

## **The Meaning of Media**

# **Modes of Modification: Variance and Change in Medieval Manuscript Culture**



Edited by  
Karl G. Johansson

## **Volume 1**

# The Meaning of Media

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Texts and Materiality in Medieval Scandinavia

Edited by  
Anna Catharina Horn, Karl G. Johansson

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Anna Catharina Horn and Karl G. Johansson

## Some Reflections on Writing a New History of Texts for the Scandinavian Middle Ages

The present book is the first in a new series intended to provide the foundation for a new history of texts in transmission in the Scandinavian Middle Ages. It is therefore relevant to stress what is central to and new about this approach to medieval manuscript culture. The traditional synthesis in the form of literary history is generally presented as a chronological narrative formed around the production of works, primarily works at the centre of an accepted canon. Our contention is that it is more relevant to establish a dynamic model based on the dissemination, distribution, and reception of *texts* in motion rather than static *works*, while to some degree, however, retaining relevant aspects of the production of the original form. One central aim is to provide the theoretical and methodological framework for such a narrative of the history of texts. Our use of the concepts of *genre* and *type* of text will, for example, as a consequence also be determined by the actual reception of texts over time rather than by fixed and static categories. At the outset, it is also important to stress that the material taken into account will to a large extent involve texts that are traditionally placed outside of the canon. This enables us to form a more comprehensive view of the emerging literate culture in Latin and the vernacular.

The literate culture of the Middle Ages, in manuscripts and epigraphic writing, has with good reason been characterized as constituted by *variance* on all levels, from palaeography and orthography to the transmission of motifs and larger textual units (see e.g. Zumthor 1987). It is obvious, however, that there has been a tendency in earlier scholarship to divide the investigation of this culture into various fields of study, with the result that interrelations and conflicting tendencies leading to *changes* in a longer-term perspective may have been overlooked. Good examples of this would be the lack of studies on the relation between epigraphy and manuscripts throughout the Middle Ages, or on the interaction between manuscript traditions and the emerging print culture of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. It has been common to focus on runic material as representative of regional literacy, while inscriptions in Latin have very often been neglected. And yet, from the introduction of Roman script and Latin texts, probably as early as the tenth century, but attested more clearly only in later centuries, our material demonstrates the interaction between the traditional use of runes and the novelty of Latin texts in various media. Runes are primarily found in epigraphic contexts, sometimes in direct connection with Latin inscriptions. In the manuscript material, Roman script dominates, but we do find examples of written runic messages, both

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shorter phrases in marginalia and also a few longer texts. Latin was primarily written and carved with Roman letters, but there are already instances in the earlier material of Latin being written or cut in runes. In the earliest period of the printing press, the relation between handwritten and printed texts needs to be studied further; there is no obvious or definite breaking point at which the move from a manuscript culture to a print culture has taken place, or consensus about how this change should be defined. An important contention at the outset, therefore, is that the rich diversity found in the medieval material plays perhaps the most significant role in our understanding of the emerging literate culture. It is therefore necessary to carry out further investigations of variance and change – what we choose to refer to as *modes of modification* – on various textual and material levels in the transmission and dissemination of texts in order to establish a systematic synthesis.

Materiality, in the form of stone, lead amulets, parchment, and paper, and how it formed part of literate culture, must be a central part of the study of reception and literacy in the Middle Ages. It is interesting to note, however, that the new interest in the full range of medieval literate culture represented in what is today often referred to as the *New Philology* or *Material Philology* already had its predecessors in the longer tradition of philology. Ernst Robert Curtius can suffice as an example. He stated in the early 1950s:

Now, to reading conceived as the form of reception and study, corresponds writing conceived as the form of production and creation. The two concepts belong together. In the intellectual world of the Middle Ages they represent as it were the two halves of a sphere. The unity of this world was shattered by the invention of printing. The immense and revolutionary change which it brought about can be summarized in one statement: Until that time every book was a manuscript. Merely materially, then, as well as artistically, the written book had a value which we can no more feel. Every book produced by copying represented diligence and skilled craftsmanship, long hours of intellectual concentration, loving and sedulous work. Every such book was a personal achievement – we find this expressed in the colophon, in which the scribe often tells us his name and unburdens his heart: “sicut aegrotus desiderat sanitatem item desiderat scriptor finem libri”.

