

# Runes: A study from a holistic vantage point

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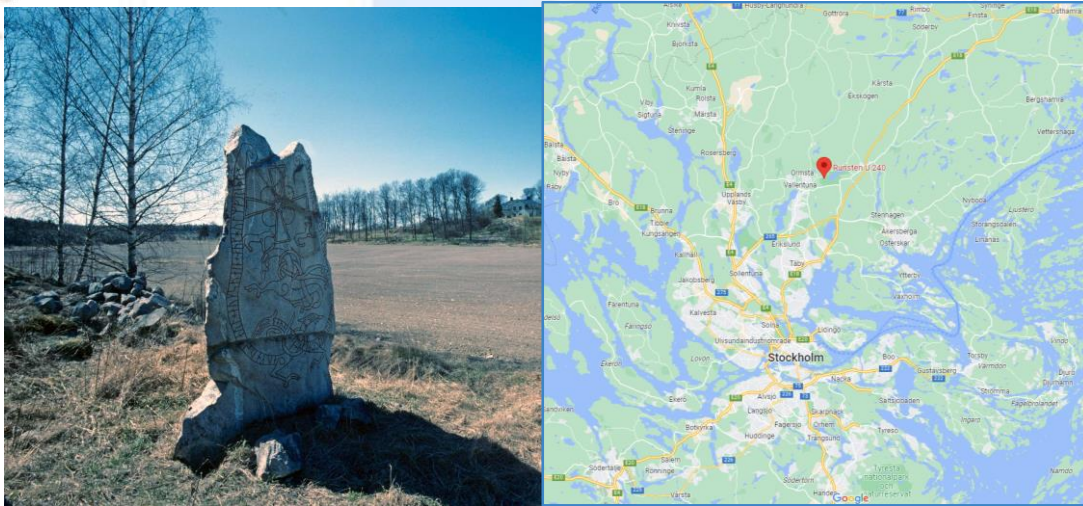
**Abstract** - This piece of work deals with understanding runes and the languages that are associated with them. The main objective of this paper is to create a dialogue on what runes are, their origin and evolution, and finally how can they be useful in understanding the cultures that were impacted by them. The primary source material we analyze is runic inscriptions that are found on Artifacts and Runestones. We look at various notable runestones and how the runic inscriptions on them can be interpreted to better resolve the image we have of the past. The article also discusses the importance of spreading awareness about the subject and the ill influence of counterfeits and misinformation.

**Index Terms** - Runes, Futhark, Inscriptions, Linguistics, Proto-Norse, Old Norse (ON)

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Runology:

It can be loosely described as a branch of Germanic Linguistics that deals with the study of the runic alphabet. The difficulty in naming or defining runology arises from the fact it involves a plethora of disciplines and schools of thought like linguistics philosophy, archaeology, religious studies, etc. And the subject in question loses its value if one of these disciplines is negated or omitted. "Should runology constitute a discipline in its own right? Ogam script does not seem to have called forth generations of ogamologists." (Barnes, 2013). From this, we see that it is not yet a term that is defined exactly and in some sense vague like an umbrella term. However, the study in itself is important and necessary to understand the culture, practices, and lifestyle of the population that used it.



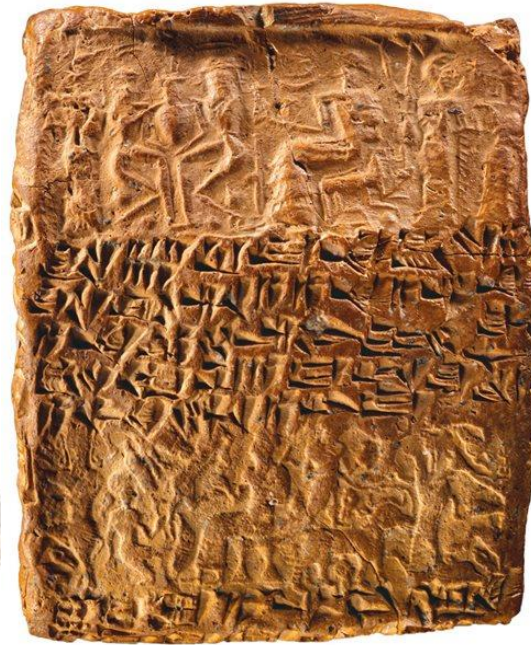
**Fig.1 The lingsberg Runestone (U240). Source:Nilsson, Pål-Nils 2021.**

The above rune stone is erected by a family (wife and 3 sons) in memory of their husband/father, in Lingsberg, Vällentuna (Near Stockholm). The Lingsberg Runes stone is a collection of U240 (in image), U241, and fragments of U242 engraved in old Norse using Younger Futhark.

In a wider look, we find that the opinion on runes among contemporary people can be fit on a spectrum that ranges from "Runes are magic only" to "Runes aren't magic at all". There have been various books that are written on rune magic and various written on the academic side of the topic. This piece of work aims to understand runes, their origin, when and where they can be found, and their usage.

### 1.2 The Significance of Writing

Runes are graphemes that are native to the Germanic population and are equivalent to the alphabets [A, B, C...] of the English language. The series of characters called Futhark (Elder and Younger) was used to write Old Norse (mostly Younger), a language that was used approximately from ca. 700 AD to ca.1200 AD. These graphemes represented by the futhark Glyphs are used to communicate in the form of writing. Writing has been a significant portion of human history and can be considered a superior form of communication (in the pre-technology world) as it transcends the effects of time when preserved well. Writing is fundamentally the physical form of the spoken word, archaeological evidence shows that it first emerges in Sumer around B.C. 3300 near the city of Uruk. Writing has served its purpose by helping us keep count (We see evidence of counts of temple offerings), for nomenclature, and of course to tell stories.



**Fig 2: Old Assyrian, ca. 2000–1800 bce, Anatolia. Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.**

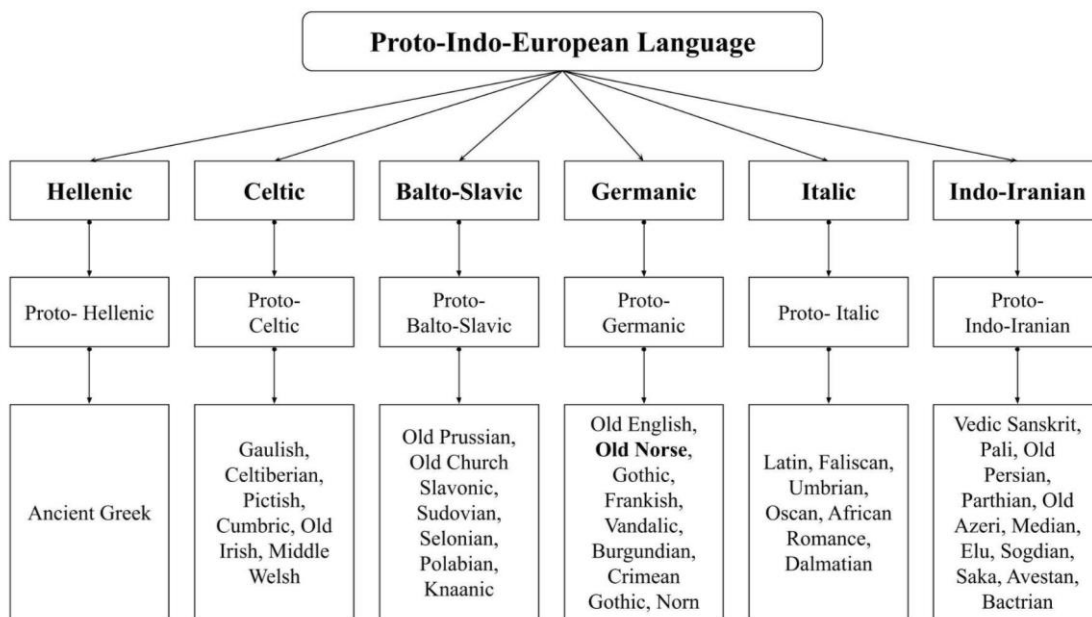
The above table shows us a recording of a loan being repaid from the Karriya settlement to the Ashur-nada settlement. “The tablet is impressed with four-cylinder seals, which belong to the three witnesses of the transaction: Two of the seals belong to the Old Assyrian stylistic tradition; the third is from an Anatolian-style seal with imagery borrowed from Mesopotamia; the fourth is from a seal belonging to a royal official”, (Grutz, 2020). These runes were also used similarly, to convey specific information may it be claiming property, honoring the dead, and much more which shall be explored in the chapters to come. Thus defining the scope of this work to understand the role of the runes in the past and the present.

