

# **The Runes According to Sigurd Agrell**

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# The Runes According to Sigurd Agrell

In this document I make an attempt to relate what Sigurd Agrell writes about the old Germanic rune alphabet, predominantly derived from two of his books: "Runornas talmystik och dess antika förebild" (Lund: Gleerup. 1927), and "Lapptrummor och runmagi: tvenne kapitler ur trolldomsväsendets historia" (Lund: Gleerup. 1934). In his books on the runes he argues and intends to prove that the conventional runic order, the Futhark, represents a displacement cipher, in which the last rune has been placed in the first alphabetical position, in order to hide the symbolic numerical value of each rune. He introduces the Uthark, where the first rune is Uruz, not Fehu, and proposes to show how all the mystical interpretations of numbers through this operation correspond with the numerical values in several alphabets and other symbolic numerical contexts within the mystery religions in Late Antiquity, where particularly the Mithras cult predominates. The Mithras cult was an important cult among Roman soldiers, and he suggests that Germanic warriors first and foremost came into contact with this religion as they served with the Roman legions that guarded the northern borders of the Roman Empire, and that the runic alphabet has been severely influenced by the Mithras cult and other mystery religions of Late Antiquity.

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## 1. Uruz u

The first rune has originally undoubtedly had a name which means 'bull, aurochs'. The Mithras cult regarded the bull as a symbol for organic life and its beginning. According to the myth Mithras sacrificed a bull. It was a celestial bull, which Mithras had brought to his cave from the "Realm of the Moon".

It has been established that the Babylonian Mithras worshippers spoke Aramic during the Babylonian stage of development, at the time when the Persian realm was spreading. This caused the Semitic alphabet to influence the Mithras followers. And the Semitic alphabets begin with a letter, which has been called 'ox, cattle' (Hebrew: *Aleph*). This symbol has resulted in the first letter of the Greek alphabet A, called *Alfa*. In olden days the similarity of the letter to a head of an ox was striking: ✎. Still in Late Antiquity the Greeks knew that the symbol represented the head of an ox. In a document on the mysteries of the Greek alphabet, written in Coptic, it is stated that this letter is connected with "the first heaven".

In the Persian religion the bull was regarded as sacred: his soul was considered to be "in heaven", protected by Zarathustra.

Also in ancient Egypt a cow was a symbol of the sky: the cow and the bull were regarded as being sacred.

The most ancient Semitic letters, the alphabet of Sinai, have emerged in connection with Egyptian written characters, which were simplified to become a few characters representing sounds. The Hebrew letter mystery has connected the first and the last letter of the alphabet with "the sky" and "the earth".

In Old Norse mythology Audhumbla is the origin of all organic life, as she appears in the stories of the creation of the world. In the dawn of time Ymer drinks milk from her dugs. She

appears, and begins to lick a block of ice which has been created in Ginnungagap, the 'immense void' between Muspellheim and Nifelheim. And out of the block of ice a man, Bure, emerges, and he becomes the ancestor of the gods. The gods killed Ymer and created the world from his body parts.

## **2. Thurs d**

The oldest name for this rune means "troll", "giant", "ogre". The rune has also been called "Thorn", which means "thorn", "prickle", "spike", - but this may be a noa word, in order to avoid "calling the troll by its name". Towards the end of the 18th century in a southern Swedish (Scanian) administrative county district, called Skytts härad, people still believed that old briar bushes growing on ancient grave mounds made the trolls living in the mound less dangerous.

The rune represents the giants, but also the evil spirit of the water, the Neck. According to the Uthark runic order it is the second rune in the runic alphabet, and the number two is the demoniacal number. And thus the anti-demonical word "thorn", was quite appropriate as a replacement for "thurs".

The fact that the number two has been perceived as a demonical number in the mysticism of Late Antiquity is well confirmed, among other things in statements by neo-Platonic philosophers. Also in the Near East, the homeland of the Mithras cult, the number has been connected with the evil spiritual power. To Zarathustra evil was the second life principle, and the number was associated with Angra Mainyu, Ahriman, Ahura Mazda's adversary and twin brother.

Even in Norse folklore the notion of the number two as being demonical is apparent. There are many examples: Two flames are burning where a dragon is gloating over a hidden treasure, a dragon can be killed by the use of a twin rod of juniper, in Denmark magic can be wielded by using objects in pairs, and from Scania (southern Sweden) there is a tale about a boy who has irritated witches, and because of this he received dangerous gifts from them on Maundy Thursday, two of everything. In the Swedish provinces Scania and Småland the Devil is called "the other one" and so on.

## **3. Ansuz 𐌆**

This rune has always had a name which means 'Norse god', 'Æsir god'. The number three represents the divine, as opposed to the demonical number two. Already in the Sumerian culture the main gods were three in number. Mithra is sometimes characterized as the "three-figured" god (most likely the prototype for the Norse god triad "High, Equally High and Third" mentioned in Snorri's Gylfaginning). The rune and the number three are connected with both Odin and Tyr, especially when a weapon is to be consecrated. To the Persians, Ahura Mazda and the sky were almost regarded as the same; according to Bundahishn the sky was the first created item. Among the Roman Mithraists Caelus ('the sky') has been a name for Zeus-Jupiter, the Roman-Greek Ahura Mazda correspondence. And in the Norse mythology Zeus-Jupiter is called Tyr.

