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Runes around the North Sea and on the Continent AD 150-700; texts & contexts

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I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. Aim of this study

1.1. This study offers an edition of inscriptions found in England, The Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Hungary and Rumania, dating from the period 150-700 AD. The book has been divided into two parts; the first part contains essays on early runic writing and the historical and archaeological contexts of runic objects. The second part of this study contains a catalogue of the early runic inscriptions found in the regions mentioned above. The inscriptions of Germany, France, Belgium, Switzerland and Hungary have been listed together as the Continental Corpus¹. One found in Hungary and two found in Rumania are listed among the Danish and Gothic Corpus. The catalogue offers readings, interpretations and limited graphic, orthographic and linguistic analyses of the inscriptions from the above mentioned corpora. A concordance of the runic texts, an index on sites, and maps will facilitate the use of the book. The basic principle underlying this investigation is *comparison*. Other important issues are the origin and initial spread of runic knowledge, and the aim and use of early runic writing.

1.2. Definition of the problem: This study aims at a comparison of the earliest runic traditions in the countries around the North Sea (England, The Netherlands, Denmark) and on the Continent, i.c. predominantly Germany. Thus, the geographical point of departure is not Scandinavia, as is mostly the case when studying the early runic traditions. The choice for an unorthodox approach stems from the expectation that in doing so some answers might be found to questions concerning the essence of runic script in the first few centuries of our era. When focusing on the function of runic writing, one automatically has to face the questions: why was this special script designed at all, and who first used it? It seems logical to look for the origin of the runic script not in Scandinavia, but near the Roman *limes*. This point of view is contested, but it still seemed interesting enough for further investigation. The issue of the first runographers and their social context has also been dealt with. It appears imperative to reconsider the contents of the early runic inscriptions with a fresh view. It turned out that the changing of perspective leads to unexpected insights.

The runic texts are treated in the Catalogue, which contains concise linguistic information and the most important data with regard to the objects and datings. The overall aim has been to provide the reader with a practical survey of the oldest inscriptions from the aforementioned areas, together with relevant archaeological and cultural-historical data. Within this framework there was, unfortunately, no room for extensive linguistic considerations, although in compiling the catalogue quite some information from various sources has been used.

Below a survey will be given of the procedures followed in this investigation, including a summary of the methods used. Attention will also be paid to necessary/logical restrictions.

¹ This corpus is also known as South Germanic, but I prefer the term Continental.

2. Points of departure

2.1. Runic writing started at a time that a large part of Europe was under Roman imperial sway. Therefore, the impact of Roman culture on Germania and the Germanic - Roman relations during the first two centuries of our era were among the first subjects to be investigated. A separate chapter has been dedicated to questions concerning the identification of both the early runographers and the location of the original region of runic writing. In my opinion, any runologist must take up a position in this field, in order to create a point of reference for further runic research.

2.2. The oldest datable runic find (*ca.* 160 AD, cf. Ilkjær 1996^a:68,73) is a comb with the legend **harja**, found in the bog of Vimose on the Danish island of Funen. Ambiguous (runic or Roman) is the inscription on a brooch from Meldorf, North Germany, dated around 50 AD (Düwel & Gebühr 1981). From the 2nd century onwards, runic items have regularly been recorded, albeit in small numbers, and with findless intervals both in space and in time. Attestations from the 2nd - 4th centuries have been found in present-day Denmark, Sweden, Norway, North Germany, Poland, Russia and Rumania. From the 5th century onwards, runes appear in The Netherlands, England, and South Germany. A substantial number of inscribed objects are weapons, parts of weapons and jewellery. The material used is mostly (precious) metal, but objects of wood and bone have also survived.

2.3. Nearly two hundred gold bracteates inscribed with runes, dating from the 5th-6th centuries, constitute a large category. They form a substantial and separate group among the objects with runes from the Migration Period. Bracteates must not be overlooked in any study of early runic texts. The fact that these precious objects were manufactured during a rather short period (of some generations) may be due to a rise in power of an elite, or to the emergence of power-centres, like Gudme on Funen. Therefore, attention has been paid to these historical developments.

2.4. The initial aim of the present study was to focus on the countries bordering the North Sea, i.e. to investigate the Danish, Frisian and Anglo-Saxon runic traditions, but soon the need for an extension to a larger area was felt. Therefore the Continental inscriptions were also included, being most fit for comparison with the North Sea group, especially as regards the combination and relation of objects, runes and texts, and also because of the cultural/political background in the Early Middle Ages². The intention, therefore, is to detect possible similarities and differences between the runic traditions of England, The Netherlands, Denmark and the Continent, and to find out if it is possible to speak of a common runic tradition, to be traced all over West and Central Europe and springing from one central source. Such deliberations lead to the question whether through the inventarisation and subsequent comparison of texts, objects and their archaeological and historical contexts, information can be obtained about the use, spread and aim of runic writing in the period under discussion. If the nature and status of runic usage approximately can be established, insofar this can be deduced from the inseparable triad: objects, texts and (archaeological) contexts, one might gain some insight in why people created runic script.

