

LARA E. C. HARRIS

## A HANDLIST OF MEDIEVAL SCANDINAVIAN MEDICAL VERNACULAR MANUSCRIPTS<sup>1</sup>

There are thirty-seven manuscripts in Scandinavian vernacular languages from the medieval period before 1550 containing medical lore. Although the middle of the sixteenth century may not be generally regarded as *strictly medieval*, the year 1550 is one of the rough cut-off points used by scholars marking the end of the medieval period and the start of the early modern era (Salonen and Jensen 2023). This is because by 1550, the evangelical movement that had started in the 1520s, known as the Reformation, begins to fully take over.<sup>2</sup> I include three decades of this religiously ambiguous period in my analysis of medieval manuscripts because the manuscripts written in the first half of sixteenth century have copied sections from older manuscripts, meaning that the texts they contain had been in circulation during the medieval period. This allows for a more comprehensive overview of the medical knowledge available in Scandinavia in the Middle Ages. Whilst thirty-seven may not sound like a terribly small number, one must consider that many of these manuscripts are mere fragments, sometimes having as little as two sides of one page, while others contain only a few leaves of medical knowledge amidst other religious or law texts. Few of these codices actually contain medical texts back-to-back. For comparison, the number of medical manuscripts in Middle English (between

1 Transcriptions and translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

2 The Reformation is one of the major events that mark the end of the Middle Ages and the start of the Early Modern period. The evangelical movement is thought to have begun in Sweden when Gustav Vasa ascended the throne, but the movement is not thought to have been completed until the establishment of the Uppsala Synod in 1593 (Kouri 1995, 43–45). In Denmark, the traditional view is that the Reformation took place when Christian III ascended the throne in 1536, after fighting a civil war and gaining control over Norway, too. Nonetheless, popular evangelical movements had started to germinate amongst the bigger towns since the 1520s. For an overview of the development of the Reformation, see Grell (2016).

the twelfth and fifteenth centuries) amounts to over 350 (Robbins 1970, 393). Those of German origin are indeed so many that they have not, to this date, been added up (Brévert 2008, 6).<sup>3</sup> Next to these numbers, the Scandinavian medical material is rather thin.

Of the relatively little material there is, much of it goes back to or builds upon the work of Henrik Harpestræng (b. ca. 1164, d. 1244), a Danish medical author and personal doctor of King Erik *Plovpenning*. He is best known for his botano-medical works: the *Liber Herbarum*, known as the *latinske urtebog* (Latin herbal) in Denmark, and *Den danske Urtebog* (the Danish herbal), written in the vernacular. There are no extant original manuscripts in Harpestræng's hand, yet thirty out of the thirty-seven manuscripts either explicitly attribute certain texts to Harpestræng or have copied texts attributed to him elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> There are only two manuscripts written in East Norse that are directly related to Harpestræng's original *Den danske Urtebog*: Cod. Holm K 48 (also known as Sth K 48, no. 1) and Ny kgl. saml. 66 8vo (also known as NKS 66, no. 2). Henning Larsen (1931, 39) created a stemma in which he asserted that both exemplars are copies of two distinct copies of Harpestræng's original herbal book, meaning that they are both two steps removed from Harpestræng's own manuscript. Fabian Schwabe (2011) does not contest Larsen's view and adds that virtually all the Icelandic manuscripts, except AM 655 XXX 4to (no. 30) and possibly AM 673 a II 4to (no. 32) are somehow related to NKS 66 in the stemma. The earliest extant copy of the *Liber Herbarum* is found in

- 3 Another reason why there has been trouble enumerating the German *materia medica* is because there are too many overlapping genres and sub-genres that are not always easy to categorise. As explained by Schnell (1995, 6) in his survey of twelfth-century German medical manuscripts, there are various texts that enter the 'medical' division, which include genres such as 'herbals', 'medicinal handbooks', 'collections of recipes', 'guides to good health', which makes it harder to divide the texts between those that are medicinal, pharmacological, botanical, or even magical. Nevertheless, the only German medical corpus that has been quantified is that of the twelfth century, by Hellgardt (1988). Hellgardt offers an overview of the manuscripts produced in that century and categorises six out of the fifty-three manuscripts as medical ones, excluding ten other manuscripts wherein isolated medical recipes can be found. That would form 10 per cent of the extant German manuscripts of the century.
- 4 The only manuscripts in this list that do not have any direct association with Harpestræng (meaning that his name is not mentioned and that none of his works seem to have been copied) are Thott 245 8vo (no. 14), C 22 (no. 19), M 59 (no. 23), X 502 (no. 28), J 8 (no. 29), and possibly AM 655 XXX 4to (no. 31), although this last one is unclear.

Upps D 600 (no. 8), which dates to the mid-fifteenth century, making it harder to grasp what the original may have looked like.<sup>5</sup>

These so-called herbals are botanical works consisting of up to fifty-three chapters (*Liber Herbarum*) and 150 chapters (*Den danske Urtebog*) dealing with plants and their medical uses, as well as a few minerals and chemical compounds,<sup>6</sup> often ordered alphabetically. There are two other works associated with the *Urtebog* which have often been attributed to Harpestræng. These are a *Stenbog* (lit. stonebook, lapidary), describing the properties of minerals and gemstones, and a *Kogebog* (cookbook) with recipes,<sup>7</sup> both of which appear as a unified work in NKS 66 8vo (see below, no. 2), though it is unclear whether Harpestræng did in fact compose these texts (Johnsson 1921, 14). Nevertheless, he is also the author of other lesser-known works. For instance, there is evidence that he produced an astrological prognostic for King Erik *Plovpenning* with instructions for bloodletting. Two manuscripts survive that explicitly mention Harpestræng as the author, GKS 3656 8vo (no. 10), and the *Codex Grensholmensis* (no. 26, also known as Klemming VIII), in Linköping, shelf-marked Saml. 1a, from around the year 1500.

Harpestræng is also said to have composed a *lægebog* or 'leechbook' (Hauberg 1919). Unlike the herbals, leechbooks generally focus on diseases and their treatments and not on the properties of plants. They are usually arranged in a head-to-toe structure, rather than in alphabetical order, as is customary for herbals. Even though there is no extant original Harpestræng leechbook, it likely existed, as it is referenced in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts such as Upps. D 600 (no. 8) and AM 45 (no. 17), surveyed below.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, there is speculation that the Danish

5 The first Danish translation of the *Liber Herbarum* is found in NKS 314 b 4to (no. 9).

6 Chemical elements and compounds found in the *Urtebog* include gold, silver, copper acetate, and mercury.

7 Neither the *Stenbog* nor the *Kogebog* will be explored in this project, but for an overview of these, see Kristensen (1908–1920).

8 N.B. It is important to note that D 600 and AM 45 4to contain leechbooks attributed to Harpestræng. However, while Thott 710 4to and NKS 314b 4to explicitly cite Harpestræng as the author of a *Lægebog*, they then copy his *Urtebog*. This implies that "Lægebog" and "Urtebog" may have been used interchangeably in the medieval period. Nevertheless, these two manuscripts, as well as AM 819 4to, GKS 3457 8vo, and AM 188 8vo, all contain the same text that D 600 and AM 45 4to refer to as *Lægebog*, in addition to entries from the *Liber Herbarum* and *Den danske Urtebog*.

physician may have authored a list of treatises or articles dealing with hygiene and surgery, which are interpolated between chapters of the *Liber Herbarum* or *Den danske Urtebog*. Due to the nature of these short articles, there is speculation that they may have once been a single, symbiotic work (Molbech 1826, 6).

Harpestræng is referred to as a Salernitan doctor (Kristensen 1908–1920; Johnsson 1921), a term used for physicians who followed the training given in Salerno, Italy, where a prominent medical school had blossomed in the late tenth or early eleventh century. The Salerno school of medicine was not a formal institution but rather a movement that saw the renaissance of ancient Greek medical texts by Pliny, Hippocrates, Dioscorides, and Galen combined with the arrival of Arabic medicine, due to the growth of Salerno as a popular trading town between Christians and Muslims. One need not have been physically in Italy to train in the Salernitan fashion, as all the texts created or compiled in Salerno quickly spread across Europe. The texts produced by Salernitan authors followed the Hippocratic theory that illness was the result of an imbalance of the four cardinal humours: phlegm, blood, yellow bile, and black bile. Between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, these sources were used in the creation of new texts such as the *Trotula* and *Secreta mulierum*, and Harpestræng's work can be included here, as he duly follows Galen's theory of the four qualities of plants (hot, cold, dry, and wet) and the four degrees in which these qualities lie.

It has been established that Harpestræng's work is mostly derived from *De viribus herbarum* (On the strengths of the herbs), also known as *De virtutibus herbarum* (On the virtues of the herbs), composed by a Macer Floridus, who has been identified as Odo Magdunensis, supposedly a French author from the Loire area (Kristensen 1908–1920; Flood 1976, 63). Of the 150 chapters of *Den danske Urtebog*, eighty-one are, at least in part, translations from Macer's work (Hauberg 1936, 14). This has led some scholars to speculate that Harpestræng may have been trained in France, perhaps in Montpellier (Schwabe 2009, 202), or Orléans (Kristensen 1908–1920, v; Johnsson 1921, 15) an area well known for its physicians, which would eventually replace Salerno as the centre for medical education (McVaugh 1975, 57). Another clue that hints at his studying in France is a fifteenth-century manuscript in the National Library of

France (Paris, BN ms. Fr.1357, 2vo). Under a text presumably written by French astrologer Symon de Phares, titled *Recueil des plus celebres astrologues et de quelques hommes doctes* (Collection of the most famous astrologers and other learned men), a certain “maistre Henry de Danemarch” (master Henry of Denmark) is mentioned as a renowned physician and astrologer in Orleans. He is said to have resided in the city under the rule of King Philippe Augustus in 1181, giving us a clue about his whereabouts and age (Johnsson 1921, 15). This matches another source that refers to Harpestræng by his first name followed by his home country. That is a manuscript at the Royal Danish Library (GKS 1654 4to) containing a work in Latin titled *Liber de simplicibus medicinis laxativis* (A book on simple laxative medicines) citing “Henricus Dacus” (Henrik the Dane) as its author.<sup>9</sup>

Harpestræng’s work also has Arabic influences copied from Constantine the African’s *De Gradibus Liber* – itself a translation of the work by Ibn al-Jazzar – in his *Urtebog*. Constantine, originally from Carthage, is best known for his translations of Arabic medicinal texts into Latin (see Green 1987), and sixty-nine chapters of *Den danske Urtebog* partially draw from Constantine’s work (Hauberg 1936, 14). Ten chapters have not been ascribed to any source and therefore could possibly be Harpestræng’s own composition (Hauberg 1936, 14). Even if it was not Harpestræng who wrote those ten chapters, it was probably a Scandinavian author, as the plants used are unique to Scandinavia, such as “Angelica” (*Angelica archangelica*). “Benedicta alba” (*Geum urbanum*) and “Benedicta ruffa” (*Geum rivale*) are also not known from any other Salernitan texts, so this may be evidence of local Scandinavian knowledge seeping into the written texts.<sup>10</sup>

Some manuscripts contain various additional texts popular amongst the medieval Salernitans, such as the *Regimen sanitatis Salernitatum*<sup>11</sup> (NKS 314 b 4to and X 23) and excerpts from thirteenth-century Iberian doctor Petrus Hispanus’ *Thesaurus pauperum*, a popular text that survives in at least twenty manuscripts from before 1340 (Lindberg 2017, 62).

Later manuscripts from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries display

9 The text was edited by John William Johnsson (1914).

10 I am sceptical of Harpestræng’s authorship of these entries, as none of these plants appear in the earliest copies of the *Urtebog*, K 48 4to and NKS 66 8vo.

11 The *Regimen sanitatis Salernitatum* (the Salernitan ‘Code’ or ‘Rule’ of Health) is a medieval didactic poem in hexameter verse, allegedly composed by Arnold de Villa Nova. For a translation of this text, see Ordrónaux (1871).

a wider variety of influences outside the Salernitan sphere, especially the manuscripts of Danish origin. Thott 710 4to, NKS 314 b 4to, and NKS 134 4to all have entries in German.<sup>12</sup> In the case of Thott 710 4to, the German entries are found in German manuscripts, whereas NKS 314 b 4to has translated the Harpestræng content into German. The fifteenth century saw the dawn of printing, making it much easier for texts to travel faster than ever before. Christiørn Pedersen was the first Danish physician to publish a medical book in print in 1533, titled *En nøttelig Legebog faar Fattige och Rige Unge och Gamle* (A Useful Leechbook for the Poor and the Rich, the Young and the Old), from which at least three manuscripts have copied, AM 819 4to (no. 15), M 5 8vo (no. 25), and *Lavriids Pedersens Lægebog* (which I shall call *Huskurer*, see no. 16).<sup>13</sup> Other figures make an appearance in our late medieval medical manuscripts, such as Peder Månsson, Bishop of Vadstena, who wrote his own manuscripts on natural sciences, and a Master Alexander, who might be a Spanish doctor or possibly a fictitious character but whose work is mentioned in three Swedish manuscripts: Upps D 601, no. 24; C 19, no. 18; and no. X 23, no. 26 (Zachová 2013; Ottosson 1977, 131–3). AM 819 4to mentions advice given by a Dr Karl.

There is no complete, comprehensive overview of the Scandinavian medical corpus to date. Poul Hauberg (1936) published a list of medical manuscripts and fragments containing parts of the *Liber Herbarum* but left manuscripts containing other medical texts out of that list. He later published a book encompassing all manuscripts linked to Harpestræng, into the Early Modern era (1982).<sup>14</sup> Marius Kristensen, on the other hand,

12 There is evidence of Danish influence bleeding into Germany too. There are two manuscripts from the fifteenth century that contain Harpestræng content: Ms. Giessensis 610.Fol. (Universitätsbibliothek, Giessen) and Bibl. Pal. Vind. Cod. 2962 (Universitätsbibliothek, Wien) (Hauberg 1936, 31–34).

13 A first edition is kept in the Royal Library in Copenhagen, under the shelf-mark Hielmst. 1516 4to. The text has been edited by Adams and Boeck: <https://tekstnet.dk/christiørn-pedersen-legebog/metadata>.

