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# Literate Mentality and Epigraphy

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It has been customary to link the development of literacy in medieval society to the emergence of a literate mentality at least since Michael Clanchy's (2013; first published 1979) seminal work on the history of memory, writing, and the making of records in England 1066–1306. The idea of a literate mentality could be expected to be relevant for the study of written culture at large, but it has hitherto mainly been addressed in studies on medieval administrative writing. Here, we intend to reflect on how epigraphic materials of different kinds connect to the concept of a literate mentality using a tripartite model of writing suggested by the slavist Simon Franklin (2002). The sources analysed stem from the medieval Swedish town of Lödöse, where a rich and varied epigraphic corpus has survived, comprising monumental and ephemeral inscriptions, in the vernacular and in Latin, in Scandinavian runes and in the Latin alphabet.

## 1. The literate mentality

The idea that the introduction of writing into a culture would change the ways of thinking among its population has been part of historical literacy studies from its beginning. It has even been argued that writing changed the minds of people in a neuro-psychological sense, though few maintain such radical hypotheses today.<sup>1</sup> Clanchy's concept of 'literate mentality' also points to a transformed way of thinking in a literate culture in comparison with a pre-literate one, but it does not frame writing in itself as restructuring our cognition; instead, the literate mentality refers to emerging habits and assumptions among social groups concerning the written word, "a cluster of attitudes which literates [...] shared" (Clanchy 2013: 188). The attitudes in question concern the written word in contrast to memory and oral practices, such as an increased trust in written documents over memory in legal procedures. Clanchy offers no list of criteria as to what constitutes a literate mentality,

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1 For a recent historical overview and analysis of the different relevant research traditions, see Melve (2019).

but presents a range of historical examples in the second part of his study to describe the process through which writing became natural in various societies.

The term ‘literate mentality’ is often referred to in scholarship, in the titles of works or briefly in introductions and conclusions, but is rarely discussed thoroughly. Anna Adamska and Marco Mostert (2004: 3) describe literate mentalities (in the plural) as something qualified by attitudes within a social group, namely when a group “takes it for granted that juridical acts are written down, when it considers the keeping of records important, and when its members have recourse to the archives thus formed”. Adamska (2004: 37) offers a more expanded discussion, later summarised in the two-volume anthology *Medieval Urban Literacy* (see Mostert/Adamska 2014 a and 2014 b), where the editors enumerate some “factors contributing to the development of ‘literate mentalities’” (Mostert/Adamska 2014 a: 1 n. 2):

- It is seen as a ‘natural’ thing to preserve human actions in writing;
- It is thought that written records can be used to reconstruct the past;
- Writing is trusted as an instrument for fixing and defining events.

These aspects of the use of writing in a society are complemented by two other factors concerning the spread of literacy and attitudes towards literates:

- There is an increase in alphabetisation, that is, the spread of the elementary skills of reading and writing among ever more social groups;
- There is an increase in the prestige of those individuals who can read and write.

The first three factors listed above are formulated from the perspective of administrative writing. In fact, the emergence of literate mentality in a society has been viewed more or less as a consequence of a certain stage of bureaucratisation. For instance, Clanchy (2013: 19) claims that “lay literacy grew out of bureaucracy, rather than from any abstract desire for education or literature”, though he also stresses the importance of religious lay reading. Our intention in this article is to discuss how another form of writing, namely epigraphy, might connect to the factors suggested by Mostert and Adamska, in order to explore what other perspectives on literate mentality the epigraphic material has to offer.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The administrative literacy of Lödöse

Before examining the epigraphic material, we will give an overview of the medieval town Lödöse and the traces of literate mentality in parchment and paper sources preserved there. Lödöse is situated around 40 km upstream of the large Göta river, which runs through the western part of present-day Sweden and into the Kattegat, and was the only port in the west of Sweden during the Middle Ages. The area along the river was a frontier region for the three Scandinavian kingdoms, and Lödöse was a meeting place for representatives of the

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2 There have been several studies into epigraphy and medieval literacy (see, for example, Garrison 1999; Larsson 2009 and 2014; Zilmer/Jesch 2012; Zilmer 2019 and 2020), but the question of how epigraphy relates to a literate mentality has not yet been addressed explicitly.

different realms (see Harlitz 2010). The town was also visited by pilgrims on their way either to the continental mainland or to Nidaros, today's Trondheim (see Ekre 2003).

Lödöse was a trading place from the middle of the eleventh century and its importance and population grew through the centuries.<sup>3</sup> Minting took place in the town from before 1150, which makes it one of the earliest sites of minting in Sweden (see Harlitz 2010: 78). Three parish churches, St. Peder, St. Olof, and St. Mary, were built in the twelfth century, and some were probably preceded by wooden churches. A Dominican convent was established in 1243 and replaced the former church of St. Mary (see Ekre/Hylander/Sundberg 1994: 25). In the fourteenth century, the Lödöse region was an important nexus of the kingdoms of Norway and Sweden, united in a personal union under King Magnus Eriksson in 1319 (see Harlitz 2010: 117). In 1473, a 'New Lödöse' was founded nearer to the coast, and the burghers of 'Old Lödöse' were advised to move there; the old town continued to exist, but never regained its wealth and importance (see Harlitz 2010: 128–147).

