Frontispiece: Professor Emeritus Richard N. Bailey, OBE: 'in medio duorum' (Photo: Alison Bailey)

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CROSSING BOUNDARIES

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO THE ART, MATERIAL CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE OF THE EARLY MEDIEVAL WORLD

Edited by

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Essays presented to Professor Emeritus Richard N. Bailey, OBE,
in honour of his eightieth birthday

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Front cover: Mosaic image of Edgar and the kings crossing the bar; modern public art in Edgar's Field Park, Chester (Photo: P. Everson)
Back cover: Taplow gold braid (Photo: Jane Hawkes)

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Preface

It is a great pleasure to be able to put on record our thanks to the contributors to this volume, not only for their good humour, patience and sustained commitment to the project, but also for having the courage to seize the opportunity to approach their chosen topics from what are sometimes unorthodox angles. If the results occasionally court controversy, so be it: that is precisely what a volume of this kind should do. Their willingness to take risks, and the wide range of the subject-matter of their contributions, is also an apt reflection of the breadth of interests and learning, and the originality of approach, of the honorand, Professor Emeritus Richard Bailey, OBE. Far more than that, it is an eloquent testimony to the considerable affection and respect in which he continues to be held by friends, colleagues and pupils alike, all of whom have benefited from his wise advice and acute criticism, generously proffered, over many years. We are delighted to dedicate this volume to him as a token of our thanks and appreciation.

Though the response to our request for contributions has been overwhelming, it has inevitably proved impossible for a number of friends, colleagues and pupils of the honorand to participate who, in other circumstances, would very much have wished to do so. They would, nevertheless, like to join us in celebrating the occasion of his eightieth birthday. They include: Peter Addyman; Coleen Batey; Carol Farr; Roberta Franks; Signe Fuglesang; Luisa Izzi; Susan Mills; the late Jennifer O'Reilly; Steven Plunkett; Julian Richards; the late Charles Thomas; Ross Trench-Jellicoe; Sir David Wilson; and Susan Youngs.

Finally, we take this opportunity to place on record our warmest thanks to the anonymous readers, and to the publisher for its support and guidance in facilitating the production of what has proved to be a technically complex volume.

Eric Cambridge and Jane Hawkes
January 2016

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A glimpse of the heathen Norse in Lincolnshire

John Hines

A new find

Evidence of religious allegiance and practices amongst the Scandinavians who invaded and eventually settled in England in the Viking Period has always been elusive – even though these people are definitively and pejoratively labelled as 'heathens' in English sources such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Wulfstan's homilies. One source which does provide both figuratively and literally hard information on a knowledge and use of myths associated with the traditional gods and goddesses amongst this population is the Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture that Richard Bailey has done so much to make accessible and more comprehensible to students and scholars. In the space created by what is largely an absence of evidence, it has been possible to consider, quite reasonably, whether there had been a rapid assimilation of the Scandinavian incomers – however few or many they may have been – to local culture, which may have included their prompt conversion to Christianity.[1] An alternative view may be that the nature of traditional religious practice in Viking-period Scandinavia was of a materially indistinct character which would inevitably render it largely invisible. Whichever the case, but particularly in the latter view, an inscribed artefact found in the parish of Saltfleetby St Clement, Lincolnshire, in the summer of 2010 is important, not only as a rare find but also as an unusually informative one.

In recent years, responsible metal-detecting has contributed many new archaeological finds and has, in some cases, truly transformed our understanding of topics, areas and periods. This is not least so in the case of the pre-Conquest, early Middle Ages, and especially true of the historic county of Lincolnshire.[2] The object on which a full report is published here for the first time was found by Mrs Denise Moncaster, a local detectorist who regularly searches the fields in the Saltfleetby area (see Fig. 12.1).

Recognising the unusual character and interest of the object, she reported it promptly to the county Finds Liaison Officer, Adam Daubney, who, in preparing a record of the find for the Portable Antiquities Scheme database, asked me to comment on it because of what appeared to be a runic inscription that it bore. The identification of the inscribed marks as runes could be confirmed instantly; equally immediate was excitement and even incredulity at what could first be read.

The inscribed object is a lead spindle-whorl, weighing 49.8g. Lead spindle-whorls are typically cast and finished by paring with a knife. Its outline, viewed from above or below, can be described as more of a curved triangle than
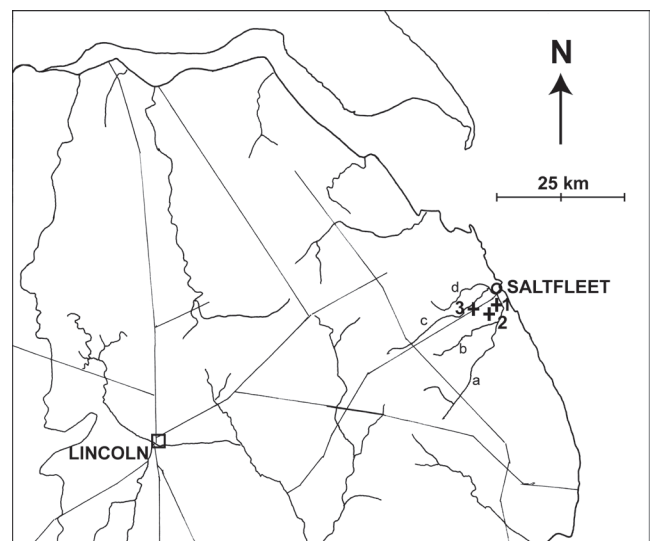
Fig. 12.1 The location of Saltfleetby, Lincolnshire, showing the relative positions of the three parish churches of Saltfleetby and the local rivers referred to in the text. Key: 1. Saltfleetby St Clement; 2. Saltfleetby All Saints; 3. Saltfleetby St Peter (a) Great Eau; (b) Long Eau; (c) Greyfleet Drain; (d) South Dike (J. Hines)

as circular; this shape may have assisted spinning by finger when on the spindle. Its maximum width is 28.5mm and its maximum height 16.5mm. In profile its body has a vertical walled part and a conical part (Fig. 12.2). Experts in hand-spinning advise that it should have been used with the flat face uppermost and the conical face downwards. There is a vertical hole through the whorl for the spindle with a diameter of 7–8mm.

