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# Christian Prayers and Invocations in Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions from the Viking Age and Middle Ages

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## **Abstract**

Previous studies of Christian runic inscriptions have tended to deal with particular types of inscription from defined periods of time. This article analyses all the relevant Scandinavian runic material from the Viking Age and the Middle Ages, focusing on textual features and material contexts of inscriptions that use prayers and invocations. Its main aim is to explore the dynamics of what may be termed “the runic prayer tradition” with a view to identifying potentially stable elements of this tradition as well as those that alter over time. Two main categories of prayer and invocation explored are formulations in the vernacular and in Church Latin. The results of the study reveal various possibilities of variation in the runic prayer tradition, but also suggest links and overlaps between the earlier and later vernacular prayers. The evidence further suggests some sort of a division between a monumental (or public) form of discourse in connection with rune-stones, grave monuments and church buildings – which are dominated by vernacular prayers – and that of various loose objects, where Latin prayer formulas seem to be favoured.

*Keywords:* Viking Age, Middle Ages, Scandinavia, Christianity, Christian runic inscriptions, prayer, invocation, vernacular, Latin

Many runic inscriptions from the Viking Age and Middle Ages are directly related to Christian culture – they originate from a period during which Christianity was introduced and gradually institutionalized. The emergence and increase in number of certain types of inscription have

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been associated with Christian practices. There has, for example, been discussion of the role of Christianization in the rise and spread of the late Viking Age rune-stone custom. The obvious and immediate outcomes of the interaction between the native epigraphic tradition and Christianity, however, are medieval Christian runic inscriptions on grave monuments, on the walls and furnishings of stave and stone churches as well as on different types of religious object.

A common approach to Christian runic inscriptions is to look at particular types of inscription, categories of artifact, regions or periods of time. This article explores some aspects of the dynamics of the overall tradition, based upon preserved Viking Age and medieval inscriptions from Denmark, Norway and Sweden. There are a few concentrations of inscriptions in other parts of the Nordic realm where settlers of Scandinavian origin made use of runic script, but these date either from the Viking Age (the Isle of Man) or predominantly from the Middle Ages (Iceland and Greenland). This material does not allow for the study of the dynamics of Christian runic inscriptions in the way the material from Scandinavia proper does. The focus is on Christian prayers and invocations. Other expressions of Christianity are ignored, e.g., cross ornamentation and pictorial evidence, which especially in the case of stone monuments complement the textual elements. Various Christian features of rune-stones and grave monuments have been examined in previous studies – either in isolation or in combination with each other. The focus here is narrowed to the analysis of textual features and material contexts of inscriptions that use runic prayers, with the aim of distinguishing those features which are relatively stable elements of the corpus from those which alter over time.

## The corpus

Prayers, invocations and blessings are the most common verbal expressions of Christianity in runic inscriptions from the Viking Age and Middle Ages. In addition there are Christian terms (such as *kristinn* ‘Christian’, *kross* ‘cross’, *kalikr* ‘chalice’), Christian personal names, and references to practices that have received a Christian interpretation – for instance, Viking Age and early medieval inscriptions may refer to the making of ‘bridges’ and clearing of paths, which was considered a pious act. In this study Christian prayers and invocations have received a broad definition. Besides formulas that explicitly solicit help and consideration from God or some other divine agency, I have included quotations from

Scripture, liturgical formulas and other texts of varying content, structure and length that invoke divine assistance, blessing and protection. Also considered are inscriptions that refer to the act of praying in that they ask readers to pray for somebody's soul. Inscriptions that consist merely of one or more sacred names — such as different names for God, names of saints, the evangelists, the archangels — qualify for inclusion in that they express a form of devotion and serve invocatory purposes. Inscriptions whose intention is unclear, and which may indeed contain no reference to the divine at all, have been omitted. Problems that arise from following the approach here outlined will be commented upon below.

This study does not differentiate between the various supplicative and manipulative functions and contexts of use of Christian prayers and invocations in terms of traditional dichotomies categorized as religion versus magic. With certain types of text, like medieval charms and incantations modelled upon Christian vocabulary, and certain types of object, such as Christian amulets, the manipulative and ritualistic purpose may seem evident. However, some inscriptions and artifacts hover uncertainly between the spheres of religion and magic (cf. Spurkland 2012, especially 198–200; Steenholt Olesen 2007, 38; on Christian and magic formulas in runic inscriptions, see also MacLeod and Mees 2006, especially 184–210; McKinnell, Simek, and Düwel 2004, 147–61, 172–89). Furthermore, the scholarship of the past decades has started viewing magic as an inherent part of medieval religion and culture. Studies have concerned what can be described as “the large grey area of popular practices in Christian Europe that are not clearly magic or miracle, but lie on a spectrum in between” (Jolly 2002, 7; cf. Kieckhefer 1989; more specifically on medieval textual amulets, see Skemer 2006). Instead of operating with universal labels such as “magic” and “religion”, one needs to examine particular practices in their own contexts (Jolly 2002, 11). In the following analysis of runic prayers and invocations I will from time to time comment on such individual or general concerns and practices as the inscriptions may illuminate.

Proceeding from the broad definition just outlined, and including possible fragmentary evidence, we can estimate that approximately 13 per cent of the runic material from the Viking Age and early medieval period (up to c. 1150/1200; see chart 1) contains Christian prayers and invocations. In inscriptions that date from the High and Late Middle Ages (c. 1150/1200–1500) the proportion is around 18 per cent. There are, however, a greater number of debatable cases in the high and late medieval group; if we limit ourselves to the unambiguous examples, the ratio

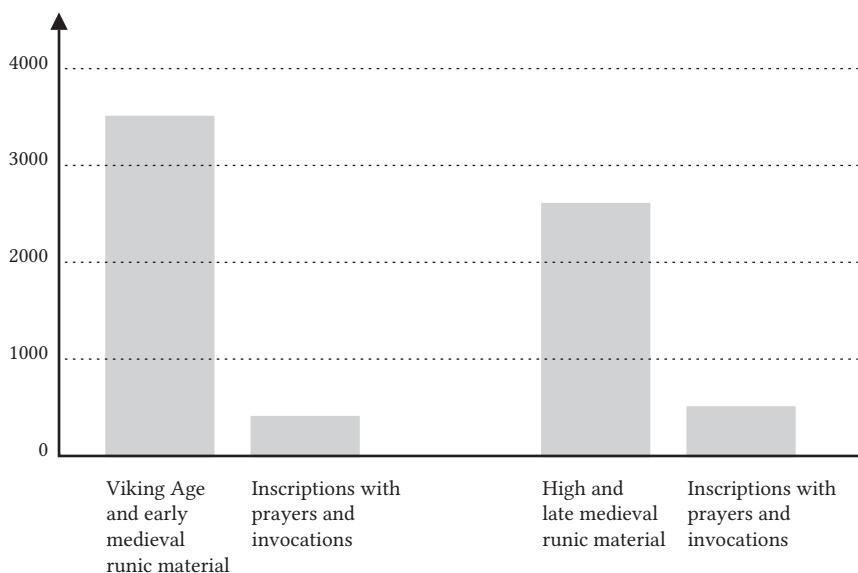


Chart 1. Number of inscriptions containing Christian prayers and invocations in comparison with total number of inscriptions

is around 14 per cent. This division into a fundamentally Viking Age and medieval corpus and the figures presented in chart 1 (which are numbers of inscriptions) are based on the Scandinavian Runic Text Database. The database has been used as the main source for establishing the corpus; updates and corrections as well as information on new finds have as far as possible been taken into consideration.<sup>1</sup>

The material does not indicate any drastic changes in the general proportion of recorded prayers and invocations from the two periods, despite changes in the nature of the material (types of inscription, artifact, etc.). Further analysis of different chronological and regional groups of

<sup>1</sup> I have used the latest version of the database, from 2008, with a few divergences. Certain dating principles remain debatable. There is an overlap between the two groups, which also makes the classification of some inscriptions arbitrary. Inscriptions that have been given a date range of c. 1100–1400 are categorized as high or late medieval; those from c. 1000–1150 as Viking Age/early medieval. For information on new finds, see, e.g., *Danske Runeskrifter*, i.e. <http://runer.ku.dk/>, and the reports (“Rapporter från runverksamheten”) available at <http://www.raa.se/kulturarvet/arkeologi-fornlamningar-och-fynd/runstenar/rapporter/>. It is not possible to discuss all the criteria related to the inclusion or exclusion of individual inscriptions in this article; I have, however, assessed and catalogued each of them individually.

inscriptions would be needed to trace developments along the Viking Age and medieval timeline, but that is a matter for future studies.

Two main categories of prayer and invocation can be distinguished using linguistic criteria: (1) vernacular or vernacularized formulations; (2) quotations and formulas in Church Latin.<sup>2</sup> Besides traditional Latin texts the latter category includes words and expressions that are of Hebrew or Greek origin but were used by the Roman Church; in runic inscriptions these elements are often recorded together with Latin formulas. As an alternative, runic prayers can be categorized according to whether they are freely formulated texts, adaptations of conventional formulas, or fixed quotations. For the purposes of the current study the distinction between vernacular and Latin prayers will suffice. Besides vernacular and Latin prayers I recognise an additional group of around 45 inscriptions that are formulated in the vernacular, but also contain Latin prayer elements or record requests to pray the *Pater Noster* or the *Ave Maria*. Their main features as well as the problems related to the study of inscriptions of mixed linguistic content will be commented upon below.

Determining whether a given text should be categorized as vernacular or Latin can be problematic – factors to consider are spelling, morphology, textual content and co-text (i.e. type of inscription and whether any associated or surrounding text is in the vernacular or in Latin), and the context of the artifact. What should count as explicitly Latin elements in runic inscriptions has been much discussed (see e.g. Knirk 1998, Ertl 1994, Gustavson 1994a, 1994b). Since this study is concerned primarily with formulation, prayers and invocations are defined as vernacular or Latin based chiefly upon their content and the textual context in which they are found, although spelling variants and grammatical forms have also been taken into account. The criteria for recognising a text as “vernacular” are perhaps broader than in some previous studies. In addition to clearly vernacular formulations this group includes various sacred names and Christian terms that either appear within a vernacular context or are recorded in a form that does not automatically imply direct Latin input. The Latin group consists of religious texts of various length, some of which consist of (series of) sacred names in Latin form. Inscriptions that

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Formula’ is in this study used to denote certain standard phrases – in the vernacular or in Latin – that are repeated in various inscriptions. They may follow more or less fixed patterns of wording, but they also allow for some variation in content and structure. ‘Formulation’ is a general term used to describe the wording and composition of runic inscriptions; it covers freely formulated texts as well as different types of formula and quotation.

demonstrate mixed features with regard to their form and content belong in the third (combined) group, mentioned above. A different approach would be to consider the memorized quotations of *Ave Maria* and *Pater Noster*—recognisable as such because used within a predominantly vernacular context—as loan-words or vernacularized phrases. The use of the *Ave Maria* and the *Pater Noster* as conventional prayer formulas and the occurrence of the Latin titles of prayers in vernacular contexts will be discussed in the section on Latin prayer formulas.