² A substantial part of the regions (apart from Denmark) from where early-medieval runic writing is recorded was politically and culturally subdued by Merovingian influence.

2.5. The study has been restricted to a group of runic inscriptions dating from the earliest period of recorded runic writing, from *circa* 150 to 700³, i.e. from the Roman Imperial Period via the Migration Period (from 350-500) to the Merovingian Period from 500 - 725. This restriction is a logical consequence of the fact that initially the Frisian and Anglo-Saxon inscriptions were taken as a starting point. This necessitated the study of the preceding runic culture of Denmark and North Germany. The inscriptions from the period of the older *futhork* are considered to be the most puzzling of all. Some of the reasons for their unintelligibility are that basic questions concerning origin and purpose of the runic alphabet have still not been solved. Therefore, the initial question should be: why and by whom were the runes introduced in Germanic society? One cannot start studying the oldest inscriptions without pondering over these questions and without trying to offer an acceptable solution concerning the problem of the origin of the runes. The observation that the greater part of the earliest runic objects has been found in a context with clear connections to the Roman Empire, showing obvious relations to the military and economic elite of Germanic society, has led me to think that the art of writing in an otherwise oral society may have been introduced in the North by Germanic people who had connections with the Roman empire, such as mercenaries (cf. Rausing 1987; Axboe & Kromann 1992; Rix 1992).

2.6. To trace any influence of archaic mediterranean alphabets on early runic writing is another subject of this study. Proceeding on the above mentioned primary runological question concerning the origin of the runic alphabet, one wonders *which* Mediterranean alphabet must have been the forerunner of the runes and *when* and *where* the take-over took place. Many views have been proposed on this matter and still a consensus has not been reached. No exactly fitting, all-covering matrix alphabet has been found yet. At this stage one group of runologists considers the Latin alphabet most likely the forerunner; another group prefers the theory of an origin based on the Greek or North Italic/Etruscan alphabets. The time of borrowing will probably have been the 1st century AD. On the strength of the present data, propositions will be forwarded as to the questions *how* a certain collection of graphs came to the north, and *who* took them there. This subject will be treated more elaborately in chapters II and III of this study.

2.7. The runic objects discussed in this study have been found in different regions, but they show several similarities and a possible coherence as regards texts and contexts. Restricting myself to a discussion of these finds only, gives me the possibility to focus on a group of comparable items, in this case almost all portable, precious, objects. Besides, it has been possible to date most of the objects with reasonable accuracy by means of archaeological data. Furthermore, the selection of this group offers the possibility of studying mutual contacts, the possible status of runic writing and the status of owners, commissioners and makers of runic objects in a gift-exchanging society, such as existed in the period under study. Legible texts of 48 rune-bracteates from the second half of the fifth century will be included in this study. The study of the bracteates has been based on descriptions, photos and drawings

³ The datings are relative because they are based on the find context of the runic objects. Actually, runic writing in a specific area may have begun at least a generation earlier. Runic objects may have circulated a long time before they were deposited in the ground. The exact beginning and end of a runic period actually cannot be determined, especially when additional circumstantial evidence is lacking.

from the six volumes of the *Ikonographischer Katalog* (ed. Axboe et al. 1984-1989). Bracteates with as yet unintelligible sign-sequences have been omitted, as no certainty about the transliteration can be obtained in these cases. For instance, a rune that apparently has to be transliterated as **l** occurs in at least five different forms: ᚠ ᚡ ᚢ ᚣ ᚤ (cf. the remarkable differences in the number of **l** and **u** runes on bracteates when compared with other objects in the study by Müller 1986, p. 452-467, esp. p. 459).

2.8. I must explain why I have confined myself to the period before 700 AD, and why I have decided not to treat younger inscriptions, with the exception of the Frisian Corpus, in which the upper limit is difficult to determine. I admit that such a division is rather arbitrary, hence the year 700 is, to some extent, an imaginary borderline. The main reason for drawing this line is that runic writing in the older *futhork* appears to have stopped in Scandinavia and on the Continent by then, hence the 'archaic' period had come to a definite end. In Frisia and England the older *futhork*-set of 24 characters was in use from the 5th c. onwards and continued to be used, but additions and alterations were made. In inscriptions from around 500 onwards, certain specific runic variations occur that are common to Anglo-Saxon England and Frisia. In the course of time English runic writing underwent new developments. The only exactly datable runic object, St. Cuthbert's coffin (698), shows a typical Anglo-Saxon runic innovation: the so-called 'bookhand-s'. Therefore the borderline between the older, Anglo-Frisian tradition and the younger, Anglo-Saxon tradition in England can be drawn close to 700 AD. Page (1973, 1985 and 1987^b) divided runic usage in England into periods before 650 and after. I stretched the first period to 700, because I wanted to include two inscriptions (St. Cuthbert's coffin and the Whitby Comb), dated close to 700, to show some contrast with the earlier 'archaic' runic period. After 700, the runic script went its own insular way in England, a way hardly comparable to developments in other regions. Only for Frisia the year 700 as a *terminus ante quem* is unfit. Here one cannot distinguish a clear boundary that marks an earlier and later period, and, besides, I intended to include the whole, small, corpus. The end of runic writing in Frisia was probably around 800.

