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Elmer Antonsen as a Runologist

Abstract

One of the most important contributors to our understanding of older runic epigraphy, Elmer Antonsen was a controversial scholar. Best remembered for bringing an overtly structural and neo-Bloomfieldian approach to the study of the earliest inscriptions, he was also something of a contrarian, promoting readings and interpretations of older runic texts which did not find much support in the broader runological historiography. This paper examines some of his more lasting contributions to the epigraphic field in terms of his analyses of a handful of older runic inscriptions: that on the Nøvling fibula, on the Lindholmen amulet and finally the memorial text on the Reistad stone.

Keywords: Elmer Antonsen, historical linguistics, historical phonology, runic inscriptions, craft literacy, methodology

1. Introduction

The late Elmer Antonsen (1929–2008) was a historical phonologist who came to the study of early runic epigraphy only after he had completed his dissertation at the University of Illinois (Antonsen 1961a). As a neo-Bloomfieldian, his interpretations were often more structurally informed than those of his predecessors and hence more linguistically sophisticated. Yet his analyses were also often insufficiently argued, assuming considerable knowledge on the behalf of his audience and tending to over-claim. His assessment of the anthroponym **bidawarijaz** on the Nøvling fibula (KJ 13a, Antonsen 1975: no. 4), for example, seems to have been an advance on that represented in the corpus edition of Krause and Jankuhn at the lexical level, but it was interpretatively ambitious and poorly explained. Attempting to translate the text as if it were Indo-European rather than Germanic was incautious, even if Antonsen's basic etymological insight seems essentially to have been correct.

Antonsen's interpretation of the anthroponym on the Lindholmen amulet (KJ 29, Antonsen 1975: no. 17) was similarly unexpected and under-explained. Yet his basic etymological insight accords strikingly well with a more contemporary morphological assessment of the Indo-European term for 'sun', as well as a typological analysis of the find. It is his interpretation

of the inscription on the Reistad stone (KJ 74, Antonsen 1975: no. 41), however, which is perhaps the most remarkable. The recent discovery of a second rune-inscribed bracteate at Trollhättan (Axboe & Källström 2013) provides an answer to his critics that was not available in Antonsen's lifetime. His analysis, based on typological and phonological considerations, has often been criticised at the empirical level, but it makes considerably more sense than the interpretations put forward by other scholars.

2. Background

Born in Glen Falls, in upstate New York, at the beginning of the Depression, Antonsen came to linguistic study after serving in U.S. Army Intelligence, including spending time in the American zone of occupation in post-war Germany. After taking his dissertation under Ernst A. Phillipson at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, in 1970 Antonsen was appointed Professor of Germanic Languages and Linguistics, and served as Head of the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures at Urbana from 1972–82, and subsequently the Department of Linguistics from 1992 up until his retirement in 1996. Other than his runological contributions, most of his publications were on historical Germanic phonology, including key contributions to *Language* (1961, 1965, 1966) and *Scandinavian Studies* (1963, 1967), a chapter in *Toward a Grammar of Proto-Germanic* (1972) and his last book *Elements of German* (2007). His best-known works, however, are his *Concise Grammar of the Older Runic Inscriptions* (1975) and the compilation of his revised runological writings *Runes and Germanic Linguistics* (2002).

Antonsen's contribution to runic studies was mostly phonologically predicated. His more formal structural approach to historical phonology saw him question some of the less clearly formulated interpretations that appear in Krause's corpus of the older inscriptions (KJ) and the grammar that Krause (1971) derived from it. Coming to the early runic texts after he had published his first extensive phonological studies of the Old Germanic languages, Antonsen could see a number of areas where traditional interpretations could be improved, while others he dismissed as implausible.

His *Concise Grammar* is still in print, but is filled with interpretations that Antonsen never fully explained. Quite often these prove worth revisiting as some of them represent advances over those found in the works of Krause, the leading figure in the runological field in the 1960s. Often his critics assume that there was little worth in Antonsen's revision of the tradition

of Krause. But not only was Antonsen one of the few runic scholars ever to publish in leading linguistics journals such as *Language*, his *Concise Grammar* represents an advance on Krause's work in many key respects, despite its many detractors (esp. the critical review of Knirk 1977 and the derivative Høst 1977).

