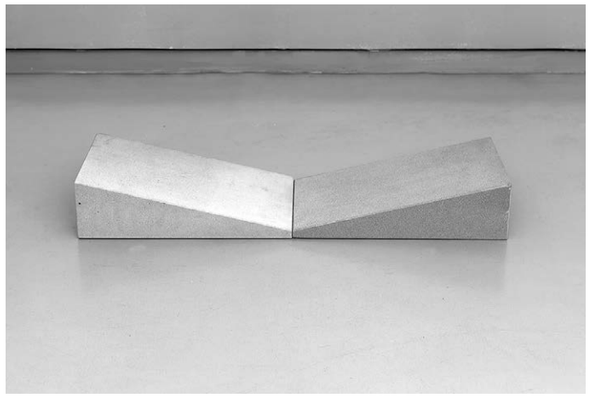
Petrine Vinje | **F- U- Þ- A- R- K**

- Petrine Vinje | **F- U- Þ- A- R- K**

The book at hand presents works from the years 2014–22, in which I have explored runes as a writing system, as vehicles of meaning, form and concept. F- U- TH- A- R- K[01] leaps off from an interdisciplinary research project at the Norwegian Runic Archive[02], in 2013–14, that nurtured a reciprocal dialogue between academic research and artistic processes. The cryptic symbols of the Futhark[03] continued to speak, insinuating themselves into a flow of new artworks in the coming years. During this time, I conducted a number of conversations with researchers in the field, some of whom have contributed to this book. In her article "Mind-body-technology' and function: the multiple components of runic production", Alessia Bauer investigates just how fundamental medium and material are to the linguistic development of runic writing. For the pre-modern inhabitants of Northern Europe, runes are a communicative medium for creating meaning in the transition from oral to written society. The original Norwegian version of Karoline Kjesrud's article "'Thou, O Lord, art mighty forever'. Runes — from characters to magic" was first published in the artist-researcher book *Agla Hagla*.[04] It is printed here in a revised version, with additional remarks about the Øverby stone.[05] Art historian Simone Neuenschwander writes in her text that, for her, my works can be viewed as "Bühnen der Sprache" — language platforms. With this interpretation in mind, the artist-researcher-book at hand, has become a platform for thoughts that draw nourishment from humanity's linguistic confusions, embodied knowledge and technological development.

Petrine Vinje, Oslo, June 2023.

01. The Þ rune (from the Proto-Germanic Þurisaz) is pronounced 'th', and survived as the Icelandic letter Þ.
02. The *Agla Hagla* project (Petrine Vinje, Karoline Kjesrud) was chosen for the Arts and Culture Norway's initiative — Hva er det med arkiv? (What is it about archives?) and explored how art could contribute to a discussion about archives and democratic openness in the archive sector. It was announced in 2012 and ended in 2015 with the publication of a project report edited by Gerd Elise Mørland and Per Olav Torgnesskar (Arts Council Norway, Oslo, 2015). Available in digital form from: https://www.kulturdirektoratet.no/web/guest/vis-publikasjon/-/hva-er-det-med-arkiv- [As of 03.06.2023]
03. Futhark, the name given to the writing system of runes, is derived from the first six characters of the alphabet: F- U- TH- A- R- K. Futhark remained in use until it was displaced by the Latin alphabet in the Middle Ages.
04. Petrine Vinje, Karoline Kjesrud: "Agla Hagla / Du er sterk i evighet (Herre) / Runer — fra skriftspråk til magi", Alfabetprodukt, Oslo, 2014.
05. A recent find (2017) on the Øverby farm, Rakkestad.



Simone Neuenschwander

THEATRES OF LANGUAGE ON THE WORK OF PETRINE VINJE

While visiting Petrine Vinje's exhibition in Villa Concordia in Bamberg, the first thing I noticed was the artist's succinct intent towards structure, simplicity and clarity visible in her work. In contrast to the exhibition rooms, with their baroque architecture, stucco-decorated wall niches and concave ceilings and ornamental murals evoking an atmospheric totality, her works read more like an obstacle course made up of fragments and singular units of an analytical thought process. This grew more evident through the contemplative oscillation between abstraction and symbolism, as was shown by a series of wedge-shaped objects on the floor, the materiality and form of which only differed due to the respective media used: carved spruce, beeswax, sandstone or composite foam, (*BOK A & B*, *BOK C*, *BOK D / E*, *VVVVV*, 2016). The positioning of the objects meant they resembled open books, which, aside from the factuality of their form, refers to the cultural storage systems of language. Along with other objects, within which the flexibility of both organic and artistic material is exploited, a landscape, made up of small platforms, pedestals and stelae, begins to spread, that both stabilised and complemented one another. The notion of plot, conveyed as much by the construction as by the dissection of elementary materiality and forms, was combined with the representation of letters as mobile signifiers. In the space, the pieces were consolidated as a series of mental bodies, partly based on the artist's own in-depth research into historical documents on language, that ranged from archaic letters carved into wood, stone or bone, to the mediaeval tradition of parchment manuscripts, such as the Bamberg Codex, as well as to the first printed books, produced in Bamberg as early as the mid-15th century. Using the visual techniques of printing, carving and notching, Petrine Vinje referred to the human need to record and decipher, something that ran almost like an intangible subtext throughout the exhibition.

COMMUNICATION TAKES THE STAGE

In many of Petrine Vinje's sculptures and installations, recurring forms such as steps, pedestals, or shelf elements can be found, revealing her interest in the linking of visual and linguistic ordering devices. It was in this context that she created the public artwork *Helga*, *Dagfinn*,

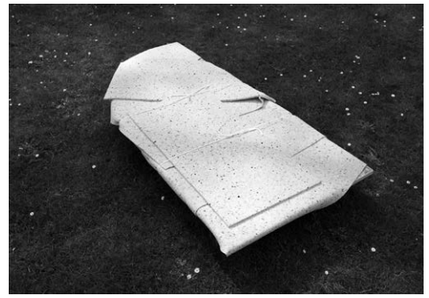
Judith, *Rita* and *Nawal* (2014) for the Research Council of Norway's new building in Oslo, which features five autonomous objects set in the monumental foyer that directly respond to the postmodern glass architecture and geometrically patterned granite floor.
The titles of the sculptures refer to linguists and cultural theorists who are important to the artist both in terms of method and as a source of inspiration. Not only the given names personify the objects — their staircase-like forms also relate to situations of learning, listening, and entertainment, as inscribed within the lecture theatre's architecture or the antique amphitheatre.
The fusion of communicative exchange with a mobile positioning of the body describes one of the core starting points for Vinje's work: her pieces could be perceived as a symbolic platform that intends to combine mental performance with physical movement in one space, not to be considered as separate entities.

Continuing in this strain, she created the site-specific installation *Anatomical Theatre* for the 2013 Norwegian Sculpture Biennial, which consisted of an octagonal arena made of chipboard and could be implemented for various events during the course of the exhibition, including lectures, film programs and discussions. The sculptural structure, which resembled the historical 15th century interior of Uppsala University, became a dialogical space, positioning the work directly within the social context of the Biennale. Vinje created a symbolic re-organization of language by implementing both the temporal experience and the potential for actual use provided by the arrangement of modular forms, signs and volumes in the installation. This was not, as in the tradition of conceptual art, merely transferred to the minds of the viewers, but concentrated primarily on the procedure of knowledge transfer both with and through the body, using its ability to first internalize language and then store it subconsciously. Having said this, Vinje's works create an awareness of latent learning processes and intuitive linguistic experience that fundamentally shape the encounters we have with our surroundings.

EXPANDING VESSELS

Petrine Vinje also included her observations on the close interrelationship between language and body in her new sculptures created for the Villa Concordia's baroque garden. The objects were installed with an inviting quality, and beckoned visitors to sit or lie on them within the idyllic park landscape, their conceptual openness simultaneously igniting a positive form of confrontation with other visitors of the exhibition. Rather than emphasising language's ability to represent, it was handled rather as a type of ongoing activity, which, first when implemented in the form of mutual communication, has the ability to shape life and reality. The garden, originally designed for private leisure and usually reserved for Villa Concordia's scholarship holders and staff, was open to the public and, with its sculptural pews, became a sort of democratic formation. The forms of the temporary objects, made from wood and foam, recalled those of benches, deckchairs, as well as objects used for sporting activities, bringing linguistic communication itself to the fore, the contents of which remained hypothetical, only becoming real through direct experience. Vinje's works were thus transformed into expanding vessels, which activate communication as a holistic achievement of mind and body, and in opposition to the increasing virtuality of our digitized world.

The notion of expanding vessels is a distinct and visible aspect of Vinje's sculptures, and results from the artist's use of simple and 'transient' material in their creation. Despite the objects' forms invoking a sense of intactness and wholeness, the time and manual labour gone into producing them is clear to see. The craftsmanship, visible in the form of physical interventions and marks left in the material, and with it the plausible recording of language, is a theme taken from her studies of cultural-historical recording techniques that Vinje often goes on to adopt within her sculptures. This is also shown in the group of works she created for the exhibition *The Solomon — The Josephine* (2013), exhibited in the artist-run gallery NoPlace in Oslo, where she dealt with the changing importance of craftsmanship from early days to the present. Vinje's objects, constructed using simple wooden parts, recycled textiles and plastic cords, link the cyclical aspects of diverse forms and materials. Beginning with motifs of knots and knotting methods, she investigated how these serve as specific models of reflection and design within the fields of mathematics, poetics and spirituality. This interlacing motion can also be seen in the autonomous, homogeneous objects displayed in the Villa Concordia, which, operating as potential 'shifters' in the space[01], constantly connect the real-life constellation



of rooms with our own imaginary worlds and our ability to remember.

In this sense, the modular forms in Vinje's works have the potential of dynamic visualisation: not only do they record the traditions of collective memories, but they also initiate a progressive linguistic processuality. Referring to Minimal Art's geometric, self-contained sculptures, French philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman states in his book, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, that the closed forms of these works might lead to a feeling of seclusion or secrecy. Through the sense of something being withdrawn from sight, a "layer of meaning [settles around the expressionless cube], surrounds it with word games, a firework of images, emotions, intensities, almost that of bodies and faces. In short, *anthropomorphism* takes place."[02] The conveyance of human qualities on this scale, as formulated by Didi-Huberman to describe the effectiveness of Minimal Art objects, is a concept perpetuated throughout Vinje's work. Her objects and installations are closely related to the human body, also to be perceived as autonomous representatives of themselves or as practical objects or tools used for human communication. Their arrangement as singular units means that a greater context and correlation is required for them to merge

01. cf. The term "shifters" is used in the sense of Rosalind E. Krauss, to describe indexical images, in terms of marks or traces, that invoke a physical relation to the referents: Rosalind E. Krauss, „Notes on the Index", in: *Kunsttheorie im 20. Jahrhundert*, hrsg. von Charles Harrison und Paul Wood, Bd. 2, Ostfildern-Ruit, 1998, pp. 1205–1208 f.
02. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Was wir sehen blickt uns an*, Zur Metapsychologie des Bildes, Bild und Text, ed. Gottfried Boehm & Karlheinz Stierle, Munich, 1999, p. 105. (from the original French: *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, Collection Critique, Les Editions Minuit, Paris,1992)

to form a not-yet-uttered sentence or text, something first achieved by means of physical movement in the space.

THE BODY AS A POLITICAL RESOURCE

As a result of this described mobility, Petrine Vinje's work also reveals a contemporary advancement of Process Art, which in the early 1960s connected Minimal Art and Performance, and worked intensely on a new mode of viewer participation in terms of space, object and time. A thorough study into the changing role of the viewer had become a central aspect of the work of Robert Morris, who developed performances and dance choreographies together with dancers such as Yvonne Rainer or Simone Forti at the Judson Dance Theater in New York in the 1960s. Morris viewed the temporal perception of his sculpture as being inseparably linked to physical movement within the space, essentially striving to guide the viewpoint away from the institutional space in order to focus on the real social and political aspects of the work. In 1971, on the occasion of his first European retrospective at the Tate Gallery in London, Morris created an experimental conceptual piece consisting of works made up of ramps, triangles, circles and cylinders, and where visitors were invited to reconstruct his sculptures in the space, and to move around with and within them. Morris' exhibition closed about five days after it's opening, as some visitors had been injured during their interactions with the objects. Although this participatory project failed, the intention to offer viewers a more self-aware experience as well as personal involvement in the artistic process has, to date, still not lost any relevance. This is also illustrated by the *Bodyspacemotionthings* exhibition, Robert Morris' project conceived for the huge turbine hall in Tate Modern in 2009.[03] The motives that fuelled his 1971 London exhibition can be found within various contexts: Art Workers' Coalition (founded in 1969), which demanded a redefinition of the social value of artistic work, as well as Morris' involvement in the protests against the Vietnam War also played an important role.[04] His interactive sculptures unfurled a number of options to the viewer, from individual participation and responsibility, to contemplating the social ideals of freedom but also the limitations these ideals can present. Morris viewed the expression of self-determined, physical movement within an artistically pre-determined situation as the symbolic equivalent of the social and political possibilities of taking action in the real world.

