

The Serpent and the Eagle:
An Introduction to the Runic Tradition

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December 18, 2005

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction | 7 |
| I Runic Fundamentals | 13 |
| 1 Yggdrassil | 15 |
| 1.1 The Role of Cosmology | 16 |
| 1.2 An Overview of the Tree | 16 |
| 1.3 Beginnings Of A Runic Theory of Magic | 19 |
| 2 The Tripartite Universe | 21 |
| 2.1 The Three Divisions | 22 |
| 2.2 Magic and the Tripartite Universe | 25 |
| 3 The Norns, Fate, and Magic | 29 |
| 3.1 Urð(Wyrd) and Verðandi: Past and Present | 30 |
| 3.2 Magic and the Norns | 32 |
| 3.3 Skuld: The Future | 33 |
| 3.4 Orlog: The Primal Law | 33 |
| 3.5 Paradoxes of Fate | 34 |
| II The Runestaves of the Elder Futhark | 37 |
| 4 The First Aett: The Aett of Creation | 39 |
| 4.1 An Introduction to the First Aett | 40 |
| 4.2 Fehu— Cow, Livestock, Gold | 40 |
| 4.3 Uruz: The Primordial Aurochs | 43 |
| 4.4 Thurisaz: The Giant and the Thorn | 44 |
| 4.5 Ansuz: The Mouth and The God | 46 |
| 4.6 Raiðo: Riding | 49 |
| 4.7 Kenaz and Kaunaz: Torch and Canker | 51 |
| 4.8 Gebo: To Give | 52 |
| 4.9 Wunjo: Joy | 53 |
| 4.10 Final Thoughts on the First Aett | 54 |

| | | |
|------------|--|-----------|
| 5 | The Second Aett: The Aett of Struggle | 57 |
| 5.1 | Introduction to the Second Aett | 58 |
| 5.2 | Hagalaz: Hail | 58 |
| 5.3 | Nauðiz/Nauthiz: Need, Necessity | 59 |
| 5.4 | Isa: Ice | 61 |
| 5.5 | Jera: Year, Harvest | 62 |
| 5.6 | Eihwaz: The Yew | 63 |
| 5.7 | Perthro: The Lot Cup | 65 |
| 5.8 | Elhaz/Algiz: The Elk | 66 |
| 5.9 | Sowilo: The Sun | 68 |
| 5.10 | Final Thoughts on the Second Aett | 70 |
| 6 | The Third Aett: The Aett of Rulership | 71 |
| 6.1 | An Introduction to the Third Aett | 72 |
| 6.2 | Tiwaz: The Shining God | 72 |
| 6.3 | Berkano: The Birch | 74 |
| 6.4 | Ehwaz: The Horse | 76 |
| 6.5 | Mannaz: The Man | 77 |
| 6.6 | Laguz: The Water | 79 |
| 6.7 | Ingwaz: A Harvest God | 80 |
| 6.8 | Dagaz: The Day | 82 |
| 6.9 | Othila: The Estate | 83 |
| 6.10 | Final Thoughts on the Third Aett | 84 |
| III | Runic Practice | 85 |
| 7 | Meditation | 87 |
| 7.1 | The Role of Meditation in Runic Practice | 88 |
| 7.2 | A Suggested Practice | 89 |
| 8 | Divination | 91 |
| 8.1 | Historical Methodology | 92 |
| 8.2 | Preparation and Retirement of the Rune-Lots | 93 |
| 8.3 | A Ritual of Divination | 94 |
| 8.4 | Divination Spreads | 94 |
| 8.5 | Dream Interpretation as Another Traditional Form of Divination | 96 |
| 9 | Rune Magic | 99 |
| 9.1 | Magic and Poetics | 100 |
| 9.2 | Poetic Formulas | 103 |
| 9.2.1 | Simple Formulas | 103 |
| 9.2.2 | Complex Formulas | 103 |
| 9.3 | Carving Runes | 104 |
| 9.3.1 | Ritual Structure | 105 |
| 9.3.2 | A Sample Runic Ritual | 106 |
| 9.4 | Runic Word Formulas | 107 |
| 9.5 | Final Thoughts | 109 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| <i>CONTENTS</i> | 5 |
| A The Valkyrie | 111 |
| B The God Oðinn | 115 |
| C Sample Rituals and Historical Formulae | 119 |
| C.1 Sample Rituals | 120 |
| C.1.1 Creating a Word-Formula Talisman | 120 |
| C.1.2 Setting a Niðing pole | 121 |
| C.2 Traditional Word Formulas | 122 |
| C.2.1 Alu | 122 |
| C.2.2 Laukaz | 122 |
| C.2.3 Linu | 123 |
| C.2.4 Salu | 123 |
| D In Contrast to Christianity | 125 |
| D.1 Chronology and the World | 126 |
| D.2 The Afterlife | 127 |
| E Annotated Bibliography and Resource List | 129 |

Introduction

I have been a student of runes for twelve years, having discovered them towards the end of high school. I had been looking for a deeper path to follow and stumbled across a small book which changed my life. It was Lisa Peschel's *A Practical Guide to the Runes*. The book sat on my shelf for some time until one day I decided to make my own set of runestaves for divination. What I lacked in craftsmanship and knowledge of woods I made up for in determination and three days later emerged with my very own set of runestaves. As an aside, most of that time was spent sawing the branch into rounds— the wood was so hard that I was unable to carve or sand it afterward and resorted to painting the runes on the wood with acrylic paint. Twelve years later, I still use that old set.

Eventually, I began experimenting with Runic magic as my divination skill improved. My first talisman was no big success, but the next ten talismans produced the desired results without fail. I was immediately fascinated and knew that this was something that resonated with me deeply, and when I went to college, I began to spend what little discretionary income I had on books on runes starting with the works of Edred Thorsson (which I only partially understood at the time).

Since that time, I have endeavored to study the main subjects connected with the runes both through academic and magical means. I studied other Indo-European peoples and their traditions in order to give me a basis for comparison. In short, I have read all that I could, absorbed and contemplated the material until I began to understand more. If I can give any advice to the beginner, it is study, but practice what you study until you understand it.

Most of the current works in the field of esoteric runology tend to suffer from one of two major failings from a beginner's perspective. Some works are ungrounded in traditional lore. These include works which seek to reinterpret the Runes for a specific audience or those who want to merge them with other traditions. The second issue is that some books are overly abstract and don't provide the references necessary for the individual to continue to begin to seek the mysteries through a study of the available source material themselves. These latter books, while useful and important, are no place for a beginner to start. I.e. they may shed some light on interpretation of the source material, but if the student does not already have a grounding in that material, it will be difficult for them to grasp what is being taught.

This book is not expected to be an easy read for the beginner. There is a lot of information contained herein, and it is likely that only careful study will allow it to be entirely digested. I would recommend that the beginner study Part 1 in depth, then read through parts two and three lightly. Part two can be studied in conjunction with the meditation suggestions in Chapter 7, and the section on each rune reread before meditative practices are started. Indeed all of Part 3 can be sequentially worked through while repeatedly re-reading the relevant sections of Part 2. Furthermore, it is suggested that the would-be student of the Runes begin to build a library of source material, including the Eddas and Sagas as well as current esoteric works.

This book bears the title which has many meanings in Norse mythology and all of them are hoped to be applicable to this work. First, there is an eagle which sits atop the World Tree with a hawk between his eyes, while on a root of the same tree the Niðhoggr serpent gnaws. These are the ultimate poles of the world and represent also the ultimate poles of the soul as well.

The other main connection of these two symbols is probably related to the animals relationships on the World Tree. The story is told that Oðinn, in trying to recover the Mead of Inspiration transforms himself into the likeness of a serpent and tunnels into the mountain where the mead has been hidden by the giants. He beguiles Gunloth, who has been asked to guard the mead, and is permitted to drink some of the mead. He then transforms into the likeness of an eagle and carries the Mead back to Asgard.

This book is written to assist people in their quest for the mead which Oðinn dispenses. It is

hoped that by studying this book and working with the ideas and concepts, that the seeker will be able to more easily progress magically and spiritually in this tradition. It is hoped that much of it is accessible to beginners as well as showing insight to more advanced students, and it contains some material which, being the fruits of my own research, I have not been able to find elsewhere.

The recent book market has seen a preponderance of books which claim to teach mysticism or magic with a minimum of work from the student. In reality, the magical journey is a never-ending one. Growth may change and milestones may be reached but the growth continues. Becoming masterful in any spiritual tradition takes years, but the journey must be taken as a series of many small steps. Beginners should expect that nothing less than years of study and working with a magical system will make them masters of their traditions. Yet in the runic tradition, it has been my experience that relative beginners can almost immediately begin working actively with the tradition and get results.

I also think that we never stop being beginners. The road ahead is infinitely long and can never be fully traveled. It is sometimes easy and sometimes painfully difficult. Paradoxically, this is what makes it fulfilling and satisfying.

Another trend in recent years has been the commercialization of many ancient spiritual traditions. Along with this trend have come people who wish to purchase spirituality. While the selling of talismans is an ancient practice that personally have no problem with, one cannot learn Zen by attending a handful of weekend seminars at \$1000 each. This trend has resulted in a watering down of ancient traditions of wisdom. I have no problem with people legitimately making money from the spiritual services they offer others but there is a subtle difference between this practice and encouraging people to substitute money for spirituality.

Spirituality is a solitary path which only the individual can walk. Others can guide and offer assistance in difficult places but in the end, the individual must make the required effort and have the necessary faith to continue. Faith may be placed in the universe or in higher powers, but above all, it must be placed in oneself. Unconditional faith in oneself and in higher aspects of one's life can be necessary to overcome the darkness which can loom ahead when crises emerge.

The runic path is a good example. Oðinn sacrifices himself to himself all alone on a tree of unfathomable height in the pursuit of the unknown (ON Runa). This sense of the unknown is what draws us on, always seeking that which we cannot know. In Norse mythology, Runa could be seen as representing the goddess Freya who is connected with magic, but Runa cannot even be narrowed down in this manner. Runa manifests in the eerie sense of connection which sometimes surrounds seemingly unconnected coincidences, and in the quiet of the night. She is the mother of the runes and their originator. When one experiences her, it is in a private way and no one can share in that state, though they may arrive at it themselves, and the more one seeks of her, the more one finds.

In some places I have made allusions to Judeo-Christian beliefs, and this may upset some readers or make others question the validity of my work. For better or worse, we live in a culture which is predominantly Christian, and so this tradition offers a reference point for beginners who may not otherwise easily understand the material. Furthermore, much of Christian mythology (aside from the general abstractness of God, the Son, and angels) directly parallels Norse mythology, and while it is unclear how much influence Christianity has had on our understanding of Norse mythology, it is clear that Norse mythology and several related traditions (most notably Zoroastrianism and Neoplatonism) gave shape to critical areas of Christian theology, from cosmology (Heaven–Earth–Hell borrowed from the Zoroastrians) to the Trinity borrowed from the Neoplatonists (The All/The Father–The Word/Light/Son–The World Soul) so these ideas share a common Indo-European heritage and can be reasonably compared. It is even likely that the current emphasis on the crucifixion (as opposed

to the original emphasis on the resurrection) was likely a Scandinavian influence and related to the importance that Oðinn self-sacrifice had in Norse cultures.¹

Comparative methods are very important for understanding any traditions, particularly when such study involves comparing structures with a common historical root, for in this way more information can be obtained than by studying them separately. However care must also be taken not to blur the traditions too much either. The differences are as real and important as the similarities because both are required to make sense of a mythical pattern.

Some readers may wonder why one would look to magic as a basis for a spiritual path. Compared to other meditative disciplines, magic is dangerous, and hence it must be used along with other forms of meditation rather than as a substitute for them. Magic is fundamentally an act of making abstract unknowables manifest through ritual and meditation. In the Germanic traditions the abstract unknowables were the Runes. This type of practice magnifies the aspects of the soul which are used to make contact with those abstract forms. Magic performed out of cruelty or anger will hence revisit itself upon the magician and should be avoided. Motive is important. But through that very process of magnification, one can also grow tremendously, and I sometimes liken magic to an "Alchemy of the Soul."

The reader is encouraged to consider one thing above all else. Experience has shown that one's life is a reflection of spiritual processes, and a magician's desire may be counter to his or her soul's necessity. When this type of conflict occurs it echoes in one's life— magic, unless backed by the order of the sacred world (echoed in the soul) has temporary effects and often conspires to undo the fertile areas of one's life. Therefore, magic is by no means the sole answer in the face of life's greatest hardships, and if magic produces does not produce the desired result but other hardships appear, one should not continue using it on the matter until one is better in touch with the necessity of the situation.

Such a phenomenon is not a matter of angry gods, nor is it a matter of innate consequences of actions. Rather it is a result of the magician losing touch with the necessary spiritual order of things—that order which the Indo-European magician was entrusted with maintaining. Just as the Celtic Kings' imperfections adversely affected the fertility of the land, so too the magicians' imperfections can adversely affect one's life. Magic is a spiritual tool and a sacred trust, not a panacea for all worldly problems. Furthermore, this warning is a part of this book because I believe that every Magician faces it at some point.

However, one should not draw the conclusion that magic should never be used for the fulfillment of personal desires. Just as an incantation opposed to the necessary spiritual order causes harm in one's life, an incantation which restores that order can have very positive effects. This order permeates one's own life as well as the world and is known as it is described in myth and legend.

The tools of the Magician both for understanding the sacred order and for manipulating events are the Runes. The modern English word "Rune" comes from the late scholarly Latin *Run* which is borrowed in turn from the Old Norse *Rûn* meaning "secret" or "mystery" as well as referring to the forms of the staves or letters. The original sense of the term is very close to the Latin *Arcanum* also meaning "secret" or "mystery." They were probably originally carved in wood, but there are reasons to think that the metal and stone findings we have may not be far predated by the practices of carving it into wood.²

¹This was due to obvious surface similarities in these two myths. However, it should be noted that the surface similarities hide a very different outlook on the nature of the world, the endeavors of mankind, and the chronology of the universe. In short, although this was likely a strong influence on Christianity, it is not a simple equivalent.

²Although the standard estimates of the origins of the Futhark tend to assume that they must have been carved on wood for one to two hundred years before our earliest metal finds, the argument is shaky. While it is true that the linguistic evidence

One should not forget that the original meaning of the word "Rune" was "secret" or mystery. The runes are fundamentally unknowable, but as magicians we can begin to grasp them. Indeed, the nature of the spiritual journey is that of questing after those runes. What is presented in Part 2 of this book is an introduction, a look at the appearances of the Runes. In actuality the runes themselves are beyond description, and they are unteachable, though a good teacher can assist in such learning. They will slowly manifest in the life and mind of those that seek to grasp them, but they are even then unknown, ephemeral strands leading back to their mother, RUNA.

One of my goals in creating this work is the continued re-establishment of the Runic tradition based on solid lore and study. In the quest to make this accessible, I have used public domain translations where available. The two glaring exceptions are the Old English poem "The Wanderer" and the Rune Poems. In the case of "The Wanderer," I have seen it fit to provide my own translation to the short passages used.

In the case of the Rune Poems, I have decided to use Thorsson's translations with his permission. These translations are found in his book *Rune-Song* published by Runa-Raven Press. I have made this decision for two reasons. First, most translations of the Rune Poems tend to miss some critical areas in the translation or make serious omissions. Part of the problem is that they are some aspects are necessarily lost in translation. But a second part is that there is rarely any discussion as to the translation itself from an esoteric and/or linguistic perspective. These factors often result in a fair bit of poetic license being taken with the translation. For example, Bruce Dickens translated the Old English *beorna* as "warrior" in the Old English Rune Poem even though it is probably more accurate to translate it as *bairn* or *child* both linguistically and esoterically.

Finally, I must acknowledge and thank the many people who have helped make this book possible. I thank first those who help inspire it: John Peckham, Cecilia Cadena, and Charles Posinoff. I also thank the scholars whom I have not met who have contributed knowledge to this subject and upon whose work this book is based: Calvert Watkins, Edgar Polome, and Georges Dumezil. Yet the greater part of thanks is owed, I think, to one who has never failed to be a mentor to me, and has never failed to write something insightful when it is needed. I therefore thank Edred Thorsson. This book is dedicated to him.

points to a wood-based origin, there are reasons to challenge this conclusion. While wood would have made a good material for many common uses for Runes, particularly the divination rites described by Tacitus, many other uses, such as enchanted broaches and memorials, would not have been appropriate to the material. One must ask how long it took the uses of the Runes to diverge.

In Indo-European poetry there exists a strange formula which, while noted for centuries, has rarely been closely examined. The formula can be translated as "tree and rock" and generally refers to truth according to Watkins. My own reading, however, suggests that the truth referenced in the formula does not consist of common fact but rather of essential nature, and one cannot deny its impact on other Indo-European magical traditions. For these reason, I think that the Germanic peoples may have seen the materials of wood, metal, and stone as analogous and used terminology appropriate. Wood still would likely have been the most common material used, but metal and stone could have been used in early times.

Part I

Runic Fundamentals

Chapter 1

Yggdrassil— It's lore and meaning

1.1 The Role of Cosmology

Cosmology is central to magic for reasons which will become clear later on in this chapter. Every magical tradition which has ever been has used a magical cosmology to communicate the teachings to the next generation of practitioners. Without such a cosmology, there can be no magical tradition because there is no means to pass down the cosmic truths which are so much a part of its practice.

The cosmology forms a working model for the universe in such a way that an individual can be more conscious about the effects of his or her actions and therefore more in control of the visible and invisible influences in life. This concept too will become more clear through application and experience, for communication itself can be argued to form the foundation of all magical action.

It is tempting to think of the ancients as unsophisticated brutes who believed in their myths out of a superstitious nature. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. The ancients clearly saw their tales and mythic beings as possessing an allegorical (rather than simply physical) truth. One has only to read translations of many of the Roman writings to see the diversity in thought concerning religion or to see how little the general interpretation of religious experience has changes since the days of the Roman Empire. The arguments that Firmicus Maternus makes in defense of Astrology are as valid today as they were eighteen hundred years ago because he defends Astrology from the same attacks that fundamentalists and skeptics make concerning it today. In short, diversity of interpretation of religious experience is nothing new— it has existed in all cultures and all times.

The Norse Myths are quite preposterous when contemplated literally and without poetic interpretation, perhaps more so than many other Indo-European cultures, but the allegories contained within the stories give rise to an extremely profound world-view. Furthermore, we have somewhat authoritative writings which discuss the poetic interpretation of the stories.

1.2 An Overview of the Tree

Central to the Norse cosmology is the concept of the World Tree Yggdrasil, also called Laereth and Hoddmimir. It is said to stand above the Nine Worlds ¹ and can be thought to be the Center of the World.² The concept of the World Tree is a very intricate piece of Norse mythology.

The World Tree itself has an odd anatomy. At the top of the tree sits an eagle with a hawk in between its eyes, harts gnaw on its new shoots, its trunk is rotting, and the Niðhogg dragon is gnawing on its roots. Between the eagle and the dragon runs Ratatosk the squirrel, carrying insults back and forth.³ In some of the manuscripts, the worms which gnaw on the roots and the harts which gnaw on the shoots are given the names of dwarves.⁴ Another version has a hart named Eikthyrnir eats the shoots of the tree and produces water (of life?) into the well while a goat named Heithrun (Bright Rune) eats the limbs and fills the horns with mead. Despite its ailing nature, however, Yggdrassil will survive in this form until Ragnarok, the End of the World which makes way for the next. Even after Ragnarok, its shoots shall spring anew and the new beginning of the human race shall have their shelter in the tree during Ragnarok.⁵

¹ See Voluspa, stanza 2. Voluspa is part of a body of poetry collectively known as "The Poetic Edda."

² Gylfaginning, chapter 15 calls Yggdrassil "The chief centre or holy place of the gods." (Faulkes translation). Gylfaginning is the first part of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*

³This anatomy is given in two main texts: Chapter 15 of Gylfaginning and Grimnismal, stanzas 25-35.

⁴As above. Lee M Hollander states in footnote 47 of page 60 of his translation of *The Poetic Edda* that this is likely an interpolation. Whether this is true or not, the assignment of dwarf names to the destructive forces would be in keeping with the other myths.

⁵Lif (Life) and Lifthasir (Love of Life) hide in the branches of the World Tree during Ragnarok and represent the new

Oðinn hangs on the tree in order to learn the Runes and endures nine nights stabbed with a spear, without food or drink. By most interpretations, he dies on the tree, only to rise up again with the knowledge of the universe. Oðinn also speaks of sacrificing himself to himself in this endeavor.⁶

The imagery of the the World Tree is very vivid and powerful and there has been much debate around the significance of the concept. Voluspa describes the tree as an ash, but also describes it as evergreen. Many students have claimed that this is evidence that the World Tree is a Yew tree, for it was sometimes called needle-ash by the Norse. I feel, however, that this explanation, while plausible and acceptable, fails to note the sequence of descriptions mentioned in Voluspa.

Voluspa describes how the first man was made from an ash tree and the first woman from an elm, and the story is retold by Snorri in "Edda." The description of Yggdrassil occurs immediately between that story and the story of the coming of the Norns. Immediately one is reminded that the Norse used poetic formulas called kennings to enhance alliteration by referring to an object by metaphor. Ash is a kenning for man, for the reason that the first man was created from an ash tree.

To a large extent, then, Yggdrassil can be seen as a metaphor for the totality the existence of a human. Each component, from Niðhogg to the eagle, is an aspect of the self– this is the primary significance of the concept. This is by no means contrary to the image of a universal World Tree, for the World Tree is thus a glyph of divine order, a universal model for human experience. One should note that Lif and Lifthasir find shelter in the World Tree when the world come to an end.⁷

Such an interpretation will no doubt have the reader asking for an exposition of this concept in the greatest detail possible. This is not possible here for reasons of space– the totality of the meaning of the image is contained in the image itself, and only study and contemplation will produce clear understanding. However, some small interpretation is in order.

At the apex of the tree is the eagle with the falcon sitting on his head in between his eyes. The eagle is an animal which has been long associated with kingship and sovereignty due to its greatness in size and majestic appearance. Oðinn takes the shape of an eagle after consuming the Mead of Inspiration and flies back to Asgard with the mead. The falcon rarely appears in Norse mythology, so an interpretation here is somewhat difficult, though it is likely that this animal represented keen sight (perhaps similar to how Oðinn sees everything from Valaskalf. However, the general meaning of this image is clear– at the top of the tree dwells the sovereign power.

The goat Heithrun who eats the branches of the tree and produces the mead is another enigmatic image. As mentioned earlier, Heithrun means "Bright Rune" or "Bright Mystery." One can associate the branches of the tree with human hair which is associated with a numinous power called "Hamingja" or "Luck." A goat is portrayed here for the simple fact that they eat nearly anything, and mead often symbolizes inspiration. The image of the Bright mystery transforming one's numinous power into inspiration is a powerful image indeed.

Another important aspect of the Tree image is that of the dragon gnawing on its root. Niðhogg is said to rise up at the end of the world and take the corpses back with him. The concept of a serpent rising up a tree/human is almost certainly of Indo-European origins and is a common motif in many of the legends and myths, not only of the Norse, but also of many other Indo-European peoples as well.

The Hindus speak of a serpent called the Kundalini lying coiled around the base of the World Tree, which is again a model for the human being. This serpent can rise up under certain ecstatic

beginning of humanity following the end of the world.

⁶See Havamal, stanza 139.

⁷It should be noted, however, that the distinction between the outer and inner worlds which we tend to assume today is not a traditional one. Most of the Indo-European cultures have placed an emphasis on turning within to find the Truth. This methodology is present in the story of Oðinn on the tree, and it is also present in the writings of Plato, which owe a good deal to Greece's Indo-European heritage.

circumstances brought about through asceticism (the all-powerful discipline in the Vedas) or, among the Tantric schools, sex. It is connected with vital energy which, when properly controlled can lead to enlightenment.

The Greeks similarly portray the serpents rising up the winged staff in the Caduceus of Hermes. The winged staff could be argued to represent the magician's soul or self. Elsewhere we see Medusa, the sight of whom turns a man to stone. She is slain by Perseus and her head is used to petrify the sea monster and save Andromeda. His sword is given to him by the war-goddess Athena. In the case of Medusa, she is an example of the Greek concept of the serpentine power rising into the head and this same concept existed in the Runic traditions as the Helm of Awe (see below).

The Celtic version is noticeably more distant, but the serpents appear to dwell in the earth, as both the *Historia Regium* tells us in the story of Merlin and *Votigern*.⁸ Also the *Maginogion* tells us a story of shrieking subterranean serpents who cause the land and women to be barren and a host of other plagues. They are discovered by filling trenches with mead. The serpents are here too associated with magico-spiritual power and the *Gundastraup Cauldron* portrays a seated horned figure holding a serpent in one hand and a torc in the other. Finally the Old Irish "Cattle Raid of Cooley" features two pig-herds who are transformed into serpents who rain snow down on each others' realms. These serpents later incarnate in the two prize bulls which kill each other at the end of this story.

Among the Norse too, the serpent is a guardian of magico-spiritual riches, portrayed as gold and other valuables. Gold was for them a symbol of vital energy, and it is not all that they guard. Sigurd won the Helm of Terror (Old Norse *Ægishjalmr*) by slaying *Fafnir* which, in striking similarity to the head of the Medusa, paralyzes his enemies with terror.⁹ Egill speaks of Eric standing in such a helmet of terror:

There sate in might
The monarch strong,
With **helm of terror**
High-throned and dread;
A king unbending
With bloody blade
Within York city
Wielded he power.

'That moon-like brightness
Might none behold,
Nor brook undaunted
Great Eric's brow:
As fiery serpent
His flashing eyes
Shot starry radiance
Stern and keen.

(Stanzas 4 and 5, W. C. Green translation, emphasis mine)¹⁰

These two stanzas are of particular interest concerning the nature of the serpent, possibly rising

⁸Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote this first great work of Arthurian legends. Although he claimed to have merely copied a pre-existing manuscript, the general evidence is to the contrary. It is clear, however, that much of the material is of Celtic origins.

⁹There are other parallels between Sigurd and Perseus as well. Sigurd's sword, like that of Perseus is of divine origins, having been given to his father by Oðinn, and Sigurd, like Perseus, rescues a woman thereafter who he promises to marry. Unlike Perseus, however, Sigurd marries someone else and so begins his demise.

¹⁰This entire translation from the late 19th century can be found at http://www.northvegr.org/lore/egils_saga/index.php

around the trunk of the World Tree. Like in the Volsung Saga, the serpent is, again, connected with the Helm of Terror. In particular, this poem makes reference to Eric's eyes becoming akin to those of serpents, as a result, or perhaps as evidence, of the Helm of Terror. Furthermore, Egil makes reference to this mythical concept not merely as an allusion to Sigurd, but rather as a present reality. Unlike the Greeks, the Norse maintained this formula as a living reality not only discussed by philosophers and mystics but as a concept which was clearly understood in common tales about contemporary individuals.

The Niðhogg dragon, then, represents the great, primal, vital, magico-mystical energy which could, in a moment of Ecstasy, rise up the the head and produce the Helm of Terror effect that Egil speaks of. This metaphor is told in the Sigurd story as the hero slaying the dragon with the divine sword of his father and in Voluspa as the Niðhogg dragon who gnaws on the root of the world tree and rises up in the end of the world to take back down the bodies of the dead.

One should note that, perhaps, there was no symbol as versatile in magic as the symbol which represented the Helmet of Terror. The Galdrabok and other medieval manuscripts attribute to it the powers of victory, terror, health, love, and reconciliation, and the Volsung Saga attributes the Dragon's Heart to the ability to understand the speech of birds and general wisdom.

The interpretations above should not be taken as all there is to the symbolism. Myths have a way of encoding vast amounts of understanding, knowledge, and wisdom into a short description or tale. Furthermore, every portion and version of the depiction can be similarly interpreted, but true understanding of the concepts can only come from an application and contemplation of the images. The understanding which results from doing is true understanding in a way that knowledge from study is not (try learning how to fix a computer simply by reading about it).

When Oðinn hangs himself on the tree, the tree is as much Oðinn as he himself is. When he sacrifices his own life in an offering to himself, he is giving himself up to a greater, more universal form of himself. This is a great task of turning inward to search the deep, dark corners of the psyche in order to better grasp the great mysteries of the cosmos. In doing so, he gains a drought of mead so that one word leads on to another word and one deed leads on to another deed. When he rises up again, he knows the Runes (Cosmic Mysteries) and is able to teach them to a select few.

It should be noted at this point that this model of the Universe and the Self being equivalents would have likely been assumed by the ancient Norse in general. While this is a difficult lesson for us to learn in our own society, it would be wrong to assert this obvious fact as the key significance that the world tree had to the Norse. A detailed exploration of this concept is, however, beyond the scope of this book.

It is well recommended that one who wishes to read, write, and otherwise work with runes read and contemplate the above passages repetitively and study all related material. Understanding such great concepts is a life's work at least, and there is no easy way out. The great secrets of the universe cannot be learned through passive learning— they must be actively sought after.

1.3 Beginnings Of A Runic Theory of Magic

When Sir Frazer wrote "The Golden Bough," anthropologists had a very simplistic understanding of magical theory in traditional cultures. Currently this is changing, and the missing pieces are being put into the puzzle in academic circles. A new theory of how magic is believed to operate within traditional circles, known as the semiotic theory of magic, has been introduced over the last few decades.

This theory of magic holds that the magician uses his/her traditional methods to communicate

with an object or individual through a hidden (occult) level of reality. This theory is particularly appealing from a Runic perspective because it can be argued that the Runes form a language for such magical communication. It should be noted however, that this theory is still far from complete.

Another theory of magic which, though it originated in the 20th century, fits many of the writings particularly well is the school of thought known as Thelema.¹¹ Thelema postulates that one's world is an emanation from one's Will, and that the art of magic is simply that of causing Willed change, to paraphrase Aliester Crowley. While the Norse did not appear to have a concept of True Will, one is struck by the simplicity of many of the descriptions of Runic magic in Egill's Saga where the ritual seems to include some simple action followed by a declaration of Will. It must be said that most of Thelemic thought and philosophy is drastically different from the philosophy embodied on the Runes. The Norse seem to assume a dynamic will under the control of conscious focus while the Thelemite's concept of Will is more static. It should be noted also that Thelema. While definitely the product of modern thought is definitely influenced by the classical teachings of Greece, Persia, and Rome.

Still others¹² postulate that Magic is the art of tapping into the "unlimited power of the subconscious." They reason that because all religions are different, they must be subjective. Therefore they must reside in the subconscious. So all magic must work on the placebo effect. This model is also adhered to some seemingly exoteric authors, like Napoleon Hill, who write books on successful living.¹³

The most coherent model I have been able to construct for the way the Norse would have seen magic has some similarity to all of the above theories but some notable differences as well. I do think it justified to say that the general model of the Semiotic Theory of Magic holds up to scrutiny in this case. However, this is controlled through conscious focus and a declaration of Will.

