

# Runic Amulets Made of Metal from Medieval Bornholm

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## Abstract

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Since 1941-42 when the standard work *Danmarks Runeindskrifter* ("The Runic Inscriptions of Denmark") was published, there has been a great increase in the number of finds of runic amulets made of metal in the Late Viking Age and the medieval period. Runic amulets of metal, which at that time only consisted of a few curious finds, today form one of the largest groups of medieval runic finds, and new amulets are being handed in at regular intervals for examination at the Runological Laboratory in the National Museum in Copenhagen. The increase in the number of finds has been exceptionally marked in Bornholm as a result of a successful collaboration between metal-detectorists and Bornholm Museum. Material from this source makes up a third of the total number of Danish finds, and the Bornholm amulets are representative of all the Danish material, both physically and as regards their contents. The present article takes stock of the Bornholm runic amulets at the present time, including their physical characteristics, difficulties in connection with their reading and interpretation, as well as problems connected with their dating. By virtue of their linguistically meaningful inscriptions, three of the amulets, including a recent find lead from Lille Myregård in Nylarsker parish, form the basis for a discussion of the age and employment of the amulets.

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## 1. Introduction

"The increase in the number of archaeological finds often takes place in a capricious and accidental manner. Time and again we witness how a whole new find-group [...] becomes visible, immediately arouses surprise and raises expectations" (Nordén 1943, pp. 143 f., my translation).

In this quotation the Swedish philologist Arthur Nordén refers to a group of metal objects bearing runes from the Viking Age and the medieval period, all of which had been found in Sweden in the course of the 1920s and 1930s. At that time parallel material from Denmark was scanty. In the over sixty-year-old standard work *Danmarks Runeindskrifter* there

are only four metal objects of comparable character, including a silver coin from Bornholm (DR 410) with a runic inscription in Latin. Since the 1940s, however, runic amulets, mainly of lead, have come to light at regular intervals in Scandinavia (cf. the survey in Düwel 2001, pp. 267 ff.). In addition there have also been scattered finds from outside Scandinavia in areas to which the Vikings made their way, for example at Gorodische near Novgorod in Russia (Melnikova 1987, pp. 163 ff.).

In the last twenty years the increase in numbers in this group of finds has been considerable, and this is by no means the result of

accident. On the contrary, it has been the result of thorough investigations with metal detectors, mainly carried out in connection with archaeological excavations. At the time of writing 48 runic amulets from Denmark (including Scania) have been registered in the Runological Laboratory at the National Museum in Copenhagen. There are many indications that these finds only make up a fraction of what we can expect to find in the future, and it would appear that the employment of runes on amulets in the Late Viking Age and in particular in the medieval period may have been much more widespread than hitherto assumed.

## 2. The runic amulets from Bornholm

The increase in the number of runic amulets has been particularly marked in Bornholm. Down to 1996 the above-mentioned silver coin, the Bornholm amulet, was the only registered medieval runic amulet from the island, although there are many medieval runic inscriptions from Bornholm, mostly on erected stones. Today there are 17 runic amulets from Bornholm registered at the National Museum (fig. 1). The runic amulets from Bornholm can be assumed to be representative of the group as a whole.

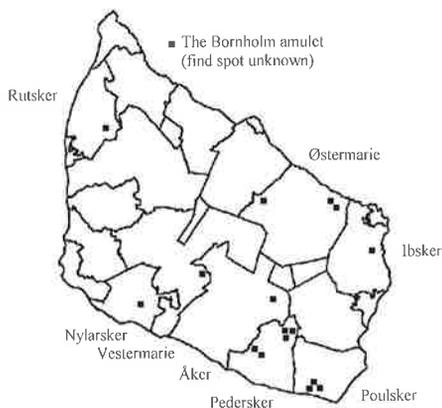


Fig. 1. Distribution of runic amulet finds from medieval Bornholm.

