Mindy MacLeod and Bernard Mees

RUNIC AMULETS

AND

MAGIC OBJECTS

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Preface

In 1997 the Uppsala professor, Dr Henrik Williams, was visiting Australia as a guest of the Department of Germanic Studies at the University of Melbourne. He had discovered, to his surprise, that there were two people in Melbourne writing independently on runic matters and decided to bring them together. The first products of our ensuing collaboration were two jointly written papers. We found that our differing backgrounds served to complement each other's weaknesses, if not always strengths, and we soon discovered we were often able to cover a lot more ground than a single writer could be expected to.

Our respective backgrounds as a Scandinavist on the one hand, and as a Germanist (who has also read in classics), on the other, are a good guide to the principal authorship of the different themes and geographies covered in this work. It grew from our second joint paper, which was inspired by an observation by the American linguist Dr Thomas L. Markey.

Abbreviations

CIL   *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum*, ed. Theodor Mommsen et al., 17 vols (Berlin 1863–).

DR   *Danmarks Runeindskrifter*, ed. Lis Jacobsen and Erik Moltke, 2 vols (Copenhagen 1941).

IK   *Ikonographischer Katalog* of *Die Goldbrakteaten der Völkerwanderungszeit*, ed. Karl Hauck et al., Münster Mittelalter-Schriften 24, 4 vols (Munich 1985–89)

N A   Catalogue number from the runic archives in Oslo of an inscription from Norway (other than from Bergen) not yet published in *NIyR*, but listed in the downloadable University of Uppsala database 'Samnordisk runtextdatabas', http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forsk/samnord.html.

N B   Catalogue number from the runic archives in Oslo of an inscription from Bergen not yet published in *NIyR*, but referenced in the Norwegian National Library on-line database 'Runeinnskrifter fra Bryggen i Bergen' http://www.nb.no/baser/runer/index.html.

NIyR   *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer*, ed. Magnus Olsen et al., 6 vols (Oslo 1941–); and cf. Jan Ragnar Hagland, 'Runer frå utgravingane i Trondheim bygrunn 1971–1994', which has been published on the internet (http:/www.hf.ntnu.no/ nor/Publik/RUNER/ runer-N774-N894.htm) as a preliminary version of *NIyR* vol. VII.

SR   *Sveriges runinskrifter*, ed. Sven Söderberg et al., 15 vols (Stockholm 1900–).

U UR   Catalogue number from Uppland Prehistorical Society's collections of an inscription from Sweden not yet published in *SR*, but listed in the downloadable University of Uppsala database 'Samnordisk runtextdatabas', http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forsk/samnord.html.

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Introduction

MANY objects once thought of as having magical powers feature texts written in runes, providing sources that today shed light on the lives and experiences of the northern European peoples the ancient Romans first called Germans. These pre-Christian Germanic or Teutonic folk were not just early Germans or Scandinavians, though; they are the ancestors of several modern nations in Europe and beyond – from England and Holland to Austria and Germany and up to the Nordic countries, from North America to Australasia as well – and also include tribes who once ruled over other peoples such as the Franks, Lombards, Burgundians and Goths. The runic texts surveyed in this book are often previously misunderstood keys to comprehending the religious, cultural and social world of the early Germanic peoples prior to and during their conversions to Christianity, and the cultural and intellectual Latinising that followed the adoption of both the writing system and the official religion of the late Roman Empire.[1]

The study and interpretation of old Germanic inscriptions, though, can be a strange business. In fact it has been suggested that the first law of runic studies is that 'for every inscription there shall be as many interpretations as there are runologists studying it'. This may seem a bit too clever or even a little bewildering. But a lot of what passes for expert runic interpretation has too readily strayed into the fantastic in the past, and never more so than in considerations of the runic legends that appear on amulets and other similar items. This is at least part of the reason why no major contributions to the topic of this study have appeared before and why the subject of runic amulets has usually been treated so poorly when it has been assessed at all.[2]

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[1] The general introductions to the study of runes in English are R.W.V. Elliott, *Runes*, 2nd ed. (Manchester 1989) and R.I. Page, *Runes* (London 1987). Studies of the traditions of individual countries include R.I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes*, 2nd ed. (Woodbridge 1999), T. Spurkland, *Norwegian Runes and Runic Inscriptions*, trans B. van der Hoek (Woodbridge 2005), S.B.F. Jansson, *Runes in Sweden*, trans. P.G. Foote (Stockholm 1987), and E. Moltke, *Runes and their Origin, Denmark and Elsewhere*, trans. P.G. Foote (Copenhagen 1985). Other standard works include the still useful L. Musset, *Introduction à la runologie* (Paris 1965), W. Krause, *Runen* (Berlin 1970), and K. Düwel, *Runenkunde*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart 2001).

[2] Cf., however, the recent sourcebook by J. McKinnell and R. Simek, *Runes, Magic and Religion* (Vienna 2004) and the useful surveys of later runic amulets: E. Moltke, 'Mediaeval rune-amulets in Denmark', *Acta Ethnologica* (1938), 116–47 and K. Düwel, 'Mitterlalterliche Amulette aus

This first apparent law of runic studies also masks the fact that many people who interest themselves in runic texts are often neither linguists nor experts in the study of inscriptions. Often what pass for expert interpretations of runic inscriptions turn out to be no more than educated guesses by specialists in medieval literature or archaeology. Our aim here is not to provide new readings or linguistic interpretations of the runic texts we assess, though on occasion it has become obvious to us that some commonly accepted interpretations have proven implausible when the amulet inscriptions are taken in their proper context. Our main approach is epigraphic: we have arranged the inscriptions according to type, and then assessed them in terms of what they have in common, an approach that has often enabled us to sort plausible interpretations from the improbable even before considering other issues.

The usual interpretative approach in runic studies is basically etymological. We have mostly refrained from etymological argument here, though. Etymological analysis is essential when assessing fragments of only partially understood languages. Nonetheless it is often done in the absence of other considerations – later or etymologically reconstructed meanings are often blithely read onto early forms without due attention being paid to matters such as immediate context and broader meaning relationships, or what linguists call collocation and semantic fields.[3]

The traditional approach has also often proven too restricted in its horizon – few runologists seem to be interested in comparing runic texts with similar expressions from other epigraphic traditions. We have been open to comparing runic amulet texts with those appearing on Greek and Roman amulets especially in light of the progress made in the last few decades in the understanding of Graeco-Roman magical practice. We have also been influenced by some of the methods developed in Etruscan studies, where given the difficult nature of the language, a stress on isolating and comparing formulaic elements is considered essential. The impressive recent developments in the understanding of Celtic and other areas of early European epigraphy have also proved significant to our assessments.

