

**RUNES AROUND THE NORTH SEA AND  
ON THE CONTINENT AD 150-700;  
TEXTS & CONTEXTS**

**Proefschrift**

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door

Jantina Helena Looijenga

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19. *Bergakker* (Gelderland), a gilt-silver scabbard mount, found with a metal detector in 1996. It is dated early 5th c. In the Museum Kam, at Nijmegen.

The ornamentation is in provincial-Roman style and might be compared to objects from nearby Gennepe (North Limburg), a 4th c.-settlement of Frankish immigrants into a region which was situated within the *limes* (Bosman & Looijenga 1996). In general, according to the type and ornamentation, the scabbard mouth belongs to a group of swords from North Gallia up to the lower Rhineland of Germany and the Netherlands. The runes could have been added anywhere, but I do not think it likely that that has happened outside the above mentioned area, and that the object subsequently has been brought back to its area of origin. Bergakker site probably was a settlement site, although there existed a shrine of the goddess Hurstrga on the same spot. The scabbard mount was part of a large find-complex, which may have belonged to a local smith, or, in view of the sanctuary, it may as well have been part of a votive deposit. The scabbard mount does not show traces of wear, hence it may never have been collected by the commissioner (personal communication from the finder, Mr. D. Jansen, Wychen). Among the many other finds from the same spot, is a stylus, a small silver votive sheet, showing three ladies, probably *Matrones*, and a bronze seal-box, typical for votive deposits.

In the first, preliminary publication (Bosman & Looijenga 1996) the inscription was transliterated as *habeþewas:ann:kesjam:logens:*

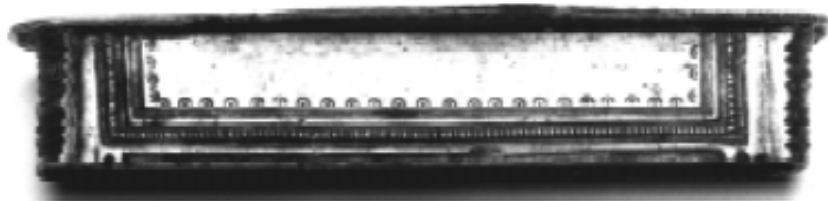


*Drawing by D. Jansen, Wychen, The Netherlands.*



*Photo by courtesy of the Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen, Holland.*

Photo by courtesy of the Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen, Holland.



One character is anomalous and hitherto unattested. It has the form of a double-lined Roman capital V and occurs four times in the inscription. One other character, s, appears twice in double lines, and once in single lines. The s is in three strokes. It is remarkably small, shorter than the other runes (apart from k, which is carved very small). There is one bindrune, forming wa, an unusual combination.

The runes run from left to right. The words are separated by division marks: three times composed of two dots and one time of four dots. The inscription contains four words. The last word is followed by a zig-zag line, filling up space. A similar technique can be found for instance on the *Pforzen* (Continental Corpus) silver belt buckle.

The first rune is a single-barred h. The second rune is a, the \*ansuz rune. The third rune has only one sidetwig to the right, at the middle of the headstaff. I think the rune has been inserted afterwards, since it is smaller and tucked in between the preceding and following runes. In that case it is most probably l. At first I took it for an incomplete thorn. The fourth character is anomalous, at first sight it resembles no known rune. I contemplated the possibility of a double u rune, executed upside-down. But, if it should be considered a writing sign, and part of the text, its value may be established by the context (i.e. the rest of the text). The fifth rune is clearly a thorn. The sixth character is similar to the fourth one, only rendered somewhat larger. The following character appears to me as a bind-rune of w and a. The w was cut first, since the lower sidetwig of the a cuts through the lower part of the hook of the w. The last rune is an s, rendered in double lines.

Thus we have hal?þ?was.

The sequence þ?was reminds of a well-known Germanic name-element, nominative *þewaz*, such as occurs in *owlþuþewaz* of the Thorsberg (Schleswig-Holstein) bronze sword-chape. Therefore I take it that the mysterious sign that looks like a double V must represent e. When comparing its form to the well-known runic  $\text{𐌺}$ , both characters share the upper part. Normally the two hastas of the e rune run vertical, and here we find two slanting lines that touch at their ends. There is a parallel in the lost inscription of *Engers* (Continental Corpus), reading *leub* (see there, nr. 15). Here the hastas of the e rune slant towards each other, without touching, though.

haleþewas I take as a personal name in the genitive, masculine a-stem. The first part of this compound might be *hāle-*, < Gmc \**hail-*, adj. 'whole, safe, unhurt', or, if *hale*, it may be connected with ON *hali* (and Middle Irish *cail* De Vries 1962:204), the meaning might be 'spear'. The second part is *-þewas*, gsm. a-stem, 'thane, retainer, warrior'.

