

LATIP 2021**International Conference on Language and Technology in the Interdisciplinary Paradigm****SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF RUNES WITHIN THE LINGUISTIC
WORLDVIEW OF ANCIENT GERMANS**

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Abstract

The paper deals with the phenomenon of ancient Germanic runic inscriptions and the runic signs. The symbolic meanings here are of a high cognitive value as they contain a lot of information concerning Germanic key concepts as well as main global features for any key concept characterization. The authors apply the cognitive approach to the symbolic meanings of runes. The paper seeks to use the runic script system and the symbolic meaning of runes within this system as a material for the study of the key concepts represented in the linguistic worldview of ancient Germans. Some runic signs of the runic inscription are analyzed. Runic signs are observed from their conceptual symbolic meaning, and in this case, the symbolic meaning of runes is the priority. The authors analysed some aspects of symbolic meanings of runes according the Icelandic Rune-Poem. This time the authors emphasized the Icelandic variants of the conceptual meaning and their interactions within the modern Icelandic language. The conceptual meaning of the key archetype "God" (as pre-Christian deity) and its opposition, realized in some negative meanings of runes Kaun (ulcer, disease); Hagall (hunger, hail); and Nauðr (need), are observed, as the opposite meaning that is represented by the post Christian key archetype "Devil" was absent in the linguistic worldview of ancient Germans.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Icelandic language, runic inscriptions, runic songs, symbolic meaning of runes



1. Introduction

Analysing different functional aspects of runic writing and features of ancient Germanic worldview, a researcher quite frequently has to return to the problem of symbolic meaning of runes (Askeberg, 1944; Marstrander, 1928; Wimmer, 1887), and to some general problems of the runic writing system (Damsma & Versloot, 2016; Kalinin, 2015; Van Renterghem, 2019; Waldispühl, 2015).

These symbolic meanings are connected to the conceptual meanings in our consciousness.

As Whorf (1940) stated:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena are not found there because they stare every observer in the face. On the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscope flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds - and this means largely by the linguistic systems of our minds. (p. 229)

A similar idea is promoted in Weisgerber's (1929) work "Native Language and Spiritual Formation".

Language has been a social phenomenon, inextricably linked to the culture, history and various extralinguistic factors of its speakers since self-organization and the advent of its developed system (Ogneva et al., 2018, p. 730).

So, the main idea is to find a conceptual connection between the sign itself, all the features of those signs and the inner image in our consciousness. It will help us to define the conceptual features of the key concepts for any of the worldviews.

2. Problem Statement

When considering in one of our works the differences in the meanings of runic signs (Kaun – ulcer, disease; Hagall-famine, hail; and Nauðr-need in Old Norse and Old English as their opposition to the runic sign OS (AS), and its meaning as an opposite concept), it became necessary to specify the meanings of these signs in Old Norse, Old Icelandic and modern Icelandic. It should be understood that the symbolic meaning of the runes was not always the focus of attention (Askeberg, 1944). However, from the point of view of cognitive linguistics, it is symbolic meanings that can expand our knowledge of the linguistic world view of the ancient Germans and key concepts in modern languages.

3. Research Questions

The idea of symbols is as ancient as the human civilization itself. At the dawn of human civilization, people gave symbolism to absolutely everything. They could draw the sign of the sun and worship it as their deity, associating it with good or evil. But these symbols always had their own logic. When attempts were made to decipher the Egyptian pictographic inscriptions, one of the questions was about the direction of the writing: right to left, or left to right, or maybe vertically. It turned out that one had to read where the head looked in each particular line. Everything is logical from the point of view of

ancient Egyptians, but nowadays people would not immediately find any logic there, and it would seem that all this writing is absolutely chaotic. But if we assume that language is a system, then we should also assume that this system is logical.

In this sense, the runic writing is absolutely logical, including where we may not expect it. The main question we seek to answer is: do the symbolic meanings of the runes under study possess the properties of stability and universalism typical of key concepts?

