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SCHOLARS AND THE MAGICAL WORLD OF RUNES. THE BEGINNINGS OF THE SCIENTIFIC APPROACH TO RUNES IN 17TH CENTURY SCANDINAVIA

Abstract

This paper deals with the beginnings of scholar and scientific study of runes in 16th and 17th century Scandinavia. Although in many ways provoked by the political and propagandistic needs of the rulers (such as Christian IV of Denmark or Carl IX of Sweden), the study, performed by scholars such as Johannes Bureus in Sweden and Ole Worm in Denmark, led gradually to the development of a rational approach to runes and critical methods for analysing them.

Key words: runes, history of historiography – Scandinavia, antiquarianism, history of science.

Słowa kluczowe: runy, historia historiografii, historiografia skandynawska, antykwarystyka, historia nauki.

The question of runologic studies was discussed during the inter-war period by a German scholar, Gerhard Jaffé.¹ Since then, this issue has been only partially mentioned by historians, mostly in connection with the runologic studies themselves. The history of runologic research has not been treated as a separate research question. Nevertheless, the topic is mentioned in the recent work of Karen Skovgaard-Petersen, the anthology of biographical studies of Swedish historians and an older Swedish study by Kurt Johannesson.²

¹ G. Jaffé, *Geschichte der Runenforschung. Geistgeschichtliche Betrachtung der Auffassungen im 16.–18. Jahrhundert* Berlin and Leipzig: B. Behrs Verlag/Friedrich Feddersen, 1937.

² *Historiography at the Court of Christian IV (1588–1648). Studies in the Latin Histories of Denmark by Johannes Pontanus and Johannes Meursius* Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2002; Gyllene Äpplen, *Svensk idehistorisk läsebok*, ed. G. Broberg, Stockholm: Norstedts, 1991; K. Johannesson, *Gotisk renässans. Johannes och Olaus Magnus som politiker och historiker* Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1982, English translation published in 1991.

However, the gradual growth of interest in runes in terms of their scientific treatment is an important part in the development of the new historiography in the 17th century. This means that, at that time, not only had the superstitious interpretation of the runic alphabet – giving it witchcraft and magical powers – been abandoned, but also that this study contributed to the development of a new historiographical method and critical skills. Modern scholars tried to explain runes in the most rational way, presenting them as an ancient alphabet that could be translated into one's own language. The task of writing down runic inscriptions also stimulated the development of empirical and critical methods in accordance with the new scientific patterns for research.

The study of runes was a part of the antiquarian branch of historical writing. In this period, such interests were in fact seen as a separate field of study. History was defined as a chronological narrative about political and military events. With a pragmatic purpose of religious or political character, it was often criticised in the 17th century as biased, and subordinate to different sorts of political interests and needs. The rise of antiquarian study, while it can be traced back to classical historiography, is associated with the Renaissance – the Italian writer Flavio Biondo with his *Italia illustrata* from 1474 is usually mentioned as its most famous pioneer. The antiquarian studies presented an alternative to the traditional, narrative and rhetoric scope of interest. They wanted to concentrate on non-political issues: customs, law and legal institutions, art, economy, literature, genealogy and, finally, language. Such topics required other kind of sources: they could not be studied basing on written resources alone. Thus, the antiquarians also tried to collect material objects, such as masterpieces of art, weapons, coins – runic inscriptions were seen as more related to antiquarian field than to traditional, narrative history. “This widening of the subject of history, the historicizing of more and more areas of human life is one of the major characteristics of historical studies in early modern period.”³

On the other hand, the antiquarians tended to concentrate on national history rather than devote their studies to classical past. If mentioned, it was seen rather as an introductory period, the universal history to which the nation's past had to be related to. The emphasis, however, was put on native language, local customs, national law and institutions, and national cultural achievement, such as literature. This meant that the antiquarian study soon began to suffer from the same weaknesses as narrative history – being subordinated to political purposes. In both cases, the role of the writer was to deliver evidence of the country's greatness, justify its expansion or compensate for its losses. The main difference was, however, that narrative history was supposed to show the greatness of the nation's ancestors as warriors, rulers and politicians while antiquarian research was supposed to provide evidence of an individual nation's glorious past in terms

³ K. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Historiography*, p. 150.

of a high level of cultural development. Runes, identified as a very old alphabet proving that people's ancestors were able to read, write and produce literary texts, could serve this non-scholarly purpose perfectly.

