Consulting the Runes

The Nature and Extent of Runic Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England

(Image: Stephens 1884)

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Introduction

Aims and Objectives

The aims of this dissertation are to determine the extent and nature of runic literacy and use in Anglo-Saxon England. It will focus on the public uses of runes and the functions of these inscriptions, specifically examining the evidence provided by both the runestones of Northumbria and the coins of East Anglia and Kent, the two areas of England with the strongest runic traditions. Furthermore, the literary ability of the carvers and the intended readers will be discussed. Lastly, it will discuss the relationship and transition between the runic and roman scripts.

Through the examination of these topics, this purpose of this dissertation is to argue that in the case of both the runestones and coins, there was likely as sizable number of ceorls (freemen) and nobles who had at least passive literacy with the runic script. Furthermore, it will argue that the runic script and roman script occupied different domains of use, the runic script in Northumbria used mainly in commemorative, poetic and formulaic statements derived from oral utterances, whereas the roman script was used where true book-literacy and record-keeping and formality was intended. It will be demonstrated that where the runes and roman scripts interact, there is a transition from the traditional and archaic oral culture of Anglian society, to a truly literate culture enforced by ecclesiastical centres.

Similarly to the runestones, it will be argued that the coins also represent evidence of different domains of use. Here, the runic script acts as the informal and secular script used for formulaic reproduction of the moneyer’s name, whilst the roman script acts as the formal, ecclesiastical and elite script acceptable for the king’s name. Here, the attitudes and transition from runic to roman can be seen as a top down change, where, as coinage develops in the eighth-century from an informal domain to a private to a royal one, roman script is adopted and enforced by the king.

Methods

In order to fully examine all the relevant evidence, a number of case studies will be analysed. In the cases of both the runestone and coins, both the inscriptions and the objects themselves will be analysed in detail.
**Transliteration and Translation**

The inscriptions will be transliterated and translated in accordance with common runological tradition in which the transliteration is presented in bold letters. Where runes are transliterated, they will be written in lower case, whilst letters in the roman script will be transliterated in capitals. Next, if the inscriptions is lengthy such as with the runestones, it will be normalised into italic letters, before being wholly translated into modern English. When attention is drawn to a specific rune, the form of the rune itself will be given in brackets, then its transliteration in quotation marks, and lastly the poetic name of the rune will be given. The translations themselves will generally be taken from reliable sources in order to gain an understanding of the utterance inscribes, and the specific forms of the runes and bind-runes will be examined in order to gain a full picture of the inscribers knowledge with the runic alphabet.

**Runestones**

Runestones will be split into two separate groups, memorial and non-memorial, in order to explore the differing functions that may have been behind their inscriptions. In the analysis of the memorial runestones, a method borrowed from Judith Jesch (1998) in her analysis of Scandinavian runestones will be used, where the inscription will be divided into a number of common elements from which we may be able to determine the possible functions of the runestones and examine who may have been expected to read the inscription. Furthermore, the materials, dimensions and geographical placement of the objects will be taken into account, in order to insure that the inscription is analysed within the context of these factors.

**Runic coins**

The coins will be divided into four main groups: the early gold coinage, the silver penny coinage, the broad-flan coinage and the Northumbrian coinage, allowing for easy comparison between these groups. Within these groups, coins will be divided by their date of creation, moneyers and king, allowing for in-depth analysis of the development of rune-use.
The runestones of Northumbria

In ninth-century Northumbria there appears to be a rise in the number of runic inscribed objects. This phenomenon can be well examined in the runestones, monuments that appear almost entirely in ecclesiastical contexts and overwhelmingly in Northumbria (fig. 1) (Page 1999, p.130). This trend is not limited to monuments, and there appears to be an overall increase in both portable finds and monuments inscribed with runes in general in ninth-century Northumbria, including coins (discussed below).
Runestones provide us with examples of very public inscriptions. The placement of many of these runestones show that they were easily available for public access, and were clearly meant for display (Findell and Copář 2017, p126). The appearance of the runestones, which are thirty-seven in total, prove that there must have been literates during this period in Northumbria in order to make the inscriptions. Just how many, however, is impossible to know for certain. The number of thirty-seven surviving stones is remarkably low if we consider what must have been the population of Northumbria in this period. However, we also cannot know how many monuments, either crosses or memorials, were constructed of perishable materials such as wood.

**Memorial inscriptions**

Memorial inscriptions are the most common runestone inscriptions in the Anglo-Saxon period, often formulaically recording the names of the commemorated, their sponsors, and sometimes the signature of the carver and sometimes requests to pray for the soul of the deceased (Findell and Kopář 2017, p.126; Page 1999, p.141). The Great Urswick Stone (fig. 2) is one of many commemorative stones, bearing many of the same commemorative practice as other stones of its type, such as the very similar Thornhill III stone (Findell and Kopář 2017, p.126; Page 1999, p.143). Commonly dated to the ninth-century on art historical grounds, the Great Urswick Stone sits at 117 cm tall (Page 1999, p.141). It is comprised of red sandstone, and is curved in shape due to its reuse as window lintel in the Norman period, before it was later integrated into the building of St. Michaels Church.
Though the stone no longer stands where it was originally placed, its significant weathering shows that it was outside for some time, clearly meant for public display (Page 1999, p.136; Findell and Kopár 2017, p.126). The carving on the front of the stone include two figures standing in front of a cross, the left figure with his right arm raised toward other. The carver cut a panel for the runes to contain, though he did not account for the space the lines of runes would take up. Whilst the runes begin large at the top of the panel, they get smaller as the rune-master attempted to account for lost space. Instead, the carver was forced to place the final character of þer and the final word of the prayer into the same space as the cross (Page 1999, p.150; Findell and Kopár 2017, p.129). Notably, the panel on the stone is central, clearly showing that the inscription was intended to be read as the main part of the inscription. The inscription on the stone when transliterated, normalised and translated, reads (Page 1999, p.141):

```
+tunwinisæ|æftertoroi|tredæbeku|næfterhisb|æurnægebidaes(th)e|rs||au|læ
Tunwini setæ æfter Toroítredæ bekun after his beurnæ gebidaes ()the) saulae
Tunwini set up a monument after Torhtræd his son. Pray for his soul.
```
These inscriptions, when divided into its standardised elements, can be analysed as follows:¹

1. Tunwini (the commissioner of the monument)
2. Set up a monument (the statement of commissioning the monument)
3. After Torhtred (the commemorated)
4. His son (the relationship between the commissioner and the commemorated).

And then the optional ritual action:
5. Pray For his Soul.

