In January 2011 Bruun Rasmussen Auctioneers in Århus, Denmark, tendered a “modern” runic object at an Internet auction. It was described as a richly carved Norwegian cattle horn with a runic inscription, probably from the 1700s–1800s. Since no minimum bid was proffered, the item was not sold. Shortly thereafter Bruun Rasmussen was informed by the Runic Archive in Oslo, which had just heard of the auction, that the horn was not Norwegian but Icelandic.

The horn was offered again by Bruun Rasmussen at Internet auction 1111 as item no. 1641, this time described as follows: “Íslendsk kohorn fra sydlandet, rigt udskåret med profilportrætter, blomster og bladværk samt rune inskription. 19. årh.s midte. L. 46. NB Senere monteret repareret spuns” (“Icelandic cattle horn from southern Iceland, richly carved with profile portraits, flowers and foliage as well as a runic inscription. Mid-19th century. Length 46 cm. Note: Later mounted [or] repaired bung”); see http://www.bruun-rasmussen.dk/search.do?pg=1&iid=30035534&cid=456&mode=detail (accessed 18 March 2011).

The horn was sold on 17 March, the bidding won by Minjar og saga, the association of friends of the National Museum of Iceland (Þjóðminjasafn); it was then given to the museum and received the inventory number Þjms. 2011-52. By coincidence the National Museum of Iceland had in February opened an eleven-month-long temporary exhibition of carved horns entitled “Velkomnir vinir!” (“Welcome friends!”; see the catalogue, edited by Lilja Árnadóttir, Guðvelkomnir, gýðir vinir! Útskorin íslensk horn / Be ye welcome, good my friends! Icelandic carved horns, Rit Þjóðminjasafns Íslands 24, Reykjavík 2011).

The horn is apparently now intended to resemble a powder horn (see fig. 1); at any rate, the wooden plug at the base, mounted sometime after the
original fashioning and carving, is not water-tight. It is fastened with copper rivets, and as perhaps indicated by remains of green color on the horn, there may previously have been a copper fitting at this end, as there still is at the narrow tip. A non-functional, ornamental black stopper mounted on the narrow tip has now been removed. Although it is not at all common to have profile portraits on Icelandic horns, the floral and plant motifs fit well into the carving tradition. According to the collections manager at the National Museum of Iceland, Lilja Árnadóttir (pers. comm.), the handiwork might perhaps be attributed to Oddur Eyjólfsson (1815–95), who lived at Sámsstaðir in Fljótshlíð, southern Iceland. In particular the floral patterns correspond very well to those on the horn by Oddur Eyjólfsson dated to 1858 (Þjms. 11926).

The runic inscription is found within a cartouche with a squat or flattened diamond-shape, sharply pointed at both ends, that encircles more than half the horn close to its base (see fig. 2). It reads:

ey skal sakameyni blandin / miödur
Ey skal saka meini blandinn mjöður.
“Never shall mead mixed with poison do harm.”

The runic forms are generally typical for post-reformation Icelandic inscriptions. The e-rune has a crossing bar, the y-rune is a dotted u, the s-rune, a-rune and n-rune are long-branch variants, the d-rune is a short-twig t with a bar crossing the stave, the ø-rune is simply a stave with a small open ring in the center (†; thus resembling somewhat the letter ø), and the r-rune has a rather rare, open form quite similar to the older runic a-rune (†; based perhaps on the open form of the so-called Greenlandic r; Senior
Antiquary Thorgunn Snædal, Stockholm/Visby, points out [pers. comm.] that the “Greenlandic” r-form on the whorl from Hruni in Árnessýsla in southern Iceland, found in 1880, could be a possible source). Words are generally separated from one another with spaces, but a standard space between saka and meyni appears to be lacking, perhaps the result of a minor carving mistake. The spelling is typical for Icelandic of this period, many centuries after /i(ː)/ and /y(ː)/ coalesced to [i(ː)] through itacism and after /d/ and /ð/ had become allophones, or positional variants.

The text here is clearly a reflection of the two short lines at the end of strophe 9 of the Eddic poem Sigrdrífumál (here normalized and translated):

```
  Full skal signa  "Bless your full cup
    ok við fári sjá       and beware of treachery
    ok verpa lauki í lǫg;   and sprinkle onion in your drink;
  þá ek þat veit,         then I know this,
    at þér verðr aldri     that for you mead will never
    meinblandinn mjǫðr.     be mixed with harm [poison]."
```

The variant meini blandinn for Codex Regius’s meinblandinn (cf. Lokasenna, str. 56, where this collocation is recorded) occurs also otherwise in quotations of this strophe in Iceland, most notably in formulas used in sacrificial offering ceremonies practiced by the heathen Ásatrúarmenn (‘Æsir-believers’): “Full skal signa / og við fári sjá / og verpa lauki í lög; / þá ég það veit / að verður aldregi / meini blandinn mjödur”. According to the web-site of the organization (http://asatu.is/, accessed 10 February 2011; cf. now http://asatu.org/), Ásatrúarfélagið is “a religious organisation for those who believe in the Icelandic/Nordic folklore, the spirits and entities...”

_Futhark 2 (2011)_
the folklore represents, in addition to gods and other beings from the Nordic pantheism”. Compare also the episode with the drinking horn in Egils saga, ch. 44, where Egill Skalla-Grímsson receives a horn in which the hosts had mixed poison in the drink (blönduðu ... drykkinn ólyfjaní), carves runes, smears them with his own blood, and recites a verse whereupon the horn breaks and the deadly concoction spills into the straw on the floor.

Based on the text of the inscription, one might infer that the horn was originally made and carved as a drinking vessel, but that it was—like many other Icelandic horns—refashioned at some later time as a powder horn. The inscription would, however, be upside down if the horn had originally been a standard one used for drinking out of the large end. Due to its great size, it was hardly a standard hip flask (brennivínshorn) either, with a watertight plug in the wide end and a stopper for rationing and pouring in the pointed end. It could, however, have had a function midway between the two, being perhaps a large liquor horn to be passed around from man to man for communal serving. Lilja Árnadóttir has further suggested that the horn could originally have been simply a decorated horn without any utilitarian function, perhaps made as a gift for someone (pers. comm.).

Opposite the profile portraits there is a rectangular cartouche enclosing a second text with two lines. The upper line is in a runelike script and consists of two words or entities of four and three letters, and the lower line is in yet another script or system that is much less runelike and may have six characters (see fig. 3). The author of this notice is not familiar with the scripts (or script and numbering system) employed here, nor was Thorgunn Snædal (pers. comm.). It is none-the-less tempting to assume that the runelike letters

Fig. 3. The other inscription(s) on the vessel. © Þjóðminjasafn, Reykjavík.

_Futhark_ 2 (2011)
may represent initials, perhaps a female name (something like NLDA or NEDA, with a ḃ-like D for -dóttir, and A for a place-name, or family name?) and a male name (something like KTS, with the last sign, an arrow pointing downward, probably based on a short-twig s-rune in full height and likely standing for S, for -son, rather than C). Any information that could lead to an understanding of the text in this cartouche would be appreciated.

The author of this notice would like to thank researcher K. Jonas Nordby (Oslo), Professor emerita Jonna Louis-Jensen (Copenhagen), and Professor emeritus Svavar Sigmundsson (Reykjavík) for contributions to the interpretation of the runic inscription made in personal communications, and particularly to Lilja Árnadóttir (Reykjavík) for art-historical and ethnographic information and for personal examination of the horn.