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## Corrections in Viking Age rune-stone inscriptions

### 1. Introductory

The number of mistakes in Viking Age runic inscriptions is extremely small, as was convincingly demonstrated by Svante Lagman (1989, 27–37). Mistakes that were corrected do naturally not figure in Lagman's article, with the exception of **h** resulting from **a/n** corrected into **n/a**. A study of corrections may contribute to acquiring a clearer insight into both the runographer's orthographic skill and his attitude towards the physical appearance of the inscription on the stone.

In this article I shall first enumerate and discuss the several types of corrections. Of course the quantitative aspect will have to play a part here. The nature of the material in which the inscription was made, is of rather great importance. Two factors that must by no means be overlooked are the possible painting of inscriptions on stone and the possible making of a preliminary sketch. Some space will be devoted to the artistic effect of corrections. The causes of — corrected — mistakes will be discussed; these may throw some light on the way the runographer worked and the way in which he looked upon his "job".

### 2. Types of correction

#### 2.1. "Wrong" character corrected

These corrections may be effected in different ways.

##### 2.1.1. *The correction was made across the original character*

I found 53 inscriptions with this type of correction; as some contained more than one such case, it should be added that the number of

corrections is 62. The change of **a/n** to **n/a** resulting in **h** occurs in no less than 31 instances. This amounts to 50% of the 62 cases.

Sometimes the correction results in fancy characters, but quite often it produces a pseudo bind-rune. Thus in Lindö, U 238 a **t** (1) was changed into **f**, resulting in **ƿ**.

Incidentally I might mention that in 32 medieval inscriptions this type of correction occurs (40 cases), of which none have the **h** resulting from corrected **a/n**. 22 of these inscriptions were made in wood.

#### 2.1.2. *The correction results in a genuine bind-rune*

Only 2 instances could be found: Tuna, Sm 42 and Ulvsta, Vs 22 (see Sm p. 131 and Vs p. 66 f.).

#### 2.1.3. *The mistake discovered when a shallow "sketch" had been made*

Of this 13 clear instances were found. As an example we can take Risbyle, U 160, in which 27 **h** (should be **a**) has a shallow **n**-branch.

#### 2.1.4. *The mistakes "corrected" by adding the correct form*

In the 5 instances found of this type the wrong runes were left as they were, after which the correct runes were added. By way of illustration we may take Svista, U 193: **litu ritu rita**: on finding that the spelling **ritu** was wrong, the runographer added the correct form: **rita**.

#### 2.1.5. *The mistake "wiped out"*

I have not been able to find any examples of this way of correcting mistakes, no doubt owing to the nature of the material. It is not surprising that this type of correction, on the contrary, is found in medieval inscriptions made in wood.

### 2.2. Omissions remedied

This, too, might be effected in different ways.

#### 2.2.1. *Omitted rune inserted*

I found 56 of such insertions in 54 inscriptions. There are several ways in which the insertions were effected: the inserted rune can be recog-

nized by its being extremely close to its neighbours (e.g. Yttergran, U 646: 1–3 **sta**); occasionally the originally omitted rune actually touches its neighbours (e.g. Helenelund, UFV 1953; 264: 59–61 **kul** 𐀚); sometimes the inserted rune has a very narrow shape (e.g. Alsta, U 837: 13–15 **uph** 𐀚); it may also have less than the normal height (e.g. Spånga, U 61: 34–36 **lft** 𐀚); finally we find some runes that had to be given a “slant” (e.g. Värnamo, Sm 64: 11–12 **ten** 𐀚).

### 2.2.2. Insertion of the omitted rune results in a bind-rune

In 14 cases bind-runes are almost certainly the result of insertion. A clear example is to be found in Åshusby, U 430: 9 **uk** K, where **u** was added afterwards (cf. U II p. 221).

### 2.2.3. Omitted rune(s) added outside the text-band

31 such additions were found in 27 inscriptions. An example of a whole word added outside the text-band is to be found in Vetlanda, Sm 110: 8–11 **sati**. All in all there are 14 cases (13 inscriptions) where one or more words were added afterwards. 17 cases (14 inscriptions) show the addition of just one rune (e.g. Vible, U 92: 11 **u**).