Lastly, there sits a maker’s mark, which though damaged, can be reconstructed as (Findell and Kopár 2017, p.129):

\[
\text{Lylþi || sw[o-]}
\]
\[
\text{Lyl þis w[orhtæ]}
\]
\[
\text{[Lyl m[ade this].]}
\]

By examining these elements, we may be able to determine the functions of the runestones, and examine who may have been expected to read its inscription. Page (1999, p.104) argues that one reason a runestone could have been raised is for the purpose of documentation, recording the death legally and publicly so that the heir could take over, or record evidence of the transference of property. The first four elements of the Great Urswick Stone inscription would benefit this purpose, announcing the commissioner of the stone, the death of the commemorated, and the commissioner’s relationship to the commemorated. For this reason, Page argues, that it is only professionals that would need to be able to read the runes (Page 1999, p.104). However, Meijer (1997, p.84) highlights that there would be little reason in taking the trouble to learn runes if only to carve them on monumental stones, just so that a very few number of people could read them. It instead may have been desirable and intended for the stone to have been read by others passing or gathering at the stone. It is impossible to reconstruct whether the runes would have been read aloud to a group, and it is unwise to claim that the appearance of these runes mean that everybody who passed or gathered at the stone was literate enough to read them. However, it should be noted that illiterates and semi-literate people could have made use of the written word through intermediaries, literate

¹ The dividing of the inscription into these elements is a model borrowed from Judith Jesch (1998) in her discussion of Viking-Age runestones.
members of society who could read out the message in their behalf (Harris 1989, p.33-4; Jesch 1998, p.471). Lastly, the fifth optional element of the stone bids a ritual action of the reader, namely that they should pray for the soul of the commemorated. Because of this, it is unlikely that the one who commissioned the stone expected only professionals to read it. The lines on the stone are consciously inscribed in alliterative verse, implying that alongside the possible legal function of the runestone, it likely also performed commemorative ritual function to the community in which the poetic text may have been read aloud by those gathered around it (Findell and Kopár 2017, p.130-1).

The ecclesiastical nature of the rune-stones, and the poetic utterances they contain, may provide us with evidence of a transition from an oral to a literate culture within the Northumbrian church. Jesch (1998, p.467) highlights that in the absence of literacy, “…the strictures of poetry are the best way of ensuring the survival of an utterance…”. Many of these formulaic inscriptions, such as the inscription of the Great Urswick Stone, has been noted to contain archaic linguistic features for its date (Findell and Kopár 2017, p.130). Parallels can be drawn between the utterances on these monuments with many other predominantly oral cultures, who when engaging in ritual, make use of a special, archaic language, contrasting with the everyday spoken language of society (Brink, 2005). The poetic, formulaic and archaic utterances on the stones imply that this is a recording of an existing and older oral tradition put into writing for the ritual purposes of commemoration.

The use of the runic script, as opposed to the also available roman script, appears to be a component of this oral culture. Brink (2005, p.67), argues that the runic script itself is a product of oral culture, used to write short, formulaic and patterned statements that were easy to remember and could be repeated on runestone after runestone. However, the roman script was a script of a truly book-literate culture, in which repeatability and formulaic structure are unnecessary; a script in which an alphabet is not being utilized to record the spoken word, but for record keeping and documentation. It may be possible, then, that the monumental stones bearing a purely roman text represent a further step in the transition from a reliance on oral record keeping and commemoration in the church to one of true literacy, in which society could not function without the support of written text.

What, then, can we make of the runestones which bear mixed runic and roman inscriptions? The approximately ninth-century Falstone Monument bears a side by side runic and roman inscription, the passages almost identical in meaning, reading (Page 1999, p.142):
Page (1999, p.142) highlights that the inscriber of the stone appeared to be more comfortable in the roman script than the runic script. For example, in the runic inscription, the inscriber cut the separate runes “œ” instead of using the ‘ɔ’ (œ) Æthel rune, which would more properly represent the sound in question. In this case, the runic script may have already been an archaic alphabet, and was intended to look back to and respect ancestral commemorative practices, whilst the roman script represented a look forward into the newer ecclesiastical practice. Alternatively, these stones could represent ecclesiastical areas where some are literate in roman script and some are not. The inhabitants of these geographical areas may have been divided in some way, possibly by economic grounds, and the side-by-side text may have been for the benefit of those only literate in one script.

Non-memorial inscriptions

In the case of non-memorial runestones, the Ruthwell Cross in Dumfried, Scotland, is a most impressive and unique example. Standing at around 365cm, it bears the longest runic inscription in Anglo-Saxon England, at 320 surviving runes (Meyvaert 1992, p.96). The cross bears a number of relief-carved sculptures on each face, with associated Latin inscription describing these scenes (fig. 3). The Cross is made up of two stones, the upper stone consisting of the cross and upper-shaft, and the lower stone being the greater part of the shaft and base (Page 1999, p.145). There is much debate over the dating of the cross, though MacLean (1992, pp. 49-70) argues for a date in the mid-eighth-century based on stylistic and historical grounds, a date which is further supported by Page (1999, p.145). Unfortunately, along with considerable weathering of the surface, the cross defaced in the seventeenth-century, when Protestant reformers toppled the Cross, seeing it as “idolatrous” (Farrell, 1992, p.34; Page 1999, p.54). This defacement and weathering left a number of runes illegible. Furthermore, an attempted reconstruction of the cross in the nineteenth century saw the head of the cross reattached to the shaft backwards (Farrel 1992, p.36). Luckily, there does exist some record of...
the runes on the cross before its defacement that allow us to cautiously supplement these damaged words.

The sculptures on the north and south faces of the cross are in reference to a number of stories about the life of Christ. The associated roman inscriptions on these faces are contained in broad borders surrounding the sculptures, and describe the scenes depicted in the Latin language (Page 1999, p.146). The top stone of the cross bears runic inscriptions, though they are so damaged that they near illegible.

Figure 3: An engraving of all four sides of the cross (Stuart 1867 cited in Cassidy 1992).

The runic inscriptions of the lower stone are the longest, occupying the eastern and western faces of the cross. They are presented in a strange fashion, not set in a continuous text along the length of the border like the Latin inscriptions, but set in short horizontal lines of two to four letters each (fig. 4).
Page (1999, p.147) argues that the odd placement of runes implies that they may have been added to the monument sometime after completion. However, this is disputed, and Meyvaert (2012, p.407-14) instead argues that the meticulous and calculated inscribing of the runes implies that the cross was lying down and incomplete when the runes were added. Unlike the Roman inscriptions, they are in Old English and do not reference any of the scenes carved on the cross. Instead, the text has been identified as an alternative version of the Old English poem *Dream of the Rood*, recorded in the Vercelli Book (Page 1999, p.147; Ball 1991, p.111; Howlett 1992). The RuneS Database offers the transliteration and translation:

```plaintext
[...]uœþo[|...]dægisgæ(f)[.|]m[.|]r[.|]am[.|]erdominnæ[...]gere[da|hi|gnæ|go|da|lm|eœ[tt|ig|p]ah|ew|al|de|on|ga|lg|ug|i|st|iga|(mod)|igf[.|.]|.]men[.][.|.]icr|iicn|æKy|nin|che^afun|æsh|(l)ard|(h)æ|da|ic|(n)ido|rstæ[.|.]sm|æræ[.|.]uuŋ|Ket|(m)en|bææ|gad[.|.]c[.|.][.|.]ib|b|doæ|b|ist|e|mi[.|.]i|]|(b)is[.|.|.|.|.|.|.|.]kris[.|.]wæson|ro|di|hw|eb|r
```
...creation... '...He disrobed himself Almighty God as he was about to mount the gallows courageous [before] [...] men.' 'I [...] a mighty king, the Lord of Heaven. I dared not bend down. Men mocked the two of us both together. I [was] stained with blood (...'). '[...] Christ was on the cross. Yet there came from afar noble ones hastily together. I beheld it all. I was bitterly distressed with sorrows, bowed down...' 'Wounded with arrows. They laid him down, the one weary of limb. They stood at the body's head. There they beheld...'.

