

Fragmentology

A Journal for the Study of Medieval Manuscript Fragments

Fragmentology is an international, peer-reviewed Open Access journal, dedicated to publishing scholarly articles and reviews concerning medieval manuscript fragments. *Fragmentology* welcomes submissions, both articles and research notes, on any aspect pertaining to Latin and Greek manuscript fragments in the Middle Ages.

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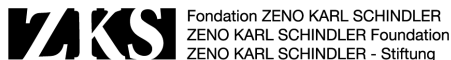
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Research Note

Fragments Combined: A Comprehensive Dataset on Medieval Book Fragments in Stockholm and Helsinki

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Abstract: This research note presents a new dataset on more than 29,000 manuscript fragments preserved in Stockholm and Helsinki. The dataset, created by the *Books of the Medieval Parish Church* project (2021–2025), hosted by the National Library of Finland, integrates these fragments into a single, coherent corpus. The dataset further contributes to the metadata on the fragments by adding new information especially on their early modern reuse—which is central to provenance analysis—and harmonizing metadata from institutional databases. For the first time, the entire corpus can now be considered systematically and analysed statistically. The dataset is published open access via Zenodo, with a full description of its structure and contents.

Keywords: manuscript fragments, Nordic fragments, dataset

Sweden and Finland hold unusually large collections of medieval parchment fragments. These derive from the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century practice of reusing leaves from medieval books as soft covers for tax records—a custom widespread in the early modern Kingdom of Sweden (which included Finland). More than 20,000 manuscript fragments are preserved in the Swedish National Archives in Stockholm and roughly 5,500 in the Finnish National Library in Helsinki; with the addition of fragments from incunabula and early printed books, the combined total exceeds 30,000. For research purposes, the fragments are best regarded as a single entity—the Stockholm-Helsinki collection.¹

¹ For an introduction to the Stockholm-Helsinki collection, see Å. Ommundsen and T. Heikkilä (eds.), *Nordic Latin Manuscript Fragments: The Destruction and Reconstruction of Medieval Books*, Abingdon 2017, and J. Brunius, *From Manuscripts to Wrappers. Medieval Book Fragments in the Swedish National Archives*, Stockholm 2013.

This research note presents a new dataset on the Stockholm-Helsinki fragments, created by the *Books of the Medieval Parish Church* project (2021–2025), hosted by the National Library of Finland.² The dataset advances the study of the fragments in two main ways. First, it integrates the physically separate collections in Stockholm and Helsinki into a single, coherent corpus, defining its scope and structure in greater detail than before. Achieving this required, among other steps, itemising the Helsinki fragments—earlier catalogued only as reconstructed codices, not individual objects. Over a thousand fragments of early printed books, not previously included in fragment catalogues, were also similarly itemised. Second, the dataset contributes to the metadata on the fragments, adding new information especially on their early modern reuse—which is central to provenance analysis—and harmonizing metadata from institutional databases. For the first time, the entire corpus can now be considered systematically and analysed statistically. The dataset is published open access via Zenodo, with a full description of its structure and contents.³ The following sections outline its principal features.

From Books to Fragments to Data

The reuse of parchment from manuscripts was already practised in medieval Sweden but became increasingly widespread after the Reformation. Although fragments served a variety of purposes,

² The project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 948497 (BOMPAC, *Books of the Medieval Parish Church*), PI: Dr. Jaakko Tahkokallio [<https://www.helsinki.fi/en/researchgroups/books-of-the-medieval-parish-church>].

³ S. Eskola, J. Tahkokallio, and H. Kaasik, *Stockholm-Helsinki-Frs-Combined-BOMPAC* [Dataset], Zenodo 2025 [<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1751106>]. The data was compiled as a joint effort by several scholars and research assistants between 2021 and 2025. The project's metadata is also available as more detailed but less consistent sub-datasets, see S. Eskola, H. Kaasik, and J. Tahkokallio, *Raw-Metadata-BOMPAC* [Dataset], Zenodo 2025 [<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17701360>]; and S. Eskola and S. Rämö, *Early-print-fragments-BOMPAC* [Dataset], Zenodo 2025 [<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1771176>].