Charters indicate that Lödöse was frequently visited by the king and the royal family, especially during the fourteenth century (see Harlitz 2010: 109–116). The oldest preserved charters from Lödöse were issued in the 1270s, but it is only in the middle of the fourteenth century that there is a marked increase in preserved letters (see Larsson 2009: 209–210). This increase was not due to an intensified literate activity among the general population, however, as the letters were mainly issued by King Magnus Eriksson and his sons. As to the local town administration, some letters are preserved from the second half of the fourteenth century, and all of them concern errands in other towns overseas, mostly Lübeck (see SDHK nos. 6178, 6268, 6569, 7754, 9914, 10508, and 40696). In the 1420s and 1430s, a few charters, mostly concerning the selling of property, were issued by burghers of Lödöse (see SDHK nos. 19835, 20358, 22110, 22896, and 22885), and several letters concerning local matters were issued by the town council (see SDHK nos. 17715, 20625, 21133, 21181, and 23160). A novelty in the fifteenth-century charters from Lödöse is the use of the vernacular instead of Latin.

Thus, even if the habit of issuing charters was present in Lödöse from the late thirteenth century, there are no signs of this practice having spread to the local population. The town council letters from the second half of the fourteenth century, conversely, bear witness to a culture based on memory and oral agreements rather than the written word.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the town law of Lödöse, preserved in a manuscript from around 1345 (Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket B 58), shows very little of expected writing practices among the population; only wills are mentioned as being a required written document (see Larsson 2014: 22). The expectation seems instead to be that agreements would be memory-based and testified by witnesses. The medieval Swedish town law, probably introduced in the late 1350s, placed higher demands on the urban administration in that it required that judicial proceedings be recorded in the town book, but there are no traces of such a town book from Lödöse (see Larsson 2014: 23).

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3 A recent investigation of the history of the town is found in Harlitz (2010).

4 This can be seen in that even though the letters mostly deal with inheritance matters, they rarely mention the existence of written wills or other written documents. In dealings with matters in other towns overseas, however, it is obvious that written statements from the town council and recommendation letters were a necessity.



Traces of a local administrative literacy at Lödöse thus mainly stem from the fifteenth century, but one must take into account that a very large proportion of the sources has been lost (see Larsson 2009: 210). Still, Lödöse shows a similar pattern to other Swedish towns, and the sources give us reason to believe that written documents were probably not necessary for many of the local juridical and economic practices in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In the first half of the fifteenth century, however, there seems to be an increase in the number of agreements put into writing, which may indicate the emergence of a literate mentality.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Epigraphic material and different kinds of writing

The basic definition of epigraphy is the study of inscriptions, that is, texts incised, stamped, scratched, or painted onto durable surfaces such as stone, metal, wood, plaster, and the like (see Beltrán Lloris 2014; Cooley 2012: 117–119, 124–127; Favreau 1997: 5). Inscriptions may be categorised in a multitude of ways: by function, material, type of monument or object, type of text, or expected audience (for example, public or private). It is our contention that the many forms and functions of epigraphic material suggest that such sources are particularly fruitful for discussing the history of literacy, since they relate to all levels in a society.

The corpus of inscriptions presented here is classified according to a model suggested by the slavist Simon Franklin (2002: 20), which has also been used in research into medieval Scandinavian and medieval Rus' epigraphic material (see Rozhdestvenskaja 2012; Zilmer 2018). Franklin distinguishes between three kinds of writing – primary, secondary, and tertiary – based on the relation between the text and the text-bearing object. An overview of the three categories with definitions and examples is presented below (see Table 1):

Category	Definition of categories	Examples
<b>Primary writing</b>	The principal purpose of the production of the object is to bear a written message	Manuscript codices; birch-bark letters; wooden wax tablets
<b>Secondary writing</b>	Writing is integral to, but not the main purpose of, the object's production	Coins; seals; pictures with labels and captions
<b>Tertiary writing</b>	Writing is produced on objects that already exist for other purposes	Graffiti (on walls, pots, or other portable objects)

Table 1: Three kinds of writing according to Franklin (2002: 20)

These three categories have the potential to capture interesting aspects of habits that involve writing, as they are defined through different discursive conditions that consider

5 Manuscripts were surely also present in the Dominican convent in Lödöse already in the thirteenth century, but none have been preserved. One manuscript from the last part of the period with a connection to Lödöse may be an indication of an appreciation of literate culture among the Lödöse inhabitants, namely Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket A 1, a voluminous parchment folio containing Old Swedish translations of various books of the Bible. The manuscript was produced at Vadstena Birgittine Abbey and donated to the monastery by a Lödöse widow and her daughter, who lived as a sister in the abbey.

the text and the object as a whole. It is not always simple, however, to classify specific inscriptions unambiguously into one of the three categories (see Franklin 2002: 20; Zilmer 2020: 74–77), and it is not possible here for us to discuss each object in our corpus singularly; the following analysis therefore relies in large part on conclusions about the artefacts' function drawn in the editions of the texts. In any case, the aim of Franklin's trichotomy is not a final, unequivocal classification of each object, but while this general division of a corpus into distinct categories may conceal some ambiguous cases, it can still help us to analyse the relation between object and writing.