The Norse concept of the hidden aspects of reality was quite different from the view we have today of the subconscious. The totality of the universe is contained within and some of this is unconscious. Through turning inward, we can effect the world around us. The communication travels through the World Tree and causes the desired effects on the object of the spell.¹⁴

The above description is intended to be over simplistic and cover the portions of theory covered in this chapter. It describes the basic mechanism of magic on the lowest level. In the following chapters, a more detailed and fleshed out theory of magic will emerge, as the above discussion is a very small portion of the Norse worldview.

It should be noted that this book, as small as it is, can in no way report to be a comprehensive survey of Norse magical theory and cosmology. True understanding will only be obtained by study, meditation, and practice.

¹¹Thelema, it should be remembered has its roots in Hermeticism which, in terms, owes no small debt to the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, and Pythagoras.

¹²This includes Chaos Magicians and other more secular magical traditions. It should also be noted that some Buddhists have a somewhat similar idea.

¹³See *The Master Key to Riches* by Napoleon Hill. This book contains some very esoteric-looking diagrams which contain some interesting parallels to Norse mythology...

¹⁴I use this term here because it is plain English and has a similar sense to the Icelandic *Galdr*: both appear to be related to words for vocalizations

Chapter 2

The Tripartite Universe

2.1 The Three Divisions

According to the great scholar Georges Dumézil, the Indo-Europeans organized their society and mythology according to a three tiered structure which appears in poetic phrases and iconography. Indeed it is the basis for Order as the Indo-Europeans saw it.

The basic structure is as follows. At the top is the first function which is responsible for order, both sacred and social. Here is the priest and the king. In the middle is the Warrior who is responsible for defence of the order (which can involve being proactive against enemies of the order). Finally in the lowest tier is the producer and dispenser of riches.¹

Among the Norse, Odhinn ("Master of Frenzy") and Tyr ("A God")² share the first function. In many other Indo-European cultures, the function is so divided. The Rig Veda treats Mitra and Varuna in the same way, as did the Mithraic followers who saw the Persian god Mithra as being the producer of order, by the side of Ahura Mazda. It must be noted, though, that although Odhinn and Tyr share the first function, they are by no means equal. Odhinn accepts almost all of the social as well as sacred functions while Tyr remains the god of the Thing (legal assembly).

Thor ("Thunderer") is the Norse warrior god, and a god of action. It is he who defends Asgard from the Jotnar (Etins), a race of giants similar to the Greek Titans or the Irish Formorii. While the Etins and other enemies of Divine Order may plague men with pestilence, threaten to sink their ships at sea, or kill their crops with drought, it is Thor's duty to protect the men and gods. He is married to the grain goddess Sif ("Sib") and has fertility roles which he fulfills not by nurturing the crops but by guarding them from the giants. He has a hammer which is the source of lightning named Mjollnir.

The Norse had many producer gods, the most important of which are Freya ("Lady"), Freyr ("Lord"),³ and Njordhr. These are gods of sexuality, fertility, fecundity, and riches. They manifest the fruits of order and sustain the populace through production of required materials. They are also responsible for pleasure and happiness.

When I was first exposed to the theories of Dumézil, I was rather skeptical. The whole model seemed somewhat artificial and shallow. Furthermore, I questioned the methodology I perceived to have been used to make the conclusions. However, sometime later, I was able to research them in more depth and was amazed at their elegance. For this reason, I highly recommend that any student study his writings directly so as to directly judge them for him or herself. The model is not simply an abstract structure but an operant sacred and magical formula. Dumézil points out that there are invocations which use this formula in Egil's Saga where he curses King Eirik of Norway just before leaving for Iceland—Odhinn, Thorr, Freyr and Njordhr are mentioned.

Dumézil also cites a similar healing charm which invokes Freyr, Freya and Njordhr, then Odhinn and Thorr, and the same structure is argued to exist in the Poetic Edda (Skirnismal, stanza 33) where Skirnir curses Gerdh, invoking Odhinn, the Foremost God (Thorr), and Freyr. Again, the emphasis on working magic by invoking the three functions and by analogy the entirety of Divine Order seems to be a fairly solid interpretation of these passages.

It should also be noted that Adam of Bremen, towards the end of the pagan period, visited Upsala, Sweden and wrote of a similar structure concerning their sacrifices to the gods. He mentions that the

¹One might note the seemingly superficial similarity to the Christian Trinity, but the connection is deeper than it would otherwise appear. Plato wrote of the three functions both internal (Head, Heart, and Belly) in *The Republic* and societal. Neoplatonism quickly developed the idea into a Holy Trinity of Godhead which was divided into an unknowable All/Father, Demiurge/Word, and World Soul. It was this development which laid the groundwork for the idea of the Trinity.

²Note that the suffix "tyr" appears in epithets for other gods, such as "Farnatyr" (Cargo-God, i.e. Odhinn). I suspect that Tyr is best translated as "A God" in this context. However, it should be noted that Tyr (from *Tiwaz) shares the same PIE root as Zeus, and the Latin dies ("Day"). See 6.2 below.

³Note that the Mod. Eng. terms "Lord" and "Lady" both refer in their origins to grain-related functions. See 6.7.

pagans would pour out libations to Thorr if pestilence or famine threatened; to Odhinn, if war; and to "Fricco" (Freyr?) in celebration of marriages.⁴

The same structure is said to have been introduced into society by Rig, who is generally identified as Heimdallr. He breeds three classes of men: Thrall (Slave), Karl (Freeholder), and Jarl (Earl). At first glance, these classes do not fit well with the model described above, and Dumézil goes to great length to try to fit the models together, but perhaps there is a one-to-one connection which is overlooked because a piece of the puzzle overlooked. The connection of Jarl to Odin is easy and natural, and Dumézil successfully links Karl to Thorr. It is argued here, however, that Thrall is the representative of the producer class rather than Karl.

In particular it should be noted that each of the three offspring of Rig are described by color. Thrall is described as "Black," twisted, and ugly. Karl is described as having red hair and skin, which would certainly fit well with Thorr, and Jarl is described as being beautiful and white (presumably with blond hair). White is clearly connected with the first function in Norse myth with Tyr's name being derived from a Proto-Indo-European root meaning "Shining" and Odhinn as connected with white too (his beard is hoary, and he is connected with death).

Thrall is thus described as being similar to dwarves or dark elves, who are also dark, twisted, and ugly. The dwarves live in the earth and were created out of the maggots that grew in the body of the primaeval giant Ymir. They are expert craftsmen and have produced Thorr's hammer, Sif's hair, Freya's necklace, and other great treasures. Generally, they do not deal with the Aesir or Vanir directly but rather through Loki who is, in essence, a giant rather than a god. In the tale where Alvis deals with Thorr, the warrior god prevails and Alvis is turned to stone.⁵

The great exception to the above pattern is the story of Freya who wandered the world weeping tears of gold in search of her husband Odhr (Frenzy, Inspiration, Song: the name is closely related to Odhinn). In her travels she eventually meets four dwarves who give her, in exchange for sexual favors, a great necklace made of gold. I think that there is sufficient cause to link, albeit tentatively, the Thralls with dwarves and hence with Freya and craftsmanship. Also note that the somewhat grisly lay of Vollund tells the story of a great craftsman taken as a thrall (and by his captors rendered lame), who gains his revenge by slaying his captor's sons and crafting various ornaments from their heads—he sets their skull with silver, makes beads of their eyeballs, and of their teeth he makes broaches.

There is a second consideration to make as well. By the Viking age, the tendency of chieftains to hire permanent professional warriors as their champions had died away, and the professional warrior was a freeholder and farmer. The captured and vanquished were called thralls, or slaves, and were placed into a sort of forced indentured servitude. They were often the people to look after the livestock or tend to other factors of production. The mythic structure remained, but was told in ways that related to society as it had become, rather than as it had been in the past. This was especially necessary in a myth which told of the creation of social order.

I also postulate that the tripartite structure described above pertains also to the cosmology as a whole. All beings in the myths can be described as Celestial (Dwelling in the Heavens), Terrestrial (Dwelling on the Earth), and Chthonic (Dwelling in the earth or Sea⁶). These also correspond to the functions of Order, Action, and Production. The chthonic creatures are often producers or guardians of great treasures, heroes occupy the land, and the gods are creators and representatives of divine order. What follows is a brief description of the three great realms.

⁴The above examples are all from *Gods of the Ancient Norseman* by Dumézil, pages 4-6.

⁵For the story of Alvis, see *Alvismál* in the *Poetic Edda*. The other stories are told by Snorri in *Edda*.

⁶One should also note that Roberto Assagioli postulated a model for the psyche with a similar structure for use in psychotherapy. See his book: *Psychosynthesis: A Collection of Basic Writings*. Also the term Chthonic comes from the Gr. *Chthonios* (literally "In the earth") and is first attested to in English in 1882.

The Chthonic realm is inhabited by dwarves, dragons, and ancestors. It is representative of danger and death, but it is where both Odhinn and Vafthrudhnir learn the Runes. Initiations and riches are won here. Here dwell the dead, and ancestral spirits are sometimes associated with the fertility of the land. Here dwell the primal forces as well. Of the Nine Worlds, it is home to Niflheim, Muspellsheim, Swartalfheim, and Hel.⁷

Niflheim ("Mist Home") is the realm from whence the primal venomous waters began to appear at the creation of the world. From the water arose mist, and from the mist rime. It is home to great frost giants who are the offspring of Ymir, the primaeval giant. This is the realm of primordial matter.

Complimenting Niflheim is Muspellsheim. In this realm arose the primaeval fire which met the ice and created the waters of life. From the fire arose sparks. When these met the ice, the ice constricted the fire and the fire lent life to the ice, and at length it had the form of a man. This was Ymir. Muspellsheim is populated by great giants made of fire, but primordial as the frost giants. At the end of the world, they will burn the land and their leader, Surt (The Dark One) will slay Freyr. This is the land of primordial energy.

Ymir was sacrificed and out of his body was made the world. His skull became the sky, his blood the sea, his teeth and bones the rocks and mountains. His lashes were used to make Midgard, his hair the forests, and his brow became the clouds.⁸

Swartalfheim is a realm created in the depths of the earth for the dwarves who were created out of the maggots which grew in Ymir's body. In myth they are pictured as creatures often undone by light, the sword, and other symbols of truth. The sun is used by Thor to turn Alvis to stone, Sigurd slew Regin and his brother Fafnir⁹ with a magical sword¹⁰ given to him by Odhinn. Here great treasures are made or guarded.

Lastly, Hel is the realm of the dead. Here, in its cold halls, lie the shades of those who have passed away. From here, it is said, magicians could call spirits and ask them to do his bidding. These spirits (draugr) were much feared in ancient times. Also it is here that Baldr awaits the end of the world when he can return to Asgard and take Odhinn's place, and it is here that Odhinn journeys in order to learn what Baldr's dream portends. Here the runes are learned by Oðinn and Vafthrudhnir.

These realms are either connected with the initial creation of the universe or else with continued creation and fertility. It is from the interaction of Nifleheim and Muspellsheim that the world is created out of the Void of Potential ("Ginnungagap"). The Dwarves were created to continue forming the world and also to create great treasures, and the ancestors are sometimes seen as influencing the fertility of the land.

While the chthonic beings live in the land, the terrestrial beings live upon it. Here we have Midgard (Middle Enclosure) and Utgard (Outer Enclosure). Here we have entities responsible for events rather than creations.

Midgard is the realm of men. It is this world, and it represents nature tamed by the introduction of devine order. Here men act, scheme, etc. In the mythic tales, they are more noted for their actions

⁷For a full depiction of the nine worlds, see *Runelore* by Edred Thorsson.

⁸Note the notion that the earth was created by a primal sacrifice of a humanoid— that every aspect of our world has a direct anatomical connection to the human body. This reinforces the notion that the external world is analogous to the internal one.

⁹Fafnir is, in fact a dragon. That his is brother to Regin the dwarf seems somewhat perplexing. See *Fafnismal* in the Poetic Edda. One might note, however, that Regin is the smith who reforges Sigurd's sword, and Fafnir a guardian of great treasures. See also the *Volsung Saga*.

¹⁰It should be noted that the sword was a symbol of sovereignty in Norther Europe in a way that no other weapon was. Before the Viking Age began, swords were so costly that only the earls could afford them. This was because they were manufactured through a process known as "pattern welding," and it would often take a smith over a month to forge a single sword. Near the beginning of the Viking Age, the Scandenavians discovered means of making homogenous steel swords which were of nearly the same quality as the Iron swords and yet were more economical to produce. Yet as the *Volsung Saga* shows, the symbolism survived.

than their creations. Sigmund does not create his ancestral sword, for it is given to him by Odhinn. Nor does Sigurd reforge the broken pieces, this is left to a dwarf. Sigurd, like many other heroes, however, remembered for his actions and is called Sigurd the Dragon Slayer. While humans do not, as a general rule, make anything particularly noteworthy in the mythic tales, their actions are often remembered. This is, however, a realm where the influence of all other realms is visible. Even in the Lay of Völlumund (Völlumundarkviða), the items which Völlumund makes are noteworthy because of their nature but rather because they represent his action of revenge.

Utgarð, or Jotunheim, is the realm of the Giants, who represent untamed nature. Here is represented the primordial powers of wind, snow, earthquake, storm, and drought. The giants are a threat to the divine order simply because they are not tamed and so are not part of that order. They are, for the most part, subdued by Thor who fights them occasionally. Because the giants are the causes of natural disasters, Thor is the protector of the people as well as the gods, and libations were poured to him.

Lastly, the celestial realms of Asgard, Vanaheim, and Ljossalfheim are located in the heavens, perhaps as part of the starry sky itself. Here Divine Order exists and is given to the sons of men.

Vanaheim is the homeland of the Vanir, one of the races of gods. They represent fertility, fecundity, agriculture, and wealth. Among them are Freya, Freyr, and Njordhr. In the beginning, the Vanir and Aesir were separate, but then a great war came¹¹ and the two sides fought each other with great ferocity. In the end, a truce was declared and the two sides became so inseparable that the term Aesir was eventually used to mean the Aesir and the Vanir.

Freyr is said to dwell with the Elves. They, like the Vanir, are bringers of fertility and fecundity, and sometimes mischief and malice. The Ljossalfir are possibly associated with the light-bodies, or minds,¹² of our ancestors.

Asgard (The Enclosure of the Gods) is a walled fortress from where the great gods of supreme order dwell. These include Odhinn, Frigga, Tyr, Thor, Bragi, and many others. These gods live in an idealized order which is imitated by human society. They are the ordering principle, in charge of ordering all three functions.

These celestial realms are populated by entities connected with consciousness, ecstasy, order, and sovereignty. This influence is brought down to the other realms. So the Valkyries act on Odhinn's will, selecting who should die in battle, and in other ways the gods are thought to act in our lives. They even wander the world as suits their needs.

2.2 Magic and the Tripartite Universe

Magic is the tool of those who would work with the sacred order. Its use is associated with that part of the first function which is associated with creating and maintaining the spiritual order, and in most Indo-European cultures the Priest figure assumes this responsibility. By the time Norse mythology was recorded, the emphasis on Tyr and Odhinn had almost entirely shifted to Odhinn. Odhinn is the god of magic.¹³

While it is true that the three functions are internal as well as external, different people are dominated by different lusts. Some lust for money, comfort, or pleasure. Others lust for power and excitement. Still others lust for truth, vision, and inspiration. In fact, we all lust for all these things

¹¹See 4.2 below.

¹²Hugr is the Old Norse word for Mind. It denotes that which is bright and shining.

¹³See 6.2 below for more information on this change and when it may have happened.

to some degree or another, but we innately assign priorities to them. These desires often conflict, and sometimes the result is self-deception, falsehood, and other undesirable results.

Whosoever takes up the runes must take heed that self-deception is **dangerous** where magic is concerned. One must proceed by practicing total self-honesty, for only then can one be truly conscious. Odhinn might have broken an oath, but he did not do so out of self-deception but rather for the good of the Aesir and poets.

Conscious action is, perhaps, what characterizes the priest-king level of the Tripartite model. In many of the Indo-European cultures, a mistake on the part of the king can render the land barren. Ignorance and hastiness are the banes of social order. How much more destructive they are where the sacred order is concerned! Self-honesty is the beginning principle of consciousness. It enables us to learn from our mistakes and avoid the harm that can come to ourselves when we blindly work magic without comprehending our current situation or the tools which are before us.

Conscious action can then be divided into two basic types of actions. Manifest, outward actions are made with full awareness of the nature of the world and so are able to create the desired result. This is the gift of the sovereign ruler. An example of such action is where Oðinn engenders a son who will avenge him at the end of the world even while he gathers his army of fallen warriors. This allows Oðinn's soul to pass on. Oðinn acts in full consciousness that he is preparing for his own death and as such is able to conquer it.

Symbolic conscious actions are at the heart of Runic magic. An action is still made with full consciousness of the action itself and the desired results, but the action takes a symbolic manifestation rather than a direct one. The symbols resonate with the cosmos both inner and outer, and create the intended result. One can even, perhaps, define magic as "symbolic conscious action."

The aspiring Runic magician should therefore understand that, with the goals of self-growth and discovery of truth, the road to personal empowerment will be greatly shortened and will be at least possible, though usually not easy.

One might think that I am saying that one should not use magic unless one knows everything there is to know about the universe. This is not the case. A magician is not and can never be omniscient, though little can be hid from his eyes. Rather, it has been my experience that the gods demand more knowledge from us as we grow— that magical growth must be auxiliary to personal growth if it is not to be unduly destructive.

There is another, more subtle form of self-dishonesty which the magician need be aware of. Many popularized "traditions" (if I may use the term loosely) espouse a rigid and utopian moral standard regarding magic. As I shall show below, such a fixed standard has little place in Runic magic and is the product of popularizing traditions to make them appear more acceptable to the public eye rather than of generations of ancient wisdom.

It must immediately be noticed that Oðinn (who is, after all, the parton of the Runes) is not without his demonic attributes. He is an eerie god who does what he deems necessary, often killing those who have served him well. He is a breaker of oaths, and the one-eyed god who paralyzes his foes with terror.¹⁴ His demonic aspect has its parallels in the Irish figure of Balor¹⁵ ("Of the Evil Eye") and the Vedic Varuna (also a parton god of magical arts).

In particular, the Norse and Vedic treatments of magic tend to remove it from the boundaries of social laws or morals as these are the territory of the complimentary first-function god (perhaps originally Tyr) who appears in the Vedas as Mitra, and among other Indo-Europeans as their king

¹⁴Dumezil has an excellent discussion of this topic in his "Gods of the Ancient Norsemen"

¹⁵Also note that Lugh when preparing the Tuatha De Dannan for the second battle of Moy Tura adopts a ritual posture emulating Balor and Nuada's mutilations. Oðinn's mutilation is also likely of Indo-European roots, according to Dumezil, and Lugh is often seen as the Irish version of Oðinn.

god (Zeus, etc.). The same treatment is generally given in the Irish literature where the druids are often removed from the laws of society and so are free to do as they deem necessary.

Magic requires a strong sense of self. It requires an ability to question morality, authority, and even reality. Most importantly, however, is a sense of self-honesty and accountability. It is easy to see why magical growth must be auxiliary to personal growth.

Chapter 3

The Norns, Fate, and Magic

3.1 Urð (Wyrð) and Verðandi: Past and Present

Another concept which must be understood in its relation to Runic magic is the Viking concept fate, which is itself inseparable from the concept of time. These two concepts are manifest in the Norns whose names reflect the Norse concepts of fate and time. Voluspa mentions them, calling them the thurse-maidens, and naming them Urð, Verðandi, and Skuld.¹

The designation of "Thurse-maiden" or "Giantess" is, in fact hardly accidental and is very illustrative of the Viking mentality towards fate and time. One can argue quite successfully that the giants themselves symbolize a sort of primeval order (entropy) which is both a threat to human safety yet also necessary for continued prosperity and plenty. The giants predate the gods in the legends, as Ymir ("Roarer") is the first humanoid entity to arise in the cosmos; he is also designated as a giant, and the father of all future giants. Furthermore, Oðinn, Vili, and Ve are said to sacrifice Ymir and make the world out of his body. The giants are often seen as being responsible for natural phenomenon, such as the wind, which is produced by an Etin in the shape of an eagle (named Corpse-Gulper²) as he flaps his wings, and whole legions of giants are responsible for the fire in Ragnarok.³ Many other examples abound, and it seems likely that this interpretation does carry over to the Norns, who can be seen as primeval and mechanistic in their own way.

The names of the Norns and their usages are also important, particularly for Urð, the first of the Norns. Her name literally means "Has Turned (or Happened)," which could easily be interpreted as past action. Furthermore, her name in other contexts is used to mean something analogous to fate. "Fate" in this sense is different to what we think of today, but rather the sum of all past actions and their force, manifest and subtle, on the events to come. The Old English poem, "The Wanderer," speaks of Wyrð (The Old English cognate of Urð) in such terms. In Old English:

Oft him anhaga are gebideð,
metudes miltse, þeah þe he modcearig
geond lagulade longe sceolde
hieran mid hondum hrimcealde sæ,
wadan wræclastas. Wyrð biðful ared!
[9 lines omitted]

Ne mæg werig mod wyrde wiðstandan,
ne se hreo hyge helpe gefremman.
Forðon domgeorne dreorigne oft
in hyra breostcofan bindaðfæste;

I have translation this as:

Oft he who alone does bide⁴,
Mercy bestowed, though he must bear himself
over seaways, sick with longing
Boiling with oars the ice-cold sea
Wending the way to exile. Wyrð is fully strong!⁵
[9 lines omitted]

¹Stanza 8 mentions them as terrifyingly strong giantesses, while stanza 20 gives their names and associations with fate.

²See Vafthruðnismal, stanza 37. The Etin's name in Old Norse is Hraesvelg.

³See Voluspa stanza 51 and the final chapters of Gylfaginning.

⁴Most other translators translate gebideð here to be "longs for mercy" or "waits for mercy" but I think bide here better represents the general sense of stasis and waiting that the opening of the poem suggests.

⁵i.e. Wyrð cannot be escaped

No weary companion might Wyrð withstand,
 nor untamed⁶ heart bring help⁷
 For this, those eager for justice oft
 the dreariness in their breast bind fast.

Then the poem continues to recount the Wyrð of the narrator at first in the third person then later in the first— such is his "fate" to wander in exile, lamenting his earlier, more joyful days. Near the end, one final appearance of the name is made:

wæpen wælgifru, wyrð seo mære,
 ond þas stanhleoðu stormas cnyssað,
 hriðhresende hrusan bindeð,
 wintres woma, þonne won cymeð,
 nipeðnihtscua, norþan onsendeð

hreo hæglfare hæleþum on andan.

Which I translate as:

woefully⁸ painful, Wyrð's well is,
 And that stony bluff that breaks the storm,
 Fevers fell and the earth binds⁹,
 Winter's terror, when untoward comes,
 That growing darkness, [and]from the north [she]sends
 the hailstorm in anger toward the hero.

Here we see Wyrð connected with the term mere (think of spring, well, lake), and as a dark and terrible force which comes forth from the unseen darkness of the nights of the Northern winter. At least part of the pessimism here is likely to be beyond the bitterness of this tale concerning one far from his homeland and kin. Surprisingly often in the Norse material (as well as the Anglo-Saxon) when terms connected with fate are used, they have a negative connotation. Even today, such phrases as "met his fate" or "faced his fate" almost always carry with them a connotation of a terrible event, such as death. This being said, similar words such as Old Norse *Domr* (c. f. Mod. Eng. "doom") occurs in positive contexts as well.

The Norse association with fate, it shall be demonstrated, has deep roots in very old Indo-European ideas, and that similar concepts are found in other Indo-European traditions. While a second concept of "fate" is denoted by the term "orlog" or primal law, this shall be dealt with later in this chapter and also has clear Indo-European roots.

Hinduism has preserved a concept of fate which also distinctly mirrors the Norse. The word "karma" actually means action, and in the fatalistic sense of the word is perhaps best translated as past action. Hinduism differs from the ancient Norse paganism in that the emphasis is primarily personal in Hinduism while it assumes a broader and less "judgmental" role in the Germanic tales.¹⁰ Yet again, Indian thought holds the past as the source of one component of fate. Furthermore, the

⁶as in angry / tempestuous

⁷usually translated as comfort, but might also signify an ability to turn around a bad situation.

⁸literally "murderously"

⁹i.e. death eventually takes everyone

¹⁰It should be noted, however, that the traditional Hindu "judge-mental" version of Karma has been seriously misunderstood in the West. Hinduism is not concerned with "good" vs. "bad" Karma so much as it is with Truthful Karma vs. Inert Karma. These modes actually correspond to the tripartite modes described in the previous chapter.

concepts do not appear to be borrowed because, although the core concept is the same, many of the surface details are not, indicating a natural divergence rather than a displacement of ideology.

The name *Urðis* cognate to *Weird*, and clearly had fatalistic connotations. When our ancestors say something as *Weird*, the term carried with it all of the connotations of past connection and fate mixed with a certain eerie appropriateness, like in the case of an omen. The word has gradually lost its sacred meaning until today, when the word is a synonym for "strange."

The second of the Norns is named *Verðandi*, and her name translates as the present participle version of *Urð*, "[That Which] Is Turning (or Happening)." Her name rarely appears in the literature, save simply in reference. However, the name is still important as it contains useful information about the role of *Urð*.

As mentioned above, both *Urð* and *Verðandi* derive their names from the Old Norse verb meaning "to turn" or "to become,"¹¹ and *Urð* is the past tense of the present participle *Verðandi*. What is turning become what has turned after it has come and gone. *Verðandi* makes *Urð*. An action now becomes part of the force of *Urð* immediately after it has been done. Now is the moment of power.

Many Indo-European peoples would hold their kings responsible for every blight or drought. This was especially true of the Celts, where kings sometimes lost their lives under such circumstances. Among the Greeks, Zeus was a god associated with the grain harvest as well as sovereignty, and the pattern does not appear to be the result of borrowing because the root idea is buried deeply in the mythology, not a parallel of simple surface features. Sovereignty was responsible for the collective fate of the people.

Conscious action is the chief trait of sovereignty, and despite the distortion that the Norse brought to this concept,¹² this principle remained visible. *Oðinn* is the omniscient god who sees the entire world from his hall at *Valaskjalf* ("Window Shelf"). He acts in ways which are initially difficult to comprehend yet are always in the best interests of the gods and men. He is unpredictable, but even his demonic/"dishonorable" actions are done in the best interests of the *Aesir*, *Vanir* and *Men*. For example, he broke his oath to win back the mead of inspiration which was rightfully the property of the *Aesir*. Yet this action was not only necessary in a larger sense, but also beneficial to the divine order of the universe, where poets drink of the mead of inspiration in order to speak of the tales of the gods, heroes dead, or even dear friends and loved ones.

3.2 Magic and the Norns

While *Urðis* and *Etin*, and so is part of the Primeval Order, *Oðinn* in particular, is the Sovereign god. He exercises some limited control over fate, though he cannot prevent the eventual demise of his son or himself. He sometimes chooses who dies in battle and who is victorious, and he acts in the ultimate best interests of gods and men.

Urð is created by the actions of every object in the world. A rock has no consciousness, no *Oðr* (Inspiration), and so cannot act, but only react. A rock does not create new fate but only furthers that *Urð* which falls upon it. Similarly, most people are not entities who consciously act most of the time, but rather simply respond to series of stimuli, both external and internal, in the formulation of a reaction. This is the way of organic systems, and is especially visible where groups of people are concerned. In this mode, the producer acts upon the various biological urges for greater personal security.

¹¹Note that the cognate verb, OE *Weorthan* is also the root of the word "worth" as well as "weird."

¹²See Dumézil's *Gods of the Ancient Norsemen*, Chapter 2 for a discussion of the Norse concept of sovereignty

The warrior exercised some limited sovereignty among the Icelanders, and the sagas speak of many of them "owning" thralls and managing their estates. The ecstasy (Old Norse *Oðr*) of battle was thought to allow men into Valholl, and the primary importance of their mode of existence was characterized by the ecstasy of battle. In such an ecstatic state, the warrior achieves some spiritual power, but it is transitory.

Only the true sovereign leader is in the position of living constantly in a position of conscious action. Conscious action has the power to create new trends in the pattern of *Urð*'s power rather than simply perpetuating the current trends. When we take conscious control of ourselves, we become to a much greater degree masters of our own destiny. Every action, every thought that manifests or guides a decision now becomes a force of fate under the magician's control rather than a blind agent of fate.

3.3 Skuld: The Future

The final Norn is named Skuld. The Old English cognate is "Shuld" from which the modern English word "Should" arises. Her name is different and distinct from the others and again not often mentioned in the mythical literature, save as a reference. Yet again it illustrates the Norse concept of fate rather well.

Skuld does not appear to represent the sort of fixed reality that the other two Norns do. In this view, the future is not set by her, but she only represents the possibilities and probabilities which it contains. Fate is a product of *Urð* and other factors, not the result of a definite future.

3.4 Orlog: The Primal Law

Voluspa speaks of the Norns in relation to ordaining fate. Contrary to some of the later versions, the norns are not, like their Greek counterparts, associated with spinning, but rather with allotting fate to men by marking their fates on wooden lots. Presumably this would involve the Runes.¹³

The Norns are also credited with making laws for men in this process. This is not without meaning, as another word which is often translated as fate is *orlog*, which literally translates as "Primal Law or Lot." This dual fate is also found in the Sanskrit corpus, as *Dharma* also translates as "Law" and stands aside *Karma* as a factor in "fate." Again the surface similarities are less striking than the overall structure, indicating that the concepts were not merely borrowed but are descended from a common ancestor. I suspect that the Irish *geas* is also descended from the same root idea.

In general, Indo-Europeans tended to be somewhat frightened of the primal. The primal represented a threat if it was not transformed through sovereign forces into the fertile provider. Yet at the same time, the primal represents the vital forces without which life would cease.

One could argue that the flow of *orlog* in the *Volsung* saga underlies most of the saga. In particular, the strong warnings that *Brynhild*/*Sigdrifa*¹⁴ gives *Sigurd* in *Sigdrifumal*. In particular, she warns him not to betray kinsmen, swear oaths, not to remain silent, spend the night with a witch, and many other actions, as they will spell his doom.¹⁵

¹³Note that the Runes themselves are not limited in their use to the Aesir. The poetic Edda speaks at length and in many places about the use of Runes by the gods, men, elves, dwarves, and etins.

¹⁴In the Heroic Poems of the Poetic Edda, *Sigdrifa* is the name of the valkyrie who gives *Sigurd* advice, though *Helreið Brynhildar* makes reference to her under the name of *Brynhild*. In the *Volsung* saga, which largely consists of a condensed version of existing and lost heroic poems, she is simply called *Brynhild*.

¹⁵See *Sigdrifumal* stanzas 24-39 and the *Volsung* Saga, chapter 21.

