Richard Britnell: Pragmatic Literacy and Its Uses, c.820-c.1200

The Carolingian empire, with its reconstruction of a large palace-centred administration, raised government administration in Western Europe to a new level of formality. But just as the decline of Roman administrative practices cannot be ascribed wholly to the political decay of the empire, neither can the growing production of records in the Carolingian empire during the eighth and ninth centuries, be explained solely by territorial expansion. Even quite small states began to use written records – especially for the recording of property transactions – which was partly at least related to the spread of Christianity and a literate clergy. Both within the territory of the Carolingian empire and elsewhere the volume of extant records increased significantly from the mid eighth century into the ninth, and sometimes into the tenth, for reasons that have little to do with the geographical scale of government operations and have more to do with state-building, the development of legal procedures and the widespread growth of clerical literacy.

The volume of extant records from many regions of Western Europe dipped in the tenth and eleventh centuries because of the widespread local political instability associated with the renewed invasions and political instability. However, record-keeping in the Ottonian Empire increased, and the tenth century was also less disturbed in Mediterranean Europe than in the west. In these regions archives are often richer than in earlier centuries. All this while, however, it remains important not to envisage even the greatest chanceries or writing offices as evidence of bureaucratic government. The offices themselves may not have been very busy: the names of seven notaries are recorded from the thirteen-year reign of Radulf of West Francia (923-36), but only forty-nine royal acta are known, less than four a year. The Greek empire combined a lavish court with a complex military and naval system, requiring systematic taxation. It has been claimed that ‘the administration of the East Roman Empire in the tenth century was, whether for good or for evil, more effective than that of any other state,
anywhere to the west of China, in that age’. Another major European administration of the
tenth century was the Muslim Caliphate of Cordova under ‘Abd-al-Ruhman III and his
successors. Its central secretariat was under the supervision of the viziers of the diwan. The
need to communicate with provincial civilian and military administrations was such that the
government maintained a postal service.

From the later eleventh century there was a Europe-wide recovery and surge in the
number and range of administrative records to levels unprecedented since the days of the
Roman Empire. Up to this point the driving forces had been state-building and the
development of judicial practices; governments had characteristically used the written word
for recording laws, for communicating instructions, and for recording grants of property and
franchises. From now on these considerations weighed even more, and the use of writing by
government spread further – as to the Scottish and Scandinavian kingdoms. A growing
volume of business reduced the capacity of administrations to rely on memory and
encouraged the systematic registration of information in rolls or ledgers. In addition,
economic development added weighty additional pressure against old ways of doing things,
and so contributed independently to the reason why governments as well as their subjects
needed to write things down. Economic change undermined the facility with which regular
administrative procedures could be guided by static texts – whether books of law or
statements of custom – and contributed to the pressure to create systematically updated
information. The desirability of keeping regular financial accounts further encouraged the
development of a new range of clerical practices, and moved governments and private
property owners to dependence on regular bureaucratic procedures. As this implies, the use of
literacy outside government accelerated rapidly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The
increase was at first strongly associated with large institutions, notably monastic houses, but
by the thirteenth century had become much more widespread, as is apparent from the striking
evidence of literacy in everyday life from Bergen and Novgorod.
Michael Schulte: Runes and ‘Pragmatic Literacy’: Aspects of Runic Literacy in Scandinavia to c. 1200

Venantius Fortunatus, the sixth-century bishop of Poitiers, directly compared runic writing with the function of papyrus (see Page 1999:100-102, also Clanchy 1993:12-13, with reference to Bk. viii, ch. 18, Patrologiae LXXXVIII, col. 256):

\[\text{Barbara fraxineis pingatur runa tabellis, quodque papyrus agit, virgula plana valet.}\]

“The barbarous rune may be painted on tablets of ash-wood:
and what papyrus can do, that a smoothed stick does just as well.”

