

Tanja Ratilainen, Janne Harjula,
Jussi Kinnunen & Jere Leppänen



A BRICK WITH A RUNIC INSCRIPTION FROM THE EPISCOPAL CASTLE OF KUUSISTO, SOUTHWEST FINLAND

ABSTRACT

A brick with a runic inscription was discovered in the 1980s during excavations of the Outer Bailey II of the Episcopal Castle of Kuusisto in Southwest Finland. In this article we present a transcription for the characters executed in medieval futhark and propose an interpretation for their purpose. A comparison with 27 other known medieval cases from Scandinavia shows that most of the inscribed bricks come from Denmark and are mostly from ecclesiastical contexts. The interpretation of the inscription $\mathfrak{R}\mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{Þ}\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{T}$ – **rupil** – *ruthil*, remains speculative, but it may have had an apotropaic purpose and been executed by someone involved in brick making, perhaps from southern Scandinavia. In the context of Finnish archaeology, the find is the first medieval runic inscription written in a Scandinavian language, as well as the first medieval runic inscription from a non-urban setting. Consequently, the Kuusisto find, and its interpretation significantly expand the understanding of runic literacy in medieval Finland.

Keywords: brick, Kuusisto Castle, literacy, Middle Ages, rune

INTRODUCTION

A brick with a runic inscription was discovered in the 1980s during excavations of the Outer Bailey II of the Bishop's Castle of Kuusisto in Southwest Finland. A photograph of the brick piece, along with other bricks from the site, was published in 1994 by Leena Venhe, who was working on the brick material at the time.¹ However, the inscription was never interpreted or published. The brick was subsequently rediscovered during Ratilainen's doctoral dissertation research and was further studied and analysed for her *Dies Medieuales 2022* conference paper, which focused on the marks, traces and carvings made on the bricks in the fortifications belonging to the bishop of Turku, in Koroinen and Kuusisto.² The publication of Professor Haggrén's *Festschrift* provided an opportunity to finally disseminate the results of this fascinating discovery. In this article, we present a transcription of the characters inscribed in medieval futhark and offer an interpretation of their purpose. Furthermore, a comparison is made with 27 medieval runic inscriptions on bricks from Scandinavia.

FIGURE 1. Kuusisto Bishop's Castle from the Southeast. Photo: Hannu Vallas, 1999. Archives of the Department of Building history, Hannu Vallas Collection, Finnish Heritage Agency.



The Episcopal Castle of Kuusisto is located approximately 15 km south-east of the medieval town of Turku. During the Middle Ages, the castle served as the primary stronghold of the bishop of Turku, symbolising the ecclesiastical authority that existed independently of secular power.³ The castle was situated on an island, close to the main sea routes and safeguarded by the archipelago (Fig. 1). The earliest evidence of the bishop's residence at Kuusisto dates from 1295. The construction of the stone castle commenced in the early 14th century, with brick becoming the predominant material employed in the 15th century. By the end of the Middle Ages, the castle, comprising three baileys and several towers, constituted an impressive feature of the coastal landscape. In 1528, the castle was ordered to be dismantled and subsequently employed for the acquisition of building materials for the benefit of the Swedish Crown.⁴ The initial archaeological excavations at the site were conducted by Reinhold Hausen in 1877. Subsequent excavations have been conducted on numerous occasions, mainly due to the necessity of continual restoration works, which remain a current requirement.⁵ During the fieldwork conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, a considerable quantity of brick material, including roof tiles, was gathered from the site.⁶

The use of brick as a building material was first introduced to the mainland of medieval Finland in the second half of the 13th century. It would currently appear that the earliest episcopal fortification at the cape of Koroinen in Turku and the Crown's castles at Turku and possibly at Viipuri were among the earliest sites to utilise brick. Several archaeological sites dating from the 14th and 15th centuries have yielded evidence indicating that brick was used much earlier and on a more widespread basis in medieval Finland than had previously been assumed. It is also evident that the bishop, who presided over the sole diocese in the region during the Middle Ages, was a major agent in the dissemination of brick use in medieval Finland.⁷

In Scandinavia, the practice of runic writing persisted throughout the medieval period. A considerable number of medieval inscriptions have been identified through archaeological excavations or during building archaeological studies in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. These inscriptions were usually created on carvable materials, including bone, ceramics, leather, metal, mortar, stone, and wood. The objects or structures on which they were carved also exhibit considerable variation.⁸ The content of the inscriptions ranges from invocations to commercial correspondence, and from writing exercises to love letters.⁹ From the 12th century onwards,¹⁰ unfired bricks offered a suitable surface on which to inscribe runes. To date, a total of 28 bricks bearing runic inscriptions, of which 27 are of a medieval date, have been entered in the open rune database of

Uppsala University.¹¹ We are pleased to announce the addition of the first brick from Finland to the assemblage.