A reading of the inscription

The runes are in two rows, one around the vertical wall of the whorl and the other in a ring around the spindle hole on the flat (upper) face (Fig. 12.3a–b). The runes had been cut into the soft lead of the object with a knife; some deliberately formed points in the inscription clearly preserve the shape of the knife tip in cross-section. A simple, but not readily identifiable, curvilinear motif has also been cut into one side of the sloping face of the conical part of the whorl (Fig. 12.3c).

The runes themselves are immediately identifiable as the forms of the 'long-branch' variant of the later Scandinavian fuþark, including forms which show that the script available had already started to expand from the reduced, sixteen-character

Fig. 12.2 The Saltfleetby spindle-whorl, width 28.5mm (Photo: John Morgan, Cardiff University)

'younger fuþark' that had been adopted by the beginning of the Viking Age towards a character set of twenty-four or more graphs of the Scandinavian Christian Middle Ages which mirrored the Latin alphabet. The Saltfleetby inscription includes two new rune-forms of this kind: there are six instances of a dotted rune ᛂ representing **e**, phonologically the middle front vowel. The script and spelling system also distinguishes the low and middle back vowels **a** and **o** as ᛆ and ᚮ respectively: rune-forms which are interpreted as descendants of the original **jāra* rune ᚼ and **ansuz* rune ᚠ.[3] The inscription has been written so that the tops of the runes around the side wall are at the edge between the wall and the cone, while the tops of the runes on the flat face are at the outer edge.

There is one point in the inscription where the identity of the runes cut is not immediately legible (discussed below). Typical long-branch runic forms include a **t** rune that retains its early form ᛏ as opposed to a reduced ᛐ. **b** is also represented by the original form ᛒ rather than ᛓ or ᛔ. This set of graphs is thus a somewhat more conservative version of the younger fuþark, and on the whole is more characteristic of inscriptions from Denmark than from Norway or Sweden. The form of the **n** rune, which occurs twice on the Saltfleetby whorl, however, is much more like the reduced 'short-twig' ᚾ rather than ᚿ. All the same, the by-stave on the Saltfleetby **n** definitely crosses the vertical stave in both instances, and we should not make too much of this one graphic form as an apparently 'un-Danish' feature.

The inscription around the side wall of the spindle-whorl is fully legible, and it transpires that this is – as near to certainty as is practically possible – the beginning of the text. In this sequence, individual words are divided by single or double dots, while at one point a small saltire cross **x** can be found at mid-height on the wall. This cross has been overcut by the rune immediately to its left; it would appear that, having inscribed the runes around the wall, the inscriber had not left quite enough space to fit in the last rune of the final word here, an **r**, which therefore, a little clumsily, obscures the cross.

The transliteration of the text on the side wall is:

x oþen . ok . einmtalr . ok : þalfa . þeir

Several Old Norse lexemes are immediately identifiable here, especially *ok*, 'and', and *þeir*, 'they' (in this case the masculine form). **oþen** was the first sequence of letters read, and the cause of immediate interest because it is a known runic spelling of the name of the god, normalised as Óðinn in Old Norse.

