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SPECIAL ISSUE

## **Grammarians, Skalds and Rune Carvers II**

Edited by Michael Schulte and Robert Nedoma

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# Óláfr Þórðarson and the ‘Norse alphabet’

## A thirteenth-century Icelandic grammarian’s account of runic writing

Fabrizio D. Raschellà

The present study deals with those sections of the so-called *Third Grammatical Treatise*, written by the Icelandic scholar and poet Óláfr Þórðarson around the middle of the 13th century, in which the author describes a variety of the Scandinavian runic alphabet and compares it with the Latin alphabet. The investigation is part of a long-standing and comprehensive study on Old Icelandic grammatical literature, to which I have devoted the greater part of my scholarly work. The paper aims to define the type of runic alphabet used by Óláfr in the context of medieval Scandinavian runic writing. A proposal for interpretation of an obscure runic pangram, included by Óláfr in his discussion of runes, is also provided.

### 1. Introductory remarks

1.1 The so-called *Third Grammatical Treatise* was composed by the Icelandic scholar and poet Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld (‘the white poet’) around the middle of the 13th century. It includes, in its first part — traditionally known as ‘The Foundation of Grammar’ (*Málfræðinnar grundvöllr*) —, two chapters devoted to the description of what can be regarded as the standard runic alphabet of his time — the ‘Norse alphabet’ (*nórænt stafróf*), in the author’s own words — together with a comparison with the Latin alphabet as it was commonly applied to the writing of contemporary Icelandic.<sup>1</sup> The passage has been the object of an extensive and

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1. The treatise, consisting of two main parts (the second one, called *Málskrúðsfræði* ‘The discipline of language ornamentation’, deals with the elements of classical rhetoric applied to Icelandic traditional poetry), has been handed down in three principal manuscripts: AM 748 Ib 4to (ca. 1300), AM 242 fol (the well-known *Codex Wormianus* of Snorri’s *Edda*; second half of the 14th c.), and AM 757a 4to (ca. 1400). Only the first and the second of them are

sometimes lively debate among scholars of Nordic philology and runology, especially in the first decades after the publication of Björn Magnússon Ólsen's essay on runes in Old Icelandic literature (1883). The most important of these contributions will be mentioned at relevant points in the following discussion.

The present study will offer a critical reconsideration of the runic alphabet presented in Óláfr Þórðarson's grammatical treatise by means of a detailed analysis of every letter of that alphabet, both separately and in the context of its interrelations with other letters. In addition, the system of correspondences with the letters of the Latin alphabet, expressly indicated and commented on by Óláfr himself, will be examined. In doing this, special weight will be given to grapho-phonemic issues, i.e. to the relation between the formal aspects of letters and the underlying phonological entities. Moreover, a comparison of certain characteristics of Icelandic runic writing with those of the other Scandinavian areas with which the author of the treatise was in closer contact, i.e. Denmark and Norway, will be made — something fundamental for understanding the extent of Óláfr's indebtedness to the runographic tradition of those countries and for determining the actual value of some of the letters included in his runic alphabet. Another element which is indispensable to a correct interpretation of Óláfr's discussion on runes is the runic pangram (i.e. a sentence containing all letters of the runic alphabet) which Óláfr reports having learned during one of his stays in Denmark from the Danish king himself. This sentence, whose meaning has been a puzzle for generations of scholars, will be carefully analyzed with regard to the lexical and grammatical properties of its single components, paying particular attention to its connections with the rest of Óláfr's discussion on runes. Finally, a totally new interpretation of the sentence will be proposed.

1.2 The history of runic literacy or, in more general terms, of the presence of runes on Icelandic soil, is as old as the history of Iceland itself from the Norse colonization onwards; runes were simply brought to the Atlantic island, along with

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relevant for the purposes of the present study; in the following, they will be referred to with the traditional sigla A and W, respectively. The standard critical edition of the treatise is still that carried out by Björn Magnússon Ólsen (1884), which also includes an edition of the *Fourth Grammatical Treatise*. However, as far as the first part of the treatise is concerned, the only one which will be considered here, a separate edition (Wills 2001) is available, which will be the basis for textual references in the present investigation (see also below, fn. 5). Other editions will be mentioned for the sake of comparison in the following discussion. Manuscripts A and W have also been published in facsimile editions (Wessén 1945 and Sigurður Nordal 1931, respectively). Photographic reproductions are now available for both manuscripts at the following web sites: <<http://www.am.hi.is:8087/VefHandritalisti.aspx>> (A); <<http://www.e-pages.dk/ku/621/>> (W). For a survey of the main issues and scholarly research concerning the *Third Grammatical Treatise* as a whole, see the relevant sections in Raschellà 1983 and 2007.

other products of their traditional culture, by Scandinavian immigrants. However, traces of their existence are much less conspicuous in Iceland than in the other Scandinavian countries (notably Norway) from which they were imported, especially in the earliest stages of colonization (see Bæksted 1942: 13–16 for a thorough discussion). The oldest extant runic inscription from Iceland likely dates back to the 10th or 11th century,<sup>2</sup> while the beginning of a regular use of runes on the island is generally placed around the year 1200. Tradition — as represented by the Prologue to the Icelandic grammatical treatises in the *Codex Wormianus* of Snorri's *Edda*<sup>3</sup> — has it that a certain Þóródr rúnameistari ('rune-master') was, together with Ari Þorgilsson the Wise, the reformer of the Icelandic fuþark at the turn of the 11th and 12th centuries. The reliability of this information, firmly supported by Björn Magnússon Ólsen (1883: esp. 80–89) and by others before him, has been questioned with equal determination by several scholars.<sup>4</sup> However, the lack of solid historical evidence for an actual runic reform in medieval Iceland is a question most probably bound to remain unanswered. What is certain, rather, is that one of the most remarkable testimonies of scholarly interest for runic matters in 13th-century Iceland comes from Óláfr Þórðarson's grammatical treatise. It is, at any rate, reasonable to assume that Óláfr's concern with runes may have fostered a new interest in runic writing among Icelanders and its flourishing in Iceland in later times (cf. Bæksted 1942: 20, echoing Finnur Jónsson 1910: 297).

## 2. Óláfr's runes: Inventory and general overview

2.1 The runic alphabet and its relationship with the Latin alphabet is treated in chapters III and IV of the first part of Óláfr's work (Wills 2001: 84–90 [§§ 3–4]),<sup>5</sup>

2. This is the inscription on the Viðey stick fragment, discovered in 1993 (Dillmann 1996: 51–54; Þórgunnur Snædal 1998: 17–18 and 2000–2001: 5, 34–35). Before this discovery no Icelandic runic inscription could be traced back with certainty to before 1200 (cf. Bæksted 1942: 16, 57).

3. The text of the Prologue has been published as an appendix to the edition of the *Third and Fourth Grammatical Treatises* in Björn Magnússon Ólsen 1884: 152–155; it is the only critical edition to date. For a commentary, see Wills 2001: 58–60 (§ 5.1.1; the system of reference to Wills 2001 is explained below, fn. 5).

4. For an essential overview, see Bæksted 1942: 16–20 and Wills 2001: Introd. 31–34 (§ 3.4.1), 58–60 (§ 5.1.1).

5. References to and quotations from the treatise are, as a rule, in accordance with Wills's critical edition (Wills 2001: 76–100, "Edition and translation"), which "provides a normalised text of MG [= *Málfræðinnar grundvöllr*] based on A and new readings of all the medieval manuscripts of 3GT [= *Third Grammatical Treatise*]" (Wills 2001: Introd. 37), as well as the only complete

in connection with the discussion of the ‘attributes’ (Oícel. *tilfelli*, translating Lat. *accidentia*) of the letter according to Latin grammatical tradition. For a while, Óláfr faithfully follows the description of letters typical of Latin grammarians, for example distinguishing the runic letters into ‘vowels’, ‘semivowels’ and ‘mutes’. But when he comes to mention the third attribute of the letter, the ‘power’ (i.e. its sound value[s]), and, after this, when he introduces the runic pangram he learned from the Danish king Valdemar II,<sup>6</sup> he increasingly focuses his attention on the letters of the runic alphabet and questions concerning their use, albeit keeping a constant reference to the Latin alphabet and grammatical theory.

2.2 A general description of all the letters that make up the runic alphabet contemplated in Óláfr’s treatise is provided below. This begins with a chart (Table 1) where the letters are arranged according to the order in which they are first mentioned by the author, from the initial description of the five runes denoting vowels (Wills 2001: 84 [§ 3.6]) through to the end of the commentary on king Valdemar’s runic pangram (Wills 2001: 90 [§ 4.22]). This chart also includes other relevant elements, such as the equivalents of runic letters in the Latin alphabet, the phonemic values of the runes and, if mentioned in the treatise, their names. In regard to the shape of the runes, it should be noted that the symbols reproduced in the table are strongly normalized, in the sense that no allowance is made for their shape variation in the two manuscripts of the treatise. In particular, the rounded variants of some runes are preferred to the straight, angular ones (e.g.  $\mathfrak{P}$  rather than  $\mathfrak{P}$ ) as they are predominant in manuscript practice. The rune names listed in the table are those actually occurring in the treatise. As can be noticed, Óláfr mentions only a few rune names, namely those of the five vowel runes and of three consonant runes. In view of this, and for the sake of greater perspicuity, I will use, in the subsequent discussion of the single runes, names composed by the corresponding letters in the Latin alphabet and the word ‘rune’: e.g. *y*-rune, *s*-rune, etc.

Some of the letters displayed in the table require commentary:

### 2.2.1 $\mathfrak{N} = u$ (*v*) and $\mathfrak{I} = i$

In the introductory passage on the attributes of the letter, which immediately precedes the description of the runic alphabet, Óláfr informs us, producing relevant examples, that the (Latin) vowels *i* and *u* become ‘consonants’ (i.e. semivowels)

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English translation to date. Wills’s work, a University of Sydney PhD thesis, is available online in html format (see bibliographical references below). In referring to Wills’s edition, both page numbers (for the printed, unpublished, version) and paragraph numbers (for both the printed and the online version) are given.

6. This particular text will be the object of detailed discussion below, § 4.

when they are followed by a vowel in the same syllable: *i ok u hafa því fleiri hljóðs- greinir at þeir eru stundum samhljóðendr, sem í þessum nöfnum: iarl, uitr* (Wills 2001: 84 [§ 3.5]).<sup>7</sup> He then adds that the letter *u*, when it takes a consonantal value, is, in Norse, called *venð*: *ok er þá u venð kallat í nórænu máli* (Wills 2001: *ibid.*). The same principle tacitly applies also to the corresponding runic letters, *l* and *ŀ*, which could, in fact, have either a vocalic or a consonantal value according to their position in the syllable. On the consonantal value of *ŀ* in particular, see further below, § 4.4.5.