Contextual considerations are important when setting up different groups of inscriptions. Indeed, one and the same element may be included in either the vernacular or the Latin group depending upon the way it is used in a particular inscription. The name of the archangel Michael, Old Norse *Mikjáll* (recorded with a number of variant spellings in runes), can serve as an example. On the one hand, we have vernacular prayers like *Mikjáll gæti ond hans*<sup>3</sup> ‘May Michael watch over his spirit’, recorded on the Ängby rune-stone (U 478) or *Guð hjalpi sál hans ok sankta Mikjáll* ‘May God and Saint Michael help his soul’ on the Klemensker stone 4 from Bornholm (DR 402). In both inscriptions the name is recorded as **mihel**. According to Wessén and Jansson (*SRI*, 7: 298) this may reflect a pronunciation of the fricative consonant, [ç], corresponding to Latin *ch* in *Michael*. The prayer on the Klemensker stone addresses × **sata** × **mihel**, *sankta Mikjáll* ‘Saint Michael’—as do some other prayers on Danish and Gotlandic rune-stones. The use of *sanktus/sankta* (also recorded with variant spellings) is of interest in the present context; we are dealing with a word of foreign origin but in the runic inscriptions concerned it can be understood as a vernacularized element. Indeed, on the Klemensker stone *sankta* modifies masculine *Mikjáll*, a usage that can perhaps be compared to that of other loan-words signifying titles, like *herra* ‘master, lord’ (Jacobsen and Moltke in *DR, Text*, col. 706).

In contrast to these examples, we find *Michael* (**mikael**) and the names of the other archangels on a medieval folded lead plate of unknown origin (A 284). The inscription contains Latin words and phrases, some of which appear corrupt. In this context we may certainly consider the name *Michael* as an element of a Latin inscription. Other sacred names,

<sup>3</sup> For the sake of consistency edited texts of Scandinavian runic inscriptions are given in normalized Old West Norse, taken in the first instance from the Scandinavian Runic Text Database, though also checked against corpus editions or other available publications. Transliterations too follow in general the database, with modifications such as bows for bind-runes. Also English translations are in the first instance taken from the database, but have on occasion been altered slightly or improved.



for example *Jesus* and *Maria*, may similarly find their place either in the vernacular or the Latin group. *Jesus* used together with *Kristr* can be taken as a vernacularized element (Old Norse *Jésús Kristr*), whereas *Jesus Kristus* and *Jesus Nazarenus* can be considered Latin elements, although this would also depend upon the context they appear in. If contextual elements are lacking, the classification will simply have to rely on the recorded forms of names and, where applicable, the use of declensional endings (cf., e.g., **petrus/pætrus** *Petrus* vs. **petr/pætær** *Pétr*).

As expected, vernacular prayers completely dominate the Viking Age and early medieval material (c. 450 instances). They are recorded on raised runic monuments and early Christian gravestones; in addition there are a few possible examples on loose items. Vernacular prayers also account for almost 50 per cent (c. 240 instances) of preserved high and late medieval runic prayers and invocations, which occur in inscriptions on medieval gravestones, in stave and stone churches, on church furniture, and on a variety of loose items. Even if we exclude fragmentary or questionable evidence—for instance, several Gotlandic gravestone inscriptions which in their present state contain only vernacular formulations, but may originally have included Latin elements—the ratio is still around 43 per cent. The general proportion of preserved vernacular prayers in the medieval material is not altered by the exclusion of inscriptions that simply refer to the act of saying prayers (most notable in Gotlandic gravestone inscriptions), which could be interpreted as implicit references to the conventional *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria*. On the other hand, inscriptions of this type sometimes incorporate complete prayers in the vernacular or combine vernacular prayers and Latin elements. Overall, vernacular formulations continued to form a significant part of what might be termed “the runic prayer language” even after the era of the traditional runestone. Whether or not medieval vernacular prayers formed an unbroken link with the traditions of the Viking Age is less clear, and a question to which I shall return below.

Latin prayers, invocations and blessings are very much a phenomenon of the High and Late Middle Ages, and they account for around 41 per cent of the material (c. 200 instances). They occur in the same contexts as inscriptions with vernacular prayers, i.e. on church buildings, gravestones, church furniture, and loose items. To the corpus we can add one relatively early example of *Ave Maria*, **āue maria**, recorded on a grave slab from Gretlanda (Vg 164), dated to the end of the eleventh century and thus belonging to the group of early medieval grave monuments.

In the mixed group of runic prayers and invocations we find a rune-

stone from Backgården (Vg 76, c. 1100) which refers to the praying of the *Pater (Noster)*, **pat ær : reṭ : h[-ær]ium : atbiþia : bat[ær]** ‘It is right for everyone to pray the *Pater (Noster)*’. There is a further uncertain case on a fragmentary eleventh-century stone inscription from Öland (Öl 44). The stone has a four-word vernacular prayer *Guð hjalpi sálu hans* and a sequence **lis : iki**, which has been interpreted *Les Ave* ‘read Hail (Mary)’ (Brate in *SRI*, 1: 113). The use of both vernacular and Latin elements is a phenomenon found mainly in gravestone inscriptions from Gotland and parts of mainland Sweden, but occasional examples are known from other contexts (church walls and furnishings, loose items).

### Vernacular prayers and invocations

Vernacular prayers from the late Viking Age and the early medieval period tend to be variations and modifications of the common formula *Guð hjalpi ǫnd/sál(u) hans* (or: *hennar/þeira*) ‘May God help his (or: her/their) spirit/soul’. The composition of the prayer has been analysed in various studies and will not be re-examined here (on structural and content-related variations, see Zilmer 2012 with references). Previous scholarship has also tried to trace the origin of the formula through theological analysis of its components and core message. There has been discussion of the extent to which the prayers recorded on rune-stones may have been influenced by elements from the Latin liturgy of the dead; although some indirect influence has been identified, direct borrowings are not very evident (Beskow 1994, cf. Gschwantler 1998). Certain features of runic prayers have been interpreted as evidence of popular religiosity (Gschwantler 1998; see also Williams 1996a, 1996b).

The origin of *Guð hjalpi ǫnd/sál(u) hans* has thus far remained unexplained. It is conceivable that the formula stems from prayers originally designed for missionary purposes. Prayers of this type may first have been introduced into other Germanic languages as a means of spreading the Christian message and reached Scandinavia by different paths (Gschwantler 1998, 738, 743 f.; cf. Segelberg 1972, 162, 170–76). Although the number of vernacular rune-stone prayers found outside the core area in central Sweden remains limited, variants of the formula can be traced in different parts of Scandinavia. This would indicate independent manifestations of the tradition, though possibly modelled on one common source. At the same time, the analysis of variation in prayer formulations and their regional distribution shows runic prayers to have been dynamic elements of vernacular tradition rather than the formalized tools of Christian mission

(Zilmer 2012). The oral context around the prayers is of significance — they function as immediate appeals and the inscriptions refer to the reciting of prayers (Zilmer 2009, Palm 2006). This is well illustrated by the inscription on the Berga stone (U 947), with its statement: *Nú er sál sagt svá: hjalpi Guð* ‘This is now said for (his) soul: may God help’.

During the Viking Age and the early medieval period vernacular prayers are first and foremost a rune-stone phenomenon. Nearly 400 instances are recorded on raised stones, boulders and bare rock; close to 70 per cent of this material originates from two central Swedish provinces, Uppland and Södermanland. Vernacular prayers also occur on early Christian grave monuments (up to 50 instances, if fragmentary evidence and a few questionable cases are included) and the odd loose item. As an example of the latter may be mentioned the inscription on a walking stick from Schleswig (DR Schl4), dated to the eleventh century. On two adjacent sides of the stick, A and D, the same prayer is repeated, albeit with different spelling, which may suggest different carvers or a practice situation: **krist : haba suia · harbara · | kris- × hialb × suein × harbara ·** *Kristr hjalpi Svein harpara* ‘May Christ help Sveinn Harper’. A whetstone from Sigtuna (U Fv1984;257) carries a prayer containing the formula *Guð hjalpi: kup · hia-... | ant · han-*. This artifact may date from the second half of the eleventh century, although it has by some been assigned to the twelfth or even later.

The use of similar prayers on raised rune-stones and early Christian grave monuments emphasizes some of the connections and overlapping features between the two types of monument. As is well known, rune-stones and grave monuments from the late Viking Age and the early medieval period formed part of a broader commemorative tradition, at least in parts of Scandinavia (cf., e.g., Ljung 2009, 195 f.). Sometimes it can be difficult to distinguish one type of monument from the other typologically. At the same time, one might expect that due to their closer connection to sites of early churches and Christian burials, grave monuments would have represented a more established form of religious practice, with possible consequences for the verbal formulation. This is not, however, borne out by the evidence. Inscriptions on grave monuments reflect formulations known from Viking Age rune-stones, with some adaptations or additions probably due to memorial type and burial practice. Such reflection is clear, for instance, in the material from the province of Östergötland where we find nearly thirty vernacular prayers on early Christian grave monuments, although several are only fragmentarily recorded. On an eleventh-century stone from Skänninge (Ög 239) we thus find the traditional

prayer *Guð hjalpi sálu þeira beggja* ‘May God help both of their souls’. The commemorative formula identifies the stone as a grave slab by pointing out that it was laid by the commissioner, not raised (*lagði stein þenna* ‘laid this stone’).

There is, however, one significant difference between the wording of the prayers on rune-stones and early Christian grave monuments. The rune-stone prayers employ both *sál* og *qnd*, which judging from the overall material were more or less interchangeable, notwithstanding certain regional fashions and carver-related preferences can be observed. The term *qnd* is virtually absent from prayers on grave monuments, insofar as this can be determined (i.e. leaving aside fragmentary evidence). Exceptions are: Ög 139† from Västra Tollstad church (*Guð hjalpi qnd ...* ‘May God help (his) spirit’), Sö 356 from Eskilstuna (*Gu[ð hjalpi] qnd hans [ok] Gu[ðs móðir] ok þe[ira manna] sem gera létu* ‘May God and God’s mother help his spirit and (the spirit) of those men who had (this) made’), Vg 105 from Särestad (*[Guð] hjalpi qnd hans ok sú helga sankta María* ‘May God and the holy Saint Mary help his spirit’), and N 187 from Årdal church (*Hjalpi Guð qndu ...* ‘May God help (his) spirit’). These exceptions may possibly be due to regional customs. Nevertheless, it is of interest that prayers on grave monuments that are more or less contemporary with the rune-stones by and large do not record *qnd*. This could be a discourse-related feature, possibly motivated by the type of monument.

The composition and contents of vernacular prayers and invocations originating from the High and Late Middle Ages are more varied. It is a point of discussion whether certain earlier and later vernacular prayers can be viewed as links within a relatively stable tradition. I noted above that rune-stones and early Christian grave monuments make use of prayers of the same type. That the later material shows the continuing use of vernacular prayers of similar composition to those earlier ones is perhaps even more significant. Formulas of the type *Guð hjalpi qnd/sál(u) hans* (with modifications) were not restricted to the Viking Age and early medieval period but also make their appearance in high and late medieval inscriptions, for example on grave monuments and in stone and stave churches. There they could be used alone or together with other formulas.

