Gnostic Runology – Runes as "Religious-Concept Forms"

http://www.GnosticStudies.org/Runes

Friedrich Fischbach's Little Booklet on the Runes

Friedrich Fischbach (1839-1908) was a German textile designer. In 1862 he moved to Vienna where he was a decorator & designer. While there, he prepared drawings for the collection of pattern designs in the Austrian Museum. In 1870, he became a teacher of ornamentation at the Royal Academy in Hanau, Germany. Then, from 1883 to 1888, he served as director of the newly organized Industrial Art School of St. Gall in Switzerland, before moving back to Germany in 1889.

Fischbach founded many societies for the advancement of industrial art and, through his work, he exercised a great influence on textile designing in Germany. In 1909, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York City, acquired his surviving collection of antique embroideries and fabrics.

Towards the end of his life, Fischbach began publishing books on Nordic and Germanic Mythology, including a particularly interesting little text where he discusses the Runes, entitled *Origin of Gutenberg's Letters* (1900). In this 44 page booklet, he uses his experience with textile ornamentation to explain his understanding of the Runes and their Religious origin.

Fischbach: From Textile Ornamentation to Religious Symbolism

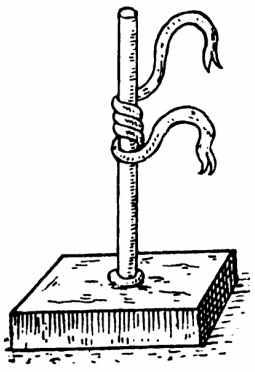
No matter how deeply the Nature of the oldest Runes have been understood, what has remained unclear is what their Forms (in and of themselves) express or mean as individual Characters. **People are too used to seeing Letters only as spiritless Characters...** Thus, a preliminary explanation has to be done, before an unraveling of the Form of the Runes will be possible.

The famous German architect Gottfried Semper (1803-1879) predicted, in the 1850s, that comparative Ornamentation would one day become interrelated with comparative Linguistic Research. This would be possible as soon as there becomes a way to have an overview of the most important Ornaments from all time periods and all countries. Semper emphasized that before Scripts and Figures existed, discoveries about the views, and especially the Religion, of the Ancients were accessible through their sacred Symbolic-Ornaments [*heilige Symbol-Ornamente*].

When Fischbach discovered the relationship of old Peruvian Textile-Ornaments with Oriental Carpet-Patterns, he says he found the Source, Root or Cause in their common Religious symbols, in the communion of Ethical and Religious Perspectives based upon an imperishable concept.

