

Onoma **55**
Journal of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences

ISSN: 0078-463X; e-ISSN: 1783-1644
Journal homepage: https://onomajournal.org/

The continuity of Viking Age names in Denmark – 18th-century evidence of long-lasting survivors

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To cite this article: Eggert, Birgit. 2020. The continuity of Viking Age names in Denmark – 18th-century evidence of long-lasting survivors. *Onoma* 55, 167–184.
DOI: 10.34158/ONOMA.55/2020/10

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.34158/ONOMA.55/2020/10

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Article history
Received on 12 February 2020.
Final form accepted on 28 June 2021.
Published online on 28 July 2021.

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Abstract: In Denmark the old Nordic names used since the Viking Age are estimated to represent only 5–10% of the names by the end of the Middle Ages (i.e. 1536 in Denmark). The oldest Danish census with the total population's names from 1787 along with the so-called Jessen Reports from the 1740s, which contain reports of uncommon personal names around the country, provide insight into the diversity and continuity of Nordic names that still existed, but were hidden under a thick layer of extremely frequent Christian names. This is the period before the so-called Nordic Name Renaissance, that with the national romanticism in the 1800s, resumed many Nordic names – often in a(n) (adapted) Norse form – e.g., *Gunhild*, *Gyda*, and *Helge* vs. Danish *Gundel*, *Gye*, and *Helle*. In this study, name examples are examined in the two 1700s sources to illuminate the geographical distribution and the linguistic as well

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as the social variation of the remains of the Viking Age name system that was still used in Denmark in early modern times.

Keywords: Personal names, Viking Age, Nordic names, continuity of names, historical socio-onomastics.

La continuité des noms de l'ère viking au Danemark – preuve du XVIIIe siècle de survivants de longue date

Résumé : Au Danemark, on estime que les anciens noms nordiques utilisés depuis l'âge viking ne représentent que seulement 5 à 10 % des noms à la fin du Moyen Âge (c'est-à-dire 1536 au Danemark). Le plus ancien recensement danois avec les noms de la population totale de l'année 1787 ainsi que les soi-disant rapports Jessen des années 1740, qui contiennent des rapports sur les noms personnels peu communs dans le pays, donnent un aperçu de la diversité et de la continuité des noms nordiques qui existaient encore, mais qui étaient cachés sous une épaisse couche de prénoms extrêmement fréquents. C'est la période qui précéda la soi-disant Renaissance des noms nordiques, qui, avec le romantisme national des années 1800, a repris de nombreux noms nordiques – souvent sous une forme nordique (adaptée) – par exemple, *Gunhild*, *Gyda* et *Helge*, à comparer aux formes danoises *Gundel*, *Gye* et *Helle*. Dans cette étude, des exemples de noms sont examinés, choisis dans les deux sources des années 1700, afin d'éclairer la répartition géographique et la variation linguistique ainsi que sociale des vestiges du système de noms de l'ère viking qui était encore utilisé au Danemark au début des temps modernes.

Mots-clés : Noms de personnes, Âge Viking, noms nordiques, continuité des noms, socio-onomastique historique.

Die Kontinuität der Namen der Wikingerzeit in Dänemark – Zeugnisse langlebiger Überlebender aus dem 18. Jahrhundert

Zusammenfassung: Nach einer Schätzung repräsentieren die alten nordischen Namen, die in Dänemark seit der Wikingerzeit in Verwendung waren, nur 5–10% aller am Ende des Mittelalters (1536 in Dänemark) vergebenen Namen. Die den gesamten Personennamenschatz enthaltene Volkszählung von 1787 zusammen mit den sogenannten Jessen-Berichten aus den 1740er Jahren, die Daten über ungewöhnliche Personennamen enthalten, ermöglichen eine Einsicht in die Vielfalt und Kontinuität der noch existierenden nordischen Namen, die unter einer dicken Schicht von extrem frequenten Namen christlichen Ursprungs verborgen waren. Es handelt sich hier um die Periode vor der sogenannten nordischen Namenrenaissance, die zusammen mit der Nationalromantik im 19. Jahrhundert viele nordische Namen wieder aufgenommen hat, oft in einer adaptierten altnordischen Form – zum Beispiel *Gunhild*, *Gyda* und *Helge* vs. dänisch *Gundel*, *Gye* und *Helle*. In dieser Studie werden Namensbeispiele zweier Quellen aus dem 18. Jahrhundert untersucht, um die geographische Verteilung als auch die linguistische und soziale Variation der Überreste des Namenssystems der Wikingerzeit aufzudecken, wie es in Dänemark der frühen Neuzeit noch in Verwendung war.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Personennamen, Wikingerzeit, nordische Namen, Namenkontinuität, historische Sozio-Onomastik.

