



From pagan charms to pious prayers?

A case study of two runic formulas

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Emnet for dette bidraget er to runeformler fra ulike tidsepoker. De er strukturelt nokså likt gjennomført ved enderim og “[v]ekslede initialer med faste repetisjoner” (Nordby 2018: 109). Den ene er den velkjente *þistill-mistill-kistill*-formelen, som først opptrer på den danske Gørlevsteinen rundt 800–850 e.Kr., den andre er den yngre *horn-þorn-korn*-formelen, som er ristet inn i kalkpuss i to gotlandske kirker og på en blyamulett fra Källingeby. Denne type formler kobles gjerne til en opplæringskontekst, særlig *horn-þorn-korn*. Artikkelen argumenterer for en symbiose mellom hedenske og kristne allegorier som kommer til syne i ulike kontekster. Det argumenteres for en interaksjon mellom folkemagi og kristne bønner som tar i bruk både hedenske og kristne virkemidler. Den prototypiske vernefunksjonen av de to formulene kommer tydelig fram på amulettinnskrifter fra middelalderen, jf. *þistill-mistill-kistill*-formelen på Vedslet-sandsteinamuletten (DR 57) og *horn-þorn-korn*-formelen på Källingeby-blyamuletten (DK Bh 20).

1 Introduction

It has long been noted that the encrypted *þistill-mistill-kistill* formula (‘thistle-mistletoe-small casket/chest’, abbreviated *þ-m-k*) is one which might betray pre-Christian origins. It can be identified as a heathen formula proper with a straightforward cursing function, viz. a ‘locking charm’.¹ Magnus Olsen, in *Norges indskrifter med de yngre runer* (NIyR IV, 180) characterizes its nature as ‘truly heathen’ (“ramhedensk”). De-

1. McKinnell, Simek and Düwel (2004: 134, 136).

spite its pagan roots, however, this formula can be deployed in combination with Christian motifs; see section 4 on the iconography of the Ledberg stone shortly after AD 1000. As I have dealt with the *þ-m-k* formula elsewhere, I will not discuss its diverse attestations at length here.²

The second formula, *horn-þorn-korn* ('horn-thorn-corn', abbreviated *h-þ-k*), lends itself to an interpretation in a framework of Christian edification, with clear references to Biblical symbolism (cf. Nielsen 2019), but it is not devoid of folk-magic symbolism. The time-line reinforces the notion of an ongoing shift where Biblical allegory makes persistent headway. While the encoded *þistill-mistill-kistill* formula occurs in the early Viking Age on the Gørlev stone (DR 239), the *horn-þorn-korn* formula, being encoded as well, is probably not encountered before the High Middle Ages (on dating see section 2). Firmly entrenched in a Christian context, *horn-þorn-korn* can be interpreted as a condensed formula of repentance and edification, which simultaneously functions as an incantation for healing ailments.³ The lead amulet of Kællingeby 1 lends further support to this integral view as it combines a short runic prayer in Latin with a magic charm written in Old Danish. The whole inscription ends with the *horn-korn-þorn* formula (see section 8).

The present focus rests on the assimilation of pagan symbolism and its effective use within a markedly Christian setting of folk beliefs. The intersection between Christian and pagan is very common in the Germanic-speaking world and other Old Germanic traditions provide clear parallels; compare for instance healing charms and medical charms of Old High German, Old Saxon and Old English. There is a huge body of literature on this field (see, e.g., Murdoch 1989 and Schwab 1996).

In sum, the three basic research questions to be addressed in this paper are as follows:

First, what does the medieval triad *horn-þorn-korn* (or alternatively, *horn-korn-þorn*) allude to in comparison with its forerunner *þistill-mistill-kistill*, and what is its symbolic value?

2. See Schulte (2020), moreover Nordby (2018: ch. 6.1.4), both with a survey of the research literature.
3. On different kinds of Christian formulas, see Herjulfsdotter (2013). The notion of 'folk magic' (*horn-þorn-korn*) is addressed by Gustavson in GR 3, p. 18. See below, sections 7 and 8.

Second, in what way does the *horn-þorn-korn* formula replace the older, ‘intrinsically pagan’ *þistill-mistill-kistill* formula at later stages? Third, are we faced with two diametrically opposed world views or an interactive syncretism of shared concepts and values, with motifs and strands of different origins?

2 The ‘older’ versus the ‘younger’ formula: A brief note on dating

As argued, the idea of a functional shift from a pagan magical curse formula (*þ-m-k*) to a Christian edification formula (*h-þ-k*) is by no means far-fetched. Several arguments relating to formal structure and allegorical symbolism will be mentioned in section 3. At this point, a commentary on dating these inscriptions seems appropriate. The ‘old’ formula can be traced back at least to the early Viking Age, viz. the early 800s; see the Danish Gørlev stone DR 239 which probably belongs to the first half of the 9th century. Other instances of the same formula, such as Bryggen rune-stick N B391, must be dated to the period AD 1250–1350. It is noteworthy that N B391 contains both the ‘folk-magic’ term *ristill* (‘zona herpes’, also ‘giantess’) and the Christian term *þistill* for ‘epistula’ (cf. Liestøl 1963: 18). The symbiosis of Christian and pagan motifs on the 11th-century Ledberg stone is addressed in section 4.

The *horn-þorn-korn* inscriptions in Väte and Bunge Churches most probably belong to the 15th and 16th centuries.⁴ The five carvings in Bunge seem to be rather late and possibly even post-medieval.⁵ For some reason, the rune carvings on the southern wall of the tower chamber (G 330) have not been dated, while the others have been taken to belong to the 16th century. The inscription G 331a even has the specific year 1593, and the northern wall has the year 1570. However, it must be added that the plaster layer itself is said to belong to the 13th century, which allows for the possibility that the carvings may be medieval.

The amulet from Kællingeby 1 and its close parallels are not dated more closely on archaeological grounds, but Danish lead amulets typically

4. I owe thanks to Magnus Källström for informing me about the dating of the *horn-þorn-korn* inscriptions at Bunge and Väte Churches (email dated July 2, 2021).
5. On G 330 Bunge Church, see Helmer Gustavson in GR 3, pp. 23–31.

belong to the period around 1100–1400.⁶ Bornholm poses a particular challenge both runographically and linguistically. The typological variation of runic forms is great and the language varieties of East Scandinavian (Old Danish) tend to be generally conservative. Therefore, Imer and Olesen (2018) opt for a broad dating of Källingeby 1 to the period 1100–1350, which corresponds to the older Middle Danish period in language history (cf. Jørgensen 2016: 80).

3 A direct link between the two formulas

The two formulas under scrutiny are clearly distinct, but functionally related. Both deploy liquids in their rhyme. The second clue to the existence of a straightforward relationship between the two formulas is based on the two *b*-words, which have similar connotations: the *thorn* of the younger formula and the *thistle* of the older one make up a twin formula in the *First Book of Moses* (*Genesis* 3:16–18; my emphasis).⁷

To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. *Thorns and thistles* it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.”

In Christian symbolism, the thorn is an emblem of Christ’s passion, the crown of thorns being a travesty of the Roman Emperor’s crown of roses.⁸ The symbolism of the thorn and the thorn bush, or briar, is reinforced by the Bible verse of *Exodus* 3:2, 4, where God summons Moses to lead God’s people. Holy fire does not consume what it inflames, and Mary could become a mother and yet have her virginity intact. Some altar paintings of the 15th and 16th centuries show Mary and the Christ-child in the Burning Bush.⁹

6. I wish to thank Rikke S. Olesen for a detailed comment on the dating of Källingeby (email dated August 27, 2021).

7. On this type of formula, see, e.g., Schulte (2022), with references.

8. See, e.g., Cooper (1978: 170), under *thorn*.

9. See Måle (1961: 173); cf., in a general perspective, Biedermann (1992: 341).

And the angel of the Lord appeared unto Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. [...] God called to him out of the midst of the bush.