Therefore, as we shall see, runes were soon included into the patriotic and nationalistic vision of national history, serving as evidence of past glory. This pragmatic and patriotic purpose meant, however, that the state – precisely to say, the Crown – saw its own interest in supporting that study, giving the scholars necessary aid. In the 17th century, the modern state's expansionist policies often required moral and political justification; and the belief that it could be found in the past, as the past was usually seen as a glorious period, a “golden age”, that could provide contemporary society with models and examples, as equally strong. Thus, it was commonly believed that historical study could support politics with necessary reasons and justifications. Another form of political pragmatic purpose was the need to argue with the typical Southern European, mainly Italian and French, feelings of superiority. The Northern (but also central i.e. Germans - and Eastern) European nations didn't have the luck to have been part of the Roman Empire, and, in this way, could be proud and direct heirs of its cultural heritage. The direct result was that the Italian scholars often presented a rather patronising attitude, creating the vision of the peripheral nations as totally barbarian. This commonly caused discomfort and led to several attempts to show the glory and ancient character of the national past. We can talk of an entire tendency in historiography that was willing to embrace a multitude of legends and mythology to create a convincing picture of the national past as equally remote and attractive as the Roman one.⁴ In this vision, runes were supposed to play an important role.

In the case of the Scandinavian realms the rivalry between Denmark-Norway and Sweden was equally important. Both countries claimed supremacy in the region, both believed that their country should be recognised as the cradle of regional (if not European) civilisation.⁵ This conflict was mainly seen during the reign of Christian IV (1588–1648) in Denmark and the Swedish kings of that time: Charles IX (1599–1611) and Gustav II Adolf (1611–1632), and queen Christina (1633–1654). Rulers with large ambitions of not only dominating the Baltic region, but even winning a superior position within the Roman Empire put a strong emphasis on historical study, expecting the scholars to develop the vision of the past that could legitimise such ambitions.

⁴ K. Johannesson, *Gotisk renässans...*, pp. 115–116; The German case has been recently analysed by a Swiss historian, Caspar Hirschi, *The origins of Nationalism. An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to early Modern Germany* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 73, 86, 153.

⁵ E. Jørgensen, *Historieforskning og Historieskrivning in Danmark indtil Aar 1800*, København: Den danske historiske Forening, 1964, p. 85.

The existence of runes had already been noticed by classical writers such as Cicero and Tacitus. The Danish chronicle of Saxo Grammaticus also included some information about this ancient alphabet. In early modern times, scholars such as Theseus Ambrosius (1469–1540) believed that the runic alphabet was identical with Gothic, used by Ulifila in his book.⁶ The same view was shared by the 16th century Swedish historians Johannes and Olaus Magnus (1488–1544 and 1490–1557 respectively). The Brothers Magnus, exiled Catholic clergymen living in Italy, directly experiencing the Italian feeling of cultural superiority, tried in their works to portray the glorious past of their homeland and provide evidence that the ancient Swedes (Goths) should not be perceived as barbarians. Runes were mentioned several times in that context. Both historians included a runic alphabet (*alphabeticum gothorum*): Joannes in his *Historia... de omnibus Gothorum* (Rome, 1554) with a Latin transcription and Olaus in his famous *Carta marina et descriptio septentrionalium terrarum ac mirabilium rerum in eis contentarum diligentissime eleborata* (Venice, 1539) and *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (Rome, 1555). Olaus Petri (1492–1552), another Swedish chronicler, with a clear need to base his statements on sources, studied not only medieval scripts, but also runic inscriptions.⁷ It was also noticed that the Swedish archbishop Laurentius Petri (1499–1573) probably possessed a “textbook to teach runes” (*Gamle Aerkebiskop Larses Undervisning*), which was presumably written by his brother, the previously mentioned Olaus Petri.⁸ The Brothers Magnus also made efforts to date the runes: Johannes believed that they were extremely old (that they belonged to the time “*ante universale diluuium vel paulo post*”), while Olaus was more cautious. Nevertheless, Olaus supported his brother’s view that runes, because of their age, are older than the Latin alphabet and thus can be seen as proof of the high level of culture in the Goths’ society. He claimed that runes were letters used mainly for practical purposes, but he also suspected that they could be seen as secret alphabet to pass on secret information and messages.⁹ Both brothers were later esteemed and highly respected as scholars who decisively contributed to restoring knowledge about runes and keeping them in the popular memory. Equally important was the fact that they were able to draw foreign scholars’ attention to this Scandinavian achievement.¹⁰

⁶ G. Jaffé, *Geschichte der Runenforschung*, Berlin–Leipzig, B. Behrs verlag, F. Feddersen, 1937, 2–3; J.K. Nordby, *Efterreformatöriska runeinnskrifter i Norge. Opphav og tradisjon*, Oslo: University of Oslo, 2001, p. 31.

⁷ J.K. Nordby, *Efterreformatöriska runeinnskrifter*, pp. 31–32; O. Ferm, “Religiös reformator och historiker”, [in:] *Svenska historiker från medeltid till våra dagar*, ed. R. Björk et al., Stockholm: Norstedts, 2003, p. 86.

⁸ J.K. Nordby, *Efterreformatöriska runeinnskrifter*, p. 31; Jaffe, *Geschichte der Runenforschung*, p. 13.

