence of *u*-epenthesis was directly conditioned by the phonological environment.

Regardless of the details by which this change has spread in the language, this study has confirmed a clear and steady trend towards its generalisation in the period studied, which may be promising as a tool for the dating of texts. The pattern emerging is that of rare occurrences in the earlier part, mostly in the form of inverse spelling, and increasingly as an orthographic representation of the epenthetic vowel, through “ur” spellings which reaches 100% of the instances in [49] AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók*. There is an interesting conservative comeback at the very end of the period as evident in [50] Holm. perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, but the general tendency appears to be quite clear.

6.7 The orthographic manifestation of palatalisation

The purpose of this section is to analyse the spread of the orthographic representation of palatalisation of the stops *k* and *g* before the front vowels *æ* (< *é* + *ø*) and *e*. Based on the emergence of the first orthographic changes, the orthographic manifestation of palatalisation of these stops is thought to have appeared in Icelandic over the course of the fourteenth century. However, the phenomenon was never expressed orthographically before the high front vowels: *i*, *í*, *y*, *ý*. Examples of this change are to be found in the orthography when an “i” is inserted between the letter denoting the stop and the vowels *e* and *æ*. The front vowels (monophthongs)¹⁴ of Icelandic in this period were as in *Table 6.6*.

	unround		round	
	short	long	short	long
high	<i>i</i>	<i>í</i>	<i>y</i>	<i>ý</i>
mid	<i>e</i>	(<i>é</i>) ¹⁵	<i>ö</i> (< <i>ø</i> + <i>ø</i>)	
low		<i>æ</i> (< <i>é</i> + <i>ø</i>)		

Table 6.6: The front vowels of Icelandic in the fifteenth century.

¹⁴ Front diphthongs were *ei* (unrounded) and its rounded version *ey*. However, derounding of *ey* and its merger with *ei* began to spread in this period (see Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 1994).

¹⁵ As seen in Chapter 6.4, throughout the period studied, older (long) *é* evolves into the modern sequence *je*.

It is a matter of some debate whether this orthographic change was triggered by an underlying phonological change, or whether the stops had always been palatal, from which it would follow that the change would be merely orthographical. It is the opinion of many (notably Noreen 1923, 40–41, 190–191; Stefán Karlsson 2000, 29, 51, 55; Bandle 1956, 127–128, 141–142) that *k* and *g* must have always had palatal allophones in positions before front vowels, but this makes it necessary to explain why, at some point in the history of Icelandic, scribes must have felt the need to change the spelling to indicate a distinction that in most cases carried no phonemic opposition. Kristján Árnason (2011, 101–102) has also discussed the nature of this change: he explains that in Old Icelandic the palatalisation of the stops *k* and *g* was caused by any front vowel, but it became contrastive after the merger of *ø* : *ɔ*. The earliest step in the development of orthographic representation of the palatalisation was thus the orthographic expression of palatal *g/k* immediately before the front vowel *ö* resulting from the merger of earlier front *ø* [œ] and back *ɔ* [ɔ] (taking place already in the thirteenth century), as in, for instance, the pairs shown in *Table 6.7*.

<i>ø</i>	<i>ɔ</i>
<i>gø</i> r	<i>gɔ</i> r
<i>kø</i> r	<i>kɔ</i> r

Table 6.7: Minimal pairs before the merger of *ø* : *ɔ*. Vowels are contrastive.

<i>ö</i>	
“ <i>giö</i> r”	“ <i>gö</i> r”
“ <i>kiö</i> r”	“ <i>kö</i> r”

Table 6.8: Minimal pairs after the merger of *ø* : *ɔ*. Palatalisation is contrastive.

Prior to the merger of *ø* : *ɔ*, the primary feature distinguishing the words in these pairs was the quality of the vowel. The palatalisation before the front vowel *ø* was automatic, depended on the phonological environment and was thus not contrastive, being in complementary distribution with the non-palatal one. However, after the merger of the vowels, both words in each pair had the same vowel quality, the front *ö* [œ]. Yet the velar stop which occurred before the back *ɔ* [ɔ] remained unaffected before the new front vowel *ö* [œ]—and thus the palatalisation became contrastive. Orthographically, it resulted in spellings with “*gi*” and “*ki*” for the palatal stop, as shown in *Table 6.8*.

This orthographic change is quite natural, as the palatalisation had now become contrastive: inserting “*i*” was likely the most straightforward solution. However, it remains debatable whether there was a phonological contrast between a palatal and velar

/k/ and /g/, or whether the palatal was realised (and should be analysed) as a sequence of two segments, essentially /gj/ and /kj/ (see discussion below).

In the early stages of Icelandic orthography, a rule inherited from the Latin script by which an orthographic distinction was made between a velar stop and palatal stop was occasionally followed: “c” was used for the velar stop immediately before back vowels, while “k” was used instead before front vowels, since the palatal stop had evolved into the sequence “ts” before front vowels in Latin and Romance where it was still denoted with “c”. Indeed, “c” is used for *ts* in rare instances, though not necessarily before front vowels, as Hreinn Benediktsson (1965, 79) shows. However, the convention of using “k” before front vowels and “c” elsewhere was never widely or consistently used in early Icelandic orthography, and the “k” ultimately supplanted the “c” in most positions, except word-finally (Hreinn Benediktsson 1965, 79). The relatively quick displacement of “c” and the extension of “k” to almost all domains, and particularly word-initially, may indicate the lack of any phonological distinction between palatal and velar stops, but the actual realisation of these sequences is far from certain.

The second step in the orthographic development, which is the one that will be examined in this chapter, is the expression of palatalisation before *æ* resulting from the merger of the two front vowels *ǣ* [æ:] and *ǿ* [œ:]. Both were front but the rounding was the main distinguishing feature. There must also have been a difference in tongue height, but that is less clear (*ǣ* was part of a three-way height distinction, but *ǿ* only contrasted in height with *ý*). The derounding of *ǿ* [œ:] resulted in a merger with *ǣ* [æ:]; it seems likely that the outcome was simply [æ:], particularly if long *é* had already diphthongised, meaning that it was no longer a suitable candidate for a merger with a long monophthong. Either way, both vowels were front and probably triggered the palatalisation of immediately preceding *k* and *g* (Kristján Árnason 2005, 360). Yet, judging from the orthographic evidence, this only started in the fourteenth century after the two phonemes had merged into [æ:]. Later, the phoneme *æ* developed into the diphthong [ai], possibly through the stage [æi].

The fact that the orthographic manifestation of palatalisation begins to emerge long after the merger of *ǿ* and *ǣ* became apparent in the orthography may indicate that it was merely an orthographic change without an underlying phonological one: the

orthographic expression of the palatalisation of *k* and *g* immediately before the newly arisen *æ* appears around the time when the diphthongisation of *æ* to [ai] was starting. Assuming *æ* [æ:] became the diphthong [ai] (as it is in the modern language), the first part of which is not front but rather the non-front [a], one wonders whether the orthographic expression of palatalisation is somehow linked to this diphthongisation.

In the modern language, *gæta/gæla* (from *géta/góla*) and *kæra/kæla* (from *kéra/kóla*) all have palatalisation before the diphthong [ai:]—even if the first component of the diphthong is the non-front [a]. The palatalisation must thus be inherited from a stage when *k/g* in these words was followed by a front vowel. It seems not unreasonable that the situation in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was somewhat similar. It is therefore legitimate to ask if the diphthongisation of [æ:] to [ai] prompted the orthographic representation of the palatalisation. It is possible that the fact that the contrast between a velar *k/g* before [a] vs palatalised *k/g* before [ai] motivated the scribes to insert an orthographic “i” in the same way as was already done before *ö* whenever *g* or *k* preceding it are palatal. Yet it cannot be regarded as fully comparable as the palatalisation never was contrastive before *æ* in the same way it was before *ö*.

It may be suggested that the sequences *kæ* and *gæ* would be best analysed as /kjæ/ and /gjæ/ rather than /c^hæ/ and /cæ/ at the phonological level, at least synchronically, given that the palatalised stops would just be allophones occurring before front vowels, something that the first element of [ai] is not. Gussmann (1984, 152) argued that analysing [c^h] and [c] as /k^hj/ and /kj/ rather than /c^h/ and /c/ would explain their distribution more elegantly, though Haukur Þorgeirsson (2013, 58) has challenged this view arguing instead that historical changes have created a pattern that cannot be adequately described by synchronic rules. Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson (1993, 54–56) arrives at a similar conclusion as Gussmann: after illustrating the difficulty in describing with a univocal rule the distribution of palatal and velar stops in contemporary Icelandic, he suggests that the lack of a “j” in the traditional spelling may lead us astray in the attempt to reconstruct the phonological system while trying to make sense of the occurrence of non-palatal stops written down as if they are followed by palatal vowels in the spelling. Similarly, according to Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (1993, 39–43), although a palatalisation rule affecting stops before *i* (< *i + y*) and *í* (< *í + ý*) can be assumed, the alternation between palatal and

non-palatal stops in other environments (before *e*, *ei*, and *æ*) is more plausibly accounted for by postulating the insertion of a /j/ not represented in the spelling. This reflects the earlier palatalisation before *ø*, which, following its merger with *ϕ*, led to a phonemic split of palatal vs. non-palatal stops before *ö*.

From this perspective, despite the phonetic realisation being that of a palatal stop, it may be argued that palatal *kæ* and *gæ* would perhaps be best accounted for (in the phonological system of contemporary Icelandic) as the realisation of underlying /kjæ/ and /gjæ/, just as *kjö* and *gjö*, which are indeed spelt with a “j”. This would remove the difficulty of justifying the non-palatal character of stops in loanwords such as *gæd* (from English *guide*), *IKEA* (the Swedish brand), *Keikó* (the name of the titular orca in the 1993 movie *Free Willy*), or *kæi* (‘quay’, from Danish *kaj*).

The spelling change before *æ* and *e* was reversed during the 19th-century standardization of orthography. Presumably, there was insufficient phonological motivation to maintain it, since palatal realizations were not contrastive, unlike the contrast that arose following the merger of *ø* and *ϕ*. It may be also asked whether we would be discussing this matter at all had the habit of always denoting a palatal stop with a spelling involving “j” been introduced in Icelandic orthography. Had this been the case, and we were presented with orthographies such as “gjæði” (instead of *gæði*) and “gæd”, we would then analyse them phonemically as /gjæði/ and /gæd/, not as /cæði/ and /gæd/. However, Haukur Þorgeirsson (2013, 67–68) believes that the alliteration of palatal and velar stops in poetry does not stem from their allophonic nature as much as from orthographical influence and tradition.

At any rate, if the orthographic addition of “i” into “gæ” and “kæ” was motivated by the reasons just described, it is possible that this very practice could be responsible for the prompting of the extension of the representation of the palatalisation to a position before the letter “e”. The orthographic addition of “i” between “g” or “k” and “e” was in fact the next stage of this change, and it happened somewhat later than the development before “æ”. Scribes began to write “giefur” and “kiemur” instead of simply “gefur” and “kemur”. It is far from certain, however, that this was solely due to the influence from spellings such as “giæfi” and “kiæmi” and other “giæ” and “kiæ” spellings. Some underlying development at the phonetic level cannot be securely ruled out.

Furthermore, the palatalisation of *g/k* before the diphthongs *ei* and *ey* does not have a frequent orthographic manifestation. Only one clear instance of “giey-” was found in the corpus ([49] AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók*). The diphthongisation of short *e* before *ng*, as discussed in Chapter 6.3, presents some special cases, as in *gengr*, where it is not fully clear if the “i” in the “gie” sequence is prompted by the palatalization of *g*, a possible diphthong/*je* sequence or perhaps both. In fact, not all “gie” spellings can be securely considered representation of palatalisation: aside from “giengur”, “gieck” (from *ganga*, “walk”) is also ambiguous as class 7.3 verbs may have adopted analogically either the long vowel *é* or the diphthong [ie] from the verbs in class 7.4.

The vowel *u* was also fronted at some point, but there is no orthographic manifestation of this. Presumably, this did not happen until the derounding of *y, ý* was completed. The fronting of *u* seems never to have caused palatalisation of *g/k*. Modern Icelandic *gull* ‘gold’, *Gulli*, a diminutive of the name *Gunnlaugur*, *kunna* ‘be able to/know how to’, *kuldi* ‘cold’ (noun) do not display palatalisation.

Kristján Árnason (2011, 100–101), explains that despite the minimal pairs *kjör* : *kör*, *gjör* : *görottur*, palatal and velar stops “are in partial complementary distribution, and it is common for morphological paradigms to show an alternation between a velar and a palatal stop”. He further explains how it is possible to find a historical-phonological explanation for the palatalisation of *kæ-/gæ-* in the fact that it used to be a front monophthong, as it was observed above, at the time in which the preceding plosives were palatalised. The current situation cannot be entirely explained with a simple phonological process, given that the palatal stop is no longer followed by a front-vowel when it precedes the diphthong [ai]. Moreover, other front vowels such as *ö* (originating from etymological *ø*, as in *götu* < *gøtu* from *gata*) and *u* do not cause palatalisation and occasionally the vowel *e*, from which palatalisation is expected, does not cause it either.

Kristján Árnason (2011, 101) also explains that the palatalisation in modern Icelandic (which he calls “second” palatalisation to distinguish it from that operating in Old Icelandic and producing pairs such as *kjör* and *kör*), despite being manifest as a tendency in the language, does not always take place when it would be applicable. For example, *elskendur* does not display a palatal stop, the morpheme boundary between the root and the suffix (-*and-*) no doubt blocking the palatalisation. Furthermore, in today’s Icelandic,

there can be observed some oscillations between palatal and velar pronunciations of these stops (Kristján Árnason 2011, 102). It can be observed that Icelanders may pronounce the female name *Rakel* as [ra:k^hɛl] while others will pronounce it [ra:c^hɛl] and instances of [k^hɛnna] for *kenna* instead of the more common [c^hɛnna] may also be heard.

In the same discussion, Kristján Árnason (2011, 102) shows a list of loanwords that either show or do not show palatalisation of *g* and *k*: the phenomenon seems to always apply before *í* and *i*, but not always or necessarily before *e*, *ei*, or *æ*. Furthermore, anecdotal observations may show that some Icelanders do not exhibit very distinct palatal stops in a number of lexical items, as if the distinction, lacking a powerful phonological value, is being neutralised, at least in some positions. While one will most likely never hear a pronunciation *[keɛra]¹⁶ for *gera*, it may happen to hear something closer to [kei:r] for the personal name *Geir*, instead of the expected [cei:r], [kai:tɪ] instead of [cai:tɪ] for *gæti* first and third person singular subjunctive preterit of *geta* ‘can/be able to’, [c^hɛtɪtɪ] instead of [c^hɛtɪtɪ] for the personal name *Ketill*, etc. Kristján Árnason (2011, 102) confirms this by noting the occasional realisation of *kemur* and *gefa* [k^hɛmʏr] and [keɛva]. There is clearly a tension, in the phonological system, between the palatalising force of front vowels and the regularisation of the distribution and realisation of stops in all positions.

An example of this, although a different process and perhaps more morphological than phonological, is the occasional palatalisation that can be observed even in compounds: *verkefni* ‘project’ may be pronounced [vɛɾɕɛpnɪ], showing a tendency to overlook the morpheme boundary, allowing the front vowel to palatalise the *k*. A separate study should be carried out to gauge the extent of this phenomenon, but, if true, it shows two things: on the one hand, there is not a strong tendency in Icelandic to separate palatal and velar stops and attribute to them a phonologically distinctive power. On the other hand, it indicates how there is no phonetic “determinism” for which a front vowel must invariably palatalise preceding stops (or other consonants), and maybe eventually result in an affricate, as it happened in Faroese. Furthermore, although the reversal of palatal stops to (slightly more) retracted ones is by no means systematic and widespread, it

¹⁶ The modern Icelandic long *e* vowel is often transcribed as [ɛ:] in the relevant literature. Strictly speaking, however, this representation is more appropriate at the phonemic level (/ɛ:/), as in contemporary pronunciation long *e* is generally realised diphthongally, typically as [eɛ] and in some cases as [ɪɛ].

would in fact make the argument for a phonological opposition weaker, since there can hardly be a phonological opposition where a free variation seems to exist.

Although a strictly functionalist approach would argue that the presence of minimal pairs such as *kör* and *kjör* is sufficient proof to consider velar and a palatal *k* as separate phonemes, there seem to be way more numerous examples of the opposite. Suggesting analysing the palatal stops as sequences of either *g* or *k + j* would perhaps confer more order to our description of the phonological system but would still not account for the oscillations that can be encountered between speakers. Indeed, if we observe the language at the synchronic level, the evidence for irregularities in the distribution between palatal and velar stops can be observed.

Nothing, of course, precludes the possibility that future developments may lead to a clearer separation of these sounds into independent phonemes. At present, however, such a development is far from being realised. It remains open to debate whether the existence of a single genuine minimal pair and two further lexical items beginning with similar sound sequences — in which the initial consonant is palatal in one case and velar in the other — provides sufficient evidence to establish a phonological opposition between the two elements, especially in light of the overwhelming number of cases in which the two sounds occur in complementary distribution, alternating within the same paradigms according to their phonological environment.

In other words, the language appears to exhibit a tension between the potential for a phonemic split between palatal and velar stops—supported by the existence, however rare, of minimal pairs—and the possibility of merger. In the latter scenario, palatal variants would disappear, and the few instances in which a palatal stop is phonemically contrastive would be reanalysed as sequences of stop + *j*, as is already the case before non-front vowels (e.g. *kja, gja, gju*). This would mean that there is no definitive reason to exclude either that the palatalisation of the *ge/ke* stops in Icelandic may have either been present since an early date or that it may have gained some ground around the same time in which it makes its appearance in the orthography.

The history of this change appears to be both obscure and complex, whether from a diachronic or synchronic perspective, as the relevant literature demonstrates. The present study therefore aims to provide a general overview of its orthographic manifestation

in the scribal hands under examination. For reasons of scope and feasibility, no attempt is made here to analyse its distribution across individual lexical items. Nonetheless, because the quantitative pattern that emerges in this case diverges quite markedly from that observed in other changes, some tentative considerations regarding the phonological developments underlying the phenomenon will be offered.

While the hypothesis involving *j*-insertion appears more convincing than that of straightforward palatalisation, the data collected here does not provide conclusive support for either interpretation. Both remain plausible, yet the overall distribution of forms across the period—despite the limited dataset—offers insights that are nonetheless worth considering.

Notwithstanding the interpretation of the underlying nature of this phenomenon, this analysis will show the rate of the spread of spellings indicating a palatal pronunciation of *k* and *g* before *æ* and *e*. The results of the study for this orthographic change are shown in *Table 6.9.* and *Table 6.10.* As in previous sections, the value of 100% is highlighted in yellow, while anything above 50% is highlighted in blue. It must be specified that the dataset does not separate instances with *æ* from those with *e*. It may have been desirable, but it is a realisation that came too late in the process and would have been too time-consuming to implement at a later stage. However, the hands noting palatalisation before *e* have been noted in the discussion below.

Table 6.9: The representation of palatal *k*.

