

Zeitschrift: Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie
Herausgeber: Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Skandinavische Studien
Band: 68 (2021)

Artikel: A Middle Norwegian Herr Ivan : in search of a language
Autor: Johansson, Karl G.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-919713>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)


Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 17.08.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

A Middle Norwegian *Herr Ivan* – In Search of a Language¹

Karl G. Johansson (Oslo)  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4572-8789>

Abstract: The view of Norway as a region in decay in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, subdued under Danish rulership, has in earlier research overshadowed the fact that there were still milieux in Norway where literature was re-written and distributed. The literary centres in Scandinavia had moved and changed, but writing continued among the literate classes. The version of *Herr Ivan* in a Norwegian mid-fifteenth-century manuscript, E 8822, in the National Archives, Stockholm, is central to this discussion of the Norwegian part of the Scandinavian literary system and its relationship to Danish translations from the same period. One objective is to present the relatively underresearched material in *Birgittine Norwegian*, which may provide new insights into the development of literacy in Scandinavia in the late Middle Ages.

Keywords: E 8822, Birgittine Norwegian (birgittinnorska), Middle Norwegian (mellomnorsk), literacy, literary systems, literary centres, *Eufemiavisor*

The present study does not deal directly with this book's primary subject, that is, Danish versions of the *Eufemiavisor*, but rather focuses on the version found in a Norwegian manuscript of the Swedish version of *Herr Ivan*. It is important, I think, to consider this text in order to further illuminate the dissemination of the *Eufemiavisor* in the Scandinavian realm at large. It is necessary to stress the importance of a focus on the Danish material. That material has too long been neglected in Scandinavian studies, due primarily to a focus on the mostly Icelandic 'canon' of Old Norse studies, but also as a result of the preference shown to the Swedish *Eufemiavisor*. In order to get a more complete picture of the literary system encompassing Scandinavia (including Iceland), more scholarly engagement with the Danish translations of the fifteenth century and later is necessary.

It is crucial, however, that as this material is brought into the discussion, it should not be treated in isolation from the overall literary system of Scandinavia. Danish, as well as Swedish, Norwegian, and Icelandic literature did not, it should go without saying, develop in a vacuum. In many of the chapters in this book, Danish literature's relationships both to the Swedish and the European literary systems are treated explicitly, as is the Norwegian background for the Swedish and subsequently Danish translations. My goal here, then,

1 The present study is based on research conducted within the research programme "Modes of Modification. Variance and Change in Medieval Manuscript Culture", funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond.

is to contribute to a more general perspective of what is going on in the literary system of Scandinavia in the time of the Danish translations. My contention is that the view of Norway as a region in decay in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, ruined by severe waves of plague in the fourteenth century and subdued under Danish rulership, has overshadowed the fact that there were still milieux in Norway where literature was re-written and distributed. The literary centres in Scandinavia had moved and changed, but literary culture continued among the learned classes. The version of *Herr Ivan* in a Norwegian manuscript from mid-fifteenth century will be central to my discussion of the Norwegian part of the Scandinavian literary system and its relationship to the Danish translations from the same period.

A few years ago, I published an article in which I argued that the translations of *Eufemiavisor* could be seen as representative of the movement of political power and consequently cultural activity from the Norwegian court at Akershus to the eastern (and subsequently southern) parts of Scandinavia (Johansson 2015). My argument was that there is need for a more nuanced understanding of the processes that ended the flourishing literary activity in Norway already two decades before the arrival of the Black Death in 1348. Traditionally the plague has been used as the one and only explanation of the Norwegian decay, but even if it did contribute to the breakdown it is hard to see why it should have impacted literary production in Norway more than in other parts of Scandinavia.

I think there are reasons to argue for a continuity in the development of literacy in the western regions throughout the period, despite the plague's diminishment of literary production. Here I have drawn heavily from a study presented by Jonathan Adams (2015) on the manuscript E 8902 in the Swedish national archives and the language of its two scribes, often referred to as *Birgittinnorska*. Adams believes the language of these texts to be Norwegian, rather than badly-treated Swedish, as has previously been assumed. This indicates that the scribes sought to adapt the language of their source text to that of their own region. There are a number of manuscripts containing writing in a similar linguistic form, not only adaptations from Swedish material, but also original compositions. Other noteworthy examples of this linguistic form can be found as marginalia added into older Old Norwegian manuscripts made in what seems to be a regional variant of eastern Scandinavian, suggesting some perception of linguistic continuity with Old Norse.

There are three things that can be stated at this point:

1. Our traditional view of national languages established in the nineteenth century does not really apply to the study of medieval languages (read: written languages).
2. The national borders could with good reason be replaced by social, political and cultural lines of diffusion when we study the history of texts in the Scandinavian Middle Ages.
3. The use of writing and texts in Scandinavia needs to be further studied from a pan-Scandinavian perspective in order to further our understanding of the interplay between regional variants, individual and institutional networks and various input in the form of translations and new European trends.

Middle Norwegian (*Mellomnorsk*)

The period I am interested in here, the so called *mellomnorsk* period, is usually considered to be between c. 1350 and c. 1537. As already mentioned, Norwegian scholarship has tended to view it as a period of decay and it has received far less attention than it deserves. This is mainly due to the romantic idea of a flourishing national language and culture disrupted by the Black Death and subsequently diminished by the political dominance of Swedish and later Danish kings. These romantic ideas of the nineteenth century have not sufficiently been challenged. But people in Norway, then as now, continued to speak their own local variants of the Scandinavian language, and the evolutionary processes leading to Modern Norwegian were already well under way in the northern and eastern parts of the realm of Norway in the early fourteenth century. Only in the western parts of the region was something reminiscent of Old Norse still spoken.

