

# THE ICELANDIC RUNE-POEM

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## The Icelandic Rune-Poem

The text commonly called the Icelandic rune-poem is only a poem by courtesy. It consists of a series of stanzas of common pattern. Each is a single sentence, its subject one of the runes of the sixteen-letter futhark. There follow three groups of periphrases or kennings defining, or alluding to, the rune-name. For this reason the form has been called *þrideilur*, ‘three parts, triads’ (at any rate as early as 1627 when Arngrímur Jónsson defined the term: *þrydeylur, quasi triplices expositiones*),<sup>1</sup> though that begs the question too, as I hope to show. Here, for convenience, I shall use the more common English appellation, the Icelandic rune-poem. This work survives in two quite early manuscripts, AM 687d 4<sup>o</sup> and AM 461 12<sup>o</sup> as well as a number of later ones, and there are texts of and quotations from it in seventeenth-century printed books. There are at least four modern editions of the poem, those of Kålund, Wimmer, Lindroth and Dickins.<sup>2</sup>

### The Two Earliest Manuscripts

AM 687d 4<sup>o</sup>, now in the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, Reykjavík, is dated *c.* 1500. It is a single bifolium, measuring roughly 145mm x 200mm, and bearing additional traces of horizontal and vertical folding, presumably for ease of carrying, that are likely to pre-date Árni Magnússon’s ownership. Árni had the bifolium bound and titled ‘Galldrastafer’, which indicates his attitude to the material. In 1892 the official catalogue of the

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1. Jakob Benediktsson, *Ole Worm’s correspondence with Icelanders* (Bibliotheca Arnarnagæana vii, København, 1948), p. 5. Cf. the *Thrydeilur* of Ole Worm, *runer seu Danica literatura antiquissima* (Amsterdam, 1636), p. 95. One difficulty with the term *þrideilur* is that eighteenth-century writers on runes used it in a quite different sense: to define the division of the futhark into three *attir*. Early runologists also listed *funndeilur*, *nideilur* and various other numbers of kennings in a verse, but also *tvideilur* by which they referred to the Norwegian rune-poem, whose stanzas are of two lines linked by rhyme. Throughout this paper I use the terms ‘kenning’ and ‘paraphrase’ interchangeably and in the most general sense, rather than make subtle distinctions as some of my colleagues have done.

2. Kr. Kålund, ‘Et gammel-norsk rune-rim og nogle islandske rune-ræmser’, *Småstykker 1-16* (Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur xiii, København, 1884-91), pp. 1-21, with a supplement and some comments by S. Bugge, pp. 100-113; Ludv. F. A. Wimmer, *Die Runenschrift*, trans. F. Holthausen (Berlin, 1887), pp. 275-88; Hjalmar Lindroth, ‘Studier över de nordiska dikterna om runornas namn’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, xxix (n. s. xxv) (1913), 256-95; Bruce Dickins, *Runic and heroic poems of the old Teutonic peoples* (Cambridge, 1915), pp. 28-33. For completeness I mention here the text printed by Maureen Halsall, *The Old English Rune Poem: a critical edition* (McMaster Old English Studies and Texts ii, Toronto, 1981), pp. 183-6, which is confessedly based on those of Wimmer and Dickins. Of the Icelandic and Norwegian rune-poems Jonna Louis-Jensen comments: ‘Digtene er udgivet flere gange, men en definitiv tekst er stadig ikke etableret’ [there are several editions of the poems, but no definitive text has yet been established], ‘Norrøne navnegæder’, *Nordica Bergensia*, iv (1994), 35-52 at p. 41.

Arnamagnean Library, Copenhagen, listed its contents as: 1) f. 1r, Latin prayers to Mary, 2) f. 1v, the Icelandic rune-poem, 3) ff. 1v-2r, cryptic alphabets, 4) f. 2r, the rune-names with Latin glosses upon them, 5) f. 2v, Latin exorcisms and prayers.<sup>3</sup> This agrees with Kålund's account in his edition of the Icelandic rune-poem, though there he paginates (1-4) rather than foliating,<sup>4</sup> and Wimmer concurs in his edition of the verses, citing only pp. 2-3,<sup>5</sup> Lindroth's detailed presentation of later variant texts of the poem gives but the sketchiest account of AM 687d 4<sup>o</sup>; indeed he admits (though only in a footnote) that he did not examine either of the two earlier manuscripts.<sup>6</sup> Dickins simply mentions the manuscripts in passing.<sup>7</sup>

Whatever was the case in the earlier years of this century, when I first saw AM 687d 4<sup>o</sup>, in 1993, it no longer had the form that Kålund defined. At some time or other the bifolium had been turned inside out and refolded so that pp. 4, 1 (ff. 2v, 1r) held the rune-poem and related material (items 2-4), and pp. 2, 3 (ff. 1v, 2r) the Latin religious texts. This arrangement is consonant with the secondary, pre-Árni, folding which made the manuscript a convenient size for keeping in the pocket. By this the empty lower half of Kålund f. 2r formed the outside, and consequently became very scuffed and dirtied. However, the arrangement does not make sense of the bifolium itself, so it is likely that the format defined by Kålund is the one the scribe intended.

A series of photographs taken in ?1963 and preserved in the Arnamagnean Institute, Copenhagen, gives the individual pages, with the bifolium, apparently taken from its binding, placed flat. After this, however, the manuscript was rebound in its Kålund order. The incorrect formatting based on the evidence of the secondary folding seems to have taken place during conservation in 1980 when the manuscript was prepared for sending to Iceland. It has now been corrected, and the rune-poem again occupies f. 1v.

Clearly there has been some tampering with the sheet over the years, and this may cast light on a dark subject, the changing condition of this important and in some respects unique presentation of the Icelandic commentary on the rune-names. At present f. 1v is in many places hard, even impossible to read, and it is a matter of speculation whether earlier

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3. Kr. Kålund, *Katalog over den Arnamagnæanske Handskriftsamling* (København, 1888-94), no. 1717.

4. 'Et gammel-norsk rune-rim', 17-18.

5. *Rimenskrift*, p. 282.

6. 'Diktarna om runornas namn', 257; also 'De båda hdskr. 687 och 461, some noggrannt äro undersökta av både Kålund och Wimmer, har jag ej själv undersökt, utan lämnar uppgifterna efter desse' [I have not myself examined the two manuscripts 687 and 461, which were looked at in detail by both Kålund and Wimmer. I have taken my information from them], 276, note 1.

7. *Runic and heroic poems*, p. 8.

editors could see much more than we can now, whether the condition of this page has declined a good deal since the opening decades of this century, perhaps in connection with the refolding and rebinding. Dr Peter Springborg, Director of the Arnarnaganean Institute, thinks this unlikely, since Institute policy on conservation has always been very conservative. He suggests (personal communication) that nineteenth-century scholars may have applied reagents to make the text more easily visible, and that these have in the end darkened the parchment. This is possible - apparently Kålund received permission to use reagent on Arnarnaganean manuscripts though AM 687d 4<sup>o</sup> is not among those listed; but the general appearance of the parchment does not suggest to me the application of reagent, though the occasional line of writing may have been so treated.

Unfortunately none of the early editors gave a detailed account of the manuscript's state. Kålund contented himself with saying: 'desværre er skriften på en del af dette parti næsten helt bortslidt' [alas, the text on part of this section is almost entirely rubbed away], and recording individual sequences that he found *ulæselige* [illegible]. In a generalisation Wimmer agreed with Kålund: 'Die handschrift ist indessen an mehreren stellen sehr undeutlich oder sogar ganz unleserlich und muss also mit hülfe der übrigen texte ergänzt werden, deren abweichende lesarten im übrigen nur angeführt werden, wo sie einige bedeutung haben' [In several places the manuscript is very unclear or even illegible, and so has to be supplemented from the other texts, whose variant readings are moreover cited only where they have any significance]. He also reported bits that were *unleserlich*, usually (though not always) agreeing with Kålund; indeed, there must be suspicion that his readings were strongly influenced by Kålund's. There is no indication that Dickins ever saw the manuscript (indeed I do not think he did), contenting himself with saying that occasional readings were 'illegible in 687'; there are now many more illegible passages than he cited.

At present the page bearing the rune-poem is badly rubbed and blackened in places, so that only the first line can be read with any ease. Parts of text in the obscured areas can be made out using the microscope, parts with the help of ultra-violet light, and parts even by using back-lighting. What can be seen in natural light varies a good deal according to the nature of the light and its direction. But there still remain bits of the poem that today are unreadable. In general these correspond to Kålund's illegible sequences, but there are parts he could read and I cannot (for instance, the opening of stanza 13), and vice versa. The excellent photograph taken under ultra-violet light in ?1963 is of immense help (note too other prints from ?1963, ?1977) but even that leaves some details obscure. More might become accessible by using new techniques of lighting and recording.

The matter is of some importance in more general runic studies. For example, the name of the final rune in the Norse/Icelandic futhark is expounded in all four modern editions of the Icelandic rune-poem: *y (ýr) er bendr bogi*, 'y is a bent bow'. Wimmer, Kålund and Lindroth admitted this passage could not be read in MS AM 687d 4<sup>o</sup> Dickins

was silent on the point. At present it is certainly largely unreadable, even under ultra-violet light; indeed, the rune-form itself that opens the verse can be detected only with some difficulty. This passage is one where the ultra-violet light photograph is of little help. Yet the identification of the rune-name *yr* as 'bow' depends on this verse, and that translation may be significant in explaining the name of the Old English rune *yr*.<sup>8</sup> The other comparatively early manuscript of the Icelandic rune-poem, the sixteenth-century AM 461 12°, omits this letter altogether, so it is no help. To get such a reading as *bendr bogi* we must consult early modern sources. For instance, in 1627 Arngrímur Jónsson quoted the verse as *yr er bendur bogiel Bardaga gagnloc fyfvu flyter*.<sup>9</sup> Or there are later adaptations of the text, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ones written up by antiquaries such as Jón Ólafsson, though these often differ in detail from the earlier versions and are likely to be unreliable guides.<sup>10</sup> They have readings for this passage of *Benttur Bogi*, *tvibendtr bogi*, *tvibentr bögi* and so on. Clearly it is likely that *bendr bogi* is not far off the mark for the illegible AM 687d 4°. Yet the full material needs to be adduced.

Another weakness of existing editions is that their editors made no attempt to define the lay-out of the rune-poem in AM 687d 4° (or in other manuscripts, as for that) though it may throw useful light on the Hicces text of the Old English rune-poem.<sup>11</sup> The sixteen Scandinavian rune-names are defined in sixteen lines, each beginning with the form but not the name of a letter in the mixed or 'older Norwegian' runic futhark.<sup>12</sup> Thus the rune graphs stand discretely in vertical line down the left-hand side of the page, as indeed in the Hicces printing of the Old English poem. AM 461 12° does not have the same lay-out, for it does not include the graphs; instead each verse begins with the rune-name. The text is not set out formally in individual lines, each treating a single rune, though there is

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8. Cf. the statement in R. I. Page, *Introduction to English runes* (London, 1973), p. 85, who ought to have known better. There is a discussion of the name's meaning in Halsall, *Old English Rune Poem*, pp. 156-7. In this matter some of the studies of Cynewulf's runic signatures might be useful, if scholars could only agree on their signification.