Ball (1991, p.131) notes that despite its initial appearance, the runes are carefully thought out and divided, the majority of the lines keeping “sense and grammatical construction flow across the metrical division”.

Much can be conferred about the rune-master or patron who designed this inscription. They were clearly skilled, bore knowledge of poetic form and likely had access to manuscript sources. Furthermore, there is evidence that the runes on the cross were transliterated from an original roman script, and the forms of the runes themselves imply heavy influence from Northumbrian runic manuscript sources. Firstly, there are many examples of geminate (doubled) runes in the inscription, a common feature of Northumbrian texts (Ball 1991, p.116). Furthermore, there are multiple examples of runes that seem to be inherited from later Northumbrian manuscript tradition, ‘ᚦ’ (k) calc ‘ᚦ’ (g) gar and ‘ᚦ’ (k). These newly invented runes developed due to the evolution of sounds in the Northumbrian dialect, ‘ᚦ’ representing back k/c, ‘ᚦ’ representing back g and ‘ᚦ’ representing a back k/c followed by a secondary fronted vowel (Page 1999, p.45). These complex rune forms, and their manuscript origins, heavily imply that the text was translated from Latin, and clearly show the signs of a great deal of manuscript influence. As such, the stone was likely erected and designed with heavy ecclesiastical involvement.

Again, we return to the question: why did the inscriber choose to carve runes for this inscription rather than roman, like the other inscriptions on the cross? As previously mentioned, the nature of the runic inscription itself is very different from its roman counterpart, not
referencing any of the carved scenes on the cross and being decidedly poetic in nature. Again, we see runes consciously employed to display decidedly English poetical forms. As with the commemorative stones, the runes are representing a memory of a traditional oral culture, as opposed to the truly literate ecclesiastical Christian stories. Furthermore, the use of runes on the Cross may be a symbolic example of the church represent their own Northumbrian culture and history into Christian symbolism, presenting this image to both to the local community and Irish travellers who likely frequented the area in this period.

**Runic coins**

**The role of the moneyer**

Anglo-Saxon coinage provides us with the largest corpus of runic inscribed objects, the content of which consist almost entirely of personal names (Page 1999, p.117). These coins are useful in analysing the extent and nature of runic literacy, presenting an example of a very public expression of runic use.

To determine who was ultimately responsible for the content of the inscriptions and iconography on the coins, we must first examine the organisation of minting. In order to have both the resources and skill to cut the dies, the die-cutter must have had at least both the tools and skill of an ironsmith. However, the small size of the coins and complexity of many of the coins iconography likely required some form of specialist training, and the die cutter may have held a position in society similar to or the same as the jeweller (Gannon 2003, p.15). Gannon further highlights that the common appearance of the moneyer’s names inscribed on the reverse of most coins in mid-eighth century outnumber the identifiable die-cutters, and that die-cutters appeared to work for more than one moneyer simultaneously. The names that frequently appear in runic script on the reverse of the coin are often interpreted as the name of the moneyer, a view that has been supported by most (Blackburn 1991, p.139, Page 1999, p.118).

Some scholars have argued that royal control was the primary drive behind early coin production (Metcalf 1994, pp.10-25). This argument has some support, as there are two definite cases of kings names on early gold coinage: that of Eadbald of Kent (616-40) and Aldfrith of Northumbria (685-704) (Naismith 2012, p.91). Gannon (2003, p.189) argues that early coin minting came under the patronage of the church, which can be supported by the nature of the Christian iconography inscribed and the resources or the church. Lastly, Grierson (1975, p.139) and Blackburn argue that coin production was originally a private affair in the hands of
the moneyers, that continued and was dominated by Pada and Epa/Æpa by the time of the 7th to early 8th century silver pennies, and then slowly coming under royal control. Based on this early evidence, it appears that coin minting came under various patronage throughout this early period, though the often included moneyer’s names inscribed on the coins would imply the moneyers themselves had final say in deciding the content of the inscription.

**Gold coinage**

Following the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, both England and their Frisian neighbours ceased native coin production (Blackburn 1991, p.140). From 575-675, there were two denominations in gold, the larger *solidus*, weighing approximately 4.55g and the *tremissis*, possibly identified as the *scilling* referenced in Anglo-Saxon law (Blackburn 1991, p. 141). Early on, these coins travelled to England from the continent and were often used in a decorative fashion, being pierced for mounting on clothing or hung as pendants (Blackburn 1991, p.141; Gannon 2003, pp.8-10).

In the later sixth century native coinage begins to be minted on a small scale, though few of these survive and even fewer bear inscriptions. Three of the earliest runic coins we have are of debatable relation to one another. The ‘scanmodu’ *solidus* in the British Museum has no recorded find-spot, and there has been much debate over whether the coin is of Frisian or Anglo-Saxon origin, though it will be briefly discussed here. It has been said to be of Anglo-Saxon origin by some runologists due to the shape of the (F) ‘a’ ᚪ rune, thought to have been distinctively Anglo-Saxon (Elliott 1989, p.102). However, Page (1995, pp.78-9) highlights the severe lack of evidence to support this claim, as the so-called Old English ‘a’ is found on numerous finds in Frisia. A pair of related coins, the ‘hada’ and ‘weladu’ *solidi* are more certainly Frisian, and all three coins have been usually interpreted as personal names, and specifically as that of the moneyer by Looijenga (Blackburn 1991, p.143; Looijenga 2003, p.308).

Whilst there are too few of these coins to draw any concrete conclusions on the nature or extent of runic literacy, these runic inscriptions show the desire, probably of the moneyers, to mark their work. These gold coins were likely only produced on a very small scale and intended for regal or high-ranking use. Furthermore, these coins possibly suggest the beginnings of a tradition of naming the moneyer on the coin, one that would spread into England and continue for quite some time. At least in this early period, the coins tell us there
was a level of passive and active literacy among those of higher social-status amongst the Frisian neighbours of the Anglo-Saxons.