The basic four-word formula is found on a twelfth-century grave monument from Vrigstad (Sm 83): *Guð hjalpi sálu han[s]*. A lost medieval gravestone from Hopperstad stave church (N 390†), seems to have carried a prayer addressing *Guð dróttinn* ‘Lord God’ and naming the person for whose soul the prayer was made. According to a seventeenth-century drawing it stated: + **koþ trotin hialli ia!o** + **kætila** + *Guð dróttinn*

*hjalpi sálu Ketils*. A medieval stone from Selje (N 419) contains a more all-embracing prayer to Christ and adds the adverb *vel* ‘well’: *Kristr, hjalp oss vel* ‘Christ, help us well’.<sup>4</sup>

Certain prayers may be expanded by soliciting divine assistance for the person(s) responsible for carving the inscription or making the monument. A well-known example comes from Hopperstad stave church (N 393), and the prayer also expresses the expectation that people will read the runes that have been carved: *Dróttinn hjalpi þeim manni, er þessar rúnar reist, svá þeim, er þær ræðr* ‘May the Lord help the man who carved these runes; likewise him who reads them’.<sup>5</sup>

Other vernacular prayers in runic inscriptions from the High and Late Middle Ages may follow similar patterns but use different verbs. We find: (*Guð*) *signi* ‘(God) bless’, *náði* ‘be gracious’, *geymi* ‘protect’, *blessi* ‘bless’, *gæti* ‘protect/watch over’, *gefi* ‘give’, *sé* ‘see’, etc. carved on a wide range of objects.<sup>6</sup> Variation in the structure and components of prayers is not an innovative feature in the later medieval inscriptions. As mentioned above, such variation is well documented in prayers on rune-stones and early Christian grave monuments. What is new in the material from the High and Late Middle Ages is the combination of various formulations on one and the same item. The four sides of a mid-thirteenth-century runic stick from Bryggen (B 13) contain prayers to God, St. Mary, and all God’s saints together with the invocation of several individual saints. The prayers use different verbs and demonstrate varying structure – besides *hjalpi* (as in: *Hjalpi mér Klemetr, hjalpi mér allir Guðs helgir ...* ‘Help me, Clement, help me, all of Gods holy (men) [= saints]’), we find *gefi* (*Guð gefi oss byr ok gæfu María* ‘May God give us good wind, and Mary good luck’), *gæti* (*Allir helgir menn, gæti mín nótt ok dag, lífs míns ok sálu* ‘May all saints protect me by night and day, my life [= body] and soul’) and *sé* and *signi* (*Guð sé mik ok signi* ‘May God see me and bless me’). Parts of the inscription are incidentally carved using coded runes of varying design.

From Kaupanger stave church comes a different kind of variation. There we find three instances of the simple prayer *Guð gæti* ‘May God protect’, rendered with different spellings. A 85 has: **kup gæ**, A 86: **gub g**, A 87: **gud gæte**. A 85 and A 86 occur on the same pillar and are incomplete,

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., N 346, N 54 and N 42. Cf. G 104B and G 108.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Bo NIYR;1, DR 347, N 411, N 478. Cf. Sm 26, N 506 (with *Guð signi* ‘God bless’) and N 149 (with *Guð blessi* ‘God bless’).

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Sm 54, Sm 117†, Vg 144, Nā 20, DR 173, N 22†, N 128†, N 368. Several inscriptions from Gotland, Bryggen in Bergen and elsewhere in Norway record vernacular prayers of this type with different verbs.

although they might be considered to be abbreviations; A 87 is two pillars away from them. The three inscriptions are obviously carved by different people, as the form of the runes makes evident, and most likely document successive attempts at reproduction or copying of the same text. The various spellings of ‘God’ could, however, reflect different attempts at arriving at an acceptable rendering of this word in runes.

As these examples show, vernacular prayers with wording similar to the *Guð hjalpi* formula occur in various Norwegian inscriptions. We also find parallels in the Danish, mainland Swedish and Gotlandic material. Given that in Norway use of the prayer *Guð hjalpi ond/sál(u) hans* is limited in the earlier inscriptions, we may here be dealing with a local development in high and late medieval runic tradition. At the same time, this may be a matter of chance, since the overall number of Norwegian rune-stones and early Christian grave monuments is modest.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of whether later medieval prayers in Norway represent a modified version of earlier prayer practices or an independent phase of religious expression, it is significant that vernacular formulas are well documented in the high and late medieval inscriptions there. The possibility of tracing continuing or overlapping practices is greater in the case of later medieval runic grave monuments from the Swedish provinces of Östergötland, Småland and Västergötland where we also have ample evidence of the use of prayers on rune-stones and early Christian grave monuments. To these we can add the island of Gotland, where vernacular prayers occur on (picture-stone shaped) rune-stones dating from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a custom continued in the runic inscriptions placed on later medieval grave monuments.<sup>8</sup>

Other types of vernacular runic prayer and invocation are known from different parts of Scandinavia; these differ from the *Guð hjalpi* pattern and introduce new elements into the vernacular prayer language. Various later medieval runic prayers refer to the act of prayer itself by employing the verb *biðja* ‘pray’. Possible earlier examples of *biðja* occur on two fragmentary rune-stones, from Södermanland (Sö Fv1954;19) and Väst-

<sup>7</sup> For examples of prayers, see N 63, N 187 as well as N 185† and N 237†.

<sup>8</sup> Late medieval runic inscriptions in Gotland could arguably be seen as separate from the rest of the Scandinavian tradition. Christian runic inscriptions from Gotland—from the Viking Age as well as the whole medieval period—nevertheless share many common features with the material elsewhere. The late medieval Gotlandic inscriptions are included in the survey in order to provide a comprehensive overview of developments within the runic prayer tradition in different parts of Scandinavia.

Table 1. Examples of formulations with the verb *biðja* ‘pray’

<i>Ek bið(r) / bið ek ...</i> ‘I pray/beg ...’	Vg 163, grave slab, thirteenth century ( <i>Herra Guð bið ek signa ...</i> ‘I beg God the Lord to bless ...’); G 104A, church-wall inscription, fifteenth century ( <i>Sóta herra Jésús Kristus, ek biðr þik fyrir þá synd(?) ok *dróvilsi þín sóta móður frú María mæR</i> ‘Sweet Lord Jesus Christ, I pray to you for(?) your sweet mother Lady Mary the maid that sin and distress ...’)
<i>Hverr sem biðr fyrir ...</i> ‘whosoever prays for ...’ / <i>N.N. bið fyrir ...</i> ‘N.N. prays for ...’	G 3, grave slab, second half of fourteenth century ( <i>Hverr sem biðr fyrir henna[r]</i> ... ‘Whosoever prays for her ...’); DR EM85;432A, church-wall inscription, twelfth century ( <i>Thomás prestR bið fyrir mik</i> ‘Priest Thomás pray for me’)
<i>Biðið (bónir) fyrir ...</i> ‘pray (prayers) for ...’	G 12, grave slab, c. 1349 ( <i>Bið[i]ð bónir ...</i> ‘Pray prayers ...’); G 33, grave slab, fourteenth century ( <i>Biðið fyrir þeira sálum</i> ‘Pray for their souls’); N 264, monastery inscription, fourteenth century ( <i>Biðið fyri[r]   Biðið fyrir sál [Randviðs(?)/Ragnvalds(?)] ...</i> ‘Pray for   Pray for Randviðr’s(?)/Ragnvaldr’s(?) soul ...’)
<i>Biðið góðs fyrir ...</i> ‘pray for good (i.e. mercy) for ...’	G 282, grave slab, fifteenth century? ( <i>Ér biðið góðs fyrir Margítu sál af Otheim, á mik</i> ‘Pray for good for Margíta of Otheimr’s soul, [who?] owns me’); G 322, grave slab, 1230–60 ( <i>Biðið góðs fyrir hans sál</i> ‘Pray well for his soul’)
<i>Biðjum oss ...</i> ‘we pray for ourselves ...’	G 128, church inscription, sixteenth century ( <i>Vér biðjum oss ...</i> ‘We pray for ourselves ...’)
<i>Lát biðja fyrir ...</i> ‘have people pray for ...’	G 201, grave slab, fourteenth century ( <i>Ok hon bað: lá[t] biðja fyrir hans sál</i> ‘And she ordered: Have people pray for his soul’)

manland (Vs 4). In inscriptions from the High and Late Middle Ages we find a variety of formulations that employ this verb (see table 1).

The majority of these formulations are known from Gotlandic grave-stone and church-building inscriptions, but they also appear in Norway, Denmark and mainland Sweden. As well as in wholly vernacular inscriptions we find *biðja* used in connection with recitation of the *Pater Noster*. It is also found on a thirteenth-century wooden stick from Bryggen

(N 289) that may have functioned as a rosary. In line C we have: ... þik ok biðja mér miskunnar viðr þik ok Maríu, móður, ‘... you and pray for mercy for me from you and Mary, (your) mother’. The beginnings of lines A and B have been compared to the *Kyrie* (*Kyrie eleison* and *Christe eleison* respectively). The reference to *María móðir* in line C has been linked to *Sancta Maria Dei genitrix*, and that part of the inscription interpreted as an introduction to the *Ave Maria* (Liestøl in *NlyR*, 6: 51; cf. Spurkland 2012, 191). At the same time, the mention of Mary the mother may also accord with vernacular invocations of Mary as God’s mother that are known from contemporary as well as earlier runic material. The inscription as a whole exhibits a blend of expressions that may have their background in Latin texts adapted for vernacular prayer. This is significant, since in general medieval runic material does not contain many examples of the reformulation in the vernacular of specific Latin religious texts. When identifiable scriptural, liturgical and other general religious quotations are carved in runes, they are usually given in Latin (see, however, the runic stick B 524 containing an Old Norse version of a short passage from the *Passio Sancti Andreae Apostoli*).<sup>9</sup>

Looking at possible lines of textual development and changes from earlier practice, we observe that the later medieval vernacular prayers make greater use of individual reference. Personal names are documented in around 6 per cent of the vernacular prayers from the Viking Age and early medieval period. The common strategy at this time was to formulate prayers with personal pronouns in the third person, although the commemorative formulas normally identify the deceased by the name. In the High and Late Middle Ages personal names are frequently included in vernacular prayers on Gotlandic gravestones, and occasional examples can be found elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> They are also used in prayers known from Norwegian and Gotlandic church walls and furnishings. The approximate percentage of prayers with personal names in the Gotlandic material is 35;<sup>11</sup> the proportion would be even higher if we excluded all fragmentary and uncertain evidence where the potential use of personal names cannot be established (on the vocabulary of Gotlandic inscriptions, see Snædal 2002, 184–88). In addition to personal names, some Gotlandic prayers include

<sup>9</sup> In addition there are non-religious Latin inscriptions from the High and Late Middle Ages, frequently quoting poetry.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Ög 49, Sm 54, Sm 117†, DR 103.

<sup>11</sup> The percentage remains the same if inscriptions from the combined group are added – i.e. vernacular prayers including references to *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria* or some other Latin elements.



the occasional place-name reflecting the common custom of identifying an individual by their place of origin or abode recorded in other Gotlandic runic inscriptions. A fourteenth-century grave slab from Lärbro church (G 295) has the prayer: *Bið ið góðs fyrir B[óthe]iðar(?) sá[l] af Bjergi, som hér hvílisk* ‘Pray for good for the soul of Bótheiðr(?) of Bjerg, who rests here’. In the Norwegian material – comprising inscriptions on gravestones, on church walls and furniture, and on various loose items – the percentage of prayer formulations containing personal names is around 16.<sup>12</sup> In this case, the number would be higher if we excluded examples which cannot be shown with certainty to be prayers. Various formulations are used, e.g., *Statt í friði Guðs, Ása* ‘Stand in God’s peace, Ása’ (N 46, Lom stave church) or *Haldi hinn helgi Dróttinn hǫnd yfir Brynjólfs ǫndu* ‘May the holy Lord hold (His) hand over Brynjólfr’s spirit’ (N 319, Urnes stave church).

The inclusion of personal names in prayer formulas reflects certain general features of the discourse of runic inscriptions in the High and Late Middle Ages. For one thing, we find such names in the memorial language of contemporary grave monuments (as in that of the Viking Age rune-stones and the funerary monuments of the Early Middle Ages). Further, they form part of the personal graffiti appearing in stone and stave churches where importance is given to recording one’s presence in the church. The inclusion of personal names can also be motivated by a wish to focus on the person(s) who made or owned a particular object. This is exemplified by a thirteenth-century baptismal font from Hossmo church (Sm 164): *Ek bið þik ... at þú biðr nafnliga fyrir þann mann, sem m[i]k gerði; Jakob hét h[ann]* ‘I beg you ... that you pray for the man who made me, and mention his name; he was called Jakob’. However, whereas earlier prayers tend to mention individual family members,<sup>13</sup> their later medieval counterparts may stress the fact that they relate to a broader community of Christians. Personal references can be combined with the idea that those commemorated are members of Christian society.<sup>14</sup> Some prayer formulas are for example intended for the benefit of all Christian souls, as is the last phrase in the inscription on the fourteenth-century

<sup>12</sup> This only refers to formulations that are intended to benefit the person identified; the inclusion of sacred names is not taken as evidence of the use of personal names.

