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

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*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*

1997

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Looijenga, J. H. (1997). *Runes around the North Sea and on the Continent AD 150-700; texts & contexts*. s.n.

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## II. HISTORY, ARCHAEOLOGY AND RUNES

### 1. Introduction

1.1. Runes and rune-carrying objects cannot be studied without giving them their proper place within the society that produced them. Establishing the outlines of this context forms an important part of the present study.

Artifacts exhibiting runes are recorded from the second century AD onwards. About 400 odd artifacts (including nearly 200 runic bracteates), inscribed with runes from the older *futhork*, produced over the period of *ca.* 150 - 650, are recorded. From around the year 200, we already know some 25 attestations, found in an astonishingly large area: from Scandinavia and North Germany to Eastern Europe. The earliest attestations are mostly found on precious and portable objects. Whether these surviving items are representative for all runic script from the oldest, or archaic, period, is questionable. It is not clear when, where and for what reasons Germanic people developed their own writing system. A combination of philology, archaeology and history may be helpful in detecting the origin of runic writing and in understanding more about the society that used runes. Objects with runes generally emerge as a result of archaeological activities, hence in many cases a context is available. In recent years, quite a lot of new finds have produced a *hausse* of articles, mostly focusing on the new find and its immediate connections only. Therefore an in-depth comparison with older finds is necessary, followed by an update.

1.2. Through migration and acculturation, runic writing spread to large parts of Europe, along with members of the social and political upper classes and also with craftsmen, who travelled either in the retinue of their lords or as individuals. The propagation of runic knowledge may have been favoured by the custom of exchanging prestige-goods among the Germanic elite of North-, West- and Central Europe. Indigenous runic traditions emerged in Scandinavia, Germany, The Netherlands and England, each more or less distinct from the others. This is illustrated partly by the sort of objects<sup>15</sup> found in a distinct area and the way of depositing these objects, but especially by the language of the texts and the use of typical runic forms. The Goths in the Black Sea-region may have practised runic writing, although as yet very few remains of this activity have been found. It remains uncertain whether in this part of Europe ever existed an indigenous runic tradition.

On the other hand, the various runic traditions had many features in common, which would imply that runes were *en vogue* among people who had something in common and who lived in a similar *milieu*. The German archaeologist Roth points out that among certain families it was customary to make runic inscriptions, especially on metal. These families probably formed a small elite, a 'middle-class' or 'upper middle-class', according to Roth (1994:310f.). His findings concerned South Germanic runic writing, but the situation may have been similar in other regions where runic writing was practised during roughly the same period. It was the supposition that one or more specific groups were concerned, that provided the stimulus to investigate the character of such groups. It appears that these groups emerged in a society

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<sup>15</sup> In Denmark and Germany runes mainly occur on brooches and weapon(part)s, in Frisia mainly on coins, combs, pieces of wood and bone; in Anglo-Saxon England mainly on coins, brooches, weapon(part)s, pots and urns.

with small power centres, as members of an elite controlling each other by way of a gift-exchange policy. They could afford to employ craftsmen, such as weaponsmiths and jewelers, who may have qualified to be among the first to possess runic knowledge.

Some of the oldest runic inscriptions are signatures of weaponsmiths, who, by signing their products, imitated a Roman practice. In a largely oral culture, such as that of the Germanic peoples, writing was not primarily a means of communication, but rather a status symbol, because the addition of runes to an object increased its value. An attempt at mystification through inscribing letters on the object may also have played a role.

Later on, runographers can be located among bracteate-designers, although Moltke (1985:80, 114) considered metal-workers illiterate, especially because of the many faulty and corrupt runes on bracteates. This, however, does not prove that all smiths were unable to write anything meaningful in runes. Artisans qualify as runewriters because of the so-called 'makers' formulae that have been found on all sorts of objects. They could easily pass their knowledge on to others, since some of them may have travelled in the retinue of some high-placed person, or they may have gone from market to market in a group of merchants and other craftsmen. This would explain why the practice of rune writing spread so quickly over a large area.

1.3. During the entire runic period up to the High Middle Ages, runes were used to formulate all sorts of texts, but in the early texts especially personal names are found. We find expressions of ownership, signatures of makers and writers; dedications from one person to another, and also the names of the objects themselves. Runes were supposedly also used within a ritual context, as sometimes appears to be the case with amulets, gravegifts and objects deposited in bogs or hoards. Whether this required specialized rune writers, such as priests, is unknown. Any evidence of religion in early runic texts is ambiguous (perhaps apart from certain texts on bracteates, e.g. **uīu** 'I consecrate', sometimes followed by 'the runes'). One may wonder about the possible function of the consecration of runes, but apparently this referred to the use of certain, possibly formulaic, texts, in connection with a hitherto unknown ritual. The Stentofte rune stone from (assumably) the 7th century bears a text that clearly refers to an act of offering: 'with nine steeds, with nine he-goats, Hapuwulf gave **j**' (Santesson 1989). If **j** represents its rune-name *\*jāra* 'good year, harvest' this may be interpreted as an instance of a symbolic use of runes, pointing to a function of runes in a context of a fertility ritual.

1.4. In scholarly works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the runographers of the past are often referred to as *Runenmeister*. This suggests a highly skilled and extraordinary professional, who would have performed in a cultic or religious setting, as a kind of 'priest'. However, from the first centuries of recorded runic writing, evidence of priests propagating runes is lacking. I prefer to refer to the runographers in more neutral terms. Wulf (1994:31-44) states that there is no proof of any religious or magical connotation of runemasters' names in runic inscriptions. He presumes that many of those names are just ordinary personal names.

1.5. The practice of offering and depositing war-booty in bogs suggests the involvement of some official religious ceremony. Especially weapons and bracteates were used for ritual deposition, so if the religious character may be inadequately expressed by the texts, this may have been symbolized by or integrated in the act of offering. Even if it may not always be possible to reconstruct the character of any cult, a sacred motive for the writing of runes at

certain occasions cannot be excluded. It may very well be that the very act of writing had a function as a means of communication with the gods or the supernatural. Since only a few of the hundreds of deposited objects bear runes, these may have had a *pars pro toto* function. Some words like **laukaz** 'leek', **alu** 'ale', **lapu** 'invitation' on bracteates may point to the use of intoxicating herbs and drinks, possibly in connection with a cult.

## 2. From the pre-Roman Iron Age to the late-Germanic Iron Age

2.1. In the pre-Roman Iron Age (500-100 BC), Northern Europe is characterized by unpretentious cremation graves with gravegifts such as simple fibulae and girdle buckles, remarkable only in their uniformity (Parker Pearson 1989:199). There is evidence of offering practices in which a special, privileged caste may have been involved. Offerings in bogs and lakes continued through the centuries. It was not just agricultural items such as wooden ploughs that were deposited, but pots, iron and bronze arm- and neckrings and human beings as well.

2.2. At around 200-150 BC, a remarkable development in burial practices took place in the North German Plain, in Denmark and in Southern Scandinavia (Parker Pearson 1989:202). In certain cremation graves, situated at some distance from other graves, Celtic metalwork appears: brooches and swords, together with wagons, Roman cauldrons and drinking vessels. The area of these rich graves is the same as the places where later (first century AD) princely graves are found. A ruling class seems to have emerged, distinguished by the possession of large farms and rich gravegifts such as weapons for the men and silver objects for the women, imported earthenware and Celtic items. This process continued throughout the beginning of this era and is especially noticeable in Jutland and on Funen. The first historical contacts with the Romans took place during this period. The journey of the Cimbri and Teutons from Jutland, at the end of the second century BC, possibly resulted from different motives: e.g. internal struggles for power, overpopulation, climatic changes and long-distance trade, which included the import of prestige goods. The pre-Roman Iron Age Germanic society hardly knew any private property (perhaps apart from cattle), and certainly no privately owned land, since this was common property (Hedeager 1992<sup>a</sup>:245). The agriculture of the celtic field-system could not expand much and an increase of agricultural production was not possible, which put a strain on society. The first four centuries AD saw a reorganisation of the villages, the redistribution of land, improved tools and a larger produce of the fields. Hedeager (1992<sup>a</sup>:245) conjectures that the early weapon deposits, and perhaps also the bog offerings of people in the north of Jutland, bear witness of internal conflicts. The differentiation process that may have started at around 150 BC continued till the development of royal power centres centuries later (Hedeager 1992<sup>a</sup>:244ff.).

With the increase of the number of landowners (and private property), new tensions and conflicts could originate within the community. The accumulation of property produced a new elite. Social status became important, which was expressed by the possession of prestige goods (Hedeager 1988<sup>a</sup>:137ff.). Literacy, used for spiritual or profane purposes, may be expected to have developed among high-placed persons or privileged groups.

The fact that the oldest known runic inscriptions were carved on weapons and on jewellery, and overwhelmingly bear names that can be interpreted as an expression of a ruling class can

hardly be seen as accidental. In this society, the runic script may have filled a need in which writing of some sort was required to express ownership or prestige on the one hand, and a cultural identity on the other.

### 3. The emergence of an elite

3.1. During the first few centuries of our era a new funerary custom emerged: inhumation alongside the existing cremation rite. The inhumation graves (especially in North Jutland, Sealand, North Poland and the Upper Elbe region) contain gravegifts such as Roman drinking vessels, and are further characterized by the absence of weapons. These graves, of both men and women, are known as *Fürstengräber*, deviating in their gravegifts from Germanic graves in regions that were at war with the Roman Empire. Hedeager (1988:131) makes a distinction between graves with weapons and graves without weapons. Graves containing weapons are related to active warriors. Older men were never buried with weapons, but with gold grave-goods and sometimes with Roman imports and spurs. Both weapons and spurs have been found in the graves of quite young males, indicating that the right to be a warrior and the access to wealth were not achieved but inherited.