9. Jakob Benediktsson, *Ole Worm's correspondence*, p. 5. Arngrímur translates the verse, *yr est Bendur i.e. tetensus, Bogie i.e. arcus; Bardaga i.e. militiæ, gagn i.e. commoditas; fyfvu i.e. teli flyter vel fleitirlid est delator vel festinator*. Cf. also Worm, *runer*, p. 95: *y er beñpur bogie, barþaga gagn, og fifvu flytir* which he translates, *arcus intensus, militiæ commoditas, teli delator*.

10. Below, pp. 19-22. There is also AM 687d 4°'s Latin translation of the rune-name, *arcus*, to be considered, but again the validity of such Latin additions needs to be examined. Other texts of the Icelandic rune-poem show they are not primary: below, pp. 8, 32

11. R. I. Page, 'Anglo-Saxon texts in early modern transcripts', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, vi, 2 (1973), 69-75, discussing George Hempl, 'Hicces's additions to the Runic Poem', *Modern Philology*, i (1903), 135-41.

12. As given in Magnus Olsen *et al.*, *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer* (Oslo, 1941- ), v, 243, though with, just visible under ultra-violet light, a doubled form of the final rune.

some suggestion that was once planned as we shall see. Probably AM 687d 4° has the original format here, but it needs explicating. Such weaknesses as these in the earlier editions justify this further attempt at presenting the Icelandic rune-poem.

### 1. The AM 687d 4° (hereafter = A) text: f. lv, 11. 1-16. (Plate 1)

Abbreviated words/syllables are rendered in *italic* (which cannot be more than a general indication since the scribe was inconsistent in writing out the forms of some endings). Letters and groups which the scribe omitted in error or through lack of space are supplied within angled brackets < >. Letter sequences that cannot now be identified are inserted, for convenience of reading, within square brackets [ ], on the evidence either of the available space or of related texts. Such added readings have, of course, little authority for the A version of the poem. The convention [...] indicates that the reading cannot be supplied with any conviction, and merely suggests very roughly how many graphs are lost. It is not always easy to distinguish certain spelling conventions in the manuscript - whether *u* or *v*, *d* or *ð* is intended, for instance. In such cases I have perhaps rather arbitrarily chosen one graph or the other. It is sometimes hard to determine whether the scribe intended a space between adjacent words or not, and again my practice here is inevitably arbitrary. Stops (raised points, colons) are not always easy to distinguish from chance marks on the parchment surface. Rune forms are here given their conventional transliterations in **bold** characters.

- |     |                                                                |                      |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| (1) | <b>f</b> er frænda rog ok flædar viti ok g[ralfseids gata      | Aurum fy<l>ker       |
| (2) | <b>u</b> er skygia gratur ok skæra þuer[rir ok] hirdis hatr    | Vmbre · Visi         |
| (3) | <b>þ</b> er kuenna kuql ok kleita ibui ok [..]runar ver        | Sat[ur]nus. þeingill |
| (4) | <b>o</b> er alldingautr ok asg[ar]dz iof[ur ok v]alhallar visi | Jupi[ter] Oddviti    |
| (5) | <b>r</b> er sitiandi sela ok snudig ferd ok iors erfidi        | Ite<r> · Ræsir       |
| (6) | <b>k</b> er barna baul ok bardagi ok h[o]ldfuahus.             | Flag[...] [k]ongur   |

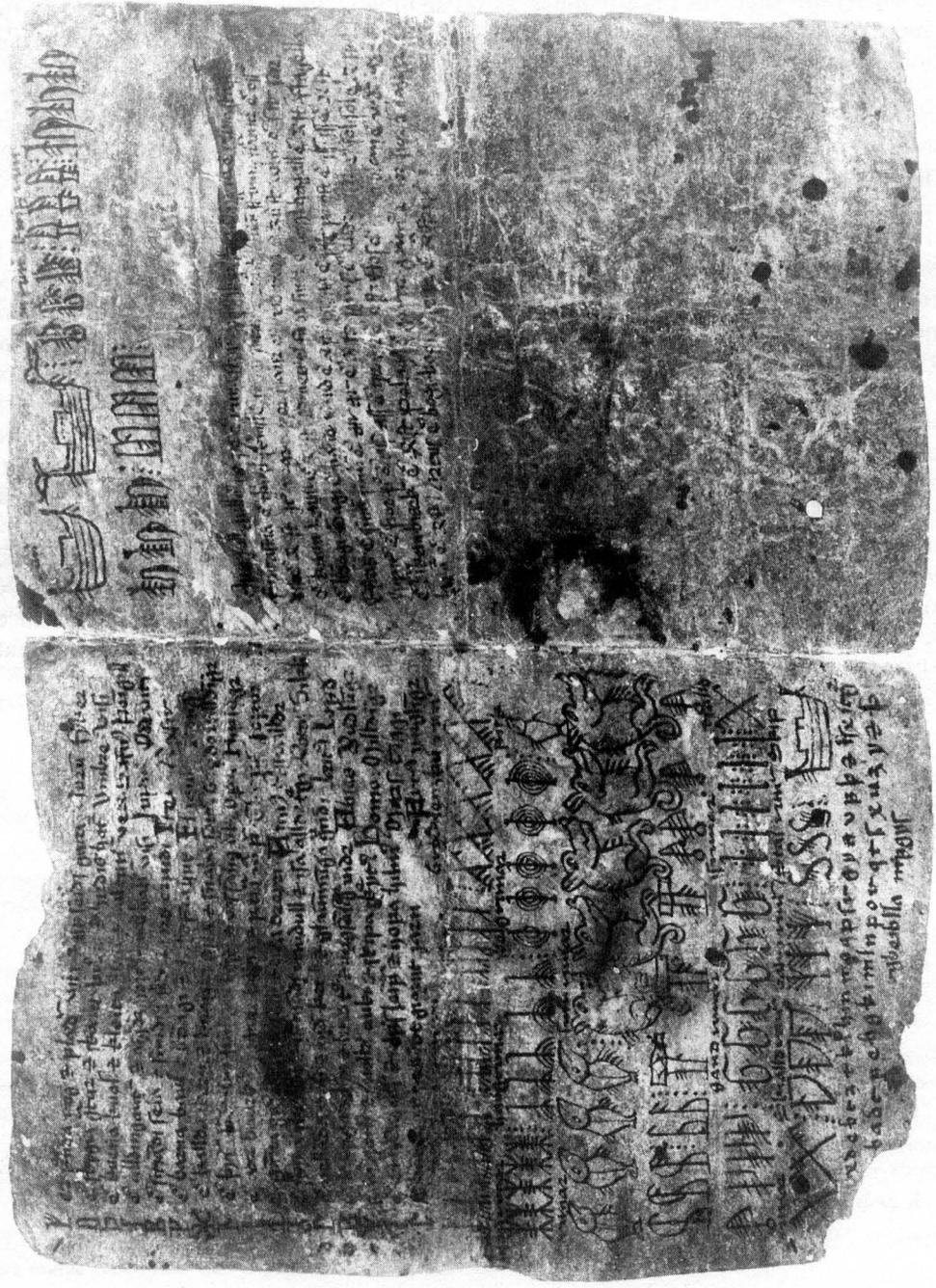


Plate 1. MS AM 687d 4°, fols. 1v-2r.

- (7) **h** er kалlda [k]orn ok knap[a dri]fa ok snaka sott.  
G[ran]do Hilldingr
- (8) **n** er þyiar þra [ok.....] kost[r] ok v[o]ssamlig verk.  
Opera Niflungr
- (9) **i** er ar baur[k]r [ok un]nar þ[e] kia ok feigra manna far.  
Gl[a]cies jofur
- (10) **a** er gunma g[.]d[.....]ok d[a]ladreyri.  
Annus Allvalldr
- (11) **s** er s[k]yia skiolldr [ok sk]inandi raudull ok isa alldrtregi.  
Rota: Siklin<gr>
- (15) **I** [er] vellanda va[.] ok [..]dr ket[i]ll ok glaunmunga grandi.  
Iacus Lofd<ungr>
- (13) **b** er [.....] ok litid tre ok u[.]gsamligr uidr  
Abies.Budlungr
- (14) **m** er manns g[a]man ok molldar auki ok skipa skreytir.  
Homo Milldingr
- (12) **t** er [ein]hendr [a]s ok vlf[s]leifar ok hofa hilmir.  
Mars · Tiggi
- (16) **y** er ber[.....]otgiarnt jarn  
Arcus ynglingr

Notes on the transcript:

1. K(ålund) and W(immer) read 'grafseiðs' which is obviously correct: I could see no sign of the symbol for 'ra'.

2. skæra þuer[rir]: K notes 'sk...þ...., med de ovrige bogstaver ulæselige' [sk...þ.... with the rest of the letters illegible], though he later adds (p. 102) that the sequence 'skara þuer ..' is 'temelig tydelig' [fairly clear]. No comment from W on this point. I read fragments with the ultra-violet lamp. The first word seems to be 'skæra' or possibly 'skæ<sup>r</sup>ia', which could, I suppose, be gen. pl. of a noun *skara*, 'swathe of mown grass'; drizzle could properly be called 'destroyer/reducer of mown grass' if it lasted long enough.

3. I read 'kleita' under ultra-violet and also in the ultra-violet light photograph. K, W have 'kletta' which makes more sense - this would suggest that the scribe made an ill-formed first *t* with a very short horizontal. Neither K nor W could read 'ibui' which however becomes visible under ultra-violet light, as does the '1' (possibly preceded by 'a', the final stroke of which is perhaps to be seen) of '[..]lrunar'. Of the latter K remarks: '687, hvor de tre første bogstaver er utydelige, synes at have málrúnar ver' [687, where the first three letters are indistinct, seems to have málrúnar ver]. W saw the '1' of '[..]lrunar' but suggested *baul- /böl-* for the first element of the compound. Alternatively he supplied *varðrúnar* from a later text of the poem, but that does not fit what can be seen in 687. Neither *mál-* nor *bql-* provides the expected alliteration of this word. *Valrúnar*, otherwise apparently a *hapax*, does not make sense except presumably as a personal name. Is an otherwise unrecorded *vélrunar* possible?

4. K, W read more details of this line than I can, nor does ultra-violet light help.

6. K reads as I do. Wimmer quotes *flagella 'ohne zweitel'* [without doubt], appealing to the Latin translation of the rune-name on the facing page (which is of uncertain authority). I can see, under ultra-violet light, only two short vertical strokes immediately after 'g'. In his supplement to K Bugge (p. 112) read here 'Flag... skal vel være Flag[mona], en mindre rigtig Form for phlegmone' [Flag... must, I suppose, be Flag(mona), a rather inaccurate form of phlegmone].

