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PERSONAL NAMES IN MEDIEVAL RUNIC INSCRIPTIONS  
FROM DENMARK

*Abstract.* Runic inscriptions are an important source for personal names in Scandinavia. From the period before the Christianisation of Denmark we know of only a few personal names of non-Scandinavian origin, while the personal name material from late medieval manuscript sources shows that the old Nordic names were soon ousted by new non-Nordic names with relationship to Christianity. This paper is an attempt to give a survey of the personal names found in runic inscription and to enclose the social status of the persons referred to. The question is: In what way does the runic material contribute to our knowledge of the “great name change”?

*Introduction*

Runic inscriptions are among the oldest sources for personal names in Northern Europe and the inscriptions have provided us with a large corpus of personal names from the Iron Age sources (3<sup>rd</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD) to the end of the Viking Age (8<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> century) when the epigraphic runic tradition was ousted by the manuscript tradition and the Roman alphabet in the late medieval period (post c. 1350). Scandinavian Viking Age personal names are typically compound names, which differ from the Germanic personal name stock in that a number of these names contain the names of gods from the Nordic mythology as their specific. Other common types are hypocoristic forms of the original compound names and simplex names, primarily appellative types such as e.g. *Kætill* ‘kettle’. The personal names in the runic inscriptions are sometimes combined with appositions such as titles and characterising elements (by-names) referring to e.g. occupation, place of birth/resident or personal characteristics. This type of information has been used in socio-onomastic studies in order to estimate the status and the social rank of named persons. The exact meanings of a number of titles, however, are uncertain, but some seem to refer to military ranking, others to ownership of land and others again may be cultic titles.

The Scandinavians were definitely not isolated from the rest of the continent throughout the Iron Age as revealed by the great amount of excavated imported Roman objects. Non-Nordic manuscript sources as

well as runic inscriptions show that the Scandinavians in the Viking Age were travellers in contact with peoples from the continent as well as the insular regions. Interestingly, the contact with other European peoples does not seem to have influenced the local Danish practise of naming at all. Only two non-Nordic names have been found in runic inscriptions from the Viking Age: A comb from c. 900-50 found in Århus in Jutland is inscribed **hik:uin**. Since personal names are often found on this type of personal objects the runes have been interpreted as a non-Nordic name, perhaps Old English \*Hægwin, although this name is undocumented in English sources (c.f. Moltke 1985: 361; Lerche Nielsen 1997: 75). If these runes do spell a name it is possible that the comb belonged to a resident. The one other non-Nordic name we know of did not belong to a resident, but to the father of a woman named *Tófa*, presumably the wife of King Harold Bluetooth (c. 945-85). The runic form is transliterated **mistiuis** and is interpreted as the genitive case of the Slavic man's name *Mstivoj*. This person is presumably identical with the historically known leader of the Slavonic tribe the Obotrits (DR 55).

During the medieval period the social structures in Denmark were completely changed and reconstructed as a result of the introduction to Christianity. On the Jelling rune-stone in Jutland (probably from around the year 980) the above mentioned king Harald Bluetooth officially claimed to have Christianised the Danes (DR 42). As a starting point becoming a Christian did not necessarily include an adoption of a Christian name. (In the following this term covers both biblical names and the canonised names of both foreign and local saints). Harold Bluetooth, for instance, did not change or supplement his old Nordic name with a Christian name. In the following century the heirs of the throne were named after their ancestors according to tradition, and the few Christian names given in the royal families (all names of saints) were given to daughters, younger sons and sons of mistresses (c.f. Meldgaard 1994: 207). The topic of how difficult the balance between traditional and innovative naming was in relation of manifestations of authority and power in dynastic families in Scandinavian in the early medieval period has recently been discussed by Fjodor Uspenskij (2004).

Although the patterns show a strong and consistent tradition in the practise of naming in the period after the conversion, studies of manuscript sources have shown that Christian names were rather rapidly implemented into Danish (and early on in adapted forms) and that these names, especially the names of saints, soon became popular in all layers of society. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century the old Nordic names had largely been ousted by Christian names (c.f. Hornby 1947: 211).

