

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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Review

Åslaug Ommundsen and Tuomas Heikkilä, ed.,
Nordic Latin Manuscript Fragments: The Destruction and Reconstruction of Medieval Books, Abingdon: Routledge 2017, 304 pp. ISBN 9781472478580.

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This volume presents the state of the research on fragments in the Nordic countries of Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland. As such, it presents over a century and a half of research, beginning in the 1840s with what was, in comparison to current research, a selective approach (pp. 10–15). This early approach exemplified by the assessment of the Norwegian historian P.A. Munch (1810–1863), “Most of the findings [in the Norwegian National Archives] are fragments in Latin books of ascetic (*sic!*) contents and therefore not of particular interest for us, apart from that they are beautifully written and seem ancient.” (p. 11). This very selective and unsystematic approach is still common in traditional manuscript research. New ways to look at fragments started in countries at the boundaries of medieval Latin culture.

In the Nordic countries, the systematic study of medieval manuscript fragments began already in the 1930s. By the 1940s, the first efforts at cataloging were undertaken, by, for example, Toni Schmid in Stockholm, by the musicologist Toiv Haapanen in Finland, by Jørgen Rasted in Denmark, or, in the 1950s, by Lilli Gjerløw in Norway. What Heikkilä and Ommundsen in their introductory chapter call the “latest wave” (p. 12) began in 1993, at the same time as the archivist Jan Brunius’ pioneering work in digital cataloguing efforts. Since then, there has been a close and very productive cooperation among the Nordic countries. Alongside this research,

there have been numerous workshops (Stockholm 1993, 2003, 2013; Oslo 2003, 2005 and 2006; Bergen 2005, 2009, 2010; Helsinki 2007) and numerous publications. From 2006 to 2011, Heikkilä directed a research project about the culture of writing in Finland, taking into account Latin manuscript fragments. In Norway, systematic research was advanced by Andreas Haug, Espen Karlsen, Gunnar Pettersen, Tor Weidling, Michael Gullick, Åslaug Ommundsen and others, resulting in the project *From manuscript fragments to book history*, directed by Åslaug Ommundsen at the University of Bergen.

In regard to fragment research, the Nordic countries, especially Sweden, Finland and Norway, are today several steps ahead. First of all, they have already catalogued a large part of their fragments, and can provide precise information about their inventory of surviving fragments. Second, based on this cataloguing, they have begun to carry out fundamental historical research. In comparison to other European countries, where, in spite of an abundance of complete codices, fragment research is still largely in its infancy. The Nordic countries have in fact relatively few complete codices,¹ the sheer number of Nordic fragments is however impressive. There are about 50,000 single fragments in public institutions, and they witness about 15,000 medieval books from between the tenth and fifteenth centuries. Most of these fragments are held in archives (not libraries). The Swedish National Archives alone hold about 23,000 fragments (from about 11,000 codices); in Finland there are more than 9,400 fragments (witnesses of about 1,500 codices), in Norway 6,500, and in Denmark more than 10,000 fragments. Iceland holds a significantly smaller number with a total of about 750 fragments (p. 8), of which 218 are in Latin (p. 171).

This volume brings together a total of ten articles, including one for each of the five Scandinavian countries. The article by Jan Brunius, author of the seminal book *From Manuscripts to Wrappers. Medieval Book Fragments in the Swedish National Archives* (Stockholm 2013), provides a concise introduction to the fragments

1 Only Sweden has a large store of about 1,650 medieval codices, of which about 650 are from Sweden. Norway, in contrast, has only 10–12 Latin codices that were produced there (p. 139). There are only a few dozen Finnish codices and only a single complete Latin codex in and from Iceland (p. 169).

in Sweden, where almost half of the Nordic fragments can be found. Most of the recycled manuscripts, primarily liturgical ones (84%), found new uses after the Reformation, between 1530 until 1630 (with a peak in the year 1565). It is assumed that most of these manuscripts came from Swedish parishes, although a particular parish can be determined in only a very few cases; Brunius mentions 21 of them (p. 68). Thus, direct indications of provenance are rare. But the so-called 'portfolio theory' (pp. 74–76) can provide indirect indications of provenance, based on the fact that the origin of the wrappers and covers can be accounted for by the activity of officials from the central administration in Stockholm. Therefore, the fragments must be from Sweden and must even be from certain provinces.

Tuomas Heikkilä's article is a textbook example of how systematic fragment research can reveal significant historical developments. This is possible only if reconstruction is considered very broadly, moving beyond the traditional understanding of reconstructing a single manuscript from a few surviving parts, to using large sets of fragments to rebuild entire libraries, or even literary cultures. Indeed Heikkilä's article reconstructs the emergence of a literary and book culture in Finland from the sum total of surviving Finnish fragments. As mentioned above, in Finland there are about 9,400 fragment leaves from about 1,500 manuscripts. This allows the author to reconstruct the emergence of book culture in Finland. According to Heikkilä, book culture entered the northernmost edge of the *Latinitatis* in the eleventh to twelfth century, at the same time as Christianization. The oldest fragments, however, probably come from imported manuscripts. With all due caution, we can assume English, German and French missionary influences. In keeping with political developments, Swedish influence follows in the thirteenth century. Finland did not develop its own book culture until the fourteenth century, and organized book production only emerges in the fifteenth century.

