Syntactic variation in the older runic inscriptions

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Introduction

This paper is a contribution to the grammar of the older runic inscriptions, focusing on their syntax, in particular the position of the verb and the position of "modifiers" relative to a head noun (cf. Eythórsson 1995, 2001). It is implicit in the present account that syntax is important for a general understanding of the runic inscriptions. Admittedly, the syntactic analysis often depends on a particular interpretation. Moreover, given the fragmentary nature of the inscriptions, certain important diagnostics needed to establish word order (auxiliaries, sentence adverbs) are often absent. It must also be kept in mind that factors such as alliteration, meter and poetic diction can affect word order. In favorable circumstances, however, syntax can be used to support an interpretation. I claim that earlier accounts of runic syntax (e.g. Antonsen 1975, Braunmüller 1982, Nielsen 2000) are in many cases based on a misinterpretation of the facts or an untenable analysis, or both.

The basic assumption regarding word order is that the language of the early runic inscription is subject-initial language, as are the other old and modern Germanic languages (and other Indo-European language with the exception of Celtic). The points of variation are the following:

First, the position of the finite verb is either V2 or non-V2: the verb occurs or doesn't occur in the second position, i.e. following a single initial constituent, to the left of the subject. Moreover, V1 also involves the same position as V2, as shown by the position of the verb to the left of the subject.

Second, a complement can either precede or follow its head, for example a verb (V), a noun (N) or a preposition (P). Thus, in the Verb Phrase (VP) we find either verb–object (VO) order or object–verb (OV) order. In the Noun Phrase (NP) the "modifiers" such as genitives, pronouns of various kinds and numerals may either precede or follow the head noun. Finally, in the runic inscriptions there are a few examples of Prepositional Phrases (PPs), but no postpositions.

The examples below are generally taken from the standard handbook by Krause (1966) (abbreviated as K, followed by the number of the relevant inscription). Moreover, the grammar by Antonsen (1975) was also consulted (abbreviated as A). Readings and interpretations that deviate from those of these manuals are indicated as appropriate.

Verb Second (V2) and Verb First (V1)

The clause in (1) exhibits the order object–verb–subject. Given that the finite verb occurs to the left of the subject (the enclitic pronoun *eka/ika*), it can be assumed that it is not in the basic position in VP. In this case the complement can be assumed to have been fronted to clause-initial position. Thus, the fact that the verb occurs between the fronted complement and the subject constitutes evidence for V2.

	(1)	Sjælland bracteate 2 (K127, cf. A71)
		hariuha **hait**ika farawisa
		Hariuha am-called+I knowing-danger
		'I am called Hariuha, the one who knows danger.'

The same holds true of the syntactic structure of other inscriptions exhibiting similar patterns, such as the one from Stentoften shown in (2).

	(2)	Stentoften stone (K96, A119)		
		hidezruno	<ru>no	**felAh**-ekA hederA
		bright-runes.gen	sequence.acc.sg	commit+I here
		Ginoronoz		
		mighty-runes.acc		
		'The sequence of bright runes, mighty runes, I commit here.'		

Moreover, on this analysis, it is reasonable to interpret the text in (3) as consisting of two clauses rather than, as is standardly done, of just one involving a subject–object–verb word order, in which case a clitic would be attaching to the final verb. On the view defended here, the first clause (*ek erilaz*) contains a subject, a complement noun and a missing copula, while the second one has a fronted complement followed by the finite verb to the left of an enclitic subject pronoun.

	(3)	Lindholm amulet (K29, A17)
		ek erilaz sa wilagaz **hat**eka
		'I (am) the runemaster. I am called the Deceitful One.'

This interpretation becomes all the more plausible given that *ek erilaz* is attested occurring by itself, arguably as a nominal clause, as in the following case:

	(4)	Bratsberg clasp (K16, A75)
		ek erilaz
		'I (am) the runemaster.'

On the usual analysis, the text in (3) would be a single clause, and the clitic element *-(e)ka* would be a subject agreement marker, not a pronoun (an argument). This agreement marker would, however, be referentially dependent on the subject *ek* (cf. Old Norse-Icelandic **ek heiti-k** 'I am called', cf. Eythórsson 1995, 2001). The example in (5) similarly allows for a twofold analysis; it can be interpreted as either consisting of two separate clauses, a nominal clause followed by a verb-initial clause (V1) with an enclitic subject pronoun, or as a single clause with *-kA* as an agreement marker.

