

RUNES IN FINLAND

KENDRA
WILLSON (ed.)

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RUNES

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IN FINLAND

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Ulla Moilanen

The inscribed silver disc brooch from the Tuukkala cemetery in Mikkeli

Abstract

THE SILVER DISC BROOCH FOUND in the Tuukkala inhumation cemetery in Mikkeli in 1886, dated to the twelfth or thirteenth century, is one of very few Late Iron Age artefacts found in Finnish territory that contain Scandinavian runic inscriptions. The inscriptions occur in two locations on the reverse of the brooch and the carvings appear to form a typical owner inscription. The text contains at least one, or probably two, proper names, and microscopic examination of the brooch indicates that the texts were probably made with different implements. Because the brooch is a stray find from a cemetery, the exact location of which was destroyed before excavation, closer examination of the individual with whom the artefact was buried is not possible. The runic inscriptions and various traces of repairs visible on the brooch, however, point to a long period of use and possible changes in the significance of the object over its lifespan.



Figure 1: A map of the locations and areas mentioned in the text.

Introduction

Only a few runic inscriptions dated with certainty to the transition between the Iron Age and the Middle Ages are known from Finland. One is on a runestone fragment found in Dragsfjärd (Stora Ängesön, Kimitoön; Källström in this volume). Tuukka Talvio (2002: 157, 164) also mentions eleventh-century Byzantine bracteate imitations with legends resembling runes from Janakkala and Masku, and a Danish penny of Svend Estridsen with a runic inscription from Kuusamo. According to Heikki Oja (2015: 75–76), Finnish finds also include a Late Iron Age amulet from Vörå decorated with a single rune (Oja 2015: 75–76). One of the few runic inscriptions, and one that is deliberately carved on an object, is on a silver disc brooch found in an early medieval inhumation cemetery in Tuukkala in Mikkeli (Figure 1).

The Tuukkala cemetery was discovered in 1886 in conjunction with the leveling of an army training ground during which several graves were destroyed. In the same year, Johan Reinhold Aspelin excavated

32 graves at the site, of which six were cremations and the rest inhumations. Archaeological investigations were conducted at Tuukkala in 1933 and 1934 as well but the number of graves found at that time is not clear (Mikkola 2009: 179; Moilanen 2017: 170). In 1938 two additional graves with artefacts were revealed, but excavations were conducted for the next time only in 2009. The graves that have been investigated include both adults' and children's graves. Both biological sexes are represented. Some of the graves were furnished with grave goods while others were entirely devoid of artefacts (Mikkola 2009). On the basis of the artefact finds and carbon dating, it appears that the burial ground was in use from the twelfth through the fourteenth century (Mikkola 2009: 184).

This dates the cemetery to the cusp of the Iron Age and Middle Ages according to standard periodisation in Finnish archaeology. Finnish chronology places the Viking Age between AD 800/825 and 1050 in western Finland and between AD 800/825 and 1050/1100 in eastern Finland and Karelia. The Crusade period, which dates from AD 1050–1150 in western Finland and AD 1050–1300 in eastern Finland and Karelia (Raninen & Wessman 2015: 216), is the last period that is still considered Late Iron Age. It marks the transition from the Iron Age to the Medieval Period and could also be classified as Early Medieval based on the chronology in the surrounding areas.

Because of the artefact finds, the Tuukkala cemetery is regarded as one of the richest burial sites in eastern Finland. The artefacts indicate contacts with both Karelia and places further east and with Sweden and Gotland in the west (Raninen & Wessman 2015: 356–357). An example of the latter is the silver disc brooch from the cemetery, which according to several researchers was produced in Gotland or continental Sweden (Nordman 1924: 67–68; Lehtosalo-Hilander 1984: 384; Uino 1997: 359). One factor pointing to Gotland is the fact that corresponding brooches in Swedish silver hoards often occur together with Gotlandic coins (Myrberg 2015: 163). Russia has been regarded as another possible place of production on the basis of the stylistic factors of some brooches (Uino 2003: 393; Saksa 1998: 37–38); there, in turn,



Figure 2: The silver disc brooch from Tuukkala in Mikkeli.

such finds have been seen as showing Byzantine influence (Nordman 1924: 16–17). In Finland, silver disc brooches have been found primarily in Häme and Savo (Figure 1). They are also known from Karelia, Russia, Scandinavia, Estonia, and Germany (Kivikoski 1951: 30; Kivikoski 1973: 134; Uino 1997: 359; Uino 2003: 393; Saksa 1998: 37).

The silver disc brooch with the runic inscription found in Tuukkala is one of the finds from 1886 and may have come from one of the graves that was destroyed before Aspelin's excavations. The inscription on the reverse side of the brooch is located in a place which had previously held a pin catch or an attachment loop for a pin. The front of the brooch is decorated with botanical ornamentation which surrounds a small cross in the centre (Figure 2).