**II. ORIGIN**

This chapter will deal with understanding the origin of Futhark and its association with the Old Norse and its older relatives.

**2.1 Proto-Indo-European Language (ca. 3000 BC)**

It is considered among the academic circle as the common ancestry for the Indo-European languages that emerge later in the timeline. It is to be noted that there is little evidence of it being a singular language but used as more of a term to describe similarities in the Indo-European languages. Proto-Indo-European Language (PIE for short) is one of the languages that has been the most extensively studied when compared with the other proto-languages. A proto-language is an ancestor language that is postulated after considering a sample space of languages that have similarities and could have evolved from the said proto-language creating a family of languages. “Akkadian is a language that belongs to the Semantic languages family a branch of the Afroasiatic language family but Sumerian is a language that has its roots and doesn't have a family of languages” (Noemie, 2023). From this, we see how languages can be close by geographically but need not belong to the same family.



**Fig 3: The ancestry of Old Norse till the Proto-Indo-European Language. Source: Original Work.**

PIE amongst its peers (in terms of the time) is considered the most understood and is estimated to have been spoken as a singular language around 4000 BC to 2000 BC from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age. There are various descendants of the language that are spoken today, the most popular ones being English and Spanish. The branch of the Indo-European Language that we focus on here is the Germanic division as it is the one that serves as a base for the old Norse language and in turn its sub-branches. The word Germanic comes from the Latin word Germanus, Roman General Julius Caesar was the first to write the word Germani in his writing, describing the tribes of North-eastern Gaul.



**Fig 4: Color-coded map of the branches of the Germanic language spoken in the area, Red: North Germanic, Green & Yellow south Germanic, Blue East Germanic. Source: Own Work.**

The Proto-Germanic branch (ca. 700 BC) of PIE can be geographically classified into

**East Germanic Subclass**

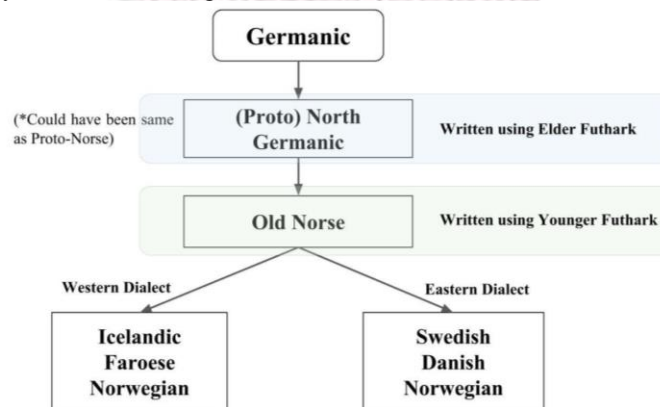
This branch of the Germanic language has 3 subdivision languages namely Gothic, Vandalic, and Burgundian (which are all now extinct). Off the three, Gothic is the most well-documented language with the support of ample Text Corpus content. The other two are not that rare and we are familiar with them due to historical accounts.

**West Germanic Subclass**

The western branch is the largest of the three branches and is further classified into Ingvaemonic (which constitutes English and Frisian), Istvaeonic (Dutch), and Irminonic (German). From where we get Old English, Old High German, Old Frisian, and Old Saxon, fundamentally the ancestors of spoken languages like English and German.

**North Germanic Subclass**

These languages are also termed Nordic languages and consist of the languages that appear around the Scandinavian region. The most recent ancestors for these languages are Swedish and Danish which arise from the eastern dialects of Old Norse, Icelandic, and Faroese from the western dialects, and finally, we have Norwegian which comes from both the western and eastern dialects.



**Fig 5: Explains the branching of Germanic to modern Scandinavian languages. Source: Own work.**

The primary subdivision that these languages stem from is termed Old Norse which was in use from ca. 700 AD to ca. 1200 AD. Old Norse was written using the Younger Futhark characters whereas its predecessor, Proto-Norse (also called Proto-North Germanic) was written using the Elder Futhark characters and was in use around 25AD. We have surviving runic inscriptions of the proto-Norse language in the Elder Futhark script, some of the popular examples are the Einang stone which is a 4th-century stone that is found in Oppland, Norway.



**Fig 6: The Einang stone with an inscription in Elder Futhark. Source: Lars Gustavsen, 2022.**

The rune inscription reads [transliteration: (Ek go)ðagastiz runo faihido] “(I, Go)dguest painted/wrote this runic inscription”, (Spurkland, Terje, 2005). The inscription only bears the name of the runemaster and not the person that was buried in the grave mound on which this rune stone was found upon.

**III. SCRIBING RUNES**

As mentioned earlier runes are graphemes used to write either Old Norse or proto-Norse (younger/ elder futhark). It is fundamental to understand this as alphabets scripts can be used to write various languages. For example, “the Arabic alphabet/ script, and can be used to write many languages Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, Kazakh, and Tajik” (Noemie, 2023). Futhark was primarily written from left to right in the case of wood shavings and right to left in some inscriptions. We also see evidence of boustrophedon (a snake-like pattern that alternates directions to keep the viewer's eye on the text) in the case of bigger inscriptions. The direction seems to be the one the inscriber chooses, whatsoever it may be! This might probably be due to the lack of a unified operating system for the language (could be disputed-speculative). Like alphabets getting their name from the first two letters in Greek, Futhark gets its name from the first six letters,  $\text{F} \text{U} \text{þ} \text{A} \text{R} \text{K}$  (futhark) ‘þ’ stands for ‘th’.

