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Runes about a Snow-White Woman:
The Lund Gaming-Piece Revisited

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Abstract

A small, well-preserved, wooden runic object was found in a well in the city of Lund in Scania (Skåne) in 2004 and has puzzled researchers ever since. It is presumably a gaming-piece for a board game. The dating of the archaeological layer in which the object was found suggests that it ended in the well between c. 1220 and 1235. The reading of the individual runes is in almost every case certain. The reading order of the lines, the interpretation of the linguistic content and the provenance, however, have caused disagreement among those who have studied the object. The inscription was tentatively discussed in the author's Ph.D. dissertation from 2007, but many questions remained unsolved. This paper reviews the discussion so far, and offers a more coherent linguistic interpretation. It also suggests a probable provenance for the object.

Keywords: medieval runic inscription, Lund, gaming-piece, order of reading, rune-carver formula, love, love sorrow

The runic find

A circular piece of beechwood ornamented and inscribed with runes came to light in the spring of 2004 in the city of Lund. It was found in the course of an archaeological excavation in the residential block known as "kv. Blekhagen 10–12", in the filling of a well at a depth of about two metres. The object itself has not been dated, but technical analyses have cast light on the age of the well and the layer of filling. The woodwork in the well consisted of beech and reused oak. The beech was felled in the years between 1202 and 1214 (Swedish dendrochronology nos. 69316–47, household/phase 11). The filling has been dated by archaeological methods of stratigraphy to the period c. 1220–35 (household/phase 12; Ericsson et al. 2013). This means that

the runic object ended up in the well sometime between c. 1220 and 1235, and the dating of the filling provides a *terminus ante quem* for the ornament and the runic inscription of c. 1235. Since there are no significant traces of wear and tear on the surface of the piece, the ornament and the runes were probably incised in the 1220–35 period. The object is now kept at Kulturen (Museum of Cultural History) in Lund where it is registered with museum no. KM 86581:1624.

In form, the object resembles an ice-hockey puck in miniature (it is about 5.1–5.2 cm. in diameter and 1.2–1.4 cm. in thickness), and that it is why it has been facetiously referred to as "the rune-puck" by the Swedish archaeological team involved in the excavation. Circular objects of this type are referred to as discs by archaeologists and are frequently found when excavating medieval towns. Discs are often interpreted as gaming-pieces for different types of board game, and gaming-pieces from medieval Lund have recently been discussed as a part of a master's thesis (Spjuth 2012), which includes individual detailed find-lists of discs of horn/bone, stone and wood. The presumed gaming-piece from "kv. Blekhagen" is, however, not included in the list of wooden discs. It is not always possible to determine with certainty whether discs should be interpreted as gaming-pieces or as other types of objects, e.g. amulets or spinning whorls, but there are several similarities between the runic disc and other disc finds from Lund classified as gaming-pieces, and therefore the beech piece is here and below referred to as a gaming-piece.

Ornamentation on discs from Lund consists typically of concentric circles (particularly common on lathed horn discs) or simple patterns of incised lines or geometric shapes, though some are more exquisitely decorated (cf. illustrations of discs from Lund in Persson 1976, 380 f., and Spjuth 2012, 31). The ornamentation of the gaming-pieces is mentioned, but not explicitly discussed, in the recent thesis by Spjuth. Notable is perhaps the fact that the majority of wooden discs from Lund are not ornamented (Spjuth 2012, 65 f.). The runic gaming-piece has an almost centred simple cross-shape incised on the one flat face. The cross arms are narrow at the centre and broader at the perimeter. This particular type of cross is generally known as a cross pattée. It is very common in (Christian) medieval art all over Europe and also frequently depicted on Danish late Viking Age/medieval runestones. The runic piece is comparable to another ornamented wooden disc from Lund also interpreted as a gaming-piece. That disc dates to the first half of the 1100s and is incised on both flat faces (KM 66166:1326; Persson 1976, 381 [photo]). On the one face are two or more anthropomorphic shapes and on the opposite face, a centred cross-shaped ornament. One of the anthropo-

morphic shapes seems to have a halo. The depictions can be interpreted as religious markers, though secular shapes were the preferred explanation in Persson 1976.

