



Marco Battaglia e Alessandro Zironi

# DAT DY MAN IN ALLA LANDEN FRY WAS

Studi filologici in onore di  
Giulio Garuti Simone Di Cesare

PISA  
UNIVERSITY  
PRESS

**b** Alc is riucht list ende konst. Riuch  
tes ende goedes. Maet meēt dat riuc  
htes en goedes. Riuchtes. dat meēt  
riuchlikera ende eerlikera tinga. Al  
soe bitiothet hit ws di paens. Maet  
bitiothet wiro goedes. Metlikera  
ende eerlikera tinga alsoe spreckt di  
keyser. Hoe manich riucht ister? t wa. een godlic ende  
een menslic. Dat aerste is di oen bern. En dat oeder  
scheltu lera. dat cē is natuerlic: ende dat oeder is taulic



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a cura di

Marco Battaglia e Alessandro Zironi



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# A Note on the Runes in *The Lover's Message*

Marina Buzzoni

bi water he sent adoun  
light *linden spon*  
*he wrot hem al with roun.*

[Thomas of Erceldoune's *Sir Tristrem*, st. 84; quoted from Garuti Simone 2010, p. 174]

## 1. Preliminary remarks

The runic message carved on a wooden stave in the 54-line-long Old English elegy usually known as *The Husband's Message* has always been recognized as a *crux* by scholars, and therefore has given rise to a wide spectrum of different interpretations. The special characters are embedded in the final part of the poem, which covers lines 49-54, here quoted from Klinck's 1992 edition (p. 102):

Ofer eald gebeot      incer twega<sup>1</sup>  
ge[h]yre ic ætsomne      ʒ · ʀ · geador,  
ƿ · ƿ ond ƿ<sup>2</sup>      aþe benemnan  
þæt he þa wære      ond þa winetreowe  
be him lifgendum      læstan wolde  
þe git on ærdagum      oft gespræconn.

<sup>1</sup> I agree with Klinck on giving priority to the interpretation of line 49 as opening the sentence, rather than closing the previous one as some scholars have postulated (for the latter interpretation see, among others, Leslie 1961). Though «both constructions give acceptable sense» (Klinck 1992, p. 206), my preference is grounded in the syntactic interpretation of the passage: the order V S (*ge-yre ic*) in main clauses is in fact consistent with a V2 constraint; this implies that the first position of the sentence should be filled with a constituent, in this specific case represented by the PP [*Ofer eald gebeot incer twega*].

<sup>2</sup> On the conjunction *ond* see below, section 5, point e).

The story alluded to in the text seems to be quite straightforward: the speaker, i.e. the aforementioned wooden stave,<sup>3</sup> tells of a man who carved a secret message on it, asking a lady of apparently high lineage (l. 14: *sinchroden* “adorned with jewels”; l. 48: *þeodnes dohtor* “nobleman’s daughter, princess”) to remember the vows exchanged in old times. Lines 13-20 and 35-48 provide some background information: the staff tells of how the man was forced to flee because of a feud (l. 19b: *Hine fæhþo adraf* “A feud drove him away”), but now has wealth and power in a new land (ll. 35b-36a: *He genoh hafað / fædan gol[des]* “He owns enough decorated gold”; ll. 45b-47b: *Nu se mon hafað / wean oferwunnen; nis him wilna gad, / ne meara ne maðma ne meododreama, / ænges ofer eorþan eorlgestreona* “Now that man has overcome his troubles; he lacks neither joy, nor steeds, nor treasures, nor joys of the mead, none of the noble treasures on earth [...]”) and longs for his woman (l. 48: *þeodnes dohtor, gif he þin beneah* “[...] daughter of a prince, if he enjoys you”). Therefore, through the staff, the man urges her to set sail southward and join him (ll. 26-28: *Ongin mere secan, mæwes eþel, / onsite sænacan, þæt þu suð heonan / ofer merelade monnan findest* “Start to seek the sea, the seagull’s home, board your ship, so that, southward from here, over the sea-lanes, you can find your man”).

