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Analysing bilingualism and biscriptality in medieval Scandinavian epigraphic sources: a sociolinguistic approach

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Abstract: Written culture in high and late medieval Scandinavia is characterized by a long and complex relationship between the Latin written tradition and the older native runic one. One product of the intersection of these traditions are several epigraphs where Latin, vernacular, Latin alphabet, and runes are combined. The aim of this paper is to propose a framework for analysing such bilingual and biscriptal inscriptions which takes into account two fundamental aspects of language and script choice: (1) the literacy of those involved in the production and reception of the texts, and (2) the role of the indexicality of languages and scripts in the shaping and representation of identities. The paper draws on epigraphic analyses and modern sociolinguistic approaches to written multilingualism and shows that an interdisciplinary method can further our understanding of the relationship between the Latin and vernacular written cultures, their status relative to each other, and their social functions in medieval Scandinavia.

Keywords: bilingualism; biscriptality; Latin; linguistic landscapes; medieval Scandinavia; runes

1 Introduction

The spread of Latin written culture represented a pivotal point in the development of medieval European literate societies, and its adoption was in most cases one of the prerequisites for the later establishment of a written tradition in the vernacular. A peculiar case in this context is the development of literacy in Scandinavia, where the rise of Latin and of the Roman alphabet encountered an already established native written tradition which for eight hundred years had had the local vernaculars and the runic alphabet as its means of expression.

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This encounter gave rise to a long-standing and complex relationship between the two written cultures; it is generally described as a form of diglossia and digraphia,¹ often characterized as depending on the material used, with Latin and the Roman alphabet being predominantly written on parchment, and the vernacular and runes being predominantly carved in stone, wood, and other materials.

However, discussions about diglossia and, in particular, digraphia in medieval Scandinavia have often disregarded important areas of overlap between the two script cultures, the most obvious one being the epigraphic sphere. The coexistence of the two traditions within this domain led to them influencing each other on several levels, and to the production of inscriptions where both languages and both scripts appeared together in various combinations, showing different types of code- and script-switching. Although not all combinations of languages and alphabets were equally common, all of them do in fact appear in the corpus, the runes being used for both the vernacular and Latin, and the Roman letters being used for both Latin and the vernacular.

Despite the importance of these bilingual and biscriptal texts for our understanding of the relationship between the Latin and vernacular written cultures of medieval Scandinavia, little attention has been paid to what these inscriptions can tell us about medieval bilingual and biscriptal proficiency, and about the sociocultural motivations behind different choices of language and script.²

The aim of this paper is to suggest a framework for analysing bilingual and biscriptal inscriptions which takes into account these two central aspects: the language and script proficiency of the individuals involved in the production and reception of these inscriptions, and the sociocultural implications of the linguistic, visual, and epigraphic features of the texts. The model proposed draws on theoretical and methodological considerations from modern sociolinguistic approaches to written multilingualism, in particular multilingualism that is displayed in the public sphere and contributes to a society's linguistic landscape.³ The article thus ties in

1 The term *digraphia* is used here to indicate a functional distribution between (variants of) writing systems that stand in privative opposition to one another, i.e. one writing system is characterized by the presence of a certain feature which the other writing system lacks, e.g. [+prestige], [+public], [+religious], and so forth (see Bunčić et al. 2016: 54–63 on this definition of *digraphia* and other types of biscriptality).

2 I adopt the definition of *biscriptality* given by Bunčić et al. (2016: 51) here, i.e., “the simultaneous use of more than one system of writing for one language” (see also Bunčić et al. 2016: 54). The same term can also describe the competence of individuals in more than one writing system for the same language. The Scandinavian case thus represents an example of double biscriptality, where two writing systems, the runes and the Roman alphabet, are used for two languages, the vernacular and Latin.

3 For the concept of *linguistic landscape* and the associated field of sociolinguistic research, see e.g. Backhaus (2007: Ch. 4), Gorter (2006), Huebner (2016), Landry and Bourhis (1997), and Spolsky (2009).

with and informs scholarly discussions about how sociolinguistic concepts and analytical tools developed for modern bilingual and biscriptal corpora can contribute to the study of comparable texts from the past.

The deliberations and examples presented here will, I hope, make clear that a sociolinguistic and multimodal approach to bilingual and biscriptal inscriptions is essential for understanding their diglossic and digraphic context in high and late medieval Scandinavia.

2 Runic and Latin epigraphy in medieval Scandinavia: background and research desiderata

Scandinavia has a long-written tradition that stretches back to the first centuries AD, i.e., long before Latin written culture was introduced at the turn from the tenth to the eleventh century. The traces that this tradition has left are inscriptions, both monumental and on various types of portable artefacts, carved in variants of the runic alphabet (the *futhark*) and in the Scandinavian vernaculars.

Far from being monolithic, runic written culture underwent substantial changes between its origins and the end of the Middle Ages. The runic alphabet itself changed dramatically during this long time span, as did the types of artefacts being used, the number and geographical spread of the runic inscriptions, the kind of texts they conveyed, and their purpose. In this continuous development of writing practices, what happened from the eleventh century onwards was nothing short of revolutionary, as the Latin language and Roman alphabet took more and more space in the Scandinavian linguistic landscapes, and written culture went from employing one language and one script to being bilingual and biscriptal.⁴

4 Latin written culture, as well as the use of the Roman alphabet to write texts in the vernacular, spread at different paces and with different modalities in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, but in all three areas the first attestations of locally produced texts in Latin and the Roman alphabet stem, with a few exceptions, from the eleventh century. For the greater part of this century, however, we have very few preserved texts, and then only short or fragmentary ones. Many of these texts may be connected to foreign inscribers or scriptoria, and most of them are associated with the highest echelons of secular and religious power, as shown for example by royal coins – Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish – bearing Latin inscriptions (see e.g. Tarnow Ingvarsson 2021), or letters sent from Danish kings and bishops to the papal see in Rome, now known only indirectly through references in replies from the papal see (Carelli 2001: 264). Not until the twelfth century did Latin and the Roman script start to become established somewhat more widely both in epigraphic and parchment sources – again with differences between the Nordic countries. For overviews of the introduction and spread of Latin in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, see e.g., Carlquist (2005) and Westlund (2005) on

In characterizations of the digraphic relationship between runes and the Roman alphabet, there is a tendency in both specialized runological literature and non-specialized scholarly works to stress its medial and diamesic nature. What is highlighted is often (1) the epigraphic use of runes, and in particular their use for inscriptions carved in wood, in contrast to the Roman alphabet written with ink on parchment (e.g., Spurkland 2001, 2004), and (2) the use of runic texts with a language of immediacy – private, spontaneous, ephemeral, oral – in contrast to the language of distance – official, formal, enduring, written – of texts in the Roman alphabet (e.g., Brink 2005: 99–100; Bunčić et al. 2016: 74–75; Meletis 2020: 347; Schulte 2012: 158). As has been pointed out vigorously in recent runological and epigraphic scholarship, the relationship between the two written cultures was multifaceted and much more complex (see e.g., Blennow and Palumbo 2021; Blennow et al. 2022; Bollaert 2022; Holmqvist 2021; Imer 2021b; Kleivane 2019, 2021, 2022; Palumbo 2022, forthcoming; Palumbo and Harjula forthcoming; Steenholt Olesen 2021; cf. also Palm 1997).

