

Question: Elder Futhark runes

Author: Catherine Sheard

Old Norse was the language of the Vikings, the language spoken in Scandinavia and in the Scandinavian settlements found throughout the Northern Hemisphere from the 700s to the 1300s. Old Norse was the ancestor of the North Germanic languages: Icelandic, Faroese, Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish. Old Norse was written first in runic alphabets, then later in the Roman alphabet. The first runic alphabet, found on inscriptions dating from throughout the first millennium, is known as "Elder Futhark" and was used for both proto-Norse and early Old Norse.

Below are nine Anglicized names of Old Norse gods and the nine Elder Futhark names to which they correspond. Listed below are also two other runic names for gods.

Anglicized names

a.	b.	c.	d.	e.	f.	g.	h.	i.
Baldur	Dallinger	Day	Earth	Freya	Freyr	Ithun	Night	Sun

Old Norse Runes

1	ᚼᚠᚢᚱᚱ	4	ᚱᚠᚨᚱ	7	ᚱᚦᚱᚦ	10	ᚱᚠᚢᚠ
2	ᚼᚦᚱ	5	ᚠᚦᚠᚠ	8	ᚱᚠᚢᚠᚱᚱ	11	ᚱᚦᚠ
3	ᚠᚢᚢᚠᚠ	6	ᚱᚱᚱᚠᚱᚠ	9	ᚱᚱᚱᚱ		

B1. Match the Anglicized names to the correct Elder Futhark names.

(9 pts)

B2. What are the two leftover Elder Futhark names, in the Roman alphabet? (2 pts)

B3. Write the runic names of the following gods: (9 pts)

- Tyr
- Ran
- Sif

Question Elder Futhark Runes Solution

B1

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i
1	8	4	7	6	9	3	5	11

B2. accept in either order

(a) ...**THOR**..... (b) ...**ODIN**.....

B3.

(a) Tyr **↑↗R** (b) Ran ... **Rf†** (c) Sif ... **ΣIP**

Explanation

Like any chaos-and-order problem, the key is to find a unique pair, or a repeated pattern. There are plenty of ways into this problem, but one is to notice that 6 and 9 are very similar, as are e and f, and assume they match. You may not know (yet) which is which, but this way you've got the symbols for F **ƿ**, R **R**, E **M**, Y **l** and perhaps A **f**. It's not obvious why one of them has an extra symbol, but perhaps it will emerge.

Just replacing those four symbols, we now have the following:

1	BaƿMr	4	MaXr	7	↗Xrƀ	10	XMY†
2	ƀXr	5	†X↑↑	8	MeƿY♦er	11	ΣX†
3	YƀN††	6	frey↗a	9	freyr		

Two more obvious candidates stand out: 1=Baldur (a) and 8=Dallinger (b).

We have to tolerate some vowel changes. This gives us **B**B **l**L **M**D, and possibly **Y**I ♦ **NG**. We can now revise the table as follows:

1	baldr	4	daXr	7	↗Xrƀ	10	Xdi†
2	ƀXr	5	†X↑↑	8	delinger	11	ΣX†
3	iƀN††	6	frey↗a	9	freyr		

And so on.