Finland is regarded as situated on the periphery of the runic writing culture. The limited number of artefacts with runic inscriptions from the Late Iron Age, including a genuine runestone from Hitis, Kimitoön parish, southwest archipelago,¹² are believed to be imported items and were most likely not carved by Finnish locals.¹³ Nevertheless, four objects of everyday use with runic inscriptions have been identified in Turku from the medieval period, which are believed to have been created locally.¹⁴ Furthermore, the disputed cross of Sund from the Åland Islands bears a secondary inscription, which is thought to date from the late medieval period.¹⁵ The use of runic-like characters persisted well into the modern period. They were employed in rune staff calendars and used as owner's or maker's marks (Fi. *puumerkki*, Swe. *bomärke*) as well as in coats of arms.¹⁶

THE BRICK PIECE, ITS CONTEXT, DATING, AND APPLIED METHODS

The inscription from Kuusisto was carved into the flat, upper surface of the wall brick. In this context, the term 'upper' refers to the surface that was smoothed out during the clay moulding process. The original dimensions of the brick are 12 centimetres in width. The runes are positioned in a transverse orientation on the opposite end of the flat surface, allowing for readability from that perspective. If the inscription had been applied to an ordinary brickwork, it is probable that it would have been concealed within the masonry. The height of the runic characters is 4.5–7 cm, although the dimensions are not original for all of them, as the brick is broken from both long ends.¹⁷ The total length of the inscription is 5–5.2 cm. The text is not centred in space. It is possible that the carving tool was not a knife, as the edges at some points are perhaps too wide and round (Fig. 2 and Table 1, No. 28).

The brick was originally discovered within the north-east corner of Outer Bailey II, situated at a considerable depth within layer XII.¹⁸ According to Uotila, the construction of the bailey is likely to have occurred between the years 1410 and 1440.¹⁹ The stone pavement, which covered extensive areas of the bailey, was likely laid in the late 15th century.²⁰ However, only a portion of the area (half

of square 8 and square 9) located in the corner of the curtain wall and the tower, in which the loose brick was found, was covered with the stone pavement. Furthermore, neither of these squares were covered with a wooden level of an age older



FIGURE 2. The inscribed brick, measuring 12 cm in width. Photo: Tanja Ratilainen.

	SIGNUM	C	LOCATION	YR	WRK	CON	CONTEXT 2	BT	LOC	DIR	MOR	BRICK cm	
1	Sö ATA322-4394-2011	S	Strängnäs	1973	E	CO	?	WB	UFS	L	Y	19 x 14.5 x 10	
2	Vg 237	S	Lödöse St Mary's church	1918	E	CO	Depth 70 cm, close to the inside of the E wall of the choir of the younger brick church	WB	UFS	L3R	Y	(6,5) x 12,5 x 9	
3	Vg Fv1973; 201A	S	Skara	1972	E	UR	Brick oven 1.5 m under ground. HIDDEN	WB	UFS	L	Y?	27 x 12 x 9-10	
4	Vg NOR2001; 28	S	Årnäs (Aranäs)	2000	E	C	Rubble layer, which belonged to a larger stone building	WB	UFS	S 2R	?	(13) x (12.5) x 8.5?	
5	U ALSNÖHUS;50	S	Alsno hus	1916	E	M/C	?	WB	UFS	S2R**	Y	27.5 x 9-9.5 x 9	
6	Vs 6+	S	Västerås	?	?	CA	Sacristy cellar? In brickwork?	WB	?	?	?	?	
7	Vs 7+	S	Västerås	?	?	CA	?	WB	?	?	?	?	
8	Ds Vg236 (Vg 236 X DsVg236)	S	Gestads socken	?	F	F?	?	WB	UFS	L	Y	(10) x 12 x (3.7)	
9	DR 59 (DK Mjy94 Mjy 94)	D	Øm	1921	E	CL	?	WB	UFS	SE	?	14 x 11.5 x 9	
10	DR 60 (Mjy 95 DK Mjy95)	D	Øm	1921	E	CL	?	WB	UFS	?	?	7.5 x 5.8 x 5	
11	DR 136	D	Ravnkilde 3	1935	E	M?	Found among rubble that may come from the manor house	RB?	UFS	?	?	(10) x (6.7) x (5-5.2)	
12	DR 168 (DK Njy14 Njy 14)	D	Astrup	1908	R	CH	?	WB	UFS	L	?	25 x 13 x 8.5	
13	DR 244 (DK Sj57) Sj 57)	D	Nykøbing	1841	?	CH	Originally set in the frame of the walled door on the south cross side of church. VISIBLE	WB	S	L	L	27.95 x 14.3 x 8.5	
14	DR 252	D	Ledøje	1888	R	CH	?	WB	UFS	L	Y	27 x 13 x 8-9	
15	DR 257	D	Søborg 2	1894	E	CH	80 cm from the SE corner of chancel, 16th course above ground. VISIBLE	WB	S	L	Y	17.9 x 1.8 x 7.8	
16	DR 367	D	Lösens socken	1864	R	CH	Found in a nave vault. HIDDEN	WB	UFS	L	L	27 x 14 x 11	
17	DR DKMjy97 (DK Mjy97 Mjy 97)	D	Øm	1978	S	CL		?	in two pieces	?	?	?	
18	DR DKsj8	D	Dronningholm	1937	E	C	Castle rampart, in the NW part in cleared terrain.	WB	S	L	?	?	?
19	DR DKSyd8	D	Dannemare kirke	1895	A	CH	Found during dismantling the church after a fire	WB	UFS	L***	Y	19 x 13 x 8	
20	DR EM85;439A	D	Vejby kirke	1956	R	CH	Part of the altartable? LIKELY HIDDEN*	WB	UFS	S2R	?	34.5 x 17 x 7.5	
21	DR EM85;439B	D	Vejby kirke	1956	R	CH	Part of the altartable? See No. 20. LIKELY HIDDEN	WB	UFS	L	?	28 x 17 x 8	
22	DR EM85;439C	D	Norre Løgum kirke	1960	R	CH	In the E side of the triumphal wall. LIKELY HIDDEN	WB	UFS	L	Y	25.2 x 0.7 x 7.5-7.7	
23	DR EM85;459F	S	Lund	1944	E	UR		?	LS	?	?	7.5 x 4.8 x 2.5	
24	DR Til1	D	Øm 4	1939	E	CL		WB	UFS	L****	Y	28.5 x 13.8-14.3 x 9-9.5	
25	N 5	N	Eidsberg kirke	1880- 81	RE	CH	Found during rebuilding	2B	?	?	?	?	
26	N 6	N	Eidsberg kirke	1880- 81	RE	CH	Found during rebuilding	?	?	?	?	?	
27	NA9	N	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	
28	Fi Ku u 1 / KM87051	F	Kaarina / St. Karins	1988	E	C	Archaeological XII, square R8-9	WB	UFS	S	N	(-) x 12 x (-)	

