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## RUNIC INSCRIPTIONS AS A MEMORISATION TOOL: BETWEEN ORALITY AND LITERACY

### Abstract

During the first millennium CE, runic writing developed into an important memorisation tool in Scandinavian society dominated by oral culture. The information selected to be memorised included reports about deaths of high-status persons and, rarely, socially important events. Its verbalisation casted into a formula with fixed position of elements. The “keys” to actualise memory were personal names. Latin script suggested a more convenient form of memorising the past and the practice of erecting memorial stones ceased.

**Key words:** rune inscriptions, historical memory, memorisation formula.

**Slowa kluczowe:** inskrypcje runiczne, pamięć historyczna, formuła zapamiętywania.

The runic alphabet emerged at the time when the culture of the Germanic nations was entirely oral and the remembrances of the past were transmitted by word of mouth. Cornelius Tacitus wrote in the first century C.E. that ancient songs were the only form of narrations or annals in which the Germans recorded their past.<sup>1</sup> It was only several centuries later and under the influence of Christian culture that continental Germans and Anglo-Saxons adopted Latin script and started to express their historical memories in a variety of written texts, chronicles, annals, histories, *vitae*, etc. By the ninth century, Scandinavia remained the only region of the Germanic world where the runic alphabet was still a single writing system and remained so up to the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries when Latin alphabet came into common usage.

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<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *Germania* 2.

For the first several centuries of its existence, the functions of runic writing were mostly restricted to performative and magical ones.<sup>2</sup> The inscriptions of the second-fifth centuries preserve mostly personal names and magical (**alu**, **laukaz**, texts on Lindholm, Kragehul and other amulets, futharks) or runographers' (**ek erilaz** and other) formulae.<sup>3</sup>

Further spread of runic writing, however limited, expanded the sphere of its usage and it acquired memorative function, which would dominate the texts on several thousands of memorial runic stones from Scandinavian countries in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> It was thus in runic inscriptions that the transition from oral forms of memorisation to literate ones took place in Scandinavia. Therefore, runic texts of the first millennium C.E. supply a unique chance to trace the emergence and evolution of written recording of historical memory in a still oral society.

One of the first attempts to commit a historical event to writing is the text on the Möjbro stone (the fifth or first half of the sixth century),<sup>5</sup> one of the earliest stone memorials in Scandinavia. The depiction of a horseman with a helmet on his head and a shield and a sword (?) in his hands illustrates the inscription **frawaradazanahahaislaginaz**: “Frawarad is slain on his horse.”<sup>6</sup> It is generally accepted that Frawarad was a local (warrior) chief whose high social status was attested not only by the fact of the erection of a memorial stone and his presentation in full armour, but also by his name: \**frawaz* “lord” and \**rādaz* “counsel”, i.e. “the counselor of lords” (gods?). The text thus singles out of the flow of events and secures for eternity one episode in the history of a tribe or clan headed by Frawarad.

The text supplies important information about the functioning of historical memory in Norse society of the sixth century. First, the erection of a memorial stone with a written text carved on it reflects a drastic step on the way from

<sup>2</sup> On the functions of older runic inscriptions see: J. Hines, “Functions of Literacy and the Use of Runes,” *Runor och ABC. Elva föreläsningar från ett symposium i Stockholm våren 1995*, ed. S. Nyström, Stockholm: Sällskapet Runica et mediævalia: Riksantikvarieämbetet: Stockholms medeltidsmuseum, 1997, pp. 79–92.

<sup>3</sup> S.E. Flowers, *Runes and Magic. Magical Formulaic Elements in the Older Runic Tradition*, P. Lang N.Y., Bern, Frankfurt am Main 1986; K. Düwel, “Magische Runenzeichen und magische Runeninschriften,” [in:] *Runor och ABC*, pp. 23–42; *eadem*, *Runenkunde*, 3 Aufl., Stuttgart: Verlag J.D. Metzler, 2001, pp. 208–211; B. Mees, “Runic *erilaR*,” *North-Western European Language Evolution (NOWELE)* 42 (2003), pp. 41–68.

<sup>4</sup> J. Meijer, “Literacy in the Viking Age,” [in:] *Blandade runstudier* 2 (= Runrön 11), Institutionen för nordiska språk, Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 1997, pp. 83–110.

<sup>5</sup> W. Krause mit Beiträge von H. Jankuhn, *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark* I. Text, II. Tafeln (Göttingen 1966), No. 99; U 877 (Upplands runinskrifter 3, granskade och tolkade av Elias Wessén och Sven B.F. Jansson (= Sveriges runinskrifter, 8), Almqvist & Wiksell international, Stockholm 1949–1951, No. 877; E. Antonsen, *A Concise Grammer of the Older Runic Inscriptions* Niemeyer, Tübingen 1975, No. 11).

