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93. The history of Old Nordic manuscripts III: Old Swedish

1. Introduction
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1. Introduction

Just a small number of manuscripts containing native texts has been preserved from the Old Swedish period (ca. 1225–1375). This doesn't mean that nothing was written in Sweden during this period, but rather that scribes usually wrote in Latin, not in the vernacular. The use of Latin script for writing Swedish during this period must be seen as quite extraordinary. Latin was the language of the Church and the language of knowledge. The vernacular was generally written with runes.

In spite of this, 28 manuscripts (and some fragments) containing Old Swedish texts are preserved in different archives. How represen-

tative these manuscripts are is hard to say; it is of course impossible to guess how many manuscripts were lost since we have no records of any numbers.

The native language was used to some extent only for one genre, namely for rules and regulations. Out of the 28 preserved manuscripts, a total of 24 contain laws (Åström 1993, 232).

It seems that laws and regulations were written down in Swedish as a result of a Norwegian influence before the 13th century. It has been asserted that laws were composed orally. The early laws state that it was the lawman's duty to interpret ("lagh skilia") and to recite the law ("lagh tälia") at the *thing* (Holmbäck/Wessen 1979a, xvii ff.). Therefore it has been claimed that the laws were promulgated, memorized and proclaimed by generations of lawmen (cf. Ståhle 1955, 39; and Haugen 1976, 186). Recent research hypothesizes, however, that the laws, too, were adapted throughout for the written medium under the influence of

Roman and canon law (cf. Lönnroth/Delblanc 1987, 53).

Sawyer/Sawyer (1993, 19) point out that the early laws' distinguishing features such as alliteration, rhythmic constructions etc. are not very effective mnemonic devices. Alliteration, for example, appears to reflect the influence of Latin literature rather than oral promulgation.

The oldest laws concern different Swedish provinces, not the whole country. Accordingly, they are called provincial laws ("landskapslagar"). All of the Swedish provincial laws were written over a period of ca. 100 years. During this period the Swedish monarchy was consolidated, and the Church's power and social position was strengthened. Social life was thus undergoing a huge change. Thus, these provincial laws, too, have a high historical value and are often used as important sources for understanding social life during the early Middle Ages.

The written documentation of the provincial laws can probably be seen as the first step in a process of centralisation. In the mid-14th century we have the first Swedish national law, viz. *Magnus Eriksson's national law (landslag)*. The consolidation of the monarch's power through a common Swedish law implied the drafting of law codices. From the period between 1370 and 1400 we have 35 law codices preserved; 31 of those contain the national law (Åström 1993, 235).

Among the non-juridical manuscripts from the early medieval period in Sweden is the so-called *Old Swedish Legendary*. It is a chronological survey of the most important saints, kings and emperors. The stories from this source were still popular in the late mediaeval period, since many texts from this collection are frequent in late 15th and early 16th century manuscripts (cf. Carlquist 1996, 48f.).

Besides laws and saints' lives, there are some fragments of chivalrous poetry, of economic tracts etc. The content of the preserved Old Swedish manuscripts is consequently rather homogeneous; thus the fragments provide hints about the awakening of a more varied writing culture.

2. The Old Swedish manuscripts

This section gives a short survey of the most important Old Swedish manuscripts (for Middle Swedish manuscripts, see article 120). First a couple of law codices are presented,

then the *Old Swedish Legendary* and the *Autographs of Saint Bridget*.

2.1. The *Old Västergötland law* (Cod. Holm B 59 and Cod. Holm B 193)

The Old Västergötland law is the oldest known Swedish law; it is also preserved in the oldest manuscript. The original lawmaker was Eskil, a lawman and brother of Earl Birger – the founder of Stockholm. Snorri Sturluson may have influenced Eskil to write down the law since Snorri visited him in 1219 (cf. Ståhle 1955, 42). The language of the law also shows West Scandinavian features. The preserved manuscripts are, however, just copies.

The oldest fragment is Cod. Holm B 193, which today contains only two leaves from the inheritance code, and it was found in Telemarken, Norway. According to von Friesen (1904) this fragment is written in the pure 13th century dialect of Västergötland. Von Friesen has also set the dating of B 193 to ca. 1250.

