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The Wirral Ship Fellowship – Wirral Vikings

Furthark and Ogham

Deconstruction the ancient languages

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In this text we will discuss the old Runic languages of Futhark and Ogham and the ways in which they developed over the years.

Futhark

In old Norse, there was a series of letters or alphabet that was called Futhark. This Futhark was used as a form of writing. Today we see this writing on a series of items such as inscriptions on stones and non perishable items like jewellery.



The Futhark was not a strict series of symbols, but in fact contained a series of regional variants which developed over time from its first appearance in approximately the 1st Century CE.

Different variations of the Futhark seems to occur in the different Germanic peoples of the time.

Anglo Saxons, Goths Frisians and early Scandinavians used different variations of the runic alphabet.

Ogham

At the same time as the Germanic peoples were using Futhark for writing another form was used by the Old Irish as well as Old Welsh, Pictish and Latin.



Ogham was an alphabet the appeared as an inscription on monuments dating from the 4th to 6th Century AD but also manuscripts from the 6th to 9th Century.

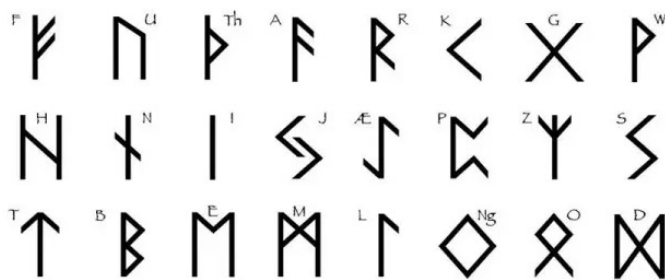
It was inscribed on stone monuments, throughout Ireland particularly Cork, Kerry and Waterford and England, Scotland, the Isle of Man and Wales, particularly in Pembrokeshire, South Wales.



old norse futhork

Up until the 8th Century, the basic Scandinavian futhork contained 24 letters or symbols. (Each symbols relating to a specific letter form).

This early period futhork is known today as the Elder Futhark. It contained 24 letters that were subdivided into three groups or families that were called 'ættir'. (nominative/accusative plural of ætt - The etymology is from the Proto-Germanic 'aihtiz' ("possession, property")).



In Scandinavia, there are approximately 260 of the known 350 known Elder Futhark inscriptions. The remainder are from continental Europe but some have been found as far to the East as the Black Sea. These inscriptions are usually short passages of text and can be seen on artefacts such as jewellery & weapons. They are typically found in graves and bogs on materials that had the best chance of preservation such as on bone or metal.

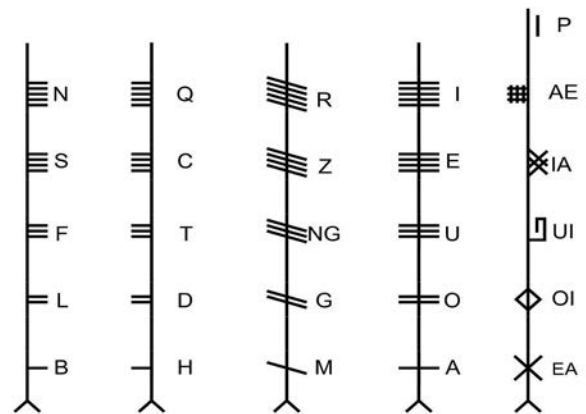
There are roughly 65 early period inscriptions found on rune-stones that appear to be mostly from the Elder Futhark or Proto-Norse periods mainly in Scandinavia.



early ogham

Ogham, is pronounced 'o:m' or 'o:əm' in Modern Irish, and it was spelt ogam and pronounced 'ɔyam in Old Irish.

The origins of the name are uncertain: it might be named after the Irish god Ogma, or after the Irish phrase og-úaim (point-seam), which refers to the seam made by the point of a sharp weapon.



Ogham is also known as or ogham craobh (tree ogham) beth luis fearn or beth luis nion, after the first few letters.

Ogham itself probably pre-dates the earliest inscriptions, some scholars believe it dates back to the 1st century AD, as the language used on these shows pre-4th century elements.

It is thought to have been modelled on or inspired by the Roman, Greek or Runic scripts. It was designed to write Primitive Irish and was





possibly intended as a secret form of communication.

All surviving Ogham inscriptions are on stone, although it was probably more commonly inscribed on sticks, stakes and trees. The inscriptions that survive are mostly people's names and were probably used to mark ownership, territories and graves.

Some inscriptions in primitive Irish and Pictish have not been deciphered, there are also a number of bilingual inscriptions in Ogham and Latin, and Ogham and Old Norse written with the Runic alphabet.

Ogham seems to be an early form of alphabet, usually inscribed around the edges of rocks running from the bottom to top and left to right or left to right and horizontally in manuscripts.