In his book on the Reformation in Norway, Henning Laugerud (2018) argues that the region was well administrated during the fifteenth century, primarily by the Catholic hierarchy presided over by the archbishops of Niðarós (Trondheim). He points out that the church during the fifteenth century re-built the structures that were damaged by the devastating plague in the years around 1350. Schools were established and priests educated to meet the needs of the whole archdiocese. Laugerud's research contrasts the generally-accepted depiction of Niðarós's state of decay during this period and instead encourages the present re-evaluation.

It should also be stressed that the idea of what constitutes *mellomnorsk* has never been agreed upon. The starting point for the decay of the literary system during this period should probably be put in the first quarter of the fourteenth century. The linguistic changes had, as already mentioned, started even earlier in the northern and in the southeastern parts of the Norwegian realm. Texts from this period also show signs of development. Jan Ragnar Hagland has demonstrated in his study of Middle Norwegian writing that the extant charters from this period are well-formed in a manner reflecting the current trends of the rest of Scandinavia and Europe (Hagland 2005). Yet Hagland still takes the traditional view of the period as one of decay. He states:

Det vil seia at vi vil freista halda den tradisjonelle oppfatninga om eit skriftspråk som normmessig var i ferd med å gå i oppløysing opp mot det vi måtte vera i stand til å augna med omsyn til kvantitative og kvalitative sider ved bruk av skriftspråk på norsk i offentleg og eventuelt privat samanheng. (Hagland 2005: 13)

This is to say that we will try to uphold the traditional understanding of a written language which as a standard was in the process of dissolution in contrast to what we might be able to see regarding quantitative and qualitative aspects of the use of written language in Norwegian in official contexts and to some extent in private contexts.

While there is a change in the literary system of the western regions of Scandinavia during this time, there remains a high degree of literary competence. Hagland comes to the conclusion that although the period saw a reduction in literary activities, this did not bring literary production to a standstill (Hagland 2005: 110).

Birgittine Norwegian (*Birgittinnorska*)

As with *mellomnorsk*, there is no agreed-upon definition of what is meant by *birgittinnorska*. It is interesting that scholarship in the field has primarily been Swedish, regarding the relevant texts as examples of the Swedish language badly mistreated by Norwegian scribes. This reflects the limitations imposed by an anachronistic national perspective, and has in turn apprehended Norwegian scholarship's interest in what *birgittinnorska* can offer to studies of the literary culture of the period.² It was obviously far more inspiring to return to the golden age of Hákon Hákonarson and his sons and grandsons.

In Swedish scholarship Lennart Moberg is one of the more recent representatives of the view that *birgittinnorska* is a hybridised form of Swedish and Norwegian:

Det vi kallar birgittinnorska är ett egendomligt svensk-norskt blandspråk, som säkerligen bara har funnits i skriven form. Det mest karakteristiska är bristen på konsekvens. Svenskt och norskt blandas till synes planlöst. En norsk diftongform och en svensk monoftongform av ett och samma ord kan t.ex. stå sida vid sida. Om man skall kalla detta för norska eller svenska, kan diskuteras. (Moberg 1998: 11)

What we call Birgittine Norwegian, is a peculiar Swedish-Norwegian mixture, which certainly existed in written form only. Its most prominent characteristic is its lack of consistency. Swedish and Norwegian are mixed seemingly haphazardly. A Norwegian diphthong form and a Swedish monophthong form of the same word can stand side by side, for example. One might discuss whether this is Norwegian or Swedish.

Jon Gunnar Jørgensen is one of the few Norwegian scholars who have recently been interested in material related to this “mixed language” and who has treated it as written Norwegian, primarily in relation to his edition of the cadastre *Aslak Bolts jordebok* from 1997. Jørgensen writes:

På Aslak Bolts tid gjorde det seg også gjeldende en viss innflytelse fra svensk gjennom birgittinerne, som fra ordenen ble opprettet i 1370 hadde sitt hovedsete i Vadstena. Enkelte norske tekster fra denne tiden har så tydelige svenske trekk at språket har fått karakteristikken birgittinernorsk. Aslak Bolt var selv vennlig innstilt til birgittinerne, og medvirket som Bergen-biskop til at ordenen i 1426 fikk overta Munkeliv kloster i Bergen. (Jørgensen 1997: xxvii)

In Aslak Bolt's time a certain Swedish influence was exerted by the Birgittines, who from the time that their order had been established in 1370 had their principal house in Vadstena. Some Norwegian texts from this time show features so clearly Swedish that the language has been characterized as Birgittine Norwegian. Aslak Bolt himself was benevolent towards the Birgittines, and, as Bishop of the Bergen diocese, he was involved in the takeover of the Munkeliv convent in Bergen by the Birgittine order in 1426.

2 One obvious exception is Marius Sandvei (1938). Didrik Arup Seip stated that *birgittinnorska* was “no. med sterkt sv.-birgittinsk språklig innslag” (‘Norwegian with a strong Swedish-Birgittine influence’) (KLN 1: 558–559).