TABLE 1. Inscribed bricks from Scandinavia. Compiled: Tanja Ratilainen.

C – Country: S – Sweden, D – Denmark, N – Norway, F – Finland; **YR – Year when found;** **WRK – Work during which brick was found:** A – After fire, E – Excavation, F – Random find, R – Restauration, RE – Rebuilding; **CON – Context:** C – Castle, CA – Cathedral, CH – Church, CL – Cloister, CO – Convent, M – Manor, M/C – Manor/castle, UR – Urban; **BT – Brick type:** WB – Wall brick, RB – Rib brick; **LOC – Location on the brick:** UFS – Upper flat side, S – On the side, LS – On the levelled surface; **DIR – Direction:** L – Lengthways, S – Sideways, L3R – Lengthways in 3 rows, S2R – Sideways in 2 rows, SE – Sideways on the other end; **MOR – Mortar:** Y – Yes, L – Likely, N – No.

RUNE cm	INSCRIPTION	OTHER	OLD WEST NORSE	ENGLISH	INTERPRETATION	DATING	
1	10.5–13	α^b^rrbm^ñ^rt^u^(!)^t)-...	no	...	...	?	1100–1500
2	3–3.5	...(b)(æ)(s)(t)æ ¶ ...þæris ¶ ...upsiro	no	...	...	?	13th or 14th c
3	11	rimus	no	...	...	Name or single word	14th c
4	6.5	...-at- ¶ ...f-...	no	...	...	?	beg. of 14th c
5	?	bouæ ¶ (b)ouæ	no	Bófa(?) Bófa(?)	Bófi(?) Bófi(?)	Male name	13th c
6	?	[-upfk- kob- ahfus]	no	...	...	?	1100–1500
7	?	[fupork fuporo-k hk-b]	no	<fupork>	<fupork> ...	First 6 characters and ?	1100–1500
8	7.5–8	...ria	no	[Ma]ría	Mary	Saint / Name	13th c
9	9–10.2	ke(t)il	no	Ketill.	Ketill.	Male name	1172–1550
10	3.4	... (-)æ(s)i	no	...	...	?	1172–1550
11	1	peder	no	Pétr.	Pétr.	Male name / Saint	1250–1400
12	7–7.5	fupor(k)	no	<fupork>	<fupork>	First 6 characters	1150–1400 / c. 1200–1250
13	5.5–6	iuuuuhhihht	no	...	...	?	end of 12th c / 1160–1300
14	?	al(-)naet : ri	no	<al-naet> rei[st](?)	<al-naet> carved(?)	?	end of 12th c / 1175–1200
15	5–5.5	þæn : fyrst^æ	no	Pann fyrsti.	The first.	a word	end of 12th c / 1175–1200
16	5–6	eko : sum : la^pis	no	Ego sum lapis.	I am a stone.	a sentence	1100–1500 / 1200–1300
17	?	(æ)(ø)	no	...	...	Uncertain if runes;	1100–1500 / 1172–1550
18	?	þprup/þ{K}ru{K}	no	...	...	?	1175–1300
19	5–6	----(α^k)(k)h	human figure	...	...	?	1175–1225
20	?	o^lof ¶ o^lof	The bow of a ship or arches	Ólafr Ólafr	Ólafr Ólafr	male name	1100–1500
21	?	fupø(r)k(h)(a)	no	<fuporkhn[ias]>	<fuporkhnias>	?	1100–1500 /
22	4.5	tihlsten	no	tiglsteynn	Brick	word	1160–1300
23	3.2–3.3	uþo-	no	<[f]uþo[rk]>	<fupork>	First 6 characters	1100–1500
24	?	-þorkh	some traces	<[fu]þorkh>	<fuporkh>	First 6 characters	1000–1400 / 1172–1550
25	?	§A ... olafs ... §B ...to ~ mik	?	§A ... Ólafs ... §B [se]ttu(?) mik	§A ... Ólafs's ... §B placed me	Male name and sentence	1100–1500
26	?	§A þo^rfyts §B ...-its...	?	§A Þorfinns §B ...	§A Þorfinnr's §B ...	?	1100–1500
27	?	a ria k	?	A[ve] [Ma]ria g[ratia]	Hail Mary full of grace	Invocation	1100–1500
28	4.5–7		no	ruthil	...	word	Medieval

TABLE 1. Inscribed bricks from Scandinavia. Compiled: Tanja Ratilainen.