(Curtius 1990: 328)

Scholarship interested in the emerging literacy in Scandinavia and in the diversity of the uses of texts that we meet in the extant material should take Curtius at his word and study the whole range of literate production and reception. The materiality of literate culture, in manuscripts as well as epigraphic contexts, is essential to our understanding of medieval literacy. It is important here to stress the importance of networks of patrons and craftspeople such as scribes and stonemasons, the contexts in which literate culture was formed. A new understanding of this culture and its changes throughout the Middle Ages and into the early modern period must focus on the production and re-production of written texts in accordance with Curtius's view and with a perspective that includes use and reception.

The present chapter, therefore, has a twofold purpose. The first aim is to briefly treat theoretical and methodological aspects of writing a history of texts in the case



of the Scandinavian Middle Ages. We wish here to present some general reflections on the writing of a new history of texts in the Scandinavian Middle Ages and the challenges that face a research programme pursuing this goal. The second aim of the chapter is to treat aspects of materiality and mediality, be they represented in epigraphic writing with runes or Roman script, or texts on parchment and subsequently paper. This preliminary discussion also functions as an introduction to the following chapters of the present book: a number of case studies that focus on a wide range of topics relevant for a new history of texts in medieval literate culture.

Finally, just a few words on the “Modes of Modification” research programme, financed for the period 2018–2025 by the Swedish Riksbankens jubileumsfond. The programme’s core group consists of seven participants who each have responsibility for a particular subproject (or what we prefer to call a *strand*, so as to indicate that the individual projects are all closely related to the overall research questions of modes of modification).<sup>1</sup> Each of the strands is expected to explore a certain perspective or a particular kind of material in order to contribute to the final synthesis of the whole programme. Within each strand, we intend to establish *observation points* (see below) that will provide information on the spatial and temporal aspects of the emerging literate culture of the Nordic realm, viewed within a larger European context and with a focus on the relevance of variance and diversity rather than the more traditional view of linear developments. The overall aim of the research programme is to further our understanding of processes of literarization within a common theoretical framework. Each strand will obviously need to establish and use methods relevant to the study of its main research questions and its particular material or field of interest, but at the same time, all strands are coordinated so that their results will be compatible and form a coherent presentation in the final volumes of the programme, which will be published in the same series as the present book.

## General considerations: Background and theoretical starting points

With the establishment of Church institutions in Scandinavia, from the first decades of the eleventh century, the Latin book culture of the Roman Church was finally firmly established. There is a relative consensus among scholars today that the earliest production of Latin manuscripts in the Nordic area for use within Church institutions

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<sup>1</sup> The core group consists of Massimiliano Bampi (Università Ca’Foscari Venezia, Italy), Anna Blenow (Göteborg University, Sweden), Stefanie Gropper (Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, Germany), Anna Catharina Horn (University of Oslo, Norway), Karl G. Johansson (University of Oslo, Norway), Elise Kleivane (University of Oslo, Norway), and Jonatan Pettersson (Stockholm University, Sweden).

can be dated to the second half of the eleventh century. As in most parts of Europe, Roman script was soon adapted for use in writing vernacular texts; judging from the extant material, this happened earlier in western Scandinavia, while the use of Latin dominated for a longer period in the eastern parts, and Latin book culture was to interact with the vernacular throughout the period under study (see e.g. Ommundsen & Heikkilä 2017; Mortensen 2018). The introduction of a new tool for linguistic communication and a new medium, writing with Roman script on parchment leaves gathered in booklets and codices, can be expected to have had an immense impact on the cultural, administrative, and political structures of society. It is only from the mid-twelfth century, however, that we find extant writing in the vernacular, primarily in the western regions – in Iceland and the Norwegian realm – and what is preserved from this period is primarily translated from Latin and related to the religious sphere. The earliest known writing in Scandinavian languages shows signs of novelty and uncertainty in orthography and form, but soon the script is used more effortlessly.

Translations played an important role throughout the Middle Ages. They brought the word of God to every part of what was becoming Europe as the Church understood it. Moreover, translations contributed to spreading the ideas of a common European cultural heritage. In this way, the narratives of, for example, the siege of Troy and Aeneas became part of the learned world of medieval scholars in the vernacular languages. Lars Boje Mortensen (2006a) discusses the relation between medieval Latin book culture and the vernacular literacy that was being established throughout Europe. Vernacular literacy, he argues, was established on the models of Latin literacy and should be studied in this light.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, the study of Latin fragments found in Scandinavian collections has further stressed the importance of medieval book culture as being at least bi-, if not to say multilingual.<sup>3</sup>