Many of the warnings seem like good and timeless pieces of advice, but a closer analysis reveals something particular to the story. The advice is timeless, but it also foreshadows the circumstances of Sigurd's death. Sigurd makes an oath to Gunnar whereby he swears his brotherhood. He is then bewitched by Gunnar's mother Grimhild to forget about Brynhild so that he would marry Guðrun. He then disguises himself as Gunnar and passes through the wall of fire so as to deceive Brynhild into marrying Gunnar. Brynhild takes revenge and arranges Sigurd's death.

The similarities between the circumstances of Sigurd's death and the warnings of Brynhild are quite stunning. Sigurd is warned about falling victim to enchantments and making oaths, both of which are prominent features in the story of his death. Sigurd actually follows most of Brynhild's advice, but it is where he does not that he sets the forces of his death in motion.

For comparison, the Celtic legends make an interesting parallel in the concept of the *geas*. Heroes in Celtic myth are often given quite "arbitrary" and complex sets of taboos, and die when they finally break them. Cuchulain may not pass by a hearth without eating and may not eat dog meat. When three crones cook a dog on a spit along his path, he eats the dog and thereafter fights his last battle. King Connery similarly breaks a long set of seemingly arbitrary taboos regarding lodging shortly before he is slain in battle, and the same pattern holds true elsewhere.

3.5 Paradoxes of Fate

The Norse were, however, far more given to subtlety in their concepts of fate. Sigurd's death follows as a natural offshoot of his failure to uphold the advice, while the hero of the Celts dies a death which was seemingly unconnected with the breaking of the *geas*. While both examples serve as prophetic (and somewhat unavoidable) foretelling of the hero's death, the Norse downplayed this type of fatalistic "arbitrariness."¹⁶

One should also note that the Norse tended also to be somewhat fatalistic about their deaths, though the writings here are contradictory. My most accounts, the Norse believed that a death in battle was desirable because it assured them of a place in Valholl. The *Havamal*, however, primarily emphasizes the physical pain and displeasure of old age as the fate which is avoided by dying in battle. In this sense, however, some caution is well deserved. Though *Sigdrifumal* does make some claim that all evil is predestined, this is not entirely the case, if the names of the Norns are any indication.

I would claim that the Norse saw their deaths as functionally preordained not because the future is immutable (it is not) but rather because it was thought to be dominated by larger forces which the hero could not hope to overcome. Oðinn and his valkyries choose who dies on the field of battle. Ran chooses who dies at sea. The gods dominate the moment of death and they choose it for humans in accordance with their own needs.

Such an attitude might account for the degree that the Norse found in such pseudo-fatalism an indomitable strength. The future is not immutable, so fighting is worthwhile. However, if the gods could always choose an individual to leave this world to serve them in the afterlife in some fashion, death is not worth fearing either— the gods will choose that a person die when they do and little can change this.

Yet it must be admitted that even the gods are unable to stave of their own destruction and death. Perhaps they are subject to the same laws of orlog which they use in selecting who to take away with them. This enigma is quite puzzling and represents a great mystery in the beliefs of the Norse.

¹⁶One should note, however, that though arbitrary from the standpoint of the circumstances of death, the Celtic *geas* often was a reflection of the soul of the Celtic hero.

How these beliefs can be reconciled here can only be approached structurally. True understanding must come from practice and experience, though the two seemingly opposite beliefs are not irreconcilable. First it must be noted that there is little evidence in any way to suspect that the day-to-day lives of the Norse were thought of as predestined. It is only in the timing, and not even necessarily the manner of death that this fatalism becomes evident, and it is only in the deaths of the gods themselves that fate seems to have any hold on them either, aside from the normal restrictions placed upon reality by *Urð*.

If this is to be accepted we still have to contend with the idea that *Urð*, like the other Norns is responsible not only for the force of past action but also the conditions of *Orlog*. Reconciling this principle requires accepting that conscious action actually adds new streams of fate rather than simply reverberating the streams already present. Most people are entirely dominated by fate and are unable to take any real accountability for the state of their lives because they lack the sovereignty that comes with true consciousness. It is this reason that *Oðinn* holds as much power over fate as he does.

Magic is a form of conscious action. When performed with sovereignty and consciousness born of inspiration and ecstasy it is a powerful vehicle for generating strands of fate. This is one deep level on which magic works in the Norse view. Sovereign consciousness need not be kind or gentle, but it must have ultimate good as its eventual goal. Goodness, in the Norse view can even include revenge done not out of anger but rather the belief that such actions will allow those slain to pass on. Even the grisly revenge of *Volund* can be argued to be good.

Part II

The Runestaves of the Elder Futhark

Chapter 4

The First Aett: The Aett of Creation

4.1 An Introduction to the First Aett

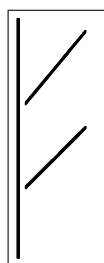
Throughout Norse mythology. The tripartate scheme continues to occur. So it is too with the Runes, which many of the textual and archeological finds seem to clearly show as being divided into three parts, called Aettir (Eights or Families— despite the fact that by the Norse times, the Futhark had been shortened from 24 to 16 runes). These families of runes are organized in the same way that humans are organized in Rigsthula, with the producers mentioned first and the sovereign powers mentioned last. Each of the Aettir is, however, a progression of that function from a state of potential to a state of harmonious wholeness, through the interaction with the other functions.

This book centers on the magic of the Elder Futhark rather than the true Norse Futhark which is called the Younger Futhark, so it is wise to keep in mind the time difference between the legends and the Runes— this measures over a thousand years between the first Elder Futhark find and any authoritative mythical texts were written down, though only a few hundred years between the last Elder find and the same writings.

The methodology of assigning meaning to the Runes is a combination of historical linguistics and a comparative look at what we know of the traditions which diverged from the Elder Futhark, most notable the Younger Futhark and Old English Futhorc. Often the names have been reconstructed by linguists, and the names which we do not have record of are denoted with a preceding asterisk, f. ex. *Fehu. I have decided to keep with this convention only in the linguistic sections of the descriptions of the runes.

The First Aett is the family of runes that contains the primal, vital, productive elements, though dangerous if not guided sovereignly. Here are found the powers of gold and livestock, of gifts and thorns. Here are also found the mysteries of joy and abundance. While this analogy is not perfect, the exceptions do tend to fit onto a pattern whereby they accentuate the tripartite structure rather than weaken it. Such a structure is particularly evident at the beginning and end of each Aett and somewhat more obscure in the middle.

4.2 Fehu— Cow, Livestock, Gold



PIE *Peku (Sheep, Livestock) -> Ger. *Fehu -> OE Feoh (Cattle, Livestock) -> Obsolete Mod. Eng. Fee (Cattle, Livestock, movable goods, and money)

Also, *Fehu -> ON Fe (Gold, cattle, possessions)

Also *Fehu->Old French Fé (Gold) -> Mod. Eng Fee (as in parking fee).

Phonetic Value: F(Father)

Fehu is a rune which denotes money, gold and cattle, as can be shown from the etymology. Like all runes, it works also, and more importantly, through allusion and mythic symbolism. A close analysis of these concepts as they appear in myth is very important to the study of the Rune.

The first war begins when the Aesir are visited by Vanir Gullveig (Gold Drunkenness), who they gash with spears and throw her body in a fire. Three times they burn her and three times she arises, reborn, from the flames. She is a witch and a seeress and travels the world, welcome to "wicked women." Her name following this treatment is Heið, "Shining One."¹ She may be an aspect of Freya, whose longing for gold is well typified in another story below. However, for purposes of this analysis they are regarded as different entities.

¹See Voluspa Stanzas 21 and 22.

One aspect of this myth is that avarice is the cause of war, and is likened to drunkenness. However, other levels of the myth must be assumed to account for the details of her magical activity. As will be shown, gold is often used to represent vital force, especially in connection with spiritual and magical ideas. In this interpretation, Gullveig also represents a lust for magical power, or perhaps its intoxicating effects.

Gullveig should be contrasted to Kvasir who also represents a form of drunkenness, but is far removed from Gullveig's destructive attributes. Where Kvasir is the source of inspiration, Gullveig is the plight of gods and men. Where Kvasir is wise, Gullveig is full of avarice. In this sense Gullveig is more similar in purpose to the Vedic Mada ("Drunkenness"), who was created as a weapon against the higher gods and eventually dismembered and split between four intoxicating things: women, gambling, drink, and hunting.

Dumezil also points out the parallels between Gullveig's treatment and metallurgical processes, lending additional weight to the idea that she primarily represents gold. However, these other aspects also generally fit within the framework of the mythic symbol that gold represents.

In stark contrast to the association with Gullveig, gold is also associated with several other goddesses. It is called Sif's Hair, Fulla's Snood, and Freya's tears. Each of these kennings has a deeper significance and deserves further exploration.

Sif is the wife of Thorr. She has golden hair, symbolic of grain, which was cut off by Loki who was then, to avoid having every one of his bones broken, obliged by Thorr to get a new head of hair for Sif. Loki went to the dwarves and had them make Sif's hair in addition to other treasures. This hair of dwarven make grows like any other head of hair but is made of gold.

A close look at this myth shows a number of interesting themes. First, Sif as the grain goddess has golden hair which is cut in a symbolic harvest. The hair is then renewed by seeking assistance of the producing entities— the dwarves. The association of gold and grain in the Norse mind is noteworthy here as it emphasizes the connection between gold and production.

Of Fulla, we have little reference. She is the keeper of Frigga's coffers, and a distributor of riches. She seems to have a similar function in this regard to Njorðr as the dispenser of riches.

Yet of all the associations to gold, its association to Freya is, perhaps, the most complex. Freya married someone named Oðr (Frnezy, Song, Inspiration, Madness). When he went away, she wept tears of gold. In another story she exchanges sexual favors to four dwarves in return for a brilliant golden necklace (Brisingamen, "Fire Girdle" or "Fire Necklace") that she cannot bring herself leave without. Again, in this myth, the gold is supplied by the dwarves, much like in the story of Sif's hair. Again, gold is linked symbolically to fire, much like in the story of Gullveig. Also, the necklace is stolen by Loki and Odhinn's terms are that Freya must start wars if she wishes to have her necklace back— again parallel to the stories of Gullveig and Sif. The similarity to the story of Gullveig is strong enough to warrant some credibility to the idea that Freya and Gullveig are the same goddess. However, there is also some value in treating them separately.

The parallel of gold and war was not lost to the authors of the Rune Poems. The Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme warns:²

(Gold) causes strife of kinsmen;
The wolf grows up in the woods.

and the Old Icelandic Rune Poem states:

Gold is the stife of kinsmen and the fire of the flood-tide
and the path of the serpent.
Gold "Leader of the War-Band"

²All translations here are from Thorsson, *Rune-Song*.

Gold, it is warned, leads to strife and war. (Also note that the Old Icelandic Rune Poem links gold also to fire.)

Gold also appears in the stories in connection with serpents and dwarves. Note above, how the dwarves produced Sif's hair and the Freya's necklace. Note how Sigurd won a great hoard of gold from the dragon Fafnir, who was brother to the dwarf Regin. Often it is also connected with fire. In fact, the Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme contains many other explicit references to the Volsung saga, so one can relate the "strife of kinsmen" to the strife between Regin and Fafnir.³

The phrase "The wolf grows up in the woods" may be a reference to the Volsung Saga, where Atli appears in Guðrun's dream as a wolf who kills Guðrun's brothers over the gold that Sigurd gained from slaying Fafnir.

Wolves are generally noted both in myth and in folklore for their appetites. Fafnir will swallow Oðinn, two wolves will swallow the sun and the moon, etc. during Ragnarok. In Hel's halls, wolves eat at the corpses. And later, in Grimm's fairy tales, the wolf is often pictured as a hungry animal who either eats main characters (such as Red Riding Hood) or eats animals until he is gorged. The wolf then represents someone who is hungry— either greedy for gold in the case of Atli or hungry for revenge, etc. As a primordial animal (a form of wild dog), it also represents a falling back from the civilized order to the more dangerous and destructive wild/primordial order.

It is my contention that the energy of the serpent is also analogous in its static state to gold and fire, that it represents a sort of vital energy which is present in the serpent metaphore. Unlike the serpent energy, the gold represents that energy whether held captive by the serpents or free to be used by the psyche. Lust for this gold is dangerous— it causes strife amongst gods and men, but gained and controlled it leads to great spiritual power, as in the case of Sigurd. Gold is the dragon's heart of the Volsung Saga.

Fehu also refers to cattle and to livestock more generally. In the myth of the beginning of the world, Audhumla is formed, a giant cow whose milk feeds Ymir as he grows. The cow liked the salty rime that condensed from the mist of Niflhiem until the likeness of a man appeared in the ice. His name was Bor, and he married Bestla, the daughter of Bolthorn. Their children were Odhinn, Vili, and Ve, who sacrificed Ymir and made the world out of his body.

Again, this rune is linked to production and formation as well as vital power, which has a natural tendency to be redistributed violently or otherwise. Redistribution is one of the main trends emphasized in the Old English Rune Poem:

| | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| (Wealth) is a comfort | to every man |
| although every man ought | to deal it out freely |
| if he wants, before the lord | his lot of judgement. |

This wealth and energy is meant to be shared— it is its nature to move and circulate. When it cannot do so by other means, the result is violence, bloodshed, and death.

Divinatory Meanings

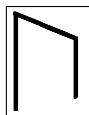
In a reading, this rune can mean many things. It is first in the rune-row and so can mean a new beginning and all the enthusiasm (fire) that comes with it. It also represents money, strife, and quarrels.

³Note how Regin very much advocated the slaying of his brother, and Fafnir warns Sigurd that Regin will betray him to, thus enticing Sigurd to kill Regin. The two brothers kill each other over gold. For more on this myth, see the discussion of Laguz below (section 6.6).

Magical Uses

Aside from its connection to prosperity magic, Fehu can be used to provide the dynamic energy to set things in motion, and also for general fiery formulas.

4.3 Uruz: The Primordial Aurochs



*Uruz->GO Urus (Aurochs)

Uruz->ON Ur (The Primal, The Aurochs)

Uruz->OHG Ur (The Primal) +Ochs (Ox) ->OE Aurochs ->Mod. Eng. Aurochs, Also *Urus was borrowed by the Greeks and Romans for their terminologies for this animal. Phonetic value: U (Rule)

The term "aurochs" refers to a now extinct breed of wild bovines which inhabited Europe through the middle ages and stood six feet tall at the shoulder. Of them, the Old English Rune Poem says:

(Aurochs) is fearless and greatly horned
 a very fine beast, it fights with its horns,
 a famous roamer on the moor it is a courageous animal.

This animal does not appear in the myths or legends, so we can only guess at its significance. The animal does not appear to have been alive to Scandinavia. Nonetheless, it would have been a familiar sight to the Germanic peoples during the Migration Age and was probably explicitly placed in the Furthark for deep mythical reasons which are now lost to us.

Yet despite its forgotten nature, the Rune remained in the Younger Futhark, though its symbolism changed. There is no consistent imagery in the Norse Rune Poems, though the themes often remain constant. The Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme reads:

(Slag) comes from bad iron;
 Oft the reindeer runs through the hard snow.

and the Old Icelandic Rune Poem states:

(Drizzle) is the weeping of clouds and the lessener of the rim of ice
 And (an object for) the herdman's hate.
 Shadow or shower⁴ "Leader"

Again, one should note that the story of the creation of the world begins with fire and water coming out the Void of Potential. Where Fehu is fire, Uruz is water and ice. Note the recurrent imagery of cold water in both poems. Furthermore, the Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme refers to Ur as "Slag," emphasizing the impure/primal nature of the mystery.

Again, one should note the possible linguistic connection between orlog and uruz. Both represent primal powers, and formidable ones at that.

As I have mentioned before, the Indo-Europeans tended to fear the primal, personifying it, as the Old Icelandic Rune Poem does with winter storms, or at least threatening weather. The primal is represented in the winter, in the storms that threaten the lives of those in the community, and also of the primal elements of the psyche, though the myths admit to the idea that life would be impossible without the primal. This theme is recurrent in the Celtic myths and arguably so in the Greek stories as well, so it may be at least of Indo-European origin if not universal.

⁴The word that appears here is "umbre" (Latin for shadow), but most translators have argued that it should refer to a shower instead but compare with the translation of the second passage of "The Wanderer" in Chapter 3 above.

Uruz can be thought to represent the vitality of the Aurochs, its courage and strength, but it also represents the primal on a deeper level. It represents the cold drizzle in the autumn or spring, and the slag which is driven from the iron by divine purifying processes. So Uruz can be thought to represent any large, powerful force of nature, and that awesome quiet which comes from walking in the deep wilderness just after a snowstorm before the clouds have parted.

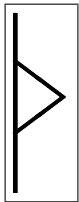
Divinatory Meanings

Uruz can represent endurance, wilderness, vitality, or health, but also illness and impurity (not in a moral sense, rather the need to cleanse something).

Magical Uses

This rune can be used to lend strength, health, or vitality, and also to aid in the purifying process as an aid to recovery from illness.

4.4 Thurisaz: The Giant and the Thorn



*Thurisaz->ON Thurs (Old Norse rune poems)
Thornuz (Thorn) -> OE Thorn ->Mod Eng. Thorn.
Phonetic value: Th (Thatch)

The thurses are those of the races of primaeval giants that are either descended directly from Ymir or else possibly existed before him. They represent raw potential unguided by any sort of divine order— in fact that makes them a sort of enemy of divine order. So Ymir gives form to the world, but Surt and his minions shall destroy it with fire and kill Freyr (See 6.7 Ingwaz below).

The Norns are mentioned in Voluspa as giantesses, though it may be more appropriate to think of them as etins, and hence representing the primal world rather than thurses representing the primordial potential.

In Skirnismal, part of the curse mentions a three-headed thurse.⁵ In one particular reference, the poem specifically links it the rune ("I carve a thurse for thee and three more"). In particular, this reference seems to equate the rune with emotional intensity with regard to both attraction and repulsion ("Lechary, lothing and lust"). These threaten her with an unhappy marriage or else no marriage at all.

And so the Old Norwegian and Icelandic rune poems call the rune the "curse of women," though they differ otherwise. The Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme warns:

Giant causes anguish to women;
misfortune makes few men cheerful.

Similarly, the Old Icelandic Rune Poem states:

(Thurse) is the torment of women And the dweller in the rocks
And the husband of the giantess Vardh-Runa.

Saturn "Ruler of the Legal Assembly."

⁵See stanzas 31 and 36

The last line of this stanza is particularly enigmatic, but a close look reveals that it is quite closely tied to the at least one of the other statements. In the original Icelandic, no word for giantess appears, and so the last line might be more simply translated "and the husband of Varð-runa." Varð-runa can be translated as "Cairn mystery" or less probably "Warding Mystery." Varð(cairne) is not only related to the German word warte ("watch-tower") but also the English word ward (and by a different etymology, guard). The general sense in the other Germanic languages of the cognate words center around ideas of watchfulness and guardianship.

One interpretation of the last line is that it refers to the warrior in the watch-tower, or perhaps a promordial guardian. The association of Varð with rocks is, perhaps, an indication that this is to be taken both literally as well as allegorically.

A second point is that Varð-runa might make her husband protected in the same way that the thorns protect, causing pain to those who try to harm him. The association of the thorn with this stave is found in the Old English tradition, and the Old English Rune Poem states:

Thorn is very sharp; for every thegn
 who grasps it; it is harmful, and exceedingly cruel
 to every man who lies upon them.

The last line might also be translated as "Those who rest among them."

At first glance, the rune poem seems to simply reiterate the dangers of this rune and its association with misfortune. However, the symbolism is particularly rich and parallel symbols can be found throughout the Germanic realm.

In the Volsung saga, the valkyrie Brynhild disobeys Oðinn's wishes and gives victory to Agnar while slaying Hjalmgunnar instead. In revenge, Odhinn pricked Brynhild with a sleep-thorn so that she might never again fight in battle, but rather be wedded. Brynhild, however, took an oath never to wed a man who knew fear. She was awakened by the fearless Sigurd. This same symbolism is found in the German folk tale, "The Sleeping Beauty" where Rosamond is fated by the actions of the wise woman who her father excluded from the celebratory feast to die after pricking her finger on a spindle (note how the spindle in this case appears to be similar to a thorn). This curse is moderated by the last wise woman who is able to lessen it so that she falls asleep for a hundred years after which time she is wedded. When the curse takes effect, a wall of thorns rises up around the castle and time ceases within until the hundred years pass and she is awakened with a kiss.

Not only is the symbolism remarkably similar, but it is found within a complex structure from which it cannot be removed. In both cases, it is a failure on the part of a powerful person which sets the curse in motion, and the resulting curse puts a woman into a deep sleep from which she can only be awakened by meeting the ordained husband. In both cases the thorn functions like the curse in Skirnismal as a curse of women.

There are notable differences as well. In the Volsung Saga, the story is tragic. Sigurd weds Guðrun and his death is set in motion by Brynhild. Also, it is Brynhild herself whose deeds set in motion her curse. These details are in stark contrast to "The Sleeping Beauty." In that story, Rosamond's father to fulfill his obligations necessitates her curse by the wise woman (gender reversal), and the story has a happy ending. These differences, however, show very little except that the stories are not identical. Whether they are descended from a common root or derived from a common symbol set is not demonstrable. However, the parallel symbolism cannot be ignored.

This rune signifies raw potential and its breakthrough into the universe in ways which, like the sacrifice of Ymir are constructive, or, like the actions of Surt during Ragnarok, destructive. It represents powerful primaeval emotions like fear and lust, and it also represents misfortune.

Many modern writers have associated this stave with Thorr and his hammer Mjólnir. There are

certainly various thematic reasons for this— Thorr wields what seem to be awesome primordial powers (in the form of lightening) against the Giants. This is likely to be what I call a secondary attribution. It flows from the themes, but is unattested directly in the source material. However if one is to accept this attribution, then this stave would have hallowing properties as well, as Thorr's hammer was deemed to have such capabilities in myth. In this regard, there are two further points that deserve discussion.

First, in this case, the relationship between Thorr, Sif, and the grain harvest needs to be understood. The sexual association that many have placed on this stave owes to this interaction and not the Rune Poems discussion of the stave being the curse of women. The Norse believed that lightening storms in the summer would bring a good rain harvest, and that lightening storms on the eve of a wedding was also fortunate. In this case, Thorr represents a beneficial sky/weather god who is married to an agricultural goddess and the lightening is representative of their sexual relationship.

Secondly, Thorr's main role among the Aesir is protective, yet he has hallowing capabilities. In one story, he visits with a human family, and they feast on Thorr's goats. Thorr swings his hammer over the goats and they are whole and living again. This function goes well beyond mere protection and war, and adds substantial depth to the character of Thorr.

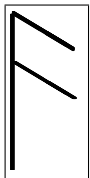
Divinatory Meanings

Breakthrough and potential being made manifest. Also can signify general misfortune and especially that which creates a state of stasis.

Magical Uses

Sleep, curses, to bring potential to manifestation, and to put into a state of stasis. Also could be used in hallowing.

4.5 Ansuz: The Mouth and The God



Ansuz ->OE Oss (Mouth?)

Ansuz ->ON As (pl. Aesir)

Phonetic value: A (Father)

This rune poses some additional linguistic and comparative difficulties. The name is one of the few which we do have direct record of its form in the Elder corpus. However, the rune poems do not hold to a specific interpretation of this rune. Furthermore, little survives of the name in the modern languages. Again, however, a pattern emerges under close study, and one can see the relation that this rune has to Óðinn.

Our main source of knowledge concerning this rune is in the Rune Poems. Especially with the lack of linguistic evidence to draw upon, these must be examined closely and within the greater context of the corpus of mythology in order to determine the significance of its mystery. The Old Icelandic Rune Poem states:

(Ase) is the Olden-Father and Asgardhr's chieftain
and the the leader of Valhalla.

Jupiter

"Point-Leader"

Thorsson translates the first line (Old Icelandic "algingautr") as the "Olden Father" but a purer sense is probably in the phrase "The Olden-Warrior" (Gautr is a name of Oðinn related to the Mod. Eng. Goth, and connected in Old Norse to concepts such as war and battle.

These three phrases clearly reference Oðinn in an unambiguous way. He is the father of the gods, and so called the All-Father, and their chieftan. His hall is Valholl, located in Gladsheim, the fifth hall mentioned in Grimnismal. He is far too complex to cover in any depth here, except for a few key mythical points.

As alluded to in this poem, Oðinn is a sovereign god. His is the chief among the Aesir, and the patron of royalty. He selects who dies in battle, with the aid of his valkyries, and the their souls become part of his heavenly army which will fight Fenrir, the wolf, at the end of the world. He is also called the cargo-god and seems to have inherited some third-functionality.

The Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme states:

(Estuary) is the way of most journeys;
But the sheath is (that way for) swords.

Arguably, this points again to Oðinn in his aspect of the cargo-god (ON Farmatyr). Oðinn is, also, associated particularly with the sword although he does not wield one in battle. The sword was symbolic more of sovereignty than might in the Volsung saga presumably because it carried with it the weight of its previous economic implications.

In contrast to the swords of the Greeks and Romans, the Celts invented a technology for making swords which was quickly copied by other peoples of northern Europe called "pattern welding." While this technique could be used to make swords and other weapons of vastly superior quality to the homogenous iron weapons of the Mediterranean, the process was also far more costly; it could take a smith a month or more to make a single sword, so only the sovereign could afford them. The Germanic peoples quickly adopted this technology, and when the Goths swept through Europe and brought an end to the Western Roman Empire, they also brought with them pattern-welding technology and the connection of the sword with sovereignty. In fact the use of the sword in knighting and coronation rituals probably owes much to the Germanic peoples, either Gothic, Franks, or Norse.⁶ For example, a sword is given to Sigmund by Oðinn, and as long as is in one piece, Sigmund has victory, but when Oðinn breaks Sigmund's sword, the tide of battle turns on him and he is defeated. The fragments are reforged for his son Sigurd and are instrumental in the slaying of Fafnir, the dragon. Also note that Freyr's doom in Ragnarok is sealed when he gives his sword up as dowery in order to marry Gerd.

The unifying theme of the stanza (involving the estuary and the sheath) is that patience and caution are generally necessary. Just as one does not go boldly sailing into the open sea, so too does one keep the personal sovereign power available but unused unless it is clear that it is necessary.

While the surface meaning of the sheath and sword metaphors may incline one to conclude that the Rune Poem is warning one to generally leave one's sword sheathed, there is deeper, more mythic element as well. Oðinn gives Sigmund the sword by thrusting it into a tree and stating that any who could pull it free could have it (certainly related to the Arthurian sword and stone story).⁷ If we accept that the tree represents a metaphor for human existence and the sword for sovereign power, then the sword remains sheathed in the tree in most people. It is only in the greatest and most sovereign that are able to unsheath the sword and apply its power.

⁶See Edge and Paddock, pages 24-26. They attribute the rise in symbolic status of the sword in Europe's Middle Ages to the Viking invasions, but I reject this theory on the grounds that the Goths and Franks were in a greater position to influence the symbol set of Europe. Furthermore, the rise of knighthood occurred first in lands with strong Gothic or Frankish influence.

⁷For a more thorough discussion of this story, see the discussion on the Elhaz rune below (section 5.8).

The Old English Rune Poem presents yet another angle on this rune:

(God) is the chieftain⁸ of all speech,
 the mainstay of wisdom and comfort to the wise,
 and for every noble warrior⁹ hope and happiness.

Here, communication and wisdom are mentioned. In several places Havamal connects these two concepts. However, both concepts are inherently connected with the OE god Woden and his ON cognate, Oðinn. In fact the name Oðinn means "Master of Oðr," and Oðr can be translated as "frenzy," but also as "song" or "inspiration."¹⁰ Watkins goes on to translate the Germanic Woðanaz (-> Oðinn) as "One who Incarnates Shamanic Wisdom," being descended from the Indo-European root *uet.

As for the title Ansuz, it is one of the few rune names associated with the Elder Futhark which is actually found in inscriptions. Polomé derives the name from terms meaning "Holder of the Reins" which places it in an interesting place with regard to the Raiðo stave that follows it. If this is to be derived from such meaning, then it is worth addressing a fairly common Indo-European theme which occurs in various mystically oriented writings from Plato to the Bagavad Gita: the soul as a chariot.¹¹

Plato, in his dialog *Phaedrus*, describes the soul as a chariot drawn by two horses representing the good and bad sides of our nature. The charioteer's job is to learn how to control the bad horse and encourage the good horse. In the Bagavad Gita, the horses are the senses and are to be restrained via asceticism. In both cases, it is the ruling principle in the self which must constrain and properly channel the primordial aspects of oneself through discipline and some detachment, and by extension self-mastery. I suspect that the Norse would have seen the horses as representing primal emotional hungers and drives that must be kept in balance with other aspects of oneself. The Old English poem *The Wanderer* mentioned in Chapter 2 of this book appears to allude to this idea in the passage:

No weary companion might Wyrð withstand,
 nor untamed heart bring help
 For this, those eager for justice oft
 the dreariness in their breast bind fast.

One must address the presence of so clear a sovereign figure in the middle of the first aett if we adopt the thesis that these aettir correspond to the three functions. The answer is actually somewhat simple. The Runes of the First Aett represent not only productive principles but the very process of creation. Oðinn is the god that sacrifices Ymir and creates the world in the first act of sovereignty, and that the result of this action was the production of the world as we know it. One should note how the three preceding runes have both primordial and production-oriented aspects while the following runes in the first Aett center much more heavily around the production and wealth theme that the Indo-Europeans tended to ascribe to this rank. Lastly, one should note that this theme of the sovereign transforming the primal into the productive is also found commonly in Old Irish mythology and in the Rig Veda as well in many guises including the War of the Functions.¹² Oðin's presence here serves to transform and create the producing Aett from the primordial wilderness. This in itself is at once sovereign and production-oriented.

Yet this rune has distinct significance in itself. It refers not only to the sovereign divine power that the sword represents, but also to the faculties of inspiration and speech which were given to

⁸Might also be translated "source"

⁹The Old English word used here might be a form of eorl ("Earl") though others have suggested that it might be distinct and related to the "Eruli" (PGmc Erilaz).

¹⁰Watkins, Calvert *How to Kill a Dragon* p118. Watkins links this word to "Shamanic Wisdom."

¹¹Note that most tarot decks adopt the description of the chariot from Plato

¹²See Dumézil, Georges. *Gods of the Ancient Norsemen*, chapter 1.

humanity by Oðinn and his brothers, Vili and Ve in the process of creating humans from trees.

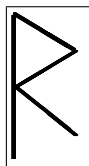
Divinatory Meanings

Soverreign action, speech, inspiration, leadership, communication. Also, the gift of consciousness which allows for soverreign action.

Magical Uses

To encourage communication, speech, sovereign action and consciousness. Also can be used to help protect the traveller, and to promote leadership. Because of its connection with conscious action, it can be used to strengthen any magical work.