The two written traditions not only coexisted side by side for several hundred years – in some areas until the end of the Middle Ages – displaying the complementary distribution sketched above, but also had considerable areas of overlap, most importantly in the epigraphic domain.⁵ These areas of overlap offered the potential for influence and blending between the two written cultures. Within the epigraphic sphere, their influence on each other can be seen, for example, in the transfer of palaeographic traits, orthographic conventions, compositional elements, and textual formulae. But the most striking examples of interaction are those inscriptions where both languages and both scripts are combined.

Such bilingual and biscriptal inscriptions are found in all the Nordic countries – Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and (with sporadic examples) Finland and Greenland. The corpus shows a rich variation in the way in which Latin, Roman

manuscript sources in Sweden, Blennow (2016) on the epigraphic material, Carelli (2001: 253–366) and Olrik Frederiksen (2005) on Danish sources, and Haugen (2005: 824–825) and Rindal (2005) on the Norwegian material.

⁵ The Roman-script inscriptions from high and late medieval Scandinavia have not been published comprehensively yet, but several editions and other works that treat various parts of the material exist, e.g., Bæksted (1968), Blennow (2016), Bollaert (2022), Carelli (2001), Gardell (1945–1946), Hamner (1933), Hinrichsen (1988), Kleivane (2021), Löffler (1889), Ström (2002), and Syrett (2002). The medieval Norwegian corpus is currently being documented in the “Between runes and manuscripts” project, led by Elise Kleivane at the University of Oslo. Part of the corpus is available in Bollaert (2022) and in a database, currently under development, connected to the Oslo project. Both runic and Roman-script inscriptions from Danish churches are currently the focus of the project “Skriften på væggen – epigrafikkens rolle i middelalderens skriftkultur i Danmark ca. 1050–1350” (“Writing on the wall – the role of epigraphy in medieval written culture in Denmark c.1050–1350”) led by Lisbeth Imer at the National Museum of Denmark.

letters, the vernacular, and runes are mixed. For instance, on a thirteenth-century Swedish grave slab from Ugglum churchyard (Vg 95),⁶ the same text, ‘Reginmōð had the monument made over Gunnarr, son of Ásbjörn’, is carved twice in Old Swedish, once with runes and again with Roman letters. Additionally, the inscription contains the carver’s signature in Latin and Roman letters: HARALDUS ME FECIT MAGISTER, ‘Master Harald made me’.⁷

In another late medieval Norwegian funerary inscription from Skålvoll (N 457), the whole text is carved in Old Norse, but it likewise blends both runic and Roman script. In contrast to the example above, in this case the inscriber switched scripts in the middle of a word, halfway through the inscription. The text reads: ‘HERE RESTS BRYNHILDR, DAUGHTER OF EINDRIDI THE PRIEST. AND EINDRIDI THE PRIEST, SON OF GEIRALDI [...], HER FATHER, made me. Whoever sees me [the inscription], sing for her soul’. The first half of the inscription is in Roman letters, while the second half is in runes, and the switch happens in the middle of the word for ‘father’.⁸

In a third example, a grave slab from Gjesing church in Denmark (DR 111), the epitaph is inscribed in Old Danish and runes (although its interpretation is uncertain because of this text’s quite irregular spelling), while the name of the inscriber, *Horder*, is carved in its Latinized form *Horderus* and displays a mixture of Roman letters and runes, reading either HORDERUS or HORDERUS.⁹

Such inscriptions have not been the object of comprehensive studies, even though they raise important questions regarding the literacy situation in medieval Scandinavia. Why were the two languages and alphabets mixed together, and why were particular combinations used for certain types of content? What do different

6 Runic inscriptions are customarily identified with a signum referring to where they are from and where they were first published, generally in the Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish corpus editions. For instance, Vg 95 refers to inscription number 95 in *Västergötlands runinskrifter*, which is volume 5 of *Sveriges runinskrifter* (SRI). The reader is referred to the bibliography for details on the signa.

7 Roman letters are given here in SMALL CAPITALS, while the transliteration of runes is in **bold**.

8 Where the inscriber changes from Roman letters to runes, the word for ‘father’ contains a letter that has the same shape in both alphabets, namely *þ*. The switch thus takes place in an element which is script-neutral, and the word could theoretically be transcribed both as FAþER and as FAþER. In addition, the word for the subjunctive ‘sing’, *syngi*, may contain a Roman letter *y*. Such examples, like the spelling of the name *Horderus* as HORDERUS or HORDERUS mentioned next, recall phenomena of script hybridity (see e.g., Angermeyer 2012).

9 For the sake of exemplifying some of the different types of information arrangement in different languages and scripts, three epitaphs have been mentioned here, as this kind of inscription offers some of the most interesting examples of the bilingual and biscriptal phenomena under consideration. However, a similar mixing of languages and scripts can be found in other types of inscriptions as well, both official, such as on baptismal fonts and church bells, and more private texts, such as inscriptions on objects of everyday use stemming from urban environments (see e.g., Palumbo and Harjula forthcoming; Steenholt Olesen 2021).

language and script choices tell us about the functions and meanings attributed to Latin and Roman letters, to the vernacular and runes? How was their use connected to the shaping of individual and community identities? What conclusions can we draw about the language and script proficiency of the authors, the inscribers, and the readers of these texts, and about the status of the two written traditions relative to each other?