Most of the amulets from Bornholm consist of pieces of lead folded together. In most cases they are a folded, hammered out sheet or a rolled, compressed strip. The surface is generally severely corroded so that it often requires a practised eye even to see the runes. The lead amulets are very frail and therefore often impossible to unfold. Thus seven of the amulets have been assessed as not being fit to be unfolded,<sup>1</sup> while three of the amulets that have been unfolded have been broken into several pieces in the process.<sup>2</sup> An attempt has been made to unfold an amulet from Poulsker parish<sup>3</sup> with the result that a corner has broken off, while the latest lead amulets to arrive have not yet been examined.<sup>4</sup> The other amulets consist of small pieces of silver or bronze with runes and these had not been folded up.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.1. Reading and interpretation

Corrosion, breaks and foldings often, alas, leave us with only isolated runes or fragmentary sequences of runes. Even in the cases where a longish inscription survives, the reading can be difficult because of the nature of the inscription itself. The runes have often been so carelessly scratched that there is no physical contact between the stem and the branch(es). This means that it can be impossible to assess to which stem a given branch belongs. Similarly, it can confuse the reading that the surfaces on which the inscriptions are written have often been pressed so tightly together that one line of runes has left an impression on top of another one.

It is quite clear that the inscriptions on the folded amulets were not intended to be read subsequently. This probably explains why the inscriptions are so carelessly inscribed and in many cases would never seem to have made sense linguistically. Several examples have also been found of an amulet that has been cut out of a larger piece of lead on which there already was some writing without any attention being paid to what had been written. One of the three amulets from Poulsker parish, Poulsker

(Munkegård) lead amulet 1, would seem for example to be complete, even though there is clear evidence of traces of runes on the very edges. Among the inscriptions from Bornholm there are only three that have been interpreted to give linguistic sense. The Bornholm amulet (cf. section 3.1), the Østermarie silver amulet (cf. section 3.2) and the Nylarsker (Lille Myregård) lead amulet (cf. section 3.3), while in all the other cases it is impossible to determine with certainty whether the language is Latin or Danish, and many of the inscriptions would seem never to have made sense at all. It is probable, however, that the inscription on the Østermarie (Jætてbrovej/Bækkeskov) lead amulet is based on a Latin original. This is because the Latin word *regnat* 'reigns' can be identified with some certainty (Stoklund 2004, p. 4). This word is part of the familiar Christian formula, *Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat* 'Christ conquers, Christ reigns, Christ commands', on several Scandinavian runic amulets (cf. Gustavson 1984).

### 2.2. Rune-typological/linguistic dating

Finds of amulets are normally stray ones and this is indeed the case with most of the finds from Bornholm. As a rule the finds therefore lack a datable, archaeological context. The dating must therefore instead be based on an analysis of the actual runic inscription, first and foremost on the forms of the runes themselves. Linguistic dating is often difficult, since one can find within one and the same inscription some features that point to a great age and others that point to a late date. The actual formation of the runes can, however, to some extent indicate whether the inscription for example is from the early or the late medieval period. The Rutsker (Møllebjerg) lead amulet is thus, for example, estimated to be from the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries on the basis of, among other things, the long branches of the a- and n-runes (Stoklund 2003, p. 868).

## 3. Inscriptions giving a linguistic meaning

### 3.1. The Bornholm amulet

The Bornholm amulet differs from all the other medieval Danish metal runic amulets in being a recycled cufic silver coin. The amulet was handed in to the National Museum in 1821 but is assumed to have been found about 50 years earlier (cf. Jacobsen & Moltke 1942, col. 468). The coin is 2.5 cm in diameter and its original die stamping is so worn that it has been difficult for the numismatists to assign a date to it. Most recently the date has been estimated to "perhaps 895–96" (Stoklund 2003, p. 859 with references). The provenance of the inscription is uncertain but it must be assumed that the coin received its runic inscription in Bornholm.

The transliteration (after Stoklund 2003, = indicates a bind-rune, / indicates a line-break, ( ) indicates uncertainty):

The A-side:

**e(i) (e)asusus kristus=fil=uis t(e)i fifi inomina  
b/atris eþ fil/ius ins / eþ sb=iritu/s**

The B-side:

**k=rist=us (bi) / bius=ank=uis fifi / fit=am  
itirn=a/m kustotapit**

Normalization (to Classical Latin):

A: e(i) Jesus Christus filius Dei. In nomine Patris et Filii ins et Spiritus

B: Christus (bi). Pius sanguis vivit vitam aeternam custodiat.

Translation (my translation):

A: Jesus Christ, the son of the living God. In the name of the Father and the Son and the [Holy] Ghost.

