

# Memorial runestones from the Viking Age and Early Medieval Period in Norway

*- studying the application of criteria to determine social status*

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## Summary

This thesis aims to present the criteria that could possibly be used to determine the social status of the people mentioned in runic memorial inscriptions. The time frame chosen for the corpus used for the study is the Viking Age and Early Medieval Period, and the region is what is known as modern day Norway. Memorial runestones have been a tradition throughout this time in all of Scandinavia, but the corpus within Norway includes only 51 runestones. The majority of memorials doesn't directly tell which social standing the people mentioned had. Therefore criteria are needed to further discuss how status could be determined. While some criteria are rather objective and show a clear picture of who the person mentioned was, other criteria are not as clear. The first part of the analysis lists the chosen criteria and mentions the runestones from the corpus. Furthermore, it explores which runestones satisfy each criterion. The second part consists of case studies of three specific runestones. Based on the criteria discussed, all three cases mention individuals who can be determined to have enjoyed higher social status.

## Foreword

The one who first and foremost deserves a big thank you is my supervisor Alessandro Palumbo. I want to thank Alessandro very much for his continuous engagement, helpful advice and patience.

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## 1 Introduction

Runic inscriptions from the Viking Age and Early Medieval Period can be used for research in many ways and for many different topics, such as personal or place names studies, research about voyages and trade connections, viking raids, kinship and settlement, and the process of Christianisation in the late Viking Age and Early Medieval Period. Runic inscriptions are on the same level as archaeological evidence, as it is preserved directly and unchanged from the contemporary time. This is different from, for example, manuscripts written down later by outsiders, who have not lived at the time when the events they describe took place, and who had their own opinions and backgrounds influencing them and lived a long time later (Jesch 1991: 42). Runic inscriptions can be found on all sorts of objects, whereof a large group are those on raised stones. A subgroup of those are the raised runestones with a memorial inscription where a sponsor raised the stone in memory of a deceased. This is the subgroup that my research focuses on, specifically on the runestones from Norway from the Viking Age and Early Medieval Period. My research is based in social history, trying to find out more about who raised those memorial stones, and what their social status might have been. Whether only high status people raised stones or people from all different levels of society were involved, or if that difference can be determined at all. The focus will be on how the status of people mentioned in Norwegian memorial runestones could possibly be determined.

Most memorial inscriptions don't mention specific events or known people, most of them seem to be personal names of people we don't know much more about, except that they have died or that they have raised a stone in memory of someone. Exceptions are, for example, the Jelling stones from Denmark (raised by two kings (DR 41 + 42)<sup>1</sup>), and a few others where we know more about the

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<sup>1</sup> Jelling Stones: The younger one (DR42), raised by King Harald in memory of his father, King Gorm and his mother is dated to between 965 and 970s. In addition to the memorial, it shows a large ornament on one side and mentions the Christianisation of Denmark. The older stone (DR 41), raised by King Gorm in memory of his wife (the same woman that is later commemorated by her son on the younger Jelling stone), is therefore dated to one generation earlier. This inscription is on a smaller stone, without any ornaments and consists of only a memorial

background of the mentioned people. They were important and powerful in their time and left their mark in history. They also appear in many other sources, so we don't have to rely only on runic inscriptions to know who those people were. But even if the runestones don't tell us much about one single person, they can be used for a variety of research, especially when a larger corpus of inscriptions is used. For example, when talking specifically about inscriptions from the Swedish region of Uppland, even more general assumptions regarding that time period for that place can be made (Jesch 1994).

Many stones have been lost, and new ones are found every once in a while, but the distribution stays the same. That way it seems safe to say that the distribution of stones we see today reflects the original one (Sawyer 1991). As there aren't that many stones from the Viking Age and Early Medieval Period with a memorial inscription in Norway, it is easier to study a large group of stones instead of a single one, as that one might not tell much by itself.

### 1.1 Aim of the thesis

The general idea is to show how the social status of the people mentioned in Norwegian memorial inscriptions on runestones from the late Viking Age and Early Medieval Period could be determined by studying different criteria. What do the Viking Age memorial runestones from Norway reveal about the social status of the sponsors and/or the commemorated? Which criteria can be used and which indicators or markers can be looked at in order to learn about their social status?

The first aim of this thesis is to show different criteria which could be used to find out more about the social status of the people mentioned on late Viking-Age memorial runestones. For this I have chosen the Norwegian runestones from the Viking Age and Early Medieval Period which contain a memorial formula (for the definition of this formula and the corpus, see chapter 3). The second aim is to go through the corpus, analysing the runestones by looking at specific traits relevant

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inscription. Birgit Sawyer (2000: 158) however argues that it was in fact King Harald as well who raised the older Jelling stone in the name of his father to rewrite history in his own favour.

to the chosen criteria, and check to what extent statements about social status can be done. Three specifically interesting runestones will be used as case studies.

However, the goal is not to sort all of Norway's memorial runestones from the Viking Age and Early Medieval Period into groups of higher or lower social status, but to show, with the help of different criteria, how those runestones could be looked at in order to learn more about the social status of the sponsors and the commemorated.

## 1.2 Previous Research

Many different topics are relevant for my research for understanding the background of the runestones, like social history, the role of women in society (for the cases where women are mentioned) or what the titles and attributes mean that might show up in inscriptions. In addition to the background, different fields of research directly regarding the runestones are necessary to be able to discuss the inscriptions properly, like, for example, art history for ornamented memorials. In the following I will mention some scholars and their work which are relevant for my thesis.

The basis of my thesis was mainly started by two publications: The article by Henrik Williams (2013) "Runstenarnas sociala dimension," and Birgit Sawyers book (2000) "The Viking-Age-Rune-Stones - Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia". From Sawyers book I took the list of memorial runestones from Norway, which defines my corpus. She did extensive work on commemoration and sponsorship on runestones in Sweden, Denmark and Norway. Her survey focuses on those who are mentioned on runestones, and in what relation they stood to each other as commissioner to commemorate. From the list of possible criteria and the list of runestones which form my corpus, I started researching on the social status of people mentioned on the runestones in Norway and how to check whether the criteria apply to the memorial runestones. The following scholars and their articles all deal with the social

dimensions of runestones and are necessary for my research to understand the background information about society and social status in the Viking Age and Early Medieval Period.

Sponsors are more often men, in numbers are only 12, 5% of runestones in Scandinavia sponsored by women and one theory for this uneven distribution between the sexes is that women were only the one in charge of raising a memorial when there was no male kinsman available (Sawyer 1991: 103), for example when her husband died, his father and/or brothers had died before and the sons of the men to be commemorated were either minors or had died as well. There is no example of joint sponsorship of a man and a woman in Norway, but they do exist in other parts of Scandinavia.

In Norway it is often brothers of the commemorated who raised the stone, and we don't find as many sons as in Sweden, and almost no sisters or daughters. Fathers as sponsors are more common in Norway compared to Sweden. The amount of Christian memorials also varies between the different regions. While Uppland has many inscriptions with crosses or Christian phrases, we rarely find them in Norway. The typical pattern for runestone memorials found in Uppland seems to include mostly close relatives, crosses and prayers, and more than one sponsor in each inscription. Of course, there are also other inscriptions without typical markers for an area. Denmark is more similar to Norway, where there are fewer runic memorials with clear Christian signs, and more single sponsors where the sponsors are not as limited to close relatives as they are in Uppland. There has also been research done on more specific words that show up in some inscriptions, such as the adjective "good," and what those little words as attributes could indicate about the person's social standing. It could be a phrase indicating social status, ownership of land, wealth or social power, rather than someone just being a generally good person. Most good people in Sweden are found in areas which are connected to strong royal influence. (Sawyer 1991: 110). There is only evidence of one "good man" in Norway. Another approach for research on the social background of runestones is to not look at specific people, but into society as such and focusing on social status. Indicators for status of a



person could be researched through criteria such as how tall the memorial stone is, which type of stone is used or how advanced the inscription is.

This is where Henrik Williams' article "Runstenarnas sociala dimension" comes in. He lists possible criteria for how to determine the social status and wealth of a sponsor. More examples for those criteria are poems in inscriptions or usage of older runes or different versions of runes, e.g. a chair-**s** or a fancy **m** or ornaments, could indicate a specific social status. Staveless runes could have been a more advanced form of runes and therefore signalled higher class (Williams 2013: 68). I will go further into which criteria Williams mentions and which ones my thesis focuses on in chapter 4.1.

The social dimension of the memorial stones hasn't been studied enough to draw clear conclusions about the social status of the people mentioned in runic inscriptions. So far, all memorial stones have been associated with people from higher status, but there is also evidence for stones raised by people from lower classes or even newly freed slaves (Williams 2013). If objective criteria for the status of a stone could be established, it would help with getting a deeper insight into Viking society and runic inscriptions.

Many scholars have done research on different aspects of runestones and the memorial inscriptions on them. Judith Jesch wrote about a few topics, including social history (1994), lexicography and vocabulary of runic inscriptions (2011, 2013) and women in the Viking Age (1991). Anne-Sophie Gräslund also covered the topic of women in the Viking Age and the mentions in runic inscriptions in 1989 and 1995. In the following, I will show more of the results on the research of Jesch, Gräslund and others sorted into different aspects of information relevant for my research topic.

### 1.3 General overview of the material

The following text will give a broader overview of runic inscriptions in stones, and I have collected a few topics where some research has been performed, either concerning runestones as such, or by using them as sources. The topics all give relevant background information which are necessary to talk about social status. Women raising runestones are rather unusual, especially in Norway, so looking at why women raised or not raised memorials can be interesting. Viking raids and inheritance traditions are sometimes mentioned as plausible reasons for the increase of runestones raised, and will be discussed as well. Other reasons for raising a memorial are mentioned in the topic afterwards. Christianisation is another relevant research topic as in Norway, the change to Christianity happens during the time frame I chose for my thesis (Viking Age and Early Medieval Period). A change of religion brings changes within a society, and some runestones in my corpus show clear signs of Christianity. The last topic discusses other subjects for important background information.

#### *Women on runestones*

12,5% of the runestones were erected by women, so it may suggest that in some cases, women had full social/economic responsibility. Another 15% is sponsored by men and women together. Numbers for women in Norway are a bit lower (Sawyer 1991).

Women's and men's roles in society were usually strictly divided, (Gräslund 1989: 233), however, in some cases women might have had "manly positions". That could explain why there are more women mentioned on runestones in specific areas where men were often vikings, and would be away on travels and raids for a long time. In this case, women had to do their husbands' jobs, just like women in the Modern Times did during wars. Finland is mentioned as an example of this, by Anne-Sophie Gräslund (1989: 233f.). Here, women took a lot more jobs men would usually do, compared to women in Sweden, who weren't involved much in the war, and didn't need them to step up in that same way.

Several hundred names of women across Scandinavia have become known through memorial runestones. Those memorial monuments tell more about the background of the people mentioned than most portable inscribed objects do, because they usually give more information about the people. They also don't move places as much as portable objects, and can therefore easier be connected to a specific area. The memorials often have relationships between the living and the dead mentioned, or tell more about the lives of the people mentioned in them.

Some examples of women raising runestones in Norway are N61 and N68, which will both be further discussed in the case studies in chapter 4.2. A third stone, N66, found at Gran church, is also raised by a woman, and as N61, N66 and N68 are in a relative small area and from about the same time period, Judith Jesch (1991: 72) suggests that it could have been a local tradition for women to raise stones.

More can be learned when comparing memorial runestones from Norway and its surrounding countries to a different place where such stones are found as well. The Isle of Man has a lot of inscriptions, at least for such a small island, but they are more often Christian. Most read "...raised this cross" instead of stone and are either cross shaped or have a cross on them. It seems to be a Norse tradition to raise memorials like this and therefore a sign of how the Norse and Celtic cultures mixed on the Isle of Man. An example would be that all names on those rune-crosses (except one) are of Celtic origin, while the inscription is in Old Norse. The language of the inscriptions shows some grammatical issues, which is likely due to Old Norse being only used for the tradition of using runestones and not otherwise as a written or spoken language. There are no female commissioners on the Isle of Man, so there is no indication that women were able to act financially independent in a way like women in Scandinavia (Jesch 1991: 72).

### *Inheritance structure*

According to Birgit Sawyer (1991, 2000) memorial runestones show a claim for inheritance. Runestones don't only commemorate the dead, but also acted as a means to show off the sponsor's name. The name of the one who raised the stone is usually listed first, and therefore seems to be more important than the name or names that follow. One reason for why their name is important - perhaps more important than the memorial of the dead - could be a declaration of inheritance or to show wealth and status (Sawyer 1991: 102). More than one sponsor would then mean that they inherit something together, or that whatever they got hasn't been divided yet.

That way it becomes important to publicly claim the inheritance by raising a memorial, stating their own name and showing their relationship to the deceased. Men would have more rights to claim the inheritance, and thus come earlier in line than women. This thought is supported by the majority of stones raised by men compared to by women. A brother would then inherit before the mother and a son before a daughter, etc... But reverse inheritance - parents inheriting from their children - is also quite common in that time period and parents seem to survive their children more frequently. Widows would then inherit from their sons as well as from their husbands (Sawyer 2003: 63). Only when a woman is the only surviving child or there are no other male family members, a woman would inherit something and from what is known, widows usually didn't have a right to inheritance from their husbands. They might only inherit from their children.

Different regions might have different laws regarding the order of inheritance, and might also have changed over time. One example would be in some parts of Sweden (Uppland, Södermanland, Öland) where women would inherit if there is no brother, father or son in line before them: In other Swedish areas, they stay behind other male family members like uncles or male cousins, who would inherit first. The latter seems also to have been true for Denmark and Norway. (Gräslund 1989: 234)

## *Christianisation*

First, a short explanation of how Christianisation is defined, compared to the definition of conversion. Terje Spurkland (2012: 184) describes the difference as the first being about society and the long term effects the change has in the societal structures, while the latter being personal and a one-time event when a person converts to the new religion. Society can be Christianised; like having a church and Christian customs without all of the people actually believing or having converted. Whereas people can convert and live with the new religion at a time or in a place where Christianisation hasn't been fully done yet (Spurkland 2012: 184).

Social and economic changes that took place - ultimately leading to the end of the Viking Age - are said to be one possible reason for the rising amount of runestones raised during this time. According to Sawyer, the erection of runestones "can be seen as a symptom of crisis, as a response to the comprehensive transformation of Viking society" (Sawyer 1991: 1). This might have caused the rapid increasing quantity of runestones in the late 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century in many parts of Scandinavia. Either to resist the changes by raising old-fashioned stones, or accepting the new religion/tradition by including, for example, Christian phrases and prayers, or crosses to the inscriptions. One reason for the uneven distribution could be that it reflects where things changed most or fastest, or where the change was opposed the most (Sawyer 1991). If runestones were raised more frequently in areas where the new religion was greatly opposed, it could help explain why there are not that many in Norway. Here, the Danish king is an overlord and the old traditions were not challenged as much. The orders they have are more indirect, so Christianisation happens slower than in other parts of Scandinavia.

Memorial stones mentioning someone raising a bridge are most likely signs of Christianity as well. In order to build roads and bridges, the Catholic Church had a system of indulgence and offered intercession for the soul of the dead or absolution (Gräslund 2005: 491). Therefore, building bridges should be seen as

a Christian tradition, perhaps comparable to donating money to the church/community in memory of someone. Self-commemoration (raising a runestone in memory of oneself while still being alive) -like the famous Jarlabanki-stones<sup>2</sup> show -could indicate donation in some form for someone's own soul (Gräslund 1989: 108).

The runestone N68 Dynna is a good example of a bridge being sponsored in addition to a raised memorial. This stone was raised by a woman, which is, in this case, interesting as women were usually the first in a family to convert to the Christian religion. And not just in Scandinavia; this phenomenon can also be observed when studying the history of the Franks, Langobards, English and Macedonia. In all regions, the women were an important part of Christianisation (Gräslund 2005: 484).

Often it can't be hard to determine whether the sponsors were Christian or not, unless there is definite evidence on the stone for it. As pagan phrases or names of gods are rare (only a few in Denmark) so it also can't be said for sure, after a certain point in time where Christianity is confirmed, that a sponsor was not Christian either. At some point Christian prayers and crosses appear frequently, especially in Sweden. The trend to erect Christian memorials might have started with the younger of the Jelling stone (DR 42) in Denmark which is dated to between 965 and 970s (Åkerström 2017). The fashion would then have spreaded from Denmark to Sweden (Liestøl 1969: 75).