7. Again K, W read more than I can here. K accepts 'krapa' where I read 'knap[a]', but admits it is *utydeligt*. W has 'krapa-' but makes no comment.

8. K supplies 'ok þungr kostr' for a passage that is *ulæseligt*. W concurs, citing parallels from later manuscripts. In fact there seems to be space for a longer word than 'þungr'. 'vossamlig' K: certainly the vowel of the first element is a little uncertain; 'vássamlig' W.

9. K supplies 'ár-börkr' and 'unnar þak' for passages he cannot read. W concurs. Most of the first and parts of the second appear under ultra-violet light. I have read 'ar' but perhaps the final consonant is 'r'; or 'aar' may be intended,

10. K, W confidently read here 'gumna góði' which I can see only in part. For the second kenning K supplied 'gott sumar', though the manuscript was *ulæseligt*. W says "gott" *sehr undeutlich*, "sumar" *unleserlich*. I could detect none of this, save, with the eye of faith, parts of ? 'sumar'. For the third K says '687 har her "dala dreymi" - det første ord dog meget utydeligt' [here 687 has 'dala dreymi', though the first word is very indistinct]. W has 'dala (*undeutlich*) dreymi'.

15. K has 'vellanda vatn ok viðr ketill', admitting that *vatn* is *usikkert* - W calls it *unsicher*. The final letters of 'vatn' I cannot now trace: indeed, the word looks more like 'vas[.]'. I

cannot confirm the opening of 'viðr'; in some lights the word appears to be 'auðr', but I am not clear that 'desolate, deserted' makes much sense here, nor does *auðr* have the expected alliteration. For the last word I have read 'grandi' with some hesitation, since 'grund.', the stop rather elongated or maybe a colon, is perhaps possible (thus K, W; the abbreviation symbol is marginally nearer 'ru' than 'ra'). Yet *glömmunga grandí*, 'beach of fish', is not an unlikely kenning for 'water, lake'.

13. K has '(Bjarkan) er laufgað lim' where I can see practically nothing. He makes no comment on the legibility of the manuscript at this point. W concurs. In the ultra-violet photograph the sequence 'fgad l' is perhaps traceable. K, W read 'ungsamliqr' which is probably wrong. The first element of the word looks more like 'u[e]ig-', ?veg-. Bugge (p. 112) objected to 'ungsamliqr' on the ground that the word did not occur elsewhere in either Old or Modern Icelandic. He amended to *vegsamliqr*.

14. *manns* is the traditional reading here but the abbreviation symbol is not clear, and there may be a case for 'manna'.

12. There are now traces only of the first element 'ein-' and the vowel of 'áss', both of which K, W present without comment. I read, with KW, 'vlfisleifar', though the symbol indicating the plural ending is not clearly written.

16. The first kenning K announces as *ulæseligt*, W *unleserlich*. The second K gives as 'ó-brotgjarnt járn' without comment. W, following Bugge's commentary on K's edition, reads 'brotgjarnt járn' regarding the unclear graph before the adjective as '*das gewöhnliche abkürzungszeichen für ok*' [the common abbreviation symbol for *ok*] which the ultra-violet photograph does not confirm. For the third K claims '687 har áben plads for 3dje "kenning"' [687 has a blank space for the third 'kenning']; W '687 hat einen leeren platz für diese umschreibung'. Certainly I could discern nothing here, and the ultra-violet photograph confirms that the scribe left a blank.

The A text has two characteristics not shared with others: i) it has an unusual order of letters in its futhark, interchanging the similar graphs **l** and **t**. Editors usually amend the manuscript order to conform to the standard one. I have retained the manuscript order (though giving the standard numbering of the runes). ii) after each line of 'verse' the manuscript adds two words: the first a Latin equivalent of the rune-name, the second a *heiti* for 'king, war-leader' beginning with the same letter as the rune-name.

Below the rune-poem is a set of six lines of what are usually called 'cryptic' runes, though they are not very cryptic. They use a common type of code which requires the futhark to be divided into three sections, *ættir*; any runic letter can then be represented by

two numbers, that of the *ætt* it occurs in, that of its position within the *ætt*.<sup>13</sup> These numbers can in turn be represented by 'twigs' on either side of a central device. The imaginative runologist can invent various designs of central device, as these examples in AM 687d 4° demonstrate. Some are named, some not. There are, for example, *Græ[n]lenzku rúnar* where a central X-form has twigs to either side: *manrúnar* where the central figure is a double-ended runic *m*; *haugrúnar* where it is a simple vertical and its twigs curve down to the base like the slopes of a mound; *belgrúnar* where the twigs are formed into semicircles on a central vertical; *fiskrúnar*, 'fish-runes', whereby the twigs are fins on either side of a fish.<sup>14</sup> Or *suinrúnar*, 'swine-runes', with the bristles on either side of a pig's body acting as the twigs. There are *gandrúnar*, with a capital G as the central device; *isrúnar* where it is the runic *i*; *tialdrúnar* formed of crossed staves with the twigs resembling banners hanging from them; *skialdrúnar*, where the twigs decorate shields; *völvorúnar* with the twigs sloping upwards from a central staff; *stálrúnar* where a capital S is the central figure. The last of the 'cryptic' runes on this page is the first of the *skiprúnar*, 'ship-runes' with the twigs adorning stem and stern of a ship's hull. This sequence continues on f. 2r, a page which has two lines of varieties of 'cryptic' runes, including *knifrúnar* where the twigs decorate blades and hafts of knives. Thereafter follow, in another hand, the nine lines of interpretation of Latin equivalents of the rune-names, edited by Wimmer.<sup>15</sup> Added at the bottom of f. lv are two lines of code roman alphabets, the first the type that Jón Ólafsson called *íraletur*,<sup>16</sup> the second an alphabet divided into pairs of letters with the conventional order reversed, more or less accurately, as *badcfeghkimhporqtsxzy&þ*.

**2. AM 461 12° (hereafter = B)**, now also in the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, Reykjavík, dates from the mid-sixteenth century (1539-58).<sup>17</sup> It is a neat little manuscript, c. 105 x 85mm. The Arnarnaganean Library catalogue lists its contents as a miscellaneous collection

13. R. Derolez, *Runica manuscripta: the English tradition* (Rijksuniversiteit te Gent, Werken Uitgegeven door de Faculteit van de Wijsbegeerte en Letteren 118° Aflevering, Brugge, 1954), pp. 142-5, 165-9.

14. These are not just early runologists' antiquarian fancies. There are, to take only a single case, epigraphical examples of *belgrumar* and *fiskrunar* (as well as other cryptic runes) on an inscribed stick from Bergen. Aslak Lieistol. *Runer frå Bryggen*, (Bergen, 1964), p. 18. Part 4 of Jón Ólafsson's *Runologia* is devoted to these scripts.

15. *Rumenschrift*, pp. 287-8. These are now very hard to make out, in some places impossible, and their first line may have been treated with reagent, for it is markedly darkened. In general Wimmer's readings seem to be correct, but not in every detail: for instance, where Wimmer read the Latin equivalent of *lqgr* as *palus*, I thought to see 'pelagus'. The material of these Latin equivalents of rune-names shares the riddling nature of the cryptic runes.

16. There is an earlier use of this code, called *villuletur*, i.e. *erratica seu deceptoría literat<ura>*, in Jakob Benediktsson. *Ole Worm's correspondence*, pp. 222 and 459-60 (Magnús Ólafsson's letter of 4 ix 1630), and cf. Kr. Kálund. *Alfræði íslenzk: islandsk encyklopædisk litteratur*, I, *Cod. Mbr. AM. 194, 8vo* (STUGNL xxxvii, København, 1908), p. 54 for related material. Jón Ólafsson deals with these codes in *Runologia*, part 4, ch. 4.

17. Details of the manuscript's contents in N. Beckman and Kr. Kálund. *Alfræði íslenzk*, II, *Rimul* (STUGNL xli, København, 1914-16), pp. ccxxxix-ccxxxi; for the date, *ibid.*, p. ci.

of computistical material, names, memorial rhymes, formulae, etc., followed by legal and religious texts. F. 15v opens with a couple of magical sequences, including the well-known *sator* formula.<sup>18</sup> The runic text begins towards the end of 1. 3. (Plate 2) I ignore in my transcript the characteristic occasional doubled forms of vowels that this scribe indulges in, as ‘gataa’ (1), ‘haatr’ (2), ‘þaak’ (9).

f. 15v, 1. 3

(1) Fe er fræn

da rogoð fyrða gaman og graf þuein

(2) Vr er skya gratr og skarar | :gs gata

þorir og hirdis hatr | sid faurull seggr

(3) þus er kuenna kuauð og kletta Jbui og

(4) Os er allden gautr og asgarz iufur og ual

hallar wiser · (5) Reid ersitiandi sæla

og snudulig ferdog iors eruidi · (6) Kaun er

barna baul og bardæi og hws holdd fua

(7) Hagall er kallda korn og knapa drifa og

snaka sott · (8) Naud er þyar þra og þuera erf

idi. (9) Is er ar borkr og unnar þak ogf

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18. This formula, usually recorded in magical contexts, has been studied many times, most recently, perhaps, in Kurt Aland, ‘Der Rotas-Sator Rebus’ in *Corona Gratiarum: miscellanea patristica, historica et liturgica Eligio Dekkers... oblata*, II, *Instrumenta Patristica*, xi (1975), 285-343. It is not infrequently recorded, in part or in whole, in epigraphical runic contexts: for example on wooden staves, from Bergþórshvoll, Anders Bæksted, *Islands runeindskrifur* (Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana ii, København, 1942), p. 206; from Bryggen, Bergen, *Norges runeskrifter med de yngre runer* vi, 1, ed. Aslak Liestøl (Oslo, 1980) no. 640, and cf. also the fragment no. 636; and Helge Dyvik, ‘Addenda runica latina: recently found runic inscriptions in Latin from Bryggen’, *The Bryggen Papers* (Supplementary Series ii, Bergen, 1988) no. B583; and Trondheim, Jan Ragnar Hagland, *Runefuma: ei kjelde til handelshistoria* (Fortiden i Trondheim Bygrunn: Folkebibliotekstomten Meddelelser viii, 2. ed. Trondheim, 1990) no. N-26747. Also Stephen E. Flowers, *Runes and magic: magical formulaic elements in the older runic tradition* (American University Studies, Ser. I. Germanic Languages and Literature liii, New York, 1986), pp. 268-9.



eiks manz farad · (10) Ar er gumna glede og  
 f. 16r [.]tsumar og vel flest þat er vill · (11) Sole[r]  
 skya skiolldr og skinandi raudull · <og> jsa all  
 dr tregi · (12) Tyr er einhendr as og ulfs  
 leifr og friggjar fadir · (13) Biarka er blomgat  
 tre og litel hrisla og j ast sæmiligs uidar ·  
 (14) Madr er manz gaman og molldar auki og ski  
 pa skreytir · ij · (15) Laugr er uellandi uimr  
 oguidr ketill og glummunga gnaud.

