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XXXXXX Berlin

20. Oktober 2015

Dr. Regine Marth

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Dear Dr. Marth,

I write to you in your capacity as the Editor of the proceedings of the International Symposium on the Gandersheim Runecasket, 1999. I am a freelance scholar, primarily interested in Anglo-Saxon literature. I am a lawyer and must emphasise that I have no relevant academic qualifications and that anything I say must be run past recognised experts in the field. I apologise for not writing in German, but my Volkshochschuledeutsch is unfortunately not up to the task!

About 2 months ago, I visited the Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum in Braunschweig and was immediately captivated by the Casket. My appreciation was derived purely from the beauty and the age of the artefact and I had no idea when viewing it that it featured a runic inscription. It is to be regretted that any other visitor who did not peruse or purchase the book would be similarly unaware. *[Correction: as pointed out by Dr Marth in her reply, this is quite untrue. The runes are clearly visible. An inexcusable error on my part. AW 11/2/16]*

On exiting the exhibition space, I purchased your excellent book for later reading and returned home to Berlin. After studying the volume and reading a review by Prof. Bammesberger, I have the impression that the deliberations of the participants in the Symposium did not come to a conclusion as to the purpose of the artefact. What is more, the two attempts at deciphering the runic inscription reached wildly differing conclusions both as to the meaning of the inscription and its relevance to the purpose of the artefact.

With regard to the two interpretations of the inscription, **I believe that it is clear that Prof. Dr. Seebold's interpretation is to be preferred to that of Dr. Looijenga and Prof. Dr. Vennemann** for the following reasons:

(a) Seebold's interpretation uses only the symbols present, whereas the analysis of Looijenga and Vennemann requires inserting an 's' to make the word 'cri[s]tene'.

(b) While both interpretations posit unrecorded words (L&V 'aeli' = oil, S 'muz' = almucia), Seebold's unrecorded conjecture can be severed without changing the basic meaning of his interpretation.

(c) The interpretation of Looijenga and Vennemann reads rune AB1 (using Dr. Waxenberger's numbering) as 'cen' (c), which is possible. However, reading the identical rune AB22 as 'cen' (c) gives a sequence n-m-c, which is not possible in Old English. Accordingly it is preferable to read

both runes as 'u', as does Prof. Dr. Seebold.

(d) Seebold's transcription and interpretation is, with the exception of the problematic final letters and the 'ear' rune at CD9, more easily transformed into standard Anglo-Saxon than the proposal of Looijenga and Vennemann. Compare:

S: hælig æli ea /uritne þii sig hīræ liin mu = halig ælthe gewritne þy sie hire lin [mu]
with

L&V: critne þii sighīr æli inmc hælig æliea = cristne þe seocra ele i(n) n(o)m(ine) c(risti) halige ele

(e) Seebold's interpretation is consistent with the evidence of Herman Riegel regarding the use of the artefact as a reliquary for clothing, while the alternative reading requires the conclusion that it was used for holy oils.

It is true that Prof. Dr. Seebold's interpretation comes with its own difficulties, but I believe that the essential reading can stand if we consider the following points:

Seebold's reading of CD9 (ear = 'ea') as representing 'ge-' is adventurous. It is based on continental manuscript sources and requires a confusion of the 'ear' and 'iar' ('star') runes. It may not be correct. However the attested Anglo-Saxon word for 'carven, decorated' is *g-writen*, not *ge-writen*, as Seebold mentions at p. 107. I note that the sound of 'ge-' is no closer to the rune sound 'ea' than is the sound of 'a-'. In fact the prefix 'a-' sometimes occurs in the form *æ-*, which is phonically quite close to the sound 'ea'. Perhaps a transcription 'awritne' or 'æwritne' is to be preferred to Seebold's 'gewritne'. Regardless, this does not affect the meaning of his interpretation.

In my view his reading of 'muz' = 'almucia' for the final symbols cannot stand. He himself says that "[damit] habe ich mich mehrere Wochen lang erbitter auseinandergesetzt" and it must be said that the outcome is unconvincing. The main considerations leading to this conclusion are:

- none of the relevant words (almucium, proto-Mütze) are attested before the C12th
- the reading of 'z' for the final marks at AB23 is highly speculative
- the transliteration lacks a final vowel, which would have been present in any possible reflex of 'Mütze'.

However, if we assume, as apparently do most experts (see Waxenberger at p.93), that the signs at AB23 are merely decorative or indicative of a line ending, there is a perfectly simple explanation for the runes AB21 and AB22. Reading them, as one must, as 'mu', they can be taken as a Latin abbreviation for 'Maria Virgo'. This would be completely consistent with Seebold's contention that the text refers to the use of the casket as a repository for relics in the form of the clothing of the Virgin Mary. I take the use by Looijenga and Vennemann of Latin abbreviations in runic form as part of their solution as an indication that there is nothing

objectionable in positing this.

The testimony of Herman Riegel in his catalogue, reported in the contribution of Prof. Dr. Zahlten at p. 141, that a label formerly attached to the casket stated that it had held relics of the Virgin Mary's clothing is strong evidence. Taken together with Prof. Dr. Seebold's interpretation of the runic text, it would be reasonable to conclude that the casket was used as a reliquary to contain clothing of the Virgin Mary and that the inscription can be read as follows:

hælig æli gewritne þii sie hira liin MV

Deutsch: 'Heilig sei ihr Leinen Jungfrau Maria im geritzten Tempel'

English: 'Holy be the linen of the Virgin Mary in the carven temple'

Might I take the liberty of suggesting that your Museum engage someone with the necessary academic standing to review the question of the meaning of the runic text and arrive at an accepted position. I am convinced that such a shared understanding is possible and it is regrettable that it has to date not been achieved. To do so would not only be an important contribution to our knowledge of runic texts. It would enable the Museum to deepen the contextual understanding of your priceless exhibit and further the fame and reputation of your remarkable institution and City.

Yours faithfully,

Andrew Wright

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