Summary
Challenges to the mind were popular at the Frankish court at the time of the Rök Stone. Due to the political situation in Scandinavia at that time the stone was made in a combined Swedish and international context. Some of the methods of the stone are inspired by the Frankish renaissance initiated by Alcuin of York.

Therefore, the interpretation may appear complicated, but all the many details are fitting in a very clear and planned structure – ending up in two simple messages – a coincidence is very improbable in that pattern. The principle has already been accepted by the scholars regarding the complicated encryption of the runes, which is a part of the structure. We must never forget that way of thinking when reading the text. In the article the following simple and logical key structure of the text is recognized:

- The text is organized into stanzas fitting a front side and a back side surrounded by an encrypted frame.
- The stanzas contain riddles being separated by the Old Norse word "sakum" ("I say") succeeded by an interrogative pronoun. Each riddle may consist of one or more stanzas.
- The answers are confirmed indirectly in the succeeding riddle – connecting in this way all the riddles.
- When "sakum" is followed by "mukmini" the riddle is a common known myth (Wessén’s "public memory"). In the other riddles all the relevant European history must be searched.
- According to the numbering nine riddles are missing - representing the "nine generations" mentioned just before the missing riddles. These riddles shall be searched in the stanzas outside the numbering.
The result is a coherent and plausible text based solely on the translation published by Runverket. All the answers are identified in the succeeding riddle - except of course for the last riddle. The structure and the interpretation of the text correspond with the set-up of the runes and the encryption.

The answers to the riddles are the mythical sword of the Gothic kings, 9 generations of ancestors, the battlefield, Siulunti, the Ingoldings and the mythical Thor and his giant son. The last stanza must refer to the unmentionable Odin, but there is no question in the last stanza – the answer is hanging in the air.

The family of Vämod is identified as descendants after the Herulian king Hrodolphus, "weapon son" of the Germanic hero, Theodoric, to whom the text clearly refers. Also the historical events around the death of Vämod at Siulunti may be identified as the Danish/Frankish wars 812-815 AD.

Two kennings at the rear side may refer to the reception by the gods in Valhall – basically making the stone a parallel to the picture stone in Tjängvide, Gotland. It should probably appoint the fallen son as a hero. The stanzas with these kennings are framed by the last three riddles written in encrypted runes invoking Thor and Odin - using obvious symbols and incantations which made the kennings in the middle to a part of a prayer.

The problems in understanding the stone are solved nearly 100% in the article below – explained in a way which does not require linguistic knowledge. Runologists and philologists have already solved their part of the translation in a nearly perfect way, but have unsuccessfully tried to make an interpretation for 60-150 years. European historians or other groups working similarly in a scholarly way may have more qualifications to interpret the text as it has a much wider context than usual runestones.

Figure 2. European context of the Rök Stone
1. The stone and the method

The Rök Stone is a Swedish rune stone covered with runes at all the visible sides. It was raised by a magnate, Varin, in the early ninth century and placed in Östergötland near the Lake Vättern. The height is 2.5 meters over the ground. With its 750 runes, it is the longest runic inscription from the Viking Ages – written in 8 visible stanzas in the verse Ijdhahatr and 2 in fornyrðislag. The last part of the text is written in encrypted runes, which were decoded already a century ago. It is well conserved and all the runes except one line are readable and translated – but never fully interpreted before. The stone is a unique work of art of that time.

Since the stone was presented as a whole in 1862, it has been a challenge due to its “mysterious” text. Already Elias Wessén published in 1958 a nearly full translation. The version finished by Runverket in 1991 (Helmer Gustavson 2000) is usually regarded to be the closest to an official Swedish translation (Widmark 1998 & Harris 2006) – a kind of a consensus-translation independent of personal interpretations. The assumption in this article is that the runologists in the last 150 years have reached the possible level of perfection with the reading of the runes and the translation. A few scholars have questioned that (Ralph 2007, Holmberg 2016), but the rest of the scholars just discuss details as nothing is certain in runology.

However, the runologists have never for more than a century reached an agreement about the full meaning and purpose of the text – around 40 different interpretations have been presented like appeal for revenge, deeds of the ancestors, poems for the grave beer, gnostic symbols, woollen and incomprehensible philosophy or simply words-burping. Therefore, a reaction has often been to prefer to regard the stone as an insoluble mystery! The reason may simply be that everybody today is so specialized that we are missing topics being too far from our own area of expertise. Of course, it is tempting to break up the text again and again in order to find new translations fitting an idea of interpretation – but the risk is circular reasoning. A consequence of the concerns of Michael Barnes¹, who is one of the nestors of runology, must be that the runologists are not eligible for a monopoly on interpretation regarding a long and complicated text like Rök covering also disciplines as European history, Carolingian renaissance, numeracy and encryption.

Consequently, the purpose here is to perform the interpretation, which can also be performed by outsiders with other skills than linguists if they are working systematically and have a broad knowledge covering such disciplines. Actually, the test may even be more certain if translation and interpretation are fully separated – as also Michael Barnes has indicated. The uncertainty will probably first be solved when it is probable to establish a likely and full interpretation and explanation.

Therefore, in this case, scholars outside the usual group of linguists and runologist are encouraged to take up the challenges of Varin. The Rök Stone appears to be an impressing Nordic competitor to the “challenges to the mind” from Alcuin’s Frankish Renaissance at the time of confrontation between the two cultures.

When I recognized the history of the Heruls in one of the statements on the stone it became obvious to me that the text was a riddle with an answer connected to the next stanza – as an indirect answer. As the text due to the wording may appear as a row of riddles an immediate assumption was that all the stone was written in riddles in the old style from ae. Vaftrudnismal and the dialog with Gestumblindi in Hervarar Saga, where the answers are included - a typical North European style from the Viking Ages – Greppa Minni. Therefore, Lars Lönnroth used Greppa Minni (Lönnroth 1977) and later Bo Ralph (Ralph 2007) has argued convincingly for the riddles too when he compared with the riddles in the English Exeter-book. The riddles were a general style

¹ Michael Barnes wrote in a paper “What is runology and where does it stand today?” ae.: “The study of runic writing in all its aspects is certainly in need of critical reappraisal. … A wide definition might include elements of (12 disciplines [history not mentioned]). But how can one define a discipline that comprises so many disparate elements? And if a discipline cannot be defined, is it meaningful to treat it as such? … Methodology is considerably easier than theory … It is of course an essential part of runological methodology to distinguish between reading and interpretation. … Methodological guidelines for interpretation have largely been conspicuous by their absence …”
introduced to the Frankish court by Alcuin of York in the end of the 8th century for both entertainment and educational purposes (Godman 1969) and it was also used by the skalds (Harris, 2006, page 95).

The method is therefore to explain the translated text as riddles beginning with “I tell” and an interrogative pronoun - and to solve them. The indirect answer must be included in the next riddle and will in this way tie together all riddles – a content which has to be in accordance with the text of the introduction in the header and with the important structure and set up of the text.

The method will be followed consequently and finally in the chapter “Kennings and prayers” where also the use of the provokingly many figures on the stone – especially in Stanza no. 12-13 – will be explained.

The basis has been the Swedish translation by Runverket from 1991 (Gustavson 2000) – translated here into English. Where Runverket has expressed doubt in a few cases, I have considered other translations from the discussions in runologic articles, but only in case of “mukminni” and "faikiAn” I have used another translation – namely “doomed” and Wessén’s “public memory”/“folk tale” for a common known myth (Schulte 2008b). The other exceptions are the names, which are written here directly as the runes are read.

In 2004 I published my first idea based on the translation from Runverket – still with some open questions. After listening to the runologists, who opposed the criticism from Bo Ralph regarding the current translation at a seminar at the University of Oslo in 2006 and after we both presented our solutions at the symposium “Kult, guld och makt” in Götene a few months later (Brandt 2007 & Ralph 2007c), I decided to await the result and the written linguistic reactions regarding Ralph’s partly translation (later opposed in writing by Barnes 2007 & Schulte 2008). As a professor in linguistics he had chosen to try the opposite way out of the deadlock, but he could at that time only explain a limited part of the text. Both versions were based on riddles and an inspiration from the Christian culture. In the meantime, I studied the set-up of the runes on the stone. Seven years later I had found answers to my open questions and found confirmation of the interpretation in the structure as in a kind of a twelve hundred years old cross word.

In 2016 Per Holmberg (Futhark 6) tried to use the theory of social semiotics in order to read the stone – using an average method based on later and much shorter runic texts in another context – but the Rök Stone is no average stone at all. The modern method does not appoint an unequivocal interpretation as claimed – on the contrary it is rather supporting the reading order of Runverket and the set up described below. His article is an elaboration of the limited solution by Bo Ralph with following summary of the overall interpretation based on several unverified metaphors: “The sun is rising and the runes can be read” (Holmberg’s figure 4). He claims this to be the total solution, but it is quite unlikely that this was the purpose behind all the efforts used by Varin. It is not in any way convincing. My further description of this Swedish article is placed (in Danish) at: http://www.gedevasen.dk/holmberg.pdf.

