

as Peter Foote has suggested, that the scriptorium where these books were produced was based at the convent.²³ AM 764 4^{to}, with its emphasis on Christian history and saints' lives, certainly seems a fitting product of an ecclesiastical institution, and when the preference for stories of women is taken into account, the nunnery must be considered the likeliest place of origin for this interesting codex.

As for the uses the book was meant for, any firm conclusions may elude us. Some of the texts in it are quite comparable to popular cloister literature such as *Vitae patrum* (there are in fact a few exempla from that work in the latter half of the manuscript), and would have made for a suitable reading at mealtimes. The same cannot be said of many of the heavily abbreviated passages nor of the numerous lists, short and long, of people and places that are included in the chronicle. These would not have lent themselves as easily to reading aloud. But could they have been meant for the schoolroom? There is evidence that in the fifteenth century children were taken into the convent to be educated and as Foote argues 'the situation in the affluent fourteenth century can hardly have been different'.²⁴ One can surmise that the clergy who served at Reynistaður and possibly some of the nuns would have been responsible for providing basic teaching. AM 764 4^{to}, however, is no basic schoolbook. Despite the superficial treatment of most of the material it contains, it far exceeds the curriculum one imagines was prescribed for the children who were sent to the convent to receive elementary education. It is more likely that the book could have been intended as a reference book for those who taught the children, and for other literate people at Reynistaður and beyond. The emphasis in the book seems to be weighed slightly towards women so it is not unnatural to assume they had a hand in its production; the book may have played a part in the education of novices and nuns alike. The way the scribes carried out their task, excerpting and abbreviating existing sources, suggests it could have appealed to those impatient for learning. For when one seeks an apt description of the chronicle in AM 764 4^{to} the word 'crash-course' inevitably springs to mind. That need not detract from the admiration one feels for the energy and ambition of these scribes who sought to bring a taste of the whole world to Skagafjörður.

²³ *A Saga of St Peter*, ed. Foote, p. 59.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

Lead Mortuary Crosses found in Christian and Heathen Graves in Norway

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Archaeologists sometimes make unexpected finds. Such was the case when the Archaeological Museum of Stavanger was excavating some pre-Christian barrows on a hilltop at the farm of Sande, close to Stavanger airport at Sola, Rogaland, in south-western Norway in the year 2000. What first looked like two crossed pieces of plastic found at the bottom of a barrow, itself the most potent symbol of Norwegian heathendom, turned out to be a Christian lead cross covered with runes. This surprise discovery is the point of departure for this article.

I shall discuss this cross in comparison with other similar crosses, mainly from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, found in and outside Norway. Of special interest is the peculiar use some of them were put to.

THE SANDE CROSS

This cross was found at the bottom of an Iron-age barrow. Radiocarbon-dating of burnt bones and charcoal from the base date the original barrow to 1690+/-60 BP, but rusty fragments of a one-edged sword found stratigraphically separate from this, at a higher level in the barrow, testify to a secondary grave from the Late Iron Age, probably A.D. 600–800. A piece of Migration-period pottery, found near the edge of the barrow, is believed to have come from an adjacent settlement, although possibly from an older grave. In another barrow excavated nearby, we found a small stone-lined chamber with burned bones, but no grave goods.²

The cross (figure 1), 109 mm high and 83 mm wide, and 19–20 mm broad across its arms and foot, is cut from a thin sheet of lead. Except for the base, which is slightly damaged, it is well preserved with straight edges. Even though the surface is somewhat corroded, the runic inscription is generally well preserved

¹ I wish to thank Geoff Egan, Nils Engberg, Signe Horn Fuglesang, John Hines, John D. Kelly, James Knirk, Arne J. Larsen, Kjell Jonas Nordby, Anne Stalsberg and the scholars at the Misjonshøgskolen (School of Mission and Theology) for their help and advice when writing this article.

² O. Rønne, *Innberetning til topografisk arkiv ang. utgraving av to gravhauger i forbindelse med reguleringsplan for Skiljaberget, Sande gnr.33 bnr. 809, Sola k* (Archival report, Museum of Archaeology, Stavanger).

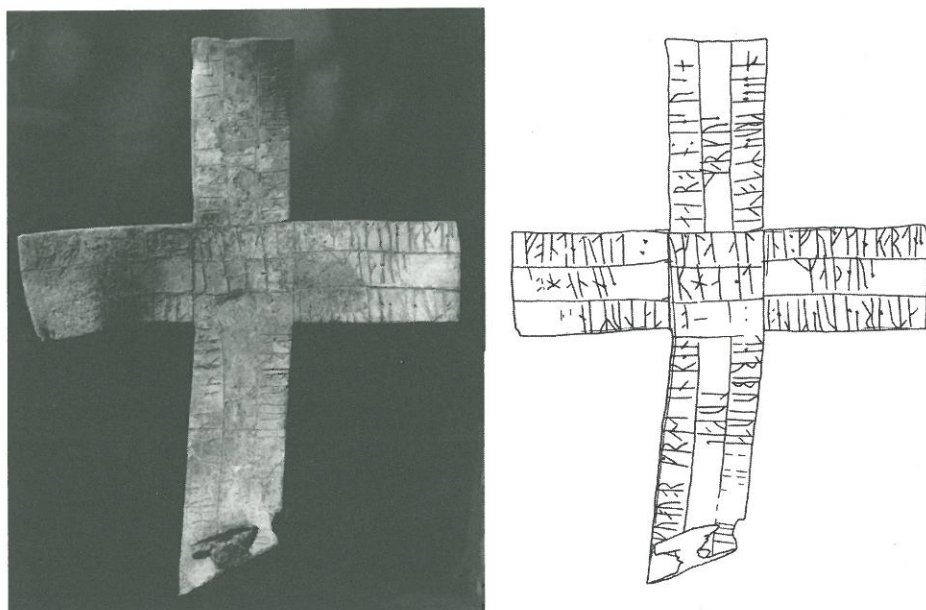


Figure 1: The Sande cross. Photo: T. Tveit, AmS. Drawing: J. Nordby.

and easily readable.

Three lines of runes have been incised with the point of a sharp knife. Simple drawn lines divide them. The middle section has three lines of runes that are separated from the arms by simple lines. Through a magnifying glass the track of the sharp, reversed knifepoint is easily observable. The dots have a particular triangular shape (figure 2).

Specialists may make a more thorough and detailed study of the runic inscription. This article concentrates on the primary content of the inscription, which has been interpreted with the help of Professor James Knirk.³ The inscription starts with a cross on the upper right side at the top and reads along the edge. Transcribed from a sometimes imperfect mediaeval Latin:

+ esse krusem tomi/ni : fugite pa^rtes / at^uerse uicit leo / te t^ribuiuta
??.....

(^ indicates that two letters are ligatured)

This first line can be interpreted as: 'Behold, the cross of the Lord, flee oh fiendish powers! Be triumphant, lion of the Jewish tribe.'

The second sentence is not easy to understand:

³ See also J. Nordby, 'Nyfunn og nyregistreringer i 2000: A362 Sande blykors', *Nytt om runer: Meldingsblad om runeforskning* 16 (2003), 13–16.

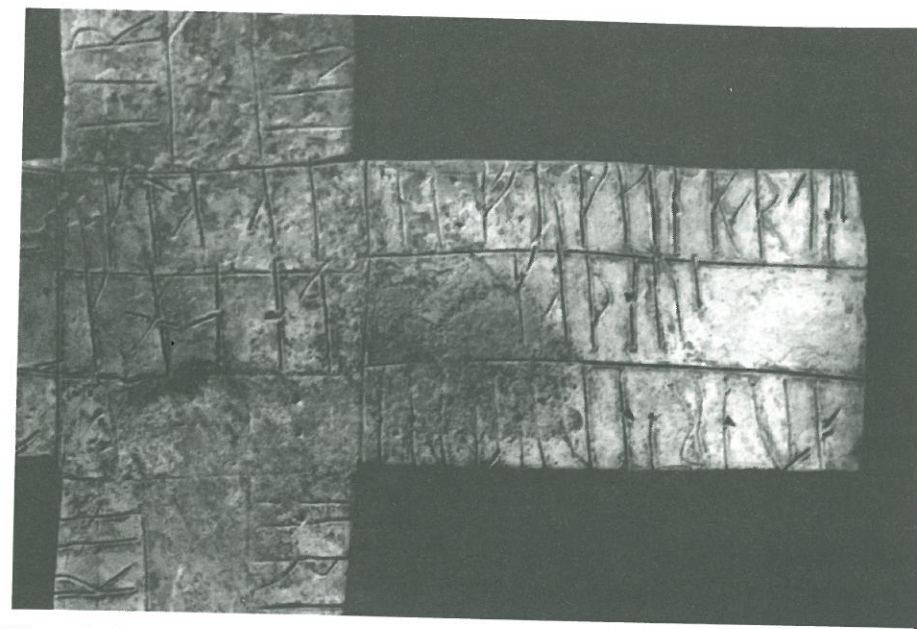


Figure 2: Detail of the cross. The use of a reversed knifepoint can be seen from the triangular dots. Photo: T. Tveit, AmS.

kuat^uo^r gra^na in pen/talum in ... / fontet^tutit: / aaron : iesus+

Magnus Olsen initially had a problem interpreting the quite similar text on the Madla cross (below), partly because of absent letters and misspelled Latin words.⁴ Eventually he was made aware of a verse found in the Latin poem *Deus pater piissime*.⁵ This poem may have been composed in the second half of the tenth century and found its way from northern France to the bishopric of Stavanger in Norway together with two other poems concerning the name of God, part of the texts of which are found on other Norwegian lead crosses.⁶ In a twelfth-century manuscript in Paris we can read in verses 165–67: 'quod fronte tulit aaron, sculptumque teramathon, quator gramis in pectalon.'⁷ This shows how the inscription on the cross has been misspelled: 'quator grana' should be 'quator gramis' and so on. The text should then be interpreted as a reference to 'Four letters on Aaron's forehead'. Aaron was the brother of Moses and a high priest.

⁴ M. Olsen, *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer* (Oslo, 1954), III, 235.

⁵ Olsen, *Norges innskrifter*, III, 308.

⁶ L. Gjerløw, 'Deus Pater piissime og blykorsene fra Stavanger bispedømme', *Stavanger museums Årbok 1954* (Stavanger, 1955), 85–109.

⁷ Bibliothèque nationale, MS lat. 12 020 (ancien fonds St Germain 332), fol. 138^v. From Gjerløw, 'Deus Pater piissime', p. 91.