### *Approach*

The manuscript sources from the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries primarily deal with people of high ranking, e.g. royals, highly ranked members of the clergy and nobles, why one may question how representative these sources are of the general name stock. Other sources for personal names are epigraphic inscriptions in Roman letters primarily found on grave-slabs/stones and parts of church buildings (donations formulas), memorial tablets and church inventory (e.g. bells, baptismal fonts and alters). Painted inscriptions in Roman letters are also found in church wall frescos, but mostly personal names refer to biblical personae. A range of coins struck in the reign of King Knud (Canutus) (1018-1035), King Svend Estridsen (1047-1075) and King Niels (1104-1134) has provided an important corpus of names of mint-masters (c.f Carelli 2001: 345).

The great finds of daily life runic inscriptions in Bergen, Norway, suggest that the use of runic script in this period was not reserved for the highest elite in the Middle Ages (at least not in Norway). In this perspective, the runic inscriptions from the medieval Denmark might hypothetically be a source documenting names of persons in other spheres than the aristocratic or the ecclesiastical in the period from c. 1100-1400. A study of this kind seems relevant considering the rather significant number of new Danish runic finds that has been discovered since the corpus edition of runic inscriptions Danmarks Runeindskrifter (DR) was published in the early 1940's and the thorough publication of Danish personal names Danmarks gamle Personnavne was completed (1. volume (First names) 1936-48, 2. volume (By-names) 1954-64). Implemented in a socio-onomastic study of this kind is the analysis of the linguistic evidence within the inscription including considerations concerning titles, by-names and patronymics, but also considerations regarding the physical sphere, the domain, in which an inscription was produced. Non-linguistic features of this kind might indicate to what part of society the named person belonged. The question is whether it is possible (in a chronological perspective) to enclose the essence of the "great name change" in medieval Denmark or not.

### *Methodical problems*

A closer look at the runic material reveals a range of methodical problems that definitely complicates matters. At first hand the basic reading of runes is often problematic because of corrosion, wear and tear and damage in general. The interpretation of a runic sequence as a name can be rather

doubtful even though the corpus edition states the interpretation as certain. Additionally, the dating of medieval runic inscriptions is very complicated and unfortunately inaccurate in presupposing as a general rule that object and inscription are contemporary. In fact, only very few objects have been archaeologically datable and the dating stated as archaeological in DR is in several instances not based on an archaeological context analysis, but on the basis of criteria of history of art that may well now be obsolete. The dating of an inscription is usually estimated according to an analysis of linguistic features, mainly the rune-typological features, but this kind of dating is also, unfortunately, very broad and often as vaguely defined as “the medieval period”. In general an attempt has been made to state a more narrow dating to for instance the “early” or the “late” medieval period. Recent finds have, however, indicated that even these rather vague estimations and thereby the entire set of rune typological dating criteria needs to be reconsidered. In addition, the main part of the new runic material from Denmark has turned out to be incomparable to the Bergen inscriptions, since the Danish inscriptions mainly consist of more or less graffiti-like and often unintelligible scribbling on amulets and church walls, primarily Latin standard prayers and magic formulas. Instances of personal names are few and rarely found in longer textual contexts. Additionally it is often impossible to decide whether a name refers to an actual person or e.g. to a saint as an invocation.

In general, objects with runic inscriptions including recent finds are related to the ecclesiastical sphere in one way or the other. The artefacts are e.g. grave-slabs, erected memorial stones mainly from Bornholm with Christian formulas, censers, baptismal fonts, church bells, building stones in churches, church walls, and amulets with formulas based on church Latin etc. Only in a few instances do inscriptions occur on objects that have daily life character, such as combs and knives. The textual contents are hardly ever daily life messages as those from Bergen and other medieval Norwegian and Swedish settlement. What is found is usually a single personal name or a single name in a master formula describing who made the object (or cut/inscribed the runes). A church wall in Sønder Asmintrup has a unique and rather profane inscription illustrating the sincerity between the ecclesiastical and the profane sphere: The inscription (found in the rear of the altar) says: “Toki took silver in loan from Ragnhild” (DR 241).

