The Elder Futhark

The 24 runes, about 150–650 CE: sound, meaning of the name, and a line from the medieval rune poems

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Fehu f
cattle, wealth

"wealth causes strife among kinsmen"
Norwegian poem

Uruz u
aurochs (OE); drizzle or slag (N, I)

"the aurochs is fierce and great-horned"
Old English poem

Thurisaz þ (th)
giant (N, I); thorn (OE)

"the thorn is very sharp"
Old English poem

Ansuz a
a god, one of the Æsir

"god: the ancient Gautr, prince of Ásgarðr"
Icelandic poem

Raidho r
riding, journey

"riding is the rider's bliss"
Icelandic poem

Kenaz k
torch (OE); ulcer (N, I)

"the torch is known to every living being by its fire"
Old English poem

Gebo g
gift

"giving is people's pride and praise"
Old English poem

Wunjo w
joy

"joy is for the one who knows little of woe"
Old English poem



Hagalaz h
hail

"hail is the whitest of grains"
Old English poem

Naudiz n
need, constraint

"need is tight on the chest"
Old English poem

Isa i
ice

"ice we call a broad bridge"
Norwegian poem

Jera j (y)
year, good harvest

"harvest is people's hope"
Old English poem

Eihwaz ï (uncertain)
yew

"the yew is a tree rough on the outside"
Old English poem

Perthro p
unknown (perhaps a gaming piece)

"peorð is always play and laughter"
Old English poem

Algiz z (later R)
uncertain: elk? sedge (OE)

"elk-sedge mostly lives in the fen"
Old English poem

Sowilo s
sun

"the sun is always a hope to seafarers"
Old English poem



Tiwaz t
the god Týr

"Týr is the one-handed of the Æsir"
Norwegian poem

Berkano b
birch

"birch is a leafy branch and a little tree"
Icelandic poem

Ehwaz e
horse

"the horse is a joy to princes"
Old English poem

Mannaz m
man, human being

"man is an increase of the dust"
Norwegian poem

Laguz l
water, sea (or leek?)

"the sea seems endless to people"
Old English poem

Ingwaz ŋ (ng)
the god Ing

"Ing was first seen by men among the East Danes"
Old English poem

Dagaz d
day

"day is the Lord's messenger"
Old English poem

Othala o
inherited land, estate

"a homeland is very dear to every man"
Old English poem

How to read it. The names are reconstructed: no early inscription names its runes. The meanings come from three medieval rune poems (Old English, Norwegian, Icelandic), written down centuries after the runes were first used; the Norse poems cover only the later 16-rune row. Quotations are our translations of the texts in Bruce Dickins's edition (1915).

Full guide, sources and inscriptions:
mythic-harmonies.com/runes-magic/elder-futhark-runes-complete-guide-meanings/

The runes the Vikings used

The Younger Futhark: 16 runes (long-branch forms), in use from the eighth century

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 **FÉ** f, v	 **ÚR** u, o, y, ø, w (v)	 **ÞURS** þ, ð (th)	 **ÓSS (ÁSS)** ą, later o	 **REIÐ** r	 **KAUN** k, g, ng	 **HAGALL** h	 **NAUÐR** n
 **ÍSS** i, e, j	 **ÁR** a, æ, e	 **SÓL** s	 **TÝR** t, d	 **BJARKAN** b, p	 **MAÐR** m	 **LǫGR** l	 **ÝR** R (mostly final -r)

Elder or Younger?

Viking Age Scandinavians (roughly 750–1050) wrote with the 16-rune Younger Futhark; the 24-rune Elder Futhark had gone out of use by then. With fewer runes, each one stood for several sounds: the k-rune also wrote g, t also d, b also p.

For a Viking-style inscription, start from the Younger Futhark and check the word in Old Norse.

Before you carve or ink

One-word "meanings" such as protection or abundance are modern. The poems give images and riddles, not keywords, and the names themselves are reconstructions.

Runes were writing first: most early inscriptions are names, makers' formulas and memorials. Rune magic has to be shown inscription by inscription.

Read more

Every rune, with the poems in the original language, the inscriptions and the scholarship, is in our free guide to the Elder Futhark:

mythic-harmonies.com/runes-magic/elder-futhark-runes-complete-guide-meanings/

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