

INTRODUCTION TO RUNES: ELDER FUTHARK



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This document expresses ancestral knowledge synthesized in an ebook format for posterity.

For preservation of runic languages, enjoy a comprehensive outline of the Elder Futhark at an introductory level intended to educate all.

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HISTORY OF RUNES



The Elder Futhark is the oldest known runic alphabet, used by Germanic tribes from approximately the 2nd to the 8th century AD. It consists of 24 symbols, each representing a phonetic sound, a concept, and often deeper symbolic or esoteric meanings.

The name “Futhark” comes from the first six runes: Fehu (F), Uruz (U), Thurisaz (Th), Ansuz (A), Raidho (R), and Kenaz (K). These runes were primarily used for writing inscriptions on stone, wood, bone, and metal, but they also held magical and divinatory significance in Norse mythology and culture.

According to Norse lore, the god Odin discovered the runes after hanging from the World Tree Yggdrasil for nine days and nights, sacrificing himself to gain wisdom.

This mythological origin underscores their role as a bridge between the mundane and the divine, often associated with fate, protection, and cosmic forces.



HISTORY OF RUNES

The evolved runes likely evolved from Old Italic scripts, such as Etruscan or Latin alphabets, and were adapted by Germanic peoples in regions like modern-day Scandinavia, Germany, and the Netherlands.

Blended with the advent of Ogham, the Druidic vertical tree language, runes incorporate the use of straight lines in their grid-line, intentional creation. Artifacts bearing Elder Futhark inscriptions have been found across Europe, from Denmark to as far as Turkey and India, highlighting their widespread use.

Over time, the Elder Futhark evolved into the Younger Futhark (with 16 runes) around the 8th-9th century due to linguistic changes in Old Norse, and later into the Anglo-Saxon Futhorc with additional symbols. Today, they are revived in modern paganism, divination practices like rune casting, meditation, and even tattoos or jewelry for personal symbolism.



RUNE INTERPRETATIONS



The 24 runes are organized into three groups called aettir (singular: aett), each containing eight runes. This division may reflect cosmological or mythological themes.

Each rune has a shape (symbol), a name derived from Proto-Germanic words, a phonetic value, a literal meaning (often tied to everyday objects or concepts), and esoteric/symbolic interpretations. In divination, runes can appear upright or reversed (merkstave), altering their meaning—though some are considered irreversible. Meanings are not fixed; they draw from ancient rune poems (like the Old Norse, Icelandic, and Anglo-Saxon Rune Poems) and modern reconstructions, as exact ancient interpretations are debated.

Historically, runes were carved for practical writing, such as memorials, ownership marks, or magical formulas on weapons and amulets.



RUNE INTERPRETATIONS

In sagas like Egils Saga, they were used for healing, protection, or cursing.

In modern contexts, they serve as:

- **Divination Tools:** Cast from a pouch or laid in spreads (e.g., single rune for daily insight, three-rune past/present/future). Interpret based on position, orientation, and intuition.
- **Magical Practices:** Inscribed on talismans for protection, prosperity, or manifestation; combined in bindrunes (overlaid symbols) for amplified effects.
- **Meditation and Self-Reflection:** Used to connect with personal energies or ancestral wisdom.
- **Cultural Symbols:** Featured in art, jewelry, and popular media to evoke Norse heritage.

Approach runes with respect and an open mind, as their power lies in personal connection rather than rigid rules.



ELDER FUTHARK: AETTS

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First Aett (Freya's or Freyr's Aett):
Associated with creation, fertility, material abundance, and the natural world. It focuses on turning chaos into order, prosperity, and personal well-being.

Second Aett (Hagal's or Heimdall's Aett):
Represents transformation, disruption, natural forces, challenges, and renewal. It embodies change and growth through adversity.

Third Aett (Tyr's Aett): Symbolizes orderly mechanisms such as divinity, justice, social order, honor, and spiritual ascension. It deals with leadership, community, and higher ideals.

ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES

Here is a detailed synopsis for each rune, including its symbol (described), name, phonetic value, literal meaning, keywords, and symbolic interpretations (upright and reversed where applicable). These draw from historical poems and modern esoteric traditions bridging ages of mankind.