### 2.2.2 $\Downarrow / \aleph = y$

The symbol  $\Downarrow$ , the typically Icelandic shape of the *y*-rune, occurs three times (twice in the introductory remarks to the 'Norse alphabet' and once in Valdemar's runic pangram) in A as the sole variant of this rune. Conversely, the symbol  $\aleph$ , the most common variant of the same rune outside Iceland, occurs only once (within the runic pangram) in W. In one instance (96:13)<sup>8</sup> W has *h* in place of the expected rune for *y*.<sup>9</sup> Icelandic inscriptions — very few indeed — containing a *y*-rune of any kind are all later than the two manuscripts of the treatise. According to Bæksted (1942: 46 and 52),  $\Downarrow$  can be considered the 'normal' shape ("normalform") in Iceland, while the 'typologically older shape' ("den typologisk ældre form")  $\aleph$  is extremely rare. As for the origin of the symbol  $\Downarrow$ , Björn Magnússon Ólsen (1883: 108–109) conjectured that it was derived from  $\aleph$  (the straight variant of  $\aleph$ ) through an intermediate stage  $\aleph$  (attested for example on the Grenjastaður stone; see Bæksted 1942: 46), with a subsequent reversal of the lateral strokes at both ends of the vertical stroke.

7. 'i and u have further distinctions of sound in that they are sometimes consonants, as in these nouns: *iarl* ['earl'], *uitr* ['wise']' (in normalized spelling: *jarl, vitr*).

8. References to the manuscripts indicate folios and lines for A, pages and lines for W.

9. This incongruity cannot be readily explained: perhaps a banal case of miscopying on the part of W's scribe (so Björn Magnússon Ólsen 1883: 82 fn. 1 and Wills 2001: Comm. 126 [§ 3.1.5]). Another, more elaborate, though not impossible, explanation could be that W's scribe omitted the runic symbol for *y* which stood at the beginning of the sentence in his exemplar and then read a following abbreviation for *hann* ('it', i.e. the letter *y*) as an *h*.



Table 1. Overview of the runic alphabet in the *Third Grammatical Treatise*

Runic letter	Equivalent in Latin characters	Phonemic value(s)	Rune name
ᚱ	u (v)	/u/ /u:/; /v/	úr
ᚦ	o	/o/ /o:/	óss
ᚨ	i	/i/ /i:/; /j/	íss
ᚩ	a	/a/ /a:/	ár
ᚪ / ᚫ	y	/y/ /y:/	ýr
ᚥ / ᚦ	e	/e/ /e:/	(stunginn, punktaðr) íss
ᚷ	r	/r/	reið
ᚸ / ᚹ	s	/s/	sól
ᚺ	n	/n/	–
ᚻ	m	/m/	–
ᚼ	l	/l/	–
ᚾ	f	/f/	–
ᚿ	þ	/p/	–
ᚫ	k	/k/	–
ᚱ	t	/t/	–
ᚷ	b	/b/	bjarkan
ᚫ	p	/p/	bjarkan (með opnum belgjum)
ᚦ	æ (i.e. a+e)	/e/ — /æ/	–
ᚦ	g	/g/	–
ᚦ	d	/d/	–
ᚨ	z	/ds/ or /ts/	knésól
*	h	/h/	–
ᚦ	ø (i.e. e+o) and ø	/ø:/; /ö/	–
ᚦ	au (i.e. a+u)	/au/	–
ᚦ	ey	/ey/	–

## 2.2.3 † / †̇ = e

Both variants are found in A (2v:24 and 27, respectively).<sup>10</sup> W strikingly shows no occurrence of this rune since, in the two places where it should appear (97:12 and 15), it is erroneously replaced by l and †, respectively. According to Bæksted (1942:39), the variant †̇, together with † (not represented in Óláfr's treatise), is the most frequent shape of this rune in Icelandic inscriptions, while the variant † is only occasional. The form † (the most 'genuine' and presumably oldest type of dotted l), rare in Icelandic inscriptions but normal in Norwegian runes, does not appear in either of the two manuscripts. However, in view of the general influence exerted by the Norwegian model on Óláfr's shaping of the runic symbols, as will be shown below, it is very likely that † was precisely the variant of the e-rune found in the original version of the treatise, a conclusion made all the more likely given Óláfr's use of the symbol † for the diphthong ey (see below, § 2.2.12). The rune for e, since it was directly derived from the *iss*-rune (i.e. the rune for i) through the dotting of its stave, has no name of its own, but is simply referred to as 'dotted (*stunginn*) or pointed (*punktaðr*) *iss*' (Wills 2001: 84 [§ 3.6 and § 3.9, respectively]).

## 2.2.4 † / †̇ = s

The former type, a short vertical stroke above the baseline with a dot at its lower end, belongs to A; the latter, a longer stroke sitting on the baseline and with a loop in place of the dot, to W. Historically and graphemically, † (or †̇), the typical short-twig variant of the s-rune, is derived from †̇, which belongs to the long-branch, or 'Danish', runes. In Danish inscriptions, the predominant symbol for the s-rune was †̇ all through the 'medieval' period (i.e., in runological terms, 11th to 14th centuries). The short-twig type — of Swedish-Norwegian provenance — made its first appearance in Denmark already at the beginning of that period, but only in the later centuries was it commonly used alongside †̇. After a period in which both s (/s/) and z (dental consonant + /s/) were used ambivalently, the tendency to restrict the type † to the notation of z (especially in Latin runic inscriptions, where it also stood for c before front vowels) became established (Jacobsen & Moltke 1941–1942/II: 971–974, 981). Exceptional evidence of the reverse (i.e. † for s and †̇ for z) is represented by inscriptions in which some Norwegian influence can be assumed.<sup>11</sup> In Norway, the distribution of the two symbols was precisely the opposite of that found in Danish inscriptions: † was the usual type for s, while †̇ was mostly used for z and c (Olsen 1933: 104; Bæksted 1942: 38, 44). In Icelandic

10. See above, fn. 8.

11. For example, in the Tornby limestone carving (Dan. *Tornby-kalkristning*) 1 (dated 1175–1225): Danske Runeindskrifter, online at: [http://runer.ku.dk/VisGenstand.aspx?Titel=Tornby-kalkristning\\_1](http://runer.ku.dk/VisGenstand.aspx?Titel=Tornby-kalkristning_1)); cf. Jacobsen & Moltke 1941–1942/II: 974, 981.

inscriptions of the same period, *s* was invariably denoted by variants of the short-twig type. Occurrences of *z* are relatively rare and are rendered by special symbols (see Bæksted 1942: 46); the sole instance in which it is represented by  $\text{h}$  is in Óláfr's treatise. Judging from Óláfr's remarks on the relationship between these two symbols (Wills 2001: 88 [§ 4.6]),  $\text{h}$  is apparently conceived of as a secondary variant of  $\text{t}$ , as is also suggested by the fact that its name, *knésól* 'kneeling sun', is derived from the rune's simple name, *sól* 'sun', which is itself reserved for the symbol  $\text{t}$ . All this considered, we are led to conclude that Óláfr closely conforms, here as in other instances, to the Norwegian standard.

### 2.2.5 $\text{K} = p$

This rune, too, like the aforementioned rune for *e*, has no name of its own. As Óláfr explains, it is in fact only a different shape of the *bjarkan*-rune ( $\text{B b}^{12}$ ), used when it has the sound of Latin *p*: *er bjarkan á þá leið ritat, ef þat stendr fyrir p látínustaf* (Wills 2001: 88 [§ 4.9]).<sup>13</sup> In this case, it is written 'with open pockets': *En því eru opnir belgir gørvir á K þá er þat hljóðar fyrir p* (Wills 2001: 88 [§ 4.10]).<sup>14</sup> We can therefore refer to it as *bjarkan með opnum belgjum* 'bjarkan with open pockets'.

### 2.2.6 $\text{t} = \text{æ}$ (i.e. *a+e*)

This is one of the five runic 'diphthongs' or 'ligatures' (*diptongi* or *límingarstafir í rúnum*) mentioned by Óláfr (Wills 2001: 88 [§§ 4.12, 4.14]),<sup>15</sup> who informs us that 'it sounds for two vowels,  $\text{t}$  [*a*] and  $\text{t}$  [*e*]' (*þat hljóðar fyrir tveim raddarstöfum, <t> ok t* (Wills 2001: 88 [§ 4.12]). This description, as Óláfr's definition of 'diphthong' in general (Wills 2001: 88 [§ 4.13]), is, in fact, a sort of historical-doctrinal reference, a notion taken from Latin grammatical tradition,<sup>16</sup> which actually means that this ligature is the result of the fusion of two separate letters into a new single letter. It should, however, be noted that both manuscripts contain obvious mistakes in this passage: W has  $\text{t}$  (= *æ*) in place of  $\text{t}$  (= *a*) as the first element of the ligature; A shows the Latin (simple) vowel *e* in place of the runic ligature  $\text{t}$ , while

12. According to common runological practice, bold characters are used to transliterate the runic symbols.

13. '*bjarkan* is written in this way if it stands for the Latin letter *p*'.

14. 'Therefore its pockets are made open in *K* when it sounds as *p*'.

15. On the notion of 'diphthong/ligature' in Óláfr, see Raschellà 2000: 384–385. General information about the terminology concerning diphthongs, digraphs, and ligatures in Old Icelandic grammatical literature can be found in Raschellà 2004: 22–25.

16. Some Latin parallels (not necessarily Óláfr's direct sources) are reported in Björn Magnússon Ólsen 1884: 47 fns. 9, 10.

it indicates the two components of the runic ligature as † and | instead of † and †, respectively. Therefore, editorial interventions are necessary to restore the (presumably) correct original reading. Such scribal inconsistencies may be due to the fact that † was seldom employed in Icelandic runic writing, where all mid and low unrounded front vowels (/e/, /e:/, /æ:/) were rendered, as a rule, with some form of dotted | (see Bæksted 1942: 47).

Irrespective of Óláfr's analytical and purely theoretical description, the actual phonemic value represented by this ligature in Valdemar's runic pangram, where it appears in the word <sup>4</sup>KR††† sprængd, depends on whether it stands for an Icelandic or a Danish vowel. This will be discussed below (§ 4.4.2).

### 2.2.7 † = g

The *g*-rune takes the 'straight' form † in its only occurrence in A, where it is merged into a ligature (bind rune) with the following *d*-rune (†) (cf. below, § 4.3). Bæksted (1942: 39) conjectures that the ligature in question might be composed of two rare variants of Danish runes (see next paragraph).