## 2. The runic message

Despite the straightforwardness of the text, the cryptic runic message which should seal the reunion of the two lovers remains a conundrum. It is composed of five runes ᚠ ᚦ ᚦ ᚱ ᚱ, which the majority of the scholars has grouped by two (ᚠ ᚦ) (ᚦ ᚱ), as the word *geador* at the end of line 50 seems to suggest, with

<sup>3</sup> A few scholars, among whom Leslie (1961, pp. 13-14) and Greenfield (1966, p. 170), identify the narrator with a human messenger rather than with a personified object. The wooden stave would thus be a separate entity. Yet, the evidence provided by Leslie to support the hypothesis of a human narrator has been considered weak in comparison to the powerful *topos* of ‘prosopopoeia’, commonly present in many Old English textual genres (see Orton 1981, p. 45), for example in some riddles (cf. Riddle 35, in which the speaker is a ‘coat’) or in the religious poem titled *The Dream of the Rood* (in which the speaker is the rood itself). Kaske (1964) and Niles (2006) claim that the object in question is not a ‘slip of wood’, but rather the ship’s personified mast. In particular, Niles (2006, pp. 230-32) argues that the word *bēam* denotes something larger than a rune-stick. Anderson (1973) sees a change of narrator at line 13, beginning with a capital letter and the interjection *Hwæt*: lines 1-12 would work as a prologue to the text reported by a human narrator, lines 13-54 would represent the core text in which the messenger is a personified object.

## A Note on the Runes in *The Lover's Message*

the last one (M) standing on its own. Their reading is made more difficult by the poor condition of the parchment where the introductory verb is placed. In fact, the middle consonant in *ge-yre* has been erased, and thus this form was variously interpreted by editors as *gehyre* “I hear” (Trautmann 1894, pp. 218-19; Leslie 1961, p. 50; Bridle 1998, p. 18; Klinck 1992, pp. 206-07), *gecyre/gecyrr* “I turn, I choose” (Kershaw 1922; Krapp-Dobbie 1936, p. 227; Muir 2006), *genyre* (æ-t-somme) “I constrain into unity” (Kaske 1964, pp. 204-06), or “I constrict/I crowd together” (Greenfield 1972, p. 152).<sup>4</sup> Many scholars (see, among others, Orton 1981, pp. 49-50; Klinck 1992, pp. 206-7) have pointed out that *gehyre* fits better in the sentence from the syntactic point of view, since the predicate would govern an expected ‘accusative-plus-infinitive’ construction (ll. 49b-50), which is quite common with verbs of perception. On the other hand, both *gecyre* and *genyre* would be followed by a bare infinitive of purpose (*benemnan* “in order to pronounce”), which, being an adjunct, would rather require the to-form like in Modern English. However, this syntactic argument proves weak, since with predicates of movement (like “turn”, for example, but to a certain extent also “constrict/crowd together”) the bare infinitive is indeed allowed, and occurs especially in poetry where it has been taken to express ‘simultaneity’ rather than ‘purpose’ (see Los 2005, in particular p. 36). The simultaneous meaning fits perfectly in our passage (cf. the translation of line 50 below). To have more elements of judgement let us turn to the manuscript. The verb under inspection is placed almost at the end of line 4 from the bottom in figure 1:

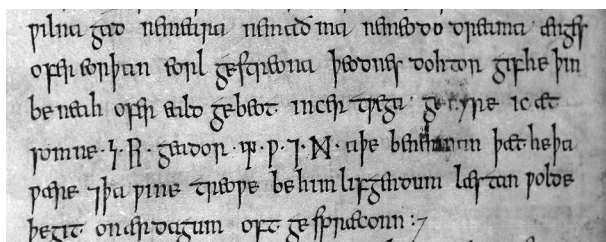


Fig. 1: *Exeter Book*, f. 123v, ll. 16-21 (*ge-yre* occurs at the end of l. 4 from the bottom)

The disputed letter displays a lump at the upper left corner crooking towards the left; this lump – which is not completely compatible with the

<sup>4</sup> *Genyre* is elsewhere unattested, but Kaske (1964, p. 205) takes it as the first person singular of *genyrran* “to constrain”. The loss of *w* is attributed by Kaske to a scribal omission; yet, the drop of the semivowel after *r* is not uncommon in Old English.