It is relevant to remember Aslak Bolt's relation to the Norwegian Birgittines in the following discussion. Here only one more quote from Jon Gunnar Jørgensen:

Betegnelsen "birgittinernorsk" er brukt om 1400-talls norsk skrift med innslag av svesismer. I Sverige stod birgittinerne for en viktig opprustning av morsmålet i skrift. De oversatte litteratur fra flere språk, faktisk også norrønt, til svensk, og tok i stor grad morsmålet i bruk på bekostning av latin. Den birgittinske innflytelsen i Norge har nok ført til innslag av svensk i norske skriftstykker, men på den annen side så *har den sannsynligvis også støttet opp under bruken av nasjonalspråket her som i Sverige*. I AB er også tekstens solide norskspråklige preg langt mer iøynefallende enn de enkelte svesismer. (Jørgensen 1997: xxix; my italics)

The term "Birgittine Norwegian" is used for fifteenth century Norwegian writing with traces of Swedisms. In Sweden the Birgittines were responsible for an important advancement in the use of the written vernacular. They translated literature from many languages – even from Norse – into Swedish, and to a great degree used the vernacular instead of Latin. The Birgittine influence in Norway probably brought Swedish traits into Norwegian writing, but on the other hand *it probably also supported the use of the national language here as [it did] in Sweden*. In AB, the text's solid Norwegian character is considerably more apparent than the isolated examples of Swedisms.

It is perhaps a bit anachronistic to talk about the written language of the time as "national", but it is interesting that the regional vernacular – a form not considered to be Old Norse – was used for writing throughout the period, and for distributing literary texts, even into the western parts of the Scandinavian literary system.

It is clear, however, that the Birgittines were only part of the explanation for eastern Scandinavian influences on the western variants of written Scandinavian of the time. There is evidence that some of the texts considered to be *birgittinnorska* were already produced early in the fifteenth century (or even late fourteenth century), before any influences from the Birgittines could be expected. A Norwegian Birgittine monastery was established in Bergen in 1427. Rather we should perhaps consider these texts as representative of the beginnings of an effort to establish a distinct regional written variant of Scandinavian language in the northern and eastern reaches of what is now Norway, and this must be understood within the contexts of its relationship to the literary activity of southern Scandinavia.

When we are looking for linguistic explanations for the emergence of mixed language in texts from northern and eastern Norway, two things are important to take into account. The first is the state of the spoken language in those regions, a matter broached in Jon Gunnar Jørgensen's quote above. The spoken language in these parts had already in the thirteenth century demonstrated similar developments to the rest of eastern Scandinavia. The second is to consider what models there were for the reformation of written language at this time. As Scandinavia's centres of literary production moved east in the first half of the fourteenth century, so too did Norway's models for literary language, thereby shifting away from the old manuscripts from the thirteenth century. Even if these manuscripts were to some extent still read by the reading elite, the language they presented must have been considered old-fashioned. The written language found in manuscripts from eastern Scandinavia would have provided what was likely to be considered a more modern written language worthy of emulation by local scribes.

Jonathan Adams discusses both *mellomnorsk* and *birgittinnorska* in his study of the manuscript E 8902 (earlier Skokloster 5 4to) in the Swedish national archives. One central observation in his study concerns the strategies of the two main scribes in adapting their source texts. Each demonstrates his own distinct variant of *birgittinnorska* while remaining highly consistent in his own use of that variant. Adams interprets this as a sign of a common strategy, that they are both aware of that they are not only producing new versions of the texts, but rather consciously adapting those texts to meet the needs of their intended audience, that is, they are producing “Norwegian” versions of the texts. From this observation Adams comes to the conclusion that the written language of the two scribes must be considered an attempt at a Norwegian written language. He states:

There are just two Norwegian examples of Birgitta’s revelations, viz. E 8902 and the nine rules for judges written inside GKS 1154 fol. My placing of E 8902 under the heading “Middle Norwegian” does not follow the traditional classification of this manuscript, which places it under Old Swedish. It has been classified as Middle Norwegian because it was copied by Norwegian scribes, was written in a type of language typical for late fourteenth-/early fifteenth-century Norway, and was in my view intended for a Norwegian audience. (Adams 2015: 28)

From this I think it is time to take a closer look at the other manuscripts deemed to have been written at least partly in *birgittinnorsk* in order to further our knowledge of what happened in the use of script and texts in this period.

The manuscripts

If we accept Adams’s argument, E 8902 is one of the primary attestations of the development of a new literary standard for the language of western Scandinavia, and therefore also an important local indicator of the same literary system responsible for the transfer of the *Eufemiavisor* into their Danish redaction. But there is other written evidence for this form of Middle Norwegian that warrants our attention.

In Linköping there is a manuscript, Linköping T 180, containing various texts from the same period as E 8902. In this manuscript we find among other texts seven stanzas from a ballad, the oldest written example of a ballad found in Scandinavia. I treat this ballad fragment in a recent publication, in which I also discuss the content of the manuscript as a whole (Johansson 2020). The most detailed discussion of the manuscript was presented by Poul Lindegård Hjorth (1976, see also Andersson 1993). Hjorth concludes in a Scandinavian mode, stating that the poem is Danish but displays Swedish traits that could possibly be Norwegian (see e.g. 1976: 26) and that the tradition must be studied from a Scandinavian perspective rather than being related to what he refers to as “en national skrifttradition” (1976: 29; ‘a national writing tradition’).

In his study of the Linköping T 180’s ballad fragment, Kaj Blom provides a lexicographic perspective on the difficulties of distinguishing the three languages:

Forvanskninger påtræffes, men øjensynlig af en sådan art at de, i en del og deriblandt vigtige tilfælde, snarest må henføres til en person der ikke var fortrolig med visen(s sprogform) og indlevet i genren. – En “nem” (men dubiøs) forklaring kunne gå ud på at det var en dansker (af danskere født) el. evt. en svensker [...] der af interesse for visen havde ført den i pennen efter bedste evne.

