

Comments on Michael Lerche Nielsen's Paper

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The most significant results of Michael Lerche Nielsen's contribution are twofold: (1) There is a fair amount of interaction between Scandinavians and Western Slavs in the Late Viking Age and Early Middle Ages — other than that recorded in later medieval texts (and through archaeology), and (2) *This* interaction seems to be quite peaceful, at least. Lerche Nielsen's inventory of runic inscriptions and name material with a West Slavic connection is also good and very useful.

The most important evidence to be studied further is that of the place names, especially *Vinderup* and *Vindeboder*. The former is by Lerche Nielsen (p. 156) interpreted to contain *vindi* 'the western Slav' which would mean a settlement by a member of this group. He compares (p. 156) it to names such as *Saxi* 'person from Saxony', *Æistr/Æisti/Æistmaðr* 'person from Estonia' and *Tafæistr* 'person from Tavastland (in Finland)'. The problem here, of course, is that we do not know for sure if these persons really, as suggested by Lerche Nielsen, stem ethnically from the regions suggested by their names or if they are ethnic Scandinavians having been given names because of some connection with non-Scandinavian areas.¹ Personally, I lean towards the view that names of this sort are of the latter type rather than the former, but that is not crucial here.

The importance of names such as *Æisti* is that it does prove a rather intimate connection on the personal plane between Scandinavians and non-Scandinavians. If *Vinderup* was settled by one person (or several) from the Wendish area it proves that relations between them and the Danes must have been rather peaceful. A Scandinavian given a name connecting him to a non-Scandinavian area, on the other hand, does not

¹ In this connection I discount the possibility of a person being named after an ancestor, in which case the question of onomastic origin is only removed a generation or more.

prove the same. *Æisti* and other name bearers of this type may very well have been engaged in armed conflict, but even so it proves a significant contact link. Hence *Æisti* may equally well mean ‘the “Estish”’ and ‘the Estonian’ just as a hypothetical **Finni* could mean ‘the Finnish’ rather than ‘the Finn’. Lerche Nielsen (p. 157) makes this clear: “There is no doubt that inhabitants’ names reflect linguistic contacts, but without circumstantial evidence it is hard to establish the exact kind of linguistic effect and significance of these encounters.”

A person who does seem to prove a more intimate relationship between Scandinavians and Wends is Gnemer Ketilsson who owned a village on the Danish island of Falster and who, according to Lerche Nielsen, was bilingual. He states (p. 156) that “it remains a puzzle to decide his ethnic ties”.² I would suggest that his father may very well have been Scandinavian, as the name *Ketill* suggests, but his mother Wendish which would explain his “too close connections with the Slavs” (p. 155).

The fifteen Scandinavian runic inscriptions found on West Slavic territory prove that not only did Slavs possibly live in Denmark, but definitely that Scandinavians lived in Wendland. The Scandinavian population cannot have been very small; the number of runic inscriptions is only one less than that stemming from the Nordic settlements on Ireland. Nor are the runic finds from Wendland insignificant. Lerche Nielsen (p. 158) notes that “the proportion of meaningful inscriptions from the West Slav lands seems to be at the same level or even higher than, for instance, urban finds from Lund, Sigtuna, Gamlebyen in Oslo, and Dublin”.

The most important aspect of these texts is that they constitute speaker-generated originals. Here, we hear from the resident Scandinavians themselves, not from much later Danish, German or Icelandic authors. And it is striking how similar the inscriptions from West Slav lands are to those from places within the Scandinavian homelands proper. And even though the West Slavic runic material is limited in quantity, it is quite rich in contents and very interesting, showing a wide range for its size. Here, we find evidence of literature, trade, teaching, self-proclamation, sexuality, and doodling.

Lerche Nielsen (pp. 167–172) presents the texts in full, but I would like to comment on or add to some of his interpretations, and as a conclusion I would like to bring into the discussion two Scandinavian runestones evidencing further contacts with the Wends.

² Saxo calls him *Guemerus*. Clearly we have a case of an *n* being misread as *u* or vice versa.

