

The Rök Stone – Riddles and answers

by Troels Brandt – 1th of December 2015



Figure 1. Front side and rear side

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. The methods of the stone are clearly influenced by the Frankish renaissance initiated by Alcuin of York.

Therefore the interpretation may appear complicated, but in spite of a lot of details they are all fitting together 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 integrated in 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 separated into riddles (statements) 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 Vämö 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 Vämö 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. 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 invocations which made the kennings 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. Therefore European historians and other groups working in a scholarly way may now be able to interpret the text as it has a much wider context than other runestones in which the runologists are the specialists.

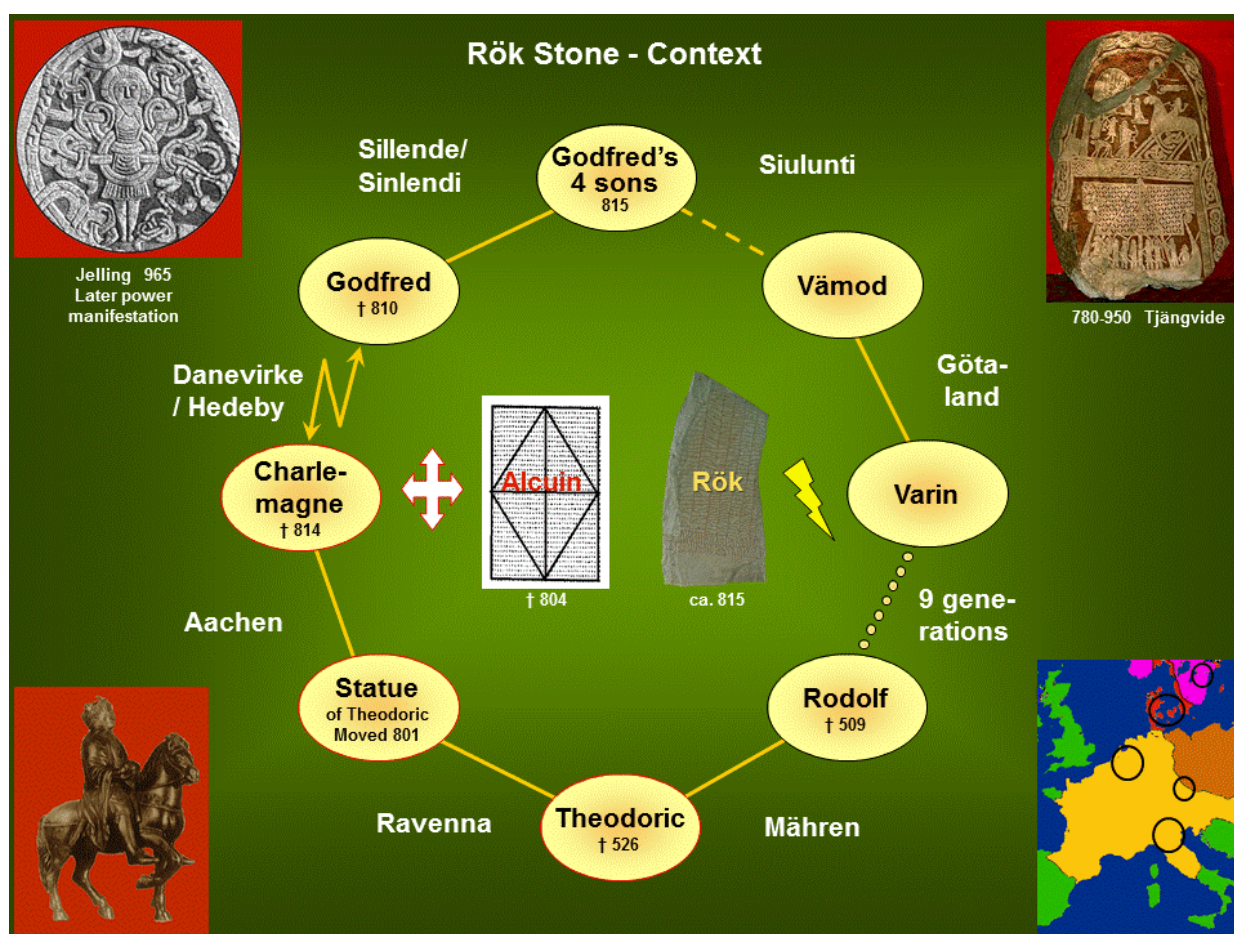


Figure 2. European context of the Rök Stone

1. The stone and the method

Since the Rök Stone was presented as a whole in 1862, it has been a challenge due to its “mysterious” text and its 750 runes - the longest runic inscription from the Viking Ages. 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.

However, the linguists 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 or philosophy. 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. To a certain degree the circular method is accepted because most reading of runic texts is a hermeneutical spiral of analyzing runes, translation and comparing different texts until an interpretation is making sense in a coherent and meaningful way. It is no exact science.

