The medieval roots of antisemitism in Sweden

Old Swedish and Latin manuscript traditions

Cordelia Heß

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
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Abstract • The lack of a local Jewish community did not prevent medieval Swedish clerics and lay people from being interested in Jews and Jewish questions. They bought, translated, read and preached from most of the available textual sources and thus spread the widely available views of the hermeneutical Jew: a cruel, stubborn and ugly person and at the same time a cipher for the entire Jewish people both in biblical times and today. This article gives an overview of the Latin and vernacular manuscripts with anti-Jewish motifs and texts and shows that the main and most common textual models and motifs were available in Swedish libraries and collections, from legends via apocryphal texts to fake disputations – adding up to a relatively complete 'hermeneutical Jew'. A focus was, as in the rest of Europe, on Passion-related piety, which was the most common form of piety in the late Middle Ages – and usually connected with distinct anti-Jewish features. The fact that we can establish direct and indirect textual and narrative lines of tradition between the medieval codices and modern printed booklets of the nineteenth century proves the long-lasting intelligibility of anti-Jewish stereotypes in Sweden – developed and spread completely independently from the Jewish minority. The medieval perspective thus adds a much-needed nuance to the debate about antisemitism in the North: it did not need any actual Jews; it simply made up its own, based on the general Christian tradition.

Introduction

In Scandinavia, research into antisemitism has often been closely connected with the history of Jewish communities. Given their relatively late arrival in the North, in Sweden only after 1782, this history has been a short one.[1] But antisemitic texts and images have always lived a life independent of people of Jewish faith. All over Europe, they spread with the consolidation of Christianity and Latin literacy and book culture. Even in Scandinavia, Christian texts (and images) of Jews were distributed, read and preached, both in the vernacular and in Latin. Even though the transmission of medieval manuscripts from Scandinavia is fragmented and disrupted by the Reformation, fires and the dissolution of collections, it is useful to map the extent of extant anti-Jewish manuscripts as well as their range in terms of text genres, authors and content. This does not give an exact image of the spread and acceptance of anti-Jewish imagery in medieval Scandinavia, but it facilitates understanding of the deep foundations and long historical roots of later forms of antisemitism.

1 I would like to thank Julie Mell and the participants of the North Carolina Jewish Studies Seminar for valuable feedback on an earlier version of this article.

The present article focuses on the medieval manuscripts in Swedish libraries and archives both in Latin and in Old Swedish / East Norse which contained anti-Jewish texts. For the majority of this material, it is possible to establish when the books came to Sweden, that is, whether their content can have been known in medieval Sweden, or whether they were part of the comprehensive war booty of the seventeenth century and thus not part of the medieval local tradition; the latter will not be part of this investigation.[2]

Considering the fragmented character of both the Latin and the vernacular manuscript collections, it is not possible to estimate the actual number and dispersal of anti-Jewish texts used and copied in medieval Sweden. It is, however, possible to conclude that within the surviving collections, all major text genres are represented and thereby also all major anti-Jewish figures of thought.

The bulk of the surviving manuscripts comes from the Birgittine monastery of Vadstena – partly because it had an extensive book collection and engaged in a comprehensive production of sermons in the Middle Ages, but partly also because its collections remained relatively intact after the Reformation, compared to other monastic libraries.[3] To conclude that Vadstena was the main centre of anti-Jewish book production and reception would thus be wrong, even though most of the surviving evidence stems from there.

In Sweden, a surprising number of medieval model texts were used until the nineteenth century and printed in modern Sweden in different contexts between 1800 and 1900. The significance of this for the genesis of modern antisemitism has not yet been sufficiently acknowledged.

Medieval manuscript collections in Sweden

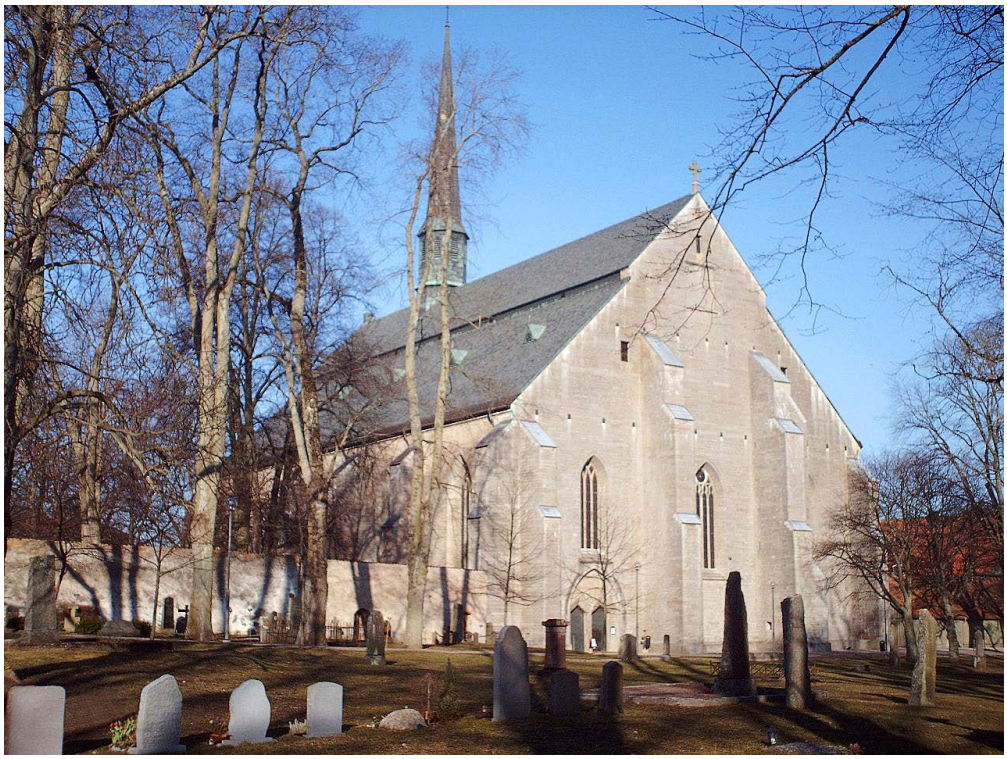
During the Middle Ages, every bishopric and monastery would have had its own library and archive. Books were circulated and copied and also sold to lay people, donated within wills and brought to monasteries at entry.[4] Compared to this originally widespread book use, the surviving collections are meagre, predominantly from Vadstena monastery and, to a much lesser extent, Skokloster and the Franciscan convent in Stockholm. We have no means of reconstructing episcopal libraries, the libraries from other monasteries or private secular libraries.[5] Thus, the contexts of book ownership and usage we can reconstruct are almost exclusively monastic, which has a number of consequences for the interpretation of the corpus: first, the difference between Latin and vernacular books is not as great

2 A similar investigation for Norwegian collections should be possible relatively easily as well, while the Danish collections require much more research regarding when they have arrived in the North.

