

# **Early Germanic Literature and Culture**

Edited by  
Brian Murdoch  
and  
Malcolm Read

CAMDEN HOUSE

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# Runic

*Klaus Düwel*

RUNES ARE THE NAME given to the earliest Germanic written characters, characters that differ from any modern alphabet. Their precise origin remains unknown, though it is assumed that they were based on a Mediterranean alphabet (Greek, Latin, or Northern Italic), Latin because of the great impact of Roman culture on Northern Europe being the most probable. In any case, the several related Northern Italic alphabets used in inscriptions found in the Alps from the fourth to the first century B.C. demonstrate the most obvious parallels to runic shapes. The earliest extant runes can be dated archeologically to the second century A.D., but it is assumed that the use of runes predates this period.

The term rune is documented in various individual Germanic languages (for example Gothic *rūna* Old High German *rūna(stab)*, Old English *rūn*, Old Norse *rún*) and means primarily “secret.” According to epigraphic and literary evidence they are considered to be “descended from the gods” (as recorded on the sixth-century Noleby stone in southern Sweden). Other sources suggest the god Odin invented or discovered them (thus the Norse poem known as “The Words of the High One,” *Hávamál* stanza 138–39). The myth that a god created the script is widespread and is the basis of the idea of the “power of writing in belief and superstition.”<sup>1</sup> Runic writing is, like any other script, a means of communication that can be used for profane and sacred as well as magical purposes.

The usual arrangement of the twenty-four runes does not follow a formal alphabet, but represents an independent and characteristic sequence that, taken from the sound value of its first six characters, is called the *futhark*:

f	u	þ (th)	a	r	k	g	w (Ƿ)
h	n	i	j	ï	p	z (R)	s
t	b	e	m	l	ŋ (ng)	d	o

A *futhark* that corresponds essentially to these letters is present, alone or together with other runic inscriptions, on a total of nine monuments from the fifth and sixth centuries, among them the Kylver stone and the bracteates (thin, round, uniface gold medallions which were worn as amulets), from Vadstena and Grumpan in Sweden. The bracteate tradition shows the *futhark* divided into three groups (each of eight runes) or genders (ON *att*, pl. *attir*). This makes it possible to use them as a secret script, in a variety of graphic ways, by indicating firstly the group and then the position within the group.<sup>2</sup> But the cryptographic use is for the older runes only uncertainly attested.

The graphic features of the runes are stave, twig, and hook, which can appear in pairs and be combined in different ways, with the exception of the twig-hook combination. A twig cannot stand alone, though a hook can. In inscriptions there is the tendency to raise the “smaller” runes to the height of the others, which explains some of the variants. There was at first no rule governing the direction of the inscription, although the bi-directional form known as *boustrophedon* was seldom used. The twigs and hooks attached to the left or right-hand side of a stave determined the direction in which the inscription was written. Runes that stand opposite to the direction of the inscription are called reversed runes; runes which are turned upside down are called inverted runes. As in Roman epigraphy, runic script also has ligatures, known as bind-runes.<sup>3</sup> Conventionally the standardized runic forms of the *futhark* are given in an angular form. The reason for this is the assumption that runes were originally conceived to be incised into wooden objects that have not been preserved. This is contradicted on the one hand by the early survival of wooden objects bearing runic inscriptions (the wooden plane from Illerup on the Jutland peninsula, ca. A.D. 200) and on the other by the contemporaneous rounded forms found on metal objects (𐌹 𐌺 on shield-mount 2 from Illerup). Angular and rounded forms could be peculiarities of particular runic writers, but they appear to be determined primarily by the nature of the material on

which they were inscribed, as there are runic inscriptions on such different materials as stone, metal, wood, bone, and leather. Associated terminology<sup>4</sup> appears in the Germanic \**writan* (Eng. *write*, Germ. *reißen*) to suggest inscription on metal while \**faibian* “to color, to paint” indicates the painting-in of (stone) inscriptions.

Each grapheme (single character) corresponds to a phoneme (single sound). This precise reproduction of the Germanic phonemic system by the *futhark* is commonly stressed, namely “that there was a near-perfect fit between the twenty-four runes of the older *futhark* and the distinctive speech sounds of the language or languages of the runic inscriptions that predate ca. A.D. 550–650.”<sup>5</sup> The conversion of a runic character into a Latin letter is called transliteration, and such transliterations are printed in bold type. In addition to its sound value, each rune also represents a *Begriffswert* (semantic value)<sup>6</sup> which is identical to the name of the individual rune, for example **f** = Germanic \**fehu* (cattle, property), **u** = \**ūruz* (aurochs, the now extinct wild ox), **o** = \**ōþalan/ōþilan* (inherited property). Clear evidence of the epigraphic use of *Begriffsrunen* (ideographic runes, where the rune-name rather than the rune’s sound value is to be read) is present in the line “Haduwolf gave j,” the last rune meaning “a (good) year” (Stentoften stone, southern Sweden, seventh century). One assumes that the rune-names had always been associated with the runes even though these names are only documented in manuscripts from the eighth century. The relevant main sources are medieval runic poems with a mnemonic function. The reconstruction of the rune-names in the earliest Germanic form is disputed. In the following table<sup>7</sup> entries with a question-mark are speculative.

<b>f</b>	* <i>fehu</i>	cattle, (movable) property
<b>u</b>	* <i>ūruz</i>	aurochs (manly strength?)
<b>þ</b>	* <i>þurisaz</i>	Thurse, giant (terrible, pernicious force)
<b>a</b>	* <i>ansuz</i>	the deity Anse, Ase
<b>r</b>	* <i>raidō</i>	journey, riding, carriage
<b>k</b>	* <i>kaunan</i> (?)	ulcer, illness
<b>g</b>	* <i>gebō</i>	gift
<b>w</b>	* <i>wunjō</i> (?)	joy
<b>h</b>	* <i>haglaz</i> masc./* <i>haglan</i> neut.	hail (sudden ruin)
<b>n</b>	* <i>naudiz</i>	need, necessity, constraint of fortune
<b>i</b>	* <i>īsaz</i> masc./* <i>īsan</i> neut.	ice
<b>j</b>	* <i>jēran</i>	(good) year
<b>ī</b>	* <i>īwaz</i>	yew-tree
<b>p</b>	* <i>perþō</i> (?)	a fruit-tree?
<b>z/R</b>	* <i>algiz</i>	elk (defence, protection?)

s	* <i>sōwilō</i>	sun
t	* <i>tīwaz</i>	Tyr (the old sky-god)
b	* <i>berkanan</i>	birch-twigg
e	* <i>ehwaz</i>	horse
m	* <i>mannaz</i>	man
l	* <i>laguz</i>	water
ŋ	* <i>ingwaz</i>	god of the fertile year
d	* <i>dagaz</i>	day
o	* <i>ōþalan/ōþilan</i>	inherited property

The sequence of the runes in the *futhark*, which deviates from the “alphabetical” order found elsewhere, may result from the rearrangement for mystical purposes of pairs of letters in a pre-existing alphabet upon which it was modeled.<sup>8</sup>

Runic script has been in use continuously from the numerous inscribed objects found in bog-lands (Illerup, Thorsberg, Nydam on the Jutland peninsula) dating from around A.D. 200 until well into the modern era, in certain regions of Scandinavia even as late as the nineteenth century. Given this unbroken continuity, it was not necessary to decipher the runic script as laboriously as was the case with other ancient writing systems. Furthermore, since the sixteenth century, studies and collections have been made by antiquarian scholars. Johan Göransson’s *Bautil* of 1750<sup>9</sup> with its illustrations of around 1200 Swedish rune-stones is still of significance. For the original of the now lost golden Gallehus horn, eighteenth-century engravings are our only source. Pre-academic study was elevated primarily by Wimmer<sup>10</sup> in the nineteenth century to a scientific level that remains to a large extent determinative to the present day. Wimmer recognized the correct chronological sequence from the older to the younger *futhark*. Wilhelm Grimm<sup>11</sup> deduced as early as 1821 that there must have been German runic monuments; these were then later discovered. At the end of the nineteenth century, national editions of runic inscriptions were begun in Scandinavia<sup>12</sup> of which the Swedish one<sup>13</sup> is not yet complete, while the less substantial Danish corpus<sup>14</sup> will soon reach its third edition. The history of research shows that runic script and monuments have been used for ideological and political purposes, in the seventeenth century by Sweden and Denmark, and in the twentieth by Germany, the use of runic signs for the SS being the most familiar.<sup>15</sup> In the second half of the twentieth century, runic research increased greatly, and international symposia and the academic journal *Nytt om runer* (University of Oslo, Norway) which has appeared annually with a bibliography since 1986, attest to the variety of research interests and activities. Runology, although it is not an established university discipline as such, has developed into a wide-ranging subject area.