rounded *c* otherwise present in the manuscript – can be easily taken to be the serif of an *n*, and the small trait bending slightly upwards in the bottom right corner might well be the final stroke of an *n*. As already noted by Kaske (1964) who analyzed the parchment through ultraviolet light, there seems not to be any remnants of the upstroke of a previous *h*<sup>5</sup>. I am therefore inclined to read the verb either as *genyrc*, and interpret line 50 in the wake of Greenfield (1972):

ge[n]yrc ic ætsomne	·ḥ · ṛ · geador,
“I constrict unitedly	·ḥ · ṛ · together
	(pronouncing with an oath)”

or as *gecyrc* (see, among others, Kershaw 1922, Krapp-Dobbie 1936, Muir 2006), assuming that the non-standard *c* comes from the correction of an original *n*<sup>6</sup>. Line 50 would therefore read as follows:

ge[c]yrc ic ætsomne	·ḥ · ṛ · geador,
“I choose unitedly	·ḥ · ṛ · together
	(pronouncing with an oath)”.

In light of the manuscript evidence, I am led to entertain the possibility that *gehyrc* is the result of overinterpretation, probably driven by a tendency to regularization: to read *gehyrc*, in fact, one has to supply what is thought to be an original *h* where the manuscript shows evidence of an erasure and a correction.

### 3. Textual interpretations

Among the many textual analyses provided over the years, a broad line can be drawn between the scholars who interpret the runes alphabetically (as in Cynewulf’s signatures) and those who take them to have a logographic value. Although both readings are plausible, the latter view has been the most widely accepted in recent years.

The alphabetic reading of the runes has led to interpret them as letters variously combined into a word: thus ḥ ṛ ƿ ƿ ƿ would stand for *s, r, ea, w,* and *d*

<sup>5</sup> On these palaeographic features see also Niles (2006, pp. 216-19), Murgia (2011).

<sup>6</sup> Klinck, though adopting the emendation *gehyrc*, since «it makes excellent sense and regular syntax», admits that «probably the scribe erased an ‘n’ written in error, and failed to write in the correct letter» (Klinck 1992, p. 207).



or *m*<sup>7</sup>, and would combine into *Dwears*, a name elsewhere unknown, or *S(ige) weard* (Hicketier 1889, pp. 363-65; see also North *et al.* 2014, pp. 253-58); *smearw* “oleum”, a reference to *oleum effusum nomen tuum* in the *Song of Songs*, 1:2 (Bolton 1969, p. 340); *sweard/sweord* “sword” (Sedgefield 1922, see also Fiocco 1999) an allusion to «the vows which once he [= the man] swore on his sword, the most solemn way of taking an oath» (Sedgefield 1922, p. 159)<sup>8</sup>; *sweard* “fleece” (Anderson 1974). Yet, considering that the runes are pointed individually, it is more likely that the scribe meant them as separate words rather than single letters (Förster 1933, facs. 62 nr. 21).

An explanation that represents a sort of in-between hypothesis is Trautmann's (1894, pp. 214 and 220), who suggests that the runes make up the personal names of oath guarantors. He thus puts forth the following interpretation for the sequence of runic letters: *Sige-red*, *Ead-wine*, and *Monn(a)*. The reading is somewhat more plausible, but the shift from two specific personal names to a more general third name is not satisfactorily explained.

The logographic reading of the runes allows for different interpretations of the passage. Treating the letters as rune-names, Koch (1921, pp. 122-23) reads *s* and *r* as the compound *sigel-rād* “sun's road” (i.e. Heaven), *ea* and *w* as *ēar-wynn* “earth's joy” (i.e. lovely earth), and finally *m* as *monn* “man”. Koch maintains that these terms refer to “elemental guarantors” of the promise between the two lovers. He therefore translates the passage as “I place together Heaven, Earth, and Man, confirming by an oath [...]”. Elliott (1955) also uses the rune-names, giving however a different interpretation of the *ea*-rune, which he reads as “sea”, rather than “soil/earth”. Elliott expands the runic lines to form a “telescoped message” (see Klinck 1992, pp. 207-08; Elliott 1955, p. 7): «Follow the sun's path [ʁ · ʀ], south across the sea [ʁ] to find joy [ʀ] with the man [ʁ] who is waiting for you». Both Leslie (1961) and Goldsmith (1975, pp. 251-52) treat the passage in a very similar way. The latter adds an allegorical meaning to the literal interpretation – the reunification theme would allude to life after death. According to Nicholson (1982, p. 318), the *s*-rune should be read as *segl* “sail” (not *sigel* “sun”), as in stanza 16 of the Old English *Rune Poem*. His reading of the passage reflects this interpretation: «Take the path across the sea to find the joy of the earth with the man to whom you were betrothed». Bragg (1999) does not agree with Elliott, whose interpretation involves reading a lot

