



Dating Medieval Roman Alphabet Inscriptions – An Example from Hallvard’s Cathedral in Oslo

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In order for Roman alphabet inscriptions to be useful primary sources for historical, linguistic or other research, it is important that they are dated. Moreover, the user of these inscriptions should be able to judge the quality, i.e., the certainty, or uncertainty of the proposed dates. Several criteria for dating Roman alphabet inscriptions are presented, based on my cataloguing work in the project “Between Runes and Manuscripts”. These are applied on Guðrun’s gravestone from Hallvard’s Cathedral in Oslo. Øystein Ekroll and Bent Lange have previously dated this gravestone to c. 1200, however, I argue that the inscription should be dated to the fourteenth century.

One of the most fundamental and exiting aspects of research on historical material is trying to date it. Nonetheless, in 1997 Syrett writes that the dating of Roman alphabet inscriptions in Norway is highly insecure, since only a small number of inscriptions, mainly from Trondheim, has been published, and those only in nineteenth-century editions, which do not always live up to modern standards. Since then, Syrett (2002) has published the Roman alphabet inscriptions from Trondheim in an extensively detailed edition. From the rest of Norway, however, modern editions are still lacking. In the past few years, Elise Kleivane and I have been working on a collection of medieval Roman alphabet inscriptions from Norway. My focus has been on public inscriptions on buildings and gravestones. As part of this work on my Ph.D. thesis, I have currently collected over 200 Roman alphabet inscriptions from Norway.¹ Apart from the reading and interpreting of these inscriptions, a central element in cataloguing them is their dating. For Roman alphabet inscriptions to be useful primary sources in historical, linguistic or other research, it is important that they are dated. Moreover, the user of these inscriptions should be able to judge the quality, i.e., the

¹ This includes 107 inscriptions from Trondheim, previously published by Syrett. The collected inscriptions are to be published as part of my Ph.D. thesis. I would like to thank Øystein Ekroll for sharing his manuscript on memorial and building inscriptions, which was a valuable help in documenting many of them and their previous publications. I am also grateful for an engaging discussion of the dating of this example from Hallvard’s Cathedral.

certainty, or uncertainty of the proposed dates. In this article, I present the principles followed for dating inscriptions on buildings and gravestones,² and apply them on a complicated case from the ruins of Hallvard's Cathedral in Oslo.

Dating inscriptions: the theory

Since Syrett (1997) published his article on dating Roman alphabet inscriptions, nothing has changed to the theory of it. Therefore, my theoretical approach is much the same as that presented by Syrett. Nonetheless, I prefer to present the method somewhat more explicitly, since this provides a foundation for discussion. In Figure 1 below, I present the steps taken when dating an inscription.

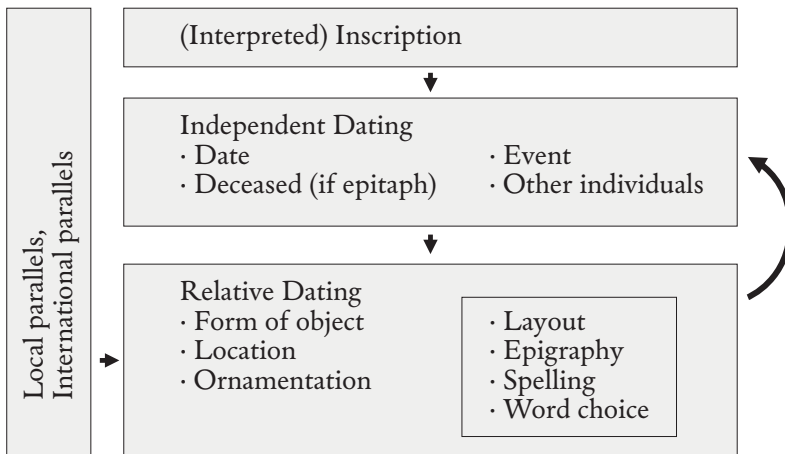


Fig.1. Steps taken when dating inscriptions.

Before an inscription is to be dated, it should be interpreted as much as possible, since most of the dating criteria require interpreted language. Once the inscription is interpreted, it is possible that it can be dated independently due to the presence of specific information. This is usually the most precise, but also the rarest. Primarily, this is the case for inscriptions which mention the date on which they have been carved, or the date the deceased died (for gravestones). Secondly, this is also the case for inscriptions mentioning known individuals, for instance when the deceased of a

² Most of the criteria used for dating are the same for other objects, but more specific considerations may be relevant, for instance, the identification of the mint responsible for an inscribed coin.

gravestone is known, or when known donators, family members or others are mentioned. It is also possible that known events, rather than people are mentioned. As mentioned, such datable inscriptions are rare. Of the 207 inscriptions with the Roman alphabet I have analysed so far, only 28 can be dated in this way.³ Moreover, rarity is not the only problem with this form of dating. It is possible that a date has been carved, but that it is damaged, or that it simply has been misread. For instance, on an early fifteenth-century gravestone from Bergen, I have read MCCCCXI[-], while Nicolaysen (1858: 4) has read MCCCCVI and Bendixen (1916: 32) MCCCCX. In this instance, the difference is only minor, but it does indicate that the dates of currently lost gravestones, which have been read in the past, should still be treated with care. Similarly, Syrett (1997: 95; 2002: 360–370)⁴ has had great difficulty dating the minuscule inscription T 99. It was dated by Klüwer (1823) to an astonishingly early 1316, while minuscule epitaphs seem to become common only by the end of the fourteenth century. A more common problem is that the identification of individuals mentioned in inscriptions, is often highly speculative. This we can see an example of in the inscription from Oslo analysed below. With these difficulties in mind, it is always necessary to crosscheck the absolute dating of the inscription with its relatively datable features. Such a crosscheck has, for instance, led Steinness (1966: 99) to argue that an inscription commemorating “Hacon of noble family”⁵ must have been made one or more generations after Hacon’s death in 1304.

