



GLANZ
UND
GRAVUR

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Runes

The Complete Handbook

Elder · Younger · Anglo-Saxon Futhark

Foreword

Runes fascinate – and few writing systems carry more myth. This book wants both: to show the beauty and depth of the old signs, and to separate honestly what is historically attested from what was added later.

Its heart is the Elder Futhark, the oldest runic row of the Germanic peoples; but the Viking-Age Younger Futhark and the Anglo-Saxon Futhorc are given full voice too. Where names, sound values or meanings are uncertain, we say so – not a flaw, but honesty.

Rune-poem quotations follow public-domain sources. The runes are set in the Unicode runic block. May this book be a faithful companion – by the hearth and at the workbench alike.

A plea for honesty

Runes are writing before they are magic.

Who honours them reads first – and interprets after.

– the motto of this book

Why still today?

Runes are not dead knowledge. They come from an age when every sign was cut by hand into stone, wood and bone – lasting, personal, meaningful. That same idea lives on in a good engraving: a name, a saying, a mark that stays. This book gives you the knowledge to understand runes, not merely to decorate with them.

In a nutshell

Three rows: Elder and Younger Futhark and the Anglo-Saxon Futhorc.

We separate evidence from myth and flag what is uncertain.

Quotations are public domain; the runes are set in real Unicode.

How Runes Work

A rune is first a letter with a sound value. At the same time nearly every rune carries a name beginning with its own sound (acrophony): *fehu for f, *īsaz for i. These names are the bridge between writing and meaning.

Ætt – the three families

The Elder Futhark is divided into three groups of eight, each an 'ætt' (Old Norse 'family, group'). This threefold division is ancient, attested on the Vadstena and Grumpan bracteates (c. 500).

Important

The popular deity-names for the ættir (Freyr's, Heimdall's, Týr's ætt)

are a late/modern mnemonic – NOT attested for the runic age.

The division itself is old; the god-attribution is not.

Direction & features

- Early inscriptions run left- and right-ward, some boustrophedon (alternating by line).
- Runes could be mirrored or inverted; bind-runes join two signs on one stave.
- Word dividers are dots or colons. Doubled sounds were often carved only once.

A note from the finds

The Vimose comb bears just one word: harja. Whether name, people or warrior-cry is still unclear – yet it proves that as early as c. 160 CE people entrusted runes to everyday objects. A comb inscription, not a heroic lay: that is how humbly runic writing began.

In a nutshell

A rune is letter and name at once (acrophony).

24 runes, divided into three ættir of eight.

Direction free; bind-runes save space; doubled sounds once only.

The Origin of Runes

Where runes come from is not fully settled. Most scholars derive them from a North Italic (Old Italic) alphabet, perhaps with Latin influence; about a dozen runes are of uncertain origin. The Negau helmet B (before the Common Era) bears an inscription in such an alphabet and is a landmark of the debate.

The oldest datable runes are on objects from bogs: the Vimose comb (c. 160 CE) with the word harja. Even these early forms are confident and mature – runes were in use earlier still. The ability to read them was later lost and only recovered in 1865 by Sophus Bugge.

Lost and found again

For centuries no one could read runes. Only scholars like the Norwegian Sophus Bugge and the Dane Ludvig Wimmer decoded them in the 19th century – sign by sign, by comparing hundreds of inscriptions. What people had shunned as ‘magic marks’ became legible again. Today scholarship knows over 6,000 runic inscriptions.

Three rows, one family

Elder Futhark (24 runes, ~150–800): the original row.

Younger Futhark (16 runes, ~800–1100): the Viking Age – fewer signs for more sounds.

Anglo-Saxon Futhorc (~26–33): England & Frisia – the row grew.

The Three Rows Compared

Elder Futhark, Younger Futhark and Anglo-Saxon Futhorc are not three different scripts but three stages of one family. Knowing the differences lets you date an inscription almost at a glance.

What changed

- Elder Futhark: 24 runes, three ættir, pan-Germanic (~150–800).
- Younger Futhark: only 16 runes – one sign carries several sounds (k/g, t/d, b/p, i/e). The paradox: fewer signs for more sounds (~800–1100).
- Anglo-Saxon Futhorc: grew to 28–33 runes to fit new Old English vowels (5th–11th c.).

Sign comparison of the three rows

Same sounds, different signs: where the Younger Futhark merges (k/g) and the Futhorc adds new vowels, the shift shows up row by row.

Sound	Elder	Younger	Futhorc
f	ƿ	ƿ	ƿ
u	u	u	u
þ / th	þ	þ	þ
a	ǣ	ǣ	ǣ
r	ᚱ	ᚱ	ᚱ
k	ᚥ	ᚥ	ᚥ
g	ᚷ	ᚥ	ᚷ
h	ᚨ	ᚨ	ᚨ
n	ᚠ	ᚠ	ᚠ
i	ᚲ	ᚲ	ᚲ
s	ᚱ	ᚱ	ᚱ
t	ᚦ	ᚦ	ᚦ
m	ᚹ	ᚹ	ᚹ
z / R	ᚷ	ᚷ	ᚷ

Same rune, different sound

The fourth rune shows the shift best: ansuz (a) in the Elder row becomes nasal a/o in the Younger and splits in the Futhorc into three signs – os (o), ac (a) and æsc (æ).

The row-name itself tells the tale: Fu-th-ark became Fu-th-orc.

Rule of thumb for dating

24 runes → early, pan-Germanic.

16 runes → Viking Age, Scandinavia.