4.6 Raiðo: Riding



*Raiðo -> OE Ridan ->Mod Eng. Ride, road, and raid.

Raiðo -> ON Riða (Ride)

Raiðo -> (possibly) Old Irish Riad (Journey)¹³

Phonetic value: R (Rainbow)

The etymology of the name of this rune signifies travel, in particular, the act of travelling. The Rune-Poems bear this out as its primary significance All three translate this rune as "Riding," though the angles they take on this concept is different. All three mention riding by horse, and while such travel is common enough not to be noteworthy by itself, there are some exceptions which should be discussed.

There are certain myths and legends where the image of riding a horse presents some important symbolism. One of these incidents occurs in the Volsung saga after Sigurd marries Guðrun. Brynhild, in grief for having lost her beloved Sigurd to Guðrun (by magic), uses her magic to call forth a wall of fire around her which none can enter except for Sigurd. Gunnar tries to leap the fire on his own horse, but his horse shies away, so he borrows Sigurd's horse with the same result. Sigurd, however, is able to disguise himself as Gunnar and ride the fire on his horse. Sigurd could have easily walked through the fire, but he rode his horse.

One may well ask whether this decision on Sigurd's part was based on practicality or symbolism. This episode takes just outside Brynhild's hall, so distance could not be a factor. More importantly, the legends actually speak of the flames falling back, not simply being endured. For this reason, I can see no reason why the story should be told this way except for symbolic impact. Sigurd's actions commit him to a violent death, and he "starts down that road" when he rides through the flames in the guise of Gunnar.¹⁴

The Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme states:

(Riding), it is said, is the worst for horses;
Reginn forged the best blade.

The second part of this poem concerns the Volsung saga again. Regin the the dwarf who reforge's Sigmund's broken sword for Sigurd. Twice Regin forged a great sword and twice Sigurd broke it over

¹³The borrowing could have gone the other direction as well.

¹⁴Chapter 29. The episode is used at once to show Sigurd's point on no return and the fearless nature of the hero. The poet particularly praises Sigurd's courage in the poetic interlude.

an anvil. When Regin complained that Sigurd was a hard man to forge for, Sigurd replied that Regin was untrustworthy just as the rest of his race. Sigurd then procured the broken sword and had Regin reforge it. The sword actually split the anvil that time as well as cutting a tuft of floating wool from the force of the stream current.¹⁵

It is this sword that he later uses to kill Fafnir and Regin before riding to the Hindar Fell where he uses the same sword to rescue Brynhild from her slumber by cutting her armor from her. Furthermore, it is the same sword that was given to Sigurd's father by Oðinn, and a symbol of divine sovereignty reforged by a producer, a dwarf. The reforging of the sword begins Sigurd's great journey and is his traveling companion almost as much as his horse. It should further be noted that in the Middle Ages in Europe, the sword and the horse were considered to be the main travelling companions of a knight and many heroic poems (such as the Song of Roland) depict the knight talking to his sword and/or horse.

The Old Icelandic Rune Poem states:

riding is a blessed sitting and a swift journey
 And the toil of the horse.
 Journey "Worthy-man"

of the Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme. Here the concept of riding is described in three closely linked ways. Like the previous example, there is the reference to the hardship that it places on the horse. Here we have the reference to the swift journey, and a reference to the notion of moving while sitting down.

The Old English Rune Poem is even less mythic in its references than the Old Icelandic Rune Poem:

(Riding) is in the hall for every warrior
 easy, but very hard for the one who sits up
 on a powerful horse over miles of road.

This rune signifies travel, both literal and metaphorical. It is the rune of journeys, swiftness, etc. It is also the toil of horses, and because the horse is a symbol of partnership, and a Rune¹⁶ which relates to coordinated effort and sacrifice for one's partners.

This stave may also be connected to the wagon of the sun described in Grimnismal 38 and 39 owing to the fact that the angular portions of the stave make a Sowilo stave. This wagon is drawn by the horses Arvarkr ("Early Awake") and Alsvith (All-swift), and these are cooled by two bellows. Finally, a great shield Svalin ("Cooling") is fixed under the sun to protect the earth from its heat.

Also, in many Scandanavian womens' names, one might note a -rid suffix. This suffix is also linguistically related to this stave and usually means something to the effect of "she who rides with." So Thorrid is "She who rides with Thorr," Ingrid is "She who rides with Ing," and Sigrid is "She who rides with Victory." Here we have the notion of a feminine presence in the wagon connected with the spiritual power of the holder of the reins, but distinct from him. This could indicate some sort of partnership or spiritual bond, or it could reflect a part of the soul as chariot metaphor.

Divinatory Meanings

Travel, swiftness, coordinated effort, and sacrifice for ones partners. Also setting out in a new path, or a change of luck. This rune can signify an action which changes the outcomes of many other important events.

¹⁵Chapter 15. Fafnir is slain in chapter 18. and Brynhild awakened in chapter 21.

¹⁶See section 6.4 which covers Ehwaz below.

between the two sets of imagery. Odhinn is enflamed by desire for the daughter of Billing. When he returns, having allowed himself to be misled, the warriors are awake, and torches burn high. His disappointment is in allowing himself to be misled— not reading his heart aright. Oðinn's desire burns like a sore. Even the clear signal of the torch is not enough for him to allow himself to see the truth that he has been betrayed.

This rune represents a sort of basal energy similar to Fehu but tied to an object. Serpents, being the maggots themselves that grew in Ymir's body are an example of such as are their brothers, the dwarves. This energy can manifest in feverish illness and infected wounds, or it can manifest in inspiration and clear vision. The energy embodied in Fehu and the energy embodied in this rune can be exchanged easily; these runes are like cousins.

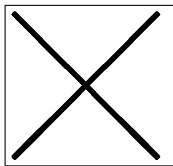
Divinatory Meanings

This rune can represent sickness and fever, but it can also represent breakthroughs in consciousness and vision, and the formative changes (as per the dwarves). It can also represent enlightenment or fire.

Magical Uses

To cause fire, fever, or infected sores. To enflame with desire, or to inspire to see the truth. Can be used with the Fehu and Elhaz runes in regards to the Helm of Terror.

4.8 Gebo: To Give



*Giftiz -> OE Gift -> Mod Eng. Gift. (cognate ON gipt)

Gebo -> OE Giefu -> Mod Eng. Give

Phonetic value: G (Gold)

The words Gift and Give are of common Germanic origin, and cognates for these words are found in essentially every Germanic language. The word had deep significance to the the ancient peoples of Northern Europe, and did not have the sense of unilaterlness that it does today. Gifts were often seen as a way of building the ties between people, as a way of forming community (notice that the rune is part of the Mannaz and Dagaz rune below).

This rune was not included in the Younger Futhark, which contained only sixteen of the runes of the Elder Futhark. As a result, there is only one Rune Poem that mentions it: The Old English Rune Poem.

(Gift) is for every man a pride and praise,
 help and worthiness; (and) of every homeless adventurer
 it is the estate and substanse for those who have nothing else.

This poem must be taken in context with the poetic traditions of the Germanic Peoples. Generous people were praised in the poems, especially those who had been friendly to the poet (as Arinbjorn was to Egill). This trend is represented not only in the Scandenavian literature but also in the Old English poetry. Watkins also shows that this is a common Indo-European theme as well.¹⁸

Perhaps more important is the notion that a gift given is something that one can count on. For those who have no estate, the gifts they give are returned in shelter and often a strong arm in battle.

¹⁸Watkins 186-187. He also looks into the reverse, where niggardliness is satirized.

Gifts build friendship, as is mentioned in several places in Havamal. This particular poem shows the importance of gifts. For example, if one wants to win the love of a woman, one should speak fairly and give freely.¹⁹ If one wants the troth of a woman, one should pledge (give) troth and keep it, and Havamal says that she will give hers as well. Small gifts can bring true friends.²⁰

Here is also the great mystery of Oðinn's gift of himself to himself. Oðinn sacrifices himself on the tree in an offering to himself so that he can learn the mysteries. This story is far too rich to cover in any detail, except that through this gift is vital in bringing forth the inspiration and allowing Oðinn to dring from Oðroerir (Inciter of Inspiration). This inspiration leads him onward as one word lead on to another word and a work lead on to another work, so that he learned eighteen mighty incantations.

Finally, one can see this rune in the triple gifts that were given by the gods to create humans from trees. These gifts were breath, soul, and countinence (i.e. spirit). This gift is returned in the form of the assistance we provide the gods at the end of the world.

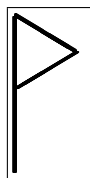
Divinatory meanings

This rune symbolizes a gift, whether divine or societal. It can also indicate new obligations or social ties as well. It can also indicate a gift being given to another.

Magical Uses

In any sort of more religious work, where something is being offered up to the gods, Gebo is appropriate. Also when giving significant gifts to others, and to encourage return of the one's investment. Also sometimes used in sexual magic, but the anceint roots of this practice are rather tentative. Particularly useful to attract people together in bonds of friendship and love.

4.9 Wunjo: Joy



*Wunjo ->OHG *wunna* -> G *wonne* (bliss, joy)
 Wunjo -> OE *wynn* -> Mod Eng. (obs.) *Win* (Joy)
 Other cognates include Mod. Eng. *Winsome* (happy), and cognates in nearly every Germanic language with similar meaning.
 There may be a connection between this run and the Obs. Mod. Eng. *Won* ("To Dwell")
 Phonetic value: W (Wander)

This rune again is not found in the Younger Futhark., and the Old English Rune Poem reinforces the general meaning of the etymologies:

(Joy) is had by the one who knows few troubles
 pains and sorrows, and to him who himself has
 power and blessedness, and also the plenty of towns.

This Rune-Poem reinforces the notion that this rune represents joy, and that this is strongly connected with one's habitation. This is a common theme in many Germanic literary traditions. From Havamal to the Rune Poems, this rune manifests in the ideologies of the Germanic peoples in a diverse yet coherent set of ideas.

¹⁹Stanza 92. This stanza closely precedes the above incident involving Billing's daughter. (see Kenaz).

²⁰Stanza 52. The precedign stanzas mention the problems of false friendship and isolation.

Happiness is mentioned in the Havamal in the early portions in relation to the self-sufficiency that wisdom accompanying success brings. The listener²¹ is advised that wisdom brings happiness because it reduces one's dependence on the advice of others. Popularity is said to bring happiness because it makes it easier to ask others for advice.²² Yet too much wisdom is said to bring unhappiness if it causes a man to know his fate.²³ Havamal also indicates that one's house brings a freedom from the reliance on others which is necessary for happiness.²⁴

On a more advanced level, this rune connects with many others in a very complex way. In the Old English Rune Poem, it completes the cycle set forth by Fehu, as freedom from sorrow, care, and trouble is the completion of the cycle which begins with comfort. The completion of the cycle of one Aett by the final rune is found in each of the Aettir of the Elder Futhark. In the second Aett, this is clearly though conflict and resolution (storm to sun), and this aspect is not lacking in Wunjo either. Wunjo is the resolution of the "Strife of Kinsmen" (Fehu) as well as the completion of the comforting aspects of that rune. In many ways the cycle which was begun with Fehu completes at Wunjo.

Additionally, there are clear references to the final rune, Othila. This rune represents land and estate, while Wunjo represents a dwelling. While the runes are very distinct, they are profoundly linked by reference, and one can think of Wunjo as being a permanent state of the comfort embodied in Fehu just as Othila is the permanent wealth. Again, the connection of Othila as a rune which ends this cycle is emphasized.

Divinatory Meanings

Happiness, joy, harmony, home. This rune generally indicates a positive mental outlook and healthy emotional state.

Magical Uses

This rune can be used to promote happiness and work with other runes to ensure that the results bring happiness. Can be used to secure a dwelling place (not necessarily buying a home or land-renting a dwelling would not be contradictory to the meaning of this rune).

4.10 Final Thoughts on the First Aett

The above runes should be well studied because they form the very foundation of the Runes. These are the production and creation oriented runes. They are particularly useful in creating results, though not necessarily drastic or beneficial. These runes bring joy and money, and so are appropriate for the level of Frey and Njorð. When fully persuaded, they lead to the next stage, the Second Aett.

In this Aett is found an esoteric account for the creation of the universe. The primal forces of fire and water (Fehu and Aurochs) produce a third, a giant (*Thurisaz) who is sacrificed by Ansuz and the order of the universe determined by Raidho and Kenaz (the heavens and the underworld²⁵). In the

²¹Havamal was certainly originally told orally, so it is more appropriate to think of the lessons being heard than read.

²²Stanzas 8 and 9. The surrounding stanzas praise intelligence but do not mention happiness.

²³Stanzas 54 to 56. The surrounding stanzas qualify the statement somewhat.

²⁴Stanzas 36 and 37. The preceding stanzas speak of travel etiquette.

²⁵See Section 6.4 which covers Ehwaz below for the heavenly connection between horses (and riders) and the heavens. Some later traditions see this rune also as a rune harmonious order, which is fitting because of the partnership that riding requires. Either way, this rune seems to reference the heavens in some way.

end are material and spiritual gifts and harmonious habitation in Midgardh, binding society together in productive and harmonious ways.

Chapter 5

The Second Aett: The Aett of Struggle

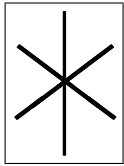
5.1 Introduction to the Second Aett

The second family of runes is filled with the turmoil of the battlefield as well as those factors which cause strife and hardship in life. These are the runes of the active principle, of the warrior, and the storm (which is, to a large extent embodied in Thorr). These runes also play a strong part in initiation. Here are the runes of darkness and death, the embodiments of Oðinn's experience on the tree.

Initiation is closely tied to the idea of the warrior. Death in battle is what brings a warrior to Valholl, and the same exists in the story of Oðinn on the tree, staked with a spear (thus marked for Oðinn). When the great night comes, the only way out is death, though this death is hopefully not physical. Metaphorical, initiatory death leads to the mysteries, to magic, and to sovereignty in ways that are profound and defy description.

While many of the runes in the first Aett were potentially hostile, the runes of the second Aett are often catastrophic. Thus they are quite useful in creating change, though this process is not always pleasant. These runes add force to talismans, and like all runes should be used with honesty and caution.

5.2 Hagalaz: Hail



*Hagalaz -> OE Haegl -> Mod. Eng. Hail

Hagalaz -> ON Hagl (Hail)

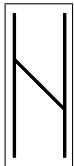
Phonetic Value: H (Hail)

Hagalaz is one of the only stave in the Elder Futhark which appears in the historical corpus with more than one basic shape. Both are shown here. The snowflake shape is the only one that appears in the Younger Futhark, while the H-like shape is the only one to appear in the Old English Futhorc and is the more common shape in the inscriptions we have from the Migration Age.

Hagalaz is a rune which is compared in all the rune poems to grain. The Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme clearly describes the formative powers of the rune in the stanza devoted to it:

(Hail) is the coldest of grains;

Christ shaped the world in ancient times.



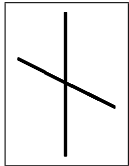
Thorsson makes an argument that Christ is a latecomer to the poem and that the poem originally used the name Hropt instead, thus preserving the rhythm and alliteration under a Christian guise. While there is little direct evidence for this thesis, it would make a great deal of sense. Hropt is another name for Odhinn, who shaped the world from the body of Ymir, the first frost giant.

The comparison of Ymir to the hailstone is quite illuminating. Ymir is created when the ice which condensed from the mist rising from the venomously cold waters of Niflheim met the sparks arising from the flames of Muspelsheim in the Void of Potential (Ginnungagap). Ymir comes to be the World through divine intervention (his sacrifice). Yet he is not only the world but the father of all frost giants. In particular, his blood became the sea, his skull the sky, his hair the forests, his brow the clouds, and his bones the rocks and mountains.

The Old English Rune Poem reinforces the aspects of this poem dealing with divine intervention and the formative aspects of the Rune:

(Hail) is the whitest of grains, it comes from high in heaven
a shower of wind hurls it, then it turns to water.

5.3 Nauðiz/Nauthiz: Need, Necessity



*Nauðhiz -> OE Nyd -> Mod Eng. Need

Nauðhiz -> ON Nauth (need, compulsion, restriction)

OE nyd + fyr (fire) -> OE niedfyr -> Mod Eng. Needfire Phonetic value: N (Need)

Particularly in obsolete usage of the word, need carries with it a sense of restriction placed upon the situation by the basic qualities of the elements involved. Friction is one such instantiation, as in the needfire— a fire produced by friction between two pieces of wood and long held to have a wide variety of magical and ritual uses. The general sense of restriction inherent in this term is well illustrated in the Old English Rune Poem:

(Need) is constricting on the chest
 although for the children of men it often becomes
 a help and salvation nevertheless
 if they heed it in time.

This poem also emphasizes the positive aspect of Need. Need is often discovered by the inner senses and is felt as a constriction of the chest. These senses can be reliable because the universe is internal as well as external. When one comes to recognize need for what it is, it becomes a help and salvation because one knows what actions are needed. In this way the sense of constriction becomes a great asset.

The Old Icelandic Rune Poem continues to emphasize the constriction-oriented elements of the rune's meaning:

Need is the grief of the bondsmaid and a hard condition to be in
 and toilsome work
 Work "Descendent of the mist".

Again, Need is seen as being an element of imposed restriction, whether it manifests as general difficulty or toilsome work.

The Old Icelandic Rune Poem has two words at the bottom of each stanza which Dickens omits. In every case, the first term is Latin while the second is Icelandic. In this case, the Latin term is "opera" (work), and the Icelandic is *niflungr* ("Decendant of the Mist").

This poem also connects the rune with the Niflungs,¹ mentioned in the Volsung saga. The Niflungs included Gunnar, and Hogni.² They carried out the actual slaying of Sigurd, and Gudhrun knows little but grief thereafter. According to the Volsung Saga, she attempts to drown herself after her second husband (Atli) dies in battle, only to commit suicide after her daughter is killed.³

The general tragedy in the lives of the Niflungs is unparalleled in Icelandic myth and legend. Even the Volsungs do not see the level of tragedy that this family encounters. It seems fitting, then, to associate a rune of trouble with such a family.

Also in the Volsung Saga, we have a direct reference to the rune. Brynhild/Sigdrifa bids Sigurd to scratch the rune on his nails to avoid being betrayed by another man's wife. He is to use this in conjunction with "ale" runes. Again, the sense of restriction based on basic qualities is shown in this example as well.

¹Each stanza has a pair of titles as described above, but which are generally left out of this book. These are probably a continuation of each stanza and serve to further describe the rune. For these translations, see Thorsson's *Runelore*. For a description of the fall of the Niflungs, see Hollander, page 268.

²Sigurd and Fafnir would arguably be included here as well because the Nibelungenlied (the German romance cognate to the Volsung saga) defines the Nibelungen as those individuals in possession of the cursed gold.

³Chapter 41. She furthermore is carried by the sea to the castle of a third king. In chapter 43, she finally commits suicide.

The final rune poem, the Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme states:

(Need) makes for a difficult situation;
The naked freeze in the frost.

Here is a warning for those who succumb to the difficulty or do not heed the need in time. Those who journey without the necessary precautions will find their very lives threatened. Furthermore, ice is associated with constriction in the creation myth, as Ymir was created out of the fire and ice– the fire melting the ice and the ice constricting the fire until it was the shape of a man. So even here, the sense of restriction holds up.

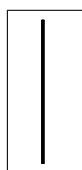
Divinatory Meanings

This rune can mean general difficulty and friction, that things will not go the way one wishes. It can also mean that there are some necessary directions that need to be taken and perhaps these may not be apparent yet. Lastly, it can also mean that the nature of the outcome will be determined by the general characteristics of the items involved, not the effort and will put into the situation.

Magical Uses

To cause difficulty or build strength (not recommended– these are better done through outward conscious action). To impose restriction on a situation, especially where the general characteristics of the entities involved naturally work with the restrictions. Lastly the rune can be used to take all the friction and need and ignite a flame, like a needfire, and thus provide a breakthrough.

5.4 Isa: Ice



*Isa -> ON Iss (Ice)

Isa -> OE Is -> Mod Eng. Ice.

Isa -> OHG Is -> German Eis.

Phonetic value: I (peach)

Ice has a very complex role in Germanic, and especially Norse cosmology. The creation of the world began with fire and water, but that water gave rise to mist which condensed into ice and formed the material matrix from which Ymir and hence the world was formed. In this respect water is the true source of all matter, but through an intermediary form of ice. This idea is likely of Indo-European origin, as it is found in the guise of philosophy among the first surviving sources of the Greeks.⁴

Thales, the first of the great Milesian philosophers argued that the world was full of spirits or gods, and that water was the source of all matter. Anaximander, his pupil, on the other hand, saw the fire of the sun as the source of life, and the source of matter to be infinite and indeterminate, like the Ginnungagap.

The third Milesian philosopher, Anaximenes, does break this pattern by arguing that because the soul is likened to air, that air must be the source of all matter. While Anaximenes does show some conservative leanings with his analogy of the soul to air, an analogy found among the Norse as well as the Hindus, his insistence of the air being the primal matter seems to indicate that the Greek

⁴See Runes, page 1168 and Heisenberg, page 60. Heisenberg's analysis is particularly keen.

tradition by this time had become more fragmented than the Norse tradition. Air/mist however is an intermediary stage between the creative water and the creative ice.⁵

Ice is the intermediary form by which water becomes the source of all matter. It also represents constriction and stillness as it is devoid of fire, the primal animating principle.⁶ Ice condenses from the still mist, and the Hel is surrounded by ice– in fact it is entered on a broad bridge of ice. The Old Norse Hel, like Hades, is not a place of punishment, but rather a common afterlife and place of rest for the ordinary souls.

The broad bridge of ice is also possibly a metaphore for the frozen ice that accumulates on the top of rivers, and this is possibly alluded to in the Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme:

(Ice), we call the broad bridge;
The blind need to be led.

The connection with death also appears in the Old Icelandic Rune Poem:

Ice is the rind of the river and the roof of the waves
and a danger to fey men.
Ice "One who wears the boar helm"

Ice is describes as a danger to men doomed to die. While the danger of death by falling through ice would have been very real to the Norse, I think that the meaning is more mythic than that. Ice is associated with Hel in many ways as is discussed above, and but Norse Rune Poems have a tendency to use mythic symbolism where possible. The mythic interpretation in no way disregards the literal, for without the literal, it cannot maintain its symbolism. Instead, the mythic simply builds upon the literal and physical and makes them more meaningful.

There is a kenning for sword which is "Valkyrie ice," and has already been identified as a symbol of sovereignty. Here, the kenning is aimed primarily at the aspect of the symbol which relates to the battlefield. The valkyrie is definitely an emissary of divine sacred order on the battlefield,⁷ and the sword is an instrument of their will rather than of the warriors. It still relates to the battlefield but is not directly second-function.

The Old English Rune Poem shows a different aspect of the rune:

(Ice) is very cold and exceedingly slippery;
it glishtens, clear as glass, very much like gems,
a floor made of frost is fair to see.

Here we are shown the beauty of ice, though we are warned of its cold and slippery nature. The stanza is very obscure, and seeminly very literal. Little can be said about this stanza.

Divinatory Meanings

This rune can indicate that the current plans will lose their drive and stagnate. In this aspect, the force is absorbed and the plan must wait or die. The rune can also indicate that form may be given to the plan and that this will allow it to be successful. In either case, perseverance will be necessary to see fruition.

⁵One might also argue that the gaping nothing of Ginnungagap is also another form of air.

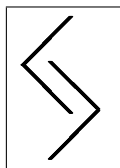
⁶Again this has its roots in older ideas and is also found among the Greeks. See Runes' edition of the writings of Heraclitus and Anaximander, and Heisenberg's analysis of these fragments.

⁷See Appendix A

Magical Uses

To give form to an action or plan, or to bring things to a state of stillness. To bring a plan to death, and to crystalize and formulate the will.

5.5 Jera: Year, Harvest



*Jera -> OE Ger -> Mod Eng. Year

Jera -> ON Ar (Year)

Phonetic value: Y (Year)

This rune is a tune of the passage and cycles of time. In particular, it makes reference to the harvest when the crops which have been in the ground for the fertile part of the year are finally brought in to feed the people through the winter. It is a time when the hard work, patience, and wisdom is rewarded with tangible results.

While this rune is fundamentally a third-function rune, it has significance within the order of the surrounding staves. The grain of Hagalaz is toiled over (Naudhiz), gains form (Isa) and is eventually harvested, in a third-function interpretation. Yet one could also see Jera as representing the spoils of battle. However, this rune is surrounded by death-runes, though those runes have initiatory significance as well. This rune symbolizes the cycle of life and death in the cycle of the year.

Every one of the Rune Poems makes mention of the harvest. The Old English Rune Poem states:

(Harvest) is the hope of men, when god lets,
holy king of heaven, the Earth gives
her bright fruits to the nobles and the needy.

The god mentioned in this poem is certainly clearly a Christian gloss, and the original reference was probably to Fro Ing (the Old English equivalent to Freyr). This god is mentioned in the Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme, which states:

(Harvest) is the profit of men;
I say Frodhi was generous.

Frodhi is another name for Freyr, who, as we have seen, occupies the third tier responsible for dispensing wealth, a theme mentioned in the Old Icelandic Rune Poem:

(Harvest) is the profit of all men and a good summer
and the ripened field.

Year "All-ruler"

In general, this rune seems particularly tied to the profit of men, and represents a point of payoff where the totality of the effort and production come to pass. Like Ansuz in the first Aett, this is also a transition rune from productive strife and storm to death, battle, and a new arising.

There is another undercurrent that needs to be discussed here as well. Havamal lists harvest as one time when a person must arise early if he has few reapers. Harvest is hard work. It is a struggle, and although this has, perhaps, primarily a third-function set of associations, it is also very much a rune of struggle. Yet while the preceding runes are crisis runes involving death, constriction, and destruction, this rune represents the struggle with the end in sight, where the struggle can be directly profitable, but which, if the opportunity is missed, will be likely to bring ruin through hunger and starvation.

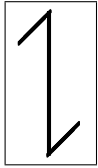
Divinatory Meanings

This rune can indicate a time of harvest or reward, when all the toil will pay off and one's needs can be fulfilled. It indicates an end to a cycle and that one's goals will likely be realized. Even if they are not, the situation is likely to improve greatly.

Magical Uses

To bring harvest and reward. To improve the situation, to attract wealth or other substance. To bring plans to fruition.

5.6 Eihwaz: The Yew



*Eihwaz -> OE Eoh -> Mod Eng. Yew

Eihwaz -> ON Yr (Yew)

Eihwaz is presumed to be cognate with the Spanish Iva (Yew), M. Lat. Ivus.

Phonetic value: EI (not found in English, between Error and peach)

The Yew tree is a fruit bearing evergreen (actually the female trees bear fruit while the male trees are conifers) which is extremely poisonous. This in itself is unusual as most conifers are reasonably edible. Furthermore the flesh of the berry is reasonably safe as long as one does not swallow a seed (please do not try this– the seeds are deadly). In addition to its venomous nature, the wood is extremely resilient and strong, making it ideal for the creation of bows, adding to its connection with death. Paradoxically, the tree is extremely long lived, so it is sometimes a symbol of immortality.

Voluspa describes Yggdrassil as an ash, evergreen, standing above Urdh's well.⁸ Many have assumed that Yggdrassil is a yew tree, though I have argued that the primary significance of the narrative is to point to the correspondence between the human condition and the World Tree. The association with the Yew tree is, however, not without merit. First, one should point out that Oðinn dies on the tree in the search for the runes. While the ash may be connected with warriors, the yew is connected rather directly with the concept of death. More importantly, one should note the connection of the World Tree with immortality. The tree is broken by Ragnarok but continues to live thereafter and even gives shelter to Lif and Lifthrasir during the end of the world that the human race might begin anew.

The connection with death is markedly illustrated by the Old Icelandic Rune Poem:

(Yew) is a strong bow and brittle iron
and a giant of an arrow.
Bow "Descendants of Yngvi"

Here we have reference to the deadly nature of the rune. Arguably, this stanza also points to an untrustworthy aspect of the rune. Brittle iron can cause death of the wielder in a battle.

The other rune poems highlight two other aspects of the tree: its connection with fire and its evergreen (Immortal) nature. In particular, the Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme states:

(Yew) is the greenest wood in the winter;
And there is usually, when it burns, singeing.

⁸Stanza 19. This stanza occurs in the middle of a narrative about the creation of men and their fate.

Directly parallel to this stanza is the corresponding stanza in the OIRP:

(Yew) is on the outside a rough tree
and hard, firm in the earth, keeper of the fire,
supported by roots, (it is a) joy on the estate

In both the preceding poems, the tree is referenced as eternal, firm, evergreen, as it is an exceptionally long-lived tree. Interestingly, it is also connected with fire in these two poems. This rune is the first rune of the second half of the Futhark and the connection to the Fehu rune is thus tempting to make.

This connection may have merit for contemplative reasons, but one should be cautious about projecting too much on the early runic system. The connection of gold to fire is fairly well established, so the reference to fire could be historically meaningful. However, the rune poems which mention the fire are not the Old Icelandic Rune Poem, the only poem to directly mention fire regarding Fehu. It is also possible that there was a shift of meaning in the other rune poems. I think that on the balance, however, that the evidence does support an allusion to the first rune. Fire and gold were connected deeply in Norse mythology, and it is not surprising that the Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme, as short as it is only mentions it indirectly. Furthermore, the Norse traditions were closely enough woven to assume that they came from analogous traditions. What was said by one poem could have just as easily been said by the other. It should be further noted that by the time the Rune poems were written, any structure of halves would have been distorted in a way that the basic Aett structure was not, so it is not surprising that if this was systematically linked in the Elder tradition that this link was forgotten by its decendent traditions. I think that the evidence points to the possibility, of not a probability of such a link being conceived among the followers of the Elder Tradition.

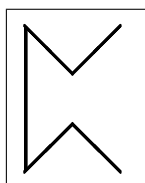
Divinatory Meanings

This rune signifies death, initiation, and transformation. It also signifies eternity and a finding of the cosmic fire (vital energy). The change that this rune signifies is difficult and often painful but one is better off for it. When it can be endured, the immortal aspects of ourselves are brought out.

Magical Uses

Death, transformation, initiation. This rune is also found in some archeological charms for protection. This rune can bring resilience and protection as well as harm.

5.7 Perthro: The Lot Cup



*Perthro -> OE Perth (lot box?)

No other certain etymologies.

Phonetic value: P (Peach)

The origins of this rune name is a mystery. There is only extremely limited evidence upon which to draw any reasonable conclusions as to the meaning and significance of the name. Even the meaning of the name is not certain, but the most plausible theory to date seems to be that the name translates as "Lot Box."

Of the decendent traditions, only the Old English Futhorc contains the rune. The stanza in the Old English Rune Poem is as follows (accepting Thorson's translation):

(Lotbox) is always play and laughter
among bold men where warriors sit
in the beer hall happy together.

