

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

⁷ Bruce Dickins and Alan S. C. Ross, *The Dream of the Rood* (London, 1954); and Ralph W. V. Elliott, *Runes* (New York, 1959).

NE FRAGMENT

ƿtXMRMƿƿ HItƿ ƿƿƿ ƿƿƿMƿƿƿtIX ƿƿ
 HM ƿƿƿHM ƿt ƿƿƿƿƿ XItƿƿƿ ƿƿƿIX

TRANSLITERATION AND GLOSS

ongereda hinae god almeztig þa he walde on galgu gistiða modig
Unclothed himself god almighty. For he would onto the cross ascend courageous.

SE FRAGMENT

ƿƿƿƿ IH RItHtƿ ƿƿƿtIXH Hƿƿƿƿƿ
 Hƿƿƿƿƿƿ Hƿƿƿƿ IH H ƿƿƿƿƿƿ
 BItƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿ
 IH ƿƿƿƿ ƿƿƿƿ BItƿƿƿƿ BItƿƿƿƿƿƿƿ

TRANSLITERATION AND GLOSS

ahof ic riicnae kyningc heafunæs hlafard hælde ic ni dorstæ bismærædu unket men
Lifted up I a great king, heaven's Lord. Bow I did not dare. Mocked us two men

ba ætgadræ ic wæs miþ blodæ bistemid
both together.⁸ I was with blood bedewed.

SW FRAGMENT

ƿƿƿƿƿ ƿƿƿƿ ƿt Rƿƿƿƿ Hƿƿƿƿƿƿ ƿMR
 ƿƿƿƿƿ ƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿ ƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿ ƿƿƿƿƿƿ ƿƿƿƿƿ
 IH ƿƿƿƿ ƿƿƿƿ BItƿƿƿƿƿ ƿƿƿƿƿ IH
 ƿƿƿƿ ƿƿƿƿ ƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿƿ

TRANSLITERATION AND GLOSS

krist wæs on rodi hweþræ þer fusæ feárran kwomu æþþilæ til
Christ was on the cross. And there hastening from afar came noblemen⁹ towards (me)

anum ic þæt al bihéald saræ 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.