No.	Shelf mark	Date	<i>n</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>ki</i>
1	AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350–1375	23	96%	4%
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350–1400	25	92%	8%
3	AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360–1400	28	100%	0%
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370–1380	35	100%	0%
5	Holm perg. 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375–1400	35	74%	26%
6	Holm perg. 19 4to	c1375–1400	33	100%	0%
7	AM 194 8vo	1387	53	98%	2%
8	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387–1395	44	100%	0%
9	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387–1395	23	100%	0%
10	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400	30	100%	0%
11	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400	26	100%	0%
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400	18	89%	11%
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400	37	95%	5%
14	AM 561 4to	c1400	58	100%	0%
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404–1420	34	100%	0%
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420	40	100%	0%
17	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400–1450	14	79%	21%
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	19	100%	0%
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	15	100%	0%
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	6	100%	0%
21	AM 151 4to (1)	c1450	21	100%	0%
22	AM 534 4to	c1400–1500	12	100%	0%
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	18	100%	0%
24	AM 430 12mo	c1400–1500	10	100%	0%
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475	21	100%	0%
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450–1475	26	100%	0%
27	AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450–1500	39	100%	0%
28	Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500	32	100%	0%
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	13	92%	8%
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450–1500	5	80%	20%
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	37	100%	0%
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500	22	91%	9%
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	14	100%	0%
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	9	67%	33%
35	AM 556 a 4to, <i>Eggertsbók</i>	c1475–1500	25	100%	0%
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	16	100%	0%
37	AM 159 4to	c1480–1500	31	100%	0%
38	AM 309 4to, <i>Bejarbók í Flóa</i>	1498	27	100%	0%
39	AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubæjarbók</i>	c1500	24	100%	0%
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	26	100%	0%
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	31	97%	3%
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500	44	100%	0%
43	AM 152 4to	c1500	23	100%	0%
44	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (1)	c1500	17	100%	0%
45	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500	11	100%	0%
46	AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500–1525	35	83%	17%
47	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500–1525	33	94%	6%
48	AM 529 4to	c1500–1550	22	86%	14%
49	AM 147 4to <i>Heynesbók</i>	c1525–1550	23	9%	91%
50	Holm perg. 3 fol., <i>Reykjahólabók</i>	c1530–1540	50	96%	4%

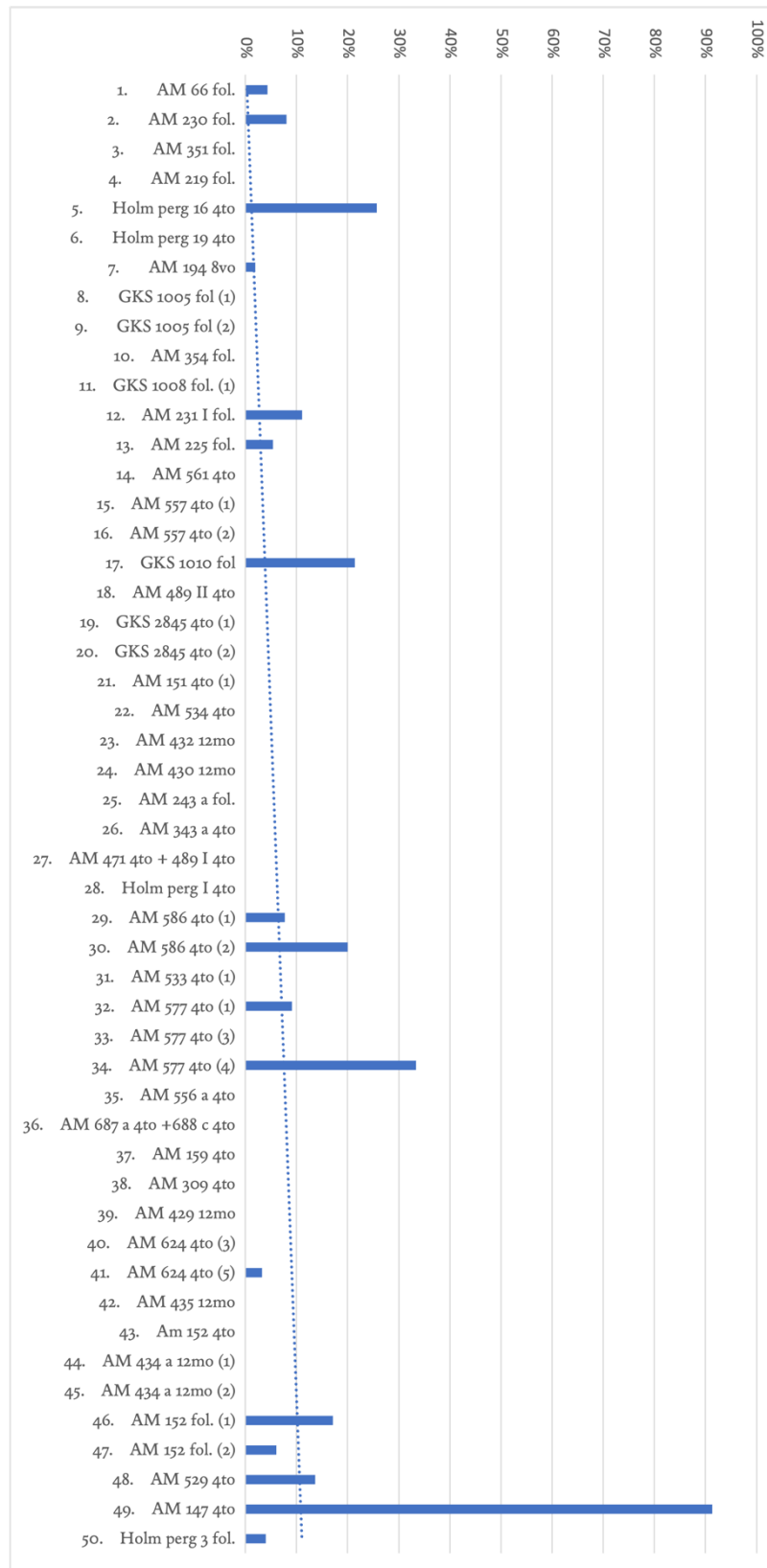


Figure 6.6: The representation of palatal *k*.

The data reveal no sustained changes over the course of the period, apart from a few sporadic instances. As we shall see below (see *Table 6.10* and *Figure 6.7* with the relevant discussion), the palatalisation of *k* appears only in the second to last hand before *e* and is almost exclusively before *æ*. More scribes indicate palatalisation of *g* (25) than they do before *k* (17). On the orthographic representation of palatal *g*, see *Table 6.10* and *Figure 6.7* below.

Five scribes indicate palatalisation of *k* in their orthography in 20% or more of instances. Of these, [49] AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók*, stands out with 91%, but the others are between 20 and 33%. These scribes are:

- [5] Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók*: 26%
- [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna*: 21%
- [30] AM 586 4to (2): 20%
- [34] AM 577 4to (4): 33%
- [49] AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók*: 91%

More than half of the entire corpus, or 33 scribes out of 50 (which corresponds to 66% of the total) show no orthographic signs of palatalisation in *ke/ka*. If we divide the corpus in two halves we observe as follows:

- Scribes 1–25:
 - no palatalisation: 18 scribes (72%)
 - 20% or more: 2 scribes
- Scribes 26–50
 - no palatalisation: 16 scribes (64%)
 - 20% or more: 3 scribes

There is thus slightly more palatalisation in the second half of the period, but the difference is not very substantial. When it comes to the palatalisation before *e*, only two scribes (and one ever so slightly) show the change, both at the very end of the period:

- [49] AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók*
- [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*

It is thus evident that the palatalisation before *e*, although appearing sporadically and, in the case of [49] AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók*, in a large majority of instances, was not at all common in the period examined. The following list is intended to provide examples of the tokens found:

- [1] AM 66 fol., *Hulda*: one instance of palatalisation was found: “kíæmi” 50r30.
- [2] AM 230 fol.: two instances were found: “kiæran” 35v16, “kiællt” 55v14.
- [5] Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók*: eight instances of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation were found: “kíæri” 5v21, “kiærafti” 5v24, “vidr|kíæmiligt” 10r31–10v1, “kíær” 10v12, “kíæri” 25v27, “kiærum” 30v5, “fkiaeru” 45r2, “kiærleik” 55r18.
- [7] AM 194 8vo: one single instance of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation was found in “kíæmi” 11r2.
- [12] AM 231 I fol.: two instances of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation were found: “kiœtí” 4va11 and “kiœrañ” 7rb27. This scribe does alternate between “æ” and “œ”, but he does not seem to have a full command of the correct etymological distribution; thus, the two letterforms are perhaps better understood as orthographic variants (allographs).
- [13] AM 225 fol.: two instances of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation were found: “kíæmí” 97rb1 and “kíæraztí” 100ra17
- [29] AM 586 4to (1): one instance of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation was found: “kiærleikr” 1r29.
- [30] AM 586 4to (2): one instance of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation was found: “kiæruz” 29v16.
- [32] AM 577 4to (1): two instances of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation were found: “kiærleikum” 25r18, “kiœmliða” 35v23.
- [34] AM 577 4to (4): three instances of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation were found: “kiærleicum” 77r21, 79v14, “kiæra” 80v16.
- [41] AM 624 4to (5): one instance of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation was found: “kiærer” 41r9.

- [46] AM 152 fol. (1): Only six instances of palatal orthography were found: “kiærleí[kumm]” 12vb20–21, “kiærleika” 22va23, “kíæmí” 31vb1, “kíæmízt” 41rb2, 41vb6, 42rb28.
- [47] AM 152 fol. (2): two instances of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation were found: “kięme” 70vb16, “kięra” 162va8.
- [48] AM 529 4to: four instances of palatal orthography were found: “kiærligri” 5v5, “kiærliða” 10v3, “junkiaeri” 20r18, a loanword ultimately deriving from Low German, but possibly reanalysed as a compound by this scribe, “kiærleik” 50r18.
- [49] AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók*: most of the instances found showed a palatal orthography, and this is also the first hand displaying palatalisation of the sequence *ke*; “kiender” 6r5, 13v8, “einkienna” 55r3, “kiennendur” 55r28, “kiemur”, 4v12, 6r7, 7v1, 60r5, 64r15 85r7, 85r9, 85r11, 120r25, “fkier” 13r19, 60r7 “fkiera” 60r8, “kienner” 12v23, 22r20, , “kieypte” 70r13, 70r15, 70r16–17, “kiennízt” 85r21.
- [50] Holm perg. 3 fol.: two instances of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation were found: “skíe” 151va11 and 151vb11, a loan from Danish *ske* (“happen”), not showing palatal pronunciation in the original language and therefore quite revealing.

One important observation is that the palatal orthography is overwhelmingly found before *æ*. Only two scribes indicate palatalisation in the sequence *ke*, and one of them has it only in one borrowing, *ske*. It is probably not irrelevant that orthographic indication of the palatalisation in *ke* only appears at the very end of the period.

Table 6.10: The representation of palatal *g*.

No.	Shelf mark	Date	<i>n</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>gi</i>
1	AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350–1375	85	80%	20%
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350–1400	59	98%	2%
3	AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360–1400	81	100%	0%
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370–1380	61	90%	10%
5	Holm perg. 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375–1400	63	94%	6%
6	Holm perg. 19 4to	c1375–1400	49	100%	0%
7	AM 194 8vo	1387	62	97%	3%
8	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387–1395	133	100%	0%
9	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387–1395	142	100%	0%
10	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400	54	96%	4%
11	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400	32	97%	3%
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400	67	99%	1%
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400	99	82%	18%
14	AM 561 4to	c1400	68	100%	0%
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404–1420	68	100%	0%
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420	53	100%	0%
17	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400–1450	79	71%	29%
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	40	100%	0%
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	45	100%	0%
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	22	100%	0%
21	AM 151 4to (1)	c1450	17	65%	35%
22	AM 534 4to	c1400–1500	24	96%	4%
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	29	100%	0%
24	AM 430 12mo	c1400–1500	60	100%	0%
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475	69	94%	6%
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450–1475	68	100%	0%
27	AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450–1500	65	97%	3%
28	Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500	39	100%	0%
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	18	78%	22%
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450–1500	11	73%	27%
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	69	99%	1%
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500	28	79%	21%
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	32	94%	6%
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	18	100%	0%
35	AM 556 a 4to, <i>Eggertsbók</i>	c1475–1500	62	100%	0%
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	113	100%	0%
37	AM 159 4to	c1480–1500	57	100%	0%
38	AM 309 4to, <i>Bejarbók í Flóa</i>	1498	92	100%	0%
39	AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubejarbók</i>	c1500	52	98%	2%
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	24	100%	0%
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	37	100%	0%
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500	24	96%	4%
43	AM 152 4to	c1500	35	100%	0%
44	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (1)	c1500	43	100%	0%
45	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500	25	100%	0%
46	AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500–1525	65	80%	20%
47	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500–1525	79	98%	2%
48	AM 529 4to	c1500–1550	22	100%	0%
49	AM 147 4to <i>Heynesbók</i>	c1525–1550	38	82%	18%
50	Holm perg. 3 fol., <i>Reykjahólabók</i>	c1530–1540	48	44%	56%

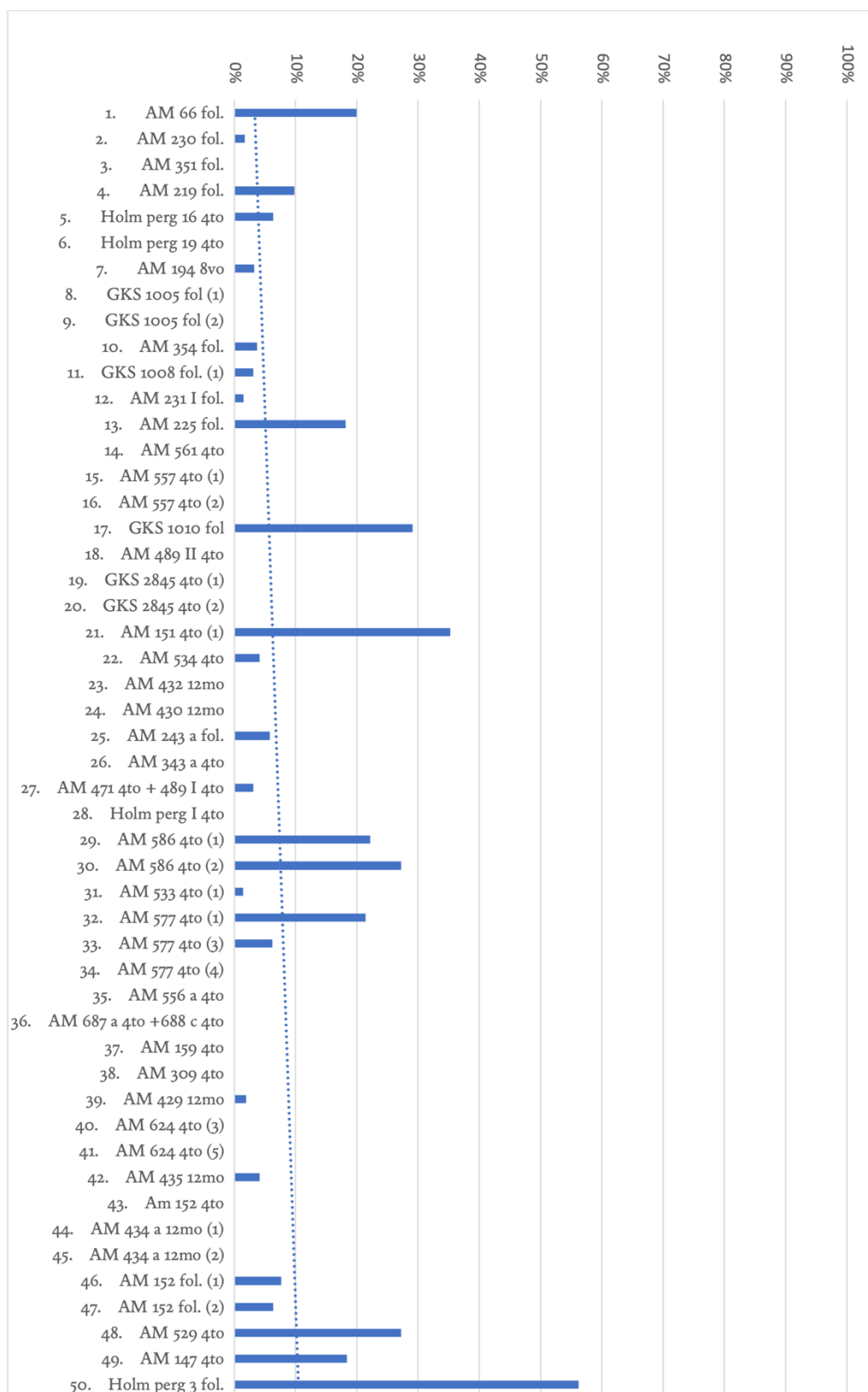


Figure 6.7: The representation of palatal of *g*.

When it comes to the tokens apparently revealing a palatalisation, it is important to note that “gieck” is an ambiguous spelling, as already discussed in Chapter 6.4. Verbs from class 7.3, such as *fá*, *falla*, *ganga*, *halda*, *hanga*, etc., adopted the long monophthong *é* or the diphthong [ie] analogically from 7.4 verbs, such as *blása*, *gráta*, *láta*, and *ráða*. In *gekk*, the “gie” spelling could thus denote either the palatalisation or the diphthong or even both. Given that “gieck” is one of the first items appearing and occasionally the only one displaying a “gie” spelling within a given hand, one wonders whether this “ie” represented indeed the diphthong [ie] resulting from *é*, and whether it was this very item which encouraged the scribes to denote a palatal pronunciation before *e*. Despite this ambiguity, forms like “gieck” have been included in the tally. This aspect will be commented on further later in the discussion. For now, the following aspects are worth considering:

Eight scribes indicate palatalisation of *g* in their orthography in 20% or more of instances: [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók* stands out with 56%, but the others are between 20 and 35%.

- [1] AM 66 fol., *Hulda*: 20%
- [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna*: 29%
- [21] AM 151 4to (1): 35%
- [29] AM 586 4to (1): 22%
- [30] AM 586 4to (2): 27%
- [32] AM 577 4to (1): 21%
- [46] AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson: 20%
- [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*: 56%

There are only two scribes indicating orthographically the palatalisation of both *k* and *g* in 20% or more of instances recorded:

- [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna*: 21% “ki” and 29% “gi”
- [30] AM 586 4to (2): 20% “ki” and 27% “gi”

Interestingly, the scribe of AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók*, who indicated the palatalisation of *k* in 91% of recorded instances, marks the palatalisation of *g* only 18% of the time. The discrepancy is difficult to explain as this hand is rather innovative in all other instances

observed. To what extent this reflects linguistic traits rather than mere orthographic choices is hard to gauge. In the whole corpus, 23 scribes out of 50 (46%) show no orthographic signs of palatalisation in *ge/gæ*. If the corpus is split into two halves we observe as follows:

- Scribes 1–25:
 - no palatalisation: 13 scribes (44%)
 - 20% or more: 2 scribes
- Scribes 26–50:
 - no palatalisation: 12 scribes (48%)
 - 20% or more: 5 scribes

Slightly more orthographic representation of palatalisation can be detected in the second half, but the difference is not substantial. The following list shows the seven scribes displaying palatalisation of *g* before *e*:

- [4] AM 219 fol.
- [13] AM 225 fol.
- [24] AM 430 12mo
- [25] AM 243 a fol.
- [33] AM 577 4to (3)
- [49] AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók*
- [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*

The following list is intended to provide examples of the tokens identified.

[1] AM 66 fol., *Hulda*: an orthography representing a palatal pronunciation was found on 17 examples: “agíæti” 10r5, “gíæfv” 10r13, “fagíætv μ ” 25r23, “agíætan” 40r25, “agíætar” 80r18, “agíætr” 90r14, “gíæzlu” 100r28, and “gíeck” (an ambiguous form, as discussed above) 30r9, 30r913, 30r914, 30r916, 30r930, 35r6, 40r20, 65r15, 65r19, 65r32.

[2] AM 230 fol.: an orthographic representation of a palatal pronunciation was found on one item: “gíæzku” 50v26.

- [4] AM 219 fol.: 10% of instances of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation were found: “giefa” 5rb6, “Gięzzku” 5vb16, “giefi” 10vb14, “aagietara” 11rb14, “aagietum” 11rb36.
- [5] Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók*: 4 items (6% of the tally) showed an orthography indicating palatal pronunciation: “agiæt” 5r22, “agiæta” 10v1, 45r4, “agiæt|azftr” 45r6–7.
- [7] AM 194 8vo: two instances of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation were found: “agiëzt” 15r20, “ágietligr” 24v12.
- [10] AM 354 fol., *Skálholtsbók yngri*: “agiætare” 5r27, “gíøta” 65r11.
- [11] GKS 1008 fol., *Tómasskinna* (1): only one instance of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation was found: “giæzflu” 35r2.
- [12] AM 231 I fol.: only one instance of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation was found: “gięzku” 3ra22.
- [13] AM 225 fol.: a small number of instances of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation were found: “agiætazta” 90rb34, “giætzlu” 90rb41, “gíęta” 90rb52, “agięti” 91ra29, “agiętligum” 92rb3, “agięta” 92rb6, “agiętlíga” 92rb7, “giefir” 92rb11, “gíæfu” 93rb14, “agiętr” 96ra44, “gięti” 96rb41.
- [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna*: a small number of instances of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation were found: more commonly, form of the adjective “agiætur” 65rb6, but more unusually at this stage, several instances of the third person singular indicative preterit of *ganga*, such as “Giec” 47ra2, “gieck” 15ra4/b8, 47vb6, 78rb18/37, 81ra9/23 (which are, however, ambiguous), and also “giæta” 37va25.
- [23] AM 432 12mo: very few instances could be found in the entire manuscript, the following showed an orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation: “gieck” 34r5, 44v2, 45v7, 57r10, 64r5, 65r5 (though they are ambiguous).
- [24] AM 430 12mo: only one instance of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation was found: “giefin” 10r8.
- [25] AM 243 a fol.: seven instances of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation were found, all forms derived from the verb *gera*: “Rada gierdar” 1ra25, “gierde” 1va20, “gierer” 5rb28, 10rb2, 10va7, 15vb1/3. Other items, such as “gefir”

10ra19/20/23/25, or “gera” 10rb29, “gegna” 15va3 did not show palatal pronunciation.

- [29] AM 586 4to (1): only one item showed an orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation in four instances: “gíæfu” 11r33, 21r2 (x2), 21r4,
- [30] AM 586 4to (2): very few instances could be found in the entire manuscript; of these, the following showed an orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation: “gíættu” 28r22, “gíæzlu” 30v31, “gíæta” 30v32.
- [31] AM 533 4to (1): only one instance of orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation was found: “agíætum” 28r13.
- [32] AM 577 4to (1): few instances could be found in the entire manuscript; of these, the following showed an orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation: “giœfu” (substantive) 5r11, “ágiœta” 25r11, “agiæt” 25v12, “agiœtir” 25v19, “giœfu” 31v18.
- [33] AM 577 4to (3): only two examples could be found in the entire manuscript, both of which showed an orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation: “giengr” 66v4|5, 67r2.
- [39] AM 429 12mo, *Kirkjubæjarbók*: several instances were found, but only one showed an orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation: “giœti” 2r15,
- [42] AM 435 12mo: few instances could be found in the entire manuscript; of these, the following one showed an orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation: “agiætaztur” 15r3.
- [46] AM 152 fol. (1): several instances were found, but only these showed an orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation: “agíæter” 1va14, “giæ|tj” 22vb17–18, “gíægdiztt” 41ra6, “giæti” 41vb12, “gíæfu” 42rb15.
- [47] AM 152 fol. (2): several instances were found, but only these showed an orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation: “giæfu” 62va3, “ágiœtur” 142ra5, “agiœtann” 142ra8, “agiœt” 142rb38, “gíœta” 172ra14.
- [48] AM 529 4to: very few instances were found, and only these showed an orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation: “giætir” 5v21, “ägiætarí” 10r8, “agiæt” 20r11, “agiætur” 20r21, “agiæta” 35r22, 55v12.

[49] AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók*: of the instances found, only these showed an orthography indicating a palatal pronunciation: “gietit” 1r6, “gieyma” (a unique occurrence) 4v23, “giæta” 5v7 “gieta” 115r8, “gielldur” 11r16, “gielldir” 13r20.

[50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjabólabók*: spellings indicating palatal pronunciation were found both before *æ* and *e*: “agíæthliga” 12ra8, “giefa” 12ra14, “agiætum” 12ra16, “giefit” 12ra33, 141va7, the ambiguous forms “gieck” 27ra4, 162vb3, and “gieck” 52rb3, 162ra8, “giefa” 71vb17, 141vb5/21, “giefit” 141vb21, “giæthe” 71vb21, “gietha” 141va6.