Notes on the transcript:

- 2 I read 'þorir' though W has 'þoris'. There is an abbreviation symbol here whose interpretation can be disputed.
4. The ending of 'wiser' is unclear; it looks something like 'wiseir'.
6. Both K and W accept 'holdfúa hus' here, though the word order in the manuscript is unmistakable. Clearly this encourages doubt as to whether W is independent of K.
8. The opening letters of the rune-name are written over an erasure or an earlier text. After 'erf | idi.' a cross directing the reader to an addition, by a second hand, in the lower margin. The addition reads 'og enn þyngre kostr//'.
9. The rune-name corrects an earlier form: ? 'ar'.
10. [.]t. Damage to the parchment surface obscures the opening of the word.
11. e[r]. Similar damage hides the abbreviation symbol. I cannot detect 'og'(2), though neither K nor W note its omission - again an indication that W is not independent of K?
14. The curious '·ij·' after this verse is not recorded in K or W, and remains unexplained.

The B version omits the final rune-name and its paraphrases. The lay-out of the poem in this manuscript suggests that the scribe changed his plan after a couple of inadequate attempts at a more impressive format. He was unable to complete v. 1 at a line end and ran over to the latter part of the following line (divided off in my transcript by |). He put the initial of v. 2 into the margin, but because part of his line was already occupied he had to divide this verse into two parts, the second occupying only the first half of the line. Verse 3 opened a new line, the initial also set out into the margin, and the scribe was able to use the second half of the preceding line to complete this verse (again marked |) Verse 4 was thus able to begin a new line, but the scribe forgot to set its initial out. Thereafter he abandoned his attempt to accommodate his text to specific lines of script, and only when a verse chanced to begin on a new line (as vv. 7, 14) did he put the initial in the margin. Otherwise a largish space in the text indicates a verse beginning.

In editing the Icelandic rune-poem the common practice hitherto has been to set it into three-line stanzas and to supply the rune-name: so, Kålund, Wimmer:<sup>19</sup>

f (Fé) er frænda róg  
 ok flæðar víti  
 ok grafseiðs gata.

However, the form is more complex than this - otherwise it could not properly be referred to as a poem. Each stanza contains three paraphrases, of which the first two share alliteration (sometimes with the rune-name too), while the third has internal alliteration. It seems more appropriate to present the material of the A text thus, transcribing the rune by its accepted **bold** graph, rather than giving the rune-name:

f er frænda rog ok flædar viti  
 ok g[ra]fseiðs gata  
 u er skygia gratur ok skæra þuer[rir  
 ok] hirdis hatr  
 þ er kvenna kuḡl ok kle<t>ta ibui  
 ok [va] lrunar ver

---

19. Lindroth simply quotes Kålund here. Dickins omits the rune-form but otherwise agrees with Kålund.

and so on, a variant on the metre *ljóðaháttur*.<sup>20</sup> Such a lay-out encourages us to amend or supply as is appropriate to the pattern of stress and alliteration. Thus it would be reasonable, in presenting the text of AM 687d, to supply *þungr* to stanza 8 (though there are spacing problems here), to accept a word beginning with *v* in the gap of stanza 3, *g* in stanza 10, *l* in stanza 13; to prefer *uidr* in stanza 15, *brotgiarnt* in stanza 16; and to justify reading *ueigsamligr/vegsamligr* in stanza 13.

I would omit the rune-names with the suggestion that they are secondary; that the purpose of this rune-poem was to present them in riddling fashion. When read aloud or recited from memory, the opening sound of the rune-name was given, and then its name expounded by the three periphrases which acted as riddling clues. Thus the beginner was encouraged to memorise the names of the individual letters of the sixteen-rune futhark. The suggestion sometimes made that the rune-poem's purpose was to teach or help memorise the order of runes in the futhark is inept: there are no clues within the verses to indicate the order in which they are to be taken.<sup>21</sup>

A comparison of the A and B texts of the rune-poem shows they cannot be traced directly to a common archetype. Though there are close resemblances and common readings, there are too many essential differences: [*..*]lrunar ver | sid faurull seggr; [*?þungr*] kost[r] | þuera erfidi; d[a]ladreyri | vel flest þat er vill; hofa hilmir | friggjar fadir. It looks as though each text is an independent (more or less) creation based on a common fund of wording, and the wording comes from a collection of alliterating kennings that expound the letter-names. It follows that Louis-Jensen's hope of a 'definitive text' is unlikely to be achieved, for there probably never was a definitive text; only a series of individual exploitations of a large and varied body of material. It also follows that any attempt to discuss the Icelandic rune-poem as a coherent text is unlikely to be successful.<sup>22</sup> The contexts in which the two versions of the poem survive are also suggestive. Both occur in close proximity to cryptic and unusual scripts or sequences, with the implication that their futharks were accounted less as practical writing systems and more as antiquarian curiosities - which after all is to be expected of a late text based on an early futhark.

Already by the date of AM 687d 4<sup>o</sup> the 'poet' was distant from his sources: hence the occasional gross error like the transposition of runes *l* and *t*. Another example is d[a]ladreyri presented as a kenning for *ár*, 'year, season, harvest'; *daladreyri*, 'blood of the

20. As suggested in Louis-Jensen, 'Norrøne navnegåder', 48.

21. Unlike the *Abeceðarinnur Nordmannicinn* whose text does contain such clues: Derolez, *Rimica manuscripta*, pp. 78-9. Indeed, A's interchange of *l* and *t* is evidence that the 'poem' is no help in keeping rune order in mind.

22. As, for instance, recently in Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The Anglo-Saxon and Norse *Rime Poems*: a comparative study', *Anglo-Saxon England*, xix (1990), 23-39; cf. here Louis-Jensen's comment in 'Norrøne navnegåde', 42; also p. 33 below.





That this list is closely related to the A and B texts of the rune-poem is clear enough, but what that relationship is is less clear. In detail. **f**: *franda rogur* is the opening of both A, B; *firdagaman* is in B but not A; *grafseidiz gata* in A, while B has a variant. The C addition *fafnis plogur* with its alliteration on the rune sound could replace either of the first two periphrases, but not the third for it has no internal alliteration. **u** is much the same in all three texts. **þ** is closer to A than B because of its final periphrasis, *vardrwnar ver* though, if I have read A correctly, this cannot adequately supply the lacuna in that text. **o** has the periphrases of A, B, but their order is wrong in C as the alliterative pattern shows. **r, k** are essentially (but not in detail) the same in the three versions, as is **h** except for C's minor variant *hnapp-* for *knapp-*. **n** is akin to A where B has a defective text. **i** is rather closer to B than A. Both A, B have trouble with the third periphrasis of **a** where C gets it right or is at least plausible. On **s** A, B agree where C has an alternative third periphrasis which, having internal alliteration, fits into the general 'verse' pattern. For **t** the three texts agree essentially in the first two periphrases but have independent third ones. Both B and C seem to be mythologically incorrect, though there is some justification for C's *Balldurz Bródir* in Snorri's statement that Týr is Oðinn's son (as Baldr certainly is).<sup>25</sup> For **b** too there are three independent versions, C having four periphrases. A, B agree on **m** but C has only the first two kennings, omitting *skipa skreytir*, which indeed has a different register - more down to earth than the first two. The three versions more or less agree on **l** though there are variations in the final periphrasis. **y** is defective in A (though what remains looks quite different from C) and is completely missing in B.

The C text supports my observation above that the early modern period had a fund of paraphrases of rune-names, from which individual collectors could select items; that indeed there was no 'definitive text' of this 'rune-poem' material. Indeed, C occasionally breaks with the simple conventions that give this material a rough verse form: its *bjarkan* has a first periphrasis that does not fit the usual alliterative pattern, while the substitution of *hnapp-* for *knapp-* in the second kenning of *hagall* also disrupts the alliteration.

The first extended printing of this type of material is in *Linguae septentrionalis elementa* by Runolphus Jonas (Islandus) (Copenhagen, 1651) (= Lindroth's RJ), no pagination, signatures B3v-4r. He too does not call these lines a poem. His definition is: '*Veteres þrideiur appellârunt: q. d. triplicem vel triplicatam descriptionem vel Periphrasin.*' He sets out the runes in futhark order and in the formal pattern that later editors have adopted.

	Firda gaman/	Voluptas virorum,	F
f Fie er	Frænda rogur/	Cognatorum jurgium,	Pecunia
	Grafseidiz gata/	Via colubri.	est.

25. Snorri *Skáldskaparmál* 17: *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar udgivet efter håndskrifterne*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (København, 1931), p. 99. Snorri gives no authority for his statement, and indeed, none is known.

<b>u</b> Vr er	Skyagratur Skara þerrer/ Hirders hatur.	Lachrymæ nubium, Nimborum exiccatio, Odium pastorum.	U Pluvia est.
<b>þ</b> þuss er	Kuenna kuol/ Klettabue/ Hamra heimramur.	Terror fœminarum, Monticola, Saxorum incola.	D Gigas est.
<b>o</b> Os er	Alldagautur/ Valhallar Vijser/ Asgardz iœffur.	Seculi Princeps, Cœsorum aulæ moderator Aulæ Asiaticæ Rex.	O Odinus est.
<b>r</b> Reid er	Sitianda sæla/ Snudug fœr/ Jors erfuide.	Sedentis voluptas, Festinum Iter, Labor eqvi.	R Eqvitiatio est.
<b>k</b> Kaun er	Barnabage/ Bardagafœr/ Holldfuahus.	Infantium molestia, Pugnæ vestigia, Tabis domus.	K ulcus est.
<b>h</b> Hagall er	Kalldakœrn/ Knappadrijffa/ Snaakasott.	Fruementum gelidum, Globosa nix, Vermium pestis.	H Grando est.
<b>n</b> Naud er	þija þraa/ þunger koster/ Vosamleg vera.	Mancipiorum mœror, Gravis conditio, Ingrata mansio.	N Molestia est.
<b>i</b> Is er	Ar Bœrkur/ Vnnar þak/ Feigs Forraad.	Cortex amnis, Stagni tectum, Moribundi decipula.	I Glacies est.
<b>a</b> Ar er	Gumna gode/ Gott Sumar/ Algroen Akur.	Hominum felicitas, Prospera messis, Floridus ager.	A Annus est.
<b>s</b> Sol er	Skipa skioldur/ Skijnande rœdull/ Huerffande huel.	Clypeus navium, Splendidus radius, Volubilis rota.	S Sol est.

<b>t</b> Tyr er	Balldurs Broder Einhendur As/ Vlffs leiffur.	Balderi frater, Deus unimanus, Reliqviæ lupi.	T Mars est.
<b>b</b> Biarkan	Lijtid lim/ Laufgad trie/ Vaxande Vidur.	Parva frons (dis) Froncosa arbor, Succrescens frutex.	B Frons est.
<b>m</b> Madur	Mans gaman/ Molldar Auke/ Skipastreiter.	Hominis oblectatio, Humi augmentum, Naupegus.	M Homo est.
<b>l</b> Logur	Vellande Vimur/ Vijdur Ketell/ Gunnunga gap.	Fluctuans lacus, Ampla cisterna, Pisciculorum fovea.	L Humor est.
<b>y</b> Yr er	Tuibendur Boge/ Bardaga gagn/ Fiffu fleitir.	Arcus utrinq; tensus, Bellica supellex, Teli vector.	Y Arcus est.