14 These later manuscripts, which will not be explored in this article, are L 45 4to (Medicinsk-historisk Museum, 1580); NKS 67 8vo (Kongelige Bibliotek, 1550–1599); NKS 719 8vo (Kongelige Bibliotek, 1575–1599); L 46 4to (Medicinsk-historisk Museum, 1619); Thott 717 4to (Kongelige Bibliotek, 1623); Thott 720 4to (Kongelige Bibliotek, 1643); Thott 204 (Kongelige Bibliotek, 1600–1699); Thott 254 8vo (Kongelige Bibliotek, 1675–1699); NKS 67 8vo (Kongelige Bibliotek, 1700–1799); Thott 721 4to (Kongelige Bibliotek, 1700–1799); *Lægebogen fra Ulvik* (privately owned, 1550–1650).

published a list of only the manuscripts that contain *Den danske Urtebog*, *Stenbog*, and *Kogebog* that he deemed relevant enough to edit, so his list is also incomplete. The present list is a new survey of the medieval vernacular Scandinavian corpus up to the middle of the sixteenth century, divided into five categories depending on the presumed origin of the manuscripts, starting with those from Denmark.<sup>15</sup>

## Danish

### *Thirteenth/Fourteenth century*

1. K 48 4to (Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm)<sup>16</sup>

Alternative names: Henrik Harpestrengs Læge- og Urte-Bog

Dating: 1290–1300

Dimensions: 19.6 × 15.0 cm

Language: Danish

Comments: This is the oldest copy of *Den danske Urtebog*, dating to the very end of the thirteenth century.<sup>17</sup> It has a total of forty-five folia made of parchment and includes most known chapters of the herbal from fol. 2v–43r, though the entries have not been listed alphabetically. The first three folios (or–2r) contain two Marian miracles of the Toledo-Saturday type and a “Skriftemålsbøn” (confessional prayer; Bullitta 2017, 8). The opening page, which begins *in medias res*, is completely worn, suggesting that this manuscript was once part of a larger codex containing legends and a herbal. The quire number 16 on 6r suggests that the first sixteen quires are missing, meaning that the original version of the codex has 120 leaves (Bullitta 2017, 9). A nineteenth-century hand on the cover of the manuscript says that the manuscript would have originally had 158 leaves, although it does not provide a reason, only the observation that the herbal

15 The manuscripts presented here focus on the human body and health. There are manuscripts, such as Kungliga Biblioteket K 45, which includes a passage with monthly predictions and zodiac signs that do not deal with remedies for the human body and thus has not been included in this handlist. Similarly, manuscripts only containing sections on veterinary— not intended for the human body, such as Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek C 54, also have not been included.

16 No online facsimile available.

17 There are two notes written on the first page of the codex, one in pen that dates the manuscript to the turn of the fourteenth century and another, in pencil, that dates it to the end of the thirteenth century.



must have been cut out of a larger exemplar due to its content being medical.

The alleged missing folios containing a miscellany of texts – including a version of the *Stenbog* found in NKS 66 – are now believed to be preserved at Kungliga Biblioteket, in K 4. Also, in a bifolio containing two accounts of the “*Passio sanctae Caterinae*” (Legend of St Christina) and the beginning of the Marian miracles found today at the University of Cambridge, Add. 3827 (Eiríkr Magnússon 1902). This is because the “*Passio*” in Add. 3827 is identical with the one in the Legendary of K 4, and the Marian miracles are also a match with K 48, meaning that originally K 4, Add 3827, and K 48 were all part of the same work. This idea has been contested by Carl J. Brandt (1859, 97), who noted some stylistic inconsistencies between the texts. In any case, regardless of whether these are truly connected, the herbal in K 48 was not written as a stand-alone piece but as part of a larger body of work.

The herbal commences on fol. 3v with entries on gold and silver, and a list of sixty plants. Towards the middle of the manuscript, from fol. 22v to 23v, there are five entries on different chemical compounds: salt, vitriol, *spanskgrønt* (lit. Spanish green; a chemical compound named after its green colour caused by the copper in it), *Pic liquida* (known as “Norwegian tar” in English), and *bitumen iuidaicum* (bitumen judaicum, a pitchy substance, similar to tar, mostly made up of hydrocarbons). This is proceeded by four chapters between 25v and 27r on how to treat pain in the chest, stomach, bladder, and head, respectively, and a chapter on *badstue* (sauna), its benefits, and how to use it. This segment looks more like a medical book, as the subject in this section is not herbs but rather diseases in different parts of the body plus instructions for treatment. There follows a chapter between 27r and 27v on taking laxatives, the same text that is attributed to Henricus Dacus – *De simplicibus medicinis laxativis* in GKS 1654 4to – before the manuscript resumes the list of simples. The manuscript ends with four entries on bloodletting and cupping at the end, on fols. 44r–47r.

All the medical content in the manuscript has been edited by Kristensen (1908–1920, 1–102) and more recently by Marita Akhøj Nielsen, which can be found online.<sup>18</sup>

18 [https://tekstnet.dk/books/harpestreng-h\\_skrifter-k48/](https://tekstnet.dk/books/harpestreng-h_skrifter-k48/)



2. NKS 66 8vo (Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen)<sup>19</sup>

Alternative names: The Danish Herb Book; Knud Jul's Book

Dating: 1300

Dimensions: 11.7 ' 9.0 cm

Language: Danish

Comments: This is the second oldest manuscript, produced around the year 1300. It has a total of 147 folia made of parchment. This manuscript contains Harpestræng's *Urtebog* (6r–114v), along with a *Stenbog* (114v–139v) and a *Kogebog* (140r–146r). The manuscript starts with a collection of Skåne church law (1r–5v). The *Urtebog* contains 135 chapters and is split in two: the *første urtebog* (first herbal) and the *anden urtebog* (second herbal). Both bodies are structured alphabetically. In the first herbal, just as in K 48, there are four chapters concerned with ailments rather than simples, on pain in the chest, stomach, bladder, and head. However, unlike in K 48, with its whimsical structure, as pointed out by Simon Skovgaard Boeck (2017, 111), these chapters have been placed appropriately around the letter F, for the active F-verbs in the sentences, “fangær” (to catch) and “far” (to get):

Vm man fangær ylt i b[r]yst (If one gets an ache in the chest)  
 Af man fangær ilt .i. quith (If one gets an ache in the abdomen)  
 Far man ylt .i. blæthær (If one gets an ache in the bladder)  
 Of man far ylt [.i.] houæth (If one gets an ache in the head)<sup>20</sup>

Just as K 48, NKS 66 also includes a chapter on bathing, which has been added with the B-entries, and the chapter on laxatives, added after G, as the paragraph starts with H (“Hwa sum wil takæ lækidom”).

The manuscript names Knud Jul (Kanutus Yuul) – hence the alternate name for this manuscript – who was associated with the Cistercian monastery in Sorø in the early fourteenth century. This is especially relevant because the monastery at Sorø is known to have included two infirmaries.

The manuscript has been edited by Kristensen (1908–1920, 103–202) and more recently by Marita Akhøj Nielsen, which can be found online.<sup>21</sup>

19 <https://permalink.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/87/dan/>

20 Titles in Old Danish in NKS 66 8vo, between fol. 37v and 40r (or pages 65–70), in Simon Skovgaard Boeck (2017, 111).

21 <https://tekstnet.dk/harpestreng-nks66/metadata>

3. T 67, no. 199 (Linköpings Stiftsbibliotek)<sup>22</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: 1300–1350

Dimensions: 15.6 ' 10.0 cm

Language: Danish

Comments: All that is left from this manuscript are four folia, preserved in a colossal codex titled *Eklesiastike Samlingar* (Ecclesiastical Collection), donated to the Library of Linköping by theologian and professor Carl Jesper Benzeliuss, Swedish teacher to Queen Louisa Ulrika. It preserves seven chapters of Harpestræng's *Dansk Urtebog*: Absinthium/Malyrt (wormwood), Abrotanus/Abrut (southernwood), Artumesia/bunæ (mugwort), Plantago/Weghbrethæ (plantago), Apium/Merky (celery), Allium/Klofløk (leek), Aristologia/Hwlyrt (birthwort) and one line of an eighth chapter, Cepa/Sypol (onion). It has been dated to the first half of the fourteenth century, though Kristensen (1908–1920, lxvvi) suggests that it could be from the same time period as AM 187 8vo (no. 4). It was only found in 1907 by librarian Carl S. Petersen at the old Linköpings Gymnasium and has now been relocated to the Linköping City Library.

Kristensen (1908–1920, 203–209) edited this fragment.

4. AM 187 8vo (Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, Copenhagen)<sup>23</sup>

Alternative names: Arnamagnæan Leechbook; Danske Lægebog

Dating: 1400–1450

Dimensions: 16.7 ' 13.1 cm

Language: Danish; Latin

Comments: There is some controversy regarding the time of composition of this manuscript. The general consensus, as stated in *handrit.is*,<sup>24</sup> is that it was produced at some point in the fourteenth century (1300–1399), as Kristian Kålund (1889, 437) claimed. Viggo Saby (1886, iii) similarly dated it to the second half of the fourteenth century (1350–1400). Christian Molbech (1826, 40) first dated it a century later, to either the middle or the second half of the fifteenth century (1450–1500). C. J. Brandt (1857, 60) and Hans Brix (1943, 36) joined him in his mid-fifteenth century dating.

22 No online facsimile available.

23 <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/en/AMo8-0187/o#mode/2up>

24 *Ibid.*

Erik Kroman (1943, 68), however, dated it to the beginning of the fifteenth century (ca. 1400), where he has been joined by Simon Boeck (2017, 109), John Kousgård Sørensen (1966, col. 77), and Ailie Westbrooke (2023). Poul Hauberg (1982, 16) settled on dating it to the first half of the fifteenth century (1400–1450).

The manuscript is mostly written in Danish, specifically in a dialect that mixes the Skåne and Sjælland dialects (Såby 1886, xi) although many headings are in Latin, along with several Latin prayers. It is the work of a single scribe, who keeps glossing at a minimum to correct errors. It contains a leechbook proper (1r–56v), with diseases mentioned in the head-to-toe fashion and a focus on their treatments, although around the last quarter of the manuscript the order becomes unstructured. For instance, all remedies for the head (headaches, eyes, ears, and deafness) lie between 1r–20v, before carrying on with ailments in lower parts of the body (throat, voice, etc.), but in 47r, there are more remedies to prevent hair loss from the scalp. The text includes some herbal treatments mentioned in *Den danske Urtebog*, although it does not contain any chapters in full, suggesting that the scribe might have been copying from the same sources as Harpestræng, rather than from the *Urtebog* itself (Såby 1886, ix). It includes sixteen contemporary magic formulae as well as one added in the seventeenth century.<sup>25</sup>

On 50r, there is a chapter on uroscopy, explaining how to use urine to determine whether a sick person will live or die from their sickness. This is followed by a text titled “Probacio galieni”, which also explains how to determine a sick person’s fate. Between 51v and 53r, there is a chapter on phlebotomy, with bloodletting and other medical advice for each month of the year. The Salernitan influence is thus very clear and places the manuscript in a learned medical context. Between 54r and 55r there are remedies specifically aimed at women along with some non-medical entries such as how to prevent a married woman from committing adultery: “Om thu wilt at thijn quinnæ tachær æy annen man” (If you want your wife not to take another man; Såby 1886, 94); and how to know whether a pregnant woman is carrying a son or a daughter: “Om thu wildæ widæ om quinnæ thet barn hauer om hun ær medh søn eller doter” (If you want to know if

25 The charms have been collected by Ferdinand Ohrt (1917–1921). Stephen Mitchell (2020 and 2025) has written about the charms within AM 187 8vo.

a woman who is with child, if she shall have son or a daughter; Såby 1886, 96). After this, there are some more remedies for a myriad of different things, including pain in the abdomen, constipation, stones, spleen, abscesses, wounds, pain in the genitals etc. At the end of the manuscript, fol. 57v–59r, there is a list of household remedies written by a hand from the early sixteenth century, in a hand not dissimilar to the first hand in AM 819 4to responsible for 1r–33v.

The scribe of AM 187 8vo is known to have worked at the Franciscan Saint Clara's convent in Roskilde (Hansen, 2016). Since the Clarissan convent apparently did not care for the sick (Westbrooke 2023, 385–386), some have suggested that the manuscript was written for the nuns' own personal use (Sørensen 1966, col 77). This seems unlikely, however, given the manuscript's contents, which include remedies for pregnancy, childbirth, and adultery—none of which are of any use to a nun. A more plausible scenario is that the scribe began working on the manuscript while in Skåne—possibly at Lund Cathedral—and later brought it with him to Roskilde, where it was purchased by the Clarissan nuns.

The text has been edited by Såby (1886).

### *Fifteenth century*

5. Thott 710 4to (Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen)<sup>26</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: 1400–1450

Dimensions: 20.6 × 15.5 cm

Language: Danish, German, Latin

Comments: This is a composite manuscript containing many different hands and mostly medical texts, although there are some religious sections scattered throughout. The entire codex is 153 folia (306 pages in total). The cover and the binding of the manuscript Thott 710 4to appear to be original but have been mended with some paper, bound by a leather strap. The manuscript has been re-bound several times. This is evident because it contains smaller manuscripts within the codex and some pages that have been replaced and/or re-positioned and re-foliated in the manuscript. The treatments are mostly in Old Danish, but there are some incantations in German scattered throughout the manuscript as well as some others

<sup>26</sup> No online facsimile available.

in Latin. Most of the manuscript dates to the first half of the fifteenth century, although certain sections date to the sixteenth (Kristensen 1908–1920, xciii; Hauberg 1919, 112).

The manuscript opens *in medias res*, with a Latin text on the Roman weight system (drachmas) and use of leeches (1r–4v). Fols. 4v–5v are blank, and they are followed by a smaller, later manuscript, written in the sixteenth century, that has been sewed in to make fols. 6r–9v, measuring approximately 9cm × 12cm, on the preparation of salves and plasters. Thereafter, between 10r and 23v, follows a list of remedies that does not seem to follow a particular order. The cures are for fertility, old wounds, intestinal worms, pestilence, chest ailments, and adultery. On 14r–14v, there is a remedy in Latin for phlegm. Between 15r and 18r there is a Latin-Danish Plant Dictionary from A–P, with the heading “Hic Sequitur de Varijs Herbis Nomina”. On 18r, below the end of the glossary, another hand has added a recipe for an eye water and a salve. This section (10r–23v) dates to the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

After this, come two texts which make up the core of the manuscript, and both are ascribed to Harpestræng. The leechbook opens with some incantations for the sick, a weather-divination spell and Saint Birgitta’s advice for childless marriages on fol 24r. This folio is barely legible due to its damaged condition, although the name Birgittæ is legible half-way down the page. The writing is very faded here – a stark contrast to the writing on 24v – suggesting that, at some point, this side of the folio must have been the cover of the manuscript before it was incorporated into its present location. The text also begins *in medias res*, so this is also not the original beginning of the leechbook. On fol. 25r, there is an entry on daily lifestyle, followed by a long section on bloodletting up to fol. 27v. Also on 27v, there is the text on laxatives ascribed to Henricus Dacus, known from K 48 and NKS 66. At the very bottom – only two lines – there is the very start of the leechbook proper: “Swa som howeth er op hoff tel allæ lymmæ, swa skal thet oc først fynnes lægædom tel for thy then tymæ ther ...” (Just as the head is the chief (top) of all the limbs, so must the remedy first be found for it because then ...).

