

Runes of the Middle Ages (1025 - 1300)

Many standing stones bear runic inscriptions that are prayers in Latin, invocations to Christ, etc. and so we will not report all these inscriptions. Moreover, in many cases, it is obvious that the inscription is a normal text, that is, the Futhark becomes a normal 'alphabet', and no magical value is attached to each rune. Some texts are magical, as we shall see, and some others are obscene. The text carries the meaning now, not at all the letters themselves, as it was so often the case in the inscriptions of the first period.

170. Bergen Inscription (on a stick of wood, probably beginning of 13rd century):

ion silkifuþ a mek en guþormr fuþllaekir / ræist mik en ion fuþkula ræþr mek

One must remember that the first three letters of the Futhark, 'fuþ' designate female genitalia. Finding an inscription *fuþ* may thus be interpreted 'innocently' as the beginning of the Futhark, or as an obscenity, as probably happens in this inscription.

Moltke translates: 'Jon silk-*fuþ* owns me, and Guttorm *fuþ*-licker carved me, and Jon *fuþ*-bump reads me.' The 'fuþ-bump' is a bit mysterious to me, it might be an allusion to a male sex, which indeed a big bump for female genitalia! Well, this inscription is certainly due to a bunch of joyous friends; whether they are homosexual or not is not very interesting. The point is that it is clear that from the beginning of the 13rd century, the feeling of sacredness for the runes was totally forgotten!

171. Canterbury Charm:

kuril sarþuara far þu nu funtin is tu þur uigi þik þ(u)rsa trutin kuril sarþuara uiþr apruauri

'Kuril wound-causer, go now, you are found. Thor hallow you, Lord of Troll, Kuril wound-causer. Against blood-vessel pus.'

Since Thor hallows with his hammer, the 'Thor hallow you' must be understood as 'Thor strike you with his hammer!', which makes sense in this curse against a sickness.

Moltke cites this charm even though it is found in a manuscript of the 11th century (the runes are in one line, the blanks have been inserted by Moltke).

172. Högstena Amulet (11th century):

Krause gives this inscription as transliterated in Old Norse:

galanda viþr, ganganda (?) viþr; riþanda viþ(r), viþr rænnanda, viþr sighlanda (?); viþr faranda, viþr flughanda : skal allt fuþ (?) anna (?) ok um dœia.

'Against the magic-making one, against the going one, against the riding one, against the running one, against the sailing one, against the travelling one, against the flying one : completely should the scoundrel [the exact word here is, sorry, 'the cunt'] be in agony and die.'

This famous curse contains the word *fuþ* which means 'female genitalia' used here as an insult. In English it became very rude to use it, yet the very same word became a strong but casual insult in French; it might well be that it had a use in Old Norse similar to modern French, which would explain why it has been used so casually in several runic inscriptions.

(note: Krause uses a word that means scoundrel but that designated the sex of a bitch until the sixteenth century.)

Instead of 'the sailing one', Moltke gives: 'against the signing one' which makes less sense than Krause's interpretation; he says nothing about the rest of the inscription.

173. London Stone (beginning of 11th century):

A classical inscription in Danish runes ('Ginna had this stone laid, and Toke') with remains of black-blue coloring in the runes.

174. Lund bone-piece 4 (end of 11th century):

bondi ris ti mal runu // arar aeru fiaprar

'Bondi cut the speech runes. Oars of eagle are feathers.'

We can find more comments on the runes of Speech in my analysis of the *Sigrdrifumal*. Notice that in modern Icelandic, *malrunar* takes the meaning of plain-language runes, as opposed to secret runes. In the case of this inscription the runes of speech are 'Oars of eagle are feathers' which is certainly not plain language.

It is also worth recalling that Snorri Sturluson, in his Hattatal, while describing a special scaldic turn of the phrase, says: 'This form is basic to all kind of poetry, exactly as the runes of speech are the most important kind of runes.'

175. Lund bone-piece 21(end of 11th century):

... **itonkugi : uratfunti**

The first part of this inscription is not interpreted, and the second part must have some sexual meaning: **urat** = 'to push', 'to wriggle', 'to shake'; **funti** = dative singular of a 'font' (which makes no sense here), or of 'encounter'.

