

Here is one more article about Goddess Runes. I am submitting it for your purview because of a phone call I received in November, 1996. The owner and publisher of a large "new age" magazine, based in one of our biggest southern cities, called to tell me he would soon be carrying an article about my book "FUTURE MEMORY." When I inquired as to when he would do one on "GODDESS RUNES," he flatly stated, "Never." "Why?" I countered. "Because the premise of the book is false. The elder Futhark are the oldest known runes and they were created by the Norse, and this is well-documented, and any other notion is wrong-headed." "Do you mean to tell me," I said, "that you consider all the archaeological evidence that clearly establishes that runes are at least 20,000 years old and come from Cro-Magnon peoples false?" Practically yelling, he retorted, "Yes, only Futhark is genuine, and it's Norse."

I would pass off the narrow-mindedness of this so called "New Ager" as one man's bias, except for the fact that many metaphysical bookstores across the United States are either refusing to carry "GODDESS RUNES" or are ignoring it - and for the same reason as this magazine publisher. Apparently, the "alternative" and "spiritual" community of today is becoming locked into a strange kind of dogma that ignores whatever research findings it does not want to consider or that might interfere with best-selling books. I have recognized this "across-the-board," even with near-death research, and it concerns me.

How are we going to advance in our thinking if we are not willing to consider different viewpoints? How can we be on the spiritual path if we ignore manifestations of spirit? How can we call ourselves metaphysicians or mystics or shamans or those who have chosen a more holistic, healthy lifestyle. . . if we condemn outright what careful research and/or science reveals?

What follows is an article adapted from my book "GODDESS RUNES," that covers some of the varied histories of runic hieroglyphs. I offer it as a teaser to our magnificent past.

GODDESS RUNES - WHAT HISTORY TELLS US

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Once upon a time, actually about twenty thousand to twenty-three thousand years ago, our forebears, the Cro-Magnon people, were an intelligent lot, sleek of body and immensely creative. Having invented the needle, they wore tailored clothes complete with decorated tunics and leggings, parkas, collared shirts with cuffed sleeves, and boots and moccasins. They built most of their dwellings facing south to take advantage of solar heat, fashioned ingenious cobblestone floors that were sturdy and dry, preserved food year-round in cold caves, ate diets so healthy we moderns would be wise to emulate them, crafted clever tools (such as a sewing needle complete with hole for thread), separated living spaces for greater efficiency, and eventually took to the water in boats for better fishing.

Their cave art entralls anyone lucky enough to see it, especially the recently discovered paintings in caves near Combe d'Arc, about 260 miles south of Paris. These stunning rock galleries depict half-human/half-animal figures and extinct European cousins of African beasts, lending even more credibility to the theory that a land bridge must have connected the continents, and that the entire world's population might have

indeed descended from one group of pioneers who started out from Africa.

Most archaeologists now credit our Cro-Magnon forebears with bringing forth the first script like unto hieroglyphs that seemed to convey sacred and spiritual truths. In his landmark text "ALLMUTTER," German professor Herman Wirth painstakingly documented the emergence of runic symbols about twenty thousand years ago. More recently, Lithuanian-born archaeologist Marija Gimbutas has produced a scholarly rendering of the goddess-worshipping, matriarchal, prehistoric societies that among other things created a written "alphabet of the metaphysical" that today we recognize as runes.

In an interview, she explained that most scholars don't understand how important religion was in the prehistory of Europe, how religion was life and life was religion. She posits that the sacred scripts of rune signs were feeling-oriented and in wide use from at least 17,000 B.C. As Gimbutas states in her masterpiece, "THE CIVILIZATION OF THE GODDESS: THE WORLD OF OLD EUROPE:"

"Although the Sumerians are generally thought to be the inventors of written language, a script in east-central Europe appeared some two thousand years earlier than any other that has yet been found. Unlike Sumerian script, the writing of the Old Europeans was not devised for economic, legal, or administrative purposes. It was developed, instead, from a long use of graphic symbolic signs found only within the context of an increasingly sophisticated worship of the Goddess. Inscriptions appear on religious items only, indicating that these signs were intended to be read as sacred hieroglyphs."