Men indtil nærmere og bedre måtte foreligge kan heller ikke *Ridder i Hjorteham* forpligte GldO. – Man kan godt tænke sig at skrivende folk i Syd-Norge kunne have et skriftsprog som det vi ser afspejlet i (afskriften) A. (Blom 1973: M57)

There are corruptions to be noted, but apparently of such a character that they, in some – and sometimes important – cases, must be attributed to a person that was not acquainted with (the linguistic form of) the ballad or familiar with the genre. A “simple” (but dubious) explanation could be that it was a Dane (born in Denmark) or possibly a Swede [...] who out of interest in the ballad had penned it to the best of his abilities.

But until closer and more thorough [investigation] is available, there is no obligation for the GldO [to include] *Ridder i Hjorteham* either. One could very well imagine that literate people in Southern Norway could have had a written language like the one we see in (the transcript) of A.

Another example of a text in what can be characterised as *birgittinnorska* is found in one of the most exquisite Norwegian manuscripts extant from the second half of the fourteenth century, GKS 1154 fol of the Magnús lagaboetr Law of the Realm (MLL). On the very first folio, on the originally blank recto page, of this manuscript a considerably later hand has added a text from the revelations of Birgitta in the language that we are now accustomed to call *birgittinnorska*. Jonathan Adams has, however, been reluctant to add this text to his list of *birgittinnorska* texts and rather considers it to be Old Swedish (Adams 2008: 17). Adams has edited the text and discussed its provenance, dating, and linguistic features (2008). It is significant that the facsimile edition (Rindal/Berg 1983) of the manuscript does not provide images of this folio; who would be interested in these scribbles from the fifteenth century?

Finally, the manuscript E 8822 (earlier Skokloster 156) which is the subject of my discussion here, containing among other texts the version of *Herr Ivan*, will be presented in more detail below.

But it is not only in re-writings of texts from exemplars in a Swedish variant we find examples of what could be considered *birgittinnorska*. The language of the cadastre *Aslak Bolts jordebok* has been characterised as Swedish-influenced. As mentioned above, Jon Gunnar Jørgensen has pointed out that the archbishop of Niðarós, Aslak Bolt, had close contacts with the Birgittine milieu in Bergen. Jørgensen stresses the Norwegian aspect of Aslak Bolt’s linguistic activities. He underscores that Bolt, while archbishop of Niðarós, crowned Karl Knutsson king of Norway, and wrote this text for the crowning in what Jørgensen characterises as Norwegian (Jørgensen 1997: xi).³

Potentially related to the Birgittines are a number of Old Norse manuscripts dated to the thirteenth century that are believed to have been sent from Bergen to the Vadstena monastery in the fifteenth century and to have influenced literary production there (see e.g. Jørgensen 2012). These are kept today in the Royal Library in Stockholm under the signa Holm. perg. 6 fol (*Barlaams saga ok Josaphats*) and Holm. perg. 4 fol (*Þiðreks saga*). The first of these seems to have been one of the source texts for the Swedish translation of

3 The charter is edited in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, vol. 6, 560–561. It is available online: www.dokpro.uio.no/perl/middelalder/diplom_vise_tekst.prl?b=6282&s=n&str (accessed 25 June 2021).

the narrative about Barlaam (see e.g. Arvidsson 2009). This could provide further evidence, but not proof, that the Birgittines were a source for the *birgittinnorsk* as a written language.

Another argument that the written language found in these manuscripts represents an attempt by various scribes to establish a written standard for northern and western Norwegian is found in the scribbles in the margins of Norwegian manuscripts in Old Norse. My example here is found in the main manuscript of *Konungs skuggsjá* (the King's mirror), AM 243 b α fol., originally written in the third quarter of the thirteenth century. In mid-fifteenth century it was, as far as we know, owned by a farmer in Gran some distance north of Oslo. The farmer, Ogmundr Lafrantsson, is known from other documents for attending the election of Kristoffer as king of Norway in Lödöse in 1442. Ogmundr has written his name in the manuscript in connection to what seems to be relatively basic matrices for charters. From this identification a large number of comments and glosses to the Old Norse text are found in the margins throughout the manuscript that may be attributed to Ogmundr. In earlier research these notes have only received passing attention as evidence for the provenance of the manuscript, not for what they reveal of their owner's linguistic and literary disposition (see e.g. Holm-Olsen 1952: 22–24). But these marginal notes can in my opinion be of great importance in many ways for our understanding of literacy in fifteenth century Norway.

The very fact that Ogmundr owned the manuscript by the mid-fifteenth century is in itself of interest as it provides a context wherein a thirteenth century manuscript was kept and also used. But it is also relevant for reflecting the use of writing by a farmer in fifteenth century Gran who formulates comments and glosses to a text that must have been rather old-fashioned in its language. The notes indicate that Ogmundr not only owned the manuscript as an object of prestige, they also show that he could read the manuscript text and relate to it. His glosses to the text provide information about his interests, which seem to have been focused on Irish *mirabilia* and geographical descriptions. Where the salvation of his soul seems to have interested Ogmundr, the courtly life appears to have been irrelevant to him. Finally, he shows a vivid interest in weapons and warfare. Ogmundr's marginalia provide a wealth of insights for the state of language during this period of Norwegian literary history, challenging the general opinion of earlier scholarship that literacy was in decay and that Norwegians could not read the old manuscripts; Ogmundr could.