* 5 incised bricks, 3 whole stones and a few fragments, 4 skulls and skeletal remains were found when the altar collapsed during a restoration. The altar block had been hidden under an oak panelling; ** On both ends of the brick; *** Only half of the space is applied and divided by a line. In the other half there is a human like figure carved horizontally; **** On the upper corner along the long side. A list of references and publications on the runes can be found at the end of the article.

than the stone pavement. (Fig. 3.) Suna states that the squares closest to the curtain wall were subject to disturbance at a considerable depth below the surface.²¹ It is therefore not possible to determine with certainty whether the brick is older than the structures. However, the coins discovered in layers VI and below suggest that the brick may originate from the 14th century.²² For the time being, it seems reasonable to conclude that the brick with the inscription is likely to date from before 1528, that is, before the castle was dismantled.

To define the runes and determine their order of carving, the brick surface with the inscription was cleaned with a brush, photographed in detail, and subjected to visual analysis. A 3D model of the inscription was created using photogrammetry in RealityCapture²³ software. Subsequently, the Cloud-to-Mesh Distance tool in CloudCompare²⁴ software was employed to generate a distance model of the brick surface. This model represents the distance from the vertices of the 3D model to a mesh representing a flat brick surface, which was derived from a subsample of the 3D model. The resulting model illustrates the depth of the inscription. (Figs. 4–5.)

The brick was also analysed with a pXRF analyser among a total of 158 bricks, redware pieces, and clay samples from Turku, Koroinen, and Kuusisto.²⁵ The analysis was conducted on February 3rd, 2023, utilising a Niton XL3t 950 GOLDD+ portable X-ray fluorescence (XRF) device belonging to the Turku Museum Centre. The analyses were performed with the ‘TestAllGeo’ mode, which per-

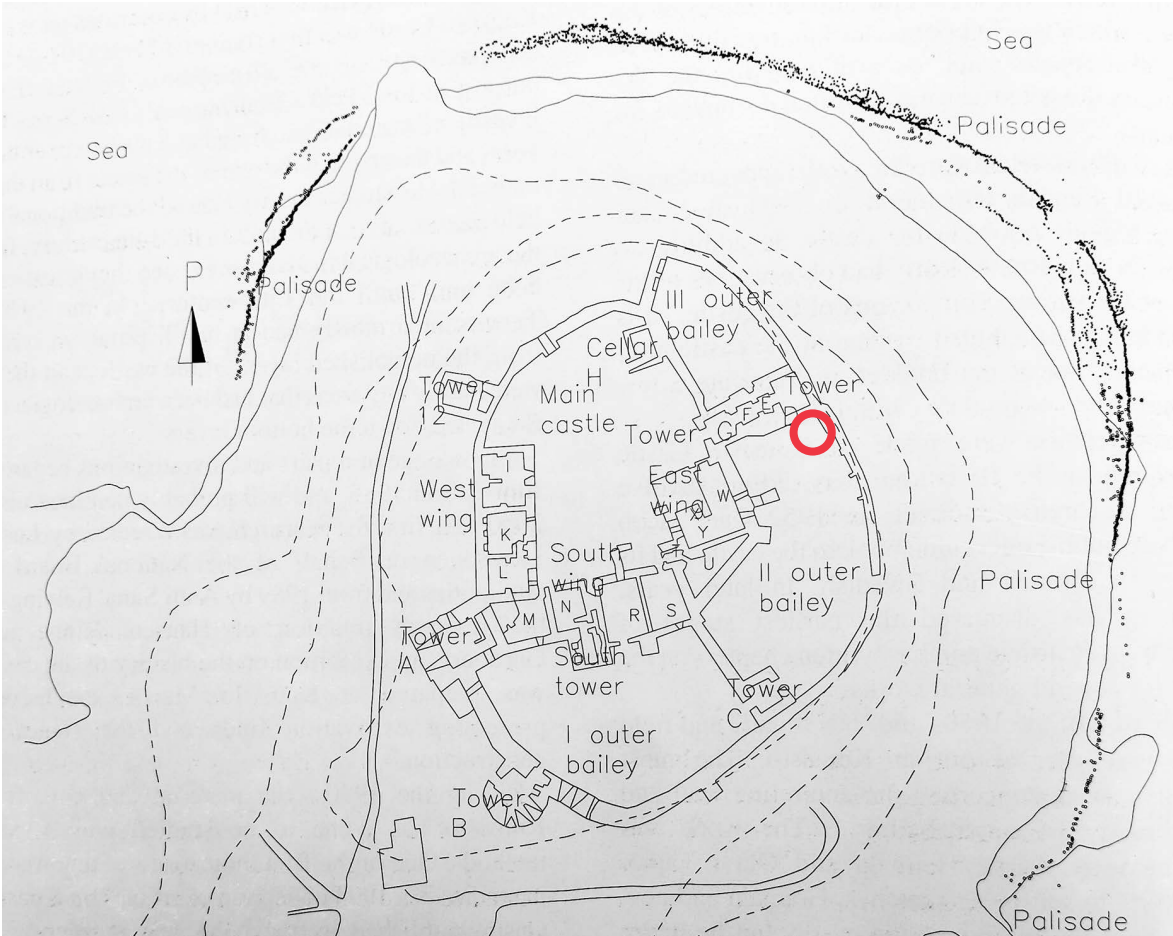


FIGURE 3. Plan of Kuusisto Castle. The area in which the brick was found is indicated by a circle. The original map was published in Uotila (1998: 90) and has been modified by Ratilainen.