Also in Scandinavian folklore the number three stands out as being sacred and divine. You spit three times to protect yourself from evil mischief and witchcraft, and by performing magical rituals built upon the number three you protect your livestock from the trolls.

Also within Sami witchcraft the number three along with its amplification (3 times 3 = 9) plays the dominating role when divine ceremonies and healing rituals are performed. Three pegs are stuck into Sarakka's porridge, when an animal was to be sacrificed you cut three parts from the animal while it was still living as a sacrifice to one of the sky gods (a portion of each ear, and a part of the tail), three images were put on the same bench when Horagalles, the Sami version of Thor, was worshipped, and so on.

There are many runic inscriptions in which the number three stands out, among others the Sigtuna amulet and the Roskilde amulet.

In Sigdrifumál, the epic poem about Sigurd and the Valkyrie, it is mentioned that you consecrate a sword by placing battle runes on its hilt, on its point and on its cutting edge, while you speak out Tyr's name twice.

Also in the Greek culture the third letter in the Greek alphabet ( Γ, gamma) is connected to the divine. It is said to be "filled with heavenly mysteries".

#### **4. Raido ᚱ**

This rune has a name, which originally meant "carriage" (*reið*). It represents Thor (*Reiðartýr*). And Thor is associated with the number four. In Heimskringla it is written that four loaves of bread were placed in front of the statue of Thor in the shrine dedicated to Thor in the Gudbrand Valley in Norway. And many incantations and formulas directed towards Thor consist of four words, such as the runic inscription "Thor consecrate these runes". The fourth stanza in the *Ljóðatal* "Woden's magical charms" in Havamal refers to a "*galder*" (a magical chant) by which the power to break free from shackles and bondage is achieved. The rune endows a person with strength, but apart from this, the rune is not used in rune magic very often.

In order for a dog not to grow tired, the black art book "Key of Solomon" you must give the dog four pieces of the tongue of a calf and four square pieces of bread four mornings in a row, and the first day must be a Thursday.

In the alphabet mysticism of Late Antiquity, the fourth Greek letter Δ, *delta*, was connected with the four elements. It represents the four corners of the world. It represents the sacred four-in-hand, the quadriga, and the quadriga represents the four elements in Mithraistic alphabet mysticism.

#### **5. Ken K**

The name comes from the Anglo-Saxon Rune Poem and its runic alphabet. Later the rune has also been called Kaun, a boil or abscess, but that is not likely to have been its original name. Yet it has been used to drive away diseases. A Sami drum shows by its symbols that the rune has represented a branch of pine wood, and by that a torch in older Scandinavian magic. This goes along well with the letter magic and number mysticism of Late Antiquity, The torch is fire and light. In Bundahishn five kinds of fire are mentioned. The Mithraistic fire god is called the "five-god" in Manichaean hymns. In the ancient Rome the number five was connected with the god Mars. The Norse Æsir god Tyr is frequently regarded as an obvious parallel to the Roman god Mars. In many ways Tyr is represented by the protecting house fire, providing light, warmth and protection to one's home, as it burns on the hearth in the house.

In Norse folklore and magic the pentagram is perceived as a symbol of health that expels the powers of darkness. The number five has been used in several ways to cure animals from boils and abscesses. Still today the hand with all five fingers spread out is a commonly used protection against the "evil eye". The pentagram wards off hostile spears and magical spells.

## **6. Gifu G**

A gift, a sacrifice, to sacrifice. In many religions the number six has been associated with the art of sacrificing. It represents the six directions: south, west, north, east, above and below. According to Mithraistic astrology the sixth celestial sphere belonged to the Moon. During Late Antiquity the Moon was believed to generate silver. According to Norse folklore the Moon is a gracious provider if you politely greet the new moon, "drop a curtsy to the New Moon", "greet the New King". The rune protects against harmful magic. Using the number six you can turn harmful magic back to its instigator. You can protect your horse by sowing six different items onto its halter: castor, garlic, anthraconite (stinkstone), bayberry, mezereon and valerian. The number six is also associated to the Norse god Njörðr. He is the god of wealth and bounties. Niord and his wife Skade is also associated with the moon, as Njörðr represents the crescent moon, being the giving partner, and Skaði, being the receiving partner, represents the waning moon. That Njörðr is considered to rule over the wind also suits his character of being a moon god, and this has parallels in other mythologies: the Greek moon goddess Artemis rules over the wind and high and low tide, and among many primitive cultures the moon and the wind are connected.