To appreciate Gimbutas's claims and how work such as hers impacts on our understanding of runes, join me on a brief excursion through the history of language, alphabets, symbols, and signs. Modern scholars have made the distant past more accessible to us, and infinitely more exciting than what used to pose as "History 101" when we went to high school. Just by focusing in on linguistics, we encounter evidence that suggests we all share common roots.

For example, John Philip Cohane, an Irish etymologist (one who studies historical linguistics), said in his challenging book, "THE KEY:" "On the basis of the evidence, it would seem that a high percentage of the people of the earth today are far more closely related than is generally assumed, and that they are bound together by at least one blood stream." Alessandro Talamonti, an Italian archaeologist now living in Venezuela, elaborates further during an interview held several years ago: "A mother civilization was once basically uniform the world over. All people share the same language, the same religion, and practically the same customs."

Gerhard Herm, author of "THE CELTS," hypothesizes an Ur-language, Ur people, and Ur-homeland ("Ur" meaning "original") in an attempt to explain how Sanskrit, the ancient metaphysical language of India, could be so closely related to the early languages of Old Europe, especially that of Iceland. He posits that Ur-people came across a land bridge and spread across the Baltics, the former Soviet Union, Europe, and Asia, reshaping their language, customs, and culture as they went.

"You have to respect the idea that all the languages were related 25,000 years ago," agrees Winfred P. Lehmann, a retired professor of linguistics and Germanic languages at the University of Texas at Austin. As he points out, "We can learn more about prehistory through language, possibly where civilization actually developed. Words give us a notion of what people were talking about, and thus something about their culture."

Recognizable alphabet characters in specific languages began to emerge about six thousand years ago, interestingly enough at about the same time as a dazzling spectacle in the sky occurred. Astronomers label this phenomenon Supernova Vela X. George Michanowsky, an expert on ancient Mesopotamian astronomy, believes that this bright "star" became an organizing principle that drew people in given areas together in an

attempt to share their awe, and that this one event greatly accelerated the evolution of human consciousness. He notes in his book "THE ONCE AND FUTURE STAR," that virtually all of the world's great myths and religions emphasize this star, and that the star symbol is found on more relics and in more ancient sites than any other design (followed in popularity, I might add, by spirals and chevrons).

All the early alphabets were cleverly crafted to contain "encyclopedias" of layered meaning. That's what makes them so difficult to decipher. In "BEFORE COLUMBUS," renowned historian and linguist Cyrus Herzl Gordon explains that not only were the early alphabet letters interchangeable for sounds, numbers, and signs of the heavens, they were actually a code language of unmistakable coherence.

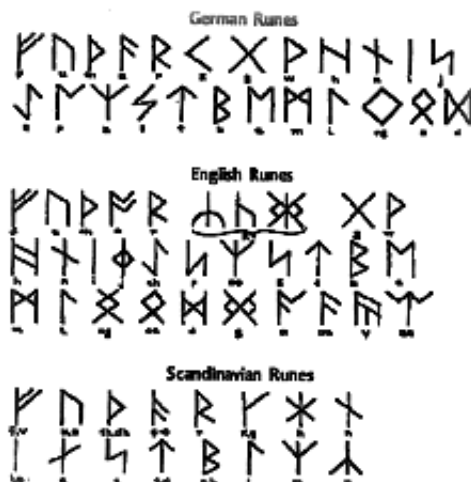
Many historians agree that this code language was tied to a desire for Holy Revelation, since. . . every early language had at its central core the need to communicate a relationship with The Source of All Being. Thus, the names of God revealed the power of God through the forms God takes as the Logos - the sound of The Holy Word.

If truth be known, these early alphabets merely continued an older tradition. . . never representative, the symbol signs were considered to be the thing itself, both magical and sacred. To this day, a primary rule in the practice of "magick" insists that sacred images do not refer, they are.

Runic alphabet characters were eventually used for charms and spells, curses and omens, as if each were a living deity of great importance and possessed of the power to manifest.

"Because in magic a symbol is what it stands for, to write down a wish or a curse in symbols automatically gives effect to what is written. In the same way, runes were engraved on swords to make them irresistible in battle, as in the case of a sword named Marr - 'may Marr spare nobody,'" says Richard Cavendish, an expert on "magick." He notes that writing with a pen did not reach northern Europe until Christian missionaries brought the art with them; runic inscriptions were carved - usually on wood, tomb stones, jewels, standing stones, equipment, and tools of all kinds.