176. Lund bone-piece 24 (11th century):

fuptramRhnkib

fup = 'female genitalia'; **tramR** = 'troll'; **hnki** = haki = 'arrange in a convenient way' (present subjunctive); **b** = beginning of a name (certainly of a girl). This makes up some kind of sexual insult to a woman whose name starts with a B.

177. Odense lead tablet:

kristus uinkit kristus regnet kristus imperat

'Christ conquers, Christ reigns, Christ commands'

This is only a portion of the complete inscription, but it is typical of very christianized inscriptions. Although the inscription is in runes, the words are directly from Latin. Some other sentences are obvious incantations the meaning of which has been lost. One is still understood, it is found also on several Middle Ages inscriptions, it reads **agla** (in runes) and is known as being the first letters of the Hebrew words 'attah gibbor leolam adonai', meaning 'thou art strong to all eternity, Lord.'

178. Ribe healing stick (carved around 1300):

It is one of the last inscriptions except those found in books. After that, until the 16th century runic inscriptions seem to go underground since no finds have been made. The flow of runic inscriptions restarts after the year 1500.

I will not give the runic form of this very long inscription. It begins with a poem in which the healer asserts him or herself.

Earth I pray guard
and the heaven above,
sun and Saint Mary
and himself the Lord God,
that he grants me hands to make whole
and healing tongue
to cure the Trembler
when treatment is needed.

From back and from breast, from trunk and from limb, from eyes and from ears; from every place where evil can enter.

A stone is called swart; it stands out of the sea. On it lie nine Needs. They shall neither sleep sweet nor make warm until you are better of it; for whom I have caused runes to utter words. Amen. And so be it.
[ends with a sign of cross].

The Trembler is the 'shivering sickness', i.e., the malaria which was quite well known at the time.

From the language used in this charm, it seems that the author copied an older Norwegian model.

Note: in modern Iceland there is a 'kvennagaldur' (a women's spell):

Risti eg þér asa atta
nauðir niu
þussa þrettan

'I cut for you eight aesir, nine nauðir, thirteen thursar.'

179. Sigtuna Amulet (end of 11th or 12th century):

Moltke gives only part of it:

þurXsarriþuXþursa trutin fliu þu nu funtin is

'Troll of wound-fever, Lord of the Troll, flee now, you are found.'

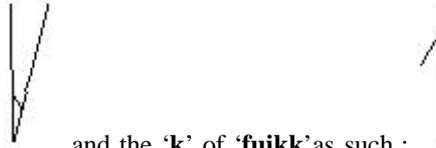
Krause does not give the original text, but notes that its meaning is not certain. He translates it as: 'Demon of the fever of wounds, Lord of the demons, Now you must flee. You have been discovered. Three kinds of pain on you, wolf. Three times the misery, wolf. |||, the rune of Ice. These ice runes will be your only joy, wolf. Enjoy the *seidr* well.'

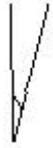
It can be compared with the Canterbury Charm, # 171 above.

180. Slesvig bone-piece 3 (12th century):

fuparsb - fuikk

The second part of the inscription is not interpreted. The first part can be interpreted in two ways. It can be either a very badly spelled futhark, or it can be read as fup-ars-b which is given by Moltke as meaning 'cunt and arse, as would still be said in free speech today.'



The rune 'r' is written as  and the 'k' of 'fuikk' as such : . This rather stylized form of the upside-down 'r' might well be also a way to writing an upside-down bound rune 'rk' This hypothesis avoids to interpret the runes as an insult to some person whose name starts with a 'b.' It would rather be a way to dedicate the Futhark to 'sb.' It is also quite possible that the ambiguous way of writing would be a kind of bad joke played on this 'sb.'

181. Slesvig bone-piece 5 and 7 (12th century):

These pieces provide good examples of the medieval Futhork.

182. Slesvig rune stick (end of 11th century):

It shows a grotesque poem

runaR iak risti

a r(i)kiata tre

sua reþ saR riki mogR

asiR a artakum

hulaR auk bulaR

meli þeR ars sum magi

'Rune I wrote

on the driving tree

so proposed the mighty son

Aesir in early days

'hurlar' and 'burlar',

may they say for you, your bum is like belly'

The words 'hurlar' and 'burlar' are visibly invented for the occasion, and the word 'rikiata' is also here in order to keep the rules of the poetical form used.

The last sentence obviously expresses that the person addressed makes little difference between what goes in his belly, and what goes out of his bum.

[Return to runic inscriptions](#)