

Vadstena monastery – production and reception

The project has as a main focus the production and reception of script in Vadstena monastery. The material treated in the different sub-projects spans the period from the 1370's to the first decades after the reformation. Changes in the use of writing are studied and the traditions and norms of writing within the two convents are discussed.

In the application the importance of the project to strengthen the competence in the field of philology was stressed. The project was also to contribute to the establishing of a database for the extant manuscript texts from Vadstena.

Results

The production of writing has been treated in a number of the sub-projects. In a study of the earliest charters Inger Lindell scrutinise 47 charters from 1368–1375, where most of the involved persons are connected to Birgitta's network. Lindell studies the orthography of 7 scribes closely, and comes to the conclusion that they, already at this early stage, show a tendency towards stability, i.e. the early scribes in Vadstena, despite the obvious variance, seem to have consciously sought a conventionalised spelling.

In his thesis on the palaeography in the two convents Nils Dverstorp treats two manuscripts from the male convent, Cod. Holm. A108 and Cod. Holm. B185, from c. 1440, and one from the sisters' convent, Cod. Holm. A9, from the end of the 15th century. He concludes that the concept of Vadstena style should be discarded as it does not describe the various scripts used within the two scriptoria, and has been applied to a style used widely in contemporary Europe. Dverstorp further describes the changes within an individual hand over time and how these changes provide new information about the production of manuscripts.

In a number of sub-projects the production of script in the sisters' convent has been treated. Ingela Bolton-Hedström in the thesis presents the production of prayer books. She demonstrates how productive this milieu was in the later half of the 15th century and until a few decades after the reformation. She provides a partially new view of the writing competence of the sisters. Her work shows that the competence of reading and writing was considerably higher than traditionally as been assumed and that the convent has provided scribal training. It is also clear that the manuscript production has been consciously planned, which is important for our understanding of the later use of printed matter from Vadstena.

In an MA thesis from the University of Oslo Maja Braaten studies the early printed images found in Vadstena manuscripts. She describes the routes of distribution for these images from Birgittine monasteries on the Continent and discusses the interplay between the images and the manuscript text. She concludes that the Birgittines early used this interplay to enhance the use of the manuscripts.

In a sub-study Lindell treats the extant production of Christina Hansdotter Brask. Christina spent 62 years in the monastery and was an active scribe. Lindell provides a relative chronology for, and demonstrates the wide scope of her production. Lindell's study of Christina's work shows how her writing changes over time and becomes unstable as she gets older. The conclusions from this study confirm on the individual level what was argued on a more general level in Dverstorp's study.

Translation from Latin and German was an important part of the activities in Vadstena. Among the extant translations the story of Barlaam has particular interest. Maria Arvidsson has in a number of articles discussed the manuscript where the text is preserved, a version that most likely provides insights into the work of the translator; it seems to be his first draft. The use of deletions and additions made by the scribe show how he has strived to find the right form.

The perspective of reception has been focused in a number of sub-studies. The most conclusive study, presented by Jonas Carlquist, consists of an edition of the manuscript Cod Holm A3 and a subsequent monograph treating the use of the manuscript in public reading at meals in the sister convent. Carlquist discusses the manuscript as a witness of a literacy event and from this he draws conclusions about the literacy competence of the sisters. He establishes the competence in the vernacular for 36 sisters. The use of an individual manuscript provides valuable insights into the table reading in the sister convent and its function. Carlquist concludes that this public reading provided material for private worship, and that the included texts reflect a conscious forming of the structure to enhance the memorising of texts important for the faith.

Carlquist's study should be seen in relation to the already presented thesis by Bolton-Hedström. The two works collaborate to further our knowledge about the writing competence of the sisters both regarding production and reception. It is clear that the script competence of the sisters in the vernacular was considerably higher than traditionally has been assumed, and Bolton-Hedström's study also stresses the Latin competence of a number of sisters. Prayer books and manuscripts for table reading were used for private worship as well as in public reading situations and were important in the daily life of the convent.

The reception of Bible text as well as the revelations of Birgitta have been discussed in the project. Carlquist demonstrates how the older text tradition of the revelations has been copied for internal use in the sister convent. He also provides many examples from Cod Holm A3 illustrating the use of Bible text as well as legendary and didactic texts from older manuscripts extant in the monastery library. In a number of articles Johansson studies the use of the s.k. Pentateuch paraphrase, extant in two manuscripts, Thott 5 4to from c. 1440 and produced within the male convent, and Cod Holm A1, a manuscript dated to 1526 and produced by a sister. Johansson argues that the two manuscripts have been produced with different purposes; the first-mentioned to serve as a source for examples to be used in sermons, the second rather to be used, parallel to the above mentioned Cod Holm A3, in public reading.

Lars-Erik Edlund has worked with questions concerning the importance of Vadstena for written Swedish.

The most important results from the project concerns the scriptorium in the sister convent and the literacy of the sisters. Our knowledge about the competence of the sisters has been furthered by a number of the sub-studies, and these have provided new insights into the production and reception of written material in the convent.

The participants of the project have taken part in some thirty conferences and seminars of interdisciplinary character, and have also contributed to more popular presentations in lectures and journals.

The project has been involved in PhD courses at the University of Oslo and in Reykholt in Iceland. A PhD course in Oslo in October 2007 counted leading scholars from the fields of literacy and Translation Studies, Joyce Coleman (Univ. of Oklahoma) and Rita Copeland (Univ. of Pennsylvania) among the teachers.

Further, the project has arranged a couple of conferences, one on Barlaam in the North in June 2004, and one on Late Medieval Scandinavian language and philology in April 2005.

The project has contributed with material to the database of manuscript texts from Vadstena in collaboration with the infrastructure project Vadstenaklostrets handskrifter elektroniskt tillgängliga.

As a continuation of the project a number of the participants are now working in new scholarly contexts. A project in collaboration with the universities in Trento and Venice treats the use of feelings in revelations (Carlquist). In another project the medieval charters are to be studied in cooperation with a historian of economics (Lindell). Studies of e.g. the collaboration between the two convents in Vadstena in book production, and an edition and commentary of Margareta Clausdotter's chronicle of Birgitta, are planned (Bolton-Hedström). A study of writing and re-writing of texts in Vadstena is planned (Johansson).

A synthesis will be presented in the volume Manuscripts from Vadstena Abbey which will be published in connection with a planned exhibition in the Royal Library in 2010.