However, not unlike the thistle, the thorn also is a crucial icon of folk magic, deeply rooted in pagan symbolism.¹⁰ Eberly (1989: 41) shows that the medieval hawthorn (= ON *hagþorn*), “as an *arbor cupiditatis*, is a constant symbol of carnal love, as opposed to spiritual love, throughout the literature of the Middle Ages”. Hence, the diametrical opposition between the hawthorn and Christ’s thorn in Christian symbolism. As Eberly (1989: 41) demonstrates, the connection between Christian and folkloric allegory is neat:

An examination of the earlier role of the hawthorn motif will show, I believe, that it served, particularly in 15th century medieval love allegory, as what could be called an *arbor cupiditatis*, an inversion of the ‘fruitful tree’ found in both the Old and New Testaments: “The fruit of the just man is a tree of life [...]” (*Proverbs* 11:30); “Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit [...] Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (*Matthew* 7:17, 20); and, in its most inclusive sense, “[...] the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, and yielding its fruits every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations [...]” (*Apocalypse* (*Book of Revelation*) 22:2)

This is particularly relevant for the *horn-þorn-korn* formula, as its less frequent variant *horn-korn-þorn* was possibly influenced by the name of the plant *hagþorn*. Not unlike the thistle, the hawthorn is esteemed as a plant of protection in folk medicine. As Stafford (2016: 223) puts it, “[t]he hawthorn offers natural protection to whatever is hidden within, but its peculiar definiteness tends to trigger retaliation” (cf. also Gustavson 2004: 18; for further elaboration see section 7).

The intimate relationship between the *thistle* (ON *þistill*) and the *thorn* (ON *þorn*) is evident both on the phonological and the allegorical level.

10. For a cross-cultural broad overview, see, Biedermann (1992: 341), under *thorns and briars*; Cooper (1978: 170), under *thorn*; on the *horn-þorn-korn* formula, cf. Gustavson (2004: 18).

Cooper (1978: 170) mentions that in many cultures, thorned plants, such as acanthus, acacia and the rose, symbolize the horns of the crescent moon. The symbolic value of its counterpart, the thistle, in pagan charms and spells is equally straightforward, but also complex (cf. Schulte 2020). The thistle is a neat symbol of fertility and infertility, which forms part of apotropaic charms.¹¹ It deters ghosts and evil spirits from returning and keeps them down in a literal sense. In this regard the thistle displays similarities with the juniper (ON *einir*).¹² Even in Christianity, as Cooper notes, it has a broad range of allegorical meanings: the spikes of the thistle depict the passion of Christ, as well as sin, earthly sorrow and evil (*Genesis* 3), or wickedness encroaching on virtue (*Job* 31).¹³ Moreover, the apotropaic function of the thistle is obvious in the emblem of Scotland which includes this plant in its visual design: *Nemo me impune lacessit* ‘nobody hurts me with impunity’.

In a textual perspective, two typological parallels between the two runic formulas, *þistill-mistill-kistill* and *horn-þorn-korn*, obtrude upon our notice: first, the two formulas in question are usually placed at the very end of the text (cf. the Ledberg stone Ög 181 and the lead amulet of Kællingeby 1; see section 8 below).¹⁴ Second, both of these formulas may occur together with *fupark* inscriptions (cf., e.g., the Gørlev stone DR 239 and Bunge inscription G 330d). On this combined use, Moltke (1985: 176) succinctly states that “the futhark itself must have been among the most powerful of protective charms”.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the functional dissimilarity of the two formulas is evidenced by several facts. In several inscriptions, the ‘older’ *þ-m-k* formula is extended by the word *ristill*, among other things; see in particular the

11. On the overall symbolism of the *thistle*, cf. Biedermann (1992: 340–341); Cooper (1978: 170).
12. On this salient parallel, see Hofsten (1957).
13. See Cooper (1978: 170), under *thistle*.
14. One of the anonymous reviewers remarks that the textual order with the text-final formula may be due to the layout and the design of runic inscriptions on the artifacts, and s/he adds that “[i]t would be important to consider the possibilities and limitations that lie in the use of particular types of objects and writing surfaces (cf. church wall graffiti and small folded amulets where parts of the text would not have been visible after folding).” This is certainly a valid comment, but the textual structure is unequivocal in the above-mentioned cases.
15. For a detailed analysis of the older *fupark*, see Düwel and Heizmann (2006); on the functional use of the younger *fupark*, see particularly Seim (1998: 237–242, 258–260) and Holmqvist (2021: 141).

Vedslet sandstone amulet DR 57, Lomen Stave Church N 75, Klukowiczi coin Poland D 163, and last but not least the Bryggen runestick N B48.¹⁶ The term ON *ristill* has often been rendered as ‘ploughshare’, ‘carving instrument’ (cf. the verb ON *rista/rísta*) and ‘resourceful woman’ (or ‘giantess’), but it also alludes to a severe skin disease, known as *zona herpes* or *herpes zoster*, commonly referred to as ‘shingles’. It denotes a painful rash which is caused by a zoster virus. Falk (1921) compares ON *náristill* and Mod. Norwegian *nárisle* (*helvetesild/-eld*). This multifunctionality ties in with the wording of the pagan curse formula and assures its effectiveness in terms of folk magic.¹⁷

The ‘younger’ *horn-born-korn* formula deploys the same rhyme and coding technique, which is why Jonas Nordby places the two formulas under the same heading: ‘Alternating initials with fixed repetitive structures: the *istil-* and *orn-*formula’ [“Vekslede initialer med faste repetisjoner: *istil-*formelen and *orn-*formelen”].¹⁸ Hence the major argument relates to formal structure:

Som kryptografisk system kan også *istil-*formelen betraktes som en form for fletting der flere ord (fra tre til syv) er flettet inn i hverandre. Men mere definerende for systemet er prinsippet om at forskjellige initialer danner ord med grupper av faste repetisjoner. Hittil har disse repetisjonene kun vært *-istil*, men det forekommer også eksempler på andre repetisjonsformler.

[‘As a cryptographic system, the *istil-*formula can be seen as a form of interweaving where several words (from three to seven) are interwoven into each other. But more essential for the system is the principle that different initials form words with groups of fixed repetitions. So far these repetitions have

16. It seems unclear to me why Nordby (2018: 106) rejects Bryggen N B48 as an *istil-*formula proper, and he does so on the basis of its five *r*-runes: “Mindre sannsynlig er det at innskriften *B48 bryggen opphavlig var ment som en *istil-*formel. Teksten ‘*tttt·iiiiiii·lllll·rrrr·3/3iO/3*’ har riktignok serier av *t*-, *i*- og *l*-runer, men *r*-serien passer ikke inn i formelen” ([as compared to the other *istil-*inscriptions; M.S.] it is less likely that Bryggen inscription B48 originally was meant to be an *istil-*formula. Admittedly the text ‘*tttt·iiiiiii·lllll·rrrr·3/3iO/3*’ has series of *t*-, *i*- and *l*-runes, but the *r*-series does not fit in with the formula.’)
17. Cf. also McKinnell, Simek and Düwel (2004: 136), who opt for the meaning “ringworm” in the context of medieval medicine; and they add: “In the context of a curse, the last sense [viz., ringworm; M.S.] seems the most likely.” The lesion caused by this fungal infection resembles a worm in the shape of a ring, hence this name.
18. See Nordby (2018: ch. 6.1.4), here at p. 109; cf. also Nielsen (2019: 8).

solely been *-istil*, but instances of other repetitive formulas occur as well.’
Transl. M.S.]