3.2. Agricultural reform, the emergence of a wealthy class, the growth of the population and the presence of a large group of young men initiated the rise of professional armies, i.e. the rise of a new class and a new elite, based on the bond between the leader and his retinue: the *hirð* or *comitatus*. Wars were fought for strategical reasons, for trading places and routes, for raw materials such as iron-ore from Jutland, for land and for the right to raise taxes (Hedeager 1992<sup>a</sup>:247). The reorganisation of power developed into a military system in which raiding and trading alternated, through the Viking Age up to the high Middle Ages. Power became centralized, such as at Stevns on Sealand. A kingdom with a network of vassals emerged. Hedeager (1988:131ff.) remarks that "Roman prestige goods now circulated among the new elite in a regional system of redistribution. Thus Roman prestige goods were part of a process in which power and influence were built up; they were used as a means of sustaining and legitimizing new power structures that cut across earlier local social structures. The old tribal structure based on ties of kinship and clan transformed gradually into permanently class-divided states".

3.3. At the end of the second century AD a sudden crisis brought about important changes: the population of the hitherto mighty and rich western part of Funen, eastern Jutland and the coastal parts of the Baltic states strongly diminished, nearly disappearing. Parker Pearson (1989:212) observes that "all over the Baltic and North-Western Europe settlement retreated away from the coastal areas into separated and nucleated blocks. The centre of prosperity shifted eastward to eastern Funen and Sealand". In The Netherlands, too, especially in the coastal areas and the adjacent sandy grounds, this disturbance was felt in these times. Van Es (1967:535f.) observed that maximum coin importation from the Roman empire into Drenthe ended shortly after 200 AD. Coin hoards such as those in Drenthe show three centres of concentration at about 200 AD, the other two were in the Lower Elbe region and in the area between the Lower Oder and Vistula, from where, at that time, the Langobards and Goths began their southward migrations (Van Es 1967:535). The hoarding shows a breach in relations, which was caused by some kind of disturbance. The Chauci were pressed westward

by the Langobards, who, after their initial westward movement, turned south to the Danube region. At any rate the whole coastal region was in a state of turmoil at about 200 AD, the causes of which may have been numerous: pressure from the north and the east, a deterioration of natural conditions such as a marine transgression, real or imaginary overpopulation, or a combination of several factors, according to Van Es (1967:537).

3.4. This change is related to wars; the period of disorder lasts from ca. 200 to the 5th century. Weapons appear as burial gifts again and also the votive offerings of weapons in bogs and lakes increase. Instances of offering deposits have been found in the bogs of Thorsberg, Nydam, Illerup and Vimose. The Danish archaeologist Ilkjær (1991:281) mentions invaders in Denmark from the area north of Skåne and from the Baltic. The weapons of the enemy, before their deposition in bogs, were first deliberately destroyed. This points to a religious practice. A firm line must be drawn between the gods and the people; what belonged to the gods, or was offered to them, should never be used again by men, therefore the objects offered were made unfit for human use. According to Ilkjær (1991:281) until Period C1b (250/260 AD) "both attackers and defenders apparently had connections with the Kattegat-area, while the Baltic, that is South-East Jutland, the southern shores of Funen and Sealand, South Sweden and Öland, was the connection in period C2 (250-320), while the areas that were subject to earlier attacks, go free".

3.5. The war booty that was offered contains an enormous number of Roman weapons. It is not exactly clear how these entered the Germanic area, perhaps via trading or looting. They may also have been imported from Roman weaponsmiths, although this was strictly forbidden by Roman authorities. Curiously enough, the blades are Roman, but the handles are Germanic. According to the Danish archaeologist Lønstrup (1988:96), warriors in Scandinavia, where no locally produced swords are known, and in Germany, carried Roman swords. So many swords have been found that it is acceptable to conclude that during the later period of the Roman Empire, most Germanic warriors were equipped with swords.

The elite graves of the third and early fourth century on Sealand and Funen contained Roman goods, witnesses of an appreciation of a Roman lifestyle, according to Parker Pearson (1989:218-220). Similarly lavish burials in the rest of fourth-century Europe are unknown. Jutland, however, showed a decline in population and in wealth during the fifth century, possibly because of intensive land-exploitation and a transgression of the North Sea. These events may have been partially responsible for the migration to Britain, but Jutland was not left uninhabited. Bornholm, Öland and Gotland grew in wealth and all the evidence points to an easterly shift of the trade centres.

3.6. From the second and third centuries, two periods of raids by pirates are recorded along the North Sea coast of Holland, Belgium and France. The first was launched on Gaul by the Chauci at the end of the reign of Marcus Aurelius. The raids continued during the last quarter of the second and the first half of the third century, and culminated in invasions into the reign of Gallienus and the Gallic emperors. The invaders were then no longer called Chauci but Franks, who, according to Van Es (1967:543), were the same people under a different name. The Betuwe was an area under constant pressure from tribes living across the Rhine. Van Es (1967:548) suggests that Chamavi from the adjacent Veluwe settled in the Betuwe as Roman *foederati* to help protect the border. Later, Constans (337-360) introduced new Franks into

this region, and Van Es thinks these Franks were Salii. The Chamavi may have pushed the Salii southwards towards Toxandria, but Julianus (360-363) and later Valentinianus (364-375) apparently supported the Salii against the Chamavi, and the Rhine frontier was restored (Van Es 1967:549). From then onwards, the Salian Franks penetrated deeper into Roman territory. The Lower Rhine was maintained as the empire's frontier, for it was essential to safeguard the line of communication between Britannia and the Upper Rhine region. Franks may have been among the troops that in 368 and 398 were transferred to Britain to help protect the population against the Saxon raids (Van Es 1967:542f.). The Salii were to play an important part in history, since from their ranks the Merovingian realm would spring, with Clovis as the first real king of a new state (Heidinga/Offenberg 1992:27). But before this, a well-known Merovingian Frank was Childeric, perhaps the last of the *foederati*. He was buried in 481 as a Roman commander and *rex* of his people. His gravegoods consisted of Roman military insignia, weapons and jewellery, and some dozens of horses also accompanied him on his journey to the next world. The same custom was observed in Wijster (Drente), where the grave of a Germanic-Roman soldier (5th c.) has been found, surrounded by horse-graves. The Sutton Hoo (7th c.) and Fallward (early 5th c.) ship burials contained also a mixture of Germanic, Roman and Byzantine gravegifts.

3.7. In the Central Netherlands in the 5th and 6th centuries, settlements were concentrated at the south of the Veluwe, the Utrechtse Heuvelrug and (the eastern part of) the Betuwe. Especially the surrounding area of Rhenen appears to be "the most suitable site for exercising political and economic powers in about AD 400" (Heidinga 1990:13). Here at least two hoards, two cemeteries<sup>16</sup> and an unusual large ring-fort have been found. In that period there was a tribal pact of Chamavi, Bructeri, Chattuarii in the Lower Rhine area between Cologne and the Central Netherlands. One of the hoards near Rhenen was discovered in 1938. It contained two gold torques and a fragment of a third, dated into the Migration Period (Heidinga 1990:14ff.). The third torquis, which was inlaid with precious stones, can be attributed to a Roman workshop. The torques of the Velp<sup>17</sup> type were made in a Lower Rhine workshop (Heidinga 1990:19). Torques, according to Heidinga (1990:16) circulated within the narrow circuit of chieftains or kings. There is one torquis with runes, a stray find near Aalen, Baden-Württemberg. The Bergakker runic find, a silver scabbard mount, originated from the (Lower) Rhine area, or North Gallia.

The wealth of the region of the Lower Rhine did not have an economic cause, but a military-political one. Here was the original homeland of the Frankish leaders with their *comitatus*, who first served in the Roman army and later made a career in Gaul and who amassed enormous fortunes (Heidinga 1990:18). To these warlords distributing large amounts of gold

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<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, one of the two cemeteries and the hill-fort have not received the professional treatment they earned. The cemetery of the Donderberg contained 800 inhumations and *circa* 300 cremations, and was in use from the 4th c. until the first half of the 8th c. The other cemetery (the Laarse Berg) was discovered in 1892, but has never been investigated. Only a few pots and sherds are retained. The Betuwe area is almost a blank map; only the double cemetery of Lent opposite Nijmegen has been excavated (Heidinga 1990:33).

<sup>17</sup> Especially the Velp hoards were very rich, one included 8 torques and three gold rings, the other (at Het Laar) contained gold medallions, numerous gold coins and a torquis. The Beilen hoard consisted of 6 torques, 1 bracelet and 22 solidi (Heidinga 1990:16). A second hoard near Rhenen was discovered in 1988. It consisted of at least 237 coins, including 97 gold tremisses and 140 silver sceattas. The deposits can be interpreted either as the *thesaurus* of a chieftain or as votive offerings.

was essential for the recruitment of (and preservation of) their retainers, for alliances (with the gods as well) and for the maintenance of their status in general (Heidinga 1990:19).

The Frankish elite may have had landed property, according to Theuvs (1990:45), but also lived on the surplus extraction and tribute levied from the population, without claiming the land itself. In this way a Frankish leader was not tied to the soil, which may explain the high mobility of the elite in the 6th c. In the course of the 6th c. the elite transformed claims on a surplus into claims on the land, and thus became a land-based elite. They were able to participate in trade networks, according to Theuvs (1990:46), who adds that artisanal centres, already in existence in the 5th and 6th centuries, produced prestigious items which circulated mainly among the upper echelons of society, and which may not have been 'trade objects'. In that case these 'prestige objects' may have formed an integral part of a gift and exchange policy.

3.8. The combination of a rising (new) elite and the manufacture of bracteates after the Roman fashion in Scandinavia and elsewhere may be compared to the custom of the Frankish nobility of the 5th and 6th centuries to establish themselves in regions where some Roman culture and population remained. Early Frankish elite burials have been found in combination with late Roman burials in the vicinity of Roman towns (Theuvs 1990:45). The Frankish leaders could only flourish in Romanized surroundings (Van Es 1994:80). Frankish kings, like Chilperic, had long, braided hair, a symbol of their magic power. The 'Germanization' of the image of the Roman emperor is reflected by the long, braided or knotted hairstyle on nearly all bracteates that show a head (esp. A and C types).