2.9. As to the older Danish tradition, which was recorded from the second century AD onwards, I chose the year 700 as the finishing point, in order to treat a relatively long runic period, covering the earliest inscriptions (2nd c. - 5th c.), the bracteate period (around 500) and the Blekinge inscriptions (supposedly 7th c.). This last group, consisting of 4 monumental stones with relatively long texts, may be looked upon as an example of the transition period between the older and younger *futhork* writing system. Blekinge was part of Denmark in the Early Middle Ages; therefore the Blekinge inscriptions have been listed under the 'Danish' runic corpus. In this study, the inclusion of the Blekinge group is meant to demonstrate the changes in runic writing in the course of the 7th century and the considerable contrast to the earlier, 'archaic', inscriptions. The gap in the Danish tradition (no finds are known from most of the later 6th and the 7th centuries) might be explained by accident (find circumstances). Moor-offerings stopped at around 500, and moor-finds represent an important category of runic objects. Some political and economical change may have been involved, but no christianization process.

2.10. Runic writing on the Continent, predominantly in Germany, occurred from the 2nd c. to the 7th c.⁴. This includes the Thorsberg finds and the Dahmsdorf, Kowel and Rozwadów spearheads, although Kowel (with the inscription **tilarids**) may be interpreted as Gothic. Actually, there is no real distinction between the large weapon-deposits such as those in the moors, and the deposits of the above mentioned spearheads. In my opinion these spearheads are unlikely to have been 'lost'. Their deposition must have been an intentional act, for example symbolizing a claim of the soil or land. They do not need to be products of a local runic tradition, but they may have been deposited by migrating Germanic tribes for some reason. The establishment of indigenous runic writing in a certain area is mostly determined by a combination of factors, provided by the objects, the language of the texts and the forms of the runes.

Some inscriptions may bear witness of the oncoming of Christianity, as is shown by the inscriptions of Oberflacht, Kirchheim Teck and perhaps Osthofen and Nordendorf I. The end of recorded epigraphic runic writing in South Germany is determined by a change of funerary customs: the deceased did not obtain any gravegoods anymore. In England, people also ceased to provide the dead with funerary gifts, but this had no consequences for the recording of runic writing.

2.11. Inscriptions from Sweden and Norway have not been included, unless when used in comparisons with the corpora treated in this study. A large number of the Swedish and Norwegian inscriptions appear on the surface of undatable stones, therefore, in most cases, an archaeological dating of the runic texts is impossible; they can only be dated (approximately) with the help of linguistic/runological arguments. Logically, they are less suitable for comparison in the context of this study⁵. My research may have provided a possibility of dating some of these texts on historical bases, see chapter III.6. Apart from the decision to select a limited group of runic texts, another reason for not including these items is that I had to draw a line somewhere, since within the limits of this project there was neither enough time nor financial means to investigate all runic inscriptions from the older *fubark*.

2.12. Another aim was the compilation of 'diagnostic' runeforms⁶. It remains to be seen how useful it is to try to establish a chronology of runeforms, and, subsequently, draw far-reaching conclusions, as we do not even know how representative our surviving runic texts are for all runic writing from a particular period. It is an accepted fact that an unknown, but probably low percentage of what was produced has survived unto our days. What has been retained

⁴ The Thorsberg runic objects (200 AD) appear to originate from the region between Lower Elbe and Rhine. Other early inscriptions of the Continent are on iron spear heads, found in Germany (Brandenburg), Poland and Volhynia (all *ca.* 200 AD).

⁵ They concern the following items (non-alphabetically): the stones of Möjbro, Årstad, Vettelund, Einang, Opedal, Kalleby, Rö, Tune, Myklebostad, Kylver, Nordhuglo, Tørvika, Barmen, Skärkind, Elgesem, Stenstad, Kjøllevik, Rosseland, Reistad, Eidsvåg, Amla, Noleby, Bratsberg, Järsberg, Møgedal, Vånga, Skääng, Berga, Saude, Tomstad, Belland, Bø, Sunde, Tanem, Kinneve, By, Krogsta, Ellestad, Rävsaal, Tveito and the cliffs of Veblungsnes, Himmelstalund, Kårstad and Valsfjord, furthermore the Setre comb, Eikeland clasp, Etelhem clasp, Bratsberg clasp, Fosse bronze plate, Førde weight, Strøm whetstone, Nedre Hov scraper, Fløksand scraper. For information about these items, see Krause & Jankuhn 1966 and Antonsen 1975.