After the division dots follow three runes ann. This is a verbform, 1 or 3 sg. pres. ind. 'grants', cf. Seebold 1970:79f., who lists ON *ann* 'grants', inf. *unna* 'to grant'.

The next part of the inscription has a remarkable lay-out, probably caused by lack of space. The upper part reads kesjam. The lower part reads logens.



De Vries (1962:307) lists ON *kesja* f. 'javelin'. This strikes as puzzling; the scabbard mount belonged to a sword, not a spear.

Fritzner (1891:279) lists ON *kesja* f. 'spjót' and gives examples of attestations: in Gammelnorsk bibelhistoria, Fornmanna sögur, Egils saga, Sturlunga saga and Flateyjarbók. These attestations are of a much later date than the Bergakker inscription. Since the meaning 'javelin' is recorded at least six centuries later, I wonder, (a) whether *kesja* had another meaning in the early fifth century, and (b) what could be the weapon's background. In the centuries that have elapsed, a change in the naming of weapon-types might have taken place.

I investigated the possibility whether *kesjam* might be a loanword. In that case it may have been the name of a certain kind of weapon that was adopted from Celts or Romans into Germanic society. If *kesja* initially were a designation of a sword, one may assume that much later a confusion in the naming of weapons might have taken place<sup>79</sup> somewhere in Germanic history. Much (1959:84ff.) observed in his description of the kind of weapons used by Germanic tribes that a sword was a rare type of armament. It seems plausible for Germanic warriors to have adopted a Celtic sword, since the Celts had a long and famous history of forging swords.

A confusion can be noticed in the meaning of the weapon that is recorded in Latin as GESA, CESA, GÆSUM (Du Cange 1954:62, 278), and which could be either a "hastas Galli, vel jaculum" (= javelin) and a "gladius" (= sword)<sup>80</sup>.

According to Schmidt (1983:761), *gaesum* is a loan from Celtic. Latin *gaesum*, Gallo-Greek *gaisos* or *gaison* 'light javelin' is, according to Walde-Hofmann (1930-1956:575f.), to be connected with Old Irish *gai*, *gae* 'spear'; *gaide* = *pilatus*; in OHG, OS we have *gēr*, in OE *gār*, in ON *geirr* 'spear' < Gmc \**gaizaz*; cf. De Vries 1962:161f.: 'heavy iron javelin'<sup>81</sup>. Gmc \**gaizaz* m. *a*-stem, should be equalled with Latin \*GAESUS. Latin has GAESUM, so the Gmc word might have been borrowed directly from Gallo-Celtic. Together with the

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<sup>79</sup> There exists another instance of a confusion of sword and spear in a runic inscription. The *Liebenau* inscription (Continental Corpus, 4th c.) may be read **ra[u]zwi**. Gmc \**rauzā-* means 'tube', 'hollow stem', cf. ON *reyr* 'reed', metaphorically 'spear', perhaps also meaning 'sword'. The inscription is on a silver disc that may have been part of a swordbelt (Düwel 1972).

<sup>80</sup> A well-known word for 'sword' in Latin is *gladius*. Schmidt (1967:159) states that Lat. *gladius* can be verified as a Gallic loan with help of the Island-Celtic languages. Island-Celtic words for 'sword' are Cymrish *cleddyf*, Bret. *klézé*, Irish *claideb*; these may be united together with *gladius* under \**kladi-*. The fact that *gladius* is a loan and no inherited word, is proved by two data: a) the change of initial *k* > *g* occurs in Latin only with loanwords; b) Ennius (239-169 BC) already attests *gladius*, which by then has dispelled the old Latin hereditary *ōnsis*, Old Ind. *asiḥ*, which got used only in a poetic sense (Walde-Hofmann 1930-1956:406). The motive for the discarding was the adoption of the two-edged Celtic sword by the Romans. The *ōnsis* was short, more like a dagger. As to the time of the adoption one may think of the first invasions by Celts into Italy (fourth century BC), according to Schmidt (1967:163).