### 2.2.8 † = d

This letter occurs with the shape † only once in the two manuscripts, namely in the word †††† flydi, in A's version of the runic pangram. The other occurrences show different forms: in the word <sup>4</sup>K[R]††† sp[r]ængd, at the beginning of the pangram in A, it is merged into a bind rune with the preceding †; in W, it lacks the dot in both the word †KR††† sprængt (an apparent miswriting for *sprængd* (cf. below, § 4.4.2, fn. 55), which is correctly spelled in the transcription of the pangram in Latin characters placed before the runic text) and in Óláfr's commentary on the pangram (missing in A), where it is nonetheless referred to as † *stunginn*, i.e. 'dotted †' (97:28); finally, W has †††† flyði in place of A's *flydi* (see below, § 4.4.1), so that no rune for *d* is used here. In any case, despite these inconsistencies in the manuscript tradition, Óláfr makes a clear distinction between the dotted and non-dotted variants of this rune and other runes in his commentary on the 'Norse alphabet'. It should further be noted that the shape of the only actual occurrence of the *d*-rune in the two manuscripts of the treatise, characterized by the dot placed in the interstice between the stave and the twig, is rare in both Icelandic and Danish inscriptions, while it is typical of Norwegian runes.

### 2.2.9 † = z

The relation of this letter with the *s*-rune († / †) has been discussed above (§ 2.2.4). As regards its phonemic values, /ds/ or /ts/, these are precisely the two values attributed by Óláfr to the symbol in question, which, as already noted, is a variant of the *s*-rune, with a name of its own (*knésól* 'kneeling sun'). Óláfr implicitly

identifies this symbol with the Latin letter *z*, when, in reference to it, he states that *z hefir náttúruliga í sér tveggja stafa hljóð, d ok s, eða t ok s* (Wills 2001:88 [§ 4.7]).<sup>17</sup> However, relying on our extended knowledge of Icelandic historical phonology, we can assert that *z* — and, consequently, the rune  $\text{h}$  in Óláfr's treatise — could stand for any combination of a dental consonant + /s/, i.e. /ds/, /ts/, and /ps/ (mostly spelled *ðs*). The only example of  $\text{h}$  supplied by Óláfr is in the runic pangram, namely in the word  $\Psi\text{tt}\text{h}$  *mannz*, where it stands for (epenthetic) /d/ + /s/ after the alveolar /n/ (see further below, § 4.4.3).

#### 2.2.10 $\text{þ} = \emptyset$ (i.e. *e+o*) and $\rho$

Like other vowel ligatures mentioned by Óláfr, this ligature is also described as formally corresponding to a Latin diphthong, namely *eo* (cf. Raschellà 1994: 685–686 and 2000: 385 ff.). This is in fact the earliest type of notation for the vowels /ø/ and /ø:/ in Icelandic manuscript writing.<sup>18</sup> It is important to note, however, that this ligature is shown to have a further correspondence with Icelandic manuscript writing in A, where the Icelandic letter  $\rho$  is added (by the same hand) above the notation *eo*. This is in all likelihood a sign that the runic symbol  $\text{þ}$  could represent, at least in the Icelandic of Óláfr's time, two different phonemic values: /ø:/ (spelled  $\emptyset$ , from an original *eo*) and /ö/ (spelled  $\rho$ ).<sup>19</sup>

The first occurrence of this ligature is found in A's version of the runic pangram, in the word  $\text{þ}\widehat{\text{P}}\text{h}\widehat{\text{ok}}$ , where it is merged into a bind rune with the following  $\text{P}$ . W's reading for the same word is  $\text{þ}\text{P}\text{hok}$ , with  $\text{þ}$  in place of  $\text{þ}$  (see below, § 4.4.4 for more details). Unfortunately, Óláfr's commentary on the pangram stops after the first word ( $\text{KR}\text{þ}\text{P}\text{sprængd}$ ), so that this letter is not further dealt with.

#### 2.2.11 $\text{f} = \text{v}$ (i.e. *a+u*)

Regarding the phonological entity represented by this ligature, a monophthongal value /ö/, although theoretically possible, appears, in the context of our treatise, quite improbable (for a discussion on this point, see Raschellà *forthc.*: 14–15). Björn Magnússon Ólsen himself (1883:87–88), who assumed that the ligature  $\text{f}$  represented the value /ø/ (something in which he was followed by later commentators), observed that no notation of this kind is attested with such a value in

17. 'z has by nature the sound of two letters in itself: *d* and *s*, or *t* and *s*'.

18. See Hreinn Benediktsson 1965: 28, 58, where the probable English provenance of this notation is also stressed.

19. For more detailed information on this point, I refer to a study of mine written some years ago but regrettably still waiting for publication: Raschellà *forthc.*: 15–16 (references are to the pages of the manuscript). A pdf copy of the manuscript can be obtained on request by writing to my email address (see bibliographical references below).

Icelandic runic inscriptions. This fact is confirmed by the absence of relevant evidence in Bæksted's corpus, where, on the contrary, we find an instance of ʀ representing the diphthong /au/, namely in ʀʀʀ olāus 'Olaus', the Latinized form of the Icelandic name *Ólafur* (from earlier *Óláfr*), contained in a 17th-century inscription (Bæksted 1942: 231). Evidence for the diphthongal value of ʀ is also provided by Norwegian inscriptions (where the most frequent notation for /q/ is ʀ,<sup>20</sup> although sporadic occurrences of ʀ are also attested), inscription no. 1 in Atrå Church (*Atrå Kirke I*; ca. 1180), for example, where the word Rʀʀ| rāuþi 'red' occurs (Olsen et al. 1941–1990/II: 195).<sup>21</sup> Danish inscriptions present very few occurrences of a ligature *āu*, most of which have a diphthongal value,<sup>22</sup> but they frequently attest to the use of the digraph *au* to denote, besides the diphthong /au/, the labial umlaut of /a/, i.e. /q/ (as in *tanmaurk* = *Danmørk* 'Denmark', found in the Jelling stone 2, dated 965–970)<sup>23</sup> or even /ø/ (as in *bausa* = *Bøsa* 'Bøsi' pers. name (acc.), occurring in the Nylarsker stone 2, dated 1075–1125).<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, Óláfr does not mention any examples of words containing this ligature in his discussion, so that it is impossible for us to establish the value he assigned to it with absolute certainty.

#### 2.2.12 † = ey

The runic symbol (also a 'ligature', like the preceding two) corresponding to the diphthong /ey/ is found only in A (2v:28). It is omitted in W, where only the Latin equivalent, spelled *æy*, is given. A's notation is, among other things, the sole Icelandic witness of this use of the symbol † (Bæksted 1942: 51), which, as noted earlier, is identical to one of the symbols used, in the same manuscript, for the

20. See Spurkland 2005: 152 for more details.

21. In Norwegian runic texts we also find for the same diphthong the variant ʀ ōu, as in inscription no. 1 in Vinje Church (*Vinje Kirke I*; ca. 1200), where the form ʀʀʀ R lōuġar, the first element of *lougardagen* 'Saturday', is attested (Olsen et al. 1941–1990/II: 266–267; cf. Spurkland 2005: 171–173). Instances of ʀ for both /au/ and /q/ are found in inscription no. 2 in Vinje Church (*Vinje Kirke II*; Olsen et al. 1941–1990/II: 270–271).

22. There are less than a dozen medieval inscriptions, for the most part limestone carvings, either of uncertain reading or illegible. The most notable item is the 13th-century Svendborg knife handle (Dan. *Svendborg-knivskaft*), which contains the word *āu* = *ō* 'on' (Danske Runeindskrifter, online at: <http://runer.ku.dk/VisGenstand.aspx?Titel=Svendborg-knivskaft>; cf. Jacobsen & Moltke 1941–1942/II: 898, 946), but its reading is extremely doubtful. In any case, the ligature denotes here a monophthongal value.

23. Dan. *Jelling-sten 2*: Danske Runeindskrifter, online at: [http://runer.ku.dk/VisGenstand.aspx?Titel=Jelling-sten\\_2](http://runer.ku.dk/VisGenstand.aspx?Titel=Jelling-sten_2); cf. Jacobsen & Moltke 1941–1942/II: 946.

24. Dan. *Nylarsker-sten 2*: Danske Runeindskrifter, online at: [http://runer.ku.dk/VisGenstand.aspx?Titel=Nylarsker-sten\\_2](http://runer.ku.dk/VisGenstand.aspx?Titel=Nylarsker-sten_2); cf. Jacobsen & Moltke 1941–1942/II: 946.

vowel /e/ (both short and long). It remains that the loop is slightly larger, but the overall appearance of the two symbols is basically the same. Such an astonishing and puzzling coincidence is possibly due to the miscopying of this ligature in the course of manuscript transmission, but the possibility cannot be excluded that it may have already existed in the original of the treatise. In the latter case, a connection would emerge with certain 12th-century Norwegian and Orcadian inscriptions, where the symbol in question is used to express the diphthong /øy/ (Olsen 1933: 101; Bæksted 1942: 51; Spurkland 1991: 143–146 and 2005: 145; cf. Raschellà *forthc.*: 11–12, fn. 28). There was, however, a fundamental difference between the Norwegian and the Icelandic notational system. While the common Norwegian rune for /e/ was  $\dagger$  — and was therefore clearly distinct from  $\ddagger$  —, in Icelandic runic inscriptions the same vowel was denoted, with comparable frequency, by the symbols  $\ddagger$  and  $\dagger$ , the former of which coincides with the symbol used for the diphthong /ey/ in manuscript A. The typically Norwegian variant  $\dagger$  is not totally unknown to Icelandic inscriptions, but it is rarely found (Bæksted 1942: 39). It is therefore more likely that Óláfr used a different symbol either for /e/ or for /ey/. A plausible conjecture here, as previously mentioned (§ 2.2.3), is that he used the Norwegian type  $\dagger$  for /e/, and that this symbol was later replaced with  $\ddagger$  by a negligent copyist, who inadvertently caused a graphemic conflict with the notation for the diphthong /ey/ (cf. also Bæksted 1942: 51). Finnur Jónsson (1927: 30, l. 8) apparently prefers to assume a corruption of the original symbol for /ey/ and, without commenting on his choice, emends it into a new ligature formed by superimposing the symbols  $\dagger$  (e) and  $\mathfrak{h}$  (y), a notation which has the disadvantage of being totally unknown to runic tradition, both Icelandic and non-Icelandic.

### 3. The alphabet type: Models and elaboration

3.1 Óláfr does not mention the total number of the letters in the ‘Norse alphabet’, but does tell us that there are sixteen letter names, thus giving us indirect information about their number: *Stafanoþn eru sextán í nórænni tungu í þá líking sem Girkir hófðu forðum daga, en þó eru merkingar þeira miklu fleiri* (Wills 2001: 84 [§ 3.2]).<sup>25</sup> So A (followed by Finnur Jónsson 1927 and Wills 2001); W (followed by Björn Magnússon Ólsen 1884) has *í danskri tungu*, literally ‘in the Danish language’, instead of *í nórænni tungu*.

The glottonyms *nóræna* and *danska* were used side by side as synonyms for ‘Nordic (language)’ all through the Middle Ages and were still virtually equivalent

25. ‘There are sixteen letter names in the Norse language, just as the Greeks had in ancient times, but the values [of the letters] they denote are many more.’

in Óláfr's time.<sup>26</sup> It is therefore clear that Óláfr is referring here to the composition of the original, 'Pan-Scandinavian', 16-rune *fuþark*, prior to the addition of the new symbols (derived from the pre-existent ones) that would gradually turn it into the extended 'medieval' runic alphabet described by Óláfr.<sup>27</sup> In no way is the term *ðönsk tunga* to be understood, in the passage in question, as specifically referring to the Danish language — even if, as we will see below, Danish is necessarily involved in the interpretation of Valdemar's runic pangram. In any case, the only adjective used by Óláfr in the continuation of this part of the treatise to designate the runic alphabet and the Norse language is *nórænn*.

