



# Midnight Sun

ISSUE

1

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Quarterly Magazine for the Scandinavian Club of Regina



What did they write about - the people who left their runic inscriptions on objects big and small more than a thousand years ago?

Midnight Sun has talked with one of the world's leading experts on runology,



Professor **James E. Knirk** at the Museum of Cultural History, the University

of Oslo. He possesses the big picture of rune history, but he also has an eye for the little details, the small messages. In the 2010 exhibition **Kiss Me**, he showed a great number of objects with person-to-person messages - some of a rather spicy character.



## In this issue:



## Runes

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← Picture: See p. 5

## Alphabets - where do they come from?



**R**unic alphabets are often looked upon as a set of magical signs, emerging out of a misty, mysterious past. Modern-day movies and TV series have no doubt helped furthering this image. Truly, in some cases, e.g. on amulets, runic inscriptions were given special powers. We will try to shed some light on the use of the oldest means of written communication between our ancestors.

Written communication emerged among tradespeople - they needed a means of keeping track of their business transactions. The first alphabet is believed to have been invented by the **Phoenicians**, great traders of the Middle East, some 4,000 years ago. This was a phonetic alphabet with only consonants. This is the sign for 𐤀 "ox", **aleph**. Phoenician signs traveled to Greece, Italy (**Etruscans** and Romans), and it is believed that **Germanic** mercenaries picked up the use of writing and brought it back to their home lands. With some exceptions, alphabets are related to each other. The earliest use of runes date from circa A.D.150, and their use varied from stone memorials to maker's and ownership formulas on weapons and jewelry.

The best known runic alphabet is probably the older futhark - named after its first six letters.



There have

been several versions of the futhark, and the inscriptions found on objects uncovered in the Nordic region, have been written in any of them. They were used in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Iceland. Finland, with its language developing from a totally different origin, does not have national historic monuments with runes. There are, however, runes of Swedish origin found in Finland, and also various runic inscriptions from around the Baltic Sea.



**Happy New Year!**



### 40th Anniversary Celebrations - YOUR Contribution...

2016 will reveal what the SSCoR Board has in store for us, but let you ask yourselves: What can be MY contribution? Whether your membership spans forty years or one - what can you tell us, or show us, as your favourite memory of our Club?

Contact Greg (306-586-9737) or Kari (karmit@hotmail.com)

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## Members' Matters

### SCoR 2015 Christmas Potluck



↑ Guests of honour: *Santa Claus* of the North Pole in full regalia brought Christmas presents, and author [Byrna Barclay](#) of Regina did a reading of a dramatic passage from her book [The Forest Horses](#).

↓ - but the most important guests of the SCoR Christmas Party - as always - were the children.







## President's Corner



It was nice to see everyone at our Christmas pot luck supper in early December, especially all of the young children. Hopefully everyone was pleased that once again Santa Claus was able to join us.

I know that as you read this Christmas is long gone. Hopefully your Christmas celebrations were full of happiness and good family times. On behalf of the board of the Scandinavian Club of Regina I hope that 2016 will be a good year for everybody..

Remember that Nordic knitting will resume in January, and we hope to offer some Rosemaling classes as well.

**Happy New Year!**

Greg

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## Editorial



Forty years - still young, some would say, but a considerable age for a club counting its members among immigrants and immigrants' descendants: each generation farther away from the Old Country. Many of the [founding members](#) have departed from history, but some are still around. We owe the Club's existence to them and to waves of new members over the years.

However, an anniversary should not just make us sit back and remember the past. It is important to look ahead to find out what will attract new members. From the SCoR Bylaws: "[—] Specifically, the purposes of the Club are to: 1. maintain the Scandinavian traditions of people who trace their ancestry to the northern countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden; [—]" Nordic background this day and age covers it all—from the nineteenth



century farmers to the modern day oil specialists. Younger generations will have other preferences than the founders.

Modern Nordic societies and culture could have more to offer than what we have come to consider the typical "Scandinavian background".

For SCoR to continue thriving and attracting new members, it is important for all of us - not just our elected representatives - to give input to what we want the direction to be for our Club's development. That might mean less resources spent on trying to revitalise activities that we have outgrown, greater efforts focused on what may attract younger generations. That might mean asking around: asking the membership what focus and activities they would like the Club to have for the next forty years - asking potential members what it would take for them to find it interesting to join us.

## Wanted: New Editor

Our volunteer editor wants to step down after the AGM in April, and we are looking for her creative successor.

Midnight Sun is a quarterly publication, presently created with [Microsoft Publisher](#).