The texts surveyed in this book appear on a wide range of media commonly dubbed amulets by runic scholars, including pieces of jewellery, pendants or plates of copper, bronze or iron, worked pieces of bone and sticks or crosses of wood. Experts in medieval studies, though, often call an inscribed object carried or worn for magical reasons a *talisman*; a similar item is only an *amulet* for these

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Holz und Blei mit lateinischen und runischen Inschriften', in V. Vogel (ed.), *Ausgrabungen in Schleswig* 15 (Neumünster 2001), pp. 227–302. The only comprehensive attempt to survey runic magic is the often speculative S.E. Flowers, *Runes and Magic* (Frankfurt a.M. 1986). Cf. also from an archaeological perspective A.L. Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones* (Oxford 1981) and M.K. Zeiten, 'Amulets and amulet use in Viking Age Denmark', *Acta Archaeologica* 68 (1997), 1–74.

3   The best analysis of early runic grammar is the often-idiosyncratic E.H. Antonsen, *A Concise Grammar of the Older Runic Inscriptions* (Tübingen 1975), which is indebted to the 1965 Russian original of È.A. Makaev, *The Language of the Oldest Runic Inscriptions*, trans. J. Meredig (Uppsala 1996), and Nordicists still tend to rely on A. Noreen, *Altisländische und altnorwegische Grammatik*, 4th ed. (Halle a.S. 1923), or later works substantially dependent on it.

scholars if it is inscriptionless.[4] Those who study the classical and early Near Eastern world, however, maintain a different view and instead call both types of objects *amulets*. In fact more modern items of a similar ilk – for instance lucky rabbit's feet and four-leaf clovers – are better known in normal speech merely as *charms*. But the distinctions often made between amulets, talismans and charms are usually artificial. The word *talisman* comes from an Arabic description for magical stones, rings or other objects that were known to the ancient Romans as *amuleta* – so it does not make much sense to call any sort of ancient charm a talisman. On the other hand, the word *charm* can be a confusing description as the same term can equally apply to a spoken or chanted spell, or even merely a more mundane effect, such as charisma – personal charm. *Talisman* and *amulet* are actually synonyms, then, though *amulet* is the usual description used in runic and classical studies for what medievalists often distinguish as talismans.

Other words for amulets or charms in English include *periapt* (cf. Greek *periapton* 'pendant') and *phylactery* (cf. Greek *phylaktêrion* 'amulet'). In normal use, however, the description *phylactery* is usually restricted to amulets with clear religious associations, most commonly the small cases with sacred writings folded up in them (*tefillin*) traditionally used in Judaism. Similar items in Christian environments are usually just called amulets, though, as they normally have no official standing as religious items. The distinction between amulet and phylactery or periapt is, again, somewhat artificial, and not one an ancient Greek would have made.

Some distinction has to be maintained, though, between a charm that can be worn or carried in any circumstance and one that is only meant to be used in a religious rite or sacred setting. An object that is dedicated and then dropped into a sacred spring, for example, is often styled an *ex voto* or *votive* – its characteristic function is that it has been offered to the sacred; it is the material equivalent of a prayer. Of course it can be difficult to establish a clear boundary between magic and religion in some circumstances. Prayers, for example, are often used in magical spells. In fact some people hold that magic is merely loosely organised or somehow devolved religion. An *ex voto*, however, has a restricted religious function. Votive items can be reused as amulets given the right circumstance – votives taken out of religious sanctuaries, even if by improper means, have sometimes subsequently come to be used as amulets. So it is often the use, rather than the type of object, or even the inscription it may bear, that distinguishes amulets and phylacteries from votives.

Amulets have been used by many different societies at many different times – they are perhaps as much a part of the modern world, in the form of lucky socks, caps or medallions, as they are of earlier societies. There has been a noted reluctance among many scholars, however, since the 1950s especially, to think of objects like amulets in a pan-Germanic or long historical perspective. This modern approach, although clearly influenced by French literary theory, first

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4   R. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1989), p. 77, which is probably still the best general survey of its type for medieval times as a whole, notwithstanding its typically inaccurate section on runes.

emerged as a reaction to German scholars who claimed Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon literature was part of their own 'Teutonic' cultural inheritance. In the nineteenth century the old Germanic past seemed especially important to many scholars and commentators seeking to explain their own worlds. Taken to ridiculous extremes under the Nazis, this type of historical understanding spawned a backlash, especially in Britain, and a less sweeping and romantic approach to history soon became the norm. A hostility to a wider and deeper perspective has permeated Anglo-Saxon and more recently Old Norse studies since that time. But this seems particularly limiting in a runic studies context. Both the runic alphabet and the amuletic tradition betrayed in the earliest inscriptions show a striking similarity in each of the attested Germanic traditions. Although mindful of the potential pitfalls of the comparativist or Germanic-continuity approach, we do not think it appropriate to limit the scope of our work by remaining too faithful to methodologies and approaches born out of reactions to past academic trends, rather than close analyses of the subject matter itself.[5]

There were several native words for 'amulet' in the old Germanic languages, then, though none of them retain this meaning today. The Old English noun *þweng* 'band, amulet', for instance, is related to Modern English *thong* and obviously originally signified something tied or worn (it may be based on *ligatura*, a Latin term for 'amulet' with a similar meaning). Another word, Old High German *zoupargiscrîp*, which literally means 'magical writing', is similarly a physical description, this time, presumably, of a phylactery containing folded-up religious writings – the term after all is only known from clerical contexts. A second type, instead, is obviously formed from descriptions of the powers of amulets, most commonly being based upon words indicating health or good fortune (which in old Germanic tradition were often considered to be the same thing), such as Old Norse *heill* and Old English *lybesn*, both of which are derived from words originally signifying 'health' but which had come to refer to 'magic'. A similar further term for 'amulet', Old English *healsbōc*, which literally means 'health-book', is also reminiscent of medieval German *zoupargiscrîp*, but may at first have referred to a book upon which people swore oaths before it came to refer to amulets more generally. Yet magical powers can be ascribed to all manner of objects, so we will not limit ourselves merely to rune-inscribed pendants, rings or the like in this survey.[6]

Some distinctions have to be observed in the use of the word *rune*, however, a term that has developed several meanings in contemporary English. In this study it is used with the meaning it had when it was reintroduced to English by antiquarians in the seventeenth century after having fallen out of use in the late Middle Ages. Nonetheless, the term *rune* originally had two meanings: in Old English it could mean both 'runic letter' and 'secret' or 'knowledge' – the modern literary employment of *rune* as a word for 'poem' was originally adopted from Finnish usage. Some have argued that there were in origin two different terms, then, one

