The Early Runic Inscriptions and Germanic Historical Linguistics

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The aim of this paper is to show some of the ways in which the relatively uniform idiom of the older runic inscriptions of Scandinavia recorded between AD 200 and 500 (by me called Early Runic) may shed light on the language history antedating the earliest attestations of the later North and West Gmc. (North-Sea Gmc.) languages, and to give some indications of the place of Early Runic itself within the Germanic language family. The phonological, morphological and syntactic material selected for presentation has been taken from Nielsen 2000.

The Unaccented Vowels

The introduction of a stress accent in Proto-Germanic and its fixation on the first (root) syllable had a tremendous impact on the subsequent development of Germanic in that the segments of the unaccented syllables were frequently reduced or lost and that assimilatory phenomena such as umlaut and breaking of accented vowels often followed in the wake of vocalic reduction in the unaccented syllables.

Another important consequence of the accent shift was that Germanic could no more uphold just short and long monophthongal subsystems, but had to operate with accented and unaccented parameters as well. No attempt will be made here to deal with the precarious business of reconstructing a Proto-Germanic unaccented vowel system that postdates the fixation of accent – or even of positing a North-West Germanic system. Instead, we shall briefly consider the extent to which the unaccented vowels of Early Runic – as a vowel system that, presumably, was closer to Proto-Germanic than that of the later North and West
Germanic languages – can be regarded as the forbears of the unaccented vowels of, e.g., Old Norse (North Germanic) and Old English (North-Sea Germanic).

With Syrett (1994) we assume that both long and short unaccented monophthongs may be posited for Early Runic along with one diphthong, -iu, cf. also Nielsen 2000, 84–8, 102. The sources of the two monophthongal subsystems are:

Examples: nsm. -gastiz ‘guest’; asm. staina ‘stone’; magu ‘son’ (< Gmc. *-iːz; *-an; *-un); 3 pres.sg.subj. ligi (-i < *jē < Gmc. *-jai(-)) ‘lies’; dsm. woduride ‘furious rider’, hahai ‘steed’ (< Gmc. *-ai); 1 pt.sg.ind. wk. vb. tawido (< Gmc. *-ōn) ‘(I) made’, gp. arbijano (< IE *-ōm) ‘heirs’, gsm. magoz (< Gmc. *-auz) ‘son’s’; the woman’s name aluko (-ū-?), nsf. lapu (< Gmc. *-ō) ‘invitation’; dsm. kunimu(n)dui (< Gmc. *eu), a personal name.

If we move on to Old Norse, the unaccented vowels here are not just short (and monophthongal) but have been considerably reduced in number as well. The main sources of the three ON unaccented vowel phonemes are (Nielsen 2000, 101–2):

Assuming that Old Norse is a direct descendant of Early Runic, ON unaccented i has absorbed the reflexes of three ERun. vowel phonemes, two monophthongs (i and ē) and one diphthong (iu), whereas ON a reflects ERun. o, which itself represented a merger of several Gmc. vowels. Finally, ERun. ū was absorbed by ON u.

In the unaccented vowel systems of the attested North-Sea Gmc. languages no phonemic parameters involving quantity (or diphthongs) were retained either. Compared with Proto-Germanic and the Early Runic language, many simplifications had taken place in North-Sea Gmc. as shown by, e.g., the early OE system, whose phonemes were all distinguished by means of tongue position (front-back, tongue height). The chief sources of the early Old English unaccented vowels are (Nielsen 2000, 101):

As in Old Norse, shortening had taken place in the early OE (North-Sea Gmc.) vowel system. ERun. ĩ, ě, ū correspond, respectively, to early OE i, æ and u, but ERun. ŏ has two early OE counterparts, æ and a. Since the distribution of the two OE vowels is etymologically determined, æ being developed from Gmc. *ō(n) and a from Gmc. *ō or au, the OE (North-Sea Gmc.) vocalism cannot have descended from Early Runic as far as ŏ is concerned. The relationship between the vowel systems of Early Runic and, respectively, Old Norse and Old English can be depicted like this (Nielsen 2000, 103):
The Accented Vowels

As compared with the unaccented vowels, the phonological interpretation of the Early Runic accented vowels is a relatively straightforward affair. There is general agreement that Early Runic had short and long vowel phonemes, each system consisting of five units (cf., e.g., Antonsen 1975, §1.3–4, §5; 1994, 57):

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{ERun.} & \text{ON} & \text{ERun.} \\
\text{i} & \text{u} & \text{i} \\
\text{e} & \text{o} & \text{ê} \\
\text{a} & \text{â} & \\
\end{array}
\]

The members of, respectively, the short and the long systems thus differed from the corresponding units of the other system only in terms of quantity, not in quality.