<sup>6</sup> Here and further the translation belongs to Elmer H. Antonsen (E.H. Antonsen, *A Concise Grammer*, No. 34).

orality to literacy. An oral society had found it appropriate, even necessary, to preserve the memory of an event in a written form principally different from the traditional oral one, thus acknowledging the specific qualities of the former. Second, the event honoured with memorisation in such a way was of high social importance. The death of a tribal chief, especially in a battle, could be fateful: endangering the existence of the whole community of the conquered by their enemies. Third, the memory of Frawarad's death was embodied in a variety of forms. It was immortalised by raising a stone (artefact memorisation), then by a depiction of the deceased (visual memorisation)<sup>7</sup>, and, last, but not least, by a written text (written memorisation as opposed to verbal memorisation in oral form which might have also been the case). Further, of special importance is the kind of information about the event subjected to written memorisation. It is the name of the chief, the fact of his death and the way he met his end ("slain on his horse", i.e. in a battle). The latter might contain also information about his status, as cavalry were not yet common in Scandinavia. The name of the chief is the most individualising element, and it appears to be the concentrated bearer of historical memory about the event. The name of Frawarad should have evoked a chain of associations and actualised the whole story especially if the retellings about Frawarad's deeds and death crystallised into a legend or heroic song, i.e. they were also preserved in oral tradition.

Close to this kind of representation of historical memory are the inscriptions from Southern Norway dated to the fourth and fifth centuries:

**...flagda faikinaz ist / ...magoz minas staina / ...daz faihido...** "...is subject to deceitful attack... my son's stone... [I]...daz, painted" (Vettland stone, Rogaland, Norway, second half of the fourth century).<sup>8</sup>

**ek wiwaz after . woduri/de witada halaiban . worahto / [me]z woduride . staina . / prijoz dohtriz dalidun / arbijarjostez arbijano** "I Wiwaz (i.e. the darting-one), wrought [the inscription] after Wōdurīdaz (i.e. furious rider), the lord (i.e. bread-ward). For me, Wōdurīdaz, three daughters, the most legitimate-to-inherit of heirs, prepared the stone" (Tune stone, Ostfold, Norway, second half of the fourth or fifth century).<sup>9</sup>

**hadulaikaz / ek hagustadaz / hlaaiwido magu minino** "Hadulaikaz (i.e. battle dancer). I, Hagustaldaz (i.e. young warrior), buried my son" (Kjølevik stone, Rogaland, Norway, second half of the fifth century).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The picture follows the tradition of continental Germanic images of horsemen derived ultimately from depictions on Roman tombstones: O. von Friesen, "Möjbro-stenen," *Fornvännen* 44 (1949), pp. 296–305; S.B.F. Jansson, "Möjbrostenens ristning," *Fornvännen* 47 (1952), pp. 124–127.

<sup>8</sup> W. Krause, H. Jankun, *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark*, No. 60; E.H. Antonsen, *A Concise Grammer*, No. 18.

<sup>9</sup> W. Krause, H. Jankun, *op. cit.*, No. 72; E.H. Antonsen, *op. cit.*, No. 27.

<sup>10</sup> W. Krause, H. Jankun, *op. cit.*, No. 75; E.H. Antonsen, *op. cit.*, No. 38.

**...iz hlaiwidaz þar** “...iz is buried here” (Amla stone, Sogn, Norway, second half of the fifth century).<sup>11</sup>

Though fragmented and sometimes difficult to interpret, these texts present the same principal features of reflecting historical memory. They bear no pictures, but they are stones specially processed into specific form and they in themselves are artefacts intended for memorisation. They secure the memory of a person, not of the event that obviously underlies the text: the name of the memorised person is stated in all cases whereas it is only the Vettland stone that mentions a “deceitful attack” that caused the death of the son of the runographer or the man who ordered the memorial.

The name of the commemorated does not occupy any fixed position like in later inscriptions. It is only on the Kjølevik stone that the name of the deceased opens the inscription, which reflects the attempt to put special stress on it; the name, however, remains unconnected with the rest of the text. It means that the process of formalisation of a memorial text was far from being completed. The phrasing, however, points to the fact that the carvers of these inscriptions were quite familiar with and widely used the “runographer’s formula”. The Tune inscription opens with the statement of carving the inscription (**ek wiwaz <...> worahto**), while the Vettland stone ends with the same formula (...**daz faihido**). The runographers, however, tried to accommodate the formula, which, stated earlier, only the fact of making an inscription for the new, memorial, purposes of erecting monuments, and to the new content to be implemented in the texts: first of all, information about the person whom the stone is to commemorate. In the Tune inscription, this information is incorporated into the runographer’s formula. The text states the name of the deceased (**woduridaz**) and marks his high social status (**witada halaiban**). The Kjølevik and Amla inscriptions attest only the fact of the death and burial of a person. In the case of Amla, the inscription suggests that the stone is connected with the burial place and is intended to mark it.

All these stones commemorate deceased of high social status, probably tribal or clan chiefs with names reflecting the notion of war activities, and in the Tune inscription the commemorated person is called “the bread-ward”, a common designation of a chief (cf. Anglo-Saxon *hlaford*). Some of them, if not all, probably fell in battle.

The tradition of written memorisation of high-status persons thus emerged in the fourth and fifth centuries. The stones are keen responses of the society to the recent past. The only event regarded to be worth recording in writing was the death of a chief, whose name is both the quintessence of information and a memory actualisation device. Structurally, loose texts are sometimes based on the “runographer’s formula”. In spite of the scarcity of “memorial” inscriptions

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<sup>11</sup> W. Krause, H. Jankun, *op. cit.*, No. 84; E.H. Antonsen, *op. cit.*, No. 43.

of this period and the insufficiency of the information, it seems justifiable to view them as signs of public acceptance of the importance, if not priority, of the written word in representing collective historical memory.

The transformation of runic script in the seventh and eighth centuries (transitional period) affected not only the repertoire of the alphabe, but also the character of runic literacy and the ways of the use of runic inscriptions.