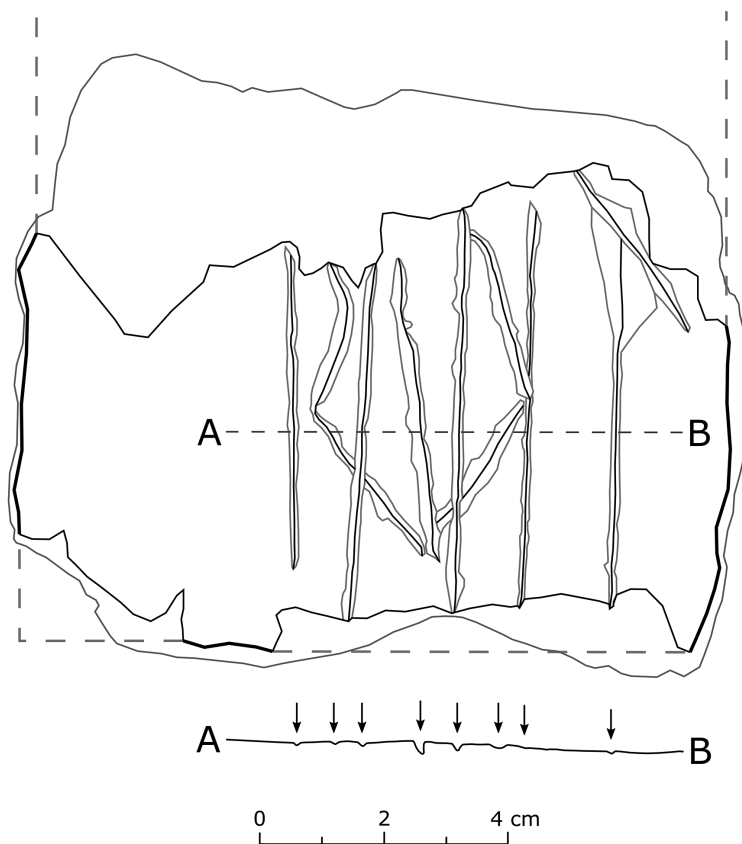


FIGURE 4. A drawing made based on a surface model of the inscribed brick, illustrating the fractured end and the depth of the incised characters. The black thickened line shows the original surface of the brick. Drawing: Jere Leppänen.

mits the examination of powder, mineral, and ore samples without initially determining whether the samples would be most effectively analysed with the Mining or Soil mode. The total analysis time was 120 seconds, with an analysis time of 40 seconds for all three filters. The ‘TestAllGeo’ mode employs both the Compton

Normalisation calibration (for soil analysis) and the Fundamental Parameters calibration (for mining analysis) to ascertain the suitability of the soil calibration and to determine whether the total metal content exceeds the threshold for Compton mode. If the sample is suitable for analysis via soil mode, the analyser will present the results from both soil and mining modes in a unified list. If both calibrations contain the same element, the mode with the lower detection limit will be displayed.²⁶

RESULTS

Interpretation of the script

The inscription is executed using medieval *futhork* script. The following order of runes can be discerned: ᚱᚱᚱᚱ. The transliteration of the script is **rupil**. The order of inscription of the characters is as follows: The sequence of characters begins with **r**, then **u**, then the lower diagonal branch of the character **p**, then **i**, then the remainder of the character **p**, and finally **l**. It is notable that the inscription is packed tightly without space between characters, which may be a result of the inscription process. As a result, the vertical strokes and branches of the various characters have become intertwined. Nevertheless, most of the characters have been inscribed individually, except for the first part of the **p**, followed by the **i**, and then the last part of the **p** (Fig. 2). This order of inscription of the components of the characters on the brick seems to be plausible. The inscription appears to represent a complete unit of characters, as evidenced by the presence of unused space both before the first rune

