Marco Battaglia*

Runick *Antiquities in the European debate and Renaissance England*

> Nec ignotum uolo Danorum antiquiores conspicuis fortitudinis operibus editis glorie emulatione suffusos Romani stili imitatione non solum rerum a se magnifice gestarum titulos exquisito contextus genere ueluti poetico quodam opere perstrinxisse, uerumetiam maiorum acta patrii sermonis carminibus uulgata *lingue sue literis saxis ac rupibus insculpenda curasse*.
> (Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, Pr. I.iii)

1. *Runes and runologists after the Middle Ages*

Given the importance attained by the occurrence of runes in the Germanic cultures of the High Middle Ages (even after their conversion to Christianity), it is surprising how slowly they regained some importance as an object of interest and, ultimately, of study. However, apart from

a) the several copies of runic sequences within Carolingian or Anglo-Saxon codices under the influence of Hrabanus Maurus' *De Inventione linguarum*[1];
b) the runic section in the Old Icelandic *Third Grammatical Treatise* (14th century); and
c) sparse initiatives in the 14th century, such as the writing of the *Law of Scania* in the Codex Runicus, AM 28.8°,

studies on runic writing betrayed an amateurish character, until the 16th century. We may glean this for instance in the *Polygraphiae libri sex*

* Università degli Studi di Pisa.

[1] Text available in *PL* 112, cols. 1579-1584. Hrabanus discusses alphabets and monograms, and in connection with runes he writes: «Litteras quippe quibus utuntur Marcomanni, quos nos Nordmannos vocamus, infra scriptas habemus: a quibus originem *qui theodiscam loquuntur linguam trahunt*. Cum quibus carmina sua incantationesque ac divinationes significare procurant qui adhuc paganis ritis involvuntur» (*PL* 112, cols. 1581-1582).

(1518), containing two 'Germanic' alphabetical series, one of which can be likened to runes (see Fig. 1; the images are located at the end of the essay). Its author, the German Benedictine Johannes Trithemius († 1516), was an exoterist and lexicographer with expertise in ciphers (cf. his *Steganographia: hoc est ars per occultam scripturam*, 1499), who put to good use a series of works on scripts and alphabets from Roman times to the Middle Ages (Arnold, 2015). A similar cultural attitude may be observed in the *Introductio in Chaldaicam linguam, Syriacam, atque Armenicam et decem alias linguas* […] (1539), by the Paduan grammarian Theseus Ambrosius [Albonesi], where on ff. 204v and 206v two runic series are illustrated (the second one defined as 'Gothic'), probably the result of relations with Olaus Magnus (cf. below); and a few years later, in the *De aliquot gentium migrationibus, sedibus fixis, reliquiis, linguarumque initiis et immutationibus ac dialectis, libri XII* (1557), the Habsburg historian Wolfgang Lazius included a runic series clearly influenced by Hrabanus' *De Inventione linguarum*. Hrabanus' text was later also incorporated by Melchior Goldast in his *Alamannicarum rerum* […], II (1606: 91-93), albeit with no suggestion of any particular reflection of a semiological or linguistic nature.

To appreciate a real turning point towards a less amateurish direction in Runic studies, one must look to Scandinavia[2] in the more general context of the local Gothicism of the 16th-18th centuries (Düwel, 2009: 623-633; Johannesson, 1982). Having never been part of the Roman Empire and of the Classical heritage, Northern populations could only claim to be the direct heirs of those peripheral cultures from which the triumphant conquerors of the Empire descended – first and foremost the Goths. This process condensed the extensive mood of a Northern European Gothomania, stimulated by the rediscovery of Jordanes' *Getica* (6th century) and its *editio princeps* by August Peutinger (1515), and the related *topos* of the origin of the Goths from Scandinavia, which in turn was later fuelled by the recovery of controversial linguistic traces in the Crimean Peninsula by the Flemish diplomat Ogier Ghislain van Busbecq. Following the political collapse of the Union of Kalmar (1520) and the emergence of a harsh antagonism between the kingdoms of Denmark and Sweden, the theme of Gothic descent was transformed into an ideological slogan that was also able to make inroads into cultural, literary, and linguistic leadership (Lundgreen-Nielsen, 2002).

[2] And Sweden in particular, with the *rimstavar*, perpetual runic calendars engraved on wood, cf. Cucina (2013).

Leaving aside a lost text by Laurentius Petri (1499-1573; cf. Brate, 1922: 105), the first noteworthy essay on the topic is the short *Om Runskrift* (ca. 1525-1530)[3] by his brother Olaus Petri (1493-1552), a Lutheran scholar at the court of Gustav Vasa and an expert in the antiquities and in the still living Swedish runic tradition. Twenty years later, the engraving of an (alphabetical) runic series in Johannes Magnus' *Historia de omnibus Gothorum Sueonumque regibus* (1554, I.vii, 25; Cucina, 1999) allowed the author to trace these characters (belonging to the Goths, descended from Magog, and originating in Sweden) back to the time of the Flood, well before the arrival of the alphabet and Trojan refugees in Rome. In this runic series each character is accompanied by a Latin transliteration, but not by its original name, and eleven out of twenty-four runes have two variants (see Fig. 2).

In a similar attempt to rehabilitate the use of runes, the more reliable *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (1555), another pro-Swedish ideological manifesto by Johannes' brother Olaus, emphasised the celebrative and monumental ancient function of runes (O. Magnus, 1555: 57). With the same function, and as an 'alphabet' of Gothic origin, they were also recognised by Anders Sørensens Vedel (1542-1616) in many of his writings (Akhøj Nielsen, 2004: 480-487), as well as by the Danish court historian and ambassador to Elisabeth I Arild Huitfeld who, for the opposite reason[4], inserted an *Alphabetum Gothicum* or *De gamle Ronebogstaffuer* at the beginning of the first volume of his *Danmarks Rigis krønicke* (1595-1604), stating that runes also belong to the traditional Danish heritage (see Fig. 3).

This legacy was challenged by the *cymbrica* series of the Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorp governor Heinrich Rantzau (*Cimbricae Chersonesi necnon Cimbrorum rerum gestarum*, 1597; see, Fig. 4)[5] who emphasised its difference from the Gothic characters, while it was endorsed by the Icelandic historian Arngrímur Jónsson (1568-1648) in his *Brevis commentarius de lslandia* (1593) and in *Crymogæa* (1609), with remarks in the latter text on another runic series, arranged alphabetically

[3] 'On runic writing', cf. Hesselman (1914-1917: IV, 555-556).

