Review Article

Klaus Düwel, Robert Nedoma, and Sigmund Oehrl. *Die südgermanischen Runeninschriften: Mit Beiträgen von Moritz Paysan, Peter Pieper, Diana Sauer und Frauke Stein.* Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde, 119. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020. 2 vols, 1331 pp. ISBN 978-3-11-053099-5. €199,95.

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Introduction

Corpus editions are one of the most vital tools for the researcher into any aspect of runology and have an enduring legacy as reference works many years after their publication. It is partly for this reason that *Futhark* dedicated a full issue to them (*Futhark* 12, 2021 [publ. 2022]), and the publication of new corpus editions has been one of the aims of the long-running German project Runische Schriftlichkeit in den germanischen Sprachen (RuneS). To date, project participants have published or are preparing editions of the Frisian inscriptions (Kaiser 2021); Nordic *runica manuscripta* outside Scandinavia (Bauer and Heizmann 2026); and the Old English (and pre-Old English) inscriptions (Waxenberger, forthcoming). The corpus edition of the South Germanic inscriptions precedes all of these and is a work of formidable size and scope. The production of this work was a long-standing ambition of the late Professor Klaus Düwel and it should be seen as part of his legacy.

The South Germanic corpus is more modest in size than some others, although the inclusion of recent finds has expanded it significantly from earlier editions: Arntz and Zeiss (1939) covered 28 South Germanic inscriptions (although they did not use this term, and their larger corpus was defined as "continental" rather than "South Germanic" — see below); the chapter of Krause and Jankuhn (1966) covering this material had 35; and Opitz (1977) had 56. The new edition has 141 entries, including a number

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of objects which are lost, and a number of inscriptions about which there is some degree of doubt in regard to authenticity and/or runic character. Some 56 of the entries fall into one or both of these categories although this is not to be taken as an argument for exclusion. Many of the uncertain cases have been included in older corpus editions as worthy of consideration and discussion, and it would have been remiss of the editors to leave them out.

Structure

The edition is a hefty work in two volumes: Part 1 contains the prefatory material and analysis together with the corpus entries while the slimmer Part 2 consists of the bibliography, indexes, high quality colour plates and other helpful information such as handlists of the inscriptions subdivided by object type, relative chronology and so on. Placing this reference material in a separate volume benefits the user by saving a great deal of flipping back and forth that would otherwise have taxed both the brain and the forearms of the reader.

The introductory sections take up about 220 pages, almost a quarter of Part 1. As well as the apparatus about abbreviations and notation used in the edition, there are accounts of the history of research on the South Germanic inscriptions; the history of runic writing in the South Germanic area; Sauer's chronological discussion (which establishes a relative chronology and periodisation, where much of the earlier literature concerned itself primarily or exclusively with absolute dating); and Nedoma's extensive analysis of the script and language of the inscriptions, which could form a short book in itself and will be discussed in more detail below. This is followed by several shorter commentaries on the matters of magic, authenticity, paratextual signs and the use of technology such as microscopy for the first-hand study of inscriptions. After two appendices by Nedoma (the first a short summary listing the inscribed objects and the contents of the inscriptions, and the second a breakdown of the corpus into categories based on legibility and levels of confidence about their authenticity and/or runic character), the main corpus entries take up the remainder of the volume.

One of the notable ways in which the edition aids the reader is by presenting inscriptions at three levels of detail: the short summary in Appendix 1; an expanded summary with key information about the object, the find context and its dating at the start of each corpus entry; and the more detailed description and analysis in the remainder of the entry. This makes referencing and comparison much easier than if one had to dig through the full entry in detail to extract basic information.

