
STAVES & STONES

The Truth of Runic Tradition



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by: josiah duff

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ABSTRACT

The research problem and task for this thesis was in the analysis of the Old Norse Futhark, or written runic language and how it has been represented through history. In order to educate the reader with a greater understanding and put the runes in context, the runes are analyzed thoroughly before being compared and contrasted to other runic systems that have been represented in modern media. The objective being to identify these similarities and differences in each language and maintain a consistent criteria to measure each language, via original use, design and form, and in-mythos development. Using this criteria and context, further conclusions and familiarity are gained and perhaps new hypotheses drawn about the Futhark and how it acts both as a written system, and a vehicle for human imagination. Additional conclusions include runes as memory and artifacts of cultural significance.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2018, I found myself having just moved back home from a job that took me from my home state, and needed something to distract me from long days of idly searching job sites and watching television. With only a few episodes of *Critical Role* (a popular *Dungeons & Dragons* Twitch stream) under my belt, I set out to play *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D) with some friends of mine. It was only then that I began my love for fantasy and the historical cultures of medieval times and before. D&D plunged me deeper, not only in that fandom but into my own imagination. And when I discovered the giants represented in D&D, my love of runes began, evolving into a desire to research the original Norse runes. Throughout my tenure at Liberty University, my graphic design work often focused on typical “viking” imagery,

including runes. When it came time to choose a topic for a thesis, the answer was obvious. When it comes to Viking history, people today are often confused between truth and fiction I want to clarify one specific misconception: their runic language.

Language serves as a window into culture, revealing values, societal norms, and even daily life. But the most important of these ideas that unites all off these cultures is runes as memory. All humanity, mythical or otherwise, long for legacy and for their story to be told. Runes act a literal set in stone legacy of someone, permanent as could be, and different from the thousand of stories written for today’s audience. I will tell these stories and bring clarity to the Norse heritage.

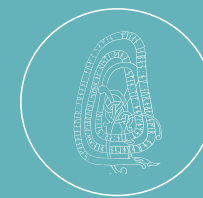
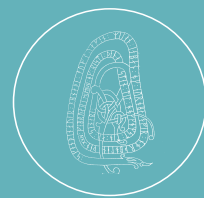
CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH



Runic languages have long been a source of debate, puzzling scholars and evading the academic scrutiny needed to decipher them in any meaningful way. After all, the word for rune can be documented among many Germanic languages as meaning “secret.” For example; “Gothic rūna, Old High German

Figure 1.1: Image derived from “Sayings of the High One” by W.G. Collingwood (Public Domain)

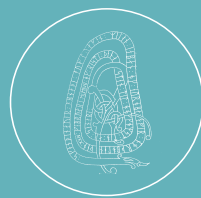




We can draw conclusions about a culture and what they value based on several factors, including written language. Comparing each language to one another, it is clear the cultures stem from different belief systems and each maintain a different bank of values from the other. I intend to draw out these values based solely on the runes themselves, their design, and other signposts of each language. Some conclusions we can draw include geographical locations,

craftsmanship, the culture's value of practicality versus beauty, and even the culture's relationship with time and legacy. Language is a natural development of a culture, a tool for communicating. If we want to use a written language to speak to others in our culture, that language should reflect the values of the same.

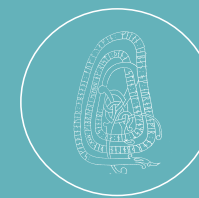
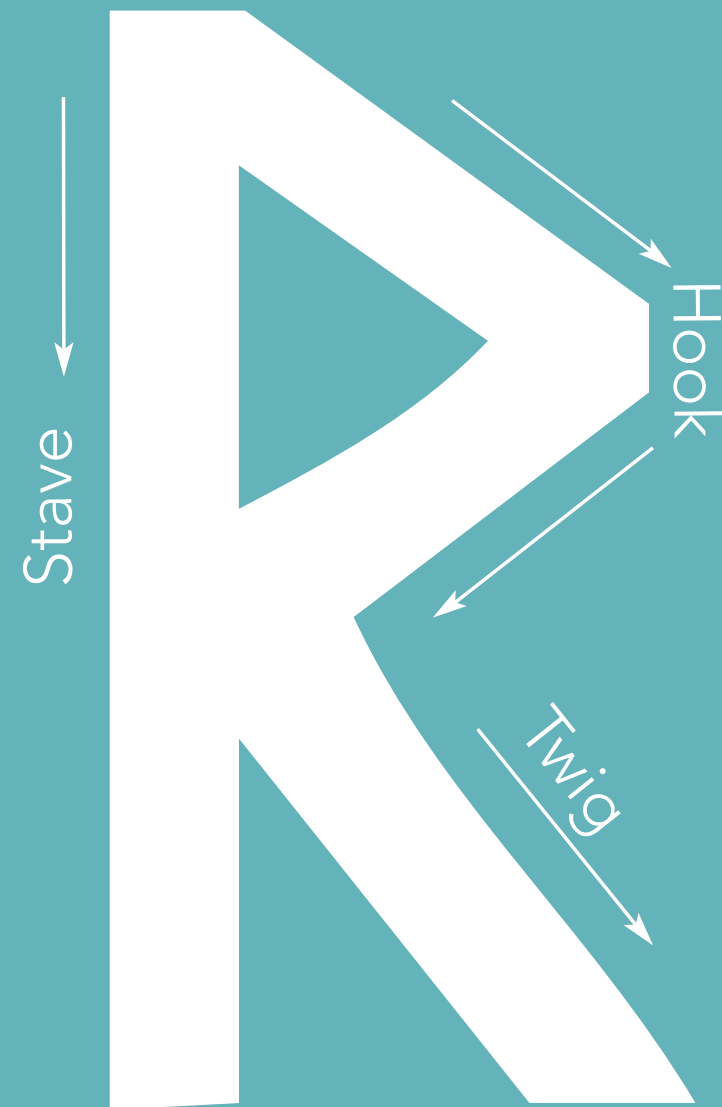
The majority of the research conducted involved books, articles, and interviews dealing with the



creators of these languages or mention of the in-mythos lore behind their development.

Runes and their Design

Just as the English alphabet draws its name from the first two letters of the Greek alphabet, alpha and beta, so do runic alphabets gain their name from the first six letters in its sequence. Each rune is made up of a combination of three forms, a stave, twig, and hook, though not all employ all three. The primary runic alphabets are Elder Futhork (used until c. 700 A.D.) and Younger Futhork (both of which will be referred to by their anglo-sized forms "Futhork" moving forward). Elder Futhork employed 24 characters while Younger Futhork had only 16. Elmer H. Antonson, in



it is both on the land of the church but also on that of a pre-Christian burial ground, which maintained a connection with ancestral (if not worship) honor and the past. "By placing the runestone at the edge of the gravesite, Gunni and Asa were combing the Christian monument with a sacred place containing the remains of the ancestors. In this way, although the physical remains of the commemorated were buried elsewhere, a physical presence at the traditional burial ground was maintained, providing some form of physical and emotional link with the past." (McLeod, 4) This shows and reinforces the use of runestones as burial stones. But Michael Shulte argues that perhaps runestones were also used by families with greater wealth to identify status and identity.

But neither of these uses point to the intention of magical signposts or other worldly phenomenon, which modern media has begun to assert. In fact, Edward Cowan writes in his article regarding runes found in Scotland, that runes can be graffiti! Crude and explicit content has been found on the walls of a tomb in Orkney, probably men speaking about women they knew, as well as a series of sentences written in different hands, compared to an Internet chat room or public bathroom stalls. Runes were common and though literacy was low, they were little more than another writing system, mysterious of course, but simple in their use.

As for runic origins, there are a few things of which to make



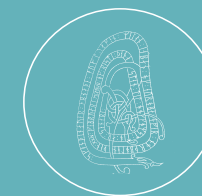
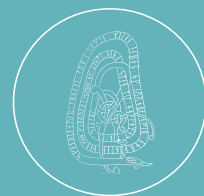
Figure 1.4: Norse art typical of the "Jelling" period.

note. Historically, there was more discovery about the runes' use following the printing press, and some scholars believe that runes hold a more objective and valuable understanding of their original meaning than any other language does. As well as other assertions that the "Ing" rune was descended from the Phoenician alphabet, and not the Greek or Latin alphabet as originally

thought. They cite alphabetical similarities, the existence of the rune as a consonant, and design of the letter as a whole (Aziz, 635-646).