Just as in the case for the orthographical representation of palatal *k*, the data shows a very uneven distribution of palatal orthography for *g* throughout the period, the orthographic representation of palatalisation of *k* and *g* starts before *æ* and then later before *e* – including the single instance found before *ey*, in *geyma*. Given that both plosive phonemes show a similar pattern of palatal representation through the period examined, it appears opportune to treat these two together and make general considerations about how their nature and appearance may be best explained.

In the New Testament translation by Oddur Gottskálksson (1540), palatal *g* and *k* are occasionally written with “i” before *e* but not before *i*, *ei* or *ey* or (Jón Helgason 1929, 32; 36). While in the *Guðbrandsbiblía*, *gæ* and *kæ* are consistently spelled “giæ” and “kiæ”, *ge* is spelled “gie” most of the time and *ke* is frequently represented with “kie” (Bandle 1956, 127, 141), Jón Helgason does not mention instances of orthographic representation of palatalisation in his work. However, the examples he includes in the vocabulary list with transcription of examples in the same orthography as the original work, never seem to include the palatalisation of either *k* or *g* before *æ* (see pp. 270 for instances of “gæ-” and 301–302 for instances of “kæ-”).

Conversely, sequences *gia* and *giu* are sometimes spelt “ga” and “gu” in the text of the New Testament by Oddur Gottskálksson, as Jón Helgason (1929, 32) points out: “hofdingar”, “iafningar”, “heidingum” for *höfðingjar*, *jafningjar* and *heiðingjum*. While Jón Helgason (1929, 36) does consider the two only instances of “ka” and “ku” standing for *kja* and *kju* (“suika” for *svíkja* and “medtæku” for *meðtækju*) as undoubtedly printing errors, he does not express the same conviction for the rare instances of “ga” and “gu”. In his opinion, these may perhaps show a confusion of the sequence *gj* (as in *heiðingjum* and

höfðingjum) with the palatal *g* before *e* and *æ*, with the two possibly having essentially the same quality, therefore writing “höfðingum” instead of something like “höfðingium”. It is not impossible, therefore, that the palatalisation was already (or had always been) somewhat established in the language up to a point where a scribe may have produced an inverse spelling “g” for etymological *gj* where a “gi” spelling would have in fact been etymological, like in *höfðingjum*. Such an assertion must be still taken with much caution, as the text was printed in Roskilde by a Danish printer, and consequently these forms may actually be meaningless.

Let us assume for the sake of discussion that these rare spellings like “ga” and “gu” for etymological *gja* or *gju* are indeed inverse. The fact that these seem to appear when “gie”, “kie”, “giæ” and “kiæ” spellings are apparently on the rise it would seem to point to some underlying phonological change happening around or slightly before this time, perhaps the very insertion of *j* (Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 1993). Otherwise, we would expect to see the same kind of confusion between palatal spellings and *gj* + non front vowels earlier on, which is not the case. Whether the underlying change was an actual palatalisation of *k* and *g* or the (perceived) drop of *j* in sequences like *gja* and *gju* is difficult to ascertain.

One further curious fact is that the “gie” spelling for the verbal form *gekk* makes an early appearance. That only this item showed a “gi” spelling early on, particularly in [1] AM 66 fol., *Hulda*, would make it more likely that the spelling “gieck” would in fact represent a form with the diphthong *je*, that is, the diphthongisation of the vowel. However, in the light of the observations just made, it may well be that the quality between palatal *g* and the sequence *gj* was practically indiscernible. It is unclear which would have been transferred analogically, the long vowel or the diphthong. In either case, the *g* would have been palatalised as both the vowel *é* and the diphthong *je* would have triggered palatalisation. If this was the case, there is a possibility that the “g” + “ie” spelling representing *gé* [ce:] as at some point re-analysed as representing *gje* and further encouraged the insertion of an “i” in other positions, to represent palatalised stops. After all, in contemporary Icelandic, were one to mistakenly write “gjeck” or even “géck”, one would be perfectly understandable in either case, as there is no phonemic contrast between velar and palatal stop before *e*.

Based on the results of this study, it can be said that the orthographic development of this change may have been as follows:

- 1) Allophonic palatalisation before $\emptyset$ became contrastive once this vowel merged with ϱ in the thirteenth century, resulting in the phoneme sequences /kj/ and /gj/ contrasting with /k/ and /g/ (*kjör, gjör* vs. *kör, göróttur*). This necessitated a spelling update to avoid confusion. An “i” (later “j”) was added, as this was the spelling used in other instances where the language displayed a palatal stop, as in “Reykjavík”, “kjósa” etc.
- 2) Early in the period studied (and possibly slightly earlier), palatal *g* and *k* before α [ai], resulting from earlier $\acute{e}$ and $\emptyset$ began to be denoted with “gi” and “ki”, respectively. This may be linked to the front monophthong resulting from the merger of $\acute{e}$ and $\emptyset$ developing into the diphthong [ai(:)]. Before the non-front [ai(:)], the inherited palatal *k* and *g* were reinterpreted as the phoneme sequences /kj/ and /gj/ respectively.
- 3) Later in the period studied, a “i” began to be added between “g” or “k” and “e” to denote the palatalisation or the insertion of *j*. Orthographic “ki” and “gi” represented the palatal stops [c^h] and [c], but before *e*, *ei* and α , they are best analysed as sequences of two phonemes, i.e. /gj/ and /kj/ in spite of the spelling lacking a “j” in the normalised orthography.

Be that as it may, the data shows a rather complex picture with palatal spellings emerging here and there starting with the earliest hands in a quasi-random pattern. The apparent randomness of the distribution of palatal orthographies throughout the period could be interpreted in at least three ways:

1. Assuming that the pronunciation had always been palatal, some scribes may have decided to represent this phonetic difference orthographically throughout the period in question while others have not, making this a merely orthographical change. Perhaps this orthographic change was motivated by the evolution of the front vowels $\emptyset$ and $\acute{e}$, ultimately merging into α which, in turn, evolved into [ai]: α had initially palatalised *g* and *k*, and these consonants retained their palatal quality even after the vowel had turned into a diphthong with a non-front first part. With Icelandic phonotactics not allowing for alternation between palatal

and velar consonants before *a*, the palatal *k* and *g* were reanalysed as sequences, namely *kj* and *gj*, which were then spelled “ki” and “gi”. Such spelling was then extended to the sequences *ke* and *ge* by analogy. The fact that orthographic signs of palatalisation of *g* before *e* appear very sporadically already in the earliest hands examined may be a sign that the palatal allophone of /*g*/ in this position had always existed. Though there are instances of phonological alternations not indicated in the orthography, such as that between plosive *g* and its fricative allophone, it would not be unheard of that allophones may receive a different orthographical treatment. For example, Italian distinguishes orthographically the labialised allophone of /*k*/ before the sequence *wV* by writing “q” instead of “c” (examples are abundant: *quando* ‘when’, *questione* ‘matter’, *quota* ‘share/amount’, *equino* ‘equine’), although there is no phonological opposition between round or unround stops, and the rounding of *c* before *u* is merely an allophonic variation. To be sure, some words that had *c* etymologically are still spelled with “c” although the emergence of a subsequent *u* would have called for a change in the spelling (and this is indeed a frequent mistake children—and a few adults too—make): Lat. *coquus* ‘cook’ > It. *cuoco* (which should be **quoco* if it were consistent with the spelling rules), Lat. *corem* > It. *cuore*, Lat. *schola* > It. *scuola*. Manuals of Italian phonetics and phonology often remark that there is no underlying difference between the articulation of palatal *c* and *q*, so that the alternation between “c” and “q” would merely be orthographical; however, essentially all speakers do in fact pronounce the *q* with their lip rounded. Failing to do so results in an unnatural pronunciation. By analogy with this example, in the Icelandic case we would have a situation by which the palatalisation created an audible difference that did not trigger a phonological split but that somehow found its way in the orthography. However, the lack of a phonological distinction made the need for an orthography representing the palatalisation far from pressing. The tendency to palatalise the stops in the positions examined never went all the way and showed some instability. This interpretation, however, does not explain why, eventually, the palatalised orthography becomes predominant.

2. If we assumed instead that there was indeed a change from velar to palatal pronunciation, or an insertion of *j*, the data would show that throughout the period in question such a change was far from being widespread.
3. A third possibility would be that there has always been some kind of intra- and inter-speaker variation as far as the palatal/velar pronunciation in these positions is concerned, and this is reflected in the seemingly random distribution of palatalised spelling, making this change a witness of synchronic oscillations rather than diachronic change. We may still assume, as we did in hypothesis 1, that the orthographic change was triggered by the evolution of the vowel *æ* into the diphthong [ai], prompting a re-interpretation of palatal *k* and *g* as a sequence of *kj* and *gj*, or at least as a consonant with a different quality that needed to be denoted (*gia* had to be distinguished clearly from *ga*). The practice of writing “giæ” and “kiæ” would have then been extended analogically to “ge” and “ke”. However, this would not necessarily imply a systematic differentiation between palatal and velar stops in the spoken language. Kristján Árnason (2011, 102) shows how even in contemporary Icelandic there can be on the one hand a tendency to sometimes extend the palatal pronunciation to loanwords that are normally pronounced with a velar *k/g*: Borrowings like *gettó* (from *ghetto*) and *geim* (from *game*) can be both pronounced [kɛhtou] and [kei:m] or [cɛhtou] and [cɛi:m], though that is not always the case: *gæd* never has a palatal *g*, though it is a loan that still reflects the phonology of English, and it may be argued that it has not been fully adapted to the Icelandic phonological system. On the other hand a tendency can be observed to reduce the frequency of palatal stops, with some speakers pronouncing *kemur* and *gefa* as [kʰɛ:myɾ] and [kɛ:va]. This situation may have been in place already in the period considered for this study: some speakers may have preferred to expand the domain of the palatal pronunciation for articulatory ease, while others may have analogically removed the distinction by extending the velar pronunciation instead. Such oscillation would explain the lack of any consistent trend in the data collected. This interpretation, however, does not account for the fact that the palatalised orthography is much more frequent in certain positions than in others, for example before *æ*, which would suggest a change (at least

in the orthography) starting before this sound and then spreading to other positions (namely, before *e*). A situation in which there is a constant oscillation of palatal and velar realisations would hardly produce an orthographic manifestation starting in a particular position and then spreading to others.

Weighing the available evidence, hypothesis 3 appears the most satisfactory. Assuming that *k* and *g* had always been palatal before front vowels raises the question of why the sporadic inverse spellings—such as “ga” or “gu” for *gja* and *gju*—did not arise much earlier, prompting regularisation of the orthography reflected in spellings like “gie”, “giæ”, “kie”, and “kjæ”. Truth be told, they may be dismissed as mistakes, but the possibility that they may be revealing inverse spellings should not be ruled out hastily. Conversely, positing an underlying phonological change towards systematic palatalisation of formerly velar stops is not strongly supported by the data: the distribution is too inconsistent to suggest a spreading innovation, and the pattern—if such it may be called—does not resemble that of other documented orthographic or phonological changes.

The slight diffusion of palatal spellings into the Early Modern period may thus be regarded as a partly orthographic trend, possibly initiated by the need to adjust the representation of palatal *g* before *æ* [ai], while the underlying phonological reality likely remained one of considerable inter-speaker variation, without a definitive direction. It is also conceivable that the orthography was not systematically adjusted to reflect the phonological development involving *j*-insertion because in certain environments—particularly before *i* and *í*—the palatal stops represented only allophonic variants of their velar counterparts. The persistence of spellings such as “ki/kí/ký/ky” and “gi/gí/gy/gý”, reinforced by the influence of earlier exemplars, likely contributed to the scribal variability observed.

To conclude, the phenomenon under consideration displays no consistent diachronic trend and therefore cannot be regarded as a reliable dating criterion. It may, however, reflect an underlying tension within the language that never culminated in a stable phonemic opposition between palatal and velar stops.

6.8 Conclusion

6.8.1 Overview

In this chapter, the occurrence of seven conservative and innovative orthographies has been analysed contrastively with the objective of mapping any trend in the spread of innovative variants through the period studied. Similar to what was done in chapter 5.5, an overview of the distribution of all innovative variants for all hands will be provided with the purpose of identifying possible similarities between hands, outliers and general tendencies.

Very broadly, the following statements can be made about the result of this study for each change:

1. The “g” spelling indicating palatalisation of unstressed word-final *-k* spread steadily and slowly through the period examined (see the column with the heading *g* in *Table 6.11*).
2. The “eing” spelling indicating the diphthongisation of *e* before *ng* is already quite established at the start of the period studied and shows oscillations while remaining largely more common than its conservative counterpart. The *eng* > *eing* change has by far the overall highest score of the seven variables, as is evident from the colour coding in the *Table 6.11*, followed by *é* > *je*, *k* > *g* and *u*-epenthesis. The remaining three variables have a much lower overall score. This is confirmed by simple average value of each variable (see the bottom row in *Table 6.11*).
3. The “ie” spelling indicating diphthongisation of older *é*, apart from a few outliers in the first half of the period, shows a sharp spread in the second half (see column *je* in *Table 6.11*).
4. The evolution of fricative *g* between *e* and *i/j* has only rare attestations until the very end of the fourteenth century, after which its appearances grow distinctly in number (see column *j* in *Table 6.11*).
5. The *u*-epenthesis is present to an extent throughout the period, but it becomes more and more common with time: the average in the first half is 14.8%, in the second half 49.7%. However, oscillations between (roughly) contemporary hands are great (see the column with the heading *ur* in *Table 6.11*).

6. The orthographic representation of palatalisation of *g* and *k* appears sporadically through the period, first before *æ*, and only at the end of the period studied also before *e*, although extremely rarely. Palatalisation of *g* is present in more hands, 25 in total, and 16 of these show also palatalisation of *k* (see columns *gi* and *ki* in *Table 6.11*).

A heatmap is shown in *Table 6.11*, illustrating the distribution of all the innovative features analysed across the period studied. The features examined are listed in the columns in the same order as they appeared in the present chapter. The frequency (in percentage) of the innovative features is indicated with colour coding: 0% is in white, while other intervals (25 percent points each, except for the first one, starting from 0.1) are in increasingly darker shades of blue. The intervals, from the lightest to the darkest shade of blue, are subdivided according to the following ranges, 0.1–25%; 26–50%; 51–75%; 76–99%; 100%, as shown in the legend for *Table 6.11*.

These results are also shown in *Table 6.11*, in which different values are highlighted in different shades of blue. The total number of features (from 0 to 7) surpassing 50% of innovative instances and of those surpassing 90% of innovative features are represented in the table.

Legend for Table 6.11:

0%	0.1–25%	26–50%	51–75%	76–99%	100%
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Table 6.11: Distribution of innovative features.

No.	Shelfmark	Date	g	eing	je	j	ur	ki	gi
1	AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350–1375	0%	100%	24.5%	0%	0%	4%	20%
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350–1400	0%	50%	0%	4.8%	1.4%	8%	2%
3	AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360–1400	0%	96.2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370–1380	0%	0%	63.7%	0%	0%	0%	10%
5	Holm perg. 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375–1400	14.7%	100%	6.7%	0%	1.4%	26%	6%
6	Holm perg. 19 4to	c1375–1400	45.2%	66.7%	0.9%	0%	9.4%	0%	0%
7	AM 194 8vo	1387	7.1%	68.2%	1.6%	0%	0%	2%	3%
8	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387–1395	36.3%	92.9%	0.4%	0%	0.8%	0%	0%
9	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387–1395	0%	39.6%	0%	0%	0.1%	0%	0%
10	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400	15.8%	22.6%	0%	0%	0.6%	0%	4%
11	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400	0%	100%	28.8%	0%	33.6%	0%	3%
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400	0.3%	0%	0%	0%	4.5%	11%	1%
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400	0%	0%	3.1%	0%	0.6%	5%	18%
14	AM 561 4to	c1400	16.7%	100%	52.6%	0%	4.2%	0%	0%
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404–1420	3.9%	95%	0%	3.8%	15.2%	0%	0%
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420	0%	81.1%	13.6%	0%	6.7%	0%	0%
17	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400–1450	11.5%	100%	67.1%	0%	9%	21%	29%
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	26.6%	100%	22.4%	0%	13.3%	0%	0%
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	29.9%	88.2%	41.8%	33.3%	39.4%	0%	0%
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	77.2%	100%	14.6%	7.7%	35.9%	0%	0%
21	AM 151 4to (1)	c1450	0%	94.6%	1.5%	0%	7.5%	0%	35%
22	AM 534 4to	c1400–1500	13.9%	33.3%	0%	0%	5%	0%	4%
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	89.4%	94.7%	92.8%	12.5%	45.1%	0%	0%
24	AM 430 12mo	c1400–1500	23.7%	100%	85.8%	15%	77.4%	0%	0%
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475	1.2%	97.7%	41.3%	0%	15.8%	0%	6%
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450–1475	36.9%	71%	83%	16.7%	51.2%	0%	0%
27	AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450–1500	98.8%	82%	66.1%	42.4%	9.8%	0%	3%
28	Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500	0.3%	100%	69.4%	41.3%	39.8%	0%	0%
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	100%	100%	0%	0%	2.2%	8%	22%
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450–1500	100%	100%	71.9%	33.3%	48.1%	20%	27%
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	0%	97.2%	34.1%	10.3%	89.6%	0%	1%
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500	97.6%	94.4%	9.8%	10.5%	39.3%	9%	21%
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	47.2%	72.7%	83.3%	6.3%	38.7%	0%	6%
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	72%	93.3%	80.6%	0%	53.4%	33%	0%
35	AM 556 a 4to, <i>Eggertsbók</i>	c1475–1500	3.4%	90.1%	20.7%	11.4%	82.8%	0%	0%
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	78.9%	100%	35.9%	0%	16.9%	0%	0%
37	AM 159 4to	c1480–1500	20.7%	32.2%	4.8%	0%	47%	0%	0%
38	AM 309 4to, <i>Bæjarbók í Flóa</i>	1498	94.2%	64.1%	62.9%	55.8%	15.8%	0%	0%
39	AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubæjarbók</i>	c1500	13.9%	78.4%	2.2%	19.4%	12.5%	0%	2%
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	50%	100%	50%	100%	65.8%	0%	0%
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	98.1%	80%	77.1%	0%	41.8%	3%	0%
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500	15%	100%	53.3%	3%	64.4%	0%	4%
43	AM 152 4to	c1500	22.2%	100%	55.3%	80%	92.9%	0%	0%
44	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (1)	c1500	30.8%	100%	52.3%	5.3%	82.3%	0%	0%
45	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500	54.5%	88.2%	43.8%	37.5%	69.8%	0%	0%
46	AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500–1525	100%	100%	86.1%	90.9%	44.7%	17%	20%
47	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500–1525	61.9%	40%	74.4%	0%	54.7%	6%	2%
48	AM 529 4to	c1500–1550	16.7%	81.8%	96.7%	92.3%	86.3%	14%	0%
49	AM 147 4to <i>Heynesbók</i>	c1525–1550	59.1%	100%	29%	25%	96.3%	91%	18%
50	Holm perg. 3 fol., <i>Reykjahólabók</i>	c1530–1540	100%	98.3%	96.5%	77.1%	40.2%	4%	56%
average			35.7%	80%	38%	16.7%	32.3%	5.6%	6.5%

6.8.2 Trends over time for each feature

If the dataset is divided into halves, then the average values of innovative features per period show a clear trend (reference to the changes is not consistent with row heading from the tables, but the order is the same). In the list below, two percentages are provided for each change, with the first indicating the average value of innovativeness for scribes [1] to [25] and the second indicating the same average for scribes [26] to [50]:

k > g: The average score in the work of scribes 1–25 is 18% but 53.4% in the work of scribes 26–50. There is thus a clear difference between the two halves with a distinct upsurge in the second half. The feature remains largely absent in the earliest portion of the corpus, with early occurrences seen in [6] Holm perg. 19 4to (45.2%) and [8] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (1), Jón Þórðarson (36.3%). These are quite high values, showing great inter-scribal variation already among the earliest scribes in this corpus (the age difference between the first nine, at least, could be negligible). In the fifteenth century, adoption increases dramatically, peaking at 100% in [29] AM 586 4to (1) and [30] AM 586 4to (2) (both dated c1450–1500).

eng > eing: The average score in the work of scribes 1–25 is 72.5%, but 87% in the work of scribes 26–50. This feature is highly variable early on. In the earliest part of the corpus, it is absent in some manuscripts, such as [4] AM 219 fol. (c1370–1380) with 0%, but with 100% occurrence in the samples from [1] AM 66 fol., *Hulda* (1350–1375) and [5] Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók* (c1375–1400). Towards the second half of the fifteenth century, the frequency is generally high (though some lower scores can be found), reaching 100% in [29] AM 586 4to (1) and [30] AM 586 4to (2) (both dated to c1450–1500).

é > je: The average score in the work of scribes 1–25 is 24.8% but 51.7% in the work of scribes 26–50. Early adoption is inconsistent. [4] AM 219 fol. (c1370–1380) shows an early spike at 63.7%, while others remain at 0%. By c1500, scribes such as [46] AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson (c1500–1525) exhibit values as high as 86.1%, though supposedly earlier scribes show even higher values, such as [23] AM 432 12mo (c1400–1500) with 92.8%.

g > j: The average score in the work of scribes 1–25 is 3.7% but 30.9% in the work of scribes 26–50. This feature is typically absent or shows very low values in the earliest

part of the corpus, but rises sharply in the late fifteenth century, reaching 100% in [40] AM 624 4to (3).

u-epenthesis (the manifestation of *u*-epenthesis through unetymological spellings): The average score in the work of scribes 1–25 is 14.5% but 53.3% in the work of scribes 26–50. The adoption of unetymological forms begins early and is mostly manifest in inverse spellings at first. While it remains at low percentages in certain manuscripts, such as [2] AM 230 fol. (1.4%) and [9] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (2) (c1387–1395), Magnús Þórhallsson (0.1%), some scribes show significantly higher adoption rates. For example, [11] GKS 1008 fol., *Tómasskinna* (1) (c1400) (33.6%) and [19] GKS 2845 4to (1) (c1450) (39.4%) demonstrate an early engagement with this feature. By the late fifteenth century, it experiences rapid expansion, culminating in 96.3% in [49] AM 147 4to *Heynesbók* (c1525–1550).

