

Texts and Contexts of the Oldest Runic Inscriptions



Tineke Looijenga



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35. PFORZEN I (Bavaria, Germany). In the Bayerisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege Schwaben, Augsburg. A silver belt buckle with runes on the front, which is rare (also: LIEBENAU, above, nr. 25, and BORGHAREN, the Netherlands, nr. 18). Dated mid 6th c. Found in 1991 in a man's grave. The runes are neatly and distinctly carved in two rows below each other, ending in ornamental lines.

They read: **.aigil.andi.ailrun l.tahu:gasokun**

·F|X|I|F·F|X|I|F· F|J|T|R|N|†
 †·↑F|H|N·X|F|H|X^N|†·

I take the dots between the words as word-dividers.

aigil is a PN, nsm. *a*-stem *Aigīl*, connected either with Gmc **agjō* ‘sword, edge’ (cf. De Vries 1962:94f., who derives ON *Egill* and OHG *Agilo* from Gmc **agilaz*), or with Go. *agis* ‘scare, fear’. See also *Agila* in GRIESHEIM. The spelling of **aigil** is interesting; in later OHG *ai* > *ei*, which would render **Egīl*. In OHG, *ai* > *ei*, and in OS *ai* > *ē*; in ON *ai* > *ē*, in OE *ai* > *ā* > *æ* (through fronting), cf. *ægili* on Franks Casket (8th c., probably Northumbrian).

andi is a conj. ‘and’.

ailrun PN nsf. *ō*-stem *Ailrūn*. The names *Aigil* and *Alrūn* (written as: **ailrun**) remind of the much later recorded ON *Volundr*, OHG *Wieland*, story (see also chapter four, 2). The historical Egill's fore-runner may have been spelled as **Aigil*.

In both **aigil** and **ailrun** the first part is written with a diphthong, although the use of the yew rune in **ailrun** is confusing. I assume that, on the analogy of **aigil**, the carver wanted to carve **ailrun**, probably instead of ***alrun**.

Remarkably, both spellings, **ai** and **ai̅**, occur in the first syllables of the names, and both syllables are stressed, according to alliterative verse. The other **as** in the text are in **andi** and **gasokun**, and these **as** occur in unstressed position. The runographer may have wanted to express this controversy graphically. But why is there a difference in orthography: **ai** versus **ai̅** with a yew rune?

I wondered whether this may be due to a scribal error. By looking at how the runes are carved, we realize that the **a** in **ailrun** has very long sidetwigs and the lower twig even crosses the bottom line. It looks as if this twig has been lengthened, i.e. carved in two strokes. It has a twist halfway. I considered the possibility that this may have been the result of a graphic mistake. Instead of carving an **i**, the runographer made an **l** too many or too soon, and therefore changed it into a yew rune. The mistake may have occurred because an **l** was to follow. Since a yew rune could be used instead of an **i** rune, as we have seen in the **raihan** inscription (Caistor-by-Norwich, England, chapter eight, nr. 12), and in Freilaubersheim, nr. 18: **dapina**, the carver tried to repair his mistake by changing **l** into **l̅**, by carving an extra sidetwig. This sidetwig coincides with the end of the lower twig of the preceding **a** rune (giving the impression as if the lower twig was lengthened). Therefore, I think the sequence **ai̅** is a scribal error (Looijenga 1999; also Pieper 1999).

The second line starts with **l**. The text proceeds with **tahu**. I connect this word with Go **tāhus* < Gmc **tanhuz*; OHG *zāh*, adj. *u-*stem ‘tough’ (Köbler 1989:520).

The third word is **gasokun**, 3 plur. pret. ind. of a verb like Go *ga-sakan* ‘to quarrel, to dispute’, or OHG *ga-sahhan* ‘to condemn, to fight’. Clearly both persons, *Aigil* and *Ailrūn*, quarrelled about (or ‘condemned’ or ‘sought’) something, which might be hiding behind the single **l**.⁴

⁴ Düwel (1994^b:290f.) proposes to regard the side twigsuggests considering the sidetwig of the **l** rune as connected with the left side twig of the following **t**—although the twigs do not meet—and thus take this as a bindrune **el**. Thus he obtains: **elahu** ‘elk’. However, this is problematic, as there is even a dot between **l** and **t**, which, because of the presence of other dots in the inscription, must be regarded as a word divider.

I suggest that the text on the Pforzen buckle is a quotation from a lost version of the Wieland story. Assuming that the verse alliterated, the enigmatic **l** may have been preceded by an *a*, in [a]**l**: *Aigil andi Ailrūn (a)l tahu gasokun. al* adj. ‘all, everything’. The text may be taken as: ‘A. and A. vigorously fought/condemned all’.