All the King's Runes

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Abstract

The so-called *Third Grammatical Treatise* by the Icelandic poet and scholar Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld (c. 1210–59) contains a section in which runes are compared to letters of other alphabets. Óláfr quotes a runic sentence that he attributes to King Valdemar II of Denmark, at whose court Óláfr stayed in the winter of 1240–41. The meaning of this sentence, which is said to contain all the runes of the futhark, has been considered obscure by many scholars. However, some attempts towards its elucidation have been made. It has for example been proposed that the sentence alludes to a hawk (perhaps referring to falconry) since one of the words might correspond to Old Icelandic *haukr*, Old Danish *høk*. Here, a different interpretation is proposed, according to which the sentence is a reference to King Valdemar and Óláfr's special interest, the runes, more specifically the *b*-rune, and its derivate, a variant of the *p*-rune, i.e. *ƿ*.

Keywords: Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld, King Valdemar II, *Third Grammatical Treatise*, Valdemar's sentence, pangrams, riddles, mnemonic devices, medieval futhark, *p*-rune

Introduction

Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld (c. 1210–59), the nephew of Snorri Sturluson, was a renowned skald and scholar. Among his works is the so-called *Third Grammatical Treatise* (being the third of four grammatical treatises preserved in one of the manuscripts of Snorri's *Edda*, Codex Wormianus), composed c. 1250. (On Óláfr, his life and his treatise, see e.g. Finnur Jónsson 1927, 3–19.) The treatise consists of two main sections, the first on grammar, mainly phonology and orthography (*Málfræðinnar grundvöllr*, 'The foundation of grammar'), and the second on figures of speech (*Málskrúðsfræði*, 'The science of language ornament'). Óláfr's treatise depends extensively on Latin models, particularly Priscian and Donatus. There are, however, many adaptations to the grammar of Icelandic

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and one very original passage, the section on runes and their comparison with letters of other alphabets. This is in fact the earliest extant work dealing with the subject of runology. In the runic section, Óláfr quotes a sentence (Finnur Jónsson 1927, 29) by his lord (*minn herra*) Valdemar, king of Denmark, where the runes are compiled in a quick (or short) phrase (*með skjótu orðtaki/orðtæki*).¹ Óláfr ran a school for priests and poets at his home in Stafaholt, West Iceland, where his treatise was presumably part of the syllabus.

King Valdemar II of Denmark, commonly known in Danish as Valdemar Sejð (Valdemar the Victorious), was born in 1170 and died in March 1241. Óláfr stayed at the Danish court in the winter of 1240–41, i.e. shortly before the king's death, and the two no doubt discussed the runic sentence during that visit. The sentence is only preserved in Icelandic manuscripts.

Valdemar's runic sentence is interesting for more than one reason. First, it is, as Finnur Jónsson (1927, 15) notes, one of the oldest Danish language sentences [on parchment] ("en af de ældste sproglige danske sætninger"). Secondly, being a pangram, i.e. a sentence containing all the letters of an alphabet (here a rune-row), it gives information about the runes in use at the time. Thirdly, the sentence is of interest because it is a runic text whose author is known. This is indeed a rarity.

Valdemar's interest in runes is not surprising. According to the Danish historian Saxo, Valdemar's father, King Valdemar I (Valdemar the Great, 1131–82), sent a group of men to examine a rock surface (later known as Runamo) in Blekinge, now in Sweden, in order to transcribe an inscription written with strange characters (Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, "Praefatio", 1: 78). The "runes" of Runamo are not runes, but it is generally assumed that in Valdemar's time they were considered to be so. Valdemar II was twelve years old when his father died, so he may not have had much first-hand information about the Runamo expedition. However, it must have been common knowledge at his court. Interest in runes was not confined to Denmark's nobility. As Olsen (1933, 104) points out, runes were in fashion among the aristocracy of the Nordic countries in the 1100s and 1200s, of which a poem by Røgnvaldr kali (c. 1103–58), earl of Orkney, is an indication. In this poem, the earl boasts of his knowledge of runes, declaring it as one of his nine skills (*Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, B, 1: 478).

¹ The *Third Grammatical Treatise* is not Óláfr's only link to the Danish court. He wrote a poem, now lost, about King Valdemar and it has been proposed that he was the author of *Knýtlinga saga*, a saga about the Danish kings from the 900s to the 1100s (cf. e.g. Bjarni Guðnason 1982, clxxix–clxxxiv).

Fig. 1. The runic sentence in AM 748 I b 4to (A), 2v, lines 12–15. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, Reykjavík. Photo: Sigurður Stefán Jónsson.

Fig. 2. The runic sentence in Codex Wormianus, AM 242 fol. (W), p. 97 [49r], lines 2–4. Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, Copenhagen. Photo: Suzanne Reitz.

Nowadays, pangrams are mainly used by font designers. Two well-known examples are (taken from Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir and Bragi Valdimar Skúlason 2014, 125):

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

Victor jagt zwölf Boxkämpfer quer über den großen Sylter Deich.

In “perfect” pangrams each letter should be used only once. In the pangrams above, however, some letters are repeated. But both sentences are meaningful. Composing a meaningful pangram, using each letter only once, is, of course, no easy task — “perfect” pangrams are almost inevitably nonsensical (as are the Icelandic examples of “perfect” pangrams in Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir and Bragi Valdimar Skúlason 2014).

The runic sentence is preserved in two manuscripts of the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, AM 748 I b 4to and Codex Wormianus, AM 242 fol. In this article, they will be referred to as A and W respectively. Both manuscripts are dated to the 1300s, c. 1300–25 (A) and c. 1350 (W). A is generally considered to be closer to the original. W offers, however, in some instances, a better reading. Bæksted (1942, 217) argues, for example, that the runic sentence in A is typologically younger than in W. In both manuscripts the sentence is written in runes and preceded by a transcription in Roman letters (figs 1 and 2).

The versions are not quite identical:

spængð mannz hōk flydi toui boll (A)

sprængt mannz hok flyþi tuui boll (W)

In the first word in A, the *r*-rune has accidentally been left out; this must have been originally **sprængd** since Óláfr discusses right away every rune of this word (see e.g. Finnur Jónsson 1927, 29). Óláfr's discussion also explains the second difference; **d** (a dotted *t*-rune) must originally have been in final position in the first word, as in A. The third difference between A and W is in the third word, A has **ø**, while W has **o**. Both variants could reflect the same phoneme, whether it was /q/ or some other similar sound.² The Roman transcriptions of the runic sentence in A and W agree on this point as both have <q> (see figs 1 and 2). The fourth difference is A's **d** (a dotted *t*-rune) against W's **p** in **flydi/flypi**, the latter most certainly representing the original (cf. Björn Magnússon Ólsen 1884, 46). The fifth difference is A's **toui** against W's **tuui**. It is suggested here that W has a better reading in this instance, cf. below.

The medieval futhark was a version of the sixteen-character futhark (the younger futhark) expanded with additional characters. This expansion took place between the late 900s and c. 1200 (cf. Barnes 2012, 6). The extensions were sometimes made by adding a dot to an existing character, sometimes by other methods. For example, the sixteen-character futhark did not have a special symbol for /p/; the *b*-rune, *bjarkan* (B/ᛃ), was used for both /b/ and /p/. In an expanded younger futhark, /p/ could be expressed by a dotted *b*-rune, ᛃ, or by K. Valdemar's sentence presents the sixteen-character futhark with some extensions. It is not quite clear how many additional runes there were in the sentence originally, but we can be sure about five, **p**, **æ**, **g**, **d** and **z**, since Óláfr discusses all of them in his treatise. It is possible that the sentence originally had **e** (i.e. ᛗ, dotted *íss*) in final position in **flydi/flypi**, see below. It is also possible that the sentence originally had **ø** (in **høk/hok** and/or **boll**). But **o** in at least one of the relevant places is very likely since it is one of the standard runes of the sixteen-character futhark.

