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Animal art and personal names in Iron Age Scandinavia: Different media – corresponding cultural codes?

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Abstract: This article addresses Scandinavian Iron Age personal names from the perspective of Iron Age visual art: *animal styles*. Introducing the naming system of 2nd to 8th century Scandinavia as a part of the Germanic system, it begins by discussing the relevance of semantic content. While the meaning of personal names is often considered unimportant or secondary, this article contests this view, arguing that the seemingly meaningless variations of compounded names have parallels in visual communication. Studies of animal art demonstrate a play with ambiguity and cunning, changing species and hybrids, communicating meanings that seem obscure to us today. In this light, it is suggested that name elements functioned as central parts of identity formation, drawing on lines of association to communicate ideals of the individual's qualities, social

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position and family connections. It is concluded that animal styles and names constitute related aspects of expressing and negotiating identities in the Iron Age.

Keywords: Dithematic names, Iron Age, animal art.

Noms personnels et art animalier en Scandinavie à l'Âge du Fer : des média différents – des codes culturels qui se correspondent ?

Résumé : Cet article traite des noms personnels de l'Âge du Fer scandinave, vus au travers de l'art visuel de cette époque dans des *styles animaliers*. L'introduction du système de dénomination en Scandinavie du IIe au VIIIe siècle, en tant que partie intégrante du système germanique, nécessite une discussion sur la pertinence de son contenu sémantique. La signification des noms personnels est souvent considérée sans importance ou secondaire. Cet article conteste ce point de vue, soutenant le fait que les variations apparemment dénuées de sens des noms composés ont des parallèles dans la communication visuelle. Les études sur l'art animalier montrent un jeu d'ambiguïté et de ruse, d'espèces changeantes et hybrides, communiquant des significations qui nous échappent aujourd'hui. Dans cette optique, il est suggéré que les éléments de dénomination fonctionnaient comme des éléments centraux de la formation de l'identité, créant des liens d'associations qui permettent de communiquer les idéaux de qualités individuelles, la position sociale et les connections familiales. Il est conclu que les styles animaliers et les noms constituent des aspects connexes de l'expression et de la négociation des identités pendant l'Âge du Fer.

Mots-clés : Noms dithématiques, Âge du Fer, styles animaliers.

Tierstilkunst und Personennamen im eisenzeitlichen Skandinavien: Unterschiedliche Medien – gleiche kulturelle Kodierungen?

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Beitrag betrachtet eisenzeitliche skandinavische Personennamen aus der Perspektive eisenzeitlicher Bilderzeugnisse, den Tierstilen. Zunächst wird das skandinavische Namensystem des 2. bis 8. Jahrhunderts als Teil des germanischen Systems eingeführt und im Anschluss die Relevanz des semantischen Inhaltes erörtert. Es wird oft angenommen, dass die Bedeutung der Personennamen unwichtig oder zweitrangig sei. Dieser Auffassung wird hier widersprochen. Ganz im Gegenteil haben die scheinbar bedeutungslosen Variationen zweigliedriger Namen Parallelen in der visuellen Kommunikation. Untersuchungen zum Tierstil zeigen, dass hier oft mit Zweideutigkeiten und Gewitztheit vorgegangen wurde, mit Veränderungen der Tierarten und Mischwesen. Dies kommunizierte offenbar Bedeutungsinhalte, die uns heute verborgen bleiben. Auf dieser Grundlage wird hier argumentiert, dass Elemente des Namens zentral für die Identitätsbildung waren und auf Assoziationsketten zurückgriffen, die die Qualitäten eines Individuums, seine soziale Position und Familienbande in idealisierter Weise ausdrücken sollten. Daraus lässt sich folgern, dass sowohl Tierstil als auch Namen als zusammengehörige Aspekte fungierten, mit deren Hilfe eisenzeitliche Identitäten ausgedrückt und verhandelt wurden.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Dithematische Namen, Eisenzeit, Tierstile.

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Animal art and personal names in Iron Age Scandinavia: Different media – corresponding cultural codes?

SOFIE LAURINE ALBRIS

1. Personal names and Iron Age identities

When runic writing first appeared in Northern Europe in the 2nd century AD, personal names were one of the most prominent – often the only – subjects of the inscriptions, implying that these labels of identity were of strong importance. Personal names thus form a part of the archaeological record by being inscribed on jewellery, weapons, tools and stones (Imer 2015: 67–90). They are also preserved as generics in place names. As an archaeologist working with place name material, I became curious about these personal names. What did they mean in their contemporary society and could approaching them from an archaeological perspective help us understand the building of identities in 1st millennium Scandinavia?

Our archaeological knowledge of pre-Christian Scandinavian societies and identities is growing rapidly due to new methods and discoveries as well as an increase in metal finds and sites. Understanding the personal names of the period in relation to their contemporary context is therefore important, but it has turned out not to be an easy task. These names are part of a large onomastic research field, where almost every name element has a long research history of its own (Andersson 2003; Peterson 2004). The material is also subject to several uncertainties (Vikstrand 2009: 7). Our knowledge about the immediate context is often inadequate, there are frequent disagreements regarding readings and interpretations of runic inscriptions and discussions about distinctions between personal names, bynames and appellatives or adjectives (Peterson 1988, 2011). Personal names also play an important part in the study of early Germanic language history and questions regarding stems, roots, declinations, grammatic gender etc. (some examples are Antonsen 2002: 261–278; Schulte 2019).