These attributes also sound throughout Petrine Vinje's work, as she points to hidden and contradictory narratives of power and powerlessness. This is revealed, as it were, by means of 'rhetorical' objects, containing the potential to activate, whether in physical, linguistic or communicative form. The differences between materiality, form and researched content are not simply encrypted within her work, but rather appear in the form of an invitation to gain new knowledge and experience by encountering the sculptures. Petrine Vinje links the social construct of the body and its integration in diverse historical, national and gender-related traditions with the symbolism of sculptural signifiers, which, with their liberal forms, call for independent thought and action. This is displayed as a continuous interweaving of signs, objects and physical movement within the space, as visible in the film and performance work *AKLA HAKLA KALES FALES* (2014). Vinje's work highlights the alterability of our cultural memory, which can be dispatched in linguistic form or as an embodied act. By combining the historical transmissions of language with the power of communication and self-determined physical activity, Petrine Vinje devises new situations that, through first-hand experience, are a constant promise of future-oriented movement.

This text was written on the occasion of the exhibition Z.E.I.C.H(N.)E.N. in Villa Concordia in Bamberg, Germany, that marked the end of Vinje`s residency and stipend from 2015–16. *Z.E.I.C.H(N.)E.N.* in Villa Concordia in Bamberg, Germany, that marked the end of Vinje`s residency and stipend from 2015–16.

03. See Robert Morris' 1971 retrospective in the Tate Gallery as well as the exhibition *Bodyspacemotionthings* 2009, in Tate Modern: http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/performance-at-tate/perspeactives/robert-morris [As of: 01.10.2016].

04. On the poster included in the Tate Gallery exhibition catalogue, Morris states: „*They [the sculptures] represent an art that goes beyond the making, selling, collecting and looking at kind of art, and proposes a new role for the artist in relation to society*", in: Robert Morris, ed. Michael Compton & David Sylvester, exhibition catalogue, 1st edition, Tate Gallery, London, 1971.

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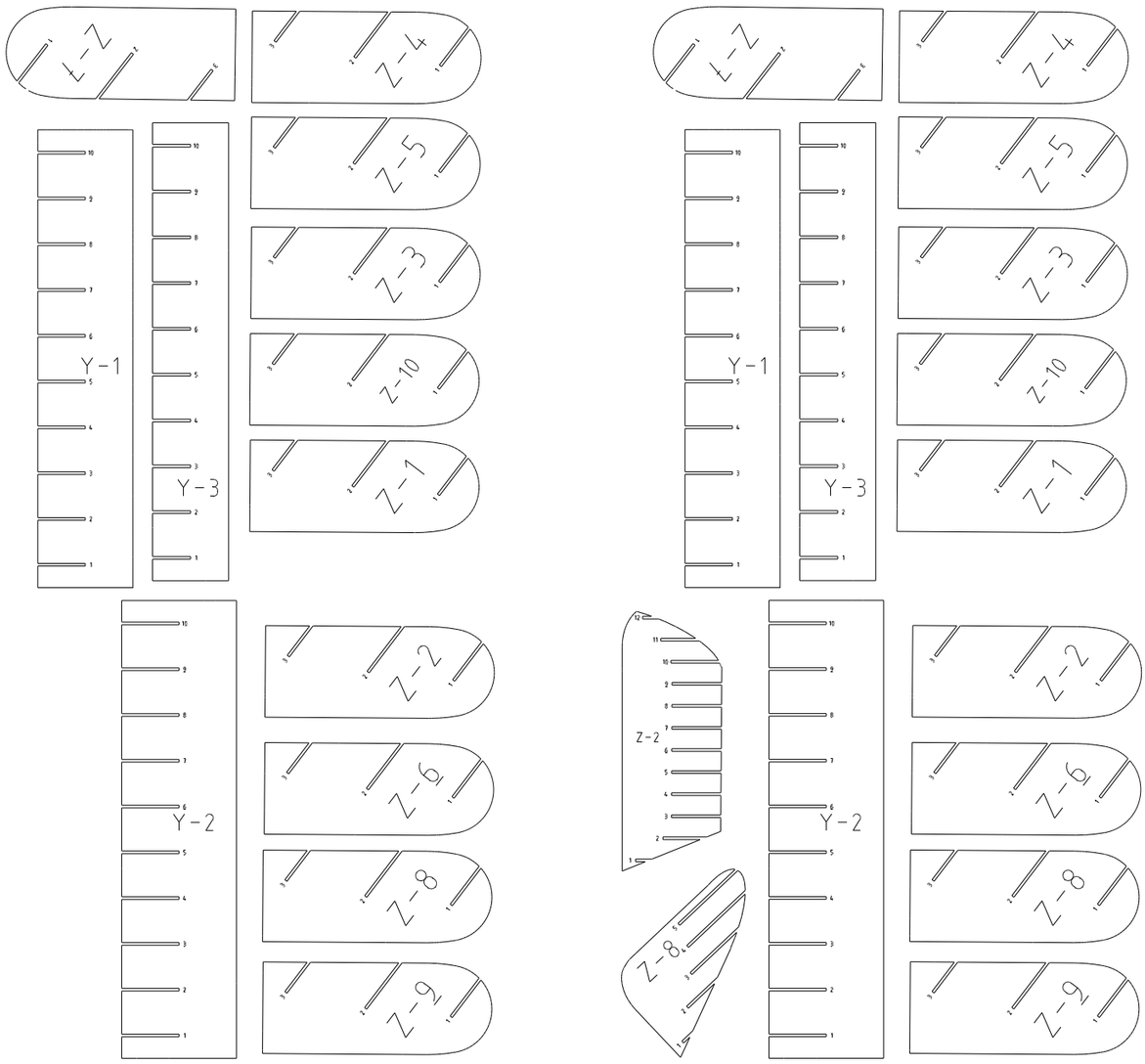
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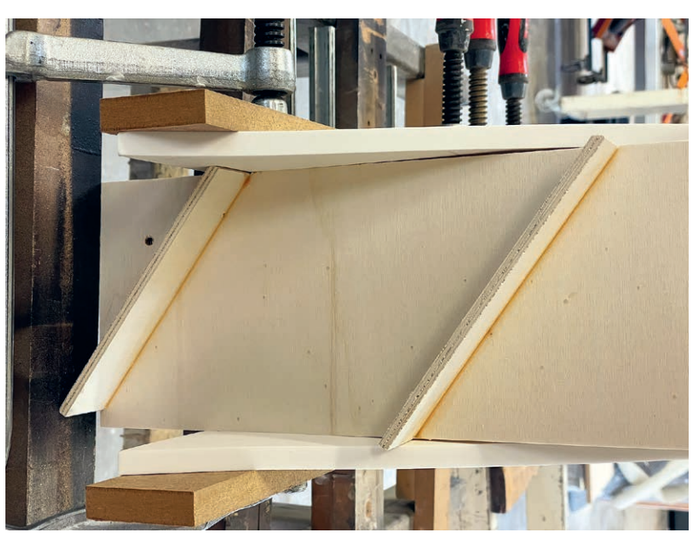


Alessia Bauer

‘MIND-BODY-TECHNOLOGY’ AND FUNCTION: THE MULTIPLE COMPONENTS OF RUNIC PRODUCTION

ABSTRACT
In accordance with the approach of Petrine Vinje (editor of the present book), which questions the so-called ‘Cartesian dualism’ of mind and body and advocates instead the interaction of an entangled mind-body-technology trialism, the present paper examines the early development of runic writing, in which the medium and the material are of central importance. During the transition from an oral to a written culture, we observe the introduction of a technology that involves a materialization of the spoken word. Yet technology is not always used in the same way and varies depending on the communicative intentions of the user, as I will illustrate on the basis of the corpus of South-Germanic runic inscriptions. Communicative function therefore constitutes a further important aspect that needs to be considered when researching the process of writing.

KEYWORDS: function, non-sense inscriptions, pseudo-runes, runic inscriptions, private communication, public communication

INTRODUCTION
In recent decades, the debate about materiality and (inter-)mediality has played an important role in several disciplines. At the end of the last century, the so-called ‘New Philology’[01] established a new way to look at manuscripts, persuading scholars to analyse a text as it actually is (and not as it could be reconstructed) and to consider the ‘archaeology’ of the manuscript as a relevant aspect of the analysis. Text and context — i.e., the content of the inscription as well as the materiality of the artefact — form a unity, which necessarily has to be assumed if the aim is to reveal the intention and function of the text and the way it was understood or even instrumentalized in a certain period in history. Further, having acknowledged the fundamental instability of medieval texts, as captured by the concept of *mouvance* postulated by Bernard Cerquiglini (1989), the goals of philology have changed relative to those that prevailed at the beginning of the 20th century, giving rise to new kinds of questions to be asked about the texts. First of all, it has become evident that abstracting a text from its context (i.e. its relationship to other texts contained in the same manuscript, its materiality, and the historical period in which it was composed or reproduced) implies a loss of relevant information about the text itself. For this reason, several aspects that were disregarded by traditional philology, such as the act of production and reproduction, the social milieu of a text’s reception, more recent copies etc., have been acknowledged as enlightening.
This new attitude fits the perspective of the present project and underlines the combination of what Tom Slevin (2018) defines as ‘mind-body-technology trialism’. In his opinion, ‘Cartesian dualism’, that is to say the fundamental separation of mind and body, is outdated and should be substituted by a threefold relationship of mind, body and technology, since humanity should be considered as “a genesis co-existent with the gift of fire as the symbol of technology”.[02] Slevin prefers to regard technology as a connecting factor between body and mind, which once again brings him — and us — to question the validity of Cartesian dualism and its claim to objectivity (in fact, the fourth element that I wish to introduce to the discussion, namely the intention of the runic carver, is also rather connected with subjectivity).
As far as the manuscript culture of the Middle Ages is concerned, this model could be applied as follows: in the production of a manuscript, the idea of a text — involving the cognitive faculties of an author — had to be realized by the hand of a scribe (body) using particular tools and a particular medium (technology) suitable for the purpose. This would result in an end product of more or less good quality, depending on the knowledge of the author, the skill of the scribe, and the suitability of his tools.

01. The seminal text in this respect was the article by Nichols, 1990.
02. Slevin (2018, p. 38): “Every historical era has its ‘fire’: while nowadays this is the most sophisticated technologies of the digital world, in the Middle Ages it was the production of parchment that changed radically the way of producing and reproducing texts.”

RUNOLOGY AS AN ACADEMIC FIELD

The above-mentioned reflections are not restricted to manuscripts; they can also be applied to the field of epigraphics, such as runology, where the transition from an abstract idea to its realization implies many steps — starting from the invention, or better, the adaptation of an alphabet from the Mediterranean region to express the Germanic language(s) and the development of suitable techniques to display it (or them).[03] The transition from an oral to a written culture implies a radical change in the way ideas are given expression: from a message produced through the act of speaking, where the spoken word ceases to exist after it has been pronounced, to the materialized written word. Oral communication needs repetition to be realized anew; written communication is visible and, as a rule, permanent. Since runic writing is an epigraphic system that can be found on a variety of objects and materials — from metal to wood and stones — materiality is evidently a central factor in the creative act; materials and the typology of objects are strictly connected with the intention of communication: monumental rune stones were meant to serve a public commemorative function, while wooden sticks were used for more private and momentary purposes.

Like manuscript philology, the academic field of runology has also developed over time. In the first phase of runological studies, scholars were first and foremost interested in methods and tools as a means to facilitate the decoding of inscriptions. The early scholars established standard representations of the writing system, reproduced in every handbook, and traced the regional development of the runic sequence in Anglo-Saxon England (the so-called Anglo-Saxon *futhorc*) and in the North of Europe (with the Younger *futhark*) respectively.[04] They soon realised, however, that many 'real' inscriptions diverge from the established standard: single runes can display 'odd' forms, they do not always follow the same writing direction, the material and/or the rune-masters' skills can be of different quality and, consequently, can lead to unusual, non-standard results. For this reason, graphematics has become more and more popular in recent years, i.e. the study of the correspondence between grapheme and morpheme and their concrete representations.[05]

Without doubt, all the components of the above-mentioned trialism, as postulated by Tom Slevin (2018), played a decisive role also in the production of runic inscriptions. Yet I would argue that the results were also dependent on a fourth component, namely the 'communicative function' of the respective inscription. In my opinion, this aspect should be added to the 'mind-body-technology trialism', introducing another facet to the overall system.

