Runes and Editors: The Changing Face of Corpus Editions

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In a recent article Karin Seim (2005) discusses the relationship between observation and interpretation in runic studies. She takes as her starting-point a statement by the nineteenth-century runologist, George Stephens (1867, 214): "Jeg giver kun, hvad der står, ikke hvad der burde stå" ('I only reproduce what is in the inscription, not what ought to be there'). This affirmation of the primacy of observation came in reply to critics, in particular Ludvig Wimmer, who complained, inter alia, that Stephens's readings of runic inscriptions were often unconstrained by the grammars and lexica of the languages in which they were written (Wimmer 1867, especially 1–27). While in no way offering a defence of the would-be *savant* of Copenhagen, Seim stresses the danger that lurks for those blessed with greater linguistic insight than Stephens: they will tend to see what their training has led them to expect to see. But of course the ignorant are not to be deemed free of preconceptions either. Indeed, it is hard to see how anyone could set about reading an ancient text without some notion of what it might say. Nevertheless, it is must be counted one of the prime tasks of those editing epigraphic texts to distinguish as rigorously as they can between observation and interpretation.

The editor has many other tasks as well. One is to present what he or she has read. In the case of runic inscriptions presentation can take a number of forms. Today's editors will usually offer the reader several or all of the following: normalised runes, a transliteration into another, usually the roman, alphabet, an edited text, a translation into a modern language. These four modes imply clear distinctions, some of which go back to that between observation and interpretation. Even though the presentation of an inscription in the form of normalised runes and/or transliteration cannot be without an element of interpretation, it should be firmly rooted

in observation. The runes and/or roman letters should render as closely as is useful what the runologist thinks to have seen. An edited text and translation, on the other hand, will normally emerge from the interpretation. The difference between a rendering in normalised runes and one in another alphabet, as also between an edited text and a translation, might be thought clear enough, but is only so on the most obvious level. The reduction of the runic graphs found in inscriptions to some printed or electronic ideal involves many of the same processes and problems as transliteration. In particular it requires the editor to decide on the level of detail needed: to what degree is infinite graphic variety to be systematised? Transliteration does, of course, involve the additional and by no means straightforward question of the basis on which roman or other alphabet equivalents are to be chosen. Edited text and translation are, one would think, distinct enough entities, but in practice the two can become entwined, as we shall see.

There was in times past less appreciation of what the presentation of runic inscriptions involved, or should involve, than is the case today. It would be troubling if that were not so, for it would indicate a total lack of progress in this area of runology. However, the past is not a single primaeval night from which modern runology emerged into the light of day. Just as there are marked differences between the types of preconception earlier runologists bring to their reading of inscriptions, so too we find clear disparities in the ways they present what they have read.

Stephens fares no better in this department than as a reader of inscriptions. One of his several presentations of the older-*fuþark* Möjbro stone may serve as an example (1884, 11 f.). What I think he would have called his transliteration runs: ÆNÆHÆ, HÆISLÆ, GINIA, FRÆWÆRÆDÆA. That is rather different from the **frawaradaz|anahahaislagina|z** on which modern runologists seem to have agreed. The accompanying translation, offered "with great diffidence" is: '*Sir-ÆNÆHÆ, Sir-HÆISLÆ, the-lady-GINIA, raised-this-stone-to-the-lord-FRÆWÆRÆD*'. That too is considerably at variance with the message others have derived from this inscription, though it does conform broadly to Elmer Antonsen's typology of the older runic inscriptions (1980; 2002, 207–35). I do not criticise here the fact that Stephens bases his reading on a drawing of the inscription taken from Göransson's *Bautil* (1750), though we may wonder why he also prints, but then ignores, a rival drawing by Carl Säve that conforms more closely to what is now painted on the stone. Misreadings, or divergent readings, are to some extent a hazard of the game. Nor am I greatly concerned that he treats older runic ᛇ as though it were Anglo-Saxon **æ**. It took some time before all

the characters of the older runic alphabet were recognised for what they are. It is the presentation of the Möjbro inscription that is so woefully inadequate. The reading is neither a transliteration nor an edited text, but a hybrid. The runic characters are rendered into roman one by one right enough, but spaces are introduced between words, and commas and a stop added. Far worse: the roman rendering of individual runes can vary according to Stephens's understanding of what the inscription says. To mention the cruder sleights of hand: the penultimate character in his reading is shown as a clear ᛁ in the drawing, but he nevertheless renders it ⟨Æ⟩; conversely, his rune 10 is shown as ᛁ, but the roman equivalent he chooses is ⟨L⟩; the character he gives as ⟨W⟩ is portrayed in his drawing as ᚦ. Things are no better in the translation. The lower case letters are Stephens's "expansions", which are in fact indistinguishable from interpretation. Here, then, we have confusion of translation with the text that would most naturally and clearly emerge as the end product of a discussion of the reading. It must undeniably have been easier to invent bits of text in English than in pre-Old Norse, but judging from his efforts here and elsewhere (see, e.g., 1863, 87; Barnes 1994, 24, 103 f.), Stephens was not one to resist the linguistic challenges that came his way. Quite what preconceptions led Stephens to give his reading of Möjbro the interpretation he did, I am unsure. He would of course have been aware that many runic stones are of commemorative type, and for whatever reason he seems to have concluded that -Æ represented a nominative masculine singular ending, while -A might be nominative feminine or dative masculine singular (though 'to GINIÆ [m.] [and] to FRÆWÆRÆDÆ' is then an alternative interpretation). The 'sir's, 'lady' and 'lord' presumably reflect the sensibilities of the Victorian age rather than a belief that it was in such terms people addressed each other in Migration Age Möjbro.