5   Cf. R.D. Fulk and C.M. Cain, *A History of Old English Literature* (London 2003), pp. 195–96, 203–4 and 230–31.
6   Flowers, pp. 143–44.

related to *row* and indicating a sense of carving, the other to *rumour* and originally referring to communicating. The original meaning for *rune* equally may just have been '(hushed) message' (cf. German *raunen* 'to whisper' and Early Modern English *round*) and the same word came to be used equally for secrets, whispers, wisdom and writing, the last as written characters conveying meaning without actually making a sound. There does not seem to have been anything particularly secret or magical (or poetic‹) about the letters of the runic alphabet originally, despite the development of one of the forms of the word to signify secrecy or knowledge.[7]

It is certain that the use of the word *rune* as 'secret' or 'knowledge' had come to be associated with magic at an early period, though. The ancient Goths, for instance, used an expression *haliurunnae*, literally meaning 'Hell-runer' to refer to sorceresses, and in Old English the etymologically identical compound *hellerˆne* translates 'pythoness' (i.e. seeress or witch). Old High German even had the equivalent compounds *hellirûna* (literally 'Hell-runes') for 'necromancy', *hellirûnâri* for 'necromancer' and *tôtrûna* (literally 'death-runer') for the feminine 'necromancess'. The magical plant, the mandrake, is still called *Alraun* (i.e. 'great-rune') in German today, the fates and furies were called *burgrˆnan* 'guarantee-runers' in Old English and one Old High German text even records a compound *leodrûna*, literally 'song-runer', with the meaning 'sorceress'.[8]

A similar connection between *runes* and *lioða* or magical 'songs' is evident in Old Norse literary sources, a linkage seen also in medieval Norse words such as *roner* for magic spells in Danish folk songs and *rúnokarl* 'magician' (literally 'rune-man'). When we consider that the English word *spell* can refer both to writing (as a verb) and magic (as a noun), and the description *glamour* (which originally meant magical charm) is a corruption of *grammar*, the homophony between *rune* 'secret' or 'knowledge' and *rune* 'runic character' seems almost destined to have eventually led to semantic interference and even confusion between these two terms. In fact magical applications of runes are frequently alluded to in the collection of Old Norse mythological and heroic poetry known as the *Poetic Edda*, and medieval Icelandic family sagas are also forthcoming with details of runic sorcery. Runic 'songs' (and it is with this meaning that the term *rune* was first loaned into Finnish) consequently fell foul of the writ of the Christian church, and even though *rune* had been considered innocent enough to gloss 'divine mystery' in the Gothic and medieval English translations of the Bible, in the Scandinavian languages the term eventually seems to have become restricted to runic letters and witchcraft. One Anglo-Saxon charm claims to be effective 'against every evil song-rune (*leodrˆnan*), and one full of elfish tricks', and post-medieval Norse books of magic often use magic sigils called 'runes' in the spells they contain. In fact a Norwegian archbishop felt compelled three times in

7 R.L. Morris, 'Northwest-Germanic *rˆn-* ›rune‹', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 107 (1985), 344–58, C.E. Fell, 'Runes and semantics', in A. Bammesberger (ed.), *Old English Runes and their Continental Background* (Heidelberg 1991), pp. 195–229 and cf. M. Pierce, 'Zur Etymologie von Germ. *runa*', *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 58 (2003), 29–37.
8 Flowers, p. 152.

the mid-fourteenth century to issue proclamations against those who engaged in 'medications, runes, black magic and superstition', while around 25 Icelandic men lost their lives following accusations of practising witchcraft (which typically included claims of employing runic magic) long after runes had ceased to be used as a living writing system on the island.[9]

The runic alphabet or *futhark* is so-named for the first six letters of the standard runic-letter ordering, the runic ABC, or *rune* or *futhark row*. The first form of writing used by the Germanic peoples, the earliest possibly runic inscription dates from the first half of the first century, though the runic tradition does not seem to have begun to flourish until about a hundred years or more after that date. Yet from that time it remained in continuous use in some parts of the Germanic world for well over a thousand years. In fact, originally employed by most of the Germanic tribes, runic inscriptions have been found all over Europe, from Ireland to Russia, from Greenland to Greece – just about wherever early Germanic folk and later the Vikings wandered. Runes did not fare well in face of the growing use of paper and parchment, though, and when runes are found in medieval manuscripts they are usually only employed in a playful manner, merely as monkish curiosities. Runic writing died out earliest in mainland Europe, and then England with the Norman Conquest, but remained a living tradition in the Nordic countries until the close of the Middle Ages. Indeed in some remote areas of Scandinavia a hybrid runic-Roman form of writing even lingered on as long as the late nineteenth century.

The origin of the runes also remains a matter of some controversy, though they are generally linked to one of the major ancient European alphabetic traditions, much recent scholarship focussing especially on Latin or the northern (Alpine) outcrop of the Etruscan tradition. What is certain, however, is that runes eventually became the everyday writing system of Viking-Age Scandinavia, and continued in use well into the Christian Middle Ages, often alongside the Roman alphabet introduced by the Latin-speaking Church.[10]

It is misleading to speak of one runic alphabet, however, as there were several different runic systems employed by different Germanic peoples at different times. Oldest is the runic alphabet usually known as the *older futhark*, which was once used throughout Germanic Europe. The continental form of the older runes seems to have died out by the eighth century, though, apart from in Frisia in the northern Netherlands. This older runic alphabet instead was extended by the Frisians, and across the English Channel also by the Anglo-Saxons, whose standard runic alphabet or futhark row contained some modified runic letterforms as well as incorporating several new ones: runes equivalent to digraphs such as *æ* and *œ* were added, while some old runes such as that originally for *z* were given new values. The opposite development occurred in Scandinavia, however, where letters which had become redundant or were otherwise judged unnecessary first

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[9] The last execution took place in 1685, although prosecutions continued until 1720; see Ó. Davíðsson, 'Isländische Zauberzeichen und Zauberbücher', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* 13 (1903), 150–51.