The most important manuscript of the *Old Västergötland law* is, however, Cod. Holm B 59. This is a rather complex manuscript with a mixed content. B 59 consists at least of two different parts. The first part contains, besides the Västergötland law, notes about "the juggler's right" (*lekareätten*), geographical and political notes, and some statutes. In this part there is also a copy of Bishop Brynjolf's statute from 1281, which gives us a terminus post quem. This part of the manuscript consists today of 47 leaves; one leaf has been lost. It is easy to see that it has been well used, since the first and the last leaves are very discoloured and seem to have been used as covers. All this gives the manuscript the appearance of a private codex.

The second part of B 59 contains three sections distributed over 29 leaves. The first section gives historical information about lawmen and bishops in Västergötland, i.e. the notes of the friar from Vidhem (*Vidhemsprästens anteckningar*). In the second section we find the so-called *Lydekini notes*. This section includes adaptations of the law from the *Young Västergötland law* made by the scribe Lydekinus. The third section is written in Latin and is about Church legislation. In this section we find the expression "de jure regio" which indicates a terminus post quem of 1280.

The second part of the manuscript must also be seen as a private book; for instance Lydekini notes end with "Explicit liber laurentii quem scripsit lydekinus". According to Beck-

man (1911, 79), there is a connection between “laurencii” and a Laurentius Dyakn from Vidhem in Västergötland whom the first part of the manuscript talks about.

2.2. The *Young Västergötland law* (Cod. Holm B 58)

The well-preserved manuscript Cod. Holm B 58 contains a revised version of the law of Västergötland, i.e. the *Young Västergötland law*, together with the *Bjärköarätt*. The latter is a city law made for Lödöse (cf. 2.8.). B 58 also contains a Latin translation of the *statutes of Tälje* from 1345. There are some defects at the beginning of the manuscript; maybe as many as three files are missing (24 leaves); 124 parchment leaves have been preserved.

An innovation in the *Young Västergötland law* is the division and numbering of the codes into different parts [“flockar”], probably due to influence from the Norwegian law of Magnus Lagaböter. But the order of the different law codes does not seem very systematic, and it differs considerably in comparison with other Old Swedish provincial laws.

B 58 does not represent the oldest version of the *Young Västergötland law*. That is found in Cod. Holm B 59, in the Lydekini notes (cf. 2.1.). You can also track the older version of the law in the marginal notes of the *Old Västergötland law* in B 59. It thus seems that the owner of B 59 tried to update his law book. An interesting fact is that some of the added regulations in B 59 are not found in B 58. This indicates that the composing of the law was a work in progress.

The drafting of the *Young Västergötland law* must have been done between 1281 and 1300, and the new editors of the version found in B 58 may have used a version of the old law which was quite different from the text in B 59 (cf. Holmbäck/Wessén 1979b, xliii). The new regulations are inserted at the end of the codes rather mechanically. It thus does not seem that the scribe has been the editor; he was probably just working for a more competent lawman. However, his writing was very carefully and aesthetically done.

2.3. The *Östergötland law* (Cod. Holm B 50 and Cod. Ups. B 22)

The complete text of the *Östergötland law* is only preserved in two manuscripts, Cod. Holm B 50 and Cod. Holm B 197. B 197 is from the end of the 16th century; so B 197 is

not an Old Swedish manuscript. However, B 50 is dated to ca. 1350. It is a rather large manuscript with 108 leaves (two leaves have no text). Many of B 50’s initial letters are beautifully illuminated. It is maintained that the scribe thought more about the appearance of the page than of the language since many mistakes appear in the text (cf. Stähle 1988, 17).

There are also five fragments of this law, all from the 14th century. The most important of these is Cod. Ups. B 22, a very defective manuscript. Olson (1911), who found 30 single leaves and 12 strips of this manuscript, maintained that B 2 in the original may have contained 87 leaves (cf. 1911, xii ff.). Later Jan Liedgren found another 61 additional strips, 56 with text. All the leaves and strips belonging to B 22 are found in folders of 15th century manuscripts from Vadstena Abbey. B 22 may have been disassembled here when the text was out of date.

The *Östergötland law* seems to have been composed around 1290, and at least before 1303 when a charter speaks about a codex to this law. The primary editor was most certainly Bengt Magnusson, lawman between 1269 and 1294 (Holmbäck/Wessén 1979a, 3).