⁶ Diagnostic runeshapes display characteristics for a special region or regions, or for a special period. These are the runes for, e.g., **h**, **s**, **k**, **j** and **e**.

may just be an accidental pack. Runic material that has survived from the early centuries of recorded runic writing is extremely scarce. Any investigation based on what might be called an ‘ad hoc group’ necessarily has its limitations, but these few remains are the tools one has to work with. On the other hand, a typological inventarisation and comparison of runeforms and varieties may reveal some interesting results. An investigation based on the comparison of runeforms has been carried out by Odenstedt (1990). His study concerned the origin and development of runes. However, his work is far from complete as regards the runeforms of the North Sea and Continental inscriptions. In this respect I intended to supplement Odenstedt's work. A survey of deviating, or ‘diagnostic’ runes is included in Chapter IV of this work.

2.13. A graphic and linguistic analysis has been made of the texts of the inscriptions. On the whole, a general knowledge of runic graphology is indispensable in determining which rune was carved, not only in the case of hardly legible runes but also in the case of lookalikes such as **r** and **u**, **l** and **u**, **w** and **p**, **s** and **j**, **d** and **m**, **g** and **n**, **l** and **k**. *Spiegelrunen*⁷ or mirror-runes also belong to the enigmatic category. For instance one graph: \diamond may be transliterated either as **(i)ng** or as (mirrored) **w**. The admission that *Spiegelrunen* may play an important role in identifying what was written can lead to surprising solutions (Pieper 1987; Looijenga 1995^a). The linguistic problems have been analysed with the help of descriptive grammars, etymological dictionaries and studies by e.g. Antonsen, Braune/Ebbinghaus, Braune/Eggers, Campbell, Gallée, Gordon, Hines, Holthausen, Clark Hall/Meritt, Kluge, Krause, Lehmann, Luick, Makaev, Markey, Meid, Noreen, H.F.Nielsen, Ramat, Schützeichel, Seebold, Steller, Stoklund, Syrett, De Vries. Names are discussed with the help of books and articles by, e.g., Förstemann, Gottschald, Kaufmann, Peterson, Reichert, Schönfeld, Weisgerber.

3. Methods

3.1. Runology is, basically, supported by two types of information: palaeography and historical linguistics (Antonsen 1995). Supplementary, but indispensable information has to be obtained from archaeology and history, and from Germanic mythology, sagas and the like. A problem here is the question of continuity, since sagas and mythological stories were recorded in much later centuries than in the period during which the runic inscriptions of this study were carved. This dissertation aims at a combination of recent archaeological and runological views.

A useful list of methodological criteria has been composed by Barnes (1996:26f.). For a runologist practical fieldwork is an absolute prerequisite. Hence I have examined the inscriptions together with the objects on which they had been carved, in order to collect all possible evidence such a combination may give: the general lay-out of the inscription, the particular way the runes were carved on the surface of the object, the occurrence of ornaments on the same surface, and, of course, the object itself. Moreover, one has to study a considera-

⁷ *Spiegelrunen* are runes that are in fact double-sided versions of one rune. Sometimes they consist of one hasta with equal sidetwigs to both sides, pockets or loops in such a way that the rune makes the impression of being mirrored, such as \diamond . Others show the same shape twice on the upper and lower part: \square or to the right and left: \updownarrow . Such a rune must be read as one rune, not as two. I regard these peculiar runeshapes as a kind of ‘ornamental runes’. Not all runes consisting of one hasta with equal twigs to both sides are mirrored runes, such as: \uparrow Υ \downarrow .

ble number of runic artefacts, to 'get the hang of it' and to train one's eyes. To become a runologist, one needs practice.

3.2. An inventarisation was made of the recorded runic material. Since most objects are kept in museums, information on the archaeological context of the object, e.g. location, dating, and related finds could be obtained fairly easily and quickly. In order to get a proper understanding of the relevant runic periods and areas I used both general and specific archaeological background information. I used magnifying glasses and a microscope. I made drawings and photographs of the runes. Unfortunately, these could not all be included in this book, due to insufficient financial means.

In several cases I re-examined the objects several months or even a year later to check my findings, especially in those cases my readings deviated from those by others.

