Variation in the Syntax of the Older Runic Inscriptions

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Abstract

There is evidence for the so-called displacement verb second in the language of the runic inscriptions, which most previous scholarship has failed to recognize. This evidence consists of clauses in which the finite verb immediately precedes a subject pronoun (or a subject agreement marker). There is, however, variation with respect to the position of the verb, as it does not appear in second position in all cases. Contrary to common assumptions, however, there are only two reasonably clear examples of verb last order. The finite verb also occurs in absolute initial position in the clause, providing an example of verb first. Moreover, it can be argued that in the early runic language both object–verb and verb–object orders occur in the verb phrase. Furthermore, while determiners either precede or follow the head noun in the noun phrase, the adnominal genitive usually precedes it. On the other hand, only prepositions are attested in the runic corpus, no postpositions. These results shed light on the development of word order at the earliest stage of Germanic.

Keywords: verb second, word order, syntax, syntactic displacement, linguistic variation, older runic inscriptions, Old Germanic

Introduction

This paper focuses on variation in the syntax of the older runic inscriptions (A.D. c. 150–650). The main objective is to shed light on word order at the earliest attested stage of Germanic, but the investigation can also contribute to a more precise understanding of the texts. Admittedly, the inscriptions which lend themselves to a well-motivated syntactic analysis are very few in number. Due to the scarcity of the runic material and the fragmentary nature of the texts, certain important diagnostics commonly
employed to establish clause structure—e.g., the placement of pronouns, auxiliary verbs and other functional elements which might be connected to particular syntactic positions—are often absent. Moreover, almost all of the sentences contained in the runic corpus consist of main clauses; there are only two examples of a subordinate clause, found in the inscriptions from Björketorp and Stentoften, both of which, however, contain the same text. Finally, some of the inscriptions involve poetry, most famously the Gallehus inscription, and factors such as alliteration, meter and poetic diction can affect word order (for a critical review, see Schulte 2009). Therefore, our picture of the syntax of the early runic language will always be sketchy and incomplete. Despite these difficulties, however, it seems a fair demand that the interpretation of a given runic inscription is, to the extent possible, grounded in a precise grammatical analysis, including that of word order and other syntactic phenomena.¹

The general empirical and theoretical background of this research can be outlined as follows (for a more detailed account of Old Germanic word order, see Eythórsson 1995 and 2001, with further references). In the concept of syntax assumed in this work, there is a fundamental difference between an abstract “underlying” (or, in earlier terminology, “deep”) structure, representing the core syntactic and semantic relations of the sentence, and the audible/visible “derived” (or “surface”) structure, manifesting the order of elements in the sentence after the various derivational operations have taken place. As a simple example from English, the question Has John read the book? is hypothesized to be derived by a “transformation” labeled “fronting”, by which the auxiliary verb has is fronted to the beginning (front) of the clause, from its underlying position in the structure John has read the book (which happens to be identical to the neutral [unmarked] surface structure of a declarative clause). Thus, the underlying word order in English has the subject (John) occurring in clause-initial position and the verb (read) in the verb phrase, near the end of the clause, preceding the

¹ The present article develops further the analysis of runic syntax set forth in earlier work (including Eythórsson 1995, 2001). The reader is in particular referred to Eythórsson (2001) for a critique of the previous scholarship, especially Krause (1971), Antonsen (1975) and Braunmüller (1982). These accounts are in many cases based on a misinterpretation of the facts or an untenable analysis, or both. Moreover, the syntactic analysis in the present paper deviates in a number of points from the accounts proposed in Nielsen (2000) and Faarlund (e.g. 1987, 1990, 2004), although it is not possible to discuss all such instances here. I would like to thank James Knirk for his help, his forbearance and his constant encouragement, and two anonymous reviewers for their comments. Needless to say, the responsibility for all errors is mine.

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direct object (the book) or other phrases associated with the verb. (Note in this connection that while the base position of the verb is in the verb phrase, auxiliary verbs like have occur to its left, as in has read.) Word orders which deviate from the basic pattern can be regarded as being “derived”, in the sense that the words occur somewhere else in the clause than in their base position. This is the case, for example, in the verb placement patterns known as verb second and verb first. In all modern Germanic languages, with the exception of English, the finite verb obligatorily appears no later than in second position in main clauses. This is verb second, according to which the finite verb is preceded by at most one initial phrase, as shown in the Modern Icelandic examples presented below as (1–3). The initial phrase may consist of only one word, as in (1), or it may be more complex, for instance, consisting of a noun modified by a relative clause, as in (2). The verb either immediately follows the subject, as shown in (1–2), or it occurs to its left, in subject–verb inversion structures, as in (3).

(1) Jón las bókina í gær
   John.nom read book-the.acc yesterday
   ‘John read the book yesterday.’

(2) Maðurinn sem ég þekki las bókina í gær
    man-the.nom that I know read book-the.acc yesterday
    ‘The man I know read the book yesterday.’

(3) Í gær las Jón bókina
    yesterday read John.nom book-the.acc
    ‘Yesterday John read the book.’