The inscription on the face of the whorl presents greater problems and uncertainties. There are three clear, or at least reasonably clear, dividing marks, in the form of single knife-points, as on the wall; a possible fourth dividing mark can at best have been very lightly and carelessly cut, and could indeed be no more than small patch of accidental damage on the face of the object. This mark, however, not only lies directly below the initial
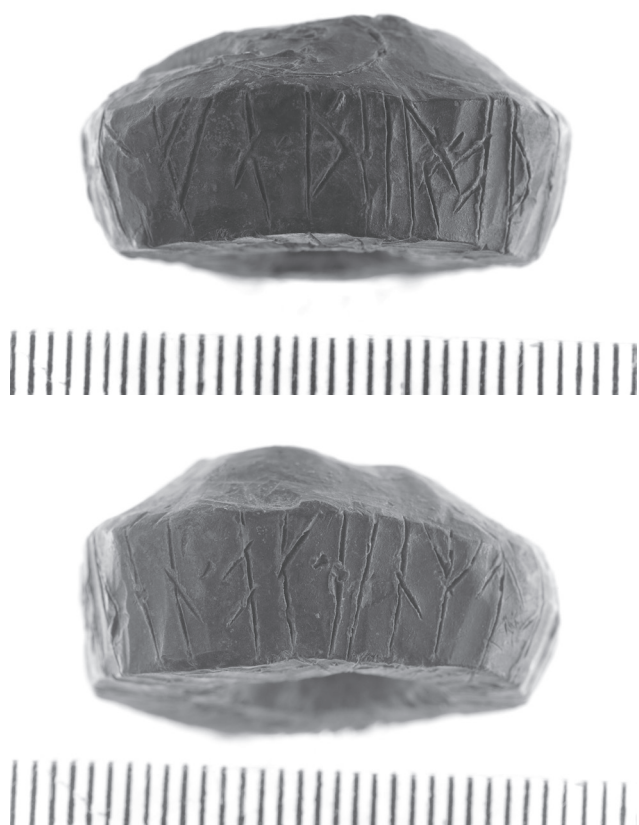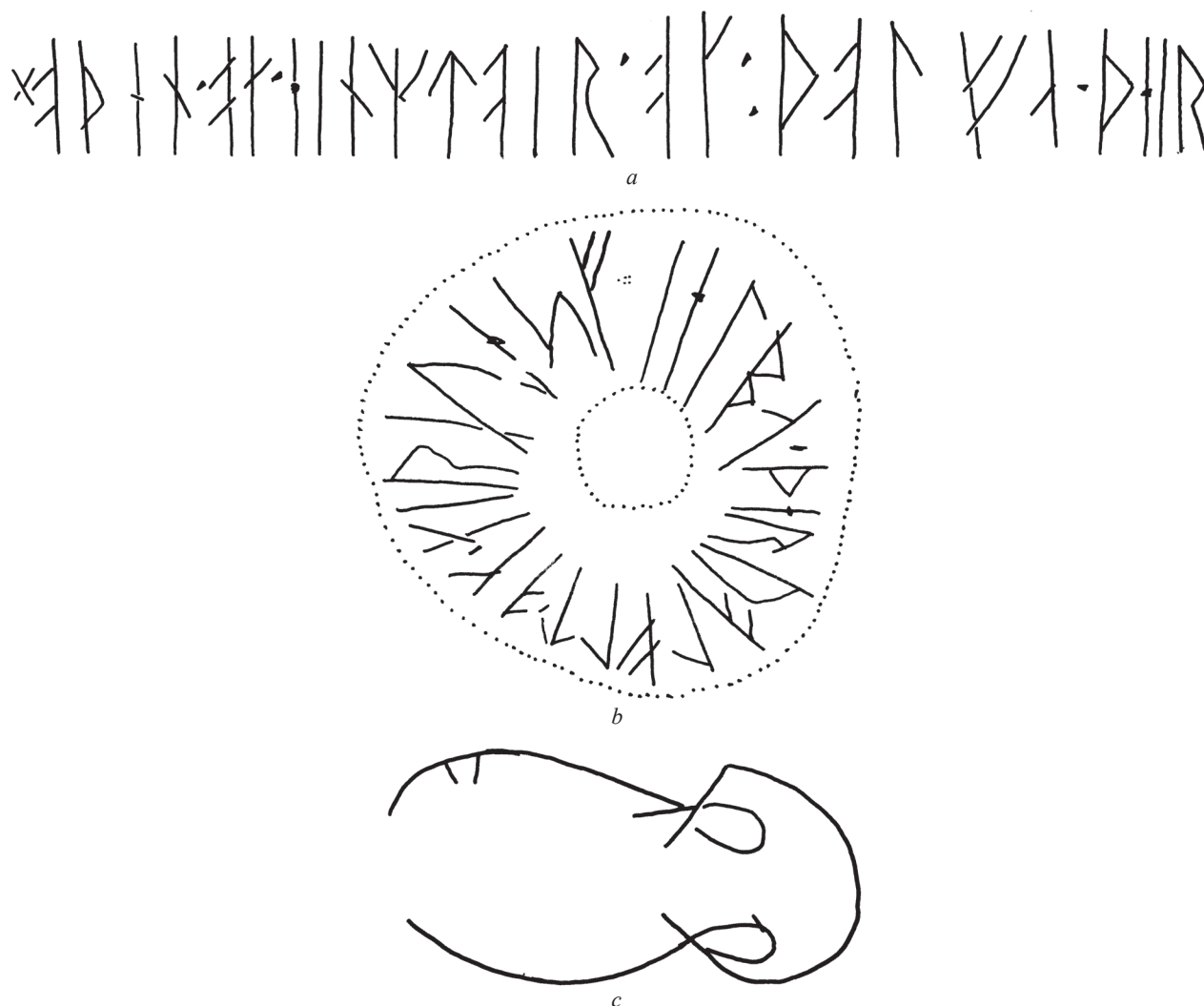
Fig. 12.3 The inscription on the Saltfleetby spindle-whorl: (a) side wall, in a single row; (b) face; (c) the motif on the conical side (J. Hines)

cross **x** on the wall, but also precedes what would serve perfectly, in syntactic terms, as the first word of the second line of the inscription.

If this place is correctly identified as the beginning of the second line, it is immediately to its left, in the last four or five graphs of the inscription, that the identity of the runes becomes unclear. Interpreted in terms of normal rune-forms of the 'long-branch' version of the younger fuþark, we can disentangle these by postulating that we begin with **iu**, | ∩, with the vertical main stave of the ∩ cutting over | at the bottom; the curved right-hand stave of the u also joins the bottom of the next rune ⸍, **e**. There is next a poorly cut long-branch **s**, ⸌, followed by **f**, ⸍.

With these identifications, and starting our reading in line with the cross on the side wall, we have:

(.) ielba . þeruolflt . ok. kiriuesf

The inscription, therefore, consists altogether of forty-nine runes, with nine or ten dividing marks, most of which separate readily identifiable words. There are twenty-five runes on the side wall and twenty-four around the flat face. It is really only the final eight runes, **kiriuesf**, that stubbornly defy interpretation.