Norse Cultural Conclusions

There are very few runestones that use elder futhark, which makes it difficult to fully understand why the Nordic

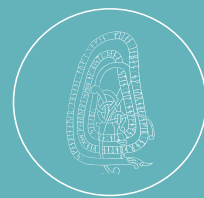


cultures used them. Furthermore, if there is any information about the daily life of Nordic peoples in these runes, it is difficult to uncover. However, conclusions can be drawn regarding Norse culture based on their constructed language. In a lecture given by Thomas Carlyle in the 19th century in which he discusses Norse mythology, he said "The dark hostile Powers of Nature they figure to themselves as 'Jötuns,' Giants, huge shaggy beings of a demonic character. Frost, Fire, Sea-tempest; these are Jötuns." (Carlyle, 32). This gives us a clue to what the Norse feared, what they knew was a potential for demise. The harsh colds of winter, the untameable fire, and the chaotic storms over the sea all spelled doom for the Norse who spent much of their time in cold

places, where fire is needed but could get out of control. We know they were seafaring folk, and as such storms would pose a great threat. Other clues to Nordic daily life come from rune names. The rune called "elk" showed their geography, saying they lived where elk also roamed, as well as a familiarity with nature and wild, implying hunter-gatherers were a staple of the society. These people using the runes were probably skilled craftsmen and created with their hands based on the material on which these runes were crafted, namely wood and stone. But a few less concrete ideas can be found by analyzing the design of the runes themselves. They are extremely simple, using three component structures for each rune, stave, twig, and hook, which brings to mind a

more utilitarian and practical outlook when it came to writing, or at least, writing runes. Carving on to wood and stone is not as simple as using a graphite pencil or an ink pen. Due to this, the runes needed to be simple and easy to carve without too much toil. Additionally, the simplicity speaks to the cultures attitudes toward writing as a whole. In their architecture, there was a greater emphasis on repeating forms like the gripping beast. Their ships were of incredible craftsmanship, and their halls of grand scale. But their writing was not so leading us to believe that writing, and scholarly pursuits as a whole, were not at the forefront of the average Norseman's mind. They were instead focused on survival in the harsh North and the conquest of other lands for food and

wealth. But when it came to the end of a life in Norse culture, oftentimes a stone would be erected in honor of the deceased and runes would serve a more important purpose. The practice of raising a runestone to the dead was rampant, and leads us to how the Norse viewed legacy, seeing stone as permanent and forever, and in some ways, seeing the runes themselves as a way to carry on memory. Runes as memory is a consistent thread throughout all of the languages analyzed here, and memory allows us to take a deeper glimpse into a culture's values. Much like how one might use a font today to give clues to the aesthetic of something, so do runes give an idea of the cultures that used them.



"Runes as memory is a consistent thread throughout all of the languages analyzed here, and memory allows us to take a deeper glimpse into a culture's values."





RUNIC LANGUAGE

DWARVISH

Runes have had many incarnations in modern media, three of which will be analyzed in how they compare and contrast in form, development, and use. The first of these are the runes found in the work of J.R.R. Tolkien, specifically those belonging to the Dwarves of the land, also known as Cirth, the Sindarin (Old Elvish) word for runes. Tolkien was an expert linguist and it is no mystery that he developed advanced languages and writing systems for Middle-Earth. As such, my earlier mention of Cirth belonging to the Dwarves is only partially true. In *Appendix E* of the *Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien goes into greater detail of Tengwar and the Cirth writing systems. There is mention, by Tolkien, that Cirth was not as systematic as other languages he developed, though he noted the

different changes the elder Cirth went through when different cultures adopted the systems. He begins the history of the Cirth system in this quote, as well as their original use which directly correlates to the runes of this world, as he states. “The Cirth were devised first in Beleriand by the Sindar, and were long used only for inscribing names and brief memorials upon wood or stone. To that origin they owe their angular shapes, very similar to the runes of our times, though they differed from these in details and were wholly different in arrangement.” (Tolkien, 441) Here, there is admittance to the similarity in form to Norse runes, which is expected, as Tolkien was a linguist and based his languages on real world composites. But in the next section he mentions that

Cirth, in a way, filtered down through cultures eventually falling to the Dwarves after the Elves developed them into a richer system known as the Alphabet of Daeron. The Dwarves then adopted the language as it stood in Eregion, where it ended up in Moria. Moria used Fäenorian letters at the time when dealing with other cultures, but in their own tongue, used Cirth since they worked so heavily with wood and stone, but also developed pen forms for the runes. This is where the information regarding Cirth directly from Tolkien begins to taper.

Any further comparisons between Tolkien’s Dwarvish runes and those of the Norse becomes almost purely the job of the observer, though the correlation is very apparent.

For example, the Dwarven script developed by J.R.R. Tolkien.



Figure 1.5: Recreation of the text found on Thror's Map

This script, found on “Thror’s Map” shows many identical runes to those found in the futharks. Take this rune for example:



Norse

Dwarvish



The first is the “a” rune, or Ansuz (named for the god Anse) in elder futhark while the other, meaning something else, is one found in Tolkien’s work. From this, one can see that it is clear that Tolkien used inspiration from existing runic languages to develop his own. Additionally, as mentioned above, the letters were developed for writing on stone and wood, specifically for small memorials, almost exactly what Norse runes were also developed for.

One notable addition to the runic stylings of the Dwarves and Cirth were Moon-Letters. Moon-Letters were runes written with mithril infused ink, that only reflected moonlight, and therefore, could only be read by moonlight. It was even

possible to modify the runes to only reflect the light of the same moon by which the runes were originally written, for example, a moon of the same phase or of a similar time of year.

And that magical note is where the differences begin. Firstly, Tolkien himself mentions that the runes “were wholly different in arrangement.” Additionally, the runes themselves were “created” by the Sindar, but Norse runes were developed from many and alphabets, including Latin, Greek, and some believe the Phoenicians (Aziz, 635). There is little in the way of unique and original letters forms except for those needed for sounds that were more easily represented by one rune rather than many.

The major difference between the previously discussed Norse cultural values and the Dwarvish cultural values lies in the Dwarvish love of mining and being underground which proves to be a decisive factor in how they wrote in stone. And much like the Norse, writing in stone necessitates simple and quick forms that could be chiseled out swiftly. However, unlike the Norse, the simple forms of the runes also extend to the Dwarves’ almost brutalist architecture where hard lines and edges serve as literal building blocks of Dwarven society.

Tolkien’s Cirth is the primary example of runes found in fantasy, and probably the most known throughout the world. As such, their comparison is the simplest

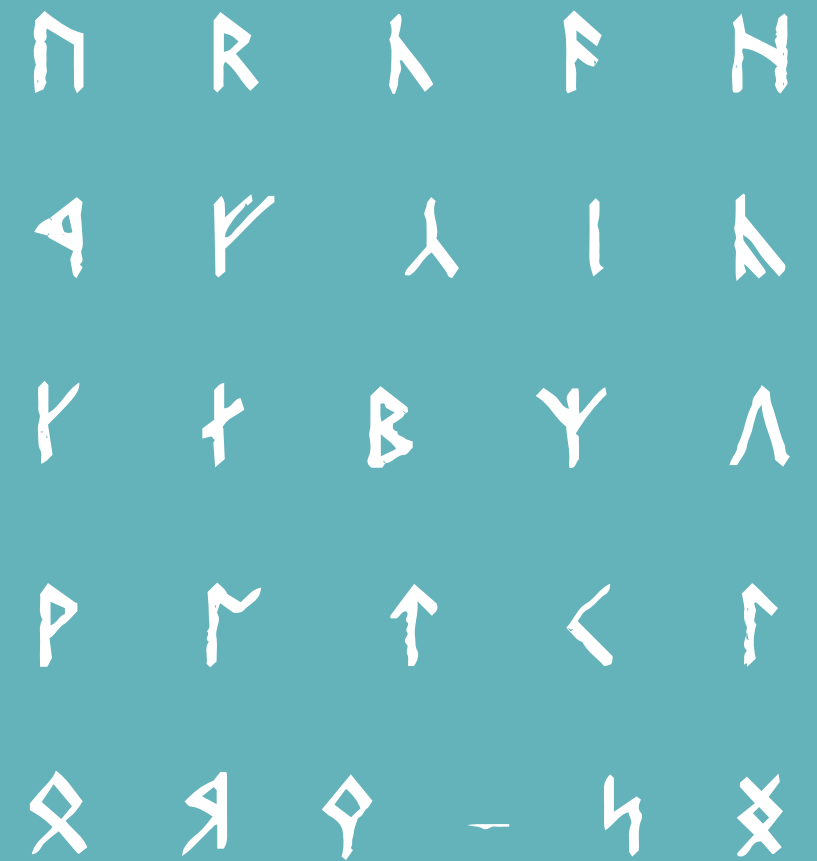


Figure 1.6: Dwarvish Alphabet



of the languages analyzed here. Tolkien was extremely meticulous when mapping the history and development of these languages. Moving forward, the comparisons will not be so obvious, as history and development are not so well documented. But once again, runes as memory, as a secret language to hide cultural value, is an essential part of the Dwarven culture, as it is for all cultures herein.



“But once again, runes as memory, as a secret language to hide cultural value, is an essential part of the Dwarven culture, as it is for all cultures herein.”





RUNIC LANGUAGE

G I A N T

When looking at fantasy juggernauts, *Lord of the Rings* is among the first, but so are the worlds of *Dungeons and Dragons*. Being a world of high fantasy based in European myth, of dragons and trolls and monsters, there is bound to be a focus on ancient writing systems with great power and strength. And among the most ancient of beings in the world of D&D, are the giants. The children of the All-Father, Annam, have roamed the world since its creation and were among the first to develop written systems. In D&D, things are generally more magical. In fact, in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, there are listed five core assumptions about the world, and these assumptions affect everything, even writing systems. They are,

"Gods Oversee the World, Much of the World is Untamed, The World is Ancient, Conflict Shapes the World's History, and The World is Magical." (*Dungeon Master's Guide*, 9). Magic, a sense of history, and the wild all contribute to the runes of the giants.