The following forms illustrate the vocalic distinctions (Nielsen 2000, 104–5):

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{widu}- Himlingsøje clasp 2 ‘wood’
  \item \textit{wita(n)da}- Tune stone ‘ward’
\end{itemize}

\begin{itemize}
  \item (Goth. \textit{fisks}, ON \textit{fiskr}, OE \textit{fisc}, OFris./OS/OHG \textit{fisk})
\end{itemize}
leþro Strårup neckring ‘the leathery one’
swestar Opedal stone ‘sister’

-gastiz Gallehus gold horn ‘guest’
was Kalleby stone ‘was’
(Goth./ON/OFris./OS salt ‘salt’, OE *sealt, OHG salz)

holtijaz Gallehus gold horn ‘son of Holt’ (or ‘wood-dweller’)
horna Strøm whetstone/Gallehus gold horn ‘horn’
(Goth. *hult ‘wood’, haūrn; ON/OE/OFris./OS holt, horn, OHG holz, horn (< PGmc. *hulta-, *hurna-))

kuni- Tjerkö bracteate ‘kin’
gudija Nordhuglo stone ‘priest’
(Goth. sunus, ON sunr, OE/OFris./OS/OHG sunu)

-uïsà Sjælland bracteate 2 ‘wise’
minas Vetteland stone ‘my’
(Goth. meïns ‘my’, ON minn, OE/OS/OHG mîn)

No Early Runic examples
(Goth./ON/OE/OS hēr, OHG hiar, OFris. hērlhīr (< PGmc. *e₂))

makija Vimose chape ‘sword’ (cf. Goth. mēkeis ‘sword’)
swabaharjaz Rö stone ‘Sváfarr’ (cf. Lat. Suebi ‘Swabians’)
(Goth. -sēþs ‘seed’; ON sâð, OS sâd, OHG sât, OE sâd, OFris. sâð (< PGmc. *e₁))

woduride Tune stone ‘furious rider’
godagas Valsfjord cliff inscription ‘Godag’s’
(Goth. flōðus ‘flood’, ON flōð, OE/OFris./OS flōð, OHG fluor)
/u:/  muha Kragehul spearshaft ‘follower, retainer’
runo Einang stone ‘rune’
(Goth./ON/OE/OFris./OS/OHG hūs ‘house’)

In addition, Early Runic had the following three diphthongs:

/ai/  staina Tune and Vetteland stones ‘stone’
haitinaz Kalleby stone ‘commanded, called’
(Goth. stains, ON steinn, OE stēn, OFris./OS stēn, OHG stein)

/au/  auja Sjælland bracteate 2 ‘luck’
laukaz Fløksand scraper ‘leek’
(Goth. bauþ ‘commanded, offered’, ON bauð, OE bēad, OFris. bād, OS bōd, OHG bōt)

/eu/  (iu] in front of i or u in a following syllable)
hleuno Vimose woodplane ‘protection’
liubu Opedal stone ‘dear’
(Goth. kiusan ‘to choose’, ON kjósa, ljúfr ‘dear’, OE cēosan, OFris. tsiāsa, OS keosan, kiosan, OHG cheosan, kiosan)

It will be noted that above no examples were provided for /e:/ . The reason that we have to posit this phoneme in Early Runic although it does not occur in the inscriptions prior to AD 500, is that in late Proto-Germanic a new monophthong, ĕ₂, entered the long accented system, pushing the old /e:/ phoneme (ĕ₁) into a more open position (see, e.g., Steblin-Kamenskij 1962, 2–6; van Coetsem 1994, 98–113, esp. 112–13; Antonsen 1994, 48). Since in Early Runic an open reflex of ĕ₁ (a:, cf. makija ‘sword’, etc.) is well attested and denoted by means of the same rune, Ī, as short /a/, the assumed presence of /e:/ < ĕ₂ in Early Runic cannot be called in question. Apart from the push-chain shift of ĕ₁ to fully open position (/a:/), the only innovation exhibited by the Early Runic accented vowels in relation to late Proto-Germanic is the phonemicisation of short /o/ < [o], formerly an allophone of /u/, cf. Gallehus holtijaz (< Gmc. *hultijaz), which
shows that the occurrence of [o] was not restricted to a-umlaut position as in Gallehus horna (< Gmc. *hurnan).

The Early Runic accented vowel system is thus identical to that usually posited as the common ancestor of all the later attested North and West Germanic accented vowel systems, cf. the comparative Germanic material adduced above. Innovations have occurred in relation to Proto-Germanic, and the system also diverges from that of Gothic, where the reflexes of Gmc. ē1 and ē2 had coalesced in ē, and where no /o/ had entered the short system as a phonemicised, a-mutated allophone [o] of /u/.