## **7. Wynn (Wunjo) W**

Joy, delight. The Rune of Success. The number seven was regarded by Persians and Mithraists to be fortunate and good. In the Greek alphabet mysticism the seventh letter represented brightness and light. In the Hebrew alphabet the seventh letter is associated with fire. Fire is synonymous with love in magic of Late Antiquity. This connection also appears in a Danish love charm. Among the Mithraists the number seven was a particularly sacred number, connected with the sphere of the sun and highest ranked among the Mithras priests. Several examples can be found where the number seven has been incorporated into Nordic fortune and love magic. The god who is most associated with the rune Wunjo is the god Freyr. The rune combines the four corners of the world with the divine number three.

## **8. Hagel H**

The eighth rune represents a hailstone, crystalline stone. The canopy of heaven has since ancient times been considered to be ice so frozen that it has been transformed into crystal, in other words stone. In Roman folklore it was believed that rock crystals were fragments of the vault of heaven that had fallen down. Among the Mithras worshippers the sky of the fixed stars was the eighth sphere, the outermost sphere. Inside that sphere were the seven planets, each in its own sphere.

The Anglo-Saxons talked about the eightfold power of a gem. The Sami concept "The Bear of Heaven" refers to a constellation of stars, in other words the starry sky.

The magic role of the rune was to create steadfastness and unity.

The rune has been associated with Heimdall, since he can be perceived as a sky god. He stands sentinel by the bridge abutment of Bifrost in the realm of the Æsir, and carefully keeps guard against Muspellheim. At Ragnarok Surt, the fire giant, and his army are expected to attack from there, and then Heimdall will sound the Gjallar Horn to call to battle. Bifrost has been interpreted both as the rainbow and the Milky Way.

## **9. Naud n**

This rune stands for need, necessity, and has had a particularly huge magic significance. It drives magical necessity, and since it is the ninth rune, it is easy to perceive that it thus affects all the nine worlds.

In the Antiquity, the number nine had a connection with the deity of fate, among the Greeks Ananke, among the Romans Necessitas. Ananke is associated with the aether and the night. In Late Antiquity she was the central power of the sorcery. Plato lets the three powers of destiny, the Moirai, dwell in a ninth sphere outside the eight spheres mentioned above. Of course, in Norse mythology this divine power the three Norns.

There are many examples, both in Norse mythology and later Nordic folklore, showing that the number nine is associated with the power of sorcery. For example, it has been used to conjure up wind, and since Woden both is a storm deity and the predominant practitioner of sorcery, there is a connection between him and the ninth rune. But it is not just in Nordic folklore that the number nine is important in magic incantations. There are incantations both in England and Germany where the number nine is used as a force.

## **10. Is i**

The rune represents ice, a frozen condition, but also death. It has been used for harmful sorcery. There are many examples both in magic incantations and in Norse folklore showing that the number ten is associated with harmful sorcery and also death. The number ten stands for death, but also for the realm of the dead. It represents Hel. But the notion of the number ten being the number of death is not only limited to the North: Hades, the Greek realm of the dead, has ten rivers. In India the number ten is regarded as being ominous. In the Persian written work the Bundahishn the number ten and its multiples are associated with death and disease. And also in the Egyptian mysteries of Isis the number ten has been associated with death.

It is easy to understand the parallel between cold ice and a dead person, when the body heat has faded away. To a Norse person life was the same as movement. When all movement comes to a standstill, it is the same as death.

## **11. Jera j**

Good year, the year's crops. The god of the year's crops is above all Freyr, the god of sun and light. In ancient Icelandic texts he is called " árguð". In the Eddaic poem Skirnismál Freyr's shoe servant Skirnir offers eleven golden apples to the giant daughter Gerd as dowry from Freyr, who desires to marry her. That the number of apples is eleven in connection with Freyr connects in a convincing manner Freyr and the year's crops with the eleventh rune in the Uthark.

The number eleven has also in more recent times been connected with fertility rites in Scandinavia. And there are also other parallels: In a Byzantine manuscript the eleventh letter in the Greek alphabet is combined with the "sprouting up of the fodder plants". And the Persian written work the Bundahishn tells that when the ancient sky bull died fifty-five different kinds of cereal sprouted forth, namely five times eleven.

The seventh rune Wunjo (Wynn) is associated with Freyr in the aspect of being a deity of friendship and love, whereas the eleventh rune Jera is associated with Freyr as a deity of the year's crops, the crops in the fields which provide food and wealth.

## **12. Eihwaz, Eoh §**

On the Vadstena bracteate, the Grumpan bracteate and the Thames scramasax this rune is the twelfth rune if you presuppose that the Uthark order is the correct one. Only on the Kylver slab does it come after Peorth, on the thirteenth position in the Uthark order. This is why Sigurd Agrell concludes in his later works that one should put less trust in the slipshod inscription on the Kylver slab than in the three other Futhark inscriptions. Yet in his earlier works he connects the Persian sky god Ahura Mazda, by Herodotos interpreted as Zeus, with the number thirteen, and by this he connects the rune with the supreme god of the sky. Also the Manichaeian sky god Aion-Zervan is connected with the number 13.