A marked difference between the two formulas, however, is that the Christian *h-p-k* formula always appears as a triad with no further extension, whereas the older *þ-m-k* formula is more playful and versatile, in that it allows for a maximum of seven elements. The medieval Bryggen finds of N B338 and N B391 suggest that such extensions are present at a later ‘Christianized’ assimilated stage of the *þ-m-k* formula. As evidenced by several medieval runic inscriptions, the wording and graphic design of the old triplet (or, more technically, trinomial) may even be altered.¹⁹ Compare Borgund Stave Church N 364, which displays the unencrypted formula with the rune \ddagger (viz., a single binary rune 2:1 for **h**) as a structuring device, or possibly a bind-rune for **hi**.²⁰ It is noteworthy that this version of the formula does not follow the standard pattern *þ-m-k*, probably because it highlights the *thistle* as its final element (on the standard pattern see section 4).

tistil mistil ok \ddagger n þiriþi þistil

kistill(?), *mistill ok h(i)n þriði*, *þistill*.

‘Small casket/chest, mistletoe, and the third, thistle.’²¹

On the basis of the available runic evidence, it can be argued that this is a specific difference between the two formulas.

19. On binomials and trinomials see, e.g., Schulte (2022), with references.

20. See Olsen in NIyR IV, pp. 175–176; cf. also Nordby (2018: 105–106 and 196–197). I owe the suggestion of a possible bind-rune to Patrick Stiles, from an email dated August 1, 2021.

21. It is unclear whether the first word in the Burgund charm reads **kistil** or **tistil** (with the transition of /þ/ to /t/ in stressed position). The reading ‘k’ for ‘t’ is probably favourable (whether intentionally disguised or not) as there are many parallels of this runographic practice (cf. Schulte [2020: 109], with reference to Seim [1998: 93, 102]). Nordby (2018: 105, 106) reads the initial rune as ‘t’, and consequently renders the first word as ‘thistle’; cf., however, the third item of this formula **þistil** (with original /þ/).

4 The Ledberg stone as a test-case: A neat Christian-pagan symbiosis

The runestone at Ledberg Church in Östergötland (Ög 181) unites Christian and pagan motifs and textual elements.²² While featuring a Viking cross, it probably depicts key motifs from *Ragnarøk* along with the *þi-still-mistill-kistill* formula (cf. in particular Hultgård 2017: 183). On one of its sides it shows an image of the great beast with gaping wolf-jaws, probably Fenrir, who attacks a warrior, or Odin, and bites his foot.²³ At the bottom of this illustration there is another warrior with no legs, who is holding out his hands. Jansson (1977: 156) calls attention to a further iconographic parallel on a pictorial stone from Kirk Andreas on the Isle of Man.²⁴ Here, Odin is bearing a spear with one of his two ravens on his shoulder, being attacked by the wolf Fenrir, one of the key figures of Norse mythology.²⁵

Further inscriptions of the late Viking Age and the early Middle Ages feature *Ragnarøk* motifs, in particular those of the wolf Fenrir and the ship Naglfar, which makes this interpretation even likelier.²⁶ The iconography of the warship is a crucial clue to the *Ragnarøk* symbolism on the memorial stone of Ledberg. Ellmers (1995: 168) arrives at the conclusion “that the dead persons, in whose memory the stones are raised, are the main figures depicted on the stones [viz. Ledberg and Tullstorp; M.S.]”. This view is shared by Hultgård (2017: 182) with regard to Ledberg. I hazard to say that this imagery involves the heroic topos of the fallen warrior(s) possibly identified with Odin, and therefore can be directly compared to the *iprð/upphiminn* formula on the memorial stone

22. On the *Ragnarøk* interpretation of Ledberg, see in particular Shetelig (1931: 216); Moltke (1934: 430–431); Jansson (1975: 76–79) and (1977: 155–156); Hultgård (2017: 183); cf. also Williams (1999 [summarized in Williams 2009]) and Källström (2016).
23. On the Fenris wolf interpretation in runic iconography, see in particular Oehrl (2011: 229–230); Hultgård (2017: 182–183), with further references. For criticism, however, see Heizmann (1999: 235). Recently, the less likely view has been revived that the scene depicts Víðarr revenging his father Odin; see Lindow and Schjødt (2020: 1444); cf. also Ramskou (1953: 186–187).
24. On Thorvald’s cross, see Hultgård (2017: 212–215), with further references.
25. On Fenrir’s central role in Norse mythology, cf. Teichert (2020: 280), with reference to Lorentz (1984: 418); moreover Heizmann (1999).
26. A neat *Ragnarøk* interpretation of the Norwegian Vang stone (N 84) has been proposed by Källström 2016 (cf. Hultgård [2017: 193–194]); on the Swedish Skarpåker stone (Sö 154), see Schulte (2004), with references. Cf. also Hultgård (2017: 197 et passim) on Stora Ekstene (Vg 4) and further runestones of the late Viking Age.

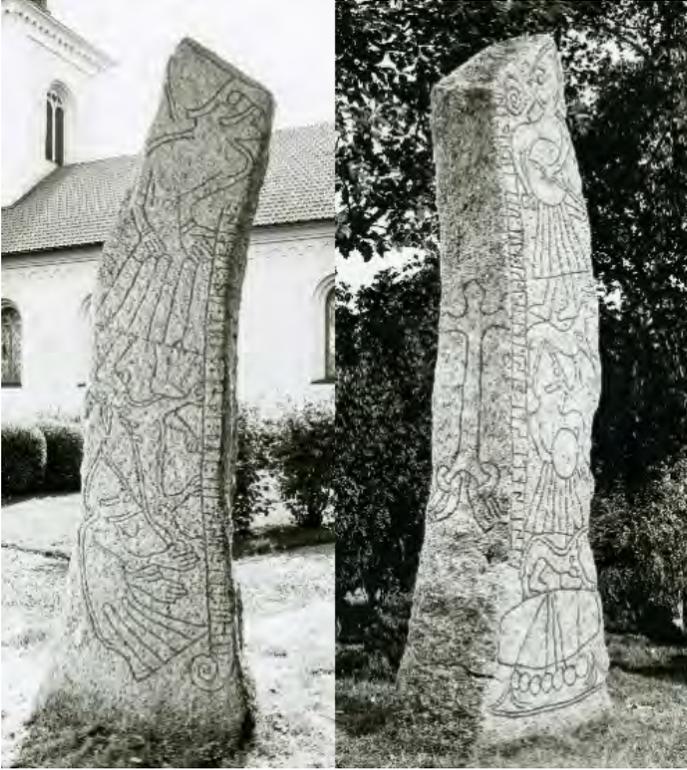
of Skarpåker (Sö 154; see below), which is roughly contemporaneous. Again, following Jansson (1987: 141), “[i]t is tempting to regard these stray lines on the Skarpåker stone as a quotation from a Swedish poem on the ‘doom of the gods’ (ON *Ragnarøk*), so well known at the time the inscription was written that everyone would understand their message – a poem which a father’s grief found fitting to call to mind by these allusive lines.” The ‘pagan’ elements on these memorials enhance the heroic status of the deceased and ensure his heroic fame even in a Christian setting. Besides, this directly supports Hultgård’s assessment of the warrior motif on the Ledberg stone, whether it directly represents Odin or not (Hultgård 2017: 182):

Att krigaren kan återge Torgöt förefaller troligare, men man frågar sig varför han skulle avbildas i kamp med ett hundliknande djur och inte i strid med andra män. Föredrar man en mytisk tolkning skulle krigaren i alla fyra scener kunna representera guden Oden och fyra faser av hans envig mot Fenrisulven.