The placing of runestones is also interesting and not all scholars agree on whether Christianisation makes people raise stones the old fashioned way on roads or assembly spots because it's difficult for them to go with the new tradition of churchyards, like Otto von Friesen (1933: 169) and Sven Ulrik Palme (1959:

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<sup>2</sup> Some stones connected to Jarlabanki and his family: U127, U 140, U142, U148, U149, U150, U164, U165, U212, U216, U217, U261 and more. Jarlabanki was probably a chieftain or similar in Täby, Sweden. He raised six stones for himself, but up to 20 runestones are connected to his family, even 1-2 generations after him. In addition to memorial inscriptions some also mention additional information like how many men he "owned" and what area he ruled and that he has built bridges. (see: Sawyer 2000: 93)

93) believe or that the lack of them leaves basically no other choice than to raise a memorial elsewhere (Sawyer 1991: 101)

Nonetheless these religious reasons don't mean that there can't have been political reasons as well for raising memorial runestones. Perhaps stating inheritance is important when there are a lot of political changes, to make sure even if systems change, the inheritance stays (Sawyer 1991: 109).

### *Viking history, voyages*

Because so much of contemporary literature, academically or not, dealing with the Viking Age is written about the Viking raids and travel abroad, it could seem that most inscriptions talk about that topic. According to Birgit Sawyer (1991: 98) it's only about 10% or less of all inscriptions of that time that tell us more about the adventures of the Vikings. It is just Vikings being such a popular topic, not only for scholarly research, but as a general interest for books and movies, that there is way more written about these specific parts of the history.

Nevertheless there is much that can be learned about Viking history through memorial runestones. For example from inscriptions which mention Viking raids and voyages of people who died abroad. A great example here are the Ingvar-stones<sup>3</sup>. These inscriptions from different areas around Stockholm, Sweden mention men who died during a journey east. What makes those inscriptions special is that all of them mention someone called Ingvar. With that information they can be connected to each other and dated to the same time as all of them died during the same voyage.

Some other inscriptions of men dying abroad mention place names as well, so we know where Vikings have travelled to (Sawyer 2003: 66).

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<sup>3</sup> There are 25 stones mentioning Ingvar or can be connected to his family who led a voyage to the east, possibly to Georgia. Vs19, Ög145(?), Ög155; Sö 9, 96(?), 105, 107, 108, 131, 173, 179, 254, 277, 281, 287, 320, 335, U439, N32, 644 & 645 (same stone), 661, 778, 837, 1143. (See Sawyer 2003: 66; 2000: 119).

runestones mentioning any sorts of Viking activity also show in which areas Vikings might have lived as that would be where the memorials for them would be raised.

### *Reasons to raise a runestone*

Viking activity, which means more men dying abroad who then can be commemorated at home when they don't return and Christianisation, which brought a lot of changes in many aspects into society are named as two of the many possible reasons behind the many runestones raised in the Viking Age (see Sawyer 1991). But runestones being connected to Vikings is mostly because those stories attract more attention and are more popular to write or read about as I mentioned before. Some scholars however, Sawyer mentions Sven B.F. Jansson as an example (Sawyer 1991: 101), thinks that the voyage-stones are the proper ones and all others just follow that new trend. This seems rather unsatisfying as there are so many runestones not at all connected to Vikings and the tradition to commemorate the dead in form of a runic inscription on stone is seen before the Viking Age as well. In addition to that there has also been activity of sea-going and travelling and trading people before and after the Vikings without having a big fashion of raising stones in commemoration (Sawyer 1991: 101). Usually, when it comes to a multi-layered topic like this one surely is, there are also multiple reasons behind it and it can't be said for certain whether there has been one supreme reason.

Judith Jesch (2011: 31) states that it's some scholars, like Sawyer, who think raising a runestone is a sign of social status and land ownership. Other scholars, especially those focusing on language find almost no evidence on that assumption. (Jesch 2011: 31)



## *Other research*

Runic inscriptions are more than texts and therefore a lot more can be studied about them. The decoration, design and layout also contributes to the meaning. The reading of the runes must happen in their own context. Semantics, such as synonyms or onomastic and poetry, the physical context to the memorial, decoration and structure and the physical surroundings and functional contexts of the inscription are important parts. Runestones are also often ignored when it comes to lexicographical research about the old languages as the inscriptions can be quite formulaic and not necessarily show the language of the time (Jesch 2013). But nevertheless there can be learned a lot from the inscriptions and many specific words have been discussed. In her article “Runes and Words: Runic Lexicography in Context” from 2013 Jesch takes an example on why context is important with the word “*bondi*” which the runic database always translates as husbandman. But it can also be a farmer or simply the head of a household without having to be a husband. It does make sense to always translate the same word with the same English word, but within the context of a specific inscription it can be seen that one word can have different meanings. Some words could indicate a specific status, titles being the obvious ones, but also attributes like “good” could possibly tell more about the social status, which I will come back to in chapter 4.1.3.

runestones can also tell about family structures, even though it is just an interpretation and assumption, but the thought of a nuclear family and bilateral kinship seems confirmed by runic inscriptions, when there are widows and sons jointly commemorating someone. It also shows that widows had guardianship of their minor children and that she was in charge of commemorating her husband if his brothers and father weren't alive anymore. Occasionally also brothers in law or mothers in law are mentioned (Sawyer 2003: 61f.).

Apart from social history which I focused most on so far, runic inscriptions can, for example, be used as sources for language research with focus on grammar, lexicography or dialect questions and many others. Those aspects of the

memorial runestones mentioned above are therefore important to my research as they give more background information, which is crucial for discussing the possible status of people mentioned.

#### 1.4 Notation system

The corpus I chose for this thesis consists of memorial runestones from the Viking Age and Early Medieval Period from Norway. What they all have in common is the memorial formula which I will discuss in more detail in chapter 3.2. In chapter 3 I go into more detail on why these runestones are fitting together and naturally form a group.

The runic inscriptions will be written in their transliterated form in bold letters and in the normalised version, Old Norse, in *italics*. The translations in English will be given as well. All transliterations, normalisations and translations are taken from the runic text database Rundata (Swedish: samnordisk runtextdatabas) unless otherwise stated.

The names for the runic inscriptions follow how they are mentioned in the edition where they first appear. They consist of two parts, first the signum and afterwards the name of the place where they have been found. The signum, for an inscription of my corpus, starts with N for Norway and a serial number. Some newer found inscriptions, which are not in any edition, have an A before their number.

A small cross behind the signum indicates that this stone has been physically lost and only drawings, photographs and/or written notes exist of them.

Apart from my corpus, which is limited to Norwegian material, a few Swedish and Danish runestones will be mentioned as examples and for comparison. Danish runestones have their signum starting with DR, while in Sweden the letter depends on the province the stone is from, for example, Sö standing for Södermanland, Ög for Östergötland, U for Uppland, Vg for Västergötland.

## 2 Theory and Method

### 2.1 Theory

#### 2.1.1 Reasons for raising runestones in the Viking Age

When the question about why runestones from the Viking Age have been raised in the first place comes up, simple commemorative reasons are the first obvious ones to think about. Inscribed Memorials have been raised long before the Viking Age, and are still raised later on, adjusting to the new religion with Christian phrases and prayers. During the Viking Age and the Early Medieval Period significantly more runestones seem to have been raised compared to earlier times, but also more than in the later Middle Ages. The inscriptions from this time period also show strong similarities. This may suggest the use of a standardized commemorative formula. One possible reason for the rising number of memorial inscriptions in the Viking Age is that due to the Viking raids more people died abroad, and therefore a runestone would be raised to commemorate the lost men at home (Sawyer 2000:16). However, according to Birgit Sawyer (2000:16) only 10% of all memorial inscriptions mention the commemorated being abroad. It may therefore not be the only reason for the large number of memorials.

As the amount of runestones rose at the time of the Christianisation of Scandinavia, those two phenomena could be connected. Quite a few of the Scandinavian memorial inscriptions from the late Viking Age and Early Medieval Period have clear ties to Christianity in the form of prayers or specific Christian phrases. These prayers or phrases were often added at the end of the typical memorial formula. Otto von Friesen (1928: 75) for example, thought that these inscriptions were propaganda to spread the new religion. Sawyer adds that the distribution of these Christian runestones might not just show where people have converted and want to spread the word about it, but also point out the areas where Christianity was opposed the most (Sawyer 1991). She sees the rising amount of runestones as a crisis symptom. When people wanted to point out that they oppose the new religion the memorials are part of the older tradition of raising runestones, which existed long before the Viking Age.

A lot of runestones are found close to roads or other places where they were visible to many people and sometimes were characterised as road monuments (Ekholm 1950: 143). While a lot of the information we have point to runestones serving as memorials, if Friesen was right that some of them were raised to promote Christian propaganda, raising them in public places could possibly be particularly beneficial. The sponsors might have wanted to state their status or religious belief, in case Christian signs appear<sup>4</sup>.

Runestones might also be connected to the change of burial habits that comes along with the Christian religion. Particularly runestones decorated with crosses may in fact be connected to early grave fields more often than can be proofed. This idea is supported by Anne-Sofie Gräslund (1987: 260). Sawyer argues that runestones may have been used because there were no graveyards or cemeteries with churches where the deceased family member could be commemorated. Memorials were therefore continued in the form of traditional runestones, like before Christianisation (Sawyer 2000: 18).

Another reason for raising commemorative runestones, which is frequently mentioned by scholars and also needs the stones to have a high visibility, is to state inheritance and/or social status. Sawyer in particular follows this thesis. She sees the fact that the sponsor's name appears first as an indicator that this person is the more important one (Sawyer 2000:146). It could state that the sponsor inherited from the deceased or succeeded them in social or political ways. Opposing that idea, the sponsor being the focus of the inscription, Judith Jesch (1998: 469) brings visual aspects of an inscription into it. She believes that the commemorated might be more in focus than the sponsor, for example, by having the name carved in the center of an inscription or in a special place within a rune-band or animal ornament. The name would thus be highlighted visually and Sawyers' idea would be more based on our modern understanding of a text,

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<sup>4</sup> While a runestone carrying a Christian sign is considered a Christian monument, the absence of religious signs doesn't immediately make an inscription non-Christian. There may have been other reasons than resistance to the new religion for not adding a cross or prayer.

reading from beginning to end and therefore first and foremost looking at the sponsor's name as it comes first.

Both Gräslund and Sawyer only see Christianisation as one of multiple reasons for the custom of runic memorials and believe that only part of the raised stones have a Christian background. Other scholars however, like Henrik Williams, believe that nearly all runestones from the late Viking Age, at least in Sweden, are Christian. The memorial formula "X raised the stone in memory of Y" is just a different form of the clearly Christian formula "(raised) after Ys soul" and can therefore also count as a Christian formula even though prayers are missing (Williams 1996: 293). Because the corpus of Norway is so small, these hypotheses count for Swedish runestones and it is difficult to draw conclusions specifically for Norwegian inscriptions.

I find it probable that the reason can't be a singular one. There must have been multiple coexisting reasons, and most likely influencing each other in some ways. Runic memorials on raised stones are known from times long before the first missionaries came to Scandinavia and are therefore no new tradition.

Christianisation surely influenced the fashion of raising inscribed stones and people have adapted to the new religion by adding clear Christian phrases to the inscriptions, but because that tradition has been there for long before, I don't believe all late Viking Age runestones to be Christian. Perhaps adoption of Christianity and the possibility of showing one's beliefs through prayers in an inscription supported the fashion and also kept up the tradition of runestones until cemeteries became more frequent and people had gravestones more and more often than runestones. Sawyer's and other scholars' argument on inheritance matters being involved also seems very plausible to me. Whether social status is something that the sponsors wanted to express or if the status only played a minor role, as in the stones being expensive and therefore only possible to produce for higher standing people to begin with, remains unclear. How the social status of sponsors and commemorated could possibly be determined will be looked at closer within this thesis.

### 2.1.2 Social status

The Viking Age society and its structure has mostly been studied by historians through linguistic and written sources, such as the sagas that were written a lot later and remains of poems, but using archaeological findings such as grave goods hasn't been done too much (Solberg 1985: 61).

Historians usually rely on written sources, e.g. provincial laws, sagas and poems, for discussing the structure of Viking Age society. Most of those written sources are from later periods, starting in the Medieval Period and are therefore a rather problematic source for early society, such as the Viking Age society. Taking provincial laws as an example, differences between groups of people are visible and in conclusion the society has surely been hierarchical. Some groups of people had a higher social standing and were wealthier than others. Often the legal rights of a man or punishments depend on this status. Higher standing people had more rights but would also get the highest fines, as they would be wealthy enough to pay more than a lower-standing man. One example Bergljot Solberg (1985:69)<sup>5</sup> mentions in his article about Social status from archaeological and historical sources, is when a fine had to be paid, the lowest amount had to be paid by freedmen, i.e. former slaves and their sons, the next higher category being freedmen's descendants some more generations down had to pay more and a group higher up being "bonde" (this term could refer to farmers or land owners, as the term is discussed by different scholars) even more, then after that would be the king's marshal, only being topped by bishops and earls. These laws only occasionally mention women, which is not enough to determine social groups. For learning more about differences in status of women the poem *Rígsþula* could be referred to where three different social groups are mentioned, also describing women (Solberg 1985: 70). But this is later written and poetic which makes it even more problematic with regard to its reliability.

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<sup>5</sup> this example refers to §200 of the Gulathing law, which is a late Viking Age law for the district comprising Hordaland and Sogn and Fjorde counties (see Solberg 1985:69)

Mary Wilhelmine Williams (1920: 35) sorts the population into five social groups: slaves, freedman (former slaves and their sons), landowners (bonde and others) who she calls the middle class, nobles and chieftains, later also liegemen of the king and the highest class being a king and his family.

But also with the help of archaeological excavations much information can be found about social status. Prehistoric graves are said to show the social status of the ones buried, indicated by weapons, jewellery and other articles found in the grave. An area with both plain graves and graves with richer material is said to show the hierarchical society, people having a different status and the area having a differentiated society (Solberg 1985: 61). For men's graves, weapons are taken as indicators for their social standing: axes are more common than spears or swords. The latter are the most prestigious and show therefore the highest social ranking (Solberg 1985: 66). The number of offensive weapons can also indicate social status, more than two weapons in a grave were found on only a few occasions (Solberg 1985:67). For determining the social status of women, beads, (oval) brooches, keys and agricultural or textile utensils are taken into account and the amount of them counted. For the grave to be categorised as a woman's grave, it has to contain at least one oval brooch or at least five beads. The wealthiest women had three brooches, keys and many beads (Solberg 1985: 68). Two brooches are fairly common, so the third brooch marks a difference when grouping graves into suggested social rankings.

Problems with drawing far reaching conclusions from grave finds only is that preservation is key, but a lot of original grave goods, like shields, were made of organic material which will rarely be found after being buried for centuries. The same could be said about fabric clothes. Moreover, many graves haven't been professionally excavated but have been found by other people and there is no guarantee that everything has been found. Simple nails could indicate that there once was a shield, but might not be seen as belonging to the grave goods by non-experts and then be lost. Graves are also often not complete and a lot of times even the sex of the one buried can't be determined.

The people mentioned on runestones only show a sample of the population, not a random one, but one that reflects the society of that time (Jesch 1994: 150). And “The vocabulary of lordship”, as Jesch calls it, rarely appears on runestones. The word “*dróttinn*” (= lord), for example, occurs only once in Norway (N252) and not frequently in other areas either (Denmark has three: DR131, DR209, DR295) (Jesch 2011: 41). Runic Inscriptions from Denmark and also Västergötland in general show more titles, which means runestones were raised by higher standing people than it might have been the case further east in Sweden (Sawyer 2000: 122).

Williams (1920:34) counts land as the most important type of wealth for social status and Sawyer (2000: 92) assumes that all sponsors of memorial runestones were land owners and therefore sees the monuments as a sign of social and economic status.

According to Sawyer (2000: 146), the late Viking Age stones displayed the social and economic status of the deceased and of the sponsor. Status has been displayed before, e.g. with burial rituals or setting burial stones in special formations like ships (Sawyer 2000: 146), which changes due to Christianisation. After that burials were changed to simpler and more liturgical traditions and when churches and cemeteries became more available, that was the one place for burials.

