

# Bibliotekarstudentens nettleksikon om litteratur og medier

Av Helge Ridderstrøm (førsteamanuensis ved OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet)

Sist oppdatert 09.12.20

## Palimpsest

En pergamentside, -bok eller annet skrivemateriale der det er skrevet *over* en annen skrift som er gjort usynlig. Tidligere skrift er skrapt vekk, lagt et lag med farge over, eller lignende, og så har noen skrevet en annen tekst oppå. Den opprinnelige teksten kan i mange tilfeller leses ved hjelp av moderne teknologi. Begrepet palimpsest brukes dessuten ofte metaforisk om blandinger av det gjennomslittige og det ugjennomslittige, om sedimentering og skrift-“sjikt” (en slags “over-skriving”).

“The word Palimpsest comes from the Greek Palimpsestos, meaning “scraped again”. Medieval manuscripts were made of parchment, especially prepared and scraped animal skin. Unlike paper, parchment is sufficiently durable that you can take a knife to it, and scrape off the text, and over write it with a new text.” (<http://archimedespalimpsest.org/about/>; lesedato 30.11.17)

“Ordet palimpsest kommer via latin fra to greske røtter, *palin*, “igjen” + *psên*, “skrape”. Palimpsest er et manuskript, pergamentrull eller bok som er blitt rensket, skrappet, radert og brukt igjen. Ettersom både behandlet papyrus og pergament var vanskelige å lage og dyre i anskaffelse, ble sletting og gjenbruk en ikke sjelden foreteelse. Man kunne enten forsøke å bleke materialet, eller stryke på hvitfarge for å lage “blanke ark”. En del eldre manuskripter finnes som palimpsester, slik at det opprinnelige innholdet må fremkalles enten kjemisk eller ved forskjellig bearbeiding. Innen arkitektur brukes begrepet i betydningen “spor av noe som var”, slik som eksempelvis spor på en husvegg etter det revne nabobygget (Johansen, 2009).” (Sidsel Hødnebo i <https://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2455428/>; lesedato 18.01.18)

“On the title page of her first prose work, *Palimpsest* (1926), H. D. [= den amerikanske forfatteren Hilda Doolittle] defines a palimpsest as ‘a parchment from which one writing has been erased to make room for another’. Palimpsests were created from the seventh to fifteenth centuries primarily in the scriptoriums of the great monastic institutions such as Bobbio, Luxeuil, Fleury, Corbie and St. Gall. Such recycling of vellum arose due to a combination of factors: the scarcity and expense of writing material; the physical deterioration of existing manuscripts from which reusable vellum was then sourced; and the changing historical and cultural factors which rendered some texts obsolete either because the language in which they were written could no longer be read, or because their content was no longer

valued. Palimpsests were created by a process of layering whereby the existing text was erased using various chemical methods, and the new text was written over the old one. But the most peculiar and interesting fact about palimpsests is omitted from the H. D.'s definition. Palimpsests are of such interest to subsequent generations because although the first writing on the vellum seemed to have been eradicated after treatment, it was often imperfectly erased. Its ghostly trace then reappeared in the following centuries as the iron in the remaining ink reacted with the oxygen in the air producing a reddish brown oxide. This process has been encouraged by the use of chemical reagents and ultra-violet light in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and by more advanced imaging technologies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. A palimpsest is thus a surface phenomena where, in an illusion of layered depth, otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other." (Sarah Dillon i [https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10023/3240/Palimpsesting\\_H\\_D\\_Dillon.pdf](https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10023/3240/Palimpsesting_H_D_Dillon.pdf); lesedato 06.03.18)

Det finnes tilfeller der papyrus ble brukt til å lage palimpsester. År 215 e.Kr. ble en papyrusrull som inneholdt 2. sang av Homers epos *Iliaden*, behandlet med en våt svamp slik at skriften nesten forsvant helt. Deretter ble det skrevet et regnskap på papyrusen (Bouquiaux-Simon 2004 s. 47).

I middelalderen ble antikkens ikke-kristne tekster ofte brukt som skrivemateriale for kristne tekster. Det er bevart en palimpsest der en tekst av romeren Cicero ca. 300 år etter hans levetid ble fjernet for å gi plass til kirkefader Augustins kommentarer til Salmenes bok i Bibelen (Bouquiaux-Simon 2004 s. 47).

