

# **RUNES AROUND THE NORTH SEA AND ON THE CONTINENT AD 150-700; TEXTS & CONTEXTS**

**Proefschrift**

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door

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35. *Lețcani* (Moldavia, Rumania). Spindle whorl, found in a woman's grave, Dated second half 4th c. Almost all runes are clearly legible. The runes appear to have been added after the firing. The inscription runs from left to right. The conic form of the object allows to distinguish two parts: one inscription of four runes on the top half and one consisting of nine runes on the lower half.

Krause (1969) proposed the following transliteration (1969:156) **idonsufthe :rango:** and interpreted this as *Idōns uft hē(r).* - *Ran(n)ō*, "Idos Gewebe (ist das?) hier. - Rangno".

After personal examination of the inscription in 1994 (Looijenga 1996<sup>b</sup>) I established the reading **rango (or rawo) :adonsufhe.**

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The upper part of the initial rune of the second part of the inscription is damaged. The rune shows a headstaff and one sidetwig to the right ᚲ; the other sidetwig of presumably an a rune has gone lost.

*The Lețcani spindle whorl showing the runes f, h and the anomalous e.*



The rune ᚲ is mostly transliterated (i)ng, here I propose to transliterate **ng**. It may, on the other hand, be taken as a mirror-rune representing **w** (cf. the *Illerup* inscriptions nrs. 3 and 4, with a similar rune for **w**), then the reading **rawo**<sup>58</sup> is possible.

The last two runes of the lower half had to be pressed close together. An **h** with one bar is followed by **e** or **m**. The runes are connected by a slanting stroke of which it is unclear whether it is a deliberate stroke and part of the inscription, or whether it is just a scratch, a damage. If the stroke should be taken as a third

runic sign, the sequence may be taken for a triple bindrune: rendering **hum**, **hem** or **hee**, **hue**. I consider this not very likely, though, and propose to read **he**. The ultimate rune has an unorthodox form; it is an **e** rune with a horizontal stroke underneath the **e**'s bar, touching the hook, thus rendering something that resembles an **m**:

𐌺

There is definitely no **t** rune in this sequence, as Krause (1969:155) thought and which led him to an interpretation that cannot be held upright. Also Seebold's (1994<sup>a</sup>:75f.) reading: **\*raþo idon sufnu[h]e**, is not correct; the last part is certainly not **nu[h]e**; neither is there **n** nor **u**, but the **h**, on the contrary, is there.

When taking ᚲ to represent **ng**, we read **rango**, *rangō*, Go. nsf. *ōn*-stem. This may be a PN, denoting the female owner of the spindle whorl or a close relative (an interpretation put forward by Krause 1969:157). But, as there may be a second name in the genitive: **adons**, Go. gsf. *ōn*-stem, 'Ado's', I wondered whether *rangō* might denote something else, perhaps the very object, the spindle whorl? That would fit into a well-known type of runic texts that explicitly mentions the object or the material<sup>59</sup>.

Unfortunately there are no attestations of a *rango* in any Germanic language, but as a spindle whorl has the form of a ring, the nearest parallel to look for would be Crimean Gothic *ringo* 'ring', cf. ON *hringr*, OE, OFris, OS and OHG *hring* < Gmc *\*hrenga-z*. The etymology is unclear, according to Kluge/Seebold (1989:601). Pokorny (1959:936) postulates IE *\*krengh-* 'circle, belt'; Old Church Slavonic has *krqgъ* < *\*(s)kron(h)-* 'circle' (Trubačev 1987:25-27). Therefore, *rango* and Crimean Gothic *ringo* may reflect the frequent IE Ablaut *e ~ o* (Gmc *e ~ a*, before nasal + consonant *i ~ a*).

In Gothic, one would expect *\*hring-s* (spelled as *\*hriggs*), but it is not attested in biblical Gothic. Apparently the *h* has been lost in initial position before consonants, as is seen in Crimean Gothic *ringo*. Yet the fourth century may be a little early for the loss of initial *h*, although this might be due to an already weakened articulation.

When reading *rango adons*, this might mean: 'ring, (e.g. spindle whorl) (possession) of Ado'.