The text refers to Exodus 28, 36–39, the directions for the costume of the high priest:

Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it as on a seal: HOLY TO THE LORD. Fasten a blue cord to it to attach it to the turban; it is to be on the front of the turban. It will be on Aaron's forehead, and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate, whatever their gifts may be. It will be on Aaron's forehead continually so that they will be acceptable to the LORD.⁸

The four letters in question are JHVE, *Yahweh* in Hebrew. This is one of many transcriptions of the proper name of God, a name too sacred to be written or uttered. This fear of using the name of God is referred to II Corinthians 12. 4: 'he was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.'

In the middle line on the arms are the names of the evangelists:

ma^{peus}, lukas, ?ohannes and ma^{rkus}.

The text in the middle section starts with an inexplicable curved line which may have been a mistake. Following this we find the letters

a^{gla},

This Hebrew acronym AGLA, thought to mean *Atta Gibbor Le'olam Adonai*, 'You are mighty for eternity, O Lord', is, according to D. Segev, 'beyond doubt the most popular potent name in the North [...] AGLA appears in magical runic charms on a plethora of artefacts like Norwegian wooden sticks and crosses, or on lead-plates from Sweden and Denmark'.⁹ The AGLA formula was integrated into Nordic magical vocabulary from around 1200 and its broad and diverse uses and popularity in Norway and elsewhere continued well beyond mediaeval times.

On the remaining lines we read:

alpha et o + ?:

Alpha and omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This is another representation of the name of God: 'first and last', drawn from Revelation 1. 8, 21. 6 and 22. 13. (Revelation 22. 13: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End'.) Alpha and o(mega) are also to be found on other runic inscriptions in Norway (see for instance the Osen cross and the lead strips from Ål stave-church (C 30964) below).

⁸ The Holy Bible quotations are from The New International Version – UK, online edition: <<http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?language=english>>

⁹ D. Segev, *Medieval Magic and Magicians – in Norway and Elsewhere: Based upon 12th – 15th Centuries Manuscript and Runic Evidence.*, Centre for Viking and Medieval Studies Occasional Papers 2/2001 (Oslo, 2001), pp. 79–93.

THE MADLA AND GRUDE CROSSES

As already mentioned, the new cross from Sande is quite similar to another cross (S 1616),¹⁰ found in 1886 in a grave at the old cemetery at Madla in Stavanger (figure 3). This cross is 142 mm high, has a runic inscription on one side and a finely carved crucifixion on the other. From its style, the drawing can be dated c. 1275–1325. Part of one arm is lost, which made the interpretation of some of the text difficult. Like the Sande cross, this cross was also divided into sections by carved lines. The text starts with a cross on the top and reads around the edges:

+ esse krucem / tomini fugite / pa^{rtes} atue^{rse} : ui/cit leo detribuiuta
ratiks ta^{uit} /

kuatuo^r grana : in penta^{tum} : kuo (f)on.....*i aa^{ro}n / iessus kristus

ma^{rikus} ma^{peus} lukas io**hannes

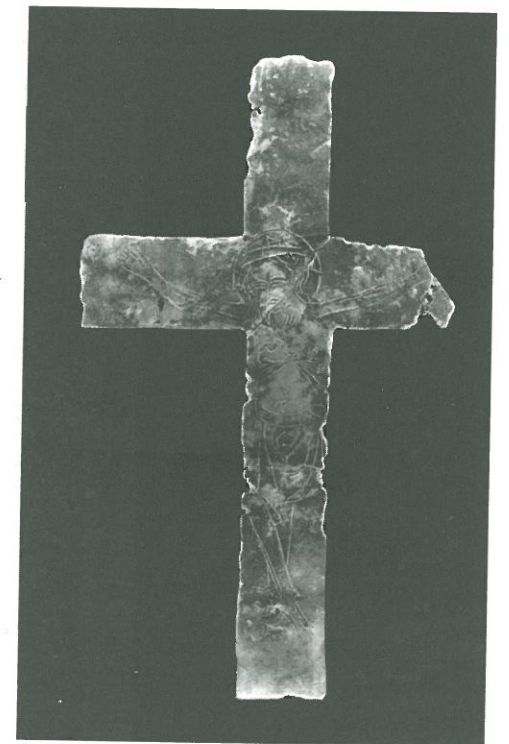
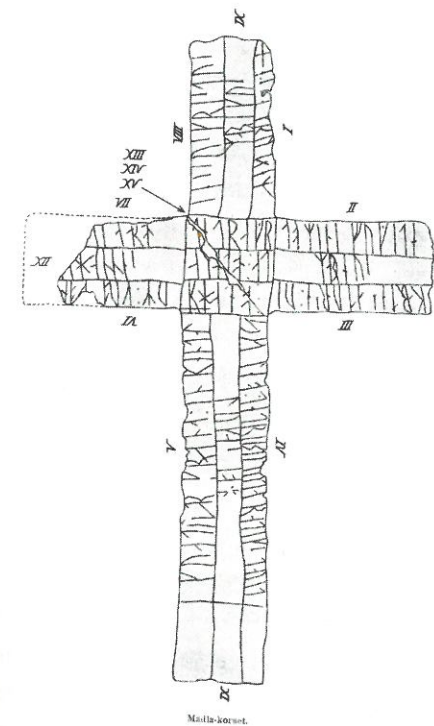


Figure 3: The Madla cross. Runes on one side and a crucifixion figure on the reverse. From M. Olsen (see note 3), p. 248 and plate IV.

¹⁰ This is an accession number in the catalogue of the collection of the archaeological museum. Stavanger = S, Bergen = B, Bryggens Museum (Bergen) = BRM, Oslo = C and Trondheim = T.

tetragramatōn : alpha e^t o

The first line Magnus Olsen interpreted as: 'Ecce crucem Domini, fugite partes adversæ. Vicit leo de tribu Juda, radix David'.¹¹ ('Behold, the cross of the Lord. Flee, O fiendish powers! Victorious is the lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the root of David.')

Similar words are also found written in roman letters on a third cross (B400, figure 4), from Grude in Klepp, 25 km south of Stavanger:

Esse crucem domini, fugite partes adverse, vecit leo de tribut iuda, radi(x
d)avidi...enven...(a)donæ +¹²

The words *radix David* refer to Revelation 5. 5: 'Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."' which was inspired

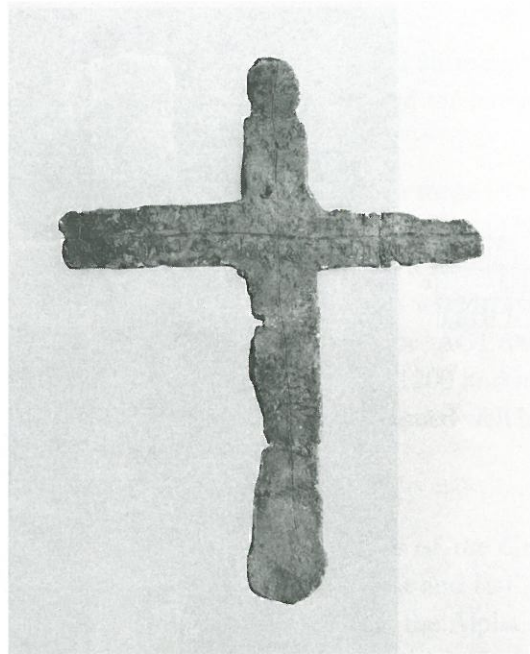


Figure 4: Cross from Grude with inscription in Latin letters. Photo: O. Espevoll, Bergen Museum.

by Isaiah 11. 1: 'A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit'. These words were extensively used in Christian supplication due to the fact that they were used in the antiphon 'Ecce crucem' which was sung before and after a Psalm of David. They were also used in funeral

¹¹ Olsen, *Norges innskrifter*, III, 232.

¹² I. Undseth, 'Indskrifte fra Middelalderen i Thronhjems Domkirke', *Christiania Videnskabs-Selskabs forhandlinger*, 1888, no. 4 (Christiania, 1888), p. 94.

services. When the priest made the sign of the cross over the grave (*signando sepulcrum*) he was to say the words: 'Ecce crucem domini: fugite partes adverse. Ecce vicit leo de tribu iuda, radix David'.¹³

Direct parallels to this 'Ecce crucem' text are also found on two lead sheets or amulets with formulae of exorcism for illness, from Schleswig, Germany,¹⁴ and Blæsinge, Holbæk, Denmark.¹⁵

Magnus Olsen had, as noted, difficulties interpreting the next line, which he first read as 'quator grana', i.e. 'four corns'. The new text from the Sande-cross confirms his interpretation as the text from the poem 'Deus pater piissime':

Sande: kua^uo^r gra^na in pen/talum in ... / fonte tutit: / aaron : iesus+

Madla: kua^uo^r grana : in penta^tum : kuo (f)on.....*i aa^ro^na / iessus kristus

Deus pater piissime (165–66): quatuor gramis in pectalon/ quod fronte tulit aaron

– translated as 'Four letters that Aaron bore on his forehead.'

The word 'tetragramaton' in the middle section of the Madla cross must mean 'four letters', and thus is another reference to the name of God written with four letters, JHVE. Below this we find the same *Alpha et o(mega)*.

Upon the first discovery of the almost identical texts of the Madla and the new Sande crosses, we thought that the same man might have carved the runes. A closer inspection disproved this. Details in the hand differ, especially the ways of contracting certain runes. T and U are ligatured in *atuerse* on the cross from Sande, but written as two letters on the one from Madla. There are also orthographical differences, such as *kerucem* on the Madla cross against *kerusem* on the Sande-cross, and *Iesus* on Madla against *Iessus* on Sande. It appears therefore that different hands carved the Madla and the Sande cross-inscriptions.

OTHER CROSSES

Including these three examples some eighteen lead mortuary crosses of this kind have been found in Norway, with or without inscriptions. It is noteworthy that most of them were found in south-western Norway, ten of them in the old bishopric of Stavanger (figure 5).

¹³ *Manuale Curatorum secundum usum ecclesie Roschildensis*, ed. by Joseph Freisen (Paderborn, 1898), p. 46. From Olsen, *Norges innskrifter*, III, 233.

¹⁴ C. Gaastgeber and H. Harrauer, 'Ein christliches Bleiamulett aus Schleswig', *Ausgrabungen in Schleswig. Berichte und Studien 15* (Neumünster, 2001), p. 217.

¹⁵ M. Stocklund, 'Runefund', *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie 1986*, Det Kongelige Nordiske Oldskriftselskab (København, 1986), pp. 205–208.