The assumption in this article is that the linguists in the last 150 years have reached the possible level of perfection with the translation – though a few scholars disagree (Ralph 2007). Consequently the purpose here is only 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 also early European history, Norse legends and numeracy. Actually the test may be more certain when translating and interpretation are separated – if all the readable text is explained in a coherent way.

Therefore 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 impressive Nordic example of competition to the “challenges to the mind” of Alcuin’s Frankish Renaissance, when the two cultures expected a confrontation.

When I recognized one of the stories on the stone it became obvious to me that the text was a riddle with an indirect answer in the next stanza. 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. *Vafrudnismal* 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 was a general style 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* (Joseph 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 all the riddles together – a content which has to be in accordance with the text of the introduction 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” 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) – written here in 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 Wesséns “public memory”/“folk tale” for a common known myth (Schulte 2008b) and “doomed”. The other exceptions are the names, which are here written 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 presenting together with Bo Ralph at the symposium “Kult, guld och makt” in 2006 (Brandt 2007 & Ralph 2007c) and listening to the runologists, who opposed his criticism of the current translation at a seminar at the University of Oslo a few month earlier, I decided to await the linguistic discussions regarding Ralph’s partly translation (later opposed in writing by Barnes 2007 & Schulte 2008) and his result. He had chosen the opposite way out of the deadlock, but both versions were based on riddles and an inspiration from the Christian culture. In the meantime I began to study the set-up of the runes on the stone. Seven years later I found answers to my open questions and found confirmation of the interpretation in the structure.

It is not realistic to give an account of the many scholarly discussions in the last 150 years, but like Joseph Harris (Harris 2006) I will refer to two works by Niels Aage Nielsen (1969) and Lars Lönnroth (1977) both referring to the earlier discussions. Of course I will also refer to interpretations I have used – and further to a few later linguistic articles. There is no need to falsify presentations of other translations, as they are all opposed by nearly all other linguists and as the topic here simply is a test of the translation from Runverket. Neither is there any reason to falsify any other scholarly interpretations as none of them are following the structure of the setup and as no scholar has claimed to have found another full solution making sense. This also includes elements of such interpretations as none of them excludes the interpretations of this paper – but of course there are a lot of other proposals of interpretations of the single elements.

I do not intent to discuss linguistic problems as it is not my expertise and as this is a test of the consensus by Runverket, but I will refer to other articles, where Runverket has expressed doubt about specific words.

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 that this “sakum” is 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 – normally his solution has 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 already by Julius Caesar in his letters to the consuls.

Just before the time of the Rök Stone Charlemagne had conquered ao. 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 missionary 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. 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 carver compensated by indicating that “sakumukmini” in front of a shift in the runic alphabet worked like a key, which was used as first word in the next two encrypted stanzas too. When you can read “sakumukmini”, the type of encryption is solved. In Stanza no. 15 in Rök runes he used the displacement method (Caesars 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 (Caesars 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.

It is obvious that he used “sakum” (I tell) combined with “pat” 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 p (Figure 8a)) in order to indicate the reading order to us.