[10] The various theories are surveyed in B. Mees, 'The North Etruscan thesis of the origin of the runes', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 115 (2000), 33–82.

began to drop out of use. A major reduction subsequently occurred, with runes like *t* now assuming the ability to represent two sounds (in this case both *t* and *d*). The older *e*-rune and *o*-rune were both lost in this way, runic *i* and *u* being used in their places. By the ninth century a *younger futhark* had emerged to become the runes of Viking-Age Scandinavia, although even they appear in two related variants, usually descriptively referred to as the *long-branch* and *short-twig* runes. A more extreme variant, the *staveless* alphabet, even continued this streamlining further and dispensed with the main stems or *staves* of each younger runic letterform altogether. Later on still the younger runic alphabets were modified again, with *dotted* variants of some runes introduced to distinguish between similar sounds, while some entirely novel runes were also adopted. These forms of the runic alphabet are often called the *medieval futharks*, following the insistence of Scandinavian scholars that only the latter part of the *Medium Ævum* that renaissance writers first declared separated their own age from ancient times is to be called medieval. Yet even within the standardised runic alphabets provided in the table given on p. 13, it must be remembered that the runes enjoyed considerable graphic variation: they can have more rounded or angular features; they can face in different directions or be written lying on their sides or even appear in inscriptions fully upside down. In fact in some cases, even completely different individual and local variants of many of the standard runes are attested.[11]

The older futhark contained a runic letter for every sound needed to represent early Germanic speech, including the runes *þ* for the sound represented in English by *th* and *ŋ* for English *ng*. It also had a character for what seems originally to have been a slightly differently articulated *i*, often distinguished in transcriptions by a diaeresis (*ï*), and a letter for *z* which later came to signify an *r*-like sound (which is usually represented as *ʀ* when early Norse inscriptions are transcribed into Roman type), different from the standard *r*. Interpreting younger texts can often be difficult, though, as the reduction in letters meant that the same spelling could render *bit*, *bet* or *bid* or *pet*. In this book we have endeavoured as much as possible to render younger inscriptions in forms as similar as is reasonable to those of literary Norse even when the spelling of the inscriptions might suggest a different transcription. We have also taken the opportunity availed by computer text-editing to use normalised runic type to represent actual texts, rather than the bold san-serif Roman type traditionally employed by runic scholars.

The complications of runic writing were exacerbated by the development of many of what seem to modern eyes whimsical practices and inventions. First, like many early Greek and Etruscan texts, runic inscriptions are often only haphazardly punctuated and they rarely separate individual words out with spaces. Often

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11 Studies of some of the peculiarities of runic writing include: I. Sanness Johnsen, *Stuttruner i vikingtidens innskrifter* (Oslo 1968), K.-E. Westergaard, *Skrifttegn og symboler* (Oslo 1981), K.F. Seim, 'Grafematisk analyse av en del runeinnskrifter fra Bryggen i Bergen' (Unpublished thesis, Bergen 1982), R.L. Morris, *Runic and Mediterranean Epigraphy* (Odense 1988), B. Odenstedt, *On the Origin and Early History of the Runic Script* (Uppsala 1990), T. Spurkland, 'En fonografematisk analyse av runematerialet fra Bryggen i Bergen' (Unpublished dissertation, Oslo 1991), M. MacLeod, *Bind-runes* (Uppsala 2002) and eadem, 'Ligatures in early runic and Roman inscriptions', in G. Fellows-Jensen et al. (eds), *Jelling Runes* (Copenhagen 2006).

early runic inscriptions have no punctuation at all, though some punctuate words rather than sentences. On occasion it is even word elements that are marked out by dotted or crossed *interpuncts* (·, ∴, ⫶, × etc.), where other times runic writers only marked out phrases with these symbols. Runic inscriptions can be written from left-to-right (dextroverse), from right-to-left (sinistroverse) or even vary between the two (a practice called *boustrophedon*). A runic inscription may even begin at the bottom of an object and scroll its way up, or read in another irregular manner.

Runic writers also liked to ligature pairs or more of runic letters together, forming *bind-runes* sharing a stem or branch, e.g. ᚸ for ᚠ + ᛕ (which in this book will otherwise be represented for typographical reasons as ᚠ͡ᛕ). Similar modifications, especially in early inscriptions, could be made to individual runic shapes, creating enhanced or *decorative* runic letterforms such as ᚨ for the usual ᚠ. Runic letters could also be repeated as a mark of emphasis in early texts, or even repeated and ligatured, a rare type of decorative letterform usually referred to as a *mirror-rune*; for instance ᛩ for a mirrored ᚹ. Other features such as facing the wrong way around also seem to be used on occasion in order to emphasise particular words or phrases. But in the main such practices seem to have been haphazard, ephemeral or even playful, and the appearance of a reversed rune or ligature in an inscription is not a guarantee that highlighting or punctuation was the intention of the carver.

The early runic spelling system, again much like that of early Greek or Etruscan practice, also failed to distinguish between short and long consonants (like the long *n* in English *unnecessary*) or vowels, even if these crossed word-boundaries. An English expression like *big gorilla* could be rendered *bigorilla* in a runic text that did not use interpuncts. Another spelling oddity is the frequent omission of *n* and *m* before other consonants, probably because inscribers thought it was not strictly necessary to indicate them, a practice which again is also characteristic of archaic Italian inscriptions. Some inscribers, on occasion, also hyper-corrected their spellings, including what seem to be parasitic vowels (like the extra vowel heard in Irish pronunciations such as *filum* for *film*). In general our normalisations represent the forms thought by linguists to underlie the runic spellings, including the (tacit) correction of spelling errors or anomalies whenever these can be detected.

From a reasonably early time, or perhaps even from the instance of their inception, each rune also had a meaningful name, a noun linked to its sound value; for example the *f*-rune, ᚠ, was called *fé* 'cattle, wealth' and runic *u*, ᚢ, was *úr* 'aurochs (wild ox)'. We know most of these names from the runic poems and other grammatical tracts written down in Norway, Iceland, England and on the Continent during the Middle Ages. Moreover, sometimes it seems that a rune could stand as a logographic representation of the word denoted by its name, much as an *m*-rune, ᛗ, was used as a *runic ideograph* for its name *mon* 'man (person)' in some Old English manuscripts. Some inscriptions make sporadic use of such runic shorthand, although this is a fairly rare occurrence, and some modern interpreters have clearly made too much of this kind of abbreviation in recent times.

Also from a reasonably early stage, the runes of the futhark row were divided into three groups or *families*. Some of the early futhark-row inscriptions indicate

this division into groups of eight runes each; in the reduced, younger-futhark row of Viking-Age Scandinavia, the first group contained six runes and the following two five each. The families are designated in Norse literary sources by the name of the first rune in each group, i.e. 'Cattle's group', 'Hail's group' and 'Tyr's group'. Moreover, simple numerical codes were based around this division of the various futhark rows, so that instead of simply writing the appropriate rune, it could instead be designated by its place in the group (e.g. 1:1, the first rune in the first family = an *f*-rune etc.). Such codes, often quite varied in their expression, were represented by special sequences of runes, modified runic letterforms or even completely new symbols. These and other forms of runic cryptography or *cryptic runes*, however, are comparatively rare in runic amulet inscriptions.