From a period of approximately 1500 years, through the times of the migration period, the Vikings, and the Middle Ages — each with its own particular modification of the runes — around 6500 runic monuments have been preserved. They are to be found from Greenland in the north to Byzantium and Piraeus in the south, from Greenland in the west to Lake Lagoda and the Dnieper estuary in the east. The main area of concentration is Scandinavia: Sweden has 3600 examples (of these 2400 are rune-stones, 1200 of these in Uppland alone, the area with the greatest density of runes), Norway approximately 1600, Denmark about 850, Greenland over 100, and 96 in Iceland. These are followed by England, with around 90 (discounting runic coins) from the period of the fifth to the eleventh centuries, and Germany with around 80 from the Merovingian period (predominantly sixth century). The number of Scandinavian inscriptions on the British Isles is in excess of 100, with 17 in Ireland. The Frisian corpus is quite modest at 20. There has been no authenticated find of a runic inscription in North America, despite strenuous efforts to find them. The case of the spurious inscription on the Kensington stone is rather alarming,<sup>16</sup> and reports of runes in South America<sup>17</sup> are unequivocally the stuff of legend. Striking are new runic inscriptions by Anglo-Saxon pilgrims in Italy and of Nordic origin in the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul.

Details of the numbers of runes are usually approximations, and it is not always possible to distinguish beyond doubt between runes, rune-like symbols, and non-runes.<sup>18</sup> Sometimes inscriptions that are held by some to be forgeries are included, and sometimes omitted. In Scandinavia, the total numbers depend on whether one does or does not include the post-Reformation runic inscriptions (around 350 of them in the Dalarna region alone). In England and Denmark there are coins with runic legends that may be listed in the runic corpus or treated as a separate group. Where multiple examples are made from a single die-stamp, one might take the number of die-stamps or the number of impressions made with them. This is true of bracteates and for runic die-stamps in general, as are known on pottery (Spong Hill, fifth century) and on weapons (Illerup spearhead, ca. A.D. 200).<sup>19</sup>

The runic period that covers inscriptions in the older *futhark* extends from around A.D. 200–700, and from these five hundred years, at least 350 inscriptions have thus far been discovered. This figure is reached only if one includes around 150 bracteates with purely runic inscriptions. De-rolez has asked “what fraction of the total number of inscriptions actually carved over five centuries has survived?”<sup>20</sup> and he estimates the losses at 25,000.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, finds of third-century lance- and spearheads demonstrate that only a small percentage of the thousands known are decorated with runes, often with silver inlays. These take the form of poetic and magical names such as **raunijaR** (tester) (Øvre Stabu), **tilarids** (goal pursuer) (Kowel), **ranja** (attacker, router) (Dahmsdorf) or **wagnijo**

(the runner) (Illerup, Vimose), which put the function of the weapon, namely to test the opposing weapons and thereby test and attack the enemy, into words. One can well imagine such ceremonial weapons being used for the ritual of opening of battle by hurling a spear over or into the enemy's army, a ritual based upon the example of the god, Odin (*Völuspá*, stanza 24; *Hljóðskviða*, stanza 27f.).<sup>22</sup>

Among artifacts recovered from the older runic period, several complexes of finds may be distinguished:



1. **Bog finds.** In the bogs of southern Scandinavia and northern Germany (Illerup, Vimose, Thorsberg, Nydam) numerous objects, among them some bearing runes, have been found.<sup>23</sup> They date from around A.D. 200. According to current views, these objects deposited in the bog were votive offerings of war booty that the native defenders had taken from the defeated invaders. However, it is equally imaginable that the invaders were victorious and made a sacrificial offering of the spoils of war captured from the defenders in some existing holy place or shrine.<sup>24</sup> This question is of significance since all speculation about the origins of runic script begins with geographical location of the earliest recorded items.

2. **Grave finds.** Six fibulae from around A.D. 200, with personal names or the name of a rune-master, as well as roughly scratched inscriptions, have been recovered from the graves of women from the social elite class.<sup>25</sup>

3. **Bracteates.** The more than 900 golden bracteates<sup>26</sup> of the migration period form a separate and specific group. These may be grouped typologically according to ornamentation: A = man's head in profile; B = full-length figure or group of figures; C = man's head in profile above a quadruped; D = stylized representation of monsters; F = quadrupeds. Runes can be found on A-, B-, C-, and F-types, but predominantly on C-types. According to Hauck's iconographic research (most recently 2002)<sup>27</sup> the figure portrayed is that of Wodan/Odin who appears in various roles (Mars, divine physician) and is depicted on the A-bracteates, in imitation of the imperial image on gold medallions, as a divine prince. On the C-bracteates he is portrayed as divine healer of Balder's fallen foal, aided by animal-like helpers. This act is invoked in mythical analogy to the second Merseburg Charm, discussed elsewhere in this volume.

For the interpretation of the inscriptions on bracteates there is (and this is unique to the older runic period), a frame of reference in late classical magical practice as recorded in Egyptian magical papyri of the third to the sixth century. From this the significance of the true, secret name of a spirit is vital for the success of the magical process. The language of "the gods and the spirits"<sup>28</sup> exhibits expressions and names which, even though they may appear meaningless or incomprehensible to humans, "all, without exception, have their meaning and significance, but naturally only for the gods."<sup>29</sup> The spirits, beings that stand midway between the humans

and the gods, use this code in speech and writing.<sup>30</sup> Many of the bracteate inscriptions that remain incomprehensible to humans are to be placed and “understood” in this communicative sense.<sup>31</sup>

4. **Individual finds** such as the Kowel spearhead already referred to represent a problematic category. In this group are such familiar pieces as the golden neck-ring from Pietroassa (now Pietroasele in Romania).<sup>32</sup> The standard interpretation of the runes on this ring, which was cut in pieces after a robbery, is: *Gutanī ō[ǰal] wī[h] hailag* (property of the Gothic people, sacred [and] inviolate), or alternatively *Gutan[ī] Iowi hailag* (consecrated to Jupiter of the Goths). This cannot be maintained after a close examination of the part of the ring which was cut, where only a **j**-rune  or possibly a **ŋ**-rune  can have stood. A **j**-rune can be interpreted as a *Begriffsrune*, an ideographic rune to be read as the rune-name, but it is still unclear what “(good) year of the Goths, sacred and inviolate” might have meant.<sup>33</sup>

The most important individual find among the older runic inscriptions is the golden horn of Gallehus. The carefully engraved inscription on the brim states: *ek HléwagastiR hóltijaR hórna táwido* “I, Leugast (Greek *Kleoxenos*) son/descendant of Holt (or: wood/forest dweller) made the horn.” Efforts to interpret this verse inscription in perfect *Stabweim* on the precious, richly decorated horn as anything other than a maker’s formula inscription have been futile.

5. **Stones.** The runic inscriptions on stones form a larger group with various sub-divisions: loose, transportable stones, stone slabs, pictorial or decorated stones, or fixed bauta-stones (cf. *Hávamál* stanza 72), which are found predominantly in Norway.<sup>34</sup> From the fourth century such bauta-stones can be found with runic inscriptions, and are often linked with grave-sites. The stone and inscription are a memorial to the dead, and additionally are to ensure the peace of the grave, and to protect the grave from intruders and against possible revenants by confining the dead person to the grave.<sup>35</sup> Individually, the interpretations of some inscriptions are controversial, for example, **alu** which appears alone on the Elgesem stone (it was found during the excavation of a grave mound). According to the interpretation of **alu**, it might be a protective formula to preserve the peace of the grave and the dead, or, if **alu** refers to a state of ecstasy, it may have been placed upon the stone “as a symbol of a cult-place.”<sup>36</sup> There is hardly a single inscription of the older runic period that has an agreed reading, let alone an agreed interpretation. This uncertainty is true, for example, for one of the longest runic inscriptions on the Norwegian Tune stone dating from around A.D. 400. It runs vertically in two rows on the front side (A) and in three rows on the back (B). With the exception of only a few runes, the actual reading is fairly clear:



- A I ekwiwaRafter • woduri  
 II dewitadahalaiban : worahto • ? (break)
- B I (break) Rwoduride : staina •  
 II þrijoRdohtriRdalidun  
 III arbijaꝛ[ or si ]josteRarbijano

The wide range of possible *interpretations*, however, may be illustrated by the following two: “I Wiw after Wodurid, the bread keeper, wrought [the runes]. For me(?), Wodurid, three daughters prepared the stone, the inheritance (but) the most distinguished of heirs.”<sup>37</sup> And: “I Wiw composed according to Wodurid, he who supplied the bread; I intended the stone for Wodurid. Three daughters prepared a pleasant inheritance, the most favored among the heirs.”<sup>38</sup> Grønvik later amended the latter with the following change: “I Wiw after Wodurid, who provided the bread, ‘wrought the rune[s],’ intended the stone for Wodurid.”<sup>39</sup>

How, then, can such widely varied interpretations (to which others could be added) come about?