The Starigard/Oldenburg 1 rib inscription (X StO11) is carved on two sides. On the concave side is found the text **porki** which is interpreted *Pörke[ll]/Pörgæi[RR]/Pörgī[sl]/ Pörgi[ls]*, all men's names. Since there is no indication that the runic sequence is damaged at the end, the most likely interpretation is *PörgæiRR*, since *RR* sometimes seems to be lost (Larsson 2002: 113–18, Källström 2007: 56–57, but compare Lerche Nielsen 2003: 226–28). On the convex side is found **fuþo a ş...** which has been seen as the beginning of the *futhark*, the runic “alphabet”, followed by a not interpreted sequence. Since the former would in that case be incomplete and this very legend appears in more than half a dozen other runic inscriptions, alternative interpretations should also be considered. The sequence **fuþ** has also been seen as an incomplete *futhark* but is in many if not all cases better interpreted as *fuð* (fem.) ‘cunt’, most probably also found in the Kamień Pomorski inscription (see below). That sexual matters were not far from the minds of rune carvers in Starigard/Oldenburg is shown by another rib inscription from the same place, X StO14, which on its concave side bears an inscription clearly to be interpreted as *Kūkr kÿss kuntu, kÿss!* ‘Prick kiss the cunt, kiss!’ (see also Holm 2013).

On the Starigard/Oldenburg 2 and 3 ribs (X StO12, X StO13) are found inscriptions interpreted as either the personal names *Ørn* and *Faxi* or the homonymous animal designations meaning ‘eagle’ and ‘horse’, respectively. We are dealing with ribs from cattle, not eagles or horses, but in any case I think personal names are the more likely choice for an interpretation.

Another name may be found on the previously not interpreted Starigard/Oldenburg 5 rib inscription (X StO15), reading **sinkn**. In theory, this might constitute two words, the latter being *ā* ‘owns’ (compare Alt Lübeck 3, where in the middle group of the *futhark* the **a** is mistakenly carved **n**: **hnins** instead of **hnias**). The runes **sink** could then be interpreted as the man's name *Sīnk(R)*. But who would claim ownership of a cattle rib? It is therefore more likely that the sequence should be interpreted as one word, ending in *-a* with a miscarving of the same type as the one just mentioned. The only word that seems to fit here would be **sīnka* which may be compared to Old Icelandic *sínka* (fem.) ‘greed’ or the weak feminine of the adjective *sínkr* ‘greedy’. The latter would make possible the interpretation of this sequence as *Sīnka*, a personal name meaning ‘the greedy (female) one’. The strong masculine form of this adjective is used in the name formation *Sīnkr* used on a Swedish runestone (Peterson 2007: 196). Female names are sometimes formed from weak adjectives (Stroh-Wollin 2012: 198).

The concave side of the Kamień Pomorski rib has already been mentioned (see above). The convex side also bears a three-rune legend: **kur**. No less than three Old Norse words would be written exactly like this: *kurr* (masc.) ‘squabble, grumbling etc.’, *kúrr* (masc.) ‘Couronian, inhabitant of Courland’, and *kúrr* (adj.) ‘relaxed’. The second alternative may seem tempting (compare note 3 below), given the geographical context, but the third is even more attractive since this word is used as a byname in Old Norse (Larsson 2002: 40–41 note 8).

There is, however, a fourth alternative. It might at first seem less probable from an orthographic point of view, but it is quite possible from a factual perspective. The word for ‘cow’ is *kýr* in Old Icelandic and would be *kūr* in Old East Norse. That *r*, so-called palatal *r*, eventually merged with “regular” *r* and was written with the **r**-rune instead of the **᚛**-rune is a well-known process (Larsson 2002: 131–32). That this phenomenon occurred also in the Wendish area is evident from another cattle-bone inscription, that of X StO14 (see above), where the word *kūr* is written **kukr**. To find a word meaning ‘cow’ on a cattle bone would of course not be unexpected, but it should be noted that when an inscription on such a bone does refer to it the word used is *naut* (U Fv1992;168C), not *kūr*. All things considered, a man’s name *Kúrr* meaning ‘relaxed’ is therefore the best interpretation.

The runes **fo l** on the Alt Lübeck 2 soapstone object could conceivably be identical to Old Icelandic *fól* (neut.) ‘fool’, but this is very unlikely considering that the last rune is isolated from the first two. The inscription should rather be grouped with the non-lexical texts, perhaps consisting of doodles, although one or more of those inscriptions may simply be too damaged or just not yet interpreted.

With my new interpretations I have tried to stress the importance of taking the runic texts in Wendland seriously. The level of literacy evidenced through these texts may be seen as proof that the resident Scandinavians had some degree of education and that they practised their runic art under not too belligerent circumstances. This may open up a new perspective on the relationship between Scandinavians and Wends. Perhaps the literary sources do stress conflict more than trade and social interaction. But that not all was peaceful is evident even in more original text sources, as shall soon be seen.