On the basis of grave finds, silver disc brooches have been regarded as feminine artefact types. Their placement in graves suggests that they may have been used to attach women's shirts or underdresses at the collar. Sometimes these artefacts may also have been used as pendants, as indicated by a small loop on some brooches. The loop may, however, have been useful on brooches as well, as some finds still had a chain attached (e.g. Myrberg 2015: 164). Pendants or ear spoons that were typical of the clothing of eastern Finland and Karelia at the time could

in turn be attached to the chain (e.g. Kivikoski 1951: 38). The Tuukkala brooch was already broken when it was put in the grave and no longer had a pin catch. Thus it may have been used as a pendant at least in its final period of use. In the literature, artefacts of this type are variously referred to as brooches and pendants (e.g. Saksa 1998: 37; Sarvas 1979: 38).

The inscriptions on the Tuukkala brooch and their interpretation

The runic inscriptions on the artefact occur in two separate groups (Figure 3). One of these comprises an inscription which both Freudenthal (1893: 2) and Nordman (1924: 67) interpreted as the feminine name $\mathfrak{B}\mathfrak{t}\mathfrak{1}\mathfrak{N}$ **botui** ‘Botvi’. Nordman, following Ailio’s (1922: 25) report on a reading provided for him by O. F. Hultman, read the longer text as $\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{t}\mathfrak{Y}\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{K}$ **-iuiamik**, which he interpreted as the words ‘-iui owns me’. If the sequence **-iui** is interpreted as *heui*, it might denote the personal name *Hegvi* or *Hägvi*, normalised Runic Swedish *Hægvi* (Peterson 2007: 126). Freudenthal (1893: 2) tentatively read the damaged first rune as \mathfrak{h} , a reading affirmed by Salberger and Gustavson (1987: 39). Freudenthal interpreted the name as *Hivi*, based on the similar female

Figure 3: The runic inscriptions and scratches on the Tuukkala brooch.



names *Arnvi* (normalised *Ar(i)n/Ær(i)nvī*, Peterson 2007: 24), *Fastvi* (*Fastvī*, Peterson 2007: 60), *Halvi* (not listed in Peterson 2007), *Ketilvi* (*Kætilvī*, Peterson 2007: 154, 156), and *Ragnvi* (*Ragnvī*, Peterson 2007: 179–180). He did not discuss the etymology of the stem *hi-*. Salberger and Gustavson (1987: 39) observed that the second rune is dotted and therefore read **heui**. According to Nordman, in view of the typology of the runes used on the Tuukkala brooch, the text belongs to the Swedish tradition of around the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Silver disc brooches decorated with botanical ornamentation, crosses, and images of saints are, however, dated by Nordman (1924: 57–59) to the thirteenth century. Other artefact finds from the cemetery have been typologically dated primarily to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but radiocarbon dating of graves investigated in 2009 suggests the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which may imply exceptionally long periods of use for at least some of the artefacts found in the cemetery (Mikkola 2009: 184).

Both of the proper names on the Tuukkala brooch are primarily indicative of Gotland. The similar-sounding masculine name *Hegvin* appears on a Viking Age bone comb found in Aarhus, Denmark (DR EM85;361/DK MJy 80), but the name *Hægvi* was also in use in Gotland, where it appears on a thirteenth-century limestone grave slab from Näs Church (Bergman 1998: 54). The form in this inscription (G 33) is **hehuiþa** (gen.) and the Scandinavian runic-text database (Sw. Samnordisk runtextdatabas) treats it instead as a form of the masculine name *Hægviðr*, which is also found in another Gotlandic inscription, G 165 (Klinte Church), in the form **hehuiþar** (gen.) (Jansson, Wessén & Svärdström 1978: 73–75; cf. *Hægvidh*, SMP 3: 516). *Bōtvī*, in turn, appears on Gotlandic runestones such as G 42 Havdhems Church and G 81b Linde Church¹ (Nordman 1924: 69; Salberger & Gustavson 1987: 39–40), and there is in addition an animal-head brooch from Gotland dated to the twelfth century (G 58, Hemse parish) that bears the runic inscription **botui a kik argais sigtiir** which may be interpreted as *Botvi á mik Arngeirs. Sigtýr* ‘Botvi from Arges’ (farm) owns me(?). Sigtir’ (cf. Jansson & Wessén 1962: 75), with **kik** a miscarving