Cryptographic writing, along with similar word or letter games, is widely attested in the medieval Scandinavian runic tradition (including even that of outposts such as Northern Britain) and usually seems to have no purpose other than a demonstration of cleverness (or emphasis). Yet romantic speculation, which has even been accompanied by a fair degree of pseudo-scholarship, has imbued many such runic inscriptions with an aura of magic and mystery of which they are largely undeserving. Certainly the bulk of the rune-stone texts of Viking times are disappointingly formulaic, stating simply that one person raised the stone concerned in memory of another. The more diverse texts from later in the medieval period cover a much wider range of topics, ranging from simple owner inscriptions, to memorial texts, obscene graffiti to business letters and even proposals of marriage. Like any other alphabet, then, the runic one was employed for a variety of uses, including, seemingly inevitably given the period, magical purposes.

In fact surprisingly few of the practices associated with runic writing seem to be inherently magical. One that undoubtedly is, though, is the appearance of certain magical symbols in connection with runic texts. But these symbols – swastikas (which are called *sólarhvél* 'sun-wheels' in Old Norse), triskelia (↻) and others including various tree-like shapes (⍦, ⍦, ⍦) – are not restricted to runic contexts, and despite their often rune-like quality it is obvious they were equally thought to be of magical portent whether appearing in runic inscriptions, as part of pictorial decorations, or even standing by themselves. The magical symbols often found associated with runic writing are reminiscent of magical signs from the classical magical tradition called *charaktêres* or *sigils*. The closest parallel to the runic use of similar signs comes, however, from North Etruscan tradition, where various asterisk-like (✳), arrow-like (�, ⍲) and 'herring-bone' (≫≫≫≫≫) signs were used as supplements to religious dedications. Crosses and other symbols accepted as suitably Christian later supplant these symbols in younger Scandinavian texts. In fact later inscriptions also witness the development of a new series of apparently magical forms (ⱦ, ⍟ etc.) which look as if they may originally have derived from certain kinds of decorative or cryptic runes. But there are several other parallels between classical amulet texts and magical spells and the early runic amuletic tradition, which leads to the suspicion that the entire Germanic amuletic tradition is ultimately dependent on Mediterranean models, much as the runic alphabet certainly was.[12]

[12] M. MacLeod and B. Mees, 'On the **t**-like symbols, rune-rows and other amuletic features of early

Classical sources describe many magical practices, such as the gathering of medicinal herbs accompanied by rituals and incantations, the performance of rites at particular times of year, the carrying of certain parts of animals, plants or stones about the body or their application to wounds, and some fragmentary finds on loose sheafs of papyrus even preserve the remains of complex magical spells. There is no doubt that early Germanic folk also practised magic of these types, some of which represent shared or similar prehistoric European (or Indo-European) inheritances, others that are later inventions or adoptions. In fact several books of spells are known from the Germanic-speaking countries that stem from the late medieval and early modern periods, and the spells in these books clearly are often mixtures of continuations of the magic of classical times as well as Christian mysticism, and, sometimes, local Germanic beliefs. But it is often difficult to sort out the indigenous from the imported in these works, and despite the claims of some modern mystics, the spells of these books at best only dimly accord with the magic described in medieval literature. Instead, the evidence from medieval literary sources indicates that much Germanic magic was expressed, as in classical tradition, by stylised, or actually sung language. A magical act is literally called a song or the like among many of the early European peoples, e.g. Latin *carmen, incantatio*, Greek *epôdê* (cf. English *ode*), Old Irish *bricht* (which is also a type of poem), Anglo-Saxon *leoð*, *sang* or *gealdor* (the latter from *gealan* 'sing') and cf. Modern English en*chant*ment. Moreover, the Old Norse term *galdr* 'incantation, magical charm', the Scandinavian equivalent of Anglo-Saxon *gealdor* (as well as the medieval German word *galster* 'charm', which is also literally something 'sung') clearly describes the type of magic that was expressed in runic inscriptions.

Norse sources differentiate between two main forms of magic, *galdr* and *seiðr*, the latter of which, that originally meant 'binding', is often disparagingly referred to in Old Icelandic literature as womanly and evil. It is tempting to think of these two as 'white' and 'black' magic respectively, although it is far from clear that *galdr* was always used for good or that *seiðr* was always employed maliciously. A parallel to the Norse tradition of *seiðr* is known only from marginal English and German sources, however, and the later Scandinavian spell books are described only as containing *galdrar*. *Seiðr*, which does not appear to have any relationship with classical 'fixing' or 'binding' magic, seems to have been judged as being unworthy of recording in these later works. Yet though described at length in Old Norse literature, perhaps it was just the case that *seiðr* had never developed into a tradition amenable to being written down.[13]

runic inscriptions', *Interdisciplinary Journal for Germanic Linguistics and Semiotic Analysis* 9 (2004), 249–99.

[13] D. Strömbäck, 'Sejd', in J. Brøndsted et al. (eds), *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, 22 vols (Copenhagen 1956–78), XV, pp. 76–79. Old English *ælfsidan* ('elf-*sidan*') and *sidsa* appear only as descriptions for ailments in medical works; see A. Hall, 'The meanings of *elf* and elves in medieval England' (Unpublished dissertation, Glasgow 2004), pp. 117ff. Goddesses with the related epithet *Sait(c)hamia* are attested in Roman-era inscriptions from the Rhineland and there is an Old Saxon cognate *siso* 'magical incantation' which also seems to feature the expected zero-grade form of the root *sai- 'tie, bind' also represented in English

The word *seiðr*, though, is closely related to words for 'magic' witnessed in the neighbouring Celtic and Baltic traditions, which suggests that it is a very old word.[14] The notion of *galdr*, a term which, in contrast, is only broadly paralleled in other European languages, may well represent a newer tradition, one growing in popularity and seemingly also closer in nature to the formulaic incantations known from the ancient Middle Eastern and Graeco-Roman worlds. But though beliefs popular in the antique cultures of the south and east coloured many of the magical practices popular in Continental Europe during the Middle Ages, it is not clear that the magical songs of Germanic tradition any more than weakly reflect the often highly complex and structured traditions used in classical times.