The reference appears to be to a sort of game of luck, perhaps some form of informal gambling. The Old Norse seemed to believe less in chance and more in a sort of operant "Luck" principle called Hamingja which could help to form and forge the world on subtle levels. The sense of the rune then is more of a manifestation of luck, a coming forth of the forces of Urð.⁹ Also, the lot box was probably also often used in various forms of divination including those using lots of runestaves.

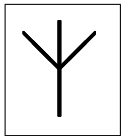
Divinatory Meanings

This rune tends to signify a surprising change of luck, or a significant and unexpected event. It can also represent a manifestation of the ephemeral principles (i.e. Runes) into life. It can also indicate that Urdh's web of fate has become inescapable.

Magical Uses

To open the lot box and make the unknown known. I have found this useful in the magical elements of divination but also in other ways to "open the lot box." Could also be used to make an unmanifest goal manifest.

5.8 Elhaz/Algiz: The Elk



*Algiz -> OE elch, eolh (Elk)

Algiz -> Goth. Algis (Swan?)

Algiz -> ON Elgr (Elk)

Phonetic value: final z. (not found in English, somewhere between road and Zulu)

The Modern English "Elk" may come either from OE Elch or ON Elgr.

This rune again does not appear in the Younger Futhark in any direct form, and only appears in the Old English Rune Poem, which states:

(Elk's) sedge has its home most often in the fen
it waxes in water and grimly wounds
and burns with blood any bairn
who in any way tries to grasp it.

This poem is, however, quite rich in its symbolism and meaning. First, Elks sedge is a kenning for sword, so the rune is taken to mean sword as well as Elk or Sedge. The sword is a symbol of sovereignty, and here is a strong warning against those who try to grasp sovereignty too soon. This symbolism is backed by the connection between water and the leek, which has long had connection with sovereignty.¹⁰

Yet, in the Volsung saga, it is only the youngest son of Volsung, i.e. Sigmund, who was able to pull the sword from the tree. There is reason to believe that this concept was not foreign to the Old English, at least at the time of the writing of the rune poem. The Volsung Saga was written down fully

⁹See chapter 3 above.

¹⁰See section 6.6 below discussing the rune *Laguz/Laukaz.

developed when the Arthurian tradition was still nascent, indicating that the shared symbolism was unlikely to have been borrowed from the Arthurian tradition. Furthermore, the complex structure of the stories has remained more similar than the surface details, indicating that the traditions did not merely borrow themes from each other but rather share a common root.

In the Volsung Saga, Sigmund pulls the sword from the tree after the supreme magic god Odin places it there. He then goes on to become a great king and dies in battle, leaving the broken sword to his son. Sigurd, then, has Regin repair the sword and slays Fafnir, and thus begin his exploits. Like his father, Sigurd dies a violent death which is foretold on several occasions. Similarly, Arthur pulls the sword from the stone after it was placed there by the supreme magician and semi-divine Merlin. Like Sigmund's sword, this sword too is of divine origin, having been given by the Lady of the Lake. Arthur becomes a great king, dies in battle, and the sword is returned to the Lady of the Lake.

There are notable differences in outlook and theme, and these cannot be denied. While Sigmund is given his sword directly by a male god, while Excalibur is given to Arthur by the female Lady of the Lake, with the semi-divine Merlin as an intermediary. The lordship of Sigmund and Sigurd lacked any real institutional backing while Arthur not only was king of a country, but also formed institutions (i.e. The Knights of the Round Table) to preserve it.

Many of these differences serve to show the cultural mixing that contributed to the developments of the Arthurian stories.¹¹ The Celtic emphasis on maidens of the Well cannot be denied, nor can the impact of the Middle Age social structure. However, this complex theme does not appear elsewhere in the Indo-European myths and legends. Because much of the development of the development of the Arthurian tradition developed in areas of substantial Norse influence (note the Norse impact on the English Language) it is reasonable to assume that the stories were carried with them. This assumption is born out in that there are monuments which bear figures from the Volsung Saga on the Isle of Man and Great Britain.¹² It then seems likely that the story of Sigmund was the antecedent of this part of the Arthurian story. This influence would have come about during the Viking age, during the Old English period, though it could have even occurred further back, as Beowulf contains a short allusion to Sigemund Waelsing (Sigmund Volsung) a couple of centuries earlier.¹³

Each of these sovereign kings dies in battle, and Sigmund is immediately struck by the burning power of the sword, for Siggir's jealousy causes the death eventually of all his siblings. All his brothers are killed by Siggir, while Signy, his sister, willingly dies as her revenge on Siggir becomes complete.

The sword has a particular connection with the Valkyrie, a sort of cross between an idealized lover, a guardian angel, and an angel of death (to use terminology which is easily understood in our culture).¹⁴ The Lay of Völund also connects the Valkyries to the ritual use of swan skins much the same way that the Berserks were connected to bear skins, so the linguistic connection with the Gothic word for swan (if accepted) substantially strengthens an emerging pattern.

The Elk also appears in the Volsung Saga in Gudhrun's dream where, as the noblest of animals, it represents Sigurd. When Ragnarok becomes fierce, Freyr unsuccessfully defends himself against Surt, the lord of the Fire Giants, with an antler— he had given up his sword as dowry. In all cases, the Elk represents a form of sovereignty much akin to the sword and in many cases directly connected to it.

¹¹The Celtic emphasis may also be responsible for the shift from the "sword in the tree" to the "sword in the stone" as sacred stones (Scone/Fal) have been long associated with sovereignty in Celtic lands.

¹²Byock, page 7.

¹³Beowulf, lines 973 through 875. See Byock page 21. Note that the Beowulf summary treats Sigemund as the dragon slayer, so it is an open question whether this represented a merging of the characters of Sigmund and Sigurd, or whether Sigmund also filled much of the role of Sigurd in the original tale.

¹⁴See the Second Lay of Helgi Hunding-Slayer. These are also recurrent themes in the Volsung Saga.

One might note this rune's connection to Isa. The Old English Rune Poem mentions water, and it was water that preceeded ice. The sword is connected with both runes. Yet these runes are very distinct, though interconnected. The sword of Isa is the instrument both of death and of materialization while the sword of Elhaz is the sacred transcendent power which guides the manifestation of the ice and begins to rise up.

This rune, then signifies the coming of sovereignty and the precursor to the completion of initiation. It represents the Valkyrie, and the Elk. Most importantly, it represents the warriors ability to become sovereign.

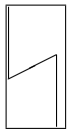
Divinatory Meanings

Protection, divine aid. Contact with one's Valkyrie. A rising after death (Eihwaz). A noble or sacred person.

Magical Uses

Protection, to call upon the gods for aid. To enter into contact with one's valkyrie.

5.9 Sowilo: The Sun



*Sowilo -> ON Sól (Sun) *Sunnen- -> OE Sunne -> Med Eng. Sun. OE Sigel (Sun, as per Rune Poem) cognate to German Sieg, Old Norse Sig, etc, as menaing victory. Hence sigalder (originally "Victory spells") came to mean incantations or charms.
Phonetic value: S (Sun)

In all the rune poems, the sun is associated with shining glory, and the victory after the storm of battle. Sometimes, as in the Old English Rune Poem, the meaning is in the subtlety of the linguistic connection that the Old English term has with victory:

| | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| (Sun) is by seamen | always hoped for |
| when they fare away | over the fish's bath ¹⁵ |
| until the brine-stallion ¹⁶ | they bring to land. |

The Old English Rune traditions have generally called the sun by the cultic name of Sigil, derived from a common root for victory. Here the sun is the force which is hoped for because it brings the safety of fair weather, and hence protection from a watery death— such a death might have had implications for the afterlife, if the pagan Old English traditions were similar to the Norse.¹⁷

One should also note that in the Second Lay of Helgi Hunding-slayer,¹⁸ that Sigrun ("Knower of Victory Runes") performs the same function. Even in the less mythical tellings, she plays an instrumental role in the survival of Helgi during ordeals at sea. As Helgi's wife and valkyrie, she protects him in battle until an enemy makes a sacrifice to Odhinn and then ambushes him.

¹⁵kenning for sea

¹⁶kenning for ship

¹⁷The Old Norse believed that a death at sea would not allow the warrior into Valhalla but rather such souls would be the Thralls of Aegir's court. Aegir was the god of the sea and of brewing among the Norse.

¹⁸See Hollander. This lay, unlike the the First Lay of Helgi Hunding-Slayer, was not included in the Vilsung Saga. It is, however, more informative about magic. Hollander points to some evidence that this poem may indeed be older than the First Lay.

The other poems are more clear on the role of the sun in glory and victory. The Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme states:

(Sun) is the light of the lands;
I bow to the doom of holiness.

In this context, the word doom probably refers to a judgement of the essential nature of the sun—of all the definitions for the word "doom" in the Oxford English Dictionary, this one is most fitting here. Finally, the Old Icelandic Rune Poem states:

(Sun) is the shield of the clouds and shining glory
and the life-long sorrower of ice.
Wheel. "Descendent of the victorious one"

Although some of the imagery of this poem is somewhat similar to the Old English Rune Poem, this poem actually goes further to speak of the sun as an entity which defeats ice.

The linguistic connection between the Old English cultic name Sigel for the sun and the word Seig also indicate a connection with glory and victory. One example of what may be practical instruction on this rune is found in *Sigdrifumat* (stanza 7):

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

I. A. Blackwell translated this passage as:¹⁹

Sig-runes²⁰ thou must know,
if victory (*sigr*) thou wilt have,
and on thy sword's hilt grave them;
some on the chapes,
some on the guard,
and twice name the name of Ty²¹.

In this stanza, *Sigdrifa* (or in other tellings, *Brynhild*) is instructing *Sigurd* on the use of victory runes. While this stanza also connects with the *Tiwaz* rune (see section 6.2), the connection with *Sowilo* is likely as well.

Of no small importance is the idea that the sun turns dwarves to stone. Here we see another side of the sun, one which is not merely a bringer of victory but a symbol of truth and sovereignty similar to the sword. Of particular interest in this matter is the *Lay of Alvis*, again part of the Poetic Edda. In this poem, *Alvis* has been promised the hand of *Thorr's* daughter in marriage. Rather than let his daughter be married to a dwarf, *Thorr* breaks his promise and begins to question *Alvis* about the names of the various natural objects until the sun rises and the dwarf is turned to stone.

The use of *Thorr's* peculiar method here deserves some discussion. *Thorr* is a warrior god, generally known for killing giants with his hammer. For him to resort to cunning interrogation brings one

¹⁹Originally published in 1906. I have added some formatting to make the lines match the original. The original version is available via Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org>). The text number of this translation is 14726

²⁰i.e. Victory Runes

²¹i.e. Tyr

to question why Thorr would use methods more characteristic of Oðinn in such a case. The answer is not an easy one. Unless we make some basic assumptions about the purpose of the method, it may not be possible to solve.

However, some careful scrutiny will show that these assumptions are at least partially valid. First, one must be willing to accept the notion that the entities in question are not mere external entities but also represent parts of the psyche. This assumption had been addressed in chapter 1 above. Second one must be prepared to see the dwarves as something akin to subconscious complexes which can subvert the precious gold (vital energy) to less than positive ends. This idea is present in the Volsung Saga, where Regin insists on half of Fafnir's gold, and the birds warn Sigurd that Regin will try to kill him to gain all the the gold for himself.

When these conclusions are considered, Thorr's methodology begins to take on striking parallels to modern psychotherapy. What he does is bring truth to a deceptive and greedy entity, and it is that truth which turns the dwarf to stone. The sun then takes on an association with truth which parallels the symbolism of the sword in some notable ways: (1) both are mythic slayers of dwarves. (2) both are symbols of truth, right, and sovereignty.

Divinatory Meanings

This rune is always very positive when it appears. It indicates success in any endeavor. Even when storms threaten, this rune indicates safety and endurance.

Magical Uses

Invoke for victory and success in any endeavor.

5.10 Final Thoughts on the Second Aett

The runes of the second Aett represent the storm, not only in the physical storms but also on the battlefield as well. They represent the warriors' development. The warrior starts out in a state of terrible fury bt great potential (Hagalaz), meets the hardship and necessity (Need) embodied in the confrontation with the primal forces of death and formation (Isa), and through such gains harvest . Like Isa, this is rune is dominated by third-functionality, though in this case it also embodies the active principle of the warrior. This harvest is followed by death and immortality (Eihwaz) and a change of luck (Perthro). Lastly we see the divine break through and lead to victory.

My experience of Runic self-initiation is similar. The world becomes a stormy place where one learns difficult lessons about harvest, need, and ice. Eventually "death" ensues and is accompanied by a change of luck which leads to a rising up to victory.

The Runes of the second function again give dynamism to a working. They should be used with some caution but they play an indispensable place in Rune Magic. Without them, the Runes would lack the active elements to make the necessary changes occur in a timely fashion.

Chapter 6

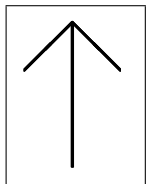
The Third Aett: The Aett of Rulership

6.1 An Introduction to the Third Aett

The third aett is made up of very benevolent concepts. These concepts in various ways express the relationship of the first function to the others. Again it illustrates the development and fulfillment of the first function through the contact with the other functions.

One should note that the word "Athlings" appears in the Old English Rune Poem primarily in this Aett. The word refers to people of noble spirit, and hence the reference is a clear reference to the connection of these runes to sovereignty. The only reference which occurs outside this aett is in the rune Kenaz.¹ That reference is, however, entirely different because it does not indicate a direct interaction between the Athlings and the torch in the way that the Runes of the third aett possess.

6.2 Tiwaz: The Shining God



PIE *dyeu- (day, lit. "To Shine") -> PGmc *Tiwaz (The god of law)
 Tiwaz -> ON Tyr (the name for a specific god as well as a common noun meaning a god hence Odhinn is Farmatyr, or cargo-god.
 Tiwaz -> OE Tiw (A specific god).
 Cognate god names include Zeus, Jupiter, and Diva.
 Non-god-name cognates include L. Dies and many other words for day.

Phonetic value: T (Tuesday)

Tyr is the Old Norse god known primarily for a single action: the sacrifice of his hand. The story is generally told that the gods new when Fenrir the wolf (and son of Loki) was born that this wolf would work their ruin. So they resolved to tie up Fenrir so that he could not work them any harm. Odin had a magic cord that was so thin that it was invisible yet so strong that it could not be broken. They then propose to Fenrir that they tie him up so that he can make sport of breaking the cord. The young Fenrir is already distrustful of the gods and will do so only on the condition that one of the gods place his hand in Fenrir's mouth as assurance that there is no trickery at work. Tyr places his hand in the mouth of the wolf and loses it when Fenrir finds he has been trapped.²

Tyr is generally regarded as a god of war rather than a sovereignty god in Scandnavian mythology. However, Dumézil claims that he is very likely the parallel of the Vedic Mitra, the god of contracts. Dumézil points out that that Tyr was almost certainly the god of the Thing (legal assembly). He then reconciles this with Snorri's statement that Tyr is not a peacemaker by stating that the Norse developed a very pessimistic view towards law. Dumézil's arguments are sound, and the picture that emerges of Tyr is less a warrior god and more a sovereign god of victory.

Many other authors have claimed that this stave represents honor. Yet in this story, Tyr loses his hand in an act of deception. In essence honor does not appear to have been a part of the Norse concept of Tyr. Others have emphasized the self-sacrificing aspect of this story. Here we have a legitimate point— Tyr willingly sacrifices his hand through an act of deception which was necessary to protect the gods. While honor and truth might have little to do with the character of Tyr in this story, the concept of self-sacrifice in support of a needed cause is at its heart.

While Tyr is by no means a warrior god, he is associated in the poem Sigdrifumal with victory.³ In stanza 7 of this poem, the valkyrie urges Sigurd to learn victory runes, to carve some on his sword hilt, some on its guard, and to call upon Tyr twice by name. Although he is not a warrior god, he is

¹see section 4.7 above.

²See Gylfaginning chapters 13 and 21. Dumézil covers Tyr in great detail in chapter 2 of "Gods of the Ancient Norsemen."

³See chapter 21 of the Volsung saga. The poem also appears in the Poetic Edda.

associated with victory. A close look at the story of the binding of Fenrir also reveals that Tyr allows the gods to be victorious but not by fighting.

The rune poems show yet another picture, but one which is complimentary to, or rather explains the view that, Tyr is a god of victory. These poems tend to see Tyr/Tiw as a heavenly guiding force, or an invisible sovereign force which is above and beyond action. The Old English Rune Poem compares Tiw (OE form of Tyr) to the North Star:

(Tiw) is a token, it keeps troth well
with noble men always on its course
over the mists of night, it never fails.

Another reference to Tyr's sovereignty is found in the Old Icelandic Rune Poem:

(Tyr) is the onehanded god and the leavings of the wolf
 and the ruler of the temple.
Mars "Director"

While the first two lines clearly refer to the story of Tyr and the binding of Fenrir, the third poses some difficulty. One would initially associate Oðinn's brother Ve, whose name means "Sacred,"⁴ with the rulership of the temple. However, the line could in fact be an anachronism from a much earlier time. If Tyr was originally the god of social order and sovereignty along side Oðinn (sacred order and sovereignty) then he have originally been the parallel of the Vedic Mitra. In contrast to Varuna to whom the improper sacrifices belonged, to Mitra belongs the sacrifices properly done. While to Varuna belong the objects that the fire siezes, to Mitra belong those objects offered to the fire. Varuna, like Oðinn/Vili/Ve is the god of the spirituality of the Otherworld, and Mitra, as Tiwaz may once have been, was the god of this world and its practices, yet no less sovereign than his sacred counterpart.

The last Rune Poem also is somewhat problematic. The Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme states:

(Tyr) is the one-handed among the Aesir;
 The smith has to blow often.

However this stanza does have some reasonably accessible meaning. While the fist image is that of the story of the binding of Fenrir, the second line contains a cryptic explanation of sovereignty.

The image of the smith blowing on the coals deserves some esoteric analysis. The Norse, like many other Indo-Europeans associated the breath with a kind of spiritual force or energy, not too dissimilar from the Hindu concept of Prana, though the latter is a more philosophical development. In this case, the breath from the bellows is being used to make the material reality right for production of metalworks by heating the coals.

The relationship of the sovereign king to this world is a strong one throughout the Indo-European world. In many cases, the king is likened to the sky, and is thus responsible for the very meteorological elements which make agriculture possible. This idea was taken so far by the Celts that the king was responsible for the welfare of the land, which could fail by an act of injustice. In any case, it is the spiritual power of the king which is accountable in this case. In many ways the image of breath descending upon the coals in order to make smithing possible seems in many ways similar to the idea of the rain falling from the heavens bringing fertility to the fields. In both cases, the spiritual force which descends makes the production possible.

⁴See Thorsson's *Green Runa* pages 41 to 45 for a particularly fascinating article on the subject of old Germanic concept to "The Holy."

One of the most hotly debated subjects in the field of comparative Teutonic mythology is the question of when Tyr's role became restricted. If we are to accept Dumézil's surface arguments, the development of Tyr as a god with a reduced influence may have been a development specific to the Norse. In essence there are three possibilities: Either Tiwaz was the supreme king-god as some have argued, he shared the position at the highest tier with Óðinn as Dumézil argues, or the divine mythology was similar in structure during the Migration Age to what it was in the Viking Age. I personally think the truth is somewhere between the last two possibilities.

Those who argue that Tiwaz was the supreme, unchallenged god place him in a role similar to that of Zeus (who bears a cognate name) or Jupiter ("Sky-Father"). This argument suffers from a number of problems. First, it should be noted that in terms of character and myth, these two gods are far more similar to Thor than to Tyr. Secondly, the Greco-Roman pantheon structure is reasonably regarded as problematic from the perspective of Indo-European comparative mythology.

Dumézil argues that Tiwaz would have had a role similar to Mitra and been the god who ruled the social order and hence been the god of kingship. Dumézil argues that the poetic and iconographic tripartite formula would indicate a role in Norse Myth equal to that of Óðinn.

Where Dumézil errs, I think, is in assuming that the King is a member of the first function with the same sense of permanence that the Priest is. In both the Vedic and Celtic traditions, this is simply not so. Indeed here the king represents a warrior who has risen up to take on the responsibilities that come from the role of King.⁵ The King in the Indo-European world is the one who bridges the First and Second functions. Furthermore, Tacitus actually mentions Mars (i.e. Tiwaz) in the second function rather than in the first, indicating either that Tiwaz had already assumed a smaller role in Germanic society by then or that Tiwaz also belonged in the second function.

In summary, this rune is a rune of victory and divine order of this world. It achieves these associations by embodying the very principles of sovereignty as embodied by the Indo-European peoples, though the Old Norse rune poems seem somewhat anachronistic in their attributions. It also represents the warrior rising up to become the King, in charge of the social order.

Divinatory Meanings

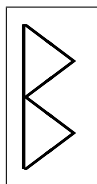
This rune indicates victory in all things, though it may necessitate a sacrifice. The rune can also indicate good guidance or that one is headed the right direction. In any event, it indicates that success is at least possible if not imminent. It can also indicate justice may be at hand.

Magical Uses

To promote justice or victory. To move things in the right direction. To correct circumstance, or to promote sovereignty. To assist with initiation.

6.3 Berkano: The Birch

⁵This is not to say that certain families would have been looked to first for this role, but the role of King was not hereditary in the same way it was in Medieval Europe



*Berkano (Birch) from PIE *Bhergo ("Birch") probably from *Bhereg ("To glisten, white")
 Berkano -> OE Beorc -> Mod Eng. Birch
 Berkano -> ON Bjork
 Cognates exist in every Germanic language and also in the Indo-Iranian languages such as Sanscrit, Parsee, etc.
 Phonetic value: B (Birch)

This rune poses some difficulties in interpretation. The Rune Poems are contradictory on some points, and even those that are agreed upon have no clear meaning or reference. One is left to look elsewhere for context for the statements made, and even these conclusions must be tentative. There is no great mythic imagery contained in the Rune Poems, but with care, a picture can be made clear.

The Old English Rune Poem states:

| | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| (Birch) is without fruit | just the same it bears |
| limbs without fertile seed; | it has beautiful branches |
| high on its crown | it is finely covered, |
| loaded with leaves, | touching the sky. |

This poem makes reference to three traits: sterility, beauty, and magesty. The trait of sterility clearly places it in the camp of the sacred sovereign or else the Primordial. While one might be tempted to try to connect the image of the sickly white, sterile Varuna of the Rig Veda to this rune, the analogy does not fit and there is no reason to assume that any similar concept existed among the Norse, except in a thematic link to sovereignty.

The traits of beauty and magesty necessitate a sovereign interpretation of the rune. Instead, the birch could be better compared to a young princess or prince, fair and magestic, but both young and not yet fertile or verile. These figures contain within themselves the nascent forms of sovereignty which will at some point manifest. By this interpretation, those who see Berkano as a rune of fertility do not entirely do so in error. It is a rune of incubation, or rather it is a rune of the outward manifestation of what is being incubated.

The interpretation of the sterility if Berkano being associated with youth is backed by the Old Icelandic Rune Poem:

| | |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| (Birch-twig) is a leafy limb | and a little tree |
| and a youthful wood. | |
| Silver Fir | Protector" |

The connection between birch and youth becomes striking. On a more subtle level however, one is challenged with the folk custom in Northern Europe of self-flagellation with birch switches to promote vitality. I maintain that these concepts are very clearly tied together. Youth is by nature energetic, and if one takes the leaves as a symbol of life energy or even luck (ON "Hamingja"), as was seen in above, then every rune poem makes reference to the link between birch and vitality.

The final rune poem may make some slight mythic reference, though this is somewhat conjectural. The Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme states:

| |
|---|
| (Birch-twig) is the limb greenest with leaves |
| Loki brought the luck of decept. |

In addition to the afore mentioned link with vitality, this stanza may make reference to the Lay of Thrym, where Thorr, with the aid of Loki, disguises himself as Freya– this is the only place in the Eddas where Loki is outright deceptive in his tactics. Loki usually is mischevious but usually at least is nominally truthful. Here, however, he outright lies to protect Thorr and help the god which is generally his enemy to retrieve his hammer.

This story requires some description. Thrym had stolen Thorr's hammer and would only give it back on the condition that the Aesir give Thrym Freya as his bride. With Loki's help, Thorr is disguised as Freya and sets off to the land of the giants along with Loki. When he arrives at the hall of Thrym, he is unable to contain his appetite and would have been discovered were it not for the quick words of Loki who explain Thorr's hunger as being related to heat of the journey, and he again conceals Thorr's identity when Thrym is shocked by the intensity of Thorr's gaze through the veil. Eventually, Thorr is in a position to take back his hammer and he gleefully slays Thrym and all the giants in the hall.

A close look at this story reveals a pattern consistent with the notion of this rune representing the incubationary process. Thorr is the entity which is being incubated by the bridal disguises and by Loki's quick words. In this way he remains in a state which could not be manifest as Thorr until he is able to emerge with Mjolnir to slay his foes. Furthermore, Thorr is an entity who represents the active, vital principle, so he is a prime candidate for the story.

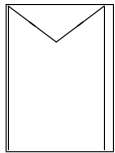
Divinatory Meanings

This rune signifies a period of hidden development after which the goals can be met as the project can emerge vital and full of life.

Magical Uses

To allow things to grow in secret, for fertility, prosperity, beauty, or even majesty.

6.4 Ehwaz: The Horse



*Ehwaz (Horse) From PIE *Ekwos

Ehwaz -> Eoh (Horse)

Ehwaz -> NHG Eh (Marriage)

Cognate with Latin Equus, Old Celtic Equuns (-> Gaulish Epona, the name of a horse and war goddess)

Phonetic value: E (Enter)

This rune again poses some linguistic difficulties in part because, of the decedent traditions, the rune only appears in the Old English Futhork, while the linguistic evidence points to some profound divergent trends. Furthermore, although the horse does not feature in the rune-row of the Old Norse, it strongly features in the myths and legends, and also in the kennings.

The linguistic connection between Ehwaz and the New High German Eh ("marriage") are actually quite meaningful. The horse was not only a "vehicle" for travel but also a traveling companion. In medieval poetry, the war horse is a companion, and knights often talk to their horses and swords. This rune then symbolizes companionship.

The Old English Rune Poem states:

(Horse) is, in front of the warriors, a joy of noble men,
 a charger proud on its hooves; when concerning it, heroes—
 wealthy men— on warhorses exchange speech,
 and to the restles it is always a comfort.

This poem makes reference to several points of interest. First, this rune makes direct reference to the corresponding stanza of the fourth rune (Ansuz). Ansuz clearly is connected with the god Óðinn

and Oðinn with his horse Sleipnir (One who Slips). Sleipnir is the son of Loki and an Etin-stallion, and this story is worth repeating.

Asgard's wall was built by an etin disguised as a human who claimed he could perform the work at an astounding pace so long as his payment would be the hand of Freya in marriage. The Aesir felt that the job would be impossible to do on time and so they agreed. The Etin had but one horse. As the time went on, it became apparent that the Aesir were wrong in their assessment and that at the current rate the giant would finish the work in time. In their desperation, they turned to Loki who took the shape of a mare and distracted the etin's stallion just as the gatehouse was nearing completion. When the giant saw what was happening, in his anger he resumed his gigantic form. When Thorr saw him, he slew the etin with his hammer. No one saw Loki for some time after that, but when he returned, he was in the company of an eight-legged colt named Sleipnir, whom he gave to Oðinn.

It is worth noting that Loki's other children are Fenrir the wolf (the wolf who slays Odhinn and swallows Tyr's hand), Iormungand (the serpent who slays Thorr) and Hel (the "goddess" who presides over the dead). His remaining child becomes Odhinn's steed. Oðinn himself is associated with death and destruction, and he is not without his demonic aspects, so this dark pattern is found even here. However, it is seriously mitigated by the sovereign influence of Oðinn.

When Sigurd, as a young man, goes to buy a horse, he meets Oðinn in the form of a stranger who advises him to pick out Grani, a horse descended from Sleipnir himself. He is with Grani when he leaps through the wall of fire to meet Brynhild. This action not only seals his death but also takes him to the point where he should have been meeting his own betrothed (hence the connection with companionship and marriage again).⁶

The concept of a horse is also common in kennings for ships, and these appear in the stanzas of the Old English Rune Poem relating to Sowilo and Laguz. Furthermore, this kenning is found in many other Indo-European poetic traditions as well.

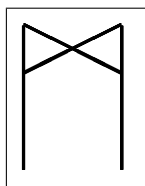
Divinatory Meanings

This rune can indicate love and companionship, but also motion and a means of achieving one's goals.

Magical Uses

In love magic, and also in general to produce a general harmonious motion to move toward a goal. Also in the assertion of sovereignty.

6.5 Mannaz: The Man



*Mannaz (Man, Human)

Mannaz -> OE Mann -> Mod Eng. Man

ON Madhr (Man) not linguistically related.

Phonetic value: M (Man)

This rune represents Man in all the rune poems (i.e. a human of either gender). For example, the Old English Rune Poem states:

⁶See the section on Raidho (4.6).

(Man) is in his mirth dear to his kinsment;
 although each shall depart from the other;
 when the lord wants to commit, by his decree,
 the frail flesh to the earth.

Here we see the themes of societal connection and separation by death associated with this rune. This theme is repeated in at least one of the other rune-poems: the Old Icelandic Rune Rhyme:

(Man) is the joy of man and the increase of dust
 and the adornment of ships.
 Man "Generous one"

Here we see the same themes appearing in a tripartite structure rather than the bipartite formula of the Old English Rune Poem. The Old English Rune Poem breaks this down into societal connection/joy and separation/death. This is a simple bipartite formula of Argument + Negated Argument common in the conservative Indo-European styles of poetry⁷ and may be taken in this case to mean the totality of human interaction. The portion of the formula of joy/societal connection has, in the case of the Old Icelandic Rune Poem undergone a doubling so that the Joy/Societal connection now is doubled appears on both sides of the Negated Argument (Argument + Negated Argument + Synonymous Counterargument).

However, the Icelandic verse contains an interesting twist: the last phrase is actually synonymous with both the argument and the negated argument. The phrase "adornment of ships" hints at the societal bonds of a Viking raiding party. Here is death as well as social ties and mirth all connected within the same kenning (so structure is actually a bipartite formula + synthesis).

The general sense of these formulas seems to sum up the totality of the experience of the human world: close friendship/kinship and death/separation, battle and mirth. However, the last remaining Rune Poem takes a more pessimistic view. The Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme states:

(Man) is the increasing of dust;
 Mighty is the talon span of the hawk.

Here we have what may be a summation of the last two lines of the Old Icelandic Rune Poem. Thile the first line here is identical with the second line of the Old Icelandic Rune Poem's stanza on this rune and the last line of the two stanzas are thematically similar. In both cases, the sense of battle and strife is implied in a predatory way, whether by the Viking ship or by the diving hawk.