But also the number twelve is connected with this rune. Sigurd Agrell makes a comparison with the 12 houses of the Zodiak, and in the Mithras cult the number 12 was associated with fruit-bearing trees.

The rune is perceived as a representative for the trees and the magic associated with trees, especially fruit-bearing trees, and in ancient times also oaks, spruces, birch trees and so on were considered to be fruit-bearing.

In folklore, to have a piece of yew wood in your pocket or somewhere in your clothes wherever you go, is considered to be one of the most powerful protections against witchcraft.

Without a doubt this rune is connected with the yew tree, and since it is, it is also associated with the World Tree, and thus it is also connected with the god Ullr, whose home is called Ydalir, "The Valley of the Yew Trees". Ullr goes on skis, and his predominant weapon is the bow and arrows, which often are used for hunting. The bows made of yew were considered to be the best ones. In Greek mythology Ullr can be most compared with Apollo, who is a son of Zeus. As a parallel, one can see the close relation between Ullr and the Norse supreme god of the sky, Tyr.

## **13. Peorth, Petra P**

Both on the Vadstena bracteate, the Grumpan bracteate and the Thames scramasax (The Seax of Beagnot) this rune is the thirteenth rune if you presuppose that the Uthark order is the correct one, whereas it holds position number twelve in the Uthark order on the Kylver stone.

The rune is regarded as being associated with stone, rocks, earth and minerals. Its name forms associations with the Greek word 'petra', which means 'rock'.

If Sigurd Agrell's theory that the Mithras cult of Late Antiquity, very popular among the Roman legionaries, has strongly influenced the warriors in the Germanic auxiliaries on the borders of the Roman Empire is valid, it is quite plausible, as Sigurd Agrell does, to presuppose that the rune has to do with Mithras, since he, according to the myths, 'was born

out of the rock'. According to Sigurd Agrell, the number 13 is also associated with birth, procreation. In connection with the number thirteen he refers to Demeter, Magna Mater, Kybele, and by way of them, the Norse goddess Fjörgyn, "The Earth Goddess".

Agrell also finds the number 13 in the inscription on one of the two Gallehus horns, and assumes that the horns were intended to protect somebody from dying in battle, a magical practice that is referred to in the thirteenth stanza of "Woden's charms", a section of Havamal:

The thirteenth I know,	Þat kann ek it þrettánda:
if a child I shall	ef ek skal þegn ungan
consecrate by sprinkling water	verpa vatni á,
He shall not fall	mun-at hann falla,
be he in any battle	þótt hann í folk komi,
This warrior shall not die by the sword	hnígr-a sá halr fyr hjörum.

Also in more recent folklore the number 13 is connected with inducing a birth process. According to an informant by the name of Eva Wigström, in southern Sweden (Scania) a brood-hen could be placed upon 13 eggs on a Tuesday for it to successfully have chickens. If you want a snake to breed a "snake-stone", according to a Swedish book of spells, the "Salomonic Magical Arts", you should tie it firmly around the middle of the snake, where a navel would be if it had one, with a cord of black silk, made of 13 threads.

The rune is also helpful by its earth power when you try to remain relatively sober during a drinking bout. It mitigates the effect of beer, which also the Old English rune poem indicates:

A lively tune means laughter and games	Peorð byþ symble plega and hlehter
where brave folk sit in the banquet hall,	wlancum [* * *] ðar wigan sittap
beer-drinking warriors blithe together.	on beorsele bliþe ætsonne.

One of the pieces of advice that Woden gives to Loddafafnir in Havamal reads:

When beer you drink      turn to the powers of the earth!

Later, by a different hand, this has been added to this poem: "Earth cures inebriation."

#### 14. Algiz

By its traditional name, this rune has been associated with the elk (European moose), which Sigurd Agrell finds strange, on the one hand, because he does not consider the elk to be any central cult animal in late pagan mythology, on the other hand the elk is a pretty unknown animal in the cultures of Late Antiquity, the very cultures which according to him have been the inspiration for the invention of the rune alphabet. The fact that it still has received an Old Norse name which means "the elk" ( \**algiz*) must according to him depend on the fact that it originally had a name which sounds very much alike, namely the Germanic counterpart to the Roman twin gods Castor and Pollux, mentioned by their Roman names and their Germanic name, "Alcis", by Tacitus.



The name can be associated with related Gothic words (*alhs*, "sanctuary"), Latvian (*elks*, "idol"), and the Anglo-Saxon verb *ealgian*, "protect". In other words, the name would mean "The Protectors", which fits in well with the Indo-European myth about the pair of twins who are gods of light, perceived as the benefactors of mankind.

The rune has been attributed to a star constellation, associated with the torch-bearers who have been depicted in Mithraistic contexts on either side of Mithras, in the same manner as the Dioscuri Castor and Pollux can be found on monuments, the twin half-brothers standing on either side of the highest god Saturn-Zervan.

According to Mithraism the Dioscuri were representatives for the two hemispheres, which leads Sigurd Agrell to interpret the numerical value of the Dioscuri to be 7 and 7 respectively (each deity plus the 6 constellations each deity is responsible for), two deities, whose combined number amounts to 14. This makes it very reasonable for the rune to be found on the fourteenth position in the Uthark order.

