



Fact Sheet:

Runes

HISTORY, MODERN USE, MISAPPROPRIATION, AND RESPONSIBLE REHABILITATION

Content warning: Some topics and symbols discussed and depicted in this fact sheet are harmful. They are depicted here for educational and awareness purposes. Only proceed if you feel comfortable to do so. The HCC has a mandate to educate the public on matters concerning Heathenry in Canada with the ethical responsibility to do so through compassion and understanding.

The Heathen Confederation of Canada (HCC) is issuing this fact sheet to provide clarity and context on **runes**. While runes have deep historical and cultural significance within Heathen traditions, they have been subject to misunderstanding and misappropriation for hateful purposes.

This document is designed to educate both Heathens and the wider public by presenting accurate information, dispelling common misconceptions, and outlining the difference between authentic practice and hateful misappropriation.

By producing this fact sheet, the HCC affirms its commitment to safeguarding our social, religious and cultural expression(s) by promoting responsible understanding, and supporting the positive, healthy growth of Heathenry in Canada.

Runes are an ancient writing system of the Germanic peoples, used for over a thousand years in both everyday and sacred contexts. Today, they remain important cultural and religious symbols for Modern Germanic Heathens. While some runes have been misused by extremist groups, their meaning cannot be judged in isolation — **context matters**. The Heathen Confederation of Canada (HCC) works to educate the public, counter misuse, and model respectful, historically informed use, ensuring **runes** remain symbols of a shared culture and never for hate.

Runes first appeared around 150–200 CE. The earliest form, the **Elder Futhark**, consisted of 24 characters, often divided into three groups called *ætt*s. Runes were carved into stone, bone, wood, and metal. They were used in memorials, ownership marks, dedications, as well as in works of healing and other magical purposes.

Runes carry both practical and sacred purposes, reflecting daily life, law, spirituality, and commemoration. They are an enduring part of Germanic and Heathen culture.

							
F (<u>f</u> ee)	U (<u>u</u> oot)	TH (<u>th</u> ree)	A (<u>f</u> ather)	R (<u>r</u> ed)	C/K (<u>k</u> ind)	G (<u>g</u> ood)	W (<u>w</u> in)
Fehu	Uruz	Thurisaz	Ansuz	Raido	Kenaz	Gebo	Wunjo
"wealth/cattle"	"aurochs"	"Thurs"	"a God"	"ride/journey"	"torch/ulcer"	"gift"	"joy"
							
H (<u>h</u> ello)	N (<u>n</u> ice)	I (<u>e</u> ye)	J (<u>y</u> es)	EI (<u>c</u> at)	P (<u>p</u> lay)	-Z (<u>h</u> as)	S (<u>s</u> now)
Hagalaz	Naudiz	Isaz	Jera	Eiwaz	Pertho	Algiz	Sowilo
"hail(storm)"	"need"	"ice"	"year/harvest"	"yew"	"lot cup/pear tree"	"elk-sedge/protection"	"sun"
							
T (<u>t</u> ake)	B (<u>b</u> ox)	E (<u>b</u> ait)	M (<u>m</u> ore)	L (<u>l</u> ike)	-NG (<u>s</u> ing)	D (<u>d</u> o)	O (<u>o</u> pen)
Tiwaz	Berkana	Ehwaz	Mannaz	Laguz	Ingwaz	Dagaz	Othala
"Týr/law/justice"	"birch"	"horse"	"man(kind)"	"lake/leek"	"Ing/fertility"	"day"	"inheritance/estate"

Modern scholarship **studies runes** linguistically and archaeologically, and museums preserve them as cultural artifacts.

For Modern Germanic Heathens, runes are **important symbols** used in ritual, art, jewelry, tattoos, and identity.

Some Heathens use rune casting for **divination**, a modern adaptation of ancient attitudes and practices.

Runes also appear widely in **popular culture** such as in books, video games, and films — often stylized in ways that depart from their authentic forms.

Modern Germanic Heathenry consists of religious behaviours, values, and beliefs which are modeled upon and associated with those of ancient Germanic Heathens. The **Heathen Confederation of Canada** represents an **inclusive, intelligent and respectful** Heathenry in Canada.

Certain runes have been **misappropriated and misused by racists, hate and extremist groups**. Beginning in the early 20th century and reinforced by Nazi Germany, this misuse not only distorts perceptions on their present use by Heathens, but their ancient context as well. The harm this causes continues today.

Runes most often misappropriated and misused for hate include:

- Othala: Inheritance or estate → misused for “*blood and soil*” ideology.
ODAL
- Sowilo: Sun → Stylized into SS lightning bolts for “*racial purity*”.
Doppel Siegrune (SS)
- Tiwaz: Law and justice → misused as a *militancy signifier*.
TYR
- Algiz: Elk-sedge or protection → misused as nationalist badge for “*honour*”.
ELHAS



‘ODAL’



‘SS’



‘TYR’



‘ELHAS’

Stylization matters. Extremist misuse often thickens rune lines, exaggerates angles, or adds a “lightning bolt” effect, frequently combined with 20th century nationalistic propaganda color schemes — white, red and Black. These designs are modern distortions for racist and hateful purposes, not authentic to their historic usage.