The tumultuous years between 1500 B.C. and 15 B.C., when most of the world's great religions sprang into being (Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Buddhism, Judaism, and later Christianity), comprise the same time frame in which "Futhark," the codified version of runes, is believed to have taken hold. Supposedly named "Futhark" because of the random combination of the first six letters in the alphabet's arrangement, the ancient "written-but-not-spoken" language developed into three major line ages consisting of three runic styles:



Germanic - the first appearance was supposedly around 2,000 B.C., although some historians staunchly

insist that it did not exist until after A.D. 800. Anglo-Saxon or English - most agree it lasted from the fifth century A.D. to the twelfth. Northern or Viking/Scandinavian - the last to appear on the scene, probably in the eighth century and until the twelfth.

The name "rune" is a fairly recent term, and was originally thought to have evolved from the German word *raunen*, which means "to cut or carve." Yet an examination of older German dictionaries long since retired from general use reveals that *raunen* once meant "to whisper secrets" and "Rune" (always capitalized then) was the noun for "secret" (also written "Run" or "Runa").

I find it fascinating that the ancient Hawaiian term for "secret" was "Huna," similar to "Runa," and that both versions of the word shared the same understanding of "secret" as "the mystery of sacred truth." Equally curious to me is that "Fohart" in Sanskrit means "the power to manifest and create words." Since "Fohart" and "Futhark" are nearly alike in pronunciation as well as spelling, I can't help but wonder if the name for the codified runic alphabets was really such a random call after all.

Secular use of the "written-not-spoken" language of runes evolved as the practical uses for written language and literacy became evident. Eventually, Futhark was broadly used to record family genealogies, battles, ownership, and announcements of all types. Stone and wood were the main media of choice, with colors often added for emphasis. Later on, it became commonplace for rune writing to include fanciful works of art that incorporated animal images, snakelike creatures, and *ringerikes* - intricate interweavings of vines and animal tails.

The older runic glyphs and how they are cast may have been influenced to some extent by the Lost Tribes of Israel. Frank C. Tribbe describes tablets dated to 707 B.C. that tell of captive Israelites being taken to the towns of Halah and Habor, near the southern shore of the Caspian Sea in ancient Media, perhaps four hundred miles east and slightly north of the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. One group went northward on the east side of the Black Sea and within a century became known as the Scythians. Another group who went westward and then north came to be called the Cimmerians, a people who later took on the name "Celts." Tribbe quotes Josephus as saying that "in his time (A.D. 37 to 95) the ten northern tribes of Israel were then 'beyond the Black Sea.'"

Scythians/Cimmerians were said to have possessed a ferocious passion. They practiced rune casting and the art of "raising sacral energies." "Sacral energies" refers to "Kundalini," a powerful force said to exist at the base of one's spine which, when fully charged or activated by intention or through ritual, supposedly "rises" up the spine and passes on through the top of the head, energizing and strengthening the individual as it does. (The term "Kundalini" comes from Sanskrit.) The philosophy of these people included an acceptance of life after death, resurrection, reincarnation, and the absolute value of truth and honesty. Archaeological evidence suggest that ritualized human sacrifice was practiced in their societies, along with head-hunting, scalping, and ceremonial sex. As their numbers fanned out across Europe and Asia, they took their beliefs and practices with them, invading one goddess-worshipping, matrilineal community after another and establishing a pantheon of male warrior gods.

The legends of Odin/Wotan descend in part from this divergent mix of cultures in Europe. Accordingly, the Germanic god Odin (warrior, seer, poet, and God of the Hanged) is credited with having rediscovered the runic power of the older sacred scripts (while his Viking counterpart, Wotan, sometimes spelled "Woden," in the same credit). Various versions of both stories are at least consistent in describing the circumstances of what we today would call a near-death experience: As Odin hung transfixed by a spear from the World Tree, the ash Yggdrasil, he is recorded to have said, "I peered down below, took the runes up, shrieking took them."

Regardless of what mythology you read from this later epoch of Celtic/ Germanic/Viking/Anglo-Saxon

history, there is reference after reference given to runes: runes everlasting, runes giving life, runes as magic signs, runes to invoke the gods and spirit keepers. Never does anyone simply say, "I know my alphabet letters." Rather, people tell how versed they are in "rune spells" (the writing or engraving of certain glyphs, perhaps singly or in combination, to meet a need or avoid a crisis). Even when runic letter script was well developed in secular alphabets, there was no divorcing it from a mystical heritage of vast proportions.