Ogham contains 25 letters and is grouped into five aicmí, (sing. Aicme = group, class). Each aicme is named after its first letter.

Originally Ogham consisted of 20 letters or four aicmí; the fifth aicme, or Forfeda, was added for use in manuscripts.

It was typically written on rocks, wood and manuscripts, the letters are linked together by a solid line.

The letters are used in vertical and horizontal variants with some examples shown below.

The four primary aicmí are, with their transcriptions in manuscript tradition and their names according to manuscript tradition in normalised Old Irish, followed by their Primitive Irish sound values, and their presumed original name in Primitive Irish in cases where the name's etymology is known

The twenty standard letters of the Ogham alphabet and six forfeda. The letter labelled IA (Ifin) earlier had the value of p. An additional (secondary) letter p is shown as 26th character (peith). This is the vertical writing of Ogham; in the horizontal form, the right side would face downward.

In the original 25 they would look like this

Right side/downward strokes

B beith [b] (*betwi-s)

L luis [l] (*lubsti-)

F fearn [w] (*wernā)

S saille [s] (*salik-s)

N nuin [n]

Left side/upward strokes

H úath [j] (*osato-)

D duir [d] (*darek-s)

T tinne [t]

C coll [k] (*koslas)

Q cert [kʷ] (*kʷer[x]tā)

Across/pendiclar strokes

M muin [m]

G gort [g] (*gorto-s)

NG gétal [gʷ] (*gʷédto-)

Z straif [sw] or [ts]?

R ruis [r] (*rudsti-)

notches (vowels)

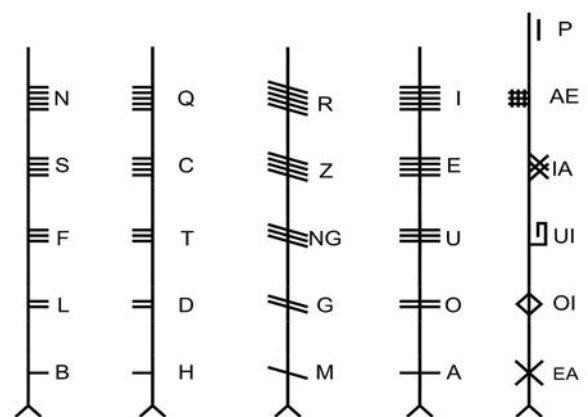
A ailm [a]

O onn [o] (*osno-)

U úr [u]

E edad [e]

I idad [i]



A letter for p is conspicuously absent, since the phoneme was lost in Proto-Celtic, and the gap was not filled in Q-Celtic, and no sign was needed before loanwords from Latin containing p appeared in Irish (e.g., Patrick). Conversely, there is a letter for the labiovelar q (ceirt), a phoneme lost in Old Irish.

The base alphabet is, therefore, as it were, designed for Proto-Q-Celtic.



Younger Futhark

In the late 700's at the start of the Viking age the futhark was shortened to 16 runes. The shortened alphabet was known as the younger Futhark.

There is a complete set of younger Futhark of the shortened alphabet on the Gørlev Rune-stone from Sjælland (the island of Zealand in Denmark) and dates from ca. 900.

The Younger Futhark from the Viking Age (16 letters)

ƿ	ᚋ	ᚑ	ᚦ/ᚥ	ᚱ	ᚷ
f	u	p	a/o/q	r	k
ᚖ	ᚗ	ᚙ	᚛	᚝	
h	n	i	a	s	
ᚢ	ᚦ	ᚨ	ᚢ	ᚣ	
t	b	m	l	R	

The runes in the Younger Futhark are simpler than those in the Elder Futhark. Each of the letters in the Younger Futhark contains only one vertical mark or 'stave' as they are known which allows them to be easily and quickly carved.

The runic letters of the Younger Futhark are simpler than those of the Elder Futhark. Each letter in the Younger Futhark has only one vertical mark or 'stave' and can be carved easily and quickly. This Younger Futhark are known as 'long-branch runes' because they are carved with full or long vertical strokes. There were also local variations and differences among different carvers. The Younger Futharks 16 long-branch runes were the common form of Old Norse writing during the Viking Age. Like the Elder Futhark, the Younger Futhark divides into ættir, but the 'families' are shorter.

Inscriptions using Younger Futhark are found in many overseas regions that contained Norse

activity. Some of these locations where a great distance from Scandinavia.

A runic inscription found in Iceland from around the year 900 was carved on a stone spindle whorl and names a woman called Vilbjörg as the owner. An inscription from the fourteenth century was found in the north of Greenland.

Runic writings are mentioned repeatedly in the sagas and many inscriptions in the Younger Futhark have been found in the British Isles, and runic inscriptions have also been found as far away as Greece and Russia. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Byzantine Empire and the Caliphate of Baghdad were frequent destinations for Norse traders and warriors.