The text is clearly close to C yet differs from it notably in the completely new third kenning for **þ**, *hamra heimramur*. There are also not so drastic variants for **o** (*alldagatur*), **k** (*barnabage*), **n** (*vosamleg vera*), **m** (*skipastreiter*), **l** (*gunnunga gap*) and a few others even less important. Significant are variations in order of kennings, where those for **o** (as in C), **t** do not comply with the rules for alliteration laid down by other 'stanzas'; or in other words, reveal that Jonas did not recognise these triplets of kennings as parts of a poem.

There is related material in *Samtak um rúnir*, a work of Björn Jónsson of Skarðsá (1574-1655), conventionally dated to 1642<sup>26</sup> It was not printed, but survives in several manuscripts.<sup>27</sup> Björn illustrates the term *þrideilur* by quoting the first three stanzas of the rune-poem (= Lindroth's BJ). I quote here from Uppsala University Library MS R694, f. 39r (later seventeenth-century, agreeing in all essentials with Royal Library, Stockholm,

26. On whom see Páll Eggert Ólason, *Saga Íslendinga v. Seytjándra öld* (Reykjavík, 1942), pp. 305-6.

27. Páll Eggert Ólason says of the work, 'fyrsta rit um rúnir...er og eftir hann, og er víða í handritum'. The catalogue of the National Library of Iceland lists seven manuscripts of it, that of the Royal Library, Copenhagen, has two, that of the Arnamagnean Institute/Collection, Copenhagen, one. I am indebted to Kári Bjarnason for further information on the manuscripts of the Landsbókasafn Íslands, Reykjavík.

MS papp. fol. 38, f. 133r; National Library of Iceland [Lbs] MSS 1199 4°, 636 4°, 756 4°, ÍB 299 4° and a couple of later manuscripts).

Af þessare þrj-deilldre kvjslan, eru nú þessar Málrúnur kallaðar þrj-deilur. Og þar með i annann Máta, að þrjár Merkingar eru almennelegast fundnar uppá hvørn staf, eður hvørt Nafn, sem svo hljóða: Fje er Frænda Rógur, Firða Gaman, og Graf-seiðis Gata. Úr er Skýa grátur, Skára [var. Skura] þerrer, og Hirðes [var. hirders] Hatur. Þuss er Kvenna Kvöl, Kletta búa, og varðrúnar ver, og svo frammveigis.

Björn goes on to mention *fimmdeilur*, *sjödeilur*, *níðeilur*, *tólfdeilur* and even *átjándteilur* though he quotes no examples: 'þessar allar deilur skyltt þyker að kunna, þeim er skálld vilja heita.'

### Other Late Material

From eighteenth-century Iceland survive numbers of manuscripts recording this aspect of the rune-names. Central to the subject is the work of Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík (1705-79) on whom Jón Helgason has written the definitive study.<sup>28</sup> The primary manuscript of Jón Ólafsson's *Runologia* is AM 413 fol., in the Arnamagnean Institute, Copenhagen. This is dated 1752 though it claims to be a revision of an earlier work, which however has not survived. Part 3 of the text is *De paraphrasi runica*, 'Um Dylgiurnar'. Jón explains the word *paraphrasis*, 'sem kallast Ummyrði, eður Dylgiur; En Dylgia kemur af Dul (occultatio); og þeir eru Dylgiur sama og Dulmæle'. Chapter 1 consists of lists of *dylgiur* of rune-names, which are arranged in ABC order (= Lindroth's JOa). These lists, which are often extensive, commonly begin with the three paraphrases that form the rune-poem stanza, but continue beyond them. For instance:

Ár er gumna giæði, gott sumar, og al-gróinn akur

followed by a group of other kennings, in this case some twenty of them, as *gleði þjóða*, *jarðar gróði*, *gumna gaman*, *fugla fognuðr*.

Bjarkan er ljitið lim, laufgaðr viðr, og lundr fagr

again with a number of additions, including *laufgat tré*, *friófsamt tré*, *vaksandi viðr*.

Fe... er frænda rógr, Fofnis bani og þegna þræta

28. Jón Helgason, *Jón Ólafsson frá Grunnavík* (Safn Fræðafjelagsins um Ísland og Íslendinga v. Copenhagen, 1926), in particular pp. 53-71.

together with *grafvitnis gata* (*al. grafseiðis gata*), *mikill peninga*, *firða gaman*, and others. Such periphrases record the material which 'rune-poems' could exploit.

Chapter 3 of this part of *Runologia* bears the title *De Figura et Interpretatione Ænigmatica, horumque Epithetica constructione Latina*. An initial note records that this chapter is not Jón's work and names Magnús Ólafsson (*c.* 1573-1636) or Sveinn á Barði (1603-87) as possible authors. It consists of a version of the rune-poem with Latin paraphrases of each verse (= Lindroth's JOB). Cryptic forms are given rather than runic graphs. In normalised (for convenience) form it reads, beginning p. 140:

- f** Fé er frænda rógr, ok fyrða gaman, grafseiðis gata.  
Fe, id est: pecunia est cognatorum jurgium, divitum deliciae,  
viperae via.
- u** Úr er skýja grátr, skara þerrir, ok hirðis hatr. id est:  
imber est nubium luctus, nubium exsiccatio, pastorum odium.
- þ** þurs er kvenna kvöl, kletta búi, Varðrúnar ver.  
þurs, rupicola: mulierum formido, saxorum incola, Varðrunæ  
maritus. Varðruna proprium nomen fæminis gigantum.
- o** Óss er aldingautr, Valhallar visir, Ásgarðs jöfurr.  
Óss, Odinus: princeps Gothorum, aulæ inferorum imperator,  
Asgarthiæ rex.
- r** Reið er sitjandi sæla, snúðig fǫr, ok jórs erfiði.  
Reið, equitatio: sedentis delectatio, iter præceps, veredi  
labor.
- k** Kaun er barna þöl, ok bardaga fǫr, holdfúa hús.  
Kaun, hulus: puer<orum> molestatio, prælii vestigia, saniei  
theca.
- h** Hagall er kalda korn, knappa drífa, snáka sótt.  
Hagall, grando: algida seges, globorum pluvia, vermium  
morbus.
- n** Nauð er þýja þrá, þungr kost, vósamlig verk.  
Nauð, calamitas: mancipii opella, adversa sors, periculosus  
labo<r>.

- i** Íss er árbörkr, unnar þak, feigs forráð.  
Íss, id est: glacies est cortex fluvii, amni operculum,  
mortali ruina. feigr, qvi jam fatali morti appropinquat.  
Forað, puteus hians.
- a** Ár er gumna góði, glatt sumar, algróinn akr.  
Annus: commune bonum, æstas exhilarans, ager maturus.
- s** Sól er skipa (rectius puto skýja) skjöldr, skínandi røð-  
(p. 141)ull, hverfandi hvel.  
Sól est ornamentum navibus (corr. clipeus nubium), resplendens  
radius, volubilis rota.
- t** Týr er Baldrs bróðir, einhendr áss, úlfs leifr.  
Týr, Mavors: Balderi germanus, mancum numen, a lupo  
mutilatus. Hæc omnia sunt desumpta ex Edda.
- b** Bjarkan er lítit lim, ok laufgat tré, vaxandi víðr.  
Bjarkan, betula: viridæ frondes, arbor germinans, lignum  
succrescens.
- l** Løgr er vellandi vimur, víðr ketill, grunnunga grund.  
Løgr, liquor: fluctuans fretum, laxis lebes, solearum solum.
- <**m**> Maðr er manns gaman, molldar auki, skipa skreytir.  
Maðr, homo: hominem oblectat, pulveris additamentum, puppium  
pigmentarius.
- <**y**> Ýr er tvíbendr bogi, ok bardaga gagn, fifu farbauti.  
Ýr, Arcus: expansa tendicula, prælii propugnaculum, jaculi  
excursor.

Jón Helgason lists ten more manuscripts dating from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that derive from Jón Ólafsson's book, not all of them giving the complete text.<sup>29</sup>

It is evident that Jón took much of his work from earlier sources, and indeed the text of his part 3, chapter 3 is more or less identical with that of Landsbókasafn Íslands MS JS

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29. *Jón Ólafsson*, pp. 68-9.

43 4<sup>o</sup>, f. 196r, which the catalogue dates to 1660-80. In addition there are a number of other manuscripts from the seventeenth century onwards which describe and illustrate *málrúnar* or *þrideilur*. Those I have examined are AM 166a 8<sup>o</sup> (C17, apparently the earliest of these), Rask 88a (a fragment only), NkS 1867 4<sup>o</sup> (1760) and Thott 477 8<sup>o</sup> (C18). In general their material resembles that of Runolphus Jonas or of Jón Ólafsson pretty closely. It seems clear, then, that by the eighteenth century there had developed a body of runic lore constructed by antiquaries, and which included the kennings that formed the Icelandic ‘rune-poem’. This contained certain readings distinct from the A,B texts: for example, the third kenning for *ár* was *algróinn akr*, of *sól* was *hverfandi hvel*. Who knows whether such readings were acceptable at an earlier period? Jón Ólafsson did not recognise his sequence of kennings as a ‘poem’ as modern scholars have done. Otherwise he would not have misplaced their order in *óss* (*aldingautr*, *Valhallar visir*, *Ásgarðs jöfurr*, shared with C, RJ and Thott 477) and *Týr* (*Baldurs bróðir*, *einhendr áss*, *úlfs leifr*, shared with RJ and Thott 477). The individual manuscripts contain occasional unusual periphrases, like Thott 477’s *hamra heimramr* (shared with RJ) used as the third for *þurs*, though whether these can be accepted as part of the rune-poem is unknown. These later manuscripts must obviously be viewed only with caution by anyone attempting to reconstruct a ‘definitive text’ of the Icelandic rune-poem.<sup>30</sup>

### Establishing the Text

Comparing the range of readings available from these various texts, and taking particular note of the two earliest manuscripts, we may reach the following conclusions:

- i) Only four rune-names have identical kennings in the two oldest manuscripts, A and B: they are those of **o**, **h**, **s**, **m**. Of these only **o**, **h** are (more or less) the same in manuscript C. Major and independent variants appear as early as the two earliest manuscripts.
- ii) There are four or five cases where all texts record closely similar ‘stanzas’, where differences between ‘stanzas’ in the various manuscripts are relatively minimal: **u** (minor variants of the two nouns in the second kenning); **r** (the second kenning displays minor variants, this time in adjective and noun); **k** (B has *hús holdfúa* against *holdfúa hús*