<sup>13</sup> See, however, the rune-stone from Tierp church (U 1143), *Guð dróttinn hjalpi ǫnd [all]ra kristinna* ‘May the Lord God help the spirits of all Christians’; also possibly the Grinda stone (Sö 165), *Kristr hjalp ǫnd kristinna(?)* ‘May Christ help the spirit of Christians(?)’.

<sup>14</sup> An early example is the Folsberga stone (U 719), *[K]ristr láti koma ǫnd Tuma/Tumma í ljós ok paradísi ok í þann heim bezta kristnum* ‘May Christ let Tumi’s/Tummi’s spirit enter into light and paradise and into the best world for Christians’.

grave slab from Silte church (G 63): *Kristr, Maríu sonr, náði ǫllum sem hér hvílask undir, ok ǫllum kristnum sálum* ‘Christ, son of Mary, be gracious to all who rest hereunder, and to all Christian souls’.

A separate category included in this study comprises sacred names. The intention behind some of the references concerned remains uncertain, especially where single names—for example, *María, Nikulás*—are recorded. Are these inscriptions to be taken as invocations calling upon divine assistance, or are they personal names (i.e. maker’s or owner’s formulas or records of someone’s presence in a church)? The question also arises whether certain sacred names should be categorized as vernacular or Latin elements (see the discussion above). I have ignored inscriptions that do not offer a clear indication of whether the name is sacred or simply that of some individual. The case of *María*, however, is different, since we do not normally encounter it as a personal name in Scandinavian runic inscriptions. In the Middle Ages the name was sacred and therefore unsuitable for ordinary people. There is, though, the odd exception. According to *Necrologium Lundense* a twelfth-century nun in Lund named *Ása* was called *María* (DGP, 1: col. 910). A lost twelfth-century runic gravestone from Öretyd (Sm 117†) seems to offer a further example: *Guð, Maríu sonr, signi hústrú Maríu sál af Áslabúðum* ‘May God, Mary’s son, bless the soul of housewife María of Áslabúðir’. Inscriptions containing the name *María* are thus generally taken as invocations of the Virgin Mary. Excluded, however, are several doubtful examples which according to earlier interpretations consist of runic Mary monograms. More recent investigations have shown that some of these monograms are not runic at all. Yet other inscriptions do have *María* carved partly or completely in bind-runes—each case has to be assessed separately.<sup>15</sup>

It is also possible that the name *Maria* might have functioned as a drastic abbreviation of the Latin prayer *Ave Maria*. That would make it natural to include such inscriptions in the Latin group. However, we also find the name used in wholly vernacular contexts where it clearly cannot stand for *Ave Maria*. A vernacular invocation of Mary is found in the formulation *Hjalp(i) María* ‘Mary help’ (e.g. G 104A, G 105). Further examples of vernacular formulations also need to be considered, including: *sálug María* ‘Blessed Mary’ (Hs 19), *Guð, María* ‘God, Mary’ (A 27), *María, móðir Guðs* ‘Mary, mother of God’ (G 142, cf. G 383, N 289), *María mæx* ‘the maid Mary’ (Bo NIYR;1, cf. G 104A), *Guð minn ok hin helga María*

<sup>15</sup> The assessments are based either on personal examination of inscriptions or examinations undertaken by other scholars (as, for example, those in Knirk 1992, 13; 1998, 484).

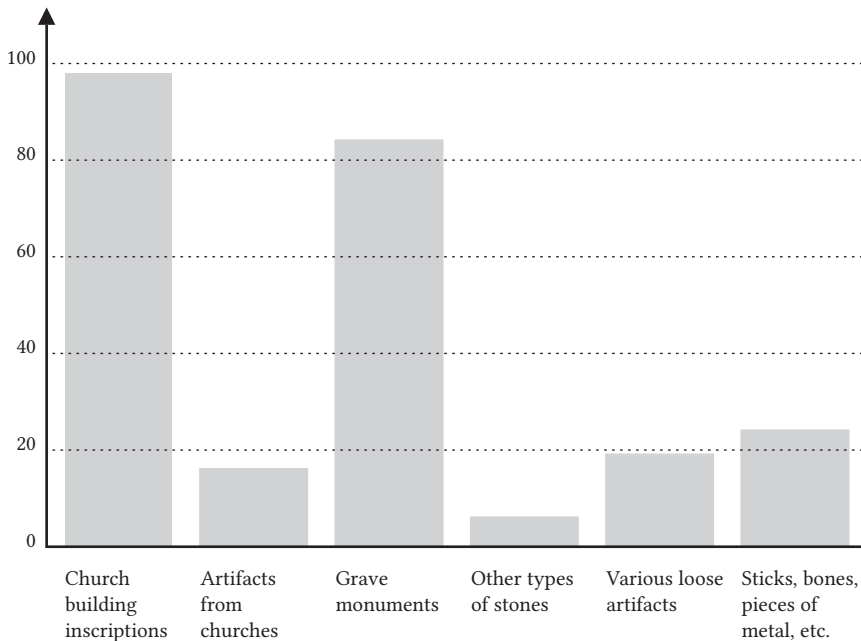


Chart 2. Types of artifact with high and late medieval prayers and invocations in the vernacular

‘My God and the holy Mary’ (N 396). To these later medieval examples we can add the fact that vernacular prayers from the Viking Age and the early Middle Ages can be addressed to *sankta María*. Furthermore, we find the prayer *Guð hjalpi ok Mar[í]a qnd Sibb[a] ...* ‘May God and Mary help Sibbi’s spirit ...’ on a rune-stone from Uppland (U 558). In the light of these and other examples, there is no reason to suppose use of the name *Maria* must imply a reference to the *Ave Maria*. On the other hand, as noted earlier, the context in which the name stands is an important factor in determining whether it is to be regarded as a vernacular or Latin element—compare, for example, the use of the name in B 1 (where it appears by itself but in conjunction with vernacular words and phrases: *Eysteinn á mik* and *hermaðr*) and N 634 (with Latin formulas: *O Alpha, Christus et Alpha* | *Jesus et Maria ...*).

To conclude this overview of medieval prayers and invocations in the vernacular, it is important to say a few words about the contexts in which the texts are found and the types of artifact that bear them (see chart 2; the numbers are absolute, not percentages).

The largest category consists of prayers and invocations found carved

into stone or wooden church buildings (on the walls or other parts of the structure), either inside or out. These account for around 40 per cent of the total material. The choice of runes in such an environment is noteworthy. Different types of inscription, not just prayers and invocations, coexist and interact within the same space. The specific locations of all types of church inscription can be combined with the analysis of their varying spheres of usage. Prayers form one type where it would be interesting to look more specifically at possible distinctions or overlaps between public and private spheres, and discuss instances of clerical usage and examples of private devotion. Jones (2010) has noted that vernacular prayers in Norwegian stave churches are commonly found in those parts of the church that the congregation had access to (on contextual aspects of church inscriptions, see also Gustavson 1991).

Most of the vernacular prayers and invocations carved into church buildings are found in Norway, Gotland and Denmark, with occasional examples from mainland Sweden. Almost two-thirds of the Norwegian material originates from stave churches, complemented by inscriptions from Nidaros Cathedral and a few other stone structures. However, vernacular prayers and invocations from stone churches dominate in the overall Scandinavian corpus—due to the fact that numerous inscriptions have been incised into the plaster of Gotlandic and Danish churches. It is not always easy to determine how far inscriptions in churches are intended as supplications (see the discussion of sacred names above). In addition, there are casual graffiti in the form of personal names which might have functioned as prayers in the sense that certain people wanted to mark their presence in the church as a way of seeking divine assistance. Since the motivation underlying such personal graffiti is unclear, they have been omitted from the corpus.

The second largest group comprises prayers and invocations occurring on high and late medieval grave monuments. Including fragmentary and questionable examples they form about 34 per cent of the total. A large proportion come from Gotland, but vernacular prayers are also recorded on grave monuments from other parts of Sweden (Östergötland, Småland, Västergötland, Närke, Bohuslän) as well as Denmark and Norway. I have emphasized the continuing significance of such prayers—of both traditional and innovative type. This particular group demonstrates clearly that vernacular prayers were not replaced by Latin equivalents, as might perhaps be expected given that medieval grave inscriptions do certainly make use of Latin burial formulas (e.g., *hic iacet*) or adaptations of these (*hér liggr* ‘here lies’). In fact, there are roughly six times as many vernacular

prayers and invocations preserved as Latin ones. In addition to medieval grave monuments, I have set up a small group comprising a few stones of unknown function or origin and individually found bricks.

The third largest group consists of prayers, invocations and blessings recorded on various small items such as wooden sticks, pieces of bone, and metal. I have separated these from other types of loose object, in that they had no other initial primary function than as a surface for writing and thus gained their supplicatory or manipulative function from the texts that were inscribed on them or the practices and rituals that were associated with them. In comparison with the two biggest groups the number of these inscriptions is limited; they account for around 9 per cent of the total corpus. The material is mostly Norwegian, with finds from Bryggen and other parts of the country; in addition there are sporadic examples from other parts of Scandinavia. The objects and their texts have to be examined with a view to identifying individual manipulative practices. At the same time, the general features of the devotional language of this third group do not differ significantly from other contexts. There are a number of inscriptions containing simple prayers, invocations and blessings—addressed, for example to *Guð* and using verbs like *blessi*, *signi*, *gæti*, etc.—which do not reveal any deeper concerns or underlying manipulative purposes. As stated on a thirteenth-century runic stick from Bryggen (B 403): *Guð, er alt má, blessi Sigurð prest, er mik á* ‘May God, who presides over all things, bless Sigurðr the priest, who owns me’. Here we even have a cleric carving or commissioning a blessing with runes on a wooden stick. A good example of a rather long vernacular inscription of this type expressing religious devotion is the above-mentioned N 289 from Bryggen which contains *inter alia* phrases that can be compared to the *Kyrie*. In some cases the inscriptions leave it unclear whether someone is simply practising their writing skills or expressing personal piety. Circumstances seem to be quite different when it comes to the inscribing of Latin texts on the same types of object, which are also a more numerous category (see below).

The fourth largest group with almost the same proportion as the previous one, i.e. nearly 8 per cent, contains prayers and invocations written on non-ecclesiastical loose artifacts. This category includes everyday objects that were for some reason or other inscribed with runic texts. We find vernacular invocations, blessings and prayers on wooden vessels, rings, knife handles, whetstones and yet other artifacts. An example is the prayer to God on a bone hairpin from Mære church (N 534), where the text can be interpreted as a type of protective formula: *Gæti Guð þess er ek olmaða*

‘May God protect him whom I enraged’. On a worked wooden fragment, perhaps part of a knife sheath, from Bryggen (B 591) we find the sequence **kupmriusua**, which according to one interpretation may contain the personal name *Guðmundr*, but it is perhaps more likely to say *Guð Mariúson(?)* ‘God, Mary’s son’; the **r** in the inscription may in fact be the bind-rune **ar**. The material contains other possible examples of the invoking of Mary; her name may be carved in full (though possibly using bind-runes) or only the initial two or three runes may be given. The function of such inscriptions is unclear.