“k” > “ki” and “g” > “gi”: The average score in the work of scribes 1–25 is 3%/8.5% but 4.2%/6.3% in the work of scribes 26–50. These features do not show the same progressive trend as the others. They appear sporadically throughout time, with a notable peak in [30] AM 586 4to (2) (20% “ki”, 27% “gi”).

6.8.3 Highest and lowest values for each feature

The present section highlights the scribes who stand out for their considerable use or absence of given features. They ought not to be confused with outliers, as outliers are rather scribes who stand out among their contemporaries. These are rather scribes that display the highest degree of innovativeness for a given feature.

1. *k > g*: [29] AM 586 4to (1) (c1450–1500), [30] AM 586 4to (2) (c1450–1500), [46] AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson (c1500–1525): all score 100%.
2. *eng > eing*: [29] AM 586 4to (1) (c1450–1500), [30] AM 586 4to (2) (c1450–1500): 100% (both score quite high for the first two changes).
3. *é > je*: [48] AM 529 4to (c1500–1500): 96.7%.
4. *g > j*: [40] AM 624 4to (3) (c1500): 100%.
5. *u-epenthesis*: [49] AM 147 4to *Heynesbók* (c1525–1550): 96.3%.
6. *k > ki*: [46] AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson (c1500–1525): 17%.
7. *g > gi*: [21] AM 151 4to (1) (c1450): 35%.

The following list indicates the scribes exhibiting the lowest values for each feature:

1. Many scribes exhibit 0% for multiple features, especially earlier in the corpus, which is expected (see *Table 8.1* for details).
2. [3] AM 351 fol., *Skálholtsbók eldri* (c1360–1400) has complete absence (0%) for all innovative features except *eng* > *eing* where it has 96.2%. This is very noticeable in the context of this manuscript, but also of those from the same period.
3. [4] AM 219 fol. (c1370–1380) is highly conservative in almost all features except the diphthongisation of *é* and palatalisation of *g* (0% *k* > *g*, 0% *eng* > *eing*, 0% *g* > *j*, 0% *u*-epenthesis and 0% palatalisation of *k*).

6.8.4. Correlations between features

In examining the relationship between different features, there are some slight correlations between the manifestation of certain changes and others. A Spearman's rho test was run in Excel to calculate the correlation coefficient between features. The values are shown in *Table 6.12*. Although none of the values reach particularly high levels, a few patterns emerge that shed light on the dynamics of orthographic and phonological change.

The strongest positive correlations are found between the diphthongisation of *é* and drop of fricative *g* (0.5), between the diphthongisation of *é* and the *u* insertion (0.51), and between drop of fricative *g* and *u* insertion (0.47). This suggests that these three features frequently cluster together in the same scribal hands or manuscripts, hinting at a shared trajectory or at least a somewhat parallel rhythm of adoption.

Moderate positive correlations are also visible between fricativisation of word final *k* and diphthongisation of *é* (0.43) and between fricativisation and drop of fricative *g* (0.34), as well as between diphthongisation of *e* before *ng* and *u* insertion (0.35). These values, while not as strong as the previous set, still indicate that the presence of one change often increases the likelihood of another. It is noteworthy that this second cluster (involving *g/je*, *g/j*, and *eing/ur*) overlaps only partially with the previous group (involving diphthongisation of *é*, drop of fricative *g* and *u*-epenthesis), which may suggest different layers or phases of diffusion within scribal practice. By contrast, most pairings display very weak or even negative correlations, which indicates that these features developed largely independently of each other.

Overall, the data suggest that the changes do not spread as a single, unified package but rather along partially overlapping trajectories. Certain innovations—especially those involving diphthongisation of *é*, drop of fricative *g*, and *u* insertion—tend to reinforce one another and may reflect a cluster of changes advancing together. The relatively modest values across the table also serve as a reminder that, while correlation indicates patterns of association, it does not in itself establish causality or direction of change. Nonetheless, the results provide a useful map of affinities and divergences, which can guide further inquiry into the interplay of orthographic innovation and scribal practice.

Table 6.12: Spearman’s correlation coefficient for the language changes.

<i>Changes</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>
<i>g/eing</i>	0.27
<i>g/je</i>	0.43
<i>g/j</i>	0.34
<i>g/ur</i>	0.19
<i>g/ki</i>	0.19
<i>g/gi</i>	0.12
<i>eing/je</i>	0.26
<i>eing/j</i>	0.25
<i>eing/ur</i>	0.35
<i>eing/ki</i>	0.13
<i>eing/gi</i>	0.07
<i>je/j</i>	0.5
<i>je/ur</i>	0.51
<i>je/ki</i>	0.07
<i>je/gi</i>	-0.04
<i>j/ur</i>	0.47
<i>j/ki</i>	0.07
<i>j/gi</i>	-0.04
<i>ur/ki</i>	0.26
<i>ur/gi</i>	-0.2
<i>ki/gi</i>	0.26

In the next section the focus will be shifted to individual scribes. The following table (*Table 6.13*) presents a comparison of the scribes and their innovative character and points out which are the most innovative scribes, (a) showing the number of features equal or

more than 50% and (b) equal or more than 90%. By looking at the total number of features scoring above 50% or 90%, some interesting observations can be made.

In the first half of the corpus, scribes 1–25, there are only two hands out of twenty-five (8%) with three variables scoring $\geq 50\%$, which are also among the youngest in this first half:

- [23] AM 432 12mo, c1400–1500.
- [24] AM 430 12mo, c1400–1500.

In addition, it may be observed that the three variables in [23] AM 432 12mo have very high scores: two values above 90% and a third one at 89.4%. [24] AM 430 12mo also scores quite high. However, this is most likely due to the broad dating (c1400–1500) of these two texts, rather than to their being precocious innovators. They were roughly dated to the whole century and therefore placed in the middle of the corpus for balance, but in light of the data they would perhaps best be located to the second half. It is impossible to prove with absolute certainty whether these texts were early innovators, or whether they were written later in the century, as it could lead to circular reasoning. However, judging from the information gathered and the considerably broad dating, the latter option is perhaps the more plausible. On the other hand, [22] AM 534 4to (c1400–1500), which shares this broad dating with AM 432 12mo, has no variables with a value of $\geq 50\%$. It may therefore perhaps be best placed within the first half of the fifteenth century.

Table 6.13: values (out of 5) above 50% (left) and above 90% (right).

No.	Shelf mark	Date	Number of values $\geq 50\%$	Number of values $\geq 90\%$
1	AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350–1375	1	1
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350–1400	1	0
3	AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360–1400	1	1
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370–1380	1	0
5	Holm perg. 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375–1400	1	1
6	Holm perg. 19 4to	c1375–1400	1	0
7	AM 194 8vo	1387	1	0
8	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387–1395	1	1
9	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387–1395	0	0
10	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400	0	0
11	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400	1	1
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400	0	0
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400	0	0
14	AM 561 4to	c1400	2	1
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404–1420	1	1
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420	1	0
17	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400–1450	2	1
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	1	1
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	1	0
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	2	1
21	AM 151 4to (1)	c1450	1	1
22	AM 534 4to	c1400–1500	0	0
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	3	2
24	AM 430 12mo	c1400–1500	3	1
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475	1	1
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450–1475	3	0
27	AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450–1500	3	1
28	Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500	2	1
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	2	2
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450–1500	3	2
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	2	1
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500	2	2
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	2	0
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	4	1
35	AM 556 a 4to, <i>Eggertsbók</i>	c1475–1500	2	1
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	2	1
37	AM 159 4to	c1480–1500	0	0
38	AM 309 4to, <i>Bajarbók í Flóa</i>	1498	4	1
39	AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubæjarbók</i>	c1500	1	0
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	5	2
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	3	1
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500	3	1
43	AM 152 4to	c1500	4	2
44	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (1)	c1500	3	1
45	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500	3	0
46	AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500–1525	4	3
47	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500–1525	3	0
48	AM 529 4to	c1500–1550	4	2
49	AM 147 4to, <i>Heynesbók</i>	c1525–1550	4	3
50	Holm perg. 3 fol., <i>Reykjahlábók</i>	c1530–1540	5	2

In the second half of the corpus, scribes 26–50, innovativeness score increases considerably: there are fifteen scribes with three or more variables showing a value of $\geq 50\%$ out of twenty-five; that is, 60% of the total. Of these, eight scribes display three variables $\geq 50\%$, six of them display four $\geq 50\%$ and two display five variables $\geq 50\%$. Among these scribes in the second half, [37] AM 159 4to, c1480–1500, stands out by being the only scribe with no variables scoring $\geq 50\%$. Its overall conservative character is partly shared by two hands with only a single variable scoring $\geq 50\%$:

- [21] AM 151 4to (1), c1450.
- [39] AM 429 12mo, *Kirkjubæjarbók*, c1500.

In the work of these two, the single feature scoring $\geq 50\%$ is the orthographic manifestation of the diphthongisation of *e* before *ng*. This is also the feature with the highest score in the work of [37] AM 159 4to, c1480–1500, who shows no features scoring $\geq 50\%$. At the opposite side of the innovativeness spectrum, there are nine scribes with four or more features scoring $\geq 50\%$. These are all in the second half of the corpus, hands 26–50. Six have four values $\geq 50\%$:

- [34] AM 577 4to (4), c1450–1500.
- [38] AM 309 4to, *Bæjarbók í Flóa*, 1498.
- [43] AM 152 4to, c1500.
- [46] AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson, c1500–1525.
- [48] AM 529 4to, c1500–1550.
- [49] AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók*, c1525–1550.

Two scribes only have $\geq 90\%$ in three features, the highest rate of innovativeness of the corpus:

- [46] AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson, c1500–1525.
- [49] AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók*, c1525–1550.

Two scribes stand out as the most innovative:

- [40] AM 624 4to (3), c1500 (two of the features score exactly 50%).
- [50] Holm perg., 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, c1530–1540.

6.8.5. Discussion of outliers

In this section, the corpus will be divided into two groups, examining the outliers found in each of them. Outliers are hands that appear significantly different from those immediately surrounding them (their presumed contemporaries) in one or more aspects.

Group [1]–[25]: Within this early group, notable outliers include [6] Holm perg. 19 4to (45.2% *g*, 66.7% *eing*), which stands out for an early change of *k* > *g* in certain positions. [4] AM 219 fol. (c1370–1380), shows 0% for most features, excluding *é* > *je* with 63.7% of innovative instances. The first and possibly earliest hand [1] AM 66 fol., *Hulda* shows very high values in the *eng* > *eing* change (100%) and in the *é* > *je* (24.5%), which is significantly higher than its contemporaries, except for [4] AM 219 fol. (c1370–1380) which has 63.7% of *je* but 0% *eing*. [3] AM 351 fol., *Skálholtsbók eldri* is a rather conservative case, with 0% across the board except for *eng* > *eing*, which is present in 96.2% of the instances, illustrating the low correlation of this change with all others. [14] AM 561 4to (c1400) also stands out by having two variables above 50%. The middle of the period sees increasing adoption of innovations. [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna* (100% *eing*, 67.1% *je*, 21% *ki*) is notable for its widespread use of multiple features. [12] AM 231 I fol. and [13] AM 225 fol. (both dated to c1400) remain conservative cases, with very low rates of innovation. The three hands that show more innovations are either broadly dated or dated later than the half of the period. These are the first scribes with three variables exceeding 50%: [23] AM 432 12mo, (c1400–1500), [24] AM 430 12mo (c1400–1500) and [26] AM 243 a 4to, (c1450–1475). The middle of the fourteenth century appears to be a turning point in many respects.

Group [26]–[50]: The late group exhibits rapid expansion of innovations. [29] AM 586 4to (1) and [30] AM 586 4to (2) (100% *g*, 100% *eing*) represent considerable innovators. [46] AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson (100% *g*, 100% *eing*, 86.1% *je*) is another strong innovator, while AM 624 4to (3) stands out for reaching 100% in *j* adoption. [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók* (100% *g*, 98.3% *eing*, 96.5% *je*, 56% “*gj*”) is one of the most innovative manuscripts of the late period.

The next step of the analysis is to try to arrange these scribal hands from the most conservative to the most innovative according to the average of innovative on the total and compare it to the original list that has been used so far, based on the traditional dating. The resulting list can be found in *Table 6.14*.

Considering the data illustrated in this discussion, several considerations can be made. Temporal trends do not show any particular surprise. Namely, older scribes (pre-1400) are overwhelmingly found in the upper range of the list in *Table 6.14*, indicating a strong conservative tendency. The most conservative manuscript is [12] AM 231 I fol. (2.4%), dated to around 1400. Other highly conservative manuscripts, like [13] AM 225 fol. (3.81%) and [2] AM 230 fol. (9.46%), are from either the last quarter of the fourteenth century or early fifteenth century. Similarly, mid-fifteenth century manuscripts (~1450–1475) show mixed degrees of innovativeness, with some manuscripts still being conservative and others adopting features at different rates. The fifth most conservative hand, [22] AM 534 4to (c1400–1500) displaying an 8% rate, had been assigned the broad date c1400–1500, which is why it was placed in the middle of the list, but it is at this point more plausible that it likely belongs among the early manuscripts in the list. Equally, late fifteenth- to early sixteenth-century manuscripts (1475–1550) dominate the lower end of the list, showing the highest rates of linguistic innovation. The work of the most innovative scribes, [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók* [46] (67.4%) and AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson (65.53%), are respectively dated to c1530–1540 and to c1500–1525, aligning with the trend of increased linguistic innovation in the early sixteenth century.

Table 6.14: manuscripts rearranged according to the average degree of innovativeness (“%” column)

No.	Shelf mark	Date	%
1	[12] AM 231 I fol.	c1400	2.4%
2	[13] AM 225 fol.	c1400	3.8%
3	[9] GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387–1395	5.67%
4	[10] AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400	6.14%
5	[22] AM 534 4to	c1400–1500	8%
6	[2] AM 230 fol.	c1350–1400	9.4%
7	[4] AM 219 fol.	c1370–1380	10.5%
8	[7] AM 194 8vo	1387	11.7%
9	[3] AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360–1400	13.7%
10	[16] AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420	14.48%
11	[37] AM 159 4to	c1480–1500	14.9%
12	[15] AM 557 4to (1)	c1404–1420	16.8%
13	[6] Holm perg. 19 4to	c1375–1400	17.46%
14	[39] AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubæjarbók</i>	c1500	18.3%
15	[8] GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387–1395	18.6%
16	[21] AM 151 4to (1)	c1450	19.8%
17	[1] AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350–1375	21.2%
18	[5] Holm perg. 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375–1400	22.1%
19	[25] AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475	23.1%
20	[18] AM 489 II 4to	c1450	23.18%
21	[11] GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400	23.6%
22	[14] AM 561 4to	c1400	24.78%
23	[35] AM 556 a 4to, <i>Eggertsbók</i>	c1475–1500	29.77%
24	[36] AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	33%
25	[31] AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	33%
26	[29] AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	33%
27	[19] GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	33.2%
28	[20] GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	33.6%
29	[17] GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400–1450	33.9%
30	[47] AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500–1525	34%
31	[42] AM 435 12mo	c1500	34.2%
32	[28] Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500	35.8%
33	[33] AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	36%
34	[26] AM 343 a 4to	c1450–1475	36.9%
35	[44] AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (1)	c1500	38.6%
36	[32] AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500	40%
37	[38] AM 309 4to, <i>Bæjarbók í Flóa</i>	1498	41.8%
38	[45] AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500	41.97%
39	[41] AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	42.8%
40	[27] AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450–1500	43%
41	[24] AM 430 12mo	c1400–1500	43.1%
42	[34] AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	47.47%
43	[23] AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	47.78%
44	[43] AM 152 4to	c1500	50%
45	[40] AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	52.2%
46	[48] AM 529 4to	c1500–1550	55%
47	[30] AM 586 4to (2)	c1450–1500	57%
48	[49] AM 147 4to, <i>Heynesbók</i>	c1525–1550	59.8%
49	[46] AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500–1525	65.5%
50	[50] Holm perg. 3 fol., <i>Reykjahólabók</i>	c1530–1540	67.4%

The other scribes in that period are in a very similar range:

- 47 [48] AM 529 4to, c1500–1550: 55%.
- 48 [49] AM 147 4to, *Heynesbók*, c1525–1550: 59.8%.

It is worth noting that FIVE scribal hands from the second half of the corpus end up among the 25 least innovative scribes:

- 11 [37] AM 159 4to c1480–1500: 14.9%.
- 14 [39] AM 429 12mo, *Kirkjubæjarbók*, c1500: 18.3%.
- 23 [35] AM 556 a 4to, *Eggertsbók*, c1475–1500: 29.77%.
- 24 [36] AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to, 1479: 33%.
- 25 [31] AM 533 4to (1), c1450–1500: 33%.

Similarly, three scribal hands from the first half of the corpus are among the 25 most innovative scribes:

- 29 [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna*, c1400–1450: 33.9%.
- 41 [24] AM 430 12mo, c1400–1500: 43.1%.
- 43 [23] AM 432 12mo, c1400–1500: 47.78%.

However, it remains difficult to determine whether the rapidity or slowness with which an orthographic innovation spreads accurately reflects the pace of the underlying linguistic change, for the relationship between the two is far from transparent and univocal. Indeed, some late fourteenth-century manuscripts show early innovation, such as [1] AM 66 fol., *Hulda* (21.21%), but they are outliers. By the mid-fifteenth century, manuscripts exhibit more variation in their innovativeness, indicating a transitional period. Shortly after the middle of the period, the average rate of linguistic innovation sharply increases, with many manuscripts exceeding 40% innovativeness. Examples of this are [48] AM 529 4to (55%), [49] AM 147 4to *Heynesbók* (59.8%), and [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók* (60.30%) which are all from c1500 or later, indicating increasing acceptance of innovations.

Judging from the trends so far observed, a stark contrast clearly exists between the first and the second half of the period, with a transitional middle period characterised by a more gradual increase of innovative features. If we zoom out and look at the

progression through the period, we can notice, for example, that in the earliest manuscripts of the corpus (i.e. those dated from before or just around 1400), relatively few innovations can be detected, but the situation changes dramatically as the century progresses, with most changes catching pace in the second half of the fifteenth century and spreading considerably around 1500. The most significant exception is palatalisation.

It may be tried to divide the period differently than has been done so far (that is, into two halves, down the middle of the fifteenth century), thus separating the middle, transitional period (see *Table 6.15*). Keeping in mind the works of the scribes are in some cases very broadly dated, we can isolate these three groups:

1. c1350–1400 (hands [1]–[14]): this group of hands generally displays few of the linguistic innovations studied; around a third of the scribes (5 out of 14) remain below 15% innovativeness. Surprisingly, [4] AM 219 fol. appears very conservative across the board but exhibits a striking 63.7% of $\acute{e} > je$ and a still noticeable 10% of $g > gi$, which is more than all those from around the same period except for [1] AM 66 fol. *Hulda*. Excluding $eng > eing$, which is already quite frequent at the start of the period, the following manuscripts start displaying a more innovative character in the $k > g$ change and very rare and sporadic instances of some or all the other changes.
 - [5] Holm perg. 16 4to, *Helgastaðabók* c1375–1400: 14.7% $k > g$; 22.1% total.
 - [6] Holm perg. 19 4to (c1375–1400): 8% $k > g$; 14.7% total.
 - [7] AM 194 8vo (1387): 45.2% $k > g$; 10.5 total
 - [8] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* (1), Jón Þórðarson, (c1387–1395): 36.3% $k > g$; 11.7% total.
2. c1400–1475 (hands [15]–[34]): these hands roughly belong to a *transition period*, where some scribes still adhere to older forms, while others start incorporating new linguistic features. The variation in percentages suggests regional or individual scribal preferences rather than a uniform shift.
3. c1475–1550 (hands [35]–[50]): these hands roughly belong period of *accelerated linguistic change*, with the majority of manuscripts adopting many of the innovative features analysed.

Table 6.15: Average values in three different sections of the corpus

<i>Scribes</i>	<i>Approximate period</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>eing</i>	<i>je</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>ur</i>	<i>ki</i>	<i>gi</i>
[1]–[14]	1375–1400	9.7%	59.7%	13%	0.3%	4%	4%	4.8%
[15]–[34]	1400–1475	41.5%	89.8%	44%	11.7%	32.1%	46%	7.7%
[35]–[50]	1475–1550	51.2%	84.6%	52.6%	37.4%	57.1%	8.4%	6.4%

These three periods are not intended as groupings of specific hands from the corpus (it would be too tentative, with so many manuscripts being dated to periods that could extend in either of these time frames) but rather to illustrate the general progression of innovations through time. In other words, at a general level and on average, we can observe an early period of little change, a longer middle period of rapid spread of change and a final period of establishment of (most) changes. This is the result of the cumulative analysis of all hands.

Though this is by no means univocal, there is a general correlation between innovation and age: younger manuscripts (post-1475) show an overall high degree of linguistic innovation. However, not all manuscripts fit neatly in a strict chronological progression—some later manuscripts, such as [42] AM 435 12mo (c1500) (34.24%), exhibit more conservative tendencies, perhaps due to scribal tradition or influence from the exemplar. This data suggests that while time is an undisputably crucial factor, the spread of linguistic change was far from uniform, and factors such as scribal training, textual genre, and regional preferences may have played a role in determining the rate of adoption of innovative features.

If we compare the list based on the tentative dating of these texts (*Table 6.11*) with the list ordered according to the degree of innovation (*Table 6.14*), we can immediately notice how some scribes are in a position that is not too far from the date assigned to them with a traditional dating, while others are considerably far removed. While there is a general trend by which older manuscripts appear lower in innovativeness, this is not at all linear. Innovativeness can be much more pronounced in a limited subset of features, bringing the average degree of innovativeness up by several percentage points.