When the page is turned over, there is a slightly later hand that is filling in. The new scribe indicates that they are carrying on from when the last

27 The hand is similar to the one starting on 65r in the prayer book AM 784 4to.

one left off by copying the exact same last few words. He begins from “... thy then tymæ ther howeth wærk tha sorgther alla lemæ” (... because when the head aches, all the limbs are afflicted). The new scribe takes the reader through the first half of the body, from the very top of the scalp, “om haar aff faller” (if the hair falls off), to the bladder and genitals. Then, on 33v, there are a few entries for ailments in Latin. At the very bottom, a later hand from the end of the fifteenth century, has a Danish remedy for pestilence. The medical content in this hand continues all the way to the top 37v. This scribe has added the ailments in the margins for easier searching. 37r contains various prayers. On 36r–36v, there is a passage attributed to St Gregory which focuses on the spiritual efficacy of six masses, particularly for the dying or deceased. Saint Gregory, who was well known as a physician, is invoked as an authority on penance and medicine.

Fol. 38r sees the return of the original scribe in the main text, but it seems as though the previous scribe who filled in for him has added the ailments on the margins. This section begins with “bolnæ a lønligh ting” (boils on genitalia), probably referring to sexually transmitted diseases. It has a few more remedies for urine infections and then begin the gynaecological remedies. There are cures and recipes for conception, menstruation and menstrual cramps, stillbirths, labour, and at the end, contraception. Following the gynaecological section, which ends on 39v, there are remedies for wounds on 40r; abscesses, burns (“brand aff ild”), and snake bite on 40v; abortion, general sickness (“siwgdom”), feet ailments, and fleas on 41r. On the last folium, 41v, there is an index listing the ailments in order of appearance in the leechbook, which is almost exactly like the one in D 600, except that it seems to be missing a page containing the last few remedies that do appear in the *Lægebog*, but the index jumps from 41v straight to the herbal. Fol. 41v contains a glossary of all the ailments mentioned in the medical book up to that point.

The main evidence that supports that this leechbook was composed by Harpestræng is a note on 41v naming its sources:

hennæ bogh eer sammen sat aff wisæ læghæs kennæ domæ aff the  
tyngth ther oftæ prowætæ æræ [--] cer constantinus / galienus /  
henrik harpæstengh och andra wisæ mesterna

[This book is compiled from the knowledge of wise physicians, of the things that have often been tested [by] Macer, Constantine, Galen, Henrik Harpestræng, and other wise masters.]

The facts that Macer, Constantine, and Galen are already known sources from which Harpestræng drew, and that the text is in Danish and not in Latin, point to the possibility that Harpestræng may have been its author. D 600 (no. 8) bears a different inscription that attributes the leechbook to Harpestræng.

Between 42v and 55v we encounter a portion of Harpestræng's *Urtebog*, under the heading "Hæræ byrgher lægæbog aa danske then ther mæster Henrik harpestragh aff syth mæklæ mæster skap dikthæthe" (Here commences the leechbook of Danish master Henrik Harpestræng, which he composed. The master shall dictate). It seems as though the terms for 'herbal' and 'leechbook' were interchangeable.

To date, there is no entire edition of this manuscript, although certain edited excerpts of the leechbook are included in *Lægebøger – Bondepraktika – Griseldis* (1970, 1–146) and others have been edited by Hauberg (1982).

6. Thott 249 8vo (Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen)<sup>28</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: 1400–1450

Dimensions: 10.8 × 7.9 cm

Language: Danish

Comments: This is a very small, pocket-sized manuscript in a very fragile condition, with its binding coming undone. It has been paginated and has a total of 272 sides.

The manuscript deals exclusively with medical content. The texts have been written by one sole scribe, and there is virtually no glossing except for a later hand which has, in a few places, added the ailments in the margins. The manuscript begins *in medias res*, as the first part of the original codex seems to have been. This has resulted in the first page suffering some damage, especially at the top, where the page has wrinkled. Pages 1–128 contain a leechbook with a wide variety of remedies for different ailments. It appears that the manuscript may have once been structured

<sup>28</sup> No online facsimile available.



in a head-to-toe fashion, as pages 1–61 seem to make their way down the lower half of the body. The leechbook starts with issues in the stomach, kidney stones, urination, boils and wounds,<sup>29</sup> men’s genitals, then women’s health. The section on women encompasses pages 52–61. Thence, the structure becomes whimsical, with remedies for constipation, pain in the chest, dropsy, and then back to the top of the body with remedies for the eyes and headaches.

The leechbook is followed by a lapidary on pages 129–159. From page 161, we find Harpestræng’s text on laxatives, although this time, rather than warning the reader about the administering of laxatives, it cautions the reader against the administering of any and all medicaments: “Hwo som will taghe legedom Han skal thet vidhe ath [nogle?] sterck legedom maa ey giffues børn ellr gamelth folk oc ey andhre thr farmcke\*\*ær” (Whoever wants to take medicine. He should know that some strong medicines must not be given to children or old people, or others, who are sick). This is followed by a version of the *Urtebog*, from page 163, though it seems to start half-way through, with *Lilium* as the first plant. The first part of the *Urtebog* is added at the end, with *Apium* coming in on page 243. This manuscript relies heavily on NKS 66 8vo, as its contents and wording are essentially the same as in NKS 66. Hauberg (1927) edited this manuscript.

7. GKS 3656 8vo (Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen)<sup>30</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: 1450–1500

Dimensions: 17.5 × 11.5 cm

Language: Danish

Comments: There are 186 folia in this manuscript, of which only the first three contain any medical advice, 1r–3r. The rest of the contents of this neat, well-preserved manuscript is of a legal nature. Those first three pages contain information on bloodletting, opening with “Thette ær legen mesther Hinrick harpæ strengh aff konnyngh Erick” (This is the medical advice of master Hinrick Harpestreng to King Erik). There is a section on fol. 3r that gives specific advice on how to let blood depending on what

29 Conditions that are not associated with any part of the body, such as wounds, burns, and boils, tend to crop up around the middle of the body, with the stomach and kidneys.

30 No online facsimile available.

astrological sign the sun is in. The last sentence of this section, half-way down the folio, reads “Er han i løwen tha ...” (if he is in Leo then ...), and the advice on bloodletting remains unfinished.

To date, no full edition exists, but the section on bloodletting has been edited in *Lægebøger – Bondepraktika – Griseldis* (1970, 147–148).

8. D 600 8vo (Uppsala universitetsbibliotek)<sup>31</sup>

Alternative names: A Leechbook from Head to Toe

Dating: 1400–1490

Dimensions: 15.0 × 11.0 cm

Language: Danish, Latin

Comments: This manuscript is generally dated to around 1450. Hauberg (1936, 27) notes that the year 1437 is recorded in two astrological figures on page 25 but notes that the hand does not look old enough to be from this year. The year 1490 is mentioned on page 50, which he thinks fits the date of the manuscript better. The manuscript has a total of 151 pages and 300 sides, and it has been paginated rather than foliated. The texts are written by the one hand, mostly within the medical genre, although there is a strong ecclesiastical element. The first part of the manuscript, pages 1–87, features countless texts in Latin and some tables, including Easter tables; astrological information; a text on “Nomes de modo horologii” (Names relating to the method of the clock); one on the thirty-day lunar cycle; a text on bloodletting; another on the full moons in each month and how they affect one’s health; and an almanac.

Next, on pages 87–91, there is a medical text ascribed to Harpestræng in Danish and subheadings in Latin, opening with “Nomina medicina magister henrici harpestreng” (The medicine of Master Henrik Harpestræng). This text gives general advice on how to heal from an illness and how to lead a healthy lifestyle: “Hwo som krank ær han schal syn dagheligh leffeth swo gøme som hær star screwth” (Whoever is ill, he shall live his daily life as carefully as it is written here). On page 88, there is the start of a leechbook with remedies for headaches, earaches, and for hair loss. This carries on to page 91, where the text ends abruptly with a remedy for horses. The same hand (in different ink) then adds a four-line text titled “Epitaphium Virgilii” (Epitaph of Virgil).

31 No online facsimile available.

Between pages 92 and 140 there is a series of shorter medical texts in Latin. Following this, on pages 141–145, there is a Latin-Danish list of herbs, trailed by a section of a religious and superstitious nature. Between 146 and 148 there is musical notation intended for chanting. At the bottom of 148, the same hand has added an entry on “spansgrønt” (copper acetate) in Latin, although they kept the name of the chemical compound in Danish. On pages 172–175, there are recipes for salves, before the scribe carries on with a fragment of Harpestræng’s *Liber Herbarum*, between 175 and 195. A medical book structured from head to toe is encompassed between 196 and 230. The text is a mixture of the *Liber Herbarum* and a slightly younger Latin text by Petrus Hispanus, *Thesaurus pauperum*. Perhaps the outline of the writing and some of its material originates from a now lost Danish medical book by Harpestræng. The text specifically contains some interesting sections at the end; perhaps the most charming is a section on how to make people happy.

On pages 231–260, there are medical and alchemical records written in both Danish and Latin. On pages 261–268 we find some minor texts in Latin. At the end of the manuscript, on pages 269–300, there is yet another medical book in Latin.

The contents and the remedies in Thott 710 4to are almost identical to D 600. Hauberg (1919, 112) claims that Thott 710 4to contains the oldest extant copy of the *Lægebog* allegedly composed by Harpestræng between fols. 25r and 41v, written in the first half of the fifteenth century, so D 600 may have either possibly been copied from the same exemplar as Thott 710 4to or from Thott 710 4to itself.

There is an online edition of the leechbook (pages 196–230 in the manuscript) available on Tekstnet.<sup>32</sup> There is also a printed version in *Lægebøger – Bondepraktika – Griseldis* (1970, 1–146).

9. NKS 314 b 4to (Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen)<sup>33</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: 1475–1500

Dimensions: 21.0 × 14.5 cm

Language: Danish, German

32 [https://tekstnet.dk/books/anon\\_laegbog-upps-d600/](https://tekstnet.dk/books/anon_laegbog-upps-d600/)

33 No online facsimile available.

Comments: NKS 314 b 4to is a comprehensive guide to *materia medica*, exclusively containing medical texts. It was first dated by Kristensen to the year 1500 'at the earliest' (1908–1920, xcvi). Hauberg revised this dating, claiming it was from the second half of the fifteenth century (1919, 114), before narrowing it down to the end of the fifteenth century (1936, 35).

The craftsmanship of the book is evident; it features an elaborate cover made from leather-covered wooden blocks adorned with intricate floral designs. The manuscript has been well preserved, showcasing vibrant pages and dark ink. The text is adorned with decorative touches in red and gold ink, including ornate capital letters and underlined titles. The whole manuscript has been written by one person, in Danish with very minimal use of Latin phrases. A later scribe has added some extra remedies or minor glosses on certain leaves (19v, 28r, 38v, 57r, 62r, 91r, 146v, 148r, 148v, 149v, 152v), this hand dates to the second quarter of the sixteenth century.<sup>34</sup>

The main bulk of the manuscript contains a herbarium between 1r and 10v (i.e. a list of herbs and their uses, with no description or context, just as a tool for quick searches); an ailment index, where diseases are listed with their cures written next to them between 11r and 14v; twenty-two translated chapters of Harpestreng's *Liber Herbarum*: "Her begynnnes lægebog paa danskæ ther mesther Henrick Harpæstreng aff syth megle mesterskap dichtede" (Here begins the leech book in Danish that master Henrick Harpestreng, of his much knowledge, dictated)<sup>35</sup> on 17r–31v; a chapter on bloodletting, cupping, and bathing between 34r and 37r; and the leechbook allegedly penned by Harpestræng on 37r–69v.<sup>36</sup> After the leechbook (37r–69v), there are some shorter sections on how to make brandy, how to make plasters and balms, a poem on the health and wellness advice given to a king of England; and small sections on fever, dropsy, pestilence, and abscesses.

From 96v to 101r there is another text that resembles a head-to-toe

34 My dating of this hand is based on the fact that it bears a striking resemblance to the one in Laurids Pedersens Lægebog, which I have firmly dated between 1533–1546 (see no. 16).

35 N.B. Even though the rubric states that this is the *lægebog* (leechbook) by Harpestræng, in modern scholarship we refer to it as the *Urtebog* and the *Liber Herbarum* as 'Herbals', as this reflects the contents and nature of the work better. This text is, in fact, a translation of Harpestræng's *Liber Herbarum*.

36 The leechbook in this manuscript does not mention Harpestræng, but it is the same text found in other Danish and Swedish medical manuscripts where this is implied: Thott 710 4to, AM 819 4to, AM 45 4to, AM 188 8vo, and GKS 3487 8vo.

leechbook, but it does not ascribe it to any author. On 101v and the first half of 102r, there is a text that explains the Galenic phlegmatic and melancholic humours, which Galen based on Hippocrates' humoral theory. This text seems to never have been finished, as there are two humours missing and the rest of 102r and 102v have been left blank. This is followed by two poems in Middle Low German conveying the medical advice attributed to Pythagoras (103r–104r and 105r–116v). Both poems deal with how the celestial bodies, such as the moon, and the times of the year affect the body and wellbeing and offers advice on how to remain in good health.

