



Johnson, Catherine Estelle (2020) *A comparative study of portable inscribed objects from Britain and Ireland, c. 400-1100 AD*. PhD thesis.

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**A Comparative Study of Portable Inscribed Objects from  
Britain and Ireland, AD 400-1100**

**2 Volumes  
Volume 1: Text**

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Archaeology

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September 2019



## Abstract

This thesis provides a comprehensive comparison and analysis of portable inscribed objects from all ethno-linguistic cultures in early medieval Britain and Ireland, in the period between the post-Roman era (c. AD 400) and ending just after the Norman Conquest (c. AD 1100). It looks at the relationships between people and objects, observing differences in inscribing practices between object types, the application of text onto material culture, and the differences and similarities of the types of inscriptions found on these objects. Where past research has placed focus on only a single script, culture, or object type, this thesis is the first to combine all Insular scripts (runes, Roman, ogham) and languages (Old English, Old Norse, Latin, Irish/Early Gaelic) on portable objects from all major cultures in early medieval Britain and Ireland (Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, Pict, Irish, Scots). In total, 270 objects are catalogued and discussed, consisting of personal adornments and dress accessories, household and personal tools, weaponry and armour, ecclesiastical objects and church equipment, objects related to writing and reading in learned environments, funerary and memorial-related objects, and objects that cannot be identified but are categorised by raw material (i.e. metal, bone, stone). The types of object show a trend towards inscribing jewellery and dress accessories in Anglo-Saxon contexts and scripts (runes and Roman letters), whilst most of the objects of Scandinavian character and text (only runes) are made of ephemeral material including complete and incomplete pieces of bone and antler. Objects with ogham inscriptions follow a similar pattern and are primarily inscribed onto tools made of antler and bone, but, like the inscriptions in Scandinavian runes, can also be found on metal dress accessories and household items.

To analyse these objects in their social, personal, and political environments, this thesis employs the theories of object biography, gift and social exchange, and agency to look at the contexts in which the objects were used and inscribed and to consider the purposes behind the inscriptions. Additionally, ideas behind the power of writing and text, in particular those texts that are described as ‘gibberish’ or non-lexical, gives insight into how text was perceived and used in those cultures that engaged with it and how this evolved over time. The inscriptions include personal names and statements of ownership, maker, and commissioner, demonstrating direct relationships between people and things, and religious texts indicating that objects were used as vehicles for devotion and faith. This thesis has revealed that a wide variety of objects were given text in early medieval Britain and Ireland. It presents new and different perspectives on concepts of cultural and personal identity in regard to the study of material culture, providing discussions that are consistently growing and evolving as more objects and inscriptions are discovered each year.

# Table of Contents

## Volume I: Text

Abstract .....	2
List of Charts .....	13
List of Tables .....	16
List of Figures .....	18
List of Maps .....	22
List of Abbreviations .....	23
Acknowledgements .....	24
Author's Declaration .....	26
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	27
1.1 Background and Objectives .....	27
1.2 Contextual Parameters .....	28
1.2.1 Chronology and Geography .....	28
1.2.2 Material .....	28
1.2.3 Epigraphy and Linguistics .....	30
1.3 Defining 'Text' .....	32
1.3.1 Primary vs. Secondary Text .....	34
1.4 Excluded Objects .....	35
1.5 Theoretical Perspectives .....	36
1.5.1 Object Biography and Agency .....	36
1.5.2 Gift and Social Exchange .....	37
1.5.3 Re-use and Modification .....	38
1.6 Thesis Structure .....	39
Chapter 2 Data Collection and Source Review .....	42
2.1 Published Corpora and Catalogues .....	42
2.2 Articles, Reports, and Chapters .....	45
2.3 Excavation Reports .....	46
2.4 Online Databases and Museum Collections .....	47
2.5 Personal Viewings and Correspondence .....	48
2.6 Difficulties in Research .....	49
2.7 Contributions of this Study .....	50
Chapter 3 Corpus Overview .....	52
3.1 Object Categories .....	52
3.2 Scripts and Languages .....	55
3.3 Chronology and Geography .....	61
3.4 Find Contexts and Circumstances .....	62
Chapter 4 Domestic and Personal Items .....	66
4.1 Personal Adornments and Dress Accessories .....	66
4.1.1 Finger-Rings .....	69
4.1.2 Brooches .....	77

4.1.3	Bracteates .....	85
4.1.4	Decorative Dress-Fittings .....	89
4.1.5	Arm-Rings .....	92
4.1.6	Dress-Pins .....	94
4.1.7	Pendants and Beads .....	97
4.1.8	‘Work-Box’ .....	100
4.2	Household and Personal Tools .....	101
4.2.1	Household Tools.....	104
4.2.2	Toilet Implements .....	110
4.2.3	Textile-Making Items .....	116
4.2.4	Gaming Pieces.....	121
4.2.5	Vessels.....	125
4.3	Weaponry and Armour.....	127
4.3.1	Sword-Fittings .....	131
4.3.2	Sword Blades .....	137
4.3.3	Sheaths and Scabbard Mounts .....	142
4.3.4	Seaxes .....	147
4.3.5	Armour.....	148
4.4	Summary of Inscribed Domestic and Personal Items .....	149
Chapter 5	Ecclesiastical, Writing and Reading, and Funerary Items .....	154
5.1	Ecclesiastical Items .....	154
5.1.1	Reliquaries and Shrines .....	157
5.1.2	Liturgical Objects and Church Equipment .....	166
5.1.3	The Franks (‘Auzon’) Casket .....	174
5.2	Writing and Reading Equipment .....	176
5.2.1	Slates and Writing Tablets .....	178
5.2.2	Seal-Dies .....	184
5.2.3	Reading and Writing Accessories .....	189
5.3	Funerary and Memorial Objects .....	193
5.3.1	Funerary Crosses and Plaques .....	194
5.3.2	Cremation Urns.....	200
5.4	Summary of Inscribed Ecclesiastical, Writing, Reading, and Funerary Items.....	204
Chapter 6	Miscellaneous and Unidentified Objects (by Raw Material) .....	207
6.1	Bone and Antler .....	207
6.1.1	Unworked Bone and Antler.....	210
6.1.2	Worked Bone and Antler.....	217
6.2	Metal Objects.....	222
6.2.1	Unidentified Mounts and Fittings.....	224
6.2.2	Folded or Cut Plaques.....	231
6.2.3	Unidentified Metal Fragments .....	236
6.2.4	Crescent-Shaped Plaque .....	237
6.3	Stone Objects.....	238

6.4	Summary of Inscribed Miscellaneous and Unidentified Objects (by Raw Material)	242
Chapter 7	Analysis of Inscriptions .....	245
7.1	Personal Names .....	245
7.2	Owner, Maker, Commissioner, Writer .....	249
7.2.1	Owner.....	250
7.2.2	Maker .....	253
7.2.3	Commissioner.....	256
7.2.4	Writer.....	257
7.3	First-Person Inscriptions .....	258
7.4	Self-Descriptive Inscriptions.....	262
7.5	Alphabets and Alphabetical Sequences.....	264
7.5.1	Runic Alphabets.....	265
7.5.2	Roman Alphabets .....	267
7.6	Religious Inscriptions .....	268
7.7	Gibberish, Cryptic, and ‘Amuletic’ Sequences .....	272
7.8	Single Runes .....	278
Chapter 8	Discussion .....	281
8.1	Cultural Differences in Inscribing.....	281
8.2	New Approaches to Portable Inscriptions .....	285
8.2.1	Object Biography .....	285
8.2.2	Exchange and Social Relationships.....	286
8.2.3	Re-Use, Modification, and Changing Perceptions.....	289
8.2.4	Object Agency.....	291
8.2.5	The Power of Writing.....	293
8.3	The Biographies of Portable Inscribed Objects.....	295
Chapter 9	Conclusions .....	302
9.1	The Evolution of Portable Text .....	302
9.2	Why Inscribe? .....	306
9.3	Significance and Future Research .....	308
	Bibliography of Works Cited .....	311

## Volume 2: Catalogue of Objects

Catalogue Conventions .....	9
Abbreviations .....	15
ÆDELFLIED ring.....	16
ÆDWEN (‘Isle of Ely’/‘Sutton’) brooch .....	17
ÆLFRIC seal I.....	18
ÆLFRIC seal II .....	19
ÆTHELSWITH ring .....	20
ÆTHELWALD seal.....	21

ÆTHELWULF ring .....	22
AACHEN sheath .....	23
ALFRED jewel .....	24
ALHSTAN ring.....	25
ARDAGH chalice.....	26
ASH-GILTON pommel I .....	27
ASH-GILTON pommel II .....	28
ATTLEBOROUGH ring .....	29
BAC MHIC CONNAIN knife handle.....	30
BACONSTHORPE page-holder/clip .....	31
BALLINDERRY die .....	32
BALLINDERRY sword .....	33
BALLYCOTTON brooch .....	34
BALLYSPELLAN brooch .....	35
BARDNEY pin .....	36
BARTON ST DAVID stone .....	37
BATEMAN brooch .....	38
BAWBURGH plaque .....	39
BEVERLEY crozier .....	40
BILLESLEY plaque .....	41
BINHAM bracteate I (IK 604,1) .....	42
BINHAM bracteate II (IK 604,2) .....	43
BINHAM bracteate III (IK 604,3) .....	44
BINHAM bracteate IV (IK 630,1) .....	45
BINHAM bracteate V (IK 630,2) .....	46
BINHAM bracteate VI (IK 630,3) .....	47
BLYTHBURGH tablet.....	48
BOARLEY brooch .....	49
BODSHAM ring .....	50
BORNAIS plaque.....	51
BOSSINGTON ring .....	52
BRAMHAM MOOR ring.....	53
BRANDON inkwell .....	54
BRANDON pin .....	55
BRANDON plaque .....	56
BRANDON tweezer .....	57
BROUGH OF BIRSAY bear tooth.....	58
BRUSSELS/'DRAHMAL' cross.....	59
BUCKQUOY spindle-whorl .....	60
BURRAY BU spindle-whorl .....	61
CAHERCOMMAUN bone .....	62
CAISTOR-BY-NORWICH astragalus .....	63
CANTERBURY brooch .....	64

CANTERBURY sundial.....	65
CARTHORPE scabbard mount .....	66
CHERTSEY sword.....	67
CHESSELL DOWN bowl .....	68
CHESSELL DOWN scabbard mount.....	69
CHESTER seal.....	70
CHICHESTER cross .....	71
CLEATHAM hanging bowl .....	72
CLONMACNOISE knife handle .....	73
CLUNY altar .....	74
COLOGNE crozier .....	75
COPPERGATE helmet.....	76
COQUET ISLAND ring .....	77
COTSWOLDS pommel.....	78
CRAMOND HILL ring .....	79
CREWKERNE strap-end.....	80
CÚ DÚILIG crozier .....	81
CUMBERWORTH plaque .....	82
CUMWHITTON pin-head.....	83
CUXTON brooch .....	84
CYNEFRID ring.....	85
DEANSWAY cross .....	86
DEANSWAY pottery sherd.....	87
DEER PARK FARMS hone .....	88
DEERNESS pendant .....	89
DEERNESS (Quoys) plaque .....	90
DERBY plaque .....	91
DERRYNAFLAN (Doire-na-bhFlann) paten .....	92
DOL3BOT ring .....	93
DOVER brooch.....	94
DRIFFIELD RING .....	95
DUBLIN antler plate .....	96
DUBLIN comb I .....	97
DUBLIN comb II.....	98
DUBLIN comb IR 14 .....	99
DUBLIN IR 4.....	100
DUBLIN IR 5.....	101
DUBLIN IR 6.....	102
DUBLIN IR 7.....	103
DUBLIN IR 8.....	104
DUBLIN IR 9.....	105
DUBLIN IR 10 .....	106
DUBLIN IR 11 .....	107

DUBLIN IR 12 .....	108
DUBLIN IR 13 .....	109
DUBLIN IR 16 .....	110
DUBLIN leather strap.....	111
DUBLIN sheath I .....	112
DUBLIN sheath II .....	113
DUBLIN sword .....	114
DUNADD disc .....	115
DUNTON plaque.....	116
EAWEN ring .....	117
EGGINTON mount.....	118
ELSTED strap-end.....	119
ENNIS bead .....	120
EVESHAM seal-die.....	121
EXETER hilt-guard .....	122
EYE fragment.....	123
FAVERSHAM pommel I.....	124
FAVERSHAM pommel II .....	125
FLIXBOROUGH ring .....	126
FLIXBOROUGH plaque.....	127
FRANKS casket .....	128
FROGLANDS object .....	130
GALLOWAY arm-ring I (SF 30).....	131
GALLOWAY arm-ring II (SF 53).....	132
GALLOWAY arm-ring III (SF 54) .....	133
GALLOWAY arm-ring IV (SF 59) .....	134
GANDERSHEIM/BRUNSWICK casket.....	135
GAYTON THORPE spindle-whorl .....	136
GORTEEN Neolithic axe-head.....	137
GREENMOUNT scabbard mount.....	138
GREYMOOR HILL ring .....	139
GURNESS knife handle .....	140
HARFORD FARM brooch .....	141
HEACHAM tweezers .....	142
HERTFORD sword .....	143
HINCKLEY disc.....	144
HOBY WITH ROTHERBY bracteate.....	145
HONINGTON tweezers .....	146
HUNSTANTON brooch .....	147
HUNTERSTON brooch.....	148
'IN DEO' ring .....	149
INCHMARNOCK slate IS.1 .....	150
INCHMARNOCK slate IS.35.....	151

INCHMARNOCK slate IS.36 .....	152
INCHMARNOCK slate IS.37 .....	153
INCHMARNOCK slate IS.38 .....	154
INCHMARNOCK slate IS.39 .....	155
INCHMARNOCK slate IS.46 .....	156
INCHMARNOCK slate IS.76 .....	157
INIS MÓR pebble .....	158
IPSWICH belt-buckle .....	159
KESWICK disc mount .....	160
KILGULBIN EAST hanging-bowl.....	161
KILLAMERY BROOCH .....	162
KILMAINHAM sword .....	163
KINGARTH slate I .....	164
KINGARTH slate II.....	165
KINGARTH slate III .....	166
KIRKDALE plaque .....	167
LANCASHIRE ring.....	168
LAWS FARM crescent plaque .....	169
LIATHMORE fragment .....	170
LIMPSFIELD GRANGE disc .....	171
LINCOLN bone .....	172
LINCOLN comb-case .....	173
LINCOLN cross.....	174
LINCOLN seal .....	175
LINSTOCK CASTLE ring .....	176
LISMORE crozier.....	177
LONDON, BATTERSEA seax .....	178
LONDON, BATTERSEA sword .....	179
LONDON, GUILDHALL bone.....	180
LONDON, KEW sword.....	181
LONDON, NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY bone.....	182
LONDON, PUTNEY seax .....	183
LONDON, ROYAL OPERA HOUSE bone.....	184
LONDON, TEMPLE sword.....	185
LONDON, THAMES EXCHANGE ring .....	186
LONDON, WESTMINSTER scabbard mount.....	187
LONG BUCKBY strap-end .....	188
LOUTH plaque.....	189
LOVEDEN HILL urn .....	190
LUND pen-case lid .....	191
MALTON pin .....	192
MARCH plaque.....	193
MILDENHALL object .....	194



MORTAIN casket .....	195
MORTON hooked-tag .....	196
MOTE OF MARK bone .....	197
MOYNAGH LOUGH antler tine.....	198
NASSINGTON comb .....	199
NORTH PETHERTON strip.....	200
NUFFIELD strap-end .....	201
OLD NENE sword .....	202
ORPHIR OR 15 .....	203
ORPHIR SF444 (OR 19) .....	204
ORPHIR SF 445 (OR 19) .....	205
ORPHIR SF 446 (OR 19) .....	206
ORPHIR SF 447 (OR 19) .....	207
ORPHIR SF 448 (OR 19) .....	208
ORPHIR SF 449 (OR 19) .....	209
ORPHIR SF 450 (OR 19) .....	210
PENRITH brooch.....	211
PERSHORE censer cover .....	212
POSTWICK seal-ring .....	213
RANNVEIG (RANUAIK) casket.....	214
RIVER BANN bell-shrine crest.....	215
ROME hooked-tags (x2) .....	216
ROOSKY arm-ring .....	217
SARRE pommel .....	218
SALTFLEETBY spindle-whorl .....	219
SANDFORD pendant reliquary.....	220
SCALFORD bracteate .....	221
SEDFORD handle .....	222
SELSEY BILL 'ring' .....	223
SHANMULLAGH cross-arm .....	224
SHIFFORD sword .....	225
SHORWELL pommel .....	226
SHROPHAM plaque.....	227
SIGERIE ring .....	228
SINGLETON mount .....	229
SITTINGBOURNE seal .....	230
SITTINGBOURNE seax .....	231
SLEAFORD brooch.....	232
SLEAFORD ring .....	233
SOUTHAMPTON (HAMWIIH) plaque.....	234
SOUTHAMPTON (HAMWIIH) bone .....	235
SPONG HILL urn C1224.....	236
SPONG HILL urn C1564.....	237

SPONG HILL urn C2167 .....	238
SPRINGMOUNT BOG writing tablets .....	239
ST ALBANS bone I .....	240
ST ALBANS bone II .....	241
ST BENETS plaque .....	242
ST COLUMBA'S PSALTER book-shrine .....	243
ST CUTHBERT altar and shrine .....	244
ST DYMUNA crozier .....	245
ST MOLAISE (Soiscél Molaise) book-shrine .....	246
ST NINIAN'S ISLE chape .....	247
ST PATRICK'S bell-shrine .....	248
STACKRUE disc .....	249
STAFFORDSHIRE HOARD gold strip .....	250
STEYNING ring .....	251
STOWE MISSAL book-shrine .....	252
STROMNESS spindle-whorl .....	253
SUFFOLK ring .....	254
SWINDON ring .....	255
DANCAS ring .....	256
TERRYHOOGAN hand-bell .....	257
TRONDHEIM sheath .....	258
UNDLEY bracteate .....	259
VALE OF YORK brooch fragment .....	260
WAKERLEY brooch .....	261
WALLINGFORD seal .....	262
WALLINGFORD weaving-sword .....	263
WALTHAM ABBEY lead spillage .....	264
WARDLEY spacer-plate .....	265
WAREHAM sword .....	266
WATCHFIELD fitting .....	267
WEASENHAM pendant .....	268
WEETING-WITH-BROOMHILL (WEETING) knife handle .....	269
WELBECK HILL bracteate .....	270
WELLS lead foil .....	271
WEST HESLERTON .....	272
WESTNESS needle .....	273
WHEATLEY HILL ring .....	274
WHITBY comb .....	275
WHITBY spindle-whorl .....	276
WILLOUGHBY-ON-THE-WOLDS bowl .....	277
WILLOUGHBY-ON-THE-WOLDS brooch .....	278
WIMBORNE chess pieces (x2) .....	279
WINCHESTER lead sheet .....	280

WINTERBOURNE metal strip..... 281

WITHAM sword ..... 282

WOLVERTON work-box..... 283

YORK spoon..... 284

## List of Charts

Chart 3.1 Categories of Portable Inscribed Objects.....	54
Chart 3.2 Types of Scripts on Portable Inscribed Objects.....	55
Chart 3.3 Languages on Portable Inscribed Objects .....	56
Chart 3.4 Distribution of Portable Inscribed Objects by Country .....	61
Chart 3.5 Find Circumstances of Portable Inscribed Objects.....	63
Chart 3.6 Distribution of Portable Inscribed Objects by Context .....	64
Chart 4.1 Types of Personal Adornments and Dress Accessories .....	67
Chart 4.2 Scripts on Personal Adornments and Dress Accessories .....	68
Chart 4.3 Languages on Personal Adornments and Dress Accessories .....	68
Chart 4.4 Scripts on Inscribed Finger-Rings .....	71
Chart 4.5 Languages on Inscribed Finger-Rings .....	71
Chart 4.6 Types of Inscriptions on Finger-Rings .....	73
Chart 4.7 Scripts on Inscribed Brooches .....	77
Chart 4.8 Languages on the Inscribed Brooches .....	78
Chart 4.9 Types of Inscriptions on Brooches .....	80
Chart 4.10 Scripts on the Inscribed Decorative Dress-Fittings .....	89
Chart 4.11 Languages on the Inscribed Decorative Dress-Fittings .....	90
Chart 4.12 Inscribed Household and Personal Tools .....	102
Chart 4.13 Distribution of Inscribed Household and Personal Tools by Context.....	102
Chart 4.14 Scripts on Inscribed Household and Personal Tools.....	103
Chart 4.15 Languages on Household and Personal Tools .....	104
Chart 4.16 Scripts on Inscribed Household Tools .....	105
Chart 4.17 Languages on Inscribed Household Tools.....	106
Chart 4.18 Scripts on Inscribed Toiletry Implements .....	111
Chart 4.19 Languages on Inscribed Toiletry Implements.....	112
Chart 4.20 Distribution of Inscribed Toiletry Implements by Context.....	113
Chart 4.21 Scripts on Inscribed Textile-Making Items .....	117
Chart 4.22 Languages on Inscribed Textile-Making Items .....	118
Chart 4.23 Distribution of Inscribed Textile-Making Items by Context.....	118
Chart 4.24 Scripts on Inscribed Gaming Pieces .....	122
Chart 4.25 Inscribed Weaponry and Armour (Ballinderry sword listed in two categories) ..	128
Chart 4.26 Scripts on Inscribed Weaponry and Armour (Ballinderry sword listed in two categories).....	128
Chart 4.27 Languages on Inscribed Weaponry and Armour (Ballinderry sword listed in two categories).....	129
Chart 4.28 Distribution of inscribed weaponry and armour by context.....	130
Chart 4.29 Find circumstances of inscribed weaponry and armour.....	130
Chart 4.30 Scripts on Inscribed Sword-Fittings .....	132

Chart 4.31 Languages on Inscribed Sword-Fittings .....	132
Chart 4.32 Distribution of Inscribed Sword-Fittings by Context .....	133
Chart 4.33 Inscriptions on Sword Blades .....	139
Chart 4.34 Distribution of Inscribed Sword Blades .....	139
Chart 4.35 Scripts on Inscribed Sheaths and Scabbard Mounts .....	142
Chart 4.36 Languages on Inscribed Sheaths and Scabbard Mounts .....	143
Chart 4.37 Distribution of Inscribed Sheaths and Scabbard Mounts by Context .....	144
Chart 5.1 Inscribed Ecclesiastical Objects .....	155
Chart 5.2 Languages on Inscribed Ecclesiastical Objects .....	156
Chart 5.3 Distribution of Inscribed Ecclesiastical Items by Country .....	156
Chart 5.4 Inscribed Reliquaries and Shrines .....	158
Chart 5.5 Languages on Inscribed Reliquaries and Shrines .....	160
Chart 5.6 Scripts on Inscribed Reliquaries and Shrines .....	160
Chart 5.7 Distribution of Inscribed Reliquaries and Shrines by Context .....	161
Chart 5.8 Languages on Inscribed Liturgical and Church Equipment .....	167
Chart 5.10 Distribution of Liturgical Objects and Church Equipment by Context .....	168
Chart 5.9 Distribution of Inscribed Liturgical Objects and Church Equipment by Country ..	168
Chart 5.11 Inscribed Writing and Reading Equipment .....	176
Chart 5.12 Scripts on Inscribed Writing and Reading Equipment .....	177
Chart 5.13 Languages on Inscribed Writing and Reading Equipment .....	177
Chart 5.14 Scripts on Slates and Writing Tablets .....	180
Chart 5.15 Languages of the Inscriptions on Slates and Writing Tablets .....	181
Chart 5.16 Types of Inscriptions on Slates and Writing Tablets .....	182
Chart 5.17 Materials of the Inscribed Seal-Dies .....	185
Chart 5.18 Distribution of seal-dies by context .....	186
Chart 5.19 Inscribed Funerary and Memorial Objects .....	193
Chart 5.20 Distribution of Inscribed Funerary and Memorial Objects by Context .....	194
Chart 5.21 Languages on Inscribed Funerary Crosses and Plaques .....	196
Chart 5.22 Distribution of Inscribed Funerary Crosses and Plaques by Context .....	197
Chart 6.1 Proportion of inscribed unworked and worked animal bone and antler objects ..	208
Chart 6.2 Types of animal bones represented by the material .....	208
Chart 6.3 Scripts on the inscribed unworked and worked bone and antler .....	209
Chart 6.4 Languages on the inscribed unworked and worked bone and antler .....	209
Chart 6.5 Origins of the inscribed unworked bone and antler .....	212
Chart 6.6 Scripts on inscribed unworked bone and antler .....	213
Chart 6.7 Scripts on the inscribed worked bone and antler objects .....	219
Chart 6.8 Inscribed Unidentified and Miscellaneous Metal Objects .....	222
Chart 6.9 Scripts on Unidentified and Miscellaneous Metal Objects .....	222
Chart 6.10 Languages on Unidentified and Miscellaneous Metal Objects .....	223
Chart 6.11 Distribution of Unidentified and Miscellaneous Metal Objects by Context .....	224

Chart 6.12 Scripts on Inscribed Metal Mounts and Fittings.....	227
Chart 6.13 Languages on Inscribed Metal Mounts and Fittings .....	227
Chart 6.14 Distribution of Inscribed Metal Mounts and Fittings by Context .....	228
Chart 6.15 Scripts on Folded or Cut Plaques .....	232
Chart 6.16 Distribution of Inscribed Folded or Cut Plaques by Context .....	233
Chart 7.1 Inscriptions with Personal Names by Themselves .....	246
Chart 7.2 Types of Objects Inscribed with Personal Names by Themselves.....	248
Chart 7.3 Types of Objects Inscribed with Owner Formulae .....	252
Chart 7.4 Types of Objects Inscribed with Maker Formulae .....	255
Chart 7.5 Types of Objects Inscribed with Commissioner Formulae .....	256
Chart 7.6 Objects Inscribed with First-Person Inscriptions .....	260
Chart 7.7 Types of Objects with Self-Descriptive Inscriptions .....	263
Chart 7.8 Scripts of the Alphabet and Alphabetical Sequence Inscriptions .....	265
Chart 7.9 Scripts of the Religious Inscriptions by Object .....	269
Chart 7.10 Languages of the Religious Inscriptions by Object.....	270
Chart 7.11 Types of Objects Inscribed with Religious Inscriptions .....	271
Chart 7.12 Scripts of the Gibberish and Cryptic Inscriptions .....	274
Chart 7.13 Types of Objects with Gibberish and Cryptic Inscriptions.....	275
Chart 7.14 Objects Inscribed with Single Runes .....	279
Chart 8.1 Materials of Objects Inscribed with Older Futhark and/or Anglo-Saxon Futhorc Runes .....	282
Chart 8.2 Materials of Objects Inscribed with Roman Letters.....	283
Chart 8.3 Materials of Objects Inscribed with Scandinavian Runes.....	284
Chart 8.4 Materials of Objects Inscribed with Ogham .....	284

## List of Tables

Table 3.1 Table showing the scripts and languages represented by the portable inscribed objects. ....	57
Table 4.1 Scripts and Languages on Personal Adornments and Dress Accessories .....	67
Table 4.2 Inscribed Finger-Rings .....	69
Table 4.3 Inscribed Brooches .....	78
Table 4.4 Inscribed Bracteates .....	86
Table 4.5 Inscribed Dress-Fittings .....	89
Table 4.6 Inscribed Arm-Rings.....	93
Table 4.7 Inscribed Dress-Pins.....	95
Table 4.8 Inscribed Pendants and Bead.....	97
Table 4.9 Inscribed 'Work-Box' .....	100
Table 4.10 Scripts and Languages on Household and Personal Tools.....	103
Table 4.11 Inscribed Household Tools.....	106
Table 4.12 Inscribed Toiletry Implements.....	110
Table 4.13 Inscribed Textile-Making Items .....	116
Table 4.14 Inscribed Gaming Pieces.....	122
Table 4.15 Inscribed Vessels.....	125
Table 4.16 Scripts and Languages on Weaponry and Armour .....	129
Table 4.17 Inscribed Sword-Fittings .....	131
Table 4.18 Inscribed Sword Blades .....	137
Table 4.19 Inscribed Sheaths and Scabbard Mounts.....	142
Table 4.20 Inscribed Seaxes .....	147
Table 4.21 Inscribed Helmet.....	149
Table 5.1 Scripts and Languages on Ecclesiastical Objects .....	155
Table 5.2 Inscribed Reliquaries and Shrines.....	158
Table 5.3 Inscribed Liturgical Objects and Church Equipment.....	167
Table 5.4 The Inscribed Franks Casket.....	174
Table 5.5 Scripts and Languages on Writing and Reading Equipment .....	178
Table 5.6 Inscribed Slates and Tablets.....	179
Table 5.7 Inscribed Seal-Dies .....	185
Table 5.8 Inscribed Reading and Writing Accessories.....	189
Table 5.9 Scripts and Languages on Funerary and Memorial Objects .....	194
Table 5.10 Inscribed Funerary Crosses and Plaques.....	195
Table 5.11 Inscribed Cremation Urns.....	201
Table 6.1 Scripts and Languages on Animal Bone and Antler.....	209
Table 6.2 Inscribed Unworked Bone and Antler .....	210
Table 6.3 Inscribed Worked Bone and Antler .....	218
Table 6.4 Scripts and Languages on Unidentified and Miscellaneous Metal Objects.....	223
Table 6.5 Inscribed Unidentified Metal Mounts and Fittings.....	225

Table 6.6 Inscribed Folded or Cut Metal Plaques.....	231
Table 6.7 Inscribed Metal Fragments.....	236
Table 6.8 Inscribed Crescent-Shaped Metal Plaque .....	238
Table 6.9 Inscribed Stone Objects .....	239
Table 7.1 Inscriptions with Personal Names by Themselves .....	247
Table 7.2 Owner Formulae Inscriptions .....	251
Table 7.3 Maker Inscriptions.....	254
Table 7.4 Commissioner Formulae Inscriptions .....	256
Table 7.5 Writer Formulae Inscriptions .....	258
Table 7.6 First-Person Inscriptions .....	259
Table 7.7 Self-Descriptive Inscriptions.....	262
Table 7.8 Possible Self-Descriptive inscriptions .....	262
Table 7.9 Runic Alphabetical Inscriptions .....	265
Table 7.10 Roman letter Alphabets and Alphabetical Sequences.....	267
Table 7.11 Gibberish and Cryptic Inscriptions .....	273
Table 7.12 Inscriptions with Single Runes .....	279



## List of Figures

Figure 1.1 'Inscribed' Spindle-Whorls on the PAS Database (Left: Brindle 2011, PAS Ref. WMID-646AC5, © Birmingham Museums Trust CC BY-SA 4.0; Right: Oakden 2014, PAS Ref. LVPL-84880E, © National Museums Liverpool CC BY-SA 4.0) .....	33
Figure 4.1 Runic-inscribed finger-rings from: (left) Revninge, Odense, Denmark, c. AD 1075-1125 (© Nationalmuseet Danmark CC-BY-SA, no. DXLIV, photograph by Lisbeth Imer) and (right) 'Absalons's Ring' from Denmark, c. AD 1075-1125 (© Nationalmuseet Danmark CC-BY-SA, no. 8537, photograph by Arnold Mikkelsen) .....	72
Figure 4.2 The Æthelwulf ring (left, object no. 1822,1214.1, asset no. 84494001) and on the reverse of the Æthelswith ring (right, object no. AF.458, asset no. 1249819001). © The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 .....	75
Figure 4.3 The Ballycotton brooch inscription (top: © The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1875,1211.1, asset no. 458269001) and two Islamic amulet seal made of black jasper (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, left: object no. 1878,1220.117, asset no. 867285001; right: object no. 1878,1220.115, asset no. 867282001). .....	82
Figure 4.4 The detail of the runes on the reverse of the Wakerley brooch (Adams & Jackson 1989, 153, plate 3 © Northamptonshire Archaeology, permission to reproduce this has been granted by Andy Chapman, NAS Secretary, Editor and Treasurer). .....	83
Figure 4.5 Detail of the reverse of the Hunterston brooch showing the additional incisions (© Trustees of the National Museums Scotland, object no. X.FC 8). .....	84
Figure 4.6 The ogham inscription on the reverse of the Vale of York brooch fragment (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 2009,8023.4, asset no. 1188406001) .....	84
Figure 4.7 The ogham inscriptions on the reverse of the Ballyspellan brooch, labelled A-D (after Coffey 1910, 29, fig. 31). .....	85
Figure 4.8 The reverse of the Harford Farm brooch, showing the runic inscription with zoomorphic decoration (Penn 2000, 109, fig. 84 © East Anglian Archaeology CC BY 3.0). ...	85
Figure 4.9 Gold bracteate worn as a pendant from Buckland, Dover (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1963,1108.1, asset no. 755425001) .....	87
Figure 4.10 'Pseudo-cuneiform' on the outer ring of a bronze seal from Bronze Age Troy, with Hieroglyphic Luwian on the inner circle (Houston 2018, 34). .....	88
Figure 4.11 Strap-end from Notmark, Denmark, c. 800 AD, inscribed with a Latin inscription and remade into a brooch (© Nationalmuseet Danmark, object no. 14201, photograph by Roberto Fortuna and Kira Ursem CC-BY-SA) .....	91
Figure 4.13 The River Witham linked-pin suite (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1858,1116.4, asset no. 34873001) .....	95
Figure 4.14 Rune-Inscribed Linked-Pin-Heads from Bardney (Proctor 2015, PAS Ref. DUR-79B856 © Durham County Council CC BY 2.0), Cumwhitton (PAS Ref. LANCUM-EEFFFB © The Portable Antiquities Scheme CC BY 2.0), and Malton (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 2000,0508.1, asset no. 148715001) .....	96
Figure 4.15 Bronze bear-tooth pendants from Finland, 800-1050 AD. (National Board of Antiquities Picture Collections provided by Finna © Finnish Heritage Agency - Musketi CC BY 4.0, object no. KM15131:3, Archaeological Artefacts Collection) .....	98
Figure 4.16 The Deerness pendant (top, Gerrard et al 2010, 11, fig. 13, photograph by Pieta Greaves) and the Hovgårdens runic pendant (bottom, Swedish Historiska Museet CC BY 2.5 SE, object no. 1136755, photo by Gabriel Hildebrand 2013-12-04) .....	99
Figure 4.17 Wolverton 'work-box' runes and additional incisions. (Tyrrell 2010, PAS Ref. BUC-337D72 © drawing by Helen Geake CC BY-SA 4.0) .....	101

Figure 4.18 Rune-inscribed antler handle from Dublin, IR 17 (Barnes & Hagland 2010, 12, fig. 2.1. © National Museum of Ireland, Drawing by John Murray) .....	109
Figure 4.19 The Ribe comb's runes, reading 'kabar' .....	115
Figure 4.20 Variations of spindle-whorls from Anglo-Saxon Brandon, Suffolk (Tester et al 2014, 287, fig. 9.6 © East Anglian Archaeology, Suffolk County Council CC BY 3.0) .....	119
Figure 4.21 Spindle-whorl from Hoftuft, Norway, inscribed with 'Gunnhildr made (this) spindle-whorl' (Kulturhistorisk Museum Oslo, C23411 © CC BY-SA 4.0 photograph by Eirik Irgens Johnsen) .....	120
Figure 4.22 Rune-inscribed wooden weaving knife from Lödöse, Sweden.....	121
Figure 4.23 Astragali from Pool, Sanday, Orkney (Tankerness Museum, Orkney, photograph by the author, June 2019) .....	123
Figure 4.24 Phalangeal bone from an ox inscribed with a Pictish symbol from the Broch of Burrian (© National Museums Scotland, X.GB 227, online ID 000-000-136-622-C).....	124
Figure 4.25 The Cleatham bowl runes as shown with their intrusive scratches (left: Leahy 2007, 180, fig. 84 © Council for British Archaeology, Archaeology Data Service access licence) and isolated (right: Bruce-Mitford & Raven 2005, 141, Fig. 97 'Runes on bowl, 3:1' © Oxford Publishing Ltd. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear) .	126
Figure 4.26 The Breamore bucket (top: © Hampshire Cultural Trust, Winchester City Museum, object no. HMCMS:A2001.39) and the Chessell Down bowl (bottom: Arnold 1982, fig. 10) .....	127
Figure 4.27 Inscribed sword-pommels from France and England (Fischer & Soulat 2009, 73, fig. 2, drawings by J Soulat. Reproduced with permission by J Soulat) .....	135
Figure 4.28 The runes on the Ash-Gilton I pommel and their individual interpretations (Evison 1967a, 98) .....	136
Figure 4.29 Groups of variations of 'Ulfberht' signatures and their accompanying reverse marks (Stalsberg 2008, 6, fig. 2) .....	140
Figure 4.30 Map of Ulfberht blades (Stalsberg 2008, 11, Map 1, after Mona Ødegården in 2007) .....	141
Figure 4.31 Incised motifs on leather sheaths from Dublin (Cameron 2007, 57) .....	145
Figure 4.32 Top: The London Battersea seax runic inscription (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1857,0623.1); Bottom: Transcription of the runic inscription (Haigh 1872, 236) .....	148
Figure 4.33 The inscribed strips on the Coppergate helmet (Tweddle 1992, fig. 598) .....	150
Figure 5.1 Reliquary Cross (© Victoria and Albert Museum, London, object no. 7943-1862).....	162
Figure 5.2 Walrus ivory pendant reliquary, c. 1050 (© Victoria and Albert Museum, London, object no. A.6-1966) .....	163
Figure 5.3 The inscriptions on the Lismore crozier (left, Michelli 1996, 40, Pl. IXb, photo by P.E. Michelli © Royal Irish Academy, access provided by JSTOR) and crozier of St Dymphna (right, Michelli 1996, 33, Pl. I, photo by P.E. Michelli © Royal Irish Academy, access provided by JSTOR) .....	164
Figure 5.4 The inscription on the crozier of Cú Dúilig (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1859,0221.1, asset no. 36069001) .....	165
Figure 5.5 Insular reliquary found in a female grave in Melhus, Norway (NTNU Vitenskapsmuseet, T8144 © CC BY-SA 4.0, photograph by Izabella Rządeczka-Juga) .....	165
Figure 5.6 Illustration of the Canterbury sundial and the position of the gnomon (Arnaldi 2011, 153, fig. 11 © Science History Publications Ltd.) .....	169
Figure 5.7 Illustration of the Brandon plaque (left, Tester et al 2014, 257, fig. 8.16, 2:1 © East Anglian Archaeology, Suffolk County Council CC BY 3.0) and the front of the St Cuthbert portable altar shrine (right, Radford 1956, 330, fig. 2) .....	170

Figure 5.8 The original 7 <sup>th</sup> century wooden portable altar of St Cuthbert (Radford 1956, Pl. XVIII, fig. 1).....	171
Figure 5.9 Alphabetical letters aligned along the rim and rivet cups of the Derrynaflan paten (top, Ryan 1997, 1002, Ill.3 after M. Browne © The University of Chicago Press, access provided by JSTOR) and the assembly marks on the Ardagh Chalice (Stokes 1878, 125) ...	172
Figure 5.10 The diminutive Latin hymn on the Derrynaflan paten (Brown 1993a, 166, fig. 19.3-5) .....	173
Figure 5.11 The Franks Casket (left, © The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1867,0120.1) and the Gandersheim Casket (right, Looijenga & Vennemann 2000, 11, fig. 1 © Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum Braunschweig/Autoren und Autorinnen) .....	175
Figure 5.12 Inchmarnock slates IS.6 (left, Lowe 2008, 118, fig. 6.16) and IS.48 (right, Lowe 2008, 157, fig. 6.28) .....	183
Figure 5.13 Two lines of a hymn on Inchmarnock IS.36, written twice probably as a copying exercise (Forsyth & Tedeschi 2008, 136, fig. 6.21) .....	183
Figure 5.14 A depiction of how slate tablets could be framed and used (Forsyth & Tedeschi 2008, 115, fig. 6.15, drawing by Craig Williams, reproduced with permission of C Williams) .....	184
Figure 5.15 The eight inscribed seals: 'Ælfric I' (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1832,0512.2, asset no. 948774001); 'Ælfric II' (Woods 2013, PAS Ref SF-BE7CB0 © CC BY-SA 4.0, photograph A. Woods); 'Æthelwald' (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1822,1214.1, asset no. 925710001); 'Chester' (© Grosvenor Museum/West Cheshire Museums, CHE/OMH 67-9); 'Evesham' (Okasha 1992a, Plate iib © Cambridge University Press, access provided by JSTOR); 'Lincoln' (Lincs to the Past 2011 © Lincolnshire County Council); 'Sittingbourne' (© The Schøyen Collection, London and Oslo, MS 2223/14); 'Wallingford' (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1881,0404.1, asset no. 34865001) .....	186
Figure 5.16 The seal of Edith, abbess of Wilton (Douce 1817, 40) .....	187
Figure 5.17 Miniature drinking-horn inkwells depicted in portraits of St Matthew in the Ebo Gospels (Giraudon/Art Resource, NY, Bibliothèque municipale de Épernay, [Public Domain] via Wikimedia Commons).....	190
Figure 5.18 Rune-Inscribed wooden box with a sliding lid from Garbølle, Denmark, 6th century (© Nationalmuseet Danmark, C24115, photograph by Lennart Larsen CC-BY-SA)..	191
Figure 5.19 Detail of the Baconsthorpe runes (Hines 2011, 283, fig. 2, drawing by David Dobson, NAU Archaeology) .....	192
Figure 5.20 Inscribed lead cross from St Augustine's, Canterbury (Potts 1925 © Kent Archaeological Society).....	196
Figure 5.21 Rune-inscribed lead cross with a Latin text from Sande, Norway, c. 1200-1300 (Sørheim 2004, 196, fig. 1, drawing by Jonas Nordby) .....	198
Figure 5.22 Reconstruction of the Wells lead foil inscription (Rodwell 2001, 149, fig. 125, drawing by Helen Humphries © English Heritage, ADS access license) .....	199
Figure 5.23 Map of notable Anglo-Saxon cremation cemeteries (Williams 2004, 94, fig. 1 © Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Wiley Online Library) .....	202
Figure 5.24 Types of stamps and their groups from Spong Hill, including the three urns with a runic stamp (1224, 1564, 2167) (Hills & Penn 1981, 6, Table 1 © East Anglian Archaeology, Suffolk County Council CC BY 3.0) .....	202
Figure 5.25 The Loveden Hill urn runic inscription (Page 2001, 626) .....	203
Figure 6.1 The three ogham inscriptions on the bone from Cahercommaun (Hencken 1938, 66, fig. 40.1-3).....	214
Figure 6.2 The inscribed bone from London's Guildhall site (Vince 1991, 185, fig. 3.65 Reproduced with permission by LAMAS and the Museum of London).....	215

Figure 6.3 Bones from London's Guildhall site used as motif pieces (left: Vince 1991, 177, fig. 3.57; right: Vince 1991, 179, fig. 3.59 Reproduced with permission by LAMAS and the Museum of London) .....	215
Figure 6.4 Sheep bone from Cahercommaun similarly decorated to the ogham-inscribed bone from the same site (Hencken 1938, 65, fig. 39, no. 477) .....	216
Figure 6.5 The incisions on the Dublin antler plate, with identifiable runes mixed with 'pseudo-runes' (Barnes et al 1997, 77, Pl. XX and XXI).....	220
Figure 6.6 The Derby bone plaque with runic inscription (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1890,0810.8) .....	220
Figure 6.7 Decorated antler plaque from Anglo-Saxon Southampton (Holdsworth 1976, 46, fig. 21.9 © Society for Medieval Archaeology, Archaeology Data.....	221
Figure 6.8 The Inscribed Unidentified Metal Mounts and Fittings: 'Egginton' (Okasha & Langley 1999, 204, Plate 1 © Derbyshire Archaeological Society); 'Hinckley' (Gilmore 2012, PAS Ref WMID-B1C4E3 © CC BY-SA 4.0 Birmingham Museums Trust); 'Keswick' (Norfolk Heritage Explorer, NHER 31652 © NCC Find Identification and Recording Service); 'Limpsfield Grange' (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. MLA1993,1001.1, asset no. 476320001); 'Mildenhall' (Okasha 1971, no. 90); 'Singleton' (Boughton 2011, PAS Ref LANCUM-0642B3 © CC BY-SA 4.0 The Portable Antiquities Scheme); 'Winterbourne' (Hinds 2010, PAS Ref WILT-219C11 © CC BY-SA 4.0 Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum); 'Froglands' (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 object no. 1999,0401.1, asset no. 417552001); 'Staffordshire Hoard' (Staffordshire Hoard Official Website © Birmingham Museums Trust CC BY 2.0, photograph by Dave Rowan and Daniel Buxton); 'North Petherton' (Howard-Jones 2004, PAS Ref SOMDOR-F51315 © CC BY-SA 4.0 Somerest County Council) .....	226
Figure 6.9 The inscribed strip from Winterbourne (top: Hinds 2010, PAS Ref, WILT-219C11 © CC BY-SA 4.0 Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum) and the inscribed knife from Waterford, Co. Waterford (Okasha 1992d, 522) .....	229
Figure 6.10 The inscribed 'knife cap' or 'bolster' from Shepway, Kent (Ahmet 2019, PAS Ref, KENT-D7B5E0 B1C4E3 © CC BY-SA 4.0 Kent County Council) .....	230
Figure 6.11 Silver runic amulet from Østermarie, Denmark, c. 1000-1125 (© Nationalmuseet Danmark CC-BY-SA, no. D 10/2000, photograph by John Lee) .....	234
Figure 6.12 Lead runic amulet from Lille Myregård, Denmark (© Nationalmuseet Danmark CC-BY-SA, no. D 252/2003, drawing by Lisbeth Imer) .....	235
Figure 6.13 The inscribed metal fragments from Eye, Suffolk (Waxenberger, n.d., © Suffolk Archaeology, Needham Market), Waltham Abbey, Essex (Huggins 1976, Pl. XI, A © Society for Medieval Archaeology, Archaeology Data Service access license), and Winchester (Okasha 1982, Pl. XIIb © Cambridge University Press, access provided by JSTOR) .....	236
Figure 6.14 Inscribed Stone Objects: 'Dunadd' (© Trustees of the National Museums Scotland, object no. X.GP 219); 'Barton St David' (Okasha 1992a, Pl. 1b © Cambridge University Press, access provided by JSTOR); 'Gorteen' (Bradley 1979, 11, fig. 1 © Limerick County Council); 'Inis Mór' (Moriarty 2018), and 'Stackrue' (Photograph by the author, June 2017) .....	240
Figure 6.15 Left: Early medieval cross-base from Iona (no. 99) with a rounded hollow at one corner for the turning of a stone (Forsyth 2016, fig. 2, from Historic Environment Scotland); Right: Rounded 'cursing stone' from the Isle of Canna, Scotland (BBC News 2012) .....	241
Figure 7.1 The near-complete futhark on the reverse of the hoop of the Penrith (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1991,0109.2, asset no. 1297128001).....	266
Figure 7.2 The 4 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> century rune-inscribed bone 'amulet' from Lindholm, Denmark (© Nationalmuseet Danmark, 5084, drawing by Stephens 1884) .....	276
Figure 7.3 Depiction of the London, Westminster scabbard mount runes (Wilson 1964, 152, no.45 ) .....	276

Figure 8.1 Detail of the two panels on the reverse of the hoops of the Hunterston brooch. The left panel reads, 'Melbrigda owns this brooch', the right panel is commonly interpreted as non-runic incisions. (© Trustees of the National Museums Scotland, X.FC 8) .....	297
Figure 9.1 The inscribed Ædwen brooch (left) and the Fuller brooch (right). (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, 'Ædwen brooch' object no. 1951,1011.1, asset no. 34867001; 'Fuller brooch' object no. 1952,0404.1, asset no. 35987001) .....	307

## List of Maps

Map 1 Distribution of portable inscribed objects according to script. ....	59
Map 2 Map of key sites of inscribed objects discussed in the text or where more than one inscribed object was found. ....	60

## List of Abbreviations

**AS** – Anglo-Saxon (runes)

**BM** – British Museum

**EF** – Elder Futhark runes (older futhark)

**EG** – Early Gaelic

**Fem** – Feminine

**CGmc** – Continental Germanic

**MAA** – Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

**Masc** - Masculine

**MI** – Middle Irish

**NMI** – National Museum of Ireland

**NMS** – National Museums Scotland

**NWHCM** – Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery

**OE** – Old English

**OI** – Old Irish

**ON** – Old Norse

**PAS** – Portable Antiquities Scheme

**PN** – Personal name

**YF** – Younger Futhark runes

## Acknowledgements

There are so many individuals who have contributed to the last four years in which this thesis was conceived, birthed, raised, and completed, that I could possibly write an additional thesis on my appreciation for them. First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisors, Dr. Katherine Forsyth and Dr. Colleen Batey, without whose expertise and guidance this thesis would not have been possible. I am beyond grateful for them agreeing to being associated with me and my work, and for sticking with me through my stubborn and scatter-brained mind. I also want to give major thanks to my colleagues and fellow PhD hopefuls and champions at the University of Glasgow. We were, and are, in this together and I absolutely would not have completed this monstrosity if not for their support and commiseration. I am so grateful that I began and ended this journey with such a fun, intelligent, and welcoming group of individuals.

I would also like to extend huge thank you's to the staff at the University of Glasgow who have offered me consolation, advice, and laughter throughout the years (EWAN!), and to the lovely Victoria Whitworth who graciously gave me the inspiration for this thesis and who helped me greatly in getting the ball rolling for me to begin my PhD. Thank you to Dr. Mark Hall, Archaeology Collections Officer at Perth Museum and Art Gallery, for giving me the valuable and enjoyable opportunity to work alongside him amongst the collections at the museum, and for providing me with Fridays to look forward to! Also deserving recognition and thanks is Dr. Andrew Reynolds at UCL, for being such a wonderful supervisor for my Master's thesis, and who encouraged me to write about and create a database of late Anglo-Saxon and Viking-age finger-rings, which ultimately became the catalyst for this PhD topic.

Along the way I was kindly granted personal access to objects for viewing and research purposes. For these opportunities I would like to thank Dr. Alice Blackwell and Dr. Martin Goldberg at the National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh, for allowing me to view and photograph the Galloway Hoard, the Hunterston brooch, and the Ballyspellan brooch, and for allowing my colleague Dr. Heather Christie to create fantastic 3D images of the two brooches. A huge thank you goes to Pernille Richards BA, MA, Documentation Officer at the Maidstone Museum in Maidstone, Kent, who graciously gave me access to the Sarre pommel. A wonderful opportunity to view and write about a newly discovered spindle-whorl from excavations at Lair, Glenshee, Perth and Kinross was given to me by David Strachan at Northlight Heritage very early in my PhD career, so I would like to extend a heart-felt thanks to him for trusting me in this matter. Huge thank you's go to Julie Cassidy, Archaeology Collections Assistant at the Orkney Museum, for allowing me to see the Burray Bu spindle-whorl in June 2017, and to Jenny Murray, Curator of Collections at the Shetland Museum for bringing me in to view and photograph the fantastic collection of spindle-whorls. Andrea Blendl at UHI in Orkney deserves a thank you for her help with runic objects and knowledge, and for taking me to Skaill House to see the Stackrue disc. It is so encouraging to be a part of this field with such an intelligent and inspiring individual!

I would like to thank Professor John Hines, Professor Elisabeth Okasha, and Dr. Gaby Waxenberger, who have so generously taken the time to answer questions over e-mail and provide me with valuable information about particular inscribed objects. It is such an honour to be able to

communicate and research alongside such knowledgeable and esteemed individuals. I should also thank James Knirk for showing me the wondrous runic archives in Oslo in 2016 and providing me with additional information about runic spindle-whorls from Scandinavia. Another huge thank you would need to go out to Jo Ward, Finds Liaison officer at the PAS in Kent, for his endless help with alerting me to new finds and for encouraging new networks between myself and experts in the field. I am so grateful for your support!

Last, but absolutely not least, I would like to endlessly thank my parents, who have sacrificed so much for my never-ending career as a student. Thank you for supporting my dreams of living and learning in the United Kingdom for so long and for encouraging me when I was down and even when I was up. I owe everything to you two.

Very last, but also not least, I would like to thank the delightful beverage green tea, without which I definitely would not have completed my Masters or PhD thesis, and to Starbucks on Byres Road for knowing my order of a venti green tea with two tea bags before I even stepped up to the counter.



## Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name Catherine Estelle Johnson

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Objectives

This thesis emerged from a desire to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the use of text on portable objects throughout all early medieval cultures in Britain and Ireland. As it stands, no such study exists, and all previous research has focused primarily on the individual scripts and cultures, be it Anglo-Saxon runes or Roman letters, Scandinavian runes, or ogham. Valuable publications including Barnes and Page's, *The Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions of Britain* (2006), or Elisabeth Okasha's, *Hand-List of Anglo-Saxon Non-Runic Inscriptions* (1971), and its subsequent supplements, have provided corpora of inscriptions in one type of script and in a specific cultural milieu, and include portable and non-portable objects. The goal of this thesis is to gather together a substantial corpus of only portable inscribed objects from Britain and Ireland and to apply to them a holistic comparative analysis. The significance of this thesis is that it looks at portable objects exclusively and encompasses all the major ethno-linguistic groups of early medieval Britain and Ireland. Its objective is to examine the kinds of moveable and personal objects early medieval people in Britain and Ireland inscribed with text in order to compare and contrast inscribing practices and delve into ideas of ownership, possession, identity, and expression.

This thesis is composed of two volumes: Volume 1 consists of the main text and analyses of the thesis, whilst Volume 2 is the catalogue of the 270 objects. The main research objective of this thesis is to observe the relationships between people and things and to compare portable inscribed objects across early medieval Britain and Ireland, regardless of ethno-linguistic context. This thesis attempts to address these objectives by focusing on the following key research questions:

1. What can the inscriptions tell us about the relationships between people and objects? How did the inscriptions alter or enhance the every-day lives of the people who owned, used, or came across them?
2. How did people express themselves through the adding of text on objects? What do these inscriptions tell us not only about the people who inscribed them, but also the world at large regarding the importance of text?
3. What are the differences of inscribing practices on portable objects between cultures in early medieval Britain and Ireland?
4. Can patterns be discerned between which objects were inscribed and which were not, how text was used on portable objects, and how this use changed over time?
5. Can the aspects and elements of the inscriptions shed light on how text was used and implemented?

## 1.2 Contextual Parameters

### 1.2.1 Chronology and Geography

The time frame for this study is the early medieval period in Britain and Ireland, which is comprised of the United Kingdom of Great Britain (England, Scotland, Wales) and Northern Ireland as well as the Republic of Ireland. The early medieval period is generally believed to begin with the end of the Roman period in Britain in c. 400 AD and end around 1100 AD following the Norman Conquest of England. This period was chosen as the focus of this thesis because of the dynamic nature of Britain and Ireland involving invasions, power struggles, movement of people, increasing inter-cultural communications, and the spread of Christianity. These occurrences led to the introduction of new technologies, cultures, belief systems, and languages that influenced and forever altered the social landscape. The end of Roman Britain opened the way for the growth of Anglo-Saxon settlement in England and southern Scotland, as well as the movement of Celtic-speaking peoples in Britain, and from Ireland to Britain, continuing into the subsequent Viking invasions in the late 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. This period, between the end of Roman Britain and the Norman Conquest, is when the British Isles saw a major influx of belief systems of material culture, further complicated by the presence of Christianity and the surviving languages and traditions of native societies. Literacy evolved greatly during this time period, beginning with runic and ogham alphabets in the vernacular, which was augmented by the roman alphabet following the conversion to Christianity, first in Latin, and then the vernaculars.

### 1.2.2 Material

The focus of this thesis is portable material culture from early medieval England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. This includes objects which have their origins in these areas but were subsequently found outside the British Isles. The primary component in this study is the difference between portable and non-portable. At its most fundamental, ‘portable’ refers to objects that are capable of and/or meant for being moved, primarily things that are compact and easily carried. By definition, non-portable objects are stationary, either too heavy to be moved or meant to stay in one location. Following the criteria laid out by the Future Thinking on Carved Stones in Scotland (Foster et al, no date) and Baldwin Brown (1905, 22), non-portable objects are static and cannot normally be moved, as in something tied to a specific location, or are not normally moved but technically could, as in a gravestone. Non-portable objects are usually designated the term ‘monuments’, which are free-standing stones as well as buildings and natural formations. Runestones dotting the landscape or early Christian carved stones are non-portable in that they are usually earth-bound but *could* be moved if necessary. Portable objects are usually termed as ‘artefacts’ or ‘loose’ objects, in the sense that they are relatively small, (potentially) movable, and usually manipulated in some way by mankind (Barnes 2012, 106; Foster et al, no date). Although moveable, portable objects could be made to stay in one spot, as in a buried cremation urn or a lead plaque placed within a grave (see Chapter 5.3), which were originally portable but were then

attached to a specific location. By nature, however, these objects are naturally moveable, can be passed between hands, carried on the body, and transported long and short distances, and thus can technically change between movable and immovable. In the theory of object biography, portable objects gain their cultural significance through exchange, circulation, and through the places they're taken, whilst non-portable objects have their stories tied up with their surroundings and through the perceptions of people who come upon them (see Chapter 1.3.) (Gillings & Pollard 1999; Joy 2009, 541; Peers 1999, 291).

The decision to use portable objects as opposed to non-portable objects lies in the intrinsic personal value of objects that can be held close to the body and easily carried from one location to another. Portable things can be kept close as personal possessions or frequently used as household tools. They can be family heirlooms, personal possessions, personal tools or household items, as well as disposable things carrying less emotional value. They can be carried as personal talismans or amulets, worn as a beloved brooch or finger-ring, kept in a pocket, or carried as a purse. They can be carried long distances or from one place in a household to another. Whereas non-portable objects make an impact in the landscape, whether emotional, physical, or visual, portable objects make an impact on people and individual psyches. They influence the intricate threads of societal values, customs, and roles. Arguably, portable objects play a much bigger and complex part in societies as they can be handed between people, changing ownership, changing perceptions, and changing emotions.

The types of objects that are included in this thesis range from a diminutive finger-ring to a large reliquary for a manuscript. They are predominantly objects of metal, but also include bone, antler, clay, wood, and leather. The functions of the objects range from personal adornments, dress accessories, weapons, and objects used for purposes including metalworking, woodworking, textile-making, domestic housework, and personal grooming (see Chapter 4). Inscribed reliquaries and other ecclesiastic items as well as inscribed objects used for the purposes of writing and reading are included (see Chapter 5). Lastly, miscellaneous and unidentified objects with texts such as fragments of unworked bone, pieces of metal, and objects of stone are also covered (see Chapter 6). The objects are placed into categories based on their fundamental purposes (listed above) and examined in regard to their inscriptions, archaeological contexts, and relationships to the wider material culture framework.

Although portable and inscribed, coins and coin brooches are specifically left out of this study solely because they belong to a numismatic analysis. Coin brooches often incorporate actual coins re-made into brooches, although they can also be composed of 'pseudo-coins' which are central insets made to replicate coinage. The only brooch of this type that has been included in the database is the **Canterbury** brooch. Although the centre of this brooch is an imitation of a coin, the inscription of 'Wudeman made this' is not a typical coin legend. It is personal and individualised, with an 'X made this' formula common in Anglo-Saxon inscriptions. Coins and the majority of coin brooches lack the level of personal ownership and consideration that is paramount to this study. Coins, by nature, are mass produced and used for currency, made with standardised legends and stamps putting them in a category of their own. This may also apply to bracteates, which were also mass produced, oftentimes with multiple examples struck with the same die (Behr 2007). However, the number of bracteates from Britain with inscriptions is low enough to constitute adding ten of them into this study to represent their position in the portable use of text in this period.

Manuscripts are also discounted from this thesis. Although portable and with text, their ‘inscriptions’ are not of the same nature in that they are highly formalised, structured, and relatively impersonal. Arguably the religious hymns written into the wax on the **Springmount Bog** tablets follow this same manuscript tradition, and they could reasonably be excluded from this thesis under these grounds except for their similarity to the **Blythburgh** tablet as well as the slates from **Inchmarnock** and **Kingarth**. They were meant for personal writing, in which the personal decision of an individual resulted in the text. Furthermore, the large number of manuscripts would ultimately create an imbalance in the corpus and take away the notion of object agency that is so strongly represented in the current corpus of 270 objects and further discussed in Chapter 8.

### 1.2.3 Epigraphy and Linguistics

The three types of scripts that are included in this study are runes, ogham, and Roman letters. The runic scripts can be identified as the earliest runic *futhorc/futhark* from the Continent (c. 150-750 AD), the Anglo-Frisian/Saxon *futhorc/futhorc* (c. 500-1000), which expanded the older Germanic futhark to thirty-two characters, and the Scandinavian younger *futhorc/futhark* (c. 750-1100), which reduced the alphabet to sixteen runes (Barnes 2012, 17-18, 37-41, 54-55; Barnes & Page 2006, 51; MacLeod & Mees 2006, 13; Page 1999a, 13-48; Waxenberger 2011b). As runes were Latinised by the influence of the Church in Scandinavia, the *futhark* kept evolving with the introduction of new rune-forms in the late 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, which eventually created the later medieval Nordic *futhorc/futhorc* (c. 1100-1500) (Barnes & Page 2006, 52-55; MacLeod & Mees 2006, 13; Page 1999a, 204). The date of 1100 AD is the cut-off point for this study although a few objects may be given dates that surpass 1100, such as the **Deansway** cross (1000-1200) or the **Kingarth** slates (800-1200). These objects are included because their probable time frames are still within the parameters for this research and are thus still relevant to the material.

The ogham script was probably developed sometime in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD in Ireland for use on wooden sticks (Forsyth pers. comms. 22 August 2019; Redknap 1991, 59) and, like the runic script, is believed to have been inspired by the Roman script (Barnes 2012, 10-11; McManus 1991, 1-5). Probably the oldest known ogham inscription is a recently re-discovered bronze leaf-shaped plaque from Newgrange, Co. Meath, dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Forsyth pers. comms. August 2019). Ogham was adopted by the Picts in Scotland at least by the 5<sup>th</sup> century, evident by the radiocarbon dating of the **Gurness** knife-handle, although the language of this inscription is still uncertain (Forsyth 1997, 33; Forsyth pers. comms. 26 July 2018). The ogham script is common on stone monuments and portable objects in Ireland, less so in Scotland and Wales, and rare in England (Foster 1965, 218; Harvey 2001, 37-39; McManus 1991, 44-77). After the end of the Roman Empire, the use of Roman letters diminished in Britain and Ireland, although the script remained in use by Celtic-speaking peoples in western Britain, seen on Latin-inscribed stones in Wales (Foster 1965, 218; Redknap 1991, 59). They appear again on 5<sup>th</sup> century bracteates and coins in England, although they do not hold lexical substance until around the 7<sup>th</sup> century with the influence of the Christian church (Algeo 2009, 40-41; Barnes 2012,

33; Looijenga 2003, 42; Okasha 2017, 207). It is during this period of Christianisation when Roman letters and Latin begin to replace the use of runes and ogham in England and Ireland, although the vernacular scripts and languages were not lost (Barnes 2012, 122-123; Page 1987b, 42; 1999, 34, 212-213, 218-221). Anglo-Saxon runes and ogham were transformed by the church, gaining characteristics of scriptural book-hand and appearing in manuscripts (Colgrave & Mynors 1996, i.30; Halsall 1981, 18; McManus 1991, 128).

Because this thesis is object-based rather than linguistic, for ease of discussion it follows a few simplistic guidelines. The term ‘Roman’ is used as a blanket term to cover all forms of the roman alphabet used in Ireland and Britain, including Insular majuscule (i.e. capitals), Anglo-Saxon capitals, and minuscule scripts (including uncial and half-uncial) (Avrin 2010, 182-186; Brown 1993b, 48; Bischoff 1990, 83-84, 90; Okasha 1968). Scandinavian runes are indicated as such, without distinguishing short-twig or long-branch younger futhark graphs (Barnes 2012, 62). Due to the difficulties in differentiating older futhark from Anglo-Saxon futhorc runes, no attempt is made to do so when it is unclear. Both scripts share a number of runic graphs, which correspond to the same unit of sound, and unless a translation can identify the language, or no diagnostic rune-forms can specify an origin, the script cannot be narrowed down. Oftentimes an inscription may incorporate runes from both the older futhark and futhorc variations. An example is the **Undley** bracteate inscription, composed of three bind-runes and eight solo runic characters. The inscription would be defined as older futhark except for the Anglo-Saxon rune ƿ, ‘a’ (Page 1999a, 183). The origin and translation of this inscribed bracteate has been a topic for much debate between linguists and runologists (Hines & Odenstedt 1987; Odenstedt 2000; Page 1999a, 183-185; Suzuki 2005, 41-45). Because this thesis does not aim to provide any further etymological discussion, the **Undley** bracteate script is listed as elder futhark/Anglo-Saxon runes and its language as Continental Germanic/Old English, combined for statistical purposes.

The main languages represented in this corpus are Old Norse, Continental and North Germanic, Old English, Old and Middle Irish (or ‘early Gaelic’), Latin, and Arabic (see Chart 3.3.). Pictish is represented by a Pictish personal name in a Latin text on the **St Ninian’s Isle** chape (see Chapter 4.3.3). A number of inscriptions defy interpretation and/or linguistic categorisation. These may represent cryptic or misunderstood texts in one or more of the above languages, including Pictish, or further languages as yet unknown. For convenience of discussion, no distinction is made between different dialects or stages of individual languages, e.g. Old Danish or Swedish, Northumbrian, Mercian, Kentish, or West-Saxon Old English (Barnes 2012, 22-25; Barnes & Page 2006, 76-85; Hines 2019a, 1-4; Kemenade 2013; Spurkland 2006, 340). In this vein, no distinction is made between the Gaelic language of Ireland (‘Irish’) and of Scotland (‘Scottish Gaelic’) as, for our purposes, these are linguistically the same, though a distinction is made between the earlier form of the language: Old Irish/Early Gaelic (400-900) and the later Middle Irish/Gaelic (900-1200) (see Forsyth 1996, xxxvi). The only distinction made is between Continental (West) or North Germanic and Old English as, although they originate from the same family of Germanic languages, it is important to recognise those inscriptions from Anglo-Saxon England and those from across the North Sea, which includes Frisia and Scandinavia. Continental Germanic will attest to languages in the Frankish-Alemannic-Frisian territories, which is also discussed as West Germanic, and North Germanic refers to the area of Schleswig (northern Germany), Denmark, Sweden, and Norway (Page 1999a, 17).

The only inscription with a known Pictish component is a personal name on the **St Ninian's Isle** chape (Forsyth, forthcoming). The ogham-inscribed knife-handles (esp. **Gurness**, **Weeting-with-Broomhill**), are undeciphered and could possibly be 'Pictish' or some unattested language, but in this thesis they are labelled as 'uncertain ogham' for the sake of convenience.

### 1.3 Defining 'Text'

One of the most challenging aspects to this study was determining what constituted as text on an object and what could be classed as decorations, natural wear or scratches, or if purposeful marks were lexical or casual 'doodles'. Text in this sense refers to a letter or a set of letters that are unmistakably written as one of the three scripts of runes, Roman letters, or ogham, and can be interpreted and translated as such. This may also include inscriptions that do not necessarily make lexical sense but have the appearance of letters suggesting some connection or influence. Non-text refers to markings that are decoration, scratches, plough marks, or natural deterioration/corrosion that are not meant to be 'read' as words or letters. A list of objects and inscriptions excluded due to the uncertainty of their texts can be found below in section 3.8.

As will be discussed further in Chapter 7.9 and 8.3.4, this distinction can oftentimes be blurred. This challenge is mostly demonstrated by the runic scripts. R.I. Page attributes this to the 'simple shapes of some runes and the decorative shapes of others' (1999, 89). Single runes are notoriously difficult to distinguish from decorative motifs or non-lexical symbols (see Chapter 7.9). For instance, is a solitary carved line an I-rune or a short-twig s-rune, or is it rather just a scratch? Is an X-motif the runic letter 'g' or is it just simply a doodle or even a small cross? Personal judgment on behalf of the author of this thesis was needed to decide which to include and which to exclude in terms of single runes. Included are the single runes on the **Ash-Gilton** pommel II, **Carthorpe** scabbard mount, **Faversham** pommels I and II, **Hunstanton** brooch, **Roosky** arm-ring, **Sleaford** brooch, and the **Willoughby-on-the-Wolds** bowl and brooch. The characters on these objects are deemed distinctive and common enough to claim as actual rune-forms. Although several scholars tend to shy away from calling several of these marks runes, preferring the terms 'pseudo', 'rune-like', or 'debased', this thesis sides on the deliberation by Page (1999, 91) in that they are, possibly standing for owner's marks, initials, or symbols for the rune-names. However, a spindle-whorl discovered by the author in the collections at the Shetland Museum, identified as coming from Haroldswick, has an incision resembling an L-rune that was dismissed by Hines (pers. comms June 2017) due to uncertainty. Also excluded are a spearblade from Holborough and several cremation urns from Loveden Hill and Caistor-by-Norwich (Page 1999a, 92), which could all bear t-runes if not for the fact that they may be more decorative than lexical, although these symbols could very well have been inspired by the shapes of runes.

A number of objects recorded on the Portable Antiquities scheme are listed as having 'pseudo-runic' or 'rune-like' inscriptions, which this thesis disregards. Many of these are lead spindle-whorls that are given dates ranging from the early medieval to post-medieval period, described with the same

formulaic narrative that appears copy-pasted, stating that if the linear designs are true runes, they could be a name or a religious text (PAS Ref, LVPL-84880E; PAS Ref, WMID-646AC5) (fig. 1.1). The inclination to label such marks as runes is addressed by R.I. Page, who describes this as, ‘a primary epigraphical law by which characters which cannot be identified as anything else are called runes’ (1969b, 161-162). Upon further examination of these spindle-whorls with ‘possible runes’, it is clear that the markings are not runes at all. The patterns are geometric, linear, and floral-like decorations, and the whorls themselves .



**Figure 1.1 'Inscribed' Spindle-Whorls on the PAS Database (Left: Brindle 2011, PAS Ref. WMID-646AC5, © Birmingham Museums Trust CC BY-SA 4.0; Right: Oakden 2014, PAS Ref. LVPL-84880E, © National Museums Liverpool CC BY-SA 4.0)**

Roman letters can also be confused with decorative or accidental scratches. Once considered for this thesis but removed is the Exeter Street sea urchin fossil, which was originally been described as having the letters ‘EEB’ carved on its face (Okasha 2004, 241, no. 227), but a new interpretation is that of natural degradation (Notton 2002). In regard to the ‘Latin imitations’ on bracteates, the three from **Binham** (630,1; 2; 3), **Hoby with Rotherby**, and **Scalford** were chosen to be a part of this corpus because the forms surrounding the central image were determined by the author to resemble Roman letters enough to be included. This can be challenged, however, especially in consideration of the **Hoby** and **Scalford** bracteates, considering they may be non-lexical imitations of the legends seen on Roman coin medallions (Gaimster 1992, 2; Suzuki 2005; Wicker & Williams 2013, 194). However, at least some of the symbols resemble the forms of true Roman letters, and thus, whether or not they held any semantic meaning, they are a part of this thesis primarily to demonstrate a symbolic use of text. Not included are bracteates from Berinsfield (PAS Ref, BERK-842B88), Holton le Moor (PAS Ref, NLM-211E22), and Kingston Bagpuize (Hines 1993), which more closely parallel coin inscriptions, and one from St Giles (Behr et al 2014, 49), which has an assortment of geometric and ‘Latin-imitation’ motifs that, to Suzuki (2005, 37), may be part of an abstract representation of a she-wolf with twins.

In terms of ogham inscriptions, there exists a large number of spindle-whorls with radial incisions, which some have viewed as ‘pseudo’ or ‘ogham-like’ letters. These incisions are all composed of a single line circling around the central perforation with vertical or slanted lines crossing through it. This appears to be a rather common decoration on spindle-whorls throughout time, and in some cases has been described as ‘early writing’ (Colchester Treasure Hunting Group), when in truth



the only spindle-whorl that has been certainly identified as having an ogham inscription is the **Buckquoy** whorl. Objects that were once considered but ultimately excluded from this corpus on these grounds are a recently discovered whorl from Glenshee (Johnson 2018), a whorl from Vai Voe in Shetland (Forsyth 1996, 529), one from Burrian (Forsyth 1996, 509-510), and a disc from Foshigarra (Forsyth 1996, 512-513). Also omitted is a weaving sword from Littleton bog, which Holder (1994, 15a) suggested to be ogham, but was dismissed as Insular fret patterns by Edwards (1996, 82).

One can deliberately or casually carve a design into a surface that looks like a letter, although their intention had not been to 'write' anything. Furthermore, the handwriting skills of individuals can create disorganised letters, in particular those in an education environment in which literacy was taught. To modern scholars some of the more 'cryptic' texts may appear non-lexical, although it is possible that the sequences could be understood by people at that time. These ideas will be explored further on in Chapter 8.3.4 in terms of the power of text and writing and how it can be used without the intention of being 'read'. All of the 270 objects included in this thesis have been chosen because they demonstrate the value of letters as semantic and symbolic avenues of expression, in which they can hold personal, amuletic, or authoritative significance. The topic of 'literacy' is widely debated, and it is important not to assume that something that cannot be immediately understood means that the one who wrote it was illiterate.

### 1.3.1 Primary vs. Secondary Text

Primary and secondary refer to the prominence of and relationship of the inscription to the object. Influential factors include where the text is placed, how it was administered (i.e. careful engraving versus light incisions), and the date of the inscription in regard to the date of the object. Fundamentally, the difference between primary and secondary inscriptions lies in the fact that whilst one text is part of the original design of the object, the other was added as a secondary thought or enhancement. An inscription engraved carefully onto the front of a finger-ring, for example the **Bodsham** ring, is primary, whilst the lightly incised runes on the back of the **Dover** brooch are secondary. One is visible to the public eye and the other is hidden, although this does not always decide whether an inscription is primary or secondary. An inscription carved onto the front of an object can also be secondary, exemplified by the runes on the **Hunstanton** brooch and the early Anglo-Saxon sword pommels, which could very well have been added years after the creation of the objects and may not have been intended to be carved onto the objects from the beginning.

The importance behind primary and secondary inscriptions is in determining the significance of the text. Why was it added onto the object, and how does it change the perception and significance of the object within its cultural and social context? A *futhork* inscription, for example, may change a brooch from an ordinary dress item to an object that has agency and possibly amuletic power. An ownership statement incised onto the reverse of a brooch or on the base of a reliquary can protect the object from theft and link an individual's identity with that of their material possession. In contrast, an ownership statement engraved decoratively onto the front of a finger-ring associates an individual with the material world and controls the agency of the object from the start. It also displays one's familiarity

with literacy in a public way, whilst an inscription on the reverse of an object is possibly more personal and private.

## 1.4 Excluded Objects

The following is a brief list of objects that have been excluded from the main corpus and discussion due to the parameters listed above, as well as because of dubious information about the objects.

- 1) **Aufret ring** – AD 600-900, excluded because the ring is likely Italian in origin, resembling Lombard rings from the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Okasha 1971, 107-108, no. 103).
- 2) **Barrington bone** – AD 400-600, excluded due to the fact that its ‘runes’ are possibly tally marks or decoration (Looijenga 2003, 295)
- 3) **Berinsfield bracteate** – AD 600-700, excluded on grounds of non-lexical coin-like inscription (PAS Ref BERK-842B88).
- 4) **Broch of Burrian spindle-whorl** – AD 400-800, excluded due to its ‘ogham-like’ markings. (Forsyth 1996, 509-510)
- 5) **Buckland spearhead** – AD 450-650, excluded due to uncertainty of ‘rune’ (Lang & Middleton 1997, 171)
- 6) **Coppergate pendant** – AD 800-1000, excluded due to lack of information about possible inscription, which may or may not be runic. (Mainman & Rogers 2000, 2475, no. 4148)
- 7) **Daventry brooch** – AD 900-1100, excluded due to uncertainty of ‘rune’ (PAS Ref, NARC-56D604)
- 8) **Dublin pin** – AD, excluded due to uncertainty of runes, possibly decoration. (Barnes et al 1997, 48-49)
- 9) **Exeter Street sea urchin fossil** – AD 700-800, excluded due to the possibility the ‘Roman letters’ are natural deterioration. (Okasha 2004b, 241, no. 227)
- 10) **Foshigarry disc** – AD 600-800, excluded due to ‘ogham-like’ decoration (Hallén 1994).
- 11) **Glenshee spindle-whorl** – AD 680-965, excluded due to ‘ogham-like’ decoration (Johnson 2018)
- 12) **Haroldswick spindle-whorl** – excluded due to ‘rune-like’ markings (Shetland Museum, ARC 6610).
- 13) **Harston strap-end** – Excluded due to uncertainty of ‘runes’ (PAS Ref CAM-755C98).
- 14) **Holborough spearhead** – Excluded due to uncertainty of ‘rune’ (Evison 1956; Page 1999a, 92).
- 15) **Holton le Moor bracteate** – AD 500-750, excluded due to non-lexical coin-like inscriptions (PAS Ref NLM-211E22).
- 16) **Ipswich whalebone fragment** – AD 870-950, excluded due to lack of information and time-management of thesis. (Waxenberger, n.d.)

- 17) **Kingston Bagpuize bracteate** – AD 450-600, excluded due to lack of information and coin-like inscription. (Hines 1993)
- 18) **Lincolnshire weight** – Excluded due to uncertainty of ‘runes’ (PAS Ref LIN-7D2361)
- 19) **Littleton Bog weaving-sword** – AD 900-1000, excluded due to ‘ogham-like’ decoration or tally marks (Holder 1994, 15c-15d)
- 20) **‘Owi’ ring** – AD 800-900 (?), excluded due to uncertainty of origin, date, and ‘runic’ inscription. (Stephens 1884, 151).
- 21) **St Andrews ring** – AD 500-600 or Post-Conquest, excluded due to uncertainty of date, inscription, and information of the ring. (Page 1969b, 163; Stephens 1884, 115)
- 22) **St Giles bracteate** – AD 450-600, excluded due to more decorative than letter-like symbols (Behr 2010).
- 23) **Sulgrave brooch** – AD 1010-1030, excluded due to uncertainty of inscription. (Okasha 1971, 116, no. 113)
- 24) **Vai Voe spindle-whorl** – AD 300-800 (?), excluded due to uncertainty of ‘ogham’ inscription or decoration (Forsyth 1996, 529)

## 1.5 Theoretical Perspectives

The main approach to this thesis is an object-based perspective, that is, focusing on archaeological objects and material culture at large rather than the linguistic aspects of the inscriptions. No sustained attempt has been made to provide original interpretations of inscriptions (rather the current scholarly consensus is followed in each case), however, in some cases, first-hand examination of individual objects has allowed for personal interpretations which are supplied where appropriate. This thesis places the inscribed objects within a theoretical framework, engaging the objects with the topics of object biography, gift and social exchange, and object agency. This facilitates a richer understanding of the social and cultural role of inscribed portable objects. In addition, the application of such approaches to this body of material has the potential to enrich these theoretical frameworks as inscribed portable objects, such as Anglo-Saxon ‘speaking objects’, which seem uniquely suited to throw fresh light on issues of, for example, personhood and agency. This engagement with wider theoretical frameworks is an innovative element of this thesis. It is implicit throughout but is examined in depth in Chapter 8 (and see further below).

### 1.5.1 Object Biography and Agency

The theory of object biography emerged in the mid 1980s from an anthropological need to understand the relationships between humans and objects. The first to suggest a biographical approach towards object studies was Igor Kopytoff in 1986. Kopytoff proposed that an object’s history can be written in the same fashion as that of a human, and if we were to follow its life from production (birth) to disuse (death), its story would reveal its material relationship with people (Joy 2009, 2; Kopytoff

1986). The underlying hypotheses behind object biography are that inanimate objects have personas, can interact with human beings, can influence their surroundings, and undergo transformations of style, use, and meaning within society (Burström 2014, 66). Objects are therefore agents amidst their surroundings, creating meaning and values as they interact with people and the environment. These interactions are often found in the form of ownership exchange as gifts or traded goods, but objects can also acquire meaning and history through events happening around them (Gosden & Marshall 1999, 174). Stated by Jody Joy, portable objects ‘build histories through exchange and circulation,’ whilst non-portable objects do so ‘by virtue of their longevity as re-interpretations gather around them’ (2009, 541 citing Peers 1999). Not only do objects benefit from these transactions, but so do people. Objects gain value and history through links they create between people, becoming ‘Things of Quality’ (Burström 2015), and people gain social status through the objects with the most intricate connections (Gosden 1999, 170). As Gosden states (1999, 170), it is a mutual process between humans and things.

An important component of object biography is the notion of agency, that is, not only the agency that the object communicates to its environment, but also the agency of the individual artist or craftsman behind the object itself. Ní Ghrádaigh explains that the popular tendency of scholars to focus primarily on cultural influences rather than the choices of the craftsmen is highly problematic (2015, 216). This takes away the sentiments attached to human beings who came in contact with an object of value, in particular the creator. The designs and inscriptions are usually put under the category of influence rather than personal inspiration or preference. Highlighting the power of human action in the area of object biography adds depth and personalization to an artefact. The lives of objects may encounter successive ‘reincarnations,’ relationships, perceptions, and transformations (Joy 2009, 543). These relationships and transformations may occur as physical modifications or social exchange between people, which are both testimony to the effects the object has on society.

The main issue with piecing together the biographies of the vast majority of portable inscribed objects, is the lack of documentary evidence. Only so much can be gathered from the inscription, findspot, and physical appearance, and often the rest is merely speculation. Burström (2015) discusses the power given to the historian when writing an object’s biography, stating that it is the historian’s interpretation and conscious selection of information that affects the meaning of an object, and their perception of an object may actually change its meaning to something entirely different than it had in the past. She also explains that a humanistic approach needs to be considered in object biographical writing in order to avoid pre-determined interpretations of objects, rather than focusing on scientific methods and material aspects.

### **1.5.2 Gift and Social Exchange**

According to the object biographical model, objects gain their value mostly from exchange and circulation within society, which creates and maintains social relationships not only in the material world but also amongst people. From an anthropological viewpoint, the substantivistic approach to economics is based on the idea that the economy of non-monetary societies is established through the

social process of exchange, and individuals maintain their social standing through the social relationships that are developed or retained through this process (Sheehan 2013, 810). The social relationships and circulation of objects often come in the form of gift giving. As gifts between people, portable objects establish connections and relationships, bringing people together in mutual understanding. Gifts carry links between the people who made them, the people who gave them, and those who received them, cementing relations that can only be broken by returning the gift (Gosden & Marshall 1999, 173). The process of gift-giving may also carry with it a competitive aspect, creating an obligation to reciprocate in a way that will bolster the giver's political or social standing (Mauss & Halls 1990, 36; Sheehan 2013, 811).

Whilst gifts are meant to carry important social ties and implications, commodities are exchanged without a meaningful relationship between giver and receiver. Commodities are alienable, and move freely between people without accumulating documented links, unlike gifts. Inalienable goods, on the other hand, create identities with a series of owners and people across time, and are meant to carry with them genealogies and historical events (Klevnäs 2015a, 13; Weiner 1992, 33). Inalienable objects can also be seen as objects meant to be kept within certain sociological confines, such as a family, and not easily transferred, moved, or given away. Härke (2000, 393) notes that in *Beowulf*, swords are often described as 'ancient,' 'ancestral,' or 'heirloom.' Beowulf's mail-coat had previously been owned by his uncle Hrethel and passed to him through a long familial line. He also is granted Hrethel's sword, as well as the sword belonging to the Danish King Healfdene (Brunning 2019, 120). Illustrated by *Beowulf*, objects of prestige continue to gain value as they are passed from one generation to the next and become inalienable possessions. Their biographies become intertwined with the lives of their owners, past and present, making them symbols of identity and genealogical status.

### 1.5.3 Re-use and Modification

The underlying theme of re-use and modification is changing of perceptions. Objects may undergo several different stages of re-use or re-interpretation, either during their systemic social lives or their after-life following disuse (Martin 2012). This may reflect a need or desire to alter the appearance or use of an object to better suit trends or cultural preferences. The function of an artefact may change from practical use to ritual, or symbolic, or vice versa. It may be reduced from a prized personal possession to an object of monetary value. In the case of the Viking raids, pieces of jewellery became a part of scrap metal in a hoard, losing their relationships to an individual and becoming a mundane item. Insular metalwork from Irish ecclesiastical sites found in Norwegian burials had their perception changed from a ritual, religious item to an object of prestige and wealth (Sheehan 2013, 819).

Objects can hold rich biographies intertwined with that of human families and generations. A concept explored by Klevnäs (2015b), and substantiated in *Beowulf* (Härke 2000, 391), is that of early medieval grave reopening and the life of objects after burial. Klevnäs points to the Merovingian and English rise in grave disturbance in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and the fact that swords and brooches seemed to be the objects of value that were consistently missing from said graves, noting that other objects such as necklaces were left untouched (2015b, 169). She attributes this to a malicious intent by those looking to

disrupt family ties spurred by blood feuds and disputes. However, the idea that relatives of the deceased had reopened the graves to continue the familial circulation of objects shouldn't be dismissed. Whether or not these swords and brooches were melted down for raw material, or kept as new possessions, it is believed that these objects were targeted due to their important symbolic connections to individuals or families, and their known accumulated biographical meanings (Martin 2012, 54). This re-use of grave goods signifies a direct social intent to change the biographies of the objects and adapt them to suit their own needs. Similarly, objects of particular value, including old and hereditary artefacts may be modified or refurbished in order to keep them in circulation. Brunning discusses the social importance of swords in Anglo-Saxon England and Viking-age Scandinavia, and how their blades could be fused back into shape and fittings be switched out for others in order to continue the lives of the objects (2019, 12, 150, 153). It is the continuity and durability of swords, with their ability to be mended and altered, which gave them their rich identities and histories as prestige items. Throughout their long lives they could be handed down through generations, keeping the memories of their former wielders, past victories, and reputations as objects of agency and status (Brunning 2019, 12-13, 120-121, 141).

Another reason an object may be modified is to satisfy cultural trends, preferences, or political or social motives. Insular objects found in 9<sup>th</sup> century graves in Norway, including jewellery, dress fittings, vessels, and a large number of ecclesiastical objects, often show evidence for having been reworked into brooches and other decorative metalwork (Ashby 2015, 95-96; Heen-Pettersen 2014, 6). These objects likely made it to Norway by means of raiding activity, although other theories include trade and missionary activity (Ashby 2015, 96). Their second lives as reworked personal adornments found largely in female graves imply they were exotic treasures meant to be displayed to the public eye. The conscious and deliberate actions of repairing, modifying, and inscribing by individuals or societies allows objects to gain more complex biographies and meanings in themselves and outwards into their environments. Cultural preferences and collaborative efforts can be observed from the altering of artefacts, adding life to old and used objects to keep them in circulation. The biographies of these remade and reused objects are directly tied up in how they are perceived and valued by the people who come in contact with them.

## 1.6 Thesis Structure

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 will discuss the methods and means by which the material was collected for research, reviewing the various sources of information regarding inscriptions, objects, and inscribed objects, which includes scholarly literature, online databases, and museum collections, discussing which sources provided the most data and supplementary information for this research. Chapter 2 will also briefly discuss the difficulties encountered during the data collection process involving the reliability of sources and missing information.

Chapter 3 expands the contextual parameters discussed above, introducing the material in terms of which objects are included in the corpus and what is excluded, as well as examining the objects and their inscriptions in quantifiable terms. A further definition of 'portable' and 'non-portable' is followed by a brief explanation of the objects that fit into these classifications. The 270 objects collected in the

corpus are organised into nine groups according to object type in Chapter 3.2 and listed in a detailed table. The inscriptions are broken down in Chapter 3.3, and the number of texts that belong to each script and language are given. Chapters 3.4 and 3.5 are dedicated to defining what qualifies as ‘Text’ as opposed to decoration or accidental scratches, as well as defining the two terms that are frequently used in the thesis, primary and secondary, and how they relate to the understanding of the use of text. The rest of Chapter 3 further discusses the contextual information of the material including geography, chronology, and archaeology, organising the objects by distribution, date, and find-spot and giving the relative proportions of each category.

Chapter 4 begins the main discussion of the objects. It is dedicated to personal and domestic objects which is further broken up into personal adornments and dress accessories, household and personal tools, and weaponry and armour. Included are jewellery, dress fittings, tools for craft-making, personal grooming implements, knives and food utensils, swords and sword fittings, sheaths, and one helmet. These objects are decorative, practical, and utilitarian, which place them in their own category of mundane objects used daily that were personal and domestic possessions.

Chapter 5 discusses the objects related to ecclesiastical, learned literacy, and funerary purposes. The first part examines the ecclesiastic items, which includes portable reliquaries, shrines, liturgical paraphernalia, and church equipment. Chapter 5.2 explores the inscriptions placed on objects used for the application and learning of literacy, which includes slate tablets, wax writing-tablets, seal-dies, and accessories such as implements for reading and writing. Chapter 5.3 is dedicated to objects for commemorative and funerary purposes. These objects are cremation urns and lead plaques that were either placed in burials or observed above ground for remembering the dead.

Chapter 6 studies the miscellaneous and unidentified objects by raw material. These objects cannot be recognised as any specific object as they are fragmentary or lack any details that may indicate what they were used for. Most of this category is comprised of whole and fragmentary pieces of bone inscribed with runes. Also included are peculiar objects of metal and stone, which are not only unidentifiable but also do not satisfactorily fit into any other category.

Chapter 7 begins the comparative analysis of the objects and their inscriptions by focusing on the texts. It begins by examining patterns and aspects of how text was used over time on portable objects in early medieval Britain and Ireland as demonstrated by the material. The types of inscriptions are broken down into eight categories according to formulae, including first-person inscriptions, owner/maker/commissioner/writer, personal names, alphabetical systems, religious texts, self-descriptive inscriptions, gibberish and cryptic sequences, and single runes. Each category examines how many texts are inscribed in that manner and how they contribute to the wider research framework. The theoretical perspectives explored above are also applied to this discussion.

Chapter 8 is the conclusion of the thesis, drawing together the theoretical ideas along with the object analysis to discuss the overall significance of the material. It begins with a discussion of the use of text on portable objects, which focuses on the question of why the objects were inscribed with text. It examines the different functions of text in terms of decoration, practical use, and symbolic and how the terms primary and secondary apply to the meaning of the text and the object. Section 8.2 examines the differences in inscribing practices of the relevant cultures in Britain and Ireland, primarily that of Anglo-Saxon versus Scandinavian. It draws upon written sources such as Anglo-Saxon poetry and

Norse sagas, comparing the oral traditions with the written, and considering the various ways in which text and writing were viewed in the two cultures. The second half of Chapter 8 considers the theoretical perspectives in depth, explaining how aspects of object biography and the power of writing can be applied to the study of portable inscribed objects from Britain and Ireland, giving direct examples of objects in the corpus. The chapter ends with a brief overview of how this topic can be further examined and researched in the future, and how it contributes to the larger context of material culture studies in archaeology.



## Chapter 2 Data Collection and Source Review

This thesis is the first comprehensive and interdisciplinary study of inscribed portable material culture from early medieval Britain and Ireland. In contrast to earlier studies, which have examined this material predominantly within their specific ethno-linguistic, cultural, epigraphic, and literary frameworks, this thesis takes a cross-cultural approach to portable text and inscribing practices. Furthermore, the overwhelming focus of earlier studies has been linguistic and epigraphic, whereas this thesis focuses more on the archaeological aspects of the material.

Having defined the geographical and chronological parameters of the study and defined what was meant by ‘portable object’, the next step was to gather data from existing sources and put together the catalogue of inscribed objects. This was added to, edited, and condensed over the course of the study until the cut-off date of June 2019, when there was a total of 270 items in the corpus. The majority of these were found in the various published corpora and catalogues (see below) but additional items were identified in museum databases, the Portable Antiquities Scheme database, in excavation monographs, and in publications on individual new discoveries. Once the corpus had been established, further research was conducted on different categories of objects and on their archaeological and historical background, also on epigraphic aspects including script. To provide an advanced analytical framework, publications focusing on theoretical aspects of material culture were consulted, including object biography and gift exchange. The main resources of information are discussed below, focusing on those that contributed the most to this thesis including catalogues and corpora, publications on linguistics and inscriptions, articles and chapters, and excavation reports.

### 2.1 Published Corpora and Catalogues

The initial and primary sources are the numerous published corpora and catalogues including online databases. The majority of these were compilations limited to a specific script and typically they combine both portable and non-portable objects. For example, Elisabeth Okasha’s, *Hand-List of Anglo-Saxon Non-Runic Inscriptions* (1971) and its three subsequent supplements (1982, 1992a, 2004a), focuses on the portable and non-portable objects from Anglo-Saxon contexts (in and out of Britain and Ireland) that are inscribed with Roman letters. These four publications were helpful in providing seventy-four inscriptions in Roman letters and four in a combination of Roman letters and Anglo-Saxon runes to include in this corpus. The other Roman letter inscriptions were either discovered after the last supplement was published (2004) or are do not qualify as Anglo-Saxon inscriptions. Although her analysis is heavily influenced by linguistic studies and each entry lacks detailed information about the archaeological contexts of the objects, the hand-lists are useful in obtaining the basic aspects of each object and their inscription as a basis for future research. Okasha is also responsible for the only published list and discussion of Anglo-Saxon inscribed finger-rings to date (2003), although this is now somewhat outdated.

Other published corpora of inscriptions include the survey of Scandinavian runes in Britain by Michael Barnes and Ray I. Page (2006), which provided information for nineteen objects in this corpus, and the discussion of Scandinavian runic inscriptions from Viking-age Dublin by Michael Barnes, Jan Ragnar Hagland, and Ray I. Page (1997), from which fifteen objects in this corpus were acquired. These two publications focus heavily on the epigraphic and linguistic aspects of the inscriptions and attribute to each object to a reference number devised by Barnes indicated by OR (Orkney), SH (Shetland), SC (Scotland), E (England), and IR (Ireland). Whilst the publication by Barnes and Page (2006) include inscriptions on all objects, portable and non-portable, the Viking-age Dublin (1997) texts are primarily portable owing to the character of the use of literacy in the city at the time. Katherine Holman's (1996) own PhD thesis, *Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions in the British Isles: Their Historical Context*, also features an extensive and thorough corpus of Scandinavian runes, which holds seven of the objects included in this thesis. In this work, Holman covers 120 inscriptions from England, Scotland, and the Isle of Man dating from 800 to 1300 AD and discusses how the runic inscriptions in these areas contribute to the knowledge of Scandinavian influence in the British Isles. She uses Barnes' catalogue numbers for her objects and includes portable and non-portable objects whilst supplying archaeological and historical information for each one.

Lists of Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions are harder to come by, as there is no corpus of Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions that stands alone as its own publication. However, partial lists of the inscriptions can be found as book chapters and individual articles. For the early runic inscriptions, Tineke Looijenga (2003) has published a corpus of inscriptions in the older *futhark* and early *futhorc* runes on the Continent, in Scandinavia, as well as England that date as early as 100 AD. She lists thirty-four portable and non-portable objects from England dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries as well as four objects she lists as possibly runic with 'non-runic and ornamental signs' (Looijenga 2003, 276-295). This corpus includes thirty of these objects, excluding coins, the Barrington bone inscribed with rune-like marks, St Cuthbert's Coffin, and a gravestone from Sandwich/Richborough, Kent. Her analysis of the earliest use of the runic script is a valuable resource and has contributed greatly to the understanding of the objects in this corpus. John Hines gives a list of twenty-five early Anglo-Saxon runic texts as a chapter in Bammesberger, *Britain 400-600: Language and History* (1990, 437-455). Twenty-two of these are included in this study, which also omits the Sandwich/Richborough stone and the Barrington bone, as well as a spearhead from Barrington. Discussions, rather than lists, of Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions can be found as chapters by R.I. Page (1987, 275-288; 1999, 157-185), although these are out of date and are not as accessible as a structured corpus.

There have not been any updated ogham corpora since the 1990s, and new finds are begging to be acknowledged. Nick Holder's unpublished Masters thesis on portable ogham-inscribed objects (1990), as well as his updated corpus in 1994, is the only analysis of solely portable objects with ogham. In his initial corpus, Holder lists nine ogham inscriptions on portable objects from England, Scotland, and Ireland, which are all included in this corpus, and an additional nine which are listed as 'possible' inscriptions. Out of these potential inscriptions, this thesis only includes the comb from **Dublin**, which was upgraded into the main section in Holder's second corpus in 1994. This updated corpus contains the original nine objects as well as three more including the **Dublin** comb, **Moynagh Lough** bone, and a weaving sword from Littleton Bog, which is not included in this study. Holder also lists thirteen

possible ogham texts which are ignored by this thesis due to the lack of substantial information about each object and uncertainty of their viability. In this second adaptation, Holder provides the only available illustrations of the ogham-inscribed comb from **Dublin** and the antler tine from **Moynagh Lough** (1994, 13; 15b-15c), which are two objects largely ignored in literature. With each object Holder goes into detail about the form of the ogham script, such as usage of vowels and visual presentation of the letters, and he provides valuable historical information regarding the ogham system and its place in literacy in Britain and Ireland.

The only corpus of ogham inscriptions in Scotland is Katherine Forsyth's doctoral thesis, *The Ogham Inscriptions of Scotland: An Edited Corpus* (1996), in which forty-one ogham inscriptions in stone and on three portable objects from thirty locations in Scotland are discussed in great detail. A further nine inscriptions are listed as 'dubia', which are also excluded from this study on grounds of uncertainty, lack of further information, and the judgment that some markings are decoration rather than ogham. This corpus is enormously helpful in providing not only detailed and thorough investigations into the linguistic and scriptural aspects of the inscriptions, but also illustrations of the inscriptions with numbers according to each stroke. Forsyth supplies her readers with analyses from a linguistic point of view, as well as essential historical contextual information about each object. She also provides detailed archaeological data about the sites from which the objects were found and thorough descriptions of the objects. Forsyth is seen as the leading scholar on ogham, and her thesis still stands as the most frequently referenced and accurate listing of Scottish ogham to date.

To a large extent, the corpora just cited supercede a number of earlier corpora which, though out of date, often contribute important information on, for instance, lost objects. These include George Stephen's, *Handbook of the Old-Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England* (1884), and Macalister's two volumes of *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum* (1945, 1949), which provide lists of inscribed portable and non-portable objects in all scripts from Celtic Britain and Ireland. Daniel Wilson's, *The Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* (1851), supplies a list of objects and monuments both inscribed and uninscribed. These publications, in particular Macalister's, contain helpful illustrations of the objects and their inscriptions, some objects of which have since been lost or lack any other photographic evidence. Although these early publications do provide valuable material and are helpful in understanding how objects were viewed in the beginnings of archaeological endeavours, they should be taken as basic sources of information and seen as stepping stones towards a more critical and updated analysis.

Catalogues of objects rather than inscriptions have also proved fruitful in supplying information and images of objects for this corpus, predominantly published catalogues of museum collections and exhibitions, including Hinton's (1974) account of the metalwork in the Ashmolean and Wilson's (1964) report of ornamental metalwork in the British Museum. Smith's earlier report of the antiquities on display in the British Museum in 1923 provides some archaeological information alongside useful and detailed drawings of many of the inscribed objects in this thesis, as does Coffey's catalogue of the objects in the National Museum of Ireland (1910). The touring exhibition, *Treasures of Early Irish Art 1500 BC to 1500 AD*, is represented in its collaborative publication produced by Polly Cone (1977). In this are high-quality colour images of the displayed artefacts, including one of the inscription on the **Killamery** brooch, which is not a frequently photographed object.

Due to the nature of this material, it is highly desirable to consult a number of sources on each object in order to get the best impression and understanding of the inscriptions. It is important not to take a single interpretation of an inscription as the only translation, especially when considering the runic texts over which there is often considerable disagreement. In cases of doubt, a range of possible interpretations is noted if helpful, but if there is a clear consensus view, this will generally be followed. No particular linguistic expertise is claimed here, instead the relevant linguistic/epigraphic experts are deferred to. In some cases where it has been possible to personally examine inscribed objects, personal opinions on interpretations are provided.

## 2.2 Articles, Reports, and Chapters

Articles and reports on individual objects, primarily published in academic journals and excavation reports, were valuable sources of information used to complete the corpus and begin the analysis. Examples include the numerous articles written by Elisabeth Okasha that focus on a singular or group of objects such as the **Deansway** cross (2004b), the **Nassington** comb (1999), and the three inscribed leather sheaths from **Aachen**, **Dublin**, and **Trondheim** (1992b). Okasha has also worked with other scholars to discuss objects such as the **Egginton mount** (Okasha and Langley 1999), the **Limpsfield Grange disc** (Okasha and Youngs 1996), the **Killamery brooch** (Okasha and Whitfield 1991/92), and the **Weasenham pendant** (Okasha and Youngs 2003). These publications either stand alone or as short contributions in larger reports focusing on the linguistic and art historical aspects of the objects and the texts. Other scholars who have contributed extensively to this study through the publication of articles and book chapters are John Hines, R.I. Page, Katherine Forsyth, and Gaby Waxenberger who are specialists in their own specified fields. The late R.I. Page was the leading authority on Old English runic inscriptions until his death in 2012, producing many works on Anglo-Saxon runes throughout his career. A collection of his essays and articles on the subject beginning in 1958 was compiled as a single publication as *Runes and Runic Inscriptions: Collected Essays on Anglo-Saxon and Viking Runes* (1995). Reports on individual objects as separate articles or in larger publications written by Page include the **Southampton (Hamwih)** bone (1970), the **Caistor-by-Norwich** astragalus (1973), the **Deansway** sherd (2004a), and the inscribed objects from **Brandon** (2014).

John Hines is the current leading consultant on Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions and has published numerous papers on runic literacy in England including individual objects such as the **Baconsthorpe** page turner (2011), the **Keswick** disc (1997), and the objects from **Sedgeford** and **Elsted** (2019b). Gaby Waxenberger has also written about the **Sedgeford** handle (2017), although whilst Waxenberger's analysis is predominantly linguistic, whilst Hines' analyses are more applicable to this thesis in that he provides essential information about the archaeological context and surrounding landscape as well as comparable material to the objects. Waxenberger has also produced epigraphic discussions on the **Whitby** comb (2011a) and the **Gandersheim** casket (1999), and is currently involved with the online database RunesS-Datenbank of the University of Göttingen ([www.runesdb.de](http://www.runesdb.de)),

which has over 8,000 records of runic objects from Scandinavia, the Continent, and the British Isles. Other runic scholars who have contributed knowledge on individual objects include Vera Evison on the **Dover** brooch (1964; 1987), Charlotte Behr on the bracteates from **Binham** (2007) and **Scaford** (2011), Alfred Bammesberger on the **Harford Farm** brooch (2003), Michael Barnes on the **Deerness** plaque (2015), and Bengt Odenstedt on the **Loveden Hill** urn (1980), the **Ash-Gilton I** pommel (1981), and the **Undley** bracteate (2000).

Katherine Forsyth has produced the majority of publications on portable ogham inscriptions, in particular her 1995 discussion of the **Buckquoy** spindle-whorl, which has been challenged by Rodway in 2017, although Forsyth's is still the interpretation accepted by most. Forsyth has also provided this thesis with valuable linguistic and contextual information about the **Bornais** plaque (2007; 2012), the **St Ninian's Isle** chape (forthcoming), and along with Carlo Tedeschi (2008), the roman and ogham-inscribed slates from **Inchmarnock**.

As chapters in larger publications, *Roman, Runes, and Ogham* (2001) edited by John Higgitt, Katherine Forsyth, and David N. Parsons is separated into seven sections and categories relating to geography and script. The sections pertaining to Irish ogham, Anglo-Saxon England, and runes in the British Isles and Scandinavia are relevant to this thesis and are composed of articles by scholars such as Okasha, Page, Barnes, Holman, and Terje Spurkland. These articles are highly specialised but, although they focus predominantly on the runic inscriptions, allow the reader insight into the different areas of script and literacy within Britain and Ireland. The articles dedicated to ogham did not contribute much, if any, helpful information regarding portable inscriptions, as the articles focused mostly on the non-portable, monumental ogham. In the same publication, runic portable objects are mentioned by Barnes (2001, 103-111), as part of a general survey of the characteristics of the Scandinavian runes in Britain and Ireland, providing basic archaeological, historical, and contextual information for the inscribed objects.

As a thesis focusing on object-based research rather than linguistics, information regarding the wider historical context of the inscribed objects and sources about the larger milieu of material culture and archaeology was needed. Experts in the field who specialize in specific object types contributed the most to this endeavour, and are as follows: Dr Steve Ashby on combs and comb-making (2006; 2007; 2009; 2013; 2014); Charlotte Behr on bracteates (2007; 2010; 2011); Esther A. Cameron on sheaths and scabbards (2000; 2003; 2007); Svante Fischer and Jean Soulat on early sword pommels (2008; 2009; 2010a; 2010b); Ragnall Ó Floinn on Irish art and reliquaries (1989a; 1994; 2001; 2004; 2009); Mark Hall on gaming and gaming pieces (2007); Toby Martin on brooches (2012; 2015); Ian Peirce and Ewart Oakeshott on Viking-age Swords (1960; 1995; Michael Ryan on Irish reliquaries (1989; 1990; 1993; 1997); Gabor Thomas on strap-ends and hooked-tags (2000; 2009); and Leslie Webster on general Anglo-Saxon art (1991b; 1993; 2003; 2010).

## 2.3 Excavation Reports

When information about the archaeological context of objects was lacking from the available literature, excavation reports were consulted for those objects that were found during controlled

archaeological digs. In these reports the inscribed objects are usually given special attention with their own segment in which experts such as Okasha, Hines, Page, or Forsyth contribute their knowledge on the object and the text, and oftentimes the only photograph and/or drawing of the object is provided. However, in order to compile comprehensive data in the catalogue, information regarding the finds number and context of the objects were also needed from the excavation reports. Unfortunately, many of the objects were found in the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, during which thorough reporting and records were not common practice, thus find numbers and individual find reports for some of the objects are not available and only a brief mention of an inscribed object is documented. Examples of these instances are with the runic **Faversham** pommels found between 1858 and 1868, the **Hunstanton** brooch, found between 1900 and 1902, and the pebble from **Inis Mór** found in 1822, which all appear to have no published formal excavation records. In cases such as these, secondary sources were needed to supply enough information for the catalogue.

## 2.4 Online Databases and Museum Collections

Digital databases and catalogues of objects were crucial resources for this thesis, predominantly when establishing and expanding the catalogue. The most contributory is the ever-growing Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS), which began in 1997 to assist the recording and documentation of small finds in England and Wales, which are increasing through the spread of metal detecting activity. Twenty-nine objects in this corpus are listed on the PAS, some of which have received much attention by the media, such as the **Saltfleetby** spindle-whorl (PAS Ref LIN-D92A22). Some of the PAS entries are the only instances in which the objects are discussed and are therefore the only source of information. The PAS is a valuable tool for research purposes, although it is important to approach the data critically as entries are often not compiled by specialists. A spindle-whorl from Huncote, Leicestershire (PAS Ref LEIC-38FE80) claimed as inscribed with ‘debased form of Saxon or Viking runes’ was excluded from this corpus following an e-mail to Wendy Scott, the Finds Liaison officer for Leicestershire and the recorder of the find, who confirmed that the interpretation was given before the Portable Antiquities Scheme was in existence, and is likely a case of wishful thinking (Scott pers. comm. 22 Feb 2018).

Furthermore, the methods of which the PAS entries are recorded often lacks expert opinion. Many objects are given broad dates of 400-1100 AD, which is less than helpful, and there are numerous ‘pseudo-runic’ and ‘pseudo-Latin’ ‘inscriptions’ on the PAS that, on examination, turn out not to be letters at all and are simply surface decoration (see PAS Ref NLM-A17211, WREX-7742F1). Fortunately, it appears the PAS is now beginning to turn to the opinion of credible runologists to verify potential runic inscriptions, as a spindle-whorl from Twywell, Northamptonshire (PAS Ref LEIC-E42484), previously listed as having rune-forms, has recently been updated with a note from John Hines who rightly confirms the markings as decoration.

The previously mentioned RuneS-Datenbank from the University of Göttingen is an online database that focuses on the inscriptions in the older futhark, Anglo-Saxon futhorc, and Scandinavian

futhark runes in all geographical areas. Easy to access, the database appears to be frequently updated with new finds and new interpretations of the inscriptions. It was also helpful in providing an alternative function for the ‘pin’ from **Westness** (OR12/Br Or12), as a tool or implement for textile production rather than a dress pin. The database is enormously constructive in researching the runic inscriptions from all regions and in all scripts, placing the portable runic objects from Britain and Ireland in the larger scope of runic epigraphy.

Online museum collections were another source for this thesis, chiefly that of the British Museum which currently houses fifty-two of the objects included in this study. The extensive online collections of the British Museum are convenient and easy to access and are valuable in supplying detailed information about each object as well as sources for additional research and high-quality photographs. Likewise, easy to use are the online collections of National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh, which holds seventeen objects in this study. Forty-one objects in this thesis are currently stored at the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin, but unfortunately the museum’s website has no accessible online catalogue. Sixteen objects are at Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery in Norwich, Norfolk. This museum does have an online database, but it is fairly difficult to use in terms of searching for objects and was more helpful in providing accession numbers rather than images or further information.

## 2.5 Personal Viewings and Correspondence

When possible, personal communication between experts and professionals in the field provided much needed assistance for newly found objects as well as objects without an adequate amount of published and accessible information. Visits to museums also benefitted this study, either by simply seeing the objects on display or with the generous support of staff to view the items personally behind the scenes. The objects were viewed as exhibited display items in the British Museum, National Museums Scotland, Ashmolean Museum, and the Orkney Museum. By special arrangement, the following items were observed closely behind the scenes: **Galloway Hoard** arm-rings (National Museums Scotland), **Ballyspellan** and **Hunterston** brooches (Celtic Exhibition, National Museums Scotland), **Sarre** pommel (Maidstone Museum, Kent), **Burray Bu** spindle-whorl (Orkney Museum), **Stackrue** disc (Skaill House), and the **Orphir** bone fragments (University of Glasgow).

Correspondence and assistance from scholars in the field of inscriptions and inscribed objects include Elisabeth Okasha, John Hines, Gaby Waxenberger, and James Knirk, who were enormously generous and helpful with answering questions and providing knowledge that was otherwise unavailable. Personal communication with Finds Liaison officers for the PAS from Leicestershire (Wendy Scott) and Kent (Jo Ahmet) allowed for the inclusion of new finds as well as further information regarding finds already on the PAS database.

## 2.6 Difficulties in Research

One of the difficulties encountered when researching these objects is when most of the information comes from antiquarian sources. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century a growing interest in ancient history inspired wealthy enthusiasts to travel the world in search of relics and antiques to collect and display in their own homes. The records of the discovery of such objects, including the excavations of sites, often lack specific details and the critical knowledge that is available in written sources today. Information may be lacking, mismatched, or altogether incorrect. The name of the find-spot may not be what the location is called today, and the efficiency of the reading of an inscription may be lacking. When possible, more recent sources for an object was sought in order to corroborate the claims mentioned in the antiquarian literature.

Revolutionary for its time, Stephen's *Handbook of the Old-Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England* (1884), is undoubtedly an important reference, although confusing and requiring a critical eye in some cases. He lists five Anglo-Saxon rings that have a rendition of the 'magical' runic text, æ r k r i u f l t k r i u r i b o n g l æ s t æ p o n t o l (1884, 188-189). Among these are the **Bramham Moor**, **Greymoor Hill**, and **Linstock Castle** rings that are in this thesis, but he adds an additional two, numbers 2 and 5, which, upon further investigation, are not two entirely new rings but the **Bramham Moor** and **Greymoor Hill** rings repeated. This publication does provide an enormously helpful basis for studying this material, however, and contains images that would otherwise not be available, including an illustration of the **Coquet Island** ring (1884, 183), which has since disintegrated into powder due to improper containment (Page 1999a, 158).

The nature of the material as small portable objects appears to increase the probability of mistaken objects and lost information. The report on the **Coquet Island** ring states that it was found by the island's lighthouse keeper in his garden, where he had previously discovered bones (Page 1999a, 158). The local antiquarian stated that the ring was found on the finger of a skeleton, but without any solid archaeological evidence or solid record this cannot be trusted. With the **Bramham Moor** ring, two contradictory stories exist. According to its original accession report in the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen (no. 8545), it was discovered near Bergen, Norway, sold to someone in England, and eventually given to the Danish King Frederick VI by an individual who had exchanged some Greek coins for it in Paris (Lisbeth Imer pers comms, 7 October 2016). However, according to every other piece of literature, including Stephens' 1884 publication, the ring was found in West Yorkshire and first published in Francis Drake's, *Eboracum*, in 1736 (Page 1999a, 4-5). Contradictorily, the online collection for the National Museum of Denmark states that the ring was indeed originally from England. It is a myriad of opposing information that perhaps contributed to Stephens' conclusion that there were two rings of this type instead of one.

The most written about, researched, and documented script involved in this research is that of runes, both Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian. The challenge in regard to this thesis was determining the trustworthy sources from the fanciful. Many pieces of literature have been published to cater to the esoteric aspect of runes, in which interpretations of inscriptions lean on magical predispositions. This thesis acknowledges the academic and credible publications by scholars only, which includes corpora



and catalogues of inscriptions and linguistic and epigraphical analyses of languages and script. A major difficulty lies with the inability to view most of the objects and to possibly gain a new perspective of the inscription. R.I. Page expresses the dilemma facing the study of runic inscriptions accurately when he states, ‘for every inscription, there shall be as many interpretations as there are runologists studying it’ (Page 1999a, 10). In this situation, personal judgement was necessary to determine which interpretations of the inscriptions were to be recognised and accepted, and which were not.

Another frustration during data gathering was when an inscribed object was casually mentioned in another source but had no further documentation. Oftentimes a previously unheard-of object was brought up during conversation, but also lacked further sources. All too often it seems that these objects are forgotten about only to later be heard of in passing. There likely are more objects to be added into this thesis, but they are without sufficient documentation and they are either lost, forgotten about, hidden away, or known only to a select few. Hopefully as this research expands, awareness of such important and valuable objects will allow for more to come to light and those which were forgotten about will emerge from obscurity.

## 2.7 Contributions of this Study

The main goal of this study is to provide a much-needed update to the corpus of portable inscriptions of early medieval Britain and Ireland, which is consistently growing with the frequent discoveries of new objects. This thesis provides the only comprehensive corpus and analysis of portable objects and inscriptions from all the major ethno-linguistic cultures in early medieval Britain and Ireland. It combines runes, Roman letters, and ogham (as well as one Arabic text) into a single composition, whereas previous scholars have focused on only one type of script or language and only one ethno-linguistic culture. This thesis brings together the scripts and languages of the Anglo-Saxons, Scandinavians, and Celtic-speaking people to examine how text was perceived and utilised on material culture. Aside from this new perspective, this thesis also focuses on an object-based approach, looking at what kinds of objects were inscribed and why. Where scholars have concentrated on the linguistic aspects of inscriptions, including translations, interpretations of letter forms, and phonological examinations, this thesis combines epigraphy with archaeology. It looks at the archaeological context of objects with inscriptions, including provenance, find-spot, date, and the type of site, as well as their systemic context regarding how and why they were used, manipulated, and inscribed (Schiffer 1972). The nature of the inscriptions regarding translation, language, script, and formulae allow a more intimate examination of artefacts and their relationships with people, which is a dynamic that is missing from the work by previous scholars.

With the recent resurgence of the scholarly application of object biography with archaeological objects (Bunning 2019; Burström 2014; Gosden & Marshall 1999; Joy 2009; Martin 2012; Williams 2004), this study provides its own contribution by bringing inscriptions into the discussion. The most current scholar to advance this approach is Bunning (2019), who encourages her readers to view Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian swords as ‘living’ objects with complex biographies. She not only looks

at them within the context of early medieval poetry and sagas, but also at the archaeological side of the objects, which is what this thesis is designed to do. However, like the theorists before her, she has omitted the discussion how inscriptions play a part in the construction and maintenance of the biography of swords. Prior to Brunning's study on swords, Martin directed his readers to the lives of early Anglo-Saxon brooches and their frequent re-use, customisation, and refurbishments (2012). He provides a valuable discussion about how object biography can be applied to these objects, incorporating the ideas of gift exchange, use-adaptation, and personal identities while also discussing the archaeological context of the brooches. Martin does touch on the inscription of the Harford Farm brooch and how it relates to the brooch's repair (2012, 58), but this is only a small component in his analysis. This is where this thesis comes into play, thus reaching a wider audience of researchers interested in ancient scripts, archaeology, early medieval Britain and Ireland, and the cultural and theoretical aspects of portable inscribed objects.

## Chapter 3 Corpus Overview

The most challenging part of this study was determining what qualified as a relevant or irrelevant object for the corpus. Where can a line be drawn between portable and non-portable? What defines ‘text’, and where does text end and decoration begin? The following chapter lays out the reasonings and parameters of the catalogue presented in Volume II, including how and why the 270 objects were chosen, and what was excluded.

