Some Thoughts on the Rune-Carver Øpir: A Revaluation of the Storvreta Stone (U 1022) and Some Related Carvings

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Introduction

Fifty runic inscriptions in the Mälar Valley are signed by a man who calls himself Øpir. Even if this well-known Upplandic rune-carver is believed to have executed many runestones, most scholars agree that some of the stones signed Øpir must be the work of other men. No modern runologist thinks, for example, that the Upplandic Øpir is identical to the Øpir who carved the runestone at Gryt church in Södermanland (Sö 11), and it is also disputed how many Øpirs we have to reckon with in Uppland. Frands Herschend (1998) has tried to divide the Upplandic Øpir into two, depending on whether the name is spelt with a dotted u-rune or not, and Laila Kitzler Åhfeldt (2002) has detected several different hands in the signed carvings by analysing the cutting technique. Even for those who embrace the traditional opinion that there was only one rune-carver Øpir in Uppland, there are three runestones that are usually dismissed, since they deviate from the rest of Øpir’s carvings. All three are found in the vicinity of Uppsala. One originates from Häga in Bondkyrka parish (U 896) but is now moved to Uppsala, another was discovered in the city itself (U 940), while the last still stands in Storvreta in Ärentuna parish (U 1022). In Upplands runinskrifter the inscriptions are transliterated, transcribed and interpreted as follows (the runes inside square brackets are taken from older sources):


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… [litu raisa stain + fir · ont · iy-m + sun + sain + taupr + fita + faþum + i tai · ma… riþ runar ubiR
… letu raisa stæin fyur and Øyndar(?), sun sinn, dauðr [i] hvitavåðum i Danma[rk]u(?). . . Æð runar Øpir.
“… läto resa stenen för sin son Ønds(?) ande. [Han blev] död i dopkläder i Danmark(?) . . . Øpir ombesörjde runorna.”
‘… had the stone raised for the spirit of Eyndr(?), their son. [He] died in baptismal robes in Denmark(?) . . . Øpir was responsible for the runes.’

U 940 (SRI, 9:41):
· ihul · aulc · þurkir · litu · rita · stain · iftir · kitilfastr · faþur · sin · hialbi · sal
kilauh hont
riþ · runar · ubiR
Igull ok þorgeirr letu retta stæin æftir Kætilfast, faður sinn. Hialpi sal. Gillaug … and(?). Æð runar Øpir.
‘Igull and Þorgeirr had the stone erected in memory of Kætilfastr, their father. May [God] help his soul. Gillaug … Øpir arranged the runes.’

U 1022 (SRI, 9:248):
[ui]kn[i · a]uk · althrn · uk ailifr · akhun · runfrþ · litu · rita · stain · iftir
ilhu[tfa k]aþur · sin
ubiR [r-· st-] ru[nar]
Vige(?) ok Hal(f)dan(?) ok Æilifr, Hakon, Runfrid letu retta stæin æftir Illug(?)
faður sinn. Øpir risti runaf[?]r.
‘Vige(?) och Halvdan(?) och Eliv, Håkon, Runfrid lät uppresa stenen till minne av Illuge(?), sin fader. Øpir ristade runorna.”
‘Vigil(?) and Halfdan(?) and Æilifr, Hakon, Runfrid had the stone erected in memory of Illugi(?), their father. Øpir carved the runes.’

In the inscriptions from Håga (U 896) and Uppsala (U 940) the carver used the verb rāða in the signature (Rēð rūnAR Øpir), and there is disagreement about the exact meaning the word has in this context (see the overview in Åhlén 1997, 50–54). Marit Åhlén (1997, 60) suggests the wording could indicate that Øpir gave advice to a less skilled rune-carver who then executed the stone, but this interpretation is not unproblematic. The signature on the Storvreta stone (U 1022) is only partly legible today, but according to older sources it can be interpreted as Øpir risti runar “Øpir carved the runes”.

Futhark 1 (2010)
Since this implies that Øpir actually did the carving himself, the inscription is of a certain interest.