The discussion of theoretical and methodological aspects of analysing the emerging textual culture and the processes of change is in itself a central part of writing a new history of texts in transmission. In order to arrive at a synthesis from the various aspects of literacy and manuscript culture that have appeared over recent decades, we need to reconsider a number of traditional delimitations often established with national and Romantic biases. This is not unique to the situation in Scandinavia, but is rather, we contend, a general challenge for modern investigations into the earliest history of vernacular literacy and manuscript culture in the larger, European context. It is therefore, we argue, necessary to discuss these issues and their implications for the study of the emerging vernacular cultures in medieval

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<sup>2</sup> For a comparative European perspective, see the studies in Mortensen (2006b). The comparative perspective necessarily also involves a wider field to which Scandinavian literate culture needs to be related. It will also be relevant to take into account contacts with and influences from the Byzantine realm, for example. For an important study, see Scheel (2015).

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Karlsen (2013) and Ommundsen & Heikkilä (2017) for recent collections of studies of Latin fragments, primarily from Norway and Iceland.

Europe in general. Further, this understanding of changes in the material dissemination of texts in manuscript culture is also relevant for the subsequent introduction of the printing press and the mass production of texts.

There are a number of groundbreaking works from the last decades of the twentieth century that provide a new understanding of the processes at work in the emerging European literate culture. D.H. Green's work on reading in the Middle Ages (1994) will be of importance to our understanding of how translations were mediated and received. Of great significance is the work of Rita Copeland (e.g. 1991) on hermeneutics and rhetoric, and on the function of translations. Martin Irvine's (1994) discussion of the role of *grammatica* in medieval education is central. Brian Stock's (1983) important study of the implications of literacy, and more specifically of the formation of 'textual communities' where written works are interpreted and play central roles in the everyday lives of members of a group, should also be mentioned. These studies opened new avenues of investigation that are still valid and relevant for our understanding of literacy and the use of texts in a multilingual manuscript culture.

More recently, we have been inspired by the innovative studies of medieval narratives in what are referred to as *storyworlds* presented in a volume edited by Lars Boje Mortensen and Thomas M. S. Lehtonen (2013). Another important study in the field of literary studies was edited by David Wallace (2016). Here, the timeframe was limited to the years 1348–1418 and attention was directed at literary texts extending beyond the traditional canon from a broad European perspective. These studies have been very influential for our approach. It is already important here to stress, however, that our perspective on texts in general, and the use and dissemination of texts throughout our period of study, is rather different from the more literary viewpoints presented in the volumes just mentioned.

We take as a starting point the idea of the *Europeanization* of not only Scandinavia but of European culture at large, that is, the formation of a common European worldview (see e.g. Bartlett 1993; Moore 2000), and distinguish three important processes in the emerging literate culture as part of this Europeanization. It is important here to stress that the idea of a Europeanization is in itself problematic. It has primarily been applied to historical studies and related to the establishment of administrative units. In the present context – that of processes of literarization and literacy – it is used instead to delimit the expansion of Latin literacy and the use of texts, including the processes of *Latinization* and *vernacularization* discussed in what follows.<sup>4</sup>

With the Roman Church, its administration, liturgy, and education, Latin literacy and book culture were introduced to Scandinavia. We can speak here of processes of Latinization. It is important to stress that these processes are active throughout the

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<sup>4</sup> For a recent critical discussion of the concept of *Europe* in literary studies on the period, see Borsa et al. (2015: esp. 13–17). See also Wallace (2016) for an example of a European literary history.

Middle Ages and well into the early modern period. They provide models for the use of written texts, and the translation of both texts and models for text production continues to be influential even when vernacular literacy with Roman letters is well established. Further, we can expect the processes of Latinization to bring diversity and change to the use of Latin texts as well; that is to say, the Scandinavian Latin book culture is not a static entity but rather in itself also part of the overall processes of Latinization. With Roman letters and Latin texts and models come interaction with the old written language, the Scandinavian runes, as well as the opportunity of developing literate activities in the vernacular. These processes of transferring Latin models and texts, and of their transformation in the vernacular, we refer to as vernacularization. It is again important to stress the ongoing processes here rather than the all-too-simplified idea of a direct and unimpeded transfer. We expect these processes to be central to our understanding of the diversity, variance, and inevitable change that we can observe in literate culture throughout the period. If the processes of Latinization and vernacularization have their origin in the institutions of the Church, it is also relevant to further study the transition of literate culture from these institutions into more secular milieus, in what we could refer to as *secularization*. It is, admittedly, difficult in the medieval material to make clear divisions between religious texts belonging to the milieus of the Church on the one hand and secular milieus such as, for example, the courts of kings and nobility on the other. To understand the literate culture of the Middle Ages in all its variance and its various routes of change, it is, however, crucial to further our insights into the spread of book culture in new social contexts involving new institutions as well as individuals from a wider societal range.