Texts of the transitional period do not narrate about events, but they appeal to the background knowledge of the community. A group of five memorial stones from Blekinge provides further insight into the process of transition to literacy. These stones are dated to the sixth to the mid-seventh century, and they are united by the names of Haduwulf, most likely a chief (konung) of a tribe or a tribal union, and his son Hariwulf.<sup>12</sup>

**hAþuwolAfA / sAte / stAbA þria / fff** “Haþuwulfar (i.e. battle-wolf) placed three staves fff. [i.e. much wealth (?)]” (Gummarp, Blekinge).<sup>13</sup>

**niu hAborumz / niu hagestumz / hAþuwolAfz gAf j / hAriwolAfz (m)A??usnuh?e / hidez runo no felAhekA hederA gino ronoz / herAmAlAs Az ArAgeu welAduds [s]A þAt bAriutip** “nine goats, nine stallions, Haþuwulfar gave fruitful year, Hariwulfar ... I, master of the runes (?) conceal here / runes of power / Incessantly [plagued by] maleficence, [doomed to] insidious death [is] he who this / breaks” (Stentoften, Blekinge).<sup>14</sup>

**hAidz runo ronu / fAlAhAk hAiderA g/inA runAz ArAgeu hAerAmAlAusz / uti Az welA-dAude / sAz þAt bArutz // uþArAbA sba** “I, master of the runes (?) conceal here runes of power. Incessantly [plagued by] maleficence, [doomed to] insidious death [is] he who breaks this [monument] // prophesy destruction / prophecy of destruction” (Björketorp, Blekinge).<sup>15</sup>

**Afatz hAriwulafa / hAþuwulafz hAeruwulafiz / warAit runAz þAiAz** “In memory of Hariwulfar. Haþuwulfar, Heruwulfar’s son (i.e. sword-wolf), / wrote these runes” (Istaby, Blekinge).<sup>16</sup>  
**hAriwulfs stAinAz** “Hariwulf’s stone” (Rävsal, Bohuslän).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> O. von Friesen, *Lister- och Listerby-stenarna i Blekinge*, Uppsala 1916.

<sup>13</sup> DR 358 (L. Jakobsen, E. Moltke, *Danmarks runeindskrifter* 1, København 1941, No. 358); W. Krause, H. Jankuhn, *op. cit.*, No. 95; E.H. Antonsen, *op. cit.*, No. 116.

<sup>14</sup> DR 357; W. Krause, H. Jankuhn, *op. cit.*, No. 96; E.H. Antonsen, *op. cit.*, No. 119. I accept the interpretation of the first two lines of Lillemor Santesson (L. Santesson, “En blekinsk blotinskrift. Et nytolkning av inledningsraderna på Stentoftenstenen,” *Fornvännen* 84 (1989), pp. 221–229) instead of older interpretations of Lis Jacobsen and Wolfgang Krause (‘[To the] <niuha> dwellers [and] <niuha> guests Haþuwulfar gave full year’) and Elmer Antonsen (‘Not Uha to the sons [i.e. natives], not Uha to the guests [i.e. non-natives], (but) Hoþuwulafz gave good-harvest’).

<sup>15</sup> DR 360; W. Krause, H. Jankuhn, *op. cit.*, No. 97; E.H. Antonsen, *op. cit.*, No. 120.

<sup>16</sup> DR 359; W. Krause, H. Jankuhn, *op. cit.*, No. 98; E.H. Antonsen, *op. cit.*, No. 117.

<sup>17</sup> W. Krause, H. Jankuhn, *op. cit.*, No. 80; Antonsen, *op. cit.*, No. 121.

The texts preserved the names of three generations of a family of local rulers: Haduwulf, the central figure of the complex, his son Hariwulf, and his father Herwulf. Texts on two of the stones declare the construction of memorials by Haduwulf (Gummarp) and Hariwulf (Rävsal). Another stone is erected in memory of Haduwulf's son Hariwulf (Istab). The fourth stone casts a spell on a person who might damage the monument (Björketorp);<sup>18</sup> the same prohibitive/protective formula is repeated on the fifth stone from Stentoften.<sup>19</sup> The latter monument starts, according to Lillemor Santesson, with a text unique in its content. It says: “[With] nine goats, [with] nine stallions Haduwulf gave fruitful year...”<sup>20</sup>

Contrary to previous period, these stones present a variety of events subjected to memorisation. The Istaby monument continues the tradition of immortalisation of a deceased. The text (“After Hariwulf Haduwulf, Herwulf’s [son], wrote these runes”) shows, however, further progress in constructing the memorial formula. Besides the name of the deceased, it contains other information that would become most important in later monuments. The inscription includes the name of the person who is responsible for the erection of the stone, his descent, his statement of making the monument. The name of the deceased is placed in the beginning of the sentence, i.e. in the most marked position.

New trends can be detected in two texts declaring the erection of monuments: “Haduwulf placed three staves. **Fif**” (Gummarp) and “Hariwulf’s stones” (Rävsal). Together with announcing the fact of raising stones, these statements of the two members of an aristocratic family also seem to proclaim Haduwulf’s and Hariwulf’s high social status and specific rights enabling them to execute the action of raising monuments. The **erilaz**, an owner of esoteric knowledge of runes (be he a priest, a Herul, or a proto-jarl),<sup>21</sup> has now been replaced by the head of a community who initiates setting of monuments and carving runic inscriptions. The implementation of Haduwulf’s and Hariwulf’s declarations in writing is of special importance. On the one hand, this fact attests the recognition of writing as a long-term memorisation tool. If the *bautasteinar* were memorials to which attribution depended solely on memory facilities, and there can be no doubt that in many cases the names of their owners were lost, a stone with an inscription stating the name of its owner was perceived as eternal (in both cases the stone with inscription was accompanied by one or more stones without inscriptions). The prohibition/protective formula represents the aspiration of the sponsors to save the monuments for eternity. On the other hand, the inscriptions

<sup>18</sup> T. Snædal, “Björketorpsstenens runinskrift,” [in:] *Runor och ABC*, pp. 149–163.

