Sivs festskrift

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Primitive tider

Spesialutgave 2023

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Dear Siv,

Throughout the years you have inspired us all immensely, with your books, articles, talks in museums and beyond, and not least the many informal chats. You approach people like you approach the archaeological material, with curiosity and enthusiasm, seeing and supporting us at the different stages in our careers. You generously share your vast knowledge and keen insights. Combining a sharp eye with a kind and inviting attitude, you encourage people around you and make them aware of their strengths. With this book we hope to give something back to you as a token of our appreciation. Here is a collection of articles from researchers and museum staff you have encountered at different times in your career, and a Tabula reflecting your wide international network of colleagues and friends.

When sending out the invitation to a selected group to contribute with a paper to this collection, we made the order both specific and open, simply asking for 'something you would like Siv to read!' The invitation included texts to be peer reviewed, and more popularising, non-reviewed papers. The result is a mix of texts from scholars in various fields, including craft practitioners and designers. The outcome shows that the contributors have taken our request to heart, making this a personal book, with contributions both in English and all the Scandinavian languages on various "Siv-related" topics.

The book testifies to your huge impact, and how your thinking and publications have stimulated research in various fields. You will notice how the contributors have a secondary agenda, reminding you of all the research projects – big and small – and all the discussion and dialogue still ahead of you. We hope you will take these hints as subtle invitations towards further joint efforts and collaborations in the years to come.

The editors, Anja Mansrud, Ingunn Røstad, Unn Pedersen og Kristin Armstrong Oma,
on behalf of all of us

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Innhold

A rune-like carving on a terra sigillata bowl from the early medieval cemetery of Deiningen, Bavaria

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Preface

Siv Kristoffersen and I are linked by more than just our long-standing academic exchange and friendship, and similar areas of research. Curiously, Siv's German ancestors originate from my home village in the border region between Hessia and Lower Saxony, an idyllic little village of c. 900 inhabitants, where I grew up and to which I still feel closely connected. Siv's great-great-great-grandfather emigrated from my small village on the river Weser to Scandinavia in the 18th century as a glassblower. This story has always caused astonishment and laughter among our colleagues. It goes without saying that under these special circumstances, and since I have even been employed at the same museum as Siv, I absolutely have to make a contribution to the current festschrift. Since Siv and I have discussed rune-like carvings together in the past (Kristoffersen 2013:139, 145, 148), and since I know that she spent a period of her life, as a young woman, in Bavaria and remembers it fondly, the topic chosen here seemed ideal to me. I hope, dear Siv, that you enjoy it.

The archaeological context (by Johannes Friedrich Tolksdorf[1])

Excavations in 2020 of the inhumation grave of an adult female, from within a known early medieval cemetery north of the village of Deiningen in the Donau-Ries district, western Bavaria (Swabia), uncovered the inscribed bowl presented in Figure 1. This bowl can be classified as African red slip ware (Hayes 1972), a specific form of terra sigillata that was produced from the 1st to the 7th century AD in what is modern day Tunisia. It can be further categorised as Hayes 99B, a pottery type with an estimated production start of around 530 AD (Cau et al. 2011). The burial itself dates to the second half of the 6th century based on typochronological evidence. While some ARWS circulated as far north as the former provincial centers in Raetia such as Augsburg or Regensburg until the mid-5th century (Heimerl 2014), in the 6th century trade of ARSW seems mainly confined to the Mediterranean area. Within this context, it is feasible that by the time of the burial this bowl was perceived by the local community as a very remarkable object, particularly considering the cross-stamp