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Onoma 55 (2020), 167–184. DOI: 10.34158/ONOMA.55/2020/10

The continuity of Viking Age names in Denmark – 18th-century evidence of long-lasting survivors

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1. Introduction

In the Viking Age, the personal names used in Denmark primarily originated in the native language, and the majority of the names were held in common with the other Nordic countries (Meldgaard 1994: 202). But during the Middle Ages personal names in Denmark became strongly dominated by Christian names that came into use with the introduction of Christianity from the 10th century and spread to all sections of society (Meldgaard 1994). The old Nordic names represent only 5–10% of the name bearers by the end of the Middle Ages (Hald 1974: 83–86). The percentage only becomes this high when the popular Nordic saints' names *Ole*, *Knud* and *Erik* are included (Meldgaard 2007: 129–130). However, name materials from the 1700s show that a number of old Nordic names were still used throughout the country, often locally concentrated and in descending frequency. Many of these names are extinct today but some of them have survived longer than what may hitherto have been believed and a few have lived on until today. It is these surviving Nordic names I will concentrate on in the following.

I have previously worked on this topic in a short article mentioning the masculine names *Issel* and *Skammel* and the feminine names *Tor* and *Tyre* as Nordic name relics in 18th-century Denmark (Eggert 2018). In another former work I have also addressed the geographical distribution in Denmark in 1801 of the Nordic names *Gorm*, *Gyde*/*Gye*, *Gundel*/*Gunild*, *Børge* and *Eske* (Eggert 2009). The names *Gorm*, *Gyde*/*Gye* and *Gundel*/*Gunild* are also included in the present study for closer analysis of these names' destiny until present, showing distribution maps from the former study. In this article I also shed light on the phenomena that originally different masculine and feminine names became homonyms due to radical changes of the Danish language in the Middle Ages and that they have not turned out to be equally frequent as masculine and feminine names in the 18th and 19th centuries.

It is not the purpose of this study to uncover the entire survival of Viking Age names in Denmark in the 18th century, but to shed light on an under-exposed subject that has suffered from the difficulties involved with studying rare names in the large quantities of written sources from that time.

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2. Historical background

2.1. Names and language in the Viking Age and in the Middle Ages

The Viking Age in Denmark is the period from c. 800 until c. 1050, and it is followed by the Middle Ages in the period from c. 1050 to 1536 when the protestant Reformation took place in Denmark. The Viking Age names are mainly of three different types, here shown in the standardised mediaeval spelling used in the dictionary *Danmarks gamle Personnavne* (DgP, 'Denmark's old personal names'):

- Dithematic names: e.g., *Gunhild*, *Thorkil*, *Thorbiorn*;
- Monothematic names: e.g., *Karl*, *Biorn*, *Helgha*, *Gro*;
- Hypocoristic names derived from the two other types: e.g., *Kalli*, *Tubbi*, *Thora*, *Tova*.

During the Middle Ages the Danish language changed a lot. The sound changes are most significant but there were also major changes in morphology and in syntax (Frederiksen 2018 & 2019; Heltoft & Nielsen 2019). With regard to the personal names, it is the sound changes that are of interest. The most important of the sound changes is the weakening of all vowels in non-stressed syllables to schwa [ə] (often "e" in writing), and weakening of *p*, *t*, *k* to *b*, *d*, *g* (or even further weakening to the disappearance of the original plosives). These sound changes resulted in other forms of the personal names than the ones known from the earliest written sources, and forms that are often quite different from the ones known from old Norse. Examples of this are the following names shown in 18th-century spelling – which is very often identical to the modern spelling of the names – and the corresponding old Norse (ON) form. Phonetic transcriptions (IPA for Danish) of the names' modern pronunciation are shown for the Danish name forms to assist readers not familiar with Danish: *Haagen* [hɔːʊn] ~ ON *Hákon*; *Ole* [oːlə] ~ ON *Ólafr*; *Bodel* [poðl̩ *or* poːl] / *Bodil* [poːtil] ~ ON *Bóthildr*; *Gundel* [kɔnl̩] ~ ON *Gunnhildr*. In addition, new words and new names came with Christianity (Meldgaard 1994: 202).

Personal names from Denmark from the earliest known sources containing personal names until the Middle Ages are thoroughly documented in the dictionary *Danmarks gamle Personnavne* (DgP, 'Denmark's old personal names'). The personal names used in the period after the Middle Ages and until about 1900 are not documented systematically; the sources of this period's personal names are so extensive that it has not been possible to review the nationwide name use in Denmark until the country's inhabitants were registered electronically in the second half of the 1900s. However, this has become possible with the recent digitisation of Danish censuses from the 1700s and 1800s available in the Danish Demographic Database (DDD). Thus, the infrequent names from that period that have only rarely been encountered in

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previous geographically and chronologically limited studies, have therefore become much easier to understand.

In focus here is the use of old Nordic names in the 1700s. This is the period before the so-called Nordic Name Renaissance that with the national romanticism in the 1800s took up again many Nordic names, then often in a(n adapted) Norse form, e.g., *Gunhild* [kɔnhil], *Gyda* [kyːtæ], and *Helge* [hɛljə] (19th-century spellings) instead of Danish forms as *Gundel* [kɔnl], *Gye* [kyː], and *Helle* [hɛlə] (Eggert 2008). The Nordic Name Renaissance in Denmark began in Copenhagen around 1820 and continued for most of the 1800s (Meldgaard 1997: 102) and, thus, it postdates the data from the Jessen Reports and the 1787 census.

