Proposal for a new Rune Database

The following is a proposal to create a single resource for the management of information about the runic corpus. This proposal relies on the involvement all scholars who currently document the runic corpus, edit it and manage electronic resources for it. I (Tarrin Wills) am making the present proposal in consultation with Judith Jesch and Marcus Smith, but I want to leave the outcomes open to wide contribution. This proposal is a work in progress, and I have set up a discussion forum for exchanging ideas about the project.

The field is under-resourced, meaning that although new finds are made regularly, whereas existing finds take a long time to be published in a definitive form. Editing is left to individuals who may not have the technical support to make their materials available to a wide audience. Meanwhile, there exists a large body of keen scholars and interested members of the public who are documenting the corpus in various ways, without necessarily the direction of established scholars.

The existing electronic corpus, the Samnordisk Runtextdatabas, is a tremendous resource used extensively within the field. The current proposal is designed to build on its strengths, at the same time increasing access to the content and to potential contributions and revisions.

The proposal is for a centralised, collaborative resource which provides a repository for information about the runic corpus, allows for a wide range of contributors, but still provides sound peer review. The creation of such a resource will advance research in the field by making the corpus more accessible to the broader scholarly community. It will aid in the coordination of documenting and interpreting new and disputed inscriptions. It will encourage the training of new scholars by allowing them to make original contributions, while being subject to peer review.

There are a number of people with the requisite technical knowledge to create such a resource. This document will therefore focus on the management and resourcing of such a project, together with the broad technical capabilities and requirements. The resource will involve an underlying database and potentially a range of systems for accessing and editing the database. As such this document will refer to the combined database and interface as simply 'the resource'.

Editorial, Scholarly and Technical Requirements

- Web-based: The resource will be available to scholars using a range of computer systems and platforms, including newer platforms and devices such as mobile phones. The World Wide Web provides the broadest compatibility and availability for developing an interface for such a resource.
- Collaborative: The resource will involve all possible scholarly contributions, and involve direct access (although not necessarily publication) on the part of anyone who has a worthwhile contribution. Contributions, reviewing and publication will be all done through the same interface.
- Peer reviewed: Publication of the material in the database will be subject to review by relevant experts where necessary. Unreviewed material may also be published, but its status will be clearly indicated.

- Different levels of access and contribution: Depending on the level of expertise of the contributor, they will be able to make different kinds of contributions. A recognized expert, for example, will be able to make instant corrections, whereas for another scholar the correction would need to be subject to review. Some other data types, such as images, may be contributed safely without compromising the quality of the database.
- Relationally modeled: The resource will be built on the principle of relational databases, which link together different types of information in a consistent, structured manner. This will allow for the technically-sound management of inscriptions, contributors, languages, interpretations and so on, and will allow the corpus to be interrogated in fresh and innovative ways.
- Multi-media: The resource will be capable of including a range of data and media types, including text corpus, geographical information, images, scanned print media and so on.
- Compatible with existing databases: Where necessary, the resource will be able to output data in a format that is compatible with existing runic databases. This will mean that the resource must contain all the information in existing databases in a way that can be extracted again.
- Multilingual: The interface to the database will be available in the major languages in the field, and any contributions can be made and translated in such languages.
- Fieldwork capable: The resource will be available for field runology both on and off the network. Field runologists will be able to access and search at least the text content of the database from portable devices that may not be connected to the Internet.
- Extensible: The resource will be capable of being developed in new ways, adding new data types and ways of searching and analyzing the data.

Management of the project

The success of such a project will rely on bringing together current contributors to the documentation of the corpus, together with the relevant technical experts. As such, the project will need a group of experts responsible for managing contributions to the scholarly content of the resource.

- Editorial Panel: The editorial panel will consist of the principal scholars responsible for documenting and publishing the national corpora. Their responsibilities will be to determine the level of expertise (and therefore access) of contributors; and referral, where relevant, to reviewers.
- Technical Panel: The technical panel will consist of the developers of the resource. Duties may be split between database management, web management and web development.
- Management Board: Depending on the resourcing of the project, a management board may be necessary. It should involve representatives of the editorial and technical panels, and will make the major decisions about the resourcing and nature of the resource.

Other Participants

- Reviewers will be appointed by the editorial board as recognized experts in the field. They will be responsible for reviewing contributions in their area of expertise, and will be able to make comments to other contributions.
- Contributors will be given access upon application to the project, where some

runological training can be shown. They will be able to make contributions subject to review, and also comment or suggest modifications to existing contributions, again subject to review.

Existing Databases

The current proposal relies on the involvement and contribution of existing resources. We hope to involve the following databases:

● Samnordisk runtextdatabas (Uppsala)
● Danske Runeindskrifter (Nationalmuseet)
● Runenprojekt Kiel
● Rune Archive, Oslo
● Nottingham Rune Dictionary + Tarrin Wills's geographical database

Can it be done?

Yes. There are lots of people who have the necessary technical knowledge in producing online, collaborative resources, managing scholarly data and so on. What we need is the involvement and cooperation of all the technical and scholarly experts in the field.

If you are involved in any runic database or scholarly online resource, please contact us — even if you don't want to be involved, it will be extremely helpful to have your views. Email Tarrin Wills <t.wills@abdn.ac.uk> to join our discussion group – or go to the pages at http://groups.google.com/group/runedb

The group pages list existing resources and give samples of web database possibilities.