⁹ G. Jaffé, *Geschichte der Runenforschung*, p. 4.

¹⁰ G. Jaffé, *Geschichte der Runenforschung*, p. 5; Kurt Johanneson, “Uppäckten av historiska arvet (1400–1750)” in *Gyllene Äpplen*, p. 284.

It could be said, that from then on, the career of runes was constantly developing. Johannes Bureus (1568–1652), the teacher of young Gustav II Adolf, often mentioned as a pioneer of runic scientific studies, made the next step to restore the old alphabet to importance.¹¹ Bureus wrote several works on the subject, some of them remained in manuscript form. The most important books he managed to publish were *Runakänsläns lärospån* (1599) and *Run ABC-Bok* (1611). Bureus wanted to prove that runes were Swedish before the Danes adopted them – which obviously could be used in the ongoing political rivalry between Sweden and Denmark-Norway. In interpreting the letters, Bureus pointed out that there are two different versions of runic alphabet, one ordinary and the other he claimed to be akin to hieroglyphs (according Bureus – Greek) and Jewish Kabbalah.¹² This is why they could serve as regular alphabet, used by many people, but simultaneously be a secret one. He also initiated the great project of publishing runic inscriptions, already presenting pictures in his works from 1599.¹³ He tried to convince King Charles IX, who decided to nominate Bureus to professor of runology, that runes should be restored as the commonly used alphabet in Sweden.¹⁴ It is often emphasised how strongly Bureus influenced the new king, Gustav II Adolf, who presented himself in propaganda as the heir to Berick or Aldric, legendary heroes of Gothic past. It is claimed that those ideas partly supported Gustav's political programme and expansion.¹⁵

In his linguistic studies, Bureus claimed – in accordance with the knowledge of his time – that the oldest language in the world is Hebrew, adding that next to this was Swedish. Thus, this nation should be accepted as a direct and close descendant of the chosen people, almost of the same age. What was more remarkable, the Goths had their own alphabet and writing a long time ago. Altogether, Bureus recognized 16 runic letters.¹⁶

At the same time, interest in runes began to grow in Denmark. The political rivalry between Denmark and Sweden was visible also on that field. On both sides, we can observe attempts to present a vision of the national past that would determine the superiority of one's own kingdom. This also included direct polemics, in which the other side was accused for falsifying history and slandering its neighbour. In the eyes of Danish historians (and the Crown as well), the books of Brothers Magnus especially were seen as horrible and totally incredible. On the order of Chancellor Jørgen Friis, the historian Hans Svan-

¹¹ J.K. Nordby, *Efterreformatöriska runeinnskrifter*, p. 32.

¹² K. Johannesson, "Uppäckten av", p. 284; G. Jaffé, *Geschichte der Runenforschung*, p. 9.

¹³ J.K. Nordby, *Efterreformatöriska runeinnskrifter*, p. 32.

¹⁴ J.K. Nordby, *Efterreformatöriska runeinnskrifter*, p. 32; G. Jaffé, *Geschichte der Runenforschung*, p. 8.

¹⁵ Z. Anusik, *Gustav II Adolf* Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1996, pp. 14, 123.

¹⁶ G. Jaffé, *Geschichte der Runenforschung*, pp. 8–9, 11.

ing (1503–1584) published *Refutatio calumniarum cuisdan Joanni Magni Gothi Upsalensi* (1561) in which he wanted to show that the general negative opinion about Danish Kings presented in Johannes Magnus' work was not true.¹⁷

Since runes were identified as a remarkable proof of national culture's ancient and distinguished character, directly supporting national pride, the question of runic origins became a political issue. This is probably why in the early 1520s, the Danish legate in Sweden, Peder Gylt, saw it necessary to inform his superior, Chancellor Christen Friis, about the Swedish studies on that subject.¹⁸ Danish historians not only mentioned the runes, but also tried to prove that they had originated in their national past. The famous Danish historian and politician, Arild Huitfeldt (1546–1609), in his *Danmarckis Rigis Krønike fra Kong Dan oc indtil Kong Knud den Siette* (1603) presented a runic alphabet with Latin transcription ("Det gamle rune bogstaffuer som ere aflagde.")¹⁹ Additionally, Claus Christoffersen Lyschander (died 1624), in *Synopsis Historiarum Danicarum, de Danske Konges Slectbog* (1622), published three runic rock inscriptions.²⁰ Stephanus J. Stephanius (1599–1650), in his critical edition of the Saxo Chronicle (1644–1645) used different sorts of sources, including runic inscriptions, that he found during his diligent travels and enquiries throughout the country.²¹ Finally, the Royal Historiographer, the Dutchman Johannes Pontanus (1571–1639), in his *Rerum Danicarum Historia. Libris X unoque tomo ad domum usque Oldenburgicam deductam* (Amsterdam 1631) tried to show the superiority of Danish past culture by recalling Saxo and his description of the use of runes.²²