B: Christ. The gracious blood lives, may it preserve life everlasting.

At first glance the inscription makes a rather confused impression (cf. fig. 2.). It runs over both sides of the coin but in quite different



Fig. 2. The Bornholm amulet. The A- and B-side. Photo: John Lee, The National Museum, Copenhagen.

ways. On the one side, referred to as A, the inscription runs around the border of the coin and in three horizontal lines in the middle. On side B there would not seem to be any system. The inscriber would first seem to have cut a few words from the top and down and then in a more slanting fashion down and to the right. The inscription contains several unusual bind-runes presumably the result of corrections.

The first attempt to explain the inscription was made by Erik Moltke, whose reading and interpretation appears in *Danmarks Runeindskrifter*. A few years ago the inscription was re-read and re-interpreted by Marie Stoklund. The new interpretation differs from Erik Moltke's on one significant point particularly. Stoklund proposes a new order of reading for the central section of side A. With this new interpretation the text fits much better with the text material that is already known. Since Moltke's first reading of the amulet many new runic inscriptions in Latin have come to light. It is now known that the great majority of the texts consist of short, more or less freely put together extracts from familiar religious phrases and they are thus very formulaic. In addition, abbreviations, such as those assumed in Moltke's reading and

interpretation would not seem to be employed in Latin written in runes. Some formulae occur extremely frequently, e.g. *Ave Maria*, *Pater Noster* and *In nomine Patris*, the last of which is in fact found on the Bornholm amulet. Parts of the text remain without literal parallels even with Stoklund's reading but certain religious phrases show obvious points of similarity, e.g. *Sanguis Domini nostri Iesu Christi custodiat animam meam in vitam aeternam* 'the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve my soul for everlasting life' from the Catholic liturgy of the mass (Moltke 1985, p. 363), the benediction *Pater custodiat te, Iesus Christus benedicta te* 'The father guard thee, Jesus Christ bless thee' as known from a Swedish amulet Vassunda copper plate 2 (Gustavson 1984, pp. 68 ff.) and the expression *sanguis Christi signet me* 'the blood of Christ bless me', as is written on the Odense lead tablet (DR 204) (cf. Stoklund 2003, p. 861).

At the present time it is still uncertain precisely what the function of the amulets can have been. In *Danmarks Runeindskrifter* it was proposed on the basis of the then state of our knowledge of that type of object that it might have been a grave amulet to be given to the dead person when he or she was placed in the grave (Jacobsen & Moltke 1942, col. 470). This still seems likely, since for example the Viborg lead strip, discovered relatively recently, was found in a male grave (Stoklund 1995, p. 9), just as the Odense lead tablet was found during excavations in an area that had previously formed part of St Knud's churchyard in Odense (Jacobsen & Moltke 1942, col. 241). It has been possible to relate quite a lot of the many amulet finds in Sweden to graves, including the above-mentioned Vassunda copper plate 2, and Norwegian finds can also be linked with graves, including a number of lead crosses inscribed with runes which have been discovered tucked down in old heathen burial mounds (Knudsen 1995). Particularly against the background of the recent material

from Bornholm, of which not a single instance can be related directly to graves, however, it is less certain that the Bornholm amulet was a grave amulet. The context of a grave is only one of many conceivable possibilities.

From late medieval manuals of medicine we know that isolated Latin quotations formed part of a number of formulae that were employed with an apotropaic function (cf. Orth 1917), and it is possible that the amulet can have been worn close to the body as a protection against, for example, illness. The Pedersker lead plate 2 “derives from a rich hoard or silver find” (Stoklund 2003, p. 867). This points to a different use, namely that the amulet can have been deposited in an area that was considered to be cultic/sacred.

A number of other finds can be associated more or less directly with settlements, e.g. the Ibsker bronze plate (Stoklund 2003, p. 868) and the Østermarie silver amulet (cf. section 3.2), and from Scania may be named a bronze strip found at an Iron Age and Viking Age excavation in Uppåkra (Stoklund 2001, pp. 8 f.). A lead plate from Kävlinge, also in Scania, which is unfortunately a stray find without any archaeological context, has an exciting and very lengthy inscription in Latin. This is a concrete blessing on a farm (Gustavson 1999, pp. 20 ff.). In Middelfart in Funen there have been recent excavations in the former village of Skrillinge. Here a cross-shaped piece of lead (without runes, however) was found in a hole for a wall-post for a medieval building. “It is probably a form of amulet that was buried at the wall of the house in order to protect it against being struck by lightning, fire or illness” (Henriksen 2005, p. 30). Perhaps the runic amulets were intended to protect not only human beings from illness but also whole households from accident.

