The Yew Rune, Yogh and Yew

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The problem of the thirteenth rune of the older and Anglo-Saxon futharks (᚛~ᚖ) has a long and divergent historiography.¹ A number of values such as eu or close or open e were accepted by earlier generations of runologists.² Indeed even in the medieval period there seems to have been little consensus as to its phonological purpose. Various values are assigned to this staff in the English manuscript tradition: i, eo, h and k; and similarly, its use in Old English inscriptions varies from an earlier employment as i to a later h. There is somewhat less ambivalence among the attested rune names, however. The Codex Salisburgensis and the Isruna Tracts designate this rune ih, and the Runic Poem names it eoh mirroring Old English vocalic development. Therefore, the original rune name has traditionally been constructed as meaning ‘yew’ (OE ēo, ēow, īw), as a similar name, yr, is recorded for one of the Nordic runes that represented r (ʀ), as if when the old value z was surrendered, that of the lost thirteenth rune was assumed.³


³ Raymond I. Page, ‘The Old English Rune eoh, ih, “Yew Tree”’, Medium Ævum, 37 (1968), 125–36 [repr. in Runes and Runic Inscriptions: Collected Essays on Anglo-Saxon and Viking Runes, ed. by David Parsons (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995), pp. 133–44]. In two of the manuscripts, British Library, Cotton Galba A.ii and St John’s College, Oxford, 17, the names of the thirteenth and fifteenth runes have been exchanged, and as in the Nordic tradition, it is the old fifteenth rune which has received the name ‘yew’ (or actually eth, corrected to eoh).

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Thus runologists have generally assumed a vocalic value for the thirteenth runes, a value clearly shown in some of the oldest inscriptions. Formerly represented in the grammars as e (i.e. close e), Wolfgang Krause’s transliteration ë now has found favour in most studies. Yet doubt remains as to the rune’s original value. Elmer Antonsen proposes to read /æː/ (i.e. *ë), Leo Connolly has reconstructed /ɨ(ː)/, Ottar Grønvik and Elmar Seebold prefer [ç], Tineke Looijenga has mooted an original value /i(ː)j/ or /ji(ː)/ and Heinrich Beck, reviving an older interpretation, now sees the rune as representing an /ɨ(ː)/ not fully lowered to /e(ː)/.4

Antonsen’s reading /æː/ is largely predicated on structural concerns — i.e. the notion that there was an imbalance between the inventory of Proto-Germanic short (*/i,e,a,u/) and long (*/iː,æː,ɔː,uː/) vowel phonemes. Yet all of the contributions it is Connolly’s which is the most intriguing and the most original.5 Following Antonsen’s principle that the yew rune must have represented a phoneme lost during the Proto-Germanic period, but still attempting to reconcile its employment in both the early inscriptions and in the rune names (the chief failing of Antonsen’s theory), he has reconstructed a Proto-Germanic vowel created through the influence of a Proto-Germanic laryngeal. This laryngeal, he proposes, retracted neighbouring Proto-Germanic i to a high central vowel that he transcribes as i. He arrived at this theory after a number of studies on the inconsistent fate of inherited IE *e, *ei and *i in the descendant dialects.6 Nonetheless he is unable to provide proof of the use of the yew rune to represent this *i.

4 KJ, p. 5.
6 Connolly, ‘The Rune ñ and the Germanic Vowel System’.
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Connolly’s linkage of the yew rune to the development of *e, *ei and *i is reminiscent of the theory that first led to the transcription ē. This transcription derives from the positing that the thirteenth rune represented a Germanic non-low front vowel, intermediate between e and i. Indeed when long, this vowel is often proposed to have derived from an intermediate value (i.e. *ē) suggested to have been produced by the monophthongisation of *ei before it developed to i.8 Yet the few inscriptions in the older futhark that employ the yew rune lexically show a value /i(:)/, and when long not necessarily one derived from *ei.10 The thirteenth rune only appears in inscriptions where it seems to be orthographically redundant. Thus some philologists have claimed that it was redundant from the time of the inception of the futhark, a redundancy that occurs in alphabetic scripts found throughout the Mediterranean (as witnessed by their abecedaria).11 Yet the thirteenth rune does not clearly formally derive from any single Mediterranean letter. Indeed it has been claimed by some to have been especially created for the Germanic script, as if it represented a sound unknown in the tradition from which it was borrowed. Antonsen’s theory seems conclusive: the yew rune probably represented a phone later lost from Germanic.12

10 In addition, as Krause points out, the name of the ice rune is also usually derived from a form with IE *ei- (see IEW 301). According to Connolly, however, the only sure Continental attestation of the thirteenth rune with a value i in Krause’s corpus, on the Freilauferzheim fibula, may represent i < *eHj.i. Wolfgang Krause, ‘Untersuchungen zu den Runennamen II’, Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Phil.-Hist. Klasse, 2 (1948) 93–108; KJ, p. 5; Connolly, ‘The Rune J and the Germanic Vowel System’, p. 28.
11 e.g. Mikhail Ivanovich Stéblin-Kamenskiî, ‘Какую систему гласных выражал первоначально рунический алфавит?’, Скандиновский Сборник, 4 (1959), 153–58; ‘Noen fonologiske betrakningen over de eldre runer’, Arkiv för nordisk filologi, 77 (1962), 1–6 (pp. 5–6).
12 The only other option would seem to be to assume some magico-religious reason for the creation of this staff. Despite the appearance of pairings in the rune-row similar to those sometimes used in alphabetic magic, such solutions are usually overly speculative. The most voluminous example of this type of analysis is the gnostic theory of Heinz Klingenberg based around the number thirteen, one that most runologists have treated with circumspection: Heinz Klingenberg, Runenschrift — Schriftdenken — Runenschriften, Germanische Bibliothek, Reihe: Untersuchungen und Einzeldarstellungen, 3 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1973). Similarly, others have pointed to the magical and religious significance of the yew tree and its connection with the ON Ygdrasil and Ullr; see Karl Schneider, Die germanischen Runenamen: Versuch einer Gesamtdarstellung; ein Beitrag zur idg./germ. Kultur- und Religionsgeschichte (Meisenheim a G.: Hain, 1956), p. 285; Harry Andersen, ‘Three Controversial Runes in the Older Futhark’, North-Western European Language Evolution (NOWELE), 4 (1984), 97–110 and 5 (1985),
Rather than beginning with theoretical concerns, however, a more grounded approach would surely be to start with a survey of how the rune is actually used in early epigraphy before bringing in other considerations. The earliest attestation of the thirteenth rune is in the Kylyver stone rune-row (KJ 1), for example, and it appears in all of the elder rune-row inscriptions save the short partial rows of Aquincum (KJ 7), Beuchte (KJ 8) and the Gudme II bracteate (IK 392). It also has the same orientation as has Latin S (i.e. ᚞) in each of these inscriptions. This includes the example on the Vadstena bracteate (IK 337, 1) where as an anticlockwise (i.e. sinistroverse) inscription, this makes the character retrograde to the rest of the text. Similarly, the character is generally direct (᚞) in the body of inscriptions collected by Krause: the only other retrograde example is one of the two yew runes on the Krogsta stone where this staff is (apparently mistakenly) employed for the graphically similar t (ᛏ; KJ 100). This is also the case in most of the English inscriptions. Yet in the four examples on English coins and the two English rune-rows, the yew rune is always inscribed as a retrograde (᚞), a practice also to be noted on a non-provenanced Danish bracteate (IK 197). A doubtful example of a retrograde form has also emerged on a find on a strap-end from Long Buckby, Northamptonshire, that dates from the late eighth century; although the top of the rune is missing, Ray Page plausibly read ‘᚞ h ɬ’ — i.e. a partial, perhaps of the common anthropomonic element břihrt. On the other hand, the manuscripts containing runes usually feature the direct form, although an apparent formal confusion with Latin Z is evident in the Codex Cotton Otho B.x.