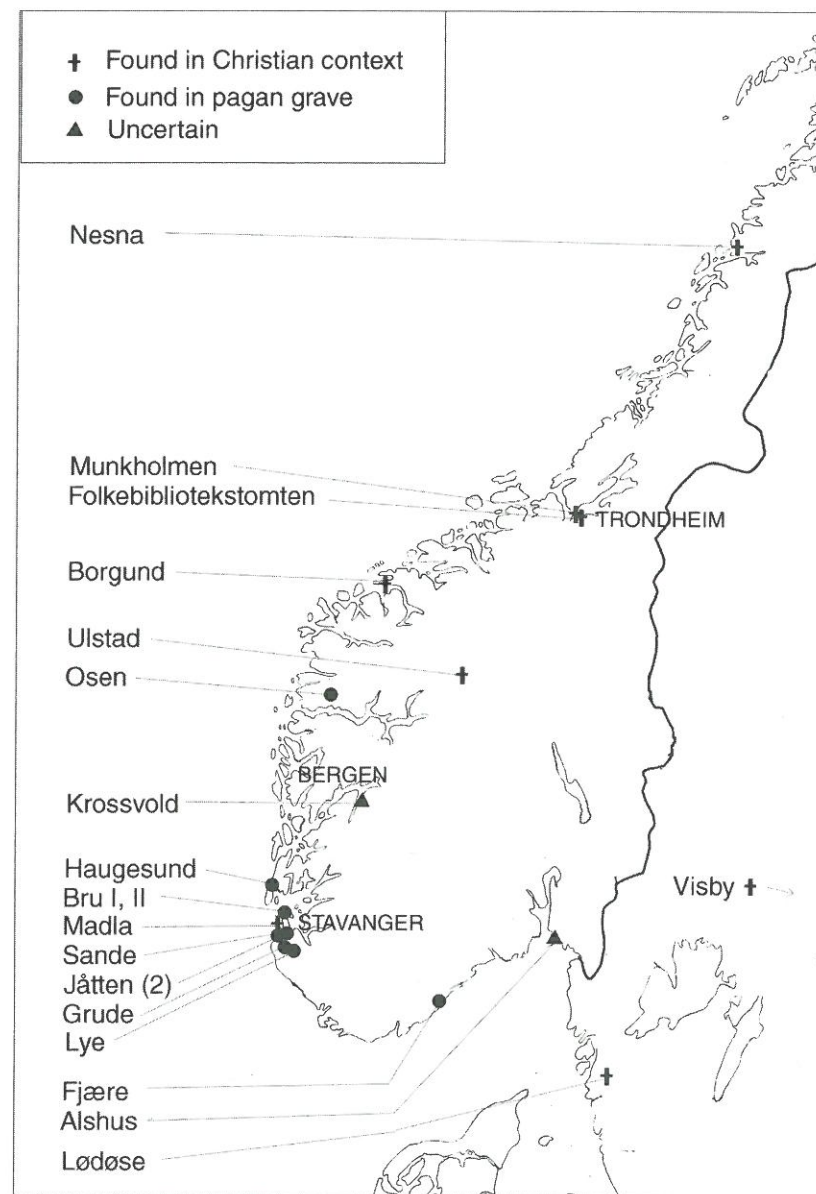


Figure 5: Finds of simple lead mortuary crosses, the two pendant crosses found in a barrow at Jåtten, Stavanger, and the iron cross in the weight stone at Ulstad, Lom. (Found in Christian contexts, i.e. in graves or mediaeval town- or farm-sites).

A 7 cm high cross without ornament or inscription (C 8277;¹⁶ figure 6), was found in a barrow at Fjære in Vest-Agder. Another cross without any inscription (B 4820),¹⁷ but with similar arms 8–8.4 cm long, was found in a barrow dated to the Early Iron Age on the farm of Re in Lye, Time, south of Stavanger. A hone and some potsherds were found in this grave, in and near the stone cist, which was made of slabs placed on edge. On one of the slabs five cup-marks can be seen. The cross was found approximately one metre north of the coffin.

In a barrow from the Late Roman period at Jåtten in Stavanger, a small lead cross (2.9 cm) and fragments of another (>2.3 cm), without inscriptions (aksj.nr.1994/58) were found at the base, near the edge of the mound. Both have holes in the top and must be regarded as pendant amulets, unlike the other crosses discussed in this article. The practice of putting a cross into a barrow, and its underlying motivation, must, however, have been the same.¹⁸

Another cross, c. 7 cm high, was also found in a barrow, along with a net-sinker or a weight from a loom, in the town of Haugesund (C 4829,¹⁹ figure 6). A lead nail in the middle may have been used for decoration or for fastening.

According to N. Nicolaysen,²⁰ a lead cross was found in a Bronze-age cairn at Sørbø, Rennesøy, Rogaland. The cross, which has been lost, was placed outside the central stone cist, together with a necklace of bronze (B 1595) and a finger ring of gold (C 1636).

¹⁶ Oldsaksamlingen – Arkeologisk tilvekst, online:

<<http://www.dokpro.uio.no/perl/arkeologi/visetekst.cgi?DATABASE=O&KRYSS21537@=on>>

¹⁷ Bergen Museum – Arkeologisk tilvekst, online:

<<http://www.dokpro.uio.no/perl/arkeologi/visetekst.cgi?DATABASE=B&KRYSS1582@=on>>

¹⁸ Pectoral crosses: in the supposed grave of Archbishop Eiliv Korting (†1332) in Nidaros Cathedral, a gilt copper cross was found on the chest of the body. The cross, which has the inscription *Ave Maria gracia plena*, is of much finer craftsmanship than the simple lead crosses. As the cross is supplied with a loop at the top, we must consider this to be the bishop's personal pectoral cross which followed him to the grave. Two sheets of lead wrapped in cloth were found on either side of the body close to the elbows. Such lead sheets laid at the elbows were also found in another bishop's grave in the church. It is believed that these sheets served some magical purpose: S. Grieg, *Middelalderske byfund fra Bergen og Oslo* (Oslo, 1933), p. 398.

A simpler 6.5 × 6 cm lead cross (T17045a) was found in a grave in the former Dominican churchyard in Trondheim. It is also regarded as a pectoral cross because of a hole for a chain. These and other personal pectoral crosses found in Christian graves (or pre-Christian graves, as at Birka, Sweden) are not discussed further in this paper.

¹⁹ Oldsaksamlingen – Arkeologisk tilvekst, online:

<<http://www.dokpro.uio.no/perl/arkeologi/visetekst.cgi?DATABASE=O&KRYSS2158@=on>>

²⁰ N. Nicolaysen, *Norske fornlevninger* (Kristiania, 1862–66), pp. 324–25.

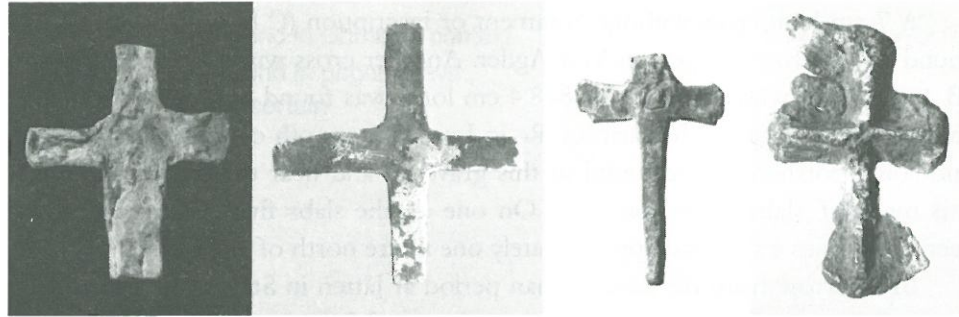


Figure 6: Examples of uninscribed crosses. From the left: C8277 Fjære, Aust-Agder, 7 × 6.2 cm. B4820 Re, Rogaland, 8 × 8.4 cm. C4829 Haugesund, Rogaland, 6.9 × 3.3 cm. C371 Munkholmen, Trondheim, 8.8 × 5 cm.

Photo: A and C: Universitetets kulturhistoriske museer. B and D: Bergen Museum.

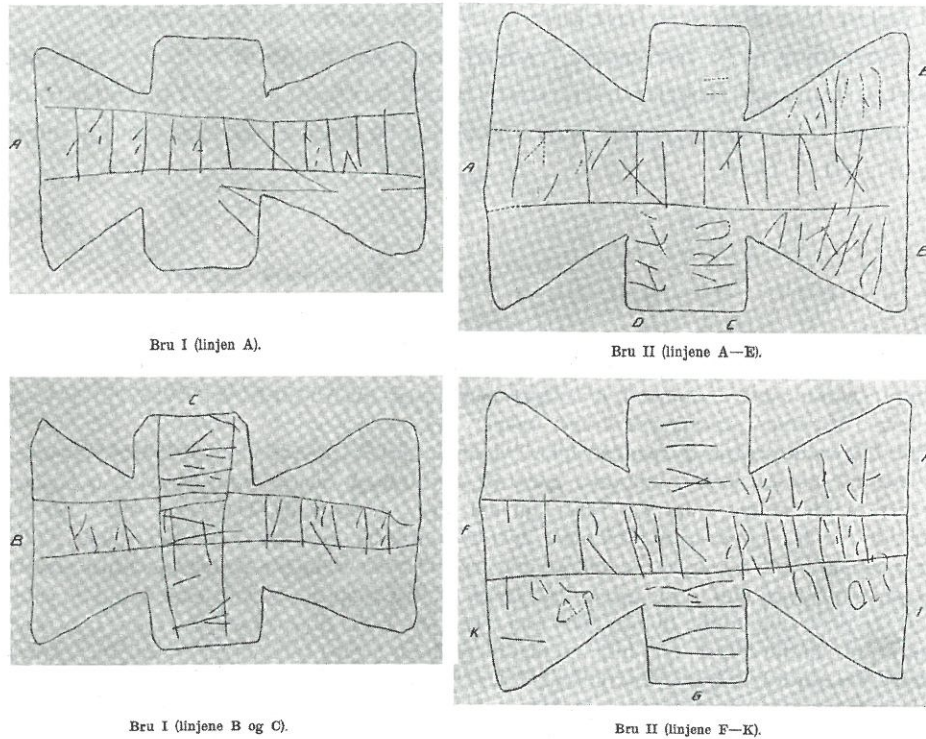


Figure 7: Bru I (left) and II. From M. Olsen (see note 4), pp. 282–83.