It is hard in the light of the foregoing to subscribe to Stephens's view in the foreword to his *Handbook of the Old-Northern Runic Monuments …* (1884, vii): "On the whole, my system of transliteration and translation remains, as far as I can see, not only unshaken, but abundantly strengthened and proved by the many *new* finds." On the contrary, the "system" almost guarantees that unless an inscription conforms to Stephens's preconceptions and is brief, plain and clear to read, it will emerge battered and bruised from its brush with the "errander of Cheapinghaven" (Wawn 2000, 215–44). The long text on the Rök stone provides a good example of what Stephens can achieve with a relatively obscure piece of runic writing. Part of face A of this inscription is read, edited and translated as follows by modern scholars (with occasional variation in the detail):

**sakumukminiþathuariaʀualraubaʀuaʀintuaʀ|þaʀsuaþtualfsinumuaʀinu
mnaʀtualraubu|baþaʀsãmãnãumisumãnum**

Sagum ok minni [or *ungmænni*] *þat, hværiaʀ valraubaʀ vaʀin tvaʀ þaʀ, svað
tvalf sinnum vaʀin numnaʀ at valraubu, baðaʀ sãmãn ã ymissum mãnnum.*

'I also tell that ancient tale [or: 'I tell the young men that', or yet something
other], which two pieces of war booty they were that were taken twelve times as
war booty, both together from various men.'

We may argue about certain features here (for my part I am far from
certain there was no *u*-mutation in early ninth-century Östergötland), but
few, I think, would want to depart radically from the above. Stephens's
system can bring up rather different readings and translations (e.g. 1884, 36):

SAKUM, UK MINI ÞAT:
HUAR I A*R*-UAL
RAUBAR UA*R*IN
TUA, ÞAR'S UA‿AÞ
TUALF SINUM
UARINUM NA*R*T,
UAL-RAUBR
BAÞ, A*R* SOMO,
NOUMIS‿SU-MONOM.

'*We-saw, and remember-thou that:*
Where in yore-fight
booty's Warin (hero, = WAMUTH)
two—where he battled ón
with-twelve his
Warins bravely—
war-spoils
gained. Thane of Glory.
from-Noumi's sea-men.'

Sensing that this close translation lacks clarity and punch, Stephens goes
on to take the text "more freely and poetically". That gives us the following
stirring piece of alliterative verse (1884, 38):

'WE SAW, FORGET IT NEVER!
WHERE, IN FIRST FIELD
FRESH SPOILS SEEKING,—
WITH HIS WARINS TWELVE

WARRING BRAVELY —
TWOFOLD VICTORY,
HARD-EARN'D TRIUMPHS,
THE STRIPLING GAIN'D
O'ER SEAMEN OF NOUMI.'

From these glimpses of a deservedly forgotten past one could be forgiven for concluding that Stephens represents the nadir of what in its day was offered and accepted as serious runic scholarship. But that would be to do him an injustice. As Andrew Wawn has shown (1995; 2000, 215–44, especially 236–42), Stephens's scholarship was the product of a relatively coherent world view. He was fiercely opposed to what he regarded as the "Germanisation" of philology, and saw attempts to systematise and standardise languages of the past as the outcome of a German obsession with order and rules. He argued that there had once been a loose-knit old-northern linguistic unity that encompassed England and Scandinavia. The Migration and Viking Age runic inscriptions of Britain, Denmark, Norway and Sweden he viewed as prime sources for this northern form of Teutonic, claiming that they bore more reliable testimony to its fragmented and unstandardised nature than the reconstructed Old Icelandic of nineteenth-century grammars. As Wawn points out (2000, 241), an essential benefit of this line of reasoning is "the creation of a scepticism-free zone inside which his [Stephens's] own runic decipherments and broader dreams of old northern glory can have free rein". Even so, Stephens touches on a dilemma that has often been ignored. When dealing with periods of language development for which there is little direct evidence, scholars tend to reconstruct a uniform variety and try to match such evidence as exists with their reconstruction. They do this not so much from a love of order and discipline as to impose constraints. For in a world where readings can be justified by appeal to otherwise unknown dialectal varieties, nothing can be tested and so nothing falsified. Yet the idea that the Germanic of Scandinavia was variation-free until well into the Viking Age conflicts with the results of socio-linguistic research and general linguistic experience. It is in particular hard to see how the radical changes of the Scandinavian syncope period can have been accomplished without wide-scale dialectal variation (cf. Barnes 1997; 2003). The dilemma is thus between uniform reconstruction masquerading as reality on the one hand and unrestrained speculation on the other. It is of course possible to take a position somewhere between the two extremes. Stephens, who clearly did not think in the terms I have just outlined, located himself unhesitatingly on the speculative fringe.