Yet what constituted this sort of magic? The usual definitions of magic in Greek and Roman tradition focus on the fact that classical spells usually aimed to compel certain results whereas religious practices proper were not so overtly coercive. It is clear that the ancients were not overly credulous though – often a spell was merely one of several acts resorted to in order to bring about a desired result. The use of a spell against rats, for example, seems typically to have been complemented by poison and traps. Magic was just one of the modes, albeit a supernatural one, that could be employed to see a certain result achieved.[15]

Classical spells also had several typical features that are paralleled in some runic texts apart from the use of magical sigils or what the magical papyri describe as *charaktêres* (some of which were clearly merely regular letters of the alphabet with loops or other modifications attached). Ancient spells often also included a range of *logoi* or sequences of vowels which were thought to be of astrological significance. There was an extensive range, too, of *voces magicae* or 'mystical words', which included creations that seem to have been based on alphabetic terminology (like *abracadabra*, probably a development of *abecedarium* 'ABC'), religious terms rearranged as palindromes (like *ablanath-analba*, often thought to be based on Hebrew *ab lanath* 'Thou art our Father') and various holy names, mostly of Hebrew or Christian origin.[16] These mystical words and other magical creations are often linked with Gnosticism, an ancient form of religious faith influenced by Pythagorean numerology that was declared by early churchmen like St Irenaeus to be a Christian heresy. Ancient amulets that contain *voces magicae, charaktêres* and the like, though, are often described as Gnostic, even if their owners were not Gnosts at all, but still believed in the powers of amulets whose inscriptions were partly based upon the numerology, naming magic and astrological beliefs that were so strongly a

sinew; see *CIL* XIII, nos 7915–16 and cf. R. Much, 'Germanische Matronennamen', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Litteratur* 35 (1891), 321–23.

[14] It is clearly related etymologically to Lithuanian *saitas* and Welsh *hud* 'magic'.

[15] H.S. Versnal, 'Magic', in S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (eds), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Oxford 1999), pp. 908–10.

[16] On the various types of classical magic see T. Hopfner, 'Mageia', in G. Wissowa et al. (eds), *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der Altertumswissenschaft*, 2nd ed., 59 vols (Stuttgart etc. 1894–1980), XIV.1 (27. Hbd.), pp. 301–93 and C.A. Faraone and D. Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera* (New York 1991).

part of Gnostic practice and also had their parallels in the Jewish tradition of the Cabbala.[17]

As in the magic spells described in ancient sources, curative charms are particularly prevalent in recorded Germanic magic, whether these be spoken or written (healing with words) or herbal (healing with plants) or both in nature. The classical traditions of *defixiones* or binding spells and *agôgai* or leading charms are also paralleled in some Germanic written sources, as are some of the magical techniques known from Graeco-Roman sorcery: transference of some property from one thing or person to another, the invocation of divine and infernal powers, and various forms of analogical ('sympathetic') or protective ('apotropaic') magic. Yet in general the texts on runic amulets are quite unlike those which typically feature in the classical tradition.

Like any other alphabet, the futhark was employed for a variety of uses; not intrinsically at first magical in itself, it was used to record names and short communications, for memorial formulations, for religious expressions, for games and coded messages, as well as for texts of a magical nature. Evidently, then, runes could come to be thought to have taken on some the magical power that they were often used to impart. In the past, however, too many scholars have embraced fantastic notions of runic magic, which has led many recent investigators, in turn, to embrace a largely sceptical approach to such issues. In fact some specialists in runic studies today evince a tendency to seek to deny any magical element whatsoever in runic inscriptions, an extreme and unnecessarily reactive approach to the failings of earlier investigators. It is not always easy to separate simple wishes, admittedly, for instance for love or health, from ritual invocations designed to ensure these things. But this is part of what we have tried to do in this book, which we hope will lead to a greater understanding of the early Germanic intellectual world and runic expressions of northern European magic.

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[17] G.W. Macrae, 'Gnosticism', in B.L. Marthaler et al. (eds), *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Detroit 2002), VI, pp. 255–61.

The Principal Runic Alphabets

1. *Early inscriptions (c. 50–750)*

ᚠ ᚢ ᚦ ᚨ ᚱ ᚲ ᚷ ᚹ : ᚺ ᚾ ᛁ ᛇ ᛃ ᛈ ᛉ ᛊ : ᛏ ᛒ ᛖ ᛗ ᛚ ᛜ ᛞ ᛟ

f u þ a r k g w   h n i j ï p z s   t b e m l ŋ d o

2. *Anglo-Saxon and Frisian inscriptions (c. 500–1000)*

ᚠ ᚢ ᚦ ᚩ ᚱ ᚳ ᚷ ᚹ ᚻ ᚾ ᛁ ᛄ ᛇ ᛱ ᛋ ᛏ ᛒ ᛖ ᛗ ᛚ ᛝ ᛞ ᚫ ᚪ (ᛡ ᛠ)

f u þ o r c g w h n i j ჳ p x s t b e ml ŋ d œ a æ (y e͡a)

3. *Viking-Age Norse inscriptions (c. 750–1100)*

A. Long-branch

ᚠ ᚢ ᚦ ᚭ ᚱ ᚴ : ᚼ ᚾ ᛁ ᛆ ᛋ : ᛏ ᛒ ᛘ ᛚ ᛦ (ᚤ ᛁ ᚠ)

f u þ ą r k   h n i a s   t b m l ʀ (y e g)

B. Short-twig

ᚠ ᚢ ᚦ ᚭ ᚱ ᚴ : ᚿ ᚽ ᛁ ᛆ ' : ᛐ ᛌ ᛏ ᛚ ᛧ (ᚤ ᚠ)

f u þ ą r k   h n i a s   t b m l ʀ (y g)

C. Staveless

ᛁ ᛁ ' ᛁ ᛁ ᛁ : ᛁ ᛁ ᛁ ᛁ ᛁ : ᛁ ᛁ ᛁ ᛁ ᛁ :