The runic inscription on the Lund piece is spread over five rows separated by framing lines. It is not customary for discs interpreted as gaming-pieces to bear runic inscriptions. Examples do, however, exist, e.g. a Nordic gaming-piece (lathed horn) from the early medieval period found in Kałdus in Poland with the inscription **i̇onatafḷ**, *Jón á tafl* 'Jón owns the gaming-piece / the board game' (Lerche Nielsen 2004; here and below texts are normalized as Old West Nordic unless otherwise stated). In this case the runic inscription explicitly confirms the function of the disc as a gaming-piece. Other runic discs interpreted as gaming-pieces come from Norway and seem to be inscribed with personal names. Three of them were found in the Old Town (Gamlebyen) in Oslo and date from the 1100s or 1200s. On one of wood the text reads **sigrit:hthạ**, the first sequence of which has been tentatively interpreted as the feminine name *Sigríðr* (A 319; Knirk 1991, 16 f.). A second likely gaming-piece, also of wood, bears the runes **sihuṛþ**, probably the masculine name *Sigurðr* (A 263; Steenholt Olesen 2007, 140, with references), and on the third piece, of antler, a circle and the runes **arni**, the man's name *Árni*, are incised (A 300; Knirk 1989, 6). In addition, a disc from Bergen made of whalebone bears the inscription **uikigr** (followed by two verticals) interpreted as the man's name *Víkingr* (N 288; *NIyR*, 4: 46 f.). The damaged runes on a fragment of a wooden disc from Tønsberg, not necessarily a gaming-piece, might spell the masculine name *Lóðurr* (A 50; Gosling 1989, 175–77). In addition, a chess-piece finely cut out of walrus ivory found in Helmond, Noord-Brabant in the Netherlands, and possibly Scandinavian workmanship, is also inscribed with runes (Stoklund 1987, 194 f.), but since the chess-piece belongs to a different category of gaming-pieces it is left out of this discussion.

On account of the unique status of the Lund find it was with joy and excited anticipation that in the spring of 2004 Marie Stoklund, curator and senior researcher at the National Museum in Copenhagen, along with three other Danish runologists, accepted an invitation to attempt to interpret its inscription. The first examination was undertaken in April 2004 before the piece was conserved by freeze-drying, by Michael Lerche Nielsen, associate professor at the University of Copenhagen, and two doctoral students, Lisbeth M. Imer and the present author. The second examination took place in June 2005 ahead of a seminar held at the Institute for Language and Folklore, Department of Dialectology and Onomastics in Lund, where the piece was described and discussed by the archaeologist Conny Johansson Hervén and

Michael Lerche Nielsen. The examination was this time undertaken by Marie Stoklund, Michael Lerche Nielsen and the present author. The inscription was never formally published but a linguistic discussion is to be found in Steenholt Olesen 2007, 138–49.

It is natural to consider a runic find from medieval Lund as East Nordic. It is also fairly natural to expect a reading of a runic inscription like the one on the Lund gaming-piece to proceed from the top and downwards. The top and downwards order was the one followed in Steenholt Olesen 2007. An order of reading running from the bottom and upwards was, however, discussed at the seminar in Lund. In the summer of 2007 the piece was examined once again, this time by Professor James E. Knirk of the Oslo Runic Archives, and the question as to the order in which the lines should be read was raised again with reference to among other matters the name-riddle in the old church in Bø, Telemark (A 104; Knirk 1986, 76–80, and Louis-Jensen 1994), where the text ran from the bottom and upwards. (Further argumentation in favour of this order is found below.)

Knirk has also argued in favour of a Norwegian provenance for the runes on the Lund piece. Since the inscription both linguistically and content-wise betrays elements that could suggest a West Nordic tradition, Professor emerita Jonna Louis-Jensen (Copenhagen) has been consulted about possible literary parallels. The following exposition of the inscription builds on earlier works and discussions and not least on the tentative interpretation of the inscription that Louis-Jensen put forward in e-mail correspondence with Knirk in 2007.