In previous research, comparisons between the Latin and runic written cultures have revolved around differences between the use of manuscripts and of runic inscriptions,¹⁰ but a comparison in domains where the two traditions overlapped, such as epigraphy, is arguably necessary.¹¹ Also, the study of the Latin carved in runes has mostly focused on its orthographic peculiarities, yielding valuable findings regarding its local Scandinavian pronunciation and the carvers' likely level of literacy.¹² However, such writing conventions are not normally considered from a sociolinguistic perspective.¹³ In general, we still lack a thorough understanding of the implications that instances of code-switching and -mixing have for bilingual and biscriptal proficiency in medieval Scandinavia, and for the sociocultural reasons behind the choices of different languages and scripts. I will argue below that an analytical approach grounded in sociolinguistic theory can take our understanding of these issues further.

3 Categorizing and interpreting bilingual and biscriptal epigraphs

It is a truism that multilingualism – and multiscriptality – is not just a modern phenomenon. Historical multilingualism and historical sociolinguistics are now

¹⁰ See e.g., Brink (2005), Schulte (2012), Spurkland (2004), and Söderberg and Larsson (1993).

¹¹ Recently, comparisons between medieval runic and Roman-script epigraphy have been made with reference to selected inscriptions by e.g., Blennow and Palumbo (2021), Imer (2021a), Imer and Steenholt Olesen (2018), Kleivane (2019: 73–75), Källström (2018: 70–73), Palumbo (2022), and Zilmer (forthcoming).

¹² See e.g., Gustavson (1994: 74), Knirk (1998: 489–492), Steenholt Olesen (2007: 38–42, 2021), and Palumbo (2020: 197 and 201–203, 2022). Individual runic inscriptions have been treated in a variety of articles. Apart from the standard editions, examples of works that present larger parts of the corpus of Latin inscriptions in runes are Düwel (2001), Ertl (1994), Knirk (1998), and Palumbo (2022).

¹³ Studies that look at possible sociocultural reasons behind the choice of language and alphabet in a Scandinavian context, albeit without drawing explicitly on sociolinguistic theories or methodologies, are Blennow and Palumbo (2021), Holmqvist (2018, 2021), and Zilmer (forthcoming). Recent investigations that make explicit reference to sociolinguistic concepts are e.g., Steenholt Olesen (2021) on Latin written in runes, and Waldspühl (2020) on the interaction between Anglo-Saxon runes and Roman letters.

well-established fields of research, but it is also clear that their study poses partly different challenges from corresponding modern phenomena, for instance due to the fragmentary nature of the material, the many variables that may influence the preservation and documentation of the sources, and the lack of contextual information.¹⁴ Such problems impact greatly on our ability to draw conclusions about the sociolinguistic aspects of the texts, so much so that one could ask whether the application of modern theories and methods to historical corpora is practicable at all. However, although we can never reconstruct the details of literacy practices in ancient or medieval times, previous research, especially in the field of Classical Studies, has shown that if the analytical tools employed are sufficiently elaborate, interdisciplinary approaches informed by modern sociolinguistic theories can add to the interpretative depth of the analysis of historical and sometimes very fragmentary data (see e.g., Adams 2003, 2007, 2013; Adams et al. 2002; McDonald 2015; Mullen 2013; Mullen and James 2012; Steele 2018). How, then, might we study the bilingual and biscriptal Scandinavian epigraphs through a sociolinguistic lens?

One of the central insights underpinning the analytical model proposed here is that the visibility and invisibility of languages in the public space, in the linguistic landscape of a multilingual society, reflects not only the literacy situation in that society but also the social functions of different languages, their status relative to one another, and, by extension, the status relationship between the communities that use them (see e.g., Landry and Bourhis 1997). A second foundational concept is that writing systems, including script and orthography, constitute a social practice. This means that social and cultural factors always play a role in the choice of script and writing conventions, as well as in their development and reform (Sebba 2009, 2012a). Third, the choices of language and writing system are but two of the possible semiotic resources that contribute to shaping the linguistic landscape, and thus it is necessary to take a multimodal approach to it. Visual resources are an integral part of bilingual and biscriptal texts (Sebba 2012b, 2013) – indeed of any text – and variables such as the positioning of languages and scripts in relation to each other are an important factor in the issues under consideration here.

The model described below is thus an attempt to retrieve as much information as possible from the linguistic, epigraphic, and visual features of the bilingual and biscriptal medieval Scandinavian inscriptions. Its focus lies on what these elements might say about the interplay between runes, the vernacular, Latin letters, and Latin language, their indexical values and status relative to one another, and the proficiency that authors, inscribers, and readers may have had. It should be noted that

¹⁴ Discussion about the limitations, but also the advantages, that epigraphic material entails where the study of multilingualism is concerned can be found in e.g., Adams (2003), Langslow (2012), McDonald (2015, 2017), Mullen (2013), Mullen and James (2012), and Pavlenko and Mullen (2015).

this framework has mainly an epigraphic focus and that, although I operate here with a broad definition of text including its visual and material properties, historical and archaeological considerations are not taken into account. Although it falls outside of the scope of this particular article, I wish to stress that the historical and archaeological context of the epigraphs, including their physical location in a building or in the landscape, also in relation to other inscriptions at the site in question, would, as far as it is accessible, need to be part of a complete account of such bilingual and biscriptal texts.¹⁵

3.1 The interplay between language, script, content, and layout

The framework proposed here revolves around the interplay between four elements – language, script, content, and layout – and focuses on the interaction of different semiotic resources used for conveying meaning. The inscriptions are categorized according to the varying relationships that these four elements can show.

This idea stems from previous research on written multilingualism, specifically the system for categorizing multilingual texts proposed by Sebba (2013). Sebba envisions three types of characteristics that can be used to describe a multilingual text: (1) language–content relationship, (2) language–spatial relationship, and (3) language-mixing type.¹⁶ Language–content relationships refer to the fact that parts

¹⁵ A question that is not addressed specifically in this article is that of how to ascertain whether a given text is bilingual or biscriptal, and the categorization of bilingual phenomena. Phenomena of script-hybridity, for instance, can complicate the classification of biscriptal texts (see the examples in Footnote 8 above). For the categorization of bilingual phenomena, consider for example the insertion of short sequences in Latin or individual Latin words into otherwise vernacular texts, such as *amen* or the name of the prayer *Ave Maria*. Where should they be placed in the continuum between code-switching and borrowing? What type of code-switching should they be classified as, or what type of borrowing? The answer to such questions depends on the theoretical and methodological frameworks used by individual scholars, which encompass a great deal of variation, as well as the aims of individual studies (for overviews of research on and terminologies of code-switching, see e.g., Auer 2010; Blomqvist 2017; Muysken 2000). An in-depth discussion of the various categorizations employed in research on code-switching is beyond the scope of this article. Moreover, the applicability of categories developed for spoken code-switching to written texts is also debatable (see e.g., Sebba 2012b: 5–8, 2013: 97–100). Here, the focus is rather on proposing a framework that captures the multimodal character of (Scandinavian) epigraphic texts, and its potential to shed light on the research questions posed.