[4] Reiterated by Hans Svaning, *Refutatio calumniarum cuiusdam Ioannis Magni* […] *huic accessit Chronicon sive Historia Ioannis Regis Daniæ* (1561).

[5] Rantzau's work was included and given pride of place by Ernest J. de Westphalen in the first tome of his *Monumenta inedita rerum Germanicarum praecipue Cimbriacarum et Megapolensium* (Westphalen, 1739: I, 1-166). Rantzau's engraving of the Jelling site and of the *Typus alphabeti* appears as Tab. XII (after p. 60), followed by explicatory notes and discussion of the runic and gothic characters in the section *Litterarum in typo signatarum explicatio* (Westphalen, 1739: 62-64).

(Arngrímur Jónsson, 1609: 24, 26-29; see Fig. 5), suggesting the runes go back to the 'ancient Gothic language', used not only by the Northern populations, but also in England, Scotland and Ireland:

> Has autem literas, non ad Norvegiam, astringo, aut Islandiam: sed ad lingvam; quæ nunc Norvegica nunc Danica dicta est; seu ipsam antiquam Gothicam, qua etiam id temporis usum credo, totum orbem Arctoum & populos vicinos: itemque Angliam, Scotiam, Irlandiam […]. (Arngrímur Jónsson, 1609: 26-27)

Arngrímur Jónsson's runic series was probably derived from the *Old Icelandic Runic Poem* as well as the *First* and *Third Old Icelandic Grammatical Treatise*. The latter two texts are found in the 'grammatical' codex AM 242 (Codex Wormianus), a manuscript which, before reaching Ole Worm (on whom cf. below), had been in Arngrímur's possession. The 'Gothic' inheritance of those ancient characters, as legitimised through the influence of Jordanes' *Getica*, was still recognised by the Flemish humanist Bonaventura Vulcanius (1538-1614) in his miscellaneous work *De literis et lingua Getarum sive Gothorum* (1597: 43-48; cf. Dekker, 2010), suggesting parallels between Wulfila's Gothic alphabet and three late medieval runic series[6].

In fact, this misconception, as we saw earlier, may well go back to the Danish humanist A.S. Vedel, author, among other works, of *Den Danske Krønicke* (1575), a Danish translation of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*. Influenced by the codex of the Norwegian kings' sagas he was studying, in the years 1570-1572, Vedel referred to the ancient Scandinavians and the Old Norse language by the appellation 'Goths'/'Gothic', according to a *cliché* revitalised by the Magnus brothers and popular between the 16th and 18th centuries. At a time of bitter contrasts between the kingdoms of Sweden and Denmark-Norway, he went further by extending to the Old Danes the alleged ethnic relations between Goths and Swedes – in an *Oratio panegyrica* (1580) for King Frederik II[7].

Vedel resorted to the label 'Gothic' in the heading he chose for a planned glossary of Old Norse, *Fax antiquæ linguæ gothicæ*, now preserved as MS. GkS Rostgaard 219,4°, p. 63. Of the 78 pages set aside

[6] Vulcanius himself, during an epistolary exchange, on 12/02/1600 received from the Swedish scholar Nicolaus Granius the fragmentary text of a Runic poem, which represents the fifth witness of a scholarly tradition that, by consensus, is traced back to the *Abecedarium Nord[mannicum]*, cf. Düwel (2008: 191-196).

[7] Whereas the first references to the term 'Gothic' as a hyperonym for all Germans can be found in Lazius' *De gentium* […] (1557), cf. Menhardt (1952).

for the glossary, only 5 or 6 were eventually filled over time with 148 glosses and remarks on the Old Norse language, but he nevertheless neglected the wrong interpretation of Jordanes' *haliurunnas* (*Getica* 24)[8], and in the materials of this manuscript he did not otherwise dwell further on runes (Akhøj Nielsen, 2008: 2-4). Runes, however, were clearly a subject dear to him: other collections of his papers, today preserved as MS. GkS 2414,4° and MS GkS 121 Additam. 4°, contain two runic alphabets, and his well-known portrait, executed by Tobias Gemperle in 1578 and imbued with ideological overtones, features runes transcribed on three scrolls referring to ancient kings of Norway (Akhøj Nielsen, 2008: 16).

Two centuries after the complete understanding of the *fuþark* (especially the old one), as already indicated by the composition of the *Third Grammatical Treatise* and the compilation of the Codex Runicus in the 14th century, the exploitation of the runes as the cultural heritage of an exclusive 'national' community did not fail to lapse into esoteric realms, finding its leaders in the Swede Johannes Bureus (1568-1652) and the Dane Ole Worm (1588-1654). An advocate of the primacy of a 'Gothic' Sweden, Bureus supported the notion of Swedish as a sacred language, directly descendant from Hebrew, according to a traditional perspective previously supported in the *Third Old Icelandic Grammatical Treatise* to explain e.g. the rune for ‹y› (Wills, 2001: 84-85). Influenced by occultism and the revival of Neo-Platonic thought, Bureus was the first to recognise in the runes a second function, namely that of vehicles of an archaic and secret wisdom (*Adulruna*) which was helpful for spiritual ascent and divination. Between 1599 and 1611, he published some interesting works[9] devoted to the analysis and dissemination of the runic knowledge, part of a project aiming to map Sweden's great runic heritage and restore runic writing in schools. Bureus' ideas opened a vast debate on language, writing and culture, which by the end of the 17th century would find expression in the extravagant, if not extreme, theses of the Hyperborean school, cf. Georg Stiernhielm (1598-1672), and of Olaus Rudbeck (1630-1702). Such conjectures ended up arousing suspicions of witchcraft and eventually alienating many European scholars.

Court physician, archaeologist and exoterist, Ole Worm is reputed as the founder of Danish antiquarian studies, assisted by a network

[8] Where indeed *-runnas* has nothing to do with the runes.