The Storvreta stone (U 1022)

At first sight the Storvreta stone (Fig. 1) does not look like an Øpir stone at all, and the inscription offers several odd and uncommon spellings. Richard Dybeck (1860–76, 1:33) who studied the runestone in 1864 remarks that Øpir is hardly himself in this carving (“Ubbe är här knappt sig sjelf”), and in Upplands runinskrifter (SRI, 9:249 f.), Elias Wessén gives several reasons why the stone cannot be the work of Øpir. Above all he calls attention to the uneven and shallow cutting technique, which he finds foreign to this carver. According to Wessén, it is more likely that U 1022 is executed by an anonymous runesmith, one who he believed cut the majority of the runestones in Ärentuna parish. Wessén also claims that this carver imitated Øpir on a runestone at Ärentuna church (U 1015) and in the light of this he thinks the carver may have got permission to use Øpir’s name on U 1022. However, Wessén does not exclude the possibility that Øpir had something to do with the inscription, for example by supplying a draft for the text. Marit Åhlén too (1997, 59 f.) dismisses the Storvreta stone as one of Øpir’s signed works, on account of the ornamentation and the strange spellings of some of the personal names.

All the same, it is undeniable that the last part of this inscription comprises a sentence which begins with the name Øpir and ends with the word rūnaR, and is therefore very likely to be a carver signature. These circumstances call for a more thorough description and analysis of the stone and its inscription.

The Storvreta stone is recorded as early as in 1667, and it seems to have been located at roughly the same place then as it is today. In the oldest account of it (Rannsakningar efter antikviteter, 1.1:17), some stone heaps (“Några Steenhoopar”) are also mentioned, and these must be identified with a grave-field containing mounds and round stone-settings, adjacent to the runestone.

In spite of the fact that the Storvreta stone has been known since the seventeenth century, there are only two drawings predating the publication in Upplands runinskrifter in 1953. The first one was made in the late seventeenth century by Johan Leitz under the supervision of Johan Hadorph and formed the basis of a woodcut, later printed in Bautil (1750) as number 509. The second drawing was made about two hundred years later by Richard Dybeck and was reproduced in the first volume of his Sverikes runurkunder.
(1860–76). A comparison between the two drawings shows that Dybeck’s is not totally independent of the woodcut in *Bautil*, since the stone is depicted at exactly the same angle and with identical proportions. Dybeck probably produced his drawing by using a copy of the woodcut, which he collated with the incisions on the stone.

These drawings—and especially the woodcut—are important, since parts of the inscription are now lost. The carver signature in particular has come under discussion, Wessén (*SRI*, 9:249) even considering the possibility that the text here was reconstructed by Hadorph. In the woodcut in *Bautil* the runes are given as *ubir r...st... runa*. Dybeck, however, could only read:

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Today only a few runes can be made out. The first word clearly reads ubir, while the last begins with ru followed by traces of two other runes. The first of these seems to be a rather than n, as it was depicted on the woodcut in Bautil, a reading apparently confirmed by the photograph in Upplands runinskrifter (SRI, 9: plate 57, see Fig. 1). This does not, however, affect the interpretation of the word as rūnaR, since n and a are sometimes confused in runic inscriptions (see, for example, Lagman 1989, 33 f.). More crucial is the physical distance between the assumed subject Øpir and the object rūnaR. The reading in Bautil and the interpretation in Upplands runinskrifter suggest that only five runes should be missing, but the section that is weathered away measures nearly 80 cm. Marit Åhlén (1997, 60) suggests the original text was possibly something like Øpir rēð, Stæinn rīsti rūna(r), but if the position of st is depicted with tolerable accuracy on the woodcut, there would be no room for the verb rīsti. To judge from the woodcut, the runes in this part of the inscription were widely spaced, as in the words that terminate the main text in the tail of the zoomorphic band. It thus seems preferable to adhere to the traditional interpretation of the last part of the inscription.

As mentioned above, the ornamentation of the stone does not correspond to the rest of Øpir’s work, and Elias Wessén (in SRI, 9: 249) has even claimed that the rune forms are uncharacteristic of him. Øpir does not in fact exhibit many characteristic rune forms, but as shown by Åhlén (1997, 65, 79 f.) he often uses both the long-branch and the short-twig variants of n and a, while very seldom employing the reversed variant of s (ś). Now this fits well with the forms found on the Storvreta stone, so we can hardly cite uncharacteristic runic usage as evidence against Øpir’s authorship. For his word separators the carver uses a single dot or a small vertical stroke, which also corresponds to the habits of Øpir.