However, the major contribution to Danish runology in that period was made by Ole Worm (1588–1654), who was known as *antiquitatis assertor, septentrions vindex*.²³ Ole Worm was an important and well-known member of the European *Republica Litteraria* in the 17th century. As a polyhistor, he contributed to the development of many scientific fields at that time. He was a physician and served as the personal doctor of King Christian IV and his family. He studied biology and one of his achievements were discoveries in the field of embryology. In a typical style of his times, he created a cabinet of curiosities – a collection of rare and peculiar things, such as fossils, artefacts, taxidermed animals – the famous Wormianum Museum. His scientific interests strengthened empirical methodology in his scholarly approach. Thus, Worm was also able to present a modern attitude towards history.

¹⁷ E. Jørgensen, *Historieforskning*, p. 89.

¹⁸ K. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Historiography*, p. 26.

¹⁹ "The old runic letters that have been put down."

²⁰ J.K. Nordby, *Efterreformatriske runeinnskrifter*, p. 32.

²¹ Jørgensen, *Historieforskning*, p. 130.

²² K. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Historiography*, pp. 164–165.

²³ E. Jørgensen, *Historieforskning*, p. 126.

This, together with literature and language, was another field of his interests. Worm wanted to continue the studies on old Norse literature, the sagas and medieval chronicles initiated in the 16th century. Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* was translated into Danish by Christiern Pedersen in first half of 16th century (published 1514). In Norway, main emphasis was put on Snorri's works, mainly the *Heimskringla*. This became an object of activity by such scholars as Laurents Hanssøn (ca. 1500 – after 1551) and Mattis Storssøn (died 1569).²⁴ The most important achievement, however, was the publication of the Snorri Sturlasson chronicle prepared by Peder Claussøn Friis (1633). This only came into being thanks to the support of Ole Worm.²⁵ As an antiquarian, Worm was also interested in topography, and he also published the same author's description of Norway.²⁶

Thanks to the support of Chancellor Christen Friis, Worm managed to convince King Christian IV that a huge project of antiquarian research in the whole realm should start, finally leading to the completion of the country's topographic description. Just as in other European states, such work was seen as a necessary scholarly contribution, not only for the position and reputation of the state, but also for its economic and social growth. One shining example is William Camden's *Britannia sive florentissimorum regnorum Angliae, Scotiae, Hiberniae (-) descriptio* (1586), a brilliant English achievement modelled after the work of Flavio Biondo.

In a letter from 11 August 1622, the king ordered educated people and the clergy in the country to search for and collect old documents and artefacts such as coins: “*alt this some kan tiene til vores danske historias at enodere og antiquitates gentis nostrae at deducere.*”²⁷ In listing all objects of interest, the king also named runes in Points 3 and 5 of his letter:

“5. Skal alle Runebogstaver skrevne eller i Steen, heele enten i Stykker, eller Træ udhugne, eller paa Metalbelter, og saadanne opsøges, og med Antegnelser hvor de ere at finde, og en rigtig nøiagtig Afskrift af dennem hid forskikkes, og kan Lineamenta med Kridene paa Stenene bedst drages og siden aftegnes, og Provtene og Præstene forelægges med al Flid strax derom at forfare, og endelig beskeden til Bisperne fremskikke, som strax skal fet udi Cancelliet indskikke. (-)

²⁴ For more information see my article “Renesansowa historiografia norweska na tle pisarstwa historycznego XVI wieku w Skandynawii”, *Kwartalnik Historyczny* CXVI, 1, (2009): pp. 75–101.

²⁵ *Norske Kongers Chronica*, Kiøbenhavn 1633

²⁶ *Norriges oc omliggende øers sandfærdige Bescriffuelse, indholdendis huis vært era af vide, baade om Landens oc Indbyggernis Leilighed av Vilkaar, saa vel I forstum Tid, som nu I vore Dage*, Kiøbenhavn 1632.

²⁷ “Everything that can serve to write down our Danish *historias* and to make conclusions about *antiquitates gentis nostrae*.” J. Andersson, *Jonas Andersson frå Skånevik om fornminne i Bergen bispedømme 1926*, ed. Asgaut Steinnes, Oslo 1972, AM 370 Fol., p. 9.

6. Alle *Calendarie runica* paa Træ og ellers.²⁸

The king described the method that should be applied in this work, pointing to the need to present the location and origin of the antiquities, searching for information among the local population and also noting the presence of piles of stones.²⁹ Similarly, Worm, in his letters to the clergy, instructed them as to how the copies should be prepared. He pointed out that it was necessary to note the exact location of the stone: not only the name of the parish, but also whether the stone was facing east or west, how large it was, what the additional pictures on the front and the back of the stone looked like, and then the inscription itself. Finally, the copyist should include all information about the stone he could gather from the people living in the area: whether they remember the stone's origin, all stories and legends associated with it, and perhaps "peculiar events" that happened nearby.³⁰ A similar letter was sent to the Norwegian *statholder* Jens Juel³¹.