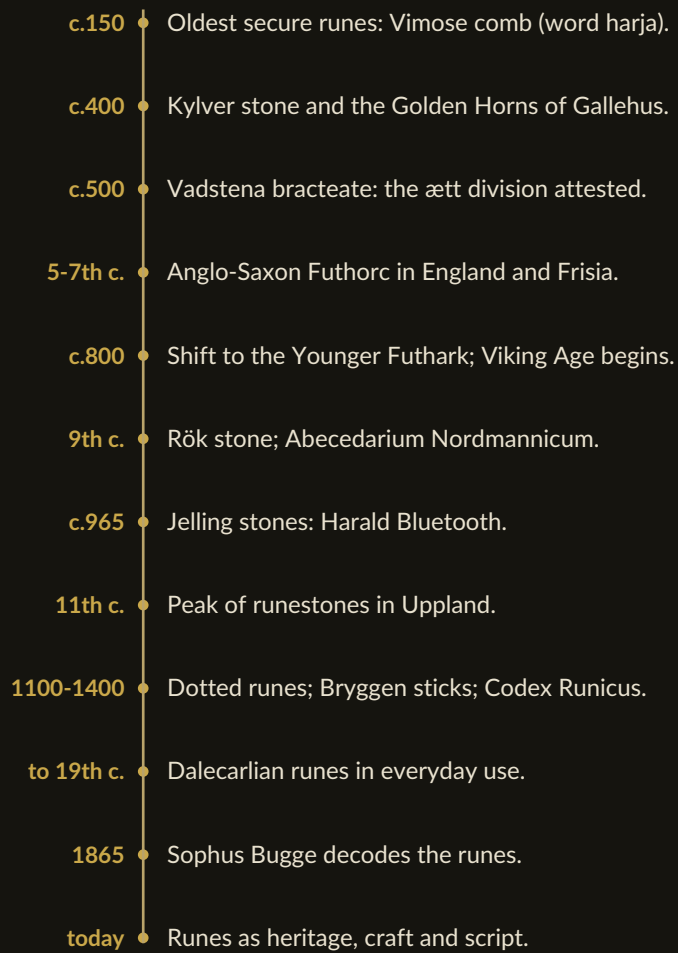
28+ runes with *os/ac/æsc* → Anglo-Saxon.

A script shrinks

The strangest twist in runic history: as Viking-Age speech grew more sounds, the script grew smaller – from 24 to 16 signs. One sign now had to stand for k and g, t and d, b and p at once. Reading became a matter of context. Why they cut it down is still unknown – perhaps the urge for fast, terse carving in a busy trading age.

A Short Timeline

Twelve waymarks from the first carvings to rediscovery – broad, with the usual scholarly ranges.

- 
- c.150 • Oldest secure runes: Vimose comb (word harja).
 - c.400 • Kylver stone and the Golden Horns of Gallehus.
 - c.500 • Vadstena bracteate: the ætt division attested.
 - 5-7th c. • Anglo-Saxon Futhorc in England and Frisia.
 - c.800 • Shift to the Younger Futhark; Viking Age begins.
 - 9th c. • Rök stone; Abecedarium Nordmannicum.
 - c.965 • Jelling stones: Harald Bluetooth.
 - 11th c. • Peak of runestones in Uppland.
 - 1100-1400 • Dotted runes; Bryggen sticks; Codex Runicus.
 - to 19th c. • Dalecarlian runes in everyday use.
 - 1865 • Sophus Bugge decodes the runes.
 - today • Runes as heritage, craft and script.

ORDER

The Three Ættir

The Elder Futhark is ordered in three groups of eight, each an ætt. This division is old and attested on bracteates; it aided memory and secret writing – branch-runes point to ætt- and place-number.

Ætt I	Ætt II	Ætt III
ᚱ Fehu	ᚱ Hagalaz	ᚱ Tiwaz
ᚱ Uruz	ᚠ Naudiz	ᚱ Berkanan
ᚱ Þurisaz	ᚱ Isaz	ᚱ Ehwaz
ᚠ Ansuz	ᚠ Jera	ᚱ Mannaz
ᚱ Raido	ᚠ Eihwaz	ᚠ Laguz
ᚠ Kaunan	ᚠ Perþ	ᚠ Ingwaz
ᚠ Gebo	ᚠ Algiz	ᚠ Dagaz
ᚱ Wunjo	ᚠ Sowilo	ᚠ Othala

First ætt – f, u, þ, a, r, k, g, w

ᚱ ᚱ ᚱ ᚠ ᚱ ᚠ ᚠ ᚱ

Fehu, Uruz, Þurisaz, Ansuz, Raido, Kaunan, Gebo, Wunjo. From wealth and primal force through danger and the god-word to gift and joy.

Second ætt – h, n, i, j, ĩ, p, z, s

ᚱ ᚠ ᚱ ᚠ ᚠ ᚠ ᚠ ᚠ

Hagalaz, Naudiz, Isaz, Jera, Eihwaz, Perþ, Algiz, Sowilo. The row of natural forces and turns: hail, need, ice, good year, yew, protection, sun.

Third ætt – t, b, e, m, l, ŋ, d, o

ᚱ ᚱ ᚱ ᚱ ᚠ ᚠ ᚠ ᚠ

Tiwaz, Berkanan, Ehwaz, Mannaz, Laguz, Ingwaz, Dagaz, Othala. From law and growth through man and water to day and inheritance.

Important

The threefold division is historical. The deity-names of the ættir (Freyr's, Heimdall's, Týr's ætt) are a modern mnemonic.

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Part I

The Elder Futhark

24 runes · ~150–800 CE · the original row

The Elder Futhark – At a Glance



Fehu

[f]

*fehu – Vieh, Besitz



Uruz

[u]

*ūruz – Auerochse



Thurisaz

[θ]

*þurisaz – Riese / Dor



Ansuz

[a]

*ansuz – (ein) Gott /



Raido

[r]

*raidō – Ritt, Reise



Kaunan

[k]

*kaunan – Geschwür / K



Gebo

[g]

*gebō – Gabe



Wunjo

[w]

*wunjō – Freude, Wonne



Hagalaz

[h]

*hagalaz – Hagel



Naudiz

[n]

*naudiz – Not, Zwang



Isaz

[i]

*Isaz – Eis



Jera

[j]

*jēra – gutes Jahr, Er



Eihwaz

[i/æ]

*ī(h)waz – Eibe



Perthro

[p]

*perþ – unsicher



Algiz

[z]

*algiz – Schutz/Elch



Sowilo

[s]

*sōwilō – Sonne



Tiwaz

[t]

*tiwaz – der Gott Týr



Berkanan

[b]

*berkanan – Birke



Ehwaz

[e]

*ehwaz – Pferd



Mannaz

[m]

*mannaz – Mensch



Laguz

[l]

*laguz – Wasser / Lauc



Ingwaz

[ŋ]

*ingwaz – der Gott Ing



Dagaz

[d]

*dagaz – Tag



Othala

[o]

*ōþala – Erbe, Heimat

The Elder Futhark is the oldest, pan-Germanic runic row. It is named after the sound values of its first six runes: f, u, þ, a, r, k.