<sup>7</sup> The last rune has been taken either as *m* or *d* (for the latter interpretation, see, among the most recent contributions, Fiocco 1999), since its shape is hybrid between the two. Yet the close resemblance between this runic letter and the *m*-rune in the *Ruin* (f. 124r, l. 23) makes *m* more probable.

<sup>8</sup> A figurative meaning deriving from this interpretation would be “phallus”.

into the runes, and provides a more direct explanation of the passage: «I put S. R. together, E. A. W. and M to declare with an oath that he was there<sup>9</sup>, and that he would carry out, as long as he lives, the faithfulness that you two often spoke of in the old days».

An interesting hypothesis is put forth by Niles (2006, pp. 213-42) who argues that the five symbols stand for five whole words rather than serving as letters that spell out a single word<sup>10</sup>. As a result, this scholar looks for words that would suit the context well, and reads the runes as conveying an auspicious message: “Take the *segl-rād*. If you do, there will surely be good fortune (*wynn*) in store for you, an *ēadig wif ond mann*”. (Niles 2006, p. 241). Unfortunately, this reading implies much expansion, though thoroughly justified and very well argued also on metrical grounds (Niles 2006, p. 240). Yet, Niles does not seem to take much into account the syntactic integration of the message: one may wonder, in fact, how this complex auspicious message would be related to the preceding main verb *ge-yre*, as well as to the following infinitive *benemnan*.

#### 4. Allegorical meanings

Whichever logographic value one is inclined to attribute to the runes, many scholars have attached an allegorical value to them, referring either to the Germanic historical and legendary background, or to the Christian religious background.

The proposal of a shared narrative at the basis of two elegies (*The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message*, to be read as a diptych) goes back to Grein (1880, p. 10), then followed by Trautmann (1894, pp. 222-25). Subsequently, Imelmann (1907a, esp. 38; 1907b; 1908; 1920) puts forth a very elaborate hypothesis according to which the elegiac fragment *Wulf and Eadwacer*, together with *The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message* are part of a lost composition about Adovacrius/Odoacer, i.e. a Saxon king of the 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>11</sup>. Similarly,

<sup>9</sup> Bragg (1999, p. 34) takes *wære* (l. 52) to be the preterite subjunctive of the verb “to be”, instead of a noun meaning “vow, oath”. Consequently, *þā* is interpreted as an adverb, and not as a definite article. As noted by Niles (2006, p. 228) the translation of the alleged adverb as “there” is problematic, since it ought to mean “then”.

<sup>10</sup> Niles (2006, pp. 219 and 251-79) points out that most Old English rune names are not fixed, and that «the names that today are ascribed to some runes had only a limited basis in tradition» (p. 252).

<sup>11</sup> Other scholars have tried to prove that *Eadwacer* in *Wulf and Eadwacer* is in fact the better-known Odoacer, Theoderic's rival.

## A Note on the Runes in *The Lover's Message*

Bouman (1962, pp. 41-91) claims that the common background is represented by the Sigurðr legend, identifying the wife in the two elegiac poems as Guðrun. Quite surprisingly, the version given by North *et al.* (2014) in the recent *Longman Anthology of Old English, Old Icelandic, and Anglo-Norman Literatures* echoes Bouman's reading: by interpreting the last rune as *d* (apparently against manuscript evidence, as shown above, footnote 7) the sequence ᚱ ᚱ ᚦ ᚱ ᚼ *s, r, ea, w, d* is treated as an anagram of *S(ige)-weard*, the Old English form of Sigurðr. Contrary to Bouman, however, North *et al.* claim that Brynhildr makes better sense as the woman to whom the message is sent. To support this assumption some thematic correspondences between the poem and the Nibelung matter are drawn<sup>12</sup>.