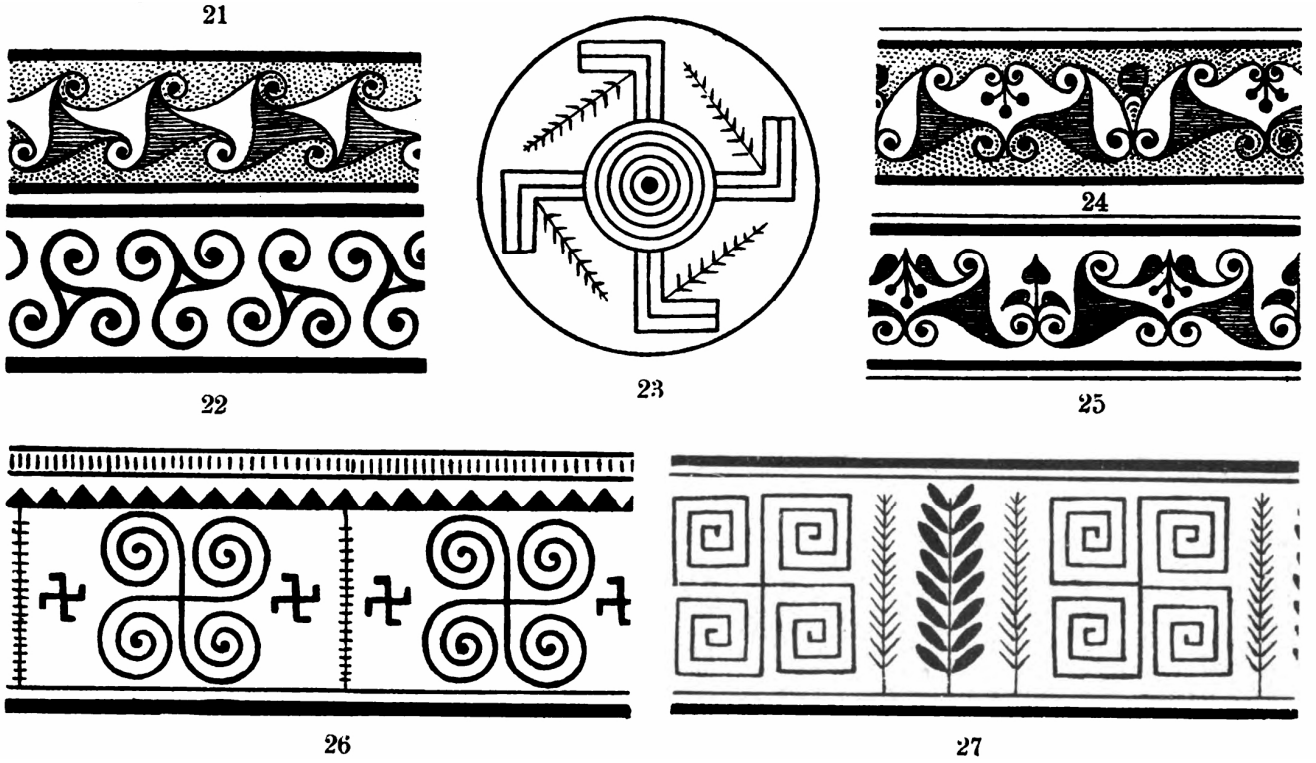
The assumption that primitive geometric Ornaments were only games of the imagination, or Ornamental-Forms [*Zierformen*] of straight, curved and crooked lines, has to be rejected. This is because, **originally, both Form and Concept were united in the most primitive Way.** For the Ancients, Religious-Concepts [*Cultus-Ideen*] were directly connected with their forms of expression, including decorations found on items such as clothing, pottery, rugs, buildings, etc.

The question that necessarily follows is: which Religion or form of Worship was the most common and widespread in Ancient times? "Fire-Worship [*Feuer-Cultus*] is, indisputably, the most prominent", Fischbach says, "even if Animism is older".