### 3.1 Object Categories

The 270 inscribed objects included in this thesis have been placed into nine categories according to their fundamental use, referring to how they were handled and used by people and society. These categories include personal adornments and dress accessories, domestic and personal use tools, weaponry and armour, ecclesiastical and related items, writing and reading equipment, funerary and memorial items, and miscellaneous and/or unidentified objects classed by raw material. These are laid out in the following table:

**Table 3.1. Object Categories and Types**

Total #	Object #	Object Type
<b>81</b>	<b>Personal Adornments and Dress Accessories</b>	
	29	Finger-rings
	18	Brooches
	10	Bracteates
	10	Decorative Fittings
	5	Arm-rings
	4	Dress-pins
	4	Pendants and Beads
	1	Thread box
<b>41</b>	<b>Household and Personal Tools</b>	
	14	Domestic and Utilitarian Items
	9	Personal Grooming
	9	Textile-making items
	5	Gaming Pieces
	4	Vessels
<b>33</b>	<b>Weaponry and Armour</b>	
	11	Sword-fittings
	10	Sword blades
	9	Sheaths and scabbard mounts
	3	Seaxes
	1	Helmet
<b>26</b>	<b>Ecclesiastical and Related Items</b>	
	15	Reliquaries and Shrines
	10	Liturgical Objects and Church Equipment
	1	Caskets
<b>25</b>	<b>Writing and Reading Equipment</b>	

	13	Slates and Writing Tablets
	8	Seal-Dies
	4	Reading and Writing accessories
<b>14</b>	<b>Funerary and Memorial Items</b>	
	10	Funerary crosses and plaques
	4	Cremation urns
<b>26</b>	<b>Bone and Antler</b>	
	21	Unworked bones and antler
	5	Worked bones and antler
<b>19</b>	<b>Metal</b>	
	10	Unidentified mounts and fittings
	5	Folded or Cut Plaques
	3	Sheets and Fragments
	1	Crescent plaque
<b>5</b>	<b>Stone</b>	
	2	Discs
	1	Neolithic Axehead
	1	Pebble
	1	Sandstone Bar
<b>Total: 270</b>		

By far, the largest category is personal adornments and dress accessories (see Chart 3.1.), which make up eighty-one (30%) of the total number of objects. These include twenty-nine finger-rings, eighteen brooches, ten bracteates, ten decorative fittings, five arm-rings, four dress-pins, four pendants and beads, and one thread box or ‘work-box’. These are objects that were worn or carried on the body as personal embellishments, clothing attachments, and trinkets. Forty-one (15%) objects are household and personal tools that would have been used every day for purposes such as personal grooming, craft-making, food production and consumption, and gaming. They are utilitarian and have been used in a domestic environment or settlement and could also be carried as personal possessions. The third largest category is weaponry and armour, of which thirty-three make up 12% of the inscribed portable objects. They are objects for combat and protection including eleven sword-fittings such as pommels and hilt-guards, ten sword blades, nine sheaths and scabbard mounts, three seaxes, and one helmet.

In the category of ecclesiastic and related items, there are 26 inscribed objects making up 9% of the corpus. These include fifteen reliquaries and shrines, ten liturgical and church furnishings, and one casket or decorative box (**Franks Casket**) of unknown function but placed in this category due to its religious imagery. These ecclesiastic objects would have largely been used in monastic environments but could be carried long distances through missionary activity or localised liturgical work by the clergy. Twenty-five objects (9%) are associated with writing and reading activity including thirteen slates and writing tablets, eight seal-dies, and four accessories such as page holders or a pen-case lid. Like the ecclesiastical objects, these twenty-five items are also associated with learned literacy predominantly in religious settings, although some of the seal-dies are representative of a secular knowledge of literacy.

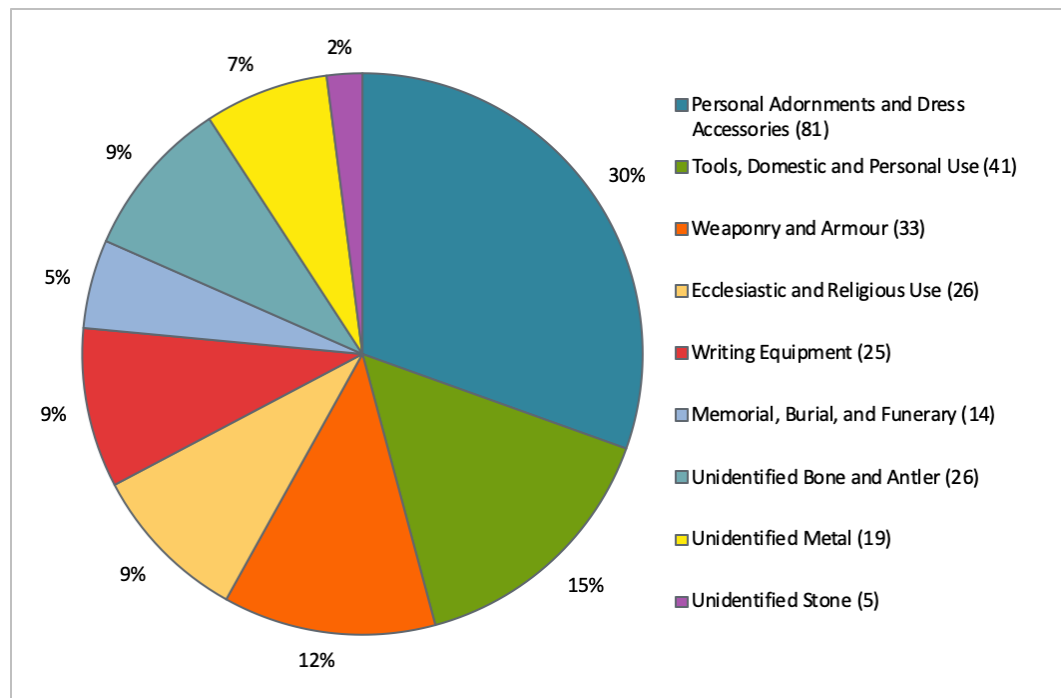


Chart 3.1 Categories of Portable Inscribed Objects

Fourteen objects (5%) are objects used for funerary or commemorative purposes, including ten crosses and plaques that could be used for designating a grave or be placed inside one, and four early Anglo-Saxon cremation urns. The categories referring to miscellaneous and unidentified objects by raw material include twenty-one unworked and five worked bone and antler make up 9% of the corpus. These objects range from fragments to entire pieces of bone and antler, of which some retain evidence for butchering and cooking marks and are predominantly inscribed with runic inscriptions (See Chapter 6). They represent a social and casual aspect to the use of runes, wherein seemingly ordinary people were familiar enough with the script to incise it onto loose pieces of ephemeral material at their leisure. Nineteen (7%) objects of metal include ten unidentified mounts and fittings, five folded or cut metal plaques, three sheets and fragments, and one plaque of unknown function in the shape of a Pictish crescent (**Laws Farm**). Most of these objects are likely decorative mounts and fittings for items of dress or weaponry, although because most of them do not have evidence for an attachment fixture (i.e. clasp, rivet), their exact uses are uncertain. The final category comprises five (2%) shaped objects of shaped stone with inscriptions: two discs, one Neolithic axehead, one pebble, and one rectangular bar of unknown purpose.

As demonstrated by the table above, inscriptions can be found on a wide variety of portable objects from early medieval England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. There was a more prevalent desire to inscribe letters on objects worn on the body including jewellery and dress accessories, marking a valuable personal possession as property or as a personal expression of identity. Inscriptions can also be found on utilitarian items for everyday activity including craft-making, food production, and personal grooming as well as objects of combat including swords and seaxes.

## 3.2 Scripts and Languages

All three major scripts in early medieval Britain and Ireland are represented by the material, including runes, ogham, and Roman letters, as well as one in Arabic script. The most prevalent script on portable inscribed objects is Roman letters. A total of 126 inscriptions represent this script, making up 46% of the corpus. Of the Roman letter inscriptions, forty-nine are primarily written in Latin (39%), nine are in Continental or North Germanic (7%), forty are in Old English (24%), thirteen are in Old or Middle Irish/Early Gaelic (11%), twenty-one are in an uncertain language including six alphabetical sequences (16%), two are a combination of Old English and Latin, and one combines Latin with Old Irish/Early Gaelic. Of the forty-nine Roman letter inscriptions in Latin, sixteen include Old English personal names, two include Continental Germanic names (**Hertford** sword, **Postwick** seal-ring), and one combines a Pictish personal name with a Latin prayer (**St Ninian's Isle** chape). Eighty-two (30%) inscriptions are in the older futhark or Anglo-Saxon futhorc runes, of which most are in Old English except for ten that are in an unknown language, four are alphabetical sequences, one is in Latin, and two are in Old English and Latin. Compared to this number, there are only thirty-eight (14%) inscriptions in Scandinavian runes and Old Norse. Sixteen inscriptions (6%) in this corpus are in ogham, of which four are in Old Irish/Early Gaelic (including one alphabet), one is in Latin, and the other ogham texts are in uncertain languages.

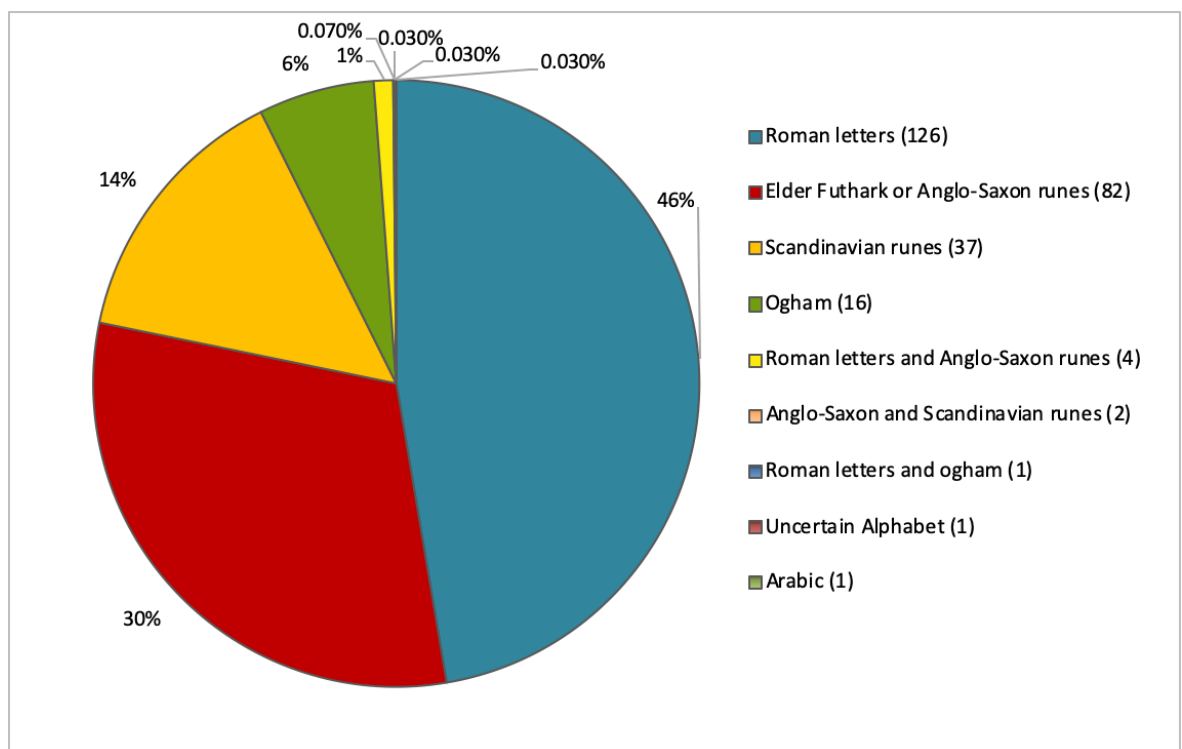


Chart 3.2 Types of Scripts on Portable Inscribed Objects

The most prevalent language represented by the portable inscribed objects is Old English, of which there are 118 making up 43% of the corpus. The second most frequent language is Latin, comprising fifty-three (19%) inscriptions, followed by thirty (11%) inscriptions in Old Norse. There are eleven objects in this corpus (4%) that are inscribed with an ogham inscription that cannot be

interpreted. These include four from the western islands of Scotland (**Bac Mhic Connain**, **Bornais**, **Inchmarnock IS.1**, **IS.76**), four from Ireland (**Clonmacnoise**, **Dublin**, **Ennis**, **Moynagh Lough**), two from England (**Weeting-with-Broomhill**, **Vale of York**), and one from Orkney (**Gurness**). Considering their contextual and epigraphic backgrounds, the languages are likely to be in Old Irish/Early Gaelic, or Pictish, but this cannot be certain. Considering the contexts, there is also a small chance that the **Bornais** and **Dublin** oghams are in Old Norse (Barnes & Hagland 2010, 14; Forsyth 2007, 467-468), and the **Inchmarnock** oghams could be non-lexical sequences of written as practice or casual doodles (Forsyth & Tedeschi 2008, 147-149).

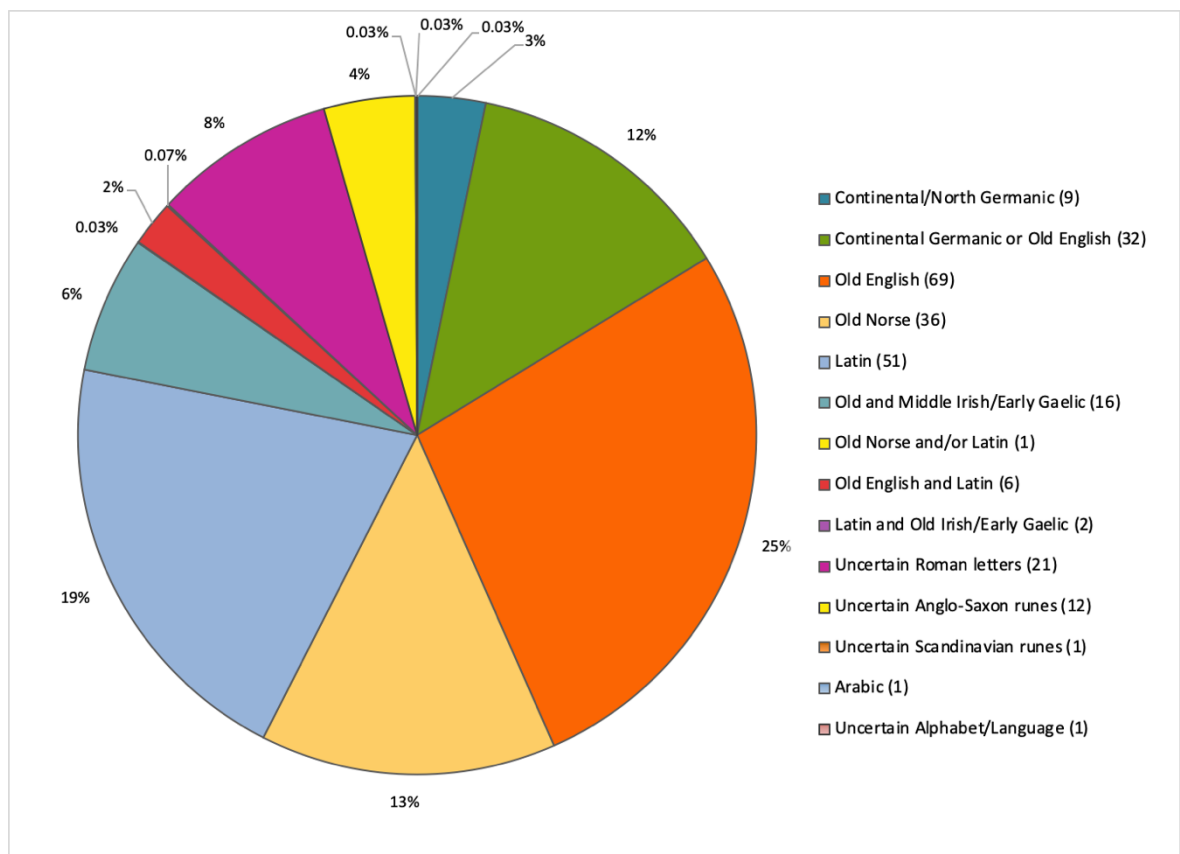


Chart 3.3 Languages on Portable Inscribed Objects

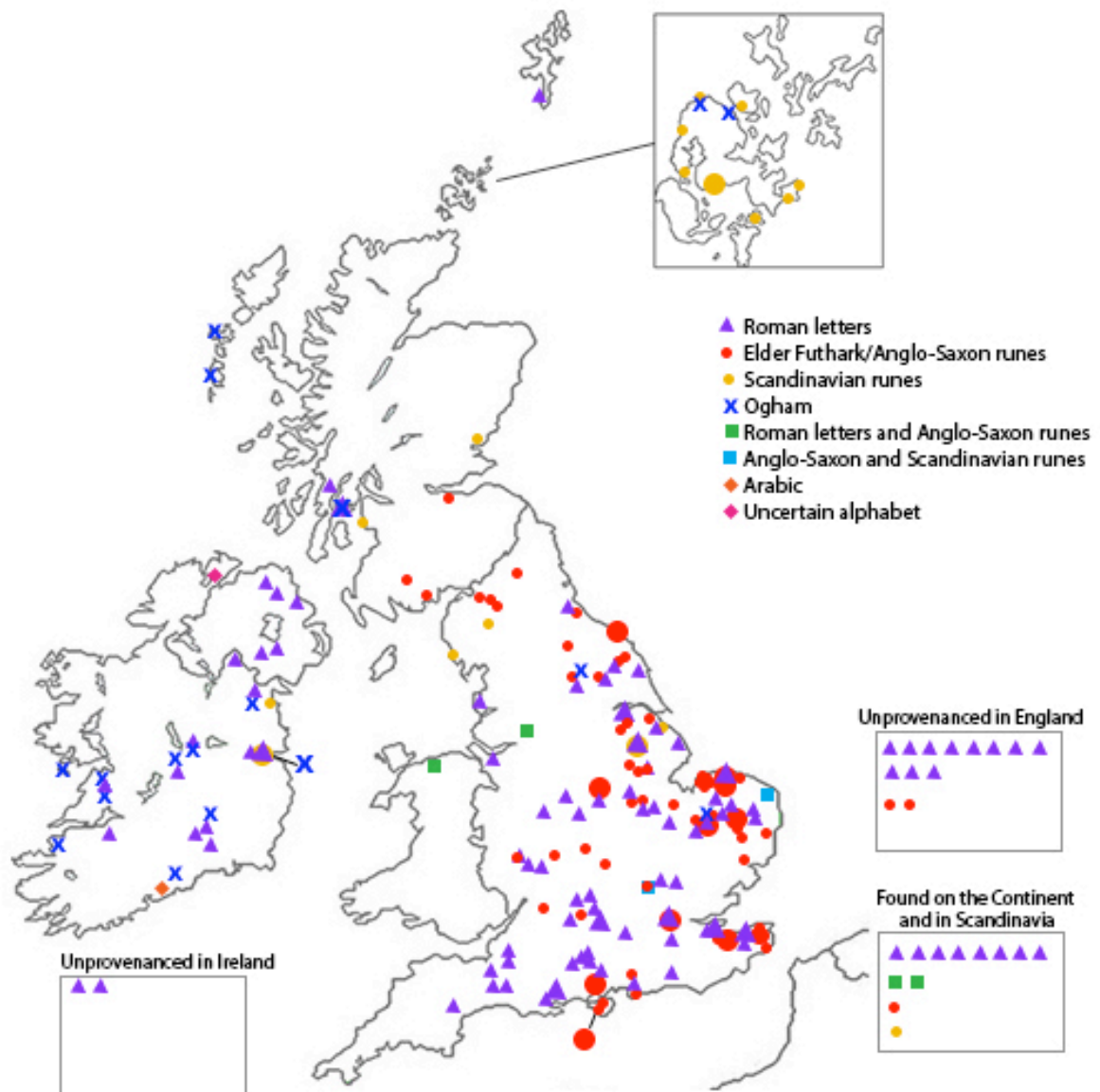
	Continental/ North Germanic	Continental Germanic or Old English	Old English	Old Norse	Latin	Old and Middle Irish/Early Gaelic	Old English and Latin	Old Norse and/or Latin	Latin and Old Irish/Early Gaelic	Unidentified/ Uncertain	Arabic
Roman Letters	9	0	31	0	49	13	2	0	1	21	0
Elder Futhark/Anglo- Saxon runes	0	32	35	0	1	0	2	0	0	12	0
Scandinavian runes	0	0	0	35	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Ogham	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	12	0
Roman letters and Anglo- Saxon runes	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian runes	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Roman letters and Ogham	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Uncertain Alphabet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Arabic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Table 3.1 Table showing the scripts and languages represented by the portable inscribed objects.

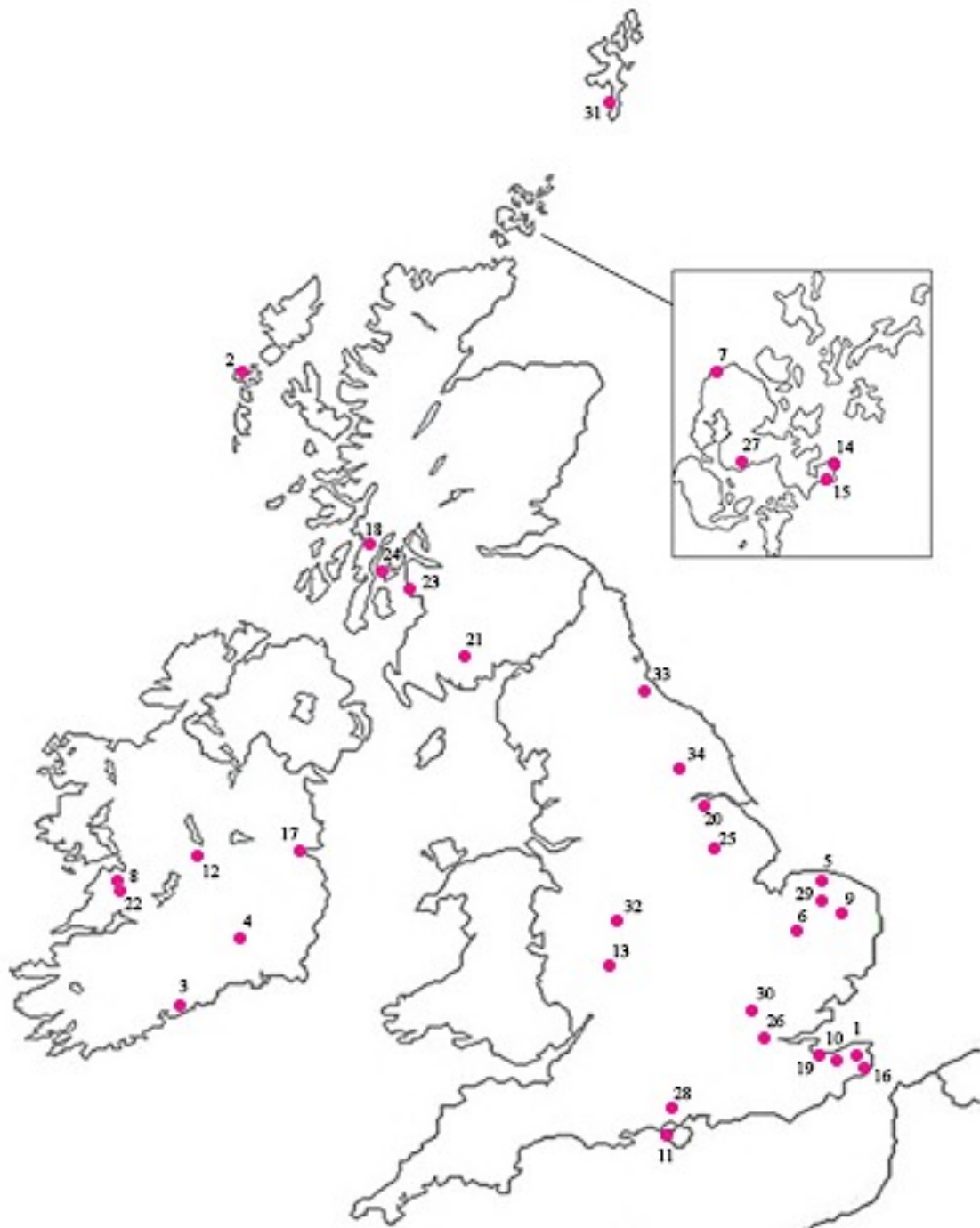


Twenty-one inscriptions in Roman letters are written in uncertain languages, making up 7% of the corpus. Six of these are alphabetical sequences (**Inchmarnock IS.46** may also be), representing Old English or Latin, and two objects are damaged so that only one or two letters remain (**Inchmarnock IS.46, Kingarth I**). Six Roman letter inscriptions are arranged in combinations that do not make immediate lexical sense including five bracteates meant to imitate the legends on coins (**Binham 630,1, 2, 3, Hoby with Rotherby, Scalford**), and a sword with a palindromic text (**Dublin**). Four further texts in Roman letters are too fragmentary or worn to decipher (**Dublin** sheath, **Kingarth III, Mildenhall** object, **Singleton** mount), and two surfaces are inscribed with obscure short sequences of letters suggested to be renditions of Latin 'Domini' (**Deer Park Farms** hone, **Winchester** lead sheet). A similar scenario is seen on fourteen inscriptions (5%) that are in elder futhark, Anglo-Saxon futhorc, or Scandinavian runic sequences that cannot be interpreted. Most of these are in arrangements that cannot be formed into lexical phrases or are too damaged and incomplete to understand. Like the untranslated Roman letter texts, they are placed in their own category because they could be in a number of languages including Continental Germanic, Old English, Old Norse, or Latin.

Also included in this corpus is one object inscribed in the Arabic Kufic script (**Ballycotton** brooch) (Ghazarian 2006, 204-211). Although this script is not known to have been used in Britain or Ireland in the early Middle ages, the brooch is included in the study because it likely was in Ireland during the period under consideration, and, although the inscribed element was likely made elsewhere it is possible that the process by which it was turned into a brooch may have occurred in an Insular context (see Chapter 4.1.2) (Feuerbach & Hanley 2017, 77; Szpiech 2012, 64). Regardless of this possibility, the inscription itself is important to the understanding of the use and perception of text in early medieval Britain and Ireland and is thus included in this research.



Map 1 Distribution of portable inscribed objects according to script. Sites with more than one object with the same script are represented by a larger dot. Sites with more than one object with different scripts are overlapped.



**Map 2** Map of key sites of inscribed objects discussed in the text or where more than one inscribed object was found. 1) Ash-Gilton, Kent; 2) Bac Mhic Connain, North Uist; 3) Ballycotton, Co. Cork; 4) Ballyspellan, Co. Kilkenny; 5) Binham, Norfolk; 6) Brandon, Suffolk; 7) Brough of Birsay, Orkney; 8) Cahercommaun, Co. Clare; 9) Caistor-by-Norwich and Harford Farm, Norfolk; 10) Canterbury, Kent; 11) Chessell Down, Isle of Wight; 12) Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly; 13) Deansway, Worcester; 14) Deerness, Orkney; 15) Deerness Quoys, Orkney; 16) Dover, Kent; 17) Dublin; 18) Dunadd, Argyll and Bute; 19) Faversham, Kent; 20) Flixborough, Lincolnshire; 21) Galloway Hoard, Dumfries and Galloway; 22) Gorteen, Co. Clare; 23) Hunterston, Ayrshire; 24) Inchmarnock, Isle of Bute; 25) Lincoln, Lincolnshire; 26) London; 27) Orphir, Orkney; 28) Southampton, Hampshire; 29) Spong Hill, Norfolk; 30) St Albans, Hertfordshire; 31) St Ninian's Isle, Shetland; 32) Staffordshire Hoard, Staffordshire; 33) Wheatley Hill, Durham; 34) York

### 3.3 Chronology and Geography

The 270 objects in this corpus range across the whole of the early medieval period in Britain and Ireland (400-1100 AD). The objects were found across England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, although twelve objects of Insular provenance were found on the Continent or in Scandinavia (Map 1). Because of the nature of portable objects, the find spot is not necessarily the place of origin for some of the objects. Some were possibly brought to the Britain or Ireland from the Continent already inscribed, for example, the early runic brooches (i.e. **'Bateman', Sleaford, Wakerley, Willoughby-on-the-Wolds**) and the bowl from **Willoughby-on-the-Wolds**. Although not produced in Britain, the objects are included in the corpus because they were used as inscribed objects in Anglo-Saxon England.

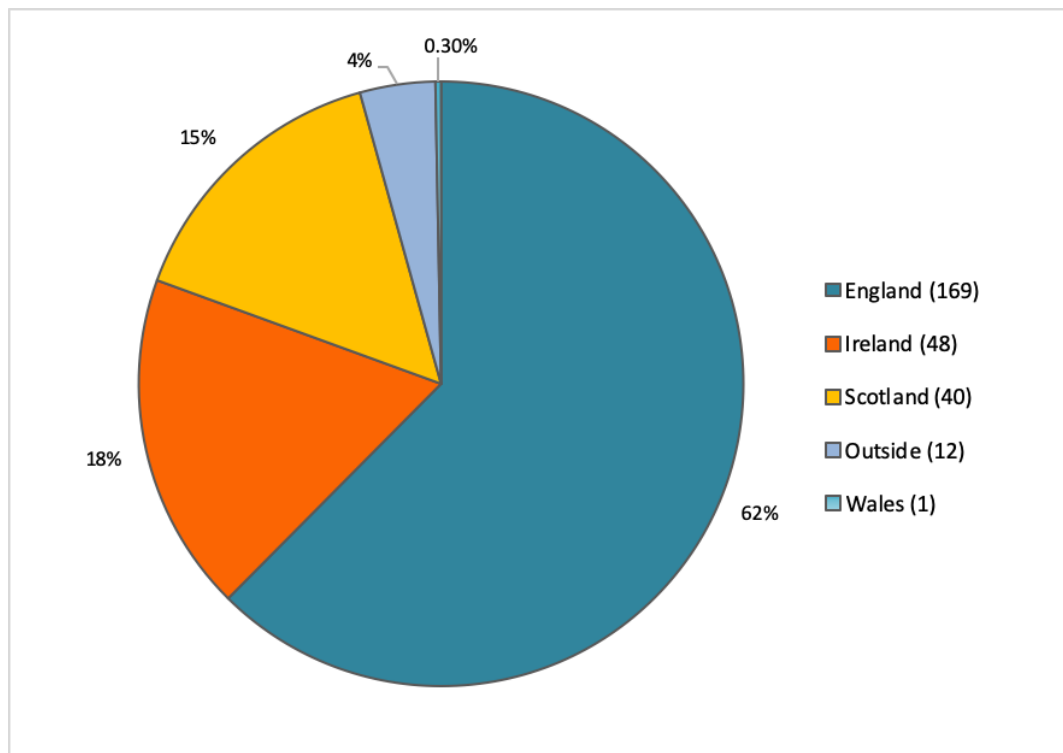


Chart 3.4 Distribution of Portable Inscribed Objects by Country

The distribution of the inscribed artefacts across Britain and Ireland is diverse, but reveals some noticeable patterns. The majority (nearly two-thirds) come from England (a total of 169 objects making up 62% of the corpus) (Chart 3.4). Forty-eight objects (18%) come from Ireland, of which most are 11<sup>th</sup> century reliquaries (the **Cú Dúilig** crozier was found in England but is Irish). Forty objects were found in Scotland (15%), and only a single inscribed object was found in Wales (**Alhstan** ring), although this object probably originated in England. As demonstrated by Map 1, the objects inscribed with Roman letters have the most dispersed distribution, and are found in Ireland, England, and Scotland. Anglo-Saxon runes are predominantly based in south-eastern and eastern England, within the Anglo-Saxon kingdom, but are also found in southern Scotland (which was a part of Northumbria). No portable inscriptions in Anglo-Saxon runes have been found in Ireland or Wales. The objects inscribed with Scandinavian runes are from Scotland (largely from Orkney), north-western England, and from two

locations on the east coast of Ireland, corresponding with Scandinavian migration. The ogham inscriptions are primarily from Ireland, with a few from the western islands of Scotland and a couple from eastern England.

Twelve objects were discovered or resurfaced outside of the British Isles, including three from Germany (**Aachen** sheath, **Cologne** crozier, **Gandersheim** casket), three from France (**Cluny** altar, **Franks casket**, **Mortain** casket), two from Norway (**Rannveig** casket, **Trondheim** sheath), two from Rome (**Rome** hooked tags), one from Belgium (**Brussels** cross), and one from Sweden (**Lund** pen-case lid). According to epigraphic, linguistic, and art historical evidence all of the objects found outside of Britain and Ireland except for one have their origins in Anglo-Saxon England. The style of the **Rannveig** casket places it within an Irish or Scottish framework (Jesch 2015, 108).

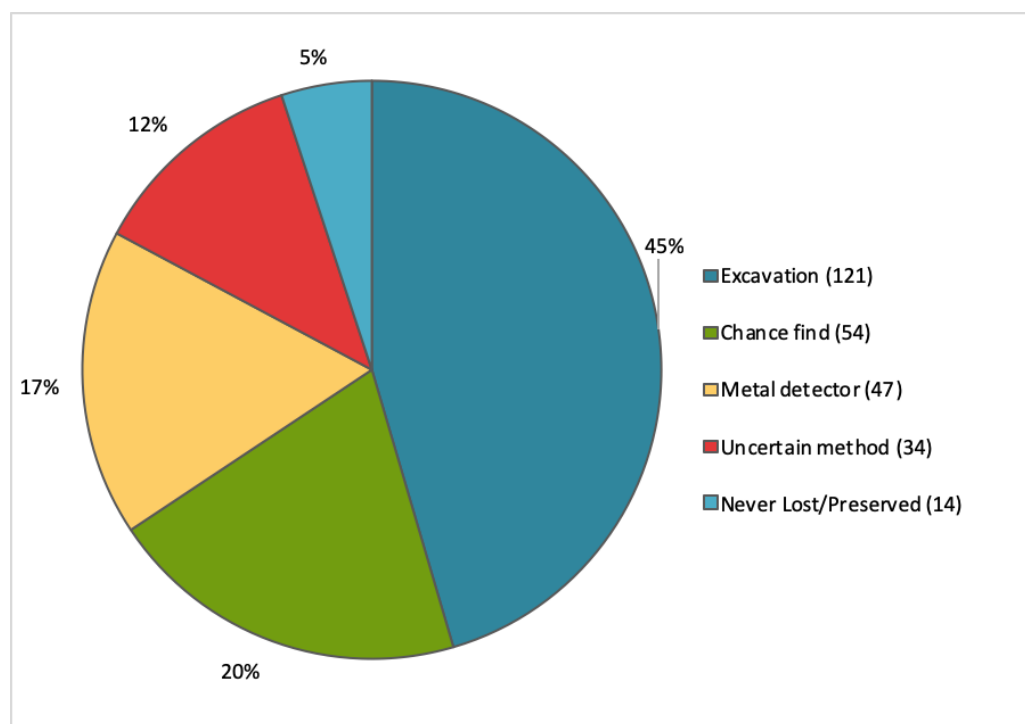
The objects are dated on the basis of their archaeological contexts, stylistic and typological aspects, as well as epigraphic elements of the inscriptions. In some cases, the inscription may date to a later period than the object (i.e. the **Hunterston** brooch), in which case the dates for both the object and text are given in the corpus. Two objects date before AD 400 but both were inscribed in the early medieval period: The Roman samian ware sherd from **Deansway** and the Neolithic axehead from **Gorteen**. Seven objects have uncertain dates including the **Ballinderry** die, **Burray Bu** spindle-whorl, **Deerness** plaque, **Dolgbot** ring, **Gayton Thorpe** spindle-whorl, **Mildenhall** object, and the **Dancas** ring. Dates for these objects are not given for a number of reasons including uncertainty or lack of diagnostic features of the object or text. In-depth descriptions of some of them are unavailable in the published literature, and the two finger-rings were found in antiquity and subsequently lost without adequate analysis. The **Ballinderry** die can be dated no more securely than from 100 to 700 AD based on its archaeological context (Hencken 1942, 55). The only reasons that these objects are included are because of stylistic and epigraphic aspects that place them between 400 and 1100 AD, although any further chronological specifications cannot be determined. Aside from the inconsistencies in dating listed above, 112 objects have their earliest possible dates between 400 and 800 and 151 objects can be dated at the earliest between 800 and 1100. Objects that may extend past 1100 include the **Singleton** mount, **Lismore** crozier, and the three slates from **Kingarth**, although their earliest possible dates place them within the applicable date range.

### 3.4 Find Contexts and Circumstances

The provenances of the objects can be divided by their find contexts and the circumstances or methods of their discoveries. The majority of objects (121, or 45%) were found through controlled excavations of settlement, monastic, and burial sites as well as locations of hoards. Although the majority of these excavations were recorded according to modern methods, a number conducted in the 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are only poorly recorded, if at all. The ninety-two objects (34%) discovered at settlements came from a range of sites: including significant sites such as **Brandon** and **Orphir**, substantial multi-period sites such as Viking-age **Dublin**, **York**, and **London**, as well as smaller sites of occupation such as **Bac Mhic Connain** on North Uist (Map 2). Also included are two Irish reliquaries

found within the walls of medieval castles (**Lismore** crozier, **Stowe Missal** book-shrine), which were likely placed there for safekeeping. With the exception of these two objects, most of the objects found at these locations are household and personal tools that would have been used within domestic environments.

Forty-two objects (15%) were found as unstratified stray finds, either by themselves or with other small objects. These include metal detecting and chance finds from farmland and fields, bogs, quarries, and other areas with no apparent archaeological context. The inscribed objects found as stray finds are widely varied. There are a significant number of Anglo-Saxon finger-rings as well as dress fittings and accessories (i.e. brooches and strap-ends), tweezers, and unidentified metal objects. As stray finds, they are usually described as accidental losses dropped by their owners or carriers, although other depositional circumstances are also possible.



**Chart 3.5 Find Circumstances of Portable Inscribed Objects**

Thirty-four objects (12%) were found in funerary contexts including cemeteries and single burials. Most of these were discovered through excavations of early Anglo-Saxon cremation and inhumation cemeteries in southern and south-eastern England including **Ash-Gilton**, Buckland (**Dover**), and **Faversham** in Kent, **Chessell Down** on the Isle of Wight, and **Spong Hill** in Norfolk (Map 2). These objects include brooches, sword pommels and fittings, cremation urns, and hanging-bowls typical of Migration Period material culture, inscribed with older futhark and Anglo-Saxon runes that prove to be difficult in translating (Hines & Bayliss 2013; Martin 2015; Mason 2008; Richards 1987). This category also includes lead plaques and crosses from the 10<sup>th</sup> to late 11<sup>th</sup> centuries from **Chichester**, **Cumberworth**, and **Lincoln** that are characteristic of a Pre- and Post-Conquest Christian burial rite in England (see Chapter 5.3.1). These later-dated objects consist of items placed inside the tombs of

ecclesiastical individuals such as Bishop Giso at **Wells** and Bishop Godfrey at **Chichester**, inscribed with Latin absolution texts and passages from the Bible.

Twenty-two objects (8%) were discovered at or close to monastic sites in England, Scotland, and Ireland. The only two objects of specifically ecclesiastical use which were found at monastic sites are the sundial from **Canterbury** Cathedral and a fragment of a reliquary from **Liathmore**. The other objects include personal items such as finger-rings (**Coquet Island**, **Cramond Hill**), functional items such as a comb (**Whitby**), seal (**Æthelwald**), and a spindle-whorl (**Whitby**), and two lead plaques (**Bawburgh**, **Kirkdale**) probably used as grave markers or grave goods. Eleven pieces of slate used for writing exercises were uncovered at two monastic locations on the Isle of Bute (**Inchmarnock**, **Kingarth**) and one wax writing tablet was discovered at the site of an Anglo-Saxon church in **Blythburgh**, demonstrating literacy in an educational environment.

Hoard finds include twenty (7%) objects found as part of Anglo-Saxon, Viking, and Irish hoards. Six inscribed bracteates from a single hoard in **Binham**, Norfolk and four runic silver arm-rings from a large hoard in **Galloway**, Scotland, make up the bulk of hoard finds in the corpus (Map 2). Also included are three brooches (**Ædwen**, **Penrith**, **Vale of York**), a scabbard chape (**St Ninian's Isle**), two hooked-tags from a hoard in **Rome**, and an unidentified metal strip from a large hoard in **Staffordshire**. Two objects from Ireland were found as part of two separate hoards of church metalwork (**Ardagh**, **Derrynaflan**), which were probably buried either for protection against Viking hoards or from local family quarrels (Ryan 1997, 998-999).

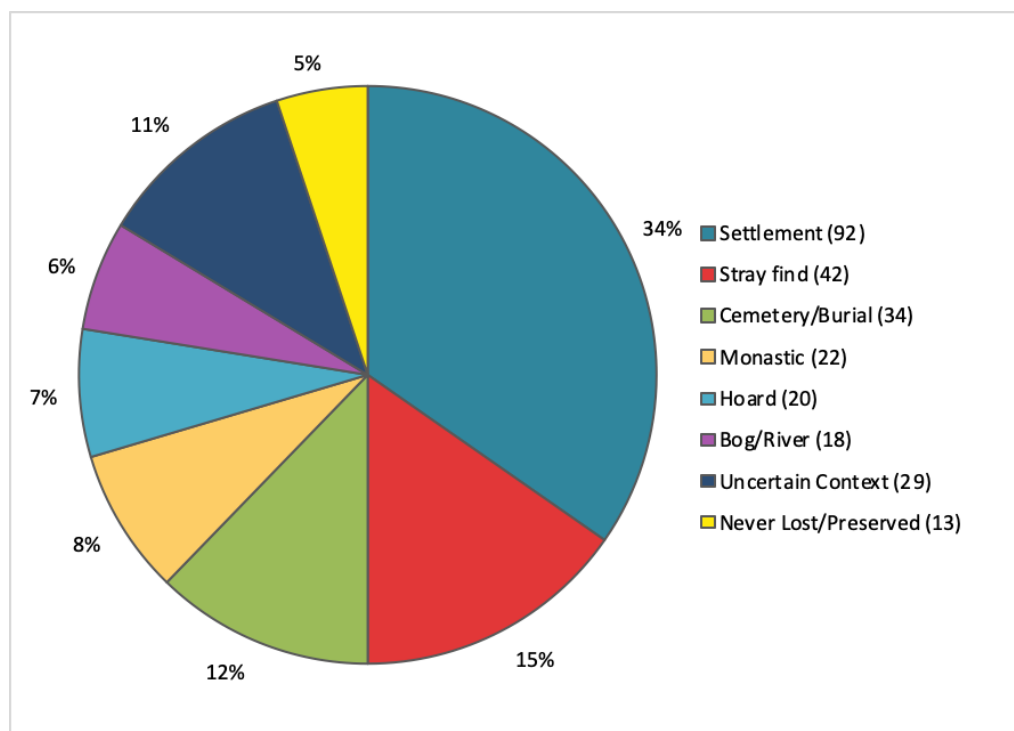


Chart 3.6 Distribution of Portable Inscribed Objects by Context

Eighteen objects (6%) were found in wet environments including bogs and rivers, of which twelve are weapons or weaponry accessories. Seven of these were found in the River Thames including six come from London (**Battersea**, **Kew**, **Putney**, **Temple**, **Westminster**). The other objects found in wet environments include a brooch (**Ballycotton**), a hanging-bowl (**Kilgulbin East**), and a set of wax

writing tablets (**Springmount**) from bogs in Ireland, an unidentified metal disc from England (**Keswick**), and a fragment of a bell-shrine from Ireland (**River Bann**). They are all single finds apart from the cross-arm from **Shanmullagh**, which was found as part of a large assemblage. The objects found in rivers and bogs were primarily found because of drainage and dredging activity. The deposition of these objects in watery places could be considered ritualistic, especially in regard to the weapons, although accidental losses are also possible (Brown 1994, 81; Feuerbach & Hanley 2017, 74; Lang & Ager 1989, 114).

Fifty-four objects (20%) were found by chance, during activity such as ploughing, harvesting, dredging, or construction work. Forty-seven objects (17%) were discovered through metal detecting activity in fields, on riverbeds, and near to settlement or monastic sites, overwhelmingly in England. Thirty-four objects (12%) have uncertain find circumstances, even though most of them have recorded provenances. Forty-three objects have uncertain or no archaeological contexts because they were either never lost, preserved in churches or family households, or because they lack sufficient historical records. Twenty-nine objects (11%) fit in with the latter, wherein they were either antiquarian finds from the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries without credible provenance or were parts of personal collections until they were brought to light in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some objects were first recorded as a part of auctions including the rings of **Ædelfled**, **Cynefrith**, and **'In Deo'**, and the pin from **Malton**, which were sold by Christie's or Timeline Auctions between 2000 and 2015, unfortunately without solid information about their provenances. Thirteen objects (5%) were apparently never lost. Other than the amber bead from a family in **Ennis**, all of the objects are Anglo-Saxon and Irish reliquaries and shrines that were first recorded as being kept in family households or local churches. A few of them were brought to the Continent and held in church treasuries until their rediscovery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The preservation of these objects is a testament to their importance as hereditary, social, and political fixtures in the Christian elite (See Chapter 5.1.1)



## Chapter 4 Domestic and Personal Items

This chapter discusses the objects under the categories of personal adornments and dress accessories, household and personal tools, and weaponry and armour. These objects are decorative, practical, and utilitarian. They are interacted with and used regularly in domestic, social, and private environments as objects that were worn on the body as jewellery, affixed to items of dress as brooches, and used for personal grooming like tweezers and combs. Metalworking, textile-making, and woodworking tools are represented in this category, as are gaming pieces, and household vessels. Also discussed in this category are objects used for combat and protection including swords and armour, which also held significant relationships with those who wielded them. As portable things, the objects in this chapter could be gifted, received, and retained as possessions and possible commodities. They were the personal belongings of people (whom are often named in the inscriptions) and would have been kept on the body or within the home as personal, moveable, and transferrable property.

### 4.1 Personal Adornments and Dress Accessories

The most numerous types of portable objects with inscriptions are those which were displayed on the body as jewellery, accessories, or items of dress (Chart 4.1). Most of these objects are meant to be seen when worn, such as finger-rings and ornate brooches, intended to make a striking impression of status and identity for those who wore them. Slightly less immediately visible are the smaller dress fittings such as clothing clasps or belt fittings, which were designed more for function than embellishment, although the decorations on some are nonetheless eye-catching. Personal adornments and dress accessories were used and worn by all levels of society, as mundane dress necessities and as purely decorative enhancements. The objects and their texts cover all aspects of early medieval British and Irish material culture and literacy. They are found in all parts of Britain and Ireland, though the distribution is uneven with a lack of Pictish and Welsh material. Some categories of personal adornments are exclusive to one culture, in particular the Anglo-Saxon finger-rings and bracteates. Indeed, the great majority of inscribed personal adornments are of Anglo-Saxon construction and script, in both runes and Roman letters (Chart 4.2, 4.3). The lack of Pictish inscribed personal adornments will be explored further on, but may be due to a number of reasons, including differences in attitudes towards the use of text as well as the preservation of objects and lack of furnished burials from Pictish Scotland.

The inscribed personal adornments have findspots concentrated in the east and south-eastern parts of England and show patterns regarding find context and distribution. Some types of objects are found mostly as stray finds, whilst others are mostly grave goods or found in hoards. The inscribed personal adornments are primarily made of metal, but there are also objects made of amber (**Ennis** bead), agate (**Linstock Castle** finger-ring), and an animal tooth (**Brough of Birsay** bear tooth). Some inscriptions are integrated neatly into the original design, such as the **Alhstan** finger-ring, indicating that the object was designed with the concept of bearing text. A great number of inscriptions on personal adornments are carved onto the reverse or on the front of their respective objects in a manner

suggesting they were ‘secondary’ additions. This is predominantly seen on the inscribed brooches. Inscriptions on the reverse would be hidden when the object was in use, that is, worn on the finger or attached to clothing. Furthermore, it is practically impossible to determine when the text was added in relation to the life of the object. At times aspects of the text itself may lend a diagnostic hand to date the inscription later than its object, and in the case of the **Hunterston** brooch, possibly even a couple centuries later. Most of the time we are left with wear marks on the inscriptions to indicate how fresh the writing was before deposition, as surface marks on the runes of a brooch may imply that the brooch was affixed to clothing whilst the inscription was there (**Boarley** brooch), although this is problematic as the archaeological context of the object could have contributed to the abrasion.

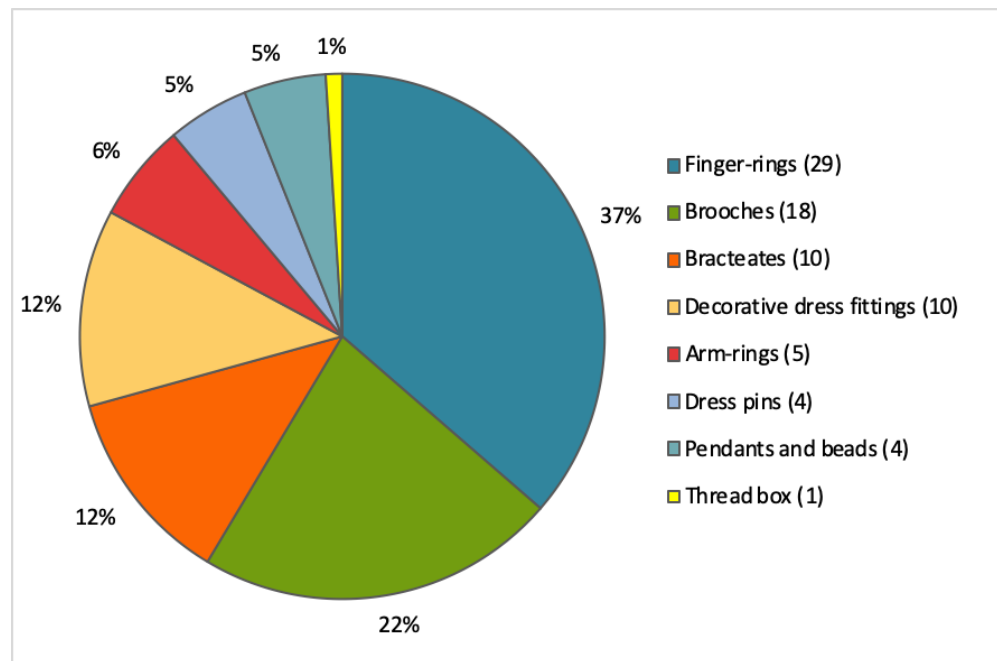


Chart 4.1 Types of Personal Adornments and Dress Accessories

Table 4.1 Scripts and Languages on Personal Adornments and Dress Accessories

	Latin	Continental Germanic or Old English	Old English	Old Norse	Old Irish/Early Gaelic	Unidentified /Uncertain	Old English and Latin	Old Arabic
Roman Letters	12	0	13	0	1	6	1	0
Elder Futhark/Anglo-Saxon runes	0	14	18	0	0	5	0	0
Scandinavian runes	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0
Ogham	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0
Roman letters and Anglo-Saxon runes	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0

Uncertain Alphabet	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Old Arabic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

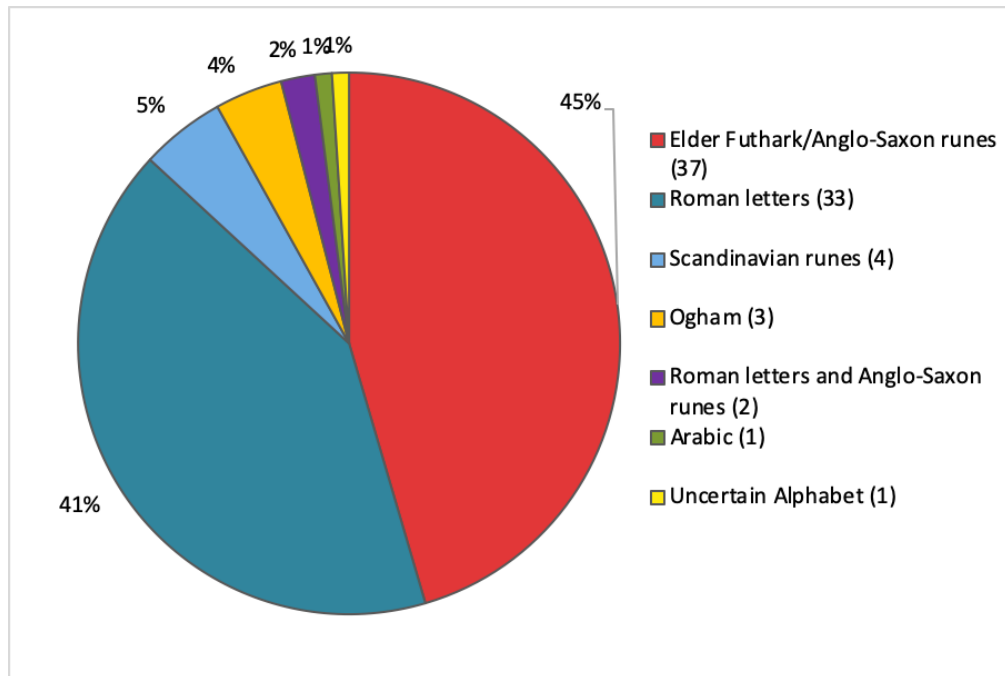


Chart 4.2 Scripts on Personal Adornments and Dress Accessories

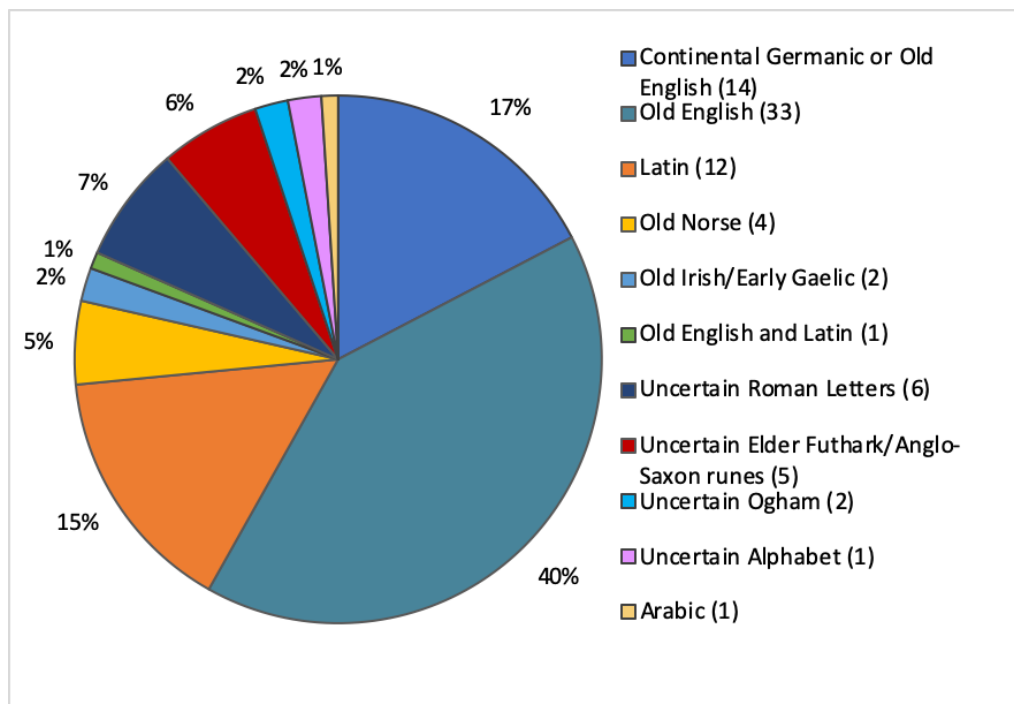


Chart 4.3 Languages on Personal Adornments and Dress Accessories

The scripts and languages inscribed on the personal adornments and dress accessories are the most diverse category in this study (Table 4.1). The inscriptions are largely in elder futhork or Anglo-Saxon runes, with thirty-seven texts (Chart 4.2). Most of these runic inscriptions are in Old English, although this category also holds the largest number of texts that are in Continental Germanic or early Old English, with fourteen examples. Thirty-three inscriptions are in Roman letters including twelve in Latin and thirteen in Old English. The most predominant language inscribed on the personal adornments and dress accessories is Old English, with thirty-three objects (Chart 4.3). Only four texts on the personal adornments and dress accessories are in Scandinavian runes and Old Norse (**Brough of Birsay** tooth, **Deerness** pendant, **Hunterston** brooch, **Penrith** brooch), and only three are in ogham (**Ballyspellan** brooch, **Ennis** bead, **Vale of York** brooch), indicating that inscribing objects of wear and ornamentation was almost exclusively an Anglo-Saxon practice in early medieval Britain and Ireland.

### 4.1.1 Finger-Rings

The 29 inscribed finger-rings are Anglo-Saxon in style and text and are the largest single group of objects with inscriptions (Table 4.2). Apart from two, they all date between AD 700 and 1100. The two exceptions are the gold bezel of a seal-ring from **Postwick**, Norfolk dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and the fragmentary **Selsey Bill** ring, West Sussex, which is given a broad date range between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries (Looijenga 2003, 292; Okasha 2004, 244-245, no. 232). The 29 objects listed below were presumably made to be worn upon a finger, however they may have held other functions including symbolic amulets, gifts, or even fitted upon a weapon as a hilt-band (Gosling 1991, 192). The inscribed rings represent all levels of society from the highly elaborate gold and enamelled rings of **Alhstan** and **Driffeld**, to the roughly inscribed non-ferrous rings from **London's Thames Exchange** and **Cramond Hill**. Seventeen rings are made of gold, eight of silver, two of copper-alloy, and one each of lead and pink agate. Additional materials include niello, gilding (including one gilded with Mercury [Brown & Okasha 2009, 138]), as well as enamelling and glass insets. The inscriptions include eight texts in Anglo-Saxon runes, nineteen in Roman letters, and two inscriptions combining the two scripts (Chart 4.4). The languages on the finger-rings include fifteen in Old English, eight in Latin, one in a combination of Old English and Latin, and five runic inscriptions in uncertain languages (Chart 4.5). Out of the eight Latin inscriptions, six include personal names comprising five Old English (**Æthelswith**, **Æthelwulf**, **Attleborough**, **Bossington**, **Sleaford**) and one Continental Germanic name (**Postwick**). As exclusively Anglo-Saxon objects, the finger-ring texts give insight into the people who owned, made, and wore them as well as their relationship with early English society.

**Table 4.2 Inscribed Finger-Rings**

Name	Object	Inscription
'Ædelfled'	Gold and niello, 800-900, undecorated	Roman letters, OE: 'Ædelfled owns me'

'Æthelswith' (Aberford)	Gold and niello, 853-874, decorated	Roman letters, Latin with OE PN: 'Agnus Dei, Queen Æthelswith'
'Æthelwulf' (Laverstock)	Gold and niello, 828-858, decorated	Roman letters, Latin with OE PN: 'King Æthelwulf'
'Alhstan' (Llysfaen)	Gold and enamel, 800-900, decorated	Roman letters and AS runes, OE (runic <i>n</i> ): '+Alhstan'
Attleborough	Silver, 1000-1100, undecorated	Roman letters, Latin with OE PN: 'Ethrald(ric) in London', may alternatively be 'Ethrald(ric) in Lund'
Bodsham	Gold and niello, 700-800, decorated	Roman letters, OE: '+[G/S]armund owns me'
Bossington	Gold, 800-900, decorated	Roman letters, Latin with OE PN: 'In Christ my name is Culla'
Bramham Moor	Gold and niello, 800-900, undecorated	AS runes, Uncertain: <i>Eryriu</i> = OE <i>erykriu</i> , 'bleeding'?. <i>Pol</i> , Old Irish/Early Gaelic <i>tonn</i> , 'skin'? <i>enol</i> = OE <i>leno</i> , Old Irish/Early Gaelic <i>léunu</i> , 'hurts'?
Coquet Island	Lead, 800-900, undecorated	AS runes, OE: 'This is silver' or 'This shield...'
Cramond Hill	Brass, 800-1000, undecorated	AS runes, OE: '...e w o r h t e l [.u]' or '...e w o r l [...e l i u'
'Cynefrið'	Gold and niello, 800-900, decorated	Roman letters, OE: '+Cynefrith+'
'Dol3bot'	Silver, Uncertain date, undecorated	Roman letters, OE: 'Compensation for wound' (?)
Driffield	Gold and enamel, 800-1000, decorated	Roman letters, Latin: 'Behold the Lamb of God'
'Eawen'	Gold and niello, 800-900, undecorated	Roman letters, OE and Latin: 'Eawen owns me; may St Peter the Rock choose her' or 'Eawen owns me; St Peter, the Rock of Christ'
Flixborough	Silver with mercury gilding, 700-900, decorated	Roman letters, Uncertain (OE or Latin): '+abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz'
Greymoor Hill	Gold and niello, 800-1000, undecorated	AS runes, Uncertain: <i>Eryriu</i> = OE <i>erykriu</i> , 'bleeding'?. <i>Pol</i> , Old Irish/Early Gaelic <i>tonn</i> , 'skin'? <i>enol</i> = OE <i>leno</i> , Old Irish/Early Gaelic <i>léunu</i> , 'hurts'?
'In Deo'	Gold, 1050-1100, undecorated	Roman letters, Latin: 'In God, O God blessed eternally, pure in the light of God'
Lancashire/ Manchester	Gold and niello, 800-900, undecorated	Roman letters and AS runes, OE (runic <i>æ</i> , <i>n</i> , <i>a</i> , <i>f</i> ): 'Ædred owns me, Eanred wrought/engraved me'
Linstock Castle	Pink agate, 700-1000, undecorated	AS runes, Uncertain: <i>Eryriu</i> = OE <i>erykriu</i> , 'bleeding'?. <i>Pol</i> , Old Irish/Early Gaelic <i>tonn</i> , 'skin'? <i>enol</i> = OE <i>leno</i> , Old Irish/Early Gaelic <i>léunu</i> , 'hurts'?
London Thames Exchange	Copper-alloy, 900-1000, undecorated	AS runes, OE: '[t/æ] f u þ n i n e'
Postwick (‘Baldhild’)	Gold, 600-700, decorated	Roman letters, Latin with CGmc fem PN: '+Of Baldhild'
Selsey Bill	Gold, 550-900, undecorated	AS runes, Uncertain A) 'b r n r n' B) 'a n m u'

'Sigerie'	Silver, 800-1000, undecorated	Roman letters, OE: 'Sigerie ordered me to be made'
Sleaford	Gilded silver, 700-800, undecorated	Roman letters, Latin with OE PN: '+Ring of Faith + Eadberht'
Steyping	Gold, 800-900, decorated	Roman letters, OE: 'Æschwulf owns me'
Suffolk	Silver, 1000-1050, undecorated	Roman letters, OE: A) 'John of Beverley, Archbishop' B) '[Athelstan][King of the English Giver]'
Swindon	Gold, 800-900, decorated	Roman letters, OE and inverted Greek symbols alpha and omega: 'Buredruð'   'Α ω'
'Dancas'	Silver, uncertain date, undecorated	Roman letters, OE: '+Thanks+'
Wheatley Hill	Gilded silver with three glass-inlaid bosses, 700-800, undecorated	AS runes, OE: 'I am called [a] ring'

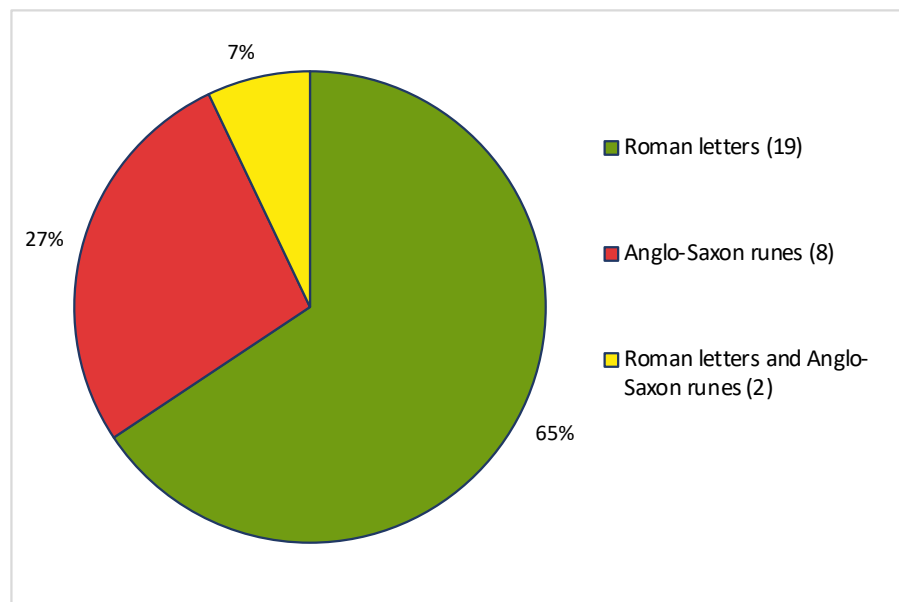


Chart 4.4 Scripts on Inscribed Finger-Rings

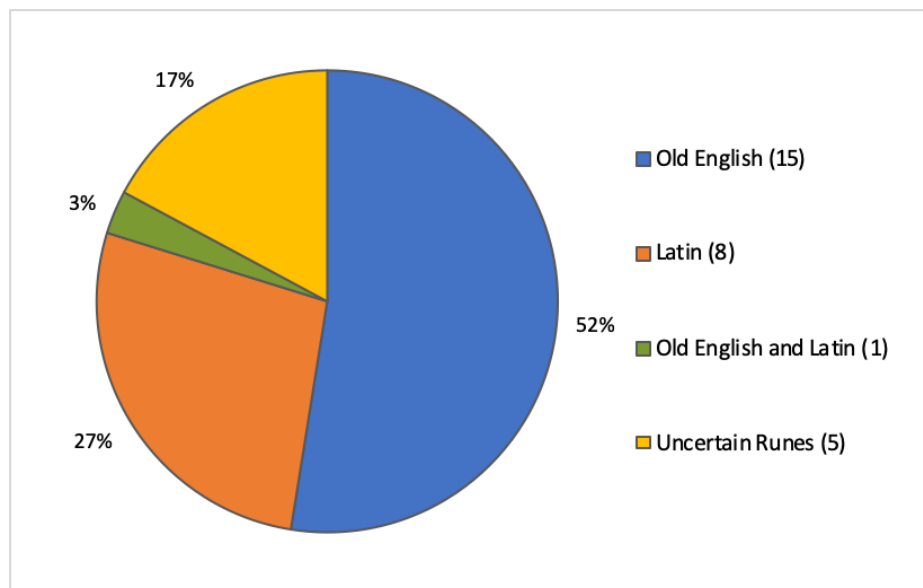


Chart 4.5 Languages on Inscribed Finger-Rings

Whilst the wearing of finger-rings is known in areas outside of Anglo-Saxon England, the act of inscribing them seems to be an exclusively Anglo-Saxon practice. No finger-rings outside of Anglo-Saxon territory during the early medieval period (400-1100) in Britain nor on the Continent have inscriptions. Three rings from Denmark and northern Germany are engraved with runic inscriptions, but they date between the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century AD and 1300 (fig. 4.1) (Lindahl 2003, 83; RuneS-Datenbank DR Schl5). The distribution pattern of the inscribed rings in this corpus is concentrated within Anglo-Saxon territory, including Wales and southern Scotland. As small, highly portable objects, finger-rings are easily dropped and lost and presumably mimic the movement of those who wore them. The find-spots of these rings therefore do not necessarily represent where they were made but where they were carried and subsequently lost, possibly as an accidental fall from a finger or pocket. Fifteen inscribed rings have recorded contexts and find-spots, of which eleven were found as stray finds, three during controlled surveys or excavations of settlements (**Flixborough, London Thames Exchange, Steyning**), and one a chance find in a churchyard (**Cramond Hill**). Five rings have a recorded find-spot but uncertain information regarding archaeological context and discovery circumstance (**Alhstan, Coquet Island, Linstock Castle, Sleaford, Swindon**). Three rings have unrecorded provenances but can be narrowed down to an English county (**Dolgbot, Suffolk, Lancashire**), and seven rings have no contextual or provenance records whatsoever, three of which were sold in auctions in 2000, 2010 (**Ædelfled, Cynefrith, ‘In Deo’**) (Okasha 2004, 249; Timeline Auctions 2015, Lot 0535; Webster & Okasha 2014) and four were recorded as 19<sup>th</sup> century antiquarian finds (**Dolgbot, Eawen, Sigerie, Dancas**).



Figure 4.1 Runic-inscribed finger-rings from: (left) Revninge, Odense, Denmark, c. AD 1075-1125 (© Nationalmuseet Danmark CC-BY-SA, no. DXLIV, photograph by Lisbeth Imer) and (right) ‘Absalons’s Ring’ from Denmark, c. AD 1075-1125 (© Nationalmuseet Danmark CC-BY-SA, no. 8537, photograph by Arnold Mikkelsen)

The inscriptions on the rings range from single personal names, owner, maker, and commissioner statements, to alphabetical sequences, cryptic ‘gibberish’, and statements of religious faith (Chart 4.6). The character of the texts shows a range of quality of craftsmanship, from the carefully

engraved to deeply cut and less artfully executed letters indicating the skill of the metalsmith. Most inscriptions are visibly engraved onto the exterior of the hoop or bezel to be visible to the public, whilst one has its inscription entirely hidden on the interior (i.e. **Æthelswith**). Most of the texts are incorporated into the original design indicating that the rings were intended to have text from the start. This is a little more difficult to determine with the simpler undecorated rings such as the **London Thames Exchange** or **Cramond Hill** rings. The ring from **Wheatley Hill** may have originally been a simple gilded silver band with runes, although at some point three glass insets were added, partially covering the inscription. As opposed to **Æthelwulf's** ring, which is visible on the front, Queen **Æthelswith's** name is hidden beneath the bezel of her ring (fig. 4.2). It is possible that her name was not part of the original concept of the ring, although it may be a practical reaction to the lack of space on the ring's exterior.

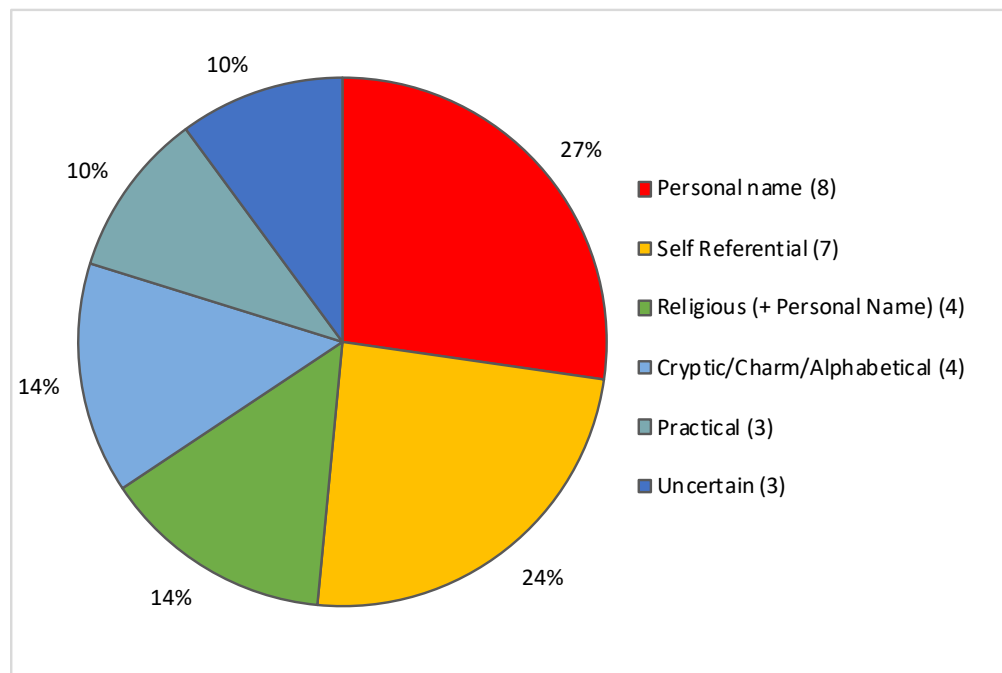


Chart 4.6 Types of Inscriptions on Finger-Rings

Seventeen Old English personal names and one Continental Germanic name (**Postwick**) are represented on sixteen of the finger-rings, including two rings that are inscribed with two names each (**Lancashire**, **Suffolk**). The personal names include five feminine, twelve masculine, and one uncertain name. Six personal names are by themselves with no additional text and six are in first-person owner, maker, or commissioner formulae including four as 'X owns me' (**Ædelfled**, **Bodsham**, **Eawen**, **Steyning**), one as 'X owns me, X wrought me' (**Lancashire**), and one as 'X ordered me to be made' (**Sigerie**). The remaining personal names are in inscriptions that are descriptive of the ring or individual themselves, such as '+Ring of faith+Eadberht' on the **Sleaford** ring and 'Ethraldric in London' (or possibly Lund) on the ring from **Attleborough**. Out of the sixteen inscriptions with Greek crosses, eleven feature personal names possibly indicating a person of ecclesiastical importance such as an abbot, bishop, or even royalty (Stalsberg 2008, 18-20). Two, possibly four, of the personal names with Greek crosses can be identified as historic individuals. Of these are the two rings of Queen **Æthelswith** (c. 838-888) and her father King **Æthelwulf** (reigned 839-858) (Karkov 2011, 125; Okasha 1971, 91-92, 112-113). The name of **Baldhild** on the **Postwick** seal-ring may refer to Balthild, a 7<sup>th</sup> century



Frankish queen (Karkov 2011, 123), and **Alhstan** on the ring from Llysfaen, Wales, may be the name of a 9<sup>th</sup> century Bishop of Sherborne (c. 817-867) (Jessup 1974, 78; Okasha 1971, 98-99). Also identifiable, although lacking initial crosses, are the names of John of Beverley, Bishop of Hexham and York (d. 721) and King Athelstan (reigned 924-939), both inscribed on the ring from **Suffolk** (Okasha 1971, 115-116). The significance and implications of personal names in inscriptions are further discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.

Seven inscriptions consist of owner, maker, and commissioner formulae which personify the rings and transform them into ‘speaking objects’ illustrated in Old English riddles and poetry (Bitterli 2009; Bredehoft 1992). Four of the rings are inscribed with sequences of ‘X owns me’, one with ‘X ordered me to be made’ (**Sigerie**), and one with the owner and maker formula, ‘X owns me, X wrought/made me’ (**Eawen**). All of these inscriptions are in Roman letters and Old English, with the exception of the combination of Old English and Latin on the **Eawen** ring (Okasha 1971, 136, no. 155). On no other single category of portable inscribed objects are these types of inscriptions so established, testifying to their importance as personal possessions as well as powerful items in themselves. Certain elite individuals with access to prestigious items and scribes wanted their finger-rings to be identified as owned property almost in a way that gave them dominion over the material world. When worn, the relationship between person and object would blur together, and if lost, the connection would still be maintained when the text was recited.

The two royal rings of Queen **Æthelswith** and her father King **Æthelwulf** are frequently discussed in terms of kingly gift-giving and patronage (Karkov 2011, 126). Royal gift-giving is mentioned in *Beowulf*, and King Alfred was given the name ‘ring-giver’ by Bishop Wulfsig of Sherborne (c.879/889-890/900) (Hinton 2006, 129; Keynes & Lapidge 1983, 187-188; Oliver 2002, 86), which may refer to decorative finger-rings as well as simpler rings to adorn the hilts of swords (Davidson 1962, 77). Anglo-Saxon wills also tell of Archbishops and Kings trading rings between each other (Turner 1820, 47). This may explain the **Suffolk** ring inscription, which has also been interpreted by Oman (1931, 107) as, ‘Athelstan King of the English giver’. Bishops and other members of the clergy wore rings to signify their holy vows, and bishops received rings as part of their consecration (Wycherley 2015, 79-80). **Æthelwulf** is known to have generously given lavish gifts to his followers, which could have included his gold ring (Abels 2013, 69), and if the ring of **Alhstan** can correctly be identified as the name *Ealhstan*, the Bishop of Sherborne, who was contemporary to **Æthelwulf**’s reign, the ring could plausibly have been commissioned by the King for him (Jessup 1974, 78). Other possibilities behind the **Æthelswith** and **Æthelwulf** rings include commemorations of the marriages of both individuals in AD 853 and 856, as well as seals to accompany royal messages, although it is curious that whilst **Æthelwulf**’s name is clear on the front of his ring, **Æthelswith** has her name carved, seemingly secondarily, onto the reverse of the ring’s bezel (fig. 4.2) (Karkov 2011, 125; Webster 2003, 92). These royal rings, as well other ornamental rings and objects of gold and jewels represent an aspect of 9<sup>th</sup> century craftsmanship in which treasures of precious metal were commissioned by the elite as an expression of power, wisdom, and faith (Pratt 2007, 185-192).

Christian faith is strongly represented on the inscribed finger-rings. In total, nineteen have some sort of Christian connotation, whether it be the inscription itself, religious imagery, or the sixteen inscriptions with one or more crosses. The **Bossington** and ‘**In Deo**’ rings refer to Christ by the name

‘Christ’ or ‘Deus’ (Okasha 2003, 35). Some rings refer to Christ as the Lamb of God (**Æthelswith** and **Driffield**) (Okasha 1971, 67, 112-113) or alpha and omega (**Swindon**) (Okasha 1971, 117-118), and one ring mentions St Peter (**Eawen**) (Okasha 1971, 136). Two rings feature Christian prayers, one of which is directed to no one specifically (**‘In Deo’**) and the other asks for protection for the owner (**Eawen**) (Okasha 1971, 136; Okasha 2004, 249). The ring from **Sleaford** calls itself the ‘ring of faith’ next to the masculine personal name Eadberht (Okasha 1971, 245-246), and the **Dancas** ring may be giving ‘thanks’ to the Lord (Okasha 2003, 36). Riddles 48 and 59 of the Exeter Book refer to a *hring* that ‘speaks’ through the ‘wounds of Christ’, possibly referring to the cutting of inscriptions into the flesh of objects (Okasha 1993a). Whoever engraved or commissioned the engraving of the **Wheatley Hill** runes was certainly familiar with these riddles, and possibly wanted to replicate the act of prayer in which this *hring* is directly involved (Okasha 1993a, 62).



Figure 4.2 The **Æthelwulf** ring (left, object no. 1822,1214.1, asset no. 84494001) and on the reverse of the **Æthelswith** ring (right, object no. AF.458, asset no. 1249819001).  
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As well as the content of the inscriptions, aspects of the text itself as well as imagery further enhances the links between the inscribed finger-rings and Christianity. Apart from the possible alphabetical association of ‘abcederial’ prayer-books (Halsall 1981, 42; Pestell et al 2009, 138), the text itself on the **Flixborough** ring is in the half-uncial script used in manuscripts during the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries and the **Wheatley Hill** runes are seriffed like manuscript Roman letters (Brown & Okasha 2009, 138; Parsons 1994, 206). Religious imagery such as the Agnus Dei and peacocks on the **Æthelswith** and **Æthelwulf** rings, and the combination of Anglo-Saxon runes and Roman letters on the rings of **‘Alhstan’** and **Lancashire** are seen in Old English manuscripts and riddles wherein runes are mixed in with Roman letters to stand for a letter or concept (Bitterli 2009, 83-97; Derolez 1954, 385; Halsall 1981, 13, 18; Karkov 2011, 125-126). As all of the inscribed rings (with the exception of the **Postwick** seal-ring and **Selsey Bill** fragments) date during or after the Anglo-Saxon conversion to Christianity, it is reasonable to suggest that the adding of text onto rings was somehow connected to Christianity and the wealth of the Church. Those who owned and/or wore the rings, primarily those of precious metal, were publicly expressing their identity and faith as well as their association with an elite minority, reflecting education and knowledge that only one of elite standing would enjoy.

Some of the runic inscriptions demonstrate that finger-rings could also be perceived as amulets. The three rings of **Bramham Moor**, **Greymoor Hill**, and **Linstock Castle** form their own group of cryptic or gibberish runic texts also seen in Old English Christian amulet charms for healing, recorded in *Bald's Leechbook III* and the *Lacnunga* (see Chapter 7.8) (Cameron 1993, 133-134; Grattan & Singer 1952, 178-179; MacLeod & Mees 2006, 140-141; Page 1964, 119; Page 1999a, 112). Other rings with possible amuletic functions include the perplexing **Selsey Bill** runic ring (Page 1987c, 303), and the **London Thames Exchange** ring, which may consist of the first three letters of the old English *futhorc* and the masculine name, *Ine* (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 84-85). The alpha and omega symbols on the **Swindon** ring are comparable to a charm against illness or 'dwarf' as demonstrated in *Lacnunga* LXXXVIIc (see **Dunton**, Chapter 6.2.2), instructing one to write the symbols between Christian crosses along their arms (Grattan & Singer 1952, 158-159; Storms 1948, 258-259). Considering the large hoop diameters of the three rings from **Bramham Moor**, **Greymoor Hill**, and **Linstock Castle** (27-29mm), the rings may have been worn upon gloves or hung from a necklace as amulet pendants rather than directly upon the finger (Karkov 2011, 125; Owen-Crocker 2004, 200). Also possibly amuletic are the runes which personify the **Wheatley Hill** ring, which read as, 'I am called a [h]ring' (Okasha 2003). As opposed to the other rings with first-person inscriptions, in this scenario the ring is declaring itself as an independent object rather than one owned or made by someone. Such a powerful statement of autonomy could be amuletic in itself.

The **Dolgbot**, **Coquet Island**, and **Cramond Hill** rings stand out with inscriptions that are difficult to contextualise. The inscription on the lost silver **Dolgbot** ring may either be interpreted as a personal name, but more plausibly, *dolgbot* refers to the Old English term for 'compensation for a wound' wherein *dolg* is translated as 'wound, scar, cut, sore' and *bot* as 'compensation', 'amends' or 'repair' (Clark Hall 1960, 86, 54 ; Okasha 2003, 30). If this translation is correct, the ring may have acted as an object passed between people to compensate for a wrong doing. The **Coquet Island** and **Cramond Hill** rings have no solid interpretation, but they demonstrate that runes are more likely to be carved on simple rings of base metal instead of ornate gold and silver rings with Roman letters. Okasha (2003, 33) suggests that runes, therefore, were seen as less elite and used for the lower classes of society. Apart from the gold and silver runic rings of **Greymoor Hill**, **Bramham Moor**, and **Wheatley Hill**, it is true that the base-metal rings of lead and copper-alloy (**Coquet Island**, **Cramond Hill**, **London Thames Exchange**) are carved with runes and are less ornately decorated and written than their precious metal counterparts. Another possibility is that these simpler rings were not finger-rings per se, but the rings set upon the hilts of swords that were popular in north-western Europe and south-eastern England (Davidson 1967, 77).

One would have to consider the number of uninscribed finger-rings in Anglo-Saxon England, as well as those from Ireland, Scotland, and Scandinavia to fully understand the context in which these twenty-nine finger-rings are concerned. Although finger-rings are known in Irish, Scottish, and Scandinavian contexts, none bear inscriptions except for the three Danish rings dating after 1050 AD. Furthermore, there is no historical evidence for the wearing of rings by Irish Christian clergy (Wycherley 2015, 80), indicating that the religious aspects of finger-rings may have been solely a custom in Anglo-Saxon England. The PAS currently lists 330 early medieval finger-rings from England and Wales, and this number is steadily rising. This in mind, only twenty-nine inscriptions imply that the

practice of inscribing rings was relatively limited even in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. In this corpus of portable inscribed objects, the twenty-nine finger-rings are the most commonly inscribed type of artefact and a clear level of interest in the use of text on finger-rings within Anglo-Saxon England, whether it was for practical, magical, personal, religious, or aristocratic purposes. The inscriptions on the finger-rings help to give insight into their relationships with people as well as information about how they expressed and promote the identity of their wearers.

### 4.1.2 Brooches

The corpus comprises eighteen inscribed brooches making this the second largest category. These can be dated between 500 and 1050 AD on the basis of form and decoration, with half the total brooches in early Anglo-Saxon and Continental Germanic styles dating between 500 and 700 AD, including cruciform, square-headed, radiate-headed, and disc-brooches (Table 4.3). The inscriptions on these early brooches are mostly short runic sequences of the older futhorc and Anglo-Saxon futhorc and in Continental Germanic or Old English and are difficult to translate (Chart 4.7, 4.8). The other nine brooches post-date 700 and are predominantly 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century silver penannular brooches in the Irish and the Irish Sea style (**Ballyspellan, Hunterston, Killamerry, Penrith, Vale of York**), but also include silver Anglo-Saxon brooches (**Ædwen, Canterbury, Cuxton**) and one equal-armed cross brooch from the Continent (**Ballycotton**). The brooches dating after 700 AD are inscribed in Anglo-Saxon runes, Scandinavian runes, ogham, and Roman letters and in the languages of Old English, Old Norse, Old Irish/Early Gaelic, and Latin. The inscriptions are relatively straightforward to read as compared to the inscribed brooches dating before 700 AD. As functional and practical items of elite dress, the inscribed brooches reveal intriguing insights into early medieval material culture involving aspects of ownership, identity, social relationships, and the changing attitudes towards the uses of literacy.

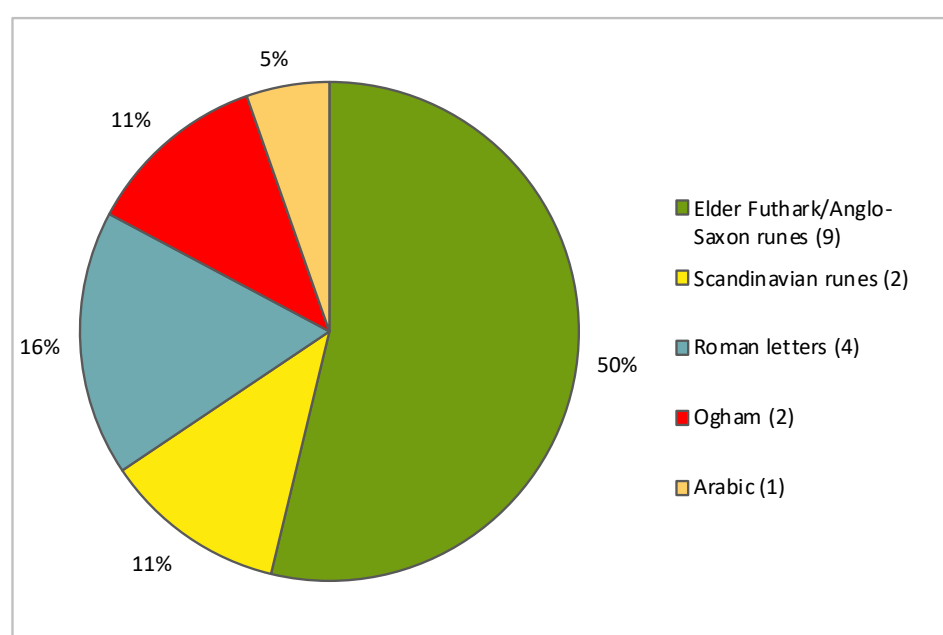


Chart 4.7 Scripts on Inscribed Brooches

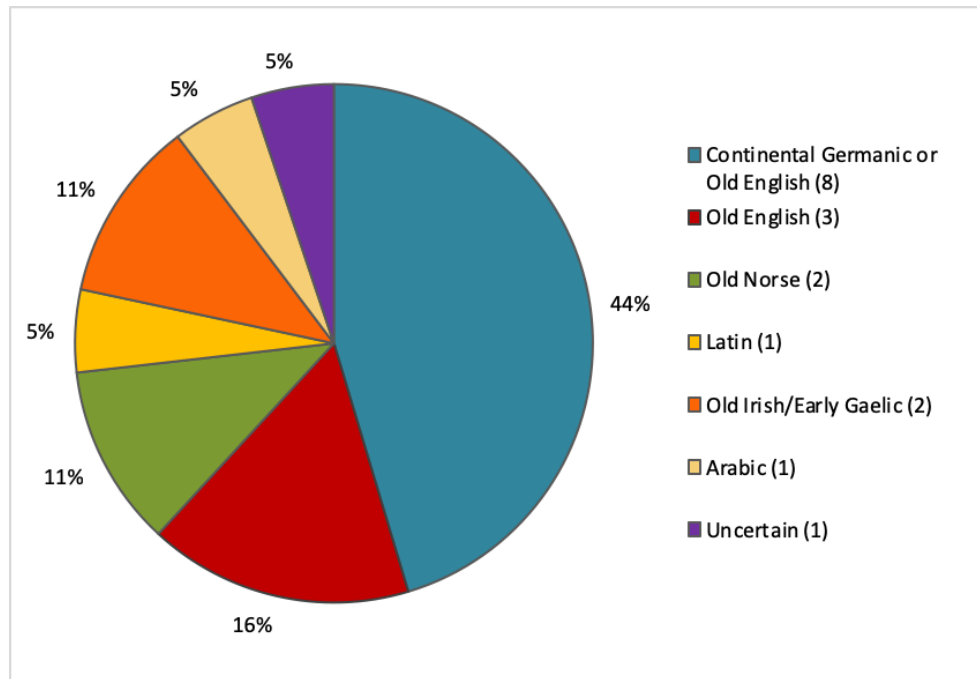


Chart 4.8 Languages on the Inscribed Brooches

Table 4.3 Inscribed Brooches

Name	Object	Inscription
'Ædwen' (Sutton/Isle of Ely)	DISC-BROOCH: Silver, 1000-1050, decorated	Roman letters, OE: '+Ædwen owns me, may the Lord own her. May the Lord curse him who takes me from her, unless she gives me of her own free will'
Ballycotton	CROSS-BROOCH: Gilded copper-alloy, 700-900, black glass disc inset	Old Arabic: 'As God wills' or 'In the name of Allah' or 'We have repented to God'
Ballyspellan	PENANNULAR BROOCH: Silver, 850-950, inscription d.900-1200, bossed	Ogham, Old Irish/Early Gaelic: A) 'Maelmaire' B) 'Cellach the Midwife' C) 'Minodor the Noble' D) Maeluadaig son of Maelmaire'
'Bateman' (Kent)	RADIATE-HEADED BROOCH: Gilded silver, 500-600, with niello, gold, and garnet	EF/AS runes, CGmc/OE: <i>lc/lk</i> , OE, 'l'. <i>gadu</i> , OE <i>gada</i> , 'companion', CGmc <i>gade</i> , 'husband, wife'
Boarley	DISC-BROOCH: Copper-alloy, 550-650, decorated	EF runes, CGmc/OE: 'to/at/with the brooch' or <i>liot</i> , 'wild, free, warrior' or CGmc/OE personal name 'Liota'
Canterbury	COIN-BROOCH: Silver, 950-980, coin imagery	Roman letters, Latin with OE PN: A) 'Wudeman made this' B) 'In the name of the Lord'
Cuxton	OPENWORK DISC-BROOCH: Silver, 900-1000, central image of bird	Roman letters, OE: 'Ælfifu owns me'
Dover	DISC-BROOCH: Gilded silver, 610-650, with gold, garnet, and shell	EF/AS runes, CGmc/OE: A) 'p d' B) 'b c c n l b / b l n c c b'

Harford farm	DISC-BROOCH: Gilded silver, 610-650, with gold and garnet	EF/AS runes, OE: 'Luda mended/repaid the brooch' or 'Luda made reparations (with the) brooch'
Hunstanton	OPENWORK SWASTIKA-BROOCH: Copper-alloy, 500-600	EF/AS runes, CGmc/OE: Possibly 's', 'l', 'u', and 'ga'
Hunterston	PSEUDO-PENANNULAR BROOCH: Gilded silver, 700-800, with amber, inscription d.900-1000	Scandinavian runes, ON with Early Gaelic PN: A) 'Malbriþa/Melbrigda owns (this) brooch' B) Uncertain. '[Recompense to (M/K)aolfriti ]'?
Killamery	PSEUDO-PENANNULAR BROOCH: Silver, 800-1000, with gold, glass, and amber	Roman letters, Old Irish/Early Gaelic: 'Ciarod[ui]r son of [-]'
Penrith	PENANNULAR BROOCH: Silver, 850-1000, bossed	Scandinavian runes, ON runic <i>futharks</i> : A) <i>fuporkhniastbmm</i> B) <i>fu</i>
Sleaford	CRUCIFORM-BROOCH: Bronze, 550-600,	EF rune, CGmc/OE: 'd'
Vale of York	PENANNULAR BROOCH FRAGMENT: Silver terminal fragment, c.850-927, bossed	Ogham, Uncertain: <b>ATFC[A/M]</b>
Wakerley	SQUARE-HEADED BROOCH: Copper-alloy, 525-560, decorated	EF runes, CGmc/OE: <i>Buhu(i)</i> , 'brooch'?
West Heslerton	CRUCIFORM BROOCH: Copper-alloy, 500-550, decorated	EF/AS runes, CGmc/OE: <i>neim</i> or <i>neie</i> or <i>mien</i> , 'necklace, collar, ornament, jewel'
Willoughby-on-the-Wolds	OPENWORK TRISKELE-BROOCH: Bronze, 460-600	EF runes, CGmc/OE: Three 'd' runes

Seven brooches were discovered in early Anglo-Saxon burial contexts (**Dover, Harford Farm, Hunstanton, Sleaford, Wakerley, West Heslerton, Willoughby-on-the-Wolds**), four as stray finds in Ireland and Scotland (**Ballycotton, Ballyspellan, Hunterston, Killamery**), three as part of Viking hoards in England (**Ædwen, Penrith, Vale of York**), and four with uncertain find-spots or contexts (**'Bateman', Boarley, Canterbury, Cuxton**). The seven brooches found as grave items are styles that include two cruciform (**Sleaford, West Heslerton**), one square-headed (**Wakerley**), and four disc-brooches (**Dover, Harford Farm, Hunstanton, Willoughby**) that were found in female graves dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> to late 7<sup>th</sup> centuries in eastern and south-eastern England. Similar to the pattern on the Continent, the inscriptions on these early Anglo-Saxon brooches (including the stray-find **Boarley** brooch and unprovenanced **'Bateman'** brooch) are single Germanic runes or short sequences that are difficult to interpret and possibly non-lexical (Barnes 2012b, 27, 33; Hines 2006, 190-191; Looijenga 2003, 106). The remaining eight brooches include five stray finds including the previously mentioned 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century **Boarley** brooch (Parsons 1999 46), three 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century Irish silver penannular brooches from Ireland and Scotland, and one 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century gilded copper-alloy Carolingian equal-armed cross-brooch from Ireland (Porter & Ager 1999). Three brooches were found as part of 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century Viking silver hoards from **Penrith**, Cumbria, the **Vale of York**, Yorkshire, and **Sutton**, Cambridgeshire (**Ædwen**) (Barnes & Page 2006, 331-333; Bruce-Mitford 1952; Graham-Campbell 1972), and two 10<sup>th</sup> century brooches were parts of private antiquarian collections in Kent and little can be said of their contexts (**'Bateman', Cuxton**) (Hinton 1974, 13; Kühn 1974, 706-707; Wilson 1964, 129). As opposed

to the earlier brooches, those dating after the 8<sup>th</sup> century are inscribed with longer, personal, and interpretable inscriptions which incorporate Roman letters and ogham. In between is the late 7<sup>th</sup> century **Harford Farm** brooch, which is believed to be one of the earliest runic inscriptions in early Old English derived from the Continental Germanic languages (Hines 2000, 82), and thus represents a turning point of runic literacy, as well as portable literacy, in England.

The inscriptions on the brooches include nine written in older futhark and Anglo-Saxon runes, four in Roman letters (**Ædwen, Canterbury, Cuxton, Killamerry**), two in Scandinavian runes (**Hunterston, Penrith**), two in ogham (**Ballyspellan, Vale of York**), and one in Old Arabic (**Ballycotton**) (Chart 4.7). The languages include eight inscriptions in Continental Germanic or Old English, three in Old English (**Ædwen, Cuxton, Harford Farm**), two in Old Norse (**Hunterston, Penrith**), one in Latin with an Old English personal name (**Canterbury**), two in Old Irish/Early Gaelic (**Ballyspellan, Killamery**), and one in Old Arabic (**Ballycotton**) (Chart 4.8). One object is inscribed with ogham in an untranslated language (**Vale of York**). The content of the inscriptions includes religious, owner and maker statements, personal names, amuletic, and uncertain runic sequences consisting of a single rune or a short phrase (Chart 4.9). Seven inscriptions consist of personal names including two masculine names in Old English (**Canterbury, Harford Farm**), and two feminine Old English names (**Ædwen, Cuxton**). Four Old Irish/Early Gaelic names are inscribed on the **Ballyspellan** brooch, and two masculine Old Irish/Early Gaelic names are scratched on the backs of the **Hunterston** and **Killamery** brooches. Another name may be written on the **Hunterston** brooch as well, although this is highly contested (Stevenson 1974, 28; Wilson 1851, 526-529). Inscriptions that announce a relationship between a person and the object in the renditions of 'X owns/made me' or 'X owns/made this brooch' are present on at least five brooches.

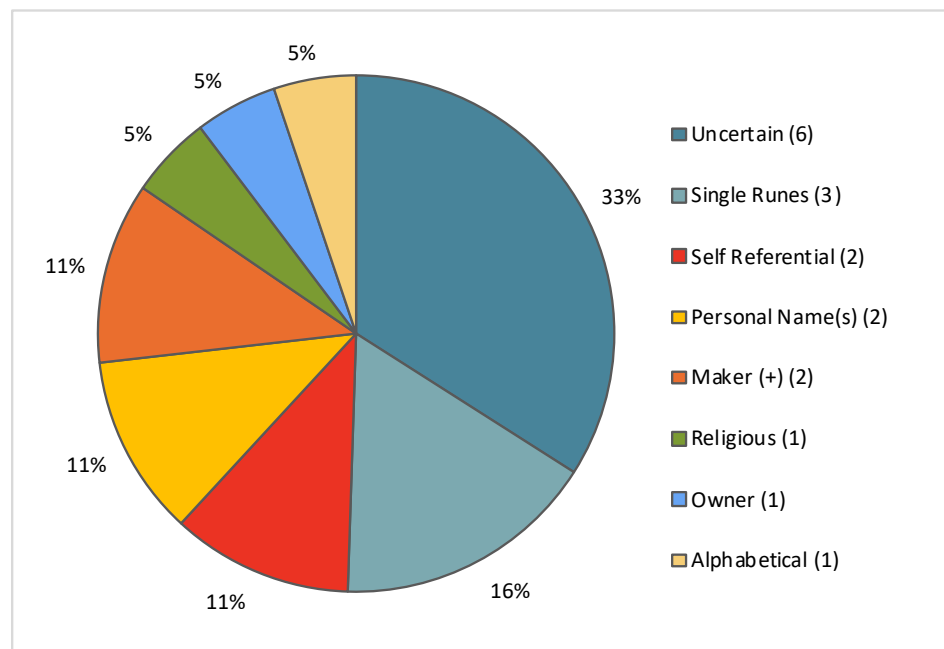


Chart 4.9 Types of Inscriptions on Brooches

There are currently no known Pictish brooches with inscriptions. This may imply different ideas of inscribing material culture, although it is important to consider the lack of Pictish material in general, which is partially due to the fact that there are no furnished Pictish burials (Ritchie 1989, 51), but also

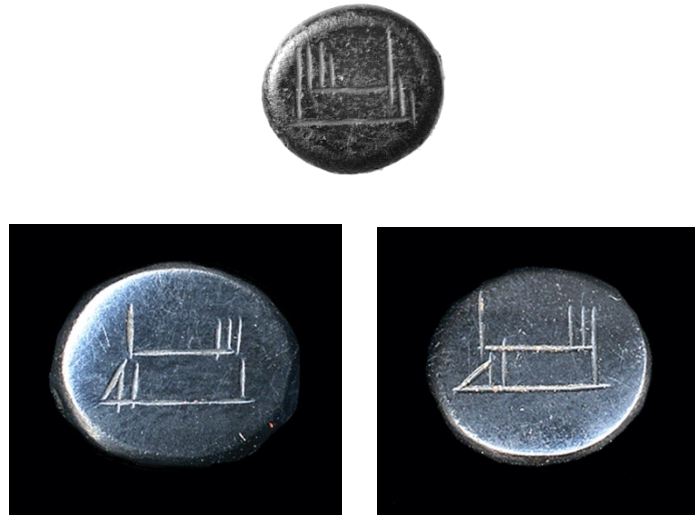
due to differences in metal detecting activity and records in Scotland as opposed to England and Wales in regards to the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

The short and puzzling runic sequences on the early Anglo-Saxon brooches reflect the earliest use of Germanic runes. The beginning of runic writing is widely believed to have been developed by elite Germanic groups to reinforce power and appears in its earliest stages as short words or phrases showing little uniformity and lexical sense carved on the backs of prestigious portable objects (Barnes 2012b, 11; Hines 1998, 188; Hines 2006, 190-191; Looijenga 2003, 27-28). Some of the earliest runic inscriptions can be found on brooches from Continental Migration and Conversion period burials (Barnes 2012b, 33). Evison (1964, 243-244) notes that out of the forty-three Continental runic inscriptions known in 1939, seventeen were on the backs of 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century cruciform, square-headed, radiate-headed brooches, and disc-brooches (Martin 2015; Owen-Crocker 2004, 39; Walton Rogers 2007, 177-198). Most of these early inscriptions are difficult to translate and could be symbolic to show status or even hold ritualistic purposes (Looijenga 2003, 28-29, 93-94). The inscriptions on the **‘Bateman’, Boarley, Wakerley, Dover, and West Heslerton** brooches are examples of such a practice, and may be descriptive terms for the object, or less likely personal names. The naming of the object itself as ‘brooch’, ‘jewel’ or ‘comb’ in inscriptions has been considered amuletic and is commonly seen on other objects including combs and brooches in Scandinavia and on the Continent (Looijenga 2003, 109; MacLeod & Mees 2006, 82; Page 1999a, 169). However, ‘b u h u [i]’ on **Wakerley** is similar to ‘b u b o’ on a 6<sup>th</sup> century bow-brooch from Weimar, Thüringen, Germany and ‘b o b o’ on one from Borgharen, the Netherlands, which are both described as abbreviated masculine names (Looijenga 2003, 261, 279, 287). The single runes on the **Hunstanton, Sleaford, and Willoughby-on-the-Wolds** brooches may be owner’s marks in the form of initials or alternatively ideographs representing their rune-names (Page 1999a, 91).

Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, and Irish societies relied on acts of gift exchange for political and economic alliances, and personal objects of value were also used for collateral, payment, or reparation (see Chapter 7.4.2) (Clarke 2011, 55; Härke 2000, 379; Looijenga 2003, 40; Scull 2011). The alternate translation of the **Harford Farm** brooch, ‘(May) Luda/Ludda made/make amends with the brooch’, may suggest such a scenario (see Chapter 7.4.2) (Bammesberger 2003, 133-135; Looijenga 2003, 279). As highly decorative brooches associated with elite and ecclesiastical individuals (Whitfield 2004), the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century Irish penannular brooches from **Hunterston, Ballyspellan, and Killamery** may have been inscribed to document and solidify a pledge or a social transaction (Etchingam & Swift 2014; O Croinin 2013, 135; Sheehan 2013). In the case of the **Hunterston** brooch, *Melbrigda* may have signed his brooch and filled in the remaining empty spaces before handing it over (Barnes & Page 2006, 217-221; Ní Ghrádaigh 2015, 219), and if Wilson’s (1851, 529) reading of the marks on the second half of the hoop is correct, the recipient of the brooch may have done the same. Diagnostic letters on the **Hunterston** and **Ballyspellan** brooches date the inscriptions to at least a century after the brooches (Barnes 2012b, 172; Holder 1990, 17; Holman 1996, 191-92), indicating that they were precious objects kept in circulation for years possibly as family heirlooms until they were inscribed and henceforth deposited. When placing brooches within the context of social exchange as gifts or legal transactions,

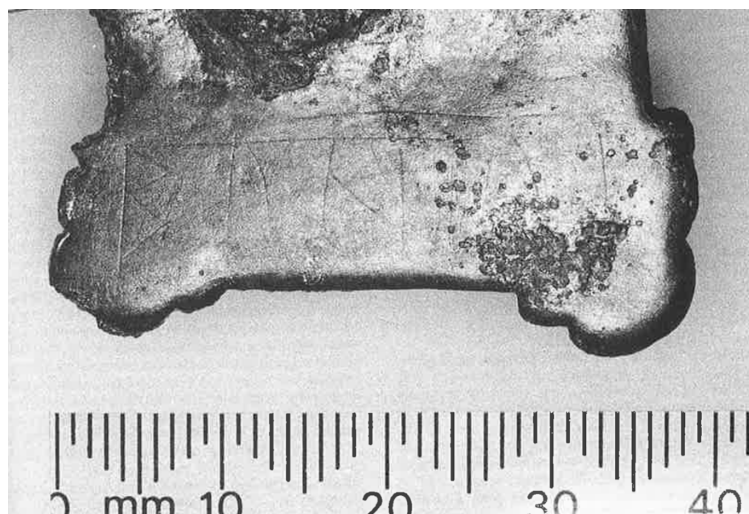


the personal names and ownership inscriptions on early medieval portable objects can take on a new light.



**Figure 4.3** The Ballycotton brooch inscription (top: © The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1875,1211.1, asset no. 458269001) and two Islamic amulet seal made of black jasper (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, left: object no. 1878,1220.117, asset no. 867285001; right: object no. 1878,1220.115, asset no. 867282001).

Religion is directly represented in two of the inscriptions. Along with declarations of owner and maker, the **Ædwen (Sutton)** and **Canterbury** brooches have messages including ‘may the Lord...’ and ‘In the name of the Lord’, which are undoubtedly prayers for protection for **Ædwen** (or her brooch against theft) and **Wudeman** (Okasha 1971, 58-59, 116-117). Also considered amuletic are the two *futhark* inscriptions on the **Penrith** brooch (see Chapter 7.5). The **Ballycotton** brooch represents a collaboration of cultural and religious values possibly brought back to Ireland as a result of 9<sup>th</sup> century Viking activity (Ó Floinn 2009, 234). The Arabic inscription on the central glass seal is an Islamic prayer in the style of a number of other inscribed seals from the Umayyad and early ‘Abbāsid periods that are now in the British Museum and reading ‘we have repented to God’ (fig. 4.3) (Porter & Ager 1999, 212-213). It is comparable to the 9<sup>th</sup> century finger-ring from Birka, Sweden engraved with a similar Islamic text on an amethyst inset and found in a female burial (Brink & Price 2008, 547). Considering the extensive trade routes between Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Kufic inscription was not necessarily written by an Arabic speaker in the Middle East, as Arabic was seen as a dominant language of education and status across the Mediterranean and was commonly spoken by many ethnic groups at the time (Feuerbach & Hanley 2017, 77; Szpiech 2012, 64).



**Figure 4.4** The detail of the runes on the reverse of the Wakerley brooch (Adams & Jackson 1989, 153, plate 3 © Northamptonshire Archaeology, permission to reproduce this has been granted by Andy Chapman, NAS Secretary, Editor and Treasurer).

Certain aspects of the inscriptions including placement, clarity, execution, and wear can give insight into the actions and motives of the inscriber(s). The inscriptions can be considered either primary or secondary, originally designed for the object or as a supplementary addition, although it is often difficult to determine. The majority of brooches in this study have their inscriptions carved onto the reverse (twelve in total). As hidden messages they could be seen as personal reminders to comfort the wearer as well as cautious warnings to the public. Alternatively, the back would be a logical place to inscribe text so that the decorative front would not be tarnished. Five brooches have their inscriptions placed on the front as part of the original or main design, of which the **Canterbury** and **Cuxton** brooches are the only two that were undoubtedly designed for the addition of text. The single runes on the **Sleaford**, **Hunstanton**, and **Willoughby** brooches are also carved onto the front, but in a casual manner suggesting secondary additions. Most of the inscriptions are clean and clearly read, suggesting they were carved shortly before deposition. These include the **Ballyspellan**, **Bateman**, **Hunterston**, and **Penrith** brooches, on which the inscriptions show little to no wear, appearing fresh as if newly carved (Barnes 2012b, 172). The inscriptions on the **Dover**, **Killamery**, and particularly the **Wakerley** brooches (fig. 4.4) are highly faded and worn, suggesting that they had been on the brooch for a while and worn from rubbing against linen. The slight wear on the **Vale of York** fragment suggests that the ogham was inscribed before the brooch was cut as hack-silver, although the wear could be due to depositional side-effects.

The empty spaces on the reverse of the brooches are ideal canvases to place inscriptions, and often the space is used creatively. The **Hunterston** runes purposefully occupy the two undecorated silver panels of the back of the hoop. The remaining empty space is scratched with cross-hatching and zig-zag markings in a likely attempt to deter anyone else from claiming authority over the brooch (fig. 4.5) (Barnes & Page 2006, 217-221; Ní Ghrádaigh 2015, 219). The **Ballyspellan** and **Vale of York** brooches have their ogham stem-lines cleverly creating connections between the reverse of the bosses, a characteristic also seen on the **Kilgulbin** bowl (Section 4.2.4.) (fig. 4.6 and 4.7). This appears to be a

deliberate choice of the inscriber to use two set points as a guide. Along with the incising of text, the **Ædwen** brooch has two triquetras and the **Harford Farm** brooch has an intricate zoomorphic interlace design that was probably carved prior to the inscription (Evison 1987, 48-49) (fig. 4.8).



Figure 4.5 Detail of the reverse of the Hunterston brooch showing the additional incisions (© Trustees of the National Museums Scotland, object no. X.FC 8).



Figure 4.6 The ogham inscription on the reverse of the Vale of York brooch fragment (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 2009,8023.4, asset no. 1188406001)

The **Ballyspellan** ogham texts show disparities between the depth and handwriting styles of the four ogham rows, which suggests that whilst the two parallel rows B and C (fig. 4.7) may have been written by the same hand, the two rows of A and C were written by two separate individuals, also possibly at different times (Personal Observation 2016). As a possible pledge brooch, this would explain the difference in handwriting, presumably the signature of each witness to the transaction. The rows are clear and unworn, indicating that the texts were carved near to the time the brooch was lost or disposed of. Aspects of the **Harford Farm** inscription suggest that *Luda* was the original text and the rest was added at a later date, supported by the fact that the second part seems to have been squeezed into the space whilst *Luda*'s name is larger compared to the remaining twelve runes (fig. 4.8) (Page 1999, 166). An almost similar situation is seen on the back of the **Bateman** brooch, and differences in the placement, form, and intensity of the runes suggest more than one runographer.

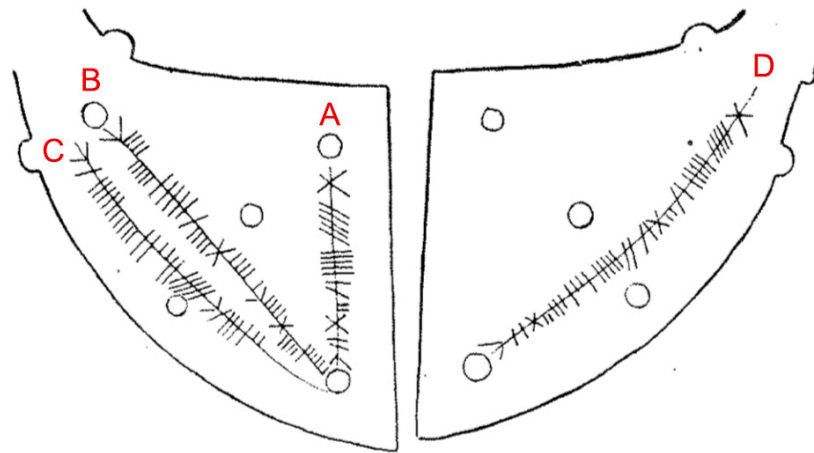


Figure 4.7 The ogham inscriptions on the reverse of the Ballyspellan brooch, labelled A-D (after Coffey 1910, 29, fig. 31).



Figure 4.8 The reverse of the Harford Farm brooch, showing the runic inscription with zoomorphic decoration (Penn 2000, 109, fig. 84 © East Anglian Archaeology CC BY 3.0).

### 4.1.3 Bracteates

Bracteates were seen as prestigious objects inspired by Roman coin medallions and were objects produced exclusively in the Migration Period (AD 400-600) (Gaimster 1992, 2; Hines 1984, 200; Scott 2015, 147). They are small, thin metal discs, between 20 and 30mm in diameter, usually made of gold, that were likely worn as pendants upon the chest, evident from wear on the suspension loops and their placement on the chest of female skeletons in burials (fig. 4.9) (Axboe et al 1985, 21; Behr 2007, 16; Wicker 2005, 50; Wicker 2015, 29). Over 1,000 bracteates are known from hoards,

burials, and as stray finds in Scandinavia, the Continent, and England, displaying approximately 620 different die designs. They have been interpreted as representing the transitional period between Roman and Germanic ideology, in which Roman letters were replaced with Germanic runes and idealised pagan kings took the place of Roman emperors (Behr 2007, 16; Gaimster 1992, 15; Looijenga 2003, 42, 44; Scott 2015, 147, 150; Seebold 1992, 304-07; Wicker 2015, 25, 38). They are seen as high-status objects used to facilitate social and political power in a post-Roman society based on kinship, gift-exchange, and trade of prestigious goods (Gaimster 1995, 12; Looijenga 2003, 39-41). The ten bracteate inscriptions in this study include five in elder futhark or Old English runes (**Binham 604,1, 2, and 3, Undley, Welbeck Hill**) and five in Roman letters (**Binham 630,1, 2, and 3, Hoby with Rotherby, Scalford**) (Table 4.4). In this corpus of texts on portable objects they stand out as integral to the object themselves, as opposed to scratches on the backs of brooches or on fragments of bone. They were planned from the beginning and are entirely primary and essential to the understanding of the objects.

**Table 4.4 Inscribed Bracteates**

Name	Object	Inscription
Binham 604,1	B-BRACTEATE: Gold, 500-600, standing male figure fighting two quadrupeds	AS/EF runes, CGmc/OE: <i>waat</i> or <i>wææt</i> , ‘wet, liquid, drink’ or form of verb <i>witan</i> , ‘to know’
Binham 604,2	B-BRACTEATE: Gold, 500-600, standing male figure fighting two quadrupeds	AS/EF runes, CGmc/OE: <i>waat</i> or <i>wææt</i> , ‘wet, liquid, drink’ or form of verb <i>witan</i> , ‘to know’
Binham 604,3	B-BRACTEATE: Gold, 500-600, standing male figure fighting two quadrupeds	AS/EF runes, CGmc/OE: <i>waat</i> or <i>wææt</i> , ‘wet, liquid, drink’ or form of verb <i>witan</i> , ‘to know’
Binham 630,1	A-BRACTEATE: Gold A-bracteate	Uncertain Roman letters
Binham 630,2	A-BRACTEATE: Gold A-bracteate	Uncertain Roman letters
Binham 630,3	A-BRACTEATE: Gold A-bracteate	Uncertain Roman letters
Hoby with Rotherby	A-BRACTEATE: Gold, 450-600, figure drinking from a horn	Roman letters, Uncertain: O [ . . ] T X C ?
Scalford	A-BRACTEATE: Gold, 450-600, figure drinking from a horn	Roman letters, Uncertain: O [ . . ] T   [ . ] N [ . ] ?
Undley	A-BRACTEATE: Gold, 400-500, male bust in profile	EF/AS runes, CGmc/OE: ‘the password, the kinsmen’s consent’ or ‘howling she-wolf. Reward to a relative’
Welbeck Hill	BRACTEATE: Silver, 550-600, stylistic	EF runes, CGmc/OE: <i>lapu</i> , ‘invitation’





**Figure 4.9 Gold bracteate worn as a pendant from Buckland, Dover (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1963,1108.1, asset no. 755425001)**

The ten bracteates in this corpus represent about 17% of the 65 known bracteates from Anglo-Saxon England (Scott 2015, 148), and a slightly smaller proportion than the over total of approximately 222 bracteates with inscriptions (Wicker 2015, 25). They all date between the early 5<sup>th</sup> to late 6<sup>th</sup> century and are made of gold foil with images depicting male figures, except for the silver **Welbeck Hill** bracteate with a stylised animal or geometric pattern. All of the bracteates could possibly be English made (in particular the silver **Welbeck Hill** bracteate), although they also show iconographic and stylistic similarities to bracteates from northern Germany and Scandinavia (Behr 2007, 21; Behr 2010, 69-70; Behr et al 2014, 54, 69; Hines 1984, 218; Scott 2015, 48). The bracteates from **Hoby with Rotherby (Hoby)**, **Scalford**, and **Undley** were all discovered as stray finds. Alternatively, the **Hoby** find may be connected to a disturbed grave (Scott 2015, 148). Similar to parts of Scandinavia and on the Continent as well as south-eastern England, the **Welbeck Hill** bracteate was discovered in a woman's grave along with additional female-gendered grave-goods (Axboe 2007, 109; Behr 2010, 77; Looijenga 2003, 45; Vierck 1970, 337-39). The six **Binham** bracteates were discovered separately over the course of 10 years in a Norfolk field forming the only known bracteate hoard in England as well as one of the largest collections of Migration period Anglo-Saxon gold in the country (Axboe 2007, 112; Behr et al 2014, 44). The **Binham** finds are a part of a significant 'bracteate cluster' linking East Anglia with a network of economic and political 'central places' in Scandinavia, the Continent, as well as England (Axboe 2007, 112-113; Behr 2007, 19-21; Behr et al 2014, 45; Hedeager 2002, 5).