If we move on to the orthography of the inscription we find several oddities, but also words which look quite normal. It is therefore appropriate to ask whether the inscription is as strange as claimed and, consequently, if it is possible to explain some of the spellings differently than hitherto.

Let us start with the first name [ui]kn[i], several of whose runes are based on the woodcut in Bautil. Parts of these runes can still be seen and are indeed mentioned by Wessén in his commentary (SRI, 9: 249). According to Wessén, [ui]kn[i] could be a representation of the male name Vīgi, but he offers no explanation of the unexpected n. Arend Quak (1978, 64) suggests that [ui]kn[i] might render the name Vīgæir with n miscarved for a and the final r omitted at the end. As a parallel he offers the spelling ihulkai (acc.) for IgulgæiR on U 938, attributed to Øpir. One could add þorka- (nom.) on
U 1072, signed by Øpir, which could be the name Porgæirr. The sequence has hitherto been interpreted as Porkell, but this would then be the only occasion Øpir uses a to denote short /e/ (cf. Åhlén 1997, 88). Thus, Quak may be right about [ui]kn[i], even if his interpretation presupposes a mistake by the carver. Personally, I would prefer a simpler explanation, and I wonder if the runes represent a female name *Vigný. No such name is attested, but both of the elements occur in runic inscriptions, and there are also parallels to the spelling of the last element -ni (for example þurni Þōrný, Vg 169, and sikni Signý, U 305).

When it comes to the following name, althrn, there is no doubt about the reading of the runes, but the interpretation is problematic. Wessén is probably right in seeing here the well-known name Halfdan, which occurs with different spellings more than forty times in Swedish runic inscriptions. No exact counterpart to the strange form on the Storvreta stone is known, but it should be noted that the “real” Øpir obviously had problems with this name. On his signed stones we meet spellings such as halfntan (U 229) and alfntan (U 462) with a superfluous n in the middle of the name, while an even more confused alfnthan is found in an attributed carving (U 925).

The next name on U 1022, akhun, is not difficult to interpret: the runes undoubtedly represent the well-attested name Hákon. According to Wessén, a few characters have been transposed, but it is difficult to understand why initial h should have been moved to a position in the middle of the name. It is simpler to assume omission of initial /h/, as in many other runic inscriptions, and that the h represents unetymological /h/ in front of the unstressed vowel. The carver most likely intended un to represent a suffix, thinking that Hákon was composed in the same way as for example Auðunn (for a discussion of the formation and etymology of Hákon, see Melefors 1993). Unetymological hs in this position are infrequent, though the rune can occasionally be found before semivowels in the second element of compounds, as for example inkihualtr Ingivaldr (U 311) and huita · huapum hvitavāðum (U 1036). There are also a few cases where an extraneous h is found in front of a vowel in an ending as in kuikhan kvik(v)an (U 308), girkha Grikka (U 922; concerning the a-stem inflection of this word see Svärdström in SRI, 12: 235), ionha lóna(?) (U 922; see Williams 1990, 104, note 38) and [suthi] Sōti (U 1032). U 922, it should be noted, is a stone signed by Øpir.

Before we leave this part of the inscription it must be noted that the carver spells the conjunction ok ‘and’ both [a]uk and uk. He also omits this conjunction between the names of the last three sponsors. The first feature is known from about 20 runic inscriptions in Uppland, the majority either
signed or attributed to Asmundr Karasunn or Ópir. Outside the work of these two carvers the feature is very rare; several of the inscriptions exhibiting it are lost and in some cases the reading is doubtful. In Uppland there are also about twenty inscriptions (including some uncertain examples) where the conjunction has been omitted between the names of some of the sponsors. A few of these are signed by carvers such as Likbjörn, Snari or Asmundr Karasunn, but four of them bear the signature of Ópir and at least two more can be attributed to him.2