It has never been examined on Danish data if the Nordic Name Renaissance had an impact on the use of the surviving old Danish forms of Nordic names. Issues on the surviving old Norse names versus the resuscitated names have been discussed in connection with Norwegian name data where it is often difficult to distinguish between the surviving old Norse name forms and the "new" Nordic renaissance names (Akselberg 2005; Haslum 2005). In Danish there is a much stronger difference between the surviving name forms and the new renaissance names that were closer to the original old Norse forms than to the Danish forms. It is questionable whether Danes were aware of the common origin at least for many of the names. Moreover, the Nordic Name Renaissance began in the capital and spread to the towns and later to the villages and the countryside (Eggert 2008), while the surviving Viking Age names seem to primarily have been a rural phenomenon as indicated below.

2.2. Geographical and social distribution of Viking Age names

Previous research on Scandinavian name data show that the surviving indigenous names are quite varied in different geographical areas. All known personal names that date back to the Danish Viking Age have not been mapped, but several studies show that there are large regional differences already in the oldest sources (Hornby 1947; Hald 1974: 82–86; Eggert 2018). This is confirmed by studies in Swedish name data from the oldest rune inscriptions to the 1500s that show significant differences (Otterbjörk 1956–1978: 211–212) as well as Swedish name data of surviving old Nordic names from the 1600s (Modéer 1964: 69–72) and Norwegian name data of the same kind from the 1300s (Halvorsen 1956–1978: 205).

In research on surviving old Norse names in Norway and Sweden after the Middle Ages it is pointed out that the names mainly were found among the rural population (Utne 2011: 38; Otterbjörk 1956–1978: 210). The Swedish name researcher Roland Otterbjörk (ibid.) argues that the development was diverse in different regions, and that in central settlements, people were probably more responsive to new names. He also says that the survival of old names in very local areas has been possible due to the strict principles for naming after

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forefathers that could keep the names within single families for centuries.

3. Empirical focus and methods

The oldest Danish source with the total population's names is a nationwide census from 1787, and along with the so-called Jessen Reports (De jessenske Relationer) from 1743, it provides insight into the diversity and continuity of Nordic names that existed but have been "hidden" behind the extremely frequent Christian names. The low frequency of many of the Nordic names has led to earlier studies with limited name materials being exceptionally fortunate if the rare old names were contained within their empirical data.

3.1. The Jessen Reports 1743

In 1743, Erich Johan Jessen who was working for the government as a chancellery secretary (*kancellisekretær*) conducted a collection of information for a natural and cultural description of Denmark and Norway through a questionnaire that was sent out to all parts of the two countries. The Norwegian material was published by the National Archives in Oslo in 5 volumes of transcriptions of a total of 172 reports (Røgeberg & Løyland & Mordt 2003–2008). There are some Danish publications in various local-historical journals (e.g., Birkelund 1918; Pedersen 1944; Wad 1921), but most of the Jessen Reports have not yet been published. The original documents are mainly preserved in the Danish National Archives and the Danish Royal Library and some are found in local archives around the country (Mikkelsen & Dupont 2016).

For Denmark, the questionnaire contained 40 questions, one of which concerned uncommon personal names. The questionnaire was sent out to all areas of the country, but it is very uneven with respect to where the questions were answered and how comprehensive the answers are. For parts of the country no reports have survived, and it is most likely that the questions were never answered in these areas. Some of the responses cover one parish and others cover bigger areas; a rough estimate is that around half the country is covered by the surviving reports. Some of the completed reports contain many uncommon names, others contain just a few names, and many submitted reports do not mention any uncommon names – but one reports all the names of the inhabitants of the entire parish! (Eggert, in press). We often know the names of the people who answered the questions and we know that many of them were local or regional officials or pastors but they have not yet been reliably identified. Therefore, it is not known whether the reports, for example, reflect in-depth local knowledge, whether they reflect the local conditions from an outsider's point of view, or if they reflect an implicit comparison to naming practices in other parts of the country. The question itself (see Figure 1) is not very clear and might have been confusing also for Jessen's contemporaries and

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probably contributing to the wide diversity in the responses. Is it the rarest names in an area that are of interest, or is it names that are typical in one area but atypical elsewhere? And how is "ordinary" defined? This, and the uneven answers both geographically and onomastically make it a difficult source to work with, and not suitable for socio-onomastic studies. But what the Jessen Reports can be used to demonstrate is that the mentioning of the names is proof that they existed at that time.