Contact Kari Mitchell ([kar-mit@hotmail.com](mailto:kar-mit@hotmail.com)) or Greg Swanson (306-586-9737) for details.



<http://www.facebook.com/scandinavianclubregina>





## Bracteates, amulets and other small things



Whereas most of the bracteate findings have been made in Denmark, this gold pendant was found at Vadstena in Sweden.



Cruciform lead amulet with runic inscription; Norway



Folded-up lead amulet, handy to carry in a purse; Norway



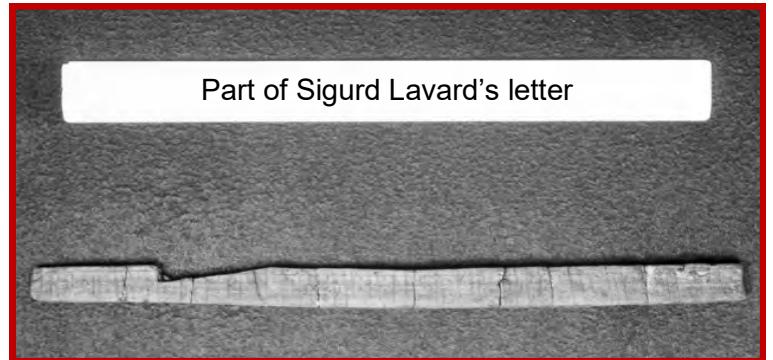
Detail of bone comb described in text.

On the 4th of July 1955, lightning struck at **Bryggen**, the Hanseatic Wharf in Bergen, Norway. The fire that followed led to more than fourteen years of excavations and more than 550 "new" rune inscriptions on bone and wood pieces were found.

One of the findings was a letter on wooden sticks from **Sigurd Lavard** - an order of spearheads to one of Bryggen's craftsmen.

But objects with runic inscriptions had been unearthed much earlier, all over Scandinavia. *Bracteates* are thin medieval or older coins.

Other findings made of metal (lead) are amulets with Christian inscriptions (dating from 11-1200s). They sometimes had the form of a cross, or were folded into a small, square shape which could be carried in special purses or sewn into pieces of clothing, and they had probably been buried with their owners. Modern day use of metal detectors has resulted in many findings of single metal objects.



Part of Sigurd Lavard's letter

Wooden objects have been preserved in the ground. As mentioned already on p.1, many of them were name labels marking the ownership of goods. A curious (but human) practise is being manifested in downright odious runes, very like graffiti on washroom walls in modern-day society - naming people and telling of sexual exploits. More innocuous graffiti, more like "Kilroy was here" have been found inscribed on walls of Norwegian stave churches.

Animal bone material was easy to carve and lent itself to the use by crafty people with a message. Bone was also used to create important tools for everyday life. Take combs, for instance.

Head lice was a common nuisance, and the remedy to help get rid of it was a good louse comb. This well preserved sample was found at a site in Sogn & Fjordane county, Western Norway.



Photo: James E. Knirk

Very interesting is the fact that leather shoes with runes have been partly preserved under the houses at **Bryggen** (picture above). This shoe has been beautifully adorned with an inscription between borders: a Latin quotation of Vergil's **Amor vincit omnia** (Love conquers all). The quotation could have continued "Let us too surrender to Love" on the other shoe, which was not found.





# Monuments



There are some 7,000 runic inscriptions in the world, half of them located in Sweden, where the great majority are runestones dating from 900 AD onwards. Most of them Christian grave monuments. The Church often took over old traditions, but at times expressed warnings against runes, considering them to be pagan.

One of the world's largest runestones, the big Jelling stone, is called "Denmark's Christening certificate" (see pic. on p.1, and margin). It is a heavily decorated three sided granite pyramid. Denmark has some of the oldest Viking Age runetones. There developed a "fashion" among men of influence to have their own runic stones raised, Theng stones and Dräng stones, and the



Runestone in Uppsala, Sweden.  
*"...björn (?) and Brand bade raise the stone after Karlung their father and Kättilbjörn after (his) brother. Öpir carved the runes"*

fashion spread to Sweden (but never reached Norway). Earlier: Runes were inscribed along the edges of the stones, but now they were often set in an elaborate artistic context, sometimes with the runes appearing inside snake formed ornaments.

Archaeologists are still able to uncover runic treasures. Part of a runestone from Norrtälje, Sweden, had been missing for many years, but was rediscovered in 2013 in Vaxholm.