In some cases only photographs or drawings could be used, for instance, when an object was not available for inspection, or lost. In most cases I was not the first person to look at the inscriptions, and I could consult the descriptions and analyses by others. Handbooks, studies, compilations, anthologies and articles I used are, for instance: Arntz & Zeiss 1939, Jacobsen & Moltke 1942, Elliott 1959/1989, Jänichen 1967, Düwel/Tempel 1968/70, Krause 1966 and 1971, Page 1973 and 1995, Antonsen 1975, Opitz 1977, 1982 and 1986, *Michigan Germanic Studies* 1981, Düwel 1983, Moltke 1985, Axboe et alii 1985-1989, *Runor och runinskrifter* 1987, *Fra Stamme til Stat* 1988, *Britain 400-600* 1990, Ilkjær 1990, 1991, 1993, 1996^{a&b}, Odenstedt 1990, *Old English Runes and their Continental Background* 1991, *Samfundssorganisation og Regional Variation* 1991, *The Age of Sutton Hoo* 1992, Hedeager 1992^a, *Runische Schriftkultur* 1994, Birkmann 1995, Lund Hansen et alii 1995, several articles by Antonsen, Axboe, Barnes, Derolez, Düwel, Heidinga, Hines, Krause, H.F. Nielsen, Odenstedt, Opitz, Page, Peterson, Rausing, Seebold, Stoklund, Theuws, Van Es, and numerous others. There was no information about every object. Sometimes there were no publications at all, in other cases they were not accessible to me at the time. 'Virgin territory' (at the time I inspected them, e.g. 1993-1996), because they were only recently discovered, and therefore not inspected or published before, are Neudingen-Baar I, 'Kent'⁸, Harford Farm, Pforzen, Schwangau, Bernsterburen, Wijnaldum B, Leţcani and Bergakker. Marie Stoklund kindly provided me with information about recent, still unpublished new-finds from Denmark, for which I am very grateful.

Occasionally I have arrived at readings differing from those of other runologists. Sometimes this was due to the decay and corrosion of the surfaces on which the inscriptions were carved. Apparently, corrosion does not stop after an object has been preserved and put in a showcase. Sometimes the runes are vague and multi-interpretable. In these ambiguous cases I have chosen to record the results of my personal inspection.

I read publications beforehand, but not too close before my own inspection of the runic texts, because I did not want to be prejudiced in any way. This does not imply that I have ignored earlier readings. My first and foremost intention has been to try to establish which runes were used and how they were carved. In the second place I have tried to establish the meaning of the inscription and to compare my findings with those of other runologists. I have tried to do this as unbiased as I possibly could, which means that I tried to exclude any suppositions

⁸ The object is also known as the 'Bateman brooch'. Page mentions it a few times (Page 1995:172 and 158), but states that it "has an undoubted but uninterpreted runic inscription which could be either Anglo-Saxon or Continental Germanic" (p. 172f.).

regarding possibly magical, religious, or whatsoever sort of purport the texts might bear. In the case of apparently senseless rune sequences, such as **aisgzh** on the Thorsberg shield-boss there are two possibilities: either one gives up any attempt to interpret the runes, or one tries to find a reasonable interpretation. The former option is unsatisfactory and the latter is dangerous, because one may easily be tempted to merely speculate.

As an example of the difficulties encountered when trying to find an explanation for **aisgzh** the following interpretations may be instructive: Krause (1971:168) inserted two vowels to get **ais[i]g[a]z h** 'der Dahinstürmende - Hagel'. I also feel inclined to read the sequence as an abbreviation, and to read it as **aisg[a]z**, or even as **aisg[isala]z**, in analogy with **asugisalz** on Kragehul. Antonsen (1995:132) proposed a different reading, based on the principle that "we have no basis for assuming that writers in runes ever intentionally left out vowels"⁹. Antonsen interprets the spelling **-sg-** as an alternate rendering of **-sk-**, which then gives **aisk-z** 'seeker'. He considers the **h** an ideographic rune **h** = **hagala-* 'hail', a metaphor for 'shower of spears and arrows'.

Personally I have difficulties determining when and if an ideographic rune (or *Begriffsrune*) was used, since the runewriters' criteria for using them are unknown to us¹⁰. There is at least one clear instance of the use of an ideographic rune: the single **j** rune on the Stentofte stone, representing its name **jāra* meaning 'good year' = harvest. The peculiar use of this ideograph is further emphasized by the fact that it was carved in an archaic fashion. The **h** in Thorsberg **aisgzh** may or may not be such a *Begriffsrune*, there is no graphic peculiarity (**h** has no archaic forerunner), but, in Antonsen's interpretation, it could symbolize its name on syntactic grounds. In some other cases, isolated runes may be read as abbreviations, such as the **r** in the Sievern bracteate, which apparently denotes **r[unoz]**. Single runes may have been read as abbreviations in the oldest inscriptions, and may later on have come to represent the symbolic meaning of the rune's name.