The Frankish kings Childeric and his son Clovis took possession of the political vacuum that had been left behind by the fall of the Roman empire. The Franks actually inherited the West Roman empire, imitating the Roman emperors' customs. One may wonder to what extent such an imitation was also emulated by the commissioners of the bracteates, in the sense that both Franks and inhabitants of the Danish Isles were looking for an ideological model to build their state on.

3.9. The decline and fall of the Roman Empire gradually (and in waves) affected large parts of *Germania Libera*. The influx and influence of Roman prestige goods and the return of soldiers from the Roman army slowed down and eventually stopped. In *Germania*, the result may have been a temporary power vacuum, with fights and uncertain social and political relations. This situation marks the Migrations Period, beginning in some parts of *Germania Libera* in the third century and lasting at least to the sixth century. In the period that followed there were probably territorial fights between small kingdoms in Denmark until the establishment of a central power by Harald Bluetooth in the tenth century. In the meantime, sacral deposits eventually disappeared and the number of princely graves decreased - power centres arose elsewhere in North and West Europe. Armies served other purposes than the consolidation of power at home; they directed their attention elsewhere. Archaeological data show that there was no increase in farming nor in the cultivation of land. Probably only one child inherited the ancestral farm; other sons had to look for another way of living. In the army one could earn wealth and honour. At first actions were still based on the old credo of *trading and raiding*. It was not until the Viking Age that colonies overseas were founded.

#### 4. The votive deposits in the Danish bogs



4.1. From 100 BC to 500 AD the practice of offerings continued in all large bogs: Thorsberg, Nydam, Ejsbøl, Porskær, Illerup, Hedelisker in Jutland; Vimose and Kragehul on Funen (Lønstrup 1988:97). It appears that substantial offerings took place, sometimes at long intervals. It is remarkable that bog deposits date predominantly from periods with few imports, which means from periods of war. This situation is comparable to the Viking age, in which periods of trade alternated with periods of plunder and civil war (Randsborg 1988:12).

4.2. According to Ilkjær (1996<sup>a</sup>: 66ff.), in the period 200-250 AD, objects offered in the Illerup, Thorsberg and Vimose bogs originated from other regions than the immediate surrounding area. The provenance of the objects is the region around the Kattegat, whereas a significant number of offerings from ca. 300 AD comes from the Baltic Sea region (Ilkjær 1996<sup>a</sup>:66). The objects are considered spoils of war. The spearheads found in Illerup and Vimose are of Scandinavian origin; the finds from Thorsberg may have come from a southerly region (Düwel 1992:346ff., with ref.), which is emphasized by the presence of Roman shieldbosses, helmets and armour. In the Vimose bog Roman military goods have also been found among the deposits of around 160 AD, e.g. from the transitional period from the older to the younger Roman Iron Age (Ilkjær (1996<sup>a</sup>:68ff.). This is also the site where the oldest known runic object, the **harja** comb (160 AD) was found, which is said to have come from an area near Vimose: from Funen, southern Jutland or North Germany (Ilkjær 1996<sup>a</sup>:68,73). With regard to the gravegoods of around 200 AD, it seems plausible to suppose that these were provided by the local inhabitants. These gravegifts are precious brooches, among which five runic rosette brooches and one runic bow fibula (Stoklund 1995:319). Such precious brooches have been found in women's graves in Skåne, Sealand and Jutland. The names were carved into the silver back of the needle-holder and can all be men's names, for instance the maker's signature.

4.3. The origin of one of the oldest runic finds, the Thorsberg shieldboss, is mainly inferred from the fibulae and other shieldbosses that were part of the same votive offering. Nine specimens of the shieldbosses (23% of the total amount) are of Roman provenance or come from an area under Roman influence. The fibulae generally occur in the northern part of the Elbe region and the Rhine/Weser area. So, the origin of the army whose equipment was deposited as a votive offering of war-booty was the area between Lower Elbe and Rhine (cf. Lønstrup 1984:99.).

In most instances, one may assume that the runes were inscribed at the same time as the production of the object, such as is evident from the runic stamp **wagnijo** on one of the Illerup spearheads. In the case of the Thorsberg shieldboss there are two possibilities: either the runes were carved by the weaponsmith during the manufacturing process, or they were added after the ritual destruction and shortly before the deposition of the object in the Thorsberg bog. This assumption is based on the impression that the runes seem to cross a scratch or groove caused by the destruction. However, this is so arbitrary that the possibility of the runes being cut when the shieldboss was made, cannot be discarded. The rim of the shieldboss is twisted due to the deformation, but not in such a way that the runes clearly overlap the rim's edge. In my opinion the overlap is dubious, since the runes curve around the corner of the edge in a natural way and it cannot be proved that the runes were made after the damage. On the other hand, the runes are at the *inside* of the shieldboss and, thus, invisible when the boss was still attached to the shield, so it might be reasonable to assume that the

runes were carved after the shield had been taken apart. But if the inscription should be a maker's signature, it would not be so dramatic that the runes were on the inner side of the boss. The maker's signature, however, is mostly placed in sight, or it is written in clear, ornamental, runes: on weapons (Illerup, Wurmlingen, Steindorf, Ash Gilton, Chessel Down II, Schretzheim III, Øvre Stabu, Kowel, Dahmsdorf, Thames Scramasax, a.o.); on an amulet box (Schretzheim I); on several brooches (such as Udby, Nøvling, Meldorf, Donzdorf); on a wooden box (Garbølle), and on the gold horn from Gallehus. This makes the hidden place of the Thorsberg inscription exceptional. But since no further evidence for the inscription of objects just before offering is available<sup>18</sup>, and as it cannot be determined that the Thorsberg runes indeed cross a scratch, I assume the inscription was added at the place of production, that is in the region between Lower Elbe and Rhine. The Thorsberg runic finds are therefore included in the Continental Corpus.

4.4. The motive for depositing appears to have been connected with the fact whether objects have been re-excavated or not. In the former case it concerns the hoarding of precious goods, in the latter it may concern an offering. In the Viking period people buried gold to take it with them to the realm of death, together with horses, dogs, ships, weapons and wagons. Another aim was to present it to the gods, in order to propitiate them when arriving in the hereafter. Hoarding treasures is something entirely different, in this case the intention is to return one day to retrieve one's possessions (Hedeager 1991:206f.). Gaimster (1993:5) states that "In early medieval Europe the hoarding of precious metals was an act of some significance in itself. Apart from burying objects in times of war or political commotion with a view to regain the hoard in better days, personal possessions carried some of the owner's power and fortune and were therefore worthy of being stored for magical reasons or for the afterlife". This indicates that writing names on special objects had a special function, too. The receiver will always remember who gave the object plus inscription to him. The object and its inscription emphasize the importance of both giver and receiver, and their special relationship.

It is useful to make a distinction between individual offerings and communal offerings, whose rituals took place in public, whereas individuals probably made deposits in secret and preferably at a rather inaccessible place (Hedeager 1991:209ff.). Offering might be based on the conviction that in case someone owed something to someone else, the following rules of gift-symbolism should apply: if the receiver of a precious object were more powerful than the giver, the receiver had to pay back with favours. If both were of equal standing, the gifts had to be similar. If the receiver was of lower standing, it was his duty to pay back with services (Hedeager 1991:208f.). Offering might be interpreted in a similar way: the offerer, of course of lower standing than the gods, gave gold and beautiful objects to flatter the gods, in order to receive favours. Individual offerings consisted of objects that could be used as payment, here and in the hereafter. Bracteates, however, were never used as currency, but may have been the ultimate diplomatic gifts. If this is so, they formed an important part of a religious system, in which the concept of the 'sacral kingdom' should certainly not be overlooked (Seebold 1992).

## 5. Bracteates

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<sup>18</sup> For instance, the inscriptions **laguþewa** and **nijjo tawide** on the Illerup shield handles had been made while the handles were still fastened onto the shield; the runes avoid the ornamental discs and rivets (Stoklund 1995<sup>b</sup>:336).

5.1. Gold bracteates were manufactured in large quantities approximately during the second half of the 5th century and the beginning of the 6th. Bracteates belong to a context of offerings, hoards and gravegifts. Specialists of the bracteates' iconography see them as amulets, but they may also be interpreted as regalia and as political or diplomatic gifts. The term 'magical amulet' originated from the idea that the Roman gold medallions had that particular function. Another aspect of the bracteates is their reflection of high social status (Gaimster 1993:12). In a gift-exchanging network these might have served as special gifts, although it remains unclear at what sort of occasions.

5.2. The bracteates are imitations of imperial coins and medallions of the Constantinian dynasty, which ended in 363 (Axboe et. al. IK 1,1 *Einleitung*, 1985:21). The manufacture of Germanic imitations of medallions started somewhere during the second half of the 4th c. Therefore it is difficult to understand why the bracteate-period should be dated in the 5th or even 6th c. Axboe's explanation is that, if bracteates occur in datable contexts, this is always in the 5th - 6th centuries. Dating is also possible on typological grounds, according to the so-called Germanic Animal style or Nydam style<sup>19</sup> (Axboe, personal communication). The animals of the C-bracteates<sup>20</sup> are closely connected with early Animal style I; the A-bracteates need not be dated significantly earlier than the C-bracteates. Therefore, Axboe presumes that the production of the gold bracteates started at about 450 and went on until about 530 (personal communication).

In this way the chronological discrepancy of one century or more between the manufacturing of the Germanic medallion-imitations and the rise of the bracteate-production is still not explained. Moreover, it is doubtful whether one should rely heavily on the bracteates' contexts, since the bracteates might have been worn by generations before they got deposited, just as the medallion imitations appear to have been in use long enough to inspire the bracteates' iconography. At Gotland bracteates were found together with Roman coins dating from the first century AD! Coins and bracteates may have circulated a long time before their deposition. Ulla Lund Hansen (1992:183-194) thinks the bracteates were produced during a very short period of perhaps only one or two generations.