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[1] This section of the article, which introduces the archaeological context of the find, was written by the archaeologist in charge, Johann Friedrich Tolksdorf (Bayerisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege, Klosterberg 8, 86672 Thierhaupten, Germany, phone +49 8271 8157-38, Johann.Tolksdorf@blfd.bayern.de). An interdisciplinary study of the burial by a collective of authors is currently in preparation.
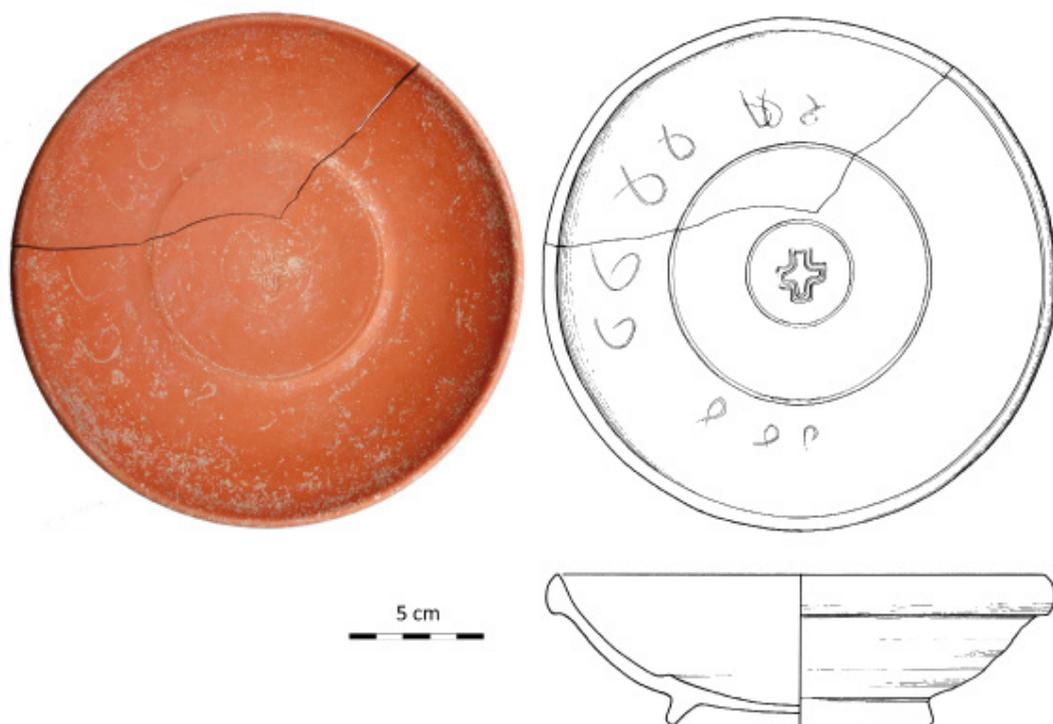
Figure 1. Inscribed terra sigillata bowl from the early medieval cemetery of Deiningen, Bavaria (photo and drawing: Bayerisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege).

on the bottom. The vessel was thus an extraordinary piece of pottery in a 6th century village north of the Alps.

Description of the carvings

Ten characters are carved in sequence on the outer zone (i.e. between the outer concentric groove and the edge) of the vessel's inner surface. These are distributed over slightly more than half of the inside. Even though they are not deeply incised, and are therefore not easy to discern in detail and difficult to document photographically, it can be stated that they are generally similar and can be described as loop-shaped. In spite of this similarity, the characters can be divided into four groups, based on their placement, size and design.

As an examination by the restorer, Beate Herbold, has shown, the signs were executed with an instrument whose tip must resemble a quill pen with a sloping edge. The left side of the loops or bows is regularly thinner than the right. The broader leg to the left interrupts the thin leg to the right, resulting in a writing direction from the lower right over the bow to the lower left. This suggests a right-to-left writing direction of the entire row, although this conclusion is by no means compelling. In any case, the characters are described below from right to left.

The carved signs 1–3 (group I) are approx. 1 cm high and 0.5 cm wide (the following measurements and observations on the execution are also based on Mrs Herbold's investigations). They are located close to the outer circular groove. While characters 2 and 3 have two crossing legs, character 1 seems to be incompletely executed.