The thirteenth rune also hardly varies its shape throughout the centuries of its employment. In the Lindkær/Over Hornbæk III bracteate rune-row (IK 110) it has been reduced to the shape of an I-rune (i.e. ᛞ), a reduction which also appears to have occurred on an Anglian coin and possibly on the Broholm bracteate (IK 225). These variants, however, seem to be mistakes on the behalf of the craftsmen so concerned. The yew rune is thus very stable in form, if not in orientation or in phonological value.

Of the rune-row inscriptions, only that from Charnay (KJ 6) gives us any clue as to the phonological value of this rune, in the graphically isolated sequence ᚞a. Seebold reads [aiç] here, yet this is unlikely as this assumes that both the a and ᚞ are retrograde to this sinistroverse 3–22. Cf. Ralph W. V. Elliot, ‘Runes, Yews and Magic’, Speculum, 32 (1957), 250–61; Robert Bevan-Jones, The Ancient Yew: A History of ‘Taxus Baccata’ (Macclesfield: Windgather, 2002). It should be noted that in the very inscription that appears to invoke the power of the yew, however, this rune does not appear, although the ice rune does: Tineke Looijenga, ‘Yew Wood and Runic Inscriptions in the Frisian Terp-Area’, in Old English Runes and their Continental Background, ed. by Alfred Bammesberger, Anglistische Forschungen, 217 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1991), pp. 335–42. Nor does it appear in what is often taken to be the only runic testament to Ulfr, the inscription on the Thorpsberg chape.


Seebold, ‘Die Stellung der englischen Runen’, p. 470 may have found a late variant similar to the n or g runes in the unclear inscriptions on the Lundeborg (IK 295) and Gudme I bracteates (IK 391).

reading (note that the main Charnay inscription is clearly dextroverse as is standard in Continental inscriptions). I have suggested that the sequence (which is found along with another isolated sequence kr) may be an abbreviation for the common early Christian nomen sacrum Iaô (and kr likewise Christus) much as Ute Schwab sought to interpret many of the shorter sequences in German inscriptions as typically Christian forms. Considering that it is graphically separated from the main inscription, however, jaï may not represent a lexeme at all.

With the form on the Charnay fibula may be grouped a number of other inscriptions in the older futhark. The By stone’s final sequence rmpl (KJ 71), the Denmark X bracteate legend ˣIwl (IK 39), the Kitnæs III-C bracteate’s ˣI t (IK 94.1), and the anticlockwise Nebenstedt II bracteate inscription  lateinit x orre  jilf  apmrml and the similar Darum IV bracteate legend laet  lateinit x orre  ll  apret (IK 129.1–2) are all of disputable value for the present purpose. Krause (KJ 55, nn. 1–2) has remarked on two similarly problematic Norwegian inscriptions from Hammeren and Oppauran that read alff (NkeR I.373–82: sinistroverse; perhaps an anthroponym Alfi) and eaiku (NkeR II.732–40). To this category also belongs the Krogsa stone, side A of which bears the interpreted mwsleij, along with a second attestation which, as has already been mentioned, shows that the thirteenth rune seems to have been confused with the t rune in s añan [stainaz].

More evidence is forthcoming from the Nebenstedt I bracteate which bears the inscription glaugiru  urnmr (IK 128). Krause (KJ 133) has related the first element to ON gljá ‘glitter’, and thus reconstructs a value /il/. Seebold prefers to see a cognate form of Olfr. glicc ‘clever, skilful’ here and so is able to accommodate a value [iç]. The third element is ambiguous for although a strong wiku ‘I consecrate’ (cf. Goth withan ‘sanctify, make holy’) is a possible form, the Kragehul spear shaft (KJ 27) spells this verb as wiju and the Vimose buckle (KJ 24) has wij, suggesting an Early Nordic *wihu with the loss of medial -h-; compare the Nydam axe haft’s wihu. Seebold also brings to attention the scrambled Broholm (IK 225) form that he reconstructs as whlo and which he suggests is probably [wi:ço] with a deformed yew rune. Moreover, a Danish bracteate of unknown provenance features a spelling wiu

21 Seebold, ‘Die Stellung der englischen Runen’, p. 487. Antonsen reads gleaugizu æurgz, and links the first element to OE gleær, ON glæsa, Lat. glēsum ‘amber’. He is unable to offer an interpretation for the third element, nor has he for the Kragehul spear shaft’s wiju (whereas he interprets the Vimose buckle’s wij as belonging to the sequence auwiļja, i.e. auju with West Germanic development). Antonsen’s value æ has obviously hampered his attempt to offer an interpretation. Antonsen, A Concise Grammar of the Older Runic Inscriptions, no. 63; Elmer H. Antonsen, Runes and Germanic Linguistics, Trends in Linguistics: Studies and Monographs, 140 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002), pp. 44–45.
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which could indicate an employment as [ç] (KJ 133, IK 197). The use of the thirteenth rune elsewhere on the bracteate, however (in jjiw1a and possibly in dwudekwwna), suggests that, despite the appearance of the j-rune putatively employed here as a logograph, Ʌ is being used as an alternative to i to represent the associated semivowel. Thus, despite the plausibility of Seebold’s interpretation, his reading of Ʌ here as [ç] is far from indisputable.

Gronvik proposes that the troublesome last character in the legend awaleubwinī on the Nordendorf I fibula be read [ç] in order to discover an enclitic pre-OHG -h ‘and’ (i.e. ‘Awa and Leubwini’), citing the Gothic form -h (-uh) < IE *-kʷe. A plausible interpretation, nonetheless it can hardly represent proof of the value of the thirteenth rune, although it is clearly preferable to interpreting the last rune as an ideograph as does Krause. More recently an unclear graph in the inscription on the Pforzen buckle has been promoted by Klaus Düwel as comprising an apparent ligature of a + ľ, representing the diphthong ai. The first line of the inscription does seem to read aigilandiaɅlrūn, i.e. Aigil andi Ailrūn. Given the peculiar nature of the ligaturing and the lack of expected -a in the putative second anthroponym, however, this inscription might be open to other interpretations both lexical and phonological.

A value ľ has been assumed for the Rubring stone’s klando (perhaps for an early High German kēn dō(ē)). Yet this interpretation was clearly made on a priori grounds. Indeed despite its inclusion in Stefan Opitz’s catalogue, given its irregular and (Lower) Austrian provenance it is probably of modern authorship — i.e. a Nazi-era forgery. More categorical is the sequence dapīna on the Freilaubersheim fibula (KJ 144) which is generally held to represent the anthroponym Dapīna. Clearly there is no hint of a consonantal value here. By this date (c. 575), however, English examples of the thirteenth rune have appeared.