### *The personal names*

In the following, examples of personal names found in medieval runic inscriptions will be presented and discussed in the light of what can be assumed about the persons mentioned and their occupations. The focus is on the most informational material and inscriptions that are read with a high degree of certainty.

### *Historically identified persons*

The archbishop in Lund in Scania, *Absalon*, (1128-1201), who was the son of the wealthy and powerful magnate Asser Rig from Sealand, is mentioned in a monumental inscription on a rune-stone from the church of Norra Åsum in Scania. The inscription says: “May Christ, son of Mary, help those who made the church, archbishop Absalon and Esbiorn Muli” (c.f. DR 347). Knowing that the Archbishop was bishop in the town of Lund in the period from 1178 and onwards the inscription probably dates from around 1200. It was hardly raised long after his death in 1201. The name *Absalon* is a Christian name from the Old Testament and it is documented as the name of clerical person in the town of Ringsted in Sealand as early as in 1148 and as the name of different clerks and magnates in documents from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The local form *Axel* is developed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The bishop of Lund was not the first Danish archbishop, but the first to bear a Christian name. It can not be determined however, if he was actually baptised Absalon as a Child or if he adopted the name later on in his life (c.f. Meldgaard 1994: 208). The other person mentioned in this statement has a typical Nordic compound name as his first name combined with the by-name *Mūli* ‘the muzzle’. This person is mentioned in a couple of documents for instance the archbishop’s testament, but his identity is not known.

From the church of Stokkemärke in Lolland (south of Sealand) comes a reliquary with a runic inscription in Latin saying: “Bishop *Gisico*” (DR 215). This bishop must be identical with a bishop Gisico, who was bishop in Odense from 1286-1304 proving this inscription to be from this period. One of the obligations of a bishop was to provide reliquaries for new churches and since Lolland belonged to his Episcopal district the connection seem obvious. The name *Gisico* is the Latin form of a well known Middle Low German name *Gisike* (diminutive of *Giso*), and it is possible that the man was German, although this is by no means certain.

*Titles indicating an occupation within the ecclesiastical sphere*

In some instances the occurrence of a title gives direct information of the occupation of the person referred to. (The term *title* covers attributes referring to occupation, although these can also be categorised as by-names). On a grave-slab from the small island of Tåsinge south of Funen it is stated that “Helgi the Deacon” “inscribed/cut”, while “Master Bo” “made” the slab (DR 184) (perhaps “made” aims at both the making of the stone and (physical) cutting the runes (c.f. Moltke 1985: 415). This particular slab is probably from 1200-1250.

The total number of registered Romanesque grave-slabs and grave-stones in Denmark is quite extensive, more than 600, but only 24 have runic or partly runic inscriptions. Grave-slabs with majuscule inscriptions are in 86 instances dated rather precisely to the period before 1250. The runic grave-slabs are unfortunately rarely dated accurately, but the presumption that runic grave-slabs should be older than equivalents inscribed with Latin majuscules has recently been rejected (c.f. Carelli 2001: 319 ff. with reference to Hinrichsen 1988). The deacon’s first name Helgi is known as the name of legendary Kings, and is registered as the name of clerics in Denmark from the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

This inscription states very clearly who was the literate and who was the craftsman, however, in general it is impossible to decide if the carver was also the craftsman. In spite of this fact, a distinction was also made in the following case: An inscription on a now lost church bell from Boeslunde in Sealand (not dated) stated partly in Latin, partly in the vernacular language, that “*Frater* (‘brother’) *Toco* made me” and (in runic Latin only) that “*Frater Ingemar* *scripsit in campana*” ‘Brother *Ingemar* wrote on the bell’ (DR 234). The inscription was slightly corrupted; however, the reading seems quite certain. The mix of languages is interesting since the traditional standard master formula “made me” was written in the vernacular, while the rest was written in Latin – in particular considering that the master formula in Latin “*me fecit*” is rather common. Both monks had Old Norse names *Toki* and *Ingimarr*, respectively, in spite of their religious occupations. Metal casting of church bells, a quite demanding procedure, is known to have taken place in monasteries, why the learned and the literate from these environments might very well also have had craftsman skills.