Bru I and II, Rennesøy

Of special interest are two lead crosses (S 3550, figure 7) found put into a Bronze-age grave cairn on the island of Bru at the Soknasund in Rennesøy *kommune*, north of Stavanger. Bru is close to the island of Moster, with Utstein monastery. This monastery, first mentioned in 1280, is the best-preserved mediaeval monastery in Norway. Soknasund is also known from Snorri's *Heimskringla* as the site of the famous battle in 1033 between Svein Alfivason and Tryggve, the supposed son of King Olav Tryggveson. Tryggve had come from the west with his fleet to win the kingdom of his father. Instead he found his death: murdered after the battle, according to a local legend.

These crosses differ from the Latin-shaped crosses mentioned in being broader than they are high and looking more like a Maltese cross. On the smallest cross, Bru I, 5.6 cm high, Magnus Olsen has read in runes on line A: *adonai in ici*. Adonai is used as the name of the Lord, as in roman letters on the Grude cross. *In* may be the first two letters of INRI (Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum). *Ici* may be 'ecce', the beginning of the familiar formula 'ecce crucem Domini'. On the reverse side are two crossing lines. Olsen interpreted the text on the end of the vertical line B as *krtto*, i.e. 'credo', the profession of faith. The crossing vertical line C could not be read. Olsen hypothetically postulated letters from the names of the evangelists.²¹

The larger cross Bru II is 6.4 cm broad and 4.4 cm high. The runic text is written in ten sections. At first Olsen read line A as: *???kbitdiush*. The end *Dius* he interprets as Deus – God, but the remaining letters can not be read; they may be abbreviations. Below in line B is the word *ba^kmik*, which may be 'pax mecum', 'peace be with me'.

The following lines are not easy to understand, but the crossing lines F and G can be read as *serbens a^ries leo uermis*. These words come from 'Alma chorus Dei' where more than fifty pseudonyms for the name of God are listed. This was sung after the Hallelujah between the epistle and the gospel. One of the hexameters reels off names that are in fact animal names: 'agnus, ovis, serpens, aries, leo, vermis' (lamb, sheep, snake, ram, lion, caterpillar) to which the four words on Bru II correspond.

On line H we can read *a^reto^h*, explained by Magnus Olsen as the Greek word *áreetos*, 'unutterable', 'secret' or 'sacred'. The meaning of this is the same as the Tetragrammaton – the four letters, transcription of the sacred name JHVE. Olsen also found the three first letters of JHVE written in Hebrew letters (line

²¹ Olsen, *Norges innskrifter*, III, 280–82.

K), but this interpretation is disputed.²² Finally we have the name *Olau*, that is Sanctus Olaus, written in roman letters (line I).²³

Krossvold, Opedal in Hardanger

During building work at Krossvold, 15 m from the shore of the Hardanger fjord, a cross (B 6267,²⁴ figure 8) was found about two feet deep, lying on a stone slab. There is no information of churches or churchyards here, but the Cistercian monastery of Lyse, near Bergen, had a daughter house in Opedal. Nearby some bones were found, but it is uncertain that these were human. The cross measures 15 cm by 12.2 cm. A hole in the foot indicates that it was once nailed on to something. One side is totally covered with an inscription in roman letters. Haakon Schetelig read some of the beginning as *XPT / saluator ibs / alph/omega...sabaoth...*. The other side had a cross in the middle surrounded by a circle, and the letters *al - ha - ab...omega* together with a monogram-like figure.²⁵ As we can see, the text read by Schetelig contains some of the same elements discussed above: transcriptions of the unspeakable name of God followed by identifiable letters, possibly for magical use.

Lilly Gjerløw found, however, that the cross contained most of verses 1–4 of the little known ‘Christie, Salvator’ from the cloister of St. Évrout in Normandy, written in the twelfth century.²⁶ That local version consists of twenty verses, of which the first fourteen are a list of names and symbols of God, while the remaining verses 14–20 are prayers for God’s protection, followed by the usual thanksgiving:

²² Pers. comm. from Professor James E. Knirk; see also Segev, *Medieval Magic and Magicians*, p. 113.

²³ Olsen, *Norges innskrifter*, III, 282–84.

²⁴ Bergen museum – Arkeologisk tilvekst, online:

<http://www.dokpro.uio.no/perl/arkeologi/visetekst.cgi?DATABASE=B&KRYSS2801@=on>

²⁵ H. Schetelig, ‘Fortegnelse over de til Bergen museum i 1908 indkomne saker ældre end reformationen’, *Bergen Museum Aarbog 1909 No.14*, 44.

²⁶ Gjerløw, ‘Deus Pater piissime’, pp. 103–106.



Figure 8: Krossvold, Hordaland, with an enlarged detail of the top showing some of the inscription.

Photo: O. Espevoll, Bergen Museum.

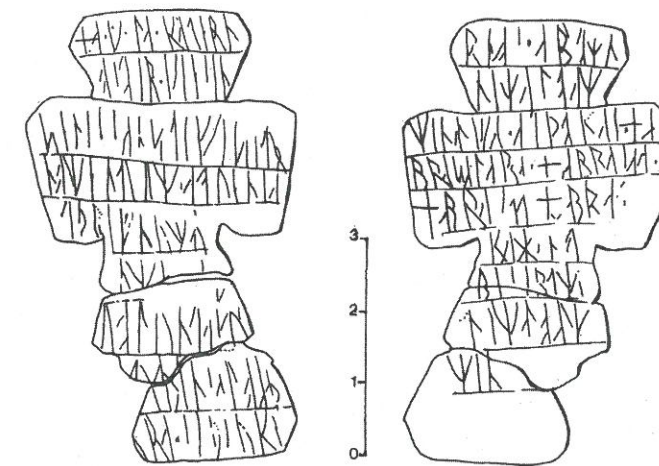


Figure 9: Osen, Sogn og Fjordane, inscribed with Pater noster and a magic Abraclara formula.

Drawing: L. Tangedal, Bergen Museum. From A. M. Knudsen, ‘Kristne kors i hedenske graver’, *Arkeo 1* (1995). Bergen.

- 1 Christie, Salvator,
Jesu, El, Alpha
et Omega, eia
- 2 Eloym, Eloë,
Adonay, Sabaot, Ia,
- 3 Saday, Robustus,
Lyros, Elom, Fortis, Vita.
- 4 Tetragrammaton,
Jot, He, Vau, Heth,
Deus, Dominus, Via.

Osen, Sogn og Fjordane

The runic cross (figure 9) from Osen in Gaular, Sogn og Fjordane, was found in a barrow in 1978. It is closely written on both sides. The text is probably complete, and has been interpreted by H. Dyvik.²⁷ The correct Latin language suggests to Dyvik that a lettered man inscribed this, probably a priest. The runes belong to the mediaeval futhark used from the end of the eleventh century until c. 1400 and the cross may be dated to the beginning of the fourteenth century.

Dyvik transcribes the text:²⁸

A: + a.g.la. patern
oster. kiesin
celissanctifice t^u^r
noment^u . aduenia
tPregnum t^u
um (f) [- -] (P)
uoluntas t^u
[---] (k) ut^PincloæP
[---] (r)ra.siPsu

²⁷ A. M. Knudsen and H. J. J. Dyvik, 'Et runekors fra Sogn og Fjordane', *Maal og minne* 1-2 1980 (Oslo, 1980), 6-8.

²⁸ Letters in () = uncertain, in [] = missing.

B: rnos.abomn
nimaloanm
mena^lfa . aiPonai . + a
bracalara . + abraça .
+ a^braca . a^bra .
pax . no
bis . (ab)om
nima^loam
mę

In normalised Latin:

A.g.l.a
Pater noster, qui es in cælis. Sanctificetur nomen tuum.
Adveniat regnum tuum (Fiat) voluntas tu(a sic)ut in cælo
et (in ter)ra.
Sit super nos!
Ab omni malo, amen
Alpha (?), Adonai.
Abraçlara, arbraca, abraçara, abra.
Pax nobis!
(Ab) omni malo, amen.

The first lines of the Lord's Prayer follow the AGLA-formula. Fragments of this prayer are known from ten to fifteen other runic inscriptions, but only one, on a lead sheet from Ulstad in Oppland (below), is more complete than this one.

Below the lines of Pater Noster follow two Latin terms praying for protection, similar to the text on a lead sheet from Odense in Denmark. Then follow the Greece *Alpha* and the Hebrew *Adonai*.

The well known magical *abraçlara* formula (found for instance at the Lausanne cross amulet from the sixth or seventh century)²⁹ is found here in a construction known from numerous Norwegian magic formulas against different form of illness, such as toothache.³⁰ By repeatedly leaving out one or two letters one could exorcise the illness like the disappearing letters.

²⁹ U. Schwab, 'Runen der Merowingerzeit', in *Runeninschriften als Quellen interdisziplinärer Forschung* (Berlin, 1998), pp. 377-78.

³⁰ A. C. Bang, *Norske hexeformularer og magiske opskrifter*, Videnskabselskabet i Christiania, Skrifter 1901 (Christiania, 1902; facsimile, 1985), pp. 415-67.

The mediaeval town of Borgund

In the mediaeval town of Borgund near Ålesund, two lead crosses have been found. One of them is an equal-armed cross with a hole for a chain which must be regarded as an amulet. Like similar amulets from Scandinavia it is not considered further in this paper. Another small, simple, and uninscribed metal cross (BRM1/457/57), 5.5 cm high and 3.5 cm broad, was found 60–70 m from a churchyard.

Crosses from Nidaros bishopric

From Munkholmen, a small island just outside Trondheim, the mediaeval archiepiscopal see Nidaros, an 8.9 × 6.1 cm lead cross (C371,³¹ figure 6), with no inscription, was found in 1831. Unlike the other crosses this one is cast. The cross is said probably to come from a grave at the monastery of Nidarholm.³²

In the thirteenth-century layers of the city of Trondheim another lead cross with runic inscriptions has been found (figure 10). *AGLA*-inscriptions are repeated several times on one side, and incomprehensible marks together with repeated instances of *AGLA* on the reverse.³³ Knirk has also read the word *agios*, from Greek *hagios* ('holy').³⁴

From the same excavation comes a wooden cross with a corresponding *AGLA*-inscription. Wooden crosses with runic inscriptions have also been found. The first of these (BRM 7529) was found at Bryggen in timber constructions burnt in the 1332 fire, and is complete. There are carved runes on the front and the back of the 11-cm long arms and the 17-cm high stem. Here are repeated *Agl*a-inscriptions together with the names, or supposed names, of different saints. The other find is a 16.6-cm long inscribed cross-arm from the same site and layer, with a fragment of the text *Nazarenus, Rex Judaeorum. In nomine Patris*.³⁵ Some small wooden crosses have also been found in the excavations at Borgund, but they are without inscriptions. I will discuss the use of these wooden crosses later.³⁶

³¹ Oldsaksamlingen – Arkeologisk tilvekst, online:

<<http://www.dokpro.uio.no/perl/arkologi/visetekst.cgi?DATABASE=O&KRYSS226@=on>>

³² Grieg, *Middelalderske byfund*, p. 398.