Short-Twig Runes,

Variations of the Younger Futhark

ƿ	ᚋ	ᚑ	ᚦ/ᚥ	ᚱ	ᚷ
f	u	p	a/o/q	r	k
ᚖ	ᚗ	ᚙ	᚛	᚝	
h	n	i	a	s	
ᚢ	ᚦ	ᚨ	ᚢ	ᚣ	
t	b	m	l	R	

Short-twig runes are usually found in Sweden and Norway. They became more popular toward the end of the Viking Age and in the following medieval centuries.

Short-twig runes were easier to carve than long-branch runes, and they were often used as a kind of cursive script among traders. Some inscriptions mix the two systems, such as those found on the Isle of Man in the Irish Sea, where Viking Age settlers came from different regions of Scandinavia.



multiple sounds

Younger Futharks use of only 16 letters, often meant that single runes often represent more than one sound.

For example, the runic symbol represents the consonant sounds:

ᚢ 'b' and 'p',

and represents

ᚦ 'd' and 't'.

The difference in these similar sounds is the way they were vocalised. The difference and distinction of 'b' and 'd' being voiced while 'p' and 't' are voiceless. Like English consonants, Old Norse consonants are voiced or voiceless. The distinction is whether the vocal cords vibrate while the air passes through (producing voiced consonants), or do not vibrate (producing voiceless ones). The results are varying sounds altered one from the other by an obstruction of the free flow of air. For instance, compare the voiceless 's' in English 'singer' to the voiced 'z' in 'zinger.'

A similar distinction is found in the voiced ᚩ and voiceless ᚦ pronunciation of the single ᚢ rune, serving for both sounds.

Additional variants of the Younger Futhark appear toward the end of the Viking Age. For example, eleventh-century dotted runes added sounds such as 'e', 'g', and 'y'.

ᚦ ᚢ ᚩ
e g y

In the mid-eleventh century an expanded medieval futhark came into use in Norway and a few other areas. Sometimes called 'futhark,' it incorporated short-twig runes. This alphabet, like other revised, later runic alphabets, continued in active use for several centuries after the Viking Age.

Christian influence

When members of the viking age converted to Christianity, runic writing became increasingly influenced by medieval Latin.

In some instances, runes were used to carve Latin inscriptions. Spelling often varies among runic inscriptions because of differences in pronunciation, regional dialects, personal ability in distinguishing sounds, and the lack of a recognized spelling standard.

Similar spelling variations widely exist in Old Norse manuscripts.

For example, the infinitive form of the verb gera 'do, make' is spelled

- gøra,
- gōra,
- gōrva,
- gōrwa,
- giōrva,
- giora,
- gjōra

In different manuscripts. To overcome the problem of variation, scholars adopted a standardized Old Norse spelling for saga editions, dictionaries, and transcriptions of runic writing. Standardized ON is based principally on Old Icelandic, the most conservative of the Old Norse dialects and the one that we know most about because of the large number of written sources.



anglo-saxon futhorc

Anglo-Saxon runes or Anglo-Frisian runes are runes that were used by the Anglo-Saxons and Medieval Frisians (collectively called Anglo-Frisians) as an alphabet in their native writing system, recording both Old English and Old Frisian (Old English: *rūna*, *ᚱᚢᚷᚢ*, "rune").

Today, the characters are known collectively as the futhorc (*ᚠᚢᚱᚱᚦᚢᚱᚦ*, fuporc) from the sound values of the first six runes.

The futhorc was a development from the older co-Germanic 24-character runic alphabet, known today as Elder Futhark, expanding to 28 characters in its older form and up to 34 characters in its younger form.

Use of the Anglo-Frisian runes is likely to have started in the 5th century onward and they continued to see use into the High Middle Ages. They were later accompanied and eventually overtaken by the Old English Latin alphabet introduced to Anglo-Saxon England by missionaries.

Futhorc runes were no longer in common use by the eleventh century,

F	U	Th	O	C	R	G	W
H	N	I	Gae	Eo	P	X	S
T	B	E	M	L	Ng	Oe	D
A	Æ	Y	lo	Ea	Q	K	St
G							

Starting from around the 5th century, it was used in Britain and Frisia as part of the diffuse Anglo-Frisian cultured sphere.

Around the 8th century, runic writing disappears from Frisia, but use continues in Britain.

In the 9th century, the now Anglo-Saxon runic row, was further developed and more runes were introduced, eventually becoming a 33-type runic row with some further unstandardised examples of runes existing.

In its late stage, it was largely analogous to the Latin script, and disappeared in its favour during the High Middle Ages.

Usage and commonality is unclear. From at least five centuries of use, fewer than 200 artefacts bearing futhorc inscriptions have survived.

The Anglo-Frisian runic row was a 28-type further development of the 24-type Elder Futhark (type = number of runes), introducing more runes and reworking some existing runes to fit the period language.