That fringe was in fact rather crowded. As a speculative interpreter of runic inscriptions Stephens had several formidable British rivals, who hastened to join in the fun. These were on the whole people with rather less knowledge than their Copenhagen colleague. And they lacked the protection of the "scepticism-free zone" he had created for himself, for, unlike Stephens, they offered no justification for the readings and interpretations they put into circulation. Their approach was rather that of the ill-prepared undergraduate struggling with an unseen translation: grasp at such words as you think you recognise and fill in the gaps with guesswork. Where the brighter undergraduate will use the context provided by his or her understanding of the passage concerned, the nineteenth-century British runester seems to have been guided by little more than vague perceptions of the ancient North — although in the case of the Orkney Maeshowe inscriptions, there were the added dimensions of wild weather and treacherous seas.

Judging by the number of competing interpretations offered, the Maeshowe corpus exerted an irresistible fascination on the nineteenth-century antiquarian mind. Of the various contemporaries of Stephens who had a go at making sense of these graffiti, I will mention the three most outrageous: Thomas Barclay, Ralph Carr, and John Mitchell. Their presentation of the inscriptions is more or less on a par with Stephens's efforts. The romanisations of the runic sequences hover uncertainly between transliteration and edited text; translation and interpretation can be hard to distinguish; and so on. But it is the end results that give the mind serious cause to boggle. These surpass anything I have encountered from undergraduates doing battle with Old Norse texts. Barclay's Maeshowe inscriptions (1863) tell of udallers, of murder, banishment and gallows, of travel in southern lands, golden numbers, funeral honours, eternal rest in heaven, and of "a lady of faultless character, of graceful manners, and of honourable descent"; he also introduces us to a number of named individuals, of whom the charmingly titled "Okon of the tooth" certainly deserves mention. According to Carr (1868), Maeshowe once boasted a "How-warden"; other characters that populate his inscriptions include a "Mirk-Quene", "Purblindy the snow-stricken", "Jarl Æily" and "Simon Sihry from Ronaldsey". We also learn of falcons, otters, whalesmen and of shag-behosed, kilted, swimming harpooners. Mitchell's Maeshowe world (1863) chiefly revolves around ships and shipwrecks. The messages of the inscriptions range from the tame "wrecked, and near this", by way of "Dark misty weather. Ship labouring hard" to "Behold the Ship was abandoned / and the Hull lies there among the breakers". This last text perhaps points to the visible remains of an earlier dramatic episode that Mitchell conjures up:

"Jerusalem leaders wrecked on the Orkney cliffs / In a mist slothfully". Even the Maeshowe *fuþark* inscription (No. 5) is pressed into nautical service. In Mitchell's interpretation, it becomes "Futhorkh bound to the North-East", where Futhorkh is the name of a "ship or person … returning home" (1863, 58).

Had Barclay, Carr and Mitchell been rank amateurs or raw students, their efforts might have been dismissed with a marginal "tut tut!" together with some general indications of where they had gone wrong. But Barclay was an established academic — Principal of the University of Glasgow no less; Carr and Mitchell did not enjoy quite the same elevated status, but, like Barclay, both were members of antiquarian societies of repute, Mitchell styling himself "Fellow of the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries of Denmark; Joint-Secretary for Foreign Correspondence Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, etc." (1863, [iii]). None of them made their runic offerings in any spirit of humility. Barclay refrains from comment on his interpretations, but presents them with the assurance of a man in total command of the subject. Carr feigns a kind of modesty, before going on to opine that with his "somewhat long experience" of Anglo-Saxon he may be able to "perceive the meanings of some words or turns of expression more clearly than even Scandinavian scholars have yet explained them" (1868, 71). Mitchell is at once withering in his judgement of others and confident of the worth of his own contributions: had anyone working on the Maeshowe corpus "afforded the requisite elucidation of the Runes", he would, he affirms, "have been spared considerable labour" (1863, x).

Such misguided "scholarship" is of course not the exclusive domain of the nineteenth-century enthusiast. The internet, as we know, is awash with runic tosh. The names of O. G. Landsverk and Alf Mongé can still raise a weary smile (cf. Haugen 1981). And it is only a few years since a member of the Celtic Department in the University of Aberdeen transformed a selection of Pictish ogam inscriptions into some distinctly odd-looking "Old Norse" texts (Cox 1999).

