

The Rök Inscription, Line 20

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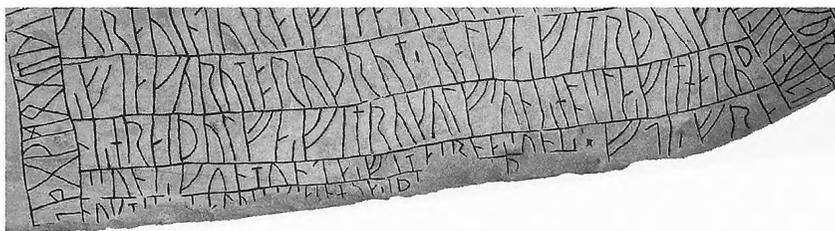
In memory of Frederic Amory

The only severely damaged line on the Rök Stone is the one numbered 20 in the now standard treatment of Elias Wessén.¹ According to Wessén and most subsequent interpreters, line 20 was to be read after his 19 and before his 21–28; in two of my articles on Rök I have followed and defended this order (though ultimately calling for a reversal of 27–28), but I did not attempt in those articles to comment extensively on the damaged line.² The present small-scale study in memory of a large-minded friend essays a reconstruction and interpretation of line 20, building on the conclusions and utilizing the conventions of those two articles, as well, of course, as on those of my predecessors.³ As previous scholars have noted, an understanding

1. Elias Wessén, *Runstenen vid Röks kyrka*, Kungl. vitterhets historie och antikvitets akademiens handlingar, filologisk-filosofiska serien 5 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1958). Line 26, side D, suffered the total loss of its first rune (coordinates cipher), but completion of the word there is non-controversial.

2. See Joseph Harris, “Myth and Meaning in the Rök Inscription,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 2 (2006): 45–109 (line 20 is discussed chiefly pp. 51–52), and “The Rök Stone through Anglo-Saxon Eyes,” in *The Anglo-Saxons and the North*, ed. Matti Kilpiö et al. (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2009), 11–45. These articles, especially “Myth and Meaning,” constitute a necessary background to the present study and its terminology.

3. Among the “conventions” in “Myth and Meaning,” 46n2: Vamoð’s name; Wessén’s line numbers and his normalizations of OSw (in most cases); but also the use of OWN forms following Ottar Grønvik, *Der Rökstein: Über die religiöse Bestimmung und das weltliche Schicksal eines Helden aus der frühen Wikingerzeit*, Osloer Beiträge zur Germanistik 33 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003). Grønvik (at least in this work) uses angular brackets for the transcription of runes (41); I follow the bold usage instead, except when quoting from Grønvik. In addition, Grønvik writes oral *la/* as <A>, nasal as <a>; I prefer to follow the tradition of writing nasal as **a**, oral as simple **a**. My references to “Section,” “Question,” and “Answer” are explained in the articles cited in note 2 above;



Rök Stone, side C (back), trimmed to highlight lines 18–20.

Rikantikvarieämbetet (Swedish National Heritage Board).

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of this line depends heavily on an overall interpretation of the Rök inscription.⁴ Philologically restrained speculation would seem to be the only method available.

A consensus description of the immediate context of line 20 might read as follows: Line 19, in “Rök runes” (or “Swedish-Norwegian” or “short-twig” runes) of a more or less uniform height about half that of more central lines, ends with a punctuating dot; its integrity of script and graphic definition are reinforced by its clear semantic unity as the concluding segment of Section 2’s Answer. Below 19 (read as a modern text, actually vertical and to the right of 19) is line 20, written in the same runes and reading in the same left-to-right (i.e., upward) direction. The runes of line 20 were from the beginning slightly smaller than those of 19, and the size of these two lines would seem to reflect progressive crowding. The rune master did succeed in getting a complete sense unit on this extreme right edge of side C (the back of the stone), but vertical shrinkage of the runes and the placement of 20 in an exposed location along the edge were the price. We do not know when the damage to 20 occurred; scholars have speculated that it might have been when the village of Rök’s old tithe barn was demolished in 1843 and the stone removed from its place. The rune stone was re-immured in the porch of the new church in the course of the same day and with the same

there I also discuss the meaning of *minni*, which I leave untranslated here. In general, I treat Wessén (note 1 above) as the edition of reference.

4. Hermann Reichert, “Runeninschriften als Quellen der Heldensagenforschung,” in *Runeninschriften als Quellen interdisziplinärer Forschung: Abhandlungen des Vierten Internationalen Symposiums über Runen und Runeninschriften in Göttingen, 4–9 August 1995*, ed. Klaus Düwel et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 100; Grønvik, *Der Rökstein*, 68.

side, the front, exposed, but the brief revelation of the whole stone, with its previously (and subsequently) hidden inscribed back, top, and sides was time enough for a church official to make a complete drawing, including the hidden faces. The drawing clearly shows that the damage was already present on June 8, 1843, but whether it is “fresh damage,” as von Friesen comments, is uncertain.⁵ In any case, the damage sheered away the bottoms of most of the runes, and in some places the affected area rises to obliterate whole runes, even extending slightly into line 19. Nevertheless, a good many runes in line 20 can be identified with certainty or near certainty, and others can be deduced from the possibilities offered by the remnants (in comparison with the normal forms of Rök runes), together with estimates of the probable words (guided by the diction of the inscription elsewhere and the probable content according to each interpretation); finally, even where effacement is complete, we can still determine, more or less, the number of missing runes and make deductions or, ultimately, guesses based on overall content.

At the end of line 20 and extending up to the top of line 19 is a series of very legible, undamaged Rök runes spelling **ftirfra**, interpreted since Bugge’s time as OSw (*a*)*ftir fra*, ON *eptir frá*.⁶ These runes are usually considered the conclusion of line 20, and their larger size (almost the size of the more standard lines of side C, such as line 18) explained as the rune master’s exploitation of the empty space left after the dot ending line 19. The stone offers several (partial) graphic analogues: on side A, the front, the bottom framing line of line 1 is fixed, but the letters expand in height to fill the natural space offered by the stone; with line 6 it is the top framing line that is fixed while the letters of the second half of the line expand (but not so dramatically as in line 1) downward in length following the space offered by the stone; the same is true of line 7. But lines 6–8 offer a somewhat different situation from lines 19–20 since 8 is a sort of dwarfed line terminated by a downward curving frame and by the stone’s shape,

5. “af allt att döma tämligen färskas skadorna” (rather fresh damage, to judge by all indications). Otto von Friesen, *Rökstenen: Runstenen vid Röks kyrka Lysings härad Östergötland* (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets- historie- och antikvitets akademien, 1920), 1; see also 84. Further, see Wessén, *Runstenen vid Röks kyrka*, 10 and 92–97, for a reproduction of the drawing.