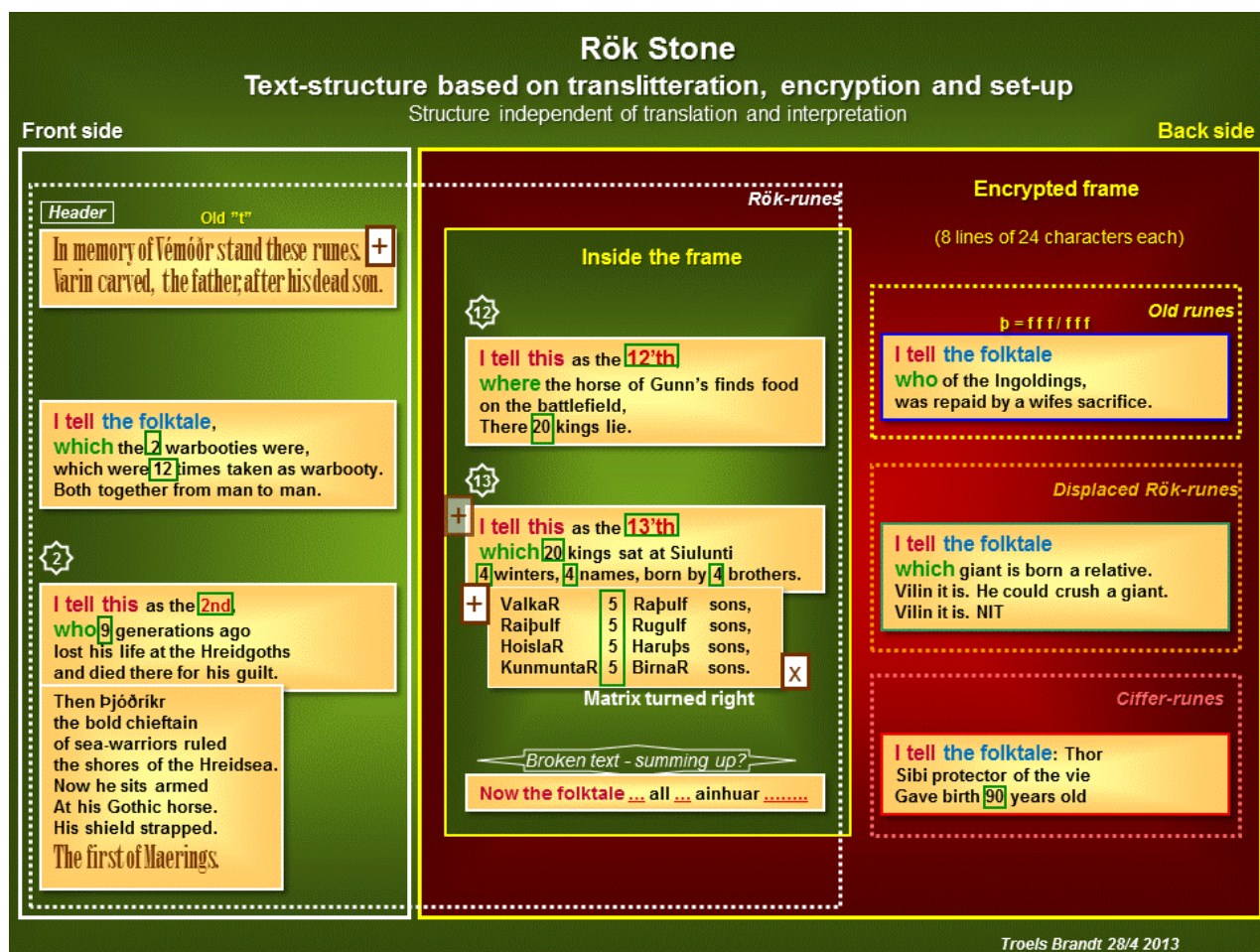


Figure 3. The structure of the translated text based on the setup of the stone

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) introducing the family. At the rear side he placed another readable set in

Rök-runes regarding the dead son – Riddle no. 12-13 including two kennings. Around the last two riddles he placed a frame of encrypted runes being used to hide an invocation of the gods in riddle no. 14-16 pointing at the content in the middle (Figure 3 and 10) – including at the kennings.

Behind the surface the missing riddles 3-11 were also hidden in stanzas out of number – marked with + and x. 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.

We may discuss if these marks have been understood directly or indirectly in our modern time, but at least Sophus Bugge cracked the code and Runverket followed the reading order by analyzing in other ways. 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 accepted the encryption – we must not expect to find woolly poetry and philosophies. We must expect complicated details and hidden messages – but a 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.

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 Vämōd 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). 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 Vämōd. 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" (was his corpse never found?) may have reasons too, which we will return to 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 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. It must be the magic sword of the Gothic kings we are looking for as the answer to the riddle as the sword was even known in the Scandinavian sagas. The connection is legendary and not historical – but that was how it was regarded by the Scandinavians too at that time.

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.*



Figur 4. Charlemagne-statuetten

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 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 Bo Ralph, who argued against the use of Theodoric – but was convincingly opposed by Michael Schulte (Schulte 2008a).

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 Hreidgotic 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 fornyrðislag. 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 maybe 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). In Scandinavian legends about Gorm a clue from the same story about Rodolpho was later used – the story must 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). He lost their strong kingdom in Mähren protected by Theodoric and caused their destiny by disregarding the gods and committing hubris.

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 – 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/Mähren. 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 we feared as pirates along the western coasts of Europe in the 5th century like the later Vikings (Hydatius 450/456 AD (Lakatos 1978)). At the time of the Rök Stone – the Viking Ages – the people of Varin were probably operating as Vikings too. If Varin was a descendant of Hrodolphus he would gladly boast of the hero Theodoric as an earlier superior chief of his people.

The name "*Marika*" is the same as "*Mar-ings*". This name is also identified in the name "*Maringa Burg*" in ON Deor. The name has usually been combined with the Goths, which is sufficient for our purpose, though Maringa Burg (Ravenna) could also refer to the Heruls who were sieged and defeated by Theodoric, when they protected Odoaker in Ravenna in 492-3 AD and fought the famous "Rabenslacht" (Brandt 2015a). An identification of the "*Marika*" as the Heruls from the River March-region (called River Marus by Tacitus in later Mähren/Moravia) will not be used in this article as it is linguistic, controversial and unnecessary.

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 "*Datius... And he was followed by his brother Aordus and two hundred youths of the Eruli ...*". Datius 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 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. The 9 missing riddles are simply these 9 generations from the deceased Hrodolphus to the carver, Varin, or his son – a possibility already mentioned by Ottar Grønvik (1983, p. 119).