Honestly

There is NO rune poem from the Elder Futhark era.

All rune-names are reconstructed Proto-Germanic forms (marked *), inferred from later sources. Especially uncertain: *þurisaz, *algiz, *perþ-.



Nr. 1

Fehu

***fehu** – **Vieh, Besitz**

Movable wealth – cattle were riches one must grow and share. The name is well secured (OE feoh).

I. Ætt

Laut: f



Nr. 2

Uruz

***ūruz** – **Aurochse**

The wild aurochs: raw, untamed strength. The name *ūruz is likely but not fully certain.

I. Ætt

Laut: u



Nr. 3

Thurisaz

***þurisaz** – **Riese / Dorn**

Giant or thorn – the name differs by tradition (OE þorn, Gothic þiuþ, ON þurs). Danger and warding force.

I. Ætt

Laut: þ



Nr. 4

Ansuz

***ansuz** – **(ein) Gott / Ase**

A god, one of the Æsir; in Old English reinterpreted as ós (mouth). Word, breath, divine inspiration.

I. Ætt

Laut: a



Nr. 5

Raido

*raidō – Ritt, Reise

Riding, journey, wagon – movement with direction and right measure.

I. Ætt

Laut: r



Nr. 6

Kaunan

*kaunan – Geschwür / Kien

In the North ulcer, in the OE poem cēn (torch). Both readings circulate; the Proto-Germanic form is uncertain.

I. Ætt

Laut: k



Nr. 7

Gebu

*gebō – Gabe

The gift – giving and receiving, hospitality, alliance. The X-shape.

I. Ætt

Laut: g



Nr. 8

Wunjo

*wunjō – Freude, Wonne

Joy and bliss (OE wynn).

I. Ætt

Laut: w



Nr. 9

Hagalaz

*hagalaz – Hagel

Hail – the destructive grain-shower that melts to water. Early single-, later double-barred (/).

II. Ætt

Laut: h



Nr. 10

Naudiz

***naudiz** – Not, Zwang

Need, constraint, want – yet wholesome to whoever meets it in time.

II. Ætt

Laut: n



Nr. 11

Isaz

***ī**saz – Eis

Ice – standstill, clarity, danger.

II. Ætt

Laut: i



Nr. 12

Jera

***j**ēra – gutes Jahr, Ernte

Good year and harvest – reward of patience. Source of English year.

II. Ætt

Laut: j



Nr. 13

Eihwaz

***ī**(h)waz – Eibe

The yew. Its sound value is disputed; only a front vowel is certain. Rare in early inscriptions.

II. Ætt

Laut: ī/æ



Nr. 14

Perthro

***perþ**- – **unsicher**

Meaning unknown – OE *peorð* is itself obscure (dice-cup? fruit?). One of the least secure names.

II. Ætt

Laut: p



Nr. 15

Algiz

*algiz – Schutz/Elch

Protection, often read elk or sedge; the original name is unknown. Value z (later ʀ), never word-initial.

II. Ætt

Laut: z



Nr. 16

Sowilo

*sōwilō – Sonne

The sun – victory, life-force. Also in the lightning form .

II. Ætt

Laut: s



Nr. 17

Tiwaz

*tīwaz – der Gott Týr

The god Týr / *Tīwaz, also an old word for god. Attested stacked as a magical sign (Lindholm).

III. Ætt

Laut: t



Nr. 18

Berkanan

*berkanan – Birke

The birch – growth, new beginnings, protection of the home.

III. Ætt

Laut: b



Nr. 19

Ehwaz

*ehwaz – Pferd

The horse – partnership of steed and rider (Lat. equus).

III. Ætt

Laut: e



Nr. 20

Mannaz

*mannaz – Mensch

Man, humankind – community and mortality.

III. Ætt

Laut: m



Nr. 21

Laguz

*laguz – Wasser / Lauch

Water/lake – or leek (*laukaz), a word of healing and protection. Both readings are defended.

III. Ætt

Laut: l



Nr. 22

Ingwaz

*ingwaz – der Gott Ing

The god Ing/Yngvi(-Freyr). Value ŋ, never word-initial; unattested in the earliest inscriptions.

III. Ætt

Laut: ŋ



Nr. 23

Dagaz

*dagaz – Tag

The day – light, turning point, clarity.

III. Ætt

Laut: d



Nr. 24

Othala

*ōþala – Erbe, Heimat

Ancestral property, homeland, inheritance – bond to kin and soil.

III. Ætt

Laut: o

ƿ ƚ ƚ ƚ ƚ ƚ

Part II

The Younger Futhark

16 runes · ~800–1100 · the Viking Age

The Younger Futhark – At a Glance



Fé
[f]
Reichtum, Vieh/Gold



Úr
[u/v/o/y]
Nieselregen/Schlacke



Þurs
[p/ð]
Riese (Thurs)



Óss
[a/o]
Gott / Flussmündung



Reið
[r]
Ritt, Reise



Kaun
[k/g]
Geschwür



Hagall
[h]
Hagel



Nauðr
[n]
Not



Íss
[i/e]
Eis



Ár
[a]
Jahr, Ernte



Sól
[s]
Sonne



Týr
[t/d]
der Gott Týr



Bjarkan
[b/p]
Birke



Maðr
[m]
Mensch



Lögr
[l]
Wasser, See



Ýr
[r]
Eibe

In the 8th century the row was cut from 24 to 16 runes – even as the language developed more sounds. The result: one sign must carry several values (k/g, t/d, b/p, i/e). Only the medieval dotted runes later distinguished them again.

Three main variants: long-branch (Danish, for stone), short-twig (Swedish-Norwegian, for wood/everyday) and the staveless Hälsinge runes. Around 3,000 runestones survive from the Viking Age, densest in Uppland.

The rune poems

Rune-names are known only from later sources:

the *Abecedarium Nordmannicum* (9th c.), the *Norwegian* (13th c.)

and the *Icelandic Rune Poem* (15th c.). Translations after Dickins (1915).