[9] Among which *Runakänslones lärospån* (1599), *Runaräfst eller Runakänslo* […] (1603) and *Runa. ABC boken* (1611). Rather little has been written about Bureus' extensive activity over half a century.

of scholars such as A. Jónsson, Th.C. Bartholin, S.H. Stephanius and J. Rhode. A collector of artefacts and manuscripts, his focus on runes (as may be easily guessed, of 'definite' Danish origin) was embedded in the debate on the origin of writing systems and the relationship to the 'perfect' language (Eco, 1993), traceable to the myth of Babel and Hebrew, from which the Danes supposedly derived them (Worm, 1636: 118-119)[10]. Of Worm's three principal works, namely, *Literatura Runica* (1636), *Fasti Danici* (1626), and the massive *Danicorum monumentorum libri sex* […] (1643), it was the latter that laid the foundations for the interplay between archaeology and runology, also arousing great interest abroad, although, unlike Bureus, the texts accompanying the drawings of many inscriptions were not transliterated but only rendered in Latin characters. His work had an impact on various authors outside Scandinavia as well, including Franciscus Junius (editor of the Codex Argenteus, with a runic appendix) and Justus G. Schottelius (1612-1676), who, still uncertain about the relationship between Gothic and Old Norse, in the second, heavily revised edition of his *Teutsche Sprachkunst* (Schottelius, 1651: 111) published an overview of runic variants excerpted from Worm (1636; cf. Fig. 6).

2. *The rediscovery of runes in England*

Following the suppression of monasteries and their libraries during the reign of Henry VIII, the drive of antiquarians and scholars to recover what remained of the cultural heritage of the local Middle Ages triggered, as in the rest of Europe, a real hunt for manuscripts and artefacts. The very notion of British antiquarianism is usually first linked to John Leland († 1552) and his acquaintance with the works of J. Trithemius (see above). The interest in the early languages and alphabetic traditions – studied by the Hermeticist school in respect of their alleged esoteric value (cf. J. Dee, *Monas hieroglyphica*, 1564) – was likewise accompanied by the rediscovery of runes. As elsewhere, they were included in the patriotic debate and conceived as elements of primaeval 'national' identity and witnesses to a renowned local culture. As in Sweden and Denmark, they were never disputed by the Church, but rather wel-

[10] In tune with the arguments of the theologian Bonaventure C. Bertrand who in his *Comparatio grammaticae hebraicae et aramicae* (1574) argued Hebrew characters derived from images.

comed, and at the same time well known among the descendants of the ancient viking communities settled in the North-East in the pre-Conquest *Ænglalond*.

Early examples of this trend include the transcription of Anglo-Saxon rune names (with accompanying Latin glosses) in London, British Library, Cotton MS. Domitian A.ix, probably by the humanist Robert Talbot († 1558)[11], or the late runic alphabet in the codex today known as Cotton MS. Titus D.xviii, in turn copied by Thomas James in what is now Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. James 6, or still the inspection of some Danish runestones on behalf of Elizabeth I by the diplomat Daniel Rogers, collector of inscriptions and author of the transcription of three sets of 'Gothic' characters. Rogers' accounts eventually attracted the interest of Vulcanius, who included them in his *De literis & lingua Getarum, siue Gothorum* (Vulcanius, 1597: 43-45), where they were juxtaposed with the runic series illustrated by both the Magnus brothers and the philologist Joseph Justus Scaliger, a figure who attracted the attention of many humanists, including British ones.

A typical example of this milieu is *Britannia* (1586) by William Camden ('the British Strabo'), a text of odeporical literature acclaimed by the most prominent scholars of the time, and with a strong identitarian accent, initiated in its genre by Biondo Flavio[12]. In the 1607 edition of *Britannia* Camden included the first (as yet inaccurate) copy of an inscription, engraved on the baptismal font of the church of Bridekirk[13] (see Fig. 7). Despite his lack of knowledge of Worm's work, and without deciphering its meaning or using the term *rune*, Camden established a possible connection with the text of the Danish inscription Jelling-1, known to him from Peter Lindeberg's *Commentarii rerum memorabilium in Europa* (1591), which contained, incidentally, the first edition of the engraving of the Jelling site (with its runes) by the aforementioned Rantzau.

[11] See also Talbot's notebook (Cambridge, CCC, MS 379) which on f. 9r contains an *alphabet*um *anglic*um *ordine latino*, with Latin letters flanked by the corresponding names of the Anglo-Saxon *fuþorc* and by some runes (digital reproduction of the ms.: <https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/fp556xm4433>).

[12] Cf. Biondo Flavio, *Italia illustrata* (1474); along the same line also Conrad Celtis' *Germania illustrata* (unfinished project) and Leandro Alberti's *Descrittione di tutta Italia* (1550).

[13] In Cumberland, where a Scandinavian dialect was preserved until around the 12th century (Page, 1971). Strangely, however, though he knew them, Camden makes no mention of the more famous inscriptions from Bewcastle and Ruthwell.

> But what they signifie, or what nations characters they should be, I knowne not: let the learned determine thereof. The first and the eight differ not much from that which in the time of the Emperour *Constantine* the Great, Christians used for the name of Christ. The rest in forme, though not in sound, come very neere unto those which are seene in the tombe of *Gormon* a King of the Danes at *Ielling* in Denmarke, the which Peter of *Lindeberge* did put forth, in the yeere 1591. (Camden & Holland, 1610, 768)

At the close of the century, the *Additions* to the 'Cumberland' section of *Britannia* feature a letter (dated Nov. 23, 1685) from William Nicolson, Archdeacon of Carlisle and teacher of Old English at Queen's in Oxford, to the scholar William Dugdale; here the Reverend discussed the characters and text of the inscription, pointing out with some skill the similarities of Scandinavian runic characters with those of the local Anglo-Saxon tradition and finally venturing a proposal for their interpretation[14].

Turning back to the Elizabethan period, it still displays an evident lack of competence in reading runic characters, which scholars of the time mainly refer to as 'Gothic letters' (or 'Danish', a frequent hyperonym for Scandinavian). At the beginning of the Stuart age, 'Danish letters' are mentioned by John Speed in his *The theatre of the empire of*

[14] *A Letter from Mr Nicolson to Sir William Dugdale; concerning a Runic Inscription on the Font at Bridekirk.* «3. On the South side of the stone we have the inscription, which I have taken care accurately to write out; and 'tis as follows: [illustration] [runic inscription]. Now, these kind [sic!] of Characters are well enough known (since *Ol. Wormius*'s great Industry in making us acquainted with the *Literatura Runica*) to have bin chiefly used by the *Pagan* inhabitants of *Denmark, Sweden,* and the other Northern Kingdoms; and the *Danes* are said to have swarmed mostly in these parts of our *Island.* Which two considerations, seem weighty enough to perswade any man at first sight to conclude, that the Font is a *Danish* Monument. But then on the other hand, we are sufficiently assured, that the Heathen *Saxons* did also make use of these *Runae;* as is plainly evident from the frequent mention of *Run-cræftigen* and *Run-stafas* in many of the Monuments of that Nation, both in Print and Manuscript still to be met with. Besides, we must not forget that both *Danes* and *Saxons* are indebted to this Kingdom for their Christianity: and therefore thus far their pretensions to a *Runic* (Christian) Monument may be thought equal. Indeed some of the Letters (as Ð, ȝ and &) seem purely *Saxon,* being not to be met with among *Wormius*'s many Alphabets: and the words themselves (if I mistake them not) come nearer to the ancient *Saxon* Dialect, than the *Danish.* However, let the Inscription speak for it self: and I question not but 'twill convince any competent and judicious Reader, that 'tis *Danish.* Thus therefore I have ventur'd to read and explain it; Er Ekard han men egrocten, and to dis men red wer Taner men brogten. i.e. Here *Ekard* was converted; and to this Man's example were the *Danes* brought» (Camden & Gibson, 1695: 840-841).