3 Vadstena Abbey was in use from 1346 until 1595, first under the Augustinian rule, then as the motherhouse of the Birgittine order. The monastery was special because it hosted a male and a female branch in the same houses, under the leadership of a prioress, and with the brethren as the spiritual guides for the sisters. Vadstena was from its beginnings favoured by the Swedish royal houses. When all monastic goods were seized by the Swedish crown in the Reformation and the acceptance of new novices was forbidden, Vadstena was exempt from this. See Fritz 2019.

4 For an overview of the medieval libraries and book collections in Sweden see Nordin 2022.

5 In other parts of Europe, there are a number of attempts to reconstruct medieval manuscript libraries, for example the Bibliotheca Laureshamensis of the Lorsch monastery, the Bibliotheca Corvina, library of King Matthias Hunyadi, both available online.



Artifex, Wikimedia Commons

Vadstena Abbey, 2007.

as in continental contexts, where we would assume different audiences for each of these – learned clerical audiences for the Latin texts, lay audiences such as wealthy burghers, some female monastic orders, and particularly the nobility at courts for vernacular texts. Because of the brethren's preaching activity, we can assume that not only the immediate monastic audience participated in the spread and reception of the content. However, both Latin and vernacular texts are preserved only in the monastic context. Second, the types of texts we find are restricted. Religious and religious-didactical texts are overrepresented, while courtly literature and historiographic works are underrepresented. On the other hand, we have a chance to form an overview of the totality of surviving manuscripts, which is impossible in most other areas of Europe.

Traditionally, the boundary between research into vernacular and Latin manuscripts in Scandinavia is very clearly demarcated. Consequently, availability and catalogization of Latin and vernacular manuscripts differ radically, as does the extent of research concerning each of these. While the vernacular manuscripts are considered an important part of national heritage, the Latin ones have not been subject to the same interest. About 250 codices in Old Swedish have survived, and they are the focus of libraries' efforts to digitize and restore, and produce text editions, and thus most of them are readily available. The oldest vernacular books contain law texts from the fourteenth century; the religious material is dominated by the collection in the Vadstena library, some of the codices being produced in Vadstena or bought for the library, while others were brought in by nuns and monks as donations, and thus constitute the closest we can come to an insight into private book ownership in

this region. Many of the oldest manuscripts are not only available in the collections, but also as high-resolution digitized copies freely available online, together with meticulous reconstructions of their provenance.[6]

The Latin manuscripts, primarily in the collections of the Royal Library, Stockholm (KB), and the University Library, Uppsala (UB), have met with much less interest in research and the holding institutions themselves. The manuscript collection at KB Stockholm is dominated by books which have come to the country after the Reformation, their basis is the collection of Antikvitetsarkivet (archive of the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters) which was closed in 1780. KB is in the process of making its medieval collection available via the website manuscripta.se, where around 400 manuscripts are listed, of which 72 are in Latin; the website is under construction and further manuscripts are being added continuously. Strangely, the collection at KB does not have a complete catalogue of its medieval Latin manuscripts following modern standards.

The bulk of surviving Latin medieval manuscripts is contained in the so-called C collection of Uppsala UB, of which a splendid catalogue is available, prepared by Monica Hedlund and Margarete Andersson-Schmitt (*Mittelalterliche Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Uppsala. Katalog über die C-Sammlung*, vols 1–8). It brings together the surviving manuscripts from the Birgittine abbey of Vadstena, the Franciscan convent in Stockholm (21 codices) and the Dominican convent in Sigtuna (also around 20 codices). Of the 770 or so codices in the collection, roughly 50 per cent are of Swedish provenance, the majority of them from Vadstena (Andersson-Schmitt and Hedlund 1988, vol. 1: ix–x). The rest are mostly war booty from the seventeenth century, comprising beautiful medieval manuscripts, for example from the episcopal collections in Frauenburg (Frombork, Prussia) – as mentioned, these will not be taken into consideration for this article.

6 See manuscripta.se: A Digital Catalogue of Medieval and Early Modern Manuscripts in Sweden.

Medieval anti-Judaism: motifs and narratives

On the basis of the available catalogues and previous research, it is possible to create a relatively complete list of the surviving anti-Jewish texts which were used in medieval Sweden. The vernacular texts in Old Swedish have been collected, analysed and edited by Jonathan Adams (2022).

Considering the specificities of the Swedish medieval manuscript collections, the results regarding the representation of anti-Jewish texts in the material are not surprising: Jonathan Adams found evidence in the *Revelationes* of Saint Birgitta, in the Old Swedish translation of the Pentateuch, a collection of translated treatises by Bonaventura, Thomas Aquinas and others, in the Vadstena sermon collections (*Svenska medeltids-postillor*) and in the didactical material (*Fornsvenska legendariet*, *Själens tröst*, *Järteckensbok*, *Jungfruspegel*), the table readings from Vadstena and prayer books. A few of the late medieval historiographic works also contain evidence. Additional evidence is to be found in the Old Danish material, which will not be taken into consideration here.