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Yet there are English inscriptions that support the value $h$, although of these some probably represent $[x]$ rather than $[ç]$. The Great Urswick stone bears the anthroponym toror{	extipa{1}}tredæ, Torhtred(e), and although $h$ is usually counted a palatal before final $i$ in Old English, this development that had begun in West Saxon by the ninth century is only evident when $h$ before $r$ begins to have a palatalising effect on $eo$ and $io$, and the svarabhakti $o$ in this inscription hardly warrants a value $[ç]$ for $j$ here. Somewhat more probably palatal, however, is the example in alme{	extipa{2}}ttig for almhe{	extipa{1}}tig on the Ruthwell cross. There are also three examples in coin legends, one from the eighth and two from the ninth century, that similarly show the yew rune with a value $h$: tilberlt, Tilberht (also tilberlt), dEBel(t (a contraction of Deegberht) and wi{	extipa{2}}tred, Wihtred. These though as can be seen by the occasional penetration of Roman letters are all quite late; yet again clear evidence for a palatal value in the element -$berht$ is lacking (we might expect *-byr$t$ or *-birt$t$). And a further extension of this rune to represent $k$ is indicated in another late coin legend where Latin réx is spelt as re$t$. An innovation perhaps influenced by the Old English development *-$hs$ > -$ks$ (cf. PG *sehs > OE siex, syx, sīx). The earliest Anglo-Frisian example of the yew rune is on the Caistor-by-Norwich gaming piece which bears the inscription ra$han$ that is usually interpreted now as /raːxan/. And such a reading would seem to support Düwel’s interpretation of the Pforzen inscription’s ai$lr$un. Seebold sees the Caistor employment, however, as a natural extension of the usage [iç] to represent /i/ before /hl/; after all, the Ing rune appears to be used as [iŋ] (instead of the usual [ing]) before a seemingly redundant $g$ on the Opedal stone (KJ 76). Yet such an interpretation assumes that Proto-Germanic *ai$th$ here is still monophthongised (we might expect, rather, [raːxan], cf. OE rāha, rā), and the palatalisation of $h$ is usually held to postdate the relevant monophthongisation in proto-English. Another English example of this rune is in the Thames silver mount legend sberzedht, beaierhadaebs which appears to be an

33 Page, An Introduction to English Runes, pp. 150–51.
38 Page, Runes and Runic Inscriptions, p. 144, prefers to read a malformed RE$s$, as appears in the other Beonna legends: surely, however, given the value $k$ for the thirteenth rune in some manuscripts the otherwise inexplicable form RE$s$ is actually a corruption of RE$fs$.
40 Seebold, ‘Die Stellung der englischen Runen im Rahmen’, p. 469. Cf. Grønvik, Runene på Tunestenen, pp. 196–97, n. 28, who proffers the development $i$ ( optionally) > $i$ ( optionally) or ($>$) > $i$, citing this inscription and the similarly early examples from Nebenstedt in u/u and glī/a-.
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attempt to produce a palindrome. The central portion is alphabetic (a, b, c), it is then flanked by the yew and ice runes, and flanked again by what may be a name encrypted in pairs: sb/er/æd/ht = s[æd][b]er][ht].

The Northamptonshire find probably also evidences a vocalic value for the yew rune as it preceeds an h and then a t rotated 90 degrees clockwise. Similarly, the two Anglo-Saxon rune-row inscriptions, on the Thames scramasax and the partial row on the Brandon pin (both from the eighth–ninth centuries) provide no help phonologically, although both examples are retrograde (1).

The value i, however, is more obviously betrayed in the Loveden Hill urn inscription’s s[þæbad, representing the anthroponym Sīþæbad, and the Dover stone legend +j[þlheard which can only represent the anthroponym Gīs(i)lheard. Similarly, the Thornhill II stone bears the legend eateᛇ, where the thirteenth rune represents [j] if not yet [j] which, as the use of j for this allophone in the late Dover stone inscription suggests, probably derives from an identification with i by way of j.

More examples with a clear value of i separate from a following h include the hælᛇ and the hᛇræ of the Gandersheim (Brunswick) casket inscription whose authenticity is doubted by Page and the title iosePᛇ for the expected genitive Josep(h)i (where, as Klaus Düwel points out to me, the rune exhibits horizontal rather than oblique branches) that appears twice on the cover of the Hedesippus Codex, a Latin translation of Josephus’ Bellum Iudaicum.

It thus seems that the earliest value of the yew rune known to us is i. It is also clear that in English sources this rune later came to represent h. This may have been part of a process of development from a high front vowel > palatal semivowel > palatalised voiced spirant > voiceless palatal spirant > voiceless velar spirant > voiceless velar stop (i.e. [i] > [j] > [j] > [ç] > [x] > [k]), which may correspond to the suggested development of the name *īha- > OE īh [i:č] > ēoh [eox]. Yet it may equally have been suggested by the manuscript tradition as the alternate values (i or h) of the Codex Salisburgensis suggest. The late (ninth–tenth-century) date offered for the Dover stone inscription, which retains a value i, also points to the latter interpretation. It is similarly possible that the consonantal values stem from the time when the runes calc (ļ) and gar (ĸ) were introduced to (somewhat inconsistently) distinguish allophones of OE /k/ and /ɡ/, the yew rune signifying a similar distinction from h; and indeed the northern English provenance (Thornhill, Great Urswick, Ruthwell and the Wihtred and Æbbeberht stycas) of the instances of the use of the thirteenth rune with a velar value seen alongside the presence of calc and gar in the northern lapidary inscriptions might seem supportive of this suggestion were it not for the analysis of the coins of the East Anglian moneyers Tilberht and Werferth offered by Mark Blackburn.

Alternatively, as the rune name for h began with [h], the otherwise redundant j~ļ may, under the influence of its name, have been thought better to represent [ç] and [x] (irrespective of palatalisation), the

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42 Page, An Introduction to English Runes, p. 182.
medial allophones of /h/. Nevertheless, when representing i it often appears near an h-rune or where one might be expected, possibly indicating that the spirant in its name influenced its employment from an early period.

A second consideration traditionally brought to bear in discussions of the purpose of the yew rune relates to its origin. Jens Jensen, for example, assuming a vocalic value for the thirteenth rune, has noticed that each ætt of the futhark contains two vowels. His theory that the futhark is grouped by a tradition of the classical grammarians (e.g. Donatus, Ars gramm. 1, 1) as the Irish Ogams are usually held to be is flawed by an attempt to use modern phonological categorisations, however, not those of antiquity (such as the semivocales and mutae). The runes are clearly based on the Mediterranean alphabetic tradition and proponents of a Roman origin for the futhark have tended to link the yew rune with the similarly shaped Roman letter Z. Yet as /zl/ was clearly served by another character (ʕ, putatively descended from Roman Y), a Roman thesis either points to a novel creation or perhaps a replacement for Greek Υ (i.e. [y]), even if Greek words which feature upsilon are typically written with I in Roman inscriptions — e.g. NIMPHIS ‘to the nymphs’ (CIL XII 1092, XIII 8522 etc.). Richard Morris has proposed a link instead with the rare epichoric Greek variant of iota that has an identical form to the yew rune, which may have a reflection in Etruscan. From a North Etruscan perspective, however, the thirteenth rune seems closest in shape to a character from the Camunic tradition which is extremely rare and appears in inscriptions where its phonological value, ancestry and arguably even graphemic status are unclear. Moreover, similar forms appear in two Rhaetic inscriptions, both of which have usually been interpreted in the past as defective forms of North Etruscan lambda (ʕ). Nonetheless, they appear to represent labial values: i.e. Rhaetic ʕAȘUNU seems to represent the Italic hieronym

56 Thomas L. Markey, ‘A Tale of Two Helmets: The Negau A and B Inscriptions’, Journal of Indo-European Studies, 29 (2001), 69–172 (p. 92). All the inscriptions seem to be a potter’s marks, i.e. anthroponymic abbreviations: cf. I-S-U (Museo Archeologico Nazionale delle Vall Camonica: Guida dai materiali al territorio, ed. by Filli Rossi (Milan: ET, 1989), p. 16) and U1, Museo Archeologico Nazionale della Valle Camonica, inv. no. ST 79011 (as autopsied by Thomas L. Markey, to whom we are grateful for the reference).
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Vesuna and Λ:USPE is probably an anthroponym comparable in the first instance to Rhaetic Φ:USUT, and then Etruscan Haspa and the commoner Hasti, Hastia, Hausti, Fasti, Fastia ‘Fausta’. The development of this character may represent a response to the ‘pernicious homography’ noted by Markey whereby the frequent development of North Etruscan alpha to an ‘open’ form (i.e. †, much as has obviously occurred with runic a) provoked either the loss, functional replacement or a distinguishing variation in the inherited form of digamma (also f), the ancestor of Roman F (hence, presumably, the upturned branches of runic f, ḵ). In fact the proclivity for Etruscoid characters to show a variation of labial and velar fricative values is well known. Hence an identification with this North Etruscan ᚦ~ᚦ may indicate that the later consonantal value was closer to the original sound represented by the yew rune than the vocalic. Yet this value is clearly shared by the h-rune, a fact that once again implies that the yew rune was phonologically superfluous from the time of the inception of the futhark.