Finally, we have prayers and invocations preserved on church furnishings and loose items that originate from churches – the fifth group, which accounts for around 6 per cent of the material. In this group we find inscriptions on baptismal fonts, censers, church bells, crucifixes, church door rings and door fittings. From what has been preserved it seems Latin prayers are favoured on certain types of ecclesiastical item, such as church bells. Nevertheless, we also encounter vernacular invocations of, for example, *Guð* and *Jésús Krístr*, and vernacular prayers. A thirteenth-century censer from Fyn (DR 173) records: **: guþ : si**, which stands for *Guð si[gni]*; the rest of the inscription, which consists of a maker’s formula, is in Latin.

### Prayers and invocations in Latin

The other main category of medieval runic prayers and invocations shows evidence of direct input from Church Latin. Typical are inscriptions that contain the prayers *Ave Maria* and *Pater Noster*, but we also find quotations from Scripture or the liturgy or material based on these, as well as different types of incantation and blessing. There are inscriptions that quote the Trinitarian formula *In nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti*, various psalms, litanies (e.g. the *Ordo Commendationis Animae* or the *laudes* litany starting with the words *Christus vincit*, *Christus regnat*, *Christus imperat*), hymns and antiphons (e.g. *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, the *Ecce crucem* antiphon and the Anthem of the Blessed Virgin or the so-called *Five gaude* antiphon). Several inscriptions make use of special acronyms and collections of sacred names and titles, including a variety of the names for God according to the *Alma Chorus Domini*, as well as the names of the apostles, the four evangelists, the archangels, different saints and various biblical figures. The discussion here is limited to the use of the *Ave Maria* and the *Pater Noster*.

Most Latin prayers and invocations appear as fixed quotations,

forming, as they do, core elements of memorized religious expression. However, such quotations can vary: most often only certain clauses of the texts are cited, depending perhaps on what was considered customary or necessary, or simply due to the limitations of the size of, or available writing space on, the artifacts. This variation in length can be best observed in inscriptions that contain parts of the *Ave Maria* and the *Pater Noster*. In the runic material these two prayers are as a rule not quoted in their complete form, as it was known in the Middle Ages.

In its present form the *Ave Maria* is composed of three parts. In the Middle Ages the first two, the so-called scriptural component, were in use—that is, the Angel Gabriel’s words saluting the Virgin (according to Luke 1:28), and the greeting of St. Elizabeth (Luke 1:42). These two salutations could be attached to each other naturally, as the first one has the words *benedicta tu in mulieribus* and the second *benedicta tu inter mulieres* ‘blessed art thou among women’. Regarding the origins of the prayer, there is evidence of the reciting of Marian salutations from the fifth and sixth century onwards, but the use of the joint prayer as an accepted form of private devotion can only be traced from around the mid-eleventh century (Helander 1956, 284). The rise and spread of the joint prayer formula can be connected to series of verses and responses as used in the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. In the period the runic inscriptions reflect, the *Ave Maria* was becoming increasingly popular as a devotional formula in Catholic tradition. Its popularity is also affirmed by the collections of Marian legends that started to appear in the early twelfth century. In the High Middle Ages the prayer was completed by the addition of *Jesus (Christus)*—in apposition to “fruit of thy womb”—and *Amen* (Helander 1956, 285). At the same time it is uncertain whether it was the general custom to include the clause *et benedictus fructus ventris tui* ‘and blessed is the fruit of thy womb’. The third part of the prayer, with the petition for Mary’s intercession, was added at some point in the fifteenth century. It was included in its current form in the Catechism of the Council of Trent of 1566.

The *Pater Noster* also goes under the name *Oratio Dominica*. Two versions of the prayer occur in the New Testament, a shorter one in the Gospel of Luke 11:2–4 and a longer, and more traditional, one in the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew 6:9–13. In both contexts the prayer is given as an instruction on how to pray. The *Pater Noster* consists of an introductory formula and seven petitions, a structure that was followed in the Middle Ages. The difference between the two versions lies primarily in the fact that Luke has only five of the seven petitions (lacking the third

and the seventh). The *Pater Noster* played a central role in the devotional life of the medieval Church. It was part of the Ordinary of the Mass and of most liturgical rites, and it also functioned as a liturgical daily prayer and was used in private devotion.

In the Nordic countries the *Ave Maria* and the *Pater Noster* formed core elements of catechetical religious instruction together with the *Credo* (the Apostles' Creed). Several medieval statutes and laws emphasize the importance of teaching these prayers in the vernacular and describe proper procedures for praying (see Helander 1956, 285; Molland 1968, 130 f.). *The Old Norwegian Homily Book* (AM 619 4°, from c. 1200) contains vernacular interpretations of and commentaries on each of the petitions in the *Pater Noster*, which are cited in Latin (cf. also *The Old Icelandic Homily Book* or *Íslensk hómiljubók*, Stock. Perg. 4° no. 15; see Wisén 1872, 28–35). The commentary starts with the words: “VER fyngium pater noster qui es in celis. Ðat er fva a vára tungu. Faðer var fa er er a himnum” (Indrebø 1931, 153) ‘We sing *Pater Noster qui es in cœlis*. That is, in our language: Our Father which art in heaven’. The same source offers an Old Norse rendering of the *Ave Maria*, as part of a homily for Christmas Day (Indrebø 1931, 33). Vernacular versions of the *Ave Maria* and the *Pater Noster* are also recorded in various fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts (see Kilström 1968, 128 f.; Geete 1907–09, 3–5, 94). It is of some interest in the light of this that Scandinavian runic inscriptions show that the *Pater Noster* and the *Ave Maria* continued to be recited in Latin throughout the Middle Ages. Inscriptions written in the vernacular but containing a request to say the prayers also refer to *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria*. The use of the Latin titles of the prayers is common in vernacular manuscripts as well, as for example in Cod. Ups. C 50 from the latter half of the fifteenth century: “Huru människian skal bidhia til gudh mädh pater noster oc Aue Maria til jomffrw Maria” (Geete 1907–09, 4) ‘How people are to pray to God with the *Pater Noster* and to the virgin Mary with the *Ave Maria*’ — this is followed by vernacular renderings of both prayers.

The numbers of runic *Ave Maria* and *Pater Noster* prayers given in different studies vary according to the classification criteria used and the extent dubious and corrupt evidence is included (cf. Spurkland 2012, 192; Sidselrud 2000 with references). In her examination of the Norwegian material Sidselrud arrives at fifty-seven *Ave Maria* inscriptions (with some additional examples that contain only the name *Maria* in a Latin context) and twenty-one for *Pater Noster* (Sidselrud 2000, 39–46). However, certain inscriptions that are part of Sidselrud’s corpus have to be excluded or should, at the very least, be questioned. These include, for example,



various inscriptions that may or may not contain some (initial) letters of the prayer formulas, dubious Mary monograms, and inscriptions that only consist of the name *Maria* or the first letters thereof, with no clear indication of whether or not it is part of the *Ave Maria*. As discussed above, simple invocations of Mary do not necessarily qualify as renderings of the Latin prayer, since the name was also used in appeals expressed in the vernacular.

The Scandinavian runic material (taken from the Scandinavian Runic Text Database with the addition of a few new finds) contains around ninety *Ave Maria* inscriptions, complete or partial. Eleven of these are categorized here as belonging to the combined group – as well as reciting or referring to the *Ave Maria*, the inscriptions may contain vernacular prayers or speak of the practice of praying. The corpus further includes ten to twelve questionable instances, i.e. inscriptions that contain a sequence of runes possibly suggestive of *Ave*. Also included are inscriptions on two rune-stones from Västergötland (Vg 165 and Vg 221) where the prayer itself is carved in roman letters. Inscriptions that only consist of the name *Maria* have been left out for the reasons stated above. The regional distribution of the material cannot be taken as representative of the spread of the prayer, but results rather from circumstances of preservation and accidents of discovery. Recent finds of *Ave Maria* inscriptions on several small metal amulets and on the walls of various medieval churches have altered the regional distribution somewhat – and more of the same kind may be expected to surface also elsewhere. So far most of the finds registered have been from Norway, Denmark, Västergötland, Gotland and Småland, with a few from other Swedish provinces. The Norwegian material – recorded mainly in churches and on rune-sticks and other wooden items from Bryggen – accounts for over one-third of the total corpus. It should be pointed out that inscriptions which refer in the vernacular to the reciting of the *Ave Maria* or which combine the Latin prayer with vernacular formulas are known chiefly from Gotland, with single finds from Östergötland, Västergötland, Småland, Närke and Denmark.

More than thirty-five *Pater Noster* runic inscriptions are known from Scandinavia. Nineteen of these exhibit some part of the prayer – most frequently the opening words *Pater Noster* – in company with vernacular prayers. Around five are of questionable value. *Pater Noster* inscriptions are known from Norway – which accounts for almost half the overall material – Gotland and Västergötland. Occasional finds occur in Östergötland, Närke and Denmark. Inscriptions that refer to the *Pater Noster* in

Table 2. Examples of inscriptions with the *Ave Maria*

<i>Ave</i>	N 625, runic stick, c. 1300: <b>auē</b> is carved close to the left end of the stick; the writer may have intended to carve a longer part of the prayer but did not complete his task; another possible example is Sö Fv1974;210, on the base of a late medieval(?) stave-tankard, where among various incised lines the sequence of three runes <b>auæ</b> has been identified
<i>Ave Maria</i> <sup>a</sup>	Vg 164, grave slab, end of eleventh century: <b>auē maria</b> ; DR EM85;516B, church-wall inscription, 1150–1300: <b>auē māria</b> ; N 622, base of a stave-tankard, early fifteenth century: <b>+auē māria</b>
<i>Ave Maria gratia</i>	N 531, church-wall inscription: <b>auē māria gracia</b> ; Sm 22, church bell, first half of fourteenth century: <b>afe maria : gracia</b> (with a name of a brother and <i>Jesus Kristus</i> )
<i>Ave Maria gratia plena</i>	Vg 210, church bell, 1228: <b>: aue : maria : gracia : plena :</b> ; G 127, church-wall inscription: <b>afe maraa : garasia : plēna</b>
<i>Ave Maria gratia plena Dominus</i>	DR 50, sword pommel, 1250–1300: <b>auæ : ma : gracia : btæna : þominu</b> , also in roman letters <b>AVE MARIA : O   MR ACIA : PLENA</b>
<i>Ave Maria gratia plena Dominus tecum benedicta tu in mulieribus</i>	N 307, church-wall inscription: <b>auē maria gracia blēna dominus tecum benedicta tu in   mulie</b> ; A 63, wooden plug, fourteenth century: <b>auē maria gracia plena dominus tekum benedicta tu in mulieribus</b>
<i>Ave Maria gratia plena Dominus tecum benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus</i>	N 347, iron door ring: <b>+ hafe maria krasia blēna tomius stekum benatita us in mulieribus æþ be</b>
<i>Ave Maria gratia plena Dominus tecum benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui amen</i>	Sm 82†, church bell, second half of twelfth century: <b>[tikānt : omaiān auē maria : grazia : plina : tominus : tekum : benetikta tū : i mulieribus : æþ benetiktūs fruktūs : uæntriſ tūi amæn :]</b> , with added <i>Dicant omnia</i> ; N 617, runic stick, c. 1250: <b>auē maria gracia plena tominus tekum   benetikta tū in mulieribus æþ benetiktūs   fruktus uentris tui amen</b>

<sup>a</sup> There are inscriptions (church graffiti, inscriptions on loose items) that besides just *Ave* contain only the initial letter(s) of *Maria*.

vernacular contexts are mostly Gotlandic, with a few finds from Västergötland, Norway and Östergötland.