³³ J. H. Hagland, *Runefunna: Ei kjelde til handelen si historie*, Fortiden i Trondheims bygrunn: Folkebibliotekstomten. Meddelelser 8 (Trondheim, 1985), pp. 14–15.

³⁴ Pers. comm.

³⁵ K. Seim, 'Runic Inscriptions in Latin: A Summary of Aslak Liestøl's Fascicle (vol. VI, 1) of *Norges Innskrifter med de yngre runer*', *The Bryggen Papers*, s.s. 2 (Bergen, 1988), 45 and 59–60.

³⁶ J. R. Hagland, 'Litt meir om blykrossar frå mellomalderen', *Frå haug og heidni* Nr. 4 1995 (Stavanger, 1995), 24, refer to another lead cross T-18098c from Følling in Stod, Nord-Trøndelag. This, however, is a circular pilgrim badge from Stockholm. See L. Anderson, *Pilgrimsmärken och vallfart*, Lund Studies in Medieval Archaeology 7 (Stockholm, 1989), fig.: Stockholm 1:2, p. 37.

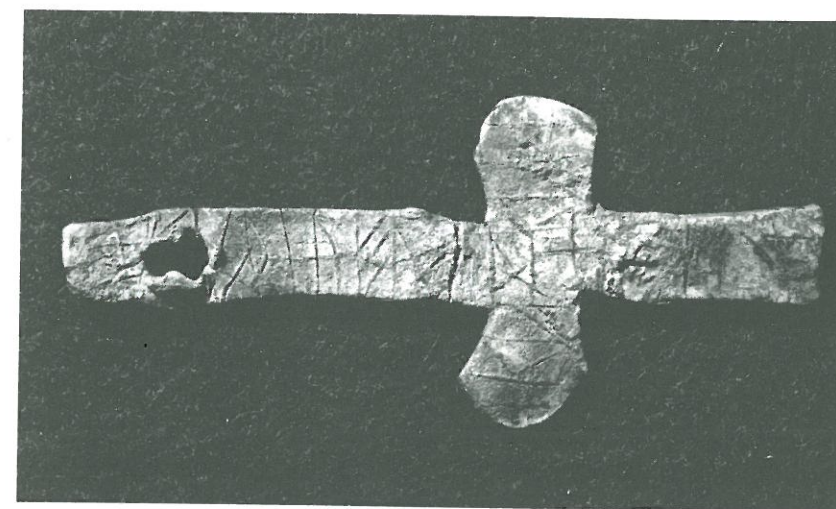


Figure 10: Folkebibliotekstomten, Trondheim.
Photo: A. Liestøl, Universitetets kulturhistoriske museer.

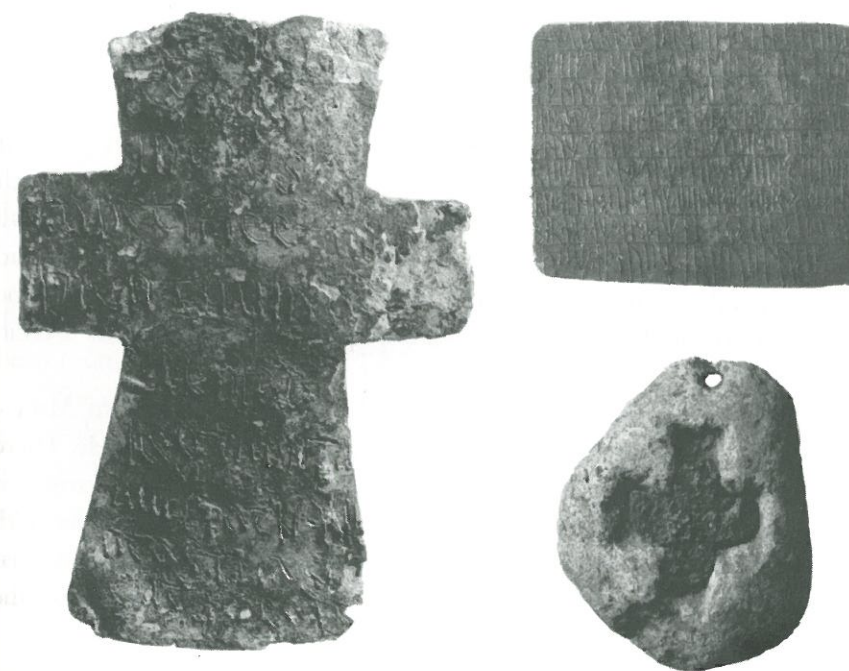


Figure 11: Langseth, Nesna. First part of the Pater Noster inscribed in lower-case roman letters. Photo: P. Fredriksen, Vitenskapsmuseet, NTNU.

Figure 12: Ulstad. Sheet of lead with a thirteenth-century Pater Noster-inscription (left) and, found under this, a soapstone weight with an iron cross. Photo: Universitetets kulturhistoriske museer.

The northernmost lead cross (T18216, figure 11) from Norway was found at a depth of one metre at a farm site at Langseth in Nesna, Nordland. It is 9.8 cm high and 7.1 cm broad. The trunk, which is rather broad, is wider at the top and the bottom. The arms are narrower, and parallel-sided. The first part of the *Pater Noster* inscribed in roman letters covers all of one side.

Crosses from eastern Norway

At Ulstad at the vicarage in Lom, in Gudbrandsdal, a most peculiar find was made in 1871 (figure 12). Under a square sheet of lead, with a thirteenth-century *Pater Noster* inscription in nine lines on each side (mentioned above), a 9 × 7.5 cm soapstone weight or sinker from a loom or a fishing net was found. In one side of the stone there was a cross-shaped hole, 3.5 × 3.7 cm. In this hole there was an iron cross. Sigurd Grieg assumes these objects to have come from a grave, where they might have been laid on the chest of the dead to give protection and peace.³⁷

Excavation at the stave-church of Nore, Buskerud, produced a small 1.5 × 1.2 cm cross without any inscriptions (C 33176).³⁸

What was believed to be a cross from the excavation in the site of the Ål stave-church in Buskerud (C 30964)³⁹ is also worthy of mention. Upon closer examination, the object turned out to be two lead strips, 10 and 5.4 cm long respectively, that were wrapped around, among other things, hair from a rodent and some cinnamon. On the longer strip there are two lines of runes on each face, and on the shorter one line on each face. Interpretation is hindered by small crosses and other signs over and between the runes, but the word *ogla* can be read several times, together with *alfa e*, some supposed biblical names and some miswritten Greek words. This is probably an example of Christian words used in a magic connection.

The last of the Norwegian lead crosses in this survey comes from Alshus, Kråkerøy, Østfold (C 27421, figure 13).⁴⁰ It is 9.3 cm high and 5.0 cm wide. There is no evidence of any churchyard association. Like the Sande and Madla crosses it has runes in framed lines, but here the runes, or rune-like signs, totally cover both sides. There is no meaning to the inscriptions. It looks like a swarm of signs that was meant to bring the forces of evil into confusion. By trying to interpret the

³⁷ Grieg, *Middelalderske byfund*, pp. 396–98.

³⁸ Universitetets oldsaksamling tilvekst 1970–71 (Oslo, 1973).

³⁹ Oldsaksamlingen – Arkeologisk tilvekst, online:

<<http://www.dokpro.uio.no/perl/arkeologi/visetekst.cgi?DATABASE=O&KRYSS16736@=on>>

⁴⁰ Oldsaksamlingen – Arkeologisk tilvekst, online:

<<http://www.dokpro.uio.no/perl/arkeologi/visetekst.cgi?DATABASE=O&KRYSS226@=on>>

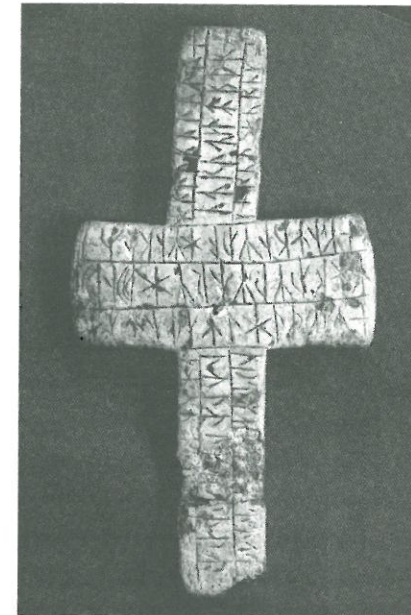


Figure 13: Alshus, Østfold with incomprehensible runes or rune-like signs.

Photo: Universitetets kulturhistoriske museer.

unreadable signs they became too busy to do any harm. Magnus Olsen cites parallels to support the case that this is a typical sort of exorcism in Norwegian folklore.⁴¹ By comparing the inscriptions with a lead sheet with runes from Tønsberg, the cross is dated to the fourteenth century.⁴²

LEAD CROSSES FOUND OUTSIDE NORWAY

The only specimens of lead crosses I know from elsewhere in Scandinavia have been found on Gotland and in Lödöse, Sweden.⁴³

The example from Gotland was found in a later thirteenth-century layer at an archaeological excavation in the Botanical Garden in Visby, close to St Olaf's church. The cross is 5.5 cm high and 4.65 cm broad. On the front and back there are altogether ninety-four runes that can be transliterated:

intesede pro nobis semper :þ: sancta
maria mater iacobi apostului :þ: sancta
maria maggalena :þ: salune :þ: sancta caeri⁴⁴

⁴¹ Olsen, *Norges innskrifter*, v, 153–54.

⁴² K. Goslin, 'Alshuskorset og en blyplate fra Tønsberg', *Mindre Ah, Årbok III Fredrikstad museum 1986–1989* (Fredrikstad, 1989), 86–92.

⁴³ See for instance K. Düwel, 'Mittelalterliche Amulette aus Holz und Blei mit lateinischen und runischen Inschriften', in *Ausgrabungen in Schleswig. Berichte und Studien 15* (Neumünster, 2001), 278–90.