for *mik* ‘me’ (Jansson & Wessén 1962: 75). The sequence **argais** would reflect the genitive form of the masculine personal name *Arn-gæiRR*, cf. Old Swedish *Arngér* or *Angēr*, which survives in the farm name *Arges* in the parish where the inscription was found (Jansson & Wessén 1962: 76). The word order is, however, somewhat strange. Pipping (1900: 51–54) interpreted the inscription as containing a double expression of the nominative form of the first person pronoun *ek* ‘I’. He viewed the final sequence **sigtiir** as a masculine personal name *Sigtir* (not listed in Peterson 2007), perhaps the name of the rune carver: *Bótúi ák ek Argais Sigtír* ‘I Botvi from Argais own (this brooch); Sigtir (carved the runes)’ (Pipping 1900: 53; cf. Jansson & Wessén 1962: 76). The established history of the use of the names and the form of the text on the aforementioned Gotlandic brooch lead one to wonder whether **heui** *Hägvi* on the Tuukkala brooch might be a farm name rather than a given name. Microscopic examination, however, does not support the hypothesis that the two names were carved at the same time. If the construction paralleled that on G 58, one would also expect a genitive form of the farm name.

Microscopic examination shows that the texts on the Tuukkala brooch were made with very thin and sharp points or needles. Two different tools may have been used as the *Botvi* text is composed of slightly broader scratches than the longer text. Another notable feature of the artefact is the clear indication of repair. The original pin either broke or was deliberately removed, at which time the silver plate was scraped off and a new pin catch and pin were attached to the brooch. In conjunction with the scraping, part of the lettering was destroyed, as indicated by the fragmentary name **heui** preceding the words ‘owns me’. On the basis of such details of the repairs and the creation of the text, the following stages can be distinguished in the lifespan of the artefact:

1. Production of the artefact and carving of the first text ‘Hägvi owns me’.
2. Scraping of silver from the surface and attachment of a new pin; text **heui** partly destroyed.

3. Writing of the name *Botvi* (may also have happened following phase 1).
4. Total removal of the pin and possible change in mode of use from a brooch to a pendant.

Also pertinent to the life stages of the brooch is the journey from Gotland to eastern Finland, where it finally ends up in the cemetery in Tuukkala, as well as its discovery in 1886. The final stages of the artefact's life cycle are represented by its inclusion in an archaeological collection, its display, and the research it inspires.

Understanding of the text and the users of the brooch

Proper names written with runes are comparatively common finds on artefacts, and runic inscriptions carved on artefacts are usually hidden on the back (Hines 1998: 188). Names may, however, be interpreted in different ways. They may indicate the brooch's owner, maker, dedication, gift, inheritance, or the name of the artefact itself (Looijenga 2003: 29). An indication of an ownership relationship is the text 'owns me' appearing on the Tuukkala brooch, which identifies the brooch with the person who owned it. The text is connected with the name *Hägvi* so it would be justified to assume one of the first owners of the brooch bore this name.

Texts that express ownership are common in artefacts with runic inscriptions. Because the Tuukkala brooch contains two different names, it may have had at least two different owners. The visible alterations and partly destroyed inscription suggest that *Hägvi* probably represents an older inscription and possibly an earlier owner than *Botvi*. The change of ownership could have occurred in different ways: by trade, inheritance, gift, or reward. For example, according to Klavs Randsborg (1980: 126), both weapons and personal items, such as jewellery, may have been transferred as inheritance during the Viking Age. Artefacts in inhumation graves that are older in their time of produc-

tion and use may point to the same thing. Older artefacts have also been found in Iron Age graves in Finland, although they are, with a few exceptions, primarily weapons or Stone Age artefacts, of which at least the latter could not have been transferred directly from one generation to the next (Wessman 2009: 100). On the other hand, the aforementioned datings from the Tuukkala cemetery suggest that objects in the area may have remained in use for a long time (Mikkola 2009: 184).

As noted above, silver disc brooches in Finland and Karelia are most often – although not exclusively – found in female graves. In Sweden, on the other hand, corresponding finds come primarily from hoards (Myrberg 2015: 167). On the basis of the grave finds, the artefact type has been regarded as feminine. The names on the Tuukkala brooch are also more suggestive of women than men. Pieces of jewellery may have been typical items passed down from mothers to daughters as heirlooms during the Viking Age and Early Middle Ages (Thedéen 2009: 90), and Ailio (1922: 26) has suggested that the two names on the Tuukkala brooch might represent a mother and daughter. According to common law practice in Karelia in later historical times, which probably reflects a long tradition, girls received a small inheritance as part of their future dowry (Ojala 2013: 53).