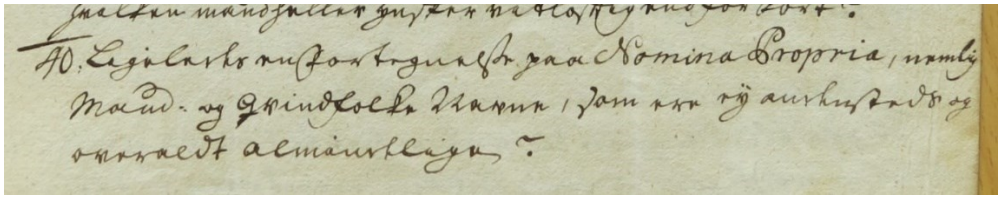


Figure 1: Question number 40 concerning personal names: "40. Likewise, a listing of Nomina Propria, namely male and female names that are not found elsewhere and exceedingly common" (my translation of "40. Ligeledes en fortegnelse paa Nomina Propria, nemlig Mand- og Qvindfolke Navne, som ere ey andensteds og overaldt almindelige").

Nonetheless, the Jessen Reports are interesting and a hitherto untapped source for the 18th-century personal name usage in Denmark. The reported name material is very varied and shows, among other things, that a number of names that are now very rare or extinct, have had a greater or less regional and local spread in the 18th century. There are between 4,000 and 5,000 reported names in the surviving reports – not different names though; many names are reported several times.

3.2. The 1787 census

The other 18th-century source I have used for this study is the 1787 census, which is the oldest source containing names of the entire Danish population (c. 840,000 inhabitants). It has been available in digital form for some years in the Danish Demographic Database (DDD) but has not yet been utilised to elucidate the use of names to the extent for which it has potential. Among other things, a nationwide source such as this gives access to many rare names which are only met in geographically limited surveys if one is lucky. These rare names highlight – in my opinion – important nuances and details in the use of names in that period of time. The census has information about residence, age, gender, and occupation of the householder, and that makes it possible to extend the study of the names with a socio-onomastic approach. As with any digitised source there might be erroneous entries due to mis-typings and mis-readings, but the advantages of a nationwide dataset clearly – in my opinion – outweigh the disadvantages of some rare errors.

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3.3. This survey

Based on an examination of the Jessen Reports and the 1787 census, I shall, in the following, present examples of more or less rare Nordic names that have survived into early modern Denmark. I have looked for names reported in the Jessen Reports in the 1787 census for information on frequency, geographical distribution, and indications of the social status of the name bearers. Thus, the 1787 census is the centre of this study, but I have also used later censuses in DDD to get information about the names' usage in the 1800s. In addition to this, I have used the database The Names of the Danes (*Danskernes Navne*) which is based on names in the Central Civil Registration (Det Centrale Personregister, CPR) in 2005, i.e., the entire population between 1968 when the CPR was created and 2005. And to illuminate today's name usage, I have used name statistics provided by Statistics Denmark (DSt) for the total living population in January 2019 (DSt: How many?), and today's baby names statistics for children born since 1985 (DSt: Name Barometer). Important for statistics from DSt is that it only includes *the first given name*; there are no statistics for a second, third etc. given name.

The names chosen for this study are partly random examples of old Nordic names found in the Jessen Reports, partly specific names found in the Jessen Reports that I have studied earlier in an article about given names in the 1801 census (Eggert 2009), and therefore I have maps to show a geographical distribution very close to the one in 1787. This is not ideal, but my work with the 1787 census has not yet come so far that I have any mappings for it. Therefore, I find it better to show the 1801 maps than not to include any maps at all.

4. The name study: Examples of surviving Viking Age names

4.1. Common gender names

Originally, a distinction was made in old Norse between masculine and feminine names by means of different endings and declinations (Otterbjörk 1956–1978: 208–209). This distinction seems to have been retained in Danish through history until the first legislation on first names in 1961 and the applicable Danish name law regulations determining that "A first name must not denote the opposite sex to the one who is to bear the name" (my translation of: "Et fornavn må ikke betegne det modsatte køn i forhold til den, der skal bære navnet", The Danish Name Law 2005: §13,2).

The medieval language changes resulted in some names developing common forms for masculine and feminine names of different origin, here represented by the names *Helle*, *Gunder*, and *Bodel*. Similar coincidences have not been found in the 18th-century data in names of origins other than old Norse. In the following, phonetic transcriptions of the names' modern Danish

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pronunciation are added to illustrate both the differences and the similarities of the names and name forms.

Helle [hɛlə] as a feminine name is derived from a form corresponding to ON *Helga*, and as a masculine name it is derived from a form corresponding to ON *Helgi*. Both *Helga* and *Helgi* are monothematic names and they both originate in a word meaning 'holy'. *Helle* is reported 8 times in the Jessen Reports, and half of these mention that the name is both feminine and masculine. In the 1787 census 400 have the name *Helle* of whom 27 are male; 5 have the name in the spelling *Hælle* of whom none are male. 15 of the male name bearers are from the eastern part of Zealand, 3 from Bornholm and 6 from Funen; this leaves only 3 to be situated in Jutland, and, thus, *Helle* as a masculine name is mainly an east-Danish phenomenon. As a feminine name it occurs in all parts of Denmark. The name bearers are largely from homes where the householder is a farmer, but there are also smallholders as well as owner-occupiers, clerks and merchants. This means that the name is neither a low social name nor a high social name. This is also the case if attention is paid solely to the male name bearers, so there do not seem to be any different social conditions for *Helle* as a masculine name:

- 1743: reported 8 times (4 mention common gender);
- 1787: 400 *Helle* (373 female, 27 male); 5 *Hælle* (5 female, 0 male);
- 1845: 482 *Helle* (476 female, 6 male);
- 2019 as the first given name: 33,904 *Helle* (33,903 female, 1 male).

