

# Texts and Contexts of the Oldest Runic Inscriptions



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10. BREZA (Bosnia). In the Zemalski Museum, Sarajevo. In 1930 the remains of a late antique building were excavated at Breza, a village on the river Stavnja, about 25 kms north of Sarajevo (Arntz/Zeiss 1939). Among the debris a fragment of a semi-circular half-column (limestone, not marble) was found, which bears a nearly complete fuþark. Another column has a Latin alphabet. The building may have been an early Christian church, and the date may be early sixth century.

The fragment is 56 cm high, 30 cms wide and 20 cms deep. The

runes are of the older futhork. They run right, and the last four runes are missing because an edge of the stone has broken away. The runes are between 0,5 and 2,6 cms high. The **h** is double-barred, which indicates a Continental (not Scandinavian or Gothic) origin for this futhork. I inspected the object and its inscription in October 1998. Until then, no runologist had personally inspected the runes.

The futhork is just below a groove under the upper brim of the column's fragment, on the right hand top corner (Looijenga 1999). When seen from front, the runes run from about the centre of the column to the right. The inscription would have run all the way to the column's end, but there the edge of the stone is broken away, and the four last runes have disappeared with it. The sequence is that of the older futhork until **t**. Then follows **e m l**. Thus, **b i n g d o** are lacking, which agrees precisely with the size of the piece which is broken away.

The runes are very neatly, but inconspicuously, carved into the soft marly surface with a sharp instrument. They have not been chiseled, but cut with a knife. It is difficult to see the inscription if one does not know it is there. In that respect the runes resemble runes on small metal or wooden objects;<sup>1</sup> they are quite unlike the runic inscriptions on stones in Scandinavia. For this reason alone, it is unlikely that the runes would have had a public function as reference for the reading of Gothic documents, as is suggested by Basler (1993:28f.). A function in a consecration rite, as I have suggested (see chapter two), could on the other hand be possible. In that case it is not so much the reading of the letters that matters, but the fact that the whole futhork and the whole Latin alphabet, are there.

Since the column with the runes is only 56 cms high, we must presume that the columns were situated on small walls, otherwise it would be impossible even to read the inscriptions.

When scrutinizing the whole surface of the column, there are many scratches, including across the runes. It seems that there were at least two more inscriptions that have been deliberately scraped

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<sup>1</sup> The shaping on a lathe of the columns and the cutting of runes with a knife, or another sharp instrument, points to artisans who were used to working with wood instead of stone. Also the *Kerbschnitt* style is really a woodcutting-style, although it was also used in metal. These features may point to Germanic artisans, rather than ancient artisans.

K N D R ^ X P H X I

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off. One runs horizontally on the left hand top, at the same height as the fupark and another runs vertically on the left side of the column. This inscription ends in a clear X. Some strokes, perhaps the remains of letters (Roman cursive?) can be seen. A deliberate handmade cut runs from top to bottom, on the left side of the vertical inscription.

K N D R ^ X P H X I

The runes are all about 2 cms high. Each rune occupies a space of about one cm. The rune for **k** is very small: 0,5 cm high. The runes **p z s t** are all over 2 cms high; they run up to the rim of the groove. **p** and **z** are the largest; respectively 2,4 and 2,6 cms high. The last rune to be seen is **l**, which misses its sidetwig in the break.

One would expect the rune for **b** to follow upon **t**, but here we must suppose that **b** was one of the four runes which have disappeared in the break. The rune for **k** has the shape of a roof, also found in

PFORZEN, DISCHINGEN (see below) and WATCHFIELD (England, chapter eight), the bracteates RAUM KØGE-C and BÖRRINGE-C (see chapter six); and occurs perhaps in MÜNCHEN-AUBING **nm?u/k** (see below, nr. 68) and NEUDINGEN BAAR **klefilpa** (see below, nr. 27). The runeform for **p** occurs also in WESTEREMDEN B (Netherlands, chapter nine), in the sequence **up**. The runeform for **j** occurs in BERGAKKER (Netherlands, chapter nine), BEUCHTE and BEZENYE I (see above), and three bracteates: DARUM (V)-C, SKOBBORGHUS-B, VADSTENA-C (see chapter six).

If the double-barred **h** rune is indeed diagnostic for the Continental runic inscriptions, the conclusion is that this inscription cannot be assigned to the Gothic runic tradition, but should be considered in the light of other Continental inscriptions. Geographically nearest are the runic items of BEZENYE, AQUINCUM and PFORZEN, at least that is where they were found. BREZA, PFORZEN and BEZENYE have some runeforms in common, the roof shaped **k**, the form of the **j**, the double-barred **h**.

A little below the futhark, near the centre of the stone, is a carving of a kind of flower. It has five leaves (see drawing). The flower is 4 cms high; the leaves are all about 2 cms. This picture reminds of the 'stars' with six points, on amulets made of antler's burr (see for instance Plate LVII in Roes 1963:71ff.). In Merovingian times six-pointed stars were drawn by means of compasses (Veeck 1931, pl. 9, 4, 5, 9; and Werner 1935, pl. 36, A 2c.). The technique by which the stone surface was decorated, originated in the silversmiths' art. This conclusion agrees nicely with the observation that the inscription most likely was executed by someone who was used to working with metal or wooden objects.