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Sverrir Tómasson, Reykjavík (Iceland)

92. The history of Old Nordic manuscripts II: Old Norwegian (incl. Faroese)

1. Introduction
2. The making of a manuscript
3. The first writing in Latin letters
4. The Norwegian codices – age and contents
5. The Norwegian diplomas
6. The Faroese manuscripts
7. The scribes and their milieu
8. The audience
9. The history of the codices
10. The history of the diplomas
11. Literature (a selection)

1. Introduction

This article deals with manuscripts written in OWN in Norway (incl. the Faroe Islands) before about 1350. Manuscripts written in Latin are not included. The term "manuscript" is used for codices (a collection of pages stitched together in book form), fragments and diplomas (letters). The earliest written texts in OWN are runic inscriptions, but we have no Norwegian (or Faroese) manuscripts written with runes. Hence they are not included in this article.

2. The making of a manuscript

The Old Norwegian manuscripts were written on parchment made of calfskin. We do not know who prepared the vellums, but the skinners mentioned in Bergen's town law might have done such work. And we do not know with certainty how ink was made or how pigments for the illuminations were obtained, although we assume that ink was made of an extraction from boiled gallnuts. Writing was done with a quill pen, mostly made from the feathers of geese and swans. The manuscripts were usually bound in wooden boards, often covered with leather, but only a few of the medieval bindings have survived. More general information about OWN manuscripts are given in Holm-Olsen (1990) and Kristjánsson (1993).

The scribes usually left an empty space at the beginning of each section of the text. Later the scribe himself or another artistic person filled this in, sometimes with pictures related to the text. This art of decorating a manuscript

is called "illumination". Many medieval Icelandic manuscripts are beautifully illustrated. From Norway, only one illustrated manuscript older than ca. 1350 has been preserved, the so-called Codex Hardenbergianus. The first part of this codex was probably written in Bergen in the first half of the 14th century and contains King Magnús Hákonarson's Norwegian Code from 1274.

3. The first writing in Latin letters

The first Norwegian texts were written in runes. The oldest preserved manuscripts written in Norwegian with Latin letters can be dated to ca. 1150–1200. They contain translated stories about saints, but only fragments remain. The oldest preserved book is the so-called *Book of homilies* from ca. 1200, written in Old Norwegian. It is evident that the first manuscripts came along with Christianity, which was introduced in Norway around 1000. In my opinion, the earliest Norwegian manuscripts were made in the first half of the 11th century (cf. Eithun/Rindal/Ulset 1994, 10–12).

4. The Norwegian codices – age and contents

The date a manuscript was created is normally not given in the manuscript itself, but there are a few exceptions. A part of AM 309 fol. contains King Magnús Hákonarson's Norwegian Code. After this section is written: "Completus fuit liber iste. Anno domini m. ccc vicesimo quinto" [This book was completed Anno Domini 1325]. Usually the dating is based on palaeographic and linguistic criteria, and on the content and the history of the manuscript. Useful informations about the dating of OWN manuscripts are given in *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (1989), and of Norwegian manuscripts in Seip (1954; 1955). The first Norwegian manuscripts probably were made in the first half of the 11th century. But no manuscript has survived from this period, the oldest ones being more than 100 years younger. All the manuscripts in existence are copies of exemplars which with a few exceptions are now lost.

The oldest preserved fragments of manuscripts contain saints' lives; AM 655 IX 4to, which can be dated to ca. 1150–1200, has fragments of an Old Norwegian translation from Latin of the saga of the apostle Matthew and the saints Blasius and Placidus. From around 1200 comes the so-called *Book of homilies* which contains sermons, among them the famous sermon for the feast celebrating the dedication of a church (the so-called "Stavechurch Homily"). Throughout the Middle Ages manuscripts were produced containing religious prose. The bulk of these manuscripts are written in Old Icelandic, but there are good reasons to believe that this kind of literature also was created in Norway. We have many sagas of male and female saints, of the apostles, of Mary the mother of Jesus, of Archbishop Thomas Becket, of Barlaam and Josaphat. An important text is *Stjórn*, a translation of the Old Testament. In the prologue we learn that the Norwegian King Hákon Magnússon (1299–1319) instigated this work so that it could be read aloud for the edification of those at his court who did not know Latin.

The oldest fragments of law texts can be dated to ca. 1200–1250. They are AM 315f. fol. and NRA 1 B, which contain parts of the older Gulaþing Code. Later come many manuscripts of King Magnús Hákonarson's Norwegian Code from 1274, the so-called *Landslǫg*. There are thirty-nine fairly complete manuscripts of this *Landslǫg* in existence and thirty-one fragments.