3.3. The material as presented in this study, is based on a total of 204 inscribed objects. These are listed in the catalogue under the headings 'Danish and South-East European Inscriptions', 'Bracteates with Runes', 'Continental Inscriptions', 'Early Runic Inscriptions in England' and 'Runic Inscriptions in or from the Netherlands'. I have listed the Danish and South-East European, also known as 'Gothic', inscriptions together for convenience sake, since only three 'Gothic' objects have been included here (Lețcani, Pietroassa, Szababattyán). Besides, it is not possible to establish the pure 'Gothicity' of all three texts. Listing the inscriptions among the Continental Corpus might have been an acceptable consideration, but then one decisive feature fails: the double-barred **h**, characteristic for the Continental and Anglo-Frisian inscriptions. Both Lețcani and Pietroassa show the occurrence of a single-barred **h**. Szababattyán might be either Continental or Gothic. Since there were close contacts between the Danish and Gothic peoples in the fourth century (Werner 1988), it seemed, for the purpose of this study, logical to list the Danish and Gothic objects together.

⁹ Perhaps unintentionally, but at least in one instance a runewriter did omit a vowel, in Charnay **uþf[i]nþai** 'may he/she find out, get to know'. But Antonsen (1975:77) reads the sequence as **uþfapai** 'to (my) husband', taking the **n** rune as a writing error for **a**.

¹⁰ Düwel (1992^b:355) proposes two criteria for determining the presence of ideographic runes, also known as *Begriffsrunen*: a syntactic argument and a graphic argument.

3.4. I subdivided the inscriptions into a legible and interpretable part and an illegible and/or uninterpretable part. Furthermore there are the categories 'possibly runic', 'non-runic' and 'falsifications'. The legible items are described more extensively than the illegible ones. Data concerning findspot, context, sort of object, material, dates and depository are provided. Ambiguous or deviating runeforms are discussed. Furthermore, one or more possible readings, c.q. transliteration(s) are proposed. A linguistic analysis of the text is made. Limited references to other authors' readings and interpretations are given. The catalogue-entries contain computerized runographic presentations of the inscriptions. A list of so-called diagnostic runeforms has been compiled. Since there is no absolute certainty as to the 'normal' or 'standard' forms of the runes, 'abnormal' only means *deviating from other runes we know*.

4. A Division into two Runic Periods

4.1. Generally speaking, it is possible to distinguish at least two main periods in the history of early runic writing. Both these periods span several centuries. To divide the corpora into two Periods appeared to be useful, in order to show the differences between the initial use of runes and the later developments. The initial use of runes appears to be more or less the same everywhere, which may point to a common source.

Period I, the 'archaic' period, stretches in all regions from the very beginning of runic writing to the 7th century, and it coincides everywhere with the pre-Christian era or with a transitional phase to Christianity. In historical terms this concerns the Roman and Merovingian periods. The exact beginning of Period I varies locally. In Denmark Period I lasts from the 2nd c. to the 6th c. In England Period I starts in the 5th and goes on to the 7th c. Continental runic writing stretches from the 2nd c. to the 7th c. From The Netherlands the whole runic period has been included, from the 5th c. to the 9th c. Period II, when runic writing appears to have become more integrated in society, began in Denmark and England somewhere during the 7th century.

4.2. There may be enough evidence from The Netherlands to distinguish two periods; the difficult thing here is to determine when one period ends and another begins. At any rate, the coins seem to represent a specific runic application, comparable to the English runic coins. Perhaps the existence of runic coins may be labelled a common North Sea speciality¹¹ A younger period may be distinguished, when peculiar developments occur and other runes appear, differing from those of the older *fupark* and the Anglo-Frisian runes. The causes for this phenomenon are unclear. The undated Westeremden B text is long, cryptic, and shows some Scandinavian runes from the period of the younger *fupark*. This definitely points to a development in the Frisian runic system. The inscription on the Bernsterburen staff also points to a later period, which tallies with the dating of the staff: *circa* 800. The two possible periods in the Dutch runic corpus may be defined as follows: the 'archaic' period presents inscriptions with runes from the older *fupark*, and also those including the Anglo-Frisian additional runes; the second period presents inscriptions with an extended use of runes from the older *fupark*, Anglo-Frisian runes and Scandinavian runes.

11. Also from Ribe (Jutland) numerous *sceattas* are known.

The only inscription in The Netherlands from outside the *terp*-area in the North is Bergakker, in the Betuwe, an island in the river estuary of the rivers Rhine and Meuse. This inscription belongs to the 'archaic' period.

The Continental corpus shows only the 'archaic' use of runes. On the basis of the texts, the rune-types and the kind of objects, it can be concluded that only Period I is represented here. Finds are scattered over a large part of West-Central Europe. The majority dates from 500-700; the largest find-area is South Germany. The attestations from Hungary and Switzerland are outliers; the finds from Belgium and France may also be considered outliers, although the presence of a Frankish runic tradition cannot be discarded. The few remains from the centuries before 500 offer an interesting picture: a line may be drawn between the finds of Fallward, Liebenau, Bergakker and Aalen on the one hand and another line from North Germany to the South-East, with the finds of Dahmsdorf, Rozwadów and Kowel.