those that survive today were predominantly used as covers for tax records between ca. 1540 and 1630. During this period, Crown officials produced more than 40,000 tax books, most bound in reused medieval parchment. Compiled across the realm and covered with parchment sourced from all of its provinces, the accounts were sent annually to Stockholm for audit and archiving. They remained largely intact until 1807, when a fire destroyed roughly a quarter of the material. Following Sweden's cession of Finland to Russia after the war of 1808–1809, the collection was divided in two as records concerning Finland were transferred to Helsinki. Later in the nineteenth century, some further dispersal occurred through archival reorganisations and the activities of librarians and collectors. Today, the great majority of fragments remain in the collections of the National Archives of Sweden and the National Library of Finland, although at least a thousand are held in other institutions.⁴

The Stockholm-Helsinki fragments have been studied since the mid-nineteenth century, with systematic cataloguing beginning in the 1910s and now nearing completion. Research on the collection has generated numerous studies on liturgy, music, manuscript production, and literary culture more broadly—not limited to medieval Sweden, as many fragments originate from books produced in England or elsewhere in Western Europe.⁵ The collection represents

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- 4 Most fragments outside these collections are parts of physically reconstructed printed works, such as diocesan missals, preserved, e.g., at the National Library of Sweden. Smaller amounts are dispersed around Sweden and, e.g., the British Library. On the archival situation, see Brunius, *From Manuscripts to Wrappers*, 34ff.
 - 5 Studies from the past twenty years include, e.g., J. Tahkokallio, “Fragments Re-Connected. Identifications of Leaves Stemming from the Same Twelfth-Century or Early Thirteenth-Century Missals Now Divided between the Collections of the National Library of Finland and the National Archives of Sweden”, *Mirator* 23:1 (2023), 1–29; G. Björkvall, *Liturgical Sequences in Medieval Manuscript Fragments in the Swedish National Archives: Repertorial Investigation, Inventory, and Reconstruction of Sources*, Stockholm 2015; J. Brunius, *Atque Olavi: Nordiska helgon i medeltida mässböcker*, Stockholm 2008; M. Gullick, “Preliminary Observations on Romanesque Manuscript Fragments of English, Norman and Swedish Origin in the Riksarkivet (Stockholm)”, in *Medieval Book Fragments in Sweden*, ed. J. Brunius, Stockholm 2005, 31–82.

an exceptionally rich source for the study of medieval book culture, particularly since most fragments derive from liturgical books of parish churches—a type of material that survives especially poorly elsewhere in Europe.⁶ Yet its scale also presents challenges, most notably the difficulty of reconstructing dispersed codices, often divided between institutions and countries. The publication of two databases in the 2000s—*Medeltida pergamentomslag* (MPO) [<https://sok.riksarkivet.se/mpo>] for the fragments in Sweden and *Fragmenta membranea* (FM) [<https://fragmenta.kansalliskirjasto.fi>] for those in Finland—has marked a major advance. However, inconsistent metadata, incompatibility between the databases, and the lack of digital images for many fragments continue to hinder research.

The present dataset unites the Stockholm and Helsinki collections, reconstructing—as far as possible—the archival situation preceding the collection’s division in 1810–1812. It lists 29,230 fragments: 22,553 recorded in MPO and 5,434 in FM, supplemented by fourteen manuscript fragments from outside these databases and 1,229 fragments of incunabula and early sixteenth-century prints previously absent from catalogues and databases relating to the Stockholm-Helsinki collection.⁷

The structure of the combined collections is as follows. Approximately 93% of the fragments derive from manuscripts and 7% from printed books.⁸ Of the manuscript fragments, about 74% are liturgical, subdivided into missals (37%), breviaries (27%), antiphoners (14%), and graduals (9%), with the remaining 13% representing other liturgical books. The liturgical fragments distribute fairly evenly from the twelfth to the fifteenth century (twelfth: 19%, thirteenth: 25%, fourteenth: 26%, fifteenth: 28%), with only a small minority dated outside this range. The non-liturgical fragments comprise

6 See J. Tahkokallio, “Lots of Fragments from Sweden: A Representative Sampling of the Manuscript Books of One Medieval Realm?”, *Digital Philology: A Journal of Medieval Cultures* 13:1 (2025), 107–126, and Brunius, *From Manuscripts to Wrappers*, 40.