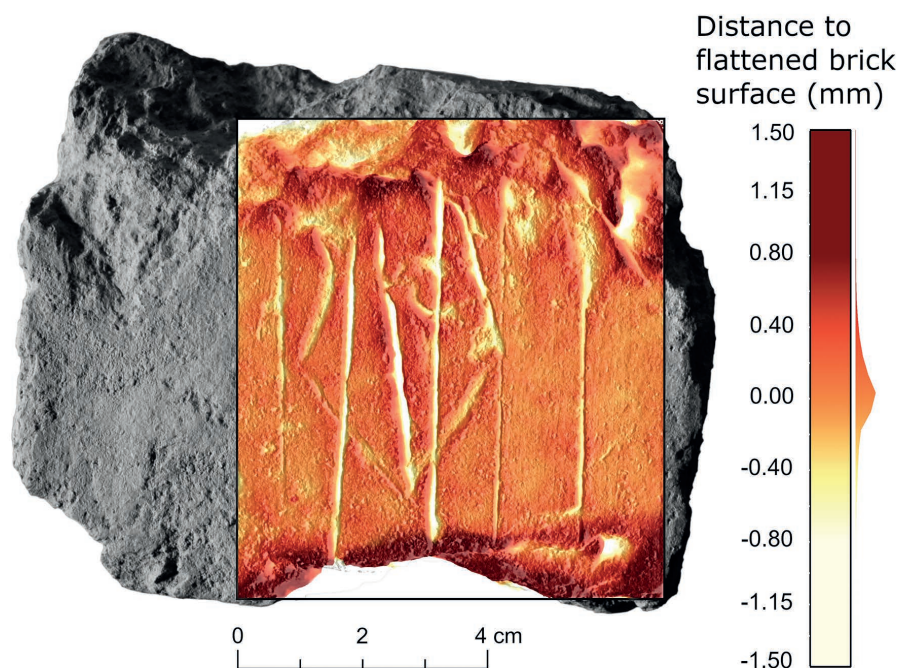


FIGURE 5. The distance model illustrates the depth of the characters. Model: Jere Leppänen.

and after the last rune. The characters **u** and **p** have been carved with greater depth than the other characters (see Figs. 4–5).

The transcription of **rupil** may be a word that appeared in Old Danish as *ruthil* or *rythil*, and *rydhil* in Old Swedish, meaning ‘elevation’ in a broad sense. The term has been employed as a topographical designation, denoting a hill (Fi. *mäki*, *kukkula*) or mound (Fi. *kumpu*), as well as in reference to other physical formations, such as swelling (Fi. *kyhmy*), wart (Fi. *syylä*), or scab (Fi. *rupi*) on a human or animal, particularly a horse.²⁷

pXRF results

The elemental values alone, as determined by pXRF analysis, are insufficient for establishing whether the clay was obtained from a local source. However, when considered alongside reference material and other bricks from Kuusisto, Turku and Koroinen, it appears to align with the category of wall bricks produced from local clay.²⁸

COMPARISON TO OTHER BRICKS WITH INSCRIPTIONS

Of the 27 inscribed medieval bricks, 17 originate from Denmark, seven from Sweden, and only three from Norway. The bricks are typically associated with an ecclesiastical context, including eleven parish churches, six cloisters or convents, and two cathedrals. Five bricks were recovered in association with a castle or manor house, and in only three instances were they retrieved from urban or rural contexts (Table 1).

In only six instances is the original position of the brick within the structure reasonably well documented. Two of these were visible within the masonry structure. In the case of Nykøbing church (Table 1, No. 13), the inscription on the long narrow side of the brick was located on the southern portal of the church. However, the written message is devoid of any discernible meaning. An additional case, situated in a less visible location, is illustrated by the example of Søborg church (Table 1, No. 15). In this instance, the brick was positioned at a height of sixteen courses, near the south-east corner of the chancel. The inscription *Þann fyrsti*, translated as ‘the first’, was discernible on the narrow side of the brick. In the remaining four cases, it is likely that the letters carved on the flat side of the brick were concealed during the construction process. Firstly, an inscription on the brickwork of the nave vault of Lösen Church, which reads *Ego sum lapis*, ‘I am a stone’ (Table 1, No. 16). Secondly, a brick was utilised in the foundation of an oven discovered in Skara with a name or a single word script *rimus* (Table 1, No. 3). Thirdly, two bricks bearing inscriptions (the name *Olafr* and the initial six letters of the futhark) were probably incorporated into an altar structure in Vejby Church (No. 20–21). Fourthly, in Nørre Løgum Church, a brick with a script *tihlsten*, ‘brick’, was originally situated on the east side of the triumphal wall (Table 1, No. 22).

All the inscriptions that have been identified thus far were inscribed on wall bricks and most of them were inscribed on the upper flat surface of the bricks prior to firing. The material does not include any moulded bricks or roof tiles. In only three instances was the inscription carved on the elongated narrow side of the brick. Most of the inscriptions were inscribed in a lengthwise orientation on the largest surface of the brick. In a total of four instances, the text was inscribed in a transverse direction, while in a couple of cases, this occurred even on two or three rows. (Table 1)

Of note is the fact that, out of a total of 27 inscriptions, 12 remain undeciphered. A significant proportion of the inscriptions are legible, yet their content appears to be devoid of any discernible meaning. The most common words inscribed are names, comprising eight cases. The majority of these are male names, including Ketil, Olafr and Petr. It is equally plausible that Olafr and Petr are derived from the names of saints, as is the female name Mary.²⁹ It is noteworthy that the name Olafr appears on three separate occasions. In four instances, the initial six characters of the futhark were inscribed. In four instances, the words or sentences are present. The inscription from Oslo is unambiguously a Latin invocation, ‘*Ave Maria Gratia plena*’ (Table 1, No. 27).

