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Stylistic variation in runic inscriptions?
A test case and preliminary assessment

Introduction

In the analysis of runic inscriptions, it is generally assumed that the tex-
tual dimensions of "style" or register variation are entirely absent and
that we are constantly dealing with forms of elaborate or "high" style
(for a definition of style, see below). However, modern text-stylistic re-
search suggests this assumption is open to doubt, given that runic texts
do not constitute an exception to the general rule of textual variation. In
particular, I refer to Douglas Biber's studies of variation in speech and
writing (1988; 1995). Biber concludes that no absolute distinction be-
tween the spoken and written can be identified and that the interrelations
between oral and written media are complex. Rather than following a
strict dichotomy, we are moving along oral and written continua with
certain overlaps. Michael Halliday, too, stresses that the opposition is
not central to relationships in spoken and written media:

> How such variation [between "most likely to be spoken" and "most like-
> ly to be written"; M.S.] actually correlates with differences in the medium
> is of course problematic; the relationship is a complicated one, both be-
> cause written / spoken is not a simple dichotomy – there are many mixed
> and intermediate types – and because the whole space taken up by such
> variation is by now highly coded: in any given instance the wording used
> is as much the product of stylistic conventions. (Halliday 2002: 328)

Abstract: This article investigates stylistic variation in runic inscriptions from ca. 600 A.D.
on. At the outset, 'style' is defined linguistically in terms of 'recurrent features'. Departing
from the Blekinge curse formula on the Stentoften and Björketorp stones, phonostylistic
variation in some younger runic inscriptions, in particular from Östergötland in Sweden,
will be assessed. The general focus rests on sandhi phenomena and assimilations across
word boundaries which have largely been neglected in runological studies. Processes of
connected speech based on 'casual styles' are shown to be central to a proper linguistic
evaluation of the transitional Blekinge group as well as younger runic inscriptions.

Keywords: stylistic variation, runic styles, oral traces, assimilation, sandhi.

My present aim is to demonstrate that certain transitional inscriptions, no matter how formulaic and conventional, bear an imprint of the spoken language more clearly than the archaic inscriptions of the older period. Why this is so will be discussed in the following. Modern stylistic research stresses the need to evaluate linguistic variation among texts in a systematic way. If we regard runic inscriptions as a text corpus like any other, it seems eminently possible and indeed necessary to trace different runic styles which have their basis in different text types and genres.

Our scope is certainly limited because of the scarcity of the runic evidence and problems of interpretation. Moreover, it will be a difficult task to differentiate between stylistic variation, dialect, and diachronic change.[1] With these problems and limitations in mind, I still think it is possible to shed new light on the problem. My first task therefore will be to show that style is a relevant issue in the analysis of runic inscriptions.

Argumentation strategies in runology

In response to the common "normative approach", the issue of "style" will be shown to be vital to the linguistic evaluation of runic texts. Hence the present plea for a variationist approach to formal and textual differences in runic inscriptions. Runological research tends to be over-concerned with the historical, and too little attention is paid to the synchronic dimensions of runic texts. Runologists, it seems to me, in order to avoid synchronic clashes, have sought at all costs to provide historical explanations for the irregularities and deviations they discerned (see Schulte 2006a). As William Labov points out:

> The use of synchronic principles is particularly appropriate when the methods of comparative linguistics lead to abstract reconstructions that are linked only indirectly to the evidence of attested languages. (Labov 1994: 16)

I also suspect that language contact with the Latin world, at least as invoked by Kurt Braunmüller (e.g. 2004a; 2004b), is unlikely to offer a

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[1] In historical linguistics many attempts have been made to isolate text types or genres that have the highest probability of approximating to the spoken language. Arnaud (1984), for instance, selects the letters of women novelists as most likely to reflect the development of the English progressive in actual speech. And Dees (1971) finds that dramatic texts such as the *Miracle Plays*, no matter how conventionalized, are in many ways closer to the vernacular than prose.

plausible explanation of variation and change in the runic transitional period between AD 500 and 700. In particular, I find it hard to share his belief that Latin morpho-syntactic structures were borrowed into Nordic, for example that the active~passive *voco~vocor* dichotomy spawned a passive clitic *-eka,* as in Lindholm **hateka,** or Stentoften **felAhekA,** Björketorp **fAlAhAk** (see my criticism in Schulte 2005). Neither can I subscribe to the following line of argument, which neglects the complex relationship between speech and writing (Braunmüller forthcoming):

> Runic script has never been a general or unmarked means of documentation and can therefore not be used as a direct source of phonetic or phonological change. [...] There is no evidence that runic inscriptions in the older futhark represent actual speech in one way or other.