The Elder Futhark consists of 24 characters

1 $\text{F}$ <sub>f</sub>	2 $\text{U}$ <sub>u</sub>	3 $\text{þ}$ <sub>th</sub>	4 $\text{A}$ <sub>a</sub>	5 $\text{R}$ <sub>r</sub>	6 $\text{K}$ <sub>k</sub>	7 $\text{G}$ <sub>g</sub>	8 $\text{W}$ <sub>w</sub>
9 $\text{H}$ <sub>h</sub>	10 $\text{N}$ <sub>n</sub>	11 $\text{I}$ <sub>i</sub>	12 $\text{J}$ <sub>j</sub>	13 $\text{ï}$ <sub>ï</sub>	14 $\text{P}$ <sub>p</sub>	15 $\text{Z}$ <sub>z</sub>	16 $\text{S}$ <sub>s</sub>
17 $\text{T}$ <sub>t</sub>	18 $\text{B}$ <sub>b</sub>	19 $\text{M}$ <sub>e</sub>	20 $\text{M}$ <sub>m</sub>	21 $\text{L}$ <sub>l</sub>	22 $\text{ŋ}$ <sub>ŋ</sub>	23 $\text{D}$ <sub>d</sub>	24 $\text{O}$ <sub>o</sub>

**Table 1: The Elder Futhark.**

The above table shows the order of the characters in superscript and the common transliteration in subscript. The Elder Futhark was primarily used to write the proto-Norse language and was in use from the 1st century to the 8th century. The table below contains the more condensed Younger Futhark that was in use between the 8th and 12th century (Viking age runic Futhark).

1 $\text{F}$	2 $\text{U}$	3 $\text{þ}$	4 $\text{A}$	5 $\text{R}$	6 $\text{Y}$	7 $\text{*}$	8 $\text{þ}$
9 $\text{I}$	10 $\text{t}$	11 $\text{h}$	12 $\text{L}$	13 $\text{↑}$	14 $\text{B}$	15 $\text{Y}$	16 $\text{↑}$

**Table 2: The Younger Futhark.**

The origin of the word “rune” is quite unknown, the Einang inscription that we see in the chapter above mentions the word “runo” in a singular form. This could mean that this word was used to describe the letters in these inscriptions. In Old Norse, the word was extensively used as a plural and to mean runic letters, the word also had secondary meanings like whisper or council. When we try to understand how the script itself is developed we see that it belongs somewhere in the Phoenician-Greek family tree of Scripts (Probably related to Old Italic). The most popular theory was that of direct Greek influence in its design but this was quickly discarded after the Vimose findings that date these scripts to an Older period where the community was not in contact with the Greeks.

The main reason for speculation of the Phoenician-Greek family tree is due to the similarities and likeness in the letter like ‘R’, ‘B’, and ‘T’ in both scripts. We also lack evidence to argue that these runes were the origin or the parent of scripts, meaning that should have been derived and adapted from somewhere. However, the most mysterious aspect is the order of runes, this family tree of alphabets writes the script in a similar order A, B, C or α, β, γ. But the runic inscription takes the order of f, u, th, a, r, k (as evident from the Kylver stone inscription), it is to be noted that there are minor variants in this order too. There should have been a phenomenon that occurred unexpectedly when these words were derived from their predecessor that led to the change in order (if it is indeed from this

family).

*In mythology, it is said that Odin hanged himself on a tree to get the runic Futhark!*

The most accepted theory is that it has some kind of a Roman origin which makes sense from the perspective of the timeline. There are also letters that look alike but are flipped upside down the ‘Ń’ looks like an upside down U and is read and pronounced the same as U. This pattern seems to be a common occurrence when languages are being derived from other languages. To understand exactly what branch or region in the tree it is derived from, we can look at the interaction of the community at the time of the script's birth. We find there is extensive interaction of the Germanic people with Romans and Celts compared to Geerks and Phonecians. This would suggest that the script was derived at a later branch around the Etruscan stage or the Celtic stage of evolution, probably borrowing from both scripts at that time.

The use of Elder and Younger Futhark runes is mentioned extensively in this work. But there are also other types of Futhark that correspond to specific languages. These Futharks can be considered as different iterations of the Germanic script and the differences arise due to changes in geography and time. Anglo-Saxon-Futhorc is the most notable example and was in use from 400AD to around 1100 AD. The Anglo-Saxon-Futhorc added to the 24 characters contrary to Young Futhark.

ƿ	Ń	Ʀ	Ʊ	ŕ	ƿ	χ	ƿ	Ń	†
l	*/ϕ	ſ	Ʊ	Ʊ	Ʊ/ƿ	↑	Ʊ	Ń	Ń
l	ϕ	ϕ	Ń	Ʊ	Ʊ	Ʊ	Ń	Ń	ϕ

**Table 3: The Anglo-Saxon Futhark.**

The use of Elder and Younger Futhark runes is mentioned extensively in this work. But there are also other types of Futhark that correspond to specific languages. These Futharks can be considered as different iterations of the Germanic script and the differences arise due to changes in geography and time. Anglo-Saxon-Futhorc is the most notable example and was in use from 400AD to around 1100 AD. The Anglo-Saxon-Futhorc added to the 24 characters contrary to Young Futhark.

**3.1 The Transition to Younger Futhark**

This transition from Elder Futhark to Younger Futhark happens as a consequence of time in the same region geographically. It coincides in time with the change in language from Proto-Norse to Old Norse. The change itself is in the letters as now with the Younger Futhark we have fewer characters (24 to 16) in place with more number of sounds. This seems ineffective to the modern mind, but this change did occur due to some reason.

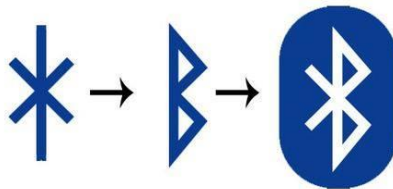
We see various mergers in terms of combining sounds we see a prominent use of ‘↑’ to write t and d with one letter, ‘ƿ’ to write k and g, and ‘Ʊ’ to write p and b. This creates confusion as to what is actually written and what it might be interpreted as, this suggests that it might make Old Norse more of a context-based language if this change can alter the meanings of words. The language itself seems to have also gone through a huge change, scholars say that the differences seen in a rune stone from 400 AD in comparison to a runestone that dates around 600 AD are bigger than the differences seen in 600AD runestone in comparison with modern Norwegian.

Could all this change be due to a catastrophe (war or disease) that might have cleared off a generation of people? Could this have left the younger generation to pick up the language with the script and piece it together? Around the 8th Century, we see that Eder Futhark plummets out of use and the Younger Futhark flourishes simultaneously. There are also instances where they were used together like in the Rök runestone (chapter 5.1).

However, the runemaster used the Elder Futhark just as a code with Younger Futhark meanings, this suggests awareness about the existence but disagreement in using it. Could it be that they found it easier and more efficient to use or were just used to using it at the time of inscription? These are the important questions that need to be answered to understand the near-instantaneous crumbling of a language.

**3.2 Bind Runes**

They are runes that are a combination of other runic characters, mostly used to mark the name of the carver. They peaked during the migration period and were very rare during the Viking Age.