The use of the Latin verb \textit{agere} gives a hint of the conference theme: ‘practical/pragmatic literacy’. Taking M.T. Clanchy’s \textit{From Memory to Written Record} (1993) as a point of departure, my special focus will rest on ‘pragmatic runacy’, or pragmatic aspects of runic writing in Scandinavia until c. 1200. In a general perspective of Northern European written culture, new finds of letters such as the Vindolanda writing tablets in non-classical Latin from about 100 A.D. and the medieval Bergen wooden sticks are crucial. These partly informal documents signal that the extent of writing in Western Europe in and before the Middle Ages has partly been underestimated, and that the linguistic and stylistic diversity of extant sources is in need of re-evaluation (cf. e.g. Adams 1995 with regard to the Vindolanda tablets). Taking a sideglance at the Vindolanda material and its colloquialisms (i.e. words or expressions used mainly in conversation, but usually absent from formal/classical Latin speech or writing), the notions of ‘pragmatic literacy’ and ‘pragmatic runacy’ will be addressed in a Scandinavian setting (on ‘runacy’ see Spurkland 2004). The paper identifies possible runic features indicative of pragmatic use. Eventually, the role of Latin in Viking Age and post-Viking Age written culture will be discussed.

References
Per Stille: Learning Runes: What Can the Usage of Runes of Identified Rune Carvers Tell Us?

There are several rune carvers in eleventh-century Sweden who show distinctive traits in the usage of runes. Mostly, it is the production of Uplandic rune carvers that has been identified and described. Curiously, these traits differ very much in spite of the fact that the carvers belong to the same period, the same milieu, and they even co-worked. Is it possible to deduce from the observance of differences and similarities in their usage of runes how the runes were learned and exercised?

Magnus Källström: Clerical or Lay Literacy in Late Viking Age Uppland? The Evidence of Local Rune Carvers and Their Work

According to common view the rune stone custom was established in Denmark in the latter part of the tenth century and then spread north to the Scandinavian Peninsula. The custom arrived in the Mälar valley around the year 1000, where it also reached its peak. During a period of about hundred years, more than 1 700 rune-stones were erected in central Sweden.

The reason for creating monuments of this kind to commemorate deceased relatives is still under debate, but it is undeniable that there must have been some kind of connection with Christianization and the missionary activities in the late Viking Age. It is, however, not clear how involved the representatives of the Church were in the creation of runic monuments. Some researchers have claimed that the people who carved the runes had a close relation to the church organization and that they even were active as missionaries.
In my dissertation (Källström 2007), the aim was to scrutinize the only contemporary sources describing literate people in the Viking Age, namely the carver signatures in Scandinavian runic inscriptions. I studied different aspects of this formula, for example variation in vocabulary, statements about the division of labor, bynames or other attributes connected to the name of carver, and so on. Special attention was also paid to personal relations between the carver and the sponsors of the monuments, when such a relation was clearly expressed in the text.

The carver signatures show an uneven distribution in the runic material. Signatures are rather rare in inscriptions from southern Scandinavia, but numerous in central Sweden. In the latter area, it is also possible to recognize different types of rune carvers. Some have executed and signed several inscriptions scattered over wide areas, while others are only testified to once or twice. This has led to a division of the rune carvers into ‘professionals’ and ‘amateurs’. For researchers who embrace the idea of the rune carver as a missionary or priest the former are of course the best candidates.

In my paper I will discuss these issues chiefly in light of the presumed ‘amateur’ carvers. What does the existence of these carvers tell us about literacy in the late Viking Age? Was it a skill linked to and underpinned by representatives of the Church during the eleventh century, or was it possibly widespread and rooted in Viking society at an earlier stage?

References

Laila Kitzler Åhfeldt: Rune Carvers in Sigtuna and Its Hinterland – Scrutinizing Their Work and Relations by Laser Scanning

As a part of the project Similar but still different: The rune stones in and around 11th century Sigtuna as a reflection of urban-rural relations, rune stones have been analysed by laser scanning and groove analysis. This method can be used to scrutinize details concerning relations between sites, regions, varying monument types, chronological phases, work effort and individual carvers.
The results indicate that ornament carvers were more susceptible to local variation, while runographers covered larger geographical distances and had more exchanges with each other. The carver signature Torbjörn in Sigtuna appears to cover a group of three people. This might help to explain the discrepancy between Torbjörn’s advanced writing habits and his poor ornamentation. In the late eleventh century, there is a significant change in cutting technique compared to the early eleventh century. A larger effort is invested in the carving, and this is probably done by more skilful carvers. A hypothetical suggestion is that these late carvers were recruited and trained as young people.