Understanding all these questions and discussions is of vital importance for the employment of the names in relation to other types of source material and this tends to make personal names unavailable to researchers outside onomastics. This may also be why archaeologists are rarely aware of the value of personal names as a testimony of Scandinavian pre-Christian mentality and identity (some exceptions are Høilund Nielsen 2001; Hedeager 2004). Archaeologists often employ Old Norse sagas and poetry in discussions of Iron

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Age ideologies. However, although part of a long oral tradition, these were written down centuries after the Iron Age. The personal names on the other hand, written on objects and monuments, are a part of the contemporary material record (Moreland 2001).

This article asks how we can move towards a better understanding of Scandinavian personal names of the 2nd–8th century as a part of their cultural context using the perspective of material culture. The paper mainly addresses the question of meaning embedded in personal names, working from the hypothesis that semantic content had more importance than is often acknowledged in onomastic research. However, both meaning and its creation were not so logical or straightforward as we might expect from a modern or strictly linguistic point of view. As a case study, the article focuses on Scandinavian Iron Age personal names, known from pre-Viking Age runic inscriptions[1] in relation to the main form of visual expression of the period, the so-called animal art, exploring the way artists produced and communicated meanings, working with ambiguity and hybrids in motifs. I believe we can use animal art as both an analogy and a direct parallel to understand some of the mechanisms that were at play in personal names.

2. Germanic naming principles and traditions

Early Scandinavian personal names were mainly formed from words that already existed and carried meaning in the vocabulary (Peterson 1988: 121–122). Names could be created as new linguistic signs, either as dithematic compounds or as derivations. Names could also employ already existing linguistic signs directly, this way being monothematic although they could be made from original compounds[2].

The Scandinavian names are part of a Germanic naming tradition with roots in Indo-European systems (Peterson 1994; Jackson 2012; Schramm 2013). Although monothematic names occur quite frequently, the dithematic type has long been seen as a central feature of Germanic naming traditions (Woolf 1939: 3). In dithematic names, the first and second element do not have a clear semantic relation, and the combination carries no meaning as a composition. In fact, the tradition of combining two themes in names can be traced in a range of Indo-European languages, and therefore it is thought that this way of composing names reaches far back in time (Andersson 1998; Antonsen

[1] As this material is limited, the text draws on examples from the Viking Age (8th–11th century) when these are relevant to understanding overall developments in naming traditions.

[2] Examples from Table 1: *Hrōþiwulfaz*, a dithematic name composed of **hrōþi* 'fame' and *wulfaz* 'wolf'; *Bera*, an **-an*-derivation of a word meaning 'bear' and *Eh(w)ō*, a short form derived from a word meaning 'horse'. A name created from a compound is *Hornabura* 'horn-bearer'. A discussion of this typology of name formations is given in Peterson (1988).

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2002: 219; Schramm 2013: 15–17). Indo-European poetic vocabulary suggests that the dithematic name type grew out of formulaic epithets of heroic praise (Schmitt 1973: 10, 624; Jackson 2012: 8–9; Schramm 2013: 30–32).

It has been pointed out that the stretch back to an Indo-European proto language is quite far and that a cohesive Indo-European culture is an academic construct, although certain correspondences cannot be overlooked (Andersson 1998: 23–24; Vikstrand 2009: 23). Both mono- and dithematic names circle around some central themes, often common to names in the Indo-European languages where they are found. Here, we will focus on the Scandinavian names, although they are part of a common Germanic tradition. In the Iron Age, it is difficult to define whether similarities between Scandinavian and continental Germanic names are caused by a common linguistic inheritance or by borrowing and contact (Peterson 1994: 158). The source material for Scandinavian names is limited with around 100 recorded in runic inscriptions and 81 as specifics in place names with the generic *-lev*, dated to the period ca. 300–800 AD (Peterson 2004; Albris 2015; Imer 2015).

Thorsten Andersson (1998) has outlined three main themes in Germanic naming traditions: religion, hero worship and kinship. On a closer look, the most prominent words within these themes are connected with warfare, battle, honour, rulership, hospitality and fame. Andersson (1998: 17–18) provides a range of Old Norse (ON) examples of the warrior aspect found in both male and female names, such as the words for battle, fight and war: *gunnr*, *hildr* and *víg*. Even words for weapons were used: *brandr* 'sword', *brynja* 'armour' and *geirr* 'spear'. The use of animals in names also stands out and these too were connected with the battle sphere (Müller 1968).