Sture Allén, the former permanent secretary of the well-known Swedish Academy, where Bo Ralph is a member, already in 2006 announced that “An overall interpretation of the text of the stone ...(consisting of 750 runes)... has recently been presented by Mr. Ralph”. Nevertheless, in 2007 Bo Ralph promised to return with an overall solution, but it is still not published in 2019, and this speech from the brotherhood is still referred as a note at the Swedish Wikipedia illustrating the difficulties in discussing more obvious possibilities in Sweden.

It is not realistic to give an account of the many other scholarly discussions in the last 150 years. Like Joseph Harris (Harris 2006) I will instead refer to the two works by Niels Aage Nielsen (1969) and Lars Lönnroth (1977) both referring to the earlier discussions. Of course I will also refer to the partly interpretations I have used – and to a few later linguistic articles, where Runverket has expressed doubt about specific words. The interpretation may be regarded as a test of the consensus-translation by Runverket. There is no need to falsify presentations of other translations, as they are all except the one of Runverket opposed by nearly all other linguists – and I do not intend to discuss linguistic problems as it is not my expertise. Neither is there any reason to falsify other scholarly interpretations as no one except Holmberg claims to have found a full solution making
sense – they just present more or less holistic ideas. It will always be possible to find alternative interpretations of single elements, but none of the existing proposals are following the structure of the text. The structure appears to be an important part of the inscription.

2. The structure of the text

My conclusion in 2004 was that the standardized expressions with “sakum” were a key to the text – independent of the translation – confirmed later by Elena Melnikova (Melnikova 2010). I further regard this “sakum” to be used together with the following interrogative pronoun as the key to the riddle-structure – except in the last stanza, where there is no interrogative pronoun and no place for a following answer.

Since Sophus Bugge cracked the code of the encrypted text a hundred years ago, apparently no scholars have focused on this interesting topic – though complicated his solution has normally just been accepted. The use of encryption is always dependent on a consequent use of key and structure – especially as several types of encryption were varied on the stone. It is obvious, when studying the set-up of runes and the text that the rune master used such type of skill all over the stone. This is unusual on a rune stone, but the technique is known from the acrostic documents of the contemporary Carolingian Renaissance. One of the encryption methods used in the official reading was already used by Julius Caesar in his letters to the consuls.

![Figure 3. The structure of the translated text based on the setup of the stone](image)

Just before the time of the Rök Stone Charlemagne had conquered the Lombardy and the pagan Saxony. He had now turned his eyes on Scandinavia. Around his new center of Europe in Aachen he gathered people like the Lombardian historian, Paulus Diaconus, the author, Petrus of Pisa, the Frankish assistant Einhard and the clerical Alcuin of York, who formed the Carolingian Renaissance. Alcuin, who was the leading scholar, was
a kinsman to the first known missioner of Denmark, Willibrord, and wrote his legend. He was a specialist in
dialog and he even invented a new small scripture and the first question mark. In 782 AD Alcuin moved from
York and reorganized the Palace School of Charlemagne, where “challenges to the mind” were an important
educational element (Godman 1987) – famous were also the poems with complicated Pythagorean acrostics
which the scholars exchanged among each other. The Franks negotiated with the Danes, penetrated Jutland in
815 AD and sent Ansgar to Denmark and Birka in 829 AD. Consequently, the Frankish empire was as a part
of the context of the Rök Stone – being dated 800-830 AD by the runologists. No acrostics have been observed,
but the encryption, riddles, number symbolism and systematic set-up of the stone is obviously inspired by the
school of Alcuin. One of the rune masters or rather a helper may have received education from Aachen – from
where actual information apparently also is referred on the stone.

The rune master used the combined word “sakumukmini” as an encryption key incorporated in the text. It was
the first word when using a new alphabet or a new encryption. First time it could be read by all readers as the
first word in Stanza no. 1 in the plain Rök rune text – using the common alphabet with 16 runes. The encryption
is concentrated in Stanza no. 14-16. These stanzas are forming a physical “frame” around Stanza no. 12-13 at
the back side – an encrypted invocation with a prayer hidden in the middle. Also Stanza no. 14 has
“sakumukmini” in front – now written in the old Futhark. The reader could not get the encryption key in
advance as the consuls of Caesar when using the code, but the “sakumukmini” in front of this shift in the runic
alphabet automatically worked like a key, which was used as the first word in the next two encrypted stanzas
too. If you can read “sakumukmini”, the type of encryption is solved. In Stanza no. 15 in Rök runes he used the
displacement method (Ceasars cipher), and in Stanza no. 16 he used cipher code (three kinds) where the
ciphers represented the position of the runes in the alphabet. He varied between the displacement method
(Ceasars cipher) and plain text, where the start of a displacement inside a line was marked with a “+”. Seven
times he used such marks (+, x or bullit – unknown as mathematical operators at that time) to show
displacement or separation of coding or text – including 9 riddles, which must be hidden somewhere in the
text according to the numbering. Link to the transliteration of runes

It is obvious that he used “sakum” (I tell) combined with “þat” or “mukmini” together with the interrogative
pronoun to mark the beginning of the riddles – both in- and outside the encrypted text. The first lines to be
read in the Rök rune text and in the encrypted frame are marked with big unusual letters in the middle of the
rune line (old t and encrypted þ (Figure 8a)) in order to indicate the reading order to us.

When carving the text the rune master carefully planned how to use the surface of the stone. He placed one set
of readable messages on the front side (including the small side to the right) in four stanzas (the header, Riddle
1-2 and an auxiliary stanza) telling about the family of Varin. At the rear side he placed another readable set
in Rök-runes regarding the dead son – Riddle no. 12-13 including two kennings. Around these two riddles he
placed a frame of encrypted runes (Riddle no. 14-16) consisting of invocations of the gods at the content in
the middle (Figure 3 and 10) – including at the kennings. This kind of invocations is also known from the
Lister stones and some of the “erilaR”-inscriptions.

Also the missing riddles 3-11 were hidden behind the surface – marked with + and x in stanzas out of number.
It must have been a complicated work to make it all fit the surface of the stone. A draft in another material
would have been a great help – but with a contact to Aachen it would not be difficult to solve that.

Without using the marks in the structure Sophus Bugge cracked the code and Runverket followed the reading
order by analyzing in other ways. Apparently they never realized that their reading was supported and
confirmed by the structure. We can, however, still use the carver’s structure to exclude most of the other
attempts to interpret the stone – if they break or do not follow this clear structure.

Before we begin it is important to realize that due to the very systematic way the rune master worked – where
all scholars have already accepted the encryption – we must not expect to find wooly poetry and philosophies.
The intention appears to be to impress with the complexity of the setup – we must not expect the simplest
explanations as the usual scientific method. We must expect complicated details and hidden messages – but also an extremely clear structural thinking by the rune master.

In the next chapters the method simply is strictly to follow the translation of Runverket and the system above as a test and explain the text as riddles based on history, legends and parallels in the world of a chieftain in the early Viking Ages in the time frame defined by the runologists (800-830 AD). In case of a full and coherent explanation it may be regarded as a successful test of the translation too.

The analyzes of the setup of the runes and the systematical use of the structure will be developed further in Chapter 6, where we will also examine the use of the remarkably many figures.

3. Riddle no. 1-11 - The family

Riddle no. 1-11 are basically set up as an introduction and three stanzas written in usual Rök-runes on the front side of the stone – and nine hidden riddles.

Purpose – Introduction:
Many scholars have underestimated the importance of the first unnumbered stanza, which is nearly undisputed except for the word "faikiAn". The text is:

After Vämod stand these runes
+Varin carved (painted), the father
after his doomed (dead?) son.

It is similar with memorial texts found on a substantial part of the later rune stones, except for the use of the word "faikiAn" (doomed – maybe because his final destiny was uncertain). Both lines are written in unusually tall runes. The first line formed as a "header" is quite obviously a key to the text telling us that the readable content of the runic text must be related to the memory of Vämod. We must never forget this introduction when interpreting the rest of the text as it must announce the primary purpose of the stone and its text – a memorial stone. The way to split up the stanza with the unnecessary "+"sign and the uncertainty of "faikiAn" may have reasons too. We will return to that problem later.

The mythical sword - Riddle no. 1:
Riddle no. 1 about two war-booties is a traditional riddle:

I say the folktale,
which the 2 war-booties were
12 times were taken as war-booty (valraub),
both together from man to man.