f u þ ą r k   h n i a s   t b m l ʀ

4. *Later medieval Nordic inscriptions (c. 1100–1500)*

A. Sweden and Denmark

ᚠ ᚢ ᚦ ᛆ ᚱ ᚴ : ᚼ ᚽ ᛁ ᛆ ' : ᛐ ᛒ ᛘ ᛚ ᛧ ᚡ ᚤ ᚯ ᚵ ᛂ ᚡ ᛏ ᛐ ᚤ ᛐ ᛒ

f u þ o r k   h n i a s   t b m l ʀ v y ø g e æ c d p

B. Norway

ᚠ ᚢ ᚦ ᛆ ᚱ ᚴ : ᚼ ᚽ ᛁ ᛆ ' : ᛐ ᛒ ᛘ ᛚ ᛤ ᛂ (ᚽᚿᚽᚿ) ᚡ ᚼ ᛂ ᛐ ᛐ ᚴ

f u þ o r k   h n i a s   t b m l y ø (ǫ) g c æ e d p

The Names of the Runes

RUNE	ATTESTED LETTER-NAMES		
	Old English	Nordic	Gothic
ᚠ	*feoh* 'wealth, cattle'	*fé* 'wealth, cattle'	*fe* 'wealth, cattle'
ᚢ	*ˆr* 'aurochs'	*úr* 'drizzle, aurochs'	*uraz* 'aurochs'
ᚦ	*þorn* 'thorn'	*þurs* 'giant, ogre'	*thyth* 'goodness'
ᚩ ᚢ ᚫ	*ōs* 'mouth'	*óss* 'river-mouth, As, god'	*aza* '?'
ᚱ	*ræd* 'ride'	*reið* 'ride'	*reda* 'ride'
ᚲ ᚴ ᚳ	*cēn* 'torch'	*kaun* 'ulcer, sore'	*chozma* 'boil' (?)
ᚷ	*gyfu* 'gift'		*geuua* 'gift'
ᚹ	*wynn, wen* 'joy'		*uuinne* 'joy'
ᚻ ᚺ ᚼ	*hægl* 'hail'	*hagall* 'hail'	*haal* 'hail'
ᚾ	*nȳd* 'need'	*nauð* 'constraint'	*noicz* '?'
ᛁ	*s* 'ice'	*ís* 'ice'	*iiz* 'ice'
ᛄ ᛃ ᛇ	*gēr* 'year', *iar* '?'	*ár* 'year'	*gaar* 'year'
ᛡ	*ēoh, h* 'yew'		*uuaer* 'cauldron'
ᛈ	*peorð* '?'		*pertra* '?'
ᛉ ᛦ	*eolhx, ilcs* 'elk' (?)	*ýr* 'yew, bow'	*ezec* 'coin, bronze bit'
ᛋ ᛌ	*sigel* 'sun'	*sól* 'sun'	*sugil* 'sun'
ᛏ	*T , t r* 'Tyr, glory'	*Týr* 'Tyr, god'	*tyz* 'god'
ᛒ	*beorc* 'birch'	*bjarkan* 'birch twig'	*bercna* 'birch twig'
ᛖ	*eh* 'horse'		*eyz* 'horse'
ᛗ ᛦ	*man* 'man (person)'	*maðr* 'man (person)'	*manna* 'man (person)'
ᛚ	*lagu* 'liquid'	*l gr* 'liquid' (*laucr* 'leek', *lin* 'linen')	*laaz* 'liquid'
◇ ᛜ	*Ing* 'Ing'		*enguz* 'Ing'
ᛞ	*dæg* 'day'		*daaz* 'day'
ᛟ	*œðil, ēþel* 'land, ancestral home, landed property'		*utal* 'inheritance' (?)
ᚪ	*æc* 'oak'		
ᚫ	*æsc* 'ash'		
ᚣ	*ȳr* 'bow' (?)		
ᛠ	*ēar* 'grave' (?)		

2

Gods and Heroes

THE Norse gods are described in the *Saga of the Ynglings* as *galdra smiðir*, 'smiths of incantations', so it is not too surprising to find invocations to them on early runic amulets.[1] The most obvious way of calling on the divine to fill an object with magic powers, then, might seem to be to inscribe a message requesting that the gods (or a particular god) bless the item concerned. In fact we do have a clear example of such an inscription in runes, on a buckle, perhaps once part of a saddle strap, found at a site known as Vimose (literally the 'holy bog' or 'moor') in Denmark. Quite a number of items, holy and mundane, were deliberately thrown into the moor in Roman times and more than one of the items recovered later by archaeologists from Vimose turned out to be rune-inscribed. The buckle dates to the third century and is clearly engraved with a religious message. The inscription is often thought to be Gothic in language, just like several other stray finds from about the Baltic seaways are, indicating that a few Gothic-speaking peoples remained behind in this area some centuries after the great Gothic migrations firstly to modern-day Poland and from there eventually into Southern Europe. The inscription is etched onto the back of the buckle and reads:

ᚠᚨᛗᛞᚨᚷᛁᚾᛚ
ᚠᚨᛁᛐᚢᛈᛁᚷᚨ

Aandaga ansula Ansau wīja.

'End ring to the As I dedicate.'

There has been some controversy in the past concerning the correct reading of this inscription partly because the first term (which seems to be related to our word *end*) begins with a double *a*-rune-spelling, a strategy that has only recently been shown to be occasionally used in runic inscriptions to highlight a word, much as is done with capital letters today. *Andaga ansula*, which looks to mean 'end ring', then, may be a way to describe a buckle, perhaps a deliberately poetic one. More clearly, though, the term *As* appears here, and is, of course, the singular of *Æsir*, the name of the principal group of gods in Norse mythology; it probably refers in the present context to Odin, who under his byname Gapt or Gaut the Gothic

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[1] *The Saga of the Ynglings* is part of *Heimskringla*, the Icelander Snorri Sturluson's chronicle of the kings of Norway.

historian Jordanes recounts was the chief god of his people. As has long been recognised, the inscription is also clearly poetic in its form: the first three terms alliterate and taken together the four words even seem to form similar types of rhythmic measures or feet. Consequently, it seems to be a line of poetry, much like a motto or an epigram. Both religious and magical sayings are often metrical in form and frequently seem to have been sung rather than spoken. But then any speech directed toward the gods might have been likely to be expressed in a song-like or poetic manner as a way of showing respect to the divine.[2]

Inscriptions similar to the Vimose text, however, are quite rare for runic, especially among the earliest finds. More commonly, other, less direct ways were relied upon to invoke divine help. One is the use of what, when they appear in Greek and Roman tradition, are usually called *historiolae* or narrative charms, which were clearly used in order to attempt to invoke a form of sympathetic magic.

Ancient narrative charms were generally inscribed on amulets in order to imbue them with beneficial medicinal properties. One such ancient medicinal *historiola*, found on a rolled-up sheet of silver, invokes the tale of a mermaid, Antaura, and her encounter with the Greek goddess Artemis. Dating from the third century AD, the amulet was found in the ruins of the Roman city of Carnuntum, in modern-day Austria. The text inscribed on the amulet is incomplete, but it begins:

> For migraines. Antaura came out of the ocean; she cried like a deer; she moaned like a cow. Artemis Ephesia met her: "Antaura, where are you bringing the headache? Not to the . . .?"