The runic text

Transliteration

The reading here starts at the bottom line, and the lines are numbered upwards as shown in figure 1. The inscription uses short-twig forms of **a**, **t**, **n**, **s** and **o** (ᛆ ᛁ ᚽ ᛌ ᚯ), which is typical for the medieval period. Short-twig *s*-runes occur relatively rarely in the area where Old Danish was spoken but examples are found, so that the shape of the *s*-rune is not a sufficient criterion for declaring the inscription as non-Danish (different shapes of the *s*-rune are discussed in *DR*, *Text*, cols. 972–74). From Lund itself there is a fragment of a comb bearing the inscription: **—ḷui:reist:runar:þesar:at:k—**, where the short-twig form occurs in both **reist** (with a digraphic spelling unusual for Old Danish) and **þesar**. There is a discrepancy between the dating of the comb-type to the late 900s or the 1000s and the runic inscription, which in a
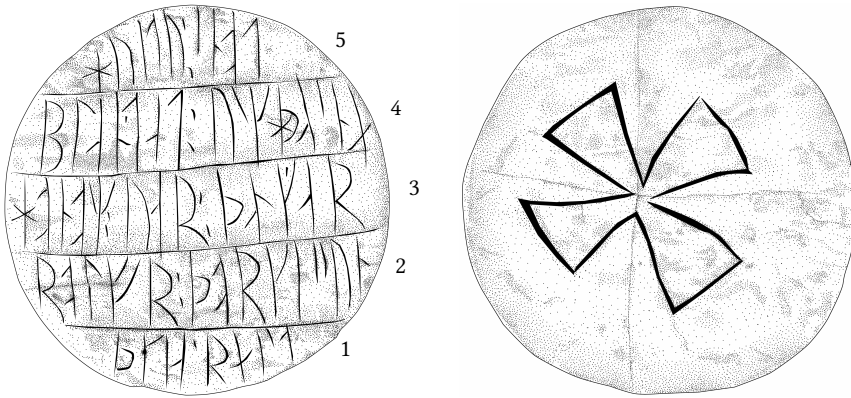
Fig. 1. The Lund gaming-piece, face with runes and face with ornament. 1:1. Drawings by architect Stine Bonde Bendixen.

Danish context gives the impression of being younger than the typology of the comb would imply (Stoklund 1998, 7 f.). It could perhaps be argued that the provenance of the comb inscription is uncertain, and that the diphthong in **reist** combined with short-twig forms might indicate West Nordic origin.

On the Lund gaming-piece, the traditional runic orthographic principle of not writing the same rune twice in succession is disregarded in **þorkissun** in line 2. However, the doubled *s*-rune would not be controversial (if controversial at all in a late medieval inscription) if the sequence were read as two separate words: **þorkis** followed by **sun** (further discussed below). The *ansuʀ*-rune, with twigs facing left (as normally in medieval inscriptions, ᚭ), is employed in the inscription with the sound value *o*, while ᚬ would seem to occur in complementary distribution with the short-twig *a*-rune (ᚬ) and is therefore to be understood as denoting *æ*. Use is made of a colon or two-point punctuation mark (short strokes made by pressing the knife-tip into the wood) whose purpose seems generally to be to divide up the text into words. The punctuation mark is, however, not employed consistently, for several sequences without separation marks must be assumed to consist of more than one word (the final sequence in lines 2 and 4, presumably also line 3). The inscription displays three dotted runes: an *e*-rune in line 1 (an *i*-rune with a strong point on the vertical just above the middle: ᛁ), a *g*-rune in line 3 (a *k*-rune with a short stroke in the space between the vertical and the branch: ᚴ), and a *d*-rune in line 4 (a dotted *t*-rune with a weakly cut short stroke in the space between the vertical and the twig: ᛏ). This last rune was first read as **d** by James Knirk in 2007. In line 3 the tenth character is certainly a bind-rune $\widehat{\textbf{an}}$ (hardly to be read with the unnatural order $\widehat{\textbf{na}}$),

while the tenth character in line 4 is a certain *þ*-rune perhaps combined with an **h** though this is more probably a correction than a bind-rune. Although there is uncertainty on this point, the transliteration is given below as **þ[þ<h]**. Rune-typologically the occurrence of short-twig forms in a Danish inscription would point to some time after the 1000s. Late medieval features such as twigs carried all the way down to the framing line are absent. On a rune-typological basis alone the dating would seem to be to the 1100s or the 1200s and this fits well with the dating suggested by the archaeologists.

