

III.

NOTE OF A FRAGMENT OF A RUNE-INSCRIBED STONE FROM AITH'S
VOE, CUNNINGSBURGH, SHETLAND, NOW IN THE MUSEUM. BY PRO-
FESSOR GEORGE STEPHENS, COPENHAGEN, F.S.A., HON. MEM. S.A. SCOT.¹

Mr Anderson, Keeper of the Scottish Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh, kindly informed me that a fragment of a Runic Stone had lately turned up in Shetland. He has since added the favour of a plaster cast of the part bearing runes, and has communicated all the information he could gather. The well-known Scottish artist, James Drummond, Esq., R.S.A., F.S.A. Scot., has also assisted me with a truthful sketch of the whole broken slab as it now is. Armed by such friendly hands, I now proceed to make some observations on this interesting relic.

Besides the earlier, chiefly Scandinavian-Frisic (commonly called "Angle"), warlike or peaceful colonisations in England and South Scotland, from the third and fourth centuries downward, when the Old Northern runes were in vogue, the Scandinavians of the Viking period, who then used their *shorter* alphabet, especially the Norwegians and Danes, made repeated and powerful inroads and settlements in Great Britain, the isles, and north and west of Scotland, and in Ireland. For various reasons 'mostly using English in Ireland, only one Runic object (a sword-fitting) has yet been found in that kingdom, and this bears "Scandinavian" (as distinguished from the older "Old-Northern") staves. But on Scottish ground, particularly its western coasts and islands, several such later Runish rivings have been met with, chiefly at Maeshowe, in the Orkneys, and in the now English Isle of Man. A fresh find from this last district, a curiously decorated old Runish cross, was engraved and described by me in "Illustreret Tidende" for July 28, 1867.

But in Shetland (Hjaltland, Hjatland, Hjetland, Hetland, Zetland, Shetland) no rune-carving has ever before been heard of. This *first* gives us therefore, as it were, a new Runish province; and the circumstance is the more striking, as the staves are cut on *the edge* of the stone, very much

¹ Enlarged from my article in Danish in "Illustreret Tidning." Folio. Kjøbenhavn, July 20, 1873. Pp. 389, 390.

in the old Keltic fashion, whose Ogham letters run along the edge-line as a base. We have the same Runic peculiarity on many of the monuments in the Isle of Man, also originally a Keltic settlement. As might be expected, these Shetland runes, sprung from the Viking movement, show the later or simpler, or "Scandinavian" futhorc.

This old-lave was discovered on the Mainland (of yore called Meginland). But I will here copy the characteristic letter of the finder *and preserver*—a simple and self-taught, but well-informed, thoughtful, honour-worthy, and patriotic Shetland peasant—to Mr Anderson. It is dated Jan. 20, 1873:—

"About the middle of Aith's Voe, on the west side, is a small stream, and a little further south on the same side is an old water-course belonging to the same stream; but it is now almost entirely filled up. However, last summer a heavy fall of rain caused the stream to run through the old water-course, where it undermined the earth at the mouth, and carried a large quantity out into the Voe, and I found the stone on the channel where the earth had been seven or eight feet deep. I had read of Runic inscriptions being found in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and even America,¹ but I had never seen any, and I had no idea of their appearance till I read, in Sir Walter Scott's tale of 'The Pirate,' where Norna of the Fitful Head is represented as having 'stone tablets inscribed with the straight and angular characters of the Runic alphabet.' As the characters on this stone which I found were straight and angular, I concluded that they might be runes. I therefore applied to Mr Arthur Laurensen of Lerwick, who kindly advised me to send the relic to you. If any attempt to decipher the inscription prove successful, please communicate the result to your humble servant,

"ROBERT COGLE,

"Gord, Cunningsburgh, Shetland."

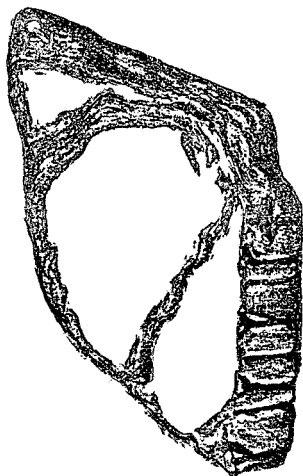
These local names remind us of the mother-land. Aith's Voe (*Eids Vágr*, the Isthmus Bay), Fitful Head (*Fitfuglahöfði*, Water-fowl Head), Lerwick (*Leirvík*, Mud Bay), Gord (*Gardr*, Garth), Cunnings-burgh, *Koningsborg*, Kings-burgh).

The broken lave itself is thus described by my friend Mr Anderson:—
"It is a triangular fragment, broken from the corner of what has apparently been a large flat slab of micaceous sandstone, close-grained and finely

¹ Mr Cogle was not aware that these "American" runic stones are all impudent forgeries.

laminated. It is 11 inches on the longest side, $9\frac{1}{2}$ on the next longest, and 8 inches on the side which shows the runes. The greatest thickness is $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches, but the edge on which the runes are cut has lost a thin layer from both the upper and under surfaces, reducing it to $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch in thickness. All the edges are somewhat water-worn, but the stone is exceedingly hard, and the runes have been boldly cut."

Found in the summer of 1872, the fragment is thus figured by Mr James Drummond, R.S.A. (heliotyped by Herr Pacht):—



The Aith's Voe Runic Stone.

We can now see that what is left is *the top* of the stone and *the end* of the inscription. A glance at so many of the similarly cut Manx stones shows that the risting has *commenced at the bottom* of the slab, and has run up to its brow. This assists us in getting at the formula.