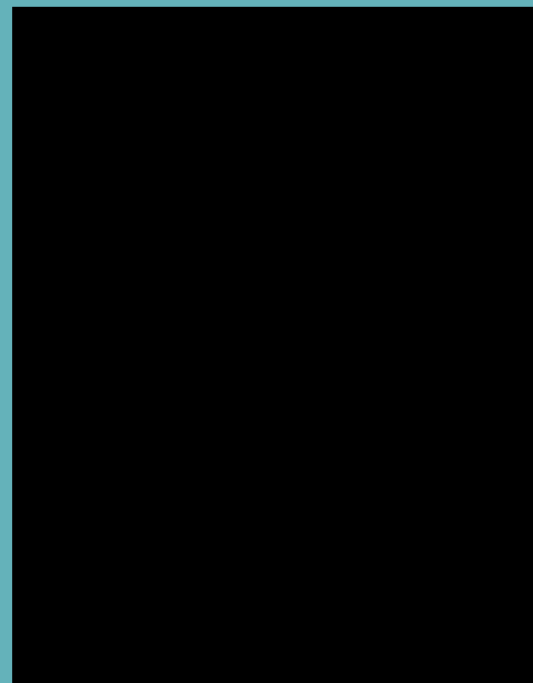


Figure 1.8: "Conch of Teleportation" featuring the Storm rune. (<https://www.dndbeyond.com/sources/skt/magic-items#2016right250ConchofTeleportation>)

Figure 1.7: Giant Alphabet



The Giant runes stand as a more ideographic language than the other systems discussed, meaning that yes, they are runes, however more closely resemble hieroglyphics languages do to their representational meaning. As a result, these runes have more contrasting features than things in common with the Norse, but as they were the original inspiration for the topic as a whole, some similarities stand out.

The primary comparison to be made between the Norse runes and the giant runes lies primarily in their representation of a concept. Giant runes each have an idea they represent, or at least, have been given names that showcase a historical or natural feature. Additionally, there is a rune for



each type of giant; hill, stone, fire, frost (ice), cloud, and storm. The ideas deal with experience, and have been given names that reflect concepts with which the giants are familiar. So one would be able to discern a little about the culture from the names themselves. The King rune shows there was an idea of authority, even monarchy in giant society, and the journey rune communicates a familiarity with travel from one place to another, perhaps suggesting nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyles. Well, the same can be said regarding Norse runes, both their representation of concepts and conclusions drawn

from the rune names. Above, it is mentioned some rune names like elk, showing elk as a part of Nordic daily life. But the giant runes and the Norse runes even have some of the same names. Journey, ice, and light are three examples of the same rune name, giving further credence to the idea that giants and giant culture was based heavily on Norse culture, which makes sense due to giants coming from Norse mythology.

But the differences weigh heavier on the scales of the two runic systems. First, the actual design of the two sets of runes are vastly different. Where

Norse runes were angular and used to cut into stone and wood, the giant runes have elaborate forms. In fact, it would be a challenge to discover a single right angle that isn't muddled with the introduction of a serif. Typographically speaking, these runes do contain serifs supported by curved brackets to make the turn a more gradual process. The traditional idea of stave, twig, and hook as represented in the Norse runes is utterly absent with little consistency between each rune. The giant runes also employ floating

forms such as dots to add to the runes themselves. Some forms do not even connect! This is a good representation of the freedom with which modern runic systems can be developed, and the assumptions designers can make about their



Figure 1.8: The Ordning



audience. With the context of runes already existing and their audience having general understanding of them, they are free to go further than the inspiration was able. The Norse people toiled to create angular forms that would be simple to carve into wood and stone, but the modern designers of the giant runes had computers with programs capable of intricate design and form and could easily explain away the complexity with magic or ancient technology. And if these runes were mostly carved into stone or wood, one could see the toil needed to make the meticulous forms unless there was a stamp system or a magical way of simply touching a surface and having the runes appear

there. Regardless, these runes, were they actually developed in a time before computers and more advanced writing systems, would not have been readily adopted due to their complexity.

There is one minor cultural value that I'd like to discuss here for a moment. I spoke of the runes of the giants being of a significantly greater detail and design, which is mostly due to modern computers. But the in-world mythos could argue that there is a greater reason for the intricate designs. There are six types of giants that exist in magical social structure and caste system known as "the Ordning." From lowest to highest, the giants are Hill, Stone,

Fire, Frost, Cloud, and Storm (MM, 149). Mostly the order deals with size, Hill being the smallest and Storm being the largest. Hill giants are lazy, gluttonous behemoths with basic desires and resemble more closely the giants one might find in old fairytales. But Cloud and Storm giants are sophisticated cultures, with castles in the clouds and a desire for isolation and wisdom (Monster Manual, 150-151). These two could be the inspiration for a more intricate system of runes, as they see beauty where the Hill or Stone giants would not. However, the giants were not so arrogant as

to leave Hill through Frost out of the runic system, adding in runes for each of their brethren as well, to serve, once more, as a memory of what the giants had wrought.

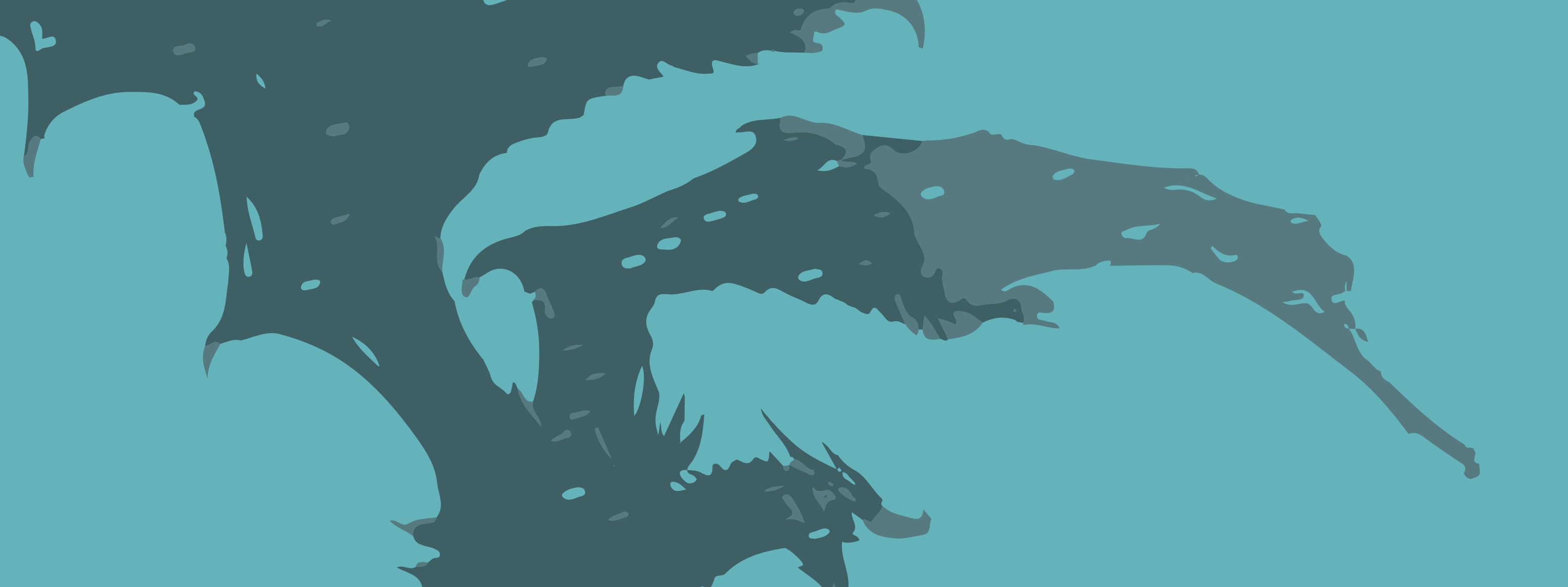
Once again we see runes acting as a way to record memory of a culture's history, and what it values. Today we use phrases like "written in stone" to denote things of permanence. It is clear that like the Norse, the Giants had an idea of posterity and legacy to be locked in time by the rough hewn surfaces of the rock surrounding them.

"Today we use phrases like "written in stone" to denote things of permanence. It is clear that like the Norse, the Giants had an idea of posterity and legacy to be locked in time by the rough hewn surfaces of the rock surrounding them."



Figure 1.9: Giant Size Comparison (Dungeon Master's Guide, 153)





RUNIC LANGUAGE

DRAGON

𐐚 𐐰 𐐱 𐐤 𐐸 𐐶 𐐷 𐐢 𐐸 𐐴 𐐲 𐐷 𐐼 𐐹 𐐷 𐐰 𐐱 𐐤 𐐸 𐐶 𐐷 𐐢 𐐸 𐐴 𐐲 𐐷 𐐼 𐐹 𐐷 𐐰 𐐱 𐐤 𐐸 𐐶 𐐷 𐐢 𐐸 𐐴 𐐲 𐐷 𐐼 𐐹 𐐷

The final runic system to be explored is that of the dragons from the Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim. These dragon runes much more apparently resemble those of the Norse and have similar uses, as well as an ancient magic that lies within their forms. The runes themselves represent the language of dragons which can be harnessed to unleash deadly power. "When a dragon uses a breath attack like fire or frost, it is speaking in an ancient and powerful language. A battle between two dragons is actually a deadly verbal debate" (TESV, Skyrim).