The meaning of the runic sentence has been considered obscure by many scholars. There is, however, a general consensus that the sentence is (or was) meaningful. Finnur Jónsson (1927, 15) says, for instance: "Meningen med sætningen skulde man tro var den, af alfabetets samtlige tegn at lave en forståelig sammenhæng." He continues: "Man skulde da mene, at hvert tegn kun forekom éngang. Helt gennemført er dette ikke. ..." He thus believes the sentence to carry meaning and that this could have

² Old Icelandic /q/ and /ø/ merged in the 1200s. Conversely, in Danish /q/ merged with /o/ except in certain environments (cf. Brøndum-Nielsen 1950, 199 f., 266–68). In the Danish medieval futhark, the ø-rune (ᛝ) could express both /o/ and /ø/ (cf. Skautrup 1944, 123).

been accomplished by making use of each symbol only once. As noted above this is an extremely difficult aim to accomplish, and it is hardly to be expected. But since the author occasionally reused symbols (e.g. **n** and **l**) it is likely that the sentence was meaningful. If it was nonsensical, there was little reason for Valdemar to break the rule of “perfect” pangrams. Besides, it cannot have been flattering for Valdemar if his composition was nonsense — it was hardly Óláfr’s intention to portray the king in an unfavourable light.

In the following, I propose a new interpretation of Valdemar’s pangram. According to this interpretation, the sentence carries meaning. As an introduction, I will briefly summarise and comment on earlier suggestions.

Before turning to various interpretations, a few general problems must be addressed. One concerns the transmission. The manuscripts postdate the pangram by c. 60–110 years (if the pangram was composed in the winter of 1240–41). Copyists may have made mistakes and, being Icelandic, they may have adhered to Icelandic spelling conventions that were presumably not used in the pangram’s original version. The doubling of consonants (as in **mannz** and **boll**) was generally not used in runic writing. This practice was not customary in Old Danish manuscripts either, except intervocally, and occasionally in final position, particularly for /l/ (cf. Brøndum-Nielsen 1950, 62). In Icelandic manuscripts, on the other hand, long consonants were usually doubled (or marked as such by other methods). Copyists may also have adhered to Icelandic rune forms. The **y**-rune in **flydi** (but only in A) has for instance a special Icelandic form, $\uparrow$ (cf. Bæksted 1942, 217). Opinions differ on Valdemar’s contribution regarding the runes themselves. According to Olsen (1933, 104), it was only the composition of the sentence Óláfr got from Valdemar, not the rune forms themselves (which Olsen believes were [Norwegian and] Icelandic) or their sound quality. Finnur Jónsson (1910, 297), on the other hand, says: “Det må nu betragtes som givet, at Óláfr hos kong Valdemar ikke blot har fået den anførte sætning, men også runerne, d.v.s. sætningen optegnet med runer, og at han har ført disse med sig til Island.” Raschellà (2016), who analyses the runes in Óláfr’s treatise thoroughly, comes to the main conclusion that the runic alphabet described in the work shows both Danish and Norwegian features; basically, this was the Danish sixteen-symbol futhark of the time, with some additions modelled on Norwegian rune forms. His discussion about the Norwegian features is clear. It is, however, less clear from his survey what is so specifically Danish about the sixteen basic runes, which, after all, had more or less the same shape throughout the Nordic countries during this period.

Another problem is our unsubstantial knowledge of Danish at the time in question, i.e. the first half of the 1200s. The oldest Danish manuscripts in the vernacular postdate that period, meaning the linguistic sources are meagre.

The authorship is yet another problem. Óláfr certainly attributes the pangram to Valdemar and his authorship does not seem to have been doubted. But it is quite conceivable (if the pangram was composed in the winter of 1240–41) that Óláfr commented on or even took part in the composition.³ In such case, the text might show some Icelandic features. Despite the scarcity of Danish linguistic sources we know that Danish and Icelandic were not identical in the 1200s, although Óláfr and Valdemar probably understood each other quite well. Or, as Finnur Jónsson (1927, 15) states: “At Olaf har haft let ved at forstå kongen og denne ham, mener jeg er hævet over enhver tvivl, selv om endelserne i det daværende danske sprog var ændrede og noget afslebne.” As already mentioned above, Óláfr wrote a poem about Valdemar. This was presumably a praise poem that the king was meant to understand. Óláfr was a keen linguist and he certainly had some understanding of language change. In the *Third Grammatical Treatise* he explains that in Icelandic /v/ was lost before /r/ (cf. *vreiðr* > *reiðr*) and that German and Danish are more archaic in this respect.⁴ This was presumably not the only difference he detected between Icelandic and Danish. If Valdemar’s pangram shows some unexpected archaisms, this might be due to a comment or a suggestion from Óláfr. Being a poet, Óláfr was used to obeying strict metrical rules and could thus be of help to someone composing a pangram. But even if Valdemar was the sole author, Óláfr’s influence cannot be ruled out. When he wrote his treatise he may have revised the original (Danish) pangram in order to make it more intelligible to his Icelandic readers.

³ Raschellà (2016, 161 f., 169) points out that the distribution of the symbols for the *s*-rune (𐐚/𐐛) and *z*-rune (𐐜) is in accordance with the Norwegian tradition rather than the Danish tradition. If this distribution is original in the pangram, it may be an indication that Óláfr, who was familiar with Norwegian runic tradition (cf. Raschellà 2016), took part in the composition of the pangram.

⁴ *Auferesis ... tekr ... af upphafi orðs staf eða samstöfu, sem þá at v sé af tekit í þessu nafni vrungu, því at þýðverskir menn ok danskir hafa v fyrir r í þessu nafni ok mǫrgum qðrum, ok þat hyggjum vér fornt mál vera ... þat er nú ekki haft í norrænu máli.* (Björn Magnússon Ólsen 1884, 87, normalised spelling). ‘Auferesis ... takes ... a letter or a syllable from the beginning of a word, as when *v* is taken from this word *vrungu*, because Germans and Danes have *v* before an *r* in this word and many others, and this we believe to be an archaic language ... this is not used any more in the Nordic language.’

Earlier interpretations

Some interpretations of and speculations on the meaning (or function) of Valdemar's pangram have been put forward. These will now be dealt with in a more or less chronological order. The oldest suggestions are not mentioned in more recent literature. I include them in this survey but they may be more numerous. The writings of Jón Ólafsson (*Runologia* [1752], in AM 413 fol., pp. 103, 156) and Liljegren (1832, 52) are not included here since they do not offer interpretations of the pangram.

The Icelandic clergyman and scholar Arngrímur Jónsson lærði ('the learned', 1568–1648) gives a Latin translation of the sentence in a letter to the Danish antiquarian Ole Worm (1588–1654) in 1630 (Jakob Benediktsson 1948, 19). His reading and translation is shown in the following, with a word-for-word English translation:

spreingd	manns	Høk	flyde	tvi	Bøll
Ruptum	virī	mentum	aversatus est	igitur	pilam
broken	man's	chin	avoided has	therefore	ball

According to Arngrímur, the sentence implies that anyone who has hurt his chin during a ball game consequently avoids a ball or a game in which a ball is used. In order to explain why chins could easily be injured during ball games, he adds that formerly balls were made of wood and not leather. Ole Worm, from whom incidentally Codex Wormianus got its name since the manuscript was once in his possession, presents this interpretation (and the comment about wooden balls) in his book on runology, without mentioning Arngrímur (Worm 1636, 75 f.; 1651, 73). Finnur Magnússon (1841, 332) agrees with this interpretation and renders the sentence in Modern Icelandic: *Sprengd manns haka flýði því böll*. The sentence's fifth word, **tuui** (W) or **toui** (A), is, according to Arngrímur, Worm and Finnur Magnússon, the adverb *því* 'therefore, thus'.

The main problem with this interpretation is obviously the third word, 'chin'. Modern Icelandic has *haka* and Modern Danish *hage*, disyllabic words, the first vowel of which is /a/. This does not fit well with the sentence's **høk** (A) or **hok** (W) and one would have to assume some mistake in the transmission. Moreover, the syntax is peculiar.