4. Purpose of the Study

Before we start analysing the runes under study, it is necessary to mention the critique of F. Askeberg on this subject. In Askeberg's (1944) works the priority is the communicative function of runic writing, as he considers a magic spell as a kind of a message. However, he rejects the previously widespread idea of the magical essence of runic signs: "Alphabetic magic, runic names and order of runes are secondary phenomena" (p. 41).

But, as we said before, we consider runic signs from their conceptual symbolic side, and in this case, the symbolic meaning of runes will be our priority. In our previous works, we analysed some aspects of symbolic meanings of runes (Bogachev et al., 2015). However, we did not consider the problem of defining concepts (especially key concepts) in such detail.

This time we emphasized the Icelandic variants of the conceptual meaning and their interactions within the modern Icelandic language.

5. Research Methods

In this paper we analyse short fragments of the Icelandic runic song, we intend to find the symbolic meanings of runic signs mentioned in this song. We then have to see whether these runic signs possess a property of stability. To achieve this, we check their meanings in the modern Icelandic within the period when runes were already out of use.

6. Findings

Bosworth-Toller (1898), dictionary gives the meaning of Os as a *divinity, god, the Anglo-Saxon form of a word whose existence in Gothic is inferred from a passage in Jornandes, 'Gothi proceres suos quasi qui fortuna vincebant non pares homines sed semideos, id est, Anses vocavere.'* The Icelandic, which throws out *n* before *s*, as the Anglo-Saxon does (cf. Icel. *gás*: A. S. *gós*), has *áss*; pl. *æsir*, a term which has an application in the opening chapters of the Yngling Saga very similar to that attributed to *anses* among the Goths: Odin, Thor, and other personages of the Scandinavian mythology are the *Æsir*. Particularly apparently did the term refer to Thor, so that the proper name *Ás-björn* is used as the equivalent of *Þor-björn*. As the first part of Scandinavian proper names it occurs frequently, and it is in the same dependent character that it mostly, if not exclusively, is found in Anglo-Saxon and O. H. German. Thus *Ós-beorn*, *Ós-lác*, *Ós-wine*, *Ós-weald* preserve the word which is found in *Ás-björn*, *Ás-lákr*, *Ás-mundr*, and this is certainly the independent *áss*. The O. H. Ger. *Ans-gár* shews the same word. Whether *ós* in the sense of god occurs as an independent word is doubtful (Bosworth, 1898).

As soon as one starts considering the OS conceptual meaning using the example of the corresponding symbolic meaning, the question arises immediately: which symbol was the opposite in its conceptual meaning? The point is that the ancient Germans had no equivalent negative figure, like, for example, the devil in Christianity. In the worldview of ancient Germans supernatural phenomena expressed by the concept OS were opposed by giants who represented personified expressions of natural disasters (fire and ice), hunger and need - that is, a collective image of all negative phenomena. This semantic field includes three signs: Kaun - ulcer, disease; Hagall - hunger, hail; and Nauðr - need. It is clear that not all these meanings have been preserved in their original form.

To begin with, let us define the concept of "God", specifying it for the Icelandic language. In Old Norse, this word is defined as "Ass", while in post-Christian Icelandic, there is already the word "Guð". In addition to the main meaning, the Old Norse dictionary gives another variant:

áss (gen. *áss* and *ásar*; pl. *æsir*, acc. *æsi* and *ásu*), m. one of the old heathen gods in general, or esp. one of the older branch, in opp. to the younger ones (the *Vanir*).

áss (gen. *áss*, pl. *ásar*), m. (1) a thick pole, main beam (in a house); (2) in a ship, yard of a sail (*beitiáss*); (3) rocky ridge (Zoëga, 1910, p. 31).

Thus, the main load-bearing beam in the house, which holds the main load, received the same nomination as the pre-Christian deity (super-being), which similarly bears the load of holding this world. In fact, for the ancient Icelanders, their home was a miniature model of the world. In modern Icelandic, the accents have shifted:

as1 m-s, -ar 1) beam, beam; pole; 2) mor. boom; 3) axis; 4) ridge, ridge;

as2 m-s, -ar 1) maps. ace; 2) one point, one (when playing dice). Ás m-s, Æsir myth. as (Old Norse deity) (Cleasby, 1957, p. 49).