Regarding the Latin texts, there is no similarly comprehensive overview of the presence of anti-Jewish texts yet. However, the situation is similar and the texts are also more or less identical: sermons and sermon collections, exempla, and legendary material about Judas Iscariot and Pontius Pilate. A

difference in the Latin material is a number of *Adversus Iudaeos* treatises, a text genre common in clerical and monastic contexts but probably not translated into the Swedish vernacular. It is most likely that anti-Jewish passages and stereotypes are also contained in the historiographic works, Bible-related texts such as *glossae*, and treatises in the Latin manuscripts from Sweden, but in view of the level of catalogization, these cannot be assessed completely.

There are also some distinct overlaps between the Latin and the vernacular manuscripts regarding anti-Jewish texts: the *Evangelium Nicodemi* for example was present both in several manuscripts of the C collection in Latin and as a vernacular version (C 225: 17r–32r; C 643: 82v–89r; C 691: 63v–71r).

Jews in medieval Sweden can be analysed from two theoretical perspectives: present absence, and 'the hermeneutical Jew'. Both point to the fact that in the absence of actual Jewish communities, medieval Christians made up comprehensive fantasies of 'the Jew' for various purposes. This 'Jew' was a collective from the theological imagination, grounded in the Church Fathers' works, particularly Augustine's *Adversus Iudaeos* texts, and the Christological Bible exegesis they developed. Central to the development of the hermeneutical Jew was Augustine's idea of witness, founded in his exegesis of Psalm 59:12: 'Slay them not, lest my people forget.' Jews were supposed to live as Jews because they bore witness to the supersession of the Old Covenant by the New Covenant, to the events of Jesus's life on earth, and, testified by the destruction of the Temple, of their own guilt and damnation (see Cluse 2018).

The Augustinian doctrine of witness was in practice partly or completely abandoned as seen by medieval outbreaks of murder, forced conversion and expulsion, but it nevertheless continued to be a point of reference for theological debates. Particularly the Franciscans developed this doctrine into 'the hermeneutical Jew': an imagination of a supra-temporal Jewish collective, bearing combined characteristics from their collective ignorance of the truth of the Gospel as well as their guilt for the torment and killing of Christ – all of these aspects were already present in the writings of the Church Fathers, and Latin Christianity adopted them widely.[7] The 'hermeneutical Jew' was in many cases and for many medieval people the first and only Jew they encountered – this was definitely true for people in Scandinavia.

By the late Middle Ages, Christian antipathy to Jews had developed into an image of Jews as physically and psychologically deviant, hostile, cruel people. The roots of this lay in the theological imagination of Jews as witnesses of the Crucifixion and their own guilt for it, leading to a collectively deviant character, which in the theological imagination consequently also had to be shown in a deviant physiognomy. The motifs of blood-lust, cruelty, stubbornness, lack of trustworthiness and ugliness were widely known and repeated in didactic literature as well as iconography. When Latin Christianity arrived in Sweden, so did the hermeneutical Jew. It was not a 'German invention' brought to the North but a universal feature of Latin Christian doctrine.[8] In this image, religious and racist aspects were bound together, and a growing body of scholarship thus argues against the need for a strict division between antisemitism and anti-Judaism (see for example Soyer 2019).

7 A short overview of this analytical figure and suggestions for further reading can be found in Heß 2023b.

8 For further discussion and literature on this, see Adams 2020.

Sermons and exempla

Sermons and exempla are the most common instances of anti-Jewish motifs in the medieval text corpus, in Sweden and elsewhere. In most medieval composite manuscripts, the two text genres appear side by side; most sermon collections would also contain exempla and vice versa.

A typical example is codex C 342, produced after 1342 and belonging to Vadstena (Andersson-Schmitt and Hedlund 1991, vol. 4: 300). In this codex, *sermones varii* are copied by four different hands, attributed to Armandus de Bellovisu and Pope Clement VI. The first of the Dominican Armandus de Bellovisu's sermons in this manuscript is titled *Sermo de adventu Christi contra Iudaeos*, elaborating on Psalm 117:26, *Benedictus qui venit*. C 342 is a codex with a relatively clear purpose and use: this would have been the typical way for texts to be collected from various models, adopted for the needs of the Vadstena priests and then distributed to local audiences in the form of sermons. Latin or vernacular text use makes little difference here, since it is impossible to reconstruct how Latin and vernacular sermons (and exempla) were used in actual preaching, whether a priest would closely follow the model or, more likely, elaborate on the model with oral variations. Latin model sermons would be read by the priests, but as far as we know, preaching was mostly conducted in the vernacular.[9]

With the examples of modern use of medieval texts in Sweden in mind, *Fornsvenska legendariet* must be named as probably the most influential text model. It is a collection of legends and miracles, based on a model version by Jacobus de Voragine probably in 1264 but copied, translated and adopted in a variety of redactions and traditions all over Europe. In Sweden, both Latin versions, full and fragmented, and a vernacular version were kept in libraries. The 'Golden Legend', also copied as *Passionale*, originally contained 182 legends of saints, telling their stories according to their feast days in the church year. In many local adaptations, saints and legends of local significance were added, and others were left out (Stammler *et al.* 1983: 452–3).

A complete version of the Latin *Legenda aurea* was preserved in Sweden, for example in manuscript C 280 (Northern Germany, fifteenth century), a codex bought by Vadstena.[10] However, the material was also translated. The Old Swedish legendary is transmitted in two main versions: Uppsala UB C 528 (Codex Bildstenianus), produced in Vadstena between 1440 and 1450; and Stockholm KB A 34 (Codex Bureanus), produced in Sweden between 1300 and 1400. The editor of the most recent edition, Per-Axel Wiktorsson, lists several more manuscripts containing parts of the material: Riksarkivet E 8900 'Codex Passionarius' (1450–70); KB Cod. Holm. A 3 'Vår Herres pinobok' (table readings for the sisters in Vadstena, 1502);[11] and three more fragments (Wiktorsson 2020, vol. 1: 12–47). He assumes that the vernacular version was produced in a Dominican convent in Småland or Östergötland and, initially at least, also remained in this setting; however, all of the manuscript versions later than 1370 have a connection to

9 On the theory and practice of medieval sermons in general, see Ohst 2021. See also the examples in Adams and Hanska 2015.