Nr. 1

Fé

Reichtum, Vieh/Gold

Laut: f

Wealth is a source of discord among kinsmen – the wolf lives in the forest.

Norwegian Rune Poem: Fé vældr frænda róge; fœðesk ulfr í skóge



Nr. 2

Úr

Nieselregen/Schlacke

Laut: u/v/o/y

Dross from bad iron / weeping of the clouds. One sign, many vowels.

Norwegian Rune Poem: Úr er af illu jarne; opt løypr ræinn á hjarne



Nr. 3

Þurs

Riese (Thurs)

Laut: þ/ð

The giant torments women; misfortune makes few men glad.

Norwegian Rune Poem: Þurs vældr kvinna kvillu; kátr værðr fár af illu



Nr. 4

Óss

Gott / Flussmündung

Laut: a/o

Estuary is the way of most journeys – in the Icelandic poem aged Gautr (Odin).

Norwegian Rune Poem: Óss er flæstra færða för; en skalpr er sværða

Nr. 5

Reið

Ritt, Reise

Riding is said worst for horses; Reginn forged the finest sword.

Norwegian Rune Poem: Ræið kveða rossom væsta; Reginn sló sværðet bæzta

—
Laut: r

Nr. 6

Kaun

Geschwür

One sign for k and g. Ulcer is fatal to children.

Norwegian Rune Poem: Kaun er barna bölván; böl gørver nán fölván

—
Laut: k/g

Nr. 7

Hagall

Hagel

Hail is the coldest grain; Christ shaped the world of old.

Norwegian Rune Poem: Hagall er kaldastr korna; Krístr skóp hæimenn forna

—
Laut: h

Nr. 8

Nauðr

Not

Constraint gives scant choice; a naked man is chilled by the frost.

Norwegian Rune Poem: Nauðr gerer næppa koste; nøktan kælir í froste

—
Laut: n

Nr. 9

Íss

Eis

Ice, the broad bridge; the blind must be led. Stands for i and e.

Norwegian Rune Poem: Ís köllum brú bræiða; blindan þarf at læiða

—
Laut: i/e



Nr. 10

Ár

Jahr, Ernte

Plenty is a boon to men; generous, they say, was Fróði.

Norwegian Rune Poem: Ár er gumna góðe; örr var Fróðe

—
Laut: a



Nr. 11

Sól

Sonne

Sun is the light of the lands; I bow to the holy doom.

Norwegian Rune Poem: Sól er landa ljóme; lúti ek helgum dóme

—
Laut: s



Nr. 12

Týr

der Gott Týr

Týr, the one-handed god; often the smith must blow. Stands for t and d.

Norwegian Rune Poem: Týr er æinendr ása; opt værðr smiðr blása

—
Laut: t/d



Nr. 13

Bjarkan

Birke

Birch, greenest-leaved of shrubs; Loki was lucky in deceit. Stands for b and p.

Norwegian Rune Poem: Bjarkan er laufgrønstr líma; Loki bar flærða tíma

—
Laut: b/p



Nr. 14

Maðr

Mensch

Man is augmentation of the earth; great is the hawk's claw.

Norwegian Rune Poem: Maðr er moldar auki; mikil er græip á hauki

—
Laut: m



Nr. 15

Lögr

Wasser, See

Water, the torrent from the mountain; yet ornaments are of gold.

Norwegian Rune Poem: Lögr er fælir ór fjalle foss; en gull ero nosser

—
Laut: l



Nr. 16

Ýr

Eibe

Yew, greenest of woods in winter; it crackles when it burns. Value R (old z), mostly word-final.

Norwegian Rune Poem: Ýr er vetrgrønstr viðá; vænt er, er brennr, at sviða

—
Laut: r

ƿ Ɔ Ɔ Ɔ Ɔ Ɔ Ɔ

Part III

The Anglo-Saxon Futhorc

~26–33 runes · 5th–11th c. · England & Frisia

The Anglo-Saxon Futhorc – At a Glance



Feoh
[f]
Reichtum



Ur
[u]
Auerchse



Þorn
[þ]
Dorn



Os
[o]
Mund/(Gott)



Rad
[r]
Ritt



Cen
[c/k]
Fackel



Gyfu
[g]
Gabe



Wynn
[w]
Wonne



Hægl
[h]
Hagel



Nyd
[n]
Not



Is
[i]
Eis



Ger
[j]
Jahr



Eoh
[j]
Eibe



Peorð
[p]
unklar



Eolh
[x]
Riedgras



Sigel
[s]
Sonne



Tir
[t]
Gott Tiw



Beorc
[b]
Birke



Eh
[e]
Ross



Mann
[m]
Mensch



Lagu
[l]
Meer



Ing
[ŋ]
Held Ing



Eþel
[ce]
Heimat



Dæg
[d]
Tag



Ac
[a]
Eiche



Æsc
[æ]
Esche



Yr
[y]
Bogen?



Ior
[io]
Flussfisch



Ear
[ea]
Grab, Erde

In England and Frisia the Elder Futhark grew to fit the sounds of Old English. From the a-rune (ansuz) came three signs (os, ac, æsc); further runes were added. The very name shows the sound shift: Futhark became Futhorc (a→o).

Provenance of the rune poem

The Anglo-Saxon Rune Poem preserves 29 stanzas.

Its manuscript (Cotton Otho B.x) burned in 1731 – the text survives only through George Hickes' 1705 print. Translation by Bruce Dickins (1915, public domain).

Four further runes – calc, gar, cweorð, stan – stand without a stanza; cweorð and stan are manuscript-only signs. The total is not fixed (28/29/31/33).



Nr. 1

Feoh

Reichtum

Laut: f

Wealth is a comfort to all men; yet each must bestow it freely, would he gain honour before the Lord.

OE Rune Poem: *Feoh byþ frofur fira gehwylcum*



Nr. 2

Ur

Auerochse

Laut: u

The aurochs is proud and great-horned, a savage beast that fights with its horns, a ranger of the moors.

OE Rune Poem: *Ur byþ anmod ond oferhýrned*



Nr. 3

Þorn

Dorn

Laut: þ

The thorn is exceedingly sharp, an evil thing to touch, severe to all who rest among them.