The conclusion is that there is a lot more going on about rune carving than just anyone deciding to make a rune stone in his backyard. There is an organisation and there are carvers with some literary education. This strengthens the assumption that rune stone carvers have some connection to church activities.

The project has been financed by The Swedish Research Council. The other project members are Professor Anne-Sofie Gräslund (project leader) and Dr Linn Lager at Uppsala University, Department of Archaeology and Classical Studies.

**Alexey Gippius: Birchbark Literacy and the Rise of Written Communication in Early Rus’**

Archaeological achievements of the mid twentieth century brought about an essentially new vision of the written culture of early Rus’. Discovery of birchbark documents in 1951 raised the curtain on Old East Slavonic practical writing which proved to have been flourishing in Novgorod from about the same time (mid eleventh century) when the earliest surviving dated parchment manuscripts were written. On the other hand, publication of a series of Cyrillic inscriptions dated to the time before the official Baptism of Rus’ by prince Vladimir Svjatoslavich (988) added weight to the hypotheses stretching the history of native Slavonic writing in the lands of Rus’ back to the first half of the tenth century or even earlier. The novel conception of socio-cultural dynamics of writing in early Rus’ proposed by Simon Franklin (2002) regards the time span between 950 and 1050 as an internally homogeneous gestation period with no obvious dividing-line at 988.

The paper starts with challenging this view which – as far as the period before 988 is concerned – appears to rest on a rather shaky ground comprised by a handful of objects whose
early datings and attributions either have been rejected by the latest research in the field or remain a matter of speculation. On the contrary, for the decades immediately following official Conversion the specimens of Cyrillic writing, though not numerous, provide undisputable evidence of the use of Slavonic writing both in confessional and secular contexts. This being the fact, the emergence of birchbark literacy in Novgorod at about 1030 can hardly be regarded as a result of a century-long gestation of pragmatic writing, developing in urban economic and administrative contexts independently of the Christian institutions. Rather, it should be seen as a by-product of the spread of Christian education under the reign of Jaroslav the Wise. Once acquired, the skill of reading and writing Cyrillic could have been applied in various contexts as ideologically neutral informational technology, but the very acquiring of it was possible only via school education, missionary and catechetical in its character. It is this nature of the birchbark literacy that seems to be responsible for the shape of the birchbark letters which, succeeding linguistically to the tradition of oral messages, at the same time display considerable influence of ecclesiastical writing, especially in the use of etiquette formulas.

**Tatiana Rozhdestvenskaya: Written Culture of Medieval Novgorod in the Light of Epigraphy**

Novgorod occupies a preeminent position in the history of literature, literacy, and book culture in medieval Rus’, in part because of the remarkable body of sources – manuscripts, birchbark documents, and inscriptions – that have survived there. North western Rus’, which included Novgorod and its hinterlands, has yielded the oldest evidence of an Eastern Slavic written language. That writing developed here at an early stage was due not to happenstance but to necessity. A means for communicating across great distances and among culturally distinct peoples was brought into being by interethnic and ethno-cultural exchanges among the Ilmen and Krivichi Slavs and native Finno-Ugrian tribes, by the development of the East-West trade route “from the Varangians to the Greek” (that is, from Scandinavia to Constantinople), and by the rise of city-states and their attendant administrative apparatus, which connected the chain of settlements (the future Novgorod and Ladoga in particular) along this route. The inscriptions were yielded by Novgorod’s silt, as well as by the broader territory exchanges among Slavic, Baltic, Finnic, and Scandinavian peoples. Within the
unique zone of contacts that defined Eastern Europe during the ninth-tenth centuries, we find inscriptions composed in alphabets ranging from Scandinavian runes, Arabic, Greek, and Slavic Cyrillic.