Signs 4–5 (group II) are the largest in the series, measuring 1.5 cm and 2 cm respectively in height and about 1.5 cm in width. Here, too, the legs do not cross, so that the carvings resemble a number 9. Signs 6–7 (group III) are the most evenly shaped loops in the sequence. At 1.5 cm and 2 cm respectively, they are as tall as characters 4 and 5, but are only about 1 cm wide and appear smaller than the neighbouring pair because of their almost axisymmetrical design. Characters 8–10 (group IV) also represent more or less clearly executed loops. Characters 8 and 9, however, overlap, which suggests a certain carelessness or lack of practice on the part of the carver. They are about 1.5 cm high and less than 1 cm wide.

Even though the signs vary in size, shape and thoroughness and are partly incomplete or difficult to document, it seems clear that they are to be understood as a series of four groups of a loop sign ↑ repeated 10 times in total. The incised signs, which were added later, probably in the find region, possibly by the buried herself, placed in a row, divided into four units, immediately give the impression that they were intended as a kind of writing. One question immediately arose during the analysis of the carvings: Could this be a runic inscription? The following aspects must be considered when assessing this question.

South Germanic runic tradition

Merovingian Period runic inscriptions from southern Germany are anything but unusual. They are counted among the so-called South Germanic runic inscriptions and are based on the Older Fuþark, i.e. the older, 24-character runic system that was in use on the continent, in England and especially in Scandinavia from the 2nd century to ca. AD 750. A total of about 460 inscriptions in the Older Futhark is known today, of which more than a quarter belongs to the South Germanic material (edition: Düwel et al. 2020).

The somewhat vague term South Germanic (*Südgermanisch*) is understood today primarily as a designation of a specific find area (ibid. LIX-LXII). The South Germanic inscriptions, which linguistically predominantly represent a preform of Old High German (and thus, irritatingly, belong to the West Germanic language family), are distinguished from the find areas in Scandinavia (linguistically North Germanic), Eastern and East Central Europe (linguistically East Germanic or Gothic) as well as Friesland and England (linguistically West Germanic or North Sea Germanic).

The vast majority of South Germanic rune finds comes from necropolises in the Alamannic (but also Frankish, Bavarian and Thuringian) settlement area, with the headwaters of the Danube, the area around Munich and Bavarian Swabia (*Bayerisch-Schwaben*) as particular focal points. Runic inscriptions from Saxon settlement areas are also counted among the South Germanic material, although linguistically they represent a preform of Old Saxon. This group consists of only a handful of inscriptions from present-day Lower Saxony, most of which belong to an earlier time horizon than other South Germanic rune finds. The corpus of South Germanic runic inscriptions, as compiled in the new edition of the material, comprises a total of 140 objects, the vast majority of which date to the 6th century, mainly to its second half (Düwel et al. 2020:LII-LVIII, 882). Less than ten of these are later, and belong to the 7th century. Another group, also of less than ten inscriptions (including the Saxon ones) dates earlier than 500 or to the beginning of the 6th century.

Of the 140 objects included in the current edition, more than 90 come from female graves, predominantly from large Alamannic cemeteries (*Reihengräberfelder*). About 60 of these objects are fibulae (ibid. 880-881). The remaining inscriptions from female burials are found on a wide variety of objects, often belonging to the woman's belt and belt pendants or belt pouch (*Gürtelgehänge*), e.g. amber and ivory pendants,

amulet capsules, spoons, belt fittings, etc. The graves in question are usually well equipped and can be categorised as upper middle or upper classes (Düwel 2008). In a few cases, the grave goods are from male burials, and then mainly parts of the armament – including sword blades, scabbard fittings and one spearhead.

The South Germanic runic inscriptions (in which, by the way, both left-to-right and right-to-left texts occur, as is generally the case in the Older Fuþark) are usually very short and lack syntax; it is not uncommon for them to be one-word inscriptions. Most of them are personal names, whereby it usually remains unclear whether the persons mentioned represent the owner, the carver, the manufacturer or the donor (Nedoma 2011; 2004; Düwel et al. 2020:CXI-CXXVI). In any case, the mention of women's names slightly predominates. In three cases the carver is undoubtedly named, and in two of these cases they are women – *Blīþgu(n)þ wrait rūnā* 'Bliþgunþ wrote the runes' on a wooden staff from Donaueschingen-Neudingen in the Schwarzwald-Baar district, Baden-Württemberg (SG-85, ± 535-560) and *Aodli(n)þ wrait rūnā* 'Aodlinþ wrote the runes' on the ivory mounting of a bronze ornamental disc from Pforzen in the district of Ostallgäu, Bavaria (SG-98, ± 585-610). The overall facts suggest that women had a strong influence on the South Germanic runic tradition and may even have been the main protagonists of this runic literacy (Düwel 1989; 2002).

