

Standardization in the North c. 700–1500

Main objective

The main objective of this research and teaching component is to bring medieval scholars from a wide range of disciplines together in order to enhance their cooperation through multidisciplinary research and teaching on BA, MA and PhD levels. Focusing on the concept of *standardization*, we will explore the themes of *text/literarization*, *artefacts/commodification* and *context/centralization* from a multidisciplinary perspective, and in a geographical perspective, that focuses on the North as one unit, and not the national viewpoints. In teaching, these ideas will be central to the multidisciplinary approach, while simultaneously acting as tools for critical reflection on our own society.

Participants

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- Conservation: Noëlle Streeton (associate professor)
- History: Hans Jacob Orning (professor), Ildar Garipzanov (professor), John McNicol (senior lecturer), Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (professor)

Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies:

- Celtic Studies: Jan Erik Rekdal (professor)
- Old Norse Philology: Jon Gunnar Jørgensen (professor), Karl G. Johansson (professor), Mikael Males (associate professor)

Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas:

- Art History: Lena Liepe (professor)

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- Numismatics: Svein Gullbekk (professor)

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Research

Standardization, or ‘the process of making objects or activities of the same type have the same features or qualities; the process of making something standard’,¹ is so fundamental a principle in today’s society, most clearly seen in our part of the world in the European Committee for Standardization, that we hardly reflect upon it. Both as an ideal and as a way of thinking, standardization bears the stamp of the modern period. However, this has not always been the case. It is the contention of this research component that the Middle Ages, especially due to the Church’s influence, was a crucial period in the development of this principle and ideal, and that standardization is an overarching process which can be followed in a number of seemingly unrelated fields.

¹ <http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/standardization>.

‘Standardization’ incorporates two main challenges in modern societies – migration and technological shifts – which according to *Humaniorameldingen* should be addressed by humanistic disciplines.² Temporally, standardization entails/brings about *technological shifts*, and *innovation* within specific fields or areas. Spatially, standardization is also a result of *migration* and *mobility*, of people and ideas, both between different geographical areas and between material, political and intellectual fields.

The research component *Standardization in the North*³ c. 700–1500 will take as its starting point the three perspectives presented in the suggested MA program below, that is, *text/literarization* (written culture), *artefacts/commodification* (material culture) and *context/centralization* (political and religious culture). The major aim of the research component is to gain further understanding of *to what degree* and *in what mode* standardization can be posited as an overarching process in the period under investigation. Below we will give a rough sketch of the various fields in which the process of standardization will be studied. Categorizing them under separate headings is only a heuristic device – our intention will be to continuously cross these borders by bringing various scholars and fields into the scope of study:

Text/Literarization:

- The adaptation of grammatical standards: the effect of Latin literacy and pedagogical systems on the vernacular, leading to increasingly firm vernacular standards.
- The standardization of the past: the development of genres in relation to pragmatic, cultural and social exigencies.
- The symbolic and pragmatic value of script: with the introduction of Latin script, a diversified set of norms and values developed in relation to runes and Latin script.

Artefacts/Commodification:

- Means of exchange: from specific, single-purpose means of exchange directly related to intrinsic value, to multi-purpose and homogenized ones.
- Precious objects: from uniquely crafted items intrinsically linked to their owners, to mass-produced goods intended for sale and without any connection to a specific person.
- Architecture and church art: from locally crafted works with heterogeneous motifs/stiles, to (gothic) homogenization of form and content (church buildings, crucifixion etc.).

Context/Centralization:

- Organization: from delegation of authority in terms of personalized relations with diffuse and contextual duties, to organizations with formalized and generalized duties/obligations.
- Allegiance: from a personal and reciprocal relationship with patrons (‘friendship’), to a more generalized notion of obedience signified by oaths, which left no room for negotiation or neutrality.
- Law and religion: from casuistic laws and a local pantheon of gods, to the ordering of law according to the general principles and systematization of a pre-Christian and Christian world view.

² Meld. St. 25, (2016–2017). Melding til Stortinget, Humaniora i Norge, 5.

³ Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Scotland and Ireland.

The complexity of the field, and the unique richness of the source material in the North, makes interdisciplinary collaboration essential: only by joining forces in the mining of the sources, can the standardization of the North be comprehensively explored. One example is the standardization of the past in the Nordic countries. With Christianity, the Old Norse worldview was incorporated in the use of the past in new ways. At the same time new literate genre in the vernacular (for example sagas about distant past, Icelandic Family sagas, Kings' sagas, knights' sagas), were developed, and these sagas replaced the multitude of pasts that existed, which most clearly can be seen in the burial mounds.

By studying the Middle Ages as a crucial period in the emergence and development of the process of standardization, we will emphasize the continued relevance of this period for our understanding of contemporary processes. Moreover, our approach counters the widespread practice of viewing historical developments in terms of evolution (technological *shifts*), and notions of centre and periphery (*mobility*). Finally, our theoretical perspective will encourage the investigation of social and cultural processes as interrelated on a high level of abstraction by following one principle (standardization) across institutions, fields and disciplines, connecting seemingly unrelated phenomena, and transcending the 'traditional' account of the emergence of individuality, rationality and secularism etc. that characterizes most medieval research.