Since one is rarely lucky enough to be able to date inscriptions absolutely, relative dating is by far the most usual. This can be based on seven elements, perhaps more in individual instances. These include the form (1) and the placement (2) of the monument, artwork engraved in association with the inscription (3), the layout of the inscription (4), the form of the letters (epigraphy) (5), the spelling (6), and the choice of words (7). The first three elements: form, location, and ornamentation, can date the inscription only indirectly. The form and location rather date the object, and the ornamentation may be independent. Often it can be assumed that these were all produced at the same time, but this is not necessarily the case. The characteristics of the layout, epigraphy, spelling, and choice of words date the inscription more directly. A dating by any of these seven elements always builds on a comparison with parallels. Preferably, such parallels should be local since different regions may have responded

³ This is an interesting peculiarity of the Norwegian inscriptions, since inscriptions dated by year seem to have been more common on the Continent (pers. comm. Estelle Ingrand-Varenne).

⁴ See also Füchs (2004:135) for a further discussion.

⁵ My translation.

differently to changing trends. However, apart from Trondheim, most Norwegian cities and villages have only a small number of inscriptions preserved. Therefore, it is often necessary to look for parallels further afield within the country, or even abroad. Moreover, in continental Europe, a much larger number of inscriptions is preserved, and has been documented more extensively, which makes it a valuable material for comparison. As Syrett (1997: 94) states, it must be assumed, unless there is evidence to the contrary, that changes in epigraphic style spread relatively quickly to Norway from influential continental centres. However, it is likely that different epigraphic centres or schools responded with different speed to such innovations in the tradition. In comparison to 1997, we are fortunate that the number of online published and searchable inscriptions has increased tremendously on the Continent, with projects such as *Die Deutschen Inschriften* in Germany or *CIFM*⁶ in France.

Let us look at these seven criteria in some greater detail. Firstly, the form of the monument is a relevant criterion for dating both inscriptions on buildings and on gravestones. For inscriptions on buildings, architectural elements may give us an idea of a *terminus post quem* the inscription may have been carved. Sometimes, they may even provide a more precise dating, for instance, if the inscription in some way can be connected to the construction or dedication of a church. For gravestones, the shape of the stone can provide us with an idea of the period in which the inscription may have been carved. For instance, trapezoidal gravestones were the most common in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Gardell 1946: 123), although, many examples have been dated to the fourteenth century (Syrett 2002; Bugge 1926: 23–30). Rectangular gravestones became more common in the fifteenth century, although, there are some examples from the fourteenth century (see Bugge 1926: 31–32).

Secondly, the find location of the inscription may give an indication of its age. This is most often the case for objects found in archaeological excavations, but there are also other instances. Inscriptions from Hamar form a good example at a larger scale. The cathedral peninsula “*Domkirkeodden*” in Hamar was abandoned shortly after the reformation, which means most inscriptions from this location can be dated to the Middle Ages (Sæther 1986: 8).

Thirdly, ornamentation is the most useful for dating memorial inscriptions, since these inscriptions are often combined with engraved artwork, unlike the inscriptions on buildings. For instance, gravestones displaying standing, or kneeling individuals in the centre of the slab range from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth century, sporadically up to 1400. Gravestones bearing crosses, however, are found all through the Middle Ages up to about 1400. For these, the style of the cross may give a more

⁶ *Corpus des inscriptions de la France médiévale*.

precise date, as exemplified by Syrett (1997: 100). From approximately 1400 we see gravestones displaying symbols of the evangelists in the four corners, and a coat of arms in the centre. Apart from these general traits, it is possible to study the artwork more closely, and for instance, the dress, attributes, or stance of the displayed individuals may provide a much more precise dating. In this way, Hohler (2001: 36) dates a gravestone from Søndre Huseby⁷, to c. 1300 based on the dress, stance, and shape of the depicted woman. Syrett (2002) has also dated several inscriptions on similar grounds. The extensive work on ornamented effigial slabs by Greenhill (1976) is an important source of information, but it is important to note that it is mainly based on continental gravestones, since little of the Norwegian material was collected when he compiled his work.

Fourthly, the layout of the inscription, especially those carved on gravestones, may also indicate a certain period. Inscriptions carved on walls generally run left to right, possibly in several lines, and there seems to be little variation in this layout. However, on gravestones, many different organisations can be found. For instance, in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century, memorial inscriptions are usually carved either on a slanted bevel encircling a tombstone, or on the edges of the face of the tomb. In contrast, the few examples we have of twelfth-century memorial inscriptions are carved in horizontal lines on the face of the stone. This horizontal layout is also found in a few inscriptions from the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (see Syrett 2002, and my forthcoming dissertation).

Fifthly, and mainly (as argued by Syrett 1997: 102), it is the epigraphy itself which can be related to the date of the inscription. Throughout the Middle Ages, the form of the letters employed has changed drastically from a Romanesque preference for angular, versal shapes (up to the twelfth century), through a Gothic preference for rounded or uncial forms (thirteenth-fifteenth centuries) to Gothic minuscules (fourteenth-fifteenth centuries) and Humanist capitals (fifteenth century). These different types of letters can be related to different periods, and even within these types, there is large variation, which may provide diachronic information. However, the developments in script have not happened overnight, and were not implemented equally quickly, or consistently in all regions. Therefore, there may be large variation between contemporaneous inscriptions, and even within inscriptions. In the example from Hallvard's Cathedral below, I will discuss the development of Gothic majuscules more extensively.