With respect to the dating of the inscriptions it can be established as a starting-point that the Latin text places the inscription in the medieval period. The forms of the runes in the inscription show great similarity to the rune

forms that are found, for example, on the rune stones from Bornholm, which in *Danmarks Runeindskrifter* have been dated typologically to “pre-medieval”, which in years corresponds to approximately 1050–1150 (Jacobsen & Moltke 1942, col. 1038). Stoklund estimates against the background of the linguistic indications that the inscription belongs by all appearances to the second half of the 11th century (Stoklund 2003, p. 862) and it is therefore probable that the inscription on the Bornholm amulet is the oldest example of a text in Church Latin written in runes.

### 3.2. *The Østermarie silver amulet*

In 1998 a fragment of silver bearing runes (2 x 2.2 cm) was found during a detector investigation at the settlement site Østersøpladsen (Englyst) in Østermarie parish. The thin plate has a hole for carrying it by that was certainly made before the runes were cut (cf. fig. 3).

Transliteration 1 (after Stoklund 2003, p. 863, ? indicates indefinable rune, ... indicates the break):

The A-side:

- 1) si(g)mo R(i)...
- 2) iR s(i).þ
- 3) þ..?arnsmo (upside down)

The B-side:

- 1) suaristaR ...
- 2) runaRauk ...
- 3) ... (a)Rheil(i) (upside down)
- 4) ...akireistb(i) (upside down)
- 5) -rk (left side vertical)

In this amulet, too, the arrangement of the lines would seem to be somewhat confused, although there are three clear horizontal lines separated by framing strokes on the A-side of the amulet and correspondingly there are four horizontal lines on the B-side but this also has a short vertical sequence between the left side edge and the carrying-hole (line 5). The runes on the A-side turn in the correct direction in

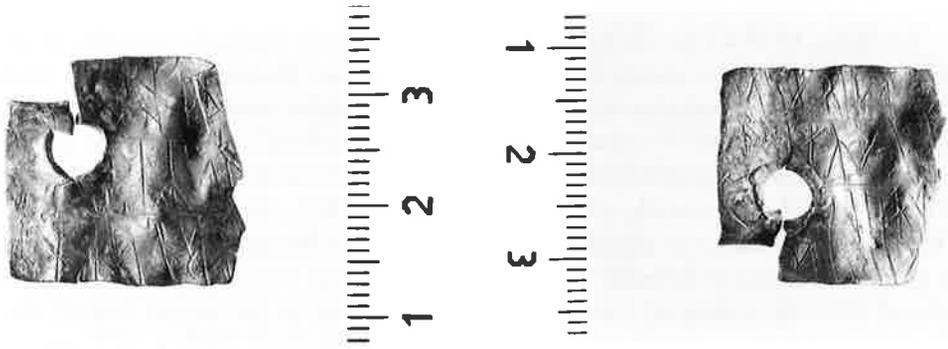


Fig. 3. The Østermarie (Englyst) silver amulet. The A- and B-side. Photo: John Lee, The National Museum, Copenhagen.

lines one and three but in line two they are upside down. The runes on the B-side in lines one and two are in the right direction but they are upside down in lines three and four. In her treatment of the amulet Marie Stoklund has elected to take her starting-point in a linear arrangement of the inscription from the top down, on the assumption that the vertical sequence on the B-side formed the conclusion of the inscription, cf. the transliteration above. It is also possible, however, that the vertically inscribed runes along the outer edge continue round the hole for carrying and in towards the middle and that the inscription should thus be read in an elliptical spiral. This explains why the runes turn upside down in some lines but the right way up in the others. This arrangement of the script, called the contour arrangement, is not known from other amulets but is frequently found on rune stones.