Once the runic corpora had been established and made accessible in the comprehensive editions published in the last century, runologists began to discuss the individuals and the social milieu involved in the production and use of runic objects. The texts — in the broad sense, as the unity of verbal communication, visual components and object — were considered in a cultural-historical context. In this regard, archaeology can provide precious information: for instance, by studying the inventories of burial places that included runic finds in southern Germany it was possible to identify the upper middle-class[06] as the one possessing runic literacy and to establish its gender distribution.[07]

03. Runes are the first writing system of the Germanic tribes, developed as an adaptation of one or more existing alphabets of the Mediterranean region at the beginning of our era. In the first runic period, which extends from the birth of Christ until the 7th century, it consisted in 24 signs that corresponded fairly accurately to the phonemes of the Germanic language (if one ignores the quantity of vowels). Since the runic row does not correspond to the alphabetical order (abc), it is called *futhark* after its first six signs. Runes were used as an epigraphic writing system and were only transposed to parchment as secondary phenomenon (the so-called *Runica manuscripta*).

04. Surprisingly, it was not before the very end of the 19th century that the original runic row (the so-called Older *futhark*) could be deciphered. Before this time, scholars were particularly familiar with the Nordic inscriptions and considered the Younger *futhark* as the point of departure for runic writing.

05. Cf. Palumbo (2020), Marold & Zimmermann (2022) and the proceedings of the conferences 'SoundandScript' edited by Cotticelli-Kurras & Rizza (2016), Waxenberger et al. (2017) and Bauer & Waxenberger (2021).

06. As far as the Merovingian period is concerned, Rainer Christlein (1968) established a categorization of the graves ranging from the poorest (type A) to the richest (type C/D).

07. Most of the graves containing runic objects belong to women. Hence the question arises whether women were only passively or also actively involved in the process of writing runes; cf. Düwel 1989.

THE RISE OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Runic inscriptions — especially those written in the so-called Older *futhark* — are a product of literacy within a basically oral culture. The question arises why a society capable of transmitting all its myths, legends, and history orally or by means of iconographic representations,[08] and of organizing its social and political life around the recitation of its laws in assemblies, suddenly felt the need to develop a writing system.

In doing so, they changed the modality of expression, i.e. from oral to written communication, and made a step from a mind-body dualism to a mind-body-technology trialism. A whole apparatus of knowledge and skills, implying cognitive faculties as well as bodily skills and the handling of new tools, had to be created. The first step was conceptual and consisted in adapting an existing writing system to the language of the people in question, that is to say, the creators of runic writing had to understand how their specific language worked and identify the sounds it employed. Once the sounds had been correlated with signs, one had to learn how to execute those signs and to choose a suitable medium. In my opinion, however, the choice of medium and technique is closely connected with the purpose the runic masters wanted to express through writing.

Examples of runic literacy allow us to differentiate between two types of communication: one that is public and monumental, the other private. Inscriptions tend to differ depending on whether they are displayed, on the one hand, on commemorative rune stones or the external, visible side of objects, such as weapons, or on the other, on the concealed inner side of objects. By way of illustration, let us consider the South-Germanic runic region in order to see how this particular aspect could be a decisive factor in the performative act of writing.

According to Strätling and Witte (2006), script always involves a paradox, which they refer to as "sichtbare Unsichtbarkeit", roughly 'visible invisibility': since script represents graphically fixed spoken language, i.e. materialized thought, it is constituted by a material (visible) component as well as by the immaterial content that it seeks to convey.[09] The fact of being visible implies that a specimen of script can be perceived as such, even if the observer is illiterate or if the sequence of signs does not make any sense (because the characters are just an imitation of script or because their combination does not produce a semantically understandable message). Even in this case, as we will see later on, script has a meaning, though it diverges from the one modern people would expect. Heier (2021) rightly suggests that "writing is not only meant for the literate part of society, but could also affect the illiterates in their perception of visible script."[10] Following Graf's study on 'pseudo-inscriptions' (2010), Oehrl (2019, 416) underlines once again that inscriptions of this kind could indeed constitute an effective means of communication. The spectrum of possible functions and meanings that were not connected with the encoding of language is huge, and each scholar has his preference: I am convinced that this kind of inscriptions could, for instance, be applied in a gender or elite discourse, or as a marker of identity, in order to differentiate oneself from other tribes (possibly, from those who had already adopted Latin literacy).

Düwel (2011, 512f.) considers pseudo-runes on gold bracteates from the Migration period as a means of communication with gods and demons. The act of 'labelling' the objects (even if only with imitations of script) might also have been an important element in the performance of rituals. Likewise, the 'marking' might indicate taking possession of the object. We cannot exclude the possibility that the motivation lay in the 'touch of exoticism' that runes and pseudo-runes tend to carry, as they do, incidentally, also today (just think of the proliferation of runic tattoos in the Western world!).

On the other hand, in order to convey a concrete linguistic message a further aspect is necessary, namely readability. To this end, the observer has to be educated at least in reading and the sequence has to encode a meaningful communication.

08. We need only think of the iconographic stones from the island of Gotland, which display numerous images of myths and heroic legends.

09. Heier (2021) applied the discourse of visibility to rune stones from the Viking period.

10. Considering non-lexical inscription from the Viking Age, Bianchi (2010) demonstrates that these monuments, despite the fact of not being 'readable' in a modern sense, display all the aspects of 'usual' rune stones, such as the layout, the decoration, the form of the stones etc. That is to say, they basically shared the same tradition.

THE SOUTH-GERMANIC RUNIC CORPUS

The corpus of the South-Germanic runic inscriptions consists of about 100 specimens, of which not all have a semantically meaningful interpretation.[11] The majority date from the period between 520 and 650, in particular the second half of the 6th century, and were found in Merovingian row cemeteries (AD 450–720). A large proportion of them were found in female graves, scratched on precious objects, mostly fibulae. The rest occur on weapons and other dress accessories. Apart from one inscription on the wall of a cave in Kleines Schulerloch, the authenticity of which is still debated,[12] all the inscriptions are on loose objects found in graves.

Due to the large number of inscriptions found in female graves, one might assume that women were particularly attracted by the new medium, possibly to affirm their social standing.[13] Following the classification of these graves in terms of their quality, on the basis of the criteria developed by the German archaeologist Rainer Christlein, all the burials correspond at least to type B (= upper middle-class) and in some cases also to type C (= upper-class).

These characteristics have given rise to questions about the function of runic literacy in a specific cultural-historical context.[14] In this perspective, the semantic interpretation of the texts — in the sense of meaningful messages — loses its primacy. From the point of view of 'New Runology' — a parallel development to the 'New Philology' — 'nonsense' inscriptions are just as significant as those that can be interpreted. According to Krämer (2006, 76f.), when we use an approach to language that involves interpretation on the basis not of phonological properties, but rather of image ("Bild"),[15] even nonsense inscriptions can be considered as script and integrated into the corpus. Taken as a whole, the corpus provides insights into the process of literalization that occurs when an oral society struggles to adopt a new technology, which was, it seems, restricted to certain social classes and a limited number of functions.[16]

In fact, the introduction of runic writing did not bring about any radical change in the way cultural contents were transmitted within the Germanic world prior to the rise of Latin literacy in the Middle Ages. The use of runes did not substitute oral communication; it merely added an aspect to the various forms in which language was expressed, and for this reason, I am convinced they were not created for pragmatic purposes.

Due to the elaborate design of the numerous fibulae carrying runes, the inscriptions are, with a few exceptions, all carved on the inner side of the objects and hence invisible when the piece was worn. In a way this seems to be another aspect of the above-mentioned paradox of 'invisible visibility', which raises the question about the function of materialized language that no-one can see. Unfortunately, our understanding of ancient societies is still inadequate to be able to fully comprehend how these worked. In any case, it is clear that it is inappropriate to judge ancient phenomena on the basis of our modern thought patterns.

In the corpus of the South-Germanic runic inscriptions, some of them on brooches (approximately 10%) displays a formula that reads *'NN leub NN'* (roughly, 'someone [is] loved by someone [else]'). As a rule, the formula begins with a female name in the nominative, while the second name is that of a man in the dative. Obviously, this represents a profession of love and friendship between two people, belonging to the sphere of private communication. Yet, even if we can encode the message from a linguistic point of view, we are not able to determine for certain the function of the engraving within a

11. The new edition of the continental runic inscriptions by Klaus Düwel, Robert Nedoma and Sigmund Oehrl was published in 2020. All the specimens from southern Germany belong to a late phase of runic literacy in the Older *futhark*, which, in this area, started not before the 6th century and lasted for about 100 years. In this culture runes represented rather a 'fashion' and were only a temporary phenomenon. Among the inscriptions, many belong to the group of the non-lexical texts (cf. Oehrl 2019, 145).

12. An overview with several contributions on this subject is to be found in the volume edited by Bammesberger & Waxenberger (2006), esp. pp. 315–393.

13. In northern Europe as well, especially in Sweden, we observe the involvement of women in erecting rune stones.

14. Cf. the study of Waldispühl, 2013.

15. See the concept of "Schriftbildlichkeit" ('writing picturality') by Krämer.

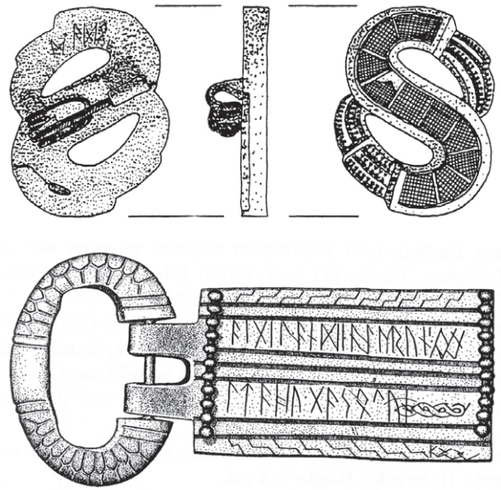
16. Due to the presence of numerous nonsense inscriptions, Graf (2010) considers the corpus of the South-Germanic inscriptions as a typical example of a 'young' literate society, where script was not always used to encode language.

social context: was it a 'document' of marriage, a wedding gift or just a declaration of love detached from formal obligations? And do the inscriptions that carry only a female name represent elliptical texts of the same kind? The practice seems comparable to the names engraved on the inner side of modern wedding rings as a sign of affection or commemoration, and which are not intended to be shown to third parties. However, since we do not know the social context for sure, this has to remain a pure assumption. Whether it was an expression of Christian love, as Ute Schwab postulated, is also speculative. Mees (2011) found parallels with love inscriptions in Latin culture, which include stereotypical phrases, such as *amo te*, placed on specific kinds of objects, like rings and cups. Unlike the latter, the runic inscriptions do not contain any verb, indicating a relationship between the specified people by means of the grammatical cases and the adjective alone.

As far as the personal names on the fibulae are concerned, they are quite diversified and partly short (abbreviated) names.[17] By contrast, men's inscriptions on weapons or those on the runic stones of the proto-Norse and Viking periods exemplify the typical Germanic onomastic, often based on synonymic variations, such as in the Old High German heroic *Lay of Hildebrand*, where the protagonists — father and son fighting against each other — are called *Hilde-brand* and *Hadu-brand*.[18] According to this pattern, the Istaby stone (Blekinge, Sweden DR 359) shows the names of three related men from the same powerful clan called *Hari-wulf*R, *Haþu-wulf*R, *Heru-wulf*R. For this reason, Mees (2011, 483) affirms that "[t]he South Germanic leub texts seem to represent elliptical expressions of a discourse of friendship and love quite distinct from that of the heroic tradition represented by early Germanic onomastic."

To the extent that this is so, and despite their brevity, texts of this kind provide an insight into the private sphere of early medieval society, which is generally rather obscure. In fact, this was a period in which literacy was used first and foremost in official contexts, at court, in the church, or for formal contracts and documents. In everyday life, however, orality was — and continued to be for a long time — the usual means of communication.

The fact of being 'hidden' indicates a different use of the technology of inscribing: within the



South-Germanic runic corpus, the execution of the runic signs is often less accurate than elsewhere, the dimension of the runic characters varies within one and the same inscription, the runic sequences can display characters that are not aligned. Generally speaking, no particular attention is payed to the visual layout and the inscriptions are rather randomly placed on the surface. By contrast the inscriptions on finds belonging to men are displayed on the front of the artefact and are skilfully executed. For instance, the Pforzen belt buckle (fig.↑) shows a longer text on two lines, each of which ends with a decorative motif. In addition to the more accurate execution, the proper names *Aigil* and *Ailrun* indicate that the inscription alludes to a heroic legend (with parallels in the *Poetic Edda*) and to accomplish a public purpose, such as glorify a powerful man. Not only do such 'texts' convey the meaning of the written message, they also add an aesthetic value to the objects. It would be an odd coincidence if the inscriptions on brooches were generally produced by unskilled craftsmen while only those on weapons and men's objects were entrusted to 'professionals'. More probably, both types of inscription were designed and produced by

17. Nedoma (2004) has provided an extensive study of the onomastic of the South-Germanic inscriptions.

18. In the heroic tradition the naming of the protagonists follows established principles: while the second part of the name remains the same, the first part varies according to the principle of synonymic variation; furthermore, the names generally alliterate with each other.

the same rune masters, albeit with varying levels of care depending on the respective function.