Runes are easily manipulated, recontextualized and misused to hateful ends by individuals who espouse hateful ideologies. They are simple symbols which can hold a lot of meaning. Their use can be deeply profound and individualistic as well as being revered by larger Modern Germanic Heathen collectives.

Runes **cannot be judged in isolation**. Public officials, educators, and law enforcement must not assume extremist affiliation simply because a rune is displayed.

- Extremist meaning arises only when runes appear **with clear hate symbols, slogans, or group identifiers**.
- Many Canadians, not just Heathens, display runes for religious, magical, cultural, or artistic reasons — *Freedom of expression* is protected under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Racist Rune Rows & Hate Symbols

There are rune rows which were **fabricated** during the German Romanticism Period (late 18th to late 19th century) and later still under the Nazi Regime, which when displayed today evoke both the **style** and **context** necessary to identify them. Racism and hate are their **original intent**.

Unfortunately, some of the individual runes therein are indistinguishable from historic runes and if they are displayed on their own, further discernment is required to identify them as hateful.

Armanen Runes

The Armanen Runes were created in 1908 by Guido von List as an ethno-mystical system, not based on historical usage. Later adopted by Nazi occultists, to profess hate-based ideologies. Esoteric Nazism, which grew from this, is a modern, hateful distortion and **is not** a legitimate part of any inclusive Heathen tradition.

Armanen Runes — or a variation called Wiligut Runes (developed by Karl Wiligut) — are used by racist and, at times, extremist individuals and groups labeling themselves as “Odinists” or “Wotanists.”

Nihilistic neo-Nazi extremists also use variants of these runes in their violent imagery.

					
Fa	Ur	Thurs	Os	Rit	Ka
					
Hagal	Not	Is	Ar	Sig	Tyr
					
Bar	Laf	Man	Yr	Eh	Gibor



Swastika (“Fylfot”)



Wolfsangel



Schwarze Sonne



Broken Sun Cross

Although there are historical variations of the swastika and wolfsangel (similar in shape to Gibor) in pre-Nazi Europe, the extreme hate associated with these symbols — both during the lead-up to and throughout World War II, as well as their continued use today — places them **beyond rehabilitation**. They should always be treated as symbols of hate, especially when paired with any Germanic aesthetic. The *Schwarze Sonne* (Black Sun) and the “Broken Sun Cross” are fabrications rooted in Nazi ideology and must likewise be recognized as **symbols of hate**. When any of these four symbols appear alongside runes, the context is unmistakably one of hate and is fundamentally incompatible with any form of positive, healthy, and inclusive Heathenry.

The Heathen Confederation of Canada affirms that:

- We, as Modern Germanic Heathens, **accept responsibility** to counter extremist misuse of runes through advocacy.
- We must **educate the public** about their authentic historical, cultural, and religious meanings.
- We must **model inclusive and respectful use** in our practices and expect the same of our peers.

Verification Process

To help distinguish inclusive religious and cultural use from hateful misuse, we recommend the following **three-step verification process** that anyone can use:

1. Identify the Rune(s)

- Confirm which rune(s) is/are being depicted and compare them against an authoritative Elder (or Younger) Futhark chart **as found on P.2**.
- Note whether the rune(s) appear in their **historic style** or if they are stylized in a **thick, angular, or lightning-bolt format** reminiscent of Nazi or neo-Nazi aesthetics.

2. Check for Accompanying Context

- Look for **accompanying hate slogans**, coded numbers, or extremist identifiers (e.g., “88,” “14,” *WPWW*, swastika, wolfsangel, or hate-group acronyms).
- Consider the **intent**: are the rune(s) used in a ritual, scholarship, artistic, or personally expressive purpose; or are they being used to promote hatred, violent extremism, xenophobia, ethnic chauvinism, or racial exclusion?

3. Assess the Setting

- Are the rune(s) being used in a **positive setting**: such as in an inclusive Heathen gathering, a cultural event or an artistic work?
- If the setting is **overtly and undeniable hateful**, the guidance is clear: **do not associate with those persons or groups in any situation it can be avoided, especially within a Heathen context.**

Our Commitment

We acknowledge the part some runes have caused when misused for hate, and we work towards their responsible rehabilitation.

Our goal is to promote a healthy, respectful use of runes as symbols of a shared cultural expression, never for hate.

Although there are ancient Germanic symbols which at one point held deep cultural significance for Heathens, some of these are beyond our desire and capacity to rehabilitate.

The use of these hate symbols are anathema to an inclusive, respectful and intelligent Heathenry.

the HCC is to provide the best representation of inclusive Heathenry in Canada at the national level and abroad to other Heathens and non-Heathens alike by: *a. Building bridges of understanding between the HCC and other cultural and religious groups, whether they identify as Heathens or not; b. Engaging with academics of various fields of interest for the furtherance of Heathenry in Canada; c. Representing a Heathenry in Canada which is inclusive, respectful and intelligent; d. Engaging with HCC members to capture representational data and use that data to further the understanding of Heathenry in Canada; e. Engaging with the media and government officials where it is felt a clear statement or position must be taken by the HCC for the good of Heathenry in Canada and the HCC; f. Assist authorities in cases of lawless or criminal activities perpetrated by Heathens in Canada where such lawlessness or criminal activity misrepresents Heathenry in Canada or perpetuates hate towards others; g. Engage with all levels of government on regulations and legislation which is relevant to minority religious groups.*