6. Sophus Bugge, *Der Runenstein von Rök in Östergötland, Schweden*, ed. Magnus Olsen, with contributions by Axel Olrik and Erik Brate (Stockholm: Hæggström, 1910), 82–83. Wessén normalizes to *æftir*, but I follow Bugge for this word.

and 7's expansion occurs after (to the right of) the end of 8; similarly 7 is naturally shortened by the curve of the stone, reinforced by its frame, creating the conditions for the expansion of letters in the last half of line 6.⁷ With the larger runes **ftirfra**, the shape of the stone is not a factor since the space offered there is purely a function of the ending of line 19's sense unit, and no analogous downward curving frame exists (or still exists) for line 20.

A variant explanation of **ftirfra**, based largely on the analogy with lines 6–8, has these runes standing in line 19, though unconnected semantically with the material before the dot; 19 therefore has an *a* and a *b* component. Line 19 proper is 19a, and **ftirfra** is 19b. In this explanation 19b is the beginning, semantically and syntactically speaking, of line 20 rather than its conclusion.⁸ This situation could be paralleled several times on the stone; for example, a sense unit ends with a dot in 5, but the inscription line continues with the beginning of a new sense unit that spills over into 6 (**• þat sakum ana/rt**); similarly in lines 14 and 17. On the other hand, sense units apparently end and new ones begin within lines 24–25 without punctuation (**traki uilin is þat** and **[i]jatun uilin is þat**), though also in these same lines punctuating crosses coincide with a shift into cipher (or into a different cipher) and a new sense unit. An important graphic objection to this variant reading would be that **ftirfra** foots with 20 at the edge of the stone so that the rune master would have had to have 20 fully planned or, better, already cut before the beginning of its sentence could be cut (but again cf. lines 6–8); in other words, if the rune master had set out to enter a sentence with the word order 19b–20, he could not have carved its beginning, the double-sized runes of 19b, first because he would not have known at the beginning that he would have that extra space for the large runes. Wessén states, very simply, another reason for his order 20–19b: “Vad ristaren nu har att tillägga är av annan art. Därför fortsätter han icke omedelbart i rad 19, utan

7. Lis Jacobsen, “Rökstudier,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 76 (1961): 15–20, offers a fine but ultimately unconvincing analysis of lines 6–8 in support of the “variant explanation” of **ftirfra** (see next note).

8. Jacobsen, “Rökstudier,” is the main proponent of this argument; she labels 19a as 19.1, and 19b as 19.2, but I consider the use of letters a bit clearer. The order 19b–20 is followed by Niels Åge Nielsen, *Runerne på Rökstenen*, Odense University Studies in Scandinavian Languages 2 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1969), 37, without argument.

markerar det nya med ny rad (r. 20)” (What the rune carver now has to add is of another kind. Therefore he does not continue directly in line 19 but distinguishes the new material with a new line [line 20]).⁹ Moreover, while **ftirfra** could be construed as the beginning of a sentence, it would require an **a** to yield [a]ftir fra; this **a** cannot be supplied from the undamaged space between the dot and **f**, but it is easily imagined in the damaged space of 20.¹⁰ This appears to be a strong argument against 19b-20, and on balance, it is more natural to imagine **ftirfra** coming at the end of 20.

In the history of the interpretation of Rök a third explanation for **ftirfra** is important. Von Friesen separated these seven runes from both 19a and 20, read them as shift cipher, and connected them to the end of line 25, the mysterious word **nit(i)**, which however is in numerical or coordinates cipher; rewritten as Rök runes and utilizing the frame as final **i**'s (normal on Rök), the sense unit so created read: **nit(i)ubafuks(i)**, ON *nyt upp af øxi* “may advantage grow up from it.”¹¹ Criticism of the larger context constructed by von Friesen and of many details would lead too far afield here and can be read in earlier

9. Wessén, *Runstenen vid Röks kyrka*, 49.

10. Bugge had already captured this argument with admirable brevity and added a syntactic one: “Dafür, dass **ftir fra** nach (nicht vor) d Z. 9 [= line 20] gelesen werden soll, spricht: 1) wir können dann die auffallende Form **ftir** entfernen; denn **a** kann die letzte Rune in d Z. 9 gewesen sein, wodurch wir die erwartete Form ***aftir** erhalten. 2) **nuk** mit dem enklitischen **'k** steht am passendsten an der Spitze des Satzes; vgl. die entsprechende Stelle der *Vafþr*” [For the case that **ftir fra** should be read *after* (and not *before*) line 20 speak the following arguments: 1) This way we can eliminate the surprising form **ftir** because the last rune in line 20 can be the **a** by which we obtain the expected form ***aftir**. 2) **nuk**, with its enclitic **'k**, stands in the most suitable position at the head of the sentence: cf. the analogous passage of the *Vafþr*] (*Der Runenstein von Rök*, 85). The reference here is to *Vafþrúðnismál* 55.7, a (partial) parallel to line 20 discussed by Bugge (83). Jacobsen (“Rökstudier,” 18) answered the first of these objections by pointing to three instances on Rök of omission on an initial **a** (lines 4, 15, and 22); but these are all instances of the preposition *at* as proclitic to a following noun and so quite different from the case at issue. For the syntactic matter raised by Bugge (and supported with the Eddic parallel) she cited an instance of somewhat similar syntax in Rök lines 7–8 (*ok dó með hann [um sakar]* “and died with [them] he”); but well before Jacobsen wrote, Otto Höfler had already improved this awkward passage with the reading *ok dœmir enn um sakar*; see *Der Runenstein von Rök und die germanische Individualweibe*, Germanisches Sakralkönigtum 1 (Tübingen: Niemeyer; Münster: Böhlau, 1952), 37–42. Since Jacobsen’s day, Höfler’s reading has been adopted by Nielsen, *Runerne på Rökstenen*, 28–29, and by Lars Lönnroth, “The Riddles of the Rök-Stone: A Structural Approach,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 92 (1977): 25–26. Grønvik, *Der Rökstein*, 53–55, adopted the new reading but with a different meaning.

11. von Friesen, *Rökstenen*, 64–65.

works beginning with Wessén's, but it is worth repeating from my earlier articles that von Friesen, Höfler, and Lönnroth are with this move guilty of an arbitrary linkage that ignores the graphic and runological routing directions. The probability of shift cipher yielding a coherent expression of longer words, as in **ftirfra** understood as (a)*ftirfra*, would also seem slight if we judge by the undisputed shift-coded line 23 (**airfbfrbhnfnbantfanhnu**) and the end of 24 (**rhprhis**): when an underlying message conceived in Rök runes has been disguised through shift cipher, a few of the resulting rune combinations may accidentally yield sensible individual words in OSw (for example, **nu**, **is**) or possible morphemes, but as a whole, it seems unlikely to produce extended, syntactically and semantically plausible discourse.¹²

Our rejection of the order 19b-20 is somewhat less conclusive than our rejection of von Friesen's move, but we are left, together with most post-Wessén writers on Rök, supporting the order 20-19b, that is, regarding **ftirfra** as the conclusion of 20. Grønvik's recent edition of Rök is an important witness for this order because Grønvik otherwise adopts many of the ideas of the school of Otto Höfler (which itself derives from von Friesen). We may use Grønvik's initial presentation of 20 (C9 in his numbering system) as the starting point for our own reading.¹³ Grønvik's underdotting signifies an only partially preserved rune, but the degree of partial preservation varies radically:

Bugge meinte, einige von ihnen [the damaged runes] bestimmen zu können, aber nicht alle, und liest (1910: 83-85) in heute geläufiger Transliteration:

C9 <nu km i ñ i m i r A l u ş A k i A i n h u A R [. . .] f t i r f r A >

Nach den ersten 24 einigermaßen sicher identifizierbaren Runen steht eine Reihe zum größten Teil unbestimmbarer Runenreste (hier zunächst durch [...] angegeben). Es handelt sich wahrscheinlich um 10 Runen. Die 8. Rune in dieser ... Reihe ... wird jedoch von Bugge als ein deutliches <þ> erkannt, die Runen 1-3 [of this heavily damaged section] von Brate (1917 [sic]: 241) als <iþi>. (Grønvik, *Der Rökstein*, 67)

12. I have not come across a discussion of such cases in terms of mathematical probability. Of line 23, Bugge (*Der Runenstein von Rök*, 103) simply states that *diese Runen Wörter ... nicht enthalten können* (these runes cannot contain words).

13. Grønvik's text-internal references are to Bugge, *Der Runenstein von Rök*, 83-85, and Erik Brate, *Östergötlands runinskrifter*, Sveriges runinskrifter 2 (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1911-18), 241.

Bugge thought that he could determine some of the damaged runes but not all; in 1910 (83–85) he read the following in today's current transliteration:

C9 <n u k m i ṅ i m i ṛ A l u ṣ Ḃ k i A i n h u A R [. . .] f t i r f r A >

After the first twenty-four moderately certainly identifiable runes stand a series of largely indeterminable rune remains (represented for the moment by [. . .]). It is a matter of probably about ten runes. The eighth rune in this series was however recognized by Bugge as a clear <þ>; and the runes 1–3 of this heavily damaged section are read by Brate (241) as <iþi>.

Such was the state of the art in reading of the fractured runes of this line in the time of Bugge and Brate, though a discrepancy in Grønvik's account with regard to the total rune space in the most heavily damaged area will be noted below (see note 16).

This consensus was built up gradually with contributions from Brate, Olsen, and von Friesen; I accept it as an accurate inventory of the runes still or once observable or partly observable in the line. When we look at the photograph accompanying this article and follow Bugge's discussion, most of the reconstruction appears possible or even probable, for example, the **iṅi** of **m[iṅi]**; and the word before **ainhuar**, spelled **alu**, is clear.¹⁴ I see no trace in the modern photo of the **m** or the subsequent runes of **mir** (*meðr*), however, and here I rely on the 1907 autopsy by Bugge's three younger colleagues. Bugge wrote simply: "R. 8–10 sind von mir und Brate als . . . **mir** gelesen" (runes 8–10 are read by Brate and by me as **mir**). (Here Bugge is numbering the runes from the beginning of the line, not as in Grønvik above within the damaged area.) In the enhanced photo (Plate II) from 1910 these three letters appear clearly.¹⁵ Within Grønvik's bracketed section, the area of most damage, it is certain that we can still read, with Brate, **iþ** as the first two runes after **huar**; but of the third rune of Brate's group we can only be certain that its staff rose to the top of the line and that no twig branched from the top, certainly not to the left and very probably also not to the right. For the remaining fragment shows approximately the top third of the staff, and the damaged area

14. Bugge, *Der Runenstein von Rök*, 83–84.

15. *Ibid.* 83n1, 84, and Plate II. This would probably be the same photograph that appears in Brate's edition cited in note 13 above.

rises steeply up the right side, extending here into line 19. Thus the rune under discussion could not be **u**, **þ**, **r**, **t**, **m**, **l**, or **ʀ**; less certainly excludable would be **a**, **b**, and **f** (the twigs, all right-branching, would have been erased, but the upper twig tends to start fairly high on the staff and might be expected to have left a trace in the remaining fragment). Besides Brate's **i**, the following would seem to be possible given the damage: **h**, **n**, **s** (perhaps less likely given the length of the remaining staff), and, crucially for my argument, **k**. In **k** (also in **a**) the right-branching twig tends to begin at a point on the staff that could well be below the end of the existing fragment and could have been completely erased in the damaged area. Anticipating my hypothesis about the content, I tentatively adopt **k** here. Subsequent discussion will help to justify that adoption.

There follows space for perhaps four or five runes in the devastated area;¹⁶ then in its midst we find (with Bugge) a clear **þ**, followed by space again for at least four or five runes before we arrive at the **f** of **ftirfra**. The rune before **f** must have been **a**. I therefore revise Grønvik's, i.e., "today's current transliteration," as our platform for interpretative hypotheses of 20:

nukṁiṅiṁiḡaluṣaḡkiainhuaRiþk̇[123(4,5)]þ[123(4)](â)ftirfra

Here the overdotted runes are my additions, **k̇** partly on the basis of detective speculation around a partially preserved staff, (**â**) without any surviving traces but dictated by the word *aftir*. With all due reservation about **k̇**, I believe this could be called the current corrected state of the art.

The next level of interpretation entails segmentation into words

16. Brate estimates the lost runes between the second **i** of **iþi** and the lone **þ** at "about seven" (*Östergötlands runinskrifter*, 241); but if the second **i** was in fact a **k**, the discrepancy of perhaps one rune-space vanishes. Elsewhere Brate mentions that "etwa 10 Runen vollständig fehlen" (Bugge, *Der Runenstein von Rök*, 273); that would seem to be equivalent to an estimate of five lost runes before and five after the lone **þ**. Neither Bugge nor Brate explicitly estimates the rune-spaces of the obliterated area between the lone **þ** and **ftirfra**, though Brate does imply that the five runes of **sunir** in 19 above the second lacuna correspond to missing runes in 20 (*Östergötlands runinskrifter*, 241). Grønvik (quoted above) seems to estimate the whole space of his bracketed areas at ten runes, of which the first three were **iþi** and the eighth **þ**; he apparently, then, allowed for four missing runes before the lone **þ**. This seems about right to me, but the space to the right of **þ** cannot have contained only two runes.

and sense units, but a full review of my predecessors is beyond my remit. I begin with Wessén, who, however, follows, more or less, Bugge's segmentation and interpretation: **nu k m[jini] mir alu [sa] k[ji] ainhuar . . . þ . . . ftir fra**.¹⁷ Wessén's own transcription is more agnostic, but his normalization and translation put his understanding largely in line with Bugge's although he fills out the space preceding the lone **þ** to yield a relative pronoun: *Nu'k minni meðr allu sagi. Ainhvarr . . . svað . . . æftir fra* "Nu säger jag minnena fullständigt. Någon . . . det som han har eftersport" (Now I tell the memorials completely. Someone . . . that which he has found out).¹⁸ Jacobsen begins the sentence with 19b but agrees on **nu'k mini mir alu** (and on the isolated **ainhuar**); Nielsen follows her but adds **saki** to yield **saki ainhuar**; Lönnroth essentially follows Bugge's (Wessén's) segmentation but normalizes and interprets in accordance with his argument that 20 provides the concluding part of a structural frame of the whole inscription that balances lines 1–2.¹⁹ In short, most or all of Bugge's segmentation just quoted is widely, if not universally, agreed on.