5.3. However difficult, some sort of chronology can be established, according to Axboe (1994:68-77). M(edallion)-type bracteates are supposed to be the earliest examples, because of their great resemblance to their model, the imperial medallion. The only M-bracteate inscribed with runes is therefore dated to the 4th century, an exception, since all other bracteates are dated to the 5th and 6th centuries. The M-types are followed by A- and C-bracteates. D-bracteates are commonly accepted as the youngest. The development of the inscriptions supposedly moved from Roman capitals to capital imitation, and eventually runic writing evolved, finding its culmination on C-type bracteates. D-type bracteates do not show runes anymore. The last runebearing bracteates are five F-type bracteates.

5.4. Some scenes from Nordic mythology may be detected among the pictures and ornaments pressed into the thin goldfoil (see numerous publications by Hauck, for instance 1992<sup>a&b</sup>).

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19. For elaborate information on dating the bracteates and the Animal-style etc. see Birkmann 1995.

20. The additions A, B, C, D, F to the bracteates refers to their type; more information can be found in the chapter on Bracteates with Runes).

Also, the concept of an 'ideal king' might be presumed, especially among the types presenting human being, horse/stag and bird (Seebold 1992:299ff.). An interpretation of the bracteates as active media in social, political or religious transactions, as a 'special purpose money' is forwarded by Gaimster (1993:1), which is quite plausible. Besides, the iconography has some military features. The picture of the Roman emperor might very well suit the concept of medallions and bracteates as military insignia. The urge to germanize the emperor's countenance appears to be inversely proportional to the custom of Germanic imperial horsemen (*equites singulares*) in the Roman army to adopt the name of the current emperor as their own *cognomen* (Bang 1906:10, 19).

5.5. There are instances of Roman connections: **walhakurne** on Tjurkö (I)-C is 'Welsh corn'<sup>21</sup>, referring to Roman or Gallic gold, obtained by melting solidi. Darum (II)-A, Revsgård-A/Allerslev show signs that may be interpreted as Roman numerals. The Haram medallion-imitation bears the text DN CONSTANTIVS PF. Broholm-A/Oure bears a picture of two heads and the corrupt text TANS PF AUG. Part of the legend of Seeland (III)-A can be read as NUMIS. This bracteate also has several signs that may be interpreted as numerals. In my opinion, Fünen (I)-C bears the name of the Roman emperor M. Aurelius Carus (Looijenga 1995<sup>a</sup>). Especially the many C-bracteates depicting horsemen may be reminiscent of the important role Germanic auxiliaries (*equites, alae*) played in Roman military history from Caesar's days onwards. Further on we see persons that have helmets, swords and spears. In spite of the rather random way these examples have been selected, I would like to suggest some sort of military or class insignia as the bracteates' origin (insignia which, eventually, may have been given some other function). The fact that they were found in hoards, among offerings, in graves (even in the graves of women), need not contradict such a supposition. These objects, precious in various aspects, were perfectly suitable for use in the hereafter, or as gifts to the gods, for whatever reason. Besides, gods often combine the divine functions of war, death, healing and fertility.

The Roman medallions and Byzantine coins were strictly exempted from trade; outside the Empire they were mainly used as a tribute or as gifts within a political and symbolic context. Hedeager (1991:212) summarizes their function thus: "a new elite was consolidated, and it was this that communicated with gods and ancestors on the part of the community. Precious gifts were intended to place the gods and ancestors under an obligation to support the existing order in the world, while the life of the private individuals in the other world was ensured by burying one's means of payment".

5.6. Large bracteate deposits, with more than three items, are always accompanied by other precious objects like brooches, beads and coins, whereas small bracteate deposits of one or two pieces are mostly found alone, or sometimes together with some goldfoil. As Hedeager (1991:211f.) puts it: "Other large bracteate deposits are included in a quite different context of seemingly much more accidental combinations like ring gold, cut gold, mounts from the mouths of scabbards, etc. There is hardly a basis for maintaining that all gold finds are hidden and forgotten hoards; in all events the large bracteate hoards with fibulae and beads, and most of the arm- and neckrings may be buried with some sacrosanct motive. It is in these finds that

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<sup>21</sup> In Wales were some of the biggest gold mines known in that period.

we find the massive gold rings and the very fine craftsmanship lacking in other finds".

5.7. There seems to be a connection between the residence and offering places of the elite, as at Gudme. There, especially, an enormous wealth of bracteates has been found, although curiously with relatively few runes [but interestingly enough, one of them is bracteate Broholm-A/Oure, with the legend TANS PF AUG (see above), another one, Gudme II-B, shows a Victoria or Fortuna figurine with two other (Roman?) figures (and the runic legend **undz**)]. The rise of the new elite coincided with the bracteate period. We find, according to Fabech (1991:302): "with the breakthrough of the Scandinavian animal style at the beginning of the Migration Period, pictorial representations that clearly stand for an ideological/religious symbolic language. For this reason we may assume that the bracteates had a place in some of the religious acts and cultic rituals. It seems possible to connect them with settlements of special character like Gudme, Lundeborg, Odense, Sorte Muld, Vå or Helgö. The fact that these sacral objects (bracteates and goldgubbar: goldfoil figurines) were found in connection with settlements indicates that religious rites took place in or near buildings at these settlements or power-centres. This supports the idea that the aristocracy of the Migration Period had sufficient power and influence to institutionalize sacrificial customs so they no longer were performed in bogs and lakes, but in settlement contexts".

The question is what kind of 'aristocracy' may have arisen in Denmark at that time. In my opinion this was a group that differed from the initial group(s) of runewriters (or at least had other purposes). On the basis of the existing evidence it looks as if these people used runes on bracteates exclusively, since from that period (second half of the 5th c. - beginning 6th c.) no other 'Danish' runic objects are known. Or, perhaps the bracteates need to be dated earlier, in the 4th and 5th centuries?

5.8. The bracteates are evidence of a lively exchange of objects and ideas between groups in Germania, but also between Romans and Germanic people. Bracteates can be looked upon as subjects in the gift-exchange-system between elites of Scandinavia, England and the Continent. Early runic writing may not have been used as a means of communication in the modern sense of the word. Some of the runic legends on bracteates seem to have served specific purposes. The runes support the iconography in some symbolical concept, which either shows scenes from mythology or has a 'political' connotation, perhaps denoting ideal leadership. The 'Roman' connection is reflected in the use of Roman symbols of power and Roman lettering. According to Axboe (1991:202), this attests the familiarity of a Germanic elite with aspects of Roman society, and their ability to adapt this knowledge to their own conditions and purposes. The social and political position of privileged families was legitimated by genealogy, the *stirps regia*. A mythological ancestor (a god, a hero) was at the origin, the *apex*.

Roymans (1988:55) states that "gods, myths and rituals are important in the integration of society and the legitimation of values and norms. Religion provides for coherency, stability and continuity". Hedeager (1992<sup>a</sup>:289) asserts that "bracteates formed a political medium, used in contexts where politics were in evidence, such as at the great feasts connected with religious ceremonies and the taking of the oath of loyalty".

In fact, this points to the rise of a leadership based on religion and secular power in a rather complex society. Although there must have existed some legislation and issuing of rules which may have required the use of a writing system, nothing of the kind has survived, if ever anything like this was written down. One has to assume that oral tradition still prevailed and

that in this time writing was confined to other functions than that of communication.

5.9. From the total of over 900 bracteates, around 140 bracteates are known from outside the area of their production; most of them have been found in Germany, but finds are scattered south as far as Hungary and east as far as Russia. The largest concentration in the west is in Britain. There is a significant change in find-contexts, though: bracteates in Denmark, South Sweden, around the Oslofjord and along the North-Sea coast of North Germany and Frisia, have all been found in hoards or deposits, whereas in England and further south in Germany they are stray finds or gravefinds, mainly from women's graves (cf. fig. 2 in Gaimster 1993:4, and fig. 3 in Andrén 1991:248). One explanation may be that in the one area the deposition of bracteates was connected with some cult or ritual that was not practised in the other area, where bracteates were merely seen as women's adornments. This could be the result of a gift-exchanging network, in which bracteates served as precious gifts only.

5.10. Interesting is the explanation Andrén (1991:253) offers for the phenomenon that outside the first-mentioned area most bracteates have been found in women's graves: they were regarded as symbols of a Scandinavian identity, used to signal allegiance. According to Düwel (1992<sup>a</sup>:56f.) only 20 of the 211 inscribed bracteates have been found in graves. Of these 20 items only 8 bear runes and capitals. Of these 8 items only 5 are purely runic. Düwel suspects that in general rune bracteates were meant for the living, rather than for the dead. Sometimes bracteates and coins are used as a 'Charon's obol', an adoption of a purely classical idea (Axboe & Kromann 1992:276). A similar context is observed in a small group of bracteates deposited in male graves on Gotland (Gaimster, 1993:9). Special coin-like bracteates were made for this purpose in southern Gotland (Axboe & Kromann 1992:276). On Gotland and along the west coast of Norway, bracteates were deposited both in graves and in hoards. Remarkable is the use of four, probably formulaic, words<sup>22</sup>: **alu**, **laþu**, **laukaz** and **auja**, the use of which, according to Andrén (1991:256) might have been inspired by four frequently repeated words or abbreviations on Roman medallions: *dominus noster, pius, felix, augustus*. The Germanic words are no translation of the Latin, but may reflect an adaptation of an ideological concept, in the sense of a 'cult of the ruler'. The four Germanic words mean, respectively, 'ale', 'invitation', 'leek, chives, garlic' and 'good luck'. *Pius* points to 'correct behaviour towards gods and men' and this concept may have been taken over by **alu**; *felix* means 'happy' and this may be echoed by the term **auja**, signifying a desirable quality or condition. *Dominus* is a general word for a person with power and might be connected with **laþu**, because **laþu** refers to some act - an invitation to take part in the ruler's (*Augustus*) cult? Most bracteates with **alu**, **laukaz** etc. on them have been found in Denmark, further on in Skåne, Gotland and around the Oslofjord. One, showing **laþ**, was found in England. These bracteates all are stray finds or parts of deposits, apart from the English one, which was found in a woman's grave.