Teaching

A central objective of our suggested multidisciplinary collaboration is the international teaching component; Studies in Viking and Medieval culture in the North. Our intention is to form close ties between teaching on the BA and MA levels and research on the PhD and senior levels. On the BA level, we intend to keep the distinction between disciplines, since it is here that the students are expected to establish their competence in the individual disciplines in the block consisting of 80 ECTS. We also wish, however, to introduce BA students to developing interdisciplinary medieval courses. We intend to establish a support group of subjects (40 ECTS), for example about the standardization of landscape, objects, and social organizations. Each of the given courses, will be taught by least two teachers from two-three disciplines (e.g. philology, archaeology, conservation). MA students will also be able to attend these courses, but to maintain a clear distinction between the BA and MA levels, special seminars will be organized for the MA students. The teachers will attend all the seminars/lectures for the trial period of three years to find out whether this affects the drop-out rate.

On the MA level, our intention is to establish a MA program which will replace the current program offered at ILN. This existing program will provide a solid starting point as we already have well-developed international contacts for recruiting students that we intend to maintain, and to expand.

1. Semester	2. Semester	3. Semester	4. Semester
Context	Elective	Master's thesis	Master's thesis
Artefacts	Elective	Master's thesis	Master's thesis
Text	Elective	Master's thesis	Master's thesis

Project seminar	Project seminar	Project seminar	Project seminar
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Figure 1. Program structure

The first semester will be made up of three obligatory courses (see Figure 1) treating the theoretical and methodological aspects specific to the three main elements of medieval studies: *context*, *artefacts* and *texts*. In these courses topics for the students future MA-thesis will be presented. It is our aim that the students have chosen a topic for their respective MA-thesis at the end of this semester.

In the second semester, the students will have three elective courses, and a project seminar, which we also will run in the third and the fourth semester. All our students will have two supervisors from two different fields. Important part of the supervision will take place in the project seminar. We will organize these seminars every second week in which the students will present their results. The responsibility for leading this seminar will be shared by the associated supervisors. The teachers, they will form a collegium that will meet regularly in order to discuss supervision and to develop multidisciplinary courses and activities that will benefit the students.

Over the years, the group has established a large international network, including links to the ERASMUS+ program. We will actively use the members of this program as both teachers and supervisors.

On the PhD level, our group has already established a multidisciplinary seminar which is held 4-5 times each semester. This seminar has developed into an important meeting point for our PhD students (from Denmark, Germany and Austria, as well as from Norway), where they present their work and receive feedback from both established scholars and other PhD students. Our intention is to further this collaboration on the PhD level and provide PhD courses with a multidisciplinary perspective.

Until now, different aspects of the Middle Ages have primarily been studied separately within each discipline. However, the complexity of the field makes interdisciplinary collaboration absolutely essential: it is one and the same *pastness* that we aim to understand, and it is only by joining forces to examine the sources – textual, visual and material – that the territory of the Middle Ages of the North can be comprehensively explored. In recent years, new and fruitful interfaces have emerged. The time is thus ripe for a complete rethinking of the study of the Middle Ages, in which the challenges of interdisciplinary collaboration are acknowledged. Seven disciplines will be represented: archaeology, art history, Celtic studies, conservation, history, numismatics, philology. By providing a platform for medieval scholarship as a serious interdisciplinary undertaking, the disciplines can feed into each other, not only to profit from each other's results but to pave the way for a holistic understanding of standardization in the North in the period c. 700–1500. We hope to include all our PhD students in this joint effort, thereby providing them with experience in this kind of work.

Potential for external funding

The applicant group consists of fourteen medieval scholars from eight disciplines localized in five different institutes/institutions, of which one is outside of the university. Ten of these scholars have previously been granted c. 95 million NOK in funding from the Research Council

of Norway, Centre for Advanced Studies, Riksbankens jubileumsfond, Nordisk kulturfond, British Academy, etc. Thus, the group has proven its capability of attracting external funding. The members of the group are intent on creating several projects within this FPiii, as documented above. We will also emphasize that a majority of this group have already been cooperating, for example, in the previous call for SFF (2016). Although the application did not succeed, it brought the members of the group closer together, in addition to securing positions for two PhD students who are now doing inter-disciplinary work within this group. Hence, the group is already active, and a new project will undoubtedly help to increase its potential for attracting external funding, including that of EU scholarships.

Preliminary budget

Our primary concern is to develop the multidisciplinary character of medieval studies. In both research and teaching, the main responsibility for assuring a multidisciplinary approach rests with the members of the project. However, in order to strengthen this perspective and create a more robust environment, we want to use most of the funding to employ scholars who can work across several disciplines. Our aim is for these employees to serve as nodes in our larger network.

- 2 associate professors in interdisciplinary studies (ILN and IAKH), with responsibility for running and developing the program, as well as developing new teaching methods on all levels aimed at fulfilling the interdisciplinary goals of the teaching component
- ½ administrative position
- 2 PhD stipends
- 1 Postdoc
- 2 part-time professors
- 1 international conference a year, for the first five years. Our goal is to publish the proceedings. The topics for these conferences will be linked either to the research component, or to the development of interdisciplinary teaching methods. Mandatory participation will be required for all MA students. We will organize seminars between our students and the speakers in relation to these conferences.