<sup>81</sup> According to De Vries (1962:161f.), the Germanic word has been considered a loan from Lat. Gall. GAESUM, but he states that it appears to be the other way round, since there existed a Germanic tribe, the *Gaesatae*. This, however, is disputed. Schwarz (1956:46f.) states that a people named GAESATEIS are recorded in 236 BC living in the Alps. They fought in the service of North-Italic Celts against the Romans in 225 BC. Their swords were of Celtic make. According to Schwarz (1956:46) *Gaesatae* is no tribal name, but a Celtic definition of soldiers, named after Celt. \**gaison* 'spear'. Schwarz presents arguments for and against the *Gaesatae* being some Germanic tribe. In the Alps in those times, one would rather expect Ligurian tribes who eventually became celticized. Schönfeld (1965) lists no *Gaesatae* in his book on Germanic personal and tribal names. As cognomina, *Gesatus* and *Gaisionis* are known from Celtic and Germanic mercenaries, resp. from Vindelica and lower Germany. In fact, these names point to the armament of the soldier (Alföldy 1968:106f.).

introduction of the Celtic sword into Germanic society, the name of the sword was adopted too. I suggest the form CESA, GESA etc. to be vulgar Latin, cf. vulgar Latin *carra*, *cerasa*, *pruna*, *pira*, *pisa* against classic Latin *carrum*, *cerasum*, *prunum*, *pirum*, *pisum* (Kluge 1913:28, b, Anm.). This would explain the co-existence of GESSUM and GESA. If we find in the early fifth c. a form *kesja* in a formerly occupied Roman area, this might indeed reflect a vulgar Latin word such as GESA or CESA. One way or another, **kesjam** seems to be connected or related to a root GAES- or perhaps better CAES-. In the latter case I suggest an early or secondary (and perhaps later lost) connection with Lat. *caesim* [caedō] adv. 'by cutting, with cuts', 'with the edge of the sword', as opposed to *punctim* 'with stabs, to prod, to pierce'. The basic meaning of the Latin verb *caedō*, *caedere*, *cecīdī*, *caesum* is 'to strike, beat, cut, kill'. The form *\*caesia-* might be a nomen agentis, with a root *caes-* + the suffix *-jan* (Meid 1967:97). If the word is borrowed from Latin, it should have been done so before the 6th c., when the *c* was still pronounced *k*. The meaning would then be 'cutter', e.g. a person fighting with a certain weapon, such as a *gladiator*, only here the weapon is not a *gladius*, but some different type of sword. One may also think of the tribe known as *Gaesatae*, who were called after their special weapon, the *gaisan*.

After being borrowed into Gmc, *kesja* would have been declined after Germanic standards. The ending *-am* in **kesjam** indicates then a dative plural, and might thus be the indirect object of **ann** + dative, which would render '(he) grants the sword-fighters **logens**'.

**logens** appears enigmatic; its ending *-ens* as well as the ending *-am* of **kesjam** (acc. sg. of Lat. *a*-stem) makes (in the light of the foregoing deliberations) the impression of (vulgar) Latin influence. It might be the nominative of a part. pres. of *lūcere* 'to shine, to flame'; *logens* 'shining' is then an adj. in the nominative. However, *o* for *u* and *g* for *k* is remarkable.

In OS we find *logna* 'sword', f. *ō-* or *n*-stem. De Vries lists ON *logg* n., or *logi* m. 'sword'. The weak declension has in Gothic the genitive singular and acc. plural ending in *-ns*. Hence, **logens** may be gen. sg. or acc. plural of *\*loge* 'sword'. I suggest we have here in the endings of both **kesjam** and **logens** a relic of an older stage of Gmc, which is attested in Gothic, but not in West Gmc. Anyway, when interpreting the text in this manner, we get a semantically perfect sentence: 'possession of H., he grants the sword-fighters a sword (swords)'. I can imagine that the weaponsmith wrote this text on the scabbard mouth as a sort of promotion for his work. Or the text refers to a leader, who bestows certain precious swords on his *comitatus*.

Summary: both *gaesum* and *gladius* end up in Latin as loanwords from Celtic. It stands to reason that at least one of these words could and did turn up in Germanic as well, borrowed either from Celtic or Latin. The borrowing went with the adoption of a certain sword.