## 6. Denmark and the Goths in South East Europe

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<sup>22</sup> Another possibly formulaic word **ota** occurs on three bracteates with the same iconography. They have been found in three different find spots: SCHONEN-C (Skåne) IK 152, TJURKÖ-C (Blekinge) IK 185, FJÄRESTARD-C (Skåne) IK 55. No satisfactory explanation has been found so far, it might be related to ON *ótti* < Gmc \**ōhtan* 'fear'. Recently, two more bracteates with the legends **alu** and **ota** were found in a graveyard near Donaueschingen (Germany).

6.1. By far the richest inhumations are women's graves on Funen, at Sanderumgård, Årslev and Brangstrup. Their material shows connections with the Black Sea region<sup>23</sup>; the so-called Gothic 'monstrous' brooches and the rosette fibulae from the Danish islands show a mutual relation. Both Brangstrup and Gudme were centres of wealth with sacral functions. The 4th-century coin hoard from Gudme consists of East Roman coins. Other hoards from the Ringe-area on Funen (Ringe, Brangstrup, Eskilstrup, Bolting, Årslev) are dated from the second part of the 4th century to the end of the 5th, a time which coincides with the bracteate deposits of Gudme II (Henriksen 1992:43). Lundeberg harbour, at the eastcoast of Funen, was in use from the third century onwards and is seen as the import harbour for South European products.

In the relations with the Gothic Černjachov-culture north of the Black Sea, Funen is most important because of the finds of Brangstrup, Årslev and the Møllegård funeral site near Gudme. The finds from Rumanian Moldavia, and from a graveyard of the Černjachov-culture near Kiev correspond with contemporary finds from Denmark and North Germany, especially from Funen, Sealand, Bornholm and the estuary of the river Oder. This guide material consists of rosette fibulae, certain iron combs, glassware and gold lunula-shaped and square pendants. Some of the rosette fibulae, found in Denmark, bear runic inscriptions. This kind of brooch was either imported into the Černjachov area, or locally manufactured after Scandinavian models. The rosette fibula was a status symbol, found exclusively in rich women's graves, and it may be compared to *Silberblech* fibulae, characteristic of aristocratic women's graves from the later phase of the Černjachov-culture at the end of the 4th c.

Only a few 'Gothic' runic inscriptions have survived. The objects have been found in today's Rumania and Hungary. In the 1960s, the graveyard of Lețcani, 30 km west of Iași in Rumanian Moldavia was excavated. In a woman's grave a *Silberblech* fibula was found, next to an earthenware spindle whorl with a runic inscription. The finds have been dated to the second half of the 4th c. In the 4th century, the area around Lețcani was settled by Goths; their culture is listed archaeologically as Sîntana de Mureș/late Černjachov-culture.

I think it highly unlikely (Looijenga 1996<sup>b</sup>) that the spindle whorl is an import, because it is a simple earthenware object, even though it has a runic inscription. Of course, the runic style might ultimately originate from Denmark. Since there was a lively exchange of objects, like glassware, iron combs and brooches (cf. Werner 1988), there must also have been an exchange of knowledge and people. The Goths were of Scandinavian descent; some of them (the elite?) may have wanted Scandinavians for husbands and wives (Stoklund 1991:60, Hedeager 1988:213-227 and notes 359-362).

6.2. The Szabadbattyán buckle has been dated to the early 5th century, it was found in Hungary and purchased *via* an exchange of goods from an antiquary<sup>24</sup>; the exact original location of the object is unknown, as is the tribal origin of the owner, cf. Krause (1966:310): "Stammeszugehörigkeit ungewiss". The German archaeologist J. Werner (in a letter d.d. 30.7.1993) suggested that the buckle could be "die Arbeit eines romanischen Goldschmieds

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<sup>23</sup> Especially the double grave of Årslev, with gold lunulae and a crystal bullet with a gnostic Greek inscription, show there were connections with South East Europe.

<sup>24</sup> The find complex, obtained by the Hungarian Museum, consisted of the following pieces: 4 fragmented big fibulae, 1 *Schnallenbügel*, 2 *Beschlägplatten mit Schnallen*, further on *silberne Gussklumpen und gewickelte Silberplatten*, according to the description in Kiss (1980:105).

(erste Hälfte 5. Jh.), vielleicht für einen germanischen Adligen im mittleren Donaauraum, der vielleicht ein Ostgermane gewesen sein könnte". It cannot be excluded that the buckle belonged to a Goth. The buckle might have been inscribed by a Gothic speaking person. Especially the legend **marings** may relate to the *Mærings*, the royal house of Theodoric (454?-526), king of the Ostrogoths, and founder of the Ostrogothic monarchy in Lombardy. Moreover, **marings** reminds of the Rök (9th c.) legend **skati marika** 'the first among the Mærings', which means this same Theodoric. What Germanic tribe lived in Pannonia in the early 5th c.? It cannot have been the Langobards, because they came to Pannonia in the 6th c. and the buckle has been dated ca. 425. According to Kiss (1980:112) the buckle is typologically later than the *Pannonische Hunnenepoche* (433/439 - 454) and dates from the time the East-Goths lived in South East Pannonia (456 - 473). However, in the 5th century the Carpathian Basin was a transit area for Germanic tribes, where they settled for only a limited period of time. So much happened in the sphere of trade, plunder, change and 'gift-exchange' that an ethnic assignment of the buckle seems almost impossible to attribute, unless it can be agreed upon that the language of the runic text is Gothic, and that the legend refers to Theodoric's kin.

6.3. The Pietroassa neckring belonged to a hoard, found in 1837 near the village of Pietroassa, nowadays called Pietroasele. (Description and photographs of some of the artifacts were published in the catalogue *Goldhelm* (1994:230ff.) The finds, gold plates, cups, vases, bowls and jewellery, all have a definitely ceremonial character. The high quality of the work is in the late-Roman tradition and was made in Byzantine workshops. The goods should most probably be seen as political gifts to allied barbarian princes, according to the catalogue text (1994:230, with references). The hoard has been dated in the first half of the 5th c. and therefore it may have belonged to some East Goth. Earlier it was thought there was some link with King Athanarich and it was therefore dated to the 4th c. Another theory, mentioned in the catalogue text, suggested that the hoard belonged to a Goth named Ganais, who was a general in the Roman army and who was killed by the Huns around 400. Initially, the hoard contained two neckrings with runes, but it was hidden by the finder, who intended to sell the objects. Soon, however, the hoard, or rather what was left of it, was impounded by the authorities, but by then one neckring with runes had gone lost, and the remaining one had been cut into two parts, thus damaging at least one rune. The runes are on the outside of the neckring, which in itself is unusual.

## 7. The Continent

7.1. From about 500 onwards, the appearance of a massive runic corpus in Central and South Germany showing the double barred **h** as diagnostic feature, has long been considered the starting point of the South Germanic or Continental runic tradition. But knowledge of runes may have been present much earlier in the Rhine area (see chapter III: On the Origin of the Runes).

Continental rune-writing is attested from about 200 onwards. The Thorsberg finds, generally included in the Danish runic corpus, were found in a bog in Schleswig-Holstein, but originate from southerly regions (see above). A rune-inscribed spearhead was found in a cremation grave near Dahmsdorf, Brandenburg, North-East Germany, reading **ranja** 'router'. A third spearhead was found in a field near Kowel, Volhynia, Ukraina, reading **tilarids** 'goal-pursuer' (among other interpretations). A fourth spearhead is known from a cremation grave



in Rozwadów, Poland, reading **???krlus** (no interpretation). Kowel lies near the vast *Pripjat* bog area and near the border with Poland, about halfway *en route* from the Baltic coast to the Black Sea. The Kowel spearhead may be regarded Gothic, for instance because of the language of its inscription (a nominative masculine singular, ending in *-s*). It may have been deposited as an offering. The Liebenau (Niedersachsen) silver disc dates from the 4th century. The Nebenstedt (Niedersachsen) and Sievern (at the mouth of the Weser) bracteates may be dated to the second half of the 5th century. The Fallward (near Sievern) footstool has been dated *circa* 425. The Aalen (at the north border of Baden-Württemberg) neckring dates from the mid 5th century. The Fallward find was excavated from an exceptional ship burial that contained Roman military equipment and peculiar wooden gravegifts; the Liebenau find is from an exceptional inhumation grave. The Aalen find has no find context. The Nebenstedt and Sievern bracteates are both hoard finds from a former bog.

7.2. Early 6th c. continental attestations encompass a central region: Baden-Württemberg<sup>25</sup>, radiating to the North, East and West. The emergence of the Continental or South Germanic tradition coincides with the Merovingian period. There are geographical gaps, leaving great parts of Germany findless. This might be due to preservation problems, such as sandy soil, or, perhaps, certain parts of Germany may not have been inhabited in the Early Middle Ages. The funeral customs among the Germanic tribes of the pre-Migration period did not facilitate the preservation of runic gravegoods, because of the cremation custom, which did not leave many gifts intact. Sometimes the dead did not even obtain gravegifts at all (see *Reallexikon: Alemannen*)<sup>26</sup>. The survival of runic objects from the 6th and 7th centuries appears to be largely connected with a change in burial customs. The practice of inhumation in row-gravefields arose during the second part of the 5th century and was introduced to Germany at around 500 AD, when the Merovingians won supremacy over the Germanic tribes in Middle- and South Germany. From then on, the graves are remarkable for their rich, elaborate gravegifts. Cosack (1982:20) conjectures that gravegifts were thrown onto the pile, but taken back again after the burning, since the deceased was supposed to have been satisfied and not in need of any objects anymore. The objects were often broken or destroyed before they were deposited on the pile. If, afterwards, people gathered pieces of melted metal, they were not very choosy, since many *Brandgruben* contained relatively many precious metal parts. The Merovingian period was rich from an archaeological point of view, but even here many objects have disappeared, since grave robbery flourished: sometimes up to 80% of the graves were robbed from the middle of the 7th c. onwards.

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<sup>25</sup> Roth (1994:311) assumes that the runic inscriptions of the *Weingarten* finds, for instance, were made at about 490, one generation before the deposition of the object in the grave.