This rune can then be said to summarize the social elements of the human world from fraternal love to war, kinship in life to separation by death, of mirth and sorrow. In order to better understand this mystery, we must understand the myth of the creation of humanity. Snorri's Edda⁸ tells how Bor's sons, already identified as Odhinn, Vili and Ve walk along the sea-shore and created man and woman out of two logs. Odhinn gave breath and life (sovereign principles), Vili gave consciousness and movement (active principles), and Ve gave the senses of hearing and sight along with face and speech (productive principles). This is mirrored in reverse by the story of how the three classes of Thralls, Karls, and Earls were created by Heimdall (Thralls first, Karls second, and Earls last).⁹ Humans, then, like the gods contain the same structures as society.¹⁰ As a result this rune can indicate the totality of inner experience as well.

⁷See Watkins, page 43.

⁸Gylfaginning, chapters 9 and 10.

⁹See Chapter 2 above.

¹⁰This is not an idea by any means restricted to the Norse. It is in fact fundamental to Plato's Republic among other sources.

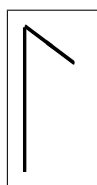
Divinatory Meanings

This rune tends to mean some sort of social change or interaction which will be influential in the development of the situation at hand. It can also indicate some inner or mystical experience which will impact the current situation. It can also indicate separation as well as union.

Magical Uses

This rune can be used for purposes of socially binding people together, to enforce contracts, and the like.

6.6 Laguz: The Water



*Laguz (Water) from PIE *lak-
 Laguz -> OE Lagu (water)
 Cognate with Latin Lacus -> O Fr. Lac -> Mid Eng. Lac -> Mod. Eng. Lake
 Cognates exist in nearly all Indo-European language groups, for example Gr. Lakkos, Old Irish Loch and Old Bulgarian loki.¹¹ All cognates appear to concern water, lakes, pits, basins, and the like.

Phonetic value: L (Lake)

This rune is quite a complex one. The word *Laguz itself probably originally meant "water" as in a pool or a lake, of the cognates are any indication. All of the Rune Poems refer to pools, lakes, or the ocean (which the Norse, and possibly the other Germanic peoples, seemed to see as one very large, salty lake).

The Old English Rune Poem states:

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| (Water) is to people | seemingly unending |
| if they should venture out | on an unsteady ship |
| and the sea waves | frighten them very much |
| and the brine-stallion | does not mind its bridle. |

Here the reference is clearly made to the sea. As was mentioned above, the Norse, and possibly the other Germanic peoples, saw the sea as a great, salty lake. The creation myth tells how Bur's sons—Oðinn, Vili, and Ve—fashioned the world out of the body of the sacrificed Ymir. Ymir's blood became the lakes and the ocean, which was placed in a huge circle of earth so large that men might think that they could never cross it.

The Old English Rune Poem also makes reference to the uncertainty of the sea voyage, and takes a particularly pessimistic view of this rune. The Norse saw the sea depths as a sort of underworld equivalent to that which existed beneath the solid ground. It is here that Aegir makes his hall, and his thralls (servants) are the souls of those who were lost at sea. One should note that serpents could also dwell in the sea as well as in the land, i.e. Jormungand.

Another similar, albeit more complicated, reference is made in the Old Icelandic rune poem:

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| (Water) is a churning lake | and a wide kettle |
| and the land of fish. | |
| Lake | "Praise-worthy one" |

¹¹See the Oxford Latin Dictionary, page 995.

Here we have references to both destruction and production. The churning water surely refers to the effects of a storm at sea, and the land of fish seems to make reference to the capacity of the sea to feed the people. The second line seems to reference the basic shape of the sea as told in the creation myth as contained within a circle of land. However, it too may reference by metaphore the food-producing role of the water.

Water appears in the creation story as the poisonous (deadly cold) source of form in the universe, and in the end, it shall overwhelm the world before Surt brings fire and burns what is left. In this aspect the rune represents a very dangerous but powerful tool for creating results. It is also connected with the past. Mimir's Well is where Odhinn's eye was placed, and Mimir's name means "Memory."

Also Urð has a well, and this not only reinforces a connection with the past but also connects the rune to fate. This connection is further reinforced by the Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme: (Water) is (that),

which falls from the mountains with a force;

But gold (objects) are costly things.

Immediately one is reminded of the story of Otr and the gold. Otr was the brother of Regin and Fafnir, a skilled fisherman, and had the form of an otter by day. Loki killed him and Otr's father demanded as ransom the otter skin filled with gold. Loki fished the gold out of the pool below Andvari's fall and showed it to Andvari (another dwarf). The dwarf refused to part with one of the rings, so he cursed that ring to be the death of any who owned it, and the rest of the gold too. Fafnir then killed his father to obtain the gold, and Regin bid Sigurd to slay Fafnir. Sigurd then slew Regin to protect the gold and was eventually ambushed and slain, and the gold split between the Niflungs (Gunnar and Hogni), who then die terrible deaths.¹² The gold was particularly costly.

Water then represents a primordial underworldly force which is deadly and powerful. It can refer to fate and past influences, and it is productive in function.

This rune may also be associated with the Leek (ON Laukr, O. Germ. Laukaz).

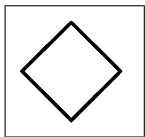
Divinatory Meanings

This rune can indicate a formational stage, much like Isa. It can also indicate past influences, helpful or otherwise, and danger as well.

Magical Uses

To promote growth and vitality, to aid in memory, and in the exploration of the past.

6.7 Ingwaz: A Harvest God



*Ingwaz (A fertility god)
 Ingwaz -> ON Yngvi(-Freyr)
 Ingwaz -> OE (Fro) Ing
 Phonetic value: Ng (Song)

Yngvi-Freyr is a fertility god, and his function is clearly third function. Like Njordh, he is a dispenser of riches, and was probably invoked in marriage rites. He is armed with an antler,

¹²This is a brief summation of a very large portion of the Volsung saga.

having given up his great sword to marry a giantess, Gerd, and is slain by Surt in the great battle of Ragnarok.

One of the themes in the mythical material concerning Freyr is the story of how he once sat on Oðinn's seat whereby he could see everything that was in all the nine worlds. He saw a beautiful giantess named Gerd, the daughter of Gymir. In the end, he gives his sword (sovereignty) up in dowery to Gerd and arms himself with an antler. The curse by which Freyr's envoy Skirnir compels Gerd to marry Freyr is mentioned in passing in the section on Thurisaz above. Freyr dies in Ragnarok in a duel with the fire giant Surt because he no longer has his sword. Here Freyr has given up his sovereignty to ally himself with the primaeval forces which are somewhat representative of the very forces of his destruction. However, this is necessary because the primordial is necessary for fertility of the land.

The Yngling saga also speaks of idea of Freyr being a previous sovereign god. Many of the kings were descended from him. While it is tempting to think of Freyr as a demoted god, this is, I think to be avoided. The gods by their very nature represent a sort of otherworldly sovereign influence, and I think it is closer to think of the myth another way. Before Freyr gave up his sword, he was not fulfilling his potential as a fertility god. His marriage to the giantess allows him to fulfill this role at the cost of his life. Here we have the marriage of the heavenly and the earthly which is also a repeated theme in Norse (and other Indo-European) myth, though this could be universal.¹³ This union results in Freyr becoming the god of the fields and the harvest. Furthermore, his armorments change from symbols of sovereignty to symbols of the forest and the natural world.

The Old English Rune Poem states:

(Ing) was first among the East-Danes
 seen by men until he again eastward
 went over the wave; the wain followed on;
 that is what the warriors called the hero.

Here Fro Ing is connected with the east, and is seemingly connected to war. However, a close look at the thematics reveals a different picture. Other than his association with warriors in the poem, and his designation as a hero, there is no reason to apply a warrior title (which is, in Norse poetry very generic) to him in this poem. Secondly, he is connected with the sea, having come from across it, and making his way back. The sea, as we have seen, is a chthonic realm, associated with the third function. Third, there is no reason to associate him, any more than any other god as a warrior god. The fertility gods of many other Indo-European cultures are armed and sometimes do battle, so his slaying of Beli and dying in a match with Surt in the Norse tales are not surprising.¹⁴

In essence Freyr represents the seminal fertility influence. He is, like Njordh, a dispenser of riches, but generally on a more natural level. He is also connected with love and marriage and can be called upon in these cases as well. He is a god of productive union.

Divinatory Meanings

This rune is often interpreted as a sign of incubation owing to its pictographic connection with seeds. However, I find little in the myths and poetry to make this a primary interpretation. I find it to indicate union, productivity, sustenance, marriage, and love. Also possibly wealth. It can also indicate a sacrifice, however, of sovereignty and truth.

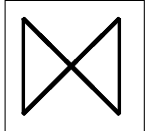
¹³Note that Odhin and the Earth mate and the result of Thorr. Also note Leda and the Swan, and many other Greek stories. The Celtic tale of the begetting of Cuchulainn is a bit more distant yet similar enough to see it in the same light.

¹⁴See Dunazil page 78. The whole of chapter four is worth careful study in this matter, however.

Magical Uses

Prosperity magic, and for love, marriage, and success.

6.8 Dagaz: The Day



*Dagaz (Day)

Dagaz -> OE Daeg -> Mod. Eng. Day

Dagaz -> ON Dagr

Not related to Latin Dies, but rather related to an Indo-Aryan root dhagh (-> Sanscrit Dah, to burn). Also probably related to Lithuanian dagas (Hot season) Old Prussian

Dagis (Summer).

Phonetic value: D (Day), ð(This)

Linguistically, Dagaz seems to represent the heat and light of the sun, and this is born out in the only rune-poem directly related to this rune, the Old English Rune Poem:

(Day) is the lord's messenger, dear to men,
the ruler's famous light; (it is) mirth and hope
to rich and poor (and) is useful to all.

In particular the poem refers to day as light, and this is similar to the related Slavic and Aryan words which reference related words by their heat. Here the cycle returns to fire, as is seen in Ragnarok. While it must be noted that this is a slightly unorthodox view of this rune in the modern traditions, I think that it is well supported by the linguistic evidence and the sequence of the last four runes in relationship to the story of Ragnarok (see below). Furthermore, the association of Day with Fire is tentatively upheld in Vafthruðnismal where the horse Skinfaxi (Shining Mane) is said to bring day and Hrimfaxi (Frost-Mane) is said to bring night. Here again we have the duality of fire and ice, and fire is day while ice is night.¹⁵

Dagaz is often interpreted as a rune which indicates a sort of awakening. This interpretation is also very valid. The Old English Rune Poem speaks of Day as a divine messenger, and one can only assume that this is ment to indicate that a certain awareness beyond the sensory awareness is represented by the rune. Furthermore, it is well worth pointing out that humans are not nocturnal creatures, so a connection between Day and awakening would likely be universal. Furthermore, when Brynhild is awakened by Sigurd, she exclaims "Hail Day and the suns of Day! / Hail Night and the daughters of Night!"¹⁶ Although this is not strong evidence, it may reinforce the association with the notion of "awakening."

This rune symbolizes light and fire, and the awakening that comes with daybreak. It also symbolizes the breaking forth of truth (as in Alvis being turned to stone by the sun at daybreak).

Divinatory Meanings

This rune tends to indicate an awakening at some level. It can also indicate some sort of truth coming out into the open, though this may not be a pleasant experience.

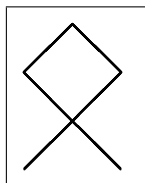
¹⁵Stanzas 11 through 14

¹⁶See Sigdrifumal and the Volsung Saga, chapter 21. Note that in some of the Eddic material (in particular Sigdrifumal) Brynhild appears under the name Sigdrifa.

Magical Uses

Awakening, and breaking forth into reality. To bring truth and a higher level of consciousness to a working.

6.9 Othila: The Estate



*Othila (Estate, Ancestry)

Othila -> ON Odal (Estate, ancestry)

Othila -> OE Ethel (Estate) Obs. Mod. Eng. Athel (ancestry, origin)

Phonetic value: O (Pony)

This rune is generally interpreted to mean "estate" or "land" because the Old English Rune Poem specifically makes reference to it:

(Estate) is very dear to every man,
if he can enjoy what is right, and according to custom,
in his dwelling, and most often in prosperity.

This interpretation is problematic for several reasons. Although, in Old English the word Ethel had primarily come to mean "Estate" the survival of older senses of the word are evident in Middle and early Modern English, where the word clearly came to mean "ancestry" or "ethnicity"¹⁷ in its decedent form of "athel." This word is in fact the root of the word atheling, meaning "of noble blood."

This stanza of the Old English Rune Poem makes little sense if it is read to refer to estate, and makes several close references to sovereignty, in particularly in the emphasis on enjoying what is right and fulfilling customary obligations. These emphasize sovereignty within a cultural group (back to ancestry and ethnicity again).

However, in many of the Germanic languages, particularly Old Norse and English, Othila was associated with the estate of a family as well as the ancestry of character (sort of a metagenetics whereby decedents pick up the fate and character of their ancestors, *either of blood or adopted*). In both cases, the familial bond is what transmits the assets, not so much a matter of environment.

This concept is well illustrated in the telling of the legacy of Ragnarok. The Aesir meet on Itha Plain after Oðinn, Tyr, Thorr, Freyr, Heimdall, Loki, and many other mythically significant figures have perished in the fighting. Odhinn's sons Baldr and Hoðr¹⁸ dwell in their father's hall, and Thorr's sons take up his hammer. In both cases the functionality of the gods is dependent on their ancestry and lineage, and there is no reason to assume that the gods do not take up their parent's estates, for the most part.¹⁹

Only slightly problematic in this equation is the idea that Hoenir takes up the rune-staves (also called blood-staves). Little is known for certain about this god, but he plays an identical role in Voluspa to that of Vili in Gyfaginning, so these gods may be identical. If so, he would be the brother of Odhinn, so the kinship link in the story would in no way be broken.

One interesting theme in this story is the establishment of a greater sovereignty than the current state of affairs. The sovereign and somewhat sinister Oðinn is dead, as is Tyr (who lost his hand in a

¹⁷While the Oxford English dictionary uses the term here "race," the ancient term was probably more along the lines of the term "ethnicity" today, relating to a cultural-linguistic group rather than one defined by physical characteristics. See Thorsson's article "Rune Wisdom and Race" in *Green Runa* (p53-58).

¹⁸The particular story of Baldr and Hoðr deserves much greater attention than can be given in this book. It must suffice to say that Hoðr probably represents "blind fate" and was Baldr's slayer. Both are sons of Oðinn. For a detailed analysis of this story, see Dumézil, *Gods of the Ancient Norsemen*, chapter 3.

¹⁹This story appears in Voluspa stanzas 58-65, and in Gyfaginning chapter 53.

false gesture of trust). Balder, however, is perfect and is now in league with Hodhr who represents blind and inescapable fate. In fact this duo may be what Volsupa may mean in stanza 64 where the Seeress speaks of a great godhead coming down to rule all, so this may not be a Christian interpolation.

In any event, the story clearly serves to illustrate the principle of inherited nobility, responsibility, and power of which Old English Rune Poem speaks.

Divinatory Meanings

This Rune generally indicates a solidity in success which will not yet fade. It can indicate a final right place to turn or to be, or lasting success. It can also indicate ancestral influences.

Magical Uses

This rune can be used to generate solidity in a desired effect, or final rightness in the situation.

6.10 Final Thoughts on the Third Aett

These runes contain, like the first Aett, a two-fold sequence, one social and one mythical. However, these appear in the reverse order of the First Aett, and the social sequence appears first. Here we have solid guiding power incubating in the young sovereign, who learns to ride, and to love, and brings this sovereignty to the Human Realm.

The second sequence is more problematic and represents, like all sequences, many things. The structural resemblance to Ragnarok cannot be ignored. All the key elements are to be found— the sea floods the land as the Midgard Serpent makes his way on land, Freyr (Ingwaz) is overcome by Surt, the fire-giant (Dagaz) and eventually the gods return to their heavenly realm and life begins anew and better (Othila),

All these runes have the capacity to bring a sort of sovereign order to a working and therefore can be a great and positive influence on any working.

Part III

Runic Practice

Chapter 7

Meditation

7.1 The Role of Meditation in Runic Practice

Before a runic magician can have great success with the runes (either in divination or magic), he or she must get to know them. In ancient times, this would be accomplished predominantly by learning the stories. This knowledge may have been crystalized through various meditative techniques now lost to us.

Meditation itself is something which is well documented to have existed in a fairly advanced state in many ancient Indo-European cultures, from India to Greece, from the Celts to the Persians. Given the large similarity between some basic ritual symbols (primarily the serpents), one may well assume that the Indo-European peoples brought a highly developed meditation system with them wherever they went. However, this conclusion is not entirely certain. A symbol hoard could have been brought by the Indo-Europeans everywhere they went and these symbols may have been applied to meditative traditions in applicable culture. Or meditation may be a proactice which may, on some level, be universal. I tend to agree with the universalists on this matter to some degree.

Meditation must play a larger role today than it did in ancient days. Few people, if any, in our culture grow up with the story of Sigurd told often in all its grandure– the closest we have is Wagner’s Ring Cycle which is often quite inaccessible to small children. Fewer are told the stories of the Norse Gods, so we must learn the runed starting at a lower level of knowledge than even the most ignorant Viking.

The meditative techniques in this book are basic and suitable for beginners as well as advanced students. We know nothing about Old Germanic meditative practices, so every excersize has been constructed rather than reconstructed. They are designed to give the student a basic understandign of the runes so that meditation or magic can be effective. Developing a basic understanding of the runes is fundamental to being able to use the runes in divination and magic. The Runes seem to represent a mythic language for communciating with the cosmos, and that language must be learned at least at an introductory level before it can be used in any sort of conversation.

It is therefore recommended that the reader meditate at least once on each rune before attempting divination or magic. Meditation should be continued for some time in order to build a strong and solid understanding of the runes which will allow divination and magic to achieve an optimal effect.

A rune’s meaning, according to Thorsson is based on six aspects of its existance (presented in his order):¹

1. Shape of the rune-stave.
2. Phonetic value associated with the stave.
3. Name of the stave.
4. Explanatory poetic stanza.
5. Order of staves– can be associated with number.
6. Tripartite division of the staves.

Each of these concepts provides a key to its meaning, so each aspect can be meditated on independently or in any combination. A beginner should start with one, and my favorite is the shape, which was deliberately omitted from the discussion of the runes in the previous chapters because we have no direct material on the menaing of the shapes of the staves. Many are, however, quite self-explanatory and therefore make fitting topics of meditation, particularly when paired with the names.

¹Runelore Page 137

7.2 A Suggested Practice

Set aside some time when you can be free from any other distractions. Sit down with a writing utensil, piece of paper and a notepad. On the piece of paper, draw the stave and its name as well as the translation and/or derivative names for the runestave. Take a moment to clear your mind of all the daily cares and worries. Focus your attention on the symbol and its names. Begin to down your ideas on the significance of the shapes and names of the runestave.

This excersize does not take long, perhaps ten minutes, so it can be done at the beginning or end of the day when other distractions are at a minimum. Furthermore, it is a flexible excersize and can be done with any combination of the factors above. Below are some additional variants:

- **Phonetic Meditation.** Try intoning the names of the runes slowly in a resonant manner. Focus all your intention on the spunds that are made and note the changes of consciousness that this can produce. This variant is best suited to those wish some experience meditating on the runes.
- **Multiple Runes.** Several runes which are related by shape, sequence, or similar phonetic value can be meditated on together. This excersize is best suited to those who already have some grounding on the Runes.
- **Paperless excersize.** This excersize or any variants can be done without any props of any kind, using the the memory and the imagination to examine the lore. I have found this variant to have a different sort of benefit than the written excersizes. It is, however, best suitable to those already well versed in runic lore.
- **Visual meditation.** In this variant, the symbol is drawn and used as a center of cocus but some or all other elements are examined from the memory. Like the variant above, this is best suited to one who already has some grounding in the Runes.

Such meditation has mystical and practical as wellas cognitive significance. By focusing on the runes, a magician allows the runes to flesh themselves out and make themselves available to the magician. These techniques can actually boost magical efforts that are underway because they keep the Runic realities present in the mind. Furthermore, divination and magic rely on skills of focus and reflection which are gained in large part though meditation. These skills are not only developed but kept sharp by the very act of meditating.

More important still is the level of initiation and growth that persuing a spiritual system in a mediational way can bring. As was discussed in chapter two, magic necessitates personal growth if it is to be constructive. This growth is achieved on many levels by the act of meditating. The act of meditating builds self-discipline, focus, and will which are useful not only in magic but also in every other area of life. Also, an ability to reflect on matters deeply is developed and this skill is usefull well beyond divination as it is the key to problem-solving. Yet on a more subtle level, meditation opens up aspects of the soul to divine energy and understanding. Through these last things, sovereignty is obtained, and the magician can become consciously aware of his life so that problems can be avoided. For these reasons, meditation should be an ongoing practice for the Runic magician.

To the would-be magician who still is reluctanct to meditate, I write this last paragraph. I never saw the value of such meditation until I tried it. The investment in time and energy is not large. Why not give it a chance?

Chapter 8

Divination

8.1 Historical Methodology

No runic subject has received the largest amount of publicity than that of divination. Runic divination was reintroduced into the popular levels of the New Age movement by Ralph Blum, and many books in print today are based upon his work. Unfortunately, Blum's work, while possibly useful to those who do not truly desire to explore the mysteries of the past, lacks any level of authentic knowledge. He does not even seem to be aware that the Futhark runestaves appear in a specific order.

However, we have enough evidence to reconstruct the ancient runic divination rituals and adapt them to modern use through an understanding of the theory and practice of the ancients. The surviving sources include the writings of Tacitus (*Germania*), and a careful look at comparative techniques.

Tacitus outlines the Germanic methods of divination in *Germania*, completed in the year 98 CE. The Germans, he says, esteem the casting of lots greatly. The procedure begins with the cutting of a branch of a fruit (or in some translations nut) bearing tree and cutting it into strips. The strips would then be marked by symbols (probably the Elder Futhark—our oldest Elder Futhark find is about 50 years older than the writings of Tacitus) and be thrown onto white cloth. Then the person administering the ritual would offer a prayer to the gods and, looking skyward, select three lots which would be interpreted by their signs. If the lots prohibit an endeavour, no further confirmation is made, but if they allow it, a confirmation is made by other means, such as by the flight of the birds or by the neighs of sacred horses. Tacitus also states that the person administering the divination would either be the priest, if it be a public matter, or the father of the house of it be private.¹

A close look at this passage by Tacitus is quite revealing. First of all, the ritual is administered by a sovereign figure (the father of a family exercised some limited sovereignty in nearly all Indo-European societies). The lots are made from the wood of a tree that bears edible fruit or nuts, emphasizing the tree's productive aspects (third functionality). Secondly, the lots are tossed out onto the cloth and a prayer offered to the gods. Then three lots are picked at random and interpreted. That Tacitus seems to say that a new branch is cut for every divination and the fact that we have no divinatory lots in the archeological record may mean that the lots were destroyed after the divination was completed (perhaps sacrificed by fire?).

The three lots have generally been interpreted to mean past-present-future and this is workable in modern practice. However, there is another possibility which is found to be equally workable. Tacitus divides the main gods into three groups. The first is Mercury (*Woðanaz -> Oðinn), the second group is composed of Hercules (*Thunraz -> Thorr) and Mars (*Tiwaz -> Tyr), and the third group is Isis, which Tacitus believes to be a foreign cult owing to the fact that her emblem was a light warship.² However Isis may be a reference to *Fraujon (-> Freya). It is well attested that the Romans referred to other culture's gods using the names of the most similar gods in their pantheon, so this assertion may stand. Furthermore the tripartite grouping of gods appears elsewhere in the writings concerning the Germanic peoples and in their poetry (see chapter 2 above), and are even found in the division of the Elder Futhark itself. The lots may represent these groups of gods and their counsel on the matter at hand. These runes would represent the situation from three points of view: (1) the king-priest. (2) the warrior. (3) the producer and distributor of riches.

Such is the tradition established by the sources. In it one can see great power, for the degree of focus and word required to make a single divination is quite high. I believe, however, that the tradition can be parted with in certain notable areas without losing an unacceptable degree of power or accuracy. In many areas, the process can be stripped down for those who have mastered skills of focus and reflection through meditation. While I can admire the power of making new lots for each

¹Tacitus. *Germania* chapter 10.

²ibid. Chapter 9

divination and giving them to the gods afterwards, I see the practice as unnecessary for the most part. Many people I know do quite well with a single set of rune-lots which they use for divination. Also, the confirmation by omens is useful only to those who do not yet have a strong grasp of the runes. This practice, in particular, seems to exist for the purpose of clarifying a reading (note that the confirmation is not done for readings which forbid an endeavour).

I am also of the opinion that the ritual need not be fixed to a specific number of lots, nor do I think that the significances of the lots need to remain fixed. In fact, like most rune-readers, I espouse a variety of methods which can be used at the will of the Runic magician.

However, I do believe that an awareness of the tradition must be a starting place, and that no constructive changes can be made otherwise. The process of seeking the Runes should be the process of going from the known into the unknown, not simply disregarding the evidence arbitrarily. Again, truth is at the core of Runic magic and other Indo-European magical and poetic traditions are in agreement.³

8.2 Preparation and Retirement of the Rune-Lots

If one is to disregard the preparation of rune lots for each individual divination, one should be prepared to compensate for this deviation from the ancient practices. The rune-lots are then best made oneself and ritually prepared in some way. Here is the basic outline of a sample means of preparing the rune-lots.

The process of creating the lots can be extended over a period of time and serve as a form of meditation for the Runic magician. Again it is recommended that one meditate on each rune at least once **before** starting this process.

First one should select the wood to make the lots themselves of and obtain a branch large enough to cut into 24 slices. The branch is then sliced and sanded down and carved with the figures of the Elder Futhark. The runes should then be dyed or painted red (ideally, the runic magician would mix a drop of his or her blood in the paint— see the next chapter). This whole procedure should be done with intent focus regarding the final outcome. In essence, each lot is prepared as a talisman, but is used for divination. I generally advise against staining the wood because the grain is such that the result is usually unacceptably dark.

The wood itself should, ideally, be that of a tree which bears edible fruit or nuts. I consider the yew tree to be an ideal tree for this purpose because it not only possesses an affinity for the Elder Futhark and represents at some level initiation, but it also produces succulent red berries which as were mentioned earlier are paradoxically edible and deadly (the flesh is edible, but the pits are deadly— again, please do not eat them). Furthermore, the wood is beautiful and makes beautiful and talismans, and the wood is smooth and pleasant to the touch. However, I have seen beautiful sets of lots prepared by friends of mine from other hardwoods, like apricot or apple, and I have seen these used quite effectively. The greatest concern is the personal significance and availability of the wood.

When the lots have reached the end of their useful life, they should be retired with ceremony and reverence. I recommend disposing of them by fire (preferably a ritual, funerary fire). It is important to maintain a reverence of the lots and the process of divination— the runes are a part of the language of the gods, as is real poetry.⁴ Without the reverence, the process loses some of its power.

³See Watkins. pg85-92

⁴Ibid. Pg. 74-93. Watkins describes poetic dissimilarities between the language of gods and the language of men. Indeed nearly every chapter in his book is enlightening in this regard.

8.3 A Ritual of Divination

Here is presented a sample ritual for runic divination. It differs radically from what I have seen in other books and is based in large part on the writings of Tacitus, Adam Bremen, and to a lesser extent, on the Eddic material. It is offered as a suggested ritual, but those who wish can and should modify it to make it their own. It requires a two tools, of course: rune lots and a white cloth of reasonable size (at least two feet square).

The first step is to relax and center, as if you were beginning a meditation (I argue that divination is a form of meditation). Close your eyes, if you wish, but forget about the general cares and worries of every-day life. Divination requires the same consciousness that meditation develops. Then begin to focus on the issue at hand. Hold it in your mind. Pick up the runes in your hands and drop them on the white cloth.

The next stage in the divination is to ask the gods for an answer. Look up towards the sky and say something like:

I call upon ye, oh mighty Aesir
 Oh, father of the gods, ye fearsome Ygg
 And Mjolnir's master, ye mighty Thorr
 And of fruitful plenty, heroic Freyr.
 Ye mighty Aesir
 Ye wise Aesir
 And give me answer to my question:
 (insert question here, preferably in poetic meter with alliteration.)

Then let the gods guide your hand to the runes that you and arrange them according to the spread of your choice. Some suggestions are listed below. Reflect on the significance of each rune in its place on the spread and meditate lightly on the meaning that it has in this contest.

When you have learned what you can from the reading, gather up the runelots and count them (dropping them can result in some being misplaced otherwise). Place them back in a ritual container and return to the other areas of your life.

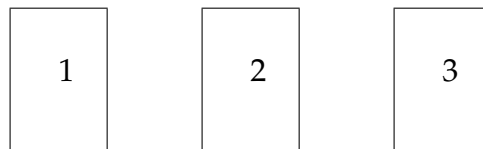
8.4 Divination Spreads

This section is intended to describe some spreads that I have found useful and to give some theoretical guidelines for working with and interpreting spreads. Few areas of divination are as underdiscussed as this one.

A spread should not be designed solely out of a desire to get a quick and easily understood answer to a problem (this is a particular problem in the Tarot community) but rather as a model of the universe which can then be applied to any given situation. A spread should be a sort of simplified cosmology which can be used to understand an issue in great depth.

The most common spread used today for runic divination is the Nornic Spread:

1. Past/Urð
2. Present/Verðandi
3. Future/Skuld



For a greater level of detail on the ideas of the norms, see chapter 3 above. It should be noted that the "future" is still fluid and can be altered by conscious action.

Earlier, I had written of an alternate reading of Tacitus's discription of the rite, where the three runes did not mention past, present and future, but rather the tripartite divisions of the most important gods. In this spread, the runes represent points of view or aspects of an issue:

1

1: Oðinn, the king and the priest. This rune represents the point of view that the sovereign god would give. This can also represent the necessity of a situation or some sort of divine help that may occur.

2

2: Thorr and Tyr. This rune represents the active principle and the warrior/protector's advice. This may prepresent advice regarding an action to take, or could represent events in the present.

3

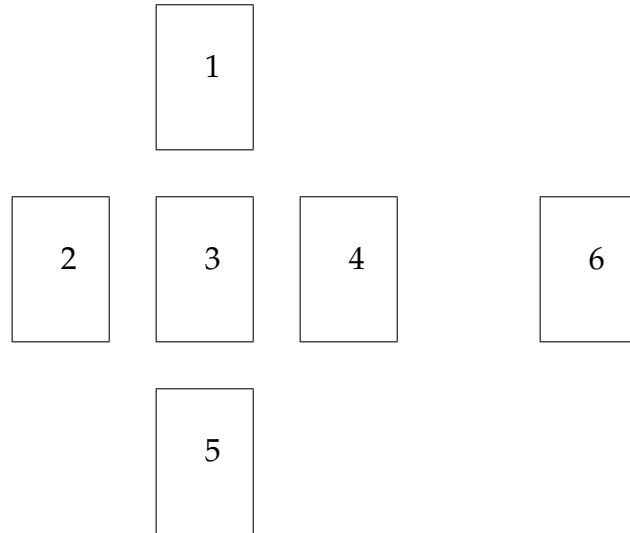
3: Freyr, Njorð, and Freya. This represents the point of view of the gods of abundnace, fertility, love, and riches. This can also represent the foundation of the question, the generation of circumstance, or those things that must be endured. It can also represent past influences on the issue at hand.