Some older manuscripts can be observed to adopt innovations early, while some later manuscripts remain conservative. For example, [1] AM 66 fol., *Hulda* (c1350–1375) ranks higher in innovativeness (21.2%) and is the position 17, further down than

many (presumably) later manuscripts, while [14] AM 561 4to (c1400) is position 22 and shows 24.78% innovativeness, which is higher than some manuscripts from the mid-fifteenth century. Some manuscripts dated as late as 1500 have low innovativeness compared to their late dating, e.g., [42] AM 435 12mo (34.2%) in position 31. To be sure, [23] AM 432 12mo (c1400–1500) is 21 positions below (at 43), while [24] AM 430 12mo is 10 positions below (at 41), but these are texts that had not been studied adequately for the purpose of dating and were placed in the middle of the list as a precautionary measure. On the other hand, [17] GKS 1010 fol., *Hrokkinskinna* is at position 29 and [39] AM 429 12mo, *Kirkjubæjarbók* at 14.

These examples underscore both a paradox and the inherent limitations of a method that relies exclusively on mathematical averages. Although the computational model employed here may seem scarcely more precise than the trained eye of the scholar, the evidence at hand is insufficient to support any definitive conclusions. Numerous potentially significant factors for the dating of manuscripts remain beyond the scope of this study, and the incorporation of such variables might well reshape the overall picture. What does emerge clearly, however, is that not all tokens carry the same evidential weight when assessing the age of a document, and that quantitative data, when considered in isolation, can at times yield contradictory results. For this reason, expert interpretation remains indispensable, as the data alone does not present an unequivocal picture.

It is interesting to group together manuscripts which display similar averages. *Table 6.16* represent manuscripts with similar rates of average degree of innovativeness. Most of them are dated to a similar period. The average, as was stressed, hides the different weight of innovations that are known to appear later than others. *Table 6.16* illustrates these similarities.

Table 6.16: manuscripts with similar degree of innovativeness.

	Shelf mark	Date	Percentage
[9]	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387–1395	5.67%
[10]	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók</i> yngri	c1400	6.14%
[16]	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420	14.48%
[37]	AM 159 4to	c1480–1500	14.9%
[39]	AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubæjarsbók</i>	c1500	18.3%
[8]	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387–1395	18.6%
[24]	AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475	23.1%
[18]	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	23.18%
[11]	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400	23.6%
[29]	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	33%
[31]	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	33%
[36]	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	33%
[19]	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	33.2%
[20]	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	33.6%
[17]	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400–1450	33.9%
[47]	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500–1525	34%
[42]	AM 435 12mo	c1500	34.2%
[28]	Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500	35.8%
[33]	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	36%
[38]	AM 309 4to, <i>Bæjarbók í Flóa</i>	1498	41.8%
[45]	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500	41.97%
[41]	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	42.8%
[27]	AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450–1500	43%
[24]	AM 430 12mo	c1400–1500	43.1%
[34]	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	47.47%
[23]	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	47.78%

It should suffice to show how the three manuscripts which show the same average throughout the features analysed (33%), are radically different within themselves and their similar score is due to mere chance, rather than correlation (*Table 6.17*).

Table 6.17: Comparison of three hands showing the same average degree of innovativeness.

No.	Shelf mark	Date	<i>g</i>	<i>eing</i>	<i>je</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>ur</i>	<i>ki</i>	<i>gi</i>
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	100%	100%	0%	0%	2.2%	8%	22%
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	0%	97.2%	34.1%	10.3%	89.6%	0%	1%
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	78.9%	100%	35.9%	0%	16.9%	0%	0%

It must be borne in mind that these similarities are still the results of a much more random distribution of innovativeness across multiple aspects of the language, so they do not tell us much. Each scribe displays an almost unique combination of conservative or innovative features. What factors may be behind the pronounced inter-scribal variations, be the text type, scribal tradition, or intended audience, is very hard to determine, particularly given how little or no correlation between hands could be found, and it is unlikely that they all originated in different scriptoria. This may suggest that each scribe operated under such a mix of different influences that it would be impossible to use quantitative measuring of innovative orthographies to identify scribal schools, and perhaps even individuals themselves, given how the influencing factors (exemplars, local habits in a given scriptorium, fashion, etc., may change through time and space).

The implication of this is that the mere statistical results of an analysis like the one detailed here, based on mathematical averages of innovativeness, cannot be reliably used to refine the dating of manuscripts beyond what scholars with traditional methods have done. This limitation arises from a fundamental principle long recognised by philologists: the presence of a rare innovation, maybe occurring only once, carries more weight than multiple conservative features when evaluating the age of a text and it is difficult to translate this “weight” univocally into mathematical data.

This analysis has shown that the distribution of innovative features is highly linked to the individual rather than occurring in any kind of uniform chronological progression. This means that a scribe who is highly innovative in one specific feature—let us say a feature that appears slightly earlier in the period in question—while remaining conservative in all others spreading slightly later, may still yield a higher overall innovativeness score than a scribe who displays moderate but widespread innovation across multiple features, including those known to appear later.

The latter case, however, would be a stronger indicator of textual recency. Not to mention the fact that some changes affect a larger number of words than other, therefore

yielding a larger mass of data. Thus, averaging all features equally may lead to misleading results when assessing the historical development of linguistic change, as it does not properly account for the asymmetry in the historical significance of different innovations. Much more complex models would be needed to account for the different age and diffusion of a given feature in a dataset. Even so, the weight of an innovation in the assessment of recency for a text changes through time (an early isolated occurrence of a change is much more significant than a later widespread occurrence of it). The evaluation of multiple factors and the attribution of different weight to each of them is an inevitable part of the dating process.

As this study has shown, innovativeness does not always correlate univocally with the dating; however, there is still a clear correlation between later manuscripts and a higher rate of linguistic innovation. To be sure, scribal conservatism persists even into the sixteenth century, likely due to genre, education, or institutional influences, but the mid-fifteenth century marks a transitional period, after which linguistic change becomes more widespread and accelerated. Manuscripts from c1475 onward dominate the lower end of the innovativeness list. This picture aligns with a period of rapid linguistic change, potentially influenced by external (social and political) factors. In short, the results of this analysis are as follows:

1. There is great inter-scribal variation in this corpus.
2. The average value of innovativeness across all variables often fails to accurately reflect the difference between the scribes.
3. A relatively young scribe can exhibit some archaic features while earlier scribes can occasionally display innovative characteristics in one or more features without there being an identifiable correlation across either features or scribal hands.

Concerning the last point, even if a relatively younger scribe shows some archaic features, he is rarely consistently archaic, and typically the archaic features are accompanied by some innovative ones. For instance, [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, c1530–1540, has low values for *u*-epenthesis, but the other variables are high. It is as if the scribe went to particular lengths to maintain etymological spellings, compared to other hands from the same period, while he did not seem to search for archaic character in other situations.

The individual idiosyncrasies are hard to explain with a systematic and overgeneralising model, as they seem to be highly dependent on the individual and to influence on him or her that are difficult or impossible to trace.

7. Script and orthography

7.1 Introduction

The study of scribal practice in late medieval Icelandic manuscript culture presents a complex interplay between individual creativity, innovative forces and broader traditional influences. Rather than constituting a phase of “stagnation”, as it has sometimes been characterised, the “long” fifteenth century emerges as a period of considerable transformation in scribal practice, during which both orthographic and palaeographic developments followed the trajectories documented in the preceding chapters.

Within this altered social framework, it is reasonable to suppose that such developments would have had tangible repercussions for scribal practice. With the emergence of an increasingly literate lay population, the uniforming influence traditionally exerted by scriptorial institutions and their traditions may have been correspondingly weakened. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the increasing assimilation of features traditionally associated with documentary writing into book hands can plausibly be interpreted as a consequence of changing social conditions, in particular the expansion of lay literacy. As non-clerical readers and writers were likely to have had greater exposure to everyday cursive scripts than to the more deliberately executed styles of formal book production, their habits may have exerted a shaping influence on the development of manuscript writing practices.

The findings of the present study show how Icelandic scribes during the period under examination exhibited a considerable degree of individual variation. No clusters of scribes indicating demarcated scribal milieus stand out in the corpus, but the individual variation emerging from the data appears to be so pronounced that it effectively challenges the possibility of identifying scribal schools or traditions, at least when assessed solely through linguistic or handwriting-based criteria. This chapter will better make the case for this conclusion by bringing together the conclusions drawn from the palaeographic study described in Chapter 5 and the study of linguistic changes as evidenced by orthographic changes in Chapter 6.

7.2 Overview of the data

Chapter 5 is dedicated to the evolution of three letterforms—“a”, “s”, and “r” rotunda—in a corpus of fifteenth-century Icelandic manuscripts. The evolution of the first two features is micropalaeographic in character, insofar as it pertains to changes in letterform. By contrast, the development of the last one is macropalaeographic, involving shifts in distribution rather than in the shapes themselves. The findings highlight distinct trajectories for each letterform, demonstrating that script evolution was neither linear nor uniform but rather influenced by multiple overlapping factors, including scribal training, stylistic preferences, and practical considerations.

1. The letter “a” exhibited the greatest level of stability: The overwhelming majority of the scribes examined used the two-compartment “a” (the “a₂”) exclusively while only a few used the single-compartment “a” (“a₃”). Moreover, the scribes using the single-compartment “a” were not confined to the second half of the corpus but were scattered from around 1400 onward. The evidence collected suggests that the two-compartment “a” constituted the dominant form in book script. This distribution appears to reflect a matter of register rather than chronology alone. For a certain period, scribes seem to have regarded the two-compartment “a₂” as the appropriate variant for book production. At a later stage, however, this distinction weakened, and the single-compartment “a” was increasingly adopted in book script as well. The present study identifies several scribes who exemplify this transition. These are not confined to the youngest members of the corpus but are distributed more widely across the period beginning around 1400.
2. In contrast, the tall “s” experienced a relatively swift transition. Before 1400, the predominant form was “s₁”, which stood on the baseline. However, after this point, the tall “s” with a descender (“s₂”) became the dominant form, with very few exceptions. This transition appears to be linked to the increasing adoption of cursive elements in Gothic script, which favoured more fluid and less labour-intensive strokes. The few outliers who retained the older form—such as [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*—appear to have done so as part of a conscious

effort to maintain a more traditional and formal style or perhaps as an imitation of the script in earlier books (see, for example, the discussion in Chapter 5.4).

3. The evolution of the “r” rotunda followed a more gradual trajectory. Initially used after round letters such as “o”, its application expanded progressively to other environments through the fifteenth century, particularly after 1450. By this time, many scribes employed the “r” rotunda in multiple environments, always beyond its original domain. However, its adoption varied significantly among individual scribes, showing a non-uniform pattern of script development. Notably, some scribes retained the straight “r” in contexts where others had fully transitioned to the “r” rotunda, indicating that individual preferences or localised traditions played a role in its distribution. An interesting example regards the distribution of “r” rotunda after “p”, which is rather varied and personalised, which is revealing as the “p” was not present in Latin models (as discussed in Chapter 5.4) and different scribes adopted different solutions.

A broader chronological analysis revealed key turning points in script development. As manifest in the work of scribes [1]–[10], working before 1400, conservative forms dominated, with the most notable innovation being the increasing use of “s₂.” Between 1400 and 1450, the “r” rotunda spread gradually, while “s₂” solidified as the standard form. After 1450, the adoption of the “r” rotunda after more and more letters accelerated, with an increasing number of scribes embracing it alongside the already established “s₂”.

One of the most striking conclusions from this study is the lack of a strong correlation between the adoption of one innovative letterform and another. A scribe who embraced “s₂” did not necessarily adopt the “r” rotunda in many environments, and vice versa. This finding undermines the notion of a strictly “innovative” or “conservative” scribe and instead suggests that letterform choices were influenced by a complex set of factors, likely including training, readability, and manuscript function. This, in principle, could result in a group of scribes with broadly similar choices, but that is not what this analysis has found.

The study revealed that changes in the script were not uniform across all manuscripts, suggesting that individual scribes played a crucial role in either preserving

conservative traits or advancing innovations. The rigid distribution of the two-compartment “a” (“a₂”) across a majority of scribal hands underlines the persistence of formal traditions, while the sporadic yet significant adoption of the single-compartment “a₃” suggests an evolving script influenced by documentary writing practices.

Chapter 6 explores the development of selected linguistic changes during the “long” fifteenth century, focusing on the interplay between conservative and innovative orthographic trends in terms of the selected phonological changes. The findings demonstrate that the orthographic manifestation of the phonological changes was neither uniform nor linear, but rather developed at different rates, often overlapping or occurring independently. The results can be summarised as follows:

1. Orthographic signs of the fricativisation of unstressed word-final *k* emerged as an early but slow-moving change, appearing sporadically before becoming more widespread by the end of the period studied and more prominent in the second half of the corpus (scribes [25]–[50]), but there is considerable inter-scribal variation also in the second half of the corpus and still some scribes with very few signs of this change.
2. The orthographic manifestation of diphthongisation of *e* before *ng/nk* followed a distinct trajectory, becoming dominant in some hands already at the beginning of the period under study, while showing significant inter-scribal variation throughout the corpus. This change thus appears quite advanced already at the beginning of the period under study.
3. The orthographic manifestation of diphthongisation of *é* shows a more pronounced shift, with a clear increase in frequency during the second half of the period examined.
4. The orthographic manifestation of the evolution of fricative *g* after a vowel or a diphthong and before *i/j* shows an increment towards the very end of the period, around 1500, though the data available are rather limited.
5. The orthographic signs of *u*-epenthesis exhibit great variation, appearing intermittently across different scribes before becoming more widespread. Much like the orthographic manifestation of the fricativisation of word-final *k*, signs of *u*-

epenthesis are considerably more prominent in the second half of the corpus, but there is still marked inter-scribal variation.

6. Similarly, the orthographic manifestation of palatalisation of the stops *k* and *g* before front vowels, though the data collected is quite limited, shows a late but notable presence. It appears first before *æ* and makes an appearance before *e*, albeit very infrequently, towards the end of the period studied.

Table 7.1 presents a combined overview of both the features of script and orthography examined. For the use of “r” rotunda, the percentages indicate the number of environments where it appears as proportion of the twenty environments examined. For ease of comparison, *Tables 7.2* and *7.3* present the average innovation rate across features for each scribe. The first table rearranges the scribes from the least to the most innovative in orthography, while the second lists them from the least to the most innovative in palaeography.

Legend for table 7.1:

0.1–25%	26–50%	51–75%	76–99%	100%
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Table 7.1: Innovativeness rate across features

No.	Shelf mark	Date	“a ₃ ”	“s ₂ ”	“t”	g	eing	je	j	ur	ki	gi
1	AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350–1375	0%	100%	15%	0%	100%	24.5%	0%	0%	4%	20%
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350–1400	0%	0%	10%	0%	50%	0%	4.8%	1.4%	8%	2%
3	AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360–1400	0%	0%	30%	0%	96.2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370–1380	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	63.7%	0%	0%	0%	10%
5	Holm perg. 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375–1400	0%	0%	40%	14.7%	100%	6.7%	0%	1.4%	26%	6%
6	Holm perg. 19 4to	c1375–1400	0%	0%	35%	45.2%	66.7%	0.9%	0%	9.4%	0%	0%
7	AM 194 8vo	1387	0%	100%	65%	7.1%	68.2%	1.6%	0%	0%	2%	3%
8	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387–1395	0%	0%	30%	36.3%	92.9%	0.4%	0%	0.8%	0%	0%
9	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387–1395	0%	0%	20%	0%	39.6%	0%	0%	0.1%	0%	0%
10	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400	50%	0%	30%	15.8%	22.6%	0%	0%	0.6%	0%	4%
11	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400	0%	0%	35%	0%	100%	28.8%	0%	33.6%	0%	3%
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400	0%	0%	40%	0.3%	0%	0%	0%	4.5%	11%	1%
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400	100%	100%	30%	0%	0%	3.1%	0%	0.6%	5%	18%
14	AM 561 4to	c1400	0%	67%	35%	16.7%	100%	52.6%	0%	4.2%	0%	0%
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404–1420	0%	100%	55%	3.9%	95%	0%	3.8%	15.2%	0%	0%
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404–1420	0%	100%	50%	0%	81.1%	13.6%	0%	6.7%	0%	0%
17	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400–1450	0%	100%	20%	11.5%	100%	67.1%	0%	9%	21%	29%
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	0%	100%	15%	26.6%	100%	22.4%	0%	13.3%	0%	0%
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	0%	100%	30%	29.9%	88.2%	41.8%	33.3%	39.4%	0%	0%
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	0%	68%	40%	77.2%	100%	14.6%	7.7%	35.9%	0%	0%
21	AM 151 4to	c1450–1475	0%	15%	45%	0%	94.6%	1.5%	0%	7.5%	0%	35%
22	AM 534 4to	c1400–1500	97%	53%	50%	13.9%	33.3%	0%	0%	5%	0%	4%
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	0%	0%	75%	89.4%	94.7%	92.8%	12.5%	45.1%	0%	0%
24	AM 430 12mo	c1400–1500	0%	100%	80%	23.7%	100%	85.8%	15%	77.4%	0%	0%
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450–1475	100%	100%	95%	1.2%	97.7%	41.3%	0%	15.8%	0%	6%
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450–1475	0%	100%	70%	36.9%	71%	83%	16.7%	51.2%	0%	0%
27	AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450–1500	0%	100%	95%	98.8%	82%	66.1%	42.4%	9.8%	0%	3%
28	Holm perg. 1 4to	c1450–1500	0%	6%	15%	0.3%	100%	69.4%	41.3%	39.8%	0%	0%
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450–1500	100%	100%	5%	100%	100%	0%	0%	2.2%	8%	22%
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450–1500	95%	100%	40%	100%	100%	71.9%	33.3%	48.1%	20%	27%
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450–1500	100%	100%	50%	0%	97.2%	34.1%	10.3%	89.6%	0%	1%
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500	0%	100%	45%	97.6%	94.4%	9.8%	10.5%	39.3%	9%	21%
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	0%	100%	85%	47.2%	72.7%	83.3%	6.3%	38.7%	0%	6%
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	0%	100%	25%	72%	93.3%	80.6%	0%	53.4%	33%	0%
35	AM 556 a 4to, <i>Eggertsbók</i>	c1475–1500	0%	100%	95%	3.4%	90.1%	20.7%	11.4%	82.8%	0%	0%
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	82%	100%	65%	78.9%	100%	35.9%	0%	16.9%	0%	0%
37	AM 159 4to	c1480–1500	0%	100%	55%	20.7%	32.2%	4.8%	0%	47%	0%	0%
38	AM 309 4to, <i>Bejarbók í Flóa</i>	1498	0%	100%	80%	94.2%	64.1%	62.9%	55.8%	15.8%	0%	0%
39	AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubæjarbók</i>	c1500	0%	100%	35%	13.9%	78.4%	2.2%	19.4%	12.5%	0%	2%
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	0%	100%	80%	50%	100%	50%	100%	65.8%	0%	0%
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	0%	100%	70%	98.1%	80%	77.1%	0%	41.8%	3%	0%
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500	0%	100%	95%	15%	100%	53.3%	3%	64.4%	0%	4%
43	AM 152 4to	c1500	0%	41%	5%	22.2%	100%	55.3%	80%	92.9%	0%	0%
44	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (1)	c1500	100%	100%	85%	30.8%	100%	52.3%	5.3%	82.3%	0%	0%
45	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500	0%	100%	95%	54.5%	88.2%	43.8%	37.5%	69.8%	0%	0%
46	AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500–1525	0%	100%	75%	100%	100%	86.1%	90.9%	44.7%	17%	20%
47	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500–1525	0%	67%	90%	61.9%	40%	74.4%	0%	54.7%	6%	2%
48	AM 529 4to	c1500–1550	0%	100%	85%	16.7%	81.8%	96.7%	92.3%	86.3%	14%	0%
49	AM 147 4to, <i>Heynesbók</i>	c1525–1550	0%	100%	85%	59.1%	100%	29%	25%	96.3%	91%	10%
50	Holm perg. 3 fol., <i>Reykjahólabók</i>	c1530–1540	0%	0%	55%	100%	98.3%	96.5%	77.1%	40.2%	4%	56%

Table 7.2: scribes ranked by increasing innovation rate in orthography.

No	Shelf mark	Date	Orthography	%	Script	%
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400	1	2.4	10	13.3
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400	2	3.8	45	76.7
9	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (2), Magnús	c1387-1395	3	5.7	3	6.7
10	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400	4	6	15	26.7
22	AM 534 4to	c1400-1500	5	8	43	66.7
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350-1400	1	9.5	1	3.3
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370-1380	7	10.5	2	6.7
7	AM 194 8vo	1387	8	11.7	29	55
3	AM 351 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók eldri</i>	c1360-1400	9	13.7	5	10
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404-1420	10	14.5	25	50
37	AM 159 4to	c1480-1500	11	15	26	51.7
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404-1420	12	16.8	27	51.7
6	Holm perg, 19 4to	c1375-1400	13	17.5	7	11.7
39	AM 429 12mo, <i>Kirkjubæjarbók</i>	c1500	14	18.3	23	45
8	GKS 1005 fol., <i>Flateyjarbók</i> (1), Jón	c1387-1395	15	18.6	6	10
21	AM 151 4to (1)	c1450	16	19.8	13	20
1	AM 66 fol., <i>Hulda</i>	c1350-1375	17	21.2	18	38.3
5	Holm perg, 16 4to, <i>Helgastaðabók</i>	c1375-1400	18	22	9	13.3
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450-1475	19	23.1	50	98.3
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	20	23.2	19	38.3
11	GKS 1008 fol., <i>Tómasskinna</i> (1)	c1400	21	23.6	8	11.7
14	AM 561 4to	c1400	22	24.8	16	34
35	AM 556 a 4to, <i>Eggertsbók</i>	c1475-1500	23	29.8	40	65
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	24	33.1	47	82.3
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450-1500	25	33.2	44	68.3
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450-1500	26	33.2	48	83.3
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	27	33.2	22	43.3
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	28	33.6	17	36
17	GKS 1010 fol., <i>Hrokkinskinna</i>	c1400-1450	29	33.9	20	40
47	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500-1525	30	34	28	52.3
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500	31	34.2	41	65
28	Holm perg, 1 4to	c1450-1500	32	35.8	4	7
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450-1500	33	36.3	36	61.7
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450-1475	34	37	31	56.7
44	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (1)	c1500	35	38.7	49	95
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450-1500	36	40.2	24	48.3
38	AM 309 4to, <i>Bæjarbók í Flóa</i>	1498	37	41.8	34	60
45	AM 434 a 12mo, <i>Lækningakver</i> (2)	c1500	38	42	42	65
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	39	42.9	30	56.7
24	AM 430 12mo	c1450-1500	40	43.1	33	60
27	AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450-1500	41	43.2	39	65
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450-1500	42	47.5	21	41.7
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400-1500	43	47.8	14	25
43	AM 152 4to	c1500	44	50	11	15.3
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	45	52.3	35	60
48	AM 529 4to	c1500-1550	46	55.4	37	61.7
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450-1500	47	57.2	46	78.3
49	AM 147 4to <i>Heynesbók</i>	c1525-1550	48	58.6	38	61.7
46	AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500-1525	49	65.5	32	58.3
50	Holm perg, 3 fol., <i>Reykjahólabók</i>	c1530-1540	50	67.4	12	18.3

Table 7.3: scribes ranked by increasing innovation rate in script.