Starting on the side wall, with the saltire cross and what can only reasonably be taken as the name of Óðinn, we would appear to have the sequence:

Óðinn and [noun or name] and [noun or name] they…

The **e** in the second, unstressed syllable in **oþen** can be explained in terms of regular sound-change either as the 'harmonisation' of the unstressed vowel to the middle back vowel [o:] in the first syllable or as reduction of [i] to [ə] under low stress.[4] The two sequences **einmtalr** and **þalfa**, linked to **oþen** by the repeated conjunctions **ok** and preceding **þeir**, are also more readily interpretable as proper names than common nouns. The *regular* runological interpretation of **einmtalr** is as the name of another familiar god in the Norse pre-Christian pantheon, Heimdallr. In this case, we would have omission of initial *h-* before a vowel in a stressed syllable – a common

phenomenon.[5] The apparently intrusive **n** before **m** could be explained as marking a nasalisation of the vowel before the nasal consonant **m**, or, alternatively, simply as insecure spelling. It is of interest to note here that the originally palatalised masculine nominative singular ending -*r*, historically written with a distinct rune transliterated as **ʀ** or **z**, has fallen together with [r] generally. This is common in later Viking-period inscriptions: the great Jelling stone inscription in Jutland, for instance, retains a single conservative **ʀ** in **haraltr.kunukʀ**: *Haraldr konungr*, 'King Harald'.[6]

As a name **þalfa** cannot be identified so directly, and we are compelled to adopt a more speculative approach. The sequence **þalfi** occurs on one Swedish rune-stone, from Södermanland,[7] where it is interpreted as a male personal name *Þjálfi*. Þjálfi is a reasonably common male personal name in Swedish inscriptions, usually spelt **þialfi** or **þelfi**, and sometimes occurring in the accusative case (once in the genitive) as Þjálfa. The syntactic context of the form in the Saltfleetby inscription does not, however, support that interpretation of **þalfa**.

Þjálfi is also known as a Norse mythological character, but not a god: he appears in the tenth-century skaldic *Þórsdrápa*, the eddic *Hárbarðsljóð*, and Snorri's Prose Edda, *Gylfaginning* Chapters 44–7, as the servant boy, *skósveinn*, of the god Þórr. He is accompanied in that story by his sister, Rǫskva. We should be careful not to be too readily influenced by the interpretation of the sequence **þalfi** on the Södermanland rune-stone and the mythological association that could lead to. Three diphthongs would appear to have been carefully and fully spelt out in the Saltfleetby inscription, in **einmtalr**, **þeir** and later in **ielba** (see below); there is no good reason why the carver could not have written **þialfa**. A personal name ending in -*a* will usually be a weak (*n*-stem) feminine. There are masculine names in Old Norse of this declension, e.g. *Sturla*, but these are rare. If, however, **þalfa** is a feminine name, we should expect the personal pronoun 'they' to be the neuter form *þau* for a mixed group rather than the masculine *þeir*. The Germanic and Norse lexicons do not help us towards a credible solution. The etymology of the mythological name Þjálfi is uncertain and disputed;[8] that of the Modern Icelandic verb *þjálfa*, 'to train', 'to tame', is similarly obscure.[9] Perhaps all we can, all we should, and indeed all we *need* to conclude is that **þalfa** appears to be a personal name, which grammatically may be feminine despite the use of *þeir*, and that, although unidentifiable from our sources, it must represent a character of the background and status to appear in subject position alongside two major gods, Óðinn and Heimdallr.

The inscription on the side wall thus seems to give us a perfectly formed noun phrase, inflected as the subject of a sentence: 'Óðinn and Heimdallr and Þálfa, they…'. If we continue reading on the face directly underneath

the sequence **x oþen**, we proceed with an appropriately formed third person plural present indicative verb, **ielba**, interpreted as *hjelpa*, normalised Old Norse *hjálpa*: 'help', 'are helping'. The use of the original **b** rune for the voiceless counterpart of the voiced stop [b], [p], is standard practice with the younger fuþark. The omission of initial *h-* in this word would match that in **einmtalr** for *Heimdallr*; the spelling **ialbi** occurs for the subjunctive *hjálpi* in many medieval Christian inscriptions, especially in Sweden. The representation of the diphthong of the first syllable as **ie** is phonologically interesting rather than really problematic. In Icelandic the erstwhile -*ja*- diphthong here, from **e* by breaking before *a* in the following syllable, was lengthened before *l* followed by certain consonants to give *hjálpa*. In the mainland Scandinavian languages the second element has, however, been raised through progressive *j*-umlaut, to give Danish *hjælpe*, Norwegian *hjelpe* and Swedish *hjälpa*, and it would appear that the Saltfleetby inscription provides unusually, but not implausibly, early evidence for this shift.[10]

Old Norse *hjálpa* – and indeed Old English *helpan* – treat the person helped as an indirect object denoted by the dative case, and the following **þer** in this inscription is the dative, *þér*, of the second person singular personal pronoun *þú*, 'thou'. We might then expect a word-divider after **þer**, but there is none. This is probably best explained merely by the fact that it is from around this point that the inscription starts to include abbreviations, and so becomes more difficult to follow; the inscriber simply omitted a divider. It is probable, though, that the 'thou/thee' referred to, and indeed addressed by, the inscription is named in the immediately following sequence, and that a division between the personal pronoun and the personal name when both refer to the same person was considered unnecessary.