Great Britaine (1611): lacking any textual evidence, but with a degree of insight perhaps only matched by Robert Cotton at the time, Speed notes with reference to the notable places in Devonshire that

> vpon *Exmors* certaine monuments of Antick worke are erected, which are stones pitched in order, some triangle-wise and some in round compasse: these no doubt were trophies of victories, there obtained either by the Romans, Saxons, or Danes, and with Danish letters one of them is inscribed. (Speed, 1611: 19)

These remarks are quite impressive, given that in 1611 Speed could hardly have relied on A. Bureus' tracts[15] or on O. Worm's seminal works.

Among the leading figures of his time, the legal scholar Henry Spelman (c. 1562-1641) is undoubtedly a forerunner of a more accurate methodology, immune to the pro-barbarian enthusiastic sentiments of the time (see for instance Hermann Conring's *De Origine Iuris Germanici Commentarius Historicus* (1643); cf. Pocock, 1987: 93-97; Kliger, 1952), which were to leave a remarkable imprint during early Romanticism. The study of Anglo-Saxon laws conducted by Spelman required, first and foremost, overcoming the obstacles posed by the still mostly unknown ancient language, an initiative that gave rise to the *Glossarium Archaiologicum*, a collection of legal headwords exploring the continental origin of Old English institutions, deities and language, and that over the years was to draw from the work of scholars like Arngrímur Jónsson, William Camden and above all Richard Rowlands Verstegan, (also author of *A Restitution of the Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities* […] (1605; 1628). While the first part of the *Glossarium* (*a – Luto, vel cæno necare*), with the slightly different title *Archæologus. In modum glossarii ad rem antiquam posteriorem* […], was published in 1626, the work was finally completed and published in its entirety posthumously in 1664, after William Dugdale stepped in (Spelman, 1664).

In 1628, Spelman had turned to Worm for advice on an inscription on the (now lost) head of the Bewcastle Cross, specifically the fragment ***ricæs dryhtnæs** ('of the Lord's reign'). After recalling the linguistic history of English, the result of the overlapping of «Saxonum […] Gothorum [sic!] […] Danorum […] Norwegiensium; qui tum cum Danis, postea, cum Normannis introierunt Angliam», Spelman addressed the inscription in detail. By misreading the term 'rune' there, he had

[15] Bureus' *Runa. ABC boken* (<https://archive.org/details/runaabcboken00bureuoft/mode/2up>), showing at p. 2 a sequence of 15 [sic!] runes, appeared in the same year.

correctly suggested to the Danish scholar the etymological connection between Old Norse *rún*, Old English *rūn*/*ryne* and the semantic domain of 'secret (concept)': «Neque enim à ᚱᛖᚾ, *Ren*, pro ductu aquarum (quod & nostrâ linguâ sonet) nec à ᚱᚤᚾ *Ryn*, pro sulco in terrâ, quamvis à re agrariâ […]: sed à ryne, aliàs geryne, Saxonico, quod mysterium & rem occultam significat»[16], managing brilliantly to come to «*susurro*, vel occultè loquor. Unde in hodiernâ nostrâ linguâ vernaculâ to roune one in the ear, est *occultè aliquem in aure alloqui*, *vel in aure alicuius clanculum susurrare*» (Spelmann, 1664: 493), namely the verb *to round* (German *raunen*).

By subordinating the name 'rune' to the peculiar semantic field of the Gothic language, which in the translation of Gr. *mysterion* of the biblical text conveys the mystery of the divine revelation, as opposed to the original value of 'scriptural sign', Spelman thus ran counter to himself with the interpretation of 'furrow; engraving' assumed by Worm (1636), and later by Aylett Sammes in *Britannia antiqua illustrata* (Sammes, 1676: 440).

Spelman's insight stemmed from the frequent misconception that any form of ancient Germanic writing was a product of the 'Gothic' culture – the first to produce literary documents. At that time, he could only rely on the anonymous *A Short Survey or History of the Kingdome of Sueden* […] (1632), an English abridged translation of A. Bureus' miscellaneous works (through A. Hildebrand's *Genealogia regum Sueciae*, 1631), which notes:

> In-ancient times both the Swedish and the Goths had their owne proper letters and language […] And therefore above all other nations the Goths were most ad|mired for their opinion concerning the immor|tality of the soule; concerning which opinion, although there bee left no ancient records […] yet may this by many monuments even untill this day remaining, plainly appeare, the which are written upon great grave-stones in this same ancient, character of Runicke letters […] Now that this people (i.e. Swedes) is a great lover of learning and letters, may from hence appeare, that even at this day the very countrey people and shepheards, have engraven upon their great staves and shepheards crooks all the principal matters set downe in our ordinary almanacks (i.e. runic calendar-staves) in their ancient Gothicke letters: by which means they are able to understand the change and other times of the moone, bissextile or leape yeare,

[16] Followed by quotations from Lc. 8.10, Mt. 13.11 e Mc. 4.11.