- a. Different readings determine different interpretations (**arjosteR** or **asijosteR**).
- b. The substitution of the missing part of the inscription at the top of the stone permits various possibilities.
- c. Following on from this, the researchers come to differing starting points for their interpretations (**worahto**, preterite of \**wurkian* “to make, prepare, work, preterite: wrought” or “to compose (in verse)”).
- d. Syntactical breaks are made at differing positions in the inscription (AI, II or AI, II, BI).
- e. Understandings of the cultic and inheritance aspects of burial and death rites, which can be reconstructed in different ways, distinguish the individual interpretative approaches.

These problems can be illustrated even more markedly by a second example. The Eggja stone (West Norway, archeological dating ca. A.D. 700) originally lay with the inscribed side facing down, as the covering stone on a flat grave. It cannot be ascertained whether this grave had been occupied and robbed or whether it was a cenotaph, an empty grave as a memorial to a dead person. Between two long rows of runes running left to right (I + II) there is the incomplete outline of a horse, the connection of which with the inscription is questionable. An inverted short third line of runes running right to left (III) is placed after the horse’s tail, between I and II. The inscription in itself is already difficult to read and additionally there are illegible sections which have been variously amended, leading to a correspondingly diverse dozen or more attempted interpretations since 1919 (among them several monographs).<sup>40</sup> Individual researchers have offered several at-

tempts at interpretations. Here, two translations may again be used to demonstrate the differences; the first is by Wolfgang Krause:

- “I It is not struck by the sun nor is the stone cut with an (iron) knife.  
 One shall not *lay* (it) bare, when the waning moon wanders (across the sky).  
 May misled men not lay (the stone) *aside!*
- II This (stone) (the) man (= the rune-magician) covered with ‘corpse-sea’ (= blood), smeared with it (= with the blood?) the rowlocks (?) in the ‘bore-tired’ boat (?).  
 As who (= in what form) has the army-Ase (= Odin?) (or: who as a warrior has) come here to the land of warriors (or: of horses)?  
 Fish, swimming from the *terrible* river, bird, shrieking *into the enemy host.*
- III Protection (**alu**) against the evil-doer!”<sup>41</sup>

We may compare the interpretation by Grønvik,<sup>42</sup> in which the sections are taken in the order II, III, I:

- “II The household is shrinking  
 over the remainder wīlR casts the wave of death:  
 the rowlocks were ground off them  
 on the point of the mast weakened by the/in the bore-hole:  
 Who led the army  
 across into that country?  
 The man-fish  
 from the current-furrows by Firnøy,  
 swimming in the foam,  
 from the land with the glowing meadows.  
 (May I) always (receive) help when I compose my verse!  
 Not by daylight and not with the sword  
 shall the carved stone be visited;  
 nor shall the man  
 who calls the naked corpse  
 (and) nor shall confused men visit this resting place!”

Once again, Grønvik<sup>43</sup> made changes, to the beginning of II (“Over my dear ones cast itself the wave of death”) and to line III (“[he] who brought prosperity and happiness”). As with the Tune inscription, these very varied interpretations depend on equally varied assumptions and pre-suppositions:

- a) Whether it is a grave or a cenotaph.
- b) The arrangement of the lines of the runes.

- c) Deviant reading of not clearly recognizable runes.
- d) Varying completion of lacunae in the inscription.
- e) Differing division of words/units in the continuously carved inscription.
- f) Deviant transcription of individual sequences of runes.
- g) Differing approaches to the interpretation of words.
- h) Alternative understanding of words as *nomen appellativum* (generic name) or *nomen proprium* (proper name).
- i) Alternative interpretation of a sequence as a compound or as a kenning.
- j) Varying syntactical divisions
- k) Assumptions about magic and cultic, ritual activities surrounding a burial as protection against desecration of the grave or against the return from the grave of the dead person as a revenant.
- l) Differing religio-historical and religio-psychological starting points.

While there is agreement that line 1 refers to a ritual act to protect the stone and the grave, yet again a whole range of very different procedures and intentions are assumed for an understanding of line 2:

- a) Consecration of the runes and the gravestone by covering them with blood.
- b) Burial of a chieftain with a blood sacrifice and consecration of the boat on which he was carried.
- c) Inscription on a cenotaph designed to stop a criminal, who was sunk on a ship in the fjord, from returning as a ghost.
- d) The rune-master's call to the god Odin to come to Eggja to accompany the dead warrior to Hel.
- e) An act of remembrance for a dead man who has vanquished naval warriors, spilt their blood, and sunk their ship.
- f) Burial in the presence of the dead man's household retinue of someone who, while travelling by ship, had suffered a broken mast.<sup>44</sup>

Thus the enigma of the Eggja inscription, despite all the efforts of leading runologists (Magnus Olsen, Lis Jacobsen, Arthur Nordén, Gerd Høst, Wolfgang Krause, Niels Åge Nielsen, Ottar Grønvik), is still unsolved and will probably remain so.

A general characterization of the inscriptions in the older *futhark* by highlighting their magic, and in some cases cultic, aspect or by stressing the profane content of their message is difficult to establish. On the one hand, one has to consider the nature of the object that bears the inscription since the inscription on a bracteate worn as an amulet and promising

the wearer protection (for example, Raum Køge, IK 98: *gibu auja* [I grant protection]) is to be assessed differently to a commemorative inscription on a rune-stone (Bø stone: “Hnabud’s Grave”). On the other, the corresponding interpretation also depends upon the understanding, perhaps even the preconception, of the runologist making the interpretation. Our restricted knowledge of the peculiarities of an earlier culture, about which, apart from the limited runic self-documentation, we may make judgments only based on reports from outside the culture, is a problem. Insofar as relatively plausible interpretation attempts have been made, older runic remains comprise primarily the recording of names (often as a statement of ownership), makers’ inscriptions, magical inscriptions on amulets, cultic and ritual acts, memorials to the dead, and inscriptions in which a mastery of the skill of writing runes as such is expressed. Only a few people were familiar with this art. Among these, the *erilaR* is particularly prominent. On the Bratsberg buckle of around A.D. 500 there is the single inscription  $\widehat{\text{ek}}\widehat{\text{eril}}\widehat{\text{a}}\widehat{\text{R}}$ , and the formula *ek erilaR* is to be found on a total of eight monuments, all of them from the sixth century. Whether *erilaR* is linked with the name of a people, the (H)erulians (protogermanic \**erulaz*), is disputed. *erilaR* is not the name of a tribe, but a designation of some rank or title. It refers to an elevated man who has knowledge of the runic art (rune-master) and may have the function of a priest. In later times this may have become a secular office, corresponding to ON *jarl*, although the transition from *erilaR* to *jarl* is difficult to accept on phonological grounds.

The difficulty, frequently referred to, of reaching any interpretation, let alone a generally acceptable one can be illustrated once more with a methodologically instructive case, but this may be prefaced with a few words on the runologist’s working methods. New runic inscriptions are usually chance finds, and these are almost exclusively loose objects. At the excavation site or later in the museum the discovered objects are cleaned. Since this cannot always be done immediately, runes are sometimes not discovered on objects in museums until years or even decades later. If, during cleaning, script-like symbols appear, the piece is handed to an expert to determine whether they are runes or just rune-like symbols. If they are runes, then they are carefully examined on the original piece (the technical term for which is “autopsy”) and the characters identified. The form of the runes allows a rough chronological classification. To establish an exact dating, the runologist works together with an archeologist. After the reading has been determined, the philological part of the work begins. Especially on monuments from the older runic period, word-dividers are often not present in the text. Consequently, the division into individual words of a continuous inscription (*scriptio continua*) can be a difficult task. According to the location of the find, the attempt will be made, on the



basis of the familiar runic vocabulary from that area and using dictionaries and onomastic reference texts, together with literary sources, to make some overall sense of the words discovered. In the course of this, new difficulties can arise if unknown forms of names or grammatical features should appear, or a word is used for the first time.