¹⁶ Other classifications of multilingual texts, both historical and modern ones, and with partly different terminologies and levels of granularity, can be found in e.g., Adams (2003), Backhaus (2007), Leiwo (2002), Mullen (2012, 2013), and Reh (2004).

of texts in different languages might express the same content, partly the same content, or different contents altogether, resulting in equivalent texts, overlapping texts, or disjoint texts respectively.¹⁷ Language–spatial relationships refer to how sections of texts in different languages are arranged visually in relation to each other, and whether the layout indicates an equal or hierarchical structure between them. Finally, the language-mixing type refers to whether different languages are mixed together in a single grammatical, textual, or visual unit.¹⁸ Here, Sebba’s framework is complemented with additional parameters in order to be applied to medieval epigraphic texts and, in particular, to Scandinavian bilingual and biscriptal inscriptions. These modifications are explained below, grouped under four points.

First, an important addition is that all three of the characteristics mentioned above can be analysed not only with regard to language-switching and -mixing, as Sebba proposes, but also with regard to the use of different scripts. We can thus analyse script–content relationships, script–spatial relationships, and script-mixing types in the same way. Furthermore, the addition of a language–script relationship is in order (i.e., what script(s) are used for what language(s)?).

A second modification regards the types of texts identified among the possible language–content relationships. While Sebba defines texts where different languages convey the same content as *equivalent*, I prefer the term *duplicating*; and instead of *disjoint*, I use the term *complementary* (following Reh 2004). Further, I divide the category of *overlapping* texts into two subgroups, *identical* and *equivalent* overlapping texts. In identical overlapping texts, content repeated in different languages or scripts is translated literally or transliterated, respectively. In equivalent overlapping texts, content repeated in different languages or scripts is conveyed through different wordings or formulae. An example of an identical overlapping text containing transliterated content is the aforementioned grave slab from Ugglum churchyard, where the commemorative formula ‘Reginmóð had the monument made over Gunnarr, son of Ásbjörn’, is carved in both runes and Roman letters.

17 Instead of the terms *equivalent* and *disjoint* used by Sebba (2013), the terms *duplicating* and *complementary* will be employed in what follows; see below.

18 The variable of language-mixing type is in some ways akin to the categorization of different types of code-switching, e.g., inter-sentential and intra-sentential. A difference between these concepts and Sebba’s framework is that he also includes switching between or within non-grammatical units. He envisions three units of analysis: “(a) grammatical units (e.g., sentences, morphemes), (b) genre-specific units relevant to textual structure and cohesion (e.g., paragraphs, headings) and (c) visual/spatial units (e.g., column, box, frame)” (Sebba 2013: 106). Obviously, both the genre-specific and the visual/spatial units need to be identified in the context of the particular type of material being studied, but an important point that Sebba (2013: 98–99) makes is that categories developed for spoken code-switching are not necessarily useful or sufficient for studying written multilingualism, and that analyses of written multilingualism need to take into account its specificities, for instance its visual aspects.

An example of an equivalent overlapping text is another Swedish funerary inscription, from Sjögerås (Vg 131), now lost, where the commemorative section in the vernacular and runes contains only the name of the deceased, Þórðr, while the corresponding part in Latin and in the Latin alphabet consists of the formula *HIC IACET THORDO*, ‘Here lies Þórðr’.¹⁹

A third addition to Sebba’s framework is the type of content expressed in different languages or scripts. Whereas a distinction between overlapping texts and complementary texts, for instance, tells us whether part of the content is repeated in two different languages or scripts, a focus on the type of content which is shared or unique can provide clues to the indexical values attached to those languages and scripts. This can be a useful variable, especially when studying formulaic texts, such as funerary inscriptions, which have recurring parts with specific contents and purposes, e.g., formulae commemorating the deceased or celebrating the sponsor, prayers and invocations, datings, signatures of the inscriber, and so on (see Section 4).²⁰

Fourth, the factors “script” and “language” are understood here not only in the sense of the graphic form of the writing system used and the idiom employed, but also as subsuming features connected to scripts and languages which are susceptible to influence in a contact situation. We should thus include two other types of relationship in the analysis, i.e., those between different scripts and between different languages. Influence in the relationship between scripts – “interscriptal relationships” – can be observed in, for instance, the shape of written signs, both in their distinctive traits and in smaller details of execution. The common linguistic levels central to studies of language contact, i.e., syntax, lexicon, morphology, and phonology, can be grouped under the umbrella of “interlingual relationships”. In addition to these levels, I also include variables pertaining specifically to written language. Particularly relevant for the study of Scandinavian bilingual and biscriptal inscriptions are influences that affect the writing systems involved, their grapho-phonological correspondences and spelling practices, as well as textual features such as the composition of monumental inscriptions and the formulae chosen. Such

¹⁹ Reh (2004: 12–14, 16 Table 10) makes a similar distinction between two types of overlapping texts: one akin to my equivalent overlapping texts, where “the notional content of the texts in the different languages is identical, although their pragmatic form and, hence, their interpersonal meaning is not” (Reh 2004: 12), and a second type consisting of exact translations. In practice, this second type does not necessarily equate to literal, word-for-word translations, which I categorize as identical overlapping texts.

²⁰ An idea related to this is that of systematically analysing multilingual phenomena in specific genres or text types, something that McDonald (2017), for instance, emphasizes. But more specific attention to the languages and scripts being used for different types of content, even within a given genre, can lead to more nuanced observations on the indexicality of languages and scripts.

elements, which developed over time within a certain written culture, can be transferred to another written culture when the two meet and mix together.

An overview of the relationships between language, script, content, and layout included in the proposed framework is given in Table 1. Table 2 gives an overview of the types of content arrangement in bilingual and biscriptal inscriptions.

Some of the parameters described above – e.g., palaeographic and textual influence – can in theory also be grouped together as forms of epigraphic influence. For instance, in a study on language contact in the Iberian Peninsula, Simkin (2012) includes among the indirect sources for language contact those pertaining to epigraphy, such as various influences of one script on another, changes in grapho-phonological correspondences, the use of abbreviations, and the adoption of certain formulae (Simkin 2012: 90–96). In and of themselves, different groupings of such features have no bearing on the outcome of the analysis, but one can nonetheless observe that some of these phenomena might reflect an influence between handwritten texts and epigraphic ones, rather than between epigraphic traditions. A Scandinavian example of this would be the use of standard salutation formulae, originating in charters handwritten in the Latin alphabet, that were employed in business-related texts carved in runes on small pieces of wood (see e.g., Schulte 2012

Table 1: Overview of the relationships between languages, scripts, content, and layout included in the proposed methodological framework.