An interpretation that goes beyond the mere 'Germanic' legend deserves – to my mind – particular attention. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Schofield (1906, pp. 201-02), leaving aside *The Wife's Lament* and focusing only on *The Husband's Message*, suggests that the story alluded to in the latter poem could be an early version of the *lai* told by Marie de France under the title of *Chevrefoil*, where Tristan carves a message for Isolt on a *bastun*, i.e. a wooden stave (ed. Rychner 1968). I wouldn't venture to surmise a direct relationship between the two texts; yet it seems to me that the motif of the engraved staff in a love-lyric such as *The Husband's Message* cannot be exclusively connected to Old Norse *rúnakefli*<sup>13</sup>, but rather should be considered within a broader European perspective in which the combination "*lettre/esprit*" becomes a particularly productive theme as will be shown below (see, among the first who raised this issue, Spitzer 1959).

Coming to the religious background, both Kaske (1964, 1967) and Goldsmith (1975) provide a Christian reading of the runic message and of the whole poem: according to the former, the stave stands for the Cross<sup>14</sup>, while the latter gives an «apocalyptic interpretation» (i.e. the staff would convey

<sup>12</sup> For example, the *fæhþo* "feud" (l. 19) which drove the husband away would be Sigurðr's duty to avenge his father, and the supply of gold which he has could be the dragon's Nibelung hoard. These alleged correspondences are however extremely general.

<sup>13</sup> Page (1999, pp. 101-02), followed by other scholars, underlines that *The Husband's Message* would be the only literary evidence for English *rúnakefli* "runic sticks", frequently mentioned in Icelandic sagas and attested by archaeological findings in Scandinavia. Particularly famous, though relatively late in date, are the Bergen *rúnakefli*, from c. 1200 to the 15th century (Page 1999, pp. 96-116).

<sup>14</sup> Kaske claims that the ship stands for the Church, and the 'stave' is to be interpreted as its mainmast, a symbol for Christ who is the pillar of Christianity. The narrator of the poem would thus be the Cross.

a summons to the life after death). From the religious point of view, *The Husband's Message* has also been read as the happy counterpart of *The Wife's Lament* (Howlett 1978). Bradley (1982, pp. 398-99), for example, argues that the lyric is «an immutable covenant» conveying the message «that, in answer to the faithful longing, love has called Jerusalem (the Church, the soul of man) to what is duly hers in heaven by virtue of espousal to Christ». On the religious nature of the poem insist also Murgia (2011) and Geremia (2014). The latter, in particular, underlines that «[t]he position in the manuscript [i.e. near homiletic texts all focused on conversion and Judgement Day] reveals and highlights the potential Christian meaning of *The Husband's Message*, whose runes, themes and images recall Biblical motifs, lending themselves to allegorical interpretations» (Geremia 2014, p. 152). Geremia's interpretation of the text is not only christological, but specifically didactic, an element which «would deserve further consideration perhaps in view of a new genre classification» (ivi, p. 152).

Among the scholars who highlight the riddlic nature of the lyric, Williamson (1977) provides a witty and interesting interpretation of the runic message. He maintains that the passage is «deliberately enigmatic»; therefore, building on the already mentioned rune-names *sigel-rād* “sun-road”, *ēar-wynn* “sea-joy”,<sup>15</sup> and *monn* “man”, he claims that the runes form a mini-riddle that may be stated as thus: «What flies through the heavens, takes joy in riding the sea, and bears man?». The solution of this puzzle within the poem is – according to the author – ‘ship’. Then, he ventures to give a supernatural, though not necessarily Christian, interpretation: «[...] I do sense that the lord of this poem has passed beyond the mere confines of middle-earth, so that perhaps the riddlic ship is no mere ship of reunification, but a ship of the dead, either mythical or real». (Williamson 1977, p. 316).

Niles' (2006) original hypothesis of the runes conveying an auspicious message has already been mentioned under section 3 above.

## 5. Towards a new proposal

The majority of the proposals so far examined require either heavy interpolation of the runic lines or much conjecture. My proposal keeps closer to the text both semantically – since it is grounded on the most certain textual ele-

<sup>15</sup> As already stated under section 3, the *ea*-rune has been given the interpretation of either “earth/soil” or “sea”.

ments at our disposal – and linguistically – since it tries to integrate the runes within the context in which they appear, keeping interpolation to a minimum.