The suggested interpretation of the sequence to the next word-divider, **uolflt**, is as a feminine personal name *Ulfljót*. This name is familiar in the masculine form, *Ulfljótr*, as the name of the first law-speaker of the Icelandic Alþingi, a Norwegian settler in Iceland. Both *Ulf*- as first element and -*ljót* as second element are recorded in women's names in early Icelandic sources such as *Landnámabók*. **uo**, however, is an unusual runic spelling. Where it does appear in the runic corpus it usually represents the sequence [vo]. In the element *ulf*- ('wolf') it can be suggested that what is spelt as a diphthong represents a glide between [u] and [lf], a development anticipating the twelfth-century lengthening of the vowel to [u:], *ú*, in Old Norse. After this putative personal name, the inscription proceeds with a further conjunction **ok**, 'and', but then, regrettably, ends in an irresolvably obscure sequence, transliterated as **kiriuesf**.

Frustratingly, **kir** and indeed **kiri** are quite familiar sequences in Viking-period and later Norse runic inscriptions, identifiable most simply as forms of the verb *gøra*, 'to do', 'to make', e.g. *gøri*, third person singular or plural present

subjunctive; or the male personal name *Geirr* (also a common noun, meaning 'spear'), which is *Geiri* in the dative singular. The representation of [g] by **k** is standard younger fuþark practice, and quite what would be expected in this inscription. With, however, the otherwise consistent use of dotted ᛂ for **e** and apparently regular spelling of diphthongs, the use of ᛁ alone for *e* or *ei* to spell either this verb or this name here would be out of keeping with the remainder of the inscription.

The sequence **uesf** which follows **kiri** sheds no clear light. There are no word-dividers, but at this end of the inscription that tells us nothing. **ues** could be the imperative singular of the verb *vesa*, 'to be'. The final **f** would then have to be a single letter standing for a lexeme – e.g. *frændi*, 'kinsman', or *fjándi*, 'enemy' – but of course the available choice is colossal. *-sf* cannot terminate a word in Old Norse. **ues** could also be the genitive singular of the neuter noun *vé*, 'shrine'; a noun which is also the name of an otherwise thoroughly obscure brother of Óðinn.[11] A *Vés f*[*rændi*] could then refer either to Óðinn or any other close relative of theirs. The sequence *-ju* can terminate a word, and indeed **kirikiu** appears as an oblique case (genitive and dative) of the feminine noun *kirkja* (church), in two medieval Swedish inscriptions. There is no basis for proposing that as a reading in the case of Saltfleetby. **kiri** also, in fact, appears in a runic version of the liturgical phrase *Kyrie eleison*, and twice in spellings of the name of Christ and the term Christianity (Old Norse *kristni*). Less implausibly **kiri** might be read as *kyrri*, on the root *kyrr*, 'calm': either the adjective itself, nominative singular masculine, weak declension, or again the third person singular or plural present subjunctive of the verb *kyrra*, 'to calm'. It would even be possible to interpret **kiriues** as the genitive case of a personal name *Gǫrvir*, 'one who makes'. There are thus several possible lexical identifications, but none of them leads to a reading that can be recommended.

Altogether, we are able to read more than eighty per cent of this inscription with confidence. In normalised Old Norse this would read: *Óðinn ok Heimdallr ok Þalfa, þeir hjálpa þér Ulfljót ok…*, and in translation: 'Óðinn and Heimdallr and Þalfa: they are helping you, Ulfljót, and …'. Even though some conjecture is required towards the end of this sequence to read the personal name *Ulfljót*, the unproblematic character of this section makes it all the more puzzling that the final eight runes should be so obscure. That can partly be attributed to the abbreviation of syllables, perhaps even of words, which first appears in **uolflt**. For such a practice to be introduced towards the end of an inscription for which there was limited space might seem quite self-explanatory but, on this object, these final runes also look considerably less carefully cut and are unusually large. The inscriber was not just running out of space. We can assume that the final sequence was meaningful, but must also then infer that what it encodes in this effectively cryptic form can only have been known to the person who wrote the text and to anyone with whom he or she chose to share that information.

The context and significance of the find

This text is a charm that has been inscribed on to an everyday, practical object, itself one quite distinctively associated not only with productive household activity, but also with the female sphere. The charm invokes the aid and support of Norse gods from the pre-Christian Scandinavian religious tradition that Late Anglo-Saxon churchmen such as Ælfric and Wulfstan identified and denounced as 'heathenism'. Grammatically, it is worthy of note that the verb used in the charm is present indicative, not subjunctive: 'they help' or 'they are helping' rather than 'may they help'. We can imagine that the action of spinning the whorl on which this charm was written was conceived of as a movement that activated the text and so made the statement a reality; it enacted the charm.