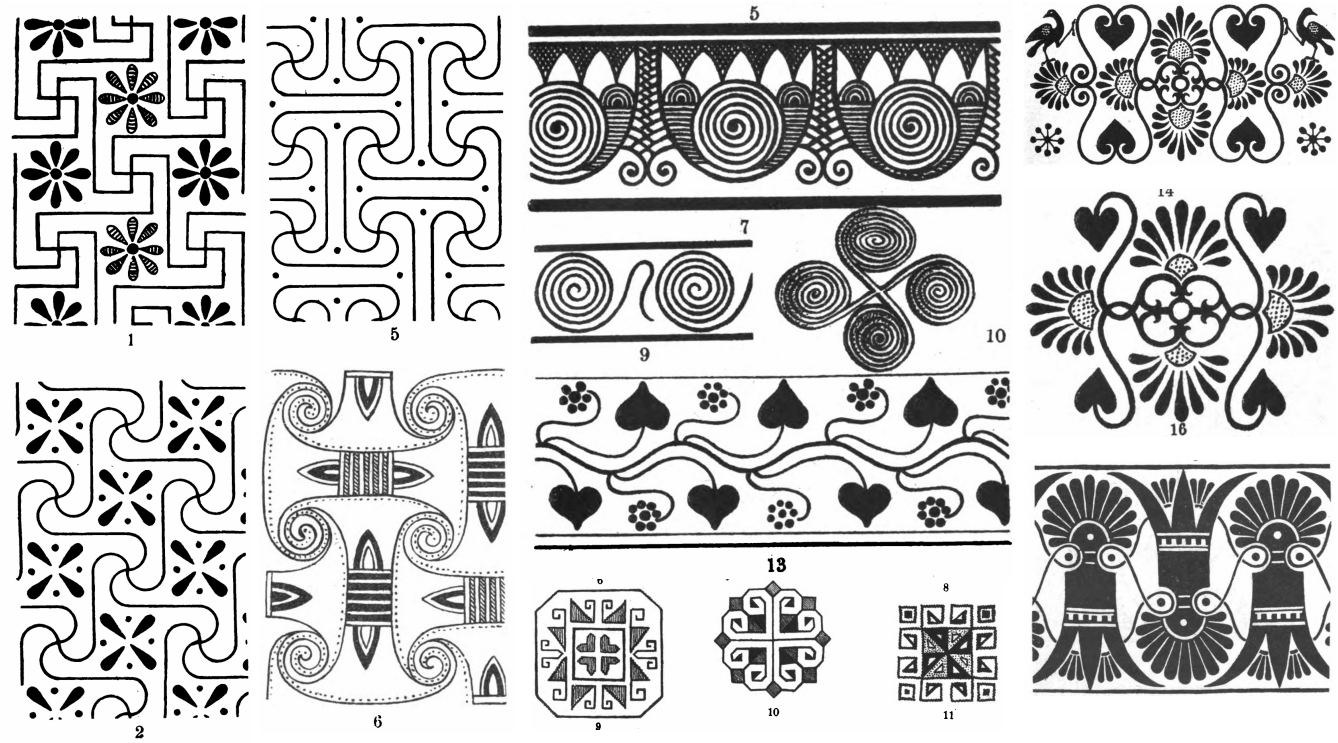


In the back of his booklet, Fischbach gives 16 plates as the proof that "these Ornaments are (for the most part) to be traced back to devices for Fire-Production". These devices, in general, are often referred to as **the 'Fire-Drill [*Feuerbohrer*]'** and, by using these primitive devices, "the sacred Fire is generated through rubbing", often via a spinning action.

This spinning action, used to create the sacred Fire, is symbolized in Ornamental-Forms through: spirals, interlaced or interwoven lines, as well as crosses, including 'spinning' or 'rotating' crosses [*Drehkreuzen*] (such as the well known Swastika).



Other related symbols that are shown in Ornamental-Forms are the Fire-Flower [*Feuerblume*] (which Fischbach equates with a "Palmette" or ornamental flower) and the Fire-Bird [*Feuervogel*].