It should be stressed again that we use the often-contested concept of Europeanization here for the emerging consciousness in the twelfth century of Europe as a cultural unit defined by the extension of the administration of the Catholic Church (Bartlett 1993). We are aware of the problem of defining the historical processes suggested by Bartlett. In relation to our focus on medieval literate culture and the manuscript book, we still choose, however, to use the concept, and suggest the following hypotheses about central phenomena in the processes of Europeanization.

- An overall hypothesis is that the establishment of Latin literacy in Europe is a prerequisite for Europeanization. This should be tested with reference to the Scandinavian material, but the outcome would obviously be significant for our understanding of processes of Europeanization as a shared European phenomenon.
- In order to establish a vernacular written language, we expect that there must be an indigenous production and re-production of Latin works. The earliest Latin works produced in Scandinavia therefore play an important role for the emerging written vernaculars.

- The early translations are highly relevant for our understanding of the vernacularization of Roman script, providing not only a system of script but also models of writing for the emerging vernacular textual cultures.
- The translations were significant in opening the way for a secularization of written culture in which individuals of the indigenous elite could participate. This transfer of an institutional Latin book culture into a more secular literate culture in the vernacular has its starting points in the earliest period we are discussing here, and is active throughout the period under scrutiny.

The processes of Europeanization in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Scandinavia, as they are reflected in both Latin and vernacular traditions, are obviously central to our discussion. In a European perspective, Latin literate culture, that is, the general use of written texts in various media, was re-established in Europe at large after a period of decline in the centuries preceding the introduction of Church institutions to Scandinavia, and in all regions of the Church, vernacular written languages emerged during the high Middle Ages. Our contention is, therefore, that the establishment of a literate vernacular culture should not be seen as unique to Scandinavia in this period. The processes of Europeanization include the establishment of vernacular written languages all over Europe and the subsequent replacement of Latin by the vernaculars in a growing number of domains. The translation of not only Latin works but, perhaps more significantly, of Latin models and types of texts, must therefore be studied as an important part of the Europeanization of Europe. Closely related to the Europeanization processes is the establishment of Latin book culture. In order to account for a Latin literacy, we must expect a long period of Latinization during which Latin as a language as well as the Roman script is introduced to Scandinavia.

If Latin at the outset is the universal and also all-encompassing language of which every literate person needs to have at least basic knowledge, while the vernacular represents the regional, this changes under the influence of translations from Latin. Translations influenced the linguistic form as well as the literary system(s) for writing in the vernacular that emerged in the period under study. In order to further illuminate the role of translation, we need to study a variety of aspects concerning translations as target-language texts. A translation will, as soon as it is transferred, be part of the receiving culture, and sometimes not even marked as being foreign to that culture. As the amount of translations increases and there is also a rise in the production of indigenous works in the vernacular, the status of the vernacular will be augmented. It can therefore be expected that the vernacular will, in the course of time, change its role in Scandinavian society (and similarly for vernaculars all over Europe). It could perhaps be said that the vernacular, in the long run, takes on the role of being the universal language. By this, we mean that over time, the vernacular literate system establishes generic forms to cover the domains originally restricted to Latin literacy. When the vernacular can be used in a variety of contexts, it obtains the same status as

Latin, or a similar one. This means that when the vernacular written languages in Europe were established in such a way as to be able to replace Latin, they all fulfilled a new kind of universal function, each language within its own specific area but still within the overall European community. In this process, we can also note that there is an increase in the number of translations from one vernacular into another. In Scandinavia there are already translations from French and German in the thirteenth century. Translations from the vernacular into Latin are not frequent, but they do appear in the later part of the Middle Ages. It is only in the early modern period that the vernaculars are more definitely taking the place of Latin in many contexts.

An overall theoretical framework for a study of the use and transmission of texts is provided by the *polysystem theory* developed by Itamar Even-Zohar (e.g. 1990). This notion of networks of texts placed in relation to each other in hierarchical systems, primarily applied by Even-Zohar to the role of translations in modern literary traditions, will however need to be adjusted in a number of ways for our intended purposes. The polysystem, in our understanding, will not just consist of relations between works in a literate system. We are interested in how works are represented in the ongoing transmission of manuscript tradition: the textual witnesses of works found in various contexts over time will, that is, be treated individually as sources of variation and modes of modification. We also intend to incorporate the material artefacts, that is, the manuscripts and other written documents and their representation of the texts in various contexts, as well as institutions, social groups, and individuals. This expanded system will enable us to connect the modes of modification in literate culture on a number of levels.