Three bracteates from **Binham**, Norfolk (604,1, 2, 3), and the two from **Undley**, Suffolk and **Welbeck Hill**, Lincolnshire are inscribed with older futhark and/or futhorc runic inscriptions consisting of short or cryptic sequences interpreted as 'magical', 'evocative', or 'ritualistic' (Hines 2014, 49-52; Looijenga 2003, 194-199, 219-220). Three bracteates from **Binham** (630,1,2,3), and the two from **Hoby with Rotherby** and **Scalford** in Leicestershire display sequences of Roman letters and letter-like motifs that are likely more symbolic than semantic. The artisans of these bracteates may have been illiterate or alternatively, literate individuals who wanted to purposefully imitate Latin coin legends in the same way

that cuneiform was simulated on metal seals from Bronze Age Troy (Houston 2018, 34; Wicker & Williams 2013, 194). Unlike the other portable inscribed objects in this corpus, the bracteate texts are somewhat dissociated from the personal act of writing texts and do not necessarily represent a strong knowledge of literacy, as the inscriptions were cut from dies possibly copied from known formulae that many would be familiar with, and often show odd rune forms or areas of error (Looijenga 2003, 28; Moltke 1985, 114-115). As opposed to inscriptions that are scratched onto the surface of objects, the bracteate inscriptions are generally described as a more ‘commercial’ use of runes in which the script is symbolic instead of communicative and lexical (Antonsen 1987, 20; Looijenga 2003, 44; Moltke 1985, 114-115).



**Figure 4.10** 'Pseudo-cuneiform' on the outer ring of a bronze seal from Bronze Age Troy, with Hieroglyphic Luwian on the inner circle (Houston 2018, 34).

The possible interpretation of Continental Germanic or early Old English *wāt*, ‘liquid’ or ‘drink’ on the three **Binham** bracteates may relate to the common bracteate sequence of ‘a l u’, *alu*, ‘ale’ (Hines 2015, 50-51; Looijenga 2003, 196), also seen on the three **Spong Hill** cremation urns (see Chapter 5.3.2.) (Hills & Penn 1977), as well as the possible reference to alcohol in the **Undley** bracteate’s *medu*, ‘mead’ (Odenstedt 2000, 114). Along with the motifs of figures drinking from horns on the **Hoby** and **Scalford** bracteates (Behr 2011, 102; Scott 2015, 150), the linguistic association with alcohol and gatherings may allude to the importance of feasting and drinking in Germanic societies, in which social and political friendships were facilitated and maintained through gift-giving practices (Frantzen 2014, 34-42; Gaimster 1992, 13-17; Lindeberg 1997, 103; Looijenga 2003, 40-41, 44). Furthermore, the **Welbeck Hill** bracteate contains the sequence ‘l a þ’, translated as *lapu*, ‘invitation’, seen a number of bracteates from Scandinavia and interpreted as an invitation to some sort of gathering (Axboe 2007, 79; Looijenga 2003, 199; Wicker & Williams 2013, 190). Bracteates could be seen as the diplomatic gifts themselves (see Chapter 7.4.2), given from leaders to their followers, or perhaps they were worn at these ceremonial events to display identity (Axboe 2007, 110-111; Behr 2007; Lindeberg 1997, 103). Their inscriptions, therefore, may have been more symbolic than lexical, meant to stand for ritualistic and aristocratic ideas rather than to be ‘read’ in the modern sense of the word.

### 4.1.4 Decorative Dress-Fittings

The ten objects categorised as decorative dress-fittings include four strap-ends, three hooked-tags, a belt-buckle, linked-pin spacer plate, and a purse-mount. These objects were once attached to clothing or dress accessories for functional and ornamental purposes (Table 4.5). Strap-ends are broadly defined as multi-purpose objects fastened onto the ends of textile or leather straps, belts, or garters to prevent fraying (Thomas 2000, 37). A similar multi-purpose purpose corresponds to hooked-tags, except these diminutive objects were sewn onto textile or leather and made with a hooked terminal for fastening pieces together (Owen-Crocker 2006, 154-155). The objects are highly individualised in regard to decoration, form, and inscription. They are all Anglo-Saxon in style, text, and are given dates placed firmly in Anglo-Saxon and Viking-Age England (500-1100 AD). Six objects are inscribed with Anglo-Saxon or older futhark runes (**Elsted, Ipswich, Long Buckby, Morton, Wardley, Watchfield**) and four in Roman letters (**Crewkerne, Nuffield, Rome I and II**) (Chart 4.10). The languages include six in Old English (**Crewkerne, Elsted, Ipswich, Long Buckby, Nuffield, Wardley**), one in Continental Germanic or early Old English (**Watchfield**), two in Latin (**Rome I and II**), and one in an indecipherable language (**Morton**) (Chart 4.11). The inscriptions include assertions of ownership, personal names, dedication, and three that are too fragmented or ambiguous to translate. The inscribed dress fittings form a group of Anglo-Saxon accessories and embellishments that were worn as practical and valued possessions. As objects with their own distinctive style, the inscriptions increase and demonstrate their value with private and public messages marking the objects as property whilst expressing individual identity and faith.

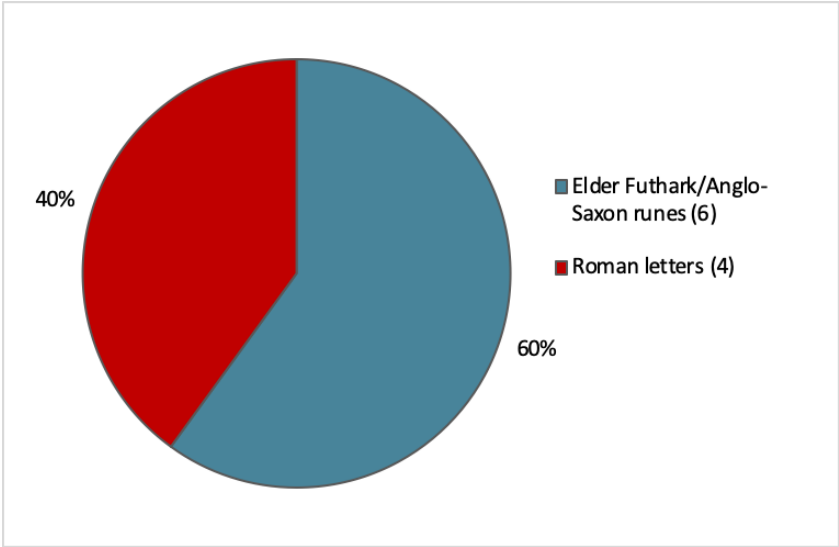


Chart 4.10 Scripts on the Inscribed Decorative Dress-Fittings

Table 4.5 Inscribed Dress-Fittings

Name	Object	Inscription
Crewkerne	STRAP END: Lead, 900-1100, decorated	Roman letters, OE: A) 'Wulfstan' B) 'owns me'
Elsted	STRAP-END: Silver, 800-925, decorated	AS runes, OE: 'Th[-]æflæd'



Ipswich	BELT-BUCKLE: Lead, 700-800, undecorated	AS runes, OE: A) 'ʃf o r' or 'ʃf e r' B) 'ʃo i get' or 'ʃo ueb' or 'ʃoe eb' or 'ʃoeg e b'
Long Buckby	STRAP-END: Gilded silver, 700-800, decorated	AS runes, OE: Possibly part of an OE PN, '-berht' or '-briht'
Morton	HOOKED-TAG: Gilded copper-alloy, 700-900, decorated	AS runes, Uncertain: 'm y n (r/u)'
Nuffield	STRAP-END: Gilded silver and niello, 900-1000, decorated	Roman letters, OE: '-th owns me'
Rome (x2)	HOOKED-TAGS (2): Silver and niello, 900-1000, decorated	Roman letters, Latin: A) '+Domno Mar-' B) '-ino Papa'
Wardley	LINKED-PIN SPACER PLATE: Copper-alloy, 700-900, undecorated	AS runes, OE: 'Ceolburg'
Watchfield	PURSE MOUNT: Copper-alloy, 520-570, undecorated	EF runes, CGmc/OE: 'For Hariboki, from Wusa' or 'Hariboki's (possession), this one' or 'Hariboki's purse'

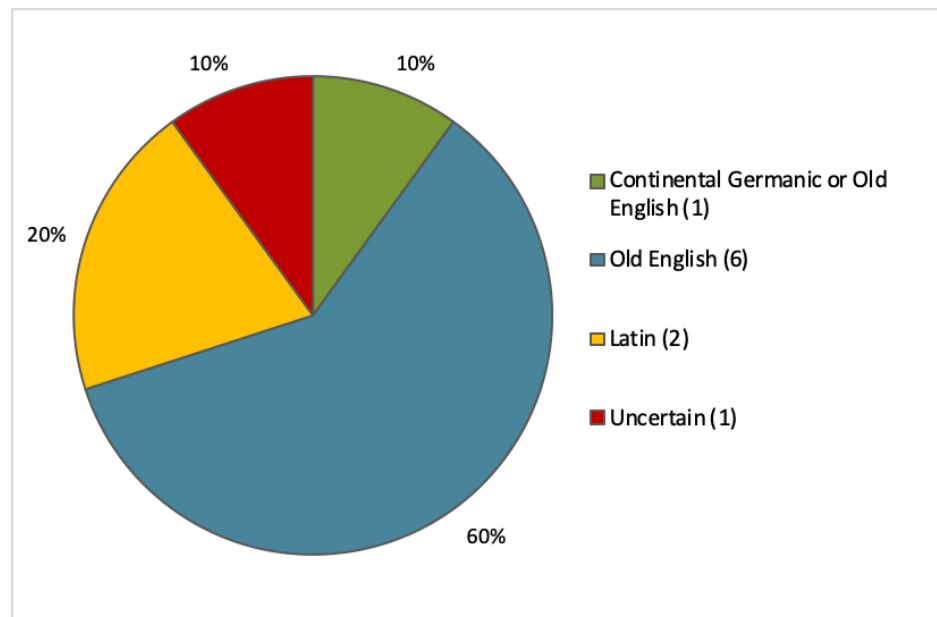


Chart 4.11 Languages on the Inscribed Decorative Dress-Fittings

The ten inscribed dress fittings were all discovered in England apart from the two 10<sup>th</sup> century hooked-tags from **Rome**, Italy, which were found in an Anglo-Saxon coin hoard (Graham-Campbell & Okasha 1991). Six of the English objects were found as stray finds (**Crewkerne**, **Elsted**, **Long Buckby**, **Morton**, **Nuffield**, **Wardley**), one was found through controlled excavation of an Anglo-Saxon settlement in **Ipswich**, Suffolk (Hilts 2013) and one comes from a male grave in the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery of **Watchfield**, Oxfordshire (Scull 1992). Although decorative dress fittings are found in all archaeological contexts (Hadley 2006, 123; Owen-Crocker 2006, 154-155; Thomas 2009, 17; Webster & Backhouse 1991, 235), the number of stray finds is consistently growing through metal detecting activity as reported by the Portable Antiquities Scheme. The PAS currently lists over 7,000 early medieval strap-ends, fittings, mounts, and hooked-tags found as stray finds in England and Wales,

including the four inscribed strap-ends and one linked-pin spacer plate in this thesis (PAS Ref SOMDOR-0DB481; SUR-219F9A; SUR-970F39; NARC677; LEIC-3EBE93). The significance of these objects as stray finds is supportive of their identification as small accessories for items of dress, lost in the same way as a button may pop off of a shirt. For Continental comparisons, Looijenga (2003, 269) lists seven strap-ends, fittings, and belt-buckles from the early Continental runic corpus, of which most are inscribed with personal names or words of protection including one of the oldest datable runic objects from the Vimose bog (RuneS-Datenbank Fyn 16; Moltke 1985, 91). Similar in shape and inscription to the **Crewkerne** strap-end is a 9<sup>th</sup> century Frankish strap-end from Notmark, Denmark, converted into a Viking brooch and inscribed on one face in Latin with Roman letters, 'I, in God's name, Ermadus made me' (fig. 11) (Roesdahl & Wilson 1992, 258, no. 122; Thomas *et al* 2008, 178).



Figure 4.11 Strap-end from Notmark, Denmark, c. 800 AD, inscribed with a Latin inscription and remade into a brooch (© Nationalmuseet Danmark, object no. 14201, photograph by Roberto Fortuna and Kira Ursem CC-BY-SA)

The inscriptions show a common element of placing personal names on dress fittings to imply ownership or personal affiliation. Five of the inscriptions contain feminine or masculine Old English names either by themselves or in the Anglo-Saxon self-referential formula 'X owns me' (Thomas *et al* 2008, PAS Ref SOMDOR-0DB481; Williams 2014, PAS Ref SUR-970F39). The **Watchfield** purse mount contains a sequence in older futhorc runes and dates between 520 and 570 AD, making it the earliest dated object in this category (Page 1999a, 182). The runes contain the Continental Germanic or early Old English masculine name *Hariboki* along with four runes interpreted as 'possession', 'purse' or a feminine name *Wusa* (Looijenga 2003, 287-289). The fitting was found in a male grave with assemblages suggesting a Continental origin, thus it cannot be said whether its runes were carved upon its arrival in England or prior (Page 1999a, 182). Split between the two hooked-tags from the **Rome** Forum hoard is an inscription translated as a dedicatory text to Pope Marinus II (942-946) (Graham-Campbell & Okasha 1991; Okasha 1992a, 53). As fasteners of the bag which held the hoard, the tags were probably commissioned in England and inscribed to document and personalise a payment to the Pope himself (Graham-Campbell & Okasha 1991, 228-229).

All of the texts are likely primary and part of the object's original design, except for the **Elsted** strap-end, whose text is inscribed lightly on the reverse suggesting it was a secondary addition. Also of interest is the **Ipswich** belt-buckle inscription. The presence of empty rivet holes on the strip indicates

that it was originally attached to another object before it became a belt-buckle plate (Hilts 20130). Its confusing sequence of runes is reminiscent of the amuletic runic texts on folded pieces of lead (**Dunton, Shropham, St Benets**) as well as the ‘gibberish’ lines of text mentioned in Anglo-Saxon charm books meant to protect against illness and supernatural beings (see Chapter 6.2.2) (Grattan & Singer 1952). Perhaps the **Ipswich** inscription was originally a runic charm, which was then re-used as a personal adornment to increase efficacy.

Like the **Elsted** inscription, the text on the **Nuffield** strap-end is also carved onto the reverse, but the letters are nielloed and sharing the space with a carving of the Agnus Dei, implying that they were planned from the onset, or at the very least, not casually incised (Williams 2014, PAS Ref SUR-970F39). As a strap-end, the object from **Nuffield** would have been affixed to a strap of textile or leather along one edge, and, theoretically, if the strap hung off of the body, both sides of the metal object could have been visible. In this case, although the inscription is placed on the reverse of the **Nuffield** strap-end, it was not necessarily hidden. Similarly, the **Elsted** strap-end could be visible as well if it hung loosely on the outside of the body. The visibility of the texts on the decorative dress-fittings, although all conceivably within eye-sight and not completely hidden in regard to their position, is limited due to the small size of the objects. In addition, where and how the fittings were affixed would also hinder whether or not the objects and their inscriptions were seen by the public eye, as they could easily be covered by an article of clothing. Thus, the inscriptions could be private reminders for those who wore them, as well as public, making an impression not by a passing glance, but when thoughtful and purposeful attention was given to the objects by others.

A number of objects under the category of unidentified metal including the **Froglands** object, **Hinckley** disc, **Limpsfield Grange** disc, and the **Mildenhall** object (see Chapter 6.2.1) may have originally served as strap-ends or decorative mounts on clothing or dress accessories, although their functions are yet unidentified. Also inscribed with Anglo-Saxon runes is a newly found silver strap end from King’s Somborne, Hampshire, not included due to its late discovery in regard to the completion of this thesis (fig. 4.12) (John Hines email communication 2019, PAS Ref SUR-4A9C55). There are many reasons why text would be added to strap-ends, hooked-tags, or a purse mount, including personal security to know an object was labelled in case of loss or theft. When considering the large number of strap-ends, mounts, and dress fittings listed by the PAS and by Gabor Thomas (2000), the range of decoration and form is highly varied, with each object having distinctive characteristics. The inscriptions would have held mostly a private and secret significance to the wearer or owner of the objects, and the value of these small objects as well as the status of the wearer would have been enhanced by the addition of text.

#### 4.1.5 Arm-Rings

The five inscribed arm-rings were found as components of Viking-Age hoards in northern Ireland and Scotland (Table 4.6). Their form and decoration identify them as 9<sup>th</sup> century Hiberno-Norse broad-band arm-rings, a type of silver ornament frequently found in Viking-age hoards in Britain and Ireland, particularly the Irish Sea region, as well as in Scandinavia (Graham-Campbell & Sheehan 1995,

776; Graham-Campbell 2017, 101). Sheehan (2011, 95-98) counts over 141 silver broad-band arm-rings from Ireland, over 200 from Britain (of which the Cuerdale hoard has 117 hack-silver fragments), and around fifty from Scandinavia. These objects come from approximately forty-five hoards and assemblages in Ireland, over twenty in Britain (including Wales), and at least twenty-one in Scandinavia, demonstrating that Ireland was the centre of production outside of Scandinavia (Sheehan 2011, 98). As hoard deposits they are seen as complete objects or cut up as hacksilver, decorated or undecorated, and either in penannular arm-ring form or hammered flat (Sheehan 2009, 68). Although broad-band arm-rings were worn as personal adornments, they were also manufactured in large amounts for currency as part of the Viking-age bullion economy, made out of ingots and adjusted to a specific weight (Ager & Graham-Campbell 2009, 48; Sheehan 2009, 67; Sheehan 2011, 99). Most arm-rings are decorated with geometric and linear stamped patterns. Undecorated and flattened arm-rings suggest that they were made into hack-silver depots before reaching the final stage of being formed into jewellery (Ager & Graham-Campbell 2009, 46-47; Sheehan 2009, 68). The five arm-rings in this corpus are all inscribed with short runic texts likely denoting abbreviations of personal names, and as will be discussed below, were probably for identification purposes for future retrieval.

**Table 4.6 Inscribed Arm-Rings**

Name	Transliteration	Translation
Galloway SF 30	ARM-RING: Silver, 800-1000, undecorated	AS runes, OE: 'b er'
Galloway SF 53	ARM-RING: Silver, 800-1000, undecorated	AS runes, OE: 't il'
Galloway SF 54	ARM-RING: Silver, 800-1000, decorated	AS runes, OE: 'd...i s i i g n æ f'
Galloway SF 59	ARM-RING: Silver, 800-1000, undecorated	AS runes, OE: 'ed' or 'ld'
Roosky	ARM-RING: Silver, 850-950, decorated	Runic or Roman 'R'

Out of approximately 400 currently known complete or fragmentary Hiberno-Norse arm-rings in Britain and Ireland, only five are known to be inscribed with text (with another recently discovered associated with the Galloway hoard), and this study is unaware of any arm-rings in Scandinavia that are inscribed. Included in this study are four rings from the **Galloway** hoard, found in a field in Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland, composed of over 100 objects including silver ingots, arm-rings, and Anglo-Saxon ornaments (Graham-Campbell 2017). The four arm-rings are inscribed with sequences of Anglo-Saxon runes and were discovered along with other uninscribed arm-rings. The inscription on the larger **Galloway** arm-ring (**SF 54**) possibly reads, 'd[...]i s i i g n æ f' (author's observation), which could be a personal name. The three smaller arm-rings (**SF 59, 53, 30**) have inscriptions composed of short sequences incorporating bind-runes and may represent a unique or creative personal signature (Stoklund 2006, 194-195). The same may apply to the inscription on the fifth arm-ring from a small hoard of four silver arm-rings from **Roosky**, Co. Donegal, which is the only inscribed arm-ring from Ireland (Barnes et al 1997, 59-61). The inscription on the **Roosky** arm-ring is likely a runic 'R', but whether it is Norse or Anglo-Saxon is uncertain, and it has also been suggested to be a Roman letter 'R'. However,

considering the context of the arm-ring it is reasonable to suggest that it is in fact runic, and likely Norse.

The Anglo-Saxon runes on the Hiberno-Norse arm-rings from a Viking hoard in Scotland create an interesting discussion about the cultural relationships surrounding the Irish Sea region. The largest **Galloway** arm-ring (**sf 54**) as well as the **Roosky** ring are either fully or partially penannular and decorated on one face with punched geometric patterns, suggesting that they were seen as jewellery prior to deposition. The other three **Galloway** arm-rings may not have been seen as personal adornments at all, as they are undecorated apart from their short runic inscriptions and are either flat or have one end folded over. As suggested by Martin Goldberg at National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh (Goldberg pers. comms. 6 September 2018), the different folding patterns of the four inscribed arm-rings create matches with similar folds on the uninscribed examples found in the hoard. As each runic arm-ring is folded differently, he suggests that the runes represent four names of the individuals responsible for burying the hoard and the folding techniques are a means of identifying property for future retrieval. A fifth runic inscription has recently been identified on another arm-ring displaced from the **Galloway** hoard, revealing the full Old English masculine name Egbert (Martin Goldberg pers comms 6 September 2018; Elisabeth Okasha email communication; Parsons 2019). This easily read inscription corroborates the theory that the arm-rings were inscribed with the names of the individuals who were associated with burying the hoard, and who intended to retrieve their treasure at some point after dividing it into equal shares.

#### 4.1.6 Dress-Pins

The four dress pins are complete or incomplete pins from Anglo-Saxon linked-pin suites, a style of female dress in 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century England in which two or three disc-headed pins were worn across the chest linked together by a chain (fig. 4.13) (Owen-Crocker 2004, 14; Page 1999a, 30; Tester et al 2014, 237). Linked pins can be found throughout England in all contexts including burials and as stray finds (Geake 1997, 35-36). The four inscribed pins show no remarkable distribution pattern except for a general concentration in eastern England. The three copper-alloy pins from **Malton**, **Bardney**, and **Cumwhitton** were found as stray finds and the silver pin from **Brandon** was discovered during excavations of the high-status site of Brandon, Suffolk (Looijenga 2003, 294; Proctor 2015, PAS Ref DUR-79B856; Prosser 2018, PAS Ref LANCUM-EEFFFB). All four pin-heads date between the 8<sup>th</sup> and early 9<sup>th</sup> centuries and display versions of the Anglo-Saxon *futhorc*, suggesting there was a fashionable trend for Anglo-Saxon women to display knowledge of, or access to, literacy (Table 4.7). As runic alphabets are commonly found on items of portable personal value and are believed to have magic connotations, the wearing of *futhorc* sequences could possibly be intended to protect the wearer (Page 2014, 261). Furthermore, *futhorc* sequences in Old English manuscripts shed light onto the lives of these portable inscribed objects as well as the identities of the people who wore them.



Figure 4.12 The River Witham linked-pin suite (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1858,1116.4, asset no. 34873001)

Table 4.7 Inscribed Dress-Pins

Name	Transliteration	Translation
Bardney	PIN-HEAD: Gilded copper-alloy, 700-800	AS runes, OE: <i>xstbemlŋdæa</i> 11 letters of the futhorc alphabet
Brandon	PIN: Gilded silver, 750-850, decorated	AS runes, OE: <i>futhorcjwhnījpxs</i> 16 letters of the futhorc alphabet
Cumwhitton	PIN-HEAD: Gilded copper-alloy, 700-800	AS runes, OE: <i>fuporcehg[.]</i> 9-10 letters of the futhorc alphabet
Malton	PIN-HEAD: Gilded copper-alloy, 600-800	AS runes, OE: <i>fuporcglæa</i> 7 letters of the futhorc alphabet

The three pin-heads from **Bardney** in Lincolnshire, **Cumwhitton** in Cumbria, and **Malton** in North Yorkshire show a striking homogeneity in design, text, and find-context (fig. 4.14). All three were found as stray finds and are gilded copper-alloy with runic letters of the Anglo-Saxon *futhorc* engraved around a central circular inset (which are missing) (Proctor 2015; Looijenga 2003, 294; Prosser 2018). The letters are carefully and expertly written with the letters facing inwards. The object that stands apart is the gilded silver pin from **Brandon**, which appears to have been modified to be a linked-pin with the addition of a perforation at its right side (Tester et al 2014, 238). Instead of being decorated with a runic *futhorc*, its front face is embellished with interlace beasts facing each other. Its sixteen-letter futhorc is scratched secondarily onto the reverse broken up in two parallel rows beginning with ‘f u þ o r c’ (Page 2014, 260). Its inscription is presumably secondary, and when compared to the other three pins, the text is entirely private and personal. Where the **Cumwhitton**, **Bardney**, and **Malton** *futhorcs* are meant to be seen and recognised, the writer of the **Brandon** futhorc had a more intimate reason for the text.



Figure 4.13 Rune-Inscribed Linked-Pin-Heads from Bardney (Proctor 2015, PAS Ref. DUR-79B856 © Durham County Council CC BY 2.0), Cumwhitton (PAS Ref. LANCUM-EEFFFB © The Portable Antiquities Scheme CC BY 2.0), and Malton (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 2000,0508.1, asset no. 148715001)

Anglo-Saxon runes began to appear in 8<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts in creative ways presumably in an attempt to convert the pagan Anglo-Saxons (see Chapter 7.5) (Colgrave & Mynors 1969, i.30; Halsall 1981, 15; Halsall 1989, 486). Full runic *futhorcs* were written on their own or broken up in poetic stanzas detailing their Roman letter equivalents (Derolez 1954, 2; Parsons 1994, 196). Certain characteristics of the runes on the **Malton**, **Bardney**, and **Cumwhitton** pins feature influence of insular manuscript bookhand, including seriffed runes and rounded letters, indicating that the scribes had training in writing Roman capitals (Halsall 1981, 18; Page 1987b, 284; Parsons 1994, 206). As female gendered dress accessories, the identity of those who wore these small, yet conspicuous pins could be literate or illiterate women showing off their Christian faith. The hidden and personally written runic *futhorc* on the **Brandon** pin would have been less for immediate public discernment and more for private meditation. There is the possibility that the runes were carved after the pin went out of use, perhaps in an effort to practice the script considering that the *futhorc* is incomplete and contains errors (Page 2014, 261). Page suggests this is because the rest of the *futhorc* was written on a second pin from the same set (2014, 261), which is possible as the *futhorc* on the **Malton** pin begins with the fifteenth letter. Perhaps the **Malton** pin had a matching companion that presented the traditional first six letters of ‘f u þ o r c’.

In this study of portable inscribed objects, the four dress pins in their diversity and homogeneity, represent a Christian adoption of pagan Old English runes, combining the supernatural power of the old script with the divine power of Christ. They exemplify a new handling of Old English runes wherein the script was adapted for handwriting in manuscripts and assimilated into a Latin milieu. The dress pins were likely owned and worn by elite women wishing to express their new-found faith in their own Germanic customs, asserting their knowledge of literacy in public and private ways.

### 4.1.7 Pendants and Beads

The four objects categorised as pendants are identified by the presence of suspension holes indicating that they were worn or hung in some manner, presumably upon the body (Table 4.8). The four objects are diverse, showing very little homogeneity except for a similar purpose as magical or religious amulets. Coming from significant multi-period and Norse sites in Orkney, the **Brough of Birsay** bear tooth and the **Deerness** metal strip are inscribed with Scandinavian runes (Curle 1982; Morris 1987; Morris & Emery 1986). Both objects are exceptional in Britain and Ireland, but bear close comparisons to objects, both inscribed and uninscribed, in Scandinavia. Also unparalleled are the amber bead from a private collection in **Ennis**, Co. Clare, Ireland inscribed with ogham, and the lead pendant found as a stray find in **Weasenham**, Norfolk with Roman letters. Although the semantic meaning behind two of the texts are ambiguous, all four objects are understood to have some amuletic significance as individual material items and via their inscriptions. They represent a tradition of wearing textual charms for supernatural guidance, a custom that is deep rooted in insular and Continental cultures (Gräslund 1972-73; Olesen 2010; Pereswetoff-Morath 2017; Simek 2011; Zilmer 2013).

**Table 4.8 Inscribed Pendants and Bead**

Name	Transliteration	Translation
Brough of Birsay	BEAR'S TOOTH: Polished, perforated, 1000-1200, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, ON: <i>futhar[k]</i> 6 letters of the futhark alphabet
Deerness	METAL STRIP: Copper-alloy, perforated, 1000-1100, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, ON: A) <i>rnuar</i> , could be <i>runar</i> , 'runes'. <i>kman</i> , <i>(e)k man</i> , 'I remember'. <i>rtkikpuun</i> , could be <i>[bo]rt gekk(t)</i> <i>pú nú</i> , 'away you went now?' B) Uncertain
Ennis	BEAD: Amber, c.400-600, undecorated	Ogham, Uncertain: ATUCML, AT[H/U]A[T/C], or ML[B/U]
Weasenham	PENDANT: Lead, 950-1100, sub-rectangular, suspension loop	Roman letters, Latin: '+This name of God in Hebrew...'

The inscribed pendants demonstrate the dichotomy between 'pagan' and 'Christian' belief systems and provide evidence for cross-cultural contact and migration. The **Brough of Birsay** and **Deerness** pendants could very likely be imports from Scandinavia, although the location and time at which their inscriptions were written is questionable (Barnes & Page 2006, 190). Direct comparisons to the **Brough of Birsay** amulet can be seen in Scandinavia in both organic and inorganic material. A 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century uninscribed bear's tooth 'amulet' from Århus, Denmark is in the Moesgaard Museum in Højbjerg (Author's Observation, Museum No. 1600.IN), and a bear's tooth was found in a child's grave in Birka, Sweden (Fuglesang 1989, 22; Gräslund 1972-73, 170). More common are miniature bronze bear tooth amulet pendants from late Iron Age women's graves in Finland and Latvia that hung at the waist (fig. 4.15) (Kivisalo 2008; Roesahl & Wilson 1992, 290, no 237). The **Brough of Birsay** tooth only bear tooth pendant currently known anywhere with an inscription, and considering the evidence, it probably is of Scandinavian origin. With a *futhark* inscription, the **Brough of Birsay** tooth is identified



as an amulet pendant, although the inclination of labelling a *fubork* as ‘magic’ is cautioned by some, as one could also represent writing practice, casual writing, or decoration (Barnes & Page 2006, 190; Curle 1982, 59-60). However, written on an object already treated with a perception of supernatural power, the inscription on the bear tooth surely carries some level of talismanic importance.



Figure 4.14 Bronze bear-tooth pendants from Finland, 800-1050 AD. (National Board of Antiquities Picture Collections provided by Finna © Finnish Heritage Agency - Musketi CC BY 4.0, object no. KM15131:3, Archaeological Artefacts Collection)

The **Deerness** pendant fits in well with the corpus of Scandinavian runic amulets (Olesen 2010; Pereswetoff-Morath 2017). Pereswetoff-Morath (2017, 34-37) counts 46 inscribed pendant amulets, mostly made of copper-alloy, from settlement sites in Sweden (32), Denmark (8), Russia (3), and one from the British Isles (**Deerness**). The inscriptions are largely uninterpreted, with only nineteen that are translated and 27 that are possibly non-lexical or are too damaged to interpret (Pereswetoff-Morath 2017, 38). The **Deerness** inscription is described as an unconventional inscription with encrypted runes with the possible phrases ‘runar’, ‘away you went now’, and ‘I remember’ (Pereswetoff-Morath 2017, 255). A 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century runic pendant from Hovgården at Adelsö, Sweden (fig. 4.16), displays a combination of conventional and unconventional rune-forms in a largely untranslated inscription (Pereswetoff-Morath 2017, 206-208). The Hovgården runes resemble runes on the **Deerness** pendant, including sequences of **þu**, although the **Deerness** runes more closely parallel the complex twig and bind-runes seen on the walls in Maeshowe, Orkney (Pereswetoff-Morath 2017, 255), possibly suggesting a local variation. Other long-shaped pendants with obscure runic inscriptions, some with two horizontal rows like the **Deerness** pendant, are known from Denmark including at Gyldensgård, Roskilde, and Bornholm (Olesen 2010, 163-164).

Also possibly amuletic is the uninterpreted ogham inscription on the **Ennis** bead. Macalister (1945, no. 53) claims the text is a ‘magical formula to aid childbirth’, although this is largely discounted. Not much is known about this object and some have questioned its authenticity and early medieval date (Holder 1990, 30). Its inscription is described as non-lexical in that it does not give a recognisable word or name and is therefore defined as cryptic ogham (Holder 1990, 27). Amber beads are plentiful from prehistoric to early medieval contexts in Ireland, cut from amber likely imported from

the Baltic or the east coast of Britain (Briggs 1997; Holder 1990, 29; O’Kelly & O’Kelly 1989, 186, 280). It is possible that the **Ennis** bead may be a piece of amber from the Bronze Age, which was reused in the early Christian era as an historical object of amuletic power.



**Figure 4.15** The Deerness pendant (top, Gerrard et al 2010, 11, fig. 13, photograph by Pieta Greaves) and the Hovgården runic pendant (bottom, Swedish Historiska Museet CC BY 2.5 SE, object no. 1136755, photo by Gabriel Hildebrand 2013-12-04)

The lead pendant from **Weasenham**, Norfolk is the only pendant written in Latin with Roman letters and the only one with a readable sequence, although most of the text is damaged (Okasha & Youngs 2003). Its purpose and exact use are questionable, although its suspension loop, Christian text, and accompanying crucifixion scene on the opposite face indicates that it was seen as a religious amulet (Okasha & Youngs 2003, 229). The readable portion of the inscription is a religious phrase. It is conceivable that the pendant was worn about the neck as instructed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Saxon *Lacnunga*, a medical book telling one to wear prayers written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin around the neck in order to heal illnesses (Cameron 1993, 134; Grattan & Singer 1952, 188-9; Okasha & Youngs 2003, 229). The choice of lead for the pendant instead of a precious metal is suggested by Okasha and Youngs (2003, 230) to signify a religious vow of poverty. Further discussed in Chapter 5.3.1, lead is a material commonly used for funerary plaques, crosses, and amulets in England, on the Continent, and in Scandinavia, and are oftentimes inscribed with Christian texts for protection, healing, and absolution (Mitchell 2011, 45; Moretti 2015, 114; Simek 2011; Zilmer 2013). The use of lead could be due to its durable yet easy-to-carve nature, or perhaps it was also considered to have supernatural powers (Simek 2011, 45-46). Considering this, the **Weasenham** pendant was probably worn by a pious individual for

protective purposes, whether against illnesses or simply for a symbolic representation of their faith (Okasha & Youngs 2003, 230).

### 4.1.8 ‘Work-Box’

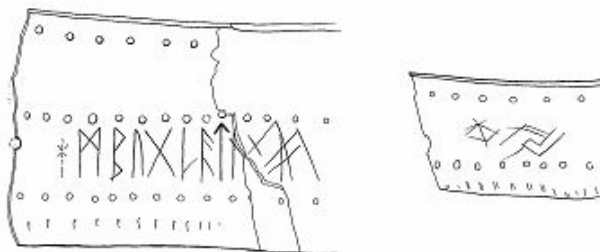
The inscribed cylindrical box from **Wolverton**, Buckinghamshire was found in a female inhumation burial placed at the right knee of the skeleton and held a chatelaine, beads, iron box mounts, and silver pendants (Tyrell 2010, PAS ref BUC-337D72). It is a type of object found in 7<sup>th</sup> century female Anglo-Saxon graves and discussed as ‘work-boxes’, ‘thread-boxes’, ‘relic-boxes’, and ‘amulet-boxes’ that were hung at the waist by a chatelaine (Glørstad 2018, 115-121; Hills 2011; Meaney 1981, 194; Owen-Crocker 2004, 156; Penn 2000, 62; Walton Rogers 2007, 135). Over 50 of these copper-alloy objects are known in Anglo-Saxon England showing a slight concentration in Kent, and similar boxes come from female graves in Scandinavia (Glørstad 2018; Hills 2011, 14). The original description of these items as ‘work-boxes’ derives from the fact that they often carry bits of thread, needles, and textiles as well as plant remains (Evison 1987, 106; Owen-Crocker 2005, 156). The contents of these boxes have also been interpreted as pagan amulets, Christian relics, or medicinal objects including herbs and cloth symbolising women’s role in society as textile producers or healers (Crowfoot 1990, 51; Glørstad 2018, 117, 120; Grattan & Singer 1952, 104-105, 188-189; Hills 2011, 16; Meaney 1981, 189; Owen-Crocker 2004, 156). Contextually and stylistically the **Wolverton** box fits in well with the corpus of Anglo-Saxon work-boxes, but its Anglo-Saxon runes sets it apart as the only one with an inscription.

**Table 4.9 Inscribed ‘Work-Box’**

Name	Object	Inscription
Wolverton	BOX: Copper-alloy, 650-700, cylindrical container	AS runes, OE: ‘m b u g [i] [æc] t n’

Along with the other ‘work-boxes’ in England and Scandinavia, the **Wolverton** box represents a continuation in the Conversion period of a classical and antiquarian tradition of the use of small personal containers for holding sacred relics and practical items (Glørstad 2018, 118; Hills 2011; Wamers 1999). The inscription on the **Wolverton** box is largely uninterpreted but has been suggested to be a personal name (Table 4.9) (Milton Keynes Council 2016). Its runes appear to read ‘m b u g i’ before a confusing set of bind-runes and incisions (fig. 4.17). It would also be reasonable to suggest that the inscription may be a cryptic amuletic text, considering one of the interpretations of these boxes as an amulet box. Additional geometric incisions are on a separate portion of the body, resembling casual ‘doodles’, suggesting that the addition of the text may have been a casual and secondary action. Some Anglo-Saxon work-boxes have equal-armed cross designs, like a box from North Leigh, Oxfordshire (Geake 1997, 34), and the fact that these boxes did not appear in England until the Conversion period does imply some Christian association, whether direct or indirect (Glørstad 2018, 19; Owen-Crocker 2004, 156). No feature of the **Wolverton** box shows an immediate Christian or amuletic association and its contents are just as inconclusive, although if a Christian influence can be applied, the

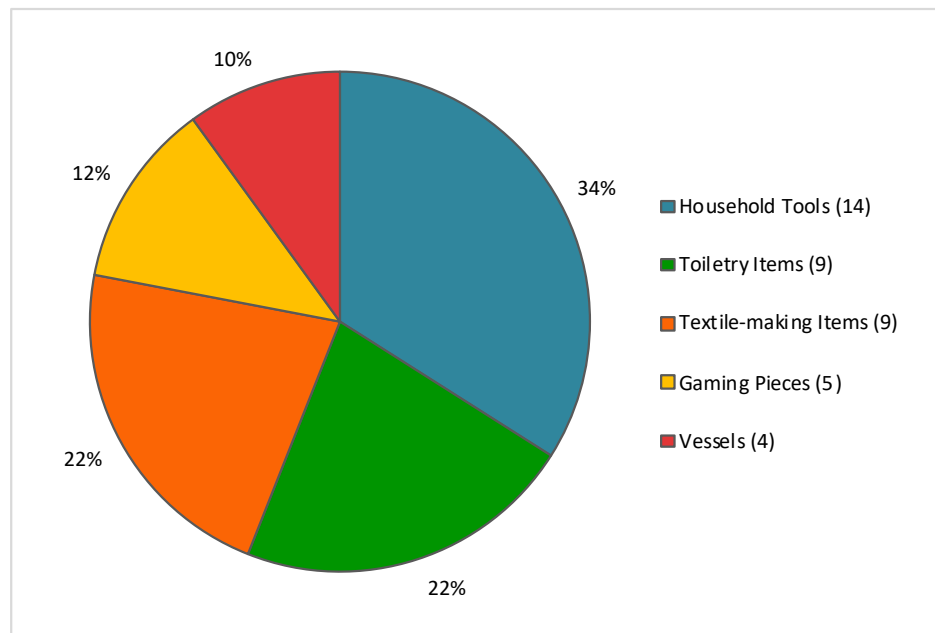
**Wolverton** box may be seen alongside the inscribed linked-pins as representing the desires of Anglo-Saxon women to express customs of the past with the new Christian trends of the present. Regardless, it is clear that the object was a treasured personal possession that merited the addition of text and decoration and a place in the grave of its owner.



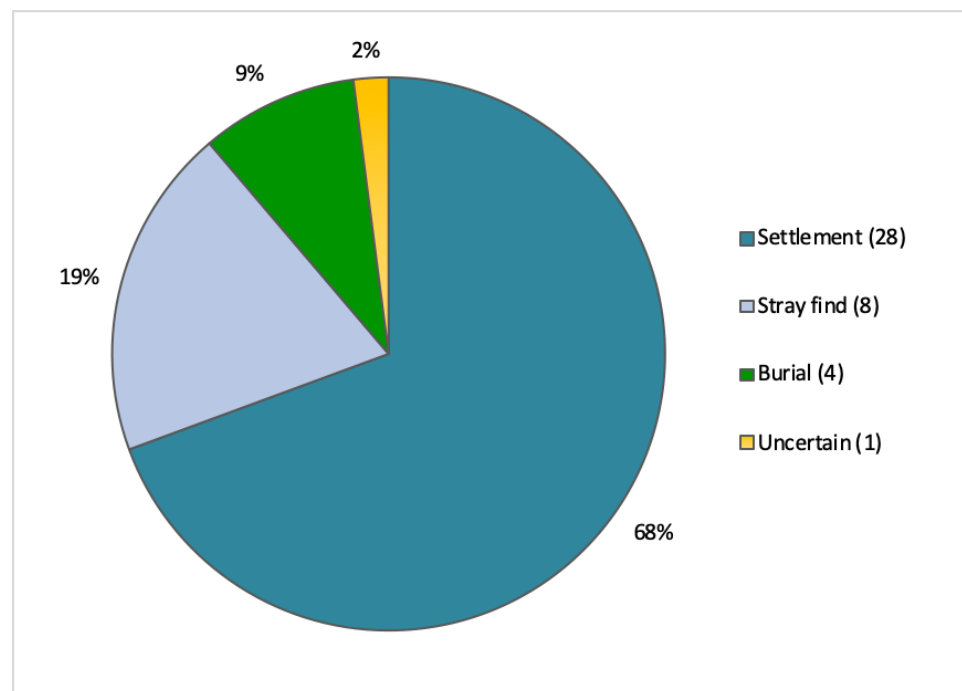
**Figure 4.16** Wolverton 'work-box' runes and additional incisions. (Tyrrell 2010, PAS Ref. BUC-337D72 © drawing by Helen Geake CC BY-SA 4.0)

## 4.2 Household and Personal Tools

The tools and domestic objects are functional, practical, as well as personal. They include objects that could be personal possessions or used by more than one individual in a group atmosphere, used by individuals for their own purposes, for a household, or for society at large. They are highly diverse, ranging from personal and household items such as small knives, textile-making items, toiletry implements including combs and tweezers, vessels, and objects used for social interaction through games (Chart 4.12). A large proportion of these objects were discovered at settlement sites (27 in total, 67%), demonstrating not only their importance as domestic items but also a level of literacy in some communal environments (Chart 4.13). Twelve were found at urban settlements in Ireland (nine from Dublin), eleven in England, and four in the northern and north-western islands of Scotland. Eight objects were found as stray finds and four were found in early Anglo-Saxon burials in England. Fifteen objects are inscribed with elder futhark or Anglo-Saxon runes and eleven are inscribed with Scandinavian runes (Chart 4.14). Eight inscriptions are in ogham and seven are in Roman letters. The texts range from personal names to assertions of ownership, maker, writer, commissioner, and religious, amuletic, and seemingly nonsensical or cryptic. The inscriptions also include sequences that refer to the objects themselves as well as texts that appear to be casual graffiti or practice writing. They give seemingly mundane objects an individualistic quality, lifting them up into tangible entities with value and agency.



**Chart 4.12 Inscribed Household and Personal Tools**



**Chart 4.13 Distribution of Inscribed Household and Personal Tools by Context**

The inscriptions on the household and personal tools are in a wide range of scripts and languages. Fifteen inscriptions are written in elder futhark or Anglo-Saxon runes and eleven are in Scandinavian runes. Out of the inscriptions in elder futhark or Anglo-Saxon runes, six can be read in Old English and five are either in Continental Germanic or early Old English (Table 4.10, Chart 4.14, 4.15). The eleven inscriptions in Scandinavian runes are all in Old Norse. Similar to the personal adornments and dress accessories, there are quite a few inscriptions that are in unidentified or uncertain languages. This includes two texts in Roman letters, one with a possible rendition of Latin ‘Domini’

(**Deer Park Farms** hone), and another with a short alphabetical sequence (**Dublin** leather strap). Three untranslated inscriptions are written in older futhark or Anglo-Saxon runes (**Deansway** sherd, **Gayton Thorpe** spindle-whorl, **York** spoon), and five are written in ogham (**Bac Mhic Connain** knife-handle, **Clonmacnoise** knife-handle, **Dublin** comb II, **Gurness** knife-handle, **Weeting-with-Broomhill** knife-handle). Only one object in this thesis can be read in Latin in the ogham script, and this is the bone die from **Ballinderry** discussed presently in the gaming pieces category. A total of eight household and personal tools are inscribed with ogham texts, representing the largest number of ogham inscriptions per category. This includes four knife-handles (**Bac Mhic Connain**, **Clonmacnoise**, **Gurness**, **Weeting-with-Broomhill**), one spindle-whorl (**Buckquoy**), one comb (**Dublin II**), and the previously mentioned bone die (**Ballinderry**). The inscriptions on the household and personal tools reveal that placing text onto utilitarian items, handled and worked with every day in domestic or private environments, was practiced by all the major ethno-linguistic cultures in early medieval Britain and Ireland.

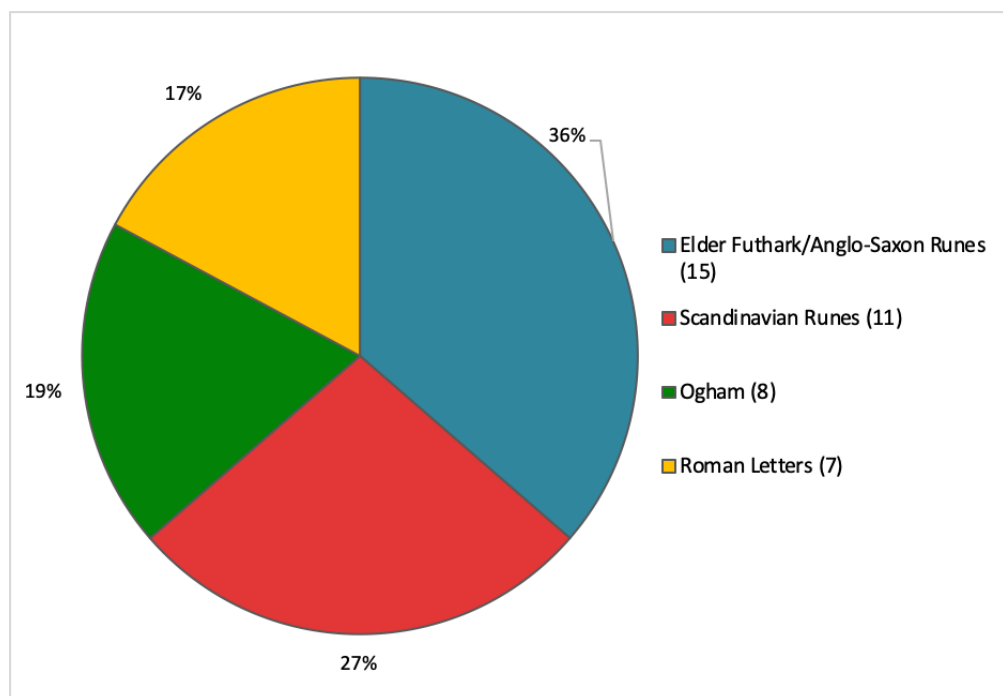


Chart 4.14 Scripts on Inscribed Household and Personal Tools

Table 4.10 Scripts and Languages on Household and Personal Tools

	Latin	Continental Germanic or Old English	Old English	Old Norse	Old Irish /Early Gaelic	Unidentified /Uncertain	Old English and Latin
Roman Letters	3	0	2	0	0	2	0
Elder Futhark/ Anglo-Saxon runes	0	5	6	0	0	3	1
Scandinavian runes	0	0	0	11	0	0	0
Ogham	1	0	0	0	2	5	0

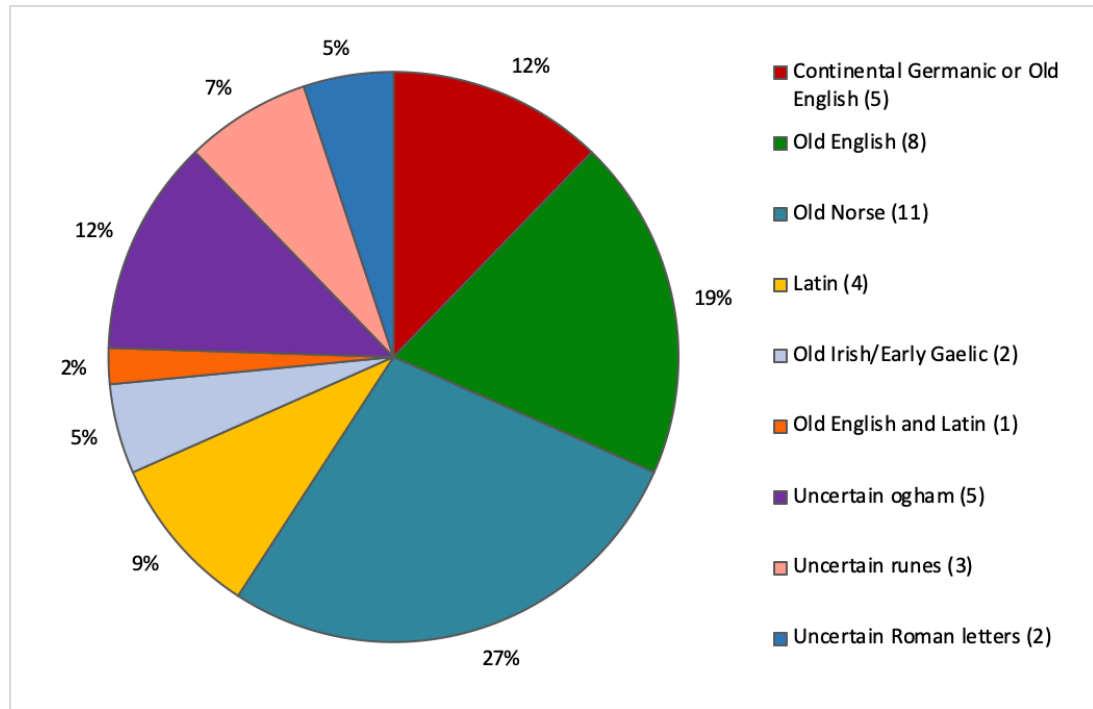
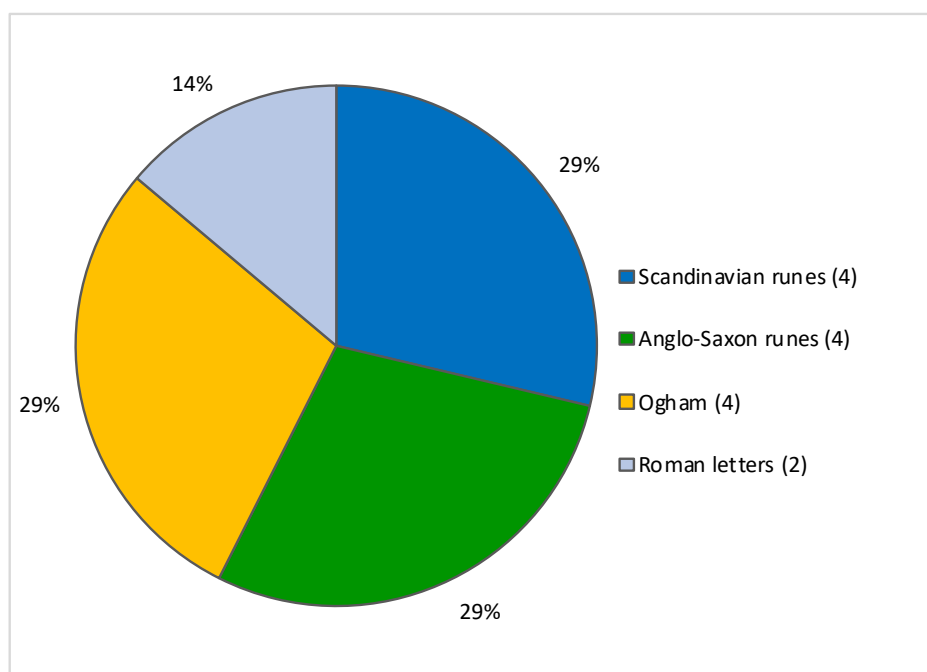


Chart 4.15 Languages on Household and Personal Tools

### 4.2.1 Household Tools

The fourteen objects in this category are household tools that would be used every day within the home. They include small knives, food preparation utensils, craftmaking tools, and miscellaneous items including a sherd of Roman Samian ware (Table 4.11). Six of the objects are made of bone or antler, four from wood, and one each of metal, stone, leather, and pottery. Although it is sometimes difficult to discern, the objects represent Pictish, Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, and Irish inscribing practices. The inscriptions include four written in ogham (**Bac Mhic Connain, Clonmacnoise, Gurness, Weeting-with-Broomhill**), four in Anglo-Saxon runes (**Deansway, London Royal Opera House, Sedgeford, York**), four in Scandinavian runes (**Dublin IR11, IR7, IR6, IR16**), and two in Roman letters (**Deer Park Farms, Dublin leather strap**) (Chart 4.16). The languages of the inscriptions include two in Old English (**London Royal Opera House, Sedgeford**) and four in Old Norse (**Dublin IR11, IR7, IR6, IR16**). The four inscriptions in ogham are untranslated (**Bac Mhic Connain, Clonmacnoise, Gurness, Weeting-with-Broomhill**), two inscriptions are in uncertain Anglo-Saxon runes (**Deansway, York**), and two are in uncertain Roman letters (**Deer Park Farms, Dublin leather strap**) (Chart 4.17). The act of inscribing these objects appears to be mostly casual as well as practical reasons such as claiming ownership, writing practice, and possibly for amuletic intent. As nearly all of the objects were discovered during controlled excavations of settlement sites, they are a small representation of the importance of personal and utilitarian objects within the home and a knowledge of literacy in domestic settings.





**Chart 4.16 Scripts on Inscribed Household Tools**

The household tools are highly varied in terms of material and use but were all in some way utilised in a domestic environment. Twelve of the objects were found at urban settlement sites in Ireland, northern Scotland, and England, and two were discovered as stray finds in Norfolk, England (**Sedgeford, Weeting-with-Broomhill**). Five objects were uncovered in 11<sup>th</sup> century deposits during the extensive excavations in **Dublin** including a wooden wood-working plane (**IR 6**), wooden tool handle (**IR 7**), a wooden stave (**IR 11**), and a bone merchant's tag (**IR 16**) inscribed in Norse runes as well as a leather strap with Roman letters (Barnes et al 1997, 22-28, 37-39, 45-47; Bradley 1979). Two others from Irish settlement sites include a sharpening hone of shale inscribed with Roman letters from **Deer Park Farms**, Co. Antrim (Lynn & McDowell 2011) and an ogham-inscribed bone knife-handle from **Clonmacnoise**, Co. Offaly (King 2008), which both date from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Two ogham-inscribed bone knife handles were found at the Iron Age wheelhouse at **Bac Mhic Connain**, North Uist, and the multi-period site at the **Broch of Gurness**, Orkney (Forsyth 1996, 55-68, 321-332). From excavations in England are the sherd of Roman Samian ware from **Deansway**, Worcestershire (Page 2004), a bone needle-case from the **Royal Opera House in London** (Malcolm & Bowsher 2003), and a wooden spoon from **York** (Page 1999a, 170), all inscribed with 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Saxon runes. The two stray finds from Norfolk, England include an ogham-inscribed bone knife-handle (**Weeting-with-Broomhill**) (Clarke 1952) and a copper-alloy utensil handle with Anglo-Saxon runes, which was found through metal detecting activity (**Sedgeford**) (Hines 2019b).



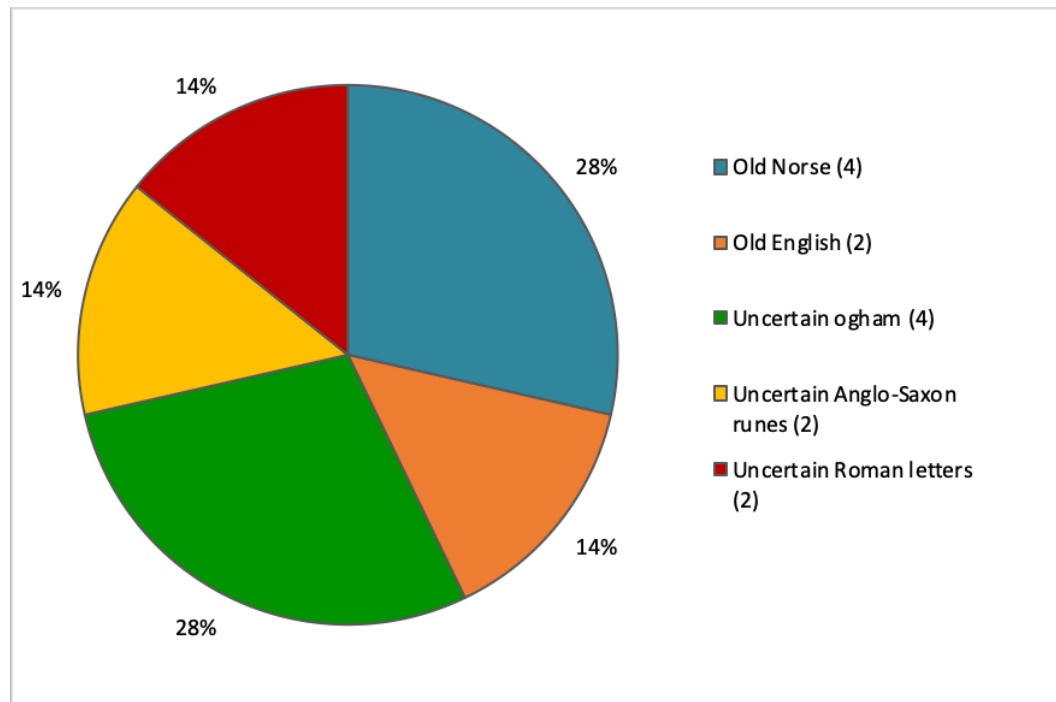


Chart 4.17 Languages on Inscribed Household Tools

Table 4.11 Inscribed Household Tools

Name	Object	Inscription
Bac Mhic Connain	KNIFE-HANDLE: Cetacean bone, c.500-800, undecorated	Ogham, Uncertain: M[a/o]QUNTEN( /a)CoT or VoS( /a)QEVQUN(a/o)M Possible personal name 'Maq-'. MAQQ, Old Irish/Early Gaelic 'son of'
Clonmacnoise	KNIFE-HANDLE: Antler, c. Pre-900, undecorated	Ogham, Uncertain: A) LORENQQAAMA B) TQQM(?)D/LM?NNV
Deansway	SAMIAN POT SHERD: Roman samian ware, Inscription d.700-900, undecorated	AS runes, Uncertain (Old English or Latin): A) OE <i>sweor</i> , 'father-in-law, cousin'. OE -scīr, 'bright, shining' or 'shire, division' B) Latin <i>[beatu]s uir</i> , 'blessed is the man'. Possible OE fem PN such as <i>Jilsuip</i> or <i>Berhtsuibe</i> . Or Latin noun, such as <i>[se]dis</i> or <i>[lapi]dis</i>
Deer Park Farms	HONE: Shale, 660-780, decorated	Roman letters, Uncertain: DNI= possibly Latin 'domini'
Dublin IR 11	WOODEN STAVE: Wood, 1050-1100, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: A) <i>fupork×hniastbmlR</i> B) <i>fuporkhniastbmlR</i> Two runic futhorks
Dublin IR 7	TOOL HANDLE: Wood, copper-alloy attachment, 1050-1100, decorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: ON <i>still</i> , 'sharp tool, spike' or ON adj, <i>stilltir</i> , 'calm, composed' or ON <i>stilling</i> , 'calm, moderation', <i>stillingr</i> , 'the quiet one' or <i>stilingr</i> , 'the chap with the stylus/augur'

Dublin IR 6	WOODWORKING PLANE: Wood, 1050-1100, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: A) 'a truthful man among the Frisians' or 'he is a mad, vehement man among the...'. B) <i>isis, er er</i> , 'who is'. 'The one who is' (?). <i>miop, mjoðr</i> , 'mead'.
Dublin IR 16	MERCHANT'S TAG: Bone, 1000-1050, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: ON PN <i>Ásb-</i> or <i>Ósb-</i> such as in the masc PN <i>Ásbern</i> , fem <i>Ásbjorg</i> , Danish PN <i>Ásbóp</i> . ON noun <i>sbita</i> , 'spike, pin, stake'
Dublin	LEATHER STRAP: Sewn with a draw-string, 1050-1150	Roman letters, Uncertain (Old English or Latin): 'ABCDEF...'
Gurness	KNIFE-HANDLE: Bone, iron blade, 400-500, undecorated	Ogham, Uncertain: <b>INEITATEMOMN MATS</b>
London, Royal Opera House	NEEDLE-CASE (?): Bone (sheep or roe deer tibia), 700-750, decorated	AS runes, Old English: ' <i>Œpilward</i> '
Sedgeford	SPOON/LADLE HANDLE: Copper-alloy, 700-1000, decorated	AS runes, Old English: ' <i>Byrnferþ</i> ', ' <i>Bjornferþ</i> ', or ' <i>Beornferþ</i> '
York	SPOON: Wood, 950-1100, decorated	AS runes, Uncertain (Old English?): 'c' and 'x'
Weeting-with-Broomhill	KNIFE-HANDLE: Red-deer antler, 400-800	Ogham, Uncertain: <b>EVUTUSUD(U/O) or (U)LUCUVUTE   GEDEVI(MUTO)S or C(OVUM)ITELEG</b>

Each major script from early medieval Britain and Ireland is represented in this material, depicting four different epigraphic characteristics and traditions. The inscriptions in Scandinavian runes are similar to the witty, informal, descriptive, and generally confusing runic sequences scratched on fragments of bone and antler in this corpus (see Chapter 6.1.1). They fit in with runic activity from late Viking-age and medieval towns in Scandinavia, which include *futhark* rows and practical, humorous, and obscene statements carved on wooden sticks and bone (Barnes 2012, 106-108; Page 1999a, 96-99). Described as a wooden stave from a bucket, **Dublin IR 11** features two runic *futhark* rows, resembling sticks from 12<sup>th</sup> century Bryggen, Bergen and Trondheim in Norway, inscribed with amuletic sequences such as *futharks* and 'gibberish' sequences (Barnes et al 1997, 39). The two texts on the Dublin IR 11 stave could therefore be amuletic, although they may also be evidence for one practicing their runic literacy, as other alphabetical texts can infer. Amongst the other three runic inscriptions from **Dublin**, one is likely to feature a personal name, and the other two consist of descriptive terms for either the object or the owner, such as **IR 7**, Old Norse *still*, 'sharp tool, spike' or a personal nickname (Barnes et al 1997, 27-28). Along with the material in Chapter 6, the runic inscriptions on tools from Viking-age Dublin demonstrate that at least a basic knowledge of runic literacy was known in the city and was used extensively for casual and less permanent purposes on disposable and degradable material rather than lavish items in precious metal.

The four inscriptions written in Anglo-Saxon runes present their own challenges. Featuring single Old English masculine names including a possible abbreviation are the **Sedgeford** handle, **London, Royal Opera House** object, and the wooden spoon from **York**, most likely referring to their owners (Hines 2019b; Looijenga 2003, 292-293; Page 1999a, 170). All three inscriptions could be part of the original design of the objects, as they are set firmly into designated areas in respect to additional

decoration. When comparing the lighter quality of the **Sedgeford** runes and the surrounding framing lines to the rest of the incisions, it is possible that they were more recent additions to the object, carved by an owner later on to identify his property. The runic sequences on the **Deansway** sherd are more challenging to interpret and are described as ‘runic graffiti’ (Page 2004a). They are incomplete, indicating that a longer sequence was originally there before the dish was broken. Because of this, the inscription cannot be satisfactorily interpreted. This object is unparalleled, but the re-use of Roman objects in Anglo-Saxon contexts is not unknown and in some cases is seen as amuletic (Eckardt & Williams 2004; Karkov 2011, 19, 27). It is possible that the **Deansway** dish was kept as an heirloom rather than a functional object, further suggested by the possible translation of *sweor*, ‘father-in-law, cousin’ (Page 2004a, 462).

The four ogham inscriptions are all carved along the lengths of small bone or antler knife handles which would have been affixed to iron blades. The knives are all dated Pre-900 AD on the basis of archaeological contexts and epigraphic features, although the **Gurness** handle has recently been radiocarbon dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> century and a similar date is also inferred for the other three (Noble et al 2018, 1344). Much speculation surrounds the four ogham knives regarding translation and whether they represent a similar cultural practice. The four ogham inscriptions have not been satisfactorily interpreted, although they can all be read. A personal name beginning with *Maq-*, as in ‘son of’ in Old Irish, may be represented on the **Bac Mhic Connain** knife handle (Forsyth 1996, 55-68), which is the typical Irish formulae, X MAQQI Y (Padel 1972, 4). An early reading of the **Gurness** knife by Macalister (1940, no. 22) reads, ‘the tool/knife of Mats...’, but this is largely guesswork. It is possible that the other three also feature personal names as claims of ownership (Forsyth 1996, 321-332), although the languages of these ogham inscriptions cannot be determined and thus the inscriptions must be left unresolved. Previous scholars have concluded that all four knives are related and are probably Pictish (Clarke 1952, 73; King 2008, 320; Macalister 1940, 218-219), but again, this is guesswork and should not be taken without some speculation. Similar handles carved from bone and antler have been found at Irish sites including **Cahercommaun** as well as the Anglo-Saxon site of Hamwih (**Southampton**) (Hencken 1938, 64-65, no. 475, 264, 866; Holdsworth 1976, 46-47, no. 11). The antler tine from **Moynagh Lough** (see Chapter 6.1.2) is also inscribed in ogham in a similar fashion possibly indicating it too was meant to be the handle of an object (Holder 1994, 15b-15c). Although a relation cannot be confirmed, there does appear to be a similar practice, whether connected or not, of inscribing ogham across the lengths of antler and bone wherever the script was known. This could, however, be more instinctual than purposeful considering a line of ogham would fit nicely onto the long shape of these objects.

The two inscriptions in Roman letters are likely the result of writing practice. The unfinished alphabetical sequence on the **Dublin** leather strap is comparable to similar texts on the **Gorteen** axehead (Bradley 1979), **Inchmarnock** slate (**IS.38**) (Forsyth & Teschedi 2008, 141-144), and the **Waltham Abbey** lead piece (Okasha 1982, 100), which are complete and incomplete Roman alphabets carved in a disorganised manner suggesting that they were written by scribes practicing their handwriting. It would be unusual to find one practicing their alphabet on an item of leather, but perhaps it was the leatherworker themselves practicing for future work. Portable sharpening hones are quite common, usually perforated on one end for suspension (Mainman & Rogers 2000, 2485; Wallace 2016,

306). Decorated hones at Garryduff, Co. Antrim indicate that they held a secondary use as motif and trial pieces (O’Kelly & Stelfox 1963, 91-92; O’Meadhra 1979, 24). The inscription on the **Deer Park Farms** hone is the only one known to have text, but with the addition of an incised animal motif, it is reasonable to assume that the text was also for the purpose of practice.

The inscriptions appear casual and spontaneous, composed of personal names, alphabetical sequences, descriptive terms, and uninterpretable ogham rows. Presumably the inscriptions were in place at the time the objects were in use, but they could have also been added just before the objects ceased to be functional. It would be difficult to ascertain a primary or secondary aspect to these texts. According to the depth, placement, and orientation of the texts, some of the objects which seem to have been inscribed from the outset include the **London, Royal Opera House** object (Malcolm & Bowsher 2003, 51), the four ogham-inscribed knife-handles, and the two utensils from **Sedgeford** and **York**. The remaining objects could have been inscribed at any time during their lifespans. An obvious case is the **Deansway** sherd, which, as a piece of Roman samian ware, was inscribed with Anglo-Saxon runes many centuries after its production (Page 2004a). Also likely later are the letters on the **Deer Park Farms** hone, when the sharpening implement was re-used as a surface for casual doodling and writing practice (Lynn & McDowell 2011, 267-269).

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**Figure 4.17 Rune-inscribed antler handle from Dublin, IR 17 (Barnes & Hagland 2010, 12, fig. 2.1. © National Museum of Ireland, Drawing by John Murray)**

A handle made of deer antler from excavations at Temple Bar West, Dublin (fig. 4.18) (IR 17) is inscribed with runes which date to the 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries and read **īm+binīþik**, which in its individual units can be interpreted as *em* (‘am’), *bein* (‘bone’), and *þik* (‘you’) (Barnes & Hagland 2010). Other interpretations include ‘Benedict(us)’, or *sem pīni þik*, ‘which may punish you’/‘torment you’ (Barnes & Hagland 2010, 16-17). This object is not included in this corpus because it was not identified until a later date during the research. Also from Dublin are ‘pseudo-runic’ incisions on a bone pin (Barnes et al 1997, 48-49). The simple and possibly more decorative nature of the incisions means they cannot be firmly identified as letters and therefore the object has been excluded from the corpus.

However, whether or not they are decorative they show some inspiration from runic writing and can be discussed alongside the **Dublin** antler plate in Chapter 6.1.2.

## 4.2.2 Toilet Implements

In this corpus there are five combs (**Dublin I, II, IR 14, Nassington, Whitby**), one comb case (**Lincoln**), and three tweezers (**Brandon, Heacham, Honington**) inscribed with text that range in date from the 7<sup>th</sup> century to the late 11<sup>th</sup> century (Table 4.12). They include four inscriptions in Anglo-Saxon runes, two in Scandinavian runes, two in Roman letters, and one in ogham (Chart 4.18). The languages include five in Old English, two in Old Norse, one in Latin, and one inscription that is written in ogham and either Old Irish/Early Gaelic or Old Norse (Chart 4.19). The inscriptions are varied in skill and feature five personal names (**Brandon, Dublin I and II, Lincoln, Whitby**), as well as religious and amuletic texts (**Dublin IR 14, Honington, Nassington, Whitby**) demonstrating the importance of these objects as personal possessions as well as their role in the expression of social and personal identity. Items of personal grooming, including combs, tweezers, shears, and razors, are common archaeological finds in early medieval Britain and Ireland and are found mostly within settlement and burial contexts, with a growing number found as stray finds as recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (Ashby 2007; Ashby 2014, 169; MacGregor 1985, 73). Their placement in female inhumations in Anglo-Saxon England suggests that they could be worn on the person, either hung from a belt, girdle, or even a brooch (Ashby 2014, 166, 170; Owen-Crocker 2004, 155). Usually considered as mundane objects of every-day use, toilet implements have recently been discussed as active players in the construction and communication of social and political identity through the social importance of hair maintenance (Ashby 2014; Williams 2004; 2015). They may have even been exchanged as diplomatic gifts amongst ecclesiastic and aristocratic individuals, or as gifts through marriage (Ashby 2014, 163).

**Table 4.12 Inscribed Toiletry Implements**

Name	Object	Inscription
Brandon	TWEEZER FRAGMENT: Gilded silver, 700-800, decorated	AS runes, Old English: '+Aldred'
Dublin I	DOUBLE-SIDED COMB: Wood, 1000-1100, undecorated	Roman letters, Old English: A) 'Ædwa[rd]' B) '-ric'
Dublin II	SINGLE-SIDED COMPOSITE COMB: Bone, 900-1100	Ogham, Uncertain: OI/EG masc PN 'Énna'e' or 'Enda' or fem PN 'Áine', or ON masc PN 'Áki'
Dublin IR 14	SINGLE-SIDED COMPOSITE COMB: Antler, 1000-1100, decorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: <i>futhor...</i> 5 letters of the <i>futhark</i>
Heacham	TWEEZERS: Copper-alloy, 650-850, decorated	AS runes, Old English: '[.] u d f [.] d   [.] u d f [.] d'
Honington	TWEEZERS: Gilded silver, 725-825, decorated	AS runes, Old English: 'May praise thee, O gentle father...and each of works, heaven and angels...'

Lincoln	COMB-CASE: Antler, 900-1150, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: 'Thorfast made a good comb'
Nassington	SINGLE-SIDED COMPOSITE COMB: Pig bone fragment, 800-1000, undecorated	Roman letters, Latin: '...Oh Lord, her/here...'
Whitby	SINGLE-SIDED COMPOSITE COMB: Bone, 650-800, undecorated	AS runes, Old English and Latin: 'My God; May God almighty help Cyne-'

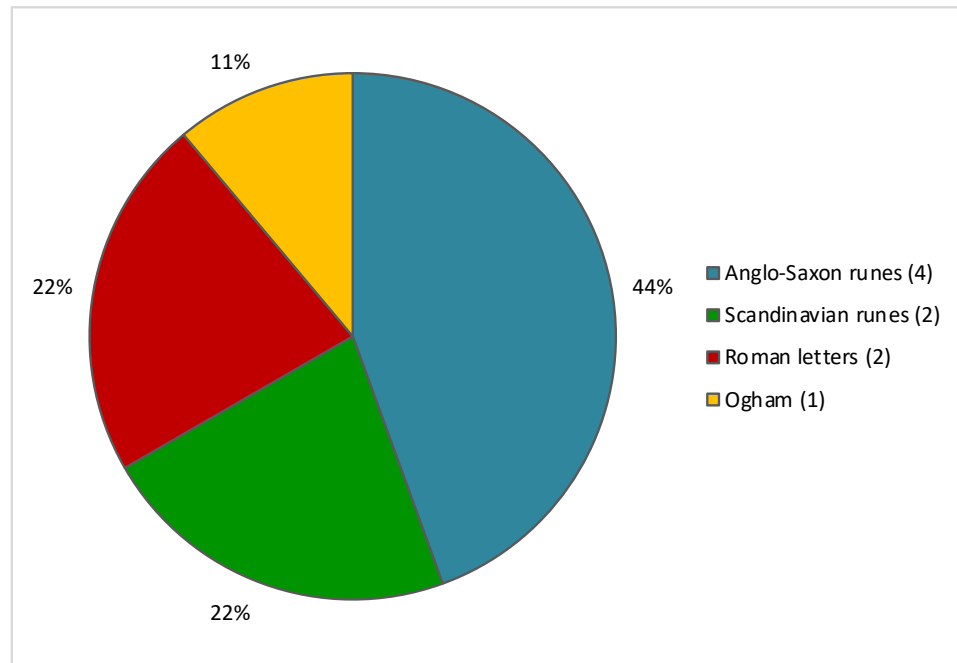
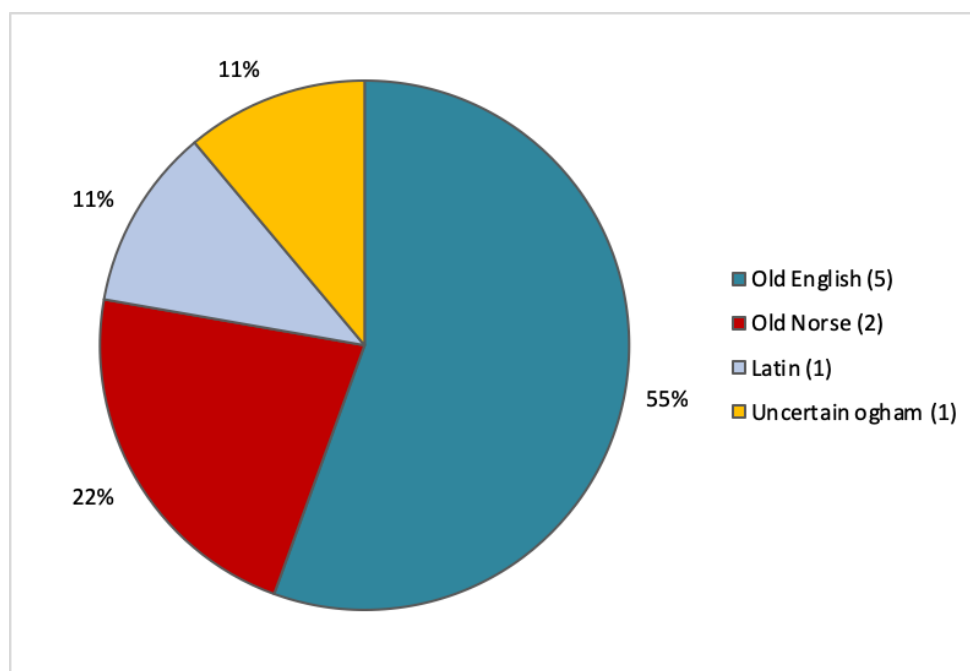


Chart 4.18 Scripts on Inscribed Toiletry Implements

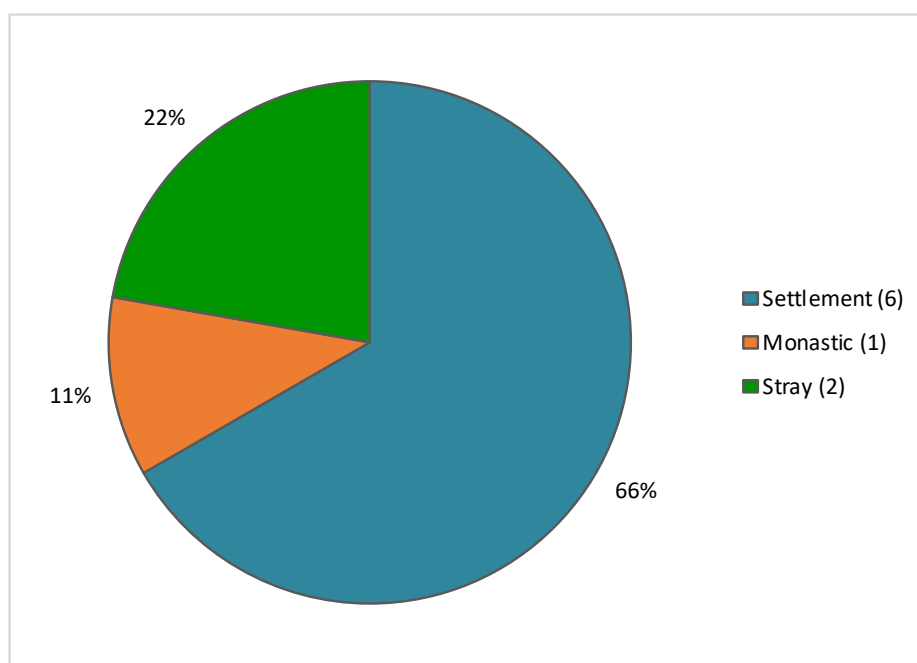
All of the inscribed toiletry implements except for two (**Heacham**, **Honington**) were found during controlled excavations of Anglo-Saxon and Viking-age settlement sites (Chart 4.20). These include three combs from Viking-age Dublin, each inscribed with an inscription in Roman letters (**Dublin I**), ogham (**Dublin II**), or Norse runes (**Dublin IR 14**) (Barnes et al 1997, 44-45; Holder 1994, 13; Okasha 1982, 89). The other finds include tweezers and a comb from Anglo-Saxon settlements in **Brandon**, Suffolk, and **Nassington**, Northamptonshire (Riddler & Rogers 2014; Wessex Archaeology 2003), a comb from the early Anglo-Saxon monastery at **Whitby**, North Yorkshire (Waxenberger 2011a), and a comb-case from Viking-age **Lincoln** (Barnes & Page 2006, 293-295). The two remaining tweezers were both found as stray finds: in **Heacham**, Norfolk (Page 1999a, 160), and as a metal detecting find in **Honington**, Lincolnshire (Richardson 2012, PAS ref PAS-6F2DA2). As objects that were tied up in social and economic aspects of daily life, it is fitting that most of them were found associated with settlements, and as represented by the **Whitby** comb, combs and tweezers were also objects used in monastic settings (Ashby 2014, 158-159; MacGregor 1985, 78-81). In early Anglo-Saxon inhumation and cremation burials, combs and tweezers are commonly found either placed around or on the body, or as unburnt objects in cremation urns, and are seen as indicators of high-status (Ashby 2014, 166; Evison 1987, 85, 118; MacGregor 1985, 73; Williams 2015, 32). In addition to buried

personal possessions, there is the likelihood that they were also used in mortuary rituals involving preparation for the deceased and remembrance purposes (Williams 2004; 2015).



**Chart 4.19 Languages on Inscribed Toiletry Implements**

Comb manufacturing in particular is viewed as a marker for a complex system of production and has been recognized at several important archaeological sites including Viking-age Dublin, where over 2,000 combs and comb fragments have been uncovered, as well as Anglo-Saxon **Southampton** (*Hamwic*), where approximately 20,000 fragments of waste material were recorded (Riddler 2001, 63; Wallace 2016, 300-301). In early medieval Britain and Ireland as well as Scandinavia, they are indicative of a framework in which the mass production of combs was facilitated by social, political, and economic wealth and carried out by highly skilled comb-makers (Ashby 2013, 196; 2014, 161; Dunlevy 1988, 347). The five inscribed combs are types that are typical of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian comb production including single-sided composite and double-sided combs, and date from the mid 7<sup>th</sup> to the late 10<sup>th</sup> century (Ashby 2009, 6-8, 14; 2013, 203-205, 231; Dunlevy 1988, 343, 349-350, 370-372; Okasha 1999, 205; Tester et al 2014, 246-256). The comb-case from **Lincoln**, described as either Scandinavian or ‘Anglo-Scandinavian’, was made to fit over the teeth of a single-sided composite comb (Barnes & Page 2006, 294; Ashby 2013; MacGregor 1985, 96). Although the **Lincoln** example is the only known inscribed comb-case in Britain or Ireland, two runic comb cases come from Ferwerd (6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century) and Kantens (5<sup>th</sup> century), the Netherlands, which state in elder *futhark* runes, ‘(m) u r a’, *mir*, ‘to me’ and ‘l (l/w)’, untranslated (RuneS-Datenbank, EROFris-NL-2, PreOFris-NL-18).



**Chart 4.20 Distribution of Inscribed Toiletry Implements by Context**

Tweezers are often difficult to identify. The **Baconsthorpe** clip, identified as a page holder or turner in this thesis, has also been suggested to be a pair of tweezers (Hines 2011). Furthermore, the Portable Antiquities Scheme suggests that the **Honington** tweezers may be an ecclesiastical object such as a candle-snuffer or even a page holder as well (PAS ref PAS-6F2DA2). The three inscribed objects classified as tweezers in this corpus (**Brandon, Heacham, Honington**) are typologically and stylistically Anglo-Saxon, dating between 650 and 850, and are inscribed with Anglo-Saxon runes in Old English dialects (Tester et al 2014, 244-246). Tweezers are frequent finds at Anglo-Saxon urban and rural settlements and are also found as grave-goods, either by themselves or in early Saxon cremation urns (see Chapter 5.3.2) (Evison 1987, 118; Tester et al 2014, 244- 246). The Portable Antiquities Scheme currently lists 269 pairs of early medieval tweezers found as stray finds. Considering the large number of known tweezers from Anglo-Saxon contexts, it is surprising that only three survive with inscriptions, which is only 1% of the combined material.

The discussion of the importance of combs and tweezers as part of the social role of hair and personal grooming in early medieval England and Europe is relatively new. As a part of the body, hair is an intrinsic part of one's self, and the maintenance and styling of hair is seen as a key role in the construction of the identities of individuals, kingroups, and cultures (Ashby 2014; Bartlett 1994; Simonsen 2015). Along with the strategic placement of combs and tweezers in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian burials, miniature forms of these objects have also been found in Migration period burials suggesting symbolic items made specifically for mortuary purposes (Williams 2004, 100, 107, 114; 2015, 32, 47). Combs and mirrors have also been carved on Pictish symbol stones in Scotland, and the Picts appear to have developed their own distinctive form of comb albeit with similar raw material to the Vikings (Ashby 2009, 3, 12; Graham-Campbell & Batey 1998, 8, 23; MacGregor 1985, 73). Along with the large numbers of bone and antler combs from Scandinavian settlements such as Dublin, York, and Ribe in Denmark (Ambrosiani 1981; Graham-Campbell & Batey 1998, 222; Wallace 2006, 298-



299), hair and hair maintenance is mentioned in Norse sagas suggesting a magical significance (Arwill-Nordbladh 2016, paragraphs 1-6; Simonsen 2015, 239). This may explain the partial runic *futhark* on the comb from **Dublin (IR 14)**. Combs with runic inscriptions are common in Scandinavia and on the Continent dating from as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD and up to the 16<sup>th</sup> century (RuneS-Datenbank N A18, N468, NOR1998;16, SkL 8). Perhaps the oldest known runic object is a comb from the Vimose bog in Funen, Denmark, dated to around 160 AD (Looijenga 2003, 9). The inscription is in elder *futhark* runes and reads *harja*, which may be a reference to the tribe of the *Harii* (Looijenga 2003, 98).

The inscriptions provide insight into the individuals who owned and made the objects, including how they wanted to be perceived by public eyes. The inscriptions feature five, possibly six, personal names. Three inscriptions feature lone personal names (**Brandon, Dublin I and II**), one with a maker formula (**Lincoln**), and another within a Christian prayer (**Whitby**). The fragmentary **Nassington** comb inscription may have also contained a personal name (Okasha 1999). Three inscriptions are Christian prayers (**Honington, Nassington, Whitby**), one features a partial runic *futhark* (**Dublin IR 14**), and one tweezer is inscribed with a possibly amuletic runic sequence (see Chapter 7.8) (**Heacham**). Along with identifying these objects as owned property it is clear that they also held some higher importance to be inscribed with ‘magical’ texts. The inscriptions show primary and secondary characteristics, indicating that whilst some texts were engraved from the beginning, others were probably casual or later additions. The **Nassington** comb inscription is particularly clumsy in appearance in relation to the other texts. The bone itself shows signs of burning, which could have occurred when the animal was cooked or when the comb was discarded in the rubbish pit (Okasha 1999, 203). Perhaps the text was carved as a practice text just prior to deposition, or the comb was thrown away due to error, although this is speculative.

The three combs from excavations in Dublin are particularly demonstrative of the diversity of Viking-age society. They are each inscribed in three different scripts and languages including Roman letters (**Dublin I**), ogham (**Dublin II**), and Norse runes (**Dublin IR 14**), with an Old English male name (**Dublin I**), an Old Irish/Early Gaelic or Old Norse name (**Dublin II**), and the beginning of the Old Norse runic *futhark* (**Dublin IR 14**). The combs are evidence that at least a basic knowledge of multiple scripts and languages existed in Viking-age Dublin, although whether this was known by local Norsemen, Irish, or by visitors is uncertain (Barnes & Hagland 2010, 15; Wallace 2016, 224, 410-414). The city was certainly a growing trading and travel route along the Irish Sea, and the population was ethnically and culturally mixed (see seax sheaths, Chapter 5.3.3), with a dominant Scandinavian presence (Wallace 2016, 201-204, 224, 410-411, 415). The personal names on the combs are presumably the owners of the objects, although as Page (1999, 165) points out, a name by itself is not entirely informative. The possible second name on the **Dublin I** comb may suggest multiple or consequent owners, or perhaps the comb was a gift from one to another (Ashby 2014, 156, 162-163).

The maker text on the **Lincoln** comb-case can be viewed as an advertising tactic in the context of locally based professional comb-makers, if *Thorfastr*, a Norseman, was indeed working within Lincoln (Ashby 2013, 196; Barnes 2012, 107-108). Evidence for comb-making has been found in Anglo-Scandinavian Lincoln as well as the nearby city of York, where similar comb-cases have been discovered (Ashby 2013, 194; Barnes & Page 2006, 294; Hadley 2006, 96; MacGregor 1985, 98; Page 1987b, 54). The object has also been discussed as a possible import from Scandinavia, but there is no

way to prove this (Barnes & Page 2006, 294). The meaning of the inscription implies that it was carved at the same time that the comb-case was made (Barnes & Page 2006, 294), but the moment of inscribing the text could have occurred at any point thereafter. One can imagine a comb-maker admiring his handiwork, carving his name upon it with pride, or having an accomplished rune-carver accomplish the task for him. As the only comb-case with an inscription, Thorfastr may have kept and used the comb-case for himself. Perhaps it was a gift to another or sold as a commissioned work. Regardless of who owned the object, the **Lincoln** comb-case is an exceptional example of an individual endorsing their craft through the use of text.

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**Figure 4.18 The Ribe comb's runes, reading 'kabar'**  
(Sindbæk & Imer 2018, photograph by Søren Sindbæk)

The use of the term *kamb*, 'comb' is mirrored on several runic combs from the Continent. Two 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century combs from Groningen, the Netherlands, are inscribed in older *futhark* runes, **kabu** and **kobu**, versions of the Germanic word for 'comb' (Looijenga 2003, 304, 305; EROFris-NL3, 4), and a recently discovered comb from Ribe, Denmark, is inscribed with **kabar**, the Old Danish word for 'comb', on one face and **kama**, 'to comb' on the other (fig. 4.19) (Sindbæk & Imer 2018). Self-descriptive inscriptions are usually described as amuletic enhancements of the inherent properties of the objects and is a common practice wherever runic writing exists (Fischer et al 2008, 73; Page 1999a, 169). The number of combs inscribed with descriptive terms is significant enough to infer some level of importance regarding the objects, whether this importance lies in the combs themselves, the act of naming a comb what it is in an inscription, or whether the act of personal grooming was perceived as socially and/or spiritually meaningful (Ashby 2014, 151-153).

The importance of proper hair maintenance in the Church (Bartlett 1994, 57) brings toiletry items into an ecclesiastical environment. A simple ivory comb was found alongside the portable altar in St Cuthbert's tomb, and appears contemporaneous to the saint's life (MacGregor 1985, 79; Simonsen 2015, 243). Highly decorative 'liturgical combs', often made of ivory, were specially made for the clergy and were probably used for ritualistic grooming before Mass or to anoint new bishops (MacGregor 1985, 78-80; Sherrow 2006, 93; Simonsen 2015, 242-243). These elaborate combs were exchanged amongst the ecclesiastics and in aristocratic circles as political and social discourse (Ashby 2014, 178; MacGregor 1985, 79). The initial cross in front of the name *Aldred* on the **Brandon** tweezer, along with its seriffed runes and gilding, may suggest that the individual who owned this object was one

in the Church, or at the very least a pious individual. As objects that could be seen as implements to ‘cleanse the soul’ of sins (Simonsen 2015, 242), the act of inscribing Christian prayers onto them, including the **Honington** tweezer, **Nassington** comb, and **Whitby** comb, would have accentuated the power of the text and the object itself. The paraphrase of the *Benedicite* verses of the Book of Daniel on the **Honington** tweezer (Hines 2015; 2019, 4) further suggests that it was an object used in a church or monastic setting, and its tapering form is dissimilar to most Anglo-Saxon tweezers (Hines 2015, 259). Perhaps it would be better suited as a discussion of manuscript page clips along with the object from **Baconsthorpe** (see Chapter 5.2.3.) (Hines 2015, 272), although for now it will remain as a tweezer in this study.

### 4.2.3 Textile-Making Items

Nine inscribed objects are associated with domestic textile production, an activity primarily associated with women in both Germanic and Celtic societies (Foreman 1998, 294; Owen-Crocker 2004, 274-275, 280-281). Included are six spindle-whorls, two thread beaters (also called weaving swords or textile-beaters) (**Dublin IR4**, **Wallingford**), and one large pin or needle (**Westness**) (Table 4.13). The inscriptions include five in Scandinavian runes (**Burray**, **Dublin IR 4**, **Saltfleetby**, **Stromness**, **Westness**), two in Anglo-Saxon runes (**Gayton Thorpe**, **Whitby**), one in ogham (**Buckquoy**), and one in Roman letters (**Wallingford**) (Chart 4.21). The most represented language is Old Norse, with five inscriptions. The remaining texts include two in Old English (**Wallingford**, **Whitby**), one in Old Irish/Early Gaelic (**Buckquoy**), and one in undeterminable runes (**Gayton Thorpe**) (Chart 4.22). In this corpus of portable inscribed objects, the inscriptions demonstrate the important relationship between people and tangible things, elevating them from mundane objects to personal possessions with agency and power. They are highly personal and include personal names, ownership and maker statements, appeals to the Gods, and words of well-wishes or friendship.

**Table 4.13 Inscribed Textile-Making Items**

Name	Object	Inscription
Buckquoy	SPINDLE-WHORL: Limestone, 700-800, disc-shaped, undecorated	Ogham, Old Irish/Early Gaelic: ‘A blessing on the soul of L’ or ‘To/From Findacht, a friend’
Burray Bu	SPINDLE-WHORL: Cattle femur head, uncertain date, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: ‘(...)byp(o)rkhn(s)’ Possibly part of the futhark alphabet
Dublin IR 4	TEXTILE-BEATER: Wood, 1050-1100, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: ‘Geirleikr’
Gayton Thorpe	SPINDLE-WHORL: Lead, uncertain date	AS runes, Old English: ‘sud’
Saltfleetby	SPINDLE-WHORL: Lead, 1000-1100, bun-shaped, decorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: ‘Óðinn and Heimdallr and Þjálf, they...help thee, Úlfjótr...’
Stromness	SPINDLE-WHORL: Steatite, 1000-1200, sub-conical, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: ‘Gautr carved the runes’

Wallingford	WEAVING-SWORD: Whalebone, 900-1100, undecorated	Roman letters, Old English: '+ Eadburg owns me + Eadburg owns me'
Westness	PIN/NEEDLE: Antler, 725-1100, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: 'kkk' or 'aaa'
Whitby	SPINDLE-WHORL: Jet, 600-800, disc-shaped, undecorated	AS runes, Old English: 'token of friendship'

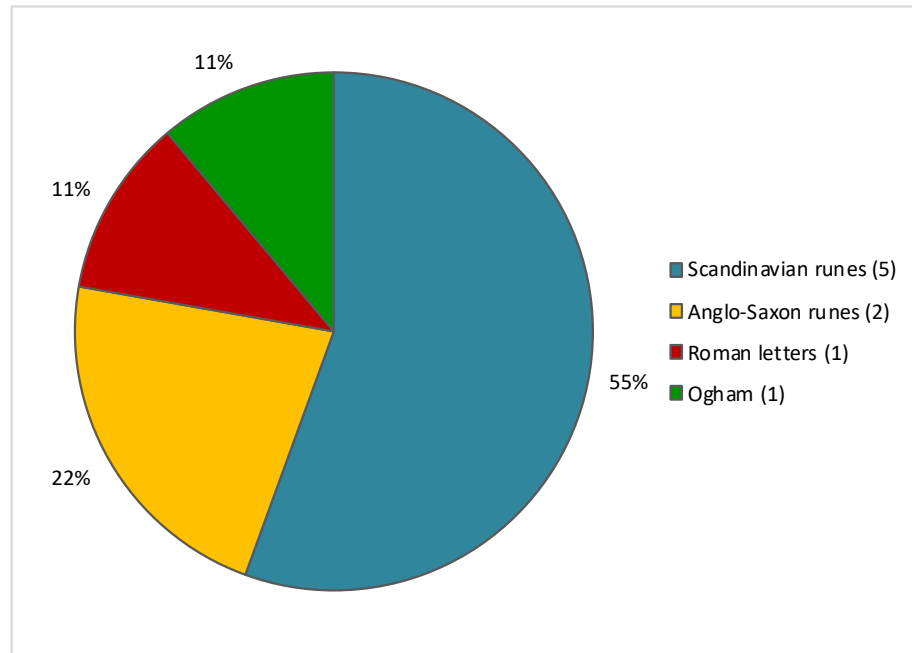


Chart 4.21 Scripts on Inscribed Textile-Making Items

As every-day tools used in domestic environments, six objects were uncovered at or in close proximity to settlement sites (**Buckquoy, Burray, Dublin IR 4, Wallingford, Westness, Whitby**), one was found as a stray find (**Saltfleetby**), and two are without a confident find circumstance (**Gayton Thorpe, Stromness**) (Chart 4.23). Four objects come from Orkney (**Buckquoy, Burray, Westness, Stromness**), four from eastern and southern England (**Gayton Thorpe, Saltfleetby, Wallingford, Whitby**), and one from **Dublin (IR 4)**. Six objects are spindle-whorls, which are some of the oldest and most common archaeological finds worldwide, discovered in burials, settlement sites, and as stray finds stretching back to the Neolithic period (MacGregor 1985, 185). Used to add weight and momentum to spindles during hand-spinning, the shapes and decorations of spindle-whorls are highly varied and individualised, and frequently incorporate incised geometric and linear patterns (fig. 4.20) (Owen-Crocker 2004, 280-282). The two objects described as textile or weaving-beaters/swords are tools used to beat threads into place on vertical looms (Christie & Creighton 2013, 120; MacGregor 1985, 188-189), and the **Westness** antler pin may have acted as a pin to separate the individual threads.

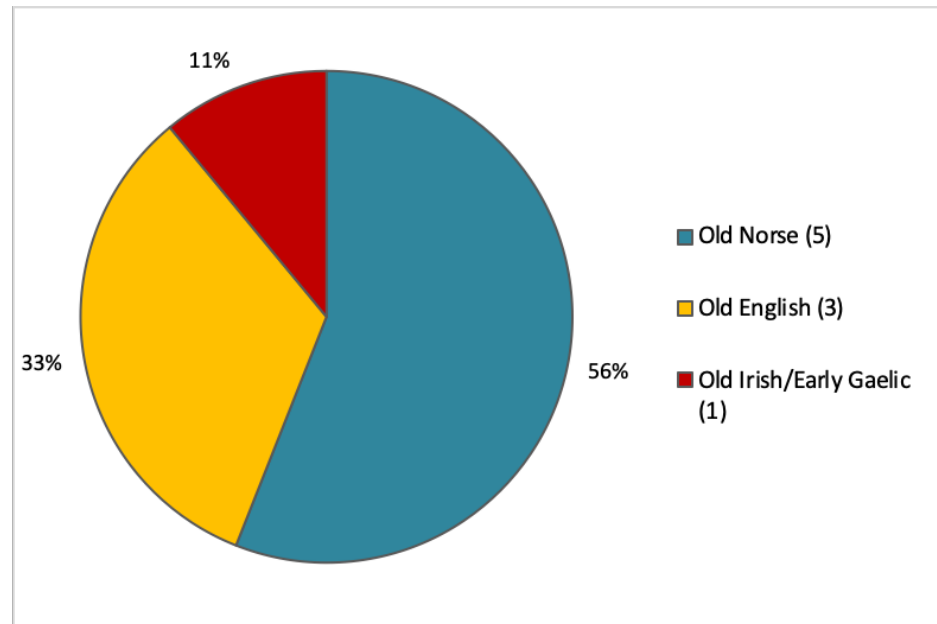


Chart 4.22 Languages on Inscribed Textile-Making Items

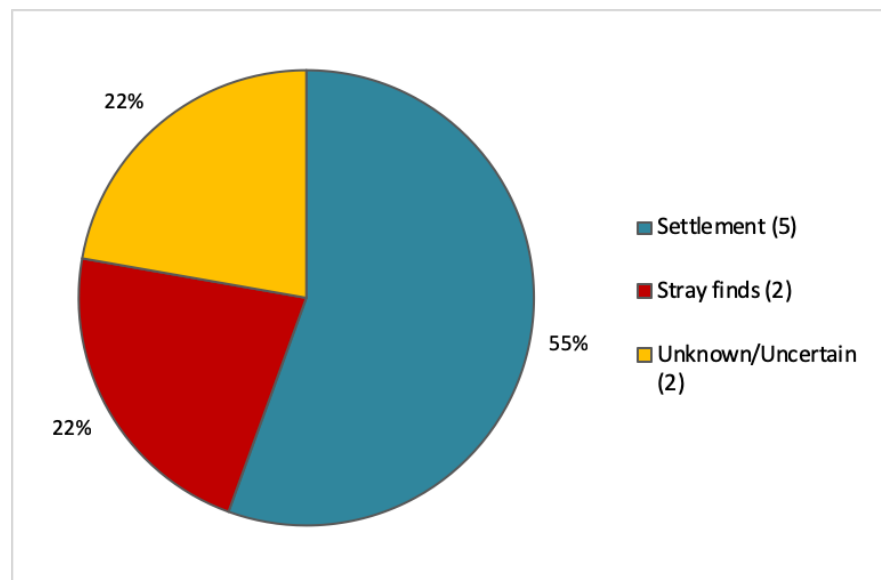
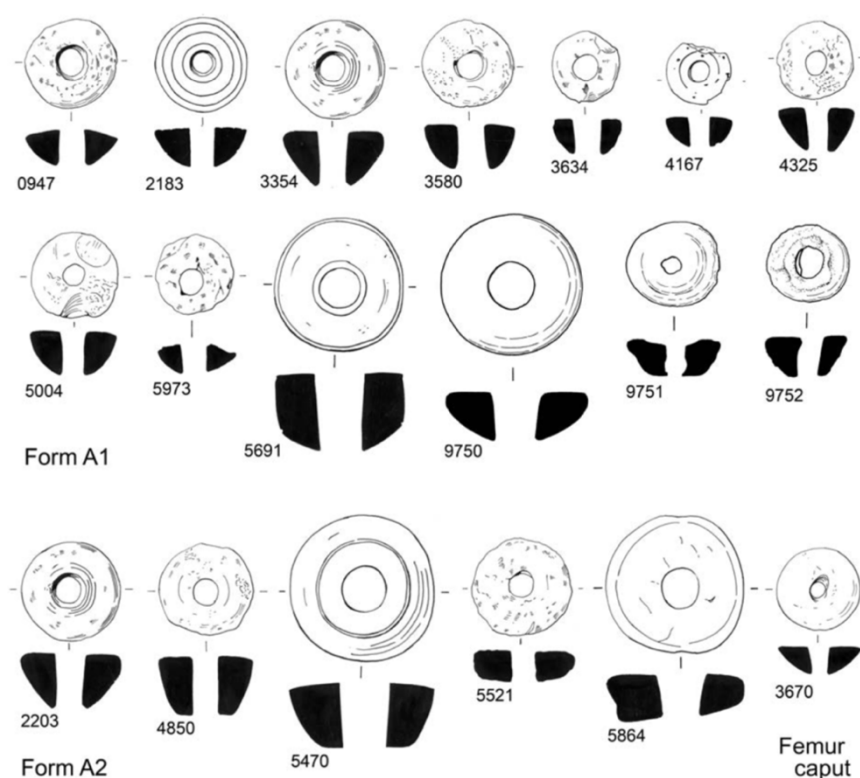


Chart 4.23 Distribution of Inscribed Textile-Making Items by Context

The inscriptions demonstrate that spindle-whorls were treasured objects, in some cases given as love or friendship tokens, and possibly seen as amulets (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 48-51; Meid 1994, 53). There are a number of spindle-whorls from Scandinavia inscribed with runic sequences that express relationships between the objects and women. Very similar to the **Stromness** whorl are two from Norway; one from Hoftuft, which states, ‘Gunnhildr made (this) spindle-whorl’ (fig. 4.21) (Spurkland 2005, 122 ; UiO, Kulturhistorisk museum, no. 23411), and one from Uppstad declaring ‘Helga owns this whorl’ (Olsen 1960, 198-199; Vebæk 1992, 92). Like the amorous messages to women inscribed on spindle-whorls from Roman Gaul (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 48-49; Meid 1994, 52-56) is a wooden whorl from Oslo, Norway, dated Post-1100, that reads, ‘Nikulas loves well the woman named Gyrid, daughter of Petr-Ragnar’ (Knirk 2017, 10 ; MacLeod & Mees 2006, 51). The inscriptions on at least three spindle-whorls

from Britain are suggestive of gift giving, in particular the **Whitby** whorl with three runes interpreted as ‘token of friendship’ (Page 1999a, 170), which were possibly written for the purpose of giving. The alternative reading of the **Buckquoy** whorl (Rodway 2017) may also relate to this theory. As objects associated with women’s work it is reasonable to assume that they could have been given to women by amorous men (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 50-51). If so, *Gautr* could have carved the runic message signing his name before giving the **Stromness** whorl to his beloved.



**Figure 4.19 Variations of spindle-whorls from Anglo-Saxon Brandon, Suffolk (Tester et al 2014, 287, fig. 9.6 © East Anglian Archaeology, Suffolk County Council CC BY 3.0)**

Some of the inscriptions suggest that spindle-whorls could be protective amulets. The runic inscription on the **Burray** can be added to the long list of Scandinavian *futhark* inscriptions seen as amuletic charms (Ljosland 2020). The ogham inscription on the **Buckquoy** whorl is usually interpreted as a prayer for one named ‘L’ (Forsyth 2005), and the unusual lead spindle-whorl from **Saltfleetby**, Lincolnshire, includes the names of three Nordic Gods in a lengthy plea for a male named *Úlfjótr* in younger futhark runes (Jesch 2020). Noteworthy is the incised motif of a face on this whorl which resembles a similar face on the lead plaque from **Dunton** (see Chapter 6.2.2), interpreted by Hines (2017) as the face of an elf or dwarf the amuletic inscription is meant to dispel. The image on the **Saltfleetby** whorl may be for a similar purpose considering the protective aspect of its inscription. From Sweden is a 12<sup>th</sup> century spindle-whorl that reads, ‘Peace to the wearer, prosperity to the owner. Ingivaldr’ (J Fv1970;86 – Historiska museet, Stockholm, no. 28996), and one from Hemne, Sør-Trøndelag, Norway, is inscribed with the descriptive term, *snaltr*, *snáldr*, ‘spindle-whorl’, which, like other objects with descriptive inscriptions, may be a means of empowering the object’s potential (N452; Spurkland 2005, 123). Female skeletons at the

Anglo-Saxon cemetery of Castledyke South, Barton-on-Humber, England were found with spindle-whorls at their hips, suggesting that the objects were carried with them on a belt or girdle (Foreman 1998, 294). As personal possessions and objects used every day, as well as for prayers or charms, they would have been kept close to their owners.



**Figure 4.20 Spindle-whorl from Hoftuft, Norway, inscribed with 'Gunnhildr made (this) spindle-whorl' (Kulturhistorisk Museum Oslo, C23411 © CC BY-SA 4.0 photograph by Eirik Irgens Johnsen)**

Some of the texts are clear and concise suggesting fresh carvings, whilst others, such as the wooden weaving-beater from **Dublin**, show signs of wear (Barnes et al 1997, 18-20), although as an object made of degradable material this would be expected. The texts would have added a deeper sense of personal value and importance, possibly meant to increase the efficacy of the objects as functional tools, such as the **Wallingford** weaving-sword that gives a voice to the object. Some of the texts certainly do not seem casual, such as the lengthy **Saltfleetby** runic inscription, carved on two sides of the whorl with a sharp instrument, although composed from a soft material, the lead whorl could have been incised at any point during its life. Described as ‘casual doodles’ are the three runes on the **Westness** pin, which also may be the owner’s name in the form of initials (Barnes & Page 2006, 193). Similar inscriptions on two wooden sticks from Trondheim, Norway, one inscribed with **kkk.kk.kkkk.k**, and the other, **iiiiiiiiii kkk kkkkkkkk kkk k**, demonstrate the act of carving ‘casual’ runes onto ephemeral objects on many pieces of bone and wood, which is seen in Scandinavia as well as Scandinavian sites in Britain (Barnes & Page 2006, 193). Apart from owner’s marks, repetition of runes in this manner have also been suggested to be for the purposes of magical charms as well as evidence for the learning of writing runes (Barnes 2012, 115; MacLeod & Mees 2006, 104, 112).

The two textile or weaving-beaters could also have been gifts to women. Comparable is a 12<sup>th</sup> century runic weaving sword from Sweden inscribed with, ‘Think of me, I think of you! Love me, I love you! Have mercy on me!’ (fig. 4.22) (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 54). Although inscribed with an Old Norse masculine name, it is highly unlikely that a man would have owned the wooden weaving implement from **Dublin**. One suggestion is that *Gerlak/Geirleikr* carved his name in large runes as a reminder of his adoration before giving it to a woman. More elaborate is the 9<sup>th</sup> century weaving-sword from Wallingford, made of imported whalebone likely from Norway (Christie & Creighton 2013, 120). The object is inscribed with

‘Eadburh owns me’ repeated once in Roman letters, which considering the Old English translation and female name, was carved in England (Christie & Creighton 2013, 120; Okasha 1971, 119). Made of imported whalebone the object would have been seen as an exquisite possession, and Eadburh would have been of some level of social standing. Because of this, the repetition of the inscription most likely was to mark her territory rather than repetition as a result of writing practice.



Figure 4.21 Rune-inscribed wooden weaving knife from Lödöse, Sweden  
(© Swedish Historiska Museet SHM 29750:542 CC BY 2.5 SE, photograph by  
Sanna Stahre 2013-04-22)

#### 4.2.4 Gaming Pieces

As pieces used for the playing of board-games and/or dicing in domestic environments, the five objects discussed below represent the use of text in three different epigraphic traditions in early medieval Britain and Ireland (Table 4.14). The five objects are all made of animal bone either worked into the form of dice (**Ballinderry**), chess pieces (**Wimborne A and B**), or left in their original form as an astragalus (**Caistor-by-Norwich**) and a phalange (**Southampton**) (Dalton 1927; Hencken 1942, 55; Page 1970, 86-88; 1973). The two pieces from **Wimborne**, dating from the 10<sup>th</sup> to late 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, were made for the game of chess, whilst the three other objects could have been used for a number of earlier games with or without a gaming board (MacGregor 1985, 132; Page 1999a, 179). The texts include one inscription in ogham (**Ballinderry**), two in older *futhark* or Anglo-Saxon *futhorc* runes (**Caistor-by-Norwich**, **Southampton**), and two in Roman letters (**Wimborne A and B**) (Chart 4.24). The inscriptions include three in Latin (**Ballinderry**, **Wimborne A and B**) and two in Continental Germanic or Old English (**Caistor-by-Norwich**, **Southampton**). The contents of the inscriptions include self-descriptive terms (**Caistor-by-Norwich**, **Southampton**), a play on words (**Ballinderry**), and two Latin words associated with the specific type of game (**Wimborne**), which were meant to identify and set the objects apart from other items within a set and during the gaming process. In this corpus, these objects and their inscriptions represent the practical side of the use of text, in which letters were used for social, interactive, and functional purposes.



Table 4.14 Inscribed Gaming Pieces

Name	Object	Inscription
Ballinderry	DIE: Sheep bone, c.550-800	Ogham, Latin: 'five'
Caistor-by-Norwich	ASTRAGALUS: Roe deer knucklebone, c.425-475	EF runes, Continental Germanic/Old English: 'roe deer', 'of a roe'
Southampton ( <i>Hamwih</i> )	PHALANGE: Cattle, 650-900	AS runes, Continental Germanic/Old English: <i>katæ</i> , 'knuckle-bone'
Wimborne A	CHESS PIECE: Whalebone, 900-1100	Roman letters, Latin: '[S]atras' = 'chess'
Wimborne B	CHESS PIECE: Whalebone, 900-1100	Roman letters, Latin: CL-

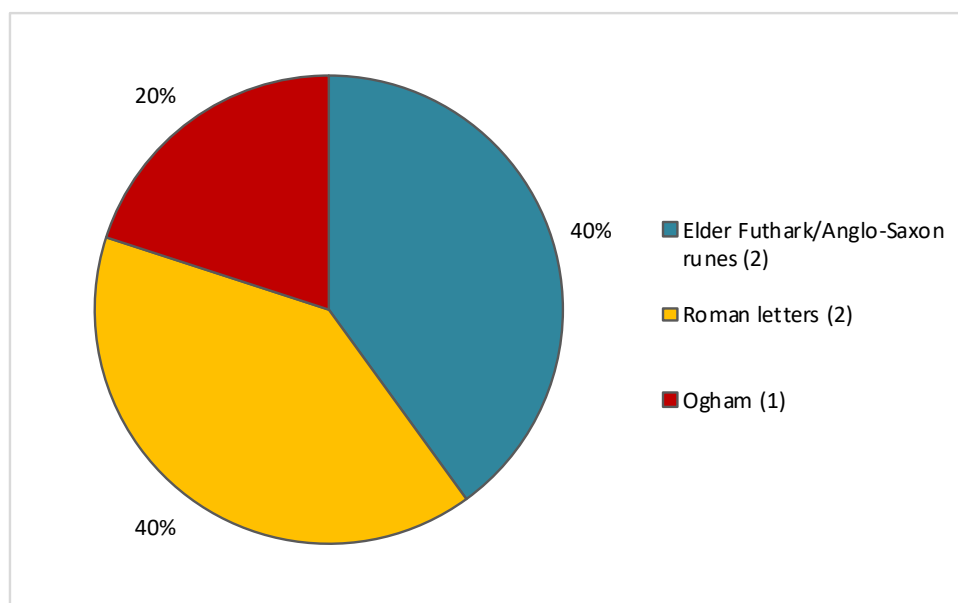


Chart 4.24 Scripts on Inscribed Gaming Pieces

The five gaming pieces were found through controlled excavations of settlement sites and a cemetery including a Late Bronze Age crannog reused in the early Christian period in Co. Offaly, Ireland (**Ballinderry**) (Hencken & Stelfox 1942), an early medieval manor house in Dorset, England (**Wimborne**) (Dalton 1928), in a rubbish pit at the Anglo-Saxon site of *Hamwih*, **Southampton** (Morton 1992, MF1:J6), and an early Anglo-Saxon cremation cemetery in Norfolk, England (**Caistor-by-Norwich**) (Myers & Green 1973). Gaming pieces in various shapes, materials, and sizes are known from all cultures in Britain and Ireland from the Bronze Age onwards (Hall 2007, 7, 19-20; Youngs 1983, 860). As an easily accessible raw material, playing pieces are most often made of bone and antler, but glass, stone, clay, and metal examples are also known (Youngs 1983, 865-866). They are oftentimes found in burial contexts, primarily in cremation and inhumation early Anglo-Saxon burials, but also in a few elite burials in Pictland, Dal Riata, and Norse Scotland (Hall 2007, 7, 13, 19-20; Page 1969a, 2; Youngs 1983, 860-861, 873-874). Long dice similar in form to the **Ballinderry** die have been found at Lagore Crannog, Co. Meath, the Broch of Burrian in Orkney, and the Outer Hebridean islands (Traill 1871, 345, 355-356; Young 1956, 319).

The games in which the pieces from **Caistor-by-Norwich**, **Southampton**, and **Ballinderry** were used could include a variety of games such as games of chance, or board-games, or even for divination purposes. The use of astragali and phalangeal bones for gaming pieces and divination lots is known from Roman, Iron Age, and Anglo-Saxon contexts, as well the ancient Mediterranean and Near East (Gilmour 1997; Hall 2007, 21-22; Ritchie 2008, 122; Youngs 1983, 865). Pictish communities also incorporated the use of astragali and phalanges, which can be found at several sites in Scotland (fig. 4.23) and are in some cases marked with Pictish symbols (fig. 4.24) (Curle 1982, 25; Hall 2007, 22; MacGregor 1985, 130-131; Traill 1871, 345). The pieces could have been used for versions of the Norse board game of *hnefatafl*, including its Anglicised version *tafl* (Hall 2007, 13; Ritchie 2008, 117-118; Page 1973, 117; Meaney 1981, 261; Youngs 1983, 864). Checkered gaming boards created for *hnefatafl* include those at Inchmarnock (**IS.1**) as well as Burrian and Birsay in Orkney, and one from Ballinderry crannog 1 (Fredengren 2002, 48; Hall 2007, 12-13; Page 1969a, 2). The **Wimborne** pieces were used for chess, which was probably introduced into western Europe and Britain in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries from the Arab-Islamic world (Hall 2007, 31; MacGregor 1985, 137; Nedoma 2014, 243). The most impressive and well-known collection of chess pieces are the 12<sup>th</sup> century Lewis Chessmen found on the Outer Hebridean island of Lewis (Caldwell & Hall 2014; Hall 2007, 25; Stratford 1997). Earlier examples of chessmen in England include cylindrical ‘pawns’ and ‘knights’ from Wiltshire, Northamptonshire, and Warrington (MacGregor 1985, 137-138). The chess pieces from **Wimborne**, Dorset, may be the earliest collection of elaborately decorated chessmen from Anglo-Saxon England (Dalton 1927, 91).