In the material that Worm received in response to this letter, runes were present only to a small extent. Worm was only able to use a few of them, so he finally decided to make his own journey and research. This plan, however, did not work out, so once again Worm decided to write letters, this time sending them to the bishops in Norway. In the autumn of 1626, he received the response from the Niels Paaske the Bishop of Bergen: a manuscript that he found highly satisfactory. A copy of the inscriptions was made in the summer of 1626, on the order of Bishop Paaske by Jonas Andersson (died 1664), a Norwegian priest's son from Skånevik in Sunnhordland.

Jonas Andersson studied in Greifswald in 1622, where he enrolled as "Jonas Andreae, Norwegus". After fulfilling his assignment on the bishop's order, he went to Copenhagen and entered (2.X.1626) the University as "Jonas And. Schonvigius Norv. Berg., ex Academia Gryphisvaldensis," as it is recorded in the *matricul*. We do not know whether he personally delivered his runic copy to Ole Worm.

Nevertheless, Ole Worm was content, and decided to trust Andersson with the whole work. In the next few years, Andersson travelled around Denmark making copies of the runic inscriptions. In the summer of 1627, he visited Skåne (today in Sweden), Lolland and Fyn in the autumn of that year, and Jutland probably

²⁸ "5. All runic letters written or in stone; whole or in pieces; or cut into trees, on metal, etc., should be found and, and with the remark where they were found a right and precise copy of it should be send here; the lines on the stones should be marked with chalk and then copied; the priest must be immediately informed, and they should send information to the bishops, who should sent it to the Chancery. "6. All *Calendarie runica* on trees, etc." J. Andersson, *Jonas Andersson*, p. 9.

²⁹ E. Jørgensen, *Historieforskning*, p. 130.

³⁰ J. Andersson, *Jones Andersson*, p. 11.

³¹ J.K. Norby, *Efterreformatatoriske runeinnskifter*, p. 32.

in 1629. The manuscripts Andersson produced became the main source for Ole Worm's work. In the later period, Worm also received inscriptions from other scholars: from Peder Alvsson of the Oslo and Hamar diocese, made in 1627, and one anonymous in 1639.³²

Happily, Andersson's manuscripts from his Bergen collection are preserved, they consist of 32 folio pages under the title *ANTIQVITATES Eller Fortegnelse Oc Afritzing paa huis gamle Legender som findis Vdij Bergen-sticht. ANNO. 1626*. The whole trip lasted two months and Andersson covered 88 miles in the northern part of the country and approximately 40 in the south.³³ In his manuscripts, Andersson also included drawings of many other artefacts and sites: old churches, medieval sarcophaguses with inscriptions, crosses, tombs, *bauta* stones and burial mounds (where the "giants" were supposed to have been buried).³⁴

Ole Worm also tried to find inscriptions himself. He could not spend too much time travelling, but he used every opportunity: once, whilst visiting – as a physician – Lady Anne Krabbe in Stenalt, he carefully studied stones with runic inscriptions in her garden.³⁵

The result of Worm's studies is enormous, and includes a long list of books published. The first was *Fasti Danici* (1626), an edition and study of a runic calendars from the 14th century.³⁶ Then, he published descriptions of two important runic rocks, Strømonument and Tryggevældesten (1628, 1636).³⁷

Another major achievement was his study of the runic alphabet, *Runir seu Danica literatura antiquissima, vulgo Gothica dicta luci reddita, Cui accessit de prisca Danorum poesi Dissertatio* (1636). In this book he tried to present a theoretical study on the material he had already collected. The scholar concentrated on a series of questions, he wanted to answer: what were runes, what was their origin, how they were used in terms of the material used and their purpose, and in what areas and for how long they were used. Finally, the author analysed the alphabet itself. Worm was certain that the runes, although they originated from Hebrew, are an original Danish achievement and should not be seen as modelled after the Greek or Latin example, mainly because the runes were older than both these alphabets. Some similarities that can be observed come from the fact that all languages and alphabets were rooted in Hebrew. Discussing some contem-

³² J. Andersson, *Jonas Andersson*, pp. 10–11.

³³ J. Andersson, *Jonas Andersson*, p. 30.

³⁴ *ANTIQVITATES Eller Fortegnelse Oc Afritzing paa huis gamle Legender som findis Vdij Bergen-sticht. ANNO. 1626* facsimile [in:] Andersson, *Jonas Andersson*, pp. 43–96.

³⁵ E. Jørgensen, *Historieforskning*, p. 123.