Further, the inscriptions on weapons are usually placed on a continuous line or in a frame executed in the same inlay technique as the inscription and occasionally displaying some decorative elements. On the Steindorf sax as well as on the sax of Gräfelfing, we observe that the runes (barely legible, due to heavy corrosion) were even carved in double lines, which have no function other than embellishment and were nielloed with silver inlay, making the object more precious.

CONCLUSION

Within the corpus of the South-Germanic runic inscriptions, several finds are not semantically interpretable. In some cases, this is due to the poor state of the object's conservation, while in others it can be attributed to the fact that in southern Germany the runic tradition appeared suddenly and disappeared after a century, without ever becoming well established.[19] Without in any way playing down the relevance of these facts, I would argue, in accordance with Graf (2010) and Waldispühl (2013), that in this predominantly oral society runic literacy was not meant to be a 'common' means of communication. In my opinion, this is true for the majority of runic inscriptions written with the Older *futhark*, and surely even more for the inscriptions of southern Germany. Their significance lay not in the messages conveyed through script, but rather in literacy itself, as a new medium. Following the argumentation of Graf & Waldispühl (2013, 54), we could affirm that the importance of script lay only secondarily on the linguistic content ("Es besteht die Möglichkeit, dass die Wirkung der Inschrift primär auf der Inschriftenpräsentation basierte und der sprachliche Inhalt sekundär war"). To possess a specimen of literacy — even if invisible to third parties — conferred prestige to the person who carried it, or maybe it served to establish a particular kind of communication to the realm of the sacred.

Both the skill of the rune carver and the material were undoubtfully decisive factors influencing the level of precision in the object produced. Yet, as I have tried to show in this paper, precision was also dependent on the communicative function of the object: when intended for public functions materialized language was treated differently from when its purpose was private and it was kept 'hidden'. For this reason, I consider it appropriate to treat intention as an essential aspect of the creative process, one that needs to be added to the 'mind-body-technology trialism'.

19. For the general characteristics of the corpus see Bauer 2015, 441–445.

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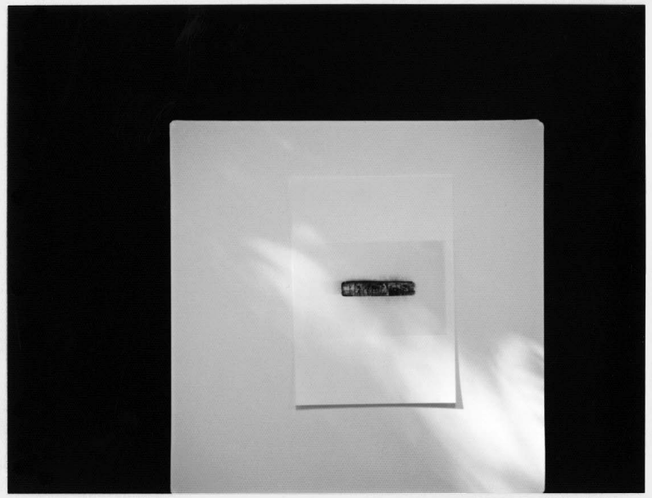
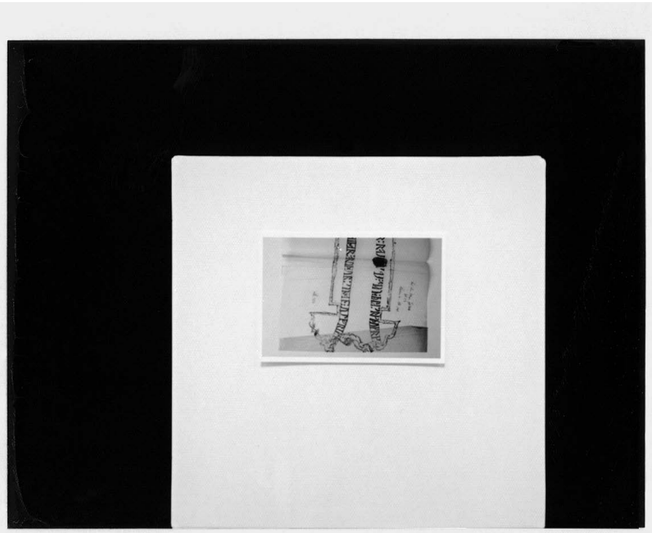




Karoline Kjesrud

“THOU, O LORD, ART MIGHTY FOREVER” RUNES — FROM CHARACTERS TO MAGIC

Every now and then, runes crop up in the media, often in the form of inscriptions on new or previously registered archaeological finds that are presented to the public. On the Viking markets that have become a feature of the summer months across Europe, Norway included, runes abound as symbols that evoke a distant past. In some cases, runes are used as mythical symbols in the service of spiritual experiences, in others as identifying marks for ideological groupings and the battles they want to fight. In other words, runes appeal today to a very broad audience. Although the characters remain constant, their symbolic value varies from one user to another. Knowledge about runes is the outcome of the meticulous work of the runologists who document this writing system from a bygone era. Obviously, runes are rooted in the past, but how does history shape the way we understand them in the present? One has the impression that, whereas the focus of contemporary runologists is on historical inscriptions as a source material for the study of languages that were spoken in the days when runes were a living system of writing, others use runes in the service of magical or ideological pursuits without worrying whether their meaning is rooted in history. But is the relationship between academic and popular interests so categorical?

MANAGING NORWEGIAN KNOWLEDGE ABOUT RUNES

In Norway, all objects with runic inscriptions that can be dated to before 1537 are collected and stored at the country’s university museums, alongside other objects from antiquity and the Middle Ages. The Cultural Heritage Act of 9 June 1978 grants ownership of all movable artefacts of cultural heritage to the Norwegian state, with responsibility for their safekeeping and management delegated to the nation’s five university museums (in Oslo, Trondheim, Bergen, Tromsø, Stavanger). The documentation and classification of runic inscriptions on artefacts of cultural heritage has been closely associated with, and dependent on, individuals who have cultivated a clear and profound interest in runes.

It was the philologist and linguist Sophus Bugge (1864–1907) who began the work of mapping out and documenting Norwegian runic inscriptions, starting in 1864 and pursuing the task until his death in 1907. He wanted to use the runic inscriptions in Oslo University’s Collection of Norwegian Antiquities in his research. Having arranged for the archive material relating to runes to be collected together in one place, he set about cataloguing the oldest Norwegian inscriptions. Thus the archive grew from the exercise of gathering the archived material in a single location. Bugge’s student, Magnus Olsen, continued the work from 1908 to 1948. Like Bugge, Olsen was based at the university and could visit the Runic Archive whenever he needed to access the material for his research. Throughout these early years, the Runic Archive functioned almost like a private resource for Bugge’s and Olsen’s research. The two scholars were also responsible for the two seminal compendia on Norwegian inscriptions: *Norges Innskrifter med de ældre Runer* (NIæR; Norwegian inscriptions with older runes) and *Norges Innskrifter med de yngre Runer* (NIyR; Norwegian inscriptions with more recent runes). It wasn’t until 1948 that a director for the Runic Archive was formally appointed with a workplace in the actual archive. Aslak Liestøl established an archiving system. He was succeeded in 1985 by James E. Knirk, who headed the Runic Archive until 2017. The Runic Archive has since been incorporated into the larger Topographic Archive at the Kulturhistorisk museum (Museum of Cultural History), where in 2019 Kristel Zilmer was appointed as the academic director for textual culture (runology) and iconography, with responsibility for the Runic Archive.

The Runic Archive holds records and archive information about all Norwegian runic inscriptions from all administrative areas, thus serving as a national research archive. Its resources include various documents, manuscripts, drawings, and personal effects from the early runic researchers, such as photographs and slide collections, drawings of local runic objects (stones, church interiors, etc.), collections of

prints, casts and drawings of inscriptions, databases and libraries. The archive is divided into several sub-archives: Norwegian inscriptions with older runes, Norwegian inscriptions with younger runes, Finds from Bergen after 1955, New finds from the rest of the country since 1960, Probable Norwegian rune inscriptions from places west of Norway, Post-Reformation runic inscriptions, Epigraphic inscriptions with Latin script from medieval Norway.

The Runic Archive functions as a portal to knowledge about and insights into Norwegian runes and runic inscriptions, but also to the history of the discipline of runology — the academic study of a writing system that was in use for more than 1,000 years, a period that stretches from around 200 AD to 1500.[01] This is roughly the same amount of time that the Latin script has been in use in Norway.

In the course of 1,000 years, any language will undergo major changes, as will also the associated cultures and societies. These historical changes had an impact on inscriptions, leaving traces that researchers seek to explain. But what is it about the past that we consider so important? Why are humanists so insistent about the significance of history for our own time? What would happen if history were left untouched, if ancient settlements and burial places were ignored and allowed to sink into the earth, and rune sticks and parchment books left to crumble to dust? Would our own era also disintegrate and turn to nothing when our time is over, thereby leaving us invisible? And if it did, what would our descendants take as a foundation for their understanding of the world?

Faced with the complexity of the world, we humans constantly ask who we are and where we come from — we are driven by a need to create our own identity. One can argue that this is part of what it means to be social; the need for identity not only shapes, but also creates social, political and cultural ties between people. When a person claims that they belong to something, they automatically distance themselves from something else. Just as one individual marks his identity as different from a brother or sister, or the members of a family show solidarity and loyalty to each other as a unit distinct from other families, or a community embraces its local environment and traditions, or a country is protective of its cultural heritage, identity is always dependent on the context in which one seeks to explain it and what the explanation seeks to relate it to.[02] Evidently, identity has a lot to do with language, place, landscape, religion and ethnicity — all of them factors that are easy to relate to.

A 321: Rune stick from Oslo gate 6

One of the objects in Oslo University's Collection of Norwegian Antiquities is C37175 / G.75025 — a small piece of wood inscribed with runes. In the Rune Archive, it is registered as A 321. The object was found at Oslo gate 6, in square Æ 3. It belongs to fire sequence 2 and can be dated to around 1200; the archaeological report estimates the late 12th century — early 13th century.

A 321 is a small wooden stick, 37 mm long, 6–7 mm wide and 4–5 mm thick. One of the ends is slightly rounded, while the other is pierced by a hole. The form of the stick suggests that it was an amulet, with the hole at one end probably serving as an attachment point for a thread and hook. The stick has runes on both sides. The inscription fills the entire length of one side and about half the length of the other.

Following the dissolution of the Kalmar Union between Norway, Sweden and Denmark in 1523, when the Swedes seceded with Gustav Vasa as their king, a need arose among those with social influence to mark the standing of the individual

01. The diffusion and uses of runes as a writing system form one of the core concerns of runology. Virtually every available introduction to runes, and indeed, to the Norse language, discusses theories about the origin and diffusion of runes. See for example Terje Spurkland: *I begynnelsen var futhark*. Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk forlag, 2001, and Ray I. Page: *An Introduction to English Runes*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1973. Michael Barnes: *Runes. A Handbook*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012,2022

02. The concept of identity is an extensive topic in many disciplines, and could of course be discussed in far greater depth. One popular scientific approach to the concept can be found, e.g., in Thomas Hylland Eriksen: *Røtter og føtter — identitet i en omskiftelig tid*. Aschehoug forlag, 2004. On the use of history in identity building, see e.g.: Tore Jansson: *Germanerna: myten, historien, språken*. Stockholm: Norstedts, 2013; Peter Heather: *Empires and Barbarians: Migration, Development and the Birth of Europe*. London: Macmillan, 2009.

countries. The kings of the respective countries wanted to legitimise their power and positions with respect to each other and the rest of Europe, and one way to pursue this aim was to emphasise historical roots. A long history carried considerable prestige, and experts were engaged to facilitate the work. Initially, the doctor and naturalist Ole Worm received support from the king and many other prominent men for his work on antiquities and runes. He worked at the university in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark-Norway and a point of convergence for cultural and intellectual development. In accordance with a royal initiative, Norwegian officials were encouraged to send both artefacts and documentation about them to Copenhagen, so as to make them available to Worm in his work.[03] It was his acquaintance with the Swedish antiquarian Johannes Bureus that inspired Worm to undertake a systematic documentation of antiquities and runic inscriptions from all over Denmark-Norway. Bureus had already initiated the documentation of Swedish antiquities with runic inscriptions in Sweden, and his work was valued by the king as a scientific contribution to establishing the ancient origins of the Swedish people.[04] Worm confidently claimed that the Danes could demonstrate a history at least as old as that of the Swedes. With the king's support, he therefore worked to corroborate the legitimacy of Danish-Norwegian political power, which needed the affirmation of academic and scholarly circles. This would enable learned men beyond the country's borders to understand that Denmark-Norway, which also included Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, the Orkney Islands and Shetland, had a long and rich history.[05]

Because runes were used to document the countries' histories as far back in time as possible, interest in the subject during the 16th and 17th centuries focused in large part on the question of the origins of the writing system. But while this meant that Worm and Bureus were pursuing much the same goal, they were drawn in different directions: Which kingdom could boast the longest history? Where did runes actually come from? Who had had them the longest? These questions led to a heated dispute between Worm and Bureus.