A similar redundancy has also been proposed for the Ing rune (ö, ů, ṯ), a character whose presence among the Old Germanic letters seems similarly idiosyncratic. After all, the Mediterranean scripts did not employ a separate character (figura) for the sound usually associated with this staff — hence Antonsen’s demand that the rune be connected with Greek agma, the name given to gamma by ancient grammarians when it served to indicate velar nasals. Yet the Ing rune seems to be unnecessary in the futhark. Although often thought to be employed for [ŋ] or [ŋg], it is frequently omitted when expected: in fact, except for in the Årstad inscription’s ūwinaż (which was read by Krause as a late form of a genitive *Jungawinaiz) and in the unclear Leţcani find’s raŋo (where the rune has also been read as a z or a mirror rune), in elder inscriptions the Ing rune seems merely to be used as shorthand for ⟨iŋg⟩, the first syllable of its Proto-Germanic name. Gerd Høst, after an inspection of the Årstad stone in situ, however, has declared that Krause’s reading is incorrect, and as Antonsen had divined, the apparent ž is in fact a k (Krause’s ţ better to be read as ek). As there

59 Schumacher, Die rätischen Inschriften, no. NO-7.
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is no other example in a lexical employment in Krause’s corpus where ŋ clearly does not also represent a vocalic value, it seems that, with the exception of the English inscriptions, this staff always bears a syllabic value, and thus the notion that the ‘lantern’ variant of the form (냔, ږ) is a bind-rune of i and ŋ (ī and ɷ) must be false. Gerhard Alexander, following William Moulton’s reconstruction of the Proto-Germanic obstruents, maintains that the Ing rune was required to distinguish the plosive allophone of PG */g/ that appeared after */ŋ/ from the usual fricative realisation, implying that it was not originally redundant, but became confused with [ŋ] — a theory consistent with its reconstructed rune name *Ingwaz. Yet runic inscriptions usually omit nasals before homo-organic obstruents. In modern Germanic dialects, the /ŋ/ phoneme only develops from */ŋg/ (not */nk/ or */nh/), and the timeframe for the development of */ŋg/ > /ŋ/ is unclear in Germanic. The apparently trustworthy evidence of the sixteenth-century English orthoepists for retention of [ŋg] pronunciations might be called into question given the appearance of fourteenth-century spellings such as lenth and strenth. And despite the confident assertions of some handbooks, neither is the evidence of the manuscript languages categorical. Middle High German alternations such as dinges could merely reveal a reinterpretation of [ŋ] (if not [ŋg]) as [ŋk]. Similarly, Old Norse verbal forms such as ganga, gakk, gengu, gekk surely represent a historical development (as the geminate kk continues the *nk of an earlier time), and once again may show an *[ŋ] (if not [ŋg]) devoicing to an *[ŋk]. Much of this behaviour is consistent with the generativist theory that reinterprets modern /ŋ/ as an abstract morphophonemic /ŋg/ cluster (with synchronic n → ŋ and g, ɣ → k, Ø rules) which explains similar behaviour in modern languages today, such as in some dialects of Dutch and German (and compare the non-standard English pronunciations [ŋiŋk] and [ŋiθən], anything). Moreover, not only is the status of traditional /ŋ/ quite unlike that of other Germanic phonemes (both in its positional distribution and in its variation


with [ŋg]), in some modern dialects (e.g. the West Midlands and Northern English dialects, where sing is [siŋ], not [siŋ] and in some southern Norwegian dialects where lange is [laŋgǝ], not [laŋǝ]) it is absent (as a discrete structural unit) altogether. 70 Hence as the Ing rune only represents the nasal before */g/ in the older inscriptions, runic ŋ may well have been required for a PG */ŋ/.

71 In fact its absence when expected, e.g. in Reistad’s iupingar/idringar (KJ 74) might stem from a dialectal variation in the development of */ŋ/ such as still exists today. Clearly, the use of the ŋ-rune had broadened by the Old English period (e.g. the Ruthwell Cross’s uŋ̣ḳet). Yet as the velar nasal was recognised by the classical grammarians (it had a nomen, agma, and potestas, but no separate figura), the extension of the use of the rune also to allophonic [ŋ] in Old English inscriptions (considering that late inscriptions such as that of the Ruthwell cross show a connection with the manuscript tradition) may have been due to the influence of classical grammatical learning, much as seems to be the case with a number of the values given to the Ogam signs in Irish manuscripts. 72 But can a similar innovation be detected in the case of the thirteenth rune?

The rune names of the futhark are mainly acrophonic and so their names can be used to assess the phonological values of the corresponding staves. It is also clear that the rune names change when the values of the staves change. This is most obviously the case with the rune name *ansuz that in Old English became os, just as the associated fourth rune changed in value from a to o. The putative change in value of the thirteenth rune in the English tradition from i to h (or [ç]), however, did not necessitate a similar change in the rune name. This may indicate that the name īh suggested a new value for the yew rune.

The reconstruction of the name yew for the thirteenth rune seems to be corroborated by the Nordic name (mentioned above) and a Gothic name uuær (< *hwair ‘cauldron’) from the Codex Salisburgensis that similarly refers to a newly designated sound (in this case hw). In Gothic the acrophonic principle seems to have provoked a change in the inherited letter name — from *eihws ‘yew’ to *hwair (uuær). Why this change occurred precisely is not clear, but the equation of uuær with *eihwaz and thus the thirteenth rune is supported by the correspondence of every other Gothic letter name to one from the older futhark (except that of ⟨q⟩ which is modelled, as in the English tradition, upon that of ⟨p⟩).

72 The Proto-Germanic reconstruction of the runic letter name, however, is not so clear. Many different forms have been proffered, most runologists accepting an ambivalent *i(h)waz. Alfred Bammesberger has reconstructed two separate lexemes, *īwa- and *īha-, but evidence from outside Germanic suggests a different explanation. 74 Clearly the Indo-European root is...
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*ei-* and the Old English names ēoh and ēh suggest a voiceless velar enlargement. Yet this seems to appear only in Germanic; with the extension *-w-*, the term already means ‘yew’ (or at least ‘red plant’) in other Indo-European languages: cf. OE ēh, ēoh, ēw, ēow, ēo, OHG īha, ēwa, ēga, OS (pl.) ēchas, ON yr; Gaulish ivo-, Old Irish eó, í, Middle Welsh ywen, Old Cornish īuin, Breton ivin (< *īwo-); Old Prussian īavis ‘yew’, Lithuanian īvai ‘black alder’, Latvian īva ‘bird-cherry’, Old Czech jīva, Russian īva, Serbo-Croatian īva ‘willow’ (< *īwa); Latin īva ‘bunch of grapes, vine’, Greek oĩn, őn, őka ‘mountain ash’ (< *oiwa); and Armenian aygi ‘grapevine’ (< *oiwiyā). In fact Sanskrit eīto ‘coloured’ and Hittite GIŠe(y)a(n)- ‘sacred evergreen’ (< the Sumerogram for ‘tree’ + *ēvo-) suggest that *-w-* produces the meaning ‘yew, red plant’ from the root *ei-* ‘red, mottled, yellow’.75 These cognate forms indicate a late Indo-European formation *ei-wo- (with o-grade ablaut in Armenian and Greek, zero grade in Celtic) or as Connolly proposes perhaps a laryngealised reconstruction *H(e)Hi-wo-.76 As there are in fact three attested Germanic forms, *īwa-, *īga- and *īha-, it has been suggested (Walde and Pokorny 1927–32:1. 165) that -g- and -h- derived from a strengthening of original -w- similar to that seen in Jugend (vs. Latin juvenitus). The two velar extensions (the Old High German lenis velar is supported by an Old English toponymic element *īg),77 however, suggest a lenition (of -h- > -g-) typical of that produced by Verner’s law.

