The Mystery of the Missing Runes

By David Hellsten and Alex Bellos

The Vikings spoke Old Norse. To write it they used an alphabet of 16 runes—though the language had more than 16 sounds. So some runes had to refer to multiple sounds.

The words below are Old Norse place names taken from runestones in Sweden, together with their modern English names, in random order. Note that the names may not be exactly the same in Old Norse as in modern English—for example, Grikland is what the Vikings called Greece. Your first challenge is to match the names.

a) ᚢᛒᛋᛅᛚ 1) England
b) ᚢᛏᚢᚾᛏᚢᚾᚢᛘ 2) Greece
c) ᚴᚱᛁᚴᛚᛅᚾᛏ 3) London
d) ᚴ说实ᛋtoISOString 4) Uppsala
e) ᚴᛅᚦᚢᚱ 5) Saxony

Most runestones are memorials to people who have died, and some of them also mention the name of the person who actually inscribed the text. Below are five inscriptions, each of which contain a name (in addition to other words related to that person), and the modern versions of those names, again in random order. Your second challenge is to match the inscriptions to the names. As a bonus, find two Old Norse words for male relatives.

f) ᚴ说实ᛋtoISOString 6) Harald
g) ᚴ说实ᛋtoISOString 7) Knut
h) ᚴ说实ᛋtoISOString 8) Thorsten
i) ᚴ说实ᛋtoISOString 9) Gunnar
j) ᚴ说实ᛋtoISOString 10) Björn

Solutions can be found on atlasobscura.com Source: United Kingdom Linguistics Olympiad