“Thomas priest pray for me” says the inscription on the wall of a Romanesque church in Tjæreby in Sealand. The man’s name *Thomas* in this inscription presumably refers to a local priest, though hypothetically the isolated name could refer to Saint Thomas as an invocation. The apostle Thomas was celebrated in the medieval (catholic) church, as well the arch-



bishop Thomas Becket of Canterbury, who was canonised in 1173. The name is known as the name of a prior in Odense on Funen mentioned in a document from 1146. From being a saint's name the name Thomas became very popular in all social classes. In a document from approximately 1300 the name is born by a peasant in the southern part of Jutland. Unfortunately the inscription from Tjæreby is not dated accurately. It was inscribed in the wet plaster in the church choir. Exactly when cannot be decided, but the Romanesque style would in Denmark date the choir to the period from 1100 till 1250. The runes appear along with casual ornaments (a bird, stars, circles and plait symbols) and two Roman majuscules PR (for priest?) and are typical of the medieval *futhark*. An estimated dating to the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century seems entirely plausible. A fine drawing of this is published in the series *Danmarks Kirker* (Frederiksborg amt, volume 3, page 1395).

In a Danish runic context only very few inscriptions contain names that are referring to one and the same person, but in the case of the Master Jacob Red-inscriptions an exception is found. The group consists of 12 casted bronze censers, of which one is now lost, all originating from the region of Funen. The physical characteristics as well as the textual similarities indicate with certainty, that these censers were produced in the same workshop (presumably in the period from 1200-1250), under the instruction of a master named *Jacob (the) Red*. Both the first name and the title of master occur in different forms; the name is spelled **iakop** and **iækop** in the vernacular, and **iacobus** in the Latin form. The master also used the by-name *Red* in Latin *Rufus*, spelled **ruffus**, and in the vernacular spelled **ryþ**, **røþ** Old Norse *Rauðr* 'the Red' and **rolut** (?) Old Norse *Rauðlitr* (?) 'red coloured'. In one example he even stated that he was from the town of Svendborg on Funen. The title "Master" is found in two certain instances apart from the censer inscriptions. The above mentioned grave-slab had the example "Master Bo" and a church pillar dated rather precisely to the period 1150-1175 carries the inscription (partly in Latin) "Master Tofi *me fecit*" (DR 165). In this case we must consider the possibility that this signature did not aim at the capability of writing, but stated who was in charge of the construction work. Master Bo and Master Tofi both had old Nordic names, while the Master from Svendborg had the Christian name Jacob/Jacobus. In the case of censer inscriptions it is obvious, that the vernacular loan word *Mester(e)* (**mæstær**) is used synonymously with the Latin term *Magister*. Unfortunately the title "Master" covers several different occupations in the medieval world as it still does today, e.g. leader, master (of profession), teacher etc. As a title the word occurs both in connection with clerical posts (most frequently) and profane posts and as an academic title. This means that the exact meaning of Jacob Red's title is uncertain; how-



ever the inscriptions provide yet another clue, since he is also referred to as *faber*, the Latin word for ‘smith’. A postposition of the word *faber* indicates that he really was a smith or at least in charge of a workshop of metal casting. Whether Master Jacob was an academic or perhaps a learned craftsman as possibly the two monks, is however impossible to determine.

### *Titles indicating an occupation outside the ecclesiastical sphere*

The word *smith* (**smiþ**) is found in five inscriptions from the late Viking Age and the early Middle Ages. This is interesting since the word *smith* is considered to correspond to the Latin word *faber* thus meaning ‘smith, craftsman (perhaps specifically master of profession)’. A parallel to the master formulas already discussed can be found on the lid of an ingenious wooden chest found in the church of Pjedsted in Jutland. The medieval runes state: “Gunni smith made me” (DR 38). The smith’s name *Gunni* is known as a legendary king’s name and is handed down in early Viking Age inscriptions (DgP I, column 413 ff.).