**Fig 6: The Bluetooth logo is a bind rune merging the Younger Futhark runes (Hagall) (✳) and (Bjarkan) (ᚷ), Harald's initials. Source: bluetooth.com.**

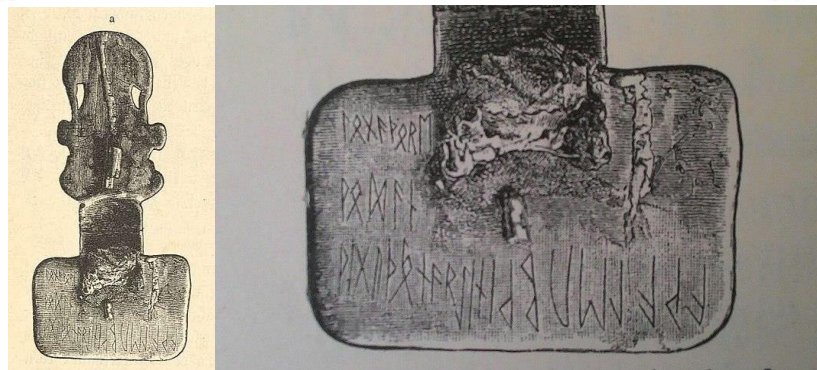
Bind runes can be classified into 2, a normal bind rune where we have ligature (2 or more graphemes are combined to form a glyph) of two runes (in some cases more), and the other is a same-stave rune (runic letters are written with a common stemline, hence the name same stave) which is popular in Anglo-Saxon inscriptions.

#### IV. RUNE FINDINGS

With the help of Archaeological digging we have found a plethora of locations with runic inscriptions, these include rune stones, runes inscribed on pieces of wood like boats, and artifacts like combs, etc. These runes are distributed at various locations geographically with the maximum density found in present-day Scandinavia and the United Kingdom.

##### 4.1 Artifacts

**Jewelry:** We have inscriptions on Bracteate (which are single-sided thin gold plates worn as jewelry), fibulae, belt buckles, brooches, rings, and amber.



**Fig 7.a: Fibula Nordendorf I 1889. Fig 7.b: Crop image of the inscription. Source: Friedrich Vogt, Max Koch: Geschichte der deutschen Literatur. Band**

**Weaponry:** The other common artifact with high numbers of inscriptions are weapons like Seaxes (notably Thames Scarmasax and Steindorf), Spearheads, Sword, and sword sheaths.



**Fig 8: The seax of Beagnoth (10th century), also known as the Thames Scarmasax with Anglo-Saxon futhoric inscriptions. Source: BabelStone, 2018.**

**Coins:** We have coins that have been inscribed/ minted with runes like the Skanomody Solidus (An Anglo-Saxon coin with Futhark inscriptions) and others where the runes are graffitied on, like the example below.



**Fig 9: Arabic dinar with a runic graffiti (ᚷ ᚱ 1, which can be kut in transliteration; however there are multiple interpretations). Source: Arild Hauge, 2004.**

**Miscellaneous:** There are various other items like combs, wooden spindles, boats, boxes, bones, and pieces of wood that contain these runic inscriptions both in Elder and Younger Futhark.



Fig 10: Crest with runes HARJA ca. 160AD. From Vimose, Næsbyhoved-Broby parish. Source: Roberto Fortuna, 2022.

#### 4.2 Runestones

We have around 3000 runes stones that contain Younger Futhark inscriptions and other items that are inscribed in Elder Futhark. These inscriptions have been found in various countries around the Scandinavian region and can be helpful to understand the way in which these languages were used and their use frequency once they are dated.



Fig 11: The distribution of runes across the globe. Source: Project Rundata.

These rune stones are mostly stones that are raised and inscribed to convey a message (may it be communication, marking territory, or other) but in some cases, it can also refer to stones that are found on the bedrock that have inscriptions. Some of the most famous runestones that are useful in understanding the language are discussed in detail in the next chapter. But from all the archaeological finds we see that Elder Futhark was used from ca. 20AD to around the 8th century to represent the Proto-Norse Language and the Younger Futhark was used approximately from 8- (early) 12th century to represent the Old Norse Language. There have been findings of fake rune stones that have been carved and chiseled by “wanna-be” runemasters (discussed in Chapter 6).

#### V. RUNESTONES

Although in the previous chapter, we found that there have been many artifacts that are inscribed with runes, this piece of work focuses mainly on inscriptions found on runestones across the world. For the sake of convenience, we shall look at some of the most notable runestones that are found in and around the Scandinavian region (with a focus on runes that were used to write Old Norse and Proto-Norse). From historical evidence and the examples we see in the above chapters, we can speculate that these runes were not for everyday use (as there is a lack of evidence for literature written in Futhark). It is theorized that the story of the Scandinavians was told orally and these runes were used to convey certain specific information and not as a medium to morph speech into writing.

#### 5.1 The Rök Runestone (Ög 136)

Is one that is considered the most famous and bears the longest runic inscription found to date. It is located near a church in Rök, Östergötland, Sweden. Due to the volume of the inscription it is considered a piece of literature and probably marks the inception of Swedish literature history.

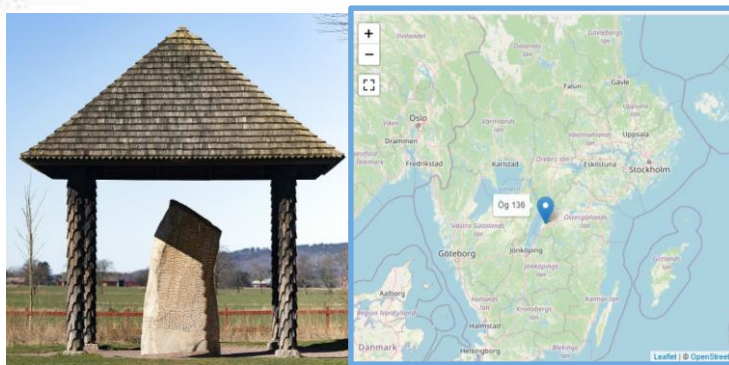


Fig 12.a: The Rök runestone. Source: Arkland 2020. Fig 12.b: Location of Ög 136. Source: Rundata.

The rock stands 2.4 meters tall and weighs 5000 kilograms, it was inscribed in ca. 800A and discovered in the 19th century. We know that it is from the early 9th century due to the use of short-twig runes in the inscription. The rock is covered with inscriptions on all its sides (5 sides) except the planted bottom side. There are a total of 28 rows of text, 10 on the first, 3 on the side, 1 on top, and 14 on the back. The direction of the runic writing is denoted in the image below.



**Fig 13: All the sides of the Rök Runestone with the directions of lines to be read in. Source: illustration by Marco Bianchi (2020) and photos by Bengt A. Lundberg (2020).**

The runestone is split into 5 sides, A, B, C, D, and E. As mentioned earlier, lines A1 and A2 are written in short-twig runes and are read from bottom to top. Line A3 - B11 is also written using short-twig runes but ask questions while mentioning some statements. On the back side of the stone, we have C12 and C13 which are written using the Elder Futhark, while C14 - C22 is written using the short-twig format. D23, E24, and C25 contain number ciphers, and C26 - C28 are substitution ciphers. The transliteration and the translation were sourced from Rundata.