ᚠ	FEHU	ᚢ	EIHWAZ
ᚢ	URUZ	ᚦ	PERTHRO
ᚦ	THURISAZ	ᛖ	ALGIZ
ᚩ	ANSUZ	ᛈ	SOWILO
ᚱ	RAIDHO	ᛉ	TIWAZ
ᚲ	KENAZ	ᛇ	BERKANA
ᚴ			
ᚷ	GEBO	ᛘ	EHWAZ
ᚷ	WUNJO	ᛘ	MANNAZ
ᚷ	HAGALAZ	ᛊ	LAGUZ
ᚷ	NAUTHIZ	◊	INGWAZ
ᚷ	ISA	ᛘ	DAGAZ
ᚷ	JERA	ᛘ	OTHILA

ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



FEHU

Phonetic: F (as in “fire”)

Literal: Cattle/Wealth

Keywords: Abundance, prosperity, success, resources

Upright: Represents mobile wealth, fulfillment, and material gain. Symbolizes prosperity through hard work and the flow of energy.

Reversed: Loss, greed, or stagnation in resources.

Synopsis: Fehu encourages gratitude for abundance while warning against attachment; it's about circulating wealth for growth.

A horizontal row of the first nine Elder Futhark runes: Fehu, Uruz, Thurisaz, Geisil, Jera, Alu, Sowilo, Mannaz, and Odal.

ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



URUZ

Phonetic: U (as in “boo”)

Literal: Aurochs (Wild Ox)

Keywords: Strength, vitality, health, endurance

Upright: Embodies raw power, manifestation, and physical/mental and resilience.

Reversed: Weakness, illness, or loss of will.

Synopsis: Uruz signifies untamed life force, urging one to harness inner strength for personal destiny and healing.



ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



THURISAZ

Phonetic: Th (as in “thorn”)

Literal: Giant/Thorn

Keywords: Protection, conflict, defense, disruption

Upright: A force of reactive power, like Thor’s hammer, for breaking barriers or protection.

Reversed: Vulnerability, misdirected force.

Synopsis: This rune warns of challenges but offers defensive energy; it teaches standing ground amid chaos.



ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



ANSUZ

Phonetic: A (as in “awe”)

Literal: God/Odin/Breath

Keywords: Communication, wisdom, inspiration, messages

Upright: Divine insight, eloquent speech, and listening to inner guidance.

Reversed: Miscommunication, deceit.

Synopsis: Associated with Odin, it emphasizes clear expression and receiving ancestral wisdom.

ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



RAIDHO

Phonetic: R (as in “ride”)

Literal: Ride/Journey/Wagon

Keywords: Travel, progress, rhythm, direction

Upright: Harmonious movement, journeys (physical or spiritual), and disciplined advancement.

Reversed: Delays, blockages.

Synopsis: Raidho represents life’s path, urging alignment with purpose for smooth progression.



ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES

KENAZ

Phonetic: K/C (as in “cane”)

Literal: Torch/Ulcer

Keywords: Knowledge, creativity, illumination, transformation

Upright: Inner light, passion, and controlled fire for creation.

Reversed: Ignorance, instability.

Synopsis: Kenaz lights the way to enlightenment but can burn if mishandled; it's about harnessing creative energy.



ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



GEBO

Phonetic: G (as in “gift”)

Literal: Gift

Keywords: Exchange, generosity, partnership, reciprocity

Upright: Balanced giving and receiving, contracts, or unions.

Reversed: Irreversible.

Synopsis: Gebo highlights interconnectedness, reminding that true gifts come with no strings attached.

ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



WUNJO

Phonetic: W/V (as in “warm”)

Literal: Joy

Keywords: Harmony, success, celebration, well-being

Upright: Fulfillment, happiness, and aligned growth.

Reversed: Sorrow, disconnection.

Synopsis: Wunjo signals a period of bliss, encouraging harmony in relationships and endeavors.



ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



HAGALAZ

Phonetic: H (as in “hail”)

Literal: Hail

Keywords: Disruption, crisis, upheaval, catalyst

Upright: Necessary change through hardship, leading to growth.

Reversed: Irreversible.

Synopsis: Like a hailstorm, it brings temporary destruction but fertilizes the ground for renewal.



ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



NAUDHIZ

Phonetic: N (as in “need”)

Literal: Need/Necessity

Keywords: Constraint, hardship, scarcity, endurance

Upright: Facing challenges to build resilience.

Reversed: Burnout, deprivation.

Synopsis: Naudhiz teaches innovation through limitation, turning needs into strengths.

ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES

ISA

Phonetic: I (as in “sleep”)

Literal: Ice

Keywords: Stillness, patience, preservation, pause

Upright: A time of waiting and introspection.
Reversed: Irreversible.

Synopsis: Isa freezes progress for reflection, warning against hasty actions.



ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



JERA

Phonetic: J/Y (as in “year”)

Literal: Year/Harvest

Keywords: Cycles, rewards, abundance, interconnection

Upright: Reaping what was sown, gradual success.