The title of smith is, apart from the inscription on the lid, found on four rune-stones that seemingly date to the late Viking age (around 950-1025). Two of these stone inscriptions (found in Grensten and Hørning in Northern Jutland) contain a Christian formula and in both cases the erector of the stone was a man referred to as “Toki (the) Smith”, presumably the work of the same person (Moltke 1985: 316). *Toki* erected the stone from Hørning (DR 58) in memory of *Thorgisli* referred to as the son of *Guthmundr*, a man he was indebted to. Exactly what their internal relation was is uncertain, but it seems that Toki was adopted as a family member. Scholars have discussed whether Toki was formerly a slave, but as erector rune-stones, albeit in this the very latest period of rune-stone erecting, the smith was definitely of some status (c.f. Moltke 1985: 315 f.). That he was both a smith and a Christian is obvious, but the inscription does not state explicitly that he cut the runes himself. The spellings vary noticeably indicating that different persons might have carried out the inscription as commissioned work (Moltke 1985: 316). On the other hand great variation can be seen also in the contemporary censer inscriptions where the spellings of the Old Danish words show considerable divergence – a fact that has to my knowledge never lead to speculations that Master Jacob had his inscriptions made by others, possibly because his title of *magister* supports that he was literate.

The third inscription that mentions a smith is from Kolind in Jutland (DR 108). This smith’s name is *Tosti* and he raised the stone in memory of

his deceased brother called *Tofa*. To identify himself he is referred to as the smith of *Ásvith*. This again indicates a special bond between the smith and the person he worked for. A recent find from the church of Bjerring in Northern Jutland carries inscription number four to refer to a smith, but in this case the smith was not the erector of the stone. The stone was raised by a woman called *Thorgunn* in memory of her deceased husband *Thori* and *Toki* the smith “cut”. In addition the inscription states that the smith was *Thori’s frændi* (Stoklund 1997:57 ff.). This word, Old Norse *frændi*, is usually translated as ‘kinsman’, but one must point out, that the family relation was not necessarily biological. This stone inscription is probably 50-100 years older than the stone inscriptions from Grensten and Hørning.

The persons we are introduced to in these inscriptions, men as well as women, all had Old Nordic names. The Christian formulas on the stones erected by *Toki* the smith are not accompanied by Christian names. The titles of smith, master, bishop, priest and brother are the only titles to be found in the examined material. The Viking Age traditional way of identifying persons in runic inscriptions, except for mentioning (much discussed) titles as e.g. Old Norse *drengr*, *thegn* and *goða*, is to underline family relations.

### *First names connected to compound patronymics*

The Viking Age inscriptions very often illustrate family relations, and a person is very commonly referred to as someone’s son. Since the punctuation in runic inscription is unstable it is complicated to decide if a father’s name in the genitive form in combination with the word *son* can be analysed as a semantic unit in the Viking Age inscriptions, but the use of a unit “father’s name + son” stabilises as compound patronymic in the medieval period (Kousgård Sørensen 1984). Whether the type is to be considered to be a compound patronymic or not, is beyond the bounds and irrelevant of this paper. The runic inscriptions from the late Viking Age/the early medieval period that contain this form of identification mark are found on the grave-slabs and on a couple of erected stones.

The Vamdrup grave-slab inscription (DR 28), partly damaged, mentions a person whose first name is, unfortunately, uncertain, but he was “Ebbi’s son”. *Thyrger* is mentioned on a grave-slab from Gjesing (DR 111) and is also referred to as “Ebbi’s son”. This particular slab is also inscribed with majuscules which date the inscription to the period from 1150-1175 (Carelli 2001: 324). It is uncertain what the person, who made the slab for *Thyrger*, was called (the runic form is **þuæþ**). The inscription is moder-

ately damaged and difficult to read, but the reading of the name *Horderus* (partly in majuscules) is certain. Perhaps Horderus cut the runes, but regardless of what part he played his name was not a commonly occurring one. Horderus is considered to be the Latin form of the Old Danish first name *Harth* (DgP I, column 479). The inscription also contain the name *Nicholaus*, but in the sentence “Nicholaus guard”. The picture of a bishop on top of the slab may very well be the Nicholas, who is invocated – the popular St. Nicholas of Myra (Moltke 1985: 413).