Runes always remained first and foremost a magical language of sacred truths and secret deeds. Secular embellishments appear almost as if incidental, an effrontery tolerated to accommodate a need for literacy.

Most of us, when we think of runes, conjure up images of Celtic warriors and their Druid priests or of Viking raiders and their attiba (wizards) and volva (female seers). Since both Celt and Norse societies held the religious aspect of life primary, rituals of every type defined their activities. Each culture worshipped a triune of powerful gods, plus hundreds of minor deities who varied in identity from place to place. These minor deities were representative of important aspects of the main gods and creation stories. Priests and practitioners committed everything to memory then, passing on their store of knowledge through a series of apprenticeships from generation to generation. Sacred law made no allowance for written records of any kind; violators were dealt with harshly.

Starkly different, Celts and Norse did share many common beliefs, such as veneration of great trees, cultivation of special herbs, disciplined personal regimens, the importance of wizardry, various types of sacrifice, and a whole world of wee helpers (e.g. fairies, gnomes, sprites, dwarves, trolls, leprechauns, and so forth). As both cultures modernized, so did their legends, until today we have "THE TALES OF KING ARTHUR" from the Celtic tradition and "THE TALES OF VALHALLA AND THE VALKYRIES" from the Norse tradition.

By the thirteenth century, Christian priests began a campaign to wipe out rune use, as they felt it was too closely aligned with pagan religious magic and therefore sinful. (The word "pagan," by the way, simply means "country dweller" in Latin; the word "magic" comes from Babylonian and Persian traditions of "magno," a reference to "receptivity" - "magnet," "magnetic," and "magi" are derived from the same root word.)

The Catholic Church, as a political maneuver in what came to be called the Inquisition, invented the term "witchcraft" so they could use unfounded accusations to gain absolute control over the masses. Hence, any form of nature worship, fertility rituals, birth control, herbal healing, shamanism, or sorcery was decreed the devil's work and outlawed. For a period of over three hundred years, tens of thousands of people were slaughtered, most of them women. Even in seventeenth-century Iceland, people were still being burned to death for the single "crime" of possessing runes.

As you can see from this brief historical excursion, runes and their usage have had a long and checkered past. What survives today are relics and myths, some describing far gentler times when runes were an integral part of uplifting the soul and gladdening the heart.

Across the eons of time in which runes can be traced, they have come to be typed in two major categories:

1. The Elder Runes - used primarily in free-form casting, Yin in energy, representative of the feminine principle, closely associated with goddess religions and the veneration of home, family, and nature. Cast together as a single unit, they are free of restrictive formats or layouts. Illustrative, they highlight connections within a greater flow of possibility and the interactions of the moment. They always emphasize spiritual themes, inner guidance, and responsive patterning (never secularized). Popularized by P.M.H. Atwater with her books "THE MAGICAL LANGUAGE OF RUNES" and "GODDESS RUNES."

2. The Younger Runes - used primarily as oracles, yang in energy, representative of the masculine principle, closely associated with the great hero-gods of mythology and the right use of power in personal behavior. Although they can be cast, they are usually taken from the pouch one at a time to emphasize a particular aspect or quality, according to specific guidelines governing usages and meaning. Instructive, they highlight individual decisions and opportunities. They always emphasize intuitive truth seeking (although secularized, they retain spiritual components). Popularized by Ralph Blum in his "THE BOOK OF RUNES" and several subsequent titles.

The secret to using the elder runes, what the new book "GODDESS RUNES" is about, is feeling and trust.

Once you capture the feeling within each runic glyph, you reconnect with the true spirit of that imagery and the energy of the moment it seeks to illustrate. Because rune signs are textured with multiple layers of sacred and secular interpretations, you can empower yourself with the confidence it takes to trust the wisdom of your own inner truthsense.

The yin runes of the goddess lay bare the flowing patterns of the heart. "The Way of A Cast" reclaims the power of the feminine.

This article is an adaptation from "GODDESS RUNES" by P.M.H. Atwater and published by Avon Books, New York City, 1996. ("THE MAGICAL LANGUAGE OF RUNES" is out-of-print.)

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