<sup>19</sup> L. Jacobsen, *Forbandelseformularer i nordiske runindskrifter*, Kungl. Vitterhets-, historie- och antikvitetsakademien, Stockholm 1935.

<sup>20</sup> L. Santesson, *op. cit.*, pp. 221–229.

<sup>21</sup> M. Taylor, “The Etymology of the Germanic Tribal Name *Eruli*,” *General Linguistics* 30 (1990), pp. 108–125.

could perform a magic or ritual function at the same time. The writing of runes on a monument could be perceived in itself a sacral act while the three runes **f** on the Gummarp stone symbolised wealth and prosperity corresponding to the good harvest year provided by Haduwulf<sup>22</sup>.

Especially important is the beginning of the Stentoften inscription commemorating, if we accept the reading of L. Santesson, an event of extraordinary importance for the community – the sacrificial ritual for securing the prosperity of the community. The practice of fertility sacrifices is well attested in different sources, written and archaeological, the former underlining the importance of fertility cult<sup>23</sup>. The ritual was performed probably not every year (according to Thietmar of Merseburg, once in nine years)<sup>24</sup> and was regarded to be the means to secure the well-being of a community.

The text includes information of paramount importance about the ritual. It stresses the name of the performer of the ritual (Haduwulf), the aim of the ritual (securing good harvest years designated by the old futhark “symbol”-rune **j**), and the composition of the sacrificial offering, nine goats and nine horses that had to confirm the adequacy of sacrifices to the ritual’s aim. The inscription thus had to certify the fact of a socially important event and to subject it to memorisation.

The complex of Blekinge monuments presents a new stage in written fixation of collective memory and its public perception. The monuments are supposed to retain information to be apprehended by at least some members of the community. The monuments are obviously intended to be preserved eternally and their safety is secured by protection formulae that are also put to writing. Together with the name of the deceased, other important social events as well as other information of social significance are subjected to written memorisation: genealogical lore, declaration of social status, etc. Introduction of prohibitive/protective spells seems to witness the increase of the status of written texts.

The inscriptions do not narrate about an event or a person. They present only “hints” or “keys” to promote actualisation of memory about these events or persons, and the most important “keys” remain personal names and mentions of most characteristic features of an event.

These tendencies grew during the eighth and ninth centuries. Already in the first half of the ninth century there appear memorial stones with inscriptions

<sup>22</sup> A. Hultgård, “År – “gutes Jahr und Ernteglück” – ein Motivkomplex in der altnordischen Literatur und sein religionsgeschichtlicher Hintergrund,” [in:] *Runica – Germanica – Mediaevalia. Festschrift für Klaus Düwel*, ed. W. Heizmann, A. van Nahl, de Gruyter, Berlin, N.Y. 2003, pp. 282–308.

<sup>23</sup> O. Sundqvist, “Runology and History of Religions. Some Critical Implications of the Debate on the Stentoften Inscription,” *Blandade runstudier* 2, 163–174. On archaeological finds see: L. Santesson, *op. cit.*, pp. 221–222.

<sup>24</sup> T. von Merseburg, *Chronik*, trans. W. Trillmich, Darmstadt: Rütten & Loening, 1957, I, p. 17.

immortalising warriors perished in Viking expeditions or in internal wars. These monuments state the fact of raising a stone by a relative of the deceased and sometimes provide additional information about him. Ninth century examples of these new trends are the Kälvesten inscription “Stig made this monument after Eyvind, his son. He fell in the east with Eyvisl. Viking made and Grimulf”<sup>25</sup> and the Sparlösa stone raised most probably in memory of the Eyvisl mentioned on the Kälvesten stone.<sup>26</sup> The type of information and the order of its arrangement appear to become more stable, and they are similar to those of the eleventh-century memorial inscriptions.

Among runic monuments of this time the most important from different points of view including the memory aspect is the stone from Rök, Östergötland.<sup>27</sup> The monument is made in memory of a certain Væmod (or Vamod) by his father Varin. The dedication includes the usual by now pieces of information, the names of the deceased and the person who let the stone raised, their relationship, the fact of making the monument: *Aft Væmoð standa runaR þaR. En Varinn faði, faðiR, aft faigian sunu* “In memory of Væmod stand these runes. And Varin wrote<sup>28</sup> them, the father, in memory of his dead son.”<sup>29</sup> The name of the deceased, however, opens the inscription like it did on the Istaby stone and the relationship of Væmod and Varin is stated in the second sentence with the repetition of the *aft*-construction. The erection of the monument is also stated two times, but in different forms: in the first case, it is the runes that stand in memory of Væmod, in the second case, it is Varin who wrote (painted) them. The phrasing thus reflects two principally different perspectives: impersonalised and timeless fact – the runes are there on the stone now and forever so that anyone can see or read them on the one hand, and a personal one-time act of making the runes on the other. The double perspective reflects two dimensions in which the death of Væmod is presented in the inscription. It is a fact of private life of Varin’s family or clan, their personal mischief commemorated by Varin’s “painting” the runes. In the latter perspective it is a public event immortalised

<sup>25</sup> Ög 8 (Östergötlands runinskrifter, granskade och tolkade av Erik Brate (= Sveriges runinskrifter, 2). Almqvist & Wiksell international, Stockholm 1911–1918).