## 2.2 Method

Runic studies combine many different fields which makes interdisciplinary work extremely important (Williams 2013: 62). Archaeology can play a big part when runic inscriptions are found within an excavation and the context of that find, for example, when the inscribed object was part of a burial mound, can give a lot of information about the inscription before it even is read and help with dating it. Philological, historical and literature studies are involved as well when it comes to reading, understanding and interpreting inscriptions. Art history also comes into play when, in addition to an inscription, ornaments or other decorations are found



on the inscribed object. Likewise for determining the style or type of an object, for example, brooches, which can help dating the object and with it possibly also the runic inscription of it. Even religious studies can be important for interdisciplinary work with runic inscriptions when it comes to Christian phrases or Christian symbols, most often crosses but also pictorial decorations of biblical scenes. Runic inscriptions can therefore be looked at from different points of view. While all of the mentioned fields are important and helpful, some might be more emphasised for specific research. The following two scholars show a good example for it: Terje Spurkland (2012) published an article about how Christian Norwegians were in the Middle Ages based on runic evidence and while that research clearly emphasizes religion studies, other fields are still necessary in order to draw conclusions for questions regarding the Spurkland's questions about the grade of Christianisation. Judith Jesch focuses on and writes about specific words used in inscriptions, for example about words which indicate a high social or political position in her article "Runic inscriptions and the vocabulary of Land, Lordship and social Power in the late Viking age" in 2011 and more general in "Runes and words: Runic Lexicography in context" in 2013. For my thesis specifically, memorial inscriptions on raised stones, it can be said that the decoration, design and layout also contribute to the meaning of an inscription (Jesch 2013: 81). Marco Bianchi (2010: 33) covers the fact that a runic memorial needs to be seen from different angles and with the help of different research fields with the word multi-modal aspect, which means that the memorial inscription does not only consist of words, but has to be seen in context with the object, the stone, it is carved into and the other fields mentioned before. When working with material as old as the memorial runestones of my corpus are, it is always important to be careful with making assumptions or drawing conclusions that can't be proven. As much as scholars have researched the runic material, there are a lot of things that aren't certain. While we have standardised translations to Old Norse for the inscriptions, the carvers often seem to write in their dialect and grammatical rules and spelling might not have as strict rules as we are used to today (see 4.1.2 language). Especially when an inscription is not

very well preserved it can be difficult to understand what exactly had been written. The amount of runic material from the Viking Age and Early Medieval Period, specifically in Norway, isn't that large, so interpretations should be done extremely carefully and generalisations should perhaps be completely avoided.

My corpus is based on Birgit Sawyers book "The Viking-Age-Rune-Stones - Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia" (2000). While she includes memorial runestones from all of Scandinavia, I only included the Norwegian inscriptions in my corpus. As mentioned in the introduction, I will look at the memorial inscriptions under the aspect of different criteria. Those criteria with the different indicators I chose are based on Henrik Williams' article "Runstenarnas sociala dimension" from 2013 in which he goes through the different possibilities of criteria that could be used to determine whether a monument is of higher or lower status. I took over the criteria Williams mentions and put them into groups that I will go through in the following chapters. In chapter 3 I will discuss the corpus I chose closer before moving to chapter four, which includes the criteria I will look into with examples from the corpus, as well as case studies on three memorial runestones which show multiple indicators for high status.

For the analysis in chapter 4 I have formed groups of the possible indicators of the criteria for social status to give the chapter an easier structure. The term indicator means a single criteria, in a way that, for example, a large stone could indicate higher status due to the criteria size of the stone being met. The criteria group this indicator belongs to is then the stone itself.

The first group is about the stone itself and includes the material a runestone is made of, the stone's size and shape, the inscription's size and if and how the surface for the inscription was prepared. Whether it was carved on only one side or multiple can also show a difference. The second group comprises various indicators connected to the language. Verse, alliterations, which adjectives have been used to describe the commemorated or the sponsor, but also the form of the written language is included. Which type of runes (e.g. short-twigged runes

vs. long-branched runes) have been used, is that type typical for that area and time? Does any rune look different from expected, are there special characters like bind-runes? The third group consists of criteria connected to the content of the inscription, what exactly is mentioned, which information does a reader get from the memorial? Names of people and places can also give more knowledge about the sponsors and commemorated behind the inscription. The mentioning of titles and additional information after the formulaic memorial (battles fought, bridges built), also belong to this group. The fourth group deals with everything else carved on the stone that isn't directly a part of the memorial inscription. This is mostly decorations in forms of ornaments, animal ornaments or crosses.

| Criteria group                  | Criteria/ indicator   | chapter |
|---------------------------------|---|---------|
| Stone type                      | Material, size, shape, inscription size, inscription surface                    | 4.1.1   |
| Language and Writing convention | Rune type, special characters, writing direction, Verse                         | 4.1.2   |
| Content                         | Names, places, titles, attributes, cause of death, other additional information | 4.1.3   |
| Decoration                      | Ornaments, pictorial ornaments, crosses   | 4.1.4   |

In chapter 4.2 I chose three inscriptions which are noticeable for how many of the indicators in multiple criteria groups they show. Those memorial runes stones are N61 Alstad I, N68 Dynna and N252 Stavanger III. After briefly introducing them I will go through each of the criteria and discuss which indicators the inscription shows, e.g. first deal with the stone type, looking at which material the stone has, how it was hewed, how big the stone is on how long the inscription, before moving on to the language of the inscription, again checking the single indicators. After going through the details of the criteria I will attempt to draw conclusions about the social status of the people mentioned in these three inscriptions.

### 3 Corpus

#### 3.1 Runestones

Runic inscriptions are the only source we have from Viking Age Scandinavia in the vernacular language (Sawyer 2000: 51). But dating them is usually difficult as it often relies on the language of the inscription, Proto Norse and Old Norse, or on looking at different variations of words which seem to be used in a certain time, though here it is important that words can also differ between areas and show regional dialect or the carvers own language rather than be a time indicator. The writing itself can also help in dating, e.g. Older vs. Younger Futhark and specific rune forms or dotted runes which are not used before the end of the Viking Age and are mostly found later in the Medieval Period. A specific year is never given, a slightly more uncertain time is in the Kuli inscription (N449) stating "Christianity has been in Norway for twelve winter" which still doesn't make it clear on when the writer believed Christianity arrived in Norway and from when the twelve years are to be counted, but it gives a very close time frame compared to most stones which are often dated to a frame of multiple decades or a whole century. A few times the people mentioned on the stone can be a hint on when the stone was raised, but only if the person can be identified with some certainty and if there are other sources giving us a date or time frame for this person's life or death. According to Sawyer the memorial runestones from Denmark are starting in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, while inscriptions from Uppland, Sweden are younger as the fashion to raise them travelled from Denmark to the rest of Scandinavia (Sawyer 1991: 98)

Memorial inscriptions are typically formulaic which doesn't help with the dating issue (Mees 2017: 12). That has been the case in earlier memorials as well, but the formula gets even more standardised in the Viking Age and towards the end of that period.

An example for an earlier memorial is the Hogganvik inscription<sup>6</sup>. Bernard Mees (2017: 22) points out that, in contrast to Roman memorials, the Hogganvik inscription mentions a lot more about the sponsor and that commemorating the act of raising a stone is just as important as commemorating the deceased. This is still correct for later memorials as well. The sponsor is mentioned first and seems to be the more important one of the mentioned people. Sawyer sees memorials also as a statement of inheritance and in that case the sponsor is the heir (Sawyer 1991: 97).

Memorials which are clearly from after the Viking Age are usually different and show more Christian prayers and phrases. At some point the fashion of raising runes stones might have shifted more towards a tradition of laying down a stone above the grave and the phrase “here lies” and similar become more often.

### 3.2 Memorial formula

The standard formula for memorial runestones is “A raised this stone in memory of X” In addition to that it could mention more commissioners (B, C, ...) or more deceased (Y, Z). Often the relationship between A (B, C) and X (Y, Z) is given and/ or some other information added. A would be the sponsor who raised the stone / had the runes carved and X the deceased who is commemorated.

Sometimes the Rune Carver is mentioned as well, usually at the end of the inscription. (Jesch 1991: 48)

While most runestones of this corpus show the standard formula, a few have slightly different variations. Those are mentioned in “3.5 The Corpus” later in this chapter.

Palm has a good definition for which inscriptions can count towards the group of memorial runestones. He has three points, if they are true for an inscription, Palm counts it as belonging to the corpus for his studies. First the inscription

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<sup>6</sup> Hogganvik: the 145cm tall and even broader runestone was found in 2009 in Agder and in addition to a memorial also shows some non-lexical sequences which are treated as magical phrases, but might be better seen as abbreviations, according to Mees (Mees 2017:1 ). The stone was found close to an Iron Age burial site, written in the Older Futhark. Mees counts it as an early memorial in which names often are in the genitive case.

mentions that someone died or second makes it likely that it once mentioned that and third the inscription needs to be close to the standard memorial, either directly containing the formula or something similar (Palm 1992: 47). With this definition he includes self-raised stones as well, but as there is none in Norway where someone raised a stone in memory of himself, this type of inscription is irrelevant. Included are also fragmented inscriptions as long as there are indications that the memorial formula was used as well as those inscriptions with a slightly different wording. For example different words for what was raised, e.g. monument, rock-slab and similar instead of the standard "stone". The inscriptions of my corpus which have such deviations from the standard formula are listed under chapter 3.5. In addition to those I also include the two inscriptions (N68 and NA53) which mention bridges being built and don't directly mention a stone being raised.

### 3.3 Geographic distribution

The only somewhat established kingdom at the time in question was Denmark. The rest of Scandinavia is more or less based on chieftains and other leaders with local or regional power. It is a very long process until Norway becomes a kingdom and most kings who got a large territory had it fallen apart after or even before their deaths. Therefore society was structured differently and not influenced as much by kings than it is later on in history (Sawyer 2003: 53). For my thesis I will be looking at runestones from within the modern borders of Norway, which are the 51 runes stones Sawyer (2000) also lists for Norway. Out of the 51 stones only two are from uncertain areas. With 20 inscriptions Rogaland has the most memorial runestones in Norway, followed by Innlandet with nine stones, which is less than half of Rogaland. Agder has seven inscriptions, Vestland six. Viken and Nordland both have two, while Vestfold, Møre og Romsdal, Trøndelag and Troms og Finnmark only have one each. The only fylke with no finds is Oslo. Interesting is that Rogaland and Vestland together, which border each other along the west coast (in the south), have half

of the inscriptions. Agder, being the fylke with the third most inscriptions, borders to Vestland in the south, along the coast. The fashion or tradition to raise runestones seems to have been a lot more common along the southern parts of Norway's west coast. When new stones are found it is usually in areas where there are already some known inscriptions, so the distribution stays more or less the same (Sawyer 1991: 98). That leads to the conclusion that there has always been more stones raised along the west coast than in the east or north and it's not just due to the fact that so few stones have been found in the areas with only one or two inscriptions but there just haven't been that many in the first place.

### 3.4 Chronology

The chosen time frame is supposed to show the fashion of raising the specific group of memorial runestones including a formula which is not found before or after in such a specific way. Because they can be counted as a group within a range of specific wording. This fashion certainly starts after the transition to the Younger Futhark and all inscriptions in the Older Futhark and those that show transitional characteristics will be excluded. For transitional characteristics the occurrence of the rune h with the value /a/ or /j/ is the main criterion (Barnes 1998: 450) if it comes along with otherwise OF runes. Jesch has a rather generous time frame for her book about the Viking diaspora. She counts the Viking Age from c.750-1100. The start of this period is often set to 793 as that is the first reliably dated record of a Viking raid in England. There were probably some before, but those are not dated or recorded or known of. (Jesch 2015: 8) The end of the time frame is a bit more difficult to put to a certain date. Even though the runestones might typically be known for the Viking Age, a lot of them are actually dated to slightly after that, especially but not only the ones with Christian touches to it. Therefore I include inscriptions dated up until the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Because the tradition of raising memorials basically stays the same. Christianisation moves rather slowly and not at the same pace in all areas and even where people have clearly converted, the inscriptions only slightly

change and Christian phrases might be added, but the standard formula stays the same for a longer time. The runestones of this sort keep being a tradition or fashion and show up throughout the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It is only after that they seem to be disappearing.

Just like for the beginning of the Viking Age, a historical date is looked for to determine the end of it. Two of many possibilities are the year 1042 when Hǫrda-Knut, the last Danish king of England, dies and the year 1066 when Harald Harðraði, a Norwegian king, dies at the battle of Stamford Bridge in England (Jesch 2015: 9).

As the memorial inscriptions from the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century are different from runestones before and after, it can definitely be called a distinctive fashion of memorial stones (Sawyer 1991: 98).

### 3.5 The corpus

I have decided to include the 51 memorial runestones from Norway in my corpus, which Sawyer (2000) also lists in her survey.

Harald Krøvel (2001) has 4 inscriptions more in his MA dissertation than Sawyer has in her survey from 2000: N A10, N A326, N544 and N241. They all are very uncertain whether they have been memorial stones because they are so fragmented and only one or two words are known. With only so little information it is impossible to say if it was part of a memorial formula. Pronouns like “his” (N A10) or words like “stone” (N A326), “this (stone?)” (N544), “his Mo-, bro-, father” (only “his –ther” is certain on N241 Sola †) are often parts of a memorial formula, but can also be part of a completely different type of inscription.

Because they are so uncertain I decided to exclude them from my corpus.

The 51 inscriptions included all have the memorial formula in common as explained further above in this chapter. Some inscriptions show only parts of the formula as they are fragmented. There is enough information that it can be believed that they once contained the formula and therefore qualify as a memorial runestone. Those will be listed here.



Seven inscription show no memorial part at all:

N96 Tanberg II †: “... þenna ... bróður sinn” (NlyR II: 13)

N97 Tanberg III †: „Áleif ... sinn ...“ (NlyR II: 16)

N214 Framvaren (cliffside): „Reist "Einriði at "Eystein“ (NlyR III: 309)

N224 Njærheim II: “Björn KI (or GI) [...] (b)róður sinn.“ (NlyR III: 147)

N226 Klepp II: „Heðinn [...] Bôðvar [...] or Bôðvarr“ (NlyR III: 151)

N233 Bore Kirke III: “(ste)ina ... ok... þenna...[lé]t gera” (NlyR III: 175)

N543: “(... reisti stei)n þenna ept Atla, fós(tra...) ... steins (or Steins) oj systur...” (NlyR V: 146)

Two inscriptions of the corpus have the wording “*gerði brú*” – “made the bridge” instead of the typical formula. Nonetheless a stone has been raised in memory of someone as the two inscriptions were also found on raised stones, but they only mention the bridges which have been raised along with the stone.

N68 Dynna: “*Gunnvör gerði brú, Þrýðriks dóttir, eptir Ástríði, dóttur sína. Sú vas mœr hönhurst á Haðalandi*” (NlyR I: 192)

NA53 Eike prestegård: “*Saxi gerði, "Guðs þakka, fyrir sálu móður sinnar, "Þorriði, brú þessa*”<sup>7</sup> (Liestøl, 1972)

Some others show slight deviations from the standardised formula, those will be displayed below.

On N238 Skjæveland † the sponsor raised or carved the runes (instead of a stone) in memory of someone: „*Ónn ... sun... (re)ist rúnar þessar ept ...*“. The same deviation can be found on the following inscription: N271 Gjerde kirke I: “*Erlendr reist rúnar þessar eptir Qlvi, fōður (sin)*”

N64 Grankirke II †: “*Hefir (or gat) settan stein þenna ef(tir)*” this stone is set instead of raised, otherwise the formula remains the same, as it is on N272 Gjerde kirke II: “*Ketill setti stein þenna eptir Finn, mág sinn.*”

N300 Eikeland is the only memorial runestone in the corpus which is referred to as a monument instead of being called a stone. “... *(r)eisti kuml þetta ept(ir)*”

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<sup>7</sup> Liestøl, Aslak, (1972), ‘Innskrifter på Eiksteinen’, Stavanger Museums Årbok: 82, 67–76.

Similar is N163 Skafså: *“Arngæirs synir reistu hellu þessa eptir Þjóðolf bróður. Guðmundr reist rúnar þessar ok þeir Qndóttir-”* instead of a stone, this mentions a rock-slab.