#### 4. Epigraphic writing in Lödöse

The epigraphic material of Lödöse consists of inscriptions on portable objects, funerary monuments, and one baptismal font. The inscriptions on portable objects are mainly written with runes, as is the baptismal font, mostly in the vernacular but sometimes also in Latin, whereas the funerary inscriptions are all in Latin and written in Latin script. Most of the inscriptions on portable objects are archeologically dated, with the oldest findings stemming from the middle of the eleventh century. The majority of these objects are dated to the early and middle parts of the thirteenth century, whereas there are relatively few inscriptions from the fourteenth century.<sup>6</sup> The inscriptions on funerary monuments, by contrast, mostly date to the fourteenth century. Altogether, the epigraphic material in Lödöse evidences traces of writing long before it becomes visible in juridical and economic documents on parchment.

##### 4.1 Primary writing

Primary writing concerns objects with no function other than to carry text, such as paper and manuscript sheets and wooden wax tablets. Pieces of wood, often in the form of a stick, or bones were used as material for carving messages with runes, and have mostly been found in urban areas like Bergen and Trondheim in Norway and Sigtuna and Lödöse in Sweden. Among the Lödöse inscriptions, wooden sticks dominate over bones, a pattern shared with the Norwegian towns, whereas almost exclusively bone inscriptions have been found in Sigtuna, near present-day Stockholm. In many aspects, runic writing in Lödöse shows close connections to Norwegian runic culture, which is natural in view of its proximity to Norway.

Twenty-five pieces of wood, bone, or metal found in Lödöse can be interpreted as examples of primary writing. Many of the texts believed to be written in the vernacular have not been interpreted; even when we can read the runes, the linguistic meaning is only understood in a minority of the texts. Some inscriptions may never have been texts with an intended meaning, but we have no reason to believe that all the undeciphered texts were meaningless to those who wrote them. Furthermore, medieval towns were often char-

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6 The number and dating of the inscriptions preserved may depend on the locations excavated and the conditions of their preservation; however, excavations have been undertaken in a relatively large number of places in the old town of Lödöse, and the number of findings are likely to be fairly representative of the different periods discussed.

acterised by a rich linguistic variation, and our shortcomings in understanding some of the texts may derive from a lack of knowledge of their linguistic milieu.

Most of the Lödöse runic texts are in the vernacular, but some are in Latin. Some texts belong to a Latin learned culture, like the cross-formed lead amulet with a liturgic formula for the commendation of the soul (Vg 264, 13th c.), while other texts consist of formulas that could be used without proficiency in the language, such as a wooden amulet with the inscription **gortin : gortan / æþ gortan / ufau · ufai · ufao** (Vg VGD1987;122).<sup>7</sup> The word **æþ** is likely to refer to the Latin conjunction “et” (“and”), but none of the other words are identifiable as Latin or vernacular words; the three words or names beginning with ‘gort-’, however – usually spelled ‘Gordan, Gordin, Ingordan’ – appear on lead amulets found mainly in Denmark but also in Norway, and seem to have been used in spells against elves (see Imer 2021: 25–27).

For around eleven of the twenty-five primary-writing inscriptions, there exists no clear interpretation of the text and the object reveals no specific function. In the remaining cases, we can point out some typical functions. Some inscriptions seem designed to communicate a message from one person to another. The clearest example is a wooden stick with a text that begins with **uær þu · uin min · arnfintir** (Vg 280, 12th c.; “Be my friend, Arnfinnr!”), and continues with what seems to be a request to this Arnfinnr (a male name). Two other candidates (Vg 265, c. 1200 and Vg 271, beginning of 13th c.) are not as clear, but still present the linguistic form of a message. Furthermore, an inscription belonging to the category of tertiary writing, namely an inscription made on a wooden weaving-knife (Vg 279, 12th c.), also takes the form of a personal message. On the upper side of its blade is written **mun : þu · mik : man : þik : un : þu : mēr : an : þrr** (“Think of me, I think of you! Love me, I love you!”), but the text on the underside is not as clear. As a speech act, it may not be precisely the same kind of message as the other examples in this category, but its text nonetheless takes the form of a message.