[“The fact that the warrior [on the Ledberg stone side B; M.S.] can represent *Þorgautr* seems more likely, but one wonders why he should be depicted in battle with a dog-like animal and not in battle with other men. If one prefers a mythical interpretation, the warrior could represent the god Odin in all four scenes and the four phases of his fight against the wolf Fenrir.”]

As I argue, the answer is probably hidden in the topos of the heroic warrior. Hence the warrior may depict Odin and the fallen warrior *Þorgautr* at the same time. Gerd Wolfgang von Weber (in Lönnroth 1981: 327) argued that the *iqrð/upphiminn* formula alludes to the cosmogonic and eschatological theme of the pagan Germanic World, but it is transferred to new, even Christian contexts without altering the basic concept. Iconographic studies (in particular Oehrl 2011 on the quadruped and the wolf Fenrir) reinforce the claim that Christian-pagan analogies, such as the eschatological events of the Apocalypse and *Ragnarøk*, were functionalized on runestones and put into the service of the mission.

Let us therefore turn to the runic inscriptions on the memorials of Ledberg and Skarpåker.



Ill. 1. The Ledberg runestone (Ög 181) with its *Ragnarrök* iconography, a cross and a memorial inscription followed by the *þistill-mistill-kistill* formula. Photo: Arne Gustafsson, Swedish National Heritage Board; Magnus Källström kindly provided me with the image files of illustration 1 (in an email dated July 6, 2021). Cf. Källström (2016: 269) and (2020: 17).

Memorial inscription on the Ledberg stone (AD 1000–1050)²⁷

[side A] (b)isi · sati : st[(n)] : þisi : iftir : þurkut : u—þi : faþur

[side B] : sin : uk : þu : kuna : baþi : þmk:iii:sss:ttt:iii:!(I)! :

Bisi setti stein þenna eftir Þorgaut ..., fǫður

sinn ok þau Gunna bæði. Þistill/mistill/kistill.

‘Bisi raised this stone in memory of Þorgautr ..., his father,

he (Bisi) and Gunna, both of them. *Þistle, mistle-toe, small casket/chest.*’

27. See Ög 181 and Rundata, under Ög 181.

Memorial inscription on the Skarpåker stone (AD 1000–1050)²⁸

[side A] **kunar : raisþi : stain : þansi : at lyþbiurn : sun : sin :**

[side B] **iarþ sal rifna uk ubhimin**

Gunnarr reisti stein þenna at Lýðbiörn, sun sinn.

Iqrð s[k]al rifna ok upphiminn.

‘Gunnar raised this stone in memory of his son Lýðbiörn.

Earth shall be riven and the over-heaven.’

To summarize the argument to this point, the iconography of the ship on the Ledberg runestone (as well as on Tullstorp) points to the function of the ship of the dead which may allude to *Ragnarøk*. In all probability the ship motif on the pictorial rune stones has two major tasks: (1) it transports the deceased on their final journey across the sea to the other world;²⁹ and (2) it invokes a topos of heroic praise not unlike the *iqrð/upphiminn* formula on the Skarpåker stone Sö 154 (cf. Schulte 2007: 63–65). This interpretation fits particularly well with the ideology of memorial stones at the end of the Viking Age and the rise of the Christian era.³⁰

5 The graphic design of the younger formula

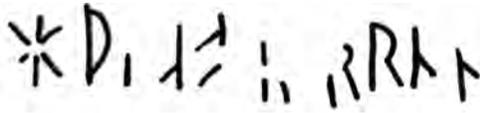
Let us now turn our attention to the *horn-þorn-korn* formula. The encrypted formula *hþkooorrrnnn* is met at least five times in Bunge Church on Gotland (viz., G 329a, G 329e, G 330g, G 331f, and G 332c) and on a Danish lead tablet from Källingeby, Bornholm (DK Bh 20; see section 8). It is noteworthy that the same formula occurs twice in an alternate order, *hþkooorrrnnn*, once in the chancel of Väte Church (G 177b; see ill. 2f) and once in Bunge Church (G 329e; see ill. 2b).

Following the Principle of Onset Gradation, the consonantal strength of the onset increases in this word chain: the pattern *h-þ-k* is a more pre-

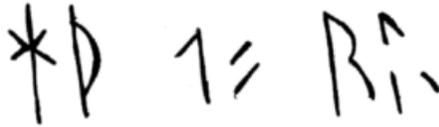
28. See Sö 154 and Rundata, under Sö 154. Translation into Old Norse.

29. On this general interpretation of ships on pictorial Gotland stones, see Lindow (1993: 47–50); moreover Oehrl (2017: 23–24), with abundant references.

30. Tullstorp DR 271 is dated to the end of the Viking Age, AD 970–1020, which implies that it may predate the Ledberg stone (see the dating in DK Sk94). On the function of heroic images on memorial stones, cf. Stern (2015).



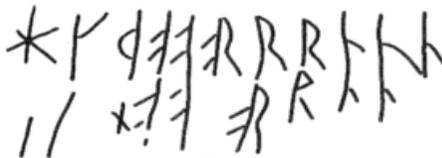
Ill. 2.c. A *horn-born-korn* formula in Bunge Church (G 330g): **hþxǫorrnxn[x]** Nielsen (2019): **hþ-oo(o)rrrn-** (Drawing and reading by Helmer Gustavson; cf. GR 3, 31)



Ill. 2.d. A fragmentary *horn-korn-born* formula in Bunge Church (G 331f) **hþ[...].ǫǫ[...].rr[...]**. Nielsen (2019): **hþk(o)(o)-rr(r)-** (Drawing and reading by Helmer Gustavson; cf. GR 3, 40–41)



Ill. 2.e. A fragmentary *horn-born-korn* formula in Bunge Church (G 332c): **[hþkoo]orrnnn**. Nielsen (2019): **hþ-(o)(o)orrnnn** (Drawing and reading by Helmer Gustavson; cf. GR 3, 44)



Ill. 2.f. Two *horn-korn-born* variants on a plaster wall in Väte Church, one being fragmentary (G 177b): **hkþooorrnnn | xxxooorrnn[x]**. Nielsen (2019): **hkþooorrnnn | -(k)þooorrn-** (Drawing and reading by Elisabeth Svärdström, GR 2, 103)



Ill. 2.g. The *horn-born-korn* formula on the lead amulet Källingeby 1: **hþkoo-orrnnn**. (Detail of a drawing by Lisbeth M. Imer, National Museum; cf. Imer and Olesen 2018: 135)

As regards the overall graphic design, this comparison attests to the consistency of the medieval (and post-medieval) *h-þ-k* formula as compared to the ‘older’ *þ-m-k* model. Also note the occurrence of reversed runes (German *Wenderunen*) for ‘o’ and not least the use of bind-runes *or* on the two *horn-korn-þorn* variants from Väte Church (G 177b). The older formula displays much more variation, both in its wording and its runographic representation (cf. Nordby 2018, Schulte 2020). As already noted, this kind of extension and further variation probably reflects later transformation processes of the original *þ-m-k* formula; cf. the attested variants on runestick N B338 and N B391, both pertaining to the High Middle Ages.

6 Who were the runecarvers?

The intriguing question of who carved these different formulas remains. Nielsen (2019: 16), in my view convincingly, argues that the *horn-þorn-korn* formula on medieval church walls was written by ‘academically schooled clergymen in the role of runecarvers’ [“akademisk skolede, gejstlige personer som runeristere”]. Evidence suggests that Gotlandic priests in the time before the Reformation had a surprisingly high level of education.³⁴ The fact of the matter is that several runic scribbles on plaster church walls were written by members of the clergy; compare for instance Norrlanda Church G 152 *c Herra Iúhan Lundi*, Väte Church G 177 *a Bróðir Iakupr*, and Källunge Church G 238 *Herra Bótulfr*; for further evidence of clerical schooling and medieval computistics, see Nielsen (2019: 16).