Henceforth, the content remains medical, but the texts become shorter, and the structure somewhat arbitrary. There are texts on the powers of “Cardabenedicta” which are also found in *Huskurer* (no. 16), a section on women's health (121r–124v), astrological treatises (128r–129r), an anatomical text on the science of bloodletting and which veins to bleed from (129v–135r). There are clear traces of German influence in this section, too. There are sections where German words have been kept: “beweritze” (southernwood),<sup>37</sup> and “honnigseem” (honey).<sup>38</sup>

There are also remedies not found elsewhere in the corpus, such as one on 124r, to heal women's perineal tears after childbirth: “Thet skeer thyt oc offthe thet quinnen wynner barn thet hennes hwd refner all sammens” (It often happens that when a woman gives birth, her skin tears). Cures for this ailment, albeit absent in the Scandinavian corpus, are known from German manuscripts, such as the so-called *Breslauer Arzneibuch*, a thirteenth-century German manuscript at the University Library of Wrocław in Poland;<sup>39</sup> the *Utrechter Azneibuch* and the *Stockholmer Arzneibuch*. Other cures from the *Breslauer Arzneibuch* also share similarities with NKS 314 b 4to, but the general structure and quality of the *Arzneibuch* (leechbook) is different enough from the *Lægebog* to ascertain that the Danish scribe was not copying directly from the texts in this manuscript, which contains a German version of

37 123r: “tha skullæ taghe saluæ oc rudhe. malyrt oc abrotanum the er beweritze” (then one shall take sage, rue, wormwood and southernwood (*abrotanum*), which is beweritze). However, the Scandinavian word for *abrotanum* is consistently *abrott*.

38 Mod. Germ. “Honnigseim” (honey); 121v: sywd thet met ædickæ oc med honnigseem (“seeth it with vinegar and honey”). In Danish, the term is consistently “honnig” or “honning”.

39 This is an extensive, neat, and expensive parchment manuscript with illustrations, written in Ostmitteledeutsch (East Middle German), in Silesia. See Külz and Külz-Trosse, *Der Breslauer Arzneibuch R.291 der Stadtbibliothek*, for an overview and edition of the manuscript.

the *Trotula*. Therefore, rather than a simple copyist or scribe, we may be dealing with a learned Danish physician trained at a German university.

On 136r–139r, there is a text on Hippocratic medicine and how to discern illness from a person's complexion, which is not to be found in other Scandinavian manuscripts. The manuscript ends with a leechbook by Master Bartolomeus (known as Bartholomew the Englishman in English, or Bartholomaeus Anglicus in Latin), between 144r and 154v. This last text can be traced back to the original exemplar. The earliest version of this text is found in C 58 at the Stadtbibliothek in Zürich, dating to the middle of the twelfth century. Another version is found in the mid-thirteenth-century Cod. germ. 92 (Cgm 92) at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in München (formerly the Hof- und Staatsbibliothek zu München).

The *Liber Herbarum* on 17r–31v has been edited by Kristensen (1908–1920, 243). The leechbook has been edited in *Lægebøger – Bondepraktika – Griseldis* (1970, 1–146). The rest of the manuscript remains unedited.

### *Sixteenth century*<sup>40</sup>

10. GKS 3487 8vo (Gamle Kongelige Samling, Copenhagen)<sup>41</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: 1490–1510

Dimensions: 14.5 × 9.5 cm

Language: Latin, Danish, Low German

Comments: This example begins with a Low German confession formula detailing numerous different ways in which one can sin (1r–9v).<sup>42</sup>

Following that, there is a version of the *Kvindens Rosengaard* (Women's Rose Garden), a Danish translation of the work by German doctor and apothecary Eucharius Rösslin in 1513. It starts on fol. 10r: “en bogh som kallis frwchtsomeligh qwynders Och Jordhemodherness Rosengardh” (a book called the fruitful women's and earth mother's rose garden) and ends on fol. 65r. It includes advice on difficult labour, how to care for women before and after childbirth, and how to care for new-born children. The

<sup>40</sup> There are two more manuscripts of the Harpestræng tradition that date to the sixteenth century but that aren't included in this list because they date to the second half of the century: Ledreborg Håndskrifts Samling 15 4to with sections from *Den danske Urtebog* and NKS 67 8vo (Det Kongelige Bibliothek, Copenhagen) with sections from the *Liber Herbarum*.

<sup>41</sup> No online facsimile available.

<sup>42</sup> This text has been edited online by Seán Vrieland (n.d.).

manuscript proceeds with snippets of medical advice in Latin and German, including the famous text on “Cardo Benedicta” (66v–68r), copied in its original language, German.

On fols. 98v–109v there is a leechbook with remedies for a wide variety of ailments, which Hauberg claimed has a connection with Harpestræng’s leechbook (1919, 121; 1982, 23–24), but they do not seem to have been structured in any particular order. At the end of the leechbook, there is an entry on “sennep” (mustard), taken from the *Urtebog*, followed by another entry on “blodh ganck” (dysentery), and ending with a glossary with the Latin and Danish names for plants.

There is not a holistic edition of the entire manuscript. However, the leechbook and the *Kvindens Rosengaard* have been edited online by Simon Boeck, Anne Mette Hansen, and Ebba Hjorth. There is a printed version of fols. 98v–103r, 109r–110v, and 129r–129v (*Lægebøger - Bondepraktika – Griseldis* 1970).

#### 11. AM 188 8vo (Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, Copenhagen)<sup>43</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: 1490–1510

Dimensions: 14.7 × 10.2 cm

Language: Danish

Comments: AM 188 8vo is a miscellany compiled around the turn of the sixteenth century,<sup>44</sup> with a heavy focus on medicine. It measures 14.7cm × 10.2 cm. The manuscript consists of ninety-two leaves, seventy-six made of paper and eighteen of parchment. There are a total of nine hands, including the ones that only add glossing. The main bulk of the text, however, is written by two hands. The first (Hand A) dates to around the year 1500 and is responsible for writing fols. 3r–41r and 52r–60v, which mainly contain astrological texts. The second (Hand B) dates to the second quarter of the sixteenth century, as this hand also adds some notes on Christian II of Denmark’s trip to Norway in 1532, rendering this the *terminus post quem* for Hand B.<sup>45</sup>

43 <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/en/AMo8-0188/o#mode/2up>

44 According to Handrit.is, the original manuscript was created between 1475 and 1525, <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/da/AMo8-0188>. Poul Hauberg (1919, 123) previously dated the manuscript to the first half of the sixteenth century (1500–1549). The website for the University of Copenhagen agrees with this view (“Restauration of AM 188 8vo”, n.d.).

45 Poul Hauberg (1919, 123) says that Hand B is writing at around the same time as the events



The manuscript opens with some annalistic notes of events that took place in 1526 on 1v, written by Hand B. In the same folio, the scribe reveals that he was born on the 8 May 1508. This is followed by a Latin text on rules to follow for the meteorological nature of the seasons on 2r–2v. A later hand from the 1600s has then filled in the empty space on 2v by adding all the names of the runes in Iceland. Hand A begins his work from here. Between 3r and 9v there is a Latin calendar, with an Easter table and then a month-by-month lunar calendar.

10r–41r consist of astrological tables and how the cosmos affects the human body, all in Latin. From 13r, there are texts and tables called “spera’ (spheres) ascribed to Apuleius, through Pythagoras (“Spera Pythagorea Appulei”). These texts and spheres describe a method for determining a person’s health and fate using numerical calculations and astrology. This theme is followed all the way through to 41r. In 30r, a later hand has added a religious verse in Danish.

On 41v, two later hands from the middle of the sixteenth century have each added one medical remedy in Danish. The second remedy is for “Lungesot” (lung ailments). The hand is very similar to the one found in *Huskurer* (no. 16). This begins the section on medicine. Hand B’s writing begins *in medias res* at the top of 42r, “Tagh these effterne wrter och skøll them i wand aff huer wrth ij gode handfull” (Take these following plants and soak them each in their own water in generous handfuls). We know not what the plants are nor what the cure is meant to be for. It seems as though this was originally a separate piece of work that got sewed in with this manuscript written by Hand A. On the opposite side, in 42v, there are two hands: the first one, at the top, reads “Abraham puocat te vel vos fugies vel fugient[-] + et aligat + salomon te vel vos mueniat +” (Abraham summons you to flee + and binds + may Salomon protect you) which has been crossed out; and another, writing in Danish, adds some more remedies for another unknown ailment. This latter hand is the same one as the one at the top of 41v.

In 43r, Hand B comes back with the aforementioned paragraph on Christian II’s trip to Norway, which carries on to 43v. At the bottom of 43v, the medical content continues, starting off with a remedy “ffaar blod-sott” (for dysentery). The medical content in Danish carries on until 51v.

take place, although he concedes that it could be as late as the middle of the sixteenth century.

Between 46v and 47v there is a section on “skørbugh” (scurvy). Fols. 48r and 48v deal with a variety of problems, none of which seem related to each other: on “ondhe yld” (lit. bad fire), “anledhe” (face), “ambudh” (penis), “amyndelsse” (memory), and “binbrwdh” (broken leg/bone). In 49r, there is a heading that reads “Tiill Quinder” (For Women); this is followed by remedies for childbirth and menstruation, and later with remedies for chest pains, for the bladder, dysentery, tuberculosis, and abscesses.

Between 52r and 60v, Hand A comes back to copy a “Formulae epistolarum” (also known as ‘Epistole Caroli’), which is a manual in Latin on how to write letters. On 61r, the medical content, written by Hand B, returns, adding treatments in no apparent order. This time, there is a heading at the top of the page reading “Legedom faar then mye siuge uti brystett: Syde oc Riighen” (Cures for much sickness in the chest: side and back). On 65v begins some veterinary advice for horses and mares and miscarried foals. Following this, on 70r, there are remedies for miscarried fetuses. Between 76r and 79v, there is a Danish translation of the treatise on the properties of Carda Benedicta and how to use it medicinally. However, part of the original text in German is found right after it, between 80r and 82v. On 82v, the last two paragraphs are written in Danish, before going on to a text ascribed to Albertus Magnus, which carries on to 84r. The codex ends with a fragment of a head-to-toe leechbook from the eighteenth century. Hauberg (1919, 127) noted that on 87r there is advice against dropsy with the use of the “Slangesten” (snake stone), which is found in AM 187 8vo.

12. NKS 134 4to (Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen)<sup>46</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: 1500

Dimensions: 21.0 × 15.0 cm

Language: Danish, German

Comments: This is a fragment of just ten paper leaves written by one hand. It does not include any gloss or show signs of later usage. The writing is neat and clear, and there are some elements of decoration. Rubrics have been marked clearly with red and gold ink. Only the first double-page has any medical material and a little bit on circulation on 1v. Thence, the content pivots to religious texts but remains somewhat related to medicine.

<sup>46</sup> No online facsimile available.

The text begins *in medias res* and includes three chapters from the *Liber Herbarum* on fol. 1r: “Pipinella”, “Serptentina”, and “Zinziber”. On the same folio, there is an entry on gout in Danish, with a German translation, and another on haemorrhage, in Danish with no German translation. At the top of 1v there is an entry on “Contra fluxum sanguinis a prope posteriore” (Against blood flow from the rear door). A Latin inscription suggests that the manuscript was copied in Randers (Jylland) on the 21 October 1499.

To date, no edition exists.

13. GKS 3457 8vo (Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen)<sup>47</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: 1490–1520

Dimensions: 14.0 × 9.4 cm

Language: Danish, Latin

Comments: This manuscript offers a remarkable window into early sixteenth-century Danish monastic life and medieval scholarship. Dated precisely to the year 1520, as evidenced by an included almanac and a specific notation on a table within the text, it was produced at the Maribo Kloster (Abbey) in Lolland, Denmark (Kristensen 1908–1920, xcvi). Its contents span hymns, prayers, psalms, and medico-botanical knowledge.

The manuscript is small and thick, consisting of 206 folia made of parchment, though not all pages are numbered. The text is written in a single hand, but later glosses indicate ongoing use and study and emendations to recipes. The manuscript opens with mostly illegible text on fol. 1r, in faded red and black ink, featuring a circular diagram with an abbreviation of “Ihesus” encircled by a sun, accompanied by a Danish inscription. Subsequent folios (1v–3v) contain a variety of prayers, including the “Pater Noster” (Our Father) and the “Ave Maria” (Hail Mary), followed by the Apostles’ Creed. These prayers are foundational to Catholic liturgical practice and often recited in that exact order, suggesting that the booklet may have been used often in Mass. A notable section begins on fol. 4r with an astronomical or calendrical table, indicating the manuscript’s use for timekeeping and liturgical planning. This section includes a preamble discussing the validity and usage of the solar table over different time spans, including leap years. On fol. 4v, there is another circular diagram that reads

<sup>47</sup> No online facsimile available.

“Tabula angelica est ista” (This is an angelic table) and an inscription below mentioning Easter dates in the year 1520.

The manuscript includes botanical and medical knowledge, mostly in Danish. A remedy for pestilence has been added on 1v, and thirteen entries of Harpestreng’s *Liber Herbarum* (but translated into Danish) have been included on fols. 13r–14r. This is followed on fol. 15r by an explanation of the Galenic concept of the ‘simples’; how plants have certain properties (hot or cold, and wet or dry) that will directly counteract certain illnesses. Between fols. 133r and 144v there is a head-to-toe leechbook, followed by forty-three chapters of the *Liber Herbarum*, although the scribe adds more plants that are unique to the Scandinavian geography and eating habits, such as *Angelica* and *Benedicta alba*, between fols. 144v and 151v. These entries have been written mostly in Latin, although the scribe seamlessly blends some Danish or provides Danish translations of the herbs. Towards the end of the codex, there are some more remedies that seem to have been added as an afterthought, in Danish and Latin, once the manuscript was completed.

To date, no edition exists.

14. Thott 245 8vo (Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen)<sup>48</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: 1500–1515

Dimensions: 17.6 ´ 11.8 cm

Language: Danish

Comments: This manuscript is a witness to the German gynaecological text known in Danish as the *Kvinders Rosengaard*, which, in this manuscript, is named *Frugtsommelige Quinders Urtegaard* (The fruitful women’s herb garden), a translation of Rösslin’s *Der Rosengarten* (The Rose Garden). It contains much of the same material as the text in GKS 3487 8vo, plus many more entries, including one about twins, why a child must be bathed after birth, and advice for heavy menstruation. This medical text can be found on fols. 1r–79r.

To date, no edition exists.

<sup>48</sup> No online facsimile available.

15. AM 819 4to (Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, Copenhagen)<sup>49</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: 1500–1515

Dimensions: 18.5 ' 12.5 cm

Language: Danish

Comments: This specimen consists of two sections, which must once have been separate products and were bound together by a later compiler. The first half, between 1r and 33v, gives us a *terminus ante quem* of 1514, as the scribe writes down the date on the last page, presumably when the manuscript was completed: “Anno domini MDXIII sabato pentecostes” (Year 1514, Pentecost Saturday). The second half, between 34r and 53v, dates to slightly later, possibly around the middle of the sixteenth century. Both sections have a sole scribe and no glosses or later emendations.