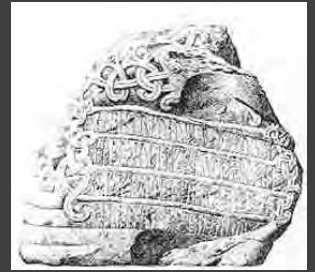
We find more of the oldest runestones in Norway than in the other Scandinavian countries. The oldest of the stones in this



picture (on the right, on display at the Oslo University Library) is a memorial stone from c. 400-500 AD, with the text: **"HadulaikaR. I Hagusta(l)daR buried my son"**.

No Viking Age monumental stones with runic inscriptions have been found on Iceland. Why is that so? Perhaps so much of the common stone found there was formed from lava and was not that suitable for stone monuments.

There are, however, several Icelandic runic grave stones from 1300-1500 with a text like **"Here rests NN"**. Runic inscriptions from this period have also been found on small objects.

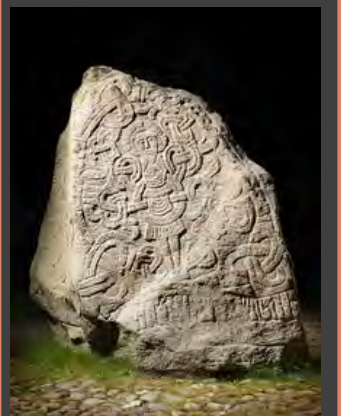
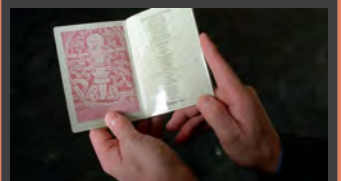


The Jelling stone is unusual in that the inscription was made in horizontal bands. It says:

**HARALDR KING BADE  
 DO THESE RUNES  
 AFTER GORMR HIS  
 FATHER AND AFTER  
 THYRVÉ HIS MOTHER  
 THE HARALDR WHO  
 WON FOR HIMSELF  
 DENMARK ALL AND  
 NORWAY AND MADE  
 THE DANES  
 CHRISTIAN**

The king was Harold I, **Harold Bluetooth**. This is the first time Norway (NURUIAK) is mentioned in writing. [Danish video](#)

The Danes even have a picture of a big Jelling stone detail in their passport!





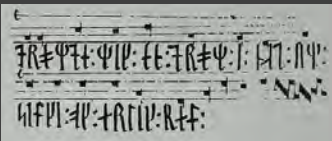


## Runes in Literary Documents



### Codex Runicus

The picture above shows the final page of Codex Runicus, a manuscript from c. 1300 containing the Scanian Law written in runes on vellum (calf skin). Scania (Skåne), now part of Sweden, belonged to Denmark back then. The last couple of lines of the page contains text and music to the song Drømte mig en drøm I nat which has become part of both countries' culture.



In 1931, the tune became the pause signal of Danmarks Radio, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, played on an automatic xylophone.



What is literature? The etymology of the word tells us that it originates from latin *litteratura*, "writing, written rendering", derived from greek *littera*, "letter". So, anything written. Which tells us we can find literature written on stones, but mostly we would think hand written or printed sources. We can bring but a few samples...

Runes are block capitals and not at all easy to write by hand. Still, they seem to have been in fairly wide use. However, there are only two medieval manuscripts written entirely with runes: Codex Runicus (see margin) and fragments of Jomfru Marias klage (Virgin Mary's Lament). The manuscript (in Old Danish) was penned by the same person who wrote the Codex Runicus.

Carmina Burana is a manuscript written around 1225, but is a collection of songs from the 1100s with poetry covering a wide range of hedonism, from drinking songs to love lyrics. The songs were popular with vagabond-like traveling students.



Scandinavia did not have a university, and students from the north traveled to e.g. the University of Padua.

These songs from the 12th century had never been found in Scandinavia until the excavation at Bryggen in Bergen (see p.4) brought forth citations in runes of lines from two songs.

It is indeed interesting to see that the tradition of student singers goes such a long way back - more or less directly comparable to Carl Michael Bellman's works around Uppsala University in the 18th century. And of course, Carl Orff based his scenic cantata (1935-36) on these medieval poems.



Contemporary bust of Sverre Sigurdsson from the Nidaros Cathedral, dated c. 1200

Sverre Sigurdsson (Old Norse: Sverrir Sigurðarson) (was the king of Norway 1184-1202. The most important historical source on Sverre's life is his biography, Sverris saga, in part written while he was alive. In the oldest manuscript of the saga can be seen a handwritten inscription in runes condemning those who do not take care of writings. On the whole, margin graffiti in old manuscripts were not unusual.

We have hardly any original manuscripts from the Middle Ages, but almost only copies of copies of copies. The codex optimus (best manuscript) from c. 1300 is not the original from about 1210.