Discarding the hypothesis, strongly supported by Björn Magnússon Ólsen (1883) but rejected by most scholars, that the runic alphabet described in Óláfr's treatise is the product of a 12th-century Icelandic reform of the basic 16-symbol *fuþark*, my overall impression — which I will substantiate in the following discussion — is that it was originally modelled on the medieval Danish runic alphabet and then adapted to the needs of Icelandic orthography, a process which also implied the addition of new symbols. To this end Óláfr availed himself of the Norwegian model, since Norwegian, being virtually one language with Icelandic, offered the most appropriate solutions. This view is hinted at in Olsen's remarks (1933: 104) concerning the comparison of the 13th-/14th-century Norwegian runic alphabet with the runes in Óláfr's treatise. More explicit are, in this regard, Bæksted's words at the end of his discussion of the relationships between the Icelandic and the Norwegian runes:

[...] den middelalderlige islandske runeskrift, saa direkte som tænkeligt er, er overført fra de unge middelalderlige norske runer, i forhold til hvilke de islandske hurtigt kommer til at represæntere et yngre trin med visse paa stedet særligt udviklede former.<sup>28</sup> (Bæksted 1942: 52)

26. For a basic survey of their history and use, see Kjartan Ottósson 2002: 789–790; see also, especially for the possible origin of the term *ðönsk tunga*, Karker 1993: 59–60.

27. The term 'runic alphabet' is preferable to 'fuþark' in referring to the medieval runic writing. The reason for this is that the letters it was composed of corresponded closely, both in number and value, to the equivalent letters of the Latin alphabet, including the supplementary or modified letters that were added to the original Latin alphabet to denote sounds and phonemes foreign to standard Latin (cf. Moltke 1976: 25). Their sequence was also, as a rule, the same as in the Latin alphabet. For a comprehensive picture of the medieval Danish runic alphabet, displaying all the basic variants of the single runes (in a normalized form), see the summary tables in Brøndum-Nielsen 1950–1973/I: 60 and Moltke 1976: 26.

28. '[...] the medieval Icelandic runic writing is derived, as far as is directly conceivable, from the young medieval Norwegian runes, of which the Icelandic ones soon come to represent a younger stage with certain special, locally developed, forms.'



However, the position of the two scholars needs to be further developed and documented. That is precisely what I will do in the next paragraphs.

3.2 Although Óláfr is clearly concerned with a variety of the medieval runic alphabet, the remote starting point of his discussion on runes seems to be a Danish 16-symbol fuþark (sometimes referred to as ‘fuþork’)<sup>29</sup> of the short-twig type, such as that displayed, for example, on the Schleswig bone fragment (Dan. *Slesvig benstykke*) 5 (11th century).<sup>30</sup> Apart from the addition of dotted runes and vowel ligatures, the most conspicuous difference between Óláfr’s runes and the Schleswig fuþark lies in the shape of the *o*-rune, which is short-twigged (𐌺) in Óláfr, but unexpectedly long-branched (𐌺) in the Schleswig inscription. Óláfr, additionally, makes use of two different *s*-types, <sup>1</sup> and <sup>h</sup>, each with its own sound value (see above, § 2.2.4), while the Schleswig series shows, of course, only one type of *s*, <sup>h</sup>, characteristic of the Danish fuþark and in all likelihood the older type. It should be further observed that a 16-rune fuþark closely corresponding to that at the base of Óláfr’s runic alphabet occurs in some Norwegian inscriptions from the late-10th and 11th centuries. This was a mixture of Swedish-Norwegian and Danish fuþarks, which, because of its early age, is known as ‘older Norwegian runic writing’ (‘eldre norske runeskrift’, Olsen 1933:84 and Olsen et al. 1941–1990/V: 242–243; cf. Haugen 1976:147). With regard to the short-twig variants of the Danish fuþark, Moltke (1976:23) observes that the typically Swedish-Norwegian short-twig fuþark not only influenced the shape of some letters of the Danish fuþark during the Viking Age, but also played a major role in the establishment of the later Danish runic alphabet (ca. 1050–1350). Regarding the absolute origin of the Scandinavian extended runic alphabets, Haugen (1976:147–150)<sup>31</sup> points out that both the practice of dotting the runes to denote structurally related phonemes and that of distinguishing the umlaut vowels from the corresponding unmutated vowels on a regular basis date, at least as far as Denmark is concerned, to the early 11th century. However, it does not seem that a complete system of dotted

29. This alternative name, used for example by Moltke (1976:25 ff.), is due to the fact that the fourth letter of the older fuþark, the so-called *ansuz*-rune, which in Viking Age Nordic denoted a nasal /ã/, in the 11th century gradually changed its value to /õ/ and finally to /o/ (cf. Haugen 1976:147). This explains, among other things, the name *óss* attached to the second vowel rune mentioned by Óláfr in his treatise.

30. Danske Runeindskrifter, online at: [http://runer.ku.dk/VisGenstand.aspx?Titel=Slesvig-benstykke\\_5](http://runer.ku.dk/VisGenstand.aspx?Titel=Slesvig-benstykke_5); Moltke 1976:327, 383–384.

31. Haugen’s renowned book on the history of the Scandinavian languages has also been published in a revised and enlarged German translation by Magnús Pétursson (Haugen 1984). For practical reasons, references to Haugen’s work in the present study are limited to the original English edition (1976), given that the two versions are equivalent in the passages referred to.

runes was accomplished before the 12th century (cf. Knirk 2002: 642). Moreover, Haugen (*ibid.*) indicates the end of the 12th century as the time of completion of the process of matching the fuþark with the Latin alphabet.

3.3 On the basis of the analysis of the single runic symbols carried out in the commentary to Table 1, together with the above remarks about the evolution of runic writing in Scandinavia, particularly in Denmark and Norway, from the initial 16-symbol fuþark to the various regional runic alphabets, I believe that the preliminary thesis that the runic alphabet as described in Óláfr's treatise is the result of an adaptation of a variant of the medieval Danish runic alphabet to a basically Norwegian type of runic alphabet may be reasonably confirmed. The following features, in particular, can be taken as evidence of this process:

- a. The distribution of the symbols  $\text{ᚱ}$  /  $\text{ᚲ}$  and  $\text{ᚷ}$  for *s* and *z* respectively (see above, §§ 2.2.4, 2.2.9), in accordance with the Norwegian rather than with the Danish model.
- b. The typically Norwegian shape  $\text{ᚳ}$  of the *d*-rune (§ 2.2.8), sporadic in Danish (as well as in Icelandic) inscriptions.
- c. The apparently ambivalent use of the ligature  $\text{ᚳ}$   $\text{æ}$  — an already infrequent symbol in Icelandic runic inscriptions — to denote both / $\text{æ}:/$  and /*e*/ (the latter, normally rendered with the dotted *i*-rune), i.e. as an equivalent of both Latin *æ* and *e* (§ 2.2.6). The use of  $\text{ᚳ}$  to denote 'the open e-sound ( $\text{æ}$ )'<sup>32</sup> was typical of Danish medieval inscriptions, but in Óláfr it also seems to be influenced to some extent by Norwegian manuscript writing. This will be better explained below (§ 4.4.2).
- d. The phonemic value assigned to the ligature  $\text{ᚳ}$   $\text{o}$ , which in the Icelandic vowel system educible from Óláfr's discussion of the runic alphabet could represent two different phonemes: / $\text{o}:/$  and / $\text{ö}/$  (§ 2.2.10). In Icelandic runic inscriptions, the umlaut vowels / $\text{ö}/$  and / $\text{o}:/$  were as a rule denoted by  $\text{ᚳ}$   $\text{o}$ , the same symbol used for / $\text{o}(:)/$ , while in Norwegian inscriptions they were kept clearly distinct, with  $\text{ᚳ}$  as the normal symbol for / $\text{o}(:)/$  and  $\text{ᚳ}$  as the normal symbol for / $\text{o}(:)/$ . This issue will be discussed in more detail below (§ 4.4.4).
- e. The apparently diphthongal value of the ligature  $\text{ᚳ}$   $\text{a}$  (§ 2.2.11). This ligature is relatively infrequent in both Danish and Norwegian inscriptions; however, in most cases it denotes a diphthongal value. It seems, therefore, that, whatever his direct model, Óláfr found in this ligature the most effective means to represent the Icelandic diphthong /*au*/.
- f. The presence of a special ligature,  $\text{ᚳ}$ , for the diphthong /*ey*/ (§ 2.2.12). Apart from the puzzling question of its formal coincidence with the rune for /*e*/,

32. "den åbne e-lyd ( $\text{æ}$ )": Jacobsen & Moltke 1941–1942/II: 981.

this symbol, totally unknown to Danish inscriptions (medieval Danish had no such diphthong), is attested, although very poorly, from the Norwegian and Orcadian areas. Thus it is most likely that Óláfr took this notation from Norwegian runic writing.

3.4 Below is a synthetic overview, in two tables (nos. 2 and 3), of the composition of the runic alphabet described in Óláfr's grammatical treatise. Table 2 represents the alphabet as handed down by the two manuscripts of the treatise and therefore includes all attested variants of the runes that compose it. Table 3 offers, on the basis of the indications emerging from the above discussion, a reconstruction of the presumable form of Óláfr's runic alphabet as it would have appeared in the original version of the treatise.

Table 2. Óláfr's runic alphabet according to manuscript readings

ƿ	ᚋ	ᚑ	ᚔ	ᚕ	ƿ	ƿ	*	ᚖ	ᚗ	᚛~᚜	᚝	᚞~᚟
f	u	p	o	r	k	g	h	n	i	e	a	s
ᚠ	ᚡ	ᚢ	ᚣ	ᚤ	ᚥ	ᚦ	ᚧ~ᚨ	ᚩ	ᚪ	ᚫ	ᚬ	ᚭ
z	t	d	b	p	m	l	γ	æ	ø q	āu	ēy	

Table 3. Óláfr's runic alphabet in its presumed original form

ƿ	ᚋ	ᚑ	ᚔ	ᚕ	ƿ	ƿ	*	ᚖ	ᚗ	᚛	᚝	᚞
f	u	p	o	r	k	g	h	n	i	e	a	s
ᚠ	ᚡ	ᚢ	ᚣ	ᚤ	ᚥ	ᚦ	ᚧ	ᚩ	ᚪ	ᚫ	ᚬ	ᚭ
z	t	d	b	p	m	l	γ	æ	ø q	āu	ēy	

On the basis of the graphemic typology of its components, the alphabet can be internally divided as follows:

1. Basic symbols, mostly derived from a Danish 16-symbol fuþark of the short-twig type:<sup>33</sup> ƿ, ᚋ, ᚑ, ᚔ, ᚕ, ƿ, \*, ᚖ, ᚗ, ᚛, ᚝, ᚞, ᚟, ᚠ, ᚡ, ᚢ, ᚣ, ᚤ, ᚥ, ᚦ, ᚧ.
2. Derived symbols, obtained by dotting (ƿ, ᚛, ᚝)<sup>34</sup> or reshaping (ᚫ) basic symbols, or else by using secondary variants of basic symbols with a Norwegian value (ᚠ).