This is a fairly uncontroversial amulet inscription, mainly because it is well preserved and is an example of a fairly easily recognisable type. But amulet texts can also be highly abbreviated or otherwise more difficult to explain – the Carnuntum text is remarkably easy to interpret even though only the opening section of it is preserved. In less well preserved, briefer or less straightforwardly expressed examples we usually need to bring in more context to be able to analyse such an amulet text properly.[3]

For instance, the Greek geographer Strabo informs us that the peoples of north-western Italy venerated Artemis most among all the gods and the

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2 W. Krause with H. Jankuhn, *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark*, 2 vols, 2nd ed. (Göttingen 1966), no. 24. Much of the controversy over the correct meaning of the text revolves around the interpretation of *Andaga ansula* and whether the text is Gothic or not rather than its basic votive meaning, although a one-time Gothic presence in the area seems clear enough from classical testimony; see J. Czarnecki, *The Goths in Ancient Poland* (Coral Gables 1975), pp. 15 and 67–100, H.F. Nielsen, *The Early Runic Language of Scandinavia* (Heidelberg 2001), pp. 49–50 and 159–60 and cf. also E. Seebold, 'Die sprachliche Deutung und Einordnung der archaischen Runeninschriften', in K. Düwel (ed.), *Runische Schriftkultur in kontinental-skandinavischer und -angelsächsischer Wechselbeziehung* (Berlin 1994), pp. 56–94, B. Mees, 'Runic **erilaʀ**', *NOWELE* 42 (2003), p. 51 and MacLeod and Mees, 'On the **t**-like symbols', n. 18 for other details.

3 R. Kotansky, 'Incantations and prayers for salvation on inscribed Greek amulets', in C.A. Faraone and D. Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera* (New York 1991), pp. 112–13.

inscriptions left behind there seem to corroborate his report. Among them is an inscription on an oddly, apparently fish-shaped, figurine cast in bronze with a hole in it for hanging, found by archaeologists among the remains of a religious sanctuary near the Alpine town of Sanzeno, near Trent. Probably an amulet rather than a votive, it features the names of four ancient mythological figures: Diana, Esia, Liber and Vesuna.

Diana is of course the ancient Italian name for Artemis and the grouping on the amulet appears to be similar to that found on two ancient Italian mirrors where the mythological figures Minerva, Fufluns, Artemis and Esia are depicted in a scene together. The mirrors depict Esia as a shade brought by Artemis to Fufluns in the company of the goddess Minerva. Liber and Fufluns are both archaic Italian names for the Greek god Dionysus and Esia is the Etruscan name for Ariadne, the daughter of Minos of Theseus and the Minotaur fame. Greek mythology also tells us that Artemis killed Ariadne, but that Dionysus (Artemis' brother) later married her; so the Sanzeno sequence of names appears to be an attempt to represent this scene (or perhaps rather this relationship) in a highly abbreviated manner. It too, then, appears to represent some sort of divine narrative charm concerning Artemis, albeit a highly abbreviated one, used to make an item holy or powerful. Given space is usually in short supply with the loose items typically used as amulets, the inscriptions that they carry are often abbreviated; so the possibility that any listing of divine figures on a runic amulet is part of a divine charm of some sort should not be dismissed lightly.[4]

Several runic inscriptions appearing on early brooches and other items of jewellery do bear inscriptions similar to that on the Sanzeno find. The best known is one which appears on a brooch from Nordendorf, Germany, discovered in the nineteenth century and which, as has long been recognised, features the names of two, or more probably three, figures from pagan Germanic mythology.

The Nordendorf brooch is of the safety-pin variety, the technical, Latin term for which is *fibula*. Safety-pin brooches were quite common in early medieval times and, favoured by most of the Germanic peoples, they were worn by both sexes. The bow-shaped brooch dates to about the sixth century, the roughly scratched text is written on the back of the decorated part of the fibula and its runes read:

ᛚᛟᚷᚨᚦᛟᚱᛖ
ᚹᛟᛞᚾ
ᚹᛁᚷᛁᚦᛟᚾᚨᚱ
ᚠᚨᛚᛗᚢᛒᚹᛁᚾᛁᛃ

Logaþore,
Wōdan,
wīgi-Þonar.
Awa Leubwiniï.

4 The Sanzeno find is the subject of a forthcoming study by T.L. Markey, 'An *interpretatio Italica* among the Casalini (Sanzeno) votives and another Helbig hoax', part of which is adumbrated in idem, 'A tale of two helmets', *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 29 (2001), 139. Cf. also A. Morandi, *Il cippo di Castelciès nell'epigrafia retica* (Rome 1999), where it is no. 22, and B. Mees, 'The gods of the Rhaetii', forthcoming.

This text clearly contains the names of at least two well-known Germanic gods, Odin and Thor, or for the latter rather *wīgi*-Thor 'blessing-Thor'. These are two of the four major Germanic deities whose names are preserved in those of the days of the week, and which take slightly different forms in each of the different Germanic traditions.

Day of the week	Modern English	Old English	Old Norse	Runic German	Modern German
Tuesday	Tyr	Tiw	Týr		Ziu
Wednesday	Odin	Woden	Óðinn	Wodan	Wotan
Thursday	Thor	Þunor	Þórr	Þonar	Donar
Friday	Frigg	Frig	Frigg		Fricka

A third figure is also mentioned in this inscription, *Logathore*, who seems to be the Old German counterpart of Lodur, a figure cited as a friend of Odin's by the Icelandic skald Eyvind, and who accompanies Odin in a scene in the Norse mythological poem the *Seeress's Prophecy* (*Vǫluspá*).[5] Lodur, Odin and blessing-Thor would thus form a triad, the usual number in which pagan gods appear in both ancient and early medieval German and Norse sources. As Logathore literally means 'trickster' or 'sorcerer' it is often thought that this is a byname for Loki, the Norse trickster-god, or perhaps even a negative reference to Odin, and hence further that this inscription therefore records a convert to Christianity denouncing the pagan gods. One well-known German mention of Odin is, after all, in a renunciation of a triad of Germanic gods, in the baptismal vow of the Saxons and Thuringians used during their conversion under St Boniface, the apostle of Germany:

> *Do you forsake the devil?*
> I forsake the devil.
> *And all devilish sacrifices?*
> And I forsake all devilish sacrifices.
> *And all devilish works?*
> And I forsake all devil's work and words, and Thunaer and Woden and Saxnote, and all the monsters who are their companions.

The Christian renouncing interpretation, though, is based substantially on debatable semantic interpretations and would be more believable if the brooch bore any Christian symbols or a verb such as 'forsake' – the key term that would be expected to appear if this interpretation were correct.[6]

Yet it is not immediately obvious which myth or tradition the Nordendorf

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5   The god's name Lodur has been tentatively identified on a wooden gaming-piece from Tønsberg; see K. Gosling, 'The runic material from Tønsberg', *Universitetets Oldsaksamling Årbok* 1986–88, pp. 175–85. The name **lutiʀ**, Lóðurr (?), also appears on an early tenth-century coin, as does (several times) the name Thor, while the word *guð* 'god' appears on over a thousand coins: see I. Hammarberg and G. Rispling, 'Graffiter på vikingatida mynt', *Hikuin* 11 (1985), 63–78.

6   W. Braune, *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*, 14th ed., ed. E.A. Ebbinghaus (Tübingen 1962), no. XVI.2.I.