It is obvious that if the content has any relation to the "header", the line of generations has to be the family of Varin, who is mentioned in the first unnumbered stanza. As a riddle the second line of the header behind the "+" (*but Varin carved, the father after his doomed son*) can lead us to Riddle no. 12, where we are told about 20 kings lying at the battlefield.

In this connection we have to notice that the header was written in tall letters. The only other text in tall letters is "Skati Mariki" just before we were to jump from Riddle no. 2 to Riddle no. 12 following the plain text. The purpose may be to indicate a continuation in the first stanza which may contain Riddle no. 11.

Riddle no. 11 itself must deal with the doomed son, Vämöð, and the obvious question which every reader will ask as the first: "What happened to him?" Especially the unusual use of the word "faikiAn" (rather doomed than dead) made this sentence a riddle. In that case this riddle can be combined with Riddle no. 12. Varin probably raised the stone because Vämöð was supposed to lie on the battlefield among 20 kings.

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. We are, however, curious about the names of the other ancestors as we know Hrodolphus, Varin and maybe Vämöð. That message the carver has also provided for us.

The "missing" names of the generations - The second layer:

We will now search for help in the rest of the unusual signs showing separation or displacement inside a rune line – remembering that separation marks were unusual at old runic inscriptions. The first remaining "+" sign was placed between two rune lines in the first stanza – unnecessary as a runic separator of stanzas or code – but after that we find the name Varin. The two last signs are found in Riddle no. 13 – a "+" sign and an "x" sign surrounding a separate stanza containing 8 names – written in the old fornyrðislag like the Theodoric-stanza. In that way these "unnecessary" signs "+" and "x" are marking totally 9 names. The 9 generations with Varin as the last name and his "doomed son" as the question of the displaced Riddle 11?

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 interesting as the rune master placed an "s" more behind Haruth than he did in the other lines. In that way 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.

<u>Matrix - Riddle no. 13</u>		
<u>Sons</u> - 5 - <u>Fathers</u>		
	+	
ualkaRfimirapulf_suniR	+	Rađulf's son?
hraiþulfaRfimirukulf_suniR		Valka's son?
hoislaRfimirharupssuniR		Rukulf's son?
kunmuntaRfimbirnaR_suniR		Raiþulf's son?
		Harup's son?
		Hoisl's son?
	x	Björn's son?
* suniR (plural) = son son		Gunmund's son?
	X	

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

We shall not regard the stanza inside the markers as real sentences, but as words in columns to be used to form the hidden riddles – a matrix of the past disguised as a stanza like the other auxiliary stanza. It is in Figure 5 decomposed from 4 lines to 8 riddles as the other helping stanza in fornyrðislag, but the column with “fim” (5) is reserved for a later purpose. A nasty false track, but clearly separated by the special marks.

Probably we have here got the names of the 8 missing generations as the 8 names do not make much sense in other ways. 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?” 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. 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.

That sounds really complicated, but he 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 above – 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, but the second was probably placed at the rear side in order to achieve the best use of the space and to place the numbers “5” inside the frame for later use.

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 to fit a 4x6 matrix. Here 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.

As demonstrated we could leave out the names in Riddle no. 13 as being too much of Alcuin-style by using “Ockhams Razor” – the expression “9 generations” would still be the 9 missing riddles leading directly to Riddle no. 11 about Varin and Vämöð 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 – and in this case the sophisticated Alcuin-style should be preferred.

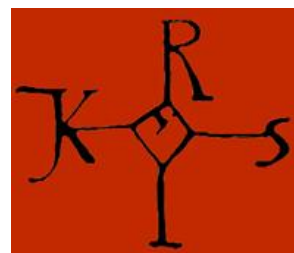


Figure 6. Even Charlemagne himself used acrostics in his signature Karolus.