Ole Worm and Johannes Bureus are considered the first true runologists, and their documentation of monuments with runic inscriptions can be regarded as the starting point for academic runology. The work they did on cataloguing antiquities with runic inscriptions laid the foundations for subsequent practice in the field: collecting, documenting, and registering inscriptions. Bureus summed up his knowledge of runes in *Runokänslanas lärospän* and the cataloguing projects *Runahäfd* and *Monumentum veterum Gothorum*. Unlike Ole Worm's *Danicorum Monumentorum*, Bureus' works were not published.

Today, there are standard works covering Norwegian, Swedish and Danish runic inscriptions.[06] Produced between the late 19th and mid 20th centuries, these contain relevant documentation of all the artefacts found prior to the point of publication. As synoptic works, they do not always contain the latest findings, and some of the original documentation is by now ripe for revision. Once in a while, the need for an additional volume becomes evident. For example, a sixth volume (in two booklets) of the Bergen inscriptions was published in the series *Norges Innskrifter med de Yngre Runer*, in 1980 and 1990. Yet another volume is expected in the same series to cover inscriptions from Trondheim. In the meantime, further artefacts with runes are being discovered on a regular basis. Major excavations in conjunction with an expansion of

03. *Dansk biografisk lexicon*. Vol. XIX, 1905.

04. *Svenskt biografiskt lexicon*. Vol. 6, 1926. Thomas Karlsson: *Götisk kabbala och runisk alkemi. Johannes Bureus och den götiska esoterismen*. PhD thesis. University of Stockholm, 2010.

05. Erik Moltke: *Jon Skonvig og de andre runetegnere*. Vol. II. Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1958: 108; Karen Skovgaard-Petersen: "Saxo, Snorre og den nationale historieforskning i 1600-tallet", in Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, Karsten Friis-Jensen and Else Mundal (eds.): *Saxo og Snorre*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums forlag, 2010: 26.

06. *Norges Innskrifter med de ældre Runer*. Vols. I–III. Sophus Bugge (ed.). Christiania: A.W. Brøggers Bogtrykkeri, 1891–1903; *Norges Innskrifter med de yngre Runer*. Vols. I–VI. Magnus Olsen, Aslak Liestøl, James E. Knirk (eds.). Oslo: Norsk Historisk Kjeldeskrift-Institutt, 1941–1990; *Danmarks Runeindskrifter*. Lis Jacobsen and Erik Moltke (eds.). Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1941–1942; *Sveriges Runinskrifter*. Erik Brate, Elias Wessén, Sven B. F. Jansson, Elisabeth Svärdström et al. (eds.). Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1900–1981.

Oslo's rail network, the so-called Follobane project, resulted in several notable new rune finds. A number of international projects are currently working to establish good digital platforms for the documentation of runic inscriptions across current national borders. These include the Scandinavian Runic-text Database (Uppsala) and RuneS (Kiel). The aims of runology have been the theme of many debates within the academic community in response to existential questions.[07] What is the primary task of runology? Is it to provide access to the latest documentation? How should the discipline be classified? Is it a branch of archaeology, philology, or linguistics? Which interest should guide the way the subject is pursued — language development or cultural history?

Runological work is characterised by the intersecting activities of documenting, researching, and interpreting already known and newly found inscriptions. While in the process of cataloguing all the known inscriptions in the oldest futhark for *Norges Innskrifter med de ældre Runer* (NIæR), Sophus Bugge was regularly distracted by new finds that demanded his attention. The same was the case for the philologists Magnus Olsen and Aslak Liestøl while collecting information for *Norges Innskrifter med de yngre Runer* (NIyR). In particular, they had to contend with a considerable quantity of runic material from Bryggen in Bergen, which required extensive work.

The archaeological excavations carried out in the 1950s and 60s, following the fire that ravaged Bryggen in 1955, resulted in numerous finds of relevance.[08] Thus a cultural-historical tragedy became a source of cultural-historical treasure. The fire allowed archaeologists to excavate the old wharf sites, providing insights into layers of history from further back in time than those that were already known. Sticks with runic inscriptions contributed new knowledge about everyday life and trading activities and have also been the subject of extensive research in relation to language development.[09] As a consequence of the Bryggen findings, the need arose yet again to correct and supplement earlier runological works with fresh interpretations and analyses. New finds can shed light on older finds, especially when they involve hitherto unknown words or spellings. These allow the scholar to reassess earlier interpretations of other inscriptions or even to reject them. Accordingly, sources are constantly subject to reinterpretation, and our understanding of history is forever changing.

The inscription on A 321 is read upwards from the base on the one side (A side) and continues downwards from top, to about half way, on the other (B side).

5 10
ᚴᛅᛚᛒᛁ: ᚠᛅᛚᛒᛁ : ᛆᚴᛚᛅ
a: kales: fales: akla
5
ᚼᛆᚴᛚᛅ
b: hakla

The oldest futhark (runic alphabet) underwent major changes during the transition from Proto-Norse to the Viking Age. Originally consisting of 24 characters, the futhark was reduced to 16 characters. One reason for this was graphic simplification — some of the runes that originally had two staves became single-stave runes — another was that certain single characters came to represent more than one sound, such as the k rune, which became the sign for both k and g.[10]

07. In the years 2013–14, a research group at CAS, Oslo, worked on a new contribution to the subject of runology, with the aim of producing a *Håndbok i runologi* (Handbook of Runology). Several scholars have expressed opinions on the subject, including Michael Barnes: "What Is Runology, and Where Does it Stand Today?" *Futhark. International Journal of Runic Studies*, 4, 2013, and: "On Types of Argumentation in Runic Studies", *Proceedings of the Third International Symposium on Runes and Runic Inscriptions, Grindaheim* 1990. James E. Knirk (ed.). Uppsala University, 1994. Elmer Antonsen raised similar questions in 1994 (printed 1995) in "What kind of Science is Runology?" Pamphlet in *Det Kg. Norske Videnskaabers Selskabs Forhandlinger*, Oslo, 1995, as did also Marie Stoklund in "Runer før, nu og fremover", in *Studier i Nordisk 2004–2005*. Copenhagen: Selskab for Nordisk Filologi, 2006.

08. *Norges Innskrifter med de yngre Runer*, 1941–1980. Only 44 of the Bryggen inscriptions are registered in Vol. VI of this publication. Aslak Liestøl estimates that this corresponds to just five percent of the total number of inscriptions from Bryggen.

09. Spurkland, Terje: *Fonografematisk analyse av runematerialet fra Bryggen i Bergen*. PhD thesis. University of Oslo, 1991.

10. See, for example, Spurkland 2001: 163, and other introductory books on runes.

Several further runic finds have been made in Norway since the extensive discoveries at Bryggen, not least in conjunction with major excavation projects in Oslo, Trondheim, and Tønsberg. Most of the newly found artefacts date from the Middle Ages. Inscriptions with runes in the older futhark, i.e. dating from roughly the 3rd to the 8th century AD, are found only rarely. Over the past twenty years, two sensational rune stones dating back to the age of migration have come to light. In 2009, a large stone with runes from this period was found during work on a private garden project in Mandal. While the runologists were studying the inscription with all the tools at their disposal, archaeologists explored the immediate surroundings and soon discovered that the rune stone was situated on the edge of a burial ground. The burial ground was divided between several terraces, and it is possible that the rune stone marked an entrance to one of these, rather than being a marker for one particular grave.[11] The work of deciphering the inscription is still ongoing. True to the spirit of their discipline, runologists are keeping a range of interpretations on the table, so long as they meet the conditions for linguistic correctness.[12]

James E. Knirk published a first reading of the inscription in 2012 in the Norwegian archaeological journal *Viking* and followed up with a revised reading in 2016, issued available as a report from the Runic Archives:[13]

a) kelbaþewas:stainaR:aaasrpkf
b) aarpaa:inananaboR
c) eknaudigastiR
d) ekerafaR

Translating word for word, this could be rendered as follows:

a) Skelba-þewaR's ["Shaking-servant's"] stone [=(grave) monument]. aaasrpkf | aarpaa [Alphabet magic]
b) ?Within/From within the ?wheel-nave/? cabin-corner [or: ?needle].
c) I [=the rune carver] [am called] Naudigastir ["Need-guest"];
d) I, [nicknamed] the Wolverine.

A complete reading is difficult in the case of Hogganvik due to the condition of the stone's surface, which is uneven and heavily weathered. But things could have been worse. Given that the stone has been lying in the ground for possibly 1,600 years, it is uncommonly well preserved. The earth that lay on top of it served as a protective layer. The fact that the inscription was found and deciphered at all is a sensation that deservedly attracted considerable media coverage.

There are several uncertainties relating to the inscription. One concerns the first word in one line of the inscription. Initially, the runologists agreed that kelba was the most likely reading of the first word of the first line, probably in the sense of "heifer", a reading that was deemed fairly certain at the time.[14] However, further work with the runic inscription has persuaded runologists to change their opinion about the first rune being a k. The reading kelba- is problematic on linguistic criteria, and moreover, traces of a possibly weathered s just before the k have been recognised. Hence it is suggested that the first word should be read as skelba "shiver". One character difference, and the entire meaning of the inscription has changed. This example illustrates the kind of uncertainties that affect many interpretations of inscriptions where the rune characters are damaged.

In 2017, another sensational rune stone turned up in Norway, this time on the Øverby farm in Rakkestad. In this case, the stone was already open to view in the garden of Randi and Olav Schie. In fact, the couple had been using it as a garden bench since 1991 and were aware of something that looked like carvings along one edge. It was only when a new neighbour managed to document the inscription on the edge

11. Zanette Glørstad, Jakob Johansson, Frans-Arne Stylegar. "Minnelund og monument. Runesteinen på Hogganvik, Mandal, Vest-Agder", in *Viking. Norsk arkeologisk årbok*. Vol. LXXIV, 2011.

12. On the linguistic approach of runologists, see e.g. Moltke 1985, Antonsen 1995, and Lena Peterson: "Runologi: Försök till ett aktuellt signalement", in *Saga och Sed: Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademiens årsbok* 1995, 1996.

13. James E. Knirk: "Hogganvik-innskriften: en hard runologisk nøtt", in *Viking. Norsk arkeologisk årbok*. Vol. LXXIV, 2011; James E. Knirk, "Revised preliminary report", available online: https://web.archive.org/web/20110604175927/http://www.khm.uio.no/forskning/publikasjoner/runenews/hogganvik/report-2.pdf [As of 03.06.2023]

14. Knirk 2011: 28.

of the stone in low spring sunlight that it became possible to identify it as runic. News about the stone spread rapidly, arousing significant interest both in Norway and abroad. Further documentation work was carried out using advanced digital technology such as scanning and photogrammetry, in addition to more conventional on-site survey methods. A fully satisfying interpretation will be difficult to achieve, since the inscription on the flat side of the stone (B-side) had been embedded in the ground and is badly damaged.[15]

Examination of the inscription on the Øverby stone suggests that it dates to the late 5th century. The runic inscription runs over one line on the edge of the stone (A-side) and two lines on the flat side (B-side). A preliminary transliteration runs as follows:
Line 1: lụ:irilaʀraskaʀrunọʀ
Line 2: inisni:[……]ạteʀfạụ
Line 3: ịnị

The group of researchers studying the stone has suggested the reading: *lū irilaʀ raskaʀ rūnōʀ in(n) Īsni* "carve quick / skilled iril runes in for Isni!". The word *irilaʀ* is striking, because it means the inscription can be grouped together with ten other Proto-Norse *iril / eril* inscriptions from various locations in Scandinavia, where it would seem that *iril* denotes a position of administrative power in a past society.[16]

Uncertainty remains about several aspects of the reading. In particular, the imperative lū!, an archaic form of the Norse j-verb *lýja*, "to hammer, strike, etc.", is unexpected, as it is not known from other inscriptions. The inscription is badly damaged where the inscription on the edge begins and in large sections on the flat side of the stone. The reading "lu" as the first word of the inscription on the A-side is reinforced by line 2 on the B-side of the inscription on the larger surface, which, it has been suggested, should be read as *in* or *into*, and for the benefit of *Īsni*, which could be a female name inflected as an i-stem.[17] Several inscriptions from the same period are preserved in which the rune carver describes that the runes are carved for a certain person. It is therefore conceivable that the same is true for this inscription.

The stone was apparently once fetched from a ridge along the edge of a ploughed field on the farm, close to a former burial ground. Discussions are ongoing about the possibilities of re-erecting the stone as a cultural heritage monument to a vanished past in the area where it was initially found. The subject matter of the inscription has generated new contextual historical interpretations about ancient power structures.[18] In all probability, new attempts to interpret the stone will follow once it is standing and freely accessible to the public.

