

Peasants and Prayers
The inscriptions of Norse Greenland

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Peasants and Prayers. The inscriptions of Norse Greenland

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Cover photos: Wooden prayer stick from Sandnes with the runic inscription 'Hail Mary, full of grace', photographer Arnold Mikkelsen 2012.

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PREFACE

It all began in 1821 with the finding of the Kingit-torsuaq stone, the first evidence of runic writing in Norse Greenland. The researchers of the time, Rasmus Rask, Finnur Magnussen and Christian Jürgensen Thomsen, took great interest in the find. It was indeed sensational to be faced for the first time with the language spoken by the Norse inhabitants of medieval Greenland. In the following almost 200 years, more than 160 additional finds of runic artefacts have been retrieved from the soils of Greenland. Many researchers have taken up the discussion of the Greenlandic runic inscriptions during that time, including Erik Moltke, Magnus Olsen and Marie Stoklund, who was encouraged to publish the Greenlandic material in 1980. During the 1980s and 1990s, Stoklund collected the known material and published new finds of Greenlandic inscriptions. Owing to other tasks in the Runologisk Laboratorium at the National Museum of Denmark, a final edition was never completed, but thanks to Stoklund's meticulous cataloguing, most inscriptions were included in the *Sammordisk Runtexdata-bas* in the early 1990s. Stoklund also made sure that photos were taken of the new finds and she made detailed notes on the inscriptions. She should also be given credit for having addressed some of the essential problems in the material, and for giving careful consideration to the question of how to deal with such a large body of material as this. My first

thanks therefore go to Marie Stoklund for having collected the material and presented it in a form that made it easy to retrieve it from the archives for my own analysis.

In the years 2009–13, the National Museum of Denmark hosted a research programme primarily funded by the Augustinus Foundation. More than twenty individual research projects were involved in the Northern Worlds programme, where all sorts of topics concerning the northern worlds were investigated. The coordinator of the programme, senior researcher Hans Christian Gulløv, encouraged me to make a fresh study of the Greenlandic inscriptions. Almost thirty years had passed since the first initiative for a collected edition, and the Northern Worlds programme meant that solid support for a completion of the edition now existed. As a part-time employee at the National Museum, I was eager to find external funding for the project. The first tranche of money was a grant from Kulturministeriets Forskningspulje, which allowed me to spend a year collecting and studying the material anew. Hence, I spent part of 2009 and 2010 in the archives at the National Museums in Copenhagen and Nuuk tracking down artefacts for the catalogue. In 2013 the Northern Worlds programme granted me another six months to carry on with the manuscript, and finally the senior researcher scheme at the National Museum enabled me to complete the

manuscript. I would like to thank Gulløv for encouraging me to begin the process, and for giving me his enthusiastic encouragement to complete it. I would also like to thank him for ensuring funds were available to publish the manuscript within the Northern Worlds programme. Proper thanks should also be given to Kulturministeriets Forskningspulje, Northern Worlds and the Augustinus Foundation, and finally to the National Museum for providing excellent conditions for senior researchers.

A number of researchers and institutions have been valuable contacts in the process. I would like to thank Eva Andersson Strand for details of and discussions concerning textile equipment; Jan Ragnar Hagland for reading parts of the manuscript, and for discussions of runes, orthography and language; Rikke S. Olesen for being such a good sparring partner and for her ability to put my feet back on the ground when thoughts went flying; Kristel Zilmer for reading and commenting on the manuscript and for her encouragement; Magnus Källström and Jan Owe for helpful comments on the construction of the catalogue; Jonas Nordby for useful discussions regarding readings, especially on cryptic runes; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson for good conversations, suggestions and encouragement for further research; Mogens Skaaning Høegsberg for his willingness to read parts of the manuscript, for general encouragement, and for answering stupid questions; and Georg Nyegaard for his keen interest and co-operation in the process. Thanks to him, valuable archaeological datings of the runic material from Qorlortup Itinnera (Ø34) are presented in this volume. I would also like to thank him for being the carrier of artefacts to and

from Greenland when I needed to have a second look at the objects, and for being such a good contact when visiting the museum in Nuuk. I am grateful to the National Museum and Archives in Nuuk for housing me during the planned two weeks in April 2010, which turned into three because of an Icelandic ash cloud that paralysed world-wide air traffic for a couple of weeks. I would like to thank all the employees for their kindness in connection with my stay. Jokes about me staying around for the Christmas party will never be forgotten! Frank and Lis, who kept up the good spirits when we were ‘trapped’ in the world’s most beautiful prison, should also receive my thanks, wherever they are in the world today.

In the process of working with the material, it was splendid to have the First Lady of Norse archaeology, Jette Arneborg, as my next-door neighbour at the National Museum. I owe her my greatest gratitude for helping me with all kinds of questions regarding the material and for reading the final manuscript. Among other things, valuable archaeological datings of the runic material from GUS are presented in this volume thanks to her. I would also like to thank her for her unabated enthusiasm whenever I have presented news on the material. Proper thanks should also be given to Simon Coury, who has not only revised the English manuscript with a hawk’s eye, but who has also been a great editor of the text and to Jens Mikkelsen for the translation of the summary into Greenlandic.

And finally, I must thank my pack, Rasmus and Dagmar, for pushing my paws away from the keyboard whenever it was time to go for a walk ♥