<sup>26</sup> The funerary custom of either cremating the body on a pile, and subsequently burying the remains of wood, body and objects in a so-called *Brandgrube*, or burying the remains in urns, was widely observed among all Germanic tribes. The gravegift custom was not always and everywhere observed. Probably the Alamanni and the Franks buried their dead with hardly any gravegifts in the 4th and 5th centuries (*Reallexikon* I:145). Many urnfields from the Migration Period were deficient in gravegifts.

## 8. England

8.1. At the beginning of the 5th century, the Roman forces had withdrawn from Britain, where the *Pax Romana* had ruled for about 400 years. The Romans left behind a cultivated, literate, and partly christianized country. During the 5th century (and perhaps yet earlier), Germanic speaking peoples from abroad settled in Britain. Their *adventus* is 'sagenumwoben'; the Britons and their king, Vortigern, are said to have invited them and to have welcomed some of them as heroes. Soon, however, Germanic tribes took over and the country came under 'barbarian' sway.

In the second half of the 5th century several areas in England had crystallized into tribal settlements: the Jutes in Kent and on the Isle of Wight, the Angles in East Anglia and in the Midlands, the Saxons in Wessex, Essex and Sussex. This geographical spread corresponds nicely with Bede's description (731) in *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* [i, 15]. Whether there were Frisians among the early immigrants cannot be established with certainty, as they are difficult to trace archaeologically in England and because there seems to be no placename evidence to support their presence. The placename argument is not a very strong one, in my opinion, since it is not unlikely that the settlements already had a name, when the new inhabitants took over. Secondly, the Frisians may have named their newly founded dwelling-places after local geographical or geological features. The hypothesis that there were no Frisians among the immigrating Germanic peoples (Bremmer 1990:353ff.), cannot longer be upheld, as a certain type of 4th c. earthenware, called after the Frisian *terp Tritzum* (situated south of Franeker, Westergoo), has also been found in Flanders and Kent (Gerrets 1994:-119ff.). Besides, Procopius states that Britain was inhabited by three races: *Brittones*, *Angiloi* and *Phrissones*, although neither Bede nor the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* mention Frisians in connection with the Anglo-Saxon settlement.

There may also be another explanation for the supposed lack of Frisian placenames in Great Britain: there is virtually no information about the language and identity of the *Fresones* that migrated from Frisia in the centuries preceding and during the Migration Period. The depopulation of Frisia already started in the third century. During the early fifth century, when Anglo-Saxons supposedly crossed the Frisian coastal region, they found Frisia almost uninhabited. Thus, in the fifth century there may have been no Frisians among the emigrants to Britain, since they might well have migrated earlier, though there is no certainty as to where they went: perhaps southwards to Flanders and from there to Kent, according to the Dutch archaeologist E. Taayke (personal communication).

Van Es (1967:540f.) mentions that Britain was subject to pirate raids during the third and fourth centuries. Among the pirates were Franks and Saxons, according to Eutropius (third quarter of the fourth century). Around 290 AD Constantius Chlorus mentioned Frisians among the invaders. During the fourth century the invaders were called Saxons (Van Es 1967:451). At the end of the fourth century Roman troops were transferred to Britain to defend the country against the Saxon raiders. Among these troops were Germanic *laeti* or *foederati*, and it is highly probable that they came from the regions near Tongeren and Doornik, and that they were almost certainly made up of Franks, according to Van Es. In some early, probably Saxon, graves in Dorchester (Hawkes & Dunning 1962) some brooches were found that indicated that the deceased women came from the Frisian coast (Van Es 1967:542). On the other hand, Hines (1990:22) states that the brooches were early Saxon or Anglian.

There appears to be a link between the gravegoods from the Fallward boatgrave (which also contained the footstool with runes), a Frankish grave near Abbeville, and a grave near Oxford (Hawkes & Dunning 1962:58ff.). The resemblance is in the ornamentation of belt-fittings and buckles of the military equipment. There is also a strap-end from Fallward that has its counterpart in a strap-end from an Anglo-Saxon site at North Luffenham (for the latter: Hawkes & Dunning 1962:65ff.).

8.2. A group from southern and western Norway landed on the east coast of Britain at the beginning of the last quarter of the fifth c., according to Hines (1990:29), who adds that these immigrants led the way for widespread Scandinavian influence in the sixth c. The royal house of East Anglia in the sixth c., the Wuffingas, may have been of Swedish origin. Scull (1992:5) claims that the Scandinavian connections of East Anglia were particularly strong, because of the widespread practice of ship burial. Since the discovery of the Fallward graveyard, which contains many individual ship burials, the connection between Scandinavia and North Germany has been established in this way, too. One may draw a line from Scandinavia *via* North Germany to England, and another line from North Germany *via* North France to England. The Frisian coast is in between and was certainly not left out of the relations.

Bede (*Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ii, 15) records that the Wuffingas took their family name from Wuffa, suggesting that he was regarded as the founder of the royal line. Wuffa began his rule c. AD 570. Clarke (1960:138f.) suggests that the Wuffingas were an offshoot of the Scyldings, the royal house of Uppsala. Wuffa appears in the genealogy as the son of Wehha and the father of Tytil and, so, as the grandfather of Redwald († 624/25), the king who was probably buried in the ship burial at Sutton Hoo (cf. Evison 1979:121-138, Werner 1982:207; Carver 1992:348ff.). Newton (1992:72f.) elaborates: "The patronymic Wuffingas seems to be a variant of Wulfingas or Wylfingas. The East-Anglian dynasty sought to 'signal allegiance' with one or more of the aristocracies of southern Scandinavia. There may be more than an etymological connection between Wuffingas of East Anglia and the Wylfingas of Beowulf. Queen Wealhþeow of Beowulf may have been regarded as a Wuffing forebear<sup>27</sup>".

8.3. Merovingian influence in England was exercised through royal marriage, religion and law in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, which is also illustrated by the fact that Erchinoald, a relative of the Merovingian king Dagobert, was identical with bishop Eorcenwald of London, who appears to have played a significant role in the development of the Anglo-Saxon Charter, according to Wood (1992:24).

The Merovingians exercised supremacy over parts of South England in the early 550s, as is shown by the correspondence between Merovingian kings and the emperor in Byzantium. There were marriages between English kings and Merovingian princesses. The marriage of the Merovingian princess Bertha with Æthelberht of Kent illustrates the relation between both countries. Bertha's father was a certain Charibert, brother of King Chilperic who ruled from 561-584. She belonged to the group of "secondary Merovingian women who were usually placed in nunneries, or were married to the leaders (duces) of peripheral peoples as Bretons, Frisians, continental Saxons, Thuringians, Alamans and Bavarians. (...) Saxon women brought no prestige to Merovingian men, but Merovingian women will have enhanced the status of Anglo-Saxon kings", according to Wood (1992:235-241).

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<sup>27</sup> This assumption might be complicated, since the queen's name can be translated as 'servant of a foreigner, e.g. a Welshman, or a Roman'.

Puzzling is a 6th century Merovingian brooch with a runic inscription, in the possession of the British Museum, Continental Department. According to the Museum records, its provenance is Frankish, but it was probably found in Kent. The runes show no typical Anglo-Frisian features, hence it might be a Continental import<sup>28</sup>, possibly from Germany. I have, therefore, listed it in the Checklist of Continental Inscriptions under the name 'Kent'. Page (1995:158) calls it "the Bateman brooch".

An import from Francia may be the 6th c. Watchfield leather case (found 27 km west of Oxford), containing a balance and weights, with copper-alloy fittings, which bear a runic inscription. The inscription, though, may have been produced in England. It reads **hæriboki wusæ**, the **h** is single-barred, which is characteristic of English inscriptions from Period I. Therefore a Continental origin of the runic text seems unlikely. Besides, **æ** in **hæriboki** shows seriffes, typical of some Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions. The case itself may be regarded a witness of Merovingian contacts, according to Scull (1993:97-102).

The earliest surviving English law-code, promulgated by Æthelberht of Kent (the Frankish princess Bertha's consort) before the establishment of Anglo-Saxon coinage may be relevant. It records fines and compensations in terms of money: *scillingas* and *sceattas*. It has been suggested that the *scilling* was a weight of gold equivalent to the weight of contemporary Merovingian *tremisses*, Scull (1993:101).

8.4. Since the oldest runes in England were written on portable objects, any conclusion as to the provenance of an object plus inscription is based on circumstantial evidence and specifications such as the language and runeforms used. Certain objects like pottery and brooches were probably produced in England. The origin of the early runic objects (from both England and Frisia) is difficult to establish, even on an archaeological and linguistic basis, especially if the inscriptions do not show any of the typical Anglo-Frisian features. Possibilities to establish a provenance occur when a mixture of Anglian and Saxon styles is present, such as is the case with the Spong Hill urns (Hills 1991:52ff.). It may be concluded these urns were produced by Anglo-Saxons in England, and, in consequence, the runes, too. The Loveden Hill urn is also a local product. The Welbeck and Undley bracteates may also have been manufactured in England, although Undley may originate from the Continent, e.g. one of the homelands of Angles or Saxons (Hines & Odenstedt 1987).

The oldest runic inscription found in England was scratched on the surface of a roe's astragalus, which has been dated, on the basis of the urn in which it was buried, to the 4th or 5th century. This knucklebone comes from a cemetery where, according to Page (in Scull 1986:125), clear signs of Scandinavian influence have been detected. A knucklebone is a toy,

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<sup>28</sup> It is difficult to establish the inscription's dialect and provenance; it was declared 'Continental' and has never been included in any Anglo-Saxon runic survey. The catalogue of the British Museum gives the following description: "No. 235, 93, 6-18,32. Gilt-silver radiate-headed brooch: semicircular, flanged head-plate with seven applied ovoid knobs, moulded, with stamped decoration; subtrapezoidal foot-plate expanding to rounded end with opposed, profiled, bird head terminals; chip-carved, geometric and linear decoration; collared garnet, garnet disc and niello inlays; runic characters incised on back of foot-plate. Pair with no. 236, 93, 6-18, 33: Gilt-silver radiate-headed brooch, pairing with, but inferior to match, no. 235. Both: 6th.c. Merovingian. Provenance unrecorded; register records that in Bateman's MS catalogue, now in Sheffield City Museum, it is called Frankish without locality; sale catalogue information "said to have been found in Kent" has no independent corroboration and may have been the basis of the statement that the runic brooch was found in Kent by Stephens (1894), repeated more questioningly in Stephens (1901): "Most likely, to judge from the type, they [i.e. the pair] may have been found in Kent". In effect the true provenance remains unknown".

which may have belonged to a North Germanic immigrant; there is no runological or linguistical reason for assigning an Anglo-Saxon provenance to the object or the inscription, apart from the findspot.