Transliteration 2 with division into words (my reading)

The A-side:

- 1) si(g)mo R (i)...
  - 2) ...?arnsþmo
  - 3) iR s(i)...
- þ

The B-side:

- 1) sua ristaR ...
- 2) ...aki reist b(i)?rkrunaR auk ...
- 3) ...(a)R heil(i)

Irrespective of which arrangement of the writing is the correct one, the inscription on the Østermarie silver amulet is so fragmentary that a total reading and interpretation are impossible. On the B-side the word *reist*, Old Norse *rista* 'inscribe, cut' in the past tense *reist* 'inscribed', however, can be identified with certainty. This verb occurs very frequently in runic inscriptions in the formulaic sentence: "X inscribed the runes". It would thus normally be expected that a subject denoting the inscriber would stand in front of the verb. The runes *aki* which stand between the edge of the break and the word *reist* might well be interpreted as the masculine name *Áki*, corresponding to modern Danish *Åge*, as tentatively proposed by Stoklund (2003, p. 866).

The word *reist* will also normally be linked with an object that indicates what was cut (generally thus the runes) but on the amulet it is followed by *bi(a)rk*. This sequence must be identical with the substantive Old Norse *bjarg* 'salvage, help, salvation' formed from the Old Norse verb *bjarga* 'to salvage, to help, to save'. According to Stoklund's solution the inscription ends here so that the object of the verb *reist* is the word *bjarg* and the inscription must therefore be translated: "Åge inscribed help". If the reading is continued further round the carrying-hole, there follows a sequence which can be read with certainty *runaR auk* Old

Norse *rúnar auk* ‘runes and’. Since it is to be expected according to the traditional formula structure that the object ‘runes’ would follow *reist*, it is reasonable to assume that the words *bjarg* and *rúnar* are to be taken as a compound word Old Norse *bjargrúnar* ‘runes of salvation’. This reading is supported by the fact that such a word does actually exist in Old Norse literature and the concept is known from a stanza in the Eddic poem *Sigrdrífumál* (*Medieval Scandinavia*, pp. 581 f.). In addition the word is found on a rune stick from 14th-century Bergen (B257) whose inscription can also be linked directly with the Eddic poem. The inscription on the rune stick begins thus: *Ríst ek bótrúnar, rist ek bjargrúnar*, which means ‘I inscribed runes of recovery, I inscribed runes of salvation’ (cf. Liestøl 1963, pp. 41 ff.). In her treatment of the Østermarie silver amulet Stoklund mentions both these parallels in a note (Stoklund 2003, p. 866), but there is yet another amulet find from Skänninge in Sweden that can be drawn into the matter for comparison. This is a runic amulet of bronze which unfortunately, like the Østermarie silver amulet, is only a fragment (Gustavson 2003, pp. 31 ff.), but the inscription has been reconstructed as: *Lyfrúnar rist ek, bótrúnar* ‘healing runes I inscribed, runes of recovery’.

On the Østermarie silver amulet line five begins after the break with the runes (a)R, and since both the Eddic poem and the two runic inscriptions name several types of runes, it is tempting to reconstruct the sentence as follows: *Áki reist bjargrúnar auk [bótrún]ar* ‘Áge inscribed runes of salvation and runes of recovery’.

This attempt at a reconstruction of the text is far from answering all our queries about the context of the fragmentary amulet inscription but it is attractive because it eliminates the difficulty in explaining the arrangement of the text, while the inscription can be set in direct relationship with known formulaic material. The word *bjarg* indicates that the content of

the inscription was apotropaic, even though it is not possible to determine exactly what there is a need for protection against. The carrying-hole suggests that the amulet has been worn, for example with a string around a person’s neck.

From a rune-typological point of view the runes are of the same type as those found on the Bornholm amulet and the rune stones from Bornholm so it is to be assumed that the two amulets are from the same period.

In the transitional period between the Viking Age and the medieval period some very dramatic developments take place in the Danish language, although latest in the eastern regions. The carver of the Østermarie silver amulet made use of a couple of unusual spellings, for example *ristaR*, presumably the present tense of *rista*, which ought to have the form *ristR* or with transition to the weak conjugation *ristiR*. The a-rune may be a manifestation of an incipient vacillation in the symbolic representation of the sound (cf. Stoklund 2003, p. 867) but in general the spellings must be said to be pretty close to the forms that would be expected in the Viking Age. For example, a correct distinction is made between the two *r*-runes R and r, which fall together in a single *r*-sound in this period of time.