In the 1845 census the only spelling that occurs is *Helle* with 482 name bearers. 476 of these are female, and only 6 are male. This means that *Helle* as a masculine name is becoming rarer, and this development continues into the 1900s as there is only one male name bearer left in 2019 and it does not appear in today's baby names statistics (DSt: Name Barometer). This stands in great contrast to the use of *Helle* as a feminine name at the present: In 2019 there were 33,903 female name bearers of *Helle*, and, today, the name is only approved as a feminine given name (Approved Names).

Gunder [kɔnɐ] as a feminine name is derived from a form corresponding to ON *Gunnvǫr*, and as a masculine name it has derived from a form corresponding to ON *Gunnarr*. *Gunder* is reported 10 times in the Jessen Reports: 2 times as a masculine name, 4 times as a feminine name, 3 times as a common gender name, and 1 time with unspecified gender. In the 1787 census the name is found 276 times in the spellings *Gunder*, *Gunner* and *Gunnar*, all pronounced [kɔnɐ]. It is more frequent as a female name, and this seem to be especially the case in the southern parts of Jutland, but the name existed as both a masculine and a feminine name all over Denmark in 1787. The majority of the name bearers live in homes where the householders have low social employment such as smallholders, servants, inferior craftsmen and shopkeepers. But there are also name bearers from higher social layers in

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homes where the householder is an owner-occupier farmer, clerk or jeweller:

- 1743: reported 10 times (2 masculine, 4 feminine, 3 common gender, 1 unspecified gender);
- 1787: 236 *Gunder* (of whom 124 are female); 39 *Gunner* (of whom 12 are female); 1 *Gunnar* (male);
- 1845: 271 *Gunder* (230 female, 41 male); 22 *Gunner* (7 female, 15 male); 3 *Gunnar* (2 female, 1 male);
- 2019 as the first given name: 43 *Gunder* (15 males, 28 females); 979 *Gunner* (only males); 3963 *Gunnar* (only males).

In the 1845 census the proportion of female name bearers has grown, still with the spelling *Gunder* as the most frequent, and *Gunner* and *Gunnar* are very rare spellings. This picture changes dramatically when it comes to 2019: The spellings *Gunnar* and *Gunner* with *-nn-* have become very frequent and exclusively for men; these spellings are only approved as masculine names today (Approved Names). The spelling *Gunder* with *-nd-* on the other hand is approved as both a masculine and a feminine name today (Approved Names), and it has more female than male name bearers in 2019. Yet, it only appears twice in today's baby names statistics (DSt: Name Barometer), and only as a masculine name.

Bodel [poðl] as a feminine name is derived from a form corresponding to ON *Bóthildr*, and as a masculine name it is derived from a form corresponding to ON *Bótúlfr*. It is reported 8 times in the spellings *Bodel* [poðl] and *Bodil* [potil] in the Jessen Reports: 3 times as a masculine name, 3 times as a feminine name, and 2 times where the gender is not specified. In the 1787 census the name is found 8,760 times in the spellings *Bodel*, *Bodil*, *Bodild* [potil] and *Bodill* [potil]; only 19 of these are male. This name has many female bearers and they are found in all parts of the country; but the very few male name bearers of the spelling *Bodel* are only found in North Jutland and in North Zealand. The male bearers of the other spellings of this name are scattered with individual occurrences in very different places. *Bodel* – in the different spellings – does not seem to be preferred by specifically high or low social groups, it is common in the countryside but less common in the higher social layers in towns and in the nobility:

- 1743: *Bodel*/*Bodil* reported 8 times (3 masculine, 3 feminine, 2 unspecified gender);
- 1787: 731 *Bodel* (726 female, 5 male), 6527 *Bodil* (6517 female, 10 male), 1397 *Bodild* (1393 female, 4 male), 105 *Bodill* (all female) [total: 8760 (19 of these are male)];
- 1845: 323 *Bodel* (322 female, 1 male), 5999 *Bodil* (5992 female, 7 male), 783 *Bodild* (782 female, 1 male), 42 *Bodill* (42 female, 0 male) [total: 7,056 (9 of these are male)];
- 2019 as the first given name: 3 *Bodel* (all female), 11,713 *Bodil* (all female).

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In the 1845 census the total number of name bearers has decreased by roughly 10%, but the number of bearers of the specific spelling *Bodel* has decreased almost 50%. The relative decrease is even bigger because the Danish population grew from c. 840,000 inhabitants in 1787 to c. 1,350,000 (a c. 60% increase) in this period. The male name bearers are only 9 in 1845, and in 2019 there are no male name bearers left: *Bodel* is extinct as a masculine name in Denmark. Also, as a feminine name the spelling *Bodel* goes towards extinction with only 3 name bearers in 2019. The spelling *Bodil*, however, is very much alive with 11,713 female name bearers in 2019.