2.4. The *Uppland law* (Cod. Ups. B 12)

Cod. Ups. B 12 is one of the manuscripts of the *Uppland law*. It was edited by Schlyter, who dated the manuscript to ca. 1300 (1834, i), which today we know is incorrect. A more reliable dating would be ca. 1350 (Henning 1967, i). B 12 contains 123 parchment leaves; two have been lost and replaced with empty leaves.

There are four additional manuscripts containing the complete text of this law, all from the 14th century. The two most important ones are Cod. Holm B 199 which, according to Henning (1967, xv ff.), stands closer to the archetype than B 12, and Cod. Holm B 52, which is a straight copy of Cod. Holm B 199. The relationship between B 52 and B 199 can be proved by some mistakes they have in common (cf. Henning 1967, v).

The remarkable thing about B 12 is that this manuscript contains, besides the law text, both a preface and a copy of King Birger Magnusson’s confirmation of the law on the 2nd January 1296. The confirmation tells us that the initiative for the *Uppland law* came from the dependants. It was prepared by the lawman of Tiundaland, Birger Persson (father

of Saint Bridget), together with 12 men. The law was thereafter proclaimed and confirmed by the King. The *Uppland law* is thus a more official law than other provincial laws. Consequently the *Uppland law* came to be important also outside Uppland. It is easy to track its influences in e.g. the *Law of Hälsingland* and in King Magnus Eriksson's national law. The Church legislation from the *Uppland law* was used, to some extent, until 1686.

2.5. The *Law of Dalarna* (Cod. Holm B 54)

Just a single manuscript has been preserved of the *Law of Dalarna*, viz. Cod. Holm B 54 (some parts of the law are preserved in the copybook of Nils Hansson Brask, Cod. Ups. B 113, 16th century). B 54 is a rather small manuscript. It contains 53 parchment leaves, but only the first 46 leaves contain the law. The writing on the last leaves consists of later notes. The manuscript contains many writing errors, which indicates that the scribe was not very accurate. One problem is that the manuscript lacks a title and information about where it has been used, mentioning only that "this law has been valid since Dalarna was built" (þæssum lagh hawa standit æ sīþan dala byghdus, cf. Wiktorsson 1981, 38f.). When Schlyter edited the law, he described it as the *older Västmanna law* due to the fact that the province of Dalarna never was a proper law region (*lagsaga*). Since the end of the 19th century when H. Schück (1891) proved that during the 1570s Mats Bengtsson's law book was seen as applying to Dalarna, almost nobody has questioned B 54's provenance (cf. Holmbäck/Wessén 1979c, xiv ff.). Only Wiktorsson (1981, 59ff.) persists in claiming that B 54 is a version of the *Older Västmanna law*, but used in Dalarna. He asserts that there was no official version of the law for the province of Dalarna; so there would be no reason to talk about a law of Dalarna.

The *Law of Dalarna* also shows many similarities with the *Uppland law*. This has led to a discussion of which law has borrowed from the other. The problem is that there are very few word-for-word similarities. Neither do the different codes follow in the same order. Recent research has maintained that the *Law of Dalarna* must be younger than the *Uppland law* because of a reference to King Birger Magnusson (Holmbäck/Wessén 1979c, xviii). The reference gives the year 1290 when Birger became king as *terminus post quem*. Probably the dating can be extended to 1298 when Bir-

ger reached lawful age. The *Uppland law* was, as mentioned above (cf. 2.4.), confirmed 1296.

The dating of the *Law of Dalarna* is thus not unchallenged. For example, why must the reference to King Birger date the whole law and not just a single regulation? Information in different laws that a certain regent has decreed a certain law is not uncommon, especially in older Norwegian laws. In the (*young*) *Västmanna law* there is also the same regulation with the same reference to King Birger. Thus it does not seem that this reference can be used as proof that the *Uppland law* must be older than the *Law of Dalarna*.

According to Hafström (1974, 43), the draft of B 54 must have been made before 1280. This is because B 54 lacks regulations about visiting (*gästning*) that was included in the *Alsnö stadga* from that year.

Probably neither the *Uppland law* nor the *Law of Dalarna* are dependent on each other. The similarities may very likely be understood as a result of the establishment of the king's power.