First, however, I should like to stress that Lerche Nielsen’s paper for natural reasons concentrates on the relationship between Wends and

Danes, since most of what we know of relations between Scandinavians and Slavs concerns Danes. Not all Scandinavians are Danes, however, and Lerche Nielsen's use of the term *South Scandinavian* should at least in some cases be replaced with *East Scandinavian* and perhaps even just *Scandinavian*. At least one Swedish family had close ties to Wendland, that of king Ólafr Æiríksson Skotkonungr (Old West Norse *Óláfr Svíakonungr*), who ruled in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. He had a concubine named *Eðla* who was the daughter of the *jarl* of Wendland (Óláfs saga Helga: 130). With her he had three children, of whom the son, Æimundr, later in the eleventh century also became king of Sweden, and a daughter, Æstriðr, became the queen of Norway. Æimundr even grew up in Wendland where he was raised by his mother's relatives (*ibid.*). King Ólafr later married Æstriðr of the Obodrites, another West Slavic tribe. With her he had the son Anundr Jacob who succeeded him as king, and the daughter Ingigærðr who became queen of Kiev.

Evert Salberger (1976) has convincingly identified the name *Eðla* on a Swedish runestone from Viby church in the province of Östergötland (see Jansson 1965). This gives indirect evidence of Wendish contacts, even if the name itself is German (SMP 1: 608).

Another Swede in Wendland was Víkarr from Tiundaland, a district of Uppland, who fought in the prow of Óláfr Tryggvason's ship *Ormr inn langi* (Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar: 344–45), presumably stayed in the area a summer, as well as participated and perished in the battle of Svöldr together with the king.

More ordinary Swedes and Gotlanders also had dealings with people southeast and south of the Baltic, and most of the runestones mentioning this are indeed from Central Sweden, that is the provinces of Uppland and Södermanland (north and south of Stockholm).

On runestones from Viking-Age Sweden certain places along the southern or south-eastern Baltic coastal areas are mentioned: Cape Kolka and Zemgale (Sö 198) in northern Latvia; Haddeby (U 1048, Sö 16, Källström 2009: 63) near Schleswig in Germany; Livonia (Sö 39, U 698†?), the coastal area of Estonia and Latvia; Ventspils (G 135) in Latvia; Vironia (U 346†, U 356, U 533), a province in Estonia, and finally Estonia itself (Vg 181, U 439?).³

Until not too long ago no Swedish runic inscription was seen to mention

³ Hypothetically, the lost runic records Vg 42† [**kur**...] and U 955 [**kura**] might represent names such as *Kūrr* 'Curonian' (masculine) and *Kūra* 'the Curonian' (feminine), respectively. The Curonians (Courians) were settled on the coast of today's Latvia and Lithuania

Slavic areas west of Estonia and Latvia, and indeed there is reason to believe that travellers from the area corresponding to today's Sweden primarily steered their course more towards the east than the south.

Nevertheless, there is at least one certain Viking-Age example of dealings between Swedes and Wends, although it is not as well-known as it should be since the discovery was made known many years after the official publication of the runic inscription and in a popular context where it might easily slip past the attention of scholars. I am referring to the runestone from Överjärna church in the province of Södermanland (Sö 351). It is somewhat damaged, but the memorial message is obviously the usual, in this case someone erecting a stone in memory of a father. The text certainly ends with an obituary notice convincingly interpreted by Sven B. F. Jansson (1967: 38):

... *ræisti stæin þannsi at Vīgæir, faður sinn. Vindr drāpu hann.*⁴

... raised this stone in memory of Vīgæirr, his father. Wends killed him.

The verb *drepa* is used fairly often on Viking-Age runestones in the combination *vera drepinn* 'be killed', but it is also recorded in a more active sense:

U 258 *Hann drāpu norrmaennr ā knærri Āsbiarnar.* 'Norwegians killed him on Āsbiorn's cargo-ship.'

U 954† *En Sassurr drap hann ok gærði nǫðingsverk, svæik felaga sinn.* 'And Sassurr killed him and did a villainous deed, betrayed his partner.'

G 138 ... *æiniga sun þæira drāpu leybika[r]* ... '... people from Lübeck killed their only son.'

It is quite clear that to *drepa* somebody was an action frowned upon, and it is significant that two out of three cases deal with "foreigners" who have killed the dead man. Somehow it is obviously more shameful than when the commemorated themselves have slain strangers. If mentioned at all it is done so euphemistically as on Sö 179 *ærni gāfu* 'gave (food) to the eagle'. Also betrayals were condemned, as seen by the text on U 954†

(Bliujienė 2001: 235), and during the tenth and eleventh centuries they were in close contact with Gotland (p. 241).

⁴ The reading of the runic sequence representing the word *vindr* is evident since it is set off by word dividers on both sides, according to an observation by Magnus Källström, Stockholm (oral communication).

above. Betrayal and the killing by foreigners is united on G 134 *Hann sviku blākumænn ī útfaru* 'Wallachians betrayed him on a voyage'.