The overall evidence thus shows that the *Ave Maria* in Scandinavian runic inscriptions is usually cited as a prayer, but occasionally the two words are employed as the title of the prayer in connection with vernacular appeals to pray. The *Ave Maria* is more dominant in the overall material than the *Pater Noster*, and it occurs more widely. This does not necessarily indicate a greater spread or popularity of the prayer, but may have to do with the types of evidence that have been preserved, forms of textual culture and contexts of usage. It is nevertheless true that *Ave Maria* inscriptions occur in a wide range of settings: some are ecclesiastical and monumental, others are secular and more casual, yet others relate to popular practices and seem to have practical concerns (cf. Sidselrud 2000, 64–86). This underlines the nature of the *Ave Maria* as a mode of both public and private devotion.

Judging from what has been preserved, runic citations of the *Pater Noster* are less common than is the case with the *Ave Maria*. The prayer is recorded in clerical settings and on small Christian (lead) amulets, with a few finds originating from (seemingly) secular contexts. More than half of the *Pater Noster* inscriptions consist of just the opening word or two of the prayer in connection with vernacular requests to pray. This practice is first and foremost found on medieval grave monuments where references to the prayer seem to be motivated by a particular type of memorial discourse. This is illustrated by the early thirteenth-century gravestone from For church in North Trøndelag (N 536). The stone was made to commemorate a certain *Síra Klemetr*, a priest, and the inscription includes the request: *Biðð Pater Noster fyrir sál hans* ‘Pray the *Pater Noster* for his soul’. It is known that the *Pater Noster* could be recited in the churchyard for the benefit of the deceased; the practice is described together with other devotional acts in indulgence privileges for various churches (*Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, 3: no. 522 from 1395, and 13: no. 67 from 1408; cf. Molland 1968, 131). Medieval runic grave monuments that include an appeal to say the *Pater Noster* for the person commemorated probably reflect the same tradition.

Some of the recorded variants of the two prayers, with illustrative examples, are provided in table 2. The most common variant is as expected the two-word formula *Ave Maria*, which is recorded in more than 40 per cent of the material. The examples in table 2 demonstrate the use of the phrase in a variety of inscriptions. The gravestone from Gretlanda (Vg 164), dating from the end of the eleventh century, provides a rather

Table 3. Examples of inscriptions with the *Pater Noster*

<i>Pater</i>	N 555, church-wall inscription: <b>p·patær</b> ∴; N 557, church-wall inscription: <b>p·patær r</b>
<i>Pater noster</i>	G 372, church-wall inscription, thirteenth century: <b>batr</b> <b>noſtr</b> ; N 79, gravestone: ∴ <b>pater</b> ∴ <b>noster</b> ∴; N 616, runic stick, c. 1170, side C: <b>b</b> <b>batær</b> ∴ <b>nøſtær</b>
<i>Pater noster qui es in cœlis</i>	N 570, church-wall inscription: <b>pater noster ki</b> <b>es</b>   <b>in</b> <b>slis</b>
<i>Pater noster qui es in cœlis sanctificetur</i>	A 173 (N 816), runic stick, 1150–1200: <b>bater</b> · <b>nuster</b> · <b>kui es in seli</b> ∴ <b>santibisetur</b>
<i>Pater noster qui es in cœlis sanctificetur nomen tuum adveniat regnum</i>	N 615, runic stick, c. 1200: <b>pater</b> ∴ <b>noster</b> ∴ <b>kui s</b> <b>in selo</b> ∴ <b>santafisetur</b> ∴ <b>nomen tum</b> ∴ <b>apfeniap</b> <b>reſno[m]</b> ...
<i>Pater noster qui es in cœlis sanctificetur nomen tuum adveniat regnum tuum fiat voluntas tua sicut in cœlo et in terra</i>	A 123, lead cross: · <b>pater n oster</b> · <b>ki es in</b>   <b>celis sanctificetûr</b>   <b>nomen tûum</b> · <b>aduenia tþ</b> <b>regnum tû um f...þ</b>   <b>uoluntas tû</b>   <b>...kuttþ in</b> <b>clo æþ</b>   <b>...rra</b> · (the inscription includes other phrases and formulas, among them <i>Sit super nos! Ab omni malo, amen</i> )
<i>Pater noster qui es in cœlis sanctificetur nomen tuum adveniat regnum tuum fiat voluntas tua sicut in cœlo et in terra panem nostrum cotidianum da nobis odie et dimitte nobis debita nostra sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris et ne nos inducas in temtationem sed libera nos a malo amen</i>	N 53, lead sheet, + <b>patær</b> <b>noſtær</b> <b>kui æs inn</b> <b>celiss</b> ∴ <b>s an̄ktificetur</b> <b>nomen tûuūm ap̄ueniap</b> <b>r/regnum tûum fiaþ</b> <b>uoluntas tua sikup</b>   <b>inn selo æþ inn tærra panæm nosstrum</b> <b>kotid ianum dānobis odie æþ dimitte nobis</b> <b>debitanost ra sikup æþ nos dimittimuss</b> <b>debitoribuss</b> <b>noss triss æþ ne nos inndukass</b> <b>inn tæmtacionæm sæþ li berānos a malo</b> <b>amen</b> (the inscription ends with the names of the four evangelists)

early example, bearing in mind that it was only around this time that the *Ave Maria* as a devotional formula gained popularity. A few fourteenth-century church-bell inscriptions from Västergötland (Vg 222, Vg 245, Vg 247, Vg 253) complement the phrase *Ave Maria* with *Jesus*, following practice in the High Middle Ages. Besides *Ave Maria* we find several inscriptions with either just *Ave* or *Ave Maria gratia*. When it comes to the

former, the interpretation *Ave* seems justified in a good number of cases (cf. e.g.  $\widehat{\text{aue}}$  in N 343,  $\text{aue}$  in A 105 and  $\widehat{\text{aui}}$  in A 233). Sometimes we cannot be certain the carved sequence was indeed meant to stand for *Ave*, but this may be considered an option (cf.  $\text{au}$  in N 45 or  $\widehat{\text{aun}}$  in Vg Fv2007;37). Other variants of the *Ave Maria* occur more randomly. However, the complete prayer consisting of both salutations is found in more than ten inscriptions, which is similar to the number containing either only *Ave* or *Ave Maria gratia*. As stated earlier, it is unclear how common it was to include the clause *et benedictus fructus ventris tui* during the Middle Ages. The runic evidence thus assumes some importance since it demonstrates the use of the complete prayer in different parts of Scandinavia.<sup>16</sup> Of further interest is the Lille Myregård lead amulet from Bornholm (Dk Bh36) where the word *sanctissima* is added: *Ave sanctissima Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui*.

We may now move on to *Pater Noster* citations (see table 3). It comes as no surprise that more than half of the material uses just the first two words of the prayer; as in the case of *Ave Maria* this can be considered the title. The formula is most common in inscriptions that urge the praying of the *Pater Noster*, although sometimes only *Pater* may be used; as for example in the inscription on the Backgården stone (Vg 76): *Pat er rétt h[v]erjum at biðja Pat[er]* ‘It is right for everyone to pray the *Pater (Noster)*’. Otherwise the single word *Pater* occurs chiefly in church-building inscriptions. Longer sequences of the prayer are also quoted, as on a lead cross from Osen, Norway (A 123). The complete *Pater Noster* is found on a small lead amulet from Ulstad in Oppland (N 53). Some runic items (probably amulets) use *Pater Noster* together with a variety of Latin words and expressions, which together make up powerful collections of Christian formulas and charms. The Blæsinge lead amulet from Denmark (DR Aarb1987;205), for instance, contains protective formulas against sickness together with the *Ecce crucem* antiphon, the Trinitarian formula, acclamations of the *Christus vincit* type, the holy acronym *agla* and *Pater Noster*.

Four or five inscriptions have elements of both the *Pater Noster* and the *Ave Maria*. On a runic stick from Lom stave church in Oppland (A 72) the initial sequences of the two prayers are carved on different sides,

<sup>16</sup> As well as Sm 82† and N 617, see Sm 38, Sm 145 (which adds *Amen + In manus tuas D[omine]*), Vg 221 (with the prayer in roman script), D Fv1980;230 (adding *Amen. Alfa et o[mega]. Agla. Deus adiuva. Jesus Christus Dominus noster*), DR 166 (which contains the complete prayer, a name and an additional *Ave Maria gr[atia]*), DR 336† (with *Amen*), Dk Bh36. Cf. also N 142† and the fragmentary N 618, which may have carried the complete prayer.

Table 4. The *Ave Maria* in inscriptions from Bryggen

N 617, runic stick, c. 1250	<b>auē m̄aria gracia plena tominus tekom   benetikta tū in mulieribus æþ benetiktuš   fruktus uentris tui amen</b>
N 618, broken runic stick, c. 1250	<b>...s : æt : benedikdus : fruktus :   ...kus : uilelmus</b>
N 619, runic stick, c. 1170–1200?	<b>auē maria kracia blena</b>
N 620, runic stick, c. 1375	<b>auē maria</b>
N 621, runic stick, shaped as a skewer, c. 1335	<b>auē maria</b>
N 622, base of a stave-tankard, c. 1400	<b>+auē m̄aria</b>
N 623, base of a stave-tankard, c. 1400–1475 (side A)	<b>auē m̄aria</b>
N 624, base of a stave-tankard, c. 1400	<b>auē ma</b>
N 625, runic stick, c. 1300	<b>auē</b>
N 638, folded lead plate, c. 1350–1400? (inside)	<b>þoysoþieæþnnoapnacþia   auē m̄aria iisus kristr auē m̄aria</b>
B 3, base of a wooden bowl, c. 1350	<b>+au+   +ma</b>
?B 422, base of a wooden bowl, c. 1335, doubtful Ave Maria	<b>ami</b>
?B 581, base of a wooden bowl, c. 1300, doubtful Ave	<b>ui</b>
B 611, runic stick, c. 1300	<b>auē ma-</b>
B 623, runic stick, fragmentary, c. 1250	<b>...- : dominus : te-...   ... benedictus : ...</b>

combined with the names of three evangelists: + **pater̄ nostær gui | es i clis mapeu :** | **markus lukas | au maria gracia**. *Pater noster qui* most likely introduces the inscription, as indicated by the cross sign. The next part of the prayer *es in cælis* occurs on a different side of the stick where it stands together with the name *Matthæus*. In three grave monument inscriptions from Gotland the formulas *Pater Noster* (*ok*) *Ave Maria* are

used together with vernacular appeals (G 60, G 62†, G 168†). Finally, on a fragmentary fourteenth-century knife sheath of leather from Örebro (Nä Fv1979;236) the words **māria pātær** *Maria Pater*(?) occur together on one side, with an additional **pātær** *Pater*(?) on the other side; **māria** and **pātær** may be interpreted as references to the prayers, not least because they are used together. Furthermore, the runic spelling of these words accords with what we find in various other *Ave Maria* and *Pater Noster* inscriptions (for alternative interpretations, see Gustavson and Snædal Brink 1979, 235–38).