The form of the spindle-whorl on which this charm was inscribed is familiar in England – both in material and in shape – and not least in Anglo-Scandinavian contexts. It represents Form A1 in the typology of spindle-whorls classified by shape devised by Penelope Walton Rogers in her analysis of the textile-producing equipment from Anglo-Scandinavian York, based initially on specimens from Yorkshire and Lincolnshire.[12] It is not impossible that the item had been brought to England from Scandinavia, where it had been inscribed, but a spindle-whorl showing this combination of material and shape really would have been quite unusual in Scandinavia in any relevant period.[13] Form A1 is dated by Walton Rogers primarily to the long period *c*. 600–1000, and the lead whorls in York are predominantly from tenth-century layers. Penelope Walton Rogers has confirmed to me that this form would be unusual in an eleventh- or twelfth-century context.[14]

The runic forms, conversely, with the introduction of two forms new to the Viking-period younger fuþark, ᛂ = **e** and ᚭ = **o**, would be expected to represent a slightly later date, in the eleventh century at the earliest. The dotting of runes does appear in Denmark, and possibly on the Isle of Man too, by the last two decades of the tenth century.[15] It is at present impossible to date the regular and general use of ᚭ for **o** any earlier than the second quarter of the eleventh century.[16] The archaeological and runological datings thus point in opposite directions, although they are not hopelessly at odds with one another. A durable and serviceable spindle-whorl could continue to be available for inscribing some time after the type itself had been superseded. It is also possible that these are peculiarly early examples of the runes in question. Specifically English influence on the development of the practice of dotting runes and the use of ᚭ for **o** has been proposed,[17] although my own judgement concurs with Barnes' scepticism on

this point: English influence is simply unnecessary as an explanation, and the chronological gap between the widespread use of runes in England and the emergence of these details in Scandinavian-Norse runic practice renders such a relationship implausible.[18] Nevertheless, dotting certainly represents the assimilation of runic writing to roman script traditions, and Viking-period Britain and Ireland was a context in which the contact preconditions for that development were abundantly provided.

There are other explicit charms such as this written in runes, although they are not copious in number. In the large collections of runic material from later medieval urban sites in Norway, in fact, conventional Christian prayers, especially the *Ave Maria* and *Pater Noster* are numerically predominant. The direct invocation of Óðinn is quite rare in any runic inscription and, remarkably, is unknown from the Viking Period. A particularly striking example, however, is the charm on a fragment of human skull from the Jutlandic coastal trading site of Ribe, datable to the eighth century. This has been read in several different ways, but for the purpose of reference here a reliable edited form may be cited as:

Ulfúrr ok Óðinn ok Hótýr. Hjalp Buri er viðr þeima verki, ok dverg unninn. Burr.

for which I would suggest the translation : 'Ulfúrr and Óðinn and Hótýr. [This] is a help to Búrr against that affliction, and the dwarf [is] overcome. Búrr'.[19] Here, we should note especially how the Saltfleetby inscription uses a triple invocation formula that is quite regular in a charm tradition.[20] We can also both compare and contrast the Saltfleetby spindle-whorl and charm with a set of so-called runic amulets found across the late Viking world, now from Orkney to Russia: on these, the texts are very obscure, and are in many cases concluded to be deliberately meaningless, although well-informed attempts at interpretation have been made.[21]

There are also parallels for the inscribing of runes on a spindle-whorl, although again nothing with a text that is truly comparable in character to that from Saltfleetby.[22] An eleventh-century soapstone whorl from Hoftun, Aust-Agder, Norway, for instance, reads **kunitr kerþsnalt**, interpreted as *Gunnhildr gerði snáld*: 'Gunnhildr made the spindle-whorl'. Both chronologically and geographically a closer parallel to the Saltfleetby specimen may be a whorl found in Lurk Lane, Beverley, East Yorkshire, which is inscribed with rune-like marks or graphs, but not such as to form a legible text.

Altogether, the evidence for the use of Norse runes in England is both sparse and fragmented. The relative wealth of evidence for later Viking-period runic literacy on the Isle of Man is not immediately reflected in the areas of north-west England and south-west Scotland bounding the Irish Sea, except perhaps in a short-twig sixteen-character **fuþark** inscription on a silver penannular brooch from Penrith; a local runic writing tradition only appears here in some half

a dozen inscriptions dated to the twelfth century.[23] There is a similar number of inscriptions from southern England, a majority of which certainly, and all of which probably, reflect the presence of a Scandinavian elite associated with the conquest and reign of Cnut. In Lincolnshire, besides Saltfleetby, there are two eleventh-century inscriptions from the city of Lincoln itself, both on bone objects: one a comb-case now in the British Museum and the other a fragment of a cattle rib from a layer excavated in St Benedict's Square.[24] The former has an inscription in long-branch runes, but differs distinctly in detail from the Saltfleetby whorl. The latter has short-twig runes.

Alongside this, it should be noted that the Anglo-Saxon/Old English runic writing tradition, whose roots date from the very beginning of Anglo-Saxon England in the fifth century and which enjoyed a real flourishing in the eighth century, shrank radically and in many respects withered away in the ninth century – to the extent that it appears only to survive as a scholarly curiosity in manuscript runes in restricted contexts in the tenth century. It is tempting to explain its striking demise in terms of the negative connotations of a style of writing that could be associated with the Scandinavian Viking enemies of the Anglo-Saxons in the ninth century, and so also with their heathenism. There is, however, no explicit or direct evidence to show that this was the case.

It is a matter of considerable interest, therefore, that there is no reason why the Saltfleetby spindle-whorl should not have been inscribed very close to, if not actually at, the place where it was found. Materially, it is completely at home there, especially if the artefact is detectably earlier than the form of the inscription: an obsolete functional object is more likely to have survived where it was commonest rather than where it was a rarity. If this is correct, the implications for this site on the North Sea coast, probably in the reign of Cnut or later, are truly remarkable. At least some people were using the Old Norse language there, in as correct and standard a form as we could ever expect to find in any contemporary Scandinavian inscription. There would have been a woman with a fully Norse name present, Ulfljót; if so, she could, of course, have been newly arrived from Scandinavia. The practices of Norse runic literacy were fully up to date: the dominant long-branch rune forms hint at a Danish rather than a Norwegian connection. Above all, of course, the inscription shows a continuing allegiance to the pre-Christian Norse religious tradition, despite the dominant Christianity of England and, indeed, the effective establishment of Christianity in both Denmark and Norway by the third decade of the eleventh century.