No.	Shelfmark	Date	Orthography	%	Script	%
2	AM 230 fol.	c1350-1400	6	9.5	1	3.3
4	AM 219 fol.	c1370-1380	7	10.5	2	6.7
9	GKS 1005 fol., Flateyjarbók (2), Magnús	c1387-1395	3	5.7	3	6.7
28	Holm perg, 1 4to	c1450-1500	32	35.8	4	7
3	AM 351 fol., Skálholtsbók eldri	c1360-1400	9	13.7	5	10
8	GKS 1005 fol., Flateyjarbók (1), Jón	c1387-1395	15	18.6	6	10
6	Holm perg, 19 4to	c1375-1400	13	17.5	7	11.7
11	GKS 1008 fol., Tómasskinna (1)	c1400	21	23.6	8	11.7
5	Holm perg, 16 4to, Helgastaðabók	c1375-1400	18	22.1	9	13.3
12	AM 231 I fol.	c1400	1	2.4	10	13.3
43	AM 152 4to	c1500	44	50.1	11	15.3
50	Holm perg, 3 fol., Reykjahólabók	c1530-1540	50	67.4	12	18.3
21	AM 151 4to (1)	c1450	16	19.8	13	20
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400-1500	43	47.8	14	25
10	AM 354 fol., Skálholtsbók yngri	c1400	4	6.1	15	26.7
14	AM 561 4to	c1400	22	24.8	16	34
20	GKS 2845 4to (2)	c1450	28	33.6	17	36
1	AM 66 fol., Hulda	c1350-1375	17	21.2	18	38.3
18	AM 489 II 4to	c1450	20	23.2	19	38.3
17	GKS 1010 fol., Hrokkinskinna	c1400-1450	29	33.9	20	40
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450-1500	42	47.5	21	41.7
19	GKS 2845 4to (1)	c1450	27	33.2	22	43.3
39	AM 429 12mo, Kirkjubæjarbók	c1500	14	18.3	23	45
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450-1500	36	40.2	24	48.3
16	AM 557 4to (2)	c1404-1420	10	14.5	25	50
15	AM 557 4to (1)	c1404-1420	12	16.8	27	51.7
37	AM 159 4to	c1480-1500	11	15	26	51.7
47	AM 152 fol. (2), Jón Þorgilsson	c1500-1525	30	34.1	28	52.3
7	AM 194 8vo	1387	8	11.7	29	55
41	AM 624 4to (5)	c1500	39	42.9	30	56.7
26	AM 343 a 4to	c1450-1475	34	37	31	56.7
46	AM 152 fol. (1), Þorsteinn Þorleifsson	c1500-1525	49	65.5	32	58.3
24	AM 430 12mo	c1450-1500	40	43.1	33	60
38	AM 309 4to, Bæjarbók í Flóa	1498	37	41.8	34	60
40	AM 624 4to (3)	c1500	45	52.3	35	60
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450-1500	33	36.3	36	61.7
48	AM 529 4to	c1500-1550	46	55.4	37	61.7
49	AM 147 4to Heynesbók	c1525-1550	48	58.6	38	61.7
27	AM 471 4to + 489 I 4to	c1450-1500	41	43.2	39	65
35	AM 556 a 4to, Eggertsbók	c1475-1500	23	29.8	40	65
42	AM 435 12mo	c1500	31	34.2	41	65
45	AM 434 a 12mo, Lækningakver (2)	c1500	38	42	42	65
22	AM 534 4to	c1400-1500	5	8	43	66.7
29	AM 586 4to (1)	c1450-1500	25	33.2	44	68.3
13	AM 225 fol.	c1400	2	3.8	45	76.7
30	AM 586 4to (2)	c1450-1500	47	57.2	46	78.3
36	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	24	33.1	47	82.3
31	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450-1500	26	33.2	48	83.3
44	AM 434 a 12mo, Lækningakver (1)	c1500	35	38.7	49	95
25	AM 243 a fol.	c1450-1475	19	23.1	50	98.3

7.3 Innovative and conservative scribes

The main objective of the analysis within this chapter is to contrast the two types of changes under examination, script and orthography. In other words, scribal hands that present a more conservative or innovative character compared to their contemporaries.

Looking at that comparison, one can see that a number of scribes analysed are particularly innovative in the scribal features having $\geq 50\%$ in all three categories, but they are far from innovative in the orthographic features. *Table 7.4* is a list of these scribes where the average score of innovativeness in orthography contrasted markedly with that of script.

Table 7.4: conservative in the orthography but innovative in script

No.	Shelf mark	Date	Orthography avg. score	Script avg. score
[7]	AM 194 8vo	1387	11.7%	55%
[13]	AM 225 fol.	c1400	3.8%	76.7%
[22]	AM 534 4to	c1400-1500	8%	66.7%
[25]	AM 243 a fol.	c1450-1475	23.1%	98.3%
[31]	AM 533 4to (1)	c1450-1500	33.2%	83.3%
[36]	AM 687 a 4to + AM 688 c 4to	1479	33.1%	82.3%
[44]	AM 434 a 12mo, Lækningakver (1)	c1500	38.7%	95%

Some of the scribes who are least innovative in orthography have adopted the new “a₃” in their script, which may suggest influence from documentary script, though neither of these texts are documentary in nature, indicating that the spread of this letterform was likely not context bound. *Table 7.5* lists these scribes:

Table 7.5: Contrasting innovation in orthography and script.

No.	Shelf mark	Date	Orthography avg. score	Script avg. score
[10]	AM 354 fol., <i>Skálholtsbók yngri</i>	c1400	6.1%	26.7%
[13]	AM 225 fol.	c1400	3.8%	76.7%
[22]	AM 534 4to	c1400-1500	8%	66.7%

Conversely, some of the most innovative scribes in orthography, are among the least innovative in the script, as shown in *Table 7.6*.

Table 7.6: innovative in the orthography but conservative in the script.

No.	Shelfmark	Date	Orthography avg. score	Script avg. score
[43]	AM 152 4to	c1500	50.1%	15.3%
[50]	Holm perg, 3 fol., <i>Reykjahólabók</i>	c1530–1540	67.4%	18.3%

[50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók* stands out for its grand design, large format, and two-column *mise en page*. It is plausible that GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók* may have served as a model or source of inspiration for it, particularly given that both manuscripts were at one point owned by the same family (see discussion in Chapter 4). This use of earlier books as exemplars in matters of layout and design may help explain the contrast between the manuscript’s relatively conservative palaeography and its more innovative orthography. The cultural and intellectual milieu associated with Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók* (see Chapter 4) thus offers a coherent context for this combination of conservative script and progressive spelling practices, illustrating how script and orthography can be shaped by distinct principles. By contrast, [43] AM 152 4to does not share these codicological characteristics, and in the absence of clear evidence concerning its production or scribal context, no comparable inference can be drawn for that manuscript.

In other cases, however, similarly to what was evidenced in Chapter 6.8, this comparison does not show any cluster of scribes evidencing comparable rates of innovation, nor any particular correlation between them based on the quantitative data. This is not surprising given the finding described in Chapter 5: the use of “a” remained quite conservative in book script throughout the period, tall “s” descending below the baseline gained ground very rapidly, while “r” rotunda expanded slowly and steadily. As can be observed in Table 7.1 above, the palaeographic changes do not exhibit the same rise as any of the linguistic changes, nor the same progression or distribution.

Other scribes (around 4/5 of the total), show a mix of conservativeness and innovativeness through multiple features. After all, orthography is (to a degree) dictated by the pronunciation, but the script is solely governed by stylistic choices. This means that scribes could frequently modernise their script without significantly adopting new spellings to represent linguistic innovations, while others incorporated linguistic shifts

maintaining older palaeographic practices in the meantime, while the majority was comfortable with the variation of forms and mixing quite freely innovative and conservative features.

7.4 *Collaborating scribes*

Scribes working on the same manuscripts offer better means of comparison as some variables such as chronological differences and different environmental influences may be either excluded or presumed to be less impactful, though this analysis will show otherwise. It is not always possible to reconstruct the history of a text or to tell how many hands worked on it, whether in different places and times or side by side, but some important considerations can still be made by comparing these scribes. Scribal hands working on the same manuscripts are listed in this section below.

One of the most revealing opportunities for understanding the dynamics of scribal practice arises when multiple contemporary scribes contribute to the same manuscript. In such cases, a more focused comparison of individual scribal choices can be made, particularly in those rare cases when it is known that the two scribes were working together or belonged to the same scribal milieu, as that can show to what extent collaborating scribes working in the same environment could differ. This section examines manuscripts produced collaboratively by two or more scribes, with the aim of assessing the degree of alignment or divergence in both palaeographic and orthographic features within a single codicological unit. It is essential, however, to keep in mind that we do not always know for certain whether manuscripts written by multiple hands were written by scribes working closely on a relatively short time span, or if a long time elapsed between the two scribes, perhaps also working in two very different places. We may assume some collaboration, for example, in the case of the two main hands of GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyj-
arbók* c1387–1395: [8] Jón Þórðarson and [9] Magnús Þórhallsson. However, in the other cases listed below the assumption of scribes working side by side has to be taken cautiously. The following analysis is going to be, as much else, tentative (for reference to the scholarship on these texts and collaborating scribes, see Chapter 4). Scribes working on the same manuscripts are the following:

- a. GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, c1387–1395; [8] Jón Þórðarson and [9] Magnús Þórhallsson.
- b. AM 557 4to, c1404–1420; [15] and [16].
- c. GKS 2845 4to, c1450; [19] and [20].
- d. AM 586 4to, c1450–1500; [29] and [30].
- e. AM 577 4to, c1450–1500; [32], [33] and [34].
- f. AM 624 4to, c1500; [40] and [41].
- g. AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver*, c1500, [44] and [45]
- h. AM 152 fol., c1500–1525; [46] Þorsteinn Þorleifsson and [47] Jón Þorgilsson

By analysing pairs or groups of scribes working on the same manuscript, this section addresses a key question that follows from earlier chapters: to what extent were scribal practices influenced by shared manuscript context? If scribes operating within the same physical and textual environment display consistent choices, this might suggest the presence of local conventions or shared training. Conversely, persistent differences—particularly in orthography—would reinforce the conclusion that Icelandic scribal culture during this period was marked by a high degree of individual variation.

Through the comparison offered below, an attempt will be made to illuminate not only the variability among scribes but also the broader implications for our understanding of scribal autonomy, standardisation, and the transmission of linguistic and graphic norms in late medieval Iceland. In this section the differences and similarity between hands from the same manuscripts will be observed and discussed.

GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, c1387–1395; [8] Jón Þórðarson and [9] Magnús Þórhallsson may have worked side by side (at least for some time) on this manuscript (see Chapter 4 for details). While Jón and Magnús do not differ in the first two palaeographic values (“a₃”, “s₂”), which are both 0%, Jón uses “r” rotunda only slightly more than Magnús (the former in six environments, the latter in four) and, most strikingly, immediately following the letter “a”. This innovative use of the “r” rotunda is not found in Magnús’ work. Furthermore, clearer differences emerge in the orthographic values: Jón sometime prefers unstressed word-final *g* and almost always *eing*, (36.3% and 92.9%, respectively), while Magnús either avoids them entirely or uses them much less

frequently (0% and 39.6%). Overall, Jón demonstrates greater innovation than Magnús with respect to the orthographic representation of recent sound changes. He also employs the “r” rotunda somewhat more extensively than Magnús. It is noteworthy, however, that Jón never employs the “r” rotunda immediately following the letter “þ”, whereas Magnús does so consistently. This practice, though, can scarcely be regarded as a distinct innovation on Magnús’ part, since scribal usage on this point appears to vary markedly from scribe to scribe (as discussed in Chapter 5.4). These discrepancies suggest that, although the scribes share the same palaeographic features, their orthographic choices reflect distinct habits or conventions. All things considered, the evidence could be taken to indicate that, even if contemporaries, Jón belonged to a younger generation than Magnús, as already suggested by Pagani (2015). This is not conclusive, however, as the difference may be explained with other factors such as a difference in training or regional provenance: The work and collaboration of Jón and Magnús still deserves further research.

AM 557 4to, c1404–1420; [15] and [16]. These two scribes show subtle yet noteworthy differences in both palaeographic and orthographic features. Prior to Mårtensson’s 2011 study (see Chapter 4 for details), the text was considered the work of a single scribe. This shows how similar the two hands argued for by Mårtensson are. This suggests they may have been closely related, and if they were indeed two individuals it could perhaps be suggested that they belonged to the same scribal milieu or were trained on the same model(s), perhaps by the same tutor, unless, of course, there was a master-apprentice relationship between the two. The sequence in which the different parts are now ordered in the manuscript, Mårtensson (2011) argued, do not reflect the sequence in which they were written. Based on evidence from script and orthography, Mårtensson’s suggested that the last part had been written by hand 1 (which was also responsible for the first part), but earlier. The middle part, then, was written by hand 2. The position of part 2 relative to the others is not clear. Palaeographically, they are identical in “a₃” (0%) and “s₂” (100%) but differ slightly in the use of “r” rotunda: the first scribe uses it in 11 out of 20 of domains, while the second uses it in 10. Moreover, the first scribe uses it consistently following “þ”, while the second uses it much less frequently following “þ”.

Orthographically, the contrast is slightly more pronounced. The first scribe uses “g” in 3.9% of instances and “eing” in 95%, while the second scribe does not use “g” for etymological unstressed word-final *k* (indicating fricativisation) at all and uses “eing” less frequently (81.1%). Moreover, the second scribe uniquely employs *je* (13.6%) and unetymological forms indicating *u*-epenthesis 6.7% of the time, which appear 15.2% of the time in the first scribe’s usage. We are thus faced with scribes whose script is very similar. In the orthography they display some of the same innovations (particularly the diphthongisation *eng* > *eing* and *u*-epenthesis), but they differ in some other innovations. Interestingly, the difference manifests in only one scribe showing very low values while the other scribe shows zero: 3.9% : 0% for the fricativisation of *k* > *g*, 0% : 13.6% for the diphthongisation *é* > *je* and 3.8% : 0% for *g* > *j*. It is thus not the case that one of the two is distinctively more innovative than the other; both show some emergent changes, but these are not the same changes found in both scribes.

GKS 2845 4to, c1450; [19] and [20]. These two scribes present significant differences in both palaeographic and orthographic features. Palaeographically, they are identical in the use of “a₃” (0%) but diverge notably in “s₂” (100% for the first scribe, 68% for the second; the use of the “s₁” variant around the middle of the fifteenth century may be characterised as somewhat conservative, as the “s₂” variant is the predominant form after around 1400 in this corpus). Their use of “r” rotunda in the new environments (other than following “o”) is not very regular, with six and eight environments out of 20 respectively (30% vs. 40%). Orthographically, the contrast is even more marked. The first scribe uses *g* in 29.9% of cases, while the second does so much more frequently, at 77.2%. The use of “eing” is also higher at 100% for the second scribe compared to 88.2% for the first. In contrast, the first scribe shows a stronger preference for diphthongised spelling of older *é*, drop of fricative *g* and unetymological forms indicating *u*-epenthesis (41.8%, 33.3%, and 39.4%, respectively), while the second scribe uses these much less (14.6%, 7.7%, and 35.9%). These differences indicate distinct scribal habits, with the second scribe leaning toward greater orthographical variation and showing a preference for consistent *eing* usage and heavier reliance on spelling indicating fricativisation of unstressed word-final *k*. This scribal pair presents a similar pattern as the [15] and [16] AM 557 4to pair of scribes: while scribe 2 shows some proclivity for archaic script in his occasional use of

the “s₁” variant, it is hard to consider him as overall more conservative when it comes to presenting sound changes in the orthography.

AM 586 4to, c1450–1500; [29] and [30]. These two scribes take turns in the writing. Agnete Loth (1977), as mentioned in Chapter 4, noted how the script and orthography of the two is very similar. There is thus credible evidence showing that they were contemporaries, interacted with one another and collaborated (see Chapter 4). They may have been trained in the same place, or perhaps were teacher and apprentice, although it is impossible to know. They show slightly different palaeographic practices in most respects: both use “s₂” at 100% and differ only slightly in “a₃” (100% vs. 95%). While scribe (1) uses “a₃” consistently, scribe (2) also uses both “a₁” and “a₂”. That he uses all three types is remarkable. It could be reflective of an attempt on his part to adopt a type of “a” that he was not accustomed to (as a seasoned scribe) or, perhaps, “a₃” may have been his regular variant but this variation shows an effort to adopt the more conservative “a₂”. More significantly, they diverge in the use of “r” rotunda, 5% for the first scribe, 40% for the second out of 20 domains: the first scribe only uses the “r” rotunda following “o” and even there it is less than 49% of the time. This limited use of the rotunda has very few parallels in the study only [43] AM 152 4to uses it this sparingly, but in a different environment. It seems almost like an individualised attempt at standardising the use of the older letterform, but such an anachronistic attempt has no parallel in the corpus. The second scribe uses the “r” rotunda in 8 environments out of 20 and more extensively and consistently following “p”. Overall, scribe (2) is more innovative than (1). Perhaps his variation in the use of “a” types might be attributed to his lack of experience.

Orthographically, the differences are even more substantial. While they both show the fricativisation of word-final *k* and diphthongisation of *eng* in their spelling 100% of the time, the second scribe shows orthographic signs of the diphthongisation of *é* (71.9%), displaying loss of fricative *g* (33.3%) and unetymological forms indicating *u*-epenthesis (48.1%), which are almost entirely absent or minimal in the first scribe (0%, 0%, and 2.2% respectively). Additionally, the second scribe employs an orthography indicating palatalisation (such as “ki” and “gi”) more frequently (20% and 27%) compared to the first (8% and 22%). These contrasts indicate that while the scribes share somewhat similar palaeographic habits, their orthographic choices differ markedly, with the second scribe more

innovative than the first one, though he uses older forms of “a” together with the single-compartment one. However, the reason behind this is hard to ascertain.

AM 577 4to, c1450–1500; [32], [33] and [34]. These are the scribes who have been identified as (1), (3) and (4) respectively (see Chapter 4). The scribal subdivisions essentially correspond to the textual units, a factor that makes it hard to tell whether these scribes worked together, or whether the manuscript was compiled at different times and in different places. Their values are presented in *Table 7.7*.

Table 7.7: Three scribal hands in AM 577 4to.

No.	Shelfmark	Date	“a ₃ ”	“s ₂ ”	“r”	<i>g</i>	<i>eing</i>	<i>je</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>ur</i>	<i>ki</i>	<i>gi</i>
32	AM 577 4to (1)	c1450–1500	0%	100%	45%	97.6%	94.4%	9.8%	10.5%	39.3%	9%	21%
33	AM 577 4to (3)	c1450–1500	0%	100%	85%	47.2%	72.7%	83.3%	6.3%	38.7%	0%	6%
34	AM 577 4to (4)	c1450–1500	0%	100%	25%	72%	93.3%	80.6%	0%	53.4%	33%	0%

Palaeographically, all three scribes score 0% for “a₃” and 100% for “s₂”, showing uniformity in these traits. However, they differ markedly in their use of “r” rotunda: scribe (1) uses it in 9 environments out of 20 (45% of cases), scribe (3) in 17 environments (85%), and scribe (4) only in 5 environments out of 20 (25%), indicating distinct preferences in letterform. The use of the “r” rotunda shows therefore stylistic variation between the three scribes where scribe (3) is the most innovative, as he uses it consistently following the letters “y”, “f”, “k”, and “m” (in addition to “p”), domains that can be characterised as new. His use of the younger letterform is thus more advanced than that of his fellow scribes. This scribe is, however, not the most innovative when it comes to displaying the sound changes under study. Indeed, when it comes to orthography, the differences are substantial. Scribe (1) marks the fricativisation of word-final *k* quite regularly (97.6%) and *eing* (94.4%), in contrast to scribe (3), who shows fricativisation of *k* only 47.2% of the time and *eing* 72.7%. Scribe (4) lies in between for fricativisation of word-final *k* (72%) but almost matches scribe (1) for *eing* (93.3%). In the use of “je” spellings and spellings indicating drop of intervocalic *g*, scribes (3) and (4) exhibit some high values together with lower ones (83.3% and 80.6% for *je*; 6.3% and 0% for *j*, respectively), while scribe (1) remains low (9.8% and 10.5%). For forms indicating *u*-epenthesis, scribes (1) and (3) show similar usage (39.3% and 38.7%), whereas scribe (4) stands out with the highest rate (53.4%). Regarding the palatalisation of *k* and *g*, scribe (1) shows both moderately (9%

and 21%), scribe (3) shows it minimally or not at all (0% and 6%), and scribe (4) presents an inverted pattern with high “ki” usage (33%) but no “gi”. Scribe (4) is overall most innovative of the three when it comes to the orthographic representation of the sound changes under study, with four values above 50%, but once again, we see that there are not clear lines between generally conservative vs. innovative scribes. Scribe (1) is, for instance, has a higher score for the fricativisation of *k* than scribe (4) while showing much more limited signs of the diphthongisation of *é*. The different changes thus manifest differently in each scribe.