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30. Lindroth gives a detailed examination of this later tradition, ‘Dikterna om runornas namn’, summed up in pp. 293-5. For completeness I mention here the runic periphrases, derived from this type of text though not exclusively so, which illustrate Olaus Verelius’s account of the runes in his *Manuductio compendiosa ad runographiam Scandicam antiquam recte intelligendam* (Uppsala, 1675), pp. 25-32 (= ch. 7, §§ 1-16): **f** *frænda rogur*, *föfnis bedur*, **u** *versta veder*, **þ** *kletta ibúi*, **o** *aldingautur*, *Asgarðs iofur*, *Valhallar visir*, **r** *snudug for*, *iors erfidi*, no *þrideilur* examples for **k** but the translation *ulcus*, **h** *kaldakorn*, *knappadriþja*, **n** *þungur kostur*, *vosamleg verk* (translated *opus arduum*), **i** *arborkur*, *unnar þeikia*, *feigs fur* (*perituri vehiculum*), **a** *gunna gamman* (*gunna giæde*), *allgroim akur* (*iardar grode*), *foldra fegurd*, **s** *skya skioldur*, *skinandi rodull*, *hverfandi hvel*, **t** *einhendur as*, no *þrideilur* examples for **b** but the individual periphrasis *lundu fegurd*, **l** *skipa fold*, *landa belte*, *hamra forron* (*scopulorum explorator*), **m** *mollard auke*, *mans gaman*, *y bendur bogie*.

elsewhere: RJ has *barnabági* [ʔ *bagi*]; ?influenced by the Norwegian rune-poem though *bági* is an emendation there) against *barna bql* elsewhere; RJ, JOB have *bardaga fqr* against *bardagi* elsewhere); **m** has consistent readings throughout save for C which omits the third kenning altogether while RJ reads here *skipastreitir*, presumably in error. Add to these **o** where C, RJ, JOB (but not JOa) have a variant order of kennings, but the alliteration supports that of AB; RJ has the minor variant *aldagautr*.

iii) There are several cases where two out of three kennings agree more or less, the third being quite different: **f** (second kenning *flæðar viti* A; *fyrða gaman* B, C, JOB, and RJ with a different order of kennings; JOa has a considerably different text here with *Fáfnis bani* as the second kenning and another completely different third kenning *þegna þræta*); **þ** (third kenning *varðrúnar* C, JOab, *-lrúnar* A; *síðfqrull seggr* B; *hamra heimramr* RJ); **h** shows minor variants in the second kenning (*knap(p)a* A, B; RJ, JOB; *hnapp-* C; *krappa* JOa) but there is the major variant *skýja skot, eða sylfr* for the third, JOa; **i** (third kenning *feigra manna fár* A; *feigs mans farað* B; *feigs forráð* C, RJ, JOB; *feigs fár* JOa); **a** (third kenning *d[a]ladreyri* A; *vel flest þat er vill* B; *algróinn akr* C, RJ, JOab); **s** (third kenning *ísa aldrregi* A, B; *hverfandi hvel* C, RJ, JOab); **t** (third kenning *hofa hilmir* A; *Friggjar faðir* B; *Baldrs bróðir* C, RJ, JOab, though RJ, JOB have an incorrect order); and **l** which has a set of minor variants in the third kenning: *glqmmunga grandí* A; *glummunga gnauð* B; *glunnumunga grund* C; *grununga grund* JOB; the more distinctive variant *gunnunga gap* RJ; and the completely different *vatn heitt* JOa.

iv) There are some cases where one kenning is missing: **n** B with later marginal addition to fill the gap (and variant reading of second kenning; *þungr kostr* A probably, C, RJ, JOab; *þvera erfiði* B); **y** A, the rune omitted altogether B; C, JOab each have three kennings here, though they do not agree (*bendr bogi, bardagagangr, fenju fleyir* C; *bendr bogi, fifu fleytir, fenju angr* JOa; *tvibendr bogi, bardaga gagn, fifu farbauti* JOB: cf. also Arngrímur's *bendr bogi, bardaga gagn, fifu flytir* agreeing with RJ). Probably **a** should be included in this group since B has only the fill-in phrase *vel flest þat er vill* for the final kenning. Also **m** for which C has only two kennings, though the other manuscripts have consistent readings.

v) One case shows widely differing kennings: **b** [...], *litit tré, uf. ]gsamligr viðr* A; *blómgat tré, litil hríska, í astsæmiligs viðar* B; *blómi lands, litit lim, laufgat tré* with a fourth kenning *vaxandi viðr* C; *litit lim, laufgaðr viðr, lundr fagr* JOa; *litit lim, laufgat tré, vaxandi viðr* RJ, JOB).

vi) There are a number of minor variants, not listed above, which may or may not be important: for example, *aldingautr/aldagautr* in **o**, *þekialþak* in **i**, *gottlglatt* in **a**, *úlfs leifr/leifar* in **t**.

vii) A, the earliest surviving manuscript, (which might *a priori* be thought to have an accurate text) has some 43 readable kennings. Four of them occur in no other version of

the poem examined here: *flæðar viti, d[a]ladreyri* (apparently an error of understanding), *hofa hilmir, [. . .]otgjarnt járn*. Another five have forms that are unique even though they are similar to those in other texts *[. . .]lrímar ver, feigra manna fár, lítið tré, v[. . .]gsamligr viðr, vellanda va[. . .]*. There is a further small group with minor variants from all other manuscripts. Of B's 44 kennings, eight are not found substantially in any other version. Thus even the earliest surviving manuscripts of the Icelandic rune-poem demonstrate an unstable tradition of wording.

Any attempt at a definitive text of the Icelandic rune-poem must take into consideration:

- (a) the evidence of (i) above, for there is likely to be a standard version of between two and four of the runic stanzas
- (b) the evidence of (ii) above, for it seems there survives a more or less standard version of some five more of the runic stanzas.
- (c) the evidence of (iii), (iv) above, which suggests that there may have been, side by side with, or intermingled with, the *þrídeilur* version of the rune-poem, a *tvideilur* one; a form whereby all or some of the rune-names are defined by two kennings only. All three early versions retain one stanza with only two, and the widely variant third kennings of (iii) suggest they may be later additions to fill what were thought to be empty spaces.
- (d) that, (iv), (v) above, there will be problems with the runes **b**, **y** for which no standard versions can be produced.
- (e) perhaps most important, all that can be reconstructed is a rune-poem appropriate to a late period, from 1500 onwards. By then numbers of variant readings had developed; (i), (vii) above. Whether the extended lists in alphabetical order are to be taken as evidence for the poem is uncertain, indeed doubtful.
- (f) that by the date of the earliest surviving manuscripts of the Icelandic rune-poem the sixteen-letter *fuþark* had long been obsolete as a phonetically precise writing system. Thus the poem as it survives is likely to be an antiquarian rhyme rather than a practical tool.

Taking up these points, the best one can do in editing the Icelandic rune-poem is something like the following. The text is normalised, as are the variants in most cases, manuscript spelling retained only for certain difficult cases. In the variants I number the kennings in sequence. It is important to stress that the edited version is to be read in

association with the diplomatic texts given above; it should not for any purpose be treated as a ‘definitive text’. The sigla used are: A = AM 687d 4°; B = AM 461 12°; C = AM 749 4°; RJ = Runolphus Jonas; BJ = Björn Jónsson; JOa = Jón Ólafsson, *Runologia* 3, ch. 1 (AM 413 fol.); JOb = Jón Ólafsson *Runologia* 3, ch. 3 (AM 413 fol.); OV = selected variants from Olaus Verelius, *Manuductio* in note 30 above.

1. f er frænda róg ok fyrða gaman  
ok grafseiðs gata.

var. 1, 2 reversed RJ. 1, róg C, RJ, BJ, JOab, OV. 2, flæðar viti A; Fáfnis bani JOa. OV gives Fáfnis beðr. 3, grafþvengs gata B; grafseiðis gata C, RJ, BJ, JOb; þegna þræta JOa.

2. u er skýja grátr ok skára þverrir  
ok hirðis hatr.

var. 2, This kenning is baffling both as to meaning and form: skæra þuer[rir] A; skarar þorir B; skara þuerer C; skara þerrer RJ, BJ, JOb. I take *skára* to be genitive of *skári*, ‘swathe of (mown) grass’, and *þverrir* to derive from *þverra*, ‘to reduce’. Thus continuous drizzle is seen as destructive to the hay-harvest. Lindroth discusses the kenning in some detail and ends by emending to *skaði þerris*, ‘enemy of drought’, a reading not found in any manuscript as far as I know. 3, hirders RJ. OV has simply *versta veðr*.

3. þ er kvenna kvöl ok kletta íbúi  
ok Valrúnar verr.

var. 2, kleita, presumably in error A. búi C, RJ, BJ, JOab. 3, [.a]lrunar ver A; siðfqrull seggr B; varðrúnar ver C, BJ, JOab; hamra heimramr RJ. *Varðrún* is recorded as the name of a giantess; hence the common reading of the later manuscripts (and the JOb explanation ‘*Varðruna proprium nomen fæminis gigantum*’). The C (BJ, JOab) and RJ readings suggest that here was a difficult kenning that could not be understood and had to be replaced. This may have been in the A text and it is unfortunate that A is partly illegible here. I suggest a name *Valrún* with a first element from *valr*, ‘the dead’ (as in the *heiti Valtýr* for *Óðinn*).

4. o er aldingautr ok Ásgarðs jöfurr  
ok Valhallar vísi.

var. 1, aldagautr RJ. 2, 3, reversed, wrongly C, RJ, JOb. 3, vísir B, C, RJ, JOab, OV.

5. **r** er sitjandi sæla ok snúðig ferð  
ok jórs erfiði.

var. 1, sitjanda RJ. 2, snúðulig B; snúðug C; snúðug fgr RJ, OV; snúðig fgr JOab.

6. **k** er barna þöl ok bardagi  
ok holdfúa hús.

var. 1, barnabági, or ?-bagi (*molestia*) RJ. 2, bardæi B; bardagafgr (*pugnæ vestigia*) RJ; bardaga fgr (*prælii vestigia*) JOab. 3, hús holdfúa B.

7. **h** er kaldakorn ok knappa drífa  
ok snáka sótt.

var. 2, knap[af dri]fa A; knapa B, hnapp- C, krapa JOa. 3, skýja skot, eða silfr JOa.

8. **n** er þýjar þrá ok þungr kostr  
ok vássamlig verk.

var. 1, þýia C, RJ, JOab. 2, adj. indecipherable A; þungr C, JOab; þvera erfiði B (which Lindroth finds incomprehensible: I am happy to agree); þunger kostur RJ. 3. v[ö]ssamlig verk A; votsom verk C; votsamlig corrected to vosamlig JOa; vósamlig JOab, OV; vósamlig vera (*ingrata mansio*) RJ; no third kenning in B text but later marginal addition, og enn þyngri kostur.