	(5)	Ellestad stone (K59, A114)		
		ekA sigimArAz Afs<A>kA		**rAisido**-kA stAinA (?)
		I SigimArAz	one-found-free-of-guilt	raised+I stone
		'I (am) S., one found free of guilt, (I) raised the stone.'		

Assuming that the occurrence of the verb to the left of the subject clitic shows fronting, the verb-initial clause in (6), even though the text is fragmentary, also indicates fronting of the verb (V1).

	(6)	Noleby stone (K67, A46)
		tojeka...
		make+I
		'I make...'

On the other hand, it is uncertain how to analyze the following sentences which exhibit the order verb–object–subject. In these examples it is possible that the subject noun (*horna*, *heldaz*) has been extraposed from the "canonical" subject position to the right of the VP; in (7) the subject (*horna*) ends up clause-finally and in (8) both the subject and the indirect object (*heldaz kunimudiu*) have been placed to the left of the direct object NP (*runoz*) and a PP (*an walhakorne*), which together appear to form a single constituent.

	(7)	Strøm whetstone (K50, cf. A45)
		wate hali hino horna
		wet.3sg.opt stone.acc this.acc horn.nom
		'Let the horn wet this stone.'

	(8)	Tjurkö bracteate (K136, A109)
		wurte runoz an walhakorne heldaz kunimudiu
		wrought runes.acc on foreign-grain Heldaz Kunimunduz.dat
		'Heldaz wrought runes on foreign grain for Kunimunduz.'

Whereas the examples in (1-3) and (5-6), all involving a subject clitic, suggest V2 (or V1), the following examples appear to be counter-evidence to such an analysis. These examples show the order object–full NP subject–verb.

	(9)	Stentoften stone (Marstrander 1952, K96, A119)
		niu hA-borumz niu ha-gestumz
		nine high-sons.dat (?) nine high-guests.dat (?)
		hAþuwolAfz **gAf** j
		HAþuwolAfz gave year
		'To nine high-sons, to nine high-guests, HAþuwolAfz gave a year (= good harvest).'

	(10)	Istaby stone (K98, A117)
		Afatz hAriwulafa hAþuwulafz hAeruwulafiz
		after HAriwulafz.acc HAþuwulafz HAeruwulafiz
		warAit runAz þAiAz
		wrote runes these
		'After HAriwulafz, HAþuwulafz HAeruwulafiz wrote these runes.'

Thus, these may be genuine counter-examples to the V2 account. However, it may be that in these cases the first phrase (*niu hA-borumz niu ha-gestumz*; *Afatz hAriwulafa*) stands apart from the remainder of the clause, instantiating an independent phrase rather than topicalization; it should also be noted that the alliteration (in both cases **h** – **h** – **h**) may be responsible for the deviant word order.

In summary, the position of the finite verb to the left of an enclitic subject pronoun can be taken as evidence for V2 (or V1) in the language of the early runic inscriptions. Although the cases in (9) and (10), in which the verb follows a subject noun (full NP), appear to contradict this analysis, it is possible to identify factors that may cause the deviation.

Word order in the Verb Phrase

In the runic corpus there are several clauses which exhibit the order subject–verb–object. These clauses are ambiguous between V2 and VO order in the VP. An example is given in (11); the assumption here is that *hadulaikaz* is a name that stands on its own and is not a part of the clause.

	(11)	Kjølevik stone (K75, A38)
		hadulaikaz ek hagustadaz **hlaaiwido** magu minino
		Hadulaikaz I Hagustadaz buried son my
		'Hadulaikaz. I, Hagustadaz, buried my son.'

Further examples of this order are found in the following inscriptions: Rö stone (K73, A26),

Reistad stone (Eythórsson 1999, cf. K74, A41), Tune stone (Eythórsson 2001, cf. K72, A27), Gummarp stone (K95, A116), and By stone (K71, cf. A111).

By contrast, other subject-initial clauses unambiguously show that the verb is not in second position but in the VP, suggesting basic OV order. Such sentences are few in number; in fact, there are only two reasonably clear cases, which are given in (12) and (13).

