

BESPREK

[1642] Livia Kaiser, *Runes Across the North Sea from the Migration Period and Beyond. An Annotated Edition of the Old Frisian Runic Corpus*. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 126. Berlin - Boston (2021), De Gruyter, 482 pp. ISBN 78-3-11-072328-1.

Scholars studying the history of Germanic languages will often find useful information in older studies, sometimes even from the 19th century, such as the major works by Siebs (1889, 1901) about the history of Frisian. They may also discover that the earlier generation of researchers did not refer to the pieces of primary sources, available about the earliest histories of Frisian, English or German: the early runic inscriptions. There is an obvious reason for that: many of the runic inscriptions that we know of now and which we can use in our reconstructions of the earliest history of Germanic languages, were either not unearthed or not identified or not properly interpreted by that time. Much has changed since then. For North Germanic runes, the data are more generous and publications from Krause (1966, 1971) and Antonsen (1975) provided a full reconstruction of the language of the Nordic runic inscriptions with Nielsen's (2000) *opus magnum* as a brilliant analysis of the position of this language in the history of Germanic.

Frisian runic inscriptions became first part of Frisian studies after 1950, when more and more inscriptions were identified, often on objects excavated long before (e.g. Düwel & Tempel 1968). An effort to provide an exhaustive overview of Frisian inscriptions was made by Quak (1990) and many new insights were discussed in Looijenga & Quak (1996). Looijenga's (1997) dissertation, published as a book in 2003 gave an exhaustive overview of all the older runic material, not only from Frisia, but also from the UK, from Germany, where also more and more inscriptions had been unearthed or identified, and a summary of the data from Scandinavia: for the first time, scholars had the possibility to consider the earliest primary sources of Germanic in their entirety. Online overviews of Germanic runic inscriptions can be found in the Kiel Corpus (Marold & Zimmermann) and its successor-project, RuneS (Akademie der Wissenschaften, Göttingen 2021). A more detailed overview of the Continental or South Germanic inscriptions was delivered by Findell (2012), recently joined by Düwel, Nedoma & Oehrl (2020a, 2020b) with 1102 pages(!), richly illustrated with photographs and drawings from nearly every object.

Scholars interested in the inscriptions associated with the history of Frisian and skilled in Italian could use Giliberto (2000), but now a wider audience is well served with the book by Livia Kaiser, published in the same series as the books by Us Wurf 73 (2024), s. 84-93; <https://doi.org/10.21827/uw.73.84-93>

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Findell and Düwel et al. At first glance, one may get confused by the title, which is very similar to Looijenga's dissertation, but we are dealing with a new publication here, a Munich dissertation, supervised by Gaby Waxenberger, who herself is working on an edition of the Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions and involved in the RuneS-project.

The book consists of three parts: a research history (pp. 7-72), a linguistic analysis (pp. 75-129) and the most extensive part, the catalogue (pp. 133-406), including photographs and drawings of all the inscriptions. Where Looijenga covers all early Germanic inscriptions in one book, Kaiser spends roughly the same number of pages on only 24 objects and thus is the reader provided with much more detailed information. The author, Livia Kaiser, was not known to me before and this may be unsurprising given the fact that she apparently did not publish anything relevant on the topic before, as can be taken from the list of references.

Chapter I sketches a research history and defines the object of study, the Frisian runic corpus. Runology is fraught with methodological problems, as the reader of this work (or other works on runic inscriptions) may experience. In Chapter II, the material is placed against a linguistic background of North Sea Germanic, Old English and Old Frisian and the various models and stages of development that can be identified. Chapter III sketches the historical and archaeological background of the find material. An inversed order of chapter II and III might have been more logical, but one can read the chapters independently.

Part 2 starts off with a phonological discussion of the language material in the Frisian runic corpus in Chapter IV. Chapter V deals with graphemic aspects and the brief Chapter VI tries to say something about the pragmatic functions of the 'texts', in particular difficult for the Frisian objects, which are for a large part the product of commercial *terp*-soil exploitation without archaeological context. Also here, to have chapter V before chapter IV might have been more logical: first analyse all the graphemic peculiarities, before drawing phonological conclusions from them.