These two spreads can be combined with good results resulting in a five rune "wheel."⁵ A sixth rune can be added for additional verification purposes:⁶

⁵Wheel and equalateral cross type symbols are fairly common among the Indo-Europeans

⁶A friend of mine, John Peckham, introduced me to this practice which he invented. It has worked well for me.

1. Sovereign help, divine influence in the question.
2. Past influences.
3. Present circumstance or action.
4. Future probability
5. Chthonic aspects to the issue
6. Summation of the reading



The reader might note that I read this spread much like an expanded Nornic spread. I do not see each rune here as a perspective on the issue but rather as an influence that either is in place or will likely come into play. As a result, this spread can be quite complicated and deserves some greater discussion.

Each of the places here represents a rather abstract complex of ideas as the runes do themselves, allowing a greater interconnection of the runes and the placements. The first place represents the First Function and the Heavenly realm This rune represents the divine order of the situation, which it must eventually conform to. This rune is rarely negative in the long run, though the results of it can be painful. As a result, it can be thought of as representing the help that the gods will give the situation.

The second through fourth places represent a stream of events and their legacies as in the Nornic reading. Here again, *Urð* can also be taken to mean something akin to the "karma" of a situation as we saw in chapter 3, *Verthandi* meaning the current action, and *skuld* representing what will likely come to pass if conscious action does not change its course.

The sixth place represents the final summation of the reading. It can represent the matter at hand, or it can represent the totality of the other runes. It can even represent advice. I use this rune as a starting point for meditations into the issue at hand, and I have always found this practice to be very useful.

Another possible divinatory practice is to meditate and ask for an answer as before and draw one lot from the container. This rune can then be meditated upon and the results used to make choices.

8.5 Dream Interpretation as Another Traditional Form of Divination

Another form of divination described in the literature is that of dream interpretation. In the *Volsung Saga* particularly, dream interpretation seems to be one of the most important means of divining the future. Indeed, it occurs no less than four times, while the only other reference to any sort of divinatory practice is particularly vague and probably represents a similar concept to the Celtic idea of the Second Sight.⁷

In the first dream which is spoken of and interpreted, *Guǫrǫr* ("Knower of Battle-Runes") dreams that when she and many of the other characters in the saga leave a bower, they see a huge stag with hair made of gold, and finer by far than any other deer. They all wanted to catch the stag

⁷*Volsung Saga*, chapter 13. It is said that *Gripir* could see the future and know the fates of men. He is *Sigurd's* mother's brother, and told *Sigurd* all that would transpire in his life.

and only Guðrun could do so. But then Brynhild shot the stag down right in front of her, causing her great sorrow. Brynhild then left her with a wolf-cub which spattered her with the blood of Hogni and Gunnar (her brothers).⁸

Brynhild interprets the dream as follows: The stag is representative of Sigurd, whom Brynhild has chosen for her husband. Guðrun will marry Sigurd because he will be under the influence of the draught of forgetfulness but quickly lose him. Guðrun will then marry Atli and then lose her brothers. Then she will kill Atli. All of this comes to pass.

It is hard to see how all these foretellings can be derived from the dream. I maintain that much of the interpretation is simply placed there for dramatic effect or representing some other soothsaying powers of Brynhild. However, when we take Brynhild's interpretation as a starting place, a symbolic picture emerges which is more compelling. The stag is Sigurd, and his hair of gold represents the gold he gained from slaying Fafnir. Guðrún was then the only one who could marry Sigurd, and Brynhild would cause Sigurd's death early on. The wolf's cub probably does represent Atli, whom Guðrun marries and he causes the death of her brothers. Note that Guðrun, warns her brothers by tying a wolf's hair to a golden ring and sending it to them along with runes urging them not to come to meet Atli.⁹

In the second instance, King Atli dreams that Guðrún thrust a sword in him. He furthermore dreams that there were two reeds that he never wished to harm, but they were torn up by the roots and bloodied. Then he dreamed that there were two hawks which flew from his hand, but died because they had no prey to catch, but that he ate their hearts mixed with honey, that some whelps (probably 2, given the rest of the dream) lay before them and he ate them willingly.¹⁰

In all cases the pairs of beings represent the two sons of Guðrun and Atli. Guðrun kills their sons and serves their roasted hearts to Atli and he eats them without knowing their true nature.

Atli is not alone in his dreams of this disaster. Gunnar's wife dreams that another river swept through their hall destroying it, and that fire destroyed everything, and a bear came in, destroyed the throne and incapacitated all. Then she dreamed that that an eagle, whom she recognized as King Atli came and spattered everyone with blood. Gunnar tries to convince her that he will be fine, but he is captured and placed into a pit of poisonous serpents by Atli.¹¹

Hogni's wife also has such dreams. She dreams that a bloody sword is brought into the hall and that Hogni is run through with that sword. Furthermore, dogs howl at both ends. Then she dreams that a somber-looking woman chose Hogni for a husband and believed this to be a spirit from another world. Hogni's reply is more accurate than Gunnar's, but he shrugs it off. He does not believe it unlikely that he will be going to his death. He is captured with Gunnar, and his heart cut from his chest and shown to Gunnar.¹²

In each of these cases, the dreams were symbolic of events which were about to happen. The symbolism manifests from a complex mythic symbol set which then describe events which are about to transpire. For this reason, dream interpretation is an advanced type of divination today because it requires, even more than Runic divination, a strong grounding in the mythic tradition.

For those interested in this advanced technique of divination, I can offer several suggestions to aid you in the quest for reliable interpretation of the dreams. The first suggestion is study the symbol set of your tradition, in this case the Germanic and Norse myths. This is important because this develops a set of symbols for communicating with your unconscious aspects of yourself.

⁸Ibid. Chapter 27

⁹Ibid. Chapter 35

¹⁰Ibid. Chapter 35. Starts at the beginning of the chapter.

¹¹Ibid. The dream occurs in chapter 36, and his death at the end of chapter 39.

¹²Ibid. The dream occurs in chapter 37 and his death in chapter 39.

Secondly, keep a dream diary. We no longer live an age which is predominantly oral, and it is very difficult to learn to remember dreams unless some techniques are employed. In this diary the dream should be described along with any recognitions one makes (such as the eagle as Atli). This diary can then be used as a reference point for previous dreams and to verify the interpretation of them.

Chapter 9

Rune Magic

Rune magic is one of the most complicated topics that this book will tackle. Volumes have been written on the subject, and many of the more reputable works do not overlap much. Indeed this is such a vast field that one can spend a lifetime studying and still find more material to work with.

I recommend the approach of doing rather than simply studying. True mastery of the techniques will only come about through practice and study is only a part of this practice. I recommend that the Rune magician study and master all the techniques listed here, but these must be mastered one at a time. Therefore I recommend starting with the techniques that you feel most at ease with and building a repertoire from there.

Yet one would do well to heed Egil's warning: One should learn how to read before one tries to write. The Runes are a language, and there are references in the Sagas to mistakes made where the magic did not have its desired outcome because the runestaves were not properly chosen. Therefore I suggest working with divination and meditation both for a while before tackling this subject.

9.1 Magic and Poetics

Indo-European magic has always been primarily verbal and poetic, if the comparative method bears out in this case. The records of Druidic magic and the Rig Veda seem to point to the poet as a custodian of the power of the spoken word, and on occasion the one who unleashes its power.¹

In the most ancient period, the Indo-Europeans had an extremely complex set of styles and poetic rules, which Watkins documents closely in his book. However, many of these complex stylistic techniques are not to be found among any of the Germanic peoples. This is, perhaps, fortunate because this makes the magic more accessible than the magic of the Celtic Druids, for example. That being said, the rules of Germanic poetics are still formidable and obscure. This is important for magical reasons because the poetics give a chance to obscure the nature of the working from normal language.² For this reason, it is important to look into the Germanic poetic rules.

The most authoritative manual of Germanic poetics ever written was probably Snorri's *Edda*. This work, completed in the thirteenth century, documents kennings, mythic tales, and verse forms. Most modern translations ignore this aspect of Snorri's work and translate *Edda* exclusively for the retellings of mythic tales. Although Iceland had been Christian for nearly two centuries, *Edda* shows how deep the roots of paganism still were in the poetic traditions.

A second important text is Calvert Watkins' *How to Kill a Dragon*, in which the noted linguist documents the poetic similarities of the liturgical, secular, and magical verbal art of the Indo-European peoples. This book is of immense interest for anyone who would revive the ancient techniques of the Indo-European poets.

Traditional Germanic poetry utilizes an entirely different system of repetitive sounds than most of the Modern English poets, and in many ways, this system is more complex. The lines seldom rhyme, but complex patterns of alliteration and internal rhymes³ are found in abundance. Furthermore, various techniques were employed to ensure this alliteration, and these techniques often obscured the meanings of key portions of the poetry. The complexity of the poetics increases as does the need for emphasis. For example, line one of Havamal stanza 138 reads:

Veit ek at ek hekk vindgameiði á

¹Watkins. Pg 85-93

²There is another point Watkins makes regarding poetic formulas is that they distinguish the language of men from the language of the gods. For more, see Watkins pg 179-193.

³Snorri discusses internal rhymes, but one of the interesting points here is that some of these are closer to the echos that Watkins discusses.

(I know that I hung on the windy tree)

The alliterating words are underlined and the internal rhymes are in bold face. Note that we have two exact echoes (t ek) followed by an internal rhyme (hekk). These internal echoes, Watkins notes, appear to have an indexical purpose, in this case appearing at the very beginning of a new section. In context this line begins what is probably the most important passage in the Havamal– the story of Oðinn's ordeal in the tree where he dies to learn the runes. Such a poetically powerful opening is not isolated in this instance. In the stanza line of Voluspá, the seeress says:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <u>H</u> ljoð bið eg allar | <u>h</u> elgar kindir |
| <u>M</u> jeri ok <u>m</u> inni | <u>m</u> ogu Heimdallr. |
| (Hear me all ye | holy children |
| great and small | decendents of Heimdall) |

The poetics of these two lines are also quite complex. Here we have an internal echo in the first line (note that the l and g transpose in the echo however) which is rhymed at the end of the second, along with the standard alliteration. The stanza later becomes an invocation to Oðinn. Much like the greeks invoked the muses for their great poetry. In the beginning of the second line, we have a simple formula of argument + counterargument (great + small). Like in other Indo-European traditions, the more complex ornaments occur for a sake of emphasis and are more likely to be found in poems of a religious nature. (It is even possible that the reason why no strophic works have been found among the Germanic peoples is that no liturgy has survived.) Also note that end-rhyming occurs rarely enough to be considered unlikely to be an intentional technique.

However, a would-be poet should, I think, concentrate on one technique at a time, allowing it to set into his or her style. For this reason, each technique will be covered in turn, sequentially from the most basic to the most refined and complex. From a magical standpoint, I think alliteration is the first tool to work with. The repeated sounds correspond directly to the runes using the phonetic values listed in their sections. Many English sounds do not have equivalents and so approximations must be used.

In the Norse poetry, alliteration is generally limited to two or three instances per line. This provides a verbal effect without it seeming too contrived. This is particularly useful when the a line in a verse form is split into two half lines. In this instance, at least one instance of the alliteration must occur in each half line.

The next subject worth covering is that of poetic meter. In this regard, Snorri is our most influential source. The third part of *Edda*, "Hattatal" is a dictionary of verse forms which are governed by meter and "distinction." Below is a partial listing of the verse forms that Snorri mentions, as a complete discussion of this topic is well beyond the scope of this book. The aspiring magician would do well to study Snorri's work in depth, however. A good portion of the book revolves around an original poem that Snorri wrote in honor of Hakon, though one cannot help but notice the gradual way he builds his poetic technique (perhaps indicating that the poem was also being written to illustrate poetic techniques). On this poem, translation will not be offered where it is not needed because the poem is of secular nature and rarely sheds light on Runic concepts save by its methodology.

In the first form and example that Snorri introduces, he emphasizes the effect of alliteration and poetic effect. The stanza goes as follows: (Again, the internal rhymes are in bold face and the alliterating sounds underlined. Also half rhymes, see below, are italicized.)

Lætr sár Hákun heitir
 (hann rekkir lid) **bannat**
 (iörd **kann** frelsa) *f*yrðum
 fridrofs (konungr) **ofsa**.

Sjálfr rædr allt ok *Elfar*
 ungr stillir sá milli
 (*gramr á gript at fremri*)
 Gandvikr i Áúfurr landi.

This verse form is called dróttkvætt, or court-meter. It consists of eight paired hexasyllabic lines, each with an internal rhyme or half-rhyme, where the vowel is different but the following consonant is the same. The paired lines share a triple repetition of an alliteration which appears twice on the first line and once on the second. Furthermore, the half-rhymes occur on the odd lines (where there are two alliterating consonants) and the full rhymes (same vowel followed by same consonant) on the even lines where one consonant continues the pattern of alliteration of the previous line.

This verse-form is particularly rigid as far as poetic rules are concerned, yet the listener is greeted with a powerful poetic impact. The key to this impact is the alliteration, and it is not accidental that the term Snorri gives the term "staffr," or stave, to the alliterative sounds. Note that this term also refers to the runic symbols as well, and this is a key to harnessing their energy.

I consider the court-meter to be a good practice form for learning the basis of Germanic poetry. However, its name implies, and it is born out in the literary record, that this form was primarily used for honoring friends and patrons, and so was not usually used in magic. However, the vast numbers of memorial stones raised in the Viking age may have had some sort of magico-religious side, so this poem could be used this way as well.

Furthermore, the verse form shows us some fundamental aspects of Germanic poetics: rhyme, alliteration and meter. Each of these fundamental techniques is tightly controlled in very formal yet unobtrusive ways. In fact the techniques seem designed to power of the poetry from the conscious mind of the listener and hence make a more subtle yet powerful impact. The concept of hiding things in poetry is well attested to in other Indo-European poetic traditions.⁴

As many scholars, including Dumézil and Watkins have pointed out, our corpus of Germanic works are lacking in clear liturgical works so in many ways, and many Indo-European cultures used different poetic techniques with sacred verses (or even lines within a verse).⁵ Because many of the most impressive techniques, such as strophic forms are generally reserved for sacred poetry in Indo-European culture, one may argue for the use of more elaborate poetic schemes for magical poetry.

This is a difficult argument to make because many of the other sacred poems in other Indo-European traditions may be contained in heroic epics or other non-liturgical works. We do have episodes of magical poetry from the Viking age which is notably lacking in the great complexity of the Greek, Irish, or Umbrian liturgy. However, one is forced to concede that the time difference between the period when the Eddas were written and the time when the Elder Futhark was in use was great enough to warrant further investigation into this subject.

Each of the derivative Futharks tended to reflect the point of view of the diverging culture. The Younger Futhark (used by the Norsemen during the Viking Age) ends the set with a rune which may have meant death—it tends to have a harshness to it which is notably lacking in the Anglo-Frisian Futhorc. In many ways the structural changes to the Futhark destroyed some of the astounding complexity of the Elder Futhark in order to accommodate new language. Because the complexity of the structure of the Elder Futhark matches some of the poetic techniques rarely used in Germanic poetry (such as merisms), it is conceivable that the Migration Age ritual poetry may have been more complex in nature than it was in any of the decendent traditions.

⁴Watkins 179-193

⁵Watkins 183. The passage he is analyzing is from *Alvismal*, and he points out that the rules for alliteration are different in the cases of the names that gods and men give things.

In the end I will leave it up to the reader to decide whether or not to utilize more complex poetics in their ritual poetry. The information is simply too incomplete for a decisive answer. For those who intend to study this matter further, I highly recommend Watkins as an author. Furthermore, strophic forms are extremely complex and well beyond the scope of this book.

9.2 Poetic Formulas

Watkins outlines two basic categories of formulas in poetry: simple and complex. As their name implies, simple formulas contain all their meaning in the definitions of their words. For this reason they are easier to master and will be covered first. These come in several forms, each of which will be listed below along with an explanation.⁶

9.2.1 Simple Formulas

Argument + Negated Argument: In this form the argument is repeated in a negated form, for example "Bound and unbound." This form is rarely found in Norse poetry because it does not conform well to the strict poetic rules over internal rhymes in lines. However it is still a powerful device and featured quite heavily in the magical literature of other Indo-European peoples, so it should be mentioned.

Argument + Counterargument: This is similar to the above type except that a form of the argument is not used in the phrase, though the sense of total inclusiveness generally remains. For example, the seeress in Voluspa speaks to all of Heimdall's children "great and small." Because this form is more poetically flexible and unobtrusive it is to be preferred over the Argument + Negative Argument type above. This formula is found in the Eddic poetry.

Argument + Synonymous Argument: Examples in Hollander's translation include "Hail and whole [to/from battle]." The purpose here is to create a stronger emphasis on the argument by adding synonyms. One example that Watkins gives as found in many Indo-European traditions is the Mod. Eng. "Safe and Sound."

Argument + Negated Counter-Argument: I am not aware of these appearing in the Eddic texts however, they are common enough elsewhere to warrant some examples. Examples might include "girt and not ungirt" or "true and not false." These are generally, in my view, a weaker form of the Argument + Synonymous Argument type listed above.

The simple formulas provide an easy, clear way to focus the aim of the magical poetry, and by doing so provide form and definition. Perhaps it is for this reason that the archaic magical poetics survived long after other forms of poetry had lost their conservatism.

9.2.2 Complex Formulas

A merism is a two part formula where the formula as a whole refers to a larger idea than the sum of its parts. One traditional example found in many Indo-European poetic traditions is "goods and chattels." Watkins argues that this originally represented the totality of movable and non-movable wealth, and he makes a convincing argument.⁷ While this merism, to my knowledge, is not found in the Old Norse poetry, it is found in the structure of the Elder Futhark itself, which begins with Fehu (movable wealth) and ends with Othila (non-movable wealth). Thus goods and chattels form

⁶For a complete discussion, see Watkins pg 41-49

⁷See Watkins 9, but more information throughout the book.

the "alpha and omega"⁸ of the Germanic magical system, which can be equated to mystical energy as above regarding Fehu.

Another important merism in Indo-European traditions, most notably the Greek and Avestan branches, poetic traditions is "tree and rock," also extensively covered by Watkins.⁹ The merism of "tree and rock" appears to Truth in a large, cosmic sense. The association is an ancient one and may be connected with the Celtic Druids. There is reason to believe that the practical uses of the runes were, for the most part confined to wood, stone, and metal. While it is conceivable that the runes were also used on leather, such finds are scarce even among the Old English and are quite specific (purses to protect coins, for example). In essence, the runes were carved "in tree and rock."

Merisms, while interesting, are of limited use in Old Norse poetry as they do not always confine themselves well to the extremely strict rules of meter and rhyme. They are, however, very useful when selecting runes and may have been used in some of the elder liturgical poetry.

The other type of complex formula is the kenning, which is the principle formulaic device in Norse poetry. A kenning is a phrase which relates metaphorically to another concept. An example already encountered in the Rune Poems is "sea stallion" which refers to a ship. "Edda" again is the fundamental reference of Norse kennings.

Kennings use quite a bit of skill to use effectively and represent one of the more advanced techniques of Norse poetics. At their simplest, they serve the means of accomplishing the alliterative needs of the poetry. They can also be used to help the poem conform to rigid metric requirements. However, this is only the surface of their magical use. A kenning represents a symbolic picture into another object, a sort of cosmological or runic statement. Skillful use of these symbols represents the apex of ritual poetry.

All of the above poetic techniques must be remembered to be mere tools, though they can be powerful. An aspiring magician cannot be expected to master these tools in any short length of time. Instead, ritual poetry must be written at the magician's level of skill. If you are skilled at writing sonnets, then begin with sonnets and slowly work these techniques into the poetry, but don't feel that you have to start over- the power of poetry comes only from inspiration, as the story of Kvasir tells us.¹⁰ Ritual poetry has much to offer, but its mastery is difficult and does take time.

9.3 Carving Runes

The historic and mythic literature are complete with depictions of Runic magic which are consistent across time and space, and more importantly consistent with the earlier archeological corpus. Egil's Saga contains three detailed accounts of runic magic and several passing references to the subject. Although a survey of the historic material is well beyond the scope of this book,¹¹ this chapter will survey techniques used across time by the ancient Runemasters.

⁸if I am allowed to mix merisms...

⁹Ibid. 161-4

¹⁰ Here is a brief overview of the story: After the First War, the Aesir and the Vanir spat into a container and the spittle was mixed with honey and made into the form of a man, Kvasir ("Drunkness"). He was wise and a skilled poet. Some dwarves killed him and brewed his blood into mead in three vats which were stolen by the Etins. Oáfinn, under the name Bolverk ("Evil-Doer"), infiltrated the giant's kingdom and discovered that the mead was kept in a mountain. He turned himself into a snake, burrowed into the heart of the mountain, and beguiled the giantess Gunloth who guarded the mead. After she let him drink some of the mead, he seized the mead, turned into an eagle, and flew with the mead back to Asgard, where he dispenses the mead to all true poets. Some of the mead spilled on the journey and this is where uninspired poetry comes from.

¹¹A brief summary is included in Thorsson's *Runelore* while a comprehensive survey is found in *Runes and Magic* by Stephen Flowers. These treatments are rather long due to the size of the body of evidence available.

Runes were carved into a variety of objects— stone, metal, wood, etc. and these are generally represented in the corpus. Most of our finds from the Elder period are metal (particularly jewelry such as broaches for fastening cloaks and pendants presumably used in ritual). The wooden wands are only found in the later era, though this is likely due to the perishable nature of the media. In addition to the wands which were presumably purely magical, runes have been found on many utilitarian items, such as broaches and weapons.

One of the more important technical points relating to carving runes in wood is that they are almost always found carved against the grain (the vertical strokes perpendicular to the grain). Experience shows that runes carved this way are easier to color and accept color more consistently than to runes carved with the grain. Furthermore, they are more readily visible, though more technically difficult to carve.

Relating to the choice of runes, most elder finds show legible inscriptions which form words, indicating that the inscription as a whole was more than the sum of the characters. The most common form of which state something to the effect of "I the Runemaster carve the Runes!" Also, words for "ale," "linnen," and "leek" were commonly inscribed on ornamental and practical items like broaches and bractiates. Other large carved stones have long intelligible inscriptions which are clearly magical, such as the Stone of Björketorp which warns of a dire curse upon whoever disturbs the monument.

While inscriptions do occur which do not match what is known about the early Germanic language, these are rare. Occasionally the entire Futhark or a portion thereof will be carved, and occasionally runes are inscribed which do not lend themselves to linguistic interpretation.

Many of these formulaic categories are well suited to magic even in modern times. Word formulas can be used to accomplish specific tasks and can be formed by choosing runes by their symbolism, carefully including vowels, and then forming words which describe the goal. Also, the Futhark makes an effective formula for initiation and training purposes, as experience has shown, although this would only make sense as a development of inward sovereignty. For all examples here, the formula chosen shall be the Elder Futhark in its entirety. I personally feel that nonsense formulas should be avoided when possible.

9.3.1 Ritual Structure

The rune-magicians in the myths and sagas practice magic in diverse circumstances with little or no preparation. Viking life in particular was not conducive to prolonged periods of ritual preparation, and for this reason the rituals portrayed in the sagas are diverse in nature and structure. However it would be a mistake to assert that the rituals do not have a basic underlying structure.

The basic Runic ritual is divided into two phases, each containing any of several possible techniques. Unlike the Neoplatonic traditions and their descendants, the Norse did not cast circles, though the hammer ritual practiced by many modern practitioners has been found to be useful in part owing to its similarity to other Indo-European traditions.¹²

In the first phase, the runes are carved and charged with vital and psychic force. The material is prepared, the runes carved, and often red dye or blood applied to the runes. During the preparation phase, the concentration is focused on the individual portions of the talisman or other charm. The techniques of concentration surrounding the runes should have been built up in the study of Runic meditation.

Historically blood was used to redden the runes in most instances. At first glance, one is tempted to assume that this was some sort of primitive blood sacrifice or perhaps an attempt to imbue the talisman with some sort of vital energy. However, the truth may be more complicated than it first

¹²It therefore becomes an open question whether the Migration Age Germanic peoples used some sort of a circle ritual.

appears. Blood is particularly associated with Runic magic among the Norse, and only distantly to life force itself which is more often symbolized as gold. Rather blood is connected with the mead of poetry in the myth of Kvasir and may represent the ecstatic principle. Also note that Ymir's blood became the sea which associated with the brewer god Aegir.¹³ Given the prevalence of Alu (-> Ale) talismans, one suspects that the blood connection is indeed ancient. See Appendix section ?? for more information on this formula.

The second stage is an enchantment phase, where the magician utters his will in spoken form, condensing his focused intent into one whole section. Here the focus is on the entirety of the work and meaning rather than on each character. "Runemaster" formulas (i.e. "I the Runemaster carve a rune") can be used here with great effect.¹⁴ Often this phase will be done in poetic form. The full meaning and power of this technique may become apparent it is put into practice.

9.3.2 A Sample Runic Ritual

True understanding can only come from practice. The above discussions are meant as a general framework to a ritual. Now it is time to learn through action and experience. This ritual is not holy writ– it can and should be modified by the magician who understands the structure. However, for the beginner, I do ask that you follow the ritual once exactly as it is written here. The only reason for this request is so that the beginner can experience the structure of the ritual. While runic rituals should generally be spontaneous, this ritual serves as a learning exercise and so requires devoted attention and the kind of environment normally given to meditation.

Materials Required:

- A length of a good, hard wood (preferably a tree-branch or log) long enough to comfortably carve all twenty-four runes in it. Note– some woods do not carve well.
- A sharp, pointed knife for carving the runes. The knife must also have a sharp edge– sharpen if necessary.
- Red paint (optional).

Stage 1: Preparing the Wood

Preferably outside, though this can be done, albeit messily, indoors if the distractions or weather prove to be too much, sit and relax. Try to clear your mind of all earthly cares and free yourself from all doubt, worry, etc. Use the knife to carve a flat surface in the length of wood so that the whole of the wand is flat, or at least enough to comfortably carve all 24 rune-staves. This should form a sort of meditation and time to prepare the mind for the next stage.

Stage 2: Carving the Futhark

The following exercises should be repeated with each rune. Although shortcuts will develop with time, these techniques used early will help to speed the development of real, powerful shortcuts:

1. Make a cognitive link with the rune, as you would in meditation.

¹³Kvasir's blood was brewed into mead by the dwarves who murdered him and this mead provides all true poets with their inspiration. When Ymir was sacrificed, his blood became the sea. The sea-god Aegir is responsible for brewing the ale for the gods, which may too be connected with ideas for divine inspiration.

¹⁴Note that Egill Skallagrímsson uses such a formula in chapter 44 of Egill's Saga.

2. Carve the rune in the wand. As you do, focus on the meaning of the rune and project it into the form that you carve.
3. Repeat for the other staves.
4. Optionally readen the staves with red paint (blood also works and is more traditional but is not generally recommended for beginners for health and safety reasons).

If this process is too overwhelming (and it may be), one can break between Aetir (between Wunjo and Hagalaz, and between Sowilo and Tiwaz). One can also break between runes. Breaks should be no more than a day, as practice and repetition are important to this exercise.

The Statement of Will

When this is all completed, recite the below incantation or something like it:

"I write a rune
 And make it red!
 Burns with blood
 this bright rune-wand.
 A row of runes
 is written here,
 Strong and shining
 magic staves.
 To grow and gain
 I shall begin.
 Nine long nights
 beneath the tree
 Until I drink
 the dear-bought mead."

The above incantation does make use of some traditional oddities (the singular rune referring to an entire inscription, for example. If you want you can make up your own words, as the above example is just that— an example. However, I do recommend to beginners that they use the above example and commit it to memory before trying the ritual. The reason is that it serves to illustrate several aspects of Runic Magic. In magic, however, these are just recommendations, and one should try whatever works for the magician (develop your talents).

This ritual should produce a certain level of initiation if followed exactly. If you alter the ritual and find that it does not produce an observable change over a period of time, try following the ritual more closely but from memory, and try reddening the runes. However, it should be noted that initiation is not for the faint of heart. It is a long and difficult process but the spiritual rewards far outweigh the intermediary difficulties. Note that Oðinn sacrifices his own life to himself in order to learn the secrets of the runes.

9.4 Runic Word Formulas

As mentioned earlier, a large number of the Elder Futhark runic finds consist of single legible words carved in a talismanic object. Evidently the ancients found this type of formula to be rather useful,

yet few modern books cover such formulas in a practical way.¹⁵ I hope here to shed new light on these formulas.

A close examination of the existing word formulas shows that they consist of two separate layers of symbolism:

1. The word as a literal, symbolic, and/or mythical construct.
2. The word as a series of ordered runestaves conveying an esoteric, hidden flow of the symbol.

For example, the one of the less common formulas is LINU, the root for the Modern English word "linnen." Presumably this word referenced bandages because it is likely that the most important clothing textiles were made of wool.¹⁶ It has no known mythic association.

The order of the runestaves is more interesting, however. First we have Laguz (Water) followed by Isa (Ice). Next come Nauðiz (Seed, constriction) and lastly Uruz (The Aurochs). What makes this sequence particularly interesting is the way in which it mirrors the creation myth, where water sprung up in the north and gave way to ice (through an intermediary mist). The ice moved southward until it reached the sparks flying from the fiery land of Muspellsheim, and the fire melted the ice while the ice constricted the fire. Eventually the ice assumed the shape of a man, and was the ancestor of all frost-giants, Ymir. Ymir grew strong by drinking the milk of the First Cow, AuǺrumla, and was sacrificed by Bor's sons to create the world. The Uruz rune here could refer to either Ymir or AuǺrumla. Thus LINU is also symbolic of the creation of living body, a fitting symbol for healing, but also much more.

A more common, though more complex word inscription is that of LAUKAZ, from which the Modern English word "leek" is derived. The symbolic and mythic level of this word must be discussed in depth before the rune sequence can be investigated. Many mythic poems speak of casting a leek in a cup to avert poison; Sigrifumal is perhaps the best known example.¹⁷ There does not, however, appear to be a direct mythic link to this word either, however.

The sequence of runes is as follows: Laguz (Water) - Ansuz (Sovereign god) - Uruz (Aurochs) - Kenaz (Torch) - Ansuz (Sovereign god) - Elhaz (Elk). Like the previous example, we have fire acting on water, but this time the effect is direct. We have the torch (Kenaz) following water, sacred and primal (the first three runes of the formula). Lastly we have sovereign (Ansuz) protection (Elhaz), though Elhaz being very strongly associated with Freyr could represent production as well. This formula in some obvious ways also parallels part of the creation story, though this is not always the case and the formula is sufficiently complex to warn against rigid interpretation.