In addition to the order of the text, the following transliteration differs in a few respects from that found in Steenholt Olesen 2007, 143:

(1) **þeta:ræist**
(2) **rolfr:þorkissun**
(3) **honom:uar:þa͡ngar**
(4) **blandat:umþ[þ<h]asn**
(5) **huitu:snot**

The rune-carver formula

The name of the rune-carver, **rolfr**, *Hrólfr*, is of common occurrence. It is a contracted form of an originally dithematic Common Scandinavian *Hrōðulfr* (Peterson 2007, 122). Its form suggests that the author of the text can hardly have been an Icelander, since *h* before *r* survives in Icelandic. In a Danish/Scanian context the survival of the nominative ending -*r*, perhaps only sporadically, would point to a dating at the latest in the "Older Middle Danish" period, i.e. 1100–1350 (cf. *GG*, 1: 9). However, a svarabhakti vowel before the -*r* would be expected from around 1200 (see the discussion of **a͡ngar** below).

The given name, *Hrólfr*, is followed by the sequence **þorkissun**. This can be explained as a masculine name in the genitive case followed by the noun *sonr* 'son' (with the nominative case unmarked, see below) and understood either as a compound patronymic designation or as an example of an actual name (primary compound patronymic). Unfortunately the use of punctuation marks in runic inscriptions is not consistent and can therefore not give any indication as to which of the alternative understandings is to be preferred. Therefore, although the spelling of similar collocations as one word or two in manuscripts can reflect both regional and chronological differences in the Nordic countries (cf. Kousgård Sørensen 1984, 83 f.), a runic spelling **þorkissun**, without punctuation marks, does not possess similar strength as evidence of provenance.

The spelling of the noun *sonr* is **sun**, as would be expected in a high medieval Danish/East Nordic context, cf. the compound designation **þorgils:sun** on a medieval grave-slab from Galtrup (DR 152). The situation, however, is perhaps different in Norway, in that it has been argued that the use of a *u*-rune for *o*-sounds in runic inscriptions from Bergen and Trondheim can reflect Icelandic language (Hagland 1989, 92–94). Runic spelling of the word *sonr* (in the nominative case) varies, however, both as an individual word and as the second element in compound patronymic designations in Norwegian inscriptions, and the variation reflects both dialectal and chronological differences. The element **sun** has no visibly marked nominative form (i.e. no final **-r**), a well-known and widely discussed phenomenon (Peterson 1993, 164). A runic spelling **sun** in **þorkissun** would, in my view, not reflect any inconsistency with the medieval Norwegian runic corpus, supported as it is by several **sun** spellings in compound patronymic designations. For example, the historically known Norwegian chieftain Sigurðr Jarlsson carved his name as **sigurþr:ialssun** in the famous inscription no. 1 from Vinje stave church (N 170), dated to the 1190s (N 170; *NIyR*, 264–68).

The first element, written **þorkis**, must reflect a Nordic, dithematic name with the first element *Þór-*, i.e. the god's name 'Thor', whereas the runes -**kis** must reflect a genitive singular form. Formally the name element could be Old Danish *-gēr*, identical with the noun meaning 'spear'. Names in ODan. *-gēr* belong to the masculine *a*-stems, and the genitive singular should be *-gērs* (with an *r*). The long *ē*, which was developed from the Common Scandinavian diphthong *æi*, was shortened at an early date to *i* in weakly stressed position so that the nominative form came to coincide with the masculine *ija*-stem's nominative form in *-ir*. This led to a transition to the declensional pattern of the *ija*-stems and hence a genitive singular form in *-is* (cf. *GG*, 1: 244 f.). A late Viking Age runic instance of this development is the spelling **askis**, genitive singular of Old Danish *Asgēr* on the runestone from Grensten (DR 91).

