

HUMANIST DISCOVERIES OF THE SCANDINAVIAN PAST



The collection of articles presented here explores humanist scholarship on the early Scandinavian past. Specifically, it examines the ideological and intellectual uses of this past in 16th- and 17th-century philology and historiography by humanist scholars within and, to a limited extent, outside Scandinavia.

In the early modern period Scandinavian scholars repeatedly proposed the idea of an advanced early Scandinavian culture that had been equivalent with, or even superior to, classical Greece and Rome. An important line of argument consisted in the demonstration that the age-old Nordic civilisation could boast its own ancient, independent cultural traditions. In the course of the 16th and 17th centuries this claim gained momentum with the advancement of the study of medieval vernacular texts, including runic inscriptions. Transferring some of the key concepts of Renaissance Latin humanism to their study of medieval Nordic vernacular monuments, Scandinavian scholars highlighted the ancient cultural traditions of Scandinavia, and more particularly of their respective nations, in writings that were often strongly coloured by the ongoing political rivalry between the two Scandinavian monarchies, Denmark-Norway (with Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroe islands) and Sweden-Finland.

The Scandinavian past featured in the exchange of information of the international learned networks, and other Northern-European humanists incorporated it in their historiographical and philological work. In their attempts to classify the Germanic languages, not only Scandinavian but also Dutch and German scholars took the early Nordic tongues into account. Some took Icelandic to have come down from primeval times in sheer pristine condition. In particular, opinions varied on the status of Gothic, which was traditionally associated with the earliest Scandinavian past. The language of the Gospels in the splendid *codex argenteus*, Gothic made a worthy northern counterpart of classical Greek, Latin and Hebrew, while runic inscriptions were often called Gothic, too.

These are some of the themes explored in the articles presented here. Plans for this collection go back to the XII International Congress for Neo-Latin Studies of the IANLS (International Association of Neo-Latin Studies), in Bonn in 2003, where two special sessions were devoted to humanist research on the Germanic and Nordic past. The articles by De Grauwe, Mor-

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tensen, and Skovgaard-Petersen were presented as papers on that occasion, while Jensson and Akhøj Nielsen undertook to write their articles at a later stage, thereby contributing decisively to the thematic coherence of the collection.

The editors wish to thank the editorial board of *Renæssanceforum* for accepting the collection as a volume of the journal.

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