When creating or choosing names, three main principles were at work: *alliteration, variation* and *repetition* (Hald 1971: 14–18). All principles were about marking kinship and relations. In alliteration, the first sound was repeated in names of father and son. The use of alliterations appeared within Germanic elite groups and we later see it used to mark kinship in poetry such as the Svear kings in Ynglingatál: *Dómaldi*, *Dómarr*, *Dyggvi* and *Dagr* (Andersson 1998: 23). In the Elder Futhark inscriptions, we rarely have names of two related persons. One case is *Hagustaldaz* commemorating his son *Hadulaikaz*[3] on the 5th/6th century Kjølevik stone from Norway. The best example in Scandinavia is a group of rune stones from Blekinge, Sweden, from the 7th–8th century. Here, three related males are named using alliterations with h-sounds: *Haþuwulfaz, Hariwulfaz* and *Heruwulfaz*. This must have been a ruling family or clan, erecting several monuments in the area (Sundquist & Hultgård 2004). They also mark their group identity by all being named with

[3] First element either **handu*- 'hand' or **hardu*- 'hard' or **haþō*- 'battle', second element a nomen agentis to **laikan* 'play, dance' (Peterson 2004: 9), perhaps also in the meaning 'fight' (Andersson 1998: 17–18).

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the second element *wulfaz* 'wolf', illustrating the *variation principle*. In this tradition, a person was named using one element from the name of another family member. Some elements became inherent in certain families as we see with the examples from the Blekinge stones. These names also illustrate how the Germanic warrior ideal was closely connected with poetic ways of expression (Andersson 1998: 20). They are combinations of respectively 'battle'+'wolf', 'warrior/army'+'wolf' and 'sword'+'wolf'. Both *Hariwulfaz* and *Heruwulfaz*, 'army-wolf' and 'sword-wolf', have counterparts in the Old English poetic warrior designations, *herewulf* and *heoruwulf* (Andersson 1998: 21, 23).

The above-mentioned name *Hagustaldaz* is formed from a compound of **hagu* 'piece of land' and the verb **staldan* 'keep, obtain', with the meaning 'owner/caretaker of a piece of land' (Peterson 2004: 9). Whereas the naming system may have started with a stock of such determinative compounds used as names, with the variation system, the semantic-syntactic connection between specifics and generics gradually lost its importance (Peterson 1988: 123–124; Jackson 2012: 7). Combining elements from relatives' names created potentially endless possibilities of variation, although some words could only work as first or second element (Müller 1968: 206–207; Shaw 2011: 157–159).

The earliest evidence of naming behaviour using alliteration and variation is found with the Germanic families mentioned in Roman sources from the Imperial Period. Meissner has showed that elites in Germanic society favoured transferring of an element from a parent and alliteration with siblings or parents (2012: 187–189). Non-noble Germanics, who had become Roman citizens, did not follow these practices.

In Scandinavia, the use of both alliteration and variation is attested in the Blekinge Rune stones. It was still in practice in Viking Age royal families such as a group of Danish kings that appear in the Frankish annals in the 8th and 9th centuries, i.e. king *Gudfred* ('god'+'love/peace/protection') and his father king *Sigfred* ('victory'+'love/peace/protection') (Meldgaard 2004: 501). The Viking Age kings also used the last of the mentioned naming principles, *repetition*, simply re-using the whole name of a relative. This created traditions for royal names reaching far into the Christian period such as *Eirik*/*Erik* (probably an original compound **aina-rikiaz*, meaning 'lone-ruler', Peterson 2004: 22). The traditions of using alliteration and variation thus prevailed through a long time, and it seems to have been important, especially within the ruling classes, to uphold these traditions. In the royal families of early Christian Scandinavia, the first sons, who could aspire to the throne, were named according to these old ways, whereas Christian names were rare and only given to daughters, younger sons and sons of mistresses (Meldgaard 1994: 207).

We need to be aware that the sources we have at hand in Scandinavia mainly concern communication of identities among elite groups. The names that we know of are not socially representative, but are in terms of both sources and origin all connected with the elite (Andersson 1998: 30). Runic writing is mostly

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found on objects and in contexts connected with wealth, power and the warrior elite (Imer 2015: 131–132). And personal names attested in place names are also tied with those who controlled or even owned the land (Albris 2015).

3. The question of meaning in Scandinavian personal names

The semantic content of personal names can fascinate an archaeologist, because it offers a different insight into Iron Age mentalities than material culture. But were the name elements mere reflections of an older linguistic stage or was their meaning apparent to those who bore it or who gave it to a child (Antonsen 2002: 219)?

Whether personal names are meaningful beyond functioning as labels to distinguish individuals from each other is discussed in onomastics and philosophy of language (Blanár 2009: 94–96; Watzlawik et al. 2016). Although etymology gets a lot of attention in research, there is a tendency to tone down the relevance of semantic contents in the act of name giving, rather seeing names as disembodied from their etymological origin, working mainly as vocal containers referring to the name bearers.