Herr Ivan in E 8822

The manuscript E 8822 today consists of 72 paper leaves. The first two leaves have no original text, only later scribbles that may be of interest for the further study of the context and provenance of the manuscript. On the first fol. (1^r) we find the attribution of the manuscript to the Franciscan friar Johannes from Trondheim.

Jstum librum Frater Johannes de nidrosia fecit colligere et conscribere ad vsum et commodum fratrum minorum custodie Bergensis et aliorum amicorum. qui eum alienauerit anathema sit.

Brother Johannes of Niðarós had this book compiled and written for the use and convenience in their duties for the little brothers [Minorites] and his other friends in Bergen. May the one who steals it be penalised with *anathema*.

The main part of the manuscript as it is preserved seems to have been the work of one scribe, but there are indications of more hands adding text in various places. An example is the script on fols. 29^v–30^r which differs significantly in size, style, and the colour of the ink. Poul Lindegård Hjorth (1971: 47–48) argues for at least three hands. Hand 1 is responsible for writing the attribution to Johannes on fol. 1^r. This hand is also the one that has written the prayers on fols. 29^v–30^r. According to Hjorth, hand 2 has written the text on fols. 3^r–8^r while hand 3 has produced the rest of the manuscript, that is, the main part. If the division between hand 2 and 3 is correct, this would indicate that two hands have collaborated on writing one of the texts of the manuscript and that they are contemporary and working in the same scriptorium. The relationship between these two hands and hand 1 is still uncertain.

The Norwegian historian Bjørn Bandlien has recently discussed the version of *Herr Ivan* and the ways in which it could be understood in its context alongside the other texts of the manuscript. Bandlien's focus is that of the historian. He is interested in explaining how the text has come to be included in a manuscript that mainly contains texts on religious matter and in what way the relationship between a manuscript belonging to a Franciscan friar and a writing that is associated with the Birgittines can be understood (Bandlien 2013). Perhaps Bandlien's line of reasoning also applies to our understanding of the use of writing and the attempt to provide a written language targeting a Norwegian audience, both as readers and as listeners to a text read in performance. The spoken language of eastern and northern Norway at this time would have been very much at the same point of departure from Old Norse as the spoken language in Sweden and Denmark; adjustments in spelling and vocabulary would be important for adapting the written language to the regional spoken variant, but it would have demanded little of the scribe to provide these marginal changes. It is interesting to note that the Franciscan monastery in Bergen was established early, already before 1250. The Franciscans did not, however, establish any house in Niðarós until 1430. It could therefore be argued that a manuscript produced in the Bergen house could have been sent to the brothers in Niðarós when the new house was recently established as a contribution to their library.

It is now time to turn to the contents of the manuscript, the bulk of which are indicative of an explicitly religious context.⁴ It should be stressed, however, that the border between sacred and secular material in medieval writing is not a firm one, and *Herr Ivan*'s appearance in an otherwise religiously-themed volume likely defies the modern dichotomy between religious and secular more than any attitude current at the time of the manuscript's production or compilation. The texts are ordered as follows:

4 Jonas Carlquist (2002: 53–54) provides a short presentation of the manuscript and its content. Carlquist also treats the function of the manuscript as a miscellany (2002: 119–124). A detailed discussion of the manuscript and the texts it contains, which I base my discussion on and refer to in the following, is presented by Poul Lindegård Hjorth (1971).

1.	Tio Guds bud utlagda (Exegesis of the Ten Commandments)	3 ^r –4 ^v	Hand 2
2.	Vår frus pina (Our Lady's Pain)	5 ^r –9 ^v	Hand 2 (5 ^r –8 ^v)
3.	Christi pina (The Passion of Christ)	10 ^r –16 ^r	Hand 3 (8 ^v –)
4.	Kroppens och själens träta (A Dispute between Body and Soul)	16 ^v –21 ^v	Hand 3
5.	Christi förtjenst (The Merits of Christ)	21 ^v –24 ^v	Hand 3
6.	Adam och Christus (Adam and Christ)	24 ^v –29 ^r	Hand 3
7.	Fyra böner etc. (Four Prayers etc.)	29 ^v –30 ^r	Hand 1
8.	Speculum missæ (An explanation of the parts of the Holy Mass)	30 ^v –32 ^v	Hand 3
9.	Tre andliga notater (Three notes on spiritual subjects)	32 ^v –33 ^r	Hand 3
10.	<i>Herr Ivan D</i>	34 ^v –59 ^v	Hand 3
11.	Fyra skålverser (Four toast poems)	59 ^v	Hand 3
12.	<i>Herr Ivan D</i>	60 ^v –72 ^v	Hand 3

The order of the texts in the collection is likely original and intentional, as is demonstrated by the fact that though it is a compilation, the manuscript was produced as a single project rather than stitched together from pre-existing folios at a later stage, as is true of many other manuscripts. Consider, for contrast, Dario Bullitta's description of Cod. Holm. K 4 as a "composite, miscellaneous manuscript" in his discussion of one of its contents, the Danish translation of the *Visio Pauli* (2016: 5). This manuscript, much like E 8822, contains a version of *Herr Ivan*, but otherwise consists primarily of hagiographic materials suggesting that it was made for a religious setting (Bullitta 2016: 22). Bullitta concludes that the manuscript seems to be the remains of two contemporary manuscripts subsequently bound together in the extant codex, but still he maintains that the hand in both manuscripts indicate that they were written by the same scribe (Bullitta 2016: 5–6). Massimiliano Bampi (2019) also considers the Cod. Holm. K 4 manuscript as well as another composite manuscript, Cod. Holm. K 47, which also contains a version of the Danish *Herr Ivan*. Bampi agrees with Bullitta's view of the manuscript K 4 points towards a monastic milieu and states:

Att *Ivan Løveridder* föreligger i ett manuscript som K 4 förefaller givetvis mer förvånande. Vad har en sådan text om en riddares död i gränslandet mellan verklighet och fiktion med uppbyggeliga och undervisande verk att göra? För att kunna svara på denna fråga behöver man vidga perspektivet och ta hänsyn till besläktade samlingshandskrifter i det östnordiska språkområdet. (Bampi 2019: 229)

That *Ivan Løveridder* is found in a manuscript such as K 4 obviously appears as a surprise. What purpose has such a text about the adventures of a knight in the borderland between reality and fiction among texts with the function of spiritual support and education? To answer this

question, one needs to widen the perspective and take into account similar manuscripts containing collections of texts from the linguistic region of eastern Scandinavia.

In the following passage Bampi treats E 8822 and compares its content and composition to Cod. Holm. K 4. He concludes after a short comparison that “[u]tifrån handskriftens innehåll kan man följaktligen tänka sig att denna underhållande text var avsedd för att tjäna ett likadant uppbyggande syfte i K 4” (Bampi 2019: 229) (judging from the contents of the manuscript it is therefore possible to assume that this entertaining text was meant to serve a similar edifying purpose in K 4). In a footnote he makes a clear, and in my opinion important, demand for leaving behind the rigid division between didacticism and entertainment. We need to be able to see more than one function for individual texts as well as manuscripts and take into consideration that composite manuscripts could have been intended to have different functions. The form and function of the composite manuscript could, further, change the original function(s) of the individual texts they contain. There is, however, one important difference between E 8822 and K 4 that should be considered. As was mentioned above the main body of text in E 8822 was written by the same hand and with the clear intention to form the collection we have in the extant manuscript. Cod. Holm. K 4, on the other hand, is a composite manuscript formed by what at the outset seems to have been two manuscripts bound together at a later stage. As Bullitta has pointed out, however, the hands of the two parts are so similar in paleography and orthography that the two parts should probably be considered to be written by the same scribe. This means that the two versions, one Danish, one Norwegian based on a Swedish translation, should not necessarily be considered as planned to form a unit with the hagiographic or primarily didactic literature. While the Norwegian manuscript originally was formed as a unit, however, the binding of the composite Danish manuscripts into one unit may be interpreted as a conscious action by the binder (collector). This would indicate that the result could be understood in rather the same way as the more original collection of the Norwegian manuscript. In two contemporary milieux, therefore, it could be claimed that the extant collections may have had similar functions, the Danish manuscript explicitly directed to nuns, the Norwegian to brothers in a monastery. In the following I will look more closely at the content of E 8822 in order to shed more light on the intended audience and functions of this manuscript in a milieu where we would expect the readers/listeners to have been predominately speaking some variant of fifteenth century Norwegian.

The first text of the collection is a poem with explanations of the Ten Commandments. The text ends on a verso page and the following text starts on a new leaf. It seems from my preliminary study, however, that both texts are written within the same quire. The text was edited by Klemming (*SFSS* 1881–1882: 84–91).

A second poem, *Vår frus pina* (Our Lady’s Pain), recounts the pains of Our Lady Mary on encountering her son dying on the cross. The text was edited by Klemming (*SFSS* 1881–1882: 61–77).

Christ’s *passio* is treated again in the following poem, *Christi pina* (The Passion of Christ). This version was the basis for Klemming’s edition (*SFSS* 1881–1882: 26–44). Another version of the text is found in Cod. Holm. A 34 (Codex Bureanus).

A popular literary genre in the European Middle Ages was the dialogue between body and soul (*Kroppens och själens träta*), which was adapted in various forms into regional

Scandinavian languages. One version is found in E 8822 in a language generally referred to as *birgittinnorsk* in earlier scholarship. There is also a version considered to be Swedish contained in the manuscript Cod. Holm. D 4 from c. 1430, and a full Danish version is only extant in the early print of Gotfred van Ghemen from the early sixteenth century (see Hjorth 1971). The relation between these Swedish and Danish traditions creates some contention between scholars trying to identify the language of the so-called *F* fragment and its now lost exemplar.⁵ Though there is general agreement that it contains a Danish translation of the text written as early as mid-thirteenth century, the language is difficult to assess. Poul Lindegård Hjorth concludes based on Paul Diderichsen's discussion of the palaeography and orthography of the fragment "at der er tale om en skånsk tekst fra det 14. århundrede (snarest fra dets første halvdel), men at der på den anden side heller ikke er noget træk, der forhindrer, at teksten kan være svensk" (Hjorth 1971: 41) (that we are talking about a Scanian text from the 14th century – at the earliest from the first half – but on the other hand there is not any trait excluding [the possibility] that the text might be Swedish). It seems preferable, then, to consider these texts within the framework of a Scandinavian literary system rather than an anachronistic national literary system. The *birgittinnorsk* text found in E 8822 was edited by Klemming (SFSS 1881–1882: 108–120).

The manuscript contains another poem about Christ's *passio*, The Advantages of Christ (*Christi förtjenst*), which has been edited by Klemming (SFSS 1881–1882: 19–25).

The typological relationship between Adam as the first man – and the one who sinned – and Christ the redeemer is treated in the next poem (*Adam och Kristus*). The focus of the poem is again the Passion of Christ. The text was edited by Klemming (SFSS 1881–1882: 7–18).