An Indo-European *H(e)Hi- might be used to justify both the old theory that the thirteenth rune represented some sort of /e(:)/ as well as Connolly’s laryngealist value /h(ː)/ (but not Antonsen’s structuralist /e:/). Yet the reconstruction of this name is not at all unproblematic. Did the rune name only ever show the velar extension? We have no sure employment of the rune as shorthand for its name which might confirm its name as we have for the Ing rune, and the comparative Gothic and Nordic evidence is unclear. In fact the Gothic names might not even be authentic, although they do seem to show specifically Gothic characteristics.78 Only the Old English evidence is categorical: the English name is ēoh or ēh, whereas the usual Anglo-Saxon name for the yew was ēo, ēow or ēw.


As we have already seen, the runic letter name probably influenced the phonological value given to \( \text{ᚦ} ~ \text{ᛇ} \) in Old English manuscripts. The original name of the rune cannot be reconstructed without some ambiguity, but given the evidence of at least two Continental inscriptions with a value of \( i \), the name *īhaz* is eminently plausible. Indeed, as the lexeme *īh* only seems to have survived into Old English to represent the name of this rune, the fact that this rune is not signified by the usual Old English term for ‘yew’ points to both the importance and antiquity of this name.

Yet the name *īh* is but one of a number of rune names beginning with *i*. The other two are that of the ice rune (ᚳ), clearly (ultimately) a reflex of archaic Greek iota (also the ancestor of Roman I) and the Ing rune (ᚴ, ᵜ, ᵥ), ultimately derived (it is usually argued) from archaic Greek qoppa (ϙ; cf. Roman Q). If the thirteenth rune bore an acrophonic name then its original value would have been similar in sound to *i*. But if it, like the Ing rune, did not have an acrophonic name, it would surely have originally had the extension which survives in the Old English tradition. The survival of the medial velar value in the name recorded in English manuscripts may have been ensured by a cognisance of the consonantal value allowed for this rune, even though it seems only to appear at a later date than the vocalic. The fact that the thirteenth rune never appears in initial position in clearly lexical inscriptions is also suggestive of the fricative interpretation of Grønvik and Seebold. Yet although [ç] sometimes appears in opposition to [x] in modern German, few theorists would accept the existence of a PG */ç*/phoneme separate to */h/*. In fact the evidence for a comparatively late palatalisation of *h* in English even puts the Proto-Germanic */ç* assumed by Seebold in doubt. Thus this value, like most of the vocalic values promoted for \( \text{ᚦ} \sim \text{ᛇ} \), is merely an allophonic variant of a phoneme more typically represented by a separate staff (i.e. ᵣ, ᵤ) and is, moreover, a doubtful one at that. After all, the employment of a separate character for an allophone of */h* is unparalleled among the Mediterranean scripts. Rather, we would expect the thirteenth rune to have represented a phoneme.

Connolly’s theory has the strength of reconciling the value suggested by the rune name with a phoneme later lost to Germanic. This */ā(:)/ he derives from the influence of a laryngeal, represented as *X* after its vowel-colouring effect had become phonemic (in fact he uses *X* to signify any laryngeal whose description is uncertain). This Germanic laryngeal he suggests was the result of the merger of the proposed Indo-European non-, a- and most of the o-colouring laryngeals, the vocalic effects of which had already become phonemic before the Proto-Germanic period (thus IE */eH₂i*- > PG */aXi*-). He detected the putative presence of this laryngeal while attempting to explain the vagaries of descent of inherited IE */e*, */ei* and */i* among the different Germanic dialects. Indeed similar arguments have been proffered to explain other features such as the irregular velarisation of IE */-w-* in a group of Germanic terms first assembled by Sophus Bugge and the Verschärfung of semivowels in North and East Germanic first identified by Adolf Holtzmann.79 In fact the influence of at least some laryngeals in early Proto-Germanic, at least where Holtzmann’s law is concerned, seems to have been accepted by a majority of theorists.80 Connolly’s value for the thirteenth rune derives


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from an Indo-European element containing a laryngeal we might reconstruct as *\(H_1(e)H_1i\)-, one that probably served as the root of the Indo-European lexeme *yew*.\(^{81}\) All of this, however, assumes that the thirteenth rune is to be derived from some Mediterranean \(\langle i\rangle\) (or \(Z\) substituting for \(Y\)). Yet what if it was in origin an \(\langle h\rangle\)?

As noted before, the vocalic sound which is the earliest surely attested value for this staff supports Connolly’s reconstruction of the thirteenth rune as representing a Proto-Germanic \(\langle i\rangle\) created by the influence of an intervocalic Proto-Germanic laryngeal (the colourless laryngeal surviving into Proto-Germanic only in intervocalic positions).\(^{82}\) Connolly could not prove the existence of this value, however, through an analysis of the inscriptions. This is quite possibly because the use of the thirteenth rune had already changed by the time of its first lexical attestation (i.e. the fourth/fifth century). Connolly also postulates that this Proto-Germanic laryngeal had been lost some time prior to the first attestation of the yew rune. Indeed he proposes that the laryngeal probably disappeared soon after the fixing of Germanic stress on the initial syllable, a development suggested by some investigators not to have been completed until as late as the second century A.D.\(^{83}\) Moreover, Connolly has also sought to demonstrate that a retained laryngeal affected the outcome of Verner’s law in some classes of Germanic strong verbs.\(^{84}\) Many laryngealists solutions merely equate the uncertain with the effect of these rather difficult to isolate phones. Yet granted the indeterminacy of attested values and the evidence of the development of the rune name, the thirteenth rune is not implausibly to be associated with the Proto-Germanic laryngeal proposed as the cause of the developments first delineated by Bugge and Holtzmann that was lost early in the Proto-Germanic period.


\(^{81}\) The precise value and position of the laryngeals in Indo-European *yew*, however, are difficult to determine. Connolly posits two, one initially, one intervocalically, i.e. *\(H_1HiwO\)-*, and considers that at least one was \(H_1\). Heiner Eichner, ‘Die urindogermanische Wurzel *\(H_2\)ew* “hell machen” ’, Die Sprache, 24 (1978), 144–62 (p. 151), instead suggests up to three, one after the diphthong, one in the extension, and possibly a third initially, claiming \(H_1\) or \(H_3\) as the likely candidates for the first two laryngeals, i.e. *\(H_1\?)\(H_2\?)\(H_1\?)we\(H_2\?)*-.

\(^{82}\) Connolly, ‘\(S_2\) and the Laryngeal Theory’, p. 27.

\(^{83}\) e.g. Robert Woodhouse, ‘Verner’s and Thurneysen’s laws in Gothic as Evidence for Obstruent Development in Early Germanic’, Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur, 120 (1998), 194–222.