Among Antonsen's characteristic contributions to runology was his critique of magico-cultural interpretations such as those that are typical of the scholarship of Krause. What principled typological work had been published in the area previously, for example, had tended to concentrate on the curses clearly represented in the transitional Blekinge inscriptions (KJ 96–97) and their reflections in younger-runic practice (Nordén 1934, 1940, Jacobsen 1935). Much of Krause's corpus is filled with magical speculation -- indeed its first edition (Krause 1937) is largely arranged on magico-religious grounds. But as Antonsen (2002: 41) complained, the "acceptance of the magical theory permits investigators to engage in boundless speculation that in effect removes these oldest attestation of any Germanic language from the realm of serious linguistic research." The use of typological analysis in runic studies, however, was something that Antonsen supported, even if he did not accept that it should be used in studies of the magical features which are widely recognised to appear in the early inscriptions by other runic scholars.

Although he did not explain his approach properly until 1980 (in a paper further developed in Antonsen 2002: 207–36), one of the key contributions that Antonsen made in his *Concise Grammar* was typological. Antonsen established the existence of three basic inscriptional types in the early runic corpus: maker's inscriptions, commemorative texts and magico-religious epigraphs. He also proposed some further epigraphic types, however, which have proved more controversial.

What Antonsen described with his three basic types is an epigraphic culture comparable to that which Havelock (1963: 39) characterised as "craft literacy", the first step towards full literacy attested in many historical cultures. Under craft literacy, epigraphic texts are generally made by craftsmen — the manufacturers of the associated items or other specialists such as magicians and priests. Three examples of such texts include the inscription on the Nøvling fibula, clearly a maker's inscription, the text on the Lindholmen amulet, which is usually accounted a magico-religious expression, and the Reistad memorial, clearly a commemorative text. Most early runic inscriptions can readily be fitted into one of these three basic types that also describe the majority of early Greek, Latin, Etruscan, archaic Italic and Celtic inscriptions. Other types recognised by Antonsen (such as his "symbols of office"

and Krause's "magico-poetic" weapon names; see Krause 1936) are not found in other early epigraphic traditions and hence are less clearly established typologically.

3. The Nøvling fibula

The first of the three inscriptions of which the interpretation in Antonsen's *Concise Grammar* was an advancement on that accepted by Krause is the maker's text on the Nøvling fibula. Conserved today in the Historical Museum in Aalborg, the rosette fibula from Nøvling, Himmerland, was discovered in 1963 in a woman's grave that has been dated by archaeologists to the C1b period – i.e. c. A.D. 210/20–260/70. The inscription clearly reads **bidawarijaztalgidai** 'Bidawarjaz carved' and Antonsen's main contribution was in his analysis of the name **bidawarijaz**.

The interpretation favoured by Krause (following Moltke 1963) related the first element **bida-** to the Old Norse hapax *biðkván*, translated as 'beloved' (cf. ON *biðja* 'to wish') by Kock (1930: §1955), and the second to the similar element in the name **ladawarijaz** attested on the Tørvika stone (KJ 91) which Antonsen connected to OHG *lantweri* 'levée en masse', literally 'land defence'. Krause's translation of **bidawarijaz** as 'der das von ihm Erwünschte verteidigt' is quite implausible, however, as *biðkván* (which is itself an editorial correction of *biðkván*) is usually accepted to mean a 'deserted' or 'waiting woman' (e.g. Faulkes 1997: 22). Instead, Antonsen duly took early runic **bida-** to be related to Old Norse *bið-* 'wait' which is more clearly attested in compounds such as *biðlund* 'forbearance' and *biðstund* 'bide a while' (cf. ON *bíða* 'to wait'). Yet a meaning 'he who defends those who wait' evidently did not make much sense to Antonsen who instead compared **bida-** to the Indo-European root which *bíða* is usually accepted to stem from – i.e. IE **b^heid^h-* 'be loyal' – and cognate nominal formations such as Latin *fīdus* 'faithful, loyal' and *foedus* 'treaty, covenant'. Antonsen's translation of **bidawarijaz** as 'protector of the oath, covenant' assumed that **bida-** had retained an earlier meaning when attested onomastically than *bið-* has in Old Norse compounds, a claim to semantic archaism that is possible, but far from assured. Yet like his assumption that **bida-** preserved full-grade root vocalism which is not paralleled in Old Norse compounds, such a semantic interpretation was based on too little empirical evidence to be considered likely.