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

The XRF analysis indicates that the inscribed brick discussed in this paper was likely manufactured using local clay. It seems reasonable to suggest that the individual responsible for inscribing the brick was a person involved in the brick-making process for Kuusisto Castle. It can be inferred that the runes were carved on the fresh surface of the brick, and that the script was visible for a period during the manufacturing of the brick. It is unclear whether the complete script has survived, as the brick is broken and there would have been space for at least two additional rows above the existing script. Given that the brick in question was of the typical wall brick variety, it seems reasonable to posit that the individual responsible for inscribing the runes had a basic understanding of masonry structures and was aware that the visibility of such writing would be limited within the walls of Kuusisto Castle. Indeed, it is possible that the concealment of the script was deliberate,³⁰ with the act of inscribing being of greater importance than the long-lasting visibility of the script. A slightly offhand execution of the script does not support the hypothesis that the primary function of the script was to be left on display. As previously noted, there are few examples from Scandinavia where the original location of

the scripted brick is known. However, similar contexts, such as a wall, an oven, a foundation, or an altar, suggest that the act of concealment was also a factor.³¹

The runic scripts discovered thus far in Turku appear to serve an apotropaic function, namely the expulsion of evil or the prevention of its intrusion into daily activities. Furthermore, the runic scripts in Turku exhibit a shared reliance on the Latin language and a convergence of Catholic beliefs and folk religion. In most cases, the writing surface was made of wood, specifically the stave vessel bottoms. However, in one instance, antler was used as an alternative material, specifically for a comb.³² The Kuusisto brick, however, appears to offer a slightly different narrative. The material used is distinct, as the surface of a brick has been employed for the first time in the inscription of a runic script. Secondly, the context of the find is non-urban. Thirdly, the language used seems to be Scandinavian, rather than Latin. In the Scandinavian context, these variables are not novelties, as can be seen in comparison with other known cases. However, in the Finnish context, they are genuinely novel, extending medieval runic writing beyond the town of Turku to the ecclesiastical centre of power in rural south-western Finland.

The interpretation of the text is challenging and remains largely conjectural, particularly given the paucity of available data, which comprises only a single word. Nevertheless, if our interpretation of the text, *ruthil*, with its presented meaning, is accurate, it contributes further to the narrative. It is possible that someone involved in brick making may have attempted to expel, or cause the formation of, a swelling, wart, or scab by executing rune magic. This could have involved writing down the name of the ailment, reciting an incantation or carrying out some other act of magic. The resulting brick with the script may then have been incorporated into the structures of Kuusisto Castle as a means of concealment, for decades or even centuries.³³

The considerable number of bricks with runic inscriptions documented from Denmark and Sweden is likely to reflect both the prevailing research context, which has involved numerous restorations and building archaeological studies, and the broader historical usage of brick as a construction material in these regions, which has been more prevalent than in Finland or Norway.³⁴ With regard to the culture of runic writing, Denmark, Sweden and Norway represent the core areas, whereas Finland appears to be situated on the margins.³⁵ The material, unfired clay, provided an opportunity for an individual versed in runic writing to express themselves. Nevertheless, the opportunity was somewhat unique during the brick-making process. It is possible that locals versed in runic writing participated in the brickmaking for Kuusisto Castle.³⁶ However, given that the inscription could be written in Old Danish, it would be intriguing to suggest that the carver involved in the brickmaking, and perhaps the entire brick-making team, originated from Southern Scandinavia.

CONCLUSIONS

The inscription was inscribed using medieval futhark. It is not possible to ascertain whether the original composition included additional words, given that the brick is fragmented. Nevertheless, it seems plausible to suggest that the transcription 'ruthil' may be derived from the Scandinavian language, with the potential to signify 'elevation', more specifically a swelling, wart, or scab. The interpretation remains highly speculative, but it may have an apotropaic purpose and was executed by someone involved in brick making, perhaps from Southern Scandinavia.

The brick fragment with a runic inscription from the Episcopal Castle of Kuusisto is the first example from medieval Finland to be added to the list of 27 other medieval bricks with runic inscriptions from Scandinavia. In the context of Finnish archaeology, the find is the first medieval runic

inscription written in a Scandinavian language, as well as the first medieval runic inscription from a non-urban setting. Consequently, the Kuusisto find, and its interpretation significantly expand the understanding of runic literacy in medieval Finland.

Tanja Ratilainen works at the Turku City Museum, formerly the Turku Museum Centre, as a researcher responsible for urban archaeological heritage in the province of Finland Proper. She is currently on leave for post-doctoral research on the Cathedral of Turku. I first met Jori as editor-in-chief of the journal SKAS in the early 2000s, when I was writing my first articles. As a pre-examiner of my doctoral thesis, he was incredibly supportive, constructive, and encouraging, and this has not changed in working life as a colleague and professor.

Janne Harjula, PhD, docent (associate professor) in historical archaeology at the University of Turku. I work as university lecturer at the Department of Archaeology, University of Turku, and have published widely on medieval material culture. Georg and I have a long history of collaboration and fellowship in the Society for Medieval Archaeology in Finland. Today, George is also a dear colleague in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Turku.

Jussi Kinnunen is a geologist, archaeologist and doctoral candidate in archaeology studying and working at University of Turku. Jori is one of my supervisors, highly appreciated colleague and a catalyst for inspiring new research. Other connective factors worth of mentioning for us are for example blackish sense of intellectual humour, liberal thinking and a taste for Caledonian distillates.