The find from Deiningen thus originates from an almost archetypical context for Southern Germanic rune finds – a richly furnished female grave from the 2nd half of the 6th century in an Alamannic *Reihengräberfeld* in southern Germany. The inscribed object itself, however, is less usual. In the South Germanic context, only two (Saxon) pottery vessels with rune-like characters or rune imitations are known, the bowl from Achim-Bierden in the district of Verden (Oehrl and Precht 2018) and the urn from Wanna in the district of Cuxhaven (Pieper 1991; Oehrl 2020: CLXX) (both Lower Saxony, c. AD 400). Readable and interpretable runic inscriptions,

stamped or carved, are found on Anglo-Saxon pottery vessels, namely on the urns from Spong Hill in Norfolk, England (5th century; Pieper 1986; 1987) and Loveden Hill in Lincolnshire, England (c. AD 500; Myres 1977:358 no. 1437 with fig. 369; Nedoma 2016). For the north, the jar sherd from Dragby in Uppland, Sweden, from the late Roman period and the Iron Age beaker from Tovrup in Jutland can be mentioned (Åhlén 1993a-b; Schönbeck 1994; Stoklund 1998:60; Imer and Søvsø 2022); the characters on the first century AD pottery sherd from Osterrönfeld in the district of Rendsburg-Eckernförde, Schleswig-Holstein, remain uncertain, as they may represent either runes or Latin letters (Dietz et al. 1996). In any case, while pottery inscriptions in the Older Fuþark are by no means unknown, they are few in number.

The shape of the character

The loop sign carved on the Deiningen bowl does indeed correspond exactly to a rounded variant of the *o*-rune ᛟ in the Older Fuþark, which, although less frequent, occurs over the entire period of early runic tradition and, with the exception of the Anglo-Frisian region, in all the main areas of distribution (Odenstedt 1990:123-125). In the Scandinavian material, from the 2nd century to about AD 750, the character ᛟ occurs at least 38 times, the loop variant ᛜ at least 26 times. In the East Germanic (Gothic) corpus, which comprises only about 10 inscriptions (Nedoma 2010), ᛜ is used at least once, on the inlaid spearhead of Mos on Gotland, Sweden (OG-4, AD 200-250), and perhaps also in the inscription on the belt buckle of Sukhodil/Shydlivtsy, Ternopil oblast, Ukraine (5th century), although this is probably more an imitation of runes (Levada and Looijenga 2019). For the South Germanic material, the finger ring from Mainz-Kastel, Wiesbaden, Hessia which bears an imitation of a runic inscription should be mentioned (SG-73, 5th century), as well as the iron ring of a belt pendant from a female grave in the *Reihengräberfeld* at Merdingen in the district of Breisgau-Hochschwarzwald, Baden-Würt-

temberg (SG-78, ± 670–695), on which a single character ᚯ is placed as a copper inlay. Below, I will introduce the Saxon urn from Wehden in the district of Cuxhaven, Lower Saxony, on which the loop sign ᚯ is also stamped in a symbolic or ornamental manner, without any other runic signs.

At least in passing, it must be mentioned that there are also objects with Latin inscriptions and imitations of Latin inscriptions (Oehrl 2020:CLXVI-CLXVIII) from the Merovingian Period *Reihengräberfelder* sites. Runic and Latin inscriptions are found on the same types of objects (i.e. brooches, strap fittings, spoons, weapons), sometimes they originate from the same site, in at least one case, the disc brooch from Chéhéry in the Département Ardennes, France (SG-21, ± 585-610), they are even found on the same object (Düwel 1994). Sometimes it can only be stated that a carving is script-like, remaining unclear whether runes or Latin letters were the inspiration. In any case, the loop sign ᚯ does not appear in the Latin context and has no parallels in the Latin alphabet of the Early Middle Ages. The influence of Latin epigraphy on the Deiningen carvings thus seems unlikely to me.