The element -**kis** may formally also represent a way of writing the genitive singular of the element *-gísl* or of a form with metathesis *-gils* (concerning metathesis in this name, see Hagland 1990). A runic inscription on a stick from Bryggen in Bergen contains the sequence **þorkis**, most likely the nominative singular form of a man's name. The runes are interpreted as a form of the masculine name *Þorgísl* (cf. the Scandinavian Runic Text Database, signum N B307; cf. Seim 1998, 219). This interpretation appears to presume that the carver simply forgot an *l*-rune, and this would also have to be the explanation of a runic spelling -**kis** of a form with metathesis *-gils*. A genitive form of *-gísl*, i.e. *-gísls*, written -**kis** can be explained linguistically

as a loss of *-l-* between two consonants (the three-consonant rule, see Seip 1955, 164; *GG*, 2: 301 f.). A name-form *Thorgiss* (dated between 1396 and 1439, *Mathias Thorgiss*) recorded in *Danmarks gamle Personnavne* under the headword *Thorger* but referred to either *Thorger* or *Thorgisl* (*DgP*, 1: 1384), along with several other similar name-forms from the 1400s, corresponds to a possible primary patronymic **þorkissun**. On a formal, linguistic basis it is not possible to make a definite decision as to which name lies behind the runic spelling on the Lund gaming-piece.

The demonstrative pronoun written **þetɑ** must represent the neuter accusative singular *þetta* 'this, that' and be understood as the direct object of **ræist**, the 3rd person singular preterite of ODan. *rīsta* 'carve', where the spelling with a diphthong is a typologically archaic feature in a Danish context. Gradually, as more and more examples of what have been explained as digraphic spellings without a phonetic basis in East Nordic have appeared in the area where Old Danish was spoken, the perception of this feature as unambiguously foreign has had to be modified (Lerche Nielsen 2001). The dating of most of the inscriptions with digraphic spelling of the historical diphthong *æi* indicates that such spellings belong typologically to the oldest strata of medieval inscriptions, and that does not fit very well with a dating to the 1200s for the Lund piece. The only other example from the area where Old Danish was spoken of the runic spelling **ræist** is found in Tornby Church, North Jutland (DR 169; *NIyR*, 5: 234 f.). That inscription has several features which suggest that the provenance is Norwegian — among others the distribution of *s*-runes for *s* and *z* (ᛁ and ᚼ respectively), and diphthongs manifested in the spellings **þorstæin** and the form **ræist** itself. This inscription is probably from the 1200s. Thus, in conclusion, while lines 1–2 of the Lund gaming-piece clearly contain a rune-carver formula with a man's name, his national origin is as yet unclear.

The sentence structure of the rune-carver formula on the Lund gaming-piece can play a role in establishing the order in which the lines are to be read, which, as mentioned above, has been the focus of the discussion of the inscription. The most frequent type of rune-carver formula in the Middle Ages has a subject-verb-object structure (SVO, with *X* here representing a name), *X reist rúnar þessar*, while in a few examples the formula shows inversion and verb-subject-object structure (VSO), *Reist X rúnar þessar*. The object-verb-subject order (OVS), *Þessar rúnar reist X*, is also recorded, and several instances are found in Norwegian runic inscriptions from Bryggen in Bergen. One of the finds (B 572), a triangular stone, displays two initial OVS rune-carver formulas corresponding precisely to the one on the Lund piece: **þetɑ:ræist:æirrikr:bɑki:um:not f**, *Þetta reist Eiríkr*

…, literally 'This carved Eiríkr …', and **þetaræistᴀ͡rne** …, *Þetta reist Árni* … 'This carved Árni …', while another Bergen inscription (B 417) reads: **þettaræistblindermaþertilþinhy̨—**, *Þetta reist blindr maðr til þín* … 'This carved (a) blind man for you …'. There is thus nothing aberrant about an initial rune-carver formula with an OVS structure, which is the order in the inscription on the Lund gaming-piece when it is read from the bottom and upwards. Unfortunately both inscriptions from Bryggen seem to be fragmentary. Still the OVS structure in all three instances appears to serve as a prelude to a following text. This might also be the case in the inscription from Lund. It is certainly very difficult to find parallels in medieval runic writing to the SOV word-order (reading from the top and downwards, as done previously) **rolfr:þorkissun**/**þeta:ræist**, although if the writer intended some kind of verse, he might conceivably have opted for an unusual sentence structure.