2.6. The *Södermanna law* (Cod. Holm B 53 and Cod. Havn., Ny kongelig Samling N:r 2237 4:o)

Both the preserved manuscripts of this law are from the 14th century. Wiktorsson (1976, 10) dates B 53 to ca. 1327, and NKS 2237 to 1335–1350. He also claims through analyses of different charters that NKS 2237 was written by a scribe who was active in Ärnäs, Kärnbo parish, Selebo hundred (1976, 53). Wiktorsson (1976, 32; 1981, 4) also shows that the master manuscript for NKS 2237 must have been Cod. AM 52 4:o, today a fragment containing just the Church legislation.

NKS 2237 contains, besides the law, a confirmation and a preface. Both additions seem to have been copied from the *Uppland law* and just marginally changed for the new context. NKS 2237 is a well-prepared and very beautiful manuscript.

Cod. Holm B 53 contains, besides the *Södermanna law*, also one leaf of the *Björköarätt*. One scribe has written both the laws but with different kinds of ink, possibly at different times.

Some important differences, especially in the Church legislation, between NKS 2237 and B 53 indicate that in the beginning of the 14th century there must have been at least two different laws for Södermanland. B 53 represents the older version that was edited around

1300. NKS 2237 is slightly more modern and was probably the result of a new editing process (cf. Holmbäck/Wessén 1979c, xvii ff.). According to Wiktorsson (1976, 19 ff.) this is incorrect; he claims that both B 53 and NKS 2237 were edited around 1326 but at different locations.

2.7. The *Gutnish law* (Cod. Holm B 64)

The language spoken on Gotland in the Baltic Sea during this period was quite different from the language of the Swedish mainland. Therefore a distinction is made between Old Swedish and Old Gutnish. Only one Old Gutnish manuscript is preserved, viz. Cod. Holm B 64 from about 1350. B 64 contains the *Gutnish law*. An older textual version of this law is found in a later manuscript, viz. Cod. AM 54 4:o from the 16th century (cf. Holmbäck/Wessén 1979d, lxy). In AM 54 there are regulations about children of priests and about thralls. These regulations are missing in B 64 because they were not suitable after the imposition of celibacy and the abolition of bondage. Accordingly the version of the *Gutnish law* found in AM 54 must have been written during the 13th century.

The *Gutnish law* includes the *Gutnish saga*, composed around 1220. The law does not seem to have a later dating. The law was probably written down by order of Archbishop Andreas Suneson who visited Gotland in 1207 (cf. Holmbäck/Wessén 1979d, lxxi f.). The *Gutnish saga* follows immediately after the law text in B 64. Both texts were written by the same scribe.

There are two mediaeval translations of the *Gutnish law*, one in Low German from 1401, and one in Danish from ca. 1550. Both these translations contain the regulations about thralls, but not the ones about the children of priests. Since they differ in the order of chapters (the *Gutnish law* is not organised in codes), it seems that there are four different preserved versions of the law (cf. Holmbäck/Wessén 1979d, lxxviii).

2.8. The *Björköarätt* (Cod. Holm B 58)

The Swedish *Björköarätt* survives only in one manuscript, Cod. Holm B 58 from about 1345. This manuscript also contains the *Young Västergötland law* (cf. 2.2.). The *Björköarätt* in B 58 was written for use in Lödöse, Västergöt-

land, but the original text was probably composed for the city of Stockholm since the *Björköarätt* mentions Stockholm and other place-names around Stockholm.

Two fragments of the *Björköarätt* are also preserved, one written for the province of Södermanland, possibly Nyköping, the other for the province of Östergötland, possibly Linköping or Skänninge.

The *Björköarätt* was not influenced by German city laws to any large extent. This is a quite unexpected fact, since many Germans lived in Stockholm during the time the Swedish *Björköarätt* was drafted (Holmbäck/Wessén 1979b, xcix).

2.9. *Magnus Eriksson's national law* (Cod. AM 51 4:o)

Around 1350 a new law was drafted. This law intended to replace the different provincial laws as a common law. It has been shown that this new national law is related to the royal regulations that had been promulgated in Skara in 1335, Skänninge in 1335, Uppsala in 1344 and Tälje in 1345. This connects King Magnus Eriksson to the national law (Holmbäck/Wessén 1962, xvi ff.). In itself the national law is rather anonymous; it lacks confirmations, prefaces and even Church legislation. It shows a close connection to the provincial laws of Uppland and Östergötland.