**Figure 4.22 Astragali from Pool, Sanday, Orkney (Tankerness Museum, Orkney, photograph by the author, June 2019)**

The inscriptions on the gaming pieces are self-descriptive and functional. The deer knucklebone from **Caistor-by-Norwich** Anglo-Saxon cemetery is sometimes referred to as the oldest runic inscription in England (Looijenga 2003, 67). The **Southampton** bone is described as a cattle phalanx, unworked, except for its four runic letters. Both bones are seen as early forms of die and feature a single word in Germanic runes describing the object itself: the Continental Germanic or early Old English *raihan*, ‘roe doe’, ‘of a roe’ from **Caistor-by-Norwich** (Looijenga 2003, 284-285) and the Continental Germanic or early Old English *katae*, ‘knucklebone’ on the astragalus from **Southampton** (Page 1999a, 169). Other than practical texts to identify the pieces in a game, the self-descriptive terms

could also empower the playing pieces as amuletic talismans by reinforcing the ‘essence’ of the object (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 82; Page 1999a, 169).

The small bone die from **Ballinderry** takes on a play of words replacing dots with the ogham letter for V, the symbol for the Roman numeral for ‘5’ (O’Neill Hencken 1942, 55). As the die was found at a site with Christian influence, the carver of the die clearly knew both ogham and the Roman alphabet as well as Latin. As opposed to the other three playing pieces, the **Wimborne** pieces represent a more formalised and standard use of text. Although the pieces are fragmentary, the inscription on one of them may be reassembled into the word ‘SATRAS’, likely a Latin rendition of the Indian word *chataranga*, ‘chess’ (Dalton 1927, 90-91; Nedoma 2014, 243; Okasha 1971, 126). The inscribing of chess pieces is rare, if not unknown, elsewhere, and considering that the other chessmen in the **Wimborne** set are uninscribed, the meaning behind the addition of text on only two is unclear. The inscriptions on the **Ballinderry** die and the **Wimborne** chess pieces reflect learned and intellectual environments in which literacy and gaming were practiced together.



**Figure 4.23** Phalangeal bone from an ox inscribed with a Pictish symbol from the Broch of Burrian (© National Museums Scotland, X.GB 227, online ID 000-000-136-622-C)

The marking of gaming pieces with figurative or illustrative designs or by colour was a means of differentiating pieces within a gaming set (MacGregor 1985, 137; Youngs 1982, 866-868). The **Caistor-by-Norwich** astragalus and the **Wimborne** pieces were blackened, probably by fire, apparently to distinguish them from the other pieces which accompanied them (Dalton 1927; MacGregor 1985, 137; Page 1973, 117; 1999, 179-180). The **Caistor-by-Norwich** knucklebone was found as part of the contents of a cremation urn of the mid 5<sup>th</sup> century along with bones, a toiletry set, and over sixty-eight gaming pieces including thirty-five astragali (Hall 2007, 22; Page 1999a, 179). Along with its darkened appearance, the runic astragalus is the largest of the thirty-five and is the only one with text, suggesting that it was the dominant piece (MacGregor 1985, 134). There is a possibility that the **Southampton** phalangeal bone served as a mere trial piece or a casual incision (Page 1970, 86-87). Although the **Southampton** bone was not found as part of a gaming set, Macgregor (1985, 134), suggests that it served a similar purpose, which is plausible given its similarity to the **Caistor-by-Norwich** astragalus.

## 4.2.5 Vessels

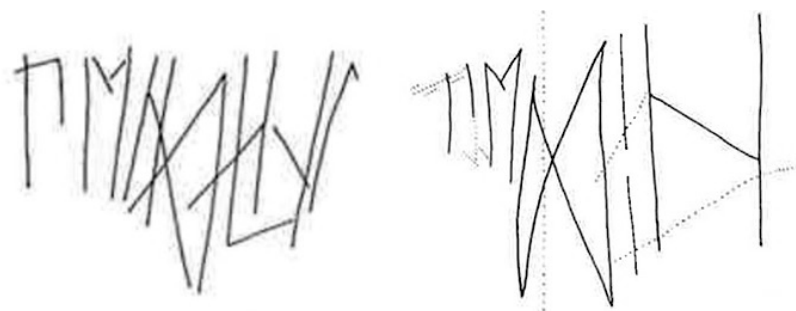
The four inscribed copper-alloy bowls date between 450 and 700 AD and represent an early use of text on domestic goods in Anglo-Saxon England and early Christian Ireland. Two are described as hanging-bowls with suspension escutcheons (**Cleatham**, **Kilgulbin East**), whereas the other two are a sheet bronze pail (**Chessell Down**) and a shallow bowl (**Willoughby-on-the-Wolds**) (Table 4.15) (Bruce-Mitford 2005, 141, 133; Geake 1995, 50). Three bowls come from early Anglo-Saxon female burials and are inscribed with older futhark or Anglo-Saxon runes, consisting of one single rune (**Willoughby-on-the-Wolds**), and two baffling sequences (**Chessell Down**, **Cleatham**). The fourth bowl comes from a bog in **Kilgulbin East**, Co. Kerry, and is inscribed with two ogham rows interpreted as two masculine Old Irish names (Holder 1990, 31-32). From the 6<sup>th</sup> century onwards, hanging-bowls are found throughout England in male weapon burials and richly furnished female graves, with a slight concentration in the eastern regions (Bruce-Mitford 2005, 26; Geake 1995, 85-87). Bruce-Mitford (2005, 62-63) lists 110 hanging-bowls from England, as well as seven from Scotland and eight from Ireland. Found in Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, and Viking contexts, their use is seemingly derived from late-Roman suspended bronze bowls and their use comes in a variety of sizes from large cauldrons to small cups (Bruce-Mitford 2005, 30-31, 34-35; Longley 1975, 15). They were used for a range of secular and non-secular purposes including oil lamps, like the triangular-shaped **Kilgulbin East** bowl and similar examples from Cuillard, Co. Galway and Ballinderry crannog I, Co. Westmeath (Bruce-Mitford 2005, 330-333, 335-345). The **Chessell Down** bowl is identified as one of six 6<sup>th</sup>-century sheet-bronze buckets from the Mediterranean decorated with hunting scenes, of which three were found in England (Geake 1995, 86). The **Cleatham** hanging-bowl is likely locally made, whilst the **Willoughby** bowl is probably an import from the Rhineland (Looijenga 2003, 290).

**Table 4.15 Inscribed Vessels**

Name	Object	Inscription
Chessell Down	BOWL: Brass, 520-570, decorated	EF/AS runes, Continental Germanic/Old English: '[b w s] e e e c c c a a a' or '[b w s] e e e k k k æ æ æ' Possibly the Gmc PNs, 'Becca, Wecca Secca'
Cleatham	HANGING-BOWL: Copper-alloy, 550-700, undecorated	EF runes, Continental Germanic/Old English: '-e d i h' or 'h i d e-'
Kilgulbin East	HANGING-BOWL/LAMP: Copper-alloy, 550-700, triangular, undecorated	Ogham, Old Irish/Early Gaelic: A) 'Renowned Cuil(l)en' B) 'Renowned Cogradedena'
Willoughby-on-the-Wolds	BOWL FRAGMENTS: Copper-alloy, 460-600, undecorated	EF/AS runes, Continental Germanic/Old English: 'a'

The inscriptions on the bowls include three written in elder futhark and/or Anglo-Saxon runes and one in Old Irish/Early Gaelic ogham, and may all represent personal names. As early Germanic runes, the three runic inscriptions are difficult to decipher and are given no certain interpretation, but as a single rune, the **Willoughby** 'a' or 'æ' may represent the initial of a Germanic or Old English personal

name, like the runic brooch from the same site (Page 1999a, 91), in which case it could be seen as an owner's mark. Also possibly featuring Germanic or Old English personal names are runes on the **Chessell Down** bowl, which may be copying amuletic rhyming sequences from Scandinavia (see Chapter 7.8) (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 145-147). If applying the same method, the inscription can be interpreted not as a charm but as a play on words to hide the three Germanic masculine names, *Becca*, *Wecca*, and *Secca* (Looijenga 2003, 280-281). The four visible runes on the **Cleatham** bowl are particularly baffling and are given no interpretation other than a possible owner signature or a descriptive name (Looijenga 2003, 291). Both of the ogham rows on the **Kilgulbin** bowl are most likely Old Irish/Early Gaelic personal names beginning with the term *Bladnach*, which may be translated as 'famous, renowned' (Holder 1990, 31-39; McManus 1991, 132). One of the ogham rows is cleverly scratched down the length of one of the escutcheons and is considerably more well preserved than the second inscription along the upper surface of the rim (Bruce-Mitford 2005, 332). This discrepancy may tell us that the two inscriptions were carved at different times, possibly representing two subsequent owners similar to the four ogham names on the **Ballyspellan** brooch (Holder 1990, 34-36). Another possibility given by Holder is that the names refer to craftsmen or donors.



**Figure 4.24** The Cleatham bowl runes as shown with their intrusive scratches (left: Leahy 2007, 180, fig. 84 © Council for British Archaeology, Archaeology Data Service access licence) and isolated (right: Bruce-Mitford & Raven 2005, 141, Fig. 97 'Runes on bowl, 3:1' © Oxford Publishing Ltd. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear)

Like most of the inscribed household tools, it is difficult, if not impossible, to say whether the four inscriptions were carved at the time the bowls were made. It is reasonable to suggest that they were not part of the original design of the bowls and were added afterwards to enhance their value. The runic inscription on the **Chessell Down** bowl is incised over part of the original punched decoration, indicating that it may have been a secondary addition. Because the runes cannot be determined to be of the older futhark or Anglo-Saxon futhorc, it cannot be said whether they were inscribed prior to the bucket's arrival into England or afterwards. As grave goods it is also possible that they were inscribed for burial purposes. The hook escutcheons on the **Cleatham** bowl were removed in a deliberate act prior to burial (Leahy 2007, 234). This could have also included the inscribing of the runes, although the inscription is so faint and obscured by intrusive scratches they could have been in place for a while before burial. The cluttered nature of the **Cleatham** runes, intermingled with additional scratches and marks, is disordered and confusing (fig. 4.25). The facts that some runes are larger than others and that some stem lines do not match create an impression that the scribe had little knowledge of runic writing. They resemble the jumbled runic sequences on the backs of the '**Bateman**' and **Harford Farm**

brooches, as well as on other runic inscriptions dated to the Migration and early Saxon period, in which the runes are disorganised and uneven, written in different sizes and appearing somewhat clumsy or haphazard.



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due to Copyright restrictions

**Figure 4.25** The Breamore bucket (top: © Hampshire Cultural Trust, Winchester City Museum, object no. HMCMS:A2001.39) and the Chessell Down bowl (bottom: Arnold 1982, fig. 10)

From a field in Breamore, Hampshire, comes a 6<sup>th</sup>-century copper-alloy bucket inscribed in Roman letters and in Greek around the top rim reading, ‘Use this, lady, for many happy years’ (fig. 4.26) (Hinton & Worrell 2017). Similar in style and decoration to the **Chessell Down** bucket, the Breamore example is also an import, likely coming from the area around Greece (Whallen 2015). A second bronze bowl of Irish origin was found in a 10<sup>th</sup>-century grave in Kaupang, Vestfold, Norway, and is inscribed in Scandinavian runes reading, ‘in the washbasin’ (Bruce-Mitford 2005, 456-457; Hårdh 2011; Spurkland 2005, 123-124). Similar to the **Rannveig** casket, the vessel was probably taken from Ireland during Viking raids (see Chapter 5.1.1). These two vessels are not included in this corpus because unfortunately they were not brought to the attention of the author until after the completion of the catalogue.

### 4.3 Weaponry and Armour

The thirty-three inscribed objects in this category were used for fighting and defensive purposes. They are predominantly components of swords, with 10 sword blades, seven pommels (**Ash-Gilton I**, **Ash-Gilton II**, **Cotswolds**, **Faversham I**, **Faversham II**, **Sarre**, **Shorwell**), four hilt components (**Ballinderry**, **Exeter**, **Kilmainhaim**, **Wareham**), and three seaxes (**London Battersea**, **London Putney**, **Sittingbourne**) (Chart 4.25). The category also includes four leather seax sheaths (**Aachen**, **Dublin I**, **Dublin II**, **Trondheim**), five decorative sheath or scabbard mounts (**Carthorpe**, **Chessell**

**Down, Greenmount, London Westminster, St Ninian's**), and one helmet (**Coppergate**). The inscriptions on sword components and their blades are discussed separately as they represent two different epigraphic and chronological traditions: the early Germanic runic pommels of the 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries and the Viking-Age hilt guards and sword blades with Roman letters from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Although there are 33 objects, 34 inscriptions are identified as the **Ballinderry** sword features two texts, one on its blade and one on its hilt-guard, therefore it is discussed in two categories: sword fittings and sword blades.

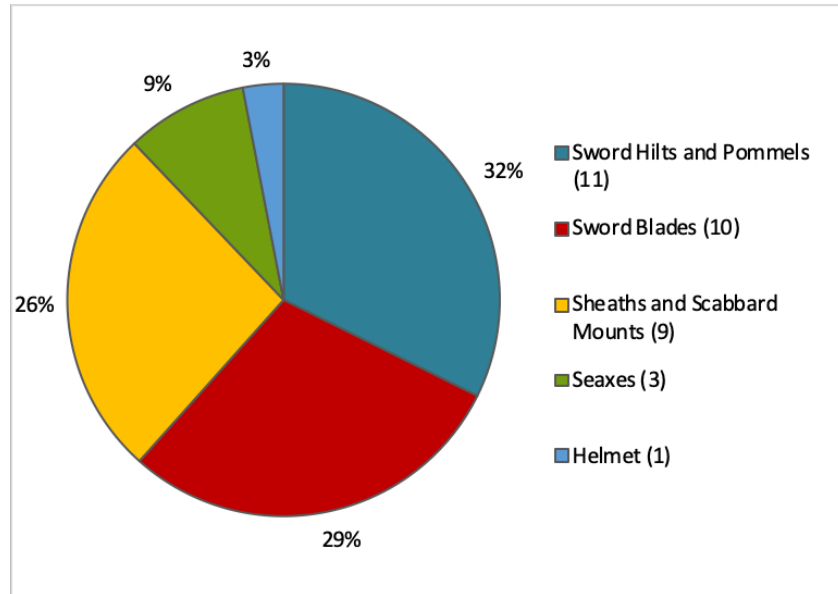


Chart 4.25 Inscribed Weaponry and Armour (Ballinderry sword listed in two categories)

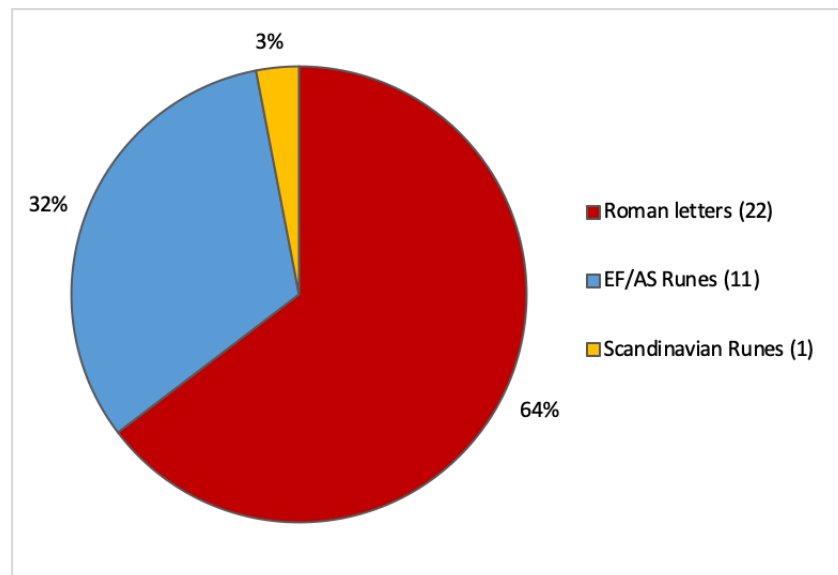


Chart 4.26 Scripts on Inscribed Weaponry and Armour (Ballinderry sword listed in two categories)

The inscriptions on weaponry and armour are mostly in Roman letters, with twenty-two in total (64%) (Chart 4.26), which are primarily inscribed on sword blades, although Roman letters are also seen on sword hilts, leather sheaths, seaxes, and one helmet. Eleven inscriptions are in older *futhork* or

Anglo-Saxon runes (32%), of which seven are on early Anglo-Saxon sword pommels, two on scabbard mounts, and one hilt guard. The only inscription in Scandinavian runes is inscribed onto a decorative metal mount from a scabbard (**Greenmount**). The objects in the category of weaponry and armour include ten that are inscribed in Continental or North Germanic, all with Roman letters and inscribed on 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century sword components (Table 4.16, Chart 4.27). Nine inscriptions are either in Continental Germanic or Old English Germanic runes and are carved into the sides of early Anglo-Saxon sword pommels. Five inscriptions are in Old English including three in Roman letters (**London Putney** seax, **Sittingbourne** seax, **Wareham** sword) and two in Anglo-Saxon runes (**London Battersea** seax, **London Westminster** scabbard mount). Seven inscriptions are primarily in Latin but also comprise of personal names including five Old English names (**Aachen** sheath, **Coppergate** helmet, **Dublin I** sheath, **Exeter** hilt-guard, **Trondheim** sheath), one Continental Germanic name (**Hertford** sword), and one name in Pictish (**St Ninian's Isle** chape). The **Greenmount** inscription is the only object inscribed in Scandinavian runes and Old Norse, and two inscriptions in Roman letters (**Dublin** sword, **Dublin II** sheath) are in uncertain languages.

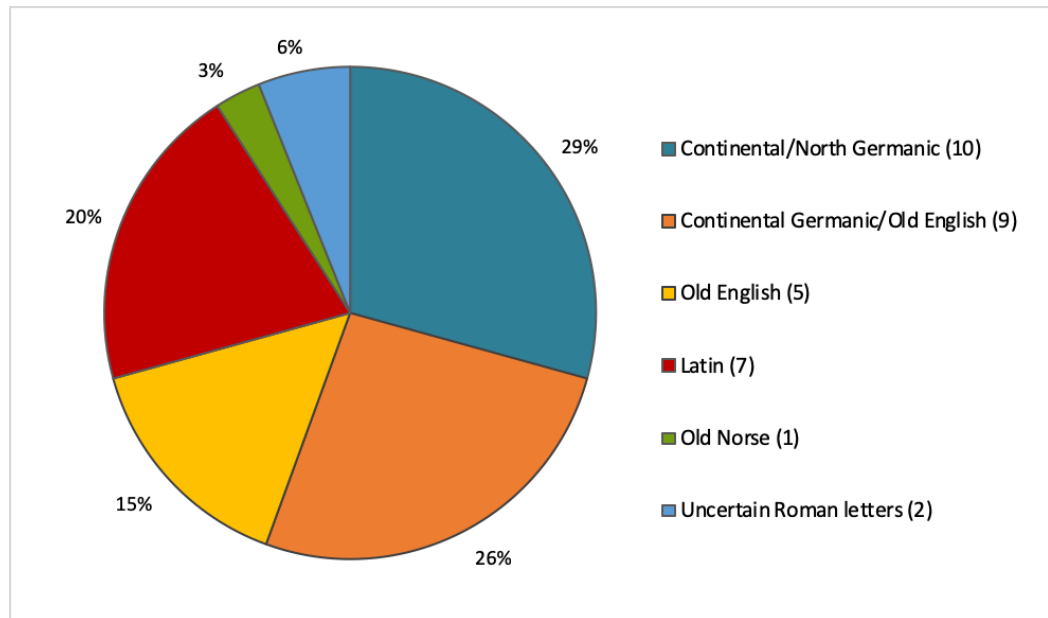


Chart 4.27 Languages on Inscribed Weaponry and Armour (Ballinderry sword listed in two categories)

Table 4.16 Scripts and Languages on Weaponry and Armour

	Latin	Continental/ North Germanic	Continental Germanic/Old English	Old English	Old Norse	Unidentified/ Uncertain
Roman Letters	7	10	0	3	0	2
Elder Futhark/Anglo- Saxon runes	0	0	9	2	0	0
Scandinavian runes	0	0	0	0	1	0



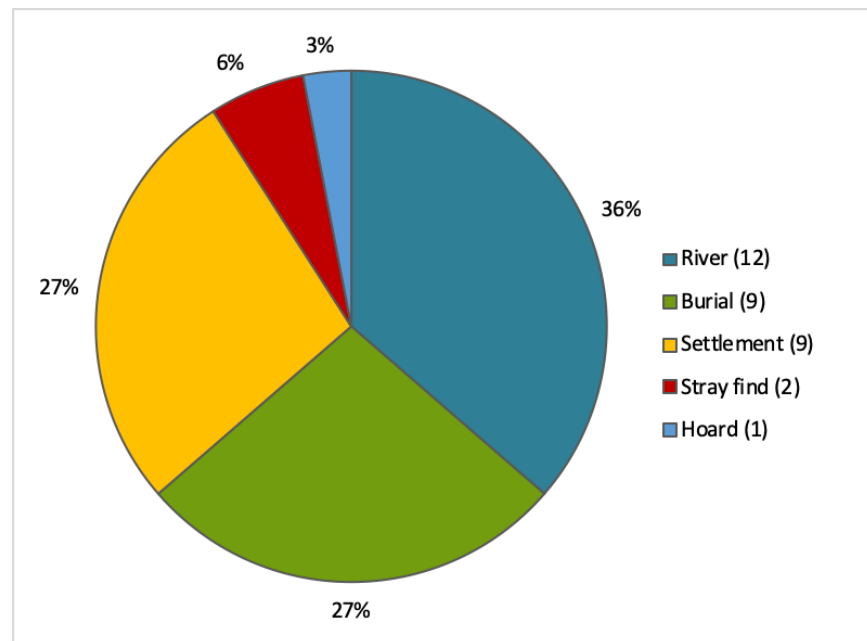


Chart 4.28 Distribution of inscribed weaponry and armour by context

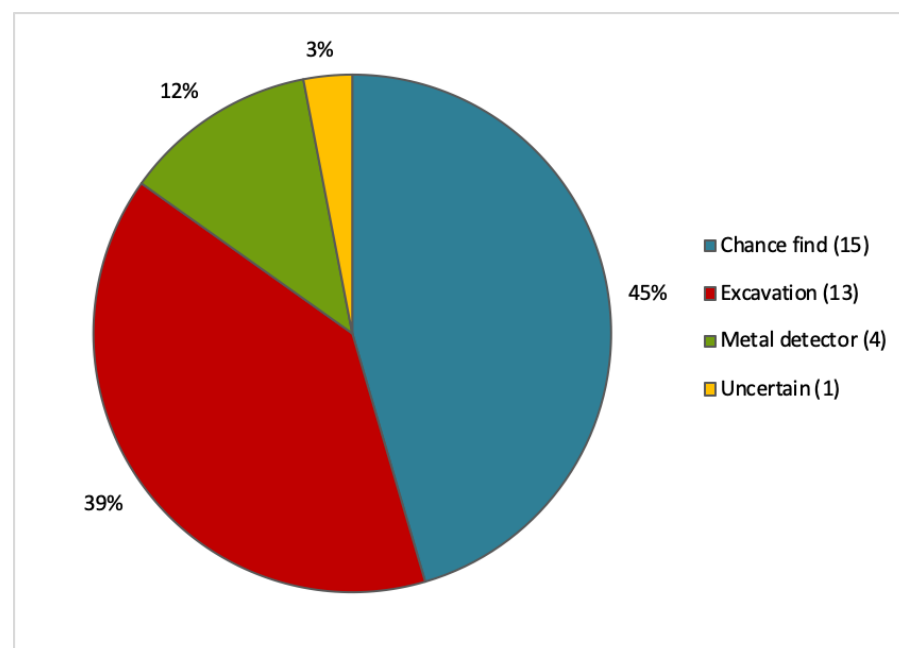


Chart 4.29 Find circumstances of inscribed weaponry and armour

The find-spots and circumstances of the inscribed objects of weaponry and armour are diverse. Twelve objects (36%) were found in or on the banks of rivers, nine objects (27%) were discovered at settlement sites, a further nine (27%) in burials, two as stray finds on land (**Carthorpe, Cotswolds**), and one (3%) as part of a hoard (**St Ninian's Isle**) (Chart 4.28). Along with the find-spots of the objects, most of the circumstances under which they were found were by chance, including fifteen that were found accidentally by river dredging or construction. Thirteen objects were uncovered through excavations of sites including cemeteries and settlements, and four objects were found through metal detecting activity (Chart 4.29). Two leather sheaths were found at settlement sites outside of Britain and

Ireland. They include one from **Aachen**, Germany, with an unknown provenance prior to its registry in Aachen Cathedral Treasury, and one from **Trondheim**, Norway, found during excavation in the city (Okasha 1992b).

### 4.3.1 Sword-Fittings

Eleven inscriptions are placed on individual components of swords including seven pommels and four hilt-guards (Table 4.17). The seven pommels are a type of ring-sword pommel characteristic of the 5<sup>th</sup> to early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, distributed between Kent and Merovingian Gaul (Evison 1967a; Fischer & Soulat 2008; 2010). The pommels are given dates from the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> to the early 7<sup>th</sup> century and are inscribed with older futhark or Anglo-Saxon runes which includes single runes and runic sequences that are difficult to decipher but represent Continental Germanic or early Old English writing (Chart 4.30, 4.31). Four inscriptions are set in Roman letters upon hilt components from Viking-age swords of the 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries (**Ballinderry**, **Exeter**, **Kilmainham**, **Wareham**). As opposed to the runic pommels, these four inscriptions are more readable. They comprise of personal names representing the owners and makers in Continental or North Germanic, Latin, and Old English. The eleven sword-fittings, discussed on their own and in the larger context of Continental and English epigraphic traditions, demonstrate the progression of the use of text, from the earliest use of runic writing to the more lexical inscriptions in Roman letters.

**Table 4.17 Inscribed Sword-Fittings**

Name	Object	Inscription
Ash-Gilton I	SWORD POMMEL: Gilded silver, 550-600, ring-sword pommel	EF/AS runes, Continental Germanic/Old English: 'Sigimer', 'I am victory', or '...Sigi owns me'
Ash-Gilton II	SWORD POMMEL: Gilded silver, 550-600, ring-sword pommel	EF/AS runes, Continental Germanic/Old English: 'z', 'z' or 'x', 'x' two runes for the CGmc 'z', <i>algiz</i> , or AS 'x', <i>eolhx</i> , 'elk'
Ballinderry	HILT-GUARD: Silver, 800-1000	Roman letters, Continental/North Germanic: 'Hiltipreht'
Cotswolds	SWORD POMMEL: Gilded silver, 550-650, ring-sword pommel	EF/AS runes, Continental Germanic/Old English: '...æ...'
Exeter	HILT-GUARD: Bronze, 900-1100	Roman letters, Latin with OE PN: '[L]eofric made me'
Faversham I	SWORD POMMEL: Gilded silver, 550-650, ring-sword pommel	EF/AS rune, Continental Germanic/Old English: 'a' or 'æ'
Faversham II	SWORD POMMEL: Gilded silver, 550-650, ring-sword pommel	EF/AS rune, Continental Germanic/Old English: 't'

Kilmainham	HILT-GUARD: Silver, 800-1000	Roman letters, Continental/North Germanic: 'Hartolfr'
Sarre	SWORD POMMEL: Bronze, 500-570, ring-sword pommel	EF/AS runes, Continental Germanic/Old English A) ] d u [ B) Uncertain
Shorwell	SWORD POMMEL: Gilded silver, 500-650, ring-sword pommel	EF/AS runes, Continental Germanic/Old English: '[i] e [c]'
Wareham	SWORD-GRIP: Iron, 900-1000	Roman letters, Old English: 'Æthe- owns me...'

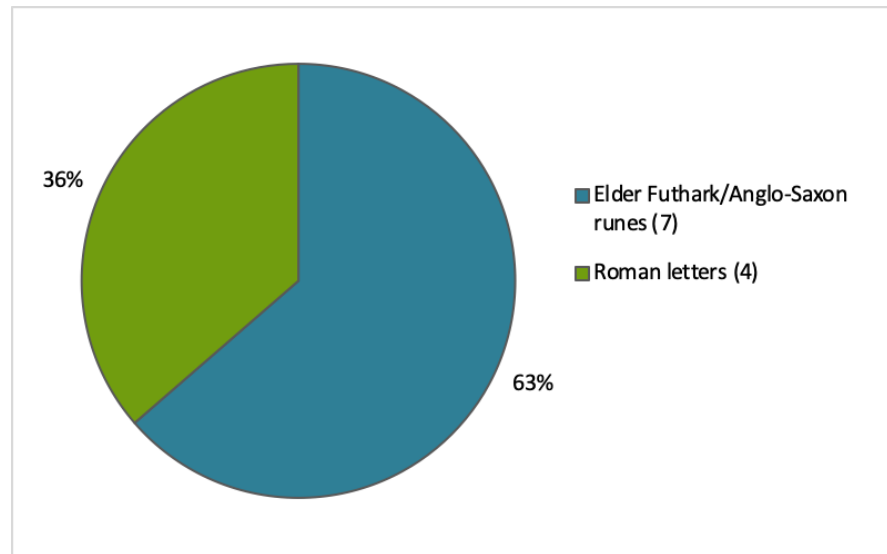


Chart 4.30 Scripts on Inscribed Sword-Fittings

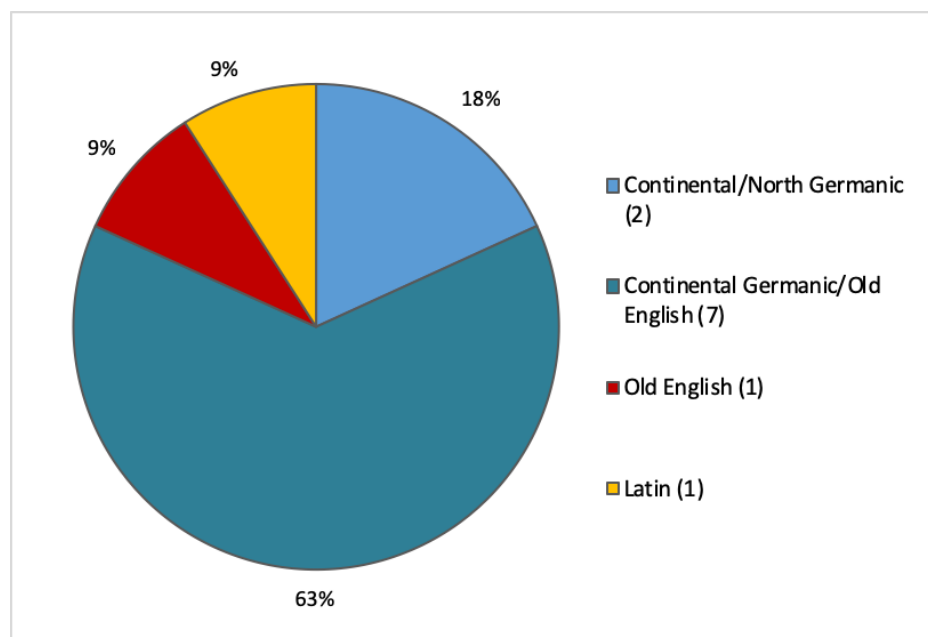


Chart 4.31 Languages on Inscribed Sword-Fittings

Six runic ring-sword pommels were found associated with early graves of south-eastern England, including five from Kent (**Ash-Gilton I and II**, **Faversham I and II**, **Sarre**) and one from the Isle of Wight (**Shorwell**) (Chart 4.32) (Basford 2008, PAS Ref IOW-358A74). The seventh pommel was found as a stray find in Gloucestershire (**Cotswolds**) alongside its iron tang and hilt (Adams 2016, PAS Ref GLO-67083F). This study is discounting an additional pommel from Buckland, Dover described as having a ‘pseudo-runic’ inscription (Fischer 2010a, 5). As ring-sword pommels, they come from a relatively short-lived tradition, likely originating in the lower Rhine region in 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century of attaching rings to the pommels of swords to symbolise political and kingly gifts in return for loyalty (Brunning 2019, 11; Evison 1967a, 63; Fischer & Soulat 2010a; Fischer 2013, 111). In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the region of Kent established its own form of ‘cocked-hat’ pommel with curved sides, represented by the seven inscribed pommels in this corpus (Evison 1967a, 70-73; Hawkes & Page 1967, 11; Richardson 2005). Ring-swords and their pommels are found primarily in graves in Scandinavia, Germany, Italy, France, and England, but have also been found in coin and bracteate hoards, particularly in Scandinavia (Evison 1967a, 84-97; Fischer & Soulat 2008, 75). In addition, the Portable Antiquities Scheme is increasing the number of stray finds, with over 65 ‘cocked-hat’ pommels recorded from England alone. Fischer and Soulat (2010a) counts eleven pommels from England and France with runic inscriptions, of which this study includes six. Two pommels from Grenay and Saint-Dizier in western France are inscribed with *alu*, ‘ale’ runes (fig. 4.27) (Fischer & Soulat 2010a, 5), which occurs on a number of migration period objects in East Anglia, the Continent, and Scandinavia, including bracteates, amulets, and the three cremation urns from **Spong Hill**, Norfolk (Barnes 2012b, 32; Looijenga 2003, 194-196; Stoklund 2006, 75). This connection between the early-Saxon sword pommels and bracteates allows for the pommels to be discussed as evidence for the earliest use of the runic script, and thus identify them as indications of an elite military network maintaining alliances across the English Channel (Fischer et al 2008, 76).

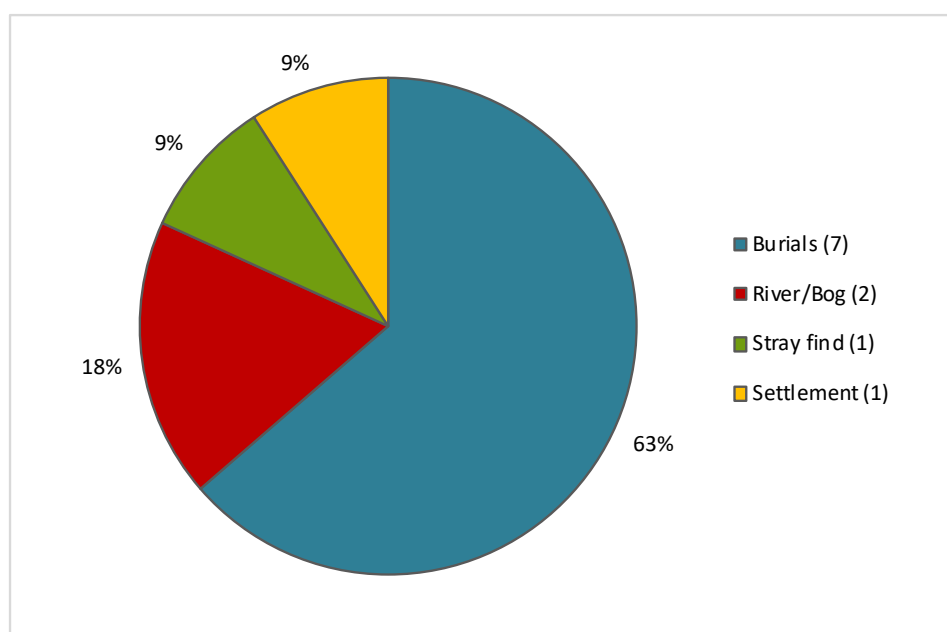
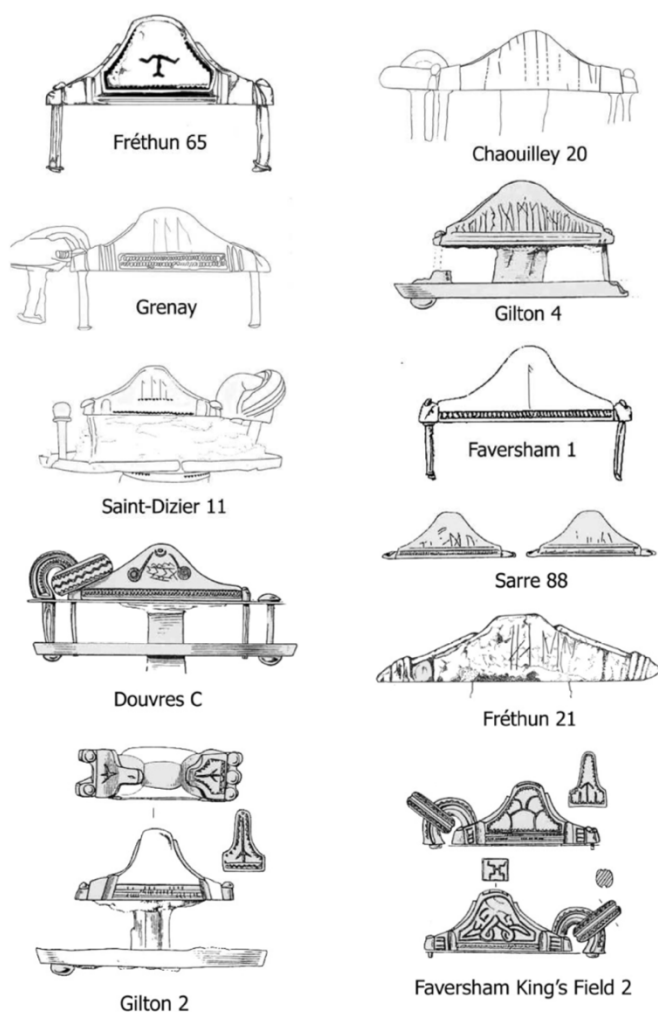


Chart 4.32 Distribution of Inscribed Sword-Fittings by Context

The three inscribed hilt cross-guards and one sword-grip date later to the 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries and are characteristic of Viking-age sword hilts (Peirce & Oakeshott 2002, 15-20). Still attached to their swords come two hilt-guards from Ireland; one from a disturbed Viking cemetery near Dublin (**Kilmainham**) (Harrison & Ó Floinn 2014, 330-331), and one from a bog (**Ballinderry**) (Peirce & Oakeshott 2002, 63-65). The third was found in isolation under a house in **Exeter**, Devon (Okasha 1971, 70-71). One inscribed handle grip was discovered in the River Frome in **Wareham**, Dorset (Okasha 1982, 100). The two swords from **Ballinderry** and **Kilmainham** in Ireland are almost identical, suggesting they were made in the same workshop, somewhere in Scandinavia or the Continent (Harrison & Ó Floinn 2014, 88; Stalsberg 2010). Their inscriptions are engraved in Roman capitals on the upper side of their cross-guards, and read, 'HILTIPREHT' and 'HARTOLFR', respectively, interpreted as Continental or North Germanic personal names (Oakeshott & Peirce 2002, 63-67). The name 'HILTIPREHT' is also seen on two swords from Berlin, Germany, and Malhus, Norway, and possibly one from London (Oakeshott & Peirce 1995). Like the inscribed blades, the names likely represent the name of a smith (Davidson 1962, 81-82; Oakeshott & Peirce 1995). Similar to the **Ballinderry** sword, the Malhus sword is inscribed with 'ULFBERHT' on its blade, possibly suggesting that whilst the blade was made in an Ulfberht workshop, the hilts were crafted elsewhere (Davidson 1962, 82). The other two inscribed hilt components include the **Exeter** cross-guard and **Wareham** grip, both inscribed with Anglo-Saxon first-person owner and maker texts, although *Leofric* from **Exeter** may in fact be the commissioner rather than craftsman (Okasha 1971, 70-71; 1982, 100). Considering that sword hilts and blades could be interchangeable, it is possible that whilst the **Exeter** and **Wareham** hilt components were specially made and inscribed in England for wealthy patrons, their blades could have been manufactured near or far-afield, as with the inscribed blades discussed below (Davidson 1962, 81-81; Evison 1967a, 75-76; Hinton 2006, 149).

The inscriptions in runes are exclusively on sword pommels dating to the early Anglo-Saxon period and are composed of single runes, obscure sequences, and personal names. They have private, personal, and possibly ritualistic or magical purposes, demonstrative of the earliest use of runes (Hawkes & Page 1967, 8-9; Looijenga 2003, 20). Unfortunately, the runes on three of the pommels are worn away to the point where only one or two graphs are visible. Three pommels are inscribed with single runes possibly representing ideographs for their rune-names, or as 'victory runes' (mentioned in the Eddic poem, *Sigrdrífumál*), intended to increase the fighting power and protection of the weapons (Hawkes & Page 1967, 8-9). The single rune on **Faversham I** is the rune for *æsc*, 'ash', which the Old English Rune Poem describes as tall and strong in the face of conflict (Brunning 2019, 75-76; Halsall 1981, 29, 92-3). Alternatively, it could also possibly be the Continental Germanic *ansuz*, 'god' (Looijenga 2003, 7). The t-rune on **Faversham II**, could stand for *tiw*, the reliable 'guiding star' in Old English, or for the Germanic god Tyr, the god of war (Evison 1956, 99; Halsall 1981, 91; Hawkes & Page 1967, 9; Page 1999a, 91). On **Ash-Gilton II**, the rune carved on both shoulders can be interpreted as either the older futhark z-rune, *algiz*, or the Anglo-Saxon x-rune, *eolhx*, ƿ, both meaning 'elk-sedge' or 'rush', which the Old English poem says is a sharp marshy grass that causes wounds (Halsall 1981, 92; Hawkes & Page 1967, 7-8). This rune is also seen engraved on the four faces of the **Carthorpe** scabbard mount (see Chapter 4.3.3). Carved on objects of combat, such meanings behind the runes would have given the swords their own agency, power, and personality. Those who wielded the

weapons would have gained confidence and inspiration through the presence of the runes on the swords, as if the swords themselves were their protective companions in battle



**Figure 4.26 Inscribed sword-pommels from France and England**  
(Fischer & Soulat 2009, 73, fig. 2, drawings by J Soulat.  
Reproduced with permission by J Soulat)

The runes on the **Ash-Gilton II** and **Faversham II** pommels are engraved on the shoulders of the pommels, within the space formed between the top and the upper guard. They are deeply carved and rather clear, indicating the runes may have been placed there at the time the pommels were made. The runes on the other pommels are carved on their broad faces and show varying degrees of wear and proficiency. Some inscriptions appear so worn and faint that they had to have been carved early on, quite possibly when the pommel was made (Evison 1967a, 97-98; Fischer 2010b; Hawkes & Page 1967, 10-11). Wear marks, particularly on the uppermost part of the pommels, which is visible on the **Ash-Gilton I** pommel, are interpreted as rubbing from a hand or clothing when the sword is sheathed (Bunning 2019, 69). In the case of the **Sarre** pommel, and possibly also the **Cotswolds** and **Shorwell** pommels, the runes were carved onto the gilded surface, which wore away leaving only traces of the text (Hawkes & Page 1967, 2). Whilst the **Faversham I** pommel features many scratches and wear

marks on its surface and edges, its single rune is relatively clear, suggesting the rune was inscribed at a later time, somewhat near to the pommel's deposition (Brunning 2019, 75; Fischer 2010b).

The runic sequence on the **Ash-Gilton I** pommel has been given at least eight interpretations, but it likely features the male name *Sigimer* (Elliott 1959a; Looijenga 2003, 276; Page 1999a, 167-168). The inscription on **Ash-Gilton I** are roughly carved, suggesting the scribe had minimal knowledge of writing on metal surfaces (fig. 4.28) (Evison 1967a, 98), although the 'runes' on either side of 's i g i m e r' may be space-fillers rather than true runes (Elliott 1959a; Evison 1967a, 98). In comparison, the inscriptions in Roman letters on the **Kilmainham**, **Ballinderry**, and **Exeter** hilts are carefully written and hardly worn, the exception being the inscription on the **Wareham** sword-grip, whose inscription is so fragmentary and lightly incised that it may have been a secondary addition, although this may be because of natural degradation of the organic material (Hinton & Okasha 1977). Brunning (2019, 69) makes note of the fact that the areas where these inscriptions are placed would have rarely been touched by a hand or article of clothing when the sword was worn at the side, thus the inscriptions would not have worn away as much as those on the pommels.

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**Figure 4.27 The runes on the Ash-Gilton I pommel and their individual interpretations (Evison 1967a, 98)**

In conclusion, as separate elements of swords, the pommels and hilts are inscribed with texts that demonstrate different inscribing practices across chronological and geographical frameworks. As ring-sword pommels were used by an elite minority to demonstrate alliances and hierarchical bonds (Brunning 2019, 11, 50; Evison 1967a), so too were Germanic runes in the earliest stages of the script (Barnes 2012, 11; Fischer et al 2008, 76; Looijenga 2003, 27-28). The seven runic pommels in this study dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> to early 7<sup>th</sup> century, therefore, are representative of the short and puzzling runic inscriptions written for personal, ornamental, and ritual purposes on prestigious objects. As components of ring-swords, the pommels are interpreted as relating to a practice of affixing rings to swords to solidify and symbolise an oath between a Lord and a retainer (Brunning 2019, 11, 81; Davidson 1962, 75-76). With this in mind, the inscriptions upon these pommels may somehow be an extension of this. Perhaps the owner of the sword wanted to enhance the power of the gift of the ring by carving runes upon the pommel, or perhaps the runes were meant to reinforce the ring-giving process and the inscription was carved at the same time. These ideas are only conjecture, as one may expect more of

these ring-sword pommels to be inscribed if this were the case. Regardless, considering the low number of inscribed pommels of this type from England, Scandinavia, and on the Continent compared to the large number of pommels that are not inscribed, there must have been some significance that necessitated the addition of the runes, setting these pommels apart from the rest.

The Roman letter inscriptions illustrate a later use of text as lexical and well-crafted statements of ownership and craftsmanship. Whilst the two inscribed with Anglo-Saxon ‘speaking object’ formulae were probably also written for specific individuals, the ‘HILTIPREHT’ and ‘HARTOLFR’ texts represent standardised names of smiths demonstrating Viking-age sword production and distribution (Oakeshott & Peirce 1995). The eleven objects discussed above illustrate differences between runic versus Roman letter writing, personal versus impersonal, and early versus later uses of text.

### 4.3.2 Sword Blades

The ten inscribed double-edged sword blades come from Ireland and England and date between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. They are made of iron alloy (steel) and inlaid with Roman capitals (Table 4.18). The sword blades are discussed separately from the pommels and hilt-guards due to distinct differences in their inscriptions as well as the fact that the components of swords could be interchangeable and were not necessarily contemporary with one another (Brunner 2019, 61, 83-88, 142; Stalsberg 2008, 8; 2010, 459). The blade inscriptions include ‘VLFBERHT’ and the lesser known ‘INGELRII’ signatures, placing them within the wide corpus of Viking-age inscribed swords likely originating from the middle or lower Rhineland region (Pedersen 2010; Stalsberg 2010). Variations of these inscriptions are known on swords throughout Scandinavia, western and eastern Europe, and central Asia, found in graves and (more commonly) in rivers, as a result of trade and warfare (Pedersen 2010, 317; Stalsberg 2008, 9-13; Lang & Ager 1989, 101). They are generally described as maker or workshop signatures, although a new interpretation as religious invocations has been proposed (Feuerbach & Hanley 2017). Approximately 166 ‘Ulfberht’ inscriptions are known in 23 European countries, of which most come from Norway, and the number of ‘Ingelrii’ swords is currently more or less 32 (Stalsberg 2008, 2, 9-10; Stalsberg 2010, 455). As portable inscribed objects, the ten blades stand out as inscriptions that are mass-produced for public consumption. In comparison to scratched letters on the back of a brooch or on an unworked piece of bone, the blade inscriptions are intended to be an intrinsic part of the weapon’s construction and purpose.

**Table 4.18 Inscribed Sword Blades**

Name	Object	Inscription
Ballinderry	DOUBLE-EDGED BLADE: Iron, 800-1000	Roman letters, Continental Germanic: ‘+VLFBERHT+’
Chertsey	DOUBLE-EDGED BLADE: Iron, 900-1000	Roman letters, Continental Germanic: ‘+MFBERIT+’, variation of ‘+Ulfberht+’
Dublin	DOUBLE-EDGED BLADE: Iron, 1050-1100	Roman letters, Uncertain: ‘SINIMIINIINIS’ or ‘SIVINIVIWINIS’



Hertford	DOUBLE-EDGED BLADE: Iron, 900-1000	Roman letters, Latin with CGmc PN: 'Leuter [made?]'
London, Battersea	DOUBLE-EDGED BLADE: Iron, 900-1000	Roman letters, Continental Germanic: '+VI- IFR I + -', variation of '+VLFBERHT+'
London, Kew	DOUBLE-EDGED BLADE: Iron, 900-1000	Roman letters, Continental Germanic: A) 'INGELRII' B) 'SITAN(B)I' or 'I(B)NATIS'
London, Temple	DOUBLE-EDGED BLADE: Iron, 900-1000	Roman letters, Continental Germanic: 'INGELRII'
Old Nene	DOUBLE-EDGED BLADE: Iron, 850-950	Roman letters, Continental Germanic: A) 'INIEFIRII' or 'INGELRII' B) '[..]BERH[.]' or '+VLFBERHTCC+'
Shifford	DOUBLE-EDGED BLADE: Iron, 850-900	Roman letters, Continental Germanic: 'IILFBERH+T'
Witham	DOUBLE-EDGED BLADE: Iron, 900-1000	Roman letters, Continental Germanic: '+LEUTLRII'

The inscriptions on the blades are all in Roman letters inlaid in plain or twisted metal wires. Most of the blades have only one inscription set on one side, but two blades have text on both faces (**London Kew** and **Old Nene**), and one blade is accompanied by an inscription on its hilt cross-guard (**Ballinderry**). The inscriptions include five variations of 'Ulfberht' signatures (**Ballinderry**, **Chertsey**, **London Battersea**, **Old Nene**, **Shifford**), two (possibly three) 'Ingelrii' (**London Kew**, **London Temple**, **Old Nene**), and two beginning with 'Leut-' (**Hertford**, **Witham**) (Chart 4.33) (Adams 1974; Davidson 1962, 31; Gorman 1999; Oakeshott & Peirce 2002, 63-65, 77-79, 80-81, 90-91, 98-99; Peirce 2004). Blades inscribed with these three names have been found in Scandinavia as pagan grave-goods, and in Christian England, Ireland, and the Frankish realm in rivers or as single finds (Stalsberg 2008, 2, 9-10; Stalsberg 2010, 455). Out of the ten inscribed sword blades in this study, nine were found in watery contexts including eight from rivers in England (five from the Thames) (**Chertsey**, **Hertford**, **London Battersea**, **Kew**, **Temple**, **Old Nene**, **Shifford**, **Witham**) and one from a bog in Co. Westmeath, Ireland (Chart 4.34) (**Ballinderry**) (Adams 1974; Davidson 1962, 31, 47; Oakeshott & Peirce 2002, 63-65, 77-79, 80-81, 90-91, 98-99; Peirce 2004). One sword was discovered during excavations at Christchurch Place, **Dublin** (Oakeshott & Peirce 2002, 109). The deposition of swords in rivers or bogs has been discussed as a purposeful ritual act, although the phenomenon may also be accidental losses, possibly at battle sites (Feuerbach & Hanley 2017, 74; Lang & Ager 1989, 114). The distribution of these blades has predominantly been attributed to Viking raids (East et al 1985, 3-4), although trade and smuggling and local smithies could have also played a part (Stalsberg 2010, 458). Another inscribed sword blade, now in the Tullie House Museum, comes from the River Thames and has an illegible inscription (Davidson 1962, 45).

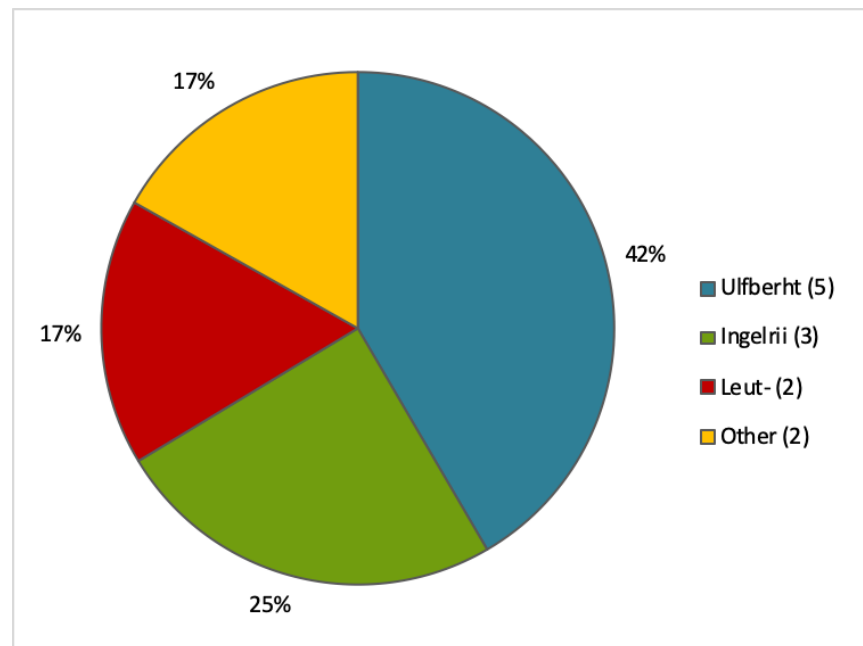


Chart 4.33 Inscriptions on Sword Blades

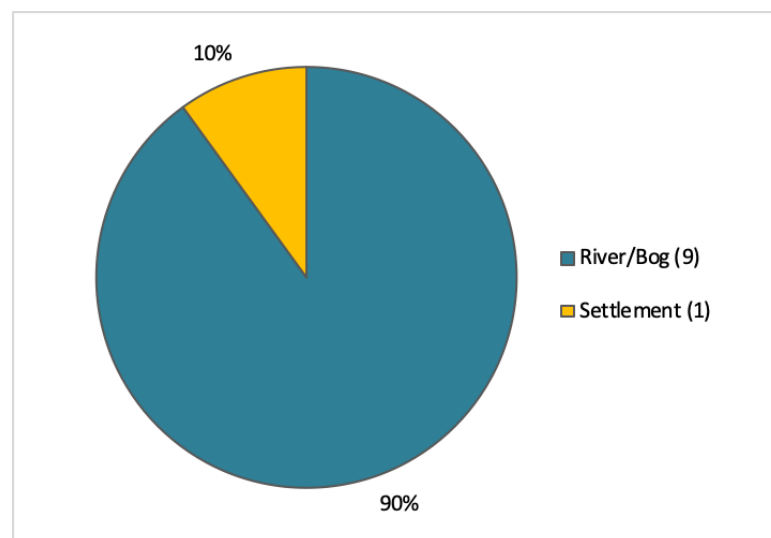


Chart 4.34 Distribution of Inscribed Sword Blades

The act of welding the names or marks of smiths into blades dates to the early Iron Age (Oakeshott 1960, 99). The name *Ulfberht* has been identified as Frankish, although no record of the name exists in contemporary sources (Stalsberg 2008, 16; 2010, 450). The use of Roman letters on the sword blades likely comes from the Latin tradition in the Carolingian Empire, where the first Ulfberht blades are believed to have originated (Stalsberg 2010, 450-451). Along with the geometric inlays that are often found on the reverse of the blade, the variations of Ulfberht signatures in regard to the placement of crosses and modifications of letter-forms, suggest the individual marks of quality by local smithies (fig. 4.29) (Gorman 1999, 10; Stalsberg 2010, 450-452). The **Old Nene** sword displays an Ulfberht and an Ingelrii signature on its blade, which are likely contemporaneous on the grounds of their similar inlays (Gorman 1999, 12). This may have been an attempt by the smith to create a forgery of an ‘original’, or to associate himself with quality craftsmanship. The **London Kew** blade has an

Ingelrii signature on side and 'SITAN(B)I', or 'I(B)NATIS' read the other way around, on the other, which has no other parallels and may be the name of the owner (Lang & Ager 1989, 106). It may also be an invocation to enhance the power of the blade, considering some blades are inscribed with phrases such as, 'IN NOMINE DOMINI' ('In the name of the Lord') (Oakeshott & Peirce 2002, 9). The inscription on the **Dublin** sword is similar to that on another sword from Helsinki and a legend on a bracteate from Sweden, which have been described as an amuletic palindromes (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 86).

The **Ballinderry** sword features an 'Ulfberht' inscription on its blade flanked by crosses and another inscription reading 'Hiltipreht', without crosses, on its hilt-guard. The juxtaposition of one inscription with crosses and the other without indicates that the use of crosses in an inscription did have some meaning. However, this may also suggest that the hilt and the blade of the **Ballinderry** sword may have differing dates and origins (Brunning 2019, 61, 83; Davidson 1962, 82). Stalsberg (2008, 6-7; 2010) lays out the various positions of crosses in respect to the Ulfberht texts on sword blades (fig. 4.29) and determines that there was some meaning behind the arrangements, possibly indicators of particular smithies, army units, or marks of quality. A new interpretation of the use of crosses suggest that Ulfberht may have been an individual with ecclesiastical prominence, perhaps a bishop, abbot, or even the name of a monastery, who produced weapons for waging war under Christ (Stalsberg 2008, 18-20). Alternatively, Ulfberht may have been the overseer or producer of the swords, who was literate enough to guide the blacksmiths in their work (Stalsberg 2008, 20-21).

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**Figure 4.28 Groups of variations of 'Ulfberht' signatures and their accompanying reverse marks (Stalsberg 2008, 6, fig. 2)**

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**Figure 4.29 Map of Ulfberht blades (Stalsberg 2008, 11, Map 1, after Mona Ødegården in 2007)**

The inscribed sword blades are representative of the movement and distribution of portable objects, as well as supply and demand in the mass production of metalwork. The large number of *Ulfbert*, *Ingelrii*, and other groups of signatures on sword blades throughout the Continent, Scandinavia, and the British Isles is a testament to international contact and military warfare (fig. 4.30) (Gorman 1999, 10; Stalsberg 2008, 21-23; 2010, 455-459). As opposed to the inscribed pommels and hilt-guards, the inscriptions display a standardised use of text, which was altered and adapted either to identify individual smithies or even forgeries to fool the buyer (Stalsberg 2010, 450-452). Other inscriptions in this corpus that feature a level of standardisation are seen on seal-dies, although the texts express a more personal relationship between people and the objects. The variations of the inscriptions show that the user could possibly have a say in what was inlaid onto their blade, adding personal enhancements such as ‘SITAN(B)I’ or ‘I(B)NATIS’ on the **London Kew** sword, for example, which has no other known comparisons in the corpus of Viking-age sword blade inscriptions.

4.3.3 Sheaths and Scabbard Mounts

Nine objects are components of sheaths or scabbards including four leather seax sheaths and five silver or bronze fittings (Table 4.19). ‘Sheath’ is used here in the sense of a flexible protective covering for a seax or knife, whilst a scabbard is a rigid container for a larger and complex weapon such as a sword (Cameron 2007, 152). The four leather sheaths (**Aachen**, **Dublin I** and **II**, **Trondheim**) are relatively similar in construction, design, and text and were manufactured in the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> centuries for use with small single-edged seaxes (Okasha 1992b). They were found outside Anglo-Saxon England, although they were likely to have originated in England (except the **Dublin** sheaths were probably made in **Dublin**), and are inscribed with Latin inscriptions in Roman capitals set within frames on one side (Chart 4.35, 4.36). Five objects are decorative mounts and fittings for sword scabbards found in England and Ireland dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> to early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. They are inscribed with three texts in elder futhark or Old English runes (**Carthorpe**, **Chessell Down**, **London Westminster**) and one in Old Norse runes (**Greenmount**). Also included is a Pictish scabbard chape from a silver hoard in Shetland (**St Ninians Isle**), which is inscribed with Roman letters in Latin with a Pictish personal name (Forsyth, forthcoming; Wilson 1973, 64-65, no. 15). As objects designed for weaponry, the sheaths and scabbard mounts are well crafted and decorative objects owned by prominent members of the warrior society, reinforced by the addition of text. Their inscriptions create a strong relationship between owner and object, one in which the power of the weapon and its user could be strengthened by the text, essentially tying identities together.

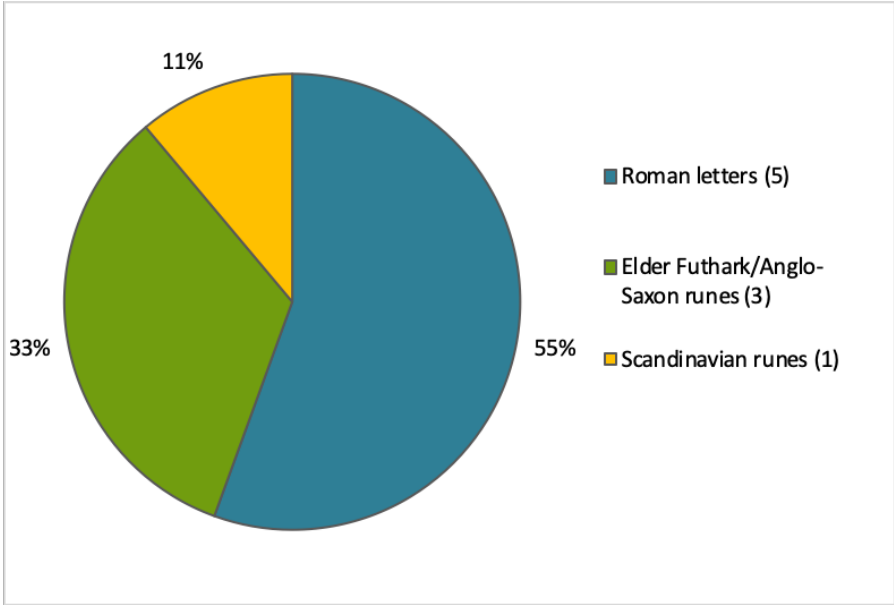


Chart 4.35 Scripts on Inscribed Sheaths and Scabbard Mounts

Table 4.19 Inscribed Sheaths and Scabbard Mounts

Name	Object	Inscription
Aachen	SEAX SHEATH: Leather, 900-1100	Roman letters, Latin with OE PN: 'Byrhtsige made me'

Carthorpe	SCABBARD MOUNT: Silver and niello, 600-700	EF/AS runes, Continental Germanic/Old English: 'z', 'z', 'z', 'z', or 'x', 'x', 'x', 'x' Four runes for the CGmc 'z', <i>algiz</i> , or AS 'x', <i>eolhx</i> , 'elk'
Chessell Down	SCABBARD MOUNT: Gilded silver, 500-600	EF/AS runes, Continental Germanic/Old English: 'destruction to the armour (of the foe)', 'self-defence', 'I strengthen the power of Swari', 'increase to (or augments of) pain', 'terrible one, wound', or 'increase sorrow/pain'
Dublin I	SEAX SHEATH: Leather, 1000-1100, decorated	Roman letters, Latin with OE PN: '+Edric made me'
Dublin II	SEAX SHEATH FRAGMENTS: Leather, 1025-1075, decorated	Roman letters, Uncertain: A) '-E[.]' B) '-[.]MIN[.]'
Greenmount	SCABBARD MOUNT: Bronze, c.1100	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: 'Domnall seal's head owns this sword'
London, Westminster	SCABBARD MOUNT: Gilded silver and blue glass, 750-800	AS runes, Old English: 's b ē r æ d h t i b c a i ē r h a d æ b s' Possible OE PN, <i>Sædberht</i>
St Ninians Isle	SCABBARD CHAPE: Gilded silver and blue glass, 700-825	Roman letters, Latin with Pictish PN: 'Resad, in the name of God, of the Son, (and) of the Holy Spirit', 'In the name of God, of the Son (and) of the Holy Spirit, Resad', or 'In the name of God - Resad - (and) of the Son (and) of the Holy Spirit'
Trondheim	SEAX SHEATH: Leather, 1000-1100, decorated	Roman letters, Latin with OE PN: '+[...]ic made me'

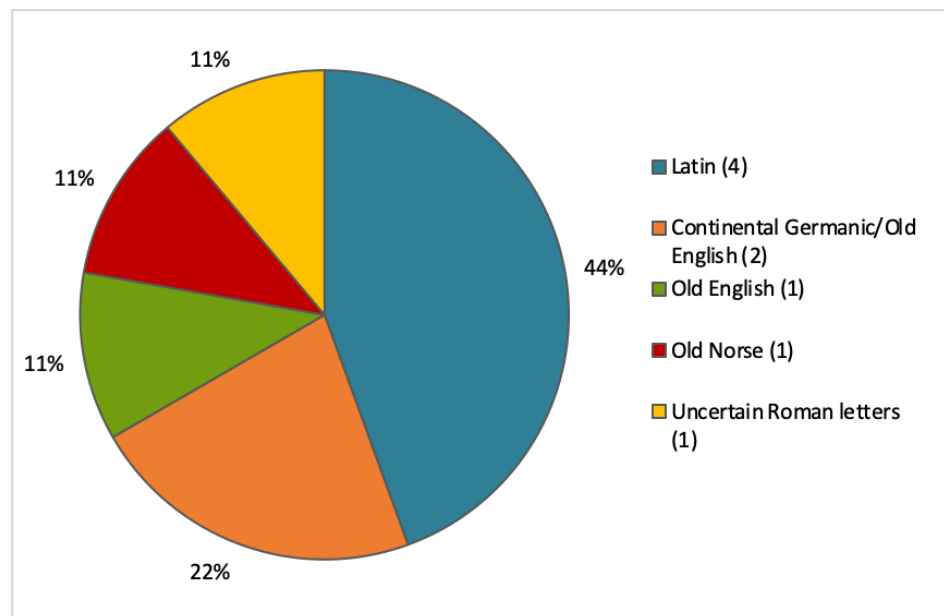
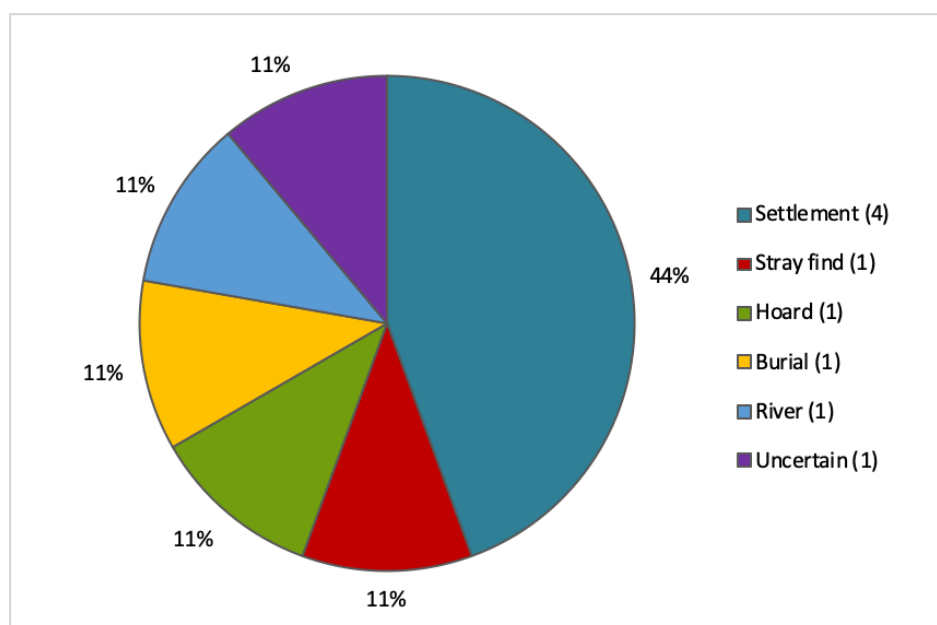


Chart 4.36 Languages on Inscribed Sheaths and Scabbard Mounts

The distribution of these inscribed objects is widespread. Three of them were found in Ireland (**Dublin I and II, Greenmount**), three in England (**Carthorpe, Chessell Down, London Westminster**), two from outside Britain and Ireland (**Aachen, Trondheim**), and one from Shetland, Scotland (**St Ninians Isle**). Their find circumstances are equally diverse (Chart 4.37). Four come from

excavations of settlement sites in Ireland and Norway (**Dublin I and II, Greenmount, Trondheim**), and one each were found as a stray find (**Carthorpe**), a river find (**London Westminster**), part of an 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century Pictish hoard deposit (**St Ninians Isle**), and an early Anglo-Saxon burial (**Chessell Down**). Some of the earliest runic objects on the Continent are scabbard mounts and fittings, including bog finds from Nydam and Vimose in Denmark, which date to between 250 and 350 AD (Looijenga 2003, 153-159). In the tradition of the earliest stages of runic writing, these are inscribed with short texts consisting of personal names and descriptive terms that give the objects special characteristics (Hines 1998, 188; Looijenga 2003, 28-29; 108-110). Similar are the runes on the **Chessell Down** and **Carthorpe** mounts as well as the early-dated sword pommels, bracteates, and brooches, which are often given interpretations involving magic and amuletic properties (Hawkes & Page 1967, 8-9; Looijenga 2003, 20, 109; Page 1999a, 169).



**Chart 4.37 Distribution of Inscribed Sheaths and Scabbard Mounts by Context**

The four leather sheaths from **Dublin, Trondheim** (Norway), and **Aachen** (Germany) are inscribed with Roman letters in Latin with Old English personal names and are part of a large corpus of sheaths designed for the type of single-edged knife of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries from England described in section 5.3.4. (Cameron 2007, 8-9, 68; Okasha 1992a, 55-56; 1992b). The large number of complete and fragmentary leather sheaths from urban settlements including Dublin, York, and London are reflections of a period of economic growth (Cameron 2007, 2-9, 61), and their presence in Dublin is suggestive of a strong English occupancy in certain areas of the city (Cameron 2003; 2007, 60-64). Despite the large number of these objects, only four survive that feature text. One inscribed leather sheath from **Dublin** is too fragmentary to decipher, but the other three from **Aachen, Trondheim**, and **Dublin** display a Latin maker formula with Old English names and an initial cross, inscribed in insular forms in a panel below geometric or floral decoration (Okasha 1992b). The term ‘maker’ could refer to the commissioner of the sheaths rather than the craftsman, in that *Beorhtsige* and *Eadric* were the patrons and owners (Okasha 1992b, 62). As personal possessions representing wealth and status, the

few that are inscribed with text would surely increase the perception of the individual as part of an Anglo-Saxon elite (Cameron 2007, 60). A few other sheaths from Dublin are incised with images including a human figure, animals, and interlace, which are described as graffiti (fig. 4.31) (Cameron 2007, 56-57). Although the tooled and main decoration including the inscriptions would have been performed by trained craftsmen, the additional incised designs could have been added at any stage, either as casual doodles, owner's marks, or in an attempt to add a personalised touch to a treasured possession.

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**Figure 4.30 Incised motifs on leather sheaths from Dublin (Cameron 2007, 57)**

Like the runic pommels, the inscriptions on the decorative mounts are more evocative and personal than those on sword blades. As opposed to the inlaid texts on the blades, the letters on the mounts are scratched or engraved by hand and highly personalised. They depict the wishes and personal touch of the owner(s) of the weapons and consist of runic sequences and a Christian prayer interpreted as protective, fighting, and talismanic charms (Elliott 1959b, 79-80; Hawkes & Page 1967, 8-9; Page 1999a, 11, 182). Similar to the **Ash-Gilton II** pommel (see Chapter 4.3.1), the pyramidal scabbard mount from **Carthorpe** is engraved with the same rune on its four faces. This rune is read as either the older futhark z-rune, *algiz*, or the Anglo-Saxon x-rune, *eolhx*, ƿ, interpreted as 'elk-sedge' or 'rush', meaning a sharp-bladed marsh-grass that cuts the skin (Halsall 1981, 92; Hawkes & Page 1967, 7-8). The runes on the **Chessell Down** mount are in Continental Germanic or early Old English and have been given multiple interpretations including 'increase to pain' (Elliott 1959b, 79-80) and 'for self-defence' (Page 1999a, 11), but may also be a descriptive name for the sword (Davidson 1962, 100). Anglo-Saxon heroic literature and Old Norse sagas describe the practice of giving swords evocative names to enhance their power, such as *Angrvathill*, 'rushing harm', and *Fjorsváfnir*, 'life's sleep-bringer' (Brunnering 2019, 119-120; Davidson 1962, 102; Hawkes & Page 1967, 4). Possibly similar to



the amuletic runic finger-rings is the dubious runic inscription on the **London Westminster** scabbard mount (Page 1999a, 182). Although the inscription has not been satisfactorily translated, MacLeod and Mees (2006, 82-93) and Leslie Webster (2017, 104) point out that *bca* is flanked by a similar sequence, possibly the masculine name *Sædberht*, reading forwards and backwards as a palindromic affect resembling Old English charms against theft (see Chapter 7.8).

Ownership is expressed in two different ways on the **St Ninian's Isle** chape and the **Greenmount** fitting. The inscription on the **St Ninian's Isle** chape, engraved in Roman letters, is both a protective prayer and statement of ownership for one named *Resad* (Forsyth, forthcoming). The inscription is similar in structure and content to the 8<sup>th</sup>-century **Coppergate** helmet, which also calls for divine guidance and protection for its owner by reciting the holy trinity (Okasha 1992c, 1014). Both inscriptions are in Latin, but whilst the **Coppergate** helmet incorporates an Old English personal name, the chape from **St Ninian's Isle** features a name of a Pictish male (Forsyth, forthcoming). The chape is one of the few Pictish objects in this corpus and features the only identifiable Pictish personal name. A second male name in the inscription was suggested by Jackson (1973, 169) to be *Spusscio*, in which the text would read 'Resad, son of Spusscio', although a more plausible interpretation is an abbreviation for *Sp(irit)us S(an)c(t)i*, 'of the Holy Spirit' (Forsyth forthcoming; MacRoberts 1965, 236-237). It is also the only inscribed object found in Shetland, although whether or not it was made there is uncertain. Current knowledge of Pictish weaponry is mostly by way of their depiction on stone carvings, as very little physical evidence survives (Ritchie 1989, 43-44). This is primarily due to the lack of furnished burials from Pictish contexts (Ritchie 1989, 51), thus the **St Ninian's Isle** chape serves as a rare example of the types of weapons used by the Picts. Several features of the inscription indicate a scribe who was familiar with manuscript writing whether in an Irish or Pictish context (Forsyth forthcoming, Jackson 1973, 169, 171-172). Considering the quality of the chape, Resad was certainly a man of particular standing and power, and the text reveals him to have been a pious individual who 'drew his sword in the Lord's name' (Jackson 1973, 170).

Dating to the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, the **Greenmount** fitting is the only object of weaponry in this corpus inscribed with Scandinavian runes and features a straightforward ownership formula (Barnes et al 1997, 50-53). Although it states that *Domnall* owns the sword, swords could change ownership frequently through gifts, heirlooms, or war booty; placing an ownership inscription on the scabbard means the sword could be replaced when needed (Davidson 1962, 101). Although the text is inscribed on the reverse of the fitting, the rivet holes are only on one edge, which would allow the fitting to be lifted up or easily removed to reveal the owner's label. Whilst the runes and language are Old Norse, the personal name is described as a Norse pronunciation of the Irish name *Domnall*, and 'seal's head' appears to be a nick-name derived from a Nordic tradition of identifying individuals based on personal appearance (Barnes et al 1997, 51-52). Similar situations can be seen on the **Hunterston** brooch, in which a Gaelic personal name sits within a Scandinavian runic ownership text in Old Norse, and the **Dublin comb II**, which features a possible Old Irish/Early Gaelic personal name on a typologically Scandinavian object (Barnes & Page 2006, 217-221; Holder 1994, 13). These inscriptions are testaments to the diversity of Ireland and the Irish Sea region in the early medieval period (Hagland 2008, 1233-1234; Holman 2003, 153-154). In the case of the **Greenmount** fitting, *Domnall* wanted to

convey his Irish and Scandinavian connections, although his precise ethnicity and background remain unknown.

#### 4.3.4 Seaxes

‘Seax’ is the term given to Germanic single-edged blades introduced to Britain from Frankish territories in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> centuries and became more commonplace in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries (Cameron 2000, 49-50; Cameron 2003, 3416; Gale 1989; Webster et al 1984, 94). Also sometimes called a *scramasax* or *handseax*, these large knives were used as personal fighting or hunting weapons and come in various lengths, but are always composed of a single cutting edge and an angled, straight, or curved back (Davidson 1962, 40-41; Geake 1997, 72-74; Underwood 1999, 68-69). Seaxes are found in Pre-Christian male burials primarily in southern England (Geake 1997, 74), and as stray and single finds, often in rivers, in mid- to late Anglo-Saxon England (Evison 1967b, 30, 34). Three seaxes are currently known to feature Old English texts on their blades (Table 4.20), including one inlaid with Anglo-Saxon runes and two with Roman letters. The decorative seaxes of the 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries have been described as display weapons rather than weapons built for combat (Evison 1967b, 36). The addition of text on the three seaxes required skill, resources, and wealth, and would have been carried out by trained scribes or smiths. Unlike swords, which would have passed through many hands, seaxes would have been personal weapons meant to stay with one or a select few (Davidson 1962, 101). This is demonstrated by the seax inscriptions, which are more personal than those on swords, particularly the blades.

**Table 4.20 Inscribed Seaxes**

Name	Object	Inscription
London, Battersea	SINGLE-EDGED SEAX: Iron, silver, copper-alloy, 900-1000	AS runes, Old English: ‘fuporcgwhnij3pxftbenjdlmœaæyêa   Bêagnop’ The 28 letter futhorc and OE masc PN
London, Putney	ANGLE-BACKED SEAX: Iron, silver, niello, 900-1050	Roman letters, Old English: A) ‘Osmund’ B) Uncertain
Sittingbourne	ANGLE-BACKED SEAX: Iron, bronze, silver, niello, 900-950	Roman letters, Old English: A) ‘+Biorhtelm made me’ B) ‘+Sigebereht owns me’

The three inscribed seaxes in this study were found as stray finds; two in the Thames in **London** and one found by chance in **Sittingbourne**, Kent (Okasha 1971, 113-114; Okasha 1982, 97-98; Wilson 1964, 144-146). All three are types that became popular in England from the 9<sup>th</sup> century and are likely English-made (Davidson 1962, 41; Elliott 1959b, 79; Evison 1967b, 30-34; Lang & Ager 1989, 109, 113). Their inscriptions are more personal than the inscriptions on sword blades, and incorporate Old English masculine personal names. The **London Putney** and **Sittingbourne** blades are both inscribed in Roman letters set within decorative silver panels on both sides, in a style that resembles the



methodically in one corner in a way suggesting it was meant to be recovered in the future (Tweddle 1992, 882-892, 1033, 1165). The inscription on the helmet is in Roman letters and in Latin and is a religious text repeated once. It asks for protection from the Lord for one with the masculine Old English name, *Oshere* (Okasha 1992c, 1014). Helmets are markers of high social status, reflected in their scarcity in Anglo-Saxon England, their impressive construction, and their place in contemporary literature (Owen-Crocker 2004, 269; Tweddle 1992, 1167). As the only known Anglo-Saxon helmet with an inscription, the **Coppergate** helmet was certainly the possession of an elite male, likely of warrior status.

**Table 4.21 Inscribed Helmet**

Name	Object	Inscription
Coppergate	HELMET: Iron, copper-alloy, 750-775	Roman letters, Latin with OE PN: 'In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit [and] God; and to all we say Amen. Oshere'

The inscription is set upon two copper-alloy bands attached to the helmet in the form of a cross (fig. 4.33), with Roman letters in high relief and retrograde (mirrored), indicating they were applied with the wrong face down possibly in error (Okasha 1992c, 1013; Tweddle 1992, 983-989). In Latin, the two texts are the same invocation prayer in a form known from early Irish texts: the version of the *Gloria in excelsis* in the 7<sup>th</sup> century Antiphonary of Bangor. This reads, '...Oh Lord, only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit of God and all, we say amen' (Okasha 1992c, 1014). Like the inscriptions on weaponry, a religious phrase such as this would reasonably be asking for protection during battle, empowered by the cruciform placement and repetition of the text (Karkov 2011, 154). A similar inscription can be seen on the **Staffordshire** Hoard gold strip, which is also repeated once and asks the Lord to 'let thine enemies be scattered', but whether this strip once adorned a helmet or another piece of armour is unknown (Okasha 2012). Another similarity is the prayer on the **St. Ninian's Isle** scabbard chape, proclaiming itself as the property of the Lord (Karkov 2011, 156-157). Read aloud, the **Coppergate** text could be in the voice of the helmet, Oshere, or its audience, demonstrating the power of the spoken word through public participation (Karkov 2011, 154-155). The possible error in placement of the inscription may point to the illiteracy of the individual who created the helmet, or of Oshere, who trusted the power of the words without having them read. On the **Coppergate** helmet, the use of text was for the benefit of Oshere. The message of faith invokes the innate power of the object, remaining silent and strong when the helmet was worn and reinforced when read and spoken aloud.

## 4.4 Summary of Inscribed Domestic and Personal Items

What this chapter has shown is that the act of inscribing personal and household objects was largely an Anglo-Saxon practice in early medieval Britain and Ireland, and that most of the portable

objects from this period and place that were given text are items to be worn on the body as decoration and for practical measures. Eighty-one objects make up the category of personal adornments and dress accessories, including finger-rings, brooches, bracteates, dress-fittings, dress-pins, pendants, and a work-box. As the objects are predominantly Anglo-Saxon in manufacture and style, the majority of the inscriptions are in elder futhork or Anglo-Saxon runes, and the second-most script is Roman letters (Table 4.1). The most significant aspect is the fact that the largest category of portable inscribed objects are finger-rings, of which all are Anglo-Saxon in provenance, script, language, translation, and style. Inscribed finger-rings appear in Britain sometime in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, which seems to have a connection with the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. No finger-rings dating from 400 to 1000 AD in Britain or Ireland are Scandinavian, Irish, or Pictish in style nor are any inscribed with Scandinavian runes or ogham. Continental Germanic finger-rings exist with inscriptions, such as the Lombard seal-rings of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, of which the **Postwick** seal-ring represents (Gannon 2012; Okasha 2004, 244-245). Scandinavian runic rings appear in Denmark and Germany in the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century near the end of the early medieval period (Lindahl 2003, 83; RuneS-Datenbank DR Schl5). Why adding text to finger-rings would be an exclusively Anglo-Saxon practice is uncertain, but this aspect presents an interesting discussion about differing attitudes towards material wealth, whether this revolves around religion, economy, social trends, or personal preferences.

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**Figure 4.32** The inscribed strips on the Coppergate helmet  
(Tweddle 1992, fig. 598)

A similar pattern can be identified with the other objects in the category of personal adornments and dress accessories. Inscribing these objects does not appear to be a noticeable practice with Norse-speaking communities in early medieval Britain and Ireland, with only two brooches (**Hunterston**, **Penrith**) and two pendants (**Brough of Birsay**, **Deerness**) inscribed with Norse runes. Furthermore, no wholly Scandinavian-style brooch is inscribed. The **Hunterston** and **Penrith** brooches, both with Scandinavian runes, are hybrids of Irish, Anglo-Saxon, and Scandinavian design (Barnes & Page 2006, 217-221; 331-333), and the **Brough of Birsay** bear's tooth and the **Deerness** pendant may be imports from Scandinavia, brought over either prior to or after their inscriptions were added (Pereswetoff-Morath 2017). Along with the finger-rings, the dress-fittings, including pins, strap-ends, and hooked-tags, do not include any Scandinavian inscriptions or objects, and are only West Germanic and Anglo-Saxon in origin, script, and language. This suggests that the wearing of text on dress accessories and jewellery was primarily an Anglo-Saxon practice in early medieval Britain and Ireland, and was not a custom that was matched in Norse-speaking and Celtic-speaking areas.

The brooches are the most diverse of the personal adornments and dress accessories in regard to the scripts and languages, which include older futhork runes, Anglo-Saxon runes, ogham, Scandinavian runes, and Arabic. The objects and their inscriptions (including the bracteates) can be used to demonstrate the evolution of the use of text during the early medieval period, beginning with the earliest inscribed brooches dating to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, which consist of short and puzzling sequences of older futhork runes in Continental Germanic/early Old English. These inscriptions are representative of the earliest use of the runic script on the Continent and in Scandinavia, which are seen on portable objects including brooches, bracteates, and weapon parts (Barnes 2012, 33; Looijenga 2003, 27-28). Although they are frequently difficult to translate, they are interpreted primarily as personal names, object-descriptive terms, tribal names, and terms with a ritualistic or magical significance (Gaimster 1992, 15; Hines 1990; 1998, 188; Looijenga 2003, 27, 38-39, 106-107, 127; Page 1999, 17). After the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the inscriptions on the brooches get longer and more complex, and the scripts are replaced by Anglo-Saxon runes and Roman letters. Ogham also makes an appearance on the brooches sometime in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. This change is primarily attributed to Christianity, which introduced manuscripts and gospel books, and with this came Roman letters and Latin (Looijenga 2003, 67). Religious inscriptions such as that on the *Ædwen* brooch and the *Canterbury* brooch appear, as well as owner, maker, and commissioner texts in the Anglo-Saxon form of 'X owns me'. The use of texts on brooches spanned the entire early medieval period in Britain and Ireland and evolved along with the objects. This trajectory of the growth and use of text can also be observable throughout the corpus, but the category of inscribed brooches can solely be used to represent this phenomenon.

The inscriptions on the household and personal tools reveal that early medieval people in Britain and Ireland added text to their personal and functional objects for a variety of reasons, including declaring ownership and craftsmanship, for writing practice, for practical purposes, for casually writing to pass the time, and for spiritual purposes including prayer. The objects are utilitarian, in which they were seen and worked with every day in the household, in social environments, or private situations. To some people, these objects may be mundane and ordinary, like the wooden handle of a tool or a stone spindle-whorl. Other objects may be inherently valuable like a weaving-sword made of imported whale's bone or a gilded silver tweezer. Others, although mass-produced, show a level of craftsmanship

that reveals them to be cherished accessories. Considering the large number of spindle-whorls, combs, tweezers, gaming pieces, and tools that are present in the archaeological record, the relatively small number of objects that are inscribed with text lifts them above the rest in terms of personal attachment, voice, and perceived value. Instead of purely functional items they become Things of Quality (Burström 2015) that influence the world around them.

The inscriptions and their translations are diverse and demonstrate that every major ethno-linguistic culture in early medieval Britain and Ireland inscribed text onto their loose utilitarian items. The most predominant scripts on these objects are older futhark and/or Anglo-Saxon runes, which are inscribed on fifteen objects. Six of these can be read in Old English whilst five are either in Continental Germanic or early Old English. Eleven objects are inscribed in Scandinavian runes which are only written in Old Norse. More ogham inscriptions are present in this category than the others, which presents interesting discussions regarding how the ogham script was used and by whom. However, this may be more of a matter of appropriate material. Ogham is more likely to be inscribed on objects of wood and bone, which most of the household and personal tools are made of. The ogham inscribed tools primarily come from Celtic-speaking areas including the islands of Scotland and Ireland, and are mostly untranslated except for the **Buckquoy** spindle-whorl and **Kilgulbin East** hanging-bowl, both inscribed in Old Irish/Early Gaelic, the **Ballinderry** die inscribed in Latin, and the **Dublin** comb inscribed with an Old Irish/Early Gaelic or Old Norse name. The four knife handles from **Bac Mhic Connain**, **Clonmacnoise**, **Gurness**, and **Weeting-with-Broomhill** show a possible common practice of inscribing rows of ogham onto similarly-shaped antler and bone knife handles. Although the inscriptions on the four handles are largely unable to be translated, they probably date to the same period (the **Gurness** knife handle was carbon dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> century) (Nobel et al 2018, 1344), and likely feature personal names in Old Irish/Early Gaelic or Pictish (Forsyth 1996, 55-68, 321-332).

The inscriptions reveal a cross-cultural tradition of inscribing personal and household utilitarian items with the names of individuals associated with them. Thirteen objects are inscribed with personal names, including two that are inscribed with two names each (**Dublin** comb I, **Kilgulbin East** hanging-bowl). A further ten objects may also be inscribed with personal names, but their inscriptions are difficult to understand and have been given multiple possible translations. Seven objects are inscribed with personal names by themselves, which, in terms of epigraphics, are usually interpreted as the names of their owners. Where the relationship between person and object is more apparent are the two Old Norse runic inscriptions stating ‘Thorfast made a good comb’ (**Lincoln** comb case) and ‘Gautr carved the runes’ (**Stromness** spindle-whorl), and the Old English text in Roman letters reading, ‘Eadburg owns me’ (**Wallingford** weaving-sword). Personal names are also found in prayers on two spindle-whorls (**Buckquoy**, **Saltfleetby**) and one comb (**Whitby**). Similar to the personal adornments and dress accessories, placing ones name onto an object that one would come in contact with every day and use for practical matters would mark the object as the property of someone, thus securing it from theft or if another attempted to claim it. It would also enhance personal and social importance of the object, creating a stronger bond between user and the material world.

The most noticeable elements to consider about the inscribed weaponry and armour are the dichotomies between the use of Roman letters and runes, personal and impersonal inscriptions, and early and later uses of text. The inscriptions reveal distinct differences between Continental and North

Germanic, Old English, and Old Norse epigraphic traditions between the dates of 400 and 1100 AD. They are written in all major Insular scripts except for ogham, and in all major languages except Old Irish/Early Gaelic. Continental Germanic and Old English are the most represented languages on the weaponry and armour, predominantly inscribed in older futhark or Anglo-Saxon runes on the early Anglo-Saxon sword pommels, which date from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The pommels and their runic inscriptions can be discussed alongside the early rune-inscribed brooches (Chapter 4.1.2) in terms of the earliest use of the runic script, which appears on portable objects on the Continent as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, in the form of single runes and puzzling sequences (Fischer et al 2008, 76; Hawkes & Page 1967, 8-9; Hines 1990; 1998, 188; Looijenga 2003, 27, 106-107, 127; Page 1996; 1999, 17). The other inscriptions in older futhark and Anglo-Saxon runes are on scabbard mounts (**Carthorpe, Chessell Down, London Westminster**) date between the 6<sup>th</sup> to late 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. They are just as perplexing, but, also like the pommel runes, they are interpreted as descriptive and personal texts to enhance the power of the weapons (Elliott 1959b, 79-80; Hawkes & Page 1967, 8-9; Page 1999a, 11, 182).

Roman letters and Latin appear on the weaponry and armour sometime between the 8<sup>th</sup> and early 9<sup>th</sup> centuries on the **St Ninian's Isle** chape and the **Coppergate Helmet**, in inscriptions that contain single personal names amongst Christian prayers. These are followed by the Roman letter inscriptions in Old English on the three Anglo-Saxon seaxes (one is inscribed with Anglo-Saxon runes ) and in Latin on the seax sheaths in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Compared to the runic inscriptions on the pommels, these inscriptions are longer, more complex in terms of standard grammar and arrangement, and are able to be read in modern terms, which is a change that doubtlessly occurred due to Christianity and Latin manuscripts (Barnes 2012, 123; Looijenga 2003, 67; Okasha 2017, 207). In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Ulfberht and Ingelrīi inscriptions inlaid in Roman letters onto sword blades represent a standardised and mass-produced use of text (Gorman 1999; Stalsberg 2008; 2010). The same development can be observed with the inscribed brooches, which begin with the early illegible runic texts in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and ending with the longer texts in Roman letters and ogham in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

Only one object is inscribed with Scandinavian runes and in Old Norse, and no objects of weaponry and armour are inscribed with ogham, which implies that this was not a tradition in Norse-speaking and Celtic-speaking areas. The Pictish personal name on the **St Ninian's Isle** chape and the possible North Germanic names on the hilts of the **Ballinderry** and **Kilmaham** swords are the only pieces of evidence for such a practice, but these texts are in Roman letters instead of runes and ogham (Oakeshott 1960, 141-142; Oakeshott & Pierce 2002, 63-67). The inscriptions in this category are placed on all components of swords including blades, pommels, hilt-guards, and the grip. As each part of a sword can be removed and replaced (Brunning 2019, 142, 153), a Norse name on a sword's hilt could be paired with a Continental Germanic name on a blade, as is likely the case with the **Ballinderry** and **Kilmaham** swords (Oakeshott 1960, 141-142; Oakeshott & Pierce 1995, 6). The biographies of early medieval swords are tied up in the maintenance and modifications that were necessary to keep them 'living' for generations (Brunning 2019, 153-154). People were very close with their weapons, and the alterations they performed upon them (including the addition of inscriptions) were expressions of their identities, which ultimately created identities of the swords themselves.



## Chapter 5 Ecclesiastical, Writing and Reading, and Funerary Items

This chapter discusses the types of objects that would have been used in ecclesiastical and monastic environments, and conditions in which a formal, learned use of text would be essential, including educational, legislative, and official settings. The objects include things used for both non-secular and secular purposes but are dominated by objects and inscriptions associated with the Christian religion. This includes objects used within the church and in monastic environments, objects used for manuscript production, and items used for Christian burial. Also present are a few objects and texts relating to pre-Christian Germanic beliefs and customs. The objects in this chapter were used in environments outside of usual domestic activity (an exception may be the cremation urns, Chapter 5.3.2), and did not necessarily belong to one single individual for personal and private use. A few objects could be seen as personal possessions (i.e. **Ædelfled** seal-die, **Sandford** reliquary, **Lund** pen-case lid, **Baconsthorpe** page-holder/clip), although technically they could be enjoyed and used by a number of people within one environment. Their inscriptions represent institutionalised and learned literacy and include some of the longest and most complex texts in this corpus.

### 5.1 Ecclesiastical Items

The inscribed ecclesiastical objects are exceptional in their manufacture, decoration, and the inscriptions which adorn them. They stand out in this corpus as highly elaborate works of art, created by the wealth and power of the Church for use within a religious setting or for a religious purpose. About 1/3 are liturgical objects or other items of church equipment (10 in total), the remaining 2/3 are reliquaries or other objects associated with the cult of relics (15 in total) (Chart 5.1). In addition, the unique **Franks Casket**, a whalebone box decorated with secular and biblical imagery, is included here because of the learned nature of its inscriptions and the possibility that it derives from a monastic context. The grandeur of these objects illustrates a level of wealth and learned literacy in Christianity in Britain and Ireland, as well as how this was used in the promotion of social and political hierarchy (Wycherley 2015, 129).

Most of the objects are inscribed with religious texts (22 in total), sometimes with more than one inscription. These inscriptions include singular names of saints or apostles, Biblical phrases or passages, and prayers. Nine objects are Irish reliquary texts asking for prayers for those who owned, made, and commissioned the objects. One inscription is an Old English first-person maker statement giving the name of the creator (or possibly commissioner) as ‘+X made me’ (**Pershore**), and one text (**Rannveig**) is a secondary declaration of ownership in the form of ‘X owns this...’. The **Franks Casket** features a mixture of secular and non-secular story-telling texts, and the **Derrynaflan** paten is inscribed with alphabetical Roman letters as well as a Christian hymn. Twenty-two inscriptions are inscribed in Roman letters, of which ten are on Irish reliquaries and shrines of the late 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, following a relatively standard formula of naming the maker, owner, and commissioner of the

objects in prayer in Middle Irish (Table 5.1). Nine objects are inscribed with Roman letters and in Latin, and only three inscriptions are with Roman letters and in Old English. These three are inscribed in Roman letters on Anglo-Saxon liturgical and church equipment (**Beverley** crozier, **Brussels** cross, **Pershore** censer). One object is inscribed in Anglo-Saxon runes, in a combination of Old English and Latin (**Gandersheim**). Two objects feature more than one script and language: the **Mortain Casket** and **Franks Casket** are both inscribed with Anglo-Saxon runes in Old English and Roman letters in Latin. Only one object is inscribed with Scandinavian runes in Old Norse (**Rannveig**). The most predominant language inscribed on the ecclesiastical objects is Middle Irish/Early Gaelic, which is inscribed on nine Irish reliquaries and one Irish hand-bell (**Terryhoogan**). Nine objects are inscribed in Latin, all with Roman letters, including three from Ireland (**Ardagh** chalice, **Derrynaflan** chalice, **Shanmullagh** cross-arm) and the other six from England.

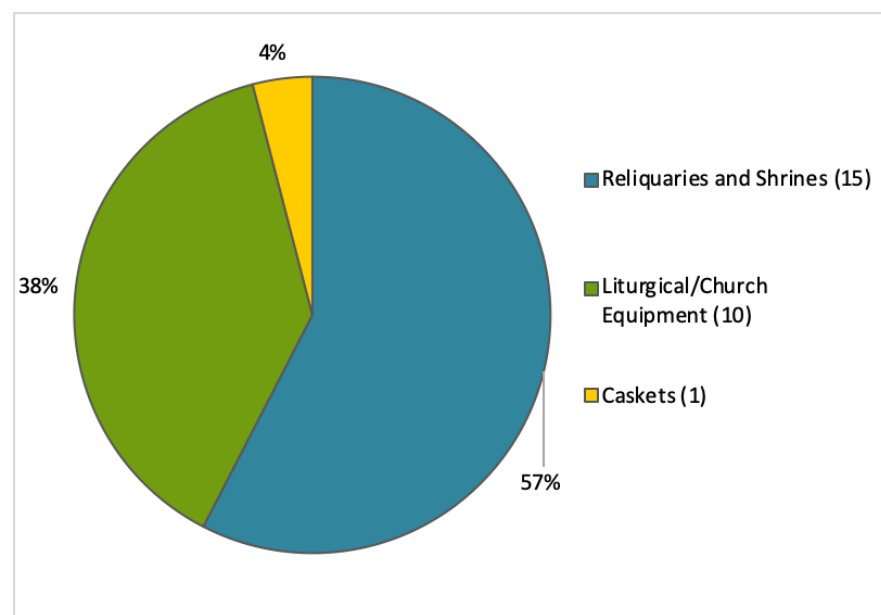


Chart 5.1 Inscribed Ecclesiastical Objects

Table 5.1 Scripts and Languages on Ecclesiastical Objects

	Latin	Old English	Old Norse	Middle Irish/Early Gaelic	Old English and Latin
Roman Letters	9	3	0	10	0
Elder Futhark/Anglo-Saxon runes	0	0	0	0	1
Scandinavian runes	0	0	1	0	0
Roman Letters and Anglo-Saxon runes	0	0	0	0	2

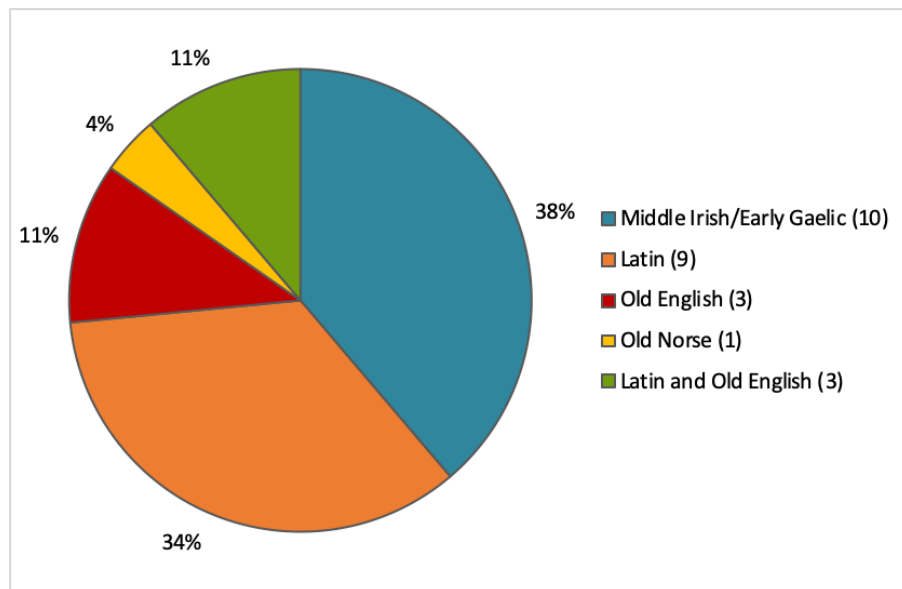


Chart 5.2 Languages on Inscribed Ecclesiastical Objects

Thirteen objects come from Ireland, six were found in Anglo-Saxon England, and a further seven, probably of Anglo-Saxon, Irish, or Scottish origin, were preserved on the continent (Chart 5.3). In all cases except for one it can be assumed that the inscriptions were added when the objects were in Britain or Ireland, mostly due to epigraphical and decorative reasons including type of script and ornament. The **Rannveig** casket is of Irish or Scottish origin but was preserved in Norway (Jesch 2015, 108). Its inscription is carved on the underside of the casket in Norse runes, but it is not known if it was added in Norse settlements in Britain or Ireland or when the object was brought to Scandinavia. This element of doubt means it ought to be included in the corpus. Michelli (1996) counts nine or ten inscriptions on Irish reliquaries and shrines dating between 1000 and 1100 AD, of which nine are included in this corpus. The book shrine of the Book of Durrow is not included due to concerns over its correct dating, and the other two listed by Michelli (shrine of St Lachtín's Arm and the Cross of Cong) are also excluded because they date after 1100 (Michelli 1996, 1-2).

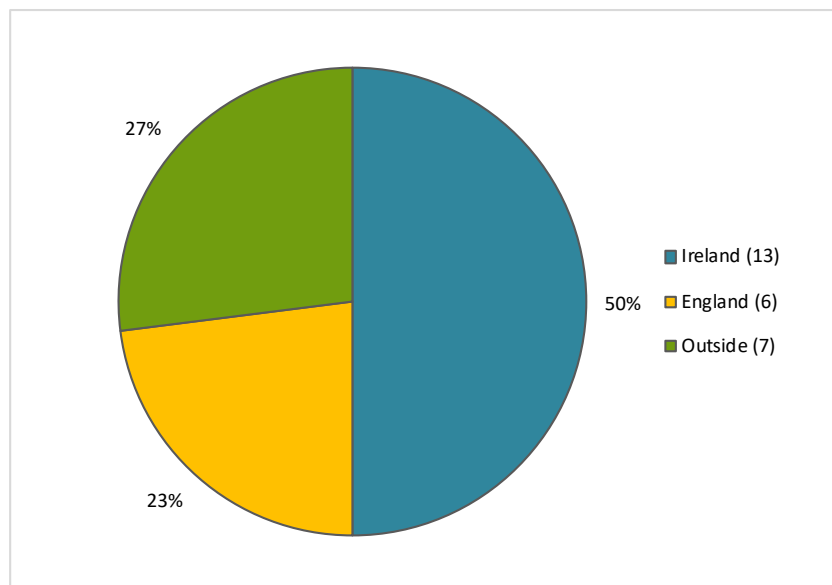


Chart 5.3 Distribution of Inscribed Ecclesiastical Items by Country

One remarkable aspect of the objects in this category is the number that have been preserved in personal or church collections, in particular the reliquaries and shrines. Six of the objects from Ireland, one from England, and the seven objects on the continent have uncertain find-spots and conflicting histories as some were ‘rediscovered’ during auctions (**Cú Dúilig, Beverley**), some in family possessions (**St Columba, St Dympna, St Molaise, St Patrick**), and some were recorded in cathedral or church treasuries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (**Brussels, Cluny, Cologne, Franks, Gandersheim, Mortain, Rannveig**). The other objects include three that were found at monastic or burial sites (**Canterbury, Liathmore, Terryhoogan**), three found in or near to rivers (**Brandon, River Bann, Shanmullagh**), two Irish hoard finds (**Ardagh, Derrynaflan**), two discovered in the walls of medieval castles (**Lismore, Stowe Missal**), one inside the tomb of a saint (**St Cuthbert**), one found by chance whilst digging underneath a residence (**Pershore**), and one found by uncertain means at the site of a modern building (**Sandford**).

### 5.1.1 Reliquaries and Shrines

The fifteen portable reliquaries in this category were designed to carry and/or be carried, transporting relics or eucharistic vessels either for missionary activity, rituals within the church, or as personal possessions (Ryan 1989, 134; Wycherley 2015, 122). They are exquisite works of art dating between the mid 8<sup>th</sup> to late 11<sup>th</sup> centuries and include nine reliquaries of Irish origin, five from Anglo-Saxon England (**Brussels, Cologne, Gandersheim, Mortain, Sandford**), and one of Irish or Scottish origin (**Rannveig**). Four are enshrined croziers (**Cologne, Cú Dúilig, Lismore, St Dympna**), three are house-shaped shrines (**Gandersheim, Mortain, Rannveig**), three are book-shrines (**St Columba’s, St Molaise, Stowe Missal**), two are bell-shrines (**River Bann, St Patrick’s**), one is a cross reliquary (**Brussels**), one is a small reliquary pendant (**Sandford**), and one is a fragment that was once part of a reliquary of unknown type (**Liathmore**) (Table 5.2, Chart 5.4). The objects include twelve that are inscribed with Roman letters, one in Anglo-Saxon runes (**Gandersheim**), one with Anglo-Saxon and Roman letters (**Mortain**), and one that is inscribed with Scandinavian runes (**Rannveig**) (Chart 5.5). Nine objects have inscriptions written in Middle Irish/Early Gaelic, and two objects have Latin texts (**Cologne, Sandford**). One object has an Old English inscription (**Brussels**), one object is inscribed in Old Norse (**Rannveig**), and two objects are inscribed in Latin and Old English (**Gandersheim, Mortain**) (Chart 5.6). Some of the longest and most intricate inscriptions in this corpus are represented by this category, which demonstrate learned literacy and a standardised use of text that could only be achieved through the Church and those wealthy enough to access it. With the exception of the non-secular inscription on the **Rannveig** casket, these inscriptions illustrate the ability of individuals to directly associate themselves with Christ and the Church by commissioning holy objects and engraving their names upon them.

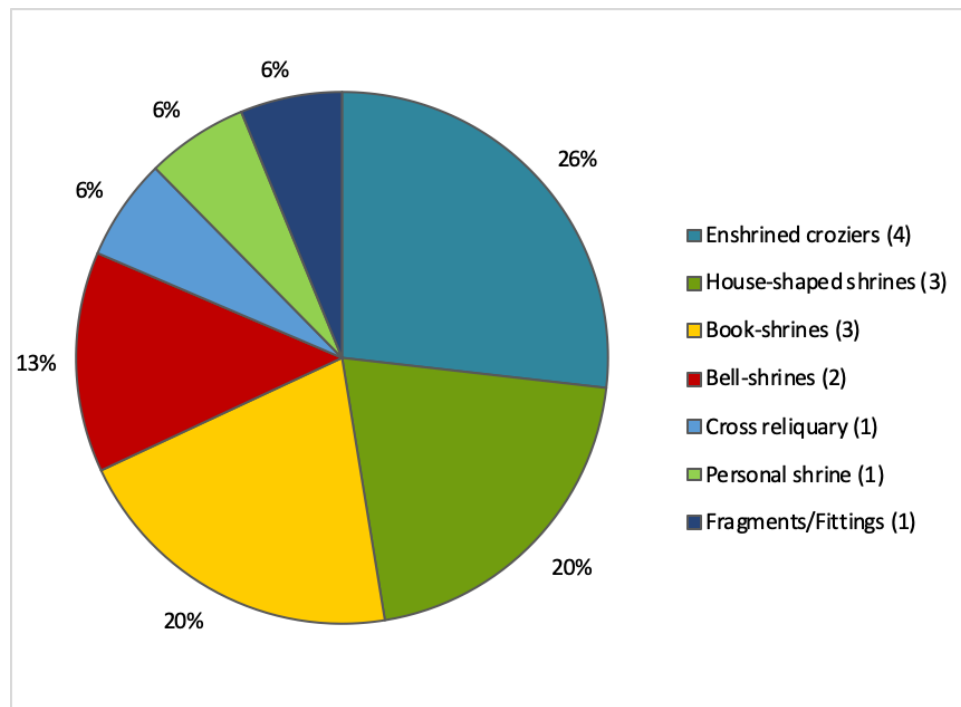


Chart 5.4 Inscribed Reliquaries and Shrines

Table 5.2 Inscribed Reliquaries and Shrines

Name	Object	Inscription
Brussels ('Drahmal')	RELIQUARY CROSS: Oak, silver, 900-1100	Roman letters, Old English: 'Lamb of God'   '+ Drahmal made me'   '+ Cross is my name; once I bore the mighty King, trembling and drenched with blood. This cross Æthelmær, and Æthelwold his brother, ordered to be made for the glory of Christ [and] for the soul of Ælfric their brother'
Cologne	CROZIER MOUNT: Silver plate on ivory, 1000-1100	Roman letters, Latin: '+The Relics of Saint Mary and Saint Christopher'
Cú Dúilig ('Kells Crozier')	CROZIER: Gilded silver, copper-alloy, yew wood staff, Pre-1039	Roman letters, Middle Irish/Early Gaelic: 'Pray for Cú Dúilig and for Máel Finnéin'
Gandersheim	HOUSE-SHAPED SHRINE: Whale's bone, bronze, 750-800	AS runes, Latin with OE <i>æli</i> 'oil', <i>hælig</i> , 'holy', and <i>ea</i> , 'water': 'I baptise you in the sign of the cross/in the holy name of Christ. I write (on) you the sign of the cross (with) chrism. Sick (men's) oil (in the name of Christ). Holy oil, chrism, water.'
Liathmore	RELIQUARY FRAGMENT: 1002-1014	Roman letters, Middle Irish/Early Gaelic: '...[a prayer for...Ma]c Cennétig, King of Ire[land]'
Lismore	CROZIER: Copper-alloy on wooden staff, c.1090-1113	Roman letters, Middle Irish/Early Gaelic: 'Pray for Nial Mc Meicc Aeducáin for whom was   Pray for Nechtain, craftsman who made this object + made this object'

Mortain	HOUSE-SHAPED SHRINE: Wood, gilded bronze, 750-850	AS runes, Old English: A) '+ God bless Æadan/ Æadda who made this chrismal' B) Roman letters, Latin: 'Saint Michael   Saint Gabriel'
'Rannveig' (Ranuaik)	HOUSE-SHAPED SHRINE: Yew wood, copper, red enamel, 700-800, inscription 900-1000	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: 'Ranuaik/Rannveig owns this casket'
River Bann	BELL-SHRINE HANDLE: Copper-alloy, 1000-1025	Roman letters, Middle Irish/Early Gaelic: 'Pray for Máel Brigte for whom it was made, and for Macene, who made it'
Sandford	PENDANT RELIQUARY COVER: Bronze, 950-1050/c. 1100	Roman letters, Latin: '+May that which lies hidden within free us from all guilt'
St Columba's Psalter (Cathach of St Columba)	BOOK-SHRINE: Silver, c.1062-1098	Roman letters, Middle Irish/Early Gaelic: 'Pray for Cathbarr Ua Domnall for whom was made this shrine and for Sitric Mac Meic Aeda who made (it) and for Domnall Mac Robartaig, coarb of Kells, for whom (it) was made'
St Dympna	CROZIER: Bronze crook on yew wood staff, c.1000	Roman letters, Middle Irish/Early Gaelic: '...[and for] Uallach Ua Liathain [who] did this work...'
St Molaise (Soiscél Molaise)	BOOK-SHRINE: Wood, bronze, silver, gold, 750-850, inscription d. 1001-1025	Roman letters, Middle Irish/Early Gaelic: 'A prayer for Cennfailad, successor of Molaise who caused this shrine to be made for...+ and for Giolla Baithín, goldsmith, who made it'
St Patrick's (Bell of the Testament)	BELL-SHRINE: Bronze, c.1091-1094/1094-1105	Roman letters, Middle Irish/Early Gaelic: 'Pray for Domnall O'Loughlin, by whom this bell was made, and for Domnall, successor of Patrick, with whom it was made, and for Cathalán O'Maelchalland, the keeper of this bell, and for Cúdulig O'Inmainen with his sons who covered it'
Stowe Missal	BOOK-SHRINE: c.1033	Roman letters, Middle Irish/Early Gaelic: '+Pray for...main Ua Cat...for whom (it) was made + And.....ind Ua D...laig + And for Mac Craith Ua Donnchadha, king of Cashel. Pray for Donnchad Mac Briain, king of Ireland + Pray for Donnchad Ua Taccáin of the community of Cluana who made (it). The blessing of God on every soul according to its deserts'

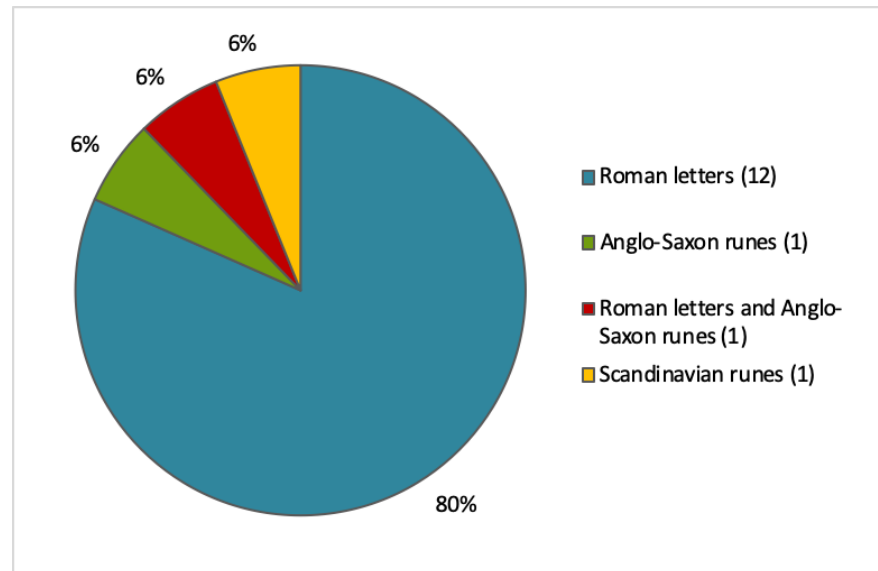


Chart 5.6 Scripts on Inscribed Reliquaries and Shrines

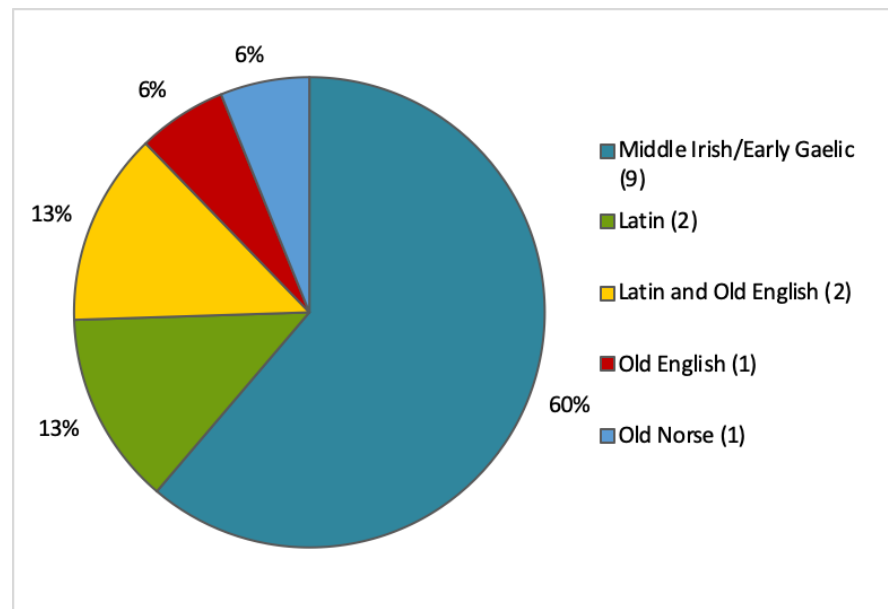
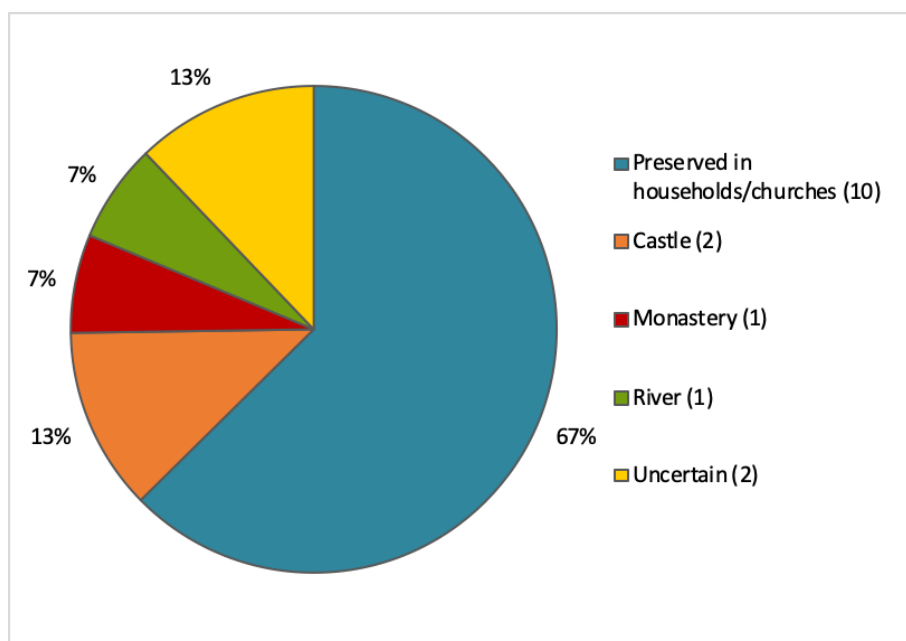


Chart 5.5 Languages on Inscribed Reliquaries and Shrines

The find-contexts and distribution patterns of these objects demonstrate a strong Irish influence as well as their portable significance. Ten objects were preserved in households or churches, including six Irish (**Cú Dúilig, Rannveig, St Columba's Psalter, St Dympna, St Molaise, St Patrick**) and four Anglo-Saxon reliquaries, which were rediscovered on the Continent (**Brussels, Cologne, Gandersheim, Mortain**) (Chart 5.7). Four objects from Ireland include a single find from along the banks of a river (**River Bann**), two found in 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century castles (**Lismore, Stowe Missal**), and one from excavations of an early monastery (**Liathmore**). The Anglo-Saxon pendant reliquary from **Sandford**, Oxfordshire also has an uncertain find circumstance. The cult of relics in Ireland was intrinsically connected to the identities and lineage of dynasties, which is demonstrated by the fact that most of the inscribed Irish reliquaries were kept by the generations of families whom commissioned

them (Lucas 1986, 13-28; Michelli 1996). On the other hand, four out of the five Anglo-Saxon reliquaries (**Brussels, Cologne, Gandersheim, Mortain**) and one Insular reliquary (**Rannveig**) found themselves on the Continent or Scandinavia and were rediscovered in church treasures in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The presence of these reliquaries outside Britain and Ireland demonstrates their significance as portable objects, wherein their movement was a result of a variety of reasons including missionary work, traveling individuals, or Viking activity (Heen-Pettersen & Murray 2018; Jesch 1991, 46; Ó Floinn 1994, 6; Okasha 2007, 75).