Since the formula lētu rētta stæin æftiR exhibits no peculiarities in U 1022, there is nothing to comment on until we reach the name of the deceased. Only the first four runes are fully preserved, but if we trust the readings of Hadorph and Dybeck, it can be read ilhu[tfa]. Wessén (in SRI, 9:249) explained this with some hesitation as a spelling of the name Illugi. He assumes f to be a misreading for g, but can find no explanation for the t (“t förefaller alldeles omotiverat”). The vertical of this rune is still preserved, but there are no traces of a branch to the left and there probably never was one. The branch to the right on the other hand can be clearly seen descending over a natural elevation in the stone. A reading l thus seems more likely than t. If we accept this reading we arrive at the sequence ilhu[fa], which could represent the accusative of the male name HælguR, known from the occasional runestone in Södermanland and Närke (Sö 188, Sö 352, NÄ 31). This interpretation does presuppose a superfluous character, namely the a at the end of the name, but this rune seems easier to explain than a totally unmotivated t. It could for example be an epenthetic vowel, resulting from a clustering of several consonants across the word boundary. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Källström 2002, 12–15), this feature is found in other runic inscriptions, for example þiuþburhu lit in U 322, which can be analysed as /þiu:þborg le:t/, or biurno sun /biǫrnã sun/ in U 346† (the name of this individual is written biurn Biǫrn in another inscription, U 356).

1 Signed carvings: Asmundr (in some cases with co-carvers) U 986, U 998, U 1144, U 1149; Ópir U 287, U 462, U 1034, U 1159. Unsigned carvings: U 173 (Ópir), U 174†, U 241 (Asmundr), U 343† (Asmundr), U 361†, U 431 (Asmundr), U 498†, U 540 (Asmundr), U 617, U 875 (Asmundr), U 920, U 1032, U 1090†, U 1145 (Asmundr).

2 Signed: Likbjörn UFv 1976:104; Snari UFv 1953:266; Asmundr U 884(?); Ópir U 181, U 922, U 1072, U 1106. Unsigned: U 61, U 193 (Asmundr?), U 361†(?), U 492(?), U 606(?), U 627†, U 843†, U 917 (Ópir), U 952† (Ópir), U 968†, U 1027, U 1036, U 1122.

3 The sequence hikkulfr on Sö 178, interpreted as HælguR in SRI, 3:152, is more likely to represent the name HægulfR with a repeated k.
If ilhu[fa f]aþur is the correct reading, the sequence can be analysed similarly as /hælgulf aþur/. Of course, we cannot rule out the possibility that the superfluous a is due to a miscarving resulting from anticipation of the stressed vowel in the following faþur.

Finally, we need to pay some attention to the last word of the inscription, transliterated ru[na] by Wessén, who supplies the two final runes from the woodcut in Bautil. As mentioned above, the third rune does indeed seem to be a, but we can exclude the possibility that there once was a final r (or r). The form runa for rūnar is uncommon in the Upplandic material, with just seventeen examples in addition to the one under discussion here. Since the word rūnar often occurs in signatures, it is no surprise to find that thirteen or perhaps fourteen of these inscriptions are signed by the carver. We encounter the names of Manni, Þorgautr, Viseti and Ærinfastr, but a total of eight of these inscriptions are signed by Øpir. There is a further example of a miscarved ruan (for runa) on U 229, signed by Øpir.

To sum up this investigation: there are several uncommon, indeed extraordinary, spellings on the Storvreta stone. Although they can be explained in various ways, it is noteworthy that most of them recur in inscriptions signed by Øpir. This calls for an explanation. It is perhaps conceivable that the inexperienced Storvreta carver admired the great master so much that he travelled around the district collecting such unusual spellings as he could find on Øpir’s stones in order to use them all in one single inscription of his own. It is perhaps more plausible, however, to view the two Øpirs as one and the same and to surmise that the Storvreta stone represents one of Øpir’s earliest carvings, executed before he had developed his characteristic style. The simple ornamentation and the shallow cutting technique argue in favour of such an interpretation, and as I will show below, the geographical distribution of Øpir’s carvings points in the same direction.

A tentative chronology of Øpir’s signed runestones

Since Øpir’s production is very large he must have worked for a great many years, and it is quite probable that his style changed over this time. If we look at the ornamentation of the signed carvings, we can discern at least

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4 The first rune in the word faþur is read as k in Bautil, but as f by Dybeck. Wessén shows no preserved rune in this position, but my own investigations (25 July 2005) revealed the remains of an f.