The first half of the manuscript (Part I) contains part of Harpestræng’s leechbook.<sup>50</sup> However, it opens with some spells and charms that do diverge from the Harpestræng material, starting with a spell to dispel rats and mice from the home, followed by a long list of prayers to Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, St John, and Elizabeth to heal gout, and a spell to incarcerate a thief so that they do not leave with the possessions they have taken. There are other prayers and charms scattered throughout Part I of the manuscript, which Hauberg (1919, 118) suggested might have been copied from the mid-fifteenth century Danish manuscript Thott 710 4to, as these are the only two copies of Harpestræng’s leechbook that contain charms or other magical entries. These charms have been compiled and edited by Ferdinand Ohrt (1917–1921).

Unlike most other leechbooks attributed to Harpestræng, the structure in AM 819 4to is obscure, as it does not follow the traditional head-to-toe order. However, from fol. 5r, there is an attempt to keep related ailments together. For instance, between 12v and 13v, all the remedies are intended for different parts of the head, followed by a section on horse veterinary medicine, and then the signs of the zodiac. Remedies for fevers are mostly bundled together between 29r and 31r. There is a final section on fol. 33r

49 <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/en/AM04-0819/0#mode/2up>

50 Harpestræng is thought to have written a leechbook, as there are various Danish manuscripts that allude to this: Thott 710 4to, NKS 314b 4to, AM 45 4to, GKS 3487 8vo, and AM 188 8vo.

dedicated to spiritual questions that one should ask the terminally ill, attributed to Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury (1033–1109). There is an entry for infertility that opens with an explanation that if a woman cannot get pregnant, this is because her womb has moved upwards to her stomach – the phenomenon known as the ‘wandering womb’. One of the suggested treatments involving the burning of goat’s hooves is also present on page 27 of *Lavrids Pedersens Lægebog* (*Huskurer*, see no. 16), although in this manuscript, the remedy is provided in German. There is a recipe for a plaster in AM 819 4to that is also written in a mixture of Danish and German, on fol. 11v, so the link with a German medical manuscript is present.

AM 819 4to contains striking similarities with the only medieval Norwegian *lægebog* (*Vinjeboka*, see no. 29). It seamlessly threads through magico-religious treatments as well as herbal ones, and its entries – albeit often much shorter due to the smaller size of the codex – largely overlap with AM 819 4to. For instance, the section on horse veterinary medicine in AM 819 4to, between 13v and 15v, matches up almost perfectly with the entries in *Vinjeboka*.

In Part II (34r–53v) of the manuscript, between 34r and 44v, lies a copy of the beginning of Harpestræng’s *Lægebog* followed by miscellaneous medical advice and charms from fols. 44r to 53. It also includes part of his *Urtebog* between 37r and 42v, but the scribe has taken some liberties; rather than listing the treatments alphabetically, per each plant’s properties, they have carried on with the traditional leechbook’s structure, naming the ailment first, and then following with the ingredients and recipe. Part II is mostly concerned with general health, such as good-quality sleep, headaches, toothache, and so on. Some chapters of Christiørn Pedersen’s *En Nøttelig Legebog* have been copied between fol. 34r and 44v, although not all remedies in this section of AM 819 4to have been taken from Pedersen’s *Lægebog*. This confirms Poul Hauberg’s notion that Part II was written later than Part I, as *En Nøttelig Legebog* was not published until 1533. Following this, there are some cures for a variety of ailments unrelated to one another (44v–48r) and a few recipes for “sten” (stones), i.e. kidney stones, liver stones etc., between 50v–52v. This is followed by a chapter on how to live a healthy lifestyle, attributed to a Dr Karl, a thus-far unidentified physician. Parts of the manuscript, namely the section on bloodletting, the medical advice, veterinary medicine and section on farming known as

“bondepraktika” have been edited in *Lægebøger – Bondepraktika – Griseldis* (1970, 149–155, 175–212, 213–216, and 244–290 respectively). The rest of the manuscript remains unedited.

16. Lavrids Pedersens Lægebog 4to [no shelfmark] (Kungliga Vitterhetsakademien, Stockholm)<sup>51</sup>

Alternative names: *Huskurer och Signerier på Danska*

Dating: 1550–1699

Dimensions: 20 × 15.5 cm

Language: Danish, German, Latin

Comments: This manuscript has been catalogued as “Huskurer och Signerier på Danska” by the Swedish Royal Academy of Letters (Vitterhetsakademien), and therefore, I refer to it as *Huskurer*. Until very recently, this small codex had been all but forgotten, with only two scholars (Hauberg 1936; Heugren 1918) having ever briefly consulted it in their quests to better understand medicine in medieval Denmark. The exemplar is a thin and small book made of paper containing purely medical knowledge. It has sixty-three sides in total, having been paginated, not foliated. Most of the manuscript is in Danish, although there are some sections written in German and some prayers in Latin.

This manuscript has become known as Lavrids Pedersens Lægebog due to a note at the back of the manuscript reading, “Lavrids Pedersen Bin ich gennant [--] Mein gelych stegt in gottis Handt. – Paffuell Jacobsen Egen Hand” (Laurits Pedersen is my name [--]. My happiness lies in God’s Hand. – Paffuell Jacobsen. Own hand). This hand, which Paffuell Jacobsen has claimed to be his own, is certainly later than both MS 1 and MS 3 by at least a few decades, if not half a century. It appears Jacobsen is a later owner of the manuscript and is shedding some light on its origins, originally belonging to this Laurits Pedersen.

The codex comprises three separate, different manuscripts that were later sewn together. Poul Hauberg (1936, 36) refers to the work as a whole as dating to the first half of the sixteenth century, but the three manuscripts seem to have been written at different times throughout the 1500s. Manuscript 1 (MS 1) is the only manuscript that fits into our time-period (up to 1550); the other two being slightly younger examples. Paul Heugren

51 No online facsimile available.



(1918, vi) assumed that MS 1 and MS 3 were originally the same, written towards the end of the 1500s, and believed that a younger manuscript (i.e. MS 2), was inserted in the middle. However, there are some clear differences between MS 1 and MS 3, such as the ink colour— including the use of red ink at one point— and some distinct letter forms, indicating that they were written by different scribes. Each section is written by one hand throughout; all three are different from each other but each manuscript is the work of a sole scribe.

The hand in MS 1 (Hand A henceforth) is the oldest. The texts penned by this hand shed light on when Hand A was writing. About a third (34.37%)<sup>52</sup> of *Huskurer* MS 1 has been copied from Christiørn Pedersen's *En Nøttelig Legebog*, the first Scandinavian medical work to be published in print in 1533. This data provides us with our *terminus post quem*. As for the *terminus ante quem*, I venture to suggest that this is 1546. This is because the only other medical work printed in the first half of the sixteenth century, another largely popular and influential work, is Henrick Smid's *Ny Urtegaard*,<sup>53</sup> the content of which is notably absent from *Huskurer* MS 1. Therefore, *Huskurer* MS 1 was most likely written in the thirteen-year window between the two works, sometime between 1533 and 1546.

MS 1 includes texts not found in Christiørn Pedersen's work, too, including recipes for cosmetic procedures, such as how to stop hair from greying or how to make it blonde(r). Also absent from Pedersen's work are several prayers in Latin when the patient and/or practitioner are encouraged to mutter a prayer as part of the treatment. There is also evidence of copying from a German manuscript: a whole paragraph on page 27 written in Early High German describes using the claws or hooves of an animal, grinding them down into a powder, and giving this to a wetnurse to drink in broth, wine, or any other liquid. The scribe also seems to copy some of Harpestræng's work, but does not cite him as a source, and the entries are much shorter than those in NKS 66 and K 48.

Whilst the author/scribe of the manuscript seems to be well-educated in medicine and languages – for they must be at least trilingual, writing in Latin, Danish, and German – they do not seem to seek any acclaim,

52 I obtained this percentage by counting all words and sentences in MS 1 and comparing them to the overlapping ones in Christiørn Pedersen's *Legebog*.

53 Henrick Smid published his medical work in four volumes between 1546 and 1553.

power, or authority. The only instance when they reference a Salernitan doctor is in an entry under “for kaalde syge” (for fever) where they mention medieval Arabic physician Avicenna. The only other two authorities our scribe mentions are “en gammel quinde fra Halland” (an old woman from Halland), on page 5, who advised another, who had cancer in her lip, that she should take a white cloth, dip it in tar, and apply it [to her lip], and an unnamed physician who used Carduus Benedictus to heal a woman with breast cancer in Augsburg, Germany. This suggests that the scribe is more interested in empirical evidence and remedies that actually work than the learned theoretical teachings of antique and medieval doctors. This is further supported by the fact that right after providing a remedy, the scribe will sometimes add “och det er forsøgt” (and this has been tried), as if they are validating the legitimacy of the remedy.

MS 1 sometimes amends some of Pedersen’s entries, replacing expensive ingredients only found in apothecaries with plants that grow locally and prescribing cheap wine over more expensive wine. This suggests that the scribe is writing for a working-class patient.

To date, no edition exists.

## Swedish

### *Fifteenth century*

17. AM 45 4to (Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, Copenhagen)<sup>54</sup>

Alternative names: Klemming I

Dating: ca. 1450

Dimensions: 19.4 × 13.7 cm

Language: Swedish, Latin

Comments: AM 45 4to is peculiar for its being primarily a legal manuscript. Of its 113 paper folia, ninety-eight relate to legal content. A text on the Swedish *Stadslag* (city law) of King Magnus Eriksson makes up the vast majority of the manuscript, covering fols. 1r all the way to 93r. Two hands, from around the middle of the fifteenth century, are responsible for the writing. The first (Hand A) goes from 1r to 42r. The second (Hand B) picks up where the first left off, which happens to be mid-sentence on the fifth line in 42r and carries on all the way to the end of the text and almost

<sup>54</sup> <https://handrit.is/search?q=AM+45+4to>

the end of the manuscript. After finishing the law text, Hand B continues to write a thirty-day almanac, found on 93v–95v, followed by an excerpt of Harpestræng's leechbook, between 96r and 98v: "Her byrias lækedomber aff mæsther henrik harpostræng" (Here begins the leechbook of Master Henrik Harpestræng). The excerpt does not seem to follow a particular order and mainly sticks to giving one remedy for each ailment. Hand B is also responsible for a "Missa Missa De quinq Wlnderibus corporis Christi" (Mass of the five wounds of the body of Christ), between 99r and 101v, written in Latin. Following the ending of the Mass, there is a six-line liturgical text and two cures for breast abscesses.

There is a text on the internal structure of the German-Roman Kingship ("Det tysk-romerske kejserdømmes indre opbygning"), on 102r–102v, and two articles of the city charter on 103r, also by the same hand. Fol. 103v is stuck to 104r, and they are thus illegible. However, according to Handrit.is, a sixteenth-century hand had written on these pages, which had presumably been left blank. Fols. 104v–105v are blank, and the rest of the manuscript is written by two later hands, from the second half of the 1500s. On 106r–108v, there is a text on the rules of duelling, by Hand C; and on 111r–112v, there are annal records of the history of the Swedish monarchy between 1521 and 1569, by Hand D. The last three pages (112v–113v) contain biographical data of Gustav Vasa of Sweden and his nine children, written in Latin: birth dates, places and times, and deaths.

The manuscript has been neatly written throughout. New chapters or paragraphs have been clearly signed by large initials and red rubrics, although these are not visible in the black-and-white facsimile found online. The original manuscript ran from 1r to 103r and had ten blank folia at the end. It appears the two scribes responsible for its conception and creation were working together or at least worked in the same institution. Even their hands are rather alike, hinting that they may have been trained together, too. The manuscript seems to have set out to be a law book from the start, its focus heavily being on laws and kingship, as emphasised by the addition of the text on German-Roman Kaisers.

Klemming (1886, 3–10) edited the medicinal sections.

18. C 19 (Uppsala universitetsbibliotek)<sup>55</sup>

Alternative names: Codex 19 Benz; Klemming V

Dating: ca. 1450

Dimensions: 22.0 × 15.0 cm

Language: Swedish, Latin

Comments: This is an exceptionally large clerical reference and handbook of 538 folia containing mostly ecclesiastical and administrative texts, but also two small leechbooks: one on 77r, and another between 292r and 293v; as well as a Swedish translation of *Den danske Urtebog* between 80r and 82r, followed by some medical advice on 82v–83v in Swedish and Latin. The manuscript is believed to have been created and used at Vadstena (Anderson-Schmitt and Hedlund 1988, 199).

The manuscript is written predominantly in Latin and Swedish by several hands and compiled between 1300 and 1500, with a strong focus on theology and canon law. It includes collections of sermons, liturgical texts, penitential instructions, and episcopal statutes, making it a highly practical handbook for clergy. Among the theological materials are “Sermones Varii de Tempore” (35v–54v), a series of sermons aligned with the liturgical calendar, and “De Mandatis Dei” (55r–62r), which expounds on the Ten Commandments. Multiple texts deal with the administration of penance and clerical functions, such as “Ut penitencie publice ab hiis quorum interest uniformiter imponantur” (That public penances may be imposed uniformly by those whom it concerns; 99r–100r), which provides guidelines for the uniform imposition of public penance. The inclusion of three separate texts related to St Birgitta – her “Revelationes” (62r–64r), a Passion meditation, and liturgical texts – conveys a strong connection to Vadstena Abbey. Additionally, the manuscript contains statutes issued by Bishop Nils of Linköping for Vadstena Abbey (245r–248v), reinforcing the book’s likely use within the Bridgettine sphere. The inclusion of masses for the dead (18r–18v) and texts on ecclesiastical discipline also aligns with Vadstena’s role as a centre of prayer and spiritual guidance.

Despite its predominantly ecclesiastical character, a few secular materials are interspersed throughout. These include legal texts such as King Karl Knutsson’s regulations on trade and wages (155r–155v) and a tax-related decree from 1436 (159v–160r), alongside medical texts (77r, 80r–82v,

<sup>55</sup> <https://manuscripta.se/ms/100408>

292r–293v), which reflect the practical needs of a monastic community. The presence of a genealogical table (507v) further suggests that the manuscript may have been used for record-keeping.<sup>56</sup>

The medical texts have been edited by Klemming (1886, 164–181).