**Chart 5.7 Distribution of Inscribed Reliquaries and Shrines by Context**

An increase of missionary activity, church consecration, and distribution of sacred relics introduced a need for portable and accessible religion throughout early medieval Britain and Ireland (Cone 1977, 137; Ó Floinn 1994, 5-6). The cult of relics was driven by the enshrining of objects seen as possessions or insignia of saints and important ecclesiastical figures and is mostly represented in early medieval Ireland, but can also be seen in England and Scotland (Lucas 1986; Overbey 2011, 150). The most commonly enshrined objects include bells, books, and croziers, which were perceived as items that were directly associated with holy individuals and church leaders (Lucas 1986, 9; Ó Floinn 1994, 33; Overbey 2011, 119; Wycherley 2015, 119, 136). In this category there are four inscribed crozier crooks that either enshrined the original wooden staff or other small items within them (**Cologne, Cú Dúilig, Lismore, St Dympna**), and one (**Beverley**) which was possibly never seen as a reliquary, although, as only the crook made of whale's bone survives, it is possible that, like the **Cologne** crozier, it could have held relics inside its staff (Ó Floinn 1994, 34; Overbey 2011, 147-149, 154-160). Over twenty of these reliquaries survive, fragmentary or whole, and sometimes all that is left is the decorative crook (Crawford 1923, 75; Johnson 2000, 119). The Prosperous crozier is not included in this study as although its main body dates between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, its inscription dates to the late or post-medieval era (Murray & Ó Riain 2017, 16). The two Irish bell-shrines (**River Bann, St Patrick**) date considerably later (to the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries) and were constructed to contain early angular hand-bells from Irish churches (Bourke 1980; Michelli 1996, 1-2). There are at least ten surviving bell-shrines from



Ireland and Scotland, and along with croziers, are the most common shrines in early medieval Ireland (Allen 2001, 204; Murray 2014b, 114; Walsh 2010, 94; Wycherley 2015, 136).

Gospel books, manuscripts, and liturgical objects including portable altars, eucharistic vessels, and processional crosses were also encased in decorative shrines in Ireland (Wycherley 2015, 115-116). Book-shrines, also sometimes called *cumdachs*, were produced between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries in Ireland to house 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts and gospel books (Michelli 1996, 21-22). These objects are highly ornate boxes that could also be suspended by a cord over the shoulders for transportation, as demonstrated by the 11<sup>th</sup> century shrine for the **Cathach of St Columba**, which was carried in battle whilst holding the manuscript to ensure victory (Lucas 1986, 17; Ó Floinn 1994, 12; Wycherley 2015, 137). There are ten known book-shrines from Ireland, of which four are lost, including the shrine for the Book of Durrow (Coffey 1910, 46; Petrie 1878, 159). Three are included in this corpus (**St Columba**, **St Molaise**, **Stowe Missal**), which date to 11<sup>th</sup> century Ireland. Most likely part of a book-shrine is the **Liathmore** fragment, which features an inscription very similar to those seen on these shrines (Michelli 1996, 15-16).



**Figure 5.1 Reliquary Cross** (© Victoria and Albert Museum, London, object no. 7943-1862)

Three ‘house-shaped shrines’ are included in this corpus. They are described as a type of diminutive container in the form of a miniature church, temple, or late antique tomb, which may have held relics but it is also possible that they were used as liturgical items to hold holy oil (Crawford 1923, 74; Looijenga & Venneman 1999, 118-119; Ó Floinn 1990, 53-54; Overbey 2011, 65-66). Two are of Anglo-Saxon manufacture (**Gandersheim**, **Mortain**) and one is Irish or Scottish (**Rannveig**). There are at least fourteen of these objects known in Ireland, England, Scotland, Scandinavia, and on the continent (Ó Floinn 1990, 52). As portable objects they are remarkably small and oftentimes display suspension loops or rods for easy transportation. Also possibly used as a liturgical ornament is the **Brussels** cross, functioning as a reliquary for supposed pieces of the true cross (Karkov 2011, 159-161). It may have been placed near or on a fixed altar during services or carried during procession (Hahn 2012, 98). A similar crucifix reliquary is in the Victoria & Albert Museum (no. 7943-1862) (fig. 5.1) dated to the 10<sup>th</sup>

century with an inscription listing the relics of saints (Beckwith 1972, 122, no. 20). It is not included in this corpus because it was brought to light at a late time in this study. There is also the small chance that this second crucifix was made in Germany rather than Anglo-Saxon England.

The last object is described as a pendant reliquary (**Sandford**), made with a suspension loop to be hung around the neck as a personal keepsake (Walton Rogers 2013, 380). This small reliquary is one of three known pendant reliquaries in Anglo-Saxon England (Webster & Backhouse 1984, 71, 125), including one made of openwork walrus ivory in the shape of a cross, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum (A.6-1966) (fig. 5.2). The **Sandford** reliquary stands alone as a personal reliquary rather than one for public appreciation. Its inscription was meant for private meditation instead of social contemplation, although it contains no personal name linking it to a specific individual.

All of the inscriptions except for one (**Rannveig**) are inscribed with religious prayers and passages. Distinct differences between the Irish and Anglo-Saxon texts can be observed. The nine objects from Ireland are inscribed in Irish using Roman letters asking for prayers on behalf of people involved in the manufacture of the objects. The five objects from Anglo-Saxon England have three inscriptions in Roman letters, one in runes, and one with a combination of the two scripts, and include one inscription in Old English (**Brussels**), two in Latin (**Cologne**, **Sandford**), and two in a combination of Old English and Latin (**Gandersheim**, **Mortain**). The texts are also religious but are less formally structured. They include prayers for individuals, maker and commissioner texts, first-person personifying texts, figurative language, and the names of saints. The **Brussels** cross is particularly complex, speaking in the voice of the enshrined cross and its reliquary in a way that alludes to the Old English riddles in the Exeter Book. The inscription alludes to the poem ‘The Dream of the Rood’, which is also partially inscribed on the Ruthwell Cross, an 8<sup>th</sup> century stone cross standing now at Ruthwell church, Dumfries and Galloway (originally part of Northumbria) (D’Ardenne 1939, 148-149). Four personal names are featured on the **Brussels** cross including one in an Old English maker formula reading, ‘+Drahmal made me’, and the names of three brothers connecting to the cross, of whom two commissioned the object in memory of the third (D’Ardenne 1939; Okasha 1971, 57-58). A similar formula is seen on the **Mortain** casket, asking for blessings for an individual who produced or commissioned the shrine in Old English. The use of Old English as opposed to Latin on the objects from England demonstrates an effort to make the objects and the reading of their inscriptions more accessible and familiar to the lay people, who would have been more familiar with Old English or Irish instead of Latin (Szpiech 2012, 64). The same can be said for the Irish reliquaries, which are all written in the vernacular to reach a larger audience.

The Irish bell-shrines, book-shrines, and croziers, as well as the fragment from **Liathmore**, are inscribed with standardised texts naming the individuals involved in their manufacture. The inscriptions follow a formula of naming the commissioner(s), craftsmen, keeper(s), and other relevant individuals beginning with ‘Pray for’ or ‘a prayer for’ in Middle Irish/Early Gaelic (Ó Floinn 1994, 40; Michelli



**Figure 5.2** Walrus ivory pendant reliquary, c. 1050 (© Victoria and Albert Museum, London, object no. A.6-1966)

1996, 5-6, 11; Johnson 2000, 119). Many of the names of the commissioners and patrons can be identified as Irish kings and abbots and were written by craftsmen who were at the very least partially literate (Michelli 1996, 7-8, 10; Murray 2014a, 165). This type of formulaic inscription is exclusive to medieval Ireland, demonstrating a use for text that was embroiled in a social and political framework. Inscribing these objects was fundamentally an authoritative means wherein a wealthy elite could commission elaborate reliquaries for their local church or household, thus maintaining their hierarchy, lineage, property, and social standing (Cone 1977, 94-95; Michelli 1996, 2-3, 11; Overbey 2011, 170; Wycherley 2015, 29, 159-160).



**Figure 5.3** The inscriptions on the Lismore crozier (left, Michelli 1996, 40, Pl. IXb, photo by P.E. Michelli © Royal Irish Academy, access provided by JSTOR) and crozier of St Dympna (right, Michelli 1996, 33, Pl. I, photo by P.E. Michelli © Royal Irish Academy, access provided by JSTOR)

Most of the inscriptions are engraved onto decorative metal strips and panels attached to the objects (fig. 5.3). In three cases the texts are directly incised onto the original face of the objects (**Sandford**, **Mortain**, **Rannveig**). The placement of the text on metal panels suggests an impermanence which allows future generations to fix the object and possibly update the inscription (Michelli 1996, 2). Many of the objects have complex biographies and are composed of elements from several refurbishments throughout time (MacDermott 1957; Michelli 1996, 19-20). Although the text on the **St Molaise** book-shrine is primary, it was added in the 11<sup>th</sup> century onto silver panels which were attached onto the original late 8<sup>th</sup> or early 9<sup>th</sup> century wooden shrine (Laing 1975, 365; Ó Floinn 1989b, 54-57). The inscription on the crozier of **Cú Dúilig** is likely a second inscription added when the object was refurbished in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (fig. 5.4) (Michelli 1996, 19). An earlier inscription naming the commissioner(s) was probably on a metal binding strip on the shaft that had been removed. Also complicated is the history of the **Cologne** crozier. The text is inscribed on a silver mount situated below the crook. Whilst the mount is certainly of Anglo-Saxon workmanship, the walrus ivory crook may be

continental (Okasha 2007, 76). As a result, like the **Brussels** cross, there is the possibility that although the artisan was Anglo-Saxon, the objects could have been made by a travelling or emigrated Englishman (Okasha 2007, 76).



Figure 5.4 The inscription on the crozier of Cú Dúilig (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1859,0221.1, asset no. 36069001)

It is only certain that one object was inscribed at the time it was manufactured (**Sandford**). In the case of the **Mortain** casket, the runes were also probably engraved initially, although there is the chance that they were carved at a later time. Perhaps the panels had been left empty for the addition of runes, although clearly there was a lack of planning as the inscription begins confidently and ends with a lack of space. In opposition are the Roman letter inscriptions on the opposite face, which run in two vertical columns between panels depicting the images of saints. These letters are cast as opposed to carved and are reasonably part of the original design. A similar dilemma arises with the **Gandersheim** runes, which are engraved on the base of a loose metal plate that is possibly a later addition, although certain rune-forms and Northumbrian terms suggest a 9<sup>th</sup> century scribe (Looijenga & Vennemann 1999, 119; Waxenberger 1999).



Figure 5.5 Insular reliquary found in a female grave in Melhus, Norway (NTNU Vitenskapsmuseet, T8144 © CC BY-SA 4.0, photograph by Izabella Rządeczka-Juga)

The runic inscription on the underside of the **Rannveig** casket is unquestionably secondary in relation to the casket. The casket is of Irish or Scottish origin, and, like other Insular shrines in Scandinavia, is attributed to Viking raiding activity and looting of Christian churches in the west (Jesch 2015, 108). In total, three Insular shrines are known in Norway, including one very similar to **Rannveig's** casket discovered in a female grave in Melhus (fig. 5.5), and one from Bologna, Italy (Blindheim 1984; Heen-Pettersen & Murray 2018). These shrines are sometimes discussed as gifts brought back for womenfolk, although there is the possibility that *Rannveig* herself travelled to Ireland and retrieved the object (Ashby 2013, 95-96; Heen-Pettersen & Murray 2018, 67-69; Jesch 1991, 46; Sheehan 2013, 819-821). The **Rannveig** casket was not originally intended to have text, and when the runes were carved onto its surface is up for debate. They could have been added at any time during the casket's journey to Norway, possibly before its departure from Britain and Ireland, on route, or upon its arrival. The type of runes were used in the Isle of Man and southwest Norway, which implies an origin for the inscription and/or its carver, but also adds to the many questions surrounding the casket (Jesch 1991, 46). Until the casket appeared in church records in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it appears to have survived above the ground as a cherished relic or personal souvenir, whilst holding relics of its own (Cormack 2007, 230).

### 5.1.2 Liturgical Objects and Church Equipment

The ten liturgical objects and items of church equipment are associated with mass and other rituals in the church. They include objects for the eucharist such as a communion chalice (**Ardagh**) and a communion plate (**Derrynaflan**), as well as accessories for priests and processions including a crozier (**Beverley**), two small portable altars (**Cluny**, **St Cuthbert**), and a censer cover (**Pershore**) (Table 5.3). Objects used to schedule and call prayer include a small sundial (**Canterbury**) and a hand-bell (**Terryhoogan**). Also included are two objects that probably come from the arms of small altar crosses (**Brandon**, **Shanmullagh**). Anglo-Saxon Christianity is better represented in the liturgical objects than in the inscribed reliquaries, which are predominantly Irish. The English objects represent the production of church furnishings in precious metal as a result of the foundation and refoundation of monasteries throughout England in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, funded almost entirely by royal and aristocratic patrons (Okasha & O'Reilly 1984, 36). Six of the liturgical objects are Anglo-Saxon, whilst four are Irish (**Ardagh**, **Derrynaflan**, **Shanmullagh**, **Terryhoogan**). All of the objects are inscribed in Roman letters and all but two are in Latin (Chart 5.8). The remaining two inscriptions are in Old English (**Pershore**) and Middle Irish/Early Gaelic (**Terryhoogan**). The **Derrynaflan** paten, inscribed with a Latin hymn, is inscribed with a series of alphabetical Roman letters. The inscriptions are largely religious, although two objects are inscribed with texts that served a practical purpose (**Canterbury**, **Derrynaflan**), and one features a first-person Old English maker formula giving the name of the man who made (or commissioned?) the object (**Pershore**). As opposed to the reliquaries and shrines, liturgical objects and their inscriptions are more personal and varied, including personal prayers and dedicatory messages to saints, as well as non-secular maker and practical texts

Table 5.3 Inscribed Liturgical Objects and Church Equipment

Name	Object	Inscription
Ardagh	COMMUNION CHALICE: Silver, bronze, gold, amber, enamel, 700-800	Roman letters, Latin: 'Peter + Paul + Andrew + James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Jude Thaddeus, Simon'
Beverley	CROZIER CROOK: Walrus ivory, 1000-1100	Roman letters, Old English: Uncertain, possibly '....at (St) John's...'
Brandon	PLAQUE: Gold, niello, 800-850, image of St John as an eagle	Roman letters, Latin: 'Saint John the Evangelist'
Canterbury	PORTABLE SUNDIAL: Silver, gold, 900-1000	Roman letters, Latin: A) 'January, December, February, November, March, October' B) 'May, August, June, July, April, September' C) 'Salvation to the maker' D) 'Peace to the owner'
Cluny	PORTABLE ALTAR: Silver, niello, oak, 1000-1100, decorated	Roman letters, Latin: '+The disciple mourns him whom Raphael always worships, the Mother mourns, to whom the holy Gabriel cleaves   [illegible]   he/she mourns'
Derry-naflan	PATEN: Silver, bronze, gilded copper, enamel and glass studs, 700-800, decorated	Roman letters, Latin: A) 'a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, k, l, m' B) 'a, b, c, d, e, g, h, i, k, l, m' C) [series of alphabetical letters] D) 'everything and accordingly' / 'everything and grace (thanks)'   'O creator...n...omnium'
Pershore	CENSER COVER: Copper-alloy, 950-1050	Roman letters, Old English: '+Godric made me'
Shanmullagh	CROSS FRAGMENT: Copper-alloy, 600-1100, decorated with image of St Paul	Roman letters, Latin: 'Saint Paul'
St Cuthbert	PORTABLE ALTAR: Oak altar, 600-700, silver casing, 700-800, silver roundel 800-900	Roman letters, Latin: A) '+In honour of St Peter' B) 'Saint Peter the Apostle' C) '+For all things were Saint Peter' (?)
Terryhoogan	HAND-BELL: Bronze, 900-1000, undecorated	Roman letters, Middle Irish/Early Gaelic: '+A prayer for Cummascach son of Ailill'

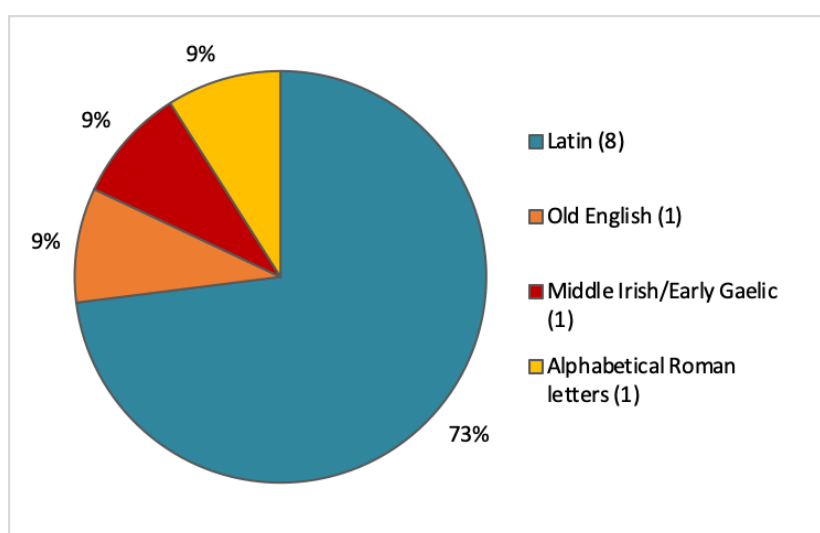


Chart 5.8 Languages on Inscribed Liturgical and Church Equipment



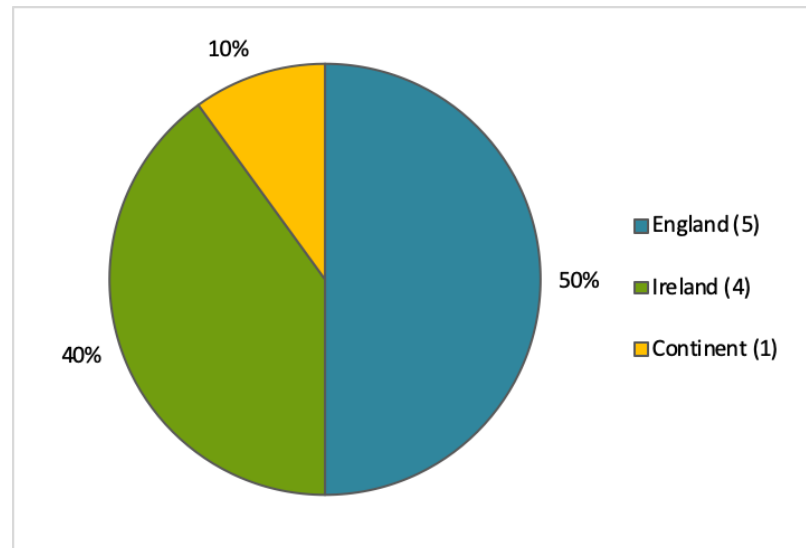


Chart 5.10 Distribution of Inscribed Liturgical Objects and Church Equipment by Country

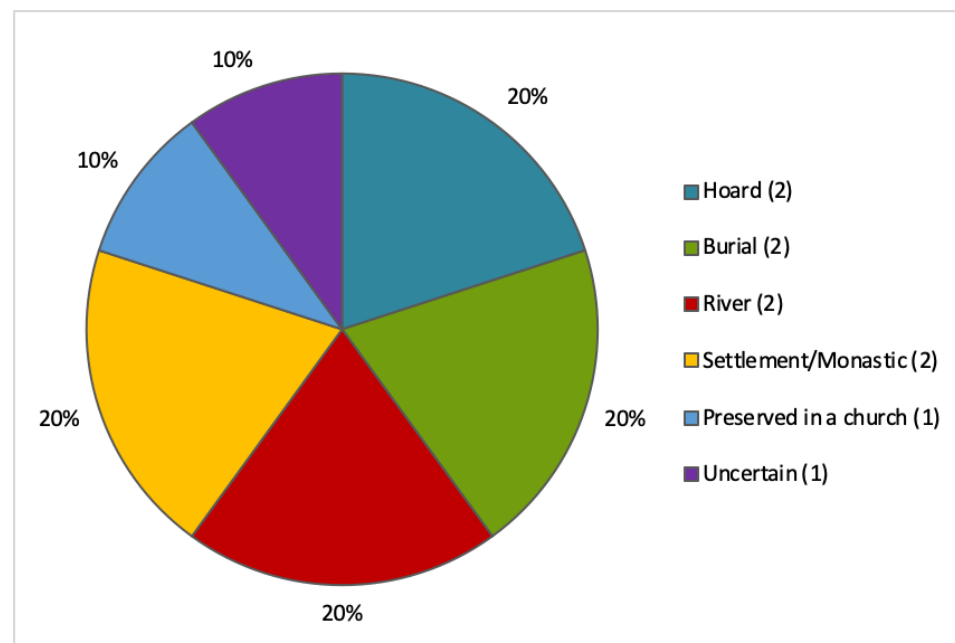


Chart 5.9 Distribution of Liturgical Objects and Church Equipment by Context

The find-spots and find circumstances of the ten pieces of liturgical/church equipment are diverse. Four were discovered in England (**Brandon, Canterbury, Pershore, St Cuthbert**), four in Ireland (**Ardagh, Derrynaflan, Shanmullagh, Terryhoogan**), and one was brought to light in France in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (**Cluny**) (Chart 5.9). The **Beverley** crozier, although Anglo-Saxon in style and inscription, ended up in Dublin after being sold in an auction in London in 1945, and is currently held by the Hunt Museum in Limerick (Okasha 1982, 91-92). The contexts in which the ten objects were found include river deposits (**Brandon, Shanmullagh**), assemblages and hoards in Ireland (**Ardagh, Derrynaflan, Shanmullagh**), monastery or church sites (**Canterbury, Derrynaflan, St Cuthbert**), and burials (**St Cuthbert**, possibly **Terryhoogan**) (Chart 5.10). Not much is said about the discovery of the **Pershore** censer cover except that it was found whilst digging in a residential cellar in the centre of the

town of Pershore, Worcestershire (Webster et al 1984, 74). The close proximity of the find-spot to Pershore Abbey creates a plausible connection (Wychampton District Council 2007). None of the objects were found through excavations and those with known find-spots were found by chance by accident or metal detecting.

Five objects are inscribed with the names of saints and apostles in Latin (**Ardagh**, **Brandon**, **Cluny**, **Shanmullagh**, **St Cuthbert**), two feature prayers for individuals in Latin and Middle Irish/Early Gaelic (**Canterbury**, **Terryhoogan**), and one is inscribed with a private Latin dedicatory statement or protective charm (**Derrynaflan**). Two inscriptions are practical, although whilst one is also decorative (**Canterbury**) the other was not meant to be visible and is entirely utilitarian (**Derrynaflan**). One inscription, although not religious in content, consists of an initial cross identifying the individual as a pious craftsman or commissioner in an Old English ‘+X made me’ formula (**Pershore**) (Okasha 1971, 106). The text on the **Beverley** crozier is too worn and fragmentary to interpret, but it may display the name of St John in an unknown context (Okasha 1982, 91-92). The use of Latin on most of these objects represents the official language of the church, as opposed to the vernacular and more common language of Old English (Barnes 2012, 123; Karkov 2011, 137; Szpiech 2012, 64).

The objects represent the daily lives and rituals of ecclesiastics in the church and could potentially be seen as personal objects to those who used them. For the scheduling and announcing of daily prayer are the 10<sup>th</sup> century **Canterbury** sundial and **Terryhoogan** hand-bell. Also known as the ‘Canterbury pendant’, the sundial was used by a figure in the church to schedule and regulate daily prayer (Schechner 2001, 196). The main text is functional, giving the abbreviations of the twelve months with holes in which a small rod, or *gnomon*, would be inserted to mark the time of the year and to cast a shadow to tell the time (fig. 5.6) (Arnaldi 2011, 151). On the narrower sides of the sundial are two prayer texts for the maker and owner of the object, who are left unnamed. Although the sundial pendant could theoretically have been a personal possession, leaving a personal name off of the object would allow for multiple keepers throughout time. This is the only Anglo-Saxon portable sundial currently known, and its high degree of workmanship is a testament to its importance at Canterbury Cathedral.

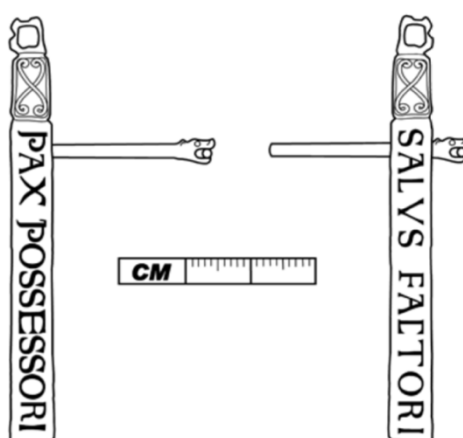


Figure 5.6 Illustration of the Canterbury sundial and the position of the gnomon (Arnaldi 2011, 153, fig. 11 © Science History Publications Ltd.)



The **Beverley** crozier, **Pershore** censer cover, and **Terryhoogan** hand-bell are objects that would have also been used in a church setting. As discussed in the previous section (5.1.1), croziers were seen as staffs of ecclesiastical office, held by bishops or abbot during sermons, and were usually specific to a single church (Cone 1977, 187). As opposed to the Irish croziers, which are composed of decorative metal hooked crooks on a wooden staff, Anglo-Saxon crozier heads are mostly carved in ivory, often curled like acanthus fronts or made in a tau cross like the **Cologne** crozier (Beckwith 1972, 58-59). Although the **Cologne** crozier was used as a secondary reliquary, there is no evidence that the same applies to the **Beverley** crozier. The association to St John of Beverley is assumed according to the possible reading of '...[at] St John'..., as well as the interpretation given by Beckwith (1972, 58-59) of the image of John of Beverley curing a sick boy. If this is correct, it is the same individual named on the **Suffolk** finger-ring.

The hand-bell from **Terryhoogan**, Co. Armagh, is a simple object of bronze inscribed with an inscription in Middle Irish/Early Gaelic in the same form as those on the Irish reliquaries (Chapman 2003; Bourke 1980, no.44). Here the text asks for a prayer for Cummascach, son of Ailill (Chapman 2003, 32). There are approximately seventy iron or bronze hand-bells that survive from the early Christian period in Ireland and were used for the call to worship by monks (Chapman 2003, 31). Another hand bell from Clogher, Donaghmore, Co. Tyrone is inscribed with 'PATRICI', but this inscription was probably added later as suggested by '1272' incised on the other side (Cone 1977, 143). For the procession of the priest or bishop down the aisle, the **Pershore** censer cover is part of an incense burner that hung from chains and gently swung side to side. The **Pershore** censer is the only liturgical object in this thesis that is inscribed in Old English. Here, the masculine Old English name Godric is given, which may have been an advertising tactic on the part of Godric, or a means of ensuring heavenly compensation for his work.



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Figure 5.7 Illustration of the Brandon plaque (left, Tester et al 2014, 257, fig. 8.16, 2:1 © East Anglian Archaeology, Suffolk County Council CC BY 3.0) and the front of the St Cuthbert portable altar shrine (right, Radford 1956, 330, fig. 2)

Although some of these objects, in particular the **Brandon** plaque and **Shanmullagh** cross fragment, are not exclusive to a monastic or ecclesiastic setting, their identification as a possible mount (**Brandon**) and fragment of an altar cross (**Shanmullagh**) are sufficient to place them in this category

(Bourke 2010, 44; Tester et al 2014, 257; Webster & Backhouse 1991, 82). Both objects are inscribed in Latin and feature the name of a saint and a corresponding illustration, with varying degrees of execution. The skilfully crafted **Brandon** plaque was probably from a set of four evangelist portraits set onto the arms of a cross, although other possibilities include a mount from a book cover or shrine (Karkov 2011, 98). Its letters are displaced in the same fashion of the letters in Text (B) on the **St Cuthbert** portable altar, further supporting its use as an Anglo-Saxon liturgical item and supporting its chronological context (fig. 5.7).

Both the **Brandon** plaque and **Shanmullagh** cross fragment were found by metal detecting activity from river contexts. The **Brandon** plaque was found as a single find on the bank of the Little Ouse in close proximity to the high-status Anglo-Saxon site of Brandon, Suffolk just prior to excavation of the site (Webster & Backhouse 1991, 82). The **Shanmullagh** cross fragment comes from a large assemblage of ecclesiastic and secular Irish, Scandinavian, and Hiberno-Scandinavian objects deposited in the River Blackwater in Co. Armagh (Bourke 2010). The object appears to have been cleanly cut at the narrow end and treated as an ingot in its hoard (Bourke 2010, 28). The character of the objects in the assemblage appear to be the contents of a workshop, with incomplete and fragmentary metalwork leading Bourke (2010, 33) to believe that the assemblage was an accidental loss by a Hiberno-Viking metalworker crossing the river between the 9<sup>th</sup> and early 10<sup>th</sup> century.

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**Figure 5.8 The original 7<sup>th</sup> century wooden portable altar of St Cuthbert (Radford 1956, Pl. XVIII, fig. 1)**

The author is aware of only four portable altars from Anglo-Saxon England including the two early wooden boards of **St Cuthbert** (fig. 5.8) and Bishop Acca of Hexham, dating between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the two 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century altars from **Cluny** and of St Andrew (Okasha & O'Reilly 1984; Radford 1956, 329). The earliest portable altars in Anglo-Saxon England were made of wood, exemplified by the **St Cuthbert** (fig. 5.8) and Hexham altars. The influence of continental styles became more elaborate and decorative after the 9<sup>th</sup> century, with some taking on a secondary use as reliquaries (Hahn 2014, 45; Okasha & O'Reilly 1984, 35-36; Radford 1956, 329; Wycherley 2015, 116). Like its continental contemporaries, the **Cluny** altar may have held relics beneath its silver frames,

which are decorated with Biblical scenes and figures with corresponding texts (Lasko 1994, 135; Okasha & O'Reilly 1984, 36-37). These objects were made for the purposes of portable religion, in which ecclesiastics were enabled to take liturgical practices throughout communities (Addleshaw 1973, 13; Hahn 2014, 45-46; Okasha & O'Reilly 1984, 35; Wycherley 2015, 115). They could also be used to provide easy movement in the church and act as small symbols of devotion affixed to a larger altar (Hahn 2014, 45). Portable altars were probably treasured personal possessions, crossing the boundaries between utilitarian and intimate, wherein their owners used them to express and promote their emotional connection to the Lord (Hahn 2014, 59). The **St Cuthbert** altar was found in his tomb at Durham Cathedral, suggesting that the wooden altar was a personal object of Cuthbert himself (Addleshaw 1973, 13). The Hexham altar, not included in this thesis as a result of time and space constraints of the thesis, was found on the chest of Bishop Acca (d. 740) in his tomb (Crook 2011, 100). Like the **St Cuthbert** altar it is inscribed with Roman letters in Latin reading, *Almæ Trinitati, agiæ Sophiae, sanctæ Mariæ*, 'To the holy Trinity, holy Wisdom, and Saint Mary'. It has since been lost.



Figure 5.9 Alphabetical letters aligned along the rim and rivet cups of the Derrynaflan paten (top, Ryan 1997, 1002, Ill.3 after M. Browne © The University of Chicago Press, access provided by JSTOR) and the assembly marks on the Ardagh Chalice (Stokes 1878, 125)

The **Ardagh** chalice and **Derrynaflan** paten, both dating to the 8<sup>th</sup> century, are often discussed together as fine examples of early Irish metalwork used for liturgical purposes (Murray 2014a). They are both items that were used during communion to hold the body and blood of Christ, but were unearthed from two separate liturgical metalwork hoards in southern Ireland (Cone 1977, 138; Ryan 1997). It is suggested that these two assemblages were buried between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries for safe keeping from Viking invaders or local dynastic conflicts (Ryan 1997, 998-999). Their inscriptions demonstrate the various ways in which literacy was used in a learned environment. The text on the **Ardagh** chalice consists of the names of the twelve apostles skilfully engraved onto the silver just under the rim (O'Loughlin 2005). The inscription is clear, concise, and primary. In contrast, the **Derrynaflan** paten is inscribed with four different sets of text on four different areas of the object. Series of alphabetical letters are inscribed along the rims and frames next to rivet holes serving as assembly marks (fig. 5.9) (Brown 1993a, 162-164; Ryan 1997, 1001-1002). The practice of using marks to guide construction is known on other pieces of Irish metalwork, but primarily in the form of simple shapes and symbols. The **Ardagh Chalice** itself features a few assembly marks (fig. 5.9), but these are mostly

Roman numerals with a few symbols that could possibly be letters as well (Brown 1993a, 163; Ryan 1993, 153; Stokes 1878, 123-126). The use of letters for practical manufacturing guides on the **Derrynaflan** paten may be discussed as an indication for a literate craftsman, supervisor, or patron (Brown 1996, 162; Murray 2014a, 162-163; Ryan 1997, 1001-1002).

Along with the letters used for an assembly guide, the **Derrynaflan** paten retains a further inscription interpreted as a Latin hymn (fig. 5.10) (Brown 1993, 165). This inscription is remarkably small and lightly incised on the rim underneath the ornament, thus keeping it entirely hidden from public sight. Brown (1993) tentatively translates the text as *omne et ig(itur)*, ‘everything and accordingly’ or *omne et g(ratia)*, ‘everything and grace/thanks’, and a second line possibly reading *O omniu(m)*, ‘O creator...n...omnium’, which could be a dedicatory message to the Lord or a prayer for the craftsman. Passages in the Anglo-Saxon medical text, *Bald’s Leechbook* and the *Lacnunga* (XXIXc.) mention carving Biblical passages onto patens to dispel illnesses and supernatural beings (Brown 1993, 165; Grattan & Singer 1952, 109), which raises an interesting possibility that the craftsman of the paten intended it to be used for such medicinal practices.

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**Figure 5.10 The diminutive Latin hymn on the Derrynaflan paten  
(Brown 1993a, 166, fig. 19.3-5)**

Additional inscribed liturgical objects that are not a part of this thesis include a silver chalice inscribed with the name of the sister of King Turlough O’Connor, which is said to have been stolen from the altar at Clonmacnoise in 1129, and an apparently inscribed small altar vessel from Ballypriormore, Co. Antrim (Murray 2014a, 165; Stokes 1878, 128-129, 162). Their exclusion from this study is entirely because they were only brought to light after the finalisation of the corpus, but they should be considered in the context of early medieval and Pre/Post-Conquest liturgical inscriptions.

### 5.1.3 The Franks ('Auzon') Casket

The **Franks Casket**, also known as the 'Auzon Casket', is one of a kind and unparalleled in Anglo-Saxon England or anywhere on the Continent or Scandinavia (Table 5.4). Constructed out of whalebone it is a highly decorated box, measuring 230mm in maximum length (9 inches) and crafted with the utmost skill by a (probably) Northumbrian artist (Karkov 2011, 147; Webster 2010, 45-48; Vandersall 1972). Each side is engraved with mostly secular images depicting Germanic and Roman legends, and of the New Testament including the Adoration of the Magi (Webster 2010, 8, 15-29). The scenes are accompanied with descriptive texts mostly in Anglo-Saxon runes, with one sentence in Roman letters. The language is mostly in Old English, switching into Latin once and then back to runes. The highly decorative and literate nature of the casket, as well as the rich resource of whalebone, suggests it was made in a monastic context, even though most of the imagery is secular (Karkov 2011, 147; Webster 2010, 7). As a portable inscribed object, the **Franks Casket** represents the peak of Old English runic literacy, mirrored by the Ruthwell Cross and Bewcastle Cross of the same period (Karkov 2011, 70-71, 137-145).

**Table 5.4 The Inscribed Franks Casket**

Name	Object	Inscription
Franks Casket (Auzon)	CASKET: whalebone, c.700, decorated	<p>AS runes and Old English (Roman letters and Latin in <b>bold</b>):</p> <p>A) 'Ægili'</p> <p>B) 'The fish beat up the sea(s) on the mountainous cliff. The king of terror became sad when he swam on to the shingle'   'This is whale bone'   'Magi'</p> <p>C) 'Romulus and Remus, two brothers: a she-wolf fed them in Rome city, far from their native land.'</p> <p>D) 'Here fight Titus and the Jews. <b>Here the inhabitants flee from Jerusalem.</b> / Doom / Hostages.'</p> <p>E) 'Here Hos/the horse stands on the mound of woe, she suffers distress as Erta had imposed it upon her a grave of grief, in sorrow and anguish of heart'   'Rush'   'Biter'   'Wood'</p>

Before the **Franks Casket** ended up in the possession of a family in Auzon, France by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, its history is unknown, and how it got to France from England is a mystery (Webster 2010, 27-29). It is suggested that the object was brought there by travelling royalty or ecclesiastic authorities, possibly given as a gift to a shrine or religious community (Webster 2010, 58). The inscriptions are primary, ornamental, and story-telling rather than personal and intimate. Whoever carefully and skilfully engraved the letters and images into the casket was highly trained and most likely very familiar with the scripts. They incorporated the use of riddling and cryptic runes, which is also a feature in many Anglo-Saxon manuscripts along with the combination of Roman letters and Anglo-Saxon runes (Daly 2017, 46; Page 1964, 118-119; Page 1999a, 86-87; Webster 2010, 9). One of the answers to a riddle on

the box even points to the material it is made of, ‘whale’s bone’ (Webster 2010, 11). Small panels in the images act as labels, such as *mægi* above the depiction of the Three Kings (Magi), and *wudu* (‘wood’), *risci* (‘rushes’), and *bita* (‘biter’) describing elements on the right panel (Webster 2010, 16, 28).

One interpretation of the **Franks Casket** is that it was used for educational purposes in the Church, in which each scene relates to a fundamental moral of Christian tradition for young pupils to decipher (Webster 2010, 33-43, 49-50). It could even have been used as a way to win the hearts and minds of pagan Anglo-Saxons into Christianity, intermixing the older Germanic with the new Christian tales. The imagery also suggests that the casket was meant to be presented to a royal patron, possibly to inspire the moral lessons of a Christian ruler (Webster 2010, 50-51). Whatever the true purpose of the box, it is clear that it was carved to visually tell stories, blending Christian, Roman, Jewish, and Germanic mythology into one intricate masterpiece. The lid of the casket is decorated with images of warriors and beside an archer the runes for ‘æ g i l i’ identifies him as the Germanic hero Egil (Webster 2010, 19). Other scenes include the Adoration of the Magi, the Germanic story of Weland the Smith, the sack of Jerusalem by the Romans with an image of the Ark of the Covenant, and the story of Romulus and Remus (Webster 2010, 15-29).

What the **Franks Casket** held is another mystery. It could have once held relics or sacred objects such as manuscripts or gospel books, or used as a eucharistic vessel (Karkov 2011, 147; Webster 2010, 53, 57). Whatever it held may have been secondary and unimportant to the highly ambitious and decorative outer display. Although the **Franks Casket** is unparalleled in the Anglo-Saxon England world, its decoration and craftsmanship shares an affinity to the **Gandersheim** house-shaped shrine, also made of whalebone (fig. 5.11) (see Chapter 5.1.1). It is also similar to two late 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century ivory reliquary caskets, one in the City Museum of Brescia, Italy, and the other currently in the Archaeological Museum in Venice, which are both decorated with carved biblical scenes (Webster 2010, 31). These comparisons are striking and invite the equivalent identification of the **Franks Casket** as a container for sacred relics. Regardless of the similarities, the distinct differences in construction, form, and imagery make the **Franks Casket** a singular object best explored on its own.



Figure 5.11 The Franks Casket (left, © The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1867,0120.1) and the Gandersheim Casket (right, Looijenga & Vennemann 2000, 11, fig. 1 © Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum Braunschweig/Autoren und Autorinnen)

## 5.2 Writing and Reading Equipment

The objects here are unique in the corpus as objects made and used exclusively for the purpose of literacy and text. They include thirteen writing surfaces including eleven pieces of slate and two tablets made of whale's bone (**Blythburgh**) and wood (**Springmount Bog**) that were used for teaching and practicing penmanship, eight seals for authenticating written documents, and four objects used for the act of reading and writing including an antler container for ink (**Brandon**), a pointer to guide reading (**Alfred Jewel**), a page holder or clip (**Baconsthorpe**), and the lid to a pen-case (**Lund**) (Chart 5.11). The inscriptions include nineteen in Roman letters, three in Anglo-Saxon runes (**Baconsthorpe**, **Blythburgh**, **Brandon**), two in ogham (**Inchmarnock IS.1**, **IS.76**), and one in a combination of Roman letters and ogham (**Inchmarnock IS.36**) (Chart 5.12). The languages on these objects are mostly in Latin (nine in total) but also include four in Old English (**Alfred Jewel**, **Lund**, **Baconsthorpe**, **Brandon**), one in Old Irish/Early Gaelic (**Inchmarnock IS.37**), and two objects inscribed with Latin and Old Irish/Early Gaelic (**Inchmarnock IS.35**, **IS.36**) (Chart 5.13). Six inscriptions are written in Roman letters comprised of alphabetical sequences or individual letters on slate tablets that are in uncertain languages. One inscription is in uncertain Anglo-Saxon runes (**Blythburgh**), and two ogham inscriptions are untranslated including an uncertain sequence of letters (**Inchmarnock IS.1**) and the ogham alphabet (**Inchmarnock IS.36**).

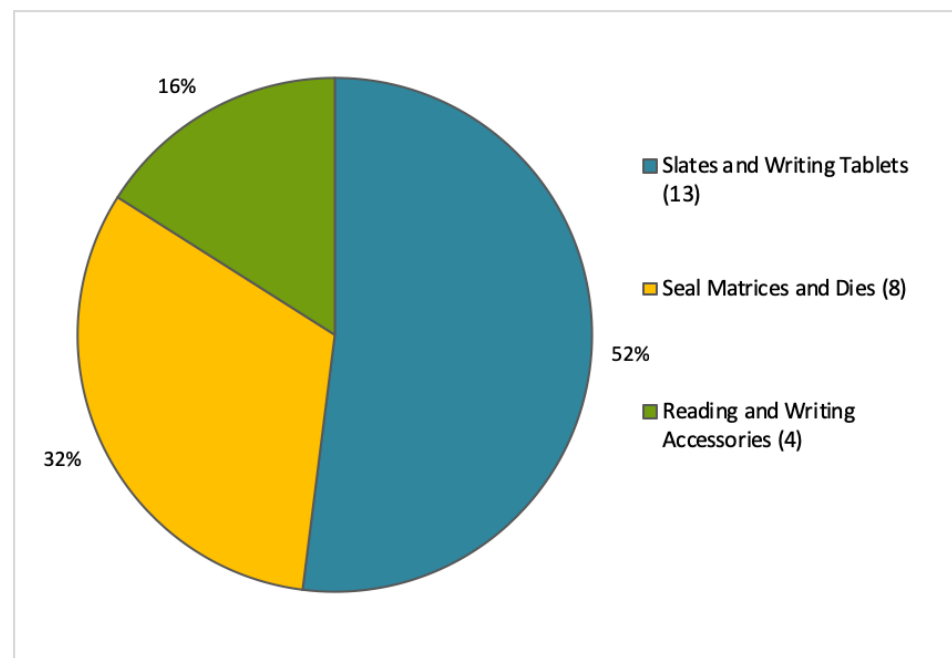


Chart 5.11 Inscribed Writing and Reading Equipment

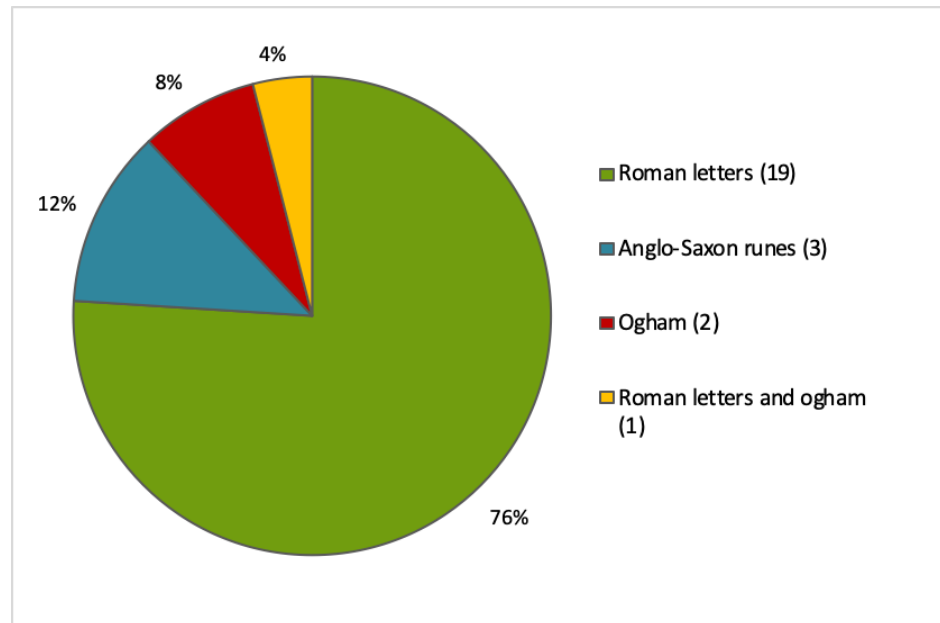


Chart 5.12 Scripts on Inscribed Writing and Reading Equipment

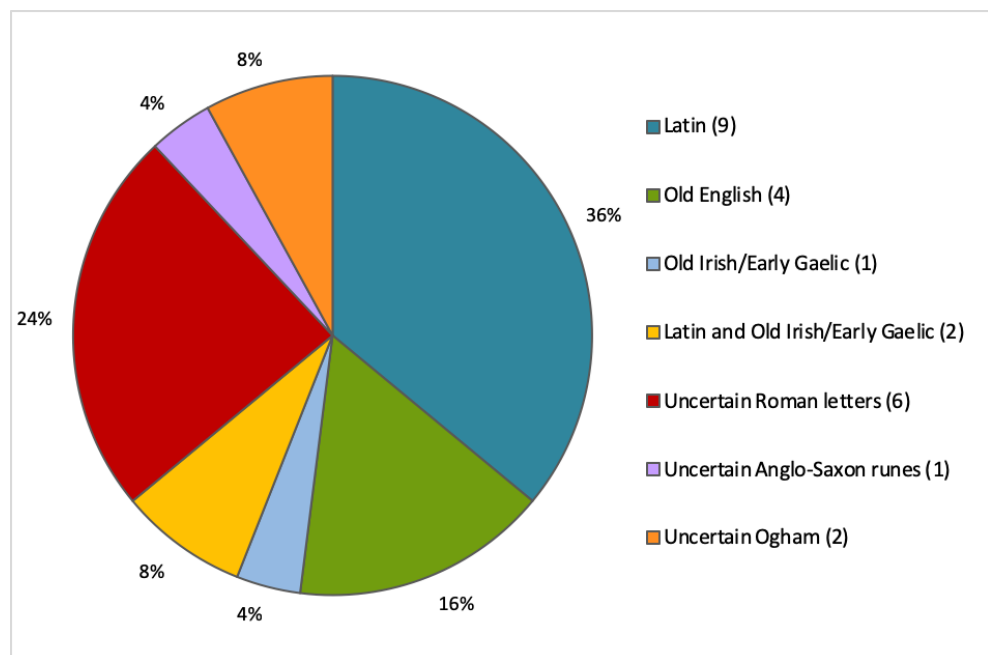


Chart 5.13 Languages on Inscribed Writing and Reading Equipment

The most predominant language inscribed on the writing and reading equipment is Latin, which can be read on nine objects, all in Roman letters (Table 5.5). Latin Roman letters is also seen on two slate tablets alongside text in Old Irish/Early Gaelic written once with Roman letters and again with ogham (IS.35, IS.36). Eight of the nine single texts in Latin capitals are on Anglo-Saxon seal-dies that follow a similar rendition of ‘+SIGILLVM[personal name]’, ‘+the seal of [personal name]’ with one or more Old English personal names. As the official language of church and legislative authority, the use of Latin for the legends on seal-dies would strengthen the seal’s legitimacy when endorsing a document.



The other Latin text in Roman letters is a lengthy recitation of passages from Psalms 30-32 written on wax tablets (**Springmount**). The inscriptions that cannot be read, in Roman letters, Anglo-Saxon runes, and ogham, are from sites with strong monastic and educational evidence indicating they were a product of writing practice. The four inscriptions in Old English include two in Roman letters (**Alfred** jewel, **Lund** pen-case lid) and two in Anglo-Saxon runes (**Baconsthorpe** clip, **Brandon** inkwell), inscribed onto objects related to the act of reading and writing in secular or non-secular environments. Like the inscribed ecclesiastical objects, all of the writing and reading-related objects are Anglo-Saxon or Irish/Early Gaelic in origin and style, and none of the objects are inscribed with Scandinavian runes or in Old Norse.

**Table 5.5 Scripts and Languages on Writing and Reading Equipment**

	Latin	Old English	Old Irish/Early Gaelic	Unidentified/Uncertain	Latin and Old Irish/Early Gaelic
<b>Roman Letters</b>	9	2	1	6	1
<b>Anglo-Saxon runes</b>	0	2	0	1	0
<b>Ogham</b>	0	0	0	2	0
<b>Roman Letters and Ogham</b>	0	0	0	0	1

The objects in this category were either created for the purpose of adding text or were used in a literate environment. The texts are primary, skilfully engraved onto the main faces of the objects, as well as secondary, carved as an additional feature. This category includes objects that were made for the sole purpose of being written upon (slates and tablets), as well as objects on which text is a necessary and fundamental component (seals). The inscriptions include evidence for the education and learning of literacy: written alphabets (full or partial); repetitions of words, and disorganised letters carved on tablets and slates; official personal tags on seals for authorising documents; commissioner, maker, and writer formulae; and one self-descriptive text referring to the object itself. The inscriptions demonstrate the process of learning how to read and write, as well as the application of text in literate environments on high-status objects.

### 5.2.1 Slates and Writing Tablets

The overwhelming majority of objects in this corpus have a primary purpose unrelated to their inscription, but the items in the following section were produced and used exclusively for the act of writing. They are surfaces onto which letters were written for educational, leisure, and scriptural

purposes, and all were found at or in close proximity to monastic centres (Table 5.6). Eleven pieces of text-inscribed slate were uncovered from two ecclesiastical sites on the Isle of Bute (**Inchmarnock, Kingarth**), in use from the early Christian period through to the later medieval periods (Laing et al 1998, 551-555; Forsyth & Tedeschi 2008). The two inscribed writing tablets in this corpus were also found in close proximity to religious sites. They include one made of whalebone found on the grounds of an Anglo-Saxon church in Suffolk (**Blythburgh**) (Webster & Backhouse 1991, 81), and a wooden tablet of six leaves from a bog in County Antrim near the site of a monastery in Drumakeely (**Springmount Bog**) (Armstrong & Macalister 1920). Nine objects are inscribed with only Roman letters, two with ogham (**Inchmarnock IS.1, IS.76**), one with Anglo-Saxon runes (**Blythburgh**), and one with a combination of Roman letters and ogham (**Inchmarnock IS.36**) (Chart 5.14). Most of the objects are inscribed with texts that are incomplete or non-lexical, but the discernible languages include three in Latin and three in Old Irish/Early Gaelic. Six objects are inscribed with Roman letters in languages that cannot be determined, including alphabetical sequences that could be in Latin or Old English (Chart 5.15). One object is inscribed with Roman letters in only Latin (**Springmount**) and one in Old Irish/Early Gaelic (**Inchmarnock IS.37**). Two objects are inscribed with two inscriptions each, with one in Latin and one in Old Irish/Early Gaelic (**Inchmarnock IS.35, IS.36**). Two slates are inscribed with ogham rows that have not been translated (**Inchmarnock IS.1, IS.76**), and one object has sequences in Anglo-Saxon runes that are in uncertain languages but could possibly be in Latin (**Blythburgh**).

**Table 5.6 Inscribed Slates and Tablets**

Name	Object	Inscription
Blythburgh	WRITING TABLET: Whale's bone, copper-alloy, 750-800	AS runes, Uncertain (probably Latin): A) o (n/g/c) u a t ** þ [...] B) [m l k æ] s u (n/g) (t/u) C) m [a] m æ m æ m [. ] (m/d) D) u n þ [
Inchmarnock (IS.1)	SLATE: 600-900. Gaming board re-used as writing tablet.	Ogham, Uncertain: B[AA/O/MA]HBAD(M/A) or M/A]LAHB[O/AA/AM]H
Inchmarnock (IS.35)	SLATE: 600-700, letters and other motifs	Roman letters, Old Irish/Early Gaelic and Latin: A) OI/EG masc PN, <i>Ernán</i> . B) Latin <i>casa</i> , 'humble/temporary dwelling', or 'monastery'.
Inchmarnock (IS.36)	SLATE: 750-800	A) Roman letters, Latin: 'Having reached the holy reward, Having reached the holy reward' B) Ogham, Old Irish/Early Gaelic: BLFSNHDT[C]Q]
Inchmarnock (IS.37)	SLATE: 700-800	Roman letters, Old Irish/Early Gaelic: A) fem PN, <i>Dari-Í</i> , 'daughter of Eo' B) Masc PN, 'tagán' C) 'to judge' or 'to incise/cut'
Inchmarnock (IS.38)	SLATE: 700-900	Roman letters, Uncertain: A) MNOP[-] - ---][R]OU[- ('rou' may be Latin <i>croux</i> , 'cross') B)   LE   AB   CD   EF

Inchmarnock (IS.39)	SLATE: 700-900	Roman letters, Uncertain: 'B', 'S'
Inchmarnock (IS.46) 'Hostage Stone'	SLATE: 700-800	Roman letters, Uncertain: 'D', 'AAB[-]'
Inchmarnock (IS.76)	SLATE: 600-900	Ogham, Uncertain: IA[G]GH[--]S[--][B] or [H][--]C[--]BGGAI
Kingarth I	SLATE: 800-1200	Roman letters, Uncertain: 'DA', '+'
Kingarth II	SLATE: 800-1200	Roman letters, Uncertain: 'AB[...]'   MN   U'
Kingarth III	SLATE: 800-1200	Roman letters, Uncertain: ][.]NF[...]  [.]AD[.]I[.]
Springmount bog	WRITING TABLETS: Yew wood, 600-700, set of 6 tablets	Roman letters, Latin: Psalms 30-32 of Vulgate translation of Old Testament

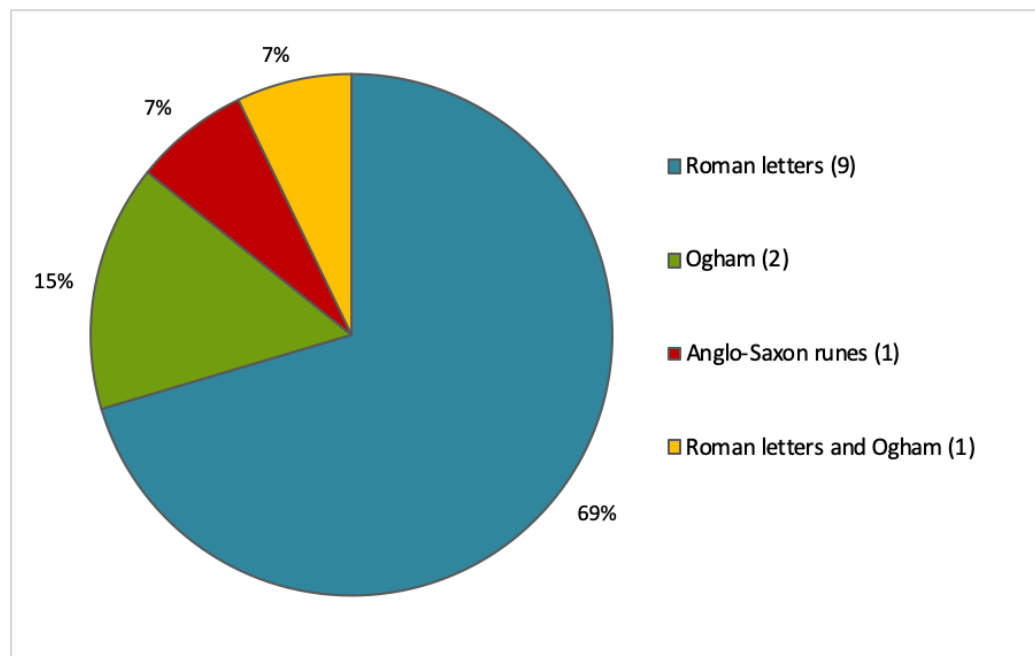
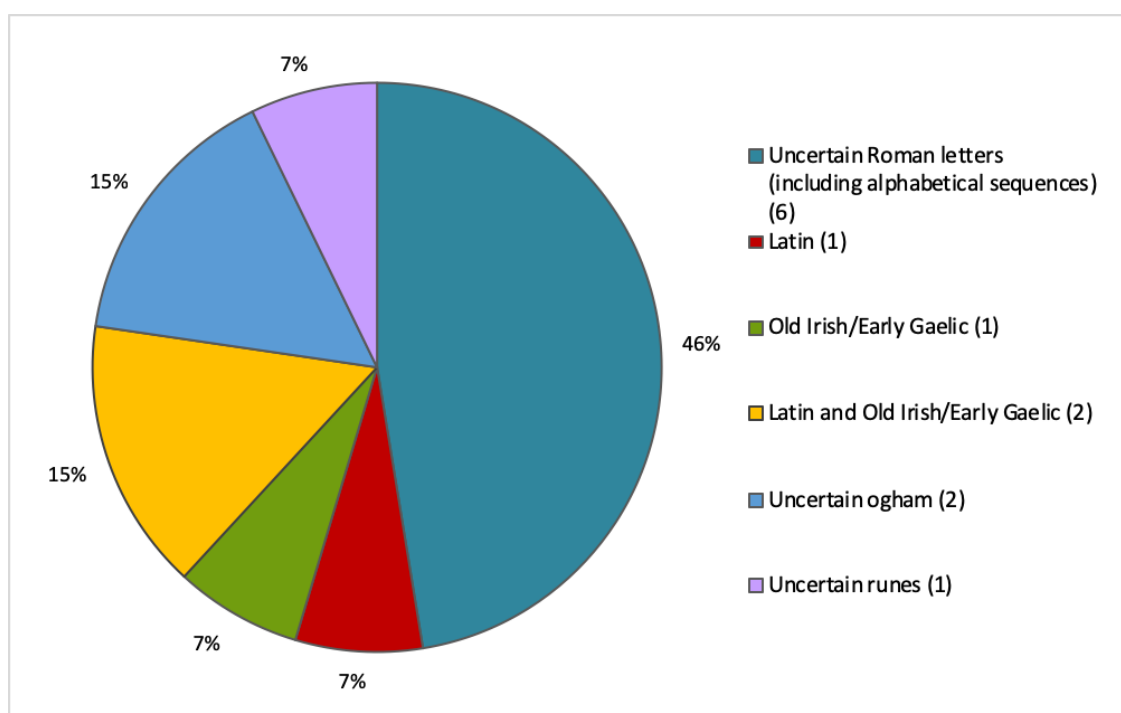


Chart 5.14 Scripts on Slates and Writing Tablets

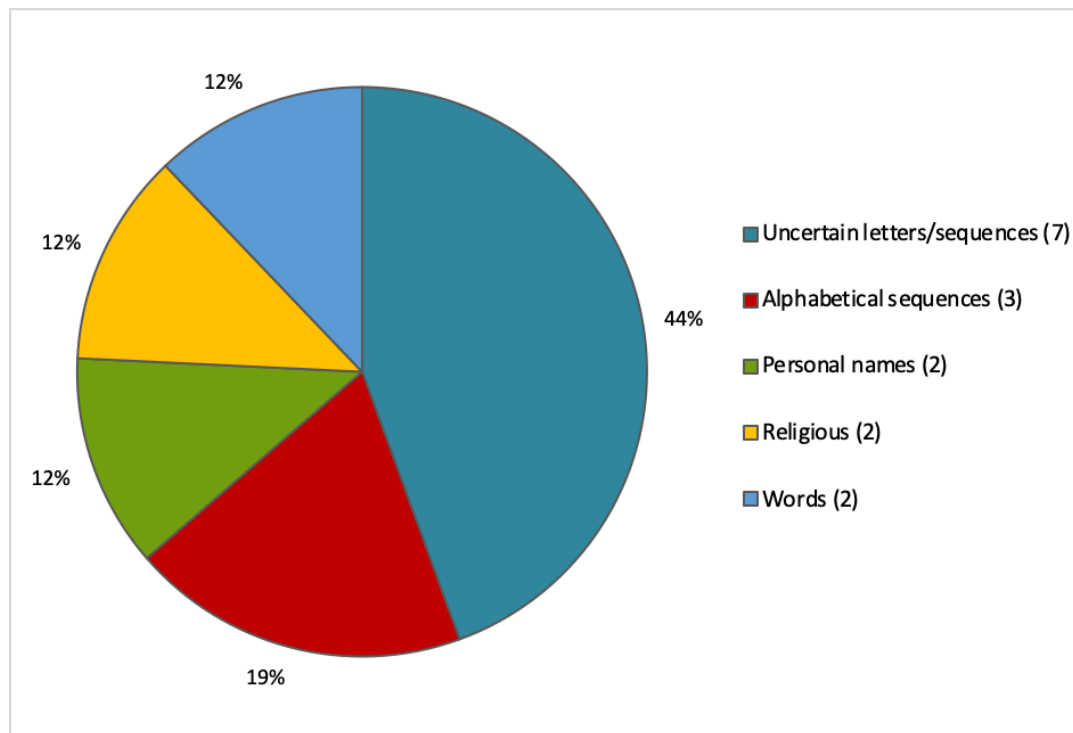
Over one-hundred pieces of slate incised with text, sketches of animals, boats, buildings, and humans, geometric motifs, and gaming-boards come from the small island monastery of **Inchmarnock**, off of the coast of Bute, Scotland (Lowe 2008, 114). The slates range from smoothed and formed writing tablets to rough pieces of quarried slate and beach pebbles (Lowe 2008, 115). Some tablets are small enough to fit in the palm of a hand, whilst others are trimmed to fit into a wooden frame (Forsyth & Tedeschi 2008, 128). Fourteen slates are inscribed with ogham and Roman letters including eight dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century, which are included in this thesis, and a further six dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century and later, which are not included (Forsyth & Tedeschi 2008, 128). A similar practice is found nearby at St Blane's Church at **Kingarth** on the adjacent, larger island of Bute, which seven pieces of slate, some that were originally roof tiles with peg holes, are incised with letters and figurative drawings (Anderson 1990, 311-316). There was surely a connection between the two sites, demonstrating the

wealth of knowledge on Bute and its surrounding landscape. (Forsyth & Tedeschi 2008, 138-139). As slate is found locally on Bute, the inhabitants of **Inchmarnock** and **Kingarth** had no shortage of material, and the slates were used for a variety of purposes other than writing including leisurely doodles and social gaming (fig. 5.12). Among the inscribed slates from **Inchmarnock** is one that was also used as a gaming-board (**IS.1**) and one described as a table or work-top (**IS.76**), covered in graffiti and measuring marks (Lowe 2008, 115). Also included is the famous ‘Hostage Stone’ (**IS.46**), featuring a child-like drawing interpreted as a hostage scene, along with letter-forms on both sides (Lowe 2008, 151-156).



**Chart 5.15 Languages of the Inscriptions on Slates and Writing Tablets**

Wax tablets are a common writing implement wherever literacy was practiced as early as the Mediterranean Bronze Age (Barnes 2012, 109; Brown 1994, 2; Chartier 2008, 2; Lalou 1989, 126; Roesdahl & Wilson 1992, 359). They are identified by one recessed face for wax, onto which a stylus was used to record notes or phrases, and usually come in a set of two or more boards held together on one edge to form a diptych (book) or polyptych (Brown 1994, 4; Lalou 1989, 124; MacGregor 1985, 122-124). Wax writing tablets were used in ecclesiastical centres for priests and pupils for manuscript drafts and educational purposes, by clerics for accounting and administrative purposes, and merchants to record sales and merchandise (Brown 1994, 8-10; Lalou 1989, 128). The **Springmount Bog** and **Blythburgh** tablets are rare examples from early Christian Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England, and feature inscriptions that are products and by-products of the study of literacy. The conditions of the bog had preserved most of the wax on the **Springmount Bog** tablets, on which passages of Psalms 30-32 in Latin were written with a stylus (Armstrong & Macalister 1920). None of the wax remains on the **Blythburgh** tablet, although the traces of runes can be faintly seen on the recessed face where the writer pressed through the wax a bit too vigorously with the stylus (Webster & Backhouse 1991, 81).



**Chart 5.16 Types of Inscriptions on Slates and Writing Tablets**

The inscriptions on the slates and tablets mostly include incomplete or broken words, single letters or words, alphabetical sequences, and series of incomprehensible letters (Chart 5.16). Some of the slates are also damaged and broken and have further incisions obscuring the text. The elements of the inscriptions include two instances of personal names (**Inchmarnock IS.35, IS.37**), three alphabetical sequences (**Inchmarnock IS.36, IS.38, Kingarth II**), and two with single words (**Inchmarnock IS.35, IS.37**). Two objects are inscribed with religious inscriptions including passages from the Bible (**Springmount Bog**) and a line from a hymn (**Inchmarnock IS.36**). Seven inscriptions are composed of either single letters or sequences of letters that do not make lexical sense, including four in Roman letters (**Inchmarnock IS.39, IS.46, Kingarth I, Kingarth III**), two in ogham (**Inchmarnock IS.1, IS.76**), and one in Anglo-Saxon runes (**Blythburgh**). These inscriptions are likely non-lexical because they were written by individuals practicing their writing, although, because some of the slates are damaged or broken, the inscriptions may be incomplete. Apart from learner texts, certain texts may be casual signatures, such as **Inchmarnock IS.1**. Most of the slates have more than one individual inscription and a couple of slates feature more than one script and language (**Inchmarnock IS. 35, IS.36**). Some, such as **Inchmarnock IS.35**, suggest a few of the texts written by different hands on the same slate (Forsyth & Tedeschi 2008, 131), indicating a social aspect to the learning and teaching of literacy.

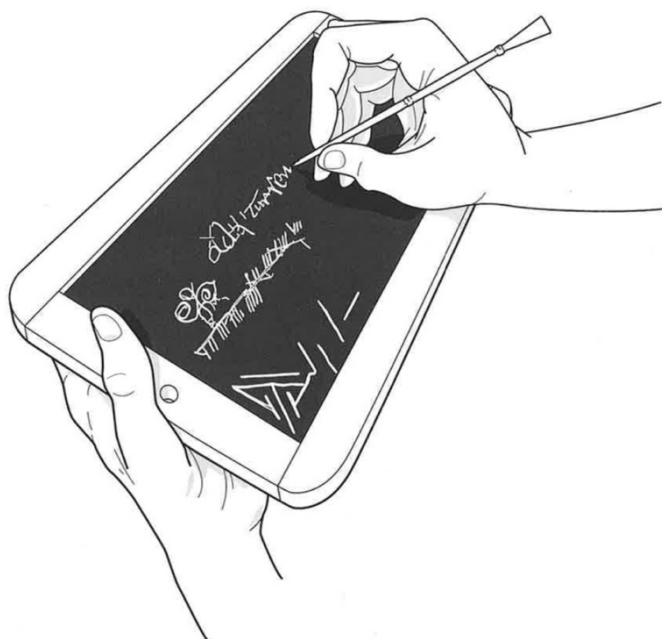
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Figure 5.12 Inchmarnock slates IS.6 (left, Lowe 2008, 118, fig. 6.16) and IS.48 (right, Lowe 2008, 157, fig. 6.28)

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Figure 5.13 Two lines of a hymn on Inchmarnock IS.36, written twice probably as a copying exercise (Forsyth & Tedeschi 2008, 136, fig. 6.21)

The only texts that form readable sequences are the religious texts written on the **Springmount Bog** tablets and **Inchmarnock IS.36**, which are passages taken directly from a quote from the Bible (**Springmount Bog**) and a hymn (**IS.36**). The **Inchmarnock** slate (**IS.36**) features a line from an Hiberno-Latin hymn written once with relative skill and a second time with a noticeable lack of control and precision (fig. 5.13) (Forsyth & Tedeschi 2008, 138). This is probably an instance of a tutor-pupil scenario involving a writing exercise. On the other side of **IS.36** is an incomplete ogham alphabet, indicating a similar activity (Forsyth & Tedeschi 2008, 139-141). The **Springmount Bog** texts show some areas of mistakes, suggesting that the inscriptions were written by a novice priest practicing to become a *psalteratus*, a skill required by priests to be able to recite the Psalms, or by an experienced cleric writing from memory for purposes of teaching (Armstrong & Macalister 1920, 166; Brown 1994, 81).



**Figure 5.14 A depiction of how slate tablets could be framed and used (Forsyth & Tedeschi 2008, 115, fig. 6.15, drawing by Craig Williams, reproduced with permission of C Williams)**

As portable inscribed objects, the slates and writing tablets could be carried and written on at the discretion of the writers. The slates are more disposable than the two tablets made of whalebone and wood and represent a casual and educational side of literacy, wherein teachers and pupils could write on specially prepared slate tablets as well as pieces picked up from the shore (fig. 5.14). The originality of the forms of handwriting as well as illustrations on the slates is so personal one can almost picture the individuals who carved them. Other slates at **Inchmarnock** are incised with images of animals and humans revealing social aspects surrounding the creation of the texts. The circumstance surrounding the watery fate of the **Springmount Bog** tablets may have been accidental rather than purposeful. Brown (1994, 81) suggests that the tablets were lost accidentally, possibly by one travelling to or from the nearby monastery in Drumakeely.

### 5.2.2 Seal-Dies

Eight seal-dies are included in the discussion of writing and reading equipment because they are directly associated with the use and transaction of written documents (Table 5.7). Their purpose is to act as an official signature of an individual or organisation by imprinting a symbol in beeswax, clay, or another material to close or authorise legal papers. The use of seals emerged within a literate culture with a need for official documentation and record-keeping. Besides their function of sealing these documents with a wax impression, seal-dies were also used as a symbol of distinction in themselves. Not only were the wax impressions used to seal documents shut, but double-sided seal-dies had their impressions hung from thin strips of material from documents so that both sides were visible and the

seal would not be broken, thus proof of authentication would not be lost (Backhouse et al 1984, 113; Heslop 1980, 9). All of the seal-dies in this corpus are from Anglo-Saxon England and date from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the late 11<sup>th</sup> century (fig. 5.15). They are made of walrus ivory (**Lincoln, Sittingbourne, Wallingford**), copper-alloy (**Ælfric I, Ælfric II, Æthelwald**), lead (**Chester**), and limestone (**Evesham**) (Chart 5.17). All of the seals are inscribed in Roman letters and in the Latin language. All but one incorporates personal names denoting the objects not only as personal tools but also as symbols of important individuals. In the study of portable inscribed objects, the seals represent the apex of Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman society in which male and female ecclesiastic and aristocratic individuals could hold authoritative roles in religious, economic, and legislative positions.

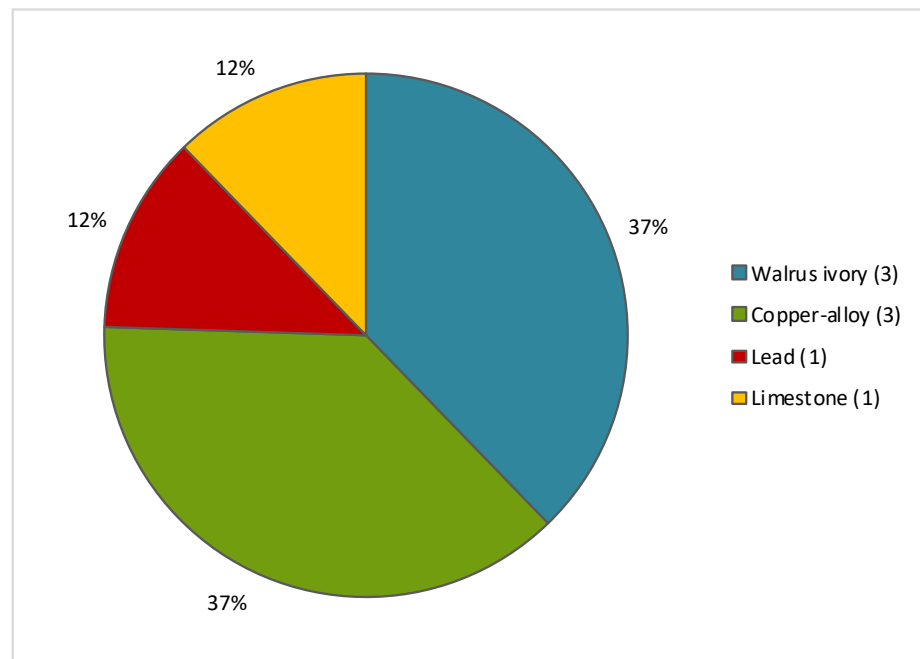


Chart 5.17 Materials of the Inscribed Seal-Dies

Table 5.7 Inscribed Seal-Dies

Name	Object	Translation
Ælfric I	CIRCULAR DIE: Copper-alloy, 950-1000, image of crowned male with sword	Roman letters, Latin: '+Ælfric's seal'
Ælfric II	DOUBLE-SIDED CIRCULAR DIE: Gilded bronze, 950-1000, with handle, image of bust in profile on one side, acanthus leaf on other	Roman letters, Latin: '+The seal [of] Ælfric'
Æthelwald	CIRCULAR DIE: Copper-alloy, 845-870, handle in shape of tower	Roman letters, Latin: '+The seal of Bishop Æthelwald'
Chester	LOZENGE-SHAPED DIE: Lead, 1050-1100, image of seated bishop	Roman letters, Latin: '+The seal of St. Peter, Bishop of Chester'
Evesham	CIRCULAR DIE: Limestone, 1000-1100	Roman letters, Uncertain language (Latin?) A) + [... A ... .] B) [... ]A[ ]T[ ]I[F ... . . .][. ... I]TIES[V]S
Lincoln	CIRCULAR DIE: Walrus ivory, 1000-1100, image of praying monk under the hands of God	Roman letters, Latin: 'The legation is sealed by the sign...'
Sittingbourne	CIRCULAR DIE: Walrus Ivory, 950-1050, image of figure with sword	Roman letters, Latin: '+The seal of Wulfric'



Wallingford	DOUBLE-SIDED CIRCULAR DIE: Walrus ivory, 1000-1050, image of male figure in profile on side A, standing female figure on side B.	Roman letters, Latin: A) '+The seal of Godwin the thegn' B) '+The seal of Godgyða, a nun given to God'
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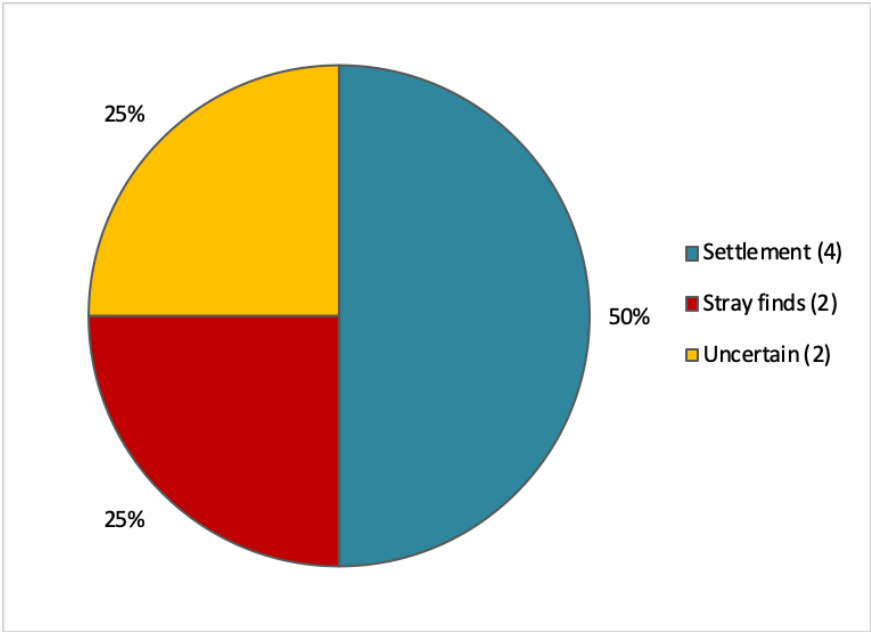


Chart 5.18 Distribution of seal-dies by context



Figure 5.15 The eight inscribed seals: ‘Ælfric I’ (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1832,0512.2, asset no. 948774001); ‘Ælfric II’ (Woods 2013, PAS Ref SF-BE7CB0 © CC BY-SA 4.0, photograph A. Woods); ‘Æthelwald’ (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1822,1214.1, asset no. 925710001); ‘Chester’ (© Grosvenor Museum/West Cheshire Museums, CHE/OMH 67-9); ‘Evesham’ (Okasha 1992a, Plate iib © Cambridge University Press, access provided by JSTOR); ‘Lincoln’ (Lincs to the Past 2011 © Lincolnshire County Council); ‘Sittingbourne’ (© The Schøyen Collection, London and Oslo, MS 2223/14); ‘Wallingford’ (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1881,0404.1, asset no. 34865001)

Four seals were found by chance or through excavations at urban settlement or monastic sites (**Æthelwald, Chester, Lincoln, Wallingford**), demonstrating their place in literate and authoritative communities (Chart 5.18). Two were found through metal detecting activity in unstratified fields in Hampshire (**Ælfric I and II**), and two of unknown provenance were rediscovered in the possessions of private households in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (**Evesham, Sittingbourne**). The earliest datable seal is the **Æthelwald** seal, dated to the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century (Heslop 1980, 2; Webster & Backhouse 1991, 238). Wax impressions of other early English seals include the double-sided lead bulla with a seal-impression of Coenwulf, King of Mercia (796-821), and a 14<sup>th</sup>-century wax impression of the 10<sup>th</sup>-century seal of Edith, abbess of Wilton (961/64-984/87) and daughter of King Edgar (r. 958-975) (fig. 5.16) (Harvey & McGuinness 1996, 4; Kershaw & Naismith 2013, 297). Wax impressions of 11<sup>th</sup>-century bishop seals include Wulfstan of Worcester (1062-95) as well as the Bishops of Exeter (1072-1103) and Rochester (1077-1108) illustrating the custom of bishops owning their own seals around the time of the Conquest (Harvey & McGuinness 1996, 63). These objects are not included in the corpus because they are the impressions in wax of the actual seals, although they should be considered in the discussion as they evidence for the existence of the seal-dies. As with the inscribed finger-rings, some seals can be identified as belonging to historic individuals. The names on the **Æthelwald** and **Chester** seals can be linked to known individuals including Bishop **Æthelwald** of Dunwich (845-870) (Webster & Backhouse 1991, 238), and Peter, Bishop of Chester (1075-85) (Cherry 1985, 473). As personal objects they presumably were only used by the individuals represented on the dies, but theoretically they could have been used by anyone under the authority of a higher power, including church and city officials.



**Figure 5.16 The seal of Edith, abbess of Wilton (Douce 1817, 40)**

Six of the inscriptions are similar in form, beginning with an initial Greek cross and the Latin word *Sigillum*, ‘seal’/‘seal of’ followed by the names of people associated with the seals (Keynes 2018, 75). The exceptions are the texts on the **Evesham** seal, which is too damaged to make sense of, and the inscription on the **Lincoln** seal, which has the Latin words *Signo*, ‘seal, mark’ and *Sigillatur*, ‘(is)

sealed' (Heslop 1986). The **Lincoln** seal was refurbished at some point, during which part of the original text was scratched out and fitted with a curved panel that is now missing. (Heslop 1986, 371). Perhaps it too once held the name of an individual, and the additional panel was attached to give the seal a new name, and consequently a new owner. There is a second inscription (Text B) on the **Evesham** seal-matrix set around the outer edge, which would not be functional as a seal impression. It is highly worn and unreadable, but Cox and Heslop (1985, 396) suggest that it holds some amuletic quality, which may be true for an inscription on a seal that does not serve the seal's main function.

The texts and imagery on the seals provide information regarding the status of the individuals and their roles in society. The seals of **Æthelwald**, **Chester**, and the *Godgytha* side (side B) of the **Wallingford** seals are identified as bishops (*episcopi*) and a nun (*monache*), respectively (Cherry 1985; Keynes 2018, 74; Okasha 1971, 71). Also likely episcopal is the seal from **Evesham**, which depicts a figure holding a crozier (Cox & Heslop 1984, 396), and the **Lincoln** seal, engraved with an image of a monk before an altar (Heslop 1986, 371). The **Ælfric I**, **Ælfric II**, **Sittingbourne** seals and the *Godwin* side (side A) of the **Wallingford** seal are likely noblemen or ealdormen, depicted by figures holding swords or wearing robes (Kershaw & Naismith 2013, 296; Keynes 2018, 74). A seal found at Aldwark, York dated to the mid-1100s reads 'the seal of snarri the tax gatherer', identifying the owner as administrative personnel (Okasha 1982, 103, no. 184). The double-sided seal from **Wallingford** also poses some questions, and some consider whether the two sides were carved at different stages, possibly distinguishing *Godgytha* as a second or subsequent owner from *Godwin*, whose seal is on the side with the decorative handle (Heslop 1980, 5; Keynes 2018, 74).

Seal-dies are often made with decorative handles, whose primary function was to assist in prying the object from the wax, and some handles are pierced with suspension loops indicating that the seal-dies may have been worn as pendants to display social status, or for safe-keeping (Fleming 2003, 63; Heslop 1980, 4; Kershaw & Naismith 2013, 298). Five of the seal-dies in this study have decorative handles (**Ælfric II**, **Æthelwald**, **Lincoln**, **Sittingbourne**, **Wallingford**), although only two of these handles have suspension holes perforated in a way that would suggest they could be worn in such a manner (**Ælfric II**, **Sittingbourne**). The ornamental handle on the **Wallingford** seal-die is chipped away at the top where a suspension hole may have once been. The most elaborate handle belongs to the seal of **Æthelwald**, which gives the seal-die dimension and depth, forming the shape of a tower when it is set on a flat surface with its matrix face-down. It is not given a suspension hole, but its openwork design could theoretically accommodate as some means of suspension, although this was likely not the case. Instead of handles, two seal-dies have modest suspension loops (**Chester**, **Evesham**), and the **Ælfric I** seal-die is decorated with an acanthus leaf design on its reverse, onto which some sort of handle or catch-plate was originally attached. This fixture had been soldered on top of the decorative design, which implies the seal-die may have been re-made into a brooch at some point (Heslop 1980, 4-5; Kershaw & Naismith 2013, 295). Seals could also worn as finger-rings as demonstrated by the **Postwick** seal-ring (Okasha 2004, 244-245). The wearing of seal-dies would increase their accessibility, keeping them at hand when needed, and safe when not. As functional and personal possessions, seal-dies were used to express one's title and position in society, and could be worn for safekeeping and for public displays of status.

### 5.2.3 Reading and Writing Accessories

The corpus includes four examples of reading and/or writing accessories which bear inscriptions. All are associated with manuscripts in monastic and settlement contexts and include an aestel/book-pointer to aide in reading (**Alfred Jewel**), a page holder or turner in the form of a clip (**Baconsthorpe**), an inkwell made of antler (**Brandon**), and a pen-case lid which may have doubled as a small wax writing tablet (**Lund**) (Table 5.8). The objects are primarily functional, and vary in material and level of ornament, from the prestigious to more modest. Their inscriptions are decorative and descriptive, varying in the ways they were applied as well as the primacy of their place on the objects. Two of the four texts are written in Roman letters (**Alfred Jewel**, **Lund**), two are in Anglo-Saxon runes (**Baconsthorpe**, **Brandon**), and all are in Old English, which was probably intended to reach a broader audience as opposed to Latin, a language not many would be familiar with (Szpiech 2012, 64).

**Table 5.8 Inscribed Reading and Writing Accessories**

Name	Object	Translation
'Alfred Jewel'	AESTEL: Gold, quartz, enamel, c.871-899, decorated	Roman letters, Old English: '+Alfred ordered me to be made'
Baconsthorpe	PAGE HOLDER/TURNER: Copper-alloy, 750-800	AS runes, Old English: 'Read whoso may, Beāw inscribed these runes'
Brandon	INKWELL: Antler, copper-alloy, 750-850	AS runes, Old English: 'Grew on a wild beast'
Lund	PEN-CASE LID: Sycamore wood, 1025-1050, animal head terminal	Roman letters, Old English: 'Leofwine [made me]'

Three of the objects were found at settlement sites with strong evidence of a monastic presence (**Brandon**, **Baconsthorpe**, **Lund**). The runic inkwell is one of the four inscribed objects from Staunch Meadow, **Brandon**, Suffolk, which substantiates the site as a place of knowledge and literacy (Riddler 2014a, 259-260). The page holder/turner from **Baconsthorpe**, Norfolk was also found in a settlement context (Hines 2011), and the wooden pen-case lid was uncovered at an urban site in **Lund**, Sweden (Okasha 1984). The **Alfred Jewel** was a stray find ploughed up in a field in North Petherton, Somerset (Hinton 2008). Its location is a few miles away from Athelney Abbey, founded by King Alfred, which may possibly suggest an association (Discenza & Szarmach 2014, 57; Hinton 2008, 27). The discovery of the **Lund** lid outside of England suggests that it was either brought over by a travelling Anglo-Saxon, or possibly even made by one living in Sweden (Okasha 2007, 75). It is included in this thesis because of its Anglo-Saxon maker or owner text, the use of a script consistent with Anglo-Saxon epigraphy, and the Anglo-Saxon masculine name *Leofwine* (Okasha 1984, 181).

As literacy was essentially tied up in the Church in 8<sup>th</sup>-century Anglo-Saxon England (Halsall 1989, 477; Okasha 2017, 207), the identifications of these four objects as reading and writing implements place them in the context of monastic use. The **Alfred Jewel** is an object whose function has been much debated, but it is generally described as the ornamental fitting for an *aestel*, a type of book-pointer to aid in reading, exclusive to 9<sup>th</sup>-century Anglo-Saxon England (Karkov 2011, 214; Pratt

2007, 189-190). The object and its inscription are usually discussed as being associated to a group of *aestels* King Alfred commissioned and sent to his bishops along with his translations of Gregory the Great's *Cura Pastoralis* ('Pastoral Care') (Abels 1998, 239; Hinton 2006, 129; Keynes 2003, 193; Webster 2003). Six additional similar objects are known, the most well-known and similar to the **Alfred Jewel** being the Minster Lovell Jewel at the Ashmolean Museum (Ashmolean Museum accession no. AN1869.20; Webster 2003, 83-85). Also suggested to be a set of tweezers, the **Baconsthorpe** object is described as an item used to turn the pages of a manuscript or to hold a page in place for reading (Hines 2011). Similar objects with wide heads have been found at centres of literacy in England including Wearmouth and Jarrow (Cramp 2006, 246; Hines 2011, 282).



**Figure 5.17** Miniature drinking-horn inkwells depicted in portraits of St Matthew in the Ebo Gospels (Giraudon/Art Resource, NY, Bibliothèque municipale de Épernay, [Public Domain] via Wikimedia Commons)

The antler-tine from **Brandon** is an object resembling a miniature drinking-horn, with copper alloy mounts at the rim which would have held a decorative lid (Riddler 2014a, 259). This type of container for ink, made from hollowed-out animal horns, is seen in evangelist portraits in Carolingian manuscripts, in particular with St Matthew (fig. 5.17), and is also described in Riddles 88 and 93 of the Exeter Book (Bitterli 2009, 151). Along with the antler example, inkwells made of colourful glass were also found at **Brandon** (Evison 2014). The wooden container lid from **Lund** was the sliding lid to a pen-case, which doubled as a small wax writing tablet, evident from the remnants of wax on its base (Okasha 1984, 182). Similar objects include a walrus ivory pen case with a sliding lid from London dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century (British Museum, no. 1870, 8-11,1; Roesdahl & Wilson 1992, 336-337, no. 418), and a 10<sup>th</sup> century wooden box with a sliding lid from excavations at Christchurch Place in Dublin (Okasha 1984, 181). One other wooden example comes from a bog in Garbølle, Denmark, dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> or early 6<sup>th</sup> century, and is inscribed with an elder futhark runic inscription reading *Hagiradaz machte*, 'Hagiradaz made' (fig. 5.18) (Looijenga 2003, 164; Nationalmuseet Danmark, C 24115; Runes-



Datenbank, Sj 62). These tiny boxes could be used in secular or non-secular contexts and for a variety of purposes (Brown 1994, 8-10; Lalou 1989, 128). The identification of the **Lund** lid as coming from a pen-case (or styli-case) is due to its secondary function as a small wax-tablet, which could have held its associated styli (Okasha 1984, 182). In contrast to the other three objects in this category, the **Lund** lid could have been used in a secular context rather than monastic (Okasha 2007, 78), possibly for clerical or administrative purposes.



Figure 5.18 Rune-Inscribed wooden box with a sliding lid from Garbølle, Denmark, 6th century (© Nationalmuseet Danmark, C24115, photograph by Lennart Larsen CC-BY-SA)

All four inscriptions represent Anglo-Saxon inscribing culture, referring to the objects themselves in a descriptive or personifying manner and representing the use of Roman letters and runes. The two inscriptions in Roman letters are maker or commissioner texts in Old English, featuring two Old English male names (Okasha 1984, 181). Coming from an 8<sup>th</sup>-century English context, the **Brandon** and **Baconsthorpe** runes belong to a literary culture endowed by the church and possibly allude to the self-speaking objects described in Anglo-Saxon riddles (see Chapter 7.2) (Page 2014, 262; Parsons 1991, 11; Symons 2016, 72). The **Baconsthorpe** inscription challenges the public to ‘read whoso may’ or ‘interpret/make sense of this whoever can’, identifying *Bēaw* as the one who carved the inscription or wrote the manuscript the object was associated with (Hines 2011, 290-294). Similar statements are seen in riddles 59 and 67, ‘read whoso will’ and ‘say whoso may’ (Hines 2011, 289). It is possible that *Bēaw* was the author of both the inscription and the codex, who wanted to apply a clever parallel to the artistic and challenging aspect of literature which only a select few would recognise (Hines 2011, 295). Also descriptive are the runes on the **Brandon** antler, which can be read in the voice of the object itself. Parallels in 11<sup>th</sup>-century Norse runes include **Dublin IR 12** and **Orphir OR 15**, which read ‘hart’s horn’/‘the deer’s antler...’ and ‘this bone was...’, identifying the material of the objects (Barnes et al 1997, 39-42; Barnes & Page 2006, 200-203).

Owing to its prestige and possible royal link, the letters on the **Alfred Jewel** were engraved with the highest skill. The letters are undoubtedly primary and were designed from the beginning. The **Baconsthorpe** runes are possibly part of the original design, creatively conforming to the triangular

shape of the object (fig. 5.19), although it could have been inscribed at any time after the object's creation. An error in calculating the framing lines is seen at one of the corners of the triangular head, in which the inscriber had to re-cut the line. The texts on the **Brandon** and **Lund** objects are a little less conspicuous than the other two and could have been written at any time in the objects' lives. Although visible on the outer face, the **Brandon** inscription is not necessary to the whole purpose and significance of the object as a functional tool, suggesting that it was a secondary addition. The **Lund** inscription is hidden under the decorative animal head of the lid and is written to a lesser degree of precision than the other four. It would only be seen when the lid was turned upside down and used as a writing tablet.

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**Figure 5.19 Detail of the Baconsthorpe runes (Hines 2011, 283, fig. 2, drawing by David Dobson, NAU Archaeology)**

It is likely, yet presumptuous to assume, that the people who used the reading and writing accessories were literate and could understand the inscriptions on the objects, although surely they would have been members of an elite minority who had access to such devices of literacy. As they are all inscribed in the vernacular, more people were likely to be able to understand their messages (Szpiech 2012, 64). With the exception of the **Alfred Jewel**, which was surely inscribed by a highly trained goldsmith, those who owned, used, and inscribed the objects could be one in the same. The individual who used the ink in the **Brandon** inkwell to write manuscripts at one point in time could have carved the clever runes in a moment of inspiration. The same can be said for the **Baconsthorpe** inscription, which was possibly used and inscribed by *Bēaw* (Hines 2011, 295).

## 5.3 Funerary and Memorial Objects

This category includes objects that were used for funerary purposes including commemorating and interring the dead. The relevant objects are ten mid to late Anglo-Saxon lead crosses and plaques and four early Anglo-Saxon cremation urns (Chart 5.19). In style, decoration, context, and inscription they represent two chronologically different burial rites, associated with pagan and Christian beliefs. Eight objects were discovered in situ as grave goods (**Chichester, Cumberworth, Lincoln, Loveden Hill, Spong Hill (x3), Wells**), whilst three lead plaques (**Bawburgh, Flixborough, Kirkdale**) and one cross (**Deansway**) were found as single finds on church or settlement grounds (Chart 5.20). As portable objects, they were not necessarily meant to be transported or moved before or after their deposition and may have spent some time above ground for memorial purposes (Findell & Kopár 2016, 118; Williams 2014, 15). Furthermore, there is the possibility that some objects were re-used as funerary objects after an initial function as domestic items used for food and drink consumption (Perry 2011).

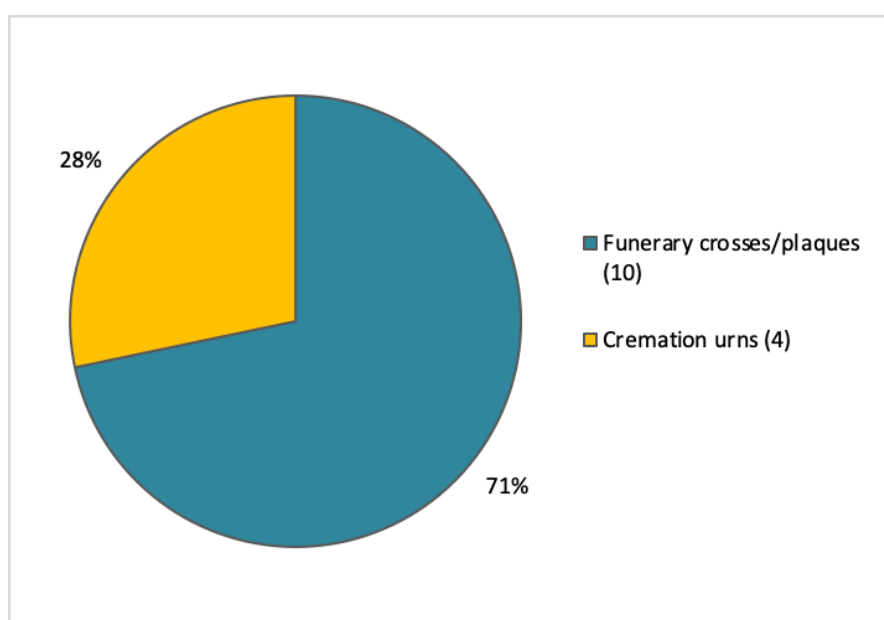
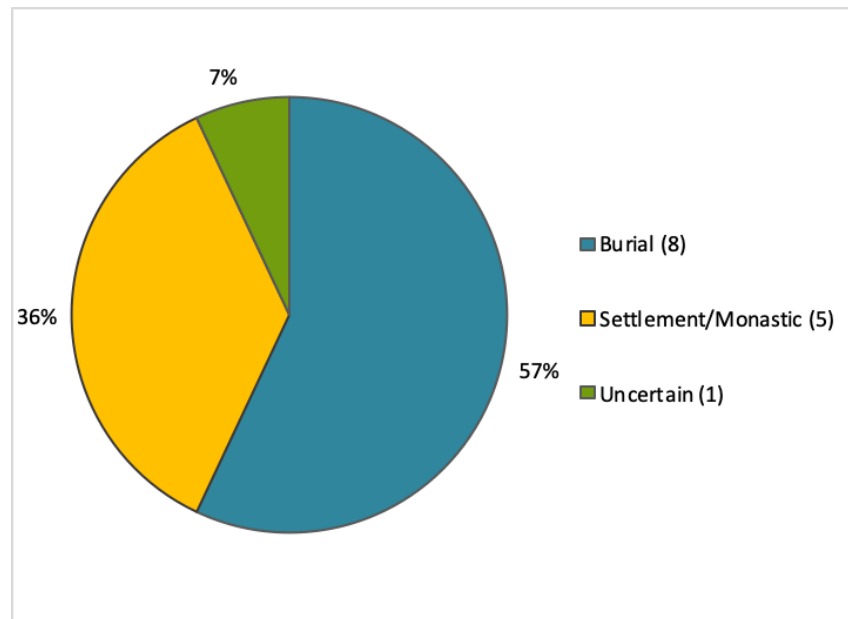


Chart 5.19 Inscribed Funerary and Memorial Objects

The four clay cremation urns from **Loveden Hill** and **Spong Hill** are inscribed with older futhork runes and as part of a pre-Christian burial tradition, originally held cremated bones and small personal items (Hills & Penn 1981, 7; Nedoma 2016, 4). Their inscriptions can be read in Continental Germanic or early Old English (Table 5.9) (Nedoma 2016). Three of the inscriptions are composed of three runes pressed into the clay with the same die upon the three urns from **Spong Hill**. The fourth inscription is a hand-carved sequence of runes on the urn from **Loveden Hill** that contains a Germanic personal name. The ten crosses and plaques are a part of a Christian burial custom and include nine inscribed with Roman letters and one with Anglo-Saxon runes (**March**). Out of the nine inscriptions written in Roman letters, six are in Latin and three are in Old English (**Flixborough, Kirkdale, Louth**). The **March** plaque is the only object in this thesis that is inscribed in Anglo-Saxon runes and Latin rather than Old English. Other inscriptions in this thesis that are in Anglo-Saxon runes and are partially in Latin include the **Whitby** comb written in both Latin and Old English. The **Billesley** plaque,



**Blythburgh** tablet, and **Deansway** pottery sherd are inscribed with Anglo-Saxon runes that are untranslated but may also be in Latin.



**Chart 5.20 Distribution of Inscribed Funerary and Memorial Objects by Context**

**Table 5.9 Scripts and Languages on Funerary and Memorial Objects**

	Latin	Continental Germanic or Old English	Old English
Roman Letters	6	0	3
Elder Futhark/Anglo-Saxon runes	1	4	0

### 5.3.1 Funerary Crosses and Plaques

The ten inscribed lead plaques are either rectangular or sub-rectangular or cut into the shape of Christian crosses (Table 5.10). They are a part of a considerable corpus of inscribed and uninscribed lead plates described as mortuary plaques from early medieval England and Scandinavia, made to commemorate a dead individual by either marking their grave or being placed inside it (Gilchrist 2008; Okasha 1996, 68; Okasha 2004b, 459; Pestell 2004, 147; Sørheim 2004). Along with the five lead crosses in this corpus, there are a further two including one from St Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury (fig. 5.20) and one from Bath, Somerset, which are not included because they were identified after the culmination of this corpus (Okasha 2004b, 460; Potts 1924). The inscribed lead crosses from Bury St Edmunds are also excluded due to the fact that they likely date after 1100 AD (Okasha 2004a, 229-233).

Table 5.10 Inscribed Funerary Crosses and Plaques

Name	Object	Translation
Bawburgh	PLAQUE: Lead, 1000-1100, incised cross on one side	Roman letters, Latin with OE PN: 'Saward, of St. John, Abbot *H[ear]dwerh, in the ground'
Chichester	CROSS: Lead, c.1088	Roman letters, Latin: 'We absolve you, O Bishop Godfrey, in place of St Peter, prince of the apostles, to whom the Lord gave the power of binding and releasing, so that in so far as your accusation warrants and the remission pertains to us, God the omnipotent redeemer, the kind forgiver, may be to you the healing of all your sins. Amen. On the 25th of September, on the feast of St Firmin bishop and martyr, Bishop Godfrey of Chichester died. On the same day it was five days after the (new) moon.'
Cumberworth	CROSS: Lead, 900-1100	Roman letters, Latin: '+Through this sign of Christ...was purified/atoned for...I pray for, beg...small foulness...[was] turned around...he who by the power of the cross redeemed the world from death, shattered hell and threw open heaven.'
Deansway	CROSS: Lead, 1000-1200	Roman letters, Latin with OE PN: 'I perceive/think of Aelf[wine] [who] was a [craftsman]' or 'I perceive/think of Aelf [who] was a craftsman of God'
Flixborough	PLAQUE: Lead, 700-900, traces of mercury gilding	Roman letters, Old English: '+Ealdwine, Ealdhere, Eadwine, Eanbeorht, Aethelgyth, Eadhaeth'
Kirkdale	PLAQUE: Lead, 700-900, in 6 fragments	Roman letters, Old English: '...coffin [-], R[-] wrote this...'
Lincoln	CROSS: Lead, 1000-1100	Roman letters, Latin with OE PN: A) 'Here lies named the body of Siford, priest of St Helen and St Margaret' B) Uncertain C) 'This...from childhood...atones for...I pray'
Louth	PLAQUE: lead, 700-900, rectangular tablet	Roman letters, Old English: A) '+Cudbur+ge++' B) [ .IS] [+ +]
March	PLAQUE: lead, 950-1100, possibly perforated	AS runes, Latin: A) 'Saint Mattheus, Saint Marcus, Saint Lucas, Saint John, deliver me from evil' B) 'With all grace, to/from the least of his saints, from/to the Lord, Amen'
Wells	CROSS: Lead foil, c.1088, attached to lead cross	Roman letters, Latin: 'O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world. Rest eternal, grant unto them, O Lord, and light perpetual shine upon them'

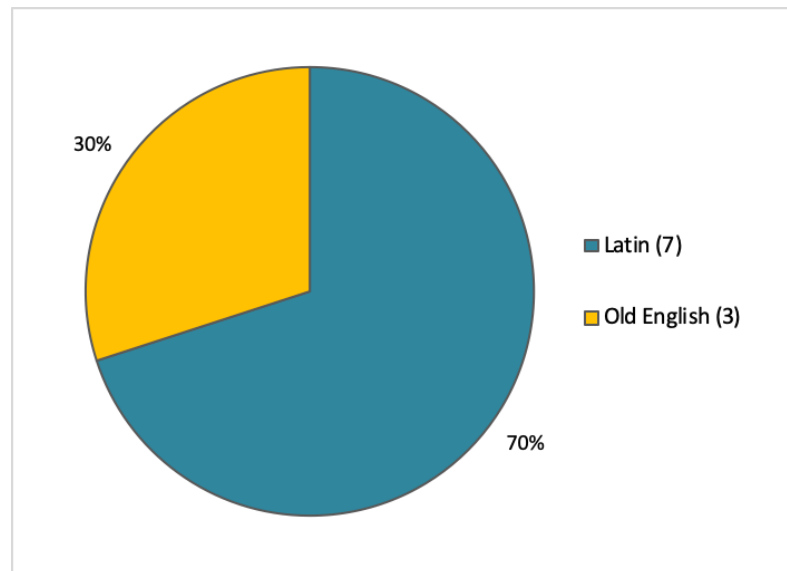


Chart 5.21 Languages on Inscribed Funerary Crosses and Plaques

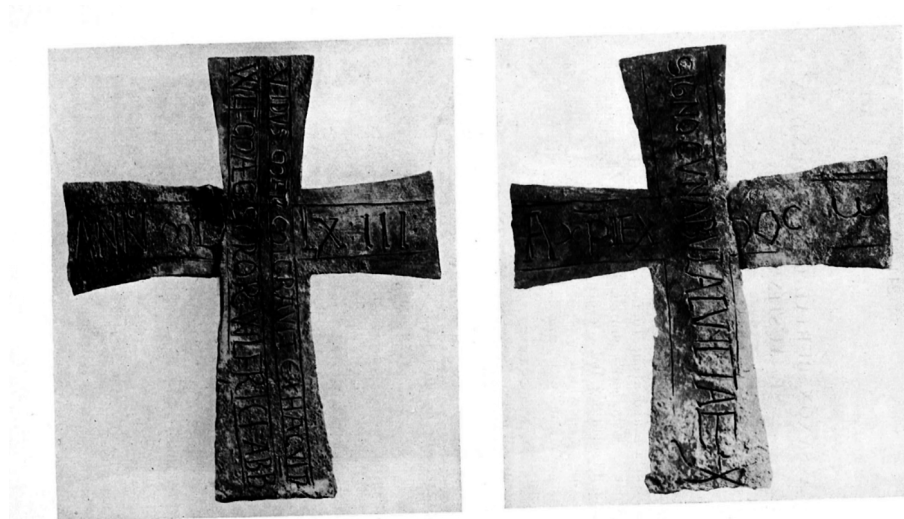
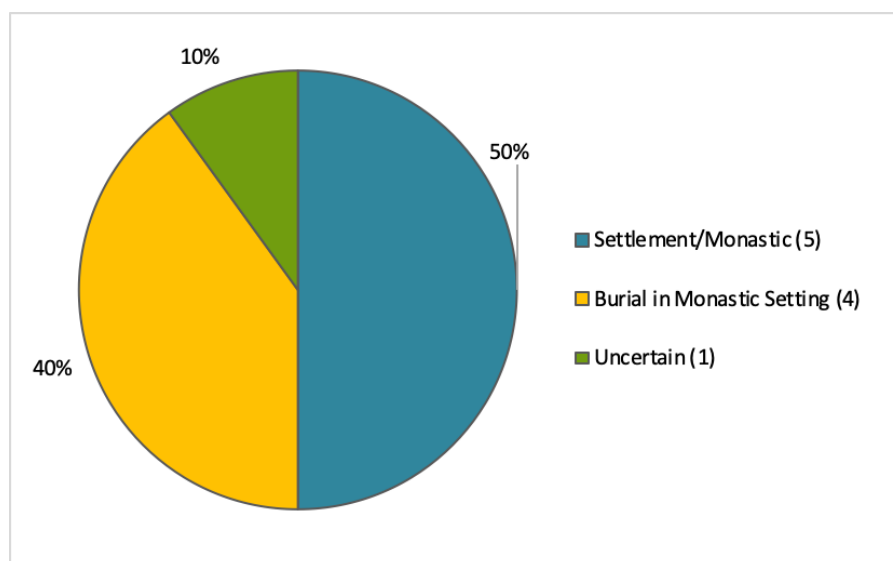


Figure 5.20 Inscribed lead cross from St Augustine's, Canterbury (Potts 1925 © Kent Archaeological Society)

The ten lead plaques and crosses in the corpus are inscribed with texts in Roman letters, with one in Anglo-Saxon runes (**March**). Seven inscriptions are in Latin (**Bawburgh, Chichester, Cumberworth, Deansway, Lincoln, March, Wells**) and three are in Old English (**Flixborough, Kirkdale, Louth**) (Chart 5.21). Most of the inscriptions are religious in nature, and they are all commemorative in some form. Six inscriptions consist of personal names (**Bawburgh, Chichester, Deansway, Kirkdale, Lincoln, Louth**), with one plaque featuring a total of seven Old English names of males and females (**Flixborough**). Although these objects are not immediately seen as personal possessions, it is their inscriptions that make them personal, identifying individuals by name or having been written in their honour. As items that measure no more than 191mm (approximately 7 inches) in length they are all small enough to easily be carried but as portable objects they were presumably not intended to be carried or moved very far, if at all. The exception is the **Deansway** cross, which

measures no more than 52mm (2 inches) in length (Okasha 2004a, 248-249), which, as discussed below, may have a more personal connotation to it than the others.



**Chart 5.22 Distribution of Inscribed Funerary Crosses and Plaques by Context**

As objects closely associated with Christianity and Christian burial rites, all of the crosses and plaques have find-spots associated with high-status monastic or settlement sites, except for the **March** plaque, which has an uncertain provenance (Bartos 2016; Brown & Okasha 2009, 137-141; Okasha 2004a, 238-239; Vallee 2012, PAS Ref LIN-66AD26; Pestell 2004, 147-148). Five objects were discovered at settlement or monastic sites in England (**Bawburgh, Deansway, Flixborough, Kirkdale, Louth**), and four objects were found inside tombs or burials at monastic sites including one cross from a mid to late Saxon cemetery under a church (**Cumberworth**), and three crosses from inside the tombs of bishops and priests (**Chichester, Wells, Lincoln**) (Chart 5.22). These crosses are inscribed with absolution texts asking to save the soul of the interred (Okasha 1982, 101; 1996, 68; 2004a, 240-241; Rodwell 2001, 148). The **Deansway** cross was found in the fill of a cess pit in a settlement context (Okasha 2004b, 457). Along with its remarkably small size, it may have been a personal memento to remember a dead loved one rather than a grave good. A similar tradition is seen in Scandinavia from as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> century, wherein lead crosses with Latin runic inscriptions were placed in burials, particularly in Norway and southern Sweden (fig. 5.21) (Sørheim 2004; Zilmer 2013, 162). Most of these date after the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and like the English crosses, consist of religious texts including the Lord's Prayer and magical Christian formulas (Sørheim 2004; Zilmer 2013, 154). Apart from funerary objects, these items could have been seen as personal amulets, further discussed in Chapter 7.

Although the five rectangular and sub-rectangular lead plaques were not found as grave goods, the known provenances are in close proximity to sites in southern and eastern Anglo-Saxon England with evidence for a monastic presence (Bartos 2016; Brown & Okasha 2009, 137-141; Okasha 2004a, 238-239; Vallee 2012, PAS Ref LIN-66AD26; Pestell 2004, 147-148). With reference to similar lead plaques that have been discovered in burials, the plaques are described in the literature as commemorative objects that were meant to be placed inside or onto coffins or used to mark the place of a grave (Brown & Okasha 2009, 139-140; Pestell 2004, 147; Watts *et al* 1997, 52). Although the

**March** plaque is not defined as a funerary plaque in its limited literature (Hines 2019a, 10-13), its remarkable similarity to a lead plaque found in a graveyard in Odense, Denmark, which also features the Latin phrase ‘Christ deliver me...from all evil’ (Barnes 2012, 124; MacLeod & Mees 2006, 135-136), is sufficient to have it be placed in this category.

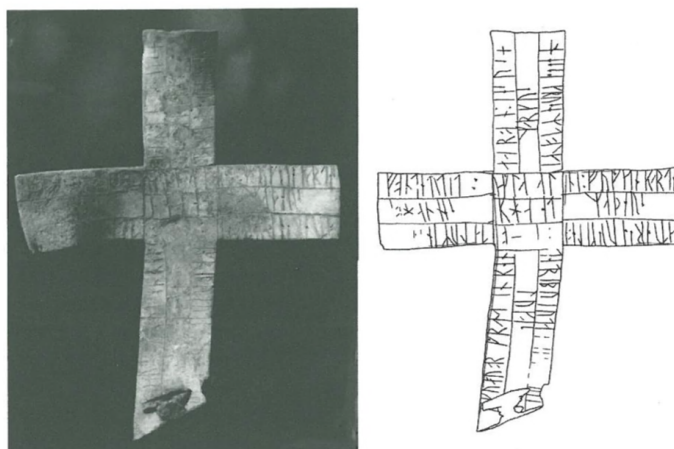


Figure 5.21 Rune-inscribed lead cross with a Latin text from Sande, Norway, c. 1200-1300 (Sørheim 2004, 196, fig. 1, drawing by Jonas Nordby)

The **Flixborough**, **Kirkdale**, and **March** plaques were once probably attached to larger objects, quite possibly coffins. This is indicated by the twelve holes around the perimeter of the **Flixborough** plaque and the damaged perforation on the plaque from **March**, which shows signs of forceful removal (Brown & Okasha 2009, 141; Watts et al 1997, 74). Alternatively, the plaques, especially those that are incised on both faces (**Bawburgh**, **Louth**, **March**), may have not been attached to anything and simply placed inside the burial either to identify the buried individual or perhaps kept as a personal Christian amulet (Gilchrist 2008, 125, 136; Moretti 2015, 114). Apart from mortuary purposes, it has been suggested that the lead plaques were once attached to reliquary chests, suggested by the possible term *ban-cyst*, ‘bone-chest’ on the **Kirkdale** plate (Okasha 2004a, 239). It is also unlikely that the **Flixborough** plaque marks a single grave for seven individuals (Brown & Okasha 2009, 141). However, this text could be a memorial tribute rather than a plaque to mark the location of a grave (Okasha 1992a, 47).

The texts on the funerary plaques and crosses are all directly incised onto the surface with the exception of the **Wells** cross, which has its inscription on a separate sheet of lead foil adhered to the cross face (Rodwell 2001, 147-149). Some of the texts are incised in innovative and artistic ways that show the creative minds of the scribes. As on the **Chichester** cross, the first nine lines of the inscription, which form the absolution text ending with ‘amen’, is in a minuscule script, and the second part, giving the date of Bishop Godfrey’s death, is mostly in capitals (Okasha 1996, 65-67). The script change is likely ornamental in order to separate the prayer from the supplementary details. Also ornamental and probably a creative use of space is the inverted bottom half of the **Wells** inscription, which is turned upside down in order to fit the triangular space (fig. 5.22) (Rodwell 2001, 149). The **Deansway** text is divided into four parts that are each placed in the four arms of the cross with its letters facing inwards towards the centre. Like the **Cumberworth** cross, it features the first-person term ‘I’, which is likely a

personal wish from the one who carved it (Okasha 2004a, 235-236). The small size of the **Deansway** cross suggests that it was intended to be a personal amulet to remember a dead loved one. If it had indeed been used as a funerary item it could have been placed on the body for protection, as some small lead sheets in burials in Scandinavia have been found (Olesen 2010, 165-166).



Figure 5.22 Reconstruction of the Wells lead foil inscription (Rodwell 2001, 149, fig. 125, drawing by Helen Humphries © English Heritage, ADS access license)

At least five of the objects were incised with horizontal framing lines prior to the text to guide the scribes' hand, who had undoubtedly been trained in manuscript book-hand (Halsall 1989, 477). The unevenness of some of the inscriptions, in particular the **Deansway** letters, suggest either lower-skilled scribes or texts not written for public eyes (Watts et al 1997, 71), instead hidden away in graves. The **Flixborough** plaque, on the other hand, shows a level of skill not replicated on the other plaques. Even so, the use of space does not appear to have been carefully planned, as the fourth line appears compressed, perhaps as an afterthought or error (Brown & Okasha 2009, 139). This is also suggestive of a hierarchical order of the names, wherein *Alduini* (Ealdwine) and *Aldheri* (Ealdhere) at the top were of a higher status than the others (Brown & Okasha 2009, 140-141). The last name of *Edelui[i]n* (Æthelwine) does seem to be a secondary addition in a space not intended for text. The letters are cramped, overlapping the top horizontal border and fit awkwardly around the nail holes. As it is in the same handwriting as the rest of the inscription one can imagine the frustration of the scribe when realising there was an additional name to be included onto the plaque.