Reversed: Irreversible.

Synopsis: Jera emphasizes patience in natural cycles, promising rewards for effort.

ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



EIHWAZ

Phonetic: Ei (as in “pride”)

Literal: Yew Tree

Keywords: Renewal, transformation, initiation, endurance

Upright: Passage through trials for wisdom.

Reversed: Irreversible.

Synopsis: Linked to life and death, it represents reliable strength and mystical transitions.



ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



PERTHRO

Phonetic: P (as in “poem”)

Literal: Lot Cup/Mystery

Keywords: Fate, secrets, chance, destiny

Upright: Uncovering hidden knowledge, gambling with fate.

Reversed: Bad luck, disillusionment.

Synopsis: Perthro deals with the unknown, viewing fate as shaped by past actions.



ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



ALGIZ

Phonetic: Z (as in “final”)

Literal: Elk/Protection

Keywords: Guardian, sanctuary, instinct, luck

Upright: Divine protection, heightened awareness.

Reversed: Vulnerability, warning.

Synopsis: Algiz acts as a shield, connecting to higher self for safety.

ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



SOWILO

Phonetic: S (as in “sun”)

Literal: Sun

Keywords: Victory, illumination, achievement, enlightenment

Upright: Success, guidance, personal power.

Reversed: Irreversible.

Synopsis: Sowilo brings clarity and honor, illuminating one's path to wholeness.



ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



TIWAZ

Phonetic: T (as in “tear”)

Literal: Tyr (God of Justice)

Keywords: Justice, leadership, honor, sacrifice

Upright: Bravery in the face of opposition, strategic victory.

Reversed: Passivity, injustice.

Synopsis: Associated with Tyr's self-sacrifice, it calls for honor and moral courage.

ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



BERKANA

Phonetic: B (as in “birth”)

Literal: Birch Tree

Keywords: Growth, nurturing, rebirth, femininity

Upright: New beginnings, care, development.

Reversed: Stunted growth, unfulfilling change.

Synopsis: Berkana oversees life's transitions, fostering nurturing energy.



ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



EHWAZ

Phonetic: E (as in “eh”)

Literal: Horse

Keywords: Partnership, trust, progress, cooperation

Upright: Steady advancement through harmony.

Reversed: Disharmony, stagnation.

Synopsis: Ehwaz emphasizes loyalty in relationships for forward movement.



ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



MANNAZ

Phonetic: M (as in “man”)

Literal: Man/Humanity

Keywords: Identity, community, harmony, self-development

Upright: Social order, rational mind, support networks.

Reversed: Isolation, self-delusion.

Synopsis: Mannaz represents human potential and the balance of self within society.



ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



LAGUZ

Phonetic: L (as in “law”)

Literal: Water/Lake

Keywords: Intuition, flow, adaptability, subconscious

Upright: Emotional depths, fluidity, inner journeys.

Reversed: Fear, blocked intuition.

Synopsis: Laguz taps into the unconscious, urging trust in the flow of life.

ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



INGWAZ

Phonetic: Ng (as in “king”)

Literal: Ing (God Freyr)

Keywords: Fertility, potential, virility, ancestry

Upright: Stored energy, long-term goals, gestation.

Reversed: Irreversible.

Synopsis: Ingwaz symbolizes masculine energy and the seed of future growth.



ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



DAGAZ

Phonetic: D (as in “day”)

Literal: Day/Dawn

Keywords: Breakthrough, awakening, enlightenment, completion

Upright: Sudden clarity, new beginnings.

Reversed: Irreversible.

Synopsis: Dagaz marks transformative insights, bridging night and day.

ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



OTHILA

Phonetic: O (as in “oath”)

Literal: Home/Heritage

Keywords: Inheritance, ancestry, legacy, tradition

Upright: Roots, family, stability.

Reversed: Rigid patterns, generational trauma.

Synopsis: Othala connects to one’s heritage, emphasizing building a positive legacy.



ELDER FUTHARK: RUNES



WYRD RUNE*

Phonetic: Silent (Ø) or W (as in “weird”)

*This rune is blank

Literal: Fate/Debt

Keywords: Destiny, consequence, interconnectedness, personal agency

Upright: Woven fate, choices shaping outcomes, cosmic balance.

Reversed: Entanglement, avoidance of responsibility, chaotic threads.

Synopsis: Wyrd embodies the ever-weaving web of fate spun by the Norns, where every deed threads through past, present, and future. It affirms that while the pattern is vast, individual actions reweave the design.



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