Researchers discuss both whether and when semantic contents played a role when names were formed (Peterson 1988: 123–124). It is assumed that at an early stage, Proto-Germanic, names preserved the Indo-European structure, being still morphologically and semantically clear (Harðarson 2004: 545–546). It is therefore speculated whether some compounds originally had a meaningful motivation, although the relationship between the elements cannot be determined (Harðarson 2004: 551–559; Nedoma 2018: 1586). We do not know if the name *Hlewagastiz* ('fame'+'guest') on the 5th century gold horn from Southern Denmark was a possessive composition: 'who *has* famous guests' (Hald 1971: 24; Jackson 2012). It could also be a determinative composition: 'who *is* a famous guest'. Especially, names ending in *-harjaz,* 'army, warrior' can be seen as both possessive and determinative compositions (Harðarson 2004: 560). *Swabaharjaz* on the Swedish 5th century Rö stone could mean either 'who has an army of Svebi' or 'Svebi-warrior'. A specific in several Iron Age place names, ON *Sævarr*, Proto-Scandinavian **saiwi-harjaz*, could mean 'who has a sea-army' or 'sea-warrior'[4].

In Early Runic, ca. 200–700 AD, most names are thought to have lost their semantic syntactic sense. Especially when it comes to the dithematic variation names, the general opinion among Scandinavian onomastic researchers is that the meaning of the elements had no relevance when the names were formed (Hald 1971: 20; Peterson 1988: 125; Meldgaard 1992: 191; Andersson 1998: 28; Vikstrand 2009: 7–9). One key argument is that some

[4] Both *swabaharjaz* and **saiwiharjaz* can in fact also be appellatives, see Peterson (2011) and Albris (2015) for a discussion of this.

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variation names seem random or create redundancy. Often used examples are the names ON *Hallstein* and *Gunnhildr*, both compounds of two words with roughly the same meaning (respectively 'stone'+'stone' and 'battle'+'battle', Hald 1971: 20; Peterson 1988: 125). The discussions tend to circle around the question of whether the compounded names could also be compounded appellatives. It is unclear whether scholars believe the name elements still carried meaning separately, even though their combinations made no sense. It is however stated by Eva Meldgaard (1992: 191) that the semantic content only had relevance the very first time a name was ever used.

In the later part of the Iron Age (especially from the 6th century) and in the Viking Period, the language in Scandinavia changed dramatically, and in this process, a range of name elements became contracted and perhaps lost their semantic relevance. The way these changes made the original elements of many names obscure is particularly obvious regarding the second elements *-*harjaz*, *-*gaizaz* and *-*warjaz* that became joined into the common ON suffix *-arr* (Peterson 1988: 126; Harðarson 2004). **Hrothiwulfaz* ('fame'+'wolf') was shortened to the less transparent ON *Hrólfr*, runic **rhuulfʀ**/**ruulfʀ**, on a group of 7th–8th century rune stones (Table 1).

The question of meaning is very complicated and there is probably not one definite answer. Some names have a clear intended meaning whereas others seem more randomly composed with the main purpose of marking genealogical relationship (Nedoma 2018: 1586). But did the separate elements retain a meaning in themselves or did references to kinship implied through variation and alliteration overshadow the semantic background?

4. Motivations for name choice and the role of names in perceptions of identity

The naming system and many of its elements survived a very long time. However, naming practices were adjusted actively, not merely passively continuing ancient traditions. Shaw (2011) discusses innovations in Scandinavian naming systems towards the Viking Age, such as the introduction of the second elements *-alfr* and *-dis* (2011: 153–159). In the Viking Age, we also see the appearance of deity names such as *Thor* and *Frey*/*Freya* as first elements (Meldgaard 1992; Vikstrand 2009; Shaw 2011: 163). It must be remembered that the naming system was pagan in its nature. The early conversion of other Germanic groups in the 4th–7th centuries probably led to loss or petrification of perceptions about the old naming systems. Although the traditional names were still in use, innovation happened in different ways in the converted groups, who started integrating Latin and Christian elements. From this point in time, the Scandinavian naming system evolved in its own direction, showing that semantic content was still at play and that intentions were put behind name choices. This tells us that we should not completely dismiss meaning as a

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motivation for name choice and as a part of the pre-Christian construction of identity. I would rather follow Michael Schulte, discussing descriptive names in Early Runic, saying that all these names are basically meaningful (2019: 86).

Examples from both the Migration Period on the continent and Viking Age Icelandic literature tell us about intentions and awareness regarding semantic content in acts of naming or the use of names. Gregory of Tours recounts the naming of the Frankish king *Chlothar II* (*Decem libri historiarum*, AD 591, X. 28, 522). When he was born, his father Gunthchramn named him *Clothar* ('fame'+'army'), wishing that he would "execute what his name means" and rule with the same power as the one he got his name from (his grandfather Chlothar I) (see full quote in Nedoma 2018: 1586). Nedoma also refers to an Ostrogoth leader mentioned in Procopios *De Bello Gothico* from the 6th century, named *Gundulf* ('battle'+'wolf'), but who some people also called *Ildulf* ('battle'+'wolf') (original in Greek, Nedoma 2018: 1588). The exchange of the first element with another carrying the same meaning, shows both awareness and play with the semantic content. Mundal (2004) gives several examples from Icelandic sagas of interchanging elements in a similar way. For example, a woman named *Steinvor* can be called *Grjótvor*, replacing the first element with a synonym (Mundal 2004: 571–573). The rewriting of the name *Hrólfr* as *gandr*, a *heiti*[5] for the wolf, shows awareness of the background of the name, although its transparency was reduced by sound contractions (Mundal 2004: 574).

