

Reykjavik
Stofnun Árna Magnússonar

GKS 1812 4to

De ordine ac positone stellarum in signis (mixed Latin and Old Icelandic)

Iceland

12th to the 14th century

This catalogue entry has been written by Christian Etheridge, who completed his MA thesis on this topic in early 2012. For further information, he can be contacted directly at: wyvern_hoo2@hotmail.co.uk.

GKS 1812 4to is a mainly computistical compilation dating over the course of three centuries.

Chronologically, the sections can be dated as follows:

Its earliest part, GKS 1812 IV 4to, dates from c.1192 and contains the Icelandic treatises *Rím I* and *Oddatala* as well as Arabic star names.

The next part, GKS 1812 III 4to, dates from 1225-1250 and contains a short computus treatise.

The third part, GKS 1812 II 4to, dates from the 14th century and contains the Old Icelandic geometrical treatise *Algorismus* and astronomical treatise *Rím II*.

The final part, GKS 1812 I 4to, also dates from the 14th century and contains the incomplete text of the *De ordine ac positione Aratea* with illustrations, well as a series of astronomical diagrams.

text

fol. 3r	Cancer habet stellas in pectore claras ii quas appellant asinos inter quas nubicula... quae vocatur spica in tunica obscuras vi, In singulis pedibus singulas summa xviii
fol. 3v	Scorpio habet stellas Ex his priores iiii quae in cornibus vel labiis quae chele appellantur positae sunt librae ... In dorso ii, In cauda I, In genu priori I, In summo pede I, In posteriori genu i.

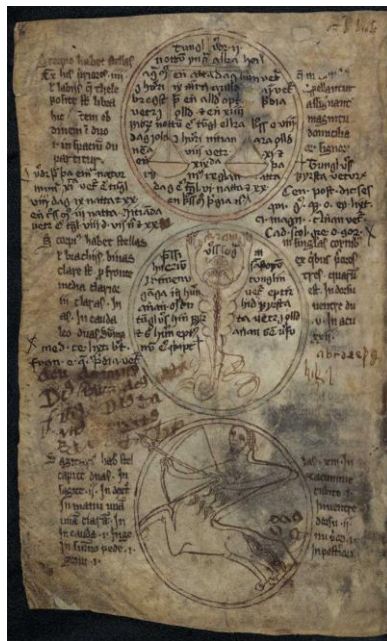
fol. 4r Capricornus habet stellas xxiii, In singulis cornibus singulis, In naso clarum unum, In capite ii, Sub collo i ... linea quibus sibi in vicem conexas habet stellas ad partem borii ii ad notii iii ad occidentem iii, Summa stellarum xxxvi

fol. 7r Centaurus habet stellas xliii, In singulis omeris singulas et in cubitis binas in pectore iii, In reliquo corpore x ... In pectore ii, In pede priori tres, In ventre duos, In sinistro femore i, In extreme pede unam claram, In cauda iii

illustrations



fol. 3r



fol. 3v



fol. 4r



fol. 7v

ff. 3r-4r Fine sepia pen drawings of 9 of the zodiacal constellations, which were once colored with wash that has now faded. Each figure is set within its own roundel. There are three roundels per page, one on top of another. Latin text is placed each side of the roundel.

fol. 3r **CANCER** has two legs on either side of an oval shell with pincers on the top and is in a green roundel. The Manger (Praesepe, Asselli) is placed upside down on the bottom of the shell. The two asses are both feeding from the manger one on each side

LEO bounds to the right, his tail is raised, his mouth is open, his front two paws are raised and he is in a red roundel.

VIRGO is facing to the right; she has a long dress and wings which are folded. She has a diadem on her forehead and long wavy hair. She holds Spica in her left hand in the form of a lily that hangs from the blue roundel that surrounds her.

fol. 3v **LIBRA** is shown as a red pair of scales in a red roundel. Inserted in the roundel are computistical notes in Old Icelandic from the fifteenth century.

SCORPIO is shown as a twisted humanoid figure with a curved tail. Its two outstretched hands reach up to grasp the top of the blue roundel. Inserted in the roundel are computistical notes in Old Icelandic from the fifteenth century.

