

READING MATERIAL: Pergamentet (The Parchment) Gert Nygårdshaug, Cappelen Damm Publishing, 1st edition 2013
390 pages
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Overall impression:

A thriller with themes from ancient history, written by an author with a fertile imagination, but still containing many curious historical and scientific facts. The novel makes me think of "The Name of the Rose" by Umberto Eco.

Style:

One feels that it is an established writer. His style is precise with great attention to detail. Text is ordered in the present time (progressive) and past (the Middle Ages) and at different geographical locations (Oslo, London and Mexico).

The main characters:

Skarphedin Olsen, infallible investigator at Kripos, Norwegian Criminal Brigade, and Fredric Drum's uncle (with whom he shares being the hero in this series of ten crime novels). Olsen eats Stilton cheese and a drinks red wine when he wants to put order in his ideas during an investigation.

Linus Lindehage, a professor at the University of Oslo, is found shot dead on the balcony of his apartment. Lindehage comes from a family of shipowners who disappeared in the sinking of their yacht off the Mexican coast near Tulum nearly forty years ago. Linus, age of 15 years at the time, was apparently the only survivor of the family of two boys and a girl a little older. The night of the murder, Lindehage was to hold a conference at the prestigious Royal Society in London on its recent decoding work of the Voynich manuscript, 240 pages of a parchment from the Middle Ages.

Livia Lindehage, Linus's wife, is an archaeologist specializing in Celtic legends and sacrificial rites (small pets). She is also co-owner of an antique shop in Oslo, sharing with Tora Aksvik, a puristic Catholic, who proves to be the distant cousin ... and the mistress of Livia Lindehage's husband.

David Broomfield, British bestselling author whom is murdered just before publishing his new novel.

Karl Otto Kistler, German colleague and friend of Professor Linus Lindehage. This is the third victim.

Leon Krewinsky, cardinal in London, who last month received two Vatican brothers, being Tomasso Ilvora (having a police record for a youth trifle), a first librarian at the Vatican. Although these are not scientists, they got exceptionally allowed to attend the conference on decoding the Voynich manuscript, held by Lindehage at the Royal Society of London.

Brother Remigo, a monk in the fifteenth century, lives in a monastery near Lake Garda, has copied on vellum a mysterious book with silver highlights. He must send this copy to the Pope in Rome.

The story:

I. THE ROYAL SOCIETY

The investigation of three murders takes place during the Easter weekend.

First murder: A renowned British writer (David Broomfield) is about to publish a new novel - he only had to submit to the editor additional documentation on the principal subject - is killed in London. A guinea pig, with an open belly, was placed by his side.

Second murder: a Norwegian researcher (Linus Lindehage) is found dead by his wife on the balcony of their luxury apartment. A dead cat is found in the barbecue next to the body.

Lindehage should have held a conference at the Royal Society in London at the time of the murder, on the occasion of the publication of his work deciphering the mysterious Voynich manuscript, work that would make him a celebrity.

Third murder: Karl Otto Kistler, a German scientist, was found shot dead in a dark alley in London. We find a large bin full of dead dogs and cats nearby.

He also had to attend the conference in London. The three victims were killed with the same weapon.

The question that arises is Skarphedin Olsen is: Who is able to kill to inhibit the content of the manuscript is being revealed? And what is the content?

At St. Paul's Cathedral in London (who was built on a former site of Celtic sacrifices), Cardinal Leon Krawinsky discusses with two clergymen from the Vatican to see if someone was able to access mysterious 32 missing pages from the Voynich manuscript, that contain a kind of "Rosetta Stone" a text in several languages, that can be used as key to decode the rest of the Voynich manuscript, the main part.

Meanwhile, in the year 1381, in the monastery near Lake Garda, we learn the story of a young friar, Brother Remigo, who learns to become a copyist.

Then all the colorful characters of Kripos (Police's special unity for homicide) in Oslo and Scotland Yard in London are set up. It is Skarphedin Olsen who finds the corpse of Linus Lindehage, it is he who comforts his wife Livia and leads the further investigation.