Period II will be dealt with very cursorily; only a few finds from the 7th century will be discussed. Crucial changes in the writing system occurred in England and Blekinge. In order to show the contrast to the older period, I have included these (late?) 7th c. inscriptions.

4.3. The runic finds are described according to the following criteria:

object: sort of object, material;

context: find circumstances (grave, bog, peat, hoard, isolated find, settlement etc), date;

inscription: kind of runic alphabet; additional runes or runic innovations; any diverging runic forms; legibility; any use of pseudo-runes or script-imitation; direction of writing;

text: contents; length; linguistic analysis; intention of text (private or public); contents obscure or clear; connection between text and object.

relation: to other runic objects and texts; to other find-contexts; to texts other than rune-texts.

Characteristics of the inscriptions and texts of Period I

- a) the use of the older *fupark* with local variations; Anglo-Frisian extension of the *fupark* with two extra characters;
- b) runes and texts that are difficult to read and/or interpret; cryptic texts;
- c) the occurrence of script-imitation and pseudo-runes;
- d) the texts are mostly short;
- e) the texts consist of names (e.g the owner's name), makers', givers' or writers' formulae, naming object or material;
- f) the texts have individual, private, intimate and ritual meanings;
- g) sometimes the meaning of the texts and runes is seemingly religious or magical. It is remarkable that memorials, political and administrative texts should be lacking, whereas the later medieval Scandinavian runic tradition contains so many of these.

Characteristics of Period II

- a) more variation in runes, inscriptions and texts, perhaps due to increased use of runic script;
- b) strong changes in the *fupark*, independent regional developments, emerging of new, c.q. additional runes; disappearance of runes from the 24-letter *fupark*;
- c) increased legibility and therefore more possibilities for interpretation;
- d) longer and more substantial texts;
- e) monumental and legible texts for public purposes;

- f) obscure and enigmatic texts for private purposes;
- g) the emergence of cryptic runes, manuscript runes;
- h) the occurrence of Christian texts.

5. On the graphic rendering of runes, findplaces, transliterations etc.

All transliterations of runes, also called readings, in the present study are given in **bold** Roman lettering, all linguistic (phonetic and phonemic) transcriptions of runic texts are in *italics*. The interpretation is given between 'single' quotation marks. For instance: **runoronu** *rūnōrōnū* 'runerow'. The location or catalogue-entry of this inscription, which is treated in this study, is in underlined italics: *Björketorp*. If, on the other hand, a runic inscription is mentioned for some reason, but not discussed, e.g. if it has no entry in the catalogue, it is written in small capitals: NOLEBY. Information about the latter category can be obtained in e.g. Krause & Jankuhn 1966, Antonsen 1975 and Page 1973 and 1995.

A *transcription* includes punctuation and diacritical marks. All linguistic data and derivations like *Go satjan*, *Gmc *sitjan* are also given in italics. Quotations are between "double" quotation marks. Illegible or damaged runes are represented by ?; runes that were omitted by the runewriter and that are inserted by the runologist, are written between square brackets: [n]. Damaged or partially legible runes are given between round brackets: (m). Runes that were lost, but which can be reconstructed from the context, are represented like this: [dæ]us or, if they are fairly legible: wihgu. Single runes that can be interpreted as an abbreviation of an entire word are represented thus: r[unoz]. Bindrunes are written bold and underlined: **ga**, **me**. The so-called (i)ng rune: \diamond or \blacklozenge is referred to as (i)ng or ng in identifiable words and in *futhark's*.

6. Anomalous runes and doubtful cases

There is one specific problem in runic studies that needs some attention. Because of the paucity of runic material there are relatively little reliable data to build theories on and draw conclusions from. It is, therefore, good to remember what may be called: *Derolez' warning*¹². This means that only a very small percentage of the inscriptions may have survived, there being an enormous number that was lost and which we do not know anything about. In view of the 200 odd surviving objects (bracteates with runes not included) with inscriptions in the older futhark from five centuries of recorded runic writing, it is logical to conclude many more must have existed. Hence, any conclusions at all about runic writing can only be tentative. Absolute statements about the chronology and spread of runic forms are no more than inspired guesses, since the basis is so small. This also implies that runes showing

¹² Derolez describes a remarkable phenomenon in his 1981 article *The Runic System and its Cultural Context* on pp. 19 and 20 as follows: "1. The total number of inscriptions down to the year 450 or so amounts to no more than between 10 and 20 in a century, or one in every five to ten years; 2. Those inscriptions are spread over a fairly wide area comprising large parts of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, with a much thinner sprinkling on the Continent; 3. Yet they show a remarkable uniformity and stability, (...)". Derolez' warning can be formulated as follows: an unknown number of runecarvers must have been at work in this vast area at any given time during the period under consideration. They must have produced thousands of inscriptions in three centuries. What has survived then, is no more than a few percent of what has been carved.

unusual forms may be looked upon with suspicion, but on the other hand they may just be remnants of an enormous mass of lost (or as yet undiscovered) runic products. An instance of hitherto unknown runic practices, which may be regarded as unusual and (therefore) possibly false, are the Weser bones (Continental Corpus). Uncommon runic practices might gain some credibility when set alongside the host of inscriptions that was probably lost in the course of time. Thus the deviants need not instantly be dismissed. Besides, investigations into the genuity of the Weser runic bones (Pieper 1989) could not prove them false. As regards the Stetten rivet¹³, it is not so much the authenticity that is at stake in the first place, but the exceptionally small size of the object and the still smaller size of the scratches. It has not been included in this study.