In order to control this network of interrelated systems, we need to establish nodes, or what we choose to refer to as observation points. These points allow us not only to provide a number of individual studies but also to connect the various points to the overall polysystem over time. This will also enable us to combine the synchronic perspective of the individual observation point and the synchronically defined system with a diachronic perspective mapping modes of modification, variance, and diversity within the system as they change in space and time. The concept of observation points is chosen to stress the importance of long processes rather than a one-way chronology; that is, the point of observation is not seen as a station on a line but rather as a place from which it is possible to observe a landscape of routes in various directions: every point is related to its preceding observation points, its contemporary context(s), and its role in the changing polysystem. A typical observation point could, for example, be an individual manuscript, a single version of a text, or that same version in its relationship to a scribal milieu. The manuscript is obviously the result of intentions and norms on many levels, for example the collection of individual texts, the material production of the manuscript, and the ordering and re-writing of the texts, all of which is related to a context of commissioner, scribe, illuminator, and so on, where the individuals are part of social

and institutional milieus. Central observation points could therefore also be institutions associated with the writing and re-writing of texts and with manuscript production, such as, for example, the archbishop's see in Niðarós in the late twelfth century or the large Icelandic church-farm of Möðruvellir fram in the second half of the fifteenth century. The polysystem approach could be used to describe the relations between the various observation points from a synchronic perspective in which texts, manuscripts, institutions, and individuals from a well-defined period within the overall timeframe are mapped and interrelated, while in a diachronic perspective we might relate the observation points over time and with a focus on variance and modes of modification.

Another important aspect of variance and change concerns the relation between social groups and institutions on the one hand and individuals on the other. It is obvious that the first two categories are highly relevant for the changes in the use of, and for our understanding of, texts in transition, but the third – the individuals responsible for text production and re-production – is also important. The choice to reproduce a text or part of a text, or to introduce it into a new context with new meanings, is always made by an individual in interplay with social conventions and institutional expectations. It would therefore be of great importance to investigate medieval understandings of the role of the individual in text transmission through studies of individuals as agents in various roles of text (re-)production as well as in changes in adapted narratives concerning, for example, the perspective of the narrator.

## Time and space

Two central perspectives in the investigation of an emerging literate culture concern time and space. We suggest that it would be necessary to operate with relatively open definitions of both the time period covered and the delineation of the geographical area in question, something that may obviously prove challenging but is essential to our approach. Regarding the time period, the preliminary timeframe could be c. 900 to c. 1600, but this period would need to be transcended in both directions when necessary to achieve the synthesis we wish to establish. The primary object of study is the literate output of the Nordic realm – what is today Denmark, Sweden and Finland, Norway and Iceland – but our perspective will inevitably lead us into European comparisons.<sup>5</sup>

In all historical scholarship, the use of defined time periods, such as Antiquity or the Middle Ages, is essential in order to structure and further study certain well-defined aspects of human society and culture. It is, however, also often the case that the use of these established temporal categories can stand in the way of observations

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<sup>5</sup> For a similar approach, see Borsa et al. (2015).

that transcend the artificial but well-established limits set by earlier scholarship. A relatively recent example of the necessity of rethinking periods can be found in the scholarly debate on Late Antiquity as a period that replaces the early Middle Ages in order to highlight the continuity of Roman culture in the first centuries after the fall of the Empire (see e.g. Brown 1971). More recently, Garth Fowden (2014) has argued for a new periodization of what he refers to as the First Millennium in order to take into account the relevance of the emerging Islam for the larger picture of Eurasian history. An interesting and inspiring approach was presented by David Wallace in his European literary history for the period 1348–1418 (Wallace 2016). One important aspect of studying Latin book culture and how it fostered vernacular literate cultures in European manuscript culture, then, must be delimiting an appropriate time period for scrutiny.