“From the point of view of manuscript preservation, palimpsests are a unique case. An early case of recycling, a palimpsest is made when the original text is scraped from the parchment and a new text is written in its place. [...] The heyday of palimpsest production was the seventh to eighth century when (frequently pagan) texts were frequently scraped off parchment to be overwritten with liturgical texts required in the great monastic centres such as Luxeuil, Bobbio and Fleury. In short, the parchment was seen as more valuable than the texts it contained. However, the original text can sometimes be visible as a ghostly underlayer, depending on the efficacy of the original preparation of the parchment and partly attributable to the acidic nature of some inks which may leave an indelible impression in parchment. [...] So while this may seem to be a case of wanton destruction of manuscript treasures, ironically palimpsests have, on occasion, served as a means of saving texts. Two famous examples of such serendipity in the Latin classical tradition are worth mentioning. In 1819, Angelo Mai, prefect of the Vatican Library, unearthed a manuscript (Vat. Lat. 5757) containing Augustine's *Commentary on the Psalms*, written in Bobbio in the seventh century. However, this text had been overwritten on a copy of Cicero's *De Re Publica* dating from the late fourth or early fifth century, which was, in fact the only surviving copy of major parts of the text. In 1853, at the monastery of St Paul in Carinthia, a copy of

books 11-15 of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* was uncovered under a text of the commentary of Jerome on Ecclesiastes, written c. 700 (probably at Luxeuil or an associated house). The Pliny, referred to as the *Codex Moneus*, is one of the best witnesses to this important text." (Irene O'Daly i <https://medievalfragments.wordpress.com/2013/02/15/secrets-of-the-page-palimpsests/>; lesedato 12.01.18)

En middelalderprests notater til en preken om Jonas og hvalen har blitt funnet i en palimpsest, antakelig brukt for å huske hovedpoengene før presten gikk på prekestolen (Barbier 2000 s. 37).

"The Archimedes Palimpsest is a medieval parchment manuscript, now consisting of 174 parchment folios. While it contains no less than seven treatises by Archimedes, calling it the Archimedes Palimpsest is a little confusing. As it is now, the manuscript is a Byzantine prayerbook, written in Greek, and technically called a euchologion. This euchologion was completed by April 1229, and was probably made in Jerusalem. [...] However, to make their prayer book, the scribes used parchment that had already been used for the writings of other books. The books they took parchment from were as follows. [...] Firstly, and most importantly, they used a book containing at least seven treatises by Archimedes. These treatises are *The Equilibrium of Planes*, *Spiral Lines*, *The Measurement of the Circle*, *Sphere and Cylinder*, *On Floating Bodies*, *The Method of Mechanical Theorems*, and the *Stomachion*. Of these treatises, the last three are of the greatest significance to our understanding of Archimedes. While the other treatises had survived through other manuscripts, there is no other surviving copy of *On Floating Bodies* in Greek – the language in which Archimedes wrote, and there is no version in any language of *The Method of Mechanical Theorems* and of the *Stomachion*. The Archimedes manuscript was used for the majority of the pages of the prayer book. The Archimedes manuscript was written in the second half of the tenth century, almost certainly in Constantinople." (<http://archimedespalimpsest.org/about/>; lesedato 30.11.17)

"The Archimedes Palimpsest" inneholder også andre verk enn av den antikke matematikeren og vitenskapsmannen Arkimedes. "Another book they used, we now know, contained works by the 4th century B.C. Attic orator Hyperides. Prior to the discovery of the Hyperides text in the manuscript, this orator was only known from papyrus fragments and from quotations of his work by other authors. The Archimedes Palimpsest, however, contains 10 folios of Hyperides text. Yet further books were used to make up the Palimpsest. Fourteen folios come from an otherwise unknown third century commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, and 20 further folios come from four other books, two of which have yet to be identified. [...] In this case, seven books were taken apart, the text was scraped off the leaves, which were then stacked in a pile, ready for reuse." (<http://archimedespalimpsest.org/about/>; lesedato 30.11.17)

