Reading the Gothic script used in some old Norwegian printed materials can be a challenge. To complicate matters, the language of these materials is Dano-Norwegian: the Danish-based language that was used in Norway by the church and government. Shown below are verses 1–3 of Psalm 23 from a Bible printed in Christiania (Oslo) in 1854.

To date, no online tool exists to automatically translate from Gothic Script to English, so readers must manually rewrite the text in modern script. The key, provided below, may provide useful reference.

After rewriting in modern script, a translation tool such as Google Translate (translate.google.com) can be helpful. Google Translate detects the language of the rewritten text as Danish (which it basically is). The resulting translation shown is somewhat understandable and much better than if the language is specified as Norwegian.

Alternatively, some readers may prefer to use the Dansk-norsk-engelsk ordbog (København, 1897). This dictionary converts Dano-Norwegian words in Gothic script to English in modern script, saving the reader the step of using an online translation tool. Find the dictionary online at tinyurl.com/ordbog-online.

**UNCODING GOTHIC SCRIPT**

BY DALE HOVLAND

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**TRADITIONS OF CHRISTMAS PAST**

BY AMY BOXRUD

Eating lutefisk and lefse, making sandbakkels and rosettes, and opening gifts on Christmas Eve instead of Christmas Day: These are all holiday traditions still practiced in many Norwegian-American families. But over the years, other immigrant yuletide traditions have fallen by the wayside. Sharing a bundle of grain with the birds, brewing Christmas beer, and Christmas masquerading are, for most Norwegian-American families, lost traditions of past generations.

**Christmas Brewing**

Since Viking times, beer has played an important role in Norwegian celebrations. And while there may not seem to be an obvious connection between brewing beer and the religious holiday of Christmas, a long-standing tradition exists in Norway, stretching back to early Christian times.

Laws. In Keeping Christmas, Yuletide Traditions in Norway and the New Land (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001), Kathleen Stokker writes that King Haakon the Good moved the mid-winter jól festival to coincide with the Christian celebration of Christmas in the 10th century. He also mandated that every peasant brew a supply of beer for the occasion.

Medieval laws upheld the custom and imposed stiff fines on any landowner who didn’t brew an ample amount for the celebration. The local priests enforced these laws, going from farm to farm to inspect and test the quality of the beer. In time, a farm’s reputation within the community rested on the quality of the beer it produced, and brewing became an important part of Christmas preparations.

The Norwegian website, Ølakademiet.no, describes Christmas beer as it was made “in the old days” as “full of malt flavor and not too bitter.” On the organization’s blog, “Bjarte Brewmaster” advises: “Christmas beer should be both sweet and strong!” In some areas, juniper was used as an ingredient for bitterness, and blueberries for sweetness.

Norwegians were a superstitious lot, and brewing was no exception. They followed careful rituals to ensure the strength and quality of the beer, including consecrating