<sup>26</sup> Vg 119 (Västergötlands runinskrifter, granskade och tolkade av Hugo Junger och Elisabeth Svärdström (= Sveriges runinskrifter, 5) Almqvist & Wiksell international, Stockholm 1940–1970).

<sup>27</sup> Ög 136. A survey of main interpretations of the Rök inscription see in: H. Gustavsson, “Rök,” [in:] *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* 25, Berlin 2003, pp. 62–72.

<sup>28</sup> More precisely ‘painted’, ‘coloured’ (L. Peterson, *Svenskt runordregister*, 2 revid. uppl. (= Runrön 2), Institutionen för nordiska språk. Uppsala universitet, Uppsala 1994, p. 11).

<sup>29</sup> The translation belongs to Peter Foote in: S.B.F. Jansson, *The Runes in Sweden*, Gidlunds, Värnamo 1987, pp. 32–34. The dedication might be versified (at least the second sentence has three alliterating words) and that can explain its specific structure. According to Sophus Bugge, Varin could have been a scald and the inscription was versified (S. Bugge, “Tolkning av Runeinskriften på Rökstenen i Östergötland,” *Antikvarisk tidskrift för Sverige* 5 (1878).

by the runes that are to “stand” eternally. This appeal to eternity is developed further in the inscription.

The largest part of the text is a series of allusions to a number of legends<sup>30</sup> all of which, but the Theodoric strophes, are obscure to us though they had to be well known in Östergötland of that time.<sup>31</sup> Each legend (a minimal content unit)<sup>32</sup> is introduced by the **sakum**-formula (“we say”)<sup>33</sup> that exists in three variants marking different sections of the text.<sup>34</sup>

Table 1.

Distribution of the **sakum**-formula

		<b>Younger runes section</b>
I.2	<b>sagum mogminni pat</b>	topic: transmission of <i>valraubar</i>
3	<i>bat sagum</i> + ordinal	topic: death of Theodoric (?)
4		topic: the statue of Theodoric
5	<i>bat sagum</i> + ordinal	topic: twenty slain konungs
6	<i>bat sagum</i> + ordinal	topic: twenty konungs at Siolund
7	<b>nu'k minni meðr allu sagi</b>	topic: (concluding phrase?) <sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> The ‘repertoire theory’ was put forward by Sophus Bugge (S. Bugge, *Der Runenstein von Rök i Östergötland, Sweden*, ed. M. Olsen, Stockholm 1910, pp. 1–258) and it is was shared, among others, by Elias Wessén and Sven B.F. Jansson. With some modifications it is accepted by most contemporary runologists (e.g. Joseph Harris, Michael Schulte, Stephan Brink, et al.). A ‘revenge’ theory was proposed by Otto von Friesen (O. von Friesen, *Rökstenen. Runstenen vid Röks kyrka Lysings härad, Östergötland*, Stockholm 1920) and supported by Otto Höffler (O. Höffler, *Germanische Sakralkönigtum. I. Der Runenstein von Rök und die germanische Individualweihe*, Tübingen, Köln: M. Niemeyer, 1952).

<sup>31</sup> H. Reichert, “Runeninschriften als Quellen der Heldenagenforschung,” [in:] *Runeninschriften als Quellen interdisziplinärer Forschung. Abhandlungen des Vierten Internationalen Symposiums über Runen und Runeninschriften in Göttingen vom 4. – 9. August 1995*, ed. K. DüwelBerlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1998, pp. 70–76.

<sup>32</sup> These units were most consistently isolated by Gun Widmark (G. Widmark, “Varför ristade Varin runor? Tankar kring Rökstenen,” *Saga och sed* (1992), pp. 25–27).

<sup>33</sup> The **sakum**-formula was specially studied by Lars Lönnroth who was the first to suggest its structural significance (L. Lönnroth, “The Riddles of the Rök-stone: A Structural Approach,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 92 (1977), pp. 1–57).

<sup>34</sup> E.A. Melnikova, “Drevnegermanskaja epicheskaja toponimija v skandinavskoj literature XII–XIV vekov (k istorii toponima *Reiðgotaland*)”, [in:] *Skandinavskie jazyki. Strukturno-funktional'nye aspekty* 2, ed. S.N. Kuznetsov, Moskva: Nauka, 1990, pp. 264–277.

<sup>35</sup> The interpretation of this phrase is difficult for reading because only few words are distinguishable. Lars Lönnroth regarded it as a conclusion of the first section (‘a post-script formula’) which seems convincing (L. Lönnroth, “The Riddles of the Rök-stone”, 23). The **sakum**-formula in line 20 (*Nu'k minni* are the only two words that can be reliably read) appears here in a specific unparalleled variant. Its most important peculiarity is the shift from plural (*sagum*) to singular (*Nu ek...*). This shift marks the change of author’s perspective and narrative strategy. Individualising ‘I’ substitutes indefinite, probably collective ‘we’ which refers to the keepers and transmitters of *minni*, the historical memory of a larger or smaller community.