The first of the Norse gods invoked is Óðinn: famously, the high one (*Hár*) of the Norse pantheon in Ásgarðr, and *Alfǫðr*, 'father of all'. The mythological sources we have concerning Óðinn are profuse and the modern scholarly

(and, indeed, less scholarly) analyses and discussions of the figure are even more overwhelming in quantity. In *De falsis diis* Ælfric, and Wulfstan following him, refer to *Oðon* as they rather summarily seek to demonstrate that Germanic and Norse 'paganism' conforms to a consistent and classical pattern of untrue religious beliefs and adherence. The centrality of Óðinn to the Norse religious cosmos of the Viking period is undeniable: this is evidenced equally in England and the Isle of Man, where Óðinn appears on the Andreas I cross-slab, while the full iconographic and typological significance of the portrayal of Viðarr on the Gosforth Cross depends upon the recognition that Viðarr is the son of Óðinn, All-father.[25] The only reflex of Norse pre-Christian religion we have in a place-name in England is Rosebery Topping, Yorkshire (< *Othenesberg* [AD 1119]), but, despite a few direct parallels in Scandinavia, a colourful folk-name for a conspicuous landmark is scarcely evidence of an active cult of Óðinn in Viking-period England. Amongst the many roles and aspects of this character, he was a war god, and a god associated both with rune lore and magic spells: an epithet that appears for him in eddic poetry is *galdrs faðir*, 'father of the spell'.[26] Óðinn is invoked in charms with some regularity – at least as far as our very sparse empirical evidence can show.[27] There would appear, then, to have been a deep-rooted and real belief that calling upon Óðinn would give efficacy to a charm or prayer.

If not necessarily more important, Heimdallr is perhaps rather more interesting in this context. Heimdallr is a much more elusive figure in our evidence for pre-Christian Norse religion.[28] A range of mythological sources implies that he was a god of genuinely high status and importance within that pantheon, but the evidence for his cult, in the form, for instance, of place-names or images, does not match this. This leaves us with an altogether mysterious character: it is impossible, for instance, to know whether the tradition that led to his portrayal in the works of Snorri Sturluson in the thirteenth century had systematically suppressed information that would have provided a full and coherent portrayal of Heimdallr, or whether this god has been artificially raised in interest and importance through the post-conversion interpretation and rationalisation of merely fragmentary scraps and traditions.

Heimdallr is also linked to the genre of charm in Norse tradition, at least through the reported existence of a poetic *Heimdallargaldr*, from which Snorri quoted a couple of lines.[29] Snorri also refers to him as a son of Óðinn. He is famously the watchman of the gods, ready to sound Gjallarhorn when the forces of chaos break loose and the apocalyptic battle of Ragnarøk is imminent. This figure is identified on the Gosforth cross.[30] A number of sources associate him with aspects of fertility and human reproduction. Fantastically, he is referred to as the son of nine mothers – nine virgin mothers according to the

lines quoted by Snorri from *Heimdallargaldr*: 'níu em ek meyja møgr'. The prose introduction to *Rígsþula* in Codex Wormianus identifies Rígr, a name derived from Old Irish *rí*, 'king', as Heimdallr: he sleeps with successive human women, and begets children representing three classes (*jarlar*, *karlar* and *þrællar*) of society; 'sons of Heimdallr', *megir Heimdallar*, is given as a kenning for humankind in *Vǫluspá* (stanza 1).[31] His fight with Loki for *Brísinga men*, the goddess Freyja's necklace, in Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa*, supposedly describing the narrative carved panels in Olaf the Peacock's house at Hjarðarholt, Laxárdalur, Iceland, has been interpreted as a battle over a fertility token.[32] He is also the ruler of 'shrines' (*Grímnismál*, stanza 13).[33]

It is frustrating, in consequence, that we cannot at present say anything more about the third figure involved, *Þalfa*. Perhaps the one detail that it is worth considering further, even if speculatively of necessity, is the reasonable presumption that this is a feminine name and therefore a female figure, alongside the two gods. Even with some information on Freyja, Iðunn and Frigg, the mythological traditions of the Norse goddesses are sparse indeed compared to those portraying the gods. Supernatural female handmaidens and para-divine figures such as valkyries and *dísir*, by contrast, are familiar. The spindle-whorl pertains to and represents the female sphere of activity and experience, and it is not unreasonable to suggest that the aid it asserts, and was supposed to enact, was also specifically for the female sphere: possibly even the *biargrúnar* (birth-runes; *Sigrdrífumál*, stanza 9) to protect a woman in childbirth.[34]