19. C 22 (Uppsala universitetsbibliotek)<sup>57</sup>

Alternative names: Klemming X

Dating: ca. 1450

Dimensions: 15.0 × 10.0 cm

Language: Latin, Swedish

Comments: This codex is a compilation of many smaller manuscripts bound together into this 157-folia exemplar. Like C 19 (no. 18), this is an ecclesiastical work written at Vadstena,<sup>58</sup> containing predominantly devotional and instructional texts in Latin and Swedish. The manuscript is made of paper, and the dating of its texts ranges between 1300 and 1500. These include an account of the life of Jesus (9r–16v); the six sins against the Holy Spirit (31r–35r); and a variety of prayers, including a “Bön till Kristi lekamen” (Prayer to the Body of Christ), Eucharistic prayers ascribed to Popes Johannes XXII, Innocentius, and Bonifacius VI, and a “Bön till Jungfru Maria före tagandet av Guds lekamen” (Prayer to the Virgin Mary before the Assumption of the Body of God), all between 81r and 81v. There are two Latin-Swedish glossaries: a general, semi-alphabetical one between 69r and 77r, and a short herbal glossary on 82r. A herbal recipe for dye lies across 129r and 129v.<sup>59</sup>

The manuscript encloses six pages of medical advice, between fols. 6r and 8v. It loosely follows a head-to-toe structure, although four remedies between 6r and 6v are for ear pain (“Före örna värk”), and eleven are for deafness (“Contra surditatem”). Fols. 7r and 7v contain nine treatments for eye health (“ad sanitatem oculorum”), and 8r six treatments for pain relief (“Pro dolore dencium”), followed by three entries titled “fore wäxtin”, which might be referring to tumours or abscesses (Swedish: “förhindra

56 For an overview of all its contents as well as editions of the texts, see Anderson-Schmitt and Hedlund (1988, 199–221).

57 <https://manuscripta.se/ms/100410#>

58 There are signatures of Vadstena Monastery on the back of the cover (Anderson-Schmitt and Hedlund 1988, 228)

59 For a full break-down of the contents see Anderson-Schmitt and Hedlund (1988, 227–232).

växten”, lit. impede growth), although the meaning is unclear. The medical section ends with a remedy for headache and an unfinished entry on eyes.

The medical sections are edited by Klemming (1886, 446–449).

20. B 4 (Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm)<sup>60</sup>

Alternative names: Arvid Trolles Lagbok; Klemming XIII

Dating: ca. 1450

Dimensions: 17.5 ´ 12.5 cm

Language: Latin, Swedish

Comments: Named after its owner, Swedish aristocrat and politician Arvid Trolle, this codex brings together a wide variety of material ranging from legal texts to remedies, charms, and genealogical notes. The heart of the codex is taken up by extended legal compilations: Magnus Eriksson’s *landslag* occupies fols. 19r–102r. The *stadslag* follows on fols. 104r–177v, with inserted material such as a note concerning opposition to royal officials (f. 112r). It contains some medical material, which is compiled and edited in Klemming’s 1886 (450–453) publication under “Strödda läke-domar” (scattered remedies). The codex opens on 1v with a group of short medical remedies: against blood sickness, fever, and poisoning; on the same folio a veterinary cure is given for sheep and goats suffering from scab. Further medical and magical texts follow in fols. 2r–3r, including a charm against gout (2v), remedies against poisoning (2v), and three rat and mouse charms introduced by distinctive incipits (3r). Additional medical and magico-religious texts are to be found towards the end of the manuscript: remedies for dysentery (102v), charms against swine plague (102v), prayers and charms for staunching blood (103r), and a Latin prayer to St. Liborius against kidney stones (103r).

21. AM 792 4to (Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, Copenhagen)<sup>61</sup>

Alternative names: Klemming VI

Dating: 1440–1499

Dimensions: 21.0 ´ 14.5 cm

Language: Latin, Swedish, Danish

Comments: This specimen comprises 236 folia of both parchment and paper and dates from the second half of the fifteenth century. The manu-

60 <https://www.manuscripta.se/ms/100256#>

61 <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/en/AM04-0792/0#mode/2up>

script features predominantly Latin texts, interspersed with sections in Danish and Swedish, written by multiple hands. There are some pen trials on fol. 90v in the Scanian dialect and two lines of a ballad on the same folium, also in the Scanian dialect, that place the manuscript in the region of Skåne, modern Sweden, which formed part of Denmark at that time.<sup>62</sup>

The manuscript's eclectic assemblage encompasses religious sermons, grammatical treatises, and medical advice. It begins with religious and didactic material, including a sermon attributed to St Augustine ("Sermo St. Augustini"; fols. 1r–26v), a theological disputation ("Disputacio prioris cum anima Guidonis"; fols. 28r–39v), and a calendar mnemonic ("Cisio Janus"; fols. 40r–52v), before delving into the first passage on medicine with a chapter on bloodletting (53r–54v) and a Latin astrological treatise on 54v. The second wave of medical remedies begins on 137r–139r, with another astrological treatise in Latin (present in M 5, no. 25), giving medical advice according to the month and star sign. This is followed by a leechbook (139r–142v) and another astrological treatise, though this time in Swedish despite its title, "Regimen sanitatis per circulum anni" (Health regime throughout the year), which lies between 140r and 142r and is also present in M 5. At the end of the medical text, there is a Latin and Old Swedish glossary (142v) and forty-eight chapters of Harpestræng's *Liber Herbarum* between 147r and 152v (Hauberg 1936, 29–30).

Many texts point to the fact that the compilers were concerned with the saving not just of lives, but of souls, too. There is a chapter on christening (55r–55v); an "Ordo confitendi" (91r–113v), about confession, which ends abruptly on fol. 113v; a section on "Opusculum tripartitum Johannis cancellarii Parisiensis" (Chancellor of Paris Jean de Gerson's three-part minor literary work; fols. 116r–126v);<sup>63</sup> and the "Stella clericorum" (127r–135v).<sup>64</sup> The copying of these texts implies a willingness to take care of the people after the Black Death, which had wiped out 45–55 per cent of

62 Skåne only became an official part of Sweden in 1720.

63 The *Opusculum tripartitum* is a work by Parisian scholar Jean de Gerson, who, dissatisfied with the clergy's negligence and the ignorance of the local people on theological matters, composed, around 1404, a three-part set that instructs readers in the Ten Commandments, sacramental confession, and most importantly, the 'knowledge of death'. This last part was highly influential and was the basis for later work on how to die a good death, such as the *Ars Moriendi* (See Pabel 2013, 8; Bast 2017, 93–96).

64 This text is a thirteenth-century treatise on the dignity of priesthood that survives in over four hundred manuscripts from the Middle Ages (Reiter 1996, 152).

the population (Gottfried 1983, 58). The manuscript even contains a short explanation of what happens when the soul leaves the body (160r–163v).

Alongside its practical content, AM 792 4to includes devotional poetry (“Salme”; fol. 159v), a love poem (“Kærlighedsdigt”; fol. 90r), two lines of a Scandinavian folk song (90v), and a guide for pilgrims (“Vejviser for pilgrimme”; fols. 189r–197v).

Klemming (1886, 182–193) edited fols. 53r–55r on bloodletting and astrology and 139r–142v – the list of remedies, and the Latin-Swedish botanical glossary.

## 22. A 49 4to (Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm)<sup>65</sup>

Alternative names: Vadstena klosters book; Naadendals klosters book; Klemming IV

Dating: 1475–1499

Dimensions: 22.0 × 15.5 cm

Language: Swedish

Comments: A 49, dated to the second half of the fifteenth century (Klemming 1886, 162), is a compilation of mostly religious texts written at Nådendal (Naantali), in modern-day Finland. The texts are mostly written in Swedish although some are in Latin. The content is diverse, including hagiographies, theological treatises, medical texts, and prayers. Particularly prominent are the legends of saints such as the “Life of St Ansgar” (1r–61v), the “Legend of St Gregory of Armenia” (63r–102v), and the “Legend of St Germanus of Auxerre” (239r–248v). The popular narrative of “Barlaam and Josaphat” (109r–121r, 122r–169v) is also present, along with excerpts from Heinrich Suso’s “Gudelig snilles väckare” (249v–257v). The manuscript further contains a compelling collection of prayers, including the fifteen prayers to the Passion of Jesus (211r–212v) and the seven joys of Mary (214v–216v), indicating a strong Marian devotion. An interesting detail is the penitential formulary (237v), which offers insight into the period’s practices of penance. The manuscript also contains short legends such as the “Legend of a Monk in Rome” (209v–210v), the “Legend of a Virgin” (219r–220v), the “Legend of St Genoveva” (259r–267v), and the “Legend of St Macra” (267v–268v).

There is a short excerpt of a leechbook in 171r and 171v, which includes

<sup>65</sup> <https://manuscripta.se/ms/100225>



the heading “nadhen dals closters book” (Nådendal cloister’s book). Nine chapters of *Den danske Urtebog* follow between 171r and 177v. P. J. Bergius states in 1758 that “this little piece [...] contains nothing of particular importance or value”,<sup>66</sup> simply because it was taken to be a straightforward copy of *Den danske Urtebog*. However, the divergences within some entries, especially for “Mirra” (myrrh) and “Malyrt” (wormwood) are great enough to imply that this must have been the result of a mixture of sources.

Klemming edited the medical section (1886, 153–163).

23. M 59 (Universitetsbiblioteket, Lund)<sup>67</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: 1490–1510

Dimensions: 15.0 ´ 10.5 cm

Language: Latin, German, Swedish

Comments: This manuscript has mostly passed under the radar of scholars of medieval Scandinavian medicine until recent years.<sup>68</sup> It contains a total of thirty-four folia, filled with miscellaneous texts and written mostly in Latin. The reason it has been included in this handlist is that it includes Swedish translations of ailments, such as “Antraces liktorn” on 22v.<sup>69</sup> Fols. 2r–14r contain a lapidary ascribed to Bartholomaeus Anglicus, at the end of which, there are entries on three different plants: “aloe”, “amomum”, and “anetum”, suggesting that we are dealing with a part of his Book 16, *De lapidibus preciosis*, and the start of his Book 17, *De arboribus et herbis et eorum prorietatibus*. This is followed by a remedy in Middle Low German for scurvy on 14v. Fols. 15r–17v are blank.

Fols. 18r–33r contain a medical handbook. In the margins there are the names of different body parts, symptoms, diseases or other problems, and in the main text there are prescriptions for remedies. The structure of the text is very fluid, following neither head-to-toe nor alphabetical order. Instead, the structure seems to flow from one ailment to a cure, to other

66 In the original text: “Denna lilla piece [...] innehåller väl ingen ting af särdeles vigt och värde” (Bergius, 1758, 45).

67 <https://tinyurl.com/bdzwzrnd>

68 Johanna Svensson (2006) wrote a Master’s dissertation, which included a partial edition of this previously unedited manuscript.

69 Mod. Eng. Anthrax.

ailments, to other cures, which – albeit unusual – is not illogical (Svensson 2006, 6). The last folio (34r–34v) contains different lists: of sins, the five senses, and the seven sacraments.

Svensson (2006, 25–38) edited the section attributed to Bartolomaeus Anglicus between 2r–14r. The rest of the manuscript remains unedited.

### *Sixteenth century*

24. D 601 (Uppsala universitetsbibliotek)<sup>70</sup>

Alternative names: Klemming II; Liber Martini Erasmi

Dating: 1490–1510

Dimensions: 22.0 × 15.0 cm

Language: Swedish

Comments: This sample is a collection of medical and botanical texts known as *Liber Martini Erasmi* (Martin Erasmus' Book), after one of its owners. Made of both paper and parchment, this codex has a total of 159 sides, as the manuscript has been paginated rather than foliated, and contains multiple hands.

The first twelve pages comprise a so-called Magister Alexander's monthly regimen with instructions for ideal times for fasting and purging, which is almost identical to manuscript X 23 (no. 26).<sup>71</sup> Pages 13–30 had previously been left blank, but later hands have filled most of them in with medical remedies, although these do not seem to follow a particular order. On page 29, a Teorgius Petri Strengnensis signed his name and added the date, 15 November 1459. Pages 31–66 enclose a Swedish leechbook edited by Klemming (1886, 11–40) structured in what seems to be an arbitrary order. This is followed by veterinary medicine (67–70) and some more medical advice in Latin with interpolations in Swedish (71–75). A treatise on melancholy (one of the four Hippocratic humours) follows, also attributed to Magister Alexander.

What is particularly noteworthy is the next passage, on pages 78–88: a unique version of the *Liber Herbarum*, which is not known from anywhere else, under the title “De Speciebus” (On species). On 89–92, there are medical incantations and charms, proceeded by various recipes in Latin.

70 <https://tinyurl.com/ycxkfu7y>

71 A ‘magister Alexander’ is known from other Latin fifteenth-century manuscripts: GKS 1656 4to (Copenhagen); Canon. Misc. 480 (Oxford); Cod. Lat. 4784 (Munich). The two latter ones attribute the adjectives *Yspanus* (Spanish) to his name.

The last third of the codex has been filled in by a younger hand. The contents remain medical and includes other medical advice in Latin whose source has not been identified.

At the end of the codex there are some interesting notes. On page 156, one of the scribes introduces himself as Lantt[e]s Erick, writing at Gripsholm Castle in September 1480. The following (and last) page, written in the same hand, mentions the birth of Magnus Martini in Stockholm in 1472, followed by a note on the 1485 wedding of King John III and Queen Gunilla, his second marriage. This points to the manuscript having been made for the personal use of (and perhaps also by) an aristocratic Swedish family.

Klemming edited some of the texts in this manuscript, which was originally shelf-marked C 601 (1886, 11–50). The rest of the manuscript remains unedited.

25. M 5 n. XCIV 8vo (Linköpings Stiftsbibliotek)<sup>72</sup>

Alternative names: Klemming VII

Dating: 1490–1510

Dimensions: 14.5 × 10.5 cm

Language: Swedish, Latin

Comments: This pocket paper manuscript encloses 180 folia of purely medical material, except for some spells to keep elves and witches at bay, towards the end of the manuscript. This makes it the longest Swedish medical book; it includes many Salernitan texts as well as prayers and magic charms, which have been compiled by Ohrt (1917–1921). The manuscript was originally believed to have been written by one scribe only (Klemming 1886) until Per Gunnar Ottosson (1977) noted that it was the work of many scribes, although their hands are remarkably similar. Ottosson noted that parts of the manuscript dated to the second half of the 1400s and that others must have dated to the second quarter of the 1500s, as the codex contains virtually the entirety of Christiern Pedersen's leechbook, published in print in 1533. The codex encloses different types of paper, too, which suggests that the current codex consisted of many smaller codices that were later put together. This would explain the whimsical structure of the manuscript: the texts appear to be unstructured and often unrelated

<sup>72</sup> No online facsimile available.

to one another except for the overarching medical topic. There are two versions of the *Regimen sanitatis per circulum anni* (Health regime throughout the year) in the manuscript: one in Swedish, between 83 and 97, and another in Latin between 118 and 126 (both present in AM 792 4to, no. 21). Klemming (1886, 399) compared the Latin version to those in AM 792 4to (no. 20) and D 600 (no. 8) and found that they are near identical, except for some differences in terms and spelling. There are chapters of the *Urtebog* scattered across the whole manuscript, at pages 98–102 and 139–150. Between 67–71 and 215–234 there are sprinkled entries taken from the *Liber Herbarum*, translated into Swedish, blended with other medical advice.