Imitation of writing

It goes without saying that a sequence of ten *o*-runes cannot constitute a linguistically meaningful message. But for what purpose should a Merovingian Period rune carver apply such a completely meaningless sequence of characters to a pottery vessel? What seems strange to a modern understanding of writing is by no means a rarity in the Early Middle Ages, and the fact that no plausible interpretation can be wrested from a runic inscription in the Older Futhark despite ongoing efforts on the part of linguists is more the rule than the exception. (1) Non-lexical runic inscriptions ("nonsense inscriptions"), (2) rune-like inscriptions ("pseudo-inscriptions") and (3) the use of rune-like or other signs within runic inscriptions

("quasi characters", *paraschriftliche Zeichen*) are very common in the Older Futhark period, and particularly in the South Germanic material (Graf 2010; Oehrl 2020).

(1) Frequently, sequences of clearly identifiable runic characters occur which, however, can hardly be ascribed any linguistic meaning. Either linguistic research has not yet found a way to decipher the message, or the inscription was never intended as an intelligible message. A good example from the South Germanic corpus is the sequence **aebi** on the disc brooch from Schwangau in the district of Ostallgäu, Bavaria (SG-108, ± 560-585), which is absolutely perfectly discernible but obviously meaningless in linguistic terms. To give another example, the back of a disc brooch from Tauberbischofs-heim-Dittigheim in the Main-Tauber district, Baden-Württemberg (SG-24, ± 585-610), bears two characters in one place which could be read runically as **gu**, on the opposite edge another line begins with two unclear characters, perhaps **ou**, followed by the runic sequence **bamaan**, which can be read without any problems but here too no linguistic interpretation is possible. In other cases, runic sequences even consist of pure vowel or pure consonant sequences, so that it can only be a matter either of a form of cryptization (consequent omission of consonants or vowels) or of non-lexical, intentionally meaningless inscriptions. Examples of such strange-seeming vowel sequences can be found above all on the Nordic gold bracteates from the period AD 450-550 (IK 70 with **iiaeiau**, IK 148 with **aiiu**, IK 339 with **euiui** and **auuuuae**, and perhaps IK 58 with **aaeeuaaauiiuu**; see Düwel 1988:108 and Heizmann 2001:332).

(2) Furthermore, inscriptions consisting of more or less rune-like characters, which are probably imitations of runic inscriptions, can be observed in the South Germanic tradition. A good example are the script-like "scribbles" on the spatha scabbard mount from Bopfingen in the district Ostalbkreis, Baden-Württemberg (SG-15, ± 535-560), which include some characters that

correspond to the simplest runic forms of the Older Fuþark (ᛁ, ᚢ, ᛁ perhaps ᚺ), but otherwise appear quite stunted, clumsily executed and only remotely rune-like. From the earlier time horizon (5th century), the above-mentioned carvings on the urn from the Saxon cemetery near Wanna should be mentioned. The characters are rune-like, and correspond somewhat to certain rune forms of the Older Fuþark, above all ᚠ, ᛁ and perhaps ᛉ). The carvings on the above-mentioned finger ring from Mainz-Kastel probably also belong to this group – these seem to combine runic, Latin and pseudo-writing. In addition to some distantly rune-like characters, the clear runic forms ᛉ, ᚱ and a character ᛕ, strongly reminiscent of the Latin letter K, can be identified.