The catalogue is surely the part that will make this book indispensable for every scholar of the early history of Frisian. It may be worthwhile to sketch the discussion of one piece, the famous SKANOMODU-coin, preserved in the British Museum and identified as 'Frisian' only by linguistic reasoning, rather than by actual historical or archaeological evidence. In the first part of the catalogue description, we are informed about its exact current location and catalogue number and a photograph of the object. Glossy paper is no longer fashionable, as it seems, and the pictures are therefore not as brilliant as they might have been. The second volume of Düwel et al. (2020) contains special arks with photo paper. Photographs of many of the Frisian objects on more glossy paper can, by the way, also be found in another recent publication: Looijenga (2021). Kaiser then proceeds with an extensive description of the object, including its material and state, in most cases based on personal autopsy. Very important for the interpretation of the object are Kaiser's descriptions of the date and place of discovery and the date and method of dating. The latter is particularly important, because dates circulate in older

literature, whose source or underpinning were entirely unclear. Now we get to know whether it is e.g. based on the gold or silver proportion, on the archaeological date of the context, or as an educated guess, based on other, similar objects. The provenance of objects can be quite an issue, as it is for the SKANOMODU-coin. Then follows an analysis of the inscription, when necessary, with detailed photographs or drawings of problematic parts, ending in a new legend, based on Kaiser's personal autopsy. The discussion of the inscription deals with its linguistic interpretation, in nearly all instances with a complete overview of all readings of the object and its interpretations from earlier scholarship. Eventually, objects which bear some form of analogy to the object – in material, in (con)text or function – are given at the end of the article. The whole treatment of the SKANOMODU-coin covers 17 pages – the average length for all 24 objects is 11 pages. The gain for every researcher is the scope of information as if one could do the autopsy oneself and look through the eyes of all the predecessors. One can make one's own decision, whom to follow or whom to 'believe', based on the extensive available information. This personal attitude is also necessary, because in many cases, the author does not comment on apparent inconsistencies or clearly outdated (mis)interpretations; these are conclusions, the reader has to draw himself.

It is the wealth of documentation and wide overview over scholarly work, that is the great strength of this book, also of the first part, with the methodology and research history. In the rest of this review, I will point out a couple of issues that may be worth rethinking followed by some detailed comments per page. Bare page numbers always refer to Kaiser's book.

The first issue concerns the identification and size of the Frisian runic corpus. It is an interesting phenomenon, that the existence of a Frisian runic corpus has been the topic of so much debate as in Page (1996) or Waxenberger (2017: 98, with further references), who mentions a 'Frisian Corpus' in parentheses. Kaiser considers the question "How 'Frisian' is the material [...]", referring on the same page to "the Old English runic tradition", where English is not in parentheses as if the latter tradition is undisputed in its English character (p. 20).

The scope of the Frisian corpus is similarly problematic, not only in this book. According to Düwel, Nedoma & Oehrl (2020a: 737-745), the 5th c. Wremen inscription is described as originating from an *Old Saxon* cemetery, apparently triggered by the fact that Wremen lies in the present-day Bundesland Niedersachsen in Germany. That the region was Frisian-speaking at least since the 8th c. until the 18th century does not seem to play a role. The object is not discussed in Kaiser's book on Frisian inscriptions either, whereas Waxenberger (2013: 22) considers the roughly equally old 5th c. Caistor-by-Norwich astragalus to be part of the earliest Anglo-Saxon attestations without any comment. As an early inscription from the North Sea coast, Wremen represents a stage of the language that was the predecessor of Frisian, English and North Sea Germanic varieties of Old Saxon and certainly not of the Old Saxon language of the two main *Heliand* manuscripts. Düwel et al. (2020a: 741, fn 4) acknowledge my viewpoint, but disagree. Evidence