Special runes section			
II.8	<i>sagum mogminni þat</i>	topic: Ingvaldings	older runes
9	<i>sagum mogminni</i>	topic: Vilin	younger and shift runes
10	<i>sagum mogminni</i>	topic: Sibbe of Vi	two types of twig runes and coordinate runes

The extended formula *sagum mogminni þat* opens the two major sections of the text, “narrative” and “sacral”, which are inscribed in different kinds of runic script, in the younger futhark (section I, lines 3–20) and in older and cipher runes (section II, lines 21–28) respectively.<sup>36</sup> It marks the beginnings of sections most probably united by their content or the theme common to all units within a section. The usage of one and the same, most extended, variant of the incipit-formula stresses the structural equivalence of both sections. The reduced formulae *þat sagum* and *sagum mogminni* are used to mark the opening of a new unit within the two sections. Each variant of the reduced formula occurs in one section only. *þat sagum* is used in the first section whereas *sagum mogminni* belongs to the second section. In all cases, *þat sagum* formula is followed by an ordinal and then by a question or an objective clause introduced by an interrogative/relative pronoun in the same way as the extended variant. The enumeration of units in the first section strongly supports its “catalogue” interpretation as the content of the units introduced by the same variant of the formula might be presumed to be thematically comparable.

The closest parallel to the **sakum**-formula from *Vafþrúðnismál* (“Segðú þat it einn..., Segðú þat annat..., Segðú þat it þriðja...”) was cited already by Erik Brate and Elias Wessén<sup>37</sup> and another parallel occurs in *Sigrdrifumál* (*Pat ræð ek þér it fyrsta..., Pat ræð ek þér annat..., Pat ræð ek þér et þriðja...*). The reiteration of initial formulae, as Michael Schulte remarked, “creates textual coherence and functions as mnemonic device.”<sup>38</sup> Another and very important function is structuring the text as the iterations divide the text into semantic segments and stress their parallelism and thematic unity. This function can be performed also by refrains like *Vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?* “would you know yet more?” in *Völuspá* (61, 62)<sup>39</sup> or *Rǫðumk þér, Loddfafnir!* “I rede thee, “Loddfafnir!” in *Hávamol*

<sup>36</sup> I follow the enumeration of lines of Helmer Gustavson, as in note 27.

<sup>37</sup> E. Brate, “Zur Deutung der Rök Inschrift,” [in:] S. Bugge, *Der Runenstein von Rök i Östergötland, Sweden*, ed. M. Olsen, Stockholm 1910, p. 296; E. Wessén, *Runstenen vid Röks kyrka*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1958, pp. 33–34.

<sup>38</sup> M. Schulte, “Memory Culture in the Viking Age: The Runic Evidence of Formulaic Patterns,” *Scripta Islandica* 58 (2007), p. 66.

<sup>39</sup> On the refrain in *Völuspá* see: M. Schulte, “The Classical and Christian Impact on *Völuspá*. Toward a Comparative and Topomorphical Approach,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 120 (2005), pp. 181–219.

(112, 113, 115, 116, 117, 119, etc.)<sup>40</sup> as well as by whole strophes like *Geyr nú Garmr mjók fyr Gniphelli...* “Now Garm howls loud / before Gniphellir...” (Vsp. 43, 48, 53, 57). It is a well-known oral narrative technique typical for folklore, especially epic texts. It was used for “threading” textual units of similar content including retellings of, or allusions to, epic stories.

The **sakum** formula is also a device to appeal to the background knowledge of the community,<sup>41</sup> which is specially marked by the introduction of the word *minni*, “memory, remembrance, what is remembered”. In four cases, it is combined with *mog (mukmini)*, which was interpreted in different ways but its most usual explanation is “folk memory”, “folk legend.”<sup>42</sup> The designation of what is told as *mogminni* suggests that the stories not only in fact are, but that they were also perceived by Varin and his audience as collective memory embodied in the legends that follow the formulae. The usage of the word *minni* attests awareness of the specific assignment of the inscription – to preserve historical and cultural memory in a new, written, form.

The “history” of the *minni* or at least of one of its pieces might be related in a rather enigmatic first episode: *Sagum mogminni(?) þat, hværiaR valraubaR vaRin tvaR þaR, svað tvalf sinnum vaRin numnar at valraubu, baðaR saman a ymissum mannum* (“I tell the ancient tale which the two war-booties were. Twelve times taken as war-booty, both together from man to man”).<sup>43</sup> The *valraubaR* is commonly interpreted as “war-booty” in the form of precious swords, shields or ornaments that changed hands of the conquerors twelve times.<sup>44</sup> The direct meaning of the compound *val-raubR*, however, is “the booty of the fallen”, especially those who fell in battle (*valr* “the slain”, cf. *Val-höll* “the hall of the slain”; *val-dýr* “the beast of the slain” = wolf, Vsp. 55; *val-föðr* = Odin, Vsp. 1). For the conquerors who survived, the war-booty indeed comprises precious objects, but for those who found their death neither arms nor ornaments had any value. The highest award for them, their “war-booty”, could be only the post-mortem fame, the preservation of their heroic deeds in memory of future genera-

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<sup>40</sup> English translation after Henry Adams Bellows, trans., *The Poetic Edda*, American-Scandinavian Foundation, New York 1923.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. the formula *svá er sagt* in Icelandic sagas as an appeal (real or artificial) to oral tradition: T.M. Andersson, “The Textual Evidence for an Oral Family Saga”, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 81 (1966), pp. 1–23; G.V. Glazyrina, “Formula *svá er sagt* in *Íslendingabók* of Ári Fróði”, [in:] *Stanzas of Friendship. In honour of Tatjana Jackson*, ed. I. Konovalova et al., Moscow: Fond sodejstvija obrazovaniju i nauke, 2011, pp. 101–114.