“The Sinai library is also renowned. The oldest manuscripts date from the fourth century. An eighth-century manuscript of the Psalms and Odes bears the scribe’s signature and the note, “The Psalter has been written in the place of God, Mount Sinai.” To be at Sinai is to step back into a world that has survived largely intact from Late Antiquity. [...] From the seventh century, with the arrival of Arab rule, Sinai became even more isolated. If the monks wanted to write a new manuscript, they were often constrained by necessity to take some existing manuscript, whose text was now considered less important, or perhaps a manuscript that was falling apart from age, and already missing sections. The writing could be erased, and the valuable parchment used a second time. The original writing remains faintly visible beneath the second text. This is what is known as a palimpsest. As a result of such reuse of older parchment, Sinai has over one hundred and sixty manuscripts with palimpsest text. When scholars come across a palimpsest, very often it is the original text that is of the greater interest. If the original writing was large, and if the second text was written at right angles to the first, it may be possible to make out the underlying text. But more often, this is not the case, and the original writing remains elusive, and it would seem, beyond recovery. And yet, from the few words that are legible in the margins of these manuscripts, scholars have long known the importance of such texts. Recent advances in digital photography techniques have made it possible to recover these faded texts. They are photographed using separate narrow bandwidths of light in what is known as multi-spectral imaging. Specialists then process and combine these images, searching for an approach that will best clarify the underlying writing. Good results are not guaranteed. But in many instances, the text that was all but invisible before, now becomes legible.” (Hieromonk Justin i Watteeuw, Collier m.fl. 2016)

“In 2014, we photographed Sinai Greek New Finds Majuscule 2 with multi-spectral imaging techniques. All of the leaves were taken from three different earlier manuscripts. Approximately two-thirds of the leaves are from a volume that was of the same size and format. As a result, the upper writing is almost directly over the lower, making it much more difficult to decipher. But the original text is clear on several leaves, and on folio 72 verso, we read about a letter that the Emperor Arcadius sent in reply to Pope Innocent concerning “the thrice-blessed John.” This would be Saint John Chrysostom, and a reference to the turbulent events surrounding his banishment from the capital. Four single leaves are from a seventh-century work called the *Pandects of Holy Scripture*, by Antiochus of Palestine, who became the abbot of the Lavra of Saint Sabbas, outside Jerusalem. The *Pandects of Holy Scripture* is a compendium of the teachings of the scriptures and the fathers of the Church, arranged in 130 chapters. Antiochus was a witness to the destruction of Jerusalem by Chosroes in 614, and his compendium includes an account of the forty-four monks of the Lavra who were killed at that time. The remainder of the manuscript, consisting of sixteen bifolia and four single leaves, was taken from what would have been a large and beautifully written manuscript. The underlying text contains passages from Ezekiel, Jeremiah, the Epistle of Jeremiah, the

Lamentations of Jeremiah, and Baruch. There is also one leaf from the book of Ecclesiasticus.” (Hieromonk Justin i Watteuw, Collier m.fl. 2016)

“Sinai Georgian New Finds 13 is a manuscript with various ascetical and hagiographical texts, written by a scribe named Mikael in the tenth or eleventh century. The manuscript is a palimpsest. Professor Zaza Aleksidze, Director of the Centre of Manuscripts, in Tbilisi, Georgia, was able to identify the underlying text as Caucasian Albanian, an ancient language once spoken in the Caucasus to the east of Georgia. This language had only survived in a few inscriptions carved on stone, and in one Armenian manuscript that listed the letters of the alphabet. Sinai Arabic New Finds 8 and 28 is a manuscript of the Gospels in Arabic, dated to the second half of the eighth century, or the beginning of the ninth. The leaves of this manuscript are very often sewn together from two, three, or four small patches, and most of these are leaves where the original text was erased. [...] A decorative initial is faintly visible on one leaf, and Latin is visible in the margin below. Multi-spectral imaging allows us to see the text more clearly. It is written in what has been identified as an Insular script, a style of writing developed in Ireland, that spread to England, where it flourished between AD 600 and 850. This was the age of Aidan and Cuthbert and Bede, the time of an unusual flowering of monasticism in England. The manuscript points to contact between that world and Sinai.” (Hieromonk Justin i Watteuw, Collier m.fl. 2016)

“[N]ineteenth-century milestones of discovery were sometimes made at great cost to the manuscript. At the time, the principal method for uncovering the palimpsest text was through the use of chemical reagents, such as hydrochloric acid and potassium cyanide. The application of this solution could make the under-text visible, but frequently resulted in long-term stain damage to the manuscript, rendering it illegible. The most widespread method of looking at erased or underwritten texts nowadays is the use of UV lamps, which literally help the researcher to consider the manuscript ‘in a new light’. [...] in cases like the Archimedes palimpsest, where the manuscript has suffered substantial elemental and circumstantial damage, UV light may not suffice. In fact, the first researcher to recognise the significance of the text, J.L. Heiberg working in 1906, used a magnifying glass to interpret the palimpsest! The team at the Walters Art Museum used a new range of methods to recover the writings of the Archimedes palimpsest, including multi-spectral imagery and even studied leaves of the manuscript using highly focused x-rays produced by a synchrotron.” (Irene O’Daly i <https://medievalfragments.wordpress.com/2013/02/15/secrets-of-the-page-palimpsests/>; lesedato 12.01.18)

