

**Danish Manuscript from the Middle Ages**  
a course by j o l n e s –  
**Joint Learning in Northern European Studies**  
**Summer term 2021**



An interview with **Seán D. Vrieland** (University of Copenhagen - Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics) and **Anja Ute Blode** (University of Cologne, Department for Scandinavian and Finnish Studies).



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## **Transcript**

### **Seán D. Vrieland**

Hi, mit navn er Seán Vrieland. Jeg er post-doc ved Den Arnamagnæanske Håndskriftsamling på Københavns Universitet og det er på Institut for Nordiske Studier og Sprogvidenskab hvor jeg forsker i nordiske håndskrifter både i middelalderlig og eftermiddelalderlig.

And in English: Hi, my name is Seán Vrieland. I am a post-doc connected to the Arnamagnæan Manuscripts Collection at the University of Copenhagen and that's located at the Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics. I research Nordic manuscripts, both from the Middle Ages and from after the Middle Ages.

### **Anja Ute Blode**

Hi, I'm Anja Blode from the Department of Scandinavian and Finnish Studies at the University of Cologne and my research is especially related to medieval Scandinavia. My main focus is on historiography, especially in Latin, but also in Danish and Swedish, and other research interests include text and manuscript transmissions in the medieval North and the reception of the Nordic Middle Ages, especially in comics, manga and anime. At the Department for Scandinavian and Finnish Studies, I work as a research assistant for the project j o l n e s – Joint Learning in Northern European Studies which was founded in 2013. And this project connects German-speaking and other European departments of Scandinavian and Finnish Studies and the project is based on the idea of networking and emphasizes the joint learning experience and interaction of the students, as well as teachers and departments.

## **WHAT IS THE COURSE ABOUT?**

### **Seán D. Vrieland**

So, this year's course is called 'Danish Manuscripts from the Middle Ages' and during the course we'll be looking at exactly what the title says– Danish Manuscripts from the Middle Ages. And so, this course looks at all sorts of aspects of these manuscripts. We'll learn a lot about codicology, palaeography, we'll also learn about the language, the old Danish language, as well as the different text genres that we find in Danish manuscripts.

**YOU CO-TEACH THIS COURSE. HOW DID YOU DESIGN THE STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE?****Seán D. Vrieland**

So, I will be starting with the first three sessions, which essentially is going to be a crash course in everything. From codicology to palaeography to language to text genre and history of the book in Denmark. And so, it's going to be a lot of material packed into small units and a lot of it is really just trying to present this material as a sort of invitation to the students to learn more about it.

**Anja Ute Blode**

In my sessions, we focus more on the practical work with digitally accessible manuscripts and we also use resources and tools we have learned beforehand in Seán's sessions. The students choose their own topic to work on independently and at the end, there should be an output, which reflects the learning outcomes of this course. And, we try to move away from the classical written assignment to a more joint project, on which everyone worked together.

**WHICH METHODS DO YOU USE IN THE COURSE?****Anja Ute Blode**

The course combines independent online teaching or online learning, asynchronous book discussions and weekly instruction via Zoom. The concept of flipped classroom is applied, whereby the input ranges from text- or lecture recordings to other didactic concepts, which are based on classroom teaching and are transferred to the digital space.

**WHAT MAKES IT SO INTERESTING TO TEACH THE TOPIC IN THIS CONTEXT?****Seán D. Vrieland**

I think this is a really interesting topic especially for students in Germany, because Denmark is such a small country, but it is a neighbouring country to Germany and the history of many scripts in Denmark and the development of writing and of language and of the different texts is all very, very connected to Germany as well. So, I'm very excited to teach this course in Germany to kind of bring that to the forefronts.

**Anja Ute Blode**

Many people don't know about medieval manuscripts from Denmark and why they are so important to Scandinavian studies. And, often the East Norse manuscripts, which means the Swedish and Danish manuscripts from the Middle Ages, are not even discussed in courses. They always do, or most often do Old Icelandic. And that's why I'm so pleased that Seán very quickly agreed to teach a course within our network. And with him, we really have an expert on hand who brings a lot of expertise and also the connection to the Arnamagnaean Institute for Manuscript Studies at the University of Copenhagen. And without the support from EduVenture Cologne, this partnership would not have been possible.

**MATERIALITY IS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPTS. IS A PURELY DIGITAL COURSE NOT PROBLEMATIC?****Seán D. Vrieland**

Now obviously we're very limited in what we're able to do, because the whole thing is done online. However, accessibility of manuscript materials in the form of images and catalogue entries and text editions – they're becoming more and more available online. So, it is possible to learn these things through the medium of online education. So, I think even if we're doing it online, the students will become very prepared for learning all about manuscripts and when they finally do get the chance to get their hand on experience with manuscripts, I think they'll be well prepared for it.

**HOW IS IT TO TEACH STUDENTS FROM OTHER UNIVERSITIES?****Anja Ute Blode**

It is, first of all, a challenge to teach other and especially international students. And you probably already know your own students from your own department from other courses and know what their level of knowledge is. And with the other students, you have to find this out first and I'm always more than positively surprised by all the existing knowledge, their own point of views and sometimes the different discussion culture they bring with them.

## **WHAT IS IT LIKE TO DEVELOP A COURSE COLLABORATIVELY FROM TWO DIFFERENT LOCATIONS?**

**Seán D. Vrieland**

It's definitely been an exciting experience to develop this course together with Anja. This is the first time that I have developed a course internationally, collaboratively, distance. And this involves a lot of writing e-mails back and forth to each other, but we're both so excited about the topic that it actually went a lot easier than what you could fear could happen. And so, this also has helped to provide me with an opportunity to explore new ways of teaching, to do it completely online, to do it distance and to do it actually in a country, where I have never taught before, nor have I ever been a student before. So, I'm excited to see what differences there are in the German education system versus what I'm used to from here in Denmark or in the United States, where I'm from.

## **WHAT IS EXCITING ABOUT DIGITAL TEACHING?**

**Seán D. Vrieland**

I think it's very exciting to try out new and different digital tools and to try them in teaching, because you never know which ones are going to really work and really stick and which ones are going to flop maybe a little bit. But still, the learning process is there – both for the students and for the teacher as well. And so, I think that it's an exciting thing to try out with different digital tools and digital methods. And because of this it's possible for me to teach from so far away and still keep up with what the students are learning and how well they're grasping these new concepts. And also to show the students, that it's not just within the teaching that these digital tools work, but also in their own further learning and research, that they can use different digital methods, digital tools, to learn about and to research and to study these physical objects, that we're not limited to being physically inside an archive to learn these things. We can do it from the comfort of our own homes to a certain extend.

## Credits

The interview was conducted on April 09 2021 via Zoom.

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