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim is a vast RPG (role-playing game) with high fantasy elements that takes place in the harsh northern land of Tamriel, Skyrim. Skyrim is heavily inspired by

Scandinavian countries. The primary residents of Skyrim are even called the Nords, as a nod to the Nordic people themselves. Life is harsh, cold, and short in Skyrim, exactly like one might imagine life in the cold north of Europe might have been.

As such, the similarities of the cultures speaks to the similarities of runic stylings. But instead of the Nord's writing system (which, due to the game being made in the United States is simply English), the analysis will instead focus on that of the dragons. The actual in-game history of the language itself is somewhat hard to pin down, as the company behind the game Bethesda hasn't released too many details. But there is history regarding the language being spoken by dragons

Figure 1.8: Poem written in Dovahzul (Bethesda Studios)

and Ancient Nords (viking-like barbarians) who would charge into battle shouting phrases in Draconic to inspire fear in their enemies. In the mythos of the game, the dragon language can be harnessed by humans known as Dragonborn. These mortals can use the Thu'um (or the Voice) to gain incredible arcane power by stringing together powerful and ancient words. At the time of the game's setting, only a few folks can still speak the Dragon language, including a secluded monk sect known as the Greybeards, high up the Throat of the World.

Above is a poem written out in the runes of the dragons. In the image, note the angular forms of the runes, accompanied by small dots or dashes. Todd Howard, the game's director commented about this in a Game Informer article, and how the creature supposedly responsible for the runes would write them. "The idea was, how would the dragons write or scratch this language in the stone or on the ground? Everything is done with the three talons. You'll always see combinations of one to three scratches, and sometimes the dot, which is like the dewclaw," (Miller,



gameinformer.com). The dew claw is the vestigial “toe” or claw commonly found on the upper leg of animals). The carving of runes into stone is very reminiscent of the Nordic use and the simplicity needed to be there for the runes to have ease of use both as dragons and as game designers. The Game Informer article goes on to discuss the concept designer, Adam Adamowicz, and how he developed the runes to represent the language that had already been designed by Emil Pagliarulo. “It doesn’t coincide directly with the alphabet we use in English. There are 34 unique characters within the language,” Pagliarulo says. Some Roman alphabet letters don’t exist, like the letter “c”. In other instances, a single runic character represents multiple Roman letters, including

many double vowels like “aa” or “ei.” This allowed for both ease of writing and for ease of game development, especially when printing the paragraphs of text found on Dragonstones throughout the game. Both the Norse and Dragon runic systems were developed with different audiences, and end goals in mind which is why their differences seem so great. One was designed as a system of writing for a culture while the other was designed for a game’s audience.

But how do the two compare? Firstly is the similarity in use of carving into stone, thus requiring angular forms both because of the stone and because of the claws used to carve. Additionally, in a way, the creators used the same rationale



Unrelenting Force

		
FUS	RO	DAH
(force)	(balance)	(push)

Fire Breath

		
YOL	TOOR	SHUL
(fire)	(inferno)	(sun)

Call Dragon

		
OD	AH	VIING
(snow)	(hunter)	(wing)

Figure 1.9: Shouts



when making both systems despite them being almost 1300 years apart from one another, simplicity and ease. Multi-letter runes allowed for quicker and simpler implementation in both cases. The systems both also seem to follow a similar structure. The Norse runes has the stave, twig, and hook consistency while the dragon runes also seem to have a structure in large claw marks, smaller claw marks and dots made with the dew claw. Much like every Norse rune employs those three ideas to make up the rune, so do the dragon

runes employ the same three idea structure to create the rune. Finally, another similarity, though a shallow one, is the idea that both languages/writing systems are no longer used in their respective settings, save for those who, like me, find the old runes interesting and capture the imagination.

Where they differ however, lies in their forms, and their conventions. Dragon runes are each a connection of three different strokes, and while the Nordic runes also have

three different elements, each is connected. The dragon runes have its elements completely separate, none of them connecting or crossing in anyway. Instead the forms are differentiated by where each element is placed within the character's grid. Additionally, the dragon runes don't have individual names and are used primarily as a script rather than a representational language like the Norse runes could, or even the giant runes discussed above.

As for divination of cultural value, I think it is apparent how important words and writing is to dragons, as they have developed a much more complex system than that of the Norse or Dwarves. For dragons, runes carry literal power, as I mentioned above. The fiery breath

of a dragon comes from his speaking of an ancient word that calls forth that flame. And a representational language needed to both serve that power but also be able to be carved by a dragon with 3 claws and a dewclaw. And so these complex and angular forms, many of which represent more than two letters, were created to not only contain the power of the draconic language, but to preserve it and keep the memory of the dragons alive.

Despite the land of Skyrim's similarity to Scandanavian culture, the runes of the dragons do not as directly correlate, but they still hold some consistency in runic conventions and truth that have been found in each of the analyzed systems.

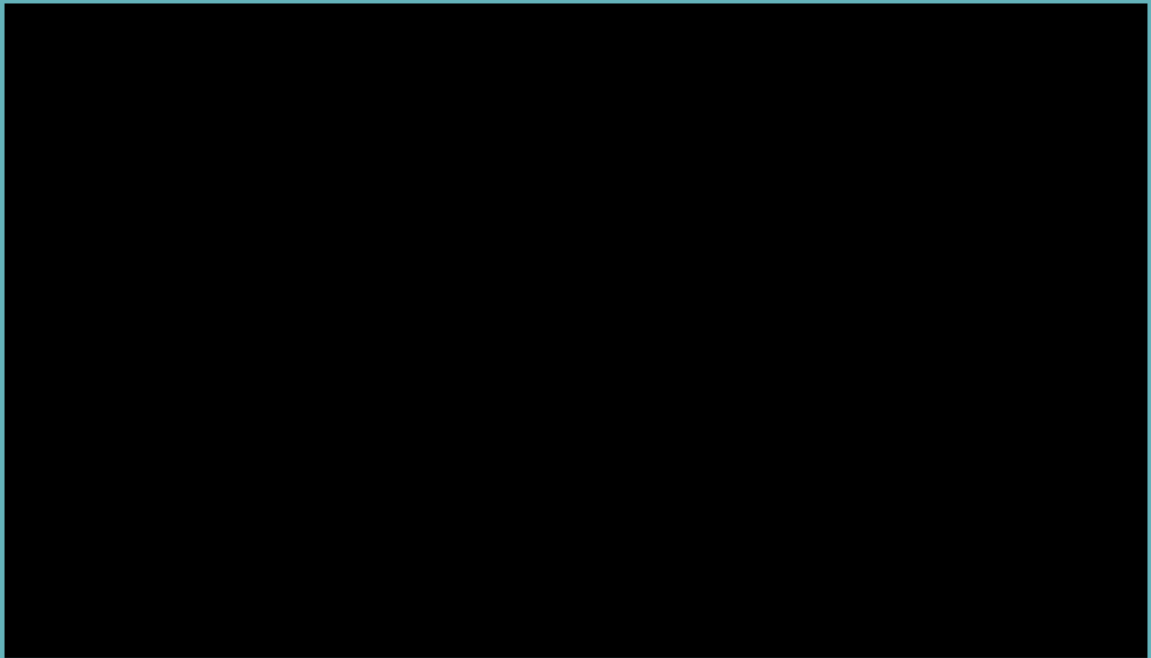


Figure 1.10: Word Wall (Bethesda Studios)



Looking across these 4 major runic languages, there are obvious similarities as well as evident differences. This led me to consider the relationship of the languages in order to develop a resource for better understanding and learning the different alphabet systems. There was a possibility for me to simply study only the Norse runes and draw conclusions from that set of information. However, when considering languages, one must always keep context of all sorts in mind including cultural values, time period, etc. In this case, I didn't want the Norse language to seem isolated or distant, which required the study of supplemental runic languages that allowed further understanding through comparison. Now that the comparison and differences have

been made, there is an overwhelming amount of evidence that runes, their very nature, may have been created for communication. And they may have even been simplified for carving into stone, but through my research and visual solutions, I see now that despite the difficulty, stone was essential to the process, for, to the Norse, stone was permanent, forever, and in it, they could carve their legacy to be remembered for generations. While my words are written into paper, I'm thankful for the opportunity to give life to those lost forgotten symbols.

“And they may have even been simplified for carving into stone, but through my research and visual solutions, I see now that despite the difficulty, stone was essential to the process, for, to the Norse, stone was permanent, forever, and in it, they could carve their legacy to be remembered for generations.”





CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

In a way, this project began on November 21, 1998, the day on which The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time was released. This game was the first game that sparked my imagination toward magic and fantasy. And the runes used to represent the Hylian language were to first to capture my attention. My friends and I memorized the runes and used them to write secret notes to one another in class. And from this interest, my love for magic and writing grew.

Runes tell stories, all kinds of stories, about cultures, myth, magic, and more. And my love for story was the first thing that drew me to runes in a more meaningful way.