The definition of a *terminus post quem* and a *terminus ante quem* for our period of study will consequently be part of the objective of our investigation, and may be adjusted as it proceeds. It is, therefore, important at this stage only to provide a preliminary definition that may very well be refined in order to better provide empirical support for the theoretical discussion. As mentioned above, a tentative *terminus post quem* could be c. 900, when writing in Latin was being introduced with the earliest establishment of Church institutions in Scandinavia while an earlier writing system, the runic script, was still in use but being adjusted in relation to the emerging Latin literacy. This choice takes into consideration the long period of knowledge about writing and its media in Scandinavia, and the fact that the Scandinavians had employed a writing system of their own for more than a millennium when Latin script was introduced. It will be relevant, therefore, to include studies of early epigraphic writing with runes as well as with Roman characters in order to provide points of departure for our overall investigation into the establishment of a literate culture in the Nordic realm (see the above remarks on observation points). The *terminus ante quem* is rather more complicated. Manuscript culture is complemented by the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century, and as early as the second half of this century, printing is introduced in Scandinavia. This could provide a possible *ante quem*, but at the same time manuscript culture does continue more or less unimpeded over the following centuries, parallel to the emerging dominance of printed texts. Icelandic textual culture provides an excellent example of this continuity, one in which a literate scribal tradition survives until the early twentieth century. It is, further, important to see manuscript culture in light of this emerging new medium. A preliminary *terminus ante quem* could therefore be c. 1600. Even in this book, however, we stretch this *terminus* in the two articles involving material from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see below).

Whatever time period we define for our study, it will be necessary to make further divisions into shorter segments within the overall timeframe, or into contextually defined segments related to individuals or institutions. It is of great importance for our final results that these shorter periods be chosen with care. The very definition of



a *terminus post quem* in itself amounts to marking the fact that the main interest is concentrated on the time following that *terminus*. It could, however, also be seen as an observation point, a point from which it would be possible to view the preceding events and tendencies in light of the appearance of the phenomenon used to define the *terminus*. For example, the printing of the New Testament in Swedish in 1526 has often been used to define the end of the Swedish Middle Ages, but this printed book comes from the same year as one of the most impressive *medieval* manuscripts produced in the Birgittine Vadstena Abbey, containing a paraphrase of the Old Testament Pentateuch. These two works, one a printed book representing the Reformation and the beginning of the early modern period in Sweden and the other a late example of medieval monastic culture, could be used to further illuminate the fifteenth century as leading up to the important changes we see in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, as well as throwing new light on what had become two parallel media by the mid-sixteenth century.

Another delimitation concerns the spatial scope of the investigation. In earlier scholarship, the modern national borders have often set the limits. A scholar working with Norwegian literate culture and language may, for example, have limited insights into the material from (say) Sweden. For the fourteenth century, this could as a consequence mean that this scholar working with Norwegian culture will note a complete breakdown of literate culture by mid-century, often without taking into account the emergence of new genres and a flourishing vernacular literate culture in the Swedish, and subsequently Danish, areas of Scandinavia. If Scandinavia is seen as an overall system, however, it appears that the changes should be studied as interrelated (see e.g. Johansson 2015). The Scandinavian system, in turn, cannot be studied independently of the larger European system of which it is a part. Any study of a region of Europe in the Middle Ages, we contend, must see it as part of and in constant interaction with the larger European context, taking into account possible encounters with Arabic and Byzantine literate cultures as well. For our purposes, it would, however, be appropriate to define the central object of study as the Nordic realm, that is, more or less the area that today forms Denmark, Sweden and Finland, Norway and Iceland; but at the same time, it would always be important to consider the ongoing parallel processes of change in the European literate system.

## The meaning of media and materiality

The material aspects of manuscripts and epigraphs as artefacts and as the carriers of texts, the media of communication, must be central to a study of variance and change. The range of tools that emerged over time and enhanced the way manuscripts and other media were used, and the variance in performance and craftsmanship, is important not only from the perspective of the codicologist or art historian. These aspects

are also highly relevant to our investigation of the use and function of texts in context. A text found in one context and with a certain function may very well be transmitted into a new context with a new function. We can also expect that additions of texts to a manuscript over time may indicate changes in the function of the whole manuscript. A modern parallel to this would be the publication of a text in a printed journal with a certain authority and a relatively well-defined group of intended readers and the subsequent transmission of that same text digitally and with an extended group of readers. Our contention, therefore, is that the models we apply to the study of the material transmission of texts in manuscript culture have implications for our understanding of the transmission of written communication in modern media as well.

Another important perspective concerns the dissemination of texts in manuscripts or in epigraphic writing with all its inherent variance. The continuous re-writing of texts and incorporation of whole texts or parts of texts into new contexts, into new compilations, and into new collections where the old text often, if not always, is provided with a new function and new possible receptions must be central to a study of variance and change in manuscript culture (see e.g. Johansson 2014). A new understanding of the processes involving the introduction of Latin models as well as Roman script for the vernacular must be built on thorough investigations of this culture of writing and re-writing. This perspective should therefore form the backbone of any study intended to establish the synthesis we are aiming for.<sup>6</sup> In this inaugural volume of our series, we have invited scholars from various areas of research related to literate culture to provide some examples of the transmission and dissemination of texts in a wide spectrum of media, from inscriptions on lead amulets and stone monuments, through the time of manuscripts on parchment and paper, to the earliest days of print culture.