33. Only the symbol ᚞, in this first group, is taken from the short-twig Norwegian fuþark (cf. above, § 2.2.4).

34. The shape of the *e*-rune, ᚛, is conjecturally restored according to the considerations set out above, § 2.2.3.

3. Compound symbols (i.e. ligatures obtained by combining or modifying basic symbols), partly inherited from the Danish and/or Norwegian runic tradition (†, ‡, †) and partly of uncertain origin (†).

#### 4. King Valdemar's runic pangram. A runological and linguistic investigation

4.1 Further substantial help in identifying the original type of runic alphabet used by Óláfr as a model for his description of the 'Norse alphabet' together with the modifications he introduced in order to conform it to the Icelandic runographic standard of his time, can be derived from the investigation of a short text, written in runic characters (Wills 2001: 88 [§ 4.5]; cf. Figures 1–2 and Table 4 below), which Óláfr reports having learned from the Danish king Valdemar<sup>35</sup> during his stay at the king's court in 1240–41 (see Björn Magnússon Ólsen 1884: xxxiv–xxxv and Finnur Jónsson 1927: 6–7). This text, a sentence containing (originally at least) all the letters of the runic alphabet, has been given a variety of names in the relevant literature.<sup>36</sup> Since this particular type of sentence has a name of its own in linguistic terminology, i.e. *pangram*, it seems most appropriate to call the text under discussion (*Valdemar's*) *runic pangram*, which also has the advantage of being a neutral label, with no other implications with regard to its function. As for Óláfr himself, he uses the generic expression *skjótt orðtæki* 'short utterance', a term virtually equivalent to 'sentence', as we will see below.

The pangram is introduced by Óláfr with these words: *Þessa stafir ok þeirra merkingar compileraði minn herra Valdimarr [Dana]<sup>37</sup> konungr með skjótu orðtæki á þessa lund: [...]* (Wills 2001: 88 [§ 4.5]), which can be roughly translated as follows: 'These letters and (all) their values were arranged by my lord King Valdemar [of Denmark] into a short sentence in this way: [...]'. What Óláfr essentially means by this statement is that the sentence, presumably purpose-built by the Danish king, contains, besides the basic symbols of the 16-rune fuþark, all the variants

35. Valdemar II Sejr ('the Victorious'), 1202–1241 (b. 1170).

36. E.g. *Valdemarske runeskema* 'Valdemarian rune scheme' (Björn Magnússon Ólsen 1883: 75), *(kong) Valdermars (rune)sætning* '(king) Valdemar's (runic) sentence' (Finnur Jónsson 1910: 296–297; Bæksted 1942: 19 ff. and 216 ff.), *mnemonic sentence* (Haugen 1976: 194 = *mnemotechnischer Satz*, Haugen [transl. by Magnús Pétursson] 1984: 245–246); *(Waldemar-) Runen(merk)satz* '(Valdemar's) (mnemonic) runic sentence' (Krömmelbein 1998: 10, 65 fn. 3), *runic formula* (Wills 2001: Introd. 35 [§ 3.4.2], but *word-formula* in the English translation: 89 [§ 4.5], *phrase* [mostly] and *sentence* [once] in the Commentary: 128 [§ 3.2.2]).

37. Only in W.

of the same runes that express sound values different from those of the respective basic symbols (in particular, dotted runes and ligatures). However, on closer examination, we notice that the pangram includes all runic letters, both vowels and consonants, previously mentioned by Óláfr except the dotted variant of | i, representing *e*, and the vowel ligatures ('diphthongs') ʃ a and † ey. The absence of the rune for *e* could be due to the fact that both occurrences of | in the sentence are in an unstressed (word-final) position, where the phonological opposition between /i/ and /e/ was neutralized and that, consequently, there was no strict need for graphic distinction (cf. below, § 4.4.5). As for the absence of the vowel ligatures, it could signify either that these letter combinations were alien to the orthographic system on the basis of which the sentence was originally composed, or that they were not regarded as standard symbols in common runographic practice. In this context, it is important to recall what Bæksted (1942:20) observes with regard to these vowel ligatures in Icelandic runic writing: "Forøvrigt er denne specielle betegnelse af diftongerne helt ukendt i de islandske indskifter († har altid lydverdien e eller é)"<sup>38</sup>; and, further on, where he notes (*ibid.*, 48): "Specielle tegn for diftongerne er ikke brugt i indskrifterne, heller ikke i form af binderuner."<sup>39</sup>

According to Björn Magnússon Ólsen (1883:75), Valdemar's runic pangram "i alt væsentligt stemmer med det udviklingstrin, hvorpå runealfabetet befandt sig i Danmark ved midten af det 13. århundrede"<sup>40</sup>. Closely connected with this statement are his remarks concerning the two chapters on runes in Óláfr's treatise (*ibid.*): "medens det første stykke væsentlig går ud fra det gamle uforandrede 16 runers alfabet, så peger det sidste i dobbelt henseende ud over dette, nemlig dels ved nye tegn for konsonanter, dels ved runediftongerne."<sup>41</sup> and the addition of new consonant symbols in particular (*ibid.*, 75–76): "Hvad de nye konsonanter angår, så kan der ikke være tvivl om, at de skyldes Olafs danske og ikke hans islandske kilde."<sup>42</sup>

38. 'Moreover, this particular notation of the diphthongs is completely unknown in the Icelandic inscriptions († always has the sound value e or é).'

39. 'Special signs are not used for the diphthongs in the inscriptions, not even in the form of bind runes.'

40. 'agrees in all essentials with the stage of development of the runic alphabet in Denmark in the middle of the 13th century.'

41. 'while the first part is essentially based on the old unchanged 16-rune alphabet, the last part goes beyond it in a twofold way, i.e. partly with new signs for the consonants and partly with runic diphthongs.'

42. 'As regards the new consonants, they are no doubt to be ascribed to Olaf's Danish source, not to the Icelandic one.' (On Björn's view about the sources of Óláfr's treatise, see above, § 1.2.)

Considering the historical circumstances in which Óláfr learned the runic pangram, there is every reason to believe that the original text was composed in Danish, i.e. King Valdemar's own language,<sup>43</sup> and using the contemporary Danish runic alphabet, of a type very close to that found in the so-called *Codex Runicus* of the Scanian Law (Dan. *Skånske Lov*; ca. 1300).<sup>44</sup> This view is shared, more or less overtly, by the greater part of those commentators who have expressed themselves on the language of the sentence.<sup>45</sup> As we have seen above, even Björn Magnússon Ólsen, despite his theory that the runic alphabet described by Óláfr is ultimately the product of an earlier Icelandic runic reform, does not question the original Danish formulation of the sentence. Bæksted's opinion is in (partial) disagreement with this: he maintains (1942: 20 with fn. 2) that the Danish king in all likelihood composed the pangram using exactly the same runes that appear in Óláfr's treatise, i.e. the Norwegian-Icelandic runes.

There is, however, one more hypothesis, put forward by Olsen (1933: 104), which in my opinion is more plausible than those reported above. The Norwegian scholar, although taking for granted that Valdemar's runic pangram preserves its original Danish formulation, casts doubts on the idea that it includes all the runic letters taught by King Valdemar to Óláfr and none else besides. Rather, he maintains that some of the original letter shapes (and the corresponding sound values) would have been replaced by Óláfr with 13th-century (Norwegian-) Icelandic runes. This is perfectly in line with what has been repeatedly argued above (§ 3). The strong affinity of the runic alphabet described by Óláfr with medieval Norwegian runic writing is undeniable.<sup>46</sup>

43. According to Brøndum-Nielsen's (1950–1973/I: 9) and Skautrup's (1944: vi) standard periodization of Danish, the language spoken by king Valdemar must have belonged to some variety of Older Middle Danish (Dan. *ældre middeldansk*), i.e. to the phase of Danish in the period between 1100 and 1350. Skautrup (*ibid.*: 182) also employs the label *Valdemarstiden* 'Valdemar's age' to refer to the culminating and most characterizing part of this period.

44. Manuscript AM 28 8vo; for thorough description, see Kålund 1892–1894: 344.

45. See, for example, Finnur Jónsson 1927: 6: "han anfører en (dansk) sætning, 'kompilet, d. v. s. lavet, af kongen selv 'min herre'" ('he quotes a (Danish) sentence "compiled", i.e. prepared, by the king himself "my lord"').

46. In more general terms, it must be observed that a close connection existed between the Icelandic and the medieval Norwegian runes, a fact that is also emphasized by Bæksted (1942: 48–52). By comparing some representative instances in the two writing systems, the Danish scholar comes to the conclusion that divergences between the two systems are almost invariably due to modifications of Norwegian runes that have occurred in the Icelandic system. This applies in particular to the runes for *d*, *e*, *s*, and *y*, whose Icelandic 'normal shape' ("normalform") is different from that of the corresponding normal Norwegian runes, while typically Norwegian forms occur for the same runes in Icelandic texts as 'special shapes' ("særformer").

4.2 Although often mentioned in studies on medieval Icelandic grammatical literature and Icelandic runes, Valdemar's runic pangram has rarely been the object of special attention. In most cases it has been hastily set aside as devoid of any logical sense or (for us moderns) as incomprehensible.<sup>47</sup> Among the authors who have dealt with it in some detail, only Finnur Jónsson (1927:29 fn. 4), Raschellà (1994:683–687), Krömmelbein (1998:65 fn. 3), and Wills (2001: Ed. and transl. 89 [§ 4.5]; Comm. 128 [§ 3.2.2]) have, to my knowledge, attempted an interpretation of the sentence, and in their case have only done so partially and without conclusive results. Not even Björn Magnússon Ólsen (1883:75–79) and Bæksted (1942:19–20, 215–217), who also devoted considerable space to the formal analysis of the sentence, ventured into the puzzle of its meaning. I will briefly mention and comment on the results achieved by these scholars further below (§ 4.5), after presenting my own analysis of the sentence.

The following examination of the runic pangram does not merely or principally aim to shed light on the admittedly obscure meaning of the sentence, but rather to corroborate the thesis that it was originally composed in Danish and written with Danish, not Icelandic, runes — as its attribution to the Danish monarch leads us to believe — and that it basically preserves its original character in its actual form.