Another group of inscriptions seem to be part of basic literacy and numeracy activities. Some rune sticks contain only the *futhark* (runic alphabet), and may be seen as the results of writing practice, a demonstration of the alphabet in a teaching activity, or a record of alphabetic knowledge. Two of the *futhark* inscriptions also display examples of the so-called *Sankt Peders lek* (“St. Peter’s Game”), a numeric riddle represented by the seemingly irregular patterning of two different runes in a line of, say, thirty runes. If one knows the correct number, however, all the runes of one kind may be sorted out by counting all the runes in intervals of this number, for example, by counting every ninth rune (see Svärdröm 1984: 23–26). There are altogether three sticks from Lödöse with the *Sankt Peders lek* (Vg 270, Vg 274, Vg 276, all 13th c.), including the two also containing the *futhark*.

A handful of the Lödöse inscriptions can be connected to magic and religious practices. Two have already been mentioned, namely the cross-formed amulet with a formula for the commendation of the soul and the amulet with the ‘Gortin’ formula. Furthermore, there exists a lead amulet with what is believed to be a pseudo-Latin inscription (Vg Fv1982;237), and a runic stick with an inscription in the vernacular with what seems to be a formula for bloodletting (Vg Fv1983;236).

7 Runic inscriptions are referenced using their established signa to indicate where they have been published. As is customary, runic inscriptions are transliterated in boldface.



A group of inscriptions has been interpreted as representing owner's tags, labels, or tally-sticks. Such inscriptions are primary forms of writing in that the object bearing them has no specific purpose other than to carry writing, but these tags would usually have been attached to items with other functions. Two wooden sticks (Vg 242 and Vg 283, neither of them dated) bear just a name and may have been used to mark ownership. Several of the uninterpreted inscriptions have also been suggested to be tags containing a name or initials. These are closely related to a group of inscriptions in the tertiary writing category, where ownership is marked on objects.

Among the findings from Lödöse, there are also writing utensils like wooden wax tablets and styli. A pair of wooden tablets have been found within the town, while twenty-one objects have been interpreted as styli.<sup>8</sup> Some of them stem from the Dominican convent area, but most were found within the town, several of them at central locations. This distribution recalls the findings of tablets and styli in the medieval town of Lund in present-day southern Sweden, where a concentration of styli was found near religious institutions and close to the central market square (see Carelli 2001: 350). This contributes to the impression of a milieu in which writing was an accepted everyday practice. Research on styli and tablets in European towns has typically concluded that these tools were in use in mercantile, administrative, and educational contexts (see Carelli 2001: 352–353).

How does the epigraphic primary writing material connect to the factors held to be important for the development of a literate mentality? The wooden tablets have been interpreted as having been in use in administration and everyday business activities, but what makes this material distinct from writing on parchment is its ephemeral character: it was not used to write archival texts, but for everyday notes and drafts. Yet the tablets and styli, together with the epigraphic primary writing material, indicate an ability to read and write that must have been relatively widespread among the town population; most of the vernacular runic inscriptions seem to be examples not of professional writing, but of everyday pragmatic literacy among the population of Lödöse. If the spread of literacy is a key part of the development of a literate mentality, the epigraphic material evidences a growing literacy in Lödöse already in the thirteenth century, long before it became visible in texts on parchment and paper.

Furthermore, the epigraphic primary writing provides examples of different kinds of communication, an aspect lacking in definitions of a literate mentality. The runic messages are very brief, but the fact that writing is taken into use for distance communication should be seen as one important step in the development of a so-called 'language of distance', which describes a situation in which language and text need to be planned in advance and there is a more pressing need to imagine an assumed reader and their potential reactions (see Koch/Oesterreicher 1985: 15–43). Finally, in the epigraphic writing it is also possible to discern certain attitudes regarding the medium of runes; it was clearly possible for runic writing to be used for Latin inscriptions, even for the liturgy and in the communication with God, as is shown by the cross-shaped amulet. Runic writing was therefore not necessarily

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8 We are grateful to Ing-Marie Trägårdh, antiquarian at Lödöse Museum, for providing us with the information about the styli findings.



seen as a low-status script, which is corroborated by the rune-inscribed stylus discussed below (see 4.3).

## 4.2 Secondary writing

Secondary writing is classified by Franklin (2002: 20) as writing that is “integral to, but not the main purpose of, the object’s production”. In turning to secondary writing in the epigraphic material from Lödöse, we focus on the few preserved medieval Latin funerary inscriptions from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Texts of this kind are not included in Franklin’s material, as medieval Rus’ lacked a native tradition of public burial inscriptions, but his definition of secondary writing fits well onto such inscriptions: their text is integral to the interpretation of the monument as the tomb of a specific individual, but is not the main purpose in manufacturing the monument.