The inscriptions on the stones from Hogganvik and Øverby are by no means alone in the challenges they present to linguistic interpretation. In the late 19th century the field of runology was largely defined by linguistic challenges.[19] At a time when considerable efforts were being made to raise national awareness for antiquities and ancient heritage, linguistic identity was a primary motivation for work on runes. Any significant understanding of runes presupposed a profound knowledge of linguistics, and runology was usually seen as more closely allied to linguistics than to any other discipline. The in-depth study of language and linguistics is a defining feature of the subject even today, often combined with studies of a contextual nature.[20] Within the runology community, it is common to distinguish between *field runologists* (those who work with runic inscriptions in the field, deciphering and decoding inscriptions) and *desk runologists* (those who interpret runic inscriptions and use them in comparative research). Linguistics plays a role in both branches of the discipline. Researchers who adopt a broader approach to the material

15. Frode Iversen, Karoline Kjesrud, Harald Bjorvand, Justin Kimball and Sigrid Gundersen 2019. "Irilen på Øverby i Vingulmark", in *Viking*. Vol. 92: 63-98.
16. Iversen et al. 2019.
17. Iversen et al. 2019.
18. Frands Herschend: "From *IrilaR* to *Erl* — identity and career 5th to 9th century CE". *Collegium Medievale* Vol. 33, 2020.
19. The same academic orientation towards linguistics was also adopted in Denmark, following the work of Ludvig A. Wimmer. Ludvig Holm-Olsen describes the development in: *Lys over norrøn kultur*. Oslo: Cappelens forlag, 1981: 99.
20. See, for example, Henrik Williams: "Runstenarnas sociala dimension", *Futhark. International Journal of Runic Studies* 4, 2013, Marcho Bianchi: *Runor som resurs. Vikingatida skriftkultur i Uppland och Södermanland*. PhD thesis, Uppsala, 2010.

are often criticised for being remote from the material and for failing to take further examples and various linguistic considerations into account.[21]

The inscription on the A side of A 321 measures 29 mm from the first to the last stave. Stretching from edge to edge of the stick, the height of the runes is 6–7 mm. The twig and stave of rune 2 and the stave of rune 3 are affected by surface damage. The stave of rune 5 is damaged in several places. In rune 6, despite damage to the entire left edge of the stave, the stave is clearly visible from the junction of the lowest twig and upwards. In rune 12, a small splinter has broken away at the junction of the twig and the stave. In rune 14, the twig starts from a point very low on the stave and stretches almost to the outer edge of the stick; thus it sits lower down than the twig on rune 11.

Rune 4 has been punctuated with the tip of a knife roughly half-way down the stave. Rune 5 may also be punctuated, but in this case the punctuation coincides with damage. The punctuation on rune 9 is placed fairly high up, above the tip of the twig of rune 8. Rune 10 is punctuated at the bottom of the stave.

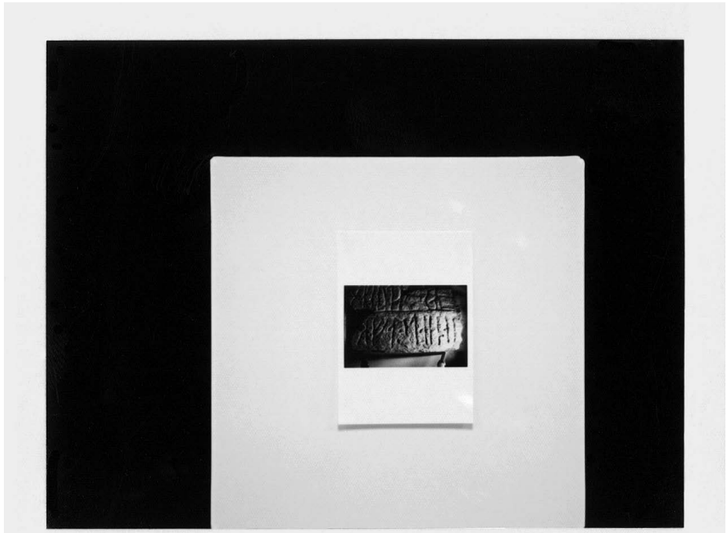
The inscription also includes short dashes as punctuation marks. The punctuation mark between runes 5 and 6 on the A side shows damage. Two short indistinct lines are placed one below the other, although not in a straight orientation. The lower line is at a slight angle, and is transected by a horizontal line. This line may be damage from a later date. The punctuation mark is also indistinct between runes 10 and 11. In this case, the mark consists of two short, slightly sloping lines — the upper inclined to the left, the lower to the right. Here as well, the dashes are uneven and not arranged one below the other.

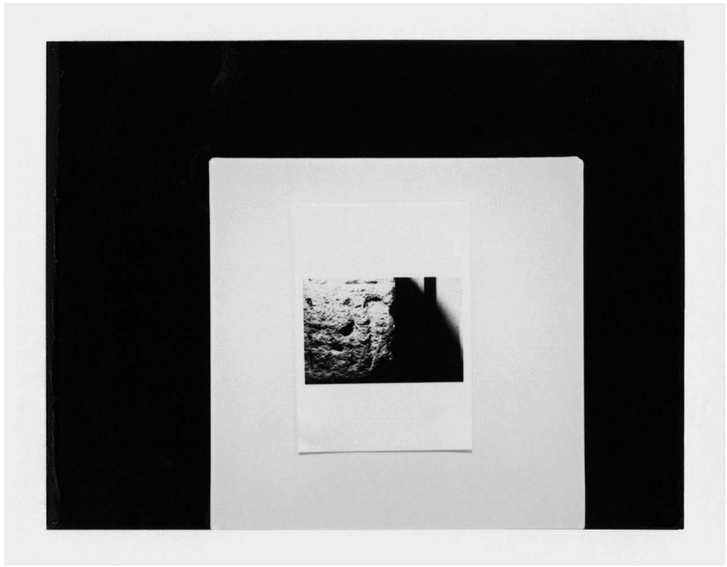
THE ANCIENT IS MYTHICAL. OR NOT SO?

Stories about places, mythical events and artefacts help to reinforce belonging and identity. Based on such stories, symbols are created, which themselves become important markers of identity. In many social contexts, not least that of Norwegian history, the concept of identity is synonymous with what is "ancient", "original", "genuine", or "authentic". In the quest to find the deepest roots of Norwegian cultural heritage, peasant culture has often been highlighted as an ideal,[22] most notably during the national romantic period in the late 19th century. The dominant idea was that the regions deepest within the country had survived untouched by international trade and cultural influences. It was here that one would find what was authentically Norwegian, that which came from the depths of the original people. Runologist Jonas Nordby has shown how, during the 18th century and through to the end of the 19th century, interest in runic writing flourished in inland Norway.[23] Anything pristine and authentic was considered valuable, while influences from elsewhere were perceived as different and even in some contexts as a potential threat. In the early decades of the 20th century, these same ideas about Norwegian culture were ideologically weaponised. Both Wilhelm Saures from the SS and Reichsführer-SS, Heinrich Himmler, visited Gudbrandsdalen in Norway in order to study the cultural heritage of the Proto-Germans. They believed that traces of a pure Nordic "race" could be found in "pristine" Norwegian peasant culture.[24] Their agenda was thoroughly ideological.

In developing their ideological symbols, the Nazis drew inspiration from Scandinavia, and especially Norway, where they found the genuinely Nordic to be represented in runes and craft traditions. Reflecting this narrative about the Proto-Germanic race, the Proto-Norse language, represented by the Proto-Norse runes, were considered as symbols of a language, history and culture. In 1940, the German linguist Wolfgang Krause was fetched into the *Ahnenerbe* project to head a special research

21. For example, Bernard Mees and Mindy Mac Leod have produced a typological study of "Magical objects" in *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects*. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006. Michael Schulte criticised them for linguistic and methodological weaknesses in their work, especially for presenting insufficient source criticism and lack of accuracy when addressing the sources: "Review of *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects*, by Mindy MacLeod and Bernard Mees (2006)", in *Journal of Germanic Linguistics 19*, 2007.
22. Terje Emberland and Matthew Kott. *Himmlers Norge*. Oslo: Aschehoug Forlag, 2013.
23. Jonas Nordby. "Nyere tids runer i Hardanger", *Hardanger historielag*. Hardanger, 2002; and *Etterreformatoriske runeinnskriftene i Norge*. MA thesis. University of Oslo, 2001.
24. Emberland and Kott 2013: 74–75, 183–185.





institute for the study of runes, the *Lehr- und Forschungsstätte für Runen- und Sinnbildkunde*. Although Krause did not contribute directly to the development of runes as the symbols now characteristically associated with Nazism, *Ahnenerbe* did encourage him to make rune monuments accessible as a means to highlight a Proto-Germanic heritage.[25] First and foremost, he brought the perspective of a linguist to his work on runes, producing knowledge that has been important in later rune research. The person most responsible for investing runes with new symbolic meanings was Hermann Wirth, at least until he was expelled from *Ahnenerbe* in 1938. For Wirth, the distinction between language and symbol was immaterial.[26] The esoteric approach to runes within an ideological framework and in the service of racial purity was pursued further by Guido von List.[27]

Runes were adapted to carry new symbolic messages as identity markers for German National Socialism. Perhaps the most notorious example is the S rune as used in the SS insignia, but also the hagal rune h and the odal rune o became important for propaganda purposes. But what kind of symbolic power did runes possess back in Proto-Nordic or Viking times, or in the Middle Ages? Did they carry symbolic values beyond their use as linguistic signs?

Runologists are careful to emphasise that runes were characters in a writing system, each symbolising a distinct sound.[28] In combination, they form meaningful words and sentences. In addition, each rune had a name. The name of the rune begins with the same sound that the rune signifies. The names were mnemotechnical tools, useful in remembering the sound of the rune, while the sound would help one remember the name. Many of the rune names reference aspects of a peasant's daily life, such as farming, weather and wind, thus also making them easier to remember. The ø-rune had the name *sól*, meaning "sun", the B-rune *bjarkan*, meaning "birch", and the }n-rune *nauð*, meaning "need". In some contexts, it seems, a single rune could be used as shorthand for the thing denoted by its name. For example, in some manuscripts otherwise written in Latin script, the m-rune is used as an abbreviation for *maðr*, i.e. man / human being. This is referred to as the ideographic use of runes.

The inscription continues on the B-side of the stick. Here it extends from one end to just below the half-way point. The inscription measures 11 mm from the first to the last stave. The lower sections of the staves of runes 2 and 3 curve slightly to the left. There is damage to the surface along the stave of rune 4. The two twigs that cross rune 1 do not intersect precisely on the stave but slightly to the left of it. Thus the crossing point is below the centre of the stave. There is a larger gap between runes 1 and 2 than between the other runes in the inscription.

Combinations of runes that do not make sense when read with their sound value, such as aaasrpkf:aarpaa on the Hogganvik stone, seem to invite alternative readings and interpretations. The inscription on the Hogganvik stone is probably an example of so-called "alphabet magic" in a system that is now unknown to us,[29] or a hitherto unknown cipher. Many runic ciphers were in use during the Viking era and the Middle Ages, and the inscription on the Hogganvik stone may well be an example of a system runologists have not yet recognised.

Throughout history, interest in interpreting even the most complex inscriptions has been widespread. Inscriptions that do not make immediate sense have been the subject of numerous attempts at interpretation. The solutions that have been proposed can generally be divided into those where the researcher has applied a contextual approach, and those where the inscription has been approached primarily from a linguistic angle. Both can lead to fruitful results. For example, the linguist Ottar Grønvik criticised the philologist Magnus Olsen for placing too much trust in contextual factors while ignoring linguistic developments in his study of Strømsbrynet (the whetstone from Strøm)

25. Ulrich Hunger: *Die Runenkunde im Dritten Reich*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984: 220–238.
26. Ibid.
27. Guido von List published a series of books through his publishing house Verlag der Guido von List Gesellschaft starting in 1909. His series includes titles such as: *Die Völkernamen Germaniens und deren Deutung* (No. 4), and *Die Kabbala und die Esoterik des Armanismus* (No. 7).
28. See e.g. James E. Knirk: "Runer som tegn og symboler", in *Middelalderens symboler*. Ann Christensson et al. Bergen: Senter for europeiske kulturstudie, 1997: 86.
29. Knirk 2011: 33–34.