In December of 2002, a new *Legend of Zelda* game released, *The Wind Waker*. Upon launching a new game file in that game, a video plays, of several tableau's detailing the story of an ancient hero. The runes on this tableau as well as the feeling of the video as a whole inspired me to make a similar video detailing another legend I had invented for my Dungeons & Dragons group. This video utilized a runic language I created to give the legend more authenticity and make it seem more ancient and legendary.

My study of these languages has been both a personal and academic journey, the culmination of which has led me to a greater appreciation of the subject.

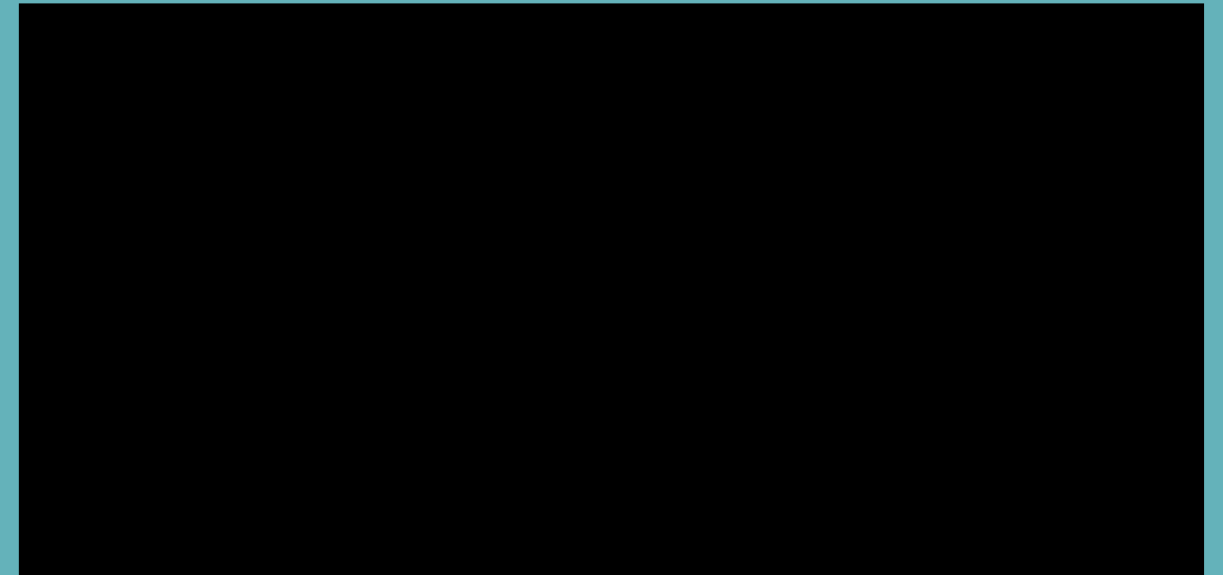


Figure 3.1: The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker, Nintendo Gamecube, 2002



Figure 3.2: Still from a video I created showing a runic language and continent.



Figure 3.3: Still from the same video detailing a creature called Kalistros.



LITHIC RUNES

Before I had even started my Masters, I set out to create a runic language of my own for us in my Dungeons & Dragons world. This was a major part of developing this thesis because the work became incredibly personal through the design process. And without realizing it, I employed small similarities to existing runic languages. This established a baseline knowledge and interest off of which the rest was built. To the right is the entirety of the runic alphabet I created. The culture that developed the system carved primarily on stone, much like the Norse did, and their rune stones were notorious and mysterious throughout the world. As a result, their culture was named the "Liths," and the runic system deemed "Lithic Runes."

ʀ ʁ ˆ ˆ
 ʁ ʁ ˆ ˆ
 u
 rne

Unlike the Norse runes, however, I did not have any structure, save for some repeating forms. The most common attribute is this line;



It appears in six runes in one way or another, and acts as the basis for the counting system, but I'll spare the details of that tally-like idea.

These runes were fairly basic, simply 26 forms to replace English characters, following the same grammatical ideas that English does. The only major difference comes with the vowel system. There are still 5 vowels, a, e, i, o, and u, but instead of being a full letter, they are written above or below the letter they

ˆ ˆ
 ˆ ˆ
 u
 pch
 o

come before or after as in existing languages like Hebrew. For example, in the word, "rune," which is a four letter word, there would be three letters, and an accent over the "N" to show the "U." I determined that a vowel will *always* be positioned over another letter whenever possible. But in the word "pouch," where a vowel follows another, the language allows for vowel placement below the rune.

You can see the inspiration from the Norse, with very angular forms and simple design. Without conscious knowledge, I drew heavily from the Norse well and set myself up for a future of runic interest.



LITHIC RUNES

Figure 3.4: Lithic Runes



KASTLEYNDR

At the time of my beginning interest of runes, it was purely a creative and imaginative endeavor. While the historical culture of the Norse was interesting to me, I'd never thought to pursue it in any scholarly way. Instead, I used the myths put forth by the Norse to inspire the stories I told my Dungeons & Dragons players. Then came the chance for me to finally be a player, and have my own character in a D&D campaign. I wanted my character be in some way related to giants, and I loved the design of the giant runes as well. So I made my character a Goliath (Half-Giant) named Kastleyndr (Kastle) tasked with collecting the giant runes in the form of magical tattoos that make her more powerful. I did a lot of illustration of this character, and these magical symbols became

very meaningful to me as a player, and a person with an appreciation for design and a love for magic and storytelling. I spent two years of my life playing as this character, and it became a valuable experience in my process for choosing which runic languages I'd use in my thesis. Only Norse runes exist in the real world, which allowed me to personally engage with them, and the culture that made them. This character, Kastle, gave me a similar experience. When I played her, I was someone who cared about and saw the power of runes in a fantastical way, beyond simple scholarly interest, and gave me an appreciation for giant runes, and other runic languages I wouldn't have otherwise had, hence her inclusion in my process.

This illustration is what I consider to be the best, and most definitive illustration of Kastle as a character. In it, she gains her signature hairstyle and braids, along with more runes and a significant amount of detail surrounding them. Note the Storm and Fire rune on her collarbone and the detail that has come with it. This detail was supposed to mirror a sort of tribal marking which identified her both as a part of her tribe while also setting her apart.



Figure 3.5: Kastle 1



This version of Kastle was an attempt at grasping a younger, more stubborn version of the character. We can see her braids are still there, but less so, and more hidden. Additionally, she only has the one rune on her chest. This suggests she hasn't started collecting runes as of yet, and hasn't had any further work done on her body to add more detail to to each rune.



Figure 3.6: Kastle 2

This illustration here is the final version of Kastle and you'll notice the art style and design of the runes was drastically changed as well as some of her physical features.

But the main difference is how the runes are organized. As a player, in order to revamp Kastle's image, I organized the runes into different domains, with the primary rune in each domain filling the circle at the center of the tattooed designs. Then, each other rune in the domain inhabits a circle surrounding the primary rune, connected by a Norse knotted pattern. These images are to show that runes have, even before my work with my thesis, been a major part of my imagination, and even identity, in the case of my Goliath, Sorcerer of the Giant Soul. They show my personal journey with getting to understand runes of other languages in a much more personal way which wouldn't otherwise be possible.



Figure 3.7: Kastle 4



RUNES IN EDUCATION

When I began my Masters work at Liberty University, I promised myself that every one of my projects would be coherent and on the same topic wherever possible, so I'd be able to graduate with a cohesive portfolio that would look clean and professionally made.

The first few classes made this goal a little difficult, as they were studying existing pieces of artwork, and our work needed to reflect that style, or was simply an analysis of that style. However, I was able to make many of my early projects focused on the same topic, namely, the world I had created for D&D. The first major project I did was for my visualization illustration class in which I created a map of my world in Illustrator (Figure 3.12). My work in my world

continued when I took an advanced typography class in which we were given significant freedom to choose the topics on which we wanted to do our research papers. This was when my research truly began, studying the typography of Norse Runes and how they are similar or different with other systems. That paper was only a few pages with significantly less information regarding the comparing and contrasting elements of the languages. But along with the research paper, there was a design element to be made regarding the typography we researched. I wanted my project to be the creation of fictional drink labels of drinks that might be served at a legendary mead hall that exists in my D&D world. These heavily featured runes.

Both the Runestone Mead (Figure 3.14) and Far Horizons Mead (Figure 3.15) feature Norse runes in their designs. The runes in 3.15 even link to make a melody of a song with the same title.