9. **i** er árbörkr ok unnar þekja  
ok feigra manna fár.

var. 2, [un]nar þ[e]kja A, þekja JOa, OV; unnar þak B, C, RJ, JOab. 3, feigs manns farad B; feigs forráð C, RJ (*moribundi decipula*), JOab (which translates *forráð* as *puteus hians*, presumably = *forað*, 'abyss, pit'); feigs fár JOa, OV. Here I have taken the vowel of *fár* as long (= 'danger, harm') as others have done, but *far*, 'path, track' (*vehiculum* OV) would seem equally possible in the context.

10. **a** er gumna gæði ok gott sumar.

var. 1, noun (2) indecipherable with any certainty A; gledi B, giæði C, góði RJ, JOB; gu<m>na gaman as an alternative OV. 2, kenning indecipherable A; adj. damaged, consistent with gott (as C, RJ, JOa) B; glatt JOB. 3, variants here suggest that this may have been a two-kenning stanza, with a third added independently in the different texts: d[aj]ladreyri A; vel flest þat er vill B; algróinn akr C, RJ, JOab. OV has a pair of unusual kennings here: jarðar gróði, foldra fegurð.

11. **s** er skýja skjöldr ok skínandi røðull.

var. 1, skipa RJ, skipa amended to skýja JOB. This too may have been a two-kenning stanza with arbitrarily added third kenning: ísa aldrregi AB; hverfandi hvel C, RJ, JOab, OV.

12. **t** er einhendr áss ok úlfs leifar.

var. 1, [ein]hendr [a]s A; sá einhendi áss JOa. 2, úlfs leifr B, RJ, JOB. Again perhaps originally a two-kenning stanza. 3, hofa hilmir A; Friggjar faðir B; Baldrs bróðir C, RJ, JOa. RJ, JOB order the stanza wrongly, Baldrs bróðir, einhendr áss, úlfs leifr.

13. **b**

There is no obvious way of rationalising the variants here. The individual texts read:

A, [?...fgad l.], litid *tre*, u[.]gsamligr uidr.  
 B, blomgat tre, litel hrisla, j ast sæmiligs uidar  
 C, blomj landz, lijtid lim, laufgad trie, vaxandj vidur  
 RJ, lijtid lim, laufgad trie, vaxande vidur.  
 JOa, lijtið lim, laufgaðr viðr, lundr fagr.  
 JOB, lijtið lim, laufgat trje, vaxandi viðr.  
 OV has lunda fegurð.

14. **m** er manns gaman ok moldar auki  
 ok skipa skreytir.

var. 3, C has no third kenning; skipastreitir (*naupegus*), presumably in error, RJ.

15. I er vellandi vimur ok víðr ketill  
ok glømmunga grund.

var. 1, vellanda va[...] A. 2, [...]dr, ?possibly *auðr* A. 3, glaummunga grandí (?grund) A; glummunga gnaud (the latter presumably an erroneous expansion of an abbreviated form) B; glummunga grund C; gunnunga gap RJ; grunwnga grund JOB; but the completely different vatn heitt JOa, though its continued list of kennings includes glaummunga grund, grunnwnga grund. OV has a completely different set of kennings: skipa fold, landa belti, hamra forron (*scopulorum explorator!*).

16. y

This stanza is a problem. A is only partly legible but certainly has only two kennings: *ben[.....]otgiarnt jarn*. B omits the stanza altogether. C, JOab have inconsistent texts that all differ from A. <tuij>*benttur bogj, bardagagangur, feniú fleyir* C; *tuibendur boge, bardaga gagn, fífú fleitir* RJ; *bendr bogje, fyfu fleytir, fenju angur + bardaga gagn* in an extended list JOa; *tvijbendtur bogi, bardaga gagn, fyfu farbauti* JOB. Also Arngrímur Jónsson/Worm's quoted *bendur bogie, bardaga gagn, fyfyu fleytir/flytir*. OV has simply *bendur bogie*.

## Conclnsions

Whether one should, or indeed can, go beyond this in establishing a text is doubtful. There is, as far as I know, no direct evidence of an earlier stage than that implied in the late recensions, though there may be clues. There is some connection with the material, and even sometimes the wording, of the surviving texts of the Norwegian rune-poem: *f valdr franda røge; þ valdr kvenna kvillu; k er báge* (amended from *beggialbæggia* recorded in some early versions) *barna; a er gunna góðe; t er æim-hendr ása; b er lauf-gronstr linna; m er moldar auke*.<sup>31</sup> There are few echoes, though rather distant, of skaldic kennings: *flæðar bál* or *eldr* and *grafþvengs grund* for 'gold/wealth', *skýja grátr* for 'rain/drizzle', *skýja skiqldr* for 'sun'.<sup>32</sup> Of the wording of early *rimur*: *róg rekka* or *visa* for 'gold', *grátur skýja* for

31. As with the Icelandic poem, it is too easy to assume that there is a 'definitive' text of the Norwegian rune-poem. On this see the valuable comments on the various texts in Kálund and Lindroth's examinations of the poem.

32. As listed in Rudolf Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden; ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik* (Rheinische Beiträge zur germanischen Philologie und Volkskunde i. Bonn and Leipzig, 1921). Dr Judith Jesch suggests tentatively that these kennings are typical of later (post eleventh-century) skaldic verse.

'rain', *börkur árbáru*, *þekja elfar*, *þak lindar* for 'ice'.<sup>33</sup> There are a few rare words not or rarely found outside the *þulur*, *glömmungr*, *grunnungr*.<sup>34</sup> There is the occasional 'quotation' from Eddic verse: *maðr er manns gaman*, *Hávamál* v. 47. And there is the expression *molðar auki* found mainly in early religious prose.<sup>35</sup> But all these present fairly simple and easily recognised concepts, of no great weight in assessing the age or affinities of the Icelandic poem.

In a brilliant solution to an epigraphical runic puzzle Louis-Jensen has recently shown that the principle (though not necessarily a fixed wording) of the kennings of the Icelandic rune-poem existed in the north as early as c. 1200. The puzzle involves inscription no. 7 in Bø church, Telemark, Norway.<sup>36</sup> In Knirk's transliteration this reads:

**suæfnbanarmer : soterbna  
fionsfinkata:fialsibui  
heztærfæþe:økhuhishui  
ti :þrlsunsæla:þtskluræþa**

33. Listed in Björn K. Þórolfsson, *Rinnur fyrir 1600* (Safn Fræðafjelagsins um Ísland og Íslendinga ix. Copenhagen, 1934).

34. Finnur Jónsson, *Edda*, p. 207, vv. 487-8.

35. Louis-Jensen, 'Norrøne runegæder', 45. Also *molðar at auka*, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, v. 3.

36. James E. Knirk, 'Runeinnskriftene i Bø gamle kyrkje', *Telemark Historie*, vii (1986), 76-80; Louis-Jensen, 'Norrøne navnegæder', 35-8. It is interesting, and may be important, that in this Norwegian inscription the name of the rune **u**, *úr*, is deemed to have the meaning given in the Icelandic, rather than the Norwegian, rune-poem. The kenning *høys viti for úr* helps to support my reading of *skára* (against Lindroth's *skaði*) in this stanza. There is a similar type of runic puzzle illustrated in part 3, ch. 7 of Jón Ólafsson's *Runologia*:

Strauma mót, og Mímis	<b>o</b>
mun-næmasti brunnr	<b>l</b>
gleði lands og liða	<b>a</b>
linna bólit stinna	<b>f</b>
grátr himins, gautr!	<b>u o</b>
glæðaför, og maðr.	<b>r m</b>

cf. also Páll Eggert Ólason, 'Fólgin nöfn í rímum', *Skirnir*, lxxxix (1915), 118-32; Louis-Jensen, 'Norrøne navnegæder', 38-9.

This is expanded and interpreted as an eight-line *fornyrðislag* stanza:

Svæfn bannar mér		
sótt er barna,	(= barna bql)	<b>k</b>
fjón svinkanda,	(= hirðis hatr)	<b>u</b>
fjalls íbúi,	(= kletta íbúi)	<b>þ</b>
hests ærfaði,	(= jórs erfiði)	<b>r</b>
auk høys víti,	(= skára þverrir)	<b>u</b>
þræls vansæla,	(= þýjar þrá)	<b>n</b>
þat skulu ráða.		

The woman's name Guðrún between two statements, the first a clue, the second a challenge: *svæfn bannar mér*, 'it (she) prevents me sleeping'; and *þat skulu ráða*, '(they, people) will have to work this out'. The Bø kennings all differ in wording from those of the (Icelandic) rune-poem but that is part of the puzzle.

Opinions on the date of the Icelandic rune-poem vary from the thirteenth century to the late Middle Ages.<sup>37</sup> It now survives in the context of magical or cryptic use of scripts or of the antiquarian study of runes within the realm of cryptography, rather than in that of practical writing systems. There is nothing in this to imply that the poem is an early composition; rather it seems to belong to a late medieval or early modern period not distant from the earliest manuscript dates. If so, the Icelandic version can be used to throw light on the Norwegian or Anglo-Saxon rune-poems only with the greatest caution.

It is worth summing up the points of difference between Norwegian and Icelandic rune-poems.

- i) the form of the Norwegian stanza is completely different from the Icelandic, it being in two lines which are formally linked together in that their last words rhyme.
- ii) three of the Norwegian rune-names have quite different meanings from the Icelandic: *úr* (slag), *óss* (river-mouth), *ýr* (yew).
- iii) seven rune-names have verses with parallel meanings in the two poems, but with notable differences of wording: *þurs*, *reið*, *kaun*, *nauð*, *ís*, *sól*, *lqgr*.

Against this is the fact that six rune kennings, of *fé*, *hagall*, *ár*, *Týr*, *maðr* and perhaps *bjarkan*, have quite close verbal similarities in the two poems. Three of these are simplistic. That hail is made up of very cold grains; Týr is a one-handed god (*ok er hann einhendr* - this last word is apparently rare in early Norse, *Gylfaginning* 13); a birch has

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37. Louis-Jensen, 'Norrøne navnegåder', 50.

very green leaves. Even the three that have a more convincing verbal connection are hardly earth-shattering discoveries; that kinsmen may fall out over wealth; a good season benefits mankind; man must return to earth. If there is a link between the two poems, it is some distance behind their present forms.

The connection with the Anglo-Saxon rune-poem is even more tenuous. Indeed, there are only a few stanzas of the English version that have any similarity at all to the Icelandic ones. They are: *rad* which has the image of the men sitting comfortably in hall to whom riding seems *sefte*, pleasurable; *hægl* which is *hwitust corna*, whitest of grains; *ger* which is *gumena hiht*, the delight of men; *beorc* which is commended in several phrases for its splendour, *on telgum wlitig...*, *hrysted fægere, geloden leafum*, lovely in its branches..., attractively adorned, springing high in its leaves; and *man* who *on myrgþe* is *his magan leof*, loved by his kin when he is in good humour but, like chimney-sweepers, destined to come to dust. But these are general similarities, commonplaces, that need not indicate anything more than that Anglo-Saxons and medieval Icelanders had the same simple minds. Otherwise the thinking could hardly be more different. For instance, Anglo-Saxon *is* is compared to glass, gems, a floor made of frost; but not to bark, thatch or a danger to the doomed; *lagu* is the interminable sea, dangerous to traverse, not a spring, geysir or a field for fish. The sun, *sigel*, is a delight to seamen on a journey, but not the clouds' shield, a shining halo, ice's killer, a revolving wheel. *Tiw* is *tacnā sum*, a certain ?guiding star, faithful in its course, not *Týr*, a one-handed god, the wolf's left-overs, the shielder of temples, father of Frigg and brother of Baldr. And again, in a few cases the English rune-name is completely different in meaning (and in one example form) from the Icelandic: *ur* (aurochs), *ðorn* (thorn), *cen* (torch).