We need to focus on the important clue that two items should follow each other “both together” as war-booties several times - rather than the specific number 12, as this number is not identified anywhere regarding "valraub". The riddle must focus on two items following their owner on battlefields - with the connected character as the very point. The answer is obviously a pair – for example a sword and its sheath – but would usual items always follow each other after they were lost? The answer must therefore be the legendary sword, which had to kill each time it was drawn from its sheath - made and cursed by the dwarfs. They had to follow each other from man to man – the only pair by necessity connected by damnation. Tyrfing was its name in Hervarar Saga (Tunstall 2004) – other names were Dainsleib and Mimung – but we are only able to find up to 6 changes of ownership due to the use of violence or treachery. Varin's finer point may have been that 2 items were mentioned – each item being a war-booty 6 times – making totally 12 times as a trap. The character of "valraub" at these changes of ownership and their number can be discussed, but according to Hervarar Saga many old legends were told about this famous sword. Consequently, the number is not crucial in our version regarding a test of the identification.
In the end of Hervarar Saga we are told that "Angantyr was king over Reidgotalandi for many years" after he had defeated the Huns with Tyrfing in his hand (Lönnroth 1977, p. 24 & Wolfram 1988, p. 27). In the following list of kings attached to the saga Angantyr was mentioned and "from him are descended lines of kings" (Tunstall 2004, chapter 14 and attachment). Therefore, it is obviously no coincidence that the next riddle of the stone is mentioning the Hreidgoths 9 generations ago. Neither is it a coincidence that the stanza in the "metre of the past" attached to the riddle is telling about the most famous Gothic king of all, Theodoric the Great. The stanza is indirectly confirming that the answer to the former riddle was the magic sword of the Gothic kings. This magic sword of Theodoric (Didrik) was known in the Scandinavian sagas at that time. We will not regard it as historical, but we can accept it as an old legend as indicated by the first “mukminni”.

A key criticism by Bo Ralph and Per Holmberg is the translation of ÞiauríkR as Theodoric, but Bo Ralph was met by protests from the runologists in Oslo in 2006 and later convincingly opposed by Michael Schulte (Schulte 2008a). The name Theodoric is known in spellings like Thiudareiks (Gothic), Þéodríc (Deor), Piðrik (sagas), Tuirik (Faroe) and Tjoðrek (Norwegian) making ÞiaurikR in Rök probable too. Names in the history of that time were usually wrongly spelled when they were translated from one language to another by the word of mouth. It is not possible to explain these mistakes by using linguistic analyzes or grammatical rules. Instead we need to analyze at the context in which the word is used in the next riddle.

It is possible that the sword was regarded as a key to the text – giving both associations to the history back to the Gothic kingdom in Riddle no. 2 and to Riddle no. 12, where a kenning is found referring to the EinherjaR, who were also connected with that sword (the legend Hedin and Hogne). For that purpose, the figures 2 and 12 in the riddle may have been used as pointers (Lönnroth 1977, page 37) – just like the sword tied together the different story lines in the Hervarar Saga.

The Theodoric riddle - Riddle no. 2:
The answer to Riddle no. 1 shall be confirmed in Riddle no. 2, which includes an auxiliary stanza:

This I say as the second,
who 9 generations ago
lost his life with the Hreidgoths,
and died at them for his guilt.

ÞiauríkR ruled,
the bold
chief of sea warriors,
over the shores of the Hreiðsea.
Now he sits armed
on his (Gothic) horse,
his shield strapped,
leader of Marika.

It has to be noticed that the auxiliary stanza is divided into a "then"-part and a "now"-part. The first part serves to connect the stanza with Theodoric 9 generations ago, when he ruled the famous Gothic kingdom. Consequently, the logical conclusion has to be that the second part about the horse nine generations later must refer to a statue of Theodoric on horseback. By a coincidence (or rather because of the fact that it was famous at that time in a surviving poem) we also know that statue. In 801 AD – around 9 generations after Theodoric, who died in 526 AD – Charlemagne moved an equestrian statue of Theodoric from Ravenna to Aachen. This dating is in accordance with the dating by the runologists to the first half of the 9th century based on runes, language and comparison with Oseberg and Gokstad (Barnes 2007). Theodoric was an ideal for Charlemagne, who died in 814 AD – but he was also an important hero to the pagan Scandinavians as Didrik according to their old legends. Many Scandinavians visited the Carolingian court – especially the Danes. The explanation about the statue is therefore generally accepted (Gustavson 2000, p. 26) except by Ralph and Holmberg.
Varin’s purpose was probably to emphasize that Theodoric was sitting "armed on his (Gothic) horse" with his "shield strapped". We know he was armed at the statue – and every Scandinavian knowing the legends of the legendary sword would have believed that the Hreidgothic king was carrying the mythical sword and its sheath at such a statue – we even know the combination from the Scandinavian Didrik Saga with the sword under another name (Lönnroth 1977, p. 24-26). The correct answer of Riddle 1 is in this way indirectly confirmed in the following riddle.

The question about the dead king:
The question in Riddle no. 2 must be who died 9 generations ago for his guilt among the Hreidgoths at the time of Theodoric. As we are missing Riddle no. 3-11, his identity may in the first case be indicated in the separate stanza attached to Riddle no. 2. It is placed as an intentional break of the system in the old metre fornýríslag – used in the ancient heroic poems as in the Edda (Hedeager 2011 page 24). It has to be noticed that this stanza two times is telling of whom this Theodoric was the chief. It appears to be a waste of space, but the double answer may tell us that at least one answer did also cover the dead person, who was either a chief of the sea warriors or of the Marika - or rather of both as a chief to whom Theodoric was superior.

It must be obvious that the person who "died with/among the Hreidgoths" was not Theodoric himself as guilt did not fit the usual picture of the heroic king. In France he later lost credibility due to his Arian faith, but the stone was placed in Scandinavia where the pagan people would never accept that their hero should incur guilt because he was not a Catholic - or believe he died of it. The clue of the riddle must be that he died because of his guilt and the answer must be a person who was famous for such a mistake.

According to a letter from Cassiodorus to the Herulian king in 507 AD, Theodoric took the Heruls under his protection and adopted their king as his weapon son: "Highest among the nations will you be considered who are thus approved by the mind of Theodoric ... in adopting you we are also throwing round you the shield of our protection." (Cassiodorus: Varia IV, 2 (507-511 AD) (Schwarcz 2005)). Procopius told in 553 AD about the Herulian king, Hrodolphus, who had already subdued the Lombards. "Rodolphus ... marched against the Lombards ... bringing upon them a war which had no real cause ... but in absolute disregard of the omens of their gods they advanced against their enemy ... and Rodolphus himself was killed" (Procopius Book VI, xiv). The event took place in 508/9 AD – a year or two after the letter from Theodoric (Schwarcz 2005). In 790 AD – around 25 years before the stone was carved – the Lombardian historian at the court of Charlemagne, Paulus Diaconus, quoted the Herulian messenger telling about the same defeat of the Heruls in this way: "Woe to thee, wretched Herolia, who are punished by the anger of God." (Paulus Diaconus, Book 1.xx). A clue from the same story about Rodolpho was later used in Scandinavian legends about Gorm – the story may have been known in Scandinavia. The consequence of this catastrophe was according to Procopius that the royal family and some of their followers migrated to Scandinavia, “and one of the most numerous nations there are the Gautoi, and it was next to them that the incoming Eruli settled at the time of question.” (Procopius Book VI, xiv). Hrodolphus lost their strong kingdom in Mähren protected by Theodoric and caused their destiny by disregarding the gods and committing hubris – and his family escaped to Sweden.

That will explain why the stone in Götaland told that Hrodolphus "lost his life with the Hreidgoths and died at them for his guilt". Both historical sources mentioning Hrodolphus/Rodolfo told about that mistake - being one of his characteristic features. When the Goths, and especially Theodoric, in the 9th century were the heroes of the Germanics, a Scandinavian would be proud of an ancestor being honored as the weapon son of Theodoric. We could ask why it was honorable to die because of own guilt, but Procopius told that he was provoked to do so by his warriors – and Paulus confirmed the provocation much later – it simply became the usual explanation following the story about the two heroes that Theodoric did not protect him when he neglected his gods and promises to keep the peace both to the Lombards and to Theodoric – though Hrodolphus in all other aspects was an honorable man. For 300 years his ancestors had lived with the consequences of his fall in the Marchfeld/Mährern. Therefore, that unusual remark could be used to characterize Hrodolphus in the riddle on the Rök Stone in Sweden – a clear parallel to the descriptions by the early Procopius shortly after his
own time, and by the late Paulus Diaconus at the time of Varin in Aachen from where we also have the information about the relocation of the statue.

That would also explain the expression, "Chief of sea warriors", in the Theodoric-stanza. The Goths were not known as sea warriors, but the Heruls were feared as pirates along the western coasts of Europe (Hydatius 450/456 AD (Lakatos 1978)). This may be the reason why Widsith told that the Danish kings "had driven off Wicingas cymn" - just like Jordanes wrote about the Heruls. Same event? Possibly, but that is irrelevant here. If Varin was a descendant of Hrodolphus he would gladly boast of the hero Theodoric as a protector and an earlier superior chief of his people.