He finds additional support for the numerical value of this rune in the fourteenth stanza of "Woden's charms" in Havamal, which seems to refer to the Zodiac, and he also finds support in Rigveda, where the Acvins, the Veda correspondence to the Dioscuri, are tightly associated with the number seven, thus represented twofold.

Sigurd Agrell also finds support for the conception that the rune is associated with a celestial constellation by the fourteenth letter in the Greek alphabet being somewhat connected with the word "star" as a concept.

## **15. Sol, Sowelu S**

The rune has been associated with the sun in all traditions preserved about this rune. That the fifteenth rune is the rune of the sun is supported by the fact that the fifteenth day in the Avestan month calendar of the Mithras cult was consecrated as Mithra's sacred day. In Babylon during the Persian rule Shamash (the sun) and Mithra were united to become a twin deity.

Also in the independent Greek-Semitic alphabet mysticism support can be found for the fifteenth letter being associated with the sun: The fifteenth Greek letter was the o character. Its shape is an image of the round outlines of the sun. In addition to this, the round outlines of the sun can be associated with an ancient Semitic sign bearing the name "eye", which can represent both the sun and the full moon. In the magical language the sun and the moon has been related to a human's two eyes. Among the Egyptians the sun was perceived as the right eye of the god Amon Re, and the moon was perceived as his left eye.

## **16. Tyr t**

This is the victory rune, the rune of the god Tyr, or Tiu. It is the sixteenth rune in the Uthark order, and in the Avestan-Persian month calendar the sixteenth day was consecrated to Mithra, who is a victory god just like Tyr. The Romans called Mithras "the unconquered god" (Deus Invictus). The Tyr rune is also mentioned as "victory rune" in the Eddaic poem *Sigrdrífumál*, and you should twice say the name Tyr while performing an engraving on three locations on your sword:

Victory runes you must know,  
if victory you desire,  
and put them on the sword hilt,  
some on the sword blade,  
some on the handle  
and twice mention Tyr.

Sigrúnar skaltu kunna,  
ef þú vilt sigr hafa,  
ok rísta á hjalti hjörs,  
sumar á véttrimum,  
sumar á valböstum,  
ok nefna tysvar Tý.

The number two represents the giants, and the number three is the number of the gods. In this way both these worlds are represented in this magic deed. The fact that Tyr has kinship with giants is suggested e. g. in the poem of Hymer.

Mithras seems to have been the most prominent god of protection for the Roman soldiers, and there are several examples confirming that he was connected with the number 16. Not only was his name tied to the sixteenth day of the Avestan-Persian calendar, but several Mithraistic amulets have been found, displaying a sixteen-pointed star, and on some of them this star is depicted along with the name Mithras.

Tyr seems to be an ancient sky god, maybe the most prominent one, since his name appears in different forms in several Indo-European mythologies, like Dyaus Pitar in the ancient Indian Veda literature, Zeus with the Greeks, Jupiter with the Romans, and Tiwaz in ancient Germanic. And the word "tyr" is a byname which simply means "god, deity", like in "Hangantýr", "the god of the hanged", i. e. Wodan, or "Reiðar Týr", "the wagon god", i. e. Thor. And although he seems to have been somewhat out of focus during the Viking Age, still it is Tyr's hand and nothing else that is accepted as a pawn by Fenrir, as the giant wolf monster suspected deception when he was asked to be tied by Gleipne the magic rope. Tyr represents irreproachability, that right must be right must be right, and because of this he is invoked together with Forsete, whenever a Thing, a legal was to be held. The one-edged sword, the seax, is one of Tyr's emblematic weapons. The other one is the spear, which may explain the shape of the rune.

### **17. Biarkan b**

The name of this rune is associated with birch trees, and with birch twigs. Sacred twigs have been associated with fertility in many cultures, and even today twigs are used in fertility magic in the North.

Also since the rune is the seventeenth rune in the Uthark order it is associated with fertility. In the Paris manuscript, found by Sigurd Agrell, the seventeenth Greek letter is connected with "pisces". And in the Near East the fish was a symbol of fertility. For example, it was the sacred animal devoted to the goddess Ataraxis. In Late Antiquity the fish was a symbol of the life-creating humidity. In the most ancient version of the Persian holy manuscript Avesta seventeen different kinds of moisture are mentioned, the humidity of the plants, the rivers and the rain. And all these seventeen variants of humidity are said to be cooperating to bring about growing power.

In the Mithras cult the seventeenth day was consecrated to Shraosha, the brother of Mithras, and his emblem was a bundle of twigs.

In the North, the birch rune is associated with the goddess Frigg and the fertility magic which is connected with her. Icelandic tradition of a later date confirms that the B rune has had a particular significance to the female gender. According to Finnish folklore from Österbotten the soul of a woman is "tied" to a birch tree and is said to dwell in it. A medieval manuscript claims that the birch tree was Frigg's sacred tree in heathen times. In an Icelandic charm, the magician's wand "kvennugaldur", the numbers 8 and 9 are combined, making the number 17 by combining 8 Ass runes and 9 Nauð runes. The charm is intended to force a woman to love someone.