The fragments in Denmark – where the "last wave" apparently was less active – are presented by Michael H. Gelting. In a manner comparable to the 'portfolio theory' (cf. Brunius, pp. 74–76), the author attempts to deduce the origin of these fragments from their secondary provenance, i.e., from the recycling process they

underwent. Thus, fragments from Ringsted Abbey are found in late 16th century account books, the monastery's *len*. The situation is different for Tønder, where, unlike in Ringsted Abbey, apparently no old manuscripts were available on site; therefore binding materials had to be provided by the *Rentenammer* (office of pensions) in Gottorf, which availed itself of parchment leaves of manuscript waste from the nearby Augustinian monastery in Bordesholm.

As Åslaug Ommundsen points out in her article, "A Norwegian – and European – Jigsaw Puzzle of Manuscript Fragments", the fragments in Norway are products of the Danish administration's binding techniques between 1536 and 1660. They are usually smaller than in Sweden, which can also be attributed to this different binding technique.² In Norway, parchment was used not as covers or wrappers, but as reinforcing material, for example as spine lining. If we assume a rough estimate of about 10,000–12,000 liturgical manuscripts at some time (p. 139), as well as fragments from about 1,080 liturgical manuscripts (90% of the roughly 1,200 Latin codices, p. 139), the significance of these sources becomes clear, especially if one considers them in relation to the small number of complete manuscripts (10–12 Latin codices that have survived intact). Thanks to these numerous sources, reconstructions become possible; one must, however, always assume to have a puzzle where only a few pieces at most will fit together. In recognition of this problem, Åslaug Ommundsen explains the title of her article more precisely, "the fragment collections will never take a shape of a neat and orderly jigsaw puzzle, but rather a mix and match of several puzzles, some of which will never connect to others." (p. 155).

A special case is presented by Iceland, where many fewer fragments have survived. Even if Icelandic fragments held in other countries, especially in Denmark, are included in the count, the total reaches only a rather modest number compared with the other Nordic countries. In his article, Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson discusses the preeminent Árni Magnússon (1663–1730). In his time, reusing manuscript waste was a common practice, and Magnússon was no

2 An impressive overview can be found in *Latin Manuscripts of Medieval Norway. Studies in memory of Lilli Gjerlow*, ed. E. Karlsen, Oslo 2013, including an article by Ommundsen.

exception. He was interested in the written witnesses to Icelandic culture; for instance, he kept a Icelandic calendar, because he considered it interesting, and used the rest as manuscript waste (p. 167). In addition to the 218 Latin fragments in Iceland, more can be found in the Arnamagnæan Collection in Copenhagen (560 fragments), as well as an indeterminate number in other collections in other countries. That there must have been a substantial number of liturgical manuscripts in Iceland is shown by the following calculation (p. 174): if in the late Middle Ages there were 330 churches and 1,200 chapels, and each church had about four liturgical manuscripts, then at a certain point in time there should have been at minimum a total of 1,200 codices (p. 175). Traces of about 340 manuscripts have survived. On the one hand, this demonstrates a great loss, but at the same time, it demonstrates the significance of the fragments. From a pan-European perspective, it is astonishing how many fragments of books, out of the estimated total to have survived, have been preserved in Iceland, as well as in Norway (p. 139) and Sweden. Rudimentary research up to now suggests that the losses in Western and Southern Europe are much larger.

It would be good to know how many fragments survive worldwide. Just over 30,000 leaves have been counted in the USA, but what are considered 'leaves' there are mostly singletons, often illuminated, from 'broken books'. Currently no one knows how many fragments there may be in Western, Southern and Eastern Europe. Most collections do not even know the number of their detached fragments (often stored in archival boxes without shelfmarks), not to mention the number of fragments in host volumes. Are there as many medieval manuscript fragments as codices, about 300,000? Or should one rather assume tenfold more? Both numbers are possible. This would mean, however, that the great number of Nordic fragments should not necessarily be considered extraordinary (cf. Brunius pp. 78–79). As is generally known, since the early Middle Ages, it was common practice to reuse parchment as 'manuscript waste'; thus, this practice is not unique to the Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Catholic liturgical manuscripts were given a second life as binding material. Such reuse of 'waste' material can be found as early as the ninth century (e.g. in St. Gall)

and as late as the early 20th century, with a peak in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There are countless libraries and archives in Western and Southern Europe with large collections of fragments that still have to be inventoried. Nevertheless, what is special about the Nordic countries is the proportion of surviving fragments to codices.

Scandinavian and Finnish research has raised numerous methodological questions and has presented fascinating results. The systematic study of medieval manuscript fragments yields more profits the greater the number of fragments that have been identified and described, and the more pieces that have been related to others. Such reconstructions go far beyond the reconstruction of codices or scriptoria or the book culture of specific countries. The study of the Nordic fragments show that our goal must be to reconstruct the book culture of Europe as a whole. The relation of Nordic written culture to that of Europe is addressed repeatedly in this volume; it is understood as a research perspective (pp. 17–19). Our hope is that fragmentology in the other regions takes up this groundbreaking approach and pursues it with equal persistence.