SAGITTARIUS is depicted as a centaur with a bow placed in a purple roundel and facing left. His front two legs rear up and he has tufts of hair on his chest. He has short curly hair and a goatee beard. His bow is drawn and the arrow extends out of the frame of the roundel.

fol. 4r **CAPRICORN** faces to the right in a green roundel. He has two long curved horns, tufts of hair on his upper body, and a twisted tail ending in an acanthus shape.

AQUARIUS faces to the left in a red roundel. He is naked and has curly hair. He clutches an urn with a handle at the bottom in his arms, a small amount of water is pouring out.

PISCES is two fish in a red roundel. The top fish swims to the left and the bottom fish to the right. There is a cord that goes from the mouth of the top fish to the tail of the bottom fish and from there to the tail of the top fish and back down to the mouth of the bottom fish.

fol. 4v Divisio scientiarum

fol. 6v Rota mensium

fol. 7r Wheel of the year and planetary orbits

fol. 7v A set of fine pen drawings in sepia ink of 6 constellations, clustered together in one image. Latin excerpts from the *De ordine ac positione stellarum* accompany each figure.

CENTAURUS faces to the left. He stands upright on his hind legs, with his left front outstretched and the right front leg bent. In his left hand he holds a long wooden club and in his right hand he holds **LUPUS** (a small dog). His chest is covered in tufts of hair and he has curly hair and a beard.

CETUS faces to the right. Its body is long and serpentine with a twisted lower body and flipper like tail. Its head resembles that of a Grey Seal.

ORION faces to the front. He wears a tunic down to his knees with hose and pointed shoes. His sword is in its scabbard tied to his waist by a loose belt. In his left hand he holds a spear and in his right hand he holds a club. On his head he wears a mail coif. Attached to his left wrist by a lead is Canis Major.

CANIS MAIOR jumps to the left. He has small ears and a small disc in his open mouth. He has a collar with a lead that is attached to Orion's left wrist.

CANIS MINOR jumps to the left but turns his head around to face the right.

fol. 10v	Heliocentric orbits of Venus and Mercury
fol. 11r	Geocentric orbits of Mars, Jupiter and Saturn
fol. 11v	Phases of the Moon
fol. 12v	Diagram of eclipses

notes

The GKS 1812 4to manuscript is associated with the Augustinian monastery based on Viðey Island off the coast of Reykjavik. This monastery was founded in 1226 by the famous author Snorri Sturluson and Þorvaldr Gizurarson the brother of the bishop of Skálholt, Magnus Gizurarson. The oldest part of the manuscript, GKS 1812 IV 4to predates the foundation. However the next oldest part, GKS 1812 III 4to, contains a partial obituarum with many of the Viðey founders relatives on it. The treatise *Rím II* is believed to have been written at Viðey around 1275-1300 and to have been heavily influenced by the *Tractatus* of Johannes de Sacrobosco. As well as astronomical and computational details in *Rím II* there are also references to Euclid's *Elements* and attempts to explain Hindu-Arabic numerals. There are also spring tidal calculations which point to the tides of the coast of south and south-west Iceland. The only educational seat in this area of Iceland is the monastery of Viðey. The geometrical treatise *Algorismus* was also likely to have been written here. The whole GKS 1812 4to manuscript was eventually owned by Alexius Pálsson the last abbot of Viðey; it would seem that he took over the archives of the monastery at the time of the Reformation in 1539. Alexius Pálsson was the uncle of the grandfather of a certain Hakon Ormsson. Inside GKS 1812 4to there are written the words 'Bok Hakonar Ormssonat Anno'. Hakon Ormsson (1614-1656) was a Sheriff and writer living in the south of Iceland. From him the book went to the possession of Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson (1605-1675) who later sent the book and other precious manuscripts to Copenhagen and to the collection of King Frederick III in the year 1662. GKS 1812 4to was eventually returned to Iceland in 1984 and now resides in the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar collection in Reykjavik.

Preliminary studies suggest that the constellation images bear a close relationship to British manuscripts from the late 13th to early 14th century. In particular, one might cite the two Bodley Hyginus manuscripts and the *De ordine* manuscript in the Getty Museum (Ludwig XII, 5).

bibliography

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