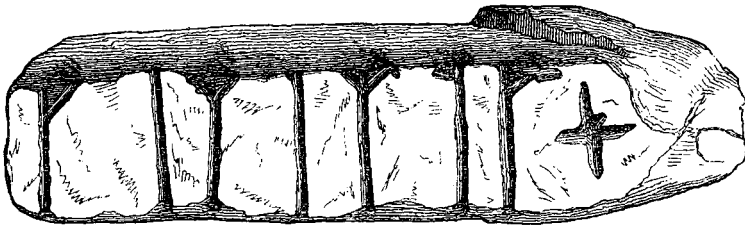
Next, it is evident that *the last word* in this last end is *MIR*, followed by the usual end-mark *+*. This, therefore, suggests the well-known

word-fall in which MIK (ME) was used, instead of THIS STONE or THESE RUNES, &c.

On loose things, such as doors, shields, rings, censers, bells, fonts, caskets, &c., we have a score of Runic examples of the verbs OWE (own, possess), CHEAP (buy), RIST (cut runes upon), SCORE (rune-carve), SKRIFE (inscribe with runes), followed by MIK instead of THIS DOOR, THIS SHIELD, &c.

On grave blocks we have *more than a score* instances of the verbs OWE, GAR (make), MARK, RAISE, SET, SKRIFE, followed by MIK instead of by THIS STONE or THESE RUNES, &c.

The runes I here give separately, half-size, photoxylographed from the cast by Herr Rosenstand :

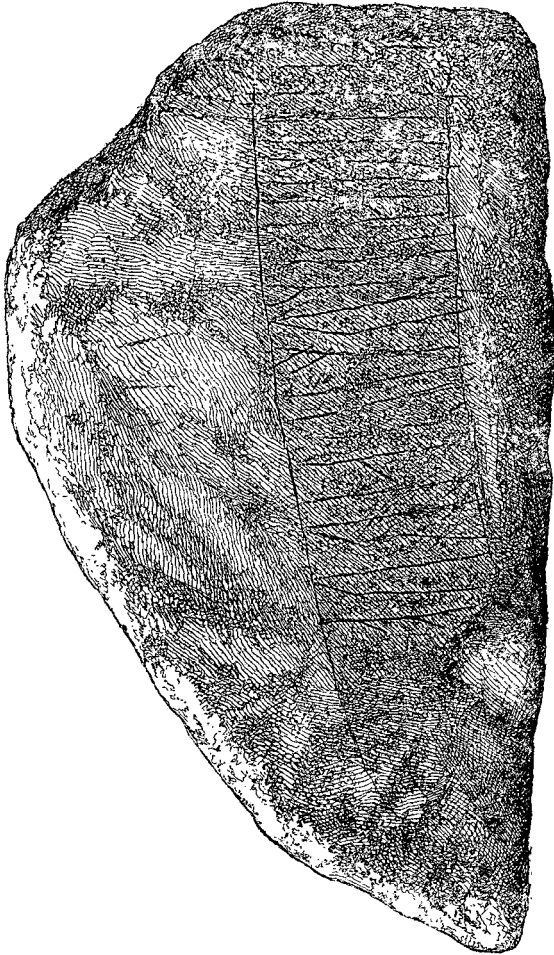


I would particularly point out a costly heathen slab found at Kirkebö, in the Færøes, and copied and explained by me at p. 728 of my "Old Northern Runic Monuments," and p. 5 of my "The Runic Hall of the Danish Old-Northern Museum." Only the upper part of the block is left, but the inscription is perfect. The staves are retrograde, and read from right to left. (See p. 429.)

This is from the same local land-group as the Shetland stone itself.

Most of these grave-stone examples use the verbs GAR (make), or HACK (hew), before the word RUNES or STONE, expressed or understood, or ME. Often the past tense is found for the common LET and the infinitive. As we know, in olden monuments, the dialectic sounds and spellings are endless. So here. We find the *past tense* of the Scandinavian KAURUA (GAR), and HAUKUA (HACK, HEW)—or however they may be spelt or

registered as "side-forms"—on runic pieces in a hundred different ways.



SATI MIH UIK UFT UNIRUO.
SET ME UIK AFTER UNIRU.

(*Uik set up this stone in memory of Uniru.*)

My lists contain more than thirty shapes of the third person singular past

of the word HAKUA alone! Some of these end in a guttural, others in a vowel. Among the latter are HAKU, HAKUI, HIA, HIAU, HIO, HIU, IKU, IO, IU, UKI, UKU, &c.

Now it is certain that the fragment before us, *which is broken and worn away, especially on the left, where the tops of the letters stood*, gives as the staves still left the rune **ƿ**, then **ᚱ**, so **l**, followed by **ʏ**, then **l**, and last the rune **ƿ**, after which comes the end-mark +. Of these characters about three-fourths yet remain. What is wanting is gone at the top, very little at the bottom, but there is *no doubt* as to the letters. Now, all this spells :

. KUI MIK.

Thus, as on the Kirkebö stone, and so often elsewhere, there is *no divisional mark*. But the staves must as usual be divided, as :

. (ha) KUI MIK.
 HEWED (*runo-carved*) ME.

The block has, therefore, doubtless borne in the common way :

[*N. N. raised this after N. N., father (or mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, &c.), his. N. N.*] HEWED ME.

More we cannot discover from so small a bit, but still it is enough to show that also in this distant colony the Northmen had their funeral monuments and their traditional letters.

The grave-minne may be from the close of the heathen or the beginning of the Christian period in the Shetlands, say about the 11th century.