The Swedish runologist Johan Bure (Johannes Bureus), who disagrees with the proposal published by Worm, provides a Swedish and a Latin translation (Bure, 1643):

Sprengder ök flyddi tve mans böla

Ruptum jumentum fugit duorum sessorum onus

The meaning of this is not entirely clear, and Bure does not offer an explanation. It might mean ‘the exhausted horse fled the burden of two men/inhabitants’. The Icelandic grammarian Runólfur Jónsson (1651, [19]/C3), who accepts Worm’s proposal, criticises Bure’s proposal severely (although not mentioning his name but calling the originator of the proposal *cornicans ille Graculus* ‘that screaming crow’), and is apparently justified in doing so. He points out, for example, that the first rune of the pangram’s third word cannot be neglected as Bure’s interpretation demands (Bure has *ök*, not *hök*).

The Danish scholar and bishop Peter Erasmus Müller (1776–1834) provides a German translation (1811, 32):

des Mannes gespaltenes Kinn bildete zwey Ründungen

Here again the meaning ‘chin’ for *hök/hok* is proposed and this chin is supposed to form ‘two swellings’, *tuui/tuui* means ‘two’ according to Müller (as it did in Bure’s interpretation). He does not explain his proposal but is apparently thinking of a cleft chin. This could be described as a chin splitting into two halves or two “swellings”. But the problem of *hök/hok* meaning ‘chin’ persists. Previous commentators have assumed the meaning ‘flee’ for *flydi/flypi*, cf. Icelandic *flýja*, Old Danish *flyje*, Danish *fly*. Here, a different meaning, ‘form’, is assumed. Müller apparently had in mind another verb, Danish *fly*, which can mean e.g. ‘arrange, establish’ (cf. Kalkar 1881–1976, 1: 569 f.). But, as Raschellà (2016, 178) points out, this verb is unlikely to be found in the pangram since it is a young loan-word (from Middle Low German *vli(g)en*).

Finnur Jónsson (1927, 29) has this to say about the meaning of the sentence:

sætningen er vanskelig ... *hök* er vel = haukr ‘høg’, dertil viser vist sprængd, men om *hök* er nom. el. acc. er tvivlsomt; snarest det første, subj. til *flýði*, men de to sidste ord er utolkede; boll skulde man tro var nom. fem. af ball ‘stærk’, men *tvvi*?

The adjective *ball* is not attested in Old Danish. Finnur Jónsson apparently assumes that the word existed and not without reason; Old Icelandic had *ballr* ‘dangerous, horrifying’ (cf. Fritzner 1886–96, 1: 110). Unlike his predecessors, Finnur Jónsson considers the sentence difficult to interpret and parts of it unclear. But he is certain about the verb *flýði* and

is inclined to believe that **hōk/hok** is 'hawk'. Raschellà (1994, 684) explains and translates the individual words very much in the manner of Finnur Jónsson 1927, to whom he refers. Like Finnur he offers no explanation of **toui/tuui**.

Bæksted (1942, 216 f.) expresses the opinion that the sentence (which is according to him unintelligible) was originally made for a magical purpose. He points out that the sentence is found in a young (from the 1500s/1600s) Icelandic book on magic where a magical function is attributed to it. The words were supposed to be read aloud three times in the right order (*Sprend manns Hoc, flijde tuui boll*) and three times in reverse order (*Boll tuui flijde Hoc manns Sprend*). This would bring the reader any object he or she desired. This magical purpose can, of course, be due to a later development. Bæksted himself mentions that the sentence in this young manuscript could have been taken from the *Third Grammatical Treatise*. He seems, however, quite convinced about the magical origin of the sentence (see also Bæksted 1942, 26, 34).

Seim (1991, 128) expresses doubt about Bæksted's idea as to the magic formula; the magical function may be secondary. There is, of course, no need to assume that the sentence's magical purpose has a long history. As Seim points out (1991, 127), fragments from Christian liturgy and prayers sometimes develop into magic formulas in a corrupted form. A well-known example is *hocus pocus*, from the Holy Communion's *hoc est corpus (meum)*. Regarding the purpose of Valdemar's sentence, Seim (1991, 128 f.) adheres to a view different from Bæksted's, i.e. that the sentence had a didactic purpose, not magical, and assumes (with reference to Bischoff 1966) Latin models.

Krömmelbein (1998, 65) renders the following (Old Danish) transcription and a German translation: "*sprængd manns hók* [für altnord. *hawk?*] *flyði tuvi boll*: 'der/den geborstenen Hügel des Mannes – floh (?)'." His interpretation is not clear. *Haukr* [accusative *hawk*] means 'hawk', not 'hill, mound', as the German translation 'Hügel' suggests. (Krömmelbein must have had the word *haugr* (accusative *haug*) 'Grabhügel, Hügelgrab' in mind.) It is clear though that Krömmelbein finds the meaning obscure. He mentions Bæksted's (1942) idea of a magical purpose and also Seim's (1991) objection to it but does not take a stance himself.

Wills (2001, ch. 3.2) cites the translations of individual words listed in Raschellà 1994 (cf. Finnur Jónsson 1927), i.e. of all except **toui/tuui**. Regarding the sentence's last two words, **toui/tuui boll**, he refers to an entry in the dictionary of Cleasby and Vigfusson (1874, 645), *tvíböllr* 'a

double ball’.⁵ No further explanation is offered in the dictionary but Wills considers this a plausible word. He also suggests a more specific meaning for *tvíböllr*, and an interpretation of the pangram as well:

The referent [of *tvíböllr*] is probably some device used in falconry, perhaps to catch a reluctant bird. The phrase then reads ‘The man’s tired hawk flies (or flees) from the double ball’. Bæksted has instead interpreted this sentence as a magical formula (1942, 216), but the more mundane interpretation of a falconry scene offered here is probably more likely.

The verb *sprengja* ‘make burst, explode’ can also mean ‘exhaust’, and Wills assumes here this secondary meaning. If some falconry device was called (or could be called) *tvíböllr*, the proposed interpretation makes sense. The same interpretation is again presented in a recent article (Wills 2016, 120 f.) where it is pointed out that the use of a bell or bells for locating and luring birds has a long history (back to the 1600s at least). According to Wills, the sentence shows Danish linguistic and orthographic features rather than Norse-Icelandic (cf. e.g. the loss of the final *-r* in **spængd/sprængt** and **høk/hok**). The word order poses a problem: **spængd/sprængt høk/hok mannz** would have been expected if the meaning was ‘the man’s tired hawk’, i.e. the genitive **mannz** following the head noun **høk/hok** and the participle **spængd/sprængt** directly preceding the head noun (cf. Nygaard 1906, 368, on the general placement of possessive genitive after the substantive in Old Icelandic/Old Norse, e.g. *þræll konungs* ‘the king’s slave’).

Raschellà has recently presented a new interpretation of the pangram and his analysis is by far the most detailed (Raschellà 2016). According to him, the language is definitely Danish, as some previous scholars have stated or apparently assumed. His reconstruction of the pangram, grammatical analysis and translation are presented here:

sprængd	mannz	høk	flypi	tuui	boll
exhausted.gen.	man.gen.	hawk.acc.	chased away	Tove.nom.	bold.nom.
‘Bold Tove chased away the exhausted man’s hawk’					

Here, it is the man who is exhausted, not the hawk, so the word order problem encountered with Wills’s suggestion is absent. The meaning of this part of the pangram is, however, somewhat strange; one would expect

⁵ This word is also listed in the *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* (ONP, with a question mark), where the *Third Grammatical Treatise* and Cleasby and Vigfusson are the only references.

the hawk to be exhausted, not its owner. The verb is *flyje*, corresponding to Icelandic *flýja* 'flee', but in Danish this verb developed a secondary meaning, 'drive away, chase away'. This is the meaning the verb has in the pangram according to Raschellà. The verb's subject is the final phrase, **tuui boll**, a common Danish personal name, *Tove*, followed by an adjective, normally spelled *bold*.