Helgi the Deacon and Master Bo were involved in the making of the Bregninge grave-slab, but the one who was buried underneath was *Swen Sazur's son*, and thus not a single personal name in this inscription is Christian. On other grave-slabs we find *Isulfr Thorgils' son* (DR 152), *Thorth Amdi's son* (DR 156), *Hildulf Swen's son* (DR 336, lost), *Enar Arnbiorn's son* (DR 353). The making of grave-slabs was a continental tradition adopted into the local culture, with reminiscences of traditional epigraphic style known from the Viking Age rune-stones. The making of grave-slabs was probably undertaken in an ecclesiastical environment and the persons mentioned in these rather late inscriptions from approximately 1150 onwards were undoubtedly Christian as were their fathers. However, the (presupposed) popularity of Christian names is not reflected in the runic material. A view of all runic grave-slab inscriptions confirm that none of the persons referred to had Christian names. Among the inscriptions in Roman letters we find examples of Christian names, approximately one fifth of the entire corpus. Just under two thirds are Old Nordic names and the rest are either English, continental or uncertain. The actual names of Christian origin derive primarily from the names of evangelists and saints (canonised kings) names, e.g. Lucas, Marcus, Mathieu, Nicholaus, Peter, Magnus, Olavus (Carelli 2001: 323).

### *By-names*

The category *by-name* is a difficult term, and I will omit to discuss the usefulness of the term in this paper. In the following only certain instances of first names with appositions that can be interpreted as by-names are exemplified.

In the parish of Bjolderup in Southern Jutland a medieval rune-stone from around 1200 is inscribed with the statement “*Ketill Urni* lies here” (DR 14). The name *Urni* is handed down as the family name of a noble family in Denmark. The name Urni, however, is known to be a place name denoting a no longer existing village in Bjolderup Parish and therefore

it is reasonable to estimate that Ketill actually came from this Village. The by-name can be compared to the Master Jacob-inscription stating that the Master was from the town of Svendborg. Master Jacob had as already illustrated the by-name *Red*. This by-name is common and normally interpreted as referring to the looks of the person, perhaps red hair. In this case another possible interpretation is that red is metaphorically referring to his occupation as a metal caster. A grave-slab from Føvling in Northern Jutland (DR 25) was placed over “*Ásbiorn (the) Slow*”. In this case the by-name “Slow” must have characterised the man in some way. Similarly the abovementioned Thyrger the son of Ebbi, was also referred to as “*Thyrger (the) Short*”.

### *First names in sparse linguistic contexts*

Frequently the runic inscriptions from the medieval period consist of a personal name only, which can be understood as a signature with an implicit “made this”. This is probably the case when the artefact is monumental as e.g. the baptismal fonts and other objects of (granite) stone, and the inscription has epigraphic character supported by the fact that artefacts of this kind are also inscribed with whole master formulas. Five baptismal fonts from Scania have the formula “Marten made me” (DR 320, 322, 326, 327, 332). The name Marten can be categorised as a Christian name, since the Roman name *Martinus* was introduced as a saints name in Scandinavia. The name was, however, also adopted in the German form *Merten* (DgP I, column 930). The earliest instance of this name is from coins struck in Roskilde in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Another example of the “made me”-formula on a font is “Nicholaus *me fecit*” (DR 162), but a number of inscriptions contain only a personal name: *Immi* (DR 16) 1175-1200, *Azur*, *Rasi* (DR 31) c. 1200, *Isli* (DR 51) c. 1200, and *Ger* (DR 153) c. 1200. As a fine parallel an inscription in Roman letters on a baptismal font from Bårse states: “Bondo (the) Frisian made me, Esgerus Red had me made.” (DR 224). Inscriptions like this underline the possibility that a signature can also hypothetically refer to the person who commissioned or paid for the object. One of the Funen censers made by Master Jacob has an inscription that also states who paid for the censer. “Toki bought me” (DR 179) and in addition a church pillar from the church of Søndberg in Jutland is relevant. The inscription says “Jacob commissioned, Skjalm made” and this statement is followed by a saying in (runic) Latin: “Where the altar, there the eye” (DR 148). The commissioner had a Christian name, the maker an old Nordic name.