### 2.2.4. Omission discovered: the mistake remedied by starting anew

This is of rare occurrence: 3 instances were found, of which only one is pretty convincing, viz. Lingsberg, U 241: 142–74 ... *æftir Ulfrik, fadurfadur sinn. Hann hafði ...*. The transliteration of 163–69 runs thus: **sino hon**. After writing 166 **o**, the runographer found he had omitted an **h** so he added **hon**.

## 3. Colour and correction

The painting of inscriptions which I referred to in section 1, may have played a part in the correction of mistakes. Such corrections can as a rule no longer be seen since the paint has only very rarely been preserved. We can distinguish several types of painted corrections: the wrong stroke was not painted, the correct one was. This correct stroke may have been cut (e.g. **rhisa** instead of **raisa**, in Risbyle, U 160; cf. Jansson 1987, 159 f.), or it may have been only painted (e.g. **hia** in-

stead of **hin**, in Sigtuna, U 391; cf. Page 1973, 160). In the case of remedied omissions we should consider the possibility that the added rune or stroke was not cut but just painted (e.g. **hiilbi** instead of **hialbi**, in Lundby, U 645).

#### 4. Preliminary sketches

There are indications that preliminary sketches were sometimes made, though this was by no means the rule (cf. Thompson 1975, 72 ff.). Elias Wessén (U I p. 294) sees the absence of a preliminary sketch as typical of inexperienced runographers. This seems hardly to be a correct view (cf. Thompson in the passage just referred to).

I found that almost 25% of the inscriptions in which corrections occur were made by runographers who signed their works and who thus probably were not inexperienced (the regions studied were Gs, Sö, U and Vs), whereas only about 17% of all the inscriptions in these four regions were signed (this percentage is based on Axelson 1993). If one includes the attributed works, the percentages are about 57 and 50 respectively.

The preliminary sketch may be seen as a shallow line. Thus, to give just one example, **sthin** (instead of **stain**), in Viggby, U 750 has an **n**-branch that is shallower than the correct **a**-branch (cf. also section 2.1.3).

But not every shallow stroke is necessarily part of a preliminary sketch. Thus in Södra Lunger, Nä 31 we find 24–28 **kerpu**, originally written **kepru** and afterwards corrected in the way described in section 2.1.1, with the correct strokes shallower than the original ones. Sven B. F. Jansson (Nä p. 98) accounts for this as follows: "ristaren har varit rädd för spjälkning."

#### 5. Causes of mistakes

It stands to reason that it is extremely difficult and in most cases impossible to find the causes of mistakes. At first sight many of these mistakes seem to have been caused by what we might call carelessness. This carelessness might be stimulated by the fact that such errors could in many instances be camouflaged when the inscription was painted (cf. Meijer 1992, 60). It should be realized, though, that what

to us seems to be carelessness, may have been viewed in quite a different way in the Viking Age.

The chance of dyslexia as the cause of mistakes should not be excluded. Thus Balle shows a marked degree of uncertainty in the writing of **a** and **n**, which might point to his being dyslectic (cf. U III p. 304).

In order to illustrate the variety of causes of mistakes I am tempted to mention an example in which the very nature of the text quite accidentally gives us the probable cause of the mistake. I am referring to Atrå, N 151: **nesrnetiolom** (= *næstr jolum*). In NlyR (II p. 343) the author suggests that the two failures to write *næstr* correctly may have been caused by an overdose of “juleølet”. Incidentally, the fact that this is a medieval inscription is irrelevant for our purpose.

## 6. Mistakes and artistic harmony

Claiborne W. Thompson (1975, 46) points out that “symmetrical spacing is occasionally destroyed by the addition of a previously omitted rune”. According to Otto von Friesen, as quoted by Friedrich Plutzar (1924, 43), corrections may sometimes not be executed in order not to disturb the harmonic impression.