Raschellà's interpretation poses some problems. First, the adjective *bold* (which is of Middle Low German provenance) is not attested in Danish until the middle of the 1400s (cf. Raschellà 2016, 184). Secondly, the secondary meaning of the verb *flyje* (a meaning which did not survive into Modern Danish) was apparently very rare, the few examples are rather young (c. 1400) and their distribution limited. This meaning is, therefore, not very likely to have existed in the 1200s.⁶ Thirdly, the word order is problematic. According to Raschellà's new interpretation, the pangram begins with the object (O), which is followed by the verb (V) and, finally, the subject (S, i.e. OVS). This is not the basic word order of the Nordic languages (which is SVO). An OVS word order is, however, quite conceivable in a highly inflected language. But Raschellà's interpretation rests on the assumption that Danish had already lost many inflectional endings. In a language of this type, basic word order is preferable or even necessary. The pangram form itself does not require any special word order. If the pangram's author had the meaning 'Bold Tove chased away the exhausted man's hawk' in mind, he would in all probability have chosen the SVO

⁶ Kalkar's dictionary, to which Raschellà refers, does not give any indication as to the relative frequency of the verb's two meanings (cf. Kalkar 1881–1976, 1: 569). But the examples in *Gammeldansk Seddelsamling* indicate that the secondary meaning was extremely rare. There are almost 600 examples of *flyje* registered (http://gammeldanskseddelsamling.dk/forside/ord?search_both=flyje), whereof, in my view, only four show the secondary meaning with some certainty. All four belong to the same manuscript, AM 187 8vo from c. 1400, a medical book. (At least one more example occurs in this book, according to a word list in Sâby 1883, 94.) In this manuscript, the verb *flyje* is also used in the regular meaning, in fact just as often as in the secondary meaning. The regular meaning seems to be quite frequent in other medical texts in *Gammeldansk Seddelsamling*. In those medical texts, *flyje* is often a part of formulaic expressions (something bad flees from a certain herb or a method), but occasionally in AM 187 8vo the verb's meaning is reversed, so to speak: a certain herb or a method drives away something bad. This apparent semantic reversal is perhaps due to mistakes in translation. This medical book is based in part on Latin models (perhaps indirectly) and Latin words and phrases appear frequently (Sâby 1883, ix). The Latin verbs *fugio* 'flee' and *fugo* 'drive away' are similar and here they may have been confused with one another. It is in any case dubious to assume that the secondary meaning existed in Danish in the 1200s, taking into consideration its apparently restricted distribution described above.

order. In addition, Raschellà (2016, 176) points out that the meaning of the pangram was probably clear both to Óláfr and his potential readers since he does not make any comments on it. This point is well taken. But if this was the case, the pangram probably did not have the meaning proposed by Raschellà. Icelanders in the 1200s would hardly have understood a sentence that included the adjective *bold* (not known in Icelandic and also uninflected) and the verb *flyje* in a meaning unknown in Icelandic. An uninflected word at the beginning of the sentence (genitive without the case marking necessary in Icelandic) would also have been problematic.

As this overview shows, there is no general consensus on the meaning of Valdemar's pangram and some scholars express doubt in their proposals. One group adheres to an interpretation involving a chin, while another group suggests that the sentence deals with a hawk. There is also a suggestion about a magic formula and one that apparently concerns a horse. I find the proposals concerning the chin, the horse and magic very doubtful and remain unconvinced with regard to the proposals concerning the hawk. In the following section, an interpretation of a different nature is proposed and evaluated. It is curious that the meaning of such a sentence was lost. The relatively close similarity between the two manuscript versions may point to a fairly good preservation of the original text. Therefore, it is worthwhile to attempt a different approach. It should be stressed though that this is yet one more suggestion that can be offered.

A new proposal

*An interpretation based on the assumption
that tvíböllr is a designation for bjarkan*

Evidently, the words **toui boll** (A) or **tuui boll** (W) have, at least in recent times, been considered the most problematic part of the sentence. I agree with Wills (2001, 2016) that this reflects the prefixed word *tvíböllr* (accusative *tvíböll*). But, contrary to him, I do not believe the word refers to falconry. I propose that *tvíböllr* (literally 'a double ball') is a designation — a metaphor actually — for the *b*-rune, *bjarkan* (B), with its two bows. This may seem strange but is not necessarily so after further consideration. In the *Third Grammatical Treatise* the rune ᚷ is called *knésól* 'knee-sun', apparently with reference to the form of the rune, resembling as it does the bent knee of a sitting or kneeling figure. Other possible parallels, though not in the treatise, can be mentioned. The Icelandic rune poem (see

below), consists of circumlocutions (kennings) of the rune names.⁷ Some of these may refer to the shape of the rune in question. For instance, the *y*-rune is called *tvíbendr bogi* 'a bow drawn twice' in some manuscripts of the Icelandic rune poem, possibly referring to the variant $\Downarrow$ (cf. Bauer 2003, 205). The *t*-rune (*Týr/týr*) is called *einhendr áss* in the Icelandic rune poem, i.e. 'a one-handed god', referring to the one-handed god Týr, or, as Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson (2002, 178–86) suggests, 'a one-armed áss-rune': *týr* is also a common noun, synonymous with *áss* 'god', and the circumlocution *einhendr áss* might refer to the graphic resemblance between certain variants of the nasal *a*-rune (*áss*, 𐌺), and the *t*-rune (*týr*, 𐌿). One of the additional runes of the Swedish runic calendar, 𐌿 , is called *tvímaðr* 'a double man' as it is made of two *m*-runes, *maðr* (cf. Bauer 2003, 215). To be sure, the denominations mentioned here, including *knésól* above, refer to specific variants of runes. *Tvíbǫllr*, on the other hand, does not refer to a variant, a fact that is most likely beside the point. Here, the point is that it appears to have been customary to describe runes with reference to their shape.⁸

Given the premise that *tvíbǫllr* could be a designation for the *b*-rune, one can try to go further. While doing this I will render individual words in the Old Icelandic forms. *Mannz* is no doubt the genitive of *maðr* 'man'. But *maðr* is also the name of the *m*-rune (𐌿). If *tvíbǫllr* refers to 𐌿 , then it is more than possible that *maðr* refers to 𐌿 . The third word, *høk* (A) or *hok* (W), could be *høk*, the plural of *hak* 'a small hook, the barb of a hook'. Together, *mannz* and *høk* could be a genitival phrase, *mannz høk*, or a compound, *mannzhøk* 'branches of *maðr* (*m*-rune)'. It should be noted here that *hak* is not attested in the meaning 'the branch of a rune', although it is well conceivable that the word could be used in this way, see below.

The first word of the sentence, *sprengd*, is a participle (of *sprengja* 'make burst, explode', neut. nom. pl.), which agrees with *mannzhøk*. Accordingly,

⁷ More properly, designations, but the traditional term *rune name* is used in this article.

⁸ Yet another possible parallel can be mentioned. In a runic name-riddle (cf. below and Louis-Jensen 1994 with references), the Reverend Magnús Ólafsson (c. 1573–1636) uses the circumlocution *öfug eik* (cf. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir 2018, 261) 'an upside down oak, a wayward oak'. This particular circumlocution seems to be otherwise unknown, but in all probability it refers to the *m*-rune (𐌿) given the context. *Eik* 'oak' is perhaps used here as a *heiti* (synonym) for *ýr* 'yew', the name of the *y*-rune. This rune looks like the *m*-rune turned upside down (𐌿) and *öfug eik* is thus possibly a circumlocution that refers to the shape of the rune in question (cf. Haukur Þorgeirsson and Katrín Axelsdóttir in Þórunn Sigurðardóttir 2018, 263 f.).

Fig. 3. The *m*-rune, its two branches in grey Fig. 4. The *b*-rune, two of its branches in grey

the beginning of the sentence is ‘scattered branches of *maðr*’, which is the subject. The fourth word is presumably the 3rd person past of the verb *flyja* ‘flee’. The object is *tvíboll* (accusative of *tvíbollar*), and the word order is thus SVO.

The questions then are how one can conceive of the branches of the *m*-rune as scattered, and how these can be conceived of as fleeing from the *b*-rune. Here it is necessary to take a close look at the *m*- and *b*-rune’s respective forms. The branches of the *m*-rune (in grey on fig. 3) could be said to correspond to the highest and lowest branch of the *b*-rune (in grey on fig. 4). One could even describe these branches of the *b*-rune as “scattered” *m*-rune’s branches.

If the grey branches of the *b*-rune in fig. 4 are removed (if they “flee”), the remains resemble very closely a variant of the *p*-rune, namely *ᚲ*. The *p*-rune in the runic sentence has this standard form (albeit there in the usual form with branches extending all the way up and down, and not the specific variant in the derivation here, cf. below), see figs 1 and 2 above. The sentence then describes how the *b*-rune, *ᚱ*, is transformed into the *p*-rune, *ᚲ*.