³⁶ *Fasti Danici, universam tempora computandi rationem antiqvitus in Dania et vicinis regionibus observatam libris tribus exhibentes, ex variis patriæ antiqvitatibus et autoribus fide dignis eruti, ac in lucem emissi.*

³⁷ *Tulshøi seu Monumentum Strøense in Scania enucleatum; Olai Wormii De monumento Trygveldensi Epistola ad... Tychonem Brahe...*

porary theories, Worm claimed that neither Ulfila nor Jordanus should be seen as creators of the runic alphabet: in fact it was much older.³⁸

The difficult question about the practical use of runes was connected with several theories about their magical power. Worm was of course aware that such beliefs not only existed in the past, but that in his own time there were people who still believed in the supernatural character of the old Nordic alphabet. When he wanted to consult some problems with the Icelanders, he met with some resistance: the people explained that they don't want to be accused of committing sorcery.³⁹ It was a rational fear, as many years later, the famous Árni Magnússon described how the common Icelanders practised witchcraft using runes by writing magic letters and signs on pieces of wood "*hvilke alle ere irressonable Figurer, som hverken de selv eller noget Menneske kan vide hvad det skal være, men af gamle Monumenter og Conjecturer kan man slutte, at det er Imprecationes og Dirae skrevne med Rune-Bogstaver, af hvilke Bogstaver disse Figuræ er componerede...*"⁴⁰

In general, Worm was convinced that the runes had a practical character above all – they were used to fulfil such needs as leaving and sending messages, commemorating important events and figures, etc. Nevertheless, the theory of the runes' magical powers could not be easily rejected. Therefore, Worm concluded that there were two categories of runic alphabets: one he called *Malrune*, serving practical needs, and the other, magical, alphabet that he called *Ramrune*.⁴¹ Worm also believed that runes reflected the existence of an ancient Danish language, original and completely free from any Roman influences.⁴² Because he followed the theory that runes are specifically Danish achievement, he concentrated only on Danish inscriptions, although he knew very well that, at that time, similar studies were being carried out by Bureaus in Sweden.⁴³ Both scholars tried to ignore each other, and if they commented on each other's work it was usually in a form of satirical pamphlets. It is also worth mentioning that Worm – following the requirements of modern science – emphasised that his conclusions were always based on primary sources (i.e. runic inscriptions he had in his hands).⁴⁴

³⁸ G. Jaffé, *Geschichte der Runenforschung*, pp. 15–23.

³⁹ E. Jørgensen, *Historieforskning*, p. 123.

⁴⁰ "...Which are irrational figures, and neither themselves or other people know what they stand for, but from old monuments and guesses we can conclude that they are curses and imprecations written in runic letters, as by these letters the figures are composed..." A. Magnusson, *Arne Magnussons Levned og Skrifter*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, vol. 2, Kiøbenhavn: Kommissionen for Det Arnamagnæanske Legat, 1930, p. 155.

⁴¹ G. Jaffé, *Geschichte der Runenforschung*, p. 22.

⁴² G. Jaffé, *Geschichte der Runenforschung*, pp. 28–29.

⁴³ E. Jørgensen, *Historieforskning*, p. 124.

⁴⁴ G. Jaffé, *Geschichte der Runenforschung*, p. 23.

Worm's most important achievement, however, was his *Danicorum Monumentorum libri sex, e spissis antiquitatum tenebris et in Dania ac Norvegia extantibus ruderebus eruti* (1643), which contained an impressive description of the runic monuments found in Denmark and Norway. In the first part of this book, we can find a general introductory study of ancient remnants with commentary from Norse literary works and the classical past. In this essay, Worm wrote also about the life, habits and culture of the ancient Nordic tribes, but he concentrated on runes, trying to synthesise his knowledge. The collection of inscriptions then follows: those from Zealand are in the second book; from Skåne, Halland, Blekinge and Bornholm in the third; and in the fourth, those from the Danish islands of Fyn, Laaland and Falster; the fifth book is on inscriptions from Jutland and Gotland; and, finally, in the sixth – from Norway. The scholar carefully presents the information on locations of the stones, their appearance and size.⁴⁵ Having broad international connections, Worm also consulted with the English antiquarian and historian Henry Spelman on some problems. Another member of the *Respublica Litteraria* he often addressed was the learned Icelandic, Arngrímur Jónsson.

Worm had also a fascinating opportunity to study runes when he, as the personal physician of King Christian IV, in 1640 was offered to drink wine from an ancient golden horn (the *Guldhornet*), which had recently been found in Schleswig. Since the horn was decorated with a runic inscription and pictures, the scholar immediately decided to analyse the object and, a year later, published a study about it, including a detailed description and interpretation.⁴⁶ Unfortunately the *Guldhornet* is now missing now, as the golden artefact was stolen and melted down in the early 19th century. Worm also published a study of a 14th century parchment written in the runic alphabet (*Codex Runicus*) in 1642,⁴⁷ and, just before his death, *Additamenta ad Monumentorum Danica* (1650) and the preface to *Specimen lexici Runicus* (1650).

