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In his recent analysis of the Tune inscription (KJ 72), Thórhallur Eythórsson (2013) attempts to use a mixture of common sense and etymology to overcome Wilson’s law — i.e. the “first law of runo-dynamics” which (as stated by Page 1999, 10) holds that there will be as many interpretations of any inscription as there are interpreters of it. Eythórsson makes a number of disputable claims in his paper, however, perhaps most strikingly in his refusal to allow a reading of side B’s attested spelling sijostez as a haplographic asijostez (with initial a represented by the final a in the preceding arbija). After all, haplography of the homoioagrammaton or same-letter type looks to be clearly attested in the Pietroasele inscription’s wi hailag for wi h hailag (KJ 41) and the Wremen text’s ksamella lguskaþi for skamella alguskaþi (Schön et al. 2006), so it is hard to understand Eythórsson’s contention that no sure examples of such graphematic elisions are attested in the early runic corpus.

Marstrander’s (1930, 320 f.) original proposal was based on an understanding that a form sijostez had no clear comparandum elsewhere in Germanic, but that forms in *ans- were well known, the term *ansuz ‘god’ being attested in several early runic inscriptions: onomastically as A(n)su- and as a dat. sg. a(n)sau. Eythórsson instead points to Old Frisian sia ‘offspring, descendants’ as a possible cognate, following Läffler’s (1892) connection of sijostez and sia with forms like the Old Norse reflexive pronouns sik, sér, sín and sinn (< *se-, *sei-). But Old Frisian sia ‘offspring’ is linked with Old Frisian sia (< *sēan) ‘sow’ by Köbler (2003, s.v. siā), much as Latin sēmen ‘seed, shoot, race, progeny, offspring, origin, author’ stems from the same root (Pokorny 1959–69, 889–91). Läffler’s etymology (< *se(i)-jo-) is less principled than Köbler’s as it assumes a derivation from a pronominal construction of a type which is otherwise unparalleled—Eythórsson’s example (after Läffler) of Old Church Slavonic svojь ‘self’s, own’ (cf. Old Prussian swais ‘id.’) is not usually held to be a
-jo- derivative, but rather to be modelled on Old Church Slavonic *mojo (m.) < *mojo 'mine' (cf. Old Prussian *mais 'id.') and Old Church Slavonic *tvojo (m.) < *t(y)ojo 'yours' (cf. Old Prussian. tvais 'id.'), terms which are generally accounted re-fashioned, thematised forms of the inherited genitive singular enclitic pronouns *moi 'of me' and *t(y)oi 'of you' (Schmidt 1978, 129; Fortson 2010, 143). Bjorvand (2008) presents an equally speculative etymology seeking to connect both sijostez and sia with Indo-European *sh2ei- 'bind', a derivation which, although it has clearer Indo-European morphological justification (cf. Latvian sija 'supporting beam under a bridge', Lithuanian sija 'connecting beam, timber bridgework'), is rejected by Eythórsson on semantic grounds. In my view, both Bjorvand and Eythórsson present quite unlikely etymologies for sijostez and sia.

Marstrander’s reading of asijostez as *asijōstēz ‘closest to the Aesir’ is probably best taken as a(n)sijōstēz ‘godliest, most divine’. It is rather better supported empirically than are Läffler’s and Bjorvand’s suggestions, as not only do the regular Indo-European terms for ‘heavenly, divine’ feature a similar palatal affix (cf. Sanskrit divyā-, Greek δῖος ‘heavenly’ and Latin divus, dīus ‘divine’, the latter also commonly substantivised as ‘god’), but as Marstrander (1930, 321) points out such a formation might also explain the unexpected inflexional vocalism in Jordanes’ description Anses (non puros homines sed semideos, id est Ansis vocaverunt; Get. xiii 78, ed. Mommsen 1882) as well as the i-umlaut in the Old English gen. pl. cognate ēsa (attested as a form of ‘shot’ in a charm in the Lacnunga). The Indo-European ancestor of Anses is clearly best reconstructed as a u-stem *h2ensu- as is indicated by the likely Hittite cognate haššu- ‘king’ as well as the surer comparanda Sanskrit āśura- ‘godlike, powerful’ and Avestan ahura- ‘god, lord’ (Kloekhorst 2008, 372–74, pace Bammesberger 1996). The Tune form asijostez may well have developed from an adjectival construction morphologically comparable to an early Nordic patronymic such as the Istaby stone’s (KJ 98) haeruwulafiz (< *Heruwulfijaz), the underlying form *ansijaz (like Latin divus ‘god, divine’) presumably taking on a substantive as well as its original adjectival function in early Germanic.

The comparison Eythórsson makes of sijostez arbijano to Latin suus heres ‘his own heir’ also seems to undermine rather than support his contention, as a superlative form of suus heres would make little sense from the perspective of Roman law where the concept is absolute rather than gradational. Indeed even the old Roman law that Eythórsson cites contrasts a single suus heres with the ‘nearest’ agnate male heir: Si

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Cf. also Oscan diíviiai ‘goddess’ (dat. sg.) and Gaulish diīiuion ‘gods’ (gen. pl.).
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intestato moritur, cui suus heres nec escit, adgnatus proximus familium habeto (‘If a person dies intestate, and has no self-successor, the nearest agnate male kinsman shall have possession of the deceased’s household’; Leg. xii tab. v 4, ed. Brun 1876). Instead ansijōstēz seems best translated as a eulogistic superlative, perhaps ‘noblest’ given the semantic extension of both Greek διος and Latin divus to mean ‘noble, excellent’ (e.g. in διε γυναικών ‘noblest of women’; Hom., Od. iv 305, ed. Stanford 1965) as well as (merely) ‘heavenly, divine’. The references to divine ancestry typical of Old Germanic genealogical tradition were clearly intended to be eulogistic and the comparable uses of descendants of Indo-European *h₂ensu- as ‘king’ and ‘lord’ in Hittite and Indo-Iranian similarly suggest that a meaning ‘noblest’ (perhaps even, with Marstrander, in the sense ‘of noblest lineage’) may have been associated with an early runic ansijōstēz.

Marstrander’s assessment of the Tune memorial is, in my opinion, one of his more important contributions to runology. Eythórsson’s questioning of his rejection of with Old Frisian sia ‘offspring’ seems to me to reflect a common problem with runic methodology. The reason that Eythórsson cites for preferring Bugge’s (NLæR, 1: 27 f.) interpretation of dalidun as da(í)lidun ‘divided’ (rejected by Marstrander) represents the same logic as that which Marstrander first applied to connect asijōstēz with *ansuz—i.e. a conviction that interpretations of runic expressions should principally be made in terms of forms actually paralleled elsewhere in Germanic. Yet Läffler’s connection of sia with Old Frisian sia is no more plausible (or reliable) than Seip’s (1929) suggestion that dalidun represents a verbal development on Old Norse dæll ‘facilis’ only otherwise clearly paralleled in Slavic (cf. Old Church Slavonic delati ‘work’, Russian delat’ ‘do’), whereas Marstrander’s suggested reading ansijōstēz can at least be supported by the common enlargement of Indo-European (zero-grade) *diu- ‘god’ by an adjectival suffix -jo- as well as by Jordanes’ Anses and Old English ēsa. Marstrander’s treatment of the Tune inscription may remain disputable in some respects, particularly his analysis the text on side B. But surely a more consistent and explicit runological method than that which Eythórsson has applied remains the best defence against the over-production of epigraphic interpretations à la Wilson’s law.

Bibliography


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