This negative judgement certainly involves an over-generalization. It relates to a crucial problem of textual philology and epigraphy, viz. the adequate phonological evaluation of written sources of bygone times. If Braunmüller were right, the older *fuþark* would have an exceptional status among alphabetic writing systems in being entirely disconnected from actual speech (cf. Coulmas 2003: 107–8). In fact, there are several indications to the contrary (see Schulte 2006a). Alphabet linguists generally stress the intricate interrelations between speech and writing, and these form the subject of numerous philological-linguistic inquiries (see, e.g., Allén 1965: 155–6). For discussion of the so-called "dependence hypothesis" as opposed to the "autonomy hypothesis", see Dürscheid (2004: 38–47). But it is not my intention here to pursue these critical reflections. I turn instead to the issue of "runic styles".

The dimension of "style"

The notion of "style" is relevant to all situationally and contextually distinctive language. Developing from studies of rhetoric in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in particular the pioneering work of Wackernagel (1873), modern stylistics covers a broad range of disciplines including functional stylistics. This latter branch explores the connexions between style and the functions of texts and seeks to identify functionally explicable properties of style.

As early as 1911, in his discussion of functional variation in language, Vilém Mathesius (1964: 23–4) considered "how the styles of speech are

manifested in the pronunciation of language, in the stock of words, and in syntax", and pointed to "the influence of functional styles on the lexical and semantic aspects of speech".

As Göran Hermerén (1983) notes, "style" can be identified in a number of ways. From a linguistic perspective, the idea that variation should be analysed in terms of sets of co-occurring features has been proposed in several studies. Monroe Beardsley (1981: 222), for instance, focuses on "recurrent features of [a work's] texture of meaning", and Dell Hymes (1974) discusses co-occurrence patterns in terms of "speech styles" that are characterised by sets of correlating linguistic features. Penelope Brown and Colin Fraser make the same point:

> It is often difficult, or indeed misleading, to concentrate on specific, isolated markers without taking into account systematic variation which involves the co-occurrence of sets of markers. A reasonable assumption is that socially significant linguistic variations normally occur as varieties or styles, not as individual markers, and it is on those varieties that we should focus. (Brown and Fraser 1979: 38–9)

In similar vein, Douglas Biber (1988; 1995) stresses that the description of linguistic variation in a given language will be multi-dimensional, and it is this expectation that forms the basis of the present study. We are thus looking for systematic co-occurrence patterns between different texts or types of text. In this sense, textual dimensions encompass features that consistently occur together and that complement one another (see Biber 1988: 15). What is being claimed here is that the isolation of "styles", in particular elements of oral styles related to actual speech, will yield new insights into the texture of certain inscriptions. Such stylistic features will be scrutinised in the following.

The Blekinge curse formula: preliminaries

Up to this point, we have been concerned with theoretical groundwork considerations. It seems clear that the choice of a particular style involves many situational and contextual variables that cannot be considered in isolation. Let us immediately turn to the runic evidence. As the investigation of "recurrent features" is dependent on texts of certain length, and extant in (at least) two parallel versions, there are few inscriptions from the older period that provide a suitable basis for study.

I shall concentrate first and foremost on the Stentoften-Björketorp

group with its curse formula. I shall demonstrate that salient co-occur-
rence patterns can be found traceable in these runic texts, and hence that
the notion of "style" is significant. Needless to say, this is a formulaic,
written text, so we are dealing with the integration of spoken features,
indicating an overlap between the spoken and written form (cf. Chafe
1982: 49–50). There are several reasons why the Stentoften-Björketorp
text offers a suitable case study.

1. Interactivity

First, we are dealing with an "interactive text" in the sense of Biber (1988:
12–30) as it moves between the first person *eka* 'I' (Stentoften **felAhekA**
'I hide', Björketorp **fAlAhAk** 'I hid') and the addressee who is mentioned
in the third person *sā* 'he' (Stentoften **sA þAt bAriutiþ**, Björketorp **sAR þAt**
bArutR 'he who breaks this'). Thus, both antipodes are realised in the text
(cf. Chafe 1982: 45–9). More specifically, the Blekinge curse provides a
linguistic channel between these two groups where the imagined ad-
dressee plays a prominent role in the writing process. This leads us
straight to the next point.