In the Sami culture the goddess Sarakka is Frigg's Sami equivalent, and she is much associated with birch trees. Fridays are consecrated to her.

According to a recording from the 18th century, in the Sami bear celebration ceremony outgrowths from birch trees, useful when starting a fire, were included. When the men had left the bear lodge and had entered the residence lodge through the sacred doorway, they washed themselves carefully in water into which ash from such outgrowths gathered from "nine birch groves" had been mixed, while they were singing a song with the lyrics "wash yourself well, bear man, in the water of eight and nine birch outgrowths". The sum of 8 and 9 amounts to 17, and the ceremony was intended to protect the women from the bear power, by making the men who had been in contact with a bear harmless to the women, since the bear was considered to be very dangerous to women, and was tabu for them.

In order to produce a tilberi in northern Sweden eight different kinds of firewood sticks were tied together by nine different kinds of yarn wound around the sticks. Again the sum becomes 17. And then the tilberi was going to be awakened by your whipping it with a birch twig.

On several archaeologically found women's ornaments, and also in other places, inscriptions have been found, inscribed with the old Germanic runes, whose gematric number amounts to 17, for example the Charnay fibula. And the seventeenth Edda stanza in Havamal's *Ljóðatal* "Woden's magical charms" is about acquiring a maid's favour and love through magic.

## 18. Eh E

The name of this rune means "horse", and apparently the horse was perceived as being an utterly sacred and magic animal, especially among the Indo-Europeans. Still today a horse's head belongs to the paraphernalia of black magic. It was considered to be very important by several Indo-European tribes to sacrifice horses. Both among the Greeks and the ancient Germanic tribes the horse has been predominantly sacrificed to wind and death deities. Thus it appears natural that the rune and the horse sacrifice have been devoted to Woden. But one must not forget that the horse also often has been consecrated to Freyr. Perhaps we may here see another sign of the Woden cult's appropriation of different sacred symbols, where Freyr's horse Frejfaxe (also called Blóðughófi, "with blooded hoofs") turned into Sleipnir, Woden's horse, and Woden's spear Gungnir corresponds with Tyr's spear. Or how the World Tree, called Lärad (the one who gives shelter) is called Yggdrasil (the jade of the terrible one) in Woden's cult.

The rune is the eighteenth rune in the Uthark order, and in Havamal Woden's 18 magic charms can be found. The number 18 appears in several magic spells. Likewise, Woden poses 18 questions to the giant Vavtrudner in Vavtrudnismál in the Poetic Edda.

## 19. Maðr, Man M

This rune represents Man, the humans, as the rune is also named both in Old Norwegian and Old Icelandic, in the Nordic rune poems and the Gothic Salzburg manuscript. The number 19 is closely connected with Man. For example, already in ancient Babylon there was a notion that a human body was related to the 12 constellations in the zodiac, while his soul was ruled by the 7 planets. This notion has then most likely been passed on the worshippers of Mithras. They perceived a human as a sort of microcosm, an image of the universe. Many Mithraistic sculptures represent human bodies with the signs of the 12 constellations distributed across them.

In statements made by Church Fathers, amongst others, one may assume that the Mithras worshippers, like the Gnostics of Late Antiquity, paid tribute to a theory, according to which the soul shedded seven different mental qualities, as it ascended to the eighth sky, passing the spheres of the seven planets. To Saturn the lazy inclinations were surrendered, to Venus the

erotic impulses, to Jupiter aspiration, to Mercury the greedy craving, to Mars the bellicose urge, to the Moon the vital energy and to the Sun the intellectual gifts.

Also in Nordic folklore there are traces of Man's relationship with the number 19. According to one story, Rollo once was out hunting, and he lost his way. Then, deep in the forest, he met a female troll, that asked him to help her daughter, who had been in labour pains for nineteen days, and she could only be delivered by the help of a human being. Likewise the number 19 appears in Scandinavian books of sorcery where prescriptions can be found in which the number 19 has significance, in that the recipe consists of 18 different ingredients plus vodka or water, constituting the 19th ingredient.

On the other hand, there are relatively few rune inscriptions to be found, where the number 19 is prominent. But they exist.

## **20. Laguz |**

This rune represents water. Its name recurs in the English word "lake", in the Swedish word "lögaredagen", the day when you took the weekly bath, the Celtic "loch" meaning lake, the Swedish word "lag", meaning syrup, liquid, decoction, solution, and also the name of the Russian lake Ladoga. Just like fire (Ken), the sun (Sol, Sowelu), and earth (Peorth, Petra) are represented in the Rune alphabet, so also the sacred water is represented by this rune, and to a certain extent also by the Hagel rune. In the Mithras cult water was as sacred as fire. Water was used in several rites. Among other stories, a monk from the 6th century, named Nonnus, that one of the inauguration tests of the Mithraists was that the initiate had to bathe in snow during 20 days. Maybe the monk has misunderstood some detail in this. Maybe it rather had to do with cleansing yourself in cold water for 20 days in a row. But here water is connected with the number 20. In Bundahishn, one of the holy books of the Parsees, it is written that Ahura Mazda let two streams circumflow the Earth, and after that eighteen streams from the same original source and united with the two first ones. This connection between water and the number 20 later occasioned Plato to regard the element as being an icosahedron, namely a polygon with 20 edges. Also the 20th letter in the Greek alphabet, *ϖ*, is connected with water.