that inhabitants of the region Land Wursten and the wider Weser-Elbe region can be associated with Anglo-Saxons and Frisians can be found in Nicolay (2005) and Hines & Behr (2019: 149). That the 5th c. is too early to show particularly Frisian linguistic features, does not make the inscription South-Germanic/German in any way, in the same vein as Caistor-by-Norwich does not show any particularly Old English features. It has to be mentioned that the Anglo-Saxon nature of the Caistor-by-Norwich inscription has actually been questioned in the past, because of its archaic linguistic nature, which does not fit Old English as we know it from the 8th c. This is an anachronistic argument. It was therefore earlier associated with Scandinavia. It seems a similar misunderstanding to me to conclude from lacking similarity between the language on the 5th c. Wremen inscription with 13th c. Old Frisian, that an inscription from the mediaeval Frisian region were (pre-)Old Saxon. Moreover, the rendering of an unstressed vowel in the Wremen inscription by **u** in [a]lguskabi ‘elk damager ≈ deer hunter’ matches well the tradition also observable in the Frisian corpus. e.g. **skanomodu**, and is unknown from Old Saxon or South Germanic inscriptions (Düwel, Nedoma & Oehrl 2020a: 742-743). In contrast, the obviously non-Frisian inscriptions from Borgharen and Bergakker have been included in Kaiser’s book. At the end of the day, it seems that even the perception of people involved in early mediaeval history are still framed by 21st century state boundaries.

In the historical part (p. 33, 69), the author is struggling with the concept of Frisian ethnicity, as the “early Germanic tribal concepts have been deconstructed in modern research” (fn.47). But it seems to me that during this deconstruction the baby has been thrown out with the bath water (Euler & Badenheuer 2009: 30-33; Kristiansen & Kroonen 2023). Since the distressing abuse of the concept of ‘ethnicity’ in the first half of the 20th century, humanities have found it difficult to deal with the concept. When Kaiser writes (p. 69) that “rather than ethnic unity in the countries around the North Sea, the parallels in evidence are found in archaeological and numismatic material, language [sic!], judicial and governmental institutions, economy and a number of other phenomena”, I could not think of much more to make up a group of people, who find themselves connected not only practically, but also culturally and probably mentally, so in fact an ‘ethnos’. The only reason to withhold the term ‘ethnic’ from such a constellation is the implicit association with the harmful, purely ‘biological’ (in parentheses!) interpretation of the early 20th century to the concept of ‘ethnos’, people. Moreover, recent DNA studies clearly show that where people live together and procreate, they will consequently share DNA-features in the true, scientific biological sense; see e.g. Leslie et al. (2015) and more recently Gretzinger et al. (2022), who clearly demonstrate the demographic relations across the North Sea in the early Middle Ages. Instead of stressing the outdated 19th-20th conceptualisation and avoiding the term ‘ethnic/ethnos’, one could try to reinvent the term, acknowledging the fact that statistically significant overlap of various social, biological, cultural or linguistic features of a group exists and at the same time allow for internal variation and

other cross-relations, and without the abject racially motivated assumed causalities of the earlier 20th century.

Single issues per page concerning part one and two. In cases where I think that other interpretations could be considered, mostly concerning the historical phonology, I give additional references:

p. 30: the author missed de Vaan's (2017) treatment of the linguistic history of the Dutch coastal regions.

p. 38, Feature 73: K. quotes Bremmer (2009) for the claim that rounding of **a* before nasals preceded the loss of the nasals before voiceless fricatives. Page 44 presents another order, with nasalised **[ã]*, only later developing to **[ɔ]*, which seems more correct.

p. 38, Feature 54: K. incorrectly claims that short **a* was raised to **æ* in open syllables also before a following back vowel in Old Frisian; cf.: OFri. *maga* 'stomach' < PGmc. **magōn-*; Runic Frisian **habuku** 'Hawk' (personal name) < *PGmc. **habuka-* 'hawk'.

p. 46, Table 6: This table is unfortunately corrupted. The correct version can be found in Waxenberger (2019: Table 5). One of the main issues is the confusion of '[a:²]' with '[a:¹]', but there are more errors.

p. 51, Figure 5: This figure offers a nice overview over the terminological confusion regarding the periodisation of Frisian. My view (2004) regarding the application of 'Mid Frisian' was omitted from the figure.

p. 76, Table 8: The reconstruction of a PGmc. **skain-* as the basis for the first element in **skanomodu** instead of **skaun-* is a fairly idiosyncratic idea, cf. the overview on p. 204 and Nedoma (2021: 48).

p. 77/78, IV.1.2: In the discussion about the PGmc. **ai*, my extensive paper including runic evidence (2017a) – with a later addition about Low German (Versloot 2022) – was missed, as well as two other relevant papers: de Vaan (2011; which is in the references) and Kümmel (2014).