It is widely assumed in theoretical syntax that verb second involves displacement (or “movement”) of the finite verb from its base position in the verb phrase to the second position in the clause. This displacement is a “transformation” with fronting of the finite verb from the underlying structure to arrive at the derived (“surface”) word order, which is the one audible/visible to us. In this paper I am mostly concerned with the question of the origin of this phenomenon. What is clear is that verb second is a Germanic innovation, originally restricted to main clauses. The difficulty, however, lies in determining if this innovation happened already in Proto-Germanic, or in the individual branches (see Eythórsson 1995). In early North Germanic (Old West and East Norse) verb second was not limited to main clauses but was extended to subordinate clauses as well. Modern Icelandic still preserves verb second in subordinate clauses, but it has become restricted.
in Modern Faroese and even more so in Mainland Scandinavian, where it is confined to certain clause types (see Vikner 1995). In West Germanic verb second is found already at the earliest stage in the Continental varieties (Old High German and Old Saxon), with some exceptions which are mostly attributable to meter and translation effects, although some cases may involve real archaisms. The original asymmetry between verb second in main clauses and verb late in subordinate clauses is maintained in Continental West Germanic, both in the early varieties and in the modern ones (Modern German, Dutch and Frisian). In Old English, however, the precise status of verb second is complicated and hence controversial; in Modern English this pattern is limited to the occurrence of auxiliary verbs in certain clause types (in particular, clauses containing a fronted negative or restrictive phrase, as in Never have I seen such a thing or Only in America can such a thing happen, both with verb second, as opposed to the non-restrictive fronted adverb in Today John has done something remarkable, which does not involve verb second). Finally, the facts of East Germanic are difficult to determine, given that Gothic is virtually only attested in a word-for-word translation of the Greek Bible.

Against this background, it is clearly of importance to try to establish if verb second is attested in the runic language, the earliest documented stage of Germanic. Based on previous work, I will show, in the section on the position of the finite verb in main clauses, that this is indeed the case, contrary to the usual view of early runic syntax (Antonsen 1975, 24 f.; Braunmüller 1982). The crucial examples involve clauses in which the finite verb immediately precedes the enclitic subject pronoun (or agreement marker) eka ‘I’. The importance of these examples has gone unnoticed in most previous scholarship, including Faarlund’s (2004) recent survey of runic word order (see, however, the brief note in Knirk 1981, as well as a fuller treatment in Eythórsson 1995, 184–88; 2001, 28–33). In other cases the finite verb does not appear in second position, but further to the right in the clause. The question is if this state of affairs is due to some identifiable “external” factor (for instance, meter or alliteration) interfering with the rule, or if it means that verb second had not become obligatory at this early stage of Germanic. This question must remain unanswered, due to the limitations of the evidence.

The finite verb can also be in absolute initial position, as verb first; this pattern is restricted to certain clause types, including the so-called narrative inversion, which is common in Old Germanic, and in some of the modern languages as well. The Icelandic verb-initial declarative clause in (4) would be perfectly natural embedded in a larger narrative context.

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(4) Komu þeir þá að helli einum
came they then to cave.dat one.dat
‘Then they came to a certain cave.’

By assumption, verb first involves displacement of the finite verb to absolute clause-initial position. This phenomenon has parallels in other Indo-European languages (e.g., Vedic Sanskrit, Ancient Greek and Latin) and may ultimately be of Proto-Indo-European origin, in contrast to verb second.

In the modern Germanic languages the base position of the verb relative to the object and other verb phrase material (complements and adjuncts) varies according to language group. The Continental West Germanic languages (German, Dutch, Frisian) have basic object–verb order, whereas North Germanic exhibits verb–object as the basic order. Interestingly, Modern English follows the latter group in having verb–object order. The examples below are from German (5), representing an object–verb language (das Buch gelesen ‘(lit.) the book read’), and Icelandic (6), representing a verb–object language (lesið bókina ‘read the book’).

(5) Hans hat das Buch gelesen
Hans.nom has the.acc book.acc read
‘Hans has read the book.’

(6) Jón hefur lesið bókina
John.nom has read book-the.acc
‘John has read the book.’

The situation in Old Germanic is different in that both verb–object and object–verb occur as basic verb phrase orders in the same language. The following examples are from Old Icelandic (cf. Rögnvaldsson 1994–95, 35 [ex. (13a, 13e)]). As seen here, the word order in the verb phrase varies between verb–object (hafa grandat honum ‘have killed him’) in (7) and object–verb (betta gera vilja ‘(lit.) this do want’) in (8).

(7) … at sárit mundi hafa grandat honum
that wound-the.nom would have killed him.dat
‘… that the wound would have killed him.’

(8) … ok kvaðsk enginn maðr þetta gera vilja
and said no.nom man.nom this.acc do want
‘… and no one said that he wanted to do this.’

Thus, the modern Germanic languages appear to have generalized one of the
variants manifested in the verb phrase in Old Germanic; Continental West Germanic has selected the object–verb pattern, while English goes with North Germanic in opting for the verb–object pattern. The potential evidence for verb phrase word order in the early runic language is scrutinized in the sections below dealing with the position of the finite and the non-finite verb.

Turning very briefly to the structure of noun phrases: determiners and other noun-modifiers precede or follow the head noun, to different degrees in the individual old and modern Germanic languages (e.g., Mod. Icel. þessi maður ‘this man’, maður þessi ‘(lit.) man this’). Finally, in prepositional phrases, the prepositions generally precede their complements (e.g., Mod. Icel. í skólanum ‘(lit.) in school-the, i.e. in the school’), with certain rather well-defined exceptions (involving “postpositions”, e.g., Mod. Icel. mín vegna’ ‘(lit.) me because of, i.e because of me’). The discussion of these issues in the language of the early runic inscriptions is found in the section on word order in the noun phrase and the prepositional phrase.