> the golden number, dominicall letters, and the like, concerning this subiect. (*A Short Survey* (1632): 31-33)

Therefore, even the runes, widespread in Scandinavia, the land of the Goths (according to the then hegemonic paradigm of Jordanes), were confused with Wulfila's alphabet, if not even considered to be his invention; such an authorship was decisively dismissed by Spelman in quoting a passage from the Isidorian *Chronica* «nam *Isidorus* in *Gothor.* Chron. sub *Æ*ra 415. dicit *Gulfilam* eorum Episcopum, Gothicas literas (non *Runicas*) adinvenisse» (Spelmann, 1664: 494), pointing out how Trithemius, Vulcanius and, unexpectedly, Arngrímur himself, among others, had fallen into such a misunderstanding. In the clouded scenario of various outlandish perceptions of the runes, Worm himself, when asked by Spelman whether the text of the Bewcastle Cross was written in the same characters as the Gothic Bible edited by Vulcanius, replied by expanding the long-standing and erroneous equation 'Runic = Gothic' to the Norse language:

> Gothicae enim nil aliud sunt quam Runicae, & illa qua exteris dicta est Gothica, ab iis, qui eam primum in peregrinas advexerunt regiones, nobis Runica est literatura vero & genuino nomine (Worm, 1751: I, 431; Schlepelern & Friis Johansen 1965: 179)

and, in turn, taking up Arngrímur's insights and quoting him *verbatim*, to Danish itself:

> Has literas non ad Norvegiam adstringo aut Islandiam: sed ad linguam quæ nunc Norvagica, nunc Danica dicta est. (Worm, 1636: 45)

In an age influenced by the idea of antiquity as an expression of linguistic purity and national identity[17], the borderline area between the runes and the recovery of Gothic is emphasised again, in 1664 and 1665,

[17] For such a linguistic patriotism see for example the extreme remarks of the Flemish Goropius Becanus on the Dutch language, ridiculed by Leibniz, or, later, those of the Swedish linguist Georg Stiernhielm. In his *De linguarum origine praefatio* – the preface to his edition of the Gothic Bible – Stiernhielm (1671) attempts to outline a genealogy of the Germanic languages where he juxtaposes a Gothic alphabet and a runic series, and furthermore points out (1671: 38 [48]): «De nostra SVEO-GOTHICA multa dicere supervacaneum est, cum a primordio suo eam nemo neget manere sinceram et incorruptam, ab externis puram et intaminatam nihilque, nisi aevo, a prima sua origine distantem» (cf. Eskhult, 2023).

by the Dutch humanist Franciscus Junius, whose interests in runic matters, and probably in the Bridekirk inscription, are documented in a letter of 1668 to John Marshall, Rector of Lincoln College (Bennett, 1946-1953: 272). Junius' philological activity addressed above all the Anglo-Saxon field and the printing of a *Gothicum Glossarium* […][18], as well as the edition of the Gothic Gospels[19] (co-edited with the minister Thomas Marshall), along with the introduction of the first runic typographic fonts.

In keeping with the growing attention of scholars towards linguistic research[20], in the prologue of the *Glossarium* Junius dedicates a few pages to the 'alphabetum runicum' (Junius, 1665: 17-31), including scant passages in 'runic' (or 'cymbric', i.e. Old Norse) language, strictly in runic characters, supplemented by a 24-rune alphabet with name/sign/phonetic and numeric value (17-18; 20-21), as well as the partial transliteration of the Norwegian *Rune Poem* (taken from Worm). In the *Glossarium* itself, a commentary, with examples taken from the Gothic Bible, provides a definition of the Gothic word *runa* (transcribed in the Wulfilian alphabet) as 'Mysterium', followed by *runa*/*garuni* 'Consilium', which conveys a semantic range more widely shared in the rest of the Germanic languages (Junius, 1665: 284-285; see Fig. 8a-b).

Robert Sheringham was the next scholar to show a special interest in runes; his *De Anglorum Gentis Origine Disceptatio* (1670) represents the first extensive treatment of Old Norse literary texts in an English publication. In addition to illustrating a Gothic alphabet, an Anglo-Saxon alphabet and the runic series of J. Magnus (Sheringham, 1670: 172-175), the author argues in favour of the notion that runes originally represented magical signs and were employed in *maleficia*, *incantationes* and other *artes magicae*, thereby tailoring Spelman's views to an alleged original runic evidence only grounded in the realm of magic (167-169), thus anticipating an 18th century mood[21] which received the idea of ancient verses conveyed in runic characters[22]. In Sheringham,

[18] Dedicated to the Swedish Chancellor Magnus G. De la Gardie, who in 1669 gifted his country the Codex Argenteus of the Wulfilian text.

[19] *Quatuor Domini nostri Iesu Christi Evangeliorum versiones perantiquæ duæ* […] (1665).

[20] This is the time of the mighty work *Babel destructa, seu Runa Suethica* (1669) by G. Stiernhielm.

[21] See for instance Thomas Percy's *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry Translated from the Islandic Language* (1763).

[22] «[…] quomadmodum in antique poëmate literis Runicis conscripto» (Sheringham, 1670: 358).

the 'Gothic' connection to the Northern people and the runes («monumenta Gothicis literis, quæ Runæ vocantur», 342) is still maintained through a partial list of the Crimean-Gothic words collected by O.G. van Busbecq (see above) during the 16th century (214-215) and the consequent Odinic myth of invention «Wodenum insuper ad Gothos ex Asia literas Runicas attulisse» (284) based on Worm's works.

Just one year after the publication of *Runographia scandica* by Olof Verelius, a Swedish scholar opposing the theory of a Hebrew origin of the runes, a different view surfaces with Aylett Sammes who, in his *Britannia antiqua illustrata* […] (1676: 440), expresses the opinion that the term 'rune', believed to be much older than Woden himself, means 'letter'. The noun is said to stem from a term related to Old English *ryn* 'furrow' and hence, by extension, *runer* had the meaning of «a Learned copy of Verses… an Incantation». Then, quoting the Swedish historian J. Messenius († 1636), Sammes points out that its original use would be «to preserve the Memories of Great Persons, and so to deliver their Deeds to Posterity», following in this respect a learned tradition going back to the Magnus brothers. Only the magical misinterpretation dating back to later eras of idolatry would have turned its use «from plainly writing the sence of things to form mysterious Incantations», as for example «meerly wearing them in Battle, would render a Man fortunate in fight, and invulnerable» (Sammes, 1676: 441).