More recently, Harðarson (2007) has proposed that **bida-** should be interpreted as a cognate of the Old Irish participle *bíth* 'striking' and hence that

bidawarijaz should be translated as ‘he who fends off a stroke’ or ‘he who wards off a blow’. Nonetheless as Bammesberger (2008) points out, the spelling **-warijaz** suggests that Krause’s association of **-warijaz** with OHG *-weri* was wrong – the indication of a vowel before the glide in **-warijaz** indicates the effect of Sievers’s (1878: 129) law (which only applies after heavy syllables) and hence a connection with ON *vár* ‘oath’, OE *wǣr* ‘true’ and OHG *wār* ‘true’ (< **wēraz*; cf. Lat. *vērus* ‘true’). Bammesberger duly suggests that **bidawarijaz** reflects a compound of **bi(n)da-* ‘bind’ with a palatal enlargement of **wār-* and hence means ‘being reliable with regard to a (binding) promise’. Yet ON *binda* never takes an *e*-grade form when it appears in Old Norse compounds – only *o*-grades in *band-* (e.g. *bandamenn* ‘confederates’) are found. Morphologically, the only likely interpretation of **bida-** is found in Antonsen’s connection with ON *bið-* ‘wait’, with **bidawarijaz** most regularly to be taken on empirical grounds (i.e. in terms of actually attested rather than theoretically possible forms) as literally indicating someone who ‘remains true’.

4. The Lindholmen amulet

Another older runic inscription whose interpretation Antonsen made an important contribution to is that on the Lindholmen amulet. Found by a peat cutter in 1840 in a moor near Lindholmen Castle, Scania, the decorative style of the letterforms on the 16 cm long piece of worked horn or bone suggests that the inscription is of migration-era or c. A.D. 375/400–560/70 date, and the object looks as if it may once have belonged to a helmet (Herschend 2001: 353, Stoklund 2001). Conserved in the Historical Museum at Lund University, the piece is usually accepted to be an amulet because of the presence of the ‘charm-word’ **alu** inscribed on one side of the convex face of the piece after a repetition of runes (**aaaaaaaazznn[.]bmutter**) whose proper interpretation is unclear. On the other hand, the naming section which appears on the other side was interpreted by Krause (after Olsen, *NIæR* II: 600, 625) as **ek erilag sa wilagaz hateka**, ‘I am known here as Wilagaz (i.e. the wily one)’. But there are no examples of older runic texts which include **sa** being used as an adverb ‘here’ or even as the definite article ‘the’. Instead, the name is more obviously to be taken as **sawilagaz**.

By 2002, Antonsen had taken his dislike of magical interpretations to such an extreme that he had decided to categorise the Lindholmen find as a “symbol of office”. But Antonsen’s main contribution to understandings of the

Lindholmen inscription was to offer a plausible linguistic interpretation of **sawilagaz**. Other scholars have suggested that missing runes be assumed in the sequence (e.g. *Sa(i)wila(u)gaz*) given the obvious omission of an expected **i**-runes in the final verb **hateka** (usually written **hait-**); see von Friesen (1933: 13), Andersen (1947), Marstrander (1952: 99–108), Grønvik (1996: 65–74) and Elmevik (1999). But Antonsen's suggestion was much simpler and orthographically regular: he sought to connect **sawilagaz** with Gothic *sauil* 'sun'.