In the linguistic, philological analysis, runic inscriptions should be analyzed synchronously as textual evidence from a certain period. They have a specific (denotative) function, and only on another level do they have other linguistic and textual functions, such as magic or number symbolism. They follow rules of a universal, typological nature, as well as the rules of an individual language, rules that can be determined for any text from a language, including inscriptions.<sup>45</sup> The epigraphic context is of primary importance, and the aim is a linguistic structure that is convincing in itself. If possible, the communicative situation of an inscribed text should also be investigated: in addition to communication between human beings, there is also the question of communication with supernatural beings.<sup>46</sup>

However, the extra-graphical context is also of importance for analysis and for interpretation. This includes, on the one hand, the relationship between the inscription and the object that bears it: are the runes on the object itself or on a repaired part, are they on the obverse or reverse? Were the runes placed on the object as part of the manufacturing process or in the course of the use of an inscribed object? On the other, the relationship between the object bearing the rune and the contemporary cultural milieu needs to be elucidated. With loose objects: provenance, routing (imported or exported article), usage, nature of the deposition, whether accidental or intentional (funerary gifts, deposition in a bog, store), nature of the find (*in situ* or in a disturbed site, completely or partly plundered), belonging to a cremation or inhumation grave. With runic standing stones: original location, possible change of location, original position (standing or lying), an individual stone or part of an arrangement of stones, the natural features of the location, any link with a grave (flat or mound grave) or a grave field, any link with special categories of find (such as hoards) in the vicinity.<sup>47</sup>

In addition one must always take into account the fact that certain pre-suppositions of the runologists play a role, suppositions that can lead to different, not to say sometimes contradictory interpretations. These can be characterized by such contrastive pairs as “skeptical — imaginative,” “mundane — magical,” “profane — sacred” and so on.<sup>48</sup> It makes a difference whether a runic inscription is processed by somebody with linguistic, paleographic, cultural-historical, or religious-historical interests without clearly expressing this interest.

A bronze fragment of a shield-boss recovered from the Thorsberg bog (Schleswig, ca. A.D. 200) shows on the reverse side of the rim six runes **aisgrh** running from right to left. These cannot be interpreted, and are therefore now considered to be a non-linguistic, meaningless sequence of runes. This is, it is true, a modern view; it is unknown what understanding of runes or what “message” (and to whom it was directed) this runic engraving is based upon. At one level, Antonsen<sup>49</sup> understands *aisk-z* as “challenger,” reads **h** as an ideographic *Begriffsrunne* “hail” in the sense of “a hail of spears and arrows” and thereby establishes a weapon name that puts into words the significance of the shield. On a second level, the attempt has been made to create, by the insertion of vowels into the sequence of consonants, a comprehensible word: *ais(i)g(a)R* “the raging, furious one” to which is added the abbreviated *h(aitē)* (= “I am called”) or the ideographic “hail” rune, again resulting in the name of a weapon. Other scholars, meanwhile, read the runes as an owner’s inscription or as the name of a rune-master. All these attempts work with suppositions that cannot be demonstrated unequivocally. Taking an archeological approach, it has been deduced from the regularity particularly of the **a**-rune on the distorted upper part, that the shield-boss was engraved with runes after it had become distorted and before it was deposited in the bog. If this is the case, one can discount the interpretations that saw here an owner’s or weapon name. At the same time, it could still be the name of a rune-master. With regard to the overall interpretation of bog deposits as votive offerings to the gods, the inscription could be linked to the one god that corresponds to the concept of rage, wrath, namely Wodan/Odin (from *\*wōþ-* “raging anger,” cf. German *Wut*). In the first of these cases the shield would have been engraved in the area of origin of the peoples who were defeated when invading the place where the deposition was made. In the second case, by contrast, it would have been engraved later by victorious local people who had captured the weapons from the invaders. None of the theories about the deposition in the bog and the possible interpretation of the inscription can be demonstrated with any certainty.<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, a Roman shield-boss with the punch-marked inscription AEL[IVS] AELIANVS was also recovered from the Thorsberg bog. Although at first the possibility was considered that the Roman custom of inscribing a name had been adopted in the runic examples,<sup>51</sup> further attempts at interpretation indicate essential differences between these two written cultures.

This is confirmed by a comparison between the approximately eighty inscriptions making up a continental (southern Germanic) corpus from the older runic period, and the roughly contemporary, though not so extensive group of Latin inscriptions from the same area.<sup>52</sup> Runic monuments from

the fifth century and especially after the first third of the sixth century in the southwestern area (Alemannia) differ from the Scandinavian examples previously characterized. There are hardly any magical inscriptions among them, apart from one obvious instance of alphabet magic to prevent a return from the dead by a female revenant on the Beuchte fibula.<sup>53</sup> There have, however, been more recent discussion of the “runes of the Merovingian period as a source for the survival of late classical Christian and non-Christian script-magic.”<sup>54</sup> In the main these involve the inscription of personal names with attached wishes and formulaic blessings referring to human relationships of various kinds. The move toward Christianity and the acceptance of the new creed are documented, according to one of the new interpretations, by the inscriptions from Nordendorf I, the demonization of the old gods Wodan and Donar, as well as the condemnation of the stag-dance rituals on the Pforzen buckle, and especially the wish “God for you, Theophilus” expressed on the Osthofen disc-fibula. The belt buckle (second half of the sixth century) recovered from a man’s grave in Pforzen in 1992 is in this connection of particular interest, offering as it does the longest inscription and the first well-rendered line in alliterative verse in continental runic inscriptions: *Áigil andi Áilrun élahu[n] gasókun* (Aigil and Ailrun have condemned the deer [the deer costume of the *cervulum facere*]). The second half-line has **ltahu** of which  $\text{M}\uparrow$  was possibly intended as the bind rune  $\widehat{\text{el}}$ .<sup>55</sup> Overall, it seems reasonable to say that Alemannic runic culture was associated with women.

The golden disc brooch from Chéhéry, which has Latin and runic inscriptions (not bilingually matched, however) is unique. Although its poor state of preservation, particularly of the runes on the reverse side, does not permit an interpretation, this brooch is important because, as part of a richly equipped grave, it documents a knowledge of Latin and runic script among those close to a woman of high social rank.<sup>56</sup> Summarizing the runic and Latin epigraphic finds, the following contrasts emerge:

#### Latin Inscriptions

- Status symbols in graves of the upper class
- on objects belonging to men and women
- on the front
- mostly inscribed during production
- of a public, representative character
- formed an essential part of the inscribed object

#### Runic Inscriptions

- Status symbols in graves of the middle class
- predominantly on women’s objects
- on the back
- mostly inscribed after the production of the object
- concealed, intended as a private communication
- of incidental nature



- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– often show some relationship to the object</li> <li>– have the character of a communicative message</li> <li>– record the making, the nature, and the function of the object</li> <li>– mostly document the acceptance of Christianity</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– do not demonstrate any recognizable relationship to the object</li> <li>– show names, which are not unequivocally linked to the object's maker, giver, owner, or the inscriber of the runes</li> <li>– sometimes stress the ability to make inscriptions</li> <li>– document the move toward the new religion (linked with syncretism)</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

“What kind of science is runology?” asks Antonsen provocatively.<sup>57</sup> One answer is: “Runology is paleography, linguistics, archeology, and mythology,”<sup>58</sup> but paleographic (today one would term it graphemic) analysis take precedence, before linguists and religious specialists process the inscriptions. Antonsen, who put the question, clearly considers “the linguist to be the primary actor in deciphering and interpreting runic inscriptions.”<sup>59</sup> A little earlier, in 1994, Barnes in his “On Types of Argumentation in Runic Studies”<sup>60</sup> passed a similar judgment. His various subheadings criticize some of the more common shortcomings in runological studies: “unsubstantiated claims and assertions — ignorance of other disciplines and lack of intellectual rigor — conjecture quoted as fact — reliance on unestablished or questionable principles.” A little later, Braunmüller too called for “a consistently synchronic linguistic analysis of runic inscriptions.”<sup>61</sup> There is criticism of the lack of any methodological basis, lack of terminological precision and (therefore) an arbitrary interpretative approach.<sup>62</sup> Does the solution really lie in the strict observation of linguistic principles? Is there an expectation which is typical for that of the neogrammarians? Precise, unambiguous linguistic terminology certainly aids understanding. It is necessary to follow these steps in sequence: transliteration, phonetic and phonemic transcription, production of text with reference to a linguistic status, linking to familiar lexemes from an individual language, possibly etymological recovery, all leading to an interpretation which considers the supralinguistic context. However, one must bear in mind that the older runic inscriptions stem from an archaic, oral culture whose writing habits are only partially known. Linguistic processes of change are only sketchily apparent, and this across wide geographical areas in which there will have been regional differences.<sup>63</sup> The paucity of recovered finds often only offers names which are not easily susceptible to linguistic analysis. There seem to be contradictory linguistic forms. In

essence, one must ask whether modern linguistic procedures are exclusively appropriate for the understanding of archaic inscriptions. The impression sometimes arises that linguistic analyses strain the linguistic record and become an artistic game. Linguistic argumentation leads to improbability when the phonemic system that the oldest *futhork* inscriptions are based upon is traced back to the middle of the first millennium B.C., thereby establishing the origin of runic writing in a pre-classical Greek alphabet.<sup>64</sup>