There is a loss of the conceptual connection between the concepts of "the load-bearing beam of the house" and "the deity, the holder of the world". To this same conceptual field, such a defining concept as "áslátta" can be attributed. The Old Norse dictionary gives this variant: *áslátta*, f. injury infected by someone (*á. djöfuls*) (Zoëga, 1910, p. 31).

So, "áslátta" is an injury to health caused by someone else; then, for example, the phrase "áslátta djöfuls" is given, that is, an illness coursed by the devil. In this case, it is interesting that the above concept is contained in the word "áslátta" itself, and the concept of "devil" was absent in Old Norse.

Look at the components of the word, you can define them as *ás+lát* where the second part means "loss, death, illness": *lát*, n. (1) loss (*þeir sögðu konungi l. sitt*); (2) death, decease (*ek segi þér l. Eyvindar bróður þíns*) (Zoëga, 1910, p. 238).

Thus, the word "áslátta" conveys the concept of "divine illness", or "illness caused by the deity". Actually, this is a certain illustration of the fact that in pre-Christian Iceland diseases that could not be treated and which were most often fatal were caused by the supernatural being, but not by the devil, as in the example of Zoëga, not by someone who opposed God as a super-being, since the linguistic world view at that time did not include such a concept. The above diseases were designated as "supernatural". A good illustration is the spell "Spell from the arrow of the Elf", which we analyzed on the material of the Old English language, and where the neutral word "drihten" is used as a designation of God, since the text itself is pre-Christian and goes beyond the Christian worldview. Religious syncretism changed Odin to

Christ, but in order not to emphasize this fact, the author used the neutral designation "drihten" to represent both variants, both pre-Christian and Christian. In our case, "OS" is, in fact, one concept of a super-essence, which can be either with a negative sign or with a positive sign, (for example, ásjá f-r help, support; protection, patronage, protection) when it is refracted from the point of view of the linguistic world view of the ancient Icelanders.

Now let us look at the meanings of runic symbols, which in the linguistic and ideological point of view are opposite to the symbol "OS". Usually these are just three symbols: Kaun – ulcer, disease; Hagall-hunger, hail; and Nauðr-need. In the runic song itself, they are represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Representation of runic symbols in the runic song

Kaun	Hagall	Nauð
Kaun er barna bölok bardagi ok holdfúa hús.	Hagall er kaldakorn ok knappa drifaok snáka sótt.	Nauð er þýjar þrá ok þungr kostr ok vássamlig verk.
A child's curse and calamity and the decay of the house.	Cold grain and icy cold and snake disease.	The longing of a slave and the hard choices and the tedious work.

The Richard Cleasby's dictionary gives the following meanings:

KAUN, n. a sore, of wounds and scabs, Bs. ii. 20 (in a verse), Mar.; fullr kauna, Luke xvi. 26: freq. in mod. usage is the phrase, blása í kaunin, to blow on one's sores, of fingers burnt, sore, or cold, Grönd. 46, = ó δ ἄλγεε και χέρ ἐφόση of Theocr. 19. 3. 2. the Rune P, see introduction to letter K. (Cleasby, 1957, p. 337)

(Introduction: K (ká) is the tenth letter of the alphabet; in the common Runes it was represented by P (kaun). The Anglo-Saxon k was called ceân or cên = Germ. kien, a pine or fir-tree. But as this was not a Norse word, the Scandinavians represented it by the Norse word nearest in sound to it, kaun (a boil or scab), which bears witness of the Anglo-Saxon origin of the old Norse Runic poem).

In modern Icelandic, the meaning of "wounds and scabs" (putrefaction) has been preserved, that is, both the verbal designation of the symbol itself and its main meaning have been preserved.

Hagall, m. a mythical pr. name: the name of the Rune H, whence Hagals-ætt, f. the second part of the Runic alphabet, vide introd. p. 227 (Cleasby, 1957, p. 255).

Introduction: The name of the Rune h was Hagall or Hagl, an Anglo-Saxon form, explained as meaning hail, hagl er kaldast korna (hail is the coldest of grains), in the Norse Runic poem; cf. hägl byð hwitust corna in the Anglo-Saxon poem, which is the prototype of the Norse. These names in the Anglo-Saxon and Norse poems are in no way derived from the form of the Rune, but are merely alike to the modern rhymes.