ALCUIN
DE SANCTA CRUCE

GRVXDECVSSEMYNDIIESSYDESANGVINESANGITA
REXDEUSEXCRUCEDONAVITCAELSESTETIBVNAI
VICTORTOLLENDONLARESHATVICTETPROTEIN
XISTDEONSTRACRVCIGRADEISENHOSTIAFIZIA
PASTOROVESMORIENSDExtraSANTEREDENIT
INCLYTASACTA SALTSLIGNIVENERABILISONIE
ABROUEHODOTRANITPRAEDACARALILIGAMN
VINCITVENKINNOREXSVNVEBOLVERATEITPEE
EXTRADENDOCHVICIVITAMDEORDETERRIVMPHA
REGIASANGTAPATCTMNDISEICHOSTEPEREMPTIO
AMPLIUSACTOTOLAVANDADVIDIOSEPTATEVIT
SIGNAGERENDARONISKANCERBATTONNIASENBU
ALTIYSVTVIDEANTQVOISOLVITPASSIOANCTA
LYCTIBVSARTERNISVVMOVEATEMPOREVICIYM
VTPRESOSPAGISSANACTABHOSITETITSTIC
SITINVCROSTHABALVEEIGELVVEVHYIOSENIN
PASYSINARCECRVCISIGNESSEVEERETERROIR
AFFICIENSHOMINESTRVCENEQVEELVCEPIDIEI
RECTORINORDETIVISSANAVITSACELASIGILLIS
TEGAVITASALUSTISITATTEMCAITICACODEIT
ETIGENEROSACAKETVOISEMPERCAIMINAPERTIO
SILICEATPLECTROQVIAACLARVSCAMINEDAVIO
INSISTENDOPROBATPREFIGIOSANCTACOTVRNIO
HOBISTESTIFICAREDCRESSSEINDEPANATVM
QVEMPRINVMINCOEPIVCHRISTISVMSVPERNII
VERASALVSCALAMVMTVLXPIASANCTAQVEDEIN
ALMACRUCIVEXILLACANCTOERTILIASACELIA
TOTATERNENATELLVSEPFERTVITVITERORON
TESTIFICATCRVCISENORANSSVETILIAFARDIT
VISCERAXUNCVARUSCONFORSEVINQVVSAYETIE
ONNIPOTENSFVLGETSITCORDEBEATAFIDESSEIC
RVREUSLIDRVSAGATVETERIVPECTORARETHO
OPTINVSADRECVMMOSFIDVSTILLEREDEMTOR
REDDIDITETRICIDVUSIGNOSVFFERAVITINISIT
BELLIGENYMEVENTNEDEREGNIOKORTATANA
INCLYFACRVVMVDVSEBETTTINISOLVEREVOTIA
SVSCIPESICTALEMRVIGVNDAMGELSACORONA

Figure 7. Alcuin's Santa Cruce. A key to understand the Rök Stone

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 due to the combinations of Theodoric/Radulf and the unique point about the guilt. 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 was so famous around 815 AD for dying because of his guilt at Theodoric 9 generations earlier that it should be emphasized on a runestone in Götaland. 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.

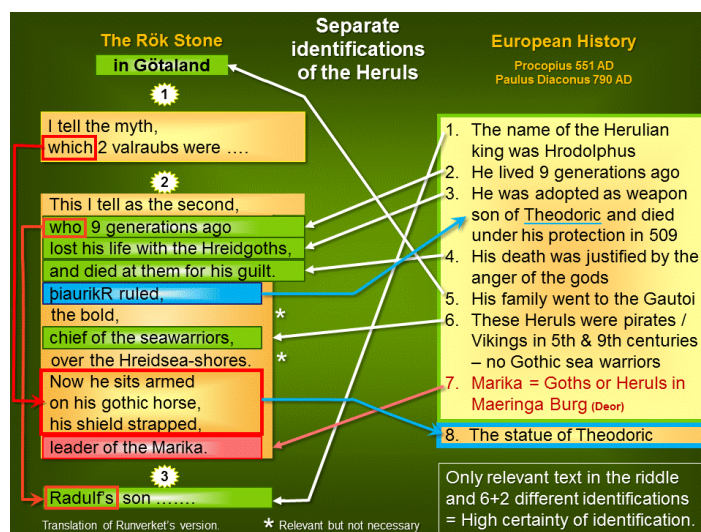


Figure 8. Separate identifications of the Heruls

We have to realize that it is not a matter of truth and certainty regarding events being history at the time of Varin as we only need to be convinced that it is likely or possible that Varin may have believed so.

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 while Hrodolphus died as a king in battle before his South European people in Moravia went to Scandinavia and before Cassiodorus (the source of Jordanes) wrote, the other Rodulf had left his people, the Norwegian Rani, in order to stay at the court of Theodoric at the time of Cassiodorus. 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 – Vämö'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 Vämö 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 Rapulf sons
Hraipulf 5 Rukulf sons* (matrix – see Riddle no. 3-10)
*HoislaR 5 Haruþs sons
KunmuntaR 5 BirnaR sons* x

Now the myth ... all ... ainhuar

As the last line of this section is spoilt, its meaning and function is discussed. The line is normally interpreted "*Now I say the memories completely. Somebody ... after asked*" as a usual closing remark (Lönnroth 1977, p. 50 & Nielsen 1969, p. 37 & Wessén 1952, p. 50-51). Instead it may prepare the change to mukminni and encryption meaning something like "*Now folktales known all by everybody will be asked.*" Under all circumstances it is a part of Riddle no. 13 as the line is not opened with "sakum", but with an "n".

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 do have to follow the riddle system searching in Riddle no. 14 after the next "sakum". Here the only obvious answer is the only group name of the text, "ðgoldiga" – 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 Sibberyð. 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 the last six lines of riddle No. 13 as real sentences – but never with a convincing result. Consequently we considered earlier other possibilities and explained the four lines, which Sophus Bugge regarded as pure nonsense. The +/x indicated displacement and a special function. They showed 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 are used to identify the events when the 20 kings 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 to be 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 as the grammar may support the false track rather than the "database" of identifications which 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).