The reason that the national law lacks Church legislation is due to a protest made by clerks from five of Sweden's seven dioceses in 1347. The clerks protested against every attempt to decrease the church's legal rights (cf. Holmbäck/Wessén 1962, xxvii ff.). This explains why most of the manuscripts containing the national law also contain Church legislation from an older law, usually from the *Uppland law* or the *Södermanna law*.

In spite of this the national law was ready to be used in 1352. Charters tell us that the *Östergötland law* and the *Uppland law* were still in use 1351, but during the year 1352 we know that the national law was used in Västmanland and Östergötland (cf. Holmbäck/Wessén 1962, lvi ff.).

Today ca. 100 manuscripts of the national law have been preserved, mostly from the Middle Swedish period. One of the most important manuscripts of *Magnus Eriksson's national law* is Cod. AM 51 4:o from the middle of the 14th century. This manuscript contains the national law together with the Church legislation from the *Småland law*. A different

and probably later hand (Holmbäck/Wessén 1979b, lxxvi) wrote the Church legislation.

Another important manuscript of the national law is Cod. Ups. B 23. In this 14th century manuscript we also find that a 16th century scribe tried to restore the lost parts of the manuscript. B 23 has been edited and closely described by Wiktorsson (1989).

2.10. *Magnus Eriksson's city law* (Cod. Holm B 154 and Cod. Holm B 170)

Around the same time the national law was written, a new city law for Sweden was drafted. Just like the national law, the city law lacks Church legislation (cf. 2.9.). The national law and the city law are often in accordance, so it is quite obvious that the city law was written in connection with the national law. One of the big differences is that the city law gives a daughter the same right of inheritance as a son (cf. Holmbäck/Wessén 1966, xlix).

The city law must have been ready before 1357 when King Birger Magnusson's regulations about sheriffs, chief magistrates and councils were announced. These regulations are not found in the city law.

Magnus Eriksson's city law is preserved in more than 100 mediaeval manuscripts, but only five of these (and one fragment) are from the 14th century. In Cod. Holm B 154 the city law takes up 98 leaves and follows after the Church legislation from the *Uppland law*. It has beautiful initials, often very large. It is quite clear that this manuscript was in frequent use; for instance many different hands have written notes in B 154.

Cod. Holm B 170 gives a clear dating and a clear notification of province. It begins with "Her byrias sutherköpungs laghboch" 'Here begins the law book of Söderköping' and ends with "Completus est liber iste sub manu konradis scriptoris. Anno ab incarnatione domini M.CCC.LXXX septimo".

Another Old Swedish manuscript containing the city law is Cod. Linc. J 88 written by the same scribe who wrote the national law in Cod. Ups. B 6. There is also Cod. Holm B 5b, which contains the national law together with the Church legislation from the *Södermanna law*. Last there is Cod. Holm B 127a; a defective manuscript which lacks Church legislation. None of J 88, B 56 or B 127a can be connected with any specific city. Holmbäck/Wessén (1966, xlv) suppose that all three were written in Stockholm, but they give no clue as to where they were used.

Every mediaeval city in Sweden had to have its own law book since the law stated that the law book should be kept in a chest together with seals and charters, and every year it had to be read aloud (Holmbäck/Wessén 1966, xv). However, very few manuscripts can be connected with a specific city. Many of the preserved manuscripts of the city law seem to have been owned by laymen, but there is very little information about scribes, dating, owners etc. Usually the manuscripts are anonymous. We do, however, know that Cod. Holm B 154 from the second half of the 14th century was used in Stockholm, and Cod. Holm B 170 from 1387 was used in Söderköping (cf. Holmbäck/Wessén 1966, xv; about the dating of B 154, see also Jansson 1943, 122f.).

According to Beckman (1917, 17f. and 240f.; see also Holmbäck/Wessén 1966, xviii f.) there are four different groups of manuscripts of the city law: the Stockholm type, the Söderköping type, the Uppsala type and the Västerås type. The most important type is certainly the Stockholm one with its prototype Cod. Holm B 154. This type was used for the first printed version in 1617–1618 (the city law was confirmed in 1617 by King Gustav II Adolf).

2.11. *The Old Swedish Legendary* (Cod. Holm A 34)

As already mentioned, the main part of the vernacular manuscripts from the Old Swedish period contain law texts. An exception is Cod. Holm A 34 from 1340–1385 (cf. Jansson 1934, 21f.), which contains the *Old Swedish legendary*. Today A 34 consists of 60 parchment leaves, but it must have been a great deal larger since the manuscript has some rather large lacunae.