With reference to Derolez' dictum¹⁴, I have included the Weser-inscriptions, but only because I wanted to give them the benefit of the doubt. Notwithstanding Pieper's profound and impressive research I am not convinced of the authenticity of the inscriptions. The runes are so different from all other known inscriptions in bone that I am reluctant to accept them as genuine. Pieper's thorough examinations of the Weser bones (some bear runes, some have drawings) have yielded no traces of falsification as regards the *runic* bones (whereas other bones with drawings appeared to be falsifications), although his research was intended to prove them false. Yet, some doubts remain, which are aroused especially because of the suspicious find-history and find circumstances. The texts of the bones consist of words that could easily have been taken from Gallée's *Altsächsische Grammatik*, for instance. Furthermore the way the runes were carved and the childlike drawings on the bones strengthened my impression that something was wrong here. Such irregularities would normally lead to the conclusion: suspect, probably false, but in this particular case falsification could not be proved yet.

A peculiar item is the stone pillar from Breza, found in 1930. According to the records of the find, published in the *Novitates Musei Sarajevoensis* nr. 9 (not available to me), several pieces of one or more pillars were found in a field. On one of these fragments a rune-alphabet appeared to have been cut. The excavators declared that this fragment belonged to a pillar that may have stood in or in front of a church, which was destroyed by fire. There was some confusion about the nature of the church, some sources speak of a church built by Goths (Jellinek 1931:32), others speak of an early Christian church, probably destroyed by fire as a

13. The Stetten rivet is a very small piece of weapon equipment, dated 7th c. The object seems too small (\varnothing 1.3 cm; height max. 0.7 cm; cf. Pieper 1991^b:309) for a deliberate inscription; in my opinion neither inscribing nor reading is possible without the use of a microscope. Yet, runic shapes can be distinguished (under the microscope), and Pieper interpreted the signs as: **afmelkud**, partly carved in bindrunes, which he took to represent a female PN *Amelgu(n)df*, interpreting the **k** in **amelkud** as a product for the OHG soundchange. The **f** might be an abbreviation of **f[ahi]** 'he/she draws' or it might be a *Begriffsrune* for **f[ehu]** 'property, wealth'. After rereading my own notes made during personal inspection of the Stetten inscription, I decided not to include this doubtful item. The object is covered with scratches and damages; the fact that some of these look like runes does not convince me of their runic identity. Altogether there are too many uncertainties to accept this item as a runic object.

14. Derolez' dictum is a warning for runologists not to draw too many conclusions from the little material we have; regarding the paucity of material one must assume that an unknown, but possibly large, number of inscriptions has gone lost, which on the one hand must make the runologist cautious, but which, on the other hand enables him to include anomalous-looking runic inscriptions, although these look spurious at first sight.

result of a Byzantine or Slavic attack (Arntz & Zeiss 1939:144). Arntz & Zeiss date the inscription on the basis of a possible presence of Langobards or Alamanni in the area. Arntz (1939:144) quotes a certain Oelmann, who saw the pillars himself in 1935, and who said that they were too small to have belonged to the church; the pillars were probably part of a canopy, perhaps situated inside the church. Besides the *fupark*, other signs were detected on different stone pieces. Arntz reproduced these fragments (with marks) and the stone piece (with the *fupark*) in his 1939 book. As far as the single signs or marks are concerned, I fail to recognize any runes among them. The *fupark*, though, seems genuine enough on the photograph. It is on a loose object of portable size, contrary to Zeiss' claims (1939:146). The dimensions are 19 cm x 30 cm x 14 cm. The confused find-history, however, and the impossibility of inspecting this item, combined with the circumstance that it turned up at such a peculiar and isolated place in 1930, makes one wonder whether this may be a hoax. Recently new information appeared. It appears that the building may have been a late-antique *aula*, which may have been the residence of an East Goth, perhaps a *comes* (Basler, 1993: 28f.). Analysis of the architectural fragments pointed to a public function of the building. A runic alphabet was carved on one pillar and a Roman alphabet was carved on another. The builders may have been East Goths, according to Basler. I have concluded that the object needs inspection, which at the moment (1997) seems not yet possible. I have not included it in this study.

Map 1. The Roman Empire and Germania Libera in the second century AD.