A similar characteristic is seen on the **Kirkdale** and **Bawburgh** plaques, which have some lines of text that are narrower than others suggesting the scribe misjudged the use of space (Watts et al 1997, 63-65). On the other hand, blank rows are visible on the text on the **Chichester** cross and on the highly deteriorated face of the **Lincoln** cross (Okasha 1996, 65, Okasha 2004a, 239), indicating that the space was overestimated. This could be because of an unskilled engraver, although it would be reasonable to suggest that the level of attention given to an object not meant for display might be somewhat downgraded. It is also suggested that the writer of the **Kirdale** plaque was practicing or imitating formal book script rather than writing the text naturally (Watts et al 1997, 71-71). In addition, the unusual formatting of the **Louth** inscription, which is broken up into seven uneven horizontal rows, appears almost too informal for a memorialising inscription, and the form of the plaque itself is of comparatively low quality to the others. Perhaps then, the uneven texts (and construction) of the plaques were for practice, and the reason they were not found in graves was because they never made it that far,

although it is also possible that they are displaced grave goods (Watts et al 1997, 52). Furthermore, the **Kirkdale** plaque was found in an area with evidence for iron and copper working perhaps suggesting that it was used as a piece of scrap metal, either prior to or after their intended use (Watts *et al* 1997, 75). Indeed, some edges of the plaque show signs of melting from exposure to heat and some are folded over suggesting that it was associated with metal working.

Although the texts on four of the objects are highly damaged and incomplete, enough can be made out to determine that the primary purposes for the inscriptions are commemorative and religious. Five out of the ten objects have inscriptions that feature personal names (**Bawburgh, Chichester, Deansway, Flixborough, Lincoln**) and three consist of the names of saints (**Bawburgh, Chichester, March**). The **Kirkdale** plaque is fragmentary but it may also be inscribed with a personal name beginning with 'R' (Okasha 2004a, 238-239). Including this object, there are twelve individuals that are immortalised on the funerary plaques and crosses, seven of which are written onto the **Flixborough** plaque, which is inscribed only with personal names. The other texts that can be read that include the names of individuals include phrases that are meant to incite the remembrance of those named through the power of God. They are thus absolution texts, meant to absolve the sins of the dead for passage into Heaven.

Although lead is typically seen as a cheap and low quality material in comparison to gold and silver, its use expanded in the 10<sup>th</sup> century as an easily accessible and useable metal for jewellery and dress accessories, exemplified by the **Crewkerne** strap-end (Chapter 4.1.4) and **Coquet Island** finger-ring (Chapter 4.1.1) (Page 1999a, 158; Thomas et al 2008, 180; Watts 1997, 75). Its frequent use for religious and amuletic objects including church furnishings, coffins, and coffin-linings may be down to its supposed magical properties (Mitchell 2011, 45; Moretti 2015, 114; Simek 2011, 45-46). In Anglo-Saxon charm-books it is mentioned as a necessarily material to write the Gospel of John upon for a charm against elves and illness (Mitchell 2011, 45). Consider the lead pendant from **Weasenham** with a Christian inscription made into a personal amulet (Chapter 4.1.7) (Okasha & Youngs 2003). Not included in this thesis due to time and space constraints is an additional fragment of a lead plaque from **Scotterthorpe**, North Lincolnshire with a Latin and Old English text in Anglo-Saxon runes, possibly giving the names of individuals as well as a religious phrase (Hines 2019a, 16-18).

### 5.3.2 Cremation Urns

The four inscribed cremation urns are representative of a pre-Christian burial rite in early Anglo-Saxon England (Table 5.11) (Rollason 2014, 44; Williams 2005; 2011, 241). The inscribed urns were discovered in early Anglo-Saxon cremation burials in eastern England, and along with the cremated bones of individuals, they each held personal items including tweezers, gaming pieces, beads, and assorted metal and ivory fragments (Hills & Penn 1981, 7; Nedoma 2016, 4). Whilst a few additional urns are incised with symbols that resemble runes (Page 1964, 122; 1999, 92-93), the four included in this corpus are the only ones with definite runic inscriptions. In addition to stamped and incised decorative motifs, all four pots are incised with elder futhark runes. Only one is incised by hand with a sharp implement (**Loveden Hill**), whilst the other three are stamped with the same die of three

runic letters in repetitive patterns (**Spong Hill**). Clay cremation urns are found in very large numbers in early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, and like the four incised pots, most of them are decorated with stamped and incised motifs that are interpreted as reflections of pagan religious beliefs (Hills 1977, 13-32; Hoggett 2010, 91; Richards 1987, 134-148; Williams 2011; 2014, 95). Conventional belief maintains that the urns were produced for the purpose of cremation, and that the physical aspects of the urns including the size, shape, and decoration meant that each urn was made for a specific individual (Hills & Lucy 2013, 235-264; Hoggett 2010, 90-91; Richards 1987, 134-148, 157-191, 193-210; Williams 2014, 107-108). However, attention has recently been given to the pre-burial lives of cremation urns and the possibility that some had been vessels for the production and consumption of food and drink before they were used to hold cremated remains (Perry 2011). If so, the decoration (and thus possibly the inscriptions as well) would be more connected to the urns' domestic lives rather than their funerary depositions.

**Table 5.11 Inscribed Cremation Urns**

Name	Object	Translation
Loveden Hill	Clay, 400-600, linear, circular stamps	EF runes, Old English: 'Sīpæbæd gets bread', 'Sīpæbæd consecrates you, grave', 'Sīpæbæd female servant, [her] grave', or 'Sīpæbæd gets (a) grave'
Spong Hill C1224	Clay, 400-500, linear and geometric stamped patterns	EF runes, Old English: 'ale'
Spong Hill C1564	Clay, 400-500, linear and geometric stamped patterns	EF runes, Old English: 'ale'
Spong Hill C2167	Clay, 400-500, linear and geometric stamped patterns	EF runes, Old English: 'ale'

Anglo-Saxon cremation urns are predominantly found in the east and south-east of England, with large concentrations in Lincolnshire, eastern Yorkshire, and Norfolk (fig. 5.23) (Higham & Ryan 2013, 81; Williams 2011, 241). Over 2,000 urns were excavated at **Spong Hill**, Norfolk (Hills 2012; McKinley 1994, 66; Williams 2014, 94). Among these, only three are stamped with runic inscriptions, although as some pots are fragmentary and some have even been lost, this number could have originally been higher (Hills 1977, 32; McKinley 1994, 66). The distribution of the urns at **Spong Hill** has revealed cluster groups of urns with similar stamped decoration suggesting familial or social burial plots or production in the same workshop (fig. 5.24) (Hills 1977, 13-22; 2012; Hills & Penn 1981, 6, 22). At **Loveden Hill**, Lincolnshire, approximately 1,790 urns have been uncovered (Findell & Kopár 2017, 115; Vince 1993, 33), but only one has a recognisable runic inscription, this time incised rather than stamped (Nedoma 2016). Several urns from **Loveden Hill** feature incised motifs that resemble runes, and there is no reason to doubt that they meant something to the carver, either symbolic or lexical, but to modern runologists they cannot be read (Findell & Kopár 2017, 116; Nedoma 2016, 5). The **Loveden Hill** urn stands alone amongst early Anglo-Saxon cremation urns (and also in the Continental corpus) by having a long sequence of hand-written runes carved into its surface (Findell & Kopár 2017, 117-118; Myres 1977).





the name of the god *Tiw*, although this could be more decorative than lexical (Page 1964, 122; 1999, 92-93). The runic stamps on the **Spong Hill** urns were thought to display this name until they were proven to be mirror-runes of ‘a l u’ (Hoggett 2010, 91; Page 1999a, 93). The earliest use of mirror-runes, or *Spiegelrunen*, are on the 3<sup>rd</sup> century lance heads and mounts from the bogs of Illerup (Jutland, Denmark) and Vimose (Funen, Denmark), which also feature the same rune, ᚱ as on the **Spong Hill** urns (Looijenga 2003, 132, 282). *Alu* is most commonly found on migration period bracteates, of which at least 21 examples from Scandinavia and the Continent are known and has been interpreted as having an association with rituals surrounding death in regard to the drinking of ale (Looijenga 2003, 195, 282; Nedoma 2016, 13). New research suggests that Anglo-Saxon cremation urns may have been initially manufactured and used as food or drink vessels, possibly even for the brewing of ale (Martin 2015, 139; Perry 2011). If this applies to the **Spong Hill** urns, the ‘alu’ runes may have held a practical purpose instead of symbolic, and were used to mark the pots for what they were used for. This would explain the use of a convenient stamp, which, as already noted, has been imprinted into the clay of each pot multiple times, instead of a hand-written label.

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due to Copyright restrictions

**Figure 5.25 The Loveden Hill urn runic inscription (Page 2001, 626)**

The inscription on the **Loveden Hill** urn is more personal in nature and meaning than those on the **Spong Hill** pots. The Continental Germanic or early Old English personal name *Siþæbæd* (fem) or *Siþæba(l)d* (masc) is distinct, and although the rest of the text is difficult to understand, it likely includes the word ‘grave’ (fig. 5.25) (Bammesberger 1991, 125-128; Findell & Kopár 2017, 117; Nedoma 2016, 15; Looijenga 2002, 281-282). Most of the interpretations of the text suggest that the inscribed name is the individual held in the urn, although alternatively *Siþæbæd* or *Siþæbald* could have been the one who dedicated the urn for a deceased loved one, or even the one who inscribed the runes. Eichner (1990, 325) gave his interpretation as, ‘Siþæbæd consecrates you, grave’, which may support this idea. Alternatively, Odenstedt (1980) reads the inscription as, ‘Siþæbæd gets bread’, which is not supported by most scholars. If Odenstedt’s interpretation were to be accepted, it could imply a previous use for the urn as a food vessel, although where the personal name would come into play is up for debate.

The **Loveden Hill** urn is the only known Anglo-Saxon cremation urn with a hand-written inscription, and the **Spong Hill** urns are the only three cremation urns with stamped runic texts. This is worth noting considering the large number of these vessels that have been found. More urns may have once been inscribed but are now lost due to damage from depositional or post-depositional conditions. The identical die on the **Spong Hill** urns may indicate that the pots were made in the same local workshop, which would have reasonably added the same stamp to other pots they produced, especially if the stamp had some connection to a pre-burial domestic use such as ale production (Findell & Kopár 2017, 116; Hills 1977, 13). As the only known Anglo-Saxon cremation urn with a hand-written inscription (and indeed the only Anglo-Saxon clay vessel with one), the individual who carved the

**Loveden Hill** runes had a need to provide the urn with a special and particular message, whether or not the inscription is related to a domestic or funerary purpose for the pot. Nedoma (2016, 5) brings attention to the fact that the runes were inscribed when the clay was still wet, which means that the inscription was directly associated with the initial purpose of the pot. If the text is connected to the pot's use as a cremation urn, the rune-carver may have considered the act of writing a personal message necessary to remember the deceased (Findell & Kopár 2017, 116). If Odenstedt's (1980) reading of the inscription as, 'Sīþæbæd gets bread', is to be accepted, perhaps the text relates to *Sīþæbæd*'s line of work in food-production (a baker?), in which the pot may have been used. Although it seems more likely that the inscription on the **Loveden Hill** urn incorporates the early Old English term, *hlaw*, 'grave' (Bammesberger 1991, 125-128; Eichner 1990, 325; Looijenga 2003, 281-282), which, considering that the runes were carved when the pot was made, should be taken to imply that the object was manufactured specifically for funerary use and the cremated remains may belong to *Sīþæbæd*/*Sīþæbald* his or herself.

The scarcity of Anglo-Saxon cremation urns with text may support the idea that the four inscribed urns were domestic-use vessels prior to their funerary use, although the lack of clay domestic pots with inscriptions does not do much to encourage this. Clearly, inscribing cremation urns was not a common practice in Anglo-Saxon England. The author is also unaware of any cremation urns inscribed with text from the Continental runic corpus, meaning that there was no significant custom to use older futhorc runes with funerary vessels, if there was one at all. Regardless of whether the four cremation urns in this study were produced for domestic or funerary use, they represent a rare use of text on clay vessels in Anglo-Saxon England and should not be taken to demonstrate any established epigraphic tradition.

## 5.4 Summary of Inscribed Ecclesiastical, Writing, Reading, and Funerary Items

The inscribed ecclesiastical objects are dominated by Irish Christianity. Fourteen (or fifteen if the **Rannveig** casket is Irish and not Scottish) of the twenty-six ecclesiastical objects are Irish in origin, although only thirteen of these remained there. The ecclesiastical objects have the largest number of objects in this study that were found outside of Britain and Ireland. This category also has the largest number of objects that were not found in archaeological contexts, and instead were 'lost' only in records, preserved in churches or family households until they were 'rediscovered' in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in auctions or in church treasuries. The greater majority of these objects are Irish reliquaries and shrines of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, made to hold the relics of saints associated with local churches and families (Michelli 1996, 2-3, 11; Overbey 2011, 170; Wycherley 2015, 159-160). The inscriptions are lengthy and standardised, engraved in Roman letters and composed of the names of the commissioners, makers, and keepers of the reliquaries with the formulae 'pray for' or 'a prayer for' in Middle Irish/Early Gaelic (Ó Floinn 1994, 40; Michelli 1996, 5-6). These are some of the longest and most complex inscriptions in

this corpus. Although the Irish reliquaries and shrines were not necessarily seen as personal possessions, they were made personal by the names of individuals within their inscriptions. The objects were the property of elite families and churches and represent a standard use of text for authoritative, political, and social means (Overbey 2011, 170; Wycherley 2015, 159-160).

The other objects of Irish origin are liturgical items and include two communion vessels (**Ardagh** chalice, **Derrynaflan** paten), a fragment of a cross (**Shanmullagh** cross-arm), and a hand-bell (**Terryhoogan**). The hand-bell dates to the 10<sup>th</sup> century and features a text similar to that of the reliquaries in the form of, 'A prayer for X', but the other three liturgical objects date as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century, with two inscribed with the Latin names of saints (**Ardagh**, **Shanmullagh**). The **Derrynaflan** paten did not include text as part of the visible decoration in its original design concept. Instead, its inscriptions are hidden, with alphabetical letters used for assembly guidelines and a small hymn in Latin written in miniscule letters underneath the panels of the rim.

There is only one inscription in Scandinavian runes and Old Norse (Rannveig casket), which is hand-written on the underside of the shrine rather than engraved where it would be immediately visible. There are no inscriptions written in ogham. Anglo-Saxon Christianity is better represented by the church and liturgical furnishings, which feature inscriptions that are not standardised like those on the Irish reliquaries. They include blessings and prayers, the names of saints, and two maker inscriptions in the form 'X made me' (**Brussels** cross, **Pershore** censer). One English reliquary has an inscription similar to the Irish reliquary texts, but instead of 'pray for', the inscription begins with 'God bless' (**Mortain** casket). The Anglo-Saxon inscriptions are more personal and diverse, and include Biblical passages, the names of saints, and poetic verses spoken in the voices of the objects. They are written in Roman letters and Anglo-Saxon runes, and in both Latin and Old English.

The inscribed reading and writing equipment represent the height of literacy in early medieval Britain and Ireland, which was associated with the institution of Christianity and legislative authority. The objects were either used for the physical act of writing or for reading or in association with such activities. Most of the inscriptions are in Latin, which are all written in Roman letters on the eight seal-dies and the set of writing tablets from **Springmount Bog**. Two Latin inscriptions are set alongside additional texts in Old Irish/Early Gaelic texts on segments of slate from **Inchmarnock (IS.35, IS.36)**. Additional inscriptions could be in Latin, except they are incomplete or fragmentary letters, or alphabetical sequences that could represent any language that used the roman script. All of the writing and reading-related objects are Anglo-Saxon and Irish/Early Gaelic in origin, style, script, and language. None of the objects are inscribed with Scandinavian runes or in Old Norse, attesting to the rich academic and manuscript culture in Ireland and England.

This category has the most inscriptions that represent the learning of literacy, which is represented by the alphabetical texts, single roman letters, and lines of texts produced for writing practice. This category also gives evidence for the teaching of ogham on pieces of slate, in the form of an ogham alphabet (**Inchmarnock IS.36**), and uncertain letters that may be personal names or one practicing their script (**IS.1, IS.76**). Outside of the reliquaries, this category holds the most inscriptions that are standardised for official use, which are all featured on the seal-dies, used for authorising legal papers. The seal-die texts are all in Latin and Roman capitals resembling coin-legends, and are made personal by the names within them and the central images symbolising the social standing of the

individuals. Like the ecclesiastic objects, primarily the reliquaries, some of the names in the seal-die inscriptions can be identified as historical figures, such Bishop **Æthelwald**'s seal (bishop from 845-870) and Peter, the Bishop of **Chester** (bishop from 1075-1085) (Cherry 1985, 473; Webster & Backhouse 1991, 238). The objects in this category of writing and reading equipment could be used by ecclesiastical individuals, city officials, royalty, and pupils of literacy, and stand out in this corpus as objects that were both used *for* text and *had* text displayed on their surfaces.

The category of inscribed funerary and memorial objects is divided into two subsections according to cultural belief, material culture, and use of text. The four cremation urns represent pre-Christian Germanic funerary practices and date to the first few centuries of post-Roman Britain and Ireland (5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries). They were found as part of substantial early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in Norfolk (**Spong Hill**) (Hills 1977) and Lincolnshire (**Loveden Hill**) (Findell & Kopár 2017) and are the only known Anglo-Saxon cremation urns with text, indicating that inscribing cremation urns was not a solid practice in Anglo-Saxon England. The texts on these objects are in older futhorc runes and include three identical stamps (**Spong Hill**) and one hand-written inscription (**Loveden Hill**). The meanings behind these four texts are uncertain and have been given multiple interpretations. The three identical stamped texts on the **Spong Hill** urns read *alu*, 'ale', which has commonly been associated with Continental Germanic rituals of drinking ale, feasting, or death (Looijenga 2003, 195, 282; Nedoma 2016, 13). Alternatively, they may in fact allude to the urns' previous use as food or drink vessels (Martin 2015, 139; Perry 2011). The only cremation urn that is hand-inscribed is the **Loveden Hill** urn. Although the inscription has been given multiple possible translations, it certainly contains a Continental Germanic or early Old English personal name within a commemorative text of some kind. Its runes had been carved when the clay was wet, indicating the vessel was made for the purpose of interment, thus the personal name in the inscription likely refers to the individual the urn contained.

The ten inscribed crosses and plaques are Christian in practice although only six of the inscriptions are religious in their translation. All ten are inscribed with Roman letters. Seven are in Latin and three are in Old English. All ten are made of lead, a material frequently used for Christian objects including church furnishings, coffins, and amuletic objects including plaques with religious phrases carved upon them for protection and healing (Mitchell 2011, 45; Moretti 2015, 114; Simek 2011, 45-46). The plaques may have been buried within graves or placed upon them as commemorative markers (Brown & Okasha 2009, 139-141; Gilchrist 2008, 125; Pestell 2004, 147; Watts et al 1997, 52, 74). Three of the inscribed crosses were found inside the tombs of bishops and priests which are kept in cathedrals (**Chichester**, **Wells**, **Lincoln**) and date to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Two of the texts on these plaques are lengthy Latin prayers for absolution on behalf of deceased bishops (**Chichester**, **Cumberworth**), which take up considerable space on the objects. The inscribed funerary and memorial objects demonstrate that inscribing objects for the purposes of interment was not a common practice until the advent of Christianity, when furnished burials replaced cremation, and cemeteries were adjacent to ecclesiastical sites

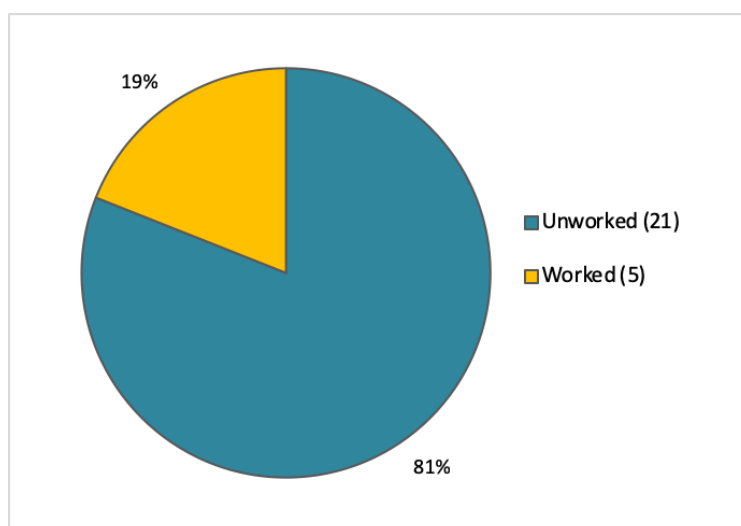
## Chapter 6 Miscellaneous and Unidentified Objects (by Raw Material)

The inscribed objects discussed in Chapter 6 are objects that cannot be assigned a practical function because they are incomplete, are missing particular elements, or are pieces of natural, unworked material. This chapter is divided into three sections according to the material of the objects: bone and antler, metal, and stone. Most of the objects are broken, damaged, or incomplete so that they are only fragments of a larger object that cannot be recognised. Some objects, predominantly the bone and antler, are pieces of unworked material that has not been cut, smoothed, or shaped in any way and therefore have no practical use. Also included are decorative pieces of bone and metal that were once affixed to a larger object, but what the function of this object was is unknown. Objects that are likely complete but their use is unknown are discussed here, as are inscribed objects that could have a number of purposes and thus cannot be placed in a single category in this thesis.

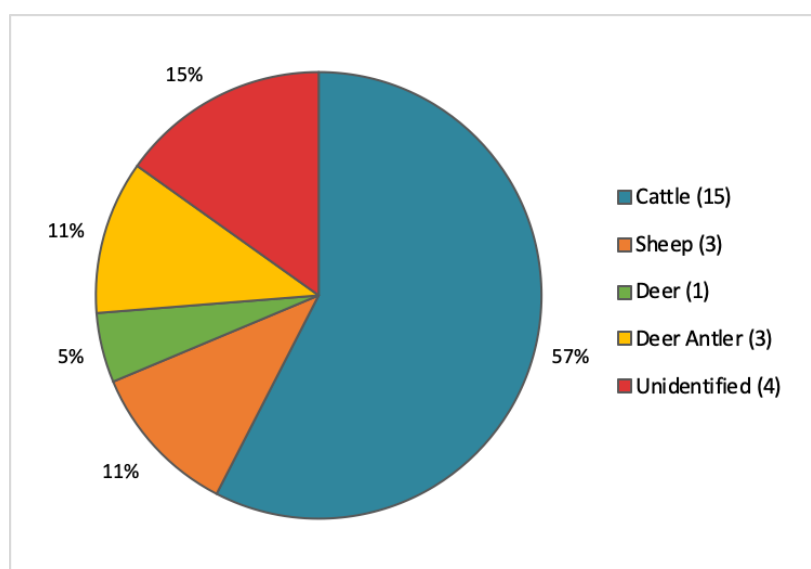
### 6.1 Bone and Antler

Twenty-six objects of bone and antler are included in this thesis, consisting of twenty-one complete and fragmentary unworked bones and five objects which have been carved and shaped in some way but cannot be identified as any particular functional item (Chart 6.1). Fifteen objects (57%) are cattle bone, three are sheep bones, three are deer antlers and one is a deer bone, and four bones are from unidentified animals (Chart 6.2). Twenty-five (96%) of the bone and antler objects were uncovered through excavations of urban settlement sites with additional evidence for bone and antler-working, whilst one has an uncertain provenance (**Derby**). Out of these objects, ten come from Scotland, of which eight are from a single site in Orkney (**Orphir**), and nine are from Ireland, including seven from Viking-age **Dublin**. Seven bone fragments are from England. The fact that the large percentage of these objects were found at settlement sites reveal the knowledge and use of literacy in domestic environments, one in which text was used for casual and communicative purposes on ephemeral material.

Seventeen out of twenty-six objects (65%) are inscribed in Scandinavian runes, making up the vast majority of the texts (Chart 6.3). Anglo-Saxon runes are inscribed on four objects (**Derby**, **London National Portrait Gallery**, **Mote of Mark**, **Southampton**), three are inscribed in ogham (**Bornais**, **Cahercommaun**, **Moynagh Lough**), and one in Roman letters (**London Guildhall**). One object has a combination of Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon runes (**Southampton**). Although eight inscriptions are in runes that cannot be formed into any readable sequences their contextual and epigraphical backgrounds suggest they are Scandinavian runes and probably in Old Norse. The other unreadable runic inscription comes from Saxon **Southampton** and it is probably in Old English, although Latin is also possible (Chart 6.4) (Holdsworth 1976, 46-47).



**Chart 6.1 Proportion of inscribed unworked and worked animal bone and antler objects**



**Chart 6.2 Types of animal bones represented by the material**

The scripts and languages acknowledge that inscriptions on animal bone, either worked or unworked, are more commonly inscribed in Scandinavian runes and Old Norse (Table 6.1). Out of the twenty-six objects in this category, most are inscribed in Scandinavian runes and predominantly come from settlement sites with a strong Scandinavian presence. Seven of these are bone and antler from Viking-age **Dublin** and eight small fragments of cattle bone are from **Orphir**. In comparison, only four objects in this category are inscribed in Old English (**Derby**, **London National Portrait Gallery**, **London Guildhall**, **Mote of Mark**). All four Old English inscriptions consist of personal names including two objects that are inscribed with two names by themselves (**London National Portrait Gallery**, **London Guidhall**), one inscribed with only one name by itself (**Mote of Mark**), and one object with a Christian prayer for a named individual (**Derby**). None of the unworked or worked bone and antler objects are inscribed in Latin, and none are inscribed in Old Irish/Early Gaelic, although the

three objects inscribed with ogham may be written in a Celtic-based languages (**Bornais**, **Cahercommaun**, and **Moynagh Lough**).

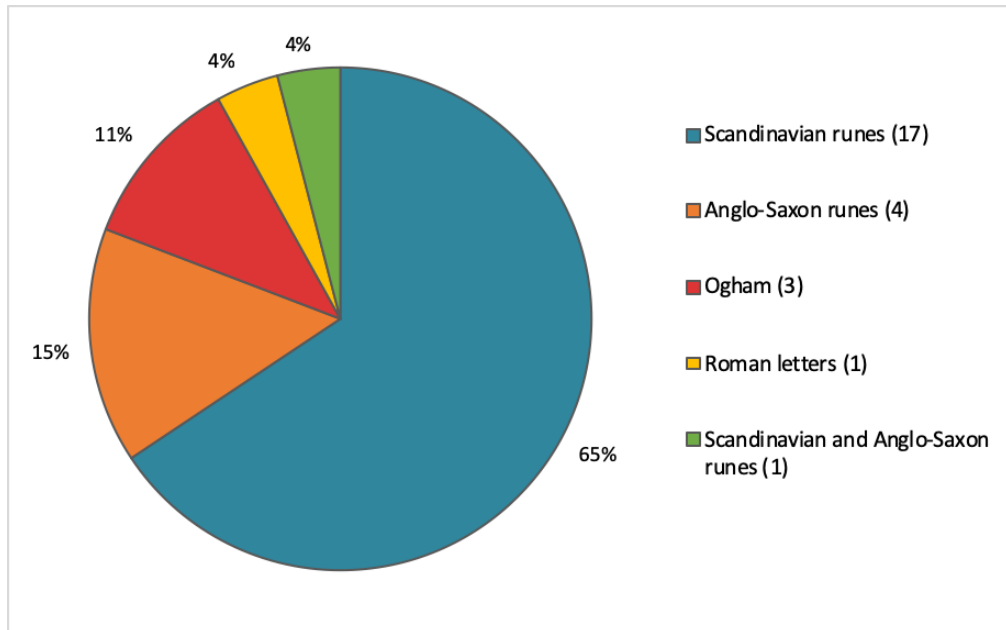


Chart 6.3 Scripts on the inscribed unworked and worked bone and antler

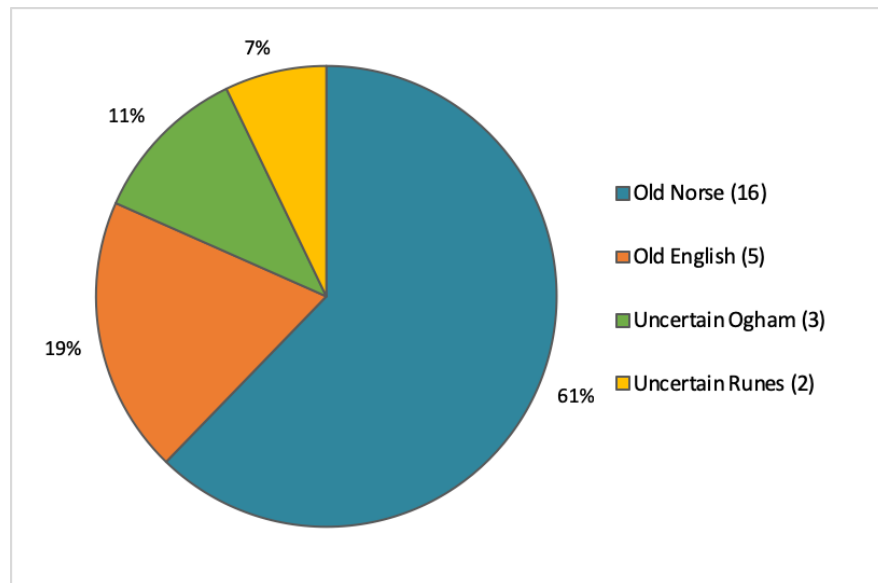


Chart 6.4 Languages on the inscribed unworked and worked bone and antler

Table 6.1 Scripts and Languages on Animal Bone and Antler

	Latin	Old English	Old Norse	Old Irish/Early Gaelic	Unidentified /Uncertain
Roman Letters	0	1	0	0	0



Anglo-Saxon runes	0	3	0	0	1
Scandinavian runes	0	0	16	0	1
Ogham	0	0	0	0	3
Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian runes	0	1	0	0	0

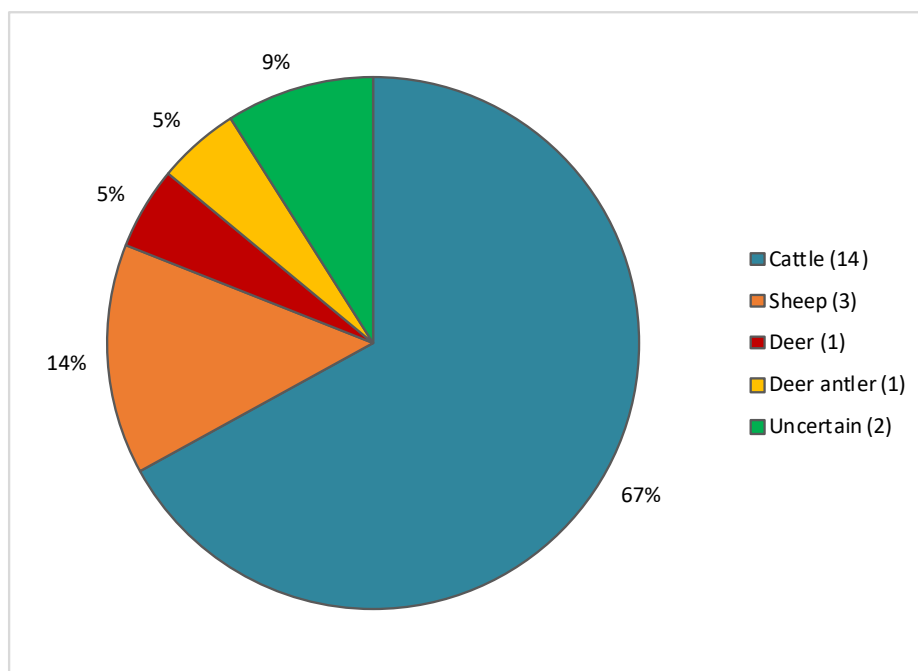
### 6.1.1 Unworked Bone and Antler

This category includes the bone and antler of animals, whether fragmentary or whole, that have not been cut or shaped in a way (other than the addition of carved letters or decoration) that may suggest that they were either attached to another object or used for a functional or decorative purpose (Table 6.2). Fourteen out of the twenty-one objects are bones of cattle, making up the vast majority (Chart 6.5). Also included are three sheep bones (**Cahercommaun, Dublin IR10, London National Portrait Gallery**), one deer scapula (**St Albans I**), one deer antler (**Dublin IR12**), and two fragments of bone from uncertain animals (**London Guildhall, St Albans II**). All of the unworked bone and antler pieces were found through excavation of multi-period settlement sites in Scotland, Ireland, and England, not only suggesting at least a basic familiarity with literacy in domestic environments but also emphasising a casual and possibly social aspect to such knowledge. The greater majority of the inscriptions (sixteen total) are in Scandinavian runes (another is in Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon runes) and are given dates between 900 and 1100 AD. Only two are in Old English with Anglo-Saxon runes (**London National Portrait Gallery, Mote of Mark**), one is in untranslated ogham (**Cahercommaun**), and one inscription is in Old English with Roman letters (**London Guildhall**). The inscriptions include personal names, witty and casual remarks, self-descriptive sequences, and ambiguous inscriptions that appear to have been written out of boredom, for leisure, for amuletic purposes, and for writing practice. They demonstrate at least a basic level of literacy (in the modern sense of the word) in domestic environments.

**Table 6.2 Inscribed Unworked Bone and Antler**

Name	Object	Inscription
Cahercommaun	METACARPAL: Sheep, 800-900, decorated	Ogham, Uncertain: A) (P/Ia)CS B) (K/Ea)Ui[.]M C) P/Ia
Dublin IR 5	RIB BONE: Cattle, 1050-1100, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: 'Ón owns/marries/sleeps with Asa'
Dublin IR 8	RIB BONE: Cattle, 950-1050, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: 'Gnúpr drooped/bowed his head'

Dublin IR 9	SCAPULA FRAGMENT: Cattle, 1050-1100, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: A) form of <i>telja</i> , 'speak, count', <i>dili</i> , 'spot, patch', or <i>tili</i> , 'end, scope'. <i>suá suá</i> , 'thus thus' B) <i>Ingi</i> -, ON name?
Dublin IR 10	SCAPULA: Sheep, 950-1050, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: A) '...Writing (in runes) is something different in the soul. Amen' or '...let...write who owns and experiences happiness (luck). Amen...' or '...by writing heals the crazy woman. Amen.' B) Uncertain. Magical formula?
Dublin IR 12	ANTLER: Red deer, c. 1000, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: 'Hart's horn (?) Aussar' or 'The deer's antler lay at the river mouth' or 'The deer's antler was the responsibility of/the possession of Úsar'.
Dublin IR 13	RIB BONE: Cattle, 950-1000, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Uncertain: <b>nrb**</b> or <b>**prn</b>
Lincoln	RIB BONE FRAGMENT: Cattle, 900-1100, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: 'B- heats the stone' or 'B- calls stone'
London, Guildhall	FRAGMENT: Bone (Cattle?), 1000-1100, decorated motif piece	Roman letters, Old English: A) 'Ælfburgh' or 'Ælfbeorht' B) 'Ælfburgh' or 'Ælfbeorht'
London, National Portrait Gallery	VERTEBRA: Sheep, 700-900, undecorated	AS runes, Old English: A) 'Tatberht' B) '-dric'
Mote of Mark	FRAGMENT: Cattle bone, 650-750, undecorated	AS runes, Old English: 'Athili' or similar 'Aitha', 'Atha-', 'Attho', 'Laitha', or 'Laitu'
Orphir OR 15	BONE FRAGMENT: Cattle, 1000-1100, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: 'this bone was [in the innards of.../broken into three.../in that.../in fresh [meat]'
Orphir OR 19, 444	BONE FRAGMENT: Cattle, 1000-1100, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Uncertain (Old Norse?): <b>**[o]*ssr</b>
Orphir OR 19, 445	BONE FRAGMENT: Cattle, 1000-1100, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Uncertain (Old Norse?)
Orphir OR 19, 446	BONE FRAGMENT: Cattle, 1000-1100, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Uncertain (Old Norse?)
Orphir OR 19, 447	BONE FRAGMENT: Cattle, 1000-1100, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Uncertain (Old Norse?)
Orphir OR 19, 448	BONE FRAGMENT: Cattle, 1000-1100, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Uncertain (Old Norse?): <b>f</b> or <b>o</b>
Orphir OR 19, 449	BONE FRAGMENT: Cattle, 1000-1100, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Uncertain (Old Norse?)
Orphir OR 19, 450	BONE FRAGMENT: Cattle, 1000-1100, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Uncertain (Old Norse?)
St Albans I	SCAPULA FRAGMENTS: Roe deer, 970-1088, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: 'Thor- scratched/carved (the) runes'
St Albans II	SCAPULA FRAGMENT: Bone, 970-1088, undecorated	Scandinavian runes (AS rune 'W'), Old English: <i>Wulfric</i> , or Anglicised <i>Úlfrikr</i> or <i>Úlfrekr</i>



**Chart 6.5 Origins of the inscribed unworked bone and antler**

Most of the unworked bone and antler date to the later early medieval period, primarily based on archaeological context, but epigraphic aspects including particular rune-forms have also helped to corroborate the dating of the objects. Eighteen (82%) of them have been dated between 900 and 1100 AD and include seventeen inscribed with Scandinavian runes and one with Roman letters (**London Guildhall**). Three objects date between 650 and 900 AD. Two of these are inscribed with Anglo-Saxon runes (**London National Portrait Gallery, Mote of Mark**) and one with ogham (**Cahercommaun**). All of the objects in this category were found at settlement sites. The majority (seventeen total) come from areas of Norse occupation and are inscribed with Scandinavian runes (Chart 6.6). Six were found through excavation of Viking-age **Dublin** and eight small fragments were uncovered at Orkney at Earl's Bu, **Orphir**. Also included are inscriptions from Viking-age **Lincoln** in eastern England, **London**, and **St Albans**, Hertfordshire. Archaeological and epigraphic evidence of Scandinavian settlement is recognised in large numbers in **Dublin**, **Orphir**, and **Lincoln**, including evidence for wide-scale bone and antler-working (see Chapter 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.2.3, 4.1.7) (Graham-Campbell & Batey 1998, 191-194; Holman 1996, 46-49; Wallace 2016, 300-301), but the oddity of finding Norse runes in **St Albans** invites the question of whether the inscriptions were written by Scandinavians or by English individuals familiar with the script (Holman 1996, 45). This question is increased by the use of the Anglo-Saxon rune for 'w', *wynn*, and the Anglo-Saxon or Anglicised Scandinavian personal name on **St Albans II**. Regardless of who the author was, both bone fragments from **St Albans** demonstrate the merging of cultures and ideas in southern England, probably encouraged in an ecclesiastical environment considering the two fragments were discovered in debris related to a late 10<sup>th</sup>-century monastic building (Barnes & Page 2006, 323).

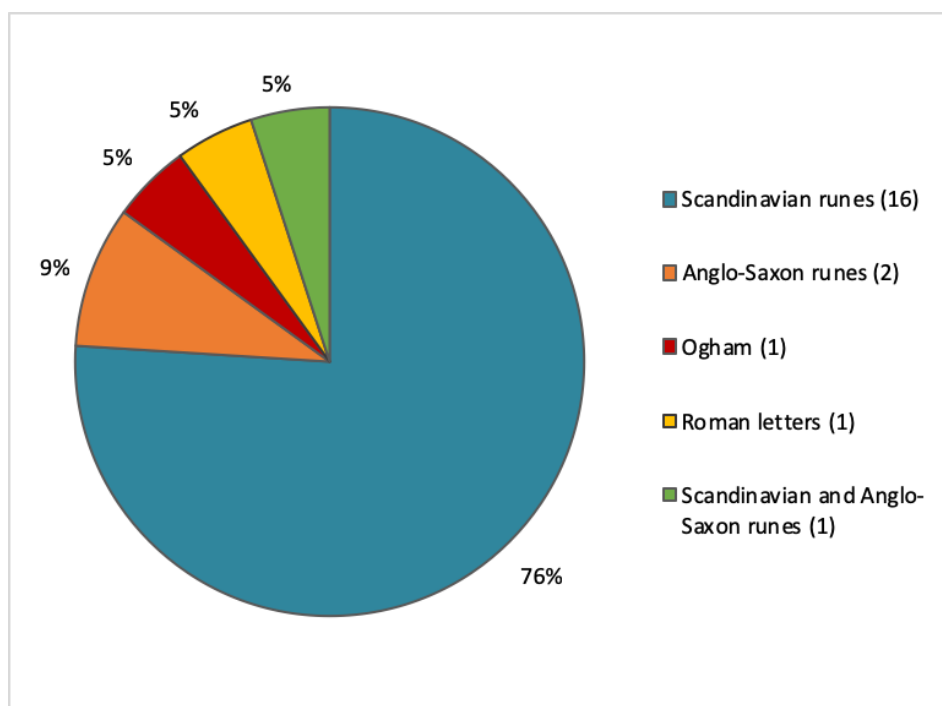
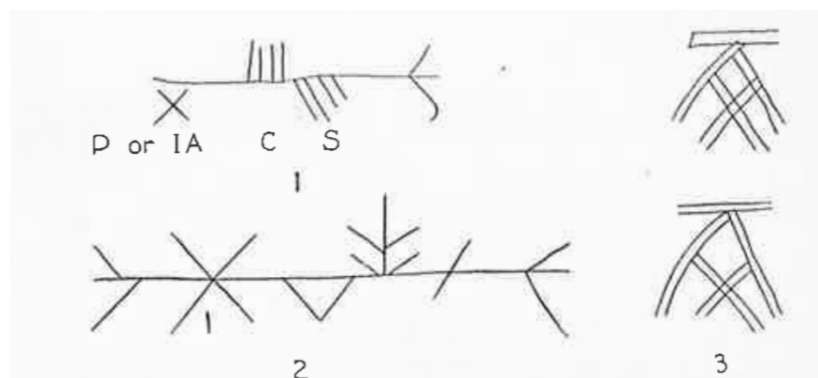


Chart 6.6 Scripts on inscribed unworked bone and antler

The bones inscribed with Anglo-Saxon runes and Roman letters include two from **London** and one from south-western Scotland (**Mote of Mark**) (Brown et al 2001; Vince 1991; Laing & Longley 2006). The three bones are all from Anglo-Saxon settlement contexts, but whilst **London** has revealed plenty of evidence for knowledge of runic writing (Holder 1998), very few runic inscriptions in either Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian runes are known from the south-western border of Scotland, which was originally part of Anglo-Saxon Northumbria (Page 2006, 93). The single ogham inscription is on a decorated sheep metacarpal from the high-status stone fort in western Ireland at **Cahercommaun**, Co. Clare (Hencken 1938, 66, no. 771). This object seems to have had no functional purpose aside from its use as a surface for incisions, and interpretations of the bone include an amuletic talisman or a motif piece, especially considering that the ogham inscriptions appear to have no linguistic significance (fig. 6.1) (Holder 1990, 22).

The Scandinavian runic inscriptions are amongst a large corpus of brief and informal runic texts that are described as spontaneous acts of ‘graffiti’ or doodling by leading runologists (Barnes & Page 2006, 96). The vast majority of the texts have been given uncertain and multiple interpretations. The inscriptions from Viking-age Dublin are particularly difficult to translate, not only because of damage to the objects and the texts but also due to the trouble with identifying distinct linguistic forms of runes and their pronunciations. The inscriptions are given multiple possible interpretations according to East or West Scandinavian, but as expected, dialectical changes to Old Norse certainly occurred in the cultural melting-pot of the city of Dublin and the translations are not as straightforward (Barnes & Hagland 14-16). The inscriptions in Scandinavian runes are comparable to material from late Viking-age and medieval urban sites in Scandinavia, in particular Bryggen in Norway (Barnes 2012, 106; Spurkland 2005, 174), which include *futhark* rows and practical, humorous, and obscene statements carved on wooden sticks and bone (Barnes 2012, 106-108; Page 1999a, 96-99). They can also be

compared to the texts on the household and personal tools from **Dublin** in this corpus (see Chapter 4.2.1) that are inscribed with similar types of texts.



**Figure 6.1** The three ogham inscriptions on the bone from Cahercommaun (Hencken 1938, 66, fig. 40.1-3)

At least eight objects are inscribed with personal names (possibly nine with **Dublin IR 12**), including at least four with names that stand alone (**London Guildhall**, **London National Portrait Gallery**, **Mote of Mark**, **St Albans II**). The purpose of inscribing a single personal name on an object has commonly been associated with ownership, although placing one's name onto a bone seems a little less likely to be the case, unless it was claiming raw material (see below). At least in the case of the **London Guildhall** bone, we can assume that the repeated personal name is for practice (Okasha 1991). The two names on the **London National Portrait Gallery** bone may have been written by two different hands, possibly creating a scenario in which individuals were practicing or sharing their skills in writing and literacy (Page 2004b). The bone from **Mote of Mark** may also be a trial piece onto which an individual practiced their handwriting, or alternatively the inscription may have been written as casual graffiti. The reading of the runes as 'a þ i l i' invites comparison to the runes, 'æ g i l i' on the **Franks Casket** (see Chapter 5.1.4), which refer to the Germanic hero Egil (Page 2006, 93; Webster 2010, 19). Unfortunately, not more of the bone survives, which would indicate whether there was originally more of the text. As it is, we are left with only five runes, which could be the name of a mythological figure or another Old English personal name. The text appears complete, and in the wider context of unworked bone and antler fragments with inscriptions, was probably also written as a way to pass the time.

Two of the inscribed bones are decorated with incised designs suggesting use as motif/trial pieces (**Cahercommaun**, **London Guildhall**). More illustrative of this practice is the **London Guildhall** bone, which features two squares of interlace patterns as well as the same Old English name written twice (fig. 6.2) (Vince 1991, 184, no. 203). Although Okasha (1991) suggests the name is that of the carver, practicing their handwriting, it is also possible that the artisan was rehearsing the carving of a patron's name upon commission for a future piece of metalwork. Seven additional bones from sites in **London** are likewise decorated with interlace squares, geometric, and triquetra designs, sometimes with one face of the bone covered with the same motif practiced to perfection (fig. 6.3) (Vince 1991, 178-193). In addition to the ogham-inscribed bone, other finds from **Cahercommaun** have similar

decorations including a whetstone and a piece of slate, as well as other odd pieces of bone (Hencken 1938, 57, no. 393; 61, no. 21; Holder 1990, 23).

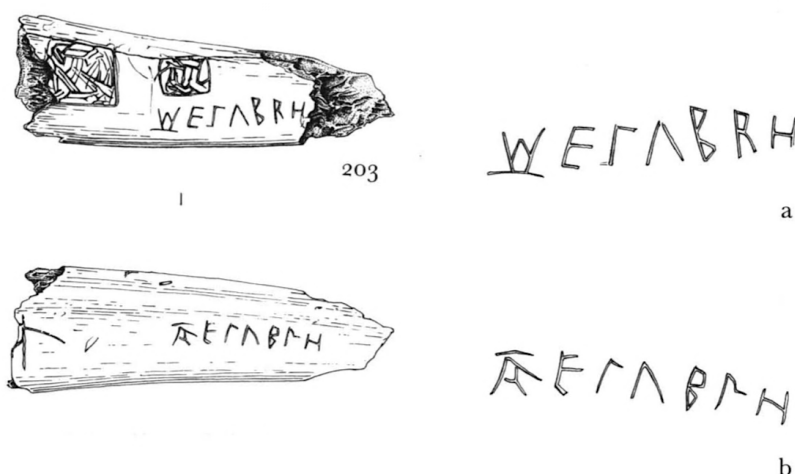


Figure 6.2 The inscribed bone from London's Guildhall site (Vince 1991, 185, fig. 3.65 Reproduced with permission by LAMAS and the Museum of London)

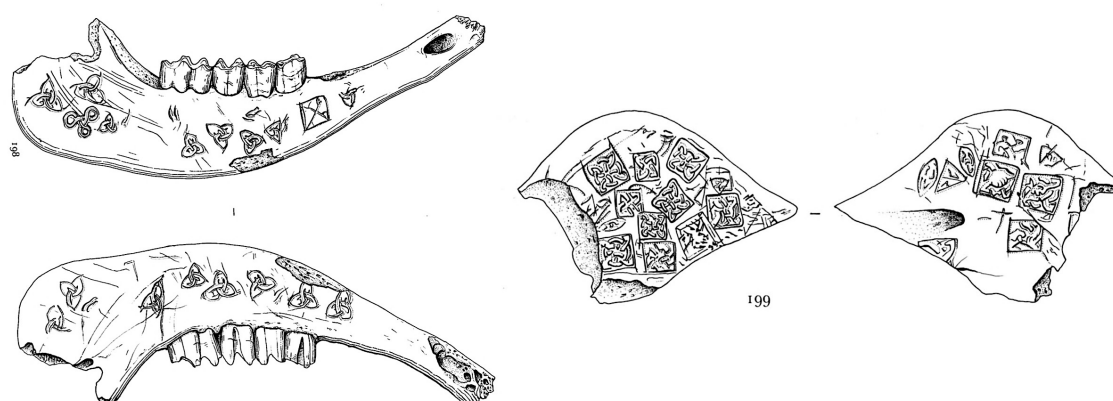
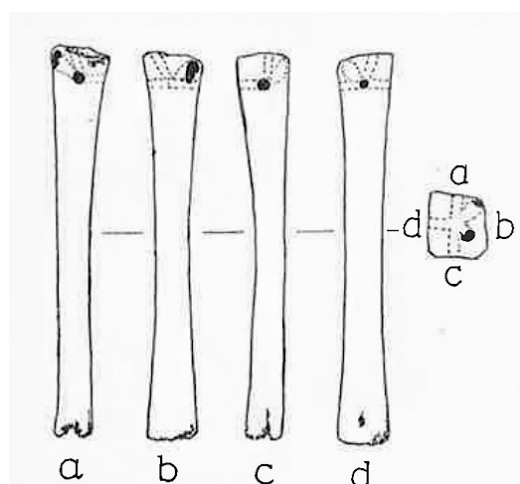


Figure 6.3 Bones from London's Guildhall site used as motif pieces (left: Vince 1991, 177, fig. 3.57; right: Vince 1991, 179, fig. 3.59 Reproduced with permission by LAMAS and the Museum of London)

Also from **Cahercommaun** is a similarly shaped sheep metacarpal which has been smoothed down at both ends with five holes pierced into one end (fig. 6.4) (Hencken 1938, 65-66, no. 477). From the same site is another fragmentary sheep bone which has been carved down and decorated with incised lines and dots (Hencken 1938, 65-66, no. 19). Along with the ogham-inscribed bone in this corpus, no practical function has been given to the other two that are decorated. When comparing them to bone implements from the same site (Hencken 1938, 64-65, no. 475, 264, 866), they may have been unfinished handles for tools. Another possible interpretation for the **Cahercommaun** bone is that it was seen as an object of divination, described in the medieval Irish tales of *Macgnímrada* and *Tochmarc Étaíne*, in which messages were carved in ogham onto rods of yew for magic and fortune-telling (Forsyth 2007, 472; Windisch & Stokes 1880-1909, I 129 sct 19). Perhaps the ogham texts, described as

cryptic by Macalister (1945, 56-57), and the bone object have a similar magical purpose (Forsyth 2007, 473).



**Figure 6.4** Sheep bone from Cahercommaun similarly decorated to the ogham-inscribed bone from the same site (Hencken 1938, 65, fig. 39, no. 477)

Barnes (et al 1997, 41-42) suggests that the text on **Dublin IR 12** may be for the practical identification of the antler as an object, possibly acquired by one named *Aussar* or *Üsar*. The text is written onto a smoothed panel on the antler, suggesting a less casual and deliberate objective wherein an individual, possibly a vendor or craftmaker, wanted to claim valuable raw material. Barnes attributes this to the prolific craft of comb-making in the city of **Dublin**, where over 40,000 pieces of bone and antler waste and over 8,000 crafted objects have been recorded (see Chapter 4.2.2) (Wallace 2016, 298-301). A similar scenario can be seen on a walrus tusk from Rommen, Sør-Trøndelag, Norway, dating later between 1100 and 1300, which is inscribed with the runes, ‘Ketill owns this’ (Roesdahl & Wilson 1992, 385, no. 592). Also referencing the object itself is the runic text on **Orphir OR 15**, which, although given multiple interpretations, certainly includes the first three Old Norse words, *þetta bein var*, ‘this bone was’ (Barnes & Page 2006, 202). A similar runic inscription is written on a bone from Lund, Denmark, reading ‘This is a bone, this is a bone’, which Barnes (2012, 114) suggests is writing practice, although when considering the inscription on **Dublin IR 10**, a possible amuletic function to naming the object, or even just carving the runes, may apply (see Chapter 8.3.2). Although questionable, interpretations of Text A on **Dublin IR 10** include sequences that call for the act of writing for healing followed by ‘Amen’ (Barnes et al 1997, 30-33). Also possibly amuletic is the inscription on the bone from **Lincoln**, comparable to a runic stick from Bergen (B252) reading, ‘Ími heated the stone’ (Barnes & Page 2006, 336; MacLeod & Mees 2006, 129), which Liestøl (1963, 38-40) describes as a cooking/kitchen curse. MacLeod and Mees (2006, 129-130) support this interpretation, acknowledging a Norse tale in which the Gods were hindered from cooking their meal by a curse. If these inscriptions can be interpreted as amuletic, the use of bone for such a text may suggest that the bone was carried for a time as a talisman.

The informal nature of the inscriptions, especially those with Scandinavian runes, imply that the carvers were writing them during moments of social conviviality. The runes on **Dublin IR 5** are

interpreted as a piece of runic graffiti concerning a man named *Ón* and his relationship to a woman named *Ása* (Barnes et al 1997, 20-22). **Dublin IR 8** features a joke about a man named *Gnúþr* in a play-on-words (Barnes et al 1997, 29-30). Runic inscriptions written in the same casual and joking manner are well known from other areas where Scandinavian runes were used such as Bryggen and at Maeshowe, although these texts date slightly later than the Dublin material (1150-1350) (Barnes 1994; Barnes 2012, 119; Holman 1996, 251-254; Knirk 2017; Liestøl 1964; Roesdahl & Wilson 1992, 358, no. 499; Spurkland 2005, 144-148, 192-196). Many of these texts are also carved upon unworked and fragmentary bone, revealing a common practice amongst Norse-speakers. Also common features of Scandinavian runic inscriptions are formulae beginning with ‘X carved...’, which is seen inscribed upon the deer scapula from St Albans (**St Albans I**) in which one named *þórr/þór-/þor* ‘scratched/carved’ the runes (Barnes & Page 2006, 322-328).

The idea of the casual and social carving of runes on bone is particularly exemplified by a bone from Bryggen (B190), on which two runic inscriptions are written by two different individuals, presumably as the passing of a note between them (Barnes 2012, 114; Spurkland 2005, 190). The presence of butchering marks on some of the inscribed bones (**IR 5, IR 8, IR 12, St Albans I and II**) suggest that the texts were carved as communal recreation during or after a feast, involving the consumption of the animal the bone came from (Barnes et al 1997, 22, 28, 39; Barnes & Page 2006, 329-330; Holman 1996, 43). A similar context for the seven small fragments of bone from **Orphir** may be implied by the inscription on **Orphir OR 15**, which may be translated as ‘this bone was in the innards of...’ or ‘this bone was in fresh/flesh...’ (Barnes & Page 2006, 200-203). The image of such a feast is enhanced by an inscription on another bone from Sigtuna, Uppland, Sweden, dated to the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, which reads, ‘The King is most hospitable. He gave most. He is popular’ (Roesdahl & Wilson 1992, 367, no. 531), or more commonly translated as, ‘The King is generous with food. He is the richest [man]. He is full of favour’ (Sudqvist 2011, 200). In this scenario, one can imagine the private and public passing of bones scrawled with casual comments, jokes, and notes across the table or underneath it. For this to be possible, at least a basic understanding of runes and writing the Norse language, and therefore some level of literacy, would have to have existed and shared throughout domestic contexts.

### 6.1.2 Worked Bone and Antler

In contrast to the previous section (6.1.1), this category includes bone and antler that was shaped or manipulated in ways suggesting they were utilitarian objects, or that they were attached to a larger object as a functional or decorative mount (Table 6.3). The objects are cut and smoothed into a particular shape, whilst only one retains evidence that it was once attached to something else (**Derby**). Four objects are in the shape of thin rectangular plates or plaques (**Bornais, Derby, Dublin, Southampton**). The fifth object is a worked deer antler tine with one end carved into a point (**Moynagh Lough**) (Holder 1994, 15b-15c). Although the original purposes for these objects are unknown, it is clear that they were cut and carved for some reasons, whether decorative or utilitarian. The inscriptions



include two in Anglo-Saxon runes (**Derby**, **Southampton**), two ogham inscriptions (**Bornais**, **Moynagh Lough**), and one in Scandinavian runes (**Dublin**) (Chart 6.7). The inscriptions show various uses of text including purposeful (primary) to casual (secondary) and from decorative to practice writing, but only one can be translated well enough to identify the language, and that is the Old English text on the **Derby** plaque. Although difficult to understand, the five inscribed worked bones and antlers can be discussed on their own as well as placed in the larger context of portable inscribed objects as texts written as casual doodles, writing practice, amuletic talismans, and decorative enhancements.

**Table 6.3 Inscribed Worked Bone and Antler**

Name	Object	Inscription
Bornais	RECTANGULAR PLAQUE: Cattle rib-bone, 700-1000, undecorated	Ogham, Uncertain: [EQBIX or XIHNE] Possibly <i>Meic Bicc</i> , 'son of Becc'
Derby	RECTANGULAR PLAQUE: Bone, 650-760/700-1000, decorated	AS runes, Old English: 'God increases the possessions/honour of Hadda[n] who incised this' or 'May God save the Hadda who wrote this'
Dublin	RECTANGULAR PLATE: Antler, 1000-1050, undecorated	Scandinavian runes, Uncertain
Moynagh Lough	ANTLER TINE: Deer, 700-800 (?), undecorated	Ogham, Uncertain: A) EBANSNA[V/F][C/Q] or K[Ea]IBANSNAFACUH B) COLO[R]RS
Southampton	RECTANGULAR PLAQUE: Bone, 800-900, decorated	AS runes, Uncertain: ðp l [..] ln [

With the exception of the **Derby** plaque, which has an unknown provenance, the worked bone and antler objects were found at multi-period settlement sites in Ireland (**Dublin**, **Moynagh Lough**), the western isles of Scotland (**Bornais**), and southern England (**Southampton**) where prolific evidence for bone and antler-working has been found (see Chapter 4.2.1, 4.2.2.). Additional evidence for literacy at the sites, predominantly in the form of casual incisions, include the second runic bone from Saxon **Southampton** (*Hamwih*) (Page 1970, 86-88), and the numerous runic texts on bone, antler, and wooden objects from **Dublin** (Chapter 5.2.1. and 7.1.1.) (Barnes et al 1997, 16-49). The ogham script is represented by objects from the multi-period settlement sites of **Bornais**, South Uist and **Moynagh Lough**, Co. Meath (Sharples et al 2015; Bradley 1991). The **Bornais** plaque was found at a secular site as an unstratified surface find in an area with Late Iron Age (Pictish) and Norse features and is inscribed with characteristically Scottish ogham dating it to the Viking-period (Forsyth 2007, 4652; 2012, 272). The site at **Moynagh Lough** revealed evidence for occupation from a small prehistoric community to a high-status early Christian crannog, although the ogham-inscribed bone was discovered as a chance find without an archaeological context (Bradley 1991; Holder 1994, 15b-15c).

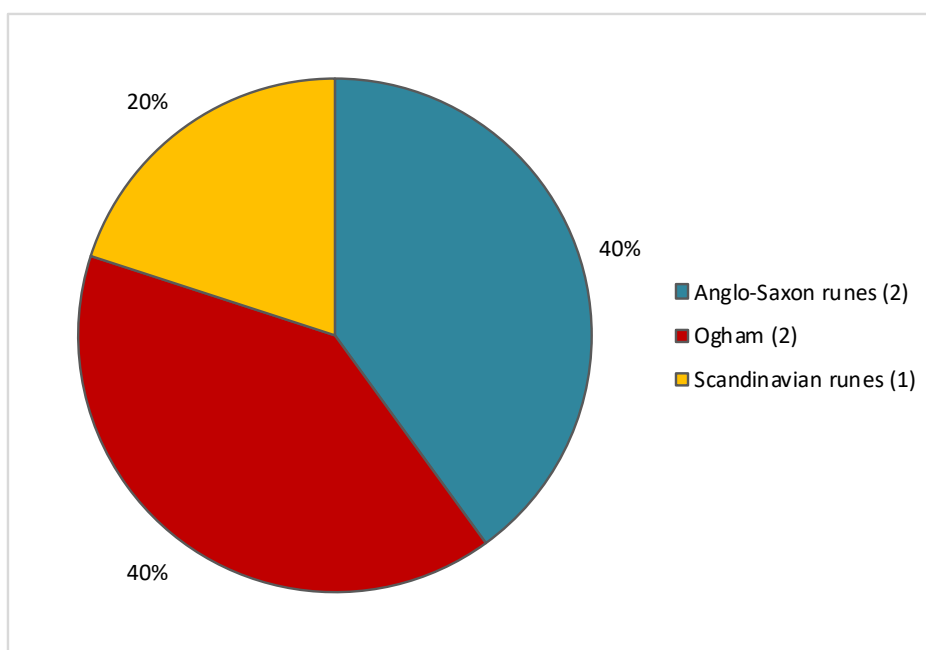


Chart 6.7 Scripts on the inscribed worked bone and antler objects

The inscriptions on the five bone and antler objects depict both casual and purposeful intent and show varying levels of skill in terms of craftsmanship. Only one inscription is given a certain reading (**Derby**), whilst the other four are either incomplete, clumsily written, or in sequences that do not make lexical sense. The **Derby** text is unparalleled from the other four objects in competence and length and is interpreted as a Christian prayer for one named ‘Hadda’, who was the individual responsible for the inscription (Batley & Evison 1961, 303). Along with the religious nature of the text, the seriffed runes and use of bind-runes in the personal name connect it with manuscript tradition (Derolez 1954; Hines 1998, 186). Not much literature exists concerning the **Moynagh Lough** ogham, and it is without a satisfactory translation. All that has been said about the two rows of ogham are that they are written in two different ogham scripts: traditional (without stem-line, short vowel strokes) and ‘scholastic’ (with stem-line, long vowel strokes, and *forfid*), and by two different inscribing instruments (Holder 1994, 15b-15c). This combination of ogham styles indicates that the carver had a good grasp of the old and new uses for the script (Holder 1994, 15c), in particular the scholastic ogham that began to appear in manuscripts during or after the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Forsyth 1996, xlix, lii). The identification of **Moynagh Lough** as a place of Early Christian occupation supports the presence of book-hand ogham (Bradley 1991; Holder 1994, 15b), and the two styles of ogham together may suggest the inscriptions were part of a lesson of writing the old ‘classical’ and new ‘scholastic’ versions of the script.

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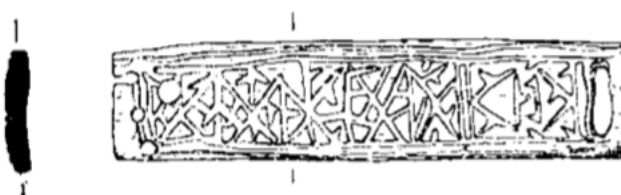
**Figure 6.5** The incisions on the Dublin antler plate, with identifiable runes mixed with 'pseudo-runes' (Barnes et al 1997, 77, Pl. XX and XXI)

The plaque from **Bornais** may represent an incomplete personal name in an Old Irish or Early Gaelic 'X son of Y' formula or a masculine name *Mac-Bicc* (Forsyth 2007, 468-469), although this interpretation is highly speculative, and to add to the perplexity of the inscription, the language could also be Pictish or even Norse (Forsyth 2012, 272). Also without a solid interpretation are the **Southampton** plaque runes, which are too fragmentary to translate (Holdsworth 1976, 46-47). Amongst the jumbled and sporadic incisions on the **Dublin** plate (fig. 6.5), Barnes et al (1997, 47-48) make out at least seven rune-forms but describe the inscription as not having any linguistic intent. Surely, though, from a context where runic writing is found on many pieces of bone (see Chapter 5.2.1), it would be reasonable to suggest that it was at least inspired by the script. Such deliberately carved markings may be a case of one practicing their runes on a piece of antler waste, possibly a fragment of a comb that was broken and thrown away as refuse (Barnes et al 1997, 47). Another explanation is that these incisions are 'pseudo'-runes meant to hold some magical, symbolic, or personal significance (see Chapter 8.3.2) (Houston 2018, 33-34).



**Figure 6.6** The Derby bone plaque with runic inscription (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1890,0810.8)

Only with the **Derby** plaque is it certain that the text was intended from the beginning (fig. 6.6). It is also the only object of the five that has evidence for an attachment mechanism in the form of two rusty rivet holes on one side. Batley and Evison (1961, 302) suggest that the plaque was suspended by a ribbon or a strap from a codex for use as a bookmark, page-turner, or ornamental accoutrement. As both faces of the plaque are incised with a decorative border it is reasonable to state that the object was not meant to be firmly attached to something. The braided border on the uninscribed face appears unfinished and interrupted at one end, indicating that this side was also intended for text, but was abandoned at some point in favour of the other side or because the artisan (presumably Hadda) decided to keep the text in the one panel.



**Figure 6.7** Decorated antler plaque from Anglo-Saxon Southampton (Holdsworth 1976, 46, fig. 21.9 © Society for Medieval Archaeology, Archaeology Data Service access license)

Along with the runic plaque, a second decorated antler plaque, this time not inscribed, was found at Saxon **Southampton** (fig. 6.7) (Holdsworth 1976, 46-47). This plaque may have been sewn onto leather or textile as evident by perforated holes at each end. A similar purpose may be behind the inscribed plaque, although no attachment holes are visible as the object is broken at both ends. The runes appear cramped and rather clumsily written, suggesting that they were not part of the original design, although the imperfection of the inner interlace may indicate that the plaque was a rough draft prior to a final product, but this is only a theory. As of yet, no suggestion as to the purpose of the **Moynagh Lough** antler tine has been suggested. The only description of the object comes from Holder (1994, 15b) in which it is described as a worked antler tine, open at one end and shaped into a ‘peg’ at the other. It’s similarity to the ogham-inscribed knife handles in Chapter 5.2.1 may suggest it was also used as a handle of some sort. There is also the possibility that it too is an unfinished implement, and its inscriptions were written for practice as well.

The object from **Bornais** is a thin plate of bone that tapers slightly to one side and is broken at both ends. An identification as a comb side-plate has been suggested (Barnes et al 1997, 47), although this is dismissed by Forsyth (2007, 426; 2012, 272) on the grounds that the plate shows no signs of wear. Instead, she suggests a peg, game counter, or betting token. A more optimistic possibility is a comparison to wooden rods mentioned in medieval Irish literature that were inscribed with ogham and used for divination, communication, and legislative purposes (see **Cahercommaun** bone, Chapter 6.1.1) (Forsyth 2007, 427; 2012, 273). Another suggestion is that the **Bornais** plate is a merchant’s label similar to wooden examples from medieval Bergen in Norway (Forsyth 2012, 273). If the inscription does in fact give the name of an individual (Forsyth 2007, 469), a merchant’s label would not be implausible.

## 6.2 Metal Objects

Included in this thesis are nineteen objects of metal that cannot be recognised as having a specific function in order to be placed into a particular category in the corpus. They may be complete, fragmentary, or components detached from a larger object. Included are ten metal strips, discs, and irregularly shaped items that were probably affixed to another object for a decorative or functional purpose, such as a dress-fitting or mount for domestic tool (Chart 6.8). Also included are five inscribed plaques or sheets of lead that are folded or kept flat, which are described as amuletic talismans or funerary objects (**Deerness, Dunton, March, Shropham, St Benets**). Two inscribed sheets of lead spillage from metalworking activity are also included in this category (**Waltham Abbey, Winchester**), and one piece of copper-alloy cut from a larger portion (**Eye**). Also placed in this category is one ornate crescent-shaped plaque, decorated on both sides, that has no apparent functional purpose (**Laws Farm**).

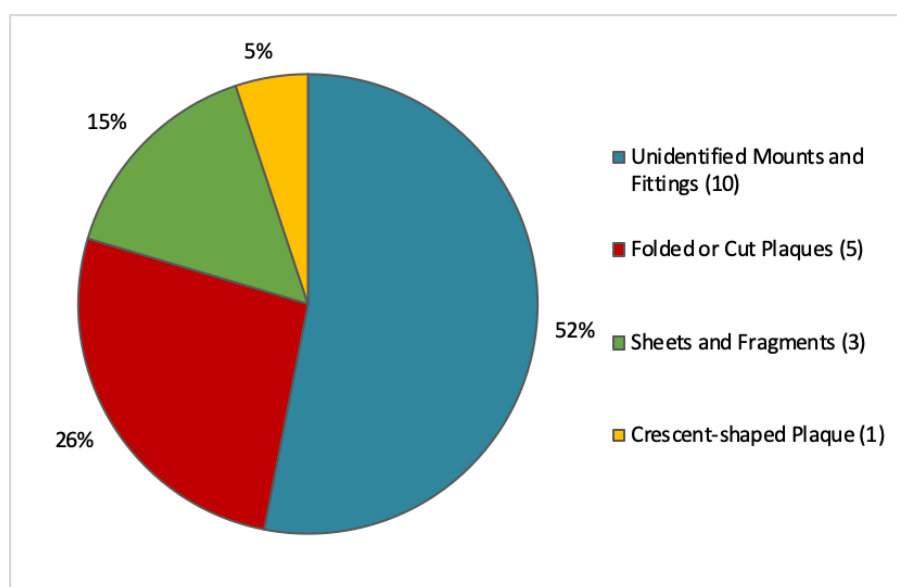


Chart 6.8 Inscribed Unidentified and Miscellaneous Metal Objects

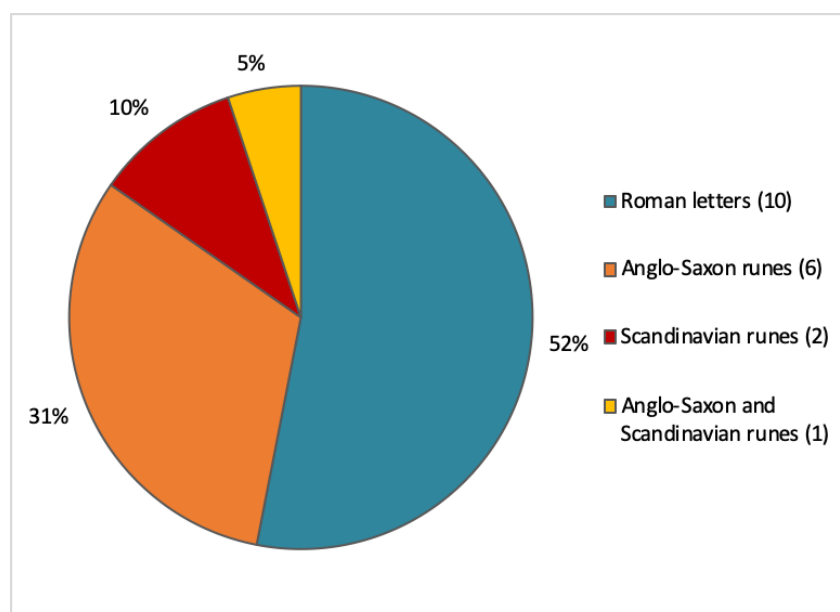
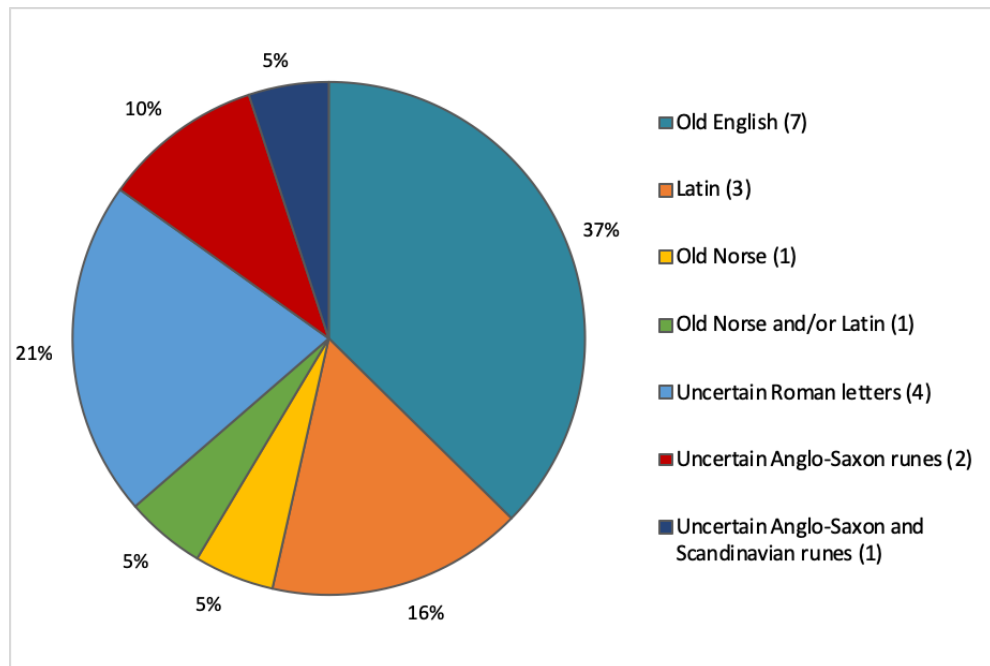


Chart 6.9 Scripts on Unidentified and Miscellaneous Metal Objects



**Chart 6.10 Languages on Unidentified and Miscellaneous Metal Objects**

The script that is most represented by the metal objects is Roman letters, with ten inscriptions total (Chart 6.9). Six inscriptions are in Anglo-Saxon runes, two are in Scandinavian runes (**Deerness**, **Laws Farm**), and one object is inscribed with text combining Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian runes together (**St Benets**). Seven inscriptions are in Old English, of which four are in Anglo-Saxon runes (**Froglands**, **Dunton**, **Shropham**, **Eye**) and three in Roman letters (**Egginton**, **Hinckley**, **North Petherton**) (Chart 6.11, Table 6.4). Three inscriptions are written in Latin and in Roman letters (**Limpsfield Grange**, **Staffordshire**, **Winterbourne**). One inscription is in Scandinavian runes and Old Norse (**Laws Farm**), and one inscription is in Scandinavian runes with Old Norse words possibly mixed with Latin (**Deerness**). Seven inscriptions are in uncertain languages, including four in Roman letters (**Mildenhall**, **Singleton**, **Waltham Abbey**, **Winchester**), two in Anglo-Saxon runes (**Billesley**, **Keswick**), and one in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian runes (**St Benets**). These inscriptions are unreadable for a number of reasons including damage, wear, and incompleteness of the objects, and one alphabetical sequence that could be Latin or Old English (**Waltham Abbey**).

**Table 6.4 Scripts and Languages on Unidentified and Miscellaneous Metal Objects**

	Latin	Old English	Old Norse	Old Norse and/or Latin	Unidentified/ Uncertain
Roman Letters	3	3	0	0	4
Anglo-Saxon runes	0	4	0	0	2
Scandinavian runes	0	0	1	1	0

Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian runes	0	0	0	0	1
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All but two of the objects come from Anglo-Saxon England. Those two objects were discovered in Scotland and include the lead plaque from **Deerness**, Orkney, and the crescent-plaque from **Laws Farm**, Monifieth, Angus. Eight objects were found at or close to settlement or monastic sites (**Deerness**, **Dunton**, **Eye**, **Egginton**, **Froglands**, **St Benets**, **Waltham Abbey**, **Winchester**) and seven were found as stray finds (**Billesley**, **Hinckley**, **Keswick**, **Limpsfield Grange**, **North Petherton**, **Singleton**, **Winterbourne**) (Chart 6.11). One object was found inside a cist burial (**Laws Farm**), one as part of a large Anglo-Saxon hoard (**Staffordshire**), and two objects have no known find context (**Mildenhall**, **Shropham**).

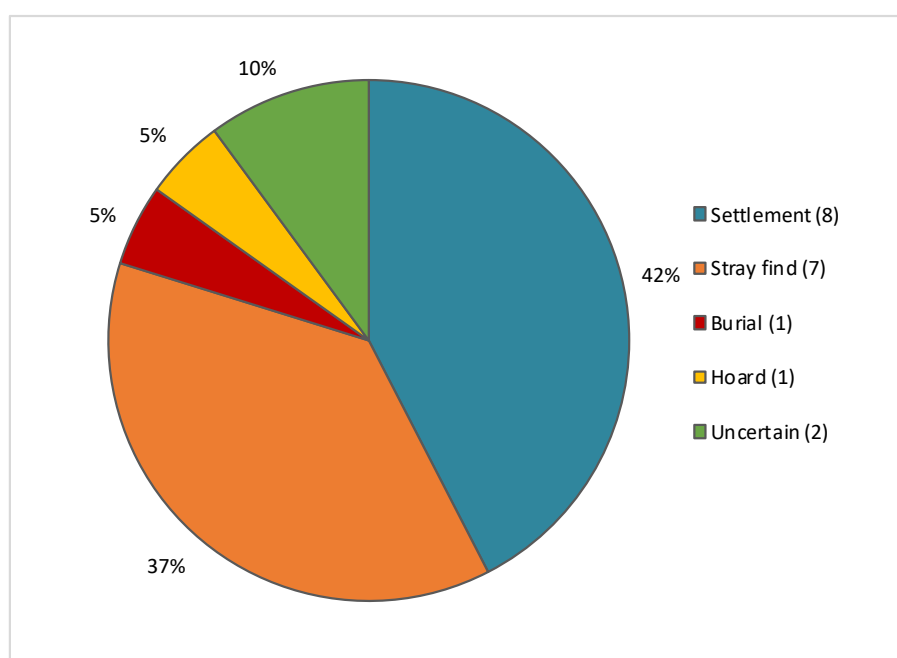


Chart 6.11 Distribution of Unidentified and Miscellaneous Metal Objects by Context

### 6.2.1 Unidentified Mounts and Fittings

The ten unidentified metal mounts and fittings include discs, thin strips, and other diversely shaped objects that lack sufficient evidence for establishing any functional or ornamental purpose (Table 6.5, fig. 6.8). The objects are damaged and fragmentary, without an attachment fixture, or they may have multiple possible uses including dress fittings or mounts for weaponry, armour, or ecclesiastical furnishings. Because of these uncertainties they are given their own category. Like the decorative dress fittings, all of the unidentified mounts and fittings are Anglo-Saxon in style, text, and provenance. Six of the objects are composed of copper-alloy, two of gold, and two of silver and include

four circular mounts (**Egginton, Hinckley, Keswick, Limpsfield Grange**), three strips of metal (**North Petherton, Staffordshire, Winterbourne**), two odd-shaped mounts (**Mildenhall, Singleton**), and one bar-shaped fitting with an animal head terminal (**Froglands**). All of the inscriptions apart from one (**Froglands**) appear to be a part of the original design of the objects and consist of eight inscriptions in Roman letters and two in Anglo-Saxon runes (**Froglands, Keswick**) (Chart 6.12). Four texts are in Old English (**Egginton, Froglands, Hinckley, North Petherton**), three in Latin (**Limpsfield Grange, Staffordshire, Winterbourne**), and three that are indecipherable but can be justified as reading in either Old English or Latin (**Keswick, Mildenhall, Singleton**) (Chart 6.13). The texts inscribed upon these objects that can be deciphered are highly personal, ranging from self-referential first-person statements including ownership and maker statements, religious sentiments including curses and protective prayers, and a possible love token inscription. When compared to the texts on other small metal embellishments with inscriptions, the ten texts in this category reveal a similarity to those on the inscribed scabbard mounts and fittings, which consist of maker and ownership texts as well as evocative statements to increase the power of the object (see Chapter 4.3.3).

**Table 6.5 Inscribed Unidentified Metal Mounts and Fittings**

Name	Object	Inscription
Egginton	CIRCULAR MOUNT: Silver, 850-950, with central stud	Roman letters, Old English: 'May (you) love (me), may (you) take (me)' or 'May (you) take (me) in love' or 'May (you) live, may (you) take (me)' or 'May (you) lead (me) to life'
Froglands	BAR-SHAPED FITTING: Copper-alloy, 700-900, decorated, animal head-terminal	AS runes, Old English: <i>Gewarahtæ</i> , 'made' or <i>gearwe</i> , 'ready'
Hinckley	CIRCULAR (MOUNT?): Silver, 1050-1100, with central incised cross	Roman letters, Old English: '+ Wulfgyfu owns me; owns (me) for her'
Keswick	CIRCULAR MOUNT: Copper-alloy, 650-850, with loose central pin	AS runes, Uncertain: t l i m s u d n
Limpsfield Grange	CIRCULAR MOUNT: Gold and niello, 800-900, with image of eagle	Roman letters, Latin: Abbreviation for <i>Aquilla</i> , 'eagle'
Mildenhall	MOUNT: Bronze, uncertain date, decorated, tongue-shaped	Roman letters, Uncertain: [.]IOB[...][P/P)(R)
North Petherton	STRIP: Copper-alloy, 1050-1100, undecorated	Roman letters, Old English: '...He will always possess it...He who may not own me'
Singleton	MOUNT: Copper-alloy and iron, 1000-1300, undecorated	Roman letters, Uncertain: 'SIHX' could be an abbreviation of 'HIS XPS', 'ihesus christus' of the nomina sacra
Staffordshire	STRIP: Gold, 600-800	Roman letters, Latin: 'Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee'
Winterbourne	STRIP: Gilded copper-alloy, 1000-1100, undecorated	Roman letters, Latin: A) '...Hoki made me...' B) Uncertain. <i>exorior</i> , <i>exortus</i> , 'to come out, come forth, spring up', <i>exorare</i> , 'to beseech, pray for', or <i>exomo</i> , <i>exomatus</i> , 'to adorn'

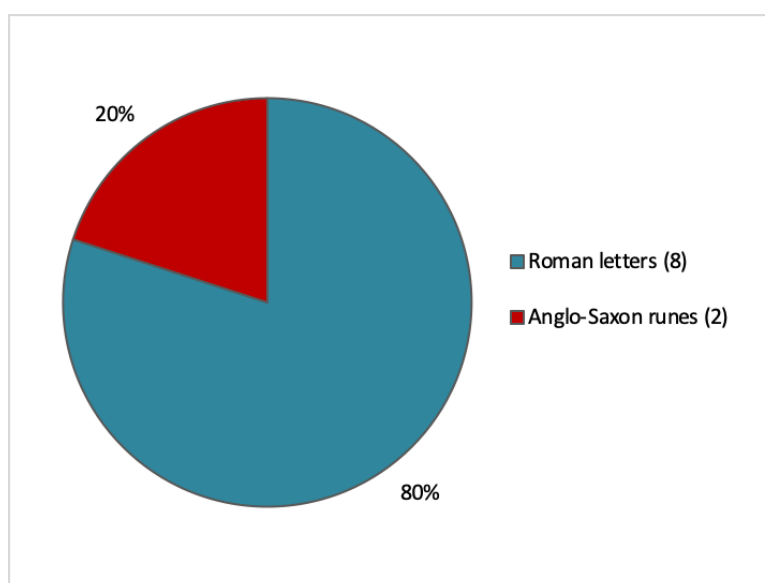


All of the inscribed metal mounts and fittings were found in Anglo-Saxon England, and all but two were found through metal detecting activity. The remaining two include one that was found by chance (**Keswick**), and one object that is without a secure provenance or information about its discovery (**Mildenhall**). Six objects were found as stray finds on land (**Egginton**, **Hinckley**, **Limpsfield Grange**, **North Petherton**, **Singleton**, **Winterbourne**), one comes from a river (**Keswick**), one from a possible market site (**Froglands**), and one from a rich hoard of Anglo-Saxon gold and silver (**Staffordshire**) (Chart 6.14). The significance of most of these objects having been discovered as stray finds supports their identification as personal accoutrements lost from items worn on a person, the same way as a button may pop off of a shirt, or a tool may fall out of a pocket. The context in which the **Staffordshire** Hoard inscribed strip was found increases the possibility that the object was originally attached to an item of military use, as will be discussed below, as the hoard is primarily made up of dismantled war-gear including 92 pommels or pommel fittings, 224 parts of sword hilts, and components of helmets. A significant part of the hoard is ecclesiastical, which may point towards an additional purpose for the strip and its inscription (Leahy et al 2011, 211-214).

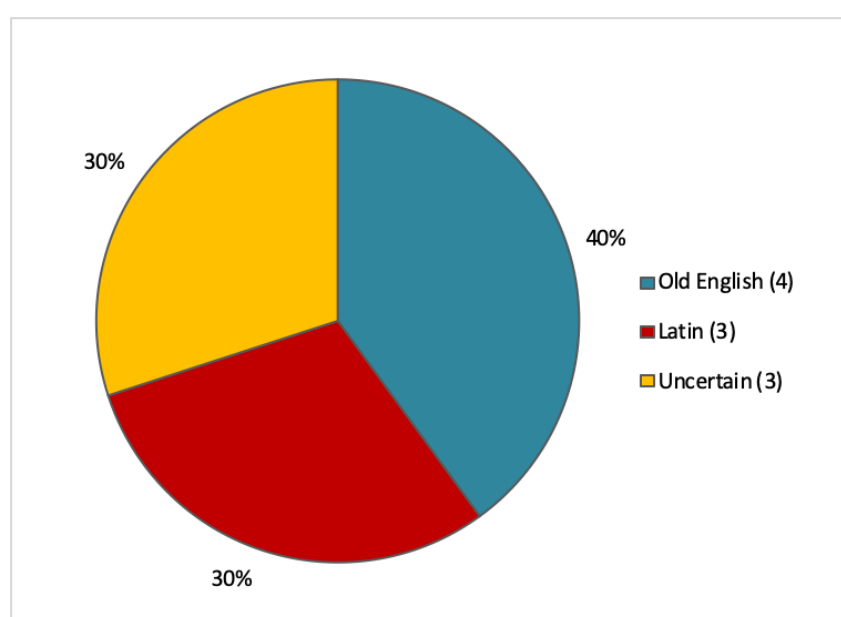


Figure 6.8 The Inscribed Unidentified Metal Mounts and Fittings: 'Egginton' (Okasha & Langley 1999, 204, Plate 1 © Derbyshire Archaeological Society); 'Hinckley' (Gilmore 2012, PAS Ref WMID-B1C4E3 © CC BY-SA 4.0 Birmingham Museums Trust); 'Keswick' (Norfolk Heritage Explorer, NHER 31652 © NCC Find Identification and Recording Service); 'Limpsfield Grange' (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. MLA1993,1001.1, asset no. 476320001); 'Mildenhall' (Okasha 1971, no. 90); 'Singleton' (Boughton 2011, PAS Ref LANCUM-0642B3 © CC BY-SA 4.0 The Portable Antiquities Scheme); 'Winterbourne' (Hinds 2010, PAS Ref WILT-219C11 © CC BY-SA 4.0 Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum); 'Froglands' (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 object no. 1999,0401.1, asset no. 417552001); 'Staffordshire Hoard' (Staffordshire Hoard Official Website © Birmingham Museums Trust CC BY 2.0, photograph by Dave Rowan and Daniel Buxton); 'North Petherton' (Howard-Jones 2004, PAS Ref SOMDOR-F51315 © CC BY-SA 4.0 Somerset County Council)

Similar to the other small inscribed objects of metal in this corpus (see Chapter 4.1.4, 4.1.6, 4.3.1, 4.3.3), including dress and weaponry fittings, a significant number of the unidentified metal objects in this category are recorded on the PAS, a number that is steadily increasing with the escalation of metal detecting enthusiasts. Currently there are over 7,000 small objects of metal that are listed as early medieval mounts or strap-ends on the PAS, which appear to be convenient and generalised terms for any unidentified complete or incomplete metal object that may or may not have an attachment fixture. The definitions of ‘mounts’ and ‘strap-ends’ in themselves are broad and could refer to any decorative and/or functional object attached to a wide array of objects including items of dress, ecclesiastical objects such as reliquaries, weaponry and armour, and household tools. It is because of this large spectrum of possibilities that the ten objects in this category were given their own section and analysis.

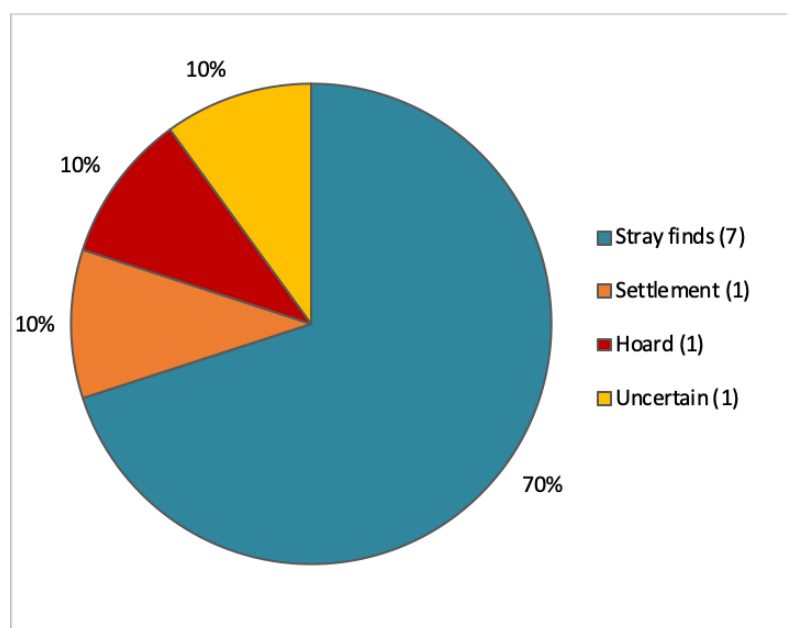


**Chart 6.12 Scripts on Inscribed Metal Mounts and Fittings**



**Chart 6.13 Languages on Inscribed Metal Mounts and Fittings**

The odd-shaped object from **Froglands** Farm, Isle of Wight, was originally labelled as a ‘strap-end’, although Page (1998b, 10) points out that this term is too simple and vague. He instead suggests that it may be part of a stylus or writing implement, noting that there are currently no known parallels for this object. There is not a lot of literature regarding this object, and without a decent photograph it is difficult to make out any clear mechanism for attachment on the animal-head terminal. Neither does the inscription lend any clue to its purpose, although the possible runes for Old English *gerewote*, ‘made ready’, as interpreted by Looijenga (2003, 294), is reminiscent of the invocation texts on scabbard mounts (see Chapter 5.3.3), which may suggest an association with weaponry. She also proposes a misspelling of *gewarahtae*, ‘made’ (also seen on the **Mortain** casket), which is also less than illuminating. As of yet, the identification of the **Froglands** object must remain only as speculation.



**Chart 6.14 Distribution of Inscribed Metal Mounts and Fittings by Context**

Also puzzling is the concave bronze object from **Mildenhall**, which is enigmatic in both text and purpose (Okasha 1971, 100, no. 90; Page 1964, 89). Its shape suggests that it served as a decorative cover for a tongue-shaped strap-end or as a strap-end itself, similar to the **Nuffield** and **Crewkerne** strap-ends (see Chapter 4.1.4) (MAA Collections, no. 1904.158; Okasha 1971, 100). Like the **Froglands** object, there is a lack of information regarding the object from **Mildenhall**, thus not much can be said about its purpose or inscription, which has so far been labelled ‘indecipherable’.

The four objects from **Egginton**, **Hinckley**, **Keswick**, and **Limpsfield Grange** are similar in their circular shape and range of possibilities surrounding their use. The **Egginton** and **Keswick** discs have traces of solder on their reverses and central studs that indicate they were originally affixed to a larger object. Only the text on the **Egginton** disc can be interpreted, albeit with its challenges, with the first word reading as either, ‘[I] take’, or, ‘may [I/you/he/she/it] take’, and the second reading either, ‘[I] love/live’, or, ‘may [I/you/he/she/it] love/live’ (Okasha & Langley 1999, 204). Combining the two words, Okasha and Langley (1999, 205) have understood the text and the disc as either a love token or a religious protective charm. They also propose that the stud, possibly affixed to a brooch, may have been

part of a set, with additional inscribed studs completing the text (1999, 203). No purpose for the **Keswick** disc has been suggested, primarily due to the fact that the only known image of the object is the black and white illustration used in this catalogue, and unfortunately nothing is known about its current whereabouts (Hines 1997). Its central rivet or pin does indicate it had been attached to something, perhaps clothing or a purse, although this is unclear. The eight runes circling around the central pin are no more comprehensible, although the similarity to the inscriptions on the runic-linked pins (see Chapter 4.1.6) may suggest a disordered series of the *futhorc* letters.

The **Hinckley** and **Limpsfield Grange** discs have been described as a brooch and a finger-ring bezel, respectively (Gilmore & Okasha 2012, PAS Ref WMID-B1C4E3; Okasha & Youngs 1996, 66), although these suggestions have been challenged and are henceforth discounted. There are no obvious signs of solder or an attachment fixture on either object, although this could have faded over time. Nevertheless, the inscriptions and their translations demonstrate the importance of the two objects as personal and decorative items, regardless of what they were used for. The **Hinckley** disc in particular features a first-person self-referential ownership text declaring it as the property of a woman named *Wulgyfu* (Gilmore & Okasha 2012, PAS Ref WMID-B1C4E3). The ‘me’ in the inscription may refer to the disc itself or rather the object the disc may have originally adorned, if it was indeed affixed to something. The text and imagery of the **Limpsfield Grange** disc is in reference to the symbol of the evangelist Mark, *Aquilla*, ‘eagle’ (Okasha & Youngs 1996, 64-65). Disregarding its initial classification as a finger-ring bezel, Okasha and Youngs (2006, 66-68) suggest that it may have been a part of a group of four discs for the four evangelists, that had been affixed to a decorative object such as a reliquary cross or book cover.

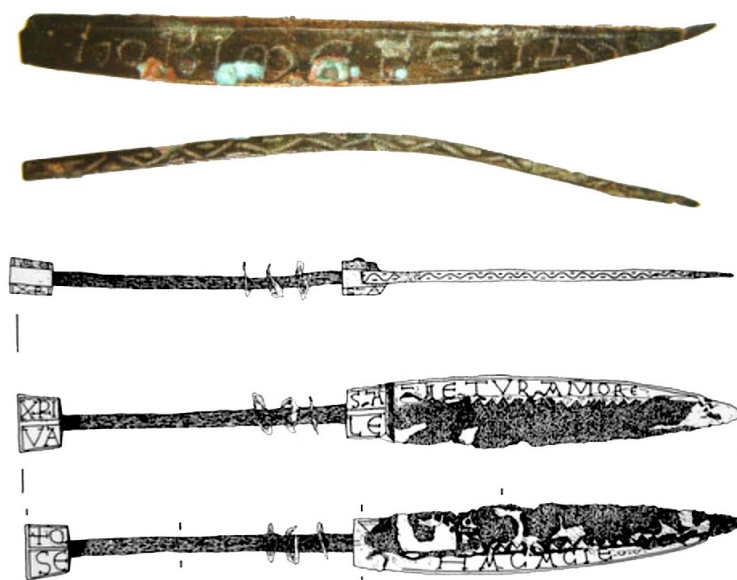


Figure 6.9 The inscribed strip from Winterbourne (top: Hinds 2010, PAS Ref, WILT-219C11 © CC BY-SA 4.0 Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum) and the inscribed knife from Waterford, Co. Waterford (Okasha 1992d, 522)

The three metal ‘strips’ from **North Petherton**, **Staffordshire**, and **Winterbourne** are inscribed with texts that seem to invoke the innate and Divine power of the objects they were presumably once affixed to or were a part of. The copper-alloy strips from **North Petherton** and

**Winterbourne** are both inscribed with self-referential messages in Roman letters, which are incomplete, but enough of the texts can be constructed in order to understand that they are first-person ownership (**North Petherton**) and maker (**Winterbourne**) inscriptions. Okasha (2004a, 243-244) proposes that the **North Petherton** text once read, '[This belongs to X] he will always possess it. [May God curse the loser/taker], he who may not own me', which, if correct, would indicate a text protecting the object from theft upon Divine punishment. An obvious comparison is the text on the **Ædwen** brooch from Sutton (see Chapter 4.1.2), which is protective for both the owner, named as **Ædwen**, and her brooch (Okasha 1971, 116-117, no. 114).

On the **Winterbourne** strip, only the sequence, 'Hoki made me' is certain, but the additional possible Latin phrases for 'to come out/come forth', 'to beseech/pray for', or 'to adorn' may also be inscribed (Okasha 2010). Both texts are comparable to the ownership, maker, and protective inscriptions seen on personal adornments and weaponry, in particular the scabbard mounts (see Chapter 5.3.3). It is possible that both the **Winterbourne** and **North Petherton** strips are decorative plates to fit onto the non-cutting edges of knives. This may also be the origin for the fragmentary mount from **Singleton**, which has iron corrosion on its reverse as well as the remains of rivets, and a possible religious inscription (Boughton 2011, PAS Ref, LANCUM-0642B3). A potential comparison to the **Winterbourne** strip are the inscribed plates on a 12<sup>th</sup> century knife from Waterford, Munster, Ireland, which has a Latin inscription reading, 'What is cut with this sharp edge, may it be filled with the powerful love of Christ' (fig. 6.9) (Okasha 1992d, 528). Not only does shape of the **Winterbourne** strip follow the curved shape of the Waterford knife, but the line and dot design on the strip is similar to that seen on the knife from Waterford. Although the PAS labels the **Winterbourne** strip as a knife plate (Hinds 2010), Okasha (2010) is more inclined to suggest that it was instead attached to a larger object, perhaps a shrine, reliquary, or book cover, also proposed for the strip from **North Petherton** (Howard-Jones 2004). Noteworthy is a recently discovered inscribed 'knife cap' or 'bolster' from Shepway, Kent, also identical to components of the Waterford knife (fig. 6.10) (PAS Ref, KENT-D7B5E0). This object is not included in the corpus because it was discovered after the compilation of the catalogue.



**Figure 6.10** The inscribed 'knife cap' or 'bolster' from Shepway, Kent (Ahmet 2019, PAS Ref, KENT-D7B5E0 B1C4E3 © CC BY-SA 4.0 Kent County Council)

Like the strips from **Winterbourne** and **North Petherton**, the **Staffordshire Hoard** strip has no obvious purpose, but considering its context it may have come from an object used for combat or a

religious object carried into battle, such as a reliquary, shrine, or large cross (Okasha 2011b, 32; 2012, 192-193). It dates significantly earlier than the other two strips, to the earlier period of Latin literacy in Anglo-Saxon England (Okasha 2012, 192). Its similarity in shape, text, and date to the two copper-alloy strips on the **Coppergate** helmet (see Chapter 4.3.5) further supports its function as a Biblical text for war, although its flat shape does not justify an attachment to a curved helmet (Okasha 2012, 192; Tweddle 1983; 1992). The two inscriptions on the **Staffordshire** strip are the same Latin quotation from the Vulgate Bible repeated once and set on the inner and outer faces (Okasha 2011b, 28; 2012, 190). The inner text is less carefully executed than the outer, suggesting a craftsman, probably illiterate, who either made an error or was using this side for a practice attempt (Klein 2013, 64; Okasha 2011b, 23-24, 33).

## 6.2.2 Folded or Cut Plaques

The five folded or cut plaques are diminutive sheets of metal, measuring no more than 66mm (2.6 inches) in length, that have been cut (**Billesley**), folded (**Deerness**, **Shropham**, **St Benet's**), bent (**Dunton**), perforated (**Dunton**, **Shropham**, **St Benet's**), and inscribed with runes (Table 6.6). All but one (**Billesley**) are made of lead, a material usually associated with objects of religion, medicine, and magic in the medieval periods (Mitchell 2011, 45; Moretti 2015, 114; Simek 2011; Zilmer 2013). The dates of these objects range from the middle to late Anglo-Saxon period (700-1100) and the later Norse period in Britain (post-1000). The plaques are all inscribed with runes including three in Anglo-Saxon runes (**Billesley**, **Dunton**, **Shropham**), one in Scandinavian runes (**Deerness**), and one in Scandinavian runes with the Anglo-Saxon w-rune (**St Benet's**) (Chart 6.15) (Hines 2019a, 17-18). Only the texts on the **Dunton** and **Shropham** plaques are translatable, whilst the remaining three inscriptions are either too fragmentary or puzzling to understand. The plaques share epigraphic and linguistic characteristics seen on other objects of amuletic significance in this corpus, in particular the pendants (Chapter 4.1.7), as well as similar plaques of lead from Scandinavia which involve runic sequences in Old Norse and Latin with healing or protective qualities (Olesen 2010; Zilmer 2013). Aspects of the five plaques including archaeological context, epigraphic features, and translations of the inscriptions suggest that the plaques come from a tradition either directly or indirectly influenced by Christianity. As portable inscribed objects they represent a long-lasting early medieval practice of using runes on small pieces of cut and folded metal for religious and healing amuletic purposes in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian epigraphic traditions (Olesen 2010).

**Table 6.6 Inscribed Folded or Cut Metal Plaques**

Name	Object	Translation
Billesley	PLAQUE: Copper-alloy, 850-1100, cut to the shape of a square	AS runes, Uncertain (Old English?): A) [...] a dmo [...] B) r l d / r ed



Deerness	PLAQUE: lead, undated, folded once over	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse and/or Latin: A) Uncertain. (i)rasa, Old Norse <i>er Ása</i> , 'Ása is' /'which/whom Ása...', or <i>rás</i> , 'race, running; course; channel'/Old Norse <i>kras</i> instead of <i>iras</i> , '[edible] delicacy' or Latin, ... <i>iras abi</i> ..., '...outbursts of anger. Go away!...'. B) Uncertain. y(n)i, Old Norse <i>vinna</i> , '[to] master, [to] overcome', or '[that X might not] overcome you'. or þikr, 'you?'
Dunton	PLAQUE: Lead, 700-800, perforated in one corner, bent over	AS runes, Old English: 'dead is the/a dwarf'
Shropham	PLAQUE: lead, 850-1100, folded, perforated once	AS runes, Old English: '...raised this sign in praise of God, ... for ...d's soul and for her Os..., ...for Alhmund's soul of all, ...'
St Benet's	PLAQUE: lead, c. 1020, folded three times, perforated once	AS and Scandinavian runes, Uncertain: ikkofrukR(m/i)þ   okinifuitR   wartRsom   (i)RsoRnRs-   mp(u)--rshR

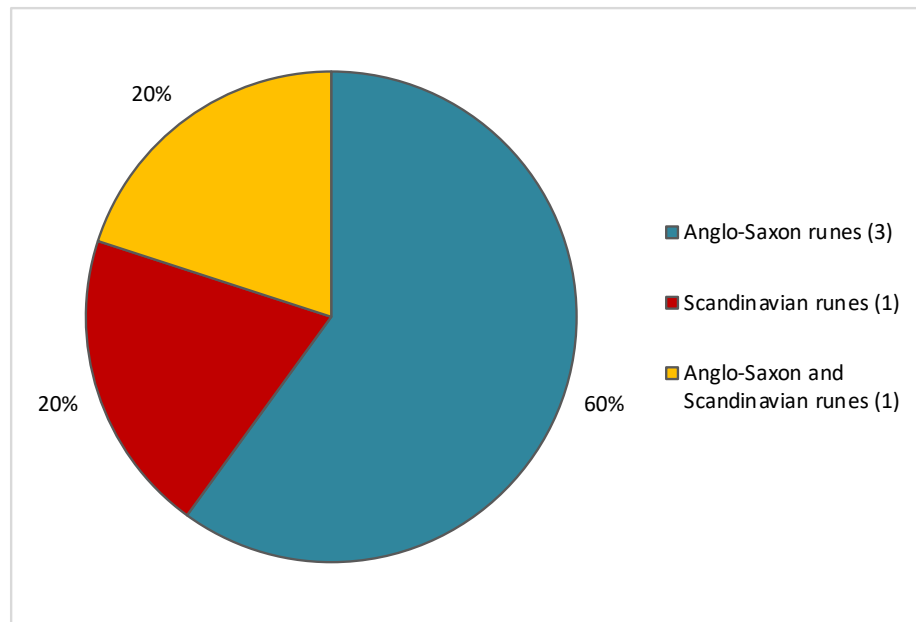


Chart 6.15 Scripts on Folded or Cut Plaques

Four out of the five plaques come from south-eastern England including three stray finds (**Billesley**, **Dunton**, **Shropham**) and one from the excavation of a late Anglo-Saxon monastery (**St Benet's**) (Chart 6.16) (Hines 2019a, 17-18). Although found as a stray find, the **Dunton** plaque was discovered in close proximity to a church, suggesting some association (Hines 2017). The fifth plaque was uncovered by a metal detectorist as a stray find on the peninsula of **Deerness** in Orkney (Barnes 2016, 144-146), close to the multi-period site where a couple of years earlier a copper-alloy runic amulet pendant was discovered (see Chapter 4.1.7) (Pereswetoff-Morath 2017, 253-256). The significance of these objects as stray finds lies in their diminutive size and the possibility that they were kept close as personal talismans and lost by accident. Pestell (2004, 141) suggests that the **St Benet's** plaque was a funerary plaque and likens it to the plaque from **Bawburgh** (see Chapter 5.3.1), which is similar in material, date, and form of inscription. The proximity of the **St Benet's** plaque to the abbey is further evidence to Pestell (2004) that the area was a place of burial and the plaque had originally been placed in one. Similar runic-inscribed lead pieces, both folded and not, have been found in burials

including one with a mixture of gibberish and Christian words from Odense (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 135), and one found inside a small leather purse in a Viking-age grave in Sweden, indicating that these objects could be kept close as personal amulets and buried with their owners possibly to assist them after death (Barnes 2012, 112; Olesen 2010, 165). Another possibility is that the proximities of the **Dunton** and **St Benet's** plaques to ecclesiastical sites indicate the plaques were used in the church as Christian healing and protective amulets, which are described in *Bald's Leechbook* and the *Lacnunga* (Cameron 1993, 133-134; Grattan & Singer 1952, 178-179) and possibly also exemplified by the three amulet finger-rings (see Chapter 4.1.1).

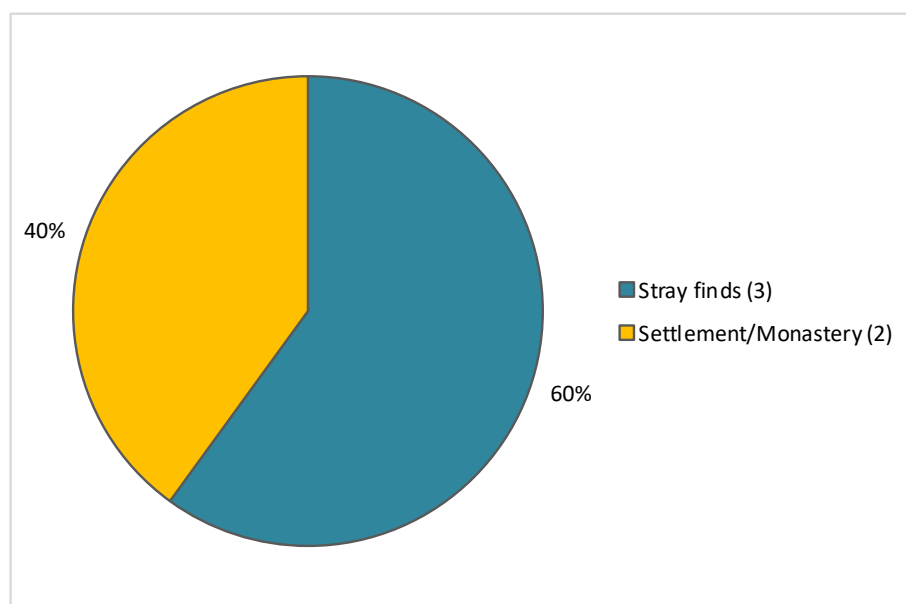


Chart 6.16 Distribution of Inscribed Folded or Cut Plaques by Context

The five plaques are all inscribed with runes, of which three are in Anglo-Saxon runes (**Billesley**, **Dunton**, **Shropham**) and have dates situated between 700 and 1100 AD. Two are inscribed with Scandinavian runes including one dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century (**St Benet's**). The other is currently undated, although is probably of a similar date (**Deerness**) (Barnes 2016, 146). The inscriptions are largely incomprehensible, and only the plaques from **Dunton** and **Shropham** can be interpreted to determine that whereas the **Dunton** plaque is an Old English healing or protective charm against an illness (Hines 2017), the inscription on the **Shropham** plaque is a religious prayer in Old English for the souls of at least three individuals named in the text (Hines 2019a, 13-16). The latter inscription is reminiscent of the Christian commemorative texts on the late Anglo-Saxon lead funerary crosses and plaques (see Chapter 5.3.1) and may be better understood in the context of these objects except for its similarity to the folded plaque from **St Benet's**, also from Norfolk. The sequence, '...raised this sign in praise of God...' on the **Shropham** plaque may actually indicate that the plaque was originally part of a lead funerary cross, which was disassembled and made into separate personal amulets. A similar scenario is suggested by the shape of a folded lead fragment from Glim near Roskilde in Denmark, dating between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, which may have been part of an arm of a cross (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 189; Olesen 2010, 165).



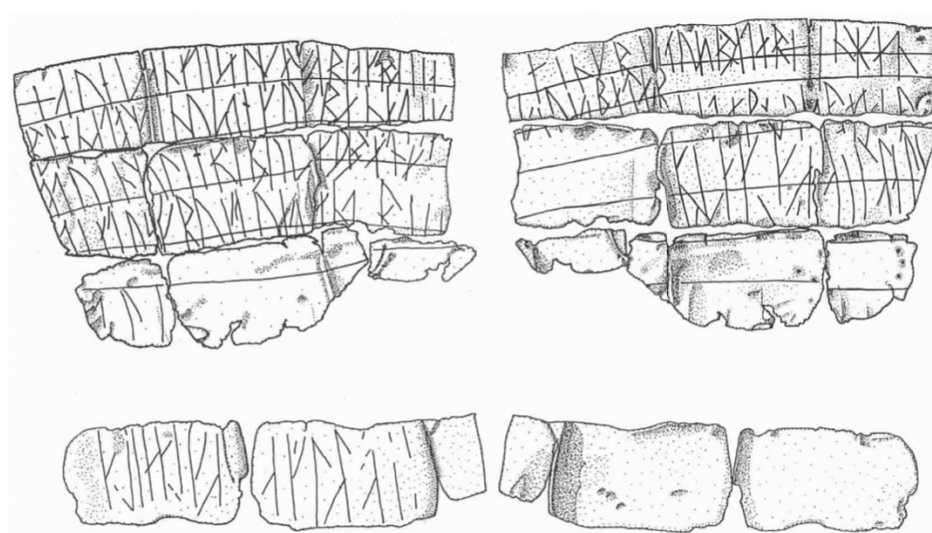
Folded lead plaques with runic inscriptions are known in relatively large numbers in Scandinavia, particularly Denmark, and are usually labelled as nonsensical, although there is also a significant amount that are inscribed in runic texts in Latin with Christian quotations, prayers, and invocations for protection and healing (Barnes 2012, 112; 2015, 146; Olesen 2010, 171-173; Pereswetoff-Morath 2017, 80, 161, 193; Zilmer 2013). Inscriptions that can be translated are often composed of words invoking help and healing through the runes themselves, such as a small perforated silver amulet from Østermarie, Denmark, reading, ‘Áki carved help runes and...heal...’ (fig. 6.11) (Nationalmuseet Danmark, D 10/2000; Olesen 2010, 169-170; Pereswetoff-Morath 2017, 237). A sheet of lead from Lille Myregård, Denmark, was inscribed with a runic ‘Hail Mary’ prayer in Latin and folded into a tight square, which was then wrapped in a second runic-inscribed strip (fig. 6.12) (Olesen 2010, 166-167). The act of folding is considered a ritualistic and meditative method to seal in and maintain the power of the text (Gilchrist 2008, 125; Olsan 2003, 362), and can be seen as early as late Antique Egypt and Greece in which there was a tradition of folding liturgical messages in papyri (De Bruyn 2011; Mihálykó 2019, 188-199). Although most of the text on the **Deerness** plaque is incomprehensible, possible words or phrases in Old Norse or Latin such as ‘to master/to overcome’, ‘outbursts of anger, go away’ have been suggested by Barnes (2015, 145-146). The plaque was originally a sheet of two horizontal rows of runes, which was folded over once at the dividing line so that one row is on each side and compressed firmly into a solid square. Also difficult to interpret are the runes on the **St Benet’s** plaque, which are left untranslated and considered nonsensical by Hines (2019). When comparing the **St Benet’s** plaque to some of the folded and cut runic plaques from Scandinavia inscribed with gibberish and Latin/Old Norse texts, there is an obvious correlation particularly in appearance (fig. 6.11 and 6.12), and considering its ecclesiastical contextual association, the plaque from **St Benets** appears to come from a common epigraphic tradition (Olesen 2010, 166-167; Pereswetoff-Morath 2017, 237).



**Figure 6.11** Silver runic amulet from Østermarie, Denmark, c. 1000-1125 (© Nationalmuseet Danmark CC-BY-SA, no. D 10/2000, photograph by John Lee)

Nonsensical and ‘gibberish’ runic charms are not exclusive to Scandinavian tradition, as gibberish runic texts are discussed as necessary remedies for illnesses and protection from supernatural forces in earlier Old English medical texts such as *Bald’s Leechbook* and the *Lacnunga* (Cameron 1993; Grattan & Singer 1952). Discovered in close proximity to a church is the amulet from **Dunton**, which is

an earlier example of runic medicine and magic from Anglo-Saxon England (Hines 2017). In its runic text can be discerned the Old English word for *dweorh/dweorg*, ‘dwarf’, which is described in the 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century Old English Christian medical text *Lacnunga* LXXXVII and XCIII as a ‘small and noxious being which assumed human form’ and caused mayhem and disease (Grattan & Singer 1952, 61, 158-159, 160-163). On one face of the plaque is an incised motif of a face, which Hines (2017) suggest may be the face of the dwarf the text is meant to dispel. Similar earlier objects from the continent include a smoothed yew rod from Britsum, Holland, dating from the 8<sup>th</sup> century, which is inscribed with Germanic runes and Roman letters with a charm to keep away ‘numbness’ (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 131). The other object inscribed in Anglo-Saxon runes is the small cut square from **Billesley**, Warwickshire, which is cut on both vertical edges suggesting the original object was a longer rectangular plaque with a full runic inscription. It is inscribed on both faces, Text A clear and concise, and Text B faint and less carefully carved. The reason for the disparities in the two texts is unclear and may indicate practice texts, doodling, or writing by two different individuals (Knirk 2010). Aspects of the **Billesley** inscription including its seriffed runes and the likelihood that the text is in Latin have identified the object as a Christian amulet (Hines 2010; Knirk 2010).



**Figure 6.12 Lead runic amulet from Lille Myregård, Denmark (© Nationalmuseet Danmark CC-BY-SA, no. D 252/2003, drawing by Lisbeth Imer)**

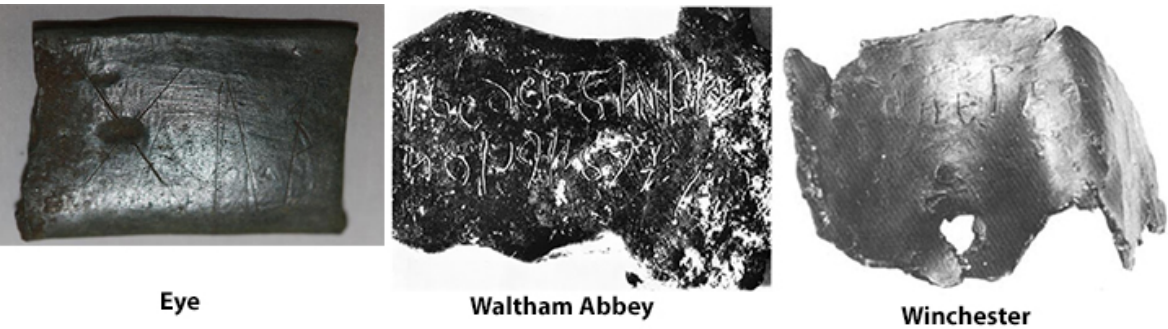
Other objects of lead in this thesis with amuletic significance or possibilities include the lead strip on the **Ipswich** belt-buckle (see Chapter 4.1.4), which, considering its puzzling runes, may have originally been a lead amulet sheet before it was refitted as a belt-buckle plate (Hilts 2013). The **Weasenham** pendant (see Chapter 4.1.7) is also interpreted as a Christian amulet to hang about the neck to cure ailments (Cameron 1993, 134; Okasha & Youngs 2003). As discussed with the lead funerary plaques and crosses, the use of lead for amuletic and Christian objects is likely due to its supposed magical properties as frequently mentioned in Old English and Latin healing charms (Mitchell 2011, 45; Moretti 2015, 114; Simek 2011, 45-46). The combination of the use of lead, folding techniques, archaeological contexts, and runic gibberish brings the five lead plaques into the wider context of early medieval amulets intended to use text to invoke comfort and protection from supernatural forces.