## News From the Old Countries



### High Speed Railway

New developments are on the horizon regarding the ongoing discussions about linking Iceland's Keflavík International Airport to the Reykjavík Capital Region by high-speed train. The latest is that municipal authorities for the areas through which the train would pass - Reykjavík, Kópavogur, Hafnarfjörður, Reykjanesbær and Garðabær - will sign a contract to begin preparatory work and research for the project in February 2016.

Plans for the rail line are still in the beginning stages, with investors and local parties aiming to begin actual work within the next three years. According to the Project Manager Runólfur Ágústsson, the venture may commence production in 2018 and be finished by 2024. The estimated cost of the project is 105 billion ISK (56.7 million CAD).



Before the work can begin, assessments are still being made as to the impact of a high-speed rail line on the

surrounding environments. The rail will run above ground from the airport to the outskirts of Hafnarfjörður, where it will then run through an underground tunnel the rest of the way to the main bus terminal in central Reykjavík, BSÍ.

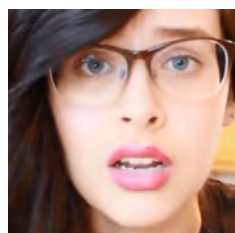
The train itself will be electric and will travel at a maximum speed of 250 kilometers per hour (155 mph). This will reduce the travel time from the airport to the capitol from 40-50 minutes by car or bus to roughly 15-18 minutes by train. The cost of a regular ticket is expected to be within the range of 800-3.800 ISK (approx. 9-16 CAD). Reduced fares will be made available to regular commuters and students.

[icenews.is](http://icenews.is)

### New Star Wars Language

Newspaper Helsingin Sanomat reports that Sara Forsberg, known as Smoukiahontas for her ["What Languages Sound Like to Foreigners"](#) YouTube video (12 million hits in 2014), was asked to develop a new alien language for the blockbuster movie franchise. The offer came through Forsberg's agent when Lucasfilm asked her to create a totally new language for ["Star Wars: The Force Awakens."](#)

"I thought that such a large movie production company would use some super-experienced language person, but they wanted me," Forsberg told the newspaper.



Forsberg, 21, [is] also known as the singer Saara. [She] said there were no special demands for the space language from the production company, just an email with a few pages from the script that needed to be translated into a new, made-up alien language.

"It was quite straightforward really. I developed words, then sentences, and then recorded them. I thought a lot about emphasis and other issues so that it would sound as much like a real language as possible and not just brskbrzt," Forsberg told the newspaper.

[—] Everything related to the new Star Wars movie was top secret, so Forsberg had to keep mum about her role for close to a year and a half. Her manager Johannes Ylinen told the newspaper that Forsberg's work garnered praise from the movie's director J.J. Abrams at the premiere in LA on Tuesday evening. [—]

[Yle, Helsingin Sanomat](#)



### Most Googled

The search engine Google has released lists of the most searched people and questions in 2015.



In Denmark, the most 'googled' men were astronaut [Andreas Mogensen](#), journalist and politician Mads Holger and rapper TopGunn.

The list of most researched women is topped by the young, conservative politician [Nikita Klæstrup](#), followed by actresses Søs Egelind and Ena Spottag.

As for foreign celebrities, Danes were most curious to learn about the US transgender icon Caitlyn Jenner, the US basketball player Lamar Obom and the Australian TV presenter [Ruby Rose](#).

[—]

[Online Post](#)





**SCoR**  
**1976 - 2016**  
**40 years!**

For SCoR history, visit the [Our Story](#) page at the Club's website. On the final page, a reference is made to "Snute". Now, who can tell us about that creature?

Scandinavian Club  
of Regina



## Upcoming Events

For all events, check our [website](#) or 

### Fishy Friday at Ricky's



First Friday of the month!  
The back room at Ricky's Grill, 777 Albert Street, at 4:30 p.m

No need to sign up - just turn up!  
Children are welcome.

### Nordic Knitters



Nordic style knitting - Every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month. 2600 Arens Road - push top buzzer for the "Activity room".

### Share the Saskatchewan Nordic ambience!



Bring family and friends to the SCoR functions!

### AGM 2016

The date for this year's AGM has been set to Thursday, April 21st.



Whitmore Park United Church, 336 Durham Drive, Regina.

For details: Follow us on our website or Facebook pages!

### SCoR 40 Years

The official celebration of SCoR's 40th anniversary will take place in the fall.

Details to follow in the next issue of Midnight Sun.



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Any views expressed in individual articles do not necessarily reflect the policies of the Scandinavian Club of Regina

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### Membership Fees

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