II. THE CRUCIFIX

Because of the sacrificed animals, everything suggests that the wife of Professor Lindehage is behind the killings.

However, over the latter's office at the University of Oslo, police found a huge crucifix with Christ taking almost the entire surface of the wall and on the back of the crucifix, Tomasso Ilvora, the Vatican's librarian fingerprints are found. Furthermore, when the police question the university colleges of Linus Lindehage, they say that this installation is recent and also report the whereabouts of a woman who is not his wife. By analyzing the content of the pockets of the victim Linus Lindehage, the police found traces of a goat cheese ... with its origin in Mexico.

The investigator Skarphedin Olsen goes to the antique shop shared by Livia Lindehage and Tora Aksvik, the second cousin of her husband.

III. Beinecke MS 408

Skarphedin Olsen asks for information about the Voynich manuscript to his nephew Fredric Drum, an expert in cryptology. Drum has earlier deciphered ancient scripts like Linear B, the Etruscan glyphs, the Rongo Rongo-Easter Island ...

Drum tells Olsen an obscure alchemist found traces of the 1600 240-page parchment and dies suddenly after submitting it to one of his friends, Marcus Marci. This one had

heard a story by Cistercian monks like what it was the devil himself who had disguised himself as copyist monks in a monastery in northern Italy to write a new Bible which itself would be presented as the Creator and Lord of the earth and sky. When the Vatican got information about this affair, the monastery was burned and erased, all the monks killed or chased away. Later, the manuscript is named after the Polish-American bookseller Wilfried M. Voynich who bought it in 1912 at the Collegio Romano, together with thirty other ancient writings. After his death, the manuscript goes to his widow who gives it to a friend who, in turn, sells it to a bookseller HP Kraus. This one, considering that the manuscript is cursed because so many of its owners have died a violent death, donates the parchment to Yale University, where it is now, at the bookstore Beinecke, cataloged under the Reference Beinecke MS 408. No scientist or amateur has so far managed to decode it.

IV. DAVID BROOMFIELD

Cardinal Krewinski is very upset about that Tomasso Ilvora has left a fingerprint allowing police to trace him. The Cardinal gets rid of the boxes containing David Broomfield's manuscript – he throws it into the river Thames and sends Tomasso - who had stolen them – to go hiding in a distant country.

Police suspicions are now moving towards a culprit that is a devout Catholic and who wishes at all costs to avoid the disclosure of the secret parchment.

V. DIVING

Comparing the names of passengers on flights between London and Oslo over the Easter weekend, Skarphedin Olsen notices the passenger in the seat next to Linus Lindehage, namely Pedro Blanco Xanxavier. By doing research on the Internet by the police computer geek, with the name of a cheese made in Mexico with the name of Xanxavier, he finally found the hacienda of Don Felipe Goncalves Xanxavier who rightly manufactures goat's cheese.

Skarphedin Olsen takes a flight to Tulum in Mexico where he met Tomasso, Tora Aksvik and finally ... Linus Lindehage !!! He had been able to find his twin brother who survived the sinking in their childhood, now called Pedro Blanco, which was adopted by the owner of the hacienda; but heavily brain damaged by the lack of oxygen in the water when the accident occurred.

At the hacienda, they all hoped for a miracle for Pedro Blanco. So Linus had designed this Machiavellian plan to simulate a miracle taking his twin brother with him to Oslo, to impersonate leaving the victim to take his place, and then come back here to the rich hacienda, and live happily with his mistress.

Linus Lindehage agrees to tell the whole truth to Skarphedin Olsen, if he lets him take a final bath in a Xenote, a natural pool with subterranean rivers leading out to the sea, normally. The investigator finally asks Lindehage what was in the parchment. Swimming to the bottom of the Xenote leading to the underground river, Lindehage cries out the first sentence of the parchment, "When we discovered the blue planet with its primitive creatures, we were confident that we could change this biomass in our image." "And Lindehage plunges into the hole and disappears.