Definitions and inclusion/exclusion of inscriptions

One of the first problems that any corpus edition needs to address is how to define the corpus and how to deal with borderline cases for inclusion in or exclusion from the corpus. The classification of this group of inscriptions as "South Germanic" defines the corpus on linguistic criteria and consequently excludes material that was included in some earlier publications (notably Arntz/Zeiss) which used geographical criteria. This is not to say that the location and geographical distribution of finds has been ignored, and when deciding on whether an item belongs in the corpus, other criteria must also be taken into account (such as dating, archaeological context, and the extent to which we can be certain that we are dealing with runic writing rather than script imitation or other marks that formally resemble runes). It is worth noting how this edition deals with the problematic or uncertain cases. In some earlier works, these problematic cases were removed from the main corpus and placed in an annex (Opitz, for instance, includes in an annex those inscriptions which are suspected of being modern or which are doubtfully runic). The new edition, instead of separating these items, adds tags to the sigla. With respect to questions of authenticity, items such as the Kärlich fibula are marked with a star: *SG-61 indicating *Authentizität* […] *zweifelhaft oder nicht gegeben*, "authenticity […] doubtful or not given" (p. xxviii). An intermediate confidence level is also marked: for cases like the much debated Kleines Schulerloch cave inscription (see contributions to Bammesberger and Waxenberger 2006), the asterisk is placed in parentheses, (*)SG-65, which is glossed as *Authentizität nicht gesichert*, "Authenticity not confirmed". These categories naturally include various degrees of uncertainty or suspicion, and the boundary between *zweifelhaft* and *nicht gesichert* is a matter of judgement on each item. In the case of Kärlich, the fibula is probably authentic, and while there are strong grounds for regarding the inscription as modern, this cannot be determined beyond doubt (pp. 329 f.); but the same classification is also used for the Maria Saal bone (*SG-76), which is certainly a modern forgery (pp. 400 f.). The difficulties of ascertaining authenticity and the varying degrees of evidence and confidence are addressed and clarified in Düwel's commentary (pp. cxlii–cxlvi).

Another question that must be addressed in relation to "authenticity" is how it should be referred to. There is a long tradition of labelling modern inscriptions as forgeries or fakes (*gefälscht, fälschungsverdächtig* etc.), but these terms ascribe to the maker a conscious intention to deceive, which can be demonstrated in some instances (like Maria Saal), but usually cannot,

since even if we are confident that the inscription is of modern origin, we do not know who made it or why. This matter has been discussed, e.g., by Williams (2012), who favours the more neutral term "modern" in general. With regard to the entries in the South Germanic corpus, however, there are perhaps stronger grounds for using the more loaded terms (although the editors do not set out their reasons explicitly). Many of the suspect items appeared in the early twentieth century, particularly in the 1920s–40s in the context of widespread popular interest in "Germanic" or "German" antiquities, an interest which was appropriated and amplified by the Nazis (see, e.g., Hunger 1984; Goodrick-Clarke 1992). Leaving aside the Weser bones (SG-134) whose authenticity is now accepted despite disputes in the past, the corpus contains ten items marked as doubtful (*SG-nn) and four marked as not confirmed (⁽*⁾SG-nn). Of these 14, nine came to light between 1920 and 1945. Naturally, the timing alone should not count against their authenticity, but we should note that the appeal (and financial value) of antiquities in this period did inspire an industry in archaeological forgeries such as the Maria Saal bone and the supposed discovery of "Attila's grave" (Eichner 2006).

A further cause for caution or suspicion is that some of the inscriptions are associated with individuals who are known to have been involved in archaeological forgeries. The connection with these individuals is not necessarily probative: they include Ludwig Ahrens, who sold the (genuine) Weser bones to the Staatliches Naturhistorisches Museum in Oldenburg in 1927/28 but also sold them a number of carved bones which he had made himself (Pieper 1989);[1] and Otto Rieger, the discoverer of the Kleines Schulerloch inscription in 1937, who was also involved in the reporting of a "prehistoric" carving at the nearby Kastlhänghöhle which is certainly of modern origin (Düwel 2006, 324 f.; cf. Eichner 2006).

Linguistic analysis

The edition devotes a good deal of space to Nedoma's extensive and comprehensive discussion of the linguistic issues, including the difficulties of defining the term *südgermanisch*. In practice, disentangling linguistic labels (e.g., *langobardisch*) from ethnic or political ones is no simple matter.

[1] Pieper notes the poor quality of Ahrens' forgeries, which corroborates his scientific findings in favour of the rune-inscribed bones, since if the latter had been made in the modern period their manufacture would have required a much greater degree of sophistication (Pieper 1989, 225–33).