It should be noted that the examples from the runic inscriptions in this paper are mainly taken from the standard handbook by Krause and Jankuhn (1966), while the grammar by Antonsen (1975) was also consulted. These works are abbreviated in the discussion below as KJ and Antonsen, respectively, followed by the number of the relevant inscription. Readings and interpretations that deviate from those given in these manuals are indicated as appropriate. I refrain from discussing inscriptions that do not appear to contain structures relevant to the main topic of this paper, for example inscriptions which consist only of a subject and a finite verb. As a consequence, some of the material which has figured in the discussion of runic syntax by other scholars, including certain readings found in the list provided by Faarlund (1990, 180–84), will be passed over in silence here. See, however, Eythórsson (2001) for a more detailed examination of such inscriptions. I hasten to add that the analysis of the remaining inscriptions is in many cases also very problematic so that the result will be quite tentative. Still, although the evidence provided by the early runic inscriptions is scanty, a careful analysis of the facts is bound to shed light on the development of word order at the earliest stage of Germanic.

The position of the finite verb in main clauses

In the runic material there are five examples in which the finite verb occurs to the left of the element eka (or -ka), which is a clitic variant of the personal pronoun ek ‘I’. These examples, presented below as (9–11) and (13–14), constitute strong evidence for displacement (“movement”) of the finite verb

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in the language of the runic inscriptions, that is, for verb second or verb first. This analysis is based on the fact, mentioned in the introduction above, that the neutral (or unmarked) word order in the early runic language is subject-initial. Moreover, subject pronouns are generally taken to be “light” elements which are not normally displaced to the end of the clause; rather, such elements tend to occur near the beginning of the clause, often attaching to the first word or phrase as enclitics. As a consequence, the fact that the finite verb precedes the enclitic subject **eka** shows that the verb is not in the base position in the verb phrase but has been displaced to the left, across the subject position. The clause in the example in (9) exhibits the order predicate complement–verb–subject.

(9) Sjælland bracteate 2 (KJ 127, cf. Antonsen 71)

| hariuha | haitika | farauisa |
| Hariuha.nom | am-called+I | knowing-danger.nom |

‘I am called Hariuha, the one who knows danger.’

The predicate complement (the personal name *Hariuha*) is plausibly analyzed as having been fronted to the beginning of the clause, and the fact that the finite verb (*haiti*) occurs between the fronted word and the subject clitic is evidence for verb second. The occurrence of *Hariuha* in clause-initial position may be an instance of so-called focus fronting, known in both Old and modern Germanic, by which material containing “new information” is placed near the beginning (front) of the clause (Barðdal et al., forthcoming). In this example the personal name would constitute new information, as it has not been mentioned earlier in this text and is presumably not retrievable from the context. A well-known parallel from Old Icelandic is found at the beginning of *Njáls saga*: *Mǫrðr hét maðr* ‘(lit.) Mǫrðr was called a man, i.e., There was a man called Mǫrðr’. Although this is obviously the first mention in the saga of the fatal individual, his name is placed in initial position for focus.

The syntactic structure of the following clause in the Stentøften inscription, shown in (10), exhibits a similar pattern; a fronted object noun phrase (**hidezruno** ⟨**ro**⟩**no**) occurs to the left of the finite verb (**felAh**), to which the subject clitic (**eka**) attaches.

(10) Stentøften stone (KJ 96, Antonsen 119)

| hidezruno | ⟨ro⟩| no | felAh | hederA |
| bright-runes.gen | sequence.acc | commit+I | here |
| ginoronoz | mighty-runes.acc |

‘The sequence of bright runes, mighty runes, I commit here.’
Moreover, in this analysis, it is reasonable to interpret the text in (11) as consisting of two clauses rather than of just one clause with a subject–object–verb word order (i.e., verb last), as is done by Krause (1971, 134) and Antonsen (1975, 24).

(11) Lindholmen amulet (KJ 29, Antonsen 17)

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{ek} & \text{erilaz} & \text{sa} & \text{wilagaz} & \text{hateka} \\
\text{runemaster.nom} & \text{that.nom} & \text{deceitful.nom} & \text{am-called+I}
\end{array}
\]

'I (am) the runemaster. I am called the Deceitful One.'

According to the view advanced here, the first clause (\text{ek erilaz} ‘I [am] the runemaster’, following Krause’s translation of the noun) contains the (non-clitic) subject pronoun \text{ek}, a predicate complement (\text{erilaz}) and a missing copula (a form of the verb ‘be’), while the second one has a fronted predicate complement \text{sa wilagaz} ‘the Deceitful One’ followed by the finite verb (\text{hate}), which is placed to the left of the enclitic subject pronoun (\text{eka/-ka}). This interpretation becomes all the more plausible given that \text{ek erilaz} is attested standing by itself, arguably as a nominal clause with an omitted copula, as in the following case:

(12) Bratsberg clasp (KJ 16, Antonsen 75)

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{ek} & \text{erilaz} \\
\text{runemaster.nom}
\end{array}
\]

'I (am) the runemaster.'

According to the analysis by Krause (1971) and Antonsen (1975), however, the text in (11) would be a single clause in which \text{ek erilaz} would be the subject and the verb would occur at the end. Although not explicitly stated by these scholars, however, in this analysis the enclitic element \text{eka}, attaching to the verb \text{hate}, would be a subject agreement marker, and not an argument of the verb. The reason is that it is unacceptable, in principle, that a verb have two subject arguments (i.e. two separate subjects, not a compound). Thus, runic \text{eka} would be of the same nature as the element -\text{k} in Old Norse (e.g., \text{heiti-k} ‘(I) am called’), which reinforces the agreement of the finite verb with the first person singular subject pronoun (cf. Eythórsson 1995, 231–33; 2001, 31; 2002, 207–09). Thus, Old Norse structures of the type \text{ek heiti-k} ‘I am called’ do not involve a “doubling” of the subject pronoun, but an agreement marker -\text{k} which is referentially dependent on a subject (\text{ek}) within the same clause. In terms of its origins, however, the element -\text{k} resulted from the pronoun \text{ek}, which was reanalyzed in a verb second/verb first position. In this light, even if the enclitic element \text{eka} is an agreement marker rather than an
argument, it nevertheless entails displacement of the verb to the left of the subject position, which constitutes evidence for verb second. Therefore, the traditional analysis of the example from Lindholmen as verb last is highly improbable.

