

Abstracts

Aya Van Renterghem, University of Nottingham: “To Twig or not to Twig: Secret Runes in the British Isles”

The existence of runic cryptography in has long been recognised by runologists: numerous epigraphical examples have been found in Scandinavia, with the Rök-stone as the prime example, and René Derolez demonstrated different types of runic codes among the Continental *runica manuscripta*. In the British Isles, at first sight, there appears to have been less interest in this phenomenon, with Hackness in North Yorkshire and the Orkney islands being the only places to have produced epigraphical examples and London, British Library, Stowe MS 57 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS 572 as the sole two manuscript representatives. In all four of these instances, twig runes are shown, yet they are geographically and chronologically disparate. The manuscripts were likely written in the South, but the carvings are situated in the North. The Hackness cross and Bodleian MS 572 have both been dated to the ninth century, whereas Stowe MS 57 and the Maeshowe twig runes, for instance, can be dated to the twelfth. In this paper I will be examining all four cases and determine if they are simply the result of a local interest and should be considered in isolation, or if it is possible to establish a relation between them.

Henrik Williams, Uppsala University: “Or Barnes10 Þorný sarð: Who did what to whom?”

One of the Maeshowe inscriptions (OR Barnes10) has been interpreted by Michael Barnes as Þorný sarð. Helgi reist. ‘Þorný fucked. Helgi carved.’ The question is what Þorný is supposed to have done exactly, and to whom. The meaning of the verb serða will be discussed, as will the inscription in relation to other runic texts with a sexual content.

Jan Ragnar Hagland, Norwegian University of Technology and Science: “The Corpus of Runic Inscriptions from Orkney and Shetland and the Notion of ‘Runic Literacy’.”

A certain amount of runic inscriptions has, over the years, been discovered in Orkney and Shetland, and elsewhere on the British Isles for that matter. It seems pertinent then in these Northern Isles to count on a certain degree of ‘runic literacy’. This is, however, a notion of modern times and not very precisely defined as a term. The present proposal will, nonetheless, be an attempt at approaching the difficult question of how and to what extent runic script was used in these islands from the Viking Age onwards, into high and late medieval times. This simple, or perhaps even simplistic, demarcation –

‘how and to what extent’ – shall in this proposed attempt serve as a working definition for the term ‘runic literacy’.

As a basis for considerations along the lines suggested above, we need access to the corpus of inscriptions from these islands known to us so far. We are, in that respect, fortunate to have the corpus established by Barnes and Page (2006, 117–214) as a point of departure: BP list seven inscriptions from Shetland and 19 from Orkney¹, the latter not including some thirty in Maeshowe published by Barnes in 1994. As the Maeshowe inscriptions appear to constitute a separate case, they will be treated accordingly in the contribution herewith proposed.

Even so, and even if the numbers are low, there is a discrepancy in size between the Shetland and the Orkney corpuses of runic inscriptions as we know them at present. In addition the new finds after 2006, presented e. g. in the call for papers to the planned gathering, contribute to an impression of somewhat more active runic communities in Orkney than in Shetland. The proposed contribution will elaborate on this.

What then, if anything, can the preserved corpus of inscriptions tell us about runic literacy in the islands that interests us here? Answers to those questions depend, of course, on several aspects of the preserved material. At first sight the sources we have got do not tell us very much. They tell us that runic script was known and used for a certain variety of purposes that cannot easily be determined any further. The main reason for this is that a great majority of the scanty source material we have, is either impossible to read and/or is not giving much linguistic sense, if any at all. This and other challenges will be further discussed within the framework of the present proposal.

Jay Johnston, University of Sydney: “Religion and Runology: How Religious Concepts Impacted Upon Antiquarian Interpretations of the Maeshowe Inscriptions”

The discovery of runic inscriptions in Maeshowe, Orkney, in 1861 generated a wealth of interest. Interpretations of the inscriptions were produced by a number of antiquarians and scholars of Scandinavian history and published both in specialist journals and newspapers. This paper examines the impact of concepts of belief/ religion in the initial interpretations of the Maeshowe runic inscriptions.

¹ Barnes, Michael P. and R. I. Page. 2006. *The Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions of Britain*. Uppsala = Runrön 19. They (p. 340) suggest that †**OR 2 Unstan** “should, we think, be omitted from the corpus”. Their abbreviation and numbering system (**SH** and **OR** + number) will be kept in the proposed presentation.

By examining selected inscriptions this analysis will elaborate upon the way in which the interpretations were deeply interrelated with wider Antiquarian discourse, especially with regard to Orkney's history and concepts of Nordic identity and its Scottish heritage. Indeed, the analysis of the inscriptions maintained, reproduced and contributed to Victorian concepts of the 'Old North' and reproduced pagan-Christian binary identities.

K. Jonas Nordby, Museum of Cultural History, Oslo: "A prayer or what?" (N 131 M Nore kirke)

There are three or four runic inscriptions cut in walls and pillars of Nore stave-church in Numedal. Inscription N131 is on the centre pillar—a spot considered one of the most prominent in the church. In *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer*, vol. 2, pp. 151–53, Magnus Olsen presents the reading unþum(e)ralskþrs which he interprets Unn þú mér alls góðs, "Grant me all that is good". This seems to allude to the phrase Guð ann oss góðs, "God grants us good" at the beginning of one of the sermons (*Sermo necessaria*) in *The Old Norwegian Homily Book* (AM 619 4to). The inscription is thus apparently a pious prayer to God begging for a good and happy life. But is this really what it says? An inspection of the inscription last summer made me think that it is a request to someone else concerning something quite different.