5 Signed carvings: Manni U 1007; Þorgautr U 308, U 958; Viseti U 337, Ærinfastr U 41; Øpir U 279, U 287, U 288, U 544, U 566, U 880, U 926†(?), U 1063, Unknown U 1016(?). Unsigned carvings: U 99, U 112 (Þorgautr), U 144.
five groups based purely on the shape of the rune-animal’s head (see Fig. 2 and Appendix). In all five groups the head is seen in profile. Group 1 is first and foremost characterised by the long lobe hanging from the snout and the elongated ear, which follows the neck-line very closely. In group 2 we find a head similar to the first, but thinner and more elongated. Group 3’s head is perhaps the one that most typifies Øpir’s carvings. It is slightly bent and has a very short lobe at the snout and often a triangular-shaped ear. In group 4 we meet a stiffer and more triangular variant of the group 3 head, often with the ear reduced to a curved line and the eye omitted. Type 5 is defined by a head with a beaklike snout and an often reversed almond-shaped eye.

If we look at other elements of the carvings in relation to these five groups, we find that they are often connected with a particular type of head. Group 1 heads sometimes co-occur with small serpents with “moustaches”, a feature which with one exception is missing from the other groups. In carvings exhibiting group 2 and 3 heads the tail of the rune-animal often follows a zigzag pattern before it ends in a foot. There are also a several cases where the rune-animal has a hind leg at a right angle to the body, the point where they connect decorated with a spiral; these are only found together with group 3 heads. The crosses on Øpir’s stones do not vary greatly, though it should be noted that cross-rays are rather frequent in those that co-occur with group 1 heads but rare in the other groups.

In the light of this it seems to me likely that the five groups represent a chronological sequence. Fortunately it is possible to substantiate the chronological relationship between some of the groups. At Gällsta in Vallentuna parish there is a runestone (U 229) signed by Øpir which belongs to my group 2. This stone was erected by Halfdan and Tobbi in memory of their father Uddi. Later these brothers were commemorated by their children, who also employed Øpir to cut the relevant stones (U 232, U 233). These unsigned, but characteristic, carvings belong to my group 4 and 5 respectively. This indicates there was a generation, or at least 15 to 20 years, between the first stone at Gällsta and the other two.6

If we compare a couple of carvings with the same basic design from my

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6 Halfdan, who was probably the elder brother at Gällsta, had four children. On his memorial stone (U 231) a daughter Heðinvī is mentioned first, which probably means she was older than her brothers. According to Sven B. F. Jansson (in SRI, 6:317 f.) she may be identical with a Heðinvī who commemorated her husband Holmgautr at Åsta, Angarns parish (U 210). The name Heðinvī is only recorded in these two carvings, which argues in favour of Jansson’s assumption. The Åsta carving is signed by Øpir and belongs to my group 3, which could fit in with the chronology, if we assume that Holmgautr died before his father-in-law. This is possible, but unsusceptible of proof.
Fig. 2. Proposed typology of Øpir’s signed carvings based on the design of the head of the rune-animals and the crosses. Drawing by the author.
Map 1. The distribution of Øpir’s signed carvings by proposed group
first three groups—for example U961 (group 1), U279 (group 2) and U898 (group 3)—they give the impression of a carver who is getting more and more confident in his profession. That gives reason to believe that group 1 comprises the earliest carvings and that group 3 should follow group 2. It should be noted that this sketchy typology based only on Øpir’s signed carvings accords well with Anne-Sofie Gräslund’s typology of the Upplandic runestones (see for example Gräslund 1998). My groups 1–3 correspond to the group she has called Pr (= Profile) 4, while my 4 and 5 comprise carvings that she recognises as Pr 5. It is also interesting to note that Gräslund has classified one runestone in my group 1 (U893) as a transitional type between Pr 3 and Pr 4, which supports the idea that this group is early. In my group 3

*Futhark* 1 (2010)
there is another example of a possible transitional type (U 168†), but in this case between the late groups Pr 4 and Pr 5, which also accords well with my typology.