## 7. Summary and conclusion

The number of inscriptions containing corrections amounts to 71, that of inscriptions containing remedied omissions to 97, thus totalling 168 (the actual total is 162, since 6 of the “correction” inscriptions are identical with the “omission” inscriptions). Although this number is by no means great, it can certainly not be ignored. It seems to show a certain degree of “carelessness”, also among those who signed their works and some of whom might be termed “professionals” (see section 4). But paradoxically it also shows a high degree of accuracy: the runographers who executed corrections may have been careless in the making of preliminary sketches, but the very fact that they corrected mistakes and/or remedied omissions, demonstrates clearly that they realized what they were doing and that, linguistically or phonetically speaking, they aimed at as high a degree of correctness as possible.

## Appendix

The inscriptions studied, arranged according to the sections to which they belong

### Section 2.1.1:

DR 81, Gs 13, Nä 31, Nä 32, Sm 85, Sm 96, Sm 113, Sö 16, Sö 84, Sö 86, Sö 120, Sö 179, Sö 195, Sö 232, Sö 250, Sö 318, Sö 355, U 91, U 126, U 173, U 238, U 270, U 281, U 323, U 324, U 341, U 375, U 391, U 453, U 462, U 474, U 490, U 600, U 616, U 653, U 665, U 681, U 774, U 862, U 898, U 1039, U 1047, U 1079, U 1139, U 1143, U 1144, Vg 9, Vg 32, Vg 77, Vs 18, Vs 24, Vs 27, ÖgFV 1983; 241.

### Section 2.1.2:

Sm 42, Vs 22.

### Section 2.1.3:

U 160, U 236, U 576, U 726, U 750, U 753, U 758, U 778, U 819, U 859, Vg 156, Vr 2, Vs 22.

### Section 2.1.4:

Sö 20, Sö 173, U 193, U 896, Vs 22.

### Section 2.2.1:

G 181, GFV 1983; 226, Michael II (Man), N 62, N 230, Sm 29, Sm 52, Sm 64, Sm 102, Sö 61, Sö 254, Sö 338, U 61, U 117, U 146, U 150, U 193, U 276, U 311, U 322, U 393, U 449, U 462, U 617, U 646, U 652, U 659, U 685, U 740, U 837, U 844, U 881, U 896, U 912, U 929, U 933, U 942, U 945, U 987, U 999, U 1007, U 1039, U 1041, U 1065, U 1068, U 1085, U 1122, U 1163, U 1173, UFV 1948; 168, UFV 1953; 264, UFV 1955; 217, Vg 85, Vg 182.

### Section 2.2.2:

Gs 7, Sm 95, Sö 213, Sö 273, Sö 308, Sö 335, U 106, U 430, U 440, U 485, U 595, U 824, UFV 1953; 264, Vg 67.

### Section 2.2.3:

DR 216, DR 218, DR 230, DR 401, Sm 16, Sm 110, Sö 2, Sö 34, Sö 45, Sö 113, Sö 179, Sö 235, Sö 247, Sö 338, U 45, U 92, U 225, U 276, U 354, U 379, U 456, U 657, U 875, UFV 1978; 225, Vg 127, Vs 9, Vs 24.

### Section 2.2.4:

U 241, U 344, U 595.

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- Fv = *Fornvännen. Tidskrift för svensk antikvarisk forskning* 1-. 1906 ff.
- G = *Gotlands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade av S. B. F. Jansson, E. Wessén & E. Svärdström* 1-2. 1962-78. Stockholm (SRI 11-12).
- Gs = *Gästriklands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade av S. B. F. Jansson*. 1981. Stockholm (SRI 15:1).
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- Vg = *Västergötlands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade av H. Jungner & E. Svärdström*. 1940-70. Stockholm (SRI 5).
- Vr = *Värmlands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade av S. B. F. Jansson*. 1978. Stockholm (SRI 14:2).
- Vs = *Västmanlands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade av S. B. F. Jansson*. 1964 (SRI 13).
- Ög = *Östergötlands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade av E. Brate*. 1911. Stockholm (SRI 2).