OE Rune Poem: *Þorn byþ ðearle scearp*



Nr. 4

Os

Mund/(Gott)

Laut: o

Os is the source of all language, a pillar of wisdom (OE mouth; perhaps Latin os).

OE Rune Poem: *Os byþ ordfruma ælere spræce*



Nr. 5

Rad

Ritt

Laut: r

Riding seems easy indoors, and very bold to him who rides the highroads on a stout horse.

OE Rune Poem: Rad byþ on recyde rinca gehwylcum



Nr. 6

Cen

Fackel

Laut: c/k

The torch is known to every living man by its bright flame; it burns where princes sit within.

OE Rune Poem: Cen byþ cwicera gehwam, cup on fyre



Nr. 7

Gyfu

Gabe

Laut: g

Generosity brings credit and honour; it gives help and subsistence to all broken men.

OE Rune Poem: Gyfu gumena byþ gleng and herenys



Nr. 8

Wynn

Wonne

Laut: w

Bliss he enjoys who knows little woe, and has prosperity and a good house.

OE Rune Poem: Wenne bruceþ, ðe can weana lyt



Nr. 9

Hægl

Hagel

Laut: h

Hail is the whitest grain; whirled from heaven, tossed by wind, it melts into water.

OE Rune Poem: Hægl byþ hwitust corna



Nr. 10

Nyd

Not

Laut: n

Trouble oppresses the heart; yet often it becomes help to those who heed it in time.

OE Rune Poem: Nyd byþ nearu on breostan



Nr. 11

Is

Eis

Laut: i

Ice is very cold and slippery, glistening like glass and gems, a floor wrought by frost.

OE Rune Poem: Is byþ ofereald, ungemetum slidor



Nr. 12

Ger

Jahr

Laut: j

Summer is a joy to men, when God lets the earth bring forth shining fruits.

OE Rune Poem: Ger byþ gumena hiht



Nr. 13

Eoh

Eibe

Laut: ĩ

The yew has rough bark, hard and fast in the earth, a guardian of flame, a joy at home.

OE Rune Poem: Eoh byþ utan unsmeþe treow



Nr. 14

Peorð

unklar

Laut: p

Peorth is play and laughter of the proud in the beer-hall. Meaning disputed.

OE Rune Poem: Peorð byþ symble plega and hlehter



Nr. 15

Eolh

Riedgras

—
Laut: x

The elk-sedge grows in the fen, wounds grimly, covers with blood whoever grasps it.

OE Rune Poem: Eolh-secg eard hæfþ oftust on fenne



Nr. 16

Sigel

Sonne

—
Laut: s

The sun is the seafarers' hope, until the sea-steed bears them to land.

OE Rune Poem: Sigel semannum symble biþ on hihte



Nr. 17

Tir

Gott Tiw

—
Laut: t

Tiw is a guiding star, keeps faith with princes, ever on its course above night's mists.

OE Rune Poem: Tir biþ tacna sum



Nr. 18

Beorc

Birke

—
Laut: b

The poplar bears no fruit, yet without seed it brings forth shoots – high and fair its crown.

OE Rune Poem: Beorc byþ bleða leas



Nr. 19

Eh

Ross

—
Laut: e

The horse is a joy to princes, proud of hoof, a comfort to the restless.

OE Rune Poem: Eh byþ for eorlum æþelinga wyn



Nr. 20

Mann

Mensch

—
Laut: m

The joyous man is dear to kin – yet every man must one day fail his fellow.

OE Rune Poem: Man byþ on myrgþe his magan leof



Nr. 21

Lagu

Meer

—
Laut: l

The sea seems endless, when men dare the rolling boat and the waves dismay them.

OE Rune Poem: Lagu byþ leodum langsum geþuht



Nr. 22

Ing

Held Ing

—
Laut: ŋ

Ing was first seen among the East-Danes, then went eastwards over the waves.

OE Rune Poem: Ing wæs ærest mid East-Denum



Nr. 23

Eþel

Heimat

—
Laut: œ

Home is dear to every man, can he there in right and plenty dwell.

OE Rune Poem: Eþel byþ oferleof æghwylcum men



Nr. 24

Dæg

Tag

—
Laut: d

Day, the Creator's light, is dear to men, hope for rich and poor.

OE Rune Poem: Dæg byþ drihtnes sond



Nr. 25

Ac

Eiche

Laut: a

The oak fattens the swine; often it sails the sea – which tests the oak's faith.

OE Rune Poem: Ac byþ on eorþan elda bearnum



Nr. 26

Aesc

Esche

Laut: æ

The ash is exceedingly high, precious to men, firm in trunk though many attack it.

OE Rune Poem: Aesc biþ oferheah, eldum dyre



Nr. 27

Yr

Bogen?

Laut: y

Yr is joy and honour to every noble, fair on a horse, reliable on a journey – war-gear (a bow?).

OE Rune Poem: Yr byþ æþelinga and eorla gehwæs



Nr. 28

Ior

Flussfisch

Laut: io

Ior is a river-fish, yet feeds on land; a fair abode, encompassed by water.

OE Rune Poem: Ior byþ eafix



Nr. 29

Ear

Grab, Erde

Laut: ea

The grave is horrible to all, when the flesh grows cold and the pale earth becomes its bed.

OE Rune Poem: Ear byþ egle eorla gehwylcun

Famous Finds & Runestones

Runes are not theory – they stand on stone, bone, gold and wood. A selection of the key witnesses, with dating and significance.



Vimose comb

Funen, DK · c. 160 CE

Bears the word harja – the oldest datable runic inscription. Already confident in form: runes were in use before.



Golden Horns of Gallehus

Jutland · c. 400–450

ek hlewagastiz holtijaz horna tawido – I, Hlewagast, [son] of Holt, made the horn. First full sentence, alliterative. The originals were melted down in 1802; the text survives only in old drawings.