Comparing the three rune-poems Halsall concluded that 'it is difficult to perceive any closer connection among them than is readily explicable by ordinary rune lore on the one hand (that is, the names of the runes in traditional sequence) and by the shared word-hoard of alliterative formulas on the other, a word-hoard which was the common property of the Germanic-speaking world'; a view which Louis-Jensen found 'uden tvivl for reduktivt' [undoubtedly too reductive]. It is certainly a *reductio*, but equally certainly not *ad absurdum*. The alternative view, that of Clunies Ross, that significantly '12 out of 29 stanzas (or 41%) in the Old English *Rune Poem* share conceptual similarities as well as rune names and alliterative formulae with their Norse counterparts' Louis-Jensen regarded as 'et lidt for stærkt udtryk' [rather too strongly expressed], and one must commend her restraint in so expressing it.<sup>38</sup> It is not my purpose to enter any contest about the origins and development of the three rune-poems, only to try to establish the text of the Icelandic version, and to see here if the Norwegian and English versions assist. I am not clear that

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38. Halsall, *Old English Rune Poem*, p. 38; Louis-Jensen, 'Norrøne navnegåder', 44, referring to Clunies Ross, 'Anglo-Saxon and Norse *Rune Poems*', 24.

they do. Do their verses on **m** help to decide whether *fyrða gaman* or *flæðar viti* is the more likely to be original in the Icelandic second kenning? Or whether *þak* is to be preferred to *þekja* in the second kenning for **i**? Or what should be its suitable third kennings for **a**, **s** or **t**? Or how to deal with the confusion that is the Icelandic **b** stanza? I think not. Too many commentators on the Icelandic rune-poem have assumed a definitive text, and accepted that it is the primary one (without variants) of Kålund, Wimmer or Dickins.<sup>39</sup> The complexities that Lindroth called attention to in his very important paper have received little notice. In this article I have failed, I suppose, to cast much light on the 'definitive' text of the Icelandic rune-poem, but I hope I have recorded the Stygian quality of the darkness.<sup>40</sup>

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R. I. PAGE

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39. For example, Clunies Ross can say (*ibid.*, p. 30) 'The Icelandic *Rune Poem* has two other kennings for *fē*, namely *flæðar viti*, "beacon of the flood" and *grafseids gata*, "path of the grave-fish" (that is serpent)' and can draw an extended conclusion from the pair - that they 'indicate a connection with the legend of the Niflung gold' - without considering alternative readings. (*Flæðar viti* is unique to A; nearly all other manuscripts have *fyrða gaman* which would not fit this argument of hers so cogently). Or her comment on the kenning *hofa hilmir* for **t** ('seems to have been modelled on kennings for the Christian deity', p. 38) which again is unique to A, the alternative readings being distinctly non-Christian. Or, speaking of the Icelandic poem in general (p. 26) 'this text includes Latin glosses for each rune name and an alliterating *heiti* for the concept "ruler" attached to each verse.' One would not guess from this that these glosses and *heiti* occur in one manuscript only and are presumably additions at that point. They are part of the riddling nature of the poem which in that manuscript does not include rune-names but gives two additional clues to each in the form of a Latin translation and an indication of its initial sound.

40. I am grateful to a number of scholars for help in producing this paper: to the directors and their colleagues of the Arnamagnean Institute, Copenhagen, and the Royal Library, Copenhagen, of the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, Reykjavík, of the Royal Library, Stockholm, and the University Library, Uppsala; also to Professor Michael Barnes, Dr Judith Jesch, Dr Kári Bjarnason, Professor Jonna Louis-Jensen.

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## APPENDIX

I give here, with some apprehension, a translation of the Icelandic rune-poem for the convenience of those who want to use its material for more general purposes — to compare it with the material of the Anglo-Saxon rune-poem, for instance, or to remark on the common understanding of rune-names in the later period. I draw attention (i) again to the need for caution in using this material, and (ii) to the truism that a translation is an interpretation of an original, not a substitute for it. I translate my text of pp. 27-30 and such of the variants and comments as are comprehensible, helpful and relevant.

1. **f** is family strife and men's delight and grave-fish's path.

var. RJ reverses the order of 1, 2. 2, 'flood-tide's beacon' A, 'Fáfnir's death' JOa. 3, 'grave-thong's' B; 'grave-fish, grave-thong' are kennings for 'serpent'. JOa has the quite different 'warriors' quarrel'.

2. **u** is clouds' tears and hay's destroyer and herdsman's hate.

3. **þ** is women's torment and crag-dweller and Valrún's mate.

var. 3, I have assumed a giantess name *Valrún* on the basis of the surviving remnants of A here. C, BJ, JOab have a giantess name *Varðrún*. B reads the completely different 'late-night traveller', and RJ 'mighty rock-dweller'.

4. **o** is ancient Gautr and Ásgarðr's warrior-king and Vallhøll's ruler.

var. 1, RJ reads *aldagautr* (*seculi princeps*), which is a recorded name for Óðinn, who is also presumably referred to by the *aldingautr* of the other texts. *Gautr* is a well-evidenced byname for Óðinn (*Odinus, princeps Gothorum* in JOB's translation). 2, 3, C, RJ, JOB have these in reversed order in despite of alliteration.

5. **r** is bliss of the seated and swift journey and horse's toil.

var. 2, the various texts give different but related words for 'swift', *snuðig* A, JOab, *snúðulig* B, *snúðug* C, RJ; and for 'journey', *ferð* ABC, *fqr* RJ, JOab.

6. **k** is children's scourge and struggle and home to putrefaction.

var. 1, RJ has *barnabági* or *barnabagi*, 'enemy of children' or 'trouble to children' (RJ gives the translation *molestia*). 2, RJ, JOB have *bardaga fqr*, hard to translate. It is usual to take *fqr* here as the plural of *far* in the sense of 'track, trace', as Wimmer: RJ translates *pugna vestigia*; JOB *prælii vestigia*.

7. **h** is cold corn and driving sleet and snakes' sickness.

var. 2, instead of the genitive plural *knappa* (translated 'sleet' above) C has the compound of similar meaning *hnapp-*, JOa the more sensible *krap(p)a drifa* = 'driving snow'. 3, 'clouds' shot or silver' JOa.

8. **n** is servant's grief and rough conditions and soggy toil.

var. 1, 'servants' C, RJ, JOab. 2, B has the obscure *þvera erfiði*; RJ the plural *þunger koster*. 3, various words for 'soggy' in the different versions, though JOB has *vósamlig* translated as *periculosus*, 'dangerous' (cf. *arduus* OV). B has no third kenning, but the uninspired marginal addition, 'and even rougher conditions', or perhaps 'and an even worse choice'. RJ reads *vósamleg vera* which he translates *ingrata mansio*, 'unpleasant lodging'.

9. **i** is river-bark and wave's thatch and trouble for the doomed.

var. 2, there are two different words for 'thatch': *þekja* in A, JOa, *þak* in B, C, RJ, JOB. 3, I translate the word *fár* here, but it is possible that *far*, 'path' is intended A, JOa. C, RJ, JOB and perhaps B seem to have 'a pit for the doomed'. RJ translates *decipula*, 'trap'; JOB *puteus hians*, 'gaping abyss'.

10. **a** is men's benefits and good summer.

var. 1, 'festivity' B. 2, 'glad' JOB. 3, the third kennings vary comprehensively and cannot be related: 'dales' blood' (with confusion with *á*, 'river') A; 'practically everything one wants', a desperate fill-in, B; 'heavy crops (or perhaps 'fruitful field') C, RJ, JOab.

11. **s** is clouds' shield and shining halo.

var. 1, in error 'ships' shield' RJ, JOB (corrected). 3, again a pair of unrelated kennings: 'ice's despair' AB, 'turning wheel' C, RJ, JOab.

12. **t** is one-handed god and wolf's left-overs.

var. The three kennings of this stanza do not keep the same order throughout. though the alliteration of the first two given here justifies their position. 3, again widely differing kennings: 'lord of temples' A, 'Frigg's father' B, 'Baldr's brother' C, RJ, JOab.

13. **b**

There is no consistency of form, though little variety of concept, in the entries for this rune-name:

A, [?leafy branch] , little tree, ?glorious wood.

B, blossoming tree, little sprig, ?of delightful wood.

C, land's flower, little branch, leafy tree, growing wood.

RJ, little branch, leafy tree, growing wood.

JOa, little branch, leafy wood, lovely grove.

JOb, little branch, leafy tree, growing wood,

14. **m** is man's delight and earth's increase and ships' painter.

var. 3, instead of *skipa skreytir* (*puppium pigmentarius*), RJ has *skipastreiter* which he translates *nauepegus*, 'shipwright' -

15. **l** is bubbling Vimur and great cauldron and fishes' field.

var. 1, the noun of A is partly illegible but what survives does not suggest *vimur*, which is the reading of the other MSS. *Vimur* is the name of a mythical river, presumably used here as a common noun. 2, *viðr ketill*, the reading of all MSS except A which is damaged here; *ketill*, literally 'kettle' but perhaps, as Wimmer suggested, used to mean 'hot spring, geysir' though it is not so translated (*ampla cisterna* RJ, *laxus lebes* JOb). 3, 'fishes': there are several different fish-names used in this kenning: *glömmung*, *glümmung* (? an error for the preceding), *grünnung*. The second noun is a problem. C, JOab have *grund* (JOb translating *fovea*). A may have the alternative *grandi*, 'beach', but it is not clear. B has *gnaud* which must be a mistake. RJ has the improbable *gunnunga gap* (literally 'men's gap', though translated *pisciculorum fovea*) here. JOa has the quite different 'hot water', presumably in the sense 'hot spring'.

16. **y**

var. Again a baffling stanza. B omits it altogether. A has two kennings only, both only partly legible, 1, *ben-* presumably the first part of a word for 'bent, drawn (of a bow)'; 2, *-otgjarnt járn*, '[br]ittle iron'. 1, '<double>bent bow' C, RJ, JOb, 'bent bow' JOa. 2, 'battle-help' RJ, JOb; 'attack' wrongly, with *gangr* for *gagn* C. The quite different 'arrow-hurler' (which does not alliterate with the rune-name) but 'battle-help' in the extended list JOa. 3, ? 'arrow-thrower', the kenning is opaque C, 'arrow-hurler' RJ, 'arrow's wrath' JOa, 'arrow-dispatcher' JOb.