A few of the existing manuscripts contain sagas of the Norwegian kings. The oldest preserved king's saga in OWN vernacular, *Ágrip*, is a Norwegian work from the end of the 12th century. The only manuscript is Icelandic, probably a copy of a Norwegian exemplar. The oldest Norwegian manuscript containing a king's saga is DG 8 from ca. 1225–1250, in which we find the so-called *Legendary Saga of St. Óláfr*. We also have a fragment of *Fagrskinna* and manuscripts of Oddr Snorrason's saga of Óláfr Tryggvason.

The Norwegian didactic work from around 1250 called *Konungs skuggsjá* ('the King's Mirror') is preserved in many manuscripts, the oldest being Norwegian from ca. 1250.

The Norwegian King Hákon Hákonarson (1217–1263) initiated the translation of courtly literature mainly from French. Some of the sagas, callad *riddarasǫgur* ('knights' sagas'), are preserved in a Norwegian manuscript from ca. 1275. Some scholars also mention *Þiðreks saga af Bern* in this connection. This is a Norwegian compilation from ca. 1250 of tales of German origin about Dietrich of Bern (i. e. Verona). One of the main manuscripts is Norwegian, from around 1275–1300.

The OWN Eddaic poems have survived only in Icelandic manuscripts, and there are rather few Norwegian manuscripts containing skaldic verses. But the archaeological excavations after the conflagration in 1955 on Bryggen in Bergen have brought to light Norwegian poetry written in runes. These runic inscriptions show that the Eddaic and skaldic forms had not died out in Norway around 1200. Therefore it is reasonable to believe that earlier on there were manuscripts in Norway containing Eddaic poems.

5. The Norwegian diplomas

In our context, the term *diploma* signifies official medieval documents in the form of letters. In OWN documents of this type most often were called *bréf*. At the outset, the Scandinavian diplomas were written in Latin, and throughout the Middle Ages Latin was used alongside the vernaculars. The oldest Norwegian diplomas have been lost, but they probably were made before ca. 1150. The oldest preserved diploma written in Norwegian is a letter from King Philippus Simonsson (1207–1217).

With the exception of a few letters in runes, the Norwegian diplomas were written on parchment, as were other manuscripts. But there are some palaeographic differences between diplomas and codices. To certify the authenticity of a diploma, one or more seals were put on it. The seals were usually made of wax and were attached to the lower edge of the diploma by means of parchment straps. Sometimes these straps were cut off older diplomas and thus have text fragments on them, mostly from private letters. Another mark of authenticity was the so-called "chirographus", for which a document was drawn up in duplicate. The text was written twice on the same piece of parchment, and along the line of division, usually dragged, was written the word "chirographus".

Contrary to the book manuscripts, most preserved diplomas are original documents, but some of them were copied. The copy (transcript) was usually framed by a new letter with new seals, saying that the copy was accurate.

The contents of a diploma may be divided into three parts: protocol, text and eschatocol. The protocol contains the greeting formula and the names of the issuer and the addressee. The eschatocol normally lists the names of those who have attached their seals to the document and gives information on when and where the document was made. Few of the oldest diplomas bear the date or place. After 1290 it was common practice to mention the exact time and place of the composition of the diploma. The year may be given either as dating from the birth of Christ or the accession of a king.

The diplomas were issued by kings, archbishops, bishops, priests, bailiffs, lawmen and private individuals such as farmers. The contents of the diplomas are varied. They are concerned with charters, contracts, conveyances, gifts, judgments, leaseholds, the purchase and sale of land, testaments etc. The diplomas provide our most important source of knowledge about medieval life in Norway (see fig. 92.1).

Almost all the diplomas that have been preserved are official documents; only very few are private letters. This is due to the fact that private letters were not used to guarantee legal property or rights. Therefore the valuable parchment could be used for other purposes, e.g. straps for seals attached to official documents (cf. Rindal 1982).

The Norwegian diplomas have been edited in the series *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*. The first volume was published in 1847, the last one in 1995, and the series is to be continued. A facsimile edition of the oldest diplomas is published in Hødnebø (1960), which also contains a useful introduction.