The lack of detailed knowledge of the prehistoric past and its language, the fact that the copyists were not always able to precisely decipher the runes often led to errors and rather fantastic theories. Worm himself was aware that the deciphering of the runes was not as perfect as it should be and decided that the best solution would be if the stones with inscriptions were sent directly to Copenhagen to let him perform his own investigations. A royal order was pre-

⁴⁵ E. Jørgensen, *Historieforskning*, 125–126; C. Adamsen, “Ole Worm som antikvar“, [in:] *Ole Worm – Liv og videnskab*, ed. H. Tegllus, M.A. Skydsgaard, Århus: Steno Museet, 2006, p. 29.

⁴⁶ *De aureo serenissimi domini Christiani Qvinti Daniae, Norvegiae etc. electi principis cornu Dissertatio* 1641.

⁴⁷ *Regum Daniae series duplex et limitum inter Daniam et Sveciam descriptio ex vetustissimo Legum-Scanicarum literis runicis in membrana exarato codice eruta, et notis illustrata ab Olao Worm (1642).*

pared in 1652 and sent to the countryside, but, obviously, the task was much too difficult. Only a few stones were delivered, and, after the fire of Copenhagen in 1728, they were used in the renovation of the house of a civil servant.⁴⁸

The runic calendars, usually in the form of a long stock, were always an interesting object of study. The *Fasti Danici*, which initiated the study of ancient chronology and time-counting in Denmark, has already been mentioned. Together with the rune stones, the wooden calendars began to symbolise the ancient culture: on the title page of *Fasti Danici* in the editions from 1626, 1633 and 1643, there was a picture of two characters from Nordic mythology, Hiarn Skiak and Gutruna, with runic calendars in their hands and stones with runic inscriptions at their feet.

Worm's scholarly achievements are held in high esteem. Despite their weaknesses, Worm's entire work was of tremendous importance. This is how Jaffé summarised it: "*Durch die Reichhaltigkeit des Materials und die Fülle der erörterten probleme, von dem der Verfasser fast keines unberücksichtigt ließ, wirkte es geradezu gigantisch und epochemachend, wiewohl nicht zu leugnen ist, daß nicht nachgehends noch ein vieles besser erläutert und klärllich sollte ausgeführt sein.*"⁴⁹

After Worm's death, the Danish study of runes practically came to a standstill. Although the historians kept the ancient alphabet in mind, they did not devote much interest to it. The famous Icelandic document collector and Copenhagen University professor Árni Magnússon (1663–1730) claimed that Worm was wrong when dating the runes – he himself thought they were not that old. He also pointed out that runes were never used, as Worm claimed, to write books; and that Worm was mistaken when he tried to transcribe Latin manuscript into runic alphabet. He also criticised the methods Worm used in deciphering and copying the inscriptions. He believed that the Swedish historians were much better at that task.⁵⁰

This opinion had a rational background, since in Sweden, unlike in Denmark, runological studies were flourishing at that time. This period is connected with the work of Johann Loccenius (1598–1677) from Holstein and his book on Swedish antiquities.⁵¹ This scholar, however, had a limited interest in runes, although he also identified them as a Gothic (i.e. Swedish) invention.⁵² Another Swede, Johann Scheffer (*De Uppsalia...*, 1666), was a follower of Bureaus and

⁴⁸ C. Adamsen, "Ole Worm", p. 32.

⁴⁹ "Because of the richness of the materials and variety of problems discussed, among which not one had been omitted, [his work] seemed to be gigantic and a landmark, however it cannot be denied that he could have delivered better and more clear explanations." G. Jaffé, *Geschichte der Runenforschung*, p. 15.

⁵⁰ A. Magnusson, *Arne Magnussons*, pp. 157–159.

⁵¹ *Johannis Loccenii Antiquitatum Sveo-Gothicarum, cum huius ævi moribus, institutis ac ritibus indigenis pro re nata comparatarum libri tres* Stockholm 1647.

⁵² G. Jaffé, *Geschichte der Runenforschung*, pp. 31–32.

Worm. An important contribution was made by Olaus Verelius (1618–1682) with his work *Runographia Scandica* (Uppsala, 1675).⁵³ The author, well known for his books on old Nordic chronicles and sagas, referred to the literary struggle between Bureus and Worm, defending his compatriot. But, what was more important, Verelius rejected the commonly accepted theory about the origin of runes in Hebrew, stating that they had their own, Germanic, roots.