Compared with these dilettantes Stephens can almost take on the appearance of a rigorous scholar. At the request of James Farrer, excavator of Maeshowe, he made one of the first attempts to read and interpret the runic inscriptions in the cairn, and the results of his efforts were included in Farrer's 1862 publication of the excavation. There is no doubt that Stephens gets much closer to the sense of these graffiti than Barclay, Carr and Mitchell. But, alas, Farrer cast his net more widely, and side-by-side with the Cheapinghaven professor's expositions stand the rival contributions of Carl Christian Rafn and Peter Andreas Munch (Farrer 1862, 25–40). In this

test of talent the competition is for the most part too stiff. The Scandinavian scholars exhibit a far clearer understanding than Stephens of the workings of Old Norse grammar and are thus in a much better position to offer plausible interpretations of the inscriptions. One might ask why there should be this difference between the British Stephens and the Scandinavian Rafn and Munch. We can hardly assume that the medieval language was more accessible to the latter two as native speakers of Danish and Norwegian respectively, since Stephens was himself quite at home in the modern Scandinavian idioms. The more likely explanation is that Scandinavian philological scholarship was strongly influenced by the German orderliness the Englishman so despised. Nineteenth-century Scandinavian education at all levels was, after all, based on the German model. In Britain, on the other hand, the tradition of the amateur gentleman scholar seems to have been firmly entrenched.

Scandinavian philological scholarship in general and runic studies in particular undoubtedly had solid foundations on which to build. Pioneers like Bureus in Sweden and Worm in Denmark—working before the era of "wissenschaftliches Runenstudium" as an early historian of the field dubs it (Jaffé 1937, 47; cf. also Düwel 2008, 220)—managed by and large to get closer to the message of the inscriptions they treated than the nineteenth-century British amateurs. Thus Worm, for example, makes fairly short work of the two Jelling inscriptions, faltering only in a few places. The famous **tanmarkaʀ:but** of Jelling 1 is interpreted as a relative clause 'QVÆ DANIAM EXORNAVIT', **but** being seen as some form of the Danish verb *bygge* 'build'; the interpretation of the phrase as a byname, already current in Worm's day, is challenged (1643, 339–41). The sequence towards the bottom of face A of Jelling 2, **sa|haraltr[:]ias:sãʀ·uan·tanmaurk** 'That Haraldr who won for himself Denmark', is read *Haraltr Kesor van Tanmaurk* (the initial **sa** being transferred to the previous word) and taken to mean 'HARALDUS IMPERATOR RECUPERAVIT DANIAM'. Face C of the same inscription with its worn middle section becomes *Aug tini folk Kristno* 'ET EARUM INCOLAS AD FIDEM CHRISTIANAM CONVERTIT' instead of **auktạni|karþi|kristnã** 'and made the Danes Christian' (1643, 333). These divergences from the modern interpretation apart, Worm delivers an accurate analysis of the words and their grammatical relationships, and is thus able to arrive at a fairly satisfactory understanding of the two inscriptions. He had less success with the Norwegian older-*fuþark* Tune inscription, which is barely recognisable in the schematic drawings he published (1643, 478)—but then he was working almost 200 years before the older runic alphabet was satisfactorily deciphered. Recognising his inability

to read the Tune runes, Worm does not embark of the type of idle guessing game favoured by nineteenth-century British interpreters. He is content to admit defeat (1643, 479): "Ejus [Tune's] delineationem exhibere placuit, etsi de interpretatione planè desperem."

In Sweden, Worm's near contemporaries, Bureus and Verelius, showed a similar understanding of the younger *fuþark* and its inscriptions. Bureus mastered many of the finer details of runic writing, and Verelius knew enough to engage in serious polemic against Worm. It is no surprise to find that both are able to offer reasonably accurate readings and interpretations of numbers of inscriptions. Under their detailed scrutiny, the complex text on the Hillersjö stone (U 29), for example, emerges clearly enough as an inheritance document (cf. *SRI*, 6: 36 f.), though it is not clear why Verelius locates the stone in "Helsingeland" (1675, 34). Like Worm, when faced with the indecipherable these two early runologists are willing to admit defeat. Verelius reproduces Bureus's careful drawings of the staveless Malsta and Hälsingtuna inscriptions but declares that such "Willoruner" ('cryptic runes') are not meant to be understood and that effort spent on trying to decipher them has little point. The drawings are included, however, just in case anyone wants to try his hand at interpreting them (1675, 66 f.). As Jansson points out (1983, 7 f.), it must have come as an unpleasant surprise to Verelius to discover that in the very same year he published his *Manuductio compendiosa ad runographiam Scandicam antiqvam*, his compatriot, Magnus Celsius, had found the key to the staveless runes.

With forerunners of the calibre of Worm, Bureus, Verelius and Celsius, it is scarcely surprising that by the nineteenth century runic studies had progressed further in Scandinavia than in Britain. In the editing department the names of Liljegren and Dybeck in Sweden, Thorsen and Wimmer in Denmark and Munch and Bugge in Norway come particularly to mind.

Liljegren's *Run-Urkunder* (1833) makes reference to 3000 inscriptions, Swedish and other, some 2000 of which are transliterated into the roman alphabet. Although Liljegren's transliterations are not as precise as modern scholarship demands, they most definitely are transliterations: there is nothing of the confusion with interpretation and edited text we find in nineteenth-century British scholarship. Indeed, Liljegren offers no interpretations at all (nor does he include drawings).