The inscription N214 at Framvaren is carved into a cliff side, so it differs from the other inscriptions by a lot. Neither does the inscription contain the formula nor is it a raised stone. But because it can be counted as a memorial from the time I'm looking at (NlyR III: 109), it is still part of the corpus.

N63 Granavollen: *“Synir Aunar rykiu restu (ep)tir aufa, bróður sinn. Hjalpi Áufis sjel.”* Here the word stone is simply left out of the formula.

N301 Manger kirke: *“Páll Einarsson reist rúnar þessa(r ok lagði) stein þenna eptir...”* here first the runes are raised or carved, but the stone is also mentioned before the «eptir» and the name of the person the stone is made or raised after (which is not known).

N417 *“Þórðr lét reisa kross þenna ept(ir)...”* is interesting as it shows two differences from the standard formula, which are not found on any of the other stones. First it mentions a cross instead of a stone and second instead of the usual way that the sponsor raised the memorial himself, it reads “had raised” as if someone else raised it and the sponsor was the one responsible for it. N252 from Stavanger and N237 † from Tangerhaug are also cross-shaped stones, but still mentions a stone being raised, not specifying it as a cross.

### 3.6 Possible problems with the corpus

The corpus as described above brings quite a few problems with it. Many inscriptions are fractured and don't give much information. Some are so broken, that it can even be certain whether they have contained the memorial formula after all. The ones that are not fractured still only give little information which makes it difficult to analyse anything.

As the corpus I chose is limited to the modern borders of Norway, it is extremely small. With only 51 inscriptions no eventual results can be generalised. To draw conclusions which are not only specific to one memorial stone, but could be

generalised for a larger area or time period the corpus would have to be a lot bigger. In the Swedish province Uppland Sawyer (2000: 238) counts 1016 inscriptions as memorial ones, which makes it easier to come to more general applicable results.

The dating problems with the runic inscriptions, specifically the ones in Norway, doesn't make it any easier as most stones can't be dated closer than to the early or later part of the Viking Age. Only very few have a more exact date and some others can at least be put in a chronology and are believed to be before/ after another inscription.

## 4 Analysis

### 4.1 Choice of criteria

According to Henrik Williams, when trying to define the status of a monument or of the people mentioned on it, most important and clear are the sizes of the stone and the inscription and how well it is done (Williams 2013: 72). Additionally other criteria are important and only if more markers or indicators of specific status can be found, the status can be properly discussed. Williams doesn't decide on specific criteria, but mentions many possibilities which can be used to learn more about the status a sponsor or commemorated might have had in his article "Runstenarnas sociala dimension" (2013). Those possibilities for criteria are, for example, the stone type, the location of the raised memorial, the language of it, the runes which are used by the carver and ornamentation.

In general it is easier to look for high status markers and find out which memorial stones might have been raised by higher standing people than trying to sort inscriptions into different social groups. Williams differs between three groups: high, middle and lower class. Signs for lower status memorials could be mistakes in the inscription, spelling mistakes, grammatical error and a not very well carved appearance as that would indicate that the rune carver didn't have much experience and it could therefore have been cheaper to get such an inscription. This is only based on assumption and spelling errors could have different explanations as well and whether or not correct spelling was as desirable as it is

in our modern world is also just an assumption. But determining low status based only on the lack of higher status markers is problematic. Someone with a lot of resources could as well raise a simple memorial, someone from the lower groups of society could probably not raise a big, expensive stone. I therefore focus more on what could indicate higher status than trying to sort inscriptions or defining clear groups or high-status vs. low-status monuments.

The inscriptions of my corpus don't directly tell anything about the social status of the people mentioned in it. The only way to find out more about them is to analyse the whole memorial, including the stone itself and everything carved on it, the inscription and any ornamentation or decoration that might be on it.

Since it's the sponsor who would raise a stone, organise it and pay for it, the inscription and the stone itself would tell more about the sponsor than about the deceased. In a few cases the sponsor might be identical with the commemorated, so-called self-raised stone as they were raised by someone in memory of themselves while still being alive. There are none of those among the Norwegian memorial runestones from the Viking Age or Early Medieval Period. A stone that is remarkable and impressive in size and appearance, is raised at a prestigious place and shows signs of the other criteria shows higher status (Williams 2013: 67) because something characterised by a larger investment might connect to higher status. While high class people could also raise a less prestigious stone, lower class people can only raise a simple stone but wouldn't be able to afford a larger one (Williams 2013: 62).

It is also important to note that no criteria can be an absolute indicator and that the question of status always has to be looked at in context of the area and time a runestone is from. Preferences on how to decorate a stone can vary a lot between different areas without meaning that all plain looking monuments in one area are of low status. Uppland in Sweden, for example, shows ornaments a lot more frequently than in Södermanland (Williams 2013: 67). The fact that it might have been a fashion in that area doesn't make all of them high status related. Runic inscriptions in Södermanland show poetic writing style more often (Williams 2013: 67), which can also indicate a higher status.

That is why it is important, when looking at runestones, to keep the area and time in mind, as styles for writing or ornaments could also have changed during the long time period the memorials are from.

Williams (2013:69) also mentions phonology and morphology issues within an inscription as possible indicators for lower status as those carvers might have less routine. Assimilations might, but far from certain, for example, be a sign of a less skilled carver and therefore lower status as they provide the reader with difficulties in reading the inscription (Williams 2013: 69). Though it's really hard to tell whether that is an actual sign for status or due to the carver's language, dialect or other reasons. Grammatical errors, such as singular verb form, when a plural would be expected, could also show that a carver didn't master the written language with all its grammar but rather thought formulaic, in phrases and didn't change the wording of the typical memorial formula to match the grammar of the specific inscription (Williams 2013: 69).

Among the parts in a memorial formula, personal names are interesting. Some names like Håkon, Eirik, and Ragnhildr are said to be connected to higher standing people. Sveinn is said to be for middle-class people (see Elias Wessén in *SRI*, 7: 427). Names with alliterations are also more likely to be worn by higher standing people (Williams 2013: 71).

The following indicators for social status are mentioned by Williams in the previously mentioned article. The stone type, i.e. which material was used, which size and shape it has and whether or not the carving surface has been prepared. In addition to the size of the stone itself, the size of the carved surface and the length of the inscription are also important. How the runes have been carved is another point. How big the runes are, how deep they are carved into the stone can show how much work it was to make the inscription (Williams 2013: 66). Jan Meijer also mentions that all staves could be carved first and only after that the branches are added or the runes can be sketched carefully first, before being carved deeper which shows a lot of thought about getting the inscription as perfect as possible (Meijer 2007: 15).

For the status of sponsor or commemorated it can also be relevant where the stone has been raised. Was it close to a main road, on your own farm, at a ting-place or at a church? (Williams 2013:65). At public places and busy roads more people would read it, increasing the reach of the sponsors message, churches and ting-places being prestigious, special places which shows the ambition of the sponsor to have the memorial on display. Raising a stone on your own farm is perhaps easier, but less people will come by the stone.

The language of an inscription can show a lot as well. Verse and alliterations (Williams2013: 65) can show how well someone knows a language and how much effort has been made. Similar to what type of runes have been used, special forms that aren't used a lot could indicate the sponsor's intention to have a special inscription (Williams 2013: 66f.).

Ornaments are a crucial part of a monument. If a stone has not only an inscription but also some form of decoration, it shows a lot of extra effort and more time and money being invested. Perhaps the sponsor also wanted to "show off" or highlight the memorial in a special way. Possible colouring of the runes and the decorative carving can also indicate higher status for the same reasons mentioned before.

Something which is not directly a part of Williams's article (2013) is the content of an inscription. Sometimes people might be mentioned that are known from other historical sources where there is more about what part of society they used to play. Places mentioned are also an interesting part, for example, to learn about where people have travelled to, which is not often found on Norwegian memorial runestones.

#### 4.1.1 Stone type

This chapter deals with the stone, in which a memorial has been carved, itself, including material, size and shape, the size of inscription, and how the surfaces of the stone have been prepared or hewed. People who want to have a high class stone would choose high quality stone (Williams 2013: 63), while others might just take a stone that was close and easy to use. Bigger stones also look

more impressive but it's debated whether it's the plain size or the size of the carving that is more important (Williams 2013: 63). Not just the size but also how many carvings the stone has can also be important, it might be just one side, or two sides with one being an ornament and the other having the inscription or more than one inscription. As an example from outside of Norway the Swedish runestone Ög 136 Rök<sup>8</sup>, which is famous for being one of the longest runic carvings in stone, is inscribed on five sides.

In general Williams believes that stones that have carvings on more than one side are higher in status than a stone with only one inscription (Williams 2013: 64).

Out of 51 there are 13 runestones with carvings on more than one side in my corpus. Eight of them have ornaments or crosses on one side and the runes on a second side, five of them have runes on more than one side<sup>9</sup>. These are N543, a rather small fragment which is now in a museum in Bergen (it's not clear where the stone was found) with runes on both sides. N271 Gjerde kirke I which has runes on both small sides and furthermore mentions the sponsor Erlendr, who could be the same person known from the Kings Saga *Erlendr ór Gerði*. Erlend was a leader of the people fighting against Olav Haraldson and died in the final battle at Stiklestad (NlyR IV: 3). The inscription has a cross before it, which means Erlend and most likely also his father, the commemorated, were Christian (see NlyR IV: 1). N61 Alstad I which has ornaments on the broad side and most of the inscription on another side, though the last part of the inscription is on the same side as the ornaments, which is discussed further in the case study in chapter 4.2.2. N225 Klepp I and N237 Tangerhaug † also have runes carved on more than one side.

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<sup>8</sup> Rök stone: the stone was found inside a church at Rök in Östergötland and shows inscriptions on five sides, partly in the older and partly in the younger Futhark (see Sophus Bugge 1888: 4-8).

<sup>9</sup> Monuments with carvings on more than one side: N61, N68, N84, N186 †, N225, N228, N237, N252, N271, N272, N273, N449, N543

### *Shape and size*

The shape of the stone can also show how much effort has been put into a memorial. Is the stone hewed on all sides or only where the inscription is? Does the stone have a specific shape? Here the cross-shaped stones stand out as they have been prepared in a special way to also state Christianity in addition to what the inscription might say.

N223 Njærheim I is almost shaped like a cross (see NlyR III: 144). In NlyR it is called a rune-cross. It also mentions the runecarver Ulfrikr, which is a rare name for that time, who probably prepared the stone into a cross form and also carved the runes, while the Ulfrikr on N237 Tangerhaug † has only prepared the stone, not carved the runes. The inscriptions read *Ulfríkr hjó*, “Ulfrikr cut” which would then refer to cutting the stone into shape and not cutting the runes. As it is a rare name it is still likely that it’s the same person, but the second time he only prepared the stone while someone else carved the runes. This conclusion can be drawn when looking at the following differences between the two inscriptions, which makes it likely that there have been two different carvers. On the Njærheim I cross the runes are short-twiggled, Man-Jær-runes in contrast to Tangerhaug, which shows no sign of the Man- Jæren style. Furthermore, in the memorial formula, different words for “this” in the phrase “raised this stone after” (*þa^na* at Njærheim vs. *þinsi* at Tangerhaug, both translating to “this”), which leads to the conclusion that the runes on N237 † have been carved by someone else while Ulfrik has only hewed the stone. The last part on N223 Njærheim I about him being the carver is also not in a usual prose form as it has a more rhythmic word order, *En Ulfrekr sorgþungr g(erði)* has the adverbial opposition before instead of after the verb (NlyR III: 147). However an alliteration is missing. That deviation from the prose form is another indication, in addition to the cross shape, about the effort and thought that has been put into the Njærheim inscription.

N252 Stavanger III is a cross shaped stone with a small cross carved into the backside, which will come up again in the third case study in chapter 4.2.3.



N417 Svanøy is shaped like a cross with the runes carved in on the broad front side. The inscription also reads “had this cross raised.” instead of “stone”.

As mentioned earlier the size of a stone can also show the ambition of the sponsor to raise a prestigious monument. Most runic memorial monuments are raised bauta stones, large, taller than wide, stones which are then carved on. In my corpus there are many that are fragmented which makes it impossible to say how tall they once were. Many stones are between 2-3m tall, but ten of the 51 are also taller than that<sup>10</sup>. The tallest one is N413 Kvamme † with 4,40m and the only one above 4m.

### *Type of stone*

About the material of the stone can be said that for the choice of the rock availability, workability, size and shape are important (Hagenfeldt & Palm 1996: 49). Most memorial stones in Norway are made of gneiss or granite, simple grey stone from the area where the stone was raised. Sandstone is easier to cut and carve, but in Norway it's rare. Hence, when it wasn't available at the local area, but the sponsor decided to have it transported from elsewhere it could show the sponsors wish to mark status and show how much effort was put into a memorial (Sawyer 2000:25).

That is due to the need of more resources (Williams 2013: 64) and more organising and shows that raising a memorial was very important and seemingly worth the effort for the sponsor. This can only really be determined when the inscription either mentions the import or when the type of stone is not local to where the stone has been, as that means it had to be taken from somewhere and transported to that location. The only examples of Norwegian memorial stones where that can be said for sure are the ones mentioned below in the next paragraph about sandstone.

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<sup>10</sup> N59 Fåberg, N208 Ryen, N238 Skjæveland †, N245 Helland III, N247 Skadberg, N251 Stavanger II, N252 Stavanger III, N273 Grindheim kirke, N413 Kvamme †, N453 Hårberg

In total there are five memorial runestones in Norway made of sandstone that has most likely been transported to the site<sup>11</sup>. A sixth sandstone memorial is N163 Skafså, but here it is *in situ* in the bedrock and was therefore locally available and hasn't been transported from further away (Hagenfeldt & Palm 1996: 18). In this case the stone might just have been chosen due to it being easily accessible and wasn't supposed to show any specific status. As the stone used for N163 was local in that area it wouldn't be anything special to have it raised, while a sandstone raised in an area where it isn't naturally found, it stands out and could show the reader that more effort was made to raise this particular stone. Sandstone is easier to work on as the stone is smoother, easier to carve and the surface can be prepared, flattened, smoothed easier than on other type of rocks (Hagenfeldt & Palm 1996: 55) but there is no sandstone in most areas in Norway and only in a small area, Ringerike north of Oslo, actually has that type of stone in the bedrock (Hagenfeldt & Palm 1996: 16). This means the sandstone memorials found outside of that area must have had their rock transported to that location. In the Viking Age raw material such as sandstone was rarely transported and was mostly used where the stone naturally occurred. There are a few monuments though in other places made of sandstone and some inscriptions (like N61 Alstad) even mention the transport of it (Hagenfeldt & Palm 1996: 22). That is another indication that the choice for the type of stone could show status, as the fact of where the stone was from was important enough to be mentioned in the inscription. However later in the Middle Ages importing stone became more and more common for gravestones and memorials placed on graveyards and at churches (Hagenfeldt & Palm 1996: 22). As it was also easier to carve into sandstone, which is smoother than other type of rocks more common in Norway, and therefore easier to satisfy the growing demand that came along with graveyards (Sawyer 2000:25).

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<sup>11</sup> Sandstone memorials: N61 Alstad I + N62 Alstad II (same stone), N63 Granavollen, N64 Grankirke II †, N66 Grankirke IV, N68 Dynna,

The previously mentioned inscription N61 Alstad is translated to “Jórunnr raised this stone in memory of <au-aun-> who owned her (ie. Was her husband), and (she) brought (it) out of Hringaríki, from Ulfey. And the picture-stone venerates them.”

The inscription itself mentions that the rock on which it is carved was transported from Ringerike, to be more exact from Ulfey which is proposed to be an island about 100km far away from its placing (Goldschmidt in *NlyR I*: 157–59).

In addition to that it also calls it a picture-stone, a hint that there are ornaments and figures carved into the front side. The Alstad stone will be closer discussed in 4.2.2 as a case study.

The Alstad stone N61 could also have influenced the other stones in Oppland and the fact that the first one was carved in sandstone could have set the fashion of using that type of stone from Ringerike (Hagenfeldt & Palm 1996: 55), like the stones N63, N64 † and N66 found at Grankirke. N62 is a separate inscription, but on the same stone as N61 and can therefore not be counted as another sandstone.