2. Audience design

Second, modern writing theory research strongly insists on the part
played by the imagined audience in the process of writing (cf. Halliday
2002: 227). Allen Bell (1984) possibly overrates this factor, stating that
the audience is the "organizing principle" of stylistic variation (cf. also
Romaine and Traugott 1985 and Willemyns and Vandenbussche 2006 from
the view-point of historical sociolinguistics). Reverting to the Blekinge
curse, the potential addressee must be regarded as *vargr í véum*, a wolf
treading on sacred ground. He is a law-breaker who is excluded from the
cultural memory of Stentoften's opening lines (Elena A. Melnikova, pers.
com.), hence the emphatic adverb **uti** 'outside' in the Björketorp legend.[2]
The noun **ArAgeu** dat. sg. 'perversion', 'unmanliness' in the curse for-
mula is another contextualisation clue (cf. ON *ergi* 'baseness', 'unmanli-
ness'). The inferior status and low prestige of the addressee lead one to
expect lower-level stylistic features in these inscriptions.

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[2] On Stentoften's introductory line see Schulte (2006b).

3. Strategy: the functional perspective

These two arguments are complemented by a third: every text consti-
tutes a particular "message type" (see Halliday 2002: 226–60). In this
respect style is subordinate to the textual function, which in the case in
point is a kind of *preventative magic*. A clue to the text's function is pro-
vided by the heading **uþarAbAsbA** in the Björketorp legend, irrespective
of whether one prefers the rendering "ulykkesspådom" 'prophecy of
misfortune' (Marstrander 1952: 147) or "Schadenprophezeiung" (Krause
1966: 216).

In this connexion, Halliday (2002: 235–6) distinguishes between
"language as reflection" and "language as action". In essence, the Ble-
kinge curse formula represents the type "language as action": it is a com-
missive speech act which threatens the imagined third person *sā* with
destruction if he breaks the monument. Following Halliday (2002: 238),
the nearer we get to the language-as-action end of the scale, the closer we
are to spoken discourse and informal style. This again supports the prin-
cipal claim that we are confronted with overlaps between oral and writ-
ten form.

4. The oral basis of the "magic" formula

Another crucial argument needs to be adduced here. The performance of
the initial ritual depends on the proper recitation of the formula where its
fixation in writing plays a complementary role (cf. Düwel 1997: 28–9).
The vital connexion of the "magic" formula with the actual speech act is
stressed by David Frankfurter with respect to Egyptian and Greek ritu-
als. His claim is

> that the formulation of the spell directly reflects oral utterance – "I bind
> NN"; "Restrain NN!" – and that the preparation of the medium itself
> (a lead tablet) derives from gestures to render the victim "like" lead. Thus
> again, the ritual performance ... dominates the written spell; the written
> spell essentially "records" the ritual. These inscribed spells carry the im-
> plication that the initial ritual "speaks on" through the written word ...
> (Frankfurter 1994: 195)

A reflex of these archaic Greek and Egyptian rituals can be seen in "mag-
ical" runic inscriptions such as the Blekinge curse (see Düwel 1997: 29).
Such runic curses share the underlying premise expressed by Frankfurter:
the proper recitation of the original oral utterance is vital for the formula
to take effect, hence the reliance on actual speech.

To sum up: these partly related observations make it plausible that oral

features and lower-level phonological rules have entered the systems of the Stentoften-Björketorp inscriptions. Reverting to the issue of "style", the particular linguistic choice in terms of "preferences" is highly context-sensitive, meaning that it is both strategic and proactive.[3]

Stylistic characteristics of curses

Before re-assessing the Blekinge formula in a stylistic perspective, let us evaluate the stylistic properties of curses more broadly. Cross-linguistically, curses display shortenings, elisions and haplologies to a larger extent than other word material and text types. More than 60 years ago, Ernst Fraenkel (1939: 36) noticed that contractions and elisions were typical of Baltic curses: "Charakteristischerweise sind diese kürzeren Formantien besonders in Flüchen gebräuchlich." Josef Svennung (1958), in a similar vein, identified far-reaching processes of contraction and shortening in forms of address, signalling close ties with oral speech and casual (also allegro) styles; see "abgeschliffene Anredeformen", "Abkürzungen der Anrede", and "Eile bei der Anrede" in the index to his work.