10 Two more complete versions are in C 281 (second half of the fourteenth century, Frauenburg) and C 527 (first half of the fourteenth century, library of Johannes Schefferus, Uppsala), but these can be assumed to have come to Sweden in post-medieval times.

11 Digitally available at manuscripta.se.

Vadstena Abbey. This means that the legends from *Legenda aurea / Passionale* were known in Sweden already in the early fourteenth century in both Latin and the vernacular, and that other versions of it were produced, translated or acquired up to the Reformation – which is not surprising given the popularity of the material in the Middle Ages and its wide range of use in preaching and devotional practices. The Dominican order and Vadstena were the primary, but most likely not the only, settings where it was used. The parallel use of Latin and vernacular versions by the priests in their preaching activities is obvious – thus, the versions in both languages had similar audiences.

The Old Swedish version contained a number of legends with nameless Jewish protagonists. Many of them are set in biblical times or in the first centuries CE, bearing witness to the period when Christianity had to define itself in contrast to Judaism. Already here, the often-invoked connection of Jews and the devil is established and was thus brought to Scandinavia ('The Chains of St Peter', Adams 2022, vol. 2: 760–5).

Many legends and miracles in *Legenda aurea* deal with Jewish conversion to Christianity. In these stories, such as the one about Hermogenes the Sorcerer, Jews discuss with the Apostles and the first Christians the doctrines of Christian faith; many of them convert and others are enraged at this. Descriptions of the fury of the Jewish high priests and their roles in killing the Christian martyrs repeat an already well-exercised narrative pattern about a perceived Jewish anger, hostility and wish to harm Christians.[12]

While these historically set miracles and legends followed the Latin original more or less closely, the Old Swedish legendary also provided a number of original legends independently of any direct text model. Others, also contained in the *Legenda aurea*, brought well-known narratives of Jewish evil to Sweden: the Jews who tried to tip over St Mary's coffin and lost their hands, the Jew who stabbed an icon, the Jewish boy in the oven. In all of these, Jewish evildoers are struck by divine intervention, and conversion is crucial to their salvation. The legends form a common Christian heritage, being widespread all over Europe, told and re-told, sometimes with local peculiarities, and always establishing clear role models: the Virgin Mary as the antagonist who wins over the Jews, conversion as the ultimate goal and only acceptable outcome for Jews.[13]

Also codices composed directly in Vadstena contain sermons with 'Jewish' topics. Examples are Uppsala UB C 3 and C 7, both written in the monastery at the end of the fifteenth century. C 3 has on fol. 104r a short *sermo* on the first Sunday after Easter with the *initium* 'Iudaei nolentes audire veritates de cristo' – the Jews do not want to listen to the truths of Christ. Latin exempla with anti-Jewish topics are, for example, to be found in codex C 9, written in the middle of the fifteenth century in Vadstena by Ericus Simonis, containing both sermon collections and exempla for which a clear text model cannot be identified (Andersson-Schmitt and Hedlund 1989, vol. 1: 113). 'Quidam vero Iudaeus iter faciens nocte superveniente non habens ubi hospitium divertet in quodam templo idolorum se posuit' (fol. 98v) – a Jew slept in an abandoned church at night and saw the sign of the cross appear, this exemplum appears in several versions in this codex and others – typically the exemplum

12 See for example 'St James the Great converts Josiah the Jew', Adams 2022, vol. 2: 723–6.

13 See also Rubin 1999 for examples from outside Scandinavia.

would end with the Jew's conversion or, if he was reluctant, death. A priest saving a Jewish girl who fled her parents is found in C 7, 182r. A Jewish father had a beautiful boy who had Christian friends and took communion with them at Easter (C 270, 2v – written in Vadstena after 1391 by Johannes Präst), a setting which usually ended in the boy's wish to convert, the father's rage and punishment, and the boy being saved by the Virgin Mary: the plot is familiar from the exemplum 'The Jewish boy in the oven', also transmitted in the vernacular (Adams 2022, vol. 2: 983–7).

As these examples show, the sermons and exempla were handed down and copied in the same codices and composite manuscripts, and the stories were similar in Latin and in the vernacular. Given the large collection of exempla and sermons with anti-Jewish topics, particularly in the context of Easter sermons and Passion piety as well as conversion, it comes as no surprise that even the texts available and produced in Sweden in clerical contexts – because these are essentially the only ones we have left – contained a fair share of the usual anti-Jewish content.

These stories with fixed and recurring narrative elements and actors were still popular in nineteenth-century Sweden. *Den lille judegossen som dog i tron på Jesus*, printed in Stockholm in 1876, tells the story of the little Jewish boy Majer, who goes to school with Christian children and starts singing hymns. His grandfather and mother punish him for that, and he dies of diphtheria with the Christian psalm on his lips (Heß 2022: 65).

Passion piety

The typical late-medieval Passion piety is represented in the vernacular material from Sweden as well. *Jungfru Marie besök vid de 15 ställena där Jesus lidit*, handed down in KB A 118 (1450–1500) as well as in KB A 49 (1400–1500), describes in detail the stations of the Passion. These stations were developed from different parts of the Gospels, originally for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Via Dolorosa. Particularly in Franciscan piety from the thirteenth century on, the stations of the cross were also popularized in the form of image cycles in churches and along roads and for everyday devotional practices, and have received a strong canonization in late-medieval Passion piety. Most Catholic churches still today contain the stations of the cross in some form.[14]

The Old Swedish text explicates the suffering of Christ and the main perpetrators: the Jews. They torment, they push away the grieving Mary, they add more and more painful details to the Passion. In its extreme bloody form, this body-centred Passion piety is typical of fifteenth-century Latin Christianity, but aspects of it, for example the focus on blood and suffering, were also integrated into Protestant and Pietist forms of piety and devotion. The Passion-related texts in *Jungfru Marie besök* unsurprisingly present Judas as the evil traitor. The Jews are repeatedly given adjectives such as cruel or vile, for example in the third station of *Jungfru Marie besök*:

> The third place was the garden that is called Gethsemane … Then the evil Jews treated Our Lord cruelly and violently: some pulled his hair, some hit him with their spears and cudgels, some knocked him to the ground, and some tied his hands behind his back as if he were a thief or criminal who could not defend himself.[15]

14 The German Lutheran Church has recently started to develop alternative ways of remembering the Passion of Christ within the framework of a Jewish–Christian dialogue. See Oertel and Koch 2012.