\(^{84}\) Connolly, ‘“Grammatischer Wechsel” and the Laryngeal Theory’.
most of the early inscriptions and that its attested values may all be secondary. Our only clear
evidence for its original value is its name, a name that seems to have suggested its attested
values, and the possibility (if not likelihood) that the yew rune continues either an archaic
Greek iota, Roman Z substituting for Y or a North Etruscan reflex of digamma in the Germanic
script. When it betrays a consonantal value, it is a velar, as is the usual description of a
laryngeal (thus the transcriptions \(H\) and \(X\)), and a similar value is often thought to have resulted
upon the hardening of a laryngeal in Germanic.\(^85\) As the Indo-European laryngeals in initial
position are usually considered to be the first to have been lost, and as laryngeals probably
only survived into Germanic in word-medial positions, a rune denoting a laryngeal is not likely
to have had an acrophonic name. According to Edward Sapir (1938 = 1990–94:V.126–31),
a laryngeal is often absorbed when in a cluster with a sonorant consonant. Consequently, he
used a typological comparison with similar developments in some American Indian languages
to explain the development of Gk. \(he\) < IE *\(we\)- as an assimilation of voicelessness from
a proximate laryngeal — i.e. IE *\(Hwe\)- > *\(we\)- > \(he\) -. And as has long been suspected, a
similar assimilation may have occurred in Holtzmann’s Verschärfung when \(-Hw\)- and \(-\w H\-
developed to \(-\text{ggw}\)- in North and East Germanic.\(^86\) Moreover, the development of IE *\(w\) -
to \(-g\)- or \(-k\)- first noted by Bugge may also have been influenced by the close presence of
a laryngeal. A similar velarisation of the extension \(-w\)- to \(-h\)- has occurred in some forms of
the Germanic term for ‘yew’, and in fact in some dialects it seems under Verner’s law
to have further developed to \(-g\)-. Indeed the reconstruction of the Gothic name with a
totally unexpected medial \(-hw\)- appears to confirm the presence of a laryngeal preceding the
semivocalic extension in the Proto-Germanic form of the rune name. The effect of laryngeals
on semivowels in Germanic might well vary between dialects (and even within them) as the
Gothic rune name \(sugil\) (cf. OE \(sygel\)) versus Wulfilian \(sauil\) (< IE *\(sH\)\(_2\)uel-*, *\(seH\)\(_2\)ul-*) has
been suggested to show by Winfried Lehmann.\(^87\) And so when this sound was lost, if it had a
Corresponding rune, this staff would probably at first have been associated with \(h\).\(^88\) Thus the
phonological redundancy of the fourteenth rune would soon have become apparent, only its
name remaining (as the pairs of names were probably learned as a mnemonic),\(^89\) and a new
value, \(i\), might well have become associated with this rune, a value derived from its name.

\(^85\) And this laryngeal would most probably be \(H\_3\), perhaps a pharyngealised voiceless velar fricative, possibly with
some labial quality. Indeed, in Connolly’s reconstruction \(H\_1\) and \(H\_2\) seem to have already been lost or had merged
with \(H\_3\) by this time, and so his \(X\) would probably have had a description similar to \(H\_3\).

\(^86\) See Henry Lee Smith, ‘The Verschärfung in Germanic’; Austin, ‘A Corollary to the Germanic Verschärfung’;
Austin, ‘Germanic Reflexes of Indo-European -\(H\)\(_y\)- and -\(H\)\(_w\)-’; Polomé, ‘A West Germanic Reflex of the
212–23.

\(^87\) Lehmann, \(\text{Proto-Indo-European Phonology}\), p. 49; cf. Eric P. Hamp, ‘\(\text{Indo-European *au before Consonant in}
British and Indo-European “Sun”}\’, \textit{Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies}, 26 (1975), 97–102; Mees, ‘Runo-
Gothica: The Runes and the Origin of Wulfla’s Script’, p. 60.

\(^88\) Cf. Armenian, where inherited initial \(H\_2\) and \(H\_3\) produce \(h\)-, and Hittite, where the reflex of \(H\_2\) (and occasionally
\(H\_3\)) is represented by \(h\), a character that usually describes a voiceless velar fricative, but in Akkadian represented
values that continued various Proto-Semitic velar fricatives, laryngeals and pharyngeals: \textit{An Introduction to the
Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages: Phonology and Morphology}, ed. by Sabatino Moscati,
Nature of the \(\text{Proto-Indo-European Laryngeals}\)’, in \textit{The New Sound of Indo-European: Essays in Phonological
de Gruyter, 1989), pp. 23–33.

The English manuscript tradition quite clearly indicates that two values were associated with the thirteenth rune and the evidence of the inscriptions seems to mirror this ambivalence. Evidently some inscribers remembered the association with $h$ as recorded in the velarity of the medial consonant of the rune name; others derived a value $i$ from the acrophonic principle of most of the other names. After the last Proto-Germanic laryngeal was lost, it is possible that its approximate value may have been retained in its runic letter name which in the English tradition always contains the velar as opposed to semivocalic extension that is exclusive to the Germanic terms for ‘yew’.

Erik Brate was the first to posit that the medial value of the associated rune name may have been the original value of the thirteenth staff.\(^{90}\) Eduard Sievers tentatively modified Brate’s value $\varsigma$ to $hw$, clearly after considering the Gothic evidence. This solution was subsequently sponsored by Bruce Dickins and C. L. Wrenn.\(^{91}\) Other investigations attempting to find a unique vocalic value for the yew rune have proved unsatisfactory, employing controversial descriptions of the vocalic system, or promoting values which are surely only allophonic realisations of one of the Proto-Germanic vowel phonemes usually accepted by theorists. A laryngeal value for this rune, however, reconciles the evidence of the rune name, the evidence suggested by a North Etruscan prototype for the runic script, and relies on an identity with a Proto-Germanic phoneme that was lost by the time of the dialectal period.

The major problem with such an identity, however, is that there is no clear evidence that the laryngeals reconstructed for Indo-European lasted long enough in Germanic to have required separate representation in the futhark. Not even a hint of a laryngeal has been detected so far in the earliest evidence from classical sources, the Negau (Ženjak) B inscription (the form TEIVA perhaps being especially relevant to a consideration of an early Germanic *eiwaz); or indeed the early runic inscriptions themselves. Moreover, as runic $t$ and $b$, derived (ultimately) from archaic Greek tau and beta, still represent $t$ and $b$, and the inherited archaic Greek heta has retained its value as the Germanic staff $h$, the Germanic adoption of these letters must post-date the first effecting of Grimm’s law; and clearly, laryngeals have no effect on the operation of the Common Germanic sound shift (cf. esp. Greek $κεφαλή$, Lat. caput, ON hofud, OE heafod, Goth. haubip, OS hobit, OHG houbit < IE *kepH- ‘head’). The variation between voiced and voiceless forms in the extension of the rune name where *$w$- was velarised, if not evidence for such velarisation occurring at different times in different dialects, may well derive from the different accentuation in the forms of the term that would have applied before the loss of nominal ablaut in Germanic: i.e. *$H₁eũi-(H)wo-/H₁(e)i-(H)wό- > *tga-liha-. As Bammesberger has suggested, there remains the possibility of the influence of a semantically separate vrddhī formation (putatively meaning ‘yew wood’) in early Germanic as a lengthened-grade form of yew might well have existed in Proto-Germanic.\(^{92}\) Yet not only are such formations rare in Germanic, vrddhī constructions are not attested for this lexeme in other Indo-European dialects. Indeed, we might even expect formations influenced