<sup>42</sup> Gun Widmark regards *greppaminni* as memories of a large community and *mogminni* as memories of a kin or lineage (G. Widmark, “Tolkningen som social konstruktion. Rökstenens inskrift,” *Runor och ABC*, 174). Michael Schulte attracted attention to the usage of *óminni* ‘oblivion’ in *Hávamál* 13 that clarifies the importance of the notion of *minni* (M. Schulte, “Memory Culture in the Viking Age”, p. 68).

<sup>43</sup> S.B.F. Jansson, *The Runes in Sweden...*, p. 32.

<sup>44</sup> H. Gustavson, “Rök...,” p. 64.

tions. The metaphoric usage of *valraubR* as the designation of “glorious memory of the fallen” seems to correspond well both to the meaning of the whole passage and to the context and the poetics of the inscription in general. The author of the inscription uses poetic devices and the interpretation of *valraubR* as a *kenning* is supported by other cases of metaphors like *GunnaR hæstR* (= wolf, lines 12–13). The passage can mean that the tradition commemorating two events (battles?) and twelve heroic deeds (?), the booty of those who fell in these battles, was transmitted by word of mouth from man to man.

The two following episodes concern the epic history of the Goths, the first deals with an obscure for us somebody’s (Theodoric’s?) death with the *Hreiðgotar*, the second tells about Theodoric’s rule over them and describes his equestrian statue brought by Charles the Great to Aahen in 801.<sup>45</sup> Both passages are connected by the mentions of *Hreiðgotar* “glorious Goths” (in the second passage they are referred to as “see-warriors” of *strandu HreiðmaraR*), an epic designation of the Goths.<sup>46</sup> The tradition about the Goths and Theodoric could constitute the two *valraubaR* spoken about in the first passage.<sup>47</sup>

These and other legends referred to in the inscription had to be actualised in the memory of those who could and would read it with the ‘actualisation keys’ that were essentially the same as those found in earlier inscriptions. These are first and foremost personal names (Theodrik, Radulf, Ingvaldings), but most legends are represented by some events or circumstances specific for just that legend. Thus, the first tale is represented by two *valraubar* (“war-booties”), the next one by a loser of life among *Hreiðgotar*, another legend is referred to by mention of twenty konungs lying on the battle-field, still another by twenty konungs sitting on Zealand for four winters. We are unable to proceed from these ‘keys’ to the whole narrations but for Varin’s contemporaries this procedure must have presented no difficulty. Personal names of heroes of legends as well as naming the details of specific situations provided enough grounds to restore the whole story.

These legends however did not only constitute epic parallels to Væmod’s death. Their more important function was to globalise this event, to present it as a happening of the same historic (cosmic) dimension as e.g. the death of

<sup>45</sup> K. Malone, “The Theoderic of the Rök Inscription,” *Acta philologica Scandinavica* 9 (1934), pp. 116–123; O. Höffler, “Der Rökstein und Theoderik,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 90 (1975), pp. 92–110.

<sup>46</sup> E.A. Melnikova, “**Sakum**-formula of the Rök inscription: variants and distribution,” [in:] *The Seventh Run-symposium Oslo, 2010*, <http://www.khm.uio.no/forskning/publikasjoner/runenews/7th-symp/template.html>

<sup>47</sup> The echoes of Gothic epic tradition in Scandinavia were incorporated in a number of *fornaldarsögur* like the lay on the battle between the Goths and the Hunns in the *Hervarar saga* (J. Helgason (ed.), *Kviður af Gotum og Húnnum*, Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1967. See also: B. Guðnason, “Theodoricus og íslenskir sagnaritarar,” [in:] *Sjötú ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni*, ed. E.G. Pétursson, J. Kristjánsson, Reykjavík 1977, pp. 107–120).

Theodoric.<sup>48</sup> A local accident acquired a world-scale significance and Væmod occupied a place among the most celebrated heroes of the past.

The text of inscriptions on memorial stones has stabilised by the 11<sup>th</sup> century, which means that the process of selection and valuation of information to be memorised on runic stones had finished. The memorial formula took its final shape by including the names of the sponsor(s) in the opening position, the statement about the creation of a memorial in the second place, the name of the deceased and his relationship to the sponsor(s) in the third place followed occasionally by information about the deceased and/or the circumstances of his death, runographer's signature and Christian invocations. The kind of information and the location of its pieces show that the most important information to be memorised consisted of connections between the deceased and those who raised the monument in his memory.<sup>49</sup> It also marked the shift of interest from the deceased to those who made the monument by placing the names of sponsors in the opening position. Other information, concerning social status of the deceased, his occupation, his deeds and death, was optional. In rare cases, when some special events were to be memorised, such as the participation of the deceased in the famous expedition of Yngvar in the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century, the key-word "Yngvar's host" (e.g. "he was/died in Yngvar's host") or simply the name "Yngvar" (e.g. "he was/died with Yngvar") were enough to actualise the memory about this tragic adventure which gave rise to a long-term tradition<sup>50</sup>.