4.3 The text of the pangram differs slightly from one manuscript to the other. Both the facsimile reproductions (Figures 1 and 2) and the transliteration (Table 4) of the sentence in the two manuscripts (which will serve as the basis for the subsequent discussion) are provided below. Table 4 also includes other textual information, as explained in the commentary accompanying the table.



Figure 1. AM 748 Ib 4to (= A), f. 2v l. 14



Figure 2. AM 242 fol. (= W), p. 97 l. 3

In fact, only one symbol,  $\uparrow y$ , is exclusive to Icelandic runes and completely unknown to the Norwegian system.

47. For example, by Bæksted (1942:216): “for os ganske vist uforstaaelig” (‘for us actually incomprehensible’), Skautrup 1944:193: “en kort — for os uforståelig — sætning [...], der måske oprindeligt har haft magisk sigte” (‘a short, for us incomprehensible, sentence [...], which maybe originally had a magic aim’), and Haugen (1976:194): “the meaning is unclear”.





be ‘typologically younger’ (“typologisk yngre”) than that of W, a conclusion which will be further reinforced by the following analysis.

4.4 Before introducing the runic text, Óláfr provides a transcription of the sentence in Latin characters, but he adds no comments of his own. This is probably an indication that the meaning of the sentence was clear to both him and his potential readers, despite the fact that it was obviously not an Icelandic text. Even though, as we shall see, the evidence is strongly in favour of the interpretation of the pangram as a Danish text, I will nonetheless also consider the possibility of reading at least the individual words of the sentence as components of a potential Icelandic text. What is evident, in any case, is that the sentence — far from being some kind of conventional text like a proverb, a saying or an esoteric formula<sup>48</sup> — has a purely mnemonic purpose, its only function being to collect all of the letters of the runic alphabet in a grammatically correct and internally consistent utterance.<sup>49</sup>

#### 4.4.1 𐀓𐀔𐀕𐀖 flydi / 𐀓𐀔𐀕𐀖 flyþi

The most convenient point from which to start our analysis is what appears to be the only verbal form contained in the sentence, *flydi* (in A) or *flyþi* (in W), since it is crucial for determining the meaning and the syntactic function of the other elements in the sentence.

Both variants of this word, although differing in the notation of the root vowel and of the intervocalic consonant, correspond, in terms of Latin writing, to the normalized Old Icelandic spelling *flyði*, which is actually the way they are transcribed in both manuscripts (apart from the absence of the accent mark on *y* denoting vowel length).

In Icelandic runic texts, the voiced dental spirant [ð], an allophone of /þ/, is invariably denoted, like the corresponding plosive [d], by some variant of the dotted *t*-rune (Bæksted 1942: 38–39). However, the form this rune takes in our treatise (see above, § 2.2.8) does not fall within the range of the usual Icelandic variants, but belongs rather to the most common Norwegian type (Olsen et al. 1941–1990/V: 244; see also the synoptic table in Bæksted 1942: 50). The notation of [ð] by means of þ, which is the norm in Norwegian and Danish inscriptions, is virtually unknown in Icelandic runic writing.<sup>50</sup> From this it could be inferred that

48. See, however Bæksted’s view in this regard, mentioned below, § 4.5.

49. Sentences of this type are known in virtually all languages that use an alphabetic writing, English included (cf. Wills 2001: Comm. 128 [§ 3.2.2]).

50. Apart from the occurrence in manuscript W of Óláfr’s treatise, the apparently sole instance of þ for [ð] is attested in one of the earliest inscriptions found on Icelandic soil, the 12th-century Indriðastaðir wooden spade (Bæksted 1942: 208–211; Þórgunnur Snædal 1998: 18 and

the spelling *flyþi* in W either continues a presumably Danish original or is due to the influence of Norwegian runic orthography. This does, in fact, seem to be the case, when one considers that *flyþi* contains the only occurrence of the rune þ in the runic pangram and that the sentence is clearly meant to include all letters of the runic alphabet. This being so, it necessarily follows that the apparently Danish-Norwegian spelling *flyþi* is the only correct spelling, i.e. the form closer to the original version of the sentence.

Regarding the two different shapes of the *y*-rune, A offers, as previously observed (§ 2.2.2), the typically Icelandic notation  $\uparrow$ , while W presents the continental variant  $\text{h}$ , which, like the spelling  $\text{þ}$  in *flyþi*, is to be viewed either as the legacy of a Danish original or the imitation of the Norwegian model. Björn Magnússon Ólsen (1883: 82), although admitting that it is impossible to establish which of the two variants Óláfr actually used, considers it likely that Óláfr's source had  $\text{h}$ , i.e. the Danish and older type. I am also inclined to share Björn's view.

Some considerations concerning the final  $\text{i}$  will be added in connection with the discussion of the word *toui* ~ *tuui* (see below, § 4.4.5).

Summing up the evidence above, we can conclude with reasonable confidence that W preserves the original, presumably Danish, spelling of this word more faithfully, while A adapts it to the standard of contemporary Icelandic runic writing. The inverse hypothesis — that Óláfr's original spelling is preserved in A and is replaced with a 'continental' spelling in W — is quite improbable.

With regard to the possible meaning(s) of the word, it is necessary to work, for this as for the other lexical elements of the sentence, on two distinct reference grounds, trying first to propose an Icelandic interpretation and then a Danish one.

In Icelandic, the form *flyði* can only be the 3rd pers. sg. preterite indicative of the verb *flyja*, which, depending on whether it assumes an intransitive or a transitive function, means either 'to flee, run away' or 'to flee sb./sth.'

When interpreting it as Danish, a normalized form *flythe* should be posited as the basis of our analysis.<sup>51</sup> This is the (arguably 3rd pers.) sing. preterite indicative of two weak verbs, *fly* and *flyje*, whose paradigms partially coincide (Brøndum-Nielsen 1950–1973/VII: 173, 404 and VIII: 333). *Fly*, which corresponds to the

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2000–2001:40). On the other hand, the absence of typically Icelandic features and the possible influence of Norwegian runic writing suggest that the inscription is not genuinely Icelandic (Bæksted 1942:210–211).

51. Other possible spellings would be *flythæ*, *flydhe*, *flyde*, *flyþi* (the last as in W) and still others (see Brøndum-Nielsen 1950–1973/VIII: 173). Unless quoting from a specific source, I will here adopt the normalized spelling used in *Gammeldansk ordbog*. For the meaning of words, I will mostly rely on Kalkar 1881–1976, because *Gammeldansk ordbog* does not, for the moment, provide translations for all entries.

meanings ‘to arrange, fit out, repair, restore’ and the like (Kalkar 1881–1976/I: 569–570 and V: 257, s.v. *fly* [2]), is, according to Brøndum-Nielsen (1950–1973/VII: 404), a ‘late loanword’ (“yngre Laaneord”) from Middle Low German *vli(g)en*. For this reason, its presence in a mid-13th-century Danish text such as Valdemar’s runic pangram seems rather improbable, although it cannot be excluded *a priori*. *Flyje* has approximately the same range of meanings as the aforementioned Icel. *flyja*, i.e. ‘to flee, run away (from sb./sth.)’; to which, in case of transitive use, the meaning ‘to drive away, chase away’ is added (Kalkar 1881–1976/I: 569 and V: 257, s.v. *fly* (*flyge*)). In order to establish which of the two verbs better fits the present context, we first need to examine the other words in the sentence.

#### 4.4.2 ‘KR†H†1 sprængd

The transcription of this word is *sprængd* in A, but *sprengd* in W. The use of *æ* for *e*, alone or as a component of the digraphs *æi* and *æy*, is typical of Norwegian orthography and is found in 13th- and 14th-century Icelandic manuscripts which are in some way influenced by Norwegian scribal conventions (Seip 1954: 96, 141; Hreinn Benediktsson 1965: 58). It should also be noted that in medieval Norwegian inscriptions there are several instances of † *æ* as a notation for /e/, especially as the first element of the digraph † *æi*.<sup>52</sup> Considering that the spelling *æ* is frequently used in A, in place of or besides *e*, to denote the vowel /e/ (both short and long),<sup>53</sup> and that no word with the same phonological structure as *sprengd* having /e:/ or /æ:/ as a root vowel is attested in Old Icelandic, we can safely infer that the vowel in question is, in terms of Icelandic phonology, a short /e/.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, it would not seem reasonable to assume that the spelling † is due to a corruption in manuscript transmission, i.e. to the replacement of an original † *e* with † introduced by some later scribe in order to conform the runic spelling of this word to the (Norwegianizing) practice of writing *æ* instead of *e*. It follows that the ligature †, although described by Óláfr as corresponding to the Latin ‘diphthong’ *æ* (or *ae*), in fact represents — in its only occurrence within the treatise — the vowel *e* (whose normal notation, in an Icelandic runic text, would be †).

The above considerations apply, of course, in the assumption that *sprængd* is an Icelandic word. However, it could (much more likely) be a Danish word. In

52. Occurrences of this notation are found, for example, in the aforementioned Atrá and Vinje inscriptions (§ 2.2.11).

53. Examples are: *sæm* for *sem*, *mæð* for *með*, *æfni* for *efni*; and, in diphthongs, *græin* for *grein*, *gnæisti* for *gneisti*, *hæyra* for *heyra*, etc.

54. The value /e/ also seems to be confirmed in Óláfr’s commentary to the runic pangram according to W’s version: *þar næst stendr e* [recte: †] (97:11) ‘Next [i.e. after R] stands e [recte: †]’.

such a case the notation *æ* would not cause any problem and, as will be shown below, things would be much simpler.

Considered from an Icelandic perspective, *sprengd* is a form of the verb *sprengja*, namely the nom. fem. sing. and neut. nom./acc. plur. of the past participle. As the causative counterpart of the intransitive verb *springa* 'to spring; burst, split; die from over-exertion, grief etc.', *sprengja* has basically two meanings: 'to make burst, break, smash sth.' and 'to exhaust, tire sb. out, work sb. to death (e.g. to override a horse)' (see, for both verbs, Cleasby & Vigfusson 1957: 584). Accordingly, the participial form *sprengd* can be assigned two potential meanings: (1) 'burst, broken, smashed' and (2) 'exhausted, fatigued, tired out'. Which of the two would better fit this specific context can be established only after having examined the other parts of the sentence and their possible relation with *sprengd*. There is, however, a serious problem on the grammatical front. As a participle with an adjectival function, *sprengd* should agree in number, gender and case with some of the nouns contained in the sentence. The plural seems to be excluded, since, as we will see below, there is no plural nominal form which *sprengd* can be referred to. This also automatically excludes the neuter gender, which in *sprengd* is morphologically combined with the plural (see above). Thus, the only possibility that remains is that of concordance with the feminine gender. Yet even in this case there are no favourable conditions, for, according to the interpretation that I will develop in the next paragraphs, none of the nouns occurring in the sentence belongs to the feminine gender. Therefore, the overall conclusion is that the word *sprengd*, if considered as part of an Icelandic context, cannot be grammatically associated with any other constituent of the sentence, a fact that severely compromises the possibility that the whole sentence is to be read as an Icelandic text.