The text on the Ellestad stone, given in (13), similarly allows for a twofold analysis; it can be interpreted as consisting either of two separate clauses: a nominal clause followed by a verb first clause with ka as an enclitic subject pronoun, or a single clause with ka as a subject agreement marker. Either way, the word order in this example is in accordance with the above assumption that the occurrence of the verb to the left of the subject shows displacement.

(13) Ellestad stone (KJ 59, Antonsen 114)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>eka sigimaraz</th>
<th>åf[s]ka</th>
<th>raisidoka</th>
<th>staîna</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Sigimaraz.nom</td>
<td>free-of-guilt.nom</td>
<td>raised+I</td>
<td>stone.acc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'I (am) Sigimaraz, one found free of guilt, (I) raised the stone.'

The clause presented in (14) is fragmentary, consisting only of a finite verb (toj- = tōju 'I make') in initial position followed by a subject clitic (the remainder of the text is uncertain). In accordance with our assumptions, however, it can be regarded as an instance of displacement, in this case verb first.

(14) Noleby stone (KJ 67, Antonsen 46)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>tojeka ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

'I make ...'

It is worth reiterating that earlier studies of runic syntax (Krause 1971, Antonsen 1975, and Braunmüller 1982) failed to appreciate the evidence provided by the placement of the element eka next to the finite verb. Faarlund (2004) does not recognize the importance of this evidence either and does not cite Eythórsson (1995, 2001; see above), nor Knirk (1981). To be sure, Faarlund (2004, 919) states that the early runic language had verb second orders, but this claim seems to be based on ambiguous word order patterns which do not provide clear diagnostics for structure.

Whereas the presence of an enclitic subject pronoun—or, in the alternative analysis, an agreement marker—in the inscriptions studied above serves as a diagnostic for structure, its absence in the clauses in (15) and (16) is problematic even though the finite verb is in initial position; the clause in (15) involves a command (with the verb wate in the optative) and the one in (16) is declarative.
(15) Strøm whetstone (KJ 50, cf. Antonsen 45)

\[
\begin{array}{lll}
\text{wate} & \text{hali} & \text{horna} \\
\text{wet.3sg.opt} & \text{stone.acc} & \text{this.acc horn.nom} \\
\end{array}
\]

‘Let the horn wet this stone.’

(16) Tjurkö bracteate (KJ 136, Antonsen 109)

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{wurte} & \text{runoz} & \text{an walhakurne} \\
wrought & \text{runes.acc} & \text{on foreign-grain.dat} \\
\text{heldaz} & \text{kunimudiu} \\
\text{Heldaz.nom} & \text{Kunimunduz.dat} \\
\end{array}
\]

‘Heldaz wrought runes on foreign grain for Kunimunduz.’

The subject horna in (15) is clause-final, whereas in (16) both the subject (heldaz) and the indirect object (kunimudiu) occur to the right of the direct object (runoz) and a prepositional phrase (an walhakurne). In these clauses the subject noun (horna and heldaz, respectively) appears to have been extraposed from the “canonical” subject position and placed to the right of the verb phrase, perhaps for focus (cf. Faarlund’s comment [2004, 919] on heldaz; however, this scholar adheres to Antonsen’s questionable analysis [1975, 54] of horna as a vocative). In short, it is quite possible that these examples involve displacement of the finite verb, but there are no diagnostics for structure which can be used to back up such an analysis. (Note that it is not entirely clear that the Tjurkö inscription is to be read with the names last; the runes run around the entire bracteate near the rim with no unequivocal epigraphic indication of where the inscription begins.)

As we have seen, the examples in (9–11) and (13–14), all involving a subject clitic (or an agreement marker), constitute evidence for verb second or verb first. The following examples, however, appear to be counter-evidence to such an analysis. These instances show a full (non-pronominal) subject noun phrase occurring between a fronted phrase (an indirect object and a prepositional phrase, respectively) and the finite verb, which in turn is followed by a direct object (j = the rune-name jāra ‘year (good growth, harvest)’ and runaz þaiaz ‘these runes’, respectively).


\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{niu haborumz} & \text{niu hagestumz} \\
\text{nine bucks.dat} & \text{nine stallions.dat} \\
\text{haþuwolafz} & \text{gaf} & \text{j} \\
\text{Haþuwolfz.nom} & \text{gave} & \text{year.acc} \\
\end{array}
\]

‘With nine bucks, with nine stallions, Haþuwolfz gave good growth.’
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(18) Istaby stone (KJ98, Antonsen 117)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>afatz</th>
<th>hariwulafa</th>
<th>haþuwulafa</th>
<th>haeruwulafiz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>after Hariwulfz.acc</td>
<td>Hþuwulfz.nom</td>
<td>Haeruwulfz.nom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

warait runaz þaiaz
wrote runes.acc these.acc

‘In memory of Hariwulfz, Hþuwulfz Haeruwulfz wrote these runes.’

Schematically, the word order in the examples in (17) and (18) can be represented as indirect object/prepositional phrase–subject noun phrase–verb–direct object. The clause in (17), in the inscription on the Stentoften stone, has been subject to various interpretations; appealing though it may be, the interpretation given here is only one possibility among many (Santesson 1989). Most of the proposals are immaterial for the syntactic analysis (an exception being the one by Antonsen 1975, 85–87, not considered here).