Further it should be noted that shortenings, ellipses and fragmentary utterances are characteristic of dramatic dialogue as well. As Anne Betten (1985: 269) remarks, "[b]ei der Analyse moderner Dramendialoge erweisen sich Verkürzungen und Wiederholungen als besonders beliebte und häufig gewählte Stilmittel." Moreover, Margret Selting (1997) discusses ellipsis in terms of an "interactively relevant construction". Recall that interactivity has already been identified as a prototypical property of oral speech.

These general observations lend support to the claim that runic curses can bear an imprint of oral styles. In particular, they may display linguistic features of what Wolfgang Dressler (1973; 1975) calls "allegro style" (see Schulte 2005; 2006a; also below). From a theoretical point of view, we may thus expect lower-level styles to be traceable in runic epigraphy. Let us therefore scrutinise the two parallel versions of the curse formula closely with this in mind.

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3 Cf. Dittmar (1997: 226; his italics): "'Gebrauchspräferenzen' meint die sprachliche Wahl aus einer Menge gegebener Alternativen für bestimmte Ziele und Zwecke. 'Stil' ist somit Handlungszielen und -zwecken untergeordnet und teils *strategischer*, teils *habitueller* Natur."

The Blekinge curse formula as a test case: recurrent features of runic textures

In the following, the term "texture" refers to all structural aspects of "text" as an entity. If the evaluation of style relies on "recurrent features" in the sense of Beardsley (1981: 222), or "systematic co-occurrence patterns", as outlined by Biber (1988; 1995), we have to look for systematic deviations in texts of certain length (cf. also Spencer and Gregory 1964). In the Blekinge group of inscriptions we find systematic variation explicable in terms of style between text A and text B below.

Two parallel versions of the Blekinge curse formula

> A. Stentoften stone (Blekinge, Sweden, AD *c.* 600–625) lines V–VI
>
> V hideʀrunonofelᴀhekᴀhederᴀginoronoʀ
> VI herᴀmᴀlᴀsᴀrᴀrageuwelᴀdudsᴀþatbᴀriutiþ
>
> 'A row of brightness-runes I hide here, mighty runes.
> Restless through baseness, (he suffers) an insidious death,
> the one who breaks this.'
>
> B. Björketorp stone (Blekinge, Sweden, AD *c.* 625–50) lines I–VI
>
> I hᴀidʀrunoronu   II fᴀlᴀhᴀkhᴀiderᴀg
> III inᴀrunᴀrᴀrageu   IV hᴀerᴀmᴀlᴀusʀ
> V utiᴀʀwelᴀdaude   VI sᴀʀþatbᴀrutʀ
>
> 'A row of brightness-runes I hid here, mighty runes.
> Through baseness restless, outside is prone to an insidious death,
> the one who breaks this.'

These two parallel texts exhibit systematic variation. As well as consistent spelling divergences, A and B contain different grammatical and morpho-syntactic structures. Thus, Robert Nedoma (2005: 171) allows for the possibility of two different modes of realising the formula, viz. "zwei verschiedene Formulierungsverfahren … mit Verschiedenheiten der Textkonstitution". Let us primarily focus on the sequences that are missing in the Stentoften text, viz. utiᴀʀ (Björk. V, runes 1–5) and -ʀ (Björk. VI, rune 3). Furthermore, note runono (Stent. V, 6–11) in relation to runoronu (Björk. I, 6–13), as well as welᴀdudsᴀ (Stent. VI, 18–26) in relation to welᴀdaude#sᴀʀ (Björk. V, 6–14 and VI, 1–3).

The relationship between Stentoften and Björketorp

As Ottar Grønvik (1996: 157) notes, the scholarly judgement about the relationship between text A (Stentoften) and text B (Björketorp) is largely based on Krause (1966: 217) who considered A a corrupt copy of B with several inadvertent omissions of individual runes and sequences. The general faith in B is also shared by Antonsen (2002: 307), who states that "Stentoften's ...**no** [in **runono**] must be a writing error in which the first two runes were inadvertently omitted". Recent research by Thorgunn Snædal (1997) and Jóhanna Barðdal (1998) ignores the Stentoften inscription entirely, an omission which allows the authors to reach far-fetched conclusions – concerning the sequence **utiAR**, for example (for criticism see Nedoma 2005: 182; Schulte 2006a: 129; 2006b: 406; Barnes forthcoming).