As regards urns with knucklebones, similar finds from the Migration Period are known. For instance an urn with a knucklebone has been found in Driesum (Friesland). Five urns with knucklebones come from the cemetery of Hoogeteintum (Friesland); one of the urns is an Anglo-Saxon vessel of the late 4th - early 5th century. Further finds are known from Westermann on the North German coast, from Tating(-Esing) on the South-West coast of Schleswig-Holstein, and from Sörup, also in Schleswig-Holstein. Knucklebones have also been found in graves from cemeteries in Poland and in East Germany (Knol 1987). None of these astragali has a runic inscription, although many of them are decorated with dots and/or circles. The interesting thing is, of course, that of all the knucklebones we know, many are decorated, but only one has runes. The piece is therefore special, but in what way? The meaning of the inscription seems not very helpful: **raihan** 'of a roedeer'; one can only speculate about the intention of this announcement. The **h** is single-barred, the rune transliterated with **ï** is the rare yew rune and here it is part of the diphthong *ai*. This does not give an indication as to its provenance, but there is a striking similarity with the Pforzen find from South Germany, which has a legend **ailrun**. The diphthong has been rendered in the same manner as in **raihan**. One may think of a common source or of a common pronunciation of the sequence **ai** for this peculiar graphic realization. Against a common graphic source speaks the single-barred **h** of **raihan**, which may be ultimately Scandinavian. The Pforzen inscription has a double-barred **h**. **raihan** may be either Proto Norse or Proto OE. Actually, it depends on when and where one considers Old English to have come into being. I suppose this must have happened after the *adventus* of the Germanic tribes to Britain. What should their language be called on the moment they set foot on British soil? Proto OE? Or West Germanic?

The second extension of the runic alphabet, to 33 characters, during the post-conversion period may be due to Christian clerics, since the complementary runes occur almost exclusively in ecclesiastical contexts, e.g. in manuscripts and on big stone crosses with Christian texts, such as Ruthwell Cross, Bewcastle Cross. The Church in England was certainly not adverse to runes. Small reliquaries or portable altars containing the extreme unction were provided with pious inscriptions in runes, even together with Roman lettering. Some texts bear witness of historical, legendary or mythological events (Franks Casket). Monks from Lindisfarne or Jarrow may have composed the rune-text of the Ruthwell Cross. Runic writing was incorporated in the Latin of the manuscripts; the runes *thorn* þ and *wynn* ð were added to the Latin script from the 7th c. onwards and remained in practice until late in the Middle Ages. On the other hand, manuscript features can be found in runic epigraphy, for instance in the seriffes that are attached to the ends of sidetwigs (e.g. **hæriboki** in the 6th c. Watchfield inscription).

## 9. The Netherlands

The Roman encyclopedist Pliny (AD 23-79) gave a description of the people living in pityful

circumstances on the marshes of the Frisian coast. In his *Naturalis Historiae Liber XVI.1.3-II.5* we find the following:

"...in the east, on the shores of the ocean, a number of races are in this necessitous condition [i.e. people living in an area without any trees or shrubs, TL]; but so also are the races of people called the Greater and the Lesser Chauci, whom we have seen in the north. There twice in each period of a day and a night the ocean with its vast tide sweeps in a flood over a measureless expanse, covering up Nature's age-long controversy and the region disputed as belonging whether to the land or to the sea. There this miserable race occupy elevated patches of ground or platforms built up by hand above the level of the highest tide experienced, living in huts erected on the sites so chosen, and resembling sailors in ships when the water covers the surrounding land, but shipwrecked people when the tide has retired, and round their huts they catch the fish escaping with the receding tide" (translation H. Rackham, Vol. IV, pp. 387ff.).

9.1. The coastal area along the North Sea consisted of marshes and fens, which were subject to daily inundations. The inhabitants raised artificial mounds on which they built their houses and farms. This practice lasted until the 11th century, when dyke-building began. These mounds are called *wierden* (in Groningen) or *terpen* (in Friesland).

The mounds were extensively quarried for soil during the second part of the 19th century until the thirties of the 20th century. These commercial excavations brought many antiquities to the surface among which were objects with runes. It may seem logical to consider all runic finds in Frisian soil Frisian, but this is not the general opinion. H.F. Nielsen (1986) wrote: "Rigourously speaking, a runic inscription should be considered Frisian only if it exhibits linguistic developments characteristic of that language, i.e. the language first attested in the Old Frisian manuscripts". But there is a gap of several centuries between the runic period and the manuscript period, runes being in use from the 5th century till about the 9th; the manuscript tradition starting from the 12th century onwards. When reasoning from a linguistic point of view, we must conclude that only three inscriptions are Old Frisian: Westeremden A **adujislu me[*b*] jisuhidu**, the coin with the legend **skanomodu**, and Hamwic **kataë**, all of which have OFris *ā* < Germanic *au*.

9.2. In the course of the past hundred years about 17 objects with runic inscriptions have been found in the Dutch provinces of Groningen and Friesland. In the early Middle Ages these regions were a part of Greater Frisia that once stretched from the Zwin (on the border with Belgium) to the estuary of the Weser. Archaeologists hold different views about the situation of central Frisia; this may have been the region of the Rhine delta and the central river-area of Rhine and Waal, with the important *emporium* of Dorestad. Another view opts for the location of central Frisia along the sea-shore of present-day Friesland.

Under the legendary leaders Aldgisl and Redbad, the power of the Frisians extended across Utrecht and Dorestad, thus threatening Frankish connections with England and Scandinavia. "In about 680 Frisia became part of the monetary continuum with the central part of the Merovingian kingdom" (Van Es 1990:167). After the death of Redbad in 719, the Franks defeated the Frisians and in 734 the Frisian territory was incorporated in the Frankish kingdom. The Frankish conquest had no adverse effects on Frisian trade. Frisian mintage got under way again in 730 with all kinds of *sceattas* (Van Es 1990:168). Dorestad was in the hands of the Frisians for a short time only, and that time was a period of minor importance in Dorestad's trade-career. (Van Es 1990:166ff.).

There were contacts with South-East England, South-West Norway, South-East Norway or South-West Sweden and the Weser area. The written sources are able to supplement the archaeological data to some extent: from Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii*, for instance, it is possible to trace relations between Dorestad, Birka, Haithabu and, more indirectly, Hamburg and Bremen. Dorestad's period of prosperity lasted for a century at the most: from about 725 until about 830. During this period Dorestad was part of the Frankish realm, but the Frisians dominated the river and sea trade routes of North-West Europe to such an extent that it is customary to speak of Frisian trade across the North Sea, which was called the Frisian Sea at the time.

9.3. To what extent the *mercatores* and *negotiatores* from Dorestad were all Frisians cannot be established. The term 'Frisian' was synonymous with 'merchant'; the noun 'Frisian' indicated a function in society rather than ethnical descent. In modern times the patronymic De Vries is among the most frequent in the Netherlands and these people are certainly not all Frisians. Two runestones at Sigtuna, U 379 and U 391, refer to 'Frisians': **frisa kiltar letu reisa stein þensa eftiR þur[kil], [gild]a sin kuþ hialbi ant hans þurbiurn risti** (U379) and **frisa ki[ltar] ... þesar eftiR albod felaha sloþa kristr hia helgi hinlbi ant hans þurbirn risti** (U391). 'The guild-members of the Frisians had this stone set up in memory of Torkel, their guild-member. God help his soul. Torbjörn carved' and 'The guild-members of the Frisians had these runes cut in memory of Albod, Slode's associate. Holy Christ help his soul. Torbjörn carved'. The language is Swedish and so are the names Torkel, Torbjörn and Slode. Albod may be a Frankish name.

It seems in the Early Middle Ages, Frisians were not so much concerned with their cultural 'Frisian' identity as they are today. How Frisian are the Frisian runic inscriptions? How Frisian are the Frisian *sceattas*? I am inclined to say: just as Frisian as the Frisians were in those days: they were *negotiatores*, merchants, travellers, as a professional group entitled to bear the name 'Frisians', but originating from various parts of the Low Countries and from the marshes near the Frisian Sea. This name-giving custom, in order to establish an ethnic definition to different groups of merchants, has an equivalent in the ancient merchants of amber. Greek geographers seem to have used the appellation Celto-Scyths for people that traded amber and who may have been neither Celts nor Scyths.

9.4. In the second quarter of the fifth century, a rapid growth in population took place in Frisia, witnessed by a substantial import of brooches, probably originating from easterly regions bordering the North Sea. The growth in population continued during the sixth and seventh centuries, but there are a few questions with regard to the identity of this new 'Frisian' population; they were obviously not the same as the historical *Fresones* from Roman times. The fact that their language, called Old Frisian, or Runic Frisian by modern linguists, is nearly identical with, or rather undistinguishable from Old English and Old Saxon, may point to a common origin.

I propose the following scenario: the people that settled in the nearly devastated coastal regions of Frisia during the fifth and sixth centuries, came from the easterly shores of the North Sea and were probably an offshoot of the host of Angles, Saxons and Jutes, who had made their way westward and eventually colonized Britain. The new inhabitants of Frisia could easily have overwhelmed the small remainder of the *Fresones* and provided them with a new cultural and linguistic identity. Politically, Frisia came under Frankish sway from the eighth century onwards, which is mirrored in the renaming of almost all Frisian placenames

(including the *terp* names! cf. Blok 1996). It is significant that in Frisia no prehistoric placenames have survived, whereas there are so many in adjacent Drenthe.

