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On the origin of the runes
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mot att bli "kolonisatörer" i området nedanför Klinten.

Det vikingatida samhällets förbindelser med inlandet försvårades inte så mycket genom kalkstenshällarna som genom hällmarksskogarna, vilka under vikinga- och tidigmedeltid måste ha varit mera hindersamma än under senmedeltiden, då man väl efter hand lyckades bryta upp vägar genom snårskogen.

"Vid 1100-talets början var Visby troligen i mångt och mycket fortfarande en bondeägd stad", säger Westholm (1989, s. 32 sp. 1). Det var varken "bondeägt" eller en stad vid denna tid. Som stad uppfattades Visby först med 1220-talet. Ordet "civitas" användes av påvestolen första gången i urkunderna 1226. Sedan återkommer denna beteckning regelbundet, då platsen utgjorde ett eget rättsområde med tätbebyggelse och hade en befäst hamn med livlig transitohandel (Yrwing 1986, s. 42 f.).

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On the Origin of the Runes

The question of the invention of the specific Germanic alphabet, the futhark, has long been hotly disputed. Everybody seems to agree that the runes were not invented spontaneously. Like every other European alphabet they were derived from an older alphabet, ultimately from the Phoenician one. But which alphabet was the immediate prototype of the runes?

There seems to be three main theories as to the origin of the runes: The "Greek theory", proposed by S. Bugge (1905–1913) and O. von Friesen (1906, 1931, 1933), the "Etruscan theory", whose protagonists were C. J. S. Marstrander (1928) and M. Hammarström (1930), and the "Latin theory" launched by L. Wimmer (1874, 1887), H. Pedersen (1923), F. Askeberg (1944), Eric Moltke (1981) and Bengt Odenstedt (1988). Odenstedt has summed up today's situation admirably: the runes are now generally believed to be derived from the Latin capitals. At first sight this appears quite convincing, but it is difficult to accept the whole of the argument.

Even though the oldest inscription, dating from the second half of the second century A.D. was found in Norway, no less than 14 inscriptions dating from about 200 A.D. have

been found in Denmark and, as has already been pointed out by Odenstedt, the majority of all the inscriptions in the old futhark have been found in Zealand and in Scania. In Scandinavia, Roman imports were common enough during the first four and a half centuries A.D. for the period to be named the "Roman Iron Age", even though no part of Scandinavia was ever occupied or settled by the Romans.

In Denmark, the richest burials of the early Roman Iron Age, among them the famous warrior grave from Hoby, are concentrated in the south part of Laaland island. It seems evident that this was the political and economic centre. In the later Roman Iron Age, in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., the centre of power and wealth shifted to south-east Zealand, where the rich graves of the period are concentrated, with Himlingøje as the type locality. Roman objects of the types found in Denmark and Scania are not found in Germania Libera. It seems as if, at the time, the Germanic nations in direct contact with the Romans on the limes were hostile, whereas the Romans could maintain contacts with Germanic nations behind their enemies. But this means that there was a state in Denmark strong enough to justify a Roman diplomatic effort. It thus seems that in the early Roman Iron Age the imports came from the Rhine area by way of the North Sea. It also seems clear that the distribution centre in Denmark was first south Laaland and later, south-east Zealand. The lack of Roman artefacts in presentday Germany suggests that Germanic warriors from the nations living there did not enter the Roman service, that they consequently did not learn to read and write Latin. The Roman equipment found in Danish graves suggests that warriors from that country did serve in the Roman army.

It seems likely that the men who were buried with Roman arms and armour and with what may be Roman *dona militaria* (Rausing, 1987) were actually such as had survived their 21 years of service, to return "home", as Roman citizens, with Roman training and with Roman skills. In most cases, and certainly if the dead man had reached officer rank, the latter included literacy, the ability to manage the centuria's stores, to indent for arms and equipment, to read orders and reports, and to formulate written orders and reports. He did so in Latin, not in Etruscan or Greek. By the first century A.D., when Claudius studied Etruscan it was probably already a dead language. The official command language of the army was latin, even in those legions which were raised and maintained in the east. Wherever he served, a professional soldier probably never heard anything but Latin spoken except when on leave. The Etruscan alphabet may still have been used by some conservative mountaineers in some forgotten valleys in the southern Alps, but few, if any, ambitious centurions or optios would ever have seen any inscriptions.