**The Consonants**

The consonant system of Early Runic can be assumed to have been virtually the same as that reconstructed for Proto-Germanic (Steblin-Kamenskij 1962, 1–2; Moulton 1972, 147–50), cf. also Gothic. This means that the voiced obstruents denoted by the runes b, d, g were phonemes with stop and fricative allophones, and that the voiceless obstruents were organized in two sets of phonemes: stops (rendered by p, t, k) and fricatives (signified by f, ð, h and s). In addition, there was an alveolar voiced obstruent, z, which was realized only as a fricative.

Early Runic had two nasal phonemes (m, n) and two liquid ones (l, r) as well as two semi-vowels (w, j). The eighteenth and final rune in the older futhark, and the only one to denote an allophone, was ñ, cf. Opedal birggu (= birgingu, cf. Krause 1971, 158, no. 70.1) ‘funeral’, where ñ [ŋ] is a velar allophone of /n/ before homorganic /g/; on the Tanem stone the rune renders the sequence ng in mairlgu, a woman’s name.

The consonant distinctions as represented by the seventeen ‘phonemic’ runes may be illustrated in the following way (Nielsen 2000, 122–4):

| b  /b/  [b] | bidawarijaz Nøvling clasp (a man’s name), cf. ON biðja ‘to wish, demand’ or ON biða ‘to await’ |
| [b] | liubu Opedal stone ‘dear’ |

(Goth. bairan ‘to bear’, ON/OFris. bera, OE/OS beran, OHG beran)
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**d** /d/ [d]  **dohtriz** Tune stone ‘daughters’
            [d]  **hagiradaz** Garbølle box (a man’s name), cf. ON rāð ‘advice’
            **alawid** Skodborg bracteate (a man’s name)
            (Goth. daúhtar ‘daughter’, ON döttir, OE dohtor, OFris. doch-ter, OS dohtar, OHG tohter)

**g** /g/ [g]  **gudija** Nordhuglo stone ‘priest’
            [g]  **lagþewa** Illerup silver mount of a shield grip 3 (a man’s name)
            (Goth. guþ ‘god’, ON god, OE/OFr./OS god, OHG got)

**p** /p/ No Early Runic examples
            (Goth. waírpan ‘to throw’, ON verpa, OE werpan, OFris. werpa, OS werpan, OHG werfan)

**t** /t/  **talgidai** Nøvling clasp ‘(he) carved’
            **haitinaz** Kalleby stone ‘called’ (pp.)
            (Goth. twai ‘two’, ON tveir, OE twēgen, OS twēne, OHG zwēne)

**k** /k/  **keþan** Belland stone (a man’s name)
            **faikinaz** Vetteland stone ‘threatened’ (pp.)
            **ek** Kragehul spearshaft, etc. ‘I’
            (Goth./OFris./OS ik ‘I’, ON ek, OE ic, OHG ih)

**f** /f/  **faihido** Vetteland stone ‘(I) painted’
            (Goth./OE/OHG faran ‘to go’, ON/OFr. fara)

**þ** /θ/  **þrijoz** Tune stone ‘three’
            **laþu** Darum bracteate 1 ‘invitation, summons’
            **leþro** Strårup neckring ‘the leathery one’
            (Goth. þreis ‘three’, ON þrír, OE þrē, OFris. thrē, OS thria, OHG thrī)
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<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>/h/</td>
<td><strong>horna</strong> Gallehus gold horn/Strøm whetstone ‘horn’</td>
<td><strong>hahai</strong> Möjbro stone ‘horse’</td>
<td>(Goth. <em>haúrn</em> ‘horn’, ON/OE/OFris./OS/OHG <em>horn</em>)</td>
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<td>s</td>
<td>/s/</td>
<td><strong>swarta</strong> Illerup bronze mount of a shield grip 1 ‘the black one’</td>
<td><strong>-uisa</strong> Sjælland bracteate 2 ‘wise’</td>
<td><strong>was</strong> Kalleby stone ‘was’</td>
<td>(Goth. <em>lisan</em> ‘to gather’, ON/OFris. <em>lesa</em>, OE/OS/OHG <em>lesan</em>)</td>
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<td>z</td>
<td>/z/</td>
<td><strong>harazaz</strong> Eidsvåg stone ‘the agile one’</td>
<td><strong>holtijaz</strong> Gallehus gold horn ‘son of Holt’ (or ‘wood-dweller’)</td>
<td>(Goth. <em>maiza</em> ‘more’, ON meiri, OE/OFris. māra, OS/OHG mēro)</td>
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<td>m</td>
<td>/m/</td>
<td><strong>muha</strong> Kragehul spearshaft ‘follower’</td>
<td><strong>lamo</strong> Udby clasp ‘the lame one’</td>
<td>(Goth./OS/OHG <em>mag</em> ‘can’, ON må, OE mēg, OFris. meg)</td>
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<td>n</td>
<td>/n/</td>
<td><strong>niþijo</strong> Illerup silver mount of a shield grip 2 (a man’s name)</td>
<td><strong>raunijaz</strong> Øvre Stabu spearhead ‘tester’</td>
<td><strong>þrawijan</strong> Kalleby stone (a man’s name)</td>
<td>(Goth. <em>niujis</em> ‘new’, ON nýr, OE nīewe, OS/OHG niuwi)</td>
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<tr>
<td>l</td>
<td>/l/</td>
<td><strong>lamo</strong> Udby clasp ‘the lame one’</td>
<td><strong>alu</strong> Elgesem stone ‘magic’</td>
<td>(Goth. <em>lētan</em> ‘to let’, ON lāta, OE lētan, OFris. lēta, OS lātan, OHG lāzan)</td>
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<td>r</td>
<td>/r/</td>
<td><strong>runo</strong> Einang stone ‘rune’</td>
<td><strong>hariso</strong> Himlingøje clasp 1 (a woman’s name)</td>
<td>(Goth. <em>raïhts</em> ‘right’, ON rétr, OE riht, OS/OHG reht)</td>
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\(w /w/\)  
\textit{wagnijo} Illerup and Vimose spearheads ‘the rushing one’