Type of relationship	Questions addressed
Language/script–content relationship	How is content arranged across languages and scripts? What kind of content is expressed in one or the other language or script?
Language/script–spatial relationship	How are languages and scripts arranged visually in relation to one another?
Language/script-mixing type	Do language and script switches appear within grammatical, textual, or visual units?
Language–script relationship	Which script(s) is used for which language(s)?
Interlingual relationship	Are there signs of influence between languages?
Interscriptal relationship	Are there signs of influence between scripts?

Table 2: Types of content arrangement in bilingual and biscriptal inscriptions.

Type of text	Duplicating	Overlapping ^a	Complementary
Type of content arrangement	Languages/scripts A and B share all content.	Languages/scripts A and B share part of the content.	Languages/scripts A and B convey distinct contents.

^aOverlapping texts can consist of identical or equivalent translations.

for examples). Features that are more specifically epigraphic include the material aspects of the inscriptions, e.g., the carving technique or the way the writing surface was prepared, as well as variables that belong broadly to the writing culture or even to “more general cultural influence” (Simkin 2012: 91), such as domains of literacy as well as types of inscriptions and artefacts.

3.2 From categorizing to interpreting bilingualism and biculturality

Crucial for the relevance of the framework described above is the fact that the variation that can be captured can be interpreted both in terms of literacy and as having a sociolinguistic function. For example, the amount and type of content expressed in different languages and scripts can give us insights into their functional distribution. Their visual arrangement can provide clues about their status relative to one another. Orthographic and palaeographic choices can be seen as having a social meaning and a role in the manifestation of identity. However, the interpretation of the features analysed is not always straightforward.

Several interpretative models of language contact in modern and historical times have been proposed, seeking to connect the presence of a certain type of multilingual text to individual and societal bilingual proficiency. For example, Reh (2004: 16, Figure 10) connects duplicating multilingual texts to individual monolingualism (or insufficient multilingualism) and societal bilingualism, while she sees complementary texts as a sign of both individual and societal multilingualism.²¹ Such interpretations take into account what Reh (2004: 8) terms the *technical* aspect of communication, i.e., that related to language proficiency. At the same time, however, there is also an *affective* aspect (Reh 2004: 8–9) pertaining to the identity and status of different linguistic communities. A given duplicating text may thus not only have been produced to respond to communicative needs and to readers’ proficiency, but also to signal equality between the languages used.²² On a similar note, Sebba (2013) remarks that multilingual texts may reflect not only writers’ and readers’ language competence, but also the relative status, actual or aspired to, of the languages used. It could be added that multilingual texts need not attest to writers’ and readers’ language competence at all. Drawing on their own and others’ research on modern and historical multilingualism, Pavlenko and Mullen (2015: 124–128) remind us that varying motivations can lie behind language choices, and that they

21 For models of language contact in classical times, see e.g., Mullen (2012, 2013) and McDonald (2015, 2017).

22 See also Spolsky (2009: 33–34) and Spolsky and Cooper (1991: 74–94).

may reflect writers' aspirations rather than readers' actual proficiency, or even stem from an intention to exclude certain groups of readers. In the Scandinavian runic corpus from the high and late Middle Ages, several examples of inscriptions in barely understandable Latin bear witness to the fact that inscribers' lack of Latin proficiency was not a hindrance to choosing that language, and that the linguistic correctness of texts was not always a goal.²³

It is difficult to establish a one-to-one correspondence between different types of bilingual texts on the one hand and the level of bilingual competence among writers and readers or the indexical values attributed to the languages in question on the other. Nonetheless, the diversity of the variables considered, the interdisciplinary approach, and comparisons within the corpus and with related phenomena in other corpora can still allow us to refine and advance our understanding of the relationship between the vernacular and Latin written cultures in medieval Scandinavia.

In the next section, I will use a funerary inscription from late medieval Sweden as a case study to illustrate the type of analysis described above, as well as the results it can yield. It is true that considering a wider range of material would allow us to identify patterns against which we could compare individual inscriptions, but this kind of comprehensive analysis falls outside the scope of the present article. Such an analysis is undertaken elsewhere (Palumbo forthcoming), and observations made there on the basis of all bilingual and biscriptal funerary inscriptions of medieval Scandinavia are referred to in the conclusions drawn below.

4 Language/script-mixing in medieval Sweden: a bilingual and biscriptal epigraph from Ukna church

In the church of Ukna, in the southern Swedish province of Småland, a grave slab has been found that bears an inscription consisting of Latin, vernacular, Roman letters, and runes (Sm 145; Figure 1). The monument has been dated to the late thirteenth

²³ Other examples of this phenomenon are the non-lexical runestone inscriptions from the late Viking Age (see Bianchi 2010, Ch. 5). These are found on runestones that in most respects follow the conventions for the runestone genre, e.g., when it comes to the material, the design of the texts, and the ornamentation. They look just like other runestones, with the difference that their texts consist of sequences of runes and rune-like signs that do not convey any lexical meaning (they do convey meaning, of course, just through different semiotic resources, for instance by using the same visual grammar as lexically meaningful runestones).



Figure 1: Grave slab from Ukna church (Sm 145), Sweden, with an inscription in Old Swedish (runes) and Latin (runes and Roman letters).

century or the beginning of the fourteenth century. Nothing is known about the person commemorated, apart from the scanty information given by the inscription itself.²⁴

+ HIC : IACET : TURGILLUS : + **hærræ : gunmundæ : sun : gas : gak : ei : fra : stat : o^ˆk : sia : o^ˆk : læsin : iðrær : bønir : firi : þyrhilsær : siæl : a:ve : ma:ria : grazzia : ple:na : do:mi:nus : te:kum : benedikta : tu in mulieribus : æð benediktus : fruktus væntris : tui : amn : in manus tuas : d**

HIC IACET TURGILLUS, Hærra Gunnmundar sunn Gäs. Gakk ei frá, statt ok sé ok lesin iðrar bønir fyrir Þörgilsar siäl. Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum. Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui. Amen. In manus tuas D[omine].