Given that the subject noun phrase intervenes between the initial phrase and the finite verb, the clauses in (17) and (18) appear to be genuine counter-examples to the verb second account. However, it is also possible that in these cases the first phrase (niu haborumz niu hagestumz; afatz hariwulafa) stands apart from the remainder of the text, as a separate statement, rather than a phrase which has been fronted within the clause itself; moreover, it cannot be excluded that the deviant word order may be due to the alliteration (in both cases h—h—h). Thus, the evidence provided by these examples for the presence or absence of verb second in the early runic inscriptions is not clear.

In the runic corpus there are several subject-initial clauses which exhibit the order subject–verb–object (verb medial) order. These clauses are ambiguous due to the lack of any diagnostics for the structural position of the verb; it cannot be decided whether they involve verb second or an underived (basic) verb–object order in the verb phrase (with due respect to Faarlund 2004, 919). An example of this kind is given in (19); the assumption here is that the name Hadulaikaz (presumably the person commemorated on the stone) stands on its own, as indeed it does on the stone, and is not a part of the clause beginning with ek hagustadaz (‘I, Hagustaldaz’).

(19) Kjølevik stone (KJ75, Antonsen 38)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>hadulaikaz</th>
<th>ek</th>
<th>hagustadaz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hadulaikaz.nom</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Hagustadaz.nom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

hlaaiwido magu minino
buried son.acc my.acc

‘Hadulaikaz. I, Hagustaldaz, buried my son.’
Further examples of verb medial order are found in the following inscriptions: Rō stone (KJ73, Antonsen26), Reistad stone (Eythórsson 1999, cf. KJ74, Antonsen 41), Tune stone (Eythórsson 2001 and forthcoming; cf. KJ72, Antonsen 27), Gummarp stone (KJ95, Antonsen 116), and By stone (KJ71, cf. Antonsen 111). For a detailed discussion, see Eythórsson (2001).

By contrast, other subject-initial main clauses unambiguously show that the verb is not in second position but remains within the verb phrase, suggesting basic object–verb order. In other words, these are instances of verb-final main clauses (verb last), which can be taken to reflect an archaic stage of Germanic, a remnant from the period when the verb second rule had not yet been generalized. However, contrary to the view endorsed in particular by Antonsen (1975), verb last is infrequent in the early runic inscriptions; as a matter of fact, there are only two clear examples of this kind, and these are presented in (20) and (21).

(20) Gallehus gold horn 2 (KJ43, Antonsen23)
\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{ek} & \text{hlewagastiz} & \text{holtijaz} & \text{horna} & \text{tawido} \\
I & \text{Hlewagastiz}\text{.nom} & \text{Holtijaz}\text{.nom} & \text{horn}\text{.acc} & \text{made} \\
\end{array}
\]
'I, Hlewagastiz Holtijaz, made the horn.'

It should be kept in mind that some of the runic inscriptions may involve poetry. This seems uncontroversial in the celebrated inscription from Gallehus, shown in (20), which confirms to the metrical rules of the Germanic long-line and exhibits alliteration (of \(h—h—h\); see Schulte 2009, 5 f.). Thus, the word order in the Gallehus inscription is possibly due to the poetic nature of the text. This poetic factor seems less likely in the Einang inscription in (21), which therefore may represent genuine subject–object–verb (verb last) main clause order in a prose text.

(21) Einang stone (KJ63, Antonsen20)
\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{…dagastiz} & \text{runo} & \text{faihido} \\
(I & \text{name}\text{.nom} & \text{rune}\text{.acc} & \text{painted}\text{.1sg} \\
(, …dagastiz, painted the rune.'

But in this case, too, caution is required, since a part of the first word (presumably a personal name) is missing in the Einang inscription, although alliteration is not particularly likely.

The subject-initial clauses in (22) and (23) also fail to confirm to the verb second syntax. In both cases the situation is somewhat complex. To be sure, the finite verb occurs before a direct object, indicating basic verb–object order in the verb phrase.

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(22) Tune stone (KJ 72, cf. Antonsen 27)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ek wiwaz} & \quad \text{after} \quad \text{woduride} \\
I \text{Wiwaz.nom} & \quad \text{after} \quad Woduridaz.dat \\
\text{witadahalaiban worahto r[unoz]} & \\
\text{bread-warden.dat} & \quad \text{made} \quad \text{runes.acc}
\end{align*}
\]

'I Wiwaz made the runes in memory of Woduridaz, the bread-ward.'

(23) Eikeland clasp (KJ 17a, cf. Antonsen 53)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ek wiz} & \quad \text{wiwio} \quad \text{writu} \quad \text{i} \quad \text{runoz} \ldots \\
I \text{Wiz.nom} & \quad \text{Wiwia.dat.fem} \quad \text{write} \quad \text{in} \quad \text{runes.acc}
\end{align*}
\]

'I Wiz write the runes in (the clasp) for Wiwia ...'

In the Tune inscription it is clear (although not for Antonsen 1975, nor for Grønvik 1981, 126 f., but cf. Grønvik 1998, 38) that the verb \text{worahto} is followed by a word beginning possibly in \text{r}, in all likelihood the noun \text{runoz} ‘runes (acc. pl.).' In the Eikeland inscription the words \text{writu i runoz} may mean ‘(I) write the runes in’, with some word such as ‘the clasp’ being understood (cf. Knirk, forthcoming); this then is followed by the incomprehensible sequence \text{asni}. Crucially, however, in both clauses a further phrase intervenes between the subject and the finite verb—a prepositional phrase in (22) and an indirect object in the dative in (23); thus, despite the fact that the verb precedes one of its complements, showing verb–object, it is not in second position in either text. To be sure, Knirk (forthcoming) analyzes the Eikeland inscription as consisting of two clauses (\text{ek wiz wiwio} and \text{writu i runoz}) rather than of just one, but this remains a conjecture.