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by an *ēígwɑ- to show some variation between high and middle vowels in the root given the connection between *ēi and the problematic ē2 promoted by some authors. 93 The laryngealist explanation of velarisation in some Germanic forms, given no evidence for a medial laryngeal in their Indo-European cognates, remains unconvincing. Moreover the Verschärfung and the velarisations of *-w- to -g- and -k- first collected by Bugge might equally be explained as the result of an expressive process similar to the gemination of West Germanic. 94

A close e value was that which originally led to the transcription ē. Yet given the attestations as i, surely Krause’s ī remains more practical wherever the thirteenth rune is attested as a vowel. And surely a transcription c is quite inadequate for this rune when it represents a consonant as its palatal status is far from clear. Similarly, the less phonologically judgemental transcription preferred latterly by Page unfortunately bears the connotation of Connolly’s (IPA) value /ɨ(ː)/ and there seems little point in adding to the already idiosyncratic inventory of Germanic phonological transcriptions by employing the well-established IPA symbol i to refer to something quite different as would Page. 95 Yet Dickins’s transcription ‘ʒ’ seems in part to represent a relationship of runic āoh to Middle English yogh. Indeed the variable Middle English use of (ʒ) (for the palatal semivowel and both voiced, and finally and before t, also voiceless fricatives) appears somewhat to parallel that of the earlier runic sign. Moreover, the relationship between the two names proposed by Anna Pauæs, i.e. āoh > *yoh > yogh in parallel to the developments of the names of ME thorn and wynn from those of runic þ and w, 96 is quite possible when we consider that a similar vocalic development had occurred in some toponyms by the Middle English period, 97 and that the final -l might well have been re-interpreted as a devoiced final -g. Her contention that the shape of the yew rune can be seen reflected in (ʒ) is also strengthened by a preponderance of reversed (1) instances of the rune in the later English tradition as is represented by the two rune-row inscriptions and the coin legends, and the confusion of the thirteenth rune with ⟨z⟩ in the manuscript futhorc of the Codex Cotton Otho B.x. In fact given that ⟨þ⟩ clearly derives from runic þ, and ⟨ƿ⟩ equally from runic w, it seems rather unlikely that (ʒ) merely represents a variant of scribal ⟨g⟩ as was argued by Henry Bradley — yogh instead appears to represent a conflation of miniscule ⟨g⟩ and runic l. 98 So despite the inevitable confusion with the IPA value [ʒ] or Middle English gh, we might prefer to maintain the Old English transcription of Dickins whenever the rune

can be shown to represent a consonant and Krause’s ɨ elsewhere, rather than Page’s somewhat unfortunate ‘ɨ’.\textsuperscript{99}

In runic, a second inherited sign for h would appear to have been redundant. It seems likely that it would have been readily re-employed for another consonantal value if one was required to represent early Germanic. Yet there is no evidence of a palatal allophone of PG */h/ at such an early stage, let alone a */ç/ phoneme. Moreover, as Markey has pointed out, the North Etruscan alphabet used to record Venetic developed an additional iota which could well be the prototype of runic ɨ:\textsuperscript{100} this punctuated iota (ɨ-) developed a graphemic independence from the usual Venetic iota as it had come to form the second part of the Venetic perigram for /ɨ/; i.e. an earlier vh had been replaced by a spelling vɨ- after h had become redundant phonologically in Venetic.\textsuperscript{101} It may well, then, have come to be associated with the Rhaetic ᛇ as both were, in effect, secondary forms of digamma. The remarkable variation in inherited kappa in the North Etruscan alphabet used in the Val Camonica includes forms reminiscent of the Venetic ii perigram (many even reduced in size) and it is obvious that this doubling of iota (used to indicate palatal glides in Venetic) can explain the formation of runic ɨ.\textsuperscript{102} Indeed the few inscriptions where these Camunic ‘kappas’ appear also make much more sense phonologically if a semivocalic value is assumed for this runic j-like letter: compare Piancogno’s IIIANOĄ,\textsuperscript{103} i.e. I[I]JANOĄ rather than KKANOĄ, and perhaps Pla d’Ort’s ZEI×SIJAŬ (ZEI×SIHIAŬ) rather than ZEI×SIKAŬ.\textsuperscript{104} The letter transcribed as Í, the ‘Claudian ɨ’ known from other epichoric Italian traditions, also appears in a Camunic inscription where it clearly indicates a glide, i.e. in EŠUI, ‘to Esus’ (؟),\textsuperscript{105} and some of the abecedaria from Foppo di Nadro suggest that Í may have gradually usurped the position of kši in the Camunic ordering.\textsuperscript{106} The appearance of both Í and II in Camunic, the North Etruscan tradition long considered to be closest to runic, suggests two new variants of iota were added to the prototype upon which the runes may have been based, one replacing a redundant sibilant character, the other usurping the grapheme which had already come to serve in some Rhaetic centres as a disambiguating replacement for digamma in light of the development of an ‘open’ form of alpha. A comparatively late Camunic graph identical in form to the yew rune has of course been isolated and although it is both of unclear phonological value and origin, it may well be that it has replaced the earlier Camunic ‘Claudian ɨ’ (i.e. ɨ), perhaps under Venetic influence. Both variant i-graphs (which under a North Etruscan thesis may have produced runic j and ɨ) ultimately seem to be modelled on orthographical developments in Venetic. Yet they still appear to have entered the prototype upon which the runes are based (given a North Etruscan derivation) as if it were that of the Val Camonica rather than a more easterly tradition.

\textsuperscript{100} Markey, ‘A Tale of Two Helmets’, pp. 91–92.
\textsuperscript{103} Maria Grazia Tibiletti Bruno, ‘Nuove iscrizioni camune’, \textit{Quaderni camuni}, 49–50 (1990), 29–169 (no. PC 35a, 47).
\textsuperscript{104} Tibiletti Bruno, ‘Nuove iscrizioni camune’, no. Pl. 2b,64.
\textsuperscript{106} Tibiletti Bruno, ‘Nuove iscrizioni camune’, nos FN 4d,60; 5e,61; and 6f,62.

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Yet few runologists support a North Etruscan origin for the runes today, so like a laryngeal explanation for the thirteenth rune, a derivation of the yew rune from an archaic *i/h* grapheme might seem rather speculative and hence unlikely. After all, the later English and Gothic velar values associated with the letter name *yew* may only have arisen after the redundancy of what had become a second rune for *i* was recognised, the medial values suggested by the rune name being adopted independently. Nonetheless there is something of a tradition of confluence between descendants of iota and heta and the values *i* and *h* in many Mediterranean orthographies: recall the orthographical heta~iota variation in Venetic (i.e. *vh-v*i- for *f*), Messapic displays a similar bivalency for heta (i.e. Anlaut *h*~Inlaut *y*-)107 and there is even a formal confusion between some forms of ⟨h⟩ and ⟨i⟩ both in epigraphical Latin (i.e. of half-H and Claudian *i*) and archaic Greek (heta/eta-cum-spiritus asper and iota). Indeed not only is half-H a particularly notable feature of Rhenish epigraphy, the appearance of a variation between -EI-, -I- and -E- attested in Germano-Roman material from the Rhineland is also reminiscent of what might be happening with the yew rune as this variation is usually concomitant with a following -H-.108 Given the frequency of suffixal *-īg* in Germanic, *īgaz*/*īhaz* would also seem a likely name for a rune connected with this sequence.109 Nevertheless the comparatively late emergence of velar values in Germanic use for the thirteenth rune suggest that the bivalency in runic was not inherited. In fact it may well have been that much as *ŋ* had come to represent /ing/, *ī* at one stage became a semi-ideographic way of writing /iːg/ (or rather /į̈ːg/).110

Yet despite the rejection here of a laryngealist approach to the problem of the origin of the rune itself, of all the explanations for the development of velarity in the three attested Northwest Germanic terms for ‘yew’, only the ones based in the laryngeal theory seem to offer much promise. Seebold’s explanation for the terms assembled by Bugge can only explain the underlying -w- > -g- (and a further devoicing of -g- > -h- seems unparallelled; indeed surely the opposite development would be more likely in a language where fricatives were subject to positional voicing).111 Similarly, Voyles’s reliance on an IE *-g*- infix cannot apply to *īhaz* and Franz Specht’s reliance on an alternation of *-w-* and *-k-* at the Indo-European level has no broadly accepted parallels.112 Criticising Wren, Page even went so far as to dispute the reconstruction *īhwaiz* completely, but offered no explanation for the crucial emergence of voiceless velarity.113 It has long been recognised that Germanic alternations of -w-, -g- and -h-can be linked to the inconsistent development of inherited labiovelars, however,114 a linkage which accords well with the connection often assumed between the thirteenth rune and Gothic ⟨h⟩.