Kylver stone

Gotland · c. 400

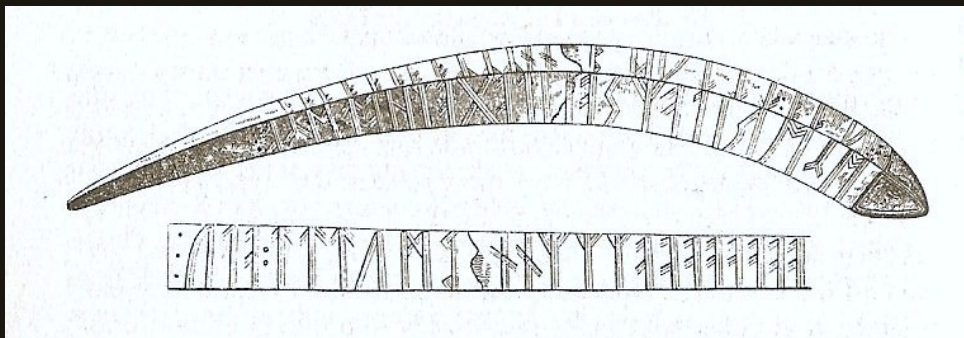
The oldest complete Futhark row (all 24), followed by the palindrome sueus and a stacked Týr-rune – often read as a magical sign.



Einang stone

Norway · c. 350–400

...faihido – painted the rune. The oldest runestone still in place; runes were originally coloured.



Lindholm amulet

Skåne · 2nd–4th c.

ek erilaz... – a rune-master names himself; plus a magical formula ending in alu, with eight Ansuz and three Tiwaz runes (disputed).



Vadstena bracteate

Sweden · c. 500

Best early evidence of the threefold ætt division (separated by dots). Proves the division – not the deity-names.



Rök runestone

Östergötland · early 9th c.

The longest known runic inscription (~700 characters). Dense with heroic allusion; its meaning is debated to this day.



Jelling stones

Jutland · c. 965

Harald Bluetooth commemorates his parents and boasts of having made the Danes Christian. Denmark's birth certificate; UNESCO site.



Gripsholm stone (Sö 179)

Södermanland · c. 1010–1050

An Ingvar stone: ...they died in the south in Serkland. A witness to the ill-fated Ingvar expedition east.



Maeshowe

Orkney · 12th c.

Some 30 Viking graffiti inside a Stone-Age tomb – boasts of treasure, women and travel. Everyday runes at their most human.



Bryggen sticks

Bergen · 12th–14th c.

Hundreds of rune-sticks: business notes, name-tags, love messages. Proof that runes were ordinary everyday writing.



Franks Casket

Northumbria · early 8th c.

Whalebone chest with runes and Latin; scenes from Weland the Smith to the Magi – pagan, Roman and Christian at once.



Seax of Beagnoth

Thames · 9th–10th c.

An iron knife bearing the only complete 28-rune futhorc on a single object – plus the name Beagnoth.

Negau helmet B

Slovenia · before the Common Era

Inscription in a North Italic alphabet – a central piece in the debate over the origin of runes.

Undley bracteate

Suffolk · 5th c.

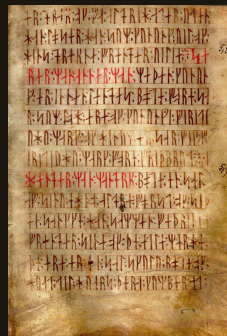
The earliest Anglo-Saxon runic inscription; its image adapts a Roman coin (wolf with Romulus & Remus).



Ruthwell Cross

Scotland · 8th c.

Stone cross bearing runic verses of the Dream of the Rood; carries the special runes calc & gar.



Codex Runicus

Denmark · c. 1300

An entire manuscript (the Scanian Law) written in runes – proof that runes served even for long books.

PRACTICE

Reading & Writing Runes

Runes are written by sound, not by the modern alphabet. There are no own signs for c, q, x – use k, kw, ks. Long and doubled sounds were often carved only once. Word dividers are dots (·) or colons (:).

To engrave a name you transcribe it sound by sound. An example in the Elder Futhark:

XIFFY N+M XRFNR

Glanz und Gravur in the Elder Futhark (v written with the u-rune).

For Viking-Age Old Norse names use the Younger Futhark – there one sign often carries several values. Never mix two rows in one word if you want it to look authentic.

Bind-runes

Two sounds can elegantly share one stave – fine for monograms and initials. Attested already in antiquity (Gallehus, bracteates).

In a nutshell

Write by sound, not by the alphabet.

No own c, q, x – use k, kw, ks; doubled sounds only once.

Old Norse names: Younger Futhark; never mix two rows.

Runes, Magic & Myth

Runes were writing – but they also stood in ritual use. On bracteates and amulets enigmatic words recur: *alu*, *laukaz*, *laþu*. Their meaning is uncertain; they are read as formulas of protection, thriving or consecration.

Odin's rune-sacrifice (Hávamál 138–139, sense)

*Nine nights I hung on the windy tree,
wounded by the spear, given to Odin, myself to myself –
then I took up the runes, screaming I took them,
and fell back from there.*

— Poetic Edda (public domain)

This myth explains why runes were held sacred: Odin wins them through pain and sacrifice. But it implies no fixed oracle system – historical use remained writing, memorial and single magic words.

Rune-masters

Early on we meet the title *erilaz* – a rune-skilled master who names himself on stone and amulet (Lindholm: *ek erilaz...*).

In a nutshell

*Runes were writing first, ritual second.
Recurring magic words: alu, laukaz, laþu – meaning uncertain.
Odin wins the runes by self-sacrifice on the world-tree (Hávamál).*

What Scholarship Says – and What Is Myth

A good rune book separates evidence from embellishment. Three points often confused:

1. Divinatory meanings are largely modern

There is no historical evidence that the Elder Futhark was used as a fixed 24-card oracle. Inscriptions are mostly names, maker-formulas, memorials and short (sometimes magical) words. The popular rune meanings (Fehu = abundance, etc.) are 20th-century systematizations. The old word-meanings (cattle, hail, ice) are scholarly; the oracular meanings are a modern overlay.

2. Armanen runes (Guido von List, 1902/1908)

A row of 18 pseudo-runes seen in a vision by the occultist Guido von List. Modern invention, not a historical alphabet; loosely tied to the 18 charms of the Hávamál, and later fed into völkisch and Nazi-era symbolism.