**Transliterated runic text (Ög 136)**

Side A: aft uamuþ stonta runaR þaR + ¶ (i)n uarin faþi faþiR aft faikion sunu ¶ sakum | mukmini þat huariaR ualraubaR uaRin tuaR ¶ þaR suaþ tualf sinum uaRin | numnaR t ualraubu ¶ baþaR somon o umisum | monum ' þat sakum ona¶rt huaR fur niu altum on urþi fiaru ¶ miR hraipkutum auk tu ¶ miR on ub sakaR ¶ raiþ | þiaurikR hin þurmuþi stiliR ¶ flutna strontu hraipmaraR sitiR nu karuR o

Side B: kuta sinum skialti ub fatlaþR skati marika

Side C: þat sakum tualfta huar histR si ku¶naR itu | uituoki on kunukaR tuaiR tikiR sua¶þ o likia + þat sakum þritaunta huariR t¶uaiR tikiR kunukaR satin t siulunti fia¶kura uintur at fiakurum nabnum burn¶(i)R fiakurum bruþrum + ualkaR fim ra^þulfs | su¶niR hraipulfaR fim rukulfs | suniR hoislaR fim haruþ¶s suniR kunmuntaR fim (b)irnaR suniR × nuk m--- (m)-- alu --(k)(i) ainhuaR -þ... ..þ ... ¶ ftiR fra ¶ saGwM | MOGMEni (þ)aD HOaR iGOLD¶(i)Ga OaRi GOIDin D GOonaR HOslu ¶ airfb<sakum> | <mukmini>bfrbnhn finb<uaim> an<si> tfbnh<burin> | <niþ>hnu¶R troki uilin is þat + rhfþ<knuo> rhis<knat>¶i | iatun uilin is + þat <(n)(i)(t)>

Side D: <-akum | mukmini þur>

Side E: <si>bi <ui>a<ua>ri

Side C: <ul niru>þR

**Transliterated runic text**

Side A: In memory of Vámóðr stand these runes. And Varinn colored them, the father, in memory of his dead son. I say the folktale / to the young men, which the two war-booties were, which twelve times were taken as war-booty, both together from various men. I say this second, who nine generations ago lost his life with the Hreidgoths; and died with them for his guilt. Þjóðríkr the bold, chief of sea warriors, ruled over the shores of the Hreiðsea. Now he sits armed on

Side B: his Goth(ic horse), his shield strapped, the prince of the Mærings.

Side C: I say this the twelfth, where the horse of Gunnr sees fodder on the battlefield, where twenty kings lie. This I say as thirteenth, which twenty kings sat on Sjólund for four winters, of four names, born of four brothers: five Valkis, sons of Ráðulfr, five Hreiðulfrs, sons of Rugulfr, five Háisl, sons of Hórðr, five Gunnmundrs/Kynmundrs, sons of Björn. Now I say the tales in full. Someone ... I say the folktale / to the young men, which of the line of Ingold was repaid by a wife's sacrifice. I say the folktale / to the young men, to whom is born a relative, to a valiant man. It is Vélinn. He could crush a giant. It is Vélinn ...

Side D: I say the folktale / to the young men: Þórr.

Side E: Sibbi of Vé,

Side C: nonagenarian, begot (a son).

**Importance**

The purpose of the stone is quite unclear although we know that it was raised in the memory of the runemaster's (Varinn) son (Vámóðr), there have been theories from notable people like Elias Wesséne and Otto von Friesen. The theory is that Varinn carved the stone to honor his dead son and included parts of mythology as a tribute (Wesséne), "The most influential proposal has been Elias Wessén's that Varinn wanted to show off his extensive knowledge of hero narratives" (Wessén 1958, cf. already Brate 1918, 250, and later Lönnroth



1977, Widmark 1992, Harris 2010). The other theory is that the stone was carved to raise Varinn's tribe to avenge his bread son and the dramatic battle may have caused his son to lose his life (Otto von Friesen). The contemporary idea around the Scandinavian universities is that the stone alongside being a tribute to the dead son also connotes another climate crisis that might come following the previous one around 536 CE (which was catastrophic).

### 5.2 The Hunnestad Monument (DR 282 - DR 286)

This monument is said to be the most famous of the Viking age monuments and was initially located in Ystad, Sweden. Hunnestad Monument was raised by a prominent family in the Gussnava area near Ystad (Jonas, 2021). It lasted long enough to be documented and observed before it was destroyed by Eric Ruuth, a Swedish Nobleman somewhere between 1782-1786 when his estate (Marsvinsholm Castle, in Ystad) was being modernized. A pictorial depiction from Ole Worm, a famous Danish polymath, and antiquary, shows that there were a total of 8 stones, 5 being image stones and 2 containing runic inscriptions. All the stones were destroyed or moved in the 18th century. However, three stones of the monument were recovered in the 19th Century and recently, on December 16 of 2020, we rediscovered a fourth stone during excavations from a Sewage line in Ystad municipality.

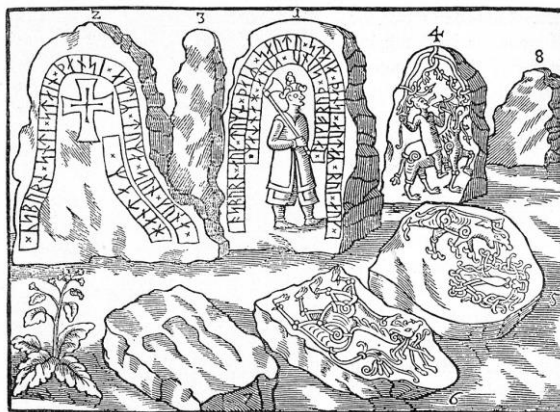


Fig 14.a: Ole Worms depiction of the monument. Source: Ole Worm (1588-1654).

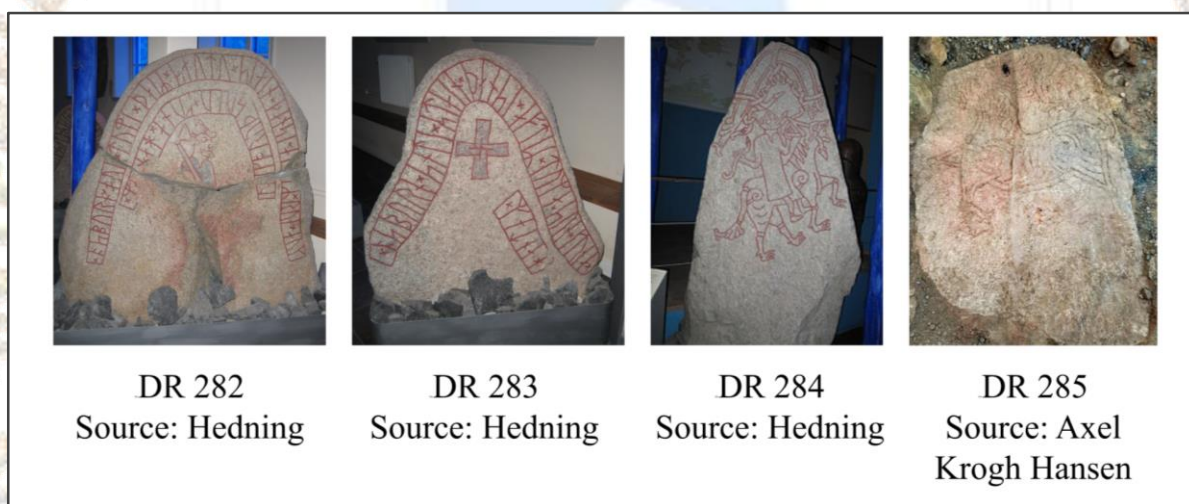


Fig 15: The Hunnestad stones that have been found.

#### 5.2.1 DR 282

The rune stone is inscribed with a man in a long coat and a pointed helmet, he carries an axe in his right hand, over his shoulder. This could be a representation of a member of the famous Varangian Guard (or St. Olaf) of the Byzantine Army. The transliteration and the translation were sourced from Rundata.