The issue of the origin of the runes was not alien to the poetic debate, since they were not least juxtaposed with rhyme, an element sometimes deemed as barbaric (cf. Lord Roscommon, Th. Campion, S. Daniel), heir to the barbarian migrations blamed for the decline of classical culture (cf. J. Donne, J. Denham). In this way, the runes became the focus of Sir William Temple's essay *On Poetry* (1680), where *rhyme* is considered as a synonym for *poetry*. Contrary to what was until then generally assumed, he even went so far as to claim that the term was not derived from Greek but from the word *rune* itself (Springarn, 1909: 63), a name referring to a form of writing that predates even the Latin alphabet and was directly created by the god Odin for the Goths on the Baltic Sea[23]. Since ancient inscriptions were traditionally in verse,

> it [i.e. the runes] came to be the common Name of all sorts of Poetry among the *Goths,* and the Writers or Composers of them were called *Runers,* or *Rymers* (Springarn, 1909: 63)

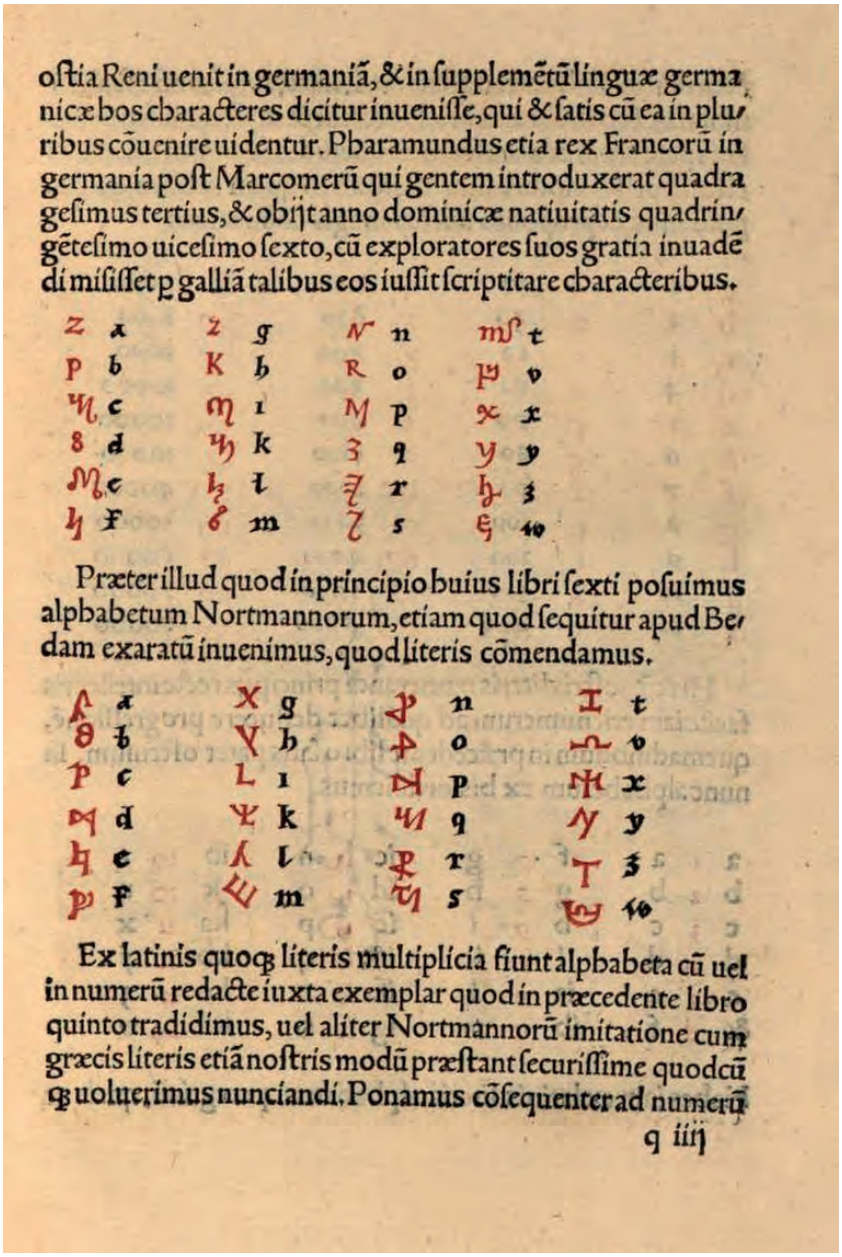
[23] The Swedish antiquarian influence is evident in figures such as O. Rudbeck, whom I. Newton invited to the Royal Society.

thereby arbitrarily expanding the semantic range of the noun, following a well-known *topos* formerly found in Worm (1636). A reference to runes can finally be witnessed towards the end of Act I of J. Dryden's libretto of *King Arthur* (1691), set to music by Henry Purcell, during the invocations to the (Saxon) pagan gods worshipped by the leaders Oswald and Osmond

> Thor, Freya, Woden, hear, and spell your Saxons,
> With Sacred Runick Rhimes, from Death in Battle.
> Edge their bright Swords, and blunt the Britons' Darts

regarding the protection provided by the deities to Saxon warriors by means of spells and 'runick' rhymes.

But the time was ripe for a scientific breakthrough in the study of the phenomenon: this took its cue from scholars such as Th. Marshall, J. Fell, E. Thwaites or W. Nicolson, and finally reached a more neutral and sober footing with Humphrey Wanley and George Hickes (author of *Institutiones Grammaticae Anglo-Saxonicae et Moeso-Gothicae* (1689) and *Linguarum Veterum Septentrionalium Thesaurus Grammatico-Criticus et Archaeologicus* (1703-1705), dedicated to Crown Prince George of Hanover, in his position as *Princeps Hereditarius Daniæ, Norvegiæ, Vandalorum, et Gothorum*); Hickes aimed to investigate the Gothic alphabet, epigraphic runes, manuscript runes and ancient languages. While remaining faithful to the subordination of all Germanic languages to Gothic, Hickes did shed new light on the field of ancient Germanic studies; he was arguably the last and greatest exponent of that invaluable school, which, besides Pope's criticism, at the end of the century Edward Gibbon in the *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789; Vol. I, ch. IX) was to define as «antiquarians of profound learning and easy faith».



ostia Reni uenit in germaniã, & in supplemẽtũ linguæ germa nicæ bos characteres dicitur inuenisse, qui & satis cũ ea in plu ribus cõuenire uidentur. Pharamundus etia rex Francorũ in germania post Marcomerũ qui gentem introduxerat quadra gesimus tertius, & obijt anno dominicæ natiuitatis quadrin gẽtesimo uicesimo sexto, cũ exploratores suos gratia inuadẽ di misisset p galliã talibus eos iussit scriptitare characteribus.

a b c d e f g h i k l m n o p q r s t v x y z 9 10

Præter illud quod in principio huius libri sexti posuimus alphabetum Nortmannorum, etiam quod sequitur apud Be dam exaratũ inuenimus, quod literis cõmendamus.

a b c d e f g h i k l m n o p q r s t v x y z 9 10

Ex latinis quoq; literis multiplicia fiunt alphabeta cũ uel in numerũ redacte iuxta exemplar quod in præcedente libro quinto tradidimus, uel aliter Nortmannorũ imitatione cum græcis literis etiã nostris modũ præstant securissime quodcũ q; uoluerimus nunciandi. Ponamus cõsequenter ad numerũ

q iiij

Fig. 1: J.J. Trithemius, *Polygraphiae* (1518: 499).
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbc0001.2009fabyan12345/?sp=499&st=image>

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set, Gothi suas literas habuerint. Cuius rei indicia præstant eximiæ magnitudinis saxa, ueterũ bustis ac specubus apud Gothos affixa: quæ literarum formis insculpta persuadere possint, quòd ante uniuersale diluuium, uel paulò pòst, gigantea uirtute ibi erecta fuissent. Literæ uerò hæ sunt:

Gothicæ literæ antiquissimæ.