The materiality of media has traditionally been more in scholarly focus when dealing with the earliest stages of the emerging literate culture of Scandinavia, that is to say the period before the introduction of Roman script and the Latin language. Runology has generally paid more attention to the form of the inscriptions and the material they are written on: stone, metal, wood, and animal bones (in some instances, human bones).<sup>7</sup> In a transition period in the late Viking Age and the first centuries of the Scandinavian Middle Ages, when both runes and Roman letters were used, the focus of scholars has often been directed primarily at the runic material. It is therefore relevant to widen the field of study to further our knowledge of this long period of multiglossic (the vernaculars and Latin) encounters as well as digraphic

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<sup>6</sup> An important contribution to the study of media and materiality in the Middle Ages has been made by the project “Medienwandel – Medienwechsel – Medienwissen. Historische Perspektiven” at the Universität Zürich; see e.g. Lutz et al. (2010) and, for a more specifically Scandinavian perspective, Heslop & Glauser (2018).

<sup>7</sup> For recent examples of runological studies with a focus on materiality and media, see e.g. Källström (2007) and Bianchi (2010).

practice (runes and Roman letters). We have asked three scholars working in this fascinating field to present their investigations and ongoing projects. In a first chapter, Lisbeth Imer introduces a new and still relatively unknown body of material: a treasure of runic, and to some extent Roman-script, inscriptions that has been revealed in the form of lead amulets. These inscriptions offer material that is both diglossic and digraphic, and that also provides insights into milieus where it seems to have been unproblematic to use the two parallel script systems to represent two different languages. A second chapter presents another set of material from this period and some preliminary results. Anna Blennow and Alessandro Palumbo study the epigraphic inscriptions in the Västergötland region of Sweden from the perspective of writing in runes and Roman letters, and the use of the vernacular and the Latin language. This material may be seen in relation to the lead amulets discussed by Lisbeth Imer, as it probably to some extent reflects a more institutional use of writing at the same time as seeming to fulfil similar functions. In both chapters, the interrelation between the two script systems is highlighted in a way that opens up new questions of relevance for a new history of texts.

Parchment and paper were the two most frequently used materials for writing with Roman letters. In the earliest period, parchment was the main material and the codex (or booklets, later bound into codices) was dominant. Paper was introduced rather late in Scandinavia, from the fourteenth century, and becomes more common only in the fifteenth century. These materials offered a more flexible medium for the dissemination of texts than wooden sticks, stones, and metal objects, but they were, as far as we can see, never really used to represent language in runic writing to any significant extent. From the mid-twelfth century, texts in the vernacular were produced, often translations from Latin, soon also from French and German, and distributed in parchment codices. We have invited three scholars to present aspects of this new use of writing with Roman letters and its implications for the literate culture of the Scandinavian Middle Ages.

The emerging manuscript culture obviously had its roots in an already-existing tradition from the continent, where writers and scribes, illuminators, and bookbinders had introduced models for the production of texts and manuscripts. Many of these models were adapted in similar form in the Scandinavian realm. Samu Niskanen treats the roles of authors as publishers of their texts in a Danish context. Niskanen's authors were all writing in Latin in the twelfth century or at the beginning of the thirteenth century, and therefore also represent an aspect central to the earliest period of literacy in the Roman script in Scandinavia, when the Latin book culture was still dominant and only just opening up to the use of the vernacular. These authors used the new medium of writing on parchment and promoted their texts in various ways. Another form of text production introduced with the new medium was that of the translator. In a second chapter, Hjalti Snær Ægisson provides an example of translated texts in transmission in the Icelandic thirteenth century. His investigation of a text related to saints' lives and relics provides insights into

the use of parchment to disseminate religious spirituality as well as the more material sides of these types of texts. It also presents an example of how a narrative was translated and subsequently disseminated through re-writing and integrated into the vernacular textual culture. If the two first chapters in this strand discuss the *auctoritas* of authors and translators, and focus on the dissemination of their work in re-writings, Sif Ríkharrðsdóttir in her chapter treats the new medium of writing with Roman letters on parchment and its implications for the distribution of material texts as well as the less tangible ideas of the time. She addresses the aspects of time and space in this movement and how it relates to the concrete image of the ocean as “the means of engaging and enforcing exchange”.