4.2. Names with a clear regional distribution

In the following, three examples of names that show a special regional or entirely local distribution are presented: *Gorm*, *Gyde*/*Gye* and *Gundel*/*Gunild*.

The masculine name *Gorm* [kɒ:m] is well known as it is the name of one of the earliest Danish kings, King Gorm the Old. It is originally an old dithematic Nordic name most likely composed of the words *guth* and *thorm*, which means 'pagan god' and 'protector' or 'protection' (Peterson 2007: 81–82), but all the way back to the oldest known sources it appears in its present one-syllable form. This is the case already in the 900s on the rune stone in Jelling (DgP). The name has never been widely used, but it is found in sources from the Viking Age and the Middle Ages. Around 1600 the name was still present in a single West Funen area (DgP), and in the Jessen Reports it is reported once as an uncommon name also on Funen. In the 1787 census 30 men are named *Gorm*, and with one exception they are all living on the western part of Funen (Figure 2). The majority of the name bearers live in country parishes in homes where the householder is a farmer or a smallholder.

Thus, it seems that West Funen is a relic area for the masculine name *Gorm*, and had the name not survived here, it would probably have gone out of use. In the 1900s, *Gorm* is much more widespread, and there is not the same geographical concentration. It has been used throughout the 20th century, and its popularity peaked in the 1940s, when c. 240 males had this name as the first given name (The Names of the Danes). In 2019 there were 999 name bearers, and the use of *Gorm* for naming babies has increased during the last two decades (DSt: Name Barometer).

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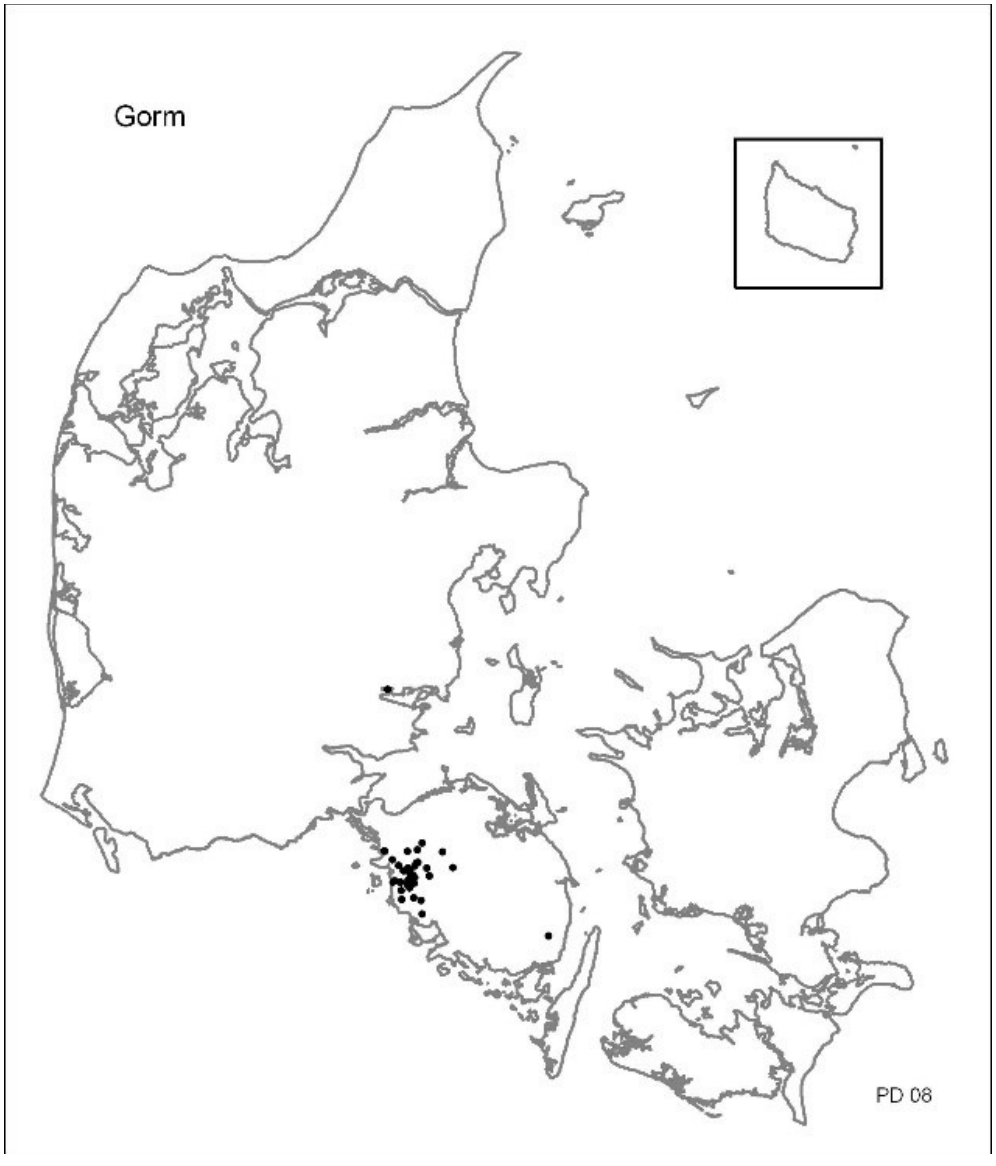


Figure 2: The distribution of the bearers of the name *Gorm* in the 1801 census; the map was made for an earlier work (Eggert 2009). The southern part of Jutland is missing for technical reasons in the digital map. Map: Peder Dam 2008.

