

Matthew James Driscoll and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, eds. 2015. *66 Manuscripts from the Arnamagnæan Collection*. Copenhagen: The Arnamagnæan Institute, Department of Nordic Research. Reykjavik: The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press. 248 pages. ISBN: 978-87-635-4264-7.

The year 2013 marked the 350th anniversary of the birth of Icelandic scholar, antiquarian, and manuscript collector Árni Magnússon (1663-1730). In commemoration of this event, the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen and the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies in Reykjavík produced *66 Manuscripts from the Arnamagnæan Collection* (available also in Icelandic and Danish versions as *66 Handrit úr fórum Árna Magnússonar* and *66 håndskrifter fra Arne Magnussons samling*, respectively) to highlight the contents of the manuscripts in the Arnamagnæan Collection. The book's 35 contributors feature 66 manuscripts—a number chosen for the total years of Árni Magnússon's life—in an effort to “spark [the] readers' interest in a collector and a collection that are truly unique in the world” (37).

In her introduction, Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir provides an overview of the life and career of Árni Magnússon, from his upbringing at Hvammur to his time collecting manuscripts in Iceland during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to his death in Copenhagen just over a year after the Great Fire of 1728. She then details the foundation of the Arnamagnæan Foundation and the Commission, the dispute over manuscript ownership between Danes and Icelanders, and the inscription of the collection on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2009. Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir's introduction is accompanied by a number of colour images, and its margins contain translations of Árni Magnússon's acquisition notes and other useful supplementary information.

Each of the 66 chapters following the introduction treats an individual manuscript in Árni Magnússon's collection. The individual chapters are brief (typically only one page) and provide descriptions of the works on which they focus. The authors summarize date and contents, provenance and transmission, known scribes and owners, and condition and distinguishing features. Many also detail when, under what circumstances, and in what form Árni Magnússon acquired a particular manuscript. Underneath the blocks of text are summaries of manuscript details (call number, total leaves, material, contents, provenance, date, scribes, current repository), and the chapter author's initials. Like the introduction, the chapters are accompanied by colour images on the page opposite the text. Usually, the image is of one representative leaf from the manuscript, but occasionally several leaves or even bindings are featured. Images of particularly beautiful or unusual manuscripts (e.g. AM 45 fol. [*Codex Frisianus*], AM 122b fol. [*Reykjarfjarðarbók*], AM 764 4to [*Reynistaðarbók*], and the liturgical

calendar in AM 249a fol., and AM 227 fol. [*Stjórn*]) are given a full two-page spread, and others offer longer and more detailed text (e.g. AM 738 4to [*Langa-Edda*], AM 28 8vo [*Codex runicus*], and AM 350 fol. [*Skarðsbók Jónsbókar*]).

The conclusion, written by Soffía Guðný Guðmundsdóttir and Laufey Suðnadóttir (with Anne Mette Hansen, who contributes an informative excerpt on script), details book production in the Middle Ages. It explains the parchment-making process and describes how sheets were folded to create *bifolia*, which would be sewn together to form a quire. Different sizes and formats are discussed as are other preparatory measures. The authors discuss tools of writing and explain the inkmaking process as well as what colours were available to Icelandic scribes. Next is a consideration of the scribes and *scriptoria* themselves, followed by a discussion of illuminations and binding. An afterward by the editors, indices and lists of manuscripts, citations, illustrations, persons, and titles, and details on contributors conclude the volume.

The book is simultaneously informative and beautiful, and it affords people without access to the Arnamagnæan Collections in Copenhagen and Reykjavík access to a medieval and early modern treasure trove. Collectively, the chapters offer a rare and unique glimpse into a diverse collection of materials, whose contents range from medieval liturgical calendars and prayer books to saga manuscripts and poetic miscellanies. This reviewer was pleased to see such a wide variety of material featured, representing the medieval and early modern periods and both Iceland and Denmark. In their stated purpose—“to give a picture of Árni Magnússon the manuscript collector and the richness and diversity of his collection” (229)—the editors and contributors succeeded admirably. They should be commended for producing such an excellent tribute to Árni Magnússon’s and his legacy—one that will be of interest and use to specialists and the general public alike.

Natalie M. Van Deusen  
University of Alberta