The lyrical statement in lines 3–5

The most significant linguistic argument in favour of an order of reading from the bottom and upwards, however, is the possibility of linking the end of line 4 with the beginning of line 5. The sequence **snæ**/**huitu** can then be read as a compound adjective, *snæhvítr* 'snow-white', most likely weakly declined in some oblique case. The adjective would then modify the following **snot**. It is first necessary to examine the runic spelling **snæ**. Although an Old Danish form *snǣ* is not recorded, it can be postulated on the basis of parallels (e.g. the alternative form *sǣ* of ODan. *sīo* 'lake'; *GG*, 1: 237 n. 2). Thus the runic spelling **snæ** does not constitute an argument for non-Danish provenance. Nevertheless it is worth noting that the form does not need any special explanation in a Norwegian context.

The last word in line 5, **snot**, is in all probability identical with the well-known poetic word *snót* (f.) 'woman' (Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1913–16, 523), also attested in Norwegian dialects, but not recorded in East Nordic sources. The word appears in two medieval runic inscriptions from Bryggen in Bergen. The first (B 111) is in verse (the metre being *dróttkvætt*) but only fragmentarily preserved, and seems to refer to a situation in which a women has in some way or other yielded to a man or lover (agreed to marriage or love-making?), but is still 'by men assumed to be a maiden' or maybe 'by men is considered to be unmarried/a virgin'; cf. Liestøl 1964, 32 f.). The second inscription (B 404) contains the wording **snot·uliota**, *snót úljóta* 'unugly woman', and this statement can be connected with that on a third Bryggen stick (B 524): **konouena**, *konu væna* 'beautiful woman', since the

accompanying introductions on the sticks (**sisi·si·sissi** and **sesesæssese** respectively) must have their roots in the same formula. The repetitive formula is also known from the Greenlandic Narssaq stick, which might be 150–200 years older than the two examples from Bryggen (cf. also MacLeod and Mees 2006, 68–70, with references). The word *snót* occurs in manuscript sources as a synonym of *kona* 'wife, married woman' and *mær* 'maiden, unmarried woman'. The term *mær* is employed on the Narssaq stick, and this word occurs in other places modified by the adjective 'white', e.g. *hvít mær*, *en bráhvíta mær* ('eyebrow-white'), *en línhvíta mær* ('linen-white'; these examples are taken from Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1913–16, 416). The poem *Sólarljóð*, in Eddic metre, contains the formula *(þá) hvítu mær* '(the) white maiden', and there is no doubt that the adjective 'white' combined with a word for a woman both in *Sólarljóð* and in other poetic contexts has the positive connotations of fair and beautiful (cf. Sveinbjörn Eigilsson 1913–16, 302).

The runes **um** in line 4 must be either the adverb or the preposition *um* (+ accusative), and **þa** is probably the feminine accusative singular form *þá* 'this, that' of the demonstrative pronoun, although formally the possibilities are several, e.g. the adverb *þá* 'then', the preterite of the verb *þiggja* 'receive, accept' and a form of the noun *þá* (f.) 'thawed ground'. It is, however, natural to analyse **þasnæ**/**huitu:snot** as an alliterating, semantically and grammatically concordant unit in the accusative feminine singular: *þá snæhvítu snót* 'the snow-white woman'. This is probably governed by the preposition **um** and forms the last part of the inscription (lines 3–5).

Line 3 begins with **honom:uar** and it seems reasonable to interpret the first word as the dative of the personal pronoun *hann* 'he'. The expected Danish runic form around 1200 would be **hanum** with umlaut of the vowel of the first syllable unmarked, cf. that the oldest Scanian manuscripts have *hanum*, *honum* only appearing in the late 1300s. Presuming the runic form **honom** to reflect marked *u*-umlaut in the first syllable corresponding to the manuscript form *honum*, the **o** in the second syllable could be explained as an example of vowel harmony *u > o* under the influence of the *o* in the preceding syllable. If, however, the first syllable is regarded as long, the lowering *u > o* could be explained as an example of vowel balance. But whereas vowel harmony can be demonstrated in Scanian manuscripts from the early 1200s (*GG*, 1: 402), vowel balance is not definitely attested in the area where Old Danish was spoken, although it is assumed that it could have existed in Scanian in the 1100s and 1200s (*GG*, 1: 403; Bjerrum 1973 [1952], 121). The vocalic systems underlying the designation of vowels in runic inscriptions from Scania and Bornholm during the period 1000–1250