Finally, both spelling and word choice, although not considered by Syrett (1997), may also provide us with a clue to the date of the inscription. Most inscriptions are

⁷ It is now preserved in Frogner Kirke in Lier.

very standardised, both in choice of words or phrases and in spelling, but no extensive study of the orthography of (Roman alphabet) epigraphy has been undertaken yet. It is likely that it would reveal more clues for dating inscriptions. Nonetheless, even lacking such a comprehensive study, it is sometimes possible to relate uncommon spellings to diachronic developments, or to find chronological boundaries for the use of certain words or titles.

Usually, these different elements fit well together, and point at a similar date. Indeed, this is a prerequisite for this relative dating to work at all. For instance, most memorial inscriptions in minuscules are found on rectangular gravestones displaying a coat of arms and evangelist symbols. All these factors point at the late fourteenth, and fifteenth century. Similarly, trapezoid gravestones displaying a central standing individual usually have a framing inscription in majuscules, to a varying degree of Gothic type. Nonetheless, sometimes, these different elements point in different directions, considerably complicating the process of dating the inscriptions. The example of Guðrun's gravestone from Hallvard's Cathedral is such a complicated case. I first present and analyse my reading of the inscription and afterwards discuss the dating of it. The criteria presented above are followed, and I focus particularly on the epigraphy of the inscription. I draw parallels to some other, local inscriptions from Oslo and Hovedøya, as well as further afield in Norway.

Dating inscriptions – the practice

From medieval Oslo, at least 13 Roman alphabet inscriptions are known⁸ and three of those stem from Hallvard's Cathedral. One, commemorating Bishop Jón, is only preserved in nineteenth-century drawings and one consists only of a small fragment. The third, commemorating Guðrun is rather well preserved. It is carved on the top and side of a gravestone with raised back and concave sides. The stone was found just outside the ruins of Hallvard's cathedral in Oslo, to the east of the western entrance to the ship (Fischer 1950: 53). The stone measures 185 cm in length, 60–47 cm in width and 41cm in height, and consists of a local type of limestone. Today, a copy of the gravestone is available for public inspection in its find location, while the original stone is preserved inside Bishop Nicholas' chapel in Ladegården, just across the street. This gravestone and inscription have previously been dated to c. 1200 (Lange 1955: 122, Ekroll 2014: 169), but in this article I will instead argue for a dating to the fourteenth century.

Guðrun's gravestone and the inscription carved on it, is remarkably well pre-

⁸ All of these are on gravestones, I have not included inscriptions on smaller objects in this study.



Fig.2. Guðrun's gravestone from Hallvard's Cathedral in Oslo. Image ©Johan Bollaert

served. Only the first three letters of the top line and part of the first letter of the second line are lost. The other letters are well visible, and do not seem to have been exposed to harsh conditions, even though the stone has cracked, and some small sections have flaked off. The inscription can be transcribed, normalised, and translated as follows:

- a) [+HER:]LIGGER:GUÐRUN:A:HAUGHŪ
- b) [M]OÐR:HĀA:ÞIOSTOLF̄S:

Hér liggr Guðrun á Haugum, móðir herra Þióstólfs.

Here rests Guðrun from Hauger, Lord Þióstólfr's mother.

The lost section in line a, indicated with squared brackets, has been supplied with + (a cross), and *hér*. Even though this reading can never be certain, it is likely since the phrases *hér hvílir* 'here rests' and (more rarely) *hér liggr* 'here lies' are found at the start of the majority of medieval epitaphs. Likewise, most Roman alphabet epitaphs begin with a cross, and it is likely that this was also the case for this inscription. Of <L> in *liggr* only the bottom bar and serif are preserved, as well as the bottom parts of <I>

and of <G>. Their reading, considering the context, is nonetheless relatively certain. The only letter which could leave a similar trace in the bottom as <L> would be a versal <E> with an exceptionally large serif, however, this would be unlikely from the context, and from the fact that otherwise uncial <E> is used in the inscription. The first <G> is also only preserved in the very bottom. This could theoretically allow for <O>, but such a reading is similarly unlikely in the context. The following words are entirely preserved and separated with three dots aligned vertically. In Guðrun, <ÐR> is carved in a ligature, and is somewhat damaged. Nonetheless, the reading is certain. The following letter is most likely <A>, although of unusual form. It consists of two almost vertical shafts, which do not meet at the top. They contain a middle crossbar, but no top bar, which is highly unusual for this letter. It is open on the top. This top bar does not seem to be lost due to damage but was never carved. In the following *Haugum*, we find the same form of the letter <A>, lacking a top bar. This place name is spelled with <GH>, and *-um* is abbreviated by <U> with a nasal bar above, this nasal bar did not fit on the top part of the stone but is carved on its concave side.

The beginning of the second line is also missing, here there is space for one, or at most two letters. A reading of the letter <M> seems most likely considering the context and the available space, since it is relatively wide. This allows for the first word of this line to be read *móðr*. In this word, <ÐR> is again carved in ligature. This is followed by the title *herra*, carved <HRA>, with a bar above <R>, and <A> again lacking the top bar. Finally, the genitive of the name *Þióstólfr* ends the inscription. This name is well readable, excepting two letters. These are more difficult to interpret, not due to damages, but due to their exceptional form, namely <T> and <F>. <T> is round, and like <A> it lacks all trace of a top bar. Instead, it contains a short curl or “*anschwung*” at the top of its bowl. As such, it looks almost like a <U>, however, it can be distinguished from this letter in that it does not contain a serif at the right bottom, which is clearly present in all forms of <U> in the rest of the inscription. Finally, <F> looks very similar to the letters <A> in this inscription, even in the fact that it lacks a top (or rather upper) bar. This is due to the extension of the usual serifs on the bars of the letter into a second shaft, complete with serifs on the top and bottom. As such, the letter is fully closed. What does differentiate it from <A> is that the left shaft of <A> is consistently bent, while in <F> it is straight.