p. 78: The text is confusing about the relative order of monophthongisation of PGmc. **ai* and the fronting of PGmc. **a/ā* in Old English. First it reads: "[...] in OE, the monophthongization preceded fronting [...]" and in the next line: "In OE [read as OE?], the monophthongization of Gmc. **ai* > OE *ā* must be subsequent to fronting [...]" The former interpretation is the commonly established opinion, which is – in my opinion – questionable. Waxenberger (2013: 41) suggests the 'Frisian' order (i.e. fronting before monophthongisation) also for OE. Ringe & Taylor (2014: 170-171) confirm that the traditional view on the order of events in Old English is not supported by the runic evidence (compare also Versloot 2021: 90).

p. 79, Table 10: The first data line mentions the attestation of **/o:/* in the Arum inscription **bōda**, but this is commonly read as **/o/*, cf. pp. 311-312.

p. 81: K. claims that Early Runic Frisian **/æ:/* (mostly PGmc. **ai*) merged with **/e:/* < PGmc. **ē¹*. This was certainly not the case, as explained by Hofmann (1964), with additional evidence for West Frisian by Versloot (1991). A similar

misinterpretation is found for */ɔ:/ and */o:/, which did not merge in West Frisian, consider: *moanne* ‘month’, *kôm/kaam* ‘came’ with Pfri. */ɔ:/ vs. *soen* ‘reconciliation’ < OFri. *sōne*, *rom* ‘fame’, with [o] < *ō (Spenter 1968: 186, 201, 215, 223).

p. 81, Table 8: An **f** is missing in the Folkestone legend; **kataë** on the Hamwic bone is not an *ōn*-stem, as I pointed out in Versloot (2016); see also the discussion on p. 92.

p. 82: “OFris. manuscripts [...] show free variation of *e* with *a*, *i*, *u* [...]”, which is certainly not the case, see Versloot (2008: 205 ff.).

p. 86: OFris. ***hām* < PGmc. **haima*- ‘home’ is a ghost word and follows from a confusion with *ham* ‘enclosed piece of land’, see Hofmann & Popkema (2008: s.v. *hem* & *hēm*).

p. 87: OFris. *ō*-stems do not have a regular ending *-a* in the dative singular; on the interpretation of **hi[l]du** or **h[i]ldu** on Westeremden A, see Nedoma (2007: 304).

p. 88: Runic Frisian and Old Frisian *mep* selected the instrumental, later also the dative, but not the accusative case (Versloot 2017b).

p. 89: On the issue of parasite vowels, compare Damsma & Versloot (2015).

p. 95/96: Two unstressed vowels are missing in the overview: *[ɪ] is found in Folkestone and *[u] in Westeremden A. My 2016-paper about the unstressed vowel system in Runic Frisian is in the references but left out of the discussion about the unstressed vowel system in this particular section, just as my 2019-paper.

pp. 102-104: I didn’t find a legend for the colouring in Table 15: read apparently means: ‘rare characters’, whereas blue is used to show new or reinterpreted characters.

p. 222: On the interpretation of Schweindorf, see also: Bammesberger (1998), Düwel (2018), Versloot (2019).

I will refrain from detailed comments to the corpus edition in part 3, which is as a whole a magnificent overview and summary of almost everything that has been and can be said about the Frisian runic corpus objects.

In conclusion, I think this book is a valuable addition to our insight and understanding of the Frisian runic corpus and it will probably remain an indispensable source for everybody dealing with these data for quite a while. The number of sources, publications, interpretations and opinions is so overwhelming, that some inconsistency in the presentation throughout the book is unavoidable. A few of them have been mentioned in the page-wise discussion. The phonological history of Frisian with all its intricacies, sometimes disputed, sometimes deeply hidden in inaccessible publications, was in my view not always rightly understood, making in particular the interpretations in chapter IV (Phonological Discussion of the OFRC) to be used with caution.

I would like to close with the book’s final sentence: “To conclude, the current edition may serve as a comprehensive resource and a starting-point for future

explorations of runic writing traditions in Frisia and around the North Sea in the Early Medieval period.”

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