A possible explanation:

The runologic dating of the stone to 800-830 AD and the name "Siulunti" have usually thrown the suspicion on a battle 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.

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 Vämö 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 bloody wars. Later the purpose of the demonstratively many figures placed in the two riddles will be explained.

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 Vämö died in a battle unknown to us as we are still following the riddle system – but the reader in the 9th century would know.

As mentioned the most obvious reading of “*þgold*” is Ingold or Ingjald/Ingeld (the spellings of the name in the sagas). “*þgoldiga*” must therefore be the Ingeldings. The old Skjoldungesaga exists in different fragments (Friis-Jensen 1984). Upphaf allra frasnagna wrote “*Odin, son of Thor*” while other fragments and the similar Langfedgatal told that the Danish kings were all descendants of Odin. Among these kings Ingeld Frodeson was famous all over Northern Europe in Beowulf, Widsith, 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 descendants of Ingjald and could be called Ingeldings. We may doubt the line of Sigurd Ring, but he was indisputably recorded so and he was probably also a descendant of the Swedish Ingjald Illråde as he was a Swedish king and his mother had its family name Åse. The three royal Danish groups of numerous brothers and their families killing each other 812-15 AD probably all descended from these two kings. Therefore all or some of them could be regarded as Ingeldings, if Varin believed a former legend similar with 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 truth and certainty of 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 likely or at least possible. We have to listen to Varin himself as he is our only witness regarding his 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, “*Siulunti*”, “*20 kings lying at the battlefield*”, “*4 winters*”, “*4 brothers*” and “*JgOldiga*”. It is a rather certain identification of the event though not quite as strong as Hrodolphus.

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 Vämö 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 jgOldiga,
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 "The runes on the Rök Stone" (Nielsen 1969, p. 46-60). He explained Riddle no. 14 and 15 by referring to the Hrungnir Myth (Snorri Sturlason, Prose Edda: "Skaldskaparmál" (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 "gjalda", 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, which he was fully aware of: Varin has demonstratively repeated the answer of Riddle no. 14: "*Vilen 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 (þur) regarding Riddle no. 15, which is confirming the explanation by N.Aa. Nielsen, and also that the system of riddles is followed to the end as supposed. The last stanza is not

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 he returned to “Sif’s husband” (Grønvik 2003). Grønvik’s 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.

Also the third line 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 Hrungrnir myth. Were elements of this Christian myth borrowed in the Iron Ages and used on the Northern gods of the stanza, Thor and Sif? Their true son was Odin according to the fragments of Skjoldungesaga – which appear to have covered 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 was regarded as descendants in the male line of Woden, but it would not be unusual if Vämö 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 Sturlason, 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 a shape of Jupiter – father of the Roman gods – based on his place in the earlier temple of Uppsala, just like Saxo did based on the calendar. A similar problem we find, when the brothers of Odin were called Hönar 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 Skjoldungesaga telling “*Odin, son of Thor*” and that Odin was an ancestor of the Danish Ingeldings. As earlier mentioned we have to 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 he would like to believe.

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. The last must be "*broður Vilis*" – which is a kenning of Odin in Sonatorrek and the Prose Edda. They are at the stone called Ingoldings. This royal line is known from the fragments of the Skjoldungesaga – and the brothers of Odin, Vé and Vili, are known from Ynglingesaga, which Snorri probably 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 in this case, which is not falsified by any facts.

Many scholars are regarding Odin as a late shape among the Scandinavian gods – probably from the 5th century. In some places he may have been “introduced” in the divine family by using mythical elements borrowed from the Christian religion. 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 and the disappearance of an old myth borrowed from Christianity.

The only text which has not been 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 reason for that was probably to make the number of signs fit 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. Like the spoilt line it is probably marking a following change – here that the next stanza is containing an invocation – the last level of the text.

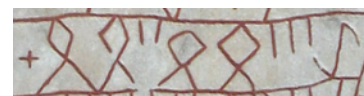


Figure 9. NIT

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 “þ” in “*sakumukmini þar*”, but the sign has never been explained. Its elements have a close similarity with the rune “f”. It is tempting to take up that challenge and combine 3 “f”-s – shown in different colors – like the bind-runes of the stone. In this way the “tree” may consist of 3 “f”-runes at each side (Figure 10b). That will solve our problem as “þ” written in cipher runes is 3,3.