There are two fundamental reasons why Krause's general conclusion cannot be correct.[4] Text A turns out to be more archaic than B, such that A and B must represent independent versions of one and the same orally transmitted formula. In any case, A cannot be a direct (and hence corrupt) copy of B. Consider, for example, the A-forms **bariutiþ, felAhekA, herAmAlAsAR** as opposed to the B-forms **barutR, fAlAhAk, hAerAmAlAusR**. None of the sequences missing from text A represent content words, which as such would have a modifying function seen from a lexical-semantic perspective. Rather, we are dealing with semantically void function words such as the copula **AR** (ON *es, er*).

A systematic comparison between text A and B shows that the "omissions" in A either affect a CV-speech syllable at a word boundary (**runono** as opposed to **runoronu** 'a row of runes')[5], or the semantically empty class of function words (**uti-AR** 'outside is', ON *úti er*, i.e., a local deixis followed by an auxiliary verb; **sA-R** 'he who', ON *sá er*, i.e., a double pronoun consisting of a demonstrative base plus a clitic relative as opposed to a single pronoun **sA**). For detailed discussion, see Schulte (2006a). The problematic sequence yet to be evaluated is **welAdudsA** (Stent. VI, 18–26) in relation to **welAdAude#sAR** (Björk. V, 6–14 and VI, 1–3).

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⁴ See, for instance, the allegedly endingless form **-dud** in the Stentoften sequence **welAdudsA**, which will be discussed in the following. Aware of this methodological one-sidedness, Düwel (2004: 136–7) raises the issue of "contradictory linguistic forms".

⁵ Runic **ronu** is attested as Modern Icel. *runa* f. '(connected) row' 'connected speech'; see Krause (1969: 97); also Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon (1995: s.v. *runa*¹).

External sandhi phenomena

This leads us to the assessment of sandhi phenomena in runic inscriptions. So far, the sequence **welᴀdudsᴀ** has received no satisfactory explanation. In a recent article, Robert Nedoma addressed the issue and concluded (2005: 172):

> Eine rundum zufriedenstellende Interpretation der korrespondierenden Sequenzen **welᴀ̣dudsᴀ** STENTOFTEN ~ **utiᴀRwelᴀdᴀude** ‖ sᴀR BJÖRKETORP steht jedenfalls noch aus, sodaß die Zeugniskraft für die Flexionsmorphologie des Späturnordischen nicht allzu groß ist.

Before arriving at this rather pessimistic conclusion, Nedoma dismissed both Antonsen's and Syrett's analogical explanation of an endingless form **-dud** (2005: 171–2, 182; see Syrett 1994: 151; Antonsen 2002: 311). For reasons of space, these attempts to get to grips with the sequence **welᴀdudsᴀ** will not be dealt with in detail here (for discussion, see Schulte 2006a with references).

In theory, the simplification of the final cluster [-ðs#] to [-ðð#] or [-ð(:)#] in **welᴀdud#** (< gen. sg. **-dauþas*) could be compared to related phenomena in certain German dialects discussed by Harnisch (1995; 1998). He mentions two similar phonological rules in Bavarian (Harnisch 1995: 84): [Phonological Rule 5: the progressive assimilation of fricatives] "Der dentale Reibelaut [s] wird an einen vor ihm stehenden palato-alveolaren Reibelaut [ʃ] assimiliert" [vriʃ+s] > [vriʃʃ] (cf. standard German *frisches* 'fresh' (strong nom. n. sg.), and [Phonological Rule 7: de-gemination] "Geminaten werden vereinfacht" [vriʃʃ] > [vriʃ]. The Stentoften form **welᴀdud** could thus be accounted for by a corresponding rule of progressive assimilation [-ð+s#] > [-ð:#] > [-ð#]. But as far as I can see, there is no evidence for the existence of this kind of assimilation rule between fortis and lenis in Old Norse dialects (cf. in particular ON *dauð-r* 'death', gen. sg. *dauð-s*).

Recall that Krause (1966: 216) placed full reliance on Björketorp, reckoning with inadvertent omission of the desinence in **-dud**: "Auslassung der Endung in der Schreibung von St[entoften]". In my view, none of the above-mentioned explanations are credible. Rather, the A-sequence **welᴀdudsᴀ** is explicable in terms of phonotactic simplification based on casual speech styles. The single **s** for expected [-ss-] or [-s:-] reflects the removal of juncture in connected speech between the two words **welᴀduds** (gen. sg.) and **sᴀ** (dem. pron.).

