

The Loveden Runic Cremation Urn

Notes on the individual characters

To the extent that they can be identified, the characters are as follows (reading left to right). Transliterations follow the Oslo standard:

1. \lesssim **s**
2. ǀ **i**. There has been much debate among runologists about the origin of this character and which sound or sounds it represented in the earliest stages of runic writing, but here it is assumed to represent a long vowel [i:], possibly with nasalisation [i:] (see Waxenberger 2010:156, 455-466).
3. þ **p**
4. ǃ **æ** (transliterated **a** in some of the literature).
5. þ **b**
6. Either ǃ **æ** or ǀ **i** with two parallel strokes (note that the vertical is doubled).
7. M **d**. The two vertical strokes following this character are normally assumed to be a word divider.
8. From this point on, the reading becomes much less certain (especially from no. 12 to the end). This character could be either ǃ **w**, or a somewhat asymmetric form of þ **p**. These two characters are easily confusable. On purely formal grounds, **w** might seem the more likely: if it is **p**, the top of the vertical is truncated (compare no. 3), but given the rather erratic execution of the carving, especially towards the end of the sequence, it would be unwise to rule out either reading on this basis.
9. ǀ **i**.
10. This character is read as < **k** in some of the literature (see Parsons 1999:56-57). Because of the eccentric angle, Bammesberger (1991:127) suggests that it might be ^ **u**. Against this reading, Parsons notes its small size relative to the rest of the text. Waxenberger supports Bammesberger's position, again pointing out the odd orientation of the character (2010:157). To add to the confusion, we should also note the existence of a variant form (the so-called *Dachform* "roof-form") of **k**, ^ . This form is attested on the Continent among the "South Germanic" inscriptions, and also on another inscribed object found in England (the Watchfield case fitting), which may be of Continental provenance (Scull 1992; Parsons 1999:68-70).
11. Like no. 8, this could be ǃ **w** or þ **p**. See comments above. Following this character are two vertical strokes interpreted throughout the literature as a word divider, like the verticals after no. 7.
12. This character resembles a reversed Roman N, and may be a variant of N **h**.
13. Probably ǀ **i**.
14. This character is similar to no. 6 and might be ǃ **æ** or ǀ **i** (see above).
15. Most problematic of all, the final character looks somewhat like a Roman K and does not clearly resemble any known rune. Page (1999:180-181) suggested that it might be K **f** (on the basis of which Odenstedt (1980) read nos. 12-15 as **hlaf** = OE *hlāf* "bread"), but this must be regarded as a very speculative reading, which has been rejected by more recent commentators. Another proposed reading is ǃ **w** (Elliott 1989:52; Eichner 1990:325; Bammesberger 1991:127-128), but this is also very uncertain.