6. The Faroese manuscripts

There is no codex or diploma which we can say with certainty was written on the Faroe Islands before 1350. But we have one important law amendment about sheep (called the "sheep-letter") on the Faroe Islands in a diploma issued in Oslo by Duke Hákon Magnússon 1298. This diploma is bound together with a Norwegian law codex (Holm perg 33 qu) from the first half of the 14th century. According to Mikjel Sørlie (1965, 9–10) this diploma was written by a Norwegian on the Faroe Islands. Sørlie (1965, 73) claims that another Norwegian law codex (LundUB Mh 15) from the first half of the 14th century, which also contains the "sheep-letter", was written by a "Bergen-influenced Faroese clerk".

7. The scribes and their milieu

We do not know much about the persons who wrote the medieval Norwegian manuscripts. With two exceptions, the scribes of the codices

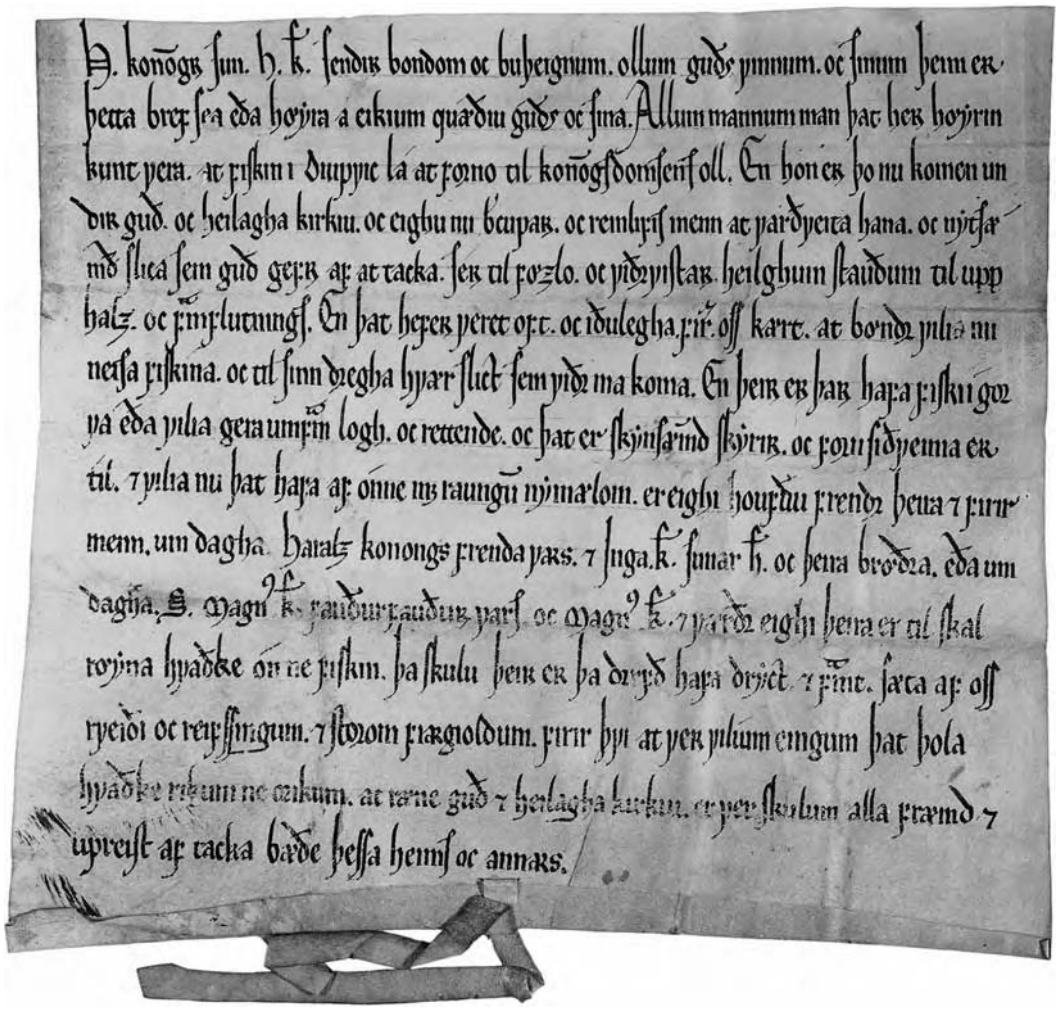

Fig. 92.1: Diploma from ca. 1224, issued by King Hákon Hákonarson

are unknown: around 1300 Þorgeirr Hákonarson made three copies of King Magnús Hákonarson's Norwegian Code and another legal text, and at about the same time Eiríkr Þróndarson made a copy of the same code. Icelandic scribes wrote manuscripts in Norway as well as they were producing manuscripts in Iceland for export to Norway (cf. Karlsson 1979).