KJ 50, in which Olsen suggests the reading: A: *Horn skal væde denne (Bryne)sten!* B: *Skad en af de paa Holmgangsvolden anvendte (hellige) Plugge og ligg (som følge deraf) fældet i kamp!* [A: Horn will wet this (whet)stone! B: Harm one of those used (sacred) on the Holmgangsvolden (The duel enbankment). Plug and lie (as a consequence thereof) felled in battle!][30] Grønvik himself believed the inscription should be interpreted solely on the basis of the stage of linguistic development of which it is an example, in which case, he claims, it can be understood as a reference to a cultic act of grave desecration, rather than as a description of the object. His own reading runs roughly as follows: *(Han) vekte opp mannen, de hines drikkebror, den skammelige beskadiger av "den høye*" [(He) woke the man, his drinking fellow, the shameful desecrator of "the high"].[31] Where Magnus Olsen reads the inscription as describing an object, Grønvik reads it as a reference to a cultic act. Runologist Terje Spurkland argues that Grønvik does in fact attribute major significance to the grave as the site where the object with the inscription was found, despite his emphasis on linguistic argumentation. For his own part, Spurkland believes the most plausible reading of the Strømsbrynet whetstone relates to the *object's* practical purpose: *Let the horn wet this stone. Let the hay be cut! Let the hay lie!*[32] In 2019, Harald Bjorvand proposed a new reading of the inscription that took the linguistic criteria, the contextual circumstances of the grave, and the object's original purpose into consideration. The whetstone was not found as part of a regular burial, but rather a burial for of someone who might have been considered an outcast in society (hali). In this case, it could be read: A: *(man) druknet den utuktige mann*. B: *hestens skjender/hestedskjender, ligg (du) med hån/spott!* [One drowned the lewd man. The horse's abuser, lay thou with scorn].[33] The object, a non-typical grave goods, was meant to scorn the dead one alone. His acts brought him death as punishment and the object buried together with him symbolised the low esteem in which society held this man after his brutal behaviour.

Some scholars have gone further than others in linking runic inscriptions to cultic rituals. But it seems that most runologists are careful to make a distinction between ascribing magical powers to runes and acknowledging that runes were used to write magic formulae.[34] There is a greater tolerance for interpreting runic inscriptions in a context involving the pursuit of magic than there is for interpreting individual runic characters as magical in themselves. Among contemporary runologists there is little doubt that the primary function of runes was communication, even when specific inscriptions do not convey a message to the viewer.[35] Even where runes appear to have been used in imitation of other inscriptions, they can still be evidence of a writing culture or indicate knowledge thereof.

> A 321 has been assigned to the archive for "New finds from the rest of the country after 1960". The archive material in the folder consists of find reports, descriptions of the object, sketches, and an excerpt from an article by Elisabeth Svärdström relating to the content of the inscription. Describing inscriptions with rhyme schemes from "The runic finds from Gamla Lödöse", the excerpt argues that the formulaic inscription *ales:tales:arfales* could be a garbled form of hocus-pocus.[36] The inscription on A 321 — *kales:fales:akla:hakla* — also sounds formulaic with a pattern similar to *ales:tales:arfales*, whereby ales is varied by starting with the letters k and f, while *akla* may also have been initially varied through the addition of an h: *hakla*.

Even if runes are not magical in themselves, still they have a life of their own as symbols, and for many they are essential tools — used as oracles and in divination, or as markers of identity. The use of runes in modern times can often be attributed to the similarity of the characters to ideograms, meaning that they stand for concepts rather than phonetic values. The runes also possess universal geometric qualities. For those who use the Proto-Norse runes for

30. *Norges Innskrifter med de ælder runer*, Vol. II: 677–710 and Vol. III: 266–267. Ottar Grønvik: *Fra Vimose til Ødemotland*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1996: 137.
31. Grønvik 1996: 136–154.
32. Spurkland 2001: 44–45.
33. Harald Bjorvand 2019: "Dramaet på Strømsbrynet", *Maal og minne* 2, 1–17.
34. Barnes 2013: 25.
35. Bianchi 2013, Barnes 2013, Spurkland 2001.
36. Elisabeth Svärdström: *Runfynden från Gamla Lödöse*. Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademieni. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1982: 12.

spiritual or ideological purposes, their straight graphic lines and sharp angles evoke a sense of purity and something unaffected and ancient. Most runologists agree that these linear shapes were preferred because they were easier to cut into wood.[37] For those who believe they know their correct use, runes are a source of spiritual experience in virtue of their symbolic values. Despite the appeal of runes as graphic forms, the difference in symbolic functions ascribed to them by different interest groups is vast.

The word *rune* is often defined as having several meanings, some relating to the aspect of a writing system, some to the aspect of arcane symbolism and occult knowledge. Etymologically speaking, the word "rune" has been traced back to earlier abstract terms in the Germanic languages that denoted "hidden lore", something secret, whereas the sense of "graphic symbol" is, from the etymological perspective, "clearly secondary".[38] Those who use runes for esoteric purposes prefer to highlight this historical meaning of the word, which effectively forms the background for the systems of runic magic they develop for contemporary use. The values ascribed to runes tend to correlate with the kind of origin theory favoured by the person who shows an interest in them. Stephen Flowers, aka Edred Thorsson, links the development of runes to Bronze Age petroglyphs and symbolic communication. In his view, runes were symbols primarily in the magical sense. Their use as characters in a writing system was a secondary development, inspired by the Greek and Latin alphabets.[39] The graphic forms, he tells us, evolved from symbols used by Bronze Age priests in cultic rituals, as recorded in petroglyphs. It was the ideographic use of symbols during the Bronze Age, he believes, that made the development of runes as characters possible, despite the fact that the carving of petroglyphs seems to have ceased around 500 BC, whereas runes first began to be used around the year 200 AD, i.e. 700 years later. Most contemporary runologists agree that runes developed as a writing system under the influence of Mediterranean languages.[40] Runic magic is often associated with Norse mythology and the realm of the gods as described in the Old Norse Edda poems. Some regard Odin as the first and supreme shaman, a deity who moved between different spirit realms and possessed appropriate insights.[41]

The source most frequently cited in support of this view is the "Sayings of the High One", stanzas 138–143, of the *Hávamál*. It is sometimes claimed of this poem that it was passed down to mortal mankind by Odin himself, rather than being a literary poetic narrative composed in the Middle Ages.

Some people associate runic magic with proximity to nature and holistic spirituality, a practice that is unconstrained by religious dogma or doctrine and more about the cultivation of personal spiritual insights and contacts with the spirit world. For them, runes are symbolic of such contact. But where some regard spiritual experience as a private matter, others see it as a business opportunity. Dedicated spiritualist centres offer part-time courses in shamanism and runic magic,[42] while countless handbooks on runic magic are available to those who want them. The books on offer vary greatly in the amount of historical background they provide. Here one finds scholars who base their knowledge on the work of esoterics from 17th- or early 20th-century intellectual circles,[43] while others present more superficial treatments of sundry traditions in a style that is popularised

37. Ray I. Page: *Runes*. London: British Museum Press, 1987: 8; Moltke 1985: 32.
38. Harald Bjorvand and Fredrik Otto Lindeman: *Våre Arveord*. Oslo: Novus forlag, 2000.
39. Edred Thorsson: Futhark. *A Handbook of Rune Magic*. San Francisco: Weiser Books, 1984: 3–5.
40. Henrik Williams: "The Origins of the Runes", in *Frisian Runes and Neighbouring Traditions. Proceedings of the First International Symposium on Frisian Runes at the Fries Museum*, Leeuwarden. Amsterdam: Atlanta, 1996: 212. Erik Moltke: *Runes and their Origin. Denmark and Elsewhere*. Copenhagen: The National Museum of Denmark, 1985: 22.
41. Jörgen I. Eriksson: *Rune Magic & Shamanism. Original Nordic Knowledge from Mother Earth*. Umeå: Norrshaman, 2012. Pål Esben Wanvig: "Runemagi er vår skjulte magiske arv", in *Medium* No. 10, 2012.
42. https://www.wanvig.no/ritualmagi-og-strukturell-magi-med-runer/ [As of 03.06.2023]
43. Edred Thorsson (1984) singles out Karl Williguť, S.A. Kummer and F.B. Marby. Thomas Karlsson, in his *Uthark. Nightside of the Runes* (Ouroboros Produktion, 2002), draws inspiration from Sigurd Agrell and Johannes Bureus, while Jörgen I. Eriksson bases his *Qabalah, Qliphoth and Goetic Magic* (Ajna, 2004–2012) on Agrell's Utharken hypothesis.

and easy to understand.[44] If these handbooks are to be believed, the rudiments of runic magic can be practised by anyone with the appropriate interest, while deeper insight into the magical and spiritual world to which runes provide access can only be acquired through training and the guidance of a master — as is generally the case with esoteric systems. The rituals are important, but the aspect of crucial significance is the form of the runes involved. For it is the rune's form, its manifest shape, that gives it its symbolic qualities and power.

THE RUNIC ARCHIVE IN THE TOPOGRAPHICAL ARCHIVE

All documentation of Norwegian rune objects, both historical and contemporary, is preserved in the Topographical Archive, which is part of the archives of the Museum of Cultural History. Until recently, the Runic Archive was a separate part of the museum's Collection of Norwegian Antiquities that was closely associated with important figures in the field of runological research in Norway: Sophus Bugge, Magnus Olsen, Aslak Liestøl, and James E. Knirk. The Runic Archive has since been incorporated into the larger Topographical Archive, where Kristel Zilmer has responsibility for inscriptions including new acquisitions. The archive material relating to individual objects includes handwritten documents, drawings, and personal effects from the early rune researchers, such as photographs and slide collections, drawings of localised artefacts (stones, church interiors etc.), collections of prints, casts and drawings of inscriptions, databases and libraries. As knowledge accumulates and technological advances lead to new epigraphic readings, earlier interpretations become ripe for review.[45] Thus runologists are constantly re-examining inscriptions.

The formulaic word *agla* appears in many runic inscriptions together with other such words, biblical names, and the names of angels. *Akla / agla* is often repeated several times successively, as in N 643, a stick from Søre Søstergården, Bryggen, in Bergen. In this object, *agla* is carved three times (almost — the third iteration lacks an a). Each rune sign is separated from the next by an incised cross, as is also the case on N 642 and N 639.

On A 321, the space between runes 1 and 2 on the B side may indicate that rune 1 is to be understood as a separate symbol, rather than as the first rune in the ensuing word. Knirk has suggested that the sign should be read not as the rune h, but as a Christ monogram.[46] It is worth noting that the line that crosses the stave is set fairly low and the transection point is imprecise.

The Runic Archive receives dozens of objects for study every year, a large number of which are what runologists call *forgeries*. This means they are imitations of runic inscriptions carved in recent times. *Authentic* inscriptions are ones that were made in the period when runic script was in widespread use as a writing system. Runologists have been using this distinction to sort authentic from false inscriptions for centuries. False inscriptions are understood as those that were not produced in the period that the palaeographic or linguistic evidence suggests they were.[47] This categorisation of inscriptions could be regarded as typical for runological purposes. Paradoxically, inscriptions are considered authentic even when they and their objects have been removed from their original context, provided the inscription is assumed to have been

44. Andy Baggott: *Runer*. Anness Publishing Limited, 1998 / Norwegian edition: Bladkompaniet, 1999: 7. Alex Thrand: *Runorna. Skrivtecken & Magi*. Malmö: Valkyria Förlag, 1994.

45. Methodological work has been facilitated by new technological tools since 1932, when Erik Moltke wrote about "Tekniske hjælpemidler og metoder i epigrafiens tjeneste med særligt henblik på runeindskrifter" (Technical aids and methods in the service of epigraphy with special reference to runic inscriptions), in *Fornvännen* 27. For example: Michelle Waldispühl: *Schreibpraktiken und Schriftwissen in südgermanischen Runeninschriften*. Zurich: Chronos, 2013; Laila Kitzler Åhfeldt: "Work and Worship. Laser Scanner Analysis of Viking Age Rune Stones", in *Theses and Papers in Archeology B:9*. Stockholm: Archaeological Research Laboratory, 2002; Laila Kitzler Åhfeldt: "Surface Structure Analysis of Runic Inscriptions on Rock. A Method for distinguishing between individual carvers", in *Rock Art Research*. 17:2, 2000; Jan O.H. Swantesson: "Läsning av inskriptioner med hjälp av mikrokarteringsteknik", in Jan Ragnar Hagland and Audun Dybdahl: *Innskrifter og datering. Dating Inscriptions*. Trondheim: Tapir, 1998.

46. James E. Knirk: "A 321 Oslo", in *Nytt om Runer. Meldingsblad for runeforskning 5*, 1990 [1991]: 17.

47. *Danmarks Runeindskrifter*. Sagsregister, 1941–42.

138 I know that I hung on a windswept tree
nine long nights,
wounded with a spear, dedicated to Odin,
myself to myself,
on that tree of which no man knows
from where its roots run.

139 With no bread did they refresh me nor a drink from a horn,
downwards I peered;
I took up the runes, screaming I took them,
then I fell back from there.

140 Nine mighty spells I learnt from the famous son
of Bolthor, Bestla's father,
and I got a drink of the precious mead,
I, soaked from Odrerir.