The name “Marika” is the same as “Marings”. This name is also identified in the name “Maringa Burg” in ON Deor. The Heruls were sieged and defeated by Theodoric, when they protected Odoaker (called Rex Herulicus) in Ravenna in 492-3 AD and fought the famous “Rabenslacht” (Cassiodorus). Since then Ravenna became the city of Theodoric – but from Western Europe it may have been regarded as the town of the Heruls. The Heruls from the River March-region (called River Marus by Tacitus in later Mähren/Moravia) – not far away from the finding place of the runic inscription “marings” – could be called “marings”. Marika, Marings and Maringa are simply the same name in three different languages – the people from Mar – and in 2009 a new “ErlaR”-inscription was found with the name Mariþeubar – an Eastherulian jarl? As the name traditionally has been identified as Goths without any explanation, an identification of the Heruls as “Marings” will be too controversial to be used in this article. It is linguistic and also unnecessary as an identification – the Goths are sufficient for our purpose. Nevertheless it will make sense if the Rökstone in this way covered the two groups of the same people.

We could never dream of a better explanation of the text in Riddle no. 2 referred to by an author at the court of Charlemagne 25 years before the stone was carved, a letter from Theodoric and the contemporary history of the Byzantine Procopius, who even told that the family of Hrodolphus settled in the environment of the Rök Stone. The reason is no pure luck. Varin simply referred to two heroes who were famous both by the Carolingian historians at the time of the stone and in the Dietrich/Didrik cycles of Germanic lore. We will even get further identification later, as the answer, Raðulf, is found in the hidden Riddle no. 3.

In general, Scandinavian historians have regarded Procopius as a weak source like Jordanes, but when it comes to contemporary events around the Roman armies in his “History of Wars” it is a mistake. Procopius was the secretary and juridical advisor of Bellisarius, the superior general of Justinian. He had close contacts with the Herulian mercenary officers serving Justinian, and he even told that he spoke with eyewitnesses from Scandinavia. The important information to notice was a contemporary event which was Procopius’ reason to spend two chapters on the Heruls. In 548 AD, two years before Procopius finished his 7th book about the Heruls, a group of Herulian mercenaries, who had settled in Singidunum (Beograd) as Byzantine mercenaries, sent an envoy to Scandinavia to find a new king among the members of the royal family, who lived there after the defeat of Hrodolphus. “They found many there of the royal blood” and brought back prince “Datus... And he was followed by his brother Aordus and two hundred youths of the Eruli ...”. Datus removed Suartuas – the Herulian candidate of Justinian. Instead the furious emperor placed Suartuas as commander of Constantinople. Everybody in Constantinople knew that embarrassing story, when Procopius wrote his work in the city with close contacts to the court. He was certainly no neutral observer and he deliberately distorted the picture of the Herulian character in order to defend Bellisarius. But he had no reason or chance to mistake, manipulate or lie about the existence of the royal Herulian family in Scandinavia without losing all his credibility. There is no doubt that this royal dynasty and their followers settled at the Scandinavian Peninsula – maybe as mercenaries, advisors or earls as they were famous in Southern Europe as such – and they were still coveted royal candidates for the other Heruls 40 years later. The following year also Jordanes wrote in Byzans about another meeting between Heruls and Danes – a coincidence? The historical truth about the battle in 509 AD and the details about the earlier journey, which are the topics being discussed by modern historians, are irrelevant for the text of the stone. What matters is the solid proof of a later presence of the Heruls and what Varin in his time would believe about the past. In the last case we shall remember the telling of the contemporary Paulus Diaconus.
Nine "missing" riddles - The first layer:
At this stage we have read all the text on the front side, but the Rökrune-text at the rear side is beginning with Riddle number 12. The next 9 riddles are missing according to the ordinal numbers, but it is hardly a coincidence that we find 9 generations mentioned in Riddle no. 2 just before. It is a logical consequence of the structure and the purpose according to the introduction that the 9 missing riddles simply are the 9 generations back to the time of Theodoric – a possibility already mentioned by Ottar Grønvik (1983, p. 119). As we shall see later people knowing the family of Varin would even get a hint how to solve the riddles – and we are provided with a confirmation of the answers to riddle no. 2 and the character of the 9 missing riddles.

But let us forget that for a moment and just follow his hints. We shall notice that the last line, where we were standing, was ending in tall letters in “Skati Mariki”? Why? The only other line with such letters is the header – both bordering the rear side. The stanza with the header is the only stanza at this page without a number. Is the text a ring – a torque, with an empty gap? Shall the text of the front side return after the gap to the unnumbered stanza leading to Riddle no. 12? If the missing riddles are the 9 generations, they will probably end up with Vämod or Varin in the memory text like this – and just these names we find in the unnumbered stanza.

If we notice the unused “+” behind the header the line is telling us “but Varin carved, the father after his doomed son”. The obvious question which every reader will ask as the first is: "What happened to him?" Especially the unusual use of the word “faikiAn” (rather doomed than dead) made this sentence a riddle. Varin must be the ninth generation and the riddle in this sentence about Vämod will lead us to Riddle no. 12, where we are told about 20 kings lying at the battlefield. Varin probably raised the stone because Vämod was supposed to lie on the battlefield among 20 kings – which the readers knew at Varin’s time.

As mentioned Theodoric wrote in the letter to the Herulian king: "Highest among the nations will you be considered who are thus approved by the mind of Theodoric." It was a judgment of an ancestor which would be told for generations in the family of Varin – a judgment given by the greatest hero of the Scandinavians and even of their enemy, the Frankish emperor. Could we expect a more probable purpose on a rune stone in memory of a dead son in the beginning of the 9th century than to remind us of such royal ancestors?

That may be the first idea behind the construction of the text – or the first layer. We do not need more in order to understand the front side. However, this is just a lead to find the names of the other ancestors as we know Hrodolphus, Varin and maybe Vämod. We shall probably fill out the gap of the torch between the high letters with “skati Marika” (Theodoric and Hrodolphus) and Vämod looking for the same signs once more – an unnumbered stanza and an unused separation mark “+”, which was unusual in old runic inscriptions.

The "missing" names of the generations - The second layer:
We do only find such a stanza at the rear side inside the frame. This stanza is in the fornyrðislag, meaning the metre of ancient stories – opposite Ljodahatr in the rest of the text. Both components are used to identify the poem with the remaining 8 names. This poem Sophus Bugge regarded as pure nonsense. At the first glance the “+/x”-signs are unnecessary, but together they are marking 1+8 displaced names, while fornyrðislag is marking the first 8 generations and Theodoric – the ancient heroes. If we follow the setup of runes and poems we will obviously get the 9 hidden riddles and answers in the stanzas without numbering - with the “domed son” of Varin as the question of the displaced Riddle no. 11. The 8 generations were physically placed in the gap between the high letters – but at the rear side of the stone. The purpose was probably to place the numbers "5" inside the frame for later use as we shall see – and to use all the space of the stone in the best and most logical way for the purpose.

The stanza with the 8 names can be read as 4 long lines (Figure 5) – here we are reading about 4 fathers with each 5 sons of the same first name. Already 100 years ago Sophus Bugge asked: "How can anyone believe that?" But no one has reacted on his obvious question. The purpose was probably to let us see a connection between the 20 kings and the 4x5 first names – but as a false track – an often used method in riddles (Bo Ralph, 2005). The plural form BirnAR of Biorn among the fathers indicates that we can ignore the usual grammatical
rules as the three other names are in singularis. The 4 long lines have identical structures - forming 4 rows and 4 columns as in a modern data matrix. Actually they appear as columns of both letters and words if they are aligned to the right. This is especially important as the rune master instead of following the “rules” placed an “s” more behind Haruth than in the other lines. With “s” and “BirmAR he got six runes in all four names of the fathers, forming real columns of letters – like Alcuin – and also an attempted number of runes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matrix - Riddle no. 13</th>
<th>Sons</th>
<th>Fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radulf’s</td>
<td>son?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valka’s</td>
<td>son?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rukulf’s</td>
<td>son?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raipulf’s</td>
<td>son?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harup’s</td>
<td>son?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HoisI’s</td>
<td>son?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bjorn’s</td>
<td>son?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunmund’s</td>
<td>son?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. Text (Chapter 4) between + and x in two different decompositions

Due to the missing grammar we shall not regard the stanza inside the markers as real sentences, but as words in columns – to us a matrix of the past – but to Varin probably a stanza like the other auxiliary stanza in fornyrðislag. It is in Figure 5 first read as 4 lines – with the column “fim” (5), which we will find reserved for a later purpose. A nasty false track, but clearly a part of the “matrix” instead of a part of a text.

That sounds really complicated, but Varin knew stanzas and when we look at Alcuin’s “Sancta Cruce” in Figure 7 it is consisting of 37 rows and 37 columns. That was necessary to construct this famous example of Porfyrian acrostics where it is possible to read texts in many directions as in a modern crossword. Consequently, it was also possible to decompose a stanza as below – and decomposition was even a basic element of the artistic Germanic Style II. Both stanzas in the old fornyrðislag were in this way used as auxiliary stanzas regarding the old ancestors.