Five medieval funerary monuments with inscriptions in the Latin language and alphabet have been found in Lödöse,<sup>9</sup> of which the oldest examples stem from the 1320s. This is surprisingly late compared with the rest of the Västergötland region, where funerary monuments with Latin inscriptions appear already in the twelfth century, although runic inscriptions in Old Swedish still were the most common choice in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (see Blennow/Palumbo 2021: 43). Two of the tombstones, excavated in the churchyard of the parish church of St. Peder (see af Ugglas 1931: 197), commemorate men identified as merchants: Rotgher of the family *de Colonia* – originally from Cologne, but later established in Lübeck, and owners of a trade house with a local branch in Lödöse – and John of Münster, originally from Westfalen (see Ekre/Hylander/Sundberg 1994: 56). Their inscriptions are as follows:

Anno D(omi)ni [M]CCC° XV° in dominica palmar[um obiit Io]h(ann)es de Monasterio. Orate p(ro) a(n)i(m)a eius (see af Ugglas 1931: 198–199, fig. 42; Gardell 1945–1946: I, 232, no. 142).<sup>10</sup>

In the year of the Lord 1325, on Palm Sunday, John of Münster died. Pray for his soul.<sup>11</sup>

Anno D(omi)ni M° CCC° XVII d(o)m(ini)ca die an(te) letare o(biit) Rotgher de Colonia. O(ra)t(e) pro eo (see af Ugglas 1931: 204, fig. 44; Gardell 1945–1946: I, 233, no. 144).

In the year of the Lord 1327, on the third Sunday of Lent, Rotgher of Cologne died. Pray for him.

The other three inscriptions were found in excavations of the Dominican convent church.<sup>12</sup> On two of them, the name of the deceased is preserved: John Brandenborch and Alfchild, wife of Simon. The third is fragmentary, and displays neither a name nor a secure date:<sup>13</sup>

9 The inscriptions are today kept in the church porch of St. Peder, except for the tombstone of Alfchild and the fragmentary tombstone from the fifteenth century, which are both preserved in the Museum of Gothenburg.

10 Since no standard corpus edition of Latin inscriptions in Sweden from this period yet exist, the transcriptions of the inscription texts presented here have been produced by the present authors from the images of the slabs published in af Ugglas (1931: 198–199 and 204, figs. 42 and 44).

11 All translations of the funerary inscriptions of Lödöse are made by Anna Blennow.

12 In addition, four very small inscription fragments were found, albeit only with a few letters preserved on each fragment: [---] ATI [---]; [---] BUR +; [---] II [---]; [---] III IN [---] (Gardell 1945: I, 204, nos. 53–56). The fragments are dated by Gardell on palaeographical grounds to the fourteenth century.

13 As for the previous three inscriptions (see n. 10), the transcriptions presented here are produced from the images of the slabs published in af Ugglas (1931: 304 and 306–307, figs. 99–100), except for the

An(n)o D(o)m(ini) M° CCC° LIII in die pentecost(is) o(biit) Ioh(ann)es Brandenborch. O(rat)e p(ro) eo (see af Ugglas 1931: 307, fig. 100; Gardell 1945–1946: I, 268, no. 207).

In the year of the Lord 1353, on Whitsunday, John Brandenborch died. Pray for him.

Anno D(omi)ni M° CCC° XLIX f(er)ia V ant(e) die o(mn)i(u)m s(an)c(t)or(um) o(biit) [Alfhi]ld uxor Sym(o)nis ho(s)p(itala)n(i) (see af Ugglas 1931: 306, fig. 99; Widéen 1940: 83, fig. 13; Gardell 1945–1946: I, 263, no. 197).

In the year of the Lord 1349, on the fifth weekday [Thursday] before All Saints' Day, Alfchild died, the wife of Simon, head of the hospital.<sup>14</sup>

An(n)o Domini MCC[CC ... orate pro e]o (see af Ugglas 1931: 304; Gardell 1945–1946: I, 304, no. 278).

In the year of the Lord 14[...]. Pray for him.

The formulas in these inscriptions are very similar. Each starts with an indication of the year, given as *anno Domini*, and then the date, expressed as a liturgical dating; thereafter, a concluding prayer is added, either “orate pro anima eius” or “orate pro eo”. All these features are in fact innovations compared with the Latin epigraphic texts of the preceding two centuries in Sweden. The first time that the year is expressed in a Latin funerary inscription is in 1263 (see Gardell 1945: I, 185, no. 20); this seems to be an isolated early example, however, since we do not find the next occurrence until 1295 (see Gardell 1945: I, 190, no. 26). From the beginning of the fourteenth century, the year is almost always included in such inscriptions. The only instances where the day of death is mentioned in Swedish funerary inscriptions previous to the fourteenth century are in two cases from Visby on Gotland, where the Roman calendar is used (see Blennow 2016: 305). This type of dating is the expected form up to 1300, and liturgical dating – as in the Lödöse inscriptions – occurs only from the fourteenth century on (see Gardell 1945: I, 160–161).<sup>15</sup> The verb “obiit” (“died”) is not found in the material from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Sweden, nor are the formulae “orate pro eo” or “orate pro anima eius”, but both formulae become very common from the fourteenth century on.