### 6.2.3 Unidentified Metal Fragments

The three objects described as unidentified metal fragments include one fragmentary piece of copper-alloy and two sheets of lead spillage (Table 6.7, fig. 6.13). The two pieces of lead spillage were found in the infill of the walls of buildings at **Waltham Abbey**, Essex, and **Winchester**, Hampshire, and are dated on epigraphical grounds between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century, although it is possible that the **Winchester** piece dates later (Okasha 1976, 130; 1990b, 758). The fragment from **Eye**, Suffolk, dates from the early 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries and was found during excavations of a multi-period site with evidence for early to late Anglo-Saxon settlement (Caruth & Goffin 2012). The three objects are irregularly shaped with broken edges and the inscriptions include two in Roman letters (**Waltham Abbey**, **Winchester**) and one in Anglo-Saxon runes (**Eye**), of which only the text on the **Waltham Abbey** object is understandable. Whilst this object features a nearly complete alphabetical sequence, the one from **Winchester** is largely untranslated and is declared non-lexical (Okasha 1976, 129-131; 1990b, 759), and the runes on the **Eye** fragment are too incomplete to formulate any solid translation. These three objects are difficult to contextualise, although in the corpus of portable inscribed objects, they demonstrate the disposable aspect of text on metal waste, as opposed to the more frequent use of bone, antler, and stone for trial pieces and the study of literacy.

**Table 6.7 Inscribed Metal Fragments**

Name	Object	Inscription
Eye	FRAGMENT: Copper-alloy, 400-600, undecorated	AS runes, Old English: 'Guthlac', or <i>gub</i> , 'battle'
Waltham Abbey	Lead, 800-1050, undecorated	Roman letters, Uncertain (Old English or Latin): [A]BCDEFGHI[K]L[M]   NOPQRS[TVX .]
Winchester	Lead, 1000-1200, undecorated	Roman letters, Uncertain (Latin?): DNE for 'Domini'?



**Figure 6.13** The inscribed metal fragments from Eye, Suffolk (Waxenberger, n.d., © Suffolk Archaeology, Needham Market), Waltham Abbey, Essex (Huggins 1976, Pl. XI, A © Society for Medieval Archaeology, Archaeology Data Service access license), and Winchester (Okasha 1982, Pl. XIIb © Cambridge University Press, access provided by JSTOR)

The two metal objects from **Waltham Abbey** and **Winchester** are described as possible spillage pieces and were both found in the infill of buildings attesting to the disposable nature of the

objects and their texts, wherein the material was procured, used during a limited period, and then discarded as waste (Okasha 1982, 100; 1990b, 758-759). **Waltham Abbey**, Essex and **Winchester**, Hampshire were early medieval monastic centres with rich archaeological evidence for metalworking in the 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> centuries (Biddle 1990; Huggins & Huggins 1973). The two texts are complete and unbroken, incised horizontally across the centres of the lead pieces and are written in an insular script reflecting learned literacy (Okasha 1976, 129-130; 1990b, 758). Not much is known about the object from **Eye** except that it was found at a multi-period site with evidence for settlement from the Neolithic to the late Anglo-Saxon period (Caruth & Goffin 2012). The fragment appears to have been cut at least along one edge, and only three runes are visible reading, *gub-*, which may suggest that the inscription and the object were originally longer. Perhaps it was purposely cut similar to the **Billesley** plaque, accidentally broken, or perhaps the object was a disposable piece of metal used for writing practice before it was discarded.

Other than the **Flixborough** ring, the **Waltham Abbey** lead piece features the most complete Roman alphabet in this study. Partial and whole alphabets are commonly described as writing practice, although alphabets were also incised deliberately as expressions of knowledge or for amuletic purposes (Brown & Okasha 2006, 138; Cramp & Higgitt 1984, 138). They are also seen inside the margins of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts as casual scribbles and pen trials (Okasha 1976, 130). The letters of the **Waltham Abbey** alphabet are well-formed and in the realm of practice text, could have been written by a tutor, pupil, or even by a craftsman rehearsing for the final product in metal. Another suggestion is that the letters are casual doodles, although their execution appears to be more along the lines of careful study rather than a spontaneous distraction. Also possibly practice writing are the letters on the **Winchester** lead sheet, which are not easy to make sense of. Okasha (1990b) describes it as nonlexical, although she suggests that *dne* could be an abbreviation of Latin *domine*, ‘of the Lord’, similar to the curious text on the **Deer Park Farms** hone (see Chapter 4.2.1.) (Okasha 2004, 236, no. 221). This is, however, highly speculative, and the text in itself does not align with any identifiable Old English or Latin syntax. Because of this the inscription is also defined as a product of one practicing the forms of individual letters rather than writing a readable word or phrase.

## 6.2.4 Crescent-Shaped Plaque

The metal plaque from **Laws Farm**, Monifieth, Angus in Scotland is an interesting and one of a kind object. Described as a bronze or silver plaque in the shape of a crescent, it is decorated on both sides with Pictish symbols with a secondary inscription in Old Norse runes at one edge (Table 6.8) (Barnes & Page 2006, 215-216). Unfortunately, the object is now lost, thus all evidence for its authenticity and existence comes from illustrations by the finder in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Roger 1880). The crescent-shaped plaque is an enigma in this corpus. The object is apparently complete, with no obvious signs of attachment fixtures. No objects with any similarity have been found as of yet, and with no seemingly practical purpose, the plaque is described as a votive or ceremonial object (Barnes & Page 2006, 216). Its inscription in Scandinavian runes could have been added at any point in the object’s life prior to its deposition inside the grave. The text likely records the Old Norse name *Ketill* or *Grímketill*,

possibly in a writer formula as ‘X carved/engraved this’, or the inscription may consist of two Old Norse personal names, one ending with ‘-m’ and the other reading ‘Ketill’.

**Table 6.8 Inscribed Crescent-Shaped Metal Plaque**

Name	Object	Inscription
Laws Farm	CRESCENT PLAQUE: Bronze or Silver, 800-1100, decorated	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: ‘[Gri]mkitil....’. Possibly ‘[Gri]mkitil engraved this’ or two separate Old Norse names, one ending in ‘-m’ and another ‘Ketill’. Possibly a third personal name with <i>þa/þæ</i> or a title.

The **Laws Farm** plaque is said to have been found in a cist with a complete skeleton inside a burial mound, although the only record of this goes back to its initial discovery in 1796 (Barnes & Page 2006, 215; Roger 1880). There is no further information about the skeleton, the burial, nor the site, and some relationship between the plaque and its find-spot is uncertain. The inscription is carved into an empty panel on one face below the main design of the object. The placement of the text suggests that it was not part of the original design of the plaque and is reminiscent of the runes on the **Rannveig** casket (see Chapter 5.1.1), which are inscribed onto the underside of the reliquary possibly when the object was taken to Scandinavia. In regard to the **Laws Farm** plaque, it is possible the object was also taken from its original Pictish context by a Viking. Considering the **Hunterston** brooch, an Irish-type object inscribed with Scandinavian runes (see Chapter 4.1.2), perhaps the plaque was inscribed by one identifying as both Pictish and Scandinavian. Unfortunately, the plaque is currently lost, and therefore any theories surrounding the circumstances of the plaque, its inscription, and its deposition are only guesswork.

## 6.3 Stone Objects

For lack of a more suitable category, the five objects of stone are placed in their own group as unidentifiable and miscellaneous items that served no obvious purpose nor indicate any specific functional context (Table 6.9). Three of the objects are small stones deliberately formed into two discs (**Dunadd**, **Stackrue**) and one spherical pebble (**Inis Mór**). Another was purposely carved into a small rectangular bar (**Barton St David**), and the fifth inscription is set on a prehistoric axehead (**Gorteen**) (fig. 6.14). The given dates for the five objects range from 600 to 1100 AD, with the earliest object dating between 600 and 800 (**Dunadd**), and the latest from 900 to 1100 (**Barton St David**). The axehead from **Gorteen**, Co. Clare was shaped in the Neolithic period but inscribed between 700 and 1000 AD (Bradley 1979, 11-12). Each object is inscribed with one line of text except for the **Barton St David** stone, which is inscribed with three. Four of the objects are inscribed with Roman letters (**Dunadd**, **Barton St David**, **Gorteen**, **Inis Mór**), and one with Scandinavian runes (**Stackrue**). The inscriptions include one in Old Norse (**Stackrue**), one in Old Irish/Early Gaelic (**Inis Mór**), and one in

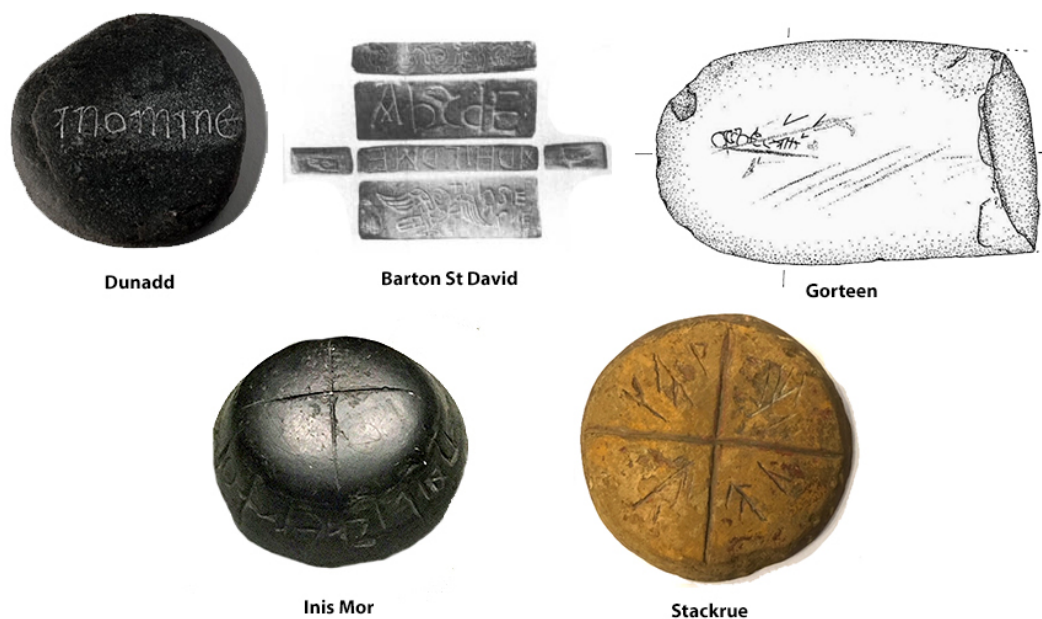
Latin (**Dunadd**). The **Barton St David** stone is inscribed with two texts in Old English and one partial alphabet in Roman letters reading, ‘ABCDE’, that could be in Latin or Old English. The other partial alphabet in Roman letters, reading ‘ABC...’ is on the **Gorteen** axhead, and considering its epigraphic context it could be in Latin or Old Irish/Early Gaelic. Discussions surrounding these five objects have primarily centred around the topic of amulets and talisman pieces. Although their exact purposes are unknown, they all share an epigraphical association with a learned ecclesiastical context.

**Table 6.9 Inscribed Stone Objects**

Name	Object	Translation
Dunadd	DISC: Slate, 600-800, undecorated	Roman letters, Latin: ‘In the name of God’
Barton St David	RECTANGULAR BAR: Sandstone, 900-1100, decorated	Roman letters, Old English (and Latin?): A) ‘ABCDE’ (OE or Latin) B) ‘Wynsige(?) owned/made] this...’ (OE) C) ‘Idhild [or Eadhild(?)] made/owned] me’ (OE)
Gorteen	NEOLITHIC AXEHEAD: Igneous stone, Inscription d. 700-1000	Roman letters, Uncertain (Old Irish/Early Gaelic or Latin): ABC[...]
Inis Mór	CARVED PEBBLE: Limestone, 700-1000	Roman letters, Old Irish/Early Gaelic: ‘+A prayer for Bran the pilgrim’
Stackrue	DISC: Steatite	Scandinavian runes, Old Norse: ‘God overcomes the Devil’ or ‘God: [this] is [his] sign’

The provenances of the five inscribed stone objects reflect their diversity as well as a possible similar context in which they were used. Two of the objects come from Ireland (**Gorteen**, **Inis Mór**), two from Scotland (**Dunadd**, **Stackrue**), and one from England (**Barton St David**). The find-spots include three settlement sites (**Dunadd**, **Gorteen**, **Stackrue**), one stray find (**Barton St David**), and one grave find (**Inis Mór**). The two discs were found at settlement sites in Scotland, one from an important early capital of Dál Riata (**Dunadd**) (Campbell & Lane 2000) and the other from a broch in Orkney (**Stackrue**) destroyed by roadworks in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Barnes & Page 2006, 153-156). Like the **Stromness** spindle-whorl, the **Stackrue** disc is made of steatite, which may suggest it came from Shetland or Scandinavia (see Chapter 4.2.3) (Holman 1996, 257-259). The two inscribed stone objects from the west coast of Ireland were discovered in the centre of a ringfort (**Gorteen**) and inside the tomb of a supposed saint (**Inis Mór**). The circumstances and relationship of the Neolithic axehead to the early Christian ringfort at **Gorteen** is unknown, and although its finder apparently noted some small bones nearby, possibly suggesting an infant burial (Bradley 1979, 12), the context of the axe is undetermined. The identification of **Inis Mór** as a place of pilgrimage corroborates the pebble’s inscription as a prayer for a pilgrim named ‘Bran’, and the discovery of a number of smoothed stones in the grave, which is interpreted as that of a saint (Stokes 1878, 19-20), further establishes an act of a ritualistic deposition.

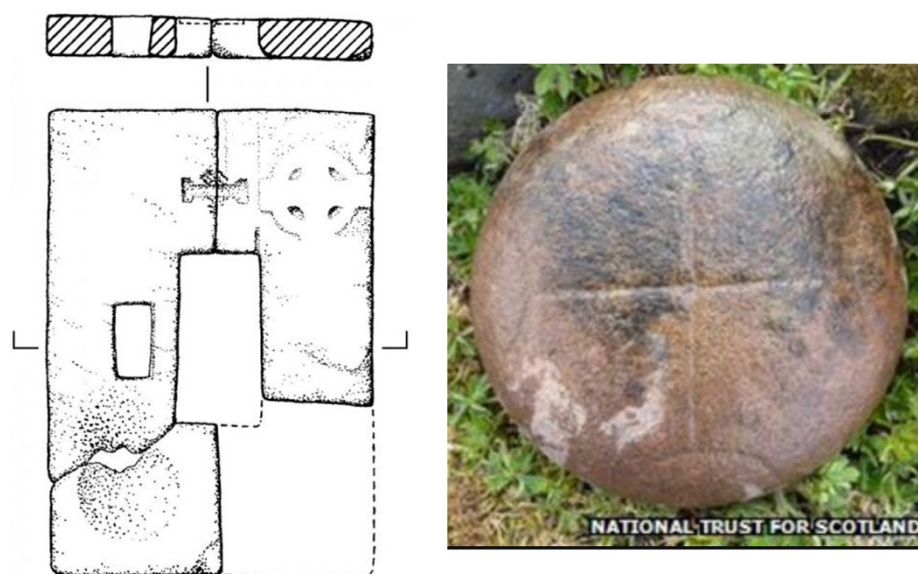




**Figure 6.14 Inscribed Stone Objects:** ‘Dunadd’ (© Trustees of the National Museums Scotland, object no. X.GP 219); ‘Barton St David’ (Okasha 1992a, Pl. 1b © Cambridge University Press, access provided by JSTOR); ‘Gorteen’ (Bradley 1979, 11, fig. 1 © Limerick County Council); ‘Inis Mór’ (Moriarty 2018), and ‘Stackrue’ (Photograph by the author, June 2017)

Although only three of the inscriptions are translated as Christian invocations (**Dunadd**, **Inis Mór**, **Stackrue**), the texts on all of the objects suggest that they were, at one point, used or handled in a learned religious setting, or at the very least, were products of such an environment. In early Christian Ireland and Scotland, evidence for the ritualistic turning of prayer or ‘cursing’ stones into the hollows of larger stones provides a possible intention for the **Inis Mór** pebble (fig. 6.15) (Forsyth 2016; Harbison 1995, 223-227; McGuinness 2013, 19-20). Similar rounded stones are known at the ecclesiastical sites of Inishmurray and Glendalough, including a small number with an incised cross on one face (McGuinness 2013, 19-20; Price 1959). In addition, a recently found example from the Isle of Canna, Scotland dating to the early 9<sup>th</sup> century is also decorated with a single cross and fits perfectly into a hollow of a cross slab in the churchyard (fig. 6.15) (Forsyth 2016). The inscription on the **Inis Mór** pebble is paralleled in the prayer texts on Irish reliquaries (see Chapter 5.1.1.) in which prayers for specific individuals are incised (Michelli 1996). Closer examination of the object may reveal wear marks on the text, but as Forsyth states (1995, 691), it is uncertain whether the inscription was on the stone when the object was in use or was added just prior to, and for the purpose of, deposition in the grave. Several different scenarios exist concerning this stone, wherein a pilgrim named ‘Bran’ came to the religious site with the stone, which was either already inscribed or was inscribed upon arrival, with text that was either written by Bran himself or by a literate person at **Inis Mór** or elsewhere. Regardless,

the stone ended up in the grave for the purpose of increasing the prayer for the individual named on the stone.



**Figure 6.15** Left: Early medieval cross-base from Iona (no. 99) with a rounded hollow at one corner for the turning of a stone (Forsyth 2016, fig. 2, from Historic Environment Scotland); Right: Rounded ‘cursing stone’ from the Isle of Canna, Scotland (BBC News 2012)

The two inscribed discs from **Stackrue**, Orkney and **Dunadd**, Argyll and Bute in Scotland are similar in shape, translation, and possible purpose. Both discs and their inscriptions can be described as amuletic talismans to invoke the protection of God (Barnes & Page 2006, 153-156; Okasha 1985, 64-65). The phrase ‘In Nomine’ (‘In the name of God’) on the **Dunadd** disc is also seen on the **St Ninian’s Isle** chape and the **Coppergate** helmet, in which it is explicitly used to invoke the power of the Lord on objects used in combat (Forsyth forthcoming; Okasha 1992c). The four sets of Scandinavian runes on the **Stackrue** disc are less easy to translate, but one quadrant is certainly **kop**, *goð*, ‘God’ (Barnes & Page 2006, 155; Holman 1996, 257-258). Further interpretations include the possible Old Norse word *tákn*, ‘token’ or ‘sign’, paralleling the **Whitby** spindle whorl Old English *wær*, ‘token of friendship’, but an alternative meaning is Old Norse ‘sign’, referring to the sign of God (Barnes & Page 2006, 156; Page 1999a, 170). No other portable Old Norse inscription in this corpus refers to the Christian God, although Christian inscriptions in Old Norse and Latin are not uncommon in Viking and Scandinavian epigraphy (Zilmer 2013). The incised cross on the **Stackrue** disc mirrors the cross on the **Inis Mór** pebble, reinforcing its Christian association, although it is uncertain if it was used for a similar purpose. Nevertheless, the portability and religious texts of the **Dunadd** and **Stackrue** discs encourage the understanding of the two discs as personal objects of prayer and contemplation.

The **Barton St David** stone and **Gorteen** axehead feature partial roman alphabets written in different ways which indicate two separate motives. Similar to the **Flixborough** ring text, the **Barton St David** alphabet (Text A) is skilfully written, with letter characteristics that reveal knowledge of manuscript writing (Brown & Okasha 2009, 138; Cramp & Higgitt 1984, 138). This, along with its



owner/maker texts, suggest that instead of a trial piece, the **Barton St David** stone may have been a sentimental Christian or talismanic keepsake (Cramp & Higgitt 1984, 138). Its function as a motif or trial piece should not be overlooked, however, as all sides of the object are carved with either letters or decorative animal and foliage designs. The otherwise unremarkable shape of the object may point toward it being used as a practice piece for future metalwork or stone carvings. Furthermore, Texts B and C may have been carved by two different hands as the handwriting of the two inscriptions appear to be different (Cramp & Higgitt 1984, 137-139), in which case a tutor-pupil scenario would make sense. There is, however, no reason to think that the **Barton St David** stone could have two functions, as both a motif/trial piece and a personal amulet, although its deposition into a spoil heap supports the former theory.

The letters on the **Gorteen** Neolithic axehead more closely resemble the other Roman alphabets in this corpus that point towards a novice at practice (see **Inchmarnock IS.38** and **IS.46**, **Kingarth II**, **Waltham Abbey**), possibly more through casual rumination rather than a formal learning environment. The axehead represents the reuse and reinterpretation of an ancient object in the early medieval period (Bradley 1979), similar to the sherd of Roman pottery from **Deansway**, Worcestershire (see Chapter 4.2.1.) (Page 2004a). Neolithic and Bronze Age stone axeheads are known from a number of early Christian sites such as Cahercommaun (Bradley 1979, 12; Raftery 1951, 13), and further examples of their reuse as surfaces for motif pieces come from Mullaghoran, Co. Cavan and Culbane, Co. Derry (Ó Meadhra 1979, 25, 31, 97). As to the biography of the **Gorteen** axehead, perhaps it was found by an individual in the early medieval period (between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries AD), kept as a personal possession, and then re-used as a writing surface. The individual who found the axehead may have wanted to keep such an ancient object as their personal possession, later using it as a writing surface. The re-use of prehistoric landscapes, tombs, and artefacts in early Christian contexts has been discussed as attempts to transform the past (pagan) and engage with the memory of ancestors in the new Christian framework (Edmonds 1999, 15-17, 51-55). It can also be seen as political measures to construct, legitimise, and empower local kingships (Driscoll 1998; Newman 1998). The axehead from Gorteen was unlikely to have been used as a tool in an early medieval context, and therefore its partial Latin alphabet was carved by an individual wanting to practice their writing in the context of Christian literacy. However, whether or not the writer understood the value of such an ancient object or merely needed an accessible writing surface is up for debate.

## 6.4 Summary of Inscribed Miscellaneous and Unidentified Objects (by Raw Material)

The most noticeable feature of the inscribed complete, fragmentary, and worked pieces of bone and antler is that they are predominantly inscribed with Scandinavian runes and in Old Norse, which includes seventeen out of the twenty-six objects. Only one object is inscribed with Roman letters, four with Anglo-Saxon runes, and three with ogham. Most of the objects in this category are unworked pieces of animal bone and antler (primarily cattle bone), and all of the objects in this category were

found at settlement sites, although one has an uncertain find-spot (**Derby** plaque). The inscriptions reveal that inscribing complete and fragmentary pieces of bone and antler was largely a practice in Norse-speaking communities, as most of the objects in this category are complete and fragmentary bone inscribed with Norse runes, dated between 900 and 1100 AD. Seven of these come from Viking-age **Dublin** and eight small fragments were found at **Orphir**, which may or may not be from a single bone. The Norse inscriptions that can be translated are composed of object-descriptive, humorous, and amuletic phrases that mirror similarly inscribed bone and wooden sticks from sites in Scandinavia such as Bryggen, which are dated slightly later than the material from Britain and Ireland (Barnes 1994; Barnes 2012, 106-108, 119; Knirk 2017). As the objects in this corpus were all found at settlement sites, they reveal a common practice amongst Norse-speaking communities of carving communicative and humorous messages upon ephemeral and easily accessible material. This in itself indicates that at least with Scandinavian societies, knowledge of runic writing was at the very least at a basic level, and instead of using it primarily for objects of precious metal, text was mostly used for social and casual means.

The bone and antler objects that were carved into a particular shape, presumably for a specific functional or decorative purpose, are inscribed with Anglo-Saxon runes, ogham, and Scandinavian runes. The only inscription that can be translated is the Old English religious message inscribed with Anglo-Saxon runes on the **Derby** plaque. The purpose for these objects is uncertain, with possibilities that range from a tool-handle (**Moynagh Lough**); a merchant's label, betting token, or amuletic plaque (**Bornais**); a bookmark or page-turner (**Derby**); and trial pieces (**Dublin, Southampton**). These suggestions are based on their similarity to other objects serving these functions, but because they are incomplete or lack evidence for attachment mechanisms, they are placed in this category as being unidentified. However, they do demonstrate that objects of worked bone and antler were inscribed by a wider range of scripts and languages than the unworked and raw material, which are predominantly Scandinavian.

The inscribed metal objects are diverse in their inscriptions and construction. They include small and decorative objects, fragments of unidentified objects, folded and cut sheets of metal, and complete and ornate metal objects with no apparent functional purpose. Most of the objects are small metal objects in the shape of discs, strips, or other forms, that either have no evidence for an attachment fixture, or have perforations or remnants of rivets, but they could have been attached to any kind of item including clothing, weapons, or ecclesiastical furnishings. Some objects are irregular in shape suggesting they may be pieces of metal waste that were used as accessible surfaces for writing practice (**Waltham Abbey, Winchester**). The only set of objects in this category that form a distinct group are the folded and cut plaques made of lead, inscribed with Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon runes. These objects are similar in form and their inscriptions, which consist of cryptic sequences and translatable words that link them with lead plaques in Scandinavia with amuletic properties (Barnes 2012, 112; 2015, 146; Gilchrist 2008; Olesen 2010; Pereswetoff-Morath 2017; Zilmer 2013).

The objects are mostly Anglo-Saxon in inscription and origin, with ten objects inscribed with Roman letters and six with Anglo-Saxon runes. Seven inscriptions are in Old English, three are in Latin, and six are in either Old English or Latin. Quite a few objects have inscriptions that cannot be translated for reasons including damage or breakage to the object and irregular sequences or forms of letters.

Amuletic, religious, and ownership and maker statements are also inscribed on these objects, indicating that they were perceived as personal items themselves, or if they had been affixed something else, they were attached to items of personal use such as a purse. The inscriptions demonstrate that inscribing small decorative metal objects was predominantly an Anglo-Saxon practice in early medieval Britain and Ireland, whilst the Scandinavian inscriptions are on metal objects that were not worn or displayed on the body or other objects. This pattern is mirrored on the dress-fittings (Chapter 4.1.4) and weaponry mounts (Chapter 4.3.1, 4.3.3), which are largely inscribed with Anglo-Saxon scripts and languages and less so with Norse runes.

Other objects in this corpus made of stone include the agate finger-ring from **Linstock Castle**, the shale hone from **Deer Park Farms**, the seal-die from **Evesham**, the steatite spindle-whorl from **Stromness**, the jet spindle-whorl from **Whitby**, and the limestone spindle-whorl from **Buckquoy**. Also made of stone are the slate tablets from **Inchmarnock** and **Kingarth**. The reason why the five inscribed stone objects form their own group is because compared to the objects just listed, the five do not fit comfortably into any specific category. Some may have been used for non-secular purposes, such as prayer stones or talismans (**Dunadd**, **Inis Mór**, **Stackrew**). Other objects appear to have been used as surfaces for writing practice (**Barton St David**, **Gorteen**). However, the objects could have also been held as personal possessions, seen as lucky charms or household accoutrements. They were not necessarily used exclusively in religious settings or for a single activity, although the object with the most likelihood to have had a single use as a votive object is the pebble from **Inis Mór** (Forsyth 2016; Harbison 1995, 223-227; McGuinness 2013, 19-20).

The inscribed stone objects share features such as inscriptions for writing practice and Christian texts, with two partial alphabets (**Barton St David**, **Gorteen**) and three prayers (**Dunadd**, **Inis Mór**, **Stackrue**). Along with the other objects in this corpus made of stone, they represent the use of accessible material for suitable surfaces for the inscribing of text, although the five objects maintain no obvious practical or domestic purpose and were more likely perceived as personal talismans and keepsakes.

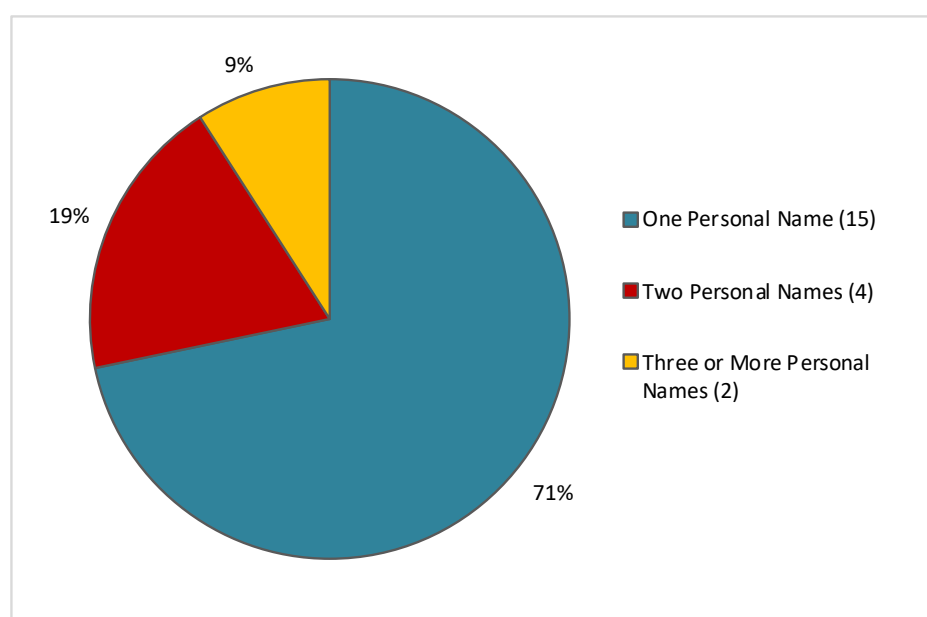
## Chapter 7 Analysis of Inscriptions

### 7.1 Personal Names

There are at least 102 inscriptions in this thesis (38% of portable inscribed objects) that consist of 133 names of individual people. This total does not include inscriptions which consist of the names of saints or Biblical figures, of which there are eight, nor does it include the mass-produced *Ulfberht* and *Ingelrui* inscriptions on sword blades, of which there are also eight. These inscriptions are not considered as personal names because they do not represent the identities of real people having their names inscribed onto objects. This total is probably an underestimate of the actual total, as it excludes uncertain inscriptions which have indications of what appear to be personal names, but are too fragmentary or worn to read; and further examples of names may be hidden among the many puzzling inscriptions in all scripts, especially runes and ogham, that have been described as ‘cryptic’ or ‘gibberish’. Also excluded are single runes, which may or may not be abbreviated forms of names. Scholars are usually quick to assume a difficult or uninterpretable inscription is a personal name, and if an inscription is incomplete, quick to assume that it originally included one. Considering the frequency with which personal names do occur in inscriptions, this is a realistic assumption, but one that needs to be approached cautiously.

Amongst these 102 inscriptions, fifteen are single personal names and six are two or more personal names by themselves without any supplementary text (Table 7.1). Sixty-four inscriptions are comprised of one personal name with supplementary text including owner and maker sequences or prayers. Fifteen inscriptions consist of two personal names, either by themselves or with further text, and eight inscriptions consist of three or more names. The majority of personal names are in Old English, of which there are seventy-eight (58%). Also included are ten Old Norse personal names (7%), thirty-four Old Irish/Early Gaelic names (25%), four Continental or North Germanic names (3%), two Continental Germanic or Old English names (1%), and one Pictish name. Three Latin inscriptions have names derived from medieval Norman, English, and Continental origins (**Chester** seal, **Chichester** cross, **Rome** hooked-tags). Seventy-six (74%) objects are inscribed with masculine names, including fifty-three Old English names, seven Old Norse names, twenty-seven names in Old Irish/Early Gaelic (35%), three Continental or Northern Germanic names, one Continental Germanic or early Old English name, and one Pictish name. In comparison, only fourteen objects are inscribed with feminine names including twelve Old English, one Continental Germanic, and one Old Norse name. Six objects are inscribed with masculine and feminine personal names together, and six are inscribed with names that cannot be interpreted. The most obvious difference between the masculine and feminine personal name inscriptions, other than the disparity in numbers, is that when the feminine names are by themselves they only appear in owner statements (mostly first-person), alone, or in Christian prayers. The masculine personal names are in inscriptions that are more diverse, consisting of single names, self-descriptive texts, owner, commissioner, and maker statements, and dedicatory religious messages. Furthermore, the feminine names are mostly engraved onto objects of personal adornments including

brooches and finger-rings whilst the masculine names appear on person adornments, weaponry, seals, unworked bone and antler, and reliquaries. When male and female names are together in one inscription they appear on an unidentified stone object as joint owner/maker statements (**Barton St David**), an unworked bone as casual graffiti (**Dublin IR 5**), a slate tablet as practice writing (**Inchmarnock IS.37**), a seal as official titles (**Wallingford**), a brooch as three male and one female name (**Ballyspellan**), and a memorial plaque as six masculine and one female name (**Flixborough**). For ease of discussion, this section will primarily focus on those inscriptions that consist of one or more personal names by themselves, with no additional text. Inscriptions with personal names and further texts are discussed in the appropriate sections of first-person inscriptions, owner/maker/commissioner/writer, and religious and commemorative inscriptions.



**Chart 7.1 Inscriptions with Personal Names by Themselves**

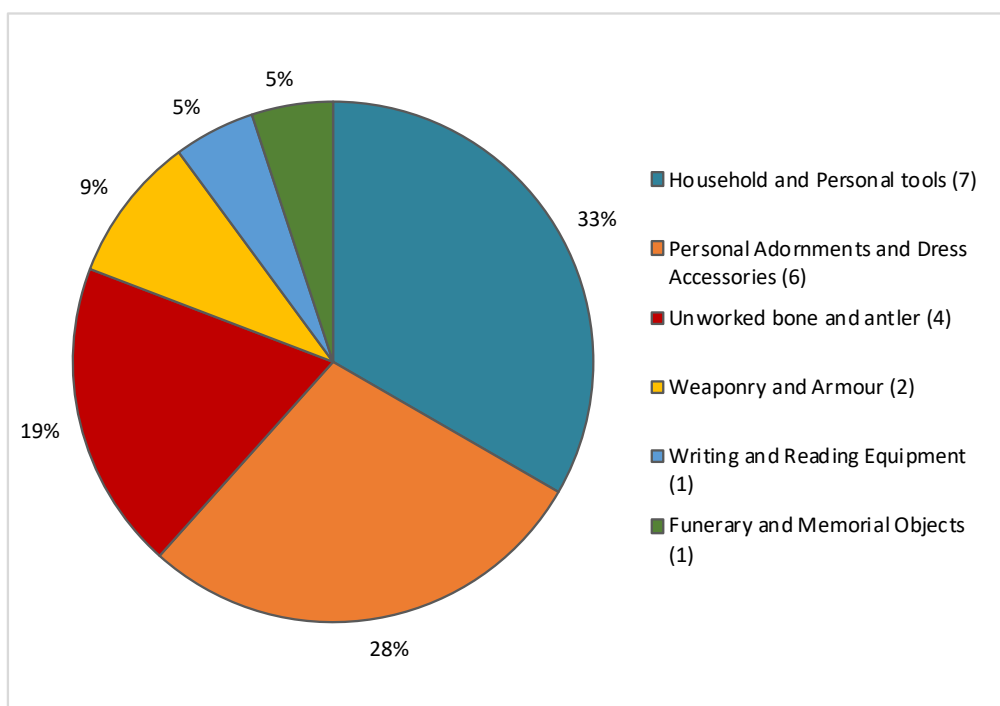
In total, there are at least twenty-one inscriptions that feature personal names by themselves or with other names, but with no additional descriptive or supplementary text. These include fifteen objects inscribed with a single name, four objects inscribed with two personal names (**Dublin comb I**, **Inchmarnock IS.37**, **Kilgulbin East bowl**, **London National Portrait Gallery bone**, possibly five with the **Suffolk ring**), one object inscribed with four Old Irish/Early Gaelic personal names (**Ballyspellan brooch**), and one object inscribed with seven Old English names (**Flixborough plaque**) (Chart 7.1). The purpose of inscribing ones name on an object appears to be highly varied. A single name by itself is usually regarded as the name of the owner of the item, or, when casually carved onto a piece of bone, the name of the one who wrote it. Two personal names could imply two separate or two contemporaneous possessors but, on a few objects it appears that two names were written as practice (**Inchmarnock IS.37**, **London National Portrait bone**). Multiple personal names could also imply multiple owners, at one time or at different periods in the life of the object, or for a commemorative purpose for those named in the inscription.

**Table 7.1 Inscriptions with Personal Names by Themselves**

Object Name	Object Type	Script/Language	Inscription
Alhstan ring	Personal Adornment	Roman and AS rune/Old English	‘+ Alhstan’
Ballinderry sword	Weaponry	Roman/Continental/ North Germanic	‘Hiltipreht’
Ballyspellan brooch	Personal Adornment	Ogham/Old Irish/Early Gaelic	‘A) ‘Maelmaire’ B) ‘Cellach the Midwife’ C) ‘Minodor the Noble’ D) ‘Maeluadaig son of Maelmaire’
Brandon tweezer	Personal Tool	AS runes/Old English	‘+Aldred’
Cynefrith ring	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	‘+Cynefrith+’
Dublin comb I	Personal Tool	Roman/Old English	A) ‘Ædwa[rd]’ B) ‘-ric’
Dublin comb II	Personal Tool	Ogham/Old Irish/Early Gaelic or Old Norse	‘Énnae/Áine’ or ‘Áki’
Dublin IR 4	Personal Tool	Scandinavian runes/Old Norse	‘Geirlak’
Elsted strap-end	Personal Adornments	AS runes/Old English	‘þ[-]æflæd’
Flixborough plaque	Funerary and Memorial	Roman/Old English	‘+Ealdwine, Ealdhere, Eadhæd, Eadwine, Aethelgyth, Eanbeorht, Æthelwine’
Guildhall bone	Unworked Bone	Roman/Old English	‘Ælfburgh/Ælfbeorht’ inscribed twice
Inchmarnock IS.37	Writing Equipment	Roman/Old Irish/Early Gaelic	A) ‘Dari-í’ B) ‘-tagán’
Kilgulbin East bowl	Household Tool	Ogham/Old Irish/Early Gaelic	A) ‘Renowned Cuillen’ B) ‘Renowned Cograðedena’
Kilmainham hilt	Weaponry	Roman/Continental/North Germanic	‘Hartolfr’
Mote of Mark bone	Unworked Bone	As runes/Old English	‘Athili’
National Portrait Gallery bone	Unworked Bone	AS runes/Old English	A) ‘Tatberht’ B) ‘-dric’
Royal Opera House bone	Household Tool	AS runes/Old English	‘Æthelward’
Sedgeford handle	Household Tool	AS runes/Old English	‘+Byrnferth’
St Albans bone II	Unworked Bone	Scandinavian and AS runes/Old English	‘Wulfric’
Swindon ring	Personal Adornments	Roman/Old English	‘+Buredruth’
Wardley spacer plate	Personal Adornments	AS runes/Old English	‘Ceolburg’

The objects that survive that are inscribed with one or more stand-alone personal names are widely varied but are predominantly items of dress, adornment, and personal tools (Chart 7.2). Seven objects in the category of household and personal tools include two combs (**Dublin I** and **II**), one tweezer (**Brandon**), a paddle or textile beater (**Dublin IR 4**), a possible needle-case (**London Royal Opera House**), an eating-utensil handle (**Sedgeford**), and a hanging bowl or lamp (**Kilgulbin East**). The six dress and personal adornment objects that are inscribed with single or multiple personal names include three finger-rings (**Alhstan**, **Cynefrith**, **Swindon**), one strap-end (**Elsted**), a linked-pin spacer plate (**Wardley**), and one brooch (**Ballyspellan**). The inscriptions on these objects appear to be mostly

primary, skilfully engraved as the focal point or main design of the object. Some of the texts look as if they were incised as a second thought or supplementary decoration onto an empty space. Other objects inscribed with unaccompanied personal names include four unworked pieces of bone (**London Guildhall, London National Portrait Gallery, Mote of Mark, St Albans II**), two swords (**Ballinderry, Kilmainham**), one slate tablet (**Inchmarnock IS.37**), and one commemorative plaque (**Flixborough**).



**Chart 7.2 Types of Objects Inscribed with Personal Names by Themselves**

Personal names do not need to be accompanied by a maker or commissioner text to suggest they could be the craftsman, patron, or donor of the object. Furthermore, the life of an object can encompass many stages of ownership throughout time, and a personal name inscribed on something does not mean that the object was owned by that one individual only before it was lost, deposited, or buried. In the case of the two rings of **Æthelwulf** and **Æthelswith**, the concept of royal gifting may be relevant, wherein the names on the rings were not necessarily those who owned or wore them (see Chapter 4.1.1). As discussed in the following chapter, the custom of social exchange through gifts, pledges, or compensation is a significant factor when studying portable objects, particularly where inscriptions are concerned. A single personal name could stand for the giver or receiver, with the object either produced for the purpose of giving and engraved to commemorate the event, or perhaps the object was originally in the possession of one and later re-used to symbolise a transaction.

An object could be inscribed with the names of multiple owners throughout the life of the item. Furthermore, concepts including gift or social exchange as well as keeping valued items as family heirlooms should be considered in light of inscribed objects. An object that will be discussed further in the following chapter is the brooch from **Ballyspellan**, inscribed with four names in ogham (Holder 1990, 14-18). Personal observation of the brooch suggests that not all the inscriptions were written by the same hand. Does this mean that the brooch was owned by four individuals at once, or do the four

names represent at timeline of personal property? Considering that one name is the Old Irish/Early Gaelic name Maelmaire and another is translated as ‘Maeluadaig son of Mailmaire’ (Katherine Forsyth *pers comms* 2016-2018), it would be reasonable to suggest that the four names represent a family, but not necessarily a contemporaneous one.

Particularly intriguing are the single ‘personal names’ on the ten sword blades in this corpus, which are usually described as the names of smithies or perhaps specific blacksmiths (Oakeshott 1960, 99; Stalsberg 2008, 16; 2010, 450). As demonstrated in Chapter 4.3.2, this has been challenged as possibly the names of bishops, abbots, moneyers, or perhaps not even personal names at all. Other theories behind these inscriptions include Christian invocations or marks of authentication or quality craftsmanship. These texts challenge the perception and understanding of what qualifies as a true personal name on early medieval objects, and whether such inscriptions imply direct personal affiliation with the objects or rather the impartial or symbolic signature, title, or mark of authenticity. In most cases, however, personal names on inscriptions are undeniably the names of actual people and can sometimes be identified as historical individuals. This can be seen on several of the finger-rings, seals, and predominantly the Irish reliquaries and shrines that feature the names of known kings and ecclesiastics. Scholars are quick to assume that personal names on objects instantly imply that the named individual was the owner of the object at some point, and quite possibly the only one who had owned it. This assumption is not unrealistic, but as the following chapter will demonstrate, the issue is not straightforward. Were the people named in the legends on the seal-dies (see Chapter 5.2.3) the exclusive owners and users of the objects, or would it be possible for individuals such as assistants to carry and handle them when necessary? When considering the double-sided comb from **Dublin (I)** (Okasha 1982, 89, no. 162), which is inscribed with two separate names on either face, do the two names represent two owners at one time? Two owners at different times? A gift from one individual to another or family members passing the comb through generations?

It is clear that personal names could be added to any object for a wide variety of reasons in the epigraphic world of early medieval Britain and Ireland. The evidence from this corpus of early medieval portable inscribed objects reveals that in the practice of adding personal names to things, a name could be professionally engraved as part of the design or personally carved onto an item to permanently and decoratively mark it as property, and to assure the memory of that individual endures. One may casually carve their name or the name of someone else upon an object for practice or out of boredom. A name could be placed onto the front of an object to publicly announce association with the object, deterring anyone else from claiming it as property, or on the reverse to be a private and discreet reminder. Personal name inscriptions are ultimately an attempt by an individual to terminate the free agency of a tangible object and to link identities with the material world.

## 7.2 Owner, Maker, Commissioner, Writer

There are forty-three inscriptions (16% of portable inscribed objects) in this corpus that allude to a relationship between an owner, maker, commissioner, or writer and the object. The owner, maker, commissioner, and writer inscriptions are not exclusive to one ethno-linguistic group in early medieval



Britain and Ireland and include Scandinavian and Irish epigraphy written in a variety of scripts, languages, and formulae. A wide range of objects are inscribed with these types of texts, including personal adornments (brooches, finger-rings, and dress fittings), household and personal tools and implements, weaponry, ecclesiastical items (reliquaries and shrines), and a number of unidentified metal objects. They are highly varied, ranging from base metal strap-ends (**Crewkerne**) to exquisite objects of metalwork (**Hunterston** brooch, **Lismore** crozier), to whale's bone (**Wallingford** weaving-sword) and leather (**Aachen**, **Dublin I** and **II**, **Trondheim**).

The inscriptions often times spell out the relationship of the individual to the object and its text. The most common are 'X owns this/me' (sixteen inscriptions), 'X made this/me' (thirteen inscriptions), 'X ordered me to be made' (two inscriptions), and 'X wrote this/carved' (three inscriptions). Eleven texts name more than one or two individuals and explain the different relationships each has with the object. Eight of these inscriptions are on Anglo-Saxon and Irish ecclesiastical objects that name the individuals who commissioned, made, and owned the items and in whose memory they were produced (see Chapter 5.1). Out of the forty-three owner, maker, commissioner, and writer texts, thirty-one (72%) are Anglo-Saxon inscriptions, of which sixteen employ the first-person formulae discussed below (see Chapter 7.3 and Table 7.6). Four (possibly five) Anglo-Saxon inscriptions are not in the voice of the object, including the **Canterbury** sundial which does not identify the maker or owner, and the **Derby** bone plaque, **Harford Farm** brooch, and the **Mortain** casket which name the writer, repairer, and maker by designating the objects as 'this'. The **Hertford** sword features an ownership inscription that is either unclear or incomplete and does not include a personal name. There are six inscriptions in Scandinavian runes that name the owner, maker, and writer (**Greenmount** scabbard mount, **Hunterston** brooch, **Lincoln** comb-case, **Rannveig** casket, **St Albans I** bone, **Stromness** spindle-whorl), and possibly one other that is incomplete (**Laws Farm** plaque). Three objects are inscribed with 'X owns this [object]' formulae (**Greenmount**, **Hunterston**, **Rannveig**), one inscription is a maker statement 'X made a good comb' (**Lincoln**), and two give the name of the individual who wrote the inscription, 'X carved the runes' (**St Albans I**, **Stromness**). These inscriptions only refer to the object or inscription as 'this' or 'the' instead of in first-person pronouns and are further discussed below in Chapters 7.2.1 through 7.2.4.

## 7.2.1 Owner

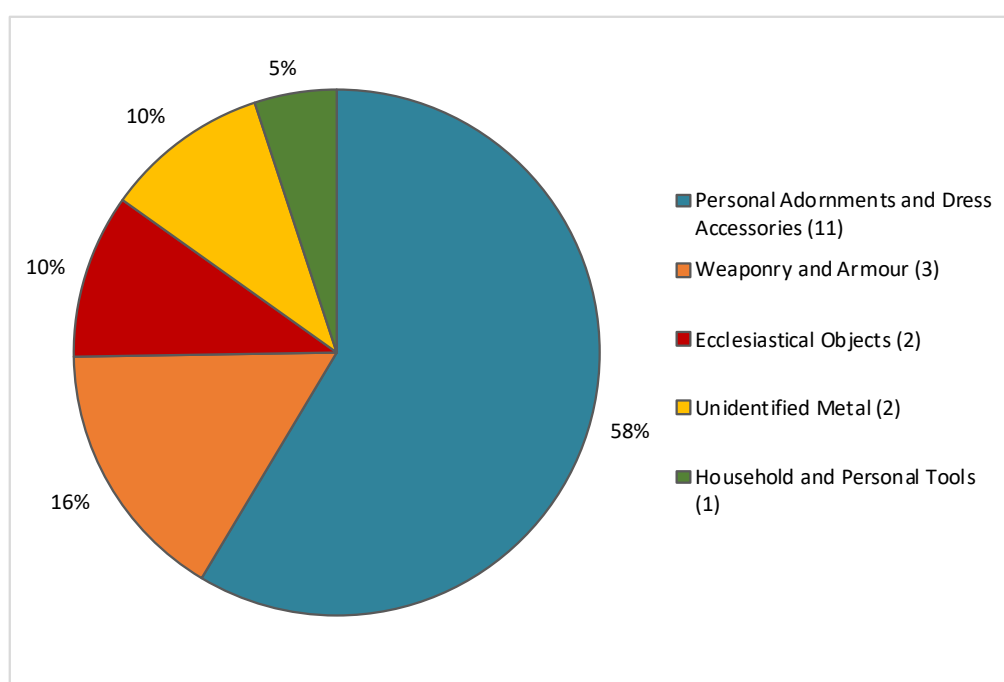
Nineteen inscriptions consist of statements of ownership, of which fifteen are an ownership inscription by itself and a further three objects are inscribed with a combination of an ownership and maker statement (**Canterbury** sundial, **Lancashire** ring, **Sittingbourne** seax) (Table 7.2). The objects inscribed with ownership texts include eight personal adornments (five finger-rings, three brooches), three dress fittings (**Crewkerne** strap-end, **Nuffield** strap-end, **Watchfield** fitting), weaponry (**Greenmount** scabbard mount, **Sittingbourne** seax, **Wareham** word), one personal and domestic tool (**Wallingford** weaving-sword), two ecclesiastical objects (**Canterbury** sundial, **Rannveig** casket), and two unidentified small metal items (**Hinckley** disc, **North Petherton** strip) (Chart 7.3). All but one of the nineteen ownership inscriptions feature the names of the owners, whilst the **Canterbury** sundial

does not name the owner nor the maker leaving the object open to be owned, possessed, and used by multiple people. Sixteen of the owner inscriptions are Anglo-Saxon texts consisting of twelve in Old English, one in Latin, and one in a combination of the two languages. All are written in Roman letters except for the **Lancashire** ring which is a combination of Roman letters and Anglo-Saxon runes, and all but two are written in the Anglo-Saxon first-person formula, 'X owns me' (see Table 7.6 and Chapter 7.4). Along with the **Canterbury** sundial, the ownership text on the **Watchfield** fitting does not follow this formula. The purse fitting pre-dates the other ownership inscriptions by at least two centuries and is written in older futhork runes. The inscription is somewhat incomprehensible, but it is clear that it identifies the purse fitting as a possession of one named *Hariboki* (Looijenga 2003, 287-289). Although it is ethno-linguistically linked to the other Anglo-Saxon objects and inscriptions, epigraphically, it falls outside the tradition of personifying first-person texts making it an example of an early ownership text in Germanic runes.

**Table 7.2 Owner Formulae Inscriptions**

Object Name	Object Type	Script/Language	Inscription
Ædelfled ring	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	'+ Ædelfled + owns + me'
Ædwen brooch	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	'+ Ædwen owns me...'
Bodsham ring	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	'+ [G/S]armund owns me'
Canterbury sundial	Ecclesiastic	Roman/Latin	'Salvation to the maker, peace to the owner'
Crewkerne strap-end	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	'Wulfstan owns me'
Cuxton brooch	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	'Ælfgifu owns me'
Eawen ring	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English and Latin	'+ Eawen owns me; may St Peter the Rock choose her'
Greenmount mount	Weaponry	Scandinavian runes/Old Norse	'Domnall seals head owns this sword'
Hinckley disc	Metal	Roman/Old English	'+ Wulfgifu owns me; owns me for her'
Hunterston brooch	Personal Adornment	Scandinavian runes/Old Norse with Old Irish/Early Gaelic name	'Melbrigda owns this brooch...'
Lancashire ring	Personal Adornment	Roman and AS runes/Old English	'+ Ædred owns me, Eanred wrought/made me'
North Petherton strip	Metal	Roman/Old English	'...he will always possess it...he who may not own me'
Nuffield strap-end	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	'-th owns me'
Rannveig casket	Ecclesiastic	Scandinavian runes/Old Norse	'Rannveig owns this casket'
Sittingbourne seax	Weaponry	AS runes/Old English	'+ Biorhtelm made me + Sigebereht owns me'
Steyning ring	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	'Æschwulf owns me'
Wallingford weaving sword	Weaponry	Roman/Old English	'+ Eadburg owns me + Eadburg owns me'
Wareham sword	Weaponry	Roman/Old English	'+ Æthe- owns me'
Watchfield fitting	Personal Adornment	EF runes/Continental Germanic/Old English	'For Hariboki, from Wusa/Hariboki's (possession), this one/Hariboki's purse'

Three objects are inscribed in Scandinavian runes and in Old Norse and read as ‘X owns this Y’ (**Greenmount** fitting, **Hunterston** brooch, **Rannveig** casket). Viking-age ownership inscriptions in Norse runes use the pronouns ‘this’, ‘the’, or ‘a’ rather than first-person pronouns that dominate the Anglo-Saxon inscribing tradition. In Scandinavia, the typical runic inscriptions seen on the numerous runestones, which date from as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century but are mostly of 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century date, feature the sequences ‘X raised this stone’ and ‘X carved these runes’ in memory of deceased loved ones (Andrén 2013, 267; Barnes 2012, 168-169; Spurkland 2005, 35, 87-96). This linguistic tradition evidently was a standard arrangement that carried onto inscriptions on portable objects and was brought over to Britain and Ireland during the Viking-age. The formula is seen on two runic inscriptions in the younger futhork as ‘X carved the runes’, inscribed on the bone from **St Albans I** and the **Stromness** spindle-whorl. It isn’t until the late Norse period in Scandinavia, i.e. after 1100 AD, that objects are given their own voices with the pronoun ‘me’. As in England, this appears to be as a result of the height of Christian conversion and consolation throughout Scandinavia, which ultimately opened up the North to a new literary culture (Steinsland 2011, 10).



**Chart 7.3 Types of Objects Inscribed with Owner Formulae**

It is possible that, in many cases, the owner inscriptions may also identify the writer of the texts. In the case of the **Wallingford** weaving-sword, ‘Eadburh’ may be the individual who wrote the identical texts naming her as the owner of the object (Okasha 2017, 208-209). With the more high-quality objects, there most likely was a separate artisan who made the objects, and possibly a third who composed and/or engraved the text (Okasha 2017, 211, 216). These include the more ornate finger-rings with owner inscriptions, such as the **Bodsham** and **Eawen** rings, which name the individuals who owned the rings and who were probably not involved with their manufacture. It is possible, however, that the individuals named on these objects had them commissioned or received the objects as gifts.

When applying the concept of gift exchange and object biography, these inscriptions take on a new dimension. A ring, for instance, could be owned and/or worn by multiple people throughout its life even though it may be inscribed with the name of one individual. The **Hunterton** brooch, for example, inscribed with the ownership statement, ‘Melbrigda owns (this) brooch’, may have been originally owned by someone else and given to Melbrigda for a pledge, or alternatively Melbrigda could have given the object to another person for the same purpose (see Chapter 8.4.1.1). The **Rannveig** casket, originally from Ireland or Scotland, was taken to Norway (probably via the Viking raids) and then marked with an inscription identifying ‘Rannveig’ as the new owner (see Chapter 5.1.1). With the ownership inscriptions that are inscribed as primary aspects of the objects (i.e. engraved onto the front), the objects were probably made with the original intent of being owned and used by the individual named in the inscription. In comparison, the ownership inscriptions carved as secondary texts (i.e. carved onto the reverse) could have been added at any time in the object’s life. Many people could have called an object their property until it was inscribed. Ownership inscriptions, therefore, can add to the discussion of object biography in terms of the movement and inalienability of material culture.

## 7.2.2 Maker

There are twenty-one objects with inscriptions naming the maker(s) (Table 7.3, Chart 7.4). Ten of these are ecclesiastical objects (reliquaries and liturgical items), five objects of warfare (**Aachen** sheath, **Dublin I** sheath, **Exeter** hilt, **Hertford** sword, **Trondheim** sheath), four personal adornments (**Canterbury** brooch, **Cuxton** brooch, **Harford Farm** brooch, **Lancashire** ring), one comb-case (**Lincoln**), and one unidentified metal strip (**Winterbourne**). Eleven maker inscriptions are by themselves, and ten combine a maker text with an owner or commissioner statement, of which seven are Anglo-Saxon or Irish reliquaries naming multiple people who were involved with the manufacture of the objects. Fourteen (67%) of the maker texts are Anglo-Saxon, which include eleven in Roman letters, one in older futhork or Anglo-Saxon runes (**Harford Farm** brooch), and two with a combination of Roman letters and runes (**Lancashire** ring, **Mortain** casket). Eight of the Anglo-Saxon maker inscriptions are in Latin (with Old English personal names), five are in Old English, and one object is inscribed in Latin and Old English (**Mortain** casket). Most of these Anglo-Saxon inscriptions are in the standard Old English formula of ‘X made me/this’, which, like the ownership texts above, would be quite familiar to the ordinary person, allowing for the craftsman to advertise his skill (Okasha 2017, 213). The maker inscriptions in Latin are in the common Latin formula, ‘X me fecit’ (‘X made me/this’). The exceptions are the **Canterbury** sundial, **Harford Farm** brooch, and the **Mortain** casket, which do not follow the standard owner/maker formula. It is important to make note of the alternate translation of the **Harford Farm** brooch (see Chapter 4.1.2), but for the sake of discussion the most widely accepted translation of ‘Luda repaired the brooch’ will be used. Like the object from **Watchfield**, the brooch and its inscription pre-date the personifying ‘X made me’ inscriptions of the late 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, reflecting an earlier epigraphic tradition prior to the advent of Christian literacy.

Table 7.3 Maker Inscriptions

Object Name	Object Type	Script/Language	Inscription
Aachen sheath	Weaponry	Roman/Latin	‘+ Byrhtsige made me
Brussels cross	Ecclesiastic	Roman/Old English	‘+ Drahtmal made me...’
Canterbury brooch	Personal Adornment	Roman/Latin	‘+ Wudeman made this
Canterbury sundial	Ecclesiastic	Roman/Latin	‘Salvation to the maker, peace to the owner’
Dublin sheath I	Weaponry	Roman/Latin	‘+ Edric made me
Exeter hilt	Weaponry	Roman/Latin	‘[L]eofric made me
Harford Farm brooch	Personal Adornment	EF/AS runes/Old English	‘Luda mended/made reparations with the brooch’
Hertford sword	Weaponry	Roman/Latin	‘Leuter made...’
Lancashire ring	Personal Adornment	Roman and AS runes/Old English	‘+ Ædred owns me, Eanred wrought me’
Lincoln comb-case	Personal Tool	Scandinavian runes/Old Norse	‘Thorfastr made a good comb’
Lismore crozier	Ecclesiastic	Roman/Middle Irish/Early Gaelic	‘Pray for Nial Mc Meicc Aeducáin for whom was...Pray for Nechtain, craftsman who made this object + made this object’
Mortain casket	Ecclesiastic	Roman and AS runes/Old English and Latin	‘+God bless Ædan/Ædda who made this chrisal’
River Bann bell-shrine	Ecclesiastic	Roman/Middle Irish/Early Gaelic	‘Pray for Máel Brigte for whom it was made, and for Macene, who made it’
Pershore censer	Ecclesiastic	Roman/Old English	‘+Godric made me’
Sittingbourne seax	Weaponry	AS runes/Old English	‘+ Biorhtelm made me + Sigebereht owns me’
Stowe Missal book-shrine	Ecclesiastic	Roman/Middle Irish/Early Gaelic	‘+Pray for Donnchad son of Brian, King of Ireland + and for Mac Craith descendant of Donnchadha, King of Cashel + a prayer for Donnchad descendant of Taccáin of the family of Cluna/Cluáin who made it/this’
St Columba’s book-shrine	Ecclesiastic	Roman/Middle Irish/Early Gaelic	‘Pray for Cathbarr ua Domnaill for whom was made this shrine and for Sitric Mac Meic Aeda who made (it) and for Domnall Mac Robartaig, coarb of Kells, for whom (it) was made’
St Molaise book-shrine	Ecclesiastic	Roman/Middle Irish/Early Gaelic	‘+ A prayer for Cennfailad, successor of Molaise who caused this shrine to be made for... + and for Giolla Baithin, goldsmith, who made it’
St Patrick’s bell-shrine	Ecclesiastic	Roman/Middle Irish/Early Gaelic	‘Pray for Domnall O’Loughlin, by whom this bell was made, and for Domnall, successor of Patrick, with whom it was made, and for Cathalán O’Maelchalland, the keeper of this bell, and for Cúdulig O’Inmainen with his sons who covered it’
Trondheim sheath	Weaponry	Roman/Latin	‘+-ic made me’

Winterbourne metal strip	Metal	Roman/Latin	‘Hoki made me...’
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Two Anglo-Saxon inscriptions name the owner and maker of the **Lancashire** ring and **Sittingbourne** seax. These inscriptions are in the formulas ‘X owns me, Y made me’ (**Lancashire**) and ‘X made me, Y owns me’ (**Sittingbourne**), identifying individuals who were involved in the production of the objects. It may have been that Ædred was not only the owner but also the commissioner of the ring from **Lancashire**, who sought out the expertise of Eanred to craft it. Alternatively, Eanred himself could have been the commissioner, having the ring made to give to Ædred. Similarly, Biorhtelm could have been the commissioner or craftsman of the **Sittingbourne** seax, and Sigebereht could have both designed and owned it. The inscribing of both names on these objects imply some relationship between the individuals, or alternatively, placing the maker’s name alongside the owner on an object of value may be a means of advertising or boasting on behalf of one displaying their connection with such a skilled artisan.

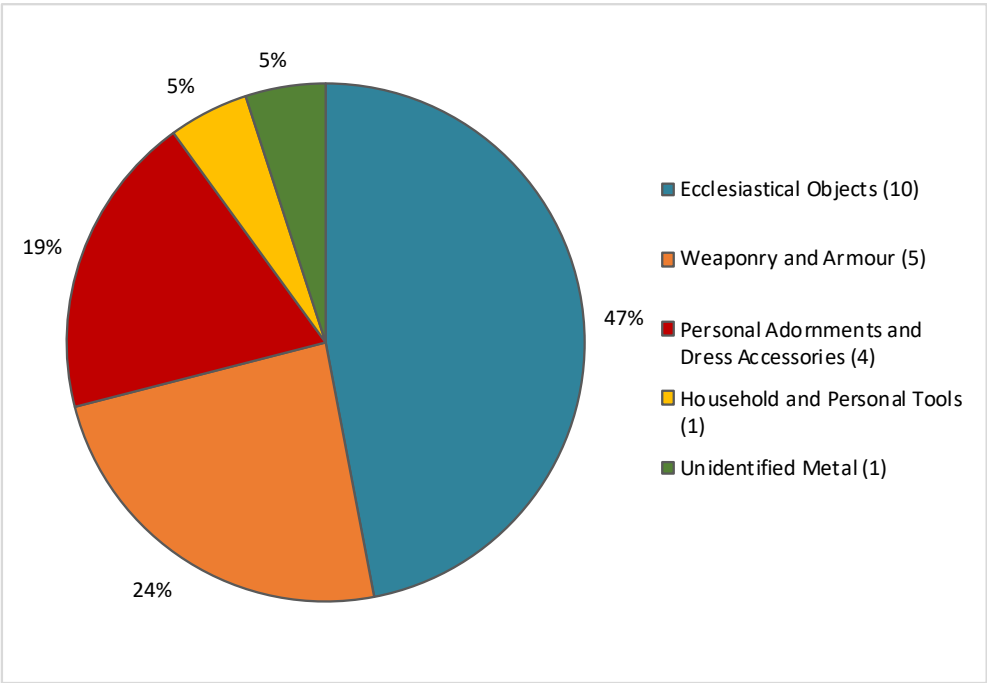


Chart 7.4 Types of Objects Inscribed with Maker Formulae

There is one maker inscription in Scandinavian runes. This inscription is on the **Lincoln** comb-case which names ‘Thorfastr’ as the maker of a ‘good comb’. Inscriptions of this sort are common in Scandinavian contexts predominantly seen on runestones in the form ‘X raised this stone’ and ‘X carved these runes’ (Barnes 2012, 71, 165-169; Spurkland 2005, 117). Many of these stones have the inscription, ‘X had the stone raised’, which implies that the raiser and the carver were not the same (Barnes 2012, 169). With this in mind, Thorfastr may not have been the maker of the comb and its case from **Lincoln**, but rather the patron who sought the expertise of a master comb-maker. If he was the maker, the inscription may have acted as an advertising tactic for a local comb-maker (Ashby 2013, 196; Barnes 2012, 107-108).

### 7.2.3 Commissioner

There is a degree of ambiguity in texts of the type ‘X made me/this’ as to whether they mean ‘physically made’ or ‘had it made’. It may be that examples of this formula actually refer to the commissioner(s) of the items (Okasha 1992b, 62). However, the fact that there are examples of inscriptions which explicitly refer to commissioners, perhaps implies that the unqualified ‘X made me’ typically did refer to the maker rather than the commissioner. Two Anglo-Saxon inscriptions are composed of a single commissioner statement (Table 7.4, Chart 7.5). These are the **Alfred Jewel** and the **Sigerie** finger-ring, which are both inscribed in the same Old English arrangement, ‘X ordered me to be made’ (Okasha 1971, 48-49, no. 4; 136-137, no. 156). In these two cases, those named in the inscriptions are certainly not those who physically crafted the objects, although it possible that both individuals also wore/used them (see Chapter 5.2.3) (Abels 1998, 239; Keynes 2003, 193). The **Alfred Jewel** appears to have been one of a set of objects commissioned by King Alfred (871 - c.886) and sent as a gift to his bishops (Abels 1998, 239; Hinton 2006, 129), thus, was the Sigerie ring a gift as well?

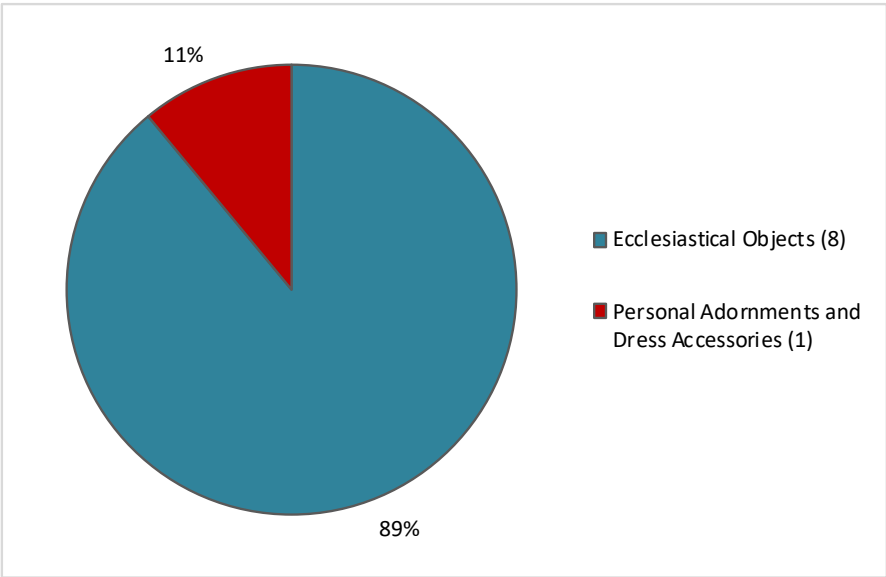


Chart 7.5 Types of Objects Inscribed with Commissioner Formulae

Table 7.4 Commissioner Formulae Inscriptions

Object Name	Object Type	Script/Language	Inscription
Alfred Jewel	Ecclesiastical	Roman/Old English	‘+Alfred ordered me to be made’
Brussels cross	Ecclesiastical	Roman/Old English	‘+ Drahmal made me...This cross Æthelmaer and Æthelwold his brother, ordered to be made for the glory of Christ [and] for the soul of Ælfric their brother’
Sigerie ring	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	‘Sigerie ordered me to be made’
River Bann bell-shrine	Ecclesiastical	Roman/Middle Irish/Early Gaelic	‘Pray for Máel Brigte for whom it was made, and for Macene, who made it’

Lismore crozier	Ecclesiastical	Roman/Middle Irish/Early Gaelic	'Pray for Nial Mc Meicc Aeducáin for whom was...Pray for Nechtain, craftsman who made this object + made this object'
St Columba's book-shrine	Ecclesiastical	Roman/Middle Irish/Early Gaelic	'Pray for Cathbarr ua Domnail for whom was made this shrine and for Sitric Mac Meic Aeda who made (it) and for Domnall Mac Robartaig, coarb of Kells, for whom (it) was made'
St Molaise book-shrine	Ecclesiastical	Roman/Middle Irish/Early Gaelic	'+ A prayer for Cennfailad, successor of Molaise who caused this shrine to be made for... + and for Giolla Baithín, goldsmith, who made it'
St Patrick's bell-shrine	Ecclesiastical	Roman/Middle Irish/Early Gaelic	'Pray for Domnall O'Loughlin, by whom this bell was made, and for Domnall, successor of Patrick, with whom it was made, and for Cathalán O'Maelchalland, the keeper of this bell, and for Cúdulig O'Inmainen with his sons who covered it'
Stowe Missal book-shrine	Ecclesiastical	Roman/Middle Irish/Early Gaelic	'+Pray for Donnchad son of Brian, King of Ireland + and for Mac Craith descendant of Donnchadha, King of Cashel + a prayer for Donnchad descendant of Taccáin of the family of Cluna/Cluaín who made it/this'

A different tradition of recording the names of commissioners (along with owners and makers) is found in Ireland where there are seven Irish reliquaries and shrines in this corpus dating between 1000 and 1100 AD, written in Middle Irish and in Roman letters. They follow their own standard formula beginning with 'pray for' or 'a prayer for' and then listing at least one or two, sometimes up to five, names of people who were responsible for the creation of the reliquaries (see Chapter 5.1.1) (Ó Floinn 1994; Michelli 1996). The key significance to these inscriptions is not only that, sometimes, the names can be linked to historical individuals including Irish Kings, bishops, and abbots, but in the corpus of portable inscribed objects they all show a particular attitude towards the use of text, which was standardised and wrapped up in the political and social parameters governing, and governed by, the Church (see Chapter 5.1.1) (Michelli 1996, 11; Overbey 2011, 170; Wycherley 2015, 159-160).

## 7.2.4 Writer

Although many, perhaps a majority, of name-only inscriptions probably refer to the writer of the text, only rarely is this relationship made explicit. There are three examples in this corpus that do so (Table 7.5). Two written in Scandinavian runes state 'X carved the runes' (**St Albans I, Stromness**). The identity of rune-carvers is often noted on Scandinavian rune-stones (in addition to the names of the



monuments' commissioner and commemorand(s)), perhaps because some were famous in their own right (Barnes 2012, 71, 165-169; Spurkland 2005, 117). There is only one Anglo-Saxon inscription that refers to the writer of the inscription. The **Derby** bone plaque is inscribed in Old English runes that state that 'Hadda' incised the inscription. This individual may have been the artisan of the object and the inscription, or alternatively the wealthy patron who commissioned the production of the plaque.

**Table 7.5 Writer Formulae Inscriptions**

Object Name	Object Type	Script/Language	Inscription
Derby bone plaque	Worked bone	AS runes/Old English	'God increases the possessions/honour of Hadda who incised this' or 'May God save the Hadda who wrote this'
St Albans bone I	Unworked bone	Scandinavian runes/Old Norse	'Thor- carved (the) runes'
Stromness spindle-whorl	Household tool	Scandinavian runes/Old Norse	'Gautr carved the runes'

In addition to these three inscriptions, it is possible that some of the maker and owner inscriptions may also refer to the individual(s) who made the inscription(s) in addition to the object(s) (Okasha 2017, 211, 216). This is probably more likely with the inscriptions that are carved secondarily onto the reverse of objects (i.e. **Harford Farm** brooch) or scratched somewhat clumsily (**Wallingford** weaving-sword), wherein someone else, perhaps the owner or wearer, wanted to add their names to an object or practice their handwriting. Inscriptions that are skilfully engraved as part of the primary design were executed by trained metalsmiths or craft-workers. In addition, the single personal name inscriptions that are scratched as secondary texts (i.e. **Elsted** strap-end) may also be the identity of the writer although this is not immediately articulated. As demonstrated, owner, maker, commissioner, and writer formulae are not always so straightforward and can be understood from many different levels concerning human-human and human-object relationships and the biography of material culture.

## 7.3 First-Person Inscriptions

First-person inscriptions are those incorporating the first-person pronouns 'I' and 'me' in which the inscription is in the voice of the object itself. They comprise a significant percentage of texts on portable objects including twenty-five objects in this corpus (Table 7.6). There are others in which the 'I' appears to be the voice of the owner or maker of the object, although the current incomplete condition of several of the inscriptions in this corpus makes it difficult to distinguish the two groups in every case.

That being said, there are at least twenty-five portable objects in this corpus (9% of portable inscribed objects) that are inscribed in the voice of the object, and a further two (**Bossington** ring, **Deansway** cross) that consist of first-person pronouns that are more likely to be that of the people who

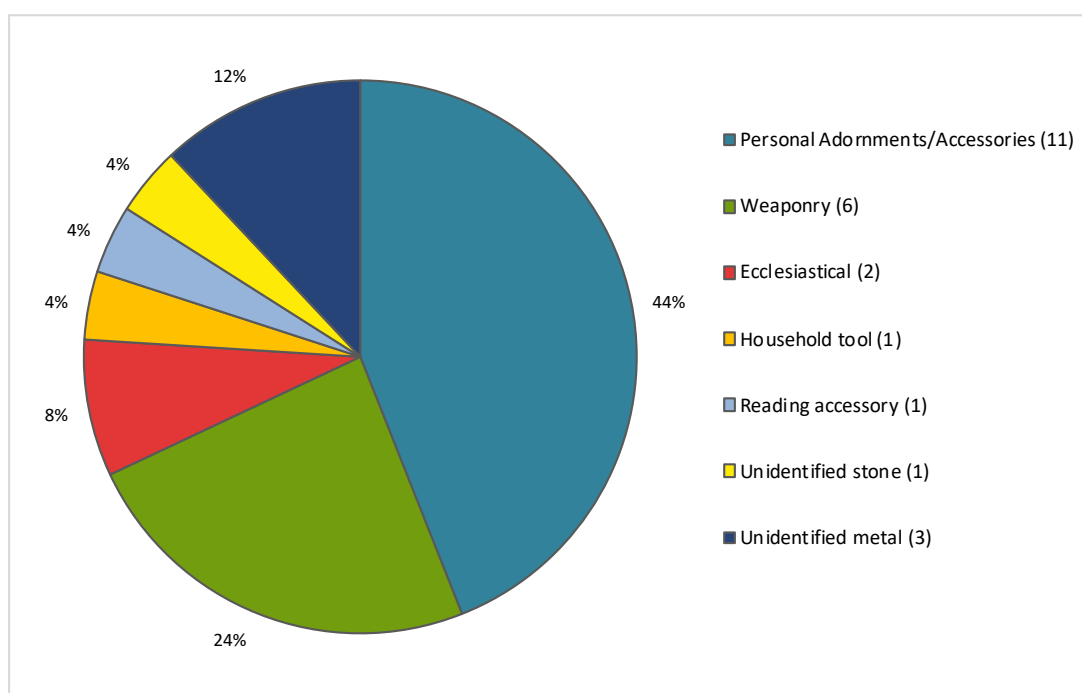
owned or made them. The **Hertford** sword and **Lund** pen-case lid are two further objects that may feature similar inscriptions; however, their texts are highly worn or incomplete and cannot be understood. These types of self-referential statements are remarkably common in Anglo-Saxon literature and inscriptions, appearing on portable and non-portable objects in a variety of material (Bredehoft 1992, 106). They are primarily represented by owner, maker, and commissioner statements in the form of ‘X owns/made me’, which give the name or names of individuals associated with the objects.

**Table 7.6 First-Person Inscriptions**

Object Name	Object Type	Script/Language	Inscription
Ædelfled ring	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	Owner, Masc
Ædwen brooch	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	Owner, Fem
Aachen sheath	Weaponry	Roman/Latin	Maker, Masc
Alfred jewel	Writing Accessory	Roman/Old English	Commissioner, Masc
Barton St David stone	Unidentified Stone	Roman/Old English	Maker and/or Owner, Masc and Fem (?)
Bodsham ring	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	Owner, Masc
Brussels cross	Ecclesiastic	Roman/Old English	Maker, Masc
Crewkerne strap-end	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	Owner, Masc
Cuxton brooch	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	Owner, Fem
Dublin sheath I	Weaponry	Roman/Latin	Maker, Masc
Eawen ring	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English and Latin	Owner, Fem
Exeter hilt	Weaponry	Roman/Latin	Maker, Masc
Hinckley disc	Unidentified metal	Roman/Old English	Owner, Fem
Lancashire ring	Personal Adornment	Roman and runes/Old English	Owner and Maker, Masc
North Petherton strip	Unidentified metal	Roman/Old English	Owner (?)
Nuffield strap-end	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	Owner, Masc
Pershire censer	Ecclesiastic	Roman/Old English	Maker, Masc
Sigerie ring	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	Commissioner, Masc
Sittingbourne seax	Weaponry	Roman/Old English	Maker, Masc
Steyning ring	Personal Adornment	Roman/Old English	Owner, Masc
Trondheim sheath	Weaponry	Roman/Latin	Maker, Masc
Wallingford weaving sword	Household Tool	Roman/Old English	Owner, Fem
Wareham sword	Weaponry	Roman/Old English	Owner, Masc
Wheatley Hill ring	Personal Adornment	Runes/Old English	Autonomous
Winterbourne strip	Unidentified metal	Roman/Latin	Owner, Masc

This section will focus on the inscriptions that are in the voice of the object itself, the so-called Anglo-Saxon ‘speaking objects’ (see Chapter 8) (Karkov 2011, 135). Not discussed here are those

inscriptions that refer to the object in a passive voice, such as ‘X made this’ or ‘X carved the runes’, which are seen in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian texts (see Chapter 7.2.4, 8.1). All of the first-person inscriptions and their objects are Anglo-Saxon in archaeological context, style, and text, and include sequences such as ‘X owns me’ or ‘X made me’. The objects include eleven personal adornments or dress accessories, six objects of weaponry, two ecclesiastical objects, one household tool, one object associated with the reading of manuscripts, one unidentified stone object, and three unidentified metal mounts or fragments (Chart 7.6). The data demonstrates that first-person inscriptions were more likely to be inscribed on secular objects, regardless of whether aspects of the inscriptions including initial crosses or seriffed letters imply religious backgrounds for the owner(s) and/or maker(s). There was clearly a preference for giving the power of speaking to personal objects that would be worn and displayed, particularly through the inscribing of finger-rings, of which there are seven (**Ædelfled, Bodsham, Eawen, Lancashire, Sigerie, Steyning, Wheatley Hill**). The other personal adornments and dress accessories with ‘speaking’ texts include two brooches (**Ædwen, Cuxton**) and two strap-ends (**Crewkerne, Nuffield**). This preference for giving voice to personal possessions can be associated with the idea of giving objects personhood and desirable qualities, thus endowing inanimate objects with agency (see Chapter 8.4.).



**Chart 7.6 Objects Inscribed with First-Person Inscriptions**

Of the inscriptions with first-person pronouns, eleven are ownership sequences comprised of ‘X owns me’ formulae, ten are maker texts as ‘X made me’, two are commissioner texts reading as ‘X ordered me to be made’ (**Alfred Jewel, Sigerie** ring), and two combine owner and maker formulae together as, ‘X owns me, X wrought/engraved me’ (**Eawen** ring) and ‘X made me, X owns me’ (**Sittingbourne** seax) (see Table 7.6). One inscription is indecipherable but is either an owner or maker text (**Barton St David** stone) and one inscription is an autonomous statement reading, ‘I am called a ring’ (**Wheatley Hill** ring). The majority of Anglo-Saxon first-person inscriptions on portable objects

are in Old English, with nineteen total. Out of this number, seventeen are in Roman letters, one is in runes (**Wheatley Hill** ring), and one is a combination of Roman letters and runes (**Lancashire** ring). Only five first-person inscriptions are in Latin, of which all are in Roman letters and are objects related, or suggested to be, weaponry. These include the three sheaths from **Aachen**, **Dublin I**, and **Trondheim**, the hilt guard from **Exeter**, and the metal strip from **Winterbourne** that could possibly be a decorative plate from a knife (PAS Ref, WILT-219C11). The two ecclesiastical objects (**Brussels** cross, **Pershore** censer), which both consist of maker sequences, are inscribed in Old English rather than Latin, which was probably intended to make the inscription more accessible and familiar to a larger audience, considering that most people probably couldn't speak Latin, even if they could read and write it (Bredehoft 1992, 106-107; Caie 2004, 12; Karkov 2011, 137; Pestell 2004, 39).

Bredehoft (1992, 106) notes that out of the portable and non-portable Anglo-Saxon first-person inscriptions, Old English is more represented than Latin, and whereas all of the Old English texts are ownership formulae, the Latin texts are maker sequences. He also states that whilst most of the Old English first-person inscriptions are on objects of precious metal, those in Latin are predominantly written on objects of stone, leather, wood, and non-ferrous metals. This is certainly observable amidst the material in this study, as the objects with Old English inscriptions are primarily gold or silver finger-rings or brooches, and those in Latin are on leather sheaths and one copper-alloy metal strip. The reason for this pattern is uncertain, but the rich pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon material culture, exemplified by the gold and silver objects inlaid with garnets from the Sutton Hoo hoard (Carver 1998), shows a preference amongst Anglo-Saxons for the lavish and extravagant. To Bredehoft (1992, 106-710), the fact that first-person inscriptions are mostly in Old English lies in the fact that people who were only literate in Old English were more likely to own precious objects, although this seems over-generalised and unsubstantiated.

The first-person inscriptions strongly invite discussion of the concept of agency (see Chapter 8.3.1.3). These inscriptions both enhance and take away the inherent qualities of the objects, ultimately changing them from mundane, alienable, and free objects to conscious, inalienable, and controlled beings (see Chapter 8.3.1.3) (Burström 2014, 41; Gosden 2005; Paz 2017, 59-61; Ramey 2013; Weiner 1992). The first-person owner texts give voice to nonhuman things, bringing out the internal power of the objects and allowing them to 'speak' for themselves and for those who own them and ultimately affect the ways in which the objects are perceived and treated by society. The inscriptions beg to be read aloud and understood, but surely not everyone who came across them would have the ability to do so (Bredehoft 1992, 103-104; Paz 2017, 24). Perhaps the power of the textual objects lies in the fact that only a small circle of literate individuals could translate the messages to those who could not read, or perhaps the visual and inherent power of an object with text was enough, even without being comprehended (Karkov 2011, 153).

## 7.4 Self-Descriptive Inscriptions

There are seven inscriptions that can be deciphered with relative confidence as self-descriptive texts (**Brandon** inkwell, **Caistor-by-Norwich** astragalus, **Dublin IR 12**, **Franks Casket**, **Orphir OR 15**, **Southampton** bone, **Wheatley Hill** ring) (Table 7.7) and five others that are difficult to interpret but attempts to do so have suggested terms identifying the objects (**Coquet Island** ring, **Dublin IR 7**, **Dublin IR 16**, **Wakerley** brooch, **West Heslerton** brooch) (Table 7.8). All of the self-descriptive inscriptions are in the runic scripts, including eight in the elder futhark or Anglo-Saxon futhorc runes and four in Scandinavian runes. The twelve inscriptions do not include those texts in which the object is identified in an owner or maker statement, such as ‘X owns this brooch’, nor does it include the seal-die inscriptions reading ‘the seal of X’, as these are discussed in the owner, maker, commissioner, writer category above. Also excluded are the inscriptions on reliquaries and liturgical items that identify the objects whilst recounting the names of the people who owned, made, or commissioned them (see Chapter 5.1). Instead, this category focuses on those inscriptions in which the object is the main focal point of the text, in which the identifying term is isolated, or the inscription describes where the object came from, what material it is made of, or what it is. For example, the solitary word for ‘knuckle-bone’ on the bone from **Southampton (Hamwih)** or the phrase ‘this is whale’s bone’ identifying the material used to construct the **Franks Casket**.

**Table 7.7 Self-Descriptive Inscriptions**

Object Name	Object Type	Script	Inscription
Brandon inkwell	Writing Equipment	AS runes/Old English	‘grew on a wild beast’
Caistor-by-Norwich astragalus	Gaming piece	EF runes/Continental Germanic/Old English	‘roe/of a roe’
Dublin IR 12	Unworked bone	Scandinavian runes/Old Norse	‘hart’s horn ? Aussar’/‘the deer’s antler lay at the river mouth’/‘the deer’s antler was the responsibility of/the possession of Üsar’
Franks Casket	Ecclesiastical	AS runes/Old English	‘this is whale’s bone’
Orphir OR 15	Unworked bone	Scandinavian runes/Old Norse	‘this bone was in the innards of/in fresh/flesh’
Southampton bone	Gaming piece	AS runes/Continental Germanic/Old English	‘knuckle-bone’
Wheatley Hill ring	Personal Adornment	AS runes/Old English	‘I am called a ring’

**Table 7.8 Possible Self-Descriptive inscriptions**

Object Name	Object Type	Script	Inscription
Coquet Island ring	Personal Adornment	AS runes/Old English	Possibly: ‘this is silver/this shield’
Dublin IR 7	Household Tool	Scandinavian runes/Old Norse	Possibly: ‘sharp tool, spike’
Dublin IR 16	Personal Tool	Scandinavian runes/Old Norse	Possibly: ‘spike, pin, stake’

Wakerley brooch	Personal Adornment	EF runes/Continental Germanic/Old English	Possibly: 'ring, jewellery, brooch
West Heslerton brooch	Personal Adornment	EF/AS runes/Continental Germanic/Old English	Possibly: 'necklace, collar, ornament, jewel''

The objects that display these texts are personal adornments including brooches and finger-rings, domestic tools, ecclesiastic items, and unworked bone and antler (Chart 7.7). The twelve texts that describe the objects are written in the runic scripts, of which three belong to the earlier corpus of Anglo-Saxon runic texts, dating between 400 and 600 AD. These include two brooches (**Wakerley**, **West Heslerton**) inscribed with possible Old English terms for 'brooch' or 'jewel', and one bone (**Caistor-by-Norwich**) with older futhork runes describing the bone as from a 'roe' deer. The phalangeal bone from Saxon **Southampton**, reading 'knuckle-bone', may also be of a similar date. Longer inscriptions addressing the inherent aspects of the objects date to 700 AD and after and describe the material of the object as well as its purpose (**Brandon** inkwell, **Dublin IR 12**, **Franks Casket**, **Orphir OR 15**, **Wheatley Hill** ring). Uncertain inscriptions from **Dublin (IR 7, IR 16)** may also describe the objects as 'sharp tool', 'spike', or 'pin'.

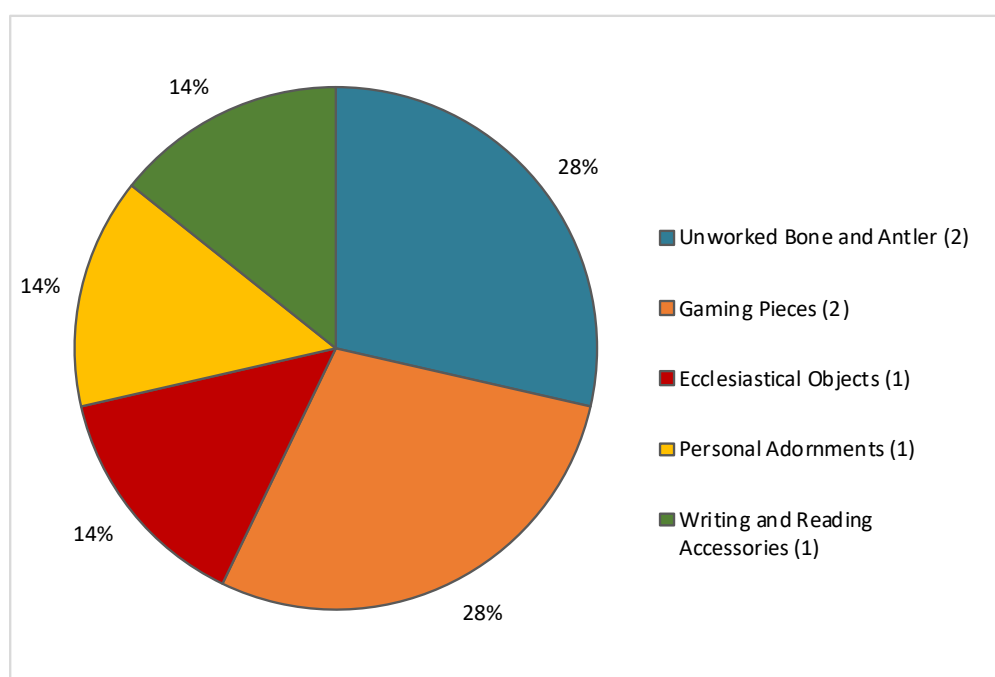


Chart 7.7 Types of Objects with Self-Descriptive Inscriptions

The primary question here is, why identify the object or its material in an inscription when this information would theoretically be obvious to anyone? The possible reasons range from the practical to amuletic, practice writing, and casual graffiti. Isolated self-descriptive terms regarding the object and the objects' material are common in the Continental and Scandinavian runic corpus, including 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century combs from the Netherlands reading **kabu** and **kobu**, 'comb', and a comb from Denmark reading **kabar**, 'comb' and **kama**, 'to comb' (see Chapter 4.2.2) (Imer 2018; Looijenga 2003, 109, 285, 304-305). Other examples include two objects from Trondheim: a 13<sup>th</sup> century stringed instrument

inscribed with Nordic runes reading **ruhta**, ‘lyre’, and a box inscribed with **[tr]æzur**, ‘jewel-case’ (Barnes et al 1997, 28; Page 1999a, 169). More direct is a 12<sup>th</sup> century piece of bone from Lund, Denmark inscribed with ‘this is a bone, this is a bone’, which Barnes (2012, 113) describes as writing practice. An inscription on a piece of bone as opposed to a functional object, for instance a musical instrument, would reasonably be more casual as graffiti or one practicing, or possibly expressing, their knowledge (Barnes 2012, 114). Although, the runes on the complete antler from **Dublin (IR 12)** may be a legal claim to possession or a note of authenticity by a craftsman (Barnes et al 1997, 41-42) (see Chapter 6.1.1.). Another practical purpose for inscribing objects with self-descriptive terms is exemplified by the two runic bones from **Caistor-by-Norwich** and **Southampton**, which were used as gaming pieces and possibly identified in their sets by their texts (Looijenga 2003, 285; Page 1973; Page 1970, 86-88). Self-descriptive inscriptions are also described as amuletic enhancements and reinforcements of the inherent properties of the objects (Fischer et al 2008, 73; MacLeod & Mees 2006, 82), which could explain the multiple combs inscribed with ‘comb’ (see Chapter 4.2.2.) and why one would carve ‘lyre’ on their treasured instrument.

## 7.5 Alphabets and Alphabetical Sequences

There are nineteen objects in this corpus (6% of the total) that are inscribed with whole or partial alphabetical sequences in one or more of the four scripts found in Ireland and Britain: eight in Roman letters, five in Anglo-Saxon runes, six in Scandinavian runes (the **Penrith** brooch has two), and the only alphabet in ogham on a slate from **Inchmarnock (IS.36)** (Chart 7.8). Fifteen objects are inscribed with alphabetical sequences by themselves, and four are inscribed with short or long alphabetical sequences along with personal names or religious hymns. Epigraphic alphabets on stone monuments have been explained as either teaching aids or amuletic texts, but as demonstrated by the evidence on portable objects, alphabetic letters could also be used for decorative and practical purposes, although sometimes it is difficult to discern between practice writing and purposeful decoration. Eleven alphabet inscriptions appear have been added as amuletic and/or decorative text, either inscribed as part of the primary and central decoration and two are carved onto the reverse or underneath part of the object as a hidden and private text. Six objects are inscribed with partial, whole, or disorganised alphabetical letters in a form that suggest the texts were written as handwriting exercises. These include the slate tablets from **Inchmarnock (IS.36, IS.38)** and **Kingarth (II)**, which are monastic centres on and near the Isle of Bute that were used for the learning of literacy (see Chapter 5.2.1). The only ogham alphabet in this corpus is inscribed on one of these tablets (**IS.36**) and is a rare piece of evidence for ogham being taught in an intellectual environment.

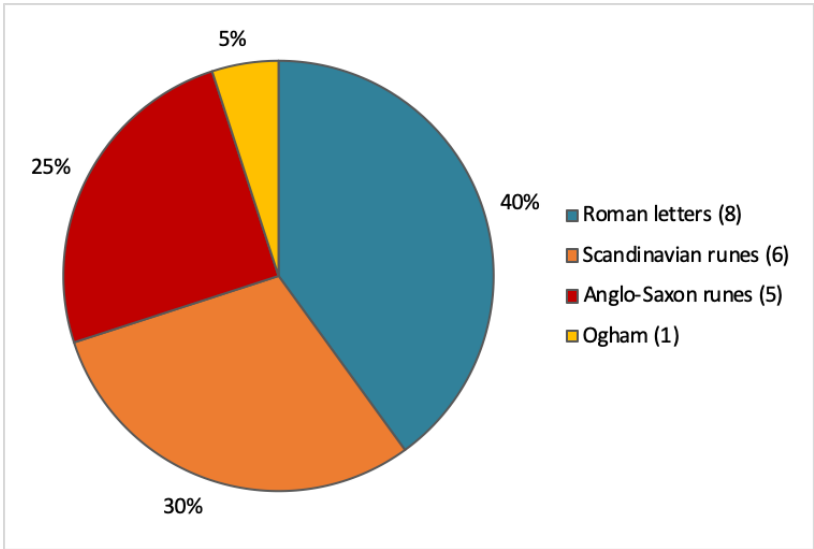


Chart 7.8 Scripts of the Alphabet and Alphabetical Sequence Inscriptions

### 7.5.1 Runic Alphabets

The ten runic alphabets in this corpus include five Anglo-Saxon and six Scandinavian inscriptions (Table 7.9). The Anglo-Saxon *futhorcs* date between 600 and 1000 AD and are inscribed on four circular pin-heads (**Bardney**, **Brandon**, **Cumwhitton**, **Malton**) (see Chapter 4.1.6) and one long-seax (**London Battersea**) (see Chapter 4.3.4). The only *futhorc* that is not part of the main design are the first sixteen letters inscribed onto the reverse of the **Brandon** pin head, whilst the other three *futhorcs* are skillfully engraved as the focal point of the objects. The placing of an entire *futhorc* on the **Battersea** seax (which is the only complete epigraphic Anglo-Saxon *futhorc*) appears to be intended to be amuletic, carved onto a prestigious weapon to empower it and placed alongside the name of the owner of the blade (Page 1964, 120). Arguably, however, the intricate inlay of the letters suggests the inscription was also meant to be decorative, not only enhancing the power of the object but also the stature of the one who wielded it.

Table 7.9 Runic Alphabetical Inscriptions

Object Name	Object Type	Script	Inscription/Placement
Bardney pin	Personal Adornment	Anglo-Saxon runes	Partial/Front
Brandon pin	Personal Adornment	Anglo-Saxon runes	Partial/Reverse
Brough of Birsay bear tooth	Personal Adornment	Scandinavian runes	Partial/Front
Burray Bu spindle-whorl	Household Tool	Scandinavian runes	Partial/Front
Cumwhitton pin	Personal Adornment	Anglo-Saxon runes	Partial/Front
Dublin comb IR 14	Personal Tool	Scandinavian runes	Partial/Front



Dublin IR 11	Household Tool	Scandinavian runes	Whole/Front
Battersea seax	Weaponry	Anglo-Saxon runes	Whole/Front
Malton pin	Personal Adornment	Anglo-Saxon runes	Partial/Front
Penrith brooch	Personal Adornment	Scandinavian runes (x2)	Whole and Partial/Front

Christianity in England brought about a new purpose and use for Old English runes, one which can be seen on a number of portable inscribed objects including the four runic *futhorcs*. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century Pope Gregory wrote to Abbot Mellitus in England instructing him to embrace and modify the pagan customs in an attempt to convert the Anglo-Saxons, which undoubtedly included the adoption and adaptation of Anglo-Saxon runes (Colgrave & Mynors 1969, i.30; Halsall 1981, 15; Halsall 1989, 486). Runes are seen in manuscripts beginning in the 8<sup>th</sup> century interspersed amongst Roman letters for cryptographic purposes, used as scribal signatures, notes within the margins, and as ornamental capitals (Derolez 1954, 385; Halsall 1981, 13, 18; Symons 2016, 18). More frequently the entire *futhorc* is written either in its full sequence or broken up into elaborately composed stanzas detailing each letter's rune name, value, and Roman letter equivalent (Derolez 1954, 2; Halsall 1981, 17; Parsons 1994, 196). In this context, all five Anglo-Saxon runic *futhorcs* show influence from manuscript runes, with particular rune-forms and seriffed letters linking them with learned literacy in a Christian milieu (Page 1991a, 83). Considering the prominence and skillful execution of the partial *futhorcs* on the **Bardney**, **Malton** and **Cumwhitton** pin-heads, the texts could be amuletic and/or decorative bringing together the old pagan and new Christian faiths (see Chapter 4.1.6). They were placed onto the objects for the public to see them, and as items of dress they would have been viewed as displays of status and education. The *futhorc* on the **Brandon** pin was probably more for personal reflection as it would have been hidden when the pin was worn rather than prominently displayed. There is also the possibility that the **Brandon** *futhorc* was written by one practicing or demonstrating their proficiency either casually or deliberately. The **Bardney** *futhorc* begins with the letter x, ʃ, rather than the initial 'futhorc', and features the last eleven letters of the runic alphabet. This may suggest that it was once part of a pair of pin-heads wherein its companion held the first, and most recognisable, part of the sequence.



Figure 7.1 The near-complete *futhark* on the reverse of the hoop of the Penrith  
 (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, object no. 1991,0109.2, asset no. 1297128001)

In contrast, the six Scandinavian *futharks* in this corpus are carved predominantly on organic material including one bear’s tooth (**Brough of Birsay**), a cattle femur (**Burray Bu**), antler from a deer (**Dublin comb IR 14**), and wood (**Dublin IR 11**). The only object of metal is a silver penannular brooch (**Penrith**) with one near-complete *futhark* inscribed on the hoop and the first two letters of a second on one terminal (fig. 7.1). All five objects and their inscriptions are dated between the mid 9<sup>th</sup> to late 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, noticeably later than the Anglo-Saxon portable *futhorc* texts, and have been interpreted as amuletic (Barnes et al 1997, 39, 44-45; Barnes & Page 2005, 189-191, 333). In Scandinavia, *futhark* rows appear to have been used as lucky charms, protective formulae, and writing practice (Barnes & Page 2006, 190-191; Barnes 2012, 115). Some of the earliest runic objects have *futhark* inscriptions including two 6<sup>th</sup> century bow-fibulas, one from Budapest with an ownership sequence and the other from Beuchte, Germany which has a personal name following its futhark, similar to the **London Battersea** seax (Looijenga 2003, 226, 230). Two additional 6<sup>th</sup> century brooches from Charnay, France and Weingarten have a partial *futhark* with ‘may he/she discover/get to know X’ (Looijenga 2003, 236), which further supports the idea of the runic *futhark* used as a charm to obtain the desires, wishes, and needs of the individual who wrote or possesses it.

### 7.5.2 Roman Alphabets

Alphabets in the Roman script, either complete or partial, are written on metalwork (**Derrynaflan** paten, **Flixborough** ring, **Waltham Abbey** spillage), stone (**Barton St David**, **Gorteen**, **Inchmarnock IS.38**, **Kingarth**), and leather (**Dublin**) as both primary and secondary inscriptions (Table 7.10). As epigraphic phenomena, they reflect a wide variety of purposes including practice writing, functional and practical inscriptions (as letters to guide the process of production), as well as having a potentially amuletic significance. In 8<sup>th</sup>-century English manuscripts alphabets are frequently seen written within the margins, written as ‘abcederian’ poems using each letter of the English alphabet in hymn books, and in Anglo-Saxon medical texts, reveal a religious significance for alphabetical systems (Halsall 1981, 42; Pestell et al 2009, 138; Sims-Williams 1990, 299-300). The ring from **Flixborough** (see Chapter 4.1.1.), engraved with a partial Roman alphabet, may be such an example of an amuletic alphabet, although it may also hold the intention of the wearer to boast their knowledge and status (Brown & Okasha 2009, 141).

**Table 7.10 Roman letter Alphabets and Alphabetical Sequences**

Object Name	Object Type	Inscription/Placement
Barton St David stone	Personal Adornment	Partial/Front
Derrynaflan paten	Ecclesiastical	Whole/Hidden
Dublin leather strap	Personal Tool	Partial/Front
Flixborough ring	Personal Adornment	Partial/Front
Gorteen axehead	Stone	Partial/Front
Inchmarnock IS.38	Writing Equipment	Partial/Front

Kingarth slate II	Writing Equipment	Partial/Front
Waltham Abbey spillage	Metal	Whole/Front

The inscriptions from **Gorteen**, **Waltham Abbey**, **Inchmarnock (IS.38)**, and **Kingarth (II)** are examples of epigraphic Roman alphabets representing individuals practicing their handwriting in domestic and monastic environments or as leisure distractions (see Chapters 5.2.1. and 6.2.) (Anderson 1900; Forsyth & Tedeschi 2008; Okasha 1976). Also possibly practice writing is the partial alphabet on the **Barton St David** stone, although this may also represent an amuletic function (see Chapter 6.3.). The alphabet on the **Dublin** leather piece may be practice as well, possibly a leatherworker honing his inscribing skills on a scrap of leather, or alternatively a botched project that was discarded (see Chapter 4.2.1.). The arrangement of alphabetical letters on the **Derrynaflan** paten are exceptional in this corpus as they represent a functional and practical use of an alphabet, in which the letters act as assembly marks to guide the production of the object (see Chapter 5.1.2.) (Brown 1993a, 163; Stokes 1878, 123-126).

There is an inclination to immediately classify Roman letter alphabets as evidence for writing practice whilst runic alphabets, particularly those of Scandinavian runes, are largely discussed as amuletic ‘magic’ (Barnes 2012, 111; 2006, 190). The terms ‘amulet’ and ‘amuletic’ in this sense are meant to refer to an object or text that is meant to invoke protection, healing, or luck from supernatural forces. It is the predilection of many scholars to assume a runic *futhark/futhorc* was written for such purposes, which is not unreasonable, but other purposes for carving alphabets should be considered, such as writing practice, to demonstrate literacy, as casual doodles, and for aesthetic and decorative reasons (Barnes 2012, 111, 115; Barnes & Page 2006, 190-191; Page 1964, 120; Seim 1998, 164-197).

## 7.6 Religious Inscriptions

There are fifty-four objects (20% of the total) in this corpus that have inscriptions that are religious in some form. This is a broad category, including all inscriptions that involve prayers, dedications, the names of saints, and biblical passages or phrases. They are distinguished by the linguistic content of the texts rather than symbols or imagery on the objects. This number does not include those inscriptions that incorporate crosses as punctuation, because these can be found in texts that are entirely secular in content, although a brief discussion about their epigraphic use will follow. Also not included in this number are owner inscriptions involving the name of individuals who are identified as an ecclesiastic, such as seal dies owned by bishops. The religious inscriptions are predominantly Christian, although one object makes reference to the Nordic gods (**Saltfleetby** spindle-whorl), another to Allah (**Ballycotton** brooch), and another tells stories from Christian, Roman, Jewish, and Germanic mythology (**Franks Casket**) (see Chapter 5.1.4).

Forty-four religious inscriptions are in Roman letters (79%), of which twenty-nine are in Latin and eleven are in Middle Irish/Early Gaelic (Chart 7.9 and 7.10). The remaining Roman letter

inscriptions include three in Old English (**Ædwen** brooch, **Beverley** crozier, **Brussels** cross) and one in Old English and Latin (**Eawen** ring). Seven religious inscriptions are in Anglo-Saxon runes including four in Old English (**Derby** bone plaque, **Honington** tweezers, **Mortain** casket, **Shropham** plaque), one in Latin (**March** plaque), and three in Old English and Latin together (**Franks Casket**, **Gandersheim** casket, **Whitby** comb). Two inscriptions are written in Scandinavian runes and in Old Norse (**Saltfleetby** spindle-whorl, **Stackrue** disc) and one inscription is in Kufic Arabic script (**Ballycotton** brooch). The **Mortain** casket features two different inscriptions, one Anglo-Saxon runes in Old English and the other written in Roman letters and in Latin. The predominance of Roman letters and Latin for the religious inscriptions demonstrates the level of power that the Christian church had on literacy in Britain and Ireland in the early medieval period, whilst the vernacular in England and Ireland was used to make religion more accessible to non-Latin-speaking people (Karkov 2011, 137; Okasha 2017, 207; Spiech 2012, 64).

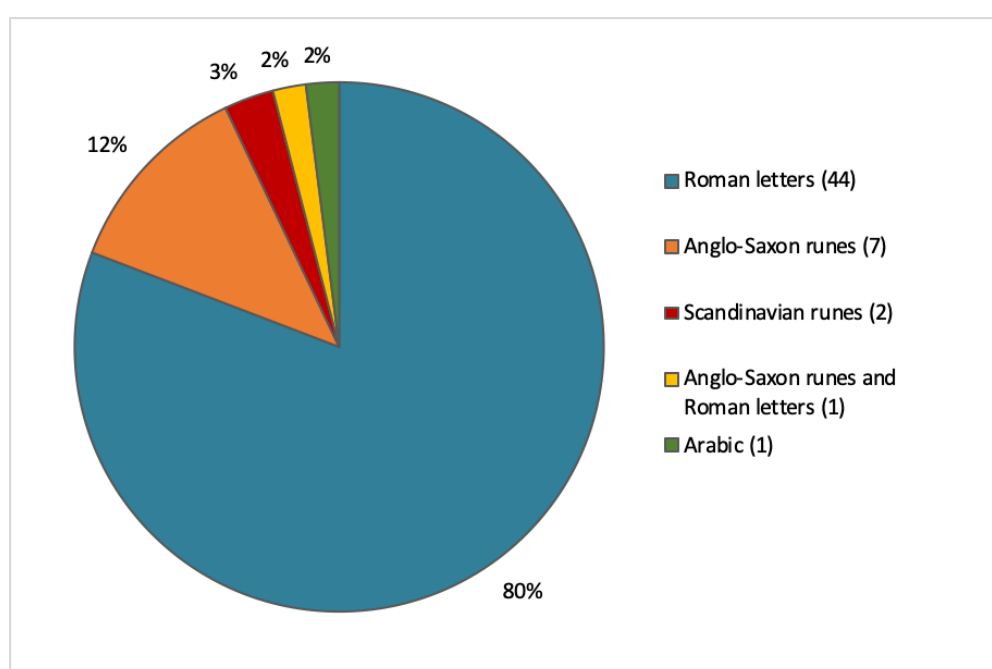


Chart 7.9 Scripts of the Religious Inscriptions by Object

Just under half of the religious texts in this corpus are written on objects directly related to the Church (Chart 7.11), including fourteen portable reliquaries and shrines (see Chapter 5.1.1), eight liturgical items (see Chapter 5.1.2), one decorative box of whale's bone (**Franks Casket**) and six funerary crosses and plaques. The other twenty-four objects include ten personal adornments (six finger-rings, three brooches, one pendant), four personal tools (two combs, one pair of tweezers, one spindle-whorl), two objects of warfare (**St Ninian's Isle** chape, **Coppergate** helmet), two unidentified metal mounts (**Limpsfield Grange**, **Staffordshire Hoard**), three stone discs (**Dunadd**, **Inis Mór**, **Stackrue**), one decorative bone plaque (**Derby**), one slate tablet (**Inchmarnock IS.36**), and one set of wax writing tablets (**Springmount Bog**). The wide variety of objects with religious texts demonstrate that the inscriptions were placed upon objects for many reasons including personal meditation, public declarations and prayers, commemorative rituals, and for practical and functional purposes. The religious inscriptions are carved as both primary and secondary texts on these objects, ultimately

transforming them into vehicles through which faith is expressed and prayers are requested and heard. They are placed visibly onto the front of the objects, such as a finger-ring or reliquary, publicly displaying a connection with the Lord. They are also carved onto the reverse as a secondary reminder (**Ædwen** brooch) or hidden as a private message (**Derrynaflan** paten) between God and the individual. Features of the texts show professional craftsmanship, with careful and skilled engraving, and secondary incisions written as a casual and/or personal meditation. Religious messages were engraved on personal items such as finger-rings as small, yet powerful, expressions of identity. Individuals devoted to their faith could inscribe prayers for themselves onto their personal items such as combs and tweezers for private and convenient acts of worship. In addition, religious texts were used for protection against theft, demonstrated by the inscription on the **Ædwen** brooch, warning would-be thieves from taking her beloved brooch (see Chapter 4.1.2.). In the same breath, **Ædwen** claims ownership of the brooch and allows herself to be owned by the Lord.

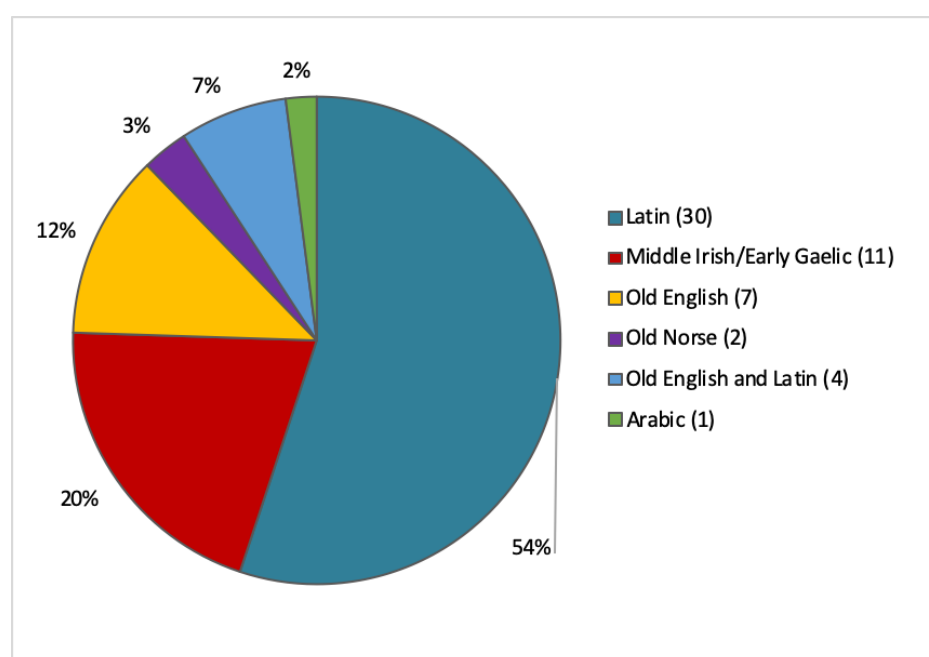


Chart 7.10 Languages of the Religious Inscriptions by Object

Twenty-seven objects consist of at least one personal name in their inscriptions along with a prayer element. Twenty-two of these inscriptions are in Roman letters, four are in Anglo-Saxon runes (**Derby** bone plaque, **Mortain** casket, **Shropham** plaque, **Whitby** comb), and one is in Scandinavian runes (**Saltfleetby** spindle-whorl). They include prayers for those named in the texts as well as dedicatory or commemorative statements. Whilst the Anglo-Saxon objects are in Latin and/or Old English, the Irish texts are all in Middle Irish/Early Gaelic and are mostly 11<sup>th</sup> century dedicatory inscriptions on reliquaries that begin with ‘A prayer for’ or ‘Pray for’ (see Chapter 5.1.1). These are complex inscriptions, often consisting of two or more personal names, of which some can be traced to known historical figures in Ireland referring to the keepers, commissioners, and craftsmen of the objects (Michelli 1996). The personal names in Anglo-Saxon religious inscriptions include owner and maker sequences (i.e. ‘X owns me’, ‘X made this’) asking for prayers and warning would-be thieves. The spindle-whorl from **Saltfleetby** calls for the help from the Nordic gods Óðinn, Heimdallr, and Þjálfa to

help one named *Úlfjótr* and possibly one other (PAS Ref, LIN-D9A22), similar to the way that the **Whitby** comb asks for help from the Lord for one named *Cyne-* (Page 1999a, 164-165). Invocative prayers are placed alongside personal names on the **Coppergate** helmet and **St Ninian's Isle** chape, which would have empowered the objects and protected their warriors during battle (see Chapter 4.3.5. and 4.3.3.). A similar text, although without a personal name, is seen on the metal strip from the **Staffordshire Hoard** (see Chapter 6.2.1), which was likely also attached to an object for combat, although the exact function of the strip is unknown.

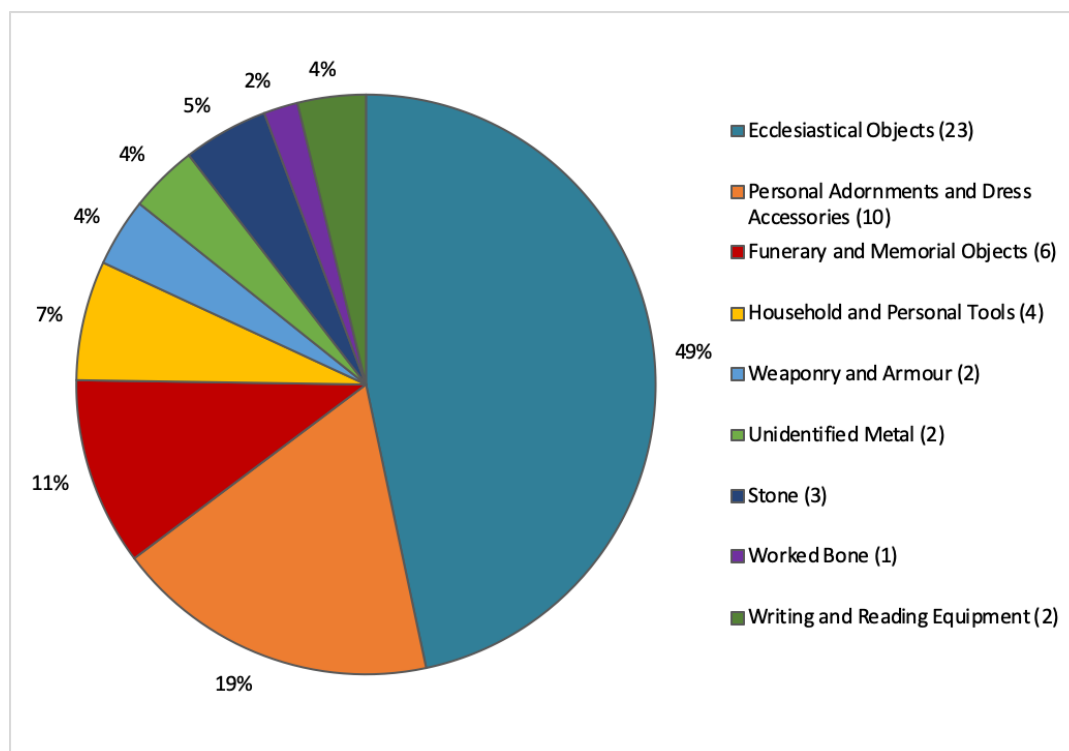


Chart 7.11 Types of Objects Inscribed with Religious Inscriptions

Typical of Anglo-Saxon inscriptions, sixty-two inscriptions in this corpus involve at least one cross placed before the text, and sometimes on either side of it. Many of these inscriptions are seemingly secular, with isolated personal names or owner/maker/commissioner formulae. Nineteen of the religious inscriptions contain at least one cross. It is not only the Anglo-Saxon inscriptions that have this element, as although fifteen of the religious inscriptions are Anglo-Saxon, four are Irish (**Inis Mór** pebble, **St Molaise** book-shrine, **Stowe Missal** book-shrine, **Terryhoogan** hand-bell), indicating a shared epigraphic custom. Okasha (2011) notes that although the purpose of adding crosses into inscriptions is not entirely known to us, the more than 100 inscriptions that display them are predominantly in Old English including seal-die texts, church dedications, and maker/owner/commissioner texts and appear to have some sort of Christian legal function (Okasha 2003, 35; 2011, 13-15). Crosses also appear in Old English medical texts, such as the *Lacnunga* which combines pagan and Christian charms to combat illness and supernatural beings (Grattan & Singer 1952). Salsberg (2008, 18-19) notes that abbots, bishops, and monks place initial crosses in their signatures, and crosses are usually written preceding personal names in lists of legal witnesses in Anglo-Saxon wills and charters (Okasha 2011a, 1, 10, 15).

Several of the objects with religious inscriptions were probably perceived as personal amulets, meant to be held close to the body for their healing and protective properties. These not only include the items of dress and adornment (i.e. finger-rings, brooches) and personal use (tweezers, combs, spindle-whorls) but also include two stone discs from **Dunadd** and **Stackrue** (see Chapter 6.3.). These two discs are inscribed with texts in Roman letters (**Dunadd**) and Scandinavian runes (**Stackrue**) with words that invoke the Lord's protection and were found at settlement sites (Barnes & Page 2006, 153-156; Campbell & Lane 2000), suggesting that they were personal objects of prayer possibly kept in the home. The **Weasenham** pendant, inscribed on one face with a religious phrase and the other with a crucifixion scene, was probably worn as a Christian amulet (Okasha & Youngs 2003, 229). Anglo-Saxon medical texts, such as the *Lacnunga CLXVIII*, tells one to hang a Christian charm-text around the neck to cure loose bowels and other ailments (Grattan & Singer 1952, 188-189), which may be an explanation for the pendant from **Weasenham**.