Yet the problem with such an identification is twofold. First, the Gothic spelling *sauil* has generally been taken to represent [sōil] and hence an apophonically regular cognate of Greek *hēlios* < IE **seh₂uel* 'sun' (Paul 1880). Moreover ON *sól* 'sun', like OE *sōl* 'sun', is usually accepted to continue an earlier **sō(w)ul-* < IE **seh₂ul-* – i.e. a form with suffixal apophony different from that attested in Gothic *sauil* (Wodtko et al. 2008: 606–11). Antonsen (2002: 232) instead made reference to the spellings of Goth. *tauja(n)* and *toja* which Marchand (1973: 71–72) had cited in the published edition of his 1955 University of Michigan doctoral thesis in order to argue that the traditional claim that the Gothic digraph *au* could represent a long monophthong was wrong. Antonsen followed his University of Illinois colleague Marchand in assuming that Goth. *sauil* should be understood as it is most obviously to be taken, not as containing a long vowel as has traditionally been assumed.

Antonsen's assumption, however, that an Indo-European form **sāwel-* could lie behind Goth. *sauil* and early runic **sawil-** cannot be accepted. Nonetheless the variation of **seh₂uel* and **seh₂ul-* that is broadly acknowledged by comparativists suggests that accentual differentiation once applied in the suffix of the inherited Germanic forms and an apophonic alternation of **sāwél* and **sāwǫ* would be expected to result in a Proto-Germanic variation of **sawil-* and **sōwul-* under Dybo's (1961) law. Dybo's law is clearly the reason why Old English *wer* 'man' shows a short vowel but its Sanskrit cognate *vīrá-* (< IE **u₁H-ró-*) evidences a long vowel. Shortening of inherited long vowels in pretonic position is a regular development in Germanic and so IE **seh₂uel* would be expected to appear as *sawil-* in early Nordic. Antonsen's solution is not just supported by Marchand's analysis of Gothic spelling, it is also quite regular (and expected) from a comparative perspective.

5. The Reistad stone

The third inscription is the early runic text on the Reistad stone, a commemorative inscription that Barnes (2012: 28–29, 2013: 15–16) takes as an example

of a find for which no categorical interpretation has yet appeared. Antonsen had interpreted the inscription quite differently from Krause, repeating his analysis somewhat more forcibly in his 1978 review of Høst's *Runer* (1976), in two of the articles which appeared updated as chapters in his *Runes and Germanic Linguistics* (Antonsen 2002: 5–8, 202–3) and finally in a rejoinder to Seebold's (2003) critical review of his 2002 book in 2007. Where the interpretations cited in Knirk's (2002) entry on the monument in the *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* (following Krause) seem truer to the text as it appears on the stone, Antonsen's makes rather better linguistic and typological sense. Most scholars (including Syrett 1994: 156–57, Bammesberger 1996, Eythórsson 1999 and Schulte 2003: 396) have tended to follow Krause's overall syntactic scheme, however, making Barnes's conclusion seem somewhat contrarian at first glance.

The 65 cm tall Reistad stone was found in 1857/58 and is usually thought to date to the c. A.D. 375/400–520/30 period. Conserved in the Historical Museum at the University of Oslo, it features a name on the first line (**iupingaz**) and what seems to represent a full sentence in the second and third (**ikwakraz:unnam|wraitā**). Yet as Antonsen was only too aware, Krause's interpretation of the Reistad form **unnam** as a verb cognate to OE *underniman* 'take surreptitiously, steal, take into the mind, understand' is quite irregular (cf. Bugge in *NIæR* no. 14, Vohlfert 1905: 52–53, von Grienberger 1906: 122–23, Noreen 1923: 385, Marstrand 1929: 215, 1930, Birkmann 1987: 125–26). Krause and others such as Bugge before him had assumed a segmentation **und-nam* with assimilation of the **-d-* to the two (putatively) surrounding nasals. But not only would such a development be unparalleled elsewhere in early runic texts, Old Norse does not use a preverb *und-* (cf. Goth. *und* 'unto, up, until') in comparable formations – like Old English and German, it instead employs the rhotic development *undir-* (cf. Goth. *undar*; *undar* 'under', ON *undirleggja* 'subdue', *undiroka* 'under-yoke', *undirstanda* 'understand' and *undirtaka* 'overpower'). The non-rhotic preposition *und* (< **unda*) appears as an archaic (and poetic) variant of *undir* 'under' in Old Icelandic, but it never appears as a preverb. Hence the usual interpretation of **unnam** as **und-nam* is problematic on both phonological and morphological grounds.