N63 Grankirke I (Granavollen) was hewed on all sides, the sandstone is most likely from Ringerike, the runes were carved in a long line on the broad side starting on the left bottom going up and then down again on the right. This stone shows no decoration.

N64 Grankirke II † is a fragmented inscription on sandstone, but only a small piece was found, built into a church. The stone is now lost.

N66 Grankirke IV was found as part of a wall in a church. Microscope examination showed that it's the same sandstone as the Alstad stone, which means this stone has also been transported from Ringerike (Goldschmidt in *NlyR I*: 157–59). It also shows figures and ornaments in the so-called Ringerike-style, though they have been carved in earlier, before the inscription was added.

N68 Dynna is a 3m high stone, but it shows high quality ornaments on one side and the inscription on another side and will be further looked at in a case study (4.2.1) due to its extraordinary appearance and content.

#### 4.1.2 Language and writing conventions

This part of the analysis includes different aspects about the language used on the memorial runestones. Some indicators for higher status could be a part of the inscription being written in verse, variation in the writing style or which type of runes were used. Any abnormality or something that isn't expected. Negative abnormalities like errors in carving, spelling or grammar have been discussed to be a sign of lower status as it indicates a less experienced carver, but other scholars, like Henrik Williams (2013:69), believe that this doesn't have to be true. Deviations from spelling and grammar norms could also have happened due to the carver's dialect or other reasons. In the following I will go through the different possible indicators of higher or lower status mentioned above and show the inscriptions from the corpus on which the indicators can be seen.

##### *Writing convention*

The writing or carving represents not only the expression of the language but is also part of the visual composition (Bianchi 2010: 115). What the runes look like is therefore also important, in addition to what the runes spell. There are different types of runes, such as the long-branch runes, also called Danish runes and the short-twig runes. Norwegian runes used before the Danish types got more and more popular, are basically short-twig runes with some long-branch characters (Barnes 2006: 14, also see Gordon 1956: 182). In Norway the long-branch and short-twig rune systems both appear and are sometimes mixed (Barnes 2006: 14), for example, on N68 Dynna stone. While Aslak Liestøl (1969: 75) believes that with the tradition of raising runestones also the Danish, long-branch runes came to Norway and Sweden and more or less superseded the short-twig runes. Michael Barnes (2006: 16) says both versions of runic characters have been used before and not every appearance of a long-branched rune is due to input from Denmark.

Another type or version of runic characters are the staveless runes. Those are often also called Hälsinge runes because they are mostly known from the

Swedish province of Hälsingland, and they don't appear on any of the runic memorial stones in my corpus. In Norway they are known from a rune stick found in Bergen,<sup>12</sup> but other than that they occur almost only in Sweden (Bianchi 2010: 118). Runes can also share a stave, which makes two or even more runes in one, called bind-runes. A bind-rune would then only have one stave with the branches of two runes attached to it; both runes have to be read separately even though they share a stave. There are three different types of bind-runes, which Bianchi (2010: 117) mentions as unambiguous bind-runes where two runes share a stave and the reading direction stays the same, ambiguous bind-runes where the reading direction is unclear and the runes sharing a stave might be difficult to distinguish, and cryptic bind-runes which include same-stave runes, cross-runes and monograms<sup>13</sup>.

The Danish runes, long-branch, also appear in Norway, on N68 Dynna and N61 Alstad I for example, they are mixed with Norwegian short-twig runes (Page 1995: 233). Whether the simplicity of carving specific types of runes is seen as easier and therefore less skill is needed or as more complicated because more knowledge of the runic writing system is necessary is not entirely clear. Short-twig runes, for example have been discussed to indicate lower status as they are easier to carve and no high skills are needed (Wessén 1969: 28), but staveless runes again could indicate higher status as it shows advanced knowledge (Bianchi 2010: 161).

Another deviation from what is the average or most used runic carving would be when single runes look different from what would be expected. An example for that is the rune for s. The so called chair-s could therefore indicate lower status as it is a specific type of that character, slightly different from how this rune is usually carved and could be due to a carving mistake, which could indicate a less experienced carver. (Williams 2013: 67).

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<sup>12</sup> N B41 from Bergen is a tree-stick showing the Futhark row in staveless runes, see Lena Peterson 1994: 243f.

<sup>13</sup> For further explanation of cryptic runes see Bianchi 2010: 117ff.

Runic inscriptions which use different types of runes within the same inscription, like adding staveless runes, could then be high status stones or at least high-ambition stones as Bianchi (2010: 161) calls them. Varying the style of the runes used in an inscription shows that the carver liked to play with the writing and the visual effects of the runes and challenge the reader (Jesch 1998: 468f.). This leads to the assumption of the ambition for a higher status (Bianchi 2010: 163).

### *Spelling and Grammar*

Noticeable are not only the special characters, like bind-runes or runes of a different type, but also spelling or grammatical errors which on first thought seem to be the opposite of the skilled carver with high ambition reasoning mentioned above. In our modern world a perfectly, according to fixed rules, spelled word is what everyone should aim for and what would count as correct and well done. Everything else counts as wrong and indicates bad writing skills, bad education and low ambition. If an inscription shows those signs, it could be because the carver was less experienced. Now with another assumption based on modern world rules, a less experienced carver who delivers “false” inscriptions, with spelling, grammar or carving errors, would be paid less and therefore more affordable for lower status people. Though both of those assumptions are based on our ideas of quality from today. Henrik Williams has pointed out that it could have been very different in the Viking Age and Medieval Period as there might not have been that many rules for writing, and writing “correctly” might not have been that important (see Williams 2010).

Presumed carving errors don't necessarily mean low status as mentioned previously, as in Sweden, for example carving deviation from what is expected occurs on higher status stones as well (Williams 2010: 35). Something that is more likely to show lower status are non-lexical inscriptions, consisting of runes but not forming any words with any meaning, a random line of runes. Which only

shows that someone illiterate imitated the look of actual inscriptions (Bianchi 2010: 169).

### *Language*

So far I mentioned the optical parts about an inscription, but looking more into the language of the inscription, there are more possible indicators of status. Not only the rune type or single runes can deviate from the norm or from what is expected, but also the way the inscription is formulated. The convention would be the standardized memorial formula and in some cases more information added afterwards. Especially that additional information can be interesting. Verse, for example, can be an indicator for higher status because it shows that the sponsor put extra effort in the inscription and seemingly cared a lot about how to express the memorial and probably also about what possible readers will think when they come across this inscription (Williams 2013: 65).

### *Corpus*

In the following I will go through the examples I found within my corpus that show indicators for the criteria group language or rune forms.

The runes on N260 Sørbo II have to be read from the bottom upwards and are mirrored, right to left, which leaves an interesting writing, but not much more to discuss in matters of the social status of any of the people involved. The inscription also only gives us the very standard memorial formula without any additional information or decoration.

The inscription on N239 Stangeland is carved with short-twiggled runes but most special about it is the last part written in poetic syntax. The verb doesn't follow right after the subject like it should in a prose form.

N239 in standardised Old Norse:

*Þorbjörn Skald reisti stein þenna ept <soi->þóri, son sinn, er á Danmörku fell.*

English translation:

“Þorbjörn Skald raised this stone in memory of <soi->þórir, his son, who fell in Denmark.”

The inscription was translated to show a normal syntax in the last line, but in the standardised ON version the verb *fell* is at the very end of the inscription. The different syntax is caused by a more rhythmic writing, the last part resembles a line from a typical verse form (NlyR III: 206). As the sponsor calls himself a skald it is likely that this type of writing was natural to him and that he therefore wanted to add a verse to the memorial inscription for his son, but as it is a rather short inscription it is only one line. This line can be compared to a metric type called “E 1”, which is a “falling” dactyl and the line in the inscription can be compared to the part of that metric type where usually sorrow and worries would be expressed (see NlyR III: 206).

N223 Njærheim I also shows the last part, about the carver, is not in prose sentence order but slightly poetic, though an alliteration, which would be typical for this kind of poetry, is missing. The adverb should be after the verb not before as on this inscription (see NlyR III: 144).

*Gautr reisti stein þenna ept Steinar, brøður sinn. En Ulfrekr sorgpungr g(erði)*

Gautr raised this stone in memory of Steinarr, his brother. And Ulfríkr the Sorrow-stricken made.

On N68 Dynna the last part which gives the reader more information about the commemorated woman is written in verse. As this memorial shows other signs of



high status, like ornaments and a specific type of stone, it will be part of a case study in chapter 4.2.

A special form of runes are the bind-runes, which I mentioned above. In my corpus there are two inscriptions, N247 and N301, where such runes appear. Rune 33 in Line A on N247 Skadberg is a clear bind-rune of the two runes for **a** and **þ** which could be read **ap** or **þa**. The latter one works better in context. The bind-rune is within the name of the commemorated person who is called Skarða (**skarp<sup>a</sup>**).

The inscription on N301 Manger Kirke shows three bind runes. Just like on N247 the first bind-rune is part of a name, in this case the sponsors name Páll (**pa<sup>l</sup>**). Rune 2 and 3 share a stave, **a<sup>l</sup>** or **l<sup>a</sup>**. As double consonants, like the // in his name, wouldn't be spelled out, the sponsor's first name consists of only 2 runes, whereas the latter one is a bind-rune. Another two bind-runes can be found in the sponsor's last name Einarsson (**æi(n)(a)<sup>r</sup>so<sup>n</sup>**). Character 6 consists of the rune **a<sup>r</sup>** and character 8 is **o<sup>n</sup>**. As the stone is not very well preserved and some runes are unreadable, the bind rune character 6 is not entirely safe.

### *Conclusion*

From the rune form found in my corpus itself it is hard to make statements about the social status or wealth of a sponsor. Deviations from what would be expected in an inscription can have different reasons, not all necessarily connected to social status.

Cryptic runes, ambiguous bind-runes or mixing different types of runes, like short-twig and staveless could be indicators for higher status, but none of those can be found on Norwegian memorial runestones from the Viking Age and Early Medieval Period.

Of the inscriptions from my corpus not many show special writing forms, but three have a part written in verse. Just like with other criteria I have mentioned before, these small deviations and noticeable differences from the “standard”, if

such a thing existed, should only be seen as indicators for the possibility of a certain status. Only together with other indicators from other criteria a suggestion can or should be made.

#### 4.1.3 Content of inscriptions

Not many inscriptions actually tell us much about the people mentioned in it, but sometimes there are small hints of who they might have been or just give a little more information about their person. The more information there is, the easier it seems to be to talk about their social status.

Of course there are also inscriptions like the Jelling stones (DR41+ DR 42) who tell us very exactly who the sponsor was and in that case the social status being easy to determine as it was the Danish Kings. On the younger one, DR42, it even says "*Haraldr konungr*", King Harald.

On other stones however it isn't even clear how many people sponsored it or are commemorated and no name can be read. N96 †, for example, reads "... this ... his brother" which doesn't even show the memorial formula, but the way the sentence is set up, it can be assumed that it once contained the formula. The only information we get from it is the relationship. N180 Åmli † only shows the memorial formula, but no name can be read. Some stones are also so fragmented that it is not clear whether a relationship or any additional information was mentioned, because the stone is broken and the inscription ends at a point where it definitely wasn't the initial end, e.g. before a name is mentioned or in the middle of a name. Others are broken off after the second name, usually the commemorated, being mentioned and it can't always be clear whether a part is missing after it or if that was the end of the inscription.

I sorted the inscriptions which could possibly tell more about social status just by the content of the inscription into those which mention place names or further information about the commemorated death, those with personal attributes or other further description of the person mentioned and those with specific names that can be connected to a historical known person, who is known from other sources as well. Or someone appears on more than one stone and a connection

between those can be made in a way that lets us assume it's the same person. There are only two cases in Norway where that seems likely (Helgi of Kleppr on N225/ N228 and the rune carver Ulfrikr on N223/ N237 †), but multiple inscriptions mentioning the same person, can be found more often in Sweden. An example for those instances would be the stones of Jarlabanki, which are possibly self-raised, but he is also mentioned on more runestones from his family members (Sawyer 2000: 93). He is still only known from those inscriptions and no other source mentions him.

### *Place names*

There are five memorials within my corpus that give more information about how or where the commemorated has died. Four of them name direct places, another one only mentions in which battle the deceased died. While the father who raised the stone N239 lost his son in a battle in Denmark, the commemorated on N184 died while fighting with Knut in England. N252 also mentions someone dying in battle but without naming a direct place. N413 † mentions that the commemorated was killed right where the stone was raised and N62 two places in the east are mentioned.

On these inscriptions we find men who have been travelling and fighting battles, they could have been Vikings or soldiers of some sort. But where that puts them in thought of social status is rather unclear. In the following I will go through the inscriptions listed above.

N239 was raised by a father, who calls himself skald, in memory of his son who fell in Denmark. Due to the rune form and language the memorial can be dated to before 1000. Since a battle in Denmark is mentioned where the commemorated died, the inscription can be dated even more precisely based on the assumption of which battle the sponsor mentions. Most likely it was a battle south where Norwegians fought under King Harald Gråfeld and Jarl Håkon in

970. What kind of position he might have had in that battle or in general in society remains unclear.

Another memorial inscription which can be dated relatively precisely is N184 Galteland. Here it is also due to a battle being mentioned in which the commemorated died. The inscription reads the following:

Standardized Old Norse: *Arnsteinn reisti stein þenna eptir Bjór, son sinn. Sá varð dauðr í liði, þá Knútr sótti England. Einn er Goð.*

English: Arnsteinn raised this stone in memory of Bjórr, his son. Who died in the retinue when Knútr "searched" England. God is one.

Knut refers to the Danish prince Knut who became king of England, Denmark and Norway, which is referred to as the North Sea Empire. He is also known as Cnut or Canute the Great. The inscription mentions that the deceased died when Knut "searched" England which has to refer to when Knut invaded England in 1015-16. The inscription is therefore dated to a few years after that battle, to around 1020. That date fits well with the style of the runes and the Christian phrase in the end of the inscription, since King Knut, and therefore most likely his people, were Christian (NlyR III: 30). The sponsor had most likely also converted or has at least been in close contact with Christianity, since he was the one to raise the memorial with a religious phrase.

N413 Kvamme † also mentions where the commemorated died ("was cut down"), namely "here where this stone stands" (*as hér vas hoggvinn es steinnsjá stendr*). The stone, which is now lost, stood at a farm at Kvamme close to Sognefjord. The sponsor and commemorated don't seem to have had a relation to each other. Noticeable is that both the fathers and the grandfathers name of the commemorated is mentioned, which could mean he was from a well-known family and therefore of higher status (NlyR IV: 220).

On N62 Alstad (the second inscription which was added later to an already existing runic memorial inscription N61), dated to the second half of the century, two places in Russia are mentioned.

Though two different areas have been discussed and it isn't entirely clear whether the two names refer to the Baltic area or to a place south of Kiev, where Viking activity has been proofed by excavations (Zilmer 2005:155).

*“Engli reisti stein þenna eptir þórald, son sinn, es varð dauðr i Vitaholmi, miðli Vitaholms ok Garða”*

“Engli raised this stone in memory of Þóraldr, his son, who died in Vitaholmr - between Vitaholmr and Garðar”

According to Kristel Zilmer (2005: 155) it is likely that the second place was named, in addition to *Vitaholmr*, because that place might not have been known well. On a memorial stone like this it makes more sense to name a place the readers would actually know about. Therefore *Vitaholmr* has to be explained further and a place close to the actual site is named.

The place *Garðar* is mentioned on other runestones, but only within Sweden. Perhaps because it was better known it is mentioned on the Alstad stone. To have a reference for people knowing that place, so they can get a better understanding of the area where the commemorated died. (Zilmer 2005: 324) Because the place is so exactly described, the sponsor must have known it. Either by being a witness himself or by a story told by a direct witness (Zilmer 2005:155)

N252: This inscription doesn't directly name a place where the deceased, Lord Erling, has died. But with the help of that additional information the Commemorated can be identified as Lord Erling Skjalgsson, it is clear that he died in the battle of King Olav Haraldsson and King Knut in 1028. This memorial runestone will be further discussed in the case study chapter 2.2.3.

### *Personal designations, attributes and titles*

In some inscriptions the sponsors and commemorated are not only mentioned by their name, but also have personal attributes, like good or best, their title or their profession stated. While some titles like King or Lord clearly show the person's social and/ or political status, other titles or attributes are more difficult to place. In Norway the only higher title is Lord, on N252 Stavanger. Of the attribute “good”, which is more common in other Scandinavian areas, only one instance occurs in Norway. In the following I will go through all seven cases in my corpus that mention attributes, epithets and titles.