Such phenomena – non-lexical runic inscriptions and rune-like inscriptions – are an inherent part of runic writing and far from representing a marginal phenomenon. They are often considered as imitations of runic writing. The intention of these "imitations of writing", however, is interpreted differently. Rune-imitating carvings have been compared, for example, with attempts by preschool children to write and have been regarded as the result of imperfect and deficient writing skills. In more recent research, however, the view is gaining ground that these "pseudo-inscriptions" were actually regarded as efficacious media that were more or less equivalent to the readable and interpretable runic inscriptions (Graf 2010; 2011; 2012; Waldispühl 2013, Oehrl 2010; 2020). A concrete linguistic meaning may not have been intended or considered necessary; the decisive factor was rather *that* the object was inscribed. The value of an inscription was not to be understood solely in its representative function as coded storage of language, but as a self-sufficient complex aimed at prestige, magical protection and other effects.

> If already at the time of carving [...] no meaningful inscription (in the modern sense) was intended or if there were arcanising intentions behind the unrecognisability of the signs, this

in no way speaks against the actual function of writing, namely to be writing qua writing: a unique act of speech (invocation and inscription) transformed into permanence or a manifestation of language as an act of speech, a document of a fascination in a society at the beginning of writing (Graf 2010:245).

(3) There are also foreign signs (*Fremdzeichen*) within runic inscriptions, i.e. signs that are associated with runes but do not represent runes themselves ("quasi characters", so-called *paraschriftliche Zeichen*). Their function and meaning is usually completely unclear; they are tentatively interpreted as word separators, markers of the beginning or end of the inscription, maker's marks, line fillers, symbols or ornaments. This group includes – to give two examples from the South Germanic material – the grid pattern at the end of the first line on the belt buckle from Pforzen in the district of Ostallgäu, Bavaria (SG-97, ± 585-610) and the tuning fork-shaped sign at the beginning of the inscription on the spearhead from Wurmlingen in the district of Tuttlingen, Baden-Württemberg (SG-136, ± 560-610).

With its ornamental, symbolic, arcanising and imitative use of writing, as well as its incorporation of foreign characters, the runic tradition displays typical features of young writing cultures, which are also encountered in a similar way in the Roman-Latin and Greek-Byzantine contexts or in manuscripts of the early Middle Ages (Düwel 2011). Writing seems to be multifunctional or multimodal in these still largely illiterate environments. Also worth mentioning here are the considerations that have been made with regard to rune-like "imitations of writing" on gold bracteates. Late antique parallels clearly show that incomprehensible and seemingly meaningless sequences of letters play an important role in Latin and Greek magic inscriptions. An inscription that cannot be interpreted linguistically may well have been designed by a specialist in writing, and its incomprehensibility may have been intended:

"What often appears to modern philologists to be dark, meaningless, incomprehensible or senseless may, in the context of a communication relationship directed at gods and demons, intentionally be incomprehensible to humans in principle" (ibid. 512-513).

In the present case, it seems to me to be of particular importance that among the phenomena of runic "imitation of writing", accumulations and rows of similar runic characters can also be observed, which can be compared with the carvings from Deiningen. As an example, I mention the row of three *d*-runes ᛗ on the bow fibula from Aschheim in the district of Munich, Bavaria (SG-6, ± 560-585), which are joined together in the manner of a ligature (so-called bindrunes) (ᛞᛞᛞ). On another part of the same brooch from Aschheim, a group of two *o*-runes, a *d*-rune and perhaps another *o*-rune (ᛟᛟᛗᛟ) are carved close together, not in a perfect line but arranged irregularly. Ornamental-looking rows or groups of similar signs, corresponding to runes in the older Fuþark, are also found above all on Saxon and Anglo-Saxon funerary pottery, where, however, unlike on the bowl from Deiningen, they are stamped. As one of many Anglo-Saxon examples (Myres 1969:246–247; 1977:66-67; Oehrl 2020:CLXXI), an ornament on the urn from Elkington in Lincolnshire, England (Myres 1969:227 no. 637 with fig. 173) consisting of 19 instances of the character ᛒ (*b*-runes?) standing side by side in a row can be mentioned. Of particular interest for the Saxon material is the 5th century urn from Wehden in Lower Saxony (Düwel 1978:221; older literature in Schnall 1973:93) which, in addition to various other ornaments, such as circle motifs (*Kreisaugen*), foot sole signs, *et cetera*, bears several rows of two or three ᛟ characters placed one above the other. These have been interpreted as *o*-runes in ornamental, perhaps symbolic use. It is obvious that the motifs stamped on the Saxon and Anglo-Saxon grave vessels (besides runes and rune-like motifs also swastika, triskele, animal figures and foot sole signs) do not represent pure decoration but symbols and efficacious signs (*Heilszeichen*).