If we map the inscriptions of these groups, an interesting pattern can be observed (Map 1). The carvings of my group 1 are concentrated in the vicinity of Uppsala with a few examples out to the west. Group 2 has a wider distribution with one stone in Gästrikland and the odd carving in the south-east. Greater activity by Øpir in this latter area begins with the group 3 carvings, and continues with those of groups 4 and 5. To judge from this distribution, it is likely that Øpir started his career in the vicinity of Uppsala, and it is then not without interest that Storvreta and the other two disputed Øpir-stones (U 896, U 940) are found in the same area (Map 2). In my view, this argues in favour of identifying the Øpir of the Storvreta stone with the well-known carver of the same name.

We can compare this pattern with the work of another famous Upplandic carver, Fotr. He has only signed a few inscriptions, but it looks as though almost every signed stone marks a change of style. There is a big step from the rather simple runestone at Danmark church (U 945) to the highly decorated example at Stav in Roslags-Kulla parish (U 177). One of the signed stones (U 464) has very simple ornamentation and the carving exhibits a shallow cutting technique, which differs from the rest of Fotr’s carvings. Wessén makes no attempt in Upplands runinskrifter to attribute the stone to another carver. Rather, he argues (SRI, 7: 278) that this is probably an early work of Fotr’s, executed before he became a master of his craft (“Sannolikt är den ... ett ungdomsverk av den ännu icke färdige mästaren”). U 464 seems to be a good parallel to U 1022. If we can accept the former as executed by Fotr at the beginning of his career, why cannot the latter be an early work of Øpir’s?

Did Øpir start as an imitator?

We know little about how the Viking Age rune-carver learned his skills, even if some conclusions can be drawn from the information in the signatures. It seems reasonable to suppose that the profession sometimes passed from father to son, as was the case with the carvers Fotr and Dorgautr Fots arfi (‘Fotr’s heir’), and there are several instances of two carvers having worked together on the same stone. This has led to the conclusion that there was some kind of system of masters and apprentices, but was it also possible for a carver to learn his profession simply by imitating existing monuments? In the Uppsala area, where Øpir probably started his career, there may not
have been many pre-existing runestones. Beyond a handful of monuments executed by what were clearly local runographers as Brandr, Asbjörn and Grimr Skald, the only carver with a sizeable production prior to Øpir is Asmundr Karasunn. It is interesting to note that Per Stille (1999, 142) has tried to attribute the Uppsala stone with the mysterious signature Rēð rūnaRǾpiR(U 940) to Asmundr. He stresses (p. 212) that the two carvers worked in the same area and that they were probably related to each other in some way. The attribution of U 940 to Asmundr has been rejected by Henrik Williams (2000, 112 f.), but there are undoubtedly many features in this carving—for
example the cross, the verb rétta and certain of the rune forms—which are reminiscent of Ásmundr’s style. The problem could easily be solved, if we assumed U 940 to have been cut by Øpir at the very beginning of his career in imitation of an Ásmundr carving. A parallel can be found in the Brunnbý stone, Funbo parish (U 993), which originally bore the signature of Øpir (Fig. 3). The carving does not look any more like an Øpir stone than U 940, but in this case no one has ever questioned Øpir’s authorship. Special attention must be paid to the cross with the rounded cross-rays on the upper part of the stone. This is the only example of such a cross in Øpir’s production, but it is a very common form in the carvings of Ásmundr and almost one of his hallmarks (Thompson 1975, 91). It thus seems very likely that Øpir copied the cross from an Ásmundr stone in the neighbourhood. The design of the rune-animal’s head is not entirely typical for Øpir, but the long ear, which follows the neckline, would place the carving in my group 1 and would thus indicate that this is an early inscription.

If we search for other examples of this kind of cross on stones which are obviously not executed by Ásmundr, we find at least five in the vicinity of Uppsala: U 995†, U 1017, U 1032, U 1036 and U 1056. In all five the rune-animal is carved in three loops in a pyramid like construction. This pattern was often used by Øpir in his classical carvings, but the rest of the ornamentation shows little similarity to his work. I cannot claim that all these carvings are executed by the young and as-yet inexperienced Øpir, but two of them have examples of an unetymological h before a vowel or semivowel in medial position (suthi Sōti and ikhuar Ingvar, U 1032, anhuit Andvētt, huita hvāum hvītavāðum, U 1036) and one (U 1032) exhibits variation between auk and uk in the spelling of the conjunction ok. The possibility that Øpir may have made some of these carvings at an early stage of his career should not be ruled out. The issue needs further investigation.