7 Ten of the fourteen manuscript fragments outside MPO and FM are preserved at the British Library and four at the Finnish National Archives.

8 The inclusion of all unlisted early print fragments would increase their share to over 10%.

theological (51%), legal (40%), and other—mostly philosophical—texts (9%). Their dating differs sharply from that of the liturgical books, as they mostly derive from thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manuscripts (32% and 44% respectively). For a more detailed breakdown of data, see the accompanying data summary.

Defining the scope of the collection accurately required several steps. For the Stockholm material, catalogued in the MPO database, these were modest and involved chiefly removing duplicate entries and excluding paper items formally listed in the catalogue but representing, for example, remnants of accounts rather than their covers. The more than two hundred Helsinki fragments included in MPO were likewise excluded to avoid overlap. For the Helsinki fragments, catalogued in FM, the process was more extensive. The official catalogues on which the database is based list fragments only as reconstructed manuscripts, not as individual parchment items. The first step, therefore, was to itemise each fragment and bring the metadata structure into line with that of the MPO. The second step targeted the uncatalogued manuscript fragments, digitised under ‘DIG’ shelfmarks in the FM database. These 318 shelfmarks, which in large part reflect preliminary codex reconstructions, were further organised into ca. 250 provisionally reconstructed codices and provided with basic metadata.

The inclusion of fragments from incunabula and early sixteenth-century prints also required archival work. Although these differ in character from manuscript fragments—and appear only in modest numbers in MPO and not at all in FM—they originate from the same administrative process of reuse. For this reason, printed fragments were incorporated into the dataset when possible, ensuring that the material evidence of parchment reuse is represented in full. In total, 1,229 such items were identified, chiefly from the collections of the National Library of Finland and other institutions holding fragments of the *Missale Aboense* (Turku Missal, 1488). Owing to the specific research aims of the project in which the data were produced, most incunabula fragments preserved in Sweden were not included.⁹

9 In addition to the National Library of Finland, fragments of the *Missale Aboense* are preserved, especially, by the Jyväskylä University Library and the

The metadata in the dataset covers, among other categories, the dating, genre, type, origin, and size of the fragments as well as information on their early modern reuse. The process of creating this metadata differed between FM and MPO. For the Helsinki fragments, the repository metadata on the medieval books (dating, genre, etc.) was concise but consistent and easily adaptable to our purposes. However, these fragments lacked almost all data on early modern reuse, the creation of which became the main task. Information on, e.g., the fiscal year and administrative district of the pertinent records was retrieved for most fragments by reading the account markings on the covers, and this information is now, for the first time, systematically available for the entire Helsinki corpus. The early modern reuse has long been recognised as the key to determining the fragments' medieval provenance, and the lack of systematic metadata has been a major obstacle to research.¹⁰ In addition to supporting provenance studies, the availability of metadata on the fragments' reuse enables them to be used in other ways, including as material evidence of post-Reformation developments and for modelling the losses caused by the 1807 fire.¹¹

As regards the Stockholm fragments, MPO offered much more detailed metadata on the medieval manuscripts as well as data fields from which metadata on early modern reuse could be created. However, this data was also relatively inconsistent and needed cleaning and refining. Particular attention was paid to managing codex sigla—created at different cataloguing stages and often overlapping—and harmonising metadata across them. This significantly increased consistency and expanded the amount of information available for

Swedish National Library, both of which hold bound copies reconstructed from cover fragments.

10 For an introduction, see S. Eskola, "The Provenance of the Swedish-Finnish Manuscript Fragment Collection: A Case Study of Early Modern Parchment Reuse", in the present issue and J. Brunius, "The Recycling of Manuscripts in Sixteenth-Century Sweden", in *Nordic Latin Manuscript Fragments*, 66–81.

11 The scale of these losses, along with a preliminary proposal for estimating the types of fragments lost, is discussed in S. Eskola and J. Tahkokallio, "How many fragments? The original extent, nineteenth-century losses, and present size of the Swedish-Finnish medieval book fragment collections", *Suomen Kirkkohistoriallisen Seuran vuosikirja* 114 (2024), 13–48. The same writers are also preparing an article on the fragments as evidence of liturgical change in sixteenth-century Sweden.

many fragments. Further, metadata on the fragments' early modern reuse was enriched for the MPO as well.