15 'Tridhia stadhin war yrtagardin / som kallas

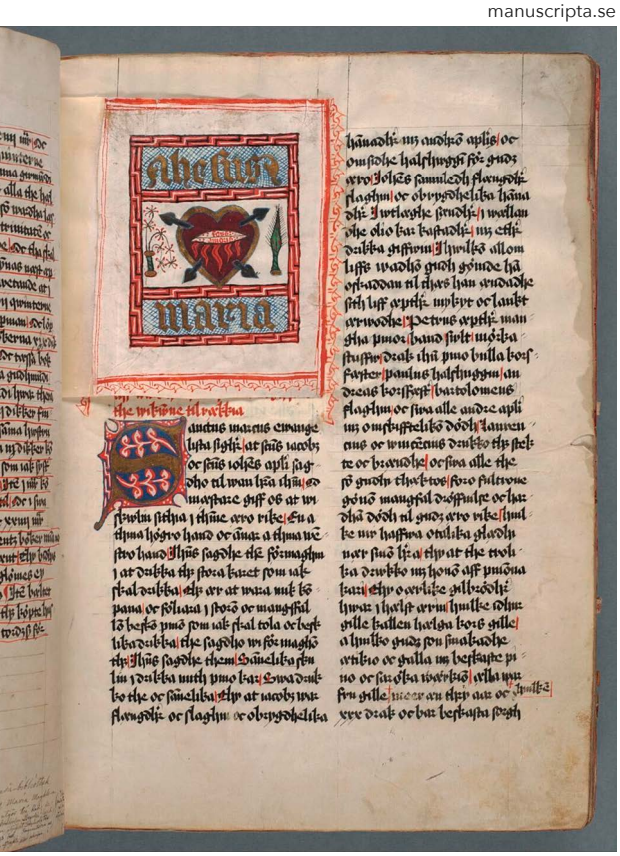


Illustration from A 3, KB, fol. 2r: *Vår Herres pinobok*.

Similar wordings are frequent in sermons on Good Friday (Adams 2022, vol. 2: 567–611).

Passion piety also played a large role in the table readings of Vadstena Abbey, namely, in 'Vår Herres pinobok', a collection of table readings for the sisters from the year 1502, in which parts of *Fornsvenska legendariet* are contained as well as *Evangelium Nicodemi* and various devotional texts about the Passion such as Pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditationes vitae Christi* (KB A1).

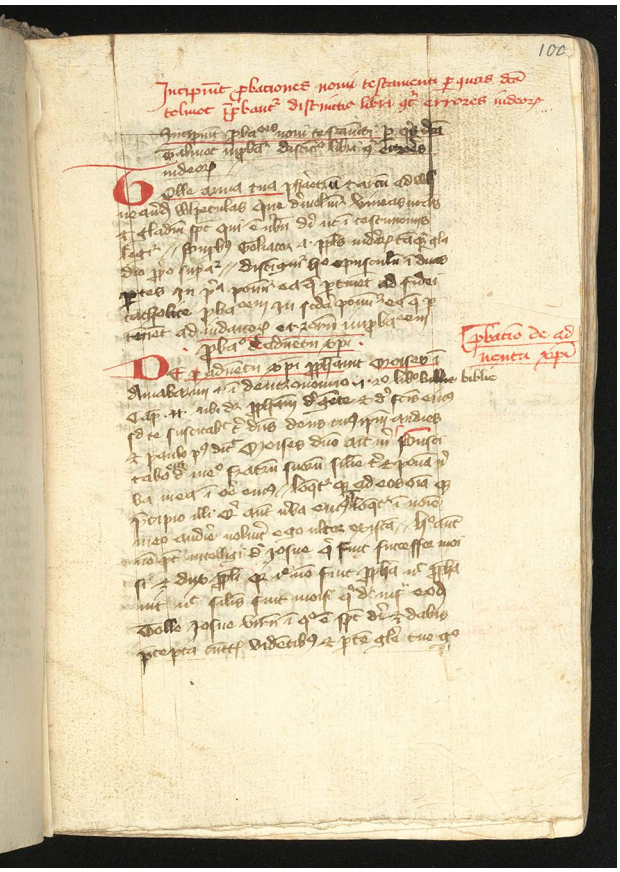
This combination of Passion-related texts is typical for late-medieval devotion and also characteristic of the Mary-centred spirituality of the Birgittine order. Very few of the text examples do without reinforcing the narrative of Jewish guilt for Jesus's death. While the narratives are set in the historical time of the Gospel, they also serve to establish 'the Jews' in the Christian imagination as a supra-temporal collective, bearing collective character traits handed down from their role in the Passion.[16]

> yessemani … Sidhan foro the snødha jwdhernær grymmelica oc osaktelica medh warom herra / somme haardrogho han / somma slogho han medh spiwtom / oc stangom / somma slogho han til iordena / oc somma bakbundo han / som han haffde warit een tiwff eller een ylgerningx man / som ey mottæ sigh ath wærya ….'Adams 2022, vol. 2: 876–7.