To sum up, the interpretation of the pangram suggested here, with grammatical analysis and translation (and the reading based on W), is:

sprængt	mannz	hok	flypi	tuui boll
sprengd	mannz	hok	flyði	tvíboll
scattered.nom.	man.gen.	branches.nom.	fled	bjarkan.acc.
‘Scattered branches of <i>maðr</i> (ᚹ) fled <i>bjarkan</i> (ᚱ)’				
i.e. ‘ᚱ → ᚲ’				

It is worth mentioning that the branches of *ᚲ* were sometimes long and sometimes short (cf. Bæksted 1942, 43). Consequently, the form in fig. 4, minus the grey branches, could resemble the *p*-rune to an even greater extent than the more standard form of the graph *ᚲ* indicates. When talking about the variant with short branches, Bæksted is not referring to a *p*-rune very similar to *ᚲ* with short branches touching the vertical relatively close to the top and bottom, respectively, and a bare section of the vertical

between (K). He mentions this rune too, but considers it to have a special form (“særlig form”). The variants of K with either long or short branches are both defined by Bæksted as regular forms (“normalform”; for a good example of the latter see figs 61–62 [Reykir] in Bæksted’s plates).

It is perhaps also worth mentioning that **m** stands next to **b** in the standard futhark row.⁹ It is thus (literally) not far-fetched to refer to the branches of Y (instead of some other rune’s branches) when composing a sentence about the form (or transformation) of B. Furthermore, /b/ and /m/ are phonetically similar.

Arguments

Right after rendering the runic sentence, Óláfr focuses on the runes of the first word, **spængd/sprængt**, and describes each of them in due order. Concerning the second rune, the *p*-rune, he has this to say according to the reading of A (2v, lines 19–22, normalised spelling):

Par næst stendr K ok er *bjarkan* á þá leið ritat, ef þat stendr fyrir *p* latínustaf, ok hefir sá rúnastafr tvá dumba stafi í sér, þá er ólíkir eru í hljóði. En því eru opnir belgir gōrvir á K, þá er þat hljóðar fyrir *p*, at þat skal meirr sundr loknum vōrrum nefna en *b*.

‘There next stands K and *bjarkan* is written this way, if it stands for the Latin letter *p*, and that rune-letter covers two mute letters, that sound differently. The bows of K are made open, when it sounds for *p*, because it shall be pronounced with more open lips than *b*.’

W (p. 97 [49r], lines 7–10, normalised spelling) has a similar text:

Par næst stendr B ok er *bjarkan* svá, at þat stendr fyrir *b* latínustaf, ok hefir sá rúnastafr ii. dumba stafi í sér, þá er þat hljóðar fyrir. En af því eru belgir opnir gōrvir á *bjarkani*, þá er þat hljóðar fyrir *p*, at þat skal meirr sundr loknum vōrrum nefna en *b*.

‘There next stands B and *bjarkan* is like this, when it stands for the Latin letter *b*, and that rune-letter covers two mute letters for which it sounds. The bows of *bjarkan* are made open, when it sounds for *p*, because it shall be pronounced with more open lips than *b*.’

⁹ To be sure, a variation of the standard row, where **m** and **l** switch places, appears in various futhark inscriptions. In these, the *b*-rune and the *m*-rune are not written next to each other (**blm**). Icelandic inscriptions exhibit only the standard row (Björn Magnússon Ólsen 1883, 73). Danish inscriptions manifest both rows (cf. Moltke 1985, 399), as do Norwegian inscriptions, although the standard row is the more common of the two (Seim 1998, 116).

Despite the discrepancies between the two manuscripts, it is clear that they are both describing the same thing — how $\mathbb{K}$ is derived from $\mathbb{B}$, by the opening of its bows, i.e. $\mathbb{B} \rightarrow \mathbb{K}$, as in the proposed interpretation of the pangram. If this is the correct understanding, the sentence has nothing to do with chins or falconry but everything to do with Óláfr and Valdemar's special interest, the runes. As mentioned above, several additional runes are included in Valdemar's pangram as well as in Óláfr's discussion. It should be stressed that the additional runes are of great importance in the runic section of the *Third Grammatical Treatise*. A sentence concerning one of these runes can hardly seem out of place in this context.

As already mentioned, there were two ways of expressing /p/ in the expanded medieval futhark, $\mathbb{B}$ and $\mathbb{K}$. According to Spurkland (1994), $\mathbb{K}$ is the younger variant of the two; the oldest instances are from the late 1100s and in the first half of the 1300s it has replaced $\mathbb{B}$ (datings based on the Norwegian material). When Valdemar and Óláfr met in the winter of 1240–41, $\mathbb{K}$ was probably still something of a novelty and perhaps for that sake an especially interesting subject.

With the interpretation of the sentence as actually meaning $\mathbb{B} \rightarrow \mathbb{K}$, the pangram constitutes a kind of riddle. This may be the case, in spite of the fact that the pangram is not accompanied by any phrase (like *þat skulu ráða* 'solve this' or *hyggðu at gátu* 'ponder this riddle') indicating a riddle. This is often the case when posing riddles but should not be considered a rule. That the pangram could be a riddle is not surprising — in this period many were fond of riddles and ambiguity. A paramount example thereof is the skaldic figure *ofljóst* (literally 'too clear'), a figure Óláfr himself discusses and praises later in his treatise (see Finnur Jónsson 1927, 44 f.). *Ofljóst* is a wordplay, often very obscure, based on the ambiguity of words and where the reader has to delve beyond the surface meaning in order to figure out the hidden one. *Ofljóst* can be used in combination with kennings, i.e. poetic circumlocutions, which are very common in Old Norse poetry and often quite complicated. For 'gold' a skald could for instance use the kenning *eldr ægis* 'the fire of the ocean', which is fairly transparent, referring as it apparently does to the sea at sunset when it has the colour of gold. When *ofljóst* is used as well, the kennings can become much more obscure. *Valfasti djúps* is a further kenning for 'gold' and it has been claimed that in order to understand it, one must realise that the base word *valfasti* 'sword' (in itself a kenning, a compound of the words *valr* 'corpses' and *fasti* 'fire') is synonymous with *brandr*, a word that can also mean 'fire'; *valfasti djúps* is thus 'the fire of the deep', which

is 'gold'.¹⁰ *Ofljóst* is not only used in kennings. The feature also occurs when skalds use the more simple figure *heiti* (synonym), cf. for example one of the poetic riddles of Gestumblindi in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 9 (*Saga Heiðreks Konungs ins Vitra*, 43 f.). *Ofljóst* is often defined as a poetic figure since it is common in skaldic verse, but it can also be seen in prose, cf. Torfi H. Tulinius 1994.

On kennings and riddles, Amory (1993, 351) writes:

The fact that the complications of kennings, then as now, have to be unriddled has suggested that the kenning had the same intellectual function in Old Norse culture as the riddle, of which the Norsemen were equally fond. Kenning and riddle indulged a love of wordplay and of contests of wit in the culture.

A sentence that had to be "unriddled" is, therefore, not unexpected in a grammatical treatise of the 1200s. Moreover, riddles were among Óláfr's special interests. In the second main section of his grammatical treatise, on figures of speech, Óláfr defines the figure *enigma*, gives an Icelandic example and an Icelandic term, *gáta* 'riddle'.¹¹

Runes and riddles are certainly a known combination. Here, one can mention the three so-called rune poems that have been preserved in pre-modern form (the Anglo-Saxon, the Norwegian and the Icelandic rune poem), in which rune names are defined in riddling verses, and runic name-riddles that enjoyed a very long life in Icelandic poetry, particularly within the popular genre *rímur*. The Icelandic rune poem consists of poetic circumlocutions, usually three for each rune. For example, one of the versions of the *t*-rune's stanza runs as follows: "[Týr] er einhendr áss / ok úlfs leifar / ok hofa hilmir" (cf. e.g. Bauer 2003, 201, normalised spelling), i.e. '[Týr] is a one-handed god / and wolf's leavings / and the ruler of temples'. The same, or similar, circumlocutions were used when poets hid a name, usually their own, in a stanza (name-riddles). The letters of the hidden name (sometimes in a scrambled order) were indicated by such circumlocutions, and also by rune names and synonyms. (On the rune poems and their age, as well as runic name-riddles, both Icelandic and Norwegian, see e.g. Louis-Jensen 1994 with references.) And then there

¹⁰ On this (possible) example of *ofljóst*, see e.g. The Skaldic Project (<http://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/m.php?p=verse&i=2710&v=t>).