### 3.3. Nylarsker (Lille Myregård) lead amulet

The third runic amulet from Bornholm which contains a meaningful inscription was handed in for examination at the National Museum in the autumn of 2003. The amulet consisted of a small piece of folded lead (2.4 x 1.4 x 0.3–4 cm) that had been found with the aid of a metal detector on Lille Myregårds Mark in Nylarsker parish. The examinations were carried out under the supervision of Marie Stoklund by Ph.D. student Lisbeth Imer of the National Museum and the present author (Stoklund, Imer & Olesen 2006, in press).

On the rather corroded brown-orange surface it was possible to make out the magic word *agla*,<sup>6</sup> frequently occurring in the context

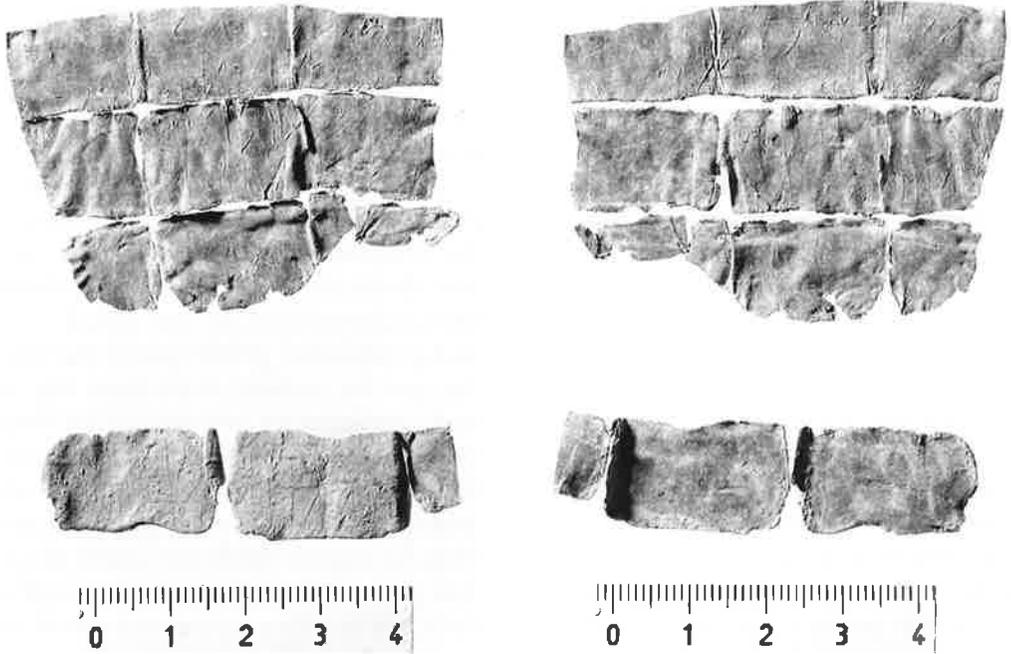


Fig. 4. The Nylarsker (Lille Myregård) lead amulet, unfolded. The A-, B-side and the outer piece. Photo: John Lee, The National Museum, Copenhagen.

of amulets, and this apparently entered into an *agla-gala-laga* formula in which the runes are re-arranged (cf. fig. 5 and the transliteration). Since a known word could be identified, there was reason to believe that the amulet bore a meaningful text and on that basis it was decided that an attempt should be made to unfold the piece of lead. When the amulet was unfolded, it broke into several small pieces, but the unfolding was successful and revealed many more runes (fig. 4).

