

What is a futhark?

A futhark is a runic alphabet. Just as the word “alphabet” comes from the names of the first two Greek letters, *alpha* and *beta*, the word “futhark” comes from the first six runic letters: F, U, Th, A, R and K. This flyer focuses on the oldest runic alphabet, the Elder Futhark. Different futharks were used at different times and places; the Elder Futhark is a little different from the Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian Futharks.

Where and when did the runes originate?

The runic letters were derived from an alphabet used in north Italy, related in turn to the Latin alphabet. The letters were modified for easier carving in wood, and to express sounds not used in Latin. Their shapes were also influenced by pre-literate signs that the Germanic peoples carved for religious or magical purposes. The oldest runic inscription, on a medallion found at Meldorf, Germany, dates from the first century. Use of runes in Scandinavia continued into the 14th century, and in a few areas even later.

In Heathen myth, the runes were first grasped by the god Odin, after an ordeal in which he hung from the World Tree for nine nights, pierced by a spear. Odin later gave knowledge of the runes to all beings, and rune knowledge was taught to humans by the god Heimdall. These myths refer not so much to the origin of the letters, but rather to grasping the meanings and connections that the letters represent. This wisdom is a great gift to us.

What are those emblems on the cover?

The cover shows a runestone from Tullstorp in southern Sweden, made around the year 1000. The inscription, in a Scandinavian Futhark, reads:
+ *klibiR* + *auk* + *ása* + + *risthu* + *kuml* + *thusi* +
uftiR + *ulf* +, “Kleppir and Ása raised this memorial in memory of Ulf.” The Thor’s Hammer in a wreath is the emblem of the Troth, one of the largest Heathen organizations today.

What is The Troth?

The Troth is one of several international organizations that promote the ancient religion of the Northlands, known as Ásatrú, Heathenry, and by other names. We are incorporated as a non-profit religious corporation in the state of Texas, and are recognized by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt religious organization.

The Troth publishes a quarterly magazine, *Idunna*, along with other writings on Heathen belief and practice. We serve as a networking organization for individuals and kindreds, and we try to assist our members to form local groups to practice our religion and make it more widely available. Once a year, the Troth sponsors a major gathering at which members and interested folks conduct workshops and ceremonies, and discuss and demonstrate their many skills and practices. The Troth also conducts a certification program for clergy, incorporating training in lore, theology, ritual, and counseling.

The Troth believes that the Gods call whom they will—regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, or sexual orientation. To hear their call is a joy, an honor, and also a duty. If you hear that call, and you are willing to live by our values and honor our Gods, then we invite you to take your place among friends and kin, and bring new honor and strength to our ancient Heathen faith.

How can I find out more?

- Visit the main website of The Troth at <http://www.thetroth.org/>
- E-mail the Troth at troth-contact@thetroth.org
- The Troth has a network of local coordinators, or “Stewards”, who are happy to answer questions and provide contacts. To find your nearest Steward, go to <http://www.thetroth.org/memsvc/stewards/>
- Write to the Troth at the address on the front of this flyer.

INTRODUCTION TO THE RUNES



Some Frequently Asked Questions



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Berkeley, CA 94701

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What are runes?

The word *rune* or *runa* meant “secret” or “mystery” in the Germanic languages. It later came to mean the letters used to write various Germanic languages, including Old Norse, and Old English, up to about 1300 AD. The old meaning of “mystery” still persists: runes were, and are, deeply significant in Heathen magic and esoteric lore.

How were runes used?

Runes can be used in the same ways as any writing system. Originally they were carved or scratched on wood, stone or metal, but manuscripts written in runes also exist. Messages of all kinds, from business letters and Christian prayers to love charms and obscene graffiti, have been found carved in runes on medieval artifacts. Runes were widely used in Scandinavia for memorial inscriptions to the deceased, even well after Christianization.

Perhaps the most famous historical use of runes was the carving of magic formulas. Artifacts and literary references show that runes, either singly or in longer inscriptions, were carved on amulets (*taufr*), gear and weapons for protection, healing, or cursing. Rune-carving for magical purposes was often done in conjunction with sung or chanted spells (*galdr*); magical runes were usually colored after carving. Runes or other symbols carved on slips of wood were also used for divination. Heathens use runes today for all of these purposes.

What do the runes mean in religion and magic?

Rune letters are symbols for shaping forces and patterns that operate throughout the cosmos. They can also be seen as symbols of the many aspects of the human mind. We learn their symbolic meanings from their names and descriptions in a few medieval “rune poems” written in Norse and Old English, from other literary references, from artifacts, and also from experience and meditation. This flyer can give only the briefest idea of all that the runes mean.

The Elder Futhark—A Brief Overview

Each rune is given with its reconstructed name in Proto-Germanic, the meaning of its name, and its symbolic meanings and associations.



fehu (cattle)—riches; movable wealth; vital energy; fire; the gods Frey and Freya



uruz (wild ox)—strength; independence; raw power; shaping force; health and healing



thurisaz (giant)—aggression; defense; directed force; the god Thor



ansuz (god)—higher consciousness; inspiration; wisdom; the god Odin



raidho (riding)—travel; journey of life; communication; rhythm; justice and right



kenaz (torch)—craft; creativity; intellect; energy harnessed towards a goal



gebo (gift)—exchange; balance; bonds of friendship and obligation; sexual union



wunjo (joy)—happiness; ecstasy; harmony; friendship; will; confidence



hagalaz (hail)—change; destruction leading to new creation; patterns



naudhiz (need)—resistance; opposition; danger; friction; strengthening the will



isa (ice)—stillness; stability; calmness; stagnation; blockage; barrenness; cold



jera (year)—cycle of seasons; patience; harvest; reward; results of past actions



eiwaz (yew tree)—life and death; axis of the universe; shamanic journeying



perthro (dice-cup or gaming piece)—fate or destiny; birth; hidden things; mysteries



elhaz (elk)—protection; defense; sacred space; honor; connection with divine



sowilo (sun)—light; advancement; growth; evolution; victory; attainment of goals



tiwaz (the god Tyr)—victory; justice; truth; sacrifice for greater good; motivation



berkano (birch tree)—growth; renewal; transformation; Goddesses; female sexuality



ehwaz (horse)—journeying; faithfulness; emotion; partnerships; trust



mannaz (man)—human life; self-knowledge; rational mind; human condition



laguz (lake)—organic life; birth and death; the unconscious mind; concealment



ingunaz (the god Freyr-Ing)—fertility; health; peace; latent power; male sexuality



dagaz (day)—paradox and resolution; enlightenment; safety; clarity; revelation



othala (inherited land)—property; boundaries; heritage; inborn abilities