When we try to place these 8 names in the right chronological order we shall notice the last column in the matrix, which must have a purpose too. “Sons” in each line is immediately indicating that the last name is the father of the line. In that way the first ancestor must, as expected, be Radulf (Hrodolphus/Rodolfo), his son must be Valka/ValkaR etc. The plural allows us to use the expression “sons” twice in each line. According to the general system each of the 8 names must be a part of a riddle: “Who was the son of the name?” Arranged in short lines the first line will be “The son of Radulf?” and the answer hidden in the next riddle, “The son of Valka?” will be “Valka” etc. The character of the names is shifting from old Germanic names (von Friesen 1920, s. 76-81) to Nordic names of the 9th century in the last line. Harris has identified the Frisian Valki, but the Western Heruls lived in East Frisia, and the daughter of a Hrodolphus, Silinga, got the son Valdar, who became later a Lombardian king.

A reader at that time would recognize at least the last names – making it easier to understand the system at the time of the stone. Actually Per Holmberg has suggested that the text of the stone was already known by the readers – making the knowledge of the family a part of the reading of the riddles. This explanation appears likely as a way to remember the entitlement to the throne of the royal family.

The regularity of the name-matrix could indicate that the text may contain more messages than I have been able to explain – especially as Varin broke the grammatical rules in the obvious order to fit a 4x6 matrix.
we also find other interesting combinations of the number 24, but they are too uncertain to be handled in this article – we will find more obvious examples later in Chapter 6.

As demonstrated we could leave out the names in Riddle no. 13 as being too much of Alcuin-style by using “Ockhams Razor” – the 9 missing riddles would still be the expression "9 generations" leading directly to Riddle no. 11 about Varin and Vämod and to the answer in Riddle no. 12 in the simplest possible way in a first layer. The identification of Hrodolphus and his family is independent of the complicated solution of the 9 names in the second layer – but the two parallel interpretations are leading to the same result. The simple solution will guide the reader in the search for the full but complicated solution. In this case the sophisticated Alcuin-style must be followed in spite of “Ockhams Razor” as it is marked as an intentional problem by +/-.

**Certainty in the identification:**
The separate identifications of the Heruls are shown in the sheet in Figure 8. It should not be necessary to explain the schematic summary with 6 or 7 independent identifications of the Herulian history. One or two of these single statements could fall out without spoiling the identification, which is very strong at that time due to the separate identifications. The identification is even further strengthened because the equestrian statue restricts these single identifications to the history of Theodoric. It is nearly impossible that more than one Radulf historically connected with Theodoric was so famous around 815 AD for dying because of his guilt 9 generations earlier that it should be emphasized on a runestone in Gotland. The identification is stronger than most accepted identifications in ancient history, and all the text of the riddle/stanzas is relevant and useful in this connection. It is not even a matter of historical truth and certainty regarding these events as we just need to be convinced that it is likely or possible that Varin may have believed so as Paulus Diaconus and the statue show.

The Heruls are also mentioned in connection with the Blekinge rune stones being further discussed in the PDF-article “The rune stones in Blekinge”, but the interpretation of the Rök Stone is not dependent of such more uncertain hypotheses.

It is necessary to mention that Jordanes told about a Scandinavian Rodulf at the court of Theodoric. He has sometimes been mixed up with Hrodolphus (Hyenstrand 1996, p. 49), but the Scandinavian Rodulf had left his people, the Norwegian Rani, in order to stay at the court of Theodoric at the time of Cassiodorus. The Herulian Hrodolphus died as a king in battle before his South European people in Moravia went to Scandinavia. As these two stories are totally contradicting and refer to two different people they must refer to two different kings with the same common Germanic name.

### 4. Riddle no. 12-13 – Vämod’s death

**The interpretation:**
Both riddles are written in Rök-runes as the content inside the frame at the rear side. Riddle no. 12:

*This I say as the twelfth,
where the horse of GunnR finds fodder
on the battlefield, there 20 kings lie.*
It is generally agreed that GunnR is a so called "kenning" – a symbol of the Valkyrie at the battlefield selecting and bringing the dead heroes to Valhall - sometimes riding a horse to the battlefield. The riddle is in the present tense and thereby the obvious answer to Riddle no. 11. Varin raised the stone because Vämod was supposed to lie dead among the 20 kings – between them or as one of them does not change the following interpretation. 20 kings are mentioned two times in this and the next stanza. 2x20 kings at a battlefield could be a kenning for the first Einherjar - making the 20 kings dead heroes (Nielsen 1969, Page 38-44). This connection was mentioned in the ON poem, Sorla Thattr, where 2x20 kings were living in the Valhall – fighting amongst themselves until the day of Twilight, when they were expected to defend the gods against the giants. We will return later to the use of the kennings and figures.

The question asked in Riddle no. 12 must be the place where these kings were lying on the battlefield – or fields. At that time everybody probably knew, but we don’t – we have to look for the identification in Riddle no. 13. Exactly here we find the only place name, Siulunti – usually interpreted as Sjælland (OI/ON Selund):

+ This I say as the thirteenth,
  which 20 kings sat on Siulunti
  4 winters, of 4 names, born to 4 brothers.

+ ValkaR 5 Raþulf sons
  Hraiþulf 5 Ruþulf sons  (matrix – see Riddle no. 3-10)
  HoislaR 5 Haruþs sons
  KumnuntaR 5 BirnaR sons  x

Now the myth ... all ... ainhuar ... ....

As the last line of this section is spoilt, its meaning and function is discussed. Under all circumstances it is not a separate riddle as the line is not opened with "sakum", but with an "n". I shall not guess on the content, but refer to the conclusion of the latest article by Joseph Harris (Harris 2015, p. 339): “Whichever necessarily speculative reconstruction we favor, line 20 stands somewhat outside the Question-Answer framework of most of the inscription, perhaps as a meta-level commentary on the inscription and an introduction to Section 3.” Like the later NIT, which must be an incantation, it is probably an introduction to a change in the reading.

In Riddle no.13 we are asked who the 20 kings were. It is tempting first to choose the names of the "4x5 brothers" in the stanza attached – especially as "4 brothers" (brudrum) in the line before appears to be the dative plural, but we have used them and we do have to follow the riddle system searching in Riddle no. 14 after the next “sakum”. Here we find the obvious answer as the only name of a group in the text, "þgoldiga" – the "Ingoldings" – as ð is the rune “Ing” and "-iga"/"ika" is the same diminutive suffix as "-ing"/"-unge". Runverket went too far when translating the names, which are here the original. Runverket combined with the nearby Ingvaldstofta, but "-tofta" is normally regarded as a later settlement (Andersson 1999). They had later a similar problem with the name Sibi, which they combined with the later village name Sibberyd. It is more likely that the stone later inspired local parents to give their children and new villages names from the stone.

Through a century many scholars have tried to explain line 2-7 of riddle No. 13 as real sentences – but never with a convincing result. Consequently, we considered earlier other possibilities and explained line 3-7, which Sophus Bugge regarded as pure nonsense. The +x indicated displacement and a special function. They turned up to make sense as single words in rows and columns. Maybe we shall explain "4 winters of 4 names born (to) 4 brothers" in the same way – a row of necessary information. Like the other lines it is not a real sentence, but the numbers may be used to identify the events when the 20 kings were sat on Siulunti. As example with 4 winters as the length of the war, in which the kings had their headquarters on Siulunti, and with 4 brothers, who caused the war or were the royal leaders. Of course, they had 4 names, but the reason for that unnecessary information may be due to the need of the numbers 3x4 being used later with the other provokingly many
numbers inside the frame. The five lines are simply pure information disguised as sentences in the data lines in order to work in the riddle as a trap. Due to the trap, the double purpose and the metre of the stanzas we may not expect too much of the grammar of these condensed sentences. The grammar may support the false track rather than the “database” of identifications as the database does not need any grammar. It is difficult for us see through, but at the time of the Rök Stone people would recognize most information in these five lines, figure out the meaning and admire the sophisticated setup – just the same purpose as behind the acrostic signature of Charlemagne (figure 6). It was not meant for a reader starting on scratch as we do.

A possible explanation:

We do not need to identify the war, but the runologic dating of the stone to 800-830 AD and the name "Siulunti" have usually thrown the suspicion on battles in Denmark. In a poem Paulus Diaconus in 782 AD tried to provoke Charlemagne to subdue the Danish king as he worshipped Odin and Thor. Later Charlemagne waged war against the Danish king Godfred in Southern Jutland for several years. According to Annales Regni Francorum (the official imperial Frankish Annals - Albrechtsen 1976, p. 17-22) heavy wars broke out in the beginning of 812 AD – apparently in the winter – between branches of the Danish royal family after the death of Godfred and his nephew. A group wanted an alliance with the Franks – opposite the pagan sons of Godfred. The sons had to go into “exile at the Sueones”, but in 813 AD they returned with "troops gathered from everywhere" and conquered the throne. The wars continued and next year the eldest brother and other candidates were killed. In the summer 815 AD Frankish troops penetrated "Sinlendi" (Southern Jutland) to support their allied Harald, but gave up as the brothers with their fleet and army "remained on an island three miles from" Jutland. Harald went into exile by the Franks and was later baptized. The duration of the wars should therefore be counted as 4 winters, and according to the Franks 4 brothers were alive in 819 AD and probably also at the end of the war.