On fols. 29^v and 30^r four prayers are written in what appears to be a different hand, most likely the one that attributed the collection to the Franciscan friar Johannes (cf. above). It is interesting to note again the focus here on Christ, Mary and St Anna, which was mentioned by Carlquist (2002: 122–123). The latter is also remembered in the four so-called *skålverser* ('toast poems') presented below.

The prayers are followed on fol. 30^v by the *Speculum missæ*, a text outlining and describing the mass. This kind of text was also introduced in other vernaculars. In Norse the genre of *messuskýringar* is represented already in both the Norwegian and the Icelandic homily books, both manuscripts dated to the early thirteenth century. The Swedish text seems, however, to be rather later, most likely from the fifteenth century, contemporary to the manuscript. It has not been edited.

From the *Speculum missæ* the manuscript continues with three shorter notes on spiritual subjects on fols. 32^v and 33^r. These texts focus on similar aspects of the Christian life, on sin and redemption, the seven Cardinal Sins, and Purgatory. These texts have not been edited.

Herr Ivan follows these. This text does not need any further presentation here. Jonas Carlquist states that the transcription of the text is not very thorough as some lines are left out by the scribe (Carlquist 2001: 123). This conclusion appears to have been drawn too quickly. It could be that the scribe – or his patron – adapted the text to fit the overall intention of the manuscript. My contention here is that a close reading of the manuscript

5 This fragment is presented and edited by Paul Diderichsen (1931–1937: 124–127; 333–338).

texts will provide a more nuanced understanding of the work of the two main scribes, as well as the alleged instigator of the work, Johannes.⁶ It is interesting to note that the scribe has left two blank pages, fols. 33^v och 34^r, before introducing the new text. This action appears to have been intended, as *Herr Ivan* is introduced on fol. 34^v, that is, on the same quire as the preceding text. On fol. 59^v the first lines of four so-called *skålverser*, ‘toast poems’, are placed in between two parts of *Herr Ivan*.⁷ They are usually referred to as *Annas skål* (‘Toast to Anna’), *Brudgummens skål* (‘Toast to the groom’), *Brudens skål* (‘Toast to the bride’) and *Glädjens skål* (‘Toast to happiness’). It could be suggested that the order of the toasts was intended to be followed during a wedding feast. The poems were edited by Klemming (*SFSS* 1881–1882: 512–513).

Carlquist has pointed out that the rubric introducing *Herr Ivan* has a similar form to the rubric preceding what he calls the religious texts of the manuscript.⁸ It states:

her äptis star en sagä aff her iwan fager ath hörä (fol. 34^v)

In the following is found a tale of Herr Ivan, wonderful to hear

This could, however, be slightly, but perhaps significantly elaborated; it is relevant, I think, to note that the first text presenting the Ten Commandments has no rubric. This text thereby distinguishes itself from the rest and forms a kind of introduction to the whole collection. The following texts treat primarily aspects of the Passion of Christ and its importance for redeeming mankind and the individual Christian. Again, this invites us to further study the composition of the collection, perhaps with a certain focus on *Herr Ivan* as the text least expected to form part of it.

Conclusion

One of the objectives of this paper has been to present a relatively underresearched material that may provide new insights into the development of literacy in Scandinavia in the late Middle Ages. My contention is that this material should be seen as representative of the literary use of written language in the western parts of Scandinavia, what is today eastern and northern Norway, at a time when the golden era of Norwegian literature had come to an end as a result of political changes in Scandinavia at large. Where previously national biases have tended to overshadow the study of this period in Norwegian and Scandinavian literacy, it is time to bring the material into the light and see these fragments in relation to the general literary system of Scandinavia in the period.

6 I am at the moment working on a close reading of all the texts of the manuscript, including a thorough study of the Norwegian traits. This study is intended to continue the reasoning introduced in the present article.

7 Carlquist mentions these four stanzas, but seems to have placed them wrong in the manuscript when he places them on fol. 30^r and connects them to the prayers discussed above. Further, perhaps from associating them with the prayers, he does not see their relation to *Herr Ivan* as they interrupt the narrative on fol. 59^v. His understanding of the four stanzas therefore appears as rather strange.

8 The distinction between religious and profane or secular texts in the medieval material is in my opinion rather problematic, which could perhaps be well illustrated by the collection under scrutiny here.

My hope is that if a more thorough scrutiny of the manuscripts, fragmentary texts and marginal notes, generally considered to be *birgittinnorsk*, is conducted it will not only elucidate a rather unknown period in Norwegian language and literature, but also shed light on efforts at that time to establish written languages to match the challenges presented by new trends from the broader literary system of Europe. Though the western (Norwegian) attempt to meet these challenges is only attested today in these sparse fragments, it provides valuable insights into the broader Scandinavian literary system.

The Norwegian scribes seem to have looked to the eastern realm of the Swedish kingdom for matrices and sources while also writing in their own regional vernacular, perhaps in continuity with the older tradition that lost its importance in the first decades of the fourteenth century. This is evident in the writings of elites, such as the archbishop Aslak Bolt in Trondheim and the Franciscan friar Johannes, as well as of the wealthy farmer, Ogmundr Lafrantsson, who use the written standard of their day even as they still read Old Norse texts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Taken together with the Danish *Herr Ivan*, this Norwegian adaptation of the work from Swedish exemplars reveals the interplay between the broader Scandinavian literary system and the regional sub-systems that constitute it. To further our understanding of the regional networks of literary dissemination the Norwegian text of *Herr Ivan* should be seen in relation to the Danish versions of the *Eufemiavisor*.