Transliterated runic text: × osburn × (a)u(k) × tumi × þaiR × sautu × stain × þansi × a(f)[t]iR × rui × auk × ¶ laikfrup × sunu × kuna × han[t]aR ×

Translation to English: Ásbjörn and Tumi they placed this stone in memory of Hróir and Leikfrøðr, Gunni Hand's sons.

#### 5.2.2 DR 283

The rune stone is inscribed with a cross that is decorated with a pattern in the middle and carries inscriptions around its shape that the rock takes and near its bottom right corner.

Transliterated runic text: × osburn × snti × stain × þansi × aftiR × tuma × sun × kuna × ¶ hantaR ×

Translation to English: Ásbjörn placed this stone in memory of Tumi, Gunni Hand's son.

#### 5.2.3 DR 284 & DR 285

The DR 284 runestone contains an inscription of a woman riding an animal while holding snakes in both her hands, the animal (could

be a wolf) is being passed through by the snake in her left hand. It also appears that there is a snake that goes in from the back of her head and comes out through the mouth (similar to a tongue). It is speculated that she could be Hyrrokkin, a jötunn who appears in Snorri's Prose Edda.

The DR 285 runestone was the one that was recently recovered, the carvings on the stone depict a Beast motif (a lion-like animal) with elaborate neck-tendrils and tail (Jonas, 2021).

### Importance

We understand that the runes were inscribed by the same family and were used to mark the memory of their family members. This monument goes hand in hand with the late Viking age culture of blending Christian and heathen iconography. We see this from DR 283 which depicts a cross and DR 284 which depicts a Jotunn from Norse mythology. In the speculated locations of the monument's stones, we see that Jotunn is closer to the burial mound (in tradition she is connected to the burial rituals) and the cross is at the forefront of the monument. This monument shows us how Christian and heathen elements were often used in unison to tell stories. The beastly elements are still a puzzle as to their exact meaning in the grave mound, it is speculated that they could have been used as a marker of power or to denote the status of the family that created the monument.

### 5.3 The Kylver Stone (G 88)

This is a rune stone that was found close to a farm in Gotland in 1903 during an excavation. The rune is famous for being inscribed with all the runes of the Elder Futhark. The rune dates around 400 AD and was discovered in a cemetery with its writings on the underside of the stone. The limestone rock was used to close a grave, from which we can date the actual stone.

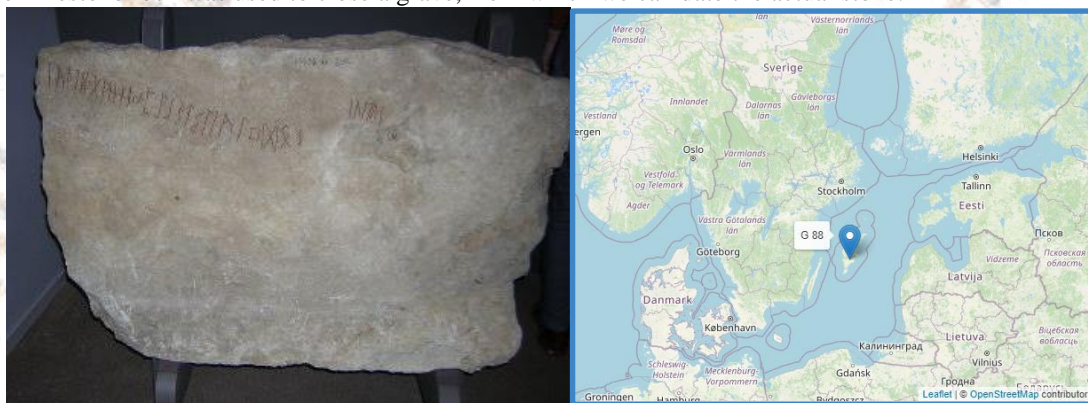


Fig 16.a: The Kylver stone. Source: Sara Kusmin, 2005. Fig 16.b: The location of the finding. Source: Rundata.

Transliterated runic text:

Variant A: (f)uþarkg(w)hni(j)þizstbemplīdo ?\*

Variant B: <su(e)us>

Translation to English:

Variant A: <fuparkgwhnijpezstbemplīdo>

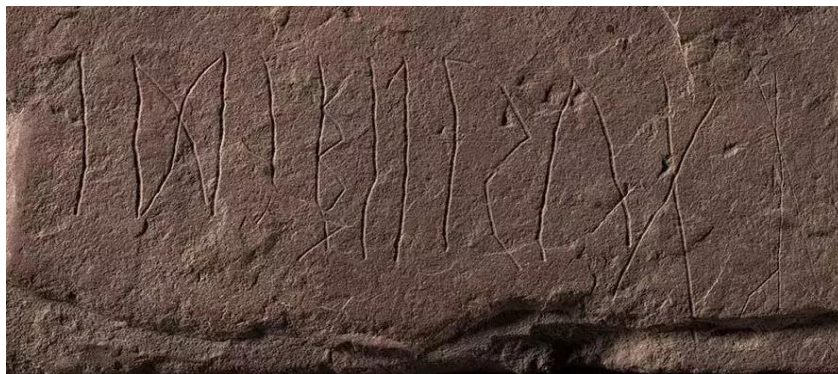
Variant B: eus>

### Importance

As mentioned, being a rune stone containing the inscriptions of the Elder Futhark language is posing as a puzzle as to what was its purpose. One theory suggests that as the runic inscription was facing the grave it was used to calm the dead person in it. In the A variant of the text denoted by the '?', we see a bindrune in the shape of a tree, this could be the top stacking of the Tiwaz rune to please the Aesir god Tyr for protection. However, it is important to understand that various runes inscribed stones were reused for multiple purposes and it could be a coincidence. The B variant contains the word Seues, the reason for this inscription is yet to be figured, it also uses the Younger Futhark character ʰ (s) instead of the ʰ (Elder Futhark s). Some have theorized that this word could be a palindromic 'eus' which is related to horses but the theory has been heavily criticized as a linguistic impracticality for the time period. The pre-Viking age stone is now being displayed in the Swedish Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm.

### 5.4 The Svingerud Runestone

This is the most recent rune stone discovery (at the time of writing this article), it is found in a grave excavation in Oslo, Norway. The grave has been dated to be around 25 AD - 125 AD using the skeletal remains, this is narrowed from the charcoal dating that estimated it to be between 1 AD - 250 AD. The topology of the discovered artifacts is hinted to be Roman-era artifacts dating from some decades BC until 400 AD. The grave is speculated to belong to a young adult, whose sex is not been determined. The runestones that are found near the burial can be of the same age as they have not been disturbed and were said to be found on the outer boundaries of the burial site. This supports the idea that the rune stone could be as old as the grave. The runestone is placed facing downwards in the grave and is not sure if related to the person buried. These are the 2 current contrasting ideas about the runestone.



**Fig 17: The runestone with Elder Futhark inscription, Oslo, Norway. Source: Alexis Pantos**

This is the primary (most legible) inscription that was found on the site in Oslo. The runic inscription reads  $I \text{ M} I \text{ B} \text{ M} \text{ N} \text{ R} \text{ X}$  or  $I \text{ M} I \text{ B} \text{ M} \text{ N} \text{ R} \text{ †}$ , which when written in English is Idiberug or Idiberun. The confusion arises as the last letter seems a bit tilted to the right, in Elder Futhark the letters  $X$  (g) and  $†$  (n) are very similar with the difference only in their angle. However, the  $†$  (n) is written with a straight line crossed from the top left coming to the bottom right. In the rune, we see that the cross is coming from the top right and ending at the top left (Mirror image). It is also to be noted that the  $B$  (B) is also stylized to have multiple triangles instead of the standard 2.