Dybeck (1855–57[–59]; 1860–76) presents a selection of Swedish inscriptions in the form of normalised runes, transliteration and drawing, but provides little in the way of interpretation. His transliterations are less precise than those of Liljegren in that he replaces separators with spaces between words. Nor is he above the occasional bit of editorial interference,

as where the Gripsholm inscription's (Sö 179) **þinsat** becomes ÞINSA (A)T (1855–57[–59], 1: 24).

Thorsen (1864–80) organises a fairly comprehensive ramble through the Danish runestones, offering some sound and some implausible interpretations on the way. Instructive is his treatment of the Jutlandic Bække 2 inscription. This runs, rather unpromisingly: **hribnã:ktubi:kriu kubþsi|aft:uibrukmþusin**. Thorsen's transliteration is identical with the modern version, except that he uses bold capitals, with a slightly variant capital ⟨A⟩ to indicate the fourth rune of the younger *fuþark* (1864–80, 1: 22). His interpretation, which recognises that the inscription is drastically abbreviated, doubtless owes much to other scholars, in particular C. C. Rafn and Carl Säve (Thorsen 1864–80, 2.2: 4; Rafn 1861, 189–94, 272 f.). But where Säve saw the first **k** of the inscription as an abbreviation of the conjunction *auk* 'and' connecting two personal names and **kriu** as a shortened form of *gerðu* 'made', Thorsen reshaped the sequence as "KUBTI:GIRUA", i.e. *køpti gerva* 'paid to make' (1864–80, 2.2: 5). Such a construction, is, I think, without parallel, but is perhaps only slightly less plausible than Rafn's explanation of **kriukub** as *grjótkumbl* 'stone-monument' (1861, 193), an interpretation recently resuscitated by Moltke (1985, 386). All more or less agree that the remainder of the inscription is to be taken as *þøsi aft Víborg móður sína* 'this [monument] after Víborg, his mother' (cf., e.g., *DR, Text*, 55–57; Moltke 1985, 386). While we may detect here a faint echo of the wild guesses of nineteenth-century British runesters, the crucial point that the message is abbreviated has been understood. Stephens (1866–1901, 2: 731–33), as it happens, cheerfully accepted Säve's interpretation, though it is amusing to speculate what he would have made of Bække 2 without the guidance of the Scandinavians—not to mention the fun Barclay, Carr and Mitchell and their ilk could have had with it.

Thorsen's transliteration of this difficult runic sequence is irreproachable. The same cannot however be said of many of the other inscriptions he treats. The very uncertainty of Bække 2 seems to have inspired him with caution. When faced with more readily comprehensible texts, Thorsen has no qualms about adding a dose of interpretation to his observation. Instead of a transliteration of Jelling 2, for example, the reader is given a "Læsning … i Olddansk" ('reading … in Old Danish'; 1864–80, 2.2: 28). While this follows the original reasonably closely, all **k**s that denote /g/ are rendered ⟨G⟩, spaces are introduced between words unseparated on the stone, the fourth rune is given as ⟨O⟩ (contrast Bække 2 above) and the text is here and there expanded. This procedure marks a decline in comparison with Liljegren's faithful reproduction of the runes in roman letters.

P. A. Munch, unlike Liljegren, Dybeck and Thorsen, and later Wimmer and Bugge, did not produce a runic corpus edition. He was nevertheless a leading figure in nineteenth-century runological research. Munch's approach to runic inscriptions is critical, sober and cautious, and he is able to bring a wealth of linguistic and historical knowledge to bear on their interpretation. In 1857, for example, we find him castigating Ole Worm for the inaccuracy of his illustrations in "*Monumenta danica*" (1857a, 3 f.; see also 1857b, 72 f.). Since this criticism comes as a prelude to a (for its time) remarkably penetrating analysis of the Tune inscription, that is perhaps not surprising (cf. p. 14 f. above). But Munch goes further, claiming that few, if any, of Worm's illustrations are faithful copies of the runic inscriptions they claim to portray, and concluding that far from benefiting scholarship his work has caused considerable damage. Although one may suspect a certain anti-Danish sentiment in this attack, the content and style are in fact fairly typical of the author: Worm is condemned first and foremost for having been far less accurate than someone treating runological topics should be. Munch can be equally withering about aspects of British scholarship. Making one of several contributions to a long-running polemic in the Scandinavian press (cf. Barnes 1992), he speaks of those "som sandsynligvis efter engelske Dilettanters Viis snarere føle sig tiltrukne af hvad der gjør Sprell og synes 'striking' end af det grundigere, der optræder i en beskednere Form" ('who probably in the manner of English dilettantes feel themselves more drawn to what causes a stir and seems "striking" than to more painstaking endeavour that appears in a humbler guise'; Munch 1862, 28).