The question of the origin of runic writing was already being debated during the first, pre-academic phase of runic research. From the late nineteenth century on, theories have been voiced that have again occasioned heated debate over the last decade. There are three basic principles at issue. First, that runic writing neither arose *ex nihilo* nor from purely Germanic conditions. Second, that the stimulus or model was a Mediterranean alphabet. And third, that the starting point for all considerations has to be the geographical area and chronological setting of the oldest runic remains. Assuming that some alphabet was taken as a model, various aspects are stressed: the cultural-historical (the cultural status); the formal (matching the inventory of symbols); the linguistic (phonemic correspondences); the (comprehensive) alphabet-historical (considering the direction of the script, writing of double sounds, ligatures, word division etc.). In all authoritative works on the subjects, the following five questions emerge about why the runic script was created:

1. Which alphabet was taken as a model, and from where?
2. At what time was this done?
3. In which area?
4. By what person/people or ethnos?
5. For what purpose?

Some answers have been suggested:

1. The following have been suggested as a model for the runic alphabet: first, Latin capitals (later also perhaps cursive).<sup>65</sup> “The Latin theory is supported by the oldest concentration of runic memorials, the powerful Roman cultural influence, as well as the obvious similarity to corresponding Latin letters, above all the runes for **f**, **r**, **b**, and **m**.”<sup>66</sup> Second, the classical Greek alphabet or cursive script, and also, particularly in American research, an archaic Greek alphabet from the sixth century B.C.<sup>67</sup> A problem with this chronologically very early start for runic script is some explanation for the lack of any finds for a period covering at least 500 years. And, third, an origin from Northern Italic alphabets was first intensively investigated in the twentieth century. It is favored in Italian

research,<sup>68</sup> and has more recently been advanced by epigraphic scholars<sup>69</sup> and linguists.<sup>70</sup>

2. Chronologically, the creation of runes pre-dates the oldest runic inscription, but which is the oldest — the Meldorf fibula (ca. A.D. 50), the Vimose comb (archeologically, ca. A.D. 160), or is it the Øvre Stabu spearhead (second half of the second century A.D.)? How far one can go back from there depends, on the one hand, upon an assumption of a “dark” age of fifty to one hundred years in which there are no recorded finds, and, on the other, upon the assumption that the runic script had, because of its lack of rounded forms, been created to be incised into wood, and that such perishable wood had not been preserved. This assumption cannot be confirmed because of the preservation of early inscriptions on wood in bogs.

3. The geographical location for the origin of runes varies depending on the alphabetic model that one chooses. On a larger scale, only objects with Latin inscriptions can be demonstrated to have entered the Germanic *barbaricum* — therefore southern Scandinavia seems likely; the *Germani* could only have become familiar with other alphabets in the areas from whence they first spread.

4. Whether a single individual or a group of people created runic script cannot be ascertained. Ethnically, depending on one’s theory, it could have belonged to the Angles, Herulians, Marcomanni or — if attested — to ethnic groups who migrated further to the southeast, though for chronological reasons the Goths can be eliminated.

5. On the question of the purpose for which runic script was invented, one can only speculate: as a cultic script or as a magic symbol, as a profane means of communication (above all in trade, in which context Moltke<sup>71</sup> hoped to find a consignment note written in runes on wood), or for divination. Here too it is a question of *quot capita tot sensus*. To offer here a personal view, the five aspects can plausibly be combined: runic script was created on the basis of a Mediterranean alphabet, most likely Latin, in the time from around the birth of Christ into the first century A.D., in the region of the western Baltic (perhaps with some impulse from the Rhine area) by one or more “intellectuals” as a means of communication for secular, but also for sacral and magic use.

In this context, one may ask which is the oldest runic inscription of all, and then one must preface any such speculation with the observation that all attempts to make datings runologically (by the form of the characters, phonological value, direction of the script, splitting of words, ligature, script conventions) or linguistically (phonological change, syncope etc.) can at best achieve only a relative chronology.<sup>72</sup> Archeological datings, which are, however, also susceptible to variation in the course of research,

form a definite basis. The large numbers of objects recovered primarily from graves but also from bogs and hoards permits an adequately differentiated typology and, on the basis of this, a reliable chronology,<sup>73</sup> which is supported by specific investigative methods (radiocarbon-dating, dendrochronology — dating by the use of tree-rings). The attempted dating of standing stones and *in situ* rock carvings is problematic if these are not closely linked to a grave containing gifts or offerings. With archeological dating it must also be clear what is being dated: the date of production or of its deposition in the grave, perhaps even the period of time that an object was in use.<sup>74</sup> A runic inscription can be carved on an object at any time during its existence. Only in a few cases is there any clear evidence. Thus, for example, the runes **eho** inscribed on the Donzdorf fibula, and also the similar decorations on the reverse, were engraved during the production process,<sup>75</sup> while on the Beuchte fibula, which had been used for a long time and was very worn, the runes show hardly any signs of wear and were inscribed only shortly before the deposition as a grave offering/gift.<sup>76</sup> For the greater number of loose objects with runes, the inscription can have been made over a long period of use, in the case of inherited pieces as long as half a century. Similar considerations hold true for the early south Scandinavian runic finds from graves and bogs from the period around 200.<sup>77</sup>

The oldest definite inscription, with the runes **harja**, a masculine name-formation from *Hari* (German *Heer* [army])<sup>78</sup> is to be found on the Vimose comb, which Ilkjær<sup>79</sup> dates archeologically to around A.D. 160. Previously the Øvre Stabu lancehead with the magico-poetical spearname **raunijaR**, old Icelandic *reynir* “tester,” was thought to be the oldest inscription, dating from the second half of the second century A.D.<sup>80</sup>

In 1979 the chance discovery of the Meldorf fibula was made, a piece that is dated to the first half of the first century A.D. Some consider the tremolo-style markings on the hasp to be ornamentation, others think they are written characters. But what characters? Epigraphers variously see them, depending on their own area of specialization, as runic, Roman majuscule, Greek, or Etruscan script. Since the first publication,<sup>81</sup> there are now different, conflicting views: Latin capitals (or an imitation) versus runes (perhaps proto-runes). The four characters were, correspondingly, read either from left to right or from right to left. The characters IDIN, in Latin, could mean “for Ida” (female) or “for Iddo” (male).<sup>82</sup> The runic reading **hiwi** could be understood as an inscribed dedication to a woman, “for Hiwi,” whose function as head of the family (*mater familias*) is possibly alluded to.<sup>83</sup> These and other attempted interpretations are open to question, particularly the most recent suggestion, **irili** (for the [rune-]master).<sup>84</sup>

Runology is not at present a formal and independent academic discipline, unlike, for example, epigraphy at some universities. With a few exceptions, runologists are philologists whose specialization in teaching and research is one of the older Germanic languages, or Indo-European philology in general. In this case other individual languages such as Celtic can also play a central role. In the broadest sense, runology is part of the study of Germanic antiquity, though this is no longer an independent subject area in Germany, and it is evident that an exhaustive study of the place and role of runic monuments will only be achieved through interdisciplinary cooperation.<sup>85</sup>

Among runologists a distinction is made between field runologists and desk runologists. Field runologists work primarily on the original objects, especially when, as in Scandinavia with its numerous rune-stones, these are scattered about the countryside. But desk runologists should also examine the originals of the inscriptions they are processing. The findings made in this way can be of great significance for their conclusions. They may, for example, come to a new reading that might provide the basis for a new interpretation. The desk runologists will sometimes discover that a fresh, untreated inscription on a freshly excavated and cautiously cleaned object will be clearer and more definite than after conservation. After decades of being kept in a museum, the legibility of runes, which were readily identifiable at the time when they were discovered, can be severely reduced. It can sometimes even happen that in the course of study a rune can become lost which is then only rediscovered through a new autopsy.<sup>86</sup> And such a direct viewing of the rune is, after all, necessary to demonstrate perhaps that an inscription taken to be genuine is in fact a falsification.<sup>87</sup> But the reverse can also happen, as with the Weser runic bones, which for a long time were suspected to be forgeries but were, with the help of scientific and forensic investigative methods, demonstrated to be genuine.<sup>88</sup>

To return to Antonsen's question, then: what kind of science is runology? The answer is that it is a difficult but rewarding activity in which precision and experience on a solid philological and linguistic basis works in cooperation with the relevant related sciences requiring imagination and deductive powers but also rational, critical control, in order to offer a plausible explanation for the meaning, role, and importance of an inscription and the object that bears the runes. As is so often the case, for the runologist as for other scholars, the best questions often come from outside.