RUNIK WISDOM

Figure 3.12: Stormwilder Map



Figure 3.13: Frozen Beard Mead Hall Bottles



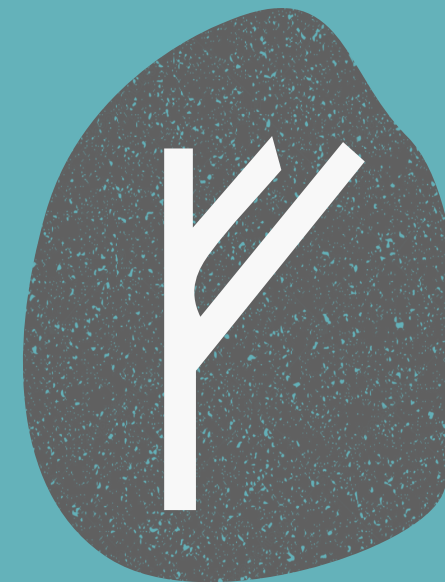
Figure 3.14: Runestone Mead Label



Figure 3.15: Far Horizons Mead Label



The second to last stepping stone to my thesis is a project I completed for my Publication class at Liberty. For the final project, students were to create an entire publication of at least 30 pages. And after several ideas that didn't seem to get me excited, I finally settled on a child's alphabet book, but not of the English language, instead of the Norse runes. I wanted it to be something that would appeal to both children and adults alike. And while the book was meant to be a book of information, I also wanted it to maintain a certain mystery that the runes inherently have. Each page detailed a rune, its meaning, its construction, and a word it might stand for. I thought it pertinent to show the book's work to help contextualize the work as I moved into my thesis.



or "F" is the first rune in the Futhark. It is frequently organized into three rows of eight runes. This makes "F" the first in its row. Every rune has a name, though the names do not have much in the way of great significance. The Norse word given to this rune is "fehu" or cattle. Since this rune is the first, the word will simply be "Fyrsta," or "begin."



is for

FYRSTA

or

BEGIN



is the second rune in the futhork, as well as the second in its row. It is also the first rune in which a "hook" is used as apart of the rune's design. Each rune can be broken down into three component parts, a stave, twig, and hook. The curved edge of the rune is a hook, which protrudes from the stave on the left. There was no standardized direction in which runes



would be written so the orientation of the hooks and twigs would give a clue to the reader which direction the text would be read. The name given to this rune is ũruz, or aurochs which are an extinct wild ox found in Europe until 1627. The name was either meant to denote this animal or the Norse word ũruz was more accurately translated to "manly strength."

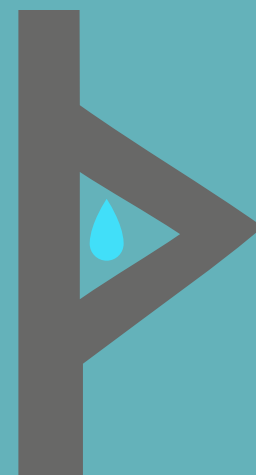


is for

ÚTAN

or

BEYOND



is the third rune in the futhork and the third in its row. It is made up of a stave with a hook protruding from it. It is one of three runes to not have a directly English equivalent. It's English composite is "th" and its name is thurisaz or thurse which means giant or terrible force.



is for

THYRSTR

or

THIRSTY



is the fourth rune in the futhork and the fourth in its row. It's name is "ansuz" or Anse, a Norse deity. It is made up of a stave with two twigs angled downward. It is a great representation of why there are very few right angles in runic designs. This is because most runes were carved into stones and wood, and right angles were difficult to carve into these materials due to wood grain and carving tools used at the time.



is for

ASKR

or

ASH





is the fifth rune in the futhark. It's name is raidö or journey. Much like the last, is also among the most recognizable forms due to its similarity to the English letter "R" and its inclusion in fictional runic script systems. This rune employs all parts of the rune anatomy, stave, twig, and hook. Here in lies the resemblance to the English letter.

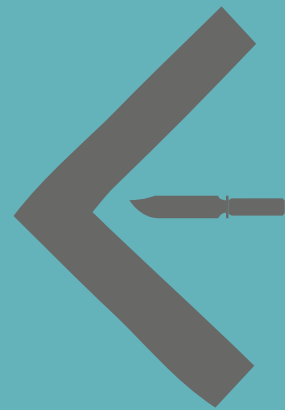


is for

RHAUDR

or

RED



is the sixth rune in the Futhark. It is made up of a single hook, which, like the stave, can exist on its own, whereas a twig cannot. It's given name is believed to be "kaunan," or, illness, or ulcer. Scholars are not actually sure if this truly is the rune's name. It is speculative, and other runes have a similarly speculative names.



is for

KNIFR

or

KNIFE



is the seventh rune in the Futhark and the seventh in its row. It is made up of two crossed staves, resembling the English character "X." However its English equivalent is "G" and as such is given the name "gebo" or "gift". The translation below also uses the Norse word "gjof" which also means gift, but a different form of the word.



is for

GJOF

or

GIFT



is the eighth rune in the Futhark and the eighth and final in its row. It is made up of a stave and a hook, resembling the English letter "P." Its English equivalent is "v" or "w" and is named "wunjo" or joy. This rune is another that doesn't have a confirmed name, and the first that has two possible English equivalents.



is for

VATN

or

LAKE





is the ninth rune in the Futhark and the first in the second Futhark row. It is made up of two staves joined by a twig which resembles both the English characters "H" and "N." This rune does correspond to its look alike, as it's equivalent is "H" and is named "haglan" meaning "hail" or "sudden ruin."



is the tenth rune in the Futhark and the second in its row. It is created by drawing a twig across a single stave, somewhat resembling an English "t." Surprisingly, its English equivalent is "N" and is named "naudiz" or "need," "necessity," or "constraint of fortune."



is the eleventh rune in the Futhark and the third in its row. It is a single stave, and the only rune to be made up of only a single feature. Its equivalent is not surprisingly "i" and has the given name "isan" or "ice." Another word for ice is provided as a translation.



is the twelfth rune in the Futhark and the fourth in its row. This form is interesting as it reinforces the rule of staves and hooks being able to stand alone while twigs cannot. This run is made up of two hooks that resemble an abstract "S" but instead is the equivalent of "j." Its given name is "jeran" or "year" specifically a plentiful one.



is for

HEIM

or

HOME



is for

NOTT

or

NIGHT



is for

ISS

or

ICE



is for

JÄRN

or

IRON





is the thirteenth rune in the Futhark and the fifth in its row. It is made up of a stave with two swigs on either side and is yet another rune to resemble the letter "S." However, it instead a letter that English doesn't have, namely "i." It's given name is indeed "iwaz" meaning "yew-tree." Other words starting with the same letter are difficult to track down so the translation is the same as the name.



is for

İWAZ

or

YEW-TREE



is the fourteenth rune in the Futhark and the sixth in the second Futhark row. It is made up of a single stave with two inward-facing hooks on the top and bottom. It is one of the runes which does not have a confirmed name, but the standing theory is "perpo" meaning "Fruit tree." It's English equivalent is "p."



is for

PRÚDR

or

PROUD



is the fifteenth rune in the Futhark and the seventh in the second Futhark row. It is made of a stave with two twigs on either side, resembling a bare tree. It is the equivalent of "z" in English and incidentally, the word used below is the same as its name "algiz" which means "elk." The same word is used as few words begin with this rune.

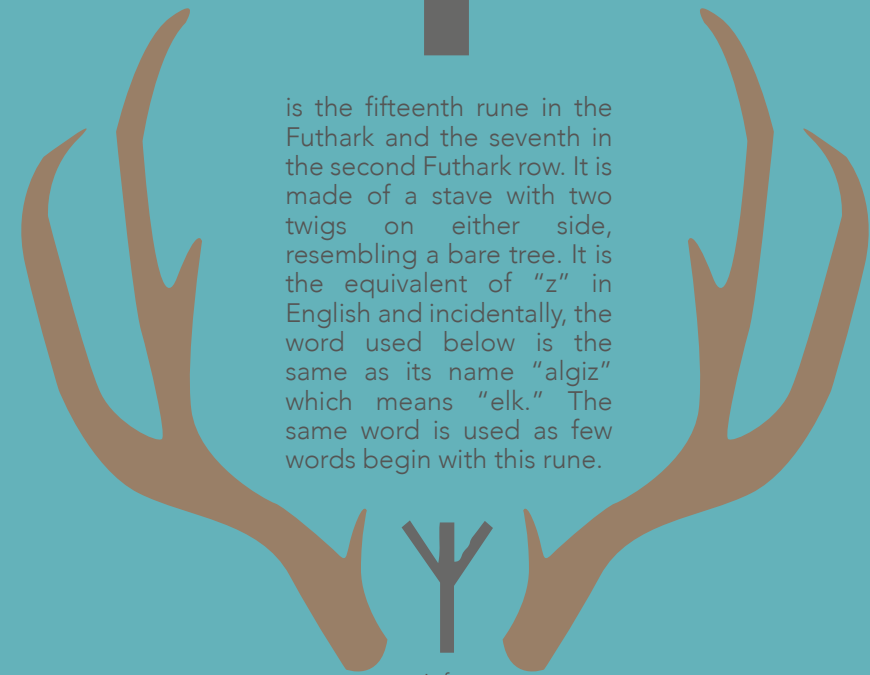


is for

ALGIZ

or

ELK





is the sixteenth rune in the Futhark and the eighth in the second Futhark row. It is made up of two hooks, connected to create a backward "s," which is appropriate, as "s" is this rune's English companion. It's name is sowilo or "sun." It is unknown the intent behind the orientation of this rune, as it would fit its companion more if flipped.



is for

SKJOLDR

or

SHIELD



is the seventeenth rune in the Futhark and the first in the third Futhark row. It is made up of a single stave topped with either a hook, or two twigs on either side. It resembles the English character "t" and is the composite of same. It is the only rune to be given a sacred name, "Tiwaz" or "Tyr," a Norse deity of justice.



is for

TROLL



is the eighteenth rune in the Futhark and the second in the third Futhark row. It is equivalent to the English "B" and strongly resembles the character. It is made up of two hooks connected to the right side of a stave and is another mainstay of fictional runic languages mean to mimic the Futhark. It's name is "berkanen" which means "birch twig."



is for

BJORN

or

BEAR



is the nineteenth rune in the Futhark and the third in the third Futhark row. It is either two staves joined by a hook, or two staves with twigs connecting them. It resembles the letter "m" yet instead is the composite of the English "e" and it's original name is "ehwaz" or "horse."



is for

ELDR

or

FIRE





is the twentieth rune in the Futhark and the fourth in the final Futhark row. This rune could be described as being made up of any amount of combinations of staves, twigs and hooks. Though two staves with two hooks is most likely. It is the Futhark's "m," despite appearance of the previous rune. It's name is "mannaz" or, simply, "man."



is for

MAER

or

MAIDEN



is the twenty-first rune in the Futhark and the fifth in the final Futhark row. It is made up of a stave with a single twig. It's name is "laguz" or "water" and is the Norse composite of "L."