That the repeated representation of a rune was intended to potentiate its effectiveness and (protective?) power is suspected in the case of the tripled *t*-rune ↑ (= ᛏ) on the gold bracteate from Køge area, Zealand, Denmark (IK 98), as well as on the stone slab from Kylver, Gotland, Sweden (KJ 1) (Hauck 1998:499-500; Heizmann 1998:530-533; Düwel 2001:523; 2005:34). Groups and ornamental arrangements of *t*-rune-like signs are also common in the South Germanic area.

Phenomena such as runic sequences that cannot be interpreted linguistically, rune-like imitations of writing and strings of similar signs, are in any case characteristic in the Older Fuþark context and the South Germanic runic tradition, so that the strange sequence of ten ᛟ characters on the terra sigillata bowl from Deiningen, divided into four units, is not at all an unusual finding.

The special significance of the *o*-rune

Why did the carver of Deiningen choose the *o*-rune of all things and repeat it ten times? This question cannot be answered with certainty, but I would like to conclude by pointing out that the *o*-rune seems to have had a special meaning and significance within the runic tradition. There are indications that this sign was associated with certain symbolic contents over a long period of time (Oehrl 2020: CLV-CLVII).

Basically, unlike in the Latin alphabet, each runic character has a phonetic value and also a name and thus a conceptual value. The phonetic value of the rune corresponds to the first sound of its name (acrophonic principle, as in the Phoenician and Greek alphabets). For example, the rune ᛗ stands for the phonetic value /m/, but can also, as a so-called conceptual rune (*Begriffsrune*), represent the concept *mannaz 'man'. The *o*-rune ᛟ or ᛟ has the name and conceptual value *ōþala 'inherited possession'. The rune names have

survived at the earliest in English and continental manuscripts of the 9th and 10th centuries (*runica manuscripta*), i.e. relatively late and in a foreign medium, but they are nevertheless likely to be of great age and probably date back to the time when runic writing originated.

Concrete evidence of the use of runes as conceptual runes, however, is only rarely found (Düwel 1974). For example, on the rune stone from Stentoften (KJ 96) in Blekinge, Sweden (6th/7th century), the *j*-rune ᛃ appears at the end of the line, in a syntactic context of a sentence: *Haþuwolafʀ gaf j* = 'Haduwolf gave j'. The sentence makes sense if one includes the *j*-rune with its conceptual value **jǣra* '[good] year' which results in 'Haduwolf gave [a good] year' i.e. he gave a good harvest. In this way, researchers have also tried to understand the possible symbolic content of some individually occurring runic characters. A good example are the two fittings of a sword hilt (c. AD 200-250) from the war booty sacrificial site of Thorsberg in Süderbrarup, Schleswig-Holstein, a site from which a number of objects with runic inscriptions originate (Matešić 2015a-b). The ᛟ character can be seen on the two fittings, executed in an elaborate engraving technique (*Tremolierstich*) (RäF 98; KJ 20; Raddatz 1987:cat. 47c, pl. 7,1-3. 76,2. 5; Düwel 1981:137-138; Grünzweig 2004:51 fn. 2; Matešić 2015a:24, fig. 149-152; 2015b:91-92, fig. 1-2). It could be intended here as a conceptual rune and thus denote the sword as an heirloom (**ōþala* 'inhereted possession'). Such a meaning and function could also underlie the ᛟ character on the urn from Wehden and the inlaid iron ring from Merdingen, as well as a group of other South Germanic objects on which variants of the *o*-rune can be seen as single carvings (in particular SG-66, SG-116, SG-109). In this context, the 4th century gravestone from Strasbourg commemorating the Roman officer Lepontius, a member of the Upper Rhine border troops consisting of Germanic mercenaries, or federates, is also of interest. On the stone, the soldier can be seen holding a standard, upon which sits the figure of a cock. On the shaft

of this signum an ᛟ character can clearly be seen (Koepp/Drexel 1924:34 plate IX,2; Fuchs 1997:114, fig. 105).