A third example from our period also referred to by Nedoma (2018: 1589) and also by Müller (1968: 211) and Green (1998: 82), is the anonymous 5th or 6th century *Opus imperfectum in Maetthaeum*, criticising the naming customs of the (assumed Germanic) barbarians near the Danube: "they use to give names to their sons in accordance with the devastations of wild beasts and birds of prey, regarding it a source of pride to have such sons, fit for war and raving for blood" (translation follows Green 1998).

So, we can conclude that name choice in elite/warrior groups had two basic motivations: the fulfilment of the meaning of the name, where the semantic meaning was meant to assign qualities to the person and/or to transfer qualities from or even revive (the power of) an ancestor. Of course, we must be careful not to read too much into the name material. Yet, many elements retained some semantic transparency and were seen as characterisations of the name bearer, even as late as the Saga period. Within a pagan cosmology, the naming system was an active and integrated part of the general world view, but in the Christian period, the names rather became relics of the past and their meaning lost relevance. Against this background, I suggest that before Christianity, and especially before the great 6th century language change, semantic background could still be at play, even for compounds that did not make sense as compositions. However, it might have been at play in different ways than we expect.

[5] In literature, *heiti* and *kennings* can be used instead of personal names (Mundal 2004: 565).

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5. A hypothesis

To an archaeologist, the fact that a combination of two words in a name does not make immediate sense does not exclude the possibility that the separate elements could be important or carry meaning. Rather, we see in material culture and ritual behaviour how meanings were created, (re)generated and combined in many ways. Iron Age material culture is saturated with symbols and references that we do not fully understand from our modern point of view. A prominent characteristic of the visual art of Iron Age Scandinavia and Germanic Europe is *animal art*, evolving in varying styles and found on weapons, jewellery, horse harness, drinking vessels, furniture and textiles. This art plays on repeated themes and elements that are detached and assembled in changing combinations (see Hedeager 2011: 61–80 for an overview). Animals, humans and their body parts can be dissolved and combined in elusive and sometimes complicated images. Some are almost naturalistic depictions of people or animals while many images are so stylized, disembodied or entangled that recognizing them requires specialised knowledge (Høilund Nielsen 2001, 2002). Siv Kristoffersen has described the images in terms of ambiguity, wittiness and cunning (e.g. 1995, 2010, 2017).

On this background, I propose to view personal names of the Pre-Christian period in the light of the ambiguous language of animal art, suggesting that semantic meaning was at play in identity formation even in names that were not composed in a meaningful way.

As mentioned, there seems to be some interplay between personal names and epic poetry. Connections between poetry and visual art have also been observed (i.e. Hedeager 2011: 81–85; Pentz 2018). Some suggest relations between hybrid images in art and the *kennings* in Old Norse literature (Kristoffersen 2010: 266 with references). *Kennings* use chains of associations and fixed metaphors to replace a word or to represent a person (Mundal 2004: 565). Different communication domains like visual art, poetry and personal names seem to have had interdependent relations, but here, I want to focus on names and visual art and explore interlinked references that can be traced in the linguistic and material domains.

In the following, I will briefly introduce the concept of Scandinavian/Germanic animal art and draw on some examples from Scandinavian researchers to show how the images play with hybridity and ambiguity. In the process, I will draw out and discuss some of the correspondences between animal art and personal names.

6. Animal art and styles

Animal art developed in the period known as the Migration Period (the 5th and first half of the 6th centuries) with its creative centre in Scandinavia (Høilund Nielsen 1998: 1; Magnus 2002: 116). The art form evolved over centuries, into

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the Scandinavian Christian era and is traditionally divided into Styles I, II and III and a group of Viking Age styles (Klæsøe 2002; Magnus 2002: 110–113).

Local developments towards animal art began already in the late 4th and early 5th centuries inspired by Roman (military) implements (Magnus 2002: 109–111). However, the first proper animal art, Style I, appeared around the middle of the 5th century as its own intricate form of expression, contained to the elite part of society (Høilund Nielsen 1997: 140). Animals, often stylised and seen in profile were the central motif, although human figures are also present. The style was characterised by disembodied animal parts assembled in surface-covering patterns (Figure 1).

