

A neglected manuscript

A Danish version of *Amadís de Gaula*

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»In the long history of European prose fiction few works are to be found that have exercised more influence not only on literature proper but also on manners and customs, or that have enjoyed a more enduring popularity, than the romance of chivalry entitled *Amadís de Gaula*.«¹

It has been a common place in (Scandinavian) literary historiography that the chivalric romance *Amadís de Gaula* was well-known and read also in Northern Europe, but never had been translated into any Scandinavian language. After giving a very short survey of the European diffusion of the *Amadís* novel, this contribution reports on a manuscript that indeed contains a Danish translation of this chivalric romance, held at The Royal Library in Copenhagen.

The novel *Amadís de Gaula*

The earliest extant edition of *Amadís* consists of four books and was printed in Zaragoza, Spain in 1508 in Jorge Coci's printing house as *Los quatro libros del virtuoso cavallero Amadís de Gaula*.² As author (or corrector) Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo (ca. 1440 – ca. 1503) is named, who announces also a Book V, which then was printed in Seville in 1510 under the title *Las sergas de Esplendian, hijo de Amadís de Gaula*.³ *Amadís* has a long and complex history of manuscript and printed transmission; the earliest references to a text called *Amadís*

1 *Amadís of Gaul. Books I and II*. Translated by Edwin Place and Herbert Behm. The University Press of Kentucky, second edition 2003, p. 9.

2 It seems to be general consensus that the *editio princeps* was produced already in 1496, but the earliest extant version is the 1508 print. Cf. Henry Thomas: *Spanish and Portugese romances of chivalry*. Cambridge 1920, pp. 41–42. – For details on the 1508 print cf. Thomas, p. 63 and Frederick John Norton: *A descriptive catalogue of printing in Spain and Portugal 1501-1520*. Cambridge etc. 1978, p. 178, pp. 231–232, p. 296, p. 350, p. 365. – Cf. also Juan Manuel Cacho Bleuca: *Los cuatro libros de Amadís de Gaula* de Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo, in: *Amadís de Gaula 1508. Quinientos años de libros de caballerías*. Biblioteca Nacional de España/Sociedad Estatal de Conmemoraciones Culturales 2008 (Exhibition Catalogue), pp. 128–162.

3 Cf. Norton, p. 296.

are Castilian and dating from the fourteenth century.⁴ The chivalric and love narration about prince Amadís and his many adventures are inspired by the French Arthurian romances, which came to Spanish and Portuguese courts during the end of the twelfth until the beginning of the fourteenth century, in a next stage they were adapted and translated, and, finally, they served as inspiration for the creation of new texts like *Amadís*.⁵

Amadís is the son of the secret love between Perion, king of Gaul (Wales), and princess Elisena. As an infant, he is carried out to sea and brought to Scotland, and later on, as a young boy, even to the court of the king of Scotland. There he meets Oriana, the young daughter of Lisuarte, king of Great Britain, and falls in love with her. In various adventures and encounters, he proves himself a marvellous knight, also together with his brother Galaor (in the meantime, his father Perion had married his mother Elisena and had another son, Galaor, now grown-up). Amadís and Galaor manage to help Lisuarte who had been deprived of his kingdom and who (together with Oriana) was taken prisoner by the wizard Arcalaus. Amadís manages to rescue Oriana and they have a son, Esplandian (the hero of the later story). The series of adventures and combats Amadís has to experience (in different parts of Europe and also in fictive places) continue in the following books II-IV, until, finally, Amadís and Oriana, who appear as the perfection of a knight and his lady, are united.⁶

The Spanish romance developed very soon to what one could call an early modern bestseller and a novel series: As early as in 1510 (i.e. when Montalvo's Book V was printed), the first continuation of the *Amadís*-novel, written by another author, Ruy Páez de Ribera, was printed in Salamanca, followed by further continuations (Books VII-XII) by three

4 Cf. Hilkert Weddige: *Die »Historien vom Amadis aus Frankreich«. Dokumentarische Grundlegung zur Entstehung und Rezeption*. Wiesbaden 1975, pp. 1–11. Also Henrike Schaffert: *Der Amadisroman. Serielles Erzählen in der Frühen Neuzeit*. Berlin/Boston 2015 (Frühe Neuzeit; 196), pp. 1–22. The Castilian fragments of a medieval *Amadís* romance were found in 1955 and are published by José Manuel Lucía Megias: Apéndice. Edición de los fragmentos conservados del *Amadís de Gaula* medieval. The Bancroft Library. University of California, Berkeley, UCB 115, in: *Amadís de Gaula 1508*, pp. 80–94.