The earliest certain Anglo-Saxon minted runic coins are rare and contain few runic inscriptions. The first is a group of four, struck from two pairs of dies and dated to c.620 on the basis of their fineness (Sutherland 1948, pp.17-8; Blackburn 1991, p.144). One die has been transliterated commonly as **benu : tigoii, tigoii/benu** or **benu:tigo||**: and the other has **benu:+tidi** or **:+tidi/benu** (Blackburn 1991, p.144; Page & Blackburn 1998 pp.12-3). Furthermore, a possibly related coin bears the letters **…BERN...** on the reverse (Ibid.). Similarly, a small issue of **tremisses** found in southern England bear the retrograde inscription **delaiona** or **desaiona**, though the latter is usually preferred (Blackburn 1991, p.144; Page 1999, p.120). They have been dated to c.660 due to their absence from the Crondall hoard and high gold content (Blackburn 1991, p.144). The last of this early group is a coin found in 1997 in Billockby, near the Norfolk Broads (Page & Blackburn 1998 pp.12-3). The coin is of the same type as six other examples, though this is the only coin to bear a runic sequence. It is of very pale gold, with a 12mm diameter and weighs 1.21g, and has been dated Blackburn to be of c.670, due to the quality of its material and absence from the Crondall Hoard (Blackburn 1991, p.144). Thus, it is possible that it is of the earliest minted coinage of East Anglia (Blackburn 1991, p.144). It is based on an imperial Roman type, and around a distinctive "lyre-shaped object" bears the retrograde runic sequence **ltoed**. Following this sequence is a possible single-barred ‘h’ rune, though it may also be two verticals in the fashion of the **benu:tigo||** type (Blackburn 1991, p.144). Following this, there is a cross, ‘x’, which could possibly indicate the end of the inscription, a ‘x’ (g) **gifu** rune or least likely an ‘†’ (n) **nyd** rune. (Blackburn 1991, p.144; Page 1999, p.214). Page argues that the sequence is likely similar to that of the **benu:tigo||** and **desaiona** coins, unintelligible and unlikely to be an Old English word, particularly due to the implausible vowel sequence **oe** (Page 1999, p.214). As of yet, these coins have no satisfactory translation, and it is possible that the inscriptions were never intended to have been read at all, simply appearing because coins were expected to bear a form of inscription and runes looked more familiar (Page 1999, p.214).

There may be a trend of unintelligible runic sequences, though the lack of runic coins in this period make this uncertain. Even if these inscriptions are nonsense, they imply that there was familiarity with the runic script. If the supplier of the legend was illegible, they still must have recognised runes as separate to the roman script that it replaced, and simply did not care
whether the script was legible or not. There also remains the possibility that the legends of these coins did hold some now uninterpretable meaning to the one who supplied it.

The East Anglian gold coinage of Pada (fig. 5) is the last of the runic gold types, though it is with Pada’s coins that the true extent of the influence of the kingdom’s specific runic tradition can be seen. Taking their obverse designs from the desaiona coins, they provide us evidence of the transitional period between gold shillings and silver pennies. Ascribed mainly to Kent, the coins began in base gold, an alloy of around 20% gold and 80% silver, before transitioning into fine silver (Blackburn 1991, p.145; Page 1999, pp.120,122). Produced at significant quantities over the period of about a decade, five distinct types have been discovered, with four of the types bearing runic pada inscriptions and the other related by type but bearing only a blundered roman inscription (Blackburn 1991 p.145).

![Figure 5: A pale gold Anglo-Saxon preliminary phase primary penny of the runic Pada type (series Pa IA), c.655-680 (Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) ID no. SF-0C2A17).](image)

**The early silver pennies**

Shortly after Pada’s issues ceased, silver penny coinage became the norm. These issues were struck during the late 7th and early 8th centuries, bearing the personal names: Æpa/Epa, Ætheliraed, Tilberht and Wigræd (Blackburn 1991, p. 147; Page 1999, p.122-3). These coins are found predominantly in southern and eastern England, possibly beginning in Kent, though the later minted coins of c.720-50 are clearly East Anglian (Blackburn 1991, p.147; Page 1999, p. 122-3). These coins were subject to numerous attempts at forgeries, often leaving us distorted legends. Similarly to Pada’s coinage, Epa’s coinage sometimes bears a blundered roman text, whilst the runic legend remains mostly consistent other than the varied spelling of Æpa or Epa (fig. 6). However, the different spellings of Æpa and Epa appear to be genuine and may be a result of the dialectical differences between Kent and it’s nearby counties (Page 1999, p.122). Likewise, the coins of Wigræd and Tilberht were also struck with spelling variations.
Wigræd appears as: \textit{wigræd, wigrd and wigr}, the latter two possibly acting as a purposeful abbreviation of Wigræd, whilst Tilberht appears as: \textit{tilberht, tilberït, and tilberlt}. The last rendition `\textit{tilberlt}’ appears to be a blundered copy of the previous ‘\textit{tilberït}’ legend, where the rare `\textit{i}’ (ᚦ) \textit{eoh} rune is mistaken as a ‘\textit{l}’ (ᚣ) \textit{lagu} rune (Blackburn 1991, p.155; Page 1999, p.123). Lastly, the coinage of \textit{Æthiliræd} is represented in three different forms, mostly as \textit{æþili|ræd}, but sometimes as \textit{æþil.|ræd} or the corrupt retrograde \textit{æ+ili|ræd}. This name was previously attributed to the Mercian king \textit{Æthiliræd} of 674 to 704. However, numismatists have largely discounted this date due to both stylistic typologies and metal analysis, which date the coins to the 710s, too late to be issues of the king (Blackburn & Bonser 1986 p. 85; Blackburn 1991, p.157; Page 1999, p.124). As such, the name \textit{Æthiliræd} is probably the name of the moneyer, in line with the tradition of other East Anglian minted coins.

\begin{figure}[h]  
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{example_spellings.png}
\caption{Examples of alternate spellings of `Æpa/Epa’ on Æpa type pennies (EMC no. 2001.1211; 2002.0241).}
\end{figure}

In the examination of these coin types, it is possible to make some tentative theories on runic literacy. Though impossible to say with certainty, if the various spellings of \textit{Æpa/Epa} are a result of dialectical differences, it seems to be that that the die-cutter was given the name of the moneyer he was to inscribe verbally. The die-cutter then would have inscribed the die based on the sound heard when receiving the instructions, resulting in the variation of ‘æ’ and ‘e’. Furthermore, the fact that the runic script remains consistent and correct in Pada and Epa’s coinage, whilst the roman script becomes increasingly distorted, implies that the die-cutter was not literate in the roman script. Similarly, the moneyers Wigræd, Tilberht and \textit{Æthiliræd} display only runes on their coinage, making no attempt at roman inscription whatsoever. Throughout this late sixth to mid-seventh-century coinage in East Anglia, runes consistently appear as the preferred and only script employed by the moneyer.
Looking at the coins alongside the other runic evidence in East Anglia, it would appear that in this period, the runic and roman scripts occupied different domains of use; the runic script acting as the informal and secular script and roman script acting as the formal, ecclesiastical and elite script. As with the Northumbrian runestones, it would appear that runes were fundamentally a product of oral culture, used to write short, informal and formulaic utterances such as the moneyers names on the coins. Roman inscriptions very rarely appear epigraphically in East Anglia at this period, though runes appear frequently. Roman script does appear, however, in surviving written documents of the period, such as royal charters and genealogies, lengthier texts that were not the written down utterances of orality, but a product of formal documentation (Page, 1999, p.216). Furthermore, it is important to note that the vast majority of runic inscriptions we find in East Anglia are in the Old English language, the spoken and informal vernacular, whilst the roman script is reserved overwhelmingly for the Latin language, the language of the church and educational elites.