Let us sum up the most evident features which the poem displays:

- a. Despite the several derived meanings, a modern consensus holds that *The Husband's Message* is primarily «a love-lyric of a rather formal kind» (Klinck 1992, p. 58). This does not mean that the poem should be interpreted *simply* as a love-lyric; rather, it means that the allegorical readings descend from this basic interpretation.
- b. It is not at all clear from the text whether the pair are married or not. The vows alluded to in ll. 15b-19a can apply to either condition. In light of this, I would favour a more general reading of the relationship between the pair, and prefer Mackie's (1934) title *The Lover's Message* over the more common title *The Husband's Message*<sup>16</sup>.
- c. On a literal level, the presence of a wooden stave on which a secret message is carved seems to be out of question<sup>17</sup>. This feature represents a strong hint for the reader/hearer, in that it links the poem with the 'piece of bark' textual tradition, which predates that of the *rúnakefli* from medieval Scandinavia by several centuries<sup>18</sup>. It seems that the ultimate traces of it should be sought in very ancient Irish sources where, just as in the Old English poem, the wooden chips are closely related to the water motif since the chips are often sent down a stream (Schoepperle 1909, in particular pp. 207-10). As a matter of fact, *The Husband's Message* contains more than an element that can be connected with the wider 'European tradition' of love-lyrics. With respect to the motif of the cuckoo (l. 23), for example, Klinck (1999, p. 203) claims that it «is so common in European literature and lore that a widespread folk background is probable». Geremia (2014, pp. 147-48) finds closer parallels in the Celtic tradition, especially in Old Welsh poetry where the cuckoo is a symbol of summer and at the same time it heralds sad omens. This same dichotomy is present in the Old English elegiac text where the bird, who announces to the woman the right moment to start her journey, is said to be sad-voiced (l. 23a: *galan geomorne*).
- d. In the love-poems that reuse and manipulate the 'piece of bark' matter,

<sup>16</sup> One of the drawbacks of the latter title is that it seems to suggest a direct link with *The Wife's Lament*, which has still to be proven. See also Clemoes (1995, in particular p. 177).

<sup>17</sup> The statement holds also if one embraces Kaske's (1964) and Niles' (2006) claim that the rune-stick is in fact the ship's personified mast (see above, footnote 3).

<sup>18</sup> See above, footnote 13.

- the *topos* of the lover enigmatically revealing his name (i.e. his identity) to the beloved woman seems to be quite common. It is in fact this specific revelation that represents the core of the encoded message.
- e. In our poem, the last rune  $\mathfrak{M}$  is linked with the previous two by the Tironian note (see fig. 1), which is written out in the same manner as the runes, and set off by the same pointing. One is therefore tempted to read this half line as unity (a compound?), since the  $\mathfrak{M}$ -rune is not separated, but rather closely joined to  $\mathfrak{Y}$  and  $\mathfrak{P}$ . As noted by Niles (2006, p. 220) the standard practice of modern editors, who silently expand the Tironian note to *ond*, may be an impediment to the reader, since «silent editorial expansion of the abbreviation effaces its role in the visual riddle that meets the eye at the bottom of f. 123v».

## 6. A revised reading

Bearing these points in mind, and in light of what has been assessed in section 2 above, I would venture to give the following interpretation to the lines containing the runic message:

Ofer eald gebeot      incer twega  
ge[n]yre ic ætsomne      ʰ · ʀ · geador,  
· ƿ · ƿ · Ʒ · Ɔ ·      aþe benemnan  
þæt he þa wære      ond þa winetreowe  
be him lifgendum      læstan wolde  
þe git on ærdagum      oft gespræconn

In addition to the old promise between you two,  
I constrict unitedly ʰ · ʀ together,  
your man ( $\mathfrak{M}$ ) in earthly joy (· ƿ · ƿ), pronouncing with an oath  
that, as long as he lives, he would keep  
the pledge and the faithfulness  
that you two often spoke of in the old days.