The palaeography and layout of the text on the Lödöse funerary monuments also indicate a new trend of standardisation, in line with the general development of funerary epigraphy in medieval Sweden from the fourteenth century. After an initial period of experimenting with various letter forms in Latin epigraphy during previous centuries, letters were now standardised into Gothic script, first into majuscules and soon also into minuscules; the first occurrences of Gothic minuscules in the Swedish epigraphic material in fact derive from Lödöse, in the funerary inscriptions of John Brandenborch and Alfchild. The layout of the

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inscription relating to Alfchild. That inscription was first published by af Ugglas (1931: 306), who read it only partly as “Anno Domini MCCCXLIX in die [...] orate pro eo”, as did Gardell (1945–1946: I, 304, no. 278). The text was later deciphered in its entirety by Harald Widéen (1940: 83, fig. 13), who also published a clearer photograph of the slab, from which the transcription here is made.

14 The text refers to the leprosy hospital, established to the north of the town at around the same time as the Dominican convent was founded (see Widéen 1950; Ekre/Hylander/Sundberg 1994: 25).

15 It is worth noting, however, that liturgical dating is found in a funerary inscription dated to the twelfth century in runes and Old Swedish from Broddetorp, Västergötland, (Vg 81; see Blennow/Palumbo 2021: 51).

text along the borders of the stone, as seen in most of the Lödöse inscriptions, also becomes dominant in the fourteenth century. Roses, crosses, or symbols of the evangelists were often incised in the corners of a slab, with roses appearing on the tombstones of John of Brandenborch and Alfhild and evangelist symbols on the monument of John of Münster and on the fifteenth-century inscription. On the tombstone of John of Münster, there is also incised a house-mark, which constitutes the first such example in the Swedish epigraphic material. Coats of arms are found sparsely in thirteenth-century funerary monuments, but became more common from the fourteenth century on, and the first example in Swedish epigraphic material of a circular coat of arms, in this case with an image of a ram, is found on the tombstone of Rotgher of Cologne.

As Gardell (1945–1946: I, 142–150) points out, major influences on Latin epigraphy in Sweden during the fourteenth century came from Northern Germany. Three of the individuals mentioned in the funerary monuments from medieval Lödöse have names expressly connected with Germany. As we can see from the epigraphic innovations found in Lödöse at this time, the town's role as an early centre for trade led to a decisive impact on epigraphic culture in this area from the fourteenth century and on; in this regard, we may assume that not only German monks and merchants, but also German stonemasons schooled in European epigraphic traditions came to Sweden from the fourteenth century on. The close contact with the continent seems to have brought with it the practice of commemorating the dead with standardised tombstones in the Northern European style.

The funerary epigraphy of Lödöse displays a number of features that are innovations in a fourteenth-century Swedish context. It is even possible to describe this change as a new 'epigraphic habit', that is, a cultural tendency to opt for epigraphical forms of writing.<sup>16</sup> The manufacturing of epigraphic objects like these funerary monuments illustrates how the use of monumental inscriptions significantly coincides with the three main factors outlined by Mostert and Adamska as central for the development of literate mentalities (see above). In funerary epigraphy, writing seems to be trusted as an instrument for fixing and defining the memory of the deceased, while the registering of the date of death relates to the function of administrative archives. The funerary monuments of Lödöse can thus be understood as part of wider developments in which writing became increasingly important as a means of storing specific information.

### 4.3 Tertiary writing

According to Franklin's (2002: 20 and 70) classification, tertiary writing can be characterised as writing that neither constitutes the *raison d'être* of the object to which the text is applied, nor as necessarily being a key part of the production process of the artefact bearing it. Around half (twenty-five) of the preserved runic inscriptions from Lödöse can be identified as tertiary writing. These are found on a variety of artefacts, but the majority (twenty-one) are objects of everyday use and tools of different kinds, such as wooden vessels, measuring devices, and knives.

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16 The concept of 'epigraphic habit' was first established by historian Ramsay McMullen (1982), with the aim of identifying socio-cultural factors behind the 'epigraphic boom' in the Roman empire during the first centuries of the common era. It has more seldom been applied to medieval epigraphy, but has been briefly discussed by, for example, Kristel Zilmer (2012).



With regard to the function of the texts in this category, writing seems often to have been added to objects with the purpose of indicating who owned them, and sometimes to convey the writer's name. As to what such texts can tell us about the writers' literacy level or about possible traces of literate mentality, their brevity makes it difficult to draw any secure conclusions; most of these inscriptions consist only of single names, a couple of runes, or even single runes. Even the few longer inscriptions in this group are rather short, such as the text "Hælge á mik. Hælga" (Palumbo 2020: 118, no. 8; "Helgi owns me. Of Helgi"), carved on a butter knife. Yet the relative frequency of such messages suggests that it was deemed important to specify through writing both one's ownership of an object and one's authorship over the production of the text.