The linguistic and runological innovations, as mentioned above, may have taken place in Frisia or in the home-lands of the Anglo-Saxons on the Continent, before their migration to Britain in the fifth century. When passing through Frisia, travellers and merchants from easterly North-Sea shores may have transferred their runic knowledge to the few Frisians who had stayed behind. On the other hand, there may have been a period of Anglo-Frisian unity in which distinctive rune forms were developed. The tribes that departed from (South) Jutland and North Germany in order to migrate westward, are likely to have split up and settled either in Frisia or in England. Among these tribes were people who knew runes; some of them stayed in Frisia, which was almost uninhabited in the 4th and 5th centuries, some moved along to Britain. This would explain the linguistic and runological similarities between Old English and Old Frisian (and Old Saxon). Since one must assume the continuation of contacts across the Frisian Sea (North Sea), runic developments are very difficult to locate. A concept such as an 'Anglo-Frisian unity' probably refers to the multiple contacts that existed during the Early Middle Ages.

9.5. In 1996 a gilt-silver scabbard mount with a runic inscription was found in Bergakker near Tiel in the Betuwe. This former *habitat* of the *Batavi* is situated in the river estuary of Rhine and Meuse. The front side of the mount is decorated with half circles and points, ridges and grooves. Parallels for this type of decoration can be found on late Roman girdle mounts such as the one from Gennep (province Limburg), dating from the second half of the fourth century AD. Parallels for the mount are hard to find. In general, late Roman weapons are scarce, only small parts have been found in fortresses. Weapons have very rarely been found in cemeteries. In fact, this object is the first weapon-part with a runic inscription found in the Netherlands. The runes are of the older *fupark*-type; one character is anomalous and hitherto unattested. The Bergakker inscription does not show any Frisian runic features, because it may be too old for that. Moreover, the Betuwe did not belong to Frisian territory. The area was controlled by a Romanized population, which incites new views on the spread of runic knowledge at the early 5th c.

At the same site a Roman altarstone was found, when a part of the field was excavated in the 1950s. The stone, from the second half of the second or first half of the third century AD, was dedicated to the indigenous (Batavian) goddess *Hurstrga*. The toponym 'Bergakker' suggests that the site is higher than its surroundings. This may have been caused by riverain deposits. The site may have functioned as a ritual centre during the Roman period. A parallel can be found at the temple site Empel (province Noord Brabant), which was dedicated to the Batavian god *Hercules Magusanus*. According to Markey (1972:372f.), the semantic features of *hurst* are (1) elevation, and (2) undergrowth, usually on a sandy mound. The goddess *Hurstrga* may be regarded as a special goddess, who was venerated in a grove on a small hill. Markey (1972:373) suggests that the name *hurst* may be connected with cult-places of fertility goddesses. At Empel a temple was erected in an oak-grove on a *donk*, which is a sandy mound and characteristic of the river landscape of the Betuwe (Derks 1996:115) On such a *donk* the sanctuary of *Hurstrga* at Bergakker may have been situated. The interesting thing of Empel was the occurrence of oaks, whereas elsewhere the area was dominated by a vegetation of willow. Together with the runic scabbard mount, a great number of metal objects were found, among which were many coins, fibulae, all sorts of bronze fragments and two objects that may be characteristic for cult-places, namely a small silver votive plate




showing three *matrones* and a silver box for a stamp. The latter type of objects have often been found in Gallo-Roman sanctuaries (Derks 1996:186). It may, therefore, have to be that the find-complex to which the runic scabbard mount belonged should be connected with the sanctuary of Hurstrga. The objects should then be interpreted as votive gifts.

9.6. What is really surprising is the apparent knowledge of runic writing in this area. The Betuwe has never before yielded objects with runes, and was certainly not expected to. The region was situated south of the *limes* until about 400 AD, when the Romans withdrew. In the turbulence that followed, the region was overrun by several Germanic tribes, such as Chatti, Franks, Saxons and Frisians.

Not until more finds turn up, will it be possible to determine how extensive or limited runic activities in this area were. Judging from the nature of the inscription, Bergakker is a clear parallel to any other inscriptions on metal.

The object has been ornamented in a way also found in the Lower- and Middle Rhine area, North Gallia and North Germany (cf. Werner 1958:387, 390, 392). It is of provincial-Roman manufacture, which is shown by the type of decoration. It has parallels in objects from nearby Gennepe, a fourth century Germanic immigrant settlement on the river Niers, south of Nijmegen (Heidinga/Offenberg 1992:52ff. and Bosman/Looijenga 1996:9f.). The Gennepe finds are said to have been produced in Lower Germany. An interesting observation is that developments in the left Rhine area (Werner 1958:385) affected the material culture of the North German coastal area in the first half of the fifth century. Werner observes that the preference of Saxon warriors for late-Roman military *Kerbschnitt* belt equipment in the fourth c. equals that of Franks living in the Lower Rhine area of Krefeld-Gellep and Rhenen (near Bergakker). When writing this, Werner could not know that a boat-grave from Fallward, near the Weser mouth, contained many objects decorated in *Kerbschnitt*. Among these objects was a footstool with runes. The grave was that of a Germanic soldier who had served in the Roman army. The *Kerbschnitt* style is of Mediterranean origin, as is shown by its motives of meanders and swastikas.

The similarity in the ornamentation of belt buckles, found in Fallward, Abbeville and Oxford points to contacts between people living near the North Sea coast of Germany, in North Gallia and Wessex in England. The existence of contacts is also shown by the spread of runic knowledge, attested in the (Lower) Rhineland, Belgium and England from the fifth c. onwards) and from around 200 onwards in North Germany. Strangely missing in this chain is North Gallia; runic finds may be expected to emerge one day in the North of France.

9.7. The Bergakker inscription shows a hitherto unattested rune for **e**. A parallel may be the **e** as used in **leub** on a melted brooch from Engers in the Rhineland (see Continental Corpus). The ductus of the two headstaves of both attestations looks more or less the same, in the way the staffs slant towards each other: \ /. I assume these forms are a variety on the 'standard' **e** rune: .

Varieties in the forms of the runes occur quite frequently, and can be expected to turn up anywhere. The fact that as yet so few varieties are known to us, is due to the little material we have. For instance: the Illerup and Spong Hill inscriptions with their mirrored runes were at first not understood, because no one knew of the existence of mirror-runes. The Chessel Down scabbard mount has an unidentified fourth rune (unless my proposal of taking it as representing **I** is accepted, cf. the so-called 'bracteate **I**' in some bracteate legends). Still another runic variety of **I** occurs in the inscriptions of Charnay and Griesheim. Intriguing and

baffling problems that are often connected with the Frisian Corpus, apply to all other early runic corpora. So questions such as "were runes ever a serious and useful script" will still for some time provide an interesting subject for conversation among runologists. For the present time I intend to take it for granted that there was an indigenous Frisian runic tradition as well as an English and a Continental one. The one Bergakker find is not enough proof for the existence of a runic tradition in the Rhine and Meuse estuaries. It might be an indication for the existence of a Frankish runic tradition, when the other attestations from Belgium and France are also taken into account. In that respect the Bergakker inscription can be regarded as a missing link in the chain that typologically connects a certain group of people (a warrior-class?) from the Rhineland, North Germany, North Gallia and England, with the Rhine estuary in the middle.

9.8. The Merovingian Franks had won supremacy over the peripheral regions (seen from Francia as centre) of Alamannia, Bavaria, Thuringia, England and Frisia; in these regions runes were used. The Merovingians, however, do not seem to have not developed an indigenous runic tradition, after they settled in former Gallia. Moreover, runes are defined as 'foreign', although they were not unknown. One may conclude, that the real powers of those days apparently did not use runes, but the Roman script.

Remarkably enough, runologists never seriously considered the existence of a Frankish (Merovingian) runic tradition, although some runic objects are recorded from Frankish territory (Bergakker, Charnay, Arlon, Amay, Chéhéry, and maybe 'Kent' too), all, not coincidentally, from the periphery of the Frankish realm. Runes were known in sixth-century Francia, as is shown by the well-known and often quoted line by Venantius Fortunatus, 6th century bishop of Tours: *barbara fraxineis pingatur rhuna tabellis, quodque papyrus agit virgula plana valet* 'The foreign rune may be painted on ashen tablets, what is done by papyrus, can also be done by a smooth piece of wood'. The Frankish king Chilperic († 584) proposed the addition of four letters to the Roman alphabet, thus showing his knowledge of runes, since one of the four new letters, described: *uui*, was shaped after the runic *w*.

Map 2. Alphabet tabel.

	Latino alfabeto	neo- strucico	strucico	ooco umbro sabellico	strucico code	augurico runico sabell.	diversi	Goissacca 2	Goissacca 3	Tono
a	AAA	A	A	AAA	AQA	AAA		AAAAYV	AAFAA	AAAANAAN
c	<C	)	)	>	(>)	)			<	>><
ch		V			Y			VV	↓	↓
e	EE	A	E	E↑	ER)(	E E	≡	AAA↑	AAFAE	AAE↑AAE
f	FF	B	B	B	9876↑	B		↓B↑		B↑↑
h	H	E	E	OE	H#	EE		H		H
i	I	I	I	I	I	I		I	I	I
k	KE			K	K	K		KKK	K	KKKK
l	LL	J	J	J	J↑	JL	^	JJJ	JL JL	JJJJ
m	MW	M	M	M	MW	M		M	M	MMMM
n	NW	N	N	N	NW	N		H	N~N	NNNN
o	OO			V		OO		OOO	OO	OOOO
p	PT	1	1	1	P17777	1T		1A17	1T1	11
ph		⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙				
r	RPP	Q	Q	Q	QPP	QD		Q	QD	QDD
rs				Q	QPP					
s	S	Z	Z	Z	SZ	SZ		SZ	ZSZ	SSSZ
s'			M	M	MM	MM		X	MM	MM
t	T	†	T	T	T†	†X		XYMY	TXY†	YX††
th		⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙		⊙	⊙	⊙
u	V	V	V	V	V	V		V	V	VV
v	A	A	A	A	↓Y↓	A		↓Y	↓Y	↓Y
z	Z	Z	Z	Z	±EZ±	±Y	‡	‡‡↓	‡↓	‡‡