¹¹ Óláfr's definition, *Enigma er myrkt sen um leynda líking hlutanna* ('Enigma is an obscure meaning about the hidden similarity between things'), is based on Donatus: *Aenigma est obscura sententia per occultam similitudinem rerum* (Björn Magnússon Ólsen 1884, 114, normalised spelling). Óláfr's example is the first half-stanza of one of Gestumblindi's riddles, the largest and best known collection of Icelandic riddles.

are the cryptic inscriptions, many of which can certainly be classified as some sort of riddles. Writing in cryptic runes was a widespread and long-standing practice and many different ways of encoding existed (cf. most recently Nordby 2018).

Possible objections

Objections can, of course, be made to the proposal above. Some of these will now be presented and dealt with.

The subject of the pangram, *sprengd mannzhoḱ*, is in the plural according to the proposed interpretation. But the verb, *flýði* (3rd person past), is apparently in the singular. In Old Icelandic, the 3rd person plural past of the verb *flýja* was *flýðu*, a form still existing in Modern Icelandic. We should thus have expected the verb form to be *flýðu*. But, as already mentioned, Danish and Icelandic were not identical in the 1200s. After the earliest period of Old Danish (800–1100) there was a merger in the inflection of verbs. A part of this change was a merger of the forms of the 3rd person singular and plural — the singular forms were subsequently used in the plural too. It seems difficult to date this merger with accuracy and it certainly did not occur in all dialects or in all verbs at the same time. In a chapter on older Middle Danish (*ældre middeldansk*), 1100–1350, Skautrup (1944, 274) mentions that the singular and plural of weak verbs (*flýja/flyje* is a weak verb) have the same form in the past tense. He gives three examples of this merger, *mælte*, *køptæ*, *hafthæ*, without mentioning their sources or their dating. Skautrup's words might be understood as if he were referring to the whole period in question, which can hardly be the case (cf. examples in Brøndum-Nielsen 1973, 123 f.). In his discussion of this merger in the past tense of weak verbs, Brøndum-Nielsen (p. 124 f.) has among his examples *hafthe* (3rd person plural past), taken from AM 24 4to (containing “Valdemar's Provincial Law of Sjælland”), a manuscript dated to the last quarter of the 1200s. This is not very distant from the time of Óláfr's stay at Valdemar's court and the original text, which may have contained the innovative verb form, is some decades older than this manuscript. It should also be kept in mind that written language tends to be conservative — an innovation may be considerably older than its oldest written witness. It is thus quite possible that Valdemar was accustomed to the 3rd person plural past *flythe*. (In both manuscripts the verb has | (i) in final position, but I assume there was a dotted rune originally, † (e), see below.) Another possibility should also be considered, i.e. the so-called vowel weakening of the unstressed vowels in Danish, which had already

begun by the beginning of the Middle Danish period (cf. Brøndum-Nielsen 1950, 405–08), changing the quality of the final vowel *-u*. In this case, one would expect the form *flythæ* rather than *flythe*, although <e> for an unstressed vowel is not unknown in the oldest manuscripts (cf. Hansen 1962, 233). In any case, according to the interpretation proposed here the verb form must be a plural form; it can only be Danish and this rules out the possibility that Óláfr “Icelandicised” the pangram in every single detail.

The common noun *hak* is not found in Old Icelandic and Old Danish dictionaries.¹² This objection is, however, of little or no relevance. *Hak* is a well-known word in Modern Icelandic (pl. *hök*) and there are examples from the middle of the 1600s in the Modern Icelandic Dictionary project. Furthermore, it has cognates in other Nordic languages, i.e. Old Norwegian (as a byname), Norwegian (landsmål/nynorsk) and Jutlandic (Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989, 299). *Hak* is also found in Faroese (*Føroysk orðabók*, 405). The word must have existed in Old Icelandic. However, it is not known in the specific meaning ‘the branch of a rune’ in Modern Icelandic. This fact does not have relevance either. Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon gives the meaning ‘smástallur, agnúi’, i.e. ‘a small shelf/pedestal, the barb of a hook’ for Modern Icelandic. For the Norwegian cognate he gives ‘smáskarð eða skora í tré’, i.e. ‘a small notch/cut on wood’ and for the Jutlandic ‘hornmyndað skarð, skot í húsi’, i.e. ‘a notch, a corner in a house’. He suggests the original meaning ‘e-ð útstætt, typpi e.þ.h. og svo spor sem það fellur í’, i.e. ‘something protruding, a tip, or the like, and the corresponding indentation’. (Incidentally, *hak* is thus related to *haka* ‘chin’, originally ‘something protruding’, Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989, 299.) Thus, it is possible that *hak* meant ‘the branch of a rune’ in Old Icelandic (and Old Danish). If not, it was at least easy for the author of the pangram to make use of *hak* in this sense. To choose the word *hak* as a synonym for a branch is understandable. The use of synonyms (Icelandic *heiti*) was very common in Old Icelandic poetry and a pangram is, of course, to some degree comparable to poetry as it must adhere to certain limitations (all letters should be used and each letter preferably only once). As already mentioned, the Icelandic rune poem consists of circumlocutions of rune names. In Icelandic poetry, not only

¹² The byname *haklangr* is, on the other hand, known from various Old Icelandic sources and apparently the same name appears in a Danish runic inscription, the Bregninge stone (DR 184 [DK Syd 12]) from the 900s (Lind 1920–21, cols 130 f.). According to Lind, the name is composed of the noun *hak* ‘slit’ and the adjective *langr* ‘long’; this is supposedly an instance of a “double byname” and the proposed meaning is ‘tall and having a harelip’.

circumlocutions could be used to designate rune names; synonyms were also used. For the *u*-rune (*úr*) one could for instance use synonyms like *regn* or *skúr* ‘rain’ (cf. e.g. Louis-Jensen 1994, 39). To use *hak* instead of the regular word for ‘the branch of a rune’ (whatever the regular word may have been at this time) is in line with this tradition.

According to the proposed interpretation, one must assume that the vowel of *høk* and *-bøll* was rounded in the author’s language. In Old Icelandic the vowel was rounded, and still is. The situation in Old Danish is, on the other hand, less clear. Remnants of *u*-umlaut (/a/ > /ø/) are certainly present in Danish (cf. *barn* ‘child’ – pl. *børn*). But its rise and fall is obscure. It is possible that the phonologisation of *u*-umlaut in Danish was less rigorous than in the West Nordic languages; it is also possible that morphological levelling has wiped out most traces of the process (cf. e.g. Andersen 1942–43, where various words are discussed that possibly show signs of *u*-umlaut, although many of the examples are admittedly uncertain). As mentioned above, linguistic sources for Danish from the first half of the 1200s are scarce in general and do not offer any information about the two words in question. Even the rounded vowel in Modern Danish *bold* ‘ball’, corresponding to *bøllr*, is of little help, since the roundness might be secondary (cf. Hansen 1962, 123, 130). It is thus difficult to argue for the two words in question having a rounded vowel in Valdemar’s language. On the other hand, it also proves difficult to rule out the possibility that such word forms existed. But if these words indeed had an unrounded vowel in Valdemar’s vernacular, he might have been affected by Óláfr’s language; word forms showing *u*-umlaut would be expected if the pangram were a joint project of the two. Another possibility is that Óláfr replaced the original *hak* with *høk*, in order to ensure correct understanding by his readers.