Diplomas issued by the king often give the name of the scribes. According to Vågslid (1938), we know the names of 35 royal scribes working up to 1350. They often call themselves *klerkr* 'clerk' or *notarius* 'notary'. In a later study, Vågslid (1989) tried to identify the scribes in the Norwegian medieval diplomas, pinpointing about 800 persons by name and title. Around 90 per cent of them belonged to the clergy at churches and monasteries. Only four of them were women. (Cf. Vannebo 1994). The bulk of the medieval scribes probably were clerics, but laymen were also able to write manuscripts. There are good reasons to believe that they received their education at churches and monasteries in Norway. For members higher up in the clergy, it was fairly normal to have some kind of university education abroad. We also know that a few members of the Norwegian aristocracy studied law at the University of Bologna.

8. The audience

Vannebo (1994) discusses what we know about the knowledge of reading and writing in medieval Norway. Obviously members of the clergy and some laymen were able to read and write. We have no exact figures, but probably less than 10 per cent of the urban population was literate. At this time Bergen had around 7000 inhabitants, and Oslo around 3000. In the prologue to *Konungs skuggsjá* 'the King's Mirror' from the 13th century, it states that people who listen to this book are welcome to suggest improvements. And the standard initial formula in the diplomas is "to all those who see or listen to this letter". These examples show that the audience normally was illiterate, so that these manuscripts had to be read aloud.

9. The history of the codices

According to Seip (1954; 1955), more than 125 Norwegian codices and fragments of codices older than ca. 1350 have been preserved. Karlsson (1979) has found that there were 54 non-legal codices in Norway in the Middle Ages, some of them imported from Iceland. These are only a small part of the codices that existed in medieval Norway. Halvorsen (1982) has emphasized that there was a greater loss of manuscripts in Norway than in Iceland. This is primarily due to the different development of the languages in these two countries at the end of the Middle Ages.

Most of the Norwegian medieval codices were owned by monasteries and churches. In the first half of the 14th century there were about 1200 churches in Norway with close to 2000 priests, and around 30 monasteries with approximately 600–700 people. Hence there must have been thousands of religious books, most of them written in Latin. From the written sources we get a few glimpses of the size of the libraries. We know that the monastery on Tautra in the Trondheimsfjord had 70 medieval books, and one in Konghelle in Bohuslän held 21 books. The archdiocese in Nidaros owned 87 volumes at the end of the Middle Ages. A church in Western Norway had 19 books around 1320. The sources also tell us about private book collections. The biggest was a collection of 36 volumes, probably owned by Árni Sigurðarson, Bishop of Bergen from 1305–1314.

Books were valuable at that time. In 1317 the Church of St. Mary in Oslo lent 4 legal codes to a man going abroad to study. These four books were valued at fourteen cows.

At the end of the Middle Ages, the Norwegian language changed so much that people could hardly understand the medieval texts. Some of the manuscripts were now collected by high ranking people and later taken out of the country. The rest were used for other purposes. Let us look at the destiny of two well-known codices (cf. Rindal 1983; Tveitane 1972).

Manuscript No. 1154 fol. in the Old Royal Collection of the Royal Library, Copenhagen (GKS 1154 fol.), also called Codex Hardenbergianus, consists of three originally independent parts. The first part contains King Magnús Hákonarson's Norwegian Code from 1274 and is the most richly illuminated of the medieval Norwegian manuscripts in existence (see figure p. 806, 92.2). This manuscript probably was written and illuminated in Bergen in the first half of the 14th century. There is one mostly erased signature from the end of the 14th century, indicating that the owner then was a bishop. From the 16th century, there are three notes saying that Helvig Hardenberg owned the book. She was born in Denmark in 1540 and was married to Erik Rosenkrantz in 1558. He was a Danish nobleman who became governor of Western Norway, residing at the Royal Palace in Bergen (Bergenhus) from 1560 to 1568. Then he became the lord lieutenant of Odense in Denmark, where Helvig Hardenberg died in 1599. While in Bergen, Erik Rosenkrantz showed much interest in the history of Norway. It is therefore possible that his wife received this manuscript from him. It was probably brought to Denmark when they moved there in 1568. We know that the manuscript belonged to the Royal Library in Copenhagen in 1670, but we do not know how it got there. This manuscript bears the name of its former owner, Codex Hardenbergianus. A few codices acquired their names in this way (e. g. Codex Frisianus, Codex Rantzovianus), but very seldom does a manuscript bear the name of a woman.