As already argued, external sandhi is crucial here because of the immediately following alveolar [s] of the demonstrative pronoun **sᴀ**. Due to

the loss of juncture, the difficult phonotactic sequence of three fricatives *[-ðs#s-] is simplified to [-ðs(:)-], hence the single **s** in **welAdudsA**. Investigation of sandhi phenomena in Viking-Age inscriptions lends support to this view (see below). We may compare the Stentoften sequence with the regular double spelling **ss** for [-s#s-] in line II of the Vetteland stone (Rogaland, Norway, AD *c.* 350). Its **magozmina̱s̱s̱taina** 'my son's stone [acc.]' represents standard (i.e. lento) phonology and retains juncture.

It is obvious that the phonotactic simplification in Stentoften is favoured by particular styles which are close to vernacular speech. The expected standard (i.e. lento) representation of the sequence **welAdudsA** in accordance with the evidence of Vetteland would be **welAduds#sA* reflecting Early Runic **we:la-dauþas#sa(:)* (cf. Williams 2001: 510).

It is noteworthy that this interpretation of the sequence **-dudsA** indicates a syncopated short form in the otherwise unsyncopated text of the Stentoften curse formula (cf. **felAhekA, herAmAlAsAR, bAriutiþ**). This makes it clear that, contrary to Braunmüller (forthcoming), traces of actual speech (incuding traces of more informal styles) are indeed to be found in runic inscriptions of the transitional period. Such traces do, though, become commoner later, indicating greater spontaneity and informality in runic writing.

Further evidence in Viking-Age inscriptions

In a study of runic orthography, Svante Lagman (1989: 29–35) identified irregular (i.e., non-standard) spellings in Swedish Viking-Age inscriptions as having a number of causes, few of which could be interpreted as genuine writing errors. In his wake, several authors (e.g. Williams 1990; 1994; Meijer 1995; and Larsson 2002: 14) stress that runic orthography is in general remarkably consistent and that runographers base their spellings on the analysis of sound.

One of the deviations noticed by Lagman (1989: 31) concerns the omission of runes in external sandhi position, e.g. **honsa̱ḻukuþs** for *hans sálu ok guðs* '[God help] his soul and God's [mother]', or **þuri:ṟisþi** for *ÞóriR ræisti* 'ÞoriR raised' (for parallel evidence from Runic Danish, see Makaev 1996: 67–8). In Lagman's view, this constitutes a norm in runic writing: "En runa sätts inte ut vid yttre sandhi, en företeelse som också betraktas som norm" 'One rune is omitted in external sandhi position, a phenomenon also regarded as the norm' (Lagman 1989: 31).

The first type of sequence is thoroughly investigated by Thompson

(1975: 47–70), who reckons with an interplay between speech and writing:

> To be sure, a number of orthographic variations do reflect linguistic differences and at the same time provide criteria for runographic analysis. (Thompson 1975: 50)

Thompson's focus rests on the loss of initial *h* in Swedish dialects, but he concludes that "most other variation in the inscriptions [including sandhi; M.S.] can be considered orthographic" (Thompson 1975: 52 with note 16). However, assimilations across word boundaries indicate that we are in fact dealing with a speech-related phenomenon.

The second example mentioned above is problematic as it may presuppose a weak masculine name form *Þóri*, oblique case *Þóra*. A more reliable example is ÖG 155 Sylten **þurfriþ risti** [...]; cf. Runic Swedish *-freðr* masc.: *-friðr* fem. (Peterson 1981: 19–24, also 2007: 230).[6] Earlier works argued for dissimilative processes to avoid to *r-s* in cases such as *-(f)riðr*, *-gærðr* and *-þruðr* (see Peterson 1981: 67 with older literature).