Seebold (2003: 300–1) prefers to interpret the Reistad form as **unþ-nam* – after all, the Charnay fibula (KJ 6) is usually accepted to feature a similar preverb in its sequence **upfnthai** and (unlike *und-*) verbs featuring **unþa-* are well-enough known in both East and West Germanic contexts. Nonetheless Antonsen preferred to see **unnam** instead as a form comparable to

the Gårdlösa expression **unwodz** and the Nordhuglo stone's **ungandiz** (KJ 12 and 65) – i.e. as a negated adjective serving as a cognomen given that a name *Ónæmr* is attested on several Upplandic rune-stones (Williams 1990: 137–39, 1993); cf. ON *næmr* ‘hunted, outcast, keen, sharp, quick at learning’ and *únæmr* ‘slow of learning’ to the vrdhhi *nám* ‘seizure, occupation, mental acquisition, learning’. Indeed Antonsen bolstered this interpretation by pointing out that the form on the following line cannot regularly be understood as an infinitive (as was suggested might be the case by Krause) – the *o*-grade ablaut of the verb **writan* is instead typical of preterites such as the 3rd sg. form **warait** ‘wrote’ which appears on the transitional runic Istaby stone (KJ 98). Antonsen’s verbal interpretation of **wraitā** presumes that the final 1st pers. sg. pret. **-a* inherited from Indo-European has been retained despite it having been lost in each of the attested manuscript languages. As Antonsen (1965: 35, n. 68) had already adumbrated, however, long before he had begun work on his *Concise Grammar*, evidence for *a*-umlaut in 1st/3rd sg. pret. forms such as OE *bēad* ‘commanded’ (< pre-OE **bæoda* < PG **bauda*) and *rād* ‘rode’ (< pre-OE **raeda* < PG **raida*) not being paralleled in the continental West Germanic languages suggests that the **-a* inherited from Indo-European must have survived into dialectal Northwest Germanic (cf. Antonsen 2007: 26). Indeed there are several examples of early runic verbs with unexpected vocalic endings, from the Vimose chape’s **wija** (*vis-à-vis* Kragehul **wiju**) to the Udby inflection **talgida** (in contrast to **talgidai** and **tawide**); see KJ 24, Stoklund (1991) and Nielsen (2000: 159–64). The main problem with Antonsen’s reading is that there is no real sign of an ending **-z** as he averred following **unnam** on the stone, only what Bugge saw as a rather inconclusive mark or crack in the rock that although also reported by scholars such as Marstrander (1929: 215) is no longer evident on the much-weathered monument.

Following Hollifield (1980: 160–61), Jasanoff (2005: 44) explains the Nøvling spelling **talgidai** as due to the preservation of 3rd sg. middle (weak) perfect periphrastic forms in *-dai* < IE **dʰedʰh₁óī* ‘did’, and the more recently discovered Udby find’s **talgida** has been argued by Nielsen (2000: 160–64, 2011: 55–58) to preserve an aoristic construction *-da* < IE **dʰeh₁t*. Whatever the precise explanation, the appearance of spellings such as **talgidai** shows that the vocalic behaviour of the earliest texts is more complex than had long been suspected and that the development of word-final (and unstressed) vowels seems to be ongoing in early runic. Nonetheless Antonsen’s interpretation of **unnam** and **wraitā** both remain somewhat difficult, although unlike **un(d/b)nam* both readings can ultimately be paralleled by later attested

North Germanic forms. Knirk was surely right to criticise Antonsen's reading **unnamz** as not justified by what can clearly be seen today on the Reistad monument, but the traditional interpretation of **unnam** as an equivalent to OE *underniman* is no less problematic on empirical grounds.