As an example of different ways of rendering parts of these prayers in runes, we can look at inscriptions that cite the short sequence *Ave Maria*. Three examples were provided in table 2: Vg 164 **āue maria**; DR EM85;516B **āue māria** and N 622, **+āue māria**. All three inscriptions use a bind-rune in *Ave*, although not always the same one; two have a bind-rune in *Maria* as well. Looking at all the inscriptions with shorter and longer versions of the prayer where the phrase *Ave Maria* occurs, we can observe (insofar as it can be established) that roughly 46 percent use one or more bind-runes, and that these may occur in either *Ave* or *Maria* or both. However, if we consider inscriptions that record only the sequence *Ave Maria* with no further part of the prayer added, the percentage of those with bind-runes is nearly 60, i.e. almost two-thirds. We may here be able to identify a customary way of carving the short form of the prayer in runes. The material shows that it is common to write either the first and second or all three runes in *Ave* as a ligature. In the case of *Maria* the usual option is to use a bind-rune in **ār**, although **mā** occurs as well. A bind-rune may be employed even when the initial letters of *Maria* alone are carved, as in the inscription from Borgund stave church (N 383): **āue mā**. These conventions occur in a variety of settings – graffiti in church buildings, inscriptions on church bells and grave monuments as well as on runic sticks and other loose objects. We may be dealing here with a particular visual form of the prayer that could be used in runic inscriptions regardless of the material employed (stone, wood, metal) – a form that could be quickly and easily acquired and perhaps almost mechanically reproduced.

The *Ave Maria* inscriptions in the Bryggen material are considered separately (see table 4). The list includes fifteen items: two among them, B 422 and B 581, are considered questionable.<sup>17</sup> The interpretations of **ami**

<sup>17</sup> A further example of a questionable *Ave* inscription is the early fifteenth-century runic stick B 666, the suggested reading of which is **āuþ**. Alternative readings are equally possible,

as *A[ve] M[ar]i[a]* and **ui** as *[A]ve* do not entirely convince when compared with other runic renderings of *Ave Maria*. On the other hand, both inscriptions are recorded on wooden bowls, a type of artifact which sometimes bears runic *Ave Maria* prayers. On that basis the two have been included in the overview. Six of the inscriptions use bind-runes, in five cases the usage is found in the sequence *Ave Maria*. If we consider only the inscriptions that contain *Ave Ma[ria]* and no further part of the prayer, the ratio is five out of eight. The type of artifact may be of importance here, since four out of the five inscriptions with bind-runes are recorded on the bases of stave-tankards or wooden bowls (the fifth is on a lead amulet). The numbers are clearly too small for the drawing of serious conclusions, but they perhaps indicate features that may be of interest. There is a further matter of chronological interest. Longer versions of the prayer are recorded in inscriptions dating from the end of the twelfth and the mid-thirteenth century, whereas the strongly abbreviated forms are a feature of the fourteenth and fifteenth century.

In future studies it would be interesting to examine shorter and longer versions of the *Ave Maria* and other Latin prayers in order to see what, if any, differences they exhibit. It could be that the shorter texts acquired a particular written form and as such were easily memorized and reproduced, rather like maker's and ownership marks. Longer citations, on the other hand, would have required some graphophonological analysis, at least where the text was not copied from a pre-existing original, resulting in inscriptions, which, as is indeed the case, demonstrate varying degrees of literacy and knowledge of Latin.

Another issue concerns the use of prayers in inscriptions that employ both runes and roman letters. Some seventy medieval Scandinavian runic inscriptions contain individual roman letters or shorter or longer passages in roman script, formulated in the vernacular or Latin. This parallel and in some cases hybrid use of the two scripts occurs on different types of object that originate from a variety of communicative contexts, for example gravestones, church bells, church graffiti, lead amulets, various loose items including runic sticks. Prayers and invocations are recorded in around thirty such inscriptions, the majority being Latin prayers, in particular citations of the *Ave Maria*. The use of Latin in inscriptions that mix the scripts is of interest – we might perhaps expect that Latin text

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hence this potential example is excluded from table 4. Other inscriptions to consider in addition to the *Ave Maria* type are: N 626 (base of a stave-tankard, **māria**), B 295 (runic stick, c. 1200, **mr̥ai**); and B 362 (base of a wooden bowl, c. 1200, **ma**). Cf. also N 645 (runic stick, c. 1250, containing the sequence : **māriuas**).



would be carved in roman script, this being possibly considered a more conventional form of writing for these types of text. However, what we find is that the *Ave Maria* prayers are by and large carved in runes. But it is noticeable that different strategies are used.

On a gravestone from Södra Ving church (Vg 165), dated to the second half of the twelfth century, we find virtually parallel texts in runes and roman, placed along opposite edges and appearing as visually equal entities. The difference between the inscriptions is that AVE MARIA GRATIA appears on one side carved in roman letters, whereas on the other, the master's formula *Haraldr steinmeistari gerði* 'Haraldr the stonemaster made (it)' is added in runes. On a mid-fourteenth-century church bell from Malma church (Vg 222) *Ave Maria Jesus* is given in runes, whereas the master's formula HAQUINUS MAGISTER appears in roman script.<sup>18</sup> A different case again is the inscription recorded on a bronze sword pommel dating from the second half of the thirteenth century, found in Ikast (DR 50), where *Ave Maria* is carved in both runes and roman: **auæ : ma : grasia : btæna : pominu | AVE MARIA : O | MR ACIA : PLENA : .** Finally to be mentioned is the twelfth-century grave slab from Öreryd churchyard (Sm 115). The prayer *Ave Maria gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus* is carved in runes; in roman script, placed in the middle of the slab, is a *hic iacet* 'here lies' burial formula in Latin and an appeal to read *Ave: LEGE A[VE]* (see Tjäder 1993).<sup>19</sup>

Different strategies, it thus appears, are employed in the recording of Latin prayers on items that carry runes and roman letters. Although the cases are not numerous, they cast light on some of the domains in which the use of the two scripts overlaps in the Middle Ages. It is, for example, worth noting that the material does not support the theory proposed by some (cf., e.g., Gustavson 1994a, 324) that roman script enjoyed a higher status in inscriptions than runes. In the varying environments in which the inscriptions occur we can observe layouts which confer more or less equal visual status on the two scripts, or there may be a certain logical division between them which is not based on hierarchical considerations. In other cases the inscriptions demonstrate a rather accidental mixing of runic and roman letters.

From the mixing of scripts I now turn to the mixed use of Latin and vernacular elements in the runic prayer language. The number of inscriptions

<sup>18</sup> See also Vg 245, Vg 247 and Vg 253. Vg 221, however, has the complete prayer in roman script.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Sm 145 where the burial formula is in roman script, whereas the vernacular appeal to pray as well as the complete *Ave Maria* are given in runes.

in the group with mixed linguistic content is not high; the textual evidence consists mainly of vernacular prayers or devotional statements into which elements from (originally) Latin prayers have been introduced. In my introduction the question was raised whether titles like *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria* in these inscriptions could be characterized as loan-words or vernacularized phrases. Based upon the structure and wording of texts, it is in reality impossible to make any broader claims about how the producers or readers of the inscriptions experienced these central Christian elements linguistically and textually. There is though a clear mixing of different types and styles of runic prayers. In addition to asking readers to pray or sing the *Pater Noster* or the *Ave Maria* for somebody's soul, several inscriptions include explicitly vernacular prayers of the same style as are found on rune-stones and early medieval grave monuments. Some inscriptions contain complete prayers both in Latin and in the vernacular.

A lost inscription on a plank from Klepp church in Rogaland, possibly dating from the twelfth century (N 227†), provides a useful example. It was an *ártíð* inscription recording the date on which the anniversary mass for the soul of the deceased was to be said: *Ártíð er Ingibjargar Káradóttur þrim nóttum eptir krossmessu um várit* 'Ingibjörg Kári's daughter's anniversary day is three nights after spring Cross-mass'. The text further appealed to potential readers to pray: *Hverr sá maðr rúnar þessar sér, þá syngi Pater Noster fyrir sál hennar* 'May every man (who) sees these runes sing the *Pater Noster* for her soul'. The inscription concluded with a prayer in traditional vernacular style: *Hjalpi Guð þeim er svá gerir* 'God help him who does so'.

This text can be compared with the inscription on a gravestone from Fornåsa church (Ög 35): *Biðjum vára Pater [Nost]er hans sál til ró ok til náða ok Ráðborgar sál. Guð gefi þeira sál himinríki* 'Let us pray our *Pater Noster* for the peace and mercy of his soul and Ráðborg's soul. May God give their soul(s) to heaven'. As was the case in N 227† immediately above, the inscription refers to the praying of the *Pater Noster*, complemented by a separate vernacular prayer.

Several corresponding examples are known from the Gotlandic grave-stones, a monumental tradition that continued into the fourteenth and fifteenth century (sporadically even later). Formulations that call upon the reader to pray (*biðja*) or sing (*syngja*) the *Pater Noster* or the *Ave Maria* for the soul of the deceased are also found in Gotlandic church-wall inscriptions, either on their own or together with other formulations and vernacular prayers. There are also inscriptions that contain other Latin elements. A fourteenth-century gravestone from Fårö church (G 334) has

a prayer that mentions a certain Lafranz, and the inscription goes on to ask Jesus Christ to be gracious to all the Christian souls that rest in the church; ending with the formulaic *Amen*, it reads: *Guð náði Lafranzar sál ok Nikulás, hans bróðursonr, lét mik gera. Bótulfr, sem kirkju bygði, hann gerði mik. Jésús Kristus náði öllum kristnum sálum, sem hér hvílask. Amen* ‘God have mercy on Lafranz’s soul, and Nikulás, his brother’s son, had me made. Bótulfr, who built the church, he made me. Jesus Christ have mercy on all the Christian souls which rest here. Amen’.

Finally we have inscriptions that record complete prayers in Latin and the vernacular. The Ulbølle censer from Fyn (DR 183), dating from the thirteenth century, contains a vernacular prayer to God, *Guð signi þann mik gerði* ‘God bless him (who) made me’ alongside *Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus*. An interesting mixture of elements is recorded on an early fourteenth-century runic stick from Bryggen (N 636), with the acronym *agla* and Old Norse *Guð* ‘God’ together with the *sator arepo* palindrome, followed by the names of the archangels, *Jésús Kristr* and the vernacular formula *María gæt mín* ‘Mary protect me’: **+ a+g+l+a + guþt + sateor + arę... | rafael : gabriel : ȳ---... | uasus krst : mariua : gæt min f...** These and other examples demonstrate how different types of word and expression can co-exist in medieval runic inscriptions.

I will complete my discussion with some comments on the types of setting in which Latin prayers and invocations are recorded (see chart 3; the numbers are again absolute, not percentages). The largest group of prayers, invocations, blessings and sundry Christian formulas in Latin consists of records on runic sticks, metal amulets and pieces of bone, which altogether make up around 37 per cent of the material. It should be noted that on small items like these there are over three times as many Latin formulations as vernacular prayers and invocations. The textual features of the group are diverse: several inscriptions appear as collections of sacred names, religious references or scriptural and liturgical citations. A variety of individual practices are documented, which is not surprising given that we are here dealing with religious terms, blessings, protective formulas and charms. Common examples include: the *Ave Maria* and the *Pater Noster*, the *Christus vincit* formula, the Trinitarian formula, various names for God, the names of the four evangelists, the acronym *agla* and quotations from the Psalms of David. In several inscriptions the main motivation behind the use of Christian phrases and formulas seems to be some practical concern or need rather than religious devotion. Some of the texts are corrupt, allowing for the identification of only the odd name

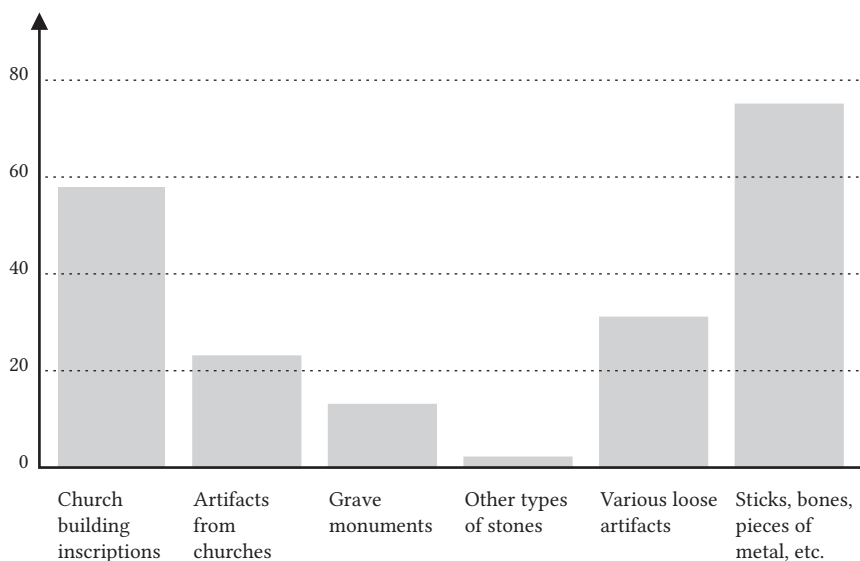


Chart 3. Types of artifact with high and late medieval prayers and invocations in Latin

or some distorted passages. More than half of the material originates from Norway, and consists mainly of runic sticks from Bryggen in Bergen. In addition we have several lead amulets from Denmark as well as other finds from different parts of Scandinavia.