Despite drawing from his work, Harpestræng himself is not named as a source, although numerous Salernitan doctors are cited, such as Hippocrates, Dioscorides, Constantine, Avicenna, Aristotle, Arnold de Villa Nova, Albertus Magnus and many more. On page 52 (also foliated as 26(r)), there is a remedy for “tanna werck” (toothache) ascribed to a Sanctus Bernardus, but Klemming (1886, 228) transcribes this name as Gerardus medicus, presumably by mistake, as he does not address this discrepancy. A Gerardus is, in fact, cited as a source later in the manuscript, at 203, which has been foliated as 102(r). It also contains two separate texts on how to dispel rodents from the home by invoking Saints Ciriacus and Kakwkylla.<sup>73</sup> The eclectic content of the manuscript and chaotic structure is what led Klemming (1886, 503) to believe that this was an apprentice physician’s personal notebook, but given the variety of hands and the religious texts, this is more likely to be a codex put together at an ecclesiastical institution.

There is very little writing by later owners and antiquarians. There is a note from 1882 saying that the book had belonged to Elias Brenner (1647–1717) and later to Erik Benzeliuſ the younger (1675–1743), who then donated it to the Linköping secondary school before it ended up at the Linköping central library. The inconsistency in pagination implies that the book has been rebound several times, perhaps during production or by later owners.

The entire manuscript – except for pages 103 and 104, which are

73 M 5 is the oldest extant manuscript to mention Kakwkylla, a rare saint only known in Sweden and Germany (see Åmark 1935; Mitchell 2020, 202–204)

penned by a hand from the Reformation – was edited by Klemming (1886, 196–395).

26. X 23 8vo (Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm)<sup>74</sup>

Alternative names: Christina Månsdotters (Natt och Dag) läkebok; Klemming III

Dating: 1500–1510

Dimensions: 10.5 × 7.5 cm

Language: Swedish

Comments: This pocket-sized medical manuscript is known as *Christina Månsdotters Läkebok*, after one of its owners. On its very last page, a hand reads “Liber domine cristine in sundhaby (Lady Cristina of Sundaby’s book). Christina Månsdotter was a noblewoman who belonged to the Swedish house *Natt och Dag* and may have had the book commissioned for her own personal interest and use.

The first nine pages (five leaves) contain a neat table of contents with all the chapter numbers and their titles. The manuscript has been foliated, but Klemming (1886) provides his edition as if it were paginated, possibly because it was only foliated later. The first section of the book after the table of contents, beginning on fol. 6r (page 11), is a month-by-month regimen attributed to Master Alexander. This is followed by a passage on bloodletting between 15v and 16v (pp. 30–33) and some remedies for stones and eye ailments (16v–18v; pp. 33–36). After this (18v–24r; pp. 36–47), there is a month-by-month health regime to maintain one’s health, addressed to the author’s son: “Myn son thet skal tik witerlikit wära at thenna eptirscriffna script dwger at tw mat triggelika liffwa” (My son, it shall be clear to you that this written scripture teaches you how to live properly; Klemming 1886, 67).

Entries from both the *Liber Herbarum* and the *Urtebog* – as well as two lines from the *Regimen sanitatis* in the entry for “Saluia” (Hauberg 1936, 36–37) – lie between 24r and 78r (pp. 47–155), blended with some scattered medical advice in the middle. Thence, there is a relatively short head-to-toe leechbook (78r–91v; pp. 155–182) and a text on treatments for pestilence (91v–93r; pp. 183–185) expressly directed to the noble class: “Nadhoghe herra oc förste iak hafwir wndirstandit aff waraktoghum man-

74 No facsimile available, although the manuscript is registered at Manuscripta: <https://www.manuscripta.se/ms/100356>.

nom ath stoor plagha oc dödhö ar nu i idhrom landum Nu wil iak scifwa idro konungxliko waldhe the beste läkedomasom iak hafwir funnit i greska manna bokom swa som är ath hwru man skal then bradödha forkoma om ther ar nokor läkedombir innan” (Gracious lords, I have understood from trustworthy men that a great plague and death is now in your lands. Now, I wish to write to your royal authority the best medical treatments that I have found in the books of the Greeks, namely, how one may prevent sudden death if there is any remedy for it; Klemming 1886, 136).

At the end of the codex, there is a short section on weather lore relating to Christmas omens and folk meteorology, followed by texts deafness, more chapters from the *Liber Herbarum*, and a treatment for stomach ailments.

Klemming edited the entire manuscript (1886, 51–144).

27. Saml. 1a 4to (Linköpings Stiftsbibliotek)<sup>75</sup>

Alternative names: Codex Grenholmiensis; Klemming VIII

Dating: 1500

Dimensions: 19.1 × 14.0 cm

Language: Swedish, Danish, Latin

Comments: This exemplar is unique in that it is a family codex, containing the biographical information of the family living at Grensholm spanning four generations, whence the codex gets its name. It may have been purchased by the family in the first half of the 1500s, as the first child born to Mætta Ryning, the owner of Grensholm at the time, was born in 1547. The manuscript originates from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century (Stephens and Ahlstrand 1844, xlvii; Klemming 1886, 500), although some texts have been added as late as the mid-seventeenth century. Written in Swedish, Danish, and Latin, the manuscript, encloses 181 pages and contains a wide range of texts. There is a helpful eighteenth-century table of contents towards the back, added by the vicar Per Kylander on page 171. Agnieszka Backman (2017, 36) observes that the cover is original and is made of paper, which was then painted green. However, there is clear evidence of the re-binding. For instance, we find an entry for the zodiac sign Pisces, which would have followed Aquarius on page 41, on page 123.

The structure of the codex in its current form makes sense: it begins with some texts on medicine, along with practical advice on pages 1–52. This section includes an almanac, an astrological treatise, texts on general

<sup>75</sup> <https://tinyurl.com/347pdv7f>

ailments, and a section on herbal pharmacology taken from *Den danske Urtebog*. It also contains a rare text only present in one other manuscript (GKS 3656 8vo, no. 7) on how to let blood, on pages 20–21, which reads “Thet er then legedom som mesther henrik harpestræng gaff konigh erik” (This is the medical advice that Master Henrik Harpestræng gave to King Erik). This medical section amounts to one third of the manuscript and ends on page 52. From page 53 follow a few stories which become progressively more moral, starting with the purely entertaining “Legend of the Knight Tungulus” (63–96) and ending with an incomplete version of the life of Griselda (124–149) and an incomplete Life of St Gregorius (151–152); after this, the texts are purely religious: sermons, masses, and prayers (153–160). This section of religious texts led Carlquist (2002, 114) to argue that it must have belonged to a pious individual with an interest in science.

Lastly, there is a spell on how to identify a thief, which is very similar to one in the *Lægebog fra Vinje* (no. 29), and a remedy against pestilence (page 181). This means that it is likely that at least the first 50 pages or so of the codex, written by two hands, made their way to Grensholm together and were rebound there, with the addition of the popular stories and religious texts.

Between pages 171–179, a later hand has added a table of contents of the entire manuscript. The herbal was edited by Klemming (1886, 400–409), who described Codex Grensholmensis as a “small and incomplete collection on the powers and virtues of herbs, based on older books” (1886, 503).<sup>76</sup>

28. X 502 (Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm)<sup>77</sup>

Alternative names: Peder Månssons Liber B

Dating: 1516–1519

Dimensions: 10.0 × 7.0 cm

Language: Swedish, Latin

Comments: This large exemplar of 273 leaves is the second codex (“Liber B”) of four codices comprising the work penned by Peder Månsson about the natural sciences, who would become Bishop of Västerås in 1524. The manuscript’s contents are eclectic and reveal a clear emphasis on practical, technical knowledge, evidenced by the inclusion of texts detail-

76 “Små och ofullständiga samlingar af örter krafter och dygder, grundade på de äldre böckerna” (Klemming 1883, 503).

77 <https://manuscripta.se/ms/100358#>

ing fishing-bait preparation (52r), leather tanning (184v–186v), and glass-making (277r–282v). There are various treatises on gemstone processing (187r–198v, 199r, 228v–229v), which indicates an appreciation for luxury crafts. As for medical advice, there are treatments for quartan fever (52v), immediately followed by advice on how to keep clean, “Taka smittan aff” (Take dirt off). The manuscript also includes a lapidary between 119v and 228r in which some stones are prescribed for human ailments and to protect against magic and spells. There is no herbal in this exemplar, but Columella’s agricultural treatise can be found between 55r and 183v, as well as sections on “Bondakonst” (The Art of Farming) and on how to run a country farm – “Landhushållning” – which indicate an interest in plants as supporting general health.

Notably, the manuscript also features texts on military strategy, including Flavius Vegetius’ “Stridskonst” (Martial Arts) on 231r–268v and Peder Månsson’s own “Stridslag” (Battle Law; 260r–261v).

There is no full edition of this manuscript, but its texts have been edited by Robert Geete (1913), who provides a full breakdown of its contents on pages xliii–xlviii. In his book, *Peder Månssons skrifter på svenska*, instead of providing a separate edition of each individual manuscript, Geete presents an edited version of the texts, drawing from multiple manuscript witnesses.

29. J 8 (Linköpings Stiftsbibliotek)<sup>78</sup>

Alternative names: Peder Månssons Liber C; Klemming IX

Dating: 1500–1522

Dimensions: 13.4 × 9.8 cm

Language: Swedish, Latin

Comments: This manuscript is the third codex by Peder Månsson, which contains a substantial amount of medical knowledge. The medical section opens on fol. 92r, with a long, esoteric entry on “Göra liffwens vathn” (making life water), and it carries on until 97r with other longer entries on how to extend human life, how to separate the four elements from all things, and how to make life water stronger. Between 102v and 119r, there is a leechbook that begins with an entry on “Vnderstanda gradus” (understanding degrees) and continues with remedies for treating humour imbalances. The leechbook carries on all the way to 119r with entries on how to treat different ailments, such as “blodith rensa” (blood cleansing) and

<sup>78</sup> Only one page has been scanned on Alvin: <https://tinyurl.com/3kucdyad>



“flegma rensa” (phlegm cleansing), and a list of all the remedies (mostly plants and herbs) for them. Klemming (1886, 411–445) edited these folia.

On fols. 151r–152r, there are entries on how to whiten teeth, a recipe for pills against pestilence, a remedy for muscle pain, a recipe for an ointment for scalp ulcers, and a recipe for treating tumours. On fols. 157v–158r, there are treatments for pestilence as well as for poisoning. The last section containing medical advice begins on fol. 215r with a recipe for “ögna vathn moth ethsr, vathn sot, cancrum, ondan eld” (eye water for poison, dropsy, cancer and *evil fire*) and continues onto 220r with recipes on how to make Watthn aff swalor (water of swallows), a concoction made from dried swallows, vinegar, and powdered galls to treat various ailments.

There is no full edition of this manuscript, but its texts have been edited by Robert Geete (1913); a full breakdown of its contents is provided on pages xlviii–liii.

## Norwegian

### *Fifteenth century*

30. Lægebog fra Vinje 12mo [Ms 8vo 3725] (Oslo Katedralskole)<sup>79</sup>

Alternative names: Vinjeboka

Dating: 1480

Dimensions: 7.0 × 4.8 cm

Language: Norwegian, Danish, Latin]

Comments: This is the only extant Norwegian manuscript that includes pieces of medical advice from before 1600.<sup>80</sup> However, it is neither a standard leechbook nor a herbal; the Lægebog is also known as *Svartebok*

<sup>79</sup> No online facsimile available.

<sup>80</sup> There has been some controversy over whether manuscripts AM 673 a II 4to and AM 696 I 4to are Norwegian or Icelandic. Larsen claims the former to be an East Norwegian sample and the latter a West Norwegian one (Henning Larsen, 1931). According to him, Iceland received medical knowledge from Denmark through Norway (MS Royal Irish Academy 23 D 43, p. 386). Hauberg (1936, 15) agreed with Larsen; however, it seems that today the consensus is that they are Icelandic, as *handrit.is* has established that the language in which they were written is Icelandic. Other than this, to my knowledge, there is only one Norwegian manuscript from the sixteenth century containing medical knowledge, which belongs to a private collector and sits outside our designated time-period. It is known as *Lægebog fra Ulvik* (Leechbook from Ulvik) and belonged to farmer and businessman Kristoffer Frimann Hjeltne. The manuscript is mainly written in Danish with some Norwegian blended in. There are two parts to it: one written in 1574 and another from 1626. There are pieces from both the *Liber Herbarum* and *Den danske Urtebog* (Eide 2009).

(Black Book), due to its heavy focus on magic. This genre commonly contains some medicinal and herbal remedies, although, unlike the other manuscripts in this catalogue, most of the treatments have a magic or religious element. Most of its remedies include reciting the “Pater Noster” or carving prayers onto one’s bed. This example is known as the first black book in Norway (Garstein 1993). It contains a magic formula to identify a thief and a spell to win the love of a woman. There is one cure for women in childbed that consists of writing a prayer on her womb. The manuscript encloses a section dedicated to “Grana Juniperi” (juniper), taken from Harpestræng’s *Liber Herbarum*, on fols. 32v–33v (Hauberg 1936, 38).

The manuscript is written in a mixture of Norwegian and Danish, with some parts written solely in Danish. This means that the manuscript cannot have been written in Norway (or by Norwegians) in its entirety, and that parts must have been written in Denmark. Garstein (1993, 18–19) also states that the language is that of an educated person. It is the only manuscript that is not kept by a national or university library; rather, it is housed in a secondary school in Oslo: Kristiania Katedralskole. It was found stuck underneath a wooden plank close to the choir in the Vinje Stave Church.<sup>81</sup>

The manuscript was edited and translated into modern Norwegian by Oskar Garstein in 1993.