An archeologist's questions to the runologist:  
 Why did anyone write in an illiterate society like the Germanic?  
 Why this native alphabet?  
 Who wrote? Surely not everybody. Some did, but who?  
 Who was able to read the runes?



Did it matter to the magic function that runes were not common knowledge as long as there was someone around to interpret?  
 Was the act of writing the prime object of the exercise?  
 How reliable are the sources?  
 How can we make them more reliable?  
 Why were only specific types of objects inscribed? Why spear-/lanceheads instead of swords? Surely swords were the more prestigious weapons and there does not seem to be any rule as to which spearheads got inscriptions. It was not only silver inlaid masterpieces which were inscribed. Why a plane and not the gold rings (like Pietroasa in the south)?  
 Is it symptomatic of the social situation that there is something wrong in practically every inscription written in the old *futhark*? Does that reflect a still experimenting milieu?<sup>89</sup>

Runologists will hardly be able answer a single one of these questions with any degree of certainty, but they can, for their part, pose further questions. For example, one might speculate as to how runic writing was learned and how it was passed on, and what people of what social rank participated in this. Further, one needs to explain the relatively standardized set of symbols which is remarkable given the large geographical area from which runic monuments originate.<sup>90</sup> Two further questions are whether there is an acceptable explanation for the fact that the sequence of the runes in the *futhark* deviates so obviously from sequence of the alphabet and what function has an inscription consisting only of this *futhark*?

We should not leave the impression that runology is not at all scientific, even though certain work by outsiders might give this impression.<sup>91</sup> It must not be forgotten that runology belongs to those human sciences whose aim, within the hermeneutic process, can be of value on an interdisciplinary basis as long as its initial premises are clear and it can present a transparent working method. Given such a basis, then it is rewarding to pursue the study of these autochthonous memorials of early writing, these original and unique documents from an age which is otherwise known to us only from outside (and almost always partisan) sources.

Translated by Malcolm Read

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Bertholet, *Die Macht der Schrift in Glauben und Aberglauben* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1949).

<sup>2</sup> Wolfgang Krause, *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1966), I, 10–29; Klaus Düwel, *Runenkunde*, 3rd ed. (Stutt-

gart and Weimar: Metzler, 2001), 183–88; Raymond I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes*, 2nd ed. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999), 80–88.

<sup>3</sup> Mindy MacLeod, *Bind-Runes: An Investigation of Ligatures in Runic Epigraphy* (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet. Institutionen för nordiska språk, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Else Ebel, *Die Terminologie der Runentechnik* (Göttingen: E. Ebel, 1963); Rune Palm, *Runor och regionalitet: studier av variation i de nordiska minnesinskrifterna* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, Institution för nordiska språk, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Michael P. Barnes, “On Types of Argumentation in Runic Studies,” in J. E. Knirk (ed.) *Proceedings of the Third International Symposium on Runes and Runic Inscriptions* (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet. Institutionen för nordiska språk, 1994): 11–29, esp. 21; René Dérolez, “On the ‘Otherness’ of the Anglo-Saxon Runes and the ‘Perfect Fit’ of the Futhork,” in *Runeninschriften als Quellen interdisziplinärer Forschung*, ed. K. Düwel (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1998), 103–26, esp. 110–26.

<sup>6</sup> See K. Düwel, “Begriffsrunen,” in *RGA*, vol. 2, 150–53.

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from W. Krause, *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhork*, I, 4. Cf. K. Düwel, *Runenkunde*, 198–99; R. I. Page, *English Runes*, 63–79. Robert Nedomá, “Runennamen,” in *RGA*, vol. 25, 556–62.

<sup>8</sup> Elmar Seebold, “Was haben die Germanen mit den Runen gemacht? Und wieviel haben sie davon von ihren antiken Vorbildern gelernt?” in *Germanic Dialects: Linguistic and Philological Investigations*, ed. B. Brogyanyi and T. Krömmelbein (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1986), 525–83; E. Seebold, “Futhork, Beith-Luis-Nion, He-Lamedh, Abgâd und Alphabet. Über die Systematik der Zeichenaufzählung bei Buchstaben-Schriften,” in *Sprachen und Schriften des antiken Mittelmeerraums: Festschrift für Jürgen Untermann*, ed. F. Heidermanns, H. Rix and E. Seebold (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft der Universität Innsbruck, 1993): 411–44.

<sup>9</sup> Johan Göransson, *Bautil* (Stockholm: Salvius, 1750).

<sup>10</sup> Ludvig F. A. Wimmer, *Runeskriftens Oprindelse og Udvikling i Norden* (Copenhagen: V. Priors boghandel, 1874); L. F. A. Wimmer, *Die Runenschrift* translated by F. Holthausen (Berlin: Weidmann, 1887).

<sup>11</sup> Wilhelm C. Grimm, *Über deutsche Runen* (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1821).

<sup>12</sup> *Norges Indskrifter med de ældre Runer*, edited by Sophus Bugge and Magnus B. Olsen (Christiania: Brøgger, 1891–1924); L. F. A. Wimmer, *De danske runemindesmærker*, 4 vols. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1893–1908).

<sup>13</sup> *Sveriges Runinskrifter* published for the Kungliga Vitterhets, Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, vol. I– (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1900–).

<sup>14</sup> *Danmarks Runeindskrifter*, ed. Lis Jacobsen and Erik Moltke (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1941–42).

<sup>15</sup> Ulrich Hunger, *Die Runenkunde im Dritten Reich* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> Hertha Marquardt, *Bibliographie der Runeninschriften nach Fundorten*, vol. I (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1961); see Robert A. Hall Jr., *The Kensington Runestone, Authentic and Important. A Critical Edition* (Lake Bluff, IL: Jupiter Press, 1994); R. Nielsen, R. A. Hall Jr. and J. E. Knirk, “Forum: The Kensington Rune-

stone,” *Epigraphic Society Occasional Publications* 23 (1998): 187–265. Cf. J. E. Knirk, review of Hall, *The Kensington Runestone, skandinavistik* 26 (1996): 45–47.

<sup>17</sup> See for example Jacques de Mahieu, ed., *Les inscriptions Runiques Précolombiennes du Paraguay* (Buenos Aires: Instituto de Ciencia del Hombre, 1972).

<sup>18</sup> R. I. Page, *Runes and Runic Inscriptions* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995; paperback ed. with new material, 1999), 161–79.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Pieper, “Der Runenstempel von Spong Hill. Pseudorunen oder Runenformel?” *Neue Ausgrabungen und Forschungen in Niedersachsen* 17 (1986): 181–200; and P. Pieper, “Spiegelrunen,” in *Runor och runinskrifter* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987), 67–72.

<sup>20</sup> R. Derolez, “The Origin of the Runes: an Alternative Approach,” *Academiae Analecta — Klasse der Letteren* 60 (Brussels: Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, 1998), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Personal communication. See on the Anglo-Saxon corpus, R. Derolez, “Runic Literacy among the Anglo-Saxons,” in Alfred Bammesberger, ed., *Britain 400–600: Language and History* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1990), 397–436, esp. 400–01.

<sup>22</sup> K. Düwel, “Runeninschriften auf Waffen,” in *Wörter und Sachen im Lichte der Bezeichnungsforschung*, ed. Ruth Schmidt-Wiegand (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1981), 128–67.

<sup>23</sup> Marie Stoklund, “Die Runen der römischen Kaiserzeit,” in Ulla Lund Hansen, *Himlingøje — Seeland — Europa* (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Nordiske Oldskriftselskab, 1995), 317–46.