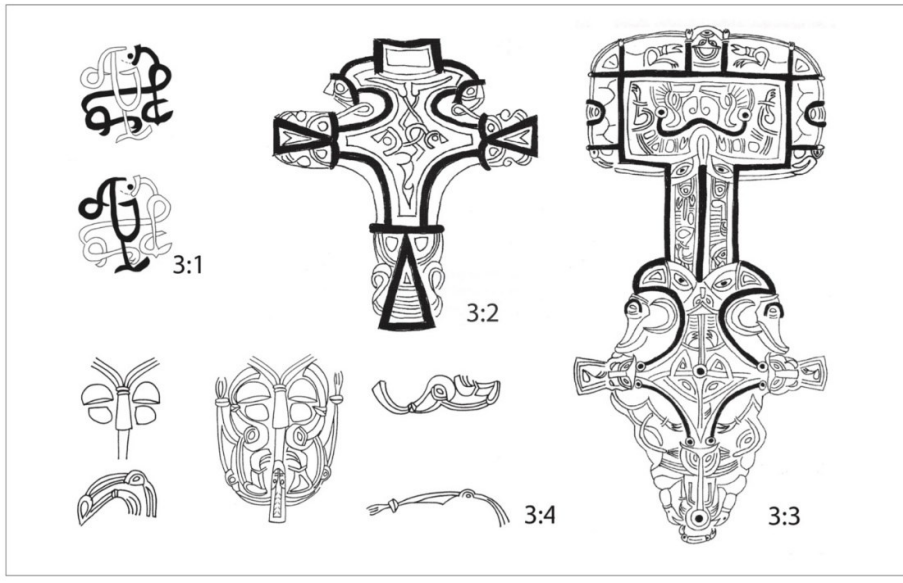


Figure 1: (3:1) Mingling rider and horse on bracteate from Skjørstad. (3:2) Foot plate of relief brooch from Karmøy, with central motif of entangled human bodies. (3:3) Relief brooch from Ågedal with split representations and mask motifs. (3:4) Mask from footplate of relief brooch from Klepp with elements drawn out. All from Norway, drawings from Kristoffersen (2017), Figure 3, with kind permission.



Figure 2: Style II plate fibula from Nørre Sandegård, Bornholm with entangled quadruped animals, broken symmetry and mask motifs. Photo by Lennart Larsen, Danish National Museum, license CC-BY-SA.

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During the 6th century, Style II appeared, lasting towards the end of the 7th century (Høilund Nielsen 2001: 471–473). Its origin seems connected with the military sphere. In many ways Style II breaks with Style I, being more uniform and no longer dominated by disembodied elements, but rather of whole, elongated quadruped animals braided into interlace patterns (Figure 2). This quadruped is difficult to identify, but according to Høilund Nielsen (2002), the dominating animal changed over time from wolf to horse and later to dragon. We also see more recognisable animals such as birds of prey, horses, boar and worms or snakes. Human faces are shown inside the thighs of animals and on the backs of birds (Høilund Nielsen 2001: 479).

Animal art spread quickly within Scandinavia and the Germanic world (Høilund Nielsen 1998: 3; Behr 2010: 460–461). The almost simultaneous appearance of Style I in all areas of distribution reflects a well-functioning elite communication network, in spite of the unstable situation in the 5th and 6th centuries. Style II also spread rapidly (Høilund Nielsen 1997: 131). Many archaeologists agree that animal art was connected to a pagan Germanic identity throughout Early Medieval Europe (Høilund Nielsen 1998; Magnus 2002: 109; Behr 2010: 453; Hedeager 2011: 50–58).

7. Meaning and ambiguity in animal art

Scandinavian and Germanic animal art has been a research field in European archaeology since the late 19th century (see overview in Høilund Nielsen & Kristoffersen 2002). While early studies focused on typologies, technologies and chronologies, the meaning behind the animal styles did not become a dominating research theme until the 1980's (Magnus 2002: 108). We have no certainty about the meaning of the animal art, although it seems to have followed some set rules (Behr 2010: 459–461). The images appear meaningful, but perhaps only readable to those who understood their language. However, the images are also clearly deliberately ambiguous (Kristoffersen & Lindstrøm 2001). In several articles, Siv Kristoffersen has discussed Style I and its effects. She stresses how the objects are expressive and visually impressive. Their images play with transformations between humans and animals both through hybridity between species and composition, where for example animal parts come together to draw a human mask. It also works with symmetry sometimes being broken by small details. Two animal profiles or animal parts may create a face or a body, something Kristoffersen (1995) calls "split representation", using a term from Claude Lévi-Strauss (Figure 1).

Together with psychologist Torill Lindstrøm, Kristoffersen has explored psychological aspects of these puzzling images (Kristoffersen & Lindstrøm 2001: 75–80). It is demonstrated how the art plays with changing images according to the angle or focus of the viewer, something resembling the

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ambiguous motifs used in modern psychology (see also Kristoffersen 2010: 263). Transformations thus embedded in the animal art give the images an incomprehensible expression, even though parts of the figures are recognisable. Although animal bodies are more anatomically coherent in Style II, the play with broken symmetry, human elements and masks continues into the Viking Age styles. We do not know if the complicated art was directed towards the owners, other artists, spectators or indeed meant to work on the objects themselves (Kristoffersen 2017: 370).

