CHAPTER FIVE

BOOKS AND THE LIBERAL ARTS

5.1 *The artes* training

This chapter considers the distribution of books reviving the liberal arts among the educated Norwegian population. Why devote an entire chapter to the occurrences of such books? The answer lies in the fact that the *artes* curriculum became an imperative, although in many ways an auxiliary tool, of early modern education, making books belonging to this educational scheme a vital asset of the learned library. The main impulse behind this development, at least within the Lutheran tradition, was Melanchthon’s stress on the liberal arts as the framework for all education: knowledge of Greek, for instance, was seen as obligatory for the study of theology and philosophy,1 while knowledge of the past, textual criticism and eloquence were also regarded as important assets for the educated elite. The *artes* curriculum was also prominent in the Danish-Norwegian educational system, and only towards the end of the early modern period, when new educational institution arose, did the liberal arts begin to lose their hold. The liberal arts constituted a learned tradition whose influence on the world of books was enduring; associated books demonstrated the same longevity as did certain other types of work among the general population and the clerical elite (cf. Chapters 3 and 4).

Two institutions in particular came to serve as transmitters of the *artes* curriculum—Latin schools and the university. As we have seen Latin schools remained over a long period the only establishments to offer a wider curriculum to those pursuing a scholarly path.2 As such,
Latin schools provided the preparatory foundations for Norwegian students who subsequently pursued university studies abroad. The particular post-Reformation Latin-school curriculum was outlined in the Church Ordinance of 1537/39 and strengthened by various acts passed during the seventeenth century, and it remained largely unchallenged until the late eighteenth century. According to the original ordinance, five levels (lektier) were scheduled as the norm for Latin schools. Although in Norway none of the sixteenth-century Latin schools offered more than four, with time, the levels were increased to five, and temporarily, to eight. To ensure the quality of the teaching, headmasters of major Latin schools would ideally be equipped with at least the equivalent of a master's degree; in smaller Latin schools, headmasters had to be in possession of a bachelor's degree. To ensure religious conformity, all teachers were to be trained in theology.

In the Latin schools, the *trivium* element of the educational curriculum was stressed; hence the schools' nickname 'trivial skoler'. Of the *septem artes liberales*, the *trivium* of grammar, rhetoric and dialectics was taught at the expense of the *quadrivium* subjects. The importance of the *trivium* with its stress on language had already been underlined by Melanchthon, who supported a curriculum with training in Latin in order to strengthen eloquence and whose views were to become decisive for the Danish-Norwegian school system. Grammar was the most important among the *trivium* subjects, and only at higher levels were rhetoric and dialectics incorporated. Of the *quadrivium* subjects, only music was generally adopted by the Latin-school curriculum, an indication of the role of music and singing in church services. Later in the period of this study, other subjects from the *quadrivium* were allowed into the system, although to varying degrees.

As noted above, the foundational Church Ordinance of 1537/39 laid out a curriculum that would be altered only slightly over the next

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*tiden etter 1950* (Halden: Forum bok, 2005), 19. For the sake of simplicity, these particular educational bodies will be referred to in this chapter as Latin schools.


4 Kolsrud, *Presteutdaning i Noreg*, 125.