108 Mees, ‘Early Rhineland Germanic’.
110 And in late Gothic the name *ēihws* appears to have been surrendered in favour of a more suitably acrophonic *ēwear > uu aer*. Indeed given developments such as *tēws > tzc, ĺih̄ > tth* and *āihws > eyz* among the other *Codex Salisburgensis* names, *ēihws* might well otherwise have produced a homonym to the name for Gothic ⟨e⟩; see Mees, *Runo-Gothica: The Runes and the Origin of Wulfla’s Script*, pp. 60–62.
111 Seebold, ‘Die Übergang von idg. -w- zu germ. -k- und -g-‘.
Karl Brunner lists examples of this alternation such as West Saxon *bræw*, Anglian *brēg*, Gothic (dat.) *braha* ‘brew’ (< IE *bhreu-*) and Old English *hweogol*, *hweowel*, *hwēol*, *hweohhol* ‘wheel’ (< IE *kweɯl-*) where delabialisation has occurred before what in Indo-European were accented back vowels (including PG *ō < IE *ā*). Nevertheless, the development in *yew* is also paralleled at least in part by occasional forms where velarity develops from a labial glide in strikingly similar variants such as OE *nīge* and *nīwe* ‘new’ (cf. OFris. *ny*, OS *nigi*, runic Norse *niuha*, PG *niuʃaz* < IE *newios*), OE *hīgan*, *hīgu* and *hīwan* ‘family’ (< IE *k̑eɯo-*) and OE *Tīg* for the usual *Tīw* (PG *Tīwaz* < IE *Deiwos*). Yet it is also clear that glides (G) sometimes develop to obstruents (C — although still maintaining an articulatory feature developed from the glide) in some instances where syllable contacts of an unstable nature have arisen upon the loss of a laryngeal (H). Thus in cases of Holtzmann’s *Verschärfung*, the loss of a laryngeal in structures such as VG$HV$ would have produced the unwieldy syllabification *VG$S$V*; and so instead of merely resyllabifying, the glide has been geminated across the syllable boundary ($) and ‘sharpened’, producing VC$C$G$V$ (e.g. IE *bheu$H$_2-eye* > PG *big$g$-ī* > ON *byggvi*). Of course the sharpening of glides to obstruents is suggested in this model to be due to an assimilation from a proximate laryngeal. Yet whatever the merits of the putative laryngeal assimilation (and even the laryngealists admit that similar developments occur in modern Faroese long after the loss of the Indo-European laryngeals), the syllable contact approach does seem to provide the key to the development of the medial variability of Germanic *yew*. Clearly, under this approach a Proto-Germanic *ei$waz* might well develop to *ei$h^w_1az*, the sharpening of the semivowel serving to lower the sonority of the onset of the second syllable (perhaps even under the influence of the loss of a putative laryngeal). And a Proto-Germanic *ei$h^w_2az* might well produce the later variants *i$h^w_1az* (in Gothic, cf. *brahua*), *īhaz* (cf. OE *hweohhol*) and a Vernerised *īgaz* (cf. Angl. *brēg*, OE *hweogol*).

Yet the best evidence for an additional phoneme in Proto-Germanic that is reminiscent of attested values of the yew rune is the second- and third-century EI spellings attested in Germano-Roman theonyms recorded on votive epigraphs from the Rhineland. After all, the earliest evidence for the value of the thirteenth rune unmistakably points to a high front vowel — its attestations as a fricative are all appreciably later. The attested values were probably influenced by the yew-rune’s letter name, and although the term for ‘yew’ is itself somewhat problematic, it is far from clear that the medial value in its letter name is the original value of this rune. The resort to the laryngeal theory to explain the problem of the Germanic front vowels has produced results no more conclusive than have similar explanations for other unexpected variations in the phonological development of Germanic. And neither have investigations of putative model alphabets proved categorical in this regard. In contrast, the votive epigraphs from the Rhineland which are contemporary with the earliest runic inscriptions exhibit evidence for a variability in the representation of Germanic front vowels similar to that which has long been seen as the likely origin of the yew rune. The use of the digraph EI to signal a variation in timbre from those vowels typically represented by I and  

116 Mees, ‘The Stentofthen Dedication and Sacral Kingship’.
The Yew Rune, Yogh and Yew

E is the result of the monophthongisation of inherited *ei* in Greek and Latin. Nonetheless a monophthongisation cannot be the cause of all of the similar Rhenish spellings — Rhenish -EIH- clearly continues *-īg- rather than *-eig-. Instead, this variation must stem from a varying description analogous to the Greek and Latin values, yet derived from some other development — presumably an a-umlaut that was restricted to secondarily stressed *ī. And if such variations do result from a third early Germanic high front vowel phoneme intermediate between /eː/ and /iː/ (perhaps also to be linked with the development of the controversial *ēz), then surely this is the original value of the thirteenth rune.

Indeed it is not difficult to see how a digraphic spelling might have been thought better replaced by a (slightly confused) reuse of one of the two Greek letters at the end of the Roman alphabet (i.e. Y or Z) by an early Germanic writer. The Germano-Roman EI spellings only occur medially, however, and they are only employed in a regular manner when they appear in the later parts of polysyllabic Germano-Roman forms. In fact there is no evidence from anywhere in early runic epigraphy that an additional vowel phoneme of this kind needs to be reconstructed for Early Nordic. Hence the reasonable suspicion remains that just as the medial -w- in the inherited Proto-Germanic form *eiwaz underwent sharpening in some Germanic dialects to *īh(w)az and *īg(w)az, a similar development is attested by the phonological values associated with the yew rune in later texts.

Much as it is only in the Old English tradition that the Ing rune has assumed an unambiguously agma-like role, it may well be that the Anglo-Saxon use of the yew rune represents some sort of standardisation of the function of this troublesome character. The name *eiwaz ‘yew’ contains a syllable juncture of the type that can lead to sharpening in Germanic and such a value is reminiscent of those represented by the Middle English letter yogh. If the yew rune’s original function was to indicate (relatively unsystematic) articulatory strengthenings of semivowels, then it would not be too surprising to witness its later attested phonological indeterminacy. In fact its association with [x] and [ç] suggests that it may originally have represented a lip-rounded laryngeal or glottal fricative (as ‘sharpening’ is most commonly associated with labiovelar environments) not too dissimilar to Connolly’s -X-(or rather -Xw-), its use being confined to /i(ː)/ in dialects which had lost this phonological segment. Given its name and the attested later values, it would seem not unwarranted to assume that the yew rune’s original function was to indicate a (perhaps only preliminarily) sharpened glide of the type first studied by Holtzmann and Bugge.