This polemic arose from a dispute about who had the right to publish the Maeshowe corpus, a project in which Munch was heavily involved. His provisional readings and interpretations of the inscriptions appeared in the Norwegian *Illustreret Nyhedsblad* (Munch 1861), and were followed by a more considered account in Farrer's Maeshowe book of 1862 (p. 13 above). Comparing Munch's efforts with those of Stephens and Rafn in the Farrer volume, one cannot deny it is the Norwegian who best understands what the inscriptions say. And just as well, for Munch affirms as part of the above-mentioned polemic how easy most of the Maeshowe corpus was to read and interpret (1862, 27): "de Dele af Indskriften, som kunne læses, ere saa lette at finde ud af, at Læsningen er den simpleste Sag af Verden, og for alle Sagkyndige maa synes saaledes" ('those parts of the collection which can be read are so easy to understand that reading them is the simplest thing in the world, something that must be obvious to any expert'). As a transliterator, or perhaps one should say presenter, of runic texts Munch is less convincing. His readings, like those of so many of his contemporaries,

combine the reproduction of the runes in roman with editorial features such as word spacing, punctuation and capitalisation. He may also use one and the same roman letter to transliterate different runes as when ⟨o⟩ is allowed to represent the ᛆ, ᚯ and ᚼ of the Maeshowe inscriptions (e.g. 1861, 206; Farrer 1862, 26, 32). It should be observed, however, that Munch may not have been solely responsible for the final form of his contribution to Farrer's volume.

With Ludvig Wimmer's *De danske runemindesmærker* (1895–1908), we enter the era of the modern runic corpus edition. The work is by no means comprehensive, concentrating on commemorative runestones to the exclusion of much else, but each of the inscriptions included is treated according to a set format. Information is given about the stone or other object bearing the inscription — find circumstances, history (as far as is known), current location, material and dimensions. The inscription is described, and the size, shapes, and peculiarities of individual runes commented on as appropriate. There follows a transliteration into lower-case, wide-spaced roman, with separators shown. Rounded brackets indicate uncertain readings, square brackets expansions and readings taken from earlier accounts, although the distinction here is not absolute. Next comes an edited text in a normalised "olddansk" ('Old Danish') and then a translation into modern Danish placed within double inverted commas. Each runic object is illustrated. Treatment of the individual inscriptions is preceded by a lengthy introduction in which the Danish commemorative runestones are discussed as a group. Themes here include: the purpose of the stones; their general appearance; the age, geographical spread, names and current locations of the inscriptions; rune forms; the sound value(s) of the runes; the language and content of the inscriptions; rune carvers; the art of the runestones; stones with runelike symbols; Danish runic monuments abroad.

With such a range of topics covered, it seems churlish to point to weaknesses in Wimmer's edition — yet weaknesses there are. One of the most serious deficiencies is the absence of a discussion of the principles on which the work is based and an account of how it was compiled. This can lead to various kinds of uncertainty, of which, by way of example, I mention one. The Snoldelev inscription (DR 248) is transliterated thus by Wimmer (1895–1908, 2: 342):

> k u n ' u a l t s t a i n ' s u n a ʀ '
> r u h a l t s ' þ u l a ʀ ' ą s a l h a u k u (m) [' ?]

Although this looks to be a fairly careful piece of work, the end result disguises the fact that the carver used both ᚼ and ᛏ for /a/. Thus the first

line runs: ᚠᚢᚦ·ᚢᚼᚷᚢᚼᚢᚷᛁᚦ·ᛌᚢᚦᚦᛆ. The rune ᚠ in the second line, on the other hand, is rendered ⟨ą⟩. What the reader is left to ponder is whether Wimmer's transliteration here is phonetically based or whether he is treating ᚷ and ᚦ as variants of the same rune. Equally unclear is the reasoning that might have led him to adopt either of these procedures. We are at some remove here from the explicitness required of today's runic editors.

Like Wimmer's monumental work, Sophus Bugge's edition of the Norwegian inscriptions in the older runic alphabet (*NIæR*) has many of the trappings of a modern corpus edition. Each inscription is treated in more or less the same way: introductory remarks about its discovery and state of preservation are followed by measurements and an indication of where it is currently to be found. The runes are reproduced in normalised form and precisely transliterated into bold roman lower case (although uncertainty of reading is not normally indicated). Out of the ensuing discussion, which takes in runography, language, message and context, comes a modified transliteration incorporating word separation, which is then translated into Dano-Norwegian. Drawings and/or photographs of the inscriptions are also provided. The lengthy introduction which precedes the treatment of individual inscriptions takes the reader far afield: to the origin and development of runic writing, rune names, and related topics—matters we today might think do not belong in an account of Norway's inscriptions in the older runes. However, we should remember that Bugge's edition was compiled at a time when knowledge of the older alphabet and its relationship with the younger was relatively fresh, so that much that is second-nature to us required explanation. More pertinently from the modern reader's perspective, the introduction also offers a brief account of the older *fuþark*, in the course of which transliteration equivalents are given for each of the twenty-four runes, variant forms discussed and sound values elaborated. Here we are not far removed from the idea of the distinct written character, whether defined as grapheme or *fuþark* unit (Barnes and Page 2006)—although Bugge could not of course have thought or written in such terms.