Jere Leppänen works with the archaeological heritage in Southwest Finland as a researcher at the Turku City Museum. His research interests relate to the Late Iron Age period, citizen science and the use of GIS tools in archaeology. I first became acquainted with Georg during his visits on excavations, and later when he was the supervisor of my master's thesis. Georg has always been most supportive and inspiring.

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NOTES

- 1 Venhe 1994: Fig. 10.
- 2 Ratilainen 2022.
- 3 Haggren 2015: 428.
- 4 Suna 1994; Suna & Lounatvuori 2009: 10–37; Uotila 1998: 87, 107–11.
- 5 Uotila 1998: 87–91.
- 6 Venhe 1994.
- 7 Ratilainen 2020. For further information regarding the diocese, see e.g. Hiekkänen 2020: 44–5.
- 8 Moltke 1985; Palumbo 2020; Palumbo & Harjula 2024: 75.
- 9 Palumbo & Harjula 2024: 72; See also Oja 2015: 58–71.
- 10 Krongaard Kristensen 2007: 230.
- 11 Söktjänsten Runor: The search term is *‘tegel’* (föremål & material) The material of the object found in Ribe, Denmark, in the 1950’s (DR DKSJy43) is uncertain, and the inscription is dated to the post-medieval period.
- 12 Källström 2024; Åhlén et al. 1997; 1998a, 1998b.
- 13 Källström 2024; Moilanen 2024.
- 14 Harjula 2008; 2015:47–9; 2016; 2019; Palumbo & Harjula 2024.
- 15 Sjöstrand 2024.
- 16 Harjula et al. 2021: 223–4; Harjula & Immonen in print; Immonen 2003; Oja 2015; Salonen et al. 2021: 63–7; Tertti 1985; Willson 2024. For further information regarding the marks and carvings on the bricks, see Aalto 2014; 2018; Luppi 1997; Ratilainen 2011. For details about the carvings on the church structures, see e.g. Hiekkänen 2020: 215; Ratilainen 2011; Savolainen et al. 2023.
- 17 Regarding the lower part, there is approximately 1 cm to the original edge of the brick.
- 18 In the squares designated as 8 and 9, situated in the XII layer, the dimensions of the squares were 2x2 metres (Suna 2002: 110 and the markings with the brick).
- 19 Uotila 1998: 108–9.
- 20 Suna 2002; Suna 1994: 14–6.
- 21 Suna 1994: 17.
- 22 Suna 1994: 17–20. It was not possible to undertake a comprehensive examination of the original finds in order to ascertain with greater certainty the age of the layers.
- 23 Epic Games 2025. RealityCapture version 1.4. (<https://www.capturingreality.com/>, 24.5.2024)
- 24 A total of 34 bricks from Kuusisto were subjected to analysis. It should be noted that no redware from Kuusisto was included in the material under examination (Ratilainen et al. 2023).
- 25 CloudCompare 2024. 3D point cloud and mesh processing software, version 2.13.2 Kharkiv. (<https://www.cloudcompare.org/>, 1.9.2024)
- 26 Thermo Fisher 2010. ‘TestAll Geo’ -mode is capable of detecting the following elements: Ag, Al, As, Au, Ba, Bi, Ca, Cd, Cl, Co, Cr, Cs, Cu, Fe, Ga, Hf, Hg, K, Mg, Mn, Mo, Nb, Ni, P, Pb, Pd, Rb, Re, Ru, S, Sb, Sc, Se, Si, Sn, Sr, Ta, Te, Ti, Th, U, V, W, Zn and Zr.
- 27 Ejder 1948; 1958; Ringdahl 2008: 124; SOÄ 11: 28, 52–3, 118; Sørensen 1984: 385; Vikstrand 2007: 69, 126–7;
- 28 Ratilainen et al. 2023.
- 29 For an interpretation of the name appearing in Alsnöhus, see Rosborn 2007.
- 30 In comparison, at Häme Castle, apart from one brick, all carvings and marks were made on the flat upper surface of the brick, thus not visible when the brick was incorporated into a wall (Ratilainen 2016). In the absence of brick carvings and marks in Hattula church, Ratilainen posits the possibility that they were deliberately concealed (Ratilainen 2012: 179). However, in the Cathedral of Turku, carvings and marks were made on both the narrow side and the end of the brick, thus leaving them visible (see, for example, Aalto 2018).
- 31 Cf. Hukantaival 2016: 91–100.
- 32 Harjula 2019; Palumbo & Harjula 2023: 78.
- 33 It was of the utmost importance to be aware of the origin and cause of the ailment and to name it to expel the disease (Krohn 1917). On the healing charms and runes: Macleod 2012: 116–62. On the deliberately concealed spells or charms against disease: Manhag 2021: 424.
- 34 Drake 2007: 115; Krongaard Kristenssen 2007. See also Ratilainen 2020: 43–5.
- 35 Willson 2024.

36 The earliest evidence of local masons dates from the 15th century, with the production of bricks by peasants at least as early as the early 16th century (Gardberg 1957: 65; 1959: 319–20, 512–3; Hiekkänen 2003: 31; Vilkuna 1998: 178).

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