The transliteration (divided out into words, + indicates a cross-sign):

The A-side:

- 1) + *auē sanctisimæ maria kra?ia*
- 2) *blena tominus tekum bænætik*
- 3) *t=a tu in m(u)lieribus æ bænæ*
- 4) *tiktus fruktus ?æntri(s) þ*
- 5) *tui*

Normalization (Classical Latin):

- 1) *Ave sanctissima Maria, gratia*

- 2) *plena. Dominus tecum. Benedic-*
- 3) *ta tu in mulieribus et bene-*
- 4) *dictus fructus ventris*
- 5) *tui.*

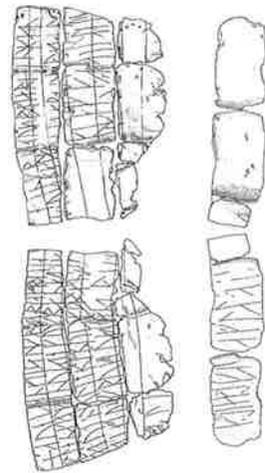


Fig. 5. Nylarsker (Lille Myregård) lead amulet. Drawing: Lisbeth Imer, The National Museum, Copenhagen.

The B-side:

- 1) + in(k)r??tus patær + inmæn
- 2) sus pætær ??tarnus b(a)t?r
- 3a) ga=la a=kla (to be read from right to left)
- 3b) a?la=lal?

Normalization (Classical Latin):

- 1) *Increatus pater, immen-*
- 2) *sus pater, aeternus pater.*
- 3a) *gala agla*
- 3b) *a[ǵ]la la[ga]*

The outer piece:

- 1) *agla=la??*
- 2) *kala a?a* (to be read from right to left)

Normalization:

- 1) *agla la[ga]*
- 2) *gala a[ǵ]la*

As is typical of inscriptions on amulets, the Nylarsker amulet's inscription is cut very carelessly (cf. fig. 4. and drawing fig. 5.) and the surfaces were full of impressions of runes because they had been pressed together so tightly. It was therefore difficult to identify the individual runes but gradually, as it became possible to isolate some words, it became clear that the inscription was in Latin. The amulet consisted in part of a tablet with text on both sides and in part a strip with text on one side, corresponding to the side that was visible before the unfolding. It is so far the only Danish example of an amulet that has proved to have been of more than one part originally.

What made the reading of the inscription particularly difficult was the fact that the runes on the B-side were upside down for a short sequence. The runes here are of a slightly different character from the other runes on the tablet, since they are elongated and almost twice as high. The same phenomenon occurs on the strip and it can only be explained by the fact that it is precisely these two sequences, both *agla*-formulae, that were inscribed on the object after it had been folded. The rune inscriber thus first wrote on one side and then

the piece was turned upside-down before the inscriber continued the writing. The runes are probably larger here because they had to fill out the whole surface of the folded amulet.

On the A-side of the amulet the inscription turned out to consist of a complete Ave Maria-prayer. This normally begins "Ave Maria, gratia plena", but here it has been expanded with the word *sanctissima*. Ave Maria inscriptions are of very common occurrence among Latin runic inscriptions, not only on amulets but particularly on church fittings and equipment. The Hæstrup church bell (which is to be found in the permanent exhibition at the National Museum) is dated to around 1200 and bears the complete prayer and the personal name Eskil (DR 166). The inscription on the B-side of the Nylarsker amulet is rather less usual. It consists of a small selection from the Athanasian creed: *Increatus Pater, Immensus Pater, Aeternus Pater* 'the Father is uncreated, the Father is immense, the Father is eternal'. The sequence *Immensus Pater* has no Danish parallel but it is found in a runic inscription on a stick (dated to c. 1400) from Bryggen in Bergen (B 619) (NlyR VI, pp. 239 f.).

The inscription is introduced and in part split up by small cross-signs, a feature that is very common in medieval runic inscriptions. In the amulet inscriptions the crosses are perhaps intended to represent signs of the cross which stood in a written source at places where the sign of the cross was to be made. In the same way as the inscription on the Bornholm amulet can be linked with religious formulae that had an apotropaic function, the amulet from Lille Myregårds Mark should be placed in such a context.