Disputations

For obvious reasons, medieval Sweden did not witness any of the popular disputations between Jews and Christians. But in written form, this instrument for humiliating Jews and proving their religion wrong also evoked interest in the North. Vadstena Abbey purchased a manuscript in Constance in the early fifteenth century with composite theological writings, amongst them *Pharetra fidei contra Iudaeos* by Theobaldus de Sexennia (Uppsala UB C 77; the text printed in Wolf 1733: 556–7). This text was popular since the thirteenth century, was produced in connection with the Talmud case in Paris that led to the burning of Jewish books as well as to the development of the image of the 'Talmud Jew', an aspect of the hermeneutical Jew focusing on obedience to an ancient, outdated and cruel law. *Pharetra fidei contra Iudaeos* claims authority, like many anti-Jewish texts, by using quotations from 'Jewish books', and generally maintains an entertaining style (Cardelle de Hartmann

16 Generally on the anti-Jewish implications of medieval Passion piety, see Bale 2012.



C 77, Uppsala UB, fol. 100r: *Pharetra fidei contra Iudaeos.*

2001: 327–49). It is unlikely that the codex was bought precisely to satisfy interest in a fake disputation in Sweden; more probably it was the Birgittine texts that were the original attraction. A note at the beginning claims that a Vadstena brother had bought it during the council in Constance and that his secretary added several pages of excerpts related to the Birgittine order at the end (Andersson-Schmitt and Hedlund 1989, vol. 2: 91). Most of the other texts contained in C 77 are connected to the order as well (excerpts from the *Revelationes* of St Birgitta, the *Regula Salvatoris* and others), so *Pharetra fidei contra Iudaeos* was certainly not the main selling point for the monastery to purchase it.

While this text may have remained in the use of the clerical members of Vadstena Abbey, vernacular versions of disputations were also available in medieval Sweden. *Fornsvenska legendariet* also presents its Swedish audience with a phenomenon well known in continental Europe: disputations between Jews and Christians, usually forced and with a given outcome. In the legendary, a disputation is set up with Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena, who stage it with 140 Jewish scholars, Pope Sylvester and two learned pagan philosophers to judge the outcome fairly. The disputation touches on the question of the Trinity, on circumcision and the covenant, on the mortality of Christ, baptism, virgin birth, and other doctrines. This disputation, as is typical of the genre, ends with a clear victory for Christianity and a mass conversion (Adams 2022, vol. 2: 741–55).

These disputations, whether used in learned clerical circles or more widely, served the self-assurance of Christians, particularly in Scandinavia, where other purposes such as public humiliation of rabbis and campaigns for burning Jewish books were meaningless. 'Arguing' with Jews about the mysteries of the Christian faith and winning would mainly mean that Christian doubts were also futile. At the same time, 'the Jews' were portrayed as following an outdated faith and law – 'living fossils', an aspect important for medieval forms of supersessionism.

Blood libel

In the Old Swedish material, the absence of blood-libel accusations is striking, considering that this was such an important part of anti-Jewish hatred in Europe and England since the mid-twelfth century. On the other hand, historians have shown that most cases of blood libel remained very local phenomena and that information about these events and pogroms did not normally attract the

attention of authors and theologians outside the immediate region where they occurred. As Magda Teter has shown, ecclesiastical elites were not interested in stories about blood libel on a broader level until the early-modern period (Teter 2020).

One of the few exceptions to this is Thomas de Cantimprés *Bonum universale de apibus*. He was a Dominican from Flanders and wrote several encyclopaedic and didactic works about natural philosophy. *Bonum universale de apibus*, composed in the second half of the thirteenth century, was a work combining both; it used the allegory of bees and their state as models for human societies. Within the many exempla Thomas collected for this book, he also included several cases of blood libel. One of them, the case of Pforzheim in 1272, is also dealt with in historiographic sources. But Thomas also collected a number of cases of blood libel with no concrete place and time, alongside other anti-Jewish exempla dealing with conversion, Jewish cruelty and blood-lust. Thomas of Cantimpré's text was thus an important milestone in the popularization and spread of blood-libel accusations; he offered a theological explanation for Jewish blood-lust, and put it in context alongside other imagined qualities of 'the Jews', thereby systematizing the various narratives, suggested motives and practices of the blood-libel allegation (see Heß 2023a).

Vadstena library owned at least two complete copies of the *Bonum universale de apibus* and one codex with excerpts from it (C 623, *c.* 1484, Vadstena, fol. 209v). The complete copies were C 38, fol. 1r–133r, a fifteenth-century codex probably written in the German lands and with a signature from Vadstena library. The second complete version is C 173, fol. 1r–123r, a codex written in the early fifteenth century in Poland and also with a Vadstena library signature (Andersson-Schmitt and Hedlund 1989, vol. 2: 230).

Given the usually only local interest in specific cases of blood libel, it is highly unlikely that the information from chronicles from the German lands found its way to Swedish medieval libraries. But with the *Bonum universale de apibus*, at least Vadstena had a solid amount of information and examples of accusations of ritual murder, which in most cases in Europe led to comprehensive pogroms and expulsions.

Judas Iscariot and *Mors Pilati*

Judas legends were manifold in medieval Sweden, as they were in the entire Latin Christian culture. Judas's identification with the entire Jewish people becomes apparent in the legend of the finding of the Holy Cross, in which Helena urges the Jews to show her the tree on which Jesus died, but they refuse because of the bad reputation their people will suffer from its discovery. The main witness is a Jew named Judas, who after the finding of the Cross is accused by the devil of working not at all like the devil's own Judas but in the opposite way, for this Judas converts and becomes the patriarch of Jerusalem (Adams 2022, vol. 2: 927–37). The version in *Fornsvenska legendariet* closely follows the Latin *Legenda aurea*.

Another formative Judas legend in *Legenda aurea* is characterized by a mixture of Hellenistic, Jewish and Christian motifs. It sets out to describe Judas's life before he became Christ's disciple and thus aims to explain how a person can become the ultimate evil, the betrayer of Christ. The legend finds the answer in a life full of predestined misdeeds: Judas's mother is told in a dream that her child will become evil and the downfall of all Jews; she places him in a river, and just like Moses, he is found and raised by royal parents, kills his step-brother and

escapes to Jerusalem. In the service of Pontius Pilate, he eventually marries his birth mother and kills his biological father, like Oedipus, over a forbidden apple. Sickened by his crime and following the advice of his mother, he meets Jesus and succeeds in asking him for forgiveness – before ultimately betraying him. The Latin version is longer and delves more deepling into the relationship between Judas and his mother Ciborea as well as the forbidden apple, but the narrative elements are similar in Old Swedish (Adams 2022, vol. 2: 1006–10).