Moreover as Antonsen also argued, reading *ek Wakraz Unnām[z] wraitā* would make much better typological sense than would an interpretation *ek Wakraz un(d/þ)nam wraitā*. Not only are binomina well-enough represented in comparable early runic texts, the use of **writan* as a verb is paralleled several times in both Scandinavian and continental runic finds. *Wakraz Unnām[z]* would consist of two (etymological) cognomina (i.e. *Wakraz* itself seems originally just to have meant 'awake' or 'watchful'), but cognates of *Wakraz* are well-attested elsewhere as given names (cf. esp. the eighth-century Benedictine martyr St. Waccar), as are later reflections of putative *Unnam[z]*. Despite its morphological problems, Antonsen's interpretation is clearly better motivated in terms of actually attested compounds and forms than other explanations are. Eythórsson (1999) suggests (with Bugge), however, that **wraitā** be connected with ON *reitr* 'a square, a space marked out, a place sketched out', as ON *rit*, OE *writ* 'writing' clearly attest the zero-grade. Yet this identification ignores the problem that *reitr* (acc. pl. *reitu* in *Grágás* I.65) seems to have been a *u*-stem originally, even if OHG *reiz* 'a scratch, a mark, a line' suggests that **wraituz* may well have retained its etymological meaning 'a scratch' in a text of this antiquity.¹

Høst (1977: 153) was initially quite sceptical of Antonsen's reading **unnamz**, but seems to have become less so over time (Antonsen 2002: 6, 202–3). The form **unnam** is unique at Reistad, however, in that it is found quite near to the right-hand edge of the stone and hence could be interpreted as a partial form **unnam[iz]** if not Antonsen's **unnamz**. Although we might prefer not to allow such emendations (or orthographic fudges) on empirical grounds (cf. Seim 2003), the Reistad stone is quite weathered and it is clear that some early runic texts do feature comparable shortening or abbreviation. Several desinentially reduced early runic terms such as the Illerup fire-iron's **gauþz** (Stoklund 1995: 210) and the Gudme bracteate's **undz** (Moltke 1985: 114–15) seem similarly to have lost their stem vowels (or had them orthographically omitted) almost as if they represent Gothic or early West Germanic terms (Mees 2012: 267–70, 273–74). And Imer's (2011: 21) reading of the Gårdlösa form as **ek unwod w** 'I Unwod(az) w(rote)' in light of the similar lack of an obvious inflection in the Værløse fibula's **alugod** (KJ 11) suggests that names in

¹ The *o*-grade form does suggest an original *a*-stem formation, but a late development of a *u*-stem variant in Old Icelandic seems unlikely (Krahe & Meid 1969: 58–59).

early runic texts could sometimes be indicated with their stems abbreviated (much as occurs quite commonly in Roman epigraphy). Given the position of **unnam** as it appears on the Reistad stone, it seems a reasonable enough interpretation of the early Norwegian term to take it as a cognomen ‘Slow-learner’.