There are no historical sources from Scandinavia from this period (Høilund Nielsen 1997: 130). The images refer to a world of associations, metaphors and symbols that we only know from glimpses of poetry and mythology, often written down much later. In this almost illiterate environment, other media would play a central role in cultural communication (Moreland 2001). As mentioned above, animal art seems to be a common expression of a shared elite ideology throughout Northern, Western and Central Europe in the Early Medieval Period. Likewise, Germanic personal names were a mark of elite identity seen against other naming traditions (Meißner 2012: 193). So, in terms of their purpose as media communicating identity, there are important similarities between visual art and personal names. They could both signal individual identity and probably belonging within a narrower group (Magnus 2002: 116). Further, both were expressions of a Germanic pagan identity. Even back in Scandinavia, where cultural confrontations with Roman traditions and Christianity may not have been a concern before the Viking Age, personal names and personal ornaments can be understood as a cohesive package.

8. Themes in animal art and personal names

In terms of choice of motifs, there are many immediate similarities between animal art and personal names. The sphere of battle and warfare is central to both. Archaeologists as well as onomastic researchers have particularly noticed correspondences between the animal species depicted in art and the species represented in personal names (Werner 1963; Müller 1968; Høilund Nielsen 2002; Hedeager 2004). Horses, snakes, boar, ravens, eagles, bears and wolves play a part in both. If we look at the list of animal related names and bynames in Elder Futhark inscriptions, it is clear that the wolf is the most frequent (Table 1). These personal names have received attention in discussions about bear- and wolf-warriors, *berserkir* and *ulfheðnar* in Icelandic saga literature and their possible connections with animal art (Breen 1997; Høilund Nielsen 2001; Hedeager 2011: 90–95). As Dale (2014: 187) has shown, there is rarely a direct relationship between wolf- or bear-names and *berserkir*/*ulfheðnar* in the Icelandic texts. Rather, these animals are among the

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most common in personal names when it comes to Viking Age runic inscriptions (see also Peterson 2007: 44–45, 240–242, 272). This does not mean that the occurrence of wolves or bears in personal names and in mythological or ritual concepts are unrelated. They all share a background and draw on the same stock of concepts (Breen 1997: 5). In my opinion, the animal names have a wider scope, and we should think of the relations as a sort of parallelism. As Thorsten Andersson has pointed out, although personal names and heroic epithets fit the same patterns of word building, it is not certain to what extend poetry was a direct source of personal names (Andersson 1998: 22–23). Poetry may have been a starting point to the way of composing such compounds, and new names made in a similar style, but they were used in two very different ways.

The birds that are represented in Scandinavian Iron Age personal names are almost completely restricted to ravens and perhaps hawks (Germanic names in general also include eagles, see Nedoma 2018). In animal art, ravens and birds of prey can be separated from each other by the shapes of beak and tail (Høilund Nielsen 2001: 474). In later years, growing public interest in metal detecting, has produced several interesting finds that illustrate ideas of mixing between birds and humans (Figure 3). These depictions are often understood in terms of Old Norse mythology as showing the god Odin in the shape of a bird (Pentz 2018). But we could also choose to see such images as related to bird-man hybrids and identification with the bird motif. Such images, as well as the use of animals in personal names have been linked to the ideas of *fylgja*, *hugr* and *hamr* in Old Norse literature (Breen 1997: 6–8; Kristoffersen 2010: 265). These terms represent abilities of the human soul to transform into animal shapes. Hedeager (2004: 232–234) sees the Iron Age human-animal relations as a ‘transcendental reality' where boundaries between animal and human are crossed over or non-existing. Naming people for animals is seen by Hedeager (2011: 80–81) as expression of hybridity between humans, animals and birds and connected with shamanistic practices.



Figure 3: Recent finds of 7th/8th century bird motifs, both from Jutland, Denmark. Left: bird with human face, photo by the finder, Geoffrey de Visscher with kind permission, right: bird with mask in the thigh, photo by Søren Greve, Danish National Museum, license CC-BY-SA.

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The reason for using animals in names has been debated. Generally, animal styles and warrior culture and relations between images and names are often related to religious concepts, particularly the god Odin (Hedeager 2011: 75–98 with further references). Others see the basic motivation as a sort of analogy, meant to compare and liken the warrior or person with the animal as discussed above in section 4 (Müller 1968; Breen 1997: 11–12; Green 1998: 81–82). The correspondences between animal art and personal names show that names and images are different media of corresponding cultural concepts and codes in a warrior culture with animals as the most important symbolic material. The choice of elements was also genealogical, and could reflect how a tribe or family modelled itself on an animal (see also Sundquist & Hultgård 2004).

Table 1: Animal elements in names and bynames in pre-Viking Age inscriptions. Sources: Peterson (2004) and catalogue to Imer (2015).