The typology of the runes points to a dating that is somewhat later than that of the Østermarie and Bornholm amulets. Use is made of rune forms that are typical of medieval inscriptions, and it is certain that the inscription is not older than the 12th century. The rune inscriber, in spite of some careless-

ness in the shaping of the individual runes, seems to be very reliable in his spelling, for the inscription shows very little inconsistency and no corrections at all. The inscription rather gives the impression that the inscriber must have had a thorough knowledge of both the Latin language and the orthographical principles of runology. The inscription, written with a sure hand and showing agreement with runic orthographical principles, not making use of special characters, indicates that the runes were not written as late as the 15th century. The inscription does, however, have features which are normally associated with late inscriptions, for example the long branches on the *n*- and *a*-runes, which are also seen in the inscription on the Rutsker lead amulet. The dating must once again be estimated tentatively to belong in the 13th or 14th century.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

The amulets from Bornholm reflect in an exciting way the continuity in the use of runes on amulets from the Late Viking Age to (the late) medieval period. The Østermarie silver amulet bears a text in Danish which was in all probability anchored in Scandinavian literary tradition. The local language was supplanted in the medieval period by Christian liturgical vocabulary and the Latin language, of which the Bornholm amulet is an early example. Slightly later the metal lead was introduced and the characteristic practice of folding amulets. An amulet inscription such as the one from Nylarsker shows that the person, doubtless a cleric, who inscribed the runes probably mastered Latin and was familiar with Latin writing traditions. This is incidentally supported by finds of closely parallel texts with letters and with runes. In 1983 a lead tablet was found in Sealand with Denmark's hitherto longest runic inscription. The inscription proved to be a parallel to an inscription in letters on a lead tablet that had been found as early as 1952 in an altar-grave in Romdrup church in

Jutland. Two German minuscule inscriptions on lead are also parallels to this, as described by Klaus Düwel (Düwel 2001). Unfortunately a complete registration of all the metal amulets with alphabetical inscriptions has not been made but the fact that we have found so relatively many runic amulets with Latin texts in Denmark perhaps suggests that they are a hybrid form of expression midway between the old tradition and the new learning. It might be thought that the runes were in themselves taken to be powerful and that may be the reason why it was decided to employ the traditional language of writing rather than the new one. Perhaps the use of runes in particular was a way of making doubly sure. The use of folded lead amulets apparently became widespread, and there are indications that these amulets were mass-produced. There are indications that a meaningful text was not a precondition for the efficacy of the amulet but that the writing itself was a necessary feature.

The runic inscriptions from Bornholm do not reveal exactly what or whom it was that the amulets were intended to offer protection against, but it is likely that human beings wished first and foremost to protect themselves against illness. It is impossible to determine exactly how the amulets were to be employed, whether the folding may have played a part in a special ritual in connection with their use. Nor is it possible to determine the exact age of the amulets. It is to be hoped that in the future more amulets will come to light and in a more securely dated archaeological context and that more inscriptions will prove to be possible to interpret so that the basis for the dating and understanding of the textual content can be strengthened.

#### Notes

- 1 Pedersker (St. Gadegård) lead piece 1 (Stoklund 2003, p. 867), Pedersker (St. Gadegård) lead piece 2 (Stoklund 2003, p. 867), Pedersker (Kællingeby SV) lead amulet 4 (unpublished),

- Pedersker (Kællingeby SV) lead amulet 5 (unpublished), Rutsker (Møllebjerg) lead piece (Stoklund 2003, p. 868) and Østermarie (Jættebrovej/Bækkeskov) lead piece (Stoklund 2002, pp. 255 ff.).
- 2 Poulsker (Munkegård) lead amulet 1 (Stoklund 2005, p. 8), Nylarsker (Lille Myregård) lead amulet (cf. section 3.3) and Pedersker (Kællingebygård Øst) lead amulet 3 (Stoklund 2005, pp. 8 ff.).
  - 3 Poulsker (Sandegård) lead amulet 2 (Stoklund, Imer & Olesen, in press).
  - 4 Åker (Kastelsbakke) lead amulet and Poulsker (Munkegård) lead amulet 3 respectively.
  - 5 The Bornholm amulet (DR 410; Stoklund 2003, pp. 858 ff.), Østermarie (Englyst) silver amulet (Stoklund 2003, pp. 863 ff.), Ibsker (Munkegård) bronze plate (Stoklund 2003, p. 868), Østermarie (Gyldensgård) bronze amulet (Stoklund, Imer & Olesen) and Vestermarie (Lundsminde) bronze amulet (unexamined).
  - 6 The word *agla* is probably formed from the initial letters in the Hebrew words *Atta gibbor leolam, adonai*, which mean 'Thou art strong in eternity, Lord' (NIyR, p. 71).

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