⁴⁴ H. Gustavson and J. P. Strid, 'Runfynd 1976', in *Fornvännen* (Stockholm, 1977), pp. 160–61.

The text 'Intercede pro nobis' is an intercession for the living, addressed to the women who followed Jesus to the tomb. The forms of the runes are late, apparently fourteenth-century, and the consistent use of the s-rune of Gotlandic form tells us that the cross was inscribed locally.

The other cross (figure 14) was found in a fifteenth-century layer in Lödöse in Sweden. It is supposed to come originally from St Olof's churchyard, 20 m away. The top is missing but the runes on both sides read:

- A: tomine gesu...
ibera te ingi-...
- B: liberasti tes...
te kamino ihnis ·s-...

This can be interpreted as: 'Domine Iesu (Christe,)libera de ignib(us) sicut liberasti t(r)es (pueros) de camino ignis (Lord Jesus Christ, save my soul from the fire, as You saved the three young men from the burning oven)'. This text was used in the formula for *Commendatio animae* in the prayer for the soul used at death. It refers to the salvation of the three young men Sadrak, Mesak and Abednego by a miracle of God in Daniel 3. This prayer is the seventh of twelve prayers all beginning with the same 'libera animam sui, tui, sicut liberasti', still used but slightly changed in the present *Rituale Romanum*.⁴⁵ The prayer must have been well known in Sweden. A fifteenth-century translation into Swedish is known, for instance, from the monastery of Vadstena.⁴⁶ The text from the *Commendatio animae* indicates that this is a mortuary cross. It demonstrates knowledge of the runes and liturgical texts, and the ability to make a short and pertinent text.

From Denmark no lead crosses are known, but lead mortuary crosses are found in France and England. Crosses with inscriptions indicating the name of the dead and the death-day have, for instance, been found in Rennes in memory of Constance, duchess of Normandy, the daughter of William the Conqueror (†1091); and in Angers with the name of a woman called Claricia (†1136) (figure 15).⁴⁷

According to Christopher Daniell,⁴⁸ a mortuary cross in the grave is a relatively common feature in England. The oldest lead mortuary cross from

⁴⁵ E. Svärdström, *Runfynden från gamla Lödöse – Vestsvensk medeltidsstadd* IV:5 (Stockholm, 1982), pp. 28–30.

⁴⁶ *University Library of Uppsala, cod. C74*. Information from Svärdström, *Runfynden från gamla Lödöse*, pp. 29–30.

⁴⁷ Henry Bradshaw Society, no. 24. From L. Gjerlöf, 'Blykors (og blyplater)', in *Kulturbistorisk lexikon för Nordisk medeltid* (Malmö, 1957), II, 18–22.

⁴⁸ C. Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066 – 1550* (London, 1997), p. 166.

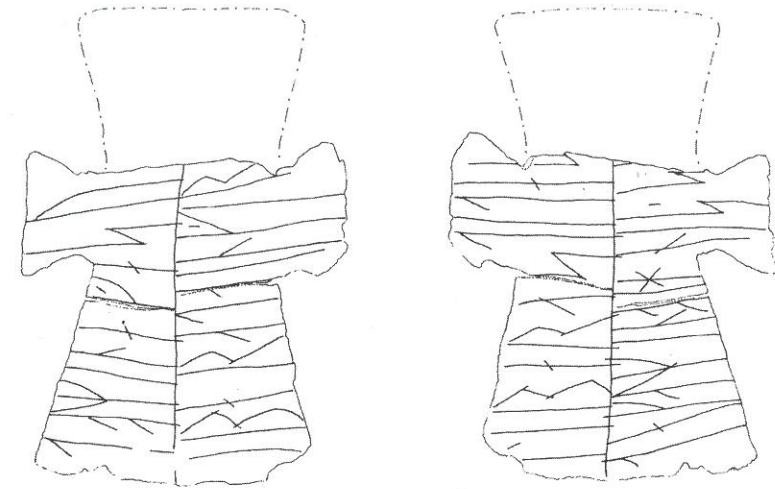


Figure 14: Lödöse, Sweden. The text is to be read from the left to the right, from bottom and up. From E. Svärdström (see note 42), figs 39 and 40. Drawings: E. Svärdström.



Figure 15: Absolution crosses from Bury St Edmunds, England, and Angers, France.

From R. Haglund, 'Likkorset', *Nordisk Folkeminne* 21 (Stockholm, 1929), 165.

England was found in the remains of a lead box containing some bones, about 7 ft below the floor of the Norman church at St Augustine's, Canterbury (figure 16). The cross measured 6 in. by 5 1/8 in. On the reverse side, by far the most legible, is an inscription in roman letters that can be translated: 'On the eleventh of March 1063 departed out of this life Wulfmæg sister of Wulfric the abbot'. Of special interest is the fact that this find gives the name of persons that are mentioned in Gocelin's *History of the Translation of St. Augustine and his Companions* (Book II, §4). This is a story about the Blessed Virgin being offended by Abbot Wulfric's rough treatment of her chapel when extending the church. The reverse of the cross can be interpreted as 'By this Alpha et Omega of Christ I mark all resting places.'⁴⁹

The presence of mortuary crosses in graves may also illuminate the case of the famous Glastonbury cross. 'In the "grave" [of Arthur] was a cross of lead, placed under a stone, and not above it, but fixed on the under side.'⁵⁰ This cross is usually considered to be a twelfth-century forgery, but it is interesting that it was actually in the grave, for it might be that it represented a particularly elaborate, indeed royal, mortuary cross,' Daniell maintains.⁵¹

A number of lead crosses, with inscriptions more like an exorcism than an absolution, have been found at Bury St Edmunds, in sarcophagi and in the monastic burial-grounds. They all have the same inscription: *crux xpisti triumphat + crux xpisti pellit hostem*, surrounded by cross-marks. These words can also be found in the ritual for consecration of churches in the Benedictional of Archbishop Robert from the beginning of the eleventh century.⁵²

The inscribed English crosses belong mainly to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Later specimens do not appear to have been inscribed, e.g. a large series from the monastic burial-ground at Bury St Edmunds, and a number of crosses that were found on the site of the Greyfriars' burial-ground in London. This whole series appears to be contemporary, perhaps the result of the Black Death.

In my opinion the total number of mediaeval mortuary crosses from graves in England, is not so numerous to justify Daniell's comment that this is a 'relatively common feature'. The situation seems rather to accord with the London Museum's *Medieval Catalogue* account, that the 'custom of burying a small, roughly cut lead cross with the dead appears sporadically throughout the Middle

⁴⁹ R. U. Potts, 'An Eleventh-century Burial Cross at St. Augustine's Canterbury', *The Antiquaries Journal* (1924), 422–25.

⁵⁰ P. Rahtz, *Glastonbury* (London, 1993), after Daniell, *Death and Burial*, p. 166.

⁵¹ Daniell, *Death and Burial*, p. 166.

⁵² L. Gjerlöv, 'Blykors (og blyplater)', pp. 20–21.

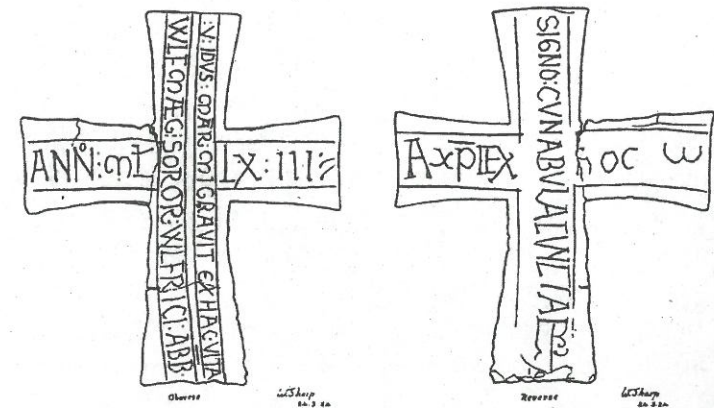


Figure 16: Wulfmæg's cross from St Augustine's, Canterbury. From R. U. Potts (see note 46), pp. 423–24.



Figure 17: Lead plague crosses, found with the bodies of the victims in a mass grave at the Greyfriars cemetery, London (Museum of London). From C. Platt, *Medieval England* (London, 1978), fig. 86.

Ages. It was, however, apparently confined to the monastic orders, and even so was far from universal.⁵³ No further finds of lead crosses have been made in London over the past thirty years. The picture is also much the same for recent finds across the country.⁵⁴

LEAD SHEETS

Finally, I shall briefly note finds of lead sheets or amulets with inscriptions in runes or roman letters (as the above-mentioned sheet from Ulstad in Lom). They are often folded carefully so that the letters could not be seen. In Scandinavia alone Klaus Düwel has listed forty-seven of these sheets.⁵⁵ Unlike the crosses, which are also found in pagan graves, these sheets are found in different Christian contexts: settlements, churches and churchyards, graves and sarcophagi. The contents of the texts vary: the Pater Noster, Ave Maria, names of God, archangels, evangelists or other holy persons, quotations from the Bible and liturgical texts, hymns, extracts of Christian legends, formulae from Antique or Jewish tradition and magic words. Düwel quotes A. J. Gurevich that 'the authors are masters of a treasure of words from different sources in their formulae, for instance the Apocrypha or other sources that have references to Christianity like the Cabalistic formulae of exorcism. It was not necessary to understand the texts. The important thing was first and foremost the rituals'.⁵⁶

FUNCTION

Crosses in Christian graves

The use of mortuary crosses is a familiar element in Scandinavian folk-tradition up to the last century, and the use of crosses remains important in modern funeral rituals. In spite of the great significance of the cross, its use in mediaeval graves is, as we have seen, uncommon. In the rules of the monastery of Vadstena, Sweden, where directions for the funerals of the nuns and monks are described, no crosses or crucifixes are mentioned. During the Middle Ages equality before God was strictly adhered to. The funeral customs were simple for rich and poor alike, and expensive crosses, like the pectoral cross found in Archbishop Eiliv

⁵³ London Museum, *Medieval Catalogue* (London, 1954, repr. 1967), p. 290.

⁵⁴ Pers. comm. from Geoff Egan, Museum of London: letter dated 16 January 2001.

⁵⁵ Düwel, 'Mittelalterliche Amulette', p. 285.

⁵⁶ A. J. Gurevich, *Stumme Zeugen des Mittelalters Weltbild und Kultur der einfachen Menschen* (Wien, 1997), p. 239. Translated from Düwel, 'Mittelalterliche Amulette', p. 285.