The oldest and most important collection of so-called courtly literature in OWN translation is in the codex known as De la Gardie (DG) 4–7 in the library at the University of Uppsala. This manuscript probably was written in Western Norway around 1270. From 1652 to 1669 the codex belonged to the Swedish Count Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie. In 1669 he donated all his valuable collection of manuscripts to Uppsala Academy or Univer-

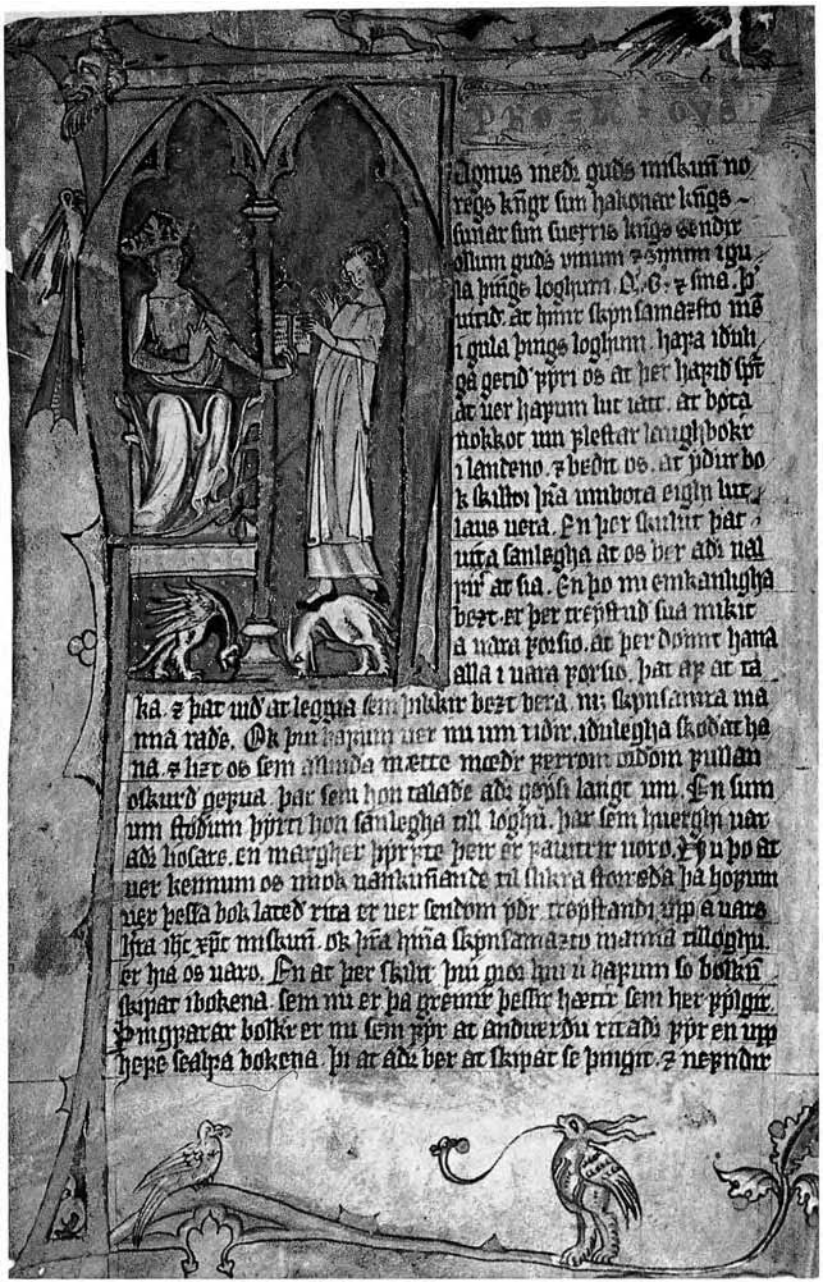

Fig. 92.2: Codex Hardenbergianus (GKS 1154 fol.) from 1300–1350. The prologue, where the king hands the law book over to a young man.

sity, and this is now part of the university library at Uppsala. Count De la Gardie bought this codex from the collection of the Danish historian Stephanus Johannis Stephanius after his death in 1650. The manuscript must have come to Stephanius from its last Norwegian owner, Laurits Samuelssøn Arctander, who wrote his name at the bottom of two leaves. He was born ca. 1600, studied at German universities, and was a tutor in Nordland when he wrote his name in the manuscript. From a letter from Stephanius to Ole Worm in 1642 we learn that Stephanius had had direct links with Arctander, but we do not know how he became the owner of the manuscript. Probably Arctander acquired the manuscript after the death in 1622 of Tollef Jonsson Benkestokk, who was a member of the noble family of Benkestokk in Nordland and wrote his name once in the manuscript. The oldest note of ownership says "Sir Snara Aslaksson owns me". Snara Aslaksson was one of Norway's leading men in the reign of King Hákon Magnússon (1299–1319).