\(tawide\) Garbølle box ‘(he) made’

(Goth. \textit{wait} ‘know(s)’, ON \textit{veit}, OE \textit{wēt}, OS \textit{wēt}, OHG \textit{weiʒ})

\(j /j/\)  
\textit{auja} Sjælland 2 and Skodborg bracteates ‘luck’

(Goth./OS \textit{juk} ‘yoke’, ON \textit{ok}, OE \textit{geoc}, OHG \textit{joh})

For comparative Germanic reasons, long consonants may also be posited for the Early Runic language. In the spelling conventions of the period the doubling of runes was not a device employed for indicating length.

The limited runic material available explains why, e.g., \(f\) is attested only in initial position, and why examples with initial \(j\) are absent. In other cases, there must have been restrictions on the actual distribution of phonemes in the word: \(/z/\) did not appear in initial position, and the semi-vowels \(/w, j/\) are not likely to have occurred finally.

The most striking feature in our material is perhaps the total absence of words with \(p\). The reason that \(p /p/\) is nevertheless included in our inventory is its attestation in the Scandinavian futhark inscriptions from before or just after AD 500, for instance in the legends on the Kylver stone and the Grumpan bracteate (Krause 1966, 12–14, 16–18). Also, \(p /p/\) fits perfectly into the system of obstruent contrasts, cf. \(b /b/\) vs., e.g., \(g /g/\) vs., e.g., \(k /k/\) vs., e.g., \(h /h/\). But the notorious Germanic scarcity of the \(p\)-sound, especially in initial position, should not be forgotten, cf. Krause 1971, §20.

A final comment on the allophones of \(b /b/\), \(d /d/\) and \(g /g/\): the arrangement of forms above is designed to show that stop allophones are used in initial position and fricative variants elsewhere. In final position I have been able to find evidence only of \(-d\), not of \(-b\) and \(-g\), cf. \textit{alawid}.

By way of summing up the phonological material surveyed in this paper, the Early Runic consonants were – not surprisingly, perhaps – identical to those posited for Proto-Germanic, whereas the Early Runic accented vowels show the same stage of development as the system reconstructable for the later North and West Germanic languages. Most worthy of note is that the Early Runic un-accented vowels may be regarded as the forbears of the later Norse unaccented
vowel system only – the unaccented vowels of Old English and the other later North-Sea Gmc. (West Gmc.) languages had a different ancestry. The dialect geographical conclusion that suggests itself is that Early Runic was a North-West Gmc. idiom that had embarked on a track different from that pursued by North-Sea Germanic (West Germanic), leading instead in the direction of Norse (North Germanic).

A Morphological Conspiracy

A remarkable fact about Early Runic morphology is the extent to which the short a-sound was associated with the masculine and neuter genders. This is, of course, immediately observable in, e.g., the nom. and acc. sg. of the a-st. nouns, cf. nsm. stainaz, asm. staina ‘stone’ and n/asn. horna ‘horn’. And as I shall now attempt to demonstrate, -a- may have been more widely used in the masc. and nt. sg. paradigms of the Early Runic dem. and interr. pronouns than in those of any of the other early recorded Gmc. languages.