From the brief review above, we see a good deal of agreement on the line. Even in Lönnroth's version (though not in Jacobsen's) it seems semantically to constitute a variant of the inscription's *sagum*-formula, with *minni* appearing here uncompounded. I shall now discuss some details assuming the general understanding of *nu'k minni . . . sagi*. I believe that the present tense and *nu* here refer forward to the last, the enciphered part of the inscription: "I shall now tell (a/some) *minni*," the neuter making the sg/pl distinction inoperative. Varin here speaks, as it were, in his own voice, using the pronoun *ek* (in contrast to the ceremonial third person of lines 1–2 in the traditional opening "formula") and the regular first-person singular inflectional form in *sagi* (instead of the apparently archaic *sagum*); uncompounded *minni*, elsewhere *mogminni*, may contribute to these less formal features.²⁰

17. Wessén, *Runstenen vid Röks kyrka*, 50; Bugge, *Der Runenstein von Rök*, 85.

18. Wessén, *Runstenen vid Röks kyrka*, 26–7. Wessén may have drawn the suggestion of an **a** before **þ** in his *svað* from von Friesen; see note 37 below.

19. See Jacobsen, "Rökstudier," 18; Nielsen, *Runerne på Rökstenen*, 37; Lönnroth, "Riddles of the Rök-Stone," 50.

20. In my articles (see note 2 above), I accepted Grönvik's innovative suggestion that *sagum* (< **sagu-miz*) is an otherwise unattested mediopassive where an ancient first-person

Perhaps we may understand the tone as more personal, the language as more demotic, as Varin introduces Section 3, the climax of the inscription and the myth surely closest to his own feelings.

These features—*nu*, present/future tense, the forward thrust of the *sagum*-formula—argue against the Jacobsen/Nielsen retrospective focus whereby line 20 capped Sections 1 and 2, but Jacobsen is right to bring up the difficulty of *meðr allu* (normalized: *með ǫllu*) “completely” in the context of line 20 since that adverbial sense attached to the phrase in the dictionaries hardly describes the allusive and playful (or merely fragmentary) way the narrative material is conveyed on Rök.²¹ (Jacobsen related “completely” more plausibly to the name-*þula* of Section 2, but that retrospective focus is unconvincing on other grounds.) In view of the prospective context, I propose to understand *með ǫllu* as “in completion,” that is, “in conclusion, finally,” with reference to the order of sections and to Section 3’s sacred story, the story that will bring the inscription to its culmination with an allusion to the highest god on the top face of the stone.

The sentence may end with *með ǫllu sagi*, but **ainhuar** introduces several possibilities. Most scholars interpret this as a single word, ON *ein(n)hvurr* “someone, anyone” (earlier “each one”).²² Wessén writes the OSw as *ainhuarr* and translates as *någon* “someone”; Nielsen attaches the word (retaining the transliteration **ainhuar**) as subject to the verb *sagi*: *En eller anden må sige* (one or another may say); Lönnroth similarly has “May each person . . . tell” [enough of the memories completely]: **nuk** = *nóg*.²³ Grønvik alone of recent scholars separates **ain** from **huar**, applying **ain** to the first clause and **huar**

singular inflection survives (*Der Rökstein*, 48–49); Bugge’s first-person is similar but vague on the origin of *-um* (*Der Runenstein von Rök*, 11–13); Brate interpreted the form as first person plural imperative “let us say” (Brate, *Östergötlands runinskrifter*, 233, and Brate in Bugge, *Der Runenstein von Rök*, 267; also Bugge, *Der Runenstein von Rök*, 11n2); Wessén seems to straddle the fence with “‘jag säger’ (el. ‘vi säga’)” (33). This word still lacks a clear and historically inevitable explanation.

21. “Med linje 20 slutter den del af indskriften, der er ristet med svensk-norske runer” (With line 20 the part of the inscription in Swedish-Norwegian runes is closed) [Jacobsen, “Rökstudier,” 21].

22. Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic–English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), henceforth Cleasby-Vigfusson, observe (*s.v.*) that *einn* and *hvurr* are written and inflected separately in early texts.

23. See Wessén, *Runstenen vid Röks kyrka*, 27; Nielsen, *Runerne på Rökstenen*, 37; Lönnroth, “Riddles of the Rök-Stone,” 50.

to the following subordinate clause: *Nu'k minni með ǫllu segi einn: hverr...* “Jetzt sage ich vollständig einen Spruch ganz allein: wer...” (Now I shall tell fully a saying, quite alone: who...). The remainder of Grønvik’s interpretation here would lead too far into his theories about the whole, but I believe his separation of **ain** from **huar** is important. Somewhat similarly, von Friesen makes this separation and regards **huar** as the interrogative pronoun, though again his overall construction of the passage would lead us astray.²⁴

In fact, the common distributive or indefinite pronoun ON *ein(n)-hverr* is itself suspicious; its only appearance in Peterson’s register of words in all Swedish runic inscriptions is here in Rök; and it seems to occur only five or six times in poetry.²⁵ Moreover, with un-compounded **huar**, the second sense unit in 20 would closely resemble other instances in Rök of the interrogative pronoun following the *sagum*-formula in a question or indirect question: lines 5–6 **þat sakum ana/rt huar fur niu altum**; line 21 **sagwmogmeni [þ]ad hoar... oari goldin = sagum mogminni þat huar... vari guldinn**. We find the same construction a third time where **huar** is in the dative case: lines 23–24 **sakum (m)ukmini uaim si burin [n]iþ/R** (OSw *sagum moꝥminni, [h]vaim se burin niðR*).

The difference between an OSw equivalent of (*einn*)*hverr* and Rök’s **huar** is worth dwelling on for a moment longer. In the OWN paradigm of the interrogative pronoun, the original *huar* was replaced by *hverr*; or as Grønvik, following Seip, puts it: the interrogative pronoun ONorw *huær, huar* has absorbed into itself both Proto-Nordic **hwar* and Proto-Nordic **hwarjar*.²⁶ The etymological distinction is clearly mirrored in Gothic *hwas* and *hwarjis*, and the Rök stone maintains that distinction with *huarir* (line 14, m. pl. nom.) and *huariar* (line 3, f. pl. nom.), both attributive (adjectival) usages in contrast to the three substantival (pronominal) usages just rehearsed; the interrogative pronouns are all to be translated as “who” or “to whom” while the others translate as “which.” If the **huar** of **ainhuar** had represented

24. See Grønvik, *Der Rökstein*, 68; von Friesen, 85–86.

25. See Lena Peterson, *Svenskt runordsregister*, Runrön 2 (Uppsala: Institutionen för nordiska språk, Uppsala universitet, 1989), s.v.; Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum* (Copenhagen: Lyngé, 1966), s.v. “einhverr, einnhverr.” Three skaldic instances date from the twelfth century or later; one is supposed to be from ca. 1025; the two Eddic occurrences (*Hávamál* 121; *Hárbárðsljóð* 30) could be earlier.