Regarding the use of the runes on coins, Both Metcalf and Page highlight that presumably the trader or merchant was happy to accept either script on the coinage, and it is impossible to know if he could himself comprehend the runes (Metcalf 1995, p.435; Page 1999, p.215). However, it is clear that there must have been some number people who were passively literate in the runic script in East Anglian society, otherwise there would be no point in inscribing the coins. If we accept that the minting of silver penny coinage was a private affair and used widely in transactions East Anglia by the ceorl or ‘freemen’ class, then the die-cutter had no need to inscribe the formal roman. Instead, the more widely understood and informal runic script and OE language would have serve the purposes of the ceorls, who needed only to read the name of the issuing moneyer to be fairly certain of the coin’s integrity.

**Broad-Flan pennies**

In c.760, a new transitional form of coinage began to appear in East Anglia (Blackburn 1991, p.159). Unlike the previous silver pennies, they are firmly regal in nature and bridge the gap between previous silver pennies and the later broad-flan pennies (Blackburn and Grierson 1975, p.271). As the broad-flan coinage was introduced, there is a sharp decline in evidence of the use of the silver pennies throughout East Anglia (Naismith 2012, p.7). The coinage reforms seem seize the use of coinage from the ceorl (or ‘freeman’) and place it in the hands of the elite, mirroring the coinage reforms of the Carolingian king Pepin the Short in c.750 (Naismith 2012, p.7). The earliest discovered coinage of this transitional style is of King Beonna, whose
coins were not only of much higher silver content, but also bore significantly higher instances of literate inscription. It is notable that some of the later and debased issues of silver pennies appear to continue to be concurrent with Beonna’s reformed coinage, implying that silver penny production did not fall under royal jurisdiction, and possibly even represents illicit penny minting in order to continue trade outside of royal control.  

Figure 7: A Wilred type coin of Beonna (Blackburn and Grierson 1975, p. 581).

Beonna’s coinage can be divided into four groups: the coinage of the moneyer Wilred and that of an unnamed moneyer, which are inscribed entirely with runes, and the coinage of Efe and Werferth, which are either in roman or mixed roman and runic characters (Blackburn 1991, p.158).

The entirely runic coinage of Wilred introduces to us a previously unknown rune-like character (Þ), meant to represent the word ‘rex’ (fig. 7) (Blackburn 1991, p. 159; Page 1999, p.126). Page (1985 p.39) argues that this character is a bind-rune of ‘R’ (r) rād and ‘Y’ (x) eolh, thus creating "r(e)x", employed to conserve space. Furthermore, Wilred uses an odd variant of the (ᚼ) ‘d’ dæg rune (Figure ?) (Page 1999, p.126). Wilred may have inscribed d in this way for matters of practicality, as the usual form ‘ᚼ’ may have been difficult to inscribe on such a small die. However, it may also be possible that these odd graphemes had a tradition of use in East Anglia, with Wilred’s coin the only surviving evidence. The use of bind-runes implies that the die-cutter was knowledgeable with runes, showing that he could create shorthand depictions of frequently occurring words. Jan Meijer (1997, p.85) highlights that the simplification of runic characters may imply that writing was becoming relatively widespread,

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2 See the dates of some of the latest silver penny (or sceattas) coinage on the Early Medieval Coin Corpus: http://www-cm.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/emc/.
possibly for commercial reasons and the need for a faster script. Perhaps in other media now lost to us, this symbol represented a common motive for rex and the king to a wide passive-literate society.

Figure 8: An ‘interlace’ type coin of Beonna (Blackburn and Grierson 1975, p. 581).

The inscription of the ‘interlace’ types provide an epigraphical use of the rare ‘Þ’ (x) eolh rune, the obverse inscription reading beonna rex (fig. 8). The moneyer Efe mostly uses a roman ‘X’ in rex, though one die instead replaces it with two ‘s’ runes. Similarly, the coinage of Werferth also represents ‘rex’ in an unexpected way (fig. 9). Page (1985, p.38) transliterates the legend as bEOnna REss, in the same fashion as the moneyer Efe’s coinage. However, this has been contested by Blackburn, who instead transliterates the inscription bEOnna REïs, arguing that Page had mistaken the rune ‘Þ’ (ï) eoh for a blundered ‘h’ (s) sigel rune (Blackburn 1991, p.159). To add further confusion, Archibald transliterates a Werferth coin discovered in 1995 as bEOnna REzs (Archibald 1995, p.14). Archibald appears to have mistaken the rune ‘Þ’ (ï) eoh for a roman ”Z”, and then further mistakenly transliterated it as a lower case letter, which would signify it is a runic ”z”, of which there is no corresponding rune for in the futhorc. Though hard to discern for definite, when comparing the runic ‘r’ of Werferth’s name on the reverse of the coin with the inscription on the obverse, the ‘R’ of REïs would appears to have been intended as a runic, thus bEOnna rEïs is the preferred transliteration.
The ‘interlace’, Efe and Werferth coinage convey useful information about interaction between roman and runic scripts. The practice of inscribing the word rex as ‘Rex’, ‘REss’ or ‘rEis’ make it clear that there was no standardised way of representing the roman letter ‘X’ in runes. Though the rune ‘ᛉ’ eolh is commonly transliterated ‘X’, Page (1995, p.6) argues that this attribution was a later phenomenon. Instead, he argues that the ‘ᛉ’ of the interlace type is evidence the runes were transliterated from an original roman script, making the runic script secondary to the roman (Page 1995, p.6-7). Furthermore, Page (1995, p.6-7) states that ‘ᛉ’ was simply an older out of use rune, repurposed as a symbol for ‘X’ due to lack of a runic counterpart. Conversely to the ‘interlace’ type, the use of the ‘ᛇ’ (i) eoh rune in Werferth’s coinage may be an attempt at the pronunciation of the /eks/ sound in runes, of which ‘ᛇ’ is fairly similar. If pronunciation was in fact the end goal, it may be that the instructions for the inscriptions were supplied verbally instead of in writing, much like the coinage of Æpa. In this way, regional differences in either pronunciation, runic knowledge or both influenced the way in which the die-cutter represented the sound.