5 Cf. Weddige, p. 2.

6 For this brief summary, cf. Thomas, pp. 41–47.

different Spanish authors.⁷ Short time after that, the international career of *Amadis de Gaula* started: First, the Spanish Books I-V were translated into French by Nicolas de Herberay des Essarts and printed in Paris in the time 1540–1544, then Books VII and IX (which became the French Books VI, VII and VIII, also translated by des Essarts and published 1545–1548), followed by further French translations and continuations until 1615.⁸ Also Italy was a successful market; in the period 1546–1551, the Venetian publisher Michele Tramezzino published ten of the twelve already existing Spanish *Amadis*-books, translated into Italian by Mambrino Roseo da Fabriano, and followed by new-made continuations and diverse *supplementa*.⁹

Between 1540 and 1615, the French *Amadis*-books emerged to the famous *Amadis*-series consisting of not less than twenty-four books, involving nine translators and ca. thirty printers and publishers – and with a very complex transmission.¹⁰

In Germany, the tradition started in 1569 with German translations from the French editions, printed in Sigmund Feyerabend's printing office in Frankfurt; the last *editio princeps* (of Book XXIV) was published in 1595, the last reprint of an *Amadis*-book in 1617.¹¹

The enormous success of the *Amadis*-series reached also the Netherlands and England; even a Hebrew translation of Book I dating from 1534–1547 is extant.¹² Actually, the novel series had a Europe-wide success and a long afterlife – not only in translations, continuations and critical-theoretical discussions about fictional literature and the novel in

7 Cf. Weddige, pp. 10–15, and Thomas, pp. 41–83. For the early *Amadis*-editions cf. Norton, p. 178 (*Amadis* Book VI), p. 296 (Book V), p. 350 (Book VII).

8 For the French translations, cf. Weddige, pp. 22–28.

9 For the Italian versions, cf. Weddige, pp. 16–21.

10 Cf. Weddige, p. 26.

11 Cf. Weddige, pp. 29–95.

12 Cf. Thomas, pp. 59–63 (especially on the Hebrew version); Weddige, pp. 97–113 and the overview by Stefano Neri: Cuadro de la difusión europea del ciclo del *Amadis de Gaula* (siglos XVI-XVII), in: José Manuel Lucía Megías & María Carmen Marín Pina (eds.): *Amadis de Gaula: Quinientos años después. Estudios en homenaje a Juan Manuel Cacho Blecua*. Alcalá de Henares 2008, pp. 565–591. Cf. also Schaffert, pp. 9–22 (on the production and reception of *Amadis*) and Anna Bologno et al. (eds.): *Repertorio delle continuazioni italiane ai romanzi cavallereschi spagnoli Ciclo di Amadis di Gaula*. Roma 2013, especially the tabular overview on the European diffusion of *Amadis* by Stefano Neri on pp. 196–197.

general until the end of the eighteenth century, but it was also transformed into operas composed by Jean Baptiste Lully (*Amadis*, 1684), Georg Friedrich Händel (*Amadigi di Gaula*, 1715), and others.¹³ Above all, *Amadís* plays an important role in the history of literary fiction as a starting-point for many adaptations, parodies or free renderings – from Bernardo Tasso’s Italian verse adaption *Amadigi de Gaula* (1560) until the end of the eighteenth century, e.g. Christoph Martin Wieland’s *Der Neue Amadis* (1774).¹⁴ The most famous text among them, of course, is Miguel Cervantes’ *Don Quijote*, often regarded as the first European novel. The emergence of a *Don Quijote* probably never would have been possible without *Amadís*.

