3.11 THE RUNIC INSCRIPTION OF THE RUTHWELL CROSS

The Ruthwell Cross is a Scottish stone monument that has engraved upon it part of an Old English poem, “The Dream of the Rood.” The inscription, which is in runic symbols, has been badly damaged by the ravages of the weather and of the Scottish Covenanters, who objected to “idolatrous monuments.” In the 1640’s the cross was broken into pieces and cast into the churchyard; consequently the inscription is now fragmentary. Most of what survives is reproduced here, with some of the missing letters supplied; the text has also been divided into words, although in the original the runes follow one another without spaces. The speaker in the poem is the True Cross, which relates the events of the Crucifixion as the Old English poet conceived them. The poem dates from the early eighth century and is in the Northumbrian dialect.7

TRANSLITERATION AND GLOSS
ongeredæ hîna ã god almeyttig þa he walde on ãgalgu gistîga modig
Unclothed himself god almighty. For he would onto the cross ascend courageous.

TRANSLITERATION AND GLOSS
ahof ic riicæ kyniç hæafunæs hlaðard hælða ic ni dorste bismerædu unket men
Lifted up I a great king, heaven's Lord. Bow I did not dare. Mocked us two men
ba ætḡadræ ic wæs miþ blode bistemid
both together. I was with blood bedewed.

TRANSLITERATION AND GLOSS
krist wæs on rodi hwebræ þer fusa ðeáran kwomu æþðilaæ til
Christ was on the cross. And there hastening from afar came noblemen towards (me)
anum ic þæt al biheáld sâre ic wæs miþ sorgum gidræfid
alone. I that all beheld. Sorely I was with sorrows troubled.

8 That is, "Men mocked both us two together."
9 Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.
NW FRAGMENT

Transliteration and Gloss

(I was) with arrows wounded. Laid down they him weary in limb.

They stood by him at his body's head.

Beheld they there heaven's Lord.

1. Complete the chart below by giving the transliteration for each rune.

2. Transliterate the runic letters of the fourth fragment in the blanks provided above.

3. What does the style in which the letters are made—angular with few curves—suggest about the original material and method for writing runes?

THE FUTHORC

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