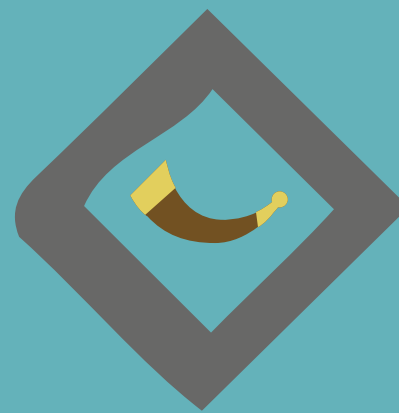


is for

LIÓS

or

LIGHT



is the twenty-second rune in the Futhark and the sixth in the final Futhark row. It is an interesting rune due to its design, and that it is two connected hooks to make an enclosed form. It is also interesting because it stands for a letter set, "ng" instead of a single letter. It's name is "ingwaz," or "god of the fertile year."



is for

HVITINGR

or

DRINKING HORN



is the twenty-third rune in the Futhark and the seventh in the final Futhark row. Its design is an odd combination of staves, twigs and hooks the combination is unclear. It could be several hooks or even a couple staves and twigs. The rune itself is equivalent to "d." Its name is "dagaz," which means "day."



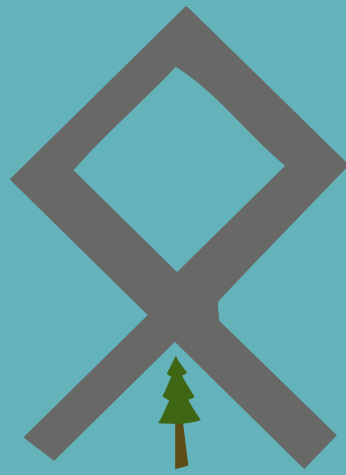
is for

DRAUGR

or

GHOST





is the twenty-second rune in the Futhark and the sixth in the final Futhark row. It is an interesting rune due to its design, and that it is two connected hooks to make an enclosed form. It is also interesting because it stands for a letter set, "ng" instead of a single letter. It's name is "ingwaz," or "god of the fertile year."



The final stepping stone to my thesis was the creation of two infographics detailing giants and dragons from D&D. Some of the same assets can be seen in my new infographics to help bolster the visuals. I've already drawn on long enough with my processes, so without too much more information, the infographics are below.

While the giant's infographic is complete, the dragons one never was. But they both give an idea of what I was going for with the infographics created for my thesis' research.



Figure 3.16: The Ordning Infographic



Figure 3.17: Dragons Infographic



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۱۰۳

CHAPTER FOUR

VISUAL SOLUTION

Figure 4.1: Full Infographic



Title

Dragon Runes

Giant Runes

Dwarvish Runes

Norse Runes





When first tasked with broaching the idea of solving a problem through design, I found myself at a loss. While many of my peers may have focused on social issues, or that in education, I found that my passions and interests lay in some thing a little more philosophical and abstract rather than definitive. This is not to say that the problems tackled by my peers are not scholarly, or that what I have tackled does not have a greater impact beyond academic study. I'm simply noting that the nature of my project is not what first comes to mind when one asks another to solve a problem through design. However I did find it difficult to answer when asked who my audience was, or who am I helping by creating this. But after giving it some thought, I

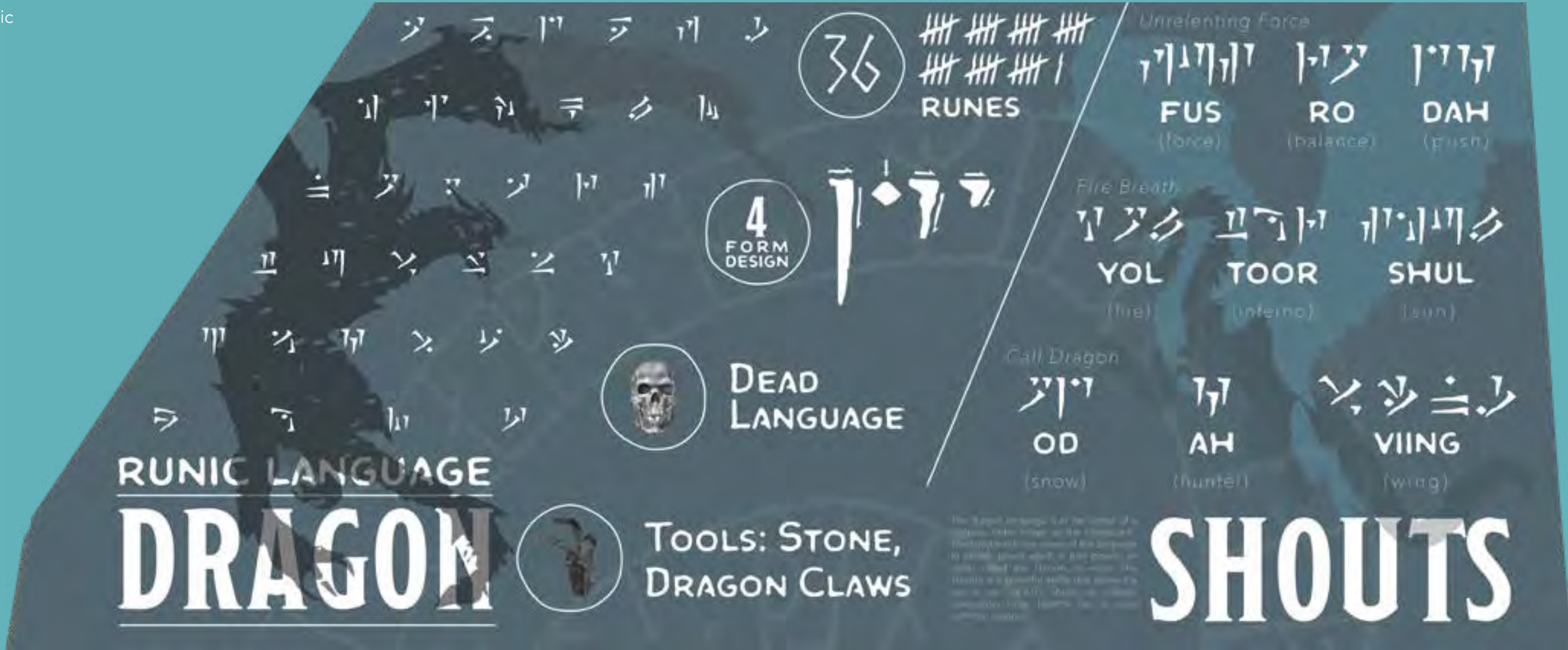
realized that I am creating this thesis for others like me who want to delve into history, but find it easier to grasp when contextualized with something they understand and enjoy.

The creation of the infographics came significantly easier than originally thought. This is a result of both my research and the many classes I've used to gain more knowledge about runes. I'd been thinking on this topic for some time before the idea of a thesis was even in mind.

And so, these infographics were born. The first thing one might notice about the infographics are their unique shape. I knew I'd want to hang these and photograph them for presentation, but five



Figure 4.2: Dragon Infographic



The first of the infographics is of Dragon Runes. The process for producing the dragon runes infographic was the most difficult as it was the first to be created. This set the template, the precedent for what content would be used, how the content is presented, and what the visual theme of the infographics would be.

As discussed above, determining the core elements of information for each language was a long and arduous process and I had to do some significant distillation of my existing research. But once I identified these qualities that felt consistent for each language, I felt comfortable moving on toward what was needed to fill the rest of the space. And I must

admit, if I hadn't started with the Dragon infographic, I think I would have spent just as long figuring out what to do. But seeing as The Voice, or Shouts, is so intimately tied to the Dragon language, it seemed irresponsible to not include that information, which led me to the idea that I needed to add some context to every language, instead

of just this one, which allowed for a significantly easier time developing content and visuals for the other infographics.





