Snædal, Þórgunnur. *Rúnir á Íslandi*. 2024. 2nd ed. Rit 113. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum. 338 pages. ISBN: 9789979654780.

The common perception among Icelanders is that runic writing belongs chiefly to ancient memorial stones—older or younger futhark inscriptions carved into Scandinavian runestones—or to the magical sigils preserved in Icelandic manuscripts. This view, though widespread, drastically underestimates the depth and breadth of the Icelandic rune tradition. One of the greatest strengths of Þórgunnur Snædal's new book, *Rúnir á Íslandi* [Runes in Iceland], is that it dismantles these misconceptions with clarity, precision, and a commanding survey of the evidence.[1] Far from being confined to solemn monuments or esoteric charms, runes permeated daily life in Iceland for centuries. Snædal's work shows that they were not merely a ceremonial relic but a living, functional writing system—one that endured far longer in Iceland than anywhere else in the Nordic world.

The book's central argument is both persuasive and revelatory: while Denmark boasts the earliest runic inscriptions and Sweden the largest number, Iceland preserved the *knowledge* of runes and their use, becoming the wellspring from which the first runologists drew much of their understanding. Runes arrived with the settlers and subsequently became embedded in the social fabric of Icelandic culture. Farm marks, property marks on tools or livestock, and gravestone inscriptions were among the most common uses, demonstrating the practical, quotidian role of runes across the island's communities. Remarkably, Snædal shows that functional literacy in runes survived in Iceland until around 1750—and in some areas even until 1900—long after the rest of Scandinavia had allowed the tradition to fade.

In tracing this history, the author overturns several persistent myths: that Iceland has no preserved rune stones, that runes were introduced only as part of magical stave practice, and that they were never a meaningful component of Icelandic culture. Such claims crumble under the weight of the material Snædal gathers, evaluates, and contextualizes. The result is a work that not only consolidates what has long been scattered across outdated studies and specialized articles, but also firmly reframes the narrative surrounding Iceland's runic heritage.

For rune enthusiasts—myself included—this book feels overdue. Earlier scholarship on Icelandic runes has so far been obsolete, incomplete, or difficult to access. Snædal's contribution, therefore, fills a glaring gap. It does not claim to answer all remaining questions, nor does it pretend that the field is now complete.

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Quite the opposite: the book emphasizes how much work remains, especially regarding younger manuscript traditions. But it provides, at last, a comprehensive foundation for further research. In this sense, the book is not only a milestone but a launching point—for academics, for younger researchers, and for the interested public.

Structurally, the volume is divided into four major parts, each dealing with a different aspect of the Icelandic rune tradition. Snædal begins with a broad overview of runic research up to the present day, offering context for how the field has developed and where Iceland fits within broader Nordic scholarship. She then turns to the origins of runes and their evolution in Scandinavia before narrowing the focus to their development on Icelandic soil. This progression—from a pan-Nordic frame to the local, Iceland-specific tradition—allows readers to appreciate both continuity and divergence.

The discussion of runes in manuscripts is divided into two sections: older manuscripts and younger ones. The overview of the younger manuscripts is inevitably less tidy; the younger manuscript material is generally understudied, fragmentary, and still awaits systematic investigation. Yet even in its imperfect state, this section is valuable because it exposes gaps in scholarship and points directly to where future research is needed most.

The final major section addresses runic inscriptions on objects and gravestones. This part is greatly strengthened by the extensive lists that follow the main text: a complete catalogue of every recorded rune stone in Iceland and every runic inscription found on objects, accompanied by maps of discovery sites. These visual tools are especially welcome, giving readers an immediate sense of geographical distribution and helping correct the misconception that Iceland lacks runic monuments altogether.

Snædal's work is both scholarly and accessible, and one can only hope that it will eventually be translated for a wider international audience. Iceland's runic heritage has long deserved a comprehensive, modern treatment; with this book, that need is finally met. At the same time, this study opens the door for future exploration. It restores to Icelanders a tradition that has been largely forgotten—an everyday rune culture as rich, persistent, and uniquely Icelandic as the sagas themselves.

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NOTES

1. This review takes into consideration the second edition of *Rúnir á Íslandi*. The first edition, which was published in 2023 and is no longer in print, lacked a name index and contained several typos and other minor errors that have been amended in the second edition.