In modern Icelandic, the verbal expression of the symbol has been preserved, but only with the meaning (hail is the coldest of grains), but in the meaning of the third rune Nauð there are much more options.

NAUÐ, f. [Ulf. nauþs = ἀνάγκη; A. S. neôd; Engl. need; Hel. nôd; O. H. G. nôt; Germ. noth; Dan. nød]:—need, difficulty, distress; í hverri nauð, Hom. 34; nauð ok erfði, Fms. vii. 208; þola nauð, to suffer need, Lex. Poët.; vetrilig nauð, Sks. 49; með nauðum, with great difficulty, Fms. ix. 387; hann var borinn með nauðum, Þryml. 8:—bondage, hann var hertekinn ok síðan seldr í nauð, Fms. x. 391 (á-nauð,

q. v.): höfgar nauðir, 'heavy needs,' of fetters, Vkv. 11:—labour, of women, in nauð-göngull, q. v.: of spells, hvern feldi af mér fölvir nauðir, Sdm. 1; nema e-n ór nauðum, to deliver, Fsm. 40; vera í nauðum, to be charmed, spell-bound, bog-nauð, dal-nauð, 'bow-need,' i. e. the hand, Edda ii. 429; kykva nauð, id., Þd. COMPDS: nauðar-maðr, m. a bondsman, Fs. 87. nauða-handsal, n. an enforced hansel, not valid in law, Grág. i. 493. nauða-kostr, m. a dire choice, Stj. 368. nauða-laust, n. adj., or at nauðalaus, without necessity, N. G. L. i. 349. nauða-mikill, adj. very severe, Ísl. ii. 132. nauða-sátt or -sætt, f. a forced agreement.

Introduction: N (enn), the thirteenth letter, is in the old Runes represented on the Golden horn by the character ᚱ, on the stone in Tune by ᚱ, and in the later Runes by ᚢ or ᚳ, all derived from the Lat.-Gr. N; it was called nauð (need, A. S. neað), nauð görir neppa kosti, Runic poem (Cleasby, 1957, p. 471).

There are a lot of derived cognate words here:

nauð| leitamaður - asking for help; ~raka vt clean-shaven; ~staddur a suffering need [distress]; ~syn f-jar, - jar need, need, need; landsins gagn og ~synjar public benefit, good of the people; ganga ~synja sinna go send natural needs; nauðugur a forced; mér er ~ einn kostur; I have no other choice; mér er það nauðugt I do it reluctantly; nauðungar||eiður m forced vow; ~ vinna f forced labor.

Note that in this case, the verbalized symbol not only retained its form, but also almost completely retained the content that was originally embedded in it. Here we have "forced labor" (slave), and "hard choice" (under the influence of circumstances), and even "longing of a slave" is also reflected in the meaning of nauð. The same meaning can be expressed by the Russian word "nuda" – "boring monotonous occupation" (Dal, 1880).

You can also see the connections between the meanings of ásjá – "help, support", and nauðleitamaður – "asking for help". The first carries a positive meaning – you "act like a god", and the second - exclusively negative (some needs forced you to do this). And as an amplifying prefix, nauð acts exclusively with a negative connotation.

7. Conclusion

Based on the above, we can conclude that the verbalized meanings of runic characters are quite fully represented in the vocabulary of the Icelandic language. If, for example, "As", as a result of a change in its conceptual meaning under the influence of Christianity was preserved mainly as archaism, since it received a new form of "Guð", then such runic symbols as Kaun and Hagl were preserved only within some key meanings. At the same time, the symbolic meaning of the runic sign Nauð is fully represented. However, the very presence of these meanings in the vocabulary of the Icelandic language suggests that these are really key, conceptual meanings within this linguistic world view, and their commonality with Old English meanings confirms the thesis of Makaev about the All-German Koine (Makaev, 1996).

On the whole, in this paper we tried to outline the main ideas of the research, which, in our opinion, has a great potential of the studying runic writing system in the frame of the cognitive approach.

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