

XXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXX

23. Oktober 2015

Dr. Regine Marth

XXXXXX@XXXXXXXXXXXX

Dear Dr. Marth,

I refer to our previous correspondence on the subject of the inscription on the Gandersheim Casket. In your reply you kindly referred me to a study by Dr. Gaby Waxenberger published in 2003, stating : "For my part, I am quite content with this and did not hear any objections so far".

I have now had the opportunity to read the study to which you refer. I regret to say that I find Dr. Waxenberger's conclusions quite unsatisfactory and her methodology inadequate. I say this on the basis of an assessment of the evidence as presented by Dr. Waxenberger herself.

Dr. Waxenberger's interpretation is too arbitrary to be relied on. In saying this, I acknowledge Dr. Waxenberger's undoubted deep expertise in both runes and Old English. My conclusions necessarily rely almost entirely on her presentation of the technical aspects of runology. However, in this task of textual reconstruction and reading, she has not done herself justice.

The problem begins when she expresses doubt about the reading of rune AB5, stating at p. 164 that:

"I do not regard this rune as an n þ but consider it to be an error or a miscut for the rune g X ... "

This is surprising, to say the least. The rune has previously been read as 'n' by all commentators cited, as well as by Dr. Waxenberger herself in her study which appeared in your 2000 book. She gives no reason for departing from this consensus. Let me be clear. I am not denying that it is possible that such an error has occurred, I simply point out that there is absolutely no evidence that it has. The letter as it stands is quite clearly an 'n', as is the identical rune at AB20, which she reads as an 'n'.

Dr. Waxenberger then proceeds to base all her readings of the long lines on the supposition that rune AB5 represents 'g', not 'n'. This approach is completely illegitimate for textual reconstruction. Let me explain why.

A textual emendation can only be adopted if it (a) renders intelligible a text which is otherwise incapable of interpretation, (b) generates a possible reading of a text whose only other readings are inconsistent with known facts or (c) renders grammatical an otherwise ungrammatical reading. I will leave aside the issue of grammatical emendation, which less controversial and is not relevant here. If all attempts at reading the letters as they stand fail to produce an intelligible text or only produce readings which are inconsistent with known facts, either the text was never

intelligible (i.e. gibberish or code), or there has been a writing error. If by positing a limited number of writing errors we can generate an intelligible or possible text where there was none before, then there is a logical reason for doing so. The resulting intelligible and possible interpretation is itself evidence of the existence of the error. To use legal concepts, we would say that the possibility of successful interpretation would count as circumstantial evidence for the existence of the error.

If, however, we already have an intelligible and possible text, to posit writing errors is completely arbitrary and unscientific. In the readings by Bugge, von Grienberger, Krause (published and adopted by Page) and Seebold, reported in Dr. Waxenberger's survey, we already have various but convergent natural interpretations by distinguished scholars which do not require positing any errors. Accordingly there is absolutely no justification on scientific grounds for departing from a straightforward reading of the runes AB5 as we see them. This is a fundamental principle for the practice of the science of philology and textual criticism going back to the days of Erasmus.

Not content with changing 'n' to 'g', Dr. Waxenberger then posits a reading of th þ for i l in runes AB8, once again without justification. As with the posited t for X transformation, l for þ is clearly possible. But to make such a change when the extant letter is readable and already provides an intelligible and possible reading is unacceptable for the reasons given above. I note that the sequence ii l is in no way suspect, as it appears unambiguously in the Ruthwell Cross inscription and again at runes AB18 and 19 in the Casket inscription. Dr. Waxenberger's reading of 'writneþiis' as 'writgeþ þis' is for these reasons doubly unfounded.

Accordingly, any interpretation based on a reading of 'writgeþ' collapses and must be rejected. Dr. Waxenberger's whole construction of the inscription as a 'pious maker's formula' requires the maker 'Æli' to be the 3rd person subject of the active verb 'writgeþ'. If the reading remains 'writ<ne>' (as it stands in the inscription) and the construction passive, the entire interpretation fails.

Dr. Waxenberger's comparison with three 'pious makers' formulae' does nothing to assist the cause. The three formulas show similarities with each other and it is quite legitimate and indeed intelligent to use them as the basis for a genre for the purposes of comparison. However, they are so far removed in vocabulary and grammatical structure from any reading of the casket inscription that the comparison provides absolutely no additional reason for preferring her interpretation.

A further aspect which makes this piece totally unsuitable as the final word on the subject is the complete absence of critical engagement with the other interpretations. All prior interpretations, including the considered and convergent readings of Bugge, von Grienberger, Krause, Page and Seebold are simply recited to be subsequently ignored.

Interpretations are merely listed or set out and no attempt is made to explain why one

interpretation is to be preferred to another. Waxenberger asserts that her interpretation is the correct one. In doing so she relies solely on the supposed similarities with the 'pious maker's formulae' as grounds for preferring her interpretation. However on closer examination, they provide little or no support.

It is most unfortunate that Dr. Waxenberger's interpretation appears to have been accepted by the museum as the last word on the subject over the contributions of scholars of the standing of Prof. Olaf Bugge, Prof. Theodor von Grienberger, Prof. Wolfgang Krause, Prof. Raymond Page and Prof. Elmar Seebold.

There is a crying need in this case for a critical review of all the proposed readings, based on clear logic-based criteria to arrive at a preferred reading or readings. Any such review should seriously engage with the scholarly consensus encapsulated in the partial reading by Prof. Krause, adopted by Prof. Page. Such a review is necessary to allow the linguistic evidence to take its proper place as part of an interdisciplinary understanding of this remarkable object, the Gandersheim Runecasket.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Wright