(12)	Gallehus gold horn 2 (K43, A23)
	ek hlewagastiz holtijaz horna **tawido**
	I Hlewagastiz Holtijaz horn made
	'I, Hlewagastiz Holtijaz, made the horn.'

It should be kept in mind that alliteration, meter and poetic diction can affect word order. The OV order in the celebrated Gallehus inscription (12) may be attributed to such factors, given that the text confirms to the rules of a Germanic long-line, but this seems less likely in the Einang inscription in (13).

(13)	Einang stone (K63, A20)
	...daga<s>tiz runo **faihido**
	(I + name) rune painted.1sg
	'(I), ...dagastiz, painted the rune.'

The examples in (14) and (15) involve the order subject–indirect object–verb–direct object/PP, indicating non-V2. The word order possibly reflects the underlying order, with the indirect object preceding the verb and the direct object/PP following it. The interpretation of both inscriptions is debated but the one given here is commonly accepted.

(14)	Tune stone (K72, cf. A27)
	ek wiwaz after woduride wita(n)dahlaiban **worahto** r<unoz>
	I Wiwaz after Woduridaz-dat breadward.dat made runes.acc
	'I Wiwaz made the runes in memory of Woduridaz, the breadward.'

(15)	Eikeland clasp (K17a, cf. A53)
	ek wiz wiwio **writu** i runo...
	I Wiz Wiwia.dat.fem write in rune
	'I Wiz write the rune for Wiwia in...'

There are only two examples of a subordinate clause in the older runic inscriptions, shown in (16) and (17) respectively; both examples, however, involve the "same" text. The clause in question is a subject relative clause, with an object pronoun preceding a finite verb. As a subject relative clause contains a "subject gap", these examples are ambiguous between an OV order and Stylistic Fronting, a phenomenon known from Old and Modern Icelandic, involving the placement of a word or a phrase in a position in which the subject is missing ("subject gap").

(16)	Stentoften stone (K96, A119)
	sA þAt **bAriutiþ**
	this.nom.m this.acc.n breaks
	'...who breaks this.'

(17)	Björketorp stone (K97, A120)
	sAz þAt **bArutz**
	this.nom.m+rel.part this.acc.n breaks
	'...who breaks this.'

In the runic corpus there are four occurrences of a non-finite verb, in all cases a past participle. In two of these examples the participle precedes an auxiliary verb, so that they might be considered to show OV order.

	(18)	Kalleby stone (A25, cf. K61)
		þrawijan · **haitinaz** was (...)
		þrawija.gen (?) called.nom.sg.m was
		'Þrawija's (.) he was called...'

	(19)	Vetteland stone (I) (K60, A18)
		(...) **flagdafaikinaz** ist
		subject-to-deceitful-attack is
		'...is subject to deceitful attack.'

However, these examples do not tell us anything about the structural position of (finite and non-finite) verbs. The participle might be in situ in the VP, showing OV order; alternatively, it might have been fronted to the beginning of the clause, along with the auxiliary verb.

In addition, there are two examples containing a past participle but no auxiliary verb.

	(20)	Möjbro stone (K99, A11)
		ana ha(n)hai **slaginaz**
		on horse.dat slain.nom.sg.m
		'Slain on a horse.'

	(21)	Amla stone (K84, A43)
		...iz **hlaiwidaz** þar
		(name) buried.nom.sg.m here
		'So-and-so (is) buried here.'

The example in (20) is ambiguous as the PP *ana ha(n)hai* might be in situ in the VP, or it might have been subject to fronting. However, although the example in (21) does not contain an auxiliary, it may suggest VO order in the VP, given that the non-finite verb is followed by the adverb *þar* (in a strict OV language the adverb would precede the participle).

Summarizing, basic VP word order in the early runic inscriptions appears variable: the inscriptions from Gallehus (12) and Einang (13) suggest OV order, but other inscriptions (especially, Tune (14), Eikeland (15) and Amla (21)) indicate VO order. The evidence to be gleaned from other inscriptions is even less clear in this respect.

Word order in the Noun Phrase and Prepositional Phrase

In the early runic inscriptions nominal modifiers in the NP either precede or follow the head noun. Considering first the adnominal genitive, there are several examples of the order genitive–noun, as in (22) and (23).