The examples on pp. lxi f. are instructive. In order to assign an inscription to a language group, various nonlinguistic factors must be taken into account, such as the geographical location of the find, its archaeological context (e.g., the inventory of finds from the same grave and from the same cemetery), and the style of the object. None of these factors can be decisive but this type of approach does raise important questions: if we are defining the corpus linguistically, and assigning objects to linguistic groupings (pre-OHG, pre-OS etc.) based largely on nonlinguistic criteria, how do we avoid projecting onto the past dialect differences which are only attested in later written records, or leaning on outdated assumptions about ethnicity and language? One of the examples highlighted in this section is the (Győr-)Ménfőcsanak fibula (OG-7), which is classed as East Germanic (and accordingly excluded from the South Germanic corpus) on the basis of its location and the style of the brooch; the inscription is only partly legible (transliterated **xxx(x)ɑi[---?** by Nedoma 2009, 123), so it obviously cannot be classified linguistically. From the limited evidence available, the classification is entirely reasonable, but we must be sensitive to the potential confusion that can arise from using a term like "East Germanic" (or "South Germanic") as both a linguistic label and a geographical or stylistic one.

The linguistic analysis is thorough, covering phonology, morphology and syntax (to the extent that the latter is reconstructible from the very short texts). This section of the edition provides a valuable synthesis of, and a gateway to, the body of more detailed literature on these topics (notably Nedoma's own extensive work on personal names). Especially welcome is the substantial treatment of graphematics and paratextual signs, which owes a considerable debt to the work of Graf (2010) and Waldispühl (2013).

Concerning pragmatics, a taxonomic system of text types (maker inscriptions, owner inscriptions and so on) is set out in the edition. The types are identified largely on the basis of the syntactic constructions found in the corpus (e.g., the group of inscriptions with the structure *Adressant*$_{\text{NOM}}$ + 'lieb, angenehm' + *Adressat*$_{\text{DAT}}$, exemplified by SG-10 Bad Krozingen *Bōba leub Agirīke* (p. cxxvi)). Kaiser used a similar approach in the Frisian corpus edition (2021). Other possible analyses of these texts are considered, but the edition does not venture further into the field of pragmatics, which has been gaining more attention in runology, with some recent research showing possible paths to a more complete understanding of how the production and reading of runic inscriptions can be viewed as social acts (see, for example, Higgs 2025 on the pre-OE inscriptions).

Corpus entries

The articles on each inscription contain comprehensive, up to date descriptions of the inscription, the object and its context (dating, manufacture, archaeological context etc.), with a literature section covering the older corpus editions and wider literature relating to the inscription. Within this framework, individual entries inevitably vary in their length and focus. To illustrate some of the ways the edition handles the problems associated with individual entries, it is worth examining one in closer detail.

SG-88 Nordendorf I

The larger fibula from Nordendorf is one of the best known and earliest recorded South Germanic inscription-bearing objects and has attracted a great deal of attention and discussion, not least due to its mention of heathen gods. The earliest published description of the inscription is by Hofmann (1866), and the fibula continues to stimulate debate in the literature over 150 years later (see, e.g., Mees 2024). Its inscription, as presented in the edition, reads:

α ᛜ$^{\text{I}}$**logaþore** $^{\text{II}}$**wodan** $^{\text{III}}$**wigiþonar**; β ᛞ **ą̣w̧a̧ļeubwini**≣

α *logaþore Wōdan Wigiþonar*; β *Awa Leubwini* (or *Awa leub Wini*?)

"α arglistig(e) [sind] Wodan [und] Kampf-Donar (oder: Weihe-Donar?); β Awa [und] Leubwini (oder: Awa [ist] lieb (angenehm) dem Wini bzw. Awa [wünscht] Liebes dem Wini?)"

"α devious, mendacious [are] Wodan [and] Battle-Donar (or Consecration-Donar); β Awa [and] Leubwini (or: Awa [is] dear (pleasing) to Wini, or: Awa [wishes] something dear for Wini?)" (p. 459; English translation by the reviewer).

This summary presentation (which is fleshed out in more detail in the corpus entry) illustrates a number of points about the edition's approach. The use of diacritics and special characters to mark epigraphical features — such as the change in orientation between the two complexes (or two inscriptions?) α and β, indicated by ᛞ — makes these visual features explicit, where they have often been neglected or subordinated. Likewise, the paratextual sign marked as ≣ (which is glossed in the description as "ein eibenrunenähnlicher Texttrenner", "a text divider resembling a yew-rune") is recorded alongside the runes (fig. 1). The attention to paratextual signs and other aspects of presentation is reflected throughout the edition

Fig. 1. SG-88 Nordendorf I, (*above*) back of headplate (Henning 1889, fig. 7), (*below*) detail of the runic inscription with the sequence **ᚴeubwini≡** (photo: Michelle Waldispühl).

and indicative of the greater interest in these matters in more recent research (as discussed above).