Summarizing the above discussion on main clause word order, the position of the finite verb to the left of an enclitic subject pronoun (or an agreement marker) may be regarded as evidence for verb second or verb first in the language of the early runic inscriptions. Although the cases in (17) and (18), in which the subject is placed between the clause-initial phrase and the finite verb, appear to contradict this analysis, it is possible to identify factors that may cause the deviation. Moreover, there are several clauses which exhibit the subject–verb–object (verb medial) order. These clauses, however, are ambiguous between verb second and an underived (basic) verb–object order in the verb phrase. Other examples are clearly not verb second, suggesting basic verb phrase order, either object–verb (examples 20–21) or verb–object (examples 22–23). The evidence from Tune (22) and Eikeland (23) is complicated, however, because the verb is placed
between its two complements. Thus, the examples from Gallehus (20) and Einang (21) are the only potential candidates for genuine verb last main clause order in the runic inscriptions. It should be stressed that although the verb last pattern may reflect an archaic stage of Germanic, predating the generalization of the verb second rule, it does not seem possible to make any statements about the absolute chronology of word order development within the language of the runic inscriptions.

### The position of the verb in subordinate clauses

As stated in the introduction above, there are only two occurrences of a subordinate clause in the older runic inscriptions, found in the “transitional” inscriptions from Stentoften and Björketorp, presented in (24) and (25); both, however, involve the “same” text so we have in effect only one example. The clause in question is a subject relative clause; the relativized element (sA and sAz, respectively) plays the role of a subject, substituting for the missing subject noun phrase.

(24) Stentoften stone (KJ 96, Antonsen 119)

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>þAt</td>
<td>bariutip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>this.nom.m</td>
<td>this.acc.n</td>
<td>breaks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘... who breaks this.’

(25) Björketorp stone (KJ 97, Antonsen 120)

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sAz</td>
<td>þAt</td>
<td>barutz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>this.nom.m+rel.part</td>
<td>this.acc.n</td>
<td>breaks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘... who breaks this.’

This example is potentially of great interest, because it might shed light on the development of word order in subordinate clauses in early Germanic. As mentioned in the above, whereas verb second originated in main clauses, as evidenced by the situation in Continental West Germanic, it was extended to subordinate clauses in North Germanic. However, unfortunately, the word order of the only subordinate clause in the runic material is indeterminable. The object pronoun þAt ‘it’, preceding the verb, may signal a basic object–verb order in the verb phrase and hence a non-verb second word order. Alternatively, the clause may involve leftward displacement of the object and, possibly, the finite verb as well. In the latter case, the word order might be an example for so-called stylistic fronting (Maling 1980, 179–86). This phenomenon is found in both Old and Modern Icelandic, with a word
or a phrase being placed in the position of the missing subject in clauses containing a “subject gap”, for instance in relative clauses. Be that as it may, it is not unlikely that by the time of the composition of the Stentoft and Björketorp inscriptions, dating from the “transitional” period, the verb second rule had been extended to subordinate clauses. Due to the structural ambiguity of the only attested example, however, this matter cannot be verified.

The position of the non-finite verb

In the runic corpus there are four occurrences of a non-finite verb, in all cases a past participle, evidently in a passive construction (Faarlund 2004, 919). In two of these examples, presented in (26) and (27), the participle precedes an auxiliary verb, so that they might be considered evidence for basic object–verb order in the verb phrase.

(26) Kalleby stone (Antonsen 25, cf. KJ 61)

þrawijan haitinaz was (…)
þrawija.gen called.nom.sg.m was
‘Þrawija’s(.) he was called (…).’

(27) Vetteland stone (KJ 60, Antonsen 18)

(…) flagdafaikinaz ist
subject-to-deceitful-attack.nom.sg.m is
‘(…) is subject to deceitful attack.’

However, these word strings are ambiguous with respect to the structural position of both the finite and the non-finite verbs that occur in them. The example in (26) contains the word þrawijan, apparently a genitive of a personal name (Prawija), which is separated from the remainder of the text by a word divider; it is unclear whether it belongs to the clause or stands apart from it. It is also unclear whether or not we have a complete clause in (27). Therefore, in these examples the past participle may involve basic object–verb order in the verb phrase, as in German Dieser Ort ist gefährdet ‘This place is at risk’, for instance. It is also possible, however, that the participle has been subject to fronting from the base position to the beginning of the clause, ending up to the left of the auxiliary verb in second position, as in German Gefährdet ist dieser Ort ‘(lit.) At risk is this place’. If the latter were the case, these examples might involve verb second of the type discussed in the above section on the finite verb. The fact of the matter
is, however, that due to the fragmentary nature of the inscriptions, which do not provide any clear diagnostics for structure, the situation cannot be determined.

In addition, there are two inscriptions containing a past participle, but the auxiliary verb ‘be’ is missing (Faarlund 2004, 919). Note that I follow Fridell’s (2008) interpretation of the Möjbro inscription in (28), taking hahai to be a dative of a place-name Hanhaz, corresponding to Modern Swedish Ḥä (cf. Old Norse hár ‘oarlock’).

(28) Möjbro stone (Fridell 2008, cf. KJ 99, Antonsen 11)

\[
\text{frawaradaz} \quad \text{ana} \quad \text{hahai} \quad \text{slaginaz}
\]
Frawaradaz.nom at/from Hanhaz.dat slain.nom.sg.m.
‘Frawaradaz from/at Hanhaz slain.’ / ‘Frawaradaz slain at Hanhaz.’