The spread and ever increasing number of inscriptions, their location at public places as well as the appearance of runic sticks with texts of various content attest the diffusion of runic literacy in the tenth century and later on. That, however, does not imply cultural transmission to literacy in Scandinavia, which remained predominantly oral with no usage of writing in administrative, judicial, religious or cultural spheres. These runic inscriptions bear all the characteristics found in oral cultures, in a non-literate society: short, formulaic statements, patterns, fixed sentences repeated on runestone after runestone, something written down not primarily for "communication", but for "memorialisation", "monumentalisation".<sup>51</sup> To define this kind of specific literate culture, Terje Spurkland suggested a term

<sup>48</sup> O. Grønvik, *Der Rökstein: Über die religiöse Bestimmung und das weltliche Schicksal eines Helden aus der frühen Wikingerzeit*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Birgit Sawyer's opinion that the late Viking Age runic stones functioned as legitimisation of hereditary rights of those who ordered the monuments: B. Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones. Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 47–91.

<sup>50</sup> G.V. Glazyrina, *Saga ob Ingvare Puteshestvennike. Tekst, perevod, kommentarij*, Moskva: Vostochnaja literatura, 2002.

<sup>51</sup> S. Brink, "Verba Volant, scripta manent? Aspects of Early Scandinavian Oral Society," *Literacy in Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavian Culture*, ed. P. Herman, Odense: University press of southern Denmark, 2005, pp. 59–117. This opinion is shared by most runologists.

“runacy” coined on the bases of, but opposed to, a wider term “literacy”.<sup>52</sup> Runic writing continued to be limited to memorial stones and occasional inscriptions on sticks, metal plates, etc. throughout the Middle Ages when Scandinavian societies became literate in the strict meaning of the word using the Latin script.

In the course of the first millennium C.E. runic writing developed into an important memorisation tool in the society dominated by oral culture. However, the events worth memorising as well as the forms of memorisation were very limited. From the fifth to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, the information to be memorised underwent selection. The overwhelming majority of memorial stones immortalise the death of a person of high social status. It is very rare that some other socially important events find representation on memorial stones, and in the ninth and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries statements about such events are combined with memorials to deceased (cf. Sparlösa, Vg. 119; Jelling, DR 42). Most important pieces of information included in dedications comprised names of the deceased and the sponsors of the monument, their relationship, statement about the erection of the monument and, optionally, some information about the deceased and the circumstances of his death, as well as runographer’s signature and Christian invocations. Simultaneously, with the process of selection and adoption of types of information to be memorised, its verbal representation developed into lexically and syntactically fixed expressions. They seem to originally derive from “runographers’ formula” but in the seventh to ninth century they were adjusted to new needs and transformed into a ‘dedication formula’ with fixed positions of all elements. Limited possibilities of carving prolonged inscriptions on stones required special tools to ‘fold’ full information about a person or an event in writing and to ‘unfold’ it in the minds of those who read the inscription. The main “keys” to actualise memory were personal names and some specific for this concrete event circumstances. The spread of a new writing system, Latin script, together with Christian written culture provided a more convenient form of memorising the past than memorial stones, and, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the practice of their erection ceased.

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<sup>52</sup> T. Spurkland, “Scandinavian Medieval Runic Inscriptions – an interface between literacy and orality,” [in:] *Roman, Runes and Ogham. Medieval inscription in the insular world and on the continent*, ed. J. Higgitt et al., Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2001, pp. 121–128; T. Spurkland, “Literacy and ‘Runacy’ in Medieval Scandinavia,” [in:] *Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350. Contact, Conflict and Coexistence*, ed. J. Adams, K. Holman, Turnhout: Brepols, 2004, pp. 333–344.

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## INSKRYPCJE RUNCZNE JAKO NARZĘDZIE ZAPAMIĘTYWANIA: MIĘDZY SŁOWEM MÓWIONYM A PISANYM

### Streszczenie

W czasie pierwszego wieku naszej ery pismo runiczne rozwinęło się jako ważne narzędzie zapamiętywania w społeczeństwach skandynawskich zdominowanych przez kulturę mówioną. Między V a X wiekiem wybierane do zapamiętania informacje dotyczyły zgonów osób z elit społecznych. Inne wydarzenia społeczne niezwykle rzadko były upamiętniane kamiennymi znakami. W wiekach IX i X odnotowywane wydarzenia łączono ze wspomnieniami o zmarłych. Najważniejsze inskrypcje podawały informacje o osobie zmarłej, fundatorze pomnika, koligacjach, powstaniu pomnika oraz niekiedy wydarzeniach towarzyszących śmierci. Czasem dodawano podpis twórcy pomnika i modlitwę chrześcijańską. Równocześnie owa informacja była rozwijana w leksykalną i syntaktycznie określona formułę, która zdaje się wypływać z formuły runicznej. W wiekach od VII do IX formuła ta dostosowana została do potrzeb formuły dedykacyjnej. Ograniczone możliwości rycia długich formuł w kamieniu spowodowały konieczność zamknięcia informacji o zmarłej osobie w specjalnych skrótach, które miały rozwijać się w umysłach odbiorców. Głównym kluczem uruchamiającym umysł były imiona i szczegóły opisywanego wydarzenia. Rozwój pisma łacińskiego umożliwił bardziej przyjazną metodę upamiętniania przeszłości i w wieku XII zaniechano stawiania kamiennych pomników runicznych.