I will adduce some further examples such as Ög 189 Bo **bruþsin**, and Ög 234 Stenby kyrka **buruþusin** both for *bróþur sinn (ON *bróður sinn* acc. sg.), and ÖG 180 Gamalkils kyrka **faþusin** for *faþur sinn (ON *fǫður sinn* acc. sg.). In his *Altschwedische Grammatik*, Adolf Noreen explicitly mentioned such truncated forms of *r*-stem nouns. But note that we are dealing with etymological *-r* (not *-R*) here (cf. the discussion on non-etymological *R* in Larsson 2002: 134–5):

> Unmittelbar vor einem mit *s-* anlautenden worte kann das *R* [sic] nach §251 schwinden, was die auffallende (5 oder 6 mal belegte) form *faþu (sin)* schafft. (Noreen 1904: §438.4 note 9)

The runic examples above show not only single spellings for double (long) consonants, e.g. **s** = [-sː-] from /-s#s-/, but also assimilations across boundaries, e.g. **s** = [-sː-] from /-r#s-/, **k** = [-kː-] from /-k#g-/, **r** = [-rː-] from /-R#r-/, and **u** = [-ɔː-] or [-oː-] from /-u#ɔ-/ or /-u#o-/. (The exact phonetic value in this last case is hard to determine.)[7]

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[6] In her dissertation on the inflection of women's names in Old Swedish, Lena Peterson (1981: 142) notes the uncertainty of gender in this case: "I det sistnämnda [ÖG 155 nom. þurfriþ; M.S.] är genus osäkert" (cf. also Peterson 1981: 20, 24). But this does not affect our sandhi analysis since we have the nom. marker NGmc. *-R* (Gmc. *-z*) in both cases (cf. Runic Swedish *-freðr* masc. vs. *-friðr* fem.).

[7] On spelling variants of weakly stressed Gmc. *auk (ON *ok*) in Runic Swedish see Kreutzer (1995) and Schulte (1998: 129–32).

Unfortunately, sandhi phenomena are widely ignored in runological research, and non-etymological spellings are rarely ascribed to this factor. For instance, Patrik Larsson (2002: 134–7), in discussing unetymological uses of the *yr*-rune does not even mention this option. Such assimilations across word boundaries are a feature of everyday speech (on spoken Icelandic see Margrét Pálsdóttir 1992: 44–53 "Eðlileg brottföll og samlaganir"; Kristján Árnason 2005: 418–24 "Óskýrmæli, talhraði og stíll"; on spoken English cf. Shockey 2003: 123). In a framework of fast speech phonology, these instances presuppose the loss of juncture due to (less formal) allegro rules. According to Wolfgang Dressler (1974; 1975), pauses vanish in allegro styles, and processes extend over boundaries (cf. assimilations and migratory processes), i.e., the units of programming are longer (cf. Shockey 2003). Needless to say, the occurrence of these forms in the epigraphic material assures their phonological status.

Conclusion

In this paper, the two versions of the Blekinge curse formula were re-evaluated from a text-stylistic perspective. It was argued that the formula had been altered in the course of oral transmission. Thus in contrast to the view of Krause (1966) and his followers, the two extant texts, Stentoften and Björketorp, are regarded as independent versions reflecting different styles – or at least features of different styles. In particular, Stentoften's style was identified as elliptical and almost fragmentary in comparison with Björketorp's fuller wording. The Björketorp version contains both expletives (i.e. function words like the copula and the relative particle) and a reinforcing element (viz. the sentence adverb **uti**). Stylistic divergences are also traceable on the sentence level where Stentoften reveals elements of casual style, i.e. fast speech rules: **runono** as opposed to **runorono** – a speech-based omission which is related to haplology – and, most importantly, **welAdudsA** as compared with **welAdAude#sAr**. Processes of connected speech were thus shown to be central to a proper understanding of differences between the two sequences.

Finally, it may be suggested that Stentoften's archaic text is more effective from a dramatic perspective than the modernised, fuller version of Björketorp. This leads us to an assessment of style in a diachronic perspective (on the historical dimension of stylistic change, see Lerchner

1995). Not only do Stentoften and Björketorp represent two distinct linguistic stages, they also reflect different stylistic modes of expression: an older minimalistic mode versus a younger, more explicit one. This historical perspective is corroborated by the general trend towards longer, less condensed texts in the later phase of the older runic period culminating in the Eggja inscription. At the same time the stylistic change that has been identified testifies to the runographer's need to reinforce the old "magic" formula in a period of on-going linguistic change and syncope.

In a broader perspective, the situation seen here reflects the inherent variability of language, which can be observed in runic inscriptions just as in non-runic texts. As shown by Halliday (1987; 2002) and Biber (1988; 1995), textual relationships are by no means uni-dimensional, and this holds for runic inscriptions as well. If the Stentoften-Björketorp formula makes a good case, which I think it does, there is every reason to investigate "style" as a textual dimension in runic writing more widely.

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