

Ancient bone sheds light on Slav alphabet history

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The rare bone find appears to prove Germanic runes were used before a Slavic alphabet was invented in the ninth century

An inscribed cow bone dating back to the seventh century proves that Germanic runes were the oldest script ever used by the ancient Slavs,

Czech scientists said Thursday.

Up to now, it was believed that the oldest Slavic [alphabet](#) was Glagolitic, invented by Byzantine monk St Cyril in the ninth century.

Cyril and his brother St Methodius came to former Great Moravia, covering today's Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia and parts of Austria, Germany, Poland, Ukraine and the Balkans, on a mission in 863.

But the broken bovine rib found in the southern Czech Republic in 2017 and examined by an international team of Czech, Austrian, Swiss and Australian scientists proved the assumption about the alphabet wrong.

"The team discovered this was the oldest inscription found with the Slavs," head researcher Jiri Machacek from Masaryk University in the city of Brno said in a statement.

The team used genetic and radio-carbon testing to examine the [bone](#).

"These sensitive analyses have shown the bone comes from domesticated cattle that lived around the year 600 AD," said team member Zuzana Hofmanova, an analyst at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland.

Robert Nedoma from the University of Vienna identified the inscription as so-called Elder Futhark runes, used by the German-speaking inhabitants of central Europe in the second to seventh centuries.



The Germanic runes belong to the so-called Elder Futhark script

The Elder Futhark alphabet comprised 24 signs, and the last seven were inscribed on the newly-found rib, according to the researchers.

"It is probable that the bone originally comprised the whole runic alphabet. Hence, it is not a specific message but rather a teaching tool,"

the scientists said.

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