It should be underlined that the dataset does not include all institutional metadata. It is best understood as research data: a foundation for quantitative analysis and corpus management, not a substitute for institutional metadata. At present, it recognises roughly 12,300 codices (excluding printed fragments): about 8,600 consisting of a single fragment, 1,600 of two fragments, and 2,000 of three or more.

The publication of this dataset comes at a time when research on the Stockholm-Helsinki fragments is advancing at an accelerating pace. It mitigates the challenges inherent in a collection divided between countries and institutions, though further integration at the institutional level would be highly beneficial. Looking ahead, the ongoing *CODICUM* project (ERC Synergy Grant, 2024 [<https://www.codicum.eu/home>]) combines methods from both the humanities and the natural sciences to study not only the Stockholm-Helsinki collection, but all 50,000 medieval parchment fragments in the Nordic countries. With such initiatives under way, the prospect of a genuinely comprehensive understanding of the Nordic fragment collections is now closer than ever.

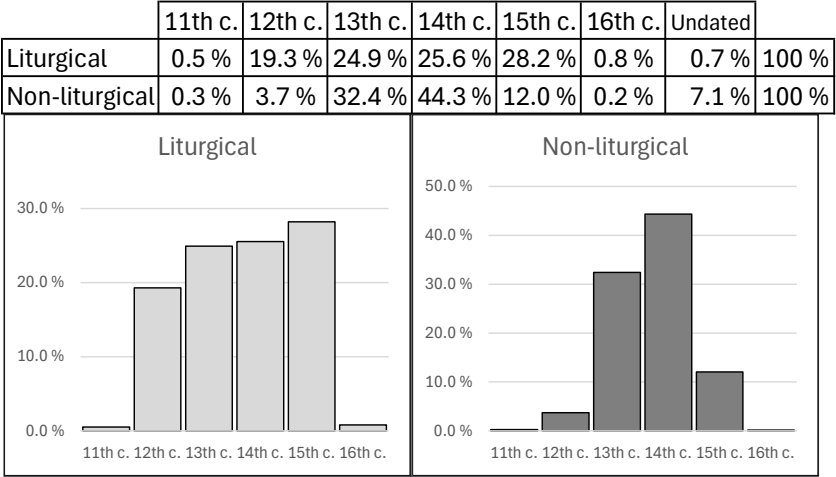
Data summary: tables and figures¹²

Share of manuscript/print fragments and liturgical/non-liturgical fragments

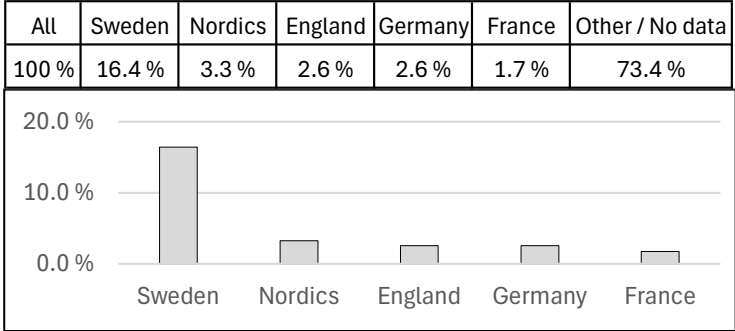
Category	Share		Liturgical	Non-liturgical	Indeterm.	
MS	93 %	Count	19,975	7,062	101	27,138
		Share	73.6 %	26.0 %	0.4 %	100 %
Print	7 %	Count	1,902	189	1	2,092
		Share	91 %	9 %	0 %	100 %
All	100 %	Count	21,877	7,251	102	29,230
		Share	74.8 %	25 %	0.3 %	100 %

¹² Concerning datings, fragments have been assigned to a century based on the midpoint of their dating range; if the midpoint falls on the turn of a century, the fragment is assigned to the earlier one. Regarding origin, 'Sweden' includes Finland, while attributions to, e.g., Denmark or Scandinavia are grouped under 'Nordics'. Dual attributions, such as 'England/France', are categorised as 'Other'.

Dating of manuscript fragments



Origin of manuscript fragments: Liturgical fragments



Origin of manuscript fragments: Non-liturgical fragments