Figure 10a. Special rune

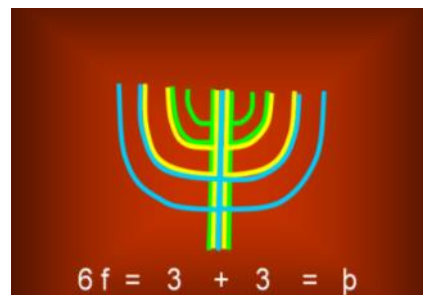


Figure 10b. 2x3 f-runes in different colors

On the earlier Gummarp-stone in Blekinge (often earlier referred to as Herulian – with wulf-names as in Rök) “f” was also used 3 times: “*Haduwulf set 3 staves fff*”. In the later ON Skirnismal the repeated runes were a part of a charm: “*Purs ríst ek þér ok þría stafi*” (“Purs” is the “P”-rune connected to Thor). We are also finding repeated runes in the ErilaR-inscriptions from Kragehul and Lindholm and in ae. Gørlev and Sealand 2. The three repeated runes were probably an incantation or invocation.

We need to notice that “f” – fehu/richness – is the first rune of both the old and the new Futhark alphabet. The “f” may, however, in this case also symbolize the Futhark-invocation of Odin – the God of the runes – which is known from many runic inscriptions (i.e. Kylver and Gørlev) – in Gørlev we find both the futhark and the invocation by three repeated runes, which may be an invocation of Odin. The special sign marking the encrypted frame of the Rök Stone may in that case be an invocation of both Odin (fff) and of Thor (P) – just like the text of the frame.

The use of symbols in the Futhark-invocation as the initiating sign of the frame 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 this and other stones. Sigurd Agrell (Agrell 1927 p. 210) described how numbers were used by the classical Greek authors and in the

Mithras Cult, which was common among the Roman mercenaries. Especially the number 24 was often used as it was the number of letters in the Greek alphabet while 7 was used in the Mithras Cult.

The former scholars went much too far regarding their examples of Scandinavian number magic and were later opposed by Anders Bæksted. But even 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. Here the runic signs were found in groups of 24. Later a magical purpose of 24 has been mentioned regarding ae. the two rune lines of the Lindholm inscription from the 6th century (Schulte 2010 p. 54).

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 also a book with 53 arithmetic tasks. In the runic inscriptions we are only sure of the repeated letters, but the Vikings liked to play with numbers – in Grimnismal (Poetic Edda XXIII) we saw two examples (ae. *"Five hundred doors, and forty more, I think, are in Valhall. Eight hundred Einherjar will at once from each door go when they issue with the wolf to fight"*). An arithmetic challenge or play?

The holy old Futhark of Odin consisted of 24 runes like the Greek alphabet. The new Furthark consisted of 16 runes – also met on the Rök Stone. 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? When we analyze the appearance of 24 and 3xf, it is obvious that this was his way of thinking – influenced probably by the classical sources and by the Frankish Renaissance of Alcuin with numerology and symbolic numbers, which only in a few cases reached the other runic inscriptions in Scandinavia.

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. I do not agree as we shall use the same principles in all lines, which must be the visible signs excl. +. In Riddle no. 14 and 15 I am counting 23, 24, 24, 24 and 25 signs for runes in the rune lines, but they are still making 120 or 5x24. 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. Is 3x24 or “3 staves fff” an invocation of Odin? The entire encrypted frame is in this way consisting of 5x24



Figure 12. The prayer

as Stanza 14-15 and 3x24 as Stanza 16 – totally 8x24. The probability for that combination – independent of the translation – is statistically less than 0,1% 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 first group – just like the earlier s in "haruthssuniR". The system may, however, like the metre, have caused some clumsy grammar in the stanzas. At this stone with all its symbols and a complicated deliberate structure we have too many “coincidences” – it is extremely unlikely that they are coincidences.

All the encrypted frame is simply a hidden Futhark-invocation consisting of 2x3 f + 8x24 – probably calling Odin – the god of the runes – who is hidden as a kenning in the 3x24 signs of Stanza no. 16 as the 3 big crosses as a header of the frame

(Figure 11 and 12). Furthermore the last stanza with Odin is the 16th stanza and the last number inside this stanza 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 – though less would do.



Figure 11. Signs in Riddle 14-16

The invocations are physically framing Riddle no. 12 and 13 containing the story of the dead Vämöð 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 4x"5" 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 in the content 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.

This prayer 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” – inside a frame we are again able to find Valhall, Odin, his horse, the dead hero, the Valkyria and the fighting EinherjaR. Even here we have a tree where we are able to read "futhorkhn..." in short twiggèd 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 Vämöð died abroad. Shall we regard the Rök Stone as a parallel to the 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!

It is nearly impossible that all this relevant symbolism and similarities should be a coincidence – but we do not need to believe it as we have already explained the text.