From Bugge we move firmly into the twentieth century and the corpus editions we still by and large consult—notwithstanding some of the volumes go back well over 60 years. *Sveriges runinskrifter* (*SRI*), *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer* (*NIyR*), *Danmarks runeindskrifter* (*DR*), *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark* (*RäF*) and *Islands runeindskrifter* (*IR*) differ considerably from each other in approach, structure and degree of personal input. *SRI* and *NIyR* concentrate on the individual inscription, consigning the broader aspects of their corpus to introductory remarks, final

reflections, indices or asides. *SRI*, not least because of the size of the corpus, has a spread of contributors. Perhaps because of this, it is less subject to editorial whim than *NIyR*, which up to and including volume 5 was virtually the private province of Magnus Olsen. In some respects *SRI* seems to have been guided by a remarkably consistent editorial policy. Thus the runes of the younger *fuþark* tend to be transliterated by the same letters of the roman alphabet from volume to volume: ᚢ and its variants, for example, are regularly **o**. There is greater emphasis on presenting the inscriptions than interpreting every detail—a tradition that perhaps owes something to Liljegren and Dybeck. Throughout, considerable attention is paid to earlier research. Differences between particular parts of the series can of course be observed: it would be strange otherwise given that the edition has been over 100 years in the making. The practice of printing a normalised version of the runes of each inscription, for example, is found only in *Ölands runinskrifter*, the very first volume. And as time goes on interpretation tends to loom larger. Certain discrepancies appear to go back to individual editors. The volumes that bear Sven B. F. Jansson's name lack detailed introductions and thus often fail to deal with broader questions raised by the corpus. A partial exception is *Gästriklands runinskrifter*, whose brief introduction nevertheless emphasises the role of the individual inscription as the basic building block of *SRI* according to "runverkets planläggning" ('the planning of the [Swedish] corpus edition'; *SRI*, 15.1:22).

NIyR, as already noted, has the same general structure as *SRI*. However the Norwegian work differs from its Swedish counterpart in an important respect. Olsen, the chief (and for a long time sole) editor devotes a great deal of space to the context and background of his inscriptions, and in doing so is apt to allow his imagination to wander. Instead of a sober weighing up of the possibilities, a tale is spun—though often with such conviction that the unwary reader may take what he is told for fact. In his presentation of the individual inscription, Olsen for the most part follows the pattern established by Bugge. He gives normalised runic representations, transliterations and translations, but in the place of *NIæR*'s modified transliteration he provides an edited text in italics. Olsen is less fastidious in his transliterations than Bugge. He introduces word spacing right from the start—not perhaps too serious in that he also includes a normalised representation of the runes. More problematically, ᛅ may be transliterated by both **ą** and **o**, ᛆ and its variants by **ǫ** and **ø**—all according to Olsen's understanding of the sounds denoted. This element of uncertainty means the reader cannot rely on the transliterations of *NIyR* to reflect observation; an element of interpretation lurks within. The procedure whereby ᛅ is rendered now **ą** now **o** can of

course be justified by appeal to different systems of runic writing, but Olsen does not do this. Indeed, nowhere in *NIyR* are the principles that underlie transliteration practice discussed or even enunciated.

DR is organised very differently from *SRI* and *NIyR*. More like an encyclopaedia, it is much easier to use for those seeking specific details than either of the other two. The disadvantage is that the story of an individual inscription may have to be teased out of different parts of the work. Nevertheless, *DR* contains a much wider spectrum of information than its Swedish and Norwegian counterparts, and this information is presented in more structured, systematised and accessible form. A clear distinction is maintained between observation and interpretation, which means that transliteration practice, for example, is explicit even though the principles that underlie it are not discussed.

Like the first five volumes of *NIyR*, *RäF* is very much the product of single mind — a fairly capacious mind, it must be said, which could call on a wide range of knowledge and also grasp the importance of giving the runic material it was dealing with precise, systematic and consistent presentation. It was not, though, a mind that understood the virtue of transparency. Thus, the introduction to *RäF*, while offering some useful insights into the older runic alphabet, provides few clues for those who would understand how this corpus edition came into being, why it takes the form it does, and what thinking lies behind the presentations. Nor do the introductory remarks reveal why the editor had such a firm belief in the value of rune forms as a dating tool. Furthermore, the background of cult and magic against which many of the inscriptions in *RäF* are seen appears to be a fundamental premise rather than a hypothesis to be demonstrated.