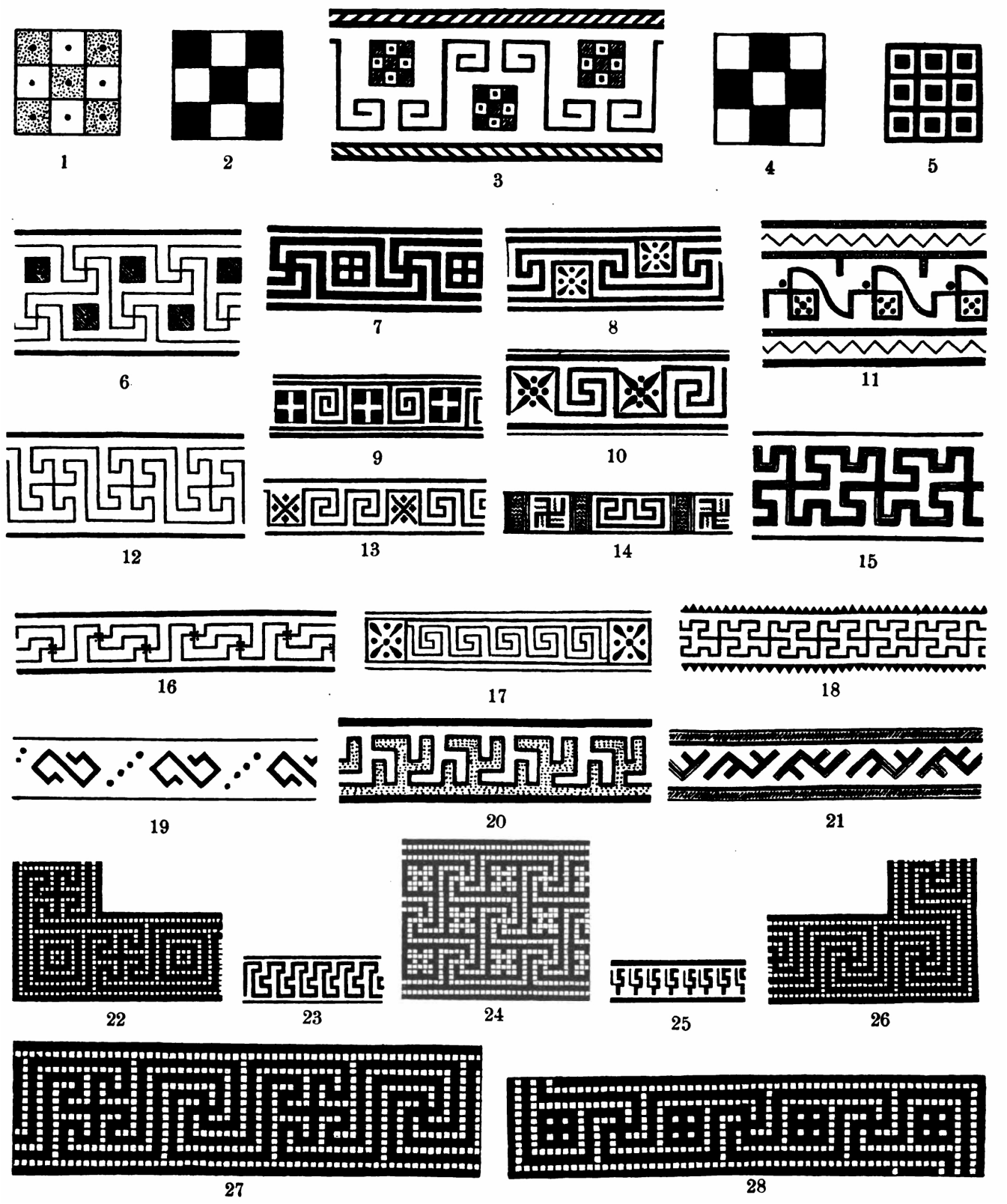
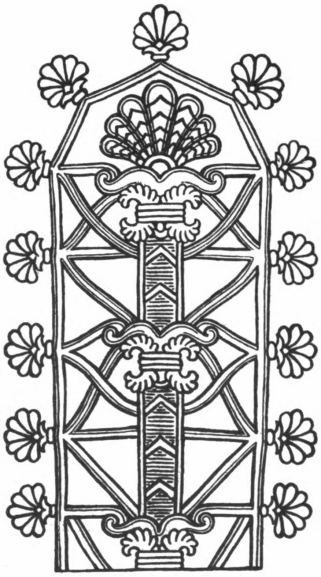
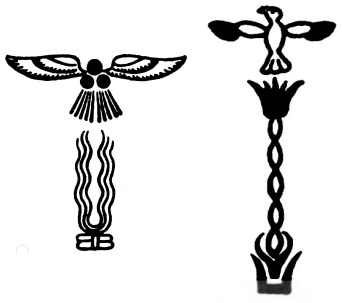


Plate 4 from Friedrich Fischbach's *Ursprung der Buchstaben Gutenbergs* (1900)



Plate 16 from Friedrich Fischbach's *Ursprung der Buchstaben Gutenbergs* (1900)





Thus, for example, from its simplest to its richest development, the Assyrian Tree of Life (left) shows the Fire-Drill with its the twisting cords, and the Fire-Flower. Another example he gives: in Zoroastrianism (considered one of the world's oldest religions), the highest God, Ahura-Mazda, hovers above the sacred Fire.