This “pre-manuscript” era provided the foundation for the development of writing in early Rus’, particularly in the north. With the Christian reforms of Vladimir and the baptism of Rus’ in 988, a new stage in the development of the written language began, as did a distinctive literary tradition manifested in bibles, saints’ lives (vitae) and liturgical books, and also in the indigenous Novgorodian traditions of chronicle-writing and law. The most archaeological evidence is the Novgorod Psalter, dating from the first quarter of the eleventh century, found in 2000. It consists of waxed wooden tablets that preserve biblical text in the early form of Church Slavonic. Novgorod’s written culture is documented in numerous examples of epigraphy: inscriptions on stone, wood, and metal, on icons and church frescoes, and on church walls (graffiti). Many of these inscriptions were revealed only in recent decades, during conservation or restoration made necessary by the removal of encroachments or to repair the destruction wrought on the churches during the 1930s, and particularly during the Second World War. Much has undoubtedly been lost. The most common inscriptions are supplications: “Lord, hear the prayer of Your servant…” or autographs of parishioners: “…wrote this”. The act of writing on walls during church service served the function of prayer, as did variations on penitential formulae that describe their authors as sinful, unworthy, evil or wretched. Various ‘chronicle’ inscriptions report significant events in the life of the congregation, their church or their city. The character of most inscriptions, irrespective of their tone, is nonetheless ultimately votive: seeking God’s help or grace. Inscriptions citing Holy Scripture and the liturgy constitute a separate category of graffiti: fragments of Lenten service for Sext have been preserved, as well as words from a church hymn (heirmos) for the Feast of Dormition, fragments from the vesperinal office of the Six Psalms (Hexapsalmos), and a sticheron and troparion for Good Friday Matins. The biblical and hymnographic graffiti often diverge from the manuscript tradition, which may reflect variants of these texts or local practices in congregational worship.

The writing and the language of most of these inscriptions document a vernacular grammar and orthography, albeit to a lesser extent than the birchbark documents. Some authors must have been professional scribes, while others, though writing was clearly part of their everyday lives, were not as learned or bookish. The inscriptions contained in fresco compositions, placed there by artists’ hands, constitute an altogether different category of writing. Embodying the unity of word and image, fresco inscriptions occupy a high point in
the city’s culture of writing. Unlike the graffiti of individual parishioners, they constitute part of the “official” Church culture. Nonetheless, these two modes of public discourse coexist within the same liturgical space. The Eastern Orthodox Church is a monument of letters, uniting texts from disparate periods and genres. Inscriptions in the churches of Novgorod and ancient Rus’ (Kiev, Ladoga, Pskov, Polotsk) reflect a written culture and linguistic situation particular to the Slavo-Byzantine world and distinct from that of the medieval West. The written “record” of medieval Novgorod is similarly a record of exchanges and identities between the literary culture and practical literacy.

Jos Schaeken: Birchbark Documents in Time, Space and Networks

The title of the lecture alludes to Dean Worth’s famous 1990 article “The Birchbark Letters in Time and Space”. On the basis of more than seven hundred birchbark documents collected until 1983, Worth examines the changing social and spatial orientation of Novgorod in medieval times. Now, a quarter of a century later, the total corpus has grown to over a thousand documents. Research in historical, philological and linguistic aspects of medieval Novgorod literacy has rapidly advanced to a point that the conclusions of 1990 are in need of a re-examination. Our investigation benefits from a powerful electronic database which underlies the popular website http://gramoty.ru. It will be argued that the rise and fall of epistolary activity on birchbark between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries shows a different chronological development, especially when it comes to the crisis in the early thirteenth century. Also, it has become clear that after the crisis the participation in communication and documentation on birchbark shifts from one “end” of the town of Novgorod to the other. These new insights call for a refined explanation in the light of the historical events in medieval Novgorod.

Michael Lerche Nielsen: Pagan versus Christian Rune Stones from the Viking Age: A Danish Perspective

The Viking Age custom of raising rune stones in southern Scandinavia has traditionally been labelled as ‘pagan’. This assumption is based on a scholarly presumption dating back to the
Renaissance stating that 16 character runes and runic monuments are ‘ancient’, i.e. literally dating back to the time of stone monoliths and giants. It is also based on the observation that inscriptions on a few rune stones in fact invoke the pagan god Thor and the fact that another handful of inscriptions contain curses directed against malevolent people that would not be expected in a Christian context. Finally, the pictorial repertoire of Viking Age rune stones, e.g. Thor’s hammers, has generally been classified as crude and savage.

Subsequently, the fading out of the rune stone tradition in southern Scandinavia following the baptism of King Harold Bluetooth in Jelling in central Jutland in the 980s has been explained as a deliberate reaction against pagan traditions. In addition, the reuse of runic monuments in church fabrics has been claimed to be an attempt by church builders to destroy or literally to step on the misconceptions of their ancestors.