A set of features that may give us interesting cues to the level of literacy and the possible literate mentality of these writers include traits that can be explained by the influence of the Latin literate culture. One such trait is the double-spelling of long consonants, an orthographic practice that is one of the innovations to appear in the runic writing system, albeit inconsistently, in the twelfth century. This practice was probably implemented under the influence of Latin writing conventions, and may indicate some degree of acquaintance with such conventions on the part of the writer (see Peterson 1994: 74; Gustavson 1994 a: 324; Palumbo 2022). In the Lödöse corpus, we find an example of this in an inscription carved into a small axe – "Petar á mik, Johannes risti mik" (Vg VGD1984;75; "Peter owns me, Johannes carved me") – where the name Johannes is spelled **iohannes**.

The use of Latin, of Latinised personal names, and of Roman letters in inscriptions otherwise written in runic script are also relevant features in this context. In the aforementioned text, the Latin form of the name Johannes – instead of other attested variants like **ion**, **ioan** or **iohan** and in contrast to **petar**, the vernacular form of the owner's name – could also give a hint about the carver's social or educational background (Gustavson 1984: 78), be it actual or aspirational, that is, whether the carver indeed came from a learned milieu or whether he wished to identify himself with one. A similar case is found in an inscription on a measuring device, where the text "Ericus á mik" is present in addition to traces of the verb "giorðe" (Vg 240; "Ericus owns me", "made"). In this text, the Nordic name Erik appears in its Latinised form (see VgR: 452). Given the vernacular linguistic context, one may speculate whether this person's name really was Ericus (see Markali 1994: 146). Yet it is also reasonable to hypothesise that the Latinised version of the name was chosen for reasons of identity, one of which may have been a perceived connection to a high-status literate culture.

Three other inscriptions on everyday objects also show an actual or aspired connection to Latin literate culture: a label on a flail for threshing (Vg 272), where the Roman-script and runic sequence **Prhl** has been tentatively interpreted as "prægill" ("flail"); the pseudo-Latin sequence **ales : tales arfales** on a measuring device (Vg 260); and a longer quotation in Latin from Psalm 50 (*Miserere*) on an artefact considered to be the shaft of a stylus (Vg 262).

It is difficult to draw secure conclusions about the short, rather uncertainly interpreted label on the flail, but if the identification of the first character as a Latin-script "p" and the interpretation mentioned above are correct, it would be not only a very interesting instance of a biscriptal inscription within the Scandinavian corpus, but also one of the few cases where both scripts are mixed in the same word, and, moreover, in a vernacular word (see Palumbo/Harjula: forthcoming).



The sequence **ales : tales arfales** has been tentatively translated as “you shall nourish these farmers”, but is more likely an example of a pseudo-Latin text without lexical meaning (Svårdström 1982: 12; Gustavson 1994: 320; see also Knirk 1990: 17; Imer/Steenholt Olesen 2018: 142). This text would then be part of a fairly widespread practice of producing inscriptions that evoked Latin, rather than reproducing actual Latin. Such texts indicate that the correctness of Latin carved in runes, such as on amulets, was perhaps not only outside many rune-carvers’ capacity, but may not have been their primary concern at all: the lexical meaning seems less important than the indexical value of Latin.

The final inscription, the longer quote from Psalm 50 on the shaft of a stylus, shows a type of literacy more directly connected to Latin literate culture. Yet this inscription also displays the influence of runic script in its spelling, which contains several so-called orthophonic spellings, in which the local Latin pronunciation, rather than the literate norm, is reproduced: **tibi solī pækaui æþ małom koram ti fici uþ iustifi... . . . şiribusm t^uis æþ finkas kom iutikaris** (cf. “Tibi soli peccavi et malum coram te feci, ut iustificeris in sermonibus tuis et vincas cum iudicaris”; “Against you only I have sinned, and I have done evil before you: that you may be justified in your words and may overcome when you have judged”). While such spellings have been generally seen as signs of the writer lacking schooling in Latin (see Knirk 1998: 490–491), the inscription on the stylus is one of several examples where the carver seems to have proficiency in the language, and where the presence of orthophonic spellings may require an alternative explanation – for example, that the carver acquired his or her skills in Latin on the basis of a pre-existing knowledge of the runic writing system, or that the choice of typically ‘runic’ spellings depended on socio-cultural reasons (see Palumbo 2022).

It is worth asking, then, to what extent the epigraphic tertiary writing from Lödöse displays factors considered defining of, or contributing to, a literate mentality. In a sense, the texts in this category resemble those in the group of primary writing, in that they are not used to define and record events. Yet many do not present the same degree of ephemerality, as is evident in some of the examples of primary writing. While the evidence provided by the texts studied in this section is admittedly too scant for us to assert strongly that their writers had developed a literate mentality, the use of writing to indicate ownership, craftsmanship, or authorship points towards a degree of awareness and acknowledgement of the societal value of the written medium, which may tentatively suggest a developing literate mentality in this stratum of the population.