Like all transliterations, this involves decisions about what is and is not salient for the runologist. One element which is not represented in the transliteration is the marking above the **o** of **wigiþonar** (line α III) which resembles an **ᛁ** rune, and has been treated as such in some of the literature (e.g., by Arntz/Zeiss 1939, 281). The detailed description of the inscription (pp. 462–64) makes the reasons for this clear: this mark is, in the view of the compilers, the carver's first — and subsequently corrected — attempt

to form the "roof" of **o**. In this case, it is to be treated as part of the rune itself and therefore not to be marked in the transliteration.

While the edition does not have a section dedicated to the principles of transliteration, the matters of what is to be represented, and how, are explained in depth in the introductory material as part of Nedoma's treatment of script and language (pp. lix–cxxviii).

This summary is followed by a brief presentation of key information about the object, the context of the find, dating, its current location, and a comprehensive set of references. The literature list includes the first mention of the brooch in the report of an academic assembly in 1865 where Prof. Lindenschmidt of the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum in Mainz presented it to the gathering (*VdPh* 1866, 125). This report does not include any information about the content of the inscription (which was first detailed by Hofmann in 1866). Not included in this overview of the literature is the treatment of Nordendorf in Stephens' *Old-Northern Runic Monuments* (Stephens 1867–1901, 2: 574–81). This reviewer is not sure whether this was an inadvertent omission, or whether Stephens' contribution was rejected as unhelpful for a modern audience. His account of the inscription does not add significantly to that of Hofmann, contains some rather odd readings, and must be read with an awareness of his anti-German sentiments. Since he was adamant that Germany had no native tradition of runic writing,[2] he placed the Nordendorf brooch in his group of "wanderers" (along with SG-95 Osthofen) and speculated that it had come to Germany from the "Northmen" (i.e., Scandinavians). Rather more usefully for the modern reader, Stephens does give a more detailed account of the discovery and presentation of the brooch by "Dr. L. Lindensmit [*sic*]", albeit accompanied by some rather scathing remarks about Hofmann's analysis. His work is certainly worthy of inclusion for the modern reader interested in the history of runology, but less so for those interested in the linguistic analysis of the inscription or in its historical, archaeological and art-historical context.

With its long history and numerous different approaches to reading and interpretation, Nordendorf I presents editors with the challenge of synthesising a very large volume of literature and evaluating many different interpretations. The interpretation favoured by the compilers is foregrounded in the summary, so the reader is not made to wait until the

[2] In his entry on Nordendorf, Stephens leaves the reader in no doubt about his position, as he rails at some length against "the modern German mania for making everything in Heaven on Earth and *under* the Earth 'German'" (1867–1901, 2: 576).

end of the corpus entry for the conclusions to be revealed in the manner of a murder mystery. The detailed linguistic analysis in the body of the entry covers and evaluates the various interpretations both thoroughly and concisely. The first element of the compound **wigiþonar**, for example, has been the subject of much debate. The corpus entry deals with different interpretations in more or less chronological order, beginning with the proposal in some of the early literature that **wigi** represents a verbal imperative, *wīgi* 'consecrate' (< PGmc. **weihija-*). The treatment of line III as a compound is attributed to Krause (1927, 273 f.; cf. Krause and Jankuhn 1966, 293), who still connected the first element with the same root, and saw in the compound an epithet "Consecration-Þonar", comparable to ON *Vingþórr* (although we might note that the etymology of the latter is by no means certain and, like Nordendorf **wigi-**, has been etymologically associated both with ON *vé* 'house; holy place, temple, sanctuary' and with *vega* 'to fight' (de Vries 2000 [1957–60], *sv.*; cf. Cleasby/Vigfusson 1874, *sv.*)). The edition's preference for the latter is partly phonological: **g** for pre-OHG /h/ < PGmc. **h* (cf. OHG *wīhen*) is unexplained, and no such difficulties are presented by a reflex of **wig-* 'fight'.