References

- Adams, Jonathan (ed.) (2008). *Displaced Texts. An Old Swedish Birgittine Revelation in Copenhagen, GkS 1154 fol. and Three Sermons in Vienna, Cod Vind. 13013* (= Samlingar utgivna av Svenska fornskriftsällskapet. Serie 3. Smärre texter och undersökningar). Uppsala: Svenska fornskriftsällskapet.
- Adams, Jonathan (2016). *The Revelations of St Birgitta. A Study and Edition of the Birgittine-Norwegian Texts, Swedish National Archives, E 8902*. Leiden: Brill.
- Andersson, Roger (1993). *Postillor och predikan. En medeltida texttradition i filologisk och funktionell belysning*. Stockholm: Sällskapet Runica et Mediævalia.
- Arvidsson, Maria (2009). "Den fornsvenska översättningen av legenden om Barlaam och Josaphat i Holm A 49". In: Johansson, Karl. G./Arvidsson, Maria (eds.). *Barlaam i nord. Legendan om Barlaam och Josaphat i den nordiska medeltidslitteraturen* (= Bibliotheca nordica 1). Oslo: Novus, pp. 153–176.
- Bampi, Massimiliano (2019). "Yvain i dansk språkdräkt: hövisk litteratur i det senmedeltida Danmark". In: Boeck, Simon Skovgaard/Vrieland, Seán D. (eds.). *A Copenhagen Miscellany. Studies in East Norse Philology*. Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, pp. 215–234.
- Bandlien, Bjørn (2013). "Yvain among Friars. A Late Medieval Franciscan Manuscript of Herr Ivan". In: *Journal of the International Arthurian Society* 1:1, pp. 81–119.
- Blom, Kaj (1973). "Danmarks norske folkeviser". In: *Danske studier*, pp. 185–190 M44–M74; M159–M160.
- Bullitta, Dario (2017). "Sources, Context, and English Provenance of the Old Danish *Visio Pauli*". In: *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 116:1, pp. 1–23.
- Carlquist, Jonas (2002). *Handskriften som historiskt vittne. Fornsvenska samlingshandskrifter – miljö och funktion* (= Opuscula 6). Stockholm: Runica et mediævalia.
- Diderichsen, Paul (ed.) (1931–1937). *Fragmenter af gammeldanske Haandskrifter*. København: Schultz.

- Diplomatarium Norvegicum*. Vol. 120 (1847–1915); Vol. 21 (1976); vol. 22 (1990–1992); Vol. 23 (2011). Christiania/Kristiania/Oslo: Kjeldeskriftfondet. Online: https://www.dokpro.uio.no/perl/middelalder/diplom_vise_tekst.prl?b=6282&s=n&str (accessed 25 June 2021)
- Hagland, Jan Ragnar (2005). *Literacy i norsk seinmellomalder*. Oslo: Novus.
- Hjorth, Poul Lindegård (ed.) (1971). *Sjælens og kroppens trætte og Ars Moriendi. Med facsimileudgave af Ghemen-trykket*. København: Akademisk forlag.
- Hjorth, Poul Lindegård (1976). “Linköping-håndskriftet og ‘Ridderen i hjorteham’”. In: *Danske studier*, pp. 5–35.
- Johansson, Karl G. (2015). “Queen Eufemia, the Norwegian Élite and the Background of the *Eufemiavisor*”. In: Ferm, Olle et al. (eds.). *The Eufemiavisor and Courtly Culture. Time, Texts and Cultural Transfer. Papers from a symposium in Stockholm 11–13 October 2012* (= KVHAA Konferenser 88). Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, pp. 136–161.
- Johansson, Karl G. (2020). “En medeltidsballad från medeltiden. Riddaren i fågelhamn i Linköping T 180”. In: Hägerdal, Hans et al. (eds.). *Nordiska – på gång och på språng! Vänbok till Gunilla Byrman* (= HumaNetten 44). Växjö: Linnaeus University Press, pp. 163–174.
- Jørgensen, Jon Gunnar (ed.) (1997). *Aslak Bolts jordebok*. Oslo: Riksarkivet.
- Jørgensen, Jon Gunnar (2012). “Didrik til hest – til øst fra vest.” In: Johansson, Karl G./Flatén, Rune (eds.). *Francia et Germania. Studies in Strengleikar and Þiðreks saga af Bern* (= Bibliotheca nordica 5). Oslo: Novus, pp. 289–307.
- Laugerud, Henning (2018). *Reformasjon uten folk. Det katolske Norge i før- og etterreformatorisk tid*. Oslo: St. Olav forlag.
- Moberg, Lennart (1998). “Heliga Birgitta på birgittinernorska. Några språkliga iakttagelser”. In: Tjäder, Börje (ed.). *Smärre texter och undersökningar* (= Samlingar utgivna av Svenska fornskriftsällskapet. Serie 3). Uppsala: Svenska fornskriftsällskapet, pp. 9–31.
- Rindal, Magnus/Berg, Knut (eds.) (1983). *King Magnus Håkonsson’s Laws of Norway and Other Legal Texts* (= Corpus Codicum Norvegicorum Medii Ævi. Quarto Series 7). Oslo: Selskapet til utgivelse av gamle norske håndskrifter.
- Sandvei, Marius (1938). “Birgittinernorsk”. In: *Maal og Minne*, pp. 40–53.
- SFSS 1881–1882 = *Medeltidens dikter och rim*, ed. Gustaf Edward Klemming (= Samlingar utgifna af Svenska fornskrift-sällskapet, vol. 25). Stockholm: Kungl. boktryckeriet.

