

DATING RAUÐÚLFS ÞÁTR

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In my monograph in *Studia Islandica* 25, *Rauðúlfs þátr. A Study* (Reykjavík 1966), 39–40, I drew attention to three loanwords in the *þátr* from Old French. One, *kurteisi* (OF *cortésie*) is common in Old Icelandic, and not only in romance sagas; one of the earliest appearances is in *Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups in forna*, in AM 645 4to (written c.1220); the corresponding adjective *kurteiss* (in the superlative form) appears already in the twelfth-century *Leiðarvísir*, probably written by Abbot Nikulás between 1154 and 1159 (*Alfræði íslensk* I, 1908, 13; cf. Bjarni Einarsson, ‘The Lovesick Skald’, *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 4, 1971, 35 and note 24). The other two, *purtréa* ‘adorn with pictures’ (OF *pourtraire*) and *flúr* ‘flower’ (OF *flour*, *flor*) are found in late thirteenth- and fourteenth-century texts, mainly romance sagas and religious works; Fritzner and Cleasby–Vigfússon (W. A. Craigie’s Supplement) list examples of *purtréa* in *Stjórn*, *Clarus saga*, *Rémundar saga*; *flúr* ‘flower’ is found in *Barlaams saga* (oldest manuscript 1275) and *Biskupa sögur* II (fourteenth century), *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, *Stjórn*, *Karlamagnús saga*, *Ævintýri íslensk* 1882, *Heilagra manna sögur* I 525/17 (*Marthe saga ok Marie Magdelene* (manuscripts fourteenth century); also in *Sverris saga* (early thirteenth century) in the sense ‘flour’; cf. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* 1848–87, II 493 (*sáðs heiti*)).

Because a shortened version of *Rauðúlfs þátr* seems to be incorporated into Snorri Sturluson’s *Heimskringla* (*ÍF* XXVII 298–99; cf. Sigurður Nordal, *Om Olav den helliges saga* (1914), 87), and there is reason to think that the original version of the *þátr* was later than Styrmir Kárason’s *Óláfs saga helga*, it seemed to me likely that it was first written in the third decade of the thirteenth century. But Old Widding (in his amusing article ‘Dating *Rauðúlfs þátr*’, *Mediaeval Scandinavia* I (1968), 115–121) argues that *purtréa* and *flúr* ‘are words belonging to a painter’s vocabulary’ and that they ‘are attached’ to the ‘florissant stil’ which developed in Old Norse in the second half of the thirteenth century, contemporaneously with a style of painting with flower decoration in church art in Norway. He uses this as evidence in support of his contention that Snorri’s brief account of St Óláfr and Rauð(úlf)r was not a shortening of *Rauðúlfs þátr* in the form in which we now have it interpolated into his separate *Óláfs saga helga*, but was the original of which the extant *Rauðúlfs þátr* was an expansion.

Two words in manuscripts that are obviously rather remote from their archetype cannot, of course, be used to date the composition of the original

text, since the date that the words entered the language cannot be precisely determined, and anyway they could easily have been interpolated at some stage in the manuscript transmission, and Ole Widding supports his argument with wider features of the style and language of the extant *Rauðúlfs þáttur*. But the fact that the language of the *þáttur* shows Norwegian influence does not really affect the situation, for Snorri might well have come across the story in Norway, and anyway Norwegian influence on spelling and style is not uncommon in Icelandic manuscripts towards the end of the thirteenth century. And interest in describing in detail artistic decorations of buildings begins in Norse sagas much earlier than 1300 or even 1250, for *Tristrams saga*, at any rate, seems to have been translated as early as 1226. The author of *Rauðúlfs þáttur* uses a considerable amount of material from southern European literature, including the description of the revolving building and its decorations, and most notably the ‘gabs’ or boasting, and the story with which the *þáttur* has the greatest affinity is *Le Voyage de Charlamagne*, which included both motifs (there is no indication that the author of the *þáttur* was acquainted with the translation of this story in *Karlamagnus saga*). This *chanson de geste* is thought to have been composed in the twelfth century, and one of the buildings in it is said to have had decorations depicting all creation. Another building is described as having been *peinte a flors*, so that two of the three French words in the *þáttur* could actually have been derived directly from the French poem (the adjective *corteis* occurs in it several times, though it does not use the word *pourtraire*). If the Norwegian or Icelandic author of the *þáttur* used a version of *Le Voyage de Charlamagne*, he must of course have known French, and this would explain both his use of loanwords from French and his partiality for romance-style descriptions of buildings. There is no reason in either the language or style of the *þáttur* why it should not have been written early in the thirteenth century, and the relationship between it and Snorri’s brief retelling of the story are best explained by his having read it, possibly in Norway. There is no reason to suppose that the version he knew differed much from the one that survives. Dating of texts, when the original manuscripts are no longer extant, by ‘linguistic facts’, is likely to be less reliable than dating them by their literary relations, which may inevitably be based on hypotheses, but at least a *terminus post quem* for literary motifs can be securely derived from the known facts of literary history, which is not inevitably more subjective than linguistic history—at any rate when dealing with loanwords.

Two further addenda to *Rauðúlfs þátrr. A Study*:

P. 12: On dream rituals, see Nora Chadwick, 'Dreams in early European literature', *Celtic Studies: Essays in Memory of Angus Matheson, 1912–1962*, ed. J. Carney and D. Greene (1968), 33–50.

P. 85, note 1: Cf. also the account of Sigurður Jórsalafari's travels in the Mediterranean area in *Morkinskinna* (ed. Finnur Jónsson, 1932), chs 46–8, pp. 338–52.