Today, the feminine name *Gunhild* [kɔnhil] is fairly rare, yet well known. However, this is an (adapted) old Norse name form that went out of use in Denmark at the beginning of the Middle Ages but was taken up again in the 19th century with the Nordic Name Renaissance (Eggert 2008: 125–127). The common Danish forms of the name are *Gundel* [kɔnl̩] and *Gunild* [kɔnil] derived from a name form corresponding to ON *Gunnhildr*. *Gundel* is found 4 times in the Jessen Reports and *Gunild* is found once. In the 1787 census there

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are 240 name bearers of *Gundel* (12 Gondel, 1 Gonnel, 192 Gundel, 1 Gundeld, 11 Gundell, 8 Gunel, 1 Guneld, 13 Gunnel, 1 Gunneld), and there are 451 name bearers of *Gunild* (1 Gondil, 1 Gonnild, 107 Gundil, 11 Gundild, 1 Gundill, 17 Gunil, 172 Gunild, 18 Gunnil, 123 Gunnild). The name bearers are concentrated in the eastern part of the country, especially Copenhagen, North Zealand and Bornholm. But there are also some name bearers on Funen and in Jutland (Figure 3). The social status of the name bearers is rather diverse, many live in homes where the householder is a farmer but there are also smallholders, craftsmen and military men. In the 1900s, *Gundel* is very rarely used, but when used it is still in Copenhagen, Zealand or Bornholm. The form *Gunild* is used in the early 1900s, but became extremely rare towards the end of the century (The Names of the Danes). In 2019 there were 5 women with *Gundel* as their first given name, and there were 27 with *Gunild* as their first given name, but 1510 bore the (adapted) old Norse form *Gunhild* (DSt: How many?). *Gundel* does not appear in today's baby names statistics (DSt: Name Barometer), and *Gunild* only appears twice. This means that the name – in both these forms – is about to become extinct, while the (adapted) old Norse name form *Gunhild* seems to be surviving.

Another well-known, but – today – rare name, is the feminine *Gyda* [kyːtæ]. Again, this is an (adapted) old Norse name form (ON *Gyða*), which was taken up again in Denmark during the 19th century. The Danish form was – before that time – *Gyde* [kyːðə], or in Jutland *Gye* [kyː]. The name was quite common in Denmark in the Middle Ages, and since then it has lived on, especially in Jutland (Figure 3). *Gyde* is found 5 times in the Jessen Reports, and *Gye* is found 11 times. In the 1787 census there are 112 name bearers of *Gyde*, and 77 name bearers of *Gye* (1 Gy, 76 Gye). *Gye* is clearly a West-Danish form of the name in 1787; only 7 of the 77 name bearers of *Gye*/*Gy* live on Funen or Zealand, the rest of them live in Jutland. *Gyde* on the other hand has a wider distribution. The major part of the name bearers of both *Gyde* and *Gye*/*Gy* in 1787 live in countryside parishes in homes where the householder is a farmer or a smallholder.

In the 20th century, the name is of little significance. The form *Gyde* has not been used as a first given name since the 1960s, but as a second given-name it is still used now and then (The Names of the Danes). The name form *Gye* does not appear in today's baby names statistics (DSt: Name Barometer) but it has been used as a second given name (The Names of the Danes); in the spelling *Gy* it has been used once in 1989, but not since then. The (adapted) old Norse form *Gyda* has been considerably more frequent during the 20th century than the Danish forms of the name. Thus, there were 39 *Gyde*, 9 *Gy*, and no *Gye* in Denmark in 2019, but 351 *Gyda* (DSt: How many?). This means that the old Danish forms *Gyde* and *Gye*/*Gy* are almost extinct, but the (adapted) old Norse name form *Gyda* seems to be surviving.