On these grounds, it seems reasonable to argue that the runic graffiti on plaster church walls in Gotland, together with other computistic texts, calendar calculations and syllabaries, formed an integral part of theological schooling, involving Christian allegory and symbolism. In connection with possible didactic and playful uses, however, we should not exclude the initial, underlying connotations of these formulas which fall into the category of (expected) protective-apotropaic manifestations (see section 8). The famous ‘Canterbury Charm’, for example, appears as an independent runic gloss in a large manuscript of computistic writings in

34. Cf. Nielsen (2019: 16), with reference to Pernler and Piltz (2013: 125–129).

Latin and Old English (cf. Bauer 2018: 187). In each single case the specific use of the formula in question must be considered. Nielsen arrives at the general conclusion that the carvers of church scribbles in Gotland were priests and assistant priests who must have been attached to the Church. Holmqvist (2021: 143) elaborates on this point:

Tolkningen [til Nielsen 2019: 21; M.S.] kaster nytt lys over innskrifter man gjerne kobler til en opplæringskontekst. Den utelukker ikke direkte at innskriften kan ha vært ristet som opplæring, men formlene som i så fall ble brukt, var neppe tilfeldig valgt. På samme måte kan *tistel-mistel-kistel*-formlen tolkes inn i en religiøs kontekst (jf. Schulte 2020), slik at også denne formelen er mer enn et repeterende formular.

[‘The interpretation [of Nielsen 2019: 21; M.S.] sheds new light on the inscriptions one often links to a learning context. It does not directly preclude that the inscription may have been carved as training, but the formulas used in that case were hardly chosen randomly. In the same way, the *thistle-mistle* formula can be interpreted into a religious context (cf. Schulte 2020), such that this formula is more than a repetitive formula. Transl. M.S.]

This type of literacy in the High Middle Ages can be contrasted with the use of the ‘old’ formula in rather different contexts on memorial stones, among other things. In a later phase the *þistill-mistill-kistill* formula was also carved within churches; see in particular the stave churches of Borgund, Lomen and Nore (N75, N132 and N364–N365).³⁵ Its function was probably apotropaic as it prevented a stillborn foetus (ON *útburðr*) from haunting the living.³⁶ In these cases the writers of the runic inscriptions might have been the women who had had a deformed foetus or aborted their child for one reason or another.³⁷ The practice of putting the stillborn foetus inside church walls is well attested. Olsen (NIyR IV, 178–

35. For further more or less plausible attestations of the *thistle-mistle* formula, see Nordby (2018: 104–109); Schulte (2020: 103–105).

36. See Olsen in NIyR IV, p. 180, with note 1; Storaker (1935: 15–20); Von Sydow (1935: 113); cf. also Hultgård (2017: 183, with note 41).

37. See in particular NIyR IV, pp. 178–180, with note 1; cf. also Nedoma (1998: 41, with notes 46–47), and McKinnell, Simek and Düwel (2004).

179) reports on the ‘locking function’ of the *thistle-mistle* formula in connection with the carvings in Borgund Church (N 364–367):

Vi var da nettop ved det stedet i kirkens grunnmur hvor der, bak en løs sten, var et lite rom som man i uminnelige tider hadde gjort bruk av for et bestemt formål: dér pleide man å sette inn aborter som var lagt i små ‘øskjor’ (esker av tynne sammenbøide trestrimler). En øskje ble tatt frem: under ‘likklædet’ skimtedes deler av et ørlite skjelett. [...] Hvor sterkt vi skal betone at abortrummet vendte mot nord, er uvisst. Her skal vi iallfall minnes om at etter en utbredt folketro førte veien mot nord dit hvor krefter som brøt menneskelivets fred, hadde tilhold.

[‘We were exactly at the spot on the foundation wall of the church where, behind a loose stone, there was a small room that had been used for a certain purpose over time: to place the aborted foetuses that were laid into small ‘caskets’ (boxes of thin, intertangled wooden strips). One tiny box came to light: underneath the ‘shroud’ shimmered parts of a tiny skeleton. [...] It is uncertain how much we should emphasize that this room was facing North. Here at least we should recall that according to folk belief the route to the North led to the forces of evil that violated the peace of human life.’ Transl. M.S.]

Yet, it is not entirely clear who executed these inscriptions. Were they carved by the women themselves, or possibly by related persons, even clerics? It would come as no surprise if the carvers of the two formulas belonged to very different milieus and deployed their formulas in different settings and for different purposes. Common ground, however, is provided by the parallel use of the *b-þ-k* formula and the older *þ-m-k* formula on the Vedslet sandstone amulet (here in an extended version **þmkr**) and on the lead amulet of Kællingeby 1 (see further section 8).

Moreover, the use of the formula *niót vel kumbls* [**niutualkums**], ‘use the monument well’, on the memorial stone of Gørlev DR 239 may be directed both at the potential revenant and at those who benefit from the fact that the dead person will not return, viz. those left behind.³⁸ Düwel and Heizmann translate this as a ‘locking formula’ comparable to the

38. For further discussion, see Pereswetoff-Morath (2019: 103–105); cf. Moltke (1985: 159, 167–168) and McKinnell, Simek and Düwel (2004: 135).

thistle-mistle formula itself: ‘Just enjoy your monument’, hence: ‘Just stay in your monument and don’t become a revenant!’ (“Bleibe bloß in dem Grabdenkmal und gehe nicht wieder!”).³⁹

7 Christian allegory or folk magic?

With regard to the *horn-þorn-korn* formula, Nielsen argues for a fully-fledged *trinitas* symbolism:

[the words *horn*, *þorn*, *korn*; M.S.] should be interpreted as allegorical symbols of the Covenant *horn*, the Resurrection *þorn* and the Gospel *korn*, rather than folk medicine as suggested previously. (Nielsen 2019: 5)

While it seems clear that the formulaic triad *horn-þorn-korn* lends itself to a *trinitas* interpretation, a neat allegory in terms of ‘Covenant – Resurrection – Gospel’ may seem slightly strained.⁴⁰ It is evident that the number *three* features prominently in different cultures and settings, not least pre-Christian and Christian charms and spells.⁴¹ I hazard to say that the three rhyme-words allude both to Christian and folkloristic (‘folk-magic’) symbolism. They have clear associations in a Biblical framework, but the symbolic value of each of these monolexemes is broad and indeed multi-functional. A clear pointer is the use of *horn-þorn-korn* together with a ‘magic’ charm and a Latin prayer on the lead amulet Källingby 1.

Murdoch (1989) and Schwab (1995), in two insightful studies, provide an interpretational clue for a symbiotic approach to folk magic and Christian allegory in Old High German healing charms. Schwab’s seminal analysis culminates in a concise statement highlighting the diversity of transitional forms which defy a clear classification in terms of folk magic beliefs *versus* Christian legends and prayers, among other categories.⁴²

39. See Düwel and Heizmann (2006: 34), with reference to DR 811 on “gravbindings-formler”.

40. On the major Trinitas in Christianity, *Deus, Filius, Spiritus sanctus*, and its iconographic representation in medieval churches, see Dahlby (1985: 11–14).

41. See, e.g., Biedermann (1992: 352–353; 355–356), under *trias* and *trinity* respectively; Cooper (1978: 179, 181), under *triad* and *trinity*; on magic triads, see, e.g., Schulz (2003: 70).