“Analytical imaging techniques, such as multispectral imaging and digital microscopy, allow objects to be examined in great detail, and in ways which could not be achieved with the naked eye or with conventional photography. The use of these techniques can uncover subtle signs of damage and change, as well as revealing features that have been lost, such as text which has been damaged or

obscured (either deliberately or accidentally), features hidden by overlying layers (including underdrawings or text on the underside of paste-downs) and also potentially highlighting alterations or modifications that have been carried out in the past. Unlike conventional digital photography, in which images are created from a combination of three colour channels (red, green and blue), multispectral imaging employs a much greater number of channels, each recorded at a specific wavelength, to yield a set of in-register monochrome images of an object, which can then be enhanced by computational techniques to reveal subtle, obscure or otherwise hidden details that would be invisible to the eye and would not be apparent using normal photography.” (Paul Garside i Watteeuw, Collier m.fl. 2016)

“It seems even people in the pre-colonial Americas recycled. For the first time, a palimpsest, or parchment where a previous document was imperfectly scraped away so it could be reused and has some remnants of the earlier document, has been discovered from the Americas. The Codex Selden, also known as the Codex Añute, dates from the mid-16th century. Even before being revealed as a palimpsest, the document was special, because it is one of fewer than 20 known Mexican codices to have survived from pre-colonial and early colonial Mexico, notes a press release about the discovery. Most of them had been destroyed by Spanish conquistadores. [...] This document is one of only five surviving manuscripts from the Mixtec area, now the Oaxaca region of Mexico, the release notes. “These codices use a complex system of pictures, symbols and bright colors to narrate centuries of conquering dynasties and genealogies as well as wars and the history of ancient cities. In essence these codices provide the best insight into the history and culture of early Mexico.” Researchers had speculated previously that the document, a five-meter-long strip of deer hide, was a palimpsest, according to the press release. It is covered with gesso, a white plaster made from gypsum and chalk, and folded in a concertina format [...] As with the Voynich Manuscript, it is primarily imagery, and researchers aren’t sure what all the images mean. [...] researchers have found that the hidden manuscript is a different style from any of the others that have survived, meaning it could offer new perspective on archaeological finds from the area [...]. Moreover, the hidden text also flows sideways across page spreads, rather than from bottom to top the way the manuscript on the surface does” (Sharon Fisher i <https://www.laserfiche.com/simplicity/scientists-discover-first-american-palimpsest/>; lesedato 29.01.18).

“Medical Recipe Attributed to Hippocrates Found in Palimpsest from the St Catherine’s Monastery Collection [...] For quite a long time writing materials were a very expensive thing. It is not surprising that Mediaeval scholars were looking for some ways to cut the costs or recycle the materials. That’s how palimpsests were introduced. Often the old not-so-important texts were scraped or washed off from the leather (or papyrus) pages to allow for the new texts to be written over. This time the unimportant text of the medical recipe book attributed to Hippocrates was replaced by a layer of Bible text known as the “Sinaitic manuscript”. Along with the recipe attributed to Hippocrates the original manuscript contains three other

medical texts and pictures of medical herbs recorded by an anonymous scribe. This finding is dated to the 6th century CE [= Common Era, dvs. e.Kr.]. St. Catherine Monastery in South Sinai holds a notable collection of palimpsests as a part of their several-thousand-volume collection of Ancient and Medieval manuscripts. Oldest of the manuscripts dates to the 4th century CE. Modern approach to the recovery of the data hidden in palimpsests includes digitizing, X-ray fluorescence imaging, ultraviolet light photography, etc.” (Stepan Chizhov i <https://www.iobookbinding.com/book-repair-and-restoration/medical-recipe-attributed-hippocrates-found-palimpsest-st-catherines-monastery-collection/>; lesedato 16.02.18)