Name	Inscription	Place	Context	Date	Interpretation
Bera	**bera**	Kragehul Bog, Fyn, Denmark	Knife handle, wood, weapon sacrifice	Late 5th c.	Bear
Eh(w)ō	**eho**	Donzdorf, Baden-Württenberg, Germany	Silver fibula, Scandinavian origin	Late Migration Per., 6th c.	Horse
Erafaz	**erafaR**	Hogganvik, Mandal, Norway	Rune stone, burial site	Late Roman/ Early Migration Per., AD 200–500.	Wolverine(?) – byname?
Fakaz	**fakaR**	Femø, Lolland, Denmark	Bracteate found on beach	Migration Per., late 7th–8th c.	Horse
Gautz	**gautR**	Illerup, Jutland, Denmark	Bog find, weapon sacrifice	Late Roman, 3rd c.	**gaujan* 'barking'
Haeruwulfaz	**hAeruwulafiR**	Istaby, Blekinge, Sweden	Rune stone, location unknown	Early Merovingian, late 6th/7th c.	Sword+wolf
Hakoþuz	**hakuþo**	Noleby, Väster-Götaland, Sweden	Rune stone, location unknown	Migration Per., 5th/6th c.	'like a hawk'? 'crouching'? 'pike'?
Hariþulf	**hariþulfs**	Rävsal, Bohuslän, Sweden	Rune stone, stone setting	Late Merovingian, 8th c.	Army+wolf? Nest/home+ wolf?

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Hariwulfaz	**hAriwulafa, hAriwolafʀ**	Istaby and Stentoften, Blekinge, Sweden	Rune stones, locations unknown	Early Merovingian, Late 6th/7th c.	Army+wolf
Haþuwulfaz	**(h)AþuwulAfA, hAþuwulafʀ, hAþuwolafʀ**	Gummarp, Istaby, Stentoften, Blekinge, Sweden	Rune stones, locations unknown	Early Merovingian, Late 6th/7th c.	Battle+wolf
Haukōþuz(?)	**haukoþuʀ**	Vånga, Väster-Götaland, Sweden	Rune stone, location unknown	Late Roman/ Early Migration Per., AD 200–500.	'like a hawk'? 'crouching'?
Haukz	**haukʀ**	Vallentuna, Uppland, Sweden	Inscribed on dice, male warrior burial with several birds of prey	Merovingian, 7th c.	Hawk(?)
Hrabnaz	**H=arabana=ʀ**	Järsberg, Värmland, Sweden	Rune stone, stone setting	Migration Per., 6th c.	Raven
Hrōþiwulfaz	**ruulf, ruulfʀ, rHuulfʀ**	Flemløse and Helnæs Fyn Denmark	Three related rune stones	Late Merovingian, late 7th–8th c.	Fame+wolf
Hurnabura	**hurnburA**	Høje Tåstrup, Zealand, Denmark	Rune stone, stone setting	Late Merovingian, late 7th–8th c.	Hornbearer
Kelbaþewaz?	**kelbaþewas/ selbaþewas**	Hogganvik, Mandal, Norway	Rune stone, burial site	Late Roman/ Early Migration Per., AD 200–500.	Calf+servant/ Self+servant
Widuhundaz	**(w)iduhudaʀ**	Himlingøje, Zealand, Denmark	Inscribed on fibula, rich female grave	Late Roman, 3rd c.	Forest+dog-wolf?

9. Concluding remarks: Associations, social communication, poetry and art

The study has shown some examples of how semantic fields in personal names are also prevalent in Iron Age art and how similar instruments could be at work in both. Direct correspondences can be pointed out, but the message is more general. The way name elements were detached and combined can be seen as parallel to animal art, and this can be understood as lines of communication through different media, but with the same cultural codes in the background – not unlike the correspondence between poetic compositions and personal names.

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Although most references in art are obscure and unintelligible to us, meaning appears to be hyper-important rather than not given any thought. Meaning was however not generated as straightforward meaningful compounds or precise references. We cannot even be sure that meaning was constant throughout the period or that the references an artist meant to convey were the same as perceived by the audience. Nor do we know if the characterisation intended when a name was given matched the associations the name created in society or the individual's self-perception.

From a psychological point of view, names can be seen as labels that both identify and distinguish an individual from others (Watzlawik et al. 2016). The name is a key part of the collective perception of an individual, not only pointing to the named person, but also conveying associations through semantic meaning or as a metaphorical reference using motifs from other domains such as poetry. In this way, a name can have several levels of meaning and can gather meanings, tying them to the individual. On this background, I suggest that the elements in names were often consciously chosen as a central part of identity formation. One important point is that even two randomly combined elements in a compound that makes no sense could have created associations. Both art and kennings show us that chains of association were important in cultural communication (Kristoffersen 2010: 267). Separate words and ornamentation elements would refer to other parts of the social communication, such as poetry, ritual and mythology.

To the question of whether traditions or stylistic motives overshadowed the semantic content in name choice, I would answer that both had equal importance. The semantic meaning may not have had first priority over variation and alliteration in the naming act itself, but it could have relevance for the further perception and self-awareness of the named person. The associations that the name created could both be social and semantic and were entangled in visual art, poetry and ritual behaviour.

The three Blekinge names *Hariwulfaz*, *Haþuwulfaz*, and *Heruwulfaz* with counterparts in Old English poetry show that the interplay between poetry and naming was active in Scandinavia in the 7th century. They also show that the variation principle did not completely kill off the possibility of meaningful names, but rather, meaning and variation could be combined (Andersson 1998: 29–30). In the Viking Age, the traditional warrior-related dithematic names spread to other groups and the semantic content faded. At this point, we may say that the importance of family and kinship took over as the controlling factor, which is why the traditional pagan names were still used in the Christian Medieval period.

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