As demonstrated by this corpus, any object could be inscribed with a religious text including those of precious metal, base metal, stone, leather, and bone. Every-day and personal tools, grooming implements, and spindle-whorls were inscribed with prayers for their owners and brooches and objects of warfare were inscribed with invocative phrases for protection and power. Objects held and utilised in church environments were carefully engraved with the names of saints, Biblical quotes, and prayers for those of high-status involved in their production. Commemorative prayers were also inscribed onto lead plaques to honour the dead. The objects and their inscriptions reveal that religion and literacy was not exclusively for those of high-status, although as most are written in Roman letters and Latin, it is clear that the church had a profound impact on Britain and Ireland in terms of the use, application, and attitude towards text.

## 7.7 Gibberish, Cryptic, and 'Amuletic' Sequences

In total, there are thirty-two (12%) complete (or at least unbroken) inscriptions in the corpus that currently have no suggested interpretation, and twelve (5%) that have uncertain translations. Out of these, sixteen inscriptions may be considered as texts that were written with the purpose of being partly or completely unintelligible 'gibberish' (Table 7.11). Five further texts are non-lexical for symbolic and/or decorative purposes (i.e. bracteate inscriptions copying coin legends in Roman letters) and five inscriptions appear to be practice letters without lexical content. The remaining six inscriptions that are challenging to interpret include puzzling ogham and runic sequences that probably hold some semantic meaning although they pose a challenge to modern eyes. The interpretation of 'gibberish' must be approached with considerable caution. Just because an inscription cannot be read today does not mean that it could not have been read during its time. Furthermore, a set of letters that appear nonsensical may have been an unintended blunder by the artist, who may have been unfamiliar with writing, or the letters may have been written for the sake of writing, without any further significance. An amuletic purpose for seemingly nonsensical inscriptions seems to be a convenient explanation that is eagerly applied to these texts, predominantly those in runes. Where then, do we draw the line?

**Table 7.11 Gibberish and Cryptic Inscriptions**

Object Name	Object Type	Script/Language	Inscription
Cahercommaun bone	Unworked Bone	Ogham/Uncertain	Uncertain
Chessell Down bowl	Household Tool	EF or AS runes/Continental Germanic or Old English	'[b w s] e e e c c c a a a' or '[b w s] e e e k k k æ æ æ'
Deerness pendant	Personal Adornments	Scandinavian runes/Old Norse	'rune/runes', 'I remember?', 'away you went now?'
Deerness plaque	Metal	Scandinavian runes/Old Norse	A) '(i)rasab(i)' B) 'y(n)ipik*'
Dover brooch	Personal Adornment	EF or AS runes/Continental Germanic/Old English	A) 'þ d' B) 'b c c n l b' or 'b l n c c b'
Dublin sword	Weaponry	Roman/Uncertain	'SINIMIAINIAIS' or 'SIVINIVIWINIS'
Greymoor Hill ring	Personal Adornments	AS runes/Uncertain	'+ærkriufltkriuriþo nglæstepoten tol'
Bramham Moor ring	Personal Adornments	AS runes/Uncertain	'+ ærkriuiifltkriuriþ onglæstæpa <sup>tn</sup> ol'
Heacham tweezers	Personal Tools	AS runes/Old English	'[.] u d f [..] d l l [.] u d f [..] d'
Linstock Castle ring	Personal Adornments	AS runes/Uncertain	'eryriufdolyriuriþo lwlestepotenol'
London Thames Exchange ring	Personal Adornments	AS runes/Old English	'[t/æ] f u þ n i n e'
London Westminster scabbard mount	Weaponry	AS runes/Old English	's b ē r æ d h t i b c a i ē r h a d æ b s'
Selsey Bill fragments	Personal Adornments	AS runes/Uncertain	A) 'b r n r n' B) 'a n m u'
St Albans bone I	Unworked Bone	Scandinavian runes/Old Norse	'Thor- scratched/carved the runes'
St Benets lead plaque	Metal	Scandinavian and AS runes/Uncertain	Uncertain
Wolverton work-box	Personal Adornments	AS runes/Old English	'm b u g [i] [æc] t n'

The term 'amulet' is often used loosely and freely. Fundamentally, it refers to an object that holds some personal and symbolic importance that elevates the object from an ordinary item to a thing that has a power of its own. Another word for an amulet is a talisman, which is meant to provide luck, protection, or healing for the one who holds it (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 1-4). In the context of this thesis, these amulets can be carried and held close to the body to encourage the powers of the objects. Any object can be made into an amulet through the perception of its owner and through the addition of text, and they range from jewellery to toiletry items and to plates of metal, wood, and bone. An object that is perceived as a talisman by one may not be seen as such by another. In the case of portable inscribed objects, it is their texts that transform, bolster, and advertise them as having such a power.

This section will focus on those inscriptions that are composed of arrangements of letters that appear to be purposefully uninterpretable or deceptive. They may all hold some amuletic significance, consisting of repetitive sequences, cryptic letters, and nonsensical rows that may act as gibberish



‘codes’ or charms for the reader to unravel. The sixteen under consideration are the **Cahercommaun** bone, **Chessell Down** bowl, **Deerness** pendant, **Deerness** plaque, **Dover** brooch, **Dublin** sword, **Greymoor Hill** ring, **Bramham Moor** ring, **Heacham** tweezers, **Linstock Castle** ring, **London Thames Exchange** ring, **London Westminster** scabbard mount, **Selsey Bill** ring fragments, **St Albans I** bone, **St Benets** lead plaque, and the **Wolverton** work-box. The confusing nature of the inscriptions seem to be no accident. Whereas some of the texts are primary and considered to be part of the original concept of the objects (**Deerness** pendant, **Deerness** plaque, **Dublin** sword, **Greymoor Hill** ring, **Bramham Moor** ring, **Heacham** tweezers, **Linstock Castle** ring, **London Thames Exchange** ring, **London Westminster** scabbard mount, **St Benets** lead plaque), all of the inscriptions are composed of enough letters to believe that their lack of understanding on behalf of linguists and runologists was no accident. The individuals who carved the texts purposefully made the inscriptions challenging for the readers, creating an aura of intrigue that established the objects as amulets. The inscriptions on the **Greymoor Hill**, **Bramham Moor**, and **Linstock Castle** rings, for example, have lengthy sequences of runes that are organised in ways that make no obvious sense, but if the texts are broken up, certain sections may be able to be interpreted. At first glance the inscriptions of the **Chessell Down** bowl, **Dover** brooch, **Dublin** sword, and **St Albans I** bone appear to be nonsensical arrangements of letters, but a second look reveals them to be palindromes or codes to decipher.

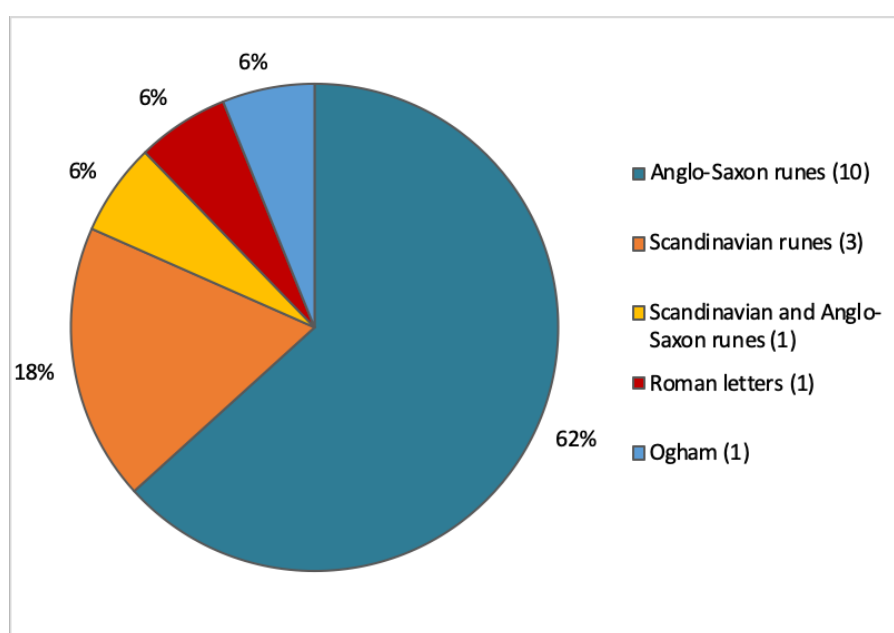


Chart 7.12 Scripts of the Gibberish and Cryptic Inscriptions

Ten of the inscriptions are in elder futhark or Anglo-Saxon runes, primarily on objects of personal adornment but also on domestic items and one object of warfare (Chart 7.12 and 7.13). Three inscriptions are in Scandinavian runes (**Deerness** pendant, **Deerness** plaque, **St Albans I** bone), and one is a combination of Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon runes (**St Benets**). Three of the inscriptions using predominantly Scandinavian runes are metal plaques which are considered as amulets in their respective literature (**Deerness** pendant, **Deerness** plaque, **St Benets** plaque) (Barnes 2016, 144-146; Hines 2019a, 17-18; Pereswetoff-Morath 2017, 253-256). One inscription is in Roman letters (**Dublin** sword), in a formula that is interpreted as a magical palindrome (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 86), and one inscription is

in ogham (**Cahercommaun**), which is described as ‘cryptic ogham’ by Macalister (1845, 56-57) and confirmed by Forsyth (2007, 473). Several other ogham inscriptions in this corpus could be considered in this category of purposeful gibberish, for example the **Ennis** bead. However, the lack of translations for some of these inscriptions may not be because they were written without them, but more because the deciphering of ogham is already a challenge to modern linguists.

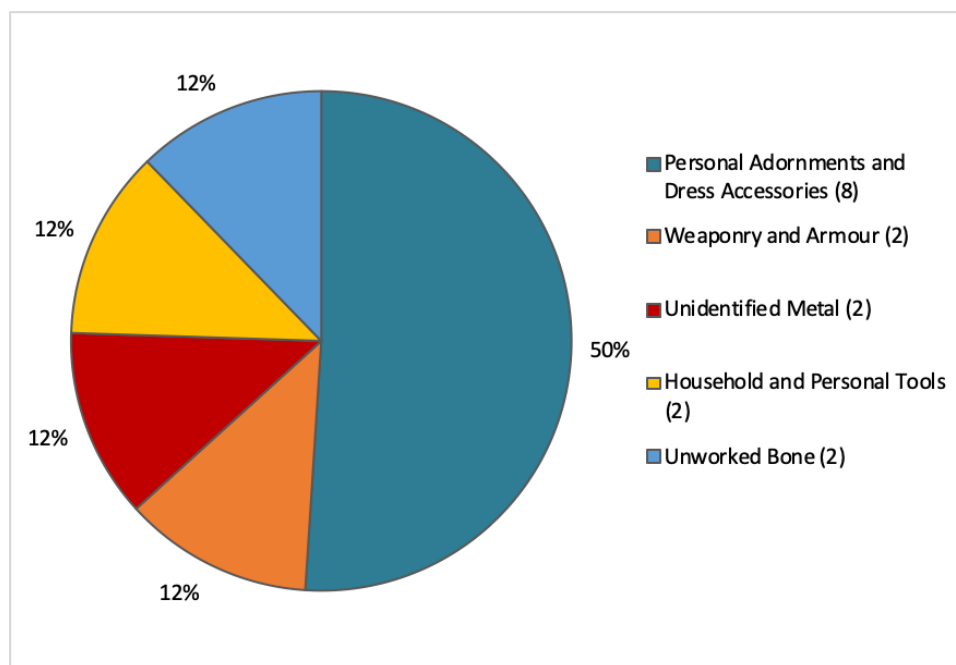


Chart 7.13 Types of Objects with Gibberish and Cryptic Inscriptions

Illegible runic inscriptions that are seemingly written for the reader to decode are prominent in the earliest period of runic writing, an example being the bone object from Lindholm (c. 375-575 AD), described as an amulet, and inscribed with the sequence *aaaaaaaazzzznnn\*bmutter* in older futhark runes (fig. 7.2) (Barnes 2012, 27, 144, 147; Looijenga 2003, 113). Similarly, the **Chessell Down** bowl is also inscribed with a rhyming formula. Its inscription has been deciphered as a code similar to the *pistill, mistill, kistill*, ‘thistle, mistletoe, casket’ runic formula from Scandinavia which is seen as *pmkiiissstttiiilll* (Looijenga 2003, 113; MacLeod & Mees 2006, 145-147). In this sense, the **Chessell Down** runes may not hold an amuletic purpose as if it follows this formula it can be broken up into three separate Old English personal names (Looijenga 2003, 280). However, the act of using text as a code to obscure meaning is arguably amuletic in itself, as only certain people would be able to understand it. **St Albans I** bone follows a similar formula, with a clever rendition of the phrase ‘Thor- carved the runes’, with the name *Thor-* expressed as **þ: þu : uur : uur** (Barnes & Page 2006, 322-328). Another play on words is featured on the **Dublin** sword, which can be read forwards and backwards, albeit still without an apparent translation (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 86). Another sword, this time from Helsinki, has the legend ‘SHVAIMIVΛHS’ and a bracteate from Sweden has ‘SIASASAISSIVSVSAIS’ on one face and ‘TTSVSAISI VSVSASI’ on the other (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 86). To Pierce (2002, 109) the inscription is merely a case of an illiterate swordsmith, but the occurrences of two similar texts,

especially one on a bracteate, and the palindromic effect, is surely more than coincidental, and could have been intended to increase the fighting power of the weapons.

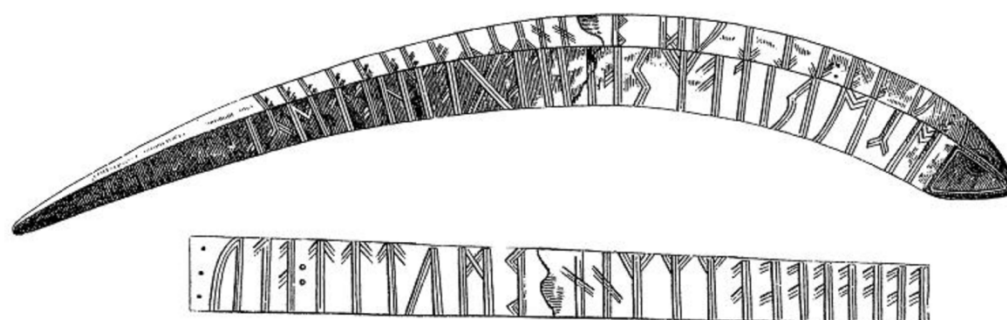


Figure 7.2 The 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century rune-inscribed bone 'amulet' from Lindholm, Denmark (© Nationalmuseet Danmark, 5084, drawing by Stephens 1884)

The **London Westminster** scabbard mount also has a confusing arrangement of Anglo-Saxon runes and bind-runes that have been perceived as a code or magical gibberish (fig. 7.3) (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 83; Page 1987c, 303). Some runologists see a personal name, *Sædberht*, although most tend to avoid proposing any further suggestions. It should be noted, however, that, the first seven runes are mirrored in the last set of six runes following *bca* set in the middle of the text, resembling the palindromic effect on the **Dublin** sword. This pattern is also noticed by MacLeod and Mees (2006, 83), who suggest that this was a deliberate attempt to hide the name *Sædberht* in an amuletic code. They also propose a similar use of text on the **Ash-Gilton I** pommel, which has been largely ignored by runic scholars (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 83) and thus coats their interpretation of the **London Westminster** scabbard mount with a fair amount of skepticism. Nevertheless, the pattern mentioned above should be acknowledged.



Figure 7.3 Depiction of the London, Westminster scabbard mount runes (Wilson 1964, 152, no.45 )

The challenges runologists face when interpreting early runic inscriptions has led to premature assumptions of the texts being cryptic or non-lexical, although in the case of the **Dover** brooch, this may be the explanation. It too may have a palindromic effect, as Text B begins and ends with the runic 'b' but in any case, its runes are carved in a way that suggest the writer knew what they were doing and intended for the text to be ambiguous, cryptic, and/or magical (Page 1987c, 302). The other Anglo-Saxon objects in this category include the **London Thames Exchange** ring, the **Selsey Bill** fragments, and the **Wolverton** work-box, which all feature runic sequences that are uninterpretable and apparently written to be so. Page (1987c, 303) suggests that the puzzling runes on the **Selsey Bill** fragments have magical or ritual significance, possibly with each individual rune standing for a particular word or

concept. The personal name *Ine* has been proposed for the **London Thames Exchange** ring (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 84-85), and with the first three letters of the *futhorc*, the inscription may possibly be translatable although it is still highly speculative. The last object, the **Wolverton** work-box, has tentatively been suggested to harbour a name, 'Bugi' (Milton Keynes Council 2016), which is not entirely illogical, and no further discussion of this object has taken place. Considering the possible amuletic function of the 'work-box' (see Chapter 4.1.8), a cryptic inscription would be reasonable to assume.

There are at least eight inscriptions in this corpus that can be interpreted as charms for healing and protection, which includes five of the gibberish texts (**Bramham Moor** ring, **Deerness** plaque, **Deerness** pendant, **Greymoor Hill** ring, **Linstock Castle** ring) and three others that can be translated to a relative degree (**Dunton** plaque, **Dublin IR 10**, **Lincoln** bone). All of these are in the runic scripts including four in the Anglo-Saxon *futhorc* and four in Scandinavian runes. Seemingly gibberish and nonsensical runic texts are attested to in both literary traditions, in particular late Viking-age Scandinavia, where they are carved on a variety of objects and described as 'healing' runes of 'help and recovery' (Olesen 2010, 170-171). Anglo-Saxon Christian medical texts including the *Lacnunga* and *Bald's Leechbook* are comprised of instructions for the healing of illnesses and injuries as well as protection from theft and the 'bewitchment by little beings' such as elves (Grattan & Singer 1952, 155; Cameron 1993). These procedures sometimes include the writing of gibberish words and phrases, sometimes intermingled with religious prayers or symbols, and sometimes right upon the body of the one who is ailing. An example is a particular charm against theft as well as for the healing of animals in the *Lacnunga* *XLIII* (Grattan & Singer 1952, 184-185), which reads, 'Luben luben niga, efith niga efith fel ceid fel, delf fel cumer orcggaei ceufor dard giug farig widig delou delupih'. Although the text on the **Heacham** tweezers is largely worn and unreadable, repeated rune-forms indicate that it may be similar to Old English medical charms with rhyming and repeating syllables (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 141). Also rhyming are the three near-identical texts on the rings of **Greymoor Hill**, **Bramham Moor**, and **Linstock Castle** (see Chapter 4.1.1), which may consist of a combination of Anglo-Saxon and Irish terms for the staunching of blood or skin irritation (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 141; Page 1987c, 303-304). Why three rings would have variations of the same runic charm is unknown, and whilst two are near-identical in appearance, the third is made of an entirely different material, which further adds to the mystery. Surely, however, there is some connection between the three rings, whether they were made in the same area or by the same craftsmen, or through a network linked by a similar cultural, linguistic, or stylistic framework.

Barnes (2012, 112) argues that the purpose of 'gibberish' texts may depend on the material they are inscribed upon, pointing out that gibberish runes on a wooden stick or bone may be less intentional than a gibberish sequence on an object of metal probably meant to hold amuletic properties. For example, the antler plate from **Dublin**, inscribed with obscure and abstract rune-forms may have been writing practice rather than an amuletic inscription, although this possibility should not be completely ruled out. The three ogham texts on the **Cahercommaun** bone, although non-runic, are a possible example of gibberish texts used for divination purposes (Forsyth 2007, 472; Holder 1994, 12; Windisch & Stokes 1880-1909, I 129 set 19). As demonstrated in this section, one should approach the topic of 'gibberish' inscriptions carefully and critically. Just because an inscription cannot be interpreted, does

not mean that it was meant to be incomprehensible from the start, nor does it mean that the inscribers were illiterate. The purpose for these seemingly nonsensical texts is predominantly described as amuletic and ‘magical’ sequences to harness the power of supernatural forces, the innate power of the object, and ultimately the power of the text itself. However, uninterpretable inscriptions can also be symbolic (of an idea or a word), writing practice, space fillers, or by an error of the carver(s).

## 7.8 Single Runes

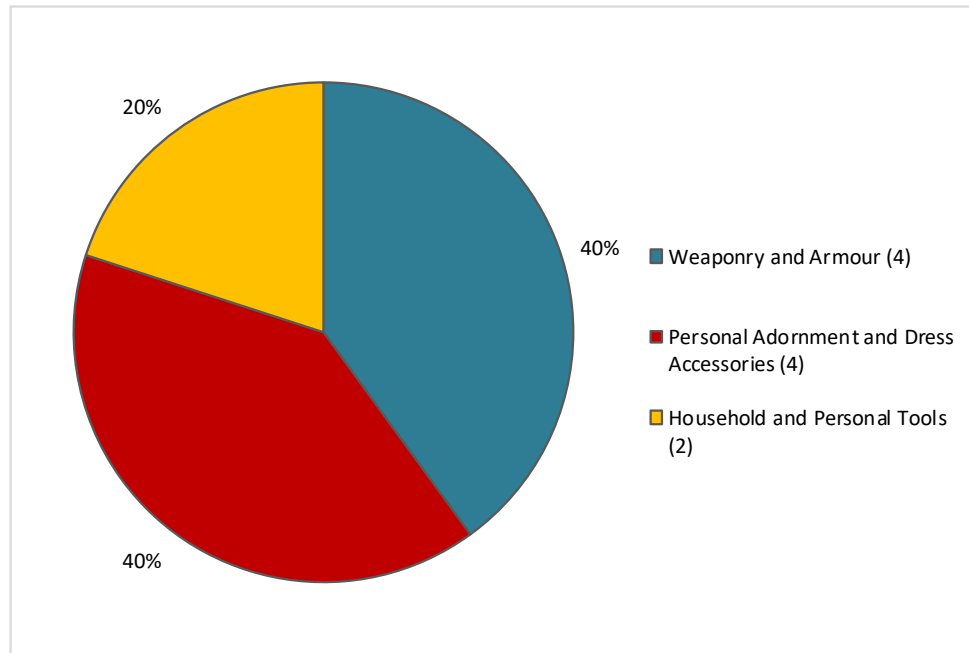
Ten objects in this corpus bear a single rune or a set of repeated single runes (Table 7.12, Chart 7.15). All of these except for two come from England and date to the Anglo-Saxon period (i.e. the mid 5<sup>th</sup> century to 700 AD). They include three sword pommels (**Ash-Gilton I**, **Faversham I**, **Faversham II**), three brooches (**Hunstanton**, **Sleaford**, **Willoughby-on-the-Wolds**), one hanging-bowl (**Willoughby-on-the-Wolds**), and one scabbard mount (**Carthorpe**). The two objects from outside Anglo-Saxon England are a Hiberno-Viking silver arm-ring from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century (**Roosky**) and a needle from Orkney dating from the 8<sup>th</sup> to late 12<sup>th</sup> century (**Westness**), both incised with Scandinavian runes. The simple shape of runes means that when there is only a single one, there can be doubt as to whether the extant marks really are runes. The difficulty lies in establishing whether or not these marks are actually runes rather than accidental scratches or plough marks. Even if they can be shown to be deliberate, it is not always clear whether they are meant to bear their letter value or are merely decorative due to their pleasing geometric shape (see Chapter 1.3) (Page 1999, 89). The markings on nine of the objects discussed here can be confidently taken to be runes because of the placements of the incisions, common features, as well as the irregularity of the markings. Two further examples are accepted with caution: the **Hunstanton** and **Willoughby-on-the-Wolds** brooches are included, onto which have been incised up to five different rune-forms, although some of the markings may in truth be decorative or accidental scratches.

As each rune has a name which is also a word (common noun, or, in two cases, theonyms), it has been suggested that in some cases single runes stand for their rune-name. Alternatively, some may be abbreviations for other words or personal names, serving, in the case of the latter as owner’s or makers marks (Barnes et al 1997, 61; Hawkes & Page 1967, 9; Page 1999a, 91). A single ‘d’-rune, as seen on the **Sleaford** and **Willoughby-on-the-Wolds** brooches, may be short for its full rune-name, *dæg*, which is also a common element in Old English personal names (Page 1999a, 91), although Looijenga (2003, 295) states that a ‘d’-rune may be more of an ‘ornamental sign’. The four silver arm-rings from the **Galloway Hoard** are each inscribed with Anglo-Saxon runes on the inner hoops (see Chapter 4.1.5.). Whilst the largest of the arm-rings (**sf 54**) is inscribed with at least nine runes, three of them feature sets of two to three runes of which two arm-rings (**sf 30** and **59**) feature bind-runes. The current interpretation of these shorter texts is that of abbreviated personal names carved for identification of personal property in the hoard (Goldberg pers. comms. 6 September 2018). This may also serve as the answer to the single ‘R’ on the **Roosky** arm-ring, which is likely to be runic rather than Roman (Barnes et al 1997, 61). Also most likely an abbreviated personal name, initials, or rather letters

denoting ownership, are the three ‘k’ or ‘a’-runes on the needle from **Westness** (Barnes & Page 2006, 193).

**Table 7.12 Inscriptions with Single Runes**

Object Name	Object Type	Script/Language	Inscription
Ash-Gilton pommel II	Weaponry	EF or AS rune/Continental Germanic or Old English	Υ Υ - ‘x’ or ‘z’
Carthorpe scabbard mount	Weaponry	EF or AS rune/Continental Germanic or Old English	Υ Υ Υ Υ - ‘x’ or ‘z’
Faversham pommel I	Weaponry	EF or AS rune/Continental Germanic or Old English	ƿ - ‘a’ or ‘æ’
Faversham pommel II	Weaponry	EF or AS rune/Continental Germanic or Old English	↑ - ‘t’
Hunstanton brooch	Personal Adornment	EF or AS runes/Continental Germanic or Old English	Σ, ƿ, ƿ, X ƿ - ‘s’, ‘l’, ‘u’, ‘ga’
Roosky arm-ring	Personal Adornment	Rune or Roman letter	ƿ - ‘r’
Sleaford brooch	Personal Adornment	EF rune/Continental Germanic or Old English	ƿ - ‘d’
Westness needle	Household Tool	Scandinavian runes/Old Norse (?)	ƿƿƿ or ƿƿƿ - ‘kkk’ or ‘aaa’
Willoughby-on-the-Wolds bowl	Household Tool	EF or AS rune/Continental Germanic or Old English	ƿ - ‘a’ or ‘æ’
Willoughby-on-the-Wolds brooch	Personal Adornment	EF runes/Continental Germanic or Old English	ƿ ƿ ƿ - ‘d’, ‘d’, ‘d’



**Chart 7.14 Objects Inscribed with Single Runes**

The clue to the significance of these solitary runes, particularly when they are carved upon objects of warfare, may be found in the Eddic tale, *Sigrdrifumál*, in which a description of how runes could be carved upon the hilts of swords would ensure victory (Clarke 2011, 42; Evison 1956, 99; MacLeod & Mees 2006, 71; Page 1999a, 91-92). For instance, the ‘t’-rune on **Faversham I** may represent the Norse god *Tiw*, the god of war (Evison 1956, 99; Page 1999a, 91). This may also be

relevant to the five sword pommels in this corpus from early Anglo-Saxon England which have longer runic texts (see Chapter 4.3.1.). The pommel from **Ash-Gilton II** and the scabbard mount from **Carthorpe** both feature the same ‘z’ or ‘x’-rune, ʒ, which is applied to the objects more than once and in decorative ways. This rune may stand for the ideograph for the ‘x’-rune’s rune-name, *eolhx*, which may possibly be related to Old English *ealgian*, ‘to protect, defend’ (Hawkes & Page 1967, 9), which would be suitable for objects used for fighting.

## Chapter 8 Discussion

### 8.1 Cultural Differences in Inscribing

It is clear from the material that in early medieval Britain and Ireland, inscribing portable objects was largely an Anglo-Saxon practice. The number of inscribed objects from the other ethno-linguistic cultures in Britain and Ireland, such as Scandinavian and Irish, are not as numerous, although this may be an issue of preservation rather than tradition. Although 169 out of the 250 objects were found in England, a further twelve were found elsewhere, but have their origins in Anglo-Saxon England (see Chapter 3.3). Excluding the **Cú Dúilig** crozier, which was rediscovered in England but is Irish, the combined 180 English objects include ninety-one inscribed with Roman letters, seventy-six inscribed with older futhork or Anglo-Saxon runes, five in Scandinavian runes (**Lincoln bone**, **Lincoln comb-case**, **Penrith brooch**, **Saltfleetby spindle-whorl**, **St Albans I bone**), four with both Roman letters and Anglo-Saxon runes (**Alhstan ring**, **Franks Casket**, **Lancashire ring**, **Mortain casket**), two with ogham (**Vale of York brooch**, **Weeting-with-Broomhill knife**), and two with a combination of Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon runes (**St Albans II bone**, **St Benets plaque**).

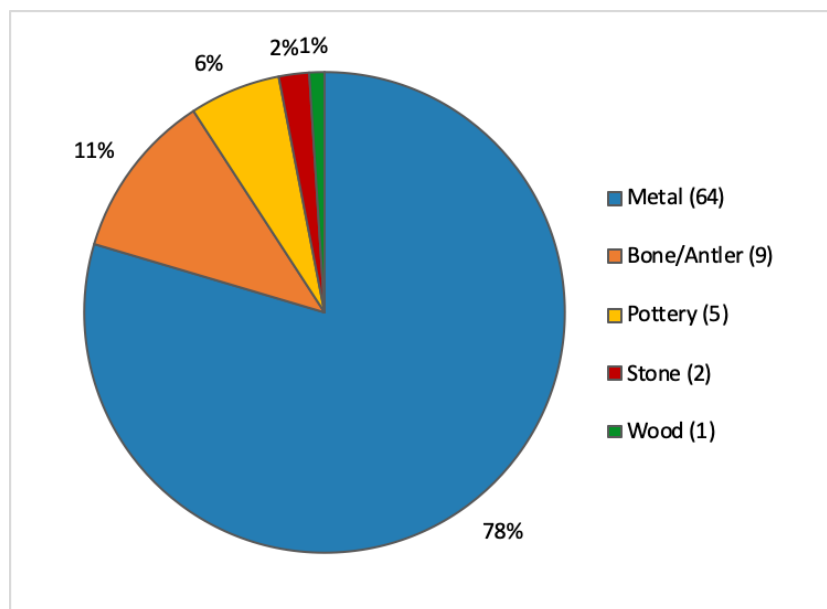
The forty-nine inscribed objects found in, or originally from, Ireland are largely ecclesiastic and church-related objects, but also include brooches, swords, and a wide variety of domestic and personal objects and tools from Dublin. Twenty-five of the Irish objects are inscribed with Roman letters, fourteen in Scandinavian runes (of which thirteen come from Dublin), eight in ogham, one in Arabic (**Ballycotton brooch**), and one with either a runic or Roman 'R' (**Roosky arm-ring**). The dominance of Roman letters on the portable inscribed objects from England and Ireland reflects the strong presence of the Christian church (Barnes 2012, 122-123; Algeo 2009, 40-41; Okasha 2017, 207). None of the portable objects in this corpus that are from Ireland are inscribed with Anglo-Saxon runes, which is interesting considering that objects with Anglo-Saxon capitals in Dublin, including one comb with two Old English personal names (**Dublin I comb**), suggest an Anglo-Saxon presence, and in a city with inscriptions in Roman letters, Scandinavian runes, and ogham, the absence of Old English runes seems unusual.

Most of the objects inscribed in Scandinavian runes in England and Ireland are from settlement sites with a strong Scandinavian population, with a concentration in Dublin. Curiously, however, the only portable inscribed object from Viking-age **York** is the wooden spoon, inscribed in Anglo-Saxon runes rather than Scandinavian. A pewter pendant from Coppergate, York, may have Scandinavian runes upon its circular face (Mainman & Rogers 2000, 2475, no. 4148), but without a proper investigation into the object, these markings may also be geometric. The lack of runic inscriptions from York is peculiar considering the volume of evidence from other medieval Scandinavian sites in Britain, Ireland, and Scandinavia, and so far, no explanation has been proposed except for the absence of runic literacy (Barnes 2012, 89; Parsons 2004).

Out of the forty objects found in Scotland, seventeen are inscribed with Scandinavian runes, nine with Roman letters, six with ogham, and six with Anglo-Saxon runes. It is important to note that the inscribed Scottish objects are primarily concentrated at specific archaeological sites rather than distributed as sporadic stray finds (as is the case in England). Although seventeen objects are inscribed



with Scandinavian runes, eight of them are diminutive fragments of bone from **Orphir**. The objects with Roman letters are predominantly from two monastic sites on the Isle of Bute (**Inchmarnock** and **Kingarth**), representing learned literacy (see Chapter 5.2.1.). All of the objects in Scotland inscribed in Anglo-Saxon runes are in the southern regions close to the modern border with England which were in Anglo-Saxon territory (**Cramond Hill**, **Mote of Mark**, **Galloway**), and the ogham-inscribed objects were all found in the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland rather than the mainland (**Bac Mhic Connain**, **Bornais**, **Buckquoy**, **Gurness**, **Inchmarnock**).

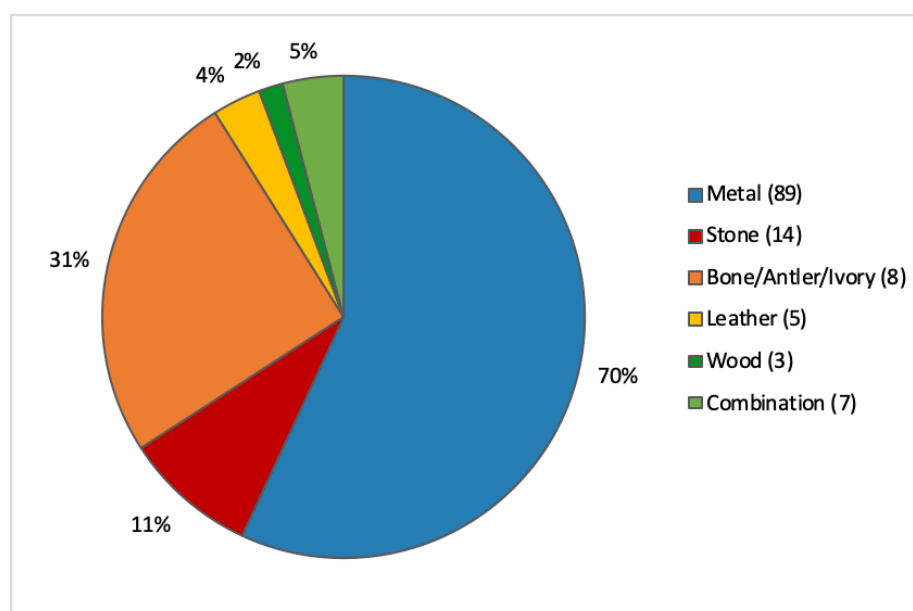


**Chart 8.1 Materials of Objects Inscribed with Older Futhark and/or Anglo-Saxon Futhorc Runes**

Anglo-Saxon runes and Roman capitals are more commonly inscribed as primary texts on precious metal, whilst Scandinavian runes are predominantly on objects of bone and wood and are mostly secondary in nature (Charts 8.1-8.3). Anglo-Saxon inscriptions in runes and Roman letters can be seen on a wide variety of objects including ornate jewellery and ecclesiastical objects in precious metal, as well as objects of lower quality such as lead plaques and non-ferrous dress accessories. The inscriptions range from primary texts integrated into the design of the objects to secondary carvings hidden on the reverse. In comparison, Scandinavian inscriptions, only in runes, are largely secondary. They are carved as casual ‘graffiti’ or messages on fragments of bone, secondary additions onto brooches, and on spindle-whorls of stone and bone. The difference lies in that the Anglo-Saxons had objects with the intention of having text, where the original design and concept of an object included the addition of letters. For example, a gold finger-ring designed with empty panels in which to engrave letters (**Bodsham**) or a pair of gilded silver tweezers with carefully incised runes set in framing lines (**Brandon**). The Scandinavian inscriptions do not seem to treat text in this manner. Most of the Scandinavian inscriptions appear to be secondary additions, carved in arbitrary positions or placed on the reverse of their objects where they are not the immediate focus of attention. The exception is the **Saltfleetby** spindle-whorl, which may have been crafted originally with the plan to add the inscription, although as a soft material, the lead whorl could have been inscribed a while after its production. The observation of the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian inscriptions reveal a noticeable difference in how the

two cultures perceived objects and text, regarding how literacy was used and displayed on material items.

Although the inscriptions in Scandinavian runes share many similarities to those in Anglo-Saxon runes, they maintain distinct differences including subject matter and the character of the inscriptions, as will be further discussed in Chapter 8.3. Not only do they appear to be more secondary than primary, carved mostly onto disposable pieces of bone and as additional texts on metalwork rather than skillfully engraved elements of the design, but they also appear to be less concerned with the intimate relationship between people and things. Anglo-Saxon texts incorporate the voices of the objects, frequently make use of owner/maker/commissioner/writer formulae, and often use the objects as vehicles for prayer. The inscriptions in Scandinavian runes are more descriptive and do not personify the objects, and although they still use owner/maker/writer texts, the inscriptions use the pronoun ‘this’ rather than ‘I’ or ‘me’. The inscriptions in Scandinavian runes suggest that the people who inscribed them on loose and portable objects, at least in the early medieval period, used them for more communicative, informative, and direct purposes. This aspect is also seen in urban contexts in Scandinavia, particularly Bryggen, where sticks of wood and bone were used to pass information between individuals (Barnes 2012, 106-107, 112-115). This more casual use of text, whereby comments, crude messages, and notes are written onto disposable pieces of bone, is not replicated to the same degree in the Anglo-Saxon inscriptions. Whether or not this is a matter of taphonomy or literary tradition, the fact that only five Anglo-Saxon inscriptions in runes or Roman letters are carved onto complete or fragmentary pieces of bone (as opposed to eighteen miscellaneous pieces of bone inscribed with casual Scandinavian runes) is worth noting.



**Chart 8.2 Materials of Objects Inscribed with Roman Letters**

Anglo-Saxon culture arrived in Britain long before the immigration of Scandinavian peoples, establishing a rich literary culture by means of their conversion to Christianity. Anglo-Saxon culture is heavily immersed with literature, with a bountiful array of poetry, riddles, and manuscripts. The venerable Bede completed his *Ecclesiastical History* in AD 731, and secular Anglo-Saxon charters and wills exist prior to this date (Colgrave & Mynors 1969; Robertson 1956; Whitelock 2011). The Anglo-

Saxon Chronicle was transcribed in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century, documenting the history of the Anglo-Saxons (Swanton 1996, xviii-xxi), and the epic poem *Beowulf* was produced in the late 10<sup>th</sup> to early 11<sup>th</sup> century (Thundy 1986). Written practices on paper do not appear in Scandinavian culture until the 12<sup>th</sup> century when the Icelandic sagas were transcribed from oral practices, including the *Eddic* poems of the Viking-Age preserved in 13<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts (Åström 2005). Okasha lists 241 Anglo-Saxon inscriptions in Roman letters on portable and non-portable objects (1971, 1982, 1992, 2004). No tally of the Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions on all media exists, but this corpus lists eighty-two on portable objects. In comparison, sixty-four Scandinavian runic inscriptions on portable and non-portable objects in Britain are listed by Barnes & Page (2006), excluding Maeshowe, Ireland, and the Isle of Man, and Holman (1996) lists 120 Scandinavian runic inscriptions from everywhere in Britain excluding Ireland.

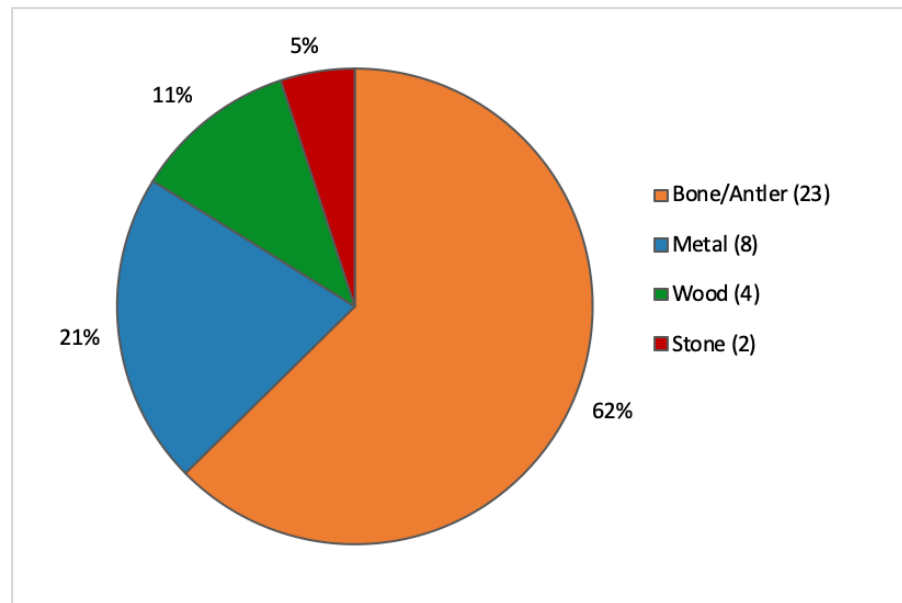


Chart 8.3 Materials of Objects Inscribed with Scandinavian Runes

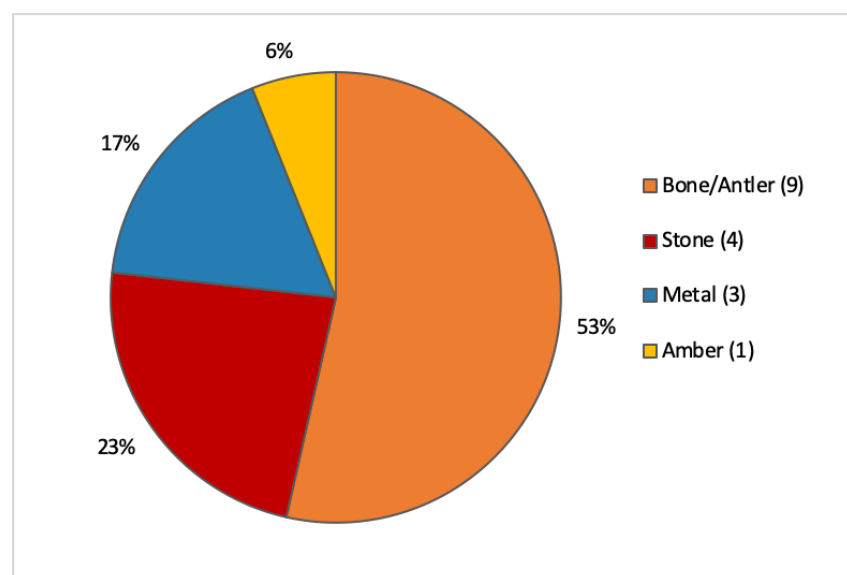


Chart 8.4 Materials of Objects Inscribed with Ogham

There is a significant lack of portable inscriptions from Pictish Scotland and early medieval Wales, which is mostly down to the absence of furnished burials with grave goods (Mitchell & Noble 2017, 25; Ritchie 1989, 51). The two inscriptions that are likely Pictish (**Buckquoy**, **St Ninian's Isle**) are all that exist for evidence for Pictish inscribing practices. This should not be used to say that the Picts were less inclined to inscribe than the Anglo-Saxons or Scandinavians, although some irregularities in proportion can be identified. Two identifiable Pictish objects in this corpus are inscribed with script other than ogham. These include the **St Ninian's Isle** chape with Roman letters (but with a Pictish personal name) and the **Laws Farm** plaque, which is inscribed in Scandinavian runes with an Old Norse name.

Out of the seventeen ogham inscriptions in this corpus, nine of them are carved on objects of bone and antler (53%) (Chart 8.4). Four are on stone (23%), including three carved onto slate tablets from **Inchmarnock** and one on the stone spindle-whorl from **Buckquoy**. Three ogham inscriptions are on objects of metal (17%) including a hanging-bowl (**Kilgulbin East**) and two brooches (**Ballyspellan**, **Vale of York**), and one ogham text is on a small amber bead (**Ennis**). Similar to the objects with Scandinavian runes, it appears there may have been a preference for inscribing ogham onto bone. Most of the ogham inscriptions that survive today are inscribed onto stone monuments, but early Irish tales preserved in manuscripts from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, although probably composed in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, make a number of references to the carving of ogham on portable objects. The majority refer to the carving of ogham on specially cut wooden sticks (Windisch & Stokes 1880-1909, I 129 sct. 19), but a range of other objects are also referred to, including a spear belonging to the hero Cú Chulainn (Atkinson 1874, 205; O'Daly 1855, 10), and a shield inscribed with cryptic ogham which saved the life of Corc, the son of the king of Munster (Atkinson 1874, 205). The degree to which these references reflect actual practice rather than literary imagination has been disputed (McManus 1991), but the archaeological evidence for ogham-inscribed portable objects in Ireland and Scotland suggests they should be given more credence than they perhaps have hitherto.

## 8.2 New Approaches to Portable Inscriptions

### 8.2.1 Object Biography

The object biography approach to material culture is a productive angle from which to observe portable inscribed objects. At the heart of the theory of object biography are the concepts of exchange, re-use, and object agency (Bürstrom 2014; Gosden & Marshall 1999; Kopytoff 1986; Martin 2012), which can be applied to the discussion of this material through notions of ownership, the relationship between people and objects, and the importance of text. The conscious actions taken by humans give the objects importance, specifically the effort and intent behind the physical operation of inscribing. Inscriptions themselves can open up discussion on the personality, intentions, and background of the owner(s), particularly if the inscription had been added much later in the object's life indicating that the item was a treasured heirloom kept through generations. Other significant themes include the exchange

and circulation of portable objects in society and the physical modification and re-use of objects. As this thesis discusses ideas of personhood and identity, portable objects carry with them complex biographies that could only be acquired by things capable of movement. They weave family histories into personal stories and emotions. They create, maintain, and end human interaction and relationships. They play a pivotal role in social structures and hierarchy. They are worn, displayed, given, and received. Where people go, they go. On the other hand, they are also fragments of bone that are scribbled on and tossed away and scraps of metal that are used for practice writing and henceforth disposed of. Even still, these inscribed fragments had a part to play in human agency, becoming things upon which humanity chose to express itself and let go of, and are given a personality of their own through the addition of communicative letters. The complex tapestry of humanity vs. materiality is the basis for this thesis, and portable objects are at the very heart of it all.

## 8.2.2 Exchange and Social Relationships

The exchanging of gifts and goods are documented customs in early medieval Britain and Ireland. Anglo-Saxon wills and tales suggest that brooches were passed from one generation to another as family heirlooms and given to churches and religious communities by wealthy patrons (Dodwell 1982, 188; Whitelock 2011, 11, 51; Whitfield 2001, 226). A woman named Scheldwara gave the Benedictine community of Ramsey, Cambridgeshire, a gold brooch with precious stones, and Glitha gave some of her jewellery to the church at Waltham to adorn the crucifix (Dodwell 1982, 188). In the will of Wynflæd, she bequeathed to her daughter, Æthelflæd, her engraved bracelet and ‘old filigree brooch which is worth 6 mancuses,’ and Wulfric bequeathed a brooch to her goddaughter, whose grandmother had previously owned it (Whitelock 2011, 11, 51). Whitfield uses the tale of *The Siege of Howth* to suggest that brooches were passed from one generation to another as family heirlooms in early medieval Ireland (2001, 226). In the story, a poet named Aithirne demands to be paid for his services with the brooch his uncle had buried after battle. In Geoffrey Keating’s 17<sup>th</sup> century *History of Ireland (Foras Feasa ar Éirinn)*, it is mentioned that brooches were meant for a king to ‘leave as an heirloom to every king who would come after him’ (Bergin 1996, 36). Furthermore, tracing back to the story of King Hakon of Norway, it is mentioned that Hakon complains of losing his inheritance as a child, all except for a single brooch and a ring, which suggests that these two items were passed down to him through family (Wilson 1863, 271).

Considering these concepts given by contemporary literature, objects could be kept for years as family heirlooms and given to subsequent generations as precious and valuable possessions. In this context, the four Old Irish names on the **Ballyspellan** brooch may represent four subsequent owners in a family, who documented ownership of the heirloom as it was handed down through generations. As a valuable and prominent piece of metalwork, the **Hunterston** brooch was inscribed at least two centuries after its production (Barnes & Page 2006, 221) indicating that it was deliberately preserved and kept in some compacity, possibly in a family household or via circulation as a gift or pledge (see further below). The same may be for the ogham inscriptions on the **Ballyspellan** brooch, although it is likely the texts were inscribed shortly after manufacture (Holder 1990, 14-18). It is difficult to determine when

the inscriptions in this corpus were carved in relation to the objects, and the dating of inscriptions by linguistic or epigraphic parameters is never straightforward. If more inscriptions can be determined to be carved at a later date, perhaps centuries after the creation of the objects, it would be reasonable to suggest that the objects were kept with families or passed between individuals for a while before their inscriptions were added.

In Anglo-Saxon culture, a good leader is expected to distribute gifts of war bounty to his people, demonstrating not only his generosity but also his hospitality and gratitude in exchange for their fealty and service (Abels 1998, 39, 165; Härke 2000, 379). Friendship and alliances were solidified in the giving of weapons, rings, arm-rings, land, torques, and treasures of gold, as well as land and places in office (Abels 1998, 32-33; 164.). Precious personal objects such as brooches and finger-rings were likely involved in the kingly gift-giving duties in Anglo-Saxon England as demonstrations of wealth, power, and rule (Härke 2000; Hinton 2006, 129; Pratt 2007, 185-192). King Alfred became the 'ring-giver' and 'the greatest treasure-giver of all kings' to Bishop Wulfsgie of Sherborne (c.879/889-890/900) as well as to Guthrum, the Danish King (d. 890) after he generously gave gifts including that of baptism in return for friendship (Abels 1998, 165; Hinton 2006, 128-129; Keynes & Lapidge 1983, 187-188). Kingly gift giving is also seen in *Beowulf* in which the king gives rings and other precious items to his followers in return for continued fealty (Oliver 2002, 86). These rings were probably originally the silver, gold, and bronze rings often attached to sword pommels of the 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries (Brunning 2019, 146; Evison 1967), and possibly some of the elaborate rings of the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries and onwards, such as the 'royal' rings of *Æthelwulf* and *Æthelswith* (see Chapter 4.1.1), may have taken on this role. In both Irish and Anglo-Saxon contexts, single personal names may also be indicators of a gift-exchange occasion, in which either the giver or receiver commemorated the event by placing their name(s) on the brooch, or object. In this case, the personal names that adorn many of the portable inscribed objects in this corpus may not reflect immediate and exclusive ownership, but instead the name of the giver or receiver of the object.

Bracteates are also described as items of value used for gift-exchange in a society where a growing community of elite families used prestige objects to gain influence (Looijenga 2003, 28). As the earliest use of runes is believed to have started and grown alongside this 'new elite', the earliest runic objects are discussed as directly tied into the gift and exchange policy coming from the Continent in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries (Looijenga 2003, 36, 110). Some of the earlier runic inscriptions may refer to their use as a gift, including an iron ring-sword from Schretzheim, Beyrisch Schwaben, Germany, reading 'g a b a r', possibly from the term *gaba-*, 'gift' (Looijenga 2003, 257). Bracteates may have been seen as diplomatic and political gifts as well considering that their runic inscriptions as well as decorations often refer to drinking and gatherings (Looijenga 2003, 40, 44). The word *alu* is present on at least 15 bracteates from Norway, Sweden, and Denmark (Looijenga 2003, 196), as well as the three bracteates from **Binham**, and three 5<sup>th</sup> century cremation urns from **Spong Hill**, Norfolk (Behr et al 2015, 50; Hills & Penn 1977). Apart from its generally accepted translation as 'ale', it may also mean 'magic' or 'intoxicating drink', or it may be referring to religious activities, rituals, or death (Looijenga 2003, 195). This word is frequently seen on bracteates, including some from Germany, Denmark, and Sweden, and is also present on sword pommels from Merovingian France (Fischer et al 2008; Looijenga 2003, 199). Similar to the **Welbeck Hill** bracteate, bracteate IK 189 displays the inscription *Tawō*

*laþōdu*, ‘I prepare an invitation’ (Wicker & Williams 2013, 190). Another bracteate from the Danish island of Fyn reads *Hōuaz laþu aaduaaliui alu*, ‘Howaz, invocation, . . . dedication’ (MacLeod & Mees 2006, 92). The important political, ritual, and social implications of feasts and gatherings are well documented in Scandinavian and Old English sagas such as *Beowulf*, Anglo-Saxon law texts such as the laws of Alfred and Æthelberht, and even Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* (Frantzen 2014, 34-42; Pratt 2007, 37-38). Germanic societies relied heavily on social relationships and the giving and receiving of valuable objects, thus the bracteate inscriptions may be alluding to this practice (Gaimster 1992, 13).

The social importance of gift-giving is also apparent in Scandinavian and Irish history. The tentatively dated 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century Old Norse poem *Hávamál* describes how friendships are solidified and strengthened through the mutual reciprocation of gifts and outlines the proper way a man should live by not being stingy with generosity and wealth (Clarke 2011, 55). These morals are further substantiated in the earliest Norwegian law code, the *Gulaping* (Sheehan 2013, 811). Icelandic laws, sagas, and poetry serve as further textual evidence for Viking-Age gift-giving, featuring leaders holding feasts and giving valuables for the exchange of loyalty from followers. Some scholars argue that the kin-based societies in Norway were the driving forces behind social material distribution, bolstering the elitist centralization of power and encouraging the Viking-Age raids to the west (Sheehan 2013, 811-812, 818). Large numbers of Irish metalwork, primarily ecclesiastic, cut up and remade into brooches and jewellery are found in Viking period female burials in Norway, possibly reflecting a desire to acquire exotic ‘souvenirs’ for women back home and for circulation in the Scandinavian gift exchange system (Sheehan 2013, 818-821). Reflecting this idea is the Insular **Rannveig** reliquary casket found in Norway, which declares in Old Norse runes that a woman named *Ranuaik/Rannveig* is the owner (Blindheim 1985).

Gift exchange in early medieval Ireland was also based on status and social relationships but was often governed and monitored by law in contractual agreements. Individuals gained social status through the exchange of gifts in the form of land, animal, clothing, and farming products, as well as items of precious metals (Doherty 1980, 72; Latvio 2005, 91). Exchange involving precious metal objects were seemingly reserved for contractual obligations. Law-texts such as the 8<sup>th</sup> century *Bretha im Fuillema Gell*, ‘Judgements Concerning Pledge-Interests’, depict brooches and silver objects as being given to the king by poets as collateral until their poetic composition was fulfilled (Etchingham & Swift 2014, 33-34). Pledges were also given as compensation for wrongdoings, a custom also occurring in Anglo-Saxon law codes, often in the form of items of personal property (O Croinin 2013, 135). In this sense, objects could be seen almost as currency. Irish Law texts describe brooches in terms of value in weight and their role in marriage, payment, and law suit transactions (Etchingham & Swift 2014, 22-24, 46-67; Whitfield 2004, 98-100).

Unlike Old Irish law-texts, brooches are not directly mentioned as objects that were exchanged between people as compensation for crimes or other misfortunes in Anglo-Saxon legal codes. Instead, monetary values and the payment of *wergild* are the usual forms of compensation methods (Lancaster 1958; Sides 2017). This *wergild*, in its literal definition, is ‘man-gold’ or ‘man-value’, and has been associated with the net-worth of a person in regard to their social standing (Pollock 1893, 246; Sides 2017, 90). Some scholars have suggested that the payment of *wergild* could be in any form of transferrable goods including valuable possessions (Clarke 2006, p.14; Sides 2017). The inscription on

the **Harford Farm** brooch has two possible translations: ‘Luda/Ludda repaired the brooch’ or ‘(May) Luda/Ludda made/make amends with the brooch’ (Hines 2000, 81; Bammesberger 2003, 133-135). If the latter is correct, the brooch may represent an object exchanged between people to make up for a conflict or to make an agreement of some sort, in this case between Luda/Ludda and possibly the female in whose grave it was found.

Placing the inscriptions within the biographical approach, at some point in the lives of the objects they were deemed significant enough to apply text. In the case of portable inscribed objects, exchange is a particularly significant factor in the creation of biographical meaning. The inscriptions may give the names of those who once handled the artefacts, and into whose hands they were transferred. They can give us insight into the individual who wrote the inscription, such as their level of literacy, and perhaps the individual who owned the object, including their name and cultural affiliation. Indirectly they can tell us about cultural interaction, beliefs, and societal customs through script and textual type, translation, and linguistic interpretation. An inscription may combine Roman letters with runes, for instance on an Anglo-Saxon finger-ring, or be in Scandinavian runes spelling out a Gaelic personal name on a brooch. Furthermore, as an object is exchanged and passed from person to person, it gathers and creates a story which increases its importance, inalienability, and quality. Objects in early medieval Ireland, England, and Scotland were seen as symbols of status and were used as motivators, instigators, and supporters of essential social relationships. In this context, objects gained status of their own, as well as intricate histories and meaning through their interactions with humanity.

### 8.2.3 Re-Use, Modification, and Changing Perceptions

The ways in which an object has been physically modified or recycled can further reveal the relationships between objects and people, by illustrating the social action taken to re-use and/or alter an object’s appearance and purpose. These actions were conscious decisions undertaken by an individual or a group of individuals according to the significance of the object (Martin 2012). The processes that were undertaken to produce the **Chessell Down** scabbard mount and its sword (believed to be composite pieces added at different times from 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century Scandinavia and England) illustrate the importance of prestige objects and how their presence and conception influence society (Page 2003, 22, 108). The runes on the scabbard are clear and hardly worn, indicating that they were added shortly before burial. The physical modifications of this object are clear indications that it was a treasured possession that was kept in circulation for quite some time, before it was laid with its owner in death. Similarly, the **Hunterston** brooch is older than its inscription, which indicates that at some point the ways in which it was perceived changed and it was necessary to inscribe it. This may involve a transformation from a family heirloom into a pledged object, signed away by the recipients, or a threat to the claim to ownership which required an ownership tag.

There is evidence of brooches being re-used and modified, such as a pendant at Winnall, Hampshire, which was originally the central piece from a 7<sup>th</sup> century composite disc brooch believed to have been worn until it was damaged, and then buried later on in the century (Owen-Crocker 2004,



139). The three runic brooches from **Boarley**, **Wakerley**, and **West Heslerton** show signs of repair (Toby 2012, 58, 136). Presumably their inscriptions were added at the time of repair, exemplifying a deliberate customisation and transformation into secondary items, possibly through a collaborative social effort (Martin 2015, 136). The 7<sup>th</sup> century **Harford Farm** disc brooch shows signs of repair and re-use, supported by the Anglian runic inscription on the reverse, which, if translated correctly, states, ‘Luda mended/repared the brooch’ (Martin 2012, 58) (see previous section for an alternative interpretation). The name *Luda*, is noticeably larger than the rest of the inscription, which Page (2003, 166) suggests is an indication that either the carver wanted to put emphasis on the personal name, or that ‘l u d a’ was the original text, with the rest added at a later time. Zoomorphic carvings also accompany the inscription, signifying intent to add further personal meaning to the brooch. Regardless of the correct translation of the runes, the brooch acquired new biographical meaning through the conscious act of both the repairer and the inscriber, whether or not they were two separate individuals, or one.

The biographies of objects could also be revived and remodeled after their initial deposition. In her discussion of brooches as family heirlooms and grave disturbances, Klevnäs (2015b), promotes the possibility of brooches and swords being taken from specific graves to disrupt the family lineage. The inalienability and representation of genealogies surrounding brooches and swords made them targets for grave robbery, either by living family members looking to retain valuable family possessions, or, as Klevnäs argues in favor of, by rival family members looking to defame and sully the prestige of other blood groups (2015b, 179). Ultimately, this resurfacing of old objects would add to their biography and place them in a new environment where their personalities, qualities, and characteristics would be modified and reborn.

In the case of the **Wheatley Hill** ring, conscious effort was made by an individual or set of individuals at different times to alter its appearance, and possibly its function. The Anglo-Saxon runes state, ‘I am called ring’, with the first and last letters covered by two of the ring’s bosses. The three bosses dominate the visual presentation of the ring, relegating the runes to the back of the hoop, hidden from view when the ring is worn. It is clear that the inscription was made before the glass insets were applied, but it is uncertain whether the bosses were added immediately after the inscription was carved, or if it took years to make the change. However, it appears that the glass insets were meant to draw attention away from the runes. Due to the plainness of the hoop itself, it may have originally been a piece of scrap metal on which to practice runic writing, later having glass insets added to make it into jewellery, showing off one’s ability to write and yet taking away the importance of the message. Unlike other trial pieces, the letters are well proportioned and neat, complete with serifs resembling manuscript writing. In addition, the ring shows evidence of previous gilding over the entire hoop and borders of the insets, now mostly worn off. The gilding could have been applied when the inscription was the main decoration, or once the bosses were applied. In either case, the **Wheatley Hill** ring has a biography comprised of various physical modifications and changing perceptions. Why place the insets on a previously used ring in the first place? Was it a valuable personal possession on which its wearer decided to bring new meaning to it and enhance its value or appearance? Was it a ‘Thing of Quality’ (see following section) due to its personifying inscription, and someone wanted to take that feature away?

Other objects in this corpus that may show evidence for re-use and modification include the **Ipswich** belt-buckle, which was originally a sheet of lead that had been reformed into a belt-buckle plate (Hilts 2013). The lead sheet may have previously been attached to another object, or alternatively it could have been used as an amulet similar to the folded and cut lead plaques with baffling runic sequences discussed in Chapter 6.2.2. The fragment of Roman Samian ware from **Deansway** was inscribed at least six centuries after its production with Anglo-Saxon runes (Page 2004a). Whether this object was kept around as a prized antique or found as an artefact or sherd and then inscribed, its age was certainly recognised, and the dish was modified to suit the perceptions, attitudes, and ideologies of the rune-carvers.

The process of re-use and modification is particularly applicable with the swords and ecclesiastical items. Brunning (2019) discusses the composite nature of early medieval swords, which were constructed of individual parts that could be removed and replaced for maintenance or customisation. This created an intricate biography of the weapons that could last generations, giving them long lives composed of qualities, features, and stories much like that of a human (Brunning 2019, 141, 150, 153-154). Similarly, the 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century reliquaries and shrines from Ireland are often composed of multiple elements through reworking, refurbishments, and additions throughout their lives. For example, the **St Molaise** book-shrine began as an 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century wooden container for a gospel book, which was encased inside inscribed silver panels in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Ó Floinn 1989b, 54-57). The portable altar of **St Cuthbert** began as a simple wooden board inscribed with the name of St Peter dating to the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Radford 1956). The board was repurposed into a relic and encased within a silver covering in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, and a further decorative silver mount was added in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The desire to preserve these objects rests in their importance within a greater social and political context in which they acted as insignia for saints, ecclesiastics, wealthy patrons, and those in office (Lucas 1986, 13-28; Michelli 1996). Through the social interactions and efforts of people that were needed to keep these objects alive and in use they gathered their own stories and significance (Gosden & Marshall 1999, 170; Martin 2012, 53, 60).

## 8.2.4 Object Agency

The inherent power, autonomy, and individuality of an object is what is defined as its ‘agency’. This concept has largely been applied to the independent actions and behaviours of individual people in a larger society, but agency in terms of the power of objects beyond human control has been gaining significant attention within the theory of archaeological material culture (Gosden 2005). To Burström (2015), the objects with the most agency are those ‘Things of Quality’ that stand out from other objects in size, ornament, and social prominence. The Tara brooch, for instance, is a ‘Thing of Quality’ as a large and empowering object of social status that would have been recognised by others. Inscriptions can also change mundane objects into ‘Things’ through the application of text itself, regardless of what the inscriptions say.

The theory of object agency is particularly relevant to the Anglo-Saxon ‘speaking objects.’ These types of inscriptions personify the objects by giving them voice and the semblance of conscious

awareness that they are things. The inscriptions both enhance and take away the agency and independence of the objects, by bringing out their inherent powers and then giving those powers over to the possession of people. Although the speaking texts would give inanimate objects a level of power above their uninscribed counterparts, such ownership texts would ultimately take away the independence and self-governance of the objects. The first-person ownership, maker, and commissioner texts force the objects to assert the authority of those named in the inscriptions and become submissive and passive participants in the relationships between humans and things (Paz 2017, 11; Ramey 2013, 342). The **Alfred Jewel** and **Sigerie** ring, which declare that they were ‘ordered to be made’, indicate some level of obedience and reliance on the efforts of humankind. The **Eawen** ring and **Ædwen** brooch are examples of an object’s agency being controlled and yet also enhanced by the text. Both objects first declare themselves as owned things. The second parts of the inscriptions give the objects the power to bless and to threaten, respectively (Paz 2017, 11). The **Ædwen** brooch inscription has made certain that if the brooch were to leave the possession of Ædwen, it would still remain her property. With the text, Ædwen has asserted her ownership through a non-verbal (yet verbal in the sense that the object speaks) action, transforming the brooch into an inalienable ‘Thing of Quality’ (Burström 2014; Klevnäs 2015a, 14). The incomplete metal strip from **North Petherton** may have a similar curse for would-be thieves (Okasha 2004a, 243-244).

This tradition of prosopopoeic verse is best represented in the Old English riddles in the Exeter Book, which, as previously demonstrated, give inanimate objects the first-person pronouns ‘I’ and ‘me’ (Bitterli 2009; Ramey 2013). These objects describe themselves, in figurative and metaphorical ways in order for the reader to decipher what they are. A sword in Riddle 20 says, ‘I am a wondrous creature’ (Bitterli 2009, 91; Paz 2017, 10) and a ship in Riddle 19 says, ‘I speed over many paths, leaving no traces behind’ (Bitterli 2009, 89). The **Brussels** cross incorporates the type of narrative verse and alludes to lines from another poem, *The Dream of the Rood*, in which the True Cross speaks, ‘Rood (Cross) is my name, once I bore the mighty King, trembling and drenched with blood’ (Karkov 2011, 159-161). Interestingly, the **Brussels** cross has three different types of inscriptions: a first-person maker formula, a poetic riddle, and a third-person commissioner and dedicatory text. The first-person inscription personifies the cross, giving it agency and personhood through its maker (Drahmal) and the Lord. Also referring to Old English riddles, particularly the ‘say what I am called’ riddles in the Exeter Book, the **Wheatley Hill** ring speaks as an autonomous, independent thing which is not owned. By identifying it as a ‘*hring*’ (‘ring’), the text also controls the ring’s agency and free-will, although the ring itself appears to use this as its power.

An inscription does not have to be prosopopoeic (first-person) to affect the agency of an object. The texts on the **Coppergate** helmet, **St Ninian’s Isle** scabbard chape, and **Staffordshire Hoard** metal strip use prayer and Biblical verse to empower the objects they adorn (or once adorned) and therefore empowering the person or persons who wielded them. If one were to wear the helmet or draw a sword from the scabbard, the inscriptions and objects would grant confidence of victory. Neither does the text need to be legible or lexical, as compared to an object that is not inscribed, an object that is inscribed is given a means of communication, whether or not it can be ‘read’. The gibberish texts on the three rings from **Bramham Moor**, **Greymoor Hill**, and **Linstock Castle** provide the rings with amuletic power (see Chapter 4.1.1), as do the baffling runic texts on the **Deerness** pendant, **Deerness** plaque, and **St**

**Benets** plaque (see Chapters 4.1.7. and 6.2.2) and possibly the enigmatic **London Westminster** scabbard mount (see Chapter 7.8). Text livens up an object regardless of its semantic meaning, allowing humans to interact with it on a more personal level and transforming them from ordinary objects into powerful entities. It causes humans to pause, observe, and consider the object as if it is truly ‘speaking’, which ultimately gives the object a level of power that its uninscribed counterparts are missing. Text propels, creates, and maintains social relationships, and on a portable object it would allow the object to collect and generate biographies of their own through exchange, whether as gifts or as an item passed between hands.

## 8.2.5 The Power of Writing

The differences in inscribing practices between Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian cultures may lie in different perceptions of objects and text itself. In Anglo-Saxon epigraphy, it appears that the objects have an innate power of which the text can bring out, wherein with Scandinavian inscriptions it seems as though it is the text that has the power, and the objects are given power through their inscriptions. Insights into how the two cultures perceived and implemented objects and text can be found in contemporary tales and literature. In the Old English Exeter Book of riddles inanimate objects are given voices of their own, which are able to be heard through the spoken and written word (Bitterli 2009; Ramey 2013). These poetic riddles give cryptic descriptions of objects for the readers to decipher, often with the object asking the reader to *saga hwæt ic hatte*, ‘say what I am called’ (Bitterli 2009, 125, 185; Paz 2017, 22). Primarily written in the Roman script, the Exeter Book oftentimes incorporate runes into the verses, sometimes spelling out the rune-names in complex riddles for the reader to decode (Bitterli 2009, 86). Inscribed objects are implied by Riddles 48 and 59, which refer to a *hring*, described as an object of precious metal that ‘speaks’ through its ‘wounds’ (as in the wounds of Christ) whilst being held and meditated upon (Okasha 1993a, 62). Okasha (1993) suggests this is a finger-ring, perhaps one that is inscribed, in which the cutting of letters would be the ‘wounds’ which could ‘speak’ to man. Considering the **Wheatley Hill** ring inscribed with, ‘I am called a hring’, the poem can be reasonably understood to be a finger-ring. If indeed these ‘wounds’ refer to text cut into an object, these riddles may provide an indication that in the Old English literary custom, text was an important tool through which the inherent powers of inanimate things could manifest.

In contrast, Old Norse sagas and poems describe the innate power of text itself, using mythology to tell of the divine origins and capabilities of runes. The eddic poem, *Hávamál*, describes how runes were created through the suffering of Odin who hangs himself from a tree in order to gain wisdom, during which the gods bestowed upon him the runes (Clarke 2011, 35; Page 1964, 107-108). The poem goes on to describe how Odin carved them, detailing how runes must be respected as they create a direct link to the gods. *Egil’s Saga* warns man not to use runes ‘unless he knows quite clearly how to interpret them’, telling how a misuse of runes lead one to misfortune (Clarke 2011, 42). Egil uses the runes in order to solve practical problems and heal illnesses through the inherent power of the letters (De Looze et al 2015, 44, 85, 211; Page 1964, 108). A sheep scapula from Fishamble Street,

**Dublin**, has a runic inscription that illustrates this application of runes, as it has been interpreted as, ‘writing in runes is something different in the soul’ or ‘by writing heals the crazy woman’ (Barnes et al 1997, 30-33). The *Sigrdrífumál* discusses the correct way to use runes including carving runes onto the hilts of swords, particularly the ‘t’-rune for the god of Tyr, to obtain victory (Clarke 2011, 42; Evison 1956, 99). In Old Norse belief, it is the runes themselves that have power, and to expose this power they must be carved onto an object in a particular way that is appropriate to the intention of the carver.

When observing the inscriptions in Scandinavian runes, it is apparent that the act of carving the runes was just as, if not more, important as the runes themselves, not only for amuletic purposes but also to acknowledge the one who carved them. Rather than inscriptions naming the owner, maker, or commissioner, the importance of text and runes themselves are exemplified by the numerous Scandinavian inscriptions reading ‘X carved the runes’, seen in Britain and Ireland as well as Scandinavia (Barnes 2012, 188). There are at least two runic objects in this corpus with such an inscription. These are the **St Albans I** bone, reading, ‘Thor- scratched/carved the runes’ and the spindle-whorl from **Stromness** which reads, ‘Gautr carved the runes’. Anglo-Saxon inscriptions also employ this formula, but they are more often written as first-person texts, which the inscriptions in Scandinavian runes never do. Several objects exist from Scandinavia with first-person statements although they all date after 1100 AD, outside of the early medieval period in Britain and Ireland (see Chapter 4.1.1) (RuneS-Datenbank N291; Spurkland 2005, 123). These include a runic shield boss from Rike reading, ‘Gunnarr made me. Helgi owns me’ (Spurkland 2005, 123), and a knife from Bergen stating, ‘Hakon carved me, but the lad owns me. Barthr owns me, he found much to put upon him(?) who carved me’ (RuneS-datenbank N291). A 5<sup>th</sup> century brooch from Etelhem, Gotland, Sweden, with an older *futhark* inscription reading either, ‘I, Erilaz, wrought [the brooch/runes]’ or in the voice of the object, ‘I was made by Merila’, may in fact be Germanic rather than Scandinavian (Looijenga 2003, 336; Peterson 1998, 565-655). As previously stated, all of the Scandinavian objects with first-person inscriptions date after 1100 AD, thus the argument here is that no Viking-Age Scandinavian inscriptions in first-person formulae exist, and this was an exclusively Anglo-Saxon phenomenon. This thesis argues that this is due to a difference in attitudes towards the importance and use of text. As the Anglo-Saxons saw text as a means of bringing out the inner voices and energies of inanimate objects, in Scandinavian tradition it was the runes themselves that had this power, which was transferred to objects when they were applied in the correct manner.

Text, then, becomes its own entity, one that affects and is affected by human action and is imbued with agency and influence in society. This applies to both legible and illegible inscriptions wherein the semantic meaning is not readily understood. The **Dublin** antler plate, inscribed with Scandinavian runes and other ‘rune-like’ markings brings to mind the concept of asemic writing, in which letters and letter-like forms are written to evoke the look of writing but not carry any semantic meaning (Houston 2018). Asemic writing is usually seen as an artistic concept by one familiar with writing or it can also be an instance of one who is aware of the appearance of letters but does not understand their use (Houston 2018, 23). They are meant to hold personal significance wherein the meaning is held in the writer’s and/or the observer’s individual intuition, written on a whim or as a deliberate act. The carver of the **Dublin** antler plate’s ‘pseudo-runes’ may have been practicing their handwriting, or perhaps the illegibility was purposeful, and meant to bear a hidden magical or personal

meaning (Houston 2018, 31, 33-34). Alternatively, the markings could have been written as casual ‘doodles’ without any deeper significance. Regardless, the incisions were influenced by the runic writing system to a degree, whether or not the individual was literate or not, and to the discerning observer, the essence of writing would have been achieved.

According to the Nordic poems, runes are powerful in themselves, and upon carving, perform feats of divine ability. With this in mind, ‘pseudo-runes’ and gibberish sequences *mean* the same as text that has a straightforward translation. Even if it cannot be ‘read’ it may have held a similar power to the individual who carved it, or perhaps the ‘reading’ requires one to decipher the text as a code. The copper-alloy pendant from **Deerness** (see Chapter 4.1.7) was originally described as ‘meaningless’ and ‘unintelligible’. Further investigations by Pereswetoff-Morath (2017) determined that these incisions were in fact a very complex system of cipher runes and she was able to translate particular words. The power of the runes transform the **Deerness** pendant into an amuletic object invoking the gibberish runic sequences holding healing and protective qualities inscribed on objects from Scandinavia and similar to the **St Benets** lead sheet and **Deerness** plaque (Olesen 2010; Zilmer 2013). Similarly, the **Chessell Down** bowl requires its reader to unravel its runes (Looijenga 2003, 280) and the **Dublin** sword is inscribed with a near-palindromic text that, placed on an object of warfare, probably held some symbolic significance (see Chapter 4.3.2). A similar interpretation supports the ogham-inscribed bone from **Cahercommaun** (see Chapter 6.1.1), which has been described as an amuletic talisman due to the illegibility of the inscription (Holder 1990, 22). If the ogham is not writing practice and the concept of asemic writing is applied to the bone, the ogham becomes a purposeful imitation of lexical ogham rows, either carved for decorative or symbolic purposes wherein the illegibility was deliberate.

Brunning’s (2019) discussion of early medieval swords brings another element to this argument. She includes a comparison of Old English and Old Norse poetry, in which she makes note that whilst the Anglo-Saxon poems allude to swords having ‘person-like’ qualities and are living things, swords in Scandinavian verse could truly come to life, sometimes in the form of shape-shifting, through the extension of their wielders (2019, 150-151). In the context of inscriptions, objects in Anglo-Saxon ideology would not need text to come alive as they already are, but the inscriptions would allow them to speak. To Norse-speakers, objects would need inscriptions to give them living qualities, just as the carving of runes give inanimate things power.

## 8.3 The Biographies of Portable Inscribed Objects

If the theories discussed above are applied to the material in this study, some interesting ideas and stories surrounding the backgrounds and inscriptions of the objects emerge. Beginning with the **Hunterston** brooch, whose runic inscription may be documenting its transition from a personal possession to a pledged item. The **Hunterston** brooch itself dates to the 8<sup>th</sup> century, blending the Irish penannular style with that of Anglo-Saxon gold, garnet, and beast ornament (Stevenson 1974, 28-40; Whitfield 2004, 87). Its runes are typologically and linguistically dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Barnes 2012, 76; Holman 1996, 191), which means that the brooch remained either in use long after its production or was kept as a family heirloom. A male with the early Gaelic name, *Melbrigda*, is named as the owner



was soon after the inscriptions were added or centuries after. The place in which the brooch was deposited is of interest, although not well recorded. The story goes that in either 1826 or 1830, the brooch was found by chance by the coast of Ayrshire, ‘as if it had rolled a short distance, perhaps out of a cleft’ on the cliff face (Stevenson 1974, 16). The brooch could have been accidentally lost in the sea and washed ashore, or lost on ground, or perhaps it was purposefully hidden in the cliff-face with the intention of retrieving it in the future.

In early medieval Ireland, the giving of a pledge as collateral solidified social obligations until the contract was fulfilled, and the use of brooches as valuable items used as pledges is mentioned in several texts from the medieval period in Ireland such as the 8<sup>th</sup> century law-texts, *Bretha Nemed Toísech* (‘The First Judgments Concerning Privileged Persons’) and *Bretha im Fuillema Gell* (‘Judgments Concerning Pledge-Interests’) (Etchingham & Swift 2014, 33-34, 46-47). Perhaps after two centuries, the **Hunterston** brooch ceased to be a family heirloom and was needed to act as a pledge. Imagine Melbrigda having his brooch inscribed (whether he was the one who carved the runes or another ‘signed’ the brooch for him) naming him the owner, just before it was handed to another to make up for a conflict, settle an agreement, or to offer a reimbursement of some kind. Labelling the brooch as his property would have assured that he would eventually get the brooch back once the debt had been paid. At the same time, the other empty panel on the hoop is incised with marks (assuming they are not runes), as well as the reverse panel of the terminals, interpreted as an act taken so that another could not claim the brooch (Barnes & Page 2006, 219). Alternatively, perhaps Melbrigda was the one receiving the brooch, and his name was carved to mark him as the new owner.



**Figure 8.1** Detail of the two panels on the reverse of the hoops of the Hunterston brooch. The left panel reads, ‘Melbrigda owns this brooch’, the right panel is commonly interpreted as non-runic incisions. (© Trustees of the National Museums Scotland, X.FC 8)

Now consider for once that the brooch had been inscribed with a second panel of runes. If so, and if the transliteration of the runes as  $\text{t}\hat{\text{a}}\text{a}(\text{l}/\text{i}) (\text{k}/\text{m})\hat{\text{a}}\text{a}\text{i}\text{f}\text{r}\text{i}\text{t}\text{i}$ , as suggested by the present author, is correct, another individual may have had his name carved upon the brooch to corroborate an agreement with Melbrigda. As previously mentioned, Wilson (1851, 529) interprets this the Gaelic phrase, *i dæol Maolfridi*, ‘in recompense to Maolfridi’, which this author tentatively agrees with. However, Wilson believes the first inscription to be in Gaelic as well, and his transcription of these runes shows its own errors. If another individual had had his name carved on the brooch as well, perhaps this was the person who received the brooch as a pledge. The two inscriptions were thus the ‘signatures’ of the individuals



to solidify the transaction, and the second inscription was followed with linear, non-runic incisions so that no one else could make their mark. The appearance of the two inscriptions may suggest they were written by different people (fig. 8.1). The left panel (Melbrigda's inscription) appears more evenly spaced and lighter in hand pressure. The right panel is darker, more compressed, and the r-rune, ᚱ, appears rounder than the 'r' in 'Malbriþa'. This paints the image of one individual 'signing' their mark on the brooch and then passing it to another so they may follow suit, although the individuals involved in the pledge may not have been literate enough and a third (or fourth) party had to get involved.

In this context, the **Ballyspellan** brooch may have also been used as a pledge to make amends or act as collateral between individuals. The four Old Irish/Early Gaelic names, carved in ogham on its reverse, may have been written to solidify and authorise the event. Personal observation of the brooch suggests that not all the inscriptions were written by the same hand, which may further suggest that they may not have been inscribed at the same time, or alternatively they could have been carved at the same time but by different people. Similar to the **Hunterston** brooch, the ogham inscriptions on the Ballyspellan brooch are dated to a later period than the brooch's production. The style of brooch is that of an Irish-type penannular brooch, dated between 850 and 950 AD (Etchingham & Swift 2014; Graham-Campbell 1972). Characteristics of the ogham texts place them sometime between the 10<sup>th</sup> century and possibly as late as the early 13<sup>th</sup> (Holder 1990, 14-18). The inscriptions are four Old Irish/Early Gaelic personal names that may represent a family group (Forsyth pers. comm. 2016; Holder 1990, 15-16). As discussed in Chapter 4.1.2, the four ogham rows show differences in hand-writing, although each one is clear, precise, and undamaged, leading to the probability that the names were carved close to the time the brooch ceased to be worn. The image conjured here is of several different scenarios behind the biography of the brooch. Perhaps the brooch remained within this family throughout generations, and the four individuals wanted to mark their property before it was buried on a hill for safekeeping, where it was found in 1806 (Macalister 1945, 32). In this scenario, the family was probably hoping to retrieve the brooch in the future. Or perhaps the family was signing their names just before giving the brooch away as a pledge or as currency in exchange for a service, a practice that is noted in Old Irish law-texts, or perhaps they were the family receiving the brooch for such purposes (Etchingham & Swift 2014, 33-34, 48). Perhaps it was not a family group at all, and instead were four individuals signing their names upon a pledge object. Any number of stories can be imagined regarding the history of the brooch and its ogham inscriptions, but unfortunately we are left with only the brooch to speak for itself.

Remaining within the topic of inscribed brooches, the **Harford Farm** brooch is worth discussing. The brooch, which dates to the early to mid-7<sup>th</sup> century, was found in a female grave at Harford Farm, Caistor St Edmund, Kent, and shows signs of refurbishment on its face and along one section of the border (Penn 2000, 45-46). The reverse of the brooch reveals fascinating personal touches that an individual (or individuals) gave to the object, which was surely a treasured item. Nearly the entire reverse is taken up with intricate interlace and geometric decorations incised with a sharp implement, as well as a runic inscription in elder futhark and/or Anglo-Saxon runes compressed within a tiny space (see fig. 4.8, page 84). The inscription has most commonly been understood to mean, 'Luda mended/repared (the) brooch' (Barnes 2012, 42; Hines 2000; Page 1999a, 166), although a second interpretation that has become to be widely accepted reads, 'Luda made reparations (with the) brooch',

or in other words, ‘May Luda make amends/compensation by means of the brooch’ (Bammesberger 2003, 135; RuneS-Datenbank, Pre-OE/OE-GB-14). This thesis will consider both inscriptions for sake of discussing the different possible scenarios surrounding the history of the **Harford Farm** brooch.

Amongst the jumble of incisions on the reverse of the brooch, a circular guideline that served as a marker for the placement of the catchplates is still visible (Penn 2000, 48-49). This line also acted as the border in which to incise the zoomorphic interlace design, as well as the feather-like linear decorations along the outer edge. It is hard to view the reverse of this brooch and not imagine the artist bent over the brooch, carefully incising the designs and admiring their work. Considering the incised decorations take up most of the space on the reverse of the brooch, we can determine that they were there first, prior to the runes, which are partly constricted within its space. This author agrees with Page (1999a, 166), who suggests that the first four runes, *Luda*, was written first, and the remaining runes were added at a later date, whether or not this date was soon after the carving of the name or a while after. This is determined by the larger size of *Luda* and the compressed nature of the twelve other runes, which run over onto one of the pin catchplates. However, there is the chance that this discrepancy was an error in judgment of space on behalf of the writer. In regard to the life of the brooch, it is only certain that the inscription was written when the pin and catchplates were affixed to the reverse. Whether this was when the brooch was first constructed, or during its most recent refurbishment, it is impossible to say. Martin (2012, 58) suggests that the inscriptions and interlace designs had been there for some time, and their presence raised the importance of the brooch to necessitate further restoration and repair. Whether or not the inscription refers to the repair of the brooch, the brooch had certainly undergone a considerable amount of conservation. The continued re-use and refurbishment of brooches is a common occurrence with early Anglo-Saxon brooches and is interpreted by Martin (2012) to mean that brooches were valued inalienable possessions that became inseparable from their owners.

If both translations of the inscription are acknowledged, perhaps Luda had his name carved on the brooch as it was his possession, and later on the second part was written to commemorate the repairing of the brooch, or rather to signify the brooch being given to another in compensation for a wrongdoing. However, the **Harford Farm** brooch is a type of composite disc-brooch that is regarded as female gendered, considering they are almost never found in male graves and their use corresponds with early Anglo-Saxon female dress (Martin 2012, 55; Owen-Crocker 2004, 36-43, 104-113; Penn 2000, 45). The name, *Luda*, is an Old English masculine name (Hines 2000, 81), therefore he was unlikely to have been the owner of the brooch, unless he had given the brooch to a female and had his name carved on it as a sentimental gesture. If he had been the repairer of the brooch (or maybe the individual who commissioned the repair) perhaps the mending of the brooch was a gift and the inscription acted as a ‘from-me-to-you’ sort of message. If the brooch had been given as compensation, as the alternate interpretation of the inscription suggests, then Luda may have ‘signed’ the brooch before handing it over to the other party, who perhaps was the woman the brooch was buried with. Maybe Luda fixed the brooch as reimbursement for the woman whom he had harmed, in which case both interpretations of the inscription would be relevant. As previously mentioned, Old English law-texts do not directly mention that brooches were exchanged as compensation (Chapter 8.2.2), however, if one's social rank dictated their ‘worth’ and what they were required to pay in terms of a fine or reimbursement, then perhaps their valuable possessions of precious metals would be suitable for such circumstances.

Other objects of interest include the **Lincoln** comb-case, inscribed in Old Norse with Scandinavian runes, ‘Thorfastr made a good comb’ (Chapter 4.2.2) (Barnes & Page 2006, 293-295). If taken in the literal sense, a Norseman named *Thorfastr* was the craftsman of the comb, and presumably the comb-case as well, and the inscription has been interpreted as a means of advertising one’s skill in comb-making (Ashby 2013, 196; Barnes 2012, 107-108). However, if we apply aspects of the biographical theory of objects, primarily exchange, then the life of the comb-case takes on new dimensions. Why, if this was an advertising tactic, is only one comb-case inscribed in such a manner? Is this a matter of taphonomy in which we have lost more evidence to archaeological contexts, or was this not a usual practice amongst comb-makers and Thorfastr was trying his luck? Perhaps Thorfastr made the comb and its case as a gift to someone, and signed it in a friendly manner. Maybe Thorfastr created the object for himself, and the inscription doubled as a maker and owner label. Another possibility is that Thorfastr was not the one who made the comb-case, and instead he was the commissioner of the work. Presumably the text had been carved at the same time the object was made (Barnes & Page 2006, 294), however there is the possibility that it was added at a later time, possibly to remember the one who crafted the case,

Inscriptions that are composed of single personal names may also represent this process of exchange, whether through legal means or as personal gifts. The wooden comb from Dublin (**Dublin I**), inscribed with two different personal names, may have been a gift from one to the other, in which case one name was the giver and the other the receiver of the comb. Alternatively, one name could have been the craftsman and the other the owner, or perhaps both individuals were the owners of the comb, either at one single time or at different times in the life of the comb. The names were most likely not carved as writing practice, as is probably the case for the two names carved on the sheep bone from **London, National Portrait Gallery**. The two Old English names, *Tatberht* and *-dric* or *Dægric*, appear to have been carved by different hands (Page 2004b, 204), and resemble the numerous fragments and complete animal bone from Dublin that are seen as a casual, social, and practical use of text (Chapter 6.1.1). The picture that these objects paint are of a group of people gathered around a feasting table or a fire, laughing, drinking ale, eating animal meat and writing jokes on the bones to be passed around amongst them (Barnes 2012, 114; Barnes et al 1997, 22, 28, 39; Barnes & Page 2006, 329-330; Sudqvist 2011, 200). Imagine the individual who wrote, *Gnúþr gnúfð/gnúþði*, ‘Gnúþr drooped/bowed his head’ in Norse runes on **Dublin IR 8**, writing the joke on a cattle rib likely fresh from a meal (Barnes et al 1997, 28-30). Imagine them smiling to themselves as they write the rhyme at Gnúþr’s expense and enjoying the joke with their comrades. Alternatively, perhaps the bone had been lying on the ground for some time after a feast, and an individual decided to re-use a bit of rubbish to either create the joke or practice their writing.

The ways in which inscriptions can tell stories and modify the perception of objects can be seen on the **Wheatley Hill** ring, **Derby** plaque, and the **Gorteen** axehead. The life of the **Wheatley Hill** ring has previously been acknowledged (Chapter 8.2.3), in which the runic inscription reading, ‘I am called a ring’, was at one point partially covered by three bosses with glass insets. This action took away the main focus from the inscription and placed the attention on the bosses. But why would one want to change the perception of this object from one that could speak to a ring whose voice would be hidden? Was the object used as a trial piece, first to practice ones engraving using a familiar Old English verse,

and re-used as accessible material to attach decorative bosses? Perhaps the covering up of some of the runes was an error on behalf of the artisan who misjudged the use of space, or alternatively this could have been intentional. The maker of the **Derby** plaque may have also made a mistake, implied by the side of the plaque that is not inscribed with text (Chapter 6.1.2). This face is also incised with a decorative border, but at one end the border seems to be unfinished, and at the other end the plaque appears to have been broken and the border runs off the edge. This side also appears rough in one spot, which may indicate that this side was used for the artist to practice before the final product on the opposite side. Alternatively, the artist may have made a mistake, forcing them to abandon their work and start over on the reverse, after all, why would one incise such a decorative border around an empty space without any intention of filling the space?

Another object previously discussed, but worth emphasis is the Neolithic axehead from **Gorteen** (Chapter 6.3). The axehead was re-used in the early medieval period as a hard surface to practice one's writing, but whether it was kept as a personal possession, in a household, or within an ecclesiastical environment is unknown. It was probably associated with the re-use of the prehistoric site in early Christian Ireland and repurposed for the learning of literacy (Driscoll 1998; Edmonds 1999; Newman 1998). Perhaps an individual wanted to practice writing their alphabet and grabbed the nearest accessible item, or perhaps the axehead was a treasured possession that the keeper wanted to personalise.

These ideas can be applied to any object in this corpus, but when giving these objects their stories, one must be aware of biases and presumptions. Burström discusses the power given to the historian when writing an object's biography, stating that it is the historian's interpretation and conscious selection of information that affects the meaning of an object (2014, 73, 78). Furthermore, the historian's perception of an object may actually change the object's current meaning to something entirely different than it had in the past (Burström 2014, 78). It is easy to allow one's imagination run wild when thinking about the lives of these inscribed objects, and whilst this may bring up more questions and disagreements, such insight and thought is necessary to challenge the usual assumptions regarding the inscriptions and their objects. When applying these theories to the objects in this corpus, their inscriptions take on new dimensions and meanings. Ownership of the objects, for example, does not seem as linear, and the reasons for inscribing text on objects are given more significance.

## Chapter 9 Conclusions

### 9.1 The Evolution of Portable Text

This corpus has revealed many factors into why text was added onto portable objects in the early medieval period in Britain and Ireland, which illustrate and encourage discussion into the initial use and growth of epigraphy and literacy. Prior to the period of this study (pre-400 AD), inscriptions are seen on Roman-era non-coin portable objects such as brooches and finger-rings, of which many are love and luck charms, similar to texts seen on Anglo-Saxon objects such as the **Egginton** mount (Johns 2013, 59-68; 157-158; 168). One can also not overlook the numerous small wooden tablets from Vindolanda and London in Roman Britain used as personal and administrative letters as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (Bowman 1998, 13-19). The end of Roman Britain did not mean the end of literacy, however the use of roman letters seems to disappear from portable epigraphy until the 7<sup>th</sup> century, apart from bracteates in England (Algeo 2009, 40-41; Barnes 2012, 33; Okasha 2017, 207). Dating ogham inscriptions is fraught with difficulties, but it is believed that the earliest use of ogham (which probably goes back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century) began with incising small objects of wood (Forsyth pers comm 22 August 2019; Redknap 1991, 59). This is obviously lost from the archaeological record, but as of yet the earliest dated portable ogham inscription is on a bronze plaque from Newgrange, Co. Meath, dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Forsyth pers comm August 2019), which tells us that ogham was developed not only as a writing system for stone monuments. In this corpus, the earliest dated ogham text is the **Gurness** knife-handle, radiocarbon dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century (Noble et al 2018, 1344), which may indicate a similar date for the three other knife-handles inscribed with ogham (**Bac Mhic Connain**, **Clonmacnoise**, **Weeting-with-Broomhill**). Also possibly of this period is the bone die from **Ballinderry**. Although its earliest date is uncertain, its archaeological context may suggest as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and no later than AD 700 (Holder 1994, 16-19).

The general understanding about the beginning of runic writing is that runes were developed around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD by elite Germanic tribes, influenced by the Roman writing system, in order to reinforce power, political connections, and cultural identity (Barnes 2012, 11; Fischer et al 2008, 76; Gaimster 1992, 15; Hines 1998, 186-188; Looijenga 2003, 31-32, 81-82). The earliest runic inscriptions on the Continent and in Scandinavia are all on portable objects, usually written in short sequences in the older futhark that are baffling and difficult to transcribe for modern linguists (Hines 1990; 1998, 188; Looijenga 2003, 27, 106-107, 127; Page 1996; 1999, 17). In Denmark and Germany, the oldest runic inscriptions appear on brooches, weapons, and weapon parts, in Frisia, on coins, combs, pieces of wood and bone, and in England on coins, bracteates, brooches, weapons or weapon parts, pots, and cremation urns (Barnes 2012, 33; Looijenga 2003, 27-28). Although many of these inscriptions are puzzling, many can also be interpreted as personal names, owner, maker, and giver formulae, object-descriptive terms, and texts that have ritualistic and magical connotations (Looijenga 2003, 20, 38-39). The baffling nature of most of these runic inscriptions points to a more symbolic rather than communicative origin for the beginning of runic writing, especially considering most people would not have been able to read them (Fischer et al 2008, 73; Gaimster 1992, 15; Looijenga 2003, 94).

Chapter four establishes that the most numerous types of inscribed objects from early medieval Britain and Ireland are personal adornments, particularly finger-rings and brooches. This chapter also demonstrates that the earliest runic inscribed objects in Britain date from the mid 5<sup>th</sup> century and include weaponry, brooches, cremation urns, and bracteates centred in south-eastern England and the east Midlands (predominantly Kent and Norfolk). These objects are inscribed in older *futhark* and early Anglo-Saxon *futhorc* rune-forms and, like the earliest portable ogham inscriptions, are difficult to interpret and have largely been left untranslated or given multiple possible meanings (Hines 2006, 190-191). The texts consist of single runes, confusing sequences, and object-descriptive terms that are reminiscent of the earliest runic objects on the Continent and in Scandinavia (Barnes 2012b, 11; Hines 1998, 188; Hines 2006, 190-191; Looijenga 2003, 27-28, 38). Inscriptions of this type can primarily be seen on the backs of brooches including the **Bateman**, **Boarley**, **Wakerley**, and **West Heslerton** brooches (see Chapter 4.1.2.), and on sword pommels from early Saxon burials from **Ash-Gilton**, **Faversham**, and **Sarre** in Kent (see Chapter 4.3.1). These texts are scratched, oftentimes clumsily, onto the objects as single runes and short sequences that may represent the initials of personal names, ideographs for rune-names, and possibly terms referring to the object itself (Looijenga 2003, 190; Page 1999a, 91, 169). On the **Bateman** brooch, the individual sections of runes may denote that the object was a gift to or from a *gada*, ‘companion’, or *gade*, ‘husband, wife’ (Looijenga 2003, 244). As runes were developed in a society that relied heavily on exchange for social and political obligations (Looijenga 2003, 11, 28, 36), the **Bateman** runes could place the brooch within the concept of gift-giving. Also representative of the earliest runes in England are the stamped graphs on bracteates and cremation urns (see Chapter 4.1.3., 5.3.2.). These inscriptions demonstrate a standardised and symbolic use of text on prestigious and ritual objects, in which the text was meant to stand for an ideology rather than ‘read’ and communicated (Looijenga 2003, 44, 195, 282; Nedoma 2016, 13). Bracteates in England also incorporate the use of Roman letters, although these closely imitate the legends on Roman coin medallions and are apparently more symbolic than lexical.

As the years progress, Anglo-Saxon runes replace the older *futhark* alphabet in Britain and the inscriptions get longer, more complex, and more legible and interpretable, a change that occurred likely due to the growth of Christianity and ecclesiastical literacy (Looijenga 2003, 67). The **Harford Farm** brooch is considered the turning point of Old English portable epigraphy, wherein the language has become more developed and separate from the old Germanic languages of the past (Hines 2000, 82). Dating to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the brooch features an inscription that is visibly and linguistically more complex than its predecessors yet is relatively more straightforward in terms of interpretation. Prior to this inscription, the longest inscriptions in the early Anglo-Saxon corpus are seen on the **Ash-Gilton I** pommel (550-600), the **Loveden Hill** urn (400-600), and the **Watchfield** fitting (520-570), which are inscribed with older *futhark* or Anglo-Saxon runic sequences that have baffled runologists since the beginning of runic studies, acquiring multiple interpretations from almost every scholar who has observed them. Although some of the runes on the **Ash-Gilton I** pommel may in fact be non-runic space-fillers (Odenstedt 1981), the objects represent the evolution of runic literacy in England, bridging the gap between short and cryptic runic texts of the old Germanic past to the more lengthy and formulaic Old English inscriptions of Anglo-Saxon England.

Changes in epigraphy occur in the 7<sup>th</sup> century as a byproduct of the introduction and spread of Christianity, which brought Roman letters and Latin back to the forefront in Britain and Ireland and invited longer and more translatable texts on portable objects. Chapter five focuses on the objects from ecclesiastic and funerary contexts including pre-Christian and Christian traditions. This chapter reveals the standardisation, institutional learning, and authoritative use of text on objects of religious value and commemoration, as well as the teaching of Roman letters and Latin on pieces of slate from monastic environments in the Irish Sea region beginning in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century (Forsyth & Tedeschi 2008). One of these sites, **Inchmarnock**, also has evidence for the continuity and teaching of ogham, in one case as an incomplete ogham alphabet written alongside a phrase from a hymn on a slate (**IS.36**) (Forsyth & Tedeschi 2008, 133-137). Ogham continues in use throughout the early medieval period, appearing sporadically on portable objects of bone, antler, stone, and metal in Ireland, Scotland, and once in England (**Weeting-with-Broomhill** knife). As previously mentioned, most of these inscriptions have yet to be satisfactorily translated, and in at least one case is described as ‘cryptic ogham’ (**Cahercommaun**).

It isn’t until the 7<sup>th</sup> century that inscriptions start to become an intrinsic part of the object. Rather than text that is inscribed onto the backs of objects such as brooches, we see letters that are incised and carefully engraved onto the front, incorporated decoratively into the form and decoration of the objects, and sometimes enhanced with the infilling of niello. Text ceases to become a private and hidden affair on portable objects and begins to be *seen* as public statements and expressions. Finger-rings are a prime example, with letters that are carefully and skillfully engraved around the bands as part of the primary decoration, also serving as indications that trained metalsmiths and craftsmen were familiar with writing, perhaps even literate. As revealed in Chapter 4, finger-rings and brooches are the most numerous portable objects given text, although the inscriptions on these two object types show different methods and purposes for inscribing. Where the finger-ring texts are largely primary, most of the brooch inscriptions are scratched as secondary features onto the reverse. What this demonstrates is an exclusively Anglo-Saxon practice of displaying text on finger-rings beginning in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, whilst brooches from all major ethno-linguistic cultures in early medieval Britain and Ireland (except Pictish) are inscribed with text either as the primary focus of the object or as secondary texts onto the reverse. The inscriptions after 700 AD also incorporate the use of more scripts and languages, oftentimes combining different forms into one text (i.e. **Alhstan** ring, **Lancashire** ring), possibly as a means of expressing education, knowledge of script mixing in manuscripts, and/or cross-cultural association (Bitterli 2009, 83-97; Derolez 1954, 385; Halsall 1981, 13, 18).

Characteristics of the portable inscriptions that date after 700 AD in Anglo-Saxon England, including scriptural book-hand (i.e. seriffed runes) and the growing use of Latin and Roman letters, show that literacy was almost entirely regulated and promoted by the church (Barnes 2012, 123; Halsall 1989, 477; Hines 1998, 186; Okasha 2017, 207). Regardless of this fact, it is clear that at least a basic understanding of literacy was available and used every day during the lives of ordinary people after 700 AD and lasting throughout the early medieval period in England (Okasha 2017, 216). Seemingly mundane, ordinary objects such as strap-ends, combs, tweezers, and spindle-whorls were given inscriptions, oftentimes scratched secondarily onto the reverse or clumsily onto the front. Personal names in inscriptions begin to be accompanied with prayers and statements of faith as well as initial

crosses indicating some Christian association (Okasha 2011a). Owner, maker, commissioner, and writer sequences appear on objects incorporating the Anglo-Saxon first-person method of ‘speaking objects’ (see Chapter 7.1). Religious phrases asking for help or quotations taken directly from Scripture are placed onto the front (**Coppergate** helmet) and backs of objects (**Ædwen** brooch) for public viewing as well as private contemplation. As the years progress into the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, the inscriptions in all scripts become longer, more ‘refined’, and are used on a wider variety of objects and materials. Chapter five demonstrates that text begins to be used for administrative purposes on seal-dies (see Chapter 5.2.2) and as politicoreligious displays on Irish reliquaries (see Chapter 5.1). Ogham reaches its peak on the 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century **Ballyspellan** brooch, on which four rows are clear, concise, and easily translated.

Scandinavian runes brought a new dimension to portable text and literacy to England and Ireland in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century, in which text was used widely in domestic environments for casual and communicative purposes. In this corpus, Scandinavian runes are inscribed on brooches, spindle-whorls, tools, fragments of bone and antler, and miscellaneous objects of metal and wood. Chapter 6 demonstrates that the inscriptions in Scandinavian runes are largely carved in ways that suggest a more casual attitude towards the use of text, including sequences on complete and fragmentary pieces of bone and antler from settlement sites that appear to have been spontaneously written following a feast or social gathering (Barnes 2012, 114; Barnes & Page 2006, 329-330). The large numbers of these inscriptions, primarily from **Dublin** and **Orphir**, is mirrored at Scandinavian settlement sites (i.e. Bergen), and implies that knowledge of runic literacy was relatively widespread amongst communities (Barnes et al 1997; Spurkland 2005, 144-148). The Scandinavian inscriptions in this corpus mostly date to the 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries and consist of *futhark* and ‘magic’ sequences, owner, maker, and writer formulae, personal names, object-descriptive terms, and in sequences that do not make obvious lexical sense. In England, Scandinavian runes were also sometimes combined with Anglo-Saxon runes (**St Albans II**, **St Benets**) demonstrating the mixing of cultural and ethno-linguistic groups.

In summary, the use of text on portable objects within the parameters of this study, which concerns the early medieval period (400-1100 AD) in Britain and Ireland, begins with the use of older futhark runes from the Continent on gold bracteates and brooches as well as ogham inscriptions on bone and antler tools. These early runic texts are generally composed of short sequences interpreted as owner and maker marks, object-descriptive terms, and tribal names not for communicative purposes, but used by a military elite for ritualistic and political means (Barnes 2012, 11; Fischer et al 2008, 76; Gaimster 1992, 15; Hines 1998, 186-188; Looijenga 2003, 44, 81-82, 91-94). Largely with the advent of Christianity, Latin, and manuscripts in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the texts become longer, more lexical, and more formulaic. Anglo-Saxon runes replace the older futhark, and the disorderly, confusing arrangements of the past (i.e. **Bateman** brooch, **Dover** brooch) are succeeded by longer, more sophisticated runic inscriptions shaped by Latin literacy (i.e. **Baconsthorpe** page-holder, **Whitby** comb). The forms of runes change themselves, with seriffed edges mimicking manuscript letters (i.e. **Coquet Island** finger-ring, **Derby** plaque), and the application of niello and gilding to enhance (i.e. **Bardney** pin-head, **London Westminster** scabbard mount) their appearance and power. Even ogham was influenced by manuscript literacy and Latin grammar, with the inclusion of stem-lines, longer vowel-strokes, indicators for the direction of reading, and a more conventional means of spelling and composition after



the 8<sup>th</sup> century (i.e. **Ballyspellan** brooch) (Forsyth 1996, xlix). Roman letters and Latin reappear in England and Ireland around the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and are inscribed on all types of portable objects, primarily personal adornments (finger-rings in particular) and non-secular objects. Roman letters evolve with the introduction of Insular forms (i.e. majuscule, minuscule) (Avrin 2010, 182-186; Bischoff 1990, 83-84, 90). Sometime in the 9<sup>th</sup> century they begin to exceed the use of runes or ogham on portable objects, and in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries roman letters are used for standardised inscriptions on sword blades and Irish reliquaries, objects that were mass produced and avenues for political and social gain. Fundamentally, changes in the use of text on portable objects occurred in order to accommodate the needs of individuals and societies for personal, political, social needs. The texts were communicative and symbolic, private and public, authoritative and sentimental, evolving in use, script, language, and the objects they were inscribed upon alongside the cultural and religious transformations that occurred between 400 and 1100 AD in Britain and Ireland.

## 9.2 Why Inscribe?

Portable inscribed objects cover a wide variety of uses, from something that is worn and displayed prominently or discreetly, to something that is used every day as a tool or personal grooming implement. They are objects to be placed inside a grave, used during warfare, kept close as a talisman and thrown away as rubbish. The inscriptions on portable objects are decorative, dedicatory, functional, descriptive, symbolic, amuletic, and authoritative. They may be primary, intended to adorn the object when the object was made, or secondary, carved as a second thought, either shortly after construction or sometime after. The inscriptions were carefully engraved as purposeful and skillful additions, and clumsily scratched as a second thought. As decoration the portable inscriptions fit into appropriate spaces on the object, encircling around a central image (i.e. **Egginton** mount, **Barney** pin, **Postwick** seal-ring) or arranged along panels left empty for the addition of text (i.e. **London Westminster** scabbard mount, **London Putney** seax, **Sittingbourne** seax). The inscriptions on finger-rings are decorative and inscribed inside individual cells around the hoop (i.e. **Alhstan**, **Bodsham**, **Steyning**) and interwoven amongst additional decorative techniques (i.e. **Æthelwulf**, **Swindon**). Descriptive texts name the object the inscription adorns as well as the people associated with the object. They include owner, maker, commissioner, and writer inscriptions in formulae such as ‘X owns this brooch’ and ‘X made this comb’ and make reference to the material and type of object they are written upon (i.e. **Orphir OR 15**, **Caistor-by-Norwich** astragalus). As dedicatory they ask for protection from the gods for the owner or owners, and commemorate the dead (i.e. **Coppergate** helmet, **Brussels** cross). As functional they are practice letters written by a student (i.e. **Gorteen** axehead, **Inchmarnock**), letters used as guidelines for construction (**Derrynaflan** paten), or letters recessed into a seal for marking a

symbol in wax (i.e. **Æthelwald** seal). As symbols they act as ideographs for concepts, words, or names (i.e. **Faversham I and II, Galloway**).



**Figure 9.1** The inscribed **Ædwen** brooch (left) and the Fuller brooch (right). (© The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, ‘**Ædwen brooch**’ object no. 1951,1011.1, asset no. 34867001; ‘**Fuller brooch**’ object no. 1952,0404.1, asset no. 35987001)

Considering that most of the inscriptions are on objects of personal adornment and dress accessories, why is the proportion of objects that are inscribed still relatively low in proportion to objects that are not? The **Ædwen** brooch shares technical and decorative styles with the Fuller brooch (fig. 9.1) (Webster 1991b), but why, then, was text not added to Fuller brooch as well? Surely its opulence would have been enhanced with, say, a self-referential term giving it personhood? Would not the owner of the Fuller brooch be just as wary about its theft as **Ædwen**, and want to personalise it as a precaution? Similarly, The **Hunterston** brooch is frequently discussed alongside the Tara brooch as a masterpiece of 8<sup>th</sup> century Irish metalwork, but why is only the **Hunterston** brooch inscribed? The 7<sup>th</sup> century tale *The Life of St Brigit* talks of a brooch recovered from the sea that is identifiable by its individual design (Whitfield 2004, 100). When observing the elaborately decorated Irish penannular brooches, each one carries a style of their own, indicating that the more elaborate brooches were designed individually for one specific person and everyone in society was aware of it. Why, then, were some objects inscribed with text and the great majority were not? Does this indicate a limited knowledge of literacy, or rather a personal disinterest in inscribing certain objects? Does this indicate specific purposes for the objects in social customs, wherein some were given as gifts and others were not? Or were more objects inscribed than the quantity that survives today, but they were lost from the archaeological record at some point?

It is important to note that the numbers of objects represented in this thesis should not be taken at face value. Preservation of artefacts and intentional destruction of objects are just two factors that affect the archaeological evidence we have today. The fact that only one inscribed handbell is in the database does not mean that handbells were less inscribed than finger-rings. Deliberate melting-down

of bells for reuse of the metal (Christie 2004, 5), destruction or disposal of bells perhaps as votive offerings to bogs, and poor preservation in the archaeological context are all factors that could change the number of handbells that we know of today. The fact that the **Coppergate** helmet is the only known helmet with an inscription cannot say much other than it is the only one that survives. Considering that the majority of helmets that are available from the early Anglo-Saxon period are in fragments, more helmets may have had inscriptions before being dismantled, corroded, or destroyed, and more may exist that have not yet been found. Furthermore, objects that have been known of for quite some time have revealed inscriptions upon further investigation years after their discovery. The bronze leaf-shaped plaque from Newgrange, for instance (Forsyth pers comm 8 August 2019), was uncovered during excavations from 1962 to 1975, but the significance of its faint ogham inscription was not realised until recently. There are most likely more inscriptions waiting to be recognised on objects hiding away in storage, and it may take many more years for them to finally be seen.

Fortunately, the wet conditions of bogs and waterlogged towns have preserved an extensive number of objects in wood and leather. The numerous complete and fragmentary pieces of bone and antler with runic inscriptions from Viking-age Dublin have survived due to the waterlogged conditions of the area, providing archaeologists with rich evidence for craftmaking and knowledge of runic writing (Barnes et al 1997). The wooden tablets from **Springmount** and the inscriptions in the wax are preserved wholly because of their deposition in the bog. Although most of the portable inscribed objects are made of metal, this does not necessarily reflect that more objects of metal were inscribed than objects of other materials. Similarly, the lack of Pictish material in this corpus does not necessarily mean that the Picts were less likely to inscribe their objects, but rather it reflects the lack of furnished Pictish burials (Ritchie 1989, 51).

### 9.3 Significance and Future Research

The significance of this research is that it is the first to combine all ethno-linguistic epigraphic traditions in early medieval Britain and Ireland into a comprehensive comparative analysis. Whereas previous literature has focused solely on an individual script, language, object type, or geographic or cultural framework, this study includes all portable inscribed objects dating from AD 400 to 1100 from Insular contexts. The main goal of this research was to identify patterns, discrepancies, and irregularities of inscribing practices across the ethno-linguistic cultures and to examine the relationships between people and objects. Ideas of ownership, possession, exchange, and the life of objects were contemplated and applied to the material. Two-hundred and seventy objects were gathered and placed in a catalogue and explored under these objectives. This study has shown that there were a wide variety of objects given text during the period under consideration, ranging from decorative items of precious metal, ecclesiastical objects, household tools, ephemeral objects and fragments of organic material, and objects of warfare. There was apparently no limit to which objects could be inscribed and which were not, although preferences for which objects were given text is seen across Insular cultures. This thesis has also revealed distinct differences in inscribing practices on portable objects as well as similarities involving the addition of personal names and messages that indicate a direct relationship between

people and objects (i.e. owner, maker, commissioner, writer). As demonstrated in this thesis, the most noticeable discrepancy is between Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian perceptions of text and material culture, wherein first-person pronouns giving voice to the objects are exclusively an early medieval Anglo-Saxon custom. Scandinavian inscriptions on objects focus on the importance of the text itself, which has a power that is conjured up through the act of writing. Anglo-Saxon inscriptions imply that the object has the power, which is brought forth with the addition of text.

This study has also demonstrated that Scandinavian runic inscriptions in Britain and Ireland were more likely to be inscribed onto household and personal tools and fragments of bone, antler, and wood, wherein Anglo-Saxon inscriptions in both runes and Roman letters are predominantly on metal adornments, dress accessories, and ecclesiastical objects. A similar pattern with the objects inscribed with ogham can be seen, as most of the ogham texts are upon bone and stone objects, with a few exceptions in metal. Finger-rings from early medieval Britain and Ireland are exclusively inscribed in Anglo-Saxon contexts and in Anglo-Saxon scripts. Furthermore, no brooch of solely Scandinavian craftsmanship is inscribed. The **Hunterston** and **Penrith** brooches, both inscribed with Scandinavian runes, are Hiberno-Scandinavian types originating from the Irish Sea region (Barnes & Page 2006, 221, 333), and although other inscribed brooches show Scandinavian art influence (i.e. **Ædwen**, **Vale of York**), there exists no brooch that is of distinct Scandinavian style (i.e. oval, Borre, Urnes), in Britain, Ireland, that is inscribed with Scandinavian runes (Kershaw 2013). There are, however, a few examples of rune-inscribed brooches from Scandinavia (RuneS-Datenbank Dalbo G387, Tyrvalds G390, Skabersjö Sk 5/DR263, Viborg MJy30/DR100B), but this practice seems to have not been transferred to Britain nor Ireland.

The potential avenues through which this study can be further applied and researched are numerous and extensive. Further research onto the topic of portable inscribed objects from early medieval Britain and Ireland would benefit with a comparison with the portable objects from the Continent and Scandinavia. Although some comparisons have been attempted in this thesis, a more in-depth analysis between the portable inscribed objects (in particular the runic inscriptions) from the British Isles, the Continent, and Scandinavia would reveal more patterns, networks, and information about the development and progression of not only the addition of text on portable objects, but also literacy in general, than this thesis was able to provide. Furthermore, whereas this thesis focuses on the study of the objects that are inscribed, a more linguistic and epigraphic analysis of the inscriptions would also enhance the understanding of the material. Analysis of individual rune-forms, for example, as well as the different types of Roman letter scripts (i.e. uncial, half-uncial) would contribute a more detailed understanding of how the different scripts were used regionally on objects.

The most noticeable irregularities centre around the shortage of Pictish material as well as the lack of rune-inscribed objects from Anglo-Scandinavian York compared to other important Scandinavian settlements such as Dublin, Lincoln, and Orphir. Although the low quantity of inscribed objects from Pictish contexts may be explained by the lack of furnished burials from Scottish Pictland (Mitchell & Noble 2017, 25; Ritchie 1989, 51), the reason for the lack of runic inscriptions from Viking-age York is currently uncertain. Further examination of this phenomenon may shed light onto the inscribing practices of the region, or lack thereof, and may expand on current understanding of runic

literacy in Viking-age York, where, as it stands, is interpreted as non-existent (Barnes 2012, 89; Parsons 2004).

The corpus of portable inscribed objects from early medieval Britain and Ireland is constantly growing. Thanks to the PAS, a consistent number of objects found by metal detectorists are being acknowledged and recorded, and the number of those inscribed with text is usually increased by at least one a year. Furthermore, with help from the RuneS-Datenbank, an online database of all runic inscriptions from Britain, Ireland, Scandinavia, and the Continent is consistently expanding and contributing to the understanding of the use and evolution of the script across all applicable geographical areas. As more objects are added to the PAS and the RuneS-Datenbank, this study also grows. Indeed, at the time of completion, this thesis is already out of date, with more objects needed to be included into the discussion.

Furthermore, with the relatively recent resurgence of the application of the theory of object biography in archaeology (Appadurai 1986; Brunning 2019; Burström 2014; Gillings & Pollard 1999; Gosden & Marshall 1999; Joy 2009; Kopytoff 1986; Martin 2012; Williams 2004), this study hopes to contribute a valuable and useful addition to the study of material culture.

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