Another aspect of literate mentality is the spread of alphabetisation. In this regard, it is important to note that the epigraphic tertiary writing from Lödöse includes several uninterpreted or uninterpretable texts, which may have been produced by illiterates or may never have been intended to convey any lexical meaning. The runic inscriptions consisting of single runes, interpreted here as owners’ marks, could also be seen as potential evidence for a low level of literacy. Yet a few inscriptions stand out in demonstrating a high-level writing proficiency, both in the vernacular and in Latin. Such examples, together with those of the primary and secondary categories of writing, indicate a fairly widespread level of literacy. In particular, inscriptions of the tertiary type indicate that alphabetisation spread across different social groups, as they are often carved on objects of everyday use like craftsmen’s tools.

Finally, epigraphic tertiary writing from Lödöse is relevant for a third component of literate mentality, namely the prestige attributed to literate individuals. Such indications may be found in the choice of the Latinised forms of names by writers who otherwise use the vernacular, or in the occurrence of pseudo-Latin or Latin-sounding sequences carved by people who do not seem to have been proficient in Latin, a phenomenon also observed in examples of primary writing. As it can be assumed that Latin was seen to have a close association with written culture, the use of the language in such cases could be read as a marked choice, perhaps with the purpose of indicating actual or aspirational connections to Latin literate culture.

## 5. Epigraphic writing and literate mentality

Previous inquiries into the concept of literate mentality have mostly taken into account administrative writing. The purpose of this article has been to explore the relevance of the concept for other areas of written culture by investigating the extent to which epigraphic sources, specifically the corpus from Lödöse, display the factors that have been seen as indicative of the emergence of a literate mentality.

Epigraphic writing offers different and complementary insights into a society's lay literacy and its literate mentality, as it encompasses considerably more varieties of writing than administrative documents do. Considering epigraphy and the many text types it includes – monumental as well as ephemeral, highly conventionalised as well as personal and informal – allows us to trace attitudes towards writing in a more diverse set of social groups than only the administrative elite. Inscriptions also give evidence of the existence of a lay literacy, however basic and ephemeral it may seem, long before any known administrative writing, which runs contrary to the hypothesis that lay writing grew out of bureaucracy. Furthermore, epigraphic material not only includes primary writing – the only type of writing present in administrative texts – but also secondary and tertiary writing. By applying Franklin's (2002) categories and taking into account the materiality of the texts, we can nuance our understanding of literacy and literate mentality. Moreover, as far as medieval Sweden is concerned, epigraphic texts are virtually the only extant examples of writing preserved from before the thirteenth century, which makes them decisive for studying literate history during the Nordic Middle Ages.

Compared to the legal documents normally analysed in studies on literate mentalities, the epigraphic primary writing from Lödöse displays a clearer element of interpersonal communication. These texts indicate that the ability to write and read may have been relatively widespread, including among non-professional writers, and the use of written instead of orally delivered messages suggests a certain trust in the written medium that is worthy of note in relation to the discussion on literate mentality. While primary writing in the form of administrative texts provides perhaps the most obvious evidence for the emergence of a literate mentality, such evidence in the epigraphic material from Lödöse is arguably found most prominently in the category of secondary writing. In the fourteenth century, new habits seem to have evolved concerning inscriptions on funerary monuments, and these texts were used to define and communicate events in a highly standardised way. That these monuments were not produced with the sole purpose of bearing text also indicates that the addition of writing was a choice, plausibly an index of social status.

In contrast to epigraphic secondary writing, the runic primary and tertiary writing studied here shed light on attitudes towards writing of individuals whose level of literacy varied greatly. The variety of uses – personal communications, displays of ownership, craftsmanship, or manifestations of faith – indicate a general recognition of the written word's value and may suggest varying degrees of literate mentality in the society's wider strata. The use of Latin is also indicative of the significance that individuals seem to have conferred on the written word; Latinised names make it possible to trace an aspirational connection to Latin literate culture among those who wrote predominantly in the vernacular, while pseudo-Latin sequences evidence the similar status attributed to Latin literate culture by those who were perhaps illiterate or not proficient in Latin.

The inscriptions from Lödöse rarely show a high degree of literacy, but they illustrate another potential contribution of the epigraphic material to discussions about literate mentalities, namely the notion that literate mentality and literacy are not necessarily dependent on one another. The concept of literate mentality aims to encompass more than proficiency in reading and writing, namely the attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, and habits concerning writing among literate as well as illiterate people. What is lacking in the current research about literate mentality, however, including the present article, is a comprehensive understanding and definition of what a 'literate mentality' encompasses. Clanchy (2013: 188) explicitly leaves this task to further research, and, even though important steps have been taken, there are still many opportunities to define the concept further. The most promising path forward, in our opinion, is to broaden the range of texts in the theoretical discussion and include epigraphic material in order to build a fuller picture of the meaning of writing in medieval societies.

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The runic signs used in this article are as follows:

- Vg (+ number) refers to runic inscriptions published in the volume *VgR*;
- Vg Fv (+ year: page) refers to runic inscriptions published in the journal *Fornvännen*;
- Vg VGD (+ year: page) refers to runic inscriptions published in the journal *Västgöta-Dal.*

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