Around 1500, four leaves from the end of DG 4–7 were cut out and subsequently inserted in a bishop's miter used at the cathedral church of Skálholt in Iceland. This is just one example of how medieval Norwegian manuscripts were dismembered and cut up after ca. 1500. The reason for this was partly the language change and partly religious changes. After the Lutheran Reformation in 1537 much Catholic liturgical literature was burned or mutilated.

From 1380, Norway was in union with Denmark. But Norway retained its own laws, and old Norwegian lawbooks had to be kept until the first authorized Danish translation in 1604. In 1846 the Director of the National Archives in Oslo discovered that the backs of certain provincial accounts from the 16th and 17th centuries had been reinforced by parchment scraps (cf. Eken 1963). These scraps had been cut out from medieval manuscripts and served to fasten the thread by which the sheets were stitched together to form a book. A smaller part of this collection of fragments represents nearly 100 manuscripts written in a medieval Scandinavian language. As recently as 1979, a fragment of the older Gulaþing Code from the first half of the 13th century was found in the binding of a younger book.

The 16th century was the period of Humanism in Norway, and scholars took a great interest in early history. Sweden (1477) and Denmark (1479) got their first universities just before that, whereas the first Norwegian university wasn't founded until 1811. Scholars used medieval manuscripts as sources for early Scandinavian history. The collecting of manuscripts started in the 16th century, mostly by Swedes and Danes. The most famous collector was the Icelander Árni Magnússon, professor in Copenhagen 1701–1730. He built up a large collection of Old Norse manuscripts, the Arnamagnæan Collection, which today is divided among the two Arnamagnæan Institutes in Copenhagen and Reykjavík.

As a result of the political situation in Scandinavia after the Middle Ages, most of the Norwegian medieval manuscripts are to be found in Danish and Swedish collections, mostly in Copenhagen, Stockholm and Uppsala. Apart from the fragments in the National Archives in Oslo, there are only two manuscripts older than 1350 in Norway, both in the National Library in Oslo. In 1961 and 1965 the Danish parliament agreed to return to Iceland a substantial part of the medieval Icelandic manuscripts which had been kept in Copenhagen. Norway never argued for the return of the Norwegian manuscripts. The only medieval Faroese manuscript, included in Holm perg 33 qu, was handed over by the Royal Library in Stockholm to the Faroe Islands in 1990.

10. The history of the diplomas

The Norwegian medieval diplomas number more than 20'000 when we include the Latin ones. From before 1350 there are 1108 original diplomas written in Norwegian. At the end of the Middle Ages there were archives including diplomas at the monasteries, the major churches and the king's chancery. Some diplomas have been privately owned. Normally the diplomas were important legal documents for the owners, and therefore preserved much better than the codices. Due to political developments, many archives were moved to Denmark. Some diplomas are also to be found in other countries, mostly in Sweden and in the Vatican Archives. After Norway left the union with Denmark in 1814, many diplomas were returned to the National Archives in Oslo.

Medieval letters are still being discovered. During the restoration of altar frontals at the University Museum in Bergen in 1960, fragments of letters from the 13th century under the painting were found.

11. Literature (a selection)

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Magnus Rindal, Oslo (Norway)

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

1. Introduction
2. The Old Swedish manuscripts
3. The making of Old Swedish manuscripts
4. The culture of Old Swedish manuscripts
5. Literature (a selection)

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 representative 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

Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft

Handbooks of Linguistics
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Manuels de linguistique et
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Mitbegründet von Gerold Ungeheuer (†)
Mitherausgegeben 1985–2001 von Hugo Steger

Herausgegeben von / Edited by / Edités par
Herbert Ernst Wiegand

Band 22.1

Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York
2002

The Nordic Languages

An International Handbook of the History
of the North Germanic Languages

Edited by
Oskar Bandle (main editor) · Kurt Braunmüller
Ernst Håkon Jahr · Allan Karker
Hans-Peter Naumann · Ulf Teleman

Consulting Editors:
Lennart Elmevik · Gun Widmark

Volume 1

Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York
2002