While traditional word formulas are certainly worth studying, it is also quite possible to create your own, bringing to bear one's fluency in the English language. The same principles would apply—the word itself should be symbolic of the desired outcome while the runes that make up the word should do the same on a more abstract level. Sometimes some thought must go into the transliteration as some sounds have no exact equivalent and several approximate ones. For instance the word "love" could be transiterated as LOWE (note the connection between the v and w sounds in the Germanic languages due to the linguistic similarity), LOFE (again v and f are relative approximates...), LOF (note the silent E could be dropped in a phonetic transliteration), and even LOW. Note too that the O could be transiterated as a U.

¹⁵Thorsson's *Futhark* has some theoretical information, but his *Rune-Song* is, to date, the only book that covers these formulas in any sort of practical way.

¹⁶According to Tacitus, the Germanic peoples wore one primary garment—a wool cloak. All other clothing was a sign of high status.

¹⁷Stanza 9.

Which is correct? It depends to some extent on the abstract, causal factors the magician wants to evoke. Laguz is essentially a given, and both Othila and Uruz suggest stability and durability but in very different ways. Fehu and Wunjo as we have seen are at once complimentary and very different, and Ehwaz would likely be beneficial to such a working. In general, I would favor either LOWE for civilized, courtly love while LUFÉ for passionate, primal, sexual love. Either way, a magician can and should create his own formulae for specific common magical tasks.

9.5 Final Thoughts

Rune magic is a complicated subject and cannot be learned without some effort. I have endeavored to provide both a theoretical and practical basis for the ancient tradition, but in the end, all magic comes from within. Runic magic has a strong tradition of extemporaneous practice, and in the end all rituals simply serve as examples.¹⁸ I suggest learning to relate to the runes through meditation, then learning divination before studying rune magic.

Above all, read the legends and the myths. Meditate on the stories, contemplate the meaning of the tale. I hope that I have helped to provide the keys to beginning to understand the mysteries, but no one can teach the mysteries of the universe, one can only make them easier for another to learn. Always search, always seek the mystery.

¹⁸See Appendix C for some examples.

Appendix A

The Valkyrie

If one reads the standard historical accounts of the Vikings, one would think that they were brutal, bloodthirsty, greedy men who raped and pillaged wherever they went. In fact this depiction is incorrect and is solely drawn from the "civilized" world of continental Europe. For this reason, most works downplay the role of Women both in Norse society and in their magico-mystical tradition. Indeed most myths and legends which come out of Scandinavia in the years following the conversion focus on male characters almost exclusively.

However it would be a mistake to assume that the Norse women were by any means unimportant in the society and magical traditions. Compared to comparable continental European tales, the women in the Norse stories were strong figures, often important to the stories in profound ways. Many times they were workers of magic or wrote runes. There is even some evidence that a much larger body of tales about goddesses was lost in the conversion than that of the gods.¹

One of the most enigmatic and powerful female entities in the stories is the Valkyrie, or "chooser of the slain." According to standard accounts, these were "angelic" spirits who hovered over the battlefield and chose who lived and died by Oðinn's will. While this view is supported in the early sections of *Sigdrifumal* and other sources, it is clearly incomplete. The valkyrie that Sigurd wakes teaches him magic and wisdom.² Furthermore, valkyries are spoken of in the "Lay of Volund" and the *Helgi Lays* as flesh and blood women, perhaps capable of supernatural feats, but certainly not simply spirits.

Such observations have triggered a strong debate concerning the nature of the valkyrie of Norse mythology. Some have seen them as enchantresses, and a title fit for all women who work magic, while others have seen them as spiritual entities which sometimes manifest, like the popular concepts of angels, to provide aid when needed. Still others have seen the valkyrie as a sort of "higher self." However, a close look at the idea as it is presented within the system of Norse myth shows a deeper, more complex, and more powerful image than meets the eye.

While valkyries, almost by definition and certainly by their association with Oðinn, are capable of working magic, there is no clear reason to assume that all female magicians were considered to be valkyries. The Norse had several feminine traditions of magic and prophecy, and perhaps these may have been somewhat independent.

In several instances, valkyries are described as human women. For example, Svava is the daughter of a king who gives Helgi Hjorvarthson his name. They become betrothed, but Helgi is killed through a betrayal by his brother. It is said that he and Svava lived again.

Sigrún was said to be Svava reborn. She was the daughter of King Hogni, and married Helgi Hundingsbane and bore two sons by him. One of the stories even says that she **became** a valkyrie after learning to walk on the water and in the air. Helgi was eventually slain in an act of revenge by Sigrún's brothers.

Of Brynhild, her parents are not known. However she too is connected with the notion of sovereignty. She gave victory to king Agnar against Oðinn's wishes, and was placed in an enchanted sleep as a result. Her sister married a chieftain named Heimir.

In each of these cases the valkyrie is connected rather strongly to the concept of sovereignty and with magic or at least with supernatural powers; however, many are human daughters of kings. One should not be surprised at this link as by the Viking age, Oðinn was the primary god of both magic and sovereignty, and the lay of *Rig* even pushes the link between magic and kingship back to the creation of society, where Heimdall fathered the ancestors of each of the three classes— Thralls

¹Note that the story of Freya and the Brising's necklace comes down to us only through one late medieval telling where the characters of gods had been supplanted with characters of humans. Otherwise, we have only one reference to this story in the Eddic literature.

²Not that this is unusual. Mercea Eliade has shown in *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* that tutelary spirits, particularly female, are quite common in shamanic traditions throughout the world.

(servants), Karls (freeman farmers), and Jarls (Earls, nobles). The son of Jarl is Kon, the Young³ whom Heimdall teaches rune magic.

It should therefore come as no surprise the valkyrie would be associated with active magic and also with sovereignty. However the connection with Oðinn goes deeper still. While Oðinn's initiation on the tree bears a strong resemblance to shamanic initiations throughout the world, the fundamental magic of the Valkyrie (i.e. being abler to walk on waves and in the air) also has fundamental similarities with shamanic traditions worldwide.⁴ She is a master of both of Oðinn's magics, both of runes and of "seið" (trance-magic).⁵

That the valkyrie also represents a purely spiritual entity can also be shown by the passages in various poems of the Elder Edda which list Oðinn's valkyries and the relative consistency that they contain. In this aspect, the valkyrie is clearly a spirit which has angelic characteristics and can be conceptualized for those schooled in the Christian tradition as a cross between a guardian angel and an angel of death. It would be a mistake to think of them as purely beneficent because their master, Oðinn, whose will they carry out, cannot easily be described in those terms.⁶

The valkyrie is a complex figure, a full exploration of which is well beyond the scope of this book. However, in my opinion, the valkyrie is a concept which can be cautiously compared to the angels of the Judeo-Christian traditions⁷ with one major difference: the Norse clearly saw the possibility and potential of a human being becoming this type of entity. As a result, the valkyrie is a more versatile and powerful magical concept than the purely spiritual interpretation could have been because it was *attainable*.

³"Kon ungr" This is clearly a play on words because konungr is the word for king, and this ancestral line fits with the sequence of the rest of the story.

⁴See Mercaé Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Note that *Heimskringla* by Snorri Sturluson shows Odhinn as having the ability to lie as if dead and send his spirit of in the shape of a large animal to fight for him.

⁵This "seið" might indeed represent the eighteenth charm listed in the *Runattals*.

⁶It must be conceded though that Oðinn always seems to have the greater universal good in mind when he engages in his seemingly malevolent actions.

⁷Interestingly, the tenth century Arab, Ibn Fadlan made the direct parallel between the and old seeress and the Angel of Death, a reference which survives outside Michael Creighton's fictionalizing of the account. There are, however, several non-fictional translations of the relevant passage on the market.

Appendix B

The God Ođinn

here is, perhaps, no more abivalent figure in Norse mythology than Oðinn. He is the chieftain of the gods, and the dispenser of the Mead of Inspiration. But he is also at times untrustworthy and feared because he is known to give victory in battle to lesser contenders. He even shows up in person to secure Sigmund's death. He is also the master of runes and of the trance-based magic his valkyries employ.

Oðinn's name means "Master of Oðr," and Oðr generally translates as inspiration, but also means song and frenzy. Oðr is generally derived from the Indo-European root *Uet which Watkins indicates has generated words in Indo-European languages meaning knowledge and poetry as well as shamanic wisdom, and these meanings clearly show up in the word Oðr as well. In fact one should note that Oðinn always has the greater good in mind in his betrayals, and that they seem to be motivated by an inspired insight into divine, otherworldly order.

Oðinn discovers the runes through a very extreme initiation—a death where he sacrifices himself to himself in order to perceive the runes (i.e. Mysteries, secrets of the universe), as is told in *Havamal*. He then learns nine mighty songs from Bolthorn and drinks a draught of mead from Oðrörir ("Inciter of Inspiration").¹ Thereafter the inspiration begins to take hold and one word leads on to another word and one work leads on to another work. This effectively doubles the mighty incantations Oðinn learned so that they are eighteen in number.²

He is also known to break promises. In the story of the recovery of the mead of inspiration, he infiltrates the halls of the Etins by causing some workers to kill each other, and steals the mead even though he has sworn not to. In this case, the recovery of the mead was in the best interest of the gods, and the mead was rightfully theirs, but Oðinn had to stoop to dishonorable action to attain this end, as in the death of Sigmund (which was important for Sigurd to rise as he did).

By historical times, Oðinn is also the primary god of sovereignty, though he presumably would have shared this role with the ancestor of Týr in early times. Other minor sovereign gods include Týr (the god of the legal assembly), Baldr (who, with Hoðr takes Oðinn's seat after the end of the world) and Hoðr (possibly the dealer of fate and the slayer of Baldr). None of these other gods have the demonic aspects of Oðinn,³ and none have his gift of otherworldly sight either, save on rare occasions such as Baldr's Dream.⁴

When one views the paradoxes of Oðinn's nature through the filter of the meaning of his name, a more complete view can be seen. Oðinn is not an immoral figure but rather one to whom conventional morality does not apply. He is beyond it because he can perceive the greater Need of the universe and act accordingly. In fact, one must note that his most despicable acts are always in the interest of gods and men from a wider viewpoint.

Oðinn is not a god to be worshipped for protection or for pleasant things, and perhaps for this reason, he was not widely worshipped in the Viking age except through the worship of him on the battlefield. Thor and Freyr were more widely worshipped because their agendas were simpler and their behavior more agreeable. Furthermore, they offered benefits more in keeping with the day-to-day concerns of the Norse people, who were more concerned with protecting their lives and achieving prosperity than in receiving inspiration or joining Oðinn in Valhöll after death.

However Oðinn is simply the most important god for Runic practices as well as, arguably, the most important god in the pantheon in general. For this reason, the runic practitioner should seek to know him through cultivating inspiration and reading the poems, myths, and legends which tell of him and his actions.

¹Strange that Oðinn should travel to drink the mead of inspiration when it was he who recovered it from the Etins.

²These are listed at the end of *Havamal*

³Although Hodhr slays Baldr, he does not do so intentionally but rather blindly following the instructions of Loki.

⁴Note that prophetic dreams are not limited to Baldr. They occur no less than four times in the *Volsung Saga*, for example.

It would, however, be a mistake to assume that all runic workers should worship Oðinn. Any true magician works by understanding the place of everything in the universe, not simply by worship. The most important goal is to understand the meanings of the stories and incorporate appropriate aspects into our lives as we grow to be able to use them. The greatest worship of all is the worship of insightful emulation. The Norse gods are not abstract entities far removed from the human condition—if they were the myths would be meaningless. Instead they are entities that embody ideas which in turn can show us the paths that we seek.

Appendix C

Sample Rituals and Historical Formulae

C.1 Sample Rituals

C.1.1 Creating a Word-Formula Talisman

Materials Required

- A small piece of wood long and wide enough to comfortably carve the required runestaves.
- A sharp-edged and pointed knife for carving
- red paint (recommended, but optional)

Fashioning The Talisman

Take the piece of wood and flatten it with the knife so that you have a comfortable area to work with. Use this as a sort of meditation to take yourself away from your normal form of consciousness and into a meditative state.

Then, for each rune, do as follows:

1. Meditate on it for at least one breath cycle.
2. Carve it into the wood against the grain.
3. Clear your mind and prepare for the next one

Once this is complete, redden the runes with the paint.

The Statement of Will

Once this is complete, Hold the talisman in both hands, breath in, and say as follows (or something like it):

"Hail ye Aesir Hail ye Asunjar
 Hail Oðinn And Oðinn's Son¹
 Hail Freyr That Harvest shall
 Come to the sons of men
 Gain for the sons of men.

I carve a rune and make it red.
 [insert description of desired result here
 (preferably in poetic form)]"

Take the talisman and set it aside. Clear your mind and then carry the talisman with you to help bring about what you wish.

¹Reference here to Thorr

C.1.2 Setting a Niðing pole

Introduction

The Niðing pole a construct that appears in Egil's Saga among other sources. It is often considered a curse, but this is probably a bit of a misunderstanding as to the nature of the action. The name itself is designed to suggest that the aim is to strip the subject of his/her sovereignty, and Egil uses it to depose Eirik and force him into exile. In this way, it is not unlike the Irish satire.

Once could translate Niðing in this case as "insult." The pole is basically there to create an other-worldly insult against the target, specifically by stating that the target is unworthy of the honors that he/she has received.

The Niðing pole is an effective way to prevent enemies from using positions of power to do the magician harm. However, in this area especially restraint and self-honesty are important. One should not use this out of vengeance, anger, hatred, etc. Instead one should focus on making a bad situation go away. The spirits involved have funny ways of making things happen, and one may be surprised at how things may seem to work out for everyone's benefit. Indeed, mutually beneficial resolution is a strong indication of sovereign action.

I used this formula once against someone in college who was stealing food from me and harrasing the neighbors. This person was eventually caught stealing from the college but in the end, the only punishment deemed necessary was an eviction from that part of student housing and mandatory counselling. Worked out well for everyone.

Materials Needed

- A pole of wood sufficiently tall to be at least waist high after being driven into the ground.
- A sharp, pointed knife for carving runes
- Something to place on the top of the pole. Traditionally, a horse's head was used. The Asatruar-men in Iceland used the head of a cod in one case against a NATO base. I have used crafts dolls painted with Runes to similar effect.

Preparation

Carve both ends of the pole so that they are pointed. Also make a flat spot in the pole and carve the name of your target in it using the Futhark. On the other side, carve a short description of the problem. For example, I used "Against a Thief."

Take this to a secluded (i.e. wild) area for the ritual.

The Ritual

Once you get the the secluded spot (preferably somewhere reasonably inaccessible), set the pole in the ground and skewer the headpiece on the top. Libations of beer can be poured to the spirits and gods at this point if desired. Speak the following or something similar:

"I carve a rune and make it red
 Burns with blood, this bright rune row
 Stought and Strong, these magic staves
 [insert a line or two in alliterative form about why you are there]
 Har in Asgard is angry with you

Strong Thorr shall strike you down
 Freyr and Freya shall frown on you
 So long as you stay near me
 No peace shall prove any wights²
 near or far through nine worlds
 Until [name]is away from me.

More libations of ale can be poured if desired. Once this is done, the magician can relax leave that place.

C.2 Traditional Word Formulas

C.2.1 Alu

Meaning, Translation, and Lore

The P. Gmc. Alu becomes "Ale" in Mod. Eng. and presumably referred to ale in ancient times as well. Flowers derives the term from roots meaning "divine inspiration" and writes that this is the likely purpose for the fibulae we find with this word inscribed on it from the Migration age.³ A closer look at the surrounding lore here provides a more defined picture, however, and I think it is more likely that ale was used to ward off the schemes of others.

Sigdrifumal links Ale Runes (ON Ölfunar) with preventing women from betraying Sigurd. This is somewhat enigmatic and could refer either to the draught of forgetfulness which Grimhild prepared, or to the scheme itself.

Note too that while Kvasir's blood becomes the Mead of Inspiration, Ymir's blood becomes the sea. Aegir, the brewer-god, lives under the sea and brews ale for the gods. So here again, we have an idea that ale may be related mythically to mead, though they represent somewhat different concepts (Kvasir being a god and Ymir being a giant).

Rune Sequence

Alu is spelled Ansuz Laguz Uruz. One can see this as representing a descending divine state of mind into the waters of life, which then form the body of the drinker.

C.2.2 Laukaz

Meaning, Translation, and Lore

Laukaz means Leek and is the root of that Mod. Eng. word. Sigdrifumal suggests casting a leek in one's cup to banish fear or things that would do the drinker harm, such as magic or poison. Such enchantments also appear in Egil's Saga.

Hollander connects the Leek with sovereignty, and possibly as an alternate name for Laguz. However, in the Elder period, we see broaches and other adornments with this word inscribed. Therefore, one might suggest that while the L-stave might refer to this and hence be useful in immediate environments, for larger enchantments, the entire word was spelled out.

²i.e. no being shall experience peace

³See Runes and Magic

Rune Sequence

This word is spelled Laguz Ansuz Uruz Kenaz Ansuz Elhaz. One should note that the first half of the word is an anagram for Alu above. One can see the emphasis is on the water (ale, mead, etc.) infused with divine inspiration (ansuz). The central runestaves might reflect the primordial and putrifying aspects of the poison or magic. Finally we have an invocation of protection in Ansuz Elhaz.

C.2.3 Linu**Meaning, Translation, and Lore**

Linu is the root of the Mod. Eng. Linnen. This was probably primarily used for bandages in the Migration Age, so many runologists have assumed that this was a healing charm. There are no references to this formula in the Eddas, but if we look to healing charms, we can see those relating to "Limb Runes" (ON Limrúnar) which might be a corruption of this formula. Although one normally doesn't see an n to m corruption, there may be other forces at work here to make it occur in this formula.

By the Viking Age, it seems unlikely that wool would have been the only cloth used for clothing for most of the population. Hence linnen might have lost some of its association with bandages. In looking for a similar word with an appropriate meaning, the Rune-masters of old may have looked to *limu in place of *linu, thus giving rise to a new magical formula of "limb-runes" as opposed to "linnen-runes." The emphasis here is then transferred from the bandage to the wounded body.

Limb runes are mentioned in Havamal and Sigdrifumal.

Rune Sequence

Laukaz Isa Nauðiz Uruz. Here we have water to ice, encountering hot resistance, and finally providing a formative force. Note the similarity to the Norse cosmogony. Hence the association with healing.

C.2.4 Salu**Meaning, Translation, and Lore**

The meaning and translation of this word is unknown. Suggested meanings have included an obscure term for sea-water or sea-weed. However it could also be related to *salo (a sale). In this case, it may be related to prosperity magic.

Rune Sequence

Sowilo Ansuz Laguz Uruz. The concepts of success, nourishment, and stable forward force is evident in this formula.

Appendix D

In Contrast to Christianity

As many references have been made in this work to the Christian tradition and many comparisons made, it is necessary to offer an analysis on how the Indo-European pagan (and hence Runic) traditions differ with Christianity. Understanding these differences is as important to understanding the Runic tradition as the similarities are.

D.1 Chronology and the World

The basic concept among the Indo-Europeans appears to be that the human and the society were fundamentally like trees. That they could grow and eventually die, but that they could impact the world in fundamental ways. To the Indo-European pagan, the world is neither sacrosanct nor evil, but rather a foundation upon which to build one's society, agriculture, etc. These actions can be compared to lifting up the world and making it more inhabitable. These things are cyclic, though, and eventually the world will come crashing down to its primordial resting point.

In ancient Persia a revolution against the Indo-European concept of divine and social order was begun by Zoroaster. Zoroaster inverted the cycle and held that we lived in a fallen age dominated by the battle of good (lead by Ahura Mazda— "The Wise Lord") and evil (lead by Angri Mani— "The Angry One"), that one day good would triumph and those who endorsed evil would be punished. Zoroastrianism thus differs from the traditional concept of order in two important ways. The first is the concept of a cosmic evil and the second is a belief that in the current age, the world is in a fallen state rather than an exalted state. Zoroastrianism remained a small cult in Persia and Babylon until the time when Darius succeeded Cyrus the Great as ruler of the Persian empire.

The Jews appear to have absorbed a number of Zoroastrian ideas during their captivity in Babylon. These appear to have included both the concept of a cosmic evil, and a reinforced idea that we live in an age where the world exists in a fallen state. During the Talmudic period that followed, many of the stories that most Christians are familiar with but don't know the origins of (such as the story of the fall of Satan from heaven) were written. The Jews appear to have picked up on two other ideas as well: the concept of abstract holy symbols including the Star of David, the Pentagram, and the Swastika,¹ and the concept of alphabetic mysticism.

While Judaism later dropped the emphasis on dualism, it did not do so before Christianity was already fully formed. So Christianity carried a construct which originated in the rebellion of Zoroastrianism and was designed specifically as a weapon against the Indo-European pagan traditions, and this construct survives in mainstream Christian theology today. Also while it can be argued that Judaism still holds with the concept of a fallen world, this concept is not nearly as pronounced as it is in Christianity.²

To the Christian, the world was created in perfection (the Garden of Eden) and fell through the influence of the Evil One (the serpent). The coming of Christ made it possible to overcome the evil of the world on a personal level through belief and praying in the name of Christ, and that the second coming would usher in the end of the world where the unbelievers would be destroyed. Consequently, there are entrenched aspects of Christian tradition which involve looking forward to death and to the end of the world, and seeing these catastrophes as cosmically Good.

In contrast, to the Indo-European pagan, the world was created as a hostile place, and is lifted up by our efforts so that it is inhabitable. It is maintained through the conscious action of the priest

¹These were important symbols in Christianity too through the Middle Ages, and in Judaism, they remained central until the mid-19th century when the Swastika and Pentagram fell out of use. In Jewish tradition, the Swastika represented the Crown of God.

²The Gospel according to John states that the world is evil, that the fundamental state of human nature is of darkness, and that the great enemy that Christ overcame was the World.

and the king, and will one day collapse to its primal state, where the primordial destructive forces prevail. The end of the world is to be forestalled as long as possible because it means the end of human activity for a time, and that the process must begin anew.

D.2 The Afterlife

Christianity, because the concept of a cosmic evil is central to its belief system, generally holds that true believers go to a place of reward and those who live outside that belief go to a place of punishment. This belief system owes itself partly to the Zoroastrian beliefs, but also to Plato's descriptions of the afterlife in *Phaedrus* and *Republic*. They differ from Plato's ideas in a number of important regards including the fact that Plato described the rewards and punishments as lasting a few thousand years after which reincarnation would allow for more progress towards ascending back to the heavens from which we came. In essence while Plato saw the afterlife as a temporary part of the cycle of reincarnation, Christianity sees it as permanent.

The Norse, and probably most other Indo-European peoples believed that reincarnation was at least possible. Whether or not it was seen as the standard version of life after death seems to have varied from culture to culture. For example, the Norse seemed to acknowledge the possibility in the Helgi lays, but most depictions of the afterlife have the soul either going to one of the halls of Asgard or to Hel's chthonic halls. In general, the idea appears to have been that the state of being at the moment of death determined the afterlife, and that those who died in the ecstasy of combat would go to Valholl, while those who drowned at sea would go to the halls of Aegir under the sea. These cases are largely devoid of reward or punishment—they are seen as a natural aspect of the soul's spiritual process. In essence, there is great emphasis placed on dying well.

Appendix E

Annotated Bibliography and Resource List

Bibliography

- [1] Michael (tr.) Alexander. *The Earliest English Poems*. Penguin, New York, 1966.

This is a really wonderful little book of translations of Old English poetry. Highly recommended.

- [2] Jesse L Byock. *The Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer*. University of California, Los Angeles, 1990.

Byock's translation of the Volsung Saga is readable and accessible. From a Runic perspective, this is one of the most important sagas in existence because it is more myth than history. Extremely highly recommended.

- [3] Georges Dumézil. *Gods of the Ancient Northmen*. University of California, Los Angeles, 1963.

Dumézil's theories regarding the tripartite structure of Indo-European myth, liturgy, and society are somewhat controversial, yet they are the cornerstone of comparative Indo-European mythology. This work is particularly important to the understanding of Norse myth, and in it Dumézil compares Norse myth with Roman legends and Vedic passages in order to arrive at a greater understanding of the stories and their significance. Highly recommended.

- [4] Stephen Flowers. *The Galdrabok: An Icelandic Grimoire*. Weiser, York Beach, ME, 1989.

A translation of an Icelandic Grimoire from the sixteenth century. Well worth reading.

- [5] Stephen E Flowers. *Runes and Magic: Magical Formuleic Elements of the Older Tradition*. Lang, New York, 1986.

This is a rare and sought after book in the field. It is no longer in print. It is a relatively complete analysis of the existing Elder Futhark runic finds, their social context, etc. Very Highly Recommended, though it is hard to find.

- [6] Stephen E Flowers. *Ibn Fadlan's Travel Report As It Concerns the Scandinavian Rûs*. Runa-Raven, P.O. Box 557, Smithville, TX, 1998.

This is a short translation of the travel report of Ibn Fadlan and contains one of the few written descriptions of Viking funeral practices. It is well worth reading.

- [7] P. G. W. Glare, editor. *The Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Oxford, New York, 1996.

I found this book to be of marginal use for this project, though it did make a wonderful compliment to the Oxford English Dictionary. Although this is one of the most important reference books in its field, it is not very useful when it comes to Runic Magic.

- [8] W. C. (tr.) Green. *The Story of Egil Skallagrimson: An Icelandic Family History of the 9th and 10th Centuries*. Elliot, London, 1893.
- Egil's Saga is one of the most important sagas from a Runic perspective. While the Volsung Saga is mythic, this saga covers runic use from an historical perspective. This was the first translation into English of this work. You can find it online at <http://www.northvegr.org>. Recommended.
- [9] Lee M. Hollander. *The Poetic Edda*. University of Texas, Austin, TX, 1962.
- The Poetic Edda is the most important source of the surviving mythic tales of the Norse. Hollander has done a great service to the field in his translation, attempting to preserve the poetics as well as the meaning of the poetry. Highly recommended.
- [10] Geoffrey of Monmouth. *The History of the Kings of Britain*. Penguin, New York, 1966.
- Geoffrey's work forms the earliest distinct corpus which centers around the story of King Arthur, and is illuminating because this work is also one of the most Celtic. It was originally written in the eleven hundreds. Recommended for historians.
- [11] Herman Palsson(tr.). *Egil's Saga*. Penguin, New York, 1977.
- When studying works in translation, it is often very useful to have more than one translation to work with. Palsson's translation of Egil's Saga is excellent and, like Green, his translation of the poetry preserves much of the esoteric content. Highly recommended.
- [12] Lisa Peschel. *A Practical Guide to the Runes*. Llewellyn, St, Paul, 1989.
- This book makes a great introduction to the modern Runic tradition provided that one understands that it was written by an outsider. While Peschel makes references to Wicca and Thelema in the book, the descriptions of the staves is reasonably accurate (and quite a bit better than a few other authors). This is the book that got me started, so I have a soft spot for it in my heart.
- [13] Oxford University Press. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford, New York, compact edition, 1971.
- This is **the** authoritative dictionary from a linguistics and philology perspective. It is expensive and contains short discussions on many potential etymologies and other linguistic topics. It is expensive and heavy, and the set requires a magnifying glass to read, but it is one of the most important reference used in the writing of this book. Extremely highly recommended, however, you may be better off using it at your local library.
- [14] Snorri Sturluson. *Edda*. Everyman, Rutland, VT, 1987.
- Edda was originally intended to be a reader's introduction to Skaldic poetry. Sturluson covered the basics of Norse mythology, kennings, and poetic form for his readers in the twelfth century. Unfortunately most translators are mostly interested in the sections of the work that relate to the study of Norse myth, so they omit the third section which covers poetic form. The Faulkes translation is therefore nearly unique in that it complete in this regard. Highly recommended.
- [15] Cornelius Tacitus. *The Agricola and the Germania*. Penguin, New York, 1948.

Tacitus's work is extremely important in the study of the ancient Germanic cultures. He never traveled himself and wrote second-hand. Nevertheless, his work is the most important work to come out of that time period, the end of the first century CE. Highly recommended.

- [16] Edred Thorsson. *Futhark: A Handbook of Rune Magic*. Weiser, York Beach, ME, 1983.
This work represents one of the first serious works in recent times on magic using the Elder Futhark by a scholar in the field. While his approach is fairly different to my own, I suggest reading this work.
- [17] Edred Thorsson. *Runelore: A Handbook of Esoteric Runology*. Weiser, York Beach, ME, 1987.
One of the great classics in the esoteric runology field. The work is divided into two parts. The first surveys the corpus of runic inscriptions and references to Runic magic, while the second covers Thorsson's ideas of the appearances of the runes, the cosmology into which they fit, and the way that the gods relate to them. Highly recommended.
- [18] Edred Thorsson. *A Book of Troth*. Llewellyn, St. Paul, 1989.
This is Thorsson's major handbook for living the modern Germanic heathen religion. Worth reading, but is not specifically related to runes per se.
- [19] Edred Thorsson. *The Nine Doors of Midgard: A Complete Curriculum of Runic Magic*. Llewellyn, St Paul, first edition, 1991.
This book is intended to be a complete curriculum to the modern tradition of rune magic using the Elder Futhark. It is extremely useful as a general curriculum, ensuring that the student gets a balanced perspective of insight, practice, and study into the older traditional material. Highly recommended. Note that this edition is now out of print, but a third edition is now available from Runa-Raven.
- [20] Edred Thorsson. *Northern Magic: Mysteries of the Norse, Germans, and English*. Llewellyn, St. Paul, 1993.
Though small, this work is important as it covers the Younger Futhark, Seiðr, and the workings of Pennsylvania Dutch hex magic. Recommended.
- [21] Edred Thorsson. *Rune Might: Secret Practices of the German Rune Magicians*. Llewellyn, St. Paul, 1994.
This work covers runic practices and lore from the modern Armanic Runic tradition. It is worth reading because many of the practices can and are applied to the Elder Futhark. This is a fairly sanitized book, and Thorsson avoids reference to the extremely racist beliefs that many of the Armanen followers (particularly between the wars) followed. Recommended.
- [22] Edred Thorsson. *Green Runa: The Runemaster's Notebook: Shorter Works of Edred Thorsson Volume I (1978-1985)*. Runa-Raven, PO BOX 557, Smithville, TX, 1996.
This is a collection of many shorter essays that appeared in a number of journals by Edred Thorsson. In them he details traditional ideas on a wide range of issues from race to holiness. There are quite a number of gems here.

- [23] Calvert Watkins. *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics*. Oxford, New York, 1995.

This is a groundbreaking look at Indo-European poetic structures, and it also documents many current and past theories in this area. The book is very dry and technical, but it is phenomenal in its scope and coverage. Be prepared to take a year or two to get through this book and come out with a whole new look at poetry. Highly Recommended.