It may seem far-fetched to describe a rune form on the basis of another rune, i.e. to refer to two of the branches of *ᚢ* in terms of the branches of *ᚦ*, but it is not unrealistic. In the so-called *First Grammatical Treatise* (1100s, author unknown), the forms of some of the vowels are described with reference to those of other vowels. The author describes for example <ø> as having the circle from <o> and the loop from <a> (cf. *The First Grammatical Treatise*, 210 f.). Here, the author considers the sound quality of <ø> to be a blending of the other two. That is not the case regarding the relationship of the sounds represented by *ᚢ*, *ᚦ* and *ᚦ*, but the train of thought is similar.

The verb *sprengja* ‘make burst, explode’ (a causative to *springa* ‘burst, explode’) may perhaps seem a little out of place in a sentence about forms

of letters. Nevertheless, this should not be very hard to accept. When arguing for the kenning *einhendr áss* 'one-handed god' as referring to *týr* 1 (versus the two-armed nasal *a*-rune, i.e. *áss*, 4), Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson (2002, 184) points out that

The notion of an injured or maimed rune is certainly in keeping with the runic terminology of medieval and early-modern Iceland, where a 'dotted' rune like, say, 1 (e), may be called *meiddr* 'hurt', *brotinn* 'broken', *stunginn* 'stabbed' or *særðr* 'wounded' *íss*. . . .

To talk about scattered branches of a rune is somewhat reminiscent of this tradition. This was already a practice in the time of the *Third Grammatical Treatise*; Óláfr himself talks about a "stabbed" 1 and 1 (cf. Finnur Jónsson 1927, 26, 31).

In fig. 4 the *b*-rune has angular bows. This rune, however, often had rounded bows, ʁ. For example, the *b*-runes in A and W have rounded bows (see figs 1 and 2). Even if Valdemar was indeed accustomed to a *b*-rune with rounded bows, that does not make the interpretation unlikely. The *m*-rune's branches were sometimes straight and sometimes curved. If the author of the pangram had ʁ in mind, he may also have been thinking of the "fleeing" branches of ʝ, so for the interpretation this objection is of no relevance. It may also be mentioned that a variant of ʕ existed, where the branches are curved, i.e. ʕ. (Incidentally, mentioning which rune shape the pangram's author might have had in mind, does not infer that forms with rounded versus angular bows had any distinctive function.)

Another objection regarding the form of the *b*-rune can be made. The word *tvíþollr*, literally 'a double ball', here '*b* with its two bows', must refer to the rounded ʁ, not the angular ʕ as indicated in fig. 4. It might be thought that the author probably would not have named the rune *tvíþollr* if he were accustomed to ʕ, but this is not necessarily the case. The word *þollr* surely means 'ball', but its meaning is not so narrow. In the Norwegian *Konungsskuggsjá* (*Speculum Regale*) from the middle of the 1200s, there is a mention of *þollr svínfylkingar* 'Spidsen, den forreste Del af Fylkingen' (Fritzner 1886–1896, 1: 230), i.e. 'the point of a swine-array (wedge-shaped phalanx)'. The meaning of *þollr* was thus not at this time confined to perfectly round objects and the angular bows of ʕ could easily be described with reference to *þollr*.

It has been proposed that ʕ developed from a special form of the *b*-rune, i.e. ʕ (cf. Olsen in *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer*, 5 [1960]: 226). The branches of ʕ were, according to this, made longer and their direction was altered. Even if this were the case, it is of no consequence to the

interpretation here. Óláfr Þórðarson obviously thought that **K** was derived from **ᚷ** by opening its bows, cf. above.¹³

Some commentators have considered **toui** (A)/**tuui** (W) a very puzzling part of the sentence. Their hesitation to interpret **toui/tuui** may be seen as an objection to my (and Wills's 2001, 2016) view on the interpretation *tví*–; if it were correct, everybody should have guessed it immediately. The spelling **tui** would have been expected if *tví*– was intended. The spelling in W (**tuui**) is, however, not problematic. The semivowel [w, u] was normally represented by <w> in the older Middle Danish period (1100–1350; Skautrup 1944, 216 f.). This symbol had no counterpart in the medieval futhark and, therefore, **uu** is an understandable choice. Wills (2016, 121) even suggests that the pangram was originally conceived in Roman letters; its <w> was then rendered as **uu** in the runic transliteration. Finnur Jónsson (1927, 15), while wondering why **u** is doubled, mentions the possibility of **uu** in **tuui** representing *w* (without drawing any conclusion from it about the reading of the word).¹⁴ The spelling in A (**toui**) is, on the other hand, not easily explained. The spelling may be due to a copying mistake or misunderstanding.

The word *mannzhøk* proposed here is perhaps a compound, and *tvíþollr* is a prefixed word. In both manuscripts these words are, however, each written in two words, which might be considered a further objection. Wills (2001) also proposes *tvíþollr* and does not consider the two-word writing problematic, and there is no need to. Compounds and prefixed words written in one word in Modern Icelandic are frequently written in two words in medieval manuscripts.¹⁵ *Mannzhøk* might also be a genitival phrase, *mannz høk*. In this case, the writing in two words is not a problem.

Composing a meaningful pangram is not easy. Composing a meaningful pangram that is also a riddle is still more difficult. One might thus consider the present interpretation unlikely — this would have been too difficult a task. Furthermore, the riddle makes reference to the context (the futhark

¹³ Cf. Barnes (2012, 94): “In the thirteenth century some carvers begin to use **K** instead of **ᚷ** for /p/, the shape perhaps conceived as **ᚷ** with the highest and lowest branch removed.”

¹⁴ It is indeed not surprising to see the influence of Latin orthography on runic orthography as suggested here. For example, length is rarely indicated in runic orthography, but when it is, it is due to the influence of Roman-alphabet practice (Barnes 2012, 24). The pangram's **mannz** and **boll** are, of course, examples of this.

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. the two-word writing of the prefixed *afsaka*, *fyrirætlan*, *offylli* and *yfirbragð* in AM 519 a 4to, an Icelandic manuscript from the second half the 1200s (*Alexanders saga* [ed. 2009], 242, 266, 301, 335). Compounds are often written in two words in this manuscript (p. 45).

expressed in the pangram), which has made the task even harder. Surely Valdemar's pangram must have been difficult to compose according to this interpretation. But composing a *dróttkvætt* stanza with its very strict meter and skaldic figures was no easy task either. Despite this, many people at the time took up the challenge.

In his discussion of the Icelandic use of $\mathbb{K}$, Bæksted (1942, 43) mentions that this rune is found in many Norwegian medieval inscriptions but only in two Danish ones (DR 136 [DK NJy 69] Ravnkilde brick and DR 306 [DK SkL 11] Lund knife haft). This variant is in fact rare in Danish inscriptions.¹⁶ It is, however, used in the Danish *Codex Runicus* (c. 1300), and its scarcity in Danish inscriptions is perhaps due to poor preservation. Still, it may well be that its use in Denmark was limited during Valdemar's time. It is, however, used in Valdemar's pangram, and if the interpretation offered here is correct, the sentence deals with this very rune. It may appear strange that a Dane composed a sentence about a rune hardly used in his country. However, Óláfr certainly must have known this rune. It was known in Iceland and common in Norway, where Óláfr had been and had connections; Raschellà (2016) points out several instances of Norwegian influence regarding the runes in the *Third Grammatical Treatise*. It is possible that Óláfr introduced this rune to the Danish king — and that the king, so impressed by his newly gained knowledge, made it the focus of his ingenious pangram.

All the king's runes: the original pangram

The runic versions of Valdemar's pangram are similar in both manuscripts but not identical. In the preceding sections I have occasionally mentioned the differences in spelling and that certain features are probably more original than others. To sum up, I show my reconstruction of what I believe is close to the spelling of the original version of Valdemar's pangram:

sprængd manz hok flype tuui bol

¹⁶ In my search through the *Danske Runeindskrifter* database for how /p/ is expressed in medieval Danish epigraphy, I have found two inscriptions with $\mathbb{K}$ (with and without dots) in addition to those Bæksted mentions: DR 169 [DK NJy 15] and DK SlB 22. The representation $\mathbb{B}$ (with one or two dots) is much more common, appearing in thirty inscriptions (whereof one also has $\mathbb{K}$, DR 306 [DK SkL 11]). (The numbers might be a little higher; the relevant runes are not in all cases legible from the photos in the database.) This indicates that $\mathbb{K}$ was much rarer than $\mathbb{B}$. But it also indicates that the use of $\mathbb{K}$ was not confined to a small area — the inscriptions with $\mathbb{K}$ are from North Jutland, Skåne and Schleswig.