<sup>24</sup> Jan Bemann, and Güde Hahne, “Ältereisenzeitliche Heiligtümer im nördlichen Europa nach den archäologischen Quellen,” in *Germanische Religionsgeschichte — Quellen und Quellenprobleme*, ed. Heinrich Beck, D. Ellmers, and K. Schier (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1992), 29–69, esp. 66–69.

<sup>25</sup> M. Stoklund, “Die Runen der römischen Kaiserzeit,” 317–46.

<sup>26</sup> Morten Axboe, Urs Clavadetscher, K. Düwel, Karl Hauck, and Lutz von Padberg, *Die Goldbrakteaten der Völkerwanderungszeit: Ikonographischer Katalog* (IK Einleitung, vols. 1–3 Text und Tafelbände; Munich: Fink, 1985–89).

<sup>27</sup> K. Hauck, “Zur religionsgeschichtlichen Auswertung von Bildchiffren und Runen der völkerwanderungszeitlichen Goldbrakteaten” (Zur Ikonologie der Goldbrakteaten, LVI), in *Runeninschriften*, ed. K. Düwel, 298–353. See also his “Die runenkundigen Erfinder von den Bildchiffren der Goldbrakteaten” (Zur Ikonologie der Goldbrakteaten, LVII), *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 32 (1998): 28–56 and pl. XI. Finally, see H. Beck and K. Hauck, “Zur philologischen und historischen Auswertung eines neuen Drei-Götter-Brakteaten aus Sorte Muld, Bornholm, Dänemark,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 36 (2002): 51–94 and pl. I, II.

<sup>28</sup> Hermann Güntert, *Von der Sprache der Götter und Geister* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1921).

<sup>29</sup> Jamblichos, *De Mysteriis*, cf. K. Düwel, “Buchstabenmagie und Alphabetzauber. Zu den Inschriften der Goldbrakteaten und ihrer Funktion als Amulette,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 22 (1988): 70–110, esp. 102.

<sup>30</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei* IX, 1.

<sup>31</sup> K. Düwel, "Buchstabenmagie und Alphabetzauber," 93.

<sup>32</sup> It is part of a hoard that was earlier thought to be linked to the Visigothic king Athanarich (fourth century) but which is now ascribed to an Ostrogoth from the first half of the fifth century. See Dorina Tomescu, "Der Schatzfund von Pietroasa," in *Katalog: Goldhelm, Schwert und Silberschätze* (Frankfurt/Main: Stadt Frankfurt am Main, 1994), 230–35.

<sup>33</sup> Hermann Reichert, "GUTANI? WI HAILAG," *Die Sprache: Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft* 35 (1991–93): 235–47; R. Marhiou, P. Pieper and R. Nedoma, "Pietroassa," in *RGA*, vol. 23, 147–58.

<sup>34</sup> W. Krause, *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark*, I, nr. 53–102.

<sup>35</sup> See K. Düwel, *Runenkunde*, 35, 98–99. See further A.-S. Gräslund and K. Düwel, "Runensteine," in *RGA*, vol. 25, 585–96; K. Düwel, "Runen und Runendenkmäler," in *RGA*, vol. 25, 499–512; and his "Runeninschriften," in *RGA*, vol. 25, 525–37.

<sup>36</sup> Elmer H. Antonsen, "Die Darstellung des heidnischen Altars auf gotländischen Bildsteinen und der Runenstein von Elgesem," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 18 (1984): 334–35. Cf. E. H. Antonsen, *Runes and Germanic Linguistics* (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002), 196–200.

<sup>37</sup> W. Krause, *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark*, I, 166.

<sup>38</sup> Ottar Grønvik, *Runene på Tunesteinen: Alfabet — språkform — budskap* (Oslo, Bergen, Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1981), 162–63.

<sup>39</sup> O. Grønvik, "Enda en gang om Tuneinskriften," *Maal og Minne* 1998, 35–40.

<sup>40</sup> See P. Fett and Gerd Høst, "Eggja," in *RGA*, vol. 6, 460–66; and Thomas Birkmann, *Von Ågedal bis Malt: Die skandinavischen Runeninschriften vom Ende des 5. bis Ende des 9. Jahrhunderts*, Ergänzungsbande zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 12 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1995): 100–101.

<sup>41</sup> W. Krause, *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark*, I, 232. Italics indicate words surmised for defective parts of the inscription.

<sup>42</sup> O. Grønvik, *Runene på Eggjasteinen: En hedensk gravinskript fra slutten av 600-tallet* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1985).

<sup>43</sup> O. Grønvik, "Om Eggjainnskriften," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 103 (1988): 36–47.

<sup>44</sup> For individual points, cf. T. Birkmann, *Von Ågedal bis Malt*, 103ff.

<sup>45</sup> Kurt Braunmüller, "Methodische Probleme in der Runologie — einige Überlegungen aus linguistischer Sicht," in *Runeninschriften*, ed. K. Düwel, 3–23, esp. 16ff.

<sup>46</sup> K. Düwel, "Buchstabenmagie und Alphabetzauber," 101–2; K. Düwel, "Zur Auswertung der Brakteateninschriften. Runenkenntnis und Runeninschriften als Oberschichten-Merkmale," in *Der historische Horizont der Götterbilder-Amulette aus der Übergangsepoche von der Spätantike zum Frühmittelalter*, ed. K. Hauck (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 32–39, esp. 36ff.

<sup>47</sup> K. Düwel, "Runeninschriften als Quellen der germanischen Religionsgeschichte," in *Germanische Religionsgeschichte*, ed. Beck, Ellmers and Schier, 336–64, esp. 345–46.

<sup>48</sup> R. I. Page, *English Runes* 13.

- <sup>49</sup> E. H. Antonsen, *A Concise Grammar of the Older Runic Inscriptions* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1975), nr. 3.
- <sup>50</sup> K. Düwel, “Runeninschriften als Quellen der germanischen Religionsgeschichte,” 346ff. and n. 13.
- <sup>51</sup> Joachim Werner, *Das Aufkommen von Bild und Schrift in Nordeuropa* (Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1966), 32–33.
- <sup>52</sup> K. Düwel, “Runische und lateinische Epigraphik im süddeutschen Raum zur Merowingerzeit,” in *Runische Schriftkultur in kontinental-skandinavischer und angelsächsischer Wechselbeziehung*, ed. K. Düwel (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1994), 229–308.
- <sup>53</sup> K. Düwel, “Runeninschriften als Quellen der germanischen Religionsgeschichte,” 353–54.
- <sup>54</sup> Ute Schwab, “Runen der Merowingerzeit als Quelle für das Weiterleben der spätantiken christlichen und nichtchristlichen Schriftmagie?” in *Runeninschriften*, ed. K. Düwel, 376–433.
- <sup>55</sup> K. Düwel, “Die Runenschnalle von Pforzen (Allgäu) — Aspekte der Deutung: 3. Lesung und Deutung,” in *Pforzen und Bergakker: Neue Untersuchungen zu Runeninschriften*, ed. A. Bammesberger (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1999), 36–54. This volume also contains interpretations by Ute Schwab, Robert Nedoma, Norbert Wagner, and Elmar Seebold. Cf. further V. Babucke and K. Düwel, “Pforzen,” in *RGA*, vol. 23, 114–18. On the metrical character of the inscription see H.-P. Naumann, “Runendichtung,” in *RGA*, vol. 25, 512–18, esp. 514–15.
- <sup>56</sup> K. Düwel, “Runische und lateinische Epigraphik,” 235–36.
- <sup>57</sup> E. H. Antonsen, “What Kind of Science is Runology?” *Det Kongelige Norske Videnskabers Selskabs Forhandlingar* (1995): 125–39; cf. L. Peterson, “Runologi: Försök till ett aktuellt signalement,” *Saga och sed: Kungliga Gustav Adolfs Akademiens årsbok 1995* (publ. 1996): 39–54, esp. 39.
- <sup>58</sup> Carl J. S. Marstrand, “Opedalstenen,” *Norsk tidsskrift for sprogvidenskap 3* (1929): 158–96. For a variation on and a history of this dictum see L. Peterson, “Runologi,” 39.
- <sup>59</sup> E. H. Antonsen, “What Kind of Science is Runology?” 137.
- <sup>60</sup> M. Barnes, “On Types of Argumentation in Runic Studies,” 11–29.
- <sup>61</sup> K. Braunmüller, “Methodische Probleme in der Runologie — einige Überlegungen aus linguistischer Sicht,” in *Runeninschriften*, ed. K. Düwel, 3–23, esp. 20.
- <sup>62</sup> See L. Peterson, “Runologi” and also his “Tolkaren och texten, texten och tolkaren,” in *Runor och ABC: Elva föreläsningar från ett symposium i Stockholm våren 1995*, ed. S. Nyström (Stockholm: Sällskapet Runica et Mediævalia; Riksantikvarieämbetet, Stockholms Medeltidsmuseum, 1997), 141–48.
- <sup>63</sup> Palm, *Runor och regionalitet*.
- <sup>64</sup> Richard L. Morris, *Runic and Mediterranean Epigraphy* (Odense: Odense UP, 1988).
- <sup>65</sup> See most recently Henrik Williams, “The Origin of the Runes,” in *Frisian Runes and Neighbouring Traditions*, ed. T. Looijenga and A. Quak = *ABäG 45* (1996): 211–18; A. Quak, “Noch einmal die Lateinthese,” *ibid.*, 171–79; H. Williams,

“The Romans and the Runes — Uses of Writing in Germania,” in *Runor och ABC*, ed. Nyström, 177–92; and K. Düwel, *Runenkunde*, 175–81 (= K. Düwel, “Runenschrift,” in *RGA*, vol. 25, 571–85, esp. 579–85).