26. Grønvik, *Der Rökstein*, 87.

the later ON *hverr*, it should, on Rök, appear as **huarir* because the vowels of final syllables are not yet lost after short stressed vowels in this text, for example, *sunu*, *sitir*.²⁷ When Wessén writes *ainhvarr*, he would seem to be promoting before its time the syncope of -i- after a short stem (and also assimilation of a necessary medial stage **-hvarr*). I conclude that Grønvik must be right in assigning **ain** to the first clause and **huar** to the second. I will discuss them in that order.

The syntax of **ain** is ambiguous. (1) It could conceivably modify *minni* as n. pl.: many of Cleasby-Vigfusson's citations of *minni* in its several relevant senses are plural, and Cleasby-Vigfusson gives the plural of *einn* "in a distributive sense" as "single," for example, *ein gjöld* (n. pl. nom/acc.) "a single wergild" as opposed to double, triple, or quadruple.²⁸ In our context this usage could yield: "I will say a unique *minni* [a pl. construction] in conclusion." The "singularity" of the *minni* could be justified in terms of the whole inscription: Section 3 embodies a myth in contrast to the two sets of non-sacred material from heroic legend in Sections 1 and 2; Section 3 is, as suggested above, the climax of the whole inscription and perhaps most fully embodies Varin's hopes; and Section 3, since its *minni* are unnumbered in contrast to Sections 1 and 2, may be drawn from a different repertoire. We could paraphrase the sense of *ein minni* (pl.) simply as "a special *minni*." (2) But perhaps a second construction will seem more probable: *einn* could be assigned to modify the subject 'k. This syntax enjoys some support from distinguished predecessors: Grønvik does not discuss the matter, but his translation ("ich . . . ganz allein," quoted above) is appealing.²⁹ Von Friesen lends some indirect support by applying *einn* separately to a person, though not to *ek*.³⁰ This phrasing "ich . . . ganz allein" presumably accompanies Varin's use of the demotic verb form *sagi* and calls attention to his personal voice.

As nom. sg. of the interrogative pronoun, **huar** is most immediately

27. Ibid., 86. Grønvik (69, 86–87) maintains this preservation in the form **nipir** by using the framing line as the second -i-; Wessén (26–27) does not discuss the matter but transcribes **nipr**, normalized *nidr*.

28. Cleasby-Vigfusson (*s.v.*) gives postposed *einn* as a special usage which might apply here, but the time differential between Cleasby-Vigfusson's texts and Rök is great.

29. Technically Grønvik's German translation is ambiguous in the same way as the inscription, but his normalization to Old Norse with *einn* makes it clear that he refers this word to the subject.

30. von Friesen, *Rökstenen*, 85–86.

taken as the subject of the verb *frá* (< **frab*), past tense of the OSw equivalent of ON *fregna* (in dialects also *frega*). Most Rök commentators, starting with Bugge, have interpreted *frá* this way, however they have construed the syntax. Jacobson and Nielsen, but also Bugge and others, take (*a*)*ftir fra* as equivalent to a verb that would in Old Norse be *fregna eptir* “ask after, investigate, research.” Wessén, for example, translates (*han*) *har eftersport* (he has investigated). Proponents of this adverb-plus-verb combination seem to have taken it for granted on the basis of later Old Norse and synonyms like *spyrja eptir*, *frétta eptir* and perhaps on the basis of the modern languages. In any case, it has a modern feel and not much support in older sources; Peterson registers a very large number of instances of *æftir* as a preposition, but only two (including this one) as an adverb, and this is her only instance of *fregna*; *Lexicon Poeticum* cites only one occurrence of *fregna eptir* (twelfth century). I shall offer alternatives for *eptir* further on, but it is tempting to interpret the verb *fregna* as belonging to the ancient formula of hearsay knowledge, as in the opening lines of *Beowulf*: *we . . . þrym gefrunon* “we have heard of the glory (of the Spear-Danes).”³¹ Grønvik’s translation *weiß ich (habe ich in Erfahrung gebracht)* “I know (I have experienced)” might rather refer to the wisdom connections of this verb, as are richly attested in *Hávamál*, for example. Touching *frá* as the past tense of *fregna*, one might raise the question whether the loss of final *-h* can have happened as early as Rök (generally dated to the first half of the ninth century); Noreen gives 980 as “der älteste Beleg des *h*-Schwundes im Auslaut” (the oldest evidence for *h*-loss in final position).³² Within Rök we have **fapi** (line 2) from **faihjan*, but internal loss of *h* precedes loss in final position.³³ This problem, if it is a problem, exceeds my knowledge, and for now I take comfort in the long line of good scholars who have accepted *frá* as “learned,” “heard tell,” “asked,” or the like.³⁴

31. R. D. Fulk et al., eds., *Klaeber’s “Beowulf” and “The Fight at Finnsburg,”* 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 110nn to lines 1–3, as well as xcixn1; see also Teresa Pàroli, *L’elemento formulare nella poesia germanica antica*, Biblioteca di ricerche linguistiche e filologiche 4 (Rome: Istituto di glottologia, Università di Roma, 1975).

32. See Adolf Noreen, *Altisländische und altnorwegische Grammatik*, Altnordische Grammatik 1, 5th ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1970), 168.

33. *Ibid.*, 167.

34. It would be even more comforting if von Friesen had dealt with this problem, but he did not, taking **ftirfra** for cipher.

Whether **huar** governs *frá* or a verb lost in the lacunas (as in Grønvik's reconstruction), line 20's second sense unit must be structured like the questions following the *sagum*-formula in 3–5 (*hværiar valraubar varin...*), 5–8 (*hvar fur niu aldum...*), 12–14 (*hvar hæstr se...*), 14–17 (*hvarir tvair tigr kunungar satin...*), 21–22 (*hvar Inguldinga vari guldinn...*), and 23–25 (*[h]vaim se burin niðr...*), and especially resembles the three questions beginning with *hvar/hvaim*. Thus, tentatively taking *frá* as the verb of the clause headed by *huar* (“who has heard tell [of something yet to be determined]?”), we enter upon the first lacuna with the probability that it will contain a noun suitable to be the object of a verb, tentatively of *frá*, and having this structure: **ipk[123(4)]**. There is a very limited number of nouns that begin with *ið*, and one has already been hypothesized for this position by von Friesen: ON *iðgjald* (< Pr-N **gelda-*), occurring only as pl. *iðgjöld*.³⁵ *Lexicon Poeticum* lists thirteen nouns that begin with *ið*, but only eight (including *iðgjöld*) survive the runological test I described above.³⁶ Most of these eight are, of course, ill-suited to the context of 20. But *iðgjöld* fits what has been reconstructed of the rune fragments and the space; its phonology is unimpeachable for Rök (for breaking cf. **iatun**, **fiaru**, **skialti**, **fiakura**, etc). Its choice by von Friesen appears, however, to be based less on such structural considerations than on some kind of analogy with *Sonatorrek*, st. 17.³⁷ Von Friesen here misinterprets Egill's idea in favor of his own

35. See Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 3rd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1977), s.v.; Rosemarie Lühr, *Die Gedichte des Skalden Egill* (Dettelbach: Röhl, 2000), 208, 283.