As mentioned above, it is possible that the sentence originally also had **ø**. This would have been a possibility in either *høk* or *-bøll* or in both words. According to the proposed interpretation of Valdemar's pangram, the relevant words had the same vowel. A priori, one would assume it was expressed by the same rune, and I think **o**, a rune of the standard futhark, more likely here than **ø**. It is, however, conceivable that the pangram's author used two different runes for the same vowel quality since his goal must have been to fit as many runes as possible into the pangram.

The spelling in my reconstruction is very close to that in W, cf. the transliteration of fig. 2 above. One difference worth stressing regards the verb's final rune. I here propose **e**, whereas W (as well as A) has **i**. If the verb form *flythe* was originally in Valdemar's pangram, as suggested above, one naturally wonders if the verb was originally written with **e** (†), and not the manuscripts' **i** (l); the difference is minute and a mistake in the transmission would be understandable. One would have expected to find the *e*-rune in the pangram as Óláfr discusses the dotted *íss*-rune (†) in his treatise (cf. Finnur Jónsson 1927, 26). Note that it seemed strange also to Björn Magnússon Ólsen (1884, 45) that the sentence did not have the vowel <e> in the Roman-letter transcriptions or † in the runic versions. He, however, considered it too bold to go against the testimony of both manuscripts in his edition of the treatise.

Accordingly, the pangram has consisted of the sixteen standard runes of the futhark and six additional runes:

Standard runes: **f u p o r k h n i a s t b m l y**

Additional runes: **p æ g d z e**

Here, some runes may be conspicuous through their absence. Óláfr knew more than the twenty-two runes of the pangram, for instance the bind-rune 𐐇 (for /au/) which he defines as a diphthong (*diptongus*) and a ligature (*límingarstafr*; see Finnur Jónsson 1927, 30). He defines † (æ) in the very same manner (although the sound it represented probably was not a diphthong in the modern sense). This rune is, on the other hand, included in Valdemar's pangram. Valdemar may thus have known more runes than those included in his pangram.¹⁷ Therefore, we cannot

¹⁷ Note that 𐐇 occurs in Danish inscriptions, although infrequently (cf. e.g. Raschellà 2016, 165). Valdemar thus possibly knew this ligature (and not only from Óláfr). There was, however, probably little need for it in the pangram. Another symbol that Óláfr discusses in his treatise and which is not included in the pangram is the ligature for /ey/. Medieval Danish did not have any such diphthong (cf. e.g. Raschellà 2016, 170) and Valdemar had, of course, no need for it.

say that the sentence displays absolutely all the runes the king knew – it only contains those he cared to use, i.e. all the runes of the sixteen-rune futhark and a considerable part of the additional runes in use at the time.

It should be noted that Óláfr considered the futhark to consist of sixteen runes as was customary at the time (cf. Finnur Jónsson 1927, 25–28). The additional runes did not have an equal status: they hardly had special names, they were not included in rune poems, and cryptic codes continued to depend on the standard rune-row (cf. e.g. Haugen 1976).

The purpose

Little has been said so far about the purpose of the sentence. Bæksted's (1942) suggestion that it constituted a magic formula was mentioned above and rejected along the lines of Seim (1991). It was also pointed out that the sentence is, according to the interpretation offered here, a riddle, which is not unexpected considering the time and the learned milieu in which it was composed.

Riddles, however, can have a purpose beyond offering amusement. Once solved, riddles may serve as a mnemonic device. For example, the riddle-like rune poems (see above) have been linked to a mnemonic purpose (see e.g. Louis-Jensen 1994). According to the interpretation of the pangram offered here, one can even propose a mnemonic device on two levels. First, the sentence is a key to an extended version of the futhark, one that contains several additional runes not included in the standard sixteen-rune futhark. The additional runes could, of course, be added at the end of the standard row (or next to their older counterparts); however, additional runes were seldom included in rune-row inscriptions, and if so, they were usually placed at the end (cf. Knirk 1994, 175, 187, 195). But such a row would be rather long (twenty-two symbols if † was originally included in the pangram) and consequently difficult to remember. A meaningful pangram, consisting of old and new runes, is obviously easier to memorise. Secondly, in order to remember the pangram itself (in case it should slip one's mind) one could be aided by thinking of one specific rune, Ɓ, its relationship with its derivate, Ɓ, and of the adjacent rune Ƴ. This mnemonic aid is simple and easy to visualise.

Mnemonic devices are, of course, a well-known phenomenon of modern times. But they have a long history and certainly such devices were of greater necessity in times when writing material was scarce and expensive and the abilities to read and write were much more limited. Often poems are used for mnemonic purposes, for instance the *Cisiojanus*, a poem in

hexameter for remembering the festivals of the Catholic Church. The *Cisiojanus* is found in an Icelandic manuscript dated to c. 1250–1300 and as far back as the late 1100s in a German manuscript (Jansson and Odenius 1957, 564). The *Cisiojanus* was thus known in Óláfr and Valdemar’s time.

Seim (1991, 128 f.) compares Valdemar’s sentence to Latin pangrams discussed by Bischoff (1966, 79–86). According to him, two very old hexametric pangrams were quite widespread, and mixtures of the two can also be found (my translations):

Adnixique globum Zephyri freta kanna secabant.

Ferunt Ophyr convexa kymba per liquida gazas.

‘Joined to the westwind’s globe, they cut through the seas on a boat.’ ‘They carry from Ophir, on a curved boat, the treasures over the sea.’ (Ophir is a place mentioned in the Bible, famous for its wealth.)

Bischoff uses the term *probationes pennae*, i.e. ‘pen exercises’. These were school exercises, and Bischoff suggests (1966, 79) that they were composed in order to make the dull task of learning and writing the letters more interesting for students.

There are certainly similarities. Valdemar’s sentence is a pangram, and furthermore it is a meaningful “imperfect” pangram (making use of some symbols more than once), similar to the sentences quoted above from Bischoff. But there are also dissimilarities. The pangrams above do not appear to be riddles (see my attempted translations above). In addition, although Óláfr ran a school where his grammatical treatise was presumably read, it is very unlikely that that work, as well as Valdemar’s pangram, was intended for elementary teaching as the sentences cited by Bischoff apparently were. But Óláfr and Valdemar were learned men. Maybe they were familiar with school exercises like the ones above. They may still have been influenced and inspired by such exercises, even if their own purpose was different. According to Bischoff, such sentences were not only widespread but were also used for a very long time — these instances of pedagogical playing around (“pädagogische Spielereien” as Bischoff calls them) can be traced back to the 600s and the tradition seems to have survived into the 1700s in Spain.

The additional runes — the dotted ones and a couple of others — included in Valdemar’s pangram, were obviously of great interest to the learned duo, Óláfr and the king. As mentioned above, Óláfr discusses some of these in detail in his treatise. Four of the five (or six) additional symbols appear already in the first word in my reconstruction of the pangram,

sprængd (runes 2, 4, 6 and 7). The initial incentive for composing the pangram might have been to import the additional runes into the futhark in a way that was easily memorised. (The purpose was, however, not necessarily strictly pedagogical — perhaps this was more in accordance with the duo's antiquarian or scholarly interest in runes.) The idea of displaying this new rune collection in the form of a riddle was maybe secondary. Be that as it may, Valdemar and Óláfr were intelligent men, fond of knowledge and probably both fond of riddles.

Bæksted (1942, 217) outlines the following scenario at Valdemar's court:

Formodentlig er kong Valdemars runesætning da opstaaet paa følgende maade: kongen og hans skjald har moret sig med at aflægge gensidige prøver paa deres runeidræt, og Valdemar Sejr har valgt en (trylle)formular, hvori han vidste, at alle alfabetets tegn forekom. Ved at gengive den med runer har han vist, at han beherskede de gamle tegn til fuldkommenhed.

As should be clear by now, I think this improbable. I do, however, agree with Bæksted on one point — the king and his skald must surely have had a good time while discussing the runes.¹⁸

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