A possible connection between Siulunti and Sinlendi/Sillende has never been investigated (Friesen 1920, p. 70-71 & Nielsen 1969, p. 14), as Siulunti as Sjælland/Sealand has been generally accepted due to the ON Selund. Both translations of the name will fit the explanation above as the brothers fought against the Franks in Sinlendi and had a base on the islands. Their main base could have been Sjælland – i.e. Tissø or the legendary Lejre. The third possible translation, Sjolund in Uppland, is usually rejected by the linguists.

It is likely that Varin may have sent his son Vämod to Denmark with the Godfred-sons to fight against the supporters of the threatening Christian emperor – just as the Franks described above. The Frankish Annals may cover all the text in Riddle 12 and 13 except the number 20 and the 8 names, which are both explained in other ways – but undoubtedly it was possible to find 20 dead members of the royal family in these wars – described as bloody by the Franks. Later the purpose of the demonstratively many figures placed in the two riddles will be explained.

As mentioned the most obvious reading of "ðgold" is Ingold or Ingjald/Ingeld (the spelling of the name in the sagas). "ðgoldiga" must therefore be the Ingeldings. The old Skjoldungesaga exists in different fragments (Friis-Jensen 1984). Upphaf allra frasagna wrote “Odin, son of Thor” while other fragments and their later summary, Langfedgatal, told that the Danish kings were all descendants of Odin and Ingeld. Ingeld Frodeson was famous all over Northern Europe in Beowulf, Widisith, the sagas and Saxo - and even mentioned by Alcuin in 797 AD. According to Langfedgatal based on the disappeared Skjoldungesaga both Harald Hildetand and Sigurd Ring were descendents of Ingeld and could be called Ingoldings. We may doubt the line of Sigurd Ring, but he was indisputably recorded so and he was probably even a descendant of the Swedish Ingjald Illråde as he was a Swedish king and his mother had their family name Åse. The three royal Danish groups of numerous brothers and their families killing each other 812-15 AD probably all descended from Sigurd and Harald. Therefore, all or some of them could be regarded as Ingoldings, if Varin believed a legend similar with the later Skjoldungesaga. That is exactly what Varin is telling in his text. This is a much better explanation than we could expect – one or two possibilities may even fail. The sagas were very uncertain and manipulated with confusing information and family lines, but the historical truth about the original history is irrelevant. Again we shall in this interpretation only make probable that the belief by Varin, which we
suppose to read in his text, was his most likely or at least possible knowledge. We have to listen to Varin himself as he is our only witness regarding his own belief about the royal family.

It has to be stressed that the interpretation of a runestone does not imply that the names are identified in other sources – it is usually impossible. Nevertheless, we have several independent details for identification: The dating around 800-830 AD, "Sialunti", "20 kings lying at the battlefield", "4 winters", "4 brothers" and "фgoldiga". It is a rather certain identification of the event though not quite as strong as Hrodolphus.

If this Danish explanation is correct the stone was erected around 815/16 AD – in the middle of the period of dating by the runologists, but the interpretation of the riddles is not dependent of that identification. The interpretation will not fall apart if Vämod died in a battle unknown to us as we are still following the riddle system – but the reader in the 9th century would know.

Conclusion regarding the text in Rök Runes:
Anyway, the proposed system of the riddles is respected with a likely answer placed in Riddle no. 14, though all the text of Riddle no. 13 may not be fully explained due to the spoilt line.

In this way the conclusion of Riddle 1-13 must simply be that all the text of the stanzas in readable Rök runes is a memorial text as promised in the header. It tells about the death of Vämod and his family line of heroes leading back to an ancestor being honored and adopted by the greatest hero of all, the famous Theodoric the Great. They could even laugh at the Frankish emperors who tried to steal a small part of the brilliance of Theodoric by moving his statue to Aachen. Could we expect a more obvious result?

5. Riddle no. 14-16 - Ancestors and gods
The last three encrypted stanzas are placed as a frame around the rear side of the stone – including the top of the stone and the small side on the right – again with a tall letter (Figure 11) in the first line to be read.

The interpretation:
The shift to the ancient and secret runes in the runic frame around Riddle no. 12-13 is probably marking that we are now going back into the world of the ancestors and the gods. Therefore, the stanzas are all initiated by “mukmini” – myths and legends. Already many years ago Riddle no. 14 and 15 were explained together:

I say the folktale,
which of the жOldiga,
was repaid (given) by a wife’s sacrifice.

I say the folktale,
which great warrior is born a relative.
Vilen it is. He could crush a giant.
Vilen it is. N I T

The possible interpretation was published by Niels Aage Nielsen in his book "Runerne på Rökstenen " (Nielsen 1969, p. 46-60). He explained Riddle no. 14 and 15 by referring to the Hrungnir Myth (Snorri Sturlsson, Prose Edda: "Skaldskaparmal" (XVII), ca. 1220 AD).

Runverket has expressed doubt about the translation of the third line, but it has later been discussed in several articles. "Goldin" (from "gialda", now "gäldad") was discussed by Grønvik (1990) where he added "give", "transfer" and "giving back" to the earlier "paid back". but already Sophus Bugge referred to the use in Hervararsaga "to receive in exchange" (Bugge 1910, p. 294). "Kvan" could be understood in the way that the offer was made by a woman - i.e. when a wife stepped aside for a more fertile woman (Widmark 1992, p. 32). Most of these expressions will cover that Sif, the wife of Thor, made the offer to step aside letting the giantess, Jernsaxe, give birth to Magni – as N.Aa. Nielsen claimed.
This illegitimate son of Thor saved, when he was three nights old, the life of Thor by removing the big foot of the dead giant Hrungnir. Afterwards the son of Thor said: "I think I could have beaten that giant to death with my fist, if we had met." This saga episode must be the one Riddle no. 15 is referring to by the text about the son "He could crush a giant" - or more directly translated from the runic "knuoknat iatun" with "knock out/to death a giant". The story is only known from Snorri’s late Prose Edda.

The text in the two stanzas is explained in a perfect way – N.Aa. Nielsen had just one problem, of which he was fully aware: Varin has demonstratively repeated the answer of Riddle no. 14: "Vilin it is". Before we discuss that we will take a look at Stanza no. 16, which N.Aa. Nielsen did not involve.

*I say the folktale: Thor*
*Sibi. Protector of the vie*
*Begot 90 years old (Runverket: Gave birth as ninety years old to a son)*

Here we find the answer Thor (pur) regarding Riddle no. 15, which is confirming the explanation by N.Aa. Nielsen, and also that our test of the system was successful as the system of riddles is followed to the end. The last stanza shall not be expected to be a riddle according to the system as it cannot be answered in a following stanza – consequently there is no interrogative pronoun in the last stanza as in all the other stanzas.

The second line “Sibi, protector of the vie” is regarded to be a separate protection formula as its three crosses are turned towards the sky – not towards the common readers as all the other text. Grønvik has spent a lot of effort on Sibi as Sif in male gender. Earlier both he, Lönnroth (1977) and Widmark (1992 p. 32) have discussed the expressions “sefi” and sifjar” as “relation by marriage” and Snorri’s kenning “verr Sifjar” for Thor. In his last book Grønvik returned to “Sif’s husband” (Grønvik 2003). His final conclusion appears to be probable. In this way we will get a double answer as in Riddle no 15. Thor would also be the most likely “protector of the vie” – neither Sif nor a local priest as suggested by Runverket.

Normally the last stanza has only been regarded as an invocation of Thor – ae. by Niels Aage Nielsen (Nielsen 1969 chapter 6). Also the third line, however, is formed by three big crosses demonstratively placed at the top as a title or conclusion gathering all the text of the rear side (Figure 1) – a cry for the gods? The text is “Begot 90 years old” (ul (ala)=avlat (sv)=begot=gave birth), which will only make sense as the identification of a god – but who?

Apparently, no scholar has found a myth with that unnatural example of a birth at the age of 90 – the 16th number on the stone. There is, however, a single myth of that kind – but a widespread one – used both by Jews, Christians and Muslims: Abraham and his wife Sara were not able to get children. Therefore, she made the offer to allow Abraham to get the strong son Ismael with a female slave in order to continue the family. Later God helped Sara to give birth when she was 90 years old to their true son, Isaac – the ancestor of the Jews (The Old Testament. First book of Moses, Chapter 16-25). Abraham had the same unusual family relations as the family of Thor in the late version of the Hrungrir myth. Were elements of this Christian myth borrowed in the Iron Ages and used on the Norse gods of the stanza, Thor and Sif? His true son was Odin according to the fragments of Skjoldungesaga (Upphaff alra frasagna) – which appears to cover Varin’s belief. Odin was according to Skjoldungesaga ancestor of the Ingeldings – just like Isaac was a basic ancestor in the Bible. The name Woden was taboo – it was hanging in the air as the answer to a never asked question. The perfect way to end this masterpiece of riddles without leaving the system – and the perfect explanation of the invocations at the next level too as we will see later.