Let us now consider the Danish hypothesis. In the variegated orthography of medieval Danish, both *sprængd* and *sprengd* are possible forms, among others.<sup>55</sup> Both spellings denote the low front vowel /æ/, originating from the lowering of Common Scandinavian /e/, a change that is also observable in Danish runic inscriptions from about 900 (Brøndum-Nielsen 1950–1973/I: 302–303; Skautrup 1944: 131–132).

As far as meaning is concerned, the situation is similar to the one outlined above for Icelandic, yet with a substantial difference on the morphological level. Old Dan. *sprængd* (in all of its spelling variants) is the past participle of the verb *sprængje*,<sup>56</sup> but, unlike the corresponding Icelandic form, it is not morphologically

55. See Brøndum-Nielsen 1950–1973/VII: 237 and VIII: 387, s.v. *sprængia*. Variants with final devoicing, as *sprengt*, are also attested, which could justify W's reading *ǰKR††P†1 sprængt*; but, as already noted (§ 2.2.8), this reading of W is more likely due to a scribal error.

56. *Gammeldansk ordbog*, online at <http://gammeldanskordbog.dk/ordbog?query=sprængje>.

characterized, and can therefore theoretically refer to any noun in the sentence, regardless of number, gender or case.<sup>57</sup> *Sprængje* is a causative verb corresponding to the intransitive *springe* ‘to jump, burst, break up, smash’, and expresses, besides the literal meaning ‘to blast, smash sth.’, two figurative meanings, one of which coincides with that of the corresponding Icelandic verb: ‘to exhaust, tire sb. out’; the other is ‘to sprinkle, spray’ (Kalkar 1881–1976/IV: 80 and V: 982–983, s.v. *sprænge*). The past participle *sprængd* can therefore be rendered as (1) ‘broken, smashed’, (2) ‘exhausted, tired out’ or (3) ‘sprinkled (with)’. Also in this case, the choice of one or the other meaning will be guided contextually when all of the other words in the sentence have been scrutinized.

#### 4.4.3 $\Psi\text{ttt}$ *mannz*

This word does not pose any particular problems either on the formal or on the semantic level. It designates the gen. sing. of the noun *maðr* (in Icelandic) or *man(d)* (in Danish), both meaning ‘man’. As for the spelling, it is sufficient to note that, although normalized spelling conventions prescribe *manns* for Icelandic and *man(d)s* for Danish, the spelling *man(n)z* can be regarded as traditional in both Icelandic and Danish medieval orthography (which, obviously, was also applied to runic writing). As mentioned above (§ 2.2.9), the sibilant /s/ tended to develop an alveolar glide when preceded by /n/, giving as a result the cluster /ds/ ~ /ts/ (in our case, /mans/ > /mands/), a cluster which in both Icelandic and Danish scribal traditions is often spelled *z*.

In conclusion, the meaning of this word is clearly ‘(the) man’s, of (the) man’, a genitive phrase which, as such, needs to be completed by means of another noun. It thus remains to establish which of the nouns in the sentence could be connected with it.

57. The levelling and partial loss of morphological and functional distinction through inflection, in nominal as well as in verbal categories, is a phenomenon which, in Danish, took place gradually over the course of the Middle Ages, reaching a peak in the 13th and 14th centuries. As a consequence of this, noun cases came to assume a basic form (roughly corresponding to the stem of a word), valid for all cases of the singular except for the genitive. The plural continued, in the majority of cases, to be distinguished from the singular, but it also was reduced to two forms, one for the genitive and one for all other cases. The genitive singular ending *-s*, originally proper to the singular of most masculine and neuter strong nouns, was gradually extended to all noun classes, both in the singular and the plural. For adjectives — including verbal participles — the reduction was even more drastic, for in the case of this lexical category the marked form of the genitive also eventually disappeared. For an overview on the main developments of Danish morphology in the Older Middle Danish period, see Skautrup 1944: 266–275.

## 4.4.4 \*𐌺𐌰 / \*𐌺𐌰 høk / \*𐌺𐌰 hok

For this word the two manuscripts each show a different reading, i.e. \*𐌺𐌰 høk (A) and \*𐌺𐌰 hok (W), yet both agree in transliterating the runic sequence as *høk*. This, together with the fact that the rune for the ligature  $\theta \sim \varrho$  (see above, § 2.2.10) is absent in W's version of the runic pangram, makes it very likely that the original text had the symbol 𐌺 in this place. Such an assumption is also implicitly maintained by Bæksted, when he states (1942: 47): "Betydningen af \*𐌺𐌰, \*𐌺𐌰 i Valdemarsrunernes to tekster er usikker, rimeligvis er dog 𐌺 og 𐌺 her at læse som ö."<sup>58</sup>

In Icelandic runic orthography, no distinction is made, as a rule, between the notation of /o/ and that of /ɔ/, so that both vowels are represented by the symbol 𐌺 o (Bæksted 1942: 47). In Danish inscriptions (where the relevant phonological opposition is between /o/ and /ø/), the distribution of 𐌺 and 𐌺 is rather unsteady. However, as a general rule, it may be said that 𐌺 is prevalingly used for /o/, while 𐌺 is the normal notation for /ø/. In any case, such a distribution is usually observed when both vowels occur in one and the same inscription (Jacobsen & Moltke 1941–1942/II: 941). Conversely, the distinction is regularly observed in Norwegian inscriptions, where 𐌺 and 𐌺 are employed with clearly different values, i.e. /o/ and /ø/ (~ /ɔ/), respectively.<sup>59</sup> Bearing in mind the varied grapho-phonemic situation just described, we will now carry out a comparative examination of the two variant readings given for this word by the manuscripts of the treatise (i.e. *høk* and *hok*) applying the usual approach.

In Old Norse-Icelandic vocabulary, no forms like *høk* or *høk* are attested as such. Admittedly, there is one theoretically possible morphological connection of *høk* with the noun *hak*, nt. 'a little hook' (Cleasby & Vigfusson 1957: 232), of which *høk* could be the nom./acc. plural form. This is, however, an extremely rare word (*ONP* records only one attestation of it, in the singular). It is therefore highly unlikely, also for semantic reasons, that this is the word that best fits the context of our sentence. As for *hok*, there is even less reason to take it into consideration given that the only attested occurrence of this form in Old Norse seems to be a miswriting for *ok* 'yoke' (so Fritzner & Hødnebo 1972/II: 34, s.v. *hok*; cf. *ONP* s.v. ?*hok*).

The scenery appears to promise much more simple and encouraging possibilities when we move to the Danish hypothesis. While *hok* does not seem to correspond to any known Old Danish form, there is little doubt that *høk* (often spelled

58. 'The meaning of \*𐌺𐌰, \*𐌺𐌰 in the two texts of Valdemar's runes is uncertain; however, 𐌺 and 𐌺 are reasonably read, here, as ö.' (Note that Bæksted employs for the ligature 𐌺 a sign closely corresponding to that found in manuscript A which cannot be reproduced here.)

59. See Olsen et al. 1941–1990/V: 244 — where the Norwegian runic alphabet around 1200, or the 'younger Norwegian runes' ("yngre norske runer"), is schematically represented and briefly discussed — and Spurkland 2005: 152–153. Cf. above, § 2.2.10, 2.2.11.

*høg(h)*) is the Old Danish word for ‘hawk’.<sup>60</sup> On the morphological level, *høk* may represent any form of the singular except the genitive (*høks*).

#### 4.4.5 𐌛𐌺𐌰 toui / 𐌛𐌺𐌰 tuui

This is perhaps the most puzzling word of the runic pangram, to the extent that, as we will see below, every previous commentator except one has refrained from venturing any interpretative conjecture. Before proposing my own interpretation, it is necessary first to clarify some issue regarding the spelling of this word, in both of its variants, and the sound values that are presumed to underlie it.

The most important point concerns the rune 𐌺 u which occurs immediately before the final 𐌰 i in both variants. As mentioned in § 2.2.1, this rune, which normally denotes the vowel /u/, is capable of assuming a consonantal value, i.e. of expressing the semivocalic allophone [w], or the labiodental fricative [v], when placed before a vowel in the same syllable. This is precisely the case for the word *toui* ~ *tuui*, which is therefore to be phonetically analyzed as [towi] ~ [tuwi] or, more likely, [tovi] ~ [tuvi]. As a matter of fact, the normal notation for intervocalic [v] was, in medieval runic inscriptions as in manuscript writing, ƿ f. There are, however, instances of relevant runic contexts in which ƿ is replaced by 𐌺, both letters clearly expressing the same sound value. One of these instances concerns precisely the spelling of our word, as will be shown below. It should further be noted that, from the paleographic point of view, the Latin letter transliterating the rune 𐌺 in A is a *v* of the insular type, i.e. a *y*-like *v* (derived from the old rune ƿ w, Old Engl. *wynn*, related to Óláfr’s *venð*; cf. above, § 2.1.1), which is clearly distinct from the *v* (or *u*) that is used throughout the manuscript to express both the vocalic and the consonantal value of this letter.<sup>61</sup> This fact clearly necessitates taking this rune to represent the value [v] in the word under examination.

The second point concerns the first vowel, for which the two manuscripts present different notations (𐌛 o vs. 𐌺 u). This is not in fact a problematic issue, since, according to my interpretation of the word under discussion, either vowel is possible here. Nonetheless, 𐌺 is preferable since it represents the only occurrence of this rune with a vocalic value (the other 𐌺 represents, as noted above, the consonantal value).

A further note is necessary with regard to the final vowel, 𐌰 i. As an unstressed vowel, it is identifiable, in terms of traditional manuscript orthography, not only with *i* but also with *e*. This applies to both Old Icelandic and (especially) Old

60. *Gammeldansk ordbog*, online at: <http://gammeldanskordbog.dk/ordbog?query=h%C3%B8k>; cf. Kalkar 1881–1976/II: 348, s.v. *høg* [1].

61. The question of insular *v*, with reference to its presence and use in Icelandic manuscript tradition, is extensively treated in Hreinn Benediktsson 1965: 22–28.

Danish scribal practices.<sup>62</sup> It is important to stress this fact because, as may be readily noted, the runic pangram does not include, as we would expect, any occurrence of the rune for *e*, that is of the dotted *i*-rune (𐌺 or 𐌻), repeatedly mentioned by Óláfr along with the other runes denoting vowels (cf. Raschellà 1994: 681, 688). Since another word in the sentence, *flydi* ~ *flyþi*, contains a final *i*-rune, it seems reasonable to assume that one of the two *i*-runes was originally dotted, thus representing the missing rune for *e*. Which of the two is difficult to establish. However, the semantic category to which *toui* ~ *tuui* will be assigned according to my interpretation, as well as external epigraphic evidence (see below), makes it likely that this was the word with the final *e*.