Given the correspondence between the (pronominal) gen.sg. a-st. ending and the gsm/n. form of the dem. and interr. pronouns in the early Gmc. languages (compare OE dægæs, OS dagas; dages, OHG tages, Goth. dagis with gsm/n. OE þæs, OS thas (Heliand C 2156, 5427; S 720); ðes, OHG des, Goth. þis), it may safely be assumed on the basis of genitives of masc. personal names like asugisalas (Kragehul spearshaft) and godagas (Valsfjord cliff inscription), cf. also the possessive pronoun gsm. minas ‘my’ (Vetteland stone), that the gsm/n. forms of the demonstrative and interrogative pronouns in Early Runic were, respectively, *þas and *hwas.

There is actually no direct attestation of any forms pertaining to the pronominal paradigms in question with the possible exception of the purported (dubious) dem. pron. nsm. sa in the legend on the Lindholmen bone amulet. Even if the Lindholmen form is disregarded, we would have to reconstruct *sa as the dem. pronoun in the nominative singular masculine in view of the comparative evidence, cf. ON sá, runic Swedish and Danish sa (Glavendrup, Tryggevælde), Goth. sa, Sanskr. sa, Gr. ὁ. The earliest attestation of the form in Scandinavia (apart from the Lindholmen amulet) is Stentoften sa, which
functions as a relative pronoun. OE sē, OS sē, thē, OHG der, dhe (etc.) may well have been analogically influenced by the vocalism of the 3 pers. pron. nsm. OE/OS hē, OHG er (< Gmc. *ez).

As for the nsm. form of the interr. pronoun, Goth. hwas, early Norse huwaz (Eggja), huaz (Rök), ONorw. hvær, EN hvā, OE/OFris. hwā suggest that the Early Runic form to be posited is *hwaz. The vocalism of OS hwē and OHG (h)wer may have been inspired by that of the anaphorical pronoun, cf. also the demonstrative (see above).

The original (Proto-Gmc.) asm. vowel in the dem. and interr. pronouns must have been -a-, cf. Goth. þana, hwana; ON þann; OE þone, hwone; OS thana, (Ofris.) hwane. The only early languages to show -e- were Old Saxon (along with -a-) and Old High German, cf. OHG den, (h)wen, (h)wenan; OS thena, hwena, but even here the pronominal adj. asm. suffixes exhibited -a- (OS blindan ‘blind’, OHG blintan), which indicates that -a- must have preceded -e- in the asm. forms of the OS and OHG dem. and interr. pronouns. In the absence of Early Runic evidence we may safely posit *þan(-) and *hwan(-) for this language. The earliest form attested in Scandinavia to suggest -a- vocalism is asm. nakdan ‘naked’ (Eggja stone), cf. also Runic Danish and Swedish asm. þan.

There can be no doubt that -a- vocalism should be assigned to the dem. and interr. pronouns in the nom. and acc. sg. neuter. All the early Gmc. languages have -a- in these forms – including Old Saxon (that, hwat) and Old High German (daʒ, (h)waʒ), cf. ON þat, hwat (EN hwat), OE þæt, hwæt, Goth. þata. The pre-Viking By, Stentoften and Björketorp stone legends all have asn. þat and the ninth-century Rök stone inscription (also) has n/asn. þat. For Early Runic, therefore, we reconstruct n/asn. *þat (dem.), *hwat (interr.).

The obvious reconstruction of the Early Runic dem. and interr. dsm/n. forms would be *þaim and *hwaim on the basis of such later North and North-Sea Gmc. forms as ON (dsm.) þeim, hveim, Eggja þaim, Rök uaim, OE þēm, hwēm, OFris. þám, hwâm and OS þēm, hwēm (cf. Nielsen 1994, 198–203), which probably all reflect the innovatory -ai- diphthong, perhaps an intruder from the plural. However, serious alternatives to such reconstructions would be *þam(-) and *hwam(-), a supposition based not so much on the, presumably, conservative Goth. vocalism (þamma, hwamma) as on the fact that the strong...
adjectival suffix is -um in ON (dsm.) spókum ‘quiet, wise’, OE/OS (dsm/n.) blindum ‘blind’, an ending which goes back to *-om(-), and which must have been borrowed by the strong adjectives prior to the shift of o to a in accented position. IE *-o- before a nasal became -u- in unaccented position in the North and West Gmc. languages. In other words, the dsm/n. forms of the dem. and interr. pronouns may be assumed to have had -a- (< *-o-) prior to the introduction of -ai- in the North and North-Sea Gmc. languages. Even in Old High German, -a- probably preceded -e- (demu, (h)wemu) as suggested by some strong adjectival dsm/n. forms in -amu retained in the Alemanic dialect of Old High German, cf. apanstīgamu ‘envious’ (Braune and Eggers 1975, §248 Anm.4, cf. also Rösel 1962, 9–10). We cannot exclude the possibility that Early Runic had -a-. This is the vowel that must be reconstructed for Proto-Germanic, and a precise date for its replacement by -ai- in the North and North-Sea Gmc. languages cannot be given. But the comparative evidence makes it probable that the pronominal dsm/n. vowel was -ai-.