36. The few words in Finnur Jónsson's *Lexicon Poeticum* beginning with *ið* appear in de Vries' *Wörterbuch* to be variants of words in *ið*.

37. Von Friesen does consider structural conditions when (85) he professes to see the top of a staff that might belong to **a** before the second **p**, helping to justify the gen. pl. in his *iðgjald*: “Insätta vi en form af *iðgjöld* efter **huar**, synes denna snarast böra, af spären af toppen till en hufvudstaf före det sista **p** och dessa båda teckens inbördes ställning att döma, vara gen. pl., alltså **ip[kialta]**” (If we insert a form of *iðgjöld* after **huar**, it seems that this ought to be the gen. pl., namely **ip[kialta]** to judge by the trace of the top of a main staff before the last **p** and the position of these two signs relative to each other). In the modern photograph I can see a tiny tick where the top of a staff would be, but considering the destruction of the surface below the tick and to both sides, especially to its left, only the short rune **r** could certainly be ruled out; **t**, which is needed for *iðgjöld*, seems not to be ruled out. We may note also that the lone **p** is quite a bit larger than the first **p**; it looks as if the rune carver was beginning, somewhere in the first lacuna, to expand his letters as he saw enough space ahead. On the interpretation of this part of *Sonatorrek* generally, see Harris, “Myth and Meaning” and the articles cited there.

idée fixe, revenge (instead of mine: renewal of the family), but this word, which also appears in *Hávamál* and four more times in Cleasby-Vigfusson, is rich with probable reflections of the thought world of Rök.

After *iðgjöld*, assuming that its last four runes adequately occupy the space to the right of **ipk**, we come next to the lone **þ**, followed by three, four, or perhaps five missing runes before the (invisible but inevitable) **[a]** of *aftir*. Here the crossword-puzzle method we have been attempting fails before too many possibilities; the best I can do is to discuss some of these. I proceeded (above) tentatively on the assumption that the verb *frá* was governed by the subject **huar**, but Grønvik instead took *frá* as first person (relating to, though not in syntactic connection with, the *ek* of the first clause) and having a summing-up sense, though technically the main clause, to which the **huar** clause is subordinate. He found the verb for **huar** in the first lacuna, thus with segmentation:

<huAR i þi[ki ni]þ[i A]ftiR> = ON *huerr [í (?) þiggi nið e]ptir*.
(Grønvik, *Der Rökstein*, 68, slightly improved)

In other words, he accepted Brate's **ipþi** and worked the **þi** part into a verb *þiggja* "receive" (in 3rd sg. pres. opt.), counting four runes to the lone **þ**, which he worked into the object of the verb.

One problem is the meaning of the preposition/adverb *í* here; Grønvik concedes: "Die hier vorgeschlagene Übersetzung ist nicht ganz unproblematisch. Das unsicher belegte Adverb *í* (?) habe ich zuerst mit 'darin' übersetzt, was aber sehr unklar ist" (The translation suggested here is not totally without problems. I first translated the uncertainly attested adverb *í* as "therein," which however is very obscure). To improve the sentence Grønvik is driven to hypothesize a rune-cutting error:

Vielleicht ist hier ein Schreibfehler zu verzeichnen, indem eine s-Rune weggelassen und ursprünglich ein Ausdruck <huaR is> mit einer Relativpartikel */is/* geplant sein kann. Demnach würde der Satz folgendermaßen lauten: <huAR is þiki niþi AftirR frá>, *awn. hver es þiggi nið eptir frá*—"Wer den Verwandten nachher empfängt (empfangen wird), weiß ich." (Ibid., 69)

Perhaps we should reckon with scribal error here, where an *s*-rune could have been omitted and the expression ***huar is**, with the relative particle **is**, could have been intended originally. Accordingly the sentence would take the following form: <*buAR is þiki niþi AftirR frA*>, OWN *hver es þiggi nið eptir frá* (Who will receive the relative hereafter, I know).

The content here reflects (and the argument is weakened by) Grønvik's idea that the latter part of the inscription deals with Vamoð's dedication as a kind of "relative" (*niðr*) to Thor, but the structural situation also seems unsatisfactory in that the space from the lone **þ** to the **f** is occupied in this reconstruction by only two runes, **i** (which takes up less room than most) and the obligatory **a** before **ftir**. To my eye (and I am relying on photographs) the second lacuna is at least the same size as the first (where Grønvik has four runes, von Friesen five). If we judge by the parallel line, 19, the first lacuna could hold five runes, the second five or, with the space under the dot, six. I grant that line 19 cannot lay down a law for the restitution of 20, but the second lacuna surely needs more than two runes.

Von Friesen (although he disposed of **ftirfra** differently) pursues reasoning somewhat similar to Grønvik's for the stretch of text from **huar** on, namely that he finds a verb and an object for the subject: **huar ip[kialta] þ[urbi]**. (The verb, here in pres. opt., takes a gen. object, hence the gen. pl. *iðgjalda*.) To paraphrase in von Friesen's sense: (Let him [the new son] consider, when he is alone [*einn*]), who might need *iðgjöld* (revenge).³⁸ Five runes before the lone **þ** is perhaps a little crowded and four after the **þ** rather generous with the white space, but this reconstruction gets in all the knowns (**ipk** + 4–5 spaces; **þ** + 4–6 spaces) and fits syntactically. The content is, as always, based on the larger—here unacceptable—understanding, but disregarding content, von Friesen's reconstruction is structurally plausible.