Very probably the "barbarian" soldier never read belles-lettres or poetry for the pleasure of it, he was probably rather unfamiliar with the Roman book hand. He could probably read the inscriptions on monuments, coins and tombstones, in capital letters, but he was almost certainly much more familiar with the Old Roman Cursive, such as it was written in the second century A.D., such as we know it from Vindolanda on the Scottish Limes, from Vindonissa, on the Aare, in Switzerland, and from a few other sites (Bowman & Thomas, p. 36). Anyone wanting to devise an alphabet fitting a Germanic language would thus be more likely to use the Old Roman Cursive for a pattern than Roman capital letters. It seems that, in the second century A.D., this Old Roman Cursive was remarkably uniform all over the Empire.

We shall see that this Old Roman Cursive was modified to form the early runes, probably in Denmark. When discussing the origin of the runes, we do not have to consider the Late Roman Cursive, which evolved out of the Old Roman Cursive sometime around 200 A.D. since, at that time, the runes were fully evolved and had been used for one or two generations.

The runes were not invented in continental Germania Libera, since citizens of the nations dwelling there did not enter the Roman service, nor in the Gothic kingdom in south Rus-

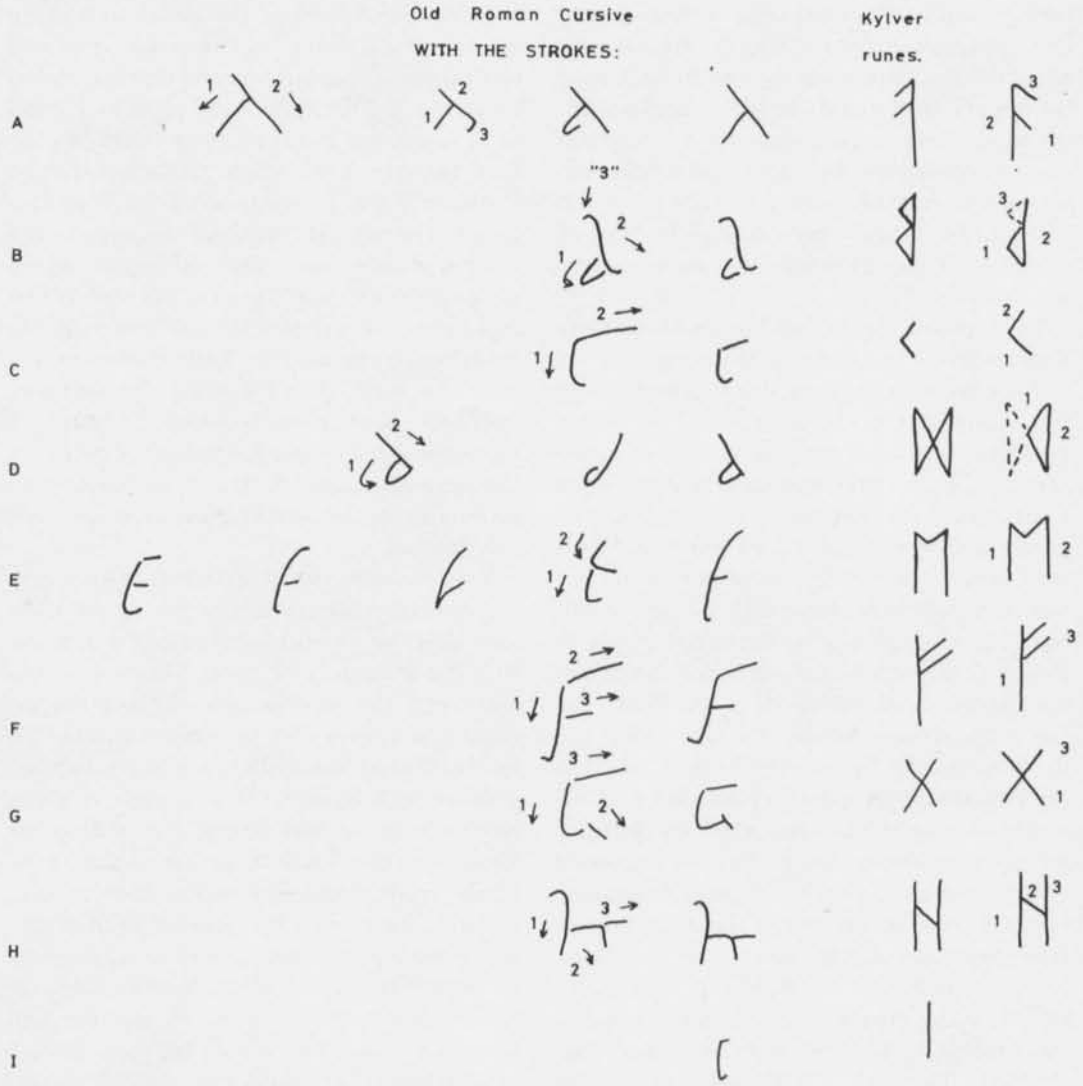


Fig. 1. Äldre romersk kursiv och den äldre futharkens runor A–I. Renritning C. Bonnevier.