cannot be established with certainty, perhaps due to irregular variation, combinations of vowel harmony and vowel balance or other rules (Bjerrum 1973 [1952], 58). In a Danish/Scanian context the appearance of the form **honom** as early as c. 1200 must be considered somewhat aberrant. In Old Norwegian manuscripts, however, both phenomena, vowel harmony and vowel balance, occur widely (Seip 1955, 128–32) and runic inscriptions from Bø, Atrå and Bryggen show examples of the spelling **honom** (A 98, N 148, B 181; all from the late 1100s or early 1200s). The runes **uar** are probably the 3rd person singular preterite of the verb *vera* 'to be', but it is not obvious what the subject of **uar** is.

The runes following **uar** in line 3 have caused a good deal of trouble and not yet received a satisfactory interpretation. The sequence **þan͡gar** can hardly represent a known word, but if one accepts Jonna Louis-Jensen's proposal (in the previously mentioned e-mail correspondence with James Knirk in 2007) and reads the *a*-rune twice in the bind-rune **a͡n**, two individual units, **þa** and **a͡ngar**, can be separated. The double reading of **a** is admissible according to classical runic orthography, in which the same rune is not normally written twice in succession. The motivation for not carving two adjacent *a*-runes in **þan͡gar** cannot be lack of space since there is room enough for another *a*-rune and a punctuation mark. With double reading of the *a*-rune the first unit would constitute a word, *þá*, for which formally the possibilities of interpretation are again many. The remaining runes, **a͡ngar**, can be explained as a form of the noun *angr* (m./n.) 'sorrow' written with a svarabhakti vowel. This would provide a subject for the verb **uar**, and **þa** would then probably be best interpreted as the adverb of time *þá* 'then'. Svarabhakti vowels are documented early in both East and West Nordic texts. In Norway svarabhakti *a* occurs frequently in texts from the southern and south-eastern parts of the country, while Icelandic texts have *u* (Seip 1955, 137 f.). In Denmark, svarabhakti vowels between a consonant and final -*r* develop over the whole country in the medieval period. In manuscripts the vowel is usually *æ*, but *a* is also employed in accordance with the system of vowel harmony (*GG*, 1: 424 f.). The translation of the middle line under this interpretation would be 'For him was then sorrow'. It is likely that **honom** refers to the carver, Hrólfr.

The word **blandat** in line 4 is probably a typologically late, weakly conjugated past participle of *blanda* 'to mix'. The form *blandat* occurs in thirteenth-century manuscripts containing early poetry (e.g. *Hávamál*), but is explained as a later form introduced by scribes (Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1913–16, 50 f.). The verb *blanda* has a long string of meanings, both concrete and figurative. The basic meaning is 'blend, mix', typically used of liquids,

e.g. blood, poison and mead. According to Finnur Jónsson's dictionary of the Icelandic *rímur* the verb *blanda* is used in that genre particularly when describing the production of the poets' drink, i.e. the mead of poetry (Old West Nordic *skáldskapar mjǫðr*), and the noun *bland* (n.) occurs similarly in kennings for the drink itself. In addition, the word appears in expressions such as *með blandinn ekka* 'with sorrow-mixed mind' (Finnur Jónsson 1926–28, 29) and in constructions involving the mediopassive form *blandask (við* or *með)*, which can mean 'to mix/involve oneself in something' and may even denote sexual intercourse. The past participle can indicate opacity, both in concrete terms (e.g. 'cloudy [liquids]') and figuratively as an expression for being unreliable (see further in *ONP*, 2: cols. 411–15). Such connotations are for instance reflected in *Lokasenna* stanza 32 where Loki accuses Freyja of being a sorceress much 'mixed' with evil: *Þegi þú Freyia, þú ert fordœða, oc meini blandin miǫk* (von See et al. 1997, 447–49). Zoe Borovsky (2001) has dealt exhaustively with the meaning of the adjective *blandinn* when used in insults of this kind directed at women. In such contexts *blandinn* is chiefly employed in accusations of unreliability. Borovsky feels it possible to associate the use of these accusations of 'being mixed' with meta-narratives concerning the theme of imbalance between the masculine and the feminine elements in the Old West Nordic universe (Borovsky 2001, 10 f.). In theory this could also be the theme of the inscription on the Lund gaming-piece.