<sup>66</sup> W. Krause, *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark*, I, 7.

<sup>67</sup> Most recently, E. H. Antonsen, “Runes and Romans on the Rhine,” in *Frisian Runes and Neighbouring Traditions*, ed. Looijenga and Quak, 5–13; Morris, *Runic and Mediterranean Epigraphy*.

<sup>68</sup> Piergiuseppe Scardigli, *Der Weg zur deutschen Sprache* (Bern: Lang, 1994), 175.

<sup>69</sup> Helmut Rix, “Thesen zum Ursprung der Runenschrift,” in *Etrusker nördlich von Etrurien: Etruskische Präsenz in Norditalien und nördlich der Alpen sowie ihre Einflüsse auf die einheimischen Kulturen: Akten des Symposions von Wien — Schloß Neuwaldegg 2.-5. Oktober 1989*, ed. L. Aigner-Foresti (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992): 411–41.

<sup>70</sup> T. L. Markey, “Studies in Runic Origins I: Germanic \**maþl*-/\**mahl*- and Etruscan *meθlum*,” *American Journal of Germanic Linguistics and Literatures* 10 (1998): 153–200; his “Studies in Runic Origins II: From Gods to Men,” *American Journal of Germanic Linguistics and Literatures* 11 (1999): 131–203; and B. Mees, “The North Etruscan Thesis of the Origin of the Runes,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 115 (2000): 33–82.

<sup>71</sup> Erik Moltke, *Runes and their Origin: Denmark and Elsewhere* (Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, 1985), 69.

<sup>72</sup> E. H. Antonsen, “On Runological and Linguistic Evidence for Dating Runic Inscriptions,” in *Runeninschriften*, ed. K. Düwel, 150–59.

<sup>73</sup> On the gold bracteates see for example M. Axboe, “Die innere Chronologie der A-C-Brakteaten und ihrer Inschriften,” in *Runeninschriften*, ed. K. Düwel, 231–52.

<sup>74</sup> Heiko Steuer, “Datierungsprobleme in der Archäologie,” in *Runeninschriften*, ed. K. Düwel, 129–49.

<sup>75</sup> K. Düwel and Helmut Roth, “Die Runenfibeln von Donzdorf,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 11 (1977): 409–13.

<sup>76</sup> K. Düwel, “Runeninschriften als Quellen der germanischen Religionsgeschichte,” 353ff.

<sup>77</sup> For a summary, see U. Lund Hansen, “Zur Ausstattung und sozialen Stellung runenführender Gräber der Kaiserzeit in Südkandinavien,” in *Runeninschriften*, ed. K. Düwel, 160–79.

<sup>78</sup> W. Krause, *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark*, I, nr. 26.

<sup>79</sup> Jørgen Ilkjær, “Runeindskrifter fra mosefund i Danmark — kontekst og oprindelse,” in *Frisian Runes and Neighbouring Traditions*, ed. Looijenga and Quak, 63–76, esp. 73–74.

<sup>80</sup> W. Krause, *Runeninschriften*, I, 76; and E. H. Antonsen, *A Concise Grammar*, nr. 1.

<sup>81</sup> K. Düwel, “The Meldorf Fibula and the Origin of Writing,” *Michigan Germanic Studies* 7 (1981): 8–18; K. Düwel, and M. Gebühr, “Die Fibel von Meldorf und die Anfänge der Runenschrift,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 110 (1981): 159–76.

<sup>82</sup> Bengt Odenstedt, “The Inscription on the Meldorf Fibula,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 112 (1983): 153–61; and “Further Reflections on the Meldorf Inscription,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 118 (1989): 77–85.

<sup>83</sup> K. Düwel, “The Meldorf Fibula,” 12; K. Düwel and M. Gebühr, “Die Fibel von Meldorf,” 171–72, and “Meldorf,” in *RGA*, vol. 19, 520–22.

<sup>84</sup> B. Mees, “A New Interpretation of the Meldorf Fibula Inscription,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 126 (1997): 131–39.

<sup>85</sup> See K. Düwel, ed., *Runeninschriften*.

<sup>86</sup> K. Düwel, “Die 15. Rune auf dem Brakteaten von Nebenstedt I,” in *Studien zur Sachsenforschung*, ed. H. J. Häfner (Hildesheim: Laux, 1977), 90–96; and M. Axboe and K. Düwel, “Nebenstedt,” in *RGA*, vol. 21, 31–33.

<sup>87</sup> See K. Düwel and W.-D. Tempel, “Knochenkämme mit Runeninschriften aus Friesland,” *Palaeohistoria* 14 (1968/70): 353–91, esp. 377–78 on the Jouswier bone plate.

<sup>88</sup> See P. Pieper, *Die Weser-Runenknöchen* (Oldenburg: Isensee, 1989).

<sup>89</sup> Henrik Thrane, “An Archaeologist’s View of Runes,” in *Runeninschriften*, ed. K. Düwel, 219–27, esp. 224–25.

<sup>90</sup> On this, see Otto Höfler, “Herkunft und Ausbreitung der Runen,” in his *Kleine Schriften*, ed. Helmut Birkhan (Hamburg: Buske, 1992, originally in *Die Sprache* 17, 1971, 134–56), 285–307.

<sup>91</sup> K. Braunnüller, “Methodische Probleme in der Runologie — einige Überlegungen aus linguistischer Sicht,” in *Runeninschriften*, ed. K. Düwel, 3–23, esp. 14–16.



*Map of early runic finds*

# Gothic

*Brian Murdoch*

GOthic IS THE EARLIEST GERMANIC LANGUAGE to be written down in full form in manuscript — other than isolated Germanic words recorded by Roman writers. Written Gothic dates from the fourth century, several centuries before the ancestor of modern German was committed to writing for the first time. Nevertheless, titles like *Gotische Literaturdenkmäler* found in the secondary literature are at best optimistic, since most of what we have in the written Gothic language (for the most part Visigothic) are translations of parts of the Greek Bible. Such non-biblical fragments as survive are small indeed: a fragment of a biblical commentary, which may or may not be a translation; a calendar fragment; a few isolated words (some in a Latin epigram); two subscriptions in legal documents, and, as the last flicker of the Gothic language, a list of words recorded in the Crimea in the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Allusions in Latin writings about the Goths, and references to Gothic historical figures in works which have survived in other languages lead us to suppose that, as with other early languages, there was an oral tradition of poetry in the vernacular. These may well have been heroic epics associated with the aristocratic warrior classes, but these works have not survived in written form. Elfriede Stutz points out on the first page of her bibliographical handbook that we do not have a single line of Gothic poetry.<sup>2</sup> The fact that what we refer to as Gothic literature means, effectively, an incomplete Bible translation, determines the approach to Gothic. The antiquity of the language and thus the relative closeness to the primitive Germanic ancestor which it, as an East Germanic language, shared with the West Germanic languages (represented now by English and German), and with the Northern group of early and modern Scandinavian languages, make it of great interest to philology. Gothic is associated with other so-called East Germanic languages spoken by tribes such as the Burgundians, the Vandals and the Gepids (classical historians group them with the Goths), the Herulians, and the Rugians.<sup>3</sup> For other languages in that group, such as Burgundian or Rugian, we must rely on place names and personal names for philological evidence, but with Gothic, sufficient material has survived to provide for a solid corpus, even if not every para-