In contrast, however, a number of runic monuments in southern Scandinavia do carry pious Christian prayers and, in addition, King Harold’s Christian runic monument in Jelling has been seen as a pivotal point for the flourishing custom of raising rune stones in a Christian context in the Mälaren Region in central Scandinavia in the eleventh century.

I do find the traditional view on the rune stone tradition too simplistic and in my opinion recent finds of runic spolia in Jutlandic churches indicate a statement of continuity rather than a humiliation of heathen ancestors. At the same time, art historians have suggested a much higher Christian influx on the pictorial programme of the rune stone ornaments. Maybe we have to consider the main core of Viking Age rune stones as Christian even in southern Scandinavia.

The paper will focus on this re-evaluation as well as the fact that it remains to be explained why there are evident differences between southern Scandinavian Christian inscriptions and late Viking Age inscriptions in central Scandinavia.

Kristel Zilmer: Christianity in Runes – On Some Contexts of Application in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia

Runic inscriptions from Viking and medieval Scandinavia demonstrate various textual, visual as well as broader contextual features that have on many occasions been analyzed as evidence of the conscious expression of Christianity within the communities in question. At the same time it is not always clear (already due to the manifold nature of the material) as to in which
sense particular inscriptions indeed serve as ‘Christian’; or to put it in a different way – what do the expressions and practices that are traceable in the context of the Scandinavian runic custom actually signal from the point of view of Christianity? What kind of Christianity, or even whose Christianity, do we find manifested in runes? What counted as Christian – and was it then referring to (collective) custom or (personal) conviction?

In this paper the emphasis will lie upon the analysis of rune-inscribed stones in differing typological settings. Rune stones make up a suitable point of departure for discussing the fusion of popular and potentially learned expression – in terms of offering glimpses into possible ways of creating identity with Christianity through the elements of traditional culture; as such, the runic media were suited to meet the various needs of the society. Additional perspectives will be gained by relating rune stones to horizontal slabs and other forms of grave monuments. A specific case to explore concerns such monuments that carry inscriptions both in runes and Latin letters.

It will also be discussed as to what extent the analyzed runic material allows us to trace certain variations (regional, temporal, etc.) but also emergent parallels with regard to the applied Christian formulations.

**James E. Knirk: The Kuli Rune Stone and the “Improvement” of Norway by Christianity**

The Kuli rune stone from the western coast of Norway could be called the “baptismal certificate” for the country. The inscription was rediscovered in 1956 and read by Aslak Liestøl as follows (Norges inskrifter med de yngre runer, vol. 4 (1957), inscription [N]449; uncertain readings in parentheses; fairly literal translation):

+þurir:auk:hal(u)arþr:rai(stu).stain:þins(i).aftu(l)iu(t)
+tualf.uintr.ha(fþ)i:(k)r(istin).(t)umr:(u)iri(t).(i)n(u)riki

Þórir and Hallvarðr erected this stone in memory of Úlf?? ... Twelve winters/years had Christianity been in Norway ...”

After its publication, the inscription led to speculation concerning which “Christianization” is referred to on the stone: (1) early attempts at Christianization by Hákon the Good around 950; (2) the first extensive Christianization by Óláfr Tryggvason around 995;
or (3) the more official Christianization by Óláfr Haraldsson (the later Saint) around 1020-1030. Also the person to whom the memorial was erected was discussed: Úlfljótr or Úlfr rauði.

An archaeological excavation in 1984 found remains of the foundations for a causeway that went past the probable original site of the rune stone. If one assumes that the causeway and the stone were contemporary, a dating of the causeway would give a date for the rune stone. The result of the dendrochronological dating performed in 1990 was 1034. Twelve years earlier would be 1022, and this (according to the relative chronology in the saga of St. Óláfr in Heimskringla) is the approximate year of the assembly at Moster where Christian laws were adopted for Western Norway. All this was presented and argued by Jan Ragnar Hagland in his article in the Festschrift for Nils Hallan (1991).