Before making my own guesses about the word or words beginning with the lone **þ**, I should comment on *aftir*. In the memorial context generally (*Aft Vamoð . . . aft faigian sunu*, lines 1–2) and especially in the context of Section 3's version of the Baldr myth and the reference there (in a **huar** question, lines 21–22) to a dead man who *vari guldinn* "was compensated for," I think *aftir* in 20 is most likely to

38. von Friesen, *Rökstenen*, 85, 87–88, 102–03.

carry a sense connected with death. Certainly it is very widespread in this general sense on rune stones, although Rök's usage appears to be either adverbial or as a preposition with implied object; this adverbial usage of *aftir* (*æftir*) is one of only two in Peterson's parsing of the Swedish runic corpus.³⁹ But one other sense should be mentioned, namely "left behind," because *eptir* in this sense is alliteratively collocated with *iðgjöld* in a significant ancient text. *Hávamál* 105 reads: *Gunnloð mér um gaf . . . / drycc ins dýra miaðar; / ill iðgjöld lét ec hana eptir hafa / síns ins heila hugar, / síns ins svára sefa* (Gunnloð gave me . . . a drink of the mead of poetry; I let her have *eptir* foul recompense for her generous mind, for her heavy heart). (*Hafa eptir* probably means "keep," rather than "in return.")⁴⁰

The word *iðgjöld* seems to occur six times in Old Norse. The verbs it is collocated with are limited to *geta* (*Sonatorrek* 17), *hafa eptir* (*Hávamál* 105) and, in prose, *hafa* (twice) and *fá* (twice). But the only synonym of *fá* and *geta* that might fit our puzzle is *þiggja*, and *Lexicon Poeticum* shows, among many occurrences in verse, a few that resemble our context, e.g. *Nú hefir hǫrð dæmi hildingr þegit* "Now the warrior has received a harsh destiny" (*Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 3). If the sentence read *huar iðgjöld þa (a)ftiR* (with *frá* as "I know" as in Grønvik), the lacuna between the lone **þ** and **f** would be filled by only one rune since successive occurrences of the same rune are normally contracted in runic orthography, here hypothetically **þaftir*.⁴¹ A sense in this direction would, however, fit my understanding of Section 3: "who received recompense after [a death]." Compare lines 21–22 (Question 1) and 23–25 (Question 2). In the myth alluded to in these Questions and more openly in the Answer (25–28) of Section 3, an Odin figure, the Kinsman (*sefi*) who respected the shrines (*viavari*), sired at ninety a descendant to

39. Peterson, *Svenskt runordsregister*, s.v. "æftir"; in Grønvik's translation (quoted above), *nachher* is also adverbial and favors a present or future sense of the verb.

40. Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, eds., *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, vol. 1, *Text*, 4th ed. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1962), 33. See Beatrice La Farge and John Tucker, *Glossary to the Poetic Edda: Based on Hans Kuhn's Kurzes Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1992), s.v. Cf. Carolyne Larrington, trans., *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 28; Patricia Terry, trans., *Poems of the Vikings: The Elder Edda* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 28; Andy Orchard, trans. *The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore* (London: Penguin, 2011), 29—all with "in return."

41. One violation of this principle in Rök is found at the beginning of line 19 (**s sunir**).

replace his dead son, the Baldr-figure Vilin, killed by a *iatun*. In the local East Gautish myth the name of the replacement son is “Thor” (26). This reconstruction of 20 would be improved if we provided more filler for the second lacuna, such as a short adverb like *ár* “in ancient days,” well known in mythological contexts; such speculation is gratuitous but would suit the myth and perhaps Varin’s standpoint as commentator. But as pointed out above, the sequence *þá ár* would normally be spelled **þar*, and the space would be filled by only three runes. A longer form of *ár*, *árla*, is also attested for mythological time, but again the sequence *árla aftir* would be contracted, yielding a total rune count in the lacuna of four: **þarlaftir*. The clumping of adverbs (or preposition/adverbs) in *þa arla aftir* might be thought syntactically objectionable, although as a whole the inscription is hardly a textbook case for Old Norse syntax.

An alternative space filler after *þa* might be to add a genitive qualifier for *iðgjöld* such as *sunar* (as in *Sonatorrek* 17) or *magar*; every one of the six recorded instances of *iðgjöld* in the dictionaries has a genitive qualifier, thus: *huar iðgjöld þa sunar/magar aftir*, *fra* (I have heard who received compensation for his son after [death]). But either of these emotive words, both used elsewhere on Rök,⁴² pushes the rune count in the second lacuna to seven. A possibly better speculation using these thematically weighted words might posit a preposed object of *aftir* in the acc. (cf. *aft faigian sunu*),⁴³ thus: *huar iðgjöld þa sunu/magu aftir* (who received recompense after [the death of] his son). This appealing filler raises the rune total for the second lacuna to a more plausible six and makes *aftir* a preposition, a more securely

42. *sunu* (acc. sg. m.) appears in line 2 of the dead Vamoð and *sunir* (*synir*) four times in the *pula* of lines 17–19. As to *magu* (acc. sg. m.), in an earlier article I adopted Gun Widmark’s explanation of *mukmini* as *mög-minni*, with the first evidence of apocope of *-u* after a stressed short vowel and the first *u*-umlaut appearing here medially in the environment of the compound. See “Varför ristade Varin runor? Tankar kring Rökstenen,” *Saga och Sed: Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademiens årsbok* (1992): 29–31; Harris, “Anglo-Saxon Eyes,” 39nn69–70. This explanation would, however, not forbid an uncompounded form *magu* (a poetic and emotional word that appears prominently in the early Norwegian inscription at Kjølevik). The form *mögminni* is independently supported by Alain Marez, “‘sakumukmini’?—Une relecture de l’inscription de Rök,” *Études germaniques* 52 (1997): 543–57.

43. Cleasby-Vigfusson (*s.v.*) generally assigns a locative meaning to *eptir* + dat. and a temporal one to *eptir* + acc., with the acc. usage very common in connection with death and succession and in runic contexts.

attested syntactic choice, to judge by Peterson's *Svenskt runordsregister*. Finally, I would like to try out just one last speculation for the second lacuna, thus: **huar iðgjald] þ[egin alftir frá**. This would mean "who has heard tell of recompense received after [a death]?" Five runes (counting **a**) are supplied, and the somewhat awkward appendage of *frá* as "ich weiß" is avoided; moreover this conjecture may match Varin's stance above the *greppaminni*-like inscription better with its reference to an audience, the audience's knowledge, and also more cryptically to the content of the myth.

Whichever necessarily speculative reconstruction we favor, line 20 stands somewhat outside the Question-Answer framework of most of the inscription, perhaps as a meta-level commentary on the inscription and an introduction to Section 3. Such an introduction has the effect of foregrounding this as the most important, climactic section, but it also fits into a picture of Varin as a sort of scholar. Wessén emphasized Varin's narrative repertory and his runic knowledge, suggesting that competitive display was one of his motives; Lönnroth generally follows this direction with more emphasis on play and wit; Widmark, modifying Wessén, also calls Varin a *pulr* but sees his cultivation of the cultural heritage as a social act of cultural preservation, perhaps born of resistance to the encroachment of the European behemoth or fears for the oral tradition following loss of his (only?) son.⁴⁴ There can be some degree of truth in all these efforts at empathetic interpretation, based as they can only be on the unique result, the inscription itself; what we can know for certain (besides his memorial purpose) is only the result of Varin's efforts: there is no comparable attempt to collect and preserve varied story material in a runic inscription.

Also unique is Varin's stance toward his medium. The inscription is artistically and complexly couched in different types of script: the standard Rök runes are graced in line 1 with the handsome **t**'s of the old futhark; after moving into shift cipher in 23, he tests the reader's alertness by sliding back into unshifted Rök runes in 24a, then again into shift cipher in 24b, turning unshifted Rök runes upside down in

44. Gun Widmark, "Tolkningen som social konstruktion: Rökstenens inskrift," in *Runor och ABC: Elva föreläsningar från ett symposium i Stockholm våren 1995*, ed. Staffan Nyström (Stockholm: Sällskapet Runica et Mediævalia, etc., 1997), 165–75. On Widmark's argument here, see Joseph Harris, "Philology, Elegy, and Cultural Change," *Gripla* 20 (2009): 257–75, esp. 267–73.