Korting's grave in Nidaros,⁵⁷ are rare. By using plain crosses made of humble lead or wood in the grave, some respect was shown to this sense of egalitarianism.

In Scandinavia crosses made of wood have sometimes been found in mediaeval graves. At each end of a thirteenth-century wooden coffin placed inside a stone cist within St. Halvard's church in Oslo, two wooden crosses were found between the ends of the coffin and the cist.⁵⁸ In many of the wooden coffins excavated at Guddal church in Sogn og Fjordane, built before 1327, wooden crosses were found on the chest of the bodies. Cross-shaped holes found in wooden coffins from mediaeval times should also be mentioned.⁵⁹ The numerous wooden crosses from Herjolfsnes churchyard in Greenland are well known. Among the sixty crosses found, some have runic inscriptions of magic and Christian character. It is supposed that these wooden crosses had a special function, in devotions or for holding in the hand, before being buried in the grave.⁶⁰

During the Middle Ages, lead was used for building purposes, mainly in roofs and windows in castles, churches etc. It was also used for seals, pilgrim-badges or other small objects. It is claimed that lead was supposed to be a magic metal from prehistoric times,⁶¹ but I can find few examples of lead in later Norwegian or Swedish magic formulae. In these formulae one could use lead from bullets or lead stolen from churches; here the source is clearly the significant element. Another use is 'casting', recorded in the nineteenth century, where melted lead (or silver) was dripped into water. The shape the metal took when hardening in the water could supposedly be read or explained.⁶² The most likely explanation of the use of lead in these cases is that it is durable, convenient to carve in, has a low melting temperature, and was easy to obtain.

The custom of placing a lead cross with an absolution or exorcism inscription on the chest of the dead body in graves is assumed to have been current in the Anglo-Norman world from the eleventh century to c. 1200. This custom seems to have been transferred to Norway, especially to south-western Norway, and to the Stavanger bishopric, which had close ties to England. Here the lead crosses remained in use for several centuries. In this way the deceased could rest under the protection of the cross, just as he or she had lived under this

⁵⁷ See note 18.

⁵⁸ Grieg, *Middelalderiske byfund*, pp. 391–92.

⁵⁹ Grieg, *Middelalderiske byfund*, pp. 386–92.

⁶⁰ M. Stocklund, 'Nordbokorsene fra Grønland', *Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark 1984* (København, 1984), 101–13.

⁶¹ Svärdström, *Runfynden från gamla Lödöse*, p. 30.

⁶² Bang, *Norske hexeformularer*, p. 361.

protection. The inference is that by burying a cross with the dead, the devil and his helpers lost their powers.

Inscribed lead crosses and plates seem to have been a reflection of the deceased and the survivors' need for a *signum*, the visible sign of protection and banishment of the evil forces. When Abelard died as a monk in Cluny (1142), certainly not an excommunicant, Héloïse asked Abbot Peter of Cluny for a letter of absolution 'ut sepulchro ejus suspendatur' ('which might be hung over his grave').⁶³

Crosses in heathen graves

Strangely enough, most of the Norwegian lead crosses are found in pre-Christian graves, mainly in barrows. The burial of Christian crosses in pre-Christian graves may reflect a Christian custom or act, represented by the Christian symbol, transmitted into an older heathen grave or belief. The meaning of this is not easy to see and lots of questions arise. Here we can only attempt to explain the reason and meaning of this practice.

Until now the oldest Christian graves of Norway have been found in the small market town of Veøy in Møre and Romsdal.⁶⁴ They are dated to the very end of the ninth century and the tenth.⁶⁵ Christianity was declared the state religion at the Mostra-thing about 1024. The death of King Olav Haraldson (St Olav) in 1030 is often regarded as the final point of transition from the Viking Age and heathen prehistoric times, into the Christian Middle Ages in Norway. But, as we know, the conversion was an extended event. It is, however, obvious that Christians must have deposited the crosses into the barrows many hundred years after the original heathen burials.

It is unthinkable that anybody could have been buried in old heathen grave-mounds as late as the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. If they had been, traces from the body or perhaps grave furniture that usually followed the pre-Christian burials should have been found. The Gula-thing law gives clearly worded regulations for the interment of the body in consecrated churchyards: 'It is so that every man that dies we shall take to the churchyard and bury in consecrated soil'.⁶⁶ Using burial cairns or mounds in the old heathen way was further strictly

⁶³ Gjerløv, 'Blykors (og blyplater)', p. 21.

⁶⁴ In Old Norse, Veøy means Holy Island.

⁶⁵ B. Solli, *Narratives of Veøy: An Investigation into the Poetics and Scientifics of Archaeology*, Universitetets Oldsaksamlings Skrifter. Ny rekke 19 (Oslo, 1966), 141–170.

⁶⁶ The law for western Norway, replaced by the new Gula-thing law in 1267 and the National Law of King Magnus Håkonson from 1274. K. Robberstad, *Gulatingsslovi* (Oslo, 1996), pp. 7–8.

forbidden: 'If anybody buries a dead body in mounds or cairns, he shall dig it up and be fined 3 øyrar to the bishop and bring the body to the church and bury it into the consecrated earth'.⁶⁷ The necessity of making laws like this tells us that heathen burials were still an issue, but this must refer, I think, mainly to the early period of conversion.

When trying to understand this curious habit of putting a Christian cross into a heathen grave, the first suggestion was to win the soul of the deceased for eternity. We can here refer to the words of I Corinthians 15. 29: 'Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?' Was this an attempt to convert the heathen ancestor to Christianity, or can we suggest that the old barrow, that was once supposed to be a sacred place, should be transferred to a Christian place of worship?

Often we can see that old heathen graves or sacred places have been subsequently given a new function as a Christian place of meeting. We can find examples of Christian stone crosses raised over a pre-Christian burial-cairn, mainly in the south-western part of Norway, as for instance Krosshaug, Klepp, Rogaland.⁶⁸ Another example is the building of churches at old heathen meeting places. About 125 churches or parishes in Norway have names reflecting pagan activities,⁶⁹ for instance the church at Norderhov, from Old Norwegian 'Nardarhof', i.e. the *hof* (temple) of the god of fertility Njord (Nerthus). Using old, heathen foci for the new Christian worship could have made it easier for people to convert to the new religion. A more practical explanation is, however, that those old heathen central places could have also been the geographic, economical or political central places of rural districts in pagan times, and continued as such under the new religion. As C. Fabech expresses it: 'The important problem of continuity is not whether a ruler who adopted the Christian church was built on a top of a pagan ritual site, but whether a ruler who adopted Christianity continued to have the religious building standing on his property'.⁷⁰ Several scholars, among them B. Helleland⁷¹ and O. Olsen,⁷² have also recently

⁶⁷ Translated from Robberstad, *Gulatingsslovi*, p. 36.

⁶⁸ B. Magnus, *Krosshaugfunnet*, Stavanger Museums skrifter 9 (Stavanger, 1975), pp. 13–16. For more examples see F. Birkeid, *Norske steinkors i tidlig middelalder*, Skrifter utgitt av Det Norske Videnskapsakademi i Oslo II. Hist.-Filos, klasse, n.s. 10 (Oslo, 1973), pp. 215–17.

⁶⁹ B. Helleland, 'Ullins vang og Njords hov: Heidne gudar på kyrkjebakken', *Fra hedendom til kristendom*, ed. by M. Rindal (Oslo, 1996), pp. 125–40.

⁷⁰ C. Fabech, 'Reading Society from the Cultural Landscape: South Scandinavia between Sacral and Political Power', in *The Archaeology of Gudme and Lundeberg*, ed. by P. O. Nilsen, K. Randsborg and H. Thrane, *Arkæologiske studier* 10 (København, 1994), p. 174.

⁷¹ Helleland, 'Ullins vang og Njords hov', p. 139.

questioned the hypotheses of cult-continuity. Some examples of cult-continuity are, however, noteworthy, such as the Norwegian Mære church built on a supposed older hall building, where a series of nineteen small rectangular gold-foil plaques (*guldgubber*) may show Freyr and the giantess Gerd.⁷³ Another example is Hørning church in Denmark, where a wooden church from the eleventh century was built over a huge Viking-age barrow.⁷⁴ The best-known example is, however, the memorial stone raised by the Christian king Harald Gormson (†987) in memory of his heathen father King Gorm the Elder (†958). The Jelling stone has a clearly Christian character. It also appears that the body of King Gorm was taken from the pagan mound and reburied in the Christian church raised between the two barrows.⁷⁵

Botolv Helleland concludes that cult-continuity is not the only factor to take into consideration when choosing the site for the new house of worship. The reasons for the decisions are generally diverse and manifold, but the desire for continuity and tradition must be considered in all human connections.⁷⁶

Having such concern about the dead and their souls tells us how close the connection was between the living and their ancestors in the barrow. Certainly the ancestors were highly appreciated, with the burial mounds as the visible symbol of the family. But the time-gap should have been too long, and the original burial too long ago, to find personal relationships between the living of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the deceased of pre-Christian times.

The mound was, however, a symbol – an identity-mark for the family and the farm. The ancestors ‘lived’ in the barrow. The dead in the barrow, ‘haugkallen’ (‘the old man’) or ‘haugbonden’ (‘the old farmer’), looked after the farm and the family and protected them against hostile forces such as monsters, trolls, wood nymphs, etc. He could be in charge of the fertility and the crops. Conversely he could be a threat if he was not their friend. The sagas and folk tales are full of stories about how to behave if you wanted the favour of the people ‘living’ in the barrows. The ideas are numerous about the taboos, what to do or what not to do on or around the barrows or in relationships with the dead. The grave mound

⁷² O. Olsen, “Hørg, hov og kirke” – 30 år efter’, in *Møtet mellom hedendom og kristendom i Norge*, ed. by H. E. Lidén (Oslo, 1995).

⁷³ H. E. Lidén, ‘Utgravingen av Mære kirke’, in *Årbok/Nord-Trøndelag historielag* 47 (Steinkjer, 1970), pp. 18–58.

⁷⁴ K. J. Krogh and O. Voss, ‘Fra hedenskap til kristendom i Hjørring’, in *Nationalmuseets arbejdsmark 1961* (København, 1961), pp. 33–34.

⁷⁵ J. Brøndsted, *Danmarks oldtid III, Jernalderen* (København, 1960), pp. 335–41.