The *Amadís*-manuscript in the Thott Collection

The Royal Library in Copenhagen owns a manuscript in Otto Thott’s collection (den Thottske samling) which contains a Danish translation of Book I of *Amadís*. This is ms. Thott 470 8°, which has been part of The Royal Library since 1785, when the most important parts of the huge private book and manuscript collection of Count Otto Thott (1703–1785) was bequeathed to The Royal Library at Thott’s death. Regarding the novel’s wide circulation in Germany and its Europe-wide success, it is not very surprising that it was well-known in Denmark and even was translated into Danish; Ludvig Holberg, for example, refers to *Amadís* in the fictional preface to *Peder Paars* (1720) and in his comedy *Den Vægelsindede* (1731).¹⁵ But above all, however, it is rather remarkable, that no knowledge of this translation exists in any Danish literary history, as far as we have seen un-

13 The three *opere serie Amadis de Grèce* (Paris 1699) by André Cardinal Destouches/Antoine Houdar de La Motte; *Oriana* (Hamburg 1717) by Reinhard Keiser/Joachim Beccau; and *Amadis aus Griechenland* (Munich 1724) by Pietro Torri/Sebastiano Biancardi. There were also composed German *opere buffe* and *Singspiele* basing on *Amadis*, corresponding to the literary *Amadis*-parodies. Cf. Weddige, pp. 296–308.

14 Cf. Weddige, pp. 309–314.

15 Cf. *Ludvig Holbergs Skrifter*. Ed. by Karen Skovgaard-Petersen et al. Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab 2009–2015. *holbergsskrifter.dk*.

til now.¹⁶ Even though the manuscript is recorded in 1795 in the *Index codicum manuscriptorum*, the Bibliotheca Thottiana's printed catalogue of the manuscripts belonging to the Thott collection,¹⁷ its existence seems to be completely unknown by Danish (and Scandinavian) scholars in Early modern literature. Besides that, the international *Amadis*-reception does not mention any Scandinavian translation of the novel.¹⁸

What does the manuscript look like? It is a paper manuscript in octavo format, has a book cover and contains a good 600 (unpaginated) pages, starting rightaway with the *Amadis* story, without title page (see below).

16 R. Paulli's comment on »Folkebøgernes Historie« (»History of the Danish chapbooks«) in J.P. Jacobsen, Jørgen Olrik & R. Paulli (eds.): *Danske Folkebøger fra 16. og 17. Aarhundrede*. Vol. 13 (ed. by R. Paulli). København 1936, p. 230: »Amadis-Romanerne, som allerede i Slutningen af det 16. Aarhundrede fortrænger Folkebøgerne i den tyske Overklassens Gunst, bliver slet ikke oversat hos os« (»The Amadis novels, which already in the late sixteenth century were driving out the chapbooks in the favour of the German upper-class, were not translated here [in Denmark] at all«). – All translations from Scandinavian languages into English are by Anna Katharina Richter, unless otherwise stated. The translations only aim at a better understanding of the original texts and are not demanding any literary quality. – Also the main Danish literary histories do not mention any Danish translation of the *Amadis*: N.M. Petersen: *Bidrag til den danske Litteraturs Historie*. København 1867; Carl. S. Petersen & Vilhelm Andersen: *Illustreret dansk litteraturhistorie*. København 1924–1934; Oluf Friis: *Den danske Litteraturs Historie. Fra Oldtiden indtil Renæssancen*. København 1975; *Dansk litteraturhistorie*. Ed. by Peter Holst et al. København 1983–1985; Jens Anker Jørgensen & Knud Wentzel (eds.): *Hovedsporet. Dansk litteraturs historie*. København 2005; Anne-Marie Mai (ed.): *Hvor litteraturen finder sted*. København 2010. – Hakon Stangerup: *Romanen i Danmark i det attende aarhundrede*. København 1936, mentions (pp. 22–23), that »[f]ørbarokkens Romantyper: Amadisromanen og Hyrderomanen maa siges at være saa temmelig forsvundet i Danmark efter Aar 1700. At de har været kendt tidligere, fremgaar af Auktionskatalogerne, der endnu annoncerer »Livre de Amadis« et Par Gange og har et temmeligt stort Udvalg af Hyrderomaner.« (»One could say that the forms of the pre-baroque novel, i.e. the Amadis novel and the pastoral novel, as good as disappeared in Denmark after the year 1700. But that they had been known before, is evident from contemporary catalogues of book auctions, which announce »Livre de Amadis« several times and which present quite a huge selection of pastoral novels.«). A former commentary in a 1843–edition of Holberg's comedies states directly that there is no Danish translation of the novel at all: »Den franske Ridder-Roman fra Middelalderen: *Amadis de Gaule*, er derimod aldrig oversat paa Dansk.« (»The French chivalric romance from the Middle Ages, *Amadis de Gaule*, however, was never translated into Danish.«) *Ludvig Holbergs Comedier*. Udgivne med Anmærkninger under Texten, Indledninger og Oplysninger til ethvert Lystspil, for det Holbergske Samfund. Kiøbenhavn 1843. Vol. I, p. 309.