In 1991 Hagland suggested reading tuilf (for tvelf) in the beginning of the second line, and explained this spelling as the result of Anglo-Saxon influence (Old English twelf). Hagland continued his work with the Kuli rune stone, and in 1997 (published in 1998) he and the Swedish geographer Jan O. H. Swantesson presented the results of their micro-mapping of the runic surface of the stone. In addition to claiming that most s-runes had a different form than that read by Liestøl (mainly varying long-branch shapes rather than short-twig ones), Hagland dismissed the reading at the end of the first line which could give Úlfjótr/Úlfr rauði as too speculative, while reading tuilf = tuelf as the first word in the second line. Later in that line, after the word “Christianity”, he read um.rit (um rétt ‘righted/improved’) where Liestøl had read uirit (verit ‘been’). The new wording, with the colorless “been” replaced by “improved”, would imply a clear, propagandistic value judgment on the part of the carver: Christianity had not only “been” here for a period, it had “improved” the country for that time!

I found Hagland’s new interpretation neither graphically plausible nor semantically reasonable. I therefore expressed reservations in my presentation of the inscription in 2001 in the Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, vol. 17. In 2006 I examined the original micro-mapping documentation of the inscription together with Jan Swantesson in Karlstad. My assessment was that most of the new readings did not have much basis in the documentation itself. In fact, I found confirmation there for Liestøl’s readings. As a major part of my presentation in Bergen, I will demonstrate and illustrate the problems with Hagland’s new reading and the new interpretation.

The rune stone from Kuli is an artefact of practical literacy providing written and material evidence demonstrating the forging of Christian identity in the years soon after the conversion. The loanword kristindómr from Old English crīstendōm indicates where the Christian impulse came from, although the other “foreign” words or spellings in the
inscription (particularly the archaic *twalf* for *tolf* and the unassimilated *uintr* for *vetr*) seem to reveal only dialectal differences. Hagland’s attempt to connect the spelling of the number twelve with Old English *twelf* cannot be supported. The inscription has an important early Anglo-Saxon loanword but appears to have been carved by a Scandinavian (Norwegian) using his Old Norse.

**Henrik Williams: ‘Dead in White Clothes’: Modes of Christian Expression on Viking Age Rune Stones**

On seven or possibly eight rune stones in the Swedish province of Uppland (north of Stockholm) there is found a statement that one or two men have died *í hvítaváðum* (in white clothes), in two cases seemingly in Denmark. The established interpretation is that we are dealing with baptismal robes which were “worn by the convert at his baptism and for a week afterwards. The Upplanders in whose memory this group of rune stones was put up were thus baptized on their deathbed. It is the missionary period, the age of conversion, that we encounter in these inscriptions” (S.B.F. Jansson, *Runes in Sweden* 1987:112).

Baptism is a prerequisite for all Christians and the faith seems well established in Uppland before some of these stones were erected. This is difficult to reconcile with the notion of such recent conversion that baptism was a rare occurrence to be mentioned specifically. The *í hvítaváðum* inscriptions have been used to prove far-reaching assertions about the function of rune stones and the status of Christianity in late Viking age Sweden. I propose to take a new and harder look at what ‘Dead in White Clothes’ really means.

**Rikke Steenholt Olesen: Runic Script and Latin Language: Innovation, Interaction and Integration**

Runic Latin – that is runic inscriptions in the Latin language – is a well-known genre of epigraphic writing in medieval Scandinavia. The dating of objects containing runic Latin indicates that runic Latin as a genre arose in the eleventh century and was a popular choice among the literate in the following centuries. The use of local script and foreign language, the types of objects in question, the spheres to which these belong and the practice in general
reflects the integration of Christian cultural heritance in the North as an interaction between tradition and innovation.

**Terje Spurkland: Pater Noster and Ave Maria in Runes – Expressions of Magic or Vernacular Religiosity?**

In the second decade of the twentieth century there were two doctoral disputations at the University of Oslo with an aftermath that came to dominate the academic debate about the mentality of medieval Norway for a long time.¹ The common topic of these dissertations was the religious life in Norway in the Middle Ages. The main question was: Were the Norwegians, generally speaking, really Christian in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries? There were two answers given to this question; one affirmative and one negative. Edvard Bull argued that the Christian religion and moral did not penetrate the soul and mind of the Norwegians; they were just like the Russian nobility of the time of Peter the Great – as soon as you scratched them on the arm the Tartar appeared (12). Frederik Paasche took the opposite view that Norse Christianity reflects a factual change of religion, “a real longing for Christ and His succession” (2).