	(22)	Vetteland stone (K60, A18)
		magoz minas staina
		son.gen my.gen stone.acc

	(23)	Bø stone (K78, A79)
		hnabdas hlaiwa
		Hnabdaz.gen grave.nom

Other examples of genitive–noun order are found in the following inscriptions: Stenstad stone

(K81, A37), Tomstad stone (K78, A77), Stentoften stone (K96, A119), Björketorp stone (K97, A120), and Rävsal stone (K80, A121).

On the other hand, the order noun–genitive appears rare; in fact, there is only one clear example (24).

	(24)	Valdfjord cliff inscription (K55, A29)
		þewaz **godagas**
		retainer Godagaz.gen

Moreover, there is one example of a comparative construction, involving a superlative adjective and a genitive of comparison. The reading of the comparative form is immaterial for the syntactic analysis; the one adopted here is *sijostez* (Eythórsson 2001); alternative readings include *asijostez* (e.g. Grønvik 1981) and *arjostez* (Krause 1966).

	(25)	Tune stone (K27, A27)
		sijostez **arbijano**
		next-of-kin.masc.nom.pl heirs.gen

Other NP modifiers (numerals, demonstratives, possessives, adjectives) occur either before the head noun (26-27) or after the head noun (28-30).

	(26)	**þrijoz** dohtriz (Tune stone, K72, A27)
		three daughters.nom

	(27)	By stone (K71, A111)
		þat azina
		this.acc stone.acc

	(28)	Gummarp stone (K95, A116)
		stAbA **þria**
		staves.acc three.acc

	(29)	Strøm whetstone (K50, A45)
		hali **hino**
		stone this.acc.m

	(30)	Istaby stone (K98, A117)
		runaz **þAiAz**
		runes.acc those.acc

Possessive pronouns are only attested following the head noun, as in (31) and (32); in the latter example the possessive is followed by an adjective.

	(31)	Vetteland stone (K60, A18)
		magoz **minas**
		son.gen my.gen

	(32)	Opedal stone (K 76, A21)
		swestar **minu** liubu
		sister my dear

Finally, prepositions are attested only five times in the runic corpus; they govern either dative, as in (33) and (34), or accusative case, as in (35).

(33)	Möjbro stone (K99, A11)
	ana hahai
	on horse.dat

Other instances of *an(a)* with dative are found on the Rö stone (K73, A26) and the Tjurkö bracteate (K136, A109). Interestingly, *after* occurs with dative in Tune (cf. Old English) but the same preposition (*Afatz*) occurs with accusative on the Istaby stone (as in Old Norse).

(34)	Tune stone (K72, A27)
	after woduride
	after Wodurid.dat

(35)	Istaby stone (K98, A117)
	Afatz hAriwulafa
	after Hariwulafz.acc

In summary, in the NP the adnominal genitive usually precedes the head noun in the early runic inscriptions; there is only one clear example of a genitive following the noun. Other nominal "modifiers" either precede or follow the noun. Finally, only prepositions are attested in the runic corpus and no postpositions.

Conclusion

A careful re-examination of the syntax of the early runic inscriptions reveals that there is evidence for V2 (or V1) at this early stage of Germanic. To be sure, the cases in (9) and (10), in which the verb follows a subject noun (full NP), appear to contradict this analysis; however, factors that may cause the deviation can be identified. Moreover, a complement can either precede or follow its head, for example a verb, a noun or a preposition. Thus, basic VP word order in the early runic inscriptions appears variable: the inscriptions from Gallehus (12) and Einang (13) suggest OV order, but other inscriptions indicate VO order. In the NP there is only one clear example of a genitive following the head noun; usually, the adnominal genitive precedes the noun. However, other nominal "modifiers" either precede or follow the noun. Finally, only prepositions, no postpositions, are attested in the runic corpus.

The differences in the position of the verb relative to other elements in the clause (subject, complements) complements instantiate variation (OV and VO order) which is very much in line with that assumed for the most archaic stage of the Germanic languages, in particular Old English and Gothic (Eythórsson 1995, Nielsen 2000). Although the other word order patterns (NP and PP order) also have parallels in the other Old Germanic languages, the evidence of the early runic language is too meager to allow for any detailed comparison in this area.

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