The paradigms, then, that we may reconstruct for the Early Runic dem. and interr. pronouns in the masc. and nt. singular are:

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<th>dem.</th>
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<td>nom.</td>
<td>sa</td>
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<td>acc.</td>
<td>ðan(-)</td>
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<td>gen.</td>
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<td>dat.</td>
<td>ðaim</td>
<td>hwaim</td>
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</table>

The penetration of -ai- into the dat. case is not the only innovation to have occurred. We probably have to posit *þes(a), *hwes(a) as the Proto-Gmc. gsm/n. forms, cf. Goth. þis, hwís, OHG des, (h)wes, OS thes, hwes; cf. also Gr. τέο, OCS česo (< IE *kheso) ‘whose’ (cf. Beekes 1995, 206–7). In Early Runic, -a- was extended analogically to the gen. case, a development similar to that reflected in Old English (þes, hwes), Old Danish and Swedish (hwes) and Old Saxon (rare occurrences of thes in Helianord Cotton and Straubing mss). The analogical pressure for introducing þas and hwas was strongest before -a- was replaced by -ai- in the dat. case. In Old High German, -e- vocalism won the day. In conjunction with interparadigmatic influence from the nsm. form of the
anaphorical pronoun, Gmc. *ez, OHG er, etc., the gsm/n. vowel -e- penetrated into the other masc. and nt. sg. case forms with the exception of the n/as. neuter. The introduction of -e- vocalism in Old Saxon was undoubtedly accelerated through contact with Old High German. For chronological and geographical reasons, -e- forms did not spread into Early Runic-speaking territory, but it is interesting that Old English exhibits nsm. sē instead of *sæ (< *sa), and that it has both hwæðer and hwædir ‘which of two’, being thus transitional in relation to the corresponding Goth./ON -a- forms and the OS/OHG -e- ones.

Our suspicions concerning the existence of an a-conspiracy in the Early Runic speech area are nourished by the fact that Early Runic exhibits a-vocalism in the gen./dat. sg. masc. n-stem suffixes, cf., e.g., the personal name keþan (Belland stone) and halaliban ‘bread’ (Tune stone), as do Old Norse (hana ‘cock’), Old English (honan), Old Frisian (skelta ‘magistrate’) and Old Saxon (hanan) in contradistinction to the *-en- ablaut variant underlying the stem suffixes of Old High German (hanen, -in), Old Low Franconian (namen ‘name’) and Old Saxon (Heliand Cotton ms. gumen ‘man’), cf. Gothic (gsm. hanins, dsm. hanin). It is usually assumed that a in Old Norse, etc., was introduced intraparadigmatically from the accusative singular, the vocalism of which was based on IE *-on- in all the Gmc. languages (Krahe II 1969, §27). Intraparadigmatic levelling is also the explanation preferred by me for accounting for the introduction of the Early Runic ending -a in the Illerup nsm. n-st. personal names swarta and lagupewa and later nouns belonging to the same case, gender and stem-class in replacement of -o as in the Illerup names nsm. n-st. wagnijo and nijijo (Nielsen 1993, 87–8). To scholars such as Andersson (1995, 30–32) and Nedoma (1997, 112–13), who are sceptical of an explanation along these lines, I would like to stress the possibility that interparadigmatic pressure may have been a contributory factor in the penetration of -a into the nominative masculine in accordance with the general predilection for a-vocalism in the masculine (and neuter) nouns and pronouns in Early Runic.
The Word-Order of Early Runic

According to Winfred P. Lehmann (1974; 1992), the word-order of Indo-European and daughter languages such as Vedic, Hittite, early Latin and the reconstructed Proto-Germanic language belonged to the object – verb type (OV) rather than to the verb – object one (VO). Most, though not all, scholars have accepted this hypothesis, cf. Hopper 1975 and Faarlund 1990; cf. also Braunmüller 1982, 113–21, 144. With a view to examining to what degree Early Runic may be described as an OV idiom, we shall avail ourselves of Greenberg’s typological principles (1990, 41). Syntactic features concomitant with consistent object – verb word-order are the position of adjectives and genitives before the forms they modify and the preference in OV languages of postpositions to prepositions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OV type</th>
<th>VO type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adj. precedes antecedent</td>
<td>adj. follows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gen. precedes antecedent</td>
<td>gen. follows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>postposition</td>
<td>preposition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now to the word-order of Early Runic. The legend carved on the Gallehus gold horn from ca. AD 400 provides a clear example of OV word-order:

**ek hlewagastiz Holtijaz horna tawido**

‘I Hlewagastiz, son of Holt, horn made’

If we restrict our survey to pre-500 Scandinavian inscriptions (and I must stress here that the dating of stone inscriptions is uncertain) and exclude from our inventory items with the verb in final position but without any object, the number of attested OV constructions probably does not exceed half a dozen.