Fischbach believes that his explanations should indicate to us that all prior accounts of Ornamentation were often mistaken. This is because those explanations did not begin with the Religious-Concepts that created or originated the corresponding Form which is an expression of the Religion.

Just as someone who does not know Christianity may have difficulty grasping "the symbolism of the Cologne Cathedral, **we cannot solve the enigma of the World-of-Forms [*Formenwelt*] which the Runes show us, if we do not start from the Sacred**", because in ancient times Religion and Worship "absolutely stood in the foreground".

The proof is here for you to see, claims Fischbach: the oldest Runes grew from the same Root as the oldest Ornaments: Fire-Worship. Runes, he says, "are actually Protection-Signs against demons and are found in connection with Magic-Words and Incantation-Signs [*Zauberworten Beschwörungszeichen*]", and that they became Letters only about three thousand years ago.

Runes correspond to fundamental Religious-Concepts, and what has been emphasized with them is not beauty, but the best possible simplicity and abbreviation for their everyday use. This is why, he says, the Runes have remained simple, suffering little alteration through time. Only a few strokes distinguish the seven oldest Runes, although it would have been easy to achieve a much richer alternation through geometrical signs of various kinds. But, again, people are too used to seeing Letters only as spiritless Characters…

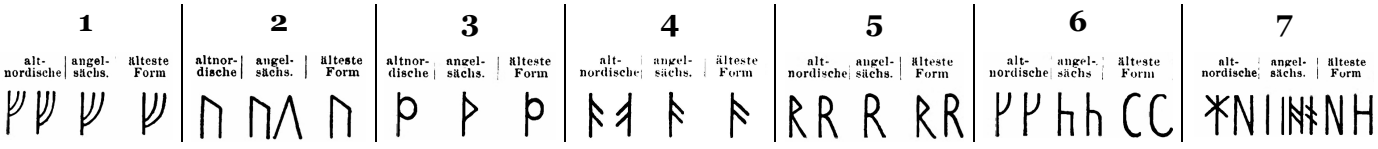
The Original Purpose of the Runes

According to Fischbach, if we want to understand the Runes, then we have to distinguish three epochs of their development and use:

1) the oldest (or earliest) in which Runes were only Magic- and Divination- and Protection-Characters [*Zauber- und Wahrsage- und Schutz-Zeichen*];
2) the middle, in which Rune Script-Characters developed (thereby becoming 'Letters');
3) and the youngest (or latest), in which they were supplemented in concurrence with the Script-Characters coming from the East and South.

Originally there were very few Runes in use and, if these were not sufficient, then (he says) the earlier ones were changed just a little, or a new symbol rooted in Religion was sought for. Hence, the similarity of the seven most sacred Runes.

It was not profane "Games-of-Form [*Formspielerei*]" that created the seven oldest Runes, but veneration for the Most-Holy and Most-Blessed [*Heiligsten und Segensreichsten*]. These are the signs for Fire (1), Primordial-Light (2), the Thunderer (3), God (4), the Fire-Wheel (5), the holy Altar woods (6) and the Conjunction of those holy Altar woods (7).



The similarity of the Runes is justified by Fischbach as originating from the veneration of the oldest Religious Symbols, those of Fire-Worship.

He says that we have to distinguish a Sign from an Image. A Sign (as a Symbol) only indicates, but does not depict (whereas an Image is a depiction). Thus, the Symbolic-Sign arises from a higher Spiritual-Power, rather than from the depiction of an object.

Runes are suggestive signs, whereas images (such as hieroglyphics) could be considered more depictive signs. If we look deeper, even the Word, to which the Sign is dedicated, is a suggestion, a seed that awakens Concepts. For Fischbach, the Runes (as suggestive signs) arise from a higher Spiritual Force (rather than from the Depiction of an Object) and therefore correspond to fundamental Religious-Concepts. This means that, for him, the Runes are signs that are suggestive of the ethical and religious views related with Fire-Worship.

