

Sigtuna Museum & Art



# The secrets of the runes

A rune hunt for kids – and grown ups!





**Hello,  
my name is Runa.  
Do you want to know  
a secret?**

**The word rune means wisdom or secret. In Swedish, the rune, "runa", can also be called "stav", which means rod, as well as being the first segment of the word for spelling, "stava". When you think of runes you might also think of rune stones? But runes were first made to be cut in wood, that's way they are angled. That makes them easy to use on different types of wood, like beech for instance. Beech in Swedish is "bok" and together with "stav" you have the Swedish word for letter, "bokstav". (The word "runa" may also mean obituary in Swedish.)**

Messages and secrets in runes were sent from person to person. In Messages, secrets and spells in runeshave about a hundred rune messages on bone, wood and metal. Rune stones are bigger and easier to see. You can still walk around Sigtuna and read runes carved a thousand years ago! We have some 30 runestone in Sigtuna. In the Sigtuna municipality we know that at least 170 have existed, of which some have disappeared and some are moved, but most are still here. This is the area with the highest concentration of rune stone in Sweden. The stones are decorated with runes, animal shapes and crosses

All known rune stones has a unique registration code, a U for the county of Uppland and then a number, or Nf for "new find", and a year.



## Colourful rune stones

Most rune stones are pale and grey today, with runes filled in with red paint. But a millennia ago they were colourful and could be seen for long distances. Like this restored stone in Ölsta in Uppland. The rune stones in Sigtuna might have been as bright as the neon signs in Las Vegas today.



Las Vegas. Photo: Marcin Klapczynski

## Text and pattern

In the beginning there was only text but as the rune cutters grew more skilful they added patterns and shapes. Specific patterns can help to date a rune stone.

## I was here

Since the beginning of time people have left their marks in grottoes, and later on many other things. These marks and graffiti all say "I was here". A recent example is the graffiti on the electricity post right across the street from rune stone No 5.



1

**Rune stone outside Sigtuna museum.** U 389

This stone was moved here 150 years ago, from a cellar near the ruined church of Saint Laurentius.

**Where do you think the original location was?**

The runes read *"Gillög and Kuse(?) had this stone erected in memory of ... Arnes´ son"*. Both Gillög and Arne were common names in the Viking Age. Kuse is probably a by-name meaning "the frightening one". "Kuslig" means scary in Swedish.



2

**Rune stone in the garden to the right of street Runstigen.** U 392

When these runes were carved, the boulder lay next to the road to Uppsala and was meant to be seen and read by a lot of people.

**Do you know anyone who has a rune stone in their garden?**

The runes read *"Sven had these runes cut/carved in memory of ... the second, Assur the third, Germund the fourth ... was their mother"*. Maybe Sven was Assurs´ and Germunds´ father? We don´t know who their mother was.



3

### **Rune stone to the right of street Runstigen. U 393**

A stone with an empty rune animal? The runes are carved on the right side of the stone.

**Have you noticed that the runes do not quite fit inside the rune animal?** The carver made the animal first and then the runes. As a modern day cartoonist has to write the text first and then draw the bubble around it. The runes read *"Ofeg had the stone erected in memory of his (?) sisters, Tora and Rodvi"*.

**Use the Futhark on the back of this pamphlet and try to find the names Tora and Rodvi.**



4

### **Rune stone at the ruin of Saint Laurentius. U 390**

This rune stone is a puzzle and two pieces have been found. The larger was used as a step stone in a house on Stora Gatan and moved here 1941.

The smaller was in a house by Stora Torget and brought to the museum in 1958. It was not until 1998 a keen eyed archaeologist saw that they belonged together. Parts are still missing. Where are they now? The runes read *"Sven had the stone erected in memory of ... his father and Frödis in memory of Ulv, her husband. God help his spirit"*.



**S:T PERS RUIN**  
*The ruin of  
Saint Peter*



**SANKT PERSGATAN**

**RUNSTIGEN**

**2**

**3**



**KLOCKBACKEN**

**PRÄSTGATAN**

**1**

**SIGTUNA  
MUSEUM**

**LILLA**

**TORGET**

**LUNN**

**HARBOUR**

**STRANDPROMENADEN**



**S:T LARS RUIN**  
*The ruin of  
Saint Laurentius*



4

5

6

**S:T OLOFS RUIN**  
*The ruin of  
Saint Olof*



7

8

9



**MARIAKYRKAN**  
*Saint Mary's  
Church*

10

**STORA  
TORGET**



**STORA GATAN**

**DSTRÖMSKA  
GÅRDEN**

**MAP OVER THE  
RUNE STONE WALK  
IN SIGTUNA**

5

**Rune stone on the left side of Prästgatan.** *Nf 1956*

The runes read *"Anund had this stone erected in memory of himself in his lifetime"*. Sometimes people would have stones erected in memory of themselves. The chief Jarlabanke in Vallentuna had at least five stones erected in memory of himself in his lifetime. This stone was once parts of the wall of Saint Laurentius and broke into six parts caused by the weight of the wall above it. The stone was restored and moved here. Do not forget to compare this stone with the electricity post across the street.



6

**Rune stone in the wall of the ruin of Saint Olof.** *U 385*

**Can you see the rune stone in the wall?** The rune stone was at least a hundred years old when the church was built and it became part of the wall. It would be interesting to know why it was used like this. The stone is probably carved by Torbjörn who was one of the first carvers here. The runes read *"... this stone for the memory of Grimulv, his mate ..."*. The word mate was used among merchants that shared their daily life on a journey.



**TRY WRITING YOUR  
NAME IN RUNES HERE:**



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**Look at the Futhark on the back of this folder  
to learn how to write with runes!**

7

### **Runestone in front of Saint Mary's Church.** *U 380*

The runes read "*Åsbjörn and Kuss/Guss had ....*". Åsbjörn was a common name at the time. Today the most common names in Sweden are Maria and Erik. Some think that Kuss/Guss is probably a byname that means "the bent one" or "the talkative one".

**Do you know what your name means?**



8

### **Rune stone in the north wall of the crypt.** *Nf 1990*

The runes read "*... in memory of Orm ...*". The male name Orm is carved on five more runic inscriptions. Orm also means snake in Swedish. **Have you seen any snakes on the rune stones?**

On most stones the runes are carved in a band that ends with an animal head. They look like dragons or snakes. They are usually called rune animals.



9

### **Rune stone in the east wall of the crypt. U 381**

The stone reads: "... erect ... God help the spirit ... ". It is a prayer for God to save the spirit of the deceased.

#### **Have you noticed all the crosses on the rune stones?**

Most stones were raised in the end of the Viking Age in the 11th century and were a way to show that people had become Christians. They had left the Aesir gods and now believed in one God. The Christian cross is a common symbol on many stones.



10

### **Rune stone south of Saint Mary's Church. U 379**

This stone is called the Friesian stone. The runes read "*The Friesian guild brethren erected this stone after Torkel, their guild brother. God help his spirit. Torbjörn carved*". The Friesian guild brethren were Friesians merchants in Sigtuna. Torbjörn carved this stone as well.

#### **Can you decipher a few runes by using the futhark?**



**Now you can continue to discover the secrets of the runes on your own. Good luck!**