sia, since they had been in use for well over a century when that kingdom was founded. It also seems that the runes were devised by practical men, to meet a practical need, not by priests or sorcerers to be used for religious purposes. There is no reason whatever to imagine that 200 years must pass before the runes were put to practical use. The fact that most preserved Latin inscriptions are incised has made us forget that the vast majority were, actually, *written,* whether in ink on papyrus, wood or parchment, or in wax, on wax tablets. In all probability not only wax tablets but also wood tablets were used in Scandinavia in the Roman Iron Age. To be sure, we have but one find of a wax tablet of the period, from Vimose, and it may have been brought home by a retired officer of the Roman army, but very much later, in the 10th century, someone in Birka wrote on wax.

Let us see whether there is any resemblance between the characters of the Old Roman Cursive (ORC) and the Old Futhark. There are some general rules concerning the ORC.

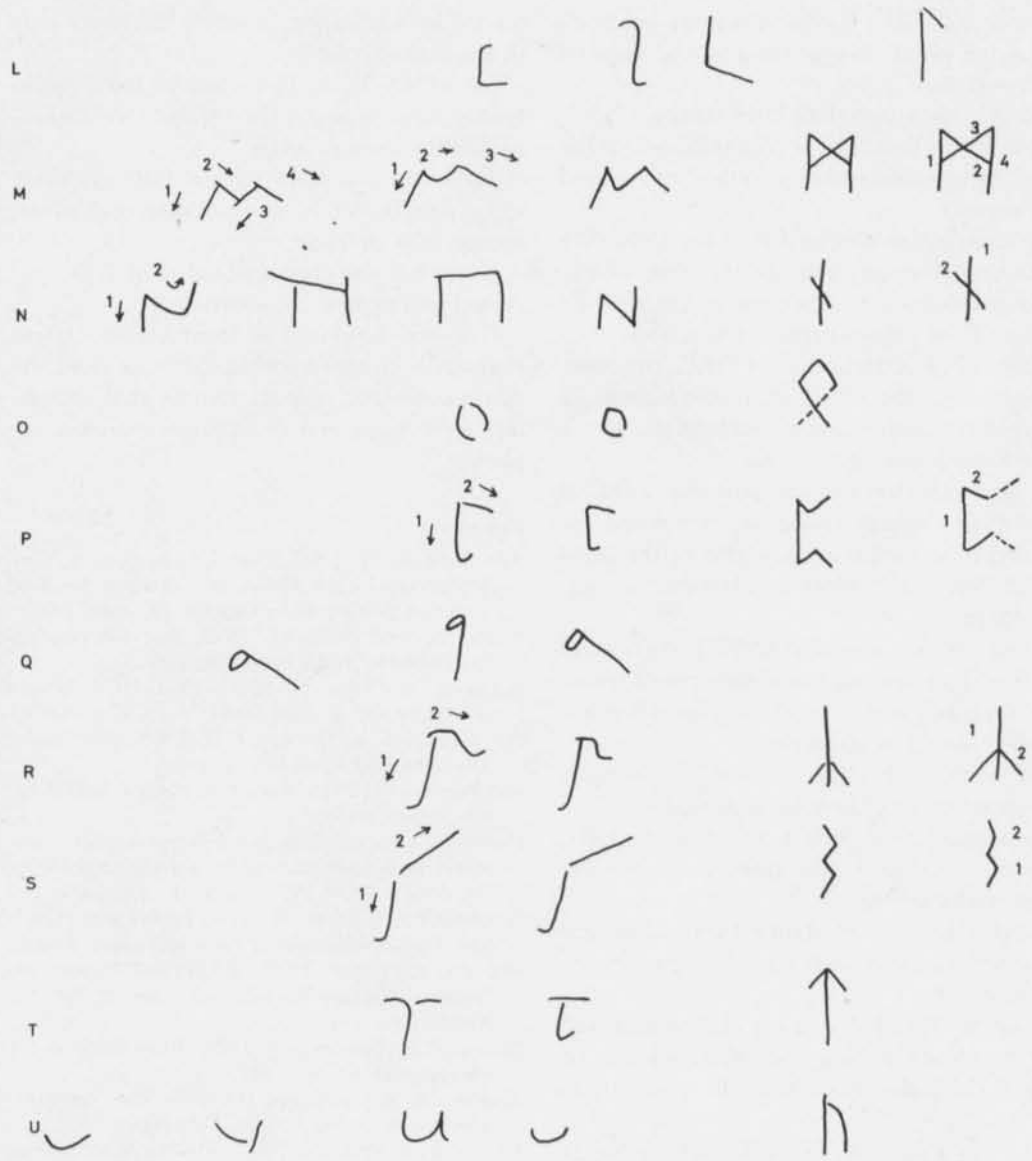


Fig. 2. Äldre romersk kursiv och den äldre futharkens runor L–U. Renritning C. Bonnevier.

It was a cursive hand, written in ink on papyrus or on wooden tablets, the latter probably predominating in northern Europe. A relatively hard pen was used, probably cut straight (Bowman & Thomas) which allowed little differentiation between thick and thin strokes. Unlike the characters of Roman monumental inscriptions, the runes are composed of main staves and secondary staves of uniform thickness. In ORC ligaturing occurs within the letters, but it is not a regular feature. In each letter the order in which the strokes were drawn appears to have been quite standardized. The pen permitted the scribe to draw straight or curved lines and so did the engraving tool, but when carving in wood straight lines were much easier to produce than curved ones. Consequently, the runes are, with few exceptions, composed of straight lines, usually one vertical main stave and one

or more secondary staves, which are not horizontal, to avoid disappearing in the lines of the wood itself.

To give the runes their later names:

Ass. This is that cursive A of ORC where the hasta has two sidestrokes, reversed and turned 180 degrees.

Bjarkan is the standard B of the ORC, the hasta straightened, the upper curve of the hasta extended into a second panse and the curves of the panses turned into angles.

Kaun is the standard C of ORC, the hasta straightened, the whole character turned 15 degrees counterclockwise, and retaining the old roman phonetic value K.