Independent dating

Now that a reading of the inscription has been established and explained, we can go about trying to date it. As mentioned above, Ekroll (2014: 169) has dated the stone to c. 1200 and Lange to before 1260 (1955: 122). Ekroll based this dating primarily on

the form of the monument (pers. comm.), and Lange on the form of the monument, as well as its placement and epigraphy. In this article, I follow the steps I have described above, and first attempt an absolute dating. Since the inscription does not contain a date, and does not mention any known events, the only possibility would be to identify Guðrun, or Þióstólfr. I have not been able to make such an identification with any certainty, but it is possible to speculate. Both the names Guðrun and Þióstólfr were common and are found in many diplomas, including several from Oslo. The name Guðrun is registered more than 100 times in the name register of *Regesta Norvegica*. One diploma (DN III 432) stands out. This diploma from 1381 mentions a woman, Guðrun Þióstólfsdóttir, who is married to Hróðbiartr Loðinnsson. The diploma documents that Guðrun and Hróðbiartr sold Þorsgarðr, a farm in Ringebu in northern Gudbrandsdalen. This is the only diploma in which both the names Guðrun and Þióstólfr are found, but the Guðrun buried in Oslo can only extremely speculatively be connected to this diploma. Firstly, this would mean that Guðrun's father was called Þióstólfr, and that her son was called after him. According to medieval naming practice, this could imply that she had at least two sons, and that the first was called after his father's father, and the second after Guðrun's father, Þióstólfr (pers. comm. Lennart Ryman). This is not impossible, but it cannot be verified.

Secondly, this would mean that Guðrun was buried in a place considerably removed from where she sold land. Þorsgarðr in northern Gudbrandsdalen lies almost 180km in straight line from Oslo. This is, however, not impossible either since the sale of land does not mean that Guðrun must have lived there personally. Moreover, the title *Herra* of her son does suggest considerable wealth. As such, it is possible that this gravestone commemorates Guðrun, married to Hróðbiartr Loðinnsson. However, it is perhaps more likely that this is not the relevant Guðrun, since the name Guðrun is registered over 100 times in the register of *Regesta Norvegica* and there must have been even more women named Guðrun of whom no diploma are preserved. The other names in the inscription do not allow for a more specific dating either. Þióstólfr was a popular name according to Lind (1905-15: 1130), found in written sources from about the end of the thirteenth century. This does not necessarily mean that the name was not in use before. It is equally likely that this is due to the lack of written sources from the earlier periods as to a lack of people called Þióstólfr. In Sweden, the name is (fragmentarily) found on Sö 248, a Viking Age runestone. Finally, the place name *Haugum*, is not very restrictive either. The place name Hauger, plural of Haug, is found in 24 locations, from Hedmark, Akershus, Kristians- and Smålenes amt (Rygh, 1897–1924). Rygh (1879–1924) documents the name from c.1300, but again, this is likely due to the preservation of written sources, rather than

the actual use of the name. As such, I conclude that although the names in the inscription point mainly at the late fourteenth or fifteenth century, this information cannot be used for dating the inscription with any certainty, since the identification of the individuals is highly uncertain, and the written sources upon which it is based are too incompletely preserved. This is a common problem for the dating of most memorial inscriptions and is far from unique for Guðrun and Þióstólfr. The absolute dating being inconclusive, a relative dating must be based on the form of the monument, its (find) location, its artwork, and the layout, epigraphy, spelling and word choice of the inscription. Below, I go through these criteria in this order.

Relative dating

FORM

The inscription is carved on a gravestone with a somewhat unusual form. Its base is slightly trapezoidal, and its central “back” is raised to approximately 40 cm over the base. The sides of this back are slightly concave. Of this form of gravestones with raised back, only two other examples with Roman alphabet inscription are known in Norway. Both stem from Øystese, in the bishopric of Bergen, and can most likely be dated to the (late) twelfth or early thirteenth century, based on the epigraphy. With runic inscriptions, at least two such gravestones are known, namely N 60 and N 440. N 60 is now lost, but was originally found in Kvem (Toten), some 80 km north of Oslo. The shape of this stone is very similar, including the concave sides, if Heyerdahl’s drawing (NIyR I: 130) is to be trusted. It was carved in a type of limestone locally found along Mjøsa. The inscription on it has been dated to the thirteenth century, possibly the second half of the twelfth century. N 440, from Giske is carved on a marble gravestone, which had a more moderately raised back, only slightly higher than the sides of the stone. This inscription has not been dated. Regarding N 60, however, Rygh (NIyR I: 131) has argued that this is the common form of gravestones from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which were intended to be placed outside the church. In Sweden, this style of gravestone was much more common, or has least been better preserved. Gardell mentions that up to 60 of these gravestones, including fragments, termed “Kistformad lockhäll”⁹ may have been preserved from Västergötland alone, the area where they were most common. He dates these mainly to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with one exception dated to the fourteenth century (Gardell 1946: 307). He does not provide an explanation, but it is possible that this late dating was based on the presence of a short minuscule inscription, which is not

⁹ Coffin shaped graveslab.

necessarily of the same period as the stone itself. It seems safe to conclude then that this form of monument was the most typical in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and indeed, it is based on this form that Ekroll (2014: 169; pers.comm.) and Lange (1955: 122) have dated this monument to c. 1200. It bears mentioning, however, that from c. 1500 a gravestone commemorating Bishop Herman is preserved in Hamar, which consists of a similarly thick, “kistformad lockhäll”. However, this gravestone does not have a raised back, instead it has an evenly high surface.