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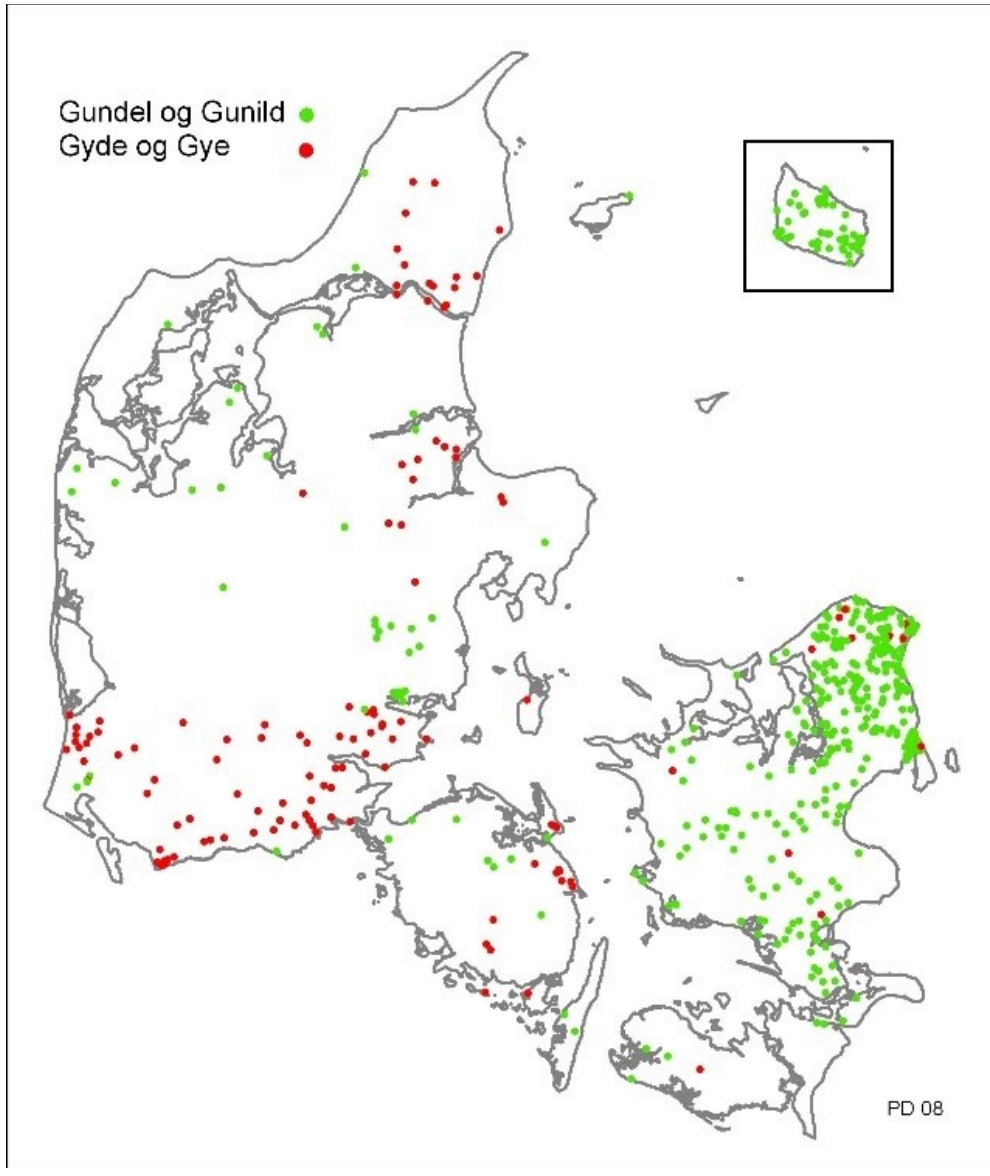


Figure 3: The distribution of the bearers of the names *Gundel/Gunild* and *Gyde/Gye* in the 1801 census; the map was made for an earlier work (Eggert 2009). The southern part of Jutland is missing for technical reasons in the digital map. Map: Peder Dam 2008.

5. Conclusion

This study consists of analysis of 6 different old Nordic names, i.e., Viking Age names, reported as uncommon in the Jessen Reports. Of these 6 names 3 of them became common gender names due to sound convergence of different masculine and feminine names after great changes in the Danish

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language in the Middle Ages, and 3 names have distinct local and regional prevalence in the 1700s.

The three common gender names are all widespread throughout Denmark without being very frequent, and shared by them is the fact that over time there occurred a prevalence for one gender in relation to the other: *Helle* as a feminine name, *Gunner* as a masculine name and *Bodel* as a feminine name. The gender difference became more and more pronounced throughout the 1800s and 1900s and all three names end up being distinctly male or female names, with no or very few name bearers of the opposite gender. The three local and regional names have different distributions in 1787, and the number of name bearers decrease for all three names during the 1800s and 1900s. Common to all the 6 names treated above is that they most often occur in the rural population and that there are some low social name bearers.

The few names dealt with in this study show that the use and survival of the old Viking Age names must depend on different circumstances. Much remains to be done to identify these circumstances more closely. This is in particular a general categorisation of the population's distribution socially and geographically (including countryside > < town/city), as well as a study of the use and distribution of the most common names geographically, socially and over time that can be used as a frame of reference for the analysis of the old Nordic names. When these things are in place, obvious research questions for a detailed examination of the continuity of the Viking Age names, for example, are these: are the names' prevalence and survival dependent on the social status of 18th-century name bearers? Are there areas with many old Viking Age names and other areas with very few or none of the old names? Does the so-called Nordic Name Renaissance take place geographically and socially in the same or other environments than where the continuity of the Viking Age names in old Danish forms were most frequent? The prerequisites for such studies on larger name data sets exist, but it will be a major and very time-consuming task.

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