ALPHABETVM GOTHICVM.

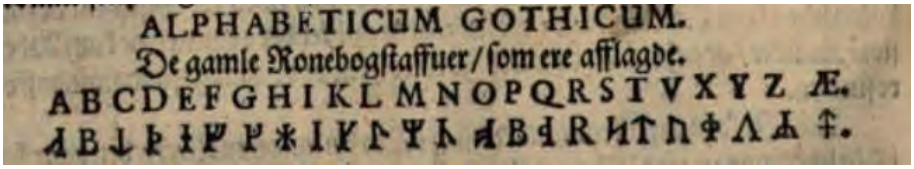
a b c d e f g h i k l m

n o p q r s t u x y z et.

His apicibus res gestas in lapidibus exprimẽtes sempiternæ hominũ memoriæ tradiderũt. Quibus etsi Romani sermonis notitia, quæ tunc ante Romam conditam nulla erat, abesset, attamen tanta ad eloquentiæ studium, & ad scribendum patrias poëses diligentia eos inflammauit, ut non solùm pueri modesti (quod Romanos longo pòst tempore fecisse scribit Cato) cantaturi carmina antiqua, in quibus laudes erant maiorum, passim instituerentur, uerumetiam graues uiri in tibias de clarorum

Res heroum magnificè gestæ oblitioni traditi minimè debent.

Fig. 2: J. Magnus, *Historia de omnibus Gothorum Sueonumque regibus*, I.vii (ed. 1558: 31). <https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/fs1/object/display/bsb1020668400057.html?zoom=0.5>



ALPHABETICUM GOTHICUM.

De gamle Ronebogstaffuer / som ere afflagde.

A B C D E F G H I K L M N O P Q R S T V X Y Z Æ.

Fig. 3: A. Huitfeldt, *Danmarks Rigis krønicke*, vol. I (1650[2]: 2). <https://books.google.it/books?id=zcNYAAAAcAAJ&pg=PP7&hl=it&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=2#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Fig. 4: H. Rantzau's *Typus Alphabeti* on the Jelling runic stones (from Westphalen, 1739: Tab. XII). <https://books.google.it/books?id=yw1dAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false>

24 RERUM ISLANDICARUM

A Ar
b Biarkan
z Knesol
d Stanginntyr vel & Ulphilæ sic
e Stunginn Is
f Fe
g Stunginn kaun
h Hagall
i Is
k Kaun (L moscoviticum
l Laugur vel Ulphilæ sic Est &
m Madur
n Nand Ulphilæ sic
o Os
p Plastur Ulph. sic
r Reid
s Sol Ulph. sic
t Tyr Ulph sic
u Ur Ulph. sic
y Yr Ulph. sic th tha
þ Puss æthiopum d dha arabū

Characteres hic cernimus 21. Sed veteres tantum 16. numerabant: Et tertium : nolebat pro suo agnoscere: quod ζ. græcorum, hoc est ts vel ds. [ut illi voluerunt] in sua lingua distinctis literis scriberent. Quartum vero à deci-
mocta-

Fig. 5: A. Jónsson, *Crymogæa* (1609: 24).
<https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb10224607?page=32,33>

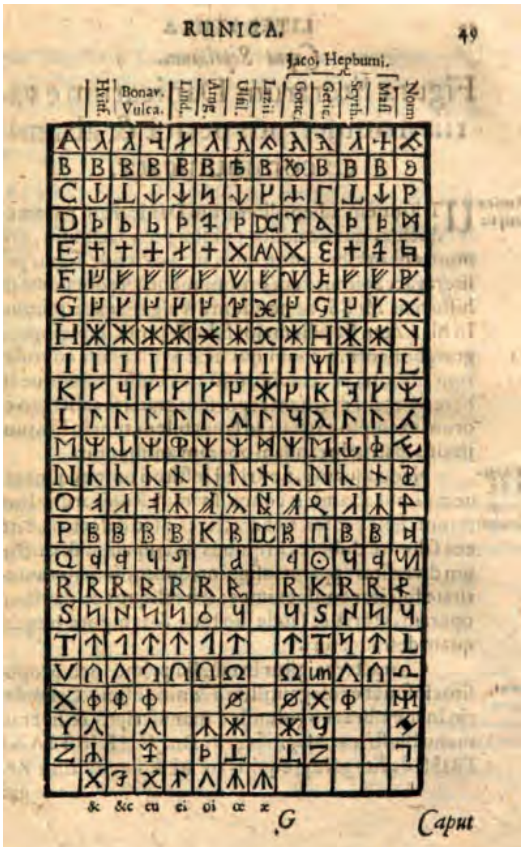
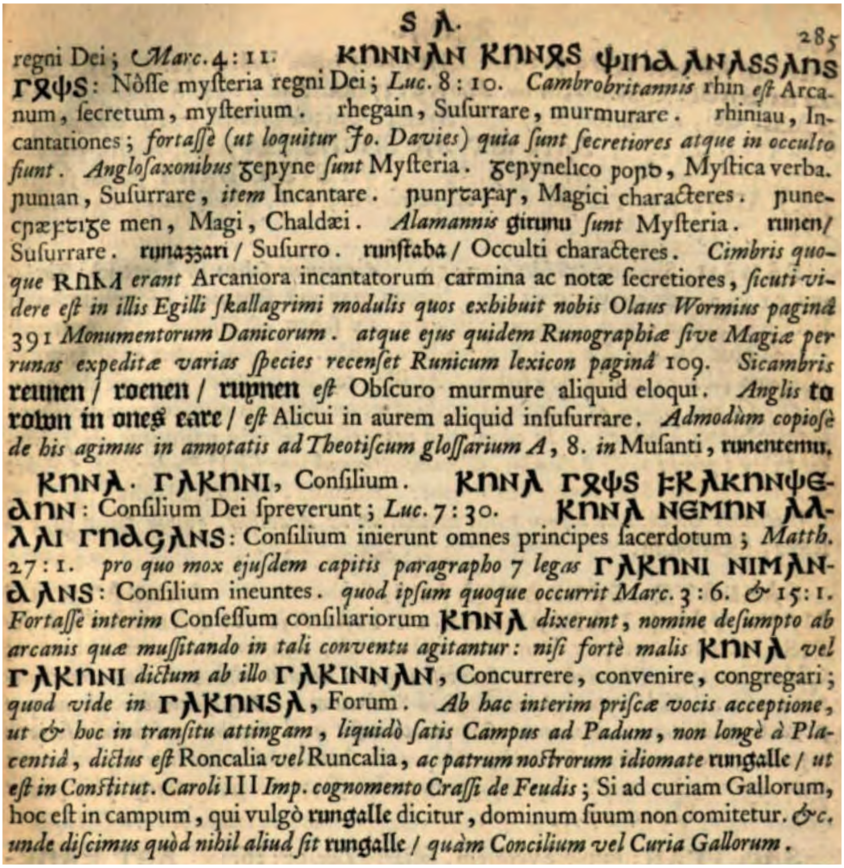