42. See in particular Schwab (1996: 261, with note 1).

Es gibt viele Übergangsformen [von volkssprachlichen magischen Rezepten; M.S.] zum Gebet." ["There are various transitional forms [from folk-magic spells and charms; M.S.] to the prayer."⁴³

Schwab argues that these medieval charms deploy Christian symbolism coupled with effective-magic devices rooted in folk belief. This impedes on any attempt at contrastive typology: Murdoch (1989) and Schwab (1995) testify to the neat interaction between Christian prayers and healing magic rooted in folk belief. I deem it unlikely that the amuletic context of Källingeby 1 is devoid of folk-magic beliefs. In this light, Nielsen's approach (Nielsen 2019: 19) seems one-sided:

Forekomsten av formelen i Bunges tårnkammer, den prominente placering på korvæggen i Väte og den textuelle kontekst med latinske bønformler på blyamuletten fra Källingeby taler efter min mening for, at vi frem for midler mod søvnløshed mv. snarest bør lede efter en overordnet, kristen forståelsesramme bag ordene *horn*, *þorn* og *korn*. Det er i den forbindelse nærliggende at kigge på de tre ords kristne, allegoriske betydning i højmiddelalderen (se fx Dahlby 1985).

['The presence of the formula in Bunge's tower chamber, the prominent location on the choir wall in Väte and the textual context, together with Latin prayer formulas on the lead amulet from Källingeby, suggest that rather than this being a means against insomnia etc., we should look for an overall Christian framework of understanding behind the words *horn*, *þorn* and *korn*. In this context, it makes sense to look at the Christian, allegorical meaning of the three words in the High Middle Ages (see, e.g., Dahlby 1985).'] Transl. M.S.]

Following Schwab's overall premise, the answer is probably more nuanced and complex. The subsequent sections elaborate on this point. It is worth mentioning that the amulet inscription of Källingeby 1 is functionally related to the 'older' *þistill-mistill-kistill* formula which occurs in an amuletic context as well, viz. on the Vedslet sandstone amulet DR 57

43. See Murdoch (1989: 144–145); Schwab (1996: 265). As the present study deals with a particular Nordic formula, Schwab's and Murdoch's valuable methodological studies are mentioned in passing only.

and possibly on the Bryggen runestick N B391.⁴⁴ This will be further discussed in the following section.

But let us first evaluate the Christian symbolism. What does the term ON *horn* allude to in this framework of allegorical symbolism? The horn is a common symbol of power, not least divine power.⁴⁵ The ‘horn’ reading is probably a translation error; compare the Latin vulgate version of the Bible which mentions ‘a horn-equipped face’, *fasies cornuta* (cf. Nielsen 2019: 19). Therefore, Michelangelo also adorned his Moses statue with horns.⁴⁶ Later Bible editions, meanwhile, interpreted the *horn* as the Hebrew image for what we call *rays* (in Latin), or *beams of light* (in English). Luke mentions the horn as a symbol of divine power, viz. the deliverance by redemption from the power of sin and the penalties ensuing from it: “[The Lord] raised up for us a horn of salvation in his servant David’s house” (*Luke* 1:69). In the *Book of Revelation* 5:6, the lamb has seven eyes and seven horns, which are said to represent the seven spirits of God, while the satanic dragon has seven heads and ten horns as symbols of his evil power (*Book of Revelation* 12:3 and 13:1). Cooper (1978: 84) summarizes the Christian symbolism as follows:

The two horns are the Old Testament and the New Testament by which the adversary can be overcome. The seven horns of the Apocalypse are the Seven Spirits of God; omniscience and power.

The devil is depicted in Christian iconography as having horns, in this case what is called in Norwegian *bukkehorn*. The traditional account of this is that it is essentially a transfer from Greco-Roman myth to Christianity: fauns and satyrs have horns, so Christian demons and devils have them as well.⁴⁷ As a drinking vessel and an instrument for ritual sacrifices in cult contexts, the horn has been widespread. On horns, note also the

44. Nordby (2018: 111) claims that we do not have *any* amulet inscriptions that bear such a formula, which is why he rejects the notion of magic *istil*-formulas on amulets (cf. note 16 above): “Med godvilje kunne kanskje pinnen [i.e., N B391; M.S.] fungert som en amulett, men vi har ingen andre eksempler [!] på at istil-formelen figurerer i amulettekster av noe slag.” In his study, however, Nordby overlooks the Vedslet sandstone amulet, which is why he relegates magical-apotropaic functions of the *thistle-mistle* formula to the realm of speculation.

45. On the overall symbolism of the *horn*, see Biedermann (1992: 172–173).

46. Cf. Nielsen (2019: 19–20), with reference to Nisbeth (1995: 124 and 155).

47. I owe this observation to Marc Pierce (email dated September 10, 2021).

alleged magical powers of rhino horns, narwhal tusks, etc. The fact that horns have been used as sacrificial vessels in libations and drink offerings is already evident from pre-Christian accounts, e.g. the Venus of Laus-sel.⁴⁸ Hunting horns have been the attribute of the saints Hubertus, Oswald and Eustachius, but also of the sacred Cornelius – for the latter because of the association with Latin *cornu*. Moreover, the horn of plenty (Latin *cornucopiae*) is an attribute both of Flora and Fortuna, the goddess of fortune, as well as a symbol for gifts that never end and that men get to enjoy undeservedly.

From this brief sketch it follows that the word *horn* has a full range of associations, mainly in a framework of Christian allegory, and this approach does not preclude the possibility of folkloric allusions either. Not least, the horn became a symbol of fertility and procreation, probably because it belonged to an animal associated with these values.⁴⁹ As Imer and Olesen (2018) note, folk medicine is a likely scenario for the ON term *þorn* in particular (compare the term *svefn-þorn* in the prose passage of *Sigrdrifumál* 4):

Thorn occurs in folk magic, for example the Gotlandic thorn of sleep, which is a bud of thorn that is tied to children to make them sleep, and corn is known from Danish folklore, where it could be placed on newborn babies to prevent the elves from taking them.⁵⁰

The word *korn* is certainly in need of further comment. Nielsen (2019: 20) suggests that it symbolizes the Christian truth, viz. the Gospel: “troen og det kristne budskap, som det blev indstiftet med Jesu offerdød på korset” [‘faith and the Christian message, as instituted by Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross’].⁵¹ Cooper (1978: 43) extends this symbolism:

Ears of wheat are the bread of the Eucharist, the body of Christ; bounty; the righteous; the godly. Corn and the wine together also represent the Eucharist.

48. Cf. Biedermann (1992: 287); also Dahlby (1985: 288, 291 and 341).

49. See Onians (1954: 239–240), with further references.

50. See Imer and Olesen (2018: 141–142), with reference to Gustavson in GR 3. Cf. also Nordby (2018: 109).

51. For further Biblical references, see Nielsen (2019: 20).

Further note *John* 6: 35 on Jesus as the Bread of Life. It is beyond doubt that the word *korn* underpins the Christian setting of the *horn-þorn-korn* formula. A clear pointer mentioned by Nielsen (2019: 21) is the *Skördesundret* or *Sädesundret* on several baptismal fonts in Gotland; on the ‘Marvel of Seed’, see in particular Lindkvist (2015: 215–218) and Heizmann (2018). Nielsen (2019: 21) further elaborates on this point:

Det hurtig voksende sædekorn, som Jesus spreder på vejen, og som narrer soldaterne under flygten til Ægypten, indgår egentlig i en apokryf tilføjelse til Bibelen. Det populære motiv er på kontinentet ofte gengivet i stensulptur og glasmosaikker (Måle 1961: 291), samt i Norden desuden som hyppigt motiv i kirkernes kalkmalerier.

[‘The fast-growing seed that Jesus spreads along the way, and which fools the soldiers during the escape to Egypt, is actually part of an apocryphal addition to the Bible. The popular motif is often depicted on the continent in stone sculpture and stained glass (Måle 1961: 291), as well as in the North as a frequent motif of paintings on the churches’ plaster walls.’ Transl. M.S.]