PLACEMENT

Lange (1955: 122) has dated the grave monument based on its form, but also on its find location. The stone was found just outside, to the east of the entrance to Hallvard’s Cathedral (Fischer 1950: 101, 151). Based on this find location, Lange argues that the stone must have been placed before 1260, since from then on it was allowed for the laity to be buried inside the church. This argument is based on two assumptions, the first is that Guðrun would have been buried inside if it had been allowed; the second that the find location is also the location where the stone was originally placed. Regarding the first, we can only speculate. Even after 1260, the church was not large enough to accommodate the burial of all laymen. However, considering that Guðrun was the mother of a lord, and received a costly gravestone, it is possible that she would have been able to afford a burial inside the church, and perhaps she would be considered worthy of it. Regarding the second, it should be noted that the form of the monument does suit best with a placement outside the church, since its raised height does not allow people to walk over it. If the stone was indeed placed outside the church, however, it seems unlikely that it was unprotected from the elements. The inscription is well preserved even though the limestone it is carved into is rather susceptible to damage by weathering. Indeed, it would be surprising that the best-preserved gravestone from Hallvard’s cathedral was one which is placed outside.¹⁰ Perhaps it was covered with a roof, or it was simply covered with soil relatively early on. The main problem with arguing from the find location of a gravestone, however, is that one assumes it has never been moved.¹¹ Very few gravestones in Norway have been found in their original location. Considering that the cathedral was rebuilt several times throughout the Middle Ages, it seems somewhat surprising that this gravestone would have been unaffected. As such, I conclude that the monument was best

¹⁰ Perhaps, its preservation is due to its form, since it is not well suited to be used as building material, unlike the most likely flat medieval gravestones supposedly forming the foundation of the Grønland district in Oslo.

¹¹ Bugge (1926:13) similarly points out that the original position of gravestones is rarely known, since many gravestones have been moved or removed after the reformation.

suitied to be placed outside the cathedral, considering its form, but that the exact placement of it should be considered uncertain. It is unlikely, but not impossible that it was originally placed inside the cathedral. As the gravestone of Bishop Herman from c. 1500 indicates, it is possible for less passable gravestones to be placed inside the cathedral also.¹² Due to this, and the uncertainty regarding where one would have wanted to bury Guðrun, the terminus ante quem of 1260, should not be considered absolute.

ORNAMENTATION

The artwork of the stone can be discussed very concisely since it does not display any. In this way, it is similar to the other Norwegian gravestones with raised back, which likewise do not contain any ornamentation. Their Swedish equivalents discussed by Gardell (1945) do more often display ornamentation, however. Similarly, Bugge (1926) discusses several Norwegian ornamented gravestones of this form, but lacking inscriptions. Regarding gravestones in general, it should be noted that examples without ornamentation are found throughout the entire medieval period.

LAYOUT

The layout of the inscription is also tightly connected to the form of the stone. The inscription is carved in two lines, running lengthwise on the stone. The first line is carved on the raised back, the second on one of the concave sides. They are placed so that the whole inscription can be read from one side of the stone, without needing to move around it. A similar placement of the inscription is found on the two stones from Øystese mentioned above, as well as N 60 and N 440, which consist of only one line. This lengthwise placement of the inscription, readable from one side is common for runic inscriptions of the whole Middle Ages, also on flat slabs. For the Roman alphabet inscriptions, including those on flat slabs, this placement is less usual, but found sporadically from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century.¹³ As such, the placement of the inscription is typical for the type of monument it is carved upon, but is not a diagnostic diachronic feature by itself.

EPIGRAPHY

The letter forms of this inscription fit most closely to what Syrett (2002: 56) calls fully developed Gothic majuscules. In Norway, Gothic majuscules became gradually

¹² The original placement of Bishop Hermans gravestone is unknown, but one assumes that if anyone was buried in the cathedral, it must be its former Bishop.

¹³ See my forthcoming dissertation for further analysis.

more common during the thirteenth century, replacing the more compact Romanesque inscriptions (Syrett 2002:32). On the continent, these Gothic characters developed already from (the end of) the twelfth century and became “high Gothic” during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Kloos: 1980,125–132). In Norway, they continued developing throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, after which they were gradually replaced with minuscules on the one hand, and humanist capitals on the other hand. Lange (1955: 122) has argued that the epigraphy of the inscription fits to the early thirteenth century, since “majuskler aleene ansees for å være brukt til henimot 1300”¹⁴ However, that minuscules were introduced after 1300, does not mean that majuscules were only used before this date. The earliest certainly dated minuscule inscriptions on gravestones in Norway stem from the end of the fourteenth century. There are two possible exceptions from the first half of the century, but their editors (Syrett 2002: 366–368, Steinness 1966: 99) have argued that they must be younger, since it is unlikely that minuscules were used so early for this purpose in Norway. Minuscule inscriptions became common only in the fifteenth century, and never replaced majuscules entirely. Plenty of majuscule inscriptions have been dated to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, including Ragnhildr’s gravestone depicted in figure three (below). Clearly, majuscules did not disappear, and their presence alone cannot be used as a criterion for dating. Instead, it is necessary to look more closely at the shape of these characters and find parallels in other inscriptions in order to form an idea about when they may have been carved. Therefore, I will first discuss the general traits of the characters, especially building on observations made by Syrett (2002). Afterwards, I compare this inscription with closer parallels.

The “fully developed Gothic” characteristics of this inscription are found in the form of the serifs (1), the closure of originally open letters (2), the swelling of bowls (3), lengthening (4) and contrast between heavy and light strokes (5). It should be noted that these characteristics have not developed overnight, but that changes in their appearance happened gradually. This means that some inscriptions displayed these Gothic features earlier than others, and that some features are found early on, while others only very late. What matters, therefore, is the total picture of the inscription.