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the 4th century Gothic bishop Wulfila, when creating the Gothic alphabet, adopted the loop-shaped *o*-rune ᛟ for representing the phoneme /o/ (Wimmer 1887; Arntz 1944:118; Gutenbrunner 1950:500-502; Krause 1968:§46-48; Marchand 1970:106, 108; Düwel 1997:809; Braune/Heidermanns 2004:23-24). Wulfila's Gothic alphabet was based primarily on the Greek alphabet and used to translate the New Testament into the Gothic language. Some characters, however, are borrowed from the Latin alphabet and, as in the case of ᛟ, from the Older Fuþark, which was still in use in this period among the East Germanic (Gothic) tribes. In the Gothic alphabet, as in the Older Fuþark, the ᛟ character has the phonetic value /o/ and also a conceptual value *utal* (**ōþal*) 'inherited possession'. The special role and longevity of the *o*-rune as a meaningful sign is also indicated by its use in the Anglo-Saxon *Nowell Codex* (which also contains the *Beowulf* epic), written around AD 1000. In this manuscript, the rune ᛟ is used as a substitute for the term *eþel* 'homeland'.

An unusual wooden pendant recovered in the Viking Age trading centre of Hedeby (Schleswig-Holstein) dates from the 9th/10th century. It has characteristics of the Viking Age Borre style and shows in the diamond-shaped centre a symbol ᛟ with small hooks on the feet (Westphal 2006:86, 101, pl. 1000,2). Since the pendant is probably to be regarded as an amulet, a protective function of the sign is quite obvious here.

Where a Christian context is present, and this is possible in the case of Deiningen due to the central sign of the cross on the bottom of the bowl, the signs ᛟ and ᛟ could also be understood as a form of Ω deliberately executed in runic style (Schwab 1998:395-397). On the Nordic gold bracteates of the period AD 450-550, ᚠ and ᛟ (the first and the last rune in the Older Fuþark) appear

analogous to A and Ω in the Christian tradition (IK 101, see Düwel and Nowak 2011:461; von Padberg 2011:617). In the Christian context, one could also think of a simple variant of the well-known Christian fish symbol, executed in runic style. Another Christian monument from the South Germanic distribution area for which corresponding interpretations are possible is the grave monument at Kaiseraugst in the canton of Aargau, Switzerland (SG-59), which probably dates to the 7th century. Two gravestones mark the head and foot end of a burial without grave goods, one is decorated with a Christian sign of the cross, the other with the sign ᛉ. A special efficacy and power seem to have been attributed also to the rune ᛗ and related signs, which are also encountered in sequences (as on the above-mentioned brooch from Aschhein and elsewhere; see Oehrl 2020, CLVIII-CLIX, CLXXIII), in accumulations or as symbolic single signs and can imply Christian ideas due to their cross shape (Schwab 1998:396-399; Graf 2010:51).

Conclusion

The carvings on the terra sigillata bowl from Deiningen do not represent a runic inscription in the strict sense. They could be regarded as a form of imitation of writing, whereby the runic tradition was the model, not the Latin alphabet. A loop sign identical to the *o*-rune was repeated ten times in four units, which seems to imitate a division into words. The stringing together of the supposed *o*-runes may have faked writing and pretended writing competence, it may have marked ownership, increased the symbolic power of the sign or functioned purely as an ornament. However, the carver may have had intentions that go far beyond our modern understanding of writing and perhaps aimed at a magical mode of action or communication with non-human addressees.

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KJ + Nr. = Krause and Jankuhn 1966
OG + Nr. = Nedoma 2010
RäF + Nr. = Krause 1937
SG + Nr. = Düwel et al. 2020