This does not necessarily imply that Varin’s family were regarded as descendants in the male line of Woden, but it would not be unusual if Vämod had female family relations to the Ingeldings.
Apparent problems

N.Aa. Nielsen was not aware of the answers in the riddle system. Neither was he aware of the borrowed mythical elements from the Bible and a similar confusion of the names of the brothers of Odin in Voluspa. That would have strengthened his defence when Grønvik attacked the name problem with Magni/Vilin (Grønvik 1983, p. 127) a few years before Nielsen died. It should have been combined with the related problem: Was Odin the father or the son of Thor? The problem is that we mostly rely on Snorri Sturlasson, though we even in his own works find obvious contradictions regarding the relations between Odin and Thor. In parts of the Edda Odin was the father of all, while he was a descendant of Thor in the prologue of the Prose Edda. Also Adam of Bremen regarded Thor as a shape of Jupiter – father of the Roman gods – based on his place in the earlier temple of Uppsala, just like Saxo thought based on the calendar. A similar problem we find, when the brothers of Odin were called Hōnar and Loður in Voluspa – opposite Ve and Vili in Ynglingesaga. It is a generally known truth in the history of religions that the names may have changed in other times and places. The late reconstruction by Snorri in Iceland in Christian times is worthless when it comes to the belief of Varin 400 years earlier in Götaland – the Norse religion was dynamic and changing from place to place. Earlier we noticed that Varin may have believed a legend like Skjoldungesaga. This saga is telling that Odin was an ancestor of the Danish Ingoldings – but we could also read “Odin, son of Thor”. As earlier mentioned we must realize that we shall not prove any historical truth, but just prove if it was possible for him to believe in the way we are interpreting his text in the most careful way. We need to follow the logical relations in Varin’s own text – only he knew what to believe in Rök around 800 AD.

Reading the three stanzas as a whole it is obvious that they are telling about Sif and Thor and his two sons – a giant son called Vilin being able to crush a giant, and their true son – born by a 90 years old. The consequence is that the true son could be called "broður Vilís" – which to us is a well-known kenning of Odin from Sonatorrek and the Prose Edda. They are at the stone called Ingoldings. This royal line is known from the fragments of the Skjoldungesaga as descendents of Odin – and Odin had the brothers, Vé and Vili, according to Ynglingesaga, which Snorri wrote using the older Skjoldungesaga or rather legends forming the basis of both works. The conclusion must simply be that his belief was like the later known royal legends – a sufficient confirmation of the interpretation of the 90 years, which is not falsified by any other facts.

In the late Viking Ages Odin was the king of the Pantheon and the “father of all”, but many scholars are regarding Odin or a part of him as a late shape among the Scandinavian gods – probably from the 5th century with several characteristics inspired by Attila (Hedeager 2011), the Roman Mercurius and a celtic god with a brimmed hat. He was not necessarily regarded as father of the gods and could not always have been so. He may originally have been “introduced” in the divine family by using mythical elements borrowed from the Christian religion – as the telling about Isac and Ismael. The Vedic Indra was raised in the hierarchy (Dumezil 1962, p. 31) – the royal dynasties may have done the same later with their “ancestor” Odin. The result would be a confusion of relations like Vili/Magni, Odin/Thor, displacement of Sif and the disappearance of the old myth told by Varin. He was not a wargod, but god of the slain – he appointed the heroes. Odin was the god of the Valhall, of poetry and of the secret and magical runes (Hedeager 2011) – all the attributes Varin exelld on the stone.

The only text which cannot be translated is the expression NIT – in a very special encryption just before the last stanza (Figure 9). The letters “n” and “i” are written in old runes as cipher runes while “t” is written as the former kind of cipher runes or is an “é”. The purpose was probably to make the number of signs fit in the lines of the frame as explained in the next chapter, but we do not know if we are expected to use displacement too. There are several possibilities how to read it, but it must in any case be one of the incantation formulas like “alu” which were usual in older runic inscriptions – a question may be if it has to be a word at all. Instead the three letters in encryption may have another purpose – decomposed they were 3 hidden “staves” – a message which we will meet in the next chapter. Like the spoilt line we probably do not need to translate in order to understand the purpose as they are both placed just before important changes in the content of the text – the first marked that we were leaving the memorial text for the encrypted divine myths.
and NIT may prepare us to search for the hidden layer in the last stanza – a hidden invocation – the last level of the text.

6. Kennings and prayers

The reading order of the encrypted frame was marked by the tree-like sign (Figure 10a). It has been agreed that it represents the rune "p" in "sakumukmini þat", but the sign has never been explained. Its elements have a close similarity with the rune “f”. It is tempting to accept that challenge and combine 3 “f”s – shown in different colors – the same technique as the bindrunes. In this way the “tree” may consist of 2x3 “f”-runes – three at each side (Figure 10b). Again “3 staves” hidden as in NIT. That will solve our problem as “p” written in cipher runes is 3,3.

The earlier Gummparp-stone in Blekinge has often been referred to as Herulian – with wulf-names as in Rök. Here “f” was also used 3 times: "Hadiwulf set 3 staves fff" (or 2x3f?). In the later ON Skírnismal repeated runes were a part of a charm: “Purs ríst ek þér ok þría stafi” (“Purs” is the “Þ”-rune connected to Thor), but at that time the meaning of the content may have changed. We are also finding repeated runes in the “ErilaR”-inscriptions from Kragehul and Lindholm and at the stones Gørlev and Sealand 2 – occurrences being also noticed by Michael Schulte. Three repeated runes (staves) were probably incantations related to their symbolic values – here used in sophisticated ways in the decrypted NIT and in the “tree”.

Usually the symbolic value of “f” is regarded to be fehu/richness, but it is not likely that it is the only purpose here. Instead we shall notice that “f” is the first rune of both the old and the new Futhark alphabet. The “f” may in this more international case symbolize the old Futhark-invocation, which is known from many runic inscriptions (i.e. Kylver and Gørlev, where we find both the futhark and three repeated runes). Probably it was an invocation of Odin – the God of the runes. The special “tree” marking the first line of the encrypted frame of the stone may in this case also mark that the frame is containing invocations of both Odin (fff) and of Thor (Þ).

This use of the symbols and the Futhark-invocation will lead us to the next interesting observation, which Hugo Pipping, Sophus Bugge, Magnus Olsen and Sigurd Agrell discussed as magical numbers. They found the numbers 24 and 16 used many times on the stone. The former scholars probably went too far regarding their examples of number magic on this and other stones. They were later opposed, but even their opponents, Anders Bæksted (1952, p. 176 & 246) and von Friesen (1920, p. 13) had to accept that the strange coincidences of regularity in the frame of the Rök Stone appear to be attempted.

Sigurd Agrell (Agrell 1927 p. 210) described how magical numbers were used in the Mithras Cult of the mercenaries and by the classical Greek authors – especially the number 24 which was the number of letters in the Greek alphabet too. Numerology and symbolic numbers became popular again in the Frankish Renaissance, where Alcuin discussed numerology with Charlemagne in letters (Godman 1985, page 20 and 56). Even the famous palace cathedral in Aachen was built by Charlemagne using the numbers 8 and 12 as holy Christian symbols in the architecture. Alcuin made a book with 53 arithmetic tasks, and the Vikings also played with numbers in Grimnismal. Maybe a magical purpose of 24 runes was already used in the two rune lines of the ErilaR-inscription in Lindholm from the 6th century (Schulte 2010 p. 54).
Did the artist behind the Rök Stone try to combine the Norse symbolism of the runes with the old classical play with numbers known from the Francs. That may explain the former scholarly observations of the use of the numbers 24 and 16 – the numbers of runes in the holy old futhark and in the new. Did the rune master work with the f-rune and the number 24 as symbols of the old Futhark-invocation making the entire frame holy – an advanced kind of symbol/kenning? Were “24” and “f” symbols of the futhark, and the futhark and three repeated letters invocations of Odin?