17 Cf. »Index codicum manuscriptorum«, in: *Catalogi Bibliothecae Thottianae*, tom. 7, København 1795, p. 529, n:o 470: »Historien om Amadis af Frankerige, udsat af Tydsk« (»The history of Amadis of France, translated from German«). It is registered within the section »Danica, Norvegica, Slesvico-Holsatica«.

18 Cf. Weddige (who discusses the French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, and the English versions), pp. 107–111; *Amadis de Gaule 1508*; Schaffert; Bologna et al. (eds.); and Lucia Megias & Marín Pina (eds.).

There are no other texts than *Amadis* in the manuscript. No translator or owner of the manuscript is named, and there is neither a dedication nor a preface. The headline presents the following text as a translation from the German: »Historie / om Amadis af franckrige, meget lystig og kortwillig for Unge Men(-)nisker at læsse med hoß følgende goede Lærdommer paa vores dans[ke] sprog, af tydsken udsatt.« (»History of Amadis from France, very pleasant to read, especially for young people, with attached good advices, in our Danish language, translated from German«). This Danish *Amadis* contains forty-four chapters, which correspond to the German tradition and the numbering of chapters in Book I. It also takes over the brief summaries of each chapter from the German prints.¹⁹ The manuscript seems to be written by one single hand, dating approximately from the last part of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century. The manuscript on its whole is in a very neat script, with only a few corrections (if any) on each page.²⁰ It looks like a fair copy, maybe it served as a printer's setting-copy, prepared by the translator/scribe.²¹ Under which circumstances it became part of Otto Thott's collection, we do not know so far, but the authors of this article are preparing an annotated edition of the Danish *Amadis*-manuscript Thott 470 8° with a commentary on its literary and bookhistorical context. The aim is to analyse the manuscript in a wider context, considering among other aspects the reception of *Amadis* in Denmark (and Scandinavia) in the Early modern era, its impact on the history of literary translation and its status in the discussion about the novel as a (new) literary genre in Denmark.

19 Cf. the German first edition, Frankfurt 1569: *Neue Historia/ Vom Amadis auß Franckreich/ seer lieblich vnd kurtzweilig / auch den junge[n] nützlich zulesen / mit viel angehefften guten Leeren / newlich auß Französischer / in vnser algemeine / geliebte Teutsche sprach gebracht. Gedruck zu Franckf. 1569. (durch Peter Schmidt / in verlegung Hieronymi Feyrabends)*. Digital edition available in the database for prints published in the German-speaking areas from the sixteenth century (Verzeichnis der Drucke des 16. Jahrhunderts, VD 16): VD 16 A 2113, digitised by Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Wien.

20 A more detailed paleographic investigation of the manuscript and the relation to the German source text is being prepared by the authors of this article.

21 There are, however, no Danish *Amadis*-prints registered in *Bibliotheca Danica*. It seems that the manuscript Thott 470 8° never went into print, but our further research will analyse these circumstances in detail. Cf. *Bibliotheca Danica. Systematisk fortegnelse over den danske litteratur fra 1482-1830, efter samlingerne i Det store kongelige Bibliothek i Kjøbenhavn: Med supplementer fra Universitetsbibliotheket i Kjøbenhavn og Karen Brahes Bibliothek i Odense*. Ed. by Chr. V. Bruun (vol. V by Lauritz Nielsen). Genudg. med tillæg og henvisninger af Det kongelige Bibliotek. Vol. I–V. København 1961–1963 [1877–1914].

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