Fig. 6: O. Worm, *Runir seu Danica literatura antiquissima* […] (1636: 49). <https://books.google.it/books?id=DKJnAAAAcAAJ&pg=PP9&hl=it&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=2#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Fig. 7: The Bridekirk inscription (Cumb.) in W. Camden's *Britannia* (1607: 632). <https://archive.org/details/bim_early-english-books-1475-1640_britannia-_camden-william_1607/page/634/mode/2up>

𐍂𐌿𐌽𐌰, Mysterium. 𐌹̈𐌶𐍅𐌹𐍃 𐌰𐍄𐌲𐌹𐌱𐌰𐌽 𐌹̈𐍃𐍄 𐌺𐌿𐌽𐌽𐌰𐌽 𐍂𐌿𐌽𐌰 𐌸𐌹𐌿𐌳𐌰𐌽𐌲𐌰𐍂𐌳𐌾𐍉𐍃 𐌲𐌿𐌸𐍃: Vobis datum est nôsse mysterium regni



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regni Dei; *Marc.* 4:11. 𐌺𐌿𐌽𐌽𐌰𐌽 𐍂𐌿𐌽𐍉𐍃 𐌸𐌹𐌿𐌳𐌹𐌽𐌰𐍃𐍃𐌰𐌿𐍃 𐌲𐌿𐌸𐍃: Nôsse mysteria regni Dei; *Luc.* 8:10. *Cambrobritannis* rhin *est* Arcanum, secretum, mysterium. rhegain, Susurrare, murmurare. rhiniau, Incantationes; *fortassè (ut loquitur Jo. Davies) quia sunt secretiores atque in occulto fiunt. Anglosaxonibus* ȝeryne *sunt* Mysteria. ȝerynelico word, Mystica verba. runian, Susurrare, *item* Incantare. runstafas, Magici characteres. runecræftige men, Magi, Chaldæi. *Alamannis* girunu *sunt* Mysteria. runen/ Susurrare. runazzari / Susurro. runstaba / Occulti characteres. *Cimbris quoque* RUNA *erant* Arcaniora incantatorum carmina ac notæ secretiores, *sicuti videre est in illis Egilli skallagrimi modulis quos exhibuit nobis* Olaus *Wormius paginâ* 391 *Monumentorum Danicorum. atque ejus quidem Runographiæ sive Magiæ per runas expeditæ varias species recenset Runicum lexicon paginâ* 109. *Sicambris* reunen / roenen / ruynen *est* Obscuro murmure aliquid eloqui. *Anglis* to rown in ones eare / *est* Alicui in aurem aliquid insusurrare. *Admodùm copiosè de his agimus in annotatis ad Theotiscum glossarium A*, 8. *in* Musanti, runentemu.

𐍂𐌿𐌽𐌰. 𐌲𐌰𐍂𐌿𐌽𐌹, Consilium. 𐍂𐌿𐌽𐌰 𐌲𐌿𐌸𐍃 𐍆𐍂𐌰𐌺𐌿𐌽𐌸𐌴𐌳𐌿𐌽: Consilium Dei spreverunt; *Luc.* 7:30. 𐍂𐌿𐌽𐌰 𐌽𐌴𐌼𐌿𐌽 𐌰𐌻𐌻𐌰𐌹 𐌲𐌿𐌳𐌾𐌰𐌽𐍃: Consilium inierunt omnes principes sacerdotum; *Matth.* 27:1. *pro quo mox ejusdem capitis paragrapho 7 legas* 𐌲𐌰𐍂𐌿𐌽𐌹 𐌽𐌹𐌼𐌰𐌽𐌳𐌰𐌽𐍃: Consilium ineuntes. *quod ipsum quoque occurrit Marc.* 3:6. & 15:1. *Fortassè interim* Consessum consiliariorum 𐍂𐌿𐌽𐌰 *dixerunt, nomine desumpto ab arcanis quæ mussitando in tali conventu agitantur: nisi fortè malis* 𐍂𐌿𐌽𐌰 *vel* 𐌲𐌰𐍂𐌿𐌽𐌹 *dictum ab illo* 𐌲𐌰𐍂𐌹𐌽𐌽𐌰𐌽, Concurrere, convenire, congregari; *quod vide in* 𐌲𐌰𐍂𐌿𐌽𐍃𐌰, Forum. *Ab hac interim priscæ vocis acceptione, ut & hoc in transitu attingam, liquidò satis Campus ad Padum, non longè à Placentiâ, dictus est* Roncalia *vel* Runcalia, *ac patrum nostrorum idiomate* rungalle / *ut est in Constitut. Caroli* III *Imp. cognomento Crassi de Feudis*; Si ad curiam Gallorum, hoc est in campum, qui vulgò rungalle dicitur, dominum suum non comitetur. &c. *unde discimus quòd nihil aliud sit* rungalle / *quàm Concilium vel Curia Gallorum.*

Fig. 8a-b: F. Junius, *Gothicum Glossarium* (1665: 284-285).
<https://books.google.it/books?id=vltAAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&-q&f=false>

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