²⁴ The Roman letters are transcribed in SMALL CAPITALS, the runes are transliterated in **bold**. A circumflex between two runes, e.g., o^ˆk, indicates a ligature. A normalized text in Latin and Old Swedish is also provided.

'HERE LIES TURGILLUS, son of master Gunnmundr Gás. Do not go from here, stay and look (at this monument) and read your prayers for the soul of Þórgíls. Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum. Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui. Amen. In manus tuas D[omine].'

The inscription starts at the top of the slab with a commemorative formula in Latin and Roman letters. After a double switch of language and alphabet, it then continues down the right-hand side, where it both gives additional information about the commemorated person and asks readers to say their prayers for his soul. After yet another change in language, a prayer is inscribed in Latin and runes. It does not follow directly after the exhortation to readers but is placed instead in a separate visual unit that starts at the top of the left-hand side, reads downwards, and continues around along the bottom side of the slab.

What do the language and script choices, the visual, textual, and orthographic conventions, used in this inscription say about the literacy of the author, inscriber, and intended readers? What clues does this inscription give us about the functions and status attributed to the two written traditions?

4.1 Language/script–content relationship

A first clue to the language and script proficiency of the composer, the inscriber, and the expected readers is provided by the relationship between language, script, and content. The inscription from Ukna is an example of an almost totally complementary text, i.e., the content given in the two languages and scripts is almost unique to those languages and scripts. The only element that is repeated in both languages and alphabets is the name of the commemorated person, mentioned once in Latin and Roman letters after *hic iacet*, and a second time in Old Swedish and runes in the exhortation to the reader.

The complementarity of this text, and the basic fact that two languages and two scripts are used, would suggest an author or inscriber who, to some degree, had to be bilingual and biscriptal, and also a model reader who was able to understand both languages and scripts. The degree of the composer's or inscriber's competence is hard to assess from this one inscription, as the sequence in Roman letters is very short and the Latin text is formulaic. However, we can note that the Latin parts, even when carved following runic writing conventions (see Section 4.4 below), are rendered without mistakes, which suggests a familiarity with liturgical Latin. As to the readers, their bilingual and biscriptal proficiency is even harder to evaluate, since, as previously noted, bilingual texts are not always motivated by the wish to communicate *through lexical means* with a bilingual audience, something that I will return to in Section 4.2.

4.1.1 Language/script choices for different types of content

Two factors important for evaluating literacy and the social functions connected to different languages and scripts are the amount and type of content they convey. In the inscription from Ukna, the Roman letters convey a much smaller amount of content compared to the runes, but they are used for two fundamental elements of a funerary inscription, namely the commemorative formula and the name of the deceased. From this perspective, one might argue that the Roman alphabet has an important communicative function here, which may shed light on biscriptal proficiency in this community and on the status given to Roman script. At the same time, it is the runes that convey the majority of the content, including (again) the name of the commemorated person. The information that monoscriptal readers miss is therefore only that Þórgíls was lying under the stone, which should have been obvious from the context anyway.

I mentioned above that the name of the commemorated person is the only piece of content that is repeated in both the Latin text in the Roman alphabet and in the vernacular text in runes. Names are particularly good examples of the fact that language choices can be motivated by issues related to identity in addition to – or rather than – language proficiency. In the inscription from Ukna, the name *Þórgíls* appears in both a Latinized and a vernacular form, which may be a telling clue about how he (or perhaps those who commemorated him) perceived and wished to present himself and his belonging to a certain cultural or social group, without necessarily saying anything about his language competences.

Studying what types of content are conveyed only in the vernacular and/or only in runes can also add to our understanding of their status and functions as language and script. Here, I mainly want to highlight three elements: the familial relation, the injunction to readers, and the prayer.

In the older Viking-Age runic tradition, the formula that opened the vast majority of the roughly 3,000 memorial inscriptions carved on runestones indicated the sponsor(s), the commemorated person(s), and their familial relation to the sponsor. This was done according to an almost standardized pattern, i.e., “[sponsor] had this stone erected in memory of [commemorated person], his/her [form of kinship]”.²⁵ In contrast to this, the expression of kinship was often not included in the high and late medieval epigraphic tradition, neither in runes nor in Roman letters. In the Ukna inscription, this compositional element is partly replaced by the *hic iacet* formula (see Section 4.4 for more on this) and it is not clear whether the father of the

25 Although the overall structure of this commemorative formula remained stable, the elements of the verbal phrase could vary. For example, verbs like ‘make’ and ‘carve’ could be used instead of ‘erect’, and words like ‘runes’ and ‘monument’ could be used instead of ‘stone’.

commemorated person was also the commissioner of the monument. However, the relation between the two is still conveyed in runes in the vernacular. This may have had communicative reasons, meaning that the sequence conveying the familial relationship, like most content in this text, was worded in such a way that it would reach the largest possible readership in the community. But it may also have been a way of connecting to the native runic memorial tradition, where the expression of kinship was an integral part of the inscriptions. Moreover, mentioning the familial relationship may also have been a way of highlighting local ties.²⁶ All these three elements – the inclusion of a wider readership, the connection to a native memorial tradition, and the evocation of a local family bond – could point towards the runes and the vernacular having the function of indexing local identity and community belonging.

The second textual element relevant in this context is the injunction to readers. When the inscription addresses them directly and asks them to read their prayers, it does so in the vernacular and in runes, which is a pattern evident in other Scandinavian bilingual and biscriptal funerary inscriptions (Palumbo forthcoming). This kind of request to readers to read, say, or sing a prayer does not occur in the older Viking-Age runic inscriptions, and its presence cannot be explained as a trait inherited from the epigraphic tradition. In this case, it seems reasonable to explain the choice of language and script as being intended to ensure the accessibility of the content to as many readers as possible.

Something similar can be noted regarding the prayer which ends this inscription. Like all prayers in medieval Scandinavian bilingual and biscriptal funerary inscriptions (Palumbo forthcoming) – in fact in runic inscriptions in general (Kleivane 2020: 237; Zilmer 2013: 150) – it is inscribed in Latin. In this case, the Latin prayer is inscribed in runes. On the one hand, this highlights the connection between Latin and religion in such inscriptions. On the other hand, the choice of runes may, as in the case of the injunction, have been motivated by the wish for it to be readable for as many people as possible. The choice of runes in the injunction to readers and in the prayer suggests that the runic alphabet had an important communicative function, and that it may have served to enable performance as well, allowing those who could read runes but were not proficient in the Latin alphabet to recite the prayer for the soul of the commemorated person.²⁷

²⁶ Expression of kinship seems to be one of the functions that are predominantly connected to the vernacular and runes in bilingual and biscriptal funerary inscriptions (Palumbo forthcoming).