In Scandinavian folklore there are several examples showing that Nordic magic connects water with the number 20. The Sami man Jon Johansson mentions a magic remedy against outgrowths, protuberances and struma, an operation which is to be performed "either in water or with your index finger around the outgrowth". You draw your finger nine times around the outgrowth while counting from twenty to one nine times. Likewise the Estonian Swedes have a way of stanching blood, consisting of your placing a house or church key on the wound while counting backwards from twenty. Blood is considered to belong to the element of water.

There is also a rite to be performed when an animal has been bewitched, "marred", so that it will neither eat nor drink. Then you count backwards from 20 to 1 while pointing at the animal for each number which is spoken (Herman Hofberg, Närke). "Just like the water goes away, so does the marring", according to an utterance, presumably from Södermanland, related by Paul Heurgren.

If a horse is stricken with colic, so called "floget" in rural Swedish vernacular, you wash a piece of a woman's linen underwear, and then you pour the water into the mouth of the horse. Or you utter a charm about Saint Peter and then you draw four figures of the numeral five on

the horse's front right hoof. While drawing the first figure you say "five", while drawing the second one you say "ten", while drawing the third one you say "fifteen", and while drawing the last one you say "twenty". By this rite you combine the number of water, twenty, with the fire rune Ken, whose number is five.

There is a rune inscription, that might have to do with the magic water number 20. It has been found on a whetstone, found at Strøm in Norway. It reads "May the horn wet this stone" (wate hali hinu horna). If you add up the gematric numbers of all these runes, it amounts to 180, that is nine times twenty, according to the Uthark order. If this has been deliberately arranged, here the number of water is combined with the number nine, the number of necessity.

## 21. Ing $\text{Á}$

This rune represents the sounds  $ng + g$  and seems to be named after the god Ingunar-Freyr, the male deity of fertility and reproduction, like the  $\text{t}$  rune is named after Tyr. It is very possible that the name of the rune originally has meant "phallus". In that case there is an interesting correspondence with letter magic of Late Antiquity.

In some ancient cipher systems the Greek letter  $\varphi$  can be replaced by a character which undoubtedly looks like a phallus. Already in the Semitic alphabet the 21st letter had a name which can be interpreted as meaning "phallus" (actually "switch") as one of several names of letters which each represents a body part.

It is very likely that Mithraistic letter magic has had a similar conception connected with the 21st character; the 21st day in the Avestan-Persian moon calendar was consecrated to a male fertility god bearing the name Râma Hvastra (in Persian Râm).

In magic of Late Antiquity the snake was one of the symbols for a "phallus".

There does not seem to be many things left in Nordic tradition that connect the Ing rune with the number 21; it is possible that the practice of giving a salute of 21 gunshots at the birth of a royal person might be an echo of the correspondence between the Ing rune and the number 21.

On the other hand, it is very interesting that the grave orb on top of the burial mound Inglinge Hög in Småland has an ornamentation, where the very Ing rune is placed in the middle.

## 22 or 23. Othila $\text{O}$

The following two runes have a debated position in relation to each other. On the Kylver slab and in most Anglo-Saxon records of the runic order Dagaz (D) is placed before Othila (O), whereas Othila (O) is placed before Dagaz (D) on every rune bracteate hitherto found.

Othila bears a name which originally means inherited land, allodial land, the estate and ground which is a yeoman's true heirloom, the land, the ground, the basis for everything else.

The twenty-second letter in the Greek alphabet is  $\chi$ , representing the sound *ch*, originally an aspirated *k*. The most common Greek word for "property" *chrêmata*, begins with this very letter. The fact that there is a connection with the number 22 is confirmed by the preserved Judaeo-Christian grimoire "The Testament of Solomon", written in Greek, where the twenty-second character  $\chi$  is regarded as a symbol for "property".

A Hebrew tradition suggest that the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet, character number 22, has been associated with the earth, while the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet has been associated with the sky. The letter number 22 in the Hebrew alphabet seems to represent a sign, a mark of property, and is associated with the creation of Man: Adam, made from the soil of the ground.