The general mixture of roman and runic letters and their variance in frequency tell us not only about the differentiation in familiarity that the moneyers and die-cutters had with each script, but also the overlapping domains of the formal and informal scripts. Page (1995, p.38) argues that the mixture of the roman and runic scripts are not unusual in this period and can be observed on other artefacts, such as the golden Manchester/Lancaster ring which reads asDRED MEC AH EAnRED MEC agROf, ‘Edred owns me, Eanred engraved me’, the seventh-century coffin of St Cuthbert from Lindisfarne which bears a single mixed rune, and the occasional use of runes in manuscripts. Page (1995, p.38) continues that mixed runic and roman use simply shows that the moneyers were following the local East Anglian tradition and
that there was no particular reason for the mixing of the scripts. However, Page fails to note that cases of mixed runic and roman script overwhelmingly appear on high-value items which would have been made by the wealthy or items that are ecclesiastical in nature. Inscribed items of a secular and lower status nature that are made with more easily obtainable materials tend to contain only the runic script, such as the recently discovered ‘Dwarf plate’ in Sussex or the bronze Cramond and lead Coquet island rings (PAS ID no.NMS-63179C; Page 1999, p.157-8). The use of roman script appears on items that are associated with higher status objects in which it would be more ‘proper’ to inscribe with a formal script and literate script. If the status of the moneyer or die-cutter as a well-to-do craftsman bridged the gap between the formal and informal domains, he may have been using roman script as much as he could, only using runes when the roman equivalent was unknown. If, as Page states, that the Beonna’s moneyers were following local fashion, it was a fashion confined to the formal domain, not a fashion prevalent in East Anglian society as a whole.

Similarly, as the use of coinage is transferred from the use of the common ceorl to a high-value currency of the elite, so did the domain of script change from the informal script of the oral culture to the formal script of the literate elite. The addition of the roman script mixed with the runic script on Werferth and Efe’s coinage may show this transition taking place, symbolising the start of associating coinage within a purely literate, educated formal sphere. Furthermore, Beonna’s seizing of coinage for purely royal control may have been an attempt to achieve a high enough standard for use in international trade. The runes would have been less recognisable on the continent, and whilst the majority of characters appearing on Beonna’s coinage were still runic, the formal and international roman script may have symbolically tied Beonna to the learned monastic continent and Rome, whilst the runic scripts reaffirmed his ties to East Anglian society and tradition.

As the broad-penny continued to develop, the runic script was increasingly supplanted and replaced by roman letters. The East Anglian coins of King Offa (757-96) begin to appear in East Anglia in around 760, and were minted by around thirty moneyers, mainly in London and Canterbury (Blunt 1961), but by six in East Anglia (Chick 1989, pp.191-2). The moneyers of London and Canterbury mostly produced their coins with entirely roman inscriptions, though the Kentish moneyer Beagheard occasionally spells his name BEAgHEARD, a runic ‘x’ (g) gifu in place of a roman ‘G’, and sometimes as BAHHRARD (Metcalf 1998, p.437; Page 1999, p.127-8). Metcalf (1998, p.436, 437) argues that the fricative ‘ch’ sound was an orthographic problem, and was occasionally represented by the runic ‘g’ because of this. The
use of the runic ‘g’ in this way can also be seen in some Northumbrian coinage, which is mentioned below.

However, the East Anglian moneyers coins are different in character, with moneyers Wihtred and Bohtræd and Eadnoth all producing coins with their names entirely in runic. A coin of Eadnoth provides a bind-rune at the beginning of the sequence, which Page reads as representing the ‘ᛖ’ (e) eoh rune and an upside down ‘ᛠ’ (ea) ēar rune, (ᛖᛠ). Therefore, the whole sequence reads eadnoþ (Page cited in Blunt & van der Meer 1969). Eadnoth’s novel use of bind-runes here, much as the bind-runes found in the aforementioned Wilred’s coinage, implies an active literate ability in the use of runes by the moneyer or die-cutter. The entirely runic coin of Wihtred is presented as wihtre/d, though on another die his name is represented as VI/hT/RE/D, a double-barred runic ‘h’ replacing the roman equivalent (Blackburn 1991, p. 161). Interestingly, Wihtred appears to continue working for a period of around thirty years following the coinage of Offa, and in this period is the only moneyer to use runes on coinage, presenting his name as: [V]I/hT/RE/D, wIHtR+ED, tw/H/ED/IR, wI/Ht/R/ED and RI/HED/wt (Blackburn 1991, p.160; Page 1999, p.128).

Judging by the uniformity in spelling of the words OFFA REX on the coinage compared to the dialectical differences of the moneyers name, it is likely that Offa’s name was given as written instruction and the presentation of the moneyers name was up to the moneyer (Blackburn 1991, p. 159). However, it should be noted that there is much variation in how Offa’s name was displayed, and was organised in many inventive ways. This implies that whilst Offa’s name was given in writing, instructions on how to place the name on the coin may have been vague, probably to simply place the words around the portrait however appropriate (Metcalf 1998, p.437). If the instructions were given in writing, or by word of mouth, we may extrapolate that the die-cutter had a working knowledge of both runic and roman script. Furthermore, the use of runes by mainly East Anglian moneyers are further examples of the specific East Anglian runic tradition. Additionally, Offa’s enforcement of using roman script for his own name on the coin may have been particularly symbolic. Before Offa enforced the use roman script for the name of the king on coinage, the runic script may have been the accepted script of both the formal and informal domains in East Anglia. By suppressing the East Anglian tradition of runic use in the formal domain and replacing it with the roman script, Offa symbolised the Mercian political dominance over East Anglia. Furthermore, as Offa’s rule continued, a gradual decline in rune use can be seen even in the name of the moneyer, possibly due to pressure from Offa’s government to stifle East Anglian runic expression.
further. Notably, coinage of the local East Anglian King Æthelberht, who briefly usurped Offa, presented the moneyer’s name, Lul, in runes directly preceding Æthelberht’s name (lul+EDILBERHT, with REX on the reverse) (Blackburn 1991, p.160; Page 1999, p.127; Naismith 2012, p. 152). Perhaps this is an attempt to reassert East Anglian runic traditions, or perhaps it is not, as a coin of Æthelberht discovered in 2014 bears Æthelberht’s name on the obverse in entirely roman letters with Lul’s name on the reverse also in roman (EMC No. 2014.0071).