“The Austrian National Library (ÖNB) possesses a considerable number of Greek palimpsests. Many of the lower scripts and erased texts were studied and described during the general cataloguing of the Vienna Greek manuscripts in the 20th century, other palimpsests could only be examined in greater detail during the last two decades, thanks especially to new developments in image technology. Since 2001, several projects at the Division of Byzantine Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences have undertaken a systematic analysis of the Greek palimpsests of the Austrian National Library with the aim to make them accessible to a larger public. This has resulted in new discoveries of several unique Ancient Greek and Byzantine texts [...] Digital images of the palimpsest folios resulting from high-resolution multispectral capture and sophisticated processing [...] enable scholars to read texts that have been invisible before. [...] The manuscript Hist. gr. 10 contains palimpsest fragments of the work *De prosodia catholica* on Greek accentuation by Aelius Herodianus (2nd cent. A.D.), one of the most important texts for the history of ancient Greek grammar, containing numerous quotations from ancient Greek authors. [...] A bifolium that may have belonged to a direct copy of the otherwise lost Greek original of the *Chronicle* of Eusebius has survived as palimpsest in the manuscript Iur. gr. 18. [...] An important contribution towards the recovery of these texts are the new images created by the image scientists of *Centre of Image and Material Analysis in Cultural Heritage* of the Technical University of Vienna.” (<https://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/byzantine-research/language-text-and-script/book-culture-palaeography-and-palimpsests/greek-palimpsests/>; lesedato 23.02.18)

Begrepet palimpsest brukes også om noen former for intertekstualitet. Den franske 1800-tallsdikteren Gérard de Nerval lagde en teori om palimpsest som han presenterte i historien “Angélique” (1854) (Bonnet 1975 s. 67). Fortellingen består av tolv brev og handler blant annet om en kvinne som flykter til Italia med sin elsker.

Begrepet palimpsest brukes ofte metaforisk om nesten utvasket hukommelse, tekster som kan tolkes som helt overraskende måter m.m. En palimpsest kan f.eks. oppfattes som “a figure of forgetting and fragmentary remembrance against all odds. The single term *palimpsest*, that is, divides against itself between two very different meanings, one figurative or metaphorical, and one literal or material; one

*palimpsestuous*, and one *palimpsestic*. Each of these two senses comes with its own understanding of memory, either eternal or temporary, and each indicates what that understanding reacts to. [...] One especially privileged site for the metaphorical use of palimpsests in literary criticism is Gérard Genette's *Palimpsestes* [...] it is always present, somewhere under the surface of the now. What *Palimpsestes* accomplishes, then, is to raise the palimpsest to the dignity of the single paradigmatic text. All 'lecture relationelle' (p. 556) is henceforth modelled on its graphic proof that writing is forever superimposed onto earlier writing." (Brecht de Groote i <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/oli.12055/full>; lesedato 05.02.18)

Den amerikanske bildekunstneren og poeten Jen Bervin "så å seie skriv dikt ved hjelp av korrekturlakk. I boka "Nets" frå 2004 har ho lagt til grunn 60 av Shakespeares i alt 154 sonettar. Ho har lagt kvitt over store delar av Shakespeares tekst, men ikkje meir enn at den utraderte teksten skin igjennom. Nokre få ord og setningsfragment står fram, i kraftigare skrift, på ein slik måte at desse framheva elementa blir meiningsberande i seg sjølv. Det oppstår faktisk nye dikt, på ein og same gong bundne til og frigjorde frå tradisjonens skrift. Dei nye dikta blir løyste ut frå den opphavlege konteksten, men alltid slik at Shakespeares fulle tekst kling svakt med i bakgrunnen, dersom vi ser nøye etter. Eller lyttar godt, så å seie på fleire frekvensar samtidig." (Paal-Helge Haugen i *Klassekampens* bokmagasin 4. mai 2013 s. 12)

Den amerikanske forfatteren Jessica Cornwells roman *The Serpent Papers* (2015) handler om "a string of gruesome murders and a conspiracy that spans centuries. [...] The city of Barcelona is at the heart of the book, but the story opens in the wintry mountains of Mallorca, another stronghold of Catalan culture. Here we meet Anna Verco, a young English academic with rare specialist skills and knowledge. She's been hired by the shadowy, mega-wealthy arts foundation Picatrix to track down a specific Catalan palimpsest: that is, a page from an ancient scroll or book, from which the original text has been scraped or washed off so that it can be reused. The medieval author is the elusive "Rex Illuminatus", but under that master calligrapher's esoteric verses and exquisite miniature illustration, words of ancient power may have been preserved, kept safe and hidden for centuries. The palimpsest won't be for sale. Anna knows she is expected to acquire this fabulous item by stealth, and the ethical issue doesn't worry her. Her fiercely single-minded quest for the Rex Illuminatus Palimpsest (otherwise known as the "Serpent Papers") is personal – and closely connected, although she doesn't understand exactly how, with the synesthetic seizures, apparently a form of epilepsy, that guide her while at the same time threatening her sanity and her life." (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jan/21/the-serpent-papers-jessica-cornwell-review>; lesedato 05.03.18)

Alle artiklene og litteraturlista til hele leksikonet er tilgjengelig på <https://www.litteraturogmedieleksikon.no>