⁷⁶ B. Helleland, ‘Stadnamn og religionskiftet: Ei problematisering med utgangspunkt i Ullensvang’, *Namn och bygd. Tidskrift för nordisk ortnamnsforskning* 90 (Upsala, 2002), p. 56.

seems to have been regarded with kindness and sympathy in prehistoric and early Christian times in Norway. The fear that later became predominant was due to new ideas about the dead and their nature. During mediaeval times the fear of spectres and ghosts grew higher, due to the mission work of the church to prevent adoration of the heathen gods and customs. The former highly appreciated ancestors were, with the help of the church, turned into frightful monsters and trolls.⁷⁷

Was the Christian cross in a heathen grave an attempt to combat the evil forces living in the barrow, or was it a sacrifice in order to obtain something? Sacrifice to, or adoration of heathen gods, barrows or pagan places was strictly forbidden in the first Christian laws: ‘Sacrificing is also forbidden to us; we shall not sacrifice to heathen gods or to mounds or places of worship. If anybody is found guilty of this, then he shall be fined every penny of his property; he shall confess and pay a fine to the church. If not he shall leave the land of our king’.⁷⁸ In the light of this wording it is hard to see the crosses as a sacrifice in order to obtain something. But the law is one thing. What was the practice? The relationship with the dead, the ancestors living in the barrow, must have been a problem for the authorities for long time. In fact we can see relics of this up to present time, i.e. seeing people giving porridge to the ‘nisse’ (‘Father Christmas’ – originally the ‘haugbonde’) on Christmas Eve. As late as 1274 there are provisions against calling on the dead in King Magnus Haakonsson’s newer Christian laws: ‘sua och þeir er fræista draugha upp at væikia eda haugbua’⁷⁹ (‘so also them trying to wake up the monster or the dead living in the barrow’). This probably reflects the interference of the church, referring to the formerly highly regarded and honoured ancestors by disparaging names.

The older English and French crosses contain obituary texts. Those kinds of texts are not found on the Norwegian crosses. As mentioned above, some of the English crosses also have inscriptions that are more like exorcisms than absolutions. The use of the cross to avert evil is, as mentioned, well known from more recent time. When looking more closely at the texts of the Norwegian crosses, we find they contain words from the Bible that give evidence of exorcism. On the crosses from Grude, Madla and Sande occur the words *fugite partes* – ‘fly, disappear’. The Pater Noster inscription with the line *Ab omni malo*, written at the Osen cross and on the lead sheet from Ulstad, was probably also used for exorcism. The name of God, written in numerous ways, may similarly

⁷⁷ E. Birkeli, *Fedrekult i Norge* (Oslo, 1938), pp. 85–99.

⁷⁸ Translated from Robberstad, *Gulatingsslovi*, p. 44.

⁷⁹ *Norges gamle love indtil 1387* (Christiania, 1848), II, 308.

have been due to the wish of protection. The Abraclara, aabraca, abracara, abra-formula from the same Osen-inscription and other magic inscriptions bear clear witness of exorcism. With this background, my theory is that burying these Christian lead crosses in heathen barrows may have been for the purpose of exorcism.

Considering the provisions in the Old Norwegian Christian laws, it seems strange that the church in particular practised exorcism. Exorcism has, however, always been a feature of religions. It occurs in the old Jewish religion, and there are numerous examples of exorcism in the New Testament. Besides exorcism in the strict sense – i.e. driving out demons from the possessed – Catholic ritual, following early traditions, has retained various other exorcisms.

There is an old doctrine about demons or evil spirits in Catholic theology, involving the creation and Fall of the rebel angels. Augustine compared the fallen angels and the heathen gods. Magical means and praxis must be understood as symbols and signs to obtain contact and covert communication with the demons.⁸⁰ Thomas Aquinas defined superstition as a system of signs used for communication with the demons. The boundary line between accepted Christian magic (*magia licita*, described as *magia naturalis*) and the forbidden magic (*magia illicita*, also called *magia daemonica*) was sharp. The crosses and lead sheets filled with biblical or Christian quotations are within the limit of the tolerated Christian magic, says C. Daxelmüller.⁸¹

The intention of the lead amulets was to frighten demons and local fairies or elves, for protection from all the evils they could make, first and foremost illness (Old Norwegian *álfaskot*) and all kinds of accidents. We are dealing with Christian magic and Christian magic inscriptions, according to Düwel.⁸²

After turning the formerly highly respected ancestors and helpers, living in the barrow, into monsters or trolls, the church now had to have the power to battle the forces still alive in the minds of people. Exorcism would seem to have been the means employed for this purpose, especially the solemn and authoritative adjuration of demons, in the name of God. The cross was the most important symbol of the power of the Christian God and that must be the reason why we also have found them in heathen graves.

At the time of placing the lead crosses into the graves, exorcism was alive and frequently used in the Christian liturgy, i.e. at baptism and the consecration of

⁸⁰ C. Daxelmüller, *Zauberpraktiken: Ein Ideengeschichte der Magie* (München, 1993), p. 92. From Düwel, 'Mittelalterliche Amulette', p. 287.

⁸¹ Daxelmüller, *Zauberpraktiken*, p. 126.

⁸² Düwel, 'Mittelalterliche Amulette', p. 287.

new churches. The holy place was defined against the evil forces outside. The Calvinists abolished the use of exorcism in the baptismal ritual, but Lutherans kept it. In Norway and Denmark the official use of exorcism at baptism was not abolished by the king until 1783. Exorcism is still available in the Catholic and Anglican churches.

Lilly Gjerløw, referring to a fifteenth-century exorcism formula, writes:

A cross and the name of God used as apotropaic – directly effective, 'magical' – charms, are common from the earlier Christian Middle Ages. In the later Middle Ages the characteristic apotropaic texts and rites most often appear in popular or Low Church contexts. *Deus pater piissime*, as we first meet the poem in Cod. Vallicellan. B 63 from the eleventh century, is a sophisticated text: it forms the introduction to a penitential mass *de trinitate*. Four hundred years later we find parts of the poem in a low church ritual for the exorcism of evil spirits by using secret words etc. – one of the kind that came into use in the context of the liturgical irregularity of the Middle Ages, but which was abandoned when, at the end of fifteenth century, printed ritual books were introduced. Between the first text and the last text lies a segment of medieval cultural history.⁸³

It is obvious that it must have been a clergyman, with a correct ecclesiastical attitude about the relations of power between the king and the church, who composed the Madla text.⁸⁴ This statement can also be extended to the Grude and Sande crosses. The author of the text must equally have had good knowledge of the Bible, the liturgy and the Latin poems. Some church in Stavanger, perhaps even the library of the episcopate, must have owned a book, probably a liturgical one, containing the poem *Deus pater piissime*.⁸⁵ The Norwegian clergyman who composed the Madla text had, furthermore, some knowledge of Latin. His writing is almost correct, something which is not the case with the lead sheet from Ulstad, where the inscription is tainted by the local Norwegian pronunciation of the Latin.⁸⁶

We can expect these learned clergymen to have been based nearby, at the see of Stavanger. Looking more closely at the misunderstood and misspelled Latin of the runic inscriptions of the Madla and Sande crosses, compared with contemporary local Latin inscriptions, we see, *pace* Magnus Olsen, that the spelling was not particularly good.⁸⁷ The clerks at the bishop's residence should have been well trained in Latin. Following this, I do not think that any of the bishop's retinue

⁸³ Translated from Gjerløw, 'Deus Pater piissime', p. 108.

⁸⁴ Olsen, *Norges innskrifter*, III, 237.

⁸⁵ Gjerløw, 'Deus Pater piissime', p. 85.

⁸⁶ Olsen, *Norges innskrifter*, III, 237.

⁸⁷ Pers. comm. from Professor Torstein Jørgensen, Misjonshøgskolen (School of Mission and Theology), Stavanger.

would have written the inscriptions. The writer could have been a person who knew the texts well, and had some knowledge, without being an expert, in Latin. Furthermore he must have been well trained in the use of runes.

The church mainly used the roman script in its writing. Was the use of runes natural for a clergyman? It has been claimed that the use of runes was magic of its own nature. Most scholars, however, now agree that the art of writing was invented as a result of the needs of an expanding economy and administration. When administration and commerce become so complex that one could no longer depend on memory, the use of writing was necessary. In this perspective we have to regard the invention of runes.⁸⁸ The numerous runic inscriptions found in excavations during the last decades, e.g. at Bryggen in Bergen, indicate that the knowledge of writing in runes was more common in mediaeval times than previously supposed. There are also examples of the church using runes for their writings. The roman script was not easy to carve on wood or lead. The runes that were still used until the fifteenth century were made for, and used by, runic writers using the point of a knife as their 'pen'.

Latin language and runes – was it of no difference whether the text was written in lower-case roman letters or in runes as in some of the texts on lead sheets and crosses, or was an exorcism carved with runes considered more effective? Düwel poses the question, and notes that the producer could see things differently from the user of the amulet.⁸⁹ Using runes, and writing in a language that could only be understood by a few educated persons, may have been magical operations in themselves. The conclusion is that the inscriptions on the Madla and Sande crosses may have been made by a person who had knowledge of the Bible, liturgy and poems of the time, and some knowledge of Latin. He must have been an educated runic-carver; probably the local priest or someone who had knowledge or access to inscriptions or spoken words that could be copied.

The next question is then: Who put the crosses in the graves? The crosses found in Christian cemeteries were, of course, placed there by the priests during the funeral services in order to help the soul through Purgatory, or to protect the bereaved. The crosses in the heathen barrows were buried for quite different purposes, most likely for the purpose of exorcism. The local people could of course have done this in secret, but more likely they asked the local priest to do it through the ritual of the church. In the name of God, in their solemn and authoritative way, the priests exorcised the evil forces or the misfortune and misery forced by the barrow and the evil of the dead living there.

⁸⁸ T. Spurkland, *I begynnelsen var...* (Oslo, 2001), pp. 13–14.

⁸⁹ Düwel, 'Mittelalterliche Amulette', p. 287.

Rogaland had close connections over the North Sea, and it is likely that the peculiar habit of placing lead crosses into the grave was imported from England. Besides using them in the Christian graves, the cross also gained a new function, as a means used for exorcism against the ancient ancestors.

Finding a new written mediaeval text does not happen every day. These inscriptions do not give new historical information, but they give the archaeologist, the historian of religion and theology, the folklorist and the linguist, a new primary source. Runologists in particular now face new challenges in comparing the use of runes between, and the different ways of carving, two similar texts. The new find from Sande raises further questions about belief and superstition, and about Christian and folk ceremonies, in the Middle Ages.