ʰkaske · ʀ identify the lover by his name (*Sige-red?*), while the remaining three runes identify the same lover by his role. The pronoun *he* in line 52 has thus a clear antecedent represented by the male name. This interpretation has some advantages over more traditional ones: it is perfectly integrated within the linguistic and semantic textual environment, it needs very little interpolation, it does not rule out further allegorical readings of the poem. The oath is pro-

nounced by the rune-stick itself which plays the role of the 'guarantor' as it was carved directly by the lover. The 'message' of the stick is additional to that of the two lovers who made a pledge in the old days (*Ofer eald gebeot incer twega* "In addition to the old promise between you two [...]"), and its main purpose is to reveal the identity of the lover longing for reunification.

As already said, this interpretation allows for different levels of allegorical reading, especially – though not exclusively – in a religious sense: the runes  $\mathfrak{h} \cdot \mathfrak{r}$  may be taken as *sigel-rād* "sun's path" and refer to Heaven, i.e. God, who became *mon* "man" (i.e. Christ) for *ēar-wyn* "the joy of the earth". The latter view would entail the renewal of the promise of eternal salvation to mankind, and perhaps allude to the reunion of the pious with the King of Heaven in the hereafter<sup>19</sup>.

Similarly, all the hypotheses put forth by those scholars who see in the runic message a 'speech' on its own can be equally advocated, since in a polysemous text they are additional to the literal reading and not a substitute for it.

## 7. Concluding remarks

Finally, a brief remark on the possibility of a further view on the concluding part of the poem. Those who prefer to take the sixth symbol as the *d*-rune, instead of the (more probable) *m*-rune, could read lines 49-54 as follows:

Ofer eald gebeot      incer twega  
ge[n]yre ic ætsomne       $\mathfrak{h} \cdot \mathfrak{r}$  geador,  
 $\mathfrak{Y} \cdot \mathfrak{P} \cdot \mathfrak{J} \cdot \mathfrak{M}$       aþe benemnan  
þæt he þa wære      ond þa winetreowe  
be him lifgendum      læstan wolde  
þe git on ærdagum      oft gespræconn

In addition to the old promise between you two,  
I constrict unitedly  $\mathfrak{h} \cdot \mathfrak{r}$  together,  
in the day ( $\mathfrak{M}$ ) of earthly joy ( $\mathfrak{Y} \cdot \mathfrak{P}$ ), pronouncing with an oath  
that, as long as he lives, he would keep  
the pledge and the faithfulness  
that you two often spoke of in the old days.

<sup>19</sup> The rendering of line 53a ("as long as he lives") becomes quite problematic if one accepts this religious perspective. A possible solution could be a metaphorical interpretation: "as long as He lives (in your heart)", i.e. "as long as you are willing to follow Him".

If one accepts the *d*-rune reading (a perspective which, however, I do not favour), one is indeed tempted to connect the ƿ (*wynn*) and ƿ (*dæg*) runes<sup>20</sup> to those carved on the *Franks Casket* as initials of the words *wudu* and *dōm*. These runes have been interpreted by Francovich Onesti (2001) as forming the compound *wynn-dæg* “joy-day”, perhaps meaning “wedding day”<sup>21</sup>. In this case, the new pledge could (either literally or metaphorically) be taken as a promise of marriage.

In this perspective, the allegorical meaning would originate from the assumption that ʰ · ʳ make up the compound *sigel-rād* “sun’s path”, i.e. “Heaven” and therefore “God”, and the half-line · ʳ · ƿ · ʝ · ƿ stands for “(in the) day of the joy of the earth”, with a possible allusion to the Doomsday, when the pious people will receive God’s mercy thus overcoming previous earthly sufferings<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> *dæg* “day” is the conventional name associated with the *d*-rune.

<sup>21</sup> «Se mettiamo insieme le piccole parole in rune interne alle immagini [...] otteniamo dal coperchio al lato di dietro: *Ægili, Mægi, risc, bita, wudu, dom, gisl*, le cui rune iniziali formano l’acrostico *Æ M R B W D G*. Se lo leggiamo con i rispettivi nomi runici otteniamo: *Æsc man rad beorc wynn dæg gifu* che suona come una frase anglosassone di questo tenore: *Æscman [and] Radbeorg wynddæg gifu* “dono per *Æscman* e *Radberga* nel giorno della gioia». (Francovich Onesti 2001, p. 11).

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed analysis of possible biblical references in *The Husband’s Message*, as well as the relationship of this text with the homiletic section in the Exeter Book, see Geremia 2014 (in particular pp. 113-18 and 140-45).



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