Dagaz may be the conventional ORC d turned 45 degrees clockwise, the panse expanded to stretch from one end of the hasta to the other, and complemented with its mirror image.

Ehwaz is the standard ORC E turned 45 degrees clockwise, its hasta and central stroke (which cannot be a straight horizontal line in a rune) replaced by an angle.

Fé, is the conventional ORC F, its hasta elongated and its lower hook erased.

Gebo may be strokes 1 and 3 of the ORC character, crossed and turned 45 degrees counter-clockwise.

Hagl is the ORC H, stroke 3 vertical instead of horizontal, and hasta straightened.

Isaz is ORC I.

Logr is ORC L, reversed and turned 180 degrees. Since a rune's sidestave cannot be higher than the main stave it was turned down.

Manr is the ORC M, with vertical hastae and the two sidestaves lengthened, to make a character not to be confused with E.

Odal is ORC O, the two curved lines turned into angles and overlapping.

Pertho is not, as has been suggested, a B with its sidestaves turned another way, but the ORC sign P with both its sidestroke and the lower hook lengthened and broken into angles.

Reid is probably the ORC character, its hasta straightened and its S-shaped second stroke turned into an angle, crossing the lower part of the main stroke.

Sol is ORC S, the hasta with its lower curve turned into an angle, the second stroke elongated into another angle.

Tyr is but the conventional ORC T, hasta straightened and its horisontal second stroke turned into an angle.

Urr is but the conventional U of ORC, reversed and turned 180 degrees.

It is not necessary to assume that certain characters changed sound value, as does the "Greek theory", nor to assume that characters were borrowed from more than one alphabet.

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Sammanfattning

Runornas ursprung har länge diskuterats, och från 1800-talets slut har en rad olika teorier framförts. Den allmänna meningen förefaller nu vara att runorna utvecklats ur den romerska kapitälskriften.

De flesta inskrifterna skrivna med den äldre futharken finns i Danmark och Skåne; av dessa dateras de äldsta till omkring 200 e. Kr. I Danmark, i synnerhet på Lolland och Själland, har man också påträffat rikt utrustade gravar från romersk järnålder, som kan visa att danskar tjänstgjort i den romerska hären. Förmodligen har hemvändande soldater och officerare förvärvat en viss grad av läs- och skrivkunnighet, och den skrift dessa varit förtrogna med var den äldre romerska kursiven snarare än den romerska kapitälskriften. Skulle man utforma ett alfabete lämpat för ett germanskt språk låg alltså den romerska kursiven närmare till hands som förebild än kapitälskriften.