Yet another version is given in the Old Swedish *Consolation of the Soul* / *Själens tröst*, again with the same narrative elements but adding a didactical framework to it as well as Judas's death and the thirty pieces of silver he received for his betrayal (Adams 2022, vol. 2: 1010–16).

The Judas legends are transmitted both in Latin and in vernacular versions, just like most of the other anti-Jewish texts. Examples of Judas legends independent of the *Legenda aurea* / *Fornsvenska legendariet* are, for example, found in UB codices C 181 and C 691. C 181 is a theological composite manuscript, containing various legends and model sermons, some historiographical writings and exempla collections. The codex came with a priest from Lödöse to Vadstena when he entered the Bridgettine order in 1478. Its origin and primary place of use was thus among the secular clergy in Sweden (Andersson-Schmitt and Hedlund 1990, vol. 2: 247). *De Juda proditore Christi* is here directly followed by *De origine Pylati*. Also in C 691, twelfth century from England, *Vita Pilati* and *Vita Judae Iscariot* directly follow each other and the codex also contains a full Latin version of *Evangelium Nicodemi*. The same codex also contains sermons with anti-Jewish topics.

Judas legends remained popular in Sweden until the modern era. *Legenden om förrädaren Judas, hans födelse och lefverne till dess han utvaldes till Jesu Apostel* was printed at least six times between 1800 and 1900, and older prints are also known. In the modern versions, Judas's Jewish faith is mentioned several times and thus his identification with the entire Jewish people is reinforced (Heß 2022: 52–55).

The Pilate tradition as well as the Judas legends put emphasis on the life of the protagonists of the Passion before and after the events leading to Jesus's death. In the Life of Judas Iscariot, Judas works in Pilate's service and they get along very well 'because he had a very similar manner to Pilate'.[17] In the Judas legends as well as in the Passion-related texts, the fates of Jesus, Judas and Pontius Pilate are closely interwoven. Pontius Pilate, although he is the Roman judge in Jerusalem and thereby representative of the Roman Empire, shares the cruelty of the Jews, and in some texts, it is he and the Jews of Jerusalem together who stage the scourging and think of different ways to torture Jesus. In other versions, he recognizes Jesus's innocence and tries to save him from the death sentence but cannot withstand the Jews. Pilate thus appears frequently alongside the Jews, basically as one of them because of his agency in the Passion.

But he also has a legendary tradition of his own. The Latin versions in Swedish manuscripts follow European traditions of *Vita Pilati*, which narrates the origins of an imagined Pilate and the story of his anger after Jesus's death, when he sends a messenger to Tiberius.[18] The messenger ends up

17 'Ok kom sik til thiænist j pylati hoff Oc wardh pylato miokit kær thy at han hafdhe licaste lund pylato.' Adams 2022, vol. 2: 1006.

18 The first part of this story forms the

with Vespasian in Spain, who is converted and healed miraculously. Tiberius sends for a miracle doctor to Jerusalem, where the messenger meets Veronica and hears about the Passion of Jesus, his death and resurrection. They both travel to Rome and Veronica's image cures the emperor. Pilate is sentenced to death and kills himself (Wiktorsson 2020, vol. 3: 421–431).

Fornsvenska legendariet contains yet another version of the Pilate legend named *Mors Pilati*, a fourteenth century addition to the *Vita Pilati* tradition focusing on Pilate's 'unruly body' – after his suicide and/or death sentence, the corpse of Pilate is said to have been thrown into the river Tiber, from where it 'travels' through Europe, ending up on a mountaintop in Switzerland and there continuously disturbing the weather. Among the many apocryphal texts about Pontius Pilate, the *Mors Pilati* is a relatively late addition from the fourteenth century. Central aspects from this version, however, are missing in the Swedish text, such as the place names Vienna and Lausanne. This particular version has a long life in Sweden: it was distributed in printed form together with the Ahasver legend and thus became a longterm bestseller in Sweden.[19] *Om Pilati ändalycht och oroliga kropp* is a relatively faithful modern Swedish version of *Mors Pilati* from *Legenda aurea* and *Fornsvenska legendariet*. Also in its modern form, it makes no direct mention of Pilate being Jewish, but the context of the two other texts as well as the tradition make it clear that also Pilate and the spooky fate of his travelling corpse are results of (Jewish) guilt for the Passion (Heß 2022: 51–2).

beginning of a legend in the Old Swedish Consolation of the Soul: 'The Punishment of the Jews', Adams 2022, vol. 2: 1068–78.

19 The myth of Ahasver, a shoemaker from Jerusalem, who witnessed Jesus's passage to Golgotha and refused him respite, and was consequently cursed to wander for eternity, originated in the Crusading period and subsequently spread throughout Europe. In the medieval legends, the Jew was called Cartaphilus. Given the predominantly theological nature of the surviving medieval texts in Sweden, it is not surprising that we have no immediate model text in the North. But while the local beginnings of the textual tradition must remain obscure, the long-lasting success of the material can be shown from the early seventeenth century on. In 1602, a print appeared in nine fictitious places and gave the legend a stable form, the Jew was given the name Ahasver and his wanderings were located in the Baltic Sea area; a few years later a longer version of the text appeared under the fictitious author Johannes Chrysostomos Dudulaeus (af Klintberg 1986; Syndikus 2012).

Evangelium Nicodemi

Another textual tradition portraying Pilate as one of the people active in Jesus's Passion are the *Acta Pilati*, handed down as part of the apocryphal *Evangelium Nicodemi* (Schelb 2012). In this complex of medieval texts, however, the tendency is to prove Pilate's innocence and to blame the Jews entirely for the Passion. The Latin and vernacular traditions in Europe are vast, with hundreds of surviving manuscripts. The popularity of *Evangelium Nicodemi* can be explained by its intent to describe the trial, verdict and execution of Jesus as well as his death, descent to hell and resurrection from different perspectives from the Gospels, thereby suggesting a parallel tradition answering the mystery of why God agreed to the suffering and death of his own son. Negotiations regarding the nature of evil and the individual responsibility of the Roman and Jewish actors add to the fiction of authenticity.