²⁷ This performance-related aspect of the runes might be supported by the orthophonic way in which the prayer in runic Latin was spelled, i.e., reflecting the local pronunciation of Latin (see Section 4.4).

4.2 Language/script-mixing type

Another trait of this inscription that might suggest it was composed with a bilingual and biscriptal model reader in mind is the type of language/script-mixing, which is here partly bilingual and biscriptal. The first switch from Latin to Old Swedish and from Roman letters to runes happens inside a single sentence: ‘HERE LIES TURGILLUS, son of master Gunnmundr Gás’. The switch is not marked in the linguistic structure of the sentence; instead, it is marked visually both by the presence of one of the two crosses that frame the Roman letters, and by the change of the side on which the inscription is carved. The change from Latin to vernacular is, moreover, underlined visually by the change from letters to runes. The second language switch, on the other hand, from Old Swedish to the Latin prayer, takes place between separate grammatical and visual units.

Although the language/script–content relationship covered in Section 4.1 and the type of language/script-mixing attested on the monument from Ukna allow us to envision a reader with bilingual and biscriptal competencies, there are some additional caveats to take into account. Some frequent Latin words or formulae, such as the prayer *Ave Maria*, might have been memorized without necessarily presupposing any knowledge of the language, and when such words were carved in Roman letters they might have been recognized visually even by illiterate readers (Kleivane 2018). Perhaps more importantly, the choice of languages and scripts in a public text is not always motivated by the linguistic skills of the majority of readers, as already mentioned in Section 3. When it comes to the readers of the inscription from Ukna, although they must have been a varied group, it is safe to assume that many of them had limited literacy in any language and script, particularly in Latin and Roman letters.

This highlights the fact that the meaning conveyed by an inscription is not limited to its lexical content. Languages and scripts in themselves convey indexical values that those who produce such texts can exploit to both present their identity and frame their environment.²⁸ In order to do so, writers do not necessarily need to master the relevant languages and alphabets. Readers do not necessarily need to understand a text’s lexical meaning fully either in order to identify its indexical meaning. This is true for both modern and historical multilingual texts.²⁹

To pinpoint what indexical values may have been attributed to the vernacular, runes, Latin, and Roman script in Scandinavian epigraphy, a comprehensive study of their use in inscriptions from various contexts and times is needed. In Section 4.1.1,

²⁸ See e.g., Ben-Rafael et al. (2006).

²⁹ See e.g., Coulmas (2009: 17–19), Kelly-Holmes (2000: 71), and Mullen (2012: 4). See also the example of non-lexical runestone inscriptions (Bianchi 2010, Ch. 5) mentioned in Footnote 23.

I highlighted some of these functions when covering the types of content expressed in different languages and scripts. The vernacular and the runes may have indexed local identity and community belonging. Where Latin and the Roman alphabet are concerned, it appears that they indexed, among other things, religion and religious authority, learned and literate culture, secular administration and power, and internationalism in many bilingual and biscriptal funerary inscriptions (Palumbo forthcoming); some of these values must have been apparent not only to the author of the Ukna inscription and its more educated readership, but also, at least to some extent, to those readers who did not have the language and script proficiency required to access the lexical content of the text.

4.3 Language/script–spatial relationship

Another important aspect of a public bilingual and biscriptal text such as the Ukna inscription is its visuality. In this case, the languages and scripts display an asymmetrical arrangement. One thing that may immediately catch the modern eye's attention is the amount of space given to the runes, which occupy the majority of the carving surface. What must have caught the local medieval eye's attention, however, is the presence of Roman letters, placed prominently at the top of the slab, at the beginning of the inscription and framed by crosses. In twelfth- and thirteenth-century Sweden, the use of Roman letters in monumental inscriptions was still a rare phenomenon compared to the use of runes, and it must have stood out in the linguistic landscape of the time. Both the layout and the textual structure suggest, then, that the Roman letters, in this particular case, were accorded a higher symbolic status than the runes.

4.4 Compositional elements, spelling conventions, and palaeographic traits

Another way of evaluating the relative status of and possible influence between the two written traditions is to look at the choices made regarding textual formulae, spelling conventions, and palaeographic features.

In a formulaic genre like the funerary inscriptions, a study of the textual and compositional elements can be particularly fruitful. In Section 4.1.1, I already touched on this level of analysis when discussing the commemorative formula and expression of kinship. Here, I want to highlight an additional point regarding the commemorative formula. The phrase *hic iacet* was completely absent from the older Viking-Age runic memorial inscriptions. Under the influence of Latin epigraphic

conventions, it started appearing in the vernacular form *hēr ligger* ‘here lies’ in runic inscriptions from the twelfth century on.³⁰ The vernacular “here lies” formula was sometimes used as an alternative to the aforementioned traditional commemorative formula widely employed on virtually all eleventh-century runestones: “[sponsor] had this stone erected in memory of [commemorated], his/her [kinship relation]”. While the use of *hēr ligger*, ‘here lies’, is a sign of influence from Latin epigraphy, it would in itself not have been surprising if found in a runic inscription from the late thirteenth century. But it is plausible that the choice to maintain the wording in Latin and Roman letters in the inscription from Ukna marks a wish by the inscriber (or someone else involved in the production of this text) to identify themselves with the Latin epigraphic tradition, rather than following the older runic conventions or adapting them to the new Latin-influenced customs.

Other clues on the interplay between the Latin and runic traditions can be found in the orthographic conventions used in this memorial. Apart from the mixing of languages and scripts, we can also see a mixing of orthographic practices. On the one hand, the runic text shows some conventions which have been borrowed from Latin written culture, most notably the double-spelling of long consonants. Spellings like **hærræ** for *herra* ‘master’ were not used in runic writing in earlier periods, but they appear increasingly often during the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. On the other hand, the Latin text in runes presents a series of spellings which are typical of the runic conventions and which render the local pronunciation of Latin rather than following a more literate norm. For instance, the Latin conjunction *et* is rendered in runes as **æð**, where **æ** is normally used for an open-mid front unrounded vowel [ɛ], and **ð** is a rarely used rune for a voiced dental fricative (much more commonly rendered by the rune used for its unvoiced counterpart, i.e., **þ**, which marks the lenition of /t/ in word-final position, a development attested in medieval Latin outside of Scandinavia as well; Stotz 1996: 228–229). Another example is a rare type of *n*-rune which is almost exclusively used for the phoneme /n/ either when it is long or when it precedes a dental consonant.³¹ In this inscription, we find it transliterated with a small capital **n**, for instance in the word **ventris ventris**.