According to Jansson (1934, 21) the dialect of the manuscript points towards Östergötland. Earlier research has mentioned the Dominican monastery of Skänninge as its place of origin, but during the 15th century it may have been transferred to Vadstena Abbey (cf. Carlquist 1996, 27). The binding is typical for Vadstena, and on the inside of the cover we find a fragment of a text by Saint Bridget (Carlquist 1996, 42f.).

The so-called *Old Swedish legendary* is a rather free translation of *Legenda aurea*. The legendary is also found in two Middle Swedish manuscripts, Cod. Ups. C 528 and Cod. RA E 8900. Jansson (1934, 46ff.) maintains that C 528 contains the most original version of

the text, but later research has shown that the differences between the manuscripts can be explained by their being aimed at different audiences: C 528 was written for use in Vadstena Abbey, A 34 and E 8900 for different lay audiences (cf. Carlquist 1996, 82f.).

Another Old Swedish manuscript containing the same texts is Cod. Holm A 124. A 124 is a very defective fragment, slightly older than A 34 (cf. Carlquist 1996, 30).

2.12. The *Autographs of Saint Bridget* (Cod. Holm A 65)

Maybe one of this period's most striking manuscripts is Cod. Holm A 65, also called the *Autographs of Saint Bridget*. Toni Schmid and Erik Noreen in particular (Högman 1961, 9f.) have discussed the authenticity of Saint Bridget's own writing. Thanks to Högman's philological survey of A 65, we can say that it is most possible and highly probable that we have here Saint Bridget's own draft. He has shown that the text in itself has priority over all Latin manuscripts (1961, 30ff.). He also put forward historical statements, palaeographical evidence, and the fact that Vadstena Abbey held the *Autographs* as authentic in the 15th century as evidence for this (1961, 70f.).

Cod. Holm A 65 consists of three paper leaves; two contain autograph A, one autograph B. The leaves of autograph A are sewn together. The paper has slightly yellowed with age and is of three different kinds. All three leaves are filled up with letters on one side. It was written by the same scribe throughout with two exceptions. On the back of autograph A a 15th century scribe has noted "Sancta birgitta screef thæssa ordh medh sinne eghne hand som røre pawan oc cardenales" [Saint Bridget wrote these words with her own hand about popes and cardinals], and on the back of autograph B we can read another note: "fyrst vil iak þik seya huru þik æru andelik understandelse giuin" [Firstly I will tell you how spiritual understanding is given you].

3. The making of Old Swedish manuscripts

Sweden is still without any greater codicological survey of the older vernacular manuscripts. We know very little about the different scribes, their schools, early chancelleries etc., especially in comparison with Norway and

Denmark. We do know that Bishop Henric of Linköping decreed in 1272 that a new priest should stay two years at the cathedral so that he could learn clerical skills (Jansson 1943, 83), but that is just about all.

However, it is quite clear that there were many scribes in Sweden during this period. The by-name *skrivare* 'scribe' was rather common during the 14th century, and even people whose profession wasn't that of a scribe carried that name.

Except for the *Autographs of Saint Bridget*, all the Old Swedish manuscripts consist of parchment. Law texts continued to be written on parchment during the 15th century, even though paper grew more popular. There are a few charters written on paper from the 14th century but they are not common. It is quite obvious that during this period paper did not constitute a threat to parchment as writing material.

The script is usually Gothic, quite soon changing to Gothic cursive. Only the *Old Västergötland law* is written in Carolingian script, an influence from the Norwegian manuscripts (cf. Jansson 1943, 88ff.).

The ink was usually made from oak galls and from vitriol, as we know through medieval recipes found in manuscripts. The ink was often black or brown; only in rubrics and for important names was coloured ink used, mostly red, but sometimes blue and green. Illuminations are not common. When they occur during this period, it is in law manuscripts, and then often in the initials. Most important here are Cod. Holm B 50, containing the Östergötland law, Cod. Holm B 6 and Cod. Holm B 10, both containing *Magnus Eriksson's national law*.

A lot of writing seems to have been done on wax tablets, but of course, nothing of this has been preserved. For example, the very special style of writing in *Saint Bridget's Autographs* may be explained by the possibility that Bridget used to write on a wax tablet (Högman 1961, 16f.).