Knirk was right to criticise Antonsen for his lack of respect for the primary epigraphic evidence – i.e. not acknowledging what textual forms were widely held by his colleagues to be recorded on the stone. But Antonsen was equally justified in his conviction that interpretations of such readings should be subject to linguistic (and indeed historical) verification. Spelling mistakes are well-enough known in both Roman and runic epigraphy, as are all sorts of contractions and abbreviations. Reistad **unnam** would be unique in North Germanic experience if it were to be accepted as a verb, whereas taking it as a cognomen *Unnām[iz]* (or *Unnām[z]*) < **un-nēm-iz* ‘unseizable, untakeable, unlearned’ (cf. Goth. *anda-nēms* ‘pleasant’) would be quite expected and (albeit somewhat ironic) otherwise unremarkable. The Reistad text already features several unexpected spellings – from the orthography **ik** for early runic *ek* at the left edge of the stone (which is often represented accordingly as **ek**) to the idiosyncratic treatment of the glide and velar nasal in what has usually been read as (a rather Latinate) **iupingaz** ‘Juthingaz’ (cf. the ancient tribal name Juthungi) where we might expect ***jupingaz** (hence Antonsen’s alternative reading **idringaz**). It should come as no surprise to find similar orthographic eccentricity, then, in the representation of **unnam** (if for *Unnāmiz*, OSw. *Ónæmr*), particularly given the proximity of the difficult term to the right-hand edge of the stone. Yet a similar admission seems rather less likely for a verbal reading **un(d/þ)nam*, as among the Old Germanic languages only Gothic clearly forms compound verbs with *und* (e.g. *und-greipan* ‘to seize’ and *und-rēdan* ‘to provide’) and verbs featuring **unþa-* (cf. Goth. *unþa-þliuhan* ‘to escape’) are quite rare, particularly in West Germanic (where they are, moreover, typically denominative, e.g. OE *ūþ-witian* ‘to study philosophy’ from *ūþ-wita* ‘philosopher, scribe’). Antonsen’s interpretation of **ik** (if not **ek**) **wakraz unnam[iz]** **wraitā** has much more to offer from a typological, empirical and linguistic perspective, and hence seems a more reasonable interpretation of the second and third lines of the Reistad inscription than it has often been judged previously.

Moreover Antonsen’s interpretation of **wraitā** has been strengthened by the appearance of a similar form on a bracteate found at Trollhättan in 2009 (Axboe & Källström 2013). The second part of the Trollhättan text clearly reads **wraitalapo** which, given the common appearance of nom. sg. **lapu**

‘invitation’ on bracteates, appears best to be interpreted as ‘I wrote an invitation’ (Mees 2014: 287–88). The interpretation ‘I wrote **alapo**’ preferred by Axboe and Källström (2013) is clearly predicated on the assumption that Antonsen’s verbal interpretation of the Reistad form **wraitā** is wrong. Yet the discovery of the second Trollhättan inscription may equally be taken as evidence that Antonsen was right – we do not know enough about the workings of the early Nordic laws of final syllables otherwise to be sure.

At the very least the Trollhättan II form would seem to rule out Eythórs-son’s interpretation of Reistad’s **wraitā** as being a reference to the surrounding land – it is hard to see how **wraitā** could have any meaning other than a reference to writing given its appearance on a bracteate. And the Trollhättan II find similarly seems to preclude Bammesberger’s (1996: 124) assumption of a spelling mistake (for a putative epenthetic ***warita**). Antonsen’s contention that the ***-a** of the 1st pres. pret. sg. could have lasted into the fifth century is usually thought to be presumptive, as the West and East Germanic languages also lose ***-a** and hence the dating of the change is often ascribed to the Proto-Germanic period (cf. Ringe 2006: 118). This reasoning, however, confuses *terminus post quem* with *terminus ante quem* – as Boutkan (1995: 332–34) acknowledges (after Perridon 1991), the North Germanic loss of ***-a** could just as well have been late. Antonsen’s evidence regarding Northwest Germanic *a*-umlaut was first adduced long before he became aware of the Reistad form and given the lack of counter-evidence it clearly supports his interpretation of **wraitā**. Other than presuming that a morphologically unexpected nominal derivation **wraitā** ‘scratching, writing’ is to be assumed in both the Reistad and Trollhättan II inscriptions (or postulating the presence of some sort of clitic **-a** in both texts), Antonsen’s plea for acceptance of a late preservation of ***-a** in early runic seems a more plausible interpretation of the evidence at hand.

6. Conclusion

Antonsen’s interpretations of early runic inscriptions have often been criticised for not paying enough attention to the empirical evidence represented by widely accepted readings of texts. Yet his linguistic interpretations of difficult inscriptions have often been dismissed on dubious grounds and frequently deserve more attention than his detractors have afforded them. His analysis of the names in the Nøvling and Lindholmen texts provided genuine advances on those accepted by Krause, and his interpretation of

the first-person text on the Reistad inscription was similarly insightful and worthy of attention. Whether he was ultimately correct or not, all three of his interpretations can clearly be taken as advancing the state of the historiography, and hence be accepted as more useful contributions to runological decipherment than they are often admitted to be.

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