Such orthophonic spellings of Latin words are generally interpreted as signs of deficient schooling in Latin, and that the author or inscriber who produced them had acquired their Latin skills by ear (see e.g., Knirk 1998: 490–491; but see Steenholt Olesen 2021: 98–101 for a partly different explanation, and a bigger emphasis on sociolinguistic aspects of runic Latin). But this might not always be the case, and it is

³⁰ The introduction of this new formula must partly also be connected to a change in the function of the rune carved monuments, as Viking-Age runestones were cenotaphs, hence not necessarily marking the presence of any grave, while the wording “here lies” was used on medieval grave slabs.

³¹ See e.g., Palumbo (2020: 208–210).

definitely not the only conceivable explanation. Orthophonic spellings of Latin words written in runes do not just appear in texts where other, clearer signs of a lack of schooling in Latin or in Latin writing conventions are evident, such as the presence of spelling mistakes or sequences that are so corrupt that they should more appropriately be labelled as pseudo-Latin. On the contrary, the orthophonic spellings also appear in runic inscriptions that show a good command of liturgical Latin, the influence of Latin writing conventions (like the double-spelling of long consonants), and a high overall level of literacy (Palumbo 2022). In these instances, such spellings might be due to the fact that the inscribers had learned the Latin they needed through the use of the runic writing system rather than through the Latin one, or that they were aware of the spelling practices and conventions used in both writing systems but chose to stick with the runic ones even when carving in Latin.

The inscription from Ukna is a case in point. Its composer and/or inscriber shows not only a very good command of the runic writing system, but also competence in Latin and in the Roman alphabet. Moreover, they distinguish clearly between the orthographic conventions employed in the two written traditions. The Latin in runes is faultless, apart from the orthophonic spellings mentioned above. On the other hand, such spellings are absent from the Latin written with Roman letters. For example, the fricative allophone of /g/, [ɣ], is in medieval runic inscriptions normally rendered with an *h*-rune, as in the genitive form of the name *Þórgíls*, i.e., *Þórgílsar*, rendered here as **þyrhilsær**. In Roman letters, the same name is written TURGILLUS, i.e., with a *g*. Also, the differentiation between the velar stop [k] and the affricate [ts] (or perhaps the fricative [s]) is represented orthographically in the runic inscription by the use of different runes, as in **tekum** *tecum* and **grazzia** *gratia*, whereas no such distinction is made between HIC and IACET. Given these differences, it is even more striking that this inscriber not only does not follow a more literate norm in the Latin in runes, which they could have done, but also employs rare runic innovations – the aforementioned runes **ð** and **ɴ** – that do not have any counterpart in the contemporary Latin-alphabet inscriptions, which makes the choice of them appear very deliberate. A possibility that was hinted at before (see Footnote 27) is that these orthophonic spellings of Latin passages may have had a performance-related purpose, allowing those who could not read Roman letters or Latin to say the prayer nevertheless, simply by reading the runes.

The Ukna inscription thus shows a consciousness in the choice of writing conventions that speaks against deficient literacy skills. On the contrary, choices such as those made here can be interpreted as having a pragmatic and communicative function, and a social function as well, playing a role in manifesting the identity of the composer, the inscriber, or the commemorated person. Rather than blending the conventions of two written traditions, and perhaps adapting the runic ones to the

Latin ones, the inscriber uses them both in a parallel fashion when deemed appropriate to what they wanted to convey.

Lastly, a few brief observations can be made about the palaeographic traits in this inscription. One regards the shape of the Roman letters, which appears to be slightly less uniform than other late medieval biscriptal inscriptions – and maybe even more so when compared to Latin monoscriptal epigraphs – for instance with regard to height, spacing, and placing in the frame.³² Conversely, the runes are quite uniformly inscribed. This difference may indicate that the inscriber was more accustomed to carving runes than Roman letters. Moreover, the runes do not show any sign of palaeographic influence from the Latin alphabet, for instance with respect to their shape or ornamental details such as serifs.³³ This lack of influence on the palaeographic level indicates a high degree of independence in the runic epigraphic tradition, more than two hundred years after the introduction of Latin epigraphy in Scandinavia.

5 Conclusion

In this article, I have argued for the importance of a systematic study of bilingual and biscriptal inscriptions for our understanding of the development of literacy in medieval Scandinavia and of its diglossic and digraphic character. While the relationship between manuscript culture and epigraphic tradition is an essential aspect of this – and indeed an under-studied one – the value of investigating domains in which Latin, vernacular, runes, and the Roman alphabet intersected cannot be ignored. These intersections should be studied with an eye to both bilingual and biscriptal proficiency, and to what they index in terms of status, identities, and social functions. Interdisciplinary methods bringing together historical linguistics, epigraphy, and modern sociolinguistic approaches to written multilingualism can add analytical and interpretative depth to this endeavour. I have proposed one possible way of investigating bilingual and biscriptal (Scandinavian) epigraphs, which revolves around the relationships between language, script, content, and layout. An example of the application of such a framework has been provided in the analysis of the Swedish inscription from Ukna church.

³² It can be noted, incidentally, that the Roman letters on the grave slab from Ukna are nevertheless much more regularly inscribed than in many other high and late medieval biscriptal inscriptions.

³³ In general, Latinized rune forms are very rare, even in the late Middle Ages. The addition of serifs to runes is also uncommon, although examples do occur. See, for example, Palumbo (2020: Ch. 3) on the rune forms used in the medieval Swedish runic inscriptions, as well as Imer (2017: 43) and Spurkland (1991: 72) for possible examples of rune shapes inspired by Roman letters.

The study of this epigraph has illustrated how aspects of literacy and language and script proficiency interplay with issues of status, indexical values, and identity. When analyses of language- and script-switching, choice of formulae, and orthographic and epigraphic conventions focus only on inscribers' and readers' competence, they give at best a partial explanation for such phenomena, and potentially even a misleading one, as shown above by the remarks on orthophonic spellings of Latin words. Instead, a sociolinguistic perspective on these inscriptions gives us the possibility of also understanding how commissioners and inscribers presented and positioned themselves in times of cultural change and changing writing practices. This also shows that a comprehensive and multifaceted study of such texts constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for understanding bilingualism and biscriptality in medieval Scandinavia, as well as the relationship between the Latin and vernacular written cultures.

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