Latin prayers and invocations on other types of loose artifact account for 15 per cent of the material. Most of the finds originate from Norway and Denmark. In this group as well we see that the number of objects carrying Latin prayers and invocations exceeds those with vernacular formulations. Besides various everyday objects such as stave-tankards and wooden bowls, knife handles, rings, a spindle-whorl and a sword pommel we find religious texts in Latin carved on lead crosses which are likely to have served as personal amulets. The texts extend from one or two straightforward words like *Ave* or *Maria* to longer prayers, protective formulas and liturgical passages. Quotations from the *Ave Maria* seem to be particularly common on stave-tankards and wooden bowls, as noted above.

Inscriptions on church furnishings and items originating from churches make up around 11 per cent of the corpus of Latin prayers and invocations. The numbers are not large, but still we can observe that there are rather more Latin prayers and invocations recorded than vernacular ones, although this may result from the chance of preservation. It is possible to

surmise that certain practices are connected with certain types of object. Church bells, for instance, tend to carry Latin quotations, particularly from the *Ave Maria*, with finds from Småland, Västergötland, Värmland, Denmark and Norway. The use of *Ave Maria* inscriptions on church bells has also been noted outside Scandinavia; the Scandinavian runic material thus follows a common pattern.

Inscriptions in church buildings account for around 29 per cent of Latin prayers and invocations, making up the second largest group. The greatest number come from stone churches, especially those in Denmark and on Gotland. The Norwegian material is dominated by inscriptions from stave churches, with only the occasional find from stone buildings. Annette Jones (2010) has indicated that the majority of Latin prayers in Norwegian stave churches occur in chancels, although some are found close to portals where they may have performed a protective function (the results of this analysis may need to be modified when prayers, invocations and various sacred names are examined together). On the whole Scandinavian churches tend to preserve more runic prayers and invocations in the vernacular than in Latin – true of both the stone and stave variety. Thus, in the overall material there are around 1.7 times as many vernacular prayers and invocations as there are Latin; for stone churches the figure is 1.6 and for stave churches 1.8. These numbers may, of course, reflect chance results, showing no more than what commonly occurred in different parts of Scandinavia. Nevertheless, it is telling that there are not more cases of Latin prayers recorded in Scandinavian churches, particularly stone churches from important milieux. Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, for example, has a number of runic prayers and invocations in the vernacular, but only one example of a possible *Amen* (N 473). A rather doubtful case there of *Pater Noster* is N 497, which besides a statement concerning people who drowned in the fjord includes the sequence: **p-r : ---qr̥**.

Finally, we have a limited number of Latin prayers and invocations preserved on medieval gravestones from different parts of Scandinavia. They form c. 6 per cent of the material (to this we can add a few finds of Latin formulations on other kinds of medieval stone). As mentioned above, this type of artifact is dominated by vernacular prayers and invocations. The texts in Latin quote common prayers like the *Ave Maria* or invoke some divine figure. Two Danish gravestones from Skåne carry complete funerary texts in Latin: *Anima famuli tui Benedicti tecum sine fine requiescat in pace. Amen* ‘May the soul of Thy servant Benedict rest with Thee in peace without end. Amen’ (DR 340†); and *In manus tuas, Domine,*

*commendo spiritum tuum, Ása* ‘Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend thy spirit, Ása’ (DR 350, cf. Luke 23:46). A further example is provided by the grave slab from Öreryd churchyard (Sm 115), discussed above, which has in roman script the Latin burial formula HIC IACET and an appeal to read the *Ave Maria*, followed by the prayer itself in runes. In other cases the burial formula may be in the vernacular, but rounded off by a phrase in Latin, as on the gravestone from Øye stave church (N 79): *Hér hvíllir Þóra, móðir Eiríks prests. Pater Noster* ‘Here rests Þóra, mother of Eiríkr the priest. Pater Noster’.

This material may be complemented by the medieval gravestone inscriptions that combine vernacular and Latin prayers and invocations or include vernacular requests to pray the *Pater Noster* or the *Ave Maria* (c. 25 instances). As mentioned earlier, these combinations are particularly common on medieval Gotland, but they also occur on grave monuments from Östergötland, Småland, Västergötland and Norway. Such gravestone inscriptions exceed in number those which have prayers and invocations in Latin only. Combined vernacular and Latin formulations are also known from church walls, and occasional examples are found on church furnishings and different types of loose object.

## Conclusions

In this examination of Christian runic inscriptions in Scandinavia during the Viking Age and Middle Ages, a broad definition of vernacular and Latin runic prayers and invocations was the point of departure. The material included a variety of Christian phrases, formulas and names, connected by the underlying purpose of seeking divine assistance or blessing, although the exact motives and concerns doubtless differ from one inscription to another. In addition to distinguishing between vernacular and Latin prayers and invocations, I have discussed inscriptions that use prayers of mixed style where formulations in both forms of language can appear side-by-side. It is apparent that in the medieval context vernacular and Latin elements could be used together as part of a common arsenal of prayer. Although an analysis undertaken on the basis of the wording of runic inscriptions cannot be fully representative of the many aspects of Viking Age and medieval prayer tradition, and although the results presented here are affected by various circumstances of preservation and interpretation, there are still some general observations to be made.

Overall in the runic material vernacular prayers and invocations outnumber the Latin ones by almost 3.5 to 1 – largely due to their presence on

a considerable number of late Viking Age rune-stones and early Christian grave monuments. Prayers of the common type ‘May God help his spirit/soul’ represent an early phase of vernacular runic prayer in Scandinavia, making their first appearance on raised commemorative stones. The continuing importance of vernacular prayers is clearly documented in different types of high and late medieval inscription, especially those found in stone and stave churches and on grave monuments, where they form part of an established medieval Christian culture. Various links and overlaps can be noted between the earlier and later vernacular prayers, and these make it possible to suggest the existence of some sort of continuous tradition running from the Viking Age into the Middle Ages. However, the more specific contours of the tradition cannot at present be confidently identified. Also observable are innovative elements that set high and late medieval prayers and invocations apart from earlier manifestations of the genre. All the while we must bear in mind that the preserved material may represent a chance selection of different regional and chronological expressions of the general custom. It is, however, the case that the composition of vernacular prayers in runic inscriptions from different periods reveals various possibilities of structural and content-related variation. This emphasizes their dynamic nature. We also observe that over the course of time vernacular prayer language becomes more varied.

In contrast, Latin prayer formulations appear as more or less fixed quotations, but one can find variation both in their length and function, the latter ranging from religious devotion to practical concerns and also encompassing amuletic-ritualistic usage. Latin prayers and invocations are adapted to the runic context in various ways. The spelling conventions, grammatical forms and vocabulary of these and other preserved runic Latin texts document degrees of competence in Latin amongst certain members of society such as the clergy, but these features also cast light on the acquaintance of ordinary people with widely recited Latin texts and even reflect outcomes of the copying and imitation of Latin texts by certain “illiterate” (i.e. non-Latin reading/writing) individuals.

The number of Latin prayers and invocations in the high and late medieval material remains below that of their vernacular counterparts. However, the spread of common Latin prayer formulas is confirmed by references to such prayers in vernacular appeals to pray. The core elements of the Latin prayer tradition, the *Ave Maria* and the *Pater Noster*, occur on numerous occasions – both shorter and longer variants of the prayers being recorded. Most commonly we find the opening two words

of the prayers, but there are also extended quotations, especially of the *Ave Maria*. The lengthier renditions may demonstrate a more detailed acquaintance with Latin prayers. However, in comparison with the relatively dynamic nature of the vernacular prayers, the Latin formulas still figure primarily as quotations that have been put into runic writing from memory or copied most likely from a runic exemplar.

The contexts in which both vernacular and Latin runic prayers and invocations occur vary to a great extent. These texts can be carved into a variety of smaller and larger artifacts of stone, wood, metal, bone or leather. Prayers and invocations are recorded on commemorative rune-stones and various types of grave monument, in the fabric of stone and stave churches, on ecclesiastical objects and other items that are associated with churches as well as on different everyday artifacts with seemingly no devotional purpose at all. Prayers and invocations also appear on runic sticks and pieces of bone and metal where they may express a variety of concerns.

The overview presented in this study has shown that the prayers recorded on rune-stones, grave monuments and on the inside or outside of church buildings are dominated by vernacular formulations. Of special significance is the well-documented use of vernacular prayers and invocations on medieval grave monuments. It should also be emphasized that both stone and stave churches record more prayers and invocations in the vernacular than in Latin. On the other hand, Latin prayers and invocations are used to a greater extent on different types of loose object – this includes the everyday kind as well as items originating from churches. Among the latter we find objects that were used in the celebration of mass, which explains the use of Latin formulas. The dominant role of Latin prayers and invocations becomes especially clear when considering small objects that served primarily as a surface for writing, such as runic sticks, lead plates and bands, and pieces of bone. As pointed out above, they carry about three times as many Latin as vernacular formulations. The use of different Christian terms, names and expressions in Latin is also determined by the type of object bearing the inscription and the textual culture it represents – this is especially evident in the case of small lead amulets and crosses of varying materials (cf. Knirk 1998; Ertl 1994).

On the basis of this data it is reasonable to conclude that forms of runic prayer could vary depending on the context and type of artifact involved. First, there is the monumental context, connected with objects like rune-stones and grave monuments, and in a certain sense also with church buildings where runic inscriptions became a part of the fabric of the holy



edifice. Despite the fact that numerous inscriptions in church buildings may be characterized as (personal) graffiti, they nevertheless occur in a context that gave them a broader public and religious function. Seen in this light, it is possible that the setting of vernacular prayers and invocations in monumental or public contexts may have been motivated *inter alia* by the wish to reach a wider audience. Second, we have the discourse of the various loose objects. Here we find a certain preference for Latin prayers, invocations and blessings. Besides being connected to particular types of object and textual genre the use of Latin formulas in this context may also have to do with the mediation of specific knowledge and private concerns, such as the possible protection of contents in stave-tankards and wooden bowls. The distinction between these two roughly delineated spheres of use is by no means absolute, since copious examples of commonly recited Latin prayers and invocations occur in church buildings and on grave monuments, while vernacular prayers and invocations frequently appear on different types of loose object. Last but not least, we find inscriptions where prayers and invocations of mixed style, form of language and type of script are recorded, showing that the distinction between vernacular and Latin elements in medieval expression of Christianity is itself uncertain. This underlines the dynamic and mixed nature of the runic prayer tradition during the late Viking Age and Middle Ages. Its multiple regional, chronological, local and individual manifestations will need to be addressed in future studies.

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