If we look closer at the numbers accepted by von Friesen, he found that all the 8 lines in the encrypted frame consisted of 24 signs. This is correct when we regard the “tree” as 2 signs (3,3) while “di” in line 21 and “ia” in line 25 are regarded as 1 sign each as they are bind-runes. If we just want to reach 5x24 as the total 120 it is also possible to reach that in other ways, but the scholarly accepted way is preferred. In Riddle no. 16 the two lines of 6 big crosses consist of totally 24 legs/signs and 7 usual runes. If the 7 runes are added to the signs in the rest of the stanza we can count 48 signs there or totally 3x24 in Stanza no. 16 – the Odin-stanza. The entire encrypted frame is in this way consisting of 2x24 as Stanza 14, 3x24 as Stanza 15 and 120=3x24 as Stanza 16 – totally 8x24. The statistical probability for a coincidence in that combination – independent of the translation – is less than 0,01% using the standard variance 6,9 of the other lines. It is extremely unlikely that this organization of the signs in the frame is a coincidence – especially as NIT is written in a very unusual way, which makes the number of signs fit in the second group – just like the earlier s in "haruthsuninR". Like the metre, however, the system may have caused some clumsy grammar in the stanzas. These symbols cover all the frame in a complicated structure. We have found too many “coincidences” at the “back” side of the Rök Stone and nothing at the front side – it is extremely unlikely that they are coincidences. The extreme use of the 24 signs – inspired via the Francs by classical use – can only be explained as an invocation calling Odin, who is hidden as a kenning in the 3 big crosses forming a header of the frame (Figure 11 and 12). All the encrypted frame must simply be regarded as a hidden Futhark-invocation consisting of 2x3 f + 3 staves + 8x24 signs. The 16th stanza with Odin is the last stanza consisting of 3x24 signs. The last number in this stanza (90), which is the numerical kenning of Odin beside “broður Vilis”, is also the 16th number – the number of runes in the new Futhark. Of course we shall be skeptical, but the entire encrypted frame appears to be constructed by divine symbols. Sophus Bugge, Sigurd Agrell and von Friesen found the traces, but the scholars did not follow them to the end, which should have been a combination of their theories.

The invocations are physically framing Riddle no. 12 and 13 containing the story of the dead Vämod on the battlefield and the two kennings for the Valkyria and the EinherjaR (Figure 12).

If we look at the provokingly many cardinal numbers inside this frame we find 20, 20, (5, 5, 5, 5 =) 20, 4, 4, 4. Combined they will again give us 3x24 – making a coincidence even more impossible. This will explain the use of a numeric kenning (2x20) for the EinherjaR, the second unnecessary repetition of “4” and the mysterious 4x5” in the matrix with the names of the family – all false tracks in the riddle system, but also a lead from the kennings of Odin in the frame to the kennings of the Valkyria and the Einharjas inside the frame. This complicated part of the message was primarily meant for Odin – not necessarily for the human readers. The true purpose of all the 16 numbers was to use them as kennings, pointers and identification.
In this light the symbolism is rather obvious: The backside of the stone is a hidden prayer to Odin to bring his dead son to his Valhall as an Einherja – the ultimate purpose of life for a young warrior in the Viking Ages. It is a sophisticated combination of Frankish symbolism and the Scandinavian invocations – the last known from many of the old runic inscriptions.

A similar combination of figures has never been identified later. It was probably the product of an international corporation which was never accepted as a Norse religious tradition. However, the basic religious concept is no single example. The scenario is well-known from at least one Gotlandic picture stone from the Viking Ages only 200 kilometers away. On the stone in Tjängvide (Figure 13) – sometimes interpreted “The arrival to Valhall” – we are again inside a frame able to find Valhall, Odin, his horse, the dead hero, the Valkyria and the fighting EinherjaR. Even here we have a tree (Yggdrasil?) where we are able to read “futhorkhn...” in short twigged runes (Brate 1925, p. 37). An inscription around the ship is telling that the stone was erected after the brother Iarulf, who was let down and killed on a voyage. Also Vämod died abroad. Shall we regard the Rök Stone as a parallel to the later stone on Gotland? Two of the most remarkable Swedish stones are in very different techniques expressing the same story and symbols – exactly the same conception of death! Often the futhark at a rune stone is regarded as a key for the reader by the runologists, but why put it at the tree of Valhall at a picture stone?! It must be an incantation at the old inscriptions.

It is nearly impossible that all this relevant symbolism and similarities should be a coincidence – rather is it confirming the advanced way of thinking which had also formed the encryption and the setup of the stone.

7. Context and purpose

The stone is by the runologists dated to 800-830 AD. In the 8th century the Christian Franks expanded into Frisia and Saxony, while the Danes at Dannevirke prepared the defence of the pagan Scandinavia. From 777 AD negotiations with the Danes were mentioned in the imperial annals of Charlemagne. The Danes received refugees from the defeated people. From 804 AD we hear about king Godfred, who had many confrontations with Charlemagne, but Godfred also established Hedeby in 808 AD to take over the Frankish – Scandinavian trade connections. A part of the royal family wanted peaceful relations with the Franks and from 807 AD members of the royal family and their followers were in Frankish exile and became later even Frankish earls along the coast. In 826 AD the Danish king Harald Klak was baptized in Ingelheim by the emperor, and in 829 AD Ansgar arrived to Birka. The Danes had in this way many contacts with the Franks, Frisians and Saxons.

The imperial annals told: After the murder of Godfred in 810 AD his pagan sons went into exile in Sweden while another royal line negotiated peace with the Franks. The sons of Godfred returned a year later and conquered the throne with help from many sides. It is likely that the pagan Varin was one of the supporters – sending his son to death. In 815 the Franks penetrated Jutland in order to support Harald Klak. At that time the Frankish and Danish wars had lasted 4 winters. Many princes were killed and the brothers were reduced to 4.

Vämod was probably killed in 815 and the Rök Stone carved in the following years. No doubt that Varin at that time could find a person from Denmark, Sweden, Saxony or Frisia, who was familiar with the Frankish renaissance (Chapter 2 and Figure 6/7), but still pagan. Probably he worked out the system of the stone together with a skilled rune master. There is no reason to believe that Varin carved the stone himself, but he probably ordered the stone and defined the purpose. Such a corporation may have caused both the historical information
and the unique and mixed style of the stone – so unusual that it never got any impact on the Scandinavian runic style. The international context was characterized by a political uncertainty between Scandinavia and the Franks in those years and the new organization of the trade, but soon after the Franks gave up Scandinavia. Scandinavia became dominated by Vikings and pagans in nearly two centuries instead.

Varin had lost his son – maybe his only son – the word “doomed” may even indicate that his destiny was unknown. The hidden prayer had a desperate character – maybe he wanted Odin to accept his son in Valhall in spite of the way he may have died – maybe Varin dreamed of a repetition of the late birth of Odin. These last three stanzas were probably primarily addressed to Odin as a prayer – but indicated also divine ancestors.

The rest of his work had without doubt the simple purpose to impress – both his people, his allied and his enemies – an important aim behind the size and concept must have been a manifestation of power and entitlement to the throne. It is easy to imagine how Varin enjoyed to guide his visitors through its sophisticated set up – it must have been impressing. Varin did not step back for the Frankish emperor. He erected a pagan Swedish counterpart to the Frankish culture in perfect accordance with its context, when the emperor threatened by attacking the Southern Scandinavia in 815 AD – just like the later Harald Blåtand demonstrated with a rune stone and impressing buildings when the pressure rose again from the southern emperors.

We may wonder why we were so lucky to find all the explanations of the old text, but the tremendous and expensive stone indicates that Varin and his ancestors had the power and importance to make themselves a part of the game, which could end up in the international annals both from the migration ages and the Danish/Frankish wars. Neither shall we forget that the Rökk Stone is placed at the later Swedish road of coronation, Eriksgatan, inside a distance of 15 kilometers from both Alvastra and Bjälbo – main properties of the two later royal families of Sverker and Birger Jarl.

8. Conclusion
The test of the self-answering riddle system was successful – even if we as the invocation just accept Thor, who was mentioned by name. The question and invocation of an unmentionable Odin, however, is making the stone a perfect piece of art.

It is often possible to create a learned construction combining a lot of random details, but it is very unlikely that such a system will end up in a clear structure and a simple message - and it is improbable that this simple message will be a perfect answer to an understandable and usual header of the text as here – especially due to all the details of the stone. If we allow ourselves to change a translation, it will in many inscriptions be possible to construct a translation and an interpretation fitting our personal expectations, but due to the unusual long text of the Rökk Stone no one has ever been close to a clear and complete explanation of all the words of the stone in any of the existing attempts. Furthermore, the basic system is separately and independently presented in the setup of the runes. In reverse it is much easier to describe a simple message with a lot of details in a chosen system as Varin is supposed to have done. The usual scholarly skepticism against complexity in the solution is no argument here as challenges and complexity probably were a deliberate choice – and as it is obvious from the setup and coding that the carvers were able to create that challenge.

The current explanation is complete at many levels though more complicated than usual due to the inspirations from the sophisticated Frankish Renaissance. The complicated encryption has been generally accepted by the scholars for a century and the rest is simply in the same style. Opposite the structure is very clear and simple – based on signs independent of the translation. The interpreted text based strictly on this structure and on the translation by Runverket is meaningful, coherent and has a simple and logical purpose for a memorial stone – a memorial text and a prayer for the dead. All signs are fully explained – even a purpose with the incantation NIT and the spoilt sentence. Structure, special signs, riddles, purpose and context are fitting all over the stone in this explanation, which is recapitulated in Figure 14 below. It is close to be impossible that it should be a coincidence – due to the system with independent structure and self-answering riddles – a perfect “crossword” of the past. This must be the likely way to explain the mysteries of the stone and the riddles of Varin.
**Appendixes and links**

**Literature**

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