Conclusions

In this article I have discussed the inscription on the Storvreta stone (U 1022) at length, and also touched upon the two other runestones where the name Øpir occurs in a context that makes it likely it is a carver signature (U 896 and U 940). I think runologists have been too hasty in rejecting these stones as the work of the well-known rune-carver Øpir. The unwillingness to accept them as such seems to rest on the silent assumption that there was little or no development in a rune-carver’s work. Such an assumption is almost certainly false, which I hope I have demonstrated by my suggested typology of Øpir’s signed carvings. A clear parallel can be found in the
work of Fotr. Of course, there are still problems to be solved. U 896 and U 940 exhibit forms which are not found in other inscriptions by Øpir, for example *fita + faþum* for *hvītavāðum* (U 896) or nominative *kitilfastr* for expected accusative (U 940; cf. Åhlén 1997, 54–58). These orthographic peculiarities are perhaps less troublesome if we assume we are dealing with the works of a beginner.

My proposal that Øpir started his career on his own and as an imitator of Asmundr Karasunn may be bold, but many of the lesser-known carvers in Uppland and Södermanland must certainly have learned the profession in a similar way. Claiborne Thompson, it will be recalled, suggested (1972) that Øpir was the pupil of a certain Igulfastr, but the interpretations of the two inscriptions (U 961 and UFv1953;263) on which this assumption was based are doubtful, and it is not entirely certain that such a carver ever existed (cf. Stille 1999, 145 f.). On the other hand, I do not think Øpir developed his skills entirely on his own. I suspect that somewhat later in his career he came under the influence of a now largely forgotten rune-carver, probably named Øynjutr, but this is a matter to which I will return on another occasion.

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Nä + number = inscription published in *Närkes runinskripter*, i.e. SRI, 14.1.


Scandinavian Runic-text Database, Department of Scandinavian Languages, Uppsala University. http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm


Sö + number = inscription published in Södermanlands runinskrifter, i.e. SRI, 3.


U + number = inscription published in Upplands runinskrifter, i.e. SRI, 6–9.


Vg + number = inscription published in Västergötlands runinskrifter, i.e. SRI, 5.

Appendix

List of carvings signed by Öpir and placed in the five provisional groups. In the right column the typological classification of Anne-Sofie Gräslund is given (based on information taken from the Scandinavian Runic-text Database, version 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1:</th>
<th>Group 2:</th>
<th>Group 3:</th>
<th>Group 4:</th>
<th>Group 5:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U 893 Pr3–Pr4</td>
<td>U 229 Pr4</td>
<td>U 36 Pr4</td>
<td>Sö 308 Pr5</td>
<td>U 23 Pr5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U 922 Pr4</td>
<td>U 279 Pr4</td>
<td>U 142 Pr4</td>
<td>U 104 Pr5</td>
<td>U 181 Pr5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U 961 Pr4</td>
<td>U 489 Pr4</td>
<td>U 168† Pr4–Pr5?</td>
<td>U 1034 Pr5</td>
<td>U 288 Pr5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U 984† Pr4?</td>
<td>U 1106 Pr4</td>
<td>U 210 Pr4</td>
<td>U 544 Pr5</td>
<td>U 485 Pr5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U 993 Pr4</td>
<td>U Fv1976;107 Pr4</td>
<td>U 1106 Pr4</td>
<td>U Fv1948;168 Pr5</td>
<td>U 880 Pr5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U 1159 Pr4</td>
<td>U 307 Pr4</td>
<td>U 566 Pr4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pr5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U 1177 Pr4</td>
<td>U 566 Pr4</td>
<td>U 687 Pr4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following carvings have been excluded since the rune-animal’s head is either missing or impossible to classify on the basis of older drawings:

U 118† Pr4
U 122† Pr4
U 262† Pr4?
U 315† Pr4
U 462 Pr3–Pr4?
U 565† Pr4?
U 926† Pr4?
U 973 Pr5
U 1100 Pr4

Futhark 1 (2010)