An instance of OV pattern which may be slightly earlier than the Gallehus specimen, is seen in the inscription on the Einang stone (AD 350–400 according to both Krause (1971, 145) and Antonsen (1975, 39)):
An inscription exhibiting OV is the Järsberg stone (AD 450 or 500–550 in the views of, respectively, Antonsen (1975, 56–7) and Krause (1971, 151)):

\[
\text{ek ěřilaz runoz waritu} \\
\text{‘I ěřilaz runes write'}
\]

To the extent that they exhibit the components in question, bracteates have examples only of the VO pattern (Halskov, Sjælland 2, Tjurkö, Trollhättan bracteates). Excluding the bracteate evidence, I have found about four instances of VO word-order among the pre-500 inscriptions of Scandinavia, all from approximately AD 400–500, cf. the Swedish Rö stone (ca. 400 according to Krause 1971, 160 and Antonsen 1975, 43–4):

\[
\text{ek ěrăzaz satido} \\
\text{‘I ěrăzaz set (pt.) stone'}
\]

and the Norwegian Kjølevik stone dated to about AD 450 (Krause 1971, 152, Antonsen 1975, 50–51):

\[
\text{ek hagustadaz ě(a)iwido magu minino} \\
\text{‘I Hagustaldaz buried my son’ (lit. ‘son my’)}
\]

The material available provides no relevant evidence from the first half of the Early Runic period (AD 200–350), but we may conclude that OV and VO constructions competed during the fifth century, which in itself would suggest that OV constructions were more frequent in the centuries immediately preceding, if Lehmann and others are right in assuming that the OV pattern was inherited from Indo-European and Proto-Germanic. The frequency as reported of, respectively, OV and VO constructions in Early Runic agrees with Knirk’s estimate, cf. Antonsen 1981, 61 and Knirk 1977, 182. But it differs in absolute as well as in relative terms from the figures listed by Antonsen (1975, 24; 1981,
56–7), who included all sentences with verb-final order (with or without an object), and by Ureland (1978) and Braunmüller (1982, 138–44), who, by taking all the inscriptions contained in Krause 1971 as their source material, included in their surveys all older-futhark inscriptions from after AD 500. In my survey, of course, only pre-500 legends which contain a finite verb and an object have been included.

Let us now proceed to examine the extent to which Early Runic is in accordance with the syntactic characteristics otherwise associated with Greenberg’s OV or VO typology.

Whereas there is no evidence of postposition, a few inscriptions do exhibit prepositional constructions, cf. the Tune stone (Norway, ca. AD 400):

**after ** · **woduride** (dat.)
‘after Woduridaz’

and the Möjbro stone (Sweden, AD 300 (Antonsen 1975, 33–4), AD 450 (Krause 1971, 156)):

**ana hahai** (dat.)
‘on steed’

As far as pre- and postmodification in noun phrases are concerned, genitives tend to precede their antecedents, cf. the Vetteland stone (Norway, ca. AD 350):

**magoz minas staina**
‘son’s my stone’

and the Bø stone (Norway, ca. AD 500):

**hnabdas hlaiwa**
‘Hnabdaz’s grave’

But genitival postmodification is also attested, cf. the Valsfjord cliff inscription (Norway, ca. AD 400):
ek hagustaldaz þewaz godagas
‘I Hagustaldaz servant of Godagaz’

Adjectival postmodification is seen in the Thorsberg chape inscription (ca. AD 200):

owlþuþewaz niwaj0emariz
‘Wolþuþewaz of immaculate repute’

as well as in that of the Opedal stone (AD 350 (Antonsen 1975, 40), AD 400–450 (Krause 1971, 158–9)):

birggguborø swestar minu liubu
‘B. sister my dear’

In the latter example it will be noted that not just the adjective liubu ‘dear’ but also the possessive pronoun minu ‘my’ follow swestar ‘sister’. A possessive pronoun following its antecedent is attested in two other instances, viz. in the Vetteland (magoz minas) and Kjøslevik (magu minino) inscriptions, where in either case ‘my’ follows ‘son’, cf. above. The Tune stone legend exhibits a cardinal number preceding its antecedent:

þrijoz dohtriz
‘three daughters’

It might be added that there are late examples (both from Norway and both from, presumably, just after AD 500) of demonstrative pronouns both (1) preceding and (2) following their antecedents:

1) þat azina (By stone)
   ‘this stone slab’
A number of the Early Runic noun phrases have appositions following the head nouns. Such appositions were seen above in the Gallehus (holtijaz), Opedal (sweistar minu liubu) and Valsfjord (pewaz godagas) inscriptions; and among the remaining five examples or so the Rosseland stone (Norway) from ca. AD 450 may be adduced:

\[ ek \text{ wagigaz irilaz agilamu(n)don } \]
‘I Wagigaz erilaz of Agilamundo’

The only potential counterexample is the contemporaneous (or slightly later) Veblungnes cliff inscription (Norway):

\[ ek \text{ irilaz wiwila } \]

where in Krause’s reading and interpretation (1971, 172) the personal name wiwila (nsm.) follows the title. From a syntactic point of view, there is more to be said for Antonsen’s transliteration of the name, wiwilan (1975, 58), which is taken to be a gsm. n-stem form: ‘I erilaz of Wiwila’, cf. the Rosseland text.

The place of appositions in relation to head nouns is not always included in discussions on word-order typology. It is a fact, however, that in OV languages titles, geographical names, etc. normally follow proper names, e.g. in Japanese (Tanaka-san ‘Mr Tanaka’, Fuji-yama ‘Mount Fuji’, etc.), cf. Hopper 1975, 74–5. The appositions attested in Early Runic may thus be regarded as OV-typology residues.

Another concomitant OV feature not anticipated above is the position of the finite verb after the past participle in the Vetteland (faikinaz ist ‘threatened is’) and Kalleby ((Sweden, ca. AD 400) haitinaz was ‘commanded/called was’) inscriptions, cf. Hopper 1975, 44.

Finally, compounds like bidawarijaz (Nøvling fibula, ca. AD 200), stainawarijaz (Rö stone) and la(n)dawarijaz (Tørvika A stone, AD 400–450) with verbal (-warijaz ‘defender of’) and nominal (bida- ‘covenant’, staina-...
‘stone’ and la(n)da- ‘land’) elements are inherently OV constructions unlike, e.g., wita(n) dahalaiban (Tune stone, ca. AD 400) ‘ward-bread’, i.e. ‘guardian of bread’, which shows VO structure; cf. Lehmann 1972, 242–3, 245.

The word-order of Early Runic would thus appear to be in a transitional state, in which an older OV layer is being replaced by a younger one with features characteristic of VO typology: indications of the latter are the use of esp. adjectives and possessive pronouns as postmodifiers and the preference of prepositions to postpositions – in addition, of course, to a shift of the position of the verb from after to before the direct object of the sentence. The most significant, inherited OV features are (besides the position of the verb) the place of genitives before and that of appositions (titles) after the head nouns plus the occurrence of OV-type compounds.

A final point to be made is that the Early Runic idiom is more in accordance with OV typology than are any of the later recorded North and West Gmc. languages. Without going into detail, early Norse and early Old English, on their part, can be shown to exhibit more OV features than can, e.g., the youngest early Gmc. languages, Old Norse (Old Icelandic) and Old Frisian. In that sense, Early Runic is transitional also in relation to the word-order typology of the later ‘early’ languages of northern and north-western Europe.

**Conclusions**

Not surprisingly, the consonants turned out to be the part of the Early Runic sound system best preserved, a part of the system from which the consonants of all the early Germanic dialects (including Gothic) may be derived because it is identical to that reconstructed for Proto-Germanic.

The historical position of the Early Runic accented vowels is slightly more restricted in that they represent a subsystem at the North-West Germanic stage, i.e. a subsystem of accented vowels reconstructable on the basis of the later North and West Germanic languages only. The word-order of Early Runic may, as we saw above, be interpreted in the same light: There would be no problem
in deriving all the early North and West Germanic languages syntactically from this system to the extent that it is known to us.

What in this paper we have called an α-conspiracy in the field of nominal and pronominal morphology, was something characteristic of Early Runic. Its morphological closest of kin in this respect were Old English and Norse (and Gothic) – in that order.

Finally, the Early Runic unaccented vowel subsystem was seen as the (natural) predecessor only of that attested in Norse.

Important aspects of the Early Runic language may thus be labelled as Proto-Germanic, North-West Germanic, North-North Sea Germanic or North Germanic (Norse). Early Runic may consequently be regarded as the direct predecessor language of Old Norse, but it would be wrong to call Early Runic a North Germanic (Norse) language, because its general character is much closer to Proto-Germanic than it is to Old Norse.

**Bibliography**