AM 624 4to, c1500; [40] and [41]. These two scribes take turns in writing this text, together with other hands (see Chapter 4 for details), something which may suggest that they worked side by side. They share identical palaeographic features in “a₃” (0%) and “s₂” (100%) but differ slightly in the use of “r” rotunda: 16 environments and 80% of the instances for scribe (3), 14 environments and 70% for scribe (5). Interestingly, scribe (5) uses the “r” rotunda more consistently than scribe (3), while scribe (3) uses it in more environments. The most significant differences emerge in orthographic practices. Scribe (3) displays fricativisation of unstressed word-final *k* in only 50% of cases, while scribe (5) uses it almost twice as often at 98.1%. Conversely, scribe (3) employs *eing* consistently (100%) compared to only 80% in scribe (5). For the diphthongisation of *é*, scribe (3) shows 50% usage, notably less than the 77.1% used by scribe (5). Moreover, forms indicating drop of fricative *g* and forms indicating *u*-epenthesis differ significantly between the two, being 0% and 41.8%, respectively in scribe (5), while they are 100% and 65.8% in scribe (3). When it comes to the orthographic manifestation of the phonological changes under study, scribe (3) scores higher than scribe (5) on three changes, while scribe (5) scores higher on two. This is not a very striking contrast, but it may indicate that scribe (3) may have been younger and perhaps less experienced than scribe (5). The number of hands in this manuscript may be taken to indicate that it came from an active scribal milieu, perhaps even the cathedral school of Hólar.

AM 434 a 12mo, Lækningakver, c1500, [44] and [45]. These two hands show partial alignment in palaeographic features but diverge significantly in orthographic practice. Both use “s₂” and “g” consistently (100%) but differ markedly in the type of “a” used, which is “a₃” 100% of the time in scribe (1), while scribe (2) never uses this type. There

is also a small discrepancy in “r”: scribe (1) uses it in 17 domains out of 20, scribe (2) slightly more in 19/20. There is only a small difference in the number of environments, but scribe (1) seems to use the “r” rotunda more consistently than scribe (2), as he displays more often values of 100%. Orthographically, the differences are more pronounced. Scribe (1) displays signs of fricativisation of word-final *k* 30.8% of the instances found, while scribe (2) uses it more frequently at 54.5%. The presence of *eing* is also distinct: 100% for scribe (1) vs. 88.2% for scribe (2). With *je*, scribe (1) shows 52.3% usage, slightly higher than the 43.8% in scribe (2). More strikingly, scribe (2) displays a loss of fricative *g* (37.5%) more frequently than scribe (1) (5.3%), but he also displays forms indicating *u*-epenthesis (69.8%) less frequently than scribe (1) (82.3%). Palatalisation was not apparent in either scribe. Overall, scribe (1) is more innovative in his consistent use of “a₃” while scribe (2) uses the older “a₂” almost exclusively; however, there do seem to be some instances of “a₁” in the work of scribe (1). Yet scribe (2) is more restrained and consistent in his use of “r” rotunda. In the orthographic changes, the difference is not great, but scribe (2) scores on average a little higher than scribe (1).

AM 152 fol., c1500–1525; [46] Þorsteinn Þorleifsson and [47] Jón Þorgilsson; Þorsteinn Þorleifsson and Jón Þorgilsson differ significantly in both palaeographic and orthographic features. Palaeographically, both use “a₂” consistently, and no instances of “a₃” were found, but there is a sharp contrast in the use of “s₂”, 100% for Þorsteinn, only 67% for Jón: the latter is one of few scribes in this study using both “s₁” and “s₂”. Typically, the scribes use only one or the other. Furthermore, after around 1400, the use of “s₁” is very limited by the scribes in this corpus, as “s₂” seems to have become the main “s” type. The use of “s₁” this late, in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, thus appears to be an archaism inspired by earlier books. Interestingly, the scribe of [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, c1530–1540, goes even further in this direction, consistently using the “s₁” throughout the sections sampled. As has been pointed out (Chapter 4), AM 152 fol. and Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, have certain similarities and may even have come from the same scribal milieu. It is noteworthy that only Jón Þorgilsson uses the old “s₁” while no such instances were found in the part attributed to Þorsteinn Þorleifsson. The use of “r” rotunda is somewhat closer, though still different: 15/20 environments for Þorsteinn against 18/20 environments for Jón. Jón uses the “r” rotunda in more environments than

Þorsteinn and at the same time his use is more regular as he uses the “r” rotunda consistently (100%) in eleven environments out of eighteen while Þorsteinn only uses it fully (100%) in only six environments out of fifteen. Þorsteinn can thus be characterised as the more conservative of the two in his more limited use of the “r” rotunda, but Jón is more consistent in his slightly more extensive use of the “r” rotunda. Jón’s somewhat innovative use of the “r” rotunda thus stands opposed to his archaic leanings in the choice of “s” variant. Orthographically, the variation is pronounced. Þorsteinn scores higher than Jón on all variables except *u*-epenthesis: he marks the fricativisation of *k* and diphthongisation of *eing* consistently at 100%, whereas Jón uses them much less (61.9% and 40%, respectively). The diphthongisation of *é* is also more represented in Þorsteinn’s hand (86.1%) than in Jón’s (74.4%). An even greater divergence is seen in the drop of fricative *g*: Þorsteinn shows high values (90.9% and 44.7%), whereas Jón never seems to show a drop of fricative *g* (0%) but has a slightly higher percentage of unetymological forms indicating *u*-epenthesis (54.7%). Finally, when it comes to the spellings “ki” and “gi” as evidence of palatalisation, Þorsteinn again scores higher (17% and 20%) than Jón (6% and 2%). Overall, Þorsteinn is more innovative than Jón, in terms of the orthographic changes displaying phonological changes, but Jón is still not particularly conservative. In terms of the script, the evidence is mixed as discussed above.

These eight instances of scribal collaboration (or at least co-appearance of scribal hands in the same manuscript) present different patterns: First, we see that some of the co-appearing scribes are somewhat similar in terms of the features of script and orthography examined. This applies to the two scribes of both [15]–[16] AM 557 4to, c1404–1420, and [19]–[20] GKS 2845 4to, c1450. While their scores are, of course, not identical, the overall difference is not great. In the first case, this comes as no surprise, as AM 557 4to was long considered written in a single hand throughout, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Second, in some cases the evidence presented both by the script and the orthography points in the same direction, essentially presenting the same picture. This is, for instance, the case with the two scribes of [8]–[9] GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, c1387–1395, Jón Þórðarson and Magnús Þórhallsson where Jón appears somewhat more innovative than Magnús on both fronts when it comes to the features studied. Similarly,

among the two scribes examined from [40]–[41] AM 624 4to, c1500, scribe (3) appeared slightly more innovative than scribe (5) both in terms of script and orthography.

Third, more commonly, the evidence from the script and orthography yields different results. This is the case with the two scribes of [29]–[30] AM 586 4to, c1450–1500, where scribe (2), who is the more innovative of the two in terms of orthography, shows conservative tendency in his choice of “a”. Similar inconsistencies emerge when comparing the three scribes of [32]–[34] AM 577 4to, c1450–1500, the two scribes of [44]–[45] AM 434 a 12mo, *Lækningakver*, c1500, and the two scribes of [46]–[47] AM 152 fol., c1500–1525, Þorsteinn Þorleifsson and Jón Þorgilsson.

Considering these results, it is important to keep the following in mind when attempting to establish a date for a manuscript: the script and the orthography may present different results. In fact, the script is wholly independent of the phonology and is mostly affected by stylistic choices that may have been influenced by models used when the scribe was an apprentice under training or by prestigious exemplars. On the other hand, the evolution of orthography is much more complex, being impacted by phonological changes, and it may in principle vary from one scribe to the other because of social or regional linguistic variation, but also orthographic models in earlier books.

In sum, this data offers a nuanced understanding scribal attitude towards script and orthography: the role of the individual scribe as agent making selective and sometimes divergent decisions about form and language was not frowned upon or discouraged but was an essential part of the tradition. Such selectivity makes it implausible that there were any training schools or regional scriptoria exerting comprehensive control over scribal output, which is what one may expect from a scribal tradition centred around monasteries. Instead, we are left with a picture of collaborative manuscript production where shared goals (i.e., completion of a manuscript) coexisted with individual autonomy in execution.

Finally, the detailed contrasts in this section provide at least some support for the idea that Icelandic manuscript culture was, aside from general shared principles, not characterised by codified orthographic norms, even within the same manuscript, meaning that in any given text written by the same scribe one may find multiple conventions. If scribes were not aligning their spelling with their collaborators—even within the same

codex—then the notion of an orthographic standard becomes highly tenuous. This reinforces the view that orthographic practices were negotiated individually, not imposed collectively.

There were of course exceptions: this study shows how the shape of the letter “s”, in particular, has experienced a fairly clear transition from “s₁” to “s₂”. Deviations are relatively few. The form of the letter “a” is fairly stable throughout the period, with “a₂” being a predominant form with only a few departures.

In summary, the data presented in this section confirms and deepens one of the claims of this discussion: that individual variation—not regional normativity or institutional regulation—constituted the most stable characteristic of Icelandic scribal culture in the late medieval period. It also highlights the importance of analysing collaborative contexts, not merely for detecting similarities, but for exposing contrasts that illuminate the true nature of scribal autonomy.

7.5 On refining the dating of texts

Any attempt to date texts solely based on linguistic features is vulnerable to a form of circular reasoning. A manuscript may be provisionally assigned to a given period, its linguistic profile then described as characteristic of that period, and those same features subsequently invoked as evidence for dating the manuscript itself. In such cases, the argument risks collapsing into the claim that the text belongs to the fifteenth century because its language is deemed fifteenth-century, and the language is deemed fifteenth-century because it occurs in texts assigned to that century. This danger cannot be dismissed, but in the present case, it is mitigated by the breadth of the data and the firm grounding provided by the relatively small number of securely dated books, which serve as reliable points of reference. In addition, the narrower dating offered by previous scholarship contribute to establishing a framework of linguistic and palaeographic trends across the period.

Within this framework, the overall picture of the developments appears consistent enough to allow for cautious refinement. It is in this spirit that an attempt will be made to narrow the dating of the three hands from the corpus that have so far been assigned only broadly to the fifteenth century. To that purpose, in this section, quantitative data

from the analysis of three broadly dated texts in the corpus will be examined to refine their chronology. The data from these manuscripts will be contrasted with the broader patterns identified in the study, with the aim of suggesting a more precise dating than that provided in the ONP catalogue. The texts under consideration are: [22] AM 534 4to, a vellum manuscript containing *Mágus saga jarls* dated to c1400–1500, and [23] AM 432 12mo and [24] AM 430 12mo, two manuscripts of *Margrétar saga* also dated to the entire century.

[22] AM 534 4to, c1400–1500

Table 7.8: innovation scores of [22] AM 534 4to.

No.	Shelfmark	Date	“a ₃ ”	“s ₂ ”	“r”	g	eing	je	j	ur	ki	gi
22	AM 534 4to	c1400–1500	97%	53%	50%	13.9%	33.3%	0%	0%	5%	0%	4%

Table 7.8 shows the innovation scores of [22] AM 534 4to. The approximate dating of this text to the entire fifteenth century provided in Kålund’s (1889–1894, 1:680–681) catalogue and retained in both the source list of ONP and in the manuscript catalogue *Handrit.is*, is most likely the result of a somewhat superficial assessment that did not sufficiently consider evidence from an orthographic and linguistic analysis. It is difficult to determine exactly which features of the manuscript led to this broad dating, though one plausible factor is the sporadic occurrence of the “r” rotunda in various positions. This highlights the importance of balancing palaeographic and linguistic evidence, each supporting and qualifying the other.

The almost exclusive use of the single-compartment “a₃” is relatively innovative and therefore very valuable; however, since its appearance is rare and sporadic across the corpus as a whole, its presence alone cannot serve as a secure chronological marker. Likewise, the inconsistent use of tall “s₂” either standing upright or extending below the baseline, is also unusual, though not unique: it appears occasionally throughout the period, without indicating any clear transitional stage. After the turn of the fifteenth century, the form of tall “s” extending below the baseline spread rapidly. As for the “r” rotunda, its distribution in [22] AM 534 4to remains limited: beyond its regular use after round letters, it also occurs after “g,” “h,” “u,” and “y,” which are among the earliest contexts to attract the form in the earlier part of the period under review.

On this basis, the innovative single-compartment “a₃” seems at odds with the still restricted distribution of “r” rotunda. Yet, when weighed against the wider results of this study, it appears more plausible that the younger “a” form represents an early innovation in an otherwise older text, rather than that the “r” rotunda being deployed more sparingly than would normally be expected in a younger manuscript. Oscillations in the use of “a” are attested throughout the period, whereas the diffusion of “r” rotunda follows a steadier trajectory.

The linguistic evidence supports this interpretation. With none of the orthographic features scoring above 33.3%, the text is so conservative that, judged solely by the phonological features observed in this study, one might reasonably think it had been copied as early as the second half of the fourteenth century (roughly the earliest part of the corpus). In fact, the scribe ranked as the fifth most conservative scribe in the corpus in terms of orthography, as shown in *Table 7.2* while he is number 43 in the corresponding ranking for the script in *Table 7.3*. The reality, however, likely lies somewhere between these two results. The aim here is not to demonstrate an absolute truth, but to arrive at as informed an estimate as possible. This inevitably raises the problem of circular reasoning: are we dealing with an unusually innovative feature of the script in an older linguistic context, or with an exceptionally conservative language in a younger text? While it cannot be proven conclusively that the “r” rotunda was never used following this distribution before the fifteenth century, the available evidence makes such an early occurrence highly improbable. This suggests that c. 1400 should be taken as a *terminus post quem*.

At the same time, the absence of key innovations (for example, the limited occurrence of fricativisation of *k*, the lack of evidence for diphthongisation of *é*, the rarity of unetymological spellings for word-final *-r* or *-ur*, and the non-occurrence of drop of intervocalic *g*) aligns [22] AM 534 4to with texts dated earlier in the century. Considering this, a dating of c1425 seems more probable.

[23] AM 432 12mo, c1400–1500

Table 7.9: innovation scores of [23] AM 432 12mo.

No.	Shelfmark	Date	“a ₃ ”	“s ₂ ”	“r”	<i>g</i>	<i>eing</i>	<i>je</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>ur</i>	<i>ki</i>	<i>gi</i>
23	AM 432 12mo	c1400–1500	0%	0%	75%	89.4%	94.7%	92.8%	12.5%	45.1%	0%	0%

Table 7.9 shows the innovation scores of [23] AM 432 12mo. This manuscript is quite conservative in some aspects of the script, and displays a more *formata* Gothic Textualis, but it is rather innovative in the orthography, ranking as the eight most innovative as shown in *Table 7.1*. The form of “a₂”, consistently two-compartment, is of limited value, since it occurs regularly throughout the period. The consistent use of tall “s₁” (standing on the baseline) does not, in itself, indicate a dating of before or around 1400 as, by contrast, the evidence from the use of “r” rotunda is more innovative, pushing the likely date forward within the same century. Although “r” rotunda appears consistently only after “o,” it also alternates with straight “r” (and is frequently dominant) after a wide range of letters.

The fricativisation of unstressed word-final *k* is overwhelmingly represented—which is uncharacteristic of the earliest texts in the corpus—but the examples are too few to be conclusive, and some resistance to this change can be observed even in later hands. The diphthongisation of short *e* before *ng* is well established, though this offers little help for narrowing the dating in this case, as the change was already widespread early in the period. More significant is the diphthongisation of etymological *é*, which is almost always present, along with few instances indicating a drop of fricative *g* and a bit less than half of unetymological spellings indicating *u*-epenthesis. The drop of fricative *g* is extremely rare before the middle of the fifteenth century and, together with the spread of the other changes just mentioned, would suggest a date around the middle of the century or perhaps somewhat after that.

Palatalisations appear to gain momentum around the beginning of the sixteenth century. Given their absence, it is reasonable to exclude the period immediately after 1500—an exclusion also supported by the evidence of the spread of “r” rotunda, which is rather advanced, but not extremely—and to place this text to c1475.

[24] AM 430 12mo, c1400–1500

Table 7.10: Innovation score of [24] AM 430 12mo.

No.	Shelfmark	Date	“a ₃ ”	“s ₂ ”	“r”	<i>g</i>	<i>eing</i>	<i>je</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>ur</i>	<i>ki</i>	<i>gi</i>
24	AM 430 12mo	c1400-1500	0%	100%	80%	23.7%	100%	85.8%	15%	77.4%	0%	0%

Table 7.10 shows the innovation scores of [24] AM 430 12mo. This text displays a consistent use of the two-compartment “a” (“a₂”), and the tall “s₂” is most systematically descending below baseline, while the distribution of “r” rotunda is somewhat advanced, though occurring at a roughly similar ratio (75%) than in [23] AM 432 12mo (80). The linguistic evidence shows a handful of instances of fricativisation of unstressed word-final *k*, a strong predominance of diphthongisation both of short *e* before *ng* (though not very valuable in this context) and of etymological *é*, a few examples of drop of fricative *g*, and a majority of unetymological spellings in “-r” or “-ur”. Palatalisation is absent. Taken together, these features would suggest a dating similar to that of [23] AM 432 12mo, plausibly around c1475, in spite of the stark difference in the *ductus* of the script and the markedly more *posato* character of the *tratteggio* in [24] AM 430 12MO.

7.6 *Final remarks*

This study refines our understanding of the general trends affecting scribal practice in the “long” fifteenth century and the possibility to analyse patterns of diffusion of innovations at a general level. A quantitative study of this kind is useful insofar as it sheds light on the historical progression of the language and the script. However, when the attempt was made to “zoom in” and find correlations pointing to regional/local clusters or patterns of hands, the research has shown a very complex picture, evidencing a pronounced degree of individual variation between all the hands analysed.

One of the most compelling conclusions of this study is the lack of strict correlation between the adoption of one innovation and another. To give an example, some scribes who embraced the diphthongisation of *é* in their spelling did not necessarily show orthographic signs of palatalisation of *k* or *g*. Any given feature is not usually a strong predictor of any other. Furthermore, this study has examined two fundamentally different sets of features: on the one hand orthographic changes that were prompted by a change in the pronunciation, while on the other, changes in script that have no connection whatsoever to pronunciation but are determined wholly by stylistic choices. There is no obvious correlation between these two sets of features. A scribe using conservative script may use innovative orthography. This suggests that changes were influenced by a complex interplay of personal scribal choices, local variations, and individual linguistic change rather

than a uniform chronological progression. Some of this orthographic variation may actually reflect linguistic variation; however, it is not possible to judge the extent of the spreads in the language of a given scribe from its practice, which was influenced by multiple factors. Furthermore, since only few of the manuscripts under study can be localised, it is impossible to determine the geographical distribution of the different linguistic varieties.

Johansson's (1997) investigation of AM 242 fol., *Codex Wormianus* situates the manuscript within a broader framework of Icelandic scribal practice in the fourteenth century. Through a combination of codicological analysis, micropalaeography, and orthographic comparison, he argues that the manuscript reflects the activity of a functioning scriptorium in which compilation, textual redaction, and copying were closely interconnected. He identifies recurring features of script and layout across a small cluster of manuscripts, suggesting the operation of a coherent scribal milieu in which professional training, shared conventions, and institutional routines played a decisive role. The thesis ultimately conceptualises AM 242 fol., *Codex Wormianus* as a product of a specific scribal milieu, whose organisation, textual priorities, and pedagogical aims can be partially reconstructed through its palaeographic and linguistic features.

Johansson distinguishes several layers of norms that may guide a scribe's practice: an *individual norm* shaped by personal habit; a *scriptorial norm*, understood as a shared institutional standard; the influence of the exemplars; and what he terms a *scribal school*, that is, a community of scribes formed by similar training and working conditions. Since the criteria for scribal attribution are not self-evident, he addresses the issue by constructing a typology of micro-palaeographic features intended to permit the reliable identification of scribal hands (1997, 159–181). On this basis, he proposes that systematic study of writing systems across groups of manuscripts may illuminate their affiliation to a particular scriptorium. Judging from the data of the present study, however, the likelihood that such an approach can meaningfully reveal the existence of scribal schools within the “long” fifteenth century appears limited. The notion of a coherent scribal milieu or school presupposes at least some degree of internal consistency that the Icelandic scribal output analysed in this study does not exhibit, whether in orthography or in the distribution of palaeographic forms within a single hand.

The search for micro-palaeographic correspondences between hands, even where such similarities can indeed be identified, is no more likely to illuminate the broader scribal environment of a given scribe than it is to reflect individual preference or the aesthetic expectations of a patron or superior. Any apparent affinities between hands may indeed derive from shared training at some stage of the scribes' formation, yet these are ultimately interwoven within a complex web of variation whose deeper origins may remain irrecoverable. A further complication arises from the fact that, as discussed in Chapter 1, books during this period tend to become smaller in format and less extensively decorated, a development that significantly reduces the range of observable features available for the identification of shared conventions.

Within such a dense field of variation, and in the absence of external corroborating evidence, it becomes difficult to determine whether similarities in scribal practice reflect the survival of an earlier custom which reached different areas through different routes, parallel developments independently reached by two scribes, or mere coincidence. It remains at least very tentative when any resemblances are overwhelmingly outweighed by the degree of variation observable in the material.

This pattern suggests that scribes may have been too mobile, or their training too diffuse, to acquire a stable and internally coherent norm from which deviations could be meaningfully interpreted. Alternatively, it may indicate that the concept of a "scribal school" in the modern sense has little applicability to late medieval Icelandic practice. While scribes must necessarily have learned their craft from others, the surviving evidence from the fifteenth century is difficult to reconcile with the presence of any consolidated school, scriptorium, or community of practice in the strict sense proposed by Jóhansson.