#### *Good man*

N244 Helland II: “*Skarði reisti stein þenna eptir Bjalfa, son sinn, harða góðan mann.*”

English: “*Skarði raised this stone in memory of Bjalfi, his son, a very good man.*”

On N244 the commemorated is called “*harða góðan mann*”, a very good man. To describe someone as a “good person” might be a phrase rather than being meant literally. The meaning of good could be an indicator for high social status and not refer to a good person as in good at heart, skilfully or similar (Sawyer 1991). The meaning of “good” is often discussed and very different opinions can be found in the literature. Erik Moltke (1985: 288f.) believes it's high status, Frands Herrschend (1994: 188f.) and Jan Paul Strid (1987: 307) say it just means generally good and Johan Hovstad (1958:307ff.) says it came up in the Viking Age and used to be connected to a chieftain and his family/surrounding, which would imply a higher ranking in society again (Gräslund 1995: 469). Birgit Sawyer mentions the word as the Nordic equivalent of the *boni homines*, a phrase known from other European sources from the Middle Ages (Sawyer, 2003: 65; 2000: 111) and sees it as a status marker. These “good” people men

were trusted people among their community and had some sort of local influence, for example, at gatherings or as witnesses (Sawyer 2000: 111). Jesch disagrees with Sawyer that “goðr” doesn’t have to mean higher status as it is also mentioned in combination with a bondi, which doesn’t really imply high status (Jesch 2011: 38). But then again Sawyer mentions the word “bondi” could also mean landowner and not just a regular farmer or farmworker (Sawyer 2000: 108) and that could imply higher status as well as it isn’t used as frequently as it should be if it just refers to a general farmer (Sawyer 2003). That would mean that Jesch’s argument doesn’t work anymore. At least not as a counter example to “good” being a sign for anything more than the literal meaning. To me it seems very difficult to determine exactly what the word was used for, both could be true. Meanings of words can be many or could have changed. In general I would think the attribute “good” does have some meaning as that would explain why it isn’t used as frequently as I would expect if it is meant literally. Specifically as it occurs only once in Norway and not at all in combination with a female name. While quite a few inscriptions about “good” people can be found in Sweden and Denmark, there is only one case known in Norway, N244 from Helland.<sup>14</sup> In Denmark and Västergötland most “good” people also had titles named in the same inscription (Sawyer 2000: 111), but in the Norwegian one only a family relation is mentioned, a father who calls his deceased son a good man.<sup>15</sup> From different epithets found in memorial inscriptions throughout Scandinavia, “good” and “best” are the most common ones (Sawyer 2000: 107).

#### *Other epithets*

N239 Stangeland was raised by a man called Þorbjörn. In the inscription it says *Þorbjörn Skald* who sponsored the stone in memory of his son who fell in Denmark. Since a place is stated here, I have already mentioned the inscription before and will come back to it in 4.1.2 as the last part of the inscription doesn't

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<sup>14</sup> Good people: 213 in Sweden, 49 in Denmark and Bornholm, 1 in Norway (Sawyer 2000:181)

<sup>15</sup> Good people with a title: 32 instances in Denmark and 39 in Västergötland (Sawyer 2000: 182)

follow prose form but is instead poetic, which seems natural since the sponsor was a skald. This is the only skald that is mentioned in a runic inscription and in Sweden it also only occurs a handful of times (NlyR III: 205).

N252 Stavanger III is raised by a priest in memory of his Lord Erling. This is the only instance of a title being mentioned in an inscription of my corpus. Through that title the memorial can be determined as a high status runestone for a socially and politically powerful man. The sponsor himself is a priest and men with this profession also had a rather well standing in society, specifically when they served a lord.

The commemorated on N273 Grindheim kirke is called Þormóðr Stinging / (Earth-) Scorcher (*Þormóð sviðanda*). That second additional name is only known from one other instance, the son of Danish King Erik Emunes *Sveinn sviðandi* (NlyR IV: 9). If Þormóðr was named after that king's son, it could indicate higher status or a good social position as his name sounds quite honourable. But his name could as well have a different background, so any conclusions stay mere assumptions and theories.

N247 Skadberg is one of the tallest runestones in my corpus and measures 3,75m in height. It reads the following inscription:

“[Ō]lhúsmenn reistu stein þenna eptir Skarða, en þeir drukku [e]rfi hans”

“The drinking-companions raised this stone in memory of Skarði when they drank his funeral-feast.”

The name “drinking companions” as the sponsors are called in this memorial doesn't say much about their status, but it is an irregular way of the sponsors to refer to themselves.

N223 mentions that the runes were carved by Ulfrikr the Sorrow-stricken (*Ulfrekr sorgbungr*), which is quite a poetic epithet, but whether he called himself a Skald is unknown. In chapter 4.1.1 I already mentioned Ulfrikr as he also appears on a



second runestone where he most likely hewed the stone, but hasn't carved the actual inscription.

N68 Dynna is an inscription by a woman who commemorates her daughter and calls her the "handiest maiden of Haðaland" which is an immense praise. This inscription is one of the case studies and more details follow in chapter 4.2.1.

### *Specific names*

There are three names within the inscriptions of my corpus which are interesting in terms of them either being historically identifiable through other sources or mentioned on more than one inscription. N252 as mentioned further above is raised in memory of Lord Erling. The rune carver Ulfrikr was also mentioned above, as his name is rare for the time and area he is believed to be the same person on both N223 and N237 †.

The second case of someone mentioned on more than one memorial runestone will be set forth below.

N225 and N228 both name someone called Helgi. This is believed to be the same person. N228 was raised by Helgi himself in memory of his brother, while on N225 he is mentioned as the uncle of the deceased.

#### N225:

*"Þórir Harðarsonr reisti stein þenna ept Ásgerði, kván sína dóttur Gunnars, bróður Helga á Kleppi."*

"Þórir, Harðr's son, raised this stone in memory of his wife Ásgerðr, daughter of Gunnarr (the) brother of Helgi of Kleppr"

#### N228:

*"Helgi reisti stein þann ept Ketil, bróður sinn."*

"Helgi raised this stone in memory of his brother Ketill."

N225 is dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century (NlyR III: 149).

N228 is dated to the Viking Age but it's difficult to get it any more specific than that, possibly the 10<sup>th</sup> century (NlyR III: 159)

Both inscriptions show Man-Jær runes which are typical for that area, but the ones used on N228 look more old-fashioned than the ones on Klepp stone, N225. The latter one also shows a cross and seems therefore to be younger. But because a man called Helge is mentioned on both stones they could be connected. Provided that it is in fact the same person, the two inscriptions can't be too far apart in time and could then be dated to 975-1025, giving about 50 years that could be in between the two stones being raised (NlyR III:160). The later one also shows a sign of Christianity with its cross and that area is believed to have been christianised no later than under Olav I Tryggvason, who ruled in Norway from 995-1000 (NlyR III: 160). This is another indicator for the time frame where N225 and N228 are put. One slightly before King Olav's time, one during or after.

Interesting in inscription N225 is that not only the father of the commemorated, but also the brother of that father is mentioned. Furthermore he is called Helgi "of Kleppr" which means he was a specific Helgi, perhaps someone who was known in at least the local area. Otherwise it makes little sense that Þórir mentioned his deceased wife's uncle. If he was known in his area, he could have had a higher social status. But he was at least known for something and someone thought he was important enough to mention that his wife was related to him (NlyR III: 160).

### *Conclusion*

All that can be said is that there are in fact runestones from higher standing people, like Lord Erling on N252, but due to the small amount of runestones that seem to be of higher status it is difficult to actually figure out whether something in the content of the inscription is a direct indicator for high social status or not.

Only some, like N252 Stavanger which mentions a title, can be quite certain while others are more vague suggestions and can't be definite.

While Sweden and Denmark have a lot more "good" men and sponsors or deceased with a title, in Denmark a title even seems to be the norm, Norway barely does. The corpus is way smaller and so are the occasions where the inscription actually and directly tells something about social status with a certainty that can be trusted. There is one man with the attribute "good", but there is no consensus about what it really means. A woman that gets a special praise and while the runestone raised in her memory was certainly not a simple or cheap one, it doesn't say much directly about her social standing within society, but it does show a bit about her mothers, the sponsors, wealth and economic independence as a woman and her possibilities. Helgi of Kleppr might have been a locally known man, well known enough to refer to him on a memorial stone even when he is only a distinct relative. But as part of the family it stays unclear how large the area is where he was known and perhaps respected. The most impressive one for me is the one with a title, a religious profession title, but nonetheless at least some title that is mentioned. The priest who, most likely, was in the service of a historically known and powerful man and as the priest his ranking in society was certainly good as well.

N239 appears twice in this chapter as it has both a title, the skald as a sponsor and gives more information on how the commemorated died, in a battle in Denmark. It was also mentioned before in 4.1.2 as the last part of the inscription has a poetic syntax, which is another indication for higher status, but not all too surprising since the sponsor calls himself a skald. The stone is a simple bauta stone with the inscription on the broad side and 2.65m tall, which puts it to an average high among the tones of my corpus, but not one of the tall stones. It is one of the few inscriptions that can be dated precisely, though it is based on assumptions about the battle mentioned, it is one of the earliest memorial inscriptions in my corpus and most likely from pagan times. With those indicators for higher status being present and due to the early dating, where runestones

were often less ornamented, I would count this memorial as part of the higher status ones, though it is only based on assumptions.

#### 4.1.4 Ornaments and decoration

Just like the shape and how the stone was worked on before the inscription was carved, any sort of decorations in addition to written words can be important to find out more about the sponsor. According to Judith Jesch (2013: 81), and I fully agree here, runic inscriptions have to be seen as multi-modal objects. The decoration, the design and layout also contribute to the meaning of the carved writing. Looking at the inscription by itself doesn't do the memorial right, all parts of it need to be considered before statements about the social status of a sponsor and/ or commemorated can be made. After looking at the stone itself, all other carvings besides the inscriptions need to be taken into account as well. A runestone "is an aesthetic object in its own right" (Jesch 1998: 464). Those additional carvings can vary from being a simple cross to large pictorial ornamentation telling a story and are connected to the people mentioned in the inscriptions. An example for the latter would be the Swedish runestone Sö 101 Ramsundsberget on which the pictorial ornaments likely tell the Sigurd saga. With choosing this saga for ornamentation the sponsor, Sigrid, shows what she had in mind, namely reaching treasure (Sawyer 2000: 156). Non-pictorial ornaments also show how much the sponsor cared about the look of the memorial and that the sponsor was able to afford such a carving as it presumably added to the cost of the memorial.

In my corpus, 19 of the 51 runestones have some sort of decoration. Having anything in addition to the message of the inscription shows more effort, more work that has been done for the memorial and is assumed to be more expensive as well as it was probably not the sponsors themselves, but some sort of rune master carving the inscription, who then needs to get paid for the work. The presence of ornamentation could therefore be an indicator for the wealth and the social status of the sponsor. Sawyer (2000: 99) states that raising a runestone was expensive and only people with enough money could raise them. That

should also imply that longer inscriptions and stones with more carving work, like ornaments and figures are more expensive than a simple, short memorial formula with only names and perhaps the relation stated.

In the following I will go through all the 19 runestones of my corpus which have a sort of decoration in addition to the inscription. First the stones with small crosses, then the ones showing larger crosses and in the end the stones with other ornaments than crosses. Sawyer (2000: 26) gives 21% as the number for Norwegian memorial runestones with crosses on it, which is significantly lower than the average when counting all Scandinavian runestones from the same time, which is 47%.

N225 Klepp I has a small cross in the end of the inscription, N251 Stavanger II, N271 Gjerde kirke I and NA13 Sørbo III have a small cross before the first rune. N413 Kvamme † has a cross both before and after the inscription.

But those crosses are probably not so much of an indicator for a higher social status as those are simpler to carve than most of the figural ornaments found on other stones or might only have the practical function of showing the reader the beginning of the inscription. It is also mostly an indicator for a Christian inscription and helps date the stones, at least to a certain extent, because they are certainly from during or after the Christianisation, towards the end of the Viking Age and beginning of the Medieval Period. When talking about ornaments showing a certain status or wealth of the sponsor, the important part is the extra effort and costs that leads to the assumption of high status and the sponsor's ambition and will to show that. Therefore these small crosses, which are more like additional runes, in carving-effort and size, can't be counted as a status symbol.

What could be counted as an indicator for higher status are the larger crosses found on 5 of the runestones in the corpus of this thesis. Those times the cross is on the broad side while the runes are on the smaller side or the backside. N224 Njærheim II, N252 Stavanger III, N272 Gjerde kirke II, N273 Grindheim kirke and N449 Kuli are the Norwegian memorial runestones from the late Viking Age and

Early Medieval Period with this feature. ON these stones it shows the cross on display and the runes just being an addition to be read on the side or back. For example N224 Njærheim II has a cross in the middle of the broad side (NlyR III: 147) while the runes are in a row on the side next to it, putting the cross into focus. Only the beginning of the inscription to the left of the cross and the end of the inscription on the right are preserved, the middle part which most likely contained the memorial formula is lost. There is also a small cross at the end of the inscription after the last rune. Another example for having the focus on the cross, one of the most known runestones in Norway, is the Kuli stone (N449). This inscription is also known as the baptism stone of Norway as it is the first time Norway (Nóregi) is mentioned in a written source within Norway and it mentions the Christianisation of the country. The stone, now displayed in a museum in Trondheim, has a large cross carved into the broad side and has the inscription on the smaller side. The inscription starts with the typical memorial formula, but afterwards add another sentence which the stone is famous for. "Christianity had been twelve winters in Norway", mentioning both the name Norway and the Christianisation of the country.

While crosses prove the Christian religion of the sponsor and the commemorated, they can't always be counted as a status indicator. Other decorations than crosses could be ornaments or pictorial figures. N61, N66 and N68 are the inscriptions raised by women on sandstone which I have mentioned before in the 4.1.1 about the type of stone. All three have ornaments on the stone as well as being made of said imported sandstone. N61 has animal figures on the front side and other ornaments on the other side. N66 and N68 also have both animals and ornaments on the broadside while the runes are carved in on the smaller side of the stone. This, in addition to the stone being imported, means the memorials must have been expensive to raise. N84 and N186 † have ornaments or ornamental figures.

Following is a more detailed description of the runestones with ornaments.

The first one, N84 Vang (NlyR I: 232) has a very peculiar shape as on the top the stone the beginning of an arc is sticking out to one side. There might have been a second stone looking just like it with which it would form a sort of gate, but the second stone has never been found. Ornaments can be seen on the broad side, while the inscription is on the small side. The stone is hewed on all sides and especially smoothed on the small side where the inscription is. The broadside is full of ornamental decoration, the upper part of it visualising a lion. A single line puts a frame around the decoration on the left and right side, a geometrical edging with the same line and rhombus forms as seen on Dynna and Alstad I (see 4.2 case studies) connects those two lines on the bottom. Two bands with a spirale in the bottom are going up from that line, crossing each other twice. Around the upper cross is a ring. Braided around the two main bands are many smaller bands and leaf-like ornaments. The whole ornament can be understood as a much stylised tree with leaves. The lion on top has typical stylistic markers, again similar to Dynna and Alstad I stones, like the double lined contour and spirale in the leg. The lion walks from right to left and in front of its head is another ornament. This ornament looks very laborious and must have been done by a skilled carver. The stone N84 Vang can therefore be counted as an expensive memorial whose sponsor must have been wealthy to some extent. N186 Bygland † shows an ornamental figure and the stone is somewhat arched on top (NlyR III: 34). The stone is now lost and drawings of it are not very clear. Another interesting part about this runestone is the name which is mentioned in the inscription, but the part where the name was carved is unclear, so only an assumption about the name was made. Presumably the memorial was raised for Olaf Erlendsson. Erlend is a prestigious name known from sagas and in the Medieval Period it became more popular, especially within powerful families.



*N84 Vang; Photo: E.S. Engelstad (in NlyR I: 163)*

N226 Klepp II is just a small fragment but a part of an ornament can be seen, though that one can't be used for dating the inscription (NlyR III: 151) and not much can be said about the social standing of the people behind this stone either.

