

The Runic Formula Alu: A Deep and Protective Draught

By Leon D. Wild

As part of my Work in the Nine Doors of Midgard, it is important to practice Galdar from the corpus of the Elder Futhark tradition. While it is relatively easy to crow these formula in the hidden space of my Working chamber, it is important for me to use (and further explore) these mysteries in Midgard – to test them, and to see how they work in the universe as I perceive it. Operative Workings and Illustrative Workings mirror and inform further Work. In this Working, I have focused on Alu.

What does Alu mean?

Runologists such as Page and Odenstedt are not satisfied with the evidence to give Alu a precise meaning, although both do assign it a probable magical role. Page, usually an opponent of magical interpretations of runes, gives it the benefit of the doubt in that it “has no practical meaning, that it may be cognate with the Gothic alhs ‘temple,’ or OE ealgian ‘protect’, and so may be a sacred or protection formula.” (1995: 107).

Flowers describes Alu, although its etymology is problematic, as one of the most conspicuous of the rune formulas which are concerned with mytho-magical substances, and is important to show that runic formulas have a connection with the magical field (1986: 147). Flowers writes that Alu represents ‘ale, intoxicating drink’ and the state of ‘magical ecstasy’ on the one hand, and also the magical and protective benefits derived from its power (1986: 243). Alu is represented on a wide range of runic inscriptions – bracteate and bone amulets, barrows, rings, clasps. It was so widely used that it is a general Elder Futhark ‘word of power’ as a way to bring potent magical force to a Working. (p 343f)

In the Edda, Alu also has its traces – ‘Ale runes’ are mentioned as being of import to learn in Sigdrífumál, where both the Valkyrie Sigdrífa (stanza 10) and Mimir’s Head (stanza 21) comment on them. There are also a range of practical applications to the learning of these runes, in the case of ‘ale runes’ the example is against the betrayal by another’s wife. The Valkyrie recommends that they be carved on a drinking horn or the back of ones hand.

Ale, as a drink was important in the Germanic/medieval world as a staple of food. Tayleur writes that fresh meat and vegetables were not as much a part of the diet as in today’s culture – that beer and bread were the dependable foodstuffs. Beer and breadmaking were linked in that they both undergo fermentation, which was considered of supernatural import, to the point where it was called “Gods gift” to the medieval world. Alu is also possibly connected with ideas of mead, as the Norse and Saxons drank not only mead and ale, but also hop-flavoured mead, and ale made with honey, and Old English Alu seems to describe both. (1973: 288).

I would think that many in the Germanic religious world (encompassing both Odians and Troth, among others) would understand the connection with magical inspiration and a fermented drink. Indeed the general “neo-pagan” view of the Troth gatherings is that there is plenty of beer soaked beards. In a brief glimpse through any Troth related newsletters, there is sure to be a brewers circle or seven. This is important for the sense of community and ‘do-it-yourself’ attitude that the Troth fosters.

From a more Oodian viewpoint, the point of Alu is not just to drain your horns again and again till the ‘magical inspiration’ induces the usual symptoms of drunkenness and you lose your sense of mental (& physical!) balance – the Havamal has much advice on this matter. This is markedly shown by the prohibition of alcohol at Woodharrow – the magical inspiration comes from within, from Rune Work – not from Strongbow ciders or Maxwells Meads (to name two local varieties). It is the mysterious symbol – the Runes - of Alu that are important.

Alu can be interpreted by its individual runes – Ansuz, Laguz, Uruz. An interpretation could be a inspired/magical flow or force – an Oodian current. Perhaps this is the root of the forces that later commentators would refer to as ‘Odic force’ (Reichenbach), or the Vril (Lytton). Alu could be seen as the force that is focused and ‘sent’ into the world by the Runer.

In *Rune Song*, Thorsson develops the practical application of Alu as a formula that on the word level means “ale” – raise magical inspiration and to use that power in magical protection or anything else. The Seed word means “increasing consciousness in a vital form”.(1993: 38).

In a personal experiment with Alu, my aim was to send a protective and ‘increasing’ power to a friend who was ebbing low in vitality and spirits. In my view, while the Oodian path is self-focused and concentrates on the individual, friends and allies are important considerations for magical works. Their health and happiness may contribute to the increase of your own.

I performed the Working with a similar set up to a general rune sending, except that the rune I sent was a bindrune inspired by the Kōrlin gold finger ring. I read the other examples of Alu in the corpus, and thought that its use on the ring was a connection with my own context.

The galdar I sent was:

Ansuz Laguz Uruz
Alu Alu Alu (x3)
AAALLLUUU (x3)
Alu

The bindrune is:



Alu provided some interesting uses and speculations, and I would encourage all Runers to delve into the rune corpus to invigorate and inspire their Work.

Reyn Til Runa!

:Sources:

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Page, R. I. 1995. *Runes and Runic Inscriptions*. Boydell & Brewer.

Tayleur, W.H.T. 1973. *Home Brewing & Wine-Making*. Penguin.

Thorsson, E. 1993. *Rune-Song*. Runa-Raven.