Figure 4.3: Giant Infographic

The Giant infographics was the easiest to complete, I think, mostly because of my work having already created an infographic about the Ordning as discussed above. The illustrations had already been complete, I had the runes already traced out on my work. But the main problem came when I had to modify the work to better differentiate itself

from the original work. The difficulty of analyzing something that belongs to someone else is that in order for the analysis to be accurate and effective, the original visuals need to be used or at least recreated in a similar, yet distinct way. After having some significant discussion regarding this with my advisor, I was eventually able to get the illustrations

in a place I was happy with while also giving them a distinct connection to the work I am referencing. I did so by changing colors, modifying the original illustration and substituting the vector trace I did of a Storm Giant with the more characterized version originally created for the Ordning infographic.





Figure 4.4: Dwarvish Infographic

The Dwarvish infographic came somewhat more difficult to me. This was mostly due to both the distinction of existing visuals from their originals as well as the decision of what extra information needed to be included. But these issues came from more a mental barrier than anything else. At the time, I was preparing for my wedding, and

much of my mental capacity was occupied. But when I was able to relax and sit down to work, I realized that I just needed to continue what I had been doing, by contextualizing the language. I had already done it twice, but the difference this time was that Tolkien had created dozens of cultures, each with individual desires and values. I didn't want to,

in a small paragraph, diminish the work in any way. But when I say down and looked at the research I had already done, I knew that it wasn't my responsibility to educate about all the cultures of Middle-Earth, or even one culture! I simply needed to give some information about this language and so I focused on some minor history, as well as a magical

aspect of them in Moon Runes. Following the discussion of legal distinction, I created a vectored dwarf head for the backdrop and recreated the text on Thorin's map from the hobbit with the runes I had vectored myself instead of lifting the original and tracing it. All in all, the infographic turned out well.





Figure 4.5: Norse Infographic

The decision to make the Norse rune infographic the fourth and final one was intentional. I wanted to give it a place of importance, to have the last word when it comes to runes. It needed to be the the supporting structure, and since this whole series is supposed to represent a stone, I figured the base the supported the whole document would be

appropriate. The other languages could not exist if the Norse did not, and so it came last. Since the world surrounding the Norse was not as colorful as the the other three, I chose to focus on rune related history and art, including Odin's finding the runes, and a but about Norse art to help contextualize the language. A little more research had

to be done for the bit about Norse art and I found it intriguing that Norse artwork was so intricate while writing was very rigid. This was the perfect example of context, showing that art as a means of expression was more important than writing. Very few runestones are nothing but runes. Almost all of them feature some sort of imagery. And thus, my choice

for infographics was validated as I continued on the tradition of visual expression as the Norse valued.



The second portion of this project are the four burned wood circlets, each containing an identifying rune from each language. I've done so much research and discussion about how those that used these languages would write them on wood and stone, so I thought it only appropriate that I do the same for a deliverable for this project.

Instead of doing carvings, a skill with which I am not proficient, I chose to do some burning instead using a wood burning knife. These would be available for display in the home and serve as a more practical deliverable than the infographics.

I chose each rune intentionally that shows off the most exemplary

forms from each language. This gives a unique and distinct circlet that are beautiful to view as well as a conversation starter.

I chose the "D" rune for Dovahzul as it makes use of three of the four forms represented in the language and is the first letter of my last name. Which is also why I chose the "D" rune for the Norse and Dwarvish languages. We used these rune sheavily in our printed materials for our wedding so I thought it necessary to make it personal for both my wife and I. And finally, I am heavily partial toward the "Storm" rune in giant. These circlets work together to show off the beautiful design and craftsmanship employed in these ancient letters, and marry the natural with decor.



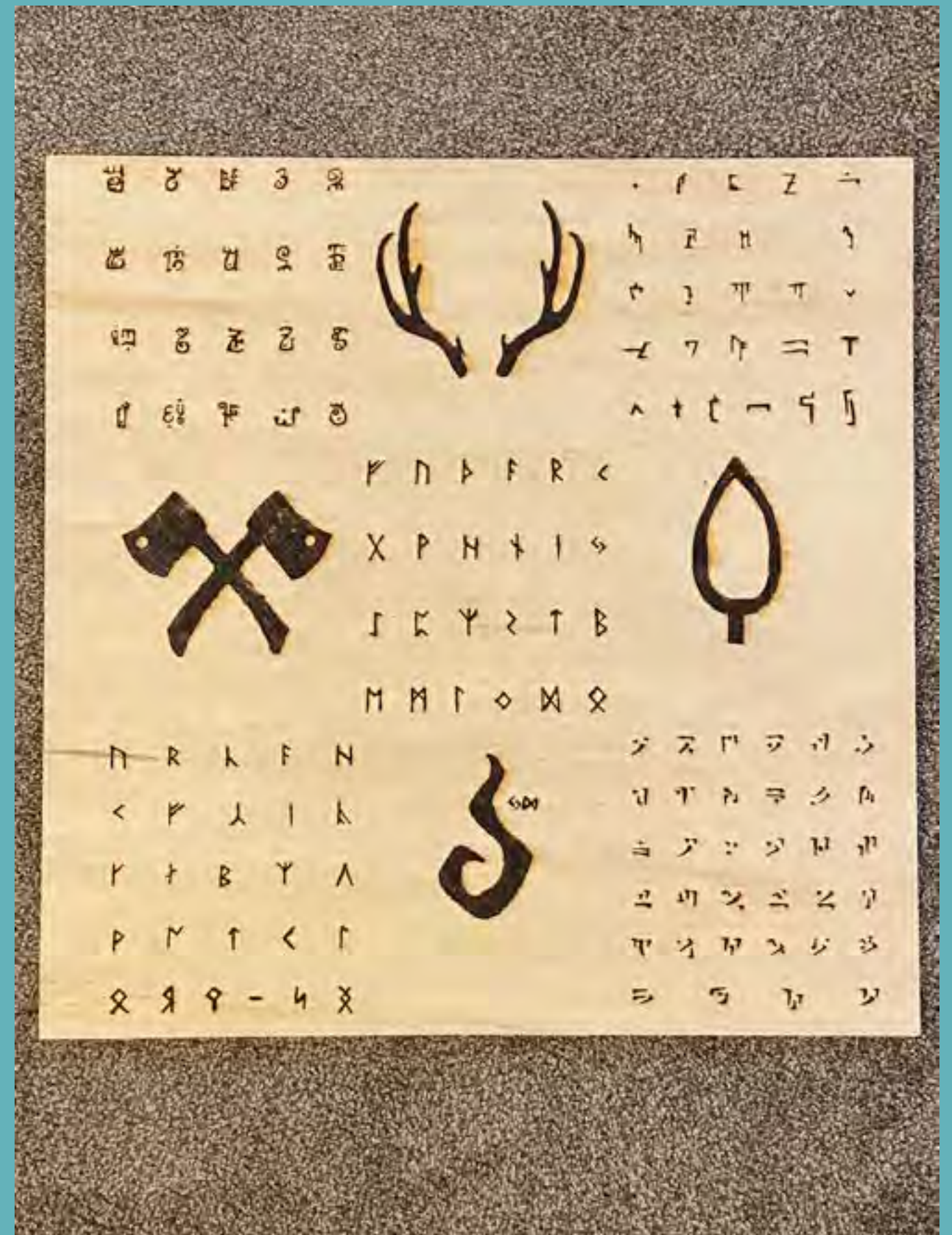
The final portion of this project came as a surprise to myself as I prepared for my thesis defense. I had pondered several presentation ideas but none seemed to stick. So I decided to go the route of a sort of performance art (though heavily sped up for the purposes of time) in which I would burn all four languages, plus my self-created language, onto a large piece of wood. So I purchased a two-foot by two-foot piece of wood and used a projector to overlay the document I created onto the wood and began to burn.

The process overall took me roughly two-and-a-half hours. I found most difficulty in the burning of the giant runes, whose intricacies proved difficult for the low resolution of the

projector to capture. Additionally, I gained several slivers, suffered back and elbow pain, and watery eyes from the burned surface's smoke hitting my eyes.

This experience gave me a better, if minor, understanding of the aches the Norse themselves must have gone through to create stone carved monuments. The long process and arduous work I completed was nothing compared to the cold winters that buffeted the cold hands of a Norse carver.

In the end, I am very thankful to have completed this piece and am excited to hang it in an office someday, as a testament to my own memory, my legacy, and story.



RUNIC LANGUAGE

CONCLUSION

RUNIC LANGUAGE

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I have often said that my 2-year Dungeons & Dragons campaign was the most successful creative endeavor to date. And that remains true. Even after completing my thesis, indeed, completing my Masters, I reflect on what success is, especially in a creative context. Is it money? Influence? How many people saw it? How much time I spent on it? What was its value? And when I think about those questions, over 250 hours of playing in a world of my creation with 6 good friends just seems insurmountable. But if it weren't for that and if it weren't for the many influences from games, movies, books, and so on, this thesis would never have come to fruition.

I set out to bring some clarity to the topic of runic languages, to remove some of the anglocized baggage that the historical Vikings carried. My infographics show both the similarities and differences between not only each runic system, but the cultures that employed them via creation, tools for writing, cultural significance, and use. Runes contain memory and stories, and what is the human experience if not memories and stories? As a Christian, what better way to communicate than through stories? We are told to write the Word of God on our heart and give it a permanence and legacy just like the Norse gave an attempted permanence to their legacy through stone.

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