Most of the inscriptions referred to in this paper do have monumental character and are in that respect far from the daily life scribbles. The closest one gets to casual use of runic script is probably from the plaster inscriptions. These inscriptions make up the most frequent type of medieval runic inscription, but do not in general provide us with a linguistic meaning to any great extent.

In case the plaster inscription consist of a single personal name it is tempting to interpret the signature as a sort of “Killroy was here”-statement whereby a personal name could be the name of e.g. a tradesman or someone who happened to visit the church at a time, where the plaster was still wet. It is, however, difficult to determinate if a (single) name referred to a living person or to e.g. a saint or biblical personae. On plaster- and lime- and sand-stone inscriptions inside churches there are examples as ‘God’, ‘Hail Mary’, ‘Christ’, ‘Saint Michael’, ‘Saint Olaf’, ‘Benedictus’, ‘Judas prayed’ all obviously referring to religious personae. Saints names, which are known as both personal names of local Danes and as the names of the protectors of many medieval churches, e.g. *Nicholaus*, *Petrus* and *Helena* are problematic to categorise, however, instances as “Olaf ca[rved]” (Stoklund, Snædal & Åhlén 1990: 30) in the church of Fjellie in Scania and “Gyrðr carved his name ... mass” in the church of Allerslev in Sealand (DR 223), must refer to the persons, who wrote.

### *Finds discovered in urban environments and stray finds*

The recent finds of runic inscriptions from the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries on amulets, hardly ever provides us with personal names, and those which do contain Christian names are ambiguous just as in case of the plaster inscriptions. The closest one gets to what the Norwegian material reflects are inscriptions from urban environments. An example of an owner’s inscription is found on a bronze stylus found in the medieval layers of Dalby in Scania the inscription says: “*Bovi* owns (the) stylus” (Moltke 1985: 469). A similar inscription in Latin on a wooden bowl says “*Olavus* owns me”. Inscriptions with more advanced contents are e.g. the inscription on a glove needle from Lund in Scania, which says “Interpret the runes *Pai* carved” (Moltke 1985: 470). In addition a poetic runic inscription in Latin was carved on horn from a deer found in the medieval layers of the town of Kalundborg in Sealand. The object is dated to 1250-1350. The quotation is known from manuscripts outside of Denmark, but the meaning is cryptic – it says “A wondrous vessel was prepared for flowers and branches” or perhaps “A wondrous vessel was prepared of flowers

and wood". On the reverse the name Christian name "Joseph" is inscribed, but again it is not possible to decide if the name refers to the person who carved the runes or the Biblical person, who might be the answer to the riddle (Stoklund 1987: 196).

### *Final remarks*

As exemplified the Danish runic material is largely similar to epigraphic Roman script. The one knowledgeable in runes in the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> century often reveals that he was also well-versed in Latin. The corpus of personal names does not significantly change the picture established through other sources from the period. What can be concluded is that people both within and outside the clergy did not adopt Christian names as rapidly as one could have imagined and that the traditional name stock can hardly be considered to have been in ("heathen") opposition to the imported Christian name stock in the period of the transition and in the medieval society.

The material seemingly provides us with the names of smiths and tradesmen, and among these we find examples of Christian names. It is however difficult to decide whether any of these persons are representative of people from all layers of society, but it is hardly the case. The names of Christian origin gained ground in the Denmark 14<sup>th</sup> century mainly and the worship of saints and the calendar of saint's days may well be decisive factors in the great name change (c.f. Meldgaard 1994: 210). Perhaps the great name change should also be seen in the light of the cultural flow from the continental world that took place in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries as the result of massive immigration from Germany, but this hypothesis the runic inscriptions can neither confirm nor deny.

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