Judith Jesch, University of Nottingham: "Vikings in Maeshowe. Some thoughts on Or Barnes 1 M."

This short talk will address the question of whether *Víkingr* in *Maeshowe 1* is the common noun or a personal name through consideration of contemporary usage in other Old Norse texts.

Michael Lerche Nielsen, University of Copenhagen: "'A good word never broke a tooth". The significance of the Brough of Birsay amulet, OR 11"

The well-known runic tooth pendant which was found in the late 1930s in the Brough of Birsay carries the opening of a Norse runic *fupork* as described in detail by Michael P. Barnes and R. I. Page (2006 187-191). Due to the intriguing object itself, it's a canine from a brown bear, there has been much speculation on how we should interpret the inscription. Does the *fupork* imply a magic function or do the runes merely demonstrate an attempt to "try out a knife [or] to demonstrate literacy" (p. 191)? This paper wishes to launch yet another line of interpretation based on the implication of the double-lined runes which are used in the inscription.

Ragnhild Ljosland, University of the Highlands and Islands: "The 12th century intruders' attitude to Maeshowe"

I will invite you to an exploration of the attitude displayed by the group who entered Maeshowe in the 1150s. What did mound breaking mean in the 12th century? Is it significant that some of the intruders seem not to have been local residents? Which beliefs did the group hold about the mound? The presentation will use saga accounts of mound breaking and folklore material to discuss the Maeshowe inscriptions, especially Or Barnes 4, 8, 25, 26, 27, 28 (treasure story), Or Barnes 14, 24 (Jerusalem travellers), Or Barnes 20 (Gauk Trandilsson's axe), and Or Barnes 23 (Loðbrók's sons).

Sarah Jane Gibbon, University of the Highlands and Islands: "'The Naversdale Runestone: Pater Noster to Pigs Nose?'"

In September 2013 Donnie Grieve discovered a runestone at the farm of Naversdale in Orphir, Orkney. The inscription, 19 characters long, is written in a similar style of runes to those in Maeshowe and so can be date-bracketed to the twelfth-fifteenth centuries with the contextual implications suggesting a date in the earlier part of this period. However, unlike the Maeshowe runes the inscription is written in Latin and is therefore a very rare find for the Northern Isles. Terje Spurkland translated the inscription as '...who art in Heaven hallowed'. Thus this find joins a corpus of Pater Noster inscriptions found across the Scandinavian World.

This paper will be in two parts; the first part will discuss the context of the find with the aim of establishing why the stone was at Naversdale whilst the second part will focus on the wider significance of this find and its value as a material expression of Christian practice in medieval Orkney.

Sonia Pereswetoff-Morath, Uppsala University: "The Runic Inscription on the Pendant from the Brough of Deerness: Is it Lexical or not?"

The copper pendant in question was found in 2009 during excavations at the Brough of Deerness, and so far it has been examined by two scholars. They are both of the opinion that the inscription on the pendant is not lexical. Michael Barnes calls it "unintelligible" (Gerrard et al 2010:2), and John Hines suggests that "actually being meaningless best explains this object and its inscription" (2013:6). On internet sites the object is already described as "Pendant with rune-like decoration" (Society of Antiquaries of Scotland).

In this paper I wish to discuss the possibility and probability of this inscription being lexical, and in order to do so I shall try to provide a reading for its runes. Some answers as to how its runes should be read I shall seek in other inscriptions from Orkney.

Also, the Deerness pendant will be compared with other metal pendants with lexical and non-lexical runic inscriptions from Scandinavia, which will probably throw some light on this object, too.

Literature: Gerrard et al 2010 = Gerrard, J., J. Barrett & M. Saunders, 2010. The Brough of Deerness Excavations 2009: Annual Data Structure Report. Unpublished report. Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research. John Hines 2013: Unpublished report. Society of Antiquaries of Scotland: <http://www.socantscot.org/article.asp?aid=806> (last seen: 31 January 2015)

Vivian Busch and Jana Krüger: "Or Barnes20: A metrical inscription?"

Or Barnes20 is one of the most disputed among the runic inscriptions which were carved into the walls of the prehistorical cairn of Maeshowe by Norsemen about the middle of the 12th century. In the inscription it is stated that it was carved by the man who was most skilled in runes west of the ocean with the axe of Gaukr Trandilssonr (known from *Njáls saga* and *Landnámabók*). In general the inscription is treated to be composed in verse. Magnus Olsen (1903, 18-21) considers the inscription to be metrical, whereas Finnur Jónsson (1904-5) firmly rejected this. Michael Barnes (1994, 155) declares it as 'rough-and-ready verse'. In previous research runic inscriptions often have been considered to be metrical only because of alliteration or internal rhyme (e.g. Hübler 1996), but as Edith Marold (2011, 101) pointed out "the starting point and guiding principle is the condition that verse inscriptions be both metrical and alliterating". Starting from this premise the metrical character of Or Barnes20 will be analysed and the inscription will be compared with other metrical runic inscriptions from the same time.

Literature: Barnes, Michael P. 1994. *The Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe, Orkney*. Runrön 8. Uppsala. Finnur Jónsson. 1904-5. Review of M. Olsen, *Tre orknøske runeindskrifter*. *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Filologi* 13, 32-3. Hübler, Frank. 1996. *Schwedische Runendichtung der Wikingerzeit*. Runrön 10. Uppsala. Marold, Edith. 2011. 'Vers oder nicht Vers? Zum metrischen Charakter von Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark'. *Futhark* 2, 63-102. Olsen, Magnus. 1903. *Tre orknøske runeindskrifter* (Christiania Videnskabs-Selskabs Forhandlinger for 1903. No. 10).