The motif of fertility and prosperity is related to the ‘old’ *thistle-mistle* formula which is an (in-)fertility formula par excellence.⁵² As argued, this provides yet another link between the two formulas, which might suggest that in the High Middle Ages the *horn-þorn-korn* formula superseded the obsolete *thistle-mistle* formula in certain environments. Interestingly, the medieval amulet of Källingeby 1 combines the *horn-þorn-korn* formula with both a forceful heathen spell and a Christian prayer in Latin (see the following section). The Middle Ages witness syncretistic uses of the ‘old’ formula which unite Christian and pagan-folkloric ideologies. On an earlier example of such syncretism see the 11th-century Ledberg stone which was briefly discussed in section 4.

52. See Schulte (2020: 112–116), with references.

8 The *horn-þorn-korn* formula on Kællingeby 1

This amulet was originally folded four times from one end and is almost intact.⁵³ The lead strip has a Latin text in runes on the outside and an Old Danish text in runes on the inside. In the following, only the runic text on the inside of the amulet will be presented. The text is not completely understood, but it seems clear that we are faced with a ‘magic’ formula, possibly a healing charm. Here the inside text in Old Danish is presented in detail, whereas the Latin folk prayer is not rendered.⁵⁴

æ ku- -alm iak s-...gubkunu- - runu iak rist a
om þæn hælkun[u]...a þors ok þæn grimilika greþ
ok þæn grimel...a greþ ok þæn auilika ælf
fran þemæriku-...kættilbi-rhu h þ kooorrrnn

Á gullmalm ek sett/sit(?)
goð-/guðkunna(r) rúnu/rúnar
ek rista/rist/reist á (?)
um þann helkunna(?) þurs
ok þann grimmliga greð/græð/gríð(?)
ok þann grimmliga greð/græð/gríð(?)
ok þann æfiliga alf
frá þér(?)... Ketil(?)biǫrgu/Ketilbiǫrgu(?) ... horn, þorn, korn.⁵⁵

‘On the gold metal, I place (these runes)/sit(?)
Runes/a rhyme (in runes?) that derive(s) from the gods,
I carve/carved on (it),
about the giant that derives from hell/is sorcery-skilled(?),
and the fierce ogre/demon,
and the fierce ogre/demon,

53. The following account of Kællingeby 1 is based on DK Bh20 and Imer and Olesen (2018: 134–142). For further information see there.

54. See Imer and Olesen (2018: 135–136), for a tentative reading and translation of both the inside and outside text.

55. Imer & Olesen (2018: 135) put the ‘þ’ of the formula in square brackets, i.e. [þ], while it seems fairly clear in the illustration.

and the eternal elf,
 (away) from you(?) ... Ketil help(?)/Ketilbjørg(?)
 Horn, thorn, corn.⁵⁶



Ill. 3. The lead amulet Källingeby 1: inside text in Old Danish. (Drawing: Lisbeth M. Imer; cf. Imer & Olesen 2018: 135)⁵⁷

This text displays typical features of folk magic, not least the two keywords *þurs* m. ‘giant, ogre’ and *alfr* m. ‘elf’. Ohrt (1935: 87), in his account on Nordic charms, includes the *þurs* among the group of ‘lower heathen beings’:

Særdeles ofte træffes i nordiske Formler lavere Væsener fra nordisk Hedentro: Underjordsfolk, (onde) Vætter, (onde) Elver, Tussen (Tursen), Trolden (der t. Eks. udskyder Gigtpile). Her er virkelig Udslag af gammel Tro [...]

[‘Very often in Nordic formulas we meet lower beings from Nordic heathendom: beings of lower realms, (evil) sprites, (evil) elves, giants (the *Þurs*), the troll (who for example fires off arrows of palsy [i.e., arrows that cause gout; M.S.]. Here the old faith really manifests itself [...].’ Transl. M.S.]

The term *þurs* features prominently in Nordic charms and amulet inscriptions, cf. for instance the Sigtuna amulet from Uppland and the ‘Canterbury Charm’, both being magic spells against blood-poisoning.⁵⁸ As Bauer (2018: 187) notes, the ‘Canterbury Charm’ is a marginal gloss at the bot-

56. Preliminary translation of the runic inside text (Old Danish); see Imer & Olesen (2018: 135) with my modifications. On the translation of the difficult runic sequence *greþ*, obviously a masculine noun (nom.sg. **greþr*), see below.

57. I owe thanks to Lisbeth Imer for sending me the drawing (email dated September 6, 2021).

58. On the *þórr/þurs* formula, see McKinnell, Simek and Düwel (2004: 126–127, 139) and Bauer (2018: 185). For a reading and interpretation of Sigtuna plate 1, see Pereswetoff-Morath (2019: 70–113), with a thorough discussion of earlier research.

tom of folio 123v and the following 125r in MS Cotton Caligula A. XV (London, British Library) dating to the mid-11th century. The incantation stands on its own and has no obvious relation to the main text of the manuscript which features computistic writings in Latin and Old English. Here the (original) apotropaic-protective use of this þórr/þurs formula is rather certain (cf. Bauer 2018: 187).⁵⁹

kurilsarþuarafarþunufuntinistuþuruigiþik | þorsatrutini[>k]urilsarþuaraiþraþrauari

Gyril(l) sárþvara, farþu nú! Fundinn estu. Þórr vígi þik, þursa dróttinn.

[G]yril(l) sárþvara. Viðr aðravari.

‘Gyril, wound-causer, go now! You are found. Thor hallow you (to perdition), lord of giants.

Gyril wound-causer. Against blood-poison (literally, blood-vessel pus).’

Reichborn-Kjennerud (1928: 55) further notes that the Norwegian word *tuss* (= ON *þurs*) occurs in the names of various diseases, e.g. *tussebit* and *tusseslag*, literally ‘tusse-bite’ and ‘tusse-attack’. He adds that *þurs* is connected with childbirth as evidenced by a record from Setesdal in Norway that *tussen beit nedfallskona* (‘the *þurs* bit the woman giving birth’; cf. Reichborn-Kjennerud 1924: 133). There are also the Old English rune-poem, the Norwegian rune-poem and the Icelandic rune-poem which attribute specific powers to specific letters such as þ (= *þurs*; see, e.g., Page 1999, Bauer 2003). The Icelandic rune poem, copies of which can be dated to the 16th century, mentions that *þ er kvenna kvöl ok kletta íbúi* (‘*Þurs* is the torment of women, and a cave-dweller’). On this basis, Hall (2009: 195, 215) assumes that the reason for the diseases named *þursar* “could be the transgression of moral norms”, and he concludes that *þurs* unites the concepts of sexual torment and illness, where the latter is embodied in the demon.⁶⁰ The famous passage of *Skírnismál* stanza 36 relates how *Skírnir* uses threats to force the giantess *Gerðr* to give her love to *Freyr*. Note that it is the *Þurs*, the ogre, who seals *Gerðr*’s defeat:

59. See DR 419, and Moltke (1985: 360–361), Rundata, under DR 419.

60. See Hall (2009: 215). For detailed discussion, see Pereswetoff-Morath (2019: 106–111, especially 109).

Þurs rist ec þér ok þríá stafi, ergi oc æði oc óþola.