From a semantic and pragmatic point of view, **logaþore** has also proven problematic. Again, the treatment of different interpretations is organised chronologically, starting with the early suggestions that it was a third theonym cognate with ON *Lóðurr* — the etymology of which is (again) uncertain — and that the inscription attested to the persistence of heathen religion among the Alamanni in the sixth century. The alternative (and now generally accepted) connection is with OE *logþor* 'wily, crafty' and *logeþer* 'enchanters, snake-charmers' (Bosworth and Toller 1898–1921, *sv.*); and Düwel (1979) interpreted it as a plural adjective 'devious, mendacious' or a noun 'deceivers, liars', modifying the theonyms *Wōdan* and *Wigiþonar* and thereby indicating not an expression but an abnegation of pagan religion. The possibility of a third theonym has recently been revived by Mees, who suggests it may be a byname for Loki and disputes the syntactic analysis of Düwel (Mees 2024, 8). One of the difficulties we face with the South Germanic inscriptions in general is that they are so short and syntactic relations are often ambiguous: a good number of the texts contain a series of personal names, and while there may be general agreement about the identification of grammatical case, the corpus contains very few verbs or adpositions that might clarify the function of the cases. The treatment of syntax in the general introduction is correspondingly very brief (pp. cxix f.).

The translations of inscription β in the corpus entry exemplify this problem. The idea that **awa** represents a nominative feminine personal

name *Awa* is not disputed; but **leubwini** is more difficult: it could be a dithematic name *Leubwini* (most likely nominative), or **leub** could be an adjective (or substantive) and **wini** a monothematic name (probably dative). There are certainly parallels in the corpus for the former (e.g., SG-126 Weimar II contains what appears to be a list of three nominative personal names: **ida:bi̯gina:hahwar:**, *Ǐda Bigīna Hāhwăr* . The first is taken to be the owner of the brooch and the others the donors, although these relations have to be inferred contextually and are not made explicit in any part of the inscription; see pp. 686–89).

If we follow the latter interpretation, then the inscription would be structurally parallel to that of SG-10 Bad Krozingen, ᚠ**boba:leub** ᚢ **agirike** *Bōba leub Agirīke* (transliteration and transcription from the edition, p. 62). The Bad Krozingen entry offers several different translations (the layout and English translations are the reviewer's, based on the German text presented with the transliteration):

1. $B\bar{o}ba_{\text{NOM.}}$ $leub_{\text{NOM.}}$ $Agirīke_{\text{DAT}}$

    a. Bōba, dear/pleasing to Agirīk

    b. Bōba [is] dear/pleasing to Agirīk

2. $B\bar{o}ba_{\text{NOM.}}$ $leub_{\text{ACC.}}$ $Agirīke_{\text{DAT.}}$

    Bōba [wishes] something pleasing/dear [for?/to?] Agirīk

In the first two, the analysis of case is identical, but it is unclear whether the adjective *leub* is to be understood as attributive (modifying *Bōba*) or predicative (the complement of an unexpressed copula). If we are dealing with a type of epigraphic culture in which syntactic cues that we might expect in the spoken language or in a manuscript text are suppressed, and the structure of the text is implicit, then it is obviously more difficult for modern readers to infer structures and sociocultural meanings that may have been evident to the makers and contemporary readers of the inscriptions. Some of Mees' objections to the interpretation of Nordendorf I favoured by Düwel et al. centre on the question of what types of syntactic structure can reasonably be inferred. Whatever our assessment, much of the information that would help us to understand the pragmatic function of the text is unavailable, or at best implicit.

The entry concludes with a short section on the function(s) of the inscription, which in this instance acts as a summary of the foregoing linguistic analysis and of how the text is to be classified in terms of formulae: inscription α as either an invocation of three gods or (as preferred in

more recent scholarship) a Christian renunciation of two pagan gods; and inscription β as either a donor formula or an expression of affection (cf. the classification of text formulae in the introduction, pp. cxx–cxxviii).

Conclusion

With Düwel's passing we lost one of the giants of runology. The fulfilment of his ambition for a full corpus edition of the South Germanic inscriptions seems a fitting tribute to him, not least in the ways it leads the reader into the substantial and far-reaching research of his colleagues. All those of us who have worked on this material have been guided and supported by Düwel, and this edition is a testament to his influence, his intellectual rigour and his generosity. It is immaculately compiled and covers often difficult and complex material in remarkable detail and with remarkable clarity.

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