When all the above elements are taken into account, it becomes clear that the only meaningful sequence that can be expressed by this 'mysterious word' is that which leads to the masculine personal name Old Norse *Tōfi* ~ *Tūfi* / Old Dan. *Tove* ~ *Tuve* (represented in our text by the nominative form). The name, which is continued, in a variety of forms and spellings, in all modern Nordic languages,<sup>63</sup> is solidly attested throughout the entire Scandinavian area in the Middle Ages (cf. Janzén 1947: 133), and, judging from its many occurrences in Danish runic inscriptions, must have been particularly popular in Denmark, especially during the Viking Age.<sup>64</sup> Both spelling variants, i.e. *tofi* and *tufi*, are present in the Danish runic material. In addition, we find an occurrence of *touæ*,<sup>65</sup> which confirms the alternate spelling of *u* for *f* and, at the same time, the possible original spelling of *e* for the final *i*, as assumed above.

#### 4.4.6 Bǫll boll

The two manuscripts agree in both the runic and the Latin spelling of this word, whose form is unequivocally *boll*. We must therefore rely on the assumption that this was the original form, faithfully preserved in manuscript transmission. This requires that we also exclude the possibility that the rune 𐌺, denoting the root

62. As far as Icelandic is concerned, see Hreinn Benediktsson 1965: 72–73. On the variety and instability in the spelling of unstressed vowels in medieval Danish, particularly on the alternation between *-i* and *-e* (often spelled *-æ*), see Skautrup 1944: 225–226 and Brøndum-Nielsen 1950–1973/I: 398–399, 402.

63. E.g. Icel. *Tói*, Dan./Norw. *Tue*, Swed. *Tu(v)e*, etc. For an overview, see *Nordic names*, online at: <http://www.nordicnames.de/wiki/Tófi> (accessed April 15, 2016).

64. See Jacobsen & Moltke 1941–1942/II: 724, s.v. *Tofi* ell. *Tufi*, and Peterson 2007: 220–221, s.v. *Tōfi* / *Tūfi*.

65. In the Listerby church gallery (Dan. *Listerby-pulpitur*), dated 1200–1300. See Danske Runeindskrifter, online at: <http://runer.ku.dk/VisGenstand.aspx?Titel>; Jacobsen & Moltke 1941–1942/I: 340, II: 414–415, 614; Moltke 1976: 368, 380.



vowel, may express a value different from /o/, all the more so given that the vowel /ø/ is already represented by the 𐌺 rune in \*𐌺ʰ (høk).

The above premise implies, with regard to Icelandic, that *boll* cannot be identified with *þoll*, the nom. fem. sing. and neut. nom./acc. plur. of the adjective *þallr* ‘hard, stubborn, evil, frightful, dangerous, harmful’ (Cleasby & Vigfusson 1957: 51; Fritzner & Hødnebo 1972/I: 110, s.v. *þallr*). For the same reason, it cannot be supposed that *boll* is a form of the Icel. noun *þollr* ‘ball, globe’ either. It follows then that the form *boll*, as such, is not identifiable with any grammatical Icelandic form.

In terms of Old Danish phonology and orthography, *boll* can be regarded as a variant spelling of *bold*, an adjective of Middle Low German provenance typical of courtly language, whose meanings range from ‘bold, brave, audacious, fearless, determined’ to ‘fine, excellent, outstanding, magnificent.’<sup>66</sup> No formal association with other Old Danish words seems practicable, except perhaps with the noun *bal* ‘ball, sphere’, of which *bold* represents a late, virtually modern (around 1500), spelling variant.<sup>67</sup> Literary attestations of the adjective *bold* are rather late (from mid-15th century). Yet, since it frequently occurs in the *folkeviser* (the traditional Danish medieval ballads), whose oral tradition is much earlier, its presence in Danish is likely to trace back up to the 13th century.

If the above interpretation of *toui* ~ *tuui* as a personal name is accepted, it is then very likely that *boll* is an adjective referring to this name, indicating a quality or property of its bearer; I argue that it was ‘bold’. With regard to morphology, as an adjectival form *boll* (like *sprængd* above) may represent any number, gender or case; here it stands, of course, for the nominative singular masculine.<sup>68</sup>

4.5 We now have sufficient evidence in place that, through a synthesis of the various arguments and conjectures advanced so far, we will be able to propose a tentative interpretation of the entire runic pangram. However, before doing so, it seems

66. *Gammeldansk ordbog*, online at: <<http://gammeldanskordbog.dk/ordbog?query=bold>>; Kalkar 1881–1976/I: 242, V: 120, s.v. *bold* [1]. Other known variants are *boldh*, *boold*, *booldh*. On the alternation *ld* ~ *ll* see Skautrup 1944: 253.

67. See cards-collection and list of sources in *Gammeldansk ordbog*, online at: <<http://gammeldanskordbog.dk/ordbog?select=bal,1&query=bal>>. The conjectural reading *bold* as a spelling variant of the fem. noun *bulþ*, *bolþ* ‘boil, pustule’, originally suggested by Ole Worm and re-proposed by Jacobsen & Moltke (1941–1942/II: 135–136, 637) for a multiple bind rune in the now lost Viborg healing stick (Dan. *Viborg-lægedomspind*) is, according to the relevant commentary in *Danske Runeindskrifter*, online at: <<http://runer.ku.dk/VisGenstand.aspx?Titel=Viborg-lægedomspind>>, ‘mere wishful thinking’ (“ren ønsketænkning”).

68. Finnur Jónsson, although not mentioning any connection with *toui* ~ *tuui*, also suggests to interpret *boll* as an adjective, namely as the ‘nom. fem. of *ball* ‘strong’ (“nom. fem. af *ball* ‘stærk’”: 1927: 29 fn. 4); however, *ball* is not attested as such in Old Danish.

best to briefly consider the ways that this sentence has been interpreted by the earlier commentators, whether in whole or part, by close analysis or more general statement.

The first attempt was made by Finnur Jónsson (1927:29 fn. 4), who, in the introduction to his edition of the treatise, referred to Valdemar's runic pangram as a Danish text (*ibid.*: 6; cf. above, fn. 45). His commentary starts with the words "sætningen er vanskelig; et hele må den dog have dannet".<sup>69</sup> It then goes on to suggest a separate interpretation for each individual word, but not for all of them. He takes *høk* to be the nominative (less likely the accusative) singular of the noun for 'hawk', which would form, together with the adjective *sprængd*, the subject of the verb *flyði*, although no translation is provided for the last two words. Finnur hesitates to offer a conjectural meaning for *boll*, which, as mentioned above (fn. 68), he regards as the possible nom. fem. sing. of an alleged Old Dan. adjective *ball*, and totally desists from interpreting "tví".

Krömmelbein (1998:65 fn. 3) also describes the sentence as 'Old Danish' ("alt-dänisch"). However, on several points his interpretation appears questionable. He renders the phrase *sprængd manns hók* (*sic*) as "der/den geborstenen Hügel des Mannes" (i.e. 'the burst hill [nom./acc.] of the man) and the verbal form *flyði* as "floh" (i.e. 'flew', which in Old Danish should correspond to *fløgh*, the 3rd pers. sing. pret. indic. of the strong verb *flyghe* 'to fly'). Moreover, Krömmelbein does not provide explanations for his lexical choices and fails to comment on the rest of the sentence.

Wills builds his translation on the suppositions of his predecessors, resulting in the following formulation: "The man's tired hawk flees from the ?double ball" (Wills 2001: Transl. 89 [§ 4.5]) or, with slight variations, "The man's tired hawk flies (or flees) from the double ball" (*ibid.*: Comm. 128 [§ 3.2.2]). The last two words in particular are based on the term *tví-böllr* 'a double ball', taken from Cleasby & Vigfusson (1957:645, s.v. *tví-*), a lexical reconstruction by which the authors of the well-known Icelandic-English dictionary conjecturally translate the words *tuui boll* at the end of the runic pangram. Wills does not express himself about the language of the sentence, yet it clearly appears from his remarks that he identifies it as Icelandic.

Bæksted (1942:215–217), although commenting at some length on the runic pangram, does not provide any interpretation. However, based on the widespread use of alphabetical series as magical protection formulae in medieval Europe, he assumes that the sentence had, originally at least, a magical character, in line with other allegedly magical formulae occurring in late 15th-century Icelandic

69. 'the sentence is problematic; however, it must have formed a meaningful whole.'

manuscripts (ibid.: 26–27, 217–220).<sup>70</sup> Except for a fleeting and merely conjectural note by Skautrup (1944: 193), it seems that no other scholar has thus far shared Bæksted's view on the alleged magical character of Valdemar's sentence.

I omit to report the brief notes I expressed on the runic pangram in my 1994 article (Raschellà 1994: 684 fn. 18), where I basically endorsed Finnur Jónsson's comments, only providing some additional information on the meaning of the individual words.

4.6 The convergence of the various pieces of evidence emerging from the above examination of Valdemar's runic pangram, with respect to both the form and the meaning of its single components as well as their syntactic interplay, necessarily leads us to conclude that the sentence was composed by the Danish king in his mother tongue and faithfully reported by Óláfr in its original form. Manuscript transmission is then the sole reason for possible corruptions in the text. Unfortunately, the extant evidence does not allow us to verify which of these possible corruptions may be actual. Therefore, I will, in the following, build on the conclusion that the language of the sentence is Danish, or, more precisely, a form of Older Middle Danish. Consequently, all forms will hereafter be cited in their alleged original Danish runic spelling. Yet, for the sake of simplicity, only the transliterated forms will be used.

On the basis of their morphological characterization, two phrases are potentially liable to act as the subject of the sentence, i.e. the syntactic entity that performs the action expressed by the verbal form *flyþi*. This function can theoretically be attributed to both the initial phrase *sprængd mannz høk* and the final phrase *tuui boll*. Considering that *tuui*, which renders the personal name *Tuvi* (or *Tuve*) in runic characters, can only be read as a nominative form, while *høk*, the head of the initial phrase, is capable of expressing any grammatical case (in the singular) except the genitive, *tuui boll* is necessarily identified as the subject phrase and *sprængd mannz høk* as the object. As far as the meaning is concerned, we can translate *tuui boll* as 'bold Tuve' (or 'Tuve the bold'). For *sprængd mannz høk*, two options are theoretically possible, according to whether the adjective *sprængd* 'exhausted, tired out' (apparently the most pertinent meaning in this context) is thought to refer to *mannz* '[the] man's' or to *høk* '[the] hawk' (acc.): (1) 'the exhausted man's hawk' and (2) 'the man's exhausted hawk'. Since the normal position

70. Curiously enough, Bæksted, in another part of his book, asserts that "magic" is too often the straw the runologist grasps at when the inscription is too enigmatic' ("magi" altfor ofte er det halmstraa, hvortil runologen klynger sig, naar indskriften er for gaadefuld"; Bæksted 1942: 210). On the *vexata quaestio* of the magical interpretation of runic inscriptions, see, most recently, Schulte 2015: 88–89.



and induce them to reconsider and study in greater depth one the most complex, yet also most fascinating, pieces of Old Icelandic grammatical literature.

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