N228 Tu has two human figures on it which is the only one with only human figures instead of animal figures or abstract ornaments that I came across. (NlyR III: 156)

A man and a woman according to their dresses. The woman wears a long dress which is rather unusual for that time and a short cloak over it, on her back long hair or a hair tie can be seen. Men's clothes from the Viking Age show more variation. He wears a robe under a cloak with pointed flaps on the side which are connected. This type of clothing is known from later written sources and drawings, but usually only from the Medieval Period as such robes were usually shorter in the Viking Age. These two figures could be gods or mythical figures (NlyR III: 156).

N245 Helland III has ornaments in between the rune lines which are in a Ringerike style (NlyR III: 217). The runes are lined in a rune band on the broad side, one line on the left edge and one on the right. In between those two rune lines ornaments in a Ringerike style can be seen. That style is named after the stones from the Ringerike area and their ornament development (Hagenfeldt & Palm 1996: 54).

A very interesting case is N66 Grankirke IV as the ornaments are from an earlier period than the runic inscription.

The stone used to be the top part of a coffin or chest which was decorated with contour drawn figures and ornaments in the Ringerike style. This rock was later used as a raised memorial before it was put into a wall when the Nicolai church was built. The runes for the memorial were carved in a band on the edge of the broad side of the stone, but clearly around some of the ornaments. It shows a knight, another man and some ornamental lines. The decorative lines of the figures and ornaments have seemingly been carved by a rather inexperienced carver and are of lower quality than, for example, the stones from Dynna or



Alstad. The runecarver however changed his runes and shortened the staves to work around the ornaments and not carve into it which would have happened if the runes were carved in a more evenly way. This separates the carver from the one who did the second inscription on the Alstad stone (N62 Alstad II) who didn't mind carving into already existing ornaments.

The ornaments and decorations were therefore not made by the sponsor and are not in direct connection to the memorial inscription. It does show that the sponsor picked out an already decorated stone and that his memorial looked perhaps more prestigious, but it remains unclear whether he just had the possibility to raise this particular stone or whether he picked it out on purpose to show his ambition.

For the sake of completeness, the last two of the ornamented stones are N61 Alstad, which has ornaments as well as animals on the broad side and N68 Dynna, which has ornaments on both broad sides and runes on a small side. But as these two memorials show signs of the other status indicators and are quite special in regard to the chosen criteria, I will come back to them in separate case studies.

At this point I can conclude that ornaments and decorations as well as crosses in addition to a memorial inscription can contribute towards the discussion about social status. Having anything besides the memorial formula shows the effort and money the sponsor invested into the stone. Small crosses however only show the religious aspect to an inscription and should not be counted as an indicator for status.

Just as most other criteria, ornaments should not be seen as absolute pinpointers for the status of a person, but as one of multiple indicators used to determine social standing. If a stone is decorated, chances that the sponsor was wealthy or of higher standing increase, but proper statements can only be made together with other fulfilled criteria.

## 4.2 Case studies

### 4.2.1 N68 Dynna

#### *General*

The stone from Dynna, N68, can be dated to roughly 1040-1050 due to the type of runes which are used. They show the transition from Swedish-Danish long-branch runes to Norwegian short-twig runes. The dates are according to assumptions by Sophus Bugge and Dr. Bjørn Hougen (NlyR I: 202). The inscription mentions a woman raising a bridge in memory of her daughter. Building bridges is a Christian way to commemorate someone, which fits perfectly into the time as the area was probably christianised at that time already.

The stone was raised by a woman called Gunnvǫr in memory of her daughter Ástríðr and stood most likely close to a bridge as the building of it is also mentioned in the inscription.

The typical memorial formula “X raised this stone in memory of Y” is changed in this case to “X made the bridge in memory of Y”. This is the only incidence of this type of modified memorial formula in the Viking Age and Early Medieval Period in Norway. Additional information about both the sponsor and the deceased is also given, which makes the inscription specifically interesting to take a closer look at.

Transliteration:

**x kunuur x kirþi x bru x þriri ks tutir x iftir osriþi x tutur x sina x su uas mar hanarst x o hapalanti**



*photo: L. Smestad (in NlyR I: 195)*

Standardised Old Norse:

*“Gunnvǫr gerði brú, Þryðríks dóttir, eptir Ástríði, dóttur sína. Sú vas moer hǫnnurst á Haðalandi”*

English:

“Gunnvôr, Þryðríkr's daughter, made the bridge in memory of her daughter Ástríðr. She was the handiest maiden in Haðaland. “

This inscription doesn't directly say much about the social status of neither the sponsor nor the commemorated, but the inscription stands out of the corpus as it describes the person mentioned more than what is usually found in memorial inscriptions. It can only lead to further thoughts about why this was mentioned and what conclusions can be drawn from it, specifically about social status.

The stone as a whole is not something that is found too often, it is a sandstone brought to the farm, where it was raised, from Ringerike and has many ornaments and figures carved into the front side, while the inscription itself is on the smaller side of the stone. The memorial was raised at a farm on the smaller one of two burial mounds. That mound does not exist anymore, but since the runic inscription is Christian it wasn't raised in connection to the burial mound, which must be from earlier pagan times.

In the following I will go through the criteria mentioned in chapter 4.1 one by one and see to what extent the inscription on N68 shows indicators of social status. The goal of this case study is to draw conclusions about the sponsors and possibly commemorated status.

#### *Criteria 1 stone*

The stone on which the inscription is carved into is 2.82m tall, the broadside is 16-54cm wide, the small side measures 16 to 18cm. The top was cut off at some point, but as only the top three runes were broken, the stone couldn't have been much taller than it is now. All sides are hewed, giving the triangular shape and

smooth surfaces. The top is tilted forward, giving the stones its characteristic look.

The material is red-brown sandstone which is not found in the bedrock of this area.

V.M. Goldschmidt has examined the sandstone type from Dynna stone (as well as Alstad stone and others) and found out that both stones, Alstad and Dynna, must have been taken from Ringerike (Goldschmidt in NlyR I: 157).

The sandstone used for the Dynna inscription must therefore have been transported from Ringerike. Since there are other sandstone memorials found in Østre Toten and Gran in Oppland, which is far away from *in situ* of sandstone in the bedrock (Hagenfeldt & Palm 1996: 18), it was a sought after stone quality. Because transport of raw material was rather rare at the time and the majority of Viking Age runestones are from locally available stone types, (Hagenfeldt & Palm 1996: 22) the sandstone at Dynna shows high ambition of the sponsor by getting a stone from further away and having it transported. The transport of such a large stone was probably followed by higher expenses than a stone from the local area would have had.

The fact that it was hewed on all sides and the specific shape of the stone, tilting on the top, also shows the ambition of the sponsor to present a prestigious memorial for her daughter.

### *Criteria 2: language and writing conventions*

The inscription starts 42cm over the base and ends 35cm below the top. The runes are about 17cm tall, filling the full width of the smaller side where they are carved into (the stone is about 18cm deep on the small side).

One **s**, r.47 in the word **su** – **sú** – she (in the addition “she was...”), is the short-twig form (only a line from top to half) instead of the long-branch lightning-looking **s**, which was used for the other occasions of **s** in the inscription. This is probably due to the carver`s try to save space, but since there is enough space on the stone and the carver didn`t run out of it as initially perhaps believed by him, this rune was only used once (NlyR I: 196).

The runes for **r** show quite some differences as well. For R. 9 and 13 it is a neat, clear rune as would be expected (this is the way all **r**-runes look like on the Alstad I stone), but r.31 has no connection between the runes bow and right bottom line. Other **r**-runes are not as neat as the first ones, but rather angular (NlyR I: 196). The **a** and **t** runes also show up in both the short-twig and long-branch versions.

With these disparities for four runes it shows the change from the long-branched, Swedish-Danish, runes to the short-twig, “Norwegian” runes, which are common for Norwegian inscriptions in the Middle Age (Page 1995: 233).

Michael Barnes (2006: 14) calls it “unsettling” that the carver switched between the different versions of runes, **a** and **t** are used in both the long-branch and short-twig version, **s** is carved as a short-twig rune as well as a long-branch one. The reason behind this switching of styles isn't exactly clear, as mentioned in the chapter about language of inscriptions, some runes can be a sign for higher status or the carver showing that he was capable of writing in different styles (see 4.1.2). Nonetheless a fixed conclusion about the status can't be drawn just from the optical appearance of the runes. Something that is more convincing for higher status is the last sentence as it is written in verse. The memorial itself is given in prose, the end where the mother praises her daughter is written in verse. This is also known from other stones in Sweden where building bridges are mentioned and the last part is written in verse (NlyR I: 200).

### *Criteria 3 content*

There are a few things that can be learned by reading the inscription and looking at the content itself. The first thing that is mentioned is the sponsor's name. Gunnvôr is the one who raised the memorial for her daughter.

The sponsor was a widow who had responsibility over a farm, based on the assumption that women only raised runic memorials when no male family member was alive anymore and that the widow then would also take over the farm. Her name is a common woman's name, but her father's name, Þryðríkr, is

not too common, though in that area it is known from three diplomas (NlyR I: 192).

The next part of the memorial inscription mentions a bridge which was built. The Catholic Church promoted the building of roads and bridges as an indulgence, similar to giving alms, already in an early stage in exchange for absolution.

Bridge stones, like Dynna, are found from the early 11<sup>th</sup> century until the end of it (Gräslund 2005: 491).

The last part of a typical memorial formula consists of the name of the commemorated. The interesting part about Astrid's name is that it is spelled in an older form without *t*: *Ásripi*. But even more interesting is the last sentence that follows right after her name and describes the commemorated daughter further by praising her "the handiest maiden in Haðaland ". There are no other inscriptions in Norway where a commemorated woman is praised in this way but Anne-Sophie Gräslund compares Astrid from the Dynna inscription to a woman on a Swedish memorial<sup>16</sup> who has been a "good sister" to someone (Gräslund 2002: 466). It is not often that women get attributed in any way, specifically not something as positive as the word "good", which has caused many theories<sup>17</sup>, and the long praise for Astrid.

#### *Criteria 4 ornaments*

The stone with the inscription is decorated on the large broad side. They are designed in the Ringerike style so it can be dated to the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Hagenfeldt & Palm 1996: 29). The pictorial ornaments show a scene from the Christian gospel: Christ, a star, the three wise men and the stable with the crib. Which shows that the mother and her daughter were familiar with the Christian stories (Gräslund 2005: 491).

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<sup>16</sup> Vs24 Odendisa stone (placed at Hassmyra). Inscription in English: "The good husbandman Holmgautr had (the stone) raised in memory of Óðindísa, his wife. There will come to Hôsumýrar no better housewife, who arranges the estate. Red-Balli carved these runes. Óðindísa was a good sister to Sigmundr."

<sup>17</sup> see chapter 4.1.3 for the word "good"

This epiphany scene on the broad side is one of the earliest Christian pictorial art in Norway, but there is no clear sign of Christianity in the text/ inscription (Page 1995: 220).

The ornament shows the stable at Bethlehem, Mary, Jesus and Joseph who shows him to the three wise men (Sawyer 2000: 142).

The pictures are framed by a simple line, but some of the figures go further over the line. On top is Jesus as a child with a star right underneath. Below that are three men with horses, the uppermost horse has a spirale ornament, while the other two don't. The last horse is carved with doubled lines as contours, typical for this style. On the bottom is a house with three people inside. The person to the left is assumed to be a woman, while the other two are men. This is based on the rather stylistic drawing of their clothing. Next to the house is another horse, without a person. The man in the house, furthest right, has a drinking horn, the other men an undefined object. Those two are therefore said to be two of the three wise men bringing their gifts to the stable at Bethlehem. This scene is separated by ornaments. On the bottom is a geometrical ornament line, the same one also found on N61 Alstad I. Over it is a more floristic ornament, one of the most typical parts of the Ringerike-style group of runestones. All ornaments are very clearly and deeply carved.

One theory is that these decorations are something Astrid herself might have made in the form of embroidery or drawing, which is then carved to the stone commemorating her. This only stays a vague theory as there isn't any proof (NlyR I: 200).

### *Conclusion*

The stone is brought to Dynna from a different place and the carving, both ornaments and inscription, are striking and might have cost a lot to have been done as well. This would mean, based on the assumptions that raising the memorial was expensive, that Astrid's mother was a relatively wealthy woman and could therefore have been of higher status. Basically all criteria for high status are fulfilled for this inscription, the stone type due to the material, shape

and hewed surfaces, the language and writing convention criteria group and the ornamentation. The content criteria is also fulfilled by the extensional praise the commemorated got.

The fact that a special type of information and praise was added after the memorial formula in this inscription, which makes it one of the longer ones, plus the mentioning of a bridge being built proves at least the high ambitions Gunnvôr had for the memorial inscription for her daughter.

#### 4.2.2 N61 Alstad I

##### *General*

The stone with the inscription N61 stood at Nedre Alstad, Østre Toten on a farm, a small part at the top is missing, and other than that it also broke above the foot of the stone. Since 1913 the stone has been in Oslo University's Oldsaksamling. The stone is 2.50m tall, about 50cm wide and 18cm deep. The runic inscription is on the smaller side. Three sides of the stone have been hewed and smoothed, the fourth side (the other small side) has not been worked on, giving the stone an asymmetrical look.

The stone is decorated on both broadsides, ornaments on the backside and animal figures on the front. These decorations are believed to belong to the inscription on the small side, carved by the same person. The inscription also states that the stone was taken from Ringerike, which is about 100km south of where the stone was raised (Jesch 1991: 71).

The inscription N61 on the Alstad stone can be dated by the style of the ornaments to the first quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Dr. Bjørn Hougen i NlyR I: 159f.). According to Stefan Hagenfeldt and Rune Palm (1996: 26) roughly to 1000.

The stone was raised by a women in memory of her husband and reads the following:



Transliteration:

iurun ᚱ rais(t)i [ᚱ] s(t)ain ᚱ þina ᚱ af(t)ir [ᚱ] au-aun- ᚱ is ᚱ (h)ana ᚱ --(t)i [ᚱ]  
auk ᚱ furþi ᚱ af ᚱ hrikariki ᚱ u(t)an ᚱ ur ulbᚱaui-  
x auk ᚱ (m)untaᚱstain ᚱ ---ir þusi x"

Old Norse:

*Jórunn reiste stein þenna eptir... es hana (á)tti ok ferði af Hringaríki útan ór  
ulføyj(u). Ok mynda-steinn (mæt)ir þausi*

English:

"Jórunnr raised this stone in memory of <au-aun-> who owned her (ie. Was her husband), and (she) brought (it) out of Hringaríki, from Ulfey. And the picture-stone venerates them."

The second inscription found on this stone, N62 Alstad II, was added later and parts of the rune staves are cut over or through the horses' feet on the bottom. This inscription is separate from the other inscription and is therefore not part of this case study.

#### *Criteria 1: Stone*

The stone is a red-brown sandstone from Ringerike, as it is stated in the inscription and which has been tested and proved by Viktor M. Goldschmidt (in NlyR I: 157)

Since the Alstad I stone is the oldest one of the sandstones in the area of Oppland,<sup>18</sup> it might have been the start of the fashion to get sandstone delivered from Ringerike and also have the ornaments in Ringerike style (Hagenfeldt & Palm 1996: 55)

The selection of sandstone can also be seen as the sponsors' ambition to show the effort they made for their memorial and therefore also their status. As

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<sup>18</sup> N63 Granavollen, N64 Grankirke II †, N66 Grankirke IV, N68 Dynna

sandstone is easier to carve than most types of stone used for memorials, detailed ornamentation was easier (Hagenfeldt & Palm 1996: 56)

### *Criteria 2: Language and writing convention*

The runes are carved on the small side of the stone, reaching from 70cm above the bottom end up to the top where a small part is missing. The runes are about 12cm high. Before the first rune, a small ornament can be seen. The second line of this inscription is within a contour line on the broadside of the stone, with a reading direction from bottom upwards. Those runes were about 5cm tall, but as the edge of the stone was subject to weathering, the runes were slightly damaged.

The inscription is carved in long-branched runes and has division markers in the form of two small crosses.