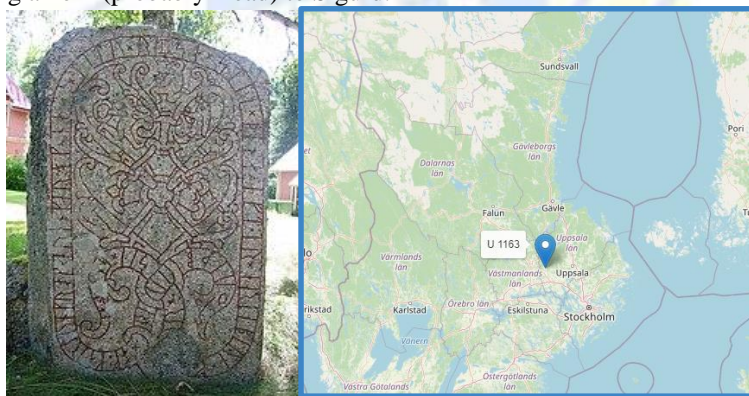
There are other characters after the ambiguous X rune, we see an inverted  $Y$  (z), a  $R$  (r), and other characters that were inscribed rather softly either using a knife or a nail (needle). Most of these are illegible as some seem to have been overwritten.

**Importance**

The name Idiberug/n can belong to either a female or a male and there are other interpretations for this word, it is speculated to most like to be a name. As this is probably the oldest rune stone that has been discovered yet, it is hard to compare it with peer literature to gain/understand the meaning or cross-reference words. The second set of characters (inscribed softly) most likely is not part of the first word, even if it was inscribed by the same runemaster. The grooves are shallow and some of the runes seem to be overwritten, as if someone was learning to inscribe runes on stone. Other stones were found as mentioned earlier but most of them are broken and puzzled with unclear inscriptions.

**5.5 The Drävle Runestone (U 1163)**

This runestone is one of the eight runestones called the Sigurd stones. The stones are known as they depict the story of Sigurd, the Germanic legend. All of these are found in Sweden and are distributed on the eastern side of the country. This specific stone narrates the story of Sigurd stabbing Fafnir (killed his father, stole the dwarf Andvaris's gold, and became a dragon) in his heart. It also shows the dwarf and a Valkyrie offering a horn (probably mead) to Sigurd.



**Fig 18.a: The Drävle runestone. Source: I, Berig 2007. Fig 18.b: The location the stone was first found. Source: Rundata.**

Transliterated runic text:

uiþbjurn × ok : karlunkr : ok × erinker : ok × nas(i) × litu × risa × stii × þina × eftir × eriibiun × f[ʌþu]r × sii × snelan

Translation to English:

Viðbjörn and Karlungr and Eringeir/Eringerðr and Nasi/Nesi had this stone raised in memory of Erinbjörn, their able father.

**Importance**

This runestone also features a stylized Christian cross, further supporting the idea of dual acceptance of Christianity and Norse paganism in the transition period for religion in the region. The stone is roughly dated to be from the 11th Century and is used as a symbol to remember the father. The runemaster is not known but the people who commissioned it are named on the stone.

**VI. EXPOSURE AND INTEGRITY**

In the Viking age, it is believed that most of the runic inscriptions that were used were for marking objects like artifacts and boats or to commemorate the dead. But after this time period around the 1300s, we see a lot of runic spells and amulets pop up. It is to be noted that the region had taken Christianity as its religion nearly a century prior. Rune magic was a popular topic of interest in Christian Scandinavia. The other area where we can see the usage of runes is with counterfeit rune stones and “runic” staves that pose to be from

a different period. In this chapter, we will look at 3 of the most compelling specimen in both Magic and counterfeits.

### 6.1 Helm of Awe

To begin with it has to be mentioned that this isn't even a rune, it's an Icelandic stave used in magical practices. It is also known as the Ægishjálmur in Icelandic and Ægishjalmr in Old Norse. Either means Aegis's or the frightener's helm, the first attested reference that we see in regard to Ægishjálmur is in the Völsunga saga in the poetic edda around 1250 AD. Fafnir the dragon is being slain by Sigurd (the story from the Drävle stone, chapter 5) and proclaims the Ægishjálmur could instill fear even in the bravest of men. It also mentions that it not only produces fear in men but also brings resentment to the owner of the helm.

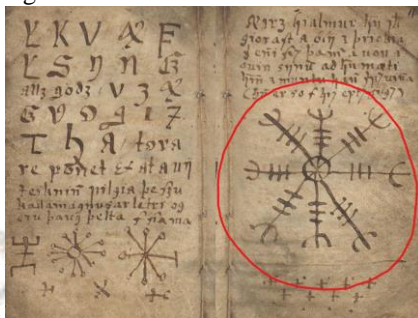


Fig 19: Ægishjálmur or Helm of Awe in the Manuscript. Source: handrit.is.

In the contemporary sense, the word is being used to describe an Icelandic magical stave sign that is made from a combination of multiple shape forms. This stave is attested in a much later manuscript around mid-1600 (Lbs 143 8vo page: 26/66), at this point the language is very close to modern Icelandic, this text mentions that it is printed (or painted) on someone to frighten their enemy (can be related to frightener's (Ægishjalmr) meaning. Contrary to popular belief it is not a sigil that was used in the Viking age but rather in a Christian Icelandic region, although it could share or even derive some of its aspects from pagan culture. It is clear from the other symbols from the manuscript that there was a Christian connotation to these magic sigils extrapolated from the crosses and the timeline.

### 6.2 Vegvísir

Similar to the Ægishjálmur, a Vegvísir is an Icelandic magical stave (not a rune) that translates to 'Wayfinder' in English. It is believed to be useful for sailors to find their way in adverse weather should they bear it. The first attestation of this symbol is found in the Huld Manuscript in 1860 AD and isn't found earlier than this time. The word Vegvísir is coined by combining two words 'Vegur' meaning way and 'vísir' meaning indicator in Icelandic.

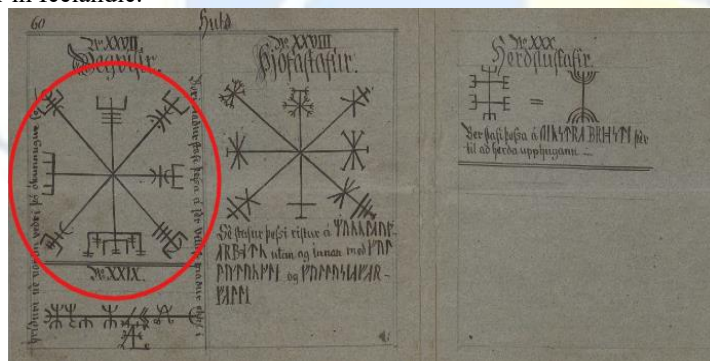


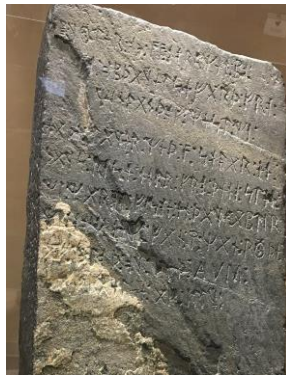
Fig 20: The Vegvísir in the Huld Manuscript. Source: handrit.is.