### **23 or 22. Dagaz D**

The name of the rune means "day", "daylight", the light of day, the bright hours of day. In the Avestan-Persian month calendar the 23rd day was consecrated to the light god Ahura Mazda, who in the first chapter of the Bundahishn is called "eternal light". Inscriptions on Roman Mithraistic monuments mention a deity who in Latin is called "Lux", the word means "light". The Mithraistic light and sky god Caelus (Latin for "sky"), was an amalgamation of Ahura Mazda and Jupiter. He is also called Zeus-Oromantes or Jupiter-Caelus. Also the Greek 23rd letter is connected with Zeus (Jupiter) according to the alphabetical mysticism of Late Antiquity. In a Byzantine codex a Greek alphabet is recorded, in which the 23rd character  $\psi$  ( $\psi$ ) has been replaced by Jupiter's symbol  $\text{♃}$ . A coin has also been found on which a sacred stone, a "baitylos", has been depicted, a cult object belonging to the Zeus cult of Crete. On this cult object the 23rd character of the Greek alphabet ( $\psi$ ) is placed.

The rune seems to have been seldom employed in Nordic magical practices, but it ought to have been an anti-daemonic rune, just like the torch rune Ken and Sowela, the Sun rune, which both have been employed so much more.

On a stone in Nordhuglen ("Huglen") in Hordaland in Norway there is a damaged inscription from around the year 400 CE which appears to be possible to reconstruct, and in translation reads "I, the priest in Hugl, immune to harmful magic" (*ek gudija ungangiR i hugulu*), an inscription consisting of 23 runes. By this inscription one might assume that the Day rune has been used as protection against trolls and black magic.

### **24. Fehu f**

The name of this rune means in all traditions wealth, personal property, cattle, goods and chattels. It is reasonable that the very rune of wealth is the twenty-fourth rune in the runic alphabet, the rune of the highest number. In the Semitic alphabet the last character bears a name which can be understood as a sign of ownership. The Mithras cult, which emerged from a region where Aramaic was spoken, has most likely absorbed several Semitic features, amongst others the very frame of alphabetical mysticism. The Semitic alphabet begins with the letter Aleph, and the word Aleph means "bull", "ox", "cattle". And it ends with the character "Taw", which allegedly means "property". The Semitic alphabet has 22 characters, and in the transfer to an alphabet consisting of 24 characters, like the Greek alphabet, the meaning of Taw seems to have been allocated to two characters, so that the 22nd character came to represent wealth, and to the person who created the runic alphabet Othila came to represent a yeoman's estate, allodial land, whereas the 24th rune came to represent wealth, goods and chattels. as Fehu represents cattle, which has been regarded as currency, wealth and money since ancient times.

The number 24 is also connected with Pluto, the god of wealth and the underworld in the Greek mythology. In black magic he was regarded as being the same deity as the Persian god

Angra Mainyu, also called Ahriman. He was the enemy to light, and according to Plutarchos and Iranian tradition he produced 24 demon princes from himself. Persian magi, those who practiced black magic, frequently sacrificed to Ahriman. This may be the closest origin of rune magic.

According to Zosimos, an alchemist of Late Antiquity, the 24th Greek letter ( $\Omega$ ,  $\omega$ ) was regarded as the symbol of the deity Okeanos in alphabetical mysticism, and his name could be regarded as another way of expressing "wealth", "a great multitude". This name has of course led to our word "ocean" and the Germanic god of wealth Njord is closely related to the sea. He lives in Nóatún, close to the sea, and according to Snorri he can calm the waves and should be invoked when going on sea voyages or when you are about to go fishing. It has been well confirmed that the number 24 and its multiples, predominantly 72, has played a major role in Norse magic. Both rune inscriptions and tradition of magic practices confirms that. The word ALU, whose combined gematric value becomes 24 according to the Uthark order, is frequently represented on amulets, These three runes can well appear in a different order, such as LUA, LAU or UAL, which shows that gematry is the crucial component in this combination of runes. The Lindholm amulet is one example, where ALU in combination with several other runes indicate that the wearer of this talisman desired to achieve material success in his or her life.

Also among the Sami population the number 24 has a great significance for material success. The greatest sacrifice known to have been performed by the Sami consisted of the slaughter of 24 reindeer, and most likely it was intended to bring luck when dealing with the reindeer. Yet this information comes from the East Sami region, where the influence from northern Germanic magical practices is less evident.

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The rune alphabet is divided into three "Ættir", groups of eight. I have a hunch that the three Ættir represent three different levels in the universe, where the first group of eight runes, the one that begins with Uruz, seems to represent the level of original creation of the worlds, representing Audhumbla, the giants and the worlds' rudimentary coming into being, featuring the first Æsir deities and the original powers.

Then follows the second group of eight runes, beginning with Hagal, in which everything is more shaped in detail, and everything finds its place. The two parts of the year, the winter half and the summer half are supported by the power of the Vanir deities. Heimdall stands as the sentinel, guarding the bridge leading from Muspellheim, the World Tree and the ancient Rock of ancient times dance around each other, and the Sun travels in his chariot across the sky.

And then the third group of eight runes follows, the one that begins with Bjarka, the one that comes the closest to mankind and the human world. Man, woman, the horse, inherited land, wealth.

The cosmic forces are present in all three Ættir, but recur in different aspects in the three Ættir on different levels.

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