Very few studies have been carried out regarding the punctuation system. As far as I know, only Cod. Holm A 34 (cf. 2.11.) has been examined from this perspective. It uses a well thought-out punctuation system both to structure the content and as a support for reading aloud (cf. Carlquist 1996, 204ff.).

4. The culture of Old Swedish manuscripts

In the Old Swedish period, we seem to have a clear difference between a literate elite and an illiterate mass. Nearly all the writing during this period was in Latin. In the vernacular there are, above all, law texts. The laws were written down as an essential part of the consolidation of the kingship when Sweden was on its way into Europe. The most interesting fact is that the laws were composed in the vernacular – not in Latin. Another interesting fact is that many of the law manuscripts from this period are private compilations, not official law-codices. This explains why the same law can differ in the order of items, that many manuscripts can be seen as unsystematic, containing repetitions and contradictions, including out-of-date laws etc. Laws tended to be treated as recommendations to be taken into account rather than as rules to be obeyed (Gunneng 1987). This also made it important for the king to make an official law that could strengthen his power (cf. Sawyer/Sawyer 1996, 18).

There is also a great collection of Saints' lives translated into Swedish ca. 1300. This collection can not have had any liturgical function. The lives are not ordered after the church year, but chronologically (cf. Carlquist 1996, 46f.). Probably the legendary was composed as a source of edificatory stories for a lay audience (Carlquist 1996, 223ff.).

Neither are the *Autographs of Saint Bridget* any proof of a higher level of lay literacy in Sweden. Bridget was from one of the noblest families in Sweden, and she was an extraordinary woman, not just because she knew how to write using the Latin alphabet.

Besides these texts preserved in Old Swedish manuscripts, we know that there were more texts written in Swedish. For example, the Norwegian Queen Eufemia had some of Chretien de Troyes' works translated into Swedish. The political chronicle of duke Erik (*Erikskrönikan*) was composed in the early 14th century. Probably the royal speculum *Um styrilsi kununga och höfþinga* [How to govern for kings and leaders] also dates from this period, as does a paraphrased translation of the Pentateuch.

Together this indicates that there was an audience for written texts of different kinds outside the church and outside the legal administration. But this audience differed greatly from later textual audiences. In spite of the

fact that everyone came into contact with written texts, in church, at the *thing* etc., very few read texts, and even fewer owned manuscripts. People *listened* to texts, maybe memorized texts or had texts read aloud (cf. Jansson 1994, 106f.).

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94. The history of Old Nordic manuscripts IV: Old Danish

1. Overview
2. Latin manuscripts
3. Vernacular manuscripts
4. Literature (a selection)

1. Overview

With regard to Danish manuscripts – a term here used to cover both manuscript books and handwritten documents of certain or probable Danish origin – the period from ca. 1100 to 1350 constitutes a well-defined whole: there are no extant Danish manuscripts dating from before ca. 1100 and only very few from the half century or so after 1350. In the following, attention is chiefly given to those manuscripts from this period which provide information pertaining to the history of the Danish language.

Historically speaking, the details surrounding these manuscripts are hazy; apart from the charters most can be dated and localised only approximately, if at all, and their scribes are anonymous, with the exception of a very small handful, who, when they provide titles, tend characteristically enough to be in religious orders. Scribal schools can be discerned only in conjunction with the largest religious institu-

tions (primarily Lund, but possibly also Sorø). Linguistically speaking, the manuscripts are sometimes solely or predominantly in Latin, sometimes solely or predominantly in Danish, the former case typically when they preserve texts which are part of the common European Latin-Christian tradition and/or can be presumed to have had interest principally for the local representatives of that tradition (diplomas, municipal laws, guild laws, necrologies, cadastres, annals and chronicles), and the latter case when they preserve texts that were the product of indigenous culture (chiefly the provincial laws), or common European texts which may be assumed to have had especial meaning for ordinary people (medical and religious works). Quantitatively speaking, the distribution of the manuscripts over the period is as could be expected: the largest number are from the first half of the 14th c., fewer from the 13th c., and only a very few from the 12th c. Given that it is known that texts have been written down in Danish since the end of the 12th c., it is more of a surprise that the great majority of vernacular manuscripts should come from the last part of the period – indeed, apart from one or two, all are dated to the period ca. 1300–1350.

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