In the 1980s there was an historiographical discussion between the scholars John van Engen and Jean-Claude Schmitt about how to understand the predominant mentalities of the Christian Middle Ages.² The general drift of this discussion was how to understand and how to uncover or reveal the mentality of the Middle Ages in Western Europe. Schmitt vigorously contested the so-called “legend of the Christian Middle Ages”. What we are dealing with is miniscule clerical elite, while the mass of medieval folk lived in a folklore culture best likened to that observed by anthropologists in Third World countries. Van Engen rejected a conception of the Middle Ages as two distinct cultures; one clerical and bookish, the other popular, oral and customary. He admitted that it is undeniable that the great majority of the common people were cut off from direct access to the written norms of a Christian culture.

The real question is the degree to which people’s rituals, art, literature and cosmology had

¹ Edvard Bull: *Folk og kirke i middelalderen. Studier til Norges historie. Kristiania og København 1912*
nonetheless been shaped or influenced by these Christian norms; that is to say, the degree to which Christian culture had over time become people’s oral culture.

It is evident that both the Bull/Paasche discussion and the van Engen/Schmitt controversy were focusing on more or less the same issue, albeit from different theoretical points of view: To what extent was common man in the Middle Ages Christian, and how was this Christianity or lack of Christianity manifested?

In Norway, we have a written material that only to a small extent was accessible to Bull and Paasche and which was seemingly completely unknown to Schmitt and van Engen. I am of course referring to the very great number of Christian runic inscriptions left over to us from the last part of the twelfth century to well into the fifteenth century. By “Christian” I mean that they in some way or other refer to a Christian issue. What may these inscriptions add in favour of arguments for or against a common medieval Christian mentality in the discussion referred to above?

Judith Jesch: With and Without Runes: Christian Monuments in Viking Age Communities of the Irish Sea Region

The Scandinavian runic inscriptions of Britain and Ireland are notoriously uneven in their chronology and geography: their distribution does not correspond closely with the main areas of Scandinavian settlement, nor are they all from the Viking Age. As a result, many runologists express skepticism about the value or extent of their evidence for the Viking or Scandinavian character of those settlements. However, the rune-inscribed stones form only part of a much larger corpus of carved stones with Scandinavian characteristics, dating mainly from the tenth and eleventh centuries. This is most evident in the Isle of Man, where there are substantial numbers of stones with Scandinavian runes, or Scandinavian-style ornament, or both, but the phenomenon can be observed throughout large areas of Britain and Ireland.

The paper will concentrate on the Irish Sea region, with a focus on the Isle of Man, but also considering the Hebrides, Ireland and the north-west of England. The carved stone monuments of the tenth and eleventh centuries will be considered as a group, of which those with runic inscriptions are a subset. This group of monuments provides clear evidence for the Christianity of the Viking Age communities of the region. The paper will thus explore the
interactions of literacy, ornament and iconography to reveal the nature of this Scandinavianised expression of Christianity in the communities of the Irish Sea region.

**Antoaneta Granberg: ‘The Trilingual Dogma’ – Between Practical Literacy and Christian Identity**

The process of Christianisation resulted in a new understanding of the relationship between language and script. A status of sacred languages was established for the languages of the Holy Scripture simultaneously with the rising authority of the production of writing.

The existence of a Trilingual dogma – i.e. the idea about Hebrew, Greek and Latin, being the only languages to be used for the text transmission of the Holy Scripture – has been interpreted differently in different cultures. It has been questioned, with all reason, if the Trilingual idea did ever become a Trilingual dogma.

The first part of the paper discusses the relevance of the Trilingual dogma for the relation between the “local” tradition of writing and the “global” tradition of writing (the Holy Scripture) in cases of existence of more than one script and more than one language in a society. The second part of the paper focuses on how the growing Christian identity reflected the praxis of writing and the understanding of different scripts and languages used in the society.

The study is based mostly on Bulgaria and Rus’, while the writing among the Goths and that in Scandinavia have been included from a comparative point of view.