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Runes and Gold Bracteates: The Futhark Sequence as Mythic Mnemonic

The riddle of the futhark sequence of the runes has been a source of fascination for over 180 years with the persistent question: why were the runes not simply listed in either a Roman or Greek sequence? Could there be some other system at work here? My answer is that the futhark can be read as an intelligible sentence based on the myth of Woden/Odin and the runes. The standard methodology for attempting to explain the sequence of the individual runes has been to treat the rune-row as a mathematical variant of the series of individual letters of the alphabet. These efforts have not produced satisfying results.

My double suggestion is not to treat the futhark as series of letters, but rather to consider it as a possible sequence of words. In this sequence the words form a sentence from mythology recalling the tale of the origin of the runes as a gift from the Father – a useful mnemonic especially for the beginner. Decipherment begins with locating words such as *stbe* and *od* for ‘staves’ and ‘inherited property,’ and ends with a complete sentence. Confirmation of the results of this theory is found in the iconography of several c-type bracteates. On several of these Migration period medals the futhark is found directly connected to Woden’s tree Yggdrasil, and with Hugin and Munin, Woden’s birds of thought and memory.