Similarly from the timeline and the content surrounding the Vegvísir we see that this is also not a Viking age sigil, but was used at a much later time period. Although these have been used in reality it is important to distinguish between real runic symbols (graphemes) and sigils that look like these runic letters.

### 6.3 Kensington Runestone

It is a runestone that was found in the United States of America, in the 1890s by Olaf Öhman, a Swedish immigrant living in Kensington, Minnesota. Immediately after its discovery, it was discarded as a fake runestone by most of the experts of the time. The main problem with this runestone pertains to the runes themselves.

The Kensington runestone contained runes that were invented in the 19th century by Edward Larson, a Swede trying to write modern Swedish using futhark (instead of the Latin alphabet). The runestone is also said to be found entangled in the root of a tree, which when the rune was carved should have been 10 years old negating the validity of the runestone being legitimate. It was around this time that the voyage of Leif Ericson to "Vinland" the name given to North America, was a topic of interest for many.



**Fig 21: The Kensington runestone in Minnesota, US. Source: Mauricio Valle.**

This chapter discusses the existence of rune-like or fake runic subjects that pose as or are misunderstood as something that they are not. Although the first couple of examples are true and not fake like the third one, most of the time it is interpreted as something else. This does not align with academic integrity, it propagates pseudo-history which in turn falsly influences the ideologies of people creating chaos and commotion. From the perspective of academia, it goes against the code of conduct and ethics for what academia truly stands for, the pursuit of education, research, and Scholarship. Emphasis on the importance of exposure to real facts and the necessity of skepticism and critical thinking.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

This research article aimed to describe and understand the runic alphabet known as Futhark from its origin to its evolution into modern languages. The work also deals with the importance of these runes and the roles that they played in the Scandinavian community throughout time.

We define what runology is and how it can be classified as a discipline. Looking at it as a part of a writing mechanic we see how it (writing in general) plays a significant role in maintaining historical and archaeological accounts. Especially when carved on stones, like most runic inscriptions, we see examples from Anatolia on what writing was used for and how it stays preserved in good conditions. The runes we look at are used to represent Nordic languages which have their ancestry inherited from the Proto-Indo-European Language. This had multiple branches, notable for the Germanic branch which was subdivided into East, West, and North Germanic. This Proto-Germanic language is the parent of Proto-Norse and Old Norse and we get our contemporary Scandinavian languages like Swedish and Danish from the eastern dialects and Icelandic and Faroese from the western dialects of Old Norse (Norwegian seems to have been influenced by both dialects).

The next chapter deals with scribing these runes and comprehending the differences and similarities between Younger and Elder Futhark from an orthographic view, the Younger Futhark being a condensed version of its predecessor. We analyze the relation Futhark's writing style has with other languages and find similar tendencies like boustrophedon being used and at times Futhark is written without spaces in between words, especially in the case of runic inscriptions on stones and monuments. It also shows us how the script itself was formed. These inscriptions are commonly found on artifacts (mostly personal belongings) like combs, brooches, and swords. They usually were used to mark the said item to its owner, on occasion there were spells or other inscriptions carved on them. The most notable place one can find runic inscriptions is the runestones. Runestones were generally used to commemorate the dead, raised by a family member in most cases. They also inscribed tales of mythology in them and occasionally both at the same inscription. The runestones can be dated using topology or by finding the date of the organic matter in the vicinity (if it's related) like human remains or grave finds using carbon dating From the example of runestones that we studied we see that

### The Rök runestone:

This rock contains the most number of lines in futhark of any runestone, carved by Varinn in memory of his son, we also have extensive lines about mythic tales. This is considered to be the first piece of literature in Swedish history. Various theories revolve around the runestone pertaining to the reason for both (commemoration and mythology) being in the same rune. Some mention that it was to tribute to his son and others say it was to raise his clan to avenge his son, the contemporary idea is that it also alludes to an upcoming crisis similar to the one that ravaged Scandinavia years prior.

### The Hunnestad monument:

These runestones show us the co-existence of pagan and Christian art (runestone with a cross) both depicted in the same monument. Giving us insights that how Christianity seeped into Scandinavia, if the predicted burial mound layout was accurate, then we can say that the pagan runestone is closer to the burial compared to the runestone with the cross. It is also important to note that this monument was destroyed to build a mansion in that area, however, we have unearthed most of the runestones. This example shows us the importance of the conservation and preservation of historical structures as they give us insights into the past, which gets lost from us forever.

### The Kylver runestone:

This specimen contains all the runic Elder Futhark (alphabet) in order, the runestone dates around 400 AD, based on the grave dating, which is in accordance with the time period of the language. What is cryptic about this stone is that it also has the word "sucus", but with the letter 's' from Younger Futhark. So this word should have been carved later on, as the languages are 300 years apart. Studying runestones similar to this one will shed light on how these were used together and about the relation and evolution of Futhark.

**The Svingerud runestone:**

This recent find is the oldest runic inscription discovered to date, it contains the name of a person (most likely) IDIBERUN or IDIBERUG, the confusion arises due to the way in which the last rune is carved. As this is the oldest example it is not feasible to compare it with other attestations, however, this runestone plays a pivotal role in helping us date the language. The older the evidence for a language, the older the language is dated. This allows us to understand what were the languages in proximity regarding geography and time, helping us learn about the evolution of Futhark writing and its origin, similar to the Vimose inscription helping us rule out the possibility of the script being derived from the Greek alphabet.

**The Drävle runestone:**

Another example of merging Christian and pagan beliefs, but in the same runestone. This runestone bears a cross and depicts a legend. Solidifying the theory of co-existence, contrary to popular belief that these cultures were complete opposites. We see that truth is often in the middle of what both sides (that tell a story) claim.

There are a plethora of runestones that tell us stories of battles, lands being purchased, boundaries being laid, and much more. These when studied together give us a beautiful understanding of both the lifestyle before, during, and after the Viking Age. Looking at these runes from a linguistic standpoint is important as it is a crucial part of any cultural civilization.

This work also highlights the misinterpretation of magical staves for runes due to their similarity and the existence of counterfeit runestones that pose as real are detrimental to the academic community if one cannot distinguish between the two.

From the perspective of a linguist, the evolution of Futhark is similar to that of other scripts. Where it simplified itself becoming a more condensed and compact script that was likely easier to use compared to its predecessor.

This research article has achieved its objective of creating a dialogue on the importance of studying runes and runestones and the need for interpretations from various disciplines of academia. Understanding these runic inscriptions is significant as it serves as our window to look into the past and appreciate it better. However, this work is limited due to the lack of fieldwork, resources, a small sample space, and time constraints. Although it bridges multiple ideologies and sheds light on them in a holistic fashion, there is a need for additional research on this topic with collaborations from experts from various disciplines. This has to be done as a team, complimenting each field which in turn will help validate and add nuances to theorizing history.

**Note:** A big thanks to **Noemie Carpentier**, **Dr. Jackson Crawford**, **rundata project**, the **project Danske Runer**, and the **rune database Danske Runeinskrifter**.

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