“Ogre” I carve for you and three runes: lewdness and frenzy and unbearable desire.⁶¹

Admittedly, the inside text of Källingeby 1 is not fully understood at this point. In particular, the alliterative fixed phrase **ok þæn grimilika greþ** is difficult to translate. It emerges again on three related lead amulets with slightly different spellings (e.g. **kreþ** instead of **greþ**), viz., Kastelsbakke, Källingeby 2 and Østre Skovgård.⁶² The semantics of the form **greþ/kreþ** is unclear. Given the parallelism of the runic sequences **þurs** – **greþ** – **alf**, on Källingeby 1, it is reasonable to argue that we are dealing with a (male) demon or troll; compare the name of the giantess *Griðr* (a feminine *ijō*-stem) who was Viðar the Silent’s mother and according to *Skáldskaparmál* 18 gave the god Þórr lodging on one of his journeys (cf. Simek 1993: 117). The female name occurs several times in kennings from the 10th century on, whereas a related masculine noun remains unattested. *Griðr* f. in turn is related to the noun *gríð* f. ‘impetuosity, fierceness, ferocity; mental unrest or upset’; cf. also Icel. *gríðar stoð* n. ‘(untamed) stallion with mares, herd of young horses’.⁶³ The three variants of the Icelandic pair formula *í gríð og erg(i)*, *í gríð og kergju*, and *í erg(i) og gríð* (‘with all forces and violence’) confirm the relationship between *gríð* ‘vehemence, ferocity’ and *ergi* ‘lewdness, sexual perversion’.⁶⁴ The demon or ogre spelled ***greþ(R)** probably embodies these qualities and, as Imer and Olesen (2018: 140) point out, “functions as a personification ... [of] a kind of supernatural evil being or pain”. This analysis is directly supported by Hall (2009) who notes that illness could be identified with supernatural beings in medieval Scandinavia.

It is most significant in our context that the runic inscription ends with the *horn-þorn-korn* formula. I think that it is almost impossible to exclude folk magic in this context. The common denominator is probably that both the lead amulet of Källingeby 1 and the Vedslet sandstone amulet (DR 57) have an apotropaic-protective function against evil spirits and

61. See Kuhn (1983: 76); transl. Larrington (2014: 63).

62. See Imer and Olesen (2018: 143–144, 146, and 149).

63. See Jónsson (1913–1916: 203b), and Heggstad et al. (2015: 223a and 224a), under *gríð* and *Grið(u)r*. Cf. also Imer and Olesen (2018: 140) who opt for an equation of **greþ** (acc.) with ON *grátr* m. ‘cry’ in their translation.

64. See Blöndal (1920–1924: 272a), under *gríð*.

diseases. As noted, Vedslet displays an extended version of the older formula, viz. **þmkrhli**, which probably alludes to *þistill-mistill-kistill-ristill*.⁶⁵ On the key term *ristill*, see above.

9 Conclusion: The assimilation of pagan ideology

The overall aim of this paper is to shed new light on the interrelation between pagan and Christian ideology in a setting of pluralistic cultural tradition. One might argue that the two interrelated formulas *þistill-mistill-kistill* and *horn-korn-þorn* represent a shared ideology rather than two distinct ones, viz. paganism versus Christianity. Both of these formulas are typical trinomials (German *Drillingsformeln*), but the ‘older’ formula is largely extended and transformed in the Christian period.

A closer examination of iconographic motifs in the early Christian period reinforces the claim that the transition to Christianity is a symbiotic process (cf. Oehrl 2006 and 2011 on the iconography of the wolf Fenrir). Several scholars (e.g., Hultgård 2017: 183) have argued that the type of merger evidenced by the memorials of Ledberg, Skarpåker and other runestones is best explained against the common background which characterized the late heathen and early Christian ideology, viz. a religious transitional period.⁶⁶ Not only the Old Testament but also the heathen myths foreshadowed the events described in the New Testament, which in turn prefigure the apocalyptic beliefs of the Norsemen around AD 1000. *Ragnarøk* can be assessed as a *praefiguratio* of the Biblical events of the Apocalypse, which merges into this early Christian ideology.

Part of the argument rests on the memorial stones from the late Viking Age which most probably display *Ragnarøk* motifs with a ship and a wolf merging into one overall heroic scene (cf. Hultgård 2017). The Skarpåker stone with its ‘heathen’ *iqrð/upphiminn* formula lends further support to this claim: it may be interpreted as a heroic topos of un-

65. Cf. Moltke (1938: 140) and (1985: 488); Schulte (2020: 104).

66. Christiansson (1959: 255) suggests that the custom of erecting runestones such as Ledberg and Tullstorp may have been directly inspired by the apocalyptic mood around AD 1000 and the *Book of Revelation* itself. For severe criticism, however, see Paul (1991: 1–16), in particular note 7.

matched bravery which is rehearsed in skaldic poetry.⁶⁷ As argued, the ambiguity of the warrior motif in the iconography of Ledberg (and Tullstorp) may actually be intended: The question of whether it represents Odin or the commemorated person may not be central since the heroic warrior – due to the topos – is the equal even of Odin. This ‘double-image theory’ also explains the fact that the Ledberg memorial actually features two images of warriors on both sides A and B – one possibly depicting Odin, the other one the deceased.

In a similar vein, the symbolism of the medieval *horn-þorn-korn* formula turns out to be more complex than previously assumed. So far, research has neglected the neat pattern of interaction between folk magic and Christian symbolism. As argued in this paper, the evidence for the merging of Christian beliefs and folklore is unmistakable. Not least, this model of interpretation fits well with the functional use of the *horn-þorn-korn* formula on the Källingeby amulet which is comparable to the older ‘magic’ amulet inscriptions from the Viking Age and the early Middle Ages, not least the Vedslet sandstone amulet. The bottom-line is that the younger formula has several features in common with its forerunner, the *thistle-mistle* formula, not least the apotropaic-protective function in an amuletic context.

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67. On this ‘topos of heroic praise’ in skaldic poetry, cf. Marold (1998: 670). In Marold’s analysis, we are dealing with what she labels the “Unvergleichlichkeitstopos” (i.e., the ‘topos of the unmatched’).

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Abstract

This runic case-study attests to the interaction of Christian, folkloristic and pagan (magic) symbolism during and after the conversion of the North. As part of a broader framework of interpretation, the paper also

addresses iconographic representations that may mix different motifs and traditions – exemplified by the Ledberg and Skarpåker stones. First of all it addresses two well-attested, encrypted formulas of three rhyming words: the Viking-age and medieval *þistill-mistill-kistill* formula and the medieval and post-medieval *horn-þorn-korn* formula. Both of these are ‘graphic formulas’ which occur in a shuffled order, in particular **þmkii-isssttiiiill** for *þistill-mistill-kistill* on the Gørlev and Ledberg stones, and **hþkooorrnnn** (or **hkþooorrnnn**) for *horn-þorn-korn* (or less frequently in an alternate order, *horn-korn-þorn*) on some plaster walls in Väte and Bunge Churches on Gotland and on the Danish lead amulet Kællingeby 1. The simple fact that these runic sequences are patterned in a more or less fixed graphic design assures their status as proper formulas.

The author suggests that the latter formula supersedes and replaces the aforementioned one in particular contexts, and he adds several arguments for this view. In its iconography, the 11th century witnesses a particularly neat symbiosis of Christian and pagan motifs, not least scenes from *Ragnarøk*. A case in point is the 11th-century Ledberg stone, which features a *þistill-mistill-kistill* formula coupled with *Ragnarøk* motifs and a Christian cross. More broadly, many pagan formulas and motifs were recycled in later centuries in a Christian setting (cf. Herjulfsdotter 2013; Oehrl 2010). Christian-pagan analogies such as the Apocalypse were intentionally functionalized and put into the service of the mission. The author argues for a subtle synergy rather than a clear dichotomy. The type of edification formula represented by *horn-þorn-korn* alludes to Christian motifs of blessing, benediction and repentance, while at the same time it does not preclude folk magic. Its use is probably multifunctional depending on the type of script-bearer and context. The lead tablet of Kællingeby 1 suggests that the ‘younger’ formula can be placed in the context of folkloric healing charms. Despite the salient Christian-Biblical allegory, this condensed formula displays notable similarities with the pre-Christian *þistill-mistill-kistill* formula whose key function was protective-apotropaic.

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