The last part of the inscription (line B) can't be fully read as some runes are not preserved. But as the Alstad stone has many similarities with the Dynna inscription (N68), like the stone-type, rich ornaments and the fact it was raised by a woman, the inscriptions could also be compared to each other. Hence the theory is made that this last line is in verse, just like the last line on N68. For this theory the missing word must have started with **m** to form an alliteration. A suggestion (see NlyR I: 150) is the word *mætir* (to venerate).

The Alstad stone would then not only have rich ornaments and a stone transported from far away in common with the inscription from Dynna, but also a verse in the end.

Since the memorial at Alstad is older than the one at Dynna it would mean the first could have been an inspiration to the second, in case the mother from Dynna knew the stone at Alstad.

### *Criteria 3: Content*

The inscription shows a typical memorial formula, beginning with the name of the sponsor, Jórunnr, followed by "raised this stone in memory of" and the name of the commemorated, which is unreadable. After the name of the commemorated it

states the relationship between sponsor and commemorated, in this case that it was the sponsor's husband. In the inscription this is written as "he owned her". This inscription is thereby one of only four stones from my corpus raised by a woman<sup>19</sup>

In addition to this memorial formula it also states where the sponsor got the stone from: Ringerike, Ulfey. This is the only time in my corpus that an information about the stone is given, but since usually a stone from the local area is used for a memorial it barely makes sense to specify where the stone is from. Only in this case where the stone has been transported from a place 100km far away does it become a fact worth mentioning. Having a stone transported is also something Henrik Williams (2013: 64) sees as a marker for high status.

The last part of the inscription says the picture-stone, which must be the memorial stone the inscription is carved onto with its ornaments, venerates them. "Them" must refer to Jórunnr and her husband. She commemorates not only her husband with a standard formula, but in some way also herself, together with her husband in an additional phrase.

It seems to have been important to the sponsor to not only raise a stone with a standard inscription for her husband, but those reading it should also know how much effort she made by having a stone transported from a different area and that the ornamented stone also venerates her, together with her husband.

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<sup>19</sup> The other three are: N66 Grankirke IV (woman - man, no relationship specified), N68 Dynna (mother - daughter), N213 Skollevoll (wife - husband)

#### *Criteria 4: Ornaments*

The stone is decorated on both broad sides, the front side is pictorial, the backside only ornamental.

On the front side the pictures are in a line below each other. Starting on top with a large bird, the body being shown from the front and the head in profile as it often appears on early, rather primitive art. Below the bird is a dog or wolf, below that one a knight on a horse with a bird, possibly a falcon for hunting, on his arm. Another dog or wolf, followed by a horse without a knight and the last one on the bottom is another knight on a horse. All the animals are walking from the right to the left.

All animals are carved in with double lines and dogs and horses have spirals as it is common for Jelling- and Ringerike style figures (dr. Bjørn Hougen i NlyR I: 159f.)

Terje Spurkland (1995: 8) believes the ornaments on Alstad I stone should be seen as a transition from Mammen style to Ringerike style and can be dated to the late 900 hundreds, the typical Ringerike style develops a little later around 1025, N68 Dynna stone is a good example for it and dated to around 40 years after N61 Alstad.

#### *Conclusion*

Many indicators for different criteria can be found when discussing this runic memorial. Not only does it look prestigious with ornaments and figures on both



*Photos: L. Smedstad (in NlyR I: 160, 61)*

broad sides, the inscription itself also shows the effort of the sponsor by letting every reader know that she had a stone transported instead of taking a local one and by most likely adding a verse in the end.

For all criteria groups, Stone type, Language and Writing convention, content and ornamentation some indicators are visible for the Alstad inscription.

With so many criteria for high status being fulfilled this memorial can count towards the high-status runestones.

Compared to the Dynna stone many similarities are found, both are made of sandstone from Ringerike, both raised by women. The inscriptions contain more than just a memorial formula and the addition after said formula is in verse. The ornaments are on the broad side (or both broadsides in case of Alstad), while the inscriptions are on the small side. On the Alstad stone the last part of the inscription is on the broadside next to the ornaments. The Dynna memorial is slightly taller than the one from Alstad, 2.82m versus 2.50m, but both stay below the 3m mark and are therefore not among the top 10 runestones from my corpus.

### 4.2.3 N252 Stavanger

#### *General*

N252 is a historically especially interesting inscription as the people mentioned can be identified with some certainty. Therefore more about them is known through other sources and makes it easy to determine it as a high-status memorial. With this historical background (see section below about the content) the inscription can be dated to the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the stone stood along a street outside of Stavanger and not, where it could be expected, at Sola where the commemorated Erling had his property. For the following reason this is believed to be the original position of the memorial (NlyR III: 258). This location can be explained by the wish for the stone to be seen. Along a way more people will come past and will be able to read it. At a far off place like a farm barely anyone would have seen it (NlyR III: 258).

The stone can now be found in the garden of Stavanger museum.



*Photo: Aslak Liestøl  
(in NlyR III: 249)*

Transliteration:

**al(f)---ir : (b)r(i)str : raisti : stain : þina : aft : arlik trot(i)n : (s)(i)(n) : -(s)-  
(i)(n)(u)(a)s : --(a)--(n)----- : (i)s (h)an (: ) (b)ar(i)þis(k) : uip ol(a)if**

In standardised Old Norse it reads:

*"<alf---ir> prestr reisti stein þenna ept "Erling dróttin sinn <-s-inuas> ..., er hann  
barðisk við "Óleif."*

In English:

“<alf--ir> the priest raised this stone in memory of his lord Erlingr ... when he fought with Óleifr.”

#### *Criteria 1: Stone*

The stone is hewed into the shape of a cross. The total height is 3.15m, the width is 95cm at the widest point.

The material is gneiss which is found locally in the bed rock. It is a rather loose material which, in combination with heavy weathering, makes the runes difficult to read, even though they were initially carved deeply into the stone.

#### *Criteria 2: Language and writing convention*

The inscription is on one of the broadsides of the stone cross. On the bottom is first a cross and above the inscription starts in two lines, readable from the bottom upwards. In addition to those two lines are another two short lines on each of the arms of the cross, further on the outside of the two lines.

The inscription is written with short-twigged runes and has division markers in between words in the shape of two dots.

The type of runes was usual for that time and area and there are no special characters, such as bind-runes or similar.

Due to heavy weathering the runes are difficult to read and some parts are not readable at all.

#### *Criteria 3: Content*

The name of the priest can't be read for certain, but according to Aslak Liestøl (see NlyR III: 253) the name *Alfgeirr* is the most likely possibility. That name is known from a priest in Sverres saga and someone called *Alfgeirr jarl* from Northumberland who lived in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and another *Alfgeirr* is named in Eyrbyggja Saga. None of them can be the same *Alfgeirr* from the Stavanger

inscription, but the sources prove that the name was known at the time and in the area where the priest from the inscription has lived (NlyR III: 253).

The sponsor is a priest who commemorates his Lord and also mentions he, the Lord, fought with someone named Olav. The fact that this Lord Erling seems to have had his own priest already shows some higher status or at least some sort of power or money he had.

In this case, minding that the stone can be roughly dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century by the form of the runes (NlyR III: 254), it must have been King Olav Haraldsson and, connected to that, Erling Skjalgsson who are mentioned in the inscription. He did fight with King Olav and was probably rich and powerful enough to have a priest who then commemorates him.

This Lord Erling who is mentioned in different historic sources, for example, has Snorri Sturluson written about that battle and Skald Sigvat has written about it in even more detail, though he wasn't at the site when they fought (NlyR III: 255). Erling lived in Stavanger at the time the inscription can be dated to. As it is unlikely that two Lord Erlings have existed at the same time and area who both fought with someone named Olav, it is safe to say that the Erling from the inscription N252 is that exact person from the other sources mentioned.

The battle of Erling, together with the Danish king Knut, against King Olav has been dated to different years, the most agreed upon one being St. Thomas day, the 21<sup>st</sup> of December, in 1028 (NlyR III:255). Erling Skjalgson died in that battle in 1028 (Palm 1992: 24).

Because the inscription can be dated so early in regards to the Christianisation of Norway, priest Alfgeirr, who is otherwise unknown as he is not mentioned in any other sources, must have been one of the first missionary priests in Norway and he might have come from the Britain as so many other priests at that time did (NlyR III: 256).

One word with large importance in this inscription is the title of Lord the sponsor is mentioning for the commemorated. Those lords were likely important owners



of land, but their relation to the sponsor of a memorial commemorating them is rather personal (Jesch 2011: 41)

There are only a few inscriptions with the word *dróttinn* in use for a person,<sup>20</sup> not for any god. The term is usually followed by a possessive, putting the relation of the sponsor to his lord in a very personal aspect (Jesch 2011: 41).

Calling the commemorated *his* lord and not just giving the title as lord.

#### *Criteria 4: Ornaments*

The stone is cross shaped, has the inscription on one of the broad sides and an ornamented cross and two lines on the other broadside of the stone.

Below the inscription is another, smaller cross. Other than that the stone is not ornamented or decorated in any way.

#### *Conclusion*

Compared to the other two stones, N61 and N68, I chose for the case study, this memorial stone shows less indicators for less of the criteria. While N61 and N68 show many of the high-status indicators in all the criteria groups, N252 does not show any indicators for the language and writing convention criteria group and only one indicator on the stone type. The two points where it trumps both N61 and N68 is first the size, N252 is 3.15m tall and with that the 7<sup>th</sup> largest stone in my corpus (counting the stones where the original size can be determined) and second, most important, the title which is a clear indicator for high status belonging to the content criteria group. The stone is from the area where it was raised, but hewed into a cross shape and the only decoration is a large cross on the broad side. For the language criteria it also doesn't show anything extraordinary, for the time and area the runes used are typical and it



Photo: O. Møllerup  
(in *NiyR III*: 247)

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<sup>20</sup> Other than N252 there are DR131 DR209 and DR295 with the term *dróttinn*

reads a standard memorial formula with only the small addition of how the commemorated died.

Usually the status of the people mentioned in an inscription can only be assumed properly when multiple indicators show the high ambition of the sponsor, like it is the case for N61 and N68. In the case of Stavanger III however it is one single indicator that is so clear that no other indicators are needed for determining this inscription as a high status one. This strong indicator is the title of the sponsor and the name of the commemorated person which leads to a historical, from other sources than a memorial, known person. As there is more known about Erlingr and who he was it is clear that he was from high status, even if the memorial stone doesn't necessarily show it.

Some indicators are stronger than others, a small deviation in the runes used might not say so much about status, but a title or name mentioned which leads to a specific, historically known person is a clear indicator. It is also more objective as it states the person's status in an absolute way, while ornaments or language indicators could go back to fashion or the sponsor's or carver's personal taste/dialect or ability.

## 5 conclusion

The aim of my thesis was to show how the status of people mentioned on runestones of my corpus could possibly be determined using different criteria.

The aim was not to sort the complete corpus into high and low status monuments, but to show the criteria that could be used.

Since the Norwegian corpus is small, it is difficult to draw general conclusions.

Most rune stones from my corpus show one or two indicators, may it be the hewed surfaces or a specific rune in the inscription, but not enough evidence to determine which social status the sponsor or commemorated might have had. A few have ornaments and/ or epithets which show the ambition the sponsor had to raise a fine looking stone, but only a handful (the ones I did a case study for, for example) show enough indication to be discussed for possible higher status.

For the majority the evidence just isn't strong enough and many runestones are too fragmented as well.

Something that can be concluded is that a runic memorial stone can only be counted as a high-status stone when multiple indicators for high status apply for it and multiple criteria are met. However there are cases when one single indicator is so strong that it is enough to determine someone's status from it. An example for that is N252 Stavanger which I discussed in the case studies (4.2.3), the inscription on it mentions a historical known person with the title Lord. The one criterion definitely met is the content criteria as the inscription mentions a title. The stone type criterion can be discussed as the cross shape of the stone is a Christian sign and doesn't need to represent status per se. The memorial also shows a small cross carved into one of the broadsides, which is also closer to only being a Christian sign than counting towards ornamentation for high ambition stones. Indicators for the ornamentation criterion are therefore absent and so are any indicators for higher status in the language and writing convention criteria group. With this runestone from Stavanger it becomes clear that runestones can be easier defined as high status due to some indicators than be defined by the lack of indicators. The memorial mentioned above is clearly high status but lacks many traits that are considered to show that. So not all memorials who were raised by people of high social standing might show indicators for it. Someone who was able to afford a prestigious monument must not necessarily have chosen to do so and could have raised a simple memorial. That leads to the next result that the criteria groups are not equally strong in showing social status.

The indicators should then be weighted differently as they don't all show social status to the same extent. Some, like the language or writing convention criteria group, I would count as a weaker criteria as there are many possible reasons that lie behind choosing specific rune types or modifications of specific runes. A stronger evidentiary value I would give to ornamentation and epithets, like praises on the Dynna stone. Ornaments surely have a lot to do with fashions that might be in place in some areas in a certain time frame, but it does show the

effort and ambition of the sponsor. The highest and closest to being an objective indicator is the mentioning of a title, specifically if that title in combination with the name leads to a person also known from other sources. Only then some certainty of the sponsor's or commemorated status can be stated.

Another interesting point is that both Alstad I and Dynna, which are both clearly high status monuments, were raised by women. While statistically rune stones raised by women are rather rare, it is interesting that two of the four Norwegian stones by women are so prestigious. Of the remaining two N66 Grankirke is similar to both Alstad and Dynna in the way that it is the same sandstone and similar ornamentation. As they are raised in the same area, in a similar time frame as well (first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century) and have other similarities within the status criteria, it could have been a sort of fashion for women in that time and area. This topic about women's rune stones or perhaps the comparison of them to other memorial rune stones raised by women in other parts of Scandinavia would be interesting for further research.

After having gone through the different possible criteria and discussing the rune stones that show indicators for each criteria group, I found it more fitting to have case studies where I started with one specific rune stone and then went through the possible criteria looking for indicators of high status. Instead of going through a single criteria group looking at all the memorials. For further research this method of case studies could be used again or in an adapted way if necessary, as there are more memorial rune stones within my corpus that would be worth looking at, like N84 Vang or N66 Grankirke.

Applying the same criteria on other runic memorials from different areas in Scandinavia or expanding the time frame could lead to interesting results concerning the differences to the Norwegian corpus. Perhaps criteria would also have to be valued differently for different areas or times, when ornamentation might be more often caused by following a fashion than representing a higher social status compared to earlier runic memorials which might in general have less ornamentation, but not due to those people being of lower status but

because it wasn't as much of a tradition to decorate memorial inscriptions. Those are just assumptions and would need further research.

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- NlyR* = *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer*. Magnus Olsen m. fl. 6 vol. hittills. Oslo 1941–.
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- Ög + NUMBER: inscription published in *Östergötlands runinskrifter*, SRI, 2.

## 7 Appendix

List of Norwegian runestones with a memorial formula from the Viking Age and Early Medieval Period

|                     |                     |   |
|---------------------|---------------------|---|
| N59 Fåberg, Østfold | N222 Eigersund      | N260 Sørbo II                           |
| N61 Alstad I        | N223 Njærheim I     | N271 Gjerde Kirke I                     |
| N62 Alstad II       | N224 Njærheim II    | N272 Gjerde Kirke II                    |
| N63 Granavollen     | N225 Klepp I        | N273 Grindheim Kirke                    |
| N64 Grankirke II †  | N226 Klepp II       | N300 Eikeland                           |
| N66 Grankirke IV    | N228 Tu             | N301 Mager Kirke                        |
| N68 Dynna           | N233 Bore Kirke III | N413 Kvamme †                           |
| N84 Vang            | N237 Tangerhaug †   | N417 Svanøy                             |
| N96 Tanberg II †    | N238 Skjæveland †   | N449 Kuli                               |
| N97 Tanberg III †   | N239 Stangeland     | N453 Hårberg                            |
| N163 Skafså         | N241 Sola †         | N543 Ukjent sted VI<br>(unknown place)  |
| N180 Åmli †         | N244 Helland II     | N544 Ukjent sted VII<br>(unknown place) |
| N184 Galteland      | N245 Helland III    | NA13 Sørbo III                          |
| N 186 Bygland †     | N247 Skadberg       | NA23 Haugset                            |
| N208 Ryen           | N251 Stavanger II   | NA222 Ervik                             |
| N211 Søgne          | N252 Stavanger III  | NA53 Eik prestegård                     |
| N213 Skollevoll     | N259 Sørbo I        |   |
| N214 Framvaren      |                     |   |