In some respects Anders Bæksted's *Islands runeindskrifter* is the most advanced of all the early and mid-twentieth-century runic corpus editions. It begins with a foreword — a light mixture of *modus operandi* and *apologia pro opere meo* — and continues with a full-blown introduction. The introduction deals with the following topics: the history of runic writing in Iceland; the types of runic material found there; the content of inscriptions and of runic writing found in medieval manuscripts; the general appearance of different types of inscription; the rune forms employed; dating; the history of research on the Icelandic runic material. Treatment of individual inscriptions is based on the following template: find circumstances, history and present location; specification of the runic artefact or the position of the runes in the case of those found in caves etc.; particulars of the inscription including measurements; date of examination; transliteration into wide-spaced, lower-case roman; edited text in italics. Peculiarities in the inscription or

problems with the reading are dealt with in notes that follow the edited text. In conclusion there is a bibliography for each inscription with selected quotations from the works cited.

About the principles underlying his transliteration practice, Bæksted is a little more forthcoming than his contemporaries. The Icelanders, he maintains, used runes as roman alphabet equivalents: "som ligefremme erstatninger for det tilsvarende latinske bogstav" ('as simple replacements for the corresponding latin letter'; *IR*, 37). His system of transliteration is based on this notion of equivalence and thus has the roman alphabet as its starting point rather than the runic—a reversal of the normal procedure. While clear and explicit enough, such an approach obviates the need for discussion of the finer points of transliteration. It is hardly self-evident, for example, that ᛂ and ᚻ should both be transliterated ⟨o⟩, but Bæksted is content to do so because he considers ⟨o⟩ to be the letter an Icelander writing in the roman alphabet would have used in the relevant contexts.

It remains to be said that all of these twentieth-century editions are copiously illustrated, though the quality of photographs and drawings, in particular in *NIyR* and the early volumes of *SRI*, may leave something to be desired.

The editing of runic inscriptions did not of course end with Bæksted and his contemporaries. Occasional volumes and fascicles have appeared since their day, although the tempo of production has sunk—indeed, it can sometimes seem to stand in inverse proportion to the money, time and technological know-how employed. Much of the runic corpus editing of the last 50 years or so has been in continuation of existing projects, notably *SRI* and *NIyR*. Although the most recent volumes of *SRI* show marked improvements on those published earlier and volume 6 of *NIyR* makes something of a leap forward in terms of information density, accuracy and clarity, neither project can reasonably be expected to provide the forum for a radical reappraisal of editing techniques.

There will of course be different views on what makes for a good runic corpus edition. I should like therefore to conclude by setting out what I consider the requirements of such a work.

The first concerns explicitness. There should be an account of how the editor(s) moved from concept to end product. As part of this there would be discussion of:

(a) How the corpus was established: what was admitted, what left out, and why.
(b) The circumstances in which the editor(s) examined the inscriptions

and the extent to which this could have affected the reliability of their readings.

(c) The form in which the inscriptions are presented and the reasoning behind the choice.

(d) The principles according to which runes are normalised and transliterations made.

(e) The distinction between observation and interpretation, and how far it is possible to maintain it.

(f) The preconceptions the editor(s) bring to their task. Do they espouse a particular point of view or are they agnostic? On what premises are their interpretations based?

A second requirement is for caution. Authoritarian pronouncements about the meaning and age of inscriptions should be avoided where no certainty exists. The chief task of the editor must be to set out the data, allowing readers to make their own judgements. That is not, of course, to say that editors must refrain from expressing opinions about what they think plausible.

A third requirement is for awareness of the pitfalls confronting the editor who dabbles in disciplines of which s/he has little experience. And as a corollary to this: circumspection in relying on assertions by scholars in fields the editor is not trained to assess.

These three basic requirements should be observed throughout the edition. Other desiderata can probably be satisfactorily accommodated in introductory chapters.

One such chapter should place the corpus in a wider context. How do the inscriptions relate to what is known of the society in which they are believed to have been carved? How do they relate to writing in other alphabets? And how do they relate to one another — are there common features or is the collection scattered and disparate?

Another chapter might consider how far the corpus reflects what was actually carved. If, as often seems likely, the material represents a tiny fraction of the total number of inscriptions made, what conclusions about language, culture, technical competence and political and ethnic relationships can safely be drawn from it?

A further chapter could usefully ponder how the inscriptions came into being. What was the source of the text? What opportunities did the carver's material offer? How much care did he bring to his task? How skilled was he?

Investigation should normally also be made into the system or systems of runic writing employed, and the type or types of language and orthography

found. Here the editor may occasionally draw a blank, in which case s/he should refrain from seeking to impose order where none can be discerned.

Something could also be said about the location and accessibility of the inscriptions. Where are they to be found and what conditions is the runologist likely to meet when s/he goes to examine them. It may also be helpful to stress that runic artefacts in collections are not necessarily static: they may move between collections, and collections may change name and location—quite often and rather bafflingly in some cases.

It goes almost without saying that consistency is a virtue, because it makes things easier for the reader. Each inscription should as far as practicable be presented in the same way; transliteration principles, once established, should be adhered to; those using phonetic and phonemic notation should distinguish rigorously between the two. And so on.

Finally, I enter a plea against electronic editions. I appreciate the ease with which they can be updated, but therein lies the snag. Nothing is permanent, and therefore there is nothing that can usefully be referred to. For all its alleged disadvantages, the old-fashioned book still has much to recommend it.

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