

Reading and interpreting runic inscriptions: the theory and method of runology

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Runology concerns fundamentally the analysis of runes as writing symbols, the examination of runic objects and reading of runic inscriptions, particularly new finds, and the interpretation of runic texts. It is a field of study experiencing growth and development. Unfortunately, the field suffers from the lack of a clearly formulated theoretical platform and methodological approach. The research project will concern itself with the formulation of the theoretical and methodological foundation of runic research.

Runic research in its basic form includes the study of objects, and the runologist must work in an inter- or multi-disciplinary way. The theoretical basis for runology is generally accepted text-philological theory, but theoretical elements from supporting object-related and historical disciplines must be systematically and consistently integrated into the theoretical framework. The basic methodology for field of study is also text-philological, employing the procedures of historical linguistics. Due to the importance that other supporting disciplines have, elements from their methods must be integrated into the framework for reading and interpreting inscriptions. In addition, runology disposes over various field techniques that are employed especially in connection with reading and documenting runes.

Several in-depth studies will support the main investigation, notably: (1) inventory of runic forms and the system of transliteration, (2) material, carving techniques and layout, (3) functions of runes, text types and genres, style, (4) chronological considerations and dating problems, (5) authenticity. The main result of the project will be a "Handbook of Runology", to be published on line initially, and in book form thereafter. In addition the project will produce an anthology or individual articles concerning the history of runic research with emphasis on theory and method, and articles concerning the reading and interpretation of important runic inscriptions.

The project is of fundamental importance for the entire field of runology. It has, in addition, great national value in the Nordic countries since it deals with research on an important part of their cultural heritage.