The form of the serifs (1) was one of the first things to start developing, and already in early thirteenth-century inscriptions from Trondheim, the Gothic form is found. The change consists of the widening of serifs from thin lines into triangles, making their connection to the shaft or bar more gradual, and the serif itself more pronounced. In Guðrun’s inscription, these triangular serifs are visible in for instance

¹⁴ “Majuscules are the only letterform used until about 1300.” (my translation)

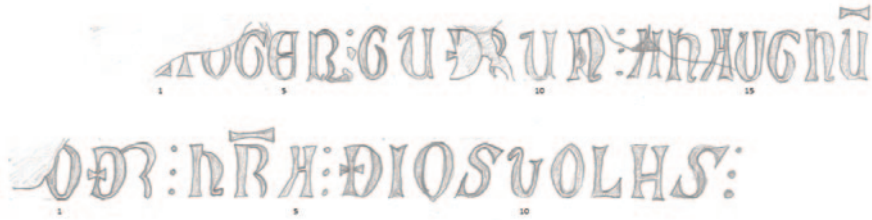


Fig. 3 A drawing representing my reading of Gudrun's gravestone. Image ©Johan Bollaert

the form of <S>, but in the vertical shafts of for instance <I>, <R> or <H>, the widening is spread over the total length of the shaft. There is no trace of lined serifs in the inscription. The second characteristic (2) is the closure of open letters, such as <E> and <C>, but also <F> and <M>. The first letter to be closed was <E>, followed by <C>, these can already be found sporadically in late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century inscriptions (such as nr. 3 and 4 in Syrett 2002). However, the closure of <M> happened only later, and Syrett (2002: 38) argues that the closure of <F> is mainly found (in Trondheim) in inscriptions clustering around the end of the thirteenth century and beginning of the fourteenth century. The closure first consists of a thin hairline, which gradually grows in width until it becomes undistinguishable in size from the main shafts, bars, and bowls of the letters it closes. In this inscription, <E> is closed with a line of the same thickness as that of its middle bar, but not as thick, or rounded as the bowl of the letter. Remarkably, <F> is closed to such an extent that the closing line forms a second shaft of its own, having the same thickness as the left shaft and even sporting serifs at its bottom and top end. Syrett (2002: 38) has identified a “full height closing stroke” in only three inscriptions from the fourteenth century, only the youngest having a “closing stroke” of full thickness. The third characteristic (3) is the swelling of bowls. This means that the middle, left- and rightmost part of bowls is wider than the top and bottom. In this inscription, swelling is strongly present in <E>, <U>, <N>, <H>, <O> and <T>, and to some degree in <G> and <R>. According to Syrett (2002: 56) such clear swelling is only found in Trondheim from around 1300, together with the lengthening of letters and the presence of Gothic contrast, even though it is present in continental inscriptions earlier. The fourth feature (4), the lengthening of the characters, can also be seen in this inscription, in that the letters are higher than they are round. This is the clearest in the elliptical shape of <O> and <G>, and the bowl of <E>. Similarly, <H> has a very high bowl, extending almost all the way up to the top of its shaft and as such

approaching the form of round <N>. The fifth feature (5) is the presence of Gothic contrast. This means that vertical lines are widened, while horizontal or oblique lines are narrower. In this inscription, this feature is not found in many letters, since it mainly consists of rounded and uncial forms, rather than its versal equivalents. The preference for uncial or round forms itself is considered typically Gothic (Kloos 1980: 132), and it is evident in this inscription. Indeed, <A> and <F> are the only letters for which the rounded equivalent has not been chosen. In these, the Gothic contrast has been taken to the extreme, in that the top bar of <A> and <F> is not simply thinned but omitted entirely. The same is found in <T>, where the top bar is omitted and replaced with a small decorative curl or “*anschwung*”. Finally, it is notable that the inscription twice contains a ligature \mathfrak{DR} , especially since ligatures are less usual among the fully developed Gothic majuscule inscriptions than among their predecessors. The letters are considered more independent, and their form more stable than what is the case for earlier inscriptions. In this inscription, the ligature in the first line can perhaps be explained by a perceived lack of space. In the second line, there is no such lack, but the sequence \mathfrak{DR} is still carved in ligature. It seems that the carver was unwilling to vary the form of these letters but chose to carve them in ligature also in the second line, to preserve formal cohesion. This stands in sharp contrast with late Romanesque and early Gothic majuscule inscriptions, where formal variation was intentional. (see Kloos 1980: 127)

In comparison with Syrett’s analysis of the inscriptions of Trondheim, the epigraphic features of this inscription point at the fourteenth century, possibly its later half. However, it should be noted that Trondheim was late in adapting Gothic epigraphic influence from the continent. It is possible that this is due to these developments spreading only slowly to Norway, but it is also possible that Trondheim was somewhat traditionalist in its production of monumental inscriptions. Therefore, it is worthwhile to look at other parallels also. I will look more closely at the inscriptions from Øystese, found on the two other gravestones with a raised back, and to some other preserved gravestones from Oslo.

Since Guðrun’s gravestone has previously been dated to c. 1200 based on the form of the monument, it is valuable to compare this inscription to the ones found on the two gravestones from Øystese, which also have a raised back. Bendixen (1888: 47–48) dated these two stones to c.1300, but the letter forms fit much better with a dating of ca. 1200.¹⁵ There is a clear difference in the epigraphy of these two inscriptions and of Guðrun’s inscription. Firstly, of all preserved letter forms, only <E> and the

¹⁵ This is discussed more extensively in the catalogue included in my forthcoming dissertation.



Fig. 4. One of the two gravestones from Øystese. Image ©Johan Bollaert

second instance of <H> are uncial, while otherwise versal forms have been used. This is especially striking for <H>, which is consistently uncial in Norwegian grave inscriptions otherwise. The letters rarely end in serifs, and if so, only very small ones. All lines are rather narrow. None of the letters has been closed, not even the uncial <E>. The letters are not lengthened. <E> and <O> are not elliptical, and the bowl of the single uncial <H> is very small and low. There is no sign of Gothic contrast, or of swelling. In other words, none of the diagnostic Gothic features of Guðrun's gravestone are found in these inscriptions, and they clearly represent an earlier epigraphic stage. Perhaps the epigraphy on these stones could be somewhat more archaic due to it stemming from a rural area but it is also older in style than any of the other inscriptions from rural Norway.