The interpretation by Jansson also presupposes that the final consonant cluster *-ndr* is written **nr**, something which at first sight might seem like an arbitrary assumption, especially since this is a word with high communicative load which should have been written with extra care (compare Williams 2010: 36). I suppose Jansson simply assumed that this was another instance of the so-called three consonant rule (Wessén 1968 § 57), where the middle of three consonants is lost (unless it is an *s*). And when you investigate cases of *-ndr* where the middle consonant is certainly lost, they turn out to be almost exclusively restricted to Södermanland; no less than ten out of twelve cases are found there.⁵

Sö 351 **uinr** for *vindr* would thus be in good company orthographically. And as there are no other objections to be made against Jansson's proposed interpretation, we may thus be sure of at least one runestone source that shows the connections between Viking-Age Swedes and Wends.

But I would claim that there is at least one other example, and that possibly of a more peaceful nature. On the runestone (U 667) from Hassla, Häggeby parish in the province of Uppland, is found the following inscription:

Igulbiörn ok Næsbiörn létu ræisa stæin ... æftir uinþa, faður sinn.

Igulbiörn and Næsbiörn had the stone erected ... in memory of **uinþa**, their father.

In another article (Williams ms.) I show that this name may be interpreted as the accusative form of the man's name *Vindi* 'the Wend, the Wendish one, the inhabitant of Wendland'. It ties in with other names derived from peoples and places in Northern Europe, viz. *Danski* 'the Danish one', *Iūti* (also *Iūtski*) 'the Jute, the inhabitant of Jutland' (for this and the following names see Peterson 2007), *Guti* 'the inhabitant of Gotland', possible *Saxi* if it means 'the Saxon one, the inhabitant of Saxony' and *Æisti* meaning 'man from Estonia'. There are also strong forms: *Danr*

⁵ Sö 20 \$...**uþmunr** [*G*]uðmundr, Sö 46 \$ **knauþimanr** *Gnauðimandr*(?), Sö 122 \$ **stanr** *standr*, Sö 137 **stanr** *standr*, Sö 138 **stainr** *stændr*, Sö 170 **agmunr** *Agmundr*, Sö 194 **ekimunr** *Ingimundr*, Sö 299 **onunr** *Anundr*, Sö 367 **hamunr** *Hämundr*, Sö Fv1958;242 **anunr** *Anundr*, U 392 **kermunr** *Gærimundr*, Hs 7 \$ **anunr** *Anundr*. The reason why there is such a concentration of this phenomenon in the province of Södermanland is unknown, but it is possible that an assimilatory process was unusually strong there, at least in this case.

‘Danish’, *Halfdan* ‘half Danish’, *Gautr* ‘inhabitant of Gautland’. See also *Æistr*, *Æistmaðr*, and *Tafæistr* above, as well as *Austmaðr* ‘man from the east’ and *Norðmaðr* ‘man from the north, from a northern country’.

It may of course be that a person called *Vindi* is given this name because he has waged war against Wends or in Wendland. But it is also possible that this type of name may be derived from more peaceful pursuits. Appellations such as *Grikkfari* ‘traveller to Greece’, *Æistfari* ‘traveller to Estonia’, and *Ænglandsfari* ‘traveller to England’ seem to point to voyages to foreign countries, not necessarily with a hostile purpose. Non-belligerent travellers are even more likely when we consider the names *Sumarliði* ‘traveller in the summer’ and *Vinrliði* ‘traveller in the winter’. That people did get named because of commercial activities is certain, compare, for example, *Kaupmaðr* ‘merchant’ (Källström 2008).

We will never know, of course, but it is in my view likelier that *Vindi* got his name from prolonged, more or less peaceful contacts with Wends than solely because of his fighting with them. Possible, too, is that he himself is of Wendish extraction but settled in Sweden. His sons, at least, had quite Swedish names.

In conclusion I note that Scandinavians and Wends had enough intimate contact to affect name-giving, and that the runic inscriptions left behind by the former constitute an important source to their life in Wendland.

Abbreviations and bibliography

§ = Inscription with a new reading or interpretation in SRD.

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- Sö + number = Inscription published in SRI 3.
- Sö Fv1958;242 = Inscription published in *Fornvännen* 53, 242.
- SRD = Samnordisk runtextdatabas 2008. Institutionen för nordiska språk, Uppsala universitet.
<http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm>
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- X StOI + number = inscription from Starigard/Oldenburg published in SRD as taken from Lerche Nielsen 2001.

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