25a, and slipping over to coordinates cipher in 25b. His coordinates cipher is expressed in several (perhaps symbolic) forms (0's from the older futhark together with s's from the younger in 25b, a line which ends in a key-like sign that points the way to 26 with its two variants on the key-like sign), culminating in the great windmills of 27–28.⁴⁵ In 21–22 Varin begins his cipher section with two lines that are famously incised in the 24-character futhark. I do not have space to discuss Varin's displacements from the 24-character standard or his special signs; but if any substantial portion of the symbolic (and numerical) subtleties discussed by Hans Schwarz in "Varin und das ältere Futhark" is true, Varin's knowledge of ancient runic art was very extensive.⁴⁶ Schwarz belonged to the Höfler school and so found "magic" where now, post-Wessén, I am inclined to find "religion" and "art"; we would, however, agree on Varin's intentional and progressive mystification in the realization of the mythic material of Section 3. For Schwarz, Varin's knowledge was traceable to a dark but unbroken tradition of runic magic passed on in verse. The alternative offered by Brate appeals more to my sense of the inscription: Varin studied older inscriptions through the lens of his skill in the younger futhark.⁴⁷

Schwarz effectively mocks this position:

Will man nicht mit Brate den Rökritzer für einen ausgekochten Paläographen und Sprachwissenschaftler halten, der sich seine Weisheit auf autodidaktischem Wege durch mühsame Analyse älterer Runendenkmäler angeeignet habe, so bleibt nur die Annahme übrig, daß er—wie andere Runenmeister—sein Geheimwissen aus lebendiger Überlieferung geschöpft hat. (Schwarz, "Varin und das ältere Futhark," 208)

If, unlike Brate, one does not wish to consider the inscriber of Rök to be a hardboiled paleographer and linguist who has acquired his

45. What I called "key-like signs" in "Myth and Meaning" (and here) should be identified as *habalruna* "Kesselhaken," "'cremacula,' i.e., a pothanger with a rack." See René Derolez, *Runica Manuscripta: The English Tradition* (Brugge: De Tempel, 1954), 133, and Klaus Düwel, "Geheimrunen," in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, ed. Heinrich Beck et al., vol. 10 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 567–8. I retain this amateur's mistake to facilitate reference across my articles.

46. Hans Schwarz, "Varin und das ältere Futhark," in *Wort und Welt: Aufsätze zur deutschen Wortgeschichte, zur Wortfeldtheorie und zur Runenkunde*, ed. Hartmut Beckers (Münster: Nodus, 1993), 197–225.

47. Brate in Bugge, *Der Runenstein von Rök*, esp. 283–91.

knowledge autodidactically by laborious analysis of older runic monuments, then there remains only the assumption that, like other rune masters, he drew his secret knowledge out of living tradition.

But were there any other rune masters of the ninth century comparable to Varin? Brate notes two Viking Age inscriptions that give evidence of “study” of some older inscriptions, but they pale in comparison to Rök.⁴⁸ Certainly no other inscription in the younger futhark makes extensive and self-conscious use of the older futhark. But the best conception of the sources of Varin’s knowledge may lie somewhere between Schwarz’s model of continuity through oral tradition and Brate’s antiquarian revivalism through writing and may include elements of both.⁴⁹

In connection with Varin’s antiquarian learning, however, one is tempted to look back at **mini mir alu** and wonder whether the rune master might be using **alu**, the ancient runic word-sign for something like apotropaic “sacred power,” to characterize the myth that will be featured in Section 3; such a unique usage would closely parallel his deployment and deformation of the older futhark. Undoubted attestations of *alu* range from ca. 200 to the Eggja stone of ca. 650–700, and no surviving instance of *alu* definitely situates the word-sign in a syntactic connection, with the result that it appears to have no inflection and so to hover between “word” and “sign.” Many scholars have related **alu** to the sacred ale, *ǫl* (<**alu*), which, in Eddic verse, embodies the “strength of earth,” is linked with death and burial (cf., for example, ON *erfiǫl* and modern Danish *gravøl*), and once is actually compounded with *minni*.⁵⁰ In our context, the ordinary ale word (**með ǫlvi*) can obviously not be inserted, and Varin, if he ever encountered inscribed **alu**, can only have understood it as we do.

48. Ibid., 287–88.

49. As his archaizing reading might suggest, Schwarz dates Rök quite early, “about 760” (197), a date he derives from Theoderic’s birth in 456 plus nine generations by relying on Höfler’s refutation of the Aachen connection and his interpretation of lines 6–7 as referring to Theoderic’s birth (Höfler, *Der Rökstein von Rök*, 9–52). Höfler himself generally adhered to Bugge’s dating in the first half of the ninth century.

50. The *alu* problem has generated a large bibliography. I find Peter Pieter, “Die Runenstempel von Spong Hill: Pseudorunen oder Runenformel?” *Neue Ausgrabungen und Forschungen in Niedersachsen* 17 (1986): 181–200, to be especially helpful. The Eddic references are to: *Guðrúnarkviða II*, 21; *Hávamál* 137; *Hyndluljóð* 38, 43 (*jarðar megin*); and *Hyndluljóð* 45 (*minnisǫl*).

There are good reasons why **alu** has never been considered for the **mini mir alu** of line 20.⁵¹ Only about twenty-three certain instances of *alu* are recognized by runologists in all Germania; of these only four (but one of these located in Västergötland) are incised in stone, bracteates being the main medium to employ *alu*. The strongest reason for rejecting the ancient *alu* in line 20, however, is not that the audience of the inscription would not understand it—puzzling bait from an artistic-antiquarian rune master would not be out of place in this inscription—but that the reader would inevitably understand it as *með öllu*, the relatively well-attested adverbial phrase discussed above. The Varin I (and most of my predecessors) have constructed would be capable of alluding to *alu* in his text, but if we are to believe that there exist *des mots sous les mots*, a sober methodology seems to demand from the text a more distinct signal of its “hypogram.”

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51. The only exception seems to be Thomas L. Markey, “Studies in Runic Origins 7: The *alu*-Problem,” an unpublished but widely circulated paper, where the occurrence of *alu* in Rök is considered “highly unlikely” (p. 1 of version of April 16, 1999). I agree, but Markey’s analysis of *allu* as an “adverb . . . ‘entirely, in all’ . . . functionally equivalent . . . to OE *ealles*” seems mistaken; the n. dat. sg. *allu* is not to be separated from *með*. Markey’s published discussion of the *alu* problem in “Studies in Runic Origins 1: Germanic **maþl-/*mahl-* and Etruscan **meθlum**,” *American Journal of Germanic Linguistics & Literatures* 10 (1998): 188–89, does not mention Rök.

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