On the other hand, the customs and reasons for inheritance may have varied. The chronicler Ahmad ibn Fadlan wrote in the 920s about northern boat funeral rituals in his description of travel to Volga Bulgaria and his account presents an example of the distribution of inheritance from an almost contemporary source. In his depiction, the chieftain is cremated in a boat and human sacrifice of a slave girl forms part of the funerary ritual. The sacrifice is preceded by the distribution of jewellery, primarily to those who conduct the ritual rather than to relatives and close associates of the deceased (Fadlan 2017: 80). Objects could also be taken from older graves for reuse (Wessman 2009: 80). Old objects could thus be related to broader social memory rather than to personal inheritance, which would thus have had collective meaning in maintaining many forms of social relations to ancestors and to the past (see also Moilanen 2021; Wessman 2009). The names engraved on

the Tuukkala brooch thus do not necessarily indicate biological kinship between the named individuals.

Runic inscriptions on artefacts can also be interpreted in other ways. The object itself may have been personified with its own name or that of its maker and it may have had agency (Burström 2015: 4). The decoration on the Tuukkala brooch and the possible change in its use may have indicated a change in the meaning of the object. The second name carved on the brooch could also refer to the person who repaired or altered the object, as in the case of the brooch from Harford Farm in England (Bammesberger 2003: 133–134). The personal name *Luda* on the Harford Farm brooch is followed by the verb **gibōetæ**, which has been interpreted by Bammesberger (2003: 134) as the present subjunctive 3rd person form of *gibētan* (later *gibētan*) ‘repair; make amends’; Bammesberger (2003: 134–135) suggests that the text could be translated as ‘may Luda make amends by means of the brooch’.

The Tuukkala brooch may also have passed from one person to another as part of trade or as a gift. These could be closely connected at the end of the Iron Age, since giving gifts may have been a significant part of the creation and maintenance of alliances and trade relations (Gustin 2004: 240–242).

Ailio (1922: 26) flatly denied the possibility of the brooch being a trade item and instead proposed a rather romantic idea involving stolen silver items or even a bride who was eventually buried in Tuukkala. Nordman (1924: 66–68) suggested that a Gotlandic woman could have been buried in Tuukkala if she had crossed the Baltic Sea in connection with marriage. The original context for the brooch is not known and nor can the artefact be identified with any specific grave. It is thus not possible to conduct more precise scientific tests on the corpse buried with the brooch. If the bones had been available for study, it would have been possible to determine the buried individual’s biological sex as well as to study the individual’s geographical origin and biological kinship relations with the help of ancient DNA and stable isotope analysis. As it is, various scenarios for the possible final user of the brooch remain speculative.

In Anglo-Saxon England as well, artefacts with runes have been found in grave contexts (Hines 1998: 186). The unifying feature of these graves, however, is not the sex of the corpse but the fact that the artefacts were generally imported and thus possibly used by the portion of the population that could afford prestige objects. Silver already formed the basis of the Scandinavian economy by the Viking Age and therefore objects made from this material may have been important simply because of the raw material (Graham-Campbell 2007: 216). The runic inscription on the Tuukkala brooch, which probably could not be read by people in the environment of eastern Finland, presumably did not increase the material value of the object. The marks may, however, have made the object distinctive in comparison with similar finds, for which reason the object may have had special significance and power as a grave good.

Although the brooch's date of production and use can be seen as a period of fairly broad mobility, and the movement of single individuals cannot be ruled out, trade is nonetheless a very likely reason for the object ending up in eastern Finland. The finds from the Tuukkala cemetery include other materials that point to broad contacts and trade networks. For instance, the textile fragments from the cemetery include striped fabric which, as indicated by the colour and structure, was imported. The dyes for the red and white stripes on the textiles come from plants that do not grow in Finland. The fabric also has direct analogues in fourteenth-century England and Novgorod (Vajanto 2015: 42, 51; Vajanto & van Bommel 2014: 64).

Earlier research on silver disc brooches has also considered whether the brooches belonged to Christian culture and whether such brooches in eastern Finnish graves represent a population that had accepted Christianity. According to Andreas Koivisto (2006: 174), these brooches do not provide information about the beliefs of the users in eastern Finland as they would in the area where they were produced. This may be influenced by the view that furnished graves do not indicate the complete acceptance of Christianity (Purhonen 1997: 373). Myrberg, on the other hand, has regarded the silver disc brooches as purely Christian (2015: 169).

Summary

Although it is impossible to conduct more precise scientific investigation into those who owned and used the Tuukkala brooch at different times, the artefact is interesting even as a stray find. The runic inscriptions on the brooch, as well as microscopic investigation of the visible traces of repairs on the object, indicate that the letters of the two bands of runes were made with different implements and probably at different times. The alterations help to identify several different stages in the object's history of use and make it possible to contemplate the social significance of the object. The alterations and carvings on the brooch may relate to changes in ownership and thus point to possible changes in the meaning of the object as well over the course of its lifetime.

Translation Kendra Willson

Endnotes

- 1 The latter has also been read as **butniq**, the genitive form of an otherwise unknown feminine name **Botny* or **Butny* (Jansson & Wessén 1962: 122).

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