## Icelandic

### *Thirteenth century*

31. AM 655 XXX 4to (Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, Copenhagen)<sup>82</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: 1250–1299

Dimensions: 15.7 × 12.3 cm

Language: West Norse

Comments: This is the oldest example of a medical text in this corpus, dating from around the second half of the thirteenth century. It is a fragment of what may have once been a bigger leechbook, but only four parchment leaves have survived. The medical advice is varied, offering

81 Other black books have been found in similar conditions, as, according to folklore, these books have their own will power and will reappear if they do not agree to being given away or destroyed (see Ohrvik 2017).

82 <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/en/AMo4-0655-XXX/o#mode/2up>

treatments for insomnia, chest and eye infections, and digestive issues, as well as advice on childbirth, contraception, and how to remove warts. It also includes thirteen entries on herbal pharmacology (plus one on coral, “koralus”). These entries are taken from Constantine’s *De gradibus liber*, either directly or perhaps through Harpestræng’s work (Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir 2023, 209–210). The manuscript also quotes Dioscorides and Galen, suggesting that the scribe may be copying from other Salernitan texts.

An edition was offered by Konráð Gíslason (1860, 241–270) and, more recently, Fabian Schwabe (n.d.) has uploaded one on Menota.<sup>83</sup> Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir (2023) has published the first in-depth article exploring the manuscript’s origins, context, and content.

### *Fourteenth century*

32. AM 696 I 4to (Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, Copenhagen)<sup>84</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: 1340–1360

Origin: Norwegian or Icelandic

Dimensions: 19.8 × 12.7 cm

Language: West Norse

Comments: This fragment consists of only two folia that were originally in different parts of the manuscript. It contains the first few entries of what looks like an Old Norse translation of *Den danske Urtebog*. The specimen follows the standard herbal book alphabetical structure, starting with “Apium” and ending with “Eupatorium”. There is an entry at the very beginning that includes remedies for dysentery, pulmonary complications, dentistry, and intestinal parasites, though sadly we have lost the previous leaf that would have contained the name of the plant used for these purposes. The plant names are first written in Latin, with a translation in Old Icelandic next to them. In the bottom margin of fol. 1r a contemporary hand has written a formula for haemostasis. The fragment does not mention Harpestræng as a source, but it does name Galen in the entry about celery (*Apium*). The language of the manuscript led Hægstad (1906, 9–10)

83 <https://menota.ku.dk/q?p=menota/eds/struct/487693>

84 <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/en/AM04-0696-I>

to argue that the manuscript may have been written in Norway – a position also held by Matteo Tarsi (2025, 330) – though it may also simply have been copied from a Norwegian manuscript (Stefán Karlsson 1967, 52).

An edition was provided by Marius Hægstad (1906).

33. AM 673 a II 4to (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, Reykjavík)<sup>85</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: ca. 1370

Dimensions: 19.1 × 12.7 cm

Language: West Norse

Comments: This is one of the oldest manuscripts in the Arnarnaganaean Collection, dated between 1190 and 1210. It has suffered significant damage due to dampness, and only nine folios remain. The fragment encloses the so-called “Physiologus” (1r–7v),<sup>86</sup> the “Fjallræðan” (Sermon on the Mount, 6v), the “Læknisráð” (medical advice, 6v–7r) and the *Predikun* (an Icelandic sermon/homily on the meaning of the ship and the rainbow, 8r–9v). The medical-advice section, which consists of only twenty-seven lines between folios 6v and 7r, may contain fourteen herbal remedies from *Den danske Urtebog*. However, because of its brevity, it is impossible to definitively connect it to Harpestræng, especially since Schwabe (2011, 5) argues that the structure is too different. The medical advice was added by a later hand, along with the “Fjallræðan”, and was originally dated to around 1500 (Kålund 1894, 91), but the dating has now been revised to 1370 by ONP. Early sources claimed that this manuscript was Norwegian (Hægstad 1913, 8–9; Hauberg 1936; Kristensen 1908–1920, xxi), but the Arnarnaganaean Institute deems it, in fact, to be of Icelandic origin. Most recently, Matteo Tarsi considers it to be Norwegian (2025, 330).

The medical advice (“Læknisráð”) was edited by Hægstad (1913, 4–5).

85 <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/AMo4-0673a-II/0#mode/2up>;  
<https://ioco.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?m9122>

86 This is an early Christian Greek text containing descriptions of animals, both real and fantastical (see Corazza, 2005).

34. AM 194 8vo (Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, Copenhagen)<sup>87</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: 1387

Dimensions: 14.0 ´ 10.7 cm

Language: Icelandic, Latin

Comments: This manuscript is an encyclopedia work of fifty-two folia and includes a section of *Veraldar saga* and sections on law. It also contains two lapidaries, translated from Bishop Marbode of Rennes' works (Kreager 2022, 121). There is botano-medical lore between 34r and 45v, with some entries possibly borrowed from Harpestræng, followed by an intermission on gemstones between the second half of 45v and 48v. This is proceeded by a section on bloodletting on 48v, "Prognostica" (the signs of death and seasonal regimens) between 49r and 51v, and ends with a nearly unreadable section on "Likneskjúsmíð" (image making) between 51v and 52v. It is not in the best condition; damage to the manuscript has made many of the folia illegible in parts. However, it is one of the few Icelandic manuscripts that can be traced back to its origins, thanks to the scribes, Ólafr Ormsson and Brynjólfur Steinráðarson, who wrote their names down. The medical section of the manuscript has been edited by Kristian Kålund (1908, 61–77) and is also available online at the Old Norse Prose Dictionary.<sup>88</sup>

Fols. 7r–52v (the entire original manuscript) has been edited by Kristian Kålund (1908).

### *Fifteenth century*

35. AM 696 II 4to (Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, Copenhagen)<sup>89</sup>

Alternative names: N/A

Dating: 1400–1499

Origin: Norwegian or Icelandic

Dimensions: 18.1 ´ 13.7 cm

Language: Old Norse

Comments: This fragment is the smallest one in the corpus, at only two folia, alongside AM 696 I, with which it may have once been compiled.

87 <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/en/AMo8-0194/0#mode/zup>

88 <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?r9115>

89 <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/en/AMo4-0696-II>

The fragment contains remedies for the plague and a section of a *Liber Lapidum*. The lower margins of the leaves have been cut off.

The fragment has been edited by Kålund (1917–1918, 76–80).

36. AM 434 a 12mo (Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, Copenhagen)<sup>90</sup>

Alternative names: *Den Islandske Lægebog* ('The Icelandic Leechbook')

Dating: ca. 1450

Dimensions: 10.4 × 7.7 cm

Language: Icelandic

Comments: At forty folios long, this is the second-longest and possibly the most famous of the Icelandic medical manuscripts, dating to the middle of the fifteenth century. The beginning of the manuscript is missing, so the text begins *in medias res*. In its current form, it only contains medical knowledge throughout (1r–40r), with the interpolation of a *Lunaria* between fols. 37r and 39r.<sup>91</sup> It encompasses an almanac with dietary recommendations for each month and time of year, as well as optimal times and dates for bloodletting. It displays other pieces of folklore, such as how to keep houses safe from witches, and apotropaic symbols. At the end of the manuscript, the Roman alphabet has been written in runes.

There is another manuscript dated around the same time,<sup>92</sup> AM 435 12mo, that Kålund believes may have been written by the same scribe (1917–1918, xiii). This manuscript encloses a text known as the "Physiognomica" (Physiognomy) between 1r and 15v, which deals with the philosophy of medicine and the human body, and a text called "Tunglfræði" (Moon Lore) in Icelandic about how the moon affects health, dreams, and the fates of children, between 55r and 58r. These two texts were edited by Kålund (1917–1918, 91–108).

AM 434 a 12mo was edited by Kristian Kålund (1907) and, more recently, translated by Ben Waggoner (2011).

<sup>90</sup> <https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/en/AM12-0434-a/o#mode/2up>

<sup>91</sup> <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?m8953>

<sup>92</sup> Although this manuscript is dated to ca. 1500 (Kålund 1894, 484), Kålund also noted that the first thirty-one leaves may date to the middle of the fifteenth century (Kålund 1917–18, xviii).

37. MS 23 D 43 8vo (Royal Irish Academy, Dublin)<sup>93</sup>

Alternative names: An Old Icelandic Miscellany

Dating: 1400–1499

Dimensions: 14.6 × 11.4 cm

Language: Icelandic

Comments: This manuscript was first dated to the first half of the sixteenth century when it was found in the early twentieth century, though further research suggests an earlier date at some point in the fifteenth century. It is the longest Icelandic exemplar, at seventy folios. Written in Middle Icelandic, the manuscript copies some of Harpestræng's work. This is the only Scandinavian medical manuscript kept at the Royal Irish Library in Dublin. Henning Larsen (1931) published a full edition and translation of this exemplar along with a thorough introduction.

## Conclusion

Scholarship concerning medieval Scandinavian medical manuscripts has heavily emphasised the influence of Henrik Harpestræng and his *Liber Herbarum* and *Den danske Urtebog*. However, an examination of these texts reveals a far more complex and multifaceted picture. The Danish manuscripts, particularly those of the early sixteenth centuries, showcase evidence of Scandinavian knowledge of German medical texts, which are sometimes translated into Danish and at other times kept in German. Of the Swedish manuscripts, AM 45 4to bears a text on the German kaisers, forming another link with central Europe. Meanwhile, a leechbook by Master Alexander, who may be Spanish physician Alexander Hispanus, is found exclusively in Swedish codices. Many other Salernitan doctors are cited, although it is not always clear whether their works are being directly copied from an exemplar or their names simply being used to confirm the validity of the manuscript.

In any case, the manuscripts also reflect local botanical and medical knowledge with the implementation of local herbs and spells and charms that hark back to Scandinavian pre-Christian lore. A Dr Karl is mentioned in AM 819 4to, who might have been a Danish physician, and an analysis of a number of manuscripts, such as *Huskurer* and M 5, strongly suggest

93 [https://www.isos.dias.ie/RIA/RIA\\_MS\\_23\\_D\\_43.html](https://www.isos.dias.ie/RIA/RIA_MS_23_D_43.html)

that these were created by practising doctors. In fact, the context of production of these manuscripts varies greatly, from ecclesiastical centres and the Bridgettine Abbeys of Vadstena, Nådendal and Maribo, to the personal books of medical enthusiasts, such as those by Peder Månsson and those written for the aristocracy (X 23 for Christina Månsdotter, *Codex Grensholmensis* written, in part, for the family at Grensholm castle, and D 601 for Martinus Erasmus).

The manuscripts suggest a train of transmission of medical knowledge from Southern Europe, through Denmark and into Norway and Sweden. However, Iceland presents a distinct case, as indicated by the herbal entries in AM 696 I 4to and AM 673 a II 4to, which could be the earliest examples of the dissemination of the *Urtebog*, after K 48 and NKS 66, or point to an earlier Salernitan tradition that made its way to Iceland. Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir (2023, 210) has pointed out that all the Icelandic manuscripts that deal with herbal pharmacology<sup>94</sup> comprise botanical entries that are absent from other Scandinavian manuscripts, meaning either that Harpestræng may have written yet another medical book, now lost (Kristensen 1908–1920, v), or that Iceland had a separate medical and/or scriptorial link to Europe.

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94 These are all the Icelandic manuscripts except for AM 696 II 4to.



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## SUMMARY

A handlist of medieval Scandinavian medical vernacular manuscripts

**Keywords:** manuscript catalogue, Old Norse medical manuscripts, medieval medicine in Old Norse, herbal medicine, *materia medica*, Harpestræng

This article presents a comprehensive handlist of all vernacular Scandinavian manuscripts (Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, and Icelandic) containing medical content, up to the year 1550. The surge of interest in Old Norse medical texts around the turn of the twentieth century led to the publication of most extant editions of Swedish and Icelandic medical texts. This interest also spurred the publication of editions and research on renowned manuscripts such as K 48 (Stockholm) and NKS 66 (Copenhagen), recognised as the earliest copies of the works by Danish physician Henrik Harpestræng (d. 1244). Harpestræng's *Danske Urtebog* and *Liber Herbarum*, along with his lesser-known texts, laid the foundation for medical knowledge across Scandinavia. This prompted Poul Hauberg to compile a book

encompassing all manuscripts traceable to Harpestræng's work within and beyond Scandinavia. However, not all medical manuscripts belong to the Harpestræng tradition. Evidence suggests that other physicians' works influenced later manuscripts, which have largely been overlooked by scholarship. Therefore, this article compiles all extant manuscripts containing medical advice, regardless of their influences, origins, or relationship to Harpestræng, to provide a more complete picture of medieval Scandinavian medical lore.

## ÁGRIP

Skrá um handrit norrænna lækningabóka frá miðöldum

**Efnisorð:** handritaskrá, norrænar lækningabækur miðalda, læknisfræði á Norðurlöndum á miðöldum, grasalækningar, Harpestræng

Þessi grein inniheldur skrá yfir öll handrit skrifuð á fornnorrænum málum (dönsku, sænsku, norsku og íslensku) um læknisfræðileg efni frá öndverðu til ársins 1550. Aukinn áhugi á fornum norrænum lækningabókum í kringum aldamótin 1900 leiddi til útgáfu flestra varðveittra gerða af fornnorrænum lækningabókum. Þessi áhugi ýtti einnig undir útgáfu og rannsóknir á þekktari handritum eins og K 48 (Stokkhólmi) og NKS 66 (Kaupmannahöfn) sem eru elstu handrit verka danska læknisins Henriks Harpestræng (d. 1244). Rit Harpestrængs *Den danske Urtebog* og *Liber Herbarum* og aðrir minna þekktir textar hans lögðu grunn að læknisfræðilegri þekkingu um öll Norðurlönd á sínum tíma. Þessar rannsóknir urðu til þess að Poul Hauberg tók saman rit um öll handrit sem rekja má til verka Harpestrængs innan og utan Norðurlanda. Hins vegar tengjast ekki öll norræn handrit lækningabóka þeim verkum Harpestrængs sem hafa varðveist. Vísbendingar eru um að önnur verk hafi haft áhrif á seinni handrit sem fræðimenn hafa að miklu leyti litið fram hjá. Því eru í þessari grein tekin saman öll varðveitt handrit sem innihalda læknisfræðileg ráð, óháð uppruna þeirra eða tengslum við verk Harpestrængs, til að gefa sem heildstæðasta mynd af norrænni læknisfræði-þekkingu á miðöldum.

Lara E. C. Harris  
 St Edmund's College  
 Mount Pleasant  
 Cambridge, CB3 0BN  
 United Kingdom  
 le339@cam.ac.uk  
 laraech@gmail.com