7. Context and purpose

In this way the rune stone is both a part of the Swedish and the international context. The time appears to be just after 815 AD, when the stone was dated and the historical connections were documented from the Frankish court. Both the content of the interpretation and the cultural impact are in accordance with the connection of that time from the Frankish court to Denmark and Sweden though we do not know which kind of assistance the rune master received. The stone and its style were unique. It was a tremendous and expensive work by one of the most powerful dynasties involved in the international events of the region – which is the reason for our luck to find historical information like the Danish wars, the story of the Herulian guilt and the equestrian statue of Theodoric reflected on the stone.

The hidden prayer had a desperate character due to the father's loss of his son, but the stone had also the simple purpose to impress – both his people, his allied and his enemies – an important aim was without doubt a manifestation of power. 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



Figure 13. The Tjängvide Stone

threatened by attacking the Southern Scandinavia – a few years before Ansgar was sent to Scandinavia in order to try a more peaceful spread of Christianity, which lasted the next 2-300 years.

8. Conclusion

The test of the self-answering riddle system was successful – even if we disregard the identification of Odin and the invocations – which are making the stone a perfect piece of art. Normally the last stanza has only been regarded as an invocation of Thor – ae. by Niels Aage Nielsen (Nielsen 1969 chapter 6).

It may be more or less possible, if we are allowed to change the translation, to construct a translation and an interpretation which are fitting a personal expectation, but due to the long text it has never been possible to reach a complete explanation in any of the many existing attempts.

The current explanation is more complicated than usual due to the imitations of the sophisticated Frankish Renaissance, but the encryption is generally accepted and the rest is 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 except maybe 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. This must be the most likely way to explain the mysteries of the stone and the riddles of Varin.

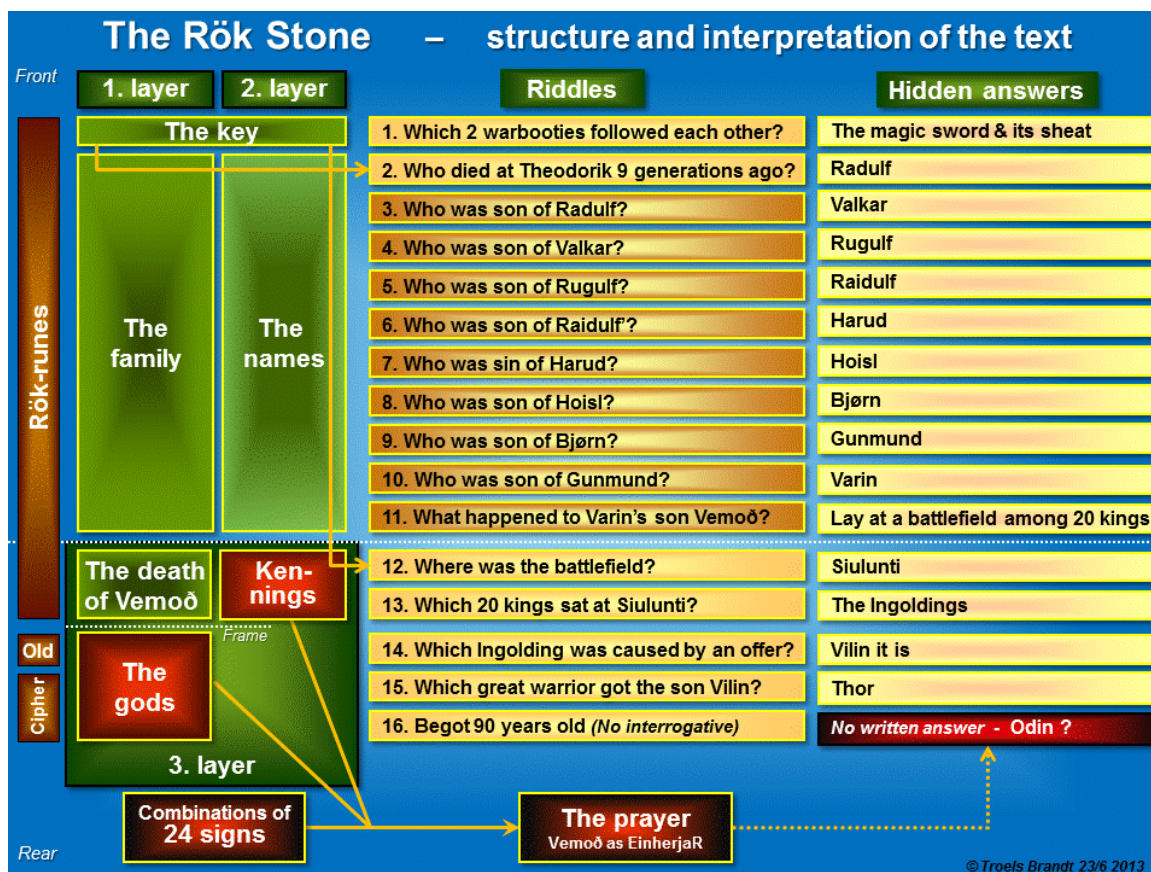


Figure 14 Recapitulation of structure and text

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