3. The blank rune (Ralph Blum, 1982)

The blank 25th rune (Wyrð, Odin) was introduced in Ralph Blum's *The Book of Runes* (1982). It has no ancient precedent. Many modern rune sets include it only because of that book.

In short

Solid: 24 signs, sound values, chronology, the threefold division, the (reconstructed) names.

Modern: fixed oracle meanings, Armanen runes, the blank rune, the deity ætt-names.

Runes Today

Runes never wholly vanished. In Dalarna (Sweden) they survived as Dalecarlian runes into the 19th century. And they reappear in surprising places:

The Bluetooth symbol

The Bluetooth logo is a bind-rune of the Younger runes (Hagall) and (Bjarkan) – the initials of Harald Bluetooth (Blåtand), who once united Danish tribes. The wireless technology unites devices – hence the name.

Tolkien & pop culture

J. R. R. Tolkien used real Anglo-Saxon runes in *The Hobbit*, but invented his own signs (Cirth/Angelthas) for *The Lord of the Rings*. These are fiction, not a historical alphabet.

A word on responsibility

In the 20th century single runes (e.g. Sowilo and Algiz) were misused by völkisch and National-Socialist circles.

That is appropriation, not history. We present the runes as what they are: ancient Germanic written heritage – for everyone.

Reading a Runestone

Most Viking-Age stones follow a fixed memorial formula. Know the pattern and the same building-blocks jump out – even before you read a single rune.

The memorial formula

- Sponsor: 'X had this stone raised ...' (often several sponsors).
- Commemorated: '... after Y, his father / brother / companion.'
- Addition: a deed, journey or death – '... he died in the east, in Serkland.'
- Sometimes a carver's signature: 'Z carved the runes.'

A typical example, in sense, in the Uppland style:

"Gunnarr and Holmgeirr had the stone raised after Sveinn, their father. May God help his soul."

The closing Christian prayer is standard on many late stones – a fine witness to how runes and the new faith met.

Carving Runes – Material & Tools

Runes are made for hard materials. Their angular, slanting shapes arose because they were cut across the wood grain – horizontal lines would vanish in the grain. That is why no rune has purely horizontal strokes.

With what and on what

- Stone: memorials, often filled with red pigment (ochre, minium) – runes were coloured, not grey.
- Wood and bone: everyday life – combs, sticks, business notes (Bryggen).
- Metal and gold: weapons, brooches, bracteates – prestige and protection.

And today

In our workshop the laser takes the place of knife and chisel: we engrave runes and motifs into slate, teak, wood discs and glass. The principle stays the same – a lasting sign in a lasting material.

In a nutshell

Rune shapes are angular – cut across the wood grain.

Stone runes were often painted red; runes were colourful.

Material drives technique: stone, wood, bone, metal – today the laser.

Common Misconceptions

Are runes Celtic?

No. Runes are Germanic. The Celts wrote, where at all, in Ogham or the Latin alphabet. Runes and Ogham are unrelated.

Is there a 'life rune' and a 'death rune'?

These terms (for Algiz upright and inverted) come from the 20th century, not the runic age. Historically the sign is *algiz, probably meaning 'protection / elk-sedge'.

Could you cast spells with runes?

Runes stood in ritual use (amulets, formulas like alu), but they were writing first. No fixed spell- or card-system is attested.

Are the deity-names of the ættir genuine?

The threefold division is old; the names 'Freyr's, Heimdall's, Týr's ætt' are a modern mnemonic.

In a nutshell

Runes are Germanic, not Celtic (Celts: Ogham/Latin).

'Life-' and 'death-rune' are 20th-century inventions.

The threefold division is real - the ætt deity-names are modern.

Appendix: From the Anglo-Saxon Rune Poem

The Anglo-Saxon Rune Poem (preserved through George Hickes, 1705) describes each rune in a short stanza. A selection in Bruce Dickins' public-domain translation (1915):

Feoh – wealth

“Wealth is a comfort to all; yet must every man bestow it freely, if he wish to gain honour in the sight of the Lord.”

Ur – aurochs

“The aurochs is proud and has great horns; it is a very savage beast and fights with its horns, a great ranger of the moors.”

Thorn – thorn

“The thorn is exceedingly sharp, an evil thing for any knight to touch, uncommonly severe on all who sit among them.”

Os – mouth

“The mouth is the source of all language, a pillar of wisdom and a comfort to wise men.”

Rad – riding

“Riding seems easy to every warrior while he is indoors, and very courageous to him who traverses the high-roads on a stout horse.”

Cen – torch

“The torch is known to every living man by its pale, bright flame; it always burns where princes sit within.”

Dotted Runes & the Middle Ages

The Younger Futhark had only 16 signs for ever more sounds. In the Middle Ages a dot came to the rescue: a set point told voiced from voiceless – the stungnar rúnir, the ‘dotted runes’.

- i with a dot becomes e.
- k with a dot becomes g.
- t with a dot becomes d.
- b with a dot becomes p.

Thus a nearly complete alphabet returned. Medieval runes long stood beside the Latin script; the Codex Runicus (~1300) even writes a whole law-book in runes.

Worksheet: Your Name in Runes

Here is how to transcribe a name into the Elder Futhark – sound by sound, not letter by letter. There are no own runes for c, q, x: use k, kw, ks.

F B C D M P X H I S

abc/kdefghij

K T N F O C R S T D

klmnoprstu

P C S S Y D O

v/w x→ks y→j z þ (th) ng

Doubled sounds are often carved only once. For Viking-Age Old Norse names use the Younger Futhark – there one sign carries several sounds.

TRY IT

Exercise 1 – Your Name in Runes

Runes are written by sound, not by the alphabet. Transcribe each sound; for c, q, x use k, kw, ks; carve doubled sounds only once.

How to

Example – the name Erik, sound by sound (e-r-i-k):

ᚱ ᚷ ᚲ ᚲ

Erik in the Elder Futhark

Now you: say your name slowly, write the sounds, and place the runes beneath. The overview plate on page 11 is your cheat-sheet.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

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.....

Exercise 2 – Read the Runes

Six short words in the Elder Futhark. Transcribe rune by rune into letters. Solutions are below – try first!