At Saltfleetby on the Lincolnshire coast, diverse cultural traditions had met at a date very late in the Viking Period, and this inscribed spindle-whorl was one tangible product of their interaction. It gives us a truly unique insight into a serious, and thoroughly Norse, cultural expression within this complex and hybrid context. Perhaps Saltfleetby was a particularly propitious site for this. The metal-detecting at Saltfleetby has identified substantial Roman-period occupation and activity towards the western, inland end of the low ridge of land. The Saltfleetby area is a ridge of slightly raised land, running approximately WSW–ENE towards the broad coastal salt marshes with the Greyfleet Drain on the northern side and the Rivers Long Eau and Great Eau ('Eau' from Old Norse *á*, 'river') to the south (see Fig. 12.1). A Roman road from Lincoln and Louth is identified as running the length of the ridge to the coast, presumably to provide access and transport to and from coastal saltings. At the confluence of the South Dike, Greyfleet Drain and Long and Great Eau on the coast, Saltfleet was established as a small harbour in the Middle Ages, surviving as a regular local market site to the end of the eighteenth century, when it was superseded by the larger centres of Louth, Grimsby and Mablethorpe.[35] The

Domesday Survey records that the taking of toll from ships calling at Saltfleet had started between the Conquest and 1087.[36] Between the Roman period and the high Middle Ages, however, there is no sign of Anglo-Saxon occupation or activity in Saltfleetby except for two stirrup-strap mounts of the type dated to the eleventh century from the same area as where the spindle-whorl was found,[37] which undoubtedly represent one and the same, relatively distinguished and successful, settlement or homestead.

In the high Middle Ages the district manifestly prospered. The dispersed strip settlement of Saltfleetby had no fewer than three parish churches, two of them now redundant: from west to east, Saltfleetby St Peter, Saltfleetby All Saints, and Saltfleetby St Clement parishes. As Barbara Crawford has explored in detail, there is a close association between church dedications to St Clement and Scandinavian coastal trading communities.[38] It is no surprise therefore that St Clement's church is that at the coastal end of the site.[39] The spindle-whorl and strap-mounts were found within the bounds of the parish of Saltfleetby St Clement. The name Saltfleetby is probably best explained as the *býr* (= homestead or settlement) defined by its proximity to the creek and harbour of Saltfleet. Equally, it is reasonable to postulate that Saltfleetby was a prosperous local landholding or estate centre, represented by the strap-mounts and spindle-whorl, which sub-divided into the three parishes of the high Middle Ages.

Archaeologically, it would be very surprising if the Saltfleetby inscription had been made as late as the post-Conquest period when Saltfleet's status as a port appears to have advanced, although both runographically and philologically that would be a very comfortable dating. Nothing, however, is quite as surprising as this evidence for a genuine ritual adherence to the pre-Christian deities in any part of the late Anglo-Scandinavian world. It is very welcome for a small new find to turn up and create such astonishment. The object and its inscription may represent individuality and non-conformity – possibly distinctly female – rather than a hitherto unsuspected, general cultural cleft in that context. If so, however, that was a form of individuality that was both striking and brave – and therefore presumably especially meaningful for the person who wanted this charm carved onto a spindle-whorl.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 Abrams 2000; 2001; Hadley 2006, 192–236, especially 224–6.
2 Leahy & Paterson 2001.
3 Spurkland 2005, 81.
4 Seip 1955, 128, 132–7.
5 Spurkland 2005, 76–7.
6 Düwel 2008, 105–11.
7 Sö194. The *Samnordisk runtextdatabas* is a convenient corpus of Scandinavian runic inscriptions, ordered by these reference numbers *http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord. htm* (Accessed 23 June 2014).
8 Simek 1993, 31.
9 Magnússon 1989, 1181, s.v. ÞJÁLFA.
10 Seip 1955, 122–3, 246.
11 Simek 1993, 362, s.v. VILI.
12 Walton Rogers 1997, 1731–45.
13 Pers. comm., Ingvild Øye, Bryggen Museum, Bergen.
14 Pers. comm.
15 Düwel 2008, 93, 102–5.
16 See Spurkland 2005, 96–103.
17 Barnes 2012, 92–4; 2015.
18 See further below, this page.
19 Cf Stoklund 1996; Macleod & Mees 2006, 25–6.
20 Macleod & Mees 2006, 15–19.
21 Steenholt Olesen 2010. A further specimen has recently been identified from the Broch of Deerness, Orkney.
22 Cf Macleod & Mees 2006, 50–1.
23 Barnes & Page 2006.
24 Page 1999, 205–6. The accession number of the comb-case is BM 1867,0320.12. An image can be viewed on *http://www. britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_ object_details.aspx?objectId=65237&partId=1* (Accessed 20 June 2014). For the rib fragment, see McKinnell 1995.
25 Bailey 1980, 127–9; Bailey in Bailey & Cramp 1988, 100–3.
26 *Baldrs Draumar*, stanza 3 (Neckel, rev. Kuhn, 1962, 277–9).
27 Macleod & Mees 2006; cf Jolly 1996, 125–8; Raudvere 2002, 92–4.
28 Cöllen 2015.
29 Turville-Petre 1964, 147–55.
30 Bailey 1996, 87–91.
31 Neckel, rev. Kuhn, 1962, 1–16 at 1.
32 Simek 1993, 44–6.
33 Neckel, rev. Kuhn, 1962, 56–68, at 59–60.
34 Neckel, rev. Kuhn, 1962, 189–97, at 191.
35 Wright 1982, 20–1.
36 Sawyer 1998, 21–2.
37 PAS LIN-EA2E51 and LIN-820011: *http://finds.org.uk/ database* (last accessed 23 June 2014); cf Williams 1997.
38 Crawford 2008, esp. 107–8 and 126–30.
39 The present, closed, church is not on its original site: in the nineteenth century a new church was constructed here a few hundred metres north of the original church.

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