Blackburn (1991, p.160) highlights that following Mercian withdrawal from East Anglia c.872, runes on coins began to see a resurgence, although remained to a small group of moneyers. A group of coins of King Æthelstan of East Anglia (c. 825-45) bear a number of spellings for a moneyer called Rægenhere who also struck coins for Æthelstan’s successor Æthelweard (c.845-55). Rægenhere spells his name inconsistently and bizarrely at times, presenting: rEG"HEREMI; +RERNHER; +ErhNPER; +rEGHEL and +IELEHrER (Pagan 1982, p.62; Blackburn 1991, p.161). Furthermore, Rægenhere produces a bind-rune of either ‘tr’ or ‘lr’ in one fragmentary coin (ᛖ) (Blackburn 1991, p.161; Pagan 1982, p.62). It is difficult to explain Rægenhere’s odd variations in spelling his own name, and it may be tempting to dismiss him semi-literate. However, this explanation is muddied when looking at the forms of the runes in the king’s name, where Rægenhere makes use of a particularly English variation of the ‘s’ rune (ᛖ). This form only otherwise appears epigraphically on the Kingmoor ring, the Thames Seax and a number of manuscripts (Blackburn 1991, p.161). The rune appears on three different dies, spelling the name: +EPELSNR; +EPELSNTR and ...LsTAN. This alternate form of ‘s’ is likely due to influence from the manuscript roman style of the letter ‘s’ (Dickins 1956, p.306; Page 1999, pp.40,46). This is evidence to the fact that Rægenheld was likely literate in both the roman and runic alphabets, and possibly had access to manuscript sources. Furthermore, perhaps the influence of this "manuscript" ‘s’ actually passed into fairly common runic use, though there is currently only a few surviving epigraphical instances of it. If this alternative rune was legible those intended to read inscription on the coin, it is possible that this rune may have been more common than our surviving evidence would suggest. Following these coins, the use of runes on coins in East Anglia continued to decline, as the royal and ecclesiastical nature of the coins remained purely in the learned sphere of the elite.

The last group of East Anglian coinage that will be discussed is by the moneyer Eadmund for King Æthelweard and King Edmund (855-69), in which a bind-rune (ᛖ) occurs always in the coins for Æthelweard and sometimes for Edmund (Blackburn 1991, p.161-2).
This bind-rune appears to be made up of (ᚠ) ‘n’ nyd and (ᛋ) ‘a’ ac, giving the transliteration: EADMVND M ᚠ or EADMVND M ᚠ (Pagan 1982, p. 69; Blackburn 1991, p.161-2). This bind-rune, M, likely represents a shortened way of representing the abbreviation ‘MON’, similar to the way bind-runes were used in the coinages of the moneyers Eadnoth and Wilred discussed above (Blackburn 1991, p.162). Furthermore, this bind-rune possibly acted as a craftsman’s mark moneyer for the moneyer.

Following these coins in East Anglia, other than occasional forms of the runic (ᚠ) ‘m’ mann, runes disappear entirely on coinage. The disappearance of runes further appears to correlate with a sharp decline in the use of runes on all objects in East Anglia following the mid ninth-century (figs. 10 & 11). Furthermore, the production of manuscripts had also fallen sharply in the period c.860 (Dumville 1991, p.190). It is during this period that Viking raids had reached their height (Grierson and Blackburn 1975, p. 268). It is a distinct possibility that the futhorc, previously common in East Anglia, became increasingly associated with the Scandinavian younger futhark brought over by the Norse. These associations may have been a further blow to the already dwindling futhorc, as the various tribal cultures of the Anglo-Saxons began to unify under a distinctive identity of "Englishness", which would have been a concept of comfort to many among these times of adversary. This concept of an "English" people can be seen earlier in Bede’s Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum, and later in Asser’s Life of King Alfred (Keynes and Lapidge 1983, p.33). In order to define themselves against the Scandinavian invaders, all symbols connecting the Anglo-Saxons to their heathen past may have been looked upon unfavourably, and where possible, roman script was adopted in its place. The final nail in the coffin of the futhorc, however, likely came in proposed educational reforms of Alfred the Great. Alfred, in a preface to his own translation of Gregory the Great’s Regula Postoralis in c.890, proposes a program of education and translation so that "…all the free-born young men now in England who have the means to apply themselves to it, may be set to learning…” (Alfred c.890). In order to enact this plan, Asser records that Alfred established a school of "…training in reading and writing under the attentive care of teachers, in company with all the nobly born children of virtually the entire area, and a good many of lesser birth as well (Asser 893, chapter 75). If Alfred’s learning initiatives were taken up by many in the late ninth-century, then the learning of the roman script would quickly surpass any surviving runic use amongst the freemen or nobles.
Northumbrian coinage

The moneyers of Northumbria did not adopt the broad-flan coinage reforms in the eighth-century. Instead, they continued to produce coins in the same manner as the previous *sceattas*, or silver pennies began by Pada (Page 1999, p.124; Blackburn 1991p, p.164; Metcalf 1998, p.436). Whilst the top-down reform to the broad-flan penny in the south allowed for royal monopoly and control, the Northumbrian coinage continued to be debased heavily. Some were
degraded to such an extent by the ninth-century that they are almost entirely brass, commonly called stycas by numismatists (Page 1999, p.124).

By c.700 royal coinage started production in Northumbria under King Aldfrith (685-704), modelled on the silver penny coinage. However, runes rarely appear on pennies in eighth-century save for the occasional ‘ᚫ’ (æ) aesc and ‘ᚦ’ (l) lagu runes mixed with roman on the coinage of King Ælfwald I (779-88): ælVAlDVS (fig. 12) (Metcalf 1998, p.436; Blackburn 1991, p.163). Very few coins of Ælfwald’s successor Æthelred I (second reign 790-6) bear runes, some bearing only a possible runic ‘l’. There appears to be little distinction among the alphabets in these coins, and it would appear that runes appear merely as supplementary characters to solve orthographic problems with the Roman script (Metcalf 1998, p.436). Alternatively, Blackburn (1991, p.163) argues that there may have been cross-influences between the scripts in this period, and the die-cutter himself would not have understood the differences between them. Lastly, it is possible that the die-cutter was aware, but simply decided that the runic letters were easier to carve on such a small surface, also taking up less space than their rounded roman counterparts.

Later on in the ninth-century, however, there is a rise in rune use on coins, and there does appear to be some discrimination between the scripts. These official issues, much like Offa’s, bear the royal name on the obverse, always in roman letters, and the name of the moneyer on the reverse, often in roman letters though sometimes mixed with runes (Page 1999, p.124; Blackburn, p.164; Metcalf, p.436). Importantly, the rise in the use of runes appears to mirror the rise of runes in Northumbria in general, such as the runestones. If the runestones represent the use of an already archaic script used for symbolic purposes, they may have a similar use on these coins, being used as a reference to Northumbria’s specific runic culture and heritage. However, similarly to the southern kingdoms, it would appear that the roman script occupied a domain of formality, appropriate and proper for the name of the king, whereas
the name of the moneyer could be written in runes, likely in a fashion decided by the moneyer or die-cutter himself.

Figure 13: A Dægberht type coin of King Eanred (EMC no.1997.0423).

King Eanred (c.810-40?) had three moneyers who signed their names in runes, Dægberht on the earlier coinage, and Brother and Wihtred on the later coinage. Wihtred is unlikely to be the same moneyer working in East Anglia, as the East Anglian moneyer was minting from c.780 until c.823, whilst the Northumbrian moneyer started in c.820-30 until c.840. This would give Wihtred a career spanning around sixty years across two kingdoms, which would be an unusually long career in this period (Blackburn 1991, p.164).