In Oslo, mainly small fragments of gravestones have been found, however, there is one better preserved example from the convent on Hovedøya, which commemorates Ragnhildr.¹⁶ In 1296, Ragnhildr entered the convent as a widow of less than 30 years old (Nicolaysen 1891: 6) and Nicolaysen dates the inscription to c. 1350. This inscription forms a much closer epigraphic parallel to the one commemorating Guðrun. In

¹⁶ My normalisation and translation of the inscription: "Hér ligger Ragnhildr Husfreyja, kona Holta Bjarnar, cuius anima in pace requiescat." Here lies lady Ragnhildr, the wife of Holtbjorn, whose soul may rest in peace.



Fig. 5. Ragnhildr's gravestone from Hovedøya. Image ©Johan Bollaert

this inscription, the serifs of staves are small, but on the bar of <L> and on <S> they are large and triangular. <E> is uncial and closed. <F> is also closed, although only in its upper part. The closing stroke is not extended into a shaft of its own. There is likewise a clear presence of swelling, although to a lesser extent. The letters are generally narrower. They are clearly lengthened, even more so than in Guðrun's inscription, as can be seen from the elliptical form of <E>. The inscription displays the same form of <A>, consisting of a somewhat squarish shape, with a slight bend in the left shaft, and a very thin, or (once) omitted top bar. The form of <R> is also similar in that it is open, and the cauda extends almost vertically down from the bowl, once curling back to the shaft. A similar form is found in Guðrun's inscription, and, interestingly, also in a small fragment of another gravestone from Hallvard's cathedral which has also been dated to the fourteenth century.¹⁷ In conclusion, Guðrun's inscription contrasts with Ragnhildr's, in that it is more thickly carved, with almost cumbersome weight.¹⁸ Guðrun's inscription also has somewhat stronger swelling,

¹⁷ This fragment contains a short part of an inscription: OCĪĀRE:HVIC, which has not been interpreted.

¹⁸ Syrett uses this term for two late Gothic inscriptions from Trondheim [66-67], and this description is fitting also here.

and a form of <F> which may be somewhat younger in style. As such, these two inscriptions are clearly closer together in style, which most likely indicates closeness in chronology.

SPELLING

The inscription is very short, and there is little that is remarkable about its spelling. The svarabhakti vowel in *ligger* is already found in a runic inscription dated to c.1200, namely N 344. The spelling of *Haughum* with <gh> is also not unusual. Seip (1954:9) documents the spelling <gh> already for the oldest Norwegian manuscripts, and the spelling Haugh is found in diploma from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. Likewise, the spelling of *Piostolfs* with <Ð> is not unusual. Seip registers initial <Ð> as usual already for the oldest manuscripts, and even in epigraphy initial <Ð> occurs, for instance, in <ÐÆNNA> *þenna* and <ÐAKE> *þakki* on a gravestone from c.1300 in Trondheim (Syrett 2002, no. 62) or on a possibly thirteenth-century fragment from Oslo in a damaged word beginning with <ÐO>. As such, the spelling of the inscription cannot be related to any particular date.

WORD CHOICE

Finally, we can look at the words used in the inscription. The inscription is carved in Norwegian, which is common throughout the entire medieval period. It is short, since it does not contain or request any prayers, and the deceased is only concisely identified. While many inscriptions are longer than this one, such short inscriptions are likewise found throughout the Middle Ages. From Trondheim, examples can be found in Syrett (2002), for instance from the fourteenth century: nr. 74, 83, 84 or 92, and from the thirteenth century: nr. 103. Outside of Trondheim, such short inscriptions are found in Huseby (O21)¹⁹ from c. 1300, or in the fourteenth century in S2²⁰ from Stavanger, or S11²¹ from Fjære.

Looking instead at individual words, it is interesting that the word *herra* is used as a title, this use is found in written sources only from around the mid-thirteenth century (DN I: 60), but the number of preserved written sources is small before this

¹⁹ Signum from my forthcoming catalogue, the inscription is read: Ave Maria. Hér ligg Ragnhildr dóttir sira Jóns. 'Ave Maria, here lies Ragnhildr the daughter of priest Jón.'

²⁰ Signum from my forthcoming catalogue, the inscription is read: *Hic requiescit Botulphus primus bone memorie episcopus Stavangrensis natione Normørensis*. 'Here rests Botulf the first, of good legacy, the bishop of Stavanger, descended from Nordmøre.'

²¹ Signum from my forthcoming catalogue, the inscription is read: Hic Ysaac nata recubet de prole beata regis Norvegie et principis et Dacie. 'May here rest the daughter of Isaak, of the blessed family of the king of Norway and the prince of Denmark.'

period. Therefore, it is possible that it was already in use well before its first preserved documentation. In (memorial) epigraphy, it is only found in two inscriptions from around 1300. Finally, also the use of the word *ligg(e)r* deserves to be mentioned. The phrase *hér liggr* is found in seven other Roman alphabet inscriptions, all of which have with a varying degree of certainty been dated to the fourteenth century. It is also found in two runic inscriptions, N 181 and N 65, which have not been dated. It is striking that there is no certain use of *hér liggr* on gravestones before the fourteenth century, although it is possible that the runic inscriptions are older. Instead, the equivalent *hér hvílir* was predominant throughout the thirteenth century. There may also be a regional difference, in that 6 out of 9 occurrences of *liggr* (including the runic inscriptions) instead of *hvílir* are found in the south east of Norway, however, this does not detract from the observation that its use seems to be younger.