Vadstena library possessed more than one exemplar of *Evangelium Nicodemi*, Latin

and vernacular, with one redaction coming from Prague via Elbing (Elbląg). Full Latin versions of *Evangelium Nicodemi* are found in C 225 (thirteenth century, France or Germany), which came to Sweden via the library of Johannes Schefferus and thus was most likely not in use in medieval times, and in C 691, described above. One Old Swedish *Evangelium Nicodemi* is in fact a faithful rendition of a Latin version of the gospel, which had limited circulation in Europe, but possibly on account of its textual features was acquired for the monastic library and preferred to the common version (Bullitta 2014). *Acta Pilati* are also found in a composite manuscript from the late thirteenth century in Vadstena library (C 643, fol. 82v–89r). The vernacular translation into Old Swedish was prepared in Vadstena in several manuscripts between the late fourteenth and the late fifteenth century for the instruction of clerics not very skilled in Latin.

Why is the *Evangelium Nicodemi* relevant as an anti-Jewish text? The apocryphal narrative about the Passion in *Evanglium Nicodemi* is designed to put blame for the *passio Christi* on the Jews. All other people involved eventually recognize him as the Messiah, except for the Jews (Zapf 2017). In many versions, it is framed with admonitions to secular lords to expel Jews from their territories. This tendency is particularly obvious in the German version by Heinrich of Hesler, prepared for the Teutonic order in the fourteenth century, but also for example in the *Klosterneuburger Evangelienwerk* (Roland 2012).

The admonition to secular lords, while pointless in Sweden, is still directly linked to the part of *Evangelium Nicodemi* most frequent in medieval Sweden: the Jews conspiring to torture and kill Christ, his death, descent to hell and glorious resurrection. In this narrative of Passion piety, the Jews are closely connected to Satan and act as his tools, and are overcome by the victorious Messiah. Their inability to understand Christ's nature is portrayed as collective ill-will.

Evangelium Nicodemi was often copied and transmitted together with other anti-Jewish texts. One of them was the third part of the 'Ahasver compilation', a booklet with the Ahasver legend, the *Mors Pilati* and a text titled *Om the straff hwart slächte ibland Judarne lida måste.* In 1634 the first printed version with the addition of the *Straff* appeared (Körte 2012), and it is in the combination with this text as well as the *Mors Pilati* that the Ahasver compilation became widely distributed and popular over the long term in Sweden. With more than twenty editions since 1642, and twenty-four during the nineteenth century alone, the booklet was very widespread in Sweden and was one of the main textual witnesses of the continuing recognition of the medieval hermeneutical Jew. This is a text of medieval but somewhat unclear origins. It was sometimes distributed as an appendix to manuscripts of *Evangelium Nicodemi*, but also appeared independently in the context of songs and *Sangsprüche* in German languages. In the early-modern period, it was distributed widely in German, both independently and included in popular anti-Jewish texts such as Johann Jacob Schudt's *Jüdische Merckwürdigkeiten* (1717). This text gives vivid descriptions of specific cruelties done to Jesus during the Passion and blames each of the twelve tribes for one of them. Each tribe receives a punishment in the form of physical deviance: blabbering speech, spitting, inability to eat, bleeding, parasites etc. It is pointed out that the punishments last 'until today': collective guilt created in biblical times and lasting eternally. Significant too is the manifestation of the guilt in Jewish bodies – a clear transgression from purely religiously motivated hatred into

a racist construct of deviance (Heß 2022: 48–50).

Conclusion: the medieval roots of antisemitism in Sweden

The lack of a local Jewish community did not prevent medieval Swedish clerics and lay people from being interested in Jews and Jewish questions. They bought, translated, read and preached from most of the available textual sources and thus disseminated widely known aspects of the hermeneutical Jew: a cruel, stubborn and ugly person and at the same time, a cipher for the entire Jewish people both in biblical times and today. The 'today' did not, as on the continent, result in violent outbreaks, but it did mould the preconception of Jews in Sweden, when they were finally admitted and invited into the country in the late eighteenth century.

The surviving manuscripts show an interesting particularity: in most cases, the same texts are transmitted both in Latin and in the Old Swedish / East Norse vernacular. Academic traditions usually lead scholars to look at these separately from each other and hence they probably tend to overstate the differences in audience and dissemination. In the Swedish example, the particularities of the surviving collections, which come exclusively from a few monastic institutions, have led to a large overlap between texts in the two languages – and thus a relatively broad audience for medieval anti-Judaism.

The overview of the Latin and vernacular manuscripts with anti-Jewish motifs and texts has, despite its obvious gaps resulting from the transmission and loss of medieval material, shown that the main and most common textual models and motifs of the 'hermeneutical Jew' were available in Swedish libraries, from legends via apocryphal texts to fake disputations. A focus was, as in the rest of Europe, on Passion-related piety. It is tempting to read the work of a deliberate editor into the surviving corpus of Latin and Old Swedish anti-Jewish texts in Sweden – but as we have no means of reconstructing the original libraries and thus the full extent of texts, the corpus must be seen as relatively random. But even in this random sample, it becomes evident that no aspect of medieval anti-Judaism was unknown in Sweden.

The fact that we can establish direct and indirect textual and narrative lines of tradition between the medieval codices and modern printed booklets of the nineteenth century proves the long-lasting recognition of anti-Jewish stereotypes in Sweden – developed and disseminated completely independently of the Jewish minority. The medieval perspective thus adds a much-needed nuance to the debate about antisemitism in the North: it did not need any actual Jews; it simply made up its own imaginary Jews, based on the general Christian tradition. ■

Cordelia Heß holds the chair of Nordic History at the University of Greifswald and is the director of the Interdisciplinary Center for Baltic Sea Region Research (Ifzo). Her research areas include late medieval religious cultures of the Baltic Sea region, interreligious contacts, memory politics and antisemitism.

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