An interesting hypothesis to explore is whether this degree of variation is just another expression of the structure of Icelandic society, and a result of the same causes which have produced a compelling low degree of dialectal variation in the country. Previous scholarship (see, for example, Helgi Guðmundsson 1977 and Finnur Friðriksson et al. 2024) has attributed the relatively low degree of dialectal variation in Iceland to several factors, such as the geography that made travelling through the country relatively easy, a cohesive and relatively impermeable ruling class, coupled with high mobility both of

priests, local administrators and their families, and with the mobility of labour. These factors may have caused a constant mixing of any innovation arising in any part of the country and of any scribal practice (cf. Helgi Guðmundsson 1977). Lacking a strong standardising effort, new and old forms must have mixed constantly.

Paradoxically, the very factors that contributed to the minimising of dialectal differentiation in Icelandic language may have been the same which fostered the high degree of individual variation in written language observed in this study—particularly in an era before standardised spelling had taken hold. The movement of the elite and the other factors mentioned clearly did not prevent the emergence of changes, since there is no lack of them, but it may have had the effect of transferring them from one place to another, creating a situation of constant flux or oscillation. In the absence of a strongly centralised educational system or consistent orthographic norms, scribes operated with considerable autonomy everywhere they went. Formal schools, in the modern sense, did not exist and students must have typically learned to read from the manuscripts that happened to be available to them and their tutors—there were, of course, no alphabet primers or introductory textbooks. Similarly, instruction in writing was based on direct imitation of letterforms found in these manuscripts, as no standardised model books circulated. As a result, the exemplars varied considerably, depending on which texts were accessible: some were more recent, others considerably older. In short, the process lacked uniformity and standardisation.

In addition to exposure of highly variable and inconsistent models, the frequent societal mobility (Helgi Guðmundsson 1977, 318–319) and lack of any entrenched local scribal traditions meant that scribes were not exposed to or constrained by localised practice, becoming thus more likely to develop idiosyncratic scribal habits, both in terms of orthography and in palaeography. Drawing on a broadly shared, yet flexible linguistic repertoire, these individuals shaped their writing according to personal preference, educational background, or diverse regional influences.

As a result, we find a coexistence of macro-level trends in the spoken language together with micro-level variation in individual scribes. Localised dialectal innovations may well have emerged and been adopted to varying degrees by individuals, depending on their exposure and inclination, but the social and institutional conditions necessary

for these innovations to stabilise at the regional level were largely absent, notably: some degree of social or geographic isolation. Only those forms that achieved widespread diffusion—often through élite or institutional channels, such as the Church or notable/ruling families—stood a chance of becoming part of a broader, *de facto* standard.

In this context, the high mobility of the population (cf. Helgi Guðmundsson 1977, 320) must have continually disrupted the formation of consistent local varieties which could have had a visible impact on norms in the orthography and script, leading to an uneven and scattered distribution of any emerging linguistic innovations at the individual level. This is not to mention the fact that there must have been some discrepancy between a scribe's pronunciation and his spelling, due to the influence that older texts may have exerted on the latter. This helps explain why the development of a more uniform orthographic norm rooted in any given spoken usage would have been both difficult and impractical to realise, if at any given point in time a scribal milieu would have been composed by people showing a very individualised distribution of conservative or innovative features. This interpretation aligns with the evidence presented in the heat maps of Chapter 6.8 and in *Table 7.1* above: while broad trends can be identified at the macro level, individual scribes do not form clearly defined clusters based on degree of innovation, reinforcing the picture of widespread individual variation rather than regionally coherent differentiation.

Thus, the considerable degree of individual variation observed in scribal output is not only compatible with a strikingly low degree of dialectal variation in spoken language (at least insofar as it is evident in more recent stages of the language)—it may, in fact, originate from the same underlying social dynamics. Language changes emerged and spread at different rates (if at all) among individual speakers. Combined with high mobility and the influence of older linguistic models, this created a state of continual flux: while long-term trends in the diffusion of innovations can be discerned, the linguistic reality at any given moment appears as a mosaic of conservative and innovative features, interwoven in varying proportions within each scribe's work.

The hypothesis that such variation in scribal practice arose because of high mobility, though difficult to verify empirically, remains both plausible and fruitful for understanding the interplay between sociolinguistic structure and linguistic performance in

Iceland's historical context. At any rate, this study suggests that the high degree of individuality observed among the scribes is not an anomaly but rather an intrinsic feature of Icelandic manuscript production. While a larger sample size might introduce additional nuances, it is unlikely to reveal a subset of strikingly similar scribal hands that would call into question the broader pattern of pronounced individualisation. On the one hand, scribes seem to operate with a freedom that allows for idiosyncratic expression, resulting in a striking diversity of scribal hands. On the other hand, the cumulative effect of their practices suggests an underlying structure that, while not enforcing uniformity, subtly shapes the evolution of Icelandic manuscript traditions over time.

To illustrate these dynamics more concretely, *Table 7.1* presents an assessment of the degree of innovativeness for each scribe across all features studied, both palaeographic and linguistic. By quantifying the extent to which individual scribes adhered to or deviated from established norms, this table provides a structured overview of the patterns identified in the analysis, reinforcing the argument that Icelandic scribal culture was simultaneously diverse in execution yet collectively shaped by broader forces.

One of the central questions surrounding studies such as this one is the relationship between spelling and pronunciation. The written forms only partially reflect contemporary pronunciation, and we cannot reconstruct with certainty the degree to which the two were connected. Unlike modern times, in the “long” fifteenth century there was no consistent school system that ensured mastery of standardised orthographic rules, and the evidence suggests that orthographic uniformity was not a primary concern for any of the scribes. What is more, the idea of orthographic consistency was probably unknown to them. They had never seen a text with full orthographic consistency because they did not exist.

In the fifteenth century, the absence of a strong superstructure or centralised literary authority meant that orthographic norms were less firmly established and more prone to individual variation due to a variety of influences, not least the scribes' pronunciation. Pronunciation seems in fact to have exerted a greater pressure on change in the orthography, with scribes making little or no attempt to conform to earlier norms with any rigour. Even books such as [50] Holm perg. 3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*, which seems to display an intention to conform to the aesthetic model of grand fourteenth-century works such

as GKS 1005 fol., *Flateyjarbók*, do show a more innovative character in the orthography. This suggests that even in cases in which an archaising effort may be detected in the design of a manuscript, this does not trickle all the way down to the orthography, which was more prone to change under the pressure of linguistic evolution.

It is this very evolution that introduces another conundrum in the interpretation of the data: given how little we know about the lives of the scribes there is very little that we can say about the origin and spread of dialectal innovation, but we also do not see any significant cluster of scribes which could be presumed to have been localised geographically or connected to some kind of overarching tradition. This degree of individual variation is even more striking if we consider that that priests mostly studied in only two main centres, Skálholt and Hólar, a fact which in theory should have contributed to a degree of normalisation. Yet the evidence does not indicate any strong unifying effect. On the contrary, orthographic variation persisted, pointing instead to the likely role of regional origins in shaping linguistic change followed by a constant mixing of varieties and practices. However, as mentioned, we cannot trace these developments to specific places, since the available data are too limited. Given how little we know about the background and biographies of the scribes, it is hard to localise any phenomena with precision.

However, if the dataset is divided as was done in Chapter 6, into two chronological phases, the differences between the two periods become clear and substantial. This fact will enable us to refine the dating of several texts until now dated to the whole fifteenth century within a narrower timespan of about fifty years. Such a narrower chronological framework will prove useful for understanding textual traditions, even within the limits imposed by the evidence, and for understanding the evolution of the language.

As mentioned in Chapter 6.8, the relationship between the chronological ordering of scribes and their degree of linguistic innovation is complex and non-linear. When we compare a list of manuscripts arranged according to their tentative dating with one based on their level of innovation (calculated as a mathematical average, as in *Table 7.2* and *Table 7.3*), it becomes apparent that while some manuscripts maintain positions relatively close to those assigned to them by previous research, others diverge significantly.

Although older manuscripts tend to exhibit fewer innovations, this pattern does not hold uniformly across all cases.

A crucial factor in this analysis is the uneven distribution of innovations, a topic which was touched upon in Chapter 6.8: some scribes exhibit a high degree of innovativeness within a limited subset of linguistic features (or even just one), raising their overall innovativeness score despite being otherwise conservative. Conversely, other scribes may introduce moderate but widespread changes across various linguistic elements, scoring lower in overall innovativeness, but displaying more changes across the set, fact which serves as a more reliable indicator of textual recency. For example, a rate of 16.7% for the *eng* > *eing* change in the scribe of [48] AM 529 4to c1500–1550, does not push back the tentative dating of the text, as the context in which this feature is found is overwhelmingly innovative and this individual detail is better understood as an archaism, rather than an argument for early dating. It is worth remembering that, generally speaking, innovations carry more weight than archaisms, which can be adopted from earlier manuscripts while innovations can, of course, not be adopted from “future manuscripts”. In that way they are more revealing of the scribe’s own practice. This example shows the importance of weighing features in a broader context, not treating all innovative features as equally significant when assessing the historical development of linguistic change, but also poses a problem for an analysis that is set to rely heavily on strictly statistical/quantitative data.

In fact, the presence of early innovations in certain older manuscripts and the persistence of conservative elements in later ones indicate that statistical approaches based on averaged innovativeness cannot independently refine manuscript dating beyond the accuracy achieved through traditional philological methods. This limitation stems from this already cited and long-standing principle in textual studies: an isolated but rare innovation often carries more chronological weight than multiple conservative features. However, translating this qualitative significance into quantitative data presents a methodological challenge, as it may prove difficult to develop a model capable of accounting for the different weight of a given innovation in context, given how not all linguistic innovations hold equal historical relevance every time.

The present analysis, as was observed in Chapter 5.8, further highlighted that innovation is more closely linked to individual scribal choices rather than progressing in a

uniform chronological trajectory, and scribes cannot be clustered together solely based on their degree of innovativeness. A scribe who exhibits a strikingly innovative character in one earlier change, but remains otherwise conservative, may, depending on the number of features, register a higher overall innovation score than another who implements moderate but consistent innovations across multiple later-developing features (though this is dependent on the number of features included: a single high feature will not weigh much against nine low features). The latter case, however, is often a more reliable signal of a manuscript's recent origin. Additionally, variations in the scope of changes must be considered—some innovations impact many words, generating a substantial dataset, whereas others may be more sporadic but carry greater historical significance.

These observations illustrate the challenges of relying solely on numerical aggregations when assessing textual evolution. Averaging all linguistic features, as was tried in Chapter 6.8, without differentiating their historical weight can obscure meaningful patterns. Thus, any attempt to date manuscripts must incorporate a multi-faceted approach, assigning different levels of significance to various types of innovations. In the light of these considerations, the process of manuscript dating remains an interpretative endeavour, where qualitative philological insights must still accompany and complete quantitative and statistical data processing to yield the most reliable conclusions.

A fundamental question underlying the present inquiry is whether an expanded dataset, that is, one extending beyond the fifty scribal hands analysed here, would significantly affect the conclusions reached. In view of both the number of hands examined and the relatively coherent picture that has emerged from the analysis, such an outcome appears unlikely. Nevertheless, the nature and length of certain texts do not always provide a sufficiently large body of data, even within the present sample. It follows that quantitative evidence derived from the examination of additional features would frequently remain limited, quite apart from the considerable time investment that such an undertaking would require.

Although the inclusion of additional scribal hands might introduce a certain degree of variation in the results, and although individual cases may emerge that display similarities to those already identified, it is unlikely that such an expansion would reveal an entirely new pattern capable of challenging the conclusions reached thus far. In

particular, the prospect of identifying a cluster of scribal hands that are at once markedly similar and yet demonstrably distinct appears remote, given the high degree of individuality already evident in the existing dataset.

One of the key insights that emerges from this study is the extent to which Icelandic scribal practice during the period under examination exhibits considerable individual variation. However, a paradox still arises: while the variation is pronounced at the individual level, the cumulative effect of these individual choices seems to be evident in the broad historical progression of most changes, as scribal practice was likely influenced by broader factors—linguistic, cultural, or even pedagogical—that, in an abstract sense, collectively shape the tradition. This suggests that while each scribe operated with a considerable degree of autonomy, they were nevertheless working within an environment that exerted some form of indirect influence over their practice, given how the progression of most changes is promptly discernible in the statistical study. As evidenced, pronunciation exerted some influence on orthographic practice. In the absence of a clearly established norm, enforced by authoritative institutions and reinforced through systematic instruction, there was little incentive for scribes to adopt spellings that diverged from their own phonological usage as is done, for example, in Iceland today. Current Icelandic orthography is largely inspired from thirteenth-century conventions, an example is the spelling of vowels before *ng*, such as “langur” and “lengi” which reflects their phonological nature before the thirteenth century. Similarly, many modern diphthongs that arose from etymological long vowels are still spelt with signs indicating long vowels, such as “á” for [au], “ó” for [ou], “æ” for [ai], etc. The main counterweight to this tendency of updating the spelling to reflect phonological changes may have been the authority of earlier manuscripts, which often reflect stages of the language less affected by the phonological developments under consideration.

However, the stabilising effect of such exemplars was necessarily limited. Even scribes consciously attempting to reproduce the orthography of their models were prone to lapses, allowing their own pronunciation to shape the written form, especially in a context where such variation was probably not frowned upon. As more scribes began to adopt spellings aligned with contemporary phonology, the prestige and influence of older orthographic traditions gradually diminished. This process appears to have been self-

reinforcing: the broader the acceptance of the innovative forms, the more rapidly they spread. One may thus describe the diffusion not as a linear progression but rather as a cumulative or exponential process, akin to a “snowball effect.” Haraldur Bernharðsson (2023) has shown how the language of *Njáls saga* was consciously processed by the scribes copying and transmitting the text through the centuries, introducing forms that would have been more familiar to any scribe’s contemporary audience. However, older texts were bound to exert some kind of influence, given that scribes were certainly rewriting older texts entirely as much as they were not copying them letter by letter.

This tension between individual innovation and underlying continuity complicates attempts to categorise scribal practices into distinct schools or traditions based solely on orthographic or macro-palaeographic features. While linguistic patterns can certainly provide some insight into a scribe’s choices, they may not serve as the most reliable indicators of broader scribal traditions. The evidence from this study, as mentioned, suggests that attempting to trace clear-cut scribal lineages or affiliations based purely on linguistic or palaeographic criteria may be problematic due to the pronounced diversity of individual hands. Instead, a more fruitful approach to identifying patterns in Icelandic scribal culture might lie in considering other manuscript-related aspects, such as codicological and textual evidence.

Codicological analysis, for example, may reveal clues about the physical processes involved in manuscript production, including quire structure, ruling techniques, ink composition, and binding methods, all of which may provide insight into shared workshop practices or regional traditions. Similarly, textual analysis—examining the content, transmission, and organisation of texts—may help uncover broader affiliations between scribes, even if their handwriting styles remain highly individualised. Cross referencing names in marginalia with those appearing in charters may also be another fruitful path. By integrating these perspectives, it may be possible to identify networks of scribal activity that are not immediately apparent from handwriting alone.

Ultimately, this study underscores the complexity of Icelandic scribal practice during this period. Rather than seeking uniformity where it may not exist, it may be more productive to embrace the heterogeneity of scribal hands as an inherent characteristic of the tradition. The challenge moving forward lies in developing methodologies that

account for both the individual variability of scribes and the collective influences that shaped their work. A multifaceted approach—one that combines linguistic, codicological, and textual evidence—may offer the best means of uncovering the larger patterns that structured medieval Icelandic manuscript culture.

In conclusion, this study has revealed the remarkable heterogeneity of Icelandic scribal practice in the late medieval period. Rather than anomalies, individual variation appears to be a defining feature of manuscript culture in Iceland. Yet, this diversity does not preclude a broader pattern of linguistic and palaeographic evolution. Indeed, it is precisely through the cumulative effect of individual choices—shaped by social mobility, educational diversity, and textual transmission—that larger trends emerge. Moving forward, a more nuanced and integrated methodology—combining linguistic, codicological, and textual analysis—will be essential for uncovering the underlying dynamics that structured the production of texts in medieval Iceland.

8. Conclusion

This thesis set out to illuminate the development of Icelandic script and orthography during the so-called “long” fifteenth century,” a period extending from the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth century. At the outset, the study aimed to:

1. trace and describe systematic changes in Icelandic script and orthography across the period,
2. assess whether these changes can serve as reliable chronological indicators for the dating of manuscripts,
3. explore what these patterns reveal about the cultural and scribal context of late-medieval Iceland, and
4. contribute a methodological framework for palaeographic and historical-linguistic research on Icelandic manuscripts.

The findings presented in Chapters 5–7, while diverse and at times internally heterogeneous, offer interesting answers to these questions and allow for a synthetic assessment of the period as a whole.

Did Icelandic script and orthography undergo systematic change during the “long” fifteenth century? The data shows unequivocally that Icelandic script and orthography underwent some important changes over the period, though this change was far from uniform:

- On the palaeographic level, some features showed striking diachronic shifts. The tall “s” transitioned from the baseline form (“s₁”) to the descending form (“s₂”) around 1400 and became dominant by mid-century, with only isolated late archaising outliers such as Holm perg.3 fol., *Reykjahólabók*. By contrast, the shape of “a” remained largely conservative: the two-compartment form (“a₂”) prevailed throughout the century, while the cursive single-compartment form (“a₃”) only gained limited traction among a minority of later scribes. The “r” rotunda gradually expanded from restricted use after rounded letters to much wider distribution—including non-round and eventually word-initial positions—but its spread was irregular and scribe-specific.

- On the linguistic level, several sound changes made their way into the orthography at different pace. The diphthongisation of *e* before *ng* (*eng* > *eing*) proved the most consistently adopted innovation, already nearly general at the start of the corpus. The diphthongisation of long *é* (*é* > *je*) progressed more slowly, accelerating after 1450, while fricativisation of unstressed word-final *k* and the drop of intervocalic *g* remained patchy, started to be manifest in the script after the middle of the fifteenth century. The *u*-epenthesis (*armr* > *armur*) shows the continuation of a change already underway by the fourteenth century, and palatalisation of *k* and *g* only rarely received overt orthographic marking before the end of the period.

Taken together, these results show that the fifteenth century witnessed not a coherent, uniform transformation, but a series of staggered and overlapping changes: some rapid and general, others gradual or sporadic.

Can the selected features be used as chronological indicators to refine the dating of manuscripts? The findings confirm that some of the examined features possess chronological value, but they also show that this value is probabilistic rather than deterministic. The tall “s” emerges as the strongest palaeographic indicator of the three examined: its shift from “s₁” to “s₂” occurs early and consistently enough to serve as a relative dating criterion. The “r” rotunda also shows clear temporal drift, becoming increasingly frequent after c. 1450, though its uneven adoption limits its reliability when used in isolation. The form of “a”, by contrast, remains largely resistant to change, with conservative and innovative forms coexisting throughout.

Among the linguistic features, the diphthongisation of *e* before *ng* and of *é* show some chronological sensitivity: *eing* is almost universal in later manuscripts, while “ie” spellings become frequent only after mid-century. The drop of fricative *g* intervocalically (*g* > *j*) was only rarely encountered as it becomes apparent in the orthography of a relatively small sample of words, but it clearly appears to gain some pace after 1450. Fricativisation of *k*, *u*-epenthesis, and palatalisation, while diachronically attested, occur too inconsistently across the corpus to anchor precise dating on their own, but they too show a somewhat steady tendency to spread in the course of the period.

Crucially, the combined analysis in Chapters 5.5 and 6.8 shows that very few scribes consistently adopt either all older or all newer forms. Most exhibit mixed profiles,

adopting some innovations while resisting others. This undermines any expectation of clean chronological clustering and underscores that reliable dating must rest on cumulative patterns across multiple features, not on any single diagnostic trait.

The results strongly suggest that the fifteenth century was marked by pronounced individualisation of scribal practice. Attempts to identify “schools” (meant as “communities of practice”) or regional clusters in Chapter 7 found no robust correlation between palaeographic and linguistic behaviours across multiple scribes. Even scribes who adopted several innovative letterforms often retained conservative spellings, and vice versa.

This variation likely reflects structural aspects of Icelandic manuscript culture. The clerical and administrative élite who produced manuscripts were few in number but highly mobile. Thus, their circulation across the island would have inhibited the development of stable local styles. At the same time, the lack of strong institutional scriptoria meant that scribes often worked semi-independently in terms of scribal choices, negotiating between personal habits, the models of their exemplars, and the expectations of patrons. The result was a fragmented landscape of scribal practice, in which broad cultural shifts (such as growing cursivity) filtered through highly localised, individual trajectories.

Beyond documenting specific changes, this study offers a methodological model for integrating palaeographic and linguistic data through quantitative, feature-based analysis. By coding features across fifty scribal hands and visualising their distributions, it demonstrates how even highly heterogeneous evidence can be systematically compared and interpreted.

The findings also provide a reference framework for future research: they establish approximate chronological ranges for some features, chart the diffusion paths of others, and show which are too variable to serve as reliable indicators. Moreover, the study reveals the necessity of interpreting orthographic change not as a simple reflection of speech but as the product of mediation—by training, exemplars, and scribal choice. This perspective repositions scribes as active agents in the historical record of language, whose practices both document and shape linguistic change.

At the same time, the absence of clear regional clustering underscores the need for more localised corpora and for the exploration of underrepresented genres (such as legal or medical texts). Future work might also extend the approach to morphological and syntactic features, or to the interaction between graphic innovation and codicological layout or decoration.

Ultimately, this study shows that the “long” fifteenth century was neither a period of stagnation nor a monolithic transition from conservative to innovative writing, but a period of profound yet fragmented transformation. It offers a picture of change as it was lived and written: incremental, uneven, and continually negotiated on the page. By tracing this interplay of continuity and innovation, this thesis contributes not just to the dating of Icelandic manuscripts, but to understanding the dynamics of cultural change within a decentralised and individualised scribal culture.

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