However, when taking the lantern-shaped rune for *w*, we get *rawo*. OHG has *rāwa* 'rest, peace, place to rest'; in other words 'a grave'. That would be interesting, as the spindle whorl was a gravegift. Thus we obtain a sentence like *rawo adon sufhe*: in which *adon* is a PN, dsf. Go. *ōn*-stem 'for Ado'. Although the language of the inscription is most likely to be Gothic (cf. also Grønvik 1985:171), it cannot definitely be excluded that South Germanic speaking persons were present in South-East Europe in the fourth century. As regards *adon*, an OHG dative sg. weak feminine ending *-on* is attested, but quite seldom (Braune/Eggers 1975:205). Concerning *sufhe* I propose, inspired by Seebold (1994<sup>60</sup>:76), 3 sg. optative *sufhē* of the verb *\*sufa-* 'to sleep', cf. Modern Swedish *sova*<sup>60</sup>. When connecting this verbform in the meaning 'may (she) sleep' with the reading *rawo rāwo* dsf. *ō*-stem, 'for the restingplace' of the upper part of the inscription, I obtain a semantically acceptable phrase. This includes a runic liberty: one rune is enough for reading twice the same letter. The sequence of the text would then be: *rawo adon(s) sufhe*: 'for the restingplace of Ado, may (she) sleep', which would be a sort of RIP dedication.

However, one would expect an East Germanic dialect being spoken in this Gothic area, and my above interpretation of *rāwo* is according to a South Germanic (Pre-OHG) coloured dialect. Gothic has no long *ā*, except *āh* < Gmc *\*arh*, e.g. *fāhan*, and in loanwords. If we should keep to East Germanic, another solution is wanted. Krause took his refuge in a somewhat artificial solution - but worth trying. In runic inscriptions it appears to be allowed to transliterate beyond any divisions in the text. In doing this, one may take the initial *r* from the upper part of the object's inscription and consider this to belong to the text of the lower part - Krause (1969:157) read thus *her* Go 'here'. When reconstructing our runic scribe's cosmetic move<sup>61</sup>, we obtain *awo :adons uf her*.

*awo* is Go. *awō* 'grandmother'. *uf* is Go. prep. + dative/acc. 'under'. The whole sentence is then: 'grandmother of Ado (is) under here', e.g. in her grave.

When returning to the first reading *rango : adons uf he*, the same cosmetic move can be carried out, *plus* admitting for another runic feature: the same letter needs not to be written

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<sup>60</sup> Seebold proposes to read *sufnu(h)e*, with *(h)* as *Hiattrenner*, referring to Gmc *\*suf-nō-*, ON *sofna*, an inchoative verb: 'to go to sleep', but a sequence *-nu-* is not there.

<sup>61</sup> There is a parallel though: the inscription from *Fallward* (Continental Corpus), reading *ksamella lguskapi* = *skamella [a]lguskapi* 'footstool (depicting) Elkhunter'. The initial *a* of *[a]lguskapi* must be borrowed from the ultimate rune of *skamella*. The requested 'cosmetic movement' in the Letcani inscription is herewith not an isolated feature.

<sup>58</sup> A reading **raþo** (Seebold 1994:76) is unlikely, because the ‘lantern’ is at the top of the headstaff.

<sup>59</sup> For instance: **kobu, kabu** ‘comb’ on a comb (Oostum and Toornwerd, Groningen), **kabr** ‘comb’ on a comb (Elisenhof, Schleswig-Holstein). Furthermore there is **horn hjartaR** ‘deer’s horn’ on a piece of antler, found in Dublin, and **hronæsban** ‘whale’s bone’ on Franks Casket. The Vimose (Funen) plane has **tal|gljjo** ‘plane’. And there is **kŋia kingia** ‘brooch’ on the Aquincum fibula. Furthermore there is the recently found footstool of Fallward, near the Weser mouth, with the word **ksamella**, NHG *Schemel* ‘footstool’.

twice. We may then read **rango : adons uf he(r)**, which means ‘Ado’s ring (= spindle whorl) (is) down here’. The purport of the inscription is expressed with reference to the object as a gravegift: *down here*. The object and the inscription may have been made especially for Ado’s afterlife, and subsequently been deposited with her in her grave.