One of the leading personalities in Swedish science at the end of 17th century was Oluf Rudbeck (1630–1702). This famous scientist, who contributed to the development of medicine by discovering the lymphatic system in the human body (simultaneously with Thomas Bartholin of Denmark), is also known for his historical book *Atlantica...*, whose first part was published in 1675.⁵⁴ In its third part, published in 1698, the writer concentrated on the ancient Nordic (Swedish) culture and literature. According to Rudbeck, runes were much older than the Greek alphabet, in fact, he returned to the old thesis of Johannes Magnus that runes were created before the Flood, and kept their form unchanged until 4th and 5th centuries CE. Runes were created in Sweden (the home of all civilisation), without any model to follow and were completely original.⁵⁵ We should keep in mind that this writer belonged to historiographical tendency, rather common in Baroque era science, of including the myths and legends in the historical narrative, both already existing and newly founded, as a sort of historical explanation.

The 17th century runologic studies are obviously far from our present scientific demands. It is claimed that the turning point came with the work of mathematician Magnus Celsius (1621–1679), the grandfather of famous physicist Andreas Celsius. Although his remarkable achievement in deciphering staveless runes was completed in second half of the century, the book describing them was published only after his death, in 1710 by his son Olaus. This form of runic script was not like the most common runic inscriptions, so they were deciphered relatively late – Magnus Celsius completed his work in 1677. He used the material mainly from the Hälsingland province in Sweden, and this is why they have been sometimes called Hälsingland runes. When the book was published, it provoked a debate that became a milestone in the development of scientific runology. However, this does not belong to the scope of this study.

⁵³ *Olai Vereli Manuductio compendiosa ad runographiam scandicam antiqvam, recte intelligendam: En kort vnderwijsning om then gambla Swea-Götha rvna-ristning.*

⁵⁴ *Olf Rudbeks Atland eller Manheim dedan Japhetz afkomne, de förnemste keyserlige och kungelige slechter ut till hela werlden, henne att styra, utgångne äro, så och desse efterföljande folck utogade, nembligen skyttar, borbarn, asar, jettar, giotar, phryger, trojaner, amaizor, traser, lyber, maurer, tussar, kaller, kiempar, kimrar, saxer, germen, swear, longobarder, wandaler, herular, gepar, tydskar, anglar, paikar, danar, siökampar, och flera de som i werket wisas skola. Olavi Rudbeckii Atlantica sive Manheim vera Japheti posterorum sedes ac patria.*

⁵⁵ G. Jaffé, *Geschichte der Runenforschung*, p. 42.

The study of runes in the early modern period became a branch of antiquarian research, committed to non-political aspects of human activity. Although such a study was meant to free history from political purposes, it soon became clear that here the scholar activity was also subordinated to the programmes and desires of the rulers. Runes, as ancient and original alphabet, early evidence of the level of culture, prove that the ancestors represented a high degree of civilization, were soon incorporated into the political struggle. At the same time, however, the attitude toward this alphabet showed growing rationalisation of the study and contributed to the development of critical methods in historical science.

Krystyna Szelałowska

NAUKOWCY I MAGICZNY ŚWIAT RUNÓW. POCZĄTKI NAUKOWEGO BADANIA RUNÓW W XVII-WIECZNEJ SKANDYNAWII

Streszczenie

Znane od dawna runy przez długi czas postrzegane były w literaturze jako znaki magiczne, o niepewnym pochodzeniu i sensie. Od XVI wieku dostrzec można tendencje do bardziej systematycznego, racjonalnego, a tym samym naukowego podejścia do tych zabytków. Wzmianki o runach, które zaczęto identyfikować jako starożytny alfabet, dowód wysokiej kultury przodków, pojawiły się w pracach XVI-wiecznych uczonych szwedzkich, takich jak bracia Johannes i Olaus Magnusonowie, a przede wszystkim Johannes Bureus, który zainteresował nimi szwedzkich władców Karola IX i Gustawa II Adolfa. Na gruncie duńskim kolekcjonerem i badaczem na wielką skalę był Ole Worm, osobisty lekarz króla Chrystiana IV, wybitny przedstawiciel XVII-wiecznego antykwaryzmu. Z jego inicjatywy król polecił rozpocząć wielką akcję gromadzenia inskrypcji runicznych, które Worm następnie wydał w dziele *Danicorum Monumentorum libri sex, e spissis antiquitatum tenebris et in Dania ac Norvegia extantibus ruderibus eruti* (1643). Gromadzenie inskrypcji oraz studia runologiczne miały służyć celom politycznym i propagandowym, jako dowód wyższości kultury skandynawskiej nad resztą Europy, a w relacjach dwustronnych – Danii nad Szwecją, lub odwrotnie. Czasy, w których się rozwijały, to przecież burzliwy okres wojen duńsko-szwedzkich oraz wojny trzydziestoletniej o hegemonię na Północy i w Europie Środkowej. Niemniej jednak, choć wciąż dalekie od wymogów współczesnej naukowości, badania nad runami przyczyniły się także do rozwoju nowoczesnego warsztatu historycznego.