Lines 3–5 of the Lund piece can thus be interpreted: *honum var þá ang(a)r blandat um þá snæhvítu snót*. It is difficult to find precise parallels to an expression *blanda angr um* but it may be compared with expressions such as *bera angr um fljóð* 'to bear sorrow about a woman' (Finnur Jónsson 1926–28, 5), *baka einhverjum sorg* 'prepare sorrow for somebody' (Sigfús Blöndal 1920–24, [1:] 57), cf. *bland iðranar* 'blend/mixture of repentance, i.e. repentance' (Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1913–16, 50), and perhaps also but less obviously *brugga svík* 'to brew/contrive fraud' (Fritzner, 1: 198). Against this background the entire inscription on the Lund gaming-piece can tentatively be interpreted as follows: *Þetta reist Hrólfr Þorgeirs/Þorgísls sun; honum var þá angr blandat um þá snæhvítu snót,* 'Hrólfr, Þorgeirr's/Þorgísl's son, carved this. For him sorrow was then caused concerning the snow-white woman'. Within this text the word *þá* in *honum var þá angr*, established above by double reading of an **a** in line 3, is somewhat superfluous and does not read well so close to the *þá* in *þá snæhvítu snót* (lines 4–5). The vocabulary in the inscription is steaming with emotion and lyrical expression, and the statement could perhaps be considered poetic. However, apart from the carver-formula, which could be an imperfect *fornyrðislag* couplet or a likewise imperfect first two short-lines of a *ljóðaháttr* stanza with *reist*

and *(H)rólfr* alliterating, and lines 4–5 *um þá snæhvítu snót*, which would be an acceptable third or full line of a *ljóðaháttr* stanza with alliteration between *snæhvítu* and *snót*, evidence for metrical structure is hard to find. The inscription could nonetheless be characterized as an irregular or imperfect stanza in a mixed Eddic metre. The imperfections may stem from its being a garbled rendering of a quotation, or perhaps even a deliberate re-writing of such. The inscription exemplifies a genre, poetry, that is meagrely represented in Old Danish. Among the runic evidence from Lund we find, for example, the inscription on the rib-bone designated as Lund bone no. 4, from the residential block known as "kv. Glambeck 5" (DR Til5): **bondi** × **ris** × **ti** × **mal** × **runu** / **arar** × **ara** × **æru** × **fiaþrar** ×, *Bóndi risti málrúnu; árar ara eru fjaðrar* 'Bóndi carved speech-rune(s); (the) oars of (the) eagle are (its) feathers'. (The final *r*-rune in **arar** and **fiaþrar** is dotted, probably in an attempt to represent **ʀ**.) This cannot be classified as poetry but has a proverbial character that illustrates the carver's acquaintance with learning. Similarly the carver Hrólfr was seemingly not a poet, but had intellectual skills over and above his ability to write in runes.

The inscription on the Lund disc does not explicitly confirm the object as a gaming-piece as does the one on the Kałdus find, but there is nothing in it that conflicts with such an interpretation either. It is hardly likely that the wooden disc simply functioned as an inscription bearer since it is carefully formed and decorated. If its function was not that of a gaming-piece, it may have been an amulet, since such a small object would have been easy to carry around.

Provenance

With Lund as its find place and an archaeological dating to the early 1200s, it is natural to assume that the language of the inscription on the gaming-piece is Old Danish/Scanian. It is questionable whether it is worth trying to determine the provenance of medieval runic inscriptions from the area where Old Danish was spoken on the basis of the traditional parameters so long as these inscriptions display such great variation and have as their background early urban environments that probably housed people from many different places of origin. Linguistically the inscription seems in several respects to harmonise with the Scanian of the 1200s, although some features appear to contradict this. For instance, it is possible to argue that the word *snót* is documented for the first time in East Nordic in this inscription and explain the lack of other occurrences as the result of the different source traditions in East and West Nordic.

The question of provenance is, however, important. Taking runic typology, linguistic forms, vocabulary and genre into account it is much easier to explain the inscription as being in Old Norwegian. On the principle of always giving the greatest weight to the most straightforward explanation in linguistic analysis, it seems most reasonable to conclude that the Lund gaming-piece is of Norwegian origin.

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