(29) Amla stone (KJ 84, Antonsen 43)

\[
\text{...iz} \quad \text{hlaiwidaz} \quad \text{þar}
\]

[name] buried.nom.sg.m here
‘[So-and-so] (is) buried here.’

In fact, as indicated by the translation of (28) above, Fridell’s account allows for two interpretations, ‘Frawaradaz from/at Hanhaz slain’ and ‘Frawaradaz slain at Hanhaz’. In the first interpretation the prepositional phrase is a modifier of the subject (‘Frawaradaz from Hanhaz’); in this case, the text would consist only of a subject noun phrase and a past participle, leaving the clause structurally ambiguous. In the second interpretation the prepositional phrase is a part of the verb phrase, showing an object–verb order (lit. ‘Frawaradaz at Hanhaz slain’). A further, less likely possibility is that the name Frawaradaz stands apart, in which case it is unclear if ana hahai slaginaz shows the basic position of the words in the verb phrase, or if ana hahai has been displaced to the front of the clause, similarly to the second German example given above (Gefährdet ist dieser Ort ‘(lit.) At risk is this place’). The example in (29) may be more revealing, however, because the past participle hlaiwidaz is followed by the adverb þar. Although the text is fragmentary and does not even contain a finite verb, it is nevertheless suggestive of basic verb–object order in the verb phrase. According to a cross-linguistic tendency, established by Greenberg (1963, 84; cf. Eythórsson 2001, 22), adverbial modifiers precede the main verb in strict object–verb structures and follow it in verb–object structures. Therefore, the placement of the adverb þar to the right of the participle in the text on the Amla stone favors a verb–object analysis.

In summary, three out of the four cases involving non-finite verb are
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structurally ambiguous. Only the example in (29) may be relevant, although the evidence is admittedly circumstantial.

Word order in the noun phrase

In the early runic inscriptions noun-modifiers either precede or follow the noun, the head of the noun phrase. Considering first the adnominal genitive (i.e. a genitive case noun or pronoun linked to an adjacent noun), there are several examples of the order genitive–noun, such as the ones presented in (30) and (31).

(30) Vetteland stone (KJ 60, Antonsen 18)
\[
\text{magoz} \quad \text{minas} \quad \text{staina} \\
\text{son.gen} \quad \text{my.gen} \quad \text{stone.acc}
\]
‘the stone of my son’

(31) Bø stone (KJ 78, Antonsen 79)
\[
\text{hnabdas} \quad \text{hlaiwa} \\
\text{Hnabdaz.gen} \quad \text{grave.nom}
\]
‘Hnabdaz’s grave’

Other examples of genitive–noun order are found in the following inscriptions: Stenstad stone (KJ 81, Antonsen 37), Tomstad stone (KJ 78, Antonsen 77), Stentoften stone (KJ 96, Antonsen 119), Björketorp stone (KJ 97, Antonsen 120), and Rävsal stone (KJ 80, Antonsen 121).

On the other hand, the order noun–genitive appears rare; in fact, there is only one clear example, shown in (32) (with due respect to Antonsen 1975, 24 ff., Faarlund 2004, 917).

(32) Valsfjord cliff inscription (KJ 55, Antonsen 29)
\[
\text{þewaz} \quad \text{godagas} \\
\text{retainer.nom} \quad \text{Godagaz.gen}
\]
‘the retainer of Godagaz’

It may be of interest to note that the head noun þewaz is animate, whereas in the cases with a prenominal genitive the head noun is inanimate (Smith 1971; cf. Antonsen 1975, 24, Faarlund 2004, 917). Given the scarcity of the evidence, however, no far-reaching conclusions can be drawn from this fact.

Moreover, there is one example of an adjective–genitive construction, found in the Tune inscription: a superlative adjective followed by the partitive genitive arbijano ‘of the heirs’, which is the regular Germanic word order in such constructions. The precise reading of the adjective is
inmaterial for the syntactic analysis. The one adopted here is *sijostez* (cf. Eythórsson 2001 and forthcoming, Bjorvand 2008), as shown in (33); alternative readings include *asijostez* (e.g. Grønvik 1981, 176; cf. Grønvik 2010, 121) and *arjostez* (Krause and Jankuhn 1966, 163f.).

(33) Tune stone (cf. KJ 72, Antonsen 27)

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
  \text{sijostez} & \text{arbijano} \\
  \text{next-of-kin.masc.nom.pl} & \text{heirs.gen} \\
\end{array}
\]

‘the next of kin of the heirs’

Other noun-modifiers involve determiners such as numerals, demonstratives and possessives. In the runic material numerals and demonstratives either precede or follow the head noun, as is also the case in other Old Germanic languages, including Old Norse. In the examples shown in (34–35) the modifiers precede the noun.

(34) Tune stone (KJ 72, Antonsen 27)

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
  \text{þrijoz} & \text{dohtriz} \\
  \text{three.nom} & \text{daughters.nom} \\
\end{array}
\]

‘three daughters’

(35) By stone (KJ 71, Antonsen 111)

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
  \text{þat} & \text{azina} \\
  \text{this.acc} & \text{stone.acc} \\
\end{array}
\]

‘this stone’

In the examples in (36–38) the modifiers follow the noun. The inscriptions from Gummarp (36) and Istaby (38) date from the “transitional” runic period. Moreover, the post-nominal placement of the demonstrative *hino* on the Strøm whetstone, given in (37), is likely to be the precursor of the structure with suffixed definite article of the type *hestr-inn* ‘(lit.) horse-the, i.e. the horse’ in Old Norse (and the modern Nordic languages). Therefore, it is potentially a specific Nordic characteristic of the early runic language.