Concluding discussion

In the first theoretical part of this article, I argued that it is only rarely possible to date inscriptions based on more absolute elements, such as the presence of an engraved date, known people or events. Indeed, also for Guðrun's gravestone, I have not been able to connect it with any certainty to any individuals known from other sources. Therefore, it is necessary to date the inscription in relation to other inscriptions, and to draw parallels. Based on parallels in form and placement Ekroll (2014) and Lange (1955) have previously argued that the monument was made c. 1200, or at least before 1260. Based on parallels in epigraphic traits and word choice, however, I argue that the inscription fits much better to the fourteenth century, possibly even its later half. It is rare that there is such a large discrepancy in how a gravestone would be dated based on its inscription and its form. Three possible interpretations can be given to this discrepancy. The first is that this an older gravestone from c. 1200, which has been repurposed in the fourteenth century, and received a new inscription. The second is that this gravestone is only old in style, and that in fact both the stone and the inscription stem from the fourteenth century. The third is that the inscription is much older than it seems and was carved in the early thirteenth century. To judge the likelihood of these possibilities, it is again useful to look for parallels.

The first option is that the inscription has been carved on an older gravestone and the stone was repurposed. Generally, the reusing of gravestones was not considered problematic during the Middle Ages. This is signified by the large number of gravestones found in walls and church foundations. The question is if the repurposing as a gravestone was also practiced. Of this there are parallels, but few. The main problem is that it is almost impossible to see when a new inscription has been carved on

an otherwise not engraved stone, as our current dilemma shows. Instead, there are more clear examples of inscribed stones which have been reused. For instance, in Trondheim, a late thirteenth century gravestone has been reused in 1610 (Syrett 2002, no. 62). A new inscription has been carved in some open space above and next to the original inscription and ornamentation. In Hamar, the gravestone of Bishop Herman was moved to Vang and reused by a local, without altering the inscription (Mathiesen 1910: 15). From Kinsarvik Kirke, a runic gravestone with raised back, N 280, is said to have been repurposed twice. Based on antiquarian descriptions, Olsen (1957: 25–26) argues that the stone first contained a runic inscription in two lines. These were removed and the stone was re-inscribed with a short runic line, after that, all runes were removed, and the stone was inscribed with Roman alphabet letters. These are the only Norwegian examples I am aware of, but in Gotland, a fourteenth-century Roman alphabet inscription has been carved around a runic inscription (G 195). The inscriptions commemorate unrelated deceased, and due to the layout, it is assumed that the Roman alphabet inscription is younger than the runic one (pers. comm. Palumbo). These examples show that old gravestones were being reused, but it is unclear to which extent this was common practice. It is clearly possible that Guðrun's inscription was carved on an older gravestone, but it is unclear how likely this is.

The second option is that both the gravestone and the inscription stem from the fourteenth century. In that case, the form of the gravestone is archaic in style. At least theoretically, this may be the case. It is possible that knowledge or even examples of this older style of grave monuments were preserved, forming the basis for this monument. In practice, Bishop Herman's gravestone from Hamar is a good example of the reuse of older styles. This stone was produced around 1500, but is slightly trapezoid, and is 31 cm thick. In form, it is very similar to some of the thirteenth-century "kistformad lockhäll" found in Västergötland (Gardell, 1945: fig. 1-73). This is even strengthened by the layout of the inscription, namely two bands of text running parallel to a central vine motif. If not for the minuscule inscription and added coat of arms, the stone could have been from the (early) thirteenth century. The question is why such an older style would have been used in Guðrun's case. In Herman's case, a bishop, it is possible that his stone received a special position in the cathedral, and that his gravestone was not floored in. It is unclear if Guðrun would have been distinguished enough for such an exceptional treatment. If so, one expects that she must have given a very large donation to the church, of which no information is preserved. An alternative could be that the stone was intended to be placed outside, but then again, the question is why.

The final option is that both the monument and the inscription stem from c.1200, this places the monument in its expected time, but means that the inscription is 100 to 200 years older than it seems. Generally, it is easier to reuse a known archaic form, than to invent a new form much earlier than its established use. The latter would mean that the carver made the same choices as were to be made a 100 years later, but that the inscription was not itself the basis of a new style. This would need a solid explanation, and at the least, one would expect to find some parallels. In Norway, no early thirteenth century gravestones are preserved with a similar script, and from the “kistformad lockhäll” preserved from Västergötland (Gardell 1945 fig. 1–73; Blennow 2016) not even one has an inscription with characteristics like this one. Instead, the style of script on those monuments is the same or older as that on the gravestones from Øystese. Even when looking abroad, c. 1200 is too early a date for the characteristics of Guðrun’s inscription. Regarding Germany, Kloos (1980: 130–132) argues that closed <F> appears from the mid-thirteenth century, and extensive lengthening only from the fourteenth century, although other Gothic characteristics are developed already in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Even in France, the characteristics of this inscription would fit better to the end of the thirteenth century than its beginning.²² It is difficult to imagine that a carver in Oslo would have been ahead in style of epigraphic centres in Germany and France. Especially considering that Syrett has otherwise indicated that there is some delay in the establishment of Gothic features in Norway (2002:56). Moreover, the clear parallels with other fourteenth-century inscriptions in Oslo indicate that the inscriptions stem from a similar time.

As such, I conclude that the inscription is likely to be from the fourteenth century, i.e., from a similar date as Ragnhildr’s inscription which is dated to around the first half or middle of this century. It is more difficult to determine whether the monument itself is from c. 1200, or if it was produced at the same time as the inscription. There are only few parallels to either the reusing of old monuments, or the reusing of an old style, but there are some parallels to both. Therefore, I must leave this question open.

In this article, I have shown that the possibility of independently dating inscriptions in Norway is rare, but that there are many ways to date them relatively. With Guðrun’s exceptional example, I show that it is important to consider all aspects of the inscription and its monument with equal attention, and not to assume that all point in the same direction, even though this is usually the case.

²² See Favreau (1997:60–88) for a summary of the developments in French epigraphic palaeography. Or Koch (1999:225–248) for a detailed analysis of the early development of Gothic majuscules in Germany and France.

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