- 1) ÞŃŔ
- 2) ǷŃĪ
- 3) ŔŃĲ
- 4) ǷŃŦ
- 5) ÞŃŦŷ
- 6) ǷĲ
- 7) ǷŃ
- 8) ŔǷĲŦ

Solutions

- 1) *Thur (giant)* 2) *Odin* 3) *Runa (secret)* 4) *Met (mead)*
 5) *Wulf (wolf)* 6) *Skal (Skål!)* 7) *alu (protection word)* 8) *Ragnar*

Did you know?

The word *alu* (no. 7) is among the most common of all runic words. It appears on bracteates and amulets across northern Europe; its exact meaning is uncertain, read as a formula of protection, consecration or thriving. Perhaps the oldest Germanic ‘good-luck’ word.

SPOT IT

Exercise 3 – Which Row?

A few signs reveal the row. Rule of thumb: 24 runes = Elder Futhark; only 16 = Younger (Viking Age); with os/ac/æsc = Anglo-Saxon. Which line is which?

A) ✚ ƿ Ʀ ʀ ʁ

only 16 signs, short-twig

B) ƿ ƿ ƿ X ƿ

with os, ac and æsc

C) ƿ R ‹ X ƿ

full 24-rune row, Ansuz = a

Solutions

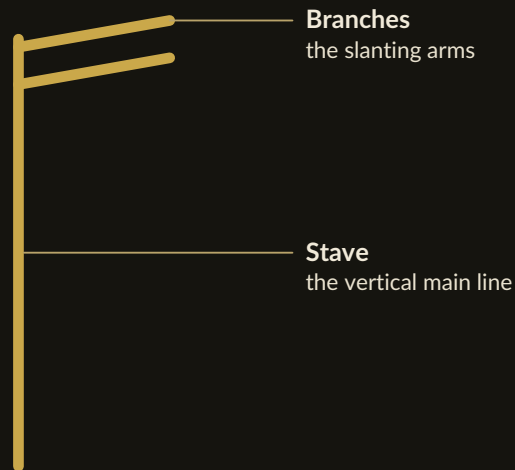
A) Younger Futhark B) Anglo-Saxon Futhorc C) Elder Futhark

Did you know?

Archaeologists often date an inscription from a few signs: the nasal óss-rune points to the Viking Age; os, ac and æsc place you in England. From a handful of strokes, scholars read whole centuries.

Anatomy of a Rune & Bind-runes

Every rune is built from an upright stave and slanting branches. Horizontal lines are almost always missing: cut across the wood grain they would barely have shown.



Bind-runes – two signs, one stave

A bind-rune (Old Norse / Icelandic *bandrún*) joins two – rarely three – runes into a single sign, usually sharing one upright stave. It is attested already in the Migration Period and common in the Middle Ages; in the Viking Age, however, it is rare.

Here is how it forms: you set the branches of one rune on the left, those of the other on the right of a shared stave.



Construction: Fehu and Burisaz share one stave.

What for?

- To save space – at a line end or on small surfaces like amulets and combs.
- To fix mistakes – a forgotten sound could be tied on afterwards.
- For ornament and emphasis – often the carver's name, artfully interlaced.

Honestly

Bind-runes are a writing technique, not magic.

No inherent magical power is attested – that is a modern reading.

Two kinds

The normal bind-rune joins adjacent runes on one stave (e.g. a doubled d in the name Hadda). The same-stave rune (samstavruna) instead strings several runes along a single long stem-line – typical of Scandinavia, unknown in Anglo-Saxon. On stones this line even becomes part of the picture: a ship's mast (Sö 158, Sö 352) or a wave beneath a ship (DR 220).

Historical evidence

- Kragehul spear-shaft (5th c.): Gebo runes joined with vowels.
- Kylver stone (~400): stacked Tiwaz runes; plus the 'lantern rune' ing from Isaz + Ingwaz.
- Franks Casket (8th c.): the word sefa as a ligature of the sounds f and a (fa).
- Rök stone (9th c.): a ligature of a and þ.
- Tuna stone (Småland): s and k in the word skipari ('sailor').
- Bluetooth logo: Hagall + Bjarkan – the initials H. B. of Harald Bluetooth.

From name to monogram

This is exactly what makes bind-runes appealing for an engraving: two initials sharing a stave make an unmistakable mark. Take two runes with an upright stave – say Tiwaz and Raido – and let their branches point left and right. A monogram that looks a thousand years old and is entirely your own.

Glossary

Futhark / Futhorc

Name of the runic row after its first sounds (f-u-þ-a-r-k / f-u-þ-o-r-c).

Ætt

One of the three groups of eight in a runic row (Old Norse 'family, group').

Acrophony

The rune-name begins with its sound value (*fehu → f).

Bind-rune

Two or more runes sharing a single stave.

Boustrophedon

Writing that alternates direction line by line.

Bracteate

A thin, single-sided stamped gold disc; often runic.

Erilaz

An early title for a rune-skilled master.

Stungnar rúnir

Medieval dotted runes for finer sound distinction.

alu / laukaz / laþu

Recurring, probably magical words of uncertain meaning.

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Finds & stones: Wikipedia articles on the Kylver, Rök, Jelling, Einang stones, Gallehus, Vimose, Lindholm, Vadstena, Gripsholm, Bryggen, Franks Casket, Ruthwell Cross, Seax of Beagnoth, Undley – cross-checked against the scholarship cited there.

Note: where names, sound values or meanings are disputed in scholarship, this is flagged in the text.

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Bryggen rune-stick – photo: Bengt A. Lundberg / Riksantikvarieämbetet, CC BY 2.5 – File:Kat nr 005 Pinne av trä ... - KMB - 16000300015442.jpg

Franks Casket (front) – W. Viëtor, Public Domain – File:Franks Casket - Front side.jpg

Seax of Beagnoth – D. H. Haigh, Public Domain – File:Beagnoth Seax Futhorc.jpg

Ruthwell Cross – A. S. Cook, Public Domain – File:Ruthwell Cross, West Face, near top.jpg

Codex Runicus – manuscript (~1300), Public Domain – File:CodexRunicus.jpeg

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For knowledge. For remembrance. For the old signs.

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