141 Then I began to quicken and be wise,
and to grow and to prosper;
one word from another word found a word for me,
one deed from another deed found a deed for me.

142 The runes you must find and meaningful letters,
very great letters,
very stiff letters,
which the mighty sage coloured
and the huge Powers made
and the runemaster of the gods carved out.

143 Odin among the Æsir, and Dain among the elves,
Dvalin among the dwarfs,
Asvid among the giants,
I myself carved some.

"Hávamál", stanzas 138–143. From *The Poetic Edda*, translation: Carolyne Larrington. Oxford University Press 1996, pp. 75–76.

carved in the period when the runic script was in common use. Inscriptions produced at a later date are frequently classified as "false", even if genuine in terms of their internal contexts and for the people who created them. Due to the negative connotations of the term "false", many researchers in recent years have preferred less loaded categorisations: "modern", "recent", "post-Reformation", "peasant runes", "newest runes". According to the definition of Jonas Nordby, runes are only false when the inscription was produced with the deliberate intention of misleading people to consider it older than it is.[48] Although every inscription entails an intended meaning, the intention behind many of the more recent inscriptions may have to do with ideology or antiquarian interests. While they may not be false for those who wrote them, it is still the case that they do not date from a time when runes constituted a living writing system; accordingly, they have to be understood on the basis of other criteria. Runologists seek to limit their material to a historical period and to focus on questions relating to the writing systems that were then in use. In many ways, more recent runes live a life of their own.

In the 1930s, Wolfgang Krause compiled a survey of inscriptions written in the older futhark. One chapter of his book was dedicated to magical formulae written in Proto-Norse runes. In this, he presents *alu*, *lina*, and *laukar* as formulaic words with protective functions.[49] Krause thought inscriptions that used these words may have been intended for some kind of cultic practice, and that the words could be understood as connoting *protection*. Krause's identification of the meaning of runic words fuelled fresh interest in runes as a coded language.[50] At the Runic Archive, inscriptions were examined, recorded, and documented.[51] In 1983, a knife that once belonged to Vidkun Quisling was submitted to the Runic Archive for examination. Incised into the shaft of the knife were Proto-Norse runes that read: *alu:lina:laukar*. The runes were immediately dismissed as "false" and linked to an interest in copying ancient cultic inscriptions. The inscription contains a "copying error".[52] The knife has since vanished from the Hjemmefrontsmuseet (Norway's Resistance Museum), where it was kept. It is worth noting that a weapon used in the Norwegian terrorist attack in July 22nd 2011, was also engraved with runes copied from a Proto-Norse inscription.

> The inscription on A 321 reads *kales fales akla (h) akla*. It is a combination of words that sounds formulaic. Like *akla*, a formulaic word found on a variety of artefacts, *kales fales* crops up repeatedly in runic inscriptions. The meaning of *kales fales* remains to be elucidated. When written in runes, *akla* is read as *agla*; it is understood as a Judeo-Christian acronym for the phrase *attah gibbôr le ôlam adônay*: "Thou, O Lord, art mighty forever."
>
> The formula is written on an amulet, and for the person who wore it, it may have given a sense of strength and reassurance. Other inscriptions with formulae similar to *agla* tend to be found on amulets, lead plates, and small crucifixes. If the amulet was considered protective, it was so within the horizon of Christian beliefs.[53]

"THOU, O LORD, ART MIGHTY FOREVER"

Runes are a source of interest to people from many social backgrounds and circles. In particular, they figure in the work of historical documentation and are often used to emphasise national independence and identity. Such political use of runes is confined to minority groups and stirs a wealth of emotions, among both the knowledgeable and the ignorant. One could imagine that the simplest way to avoid the problematic aspects of runes would be to focus on them as a writing system and to ignore their many and varied uses as symbols. It is, however, difficult to distinguish between the use of runes as elements in a writing system and as symbols — insofar as language itself possesses a symbolic authority that grounds and reinforces identity. Stories of ethnicity, myths of origin, and religious rituals have given rise to many symbols. While identity is built from such "just-so stories", the actual symbols are the runes themselves.

Runes as symbols in religious, ideological, and fantastical contexts fall outside runology as an academic discipline, despite the fact that it is precisely these functions that popular culture often wants to know more about. Runology is concerned with the history of language and only to a lesser extent with cultural history. Hence, the potential of runes as symbols and creators of identity is often left to people with only a passing and speculative interest in history. Just as formulae and formulaic words find application in new fields of life, runes survive as universal symbols — perhaps all the way to eternity?

48. Nordby 2001: 126.
49. Krause, Wolfgang: *Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark*. Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1937. On the subject of laukaR, Krause published his own booklet: *Beiträge zur Runenforschung*. Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1934.
50. Nordby 2001: 133.
51. See e.g. James E. Knirk: "Glomstad, Brandval / Kongsvinger i Hedmark, Klebersteinsfragment", in *Nytt om runer* 14, 1999: 17.
52. Archive material for Y 63.
53. Christian magical inscriptions have received considerable scholarly attention over the centuries. See e.g. Per Beskow: "Runor och liturgi", in *Nordens kristnande i europeiskt perspektiv*. Skara: Viktoria Bokförlag, 1994; Dror Segev: *Medieval Magic and Magicians — in Norway and Elsewhere: Based upon 12th — 15th Centuries Manuscript and Runic Evidence*. Oslo: Senter for studier i vikingtid og nordisk middelalder, 2001.

ALESSIA BAUER received her PhD in Older Germanic literature at the University of Göttingen in 2001 and started her professional career as assistant lecturer for Scandinavian Studies at the University of Göttingen (2004–2007) and continued this activity afterwards at the University of Munich (2007–2019). She spent three terms as visiting professor at the University of Oslo (2015–2016). Since October 2019 she holds the chair in Scandinavian Studies at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris. Alessia Bauer has been working on the field of runology since her PhD; at present, she is member of a comprehensive academic project *on runic literarcy (RuneS: Runische Schriftlichkeit*) sponsored by the Academy of Sciences and has close collaborations with the other scholars of this discipline. Her second field of research is the manuscript culture of the North.

KAROLINE KJESRUD is associate professor in medieval art and curator of the Collection of medieval art at the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo. She is co-curating the exhibition *Arv* (2023) and *Middelalder* (2024) in Historical Museum, Oslo. Karoline Kjesrud researches various themes in medieval literature, culture and religion, studying material and textual cultures of the past as communication. Her academical interests center around how motifs and symbols influence human in the past, today and in the future. She has among others published several articles about the various intentions of using runes as symbols. Karoline Kjesrud is member of the board in Medieval Oslo and the leader of Collegium Medievale. Kjesrud initiated the project Exhibition Architecture with ROM for art and architecture in 2021–23, a critical exploration of the aesthetically, spatial, specialist and curatorial aspects of making exhibitions in museums.

SIMONE NEUENSCHWANDER studied art history and German philology at the University of Basel. In 2004 she began working at the Kunsthalle Basel and was curator there from 2007 to 2009. She worked as a freelance curator in Basel and Berlin in 2010, organizing an event series at the film and concept store Image Movement in Berlin (with Andreas Reihse). From 2011 to 2013, she and Christiane Rekade headed the program of the independent exhibition space OSLO10 in Münchenstein/Basel. In 2013 she was appointed as the director of Kunstverein Nürnberg — Albrecht Dürer Gesellschaft, where she worked until 2017. Exhibitions realized at Kunstverein Nürnberg include, among others, projects by Kirsten Pieroth, Diango Hernández, Daniel Gustav Cramer and Olga Balema. She currently works as a freelance curator and author in Basel, Switzerland.

PETRINE VINJE is an artist who works in various media. She explores concepts concerning language, temporality and spatiality in material and immaterial systems. Petrine Vinje has been conducting temporal, interdisciplinary projects in public space, commissions and artistic research projects. Her work have been exhibited in a number of national and international group exhibitions, and in solo exhibitions at Galleri F15, Moss (2023), Fotogalleriet, Oslo (2018), the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo (2014), Tegnerforbundet (2017) amongst others. She has conducted several public artworks including for the Research Council of Norway, and the Norwegian Defence Estates Agency, on comission for Public Art Norway (KORO). In 2018, Vinje published *Anthology — Anatomical Theatre*, an artist-researcher book springing out from the replica of an 16th Century anatomical theatre, that Vinje installed for the Norwegian Sculpture Biennale in 2013. She received her Master in Fine Art at the Institute of Colour in 2005, and is currently a PhD research fellow at Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO).

IMAGES

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Cover *HSS202007 (Venaro White / Light Ash)* (2020) 32×122×13,5cm, Solid Surface composite.
HSS201902 (Venaro White / Light Ash) (2019) 32×122×13,5cm, Solid Surface composite.

2/60 Drawing on iPhone touch screen, becoming *HSS202007 (Venaro White / Light Ash)* (2019–20)

4/60 *BOK D/E* (2016) 22×68×10cm, green and red sandstone. Installation view from *Scivias*, 10.08–10.09.2017, Tegnerforbundet, Oslo, Norway. Photo: Øystein Thorvaldsen.
Installation view from *Z.E.I.C.H.(N.)E.N*, 14.05–22.06.2016, Internationales Künstlerhaus Villa Concordia, Bamberg, Germany. Photo: Jürgen Schabel.

5/60 *KAH* (2016) 13×25×64cm, carved pine, beeswax.
O regen (2016) 13×26×64cm, carved pine, beeswax, laquer and foam. Installation view from *Z.E.I.C.H.(N.)E.N*, 2016.

6–7/60 *Z.E.I.C.H.(N.)E.N* (2016) sitespecific, temporary installation, OSB, reconstituted foam, acoustic polyester foam, pine.

9–11/60 Stills from 3D animation *Tyri* (2021).

12/60 *Tyri* (2019). Public commission for Rustad Elementary School, Municipality of Ås, Norway.

14–19/60 Technical drawings, and process of thermoforming Solid Surface composite, into the sculptures *ASSB201922/A/01*, *ASSB201922/B/01*, *ASSB201922/C/01* (2022).

20/60 From the process of patinating bronze, for the commission *Tyri* and subsequently the sculptures *ASSB201922/A/01*, *ASSB201922/B/01*, *ASSB201922/C/01*.

21/60 Detail of the sculpture *ASSB201922/C/01* (2022)

22–23/60 *ASSB201922/A/01*, *ASSB201922/B/01*, *ASSB201922/C/01* (2022) Solid Surface composite (Corian®, DuPont™), solid bronze, archive cloth (Archival Tyvek® (DuPont™), ink, polyester thread, polyester filling.
Minni (aluminium) (2022) varied sizes, Solid Surface composite, aluminium, steel. Installation view from *Surfacing Solids*, 22.10.22–22.01.2023, galleri F15, Moss, Norway. Photo: Eivind Lauritzen.

24–25/60 Details of *ASSB201922/A/01*, *ASSB201922/B/01*, *ASSB201922/C/01* (2022)

26–27/60 From *Laboratorie RISS — meaning in material and digital networks*, a workshop with

30–32/60 4th grade pupils, in Kunstnernes hus, 2021. Stills from video: Rickard Aall, 2020.

28–29/60 *HSS201902–19 (Venaro White / Light Ash)* (2021) Each measure 32×122×19cm, Solid Surface composite, in installation with Archival Tyvek® dyed in ink, Akademirommet, Kunstnernes Hus, June 2021.

37/60 *Aschheim s-fibula* (Bavaria, ca. 550), drawing: Anja Pütz (Aschhei Museum)
Pforzen belt buckle (Bavaria, end of the 6th cent.); drawing: Volker Babucke, 1999.

38/60 *Steindorf sax* (Bavaria, end of the 6th cent.); drawing: Barbara Köhler (Institut für Vor- und Frühgeschichtliche Archologie und Provinzialrömische Archäologie, LM München).

40/60 *Studies from the Archive / Studio*, 01–02 (2013) 10×10 cm, Polaroid.

48/60 *Studies of the Archive / Studio*, 03–04 (2013) 10×10 cm, Polaroid.

TEXTS

3/60 Petrine Vinje, F- U- TH- A- R- K, proofread by the Wordwrights.

5–8/60 Simone Neuenschwander, Theatres of Language — On the work of Petrine Vinje, 2016-17. Translated from German Original ‘Bühne der Sprache — zu den Werken von Petrine Vinje’ to English by Catriona Shaw, 2017.

33–39/60 Alessia Bauer “Mind-body-technology” and function: the multiple components of runic production. Proofread by the Wordwrights, 2021.

41–55/60 Karoline Kjesrud “Thou, O Lord, art mighty forever” Runes — from characters to magic, 2014-21. Translated from Norwegian Original “Du er sterk i evighet Herre — runer — fra skrifttegn til magi” to English by Wordwrights, 2021. The original was part of an artist-researcher book by Kjesrud and Vinje which was published on the occasion of Vinje`s solo exhibition *AGLA HAGLA* in Historical Museum, Oslo, in 2014.

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For Noralf & Agnes.

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