(36) Gummarp stone (KJ 95, Antonsen 116)

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
  \text{stAbA} & \text{þria} \\
  \text{staves.acc} & \text{three.acc} \\
\end{array}
\]

‘three staves’

(37) Strøm whetstone (KJ 50, Antonsen 45)

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
  \text{hali} & \text{hino} \\
  \text{stone.acc} & \text{this.acc} \\
\end{array}
\]

‘this stone’
Possessive determiners are attested following the head noun, as shown in (39) and (40). In the latter example the possessive is, in turn, followed by an adjective (\textit{liubu} ‘dear’), apparently the only instance of an attributive adjective in the older runic corpus.

(39) Vetteland stone (KJ 60, Antonsen 18)
\begin{verbatim}
magoz minas
\end{verbatim}
\hspace{0.5cm}son.gen my.gen
\hspace{0.5cm}‘my son’

(40) Opedal stone (KJ 76, Antonsen 21)
\begin{verbatim}
swestar minu liubu
\end{verbatim}
\hspace{0.5cm}sister.nom my.nom dear.nom
\hspace{0.5cm}‘my dear sister’

In summary, the adnominal genitive usually precedes the head noun in the attested examples from the runic inscriptions. There is one clear case of a possessive genitive following the noun, and another one in which a partitive genitive follows a superlative adjective. Determiners such as demonstratives and numerals either precede or follow the noun, but possessive pronouns are only attested following it. The sole occurrence of an attributive adjective is postnominal.

Word order in the prepositional phrase

Finally, prepositions are attested only five times in the runic corpus; they govern either dative, as in the examples in (41) and (42), or accusative case, as in the example in (43).

(41) Möjbro stone (Fridell 2008, cf. KJ 99, Antonsen 11)
\begin{verbatim}
anahahai
\end{verbatim}
\hspace{0.5cm}at/from Hanhaz.dat
\hspace{0.5cm}‘at/from Hanhaz’

(42) Tune stone (KJ 72, Antonsen 27)
\begin{verbatim}
after woduride
\end{verbatim}
\hspace{0.5cm}after Woduridaz.dat
\hspace{0.5cm}‘in memory of Woduridaz’
Other instances of the preposition an(a) with dative are found on the Rö stone (KJ 73, Antonsen 26) and the Tjurkö bracteate (KJ 136, Antonsen 109). Interestingly, the same preposition (after/Afatz) occurs with dative in Tune (42) but with accusative on the more recent Istaby stone (43). The former pattern, which is presumably more archaic, has a parallel in Old English, whereas the latter corresponds to Old Norse (Grønvik 1981, 146; Eythórsson, forthcoming).

Conclusion

The examination of the syntax of the early runic inscriptions has shown that there is evidence for the displacement verb second at this early stage of Germanic. This evidence consists of clauses in which the finite verb immediately precedes a subject pronoun (or a subject agreement marker), found in the inscriptions from Sjælland (9), Stentoften (10), Lindholmen (11), and Ellestad (13). The premise for this analysis is the fact that the neutral word order in Germanic is subject-initial, and that elements preceding the subject have been fronted to a position to its left. Most previous scholarship has failed to recognize the importance of this evidence. There is variation, however, as the finite verb does not in all cases appear in second position, although, contrary to common assumptions, there are only two reasonably clear examples suggesting verb last order. This pattern is likely to be an archaism in the early runic language, although it is doubtful if an absolute chronology of the word order development from verb late to verb second can be established. At best these facts can be used to draw conclusions about the relative chronology of the changes. Moreover, the question remains unresolved if “extra-grammatical” factors such as meter or alliteration are responsible for the absence of verb second in some inscriptions, or if verb second was not obligatory in the early runic language. In the former case the variation would not be part of the core grammar of the early runic language, but in the latter case we would be dealing with real linguistic variation.

The finite verb also occurs in absolute initial position in the clause, in a process which is distinct from verb second. It was argued that at least in one instance, the inscription from Noleby (14), the verb first order results from...
displacement of the finite verb across the subject position in a declarative main clause.

A further goal of the investigation was to try to establish the basic word order in the verb phrase. Basic verb phrase order appears variable: at least the inscriptions from Gallehus (20) and Einang (21) suggest object–verb order, but other inscriptions, Tune (22), Eikeland (23) and possibly Amla (29), indicate verb–object order. The evidence to be gleaned from these inscriptions is not very clear, however, and other cases are even less revealing in this respect. The result, vague though it may be, is actually in accordance with the situation in Old Germanic, where both object–verb and verb–object orders occur in the same language. The modern Germanic languages, on the other hand, have generalized one variant, either object–verb (Continental West Germanic) or verb–object (the Nordic languages and English).

In addition, the evidence for the position of noun-modifiers relative to the head noun was investigated. It was shown that while determiners either precede or follow the head noun, the adnominal genitive usually precedes it. Finally, the order in the few prepositional phrases occurring in our material is fixed; only prepositions, and no postpositions, are attested in the runic corpus.

The main result of this investigation is that there is indeed evidence for the displacement verb second at the early stage of Germanic represented by the language of the older runic inscriptions. It is unclear if this phenomenon had become obligatory in all types of main clauses, and if it had been extended to subordinate clauses, as in Old Norse. Meager though the evidence may be, the apparent variation in the order of the elements in the verb phrase (object–verb and verb–object order) and the noun phrase (modifier–noun and noun–modifier) is very much in line with what is known from other Old Germanic languages.

Bibliography


Antonsen + number = inscription published in Antonsen 1975.


"Futhark 2 (2011)"


KJ + number = inscription published in Krause and Jankuhn 1966.


*Futhark* 2 (2011)


*Futhark* 2 (2011)