The Runes, Holy Trees, Sacred Songs and Magic-Sayings

According to Tacitus, in his book *Germania* (98 AD), Germanic tribes cut twigs or sprigs from fruit-bearing trees into sticks or staffs. They cut or carved signs into them, scattered them on a white cloth and then picked them up in one of two ways:

a) either three sticks several times in a row,
b) or several sticks over three consecutive days.

Others say that they did not use fruit trees to make these sticks or staffs, but holy Trees [*heiligen Bäume*], which have the hardwood "necessary for the sacrifice". These holy Trees are given as: either Beech, Oak and Ash; or Hazel, Elder and Juniper.

According to Fischbach, one cuts these Rune sticks/staffs from "east-hanging branches, designating them through crosses, and there were distinctive black and white sticks".

The Runes were not Magic-Formula [*Zaubermittel*] in and of themselves, Fischbach tells us, since they became magical only through Incantations or Magic-Sayings [*Zaubersprüche*].

As we shall see, this means that **sacred Songs/Chants [*heilige Gesänge*] and Magic-Sayings are closely connected with the Runes through alliteration** (use of similar phonetic sounds at the beginning of adjoining words).

Thus, the stick from a 'holy Tree' with a Rune or Runes carved upon it became the Rune-Staff [*Runenstab*], which may have also been a document or record for Verse and alliterative Rhyme, and this he calls a Staff-Rhyme [*Stabreim*].

Fischbach explains that it was very important that the Rune conformed to the Incantation or Magic-Saying, be it for Blessing or for Cursing; and that the Staff-Rhyme repeated the Initial-Sound to make the Saying more powerful.

In order to perform their Healing functions, these Sayings [*Sprüche*] were invoked through a Healing Song [*Lied Heil*]. For Divination, the "Oracle's Proclamation was usually made by a Staff-Rhyme, because the Seer rhymed the alliterated Runes."

Just like the Rune-Signs themselves, these Rhymes had their origin in the Religious-Concepts of Fire-Worship and may have also been used as a memory aid or mnemonic (a pattern of letters, ideas, or associations that assists in remembering something).

Since these Sayings allude to Universal-Secrets, the Trivial is excluded, and the Path to the highest Principles is laid out. Ancient-Germanic Poetry is thus closely related to the Runes. Odin often gives the Sayings and the corresponding Runes, and he sanctifies them through poetry.

Conclusion and Summary of Fischbach's Understanding of the Runes

For Fischbach, the Runes were originally abbreviated Religious symbols, which were only used as Characters for Magic, Divination and Protection.

Later, they came to be used to represent (or be associated with) sounds and syllables. These sounds and syllables were alliterative, so the beginning of the word or syllable rhymed (not the end of the word).

If we put together what Fischbach is saying, regarding how the Runes were used, then we can see the following:

1) The Runes "became magical only through Incantations or Magic-Sayings [*Zaubersprüche*]", but were not Magic-Formula [*Zaubermittel*] in and of themselves
2) Sacred Songs/Chants [*heilige Gesänge*] and Magic-Sayings are closely connected with the Runes "through alliteration"
3) The Rune-Staff [*Runenstab*] was used for associating Poetic "Verse and alliterative Rhyme" into a Staff-Rhyme [*Stabreim*]
4) The Staff-Rhyme repeated the Initial-Sound "to make the Saying more powerful".
5) These Rhymes had their origin in the Religious-Concepts of Fire-Worship and may have also been used as a memory aid or mnemonic
6) These Sayings allude to "Universal-Secrets" and "the Path to the highest Principles"
7) Odin often gives the Sayings and the corresponding Runes, and he sanctifies them through Poetry

Incantations, Magic-Sayings, or Songs/Chants were used with the Runes to make them Magical. These used alliterative Rhyme, repeating the Initial-Sound of the corresponding Rune, in order to reinforce its attributes. These Rhymes were often abbreviated on carved sticks or Rune-Staffs, which may have served as a memory aids for Religious-Concepts that alluded to Universal-Secrets.