Dægberht’s use of runes was confined to putting a runic ‘g’ in an otherwise roman inscription, as +DAEgBERCT or +DAEgBERCT (fig. 13), though he occasionally transcribes his name +dEbeït. The use of the runic ‘g’ is similar to its use in the Kentish moneyer Beagheard’s coinage, and possibly represented the use of the rune to solve the same problem. Furthermore, use of the rare ‘i’ (ᚴ) eoh rune on the latter example appears to have been used in an identical fashion to the pennies of the moneyer Tilberht, where it represents the same position in the name element ‘-berht’ (Blackburn 1991, p.165).

Figure 14: A Witred type coin of Eanred (EMC no.2001.0304).

The later moneyers Brother and Wihtred (fig. 14), who worked in the last few years of Eanred’s reign, sometimes signed their names entirely with runes, as +broper, +broper; +wütrr or +wihtrr. Some of Brother’s coins end using a bind-rune (er) for the last two letters of the
name. Again, Blackburn (1991, p.164) highlights that the appearance of the ‘i’ rune here represents the velar spirant [x] in the -berht of Tilberht and Dægberht, and likely performed the same function here. There are further examples of Wihtred and Brother mixing the runic and roman scripts, sometimes as +BROAper and +wihTrr (Page 1999, p.125; Blackburn 1991, p. 164). Wihtred continued to mint coins for to King Æthelred II (c.840-48?), and, alongside two other moneyers Cynemund and Leofthegn, used occasional runes in their own names. These names often appear as +VIHtRED, +CVNEMVnD, +LEOFDEgN, and LEOFDEGn. Again, we see the runic ‘t’ ‘n’ and ‘g’ appearing in mixed runic and roman inscriptions far more often than other runes. It may be that in this period the alphabets bore significant influence over each other, and when writing in a non-formal way it was not deemed inappropriate to mix the scripts together. The ‘t’ ‘n’ and ‘g’ runes may have simply been more widely known or preferred compared to their roman counterparts.

**Conclusion**

By analysing Anglo-Saxon public rune use in both the runestones and coins, this dissertation has tackled a number of aims. The appearance of runes in such public settings, the frequency in which they appear and Alfred’s historical comments on past literacy appear to imply that literacy was more widespread than previous academics imply. By examining the elements of the commemorative inscriptions using Jesch’s model, we can see that they were not purely erected for record keeping purposes due to the commemorative bidding of the reader to perform prayer for the deceased. Furthermore, it has been noted that illiterate or semi-literate members of the community could benefit from the runic script through the use of intermediaries, further boosting the usefulness of inscriptions on these runic inscribed monuments.

Next, by analysing the poetic and repetitive utterances of the inscriptions though the use models and methods by runologists of Scandinavia and the continent, this dissertation has argued that the inscriptions of the runestones represent a transitional period from an oral culture to a truly literate one. In these monuments, the runic script acts primarily as a symbol of oral culture, used to record archaic, repetitive and poetic utterances. The archaic status of the runes is further displayed through evidence suggesting that the inscription was transliterated from a roman original, showing that a conscious and symbolic choice was made to write the vernacular English poetry in the decidedly English runic script. Conversely, use of the roman script on these church-raised monuments represents the next stage in this transition from orality to
literacy, not simply being used to record the spoken words, but moving towards actually literary documents in their own right.

The coinage of East Anglia and Northumbria similarly display public runic inscriptions. The gold coins provide little evidence from which to gain any solid conclusions, though they at least display a familiarity with the runic script in the sixth and seventh-centuries and show an early form of the East Anglian runic tradition. Through analysis of the seventh and eighth-century silver coinage, there is clear evidence literacy in the runic script and illiteracy in the roman script. The fact the silver penny coinage in this period is much more numerous in East Anglia than the later broad-flan coinage further supports it was overwhelmingly in the hands of the ceorls, and as such the more common and informal runic script was preferable as the more commonly read script. Similar to the runestones, the silver pennies bearing runic inscriptions are repetitive and short, used to inscribe the name of the secular private moneyer in as a makers mark and guarantee of quality.

The broad-flan coinage of the ninth-century onwards in East Anglia was a product of reformation, the currency being taken from the domain of the ceorls to the domain of royal and ecclesiastical elites. As the control of coinage changed into the hands of the literary elite, the scripts of the coinage followed, the formal king’s name being decidedly presented in the truly literate roman script, and the more informal moneyer’s name could be inscribed in either. The roman script rapidly overtook the runic generally in this period, although runic script seemed to stubbornly hang on in the hands of East Anglian moneymen, possibly as a symbol or personal appreciation of the archaic traditional methods. The major disappearance of the runic script in coinage, however, coincides with the height of Viking raids in England, and it is likely that the association of the futhorc runic script with the younger futhark script of the Norse invaders was a reason for this. Lastly, Alfred’s recorded push towards widespread literacy in the Roman script in the late ninth-century likely proved the deciding factor in the dominance of the roman script.

The Northumbrian non-adoptions of the broad-flan coinage reforms reflects the relative isolation of Northumbria in the eighth-century. Even in this period, rune use seems sparse, seemingly used as an extension of the roman alphabet. However, the ninth-century shows us a rise in rune use on coinage, though the king’s name is still presented overwhelmingly in the roman script. The rise in rune use mirrors their rise on the runestones, and as such, this adoption of runic characters may have been also been a symbolic reference of Northumbria’s archaic runic oral heritage, whilst also looking forward to the formal literary culture it was transitioning into.
Why this research is important

The analysis of these groups may help provide future runologists and Anglo-Saxonists with a clearer picture of the nature of rune use throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. By employing the models used by Scandinavian and continental runologists, our understanding of the Anglo-Saxon *futhorc* can progress significantly. By introducing the ideas of different domains of use on these objects, we can more correctly view the different uses and purposes of the runic and roman scripts and gain further understanding of the inscribers and their intended audiences.

Opportunities for further study

There are many opportunities for further research into Anglo-Saxon runic literacy that have not been covered in this dissertation. For example, the use of the runic and roman scripts on many other groups of objects could be analysed in light of the results gained through this study, where the quality and fineness of the objects and their inscribed script may provide further strengthening to the theory of different domains of use. Furthermore, objects such as the coins are being found on an ever more frequent basis by metal detectorists across England, which may yet shed new light on the use of runes on them. Whilst this study focuses predominantly on the use of runes in East Anglia and Northumbria, it may also be helpful into examining why there appears to be a complete lack of epigraphical rune use in Wessex. Lastly, in order to gain a better understanding of the Anglo-Saxon *futhorc*, the runologists should look to work done in continental runology for ideas and inspiration. However, it should be stressed heavily that whilst parallels can be drawn between England and the continent, the various alphabets should be looked at critically and carefully, and one must be mindful of the vast differences regional variations and traditions can produce.
Bibliography