The emerging literacy in Scandinavia and the use of parchment and paper did not just trigger literary activities such as those treated in these three chapters. From the mid-twelfth century, administrative texts such as law texts, charters, and cadastres survive, the oldest generally in Latin, but soon also in the vernacular. These types of texts would not be treated in a traditional literary history, but in a history of texts in transmission they should obviously be given close attention. In the chapter by Ingela Hedström, the important question of legitimacy is discussed in relation to the *vidimus* charters, where witnesses are mentioned to legitimize the message in the copy or summary of an older charter. This type of charter reflects a certain use of texts and how the relation between the written word and the use of witnesses to legitimize content was still important.

In the last centuries of the domination of handwritten texts, a new medium appears with the printing press. The preferred material for printing is paper, but we do find examples of early prints on parchment. In order to understand the transition from a literate culture based on handwritten texts to a print culture well established by the end of the sixteenth century, we also need to take into account how the genres and text types of the handwritten culture were moved into print, and how they changed and took part in changing the use of texts and – no less importantly – our own understanding of texts. This transition period with its interrelations between manuscripts and printed texts is discussed in two chapters. Anna Katharina Richter presents a manuscript from c. 1700 containing book I of the originally Spanish novel of chivalry *Amadís de Gaula*. The tradition of this text in translations from all over Europe in the sixteenth century is a good example of how the medieval genre of chivalric texts is transferred to early print culture. The Danish text treated here, however, never reached the printing press. It is only extant in a single manuscript that might be the setting copy for a printer. Richter is primarily interested in the distribution of the text and how it reached this Danish manuscript. A different aspect of the interrelation between handwritten and printed texts is treated by Lukas Rösli in a chapter on the emergence of the title *Íslendingabók* for a text from the twelfth century in manuscript and print versions, from the earliest extant manuscripts of the mid-seventeenth century to the first printed editions. The primary object of study are the paratexts used in the various versions, which Rösli

uses to argue for a relatively late appearance of the title *Íslendingabók* in the eighteenth century; it is only in post-Reformation manuscripts and printed editions that the title is used in relation to the twelfth-century Icelander Ari Þorgilsson inn fróði. This brings us to the point where the medieval manuscript tradition meets the scholarly and editorial world of print culture, and it provides the natural end for our, admittedly neither truly chronological nor spatial, journey from epigraphic texts in runes and Roman script, through the manuscript culture of parchment and paper, to the typography of the printing press.

## Why write a new history of texts?

In this introductory chapter, we have tried to sketch the possibilities of writing a new kind of history of texts in transmission in the medieval manuscript culture of Scandinavia. Our intention has been to indicate a way of writing a history of texts rather than the more traditional history of literature or language. The idea of texts in motion, undergoing processes of re-production in new contexts and with different functions, is central to this intention. A new kind of historical synthesis needs to be open to the variance found in handwritten texts, whether they are produced with ink on parchment or paper, or carved in stone. It needs also to encompass all kinds of texts rather than the canonical texts of more traditional literary scholarship.

Three main areas can be pointed out that will be of great importance to the research we envisage:

- the production and re-production of texts in physical artefacts – the medieval manuscripts and epigraphic writing on various materials – and the changes we can register over time in the layout and use of various graphic markers to enhance both public reading to an audience and private, silent reading;
- the importance of institutions and social groups for changes in the emerging literate system, that is, the influence of, for example, church and secular schools, as well as monastic, church, and secular scriptoria; and
- the importance of individuals as agents in the changes in the literate system, including, for example, commissioners, scribes, illuminators, and later owners.

These perspectives should be adopted over a long timeline with the establishment of what we refer to as observation points, as described above, which could consist of, for example, individual texts in transmission over time, representative manuscripts, translations from various times or milieus, institutions, social groups (ascending or disappearing), as well as individuals with known relations to texts and manuscripts. The observation points will allow us to form a network of information that can subsequently be related to the overall system and provide a synthesis.

The main objective is to form a new synthesis in viewing texts in transmission in the Nordic realm based on recent approaches in a number of fields of research. Our contention is that scholarship in these fields has reached a point at which it is now possible to open up wider perspectives and again provide a more comprehensive view. A second objective, closely related to the first, is to explore the new theoretical and methodological possibilities further in order to encourage theoretical debate and to present methods for connecting insights from the various fields of scholarship involved in the investigation of the use of script and texts.

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